



Royal
Russell



PROSE FESTIVAL

SHORTLISTED STORIES

Tuesday 19 March 2019

I am very excited to welcome everyone to Royal Russell's second annual prose festival. Some of you may have heard about our poetry festival in the autumn term, and it's wonderful to share this sister festival with you as well.

Tonight will be a celebration of our key stage 3 students' literary talents, as the pressure of exams and coursework has kept our GCSE and A-Level students from joining us this evening. This year our students have composed a 300-word opening to a short story, a challenge they have risen to admirably. I am looking forward to listening to them share their intriguing openings with us over the course of the evening.

The stories in this booklet have been shortlisted by the English department from around 300 entries and so I would like to, once again, congratulate all our students who have been invited to join us this evening. What a fantastic achievement!

We are about to hear our students read their stories, after which there will be a brief interval for complimentary refreshments and light entertainment, courtesy of our talented Jazz band. During the interval there will also be an opportunity to speak to our visiting author, Nicholas Bowling, and purchase a signed copy of his novel, *Witchborn*. Nicholas will then award prizes to our festival winners.

Before we begin, I would like to give my sincere thanks to the following people for all the hard work they have put into this evening's event: Mary from the library, Mo Willis and the catering department, Katie Smith in the school office, the music department and our talented Jazz Band, and, of course, the English department. I hope you all enjoy our prose festival!

Courtney Stuart

English Department



Nicholas Bowling

Nick Bowling is an author, stand-up comic, musician and Latin teacher from London. He graduated from Oxford University in 2007 with a BA in Classics and English, and again in 2010 with a Masters in Greek and Latin Language and Literature, before moving to his first teaching job at Trinity School, Croydon. While writing ***Witchborn***, he has also performed a solo show at the Edinburgh festival, and has co-written, recorded and released an album and two EPs with soul-folk singer Mary Erskine, *Me For Queen*. ***Witchborn*** is his debut novel and was shortlisted for this year's Trinity Schools' Book Award. **On 2nd May Nick's next novel, *In the Shadow of Heroes* is released, and it follows a young Roman slave on the quest for the Golden Fleece.**

2019 PROSE COMPETITION

PRIZE WINNERS

1st prize : Aya Moustakim Clarke
Year 7 – Buchanan

2nd prize : May Sullivan
Year 7 – Hollenden

3rd prize : Thomas Beare
Year 8 – St Andrew's

Recitation prizes :

Year 7 Oliver Hampton – St Andrew's

Year 8 Ayomide Phillips - Hollenden

Year 9 Campbell Eady - Keable

YEAR 7 – YASHNA JODHUN

NOSTALGIA

The girl ran. From gunshots ringing in the smoke of explosives and fire, battle cries of the left soldiers fighting for the last of their broken nation and desperation of the left innocent lives captured in enemy hands. She struggled to salvage oxygen from the chemicals tightening the air and wiring her narrowed lungs in the isolated alleyway, her heart hammering as she heard the shouts approaching. Flashes of her family, the family who had promised never to leave her, shoving her out the garden door, before *they* came, the cold morning air and wet grass beneath her as she ran. Losing everything in a matter of seconds, losing everything to the first gunshots, echoing down the streets before dawn and the enemy aircrafts dropping incendiary explosions over a country once so bright and full of life and colour now a litter of debris and darkness. She thought of having survived twelve years in the distress of the warnings that one day the training and practice will one day be reality, the fear of not knowing how they will die. The girl on her last legs, having sold everything for a last vision of the world she had arrived in.

YEAR 7 – MATEO THOMAS

SUMMER AT THE BEACH

One evening towards the end of summer, I was strolling along a narrow pebbly shore. I had reached the beach by walking down a steep, sloping, windy path. As the light started to fade I saw huge, shimmering stalactites hanging from the entrance to the enormous cave. The cave was a black hole with tunnels that twisted and turned.

Without hesitation, I boldly entered the cave, pulling out my trusty torch, I cautiously scanned my surroundings. Slippery paths twisted and turned ahead of me. The cave smelt of seaweed and something else, the foul stench of decay!

Nervously, I scanned the cave. There were scratches on the side of the rock. On the floor I saw half-eaten fish and dead sea-creatures. A line of footprints led me to the right-hand tunnel. The prints were double the size of my feet they showed that the creature has four toes with sharp pointed claws. Carefully, I follow the footprints, timidly but shivering with excitement. The light from the torch fell onto a long spiked tail that stretched out behind a large furry creature with a massive head and ape-like face. Venom drooled from razor sharp fangs. Emerald bloodshot eyes glared at me. I froze.

YEAR 7 – MAY SULLIVAN

CHAPTER 1

The thunder rages around me, illuminating the sky with wonderful shocks of blue. The rain splatters on my face, concealing the sheen of sweat that's growing across my forehead. My legs are aching, knees crumbling. There is panic in the night, my stalkers believe that there is still good in the world, and I'm here to snuff out the light. The destruction left in my wake is far beyond anyone's expectations. I'm the shadow behind the throne, they bend to my will, I have dirt on them, I'm in control.

My stalkers are closer, I can feel their weighty breath on the back of my neck. Their pounding footsteps echo in my head. One seizes the back of my shirt, it compresses onto my throat, I gasp for air, like a fish out of water, as he stares into my eyes. I know he is a Backflash gang member, his mouth is sewn shut. I slowly reach to my back pocket as he drags me back to the city. There I find my knife and drive it into his chin, blood trickles down my knife as he collapses to the ground, the scowl that was sewn into his face gets dismembered as he forces his mouth open, splattering my face with his bitter blood. The threads rip his lips. This is the traditional process when a Backflash dies, but usually they just stare you down, in a gruesome display of solitude. But he says something, he says my name, then he mutters another name, Macy Donner. I remember that name, I saw it on a banner just this morning, before the carnage. His eyes slip shut, I have to move on, they are coming.

YEAR 7 – ALEC THURBIN

STARS AND PLANETS

Darkness. Never-ending darkness filled with giant dancing blazes of light, spinning in the endless night. In swirling luminous ovals so bright, with planets, made of rock, gas, iron and ice.

This was going to be the last night that Noah slept in his own bed for a while. Tomorrow, he would be out there, out among the stars, looking down on Earth as just another planet in the sky. He should've been sleeping, but how could he?

It seemed like time went slower and slower, but still he could not rest. There was no point trying to sleep. He got up and wearily walked over to his bedroom window. He stared at the rocket standing silently, like a skyscraper. It looked like it would never move, but tomorrow it would take him up there, to the great International Space Station.

As the sky got blacker, he thought about all his training, and wondered if he was ready to take this giant step. He had to believe in himself, if he was ever going to do this.

Suddenly, he saw a speck of light. He realised that the sun was coming up.

It was time to go.

YEAR 7 – AYA MOUSTAKIM CLARKE

ART-FULL ENCOUNTER

Early morning sunshine seeped inexorably across the sky, like gold trickling up a dark canvas. Silence cloaked the air, but the whispers of budding leaves presented the first traces of movement. Ahead stood a grand edifice, with noble columns expressing intricate detail, hinting at the treasures beyond the “Wallace Collection”.

A faint patter of vigilant footsteps announced the arrival of a dark figure, with a face of crumpled paper and a heavy heart. Gently, throbbing hands placed a delicate key into a lock, followed by a sudden “click”. As the museum’s door opened, an honest smile crept from the corners of their mouth like a child’s.

Velvet Laverly. The years never granted her mercy. Her estranged daughter had neglected her own child, embraced by cerebral palsy, “an unbearable millstone”. Despite her daughter’s disparaging rants, Velvet never ceased believing her beloved granddaughter was capable of the extraordinary, working long hours to support the child’s dreams, no matter the cost. An unspoken promise was still a promise...

Each dawn saw Velvet slaving over the Wallace Collection’s palatial halls, bucket and mop at hand. The burdensome blessing of Velvet’s condition synaesthesia, was that it played so pleasingly, if overwhelming, with the artwork. A single spark of colour would trigger a cascade of vividly enmeshed sensations – almost as if she could *hear* the paintings.

Velvet admiringly recognised every 16th Century portrait in the gallery. However, today’s “conversation” was shockingly different.

YEAR 7 – OLIVER HAMPTON

THE SAVAGE MOUNTAIN

The snow-capped mountains stood firmly in front of me, rising to meet the blue skies. I shivered with fear, staring at the mountain that I had worked so hard to summit. This is my story of survival on “The Savage Mountain”.

After years of training and reaching the top of Everest at the age of 21, I had come so far. My next challenge would be my third attempt at K2.

We arrived at the base camp, our home for the next few weeks, as we acclimatised, meeting our fellow climbers and preparing equipment. The majestic mountains, with shimmering patches of ice, towered over us. The peaks covered with blankets of snow, glistened in the golden sunshine. Jagged rocks popped out of the snow, reminding us this was no ordinary climb. The view was spectacular. The contrast of base camp, with dirty rugged rocks, gravel and the odd blade of grass reminded us of home. We set up our tents and started the task of preparing the monumental amount of kit, assisted by our porters.

For now we were safe. A voice inside me, talked to me – I could do this. Determination was kicking in. This was no place for fear.

YEAR 8 – SAM STEALEY

The sirens had started, it was the end.

We all knew it was coming, that didn't, however, make it any less terrifying. We had all heard the news; the constant war of words between Russia and us. We all knew that escalation was inevitable but nothing prepares you for the end of life. Today is the day. We have been sent home from work and school. The sirens have started; the sirens that signify the missile is impending, and there is nothing we can do to stop it. The Government has been evacuated, the President is safe, but the rest of us ... we have been left to fend for ourselves. We have our rations and have built our bunkers. Now it is time for our final goodbyes as we descend down the tunnels, not knowing whether or not we will make it out alive. If we do survive, the nuclear wasteland will be all we have left of our beloved country.

Blood on my fangs

I was always a curious girl. For as long as I can remember I would stare out through my broken windows. The edges were so sharp and jagged, they drew blood. It was alluring, how the broken windows held more power than the complete, as it showed sometimes the broken is stronger. How *the creatures* were stronger.

My village grew up scared, they never saw *the creatures* but I heard stories. Stories of their icy skin, dagger-like fangs, scarlet eyes with a piercing stare and the cloak of ink, invisible at night. *The creatures* walked like beasts, always hunting for a victim's blood.

I always watched the children telling these stories. They laughed at death, death of their family; the last victims. *The creatures* stole these victims and drank. They drank each crimson drop that fell from the body.

The other kids, made the stories a game. I wanted to scream that they should run and hide but I couldn't, so a child was killed. It was their own fault they got too close to *the creature*.

But back to my window, it made me feel strong. And, I guess I could have warned them, but I was too hungry.

YEAR 8 – THOMAS BEARE

HOLLOW

The few survivors of the war trudge wearily back to their leader all bruised, battered and silently trying to distract themselves from the cold. No-one smiles, or meets another's eyes. From over 100,000 of those who set out all full of life, full of determination, now only fifteen remain. They wander around the icy wasteland aimlessly, frozen. They look to their leader. The red plume of smoke to mark their victory rises from her. Yet no one rejoices.

Every day I relive that day again. We had battled through plains of thick ice and thirty-foot-high drifts of snow. We were promised, if we won, a life of greatness when we returned. The thought of future riches and power kept us fighting when all hope seemed lost and the pain was unbearable. We did return. We did defeat their army. We expected our rewards. Yet my life and that of my fellow survivors has not been full of greatness. We became known as the Stone Colds, the ones who lived wasted lives. We were used and lied to.

There is nothing to look forward to, nothing even to dream of now.

YEAR 8 – AYOMIDE PHILLIPS

In a flicker of a light bulb. In a blink of an eye. In a flash of lightning, they were gone. I had just come from a normal day, where the rain tapped gently against my skin and the sun searched hopelessly for an opening. Everything was as it's supposed to be until I took the next left. I stood aimlessly in shock of what lie in front of me. I thought "maybe I'm just dreaming" and "I must be hallucinating" because what I saw was unreal. Hundreds and hundreds of shoes were laying on the road right before my eyes. You might think that's not that strange and my imagination is getting ahead of me but, today a few family members were coming over and our neighbourhood is quite close so we sometimes have mini parties on our street – it's no big deal. So, there can only be one explanation for all these shoes. I tried real hard not to cry but as tears began to cascade down my cheeks, I could only think of the worst. In the far distance, I saw an eerie figure lurking at the end of the street. Step by step, he began ambling towards me with a grim look on his face. I could barely move, or speak, or see him moving effortlessly across the rocky surface until it was too late. His cold, black, beady eyes glared into mine. This lasted for what felt like forever, him and I, standing in the midst of chaos. Before I could even pluck the courage to speak, a gust of wind hurtled across my face and in a blink of an eye, he was gone.

YEAR 8 – HANAA RATIP

It was a dull, stormy night as the lady raced down the street barefoot – her feet splashing in the tormenting rain after every footstep. Thunder crackled in the distance, the wind screamed like a boiling kettle and bullet like rain drops poured down viciously, slamming against the top of the black umbrella the unknown lady was holding. The streets were bare and motionless apart from the flickering light from the street lamp by the path. The tall, tangled, majestic trees stood firmly on the ground towering over her. The lady was dressed formally in an elegant – however drenched – red gown and held a black umbrella. She breathed heavily as she ran desperately down the path. Where was she running to? Her heart continued to pound and her dainty feet racing along the path. Just as she was about to vanish into the thick blanket of fog, she began to slow down. She clutched her stomach with her arms whilst panting in exhaustion. She stopped. Slowly collapsing to the solid, concrete ground, tears began to stroll down her frozen cheeks. Umbrella in hand, she lay on the ground in a hopeless manner. However, it was as if she had a spark of hope left as she prompted herself up and wiped away the tears. Whilst inhaling deep breaths, she thought. Thought of a place to go.

YEAR 8 – IRIS NUREDINI

BEGINNINGS ARE THE WORST ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY ARE THE PERFECT RED

The perfect red. Bright but menacing, billowing through the sky in the mass of perfect white landscape. Yet there was nothing perfect about this situation. While the ruby smoke gradually diffused into the grey turbulent clouds, dark figures emerged out of thin air. Their obsidian coloured clothing fluttered around their strong slender bodies concealing their identity as they mysteriously gathered; standing at the bottom of the snowy hill staring coldly. All you could see were their dim narrowed eyes peeking through showing anger and cruelty; piercing the atmosphere. Undistracted, the posse glared a lethal glare at one solemn body who stood by the perfect red smoke. Collectively, these men were uneasy around this singular man and as he slowly raised his hand with confidence, many flinched.

Suddenly, a deep growl like a deadly bear erupted from the silence echoing around the vast space and that hand made a signal causing the members to widen their icy eyes in shock and emit deep gasps. They turned to look at each other for the first time and although truly ghastly vendetta hung in the air and caused tension you could cut with a knife, they realised they had to put that aside. The ground rumbled beneath them. Distressing screams were heard in the distance. It had begun.

YEAR 9 – ALLY GILMOUR

The lining of my stomach crumpled up like a piece of paper. I waited alone on my bed, feeling the soft tingling of water drip down and reach my lips. I could feel the softness of the bed sheets underneath my lifeless body. The bed sheets didn't feel like mine. Where was I? My brain was still alive but my limbs were frozen and eyes kept open. My eyes were the only part of my body I could use. I heard a loud noise, like a bang. Footsteps swiftly followed it. I saw a figure all in white. As it came closer I could recognise that the figure was in fact a man. It seemed that he was a doctor. My ears picked up a muffled noise which matched the patterns the man's mouth was making. But I didn't do anything in response. Suddenly, my lifeless body felt alive. My limbs jumped up. I could see my arm flying around the room. Then, my leg began to walk around on its own. But the man was still there staring at me. Like he was examining me. My mouth began to scream. I was trying to warn him. But no response. Nothing.

YEAR 9 – CAMPBELL EADY

It was freezing as always in the Arctic when we saw the figure emerge from the icy hill on the horizon; when we witnessed its shadow spread out across the white wasteland, something was afoot. Closer and closer it came to our home. No one knew where it was from but as it approached our home everyone cowered into a corner. Maybe it was the red smoke that came out of his back, maybe it was the distorted body that lay under the cloak. Foot by foot the luminous figure trudged through the snow, it was almost as if he was tired.

A bang on the door! The deafening knock still rings in my ears like an explosion. As I looked out of the window to see who it was, the figure was there. Part of my body was telling me to not open the armoured door; the other half, intrigued to see what was under that mystical cloak. Curiously, I looked through the small piece of glass at the thing I soon recognised as a person. His face was twisted and bruised. Yet I decided to open the door, to let him in ...

YEAR 9 – MAXWELL BURSON

It was dark, and silent, nothing but the very vague, but fast breathing due to my confusion. I don't know where I am, how I got here, or anything. Just that the current position I'm in, is not a great one. My first gut feeling was to look around. I slowly stood up, and looked all round my position. Three very dark hallways, all of them look as if they go for miles, they each had about 3 meters between both, almost smooth, black walls. I quickly picked up that the hallway on my right has a small, pretty dim, red light quite far down, same with the other one, but green. Just to be finished off with the empty hallway that had nothing. I stood in the intersection of these 3 hallways, contemplating which hallway to take. They all didn't look great, and I started to get on guard as I thought I heard a footstep from the red lighted hall, as fast as light, I swung around to the hall only to notice a very dim silhouette of a rather tall man, with some sort of weapon. I spun around and started to walk down the green lighted hall. While hurrying, the footsteps started again, but a lot faster, and gradually getting louder. I broke into a sprint, trying to take my attention off the heavy breathing right behind me.

YEAR 9 – LILY RAY

I stepped onto the train station platform, ticket in my hand. After this morning there was no turning back. The mundane sounds of announcements echoed through my small brain. The same occurrences every day. The sound of swallows chirping in a beech tree. The feeling of anxiety of the day ahead. The touch of the breeze sweeping through my hair. Today was going to be different, I turned looking into the eyes of a young girl so innocent and pure not knowing the darkness of the world. The screeches of wheels drew closer stepped, three two one, and jump.

YEAR 9 – MOLLY WICKING

I've never met a man, let alone a boy, who had carried as much pain through their life as he did. Bruises and scars covered his pale skin. He'd been lied to, manipulated and abused. He's seen horrors worse than hell. The nightmares started when he was only eight and they only got worse as time went on. By the time he turned fifteen he had gone completely insane. I was forced to stand by and watch the boy I loved suffer as the voices took control of his mind and body. I had to sit there as his cries for help got louder, knowing that I was incapable of saving him from his own thoughts.

He died three days before his 16th birthday. I held his cold hand as he closed his eyes for the last time and whispered to me "Be careful Alyssa, the voices are coming for you next. RUN!"

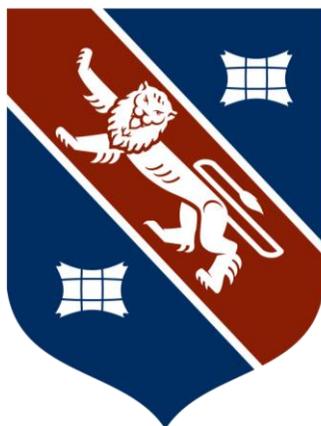
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE.

CHAPTER I.

IT is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the proper person to be married by one or other of their daughters.

"I have heard that Netherfield Park is let to Mr. Bingley," said Mr. Bennet, "and his wife is to live there. It is a delightful estate, and he has more than five thousand a year. It is a pity that Mr. Bingley should be so single. He is a very agreeable man, and his wife is a very sensible woman. I wish you would go and see them. You will find them very agreeable people, and I am sure you will like them very much. I wish you would go and see them. You will find them very agreeable people, and I am sure you will like them very much."



www.royalrussell.co.uk