

Hello! I am Vanessa and I have been appointed Bristol City poet for 2018 - 2020.

I am absolutely honoured to represent this humble metropolis that I have called home for the past eight years. My love for this city and for poetry happened more or less alongside each other: I was only a year into a burgeoning spoken word career when I moved here for university. As the streets and sights of this place have become as familiar to me as my own limbs, so has poetry become an integral part of who I am.

I know that many people don't like or care about poetry. Usually, people's lasting impression of poetry is the antiquated verse they were forced to read in English lessons. Cold, lifeless dissection of sonnets written by long dead white men is not the way to get young people excited by poetry - and yet time and again this is all our curriculum offers us. I consider this post a fruitful chance to show people how playing with words can make the world a more exciting and bearable place. Poetry is nothing more than mucking about with language: splashing it about in weird, fun and exciting ways and seeing what revelations it can offer us. We all have a unique way of expressing ourselves and this is where the essence of poetry lies. There is as much poetic potency in the lilting patois of the Caribbean men sat outside Dad's Cabs and the playful Bristolian slang of a local farmer as there is in all the poetry anthologies in a library. Most of us are already poets, whether we realise it or not!

There have been some grumbles about whether our Mayor can justify spending money on a City Poet when brutal cuts are being made to essential council services. I agree: it's a hard equation to justify in such austere times. You wouldn't be unjust in assuming the city poet's role is simply to commemorate public facing events and create positive propaganda for this city. However, I think this role can and should be about more than that. I fully understand the responsibility of being paid council money for this privilege. Consequently, I want to make sure that this role serves the people of this city in real and tangible ways. I don't want to just perform poems in central venues that many Bristol citizens can't or don't often access. I don't want to just run workshops for those who already have the means to access art easily. And I certainly don't want this post to be just about me and my opinions. The city poet should endeavour to represent *all of us* as Bristol citizens. The Bristol I know as a former UoB student and current resident of Redland is different to that of a young Somali mother of two in Easton, a born and bred Bristolian in Yate or an elderly person in living sheltered accommodation in Fishponds. I consider it my duty to honour our differences and spend as much time listening and engaging with the community as I do writing and performing.

Some of us have a joyous relationship with this city. Others of us feel frustrated, silenced and left behind. Whether because of gentrification, inadequate housing, lack of school resources, or the failures of the mental health services at universities, many Bristol dwellers have grievances about their quality of life in this city. I intend to let people express these issues, as well as celebrating the many things that make this city such an incredible place to live. Poetry is one of many things that can provoke discussions around and solutions for our societal problems.

So consider me at your disposal! I am a busy bee and there's only so many engagements I can commit to and I sadly can't promise a response to all messages. However, I will try my best to create meaningful engagements with as many of you as possible. I am especially interested in hearing from those of you who don't usually engage with the arts. Feel free to use the contact box to send in your requests for poems about Bristol. I will select the most interesting requests and create bespoke poems that will be published online. I have plenty of ideas up my sleeve for events and projects, but your input is invaluable. If you have ideas as to how I can be of service to this city, do not hesitate to message with your ideas.

Here's to filling this fair city with poetry. I hope I do our home justice.

Vanessa Kisuule