



TLC SHOWCASE

ZAKIA CARPENTER-HALL

Introduction to the manuscript	2
Extract from <i>Into The Same Sound Twice</i>	3
About the Writer	8

Introduction to *Into The Same Sound Twice*

‘Underlying all her work is a desire to explore what it means to be human, blend inner worlds with outer realities and seek uncommon perspectives.’

– Jerwood Arts

My debut poetry pamphlet *Into the Same Sound Twice* (Seren, 2023) charts moments of departure and initiation, descends into myth and speculative poetics. It includes a wide range of themes: music, the environment, the body – subject matter that is both intimate and vast.

I like what Carl Phillips wrote in his nonfiction book *My Trade is Mystery*, ‘the poem is a map, but after the fact: not a way of getting somewhere but a record of having been lost, of where that lostness brought me, until what was uncharted country became, for the space of the poem, a place to live.’ Caroline Bird wrote in her essay ‘The Discipline of Getting Lost’, ‘Don’t wait for a fully formed idea...keep writing until the subject matter is no longer what the poem is about...Each time you perch on the ledge of a blank page, fight the urge to strap on the parachute of a “meaning”. Let your imagination catch you.’

I’d love to be able to say that my writing for this pamphlet began with a project in mind, but generally that’s not how I work. I follow my curiosities, influences, creative impulses through detours and winding paths. Whatever ideas I may have had at the outset are shed like snakeskin or milk teeth during the process.

In the summer of 2021, I didn’t know that I had a pamphlet forming. What I knew was that I had quite a few recent poems – some of which, I had followed into profundity. Poets reading my work encouraged me to submit the manuscript to publishers and competitions. So in preparation, I applied for the TLC Free Reads scheme via Writing East Midlands.

Michael Langan’s feedback was very encouraging and provided enough guidance to get me to the next draft of each poem. He saw his comments and questions as a conversation with me and the work, ‘They are designed to be suggestions and not “corrections”’, he stated. In conclusion he mentioned, ‘Just to reiterate, Zakia, that your work is very strong and I can see a real sense of distinct “vision” there...’ A year later in June 2022, Seren’s Editorial Board unanimously voted to publish my manuscript which continued to develop and change to become what it is now.

Extract from *Into the Same Sound Twice* by Zakia Carpenter-Hall

The Gold Price

‘The asking price for everything was a nugget of gold, which no one had.’

~ Clarissa Pinkola Estés, ‘Jack and The Beanstalk’

My mother can turn false golds green,
so here’s the test: my father, as trusting
as Jack, brings home some metal alloy

gleaming like a love that is so pure,
it’s suspect. And neither my mother
nor I believe it could be real, and so

we test it. First for its story, which
sounds too much like a fable. Next,
for costs: a fourth of his stimulus check.

I worry about Jack, who keeps buying gold
to bestow his love, with everyone around him
disbelieving; we say that even the 18 karat

engraving could be forged. My mother
immerses this token of love in rubbing alcohol,
dabs it dry, wears it all night. When it survives,

she scrapes the exterior, tests its pliancy,
supplies a magnet to see whether the necklace
will be drawn towards it, and later watches

a silent video of a ring held suspended
in fire for a long time, and my mother seems
unsure whether it was the colour of the flame,

the consistency of the metal, the temperature
of the fire, or that the ring did not melt,
which was the true indication of its worth.

Notes: First published in *The Poetry Review*

Dust

I heard – out of nowhere – the resonant moans of a cello, and perhaps this was in response to hitting a certain pitch of feeling, a film where a couple takes a road trip and things begin to fall apart, that's when the cello sounded. I can't think in unknown music. But the washing machine provided an ambient sound and I was able to pick up on a signal not emitted from the neighbours. The theme music for stubborn gladness or a sweet but bitter need, a home that can't be returned to convened in my living room playing tenors of ache that I could not name, but had found an audience in me. I pressed my ear to the walls to find out if the noise level grew. Could I be the instrument? I checked the volume on all my devices. The resonance of those low levels of longing and mourning continued to play, though I could not translate it. I am not a musician. The melody paused in time with the washing machine as if to take a breath. I thought about people who claim to record the dead and say ghosts prefer to speak over a running faucet or radio wave static, as though a sharp white background is a kind of net. Then enter French horns in a casual flutter, everything taking its time, and talking at once, a movement. When the washer stopped, so did the jazz.

Notes: An early draft of this poem was submitted as a part of my manuscript for TLC Free Reads.

Into the Same Sound Twice

As a child, I mixed up the words musician
and magician. I couldn't be sure which one
relied on magic, which was mostly preparation.
Which artist makes something appear from nothing,
who carries instruments, sculpts emotions,
or has mastered misdirection? Are dancers
magicians or musicians? I play close, I *pay* close
attention to their music, no – their muscle isolations,
transitions between stillness and motion, between
gestures: crisp definition, rough, raw, or sequenced
as the splicing of frames in a film – seams invisible.
I wanted to know about magicians, so I watched
Black Thought freestyle for ten minutes. I'm thinking
of David Blaine when he pushed a solid metal rod
through his arm, then his hand, both times missing
all blood vessels and arteries; he didn't bleed. It got me
thinking, Does a lyrical emcee dance or perform magic?
When the lyricist starts rocking to the momentum
of his words, or spitting according to the rhythm
like he's charting a course with his body, is it intuition
which guides and fills the sails of his lungs
across the sea of a looped sound sample? As he creates
his own weather, not the rhythm but the climate,

mirror neurons firing, head nods flicker through
the crowd in agreement. The lyricist 'dances'.
This 'dance' is in his head and in his body, colours
begin to be elicited by music, hues of blues and purples.
I fall into it, lose track of time, my relationship
to sound deepens. His lyricism slippery, eel-like. Safety
is a slick business. The audience endeavours not to drown
in the undertow of a current that pulls us beneath it,
baritone but siren-like, as it calls us to disembark
and wade in something we're not ready to be freed of,
the song is a good net, we the sweet captives
can feel a tingling sensation in our toes
and limbic systems, our vagus nerves electric
as a singer thunders, *And I dared to leave* amidst ripples
of reverberating bass. We can't turn away; we sheep.

Notes: First published in *New Humanist*

About the Writer

Zakia Carpenter-Hall is an American writer, tutor and critic living in the UK. She was a winner of Poetry London's inaugural mentoring scheme, a London Library Emerging Writer, and a Jerwood Bursary Recipient. She has been a Poet in Residence with The Scottish Poetry Library, in partnership with Africa in Motion and the Obsidian Foundation, which resulted in her ecopoetry film '[Human Ecologies](#)' (2021). Her poetry and reviews have been published in *Poetry Wales*, *The Poetry Review*, *Wild Court*, *Magma* and elsewhere. She was interviewed on [The Poetry Society Podcast](#) and her Behind the Poem Feature '[Zakia Carpenter-Hall: The Mythic Element](#)' discussing 'The Gold Price' can be found via The Poetry Review's webpage. She has taught creative writing at Kingston University, the Poetry School and Royal Holloway, University of London where she is a PhD candidate. [Into the Same Sound Twice](#) (Seren, 2023) is her debut poetry pamphlet.



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