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The Poetry Society premieres performance of new commissions in response to the legacy of the First World War



2 October 2014
Southbank Centre, London

***“My subject is war, and the pity of war;”* declared war poet Wilfred Owen.**

Poetry is the medium through which generations have come to understand the **First World War**. A hundred years on, the **Poetry Society** has commissioned four of the UK’s most exciting writers, for a contemporary response to the legacy of the conflict. **Denise Riley, Steve Ely, Zaffar Kunial** and **Warsan Shire** premiere their searing new poems on **National Poetry Day**, Thursday **2 October** in the Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall, London SE1. The poets will perform their work live, accompanied by visuals created by **Robert Peake**.

The four new works which collectively make up **‘The Pity’** examine the effects of war from different angles. Some of the sequences are rooted directly in the World War I experience, exploring less familiar aspects such as the work of the post-war exhumation squads, shifts in mourning customs, or the national obsession with séances. Other sequences follow the story of global conflict right up to the present day.

‘Tucked in’ isn’t quite how we’d put it.
We weren’t plumped up neatly in bed.
If you ‘fell’ as one piece you were lucky,
Not dismembered before you were dead.

Extract from *‘I am a gramophone on the subject’* by Denise Riley

From the unconscionable to the inconsolable, from sacrifice to survival, **‘The Pity’** turns an unflinching gaze on the subject of war.

The Poetry Society has an extensive programme examining the legacy of the First World War. For further details visit www.poetrysociety.org.uk/ww1

Continues over

Commissioned by the Poetry Society and supported by The London Community Foundation and Cockayne – Grants for the Arts. The premiere of 'The Pity' takes place as part of the London Literature Festival, Southbank Centre. Thursday 2 October 6pm. Tickets £10. Box Office: 0844 847 9910 southbankcentre.co.uk/londonlitfest

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For further information or to interview the poets, contact Robyn Donaldson on 020 7420 9886 or email rdonaldson@poetrysociety.org.uk

Notes to Editors:

THE POETRY SOCIETY

The Poetry Society was founded in 1909 to promote a "more general recognition and appreciation of poetry". Since then, it has grown into one of Britain's most dynamic arts organisations, representing British poetry both nationally and internationally. With innovative education and commissioning programmes and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, the Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages. It publishes the magazine *The Poetry Review*, runs the National Poetry Competition, the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award and the youth performance poetry championship SLAMBassadors UK. The Poetry Society's early history was deeply connected with the writers of World War 1. Throughout the period its magazine, *The Poetry Review* premiered new work by writers such as Thomas Hardy, Rupert Brooke, Leslie Coulson and Marian Allen. www.poetrysociety.org.uk

THE POETS



Steve Ely

Steve Ely is a poet from the Osgoldcross wapentake in the West Riding of Yorkshire. His first book of poems, *Oswald's Book of Hours*, is published by Smokestack and was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection in 2013 and the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry. *England*, his second book of poems, will be published 2015, also by Smokestack. His novel, *Ratmen*, is published by Blackheath Books. *The Poetry Review* published his sequence of poems about werewolves in Spring 2014. He's just finished *Made in Mexborough: Ted Hughes's South Yorkshire*, a biographical work about Hughes's neglected Mexborough period.



Zaffar Kunial

Zaffar Kunial was born in Birmingham and currently lives in Cumbria where he is the 2014 Wordsworth Trust Poet-in-Residence. Recently selected as one of the latest Faber New Poets, his debut pamphlet, *Faber Young Poets 11* is published on 2 October. His poem 'Hill Speak' was placed third in the 2011 National Poetry Competition. In 2012 he won a Northern Writers' Award. A graduate of the LSE, for the last five years Zaffar has worked as a full-time 'Creative Writer' for Hallmark cards in West Yorkshire. To date, 'Hill Speak' is his only published poem. He has new poems forthcoming in the Autumn issue of *The Poetry Review*.



Denise Riley

Denise Riley has a background in both poetry and academia. She is currently Professor of Poetry and the History of Ideas at the University of East Anglia. Riley's many collections of poetry include *Penguin Modern Poets 10* (with Douglas Oliver and Ian Sinclair), and *Denise Riley: Selected Poems* (Reality Street). She edited *Poets on Writing; Britain 1970-1991*. Her long poem sequence 'A Part Song' won the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem, and was shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Award (both 2012). Her poem 'After La Rochefoucauld' is shortlisted for the 2014 Forward Prize.



Warsan Shire

Warsan Shire showed her first poem to her father at the age of 11, won an international poetry slam at 16 ("I didn't really understand what a poetry slam was"), and published her first pamphlet, *teaching my mother how to give birth* (flipped eye) in 2011 aged just 22. In 2013 she not only won the first Brunel University African Poetry Prize, but was also named the inaugural Young Poet Laureate of London. She was published in the Winter 2012 issue of *The Poetry Review*, and has new poems in the anthology *Ten: the new wave*, published by Bloodaxe in September. Born in Kenya to Somali parents, she currently lives in London.