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# Message Poems from Felix Dennis Prize Shortlisted Poets

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Forward Arts Foundation asked the poets shortlisted for the Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection to write a poem responding to the theme of 'messages' for National Poetry Day.

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[www.NationalPoetryDay.co.uk](http://www.NationalPoetryDay.co.uk)



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Ruby Robinson, Harry Giles, Nancy Campbell, Ron Carey, Tiphonie Yanique at the Forward Prizes 2016

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# Above Antarctica

I've circled this research station a million times  
in darkness, a million times in daylight  
to send your messages home ...*So far away...I miss you...*

*Not long left now...* Save. Send. Wait for a response.  
I relay your metadata on ocean warming  
and thinning ice to labs across the world. *Nowhere*

*too far away.* Your observations of this continent  
attuned to my wavelength. Spectrometer readings.  
Fossil discoveries. Aurora activity. Solar flares.

Snowfall. Open a new spreadsheet. Save.  
Fill in a hundred cells. Click send. Quick.  
*Not long left now. What can we save?*

I orbit on towards the dark horizon.

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**Nancy Campbell:** One of the most urgent messages of our time is environmental. But who is listening? Satellites enable scientists working in remote polar locations to relay research home

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There is a film of this poem made with the British Antarctic Survey on Youtube here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAo69wmmzD8>

# THE MESSAGES

Just checking in on whether the eyes are low? In haste.

Just thought I'd see if the bone is sharp? Speak soon.

Quickly following up on whether the heart is honed. Cheers now.

Just quickly following up on whether the nerves are ripped! Much love!

Just quickly checking in on if the throat is cracked? Be well!

Just thought I'd check in quickly on if the jaws are keen? Big hugs.

Thought I'd send a reminder on whether the lips are split. All best.

Wanted to send a follow up on if the chords are firm. All best

Just following up quickly on if the breath is brass. All best.

Just following up quickly on if the tone is steel! All yours.

Just following up quickly on if the lungs are spent? Take care!

Wanted to check in on whether the hurt is fine? See you.

Sending a follow up on whether the grief is full. X X.

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**Harry Giles:** I thought about how we live in a world that's full of messages — my every day is structured by emails, to do lists, reminders I've set myself, tweets, notifications, online Scrabble moves — so I wanted to make something that played with the idea of a message and inhabited the same platform. I started sketching out variations on the classic passive-aggressive "check in" message, added some twists to make it creepier, and built an engine to generate infinite variations. You can find the engine at <https://twitter.com/M3554G35>

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There is a recording of Harry Giles reading the poem available on Soundcloud here: <https://soundcloud.com/harry-giles-6/the-messages>

# Paper Boats

(for Greg)

After Mass, my gentle brother folded thoughts  
and messages into paper boats, all sharp

angles and colours, to sail the muscling river.  
No one could ever remember the Shannon

so high; racing mad between King John's

and St Munchin's quaking banks – where

we stood, empty and full of things unsaid.  
Someone said a prayer, while others flicked  
through well-thumbed pages of memory.

On the boardwalk, our Viking children ran;  
Their longboats already heading out to sea.  
With them I sent my first book of poetry;

*With love to Mum and Dad. My mother now  
among the new, my father among the old dead.*

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**Ron Carey:** We never stop trying to connect to the people we love. And we have so much to tell them when they are gone - sending messages and prayers when we miss them the most. For her Remembrance Mass, my bother Greg had the idea that all the family would write messages to my Mum. Then we made them into paper boats to float down the River Shannon. My message was I had published a book of poetry, something she always encouraged me to do but had not lived to see.

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There is a film of this poem available on Youtube here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fioOvk\\_S05c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fioOvk_S05c)

# Tether

*i.m. E.V.A. Cowell*

Some say grief is a lookout-tower,  
a swinging cage rigged beside  
the heart, battering  
a plume of sail.

Some find an anchor, slipping its noose  
and on the sand, unloosed –  
a canary, a little sun  
rising up.

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**Ruby Robinson:** This summer my grandmother passed away. I've been thinking about how mothers and daughters are sort of tethered to one another and this can be a complex dynamic, a tether being reassuring and secure, as well as a restraint or confine. I was thinking about all this and about the light and shade of my grandmother's character and the effect she had on others, particularly my mother. It made me think of seas and tides and anchors, of pushing and pulling.

It is a small poem and perhaps doesn't feel wholly complete. I wanted the message to be one of hope, in the emblem of the canary, freed from its tether at last.

# The History of Mosquito Bay

Forbearers tell the story of Lindbergh  
touching down on the runway of sand,  
his pants full of shit, his heart full of child.  
The islanders named a beach after him.  
Forbearers tell the tale of Oppenheimer  
docking at the island not Manhattan.  
His head bursting out of the window,  
so the islanders named a beach after him.  
We islanders know the bays, their stinging.  
As children, we find bones and goddesses:  
Our ancestors or other invaders.  
In the islands, there is a science  
to isolate a bone from an ancestor.  
Harder still, the story of a plague  
from the name of a god.

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**Tiphonie Yanique:** The theme this year was 'messages.' In 'The History of Mosquito Bay' I wanted to think about how the history of colonisation is passed among a community via messaging such as stories or tales. I also wanted to think about how the land itself sends messages of its own history via natural archives such as excavated bones or via the way people change the names of places. When I was in London recently I stayed in a part of the city that was heavily bombed during WW2. Here and there was newer construction among the much older architecture. That is the city's landscape saying: "Something happened here. This place was changed by history." I wanted my poem to demonstrate this for an island, even one where the topography is made of sand--which tends to shift and seemingly erase. I wanted to show that even a place like that holds history. The messages are always there.