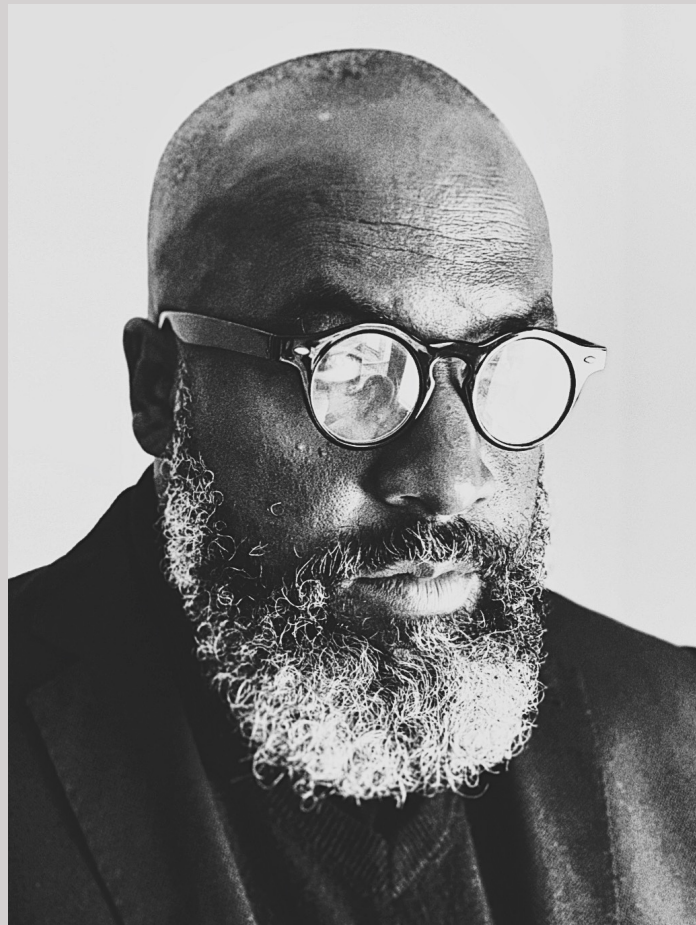


A Portable Paradise

Prom (pt)



a prom • a gala • a dance • a jig

inspired by
Roger Robinson's Poem

Pernessy Poets

for Roger Robinson

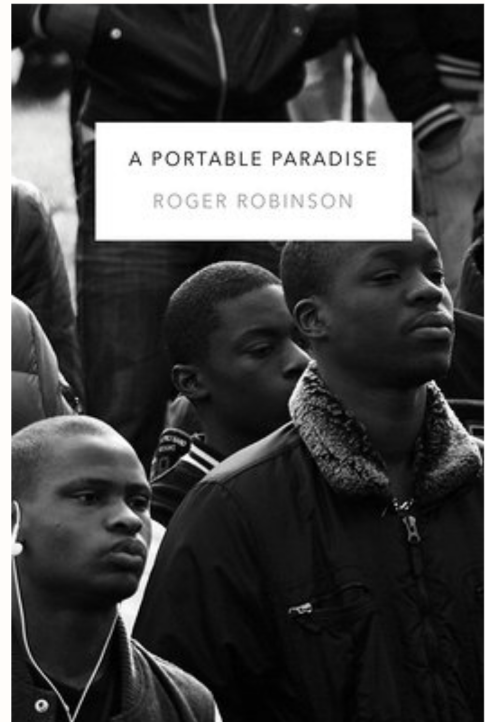
Roger Robinson is a writer and educator who has taught and performed worldwide and is an experienced workshop leader and lecturer on poetry. He was chosen by Decibel as one of 50 writers who have influenced the black-British writing canon. He received commissions from The National Trust, London Open House, BBC, The National Portrait Gallery, V&A, INIVA, MK Gallery and Theatre Royal Stratford East where he also was associate artist. He is an alumnus of The Complete Works.

His workshops have been part of a shortlist for the Gulbenkian Prize for Museums and Galleries and were also a part of the Webby Award-winning Barbican's, *Can I Have A Word*. He was shortlisted for The OCM Bocas Poetry Prize, The Oxford Brookes Poetry Prize and highly commended by the Forward Poetry Prize 2013.

He has toured extensively with the British Council and is a co-founder of both Spoke Lab and the international writing collective Malika's Kitchen. He is the lead vocalist and lyricist for King Midas Sound and has also recorded solo albums with Jahtari Records.

Roger lives between England and Trinidad. His book, *He is the second* writer of Caribbean heritage to win the prize, the highest value award in UK poetry, after Derek Walcott who won the 2010 prize. Robinson's victory was also seen as an important one for small presses.

A Portable Paradise was only the second book of poetry to win the Ondaatje Prize in May 2020.



A Portable Paradise
[Peepal Tree Press], won the
prestigious T. S. Eliot Prize 2019

Listen to Pádraig Ó Tuama read
the poem (On Being's Poetry Unbound).

To purchase Robinson's book,
A Portable Paradise [Peepal Tree
Press], please consider supporting
your local indie bookseller.

rogerrobinsononline.com

[@rrobinson72](https://twitter.com/rrobinson72)

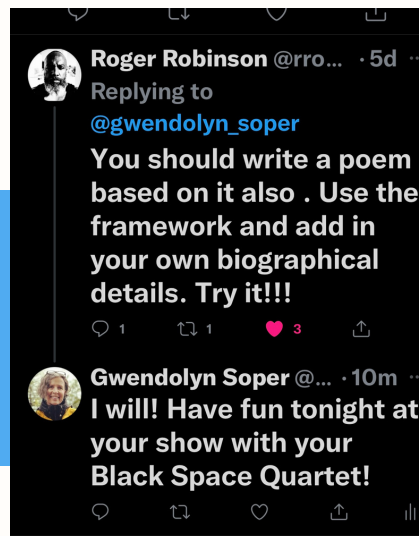
[@rogerrobinsononline](https://www.instagram.com/rogerrobinsononline)

Follow him on social media to discover his workshops, book a lecture, and more.

Elizabeth Boquet, founder of Pernessy Poets, brings writers together from around the world for Pernessy Poet workshops. She lives in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Gwendolyn Soper is a writer. The idea for her #ParadiseProject was inspired after she tweeted a photo of one of the hand-written copies she'd made of Robinson's iconic poem (which she'd given as gifts to family). Mr. Robinson saw her tweet and replied.

Gwendolyn took his advice and wrote her own paradise poem. She ultimately guided workshop participants through the same prom(pt) at a Pernessy Poets Workshop. This collection is the result of that workshop.



elizabethboquet.com
gwendolynsoper.com

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A Portable Paradise**

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A Portable Paradise

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak of Paradise,
then I'm speaking of my crush on you
that I always carry on my person,
concealed, so no one else will know,
not even you – especially you.
That way, nobody can steal it,
and when propriety puts me
under pressure, I pretend your hands
slip into my pockets, and I hold them
there, out of sight, close and warm.
And when such sustained daily stress
gets too much, I take my Paradise
to an empty room with a lamp and a desk,
turn my pockets inside out, and empty
what I can onto paper. Shine the lamp
on our entwined hands, just like
the eternal fresh hope of morning,
and stare at them till the sun rises.

- Elizabeth Boquet
Lausanne, Switzerland

elizabethboquet.com

A portable paradise

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak of Paradise
then I'm speaking of horses
who taught me to always
ride with wind and the rain so
no-one else could reach me.
That way you'll be free, they'd say
and if life's pressures intrude
on your boundaries or muddle your head
just hold onto the reins
and dig in your heels
to gallop away to the hills or
meander along the banks of a river.
And if your stresses are constant and daily
just get yourself to remember
the sweetest smell of warm
horses in winter then empty
those memories onto a page
and write your way to freedom.

- Jane Cottingham
Saint-Julien-en-Genevois, France

Portable Family

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak of hell
Then remind me of my nonna
Who told me to carry with me
Everywhere at all times
Photos of my children, in my wallet,
Next to the bed, in my attaché case, (my phone)
On desks, the office wall, the home hallway
Across Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East
They will be your energy, your wisdom, she said
Their tiny faces of smeared chocolate, your treat
Their walk through the pine forest, your solace
Their toes in the briny sea, your sun.
And when the agonizing absence presses
On the brick that was your heart
Sprinkle yourself with lemon, find yourself a quiet place
Call the name of the missing one
Picture pine trees and draw her standing there
Draw her with her toes in the briny sea
With outstretched hands surrounded by her children
Then draw her children, her diplomas, her garden
And that will be your heaven.

-Julianne DiNenna
France

A Pausable Paradise

after Roger Robinson

I do not speak of Paradise, though I know
its memory waits somewhere in my bottom desk drawer
amid insomniac scribbles and dream diaries
I've glimpsed it often enough, only half aware
until its serenity was stolen by some worldly fuss

I shovel away the guilt of someone else's sorrow
hoping it might conveniently bury the shame
of my privilege
I am neither here nor there
unworthy of my own childhood
she reminded me constantly
in other words, to fear jealousy
I learned to hide my joy

I am my own vice grip now
squeezing the life out of myself
protecting something no one can steal
something so precious I forget to own it

barefoot in warm summer driveway puddles, I knew it
I smelled it in the lilac trees on the side of the house
digging deeper, I spotted it in the golden sands
fingerpaints squished it through my chubby fingers
it even stuck to the roof of my mouth as cookie dough

decades from now, digging in the attic
a small girl with freckles will discover the treasure
between the lines, she finds me there
and wonders if her own mother
has her own pausable paradise
to feed her sweeter dreams

A Portable Paradise

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak of paradise, then I'm speaking of the wind who whispers caressing my branches:
Remember you're a Rowan tree,
a blackbird's berry paradise, orange beads they can't steal when you offer them at will.
And when life puts you under pressure, and gorging birds congregate, a fluttering feast, know that each
cluster is a sunset-colored gift.
And when your stresses are sustained, and fruit and wilted leaves are gone and you stand denuded,
know your roots are home to mushrooms and mice and your trunk to mystery-green moss.
And when your stresses are sustained and daily and winter wraps you in frost and snow,
watch your paradise take another form: shimmering crystals adorn your every twig and envelop your
sleeping buds.
And when the snow melts, shine your lamp of hope into to the dawn of spring and listen:
your berries blossomed into blackbird's song.

- Jo Christiane Ledakis
Geneva, Switzerland

A Portable Paradise

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak of Paradise,
then I'm speaking of swords. Dance. Calligraphy.
Thunder and wildness contained in a bottomless cup –
this thing, this plunging vessel I call a heart
sealed inside this cage of my chest.
That way no one can steal it. Diminish it. Negate it.
I'm under pressure, life hydraulic-pressing
til I buckle like broken clay. I'm no diamond.
Use your heart, every primordial fibre of me screams.
Hold it up like an offering, a sacrifice to the gods
sip (but slowly, slowly) its chillspicegunsteelshockwave brew
let it seep like caffeine into your blood.

Stresses – sustained and daily battleground royale
walled up, dammed, but every dam has a breaking point.
Before you break get yourself to an empty room, a bathroom,
an alleyway, any space you find or can make for yourself
and bring out your paradise, overturn the cup, pour a libation.
I've danced in snow, fought the air with swords
sliced time with words, watched the letters spill
sink into ground thirsty and parched for water.
Don't shine the lamp. Like a feral cat, wildness needs
to be coaxed into the open, enticed to creep out
from its hiding place at the bottom of the cup
where it cohabits with thunder. Don't stare. Wait.
In sleep, they will come and ask to dance.
Say yes.

- Lai Suk Yin
Malaysia

a portable paradise

after Roger Robinson

and if I speak of Paradise,
then I speak of this land where
I am lately come land of blue nights
and stars of lavender hills and scrubby
brush almost pitiable it demands nothing
of me a land finally mine I carry it concealed
in an aged wanting heart immune to the but but
buts the so dries the too hots the really barrens no
no one can steal the pleasure of earth found after
unending search of belonging when you
had not remarked the need pressing out
on each breath brittling your bones

and when life pits me against trouble or sends me
to other lands wet lands lands of tall glass and gray
of great pine forests of wild flower rivers under pointed
limey mountains not unloved but in my ear the quiet
tilling of red earth the cicada and in my eye almonds
flowering before winter turns oceans of poppies
tilted seeded heads of sunflower of olive green
groves of light and grace and wind remember
the wind fierce when it forces a reckoning
after all asks who are you and of what
are you made I will with certainty
set free this rooting heart

- klm (karen mcdermott)
Roussillon, France

A Portable Paradise

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak of Paradise
then I'm speaking of solitude,
an unseen light, too bright
for the ordinary eye.
They can't steal it, or hide it –
for first it must be found. Within
life's pressures, the ordinary day
glinting in a medicine cabinet, shut away
for tomorrow's illness. Today I choose
to forgive my stresses, peel tangerines
to kiss their jewel-like flesh. Inhale
the fresh scent and empty this paradise
into my palms, stained orange. Then leave
a bag of tiny fruit at my neighbour's doorstep
to discover. Paradise is a brown package
filled with coral light. I imagine her eyes
gleam, as she breaks open their skins.

- Nitya Nedyam
Singapore

Fort Paradise

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak since Paradise
then I am speaking from my people
who told me every bit of truth I need
to thrive as a person, this is the me
deeply concealed, they have tried to steal
this iron – this core strength, a pillar
my flesh clumps and moulds to magnetically
my inner eye knows the metal bone
smells like blood – fragrant DNA
shivers to every faint drum echo
and if the vibrations hum constantly
with thumbs plucking the catcut tissue
to an edge of reason, then retreat
to your mind, the cave where the self
sways in catatonic pulse, mumbling
an island song in flavoured lilt, a caviar
melting, till its spicy salt soothes all wounds.

-Saffron

Swiss/Jamaican poet living in Allaman, Vaud, Switzerland

My Portable Paradise

after Roger Robinson

And when I speak of Paradise,
then I'm speaking of my own home,
this walled garden of hopes sometimes
blooming, first inside me, then taking form
in this house, much older and stronger
than me, the place surrounded by a small garden
my husband and I fashion and unfashion as the years
pass and the trees cast more shade.

I know that time will steal this, too,
from me, in fact and memory. But now, sheltered
by these window-pierced walls, I watch
each day the sun and moon rise and set
inflected through atmosphere and season
and mood, and I am comforted. The ghost
of the fieldstone labyrinth we laid, then labored
to remove is comforted by rising of bee balm
and sage and mint, soothed now by snow.
Here is my pocket portmanteau packed
with such glimmers of eternity as I can stow
and sometimes, on a page like this, bestow.

- Leslie Schultz
Northfield, Minnesota, USA

winonapoet@gmail.com

A Portable Paradise

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak of Paradise,
then I'm speaking of desire:
the orange flame that licks you from the inside out.
It says, carry me into every room always –
up every hill, unashamed, wear me
on your sleeve. That way they can't burn you first.
And if life snuffs out the flame, I say
crouch down – reignite it gently with tinder
sit in a robe by its dancing blaze. If you need to,
howl What's Up by the 4 Non Blondes.
And if your stresses are sustained and daily
get to a safe place – be it a church
a bed, or campfire – and fan paradise
with a bellows: faith in a God, hot desires,
embers under marshmallows –
then lean in with your freezing skin
and the dependable sun inside you
that never sets, isn't meant to sleep.

-Gwendolyn Soper
Spring City, Utah USA

gwendolynsoper.com

An Edible Paradise

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak of Paradise,
then I'm speaking of my mother
who told me I have the ingredients
to make it: powdered sugar, butter, a touch
of cream. The blue and white vessel
on my countertop is waiting there for me.
Here's how I mix mine, she says,
and if life puts you under pressure
sift the sweetness into your own bowl.
Blend in the rest with your strong arm.
Sing what you need to sing till it comes together:
an anthem or a dirge.
And if your stresses are sustained and daily
get yourself to a kitchen – be it yours,
mine, the one in your mind – then make some.
Dip into it with your hands. Make a mess. Spread
your sweet buttercream frosting in swirls - all of it joy -
on the Great Graham Cracker of Life
then start licking it off till you sleep.

-Gwendolyn Soper
Spring City, Utah USA

Philippe

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak of Paradise
then I'm speaking of your arms around me
away from the world I cannot fathom and your voice
telling me I live somewhere on a cloud
(my heart in the sky of your eyes).
That way they can't steal me, you say.
And if life puts me under pressure,
then I'll think of how you rhyme words
from the depths of sleep or make me laugh
on dark winter mornings over nothing at all.
And if my stresses are sustained and daily
I'll get myself to any place that will let me
see you — find your eyes, your breath, your heat
and empty my pockets of paradise:
a few tadpoles (or maybe even a frog), strawberry jam and concentrated milk
shine a light on it all like a party for two
then reach out for your hand till I sleep.

- Barbara Geary Truan
Geneva, Switzerland

Apprentices

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak of Paradise,
then I'm speaking of the Master's work of art restored:
oceans waltzing with life, winds shepherding vibrant air clean,
trees everywhere talking to skies still replete with notions of immensity.
That way we can find our way back to each other.
And if life seems intransigent in its decay, impossible to restore,
if the continents of floating garbage have made your heart too sick
or you cannot imagine where to begin, remember we are all apprentices.
And if all the stresses are sustained, or if the baby seabirds
grounded by plastic in their bellies paralyse you,
get yourself somehow more and more quiet
as a moon — find the sweet threads that tie us
and empty this work of art into the undulating fibres of the implicate order.
Pour it into that placenta where everything real is lighting up
where all the original powers still pulsate and even our tiny lives may matter.
Shine those firing stars on it like a healer's hands.
Stay inside the workshop and keep working.

- Barbara Geary Truan
Geneva, Switzerland

The Violet Flame

after Roger Robinson

And if I speak of Paradise
Then I am speaking of you
Who told me to rise up and up and up
And to transmute with that violet flame
And to look up at the stars and turn it into fuel and to
Blast out my chest the only way I know best
And let the fire blaze in zest—you said –
And if the system would still stifle your flame
And syphon it away and use me more and more, to close your eyes
And breathe and ground in more of yourself than before
And to remember who you are
Remember where you came from
The stardust and crystalline energetic galore,
And how many ancestors hold you
As you embody their hope
And if the silencing is sustained, to
Surrender even more and sidle out from where you lay
And spiral up up up out of the mental haze
And seek that violent flame
That burns it all away, that

zero point, that torrential rain and
Current that flares up more, the more you stay
And find paradise in that spark
The kernel, the flame that is you
At the center of the universe
And if their blame overrides and wakes you
In the night, that spark of hope will seep into your sleep
And waking hours till you listen to that light in others,
And remember that it's all you, and you are me,
And the system that breaks down your glee,
Is also me shimmying back into the mirror and out the back
Of black holes of golden stars that cannot crease their glow
How can you fear light and dark and the banality as well
The only glass you see through is yourself—
And that violet wishing well instills light and dark into
You and I, and we instill the hope into hell we dive through
To light up you, and humanity—and myself in tell

- Emily Reid
Australian living in Gaza

And if I'm to speak
then it would be
 Paradise
i've been dammed for so long
i forgot to flow
 i speak
of rivers warbling
 nonsense
and silvered wisdoms
of treetop shivers
 murmurs
of birds and worms
buried in my throat
dirt under nails
empty spaces
edges of
songs
i've longed for
glasses of
scents
broken on this morning's rooftop dream
i've carried within.

- Barbara Turney Wieland
Somerton, Somerset, UK

**home again, home again
jiggity jig**

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