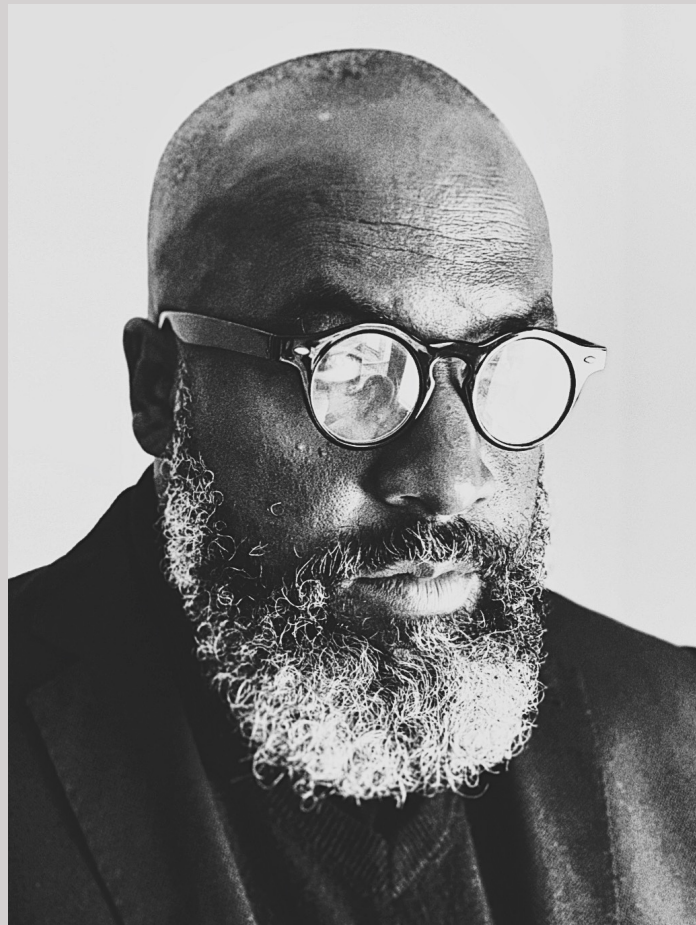


# **A Portable Paradise**

## **Prom (pt)**



**a prom • a gala • a dance • a jig**

**inspired by**  
**Roger Robinson's Poem**

Pernessy Poets

*for Roger Robinson*

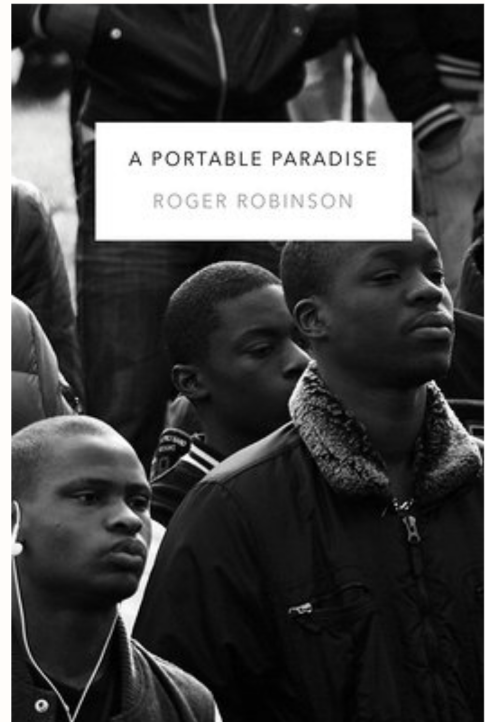
**Roger Robinson** is a writer and educator who has taught and performed worldwide and is an experienced workshop leader and lecturer on poetry. He was chosen by Decibel as one of 50 writers who have influenced the black-British writing canon. He received commissions from The National Trust, London Open 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](http://rogerrobinsononline.com)

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

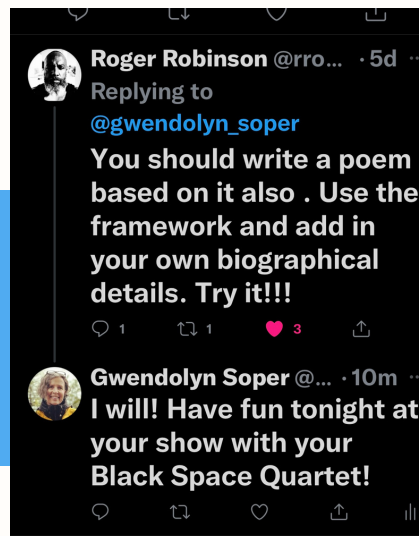
[@rogerrobinsononline](https://www.instagram.com/rogerrobinsononline)

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](http://elizabethboquet.com)  
[gwendolynsoper.com](http://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

## If in The Garden

*after Roger Robinson*

If I speak of Paradise  
then I'm speaking of    our grandmother  
who stands beside the river of time  
indulging in verdant views beneath a tree  
feasting on the whimbrel in flight    ki-ki-ki  
one eve shadowed into shame and blame.  
It's written lest we claim the truth  
hidden    the ways of knowing not  
forbidden.

If you  
have spent your life falling  
falling forward towards the horizon  
ever unattainable    no matter  
the pace or path  
the clay slab broken or effaced.  
And if like caterpillar you sense the tightness  
of the world    gagged then swallowed  
whole    your story's been mis-told.  
Close your eyes into the mute    beauty  
beauty of each breath  
inhale the tree  
                                hear the voice  
  pick another fruit.

-Mary Pecaut  
Pánama City, Pánama

[writeyourway.wordpress.com](http://writeyourway.wordpress.com)

## 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](http://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**

Pernessy Poets Workshop, Winter 2022  
based in Lausanne, Switzerland.  
Design: Gwendolyn Soper. Fonts: League Spartan  
Cormorant Garamond Me, Open Sans Light