

## **What I value about the natural world**

Shamshad Khan

Mimicry, serrated leaves with no sting. The hidden benefits of nettles. Straps of tapering chlorophyll. Mini rainbows winking in dew. Seeds of dark embryos. The way rotting is at the other end of life. How unexpected, reliable and persistent it is. An invitation to luxuriate the way nature does. To keep as still as a butterfly on a leaf before it lifts off.

I am part of an urban generation

I take walks in the small squares of green I find in between buildings

Spears of rust that were once purple flower clusters attract me

A motorised fly moving on my bare arm keeps me busy

Before I leave home I occupy myself with words from Mary Oliver's poem 'Evidence':

Where do I live? If I had no address, as many people  
do not, I could nevertheless say that I lived in the  
same town as the lilies of the field, and the still  
waters.

Mary Oliver has a relationship with the natural world that helps us grow fur, scales and amphibian skin as we read.

She soothes and calms our city hearts

Her words are wands of green light zapping the air free of carbon dioxide

I walk breathing in circles of oxygen

A mysterious bubbling on my skin

A poet who lives in nature more than I do  
warns me in advance to assume a prayer pose  
To lower my head  
To close my eyes with a transparent film

On my back street wanderings  
I stumble across the glinting silver eye of a disused fishing pond

The grey statue of a heron  
Like a single line in her poem  
Explains to me the mystery of aloneness

Just as we are  
Every autumn

Falling leaves  
Like good lovers  
Show us  
dazzling gold

The natural world speaks to our third ear  
We hear ourselves cracking twigs and squelching

our inner city  
covered in spores

I value that the natural world doesn't stop at the fence  
if we are hesitant it takes us over  
cement replaced by deep green velvet

and a moss of spires

unsure it creeps under our skin  
From the depths of decay  
white magic layers of fungal plates

Reflecting on this sort of beauty  
opens us to the unimaginable

Sitting on a park bench  
I am fixed on a page of devotion

pin pricks  
Curious

My left leg feeling  
Is it  
the sensation a tree trunk feels

I am  
Alerted

two shiny black almond eyes  
witnessing the evidence

a squirrel trusting me  
as much as I trust myself

My amazement snaps the moment

A hurried scrambling off

what I love about nature is the mud on the tread of my boots.

### **Shamshad Khan**

Shamshad Khan is a poet and resilience coach. She works with individuals and organisations using writing and coaching techniques to empower and engage. Her poetry collection *Megalomaniac*, published by Salt (2007) has been studied on the Lancaster University English Literature degree course. Her work has been featured on BBC Radio 3 and 4.

Shamshad has collaborated with artists and theatres including Horse and Bamboo Puppet Theatre as co-writer/director of the multi-media show *The Moonwatcher* (2018). She worked with Olympias Music on *Making Manchester*, a show combining physical theatre, music and poetry (RNCM, 2019), and on 'Dancing with Words' (Books UpNorth, 2019).

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A recording of this talk can be found on the WritersMosaic website at

**[writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk)**

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