

Writers who have inspired me

Testament

I guess the family tree goes way back

I can't see the roots no more

But I ain't that old

And the hope is

That the apple doesn't fall

Far from those who went before

From those we connect to

Give our respect to you

But this tree only spreads out in my mind

Like Blake's Human Abstract not real life
Not poison though, but an inspiration tree

(Like a bad concept thought up by a hippie art teacher
Where pupils write of aspirational figures on paper leaves)

An inverse tree in verse
Where actually, it is not those that made us
But those who we wish we could take the shape of
Those things we sense greatness in.

I'll start with Kae Tempest – *Brand New Ancients*
Epic and contemporary, and the everyday let downs of Tempest's *Wasted*
Tempest takes the poetics from hip hop – from New York's heaviest
emcees

Like Pharoahe Monch and UK rappers, the D Double Es, the Chester Ps,
And mixes with Blake and Euripides

Then Akala – knee deep in historical non-fiction,
Pan-Africanism weaved in with graphic novels and rapid-fire grime diction
Walking chartered London streets and chalking songs of experience

Then I'm time-skipping like Kurt Vonnegut – *Slaughterhouse-Five*
So it goes with anecdotes, stories within stories,
Capitalist apathy intersecting with World War tragedies and intergalactic
mastery

Then the intertextuality of Blake, not only referring to the biblical,
Mythical, but the everyday, how an Emanation can refer to local street
names

The angelic and to the guy who defamed him down the lane
Yet Blake died with barely a penny to his name
All the while constantly reaching for the greater narrative
To make us compassionate
To allow imagination to transform Albion

And like Orwell, often misapplied and misquoted,
Doublethink now today itself used in doublethinking
Following peers without knowing the road to Wigan
Cannot reflect and look from man to pig from pig to man again –
Enough to drive my 'mind to the abyss where poetry is written'
And like Blake, see a deeper understanding of the system we live in

Then Alan Moore mind-bending reality, working to counter culture
Taking iconic figures and turning them back on our assumptions
Watch men from Hell swamp things in league with the extraordinary
Punk rock on the page, Promethean penning the next mythologies
Like Blake with his Four Zoas and when America becomes a prophecy

'A dog returns to his vomit like a fool repeats his folly' on and on
From the Proverbs attributed to King Solomon
Reminding me of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake's words on pages
The method which transmits knowledge from generation to generation

High plains drifting like Jehst my favourite lyricist
Imagery and fury when he drops a bomb
Political, poetic and the profound delivered in rhythm like the head nod
Perhaps 'The voice of honest indignation is the voice of God'

And perhaps the list is obvious but there is reason
Many of these names appear again and again
Their imprints are not only made in my mind
But in so many in the world, the places they redefine
The spiritual and the tangible
The specific revealing the universal
The material and the euphoric
Like seeing

'A tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings
Bespanning every bough like stars'

Yeah, so it's Blake.

A lot of it keeps drawing me back to Blake.

Another old white dead guy

In the family tree

But
He wanted to chop it all down too
And imagine
Something
New

Testament

Testament is an acclaimed rapper, playwright and world record holding beatboxer based in West Yorkshire. His work includes the Hip-Hop album *Homecut: No Freedom Without Sacrifice*, spoken word performances for radio and television and the celebrated play *Black Men Walking* (nominated for Best Play at The Writer's Guild Awards 2019 & Best New Play at the UK Theatre Awards 2020). His radio play *The Beatboxer* was nominated for the Imison Award at the BBC Audio Drama Awards 2020.

Testament was Channel 4 writer-in-residence at Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester and his critically acclaimed show *Orpheus In The Record Shop* was broadcast on BBC Television in 2021. Testament's writing has been published in several anthologies and has been used as a teaching resource internationally.

A recording of this talk can be found at **writersmosaic.org.uk**

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