

**GRANDMA SMITH
AND GRANDPA
COOPER-CLARKE**

**INVESTIGATING
THE GODPARENTS
OF PUNK POETRY:
PATTI SMITH AND
JOHN COOPER
CLARKE**

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**WARNING: OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE
FROM THE START**





WHO THE F*CK ARE YOU AND WHY ARE WE HERE?

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Top Image from: https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/torn-posters_1034040.htm#query=punk&position=0&from_view=search&track=sph
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NATIONAL POETRY DAY: 5TH OCTOBER 2023

- Why do we need National Poetry Day?
- 66.5% of children and young people agreed that writing poetry made them feel better during lockdown. (The National Literacy Trust (2020))
- Poetry is an important vehicle to explore individual identity and the identity of others. (CLPE The Power of Poetry (2017))
- More than half of children and young people surveyed (54%) told us they do not currently engage with poetry. (The National Literacy Trust (2018))
- Poetry is the most common way for secondary students to encounter a Black, Asian or other minority ethnic author and single poems are the easiest texts to insert into the curriculum. (The Runnymede Trust and Penguin Random House Lit in Colour Report (2020))





**'I haven't fucked much with the past, but
I've fucked plenty with the future.'
(*'Babelogue'*, *Easter*, 1978)**

DEFINING PUNK

“Originally rock music played in a fast, aggressive, or unpolished manner [...] a genre of rock music originating in the late 1970s, characterized by a deliberately outrageous or confrontational attitude, energetic (and often chaotic) performance, and simple or repetitive song structures” (*OED online*).



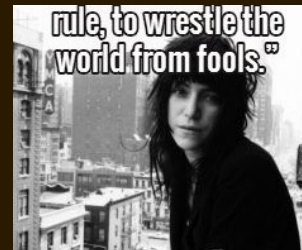
DEFINING PUNK

“In our heads we can all imagine a noise called punk rock. It’s nasty, brutish and short. It’s played on cheap guitars at high speed. [...] The general effect will not be pretty or romantic. It might even be downright ugly”
(Paul Du Noyer 6).



PATTI SMITH: 'PEOPLE HAVE THE POWER'

- Positive messages
- Calling for change
- Romantic depictions
- Offer hope
- Anarchic utopia
- 'Senses truly opened'
- 'to redeem the work of fools'



PATTI SMITH

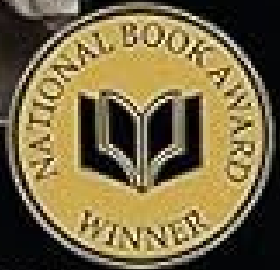
Just Kids (2010)

“I wanted to infuse the written word with the immediacy and frontal attack of rock and roll” (180)

“I wanted to be a poet but I knew I would never fit into their incestuous community” (214).

“Performing poetry night after night to an unreceptive and unruly crowd who were primed to see the New York Dolls [which] proved a challenging education” (218).

THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER



JUST KIDS

PATTI SMITH



“Autobiography has been [...] enlivened and in many cases transformed by feminist, working-class and black criticism” (Laura Marcus in *Auto/biographical Discourses* (1994) 1).

“Autobiography was a central case for feminist criticisms in the 1980s, exposing processes of exclusion and marginalisation in the construction of literary canons” (1)

GOBBING

“By the mid-1970s, the music industry promoted a state of passivity. In contrast, punk sought to erase the boundary between performer and audience, whether ideologically (anyone can do it) or physically in the practice of spitting on the group (gobbing)” (Savage, 147).

- [PS Spits](#)
- Boundaries
- Julia Kristeva – Abject
- Bakhtin - grotesque
- Bataille – formlessness





GEORGES BATAILLE

1897-1962

French Philosopher

'Formless', 1929

“affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.”
(‘Formless’ online)

MIKHAIL BAKHTIN

- Russian philosopher and Literary Critic
- 1895-1975
- Theories on the Grotesque
- Grotesque: comically or repulsively ugly or distorted



PUNK & THE GROTESQUE

- “Punk at its best was a period of creative confusion, from which astonishing things could grow. [...] It is by its nature disruptive. It creates excitement, produces heat and promotes disturbance. Punk takes traditional elements and disorganizes them.” (Du Noyer 7-8)
- “*bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh*” (Bakhtin 21).
- “a metamorphosis, of birth and death, growth and becoming” (Bakhtin 24)
- “The grotesque represents an ancient artistic urge to create a text that will challenge the traditional progressive mode of understanding and prioritize instead a newer or a previously unheard narrative” (Allen 135).
- Equalise and challenge authority

DERNGATE CIRCA 1983

- Rats 'spit through broken teeth'
- Foregrounds the inhumanity of Thatcher's Britain
- Babies die in boxes on 'beezley street'
- 'wipe clean' properties
(*Newsnight Interview*, 2013).



IMAGE COURTESY OF KEVIN BARRON



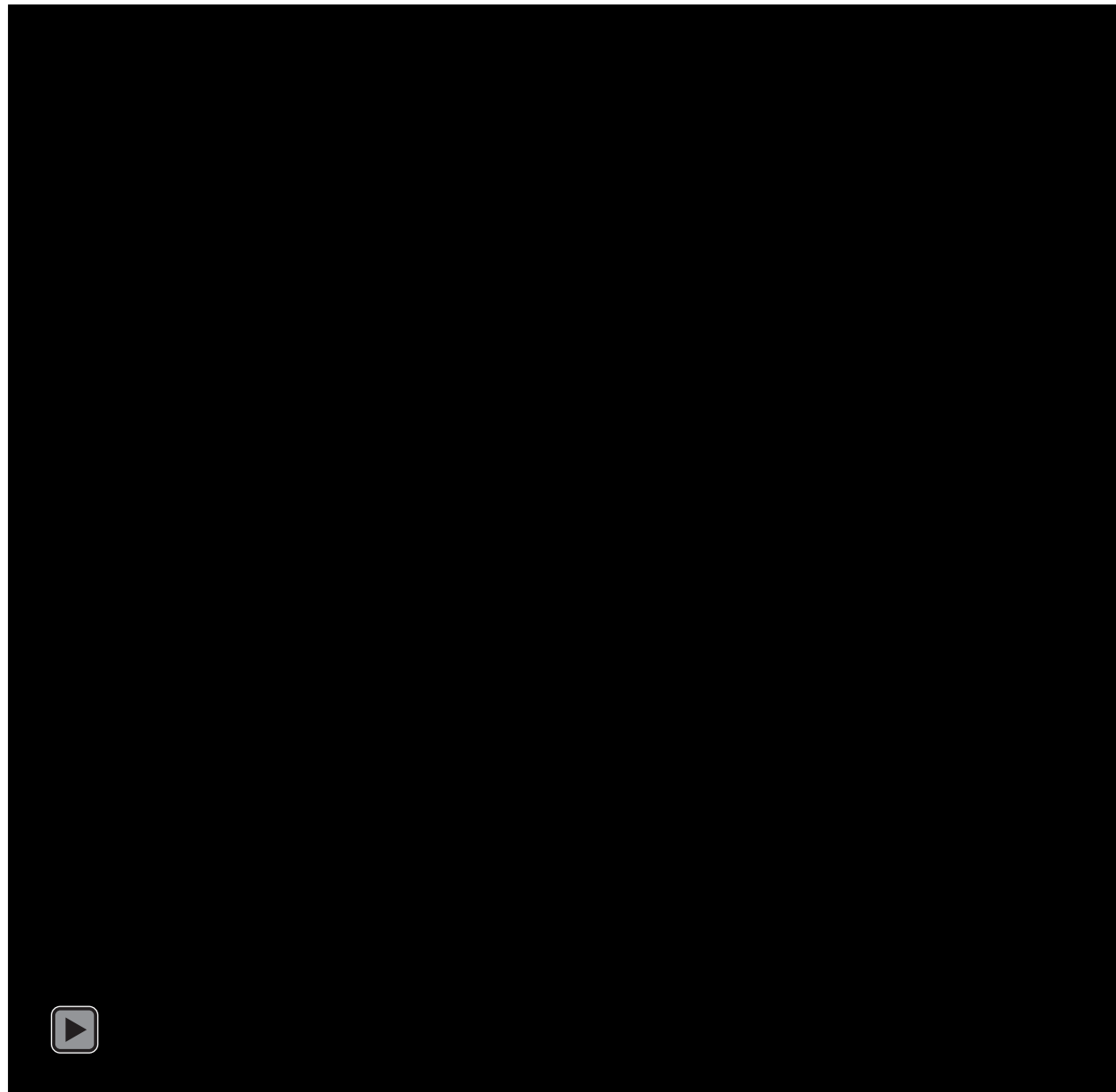
JOHN COOPER CLARKE

Heckling

As part of his definition of Punk, Du Noyer notes the use of speed, both in terms of tempo and “possibly played *on* speed” (6).

‘get back on drugs you fat fuck’

[Chicken Town](#)



- ‘majorca’ (1978)
- “engines made by Rolls-Royce” (line 3)
- “check out the parachutes can’t be found/alert the passengers they’ll be drowned” (2-3)
- ‘people turn to poison quick as larger turns to piss’ (‘Beezley Street’)
- horrors of working class life
- society being pacified
- foregrounds the material body and shared humanity.



INFLUENCE & NEXT GENERATION

“During 1976 and much of 1977, there was this all-consuming concentration on the now. Everything had to be new, and this impulse galvanised a generation into facing the world and reporting back in blunt, sarcastic, and ringing tones. That is one definition of popular culture at its best, and that’s why punk continues to resonate in another century” (Savage 149)



WHY IS PUNK NEEDED NOW?

- ‘wake up’ *Let Them Eat Chaos* (2016)
- political shockwaves
- Trump
- Brexit
- Boris
- Cost of living crisis

“There are more food banks across the UK than McDonald’s restaurants” (factcheckNI.org)

KAE TEMPEST

- ‘feel every decision you make, you must hold it (Tempest ‘Hold your own’)
- “Picasso didn’t crawl in a shell when his beloved Basque country was bombed. He reacted by creating a masterpiece in *Guernica* to remind us of the injustices committed against his people” (*Just Kids*, 65).
- Punk: “a leap of faith. A belief that life matters, so don’t fuck it up, and if someone else is fucking it up, do something about it” (Mark Baynard 13).
- Commenting on the ills of society, but in a harsh and brash manner
- “Is there anybody else awake, will it ever be day again” (Tempest, *Let them eat Chaos*)

“the water levels rising,
the animals, the
elephants, the polar
bears are dying. Stop
crying, start buying, but
what about the oil spill,
shh, no one likes a party-
popping spoil sport.
Massacres, massacres,
new shoes” (Tempest,
'Europe is Lost')

[Europe is lost](#)



TEMPEST 'FINE THANKS'

“To really see the state of things is lethal./ It's safer just to see what we can bear” (stanza 1 lines 1-2)

“No guns. Just give us brands and bills and wages,/ and rent that takes our dignity away” (stanza 3 lines 1-2)

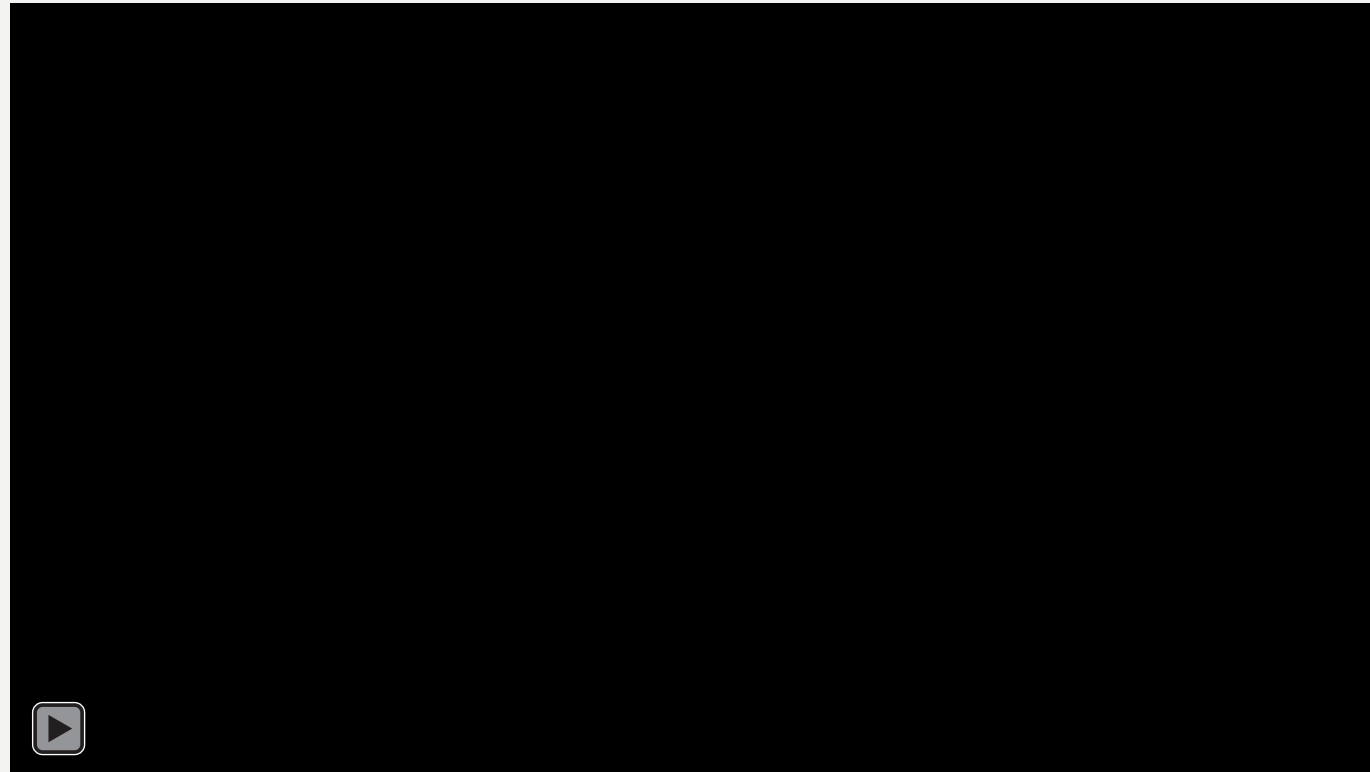
“Don't trouble yourselves with handcuffs and with cages./ There's cleaner ways than that to make us pay.” (stanza 2 lines 2-4)

“One way to achieve [the] intensity of life was to be faster than everyone else” (Savage 148) serving as a counteraction to 1970s media which “encouraged passive consumption and psychological confusion” (Savage 148).

Confrontational, emotional and expressive style of performance poetry works to counter-act passivity

LUKE WRIGHT

- 'The panel'
- As a society we are no longer critically analysing the words of political leaders, but rather passively accept them, as well as the corrupt dealings of mass corporations
- we 'stare into [our] little phones at things [we]'ve never had' ('The Panel')
- [The Panel](#)



“People have the power - to dream, to rule, to wrestle the world from fools.”



HOPE

Contemporary performance poetry can inspire a society which is still not ready ‘to behave’ (Smith).

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