**ArtSIG Poetry Conference – 22 March 2023**

Paul Crawford

**Paul Crawford** is Professor of Health Humanities at the School of Health Sciences and Director of the Centre for Social Futures at the Institute of Mental Health, University of Nottingham, UK. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA), Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences (FAcSS) and Fellow of the Royal Society for Public Health (FRSPH). As founding father of the global and rapidly developing field of health humanities, Professor Crawford leads a large program of research in applying the arts and humanities to inform and transform healthcare, health and wellbeing. He is the author of over 140 peer-reviewed articles or chapters and 14 books, most recently *Mental Health Literacy and Young People* (Emerald, 2022), *Cabin Fever: Surviving Lockdown in the Coronavirus Pandemic* (Emerald, 2021), *Florence Nightingale at Home* (Palgrave, 2020), which won Best Achievement in the People’s Book Prize 2022 and *The Routledge Companion to Health Humanities* (Palgrave, 2020). He is the commissioning editor for two series, *Arts for Health* (Emerald) and *Routledge Studies in Literature and Health Humanities* (Routledge) and is Joint Editor-in-Chief for *The Encyclopedia of Health Humanities* (Springer). In 2021, he led the campaign for young people’s mental health called *What’s Up With Everyone* with Academy Award-winning Aardman (*Shaun the Sheep*, *Wallace & Gromit*). This initiative brought five original short animations to more than 17m people within the first few months of release and won Best Social Media and Content at the Design Week Awards 2021.

***Health Humanities, Poetry and Recovery***

Professor Crawford will introduce the health humanities, focusing in on what he calls creative public mental health. He will outline how poetry can join other social and cultural assets in advancing ‘mutual recovery’.

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Femi Oyebode

Femi Oyebode studied medicine at the University of Ibadan, graduating with distinction in 1977. He trained as a psychiatrist in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and has been Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Birmingham since 1999. His books include *Mindreadings: literature and psychiatry*, *Sims’ Symptoms in the Mind- textbook of descriptive psychopathology 4-7th editions* and *Psychopathology of Rare and Unusual Syndromes*. His volumes of poetry include *Naked to Your Softness & other dreams, Wednesday is a Colour, Forest of Transformations, Master of the Leopard Hunt*, and others. He received the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 2016 and the Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (the highest honour of the RCPsych) in 2019.

***The Poetry of Disquiet***

I will be drawing on the writings of Ivor Gurney, Elizabeth Jennings, Anne Sexton, Robert Lowell, and others to illustrate the preoccupations of poets who write out of extreme disquiet. Their use of language, the richness of description and the metaphors that they deploy will serve to deepen our understanding of what it is like to be in the throes of melancholia.

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Avi Mendelson

Avi Mendelson is an Angeleno turned Londoner who immigrated from Boston to the UK

midway through his PhD at Brandeis University. His recently defended dissertation focuses on

representations of madness in Shakespeare and early modern drama. His scholarship appears in the volume Performing Disability in Early Modern English Drama (Palgrave 2021), the BSA’s Teaching Shakespeare magazine, and is forthcoming in the collection Inclusive Shakespeares (Palgrave 2023). In addition to his academic work, Avi is a theatre maker whose performance credits include The Pleasure of Your Bedlam (Arcola Theatre), The Bacchae (Tower Theatre), and The Apartments (Camden Fringe Festival).

***Shakespeare’s Madnesses***

For reasons that will remain unknown, Shakespeare was obsessed with madness and mental

health. This fixation extends beyond his popular depictions of psychic disease: Hamlet’s

questionably phony “antic disposition,” as he calls it, and King Lear’s running around in the rain enraged and delusional. Shakespeare’s fringe plays – Titus Andronicus and Timon of Athens – also show sustained fascination with minds that are aberrant, wandering, and potentially lost.

After giving an overview of Shakespeare’s madnesses, this talk analyses The Comedy of Errors and The Tempest to ask: What connections does Shakespeare draw between his artistic media – poetry and theatre – and mental health?

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James Whitehead

James’ talk will outline the different historical factors which have been influential in connecting poets and poetry to mental health and psychiatry, charting the history of this association from classical antiquity to the present day, and thinking about the potency of cultural stereotypes and myths as well as the reality behind the myth.’

**Poetry and Mental Health: The History of an Idea**

James Whitehead is a lecturer in English at Liverpool John Moores University, in the Research Institute for Literature and Cultural History. James has published one book on the connections between literature, psychiatry, and mental health, Madness and the Romantic Poet (OUP, 2017), and is working on two others: a history of the cultural representation of schizophrenia, for Liverpool University Press, and a history of autobiographical narratives of madness and mental illness.

Arji Manuelpillai

For over 15 years Arji has worked with community arts projects nationally and internationally. This has given him the privilege of working with some of the world’s most interesting people. In everywhere from prisons and Immigration Removal Centres to schools and youth clubs, Arji has continued to push creativity and self expression.

As well as being a passionate creative facilitator Arji is a published poet. Recently, he was awarded the Jerwood Arvon Prize which meant mentorship from the award winning writer and poet Hannah Lowe.

In 2021, following the release of his first book ‘Mutton Rolls’, Arji was awarded a Develop Your Creative Practice Grant from Arts Council England and he used it to research and develop a new book discussing extremism and radicalisation in its many forms.

PoetsIN

PoetsIN is an award-winning mental health charity that uses creativity to improve and manage the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people, and adults. Founded by two poets, PoetsIN is a team of individuals who have lived-experience of various mental illnesses, who lean into this experience to provide genuine insight into managing and improving mental health and wellbeing using our creative tools.

Over the course of 6 years, PoetsIN have worked with over 10,000 individuals across many sectors including IAPT, CAMHS, schools, social services, GP surgeries, prisons, and probation with proven results.

Wendy French

Wendy French was head of a school in a psychiatric hospital. She ran an arts-based curriculum believing in the arts as a way to help young people with their chaotic existence. She has worked in the community with Croydon Adult Services and Surrey libraries. She now co-runs groups at the Macmillan Cancer Centre, UCH, and Maggie’s Centre at the Royal Marsden. She has two pamphlets and four poetry books published and has edited, with a co-editor, three books of young people’s poetry from hospital schools.

EM Forster said, ‘How do I know what I feel until I see it written down?’