



Gallery of poems: Colette Bryce

Colette Bryce was born in Derry in 1970 and educated at St Mary's, Twickenham. Her work was first published by Carol Ann Duffy in 'Anvil New Poets' (1995), in which year she also won an Eric Gregory Award. Her first collection is 'The Heel of Bernadette' (Picador, 2000) which won the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival Prize for Best First Collection; her second, 'The Full Indian Rope Trick' was published by Picador in 2004.

She picked a peacock-shaped necklace made of silver and gold, set with pearls, diamond sparks and a garnet, hallmarked for 1901-1902 and designed by Charles Robert Ashbee. He was one of the earliest Arts and Crafts designers of jewellery, contributing one of the key points, that the value of jewellery lay in its design, not in the monetary value of the materials used. Although this peacock jewel is one of his more sumptuous creations, it would have been modest in price compared with the heavy diamond-set jewellery of its day.

The Wearer

Here is my necklace, blister
pearls, a single garnet
for the eye, diamond sparks,
but where am I?

This loop contained a laugh,
a pulse, a throat
that arched perhaps
in love, perhaps
disdain, that warmed
this chain and knew
itself as beautiful.

Whoosh... life! A peacock tail
can stop a clock, can shock
a room to silence.
Oh I played that game,
observed the trembling
hands of men pause
above my breasts. Exquisite,
they would murmur then.



Necklace, Charles Robert Ashbee, 1901-02.
Museum no. M.23-1965

Feast your eyes, look
for me. You'll find
my books, my silverware,
my gowns, the flute
that held my wine, the fork
that carried food
to my full lips.
The set, the props, and this,

This ... my vanity, that loved
the gaze that looked
at me, that bloomed
like any peacock tail
at the soft words
of a lover, who whispered
that my teeth were pearls,
my ear a shell, mother-
of-pearl, that sapphires
were my eyes

but where am I?