

Poetry Express Newsletter #55

ISSN 2056-970X (NB: all back issues of the Newsletter are now ISSN registered)

(NB: The content in Poetry Express is that of contributors and does not necessarily reflect the views or position of the editors or Survivors' Poetry. Copyright remains with contributors.)



Bright Star by Vanessa Vie – 2017



Charity No. 1010177 Company No. 2955445; Registered in England

Registered Office: c/o Central & North West London NHS Foundation Trust, 1 St Mary's Terrace, W2 1SU

Contributions to Dave Russell (Editor) – bricolage92@hotmail.com

Editorial

I

Well once again folks it's been a bad year for Goats, if you remember the Monty Python line, now perfectly tailored for the arts in general. This year Lottery funding for *Grants for the Arts* is down by £218 million, according to *The Stage*.

This means in effect that in the current government climate it's difficult for the Arts Council to fund anything, which impacts on organisations like ours: since other funders like ACE's monies as a foundation, but Phil and I are working on that. Another GftA application of mine (for Waterloo) was recently turned down, uniquely and honestly, purely for lack of funds, not for any de-merit. A kind of accolade, I was asked to resubmit as soon as I liked. Perhaps they don't refuse you the second time around. It took just two months two weeks for this turnaround and I surmise that the three months acceptance has at least been reduced somewhat.

Better news attends us. **Christopher Moncrieff** has joined the ranks of trustees. He's expert in PTSD, served in northern Ireland, and is a poet, dramatist and translator of many literary things from French, German, Rumanian and other languages, as well as a recipient of a Royal Literary Fund Grant and now on the Fellowship scheme.

Most pressing this quarter is the introduction and delay in activating Universal Credit and its impact on benefits – from disability to JSA. The pause is welcome, but it's hit many already. This intolerable punitive situation touches the hem of evil. Many Tories are uneasy, and even ministers are beginning to speak out – knowing they're in a unique position to bargain. We've seen this with several figures like **Sajit Jarvid** and left-wing Tories like **Heidi Allen**.

I cannot pretend to be apolitical, and with less ACE funding around, we don't even need to hide our contempt for the current system in a public manner. I admit I never did, but even foundations are feeling the difficulty being pressed to fund and exclude very worthy applications for every reason from diminishing fund to a desperate search for remaining monies.

There's another apparently unrelated disturbance that touches us more nearly. Yet it's symptomatic of the hate campaigns and post-Brexit xenophobia now afflicting us. As Alan Rickman says as a ghost in *Truly Madly Deeply* 'I blame the government.' Nevertheless I was moved to make this statement recently.

II

Survivors Poetry Unreservedly Opposes any form of Anti-Semitism

Survivors' Poetry, a proudly inclusive organisation founded to combat mental health stigma and hatred, rejects all who would divide and rule according to racist, political, religious or fringe beliefs. These opinions derive from the same mind set as those who abuse survivors of mental distress. We welcome the sharing of poetry and music, and whilst we embrace radical disquiet at the persecution of any vulnerable people, we are emphatically not a platform for hatred.

SP was in fact conceived and founded by Joe Bidder, someone who refused the office of Rabbi for an ambitious fuel sector career he eventually flung aside. If anyone embodies resistance to the the Antisemitism that produced *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (notoriously fabricated by the Tsarist secret police), it's Joe, and those like myself who are honoured to come after him. The proud Jewish traditions of charitable works and combating mental stigma are embedded in our DNA. To those who promote Anti-Semitism in any form, we are your antithesis: we know who you are and will call it out.

There are many distressed souls who resort to a catch-all of persecutors – which includes MI5 and Mossad; Anti-Semitism is often a resort of those who have proved vulnerable to such conspiracy theories. We genuinely pity those thus afflicted, but when they become abusive or the abuse becomes collective, pity must give way to firmness and action.

We are also aware that most Anti-Semitism still derives from the right wing, coupled with Islamophobia and every other hateful divide-and-rule notion – given terrible agency in the US recently. There is, however, a sliver of virulent Anti-Semitism on the Left – those who attack Momentum sites for being right-wing stooges. These can come in the guise of sympathetic activists, and we must be the more vigilant of those who appear on the side of human and survivor rights, but emphatically aren't.

I know you'll embrace the right action and the right kind of welcome to all, particularly those facing persecution and racism.

Dr Simon Jenner

Report on Events

A lively session at Tottenham Chances on **May 25th**. After protracted refurbishment of the premises, the Poetry Café sessions were resumed on **June 15th**, with **Kath Tait** as main spot, and there was a modest but attentive turnout. The new décor feels a bit cold and clinical, but the new acoustics are excellent. A few paintings on the walls, perhaps a bookshelf or two, would restore the old warmth and atmosphere.

July 13th was truly action-packed. **Razz**'s opener included *Something I Ate* – aiming some polemic at the PM, and the highly topical *Tower* – where he declaimed against ‘pseudo-concern’ and ‘sombre platitudes’. He proceeded to read more of the works of **Sophia Jackson**, including her brilliant exploration of the problems of time: “The past collides with the future . . . the future is impeded by the past.” Shamanic **Andrew** gave the audience some antiquarianism in verse derived from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, concerning a famine in 976AD, delivered in traditional verse structures. **Jason Why** sustained his customary excellent audience rapport with his random word associations. **Jeanette Ju-Pierre** made a very welcome return to Survivors after a long absence; she read two poems by her late partner Keith Clarke. Jessica Lawrence told the audience of her experience with a gas-inhaler, and her affectionate relationship with the ‘urban foxes’ of Harrow, where she lives. Lively musical interludes were provided by **Maggie and Lucy Lyrical** (in more sentimental vein than usual), **John Arthur** (lamenting that “the world has become a shopping mall” and “nobody wants to know”, and Kath Tait – her first number being a beautiful reflection on her rural childhood, then the always-hard-hitting *Bastard*.

Main spots were **Wendy Young** and **Harold Rizla**. Wendy was as dynamic as ever, opening with *Fate Sealed*. Her highspots were *Cockleshell Heroines* and an epic eulogy of Rachel Roberts, who certainly assumes heroic proportions here. Wendy certainly pulls no punches about the bitter jealousies and rivalries which Rachel suffered, or the enormity of her physical torments: I speak as one who was enthralled by her film performances in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, and *A Kind of Loving*.

Harold's attitude seems to be summed up in his own words: “I climb inside pull the edges down and tape it shut. I understand the master plan, I'm back in the Box.” His set included *Six O'Clock Blues*, *Pimlico*, *Two-Way Think-Tank*, *Cold Fact* and *Nothing's Concrete*. He seems to have a great facility for getting inside areas of stress and tension, and giving an interior view of them; his delivery could have been more laid back and clearer.

One interesting new performer with **Mamoo Mudah**, who overcame her initial reticence and hesitancy to deliver a really sensitive set. **Frank Bangay** and **Lucy Carrington** concluded the evening.

August 10th at the Poetry Café was headed by the wild violin virtuosity of **Helmut Scholtz**. It is a real credit to Survivors poetry that Helmut is always happy to make expeditions from Germany to play

for us. He really loves his violin, and wrote her a tender lyric poem, which he recited.

September 14th, at the Poetry Café an incredibly rich diversity of material presented to an enthusiastic capacity audience. Heading the bill was **Tara Fleur**, continuing to ‘take the lid off’ the abuses of the psychiatric system, and culminating in a savage indictment of Theresa May, on the assumption of her getting the sack and having to go to a Job Centre. Great opener from Razz with *Grief* and *Altus Maximus*, then a welcome reappearance by **Sophia Jackson**, with Razz reading her *Discovering Wings and Destiny* and *I Didn’t Agree*. Also a great welcome back to **Armored Weston**, still struggling with her bereavement, but with the happy news that she has found a publisher for **John Gibbens’s** work. She did tentative, but deeply moving renditions of *Wages of Love* and *Something Stronger*. I look forward to hearing rehearsed versions of these numbers. The younger generation of singer songwriters was beautifully represented by **Patrick Gardiner**, with *Pieces of Me* and *Riverside Remark*; his bucolic ruralism could warm the heart of the most hardened traditionalist; the latter song bravely faces the issues of chests burning and lungs. Sensitive poetry from **Paul Diecom**, followed by more declamatory efforts from **Dave Skull**, with *Pattern and The Dispossessed* – worship of the sod indeed! **Patrick Evans** certainly proved that the rhyming couplet is still highly effective for contemporary polemic. **John Arthur** as raunchy as ever, with the added bonus of kazoo in harness. Heartfelt expressions from **Jeanette Ju-Pierre**; unflinching wild word association from **Jason Why**. **Alastair Murray** was as accomplished as ever; great to hear an acoustic version of a Pink Floyd song once in a while. **Jessica Lawrence’s** *The Butterfly* and *Pillaging the Landscape of the Brain* never lost their impact through reiteration. **Hannah** announced that she had been to the same Rehab Centre as Robbie Williams – and found the setting idyllic. She faces the issues of paradox: “Time back to the future, and forward to the past”. Strong spots from **Paul Riley**, with *Paul’s Last Breath*, and Frank Bangay, with *Us Desperate Men* and *Waste Ground*.

Momentum was sustained at the Poetry Café on **October 12th**. The main spot was **Armored Weston** and **Kay Grant** who, a cappella, did some highly inventive settings of some of the **late John Gibbens’s** poems, combined with some solo efforts from Armored; very heartfelt; she is bravely finding her on solo feet after her bereavement. **Sophia Jackson** put in a highly welcome return appearance; Razz read *Your Boys are Golden* and *Plastic Lies*. **M C Purple** read a poem from a new collection by her friend **Beryl Stockman**, informing the audience of her healing activities, and her Butterfly Shop. This M C followed with her own *A London Prayer*, embracing all levels of concern. **Tony Marshall** gave a spirited set, rich in biblical parody and historical perspective – and painfully sensitive in its portrayal of a lynching – which followed a daily sequence in parallel with the Book of Genesis. He ended with an audience participation number, with the refrain “kiss the bloody frog” (anti-mythology? Anti-escapism. **John Arthur** was on form, as ever; **Steve James** did some highly-charged polemic. **Honey Lancaster**, alongside one other newcomer, gave some invaluable double vision – as a psychologist and a sufferer. Other acts included **Ashley Chapman**, **Jerry Mitchell & Co**, and **Jeanette Ju-Pierre**.

A TALE OF TWO SELVES & SOME PRACTICALITIES

A few nights ago, I dreamt that my mother had sent me a postcard in which she was advising me to write like William Burroughs. I'd love to candidly write about my life's tough tragic side — pain, self-destruction, pandemonium — and make public some of its morbid secrets and extreme experiences, but I'd rather keep these remnants of memory undisclosed for now. Hence — the next few paragraphs aim solely at synopsising wholesome data on my birth into the Arts and progress to this day. Dear reader — with the hope that you will kindly countenance the quasi grammar and style that I'm venturing herewith.

It was the year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and ninety-one. A scholarship to study medicine in Salamanca was granted to me. Halfway through my first year at University, I relinquished the platonic *goal* of becoming a surgeon. The year and a half later found me running away from the faculty of Economics. Meanwhile, a new habitat was gradually replacing erstwhile habitats and *Spiritual revelations were conceded to me*.

Alone, and having attained my nineteenth *blessed birthday*, I reached a pinnacle of Self — or was it the nadir? — a Damascene experience that enlightened my qualities of Intuition, Perception and Imagination, developing a new thinking, time-travelling Knowledge — dormant heretofore.

I was being born an Artist and the heart followed suit, followed suit.

My maternal grandmother, Marina, welcomed and helped this newborn I, subsidising my artistic studies during the next five years, in the course of which, I lived with her and my granddad, before making my way up from my birth place in Asturias, on the Celtic coast of Northern Spain, into England, where I have found Blake's Albion and a connection with Time.

In Asturias I attempted the life of two Art schools, and also had the advantage of being taught by wonderful private tutors and mentors — But earlier years of demanding academic formation and focus had obliterated (somehow) my capacity as passer of exams — I became an avid autodidact.

Twenty years since — Circumstances & Experience have bestowed upon me polymathic proclivity; thus, from the disciplines of Visual Art, Music, Poetry and Theatre, I've been creating *artefacts of eternity* which are brought into play, oft in tandem, with publications, recordings, exhibitions and performances. I have also had and still have the great fortune of working with many a wonderful artist from divers media and backgrounds.

It was the year of Our Lord two thousand and twelve. I meet Michael Horovitz, deep-drinker from the Pierian Spring. To encounter this kindred soul and devout polymath, has buttressed the importance of being earnest, and inspired my most recent body of work whose main lineaments are a focused Poetic Writing, the setting of Melody to Parnassian verses, the making of Picture-Poems, idiosyncratic Collages, Illustrations, and eclectic music and poetry Performances.

IN *Among these things and thousand like them*, Euterpe has been a stalwart companion throughout, a-musing me /also / into forming two alternative rock bands, three avant-garde duets and being a Solo artist on the Road. My latest musical collaborations are with Jazz musicians accompanying some of my poems and songs.

I'm currently recording a CD of Song & Verse with Michael Horovitz (with the help and some participation of pianist Peter Lemer) under the title *Lyrical Soulmates Unanimous*, which will be available soon.

Sometimes the self fostered by your parents is not the Self that passionately aspires to perfect itself for Truth

— innit? — We, creatures of chronicles along the roads that lay before us.

Dynamic support taken from Chapter One of Charles Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*.
Vanessa Vie / October 2017 / v.vie111@gmail.com / www.vanessavie.co.uk

Vanessa Vie – Featured Artist #55

It's Life!

Vanessa Vie 2017

Poor Pill-bug

Caught

Running for
its Life

A giant Hand

Paw

Pen

Turning you
into ball

Football

Cat-play

In Summer morning

Soft-sun stops

by open window

& Pill-bug

In limelight

Runs more

'tis Life!

— *a Ball!*

(said Pill-bug)

I assure you (said I)

Kindness will have you

Wrapped in soft tissue-paper

Flung alive

Flung out of window

Onto new destinies or

Fate

— *Here I go!*

(said Pill-bug)

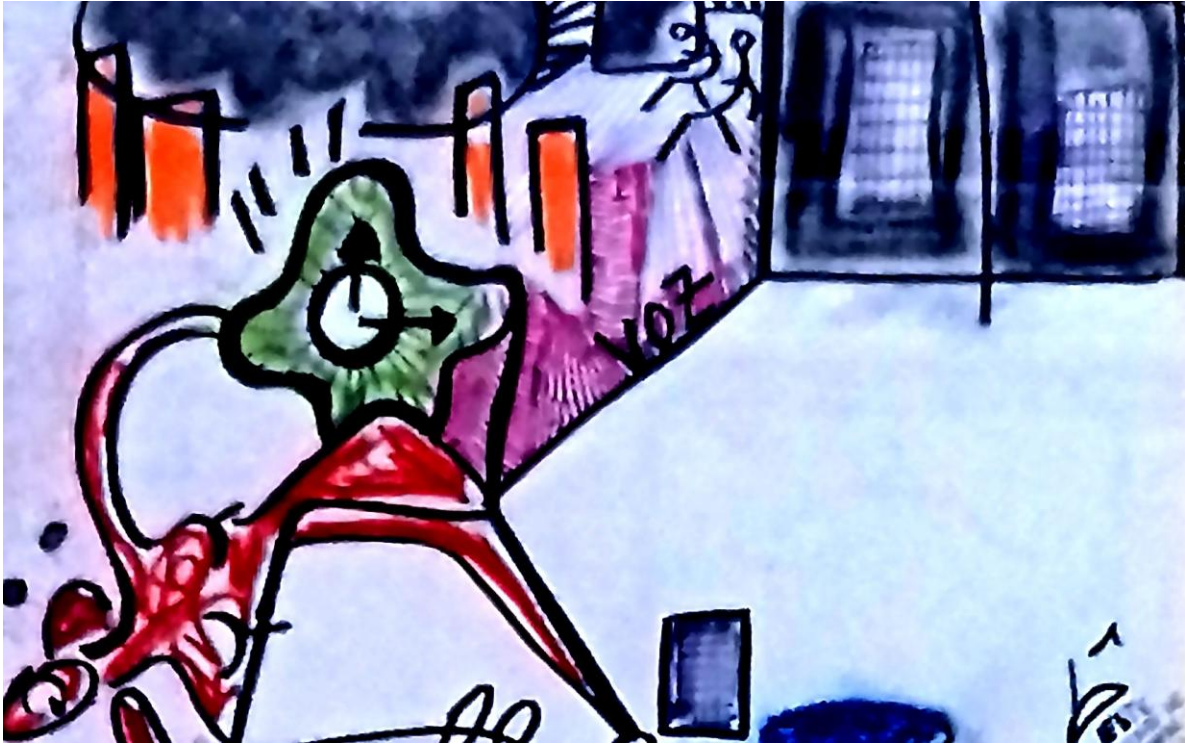
Roly-poly whilst it flew

Alive.





Superfood by Vanessa Vie – 2016



Un momento de poesia by Vanessa Vie – 1997



Ode to Dead Mice by Vanessa Vie – 2016

About the HDA

The Huntington's Disease Association (HDA) is the only organisation providing a dedicated service of advice, guidance and support for people in England and Wales who are affected by Huntington's disease.

Huntington's disease (HD) is a devastating, degenerative neurological disorder that causes progressive mental deterioration, significant behavioural changes and severe physical incapacity. It is a completely disabling hereditary condition that affects generations upon generations of families. Each child of a parent with HD has a 50% chance of inheriting the faulty gene; it doesn't skip a generation, so if a child tests positive they will, at some stage, develop HD. It's like tossing a coin.

Imagine having motor neurone disease, schizophrenia, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease... all at the same time. This is the reason HD has been described as 'the worst disease known to mankind'. It is an extremely challenging and complex terminal illness that needs expert care and round the clock support.

We run a regional Specialist HD Advisory Service to support those directly affected by the disease, and their families and carers, delivered by our HD experts and tailored to the individual needs of the families we work with. Our Specialist HD Advisers are a vital lifeline helping HD sufferers to navigate the complex care, health and emotional needs of the condition. Our advisers provide practical information, give advice and emotional support to families, identify local services, coordinate the organisation of care packages and answer crisis calls.

There are approximately 6,000 people suffering from Huntington's in the UK. For every person diagnosed another four people are at risk. That's 24,000 people whose lives will, at some point, be turned upside down by the anguish of waiting for a diagnosis, or taking their chances without. These people are referred to as 'at risk' and may exhibit early signs of HD, such as slight uncontrollable muscular movements, stumbling and clumsiness, lack of concentration, short term memory lapses and sometimes aggressive or anti-social behaviour. They are frequently unfairly judged as appearing drunk and uncooperative, which is often compounded by depression and thoughts of suicide.

Supporting individuals and families is our core focus. Our 23 Specialist HD Advisers are currently working with a total of 13,639 people affected by HD across England and Wales. Many of these are HD patients, but they also help those at risk, and their families and carers, who shoulder the heavy burden of caring for their loved ones.

Although there is currently no cure for HD, the specialist expertise we provide empowers patients and families to manage the condition, and helps to reduce the extreme fear and isolation they often feel.

Please visit www.hda.org.uk for more information on the disease and for ways to donate to the Charity.

Odds Again, by Bruce Harris (*promoted by the Huntington's Disease Association*);

This lively collection embraces the major tensions of contemporary life. It covers a broad historical spectrum too. *Devil's Evening* describes domestic stress and violence among refugees. *Stephanie's Times* gives a really broad historical sweep, from 1913 to 2007; focusing en route on 1942, 1947 and 1978. She has had involvement with the French Resistance. *Emily's Derby* covers the Suffragette movement. Someone was taken into a hospice, stigmatised as a prostitute, especially by one of the other patients, in spite of the severity of her injuries. One of the most heroic protests on the part of the Suffragettes was risking injury by obstructing a racehorse. *One Man's Paradise* explores issues of exile and immigration, with the perspective of a coastguard. An interesting conclusion to this story is that the 'refugee' boy looks inland for his salvation, not overseas. *The Fellowship of Victims* – This evokes the German Truemmerliterature of post-war desolation.

Roxanne Riding Hood – this concerns a young man who works as a drag artiste, and ends up as a decoy to trap a molester/marauder. He is finally successful in his mission, learning the arts of self-defence and gaining the friendship of the girls, who help him to perfect his disguise. He ends up feeling optimistic about his future acting career. *These Foolish Things* – The Internet has brought back epistolary fiction; there are now many novels and stories consisting of exchanges of emails. This story explores, with humour and perceptivity the tensions within a couple – John Harrow and Elaine Cunningham, who have had a split, and are making earnest attempts to adjust to the situation, including contemplating provisional rapprochements. The minutiae of shared abodes and shared belongings – and their relocation is put under close scrutiny.

Eyes Together, Eyes Apart – A fatal accident, involving an old lady, a youth and a building worker, questions deeply the personal integrity of the latter two: was the youth a mere hoodlum, set on robbing the old lady, or was he trying to protect her from a fatal accident? Was the scaffolding worker an honest person, or was he aiming to disable the old lady with his falling bucket?

Blue Genes – an excellent satire on fashionable genetic engineering, and an exploration of its background of prejudice. The programme has a massive advertising campaign, packing gigantic auditoria. Jez, the Emcee, is an actor and mime artiste par excellence. There is an effective challenge to the 'campaign', from Luke and Sally, who accept a contract, but threaten a lawsuit if the treatment proves invalid.



Childhood Dream by Vanessa Vie – 2013

In Memory of Robert Dellar



On Sunday 24 September 2017, a group of mental health service users from Mad Pride and the Mental Health Resistance Network got together to put on a 1- hour rock gig at The Amersham Arms in New Cross, SE London, to celebrate the life of well-known mental health activist and general mensch **Robert Dellar**, who died suddenly on 17 December 2016 at the age of 52, leaving a huge hole in the mental health survivor movement. He lived in New Cross with his partner Shirley Pearson and stepdaughter Sophia Pearson.

Robert was a founder member of **Mad Pride**, and through his work at Mind pioneered the model for Mental Health Advocacy projects, which is still used. He had over 25 years in the saddle as a star player in the mental health survivor movement, and most recently led Southwark Mind and Southwark Association for Mental Health, from where he reached pretty much every mental health service user in

South East London with his tireless efforts setting up groups, lobbying local service providers, organising demos, producing an anarchic newsletter (in fanzine style) and offering professional support to individuals. He had already become one of the best-known mental health professionals in East and North London. He formulated and set up the User Council for Southwark Mind, another pioneering organ whereby local mental health service users could feed in their views directly to decision makers at the huge local psychiatric hospital The Maudsley Trust and to those involved in service provision across the whole of Lambeth and Southwark. For info about the User Council contact Lambeth and Southwark Mind. But he is probably best remembered by the majority of people for the outstanding rock gigs that he put on all over South-East London in mental health settings like the Lorrimore Centre, Muses Café and many others, which were always packed to the rafters.

In his capacity as a founder member of **Mad Pride** he organised sell-out gigs at high profile venues like the Garage in Highbury and the last couple of years at former punk stamping ground The Lexington in Islington, again packed with hundreds of mental health service users. He also spearheaded many large public protests under this banner, and, along with the late great **Pete Shaughnessy**, was largely responsible for Time Out covering Mad Pride with the words 'Mad Pride have stamped into the limelight' at the time of our one day festival in Clissold Park in Hackney in 2001, attended by 4,000 mental health service users, punks and anarchists, which was covered by CNN and spawned Mad Pride groups nationally and globally. A book of reminiscences about Robert is currently being compiled by cartoon artist Lawrence Burton, entitled *Kiss of Life*.

Robert had been a music journalist before getting into mental health work, and when too ill to work in a full-time, salaried capacity any more he focussed again on campaigning and writing and produced a book called *Splitting in Two* a couple of years ago, published by Unkant Publishers, which expands on all the hilarious and significant things he and all those who came forward to be involved got up to, both at work (including in Hackney Hospital and Brixton prison) and in his free time with Mad Pride and the Mental Health Resistance Network.

He was the inspiration for countless people to realise that they have a voice, and the empowering force that drew people together to organise themselves into action. I

was privileged to work alongside him in Mad Pride and countless other ventures. Always completely committed, he was funny, true to the authenticity of his views, energetic, creative, charismatic and totally on point in his knowledge of the benefits system, mental health law and precisely what constitutes acceptable (and therefore unacceptable) practice. He was the 'go-to person', night and day, for very many people if any crisis blew up, which they often did, and if anyone needed immediate and urgent help. His true genius though lay in his ability to build communities and then throw different communities together, 'reimaging' all in the process.

The 12 hour rock gig at The Amersham Arms on 24 September 2017 ran from 12pm – 12am, and featured all Robert's fave bands and performers who are still alive, whom he put on at gigs for mental health service users as often as he could over the years, not to satisfy himself but to introduce a whole new audience to the music he loved. Headlining was the legendary punk band **Alternative TV**, also playing were **Vic Godard** and **Subway Sect**, notorious mad punk band from Blackpool **The Ceramic Hobs** (whose best known album *Straight Outta Rampton* earned them a record contract the moment it was released), highly regarded N London musician **Jowe Head** with his new band **The Infernal Contraption**, seasoned rockers **The Long Decline** (who will do a set with Vic Godard and **Mark Perry** of ATV), a set by **Dave Kusworth** (who fans will remember from **The Jacobites'** days of fame), avant-garde survivor artiste **Melanie Clifford** presented a short piece, and many more! It was a real cornucopia of punk and rock bands getting together for this one-off tribute to their mate and ours, Robert Dellar – an excellent and memorable event. The gig also showcased the inaugural **Robert Dellar Memorial Lecture**, given this year by mad academic and writer **Professor Esther Leslie**, another friend and fellow agitator (***The full text of this lecture appears on Page 18***). Any proceeds after the costs of putting on the gig are covered will be donated to the **Mental Health Resistance Network**, a campaigning organisation that Robert was very involved with up to the time of his death

Zen Jones

Out-of-Body Experience

– or Journey Into the Hell of My Sub-Conscious

I sit here today in front of my computer, with no understanding of the place that I visited six nights ago. If I'm honest, as yet I still can't find any learning that I have acquired from it. It will, it seems, take me a while to try to loosening this knot before I even attempt to undo the whole. I will put down everything within my memory of which I have I full knowledge with regard to my journey and its contents. That said – it will be done as well as I am able to do at this moment in time. My conclusion is something I am still struggling to achieve, but I am hoping it's a work in progress; as always, it's for you to arrive at your own.

I remember going to bed: I was really tired and in a lot of pain, which is ever-present for me. What happened in-between – to the point to where I woke up – I will depict below.

Where am I? All around me there is the fun of a funfair; the colours so bright and vivid. Stalls in every direction ride for as far as the eye can see, people milling around – happy, it seems, with all that surrounds them. Roller-coasters dipping and diving, with their seats filled to the brim. But it's silent all around me; I can see the rides I can see the lips moving on the people passing me by – but silence. I find myself standing at the front of a queue waiting to board the roller-coaster as it comes to a complete standstill. I lift my leg to board but the entrance is blocked before me; no matter how hard I try I can't lift my leg high enough to succeed. People are pushing me from behind it would seem telling to board but I'm unable. I try to tell them that I can't hear them but they clearly don't understand. I can't move away from the front of the queue my legs just won't move in that direction. I put out my hand to hold on to the side of the ride but my hand just goes right through it. I adjust to a different area but nothing around me is solid. Once more I try to lift my leg only to feel a shooting pain as if I had hit my shin; I keep trying leaning forward I fall and the pain registers as I hit the floor. This situation seemed to continue for it seemed like hours until at the last point of trying where I was allowed to board. I sit down holding on to my leg trying to nurse the pain that I was feeling as the ride shoots away taking me with it. Around and around we go stopping at different destinations for people to un-board. My head is hurting the pain feels as if it is about to explode the noise confusing me as the silence was deafening. I can't stay there but it's as if there are some invisible hands firmly holding me down. I can't take this anymore this feeling of oppression at the next stop I myself would un-board. We stop and I make my way to the exit door of this roller-coaster from hell but, no matter how I try, I can't get off. Everything solid is moving around me everything I touch just becomes jelly with every touch my hand is engulfed with it. Over and over I try to embark but they keep changing the height of the entrance door I can't seem to step high enough. I am once more aware of the people around me exasperated that I am holding them up but I can't do anything. I try to talk to them once more to explain, but it seems that they

can't hear my voice, and they are still mute to me whilst their lips are still visibly moving. I fall; the pain registers as I hit the ground. I try to get up but I can't hold on to anything solid. I ask for help but everyone around me acts as if I am not there. Eventually I fall through the entrance landing, hard-hitting my head, and the taste of blood in my mouth is rancid. I hurt all over and I am now shivering with the cold. I look down at myself, and all I have on is my nightshirt. I can't understand why or how I had arrived there everyone else around me is fully clothed. Why would I have left home dressed like this? I get up and look around me suddenly. I can see faces in the crowd that I recognise, but they pass me by as if I were not there. I then hear the barking of a dog; I know that bark it's my own dog Sparkle. She then appears from around the corner but not alone: dog after dog – just like her, they run towards me, I bend to touch her head but my hand passes straight through. I put my hands on my own head trying to understand what was going on all around me. I find myself screaming at the top of my voice whilst the ground is moving beneath me. Once more I fall, jarring myself badly as I hit the floor; but I just lay there in the street as all seem to pass me by. I get up and wander around aimlessly – looking for I place that I recognise, a doorway back to reality, where I could leave this place and return home. It all seems so real if it's a dream I just can't wake up. I shake my head whilst firmly slapping at my face willing myself out of this nightmare – but to no avail. I wander around nothing seems real somewhat like a fun house everywhere is just so colourfully I am drawn to its magnitude. People are laughing, clearly in the throes of great fun. As I walk among them, I find myself trying to fit in. But I am lost to them as I walk along like the pied piper as the various sizes of Sparkle run alongside of me. Suddenly it occurs to me that I must be dead: is this what heaven looks like? If that were so then I had to accept my end, but why I was being excluded from the fun around me I could not understand. Why was I being shut into a place of complete silence? I sit down on the ground and I seem to go into complete shutdown, not caring any more where I was or where I was going.

A ride arrives in front of me like an explosion I had no clue as to how it had arrived. Someone is holding the door of the roller-coaster open for me, beckoning me towards it. I don't want to get up because I know with certainty that even if I tried they would not let me board. I look away in the other direction somehow accepting my fate. But as my eye-line changed, so would the entrance of the roller-coaster – jumping as if by magic each time I turned to look in another direction. I shouted at them I say that I would no longer play their game whilst refusing to move at all. People are offering me food and drink but when I try to take it they move it further away from me. I am so very cold I reach down to touch my toes and they are like ice in my hand. Once more when I try to stand I fall it's as if I were an entity not able to touch anything around me without passing through it. I hurt all over my body and I am now shaking uncontrollably all over. So did I just sit the accepting that there was no way home? I'm not sure as from where it came but someone or something told me to try just that once more. I stood up and walked towards the door being held open for me and stepped up. Something was different they were allowing to get on was this some kind of trick? I was waiting for the axe to fall with bated breath. The ride started to move and I sat on the floor looking around me for something to wrap myself in to try to keep warm. I then saw a blanket but when I

tried to pick it up my hand just went straight through it. Someone opposite holds out a coat for me and I reach towards it only for it to disappear. I sit down again and hug my knees towards me in complete abandonment. I just did not care any more about anything. As we arrive at different stops, people un-board until there is no one left at all. There I sat going around and around on this ride taking in all the dips and dives, by then totally uncaring if we will ever stop. Memories of the life I had lived came flooding into my mind as I recalled all the things that I had done with my life. But far more vivid were the things that were done to me: hell! what did any of it matter now? Suddenly the ride was slowing and I had a feeling of recognition creeping into my mind something was familiar. The only way that I can try to explain this feeling if I try to look for the right words, would be to say that maybe it was like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis. Everything was happening in slow motion.

Slowly I opened my eyes like I was emerging from a deep sleep to find myself sitting in the middle of my bath tub. As I looked around the room the door had been closed, which is something I never do and the bathroom was a wreck. The towel holder had been pulled off the wall and the towels in all directions. All the bottles of bathroom sets that had been out on display had been thrown in every direction. The toilet roll had been completely unrolled strewn across the floor and the bathroom cabinets were open their contents all around the room. I tried to stand up but the pain in my back brought me back down hard again into the tub. My lip was hurting and as I reached to touch it my hands found a large swelling with blood still wet around it. At that point my attention was taken to the pain in my legs where I could visibly see swelling and bruising. I felt as if I were sitting in an ice box unable to make it to my feet to get out of the tub. I crawl on to my knees and reach towards the side pulling myself up in to a kneeling position. Slowly I managed to climb over the edge of the tub and on to the floor. I was then aware that it was light and that I had gone to bed at about 10.30pm the night before. The strangest thing of all is that this was the first night that I had attempted to go to my bed in over a year, because of the pain I live with daily on movement. Along with a few demons and nightmares that still frequent my dreams which are out of my control it seems – so why that night? Getting to my feet I open the door to find my dog Sparkle curled against it she is clearly glad to see me. I sit on the top of the stairs trying to make some sense of the journey I had just made but to no avail. Where had I been and why did I go there? I only know that during that time I had seen the night pass me by and the day arrive within that space of time.

I am struggling a little here as to how I am able to end this piece because it was a real experience for me, with all the terror and unexplained happenings throughout. But oddly somewhere deep inside of me, I know that it was a journey that I was destined to make and that there is real learning here for me. The whys and wherefores right now I am still trying to unravel in all honesty. But it is what it is and that's what I have to contend with until that a light may come shining through. That said, it's not a journey that I ever hope to make again.....

Teresa Joyce

Robert Dellar Inaugural Lecture

Smile – You Are Not On Camera: Robert Dellar and Emotional Literacy

A lecture is not usual at an all-day music event. I think Robert would have liked it though – he never excluded anything because it did not apparently fit. And also it allows me to say a few words about how I met Robert. Lectures are what we associate with university – and that is where I met Robert. It was early in the term that I came across him, drawn to him by his spiky hair, his punk-like demeanour.

I found out he came from Hertfordshire, on the edges of which I had grown up. He was someone I should know, was like my friends from school – obsessed with bands and gigs and fanzines and anarchy. In that first year when we both lived on campus I often watched amused from afar, as the magazine *Nice Try But It Won't Work* did everything it could to rile the student union busybodies, the Labour students, those who seemed to hold some sort of power over students and what went on. Sometimes I got closer, hanging out with Robert and others at the Nightline offices, through the night, a place designed for talking together and giving peer support. In the years that followed Robert and I would run into each other, sometimes coinciding in buses in Hackney – and that was how I became involved in the *Mad Pride: A Celebration of Mad Culture* book, and in the various things that followed.

Last year Robert and others talked to the magazine *Vice* about Mad Pride. This is how the journalist represented the thoughts of Robert and Mark Roberts.

Both Mark and Rob agree that Mad Pride was a product of its time; an organisation they can't see existing today. Pharmaceutical companies have been so successful in marketing anti-depressants, anti-psychotics and anti-anxiety drugs, that these days a huge number of people are on them – one in eleven people with mental health problems.

As more people are classed as mentally ill, arguably the stigma fades. And yet, Rob says, the downside of this is that it's contributed to a climate where it seems like mental health issues are sometimes no big deal. 'OK, so one in four people might have experienced mental illness of some kind. We need to remember that one in four hundred are suffering really badly and their lives are at risk... but they're getting abandoned,' he says.

Robert tried to move the discussion on – not to dwell in the past, but to consider the needs of now. However the past is not forgotten by him and he also noted that: 'Mad Pride's most vital legacy' was to

create ‘a community, a lot of friendships, a kind of alternative society. When mainstream society rejected people who are mentally ill, that was important.’

I want to stick with the concept of the normalisation of mental distress that Robert pinpoints, the way in which it becomes another accepted – almost unavoidable – part of modern life. This acceptance is not in itself negative, but it has been captured in certain ways. I want to set this normalisation within the wider context of a contemporary pressure to externalise emotional states. Nowadays we are not required to be externally impassive, rather we are constantly asked to reveal our mental states, our affects, our emotions. This is not an option, even, but a requirement.

We live in emoji times, in the time of the emoticon. We are constantly required – or invited – to indicate our emotional state. How we do this is through the clicking of like buttons, or more likely a thumbs up sign, a heart, or a sad face. Reactions Facebook calls them: Alongside Like there are Love’ ‘Haha’ ‘Yay’ ‘Wow’ ‘Sad’ and ‘Anger’. You will notice a bias towards the positive. We are asked by social media – that is by those entwined with advertising – to reveal our emotions – that is to press these icons – in reaction to so many tiny events. **Emojis** are in our world now. Unlike emoticons, introduced in 1982, which are formed of colons, brackets, commas, hyphens and so on, the emoji, when it first appeared, was an image of a face or a head, a reduction of a face or head, but still more tangibly one. Emojis were invented in Japan by the pager company Docomo, for whom the designer Shigetaka Kurita created a set of 176 twelve-pixel by twelve-pixel characters that were said to cover the ‘entire breadth of human emotion’. How is it that we so readily accepted that the complexity of emotions could be represented in tiny pixillated characters? How is it that we participate in rendering our emotions into legibility – into this visual language – which has a counterpart in the visual language of the face that machines learn to read, to mine for data, to instrumentalise.

Of course we have created emotions for machines before, structured our own faces so that the machines can read them, can produce a controlled image, which we are trained to feel is appropriate. The photographic machine, the camera, deals in emotions, if not from the start, then from early on as it came to deal with smiles. To be before the camera required, in time, as the medium settled into the world as a familiar, if not a friend, the adoption of a particular look: a smile. Smiles in photography have a history and they have evolved. The smile, controlled, neat, comes at a certain point as a historical achievement of photography, once the snapshot is prevalent and the smile need not be a rictus grin.

Most photographic imagery that circulates nowadays is banal, transitory, slipping past the eye. And what is important about it may be less what it shows than that we look at it, that we are known to be consumers of it, for this relationship between looker and looked at is what is key, and there are efforts to monetise it. The smile that found its way into photography in time, the signs of emotional state that might flicker across a face, are becoming operative in new ways. Now cameras have ‘smile detection’ technology, another step along the way of intelligent imaging systems. Computing systems develop affectively through machine-learning algorithms that can detect laughs, smiles, as well as all the negative emotions, and adjust or adapt their functioning accordingly. SmileTracker is the name of one system. Its manual states:

SmileTracker is a system designed to capture naturally occurring instances of positive emotion during the course of normal interaction with a computer. A facial expression recognition algorithm is applied to images captured with the user's webcam. When the user smiles, both a photo and a screenshot are recorded and saved to the user's profile for later review. Based on positive psychology research, we hypothesize that the act of reviewing content that led to smiles will improve positive affect, and consequently, overall wellbeing.

The computer develops to read and manage our emotional states. It is used in contemporary workplaces to train workers in appropriate facial expressions on meeting the public, and admonishes them if the required state of smiliness is not achieved. What might shatter this tight communication, in which one inanimate thing assumes the ability to interpret the other animate one? How might it be disarticulated? Is there any room left, any room for manoeuvre or is the circuit of gazes – the machine's to our one – too tightly drawn for anything to interrupt or break the rules? What new gestures might we work on to confound the machine, and even if just for our own amusement, for a laugh?

We have made entertainment from our compulsion to externalise emotions, films like *Inside Out* – where the production studio Pixar insisted on a maximum of six emotions to be personified as characters – but it was whittled down to five and so we got Joy, Sadness, Disgust, Fear, and Anger, a selection at least more expansive than Facebook's restricted palette, which tends towards the positive, a positivity by the way that Facebook believes makes posts and reactions more likely to be passed around on the social media platform. Facebook insist that negative emotions are less likely to be ‘shared’, and so all this positivity keeps the consumers online, onboard and on message, as it feeds into the algorithmic organization of ‘stories’ and targeted advertising, and as our private inner feelings are broadcast publically and to entities way beyond our ken.

There is also the recent film *Emoji*. The film's narrative involves an emoji who lives inside a phone and whose mood fluctuates, who is unable to hold the still, unaffected face that he is required to portray, the 'meh' face. This emoji who does not function correctly, who does not show the appropriate mood symbol, must be deleted. Of course, the narrative of the film will find a way to redeem the emoji's fluctuating emotions and the message will be that we can be accepted for who and what we are, even if that causes instability in the world. The emoji whose mood is unsettled is something like a human, relates to human emotions, more precisely than the ones that express one emotion, one feeling – and yet the film cannot abandon them, will not delete them, because they are the avatars of the smartphone social media world we have made and they have their uses. They have their uses for commerce, speeding up transactions online, for emotional management, for seeking out vulnerabilities and targeting products or fixes at us in relation to these. This becomes more sophisticated. The new Apple X arrives, with its FACE ID technology, includes animojis – animated emojis, which are custom talking emojis based on the users own facial expressions. 'The TrueDepth camera also enables new experiences, like bringing emojis to life, by mapping more than 50 facial muscles in real time, so you can be happy, or sad, or cross,' explained Apple's chief designer Jony Ive in a commercial that aired during the event.' What data can be collated in this relationship between self, emotions and phone – and the massive company that gathers it all? What are we alienating in using all this?

Would Robert have cared about any of this? Robert cared about humour, about the production of laughter, sometimes quite vicious laughter at those who ground us down. Irony, sarcasm, wit, mockery were some of the techniques used to express a panoply of emotions in response to how madness was vilified in the media and within mental health groups and settings – righteous anger or regret, indignation, anxiety, agitation, antagonism, bewilderment, self-loathing, trust, shame, disgust, Schadenfreude or pride. Pride – Mad Pride – what a complex idea, emotionally rich, strategic, communicative, rallying and transformative. Pride is like all these emotions mobilised by Robert in the pursuit of activism – righteous anger, indignation, ironic disdain, agitation, antagonism, bewilderment, and the rest – these are complex emotions. Probably there are emojis to represent them – these now proliferate daily - but they can never really cover what it means to develop them across time in a mix of modulated, changing feelings, faceted, fluctuating, directed in one direction or in many at one and the same time, expressed in confidence, in the widest sense of that word, shared and acted upon or hidden away and masked. They might not lend themselves to simple caricatures. Robert was open most distinctly to the widest range of emotions. He could understand, work with, ambivalence, fury and joy, and never judged or prescribed what emotional state was the right or proper one. He is described in a recent review of *Asylum* magazine,

the magazine of democratic psychiatry in terms many will recognise – gentle but provocative. A contradiction in terms, an emotional contradiction - to be gentle and yet to provoke – such paradox speaks to the experience of life itself, not least mad life. It was that emotional contradictoriness that is also the wellspring of creativity, the angry *and* tender songs Robert loved and brought to stage.

In contrast, this flurry of emotional expression that is represented by emojis, the constant barrage of likes and loves and signs of affect, obscure the more subtle and complex states of being that exist – because those are not currently of use to marketers or manipulators, cannot be mined so efficiently, at least not yet, cannot be simply coshed by drugs that appear as quick fix to emotional and mental distress or met with some other product that promises to wipe away trauma. This flood of emojis also leaves the smallest or no space for those that Robert drew attention to in the interview in *Vice*: those whose emotional, or mental states, are regarded as so far outside the grid, so beyond the limits that all that can happen, as Robert says, is that they get abandoned.

What room for psychosis on the palette of emojis? What room for suicidal feelings? And if there were room, if there is room, how might these be perceived in the flurry of updates, memes and one-liners? Of course suicide emojis exist – and maybe someone could communicate their intentions in this way and maybe it would be seen in the flurry. Or maybe not. And maybe someone would respond, not just with a reaction emoji, but really reaching out. Or not.

I am not here to dismiss the modes of communication of emotional states that humans – or tech companies – have invented, but rather to draw attention to what they say about the simplification of our emotional language, and the ways in which it lends itself to certain kinds of data capture and mining, and the ways in which the complex actuality of emotional states and the extremities of emotions get subsumed.

In remembering what Robert did, we also remember how he made room for the complex actualities of the real existing states of madness – from gaiety to manic depression to pride – and also we remember those on the edges of everything who he spent so many years fighting for and with, and who he brought centre-stage, sometimes just for the simple emotional benefits of, as he was wont to say, having a laugh.

Esther Leslie

The Happy Person

There was a happy person who was happy to extremes
So extremely happy that she'd make you want to scream
So deliriously cheerful that she drove us all to drink
And the doctor referred her to a shrink.

When she got to the appointment she was nearly doubled up
With chuckling and elation, the shrink told her to shut up
He took a good long look at her and twiddled his moustache
The happy person stared at him and laughed

The shrink said "No no no no no: there's something fishy here
This happy person has repressed anxiety and fear
Which are nibbling at her psyche and tangling up her brain"
He said, "excessive happiness is insane"

The shrink he hummed and hahed and uncomfortably wriggled
The happy person sat there looking at the shrink and giggled
He wrote a prescription for a pill to take with food
To even out the happy person's mood

The shrink he did not smile, he was serious and formal
He said, "Next time that I see you I expect you to be normal"
The happy person left the clinic in hysterics
The repercussions of these events were atmospheric

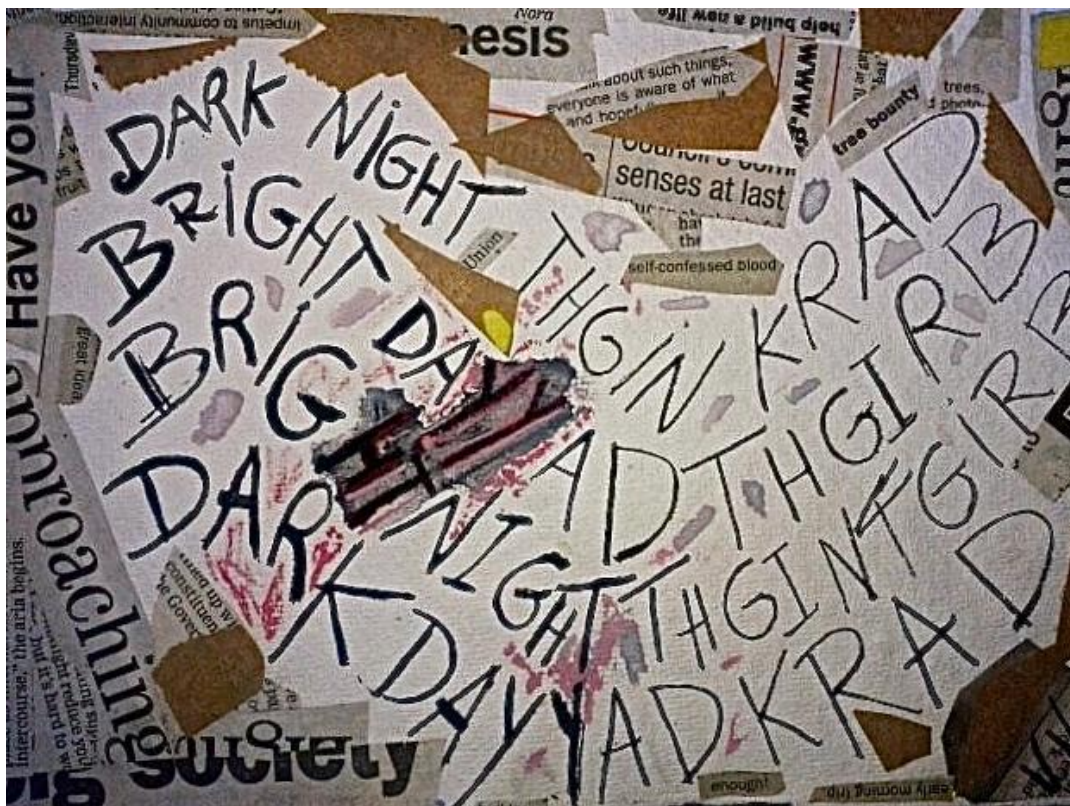
For she laughed all the way home because life is so outrageous
And other people laughed as well 'cause laughter is contagious
Hilarity spread round the town thicker than pollution
The shrink declared the town a mental institution

He declared the town a mental institution . . . !

Kath Tait



Reclining Figure by Vanessa Vie – 2003



Opposites by Vanessa Vie – 2013



Portrait of Ella by Vanessa Vie – 2015

Splash Like Jesus – Selima Hill

Bloodaxe Books 2017 ISBN978 1 78037 349 2

£12



SPLASH LIKE JESUS SELIMA HILL

SELIMA HILL

SPLASH LIKE JESUS

Publication Date : 25 May 2017

Paperback

£12.00

9781780373492

Pages: 224

Size: 198 x 129mm

Rights: World

Splash Like Jesus brings together three contrasting but complementary, familial poem sequences by 'this brilliant lyricist of human darkness' (Fiona Sampson), *Buttercup the Sloth*, about mothers; *Lobo-Lobo*, about sisters; and *Behold My Father on His Bicycle*, about exactly that. Like all of Selima Hill's work, all three sequences chart 'extreme experience with a dazzling excess' (Deryn Rees-Jones), with startling humour and surprising combinations of homely and outlandish.

'Selima Hill's *Jutland* has an astounding vivacity. Hill is a complete original whose body of work is unique in British poetry and this volume is an example of her at her best. *Jutland* consists of two extended sequences: *Advice on Wearing Animal Prints*, a kaleidoscope of shifting perspectives presenting the character Agatha, and *Sunday Afternoons at the Gravel-pits*, portraying a little girl and her father. Each poem tells an uncomfortable truth, through fireworks of surreal images. Every image is a surprise, sometimes funny, usually shocking, but at the same time archetypal as a brand new fairy-tale, and all this is achieved with crystalline brevity.' – Pascale Petit, chair of the

2015 T.S. Eliot Prize judges,
on *Jutland*

'Hill has a consistently refreshing imaginative voice, and a habit of always somehow looking in the opposite direction from everybody else. *Jutland*, her latest book, is angry, funny, moving and unnerving by turns, with the best poems tackling father-daughter relationships, violence and forgiveness in an uncompromising style. Reading her work is the strange experience of feeling as though you are looking directly through a kaleidoscope, where everything you see shines more brightly than before, only half making sense.' – Charlotte Runcie, *Daily Telegraph*, on *Jutland*

'Her adoption of surrealist techniques of shock, bizarre, juxtaposition and defamiliarisation work to subvert conventional notions of self and the feminine... Hill returns repeatedly to fragmented narratives, charting extreme experience with a dazzling excess.' – Deryn Rees-Jones, *Modern Women Poets*

Selima was described by Fiona Sampson as 'this brilliant lyricist of human darkness'. The poems are all brief and aphoristic, mainly incorporating at least one apparently incongruous image, which unfailingly push the reader into exciting areas of speculation. The main backdrop is made up of the routine irritations and obsessions of everyday life, in this instance heavily dominated by a ubiquitous and oppressive mother and siblings. She does not flinch from uttering the darkest thoughts, and

illustrating them with the supreme enlightenment of distilled black humour. At one point she proclaims that 'being scared is how I want to be' (*Everything Is Coming Together*). There is some sense of her being a fugitive, such as hunters – 'who, if I run away, will hunt me down' (*The Hunt*)

'Buttercup the Sloth' presents a very benign presence on the cover; there is certainly a charm about his contentment and inertia. *The Frantic Hens* shows the mother figure to be an elusive entity: "No one knows what she likes, or even who she is . . ." A high level of invective, counterpointed with subtlety and ambiguity, is sustained throughout the collection. Underlying the cynicism is a deep sense of loyalty: "I know that I myself never hold,/and never will, anything against her." – in spite of the fact that her mother has never seen her happy. She even goes to grotesque extremes of masochism by covering herself in honey and attracting swarms of wasps, in a failed attempt to attract her mother's attention. The mother seems to be an extremely complicated character, doing such things as carrying around Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* as a talisman. There is frequent mention of a Mrs P, which suggests an alter ego of Selima's mother. To be fair, the complications seem to be two-sided; mother is afraid of anything to do with her daughter. Sometimes communication breaks down completely: "I contradict everything she says/till in the end she never says anything". Sometimes she is really hyperbolic with the rhetoric of rejection, as in *Fairy Liquid*: "Even rats and guinea-pigs have names/and not my mother, she is too thin,/she doesn't even like being looked at . . ." In *Fish*, there is reference to a woman who is always shouting at Selima's mother, unfortunately not effective as a counterweight because she cannot be trusted.

The communication barrier extends to her sisters: "My sisters are too dumb, and not worth talking to . . . "Being friends is out of the question . . . I never listen to a word they say." Such ostracism seems totally justified, as from Selima's many descriptions, they appear as totally heartless and mercenary, and to have no desire for her company. In *Angels from the Realms of Glory*, she lampoons the extremities of their conceit – "my sisters are not sisters but angels – angels with no wings and nylon hair." Selima seems to be very keen on swimming – an activity abhorrent to her sisters, and her mother; she is also something of an exhibitionist, with a fixation on swimwear and athletic outfits, and sometimes doing naked 'star-jumps'.

The difficulties with the sisters impinge on her own motherhood: in *My Baby* – "The deal is if he lets me carry him/I promise to protect him. When my sisters//swing him round their heads by his lock/I promise I will reinforce the studs;" One section is devoted to Selima's father, with whom her relationship is much more neutral and detached than that with her mother, also ambiguous and contradictory: "He's reading to the girl on the bed/as if the girl is me but she's not://the girl I really am has gone away." She does not want to please him again when she becomes an adult.

She is utterly cynical about his power as a role model: "My father wakes me up on starry nights/and takes me out to wonder at the stars//that couldn't give a shit about the names/my father so triumphantly assigns to them." *The Girl* suggests that Selima has had a lesbian relationship, which is revealed when her father discovers the partner's dead body. It is later revealed that 'my Father is now living in eternity'.

Ratbag shows Selima's vision of humanity at large: "And all the mothers and all the mothers' daughters,/the lovely ones, the not so lovely ones,//the ones who live, or should that be, who crawl/on their knees among the millipedes?//Where do we all come from? We don't know./But luckily it doesn't really matter." Her sisters tell her she is ugly; she replies that she wants to be so. While they bake, they tear at each other's throats; Selima does not want to be like that. One of her sisters seems to have no desire to enter 'the paradise of love'. It seems that they have had to have several of their body-parts removed, which seems to have detracted from their humanity.

She senses analogies between her alienation from family and the Animal Kingdom, such as in *Songbird* – ". . . who finds she's got a cuckoo in her nest/and doesn't know how not to go on feeding it//although the cuckoo only gets more vicious, the songbird more bewildered, till at last/the so-called songbird loses her song." Ostriches are acknowledged, because they can inflict fatal kicks; she also has one vision of her mother being driven in an ostrich-drawn sedan, and another of her being smothered by mice. By way of contrast, she refers to rats 'to whom I am as pointless as a snowdrop' (*The Snowdrop*). She would prefer the company of a Great Dane to a husband.

There is also reference to the marine area: "I'm lying on the sofa like a fish/whose face if full of fish hooks being screamed at"; she later refers to carp in aquaria being fed by teams of virgins.

Insects get acknowledged here: "The newborn kittens frighten her – like bees/that bump again her ankles in a rage//because they think she won't give back their wings." A touch of the macabre and physical decomposition with *Red Ants*, and in *Shrimps*: "their only friend is Jesus

whose deep wounds/they dream they pack with spiders' webs and mosses." The sensation of an unwanted partner is compared to dust-mites (*Breath*). Selima can jokingly suggest that her mother should have been a wasp, which 'never loses, far less misses, anything!' In *The Violinists and Viola Players*, 'the lovely girls have turned into flies'. *Entomology* personifies insects: "His suit is like a suit made of water/with buttons made of ice that whispers *love me*"

In *Giants*, she has a terrifying vision of monsters 'with no heads except mouths . . . shouting at each other in a language/I refuse to want to understand' – yet resolutely, she will not succumb to fear of them. *Swimming Chickens* feels something like a dark parody of an Edward Lear nonsense poem. Lollipops are accorded an animate essence: "they fall apart in panic on their sticks//because they are afraid of being warm/and sliding down inside a sleeve like weasels." Some truly Dali-esque imagery in *Swans* – 'where airbeds in the shape of hippoptami/are bumping into airbeds shaped like swans.'

Selima, for all her self-questioning, has supreme self-confidence: her doctor "knows I always get things right." Sometimes, in her heart of hearts, she would like to be an inanimate particle 'like a snowflake//that's celebrating having been a glacier . . . that never cries nor lets itself be handled.' But then she can say "I only really care about myself/and my desire to exude compassion."

David Russell

Temper, Temper, Temper

Temper, Temper, out of control
I feel like I'm going to explode, explode
Mad Cat, I spit and scratch

You cannot tame me, you can't restrain me
You locked me up in your darkest room

With spiders and ghosts, panic and gloom
You trapped me in your judicious cage

To keep me afraid, but I got BRAVE

Chorus 1st version:

And My heart, My Soul, My Body is my own
My Voice, My Choice,
Going to Make a lot of Noise!
Got to Fight for my life,
'cause I Know I'm in the Right
And if violence is wrong . . .
How come I feel so strong?

Verse 2

Temper, Temper, break all the rules
I hate you all and that is the truth, truth
Rage, Rage, Out of the Cage
You can't break me, you cannot make me

I tried so hard to please you every day,
You hypocrites with your brutal ways
My head is bleeding from your twisted
games
Your cruel names to keep me ashamed

Chorus (2nd version) and ending:
and ...

My heart, My Soul, My Body is my own
My Voice, My Choice,
Going to Make a lot of Noise!
Got to Fight for my life,
because I Know I'm in the Right
If violence is wrong . . .
How come I feel so strong?
But violence is wrong,
got to find new ways to be strong
Violence is wrong,
got to find new ways to be strong

I tried so hard to please you every day
You hypocrites with your brutal ways
Got to find new ways to be **STRONG**
to be **STRONG**
to be **STRONG**

Veronique Walsh

The Apothecary

When Mr. Lloyd is there
The dark clouds disappear
This close-knit family
Has got me stitched up
He can see
But he doesn't treat me with drugs
He gives me all his attention
Asking me all the right questions
And when he leaves the room,
All the hope in the world walks out

He doesn't treat me with medicines
He offers me protection

Guiding me into new directions
And when he leaves the room
All the light in the world goes out
Well I'm worried and I'm weak
Fighting demons in my sleep
But that's because
The bastards broke me down
Because I spat out the truth
No-one says out loud
Maybe I'm the strong one
Because my heart speaks out

Carry the Day in through the Night
Carry a Light into the Dark-dark-dark
(Time for the Truth)

He is searching for solutions
No time for doubt or confusion
My fate is not a foregone conclusion
I've got to be brave
And find a new place in this world

Well I'm worried and I'm weak
Fighting demons in my sleep
But that's because
The bitches broke me down
Because I spat out the truth
No-one says out loud
Maybe I'm the strong one
Because my heart beats proud

Carry the Day in through the Night
Carry a Light into the Dark-dark-dark
(Time for the Truth)

When Mr Lloyd is there
The dark clouds disappear.

Veronique Walsh

MONOLOGUE ON LIFE AND DEATH

György Faludy

Translated from the Hungarian & Edited By
Thomas Ország-Land

The poem below was composed in a darkened punishment cell during a prolonged period of solitary confinement endured by its author, and committed to memory because of an absence of writing implements. That is why it is so full of light and colour, the Jewish-Hungarian poet György Faludy (1910-2006), later recalled. Faludy, a towering figure of European literature and a fierce opponent of both Fascism and Communism, fought with the US Air Force during WW2, returned to his homeland at the first opportunity to be imprisoned on trumped up charges by the Communists, participated in his country's doomed 1956 revolution, spent decades in his second exile mostly in London, Toronto and New York, and returned home once more after the collapse of Soviet administration to be received by a tumultuous welcome. His work is heavily ignored again by the servile literary establishment in Hungary to suit the taste of the current, extreme rightist administration there, but it is winning wide and growing international interest in English translation.

Like some crazed lover kicking up the leaves
along an avenue of autumn trees
with tousled hair beneath a falling sky,
that's how I loved to walk upon this earth.
Or like some traveler in a foreign city
who takes an evening stroll upon arrival,
one who looks hither, thither, starved for more
and, in a heated, happy trance, discovers

that very city of one's secret dreams
where all is new: the lit up shop displays,
the colours of the drinks in coffee-houses,
the throngs of people – were they celebrating?

–

the wild thyme scent of freedom in the air...
a city one would never want to leave:
like such a traveller, so I viewed the world.

I knew that everything is but a fleeting
phenomenon that never can recur.
When I saw butterflies flit by, I thought,
Look well, you'll never see these ones again.
And when I wined with my good friends,
I shared with them
my heart and thoughts and words as though
I had to die before the dawn – because
I'd always feared the morning
when there would be
no friends, no wine and no awakening.
I knew that others also knew that fear: they
suppressed it, and I bore it on my brow
while, whispering from its prompter's box,
my mind kept warning me that
Everything must end, that
my life was but a spark, a miracle
between the iron tongs of lifeless time,
a flash emitted by a firefly
perched on the hollow palate of decay,
an incandescent hiss of opposites...
This visceral, perpetual awareness
of my mortality endowed my life
with flavours, colours, magic and delight,
inspired and exhilarated me,
enraptured me and conjured up before me
a fairy castle from my bare existence.

Intoxicated by the planet's finite,
once only gift of wine, I came to hold
each notion and each object and each person
as drunkards would embrace and cling to
lampposts.

My world thus came alive: the firmament
displayed for me a tapestry of light,
the three dimensions of my space became
a storehouse packed with bales of rich
adventures,
the face of every clock a banquet table
set for twelve diners, and my passing moments
the dripping of the heavy drops of honey.
And I became a lover of the earth,
a fervent, roaming Romeo of clouds,
a troubadour beneath dead city walls
still carving Gothic ornaments in rhymes,
a bare priest at pagan rites of midnight bathing
. . . till time was up, and I have disappeared,
a passing, brief phenomenon, within
the timeless ocean of phenomena.

(Recsk slave labour camp, Hungary, 1952)

THOMAS ORSZÁG-LAND is an award-winning poet and foreign correspondent who writes from Jerusalem and London as well as his native Budapest. His last book was [Survivors: Hungarian Jewish Poets of the Holocaust](#) (Smokestack/England, 2014), and his last E-chapbook, [Reading for Rush Hour: A Pamphlet in Praise of Passion](#) (Snakeskin/England, 2016).

Kath to the Rescue

So: Coming home from Kentish Town on the 46 bus an old lady stands up and says “I can't find my carer; where is my carer?” I was aware of her sitting at the front with another woman when I first got on the bus, but the other lady was nowhere to be seen. Various people tried to talk to her and she just stared back at them, so I figured she was deaf. I looked directly at her and enunciated “Where are you going ?” . . . “to the Ear , Nose and Throat Hospital”. . . “Ok; we're nearly there; do you want me to help you get there ?” . . . “Yes please!”

So I took her to the appointment, having established that she lived in Kentish Town, and had been abandoned by her carer who was called

Mary (??) and worked for the Bluebird Care Agency. She had a son who worked in the city as a banker and she knew his phone number; she did not have enough money for a taxi home and the carer had her house keys. She was a bit confused as well as a bit deaf, so I assumed she was suffering from some sort of Dementia.

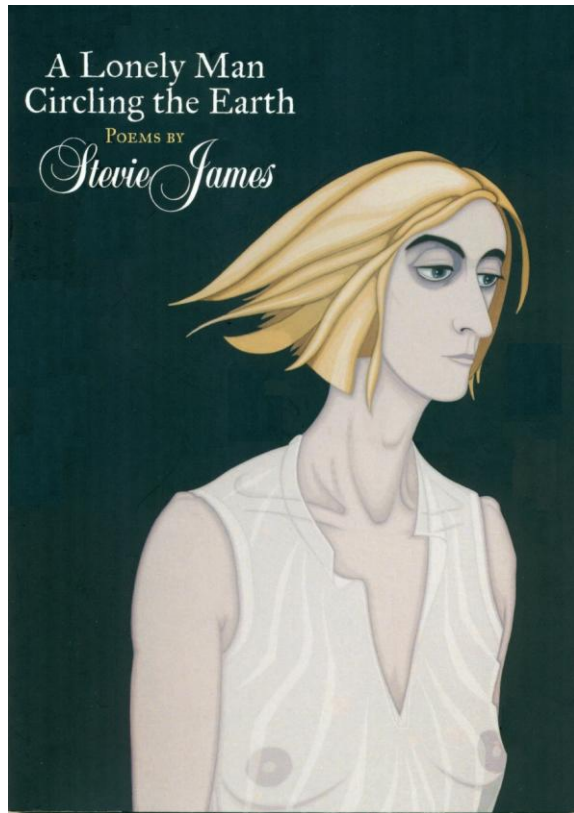
Anyway, I saw her into the Outpatients Clinic and used their phone to call her son (who didn't answer, so I left a message). Then I went with her into her appointment and spoke with the Doctors, who assured me they would make sure she got home safely. Considering her obvious symptoms of dementia I wondered how much of what she'd told me was true, because would a carer really abandon a dementia patient on the bus on the way to a hospital appointment?

So when I got home I went online to get the Bluebird Agency's phone number and called them. Yes; she was a client of theirs. No; the carer was not called Mary but Juanita . . . Yes; there had been an 'incident' but no; they wouldn't say what the 'incident' was. The police had been notified and were out on the streets looking for the old lady. “Well; she's at the Ear, Nose and Throat Hospital” I said, “so you'd better phone there”. Fine! Eventually I got a call from her grateful son who said she has Alzheimers. I wonder what happened to the poor carer. Did she have a sudden bout of nausea ? Did she decide to go back to the old gal's flat and run off with the silver? Did she receive unexpected bad news about her family member on her mob? Guess I'll never know. Carers are usually not bad people, so will give her the benefit of the doubt. So that was today's adventure. I like adventures, but why do most of mine usually involve old ladies ? The cosmos sends them my way regularly.

Kath Tait

A Lonely Man Circling the Earth – Poems by Stevie James

Leeds Survivors Press, 2017; ISBN 978-1-901045-20-8; £6.99



Stevie James, in her own words aspires to be 'the muse of androgyny'. Several of her poems indeed have a dual aspect, a character with both male and female characteristics. Gender boundaries are explored in depth: In *For Julio Galán*, the painter has an androgynous quality – "A cigarette hangs from the man's mouth/In your woman's face." Neo-expressionist Galán certainly gives ample coverage to the erotic – including transvestism. Stevie feels that she is his model/his muse: "O guide me into the dress like Dietrich/seamed up between whalebone and steel corsets." But the process is definitely two-way, as she says to him: "Cast off your gown,/Go to earth/sequestered in brown loam.

In *You Tell Me You Love Me*, she can say "You tell me I am your son/Lover, daughter . . . Mother-love and father figure". *And This Is Love* leaves it open as to whether there might be a gay partner.

Through *The Conquering of Gravity*, Stevie expresses her mythical persona; she conquers gravity by dressing up in a range of exotic wardrobe, and entering into an exotic dance; finally she casts off the wardrobe and dances naked. The female aspect predominates, especially in the area of clothing. It must not be forgotten that some of the most straight and macho of males like dressing up in female attire. *And This Is Love* paints an idealised picture of love, from the blended perspective of participant and outside observer: lovely 'two-tone' image of 'lily white cabaret girl' and 'ebony black cabaret boy'. She dreams her true lover would be an artists (presumably, conversely, she dreams that a great artist will be her lover). *Dark at Half Past Three* faces the pain of unrequited love – a something with cosmic dimensions: "the moon on her back already//she has a lonely night ahead/in her silver diamanté gown/glowing in space . . ." Some people say they die for love: "the space between us/– beloved and lover –/Is all death asks."

Push me to the Edge, But Push Me No Further defines the limits of devotion to a lover, including self-sacrifice and martyrdom. *Unequal Notes* reveals feelings of lack of correspondence and reciprocity in relation to a lover. These sentiments contrast quite sharply with her willingness to die for a composer she adores in *An Angel for Pyotr Ilyich*.

A most intimate evocation of a relationship with a close woman friend comes in *Clare in the*

Night (or White Stilettos): Clare wanted to become a nun, and made a pilgrimage to the Church of Santa Chiara (a saint akin to a moon-goddess). She is lured into the bonds of the flesh by Antonio de Barista, who seems to prove feckless and faceless. Stevie has feelings of compassion: "I feel too much pity/To remove your skirt/Shorter than the conscience/Of all the men who have been there." But she also feels she cannot fully enter the cathedral; she puts some money in the collecting box, then leaves. Does she see something of herself in Clare?

The collection has a rich cultural backdrop, including Russian literature – a 'phantom lover' derived from Dostoyevsky, and a touching portrayal of Marina Tsvetayeva in *The Dresses*: she identifies intimately with her literary heroine: "I join you in time/UNSTOPPABLE". She identifies with Marina as she tries on all the outfits which can be associated with her. In *High Heels*, she fantasizes about wearing a dazzling evening dress and being a pianist; very sad 'coming to earth: her soul is "Opalescent as the oyster's wealth/Upon a forgotten sea bed." A reference to Alvarez's study of Sylvia Plath in *Mademoiselle*, a lament for a child prodigy who did not seem to realise her potential, and who perhaps committed suicide.

Obscured by Orchids is a 'retrospective' on a past tryst. Interesting gloss on Tennyson: ". . . the back yard/From which Lady-of-Shalott-like/Sunlight bounced back/To gash orange on my tomato soup." But then she diverges from her role-model: "I say to myself 'I am half-sick of shadows'//But this lady/Belonging Patti-Smith-like to the night/Devours them/Greedily." Deeply touching image of making love on a bed of orchids.

There is a musical background – Elliott Carter's

String Quartet No. 5 and Pyotr Ilyich's *Pathétique* Symphony. From the film and pop world, Greta Garbo and Petula Clark are described in great detail, and with great affection. There is some feeling that Stevie wants to 'be' them – take over, 'clone' their bodies and souls.

Some stark social realism in *Lazarus Rising*, showing the grim underside of a job interview, and unveiling the propaganda in the process: "Lazarus (the legendary riser from the dead) is so sweet/Until he remembers it is the next century . . . and drinks to the dregs/The lost opportunities of the 20th Century. The poet can be bitterly ironic in her address to youth, but embedded in that irony is a deep compassion: "Rest your shaved heads/In the lap of utility/And know one day your winding sheets/-now rolled into neat bandages –/Will, unfurling, absorb the starch/of all your bipolar expeditions". This partly challenges the mentality of 'outward bound' expeditions, and makes a challenging fusion of arctic/antarctic pioneering with the bipolar mental condition.

Some feelings of guilt and self-doubt emerge in *I Have Borrowed All My Life From Thieves*. She feels she has done a great deal of 'cultural plundering' of the accoutrements and posturings of famous figures from the past; she has felt 'a slave to envy', and omnivorous in her approach: "I have borrowed the bedlinen of the untouchables/And fashioned it into a Fortuny gown/The razor edge of fashion/cuts your pathway." Stevie longs to break free from these attachments; but to do so is an extremely difficult process: "Your strand of pearls is as strong/As barbed wire coiling out the enemy."

Stevie is quite cynical about the creative process itself, such as in *Creativity*, where she

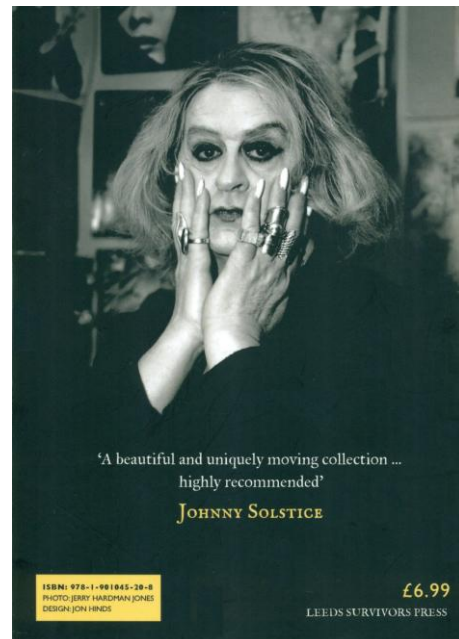
finds words 'weak and timid' and yearns for a voice 'torn/with Heathcliffian vigour'. Comparable observations on 'spoken word' are expressed in *Poetry Reading*. These poems are complemented by Stevie's description of her reading habits in *Eternal Snow*.

This poet can face the depths of pessimism with a statement like "Dying was easier after all,/Than the dress rehearsal of life. But she can be truly resilient with a sense of the post-mortem, the eternal. *Heaven* describes angels: "They are preoccupied/With god, with wings,/With little missions of mercy/Or gigantic plans of redemption.//The seers and prophets were mistaken/When they thought heaven/A remote whiteness of the cloud.//It is a simple thing/Of black, white, sable and green/Sketched in the softest of pencils." Similarly, *Light* presents a biological/cosmological perspective, from the starting point of an amoeba, with not altogether unsympathetic echoes of the Book of Genesis. The overall feeling is of someone who has struggled successfully to find her own identity: "I choked on men's fantasies far too long –/Now the song is mine, it is mine" (*For Marianne*). In *Everywoman's Handbag*, Stevie seems to be convinced that she is the generic voice of humanity. Interesting paradox in 'My book devoured, not a word read', and a final focusing on an individual partner: "I am the silent prayer on your lips."

Stevie's own words on her work are highly illuminating: "I would wish the poems to speak for themselves, and hopefully they reflect something of my desire\ dream that everyone should be able to live wherever they choose on the spectrum from male to female and all the ranges in between. I believe gender (as opposed to sex) is far more fluid than our culture has led us to believe. My 'voice' veers more to the

feminine, but I try, on occasion, to use a male voice – as in the poem *The River. For Marianne* is about the experience of Marianne Faithfull, who as a drug addict lived behind a wall. "Some interpretations of certain poems express things I wasn't even conscious of meaning. But they are perfectly valid, and I would not contradict them!" Her final assessment of her own mortality (including the title) forms a fitting conclusion to this incisive collection: "I shall die in a shroud of silver screen/And when at last I come to eternity/(which waits for us all from the moment of birth/Will a genderless god gather me in and say//I am lonely, so lonely circling the earth/What is a man or woman worth?"

Congratulations to Leeds Survivors Poetry for having produced this volume; it is high time that London Survivors emulated this example!



Copies of *A Lonely Man Circling The Earth* are available for £6 (which includes postage & packaging) from Leeds Survivors Poetry, c/o 8 Beulah View, Leeds LS6 2LA. Please make cheques payable to Leeds Survivors Poetry.

David Russell

Now you are Old

Now you are old and grey and full of care
And anxious before me, forgive this verse
And put away the pain and grief you nurse
To find the story that you have to share.

Left lost for words and lonely in this place
Forgetful of those happy days now gone
Hand me your memory to sing your song
And bring to peace your turmoil
with glad grace.

When I see you sweet smile break the surface
Not just a backward glimpse of happiness
But something to be thankful for and bless
As, hanging on to love, it will suffice.

David Potter

*Lost for Words – Illustrated: Decline into
Dementia*
https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1546878106/ref=cm_sw_r_cp_tai_8r.JzbEGPPE23

'FRAIDY HOLE

1975,
we lied
to the born-again

neighbor's boy
that a kid died there.

He wanted to see.
We threatened him

not to bring his sister.
It was out-of-bounds,

farther than when streetlights

went off; an earthen hole

in a construction site
eaten out by a John Deere

whose keys were stolen by bullies
we knew to be wary of.

Sean Casey boasted it was deeper
than the deep-end in the adult's pool.

I caught its bottom smell:
soaked cardboard and rugs.

Then lordy-boy lied---
heard his mother calling.

Jeff cursed him 'fraidy cat.
I needed someone to go down.

Adolescence is a spurring pandemic.
Go down, or we'd push you down.

Spur me to collect the black necklace of
pollywog
that rims the pond;

spurred on by roadkill guts;
the barefoot kid I spurred on past
the broken glass in a tunnel on the
creek---

spurred by the chest of the girl whose
shirt I pulled up;
the scab on the weird boy's arm

that he ate on a dare;
go down or we'd push you down.

Tolstoy wrote that all the land
any person really needs is a hole 6 x 6.

Stephen Lindow

AFTER LARRY LEVIS

Self-centered lunatic,
my poem refused to speak.
I bought it a modest writing pad
with famous poets
across its thick sheets.
I thumbed the DSM-5 for symptoms,
or a poem that understood my poem
who is stir crazy so I promised air mail,
but didn't lick my poem
but it went blue and clammy.
Threw a tantrum,
got sucked onto the cage
of the metal fan.
Was this the end of us?
I'm making this up
as I go, poem. I might
unplug the fan.
I might finish the bottle.
'Dammit!' I said
taking out scissors.
Begone with you!
Out the window
with you Lindow!

Stephen Lindow

Los Angeles Poem #36

I am a ladder
up against myself.
A factory producing nothing.
I watch rivers. I watch railroads.
I'm the distance that comes
looking for you by name.

Ruin-four-and-a-half ricochet for boredom.

The farther you are is when
I'll make my move.
My heart perches in the hormone
of your sky. Look at my hands
growing blind. I am the long division
you shout down a cave
Might my body shed any famous
before self-destruction
for the milk that lies in me deadens like a
flame.

Stephen Lindow

Prompt Me

You prompt me, you tempt me.
I'm the identity of a lost place.
My wishes are a deaf serenade, like
butterflies
out of breath at a teetering height of
summer
whose sweetness has grown
down into infatuations
for color.
I'm a distance too far for color.
You prompt, like a thirst that hides behind
a door:
a red shadow that bleeds spiders and
then apologizes
like the weather that is non-negotiable
made flesh.

Stephen Lindow

Lest We Forget – The Sky-Scraping Cinder!



Grenfell Tower

Oh!

Oh! Heartless wind, that spares not the brave
Quiet night that erupts, and who to save –
Peaceful, yes, at midnight,
With no inkling of what was to come.

Spark, flame, just a fraction of a sum
Which would, second by second,
Witness calamity.

Oh! Oh! Oh! cry says me,
Up shot the flame, in no time at all
Screaming at last the tragedy overall –
The Tower, The Tower
Into a smouldering wreck –

The homeless and stranded,
Lest we forget;
Out of a window
A flag of white was seen –
Now that person began to scream.

Babe thrown from window on high
A miracle – Babe caught
By the bye and bye
Safe now – Oh tragic little one;
But of your mother –
Who can again count the sum,
Yes: what became of your darling mum?
Tears swelling with the tongues of grief.

Oh raging inferno, where the relief –
Out of tenement window threw the self
And at the base of the Tower
More bodies to fill God's House.

Oh! Oh! Oh! – Sad, sad day;
Now I lay me down, prostrate to scream
Inside and pray,
Tears that swell at this senseless loss:
Who, what was to blame?
Oh! Oh! Oh! The cost!

Now, at the skyline
Stands calamitous distress
Grenfell Tower once more
Is no less charred rafter
And frightening to see –

And those lost and nameless
Who can oversee
The plight and sorry state.
Oh! Oh! Oh! To remedy,
But for those too many
It was simply too late.

Joy V. Sheridan
25.6.17

Home Truths –

a poetic narrative of an adult gap year

by
Hannah Hutchinson

Published by Chipmunka Publishing, PO
Box 6872, Brentwood, Essex CM13 1ZT,
UK

<http://www.chipmunkapublishing.com>
Copyright © Hannah Hutchinson 2014
ISBN 978-1-78382-061-0

Chipmunka Publishing gratefully
acknowledges the past support of Arts
Council England.



This is ‘a poetic narrative of an adult gap year’, and an action-packed and provocative narrative too. The poet astutely delineates the relationship of creativity and suffering by quoting Keats: “Most wretched men/are cradled into poetry by wrong;/They learn from suffering what they teach in song.” Hannah’s personal crisis is outlined in *Song of the Soul 2001*, there is a cry from the heart, and an expression of her creative mission: “Oh tangled threads of that tapestry I created as my spirit

sank! . . .Oblivion seeker/seven years past/crazed and dazed/sensibilities grazed/I lazed in a hospital bed/and gazed at nothing/fazed only by the lies yet to come/Oh! How time flies.”

Hannah’s professional experience as carer and counsellor, and her breadth of vision, comes out in her poetry. She does not flinch from portraying the squalid and the insanitary. She has been squeezed within the pincers of a violent domestic situation and an oppressive institutional one. The oppressors, in turn, are trying to compensate for their own insecurity: “All those people you are worried/might expose you/are probably worrying/that you might be about/to show them up.

In *Pain*, Hannah suggests she would rather face the Psychiatric Unit than her ex-husband. But she does brave the pain of parting, as in *The Not-so-Golden Triangle*: “There is a gap between my ribs/Where I have buried every lie/scavenging like a black kite,/I was his rich pickings./Now we be split in three/the Devil’s tattoo.” In *Prostate Estate*, she can express physical vindictiveness towards her husband. Great rejoicing: “now he’s extinct, my ex-dodo.”

Life, and institutions, have oppressed her dysfunctional family terribly, though there is finally a ray of light: “Truth towers above, dwarfed by reality/wrapped in their several abodes/their solidity impenetrable,/they plot, scheme, loot her sanity/exact penalties,/meddlesome,/they shun and defile, mythologise, until hope in some disguise/God, swift as electricity, sends.”

Her explorations, internal and external, are in the cause of independence, firstly from her mother, and then from her husband: “Mother, who is so critical/A referee without a whistle/A

judge without precedent/passing sentence before my defence.”

We are aware of the oppressive power of both her mother and sister, which has provided no coherent structure in ‘growing up without protection or guidance’. Mother gets a searing indictment: “Your words never evanescent, my feelings mixed/My letters fixed, your half-lies contradicted by my reality/leave your half-lies like a bad smell/leave me to rot in my own hell.”

She goes on extended travels to distance herself from her ex-husband and an uncommitted lover. There are three ‘grand tours’ – one of Greece, Turkey, Egypt and Libya, one of France, and one of India. On the first journey, she has a degree of naïve optimism, taking a ‘cure-all’ cruise. One effect of this should be to straighten out her thinking processes: “I must stop thinking in black and white of my transposed future.” But in the end she cannot take escapist comfort from visiting the sites of antiquity at a safe distance; she refers to the burning down of the Temple of Poseidon. She identifies with Aphrodite: “Like her I’m emerging from my own waves of hell.”

She is strongly aware of ‘dragging the ruined past and future into the messy present’, and is determined to keep an accurate perspective.

There is a highly sensitive portrayal of mental distress, to me synthesizing the sensations of carer and sufferer. She is sharply critical of the stereotypes perpetrated by the psychiatric system, as in *Occupational Therapy*: “[her sister’s] Personality disorder . . . which is worse,/they wear it as a curse,/depression with aggression – or this nomenclature?” Elsewhere there is reference to ‘those values corrupt,/those morals bankrupt’. *Impostor*

Syndrome faces the two-sidedness of the psychiatric system, and of intolerant, persecuting acquaintances: “All those people you are worried/might expose you/are probably busy worrying/that you might be about to show them up.” Some resentment towards her doctor: “I wish I could spray him with anti-bacterial gel.”

Psychiatric institutions are formally terrifying; but they need not finally prevail: “Truth towers above,/dwarfed by reality,/wrapped in their several abodes/their solidity impenetrable/they plot, scheme, loot her sanity,/exact penalties meddlesome;/they shun and defile, mythologise, until hope/in some disguise/God, swift as electricity, sends.”

The sordid and squalid are faced, unflinchingly and poetically: ‘her [daughter’s] handcuffs with their toothless crocodile grin’. Isolation is emphasised: “I am invisible, hunched in these shadows . . . I share my house with a stranger – an off-duty officer, and she’s always off-duty. Paranoia and persecution are awarded full prominence: “hate is clear/like a bell which rings/deceiving with the truth . . . hate is a shattered microwave plate.” Hannah unflinchingly faces her own pessimism: “Me, who has never been brimful of accepting, uncritical love and comforts . . . some role-model mother/I have acquired a large vocabulary/with which to insult you . . . she who has the power to belittle/the stalk bed as resistant/as the umbilical cord . . . 80 years a conundrum – teeth as false as your love.”

Hannah has extreme difficulty with her mother, about whom she is very scathing: “You have slipped through the fingers of God/slipped into a deep dark hole . . . How can I save you when you have no soul?” There is also considerable sibling tension with the ‘sessile sister/spoiled

girl'. Indeed, she considers herself to have been 'stretched between mother and sister.' Her relationships with men are equally fraught: My husband hurt me in repeated waves . . . a lover as fragile as his promises." There is brutal rejection: "You have dropped me/as mindlessly as a hoodie/tosses a concrete slab/from a motorway bridge/onto the transparency/of a car's windscreen." There is oppression and hypocrisy: ". . . he hacks away at my sanity/with this crusader sword." The resultant bitterness and vindictiveness is honestly expressed: "She summonsed the gall/after this operation/daring damnation/to kick him in the balls." She had tried, without success, to anaesthetise herself against these traumas: "On automatic pilot/I gave these six years my best shot." The bitterness is sometimes emphasised by stark scientific imagery: "Only so much radiation/can be squeezed from a lamp – this electric source her negation; where she's going no light shall fall."

In *The Lover*, she quotes Jane Austen: "Man has the advantage of choice, woman the power of refusal." *Rogue Male* refers to the lover as 'an emotional vampire . . . you fed on me like a jungle carcass . . .'. With the lover she had an initial infatuation, but then became disillusioned: "I was like a child in class looking up to him . . . Meeting each other only in seminal fluid. She becomes hardened, resolute: "This girl's not for turning." "I am to be my own husband, it seems/The dreamer and executor of my own dreams." She can be quite resolute in this direction: "The sooner my ex is dead and asleep, the less I'll weep." She envies Shelley's 'sexless bee/tasting all blossoms, and confined to no one' There is a bitter aside referring to 'whomsoever put the men into dementia'.

A love affair seemed to hold some promise: "I

am the body . . . he is the water I feel/bathing over me . . . I'm the car's mechanics,/he is the chassis . . . I'm a stormy sea,/he keeps me afloat. But she is finally not 'liberated' by her fling: "All that remains of him and I, after this risky blind fortnight/is an unclean car, full of detritus;/thank God now for renewed sight."

The central section is a chronicle of 'liberating' cruises, from which she hopes 'to return heartbreak-cured'. She sets off admirably equipped with historical knowledge. The wealth of detail Hannah conveys could make a guide-book in its own right. But for all her desire to escape, she has to acknowledge some feeling of affinity with desperate, immigrant 'boat people'. Her first expedition is named *Mediterranean Odyssey*, her second was to India. There is reference to many ports of call in her tightly-packed itinerary.

Travelling through India, she does not flinch from the spectacles of poverty, squalor and cruelty which constantly beset her. She pulls no punches: 'India is over-populated and over-rated'. Together they convey a judicious balance of cultural splendour and desperate poverty. She is careful not to idealise the past, however much she is impressed by its relics: "Modern society has no monopoly on a perverted sense of celebrity." Her feelings about India are mixed: ". . . where I weave, like a mysterious gander-bird, living in two words – physical and spiritual." There are two sides to everything; for all the dreadful level of poverty (and she notices among other things "a deformed souvenir-vendor touting through his pain . . . an embryonic human on the filthy floor . . . a child-tout puts malnourished babies to misuse . . . an old woman chunters abuse), Hannah did not see any obese adults in India. An interesting contradiction in 'the Ganges

water septic, river of salvation'. Her expedition to India is both an escape and an ultimate confrontation – to find the middle way to Nirvana, to relieve our collective conscience." She experiences, acutely, both the civilisation and the ecological infrastructure of India: "Organisms . . . older and deeper than human intelligence – in the compost beneath our feet creatures seethe, instinct-driven, whence we forage to drums of the jungle's beat."

Some great insights into sea travel: ". . . the sea waters/like an unbalanced washing-machine on spit . . . sea waves move horizontally/molecules move vertically."

In her description of sea travel, Hannah cleverly presents the natural/elemental and the man-made as images of each other: "This ponderous bulk of all matter felt across the kleptomaniac sea . . . the white sun plays on waves, dense plastic débris, insolent in its presence/pollutes a fathomless abyss."

And some profound questionings quoting Karen Owen: "Without a God life is futile, yet it is infantile/to presume a God is responsible now to give life meaning – If God is intelligently designed, who designed God?"

The figures of the dead present a grim backdrop: "In this world of no-speak/a mummy – wrapped in embalming bandage/in this world/jealously guards her sanity." Indeed, Hannah gains some reassurance from the Mummies in the Cairo Museum: "they raise arms against the foreigner . . . may she annihilate the tomb-robbers."

Hannah had her roots in Judaism, as illustrated in *The Tenth Month – Thoughts on Yom Kippur*, where she begs for chastisement for her sins, according to the prayers for atonement.

She proclaims "I perform my own drama in an amphitheatre of my own making/to an audience of one, this single-focus sibling/broken-winged bird."

The struggles with her problems are perpetual: "I chewed and spat out in rage . . . the splinters of an immature middle age." Poetry is a major means for her to further her struggle: "I would send perforce/a flotilla of poetry above this chafed precipitate force."

Hannah is a retired linguist and a Member of the Society of Women Writers; she is also a qualified Bereavement Counsellor. *NB: Copies of this work can be obtained, at a discounted rate, from Hannah direct via diannehutchinson2@hotmail.com*

David Russell

Author's Note

Home Truths is a poetic narrative of a gap year taken at 55/6 years old, interweaved with oppressions suffered within my dysfunctional family. I experienced extended travel and adventures to distance myself from an ex-husband and an uncommitted lover.

My poetry is very personal. The collection should be read like a novel, because it tells a linear story. I have a mother and daughter and sister who are all bloody and abusive. I have suffered physical, verbal and emotional abuse from them, and then subsequently from my second husband, whom I discovered accessing pornography. As a teenager I

was abused by my brother. It is made all the worse because we are from an educated, middle-class Jewish family.

In 2007 I left Manchester to move down to Dorset. I had been stuck in a triangular relationship with my much younger sister and our mother with whom she has a co-dependent relationship. My sister, in Bipolar 2 Crisis, came after me and I nurtured her back to health, as I have done so many times before, and since. As the elder sister my younger sister depends on me when she isn't well, but as soon as she is well again she combines forces with our mother against me. My sister stayed living down in Dorset. Then, when I came back to Manchester in 2012, she followed me back here! Our mum, now 91 and in a care home, has had severe mental health problems and probably has a narcissistic personality.

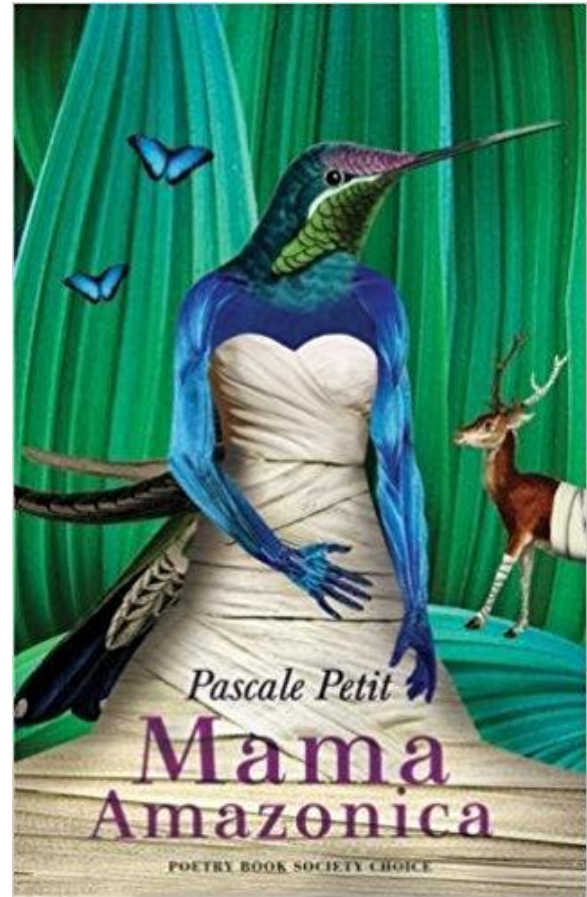
I am a survivor, and happy to say I have a new partner and two very beautiful grand-daughters. I continue to lead a fulfilling life in retirement writing more poetry, haiku and novels. I am also a competitive tennis, table-tennis and bridge player.

Hannah Hutchinson

Mama Amazonica by Pascale

Petit

Bloodaxe Books, 2017 ISBN: 978-1-78037-294-5 £9.95



Two of the most salient features of contemporary life are mental distress, and the universal threat to the world's ecosphere. Here they are mutual metaphors. Being 'hemmed in' on a psychiatric ward has obvious affinities to living in a menaced area of rainforest. There are cinematographic, dream-like transitions between the psychiatric ward and the natural environment. In some ways, the patient is to the doctor and/or the institution as is the ecosphere to ruthless 'developers'. In the mind of an extreme sufferer from physical and mental distress, the pain and trauma could feel like a

biological or biological-botanical mutation. In the opening poem, we are abruptly pulled from the rainforests to the institution: “There are rapids ahead/the doctors call mania.” So there is a dual reference, to the literal rapids of the remote forest region and the highly metaphorical rapids of mania – which often involves the mind rushing at high speed. There is then a complex extended metaphor of Pascale’s mother referring to the life-cycle of a tropical flower – and its environmental hazards in terms of marauding scarabs. The insect deprivations are related to mother’s chronic insomnia, where both Haloperidol and phenobarbitone failed.

(Author’s Note: In the first and title poem ‘Mama Amazonica’, you are right to interpret the beetles as a metaphor for the bad things that happened to my mother, and of her subsequent mental illness and hallucinations, but perhaps it would help if I also mention that in fact Victoria Amazonica giant waterlilies are actually pollinated by beetles, so the process I describe is close to what happens to them, even though later in the book I describe my father as “that scarab of a man”.)

Jaguar Girl celebrates a free spirit who assumes goddess-like proportions: “She’s a rainforest/in a straitjacket . . . as she carries the Amazon/on her back. She can indeed be a terrifying presence: “a highway bulldozed/through her brain,//shapeshifter/into a trembling rabbit/whenever I’m scared of her.” Mother

has great resilience: “She who has had electric eels/pressed to her scalp//can vanish into backwoods/where no one can reach her.” But in some sense she seems to have disintegrated, as Pascale wants ‘to sew her back together’. She would like to conjure up mum’s living presence, as the doctor comes up with his syringe.

Rainforest in the Sleep Room – the ravages of highways and bulldozers parallel those of medications and ECT. The ‘slumber’ leads into a nightmare landscape, where “Scientists climb ropes/to monitor her stats’ – a true environmental Armageddon, where “The only animals left/are grainy films/on camera traps//and a recording of the last musician-wren.” *Macaw Mummy* compares the sad fate of Pascale’s mother with a Mummy who has been buried and kept underground for around five hundred years. A very striking image of a bird with scarlet feathers; tyranny over a patient is compared to burial. *Taxidermy* feels like human vivisection. Love Charm – a totally malignant charmer.

My Mother’s Wedding Dress seems to refer to a ‘shotgun wedding’ – when Mum was pregnant with Pascale. I find a suggestion that she made her own wedding dress; comparisons are made between clothing fibres and the fibres of the forest, including cobwebs. Her courage is commended “The steel strength of the spider/must have been your strength, shielding the embryo inside . . .” The husband/father seems totally malignant: “. . . a shroud/he would have to tear from you/but only after you had

vanished/and the cells that were me/in their crib of silk were abseiled away . . ." He could only get his way through brutality. Chaplet refers either to Mum's marriage, or to Pascale's own, or to both. She will perish in the flames of the king of the forest before yielding to the groom. Something Blue evokes really brutal treatment on the psychiatric ward, being strapped to a bed which could slam her into a wall. She has 'a morpho pinned to each temple'; her fragility is rightly compared to that of a butterfly: "the broken mirror-wings on the long butterfly-net/of her train". *Bestiarum*: does this refer to the father/husband or to a predatory doctor?

Then there is a degree of gentleness and tenderness. *Bandaged Bambi* refers to surgical dressings, with a charming comparison with the actions of a vet. *Love Charm II* refers to a fantasy lover: she becomes a humming-bird, he becomes a bird-eating flower. *He Gives Her a Nightdress Sheer as a Mist-Net* – a bizarre wedding-night indeed: "Only now does she see that he's//opened all the cages, that birds are flying round the room,//crashing into the windows/before tangling in her nightie." In *Giant Jewel Beetle Ear-Pendants*, the partner goes to some perverse, surreal lengths to perfect his 'idol', weighing down her ears with absurd quantities of jewels, then referring to larvae eating away at fallen parts of sacred trees, and shamans displaying severed victims' heads decorated with threaded insects. He seems to be preparing her for some horrible sacrificial ceremony, sewing her lips

together, saying he'll stitch her eyes. Finally she feels as if her head has been cut off. *Miscarriage* perhaps refers to Pascale's birth, and the callous conduct of her father; he burst the afterbirth 'balloon' and then packs her off to work. *Serpentarium* is a highly revolutionary take on the classical motif of making love with a snake. She had a vision of having been impregnated by one. She draws serpents in her art therapy and has a final vision of sloughing off the snake's skin 'easing his skin like a dress/pulled over a girl's head'. *El Hombre Caimán* – in her drawing she conjured up the image of the love-object predator.

Precious Goliath Beetle – insects with their camera eyes are great recorders and archivists. *Buck* is a searing portrayal of a probably unwanted pregnancy and an emergency birth. Brutality engenders further brutality: she can 'feel the embryo/hardening like a bullet'. Surrealistically, the impregnator is a stag, heavily armed. Aggression and hatred engender further aggression and hatred: "instead of antlers, he begins to sprout/rifles . . ." More light on the natal process with *The Birth of Jaguar Girl*: she emerges fully formed, able to bite off her own umbilical cord. Her features gruesomely embrace the attributes of other species – 'your spots tarantulas . . . your new eyes/are as blue as morpho butterflies'. She has her pulse taken by scorpions, and spider monkeys swing through her ribs. There is an obvious analogy with a psychiatric patient under heavy sedation, and Pascale emphasises

deeply with the victim: “Every time they sedate you/I have to carry you in my belly again”. The new birth is a menace – ‘She-Who-Kills-With-One Bound’. *My Amazonian Birth* continues the natal theme, empathising deeply with the birth pangs and life cycles of the rainforest species, including the vegetable kingdom: ‘your eyes like thistles of light/that whirl/wondering/where shall we root? There is a strong sense of the balance of nature being shaken to its foundations: “Your mama’s face is a mudslide/as the septicaemia bites”. The literal is forced to blend into the metaphorical: “Your face . . . where the sloth crawled across your lips like a tongue on its first item.” Individuals and species face elemental annihilation: “One eye is life, the other death – two armadillos in their burrows”. Laboured footsteps through the undergrowth echo the paths and sensations of the wild species. Then there is one of the most intense portrayals of extreme pain which I have ever encountered: “Grief . . . that sends roots/down your chest and waves a cage/around each hope”. The sufferer feels like the wild species: “your expression is/now a flock of disturbed parrots/now and egg that will not hatch.” As mother is shunted into Intensive Care, he resembles a savagely uprooted tree: “There she lies, her roots upended like jangled nerves/they’ll diagnose as anxiety/that slides into a psychosis. Does callous humanity gloat over such a plight? “your broken mama/laid out like a long-table/for the rest of your life to feast on.” *Hummingbird Birth* – the sight of

a bird laying its eggs makes Pascale think about her own birth; the bird has a long and painful time trying to deliver which evokes her own extremely difficult birth, in which Pascale had to be placed in an incubator to survive, and her mother almost died of septicaemia. The humming bird will be a stalwart single mum. Pascale now seems proof against having any children of her own, however great the temptation. *L’Assistance Publique* seems to refer to forceful adoption or fostering. But they seem to be malignant – more of a curse than a blessing: “the rat-boy who swings from your breast”; the child is tortured by insects; perhaps children feel as if they bear some affinity to insects”. They seem to lack human responsiveness – “this doll-girl who will not say *Mama!*/However much you shake her.”

Harpy Eagle Mama – the sufferer identifies with having been savaged by rainforest predators, or injured in a xenophobic or tribal conflict. Part of her would have liked to have been ‘put out of her misery’; but her stubborn survival instinct prevails: “I live on . . . a diet of maggots and guts . . . I’m growing strong – pin-feathers/sprout from the sores of my skin.” *Baby Caimans* makes a horrific description, most probably derived from real life. A child has been swallowed whole by a cayman, and then cut out of its stomach, and surgically reassembled. It is left to the imagination whether she survived; most probably not, and if she had, what perpetual agony she would have been in. Dead or alive, she is an elemental cautionary tale, eating into the

heart of the observer: “the child will torment you/like this bug infected/with leishmaniasis. (**Leishmaniasis** is a disease caused by parasites of the Leishmania type. It is spread by the bite of certain types of sandflies.) //In *Musica Mundana*, the subject treats her oil-painting canvas as a garden. Moths and spiders get absorbed in it, to no great effect; “it was/only when I added my mother’s/ashes that the painting seemed to come/alive”. The imagination proceeds, embracing pain, decay and mutability: “waterlily scalps . . . a lace bed/adorned by the corpses of flies”. The imagination is stretched to tortuous extremes: “the daturas (poisonous plants) looked like newborn skulls with their fontanelles (parts of skulls) poised . . .” *Limed Blossoms* refers to temptation, and the roots of childhood. Pascale and/or her mother is a hummingbird, tempted by a pollinated flower. “I’ve watched my father/lift the petticoats of lilies//and rub birdlime on their thighs”. She senses life-force sounds emerging from the flowers ‘as if, at last, my childhood had found a voice.’ //My *Mother’s Dressing Gown* – mother, and her attire, were animations/reverse personifications of the rainforest flora. The garments in which her husband dressed her up were transformed into lianas and mist-net. She also became soil: “Her pelvis was a bank riddled with burrows/that Papa dug with his nails”. In real life, the father had been a ‘steamrolling man’; he always interrupted his wife’s tending of a crying baby. *Square de la Place Duplex* – a child is digging in a sand-pit, as if in search of an

underground tunnel. Her Harpy Eagle Claws – Mum has turned into a predatory bird ‘holding/her spider-monkey teddy/in her six-inch talons’; Pascale would rather be run over than be left to her tender mercies.

Madre de Dios – Pascale envisages herself as flying over the rainforest ecosphere, and sees a panorama of the beautiful and the predatory – such as a heron eating a cayman hatchling. The spectacle recalls the memory of her mother being raped, and the desire for the anguish of fire-ants to anaesthetise her against that degradation: “My mother, who would slice/off a breast before/he mauled it”. Her partner is a cockroach, a figure of doom. *Fossa* is a power-woman turned into a wild beast, extremely hard to tame. *Anaconda* – mother sees her depression as an anaconda which threatens to crush her. Hyperbolically, she moves so slowly that trees can grow on her. But her depression is menaced by the greater boa constrictor of despair. *Black Caiman with Butterflies* – the linkage of danger and beauty, butterflies sparkling in the corner of the caiman’s eyes.

In *Extrapyramidal Side Effects*, the reader is urged to his his/her imagination to compare the horrors of the psychiatric ward with braving the elements of the rainforest. Mother is ‘hyper as a rainforest . . . she lies in the hospital sheets/like a morpho in a bird’s beak . . . electrodes that think/her tongue is a catfish.” In *Hallucination*, the man-made and the natural are forced together to make a terrifying image: “I’m her dark mirror/of biting glass, a cloud/of

crystal mosquitoes/she swats away.” A highly disturbing slant on Occupational Therapy – ‘making a black jaguar/from the corpses of flies’. “She floats in her turquoise negligee/like a manatee in a tank.” *Terribilis* – malignant medications are compared to the venom of the poison dart frog: (“*The golden poison frog(Phyllobates terribilis), also known as the golden frog, golden poison arrow frog, or golden dart frog, is a poison dart frog endemic to the Pacific coast of Colombia*” – Wikipedia)

Jaguar Mama – Pascale envisages her mother as a sabre-toothed protectress. She is then transmuted into “My painted warrior, who retreated into the wetland/as her power waned, the symmetry of her face//fissioned into a Bosch triptych . . .” Good juxtaposition of the immediate and the remote with ‘a Gitane dangling from her lips like a rolled up rainforest’. Pascale bitterly resents the sedation which has been imposed on her mother: “Give me her rages, her running rampage down the street/naked, rather than this drugged beast . . .” The consequences of the treatment are wide open to speculation: “Who knows what they dream, those patients/on sleep treatment/They descend to an understorey . . .” I am sure that desperate patients frequently recall howler monkeys. Pascale indeed found her mother a pitiful spectacle: “Better to be torn limb by limb alive/than to be rowed over the stagnant likes of Mother’s eyes . . . Was it lithium or mercury that poisoned her?” Finally, mother is the rainforest – ‘hydroelectric dams draped around her

neck’. In *Bottled Macaw*, Pascale does a brilliant ‘shape-shifter’ poem in a valiant attempt to get inside a bird’s mind. // *Water-Lily Jaguar* – the doctor accuses the patient of having set herself on fire; she rejects this accusation and proceeds to have a great creative surge in the therapy room. When she hears voices, they are voices from the rainforest. She comforts her distressed neighbour ‘in speech scrolls like a Mayan deity’. The Matron seems to support this vision: ‘According to Matron I’m the goddess of bloodletting/I’ve hidden my knife for self-deception.’ Her body feels like a forest plant, undergoing its organic process. She feels like an insect-trapping plant, ‘cockroaches scuttling through my veins’. She must conceal this state from the other patients. // *Scarlet Macaws* is an impassioned plea for avine rights. These birds want to relish their scarlet plumage for themselves, not to have it used as decoration for humans; nor do they want their ashes to be used for human medicine. *Río Tambopata*: “Boats go up the river, past several good lodges, and into the Reserva Nacional Tambopata, an important protected area divided into the reserve itself and the *zona de amortiguamiento* (buffer zone)”. (Wikipedia). Visions and reflections on a river trip, including the surreal – “All I can do is focus/on the word ‘horsefly’ – a flying/mare of a beast with wraparound/eyes that bulge zigzag green, as its jaws//scissor into the reptile that has plied/these waters since the dawn of sound.” *Uirapuru and the Tangarana Tree*: the Uirapuru is the musician-wren, and the

Tangarana Tree is protected by fire-ants; the wren serenades the ants. Once there was an act of human sacrifice, where a girl was bound to a tree, to be eaten away by the ants. The wren tells her story with plangent cogency.

Corpse Flower – presumably, Pascale’s mother is deceased; she reincarnates as a corpse-flower’. *My Mother’s Love* is a quest-fable: the love is described as ‘a golden bird in a crystal cage’; it is located in a totally incongruous labyrinth. But when she finally reaches it, its wings have been torn off.

When My Mother Became a Boa – what a metamorphosis! She devoured masses of birds, “she’d eaten the world’s colours”, the bird sang inside of her. But this was all lost on the nurses and the other patients. I love the phrase “her nightdress billowed/with sequined scales”. *Mama Ferox* – in dreamscape, mother is transported from the ward to the rainforest: “she enters a stretch/no other human has braved . . . even the hairs on Nurse’s hands/that turn into spines . . .” When the curtains are drawn around her bed – “like waterfalls she must crawl behind/along a slippery ledge.”

The Hospital Haircut – Pascale had not visited her mother for years. This everyday, routine scene was suffused with the essence of the rainforest: “her skin was as pale as a python . . . Her hazel irises were cages/for creatures that wanted to break out/and eat me.” There is, however, a flashback to Mum’s younger days – ‘those

chignons of her glamorous past’, then further, to when she was nine – the ‘child-mother’. Her hair, being cut off, was ‘fairy wings, angel feathers’; a tense conclusion – ‘her thoughts locked inside/her now cropped scalp, like a wildfire.’

Zarafa the First Giraffe in France – as part of her delusions, Mother saw herself as this legendary creature, gift from an Egyptian Pasha. Imagination continued to reign supreme: she “spent the rest of her life/in a menagerie.” *Great Grey Owl* – Pascale longs to sustain eye contact with this bird ‘as if looking at her mother’. For her, the bird seems to have greater profundity than the human being. *Ocelot* – she would love to capture the essence of this creature, but that is a sort of quest for the unattainable: ‘not much yourself in your life,/more an afterthought the psychiatrist/jots in his notes, concluding/*the patient is beyond diagnosis*’. // *Kapok* is a graphic representation of a tree, with all its complex, protective structure – a tree which sheltered many species of animals and birds, but was finally smothered by overhanging orchards. *Ah Puch* seems to refer to a big cat – a fantastic object of fascination, but finally a menace who must be despatched with a fatal injection. *Snow Leopard Woman* – a feline ‘femme fatale’ with a supreme sense of self-preservation: “She knew traps were set below the snowline/so she climbed higher . . .” *In the Giraffe House* – visiting Mum reminds Pascale of being there. Some nostalgia for the past – “I want to commemorate your youth/in the savannah”. *Mama Macaw* –

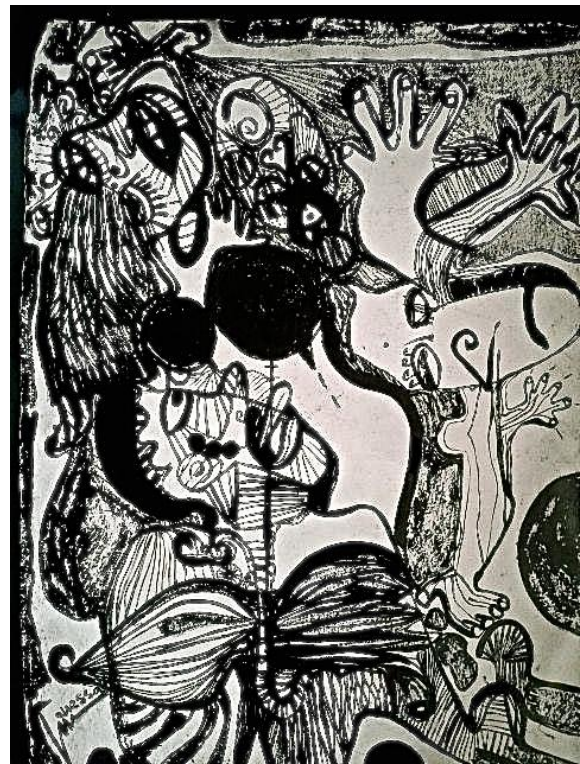
this bird assumes cosmic proportions: 'An egg with the blue-and-gold chick/of a planet inside . . . She knows her chick will be the last//of her species, the last speaker/of earth's tribe'.

Rebirth of the Rainforest is a charming vision: a doe bears a felled forest on her back, and becomes the soil; "the baby forest's horns/begin their velvet mosses, fern-spores lace her head." *My Wolverine*: there is a suggestion that Pascale's delivery at birth was premature. She identifies to a degree with a wolverine, which sometimes eats itself. "I crawl down the back phone line/as if it's an umbilicus/to the last refuge in our planet. This creature is an obvious source of inspiration: "She shows me the den where words are born/fighting." *The Hummingbird Whisperer* suggests that Pascale's mother had a caesarean, with a surreal suggestion that there is a huge aviary inside the womb. *Musician-Wren* – she would love to warble to her mother. *King Vultures* speculates on the consequences of her mother's death. In the vision, the natural processes are reversed: ". . . lumps of your flesh,/putrid at first, then sweet,./Flies buzz back to their pupas, maggots shrink into eggs." Similarly "a brush paints backwards. Then the aspects of a surgical operation are reversed, and she travels back to relative health and youth. But concomitantly with this process, Pascale shrinks back into a foetus – and there is a plea that she should never have had children. *The Hummingbird Nest* expresses a wistful desire for Pascale to have a comforting ménage with her

mother. *The Jaguar* compares Pascale's passing through the womb to a river journey – "My baby self saw the archangel-beast,/the one who arrived to help/with my birth . . . the boat of my skin rocking/its hallelujahs,/as it navigated the passage/through and away from Mama."

A supremely fluid and mobile collection, moving forwards and backwards in time, from intimate close focus to panorama, from the humdrum to the exotic.

David Russell



Love by Vanessa Vie – 2006

Three Day Festival

10 - 12 NOVEMBER 2017



Get inspired — literature relevant to our times... This is a unique, three-day festival focussed on literature relevant to the issues of our times, bringing together a range of writers including young poets, novelists, translators, philosophers, film-makers, journalists and activists.

Friday 10th, Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th November, 2017

**The University of Liverpool,
London Campus,
33 Finsbury Square,
London EC2A 1AG**

In association with

**The Centre for New and
International Writing, University of
Liverpool**

We can tell a new story. Stories written – in exclusive new

commissions – by passionate writers in response to some of the most challenging news events and distortions of language in living memory. Stories that shape the future by bearing witness to the present.

Nationality, identity and belonging have become divisive concepts, creating tension and fear, yet they also lie close to the heart of our humanity. In 2017 these concepts have been the common Word Factory threads, weaving together writers with the voice and imagination to unravel art from artifice. Citizen: The New Story is the culmination of that creative process.

Be inspired. Find your voice. Bring your friends.

Cathy Galvin. Director & Founder. The Word Factory.

Join the conversation — Tell a new story.

Festival Events & Tickets follow link:

[Other Info & Details](#)

<http://www.thewordfactory.tv/site/citizen-festival/>