

Poetry Express Newsletter

#48

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



Study by Featured Artist Laura May



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

Struggling Through the Tunnel

As the Cowards, Traitors, and Gauleiters fight out the election (leavened only by dreams the Scottish Nationalists might take 650 seats, sprinkled with that oxymoron, an assertive Green) I write now at the lowest point in SP's financial and official fortunes. Not fortunes *per se*; I'll make a distinction. We've now completed the last financial year of our latest three-year funding cycle with the Arts Council. Only towards the end of that year, in fact this February, did we succeed in making the point that's been building over the past year, and which ex-Chair and indefatigable SP Strategist Phil Ruthen has witnessed on several fronts.

This is, that the demand that we find matched funding to remain a regularly funded or National Portfolio organisation as a tie-break with other NP organisations – on the face of it fair – certainly wasn't fair in our case. The matched funding wasn't available for a very good reason. Foundations we apply to take it as read that the Arts Council are there to fund the *literary* output of SP; and *they*, the foundations support our survivor work in mentoring, support and affirmation of a user-led ethos – and relationships with survivors everywhere, including the National Network.

The trouble is that these Foundations have been enfiladed on two fronts: one, with the bankers' financial crash and squeeze everywhere, more organisations are applying for far fewer funding streams and Foundations are re-prioritising their aims, concentrating on core organisations that have answered, or will answer, to Foundations' core ethos: back to their roots, no hard-to-fund maverick cases like us. That's been on-going since 2008.

Second though, is the increasing hostility shown towards mental distress by the present – hopefully outgoing – government, particularly in the past few years, with persecutions taking place even within the unwritten elements of DWP offices, as a recent BBC Radio 4 File on 4 programme highlighted. As for the Lib-Dems or Con-Dems mental health initiative in recent weeks, it's a sugar coating on a cyanide pill as far as policy is concerned.

This has meant that Foundations have again re-prioritised their funding to deal with such persecutions and deprivations of fundamental rights, liberties and quality of life. The present government has this distinction to pleasure itself with: it's driven the suicide rate up. Less of the weak and burned-out to bother with. Except of course that the increase in Mental Distress even to the mahogany corridors of power, mean this will swallow more than a quarter of the population, which does wage slavery – and what I discussed last time – no good at all.

All in all, mental health and exclusion-led Foundations have little use for us at present; the focus lies in fighting mental health provision erosions and attacks. The golden nail in the matched-funding coffin finally came when the Big Lottery, normally our Grants for the Arts matched-funding buddies (both pots of money were originally arts-dedicated, remember?) told us, 'go to ACE and Grants for the Arts.' When I told our long suffering ACE Relationship Manager and champion Gemma Seltzer this, I could hear a gear change. We were finally allowed to apply for Grants for the Arts on an in-kind basis, meaning we find work and volunteer packages of people, spaces and skills roughly equivalent to the amount applied for. It's £40,000 for a year.

The trouble, I suppose, was that instead of this being November, it was February – it took another month to finalize the bid, by which time the money had effectively run out. With no finances, there's bound to be a period of flux. Of course we'll be looking to resume with new programmes with the success, I fervently hope, of the bids in July/August.

In one sense our slimmed-down organisation is perfectly formed for such an eventuality. We've reduced running costs from £28,000 to under £4,000. And we must particularly thank our hosts at NHS CNWL Westminster for waiving the modest rent for the foreseeable future till we have funds and they know their own fate. This is handsome and I hope we can repay that generosity by bringing new schemes and groups to St Mary's Terrace where we still work. I must also heartily thank other regular freelance employees for allowing us to defer payments to them: **Colin and Jonathan Bareham** of Raedan, our Accountants, and **Jonathan Carruthers-Jones** our Website Designer.

It means too that with no-one else to lay off there's more possibility of easy continuity though of course other paid staff are essential to our growth. In this regard I can only thank Phil Ruthen for his on-going support, which has frankly saved the organisation. And to retiring Trustee David Andrew who rising 76 is standing down but will keep a keen interest in Survivors' and is acting as broker to contacts as well as a future mentor. He's been an inspiration both to Phil and myself as a planner, and indefatigable roving ambassador to far-flung SP groups in the north, which has galvanised the regional groups like nothing else for nearly a decade. And his moving on Claire McLaughlin's volume, the first for three years, has proved yet again in a very different way, the strength and focus of his commitment.

There is fresh blood too, though that seems to close to interviews with vamps. **Carole Bremson** has undertaken a liaison and publicity role which we hope will grow with new funding, In the past four months she's re-aligned contacts through events and various projects both theatrical and poetry-focused. A director, actor and writer, she's taught at the Poetry School and has particular specialisms in voice coaching and performance training.

Again **Dave Russell**, of whom more anon, and Razz have kept the Events going after Xochitl's death in December 2012, with a verve and rock-like dedication, quite literally rock-like with Dave's guitar, that borders on the legendary. We still meet at the Poetry Café on the second Thursday of the month, and at Tottenham Chances on the fourth. You'll see the latest upcoming gigs elsewhere in this e-zine.

Celia Potterton and Chair **Marius Jankowski** still form the Board's core with a glowing commitment (even before the pub), for without them we couldn't function. They've both generously contributed funds to SP's survival. Our spirit is partly enshrined too in the figure of Trustee and Mentor Peter Street in Cumbria and several potential new Board members due to attend meetings over the next month. Gemma is still keen on supporting SP and will attend quarterly meetings where possible.

This is I know a rather dour rounding-up and not one of my trumpet blasts, but you had that last time and the bells of hell can only be unleashed quarterly on average: there aren't enough devils to tail this government.

My final thanks naturally go to Dave Russell who has produced with increasing frequency a masterly e-zine with vivid art work and a wonderful throng of contributors of great accomplishment and variety, as well as commitment to our several causes. Not least he's contributed himself a very large proportion of the writing and reviewing space. My final plea is to you, the reader. We couldn't exist or justify our existence without you. All we ask is you continue to read us, pass us on, debate and disagree if you like, and send us your poetry. There's every likelihood of you seeing yourself in the next issue of these pages.

Simon Jenner, Director

Editorial

A greatly animated 'Valentine' evening on February 12th. A sterling opener from **Razz**, with two 'Valentine debunking' poems. He then proceeded to read **Sophia Jackson's** *From sun to darkness*, one of her most intense poems – and that's saying something.

The first main spot was **Ros Kane**, renowned alike as a poet and a health activist. She started with *My Zumba Teacher*, a person with whom she seems to have a love-hate relationship – a benign entity who happens to work for OSTED: Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, which Ros seems to find dictatorial. Some charming whimsicality with *Sibling Labels*, some feminism in *Many Men Talk at you*, and the retention of childhood symbols in *Tiny Pink Pencil*. *Paid-up Pacifist* faces with incredible honesty the problem of reconciling pacifism with justified anger and indignation – "I fantasize revenge . . . who doesn't have a devil within . . ." and then ". . . You might think I'm nuts. It's not a cerebral decision – It comes from the guts." Some trenchant satire on mercenary boarding schools with *Only the Best Feathered Pillows*. The rhetoric of false idealism is counterpointed against the bedrock of "the school has limited bursary funds" – a classic evocation of the iron fist in the velvet glove. A very powerful song, *Mighty Motor*, accompanied by a motor horn, which embraces the hedonism and callousness of the car-power freak. As a finale, she read *Don't Put My Poems on the Word Processor* – "I need to read slowly, machines kill our poetry."

Kath Tait presented her new song *Lady Who*, a gallery of the world's most heroic and tragically suffering women – embracing the whole gamut of winning and losing.

Perhaps the most significant part of the evening was **Tara Fleur's** reading of a poem, *Beast Of Boleskine*, with highly explicit erotic content. This was every bit as challenging – and valuable, as last month's controversy about the reading Heathcote Williams' *The Old Man and the Young Man in Gaza*. I often wondered whether such overt expressions would be hurtful to sufferers from abuse and rape. If this is not the case, there is a significant breakthrough – an issue which merits depth debate!

She was followed by the non-explicit romanticism of **Zoe**, with *The Fates of Man*, and the theme was then explored further by **Quinn**, who spoke for 'eroticism without pride or shame'. *Mary Baby* is a distinctly sensual and sinful celebration of that sacred figure. He spoke of an 'invitation to sin' and an invitation to live (in sin?) in my imagination. Razz followed with what he called his 'most depressing' song, *Round and Round We go*, which harks back to his having worked inside a prison; some nice backing on recorder and harmonica.

Second main act were *The Children*, **John Gibbens** and **Armored Weston**. Great start with *Peckham to Kings Cross*, which paints a panoramic inner urban landscape – one of self-indulgence 'where the beer and the cigarettes roar'. Also featured were *Black Mountain*

Home. Small Talk and *I'll come to you Tomorrow*. Some traditional/retro with Doc Watson's *Shady Grove*, and the celebration of the ethos of Native Americans in *Ghost Dance*.

Warren made some serious musings, especially in his *Beneath the Cliffs* – a visionary piece where the man-made seemed to melt into the ecosphere. A celebratory, incantatory end to the evening from **Lucy Carrington**.

March 12th at the Poetry Café kept up the dynamism, in spite of the main spots, **Tanya Marshall**, being unable to make the event. Three new poems from **Razz** as an opener – *I Rise, Dogs* and *Tobacco*. First floor spot from Angie, *My Mother* – celebrating an elderly person's heroic struggle against disability, and *A Song* – celebrating stage-fright, and someone overcoming it. Razz followed with a reading of **Sophia Jackson's** *The Butterfly* and the *Funfair* – another glowing gem from Sophia's prolific output, describing childhood optimism and idealism, oppression and disillusionment with the leitmotif of a ride on the dodgems. A great surprise, and honour, in the form of **David Malin**, who has recently published a collection, *Man of Peace*. He read two poems from the book: *Stranger*, and *The Man Who Sat Up Waiting Seven Days for the World to end*. These were remarkable enough, but David followed them with *London Armageddon* – his exceptionally acerbic 'anglicised' version of Ginsberg's *Howl*. I caught some memorable phrases . . . 'drinking from glasses of heliotrope . . . Bibles turn into black bats . . . Cut down by a rhapsody of quangos . . .'

A nice spot from **Mala Mason**, including *River Queen* – a poem about sailing lessons.

On to the main spot – **Julius Howard**. *Bully's Child* explores the traumas of school life, *Woke Up This Morning With The Depression Blues* muses on negativity. *Milk of Human Kindness* speaks of altruism. *Peace and Freedom is a Killer* – an interesting concept. *Oh Deborah!* meditates on love between a 6 year-old and a 7-year old. *Twenty One* is dedicated to maturity, while *By Himself* paints a touching picture of the café musings of an old, retired man, particularly in relation to a group of younger men near their prime. His set concluded with *Goodbye to John*.

Razz opened the second half with a powerful polemic against suicide, inspired by Dorothy Parker's plea "You might as well live." He followed this with what is perhaps his most reflective song *Stick Around*, which he wrote at Tate Modern, inspired by a painting of Stanley Spencer and wife, naked. Apparently the couple never consummated their marriage, as his wife was a lesbian. The phrase 'measured disgrace' was reiterated.

Frank Bangay's spot began with a whimsical reflection on two pigeons kissing. *The Shuffling Feet of the Past* shows regret and nostalgia for old hospital precincts, as well as Paddington Police Station, being converted into luxury flats. His next poem concerned the 70s Reggae artist John Holt, with his number *The Further You Look* recorded on the Bamboo label. Holt also recorded *Mr Bojangles*, *Ali Baba*, and *Make the World Go Round*.

Some sensitivity from **Jenny**, with bath-time reveries in *Girl of a Kind*, and the sadness of *Three Tears*. Some depths of masochistic self-surgery from **Thomas Smith**. **Tara Fleur** was her usual high-octane self. She had recently organised a **Global Twitter Slam**, of which she read the winning poem, by **Lena** (aka **I Ladybird**) – *Formal Mourning*, exploring the ramifications of bereavement. Tara’s *Song* explored the absolute femininity of ‘the woman of bone’. **Lucy Carrington**’s spot was enhanced by Jenny reading her *Heaven Made Match*; another voice could set a good precedent here. **Chris Goodberg** overcame some hesitancy. Some scurrilous couplets, apparently written in Manchester Royal Infirmary, from **Rob**, read from a mobile phone – “I killed someone in my past life . . . transplanted my pubes onto my face . . . discard you from my memory like scattered birdseed . . .” **Warren** read *Night-Time* – “The only time I can be invisible” and then a lament (I think) about taking 10 years to upgrade a phone. **Razz** concluded the evening with *Hammer Horror*.

**

Momentum was sustained on **April 9th**, with **Kathy Toy** as main feature – as always, great emotional intensity combined with intricate melodies and time signatures. Her set included one song about family hang-ups, and another about domestic violence – including unjustified acquittal for same. **Razz** continues to be varied and prolific, constantly coming up with new material. *It Soon Will Be* made a strong plea for community projects. In the second half, with some tasty recorder and accordion, he sang Patrick Kavanagh’s *Raglan Road* and his own, ultra-sombre *Hope You F-off and Die* – haunting refrain of “my poetry will get you from behind”. He read Sophia Jackson’s *The Laboratory of Life*, which savagely indicts the dehumanising processes of the psychiatric system – “She doesn’t fit but perhaps she can be made to fit . . . how dare you be beautiful and feminine to me?” Sophia’s expressions progress, unabated.

Sally Smith read what she called ‘social history poems’ *Hang Out to Dry* and *The Banner*. Great line in “I carry the cross of ancestral poverty”. She spoke with deep compassion about the life and problems of her alcoholic grandfather. **Mala Mason** read *Bag Lady*, inspired by Ralph McTell’s *The Streets of London*, and *Mad Memory*, which she called a ‘memory poem’. With the latter, she told the audience about the context of the poem – a workshop picnic, and a walk up Hunter’s Hill, where “everything was an adventure”. A bit of black humour about her home poltergeist in *Oscar*.

A great new arrival in the form of Persian **Abol Froushan**. “Abol Froushan writes poetry of phenomenal presence and fresh vision, recording the sudden and re-examining archetypes and universals in microscopic detail. In so doing, he explores those familiar things we fail to notice or no longer see due to habituation of sense. Froushan has a multicultural approach to language, evident in both his Persian and English-language poems.” He read *General Relativity* and *Special Relativity*, using Einstein’s methods to explore the nature of relationships – “empty space is flat, but in your presence space curves . . . all that matters is relative malice. *Sugar Forecast* is a brilliant parody of the phraseology of the Weather

Forecast. **Alain English** did two poems about Shakespeare, praising his work but raising the ever-salient issue of his veiled identity. His followers have the right to know who he is – “We are Shakespeare, we are the raw material . . . the parts he created”. **Julian Early** waxed funereal with *At the Funeral* and *Bury Him in Wood*, while **Stephan** expostulated on some visual materials, among other things describing post-it labels as ‘man-traps for self-torture’. **Madeline** sang *Recycle My Love* and other songs; her sensitivity certainly prevailed over her hesitancy and nervousness. **Jane** did a poem about a reformed alcoholic, read from a mobile text. **Jessica Lawrence’s** *Venus Rising* and *Dreams of Flight* have lost none of their impact through familiarity. Other contributors were **Julius Howard**, on a return visit, **Keith, Tony Campbell** – with *Old-Timer’s Disease*, **Paul Riley** and **Tom Bilton** – interesting slant on ward life, alternation between chatting up nurses and chatting up patients, and *Alienation*, ‘with apologies to Pink Floyd’. A rousing finale from Lucy Carrington concluded another lively session.

An animated evening at **Tottenham Chances** on **April 23rd**, coinciding with Mala Mason’s birthday – great variety including two superb Karaoke spots: deep, soulful singing from **Carol Cabey** doing *I’m a Fool to Love* you and *Summertime*, and impassioned rap from **Unique Technique**. Some rockin’ numbers from **Cam Ringel/Citi** with bass and hand drums. Major Spoken Word proclamations: One from **Aviva**, with *Infinity*, a magnificent statement in support of a rally to save the **Runnymede Eco Village** in Egham, threatened by clearances related to Magna Carta anniversary celebrations; the other from **Tara Fleur**, with *When Woman Created the World*, written partly in collaboration with **Ingrid Andrew**, who regrettably could not attend that evening. Tara explained how she modified Ingrid’s ideas by concentrating on the darker aspects of the elemental creative process – a truly enthralling utterance: inspired phrases were legion – ‘mythical analgaesic’ and chatter in bloated placentas’ to mention but two. Molly Bloom soliloquy prepare to meet thy doom! Solid spot from **Sally Smith**, making a survey of Lewisham, Black Heath and Brixton, lamenting the dehumanisation of the urban environment – “even the vegetables are caged in metal and brick”. Some black humour from **Julius Howard** – ‘spare seat for a lecture in dissection’ (*Portal of Hell*). The usual animated word associations from **Jason why**, who read the poem *Neither Dog Nor Cat* from Cam Ringel’s new book *Umbrellas are for Whimps*, and announced its new publishing imprint, **W.C.H.** Publishing (William Cornelius Harris) with which he is involved. Good birthday set from **Mala Mason**, including her perpetual struggles with her domestic poltergeist, *Dream Maker*, *In My Uncle’s Garden*, and **London Aquarium**, where she assumes the persona of a crocodile! **Tom Bilton** read his poems *Death Wish*, *Love*, *Generation Gaps*, and *Ebb & Flow* (with some nice improvised guitar).

STOP PRESS: A great breakthrough! At last another Survivors Press title – *Remembering Blue* by *Claire McLaughlin*, reviewed in this issue.

Dave Russell

Survivors Poetry at Tottenham Chances 26/03/15



A great night at Survivors Poetry, Tottenham Chances hosted by the one and only **Razz Poet**. **Razz** performed two of his poems which are always well crafted and confessional in nature. His poetry speaks straight from the heart. Razz also performed with his band **Baffled Angels**, who were featuring at this event. A fluid group of musicians who gel together perfectly. One song they performed really stood out for me with it's melody and lyrics so very, very moving ... *Raylan Road* by Patrick Kavanagh a traditional Irish piece which sang to all our hearts.

The other features this evening included **Habiba Hrida**, performing a number of new poems from her next book of poetry due out this October. She also performed a Rap poem '*Detrimental*' which was very well received by a small audience but nonetheless a most encouraging one. She finished her set with a poem she wrote when she was just 17 years old, titled '*Good Friday*' an honest and reflective piece.

DD also featured with a set of beautiful Spanish songs, played with such magnificence on his guitar. His lyrics shine with authenticity, so much so, a few audience members rose to their feet for a little flamenco dancing!

Also featuring this evening were '**The Plankwalkers**'. I adore this group, who classify their music as being *Glamfolk-Shanty-Cabaret*. And indeed it is Cabaret!. They inhabit the whole space, not just limiting themselves to the stage – turning T-Chances into a reflection of a surreal pirate ship with melody, lyrics and movement. They performed many songs from their new album '*Splash Hits Vol.1*' and a few other favourites. Songs included '*Gotta Gun*' which I particularly adore for its powerful rhythm and subtext. '*Lady Julian*' which also holds a deep message about the transportation of Women over seas for illicit purposes. They are such a colourful and vibrant band, and indeed rocked Survivors as all good ships should do!

Diffuse was the last feature of the night. A Rap Artist who takes us all on a Dante-like ride into the underworld of our city. With lyrical poetry that is powerful, visceral, raw and certainly takes no prisoners. He raps about the darker side of life and the lack of humanity in his own history. Nothing is out of bounds in Diffuse's Raps – from violence to drugs to suicidal feelings to his own searches for God. I am always impressed by his emotional depth and honesty. Superb!

There was also a wonderful mix of talented floor spots including **Sally Smith** who gave a gutsy poetry performance. Two poems she read were very powerful and well crafted. *'Father Thames'* about her relationship with our great, but sometimes dark river and *'Weeds'* about the hundreds of prostitutes buried in nameless graves under our city.

Mala Mason performed three poems, One that I really connected with was *'Masks'* a socio-political poem that mirrors emotional issues around the many masks we wear in our individual lives and public personas. It is good to see Mala tackling some seriously darker subject matters in her work. Always a delight to watch Mala perform.

Keith Bray read two incredibly strong poems including *'Cliché Soufflé'*, Keith is a sublime poet and musician, and very much an integral part of Survivors Poetry nights for many reasons. He always supports the regular faces but also the new less confident performers who take their first steps on the stage. He collaborates with many fellow musicians and is always excited by opportunities to perform with regular poets. I had the great luck to be able to work with him recently on an improvised piece, which was incredible!

Madeleine Smith lifted us all to a melodic, humorous, heavenly place with her songs and lyrics. I particularly enjoyed hearing again *'Breaking Out Of Prison'* a somewhat tragic love affair – always a pleasure to listen to Madeleine's very personal songs. **Unique Technique**, a powerhouse Rap Artist, performed his wonderful and so fitting *'Survivors'* and his classic Rap *'Girlfriends A Magician'*. Unique is another artist who holds no prisoners in his poetry. He raps straight from the very visceral level of his emotions and observations on life, love and surviving inner turmoil.



Warren another regular at Survivors moved us all with his very unique style of poetry. Poems that play with many metaphors that question life, mood and inner journeys. **Cazz** who is very much a part of T-Chances played a couple of her songs. She has the voice of an angel, always a pleasure to see her perform. Most delightful!

And finally I, **Tara Fleur-Woman Of Bones** performed a new poem '*My Body For You Sir*', a challenging poem reflecting on the intensity and often dark, tragic outcomes of a fetish relationship between a Dom and a Slave. A Psychosexual piece that I feel fits the genre of Survivors Poetry nights, that being a safe, accepting place where we can express ourselves, what matters to us, and our recovery.

Sometimes that can mean addressing difficult, edgy subject matters, but if we can't be authentic at Survivors, where can we?

Tara Fleur-Woman of Bones

Survey

I

There's going to be a Three Thinking Debate on the Arts on Radio 3, the usual reflections on the efficacy of the Arts Council versus the illusory notion of private philanthropy, long dedicated if anywhere in this country, to football teams by Russian and other billionaires. The patronizing aristocrats who lost everything are now often the most successful in securing grants to restore crumbling piles; and quite right. But there are no private replacements for their patronage, and Keynes predicted there wouldn't be. For one thing the potential sponsors are too philistine. Kenneth Clark once noted that even the old 'top people... had charming manners, but they were as ignorant as swans.' Nevertheless they recognized they shouldn't be. Their successors don't: they see the arts, as opposed to heritage, as irrelevant. The state is going to be the only large scale sponsor of the arts for the foreseeable.

But quite apart from this there reside two poles. One is the Houston Effect, which study equated zero arts funding with the zero business investment Houston had recently experienced. When the arts funding was turned around with an opera house, a symphony orchestra, theatres and galleries, there was spectacular business investment elsewhere and Houston thrived. The Boyden Report into Theatre of 2000 as Michael Billington in his superb *State of the Nation* history of post-war theatre analyses, had a vastly beneficial effect in its advocacy of arts-funding for wealth creation. The New Labour administration reversed the Tory-level arts cuts and maximised budgets for the DCMS and ACE, with the marvellous fluorescence during the earlier Noughties we all experienced to some degree, even here at SP.

There are clear contrasts: Houston's experience says fund the arts and suddenly the wilderness grows and profit soars. Britain showed that profitable returns increased fivefold on investment, particularly in the theatre. But the principles remain.

The obverse however, that when the arts wither the culture, civilization and for those who care for it, the nation ultimately collapses, has yet to be made as convincingly; though examples from Greece, Rome, Europe and Asia abound. This is partly due not only to political inertia, but the deep-seated distrust many in power have for the arts; and even at the expense of ruining a nation, would hate that prosperity and the perilous contemporary arts scene – as well as heritage culture they sneakily enjoy – might also raise more questions than solve budget balances. The arts lean to the left, and however many token arts people bedeck Tory conferences this won't change; the right will always rightly see the arts as the enemy. They prefer dead culture, deadly theatre, dead artists and live babes to perform them.

II

More deeply such people see the possibility of the poorest making ends meet, and having more time on their hands than desperate serfdom and survival, as one of deep reflexive concern. To keep so many billionaires rich, it's necessary in their minds to keep a disproportionate number poor and debt-enslaved in that fantasy world of interest their dining friends the bankers created, partly for the purpose. For obscene levels of wealth to survive, those mired in it must ensure they pursue the direct opposite of the vaunted trickle-down effect, even to depositing their three-penny bit in a museum. Thus we get the money laundering of the City where vast fantasy sums skim through London and never touch the ground except in pitch; and super-rich government friends in themselves happy to sell off the country's assets to complex conglomerates sometimes ending in China – who might one day rightly even reclaim its debt in ownership, though we'll pay. Government friends of the super-rich recognize not only that profit equals social cost, but that social cost is necessary and desirable to profit. They also possess no sense of obligation to their country, let alone its people, and see its parameters as an irrelevance; some might call that treachery. This is deep seated.

To take one example, a Canadian educationalist phoned the last of *Any Answers* to be chaired by Jonathan Dimbleby. He noted wryly that when Labour in its levelling attempts did away with Grammar Schools the Conservative benches were unusually quiet. They too wanted to see the back of them. They recognized that disconcerting people rose from them to become prime and other ministers whom many instinctively disliked: Harold Wilson. Ted Heath, James Callaghan, Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Gordon Brown. Tony Blair was half in the case at Fettes, but not rich, and half out, and they loved and hated him accordingly. Thatcher partly bucked the trend but as some said, they felt profoundly uncomfortable; they'll never want another Thatcher. The real class hatred lies not with Class War, but with the sneerers like George Osborne.

For anyone who can't contribute to the base of their pyramid, they have a crushing solution. Most are indifferent but those in government wish to abolish for instance the notion of mental distress as an impediment to work. Only when a government minister or one of their family is attacked do they then suddenly conceive that all those mentally distressed must end in Belmarsh, but this panic betrays a true reflex. One mental health administrator, when I joked

about the removal of so many from mental health provision, and that Work Will Make You Free, said without irony: ‘No, it’s true. My own family escaped but they want us, workers and all, in the gas chambers. They’ll say it’ll be compassionate and painless. I bet they’re marking them out somewhere.’

I could have ended there, but a sense of reality suggests that neglect, removal of benefit, multiple suicides and enormous strain on the charitable and willing as well as many families, has been and will be the result. As J K Rowling’s *The Casual Vacancy* has her prime (soon dead) character announce of the removal of social provision so the rich don’t see the distressed in their village (I paraphrase from memory): ‘We’d create an apartheid, where the rich don’t have to see the poor, and the needy have no recourse to help and care.’

III

We live in chameleon times anyway and much will change beyond anyone’s control. As an appendix and the end of greed. a few thoughts after a conversation I had. It might invoke the devastating use of nature’s democracy to cheer us up – since we lack the thunderously arriving giants that Rooster Byron invoked at the end of Jez Butterworth’s great *Jerusalem*.

This chat was with Mario Petrucci – not only poet and SP patron but a Cambridge/UCL-educated physicist, carbon-monoxide emissions and reclamation expert, global warming consultant and ex-consultant of British Gas. He’s warned that there’ll be a time not too far off when plumbers and artisans, fixers of all things, will be at a premium, and lawyers and estate agents’ talents will be irrelevant. Well, I suspect justice will always have to be dispensed (even if in a Hundreds manner, full of Anglo-Saxon attitudes). If his model as a scientist is right, though, Mario remarked that one of the factors of global warming would not be the tsunami ridden on by extinct polar bears, but the Russia of the 1970s and again 1990s. There, nothing worked, and one queued all day with a form to use a single sheet of photocopy, and to fix the machine every time yourself.

Imagine that replicated as it were for the whole of society in ancient Xerox; and David Mitchell’s ‘Endarkment’ at the end of his partially dystopic *The Bone Clocks* – where there’s no internet and only intermittent phones and a few solar panels. Yes it’s possible. To adapt Cavafy’s ‘Waiting for the Barbarians’, apocalypse was a kind of solution. In that sense there’d be much leveling, but in truth it’s more likely we’ll all be poor in ways we can scarcely nightmare on. I personally feel things will be patchy, that many of us will scrub a living even as sea levels rise, scarcely less linked-in to electronics than perhaps the 1990s. But the farther north or more rural you go, the true collapse will register. Just where we need the farmland and livestock to survive, of course. One thing it would promise: stress levels would on the whole simmer downwards, and expectations pace themselves.

Simon Jenner

London Armageddon *(in honour of Allen Ginsberg)*

I have seen the holy saints of Soho, their hands burning on the crucifixes of Sodom
I have seen shabby men with diamond eyes hocking anthracite
I have tasted the acid of Lucifer
I have seen poets sucking the milk of Death
I have seen the Cyclops eye and the shield of Baal
I have seen wise men with the eyes of Nicodemus
 injecting themselves with the nectar of annihilation
I have seen the moon burnt with the face of Jesus
I have seen the noose of Forgiveness and the prayers of pederasty
I have seen children martyred in the name of Moloch
I have seen men with mildewed smiles selling hope in a gutter of blood
I have seen the dung-smearred corridors of power
I have seen the golden sphincter of Ashtoroth, armed with the velocity of starwort
I have seen worms with pigtail eyes drinking from glasses of heliotrope
I have seen heavy water sprinkled over the foreheads of buddhas
I have seen the psyches of slugs laminated with chrysolite
I have seen angelic oil smeared over the guts of androids
I have seen dawn come up on a day that never existed
I have seen ruby-eyed men, paid with manna, commit psychopathy
I have seen zombies made of sterifoam eating the flesh of gadflies
I have seen skulls of smoke rising from the hearts of rabbis
I have seen the worthless pennies of the soul rattle in the tin cans of the poor-in-heart
I have seen electric beetles impregnated by the stigmata of virgins
I have seen dusk fall on a day that never existed
I have seen the Children of God wearing the hats of Hitler
I have seen Love strangled in the barrel of Hitler's gun
I have seen Love decompose in the face of ninety-mile-high Ku-Klux-Klan
I have seen pearls turning to hellebore
I have seen the pages of the Holocaust stuck by tears
I have seen men with no faces buy women with no faces
I have seen clocks turn time backwards and leak gallons of blood
I have seen blood blood blood blood blood blood blood blood
I have seen children's faces smeared with the excreta of hypocrisy
I have seen bibles turn into black bats and fly in the face of reason
I have seen God pick up his deckchair and leave the beach empty
I have seen no reason given for no reason given for no reason given for no reason
I have seen my motherland ruined I have seen my fatherland forgotten
I have seen the houses on the hill exploding
I have seen the faces of the dead raging
I have seen lies and bitter tears and men begging for death forsaken
I have seen the curse of Judgement Day and the final countdown
I have seen the cosmos fart like an old balloon, I have seen it

thrown in a trashcan by a mystic tramp, I have seen
a small child and a rose cut down by a rhapsody of quangos
I have seen a bevy of politicians, eyes brimming with false tears
I have seen the finger on the button
I have seen apolcalypse whispered on the lips of fallen angels
I have seen a government sodomize its people and smile
I have seen the potbellied gods of Whitehall forging the idolatory
of their egos through the golden calf of Mammon
I have seen the masses genuflecting before the bloodless gaze
of punchdrunk jewelled ordure from cups of infanticide
I have seen blank vistas of electronic nothingness
I have seen the broken soap operas of anodyne big brothers
I have seen the lithe and toxic dross of pouting panting ponytailed nymphets
sacrificed on the altar of shambolic shallowness
I have seen the denizens of hell
sinking into a sea of oleaginous glossies
I have seen the red light of war
tupped by the brazen lips of lucre
I have seen the credit card confetti
at the white powder wedding
of negativity
I have seen the spiritless coupling
of sweating genitalia
explode into a barricade of angst
and vapid voyeurs
I have seen the sky turn black with smoke and mirrors
I have seen mansions made of money
pummelled by ignorance
in the hallowed halls of unlearning
I have seen the sanctimonious wideboys of WC1
whip themselves into a frothing orgasm of emptiness
I have seen the arcane arcades and boulevards
I have seen the hallways and ballparks
of collective insanity
I have seen mindless crowds
prostrating themselves before the spineless elect
in the valley of padded indifference
I have seen the browbeating blond bullies of belligerence
bonded by bigotry and big bucks
join forces with the bitches of witlessness
wading through stockpiles of sophistry and wickedness
plan armageddon in the palace of despair
I have seen the bastards of avarice
kettled in anachronisms of anathema
pound prodigious geniuses to death

and throw the bones over the circumcised
vulva of the sold-out intelligentsia

I have seen women tearing at their breasts
I have seen men going quietly mad
I have seen London vanish in a twist of smoke
I have seen a garden of prayers and the ghosts of children
I have seen God tearing up the plans and Satan torching Eden

David Malin

Monologue

(This is the monologue of Laura Stephen – my namesake. She was Virginia Woolf's half-sister and was institutionalised all her life as she was deemed 'retarded'.)

My name is Laura. I live in an institution. I am what they call 'retarded'. I cannot read or write. I have lived within the four walls of this institution all my life. My family has deserted me. I am quite happy here, I sweep the floors of the long corridors every day, I work in the laundry, and I weave baskets. The institution is very large, there are many of us. We are looked after by a Matron, who is very strict. If we misbehave we are put in a padded cell, where we are left in the dark for many hours. I do not like it in there, it is frightening. There is no sound. I am a fortunate one. There are many here who are mad and rave all day long and all night at who knows what demons. In the evening we eat gruel and attend evening prayers. There are many interruptions as the mad ones rave and the imbeciles gibber. In the morning we are awoken by the jingle of keys in the door as our dormitory is opened. We line up in our nighties and are taken for freezing cold showers. Then we go to breakfast where we eat porridge and bread and dripping. Then we go about our respective tasks for the rest of the day. In the afternoon we are allowed a break of one hour. I like to walk in the grounds or sit under an old chestnut tree and look at the sky. In the evening we sit in the hall and knit and talk. Then we go to bed. Our mattresses are filled with straw and are very uncomfortable. We have chamber-pots by our beds. There are always people screaming and raving so it is hard to get to sleep. Each day is the same as the last. I have been here for many years and I do not know if I will ever leave. I never have any visitors, except the kindly old women who bring us religious tracts, which I cannot read, and samplers to embroider. I daydream a lot. Hoping that one day somebody will come to fetch me and take me away from this place. But I am quite content here, it is my home.

Laura Stephen

The Quiet Man

My father was a quiet man, a gentle man. He slipped into oblivion way before his time. But maybe it was his time. He'd lost all his pals; the love of his life. I asked him if he was lonely or depressed; he said he wasn't.

I dreamt Nana was standing next to my bed. She turned into a woman made out of balls of wool, like the knitted green and yellow crocodile in the bedroom . . . Then I heard voices and saw shapes. Nana was dancing round in her nightie with her arms and legs flailing out, singing "Na-na, Na-na", at the top of her voice. Then she turned into a lovely grey shaggy grizzly lurcher and I said, "I knew you wouldn't hurt me," and she sat on my lap and I hugged and kissed her. What's all this got to do with my father?

Nana has two hideous pink flowery armchairs that look like something the cat spewed up. They are quite comfortable however. She also has a wicker plant-holder shaped like a snake. My father was a quiet man, a gentle man.

Ena was a scary old woman. Her kitchen stank of fish. Apparently, she had an orgasmatron in her garden. She'd sit there at the meetings with her skirt billowing out showing her enormous bloomers. She bellowed too and she'd shine a torch in your face in the middle of the night, while you lay in the arms of your Japanese boyfriend. She taught me to cook. She gave out pocket money. She rationed the food: a cube of cheese, a handful of crisps and an orange.

I never used to be afraid of the dark. "Kiss chase on the hockey-field!" yelled Clunk. Nobody wanted to kiss him. We slept out in tents in the summer. Marc Meisner used to put *Primula* cream cheese sandwiches under my pillow. The mind is like a jack-in-a-box, one thought after another unexpectedly pops up. My father was a quiet man, a gentle man.

Laura Stephen

Why I Paint – by Laura May

As someone who lives with Borderline Personality Disorder, I was offered a range of therapies to help me manage my condition. I immediately chose Art Therapy. For me, painting and drawing is something I have enjoyed since childhood, so it seemed the natural option. I didn't realise how much hard work it would be!

My favourite mediums are charcoal or watercolour, however I don't usually paint people or 'things'. I prefer to simply let the colour spread out and see where it goes. I usually have an idea in my head of the colours I want to use, but that's all I start with.

Sometimes, if I am particularly interested in a specific subject (i.e. Mythology) a lot of my work will focus around that, although I don't realise I am doing it until I look back on it later. I really enjoy working in silhouette and this is a style I repeat again and again.

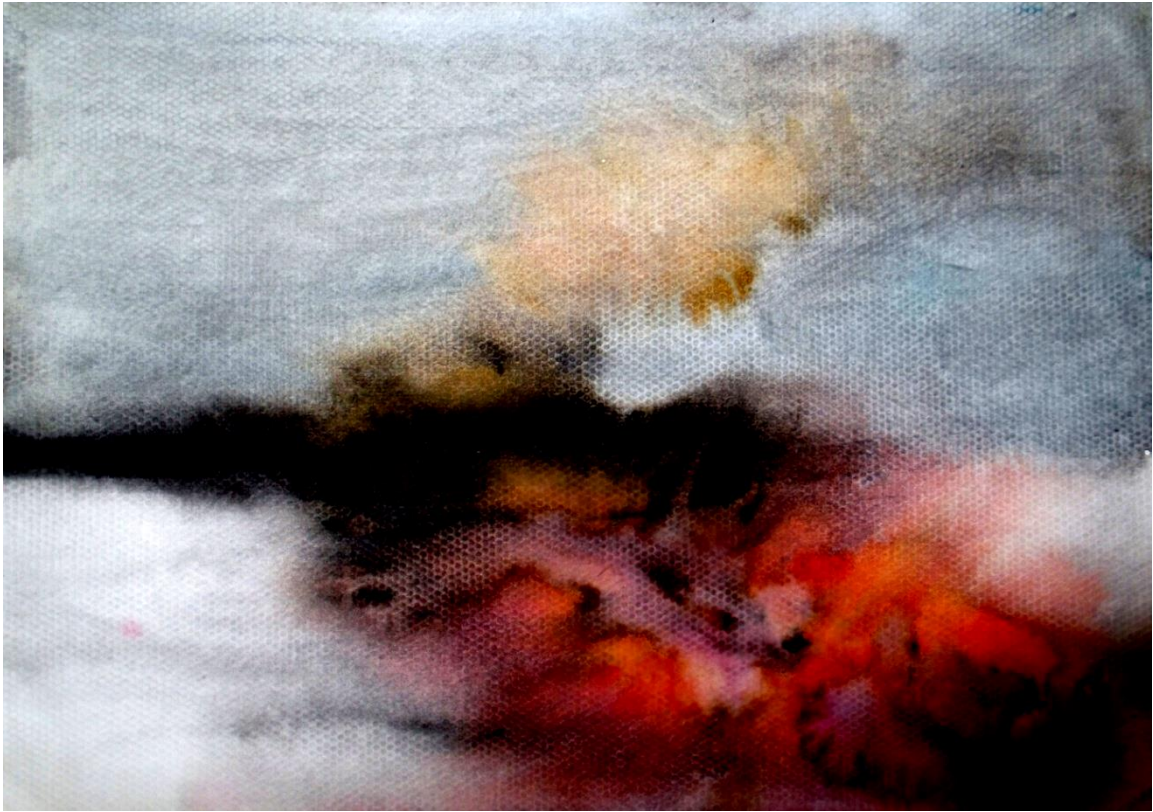
In my Art Therapy, the way I work is very different. It is intense, but also in a way quite mindless. I am often surprised at the end of a session by what has appeared on the paper. My work tends to reflect what I'm dealing with . . . so if I am anxious and depressed, I will often reach for charcoal or chalk. I don't know why, but it is a good way of gauging my mood.

Producing something beautiful gives me a great sense of achievement, although I am often very critical of my own paintings. I do not like rules and regulations, and I think this is reflected in my artwork. I change my style and techniques as often as I change my mood, and this works well living with a mental health condition.

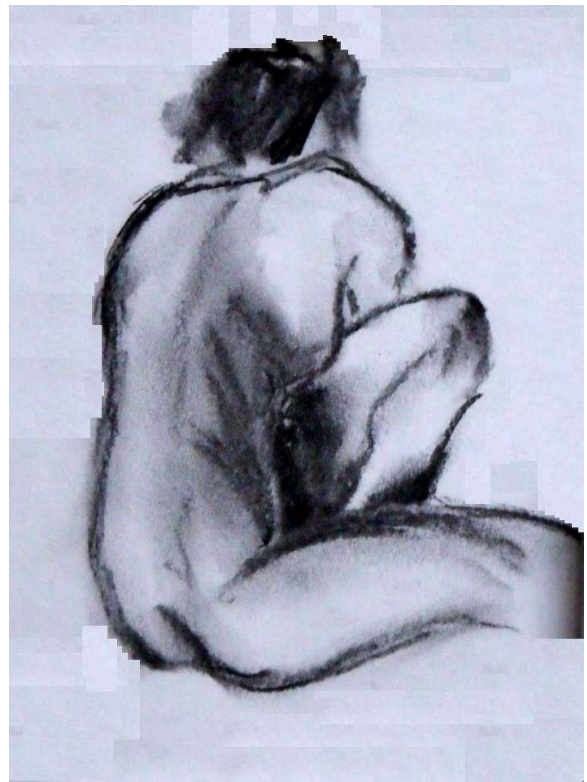
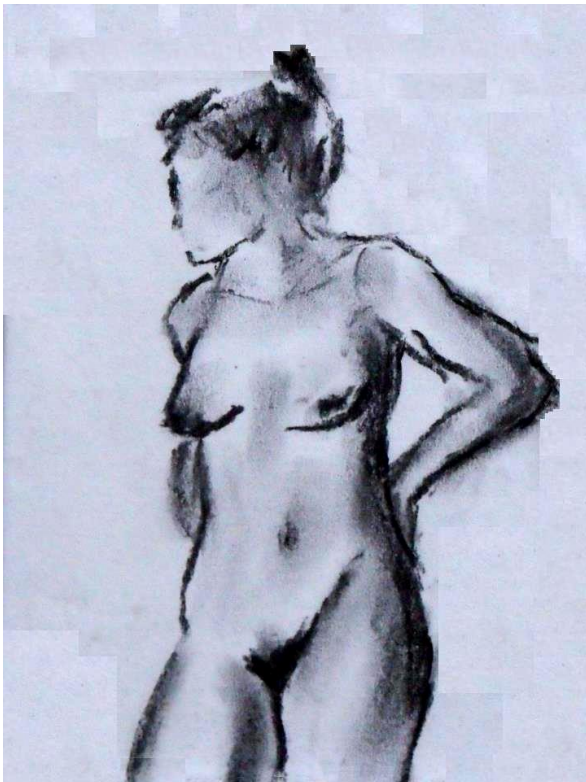
I find, above all, painting and drawing is healing. I can get my frustrations out on canvas and I feel quite cleansed afterwards.



Ravens – Laura May



Study – Laura May



Nudes – Laura May



Pattern – Laura May



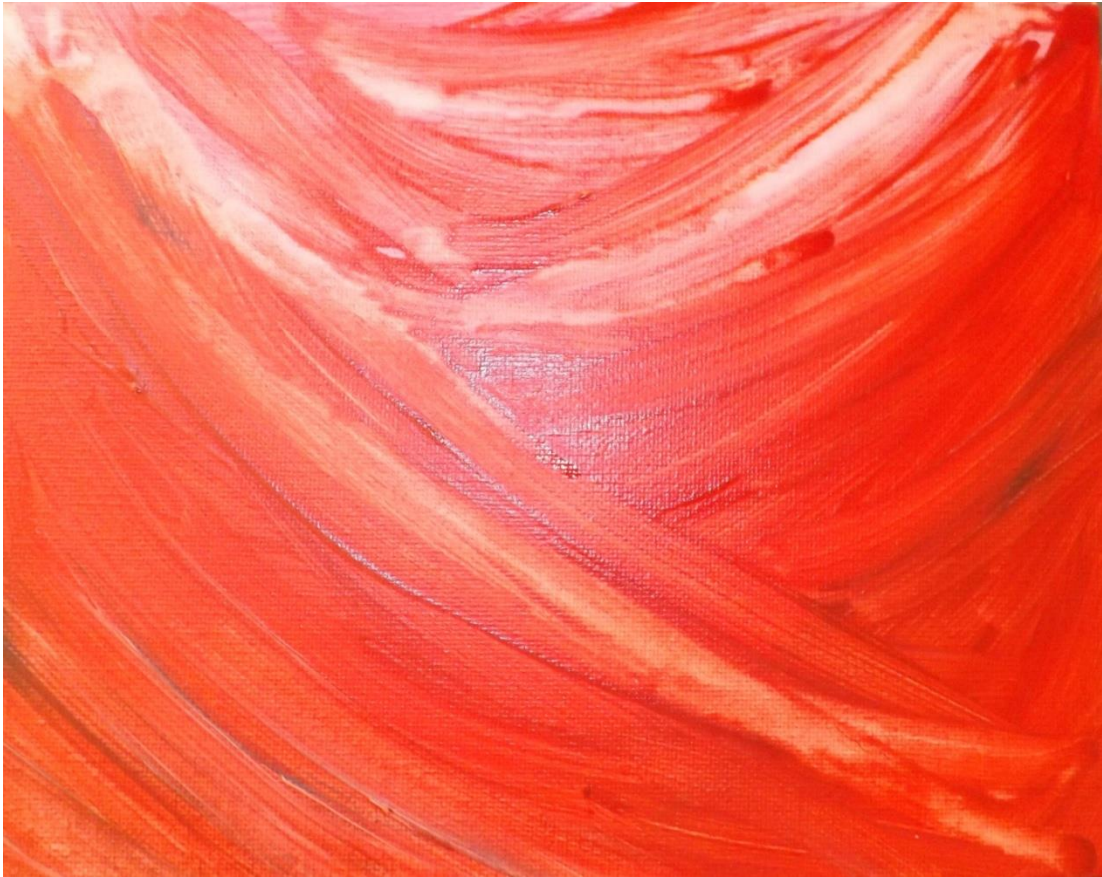
Red – Laura May



Seascape – Laura May



Laura May – Back Breaking



Laura May – Rose

Survivors' Poetry in the publication 'Poetry Express'

My name is Laura May, and I am a writer from Essex.

In 2008, I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder. Before then, I experienced a range of symptoms from depression, mania and self-harm to suicidal ideation. I always buried it deeply and tried to ignore it.

Since a young age, I have written poetry and stories. I write, simply, because I have to. Without being able to express myself through words, I wouldn't be able to cope with the thoughts and feeling rushing at me from all directions. Even as a child I knew that words could save me from myself.

When I write a poem, it is like peeling the layers from an onion. First I write the outline, then I go back, time and time again, until I get to the core. It is often a painful process which makes my eyes water and my hands bleed, but when I reach the core I know I have achieved something. I have taken what was inside me and formed it into tangible words across a page. It is such a relief for me, to get it out.

Poetry has always been, and will probably always be, my first love. It is lodged in my heart, whether I like it or not. A close second is art. I love to draw and

paint, and after undergoing Art Therapy for several years to help me manage my condition, I am now able to really push myself through art to face myself. It is not always pleasant, but it is worth it.

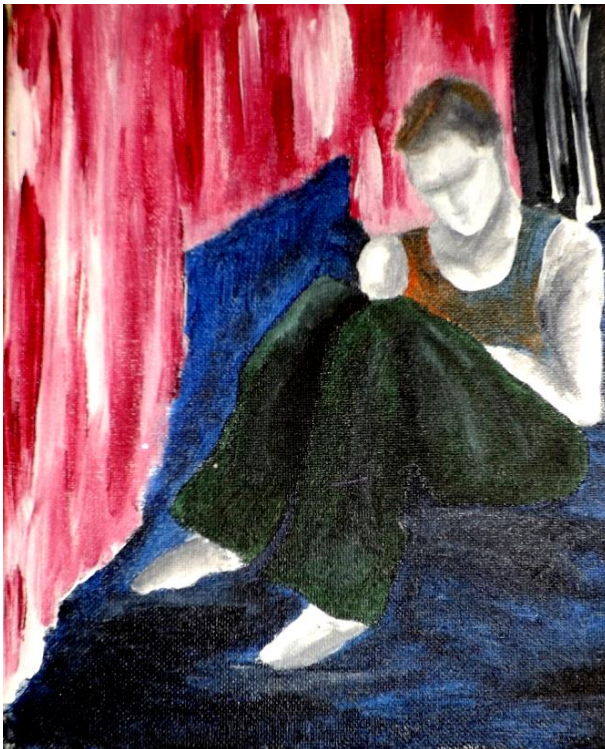
After over six years of living with this diagnosis, I am managing well. I work full time for a charity as a marketing manager, which means I get to write all the time professionally, for a great cause. I volunteer for Time to Change as a Champion, speaking out about my experiences to show the positive side of mental health. I am happily married, and things are going well.

I still get ill, I just get better again. It took me a long time to accept that there is no cure for the way my mind works, I just have to learn to manage it and be content with knowing I am doing my best.

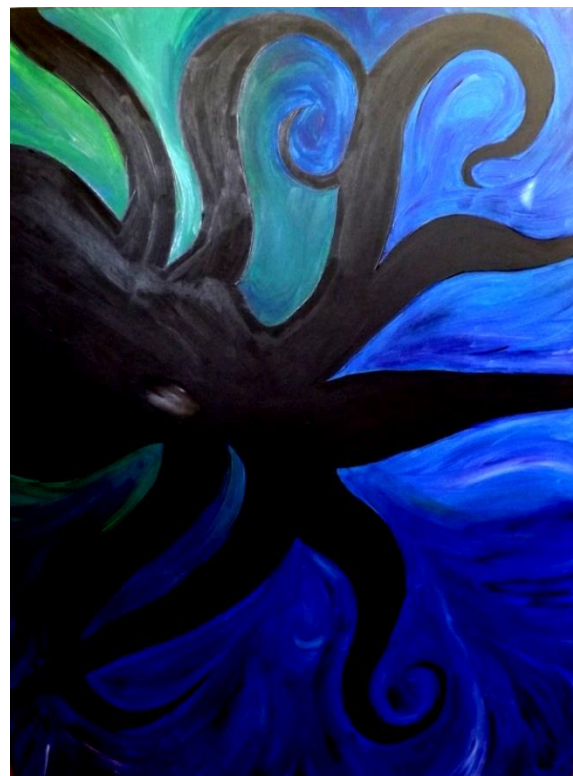
Would I call myself a survivor? Definitely. Not because I have won the war, but because I keep fighting every day. And on the days I can't fight, I have my family and friends there to lift my weapons for me.

I hope you enjoy my poetry. All of this word is as yet unpublished, so you are getting a sneak peek!

You can find out more about me at www.lauramay.org or connect with me on Twitter @lauramaywritten



Laura May – Brooke Sitting



Laura May – Octopu

Poems by Laura May

Sewn

Weave me in,
Weave me out,
Stitch my seams
And keep me together.

A finger puppet
Pulled by clouds,
I am fraying at the hem,
I am falling apart.

So, up and under,
Stitch, girl, stitch,
Drive home that needle
And help me cry,

My poor patchwork heart
Is ripped cotton, torn silk,
So I will sew it back together
With a thimble of false smiles.

The Good Fight

Sticks and stones
Can't break my bones,
I can do that all by myself,

Sticks and stones,
Never,
But words?
They'll always hurt me.

Stand and fight?
Is that the only way to win the war?

Warring with words has always been
my best defence.
But now, only knuckles will do,
So I guess I will
Stand and fight.

Honestly

Nobody wants the truth.
Just picture
the look on their faces if I declared,
bold as brass,
that I did this to myself.

Yes, honestly,
I made these incisions,
Up and down
My own tender arm,
It is a ladder,
to my truth.

Imagine, imagine,
The gasp in their mouths,
Should I confess
that only I
am responsible
for this criss-crossing map.

Honestly, the truth
is a dagger, a shaft,
it will slice deeper
than you want it to,
I promise,
You don't want it, my loves.

The Stranger

(Read at Peerfest 14)

We have never met
You do not know my heart
You have never seen my laughter
Or heard my cries.

We have never shook hands
You do not know the colours of my
hair,
You have never seen these blue eyes
Or felt my touch.

In fact, you are a Stranger
In a strange land, just like me,
You are nothing to me, personally,
And yet . . .

You know
How it feels in the dark,
How slicing skin is a release,
How empty a smile can be.

Somehow, you know
How lonely 3am is,
How happiness dances just out of
reach,
How hopeless Hope can seem.

I don't know why
I don't have an answer
But somehow you,
The Stranger,
Well. . . you just get it.

PAIN

Your pain
Like a paper cut
Every little thing
Hurts a lot
A lot of little things
Make one big pain
Its edges are rough
Confused and untidy
Not like the razor
So fast so clean
Hardly feel a thing
Its sting is enough
It leaves neat scars
Clear and precise
Takes control
Of the invisible pain
Made tangible
Some old and faded
Or young and vivid
Some still bleeding
You wear your open wounds
As you sit across from me
At our usual table
In the Sunshine Café
And I'm happy
Contented
In your company

THE WEAKEST LINK

I'd like to be the weakest link
In the chains that bind you
So you can breathe
I'd like to be a whisper
That you can hear
Above all the voices
Shouting in your head
I'd like to be the breeze
That banishes
The hurricane
The shrieking whirlwind
Of your bad thoughts
I'd like to be the cushion
Between your head
And the nearest wall
If I could move fast enough
I was almost
But not quite quick enough
That time at Kingston Hospital
And when "she"
Is talking to you
I wouldn't tell you
That she's not there
I'd tell you
That she's wrong
And you're right
I'd like to be the hand
Holding your hand
That's holding the blade
When just holding it
Is enough
But I don't know
If I could stop you
If you really wanted to
But if you did
I wouldn't be shocked
I won't go away
I'm here to stay

Dan Leissner

SHADOWS WALTZ HALTINGLY

by Alan Morrison – PART II

(Continued from PEN #46)

The Scarecrow Abandons His Post – some new biological and geological knowledge: **Mucilage** is a thick, gluey substance produced by nearly all plants and some microorganisms. It is a polar glycoprotein and an exopolysaccharide. In plants it plays a role in the storage of water and food, seed germination, and thickening membranes.

Malachite is a [copper carbonate](#) hydroxide mineral. This opaque, green banded mineral crystallizes in the [monoclinic](#) crystal system, and most often forms [botryoidal](#), fibrous, or [stalagmitic](#) masses, in fractures and spaces, deep underground, where the water table and hydrothermal fluids provide the means for chemical precipitation.

The scarecrow could be a metaphor for a debilitated person, a sufferer. Subtly the image melds into that of Alan, taking time off from school due to his mental health problems and out walking his dog.

Brittle Twigs encapsulates the life of Alan's mother, who in her earlier life was a person of great stamina, and incredibly supportive of her family. The poem plots her inexorable decline, in spite of her heroic struggles: "you fought gallant and alone for/As long as you could hold out, dumbly besieged by/The spillages of your own boiling oil pouring back/Inside your battlements, your defences melting down –". The title echoes the metaphor of mother's sanity: "Your essence, personality, which you felt slipping/Piece by piece like brittle twigs loosening from a

besom;/You kept fighting right up until there were barely any/Twigs left bound tight enough for your thoughts to keep their grip –" Without immediately sensing it, he witnessed his mother's last gasp of health and sanity.

Shadows Waltz Haltingly hones in on the original name for Huntington's Chorea – St Vitus's Dance – the controlled movements of a dance being the diametric opposite of the involuntary convulsions of the disease. The condition is total in its inexorable negativity, it can neither be prepared nor improvised. It is sporadic, devoid of fluency.

There follows a shift of tone with the vignettes of *Japanese Gardens* and *Chinese Echoes* – far more figurative and reflective than the other poems; good for variety and contrast.

Autumn Glade has a broad timespan, from Alan's childhood until the time of his mother's death and funeral. There is a post-mortem vision of mother 'On the other side of a spirit-partition'. Father has two visitations from her, apparently bringing her back to earthly life. She is resurrected in memory after her ashes have been scattered.

Bluebells is about the nature of memory and nostalgia, while *Circling the Yew* is about mortality and religion's attempt to help us come to terms with. The two poems use rural/pastoral imagery for metaphorical effect.

Clicking the Light Fantastic traces the dichotomy in the background and attitudes of mother and father – mother was a Catholic, father an Anglican; father a heavy drinker, mother a teetotaler. Frugality sustained and

enlightened them: 'That unexplored hemisphere of the spirit/Inflated on fasting, that unpeels the senses/To a sharper light of unleavened perceptions'. There is transcendental perceptivity and vision in routine squalor – 'Symbolic sight of thriving invisibles/Microscopically crawling like recusant lice/In mouldy bread-bins'. 'Spilt rice of priest-hole Eucharist' – shades of *Eleanor Rigby*, and beyond! The act of feeding a coin-box electric meter is 'spiritualised' – portrayed as a Catholic ritual.

The Amateur Bluemantle – **Bluemantle Pursuivant of Arms in Ordinary** is a junior [officer of arms](#) of the [College of Arms](#) in [London](#), dating back to Tudor times. Bluemantle is also the name of a firm of architects who renovate old buildings. It concerns Alan's father tracing his family tree back several centuries, whose researches neglected to trace an ancestor's death through 'mutant genes'. It did not initially occur to him that the disease could be hereditary, to make the crucial connection: ". . . he'd never/Thought his hobby, his sacred pastime in humdrum/Life could have become so cruelly symbolic/Of the horrendous erosion – before her natural time –/Of the woman he loved . . .". He had had a vague sense of a 'family curse', but now came to the realisation that the 'mortal threat' which could go on to menace future generations, originated in his wife's line. But he still continues his researching after his bereavement; they continue to afford him comfort, although '. . . many pastimes are bedfellows/To self-harm'.

The Dog and the Widower – the widower's dog (female) is depicted as a 'canine reincarnation' of his deceased wife. Pip,

perhaps 'mistreated/In a past she can't articulate' is extremely nervous, and shy of tactile contact. But she remains a solitary source of comfort to the widower as he sinks into reverie about the deceased human companionship which had sustained his early life. Animals, too, have feelings.

At Cotehele – Cotehele is a mansion on the banks of the river Tamar in south-east Cornwall, surrounded by a beautiful garden. This was the location where Alan's mother notified her husband of her probable impending death. Father and sons sensed a deterioration in her condition, but did not feel it was terminal. Her announcement was made against the background of foot-and-mouth disease and its tragic consequences. Later, when she was hospitalised, she had a terrifying vision of being burned as a witch, as were sufferers from 'St Vitus's Dance' in the 17th Century. There is a profound reflection on the disease's present name – 'Huntington's strange, almost onomatopoeic/Pathological tag – for it's a hunting gene repeat'.

Memory's Egg Tempera – Egg tempera paint is simply made from artist quality finely ground dry pigments, egg yolk and water. This poem is a supreme example of relating life to art – the poet's personal crisis seen in terms of Walter Sickert's *What Shall We Do for the Rent?* And Frederick Yeames' *And when did you last see your father?* He feels his organisation of his memories has been 'slapdash, fast-drying, like egg tempera –' in spite, or perhaps because, of that, memories take on 'textures so permanent', mainly the more traumatic ones.

A Study in Brown – a reflection on his mother’s body, which seems ‘almost mummified’. The corpse has an almost transcendental quality ‘as if even in death she/Was still fathoming some imponderable’. But still the body was not his mother. He regrets the dead eye’s inability to preserve visual impressions. Alan is passionately involved with the controversy about the relationship between body and soul, tending to sympathise with the Platonist for their disagreement with St Thomas Aquinas, and for their belief in an afterlife ‘More complete and complementary than the mere shadows/Of our flat-packed world.’

The Churning plumbs the depths of Kierkegaardian dread. The poem is a meditation on melancholy and angst. The Robert Burton referred to in the first stanza must be the author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, who mirrors Alan’s own concern about potential for melancholy. He protests against clinical, analytical attitudes – strangling thought’s green shoots,/Swamping growth, suffocating bulbs and lobes of sound-/Mindedness through morbid studiousness. A reference to the Biblical Adam after the fall – ‘The shadow/Of an answer formed his soul’s core and slowly wormed/Out from the bitten apple of his head’s corrupting gourd (macabre conflation of head and apple!).

For Alan, Adam’s underlying angst precedes his biting of the apple, and it is a feeling far deeper than any simplistic sense of sin and atonement: “. . . an anti-feeling that precedes the sins/It thus precludes. Pre-empted through proleptic penance,/Perpetual anticipation of . . . nothing; inflicts/A churning punishment in

the pit of the stomach/For sins uncommitted – Guilt’s gristle, undigested . . .”

Ragged Angel (In Red Cabbage) *Ragged Angel* is a biographical poem about Kierkegaard. Existential depths are further explored – ‘tectonic plates of a neurotic god scraping against his biblical conscience.’ Kierkegaard believed that his children would predecease him as retribution for spilling his ‘prenuptial seed’.

Kierkegaard rejected his ‘real life’ love Regine for his archetypal goddess, and the freeing of his mind, to make an ultimate assertion: “. . . the Either/Or of existence,/The choice between the world or God; and it was in this/Hinterland most of us dwelt, in realms of resignation,/Free-floating grief, and anxiety that springs vertiginously/From freedom’s ‘dizziness’. The state of indecision seems to be the stuff of real experience His stance was anti-clerical, claiming that Christianity ‘abolished itself’ when it conquered the world. This poem, rightly, has footnotes; an example worthy of emulation later in the collection.

Angst in August involves a visitation from a ‘dark angel’ and Alan’s definition of Angst ‘. . . and its strange reflecting agent,/Guilt – for things only imagined, played out in the head,/But which might yet be spilt from it – and there’s the hinge:/A pre-reflective preventative against impulsive evil,/Against the will even – avenging nerves, the sprung/Triggers of conscience, subsumed into our souls’ inbuilt/Obsolescence;’ He went into solitary meditation in a damp cellar – ‘the boundless space of freedom’s open prison’ where he became beset by suicidal

tendencies. To offset this he needed 'the reassurance of another presence'. "I had to save loved ones from my heart's destructiveness,/All living things seemed vulnerably inviolate,". He does recover from that extremity: "Valiumed vagueness mingled with exhaustion's natural/Analgesic brought this violent fever down . . . A sudden gust/Of unbridgeable insight surged through angst in August . . ."

The Anxious Lions – some bizarre pottery, in the form of stucco moulded lions, which are *actual* features above the porch outside the front of the building in which Alan lives – called Lion House. 'Protruding stucco firmament, to all appearances,/In defiance of gravity, re-sculpting Physics –' which is a place of solace and comfort – "– this is my refuge at the fag-end/Of a year besieged by bereavements, both of the dearly/Departed and the still-living but alighted . . . from a hollow howling world/Of bygone goodness but dependable belligerence . . ."

He celebrates the naïve art of the Staffordshire Flatback ceramics, crude but effective. The implicit roaring of the lions can drown the howling of the wind. He links his sordid apartment to his physical state – 'black mould on a basement flat ceiling,/Prompting a rupture in my stomach lining;' a malignant growth is compared to a shrub, and 'damp-fungus of the gut'.

This ailment gives him a sense of bonding with his now deceased mother, attuning him to her terminal decline. Pondering on his own life expectancy, he is faced with the problem of articulation, referring to 'word-worms' and 'poet-caterpillars' – in anticipation of

posthumous wings indeed! In the interim he feels protected to some degree by the lion figures 'Shelleyan lions holding vigil over my/Unvanquishable doubts'. He ponders on his abode at some point becoming a comfortable home – 'But for the time/Being it will be my proto-tomb, an antechamber/To future feeling'.

Desk Shutters – visiting his mother's body. Father had tried to close her eyes, but they sprang back to openness, in symbolic resilience and defiance. He hoped the vision of the corpse would give him 'some Divine insight, an elevating revelation' rather than oblivion.

The deceased's eyes are graphically portrayed – 'Light-extinguished, rinsed of purpose, mere after-prints/Of something lifted out from them – *spirit?*' Another perceptive analogy between art and life: 'This husk, this wax simulacrum, this sculpture of your/Priceless essence, pale impression of personality,/Spirit, your You, now decanted into an invisible vessel still-living eyes aren't privy to . . .'

Chanctonbury Ring – a [hill fort](#) based ring of trees on top of Chanctonbury Hill on the [South Downs](#) of [West Sussex](#), and a childhood playground for Alan and his brother – a blend of nature, erudition and Anglo-Saxon allusions – trees are 'wordless knowledge gods –/Wind-children of Woden'. Alan speaks of 'our sprung imaginations . . . Co-pilots of cloudless scopes, whispered impossibilities'. There is a feeling of ebullient optimism, as in childhood, followed by a caution, relating to later life – '. . . so much boundlessness of being . . . Would prove

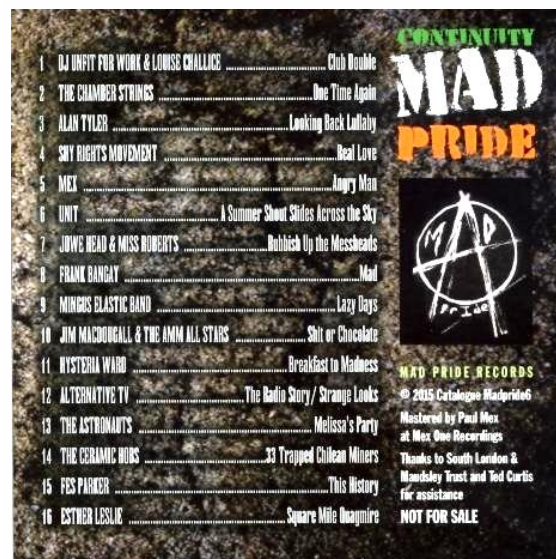
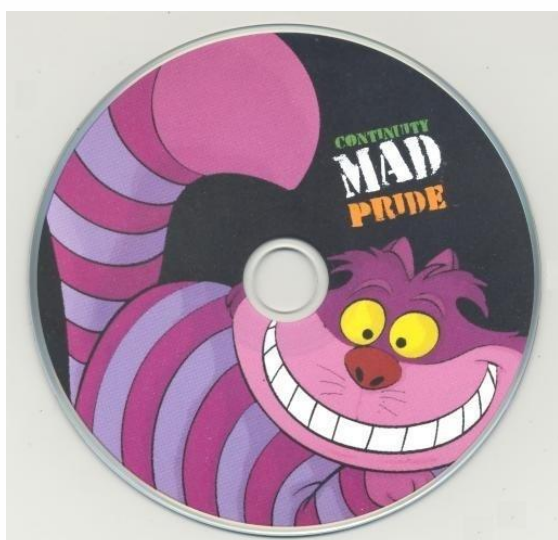
almost intolerable in troubled future moments/Impossible to foretell'. In Alan's words: "The poem is really about how we change when we grow up from what we were as children, innocence/experience, and depicts my brother and I, and how we have changed from children to adults and all that entails."

The Bloom is a beautiful articulation of the concept of 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder. It is the reader's response which generates and vitalises a true poem – 'Without your plumbing eye the poem/Calcifies to Art.'

This statement reiterates to some extent the opening of the collection, drawing a sharp distinction between living and dead art and knowledge. There is a parallel analogy between works of art/literature and human life. Art, metaphorically, can be prey to terminal diseases. To me, this collection embraces vast areas of thought and sensation.

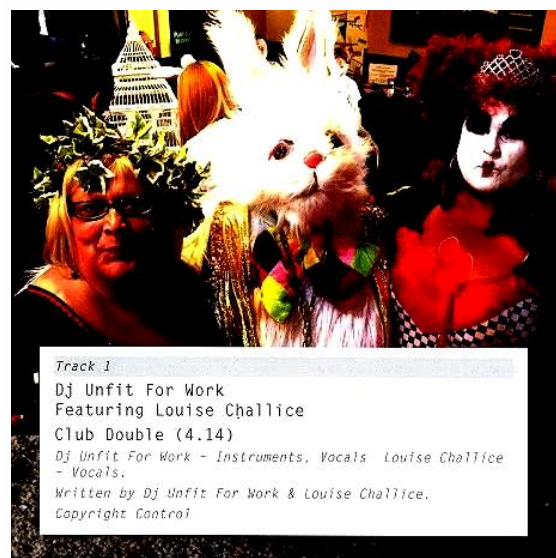
Dave Russell

Continuity – Mad Pride



I see that this compilation is non-profit making, some of the 1000 copy run being given free with Southwark Mental Health News, and the remained to be distributed by the performers. I am so impressed by the variety and the sophistication of the material. As I suspected, all the contributors are veteran performers.

Club Double, by **DJ Unfit for Work & Louise Challice** – previously unreleased: a strong blues/soul number, with some great (what sounds like) 'fuzz' organ, and ambient effects in the form of brass and scat chorus. This number has an abrupt ending, presumably intentional. DJ was a founder member of Mad Pride and Hackney Patients Council. He was leader of the rock/post-punk bands **The Regular Guys** and **The Pits**; his latest 10.5



Track 1
 Dj Unfit For Work
 Featuring Louise Challice
 Club Double (4.14)
 Dj Unfit For Work - Instruments, Vocals Louise Challice - Vocals.
 Written by Dj Unfit For Work & Louise Challice.
 Copyright Control

One Time Again, by **The Chamber Strings** – a highly tasteful presentation highly evocative of *Sergeant Pepper* and *Space Oddity*. This band is led by American singer-songwriter **Kevin Junior**, who has recorded many albums including his recent solo collection *Ruins*. The Chamber Strings' second album was *Month of Sundays*, and they are preparing a third.

Looking Back Lullaby by **Alan Tyler** – also previously unreleased. pleasant Country & Western material. As well as his solo albums, Alan is singer-songwriter for 'pioneering alternative country rockers' **The Rockingbirds**, whose new album is called *The Return of the Rockingbirds*.

Real Love, by **Shy Rights Movement** – **Mark Ritchie** is the first acoustic track here; wistfully melancholic, with a strong touch of Neil Young. He is editor of *Hiroshima Yeah!* Magazine and a contributor to *Southwark Mental Health News*. At the age of 43, he is the youngest singer-songwriter on this album.

Angry Man by **Mex** – a bit of a Rolling Stones parody; effective synthesized voice recording. Mex is a veteran producer and engineer, and has released an album called *Dr Jekyll and Mrs Hyde*, which contains a condensed version of *Angry Man*.

A Summer Shout Slides Across the Sky, by **Unit** presents some really imaginative sampling. The main theme is the medieval song *Summer is Icumen In*, interwoven with pop sounds reminiscent of the Madness group, embellished by water and bird sounds. This track is taken from their latest album *Rock in Opposition: Phase Six*. Unit is led by Andy Martin, who has worked with Hackney Patients' Council for 20 years, and is currently homeless.

Rubbish Up the Messheads by **Jowe Head & Miss Roberts**. This was an imaginative number, a delicate celeste intro, followed by a natural sound recording (perhaps an elephant or a whale?), then into some shades of Captain Beefheart. Jowe Head's new album with Demi Monde is called *Confessions from the Twisted Tower*. He has worked extensively with Mad Pride and the like, and has led such bands as **Swell Maps**, **Angel Racing Food**, **Television Personalities** and **The Palookas**. He lives

in Hackney. I have known Miss Roberts for many years as the incisive, hard-hitting singer of **The Rude Mechanicals**.

Mad by **Frank Bangay** – Frank continues to gain strength and confidence with his music-backed recognitions: cogent evidence of his tenacity and determination in making full use of the facilities, and other musicians, at **Core Arts**, from which he has produced many CDs. Strong sound effect with echoing voice, percussion, and one tempo change. Frank was a founder member of Mad Pride, and the earlier **Campaign Against Psychiatric Oppression**. He is author of the book *Naked Songs and Rhythms of Hope*.

Lazy Days by **Mingus Elastic Band** is some more tasteful C & W, with good mandolin and sax. Mingus has performed frequently with Mad Pride and Core Arts. His work covers a wide musical range – from his collaboration with **Genesis P Orridge** and **Cosey Fanny Tutti** in **Coum Transmissions** in the late 60s, to blues, electro-pop and soft rock.

Shit or Chocolate by **Jim MacDougall and the AMM All Stars** – in their name, are they referring to Cornelius Cardew's AMM Music experiments at the turn of the 60s-70s. There's certainly some feeling of that. The rather muzzy recording quality enhances the feeling of an utterly chaotic, and supremely imaginative, rehearsal run amok or Free Form session. "Jim MacDougall is a 'legendary prankster-provocateur' living in Salisbury. He has released many albums as front-man of **Apeshit** and **Aural Guerrilla**, and plans to release a recording of his 'hidden dictaphone' interviews with the police.

Breakfast to Madness by **Hysteria Ward** is reminiscent of Suzanne Vega; the lyrics are very unclear. But the tempo change and the cheer at the end make it quite exciting – Perhaps a remix is called for. Hysteria Ward were formed by Louise Challice in the 1980s. *Breakfast to Madness* has recently been re-released on vinyl to critical acclaim in the US. As well as her solo sets, Louise has performed with **Youth in Asia** and **Mental Disorder**. She contributed artwork to *Southwark Mental Health News*.

The Radio Story/Strange Looks by **Alternative TV** continues in the dark, inspired mood. Very arresting cry of terror at the beginning, More Beefheart influence; perhaps it goes on too long. I could certainly envisage this as part of a multi-media event. This band is led by **Mark Perry**, now living in Cornwall. They released their first album, *The Image has Cracked*, in 1978, and are planning a new album. They have often performed for Mad Pride. Mark is a former editor of *Sniffin' Glue* magazine.

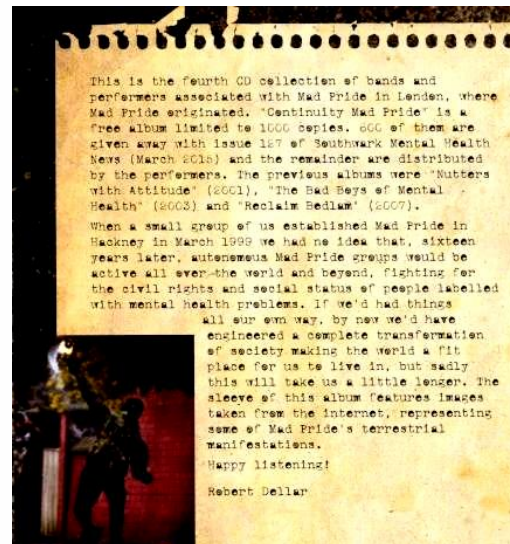
Melissa's Party by **The Astronauts** is, lyrically, extremely lucid and expressive. It tells a story: (to me) someone long homeless has at last got secure accommodation. But possible 'peer group' pressures draw him/her to a party, which threatens to get out of hand – one chilling line "they're going to sacrifice a junkie". The track embraces fluctuating feelings, relief, despair, curiosity, trepidation. It is taken from their latest compilation album *Urban Planning*. They are also veteran Mad Pride performers.

For me, *33 Trapped Chilean Miners* by **The Ceramic Hobs** is the outstanding track in this collection. The mass of *musique concrete* sound effects, including a simulated Tannoy, build a sound-picture of those bleak galleries in the mine, and proclaim the desperation of those trapped. Perhaps it goes on too long as a purely listening item. It would make a fantastic backing track for a film. The track has in fact been released as a limited edition single, which is now a collector's item. The band, led by **Simon Morris** from Blackpool, are considered to be key figures in the 'Psychiatric Underground'. The recently shared a bill up north with **Sleaford Mods**.

This History by **Fes Parker**, good garage sound, and strong train rhythm, but the vocal is indistinct; weakest track in the collection. He was "a legendary Blackpool punk rock musician whose most recent album was called *Side Room*. His coffin was draped with a facsimile of Mad Pride's banner emblazoned with the slogan 'No one likes us. We don't care' before his cremation.

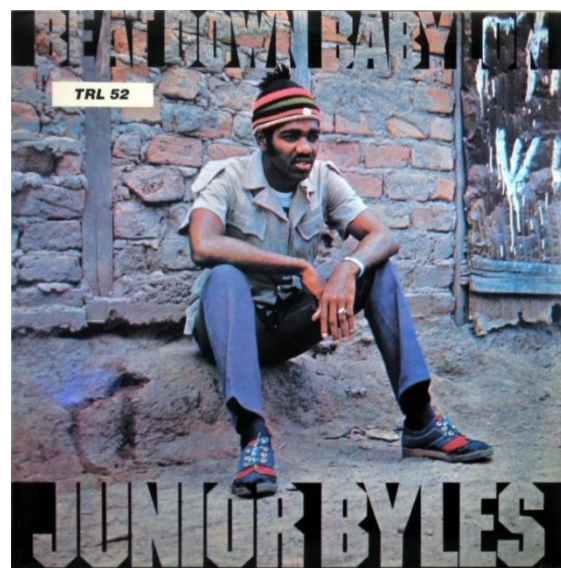
Great Conclusion with *Square Mile Quagmire* by **Esther Leslie** is a highly sensitive poem speculating on the re-routing

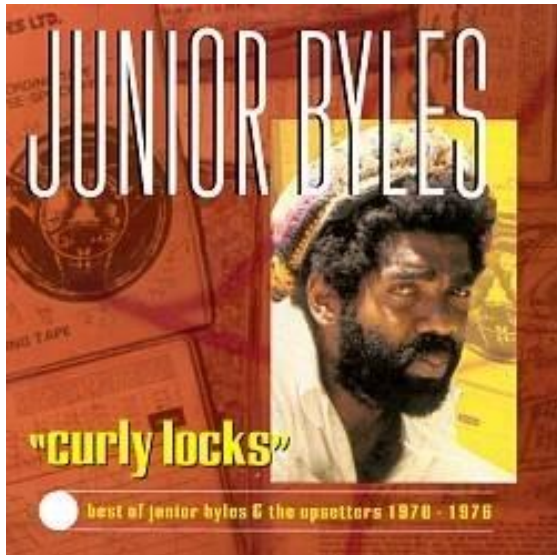
of water – 'all gurgle and splash dreams'. She is brilliantly accompanied on lap steel guitar. This is the first time I have heard this particular instrument used in free-form style. Apparently Esther "has just escaped from Broadmoor and is wandering the streets of Camden with an axe." She has written many books of critical theory and political philosophy. Her latest publication is *Derelicts: Thought Worms from the Wreckage*.



Dave Russell

JUNIOR BYLES a Roots Reggae Pioneer





Earlier this century I bought a copy of MOJO magazine. It had a free reggae competition with it. One of the tracks on the CD was A Place Called Africa by Junior Byles. The song is a heartfelt cry on the Rastafarian theme of repatriation. Listening to it reminded me how good Junior Byles is. This made me check out some of the man's other work. We will return to his music shortly. First I will tell you a bit about Junior Byles.

His full name is **Kerrie Byles Jr.** He was born in 1948 at Kingston's Jubilee Hospital, and grew up in the city's Jonestown ghetto. His father worked as a mechanic and his mother was a school teacher. His family were devoutly religious, and his early musical education was singing in church. In 1967 he co founded a vocal trio called the **The Versatiles**. At this time he was also working as a fire fighter. At the time Lee "Scratch" Perry was working as chief engineer for producer Joe Gibbs. He was scouting for talent for Gibbs new Amalgamated label and on hearing the group signed them. Two years later they went on to

work with Lee Perry, who by this time was establishing himself as a producer. Then they moved on to work with Duke Reid for his Treasure Isle label. Also other producers such as Laurel Aitkin.

In 1970 the Versatiles split up. Junior Byles while still working as a fire fighter returned to working with Lee Perry. Other members of the group would sometimes provide harmonies on his recordings. Then in 1972 The Wailers left Perry to sign with Island. Perry needed someone to fill the void, and Junior Byles fitted the bill. He gave up his job as a fire fighter, and over the next five years their partnership would produce some of Perry's most highly regarded work. Every bit as good as the work he did with The Wailers.

In 1972 Junior Byles was one of several reggae artists who offered support for Michael Manley's General Election campaign. One of his songs *Joshua Desire* was addressed to Michael Manley while another song *Pharaoh Hiding* was addressed to Hugh Shearer leader of the ruling Jamaican Labour Party. Manley was elected, but changes for Jamaica's poor were a long time coming. Junior Byles addressed this with the scathing *When Will Better Come*. These songs were released on his first album titled *Beat Down Babylon*. With musical backing from **The Upsetters**, this album showcases his song writing talents, and his haunting tenor voice. The title track has an anthem like quality to it, in another track *Curly Locks* he sings about how his girlfriend's parents won't let him see

her because of his dreadlocks and his Rastafarian faith. There is the previously mentioned *A Place Called Africa*, while *Poor Chubby* hinted at his unstable mental health. The record also includes a version of the Little Willie John song *Fever* – a song made famous by Peggy Lee. While he was working with Lee Perry he was also self producing and set up his own Love Power Label. In the mid 1970s Junior Byles left Lee Perry to work with other producers. Among the recordings from this period was a song called *Fade Away*. Some people consider it to be his finest work. “He who seeks vanity and no love for humanity shall fade away”. A couple of years later the song was featured in the reggae film *Rockers*. In 1976 he released his second album *Jordan*.

However, by 1975, Byles’ health started to decline. He was suffering from depression and became deeply affected by the death of Hailie Selassie. Unable to reconcile this with his belief in Selassie’s divinity, he attempted suicide. He survived and was admitted to Kingston’s Bellevue Hospital. It has also been suggested that he had been overworking, and that this contributed to his breakdown. After the admission his health continued to deteriorate. However despite regular spells in hospital he continued to record. But by the end of 1976 he had vanished from the scene.

He attempted a comeback in 1978 and recorded two singles for Joe Gibbs. However it was clear that he was still not well. He didn’t re emerge until 1982. Work on a planned new album

went slowly. Then he suffered much tragedy when his mother died and he lost his home in a fire. His wife and children also emigrated to the United States. Apart from a few singles Byles would release nothing until his album *Rasta No Pickpocket* in 1986. The album sadly did not see a long lived upturn in his fortunes. The next year he found himself living on the streets, scavenging for food in dumpsters and begging from passers by. He did resurface in 1989 recording a couple of singles. Three years later he played a few shows with Jamaican guitarist Earl China Smith. In 2004 he returned to live performing in Jamaica. These performances received positive reviews. This led to a short tour of the United Kingdom. I don’t know if Junior Byles’ career is still active, but I wish him well. His recordings from the 1970s show him as being one of the pioneering voices in roots reggae, and are well worth listening to.

Frank Bangay February 2015

There is more information on Junior Byles on the internet. A lot of his recordings are also on YouTube

When Hailie Selassie passed away in 1975 it caused a lot of controversy amongst the Rastafarians, some felt that Jah had put away his physical presence and was around still in spiritual form, while others didn’t believe that he had passed away. Rastafarians see Hailie Selassie as a living God.

'MONOTONOUS TONY'

He goes on and on –
I work with a guy called 'Monotonous Tony' –
maybe he was murderous, a homicidal maniac
in a previous life, baying for blood, more
blood,
a nervous breakdown, shell shock –
he collects all the broken trays we fill with
letters
for the ISLM machines, me, Clover and
Marlene,
supporting Oxford, talking about football,
endless football, Robert Maxwell, supposed
suicide,
buried in Jerusalem, facing west.

He goes on and on –
eating two meals in the canteen every day,
never gargling, cleaning his teeth, his hair –
an atrocious specimen of doomed humanity,
unclean indoor worker here at the Post Office,
Jubilee Mail Centre, Godfrey Way –
collecting broken trays, hand sorting manual
letters,
diligent, never reporting to the management,
gone missing on bus strike days.

I'm suffering endless drivel –
he was a Labour councillor for twenty-five
years,
once meeting Ken Livingstone –
I'd like to rip out his tongue, dips,
mayonnaise,
no joy in his life, resistant to thrills –
but still I sit with him.

Simon Robson

SPORT SCIENCE

Jesus Christ and his twelve disciples –
David Cameron, Angela Merkel,
Boris Johnson,
and the President of Russia too,
Vladimir Putin,
drooping flower, violet, lupin.

Good at sport, intelligent . . .
Sport science, that's where the money is –
a glass of ginger wine and whisky,
flexing your biceps, triceps, bulging muscles,
robust buttocks jogging up
and down Queens Avenue,
your exercise habits, the health centre,
multiple vitamins –
instead of watching psychedelic westerns,
El Topo –
eating your greens in tight
black bicycle leggings,
an anaemic boyfriend who you share a flat
with,
detachable from each other,
easily separated, hardly . . .

Sport science didn't help my friend Billy –
he's dead in Frimley, ex-army boxer, fists
clenched,
his last gasp, desperate wheeze –
balancing on your elbows and knees,
stretched out,
press-ups, 1-2-3.

Simon Robson

THE BOY WHO FOUND A GUN IN A SKIP

A Kalashnikov, to be more precise,
400 rounds a minute, all self-repeating,
hatred,
writing his name on the garage wall outside,
kill, kill, kill . . .

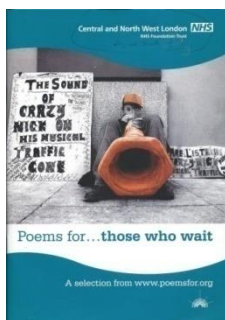
He took it home to show his mum –
in the cellar at the bottom of the stairs,
you won't find too many targets there,
just ghosts and fleeting, awful shadows,
moving spiders like the hands,
clock on the wall,
be careful with your trigger finger, she said.
Now he's stark naked, stuttering,

interrogated by the local constabulary,
awakened early one morning,
crashing through his sliding door.

Hiding inside the Buddhist monastery, he said
–
blaming the Dalai Lama and his vision of
hatred,
one of his accomplices, Prince Charles, Russell
Brand –
freedom of speech, before hanging himself,
nylon zigzag marks across his neck, throat.

Kill, kill, kill . . .

Simon Robson



*Poems for... those
who wait - A
selection from
www.poetsfor.org*

Central and North West London NHS
Foundation Trust (CNWL), and Poems
for...project.

Facilitated and edited by Rogan Wolf
September 2014

59pp full colour; free distribution

Photography: Marta Demartini and Hugh Hill

Design and layout: Portugal Prints
(Westminster Mind's arts project)

Contact: CNWL, Stephenson House, 75
Hampstead Road, London. NW1 2PL.

If you take away all the internally recognised
'names', biographies, you'd know still you
were reading literature and engaging with
artworks of consistent high quality. It's
presented in a clear, concise finished fashion,
extracts of works published are appropriately

selected. Each poem stands on its own,
introduces itself, occupies the space in
passing time, then takes its leave – a graceful
presence – a term perhaps unusual for a
review; it is a graceful book, in the eye of the
storm, even defying the storm. This means of
presentation is effective where confronted
with stimulating literature and artworks in an
unexpected setting might provoke an adverse
rather than accepting reaction. Yet take a look
where and how the individual author's
circumstances, equivalent emotions have
moved the certitude and lives of the poets,
the photo-journalists' characters. The book is
not a panacea, nor glorying in trauma, but
alive with weighting the distance. Michael
Rosen's opening poem 'These are the hands'
is also an invitation for all ages to clasp, as in
its accompanying photograph:

These are the hands/That touch us first/Feel
your head/Find the pulse/And make your bed
...

Clamp the veins/Make the cast/Log the
dose/And touch us last.

To reach the poems beyond the surgery
screen's rolling news or a daytime TV
background to backgrounds, you have to pass
through a 'triage' of Forward, and
Introduction. If you get that far, a sense of
relief – not that the triage' is superfluous or
superficial - it's fine writing, though is it best
placed in the anthology's ordering, and over-
long?

The pairing of artworks, photograph with
poetry to work in harmony, and produce a
greater 'whole' is hard enough, particularly
after the event; re-staging can betray artifice;
however, in this anthology, the couplings
'feel' right, not fortunate or forced, credit due
to the photographers Martine and Hugh, and
the design team at Portugal Prints for no
doubt considerable attention to and

surmounting this potential stumbling-block. From the cover's amazing and arresting photo of '... Crazy Nick on his Musical Traffic cone', appearing again - I'm tempted to write 'by popular demand' (p.30) - providing a visual, almost sound accompaniment to Sarah Wardle's majestically powerful yet gentle poem 'Hotel Gordon'. The lone traveller on the London tube platform (p.37) will walk, it's implied, from John Clare's nineteenth century '... vast shipwreck of my life's esteems' ('I am, The Asylum, Northampton'), further into the 21st century. The photograph in its own right encourages a series of narratives about the single female possibly hesitating, possibly confident, possibly resigned – we don't know, but we can imagine, stalling our waiting-room's intrusion. A sea grape accompanies Derek Walcott's 'Midsummer, Tobago' (pp.50-51), inviting a reading of the poet's biog, inviting exploration.

The poems into the third quarter of the selections arguably grow gloomier; for those who wait are tested, an existential arena of threat: the late David Morris' extract from 'Vinopolis' (pp.26-7): '... We are a "learning organisation"/But, really, can we ever learn?//'; the anonymous poet, born in the West Indies, whose poem 'Schizophrenia Day' is written whilst the poet is detained under a section of the Mental Health Act, with a London bus on the opposing page, parked-up, empty, still waiting for the author (pp.28-9).

A prominence of Mental health Matters is evident, and the poetry exemplifies *why* Mental Health matters. To have such subtle, important conclusions presented in this way can I believe overcome more strident messages bombarding the public with their attendant risk of lack of nuance? Janey Antoniou's poem 'Ophelia in London' (pp.34-5) is one of lasting testimony:

'... Will it be the river My Lady?/The oily, silent Thames/or the thundering rusty train wheels?/The hospitals are full.

... Ophelia, Ophelia walking in the back streets/with weary, wide unfocused eyes./Singing and sad...'

Janey Antoniou (please note: 1957-2010).

For those who wait are tested; an existential arena of threat. A first impression was this 'section' was lifting way from the overall anthology's theme, but having longer to wait than expected, a reader if reading consecutively will find the final quarter's works breaking into the light, poetry arrives with an essence of hope – an adept structuring of the collection I think: '... What you're gonna do./ I got it./ Come. And be my baby.'// says Maya Angelou (pp.46-47)

The generosity of contributors is to be applauded, likewise Editor, **Rogan Wolf**. That the book has the generous patronage of prominent writers around the globe adds to the dimensions of gravity, empathy, waiting. As do the parallel texts and/or translations themselves. **Chikwendu Anyanwu** has translated his poem into Igbo, being one of over 200 languages spoken in Nigeria. The extract from 'I Dance Ala-Igbo' is for me an eye-opener in more ways than expected – the translation's word construction, the patterning of repeated vowels, consonants, symbols used to represent the language in print here gives a sense of dance and rhythm not available in the printed English language version. **Stella Rotenberg's** 'Plea' (pp.56-7), from the collection *Shards*, and translated from the German by Donal McLaughlin and Stephen Richardson; timeless, filling empty space. **Malathy Maitri's** 'Swing' with **Lakshmi Holmström's** translation from the Tamil (pp.52-3) - just a few from many writers' contributions I could have selected:

“. . . Upon my body, shivering in the cold,/one by one, like pearls,/stars bloom and cluster/as the swing speeds.

(**Malathy Maitri** ‘Swing’)

The book’s cover may appear to some awaiting fate to have an unfortunate juxtaposition if viewed as reminiscent of a health and safety booklet, given the amazing photo of ‘. . . Crazy Nick on his Musical Traffic cone’ beneath the NHS Foundation Trust titles. I have often thought if NHS communications’ departments could be a little more flexible/discrete with its logos and branding, it would help generally, both with access to services, (sadly, for some people, the bold-blocked NHS signage over a doorway can act as a deterrent rather than a welcome, in my experience of ‘front line’ working in the voluntary sector), and particularly artworks and literature such as this. Moving the NHS reference if/when re-printed to the bottom of the cover may be a compromise? Accessibility, clear purpose - there’s a lot going on, and not everyone will get text or image, and the NHS’ positive enabling sponsorship message. However, it might mean there’s less chance of the book leaving the waiting room, thus being ready for the next in line.

A huge potential exists to distribute copies much further than a local NHS Trust area, the booklet could be well received in a variety of places where people wait. Poet **Char March**’s Poetry posters in public places for the **Leeds Hospitals’ Group** is an initiative worth comparison, and probably those laminated illustrated poetry posters that have survived the experience are still in circulation.

It is rare I think to come across a collection on a waiting-room table that meets a need, its purpose, being in a personal yet public way ‘for those who wait’ rather than being an

empty media carcass left out for anyone idly passing. The poetry and artworks combine with a grace that offers back quality time in the gaps created in the otherwise tedium or anxiety of waiting. A book to look out for.

.....
© **Philip Ruthen** 2015. A shorter version of this review was first accepted by Disability Arts Online (DAO), and the extended version here acknowledges kind permissions from DAO in textual reproduction: www.disabilityartsonline.org

Philip Ruthen’s book reviews, articles, poetry and short fiction can be found in diverse places including ‘The Recusant’ e-journal [www.therecusant.org.uk] & **Todd Swift**’s ‘Eyewear’ blog-zine [www.toddswift.blogspot.co.uk], and poetry collections ‘Jetty View Holding’ and ‘Apple Eye Feat’ from **Waterloo Press**: [www.waterloopress.co.uk]. A third poetry collection, ‘familial’, is due for publication spring/summer 2015. He is a former Trustee, and Chair, of the national literature development and disability arts charity Survivors’ Poetry, and current member of its Poetry Express e-magazine editorial support team [www.survivorspoetry.org]

A Theory of Relativity

Special Relativity

Let me be your inertial observer
moving freely in the absence of forces
that wear me down or push my sled
down icy tracks downhill

Let me have my ticking clock
and my synched ruler to measure
our distance between time and space

In the cold light of the sun set
we will surely disagree on this
You’ll think I’m shrunk
with outstretched arms

I’ll think your clock ticks faster and your heart
pumps more blood coursing through my veins
We’ll believe all that matters is relative motion

one that separates us further and further
And I can never prove that you are moving
even if the removal van is waiting outside

I'd keep on riding and watch pink light catch
through the leaves and sneak to the wall
If I could outrace it then light would stand still

But light can never freeze and neither you
And I can never catch up with your beam
no matter if I run towards you or away

You'll always run away at the same rate
Our clocks and rulers must measure differently
times and spaces so light's speed can stay, the
same

And this is how our relativity got its special spots

General Relativity or your gravitas

*"This is our universe -the vast extent of our
curved spacetime"* J Levin

Your mass of beauty
electrifies your vicinity
- I am passing through

Empty space is flat
but in your presence
space curves and time
warps me into attending

We all fall to earth like I fall
for you following a curve
in the space around me
unbeknownst unannounced
under the udder of you other
paragon of beauty that is
impossible to imagine as
a curved space in 3D

I can imagine a bowling ball
nestled on a canopy, curving
the canopy and I a marble rolling
on the curved sheet pinned to fall
towards your bowling ball
Or you having me spun around
your orbit, unable to fling free
That's how I'm intrinsically bound

to this space and this moment
of encounter I cannot jump off
or live outside of

It's meaningless
without it

Abol Froushan

*"Abol Froushan writes poetry of phenomenal presence
and fresh vision, recording the sudden and re-examining
archetypes and universals in microscopic detail. In so
doing, he explores those familiar things we fail to notice or
no longer see due to habituation of sense. Froushan has a
multicultural approach to language, evident in both his
Persian and English-language poems."*

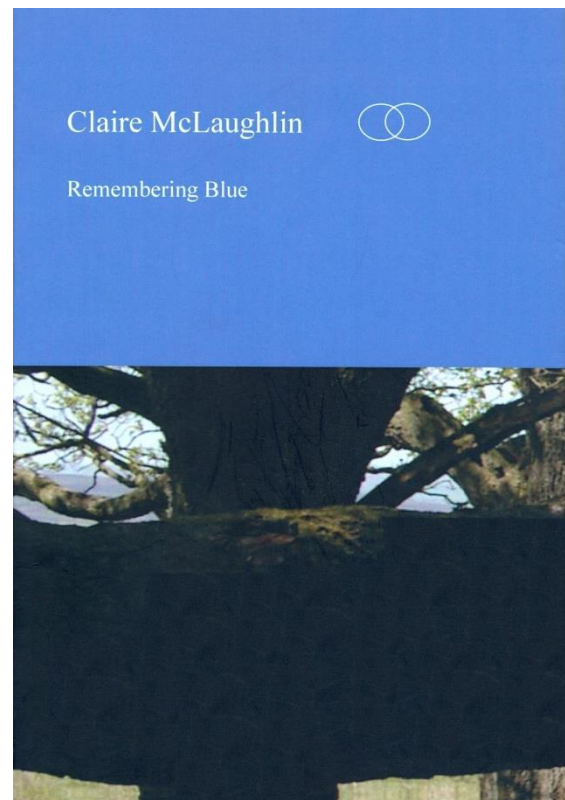
(Poetry International)

Remembering Blue

Claire McLaughlin

Survivors' Press 2014

ISBN 978-1-906742-73-7 £10



*(I have received some 'feedback comments' from
Claire herself, which provide valuable extra
perspective on her poetry and my interpretation. I
have included them in this review – Dave Russell)*

At last, the long awaited resumption of Mentoring Scheme publications, with a great enhancement of presentation quality. This collection was mentored by **Debjani Chatterjee**, a patron of Survivors' Poetry, and is prefaced by her Foreword.

My interpretation: A highly metaphysical opener with *Dissociation*, where Claire sees herself as her own sky – in a state of supreme serenity, a sort of Nirvana. The vision is flawed by 'a rent in my cloud', which is metaphorically related to a migraine. There follows an eloquent portrayal of abuse, and an archetypal memory of the Concentration Camps. **Claire's Comment:** *Dissociation*. "You describe the opening lines of this poem as depicting 'a state of supreme serenity, a sort of Nirvana'. My attempt here is to portray not an exalted spiritual state, but something quite the opposite: that disconnectedness from feeling that comes when circumstances require an individual to experience more emotional pain than he can bear, and he resorts to cutting himself off from feeling altogether. This is a pathological state, and is at the root of much mental illness, I think."

Damage explores the theme of crucifixion, starting with a frightening slant on the idea of Resurrection: "See him yearn outwards from his hammered hands,/as if his bursting heart could power his limbs/to heave him, cross and all, out of the ground/into the air where, like a monstrous bat/or hideous kite escaped its playtime bounds,/he'd swoop and swerve, only just above your head . . ." She goes on to say that women, young boys and girls, and even babies, are crucified. li deals with her friend Marie, who ' . . . has been, by past experience of pain, blasted, arrested.' Claire feels similarly disorientated. But the two relate superbly when Marie becomes a channel for music. lii celebrates her rediscovery of happy, positive vision. (*A

cabochon ruby is a gemstone which has been shaped and polished as opposed to faceted.)

I was extremely proud to feature Claire's *An Oxford Education, Circa 1964* in *Poetry Express Newsletter*. There is a close relationship between higher learning and mental stress/distress. *Going to See the Therapist* portrays a patient's unfulfillable desire for deep personal contact with a consultant. *An Old Counsellor Speaks* concerns struggling through pessimism to hope and optimism – "Yet, being together, with the pain,/your heart unfolding to my heart – I do not think this is in vain . . . we set Beauty next to Hurt/by being together, with the pain." *Goodbye with Love* is a hymn to an alter ego, with some appreciation of the latter's steadfast loyalty and spirit of self-sacrifice. *Farewell* is a touching dedication to a deceased pet – and a sympathetic vet.

The Human Heart is in triplicate – one is made of granite, one of blubbery substance, and one of golden light. Granite has supreme strength, but is 'Too cold and smooth to play its loving part.' The second heart is both vulnerable, corruptible and repellent; the third is wholly benign and positive, able to absorb and transform bad elements.

My Interpretation: *John* is a dedication to her husband, as is *An Elderly Blind Woman Essays a Portrait of her Husband*. The latter is a remarkable synthesis of vivid visual memory and imagination. **Claire's Comment:** You say of my husband, "He too may be disabled," but I feel it may be worth noting that this is not the case. The "gap of irreconcilable difference" is the gap between a sighted person and an unsighted one, between a man and a woman, between any one human individual and another.

This is further explored in *Mrs No-Eyes*, where her memories of her bygone sighted days are

incredibly vivid, as in *Registered Blind*. In *Feeling and Thinking* she describes her mastery of Braille; through this she can read Sherlock Holmes, but bitterly regrets that there can be no visual sight of a familiar word or phrase. *Remembering Blue*, title theme poem, laments that colour is confined to memory, while pink is the 'theme colour' of *Blind Woman with Geranium*. Claire has a deep attachment to trees: in *The Blind Woman and the Atlas Cedar* – "it is a dream to banish loneliness, a dream of losing self, and sense of self/within a green infinitude of trees." Alas, as is expressed in *What is a Tree?* – "My memory no longer properly retrieves/the grace and majesty of trees . . ."

My interpretation: Claire's attitude to this problem is most fully articulated in the four-part *Our Literature Class* – "I have been blind for more than fifteen years,/but can't be separated from the lust to see, to image." Her blindness gives her a heightened appreciation of visual artistic endeavour: "He frees them, to be./They give their private spaces to entertain his genius./Is this where the light comes from?/From the self-forgetting? From the giving and the sharing? From the mutual engagement in the miracle of life's process?" Her imagination engenders visions of literary figures. **Claire's Comment:** In *Our literature Class*. You say, "Her blindness gives her a heightened appreciation of visual artistic endeavour". But, since I am confessedly blind in the poem, would it help the reader understand the meaning of the poem better if it is explained that I am also remembering, with a vivid sense of loss, masterpieces of Dutch art which once I loved to look at, and whose power I reflect on more deeply, now that I can't see them any more?

My interpretation: Her husband's musical imagination makes vital communication through the barrier of her blindness. He too

may be disabled/handicapped in some way. There is a final note of optimism: ". . . two matched players/bridge the gap of irreconcilable difference." This spirit of reconciliation is further explored in *The Proper Butcher*, where her vegetarianism makes a rapprochement with her husband's carnivorous tastes.

My Interpretation: *Bassoon* plays further homage to her husband's musicality, to the extent of her feeling an almost sisterly affection for his woman tutor. **Claire's Comment:** *Bassoon:* You speak of the narrator "feeling an almost sisterly affection" for her husband's female tutor, but as I intended and understood it, it is a poem largely about a struggle with jealous feelings for the tutor!

My Interpretation: This theme is further explored in *The Reappearance*, where he plays bassoon in a concert at the local Methodist Church. **Claire's Comment:** *The Reappearance.* This poem does indeed begin with my husband playing his bassoon in a local concert, but the poem is not really about him, but about my father.

Ishq, as the footnote explains, is an Arabic word for love, which can be extreme romantic love or divine love. *For Dhillon on his birthday* is one of those written for children – In this case for a real child in the poet's family. Dhillon is both a Gaelic and an Indian name.

My Interpretation: *Grounded* appears to tell a children's story in rhyming quatrains, and expresses its young narrator's fascination with witchcraft and unattainable desire to be a full-fledged witch like her older sisters. In her vision, the two 'sisters' finally come to earth. The other poems written for children are *Rosi at Easter*, *A Spider*, and *A Snail*. **Claire's Comment:** You mention "poems written for children", and I agree that *Grounded* is best suited to a young audience, but I intended A

Snail and A Spider to speak to adults quite as much as to children. *For Dhillon* celebrates the birth of a baby, but I intended it for his parents, not for a young audience. In *For Rosi*, which you also describe as being written for children, I am writing about time and death, and did not envisage a young readership.

Someone Else's Holiday describes in full detail an exotic Scandinavian vacation planned by her friends Betty and Dennis. Initially she is primordially jealous of them and hates them, but finally wonders (in reverie?) if she can join them. *I'm Too Lazy To . . .* captures debilitated bedsit apathy and squalor, with a gracious offer of a nice cup of tea as compensation for practical tasks she cannot face. There follow some average rural reflections.

My Interpretation: *Wonder's Daughter* – represents Claire's self-image. There is some sense of self-contradiction – 'Rules, which I always seemed to be breaking/And longed to keep.' Wonder seems to have a magical power to restore Claire's eyesight and also confer a vision that is more than physical – "But when my hand found Hers/And I was gushed through by her energy and grace,/My eyes flew open. I saw it all:" **Claire's Comment:** *Wonder's Daughter: I meant this poem to be about discovering spontaneity, a trust in the essential goodness and meaningfulness of life, so that a sterile dependence on unchanging rules could be left behind.*

My interpretation: *Ark* begins as a bitter gloss on the Biblical legend. God and Noah are 'pig-headed patriarchs'; the true agonies of the species on board are depicted unflinchingly. The jubilation at the sight of the dove with the twig is untainted. One solitary passenger, a lark, heads skyward when all the other creatures rush for the land; I found no reference to the lark in the Bible version, but

it does give the ending a high note (in more ways than one). Is this an example of Claire taking artistic license? It does come across as yet another instance of a poet's inspired creativity and this survivor poet's resilient and positive spirit in the face of adversity. **Claire's Comment:** In your comments on *Ark*, you say, "I found no reference to a lark in the Bible version". But I am clear, in the poem, that the lark is my own invention ("of which old texts make no remark"). I am including the reader in my joke, taking him with me on my imaginative journey.

Dave Russell

THE BALLAD OF BILLY SNAGG

Bold Billy Snagg went out for a sly, quiet fag –
a puff of smoke,
he was on the main drag, souvenir shops,
lights that kept flashing, restaurants, bars, on, off,
but he kept on getting blown out by relentless
slags, never lighting his cigarette –
he'd won some money in the arcade there,
Sylvester Stallone, Rocky, fixed local mafia
gambling machines; he was feeling woolly, pink,
candy-floss, but he was at a loss, his next
adventure.

Poor Billy Snagg –
the Incredible Hulk ripping open his clothes,
walking barefoot over glass, cuts between his toes,
there he goes, no slags –
life ain't cute, life ain't kind.

Sulky, soft, solemn bastard,
Oliver Cromwell, roundhead, uncircumcised –
he went out for a fumble and a shag, Billy Snagg,
returning with a chicken kebab,
a tour around the go-karts, chicken kebab,
chilli sauce and whiskey to make his tongue numb.

He was almost unrecognisable in the morning,
special fried rice, barbecue spare ribs,
a bag of corn crackers if he remembers correctly –
after getting mixed up in a bare knuckle fist fight,
his ears flapping like elephants –
nothing doing, going nowhere –
life ain't cute, life ain't kind.

Simon Robson

Man of Peace and other poems by David Malin

Gaia Press 2015 ISBN 978-0-9561251-1-8 £6.99

MAN OF PEACE

AND OTHER POEMS

by

DAVID MALIN



Man of Peace and other poems by David Malin

Gaia Press 2015 ISBN 978-0-9561251-1-8 £6.99

I have to say that this collection hurt – in the best possible sense of that term, as it is so full of challenging tensions. One is constantly forced to reverse, and rotate, one's judgement as one reads on through this panoramic kaleidoscope.

The title crystallises the concept of this collection – the apparently lunatic is a saviour, a visionary, a source of inspiration. In *Stranger*, an ultimately pathetic character,

whose “. . . emotions are a weeping cyst//Of Pornography and Lust”, evinces a profound sense of mission: “His inner vision is a quickened foetal ear/He hones the light inside him to a fatal beacon . . .” Making a tortured ‘pilgrimage’ along the arteries of mechanised travel, the seeker consolidates his vision: “He hones the light inside him to a fatal beacon/All humanity lies there.” In his fantasy, he takes over the conveyances – “He steers the stinking carriage. He hails/A cab and bunks him.” Then he becomes the supreme prophet, with power over humanity – “He has their minds and souls/In thrall, their eyes ablaze with spell.” *Man of Peace*, the title poems, presents an idealised figure, a personification of purity. Beautiful opening line – “He breathes the rapt smoke of your fading dreams”. Malin’s dualism is apparent: “He gives away nothing, he gives away all . . .”

High is a celebration of euphoria. All is expanded, to gigantic, elemental proportions: “I am a god in a god, satanic lava” (shades of the orgasm of god and the devil). Diminution is concomitant with expansion: “Our souls are a gasp in the black hole of Om . . . We are motes in the eye of God . . .” The written word takes over the mind: “The poem eats itself then spews up incense”. “Heaven is pouring through a hole in my head” – wounds and defects signify enlightenment. *Master* celebrates the supreme inspirational catalyst, who prevails against all negativity – “His shadow moves/The ghost of hope/His nothing pulse . . . His footsteps are an elixir/Of silence.” There is a jarring note of contrariety in ‘A cloud world/wrecked by peace.’ This seems to indict complacency about states where there have been cease-fires and treaties, which edit out and blank off awareness of continuing conflict and suffering. The ‘hypocrisy of peace’ is also referred to in *God Takes Pity on Kindergarten Children*, a deeply compassionate poem,

reminding us that in many ways adults can be as needy as children.

The environment reflects the duality of Malin's characters. **In my reading of *A Winter's Day in Spring*** – pessimism and a sense of futility in the midst of glowing optimism. The swirl of fallen leaves and dust make the environs feel like Hell. Humanity is dragged down by, the past – 'an ego-ark/outscheduling miracles', so no magical escapes. Even the beautiful sawing of the lilac blossom "seems more outlandish/than Winter."**David's comment on this poem:** it's the 'heady magnitude/ of hand/ touching hand' that 'seems more outlandish/ than winter', not 'the lilac-blossom'. And, as for providing a gloss for readers on such as Govinda, Tara and Shiva, haven't poets always, at times, used obscure/archaic words without always explaining them? (Eliot? Yeats?) (Isn't that what the Internet is for? (!))

Malin uses a backdrop of current affairs and science as a context for his characters, foci for their fantasies and aspirations.

Strange Magic – A dreamer with infinite powers of self-re-creation – and mutation; he is transformed into the iconic Captain Magic. He becomes another man's brain, another woman's breast, also the spirit of love ". . . wantonly wandering/the roadside . . . Neon vision, radiant meat". He then refers to 'Hope foresworn, bright Despair': this is a reiteration of Malin's apparent dualism, akin to his negative gloss on peace in the earlier poems. There is another stage to his mutation: he assumes the power of the elements: "I am/the pulse of amoebic void/Chasms fall like petals/through aeons of war"; later he declares himself to be 'The Galaxy's heart'. The poem proceeds to an apocalyptic vision of war, whose absurdity of war assumes cosmic

proportions – "the cosmos//farts like an old balloon/and is chucked in a trashcan by a mystic tramp". 'Captain Magic' is shrunk to a thread of spittle on the chin of dying Jesus, then expands on a cross 'a billion miles high' – Supremely sacrificed in the nuclear testing grounds of Nevada. *It would have been reader-friendly to have a footnote explaining the Hindu and Buddhist background of Govinda, Shiva and Tara.* There is a lament for oppressed humanity: 'Anger incarcerated/with no hope of counsel/Fear, unacknowledged –/a dark stranger on the door'. He feels he speaks for the mass of humanity he is speaking to – "I am/the voice in you even now/that tramples roughshod/on my truth/like Autumn leaves" – a suggestion of self-contradiction/self-destruction.

Stranger Magic – dualism again: "He is the Devil in a mask of God." (He later refers to 'God and Satan locked in orgasm.')

He shrinks to 'a web of dust', he expands into a supernatural being, wielding power over the elements: "His thoughts rotate the Cosmic drill . . ." But at the same time he is the universal victim of sadism. Feeling in danger of being devoured by his TV, he gets his apocalyptic vision – 'Atomic galactic quantum mindswirl crack-up/Yellow white blue blackhole flash starburn . . .' He becomes the elements: "His stomach erupts slugs/With eyes of blue fire/He is a walking crushed boil, spurting lava, sun and meadows . . .". He becomes the symbol of dictatorial evil. He is a chronic case, desperately in need of surgery: "The Doctor/with eyes the size of the Universe,/arrives with his scythe of broken dreams". The Doctor and his equipment seem to be in need of healing!

In *Games Played Against the Fading Light – Life is But a Dream*, the protagonist is a smaller-scale Magician, with power to control his destiny. He can switch on and off his

visions of his love. “The Magician’s feeble Apprentice/Flicks off bits of his own soul//Into his coffee . . .”. He “coughs himself awake”. But underneath this power, there is a bedrock of helplessness – “He only glimpses/Reality//Between the meshes of his sleep/and waking.” “He’s walking on bunches of ill energy:/A winsome ego, made wayward//By Hope.” For Malin, hope is as ambivalent as peace.

Fantasy is balanced with reality, when the character suffers at the hands of science. *The Man Who Sat Up Waiting Seven Days for the World to End* – a human ‘laboratory specimen’ disintegrates, and is distilled, under the direction of Dr Frankheimer. This name carries a triple association. Frankheimer was a radical film director, who did an exceptional ‘take’ on the film version of H G Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau* – where animals are ‘humanised’ and then revert to their animal natures. To me there is an additional resonance – of Dr Frankenstein and Robert Oppenheimer, pioneer of the Atomic Bomb. A human being goes through a cycle of being generated and destroyed. The Seven Days idea is an interesting gloss on the Creation myth.

Such feelings raise the issue of hubris, which Malin bravely confronts: *The Man Who Thought He Was God* – if one really takes one’s desire to be a godhead seriously, one accepts the total load of pain – “he is a hell in a hell”. Imagery of discordant, tangential composites continues: “he walks the arctic darkness in a flurry of nails . . . he is the glimpse of a symphony in a heartbeat of radium . . .”

Nor does he flinch from existential depths: *Death in Nantille* seems to refer to the death of a stranger, someone who did not personally impinge on the author, and who therefore in some senses did not exist, or only existed in hypothesis. The reference to ‘the

childhood//I never had’ suggests extreme deprivation and unhappiness for the author in his formative years.

In Malin’s world such reveries are counterbalanced by the image of a human individual as victim. *My Sister Dies*: the demise of a severely mentally handicapped 18-year-old, which may have been a merciful release: “The breath/That for years/Had forced half-formed words/From her torn brain/Was leaving.” Phone call to a Night Nurse is a powerful evocation of nocturnal loneliness and desperation. Shades of gorilla and wolf-man lurk in the background; a dead telephone line is described as “Listen to God Talking/Listen to Eternity . . .”

Some struggle bravely, as in *Broken Woman* – one of the Dante-esque damned. Ritualised evil prevails with a vengeance – ‘cutprice cannibals . . . the shrine of a thousand poisons . . . Her babies escape into her hair/Like cursed worms’. “She fashions her heart into a huge holy fist” to combat this evil, but she is blankly stared at by her mother and ignored by her father. Art relates supremely to life “. . . the whole world, it seems, is soaked/With the ink drained from the poem.” But she struggles on – “Her thoughts are on fire/Like corridors of mirror-eyed peacocks/Her soul is a ghost in a stone” – highly original gloss on the phrase ‘getting blood out of a stone’.

Out of Her Mind is a hyperbolic picture of derangement. “Her mother sits atop/a pyramid of corpses” – shades of Golgotha! “Her sister decants herself from the ink/of night . . .” She loses all conventional articulation “. . . her voice is smoke./She walks, her words are fire, scorched of all meaning.” A touch of anti-religion: “God is in there somewhere, white beard/soiled with ectoplasm” She assumed gigantic proportions – ‘tall as a cyclone’. She is desperate for relief,

but cannot obtain it: “Her heart wants to burst/but the whispers won’t let it” She has to wait ‘tight-fisted for Jesus’ (whose advent will be coincident with her death?)

Much suffering stems from the machinations of science and politics. In *The Egg Donor* he paints a gruesome picture of this ‘giver of life’. “He is a packed showcase/of clammy eyes . . .”. There seems to be a malignancy about the ova; is there a sub-text of fear of overpopulation? The phrase ‘shrouds of umbilical bracelets’ shows the dark side of the birth process. The agonies of the operating theatre are described with total clinicality – “. . . bleeding packages/of unsutured Time/Their suppliant legs are splayed/in obscene Y’s of apostasy/Their supplicant wombs/gawp like raw wounds” – a hint of remorse with ‘he flails a caked strip/of conscience’, a suggestion of revulsion in ‘blubbery cocoons’. Biological pangs go cosmic in ‘Calving dreams from the crashed moon’s eclipse’. There is a sense of malignancy about him, but he is still revered: “He coasts the watery wards/A gloomy locust of light/Hero-worshipped/by his quadriplegic acolytes/Their fealty/burns back the sanctity of Dusk”.

Silkwood – the hugely suspicious death of Karen Silkwood had always remained fixed in my mind since that tragedy in 1974. In my opinion she was a heroic martyr, struggling to save humanity from nuclear hazards. In this poem there is a bitter irony about this tragedy perversely becoming a comfortable media legend – ‘Her enigmatic blood/In elegant autopsy phials . . . Lawyers wrangling in lush courtrooms/Glittering with atomic fall-out.’ A further depth of irony in ‘The pity only a ghost might feel/At a grain of sand’s/Destruction.’

Malin is rightly critical of the repressions engineered by of advertising and journalism, as in *Illusion* – a poem dealing with ‘this world

of sheared senses/this world of garbled bargains’.

Chernobyl Rain Thoughts recalls that great radiation disaster. I was impressed by the images of ‘cyclists/ disguised as lunar explorers’, ‘Trees . . . lean like dark skeletons/against the unrepentant sky’. *If My Art* is an ultimately reasoned appraisal of artistic aspiration. The intensity of art must not be so great as to wound or destroy, but he wants his words to be absorbed into natural phenomena. Final statement of equilibrium – “I try and sift the balance of words like sand,/Weighing down all hope of a brave or endless flight.” *Snow* – however familiar snow is, it always retains a sense of magic, capable of putting anyone off balance, and inducing an impulse to start a new life.

The other poems in this collection diverge to some extent from Malin’s dominant themes, but are of comparable power. *Skiddaw 1990* – the ramifications of an earthquake, in which a mountain becomes quasi-animate – “Spits out shattered slates like teeth” – a wrecked environment – ‘smashed ladders of rocks/Torn tapestries of roots’. But there is a final escape to peace, and sleep.

The Man with the Moon and Stars in His Eyes – wistful evocation of the splendours of nature, leading on to a sense of unfulfilment, in the form of a locked garden and an unfinished poem.

The Return of Little Boy Blue – a pertinent opening quotation: “If you can remember the sixties, you weren’t there.” The mythology of the Sixties may indeed be more convincing for the detached observer. The first stanza seems to refer to the ‘rural retreatist counterculture’, where the ‘lost souls’ sought out their derelict farm cottages. It then goes on to describe global ‘back-packing/hitchhiking’ and how many of these

expeditions came to grief. A profound sense of pain in “mother held open her womb for you”. Mum and Dad eagerly await the return.

Hymn to Britain feels like a reworking of the theme of ‘My God, My God: Why hast thou forsaken me?’ The Lord (Jesus I presume) seems conspicuously absent from the bleak inner urban landscape. The poet speculates on where, and what, he might be – perhaps not the epitome of virtue, but at one with the most violent, vicious and corrupt. A seething indictment of a dubious icon: “Would you turn Your blood into wine, or watch it run out of the faces of the disappointed, as it does, every day?”

In conclusion – I am disturbed, I am intrigued, I am aroused.

Dave Russell

Hour Of Writes – a new creative literary outlet

There’s no shortage of literary prizes; for women, teens, children, published authors and novices alike. In the gaps between these existing prizes, a new form of competition has taken shape . . .

Hour Of Writes is a peer-reviewed weekly writing competition that encourages anyone and everyone to put aside one hour per week to write about a given topic or theme. Poets, writers, and those who identify as neither have jumped at the opportunity to listen and be heard. The competition has attracted an international crowd since its launch in

December 2014, with winning entries from the UK, USA, India, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Hour Of Writes has grown into a space for discovery and exploration, creating a community for published and non-published writers to engage in public discourse. Unlikely collaborations have resulted in thought-provoking themes, including '[Organs of Donation](#)' at the Deconstructing Donation Conference, and '[Robots with Feelings](#)' at the Robotics and Sensor Opportunities conference. This year will also see the publication of the first **Hour Of Writes** magazine.

For more information about **Hour Of Writes**, you can download our Press Release here: ([PDF 119KB](#))

We're offering a select number of journalists the opportunity to try Hour Of Writes for free. To claim your free token, copy the voucher code below and follow the instructions [here](#).

Hour of Writes is really interesting, and you could take a look at it, and maybe talk to me, have a go at entering it or even write something nice about it. That's, in short, what we were trying to say with the whole press release thing anyway. It's at hourofwrites.com and all the latest entries .

Workshop News

We lost the use of the Tottenham living room at 639 due to refurbishment.

We had a workshop at Mala Mason’s flat on Saturday 4th April; there were five of us, with

3 people sending apologies. The first half we did feedback session with each participant presenting an unfinished poem. For the second half we did some automatic writing based on I BELIEVE!

It was very relaxed & informal & a good time was had by all. If it continues at Mala's place, we are thinking of putting a limit of 8 people on it & making the w/shops closed. For details contact razzpoet@yahoo.co.uk

Razz

Stop Press!

From Tara Fleur

I was interviewed by **Andy Bungay** at **Wandsworth Radio**
<https://m.soundcloud.com/chiminea-wandsworthradio/tara-fleur-interviewmp3>

This was at Ingrid Andrew's/Jason Why's event which I am now helping run.

I have also been weaving in many dark verses to Ingrid's performance poetry piece, *When Woman Created The World*. This interview talks a little about this collaboration and about my own journey.

A Shipping Forecast

Lundy Fastnet 527

Good, occasionally poor

Showers, good

Rain Later in North East

Occasionally gale 8

Back in South
Becoming cyclonic
Faros light icing
Falling slowly

13 falling more slowly
994 or 6

Light vessel automatic
1001 rising slowly
Recent rain W NW 3
16 miles 999 failing slowly

Now rising
A transient ridge of
Pressure high

Decreasing 3 at times
Then fair later

Good
For a time then
Becoming variable
Scrawly at first

For something lighter go to extra

Abol Froushan

**An Invitation to
The London Launch
of Bonnie Burstow's book**

Psychiatry

and the Business of Madness

On **Friday 12th June 2015**, at

**Palgrave Macmillan,
The Stables Building,
2 Trematon Walk**

(near Kings Cross Station)
London, N1 9FN

'The most hard-hitting and comprehensive critique of institutional psychiatry that has come out in decades'.

MANDATORY RSVP

lauren8spring@gmail.com :

You will not be allowed to enter if you are not on the confirmed guest list so please RSVP to lauren8spring@gmail.com

Surrey Poetry Festival

SATURDAY 9th May 2015

It was bright and sunny here this morning and we watched the eclipse by holding up a colander in front of the stairwell window, producing multiple small images of the moon's silhouette across the sun. I thought afterwards I could have traced them, or taken a photo, but it was more interesting just watching.

John Bevis

Welcome to the **5th Surrey Poetry Festival** which will begin at one minute past Midday on **Saturday 9th May** in **The Ivy Arts**

Centre, at the **University of Surrey**, Guildford.

A diverse array of writers – from New York, Shropshire, Cataluña, Hastings and beyond – will perform for 25 minutes each; there will also be collaborations and an open house rendition of **Bob Cobbing's** seminal ABC of Sound to fire up the evening.

Tickets are **£12.00** all day, and **£6.00** for Students.

Individual sessions: **£6; £4.00** for students.

The festival is supported by the **University of Surrey, School of English and Languages**. <http://lpp.ms11.net/etruscan>
07905 082 421

etruscanpublishing@gmail.com

JOHN BEVIS, DAVID ASHFORD, JOHN SEED 12.00-1.30

JOHN BEVIS worked in visual and book arts at **Coracle Press**, and later in printing at the Victoria & Albert Museum. *A study of birdsong, Aaaaaw to Zzzzzd*, was published by MIT Press. His writing on art includes *Certain Trees*, printed in Norfolk, and *The Suburban Fauvist*. Poetry includes *Some Alternatives to Flock* and *Window Paintings*, a 'cold war narrative' to accompany the monochrome paintings of **Stephen Skidmore**.

DAVID ASHFORD's poetry includes *Postcards From the House of Light* and *Xaragmata*; his account of literary and artistic responses to underground travel, *London Underground*, is a cultural geography. He runs **Contraband Press** and five year ago launched the University of Surrey's new wave of public-oriented poetry events five years ago. A large collection of poetry in translation called *Code Talker Paradox* is nearing completion.

JOHN SEED is author of *Manchester: August 16th & 17th, 1819*, (Intercapillary

Editions 2013) and *History Labour Night* (Pig Press, 1984). His early poetry featured in *A Various Art* (Carcanet). *Brandon Pithouse* is due this winter from Smokestack Books.

He has written on 18th-19th century religious dissenters, and migrants' history in London. *That Barrikins*, Pictures from *Mayhew II*, was published in October 2007.

"Brief lives, a moment in time – costermongers, coalheavers, sewer men, seamstresses, soldiers, shopkeepers, domestic servants, old-clothes dealers, rag-and-bone men, petty thieves, prostitutes, street people and casual workers of all kinds, old and young, male and female, thousands of unnamed and unremembered people of mid-nineteenth century London fill Mayhew's pages."

3

JOHN HEALY – A reading from

The Grass Arena, followed by Q & A with the author, 2.30-3.30 pm

In 1988 Faber and Faber published *The Grass Arena*, an award-winning and now almost universally acclaimed autobiography of a former vagrant alcoholic,

JOHN HEALY, who spent 15 violent years in a wino jungle when begging carried an automatic prison sentence. In prison Harry the Fox taught Healy to play chess. Out of prison he was a lookout for a mob that used to run scams on Post Office books, using the washroom of a public toilet as their office. Healy won ten major British chess tournaments, forcing a draw from the Soviet grandmaster Rafael Vaganian, at that time graded the second best player in the world.

His *Coffeehouse Chess Tactics* was short-listed for *The Guardian Chess Book of the Year* in 2010.

The Grass Arena is now a Penguin Modern Classic.

EMILY CRITCHLEY & JOHN HALL

4.00-5.00 pm

EMILY CRITCHLEY has published many poetry chapbooks, including *Hopeful for Love Are Th'Impoverish'd of Faith* and *Who handles one over the Backlash*. Her selected writing, *Love /All That / & OK*, was published by Pinned in the Margins (London, 2011). She is editor of the forthcoming *Out of Everywhere 2: Linguistically Innovative Poetry by Women in North America & the UK* (Reality Street).

4

Dear Luke,

It's 5.15pm.

All these people in a tube crushed in together – strange.

I write across the soft wires & the hard wires
& all collective unknowns
in a bid to guess that you're the other side
this train,
& no one knows it.
The crisis in my head –

it'll keep till dawn.

Till then I wanted you to feel –

from where I scrooch –

there is no blame

(eye-deep in someone else's elbow).

This city's musculature, it spits me out at

Greenwich, where I stay, feelingly, for news.

Till then, so long.

JOHN HALL is a visual writer, poet and influential teacher. His is a consistent preoccupation with language, its

soundedness, appearance on the page, and what it can get up to in the guise of poems.

His poetry, whose cadences echo Elizabethan poetry and the wit of Frank O'Hara, shows what can occur when language becomes crystal clear. He has been part of the UK contemporary poetry world since his poems were published in *The English Intelligencer* in 1966. *Keepsache* and *Else Here* are published by **Etruscan Books**. **Shearsman** publish a two-volume collection of essays on performance writing, poetics and poetry.

"Your gift is so constant in lyrical delicacy that its vulnerability to chill is an exact index of damage and of how far music will reach."

J.H.Prynne

His intelligence, courtesy and care for writing in English have made him a key figure in English poetry over recent decades."

Peter Hughes

PATRICK MCGUINNESS & NICHOLAS JOHNSON

5.30-6.30pm

PATRICK MCGUINNESS "has written the great book on Belgium and modern memory, *Other People's Countries*, winner of the 2014 Duff Cooper Prize. He takes his place among those singers and painters of the haunted, the melancholy, the diminished, the caricatural, the humdrum: **Ensor, Rodenbach, Sax, Huysmans, Simenon and Magritte.**" **Michael Hoffman**

Patrick McGuinness is one of those vanishing figures: the multi-lingual, multi-cultural, pan-European literary polymath. He is the poet of *The Canal of Mars*, translator of **Mallarmé's** *For Anatole's Tomb*. He has edited exemplary editions of poets **T.E. Hulme, Marcel Schwab** and **Lynette Roberts**. His first novel *The Last Hundred*

Days was set during the fall of Ceausescu. He is a Chevalier des Arts et des lettres.

"**NICHOLAS JOHNSON's** poems and assemblages include *The Lard Book*, a gargantuan visual book on tracing paper in a silver case. This was occasioned by the upside-down handwriting of clairvoyant NY poet **Hannah Weiner** and the 1996 BSE crisis. *Listening to the Stones* is a post-colonial poem about French occupation in New Caledonia, which led to the Heinghene and Ouvéa massacres.

Cleave tells of the carnage of Foot and Mouth, from a rancid farm in Tyneside to Highampton in Devon, the first agricultural plague of 21st century Europe. *Haul Song* is his best known work, a lyric poem set in the slower, older, rural world, the bankruptcy corridor of 1970s farming Devon. If the words aren't to hand then he makes them up, gaps and misalignment working as render for his meter."

Andrew Kötting

Bob Cobbing ***An ABC in Sound***

Performed by **STEPHEN MOONEY** and friends, & special guests **JESSICA PUJOL DURAN, HOLLY ANTRUM, SIMON PETTET**

7.30 pm to Close

Poet and gameing theorist **STEPHEN MOONEY** herds together performers from the wild verges, audience and collaborators from the day, to give blast, trumpet and tongue to Cobbing's 50 years young poem!

Give *ABC in Sound* a great gully of voice. Stephen Mooney's poetic works include *Shuddered, DCLP* and *The Cursory Epic*,

and he is co founder of the unique Veer Books, nearing its 100th publication.

JÈSSICA PUJOL DURAN is the editor of *Alba Londres*, a magazine on translation focused on British, Spanish and Latin American literature. She has written and translated extensively in Catalan, English and Spanish.

Her poetry and translations have been published in anthologies such as *The Dark World: anthology of language art* and the Catalan anthology *Donzelles de l'any*, 2000.

She has two chapbooks in English: *Now Worry* (Department, 2012) and *Every Bit of Light* (Oystercatcher Press: 2012).

HOLLY ANTRUM's *Catalogue* featured in her first solo exhibition *A Diffuse Citizen*, at Grand Union, Birmingham in 2014. Hovering our attention between near and far, seriousness and humour, **Jennifer Pike** (93) recites *ABC in Sound* (1964) by her late husband, **Bob Cobbing**. This film portrait draws attention to a lesser-known Pike, pivotal to a group of experimental artists and performers.

Catalogue features sound from **Bow Gamelan, Ensemble** and **Lol Coxhill**.

By exploring a 'catalogue' of work and the question of how one might take shape, the film overlaps with questions of growing old as an artist. Gently overlaying analogue and digital references

Antrum thinks about the relationship between the artist – as subject and the artist-filmmaker. Holly Antrum's 16 mm work takes into account film's accrued digital, mechanical and 'performative' qualities with sound and colour footage.

Antrum looks for people, places and lives which somehow create a narrative cross-hair, captured and embedded to a material awareness of a narrative film.

SIMON PETTET

"A former English waif but for decades a pillar of the **St. Mark's Poetry Project**, the core of all that is New York about the New York School, Simon Pettet in *As a Bee* offers a collection of tough, fragile musings.

Like the lizard in *Some Musings in the Solarium*, the reader will find "health and warmth in the depth/ of winter/ and this is not what lizard expects."

Elsewhere Pettet advises, "Have faith / The show / is about to spiral – And it does."

John Ashbery

HEARTH, his Collected Poems (so far) appeared recently from Talisman. Pettet edited *Selected Art Writings* (Black Sparrow, 1998) of the poet **James Schuyler**.

'Adventure, Aventure, Aventereure, Adventure' – the iconic opening words of Bob Cobbing's *ABC in Sound*. Over 22 minutes, beginning with A and ending with Z, Cobbing recombines letters, words and sounds to effectively rewrite the linguistic institution of the English language. It is a mythic re-beginning –

Bob Cobbing's experiments had precedents in the continental Avant-Garde movement of **Guillaume d'Apollinaire, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti** and **Kurt Schwitters**, and was of a milieu that included, among many others, **Henri Chopin, Eric Mottram, Dom Sylvester Houédard, John Latham, Jeff Nuttall** and **Ernst Jandl**.

Jonathan P Watts

