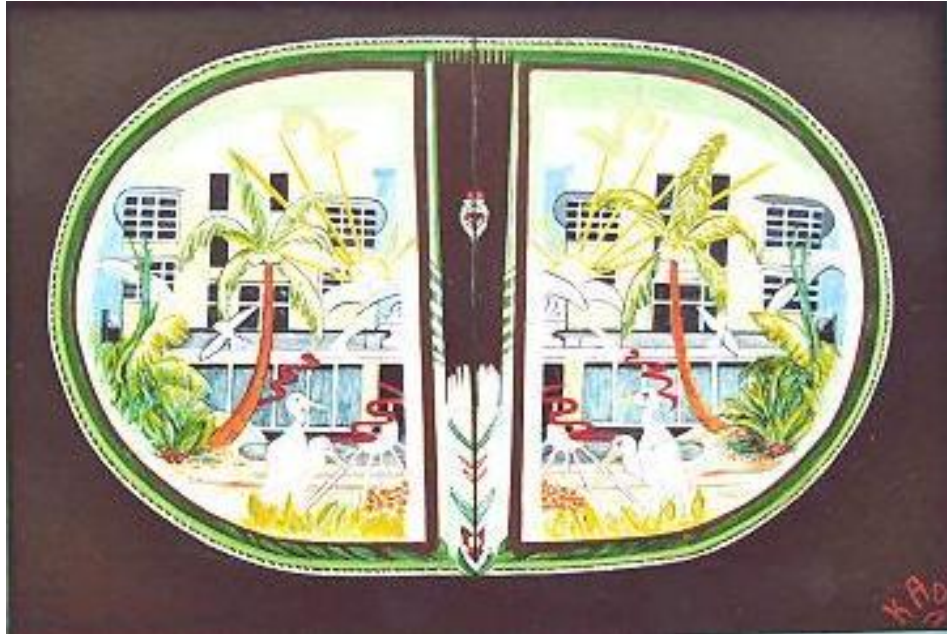


Survivors Poetry and Music

Poetry Express Newsletter #41



Cover Artwork by Keith Dyett



**Two Dedications to Xochitl Tuck
Anniversary Event**
Claire McLaughlin – An Oxford Education (poem and article)
Keith Dyett – Featured Artist

Poems Feature – including
Translations of Greek poems by Stelios Skarligos
The Man Who Disturbed the Universe
by Maria Fafalios
Poems from Bristol

**Christopher Logue Memorial
Graffiti Board**

Reviews
The Day Hospital by Sally Read
Waters of the Night by Howard Mingham
Cull by Robert Hertner

Slutwalk – Interview with Roisin Lee

Exits and Entrances

It's difficult to encapsulate the past few months save in antiphonies: near disasters with real ones, brightly countered by new dawns and some sparkling paintwork.

The most grievous loss – from which it's difficult to recover poise, is the death, on 18th December last, of Xochitl Tuck, our Events organizer from the early days, who presided over the Poetry Café and Tottenham Chances so unflinchingly that when she didn't turn up on the 12th December, the authorities were alerted. She died of Meningitis in hospital six days later. The funeral was on the 31st, and a Memorial will be held on her birthday, May 8th.

Xochitl was an institution. When SP was under-funded, indeed unfunded, she kept – with Razz – SP Events undimmed through the patches of dark we've experienced, particularly over the even patchier last decade, when the old way of managing after we left the Diorama was disrupted, and much was left from us in viable events. Xochitl, Razz and Dave Russell have kept it all together almost giving the lie to any notion of flux or re-orientation. Xochitl had strong ideas and aesthetic choices; these, interfused with new talent, made her line-ups distinctive. She was conspicuously loyal to many performers, if occasionally dismissive to a few she didn't care for. The overall distinction of her stewardship – one might almost call it a fiefdom – was exhilarating, individual in a world of cloned events – and refreshing in this utopian refusal to mourn the death of liberalism, or radicalism. She refused to admit their passing and so do we.

Xochitl's funeral was an unusual affair. It was about as far removed from the Wake as you could imagine, though Humanist and directed with music: except not the music anyone associated with Xochitl. A Wake had been held on the 21st which lasted all night. Her family attended but weren't able to extend this to the funeral, which an old friend who knew Xochitl's father, presided over instead. We were subjected to Elgar's Nimrod from the *Enigma Variations*, Chopin's Piano Concerto 1 slow movement, Delius *Walk to the Paradise Gardens*, Mozart's Flute Concerto finale, Verdi's *Nabucco* Slave Chorus (appropriate, the Hebrew Slaves a rousing liberal cause in the 1860s) and even Wagner's *Valkyrie* Ride a la *Apocalypse Now....*, Xochitl's father used to imprison her and her friend, forcing them to listen to Shostakovich and much else. Her radical parents were remarkable in themselves. Xochitl died at an absurdly young 66; she was able to save three other people's lives through organ donation.

After we all filed to the coffin in threes, someone raised a cheer for Xochitl and some of her familiar spirit was restored. But I liked the all-encompassing memorial to Xochitl that included this quiet one. There'll be more time for partying on May 8th.

That day too I wrote a Notice of Quittance to our landlord of over seven years; much had to be negotiated. Through the perseverance of Celia and Diane – our Trustees most involved in our leaving after my initial letter, we were able to leave the office on February 18th, forced to take *everything* with us. Seven foot spars of cabinets for instance were consigned to Islington Recycling Centre by myself and two women in their late sixties (one drove the van!) old friends of mine who gave their all. The sight of them hauling a large spar to a vat and hurling it over the edge is one of the abiding memories of the year so far.

Thanks to Mjka, Kay and Marius we moved rubbish, archive *et al* to the Marie Curie shop – who lent us a massive cage on four wheels for disposable material and what we donated (plants went swiftly to homes from the street!), and archives to Marius and myself, the whole operation from 8.30am to midnight, involving North and South London and Hove/Brighton.

St Mary's NHS has welcomed us with open arms and paintwork. We're installed in a supportive Support Unit – also appropriate for peer networking, with a friendly staff (Rachel, Cat) making us at home immediately. My thanks too to Celia and Rogan Wolf, the latter running a support group here, who through Celia then himself made this new premises off the Edgware Road and Paddington Green both known to us, then available through mediation both swift and silken.

So much for our recent travails. We're still connecting up as I write, with much disrupted. We're back for April, and hope far more in evidence than we have been. Dave Russell will tell you much, Marius Jankowski who's worked with Dave Skull of Creative Routes has his own stories of representation to tell. There's much to be done in developing the website: We're liaising with Disability Arts Online whose Artistic Director /Editor Colin Hambrook has been a pillar of support (and an SP signatory in 1994). These will await settling down, and the austere packaging of the latest PE, which we hope to re-present when ensconced in leaner but now certainly positive new age, with infinitely less overheads and a sustainability we've never had before. Welcome to the spring, I trust; and not one of the government's making, but ours.

Simon Jenner

Obituary



For all involved with Survivors' Poetry and Music, 2012 ended on an extremely tragic note with the devastating news of **Xochitl Tuck's** death. She had been a mainstay of Survivors for over a decade, infinitely supportive and universally loved. A full-scale memorial is planned for May 4th, at Tottenham Chances, at 4pm, an attempt to do justice to her precious memory.

She was absent from the Poetry Cafe, and subsequently found dead in her flat, apparently from a sudden attack of meningitis. I feel that a prompt reaction might have saved her life. This tragedy should be an example to us all to be more conscious and caring.

Almost simultaneously, sound poet **Geeten** passed on, followed in January by singer **Peter Cadle**. They are both deeply mourned, and honoured by Memorial events.

General News

I have at last received the long awaited translations (trs. Yannis S. Anastasopoulos) of three Greek poems by Stelios Skarligos which I had wanted to include in the previous issue. In Yannis's words: "The music of his poetic language in Greek is pretty exciting, and I hope that this music can be appreciated in English, to a certain point, by my translation. My brother who is a philologist and freelancer editor and translator had a final revision of this translation."

While searching for more poetry contributions, I had a substantial input from **Hazel Hammond**, key organiser of poetry and acoustic music events in Bristol. Bristol proves to be a hotbed of Survivors-related activity, bristling with potential Survivors affiliates. Some Bristol poems are featured in this issue, and I want the next one to be a 'Bristol Special' with poems, articles and artwork.

Dave Russell

More on Xochitl

Xochitl Tuck – Last of the Beatniks

When, a few years back, the Arts Council withdrew funding from the Survivors Poetry group, its then organizer Xochitl Tuck took on the energy and costs of running events herself. She continued to do so up to her death in December 2012.

One-time Woodstock neighbour of Dylan (they famously argued), friend of *Lily* and *Rosemary* of Dylan's *Jack of Hearts* song, expert on Broadway Musicals, ex Greenwich Village *boho* with an unusual name and an unusual life. Somewhere in between her legendary exploits and the drudge of tireless flyer distribution, is 'the real Xoch', an organizer of countless gigs, bringer-together and encourager of artists – supporter of scores of people who overcame loss of self-confidence to write and perform their poems and music, firstly at the Poetry Café, more recently also at Tottenham Chances.

Raised in Manhattan during the McCarthy era by Communist and Union Activist parents, Xochitl attended the progressive *Little Red School House* with Julius and Ethel Rosenberg's son, until blacklisting forced the family to move to Spain. Her mother was an actress and artist, whose voice and talent Xochitl inherited – her writer father a wild character who allegedly won their house in Valdeolmos, near Madrid, in a poker game. This was a haven for the expat left-wing American intelligentsia, Xochitl soaked up its atmosphere until she returned to New York in the more welcoming climate of the early 60's – where her contemporaries included Robbie Robertson of The Band, whom her friend married, and Art Garfunkel, whom she dated.

After releasing a pop single and hanging out in the *Bitter End* café, fresh from a spell in Switzerland and newly remarried, she came to London in the late 1970s. One marriage later, and after a move to Stoke Newington, she took over Survivors' Poetry in the mid-1990's with the support of her (late) musician husband Alistair Brinkley.

A confirmed London night-scener who never rose before two in the afternoon *at the earliest*, she could be her own worst critic – a self-confessed American Middle Class girl who could have been anything, but who chose the *jazz life*; she often said the Kath Tait song *River of Life* best described her. Always generous, never thrifty, what money she had passed easily through her hands to fund her and others' lives. Living in a damp, cold flat with rarely charged electricity key meter complicated matters. When she contracted a throat infection last year, it subsequently worsened and became Meningitis, from which she died. Her close friends and half-sister Irene were with her at the end.

With the intelligence of the Beats, the lifestyle of a Rock'n'Roller, Xochitl – whose name, given to her by her Mexican-born mother, means 'flower', will be fondly remembered and terribly missed by anyone who was inspired, touched – or kicked into touch – by her free spirit and enviable appetite for living. *Xochitl Tuck: b. 8 May 1946; d. December 19 2012*

Penny Potter (Owner/Administrator, Tottenham Chances)

Anniversary Event – 8th November

A lively event, with an appreciative, and largely participating (if not capacity) audience. Much regret was felt that **Peter Campbell** was unable to attend, though stalwarts **Joe Bidder**, **Hilary Porter** and **Frank Bangay** – involved with Survivors since its inception were. **Colin Hambrook**, stalwart of Disability Arts in London was there, as was **Rogan Wolf**, organizer of an online poetry site, a very welcome new arrival.

The event was opened by **Simon Jenner**, who gave a resume of current funding negotiations, and Survivors' general situation, which is presented in greater detail in Poetry Express Newsletter #40.

The highspots of the evening were Joe's and Frank's panoramic surveys of our 21-year history.

Joe pointed out that Survivors' Poetry was set up in April 1991 when the then Arts Council of Great Britain approached him and Peter Campbell, saying that they had funds in their Disability Budget, and wanted a literature component. Arts Council awarded a grant of £6,750, in June 1991. It was told by the ACGB that it had to have a national perspective; the application must go beyond the initial ideas. In answer to a promise that this could be done, Survivors Poetry was awarded a further grant of £5,000 in January 1992 and proceeded to organize its activities without an office or an administrative structure; initial operations were planned from Joe Bidder's living room. From the beginning of 1992, with the guidance of **Anna Neater**, National Outreach worker, events were organized all over the country, drawing massive audiences. This coincided with Survivors' first publication *From Dark to Light* (120pp) – which sold out within months. The Guardian intervened and published a feature article on Survivors, giving it full national recognition.

Frank Bangay organized dozens of events all over London, involving comedians, musicians and poets. These all managed to get paid, and Survivors could always pay the performers. In 1992, Survivors' groups were formed in Leeds, Liverpool and Brixton. In 1993, through the supportive collaboration of the Arts Council of Great Britain and the London Arts Board, Survivors acquired office space at the Diorama Arts Centre nr Great Portland Street, and to employ one paid worker.

The early 90s were a period of austerity, when much Arts Council funding was being cut. Joe became Trustee and Director. In 1994 it became a National Charity, all its trustees being Mental Health System survivors. There was massive interaction with hospitals, arts organizations, performance organizations and community groups. A large number of workshops took place, some of them lasting a whole week. "When you are successful, your problems are just starting" said Joe.

Within 2-3 years the London and Scottish branches each had 3 paid staff, and there were 10 other groups in the UK. In 1996 there was a 3-day National Residential Conference, organized for all Survivors' Poetry Groups. By 1998 the Arts Council had awarded £250,000 to run a 3-year programme. This, together with a £500,000 grant to the Poetry Society, was the largest grant ever awarded to poetry in the UK, which transformed the face of poetry in this country, and made it legitimate for people to 'come out' as Mental Health System Survivors. In 1997 Anvil published the epoch making poetry anthology, *Beyond Bedlam*, edited by Ken Smith and Matthew Sweeney, where 50 established poets declared their past involvement with the Mental Health system, and where similar involvements on the part of now deceased poets was also declared. Anyone could be proud

to make such an admission in such distinguished company. Joe concluded by emphasizing that “there are still mountains to climb: in order to reclaim territory, you have to believe you can do so . . . Do not forget that you have friends in the Arts Council; their hearts are in backing you.”

He added that the National Disability Arts Archive Collection (NDACA) should be approached with all archivable material (mainly from the office).

Some later words of reassurance: “You don’t need drugs; it’s all happening naturally.”

Frank, bearing a crutch, struggled bravely against severe physical pain. He gave an outline of SP’s antecedent organizations, Prompt and CAPO (Campaign against psychiatric oppression). They raised funds via donations and gigs, the main venue being the Metropolitan pub in Farringdon. Frank was a founder member of **Rock Against Mentalism**. The term ‘Mentalism’ was coined in the mid-80s to delineate prejudice against sufferers of Mental Distress (cf. Ageism and Sexism). He commented that then “people either saw us as a campaigning group or as a poetry group (they were not aware of the blend)”. He had set up workshops all over London, catering for people living in sheltered accommodation, in places such as the **Fulham Day Centre** and the **Imperial Day Centre in East Acton**. The monthly gigs he organized included such subsequent celebrities as **Jean Binta Breeze** and **Billy Childish**. Frank left his administrative work at Diorama in 1997, because of exhaustion. He then described his pursuit of funding for a writers’ workshop in Hackney. His investigations led him to the Barnaby Centre in Homerton, which developed into the Core Arts complex. The latter remains a thriving organization. Only through Frank’s outline did it become clear to me that Core Arts was an offshoot of survivors. Core Arts certainly stands out as a shining example, and a possible basis for ‘reclaiming territory’. Frank gave an amusing account of early CAPO gigs being organized from (then hospitable) public call boxes. Later, he gave a spirited vocal-and-harmonica rendition of *Train Blues*, followed by an eloquent *Prayer for England*.

Hilary Porter explained that she had not initially wanted to get involved with SP, but devotedly did so when Joe dislocated his shoulder; she remains glad that she did so. She read the poems *In Praise of Eccentricity* and the ode *To My Unborn Grandson* (her 11th! – “your gestation has not been easy”). The stark poem *Bones* refers to disinterring bones; its point is that evil tends to live on in some form long after the decease of its originators and perpetrators.

Colin Hambrook expressed great personal gratitude to Joe and to SP in being exceptionally supportive when he was homeless, and enabling him to build his base in the Disability Arts Movement.

Dave Skull described how he first met Frank Bangay in 1983, which catalysed **Mad Pride** and **Creative Routes**, which he specified as having been inspired by SP. Dave reminded the audience that his events do not depend on funding. He mentioned his monthly events supporting protests against Welfare Benefits cuts. He announced the forthcoming **Billy Blake’s Birthday Bash at Tottenham Chances** on **November 23rd** including **Edgar Broughton**. He also mentioned **SP’s** and **Creative Routes’** featuring of John Sinclair, great poet and founding member of the White Panther Party.

Rogan Wolf announced that he may become a Trustee of SP. He reminded the audience that he had an extensive mailing list and a bi-lingual poetry site online. He thought he could help to facilitate

funding. Rogan proceeded to read his *Haiku from the Waiting Room* – some perceptive phrases, like “If I hold my breath, I stop time passing”.

The main performing spot **Alastair Murray** did his usual spirited set, including *Something Wrong*, *Finding My Way Home*, and *Hearts and Minds*.

Floorspots formed the majority of the audience, and their contributions were lively indeed. **Helmut Schultz** once more aired his dazzling virtuosity, both solo (plus poem) and providing a great backing for **Razz**. I can certainly emphasise with *Deteriorating Brain*. The benign warmth of **Jessica Lawrence** was appreciatively received, as was the great musicality of her friend. Another musical treat came from **Lawrence Mathias** – a highly accomplished guitarist (especially in ragtime mode), who has just started singing – a bit of a Polymath too, involved in many of the visual and performing arts. While mentee Wendy Young reader her grim indictment of ‘normality’ *Swing Low Sweet Iscariot* – ‘time to dehumanize again. **Lucy Carrington** was as exuberant as ever.

Another welcome newcomer in the form of lutenist **Keith**. A very moving finale from **Phil Davies**, with *Life’s Too Short*. He really does shine forth as an outstanding example of all disabled artists struggling valiantly with their ailments

Finally, a special vote of thanks to the beautiful **Diane Lightfoot** and the lovely **Celia Potterton** who set the scene tone and vibe so impeccably, having triumphed heroically over considerable adversity and confusion!

The December event to some extent repeated its predecessor, the main difference being the contribution of **Peter Campbell**. Peter read *That Pleasure*, *Inner View*, *Crisis Advocate*, *Rhyming to Death*, *Fourth Station*, *Never Really Knew Him*, *Drugtime Cowboy Joe* (one of my favourites), and *A Madman Teaching*, all published in his collection, *Brown Linoleum Green Lawns*.

Two very moving memorial events for Xochitl and Geeten took place, on January 10th at the Poetry Café, and on January 14th at the Mental Fight Club. Hopefully there will be more of our events at that venue in the future.

Dave Russell

Claire McLaughlin

AN OXFORD EDUCATION circa 1964

FOR Sue Houghton

An undergraduate, I was taken from Lady Margaret Hall, “for observation”, to The Warneford Hospital, an elegant 1820s asylum, like a minor stately home, on the green summit of Headington Hill, “for lunatics selected from the higher classes of society” (at the laying of the foundation stone by the Bishop of Oxford there were present the University pro Vice Chancellor; the Provost of Oriel; the Principal of Magdalen Hall; the Proctors, Drs Williams, Bourne and Kidd), and still, 140 years later, flanked by sloping lawns, with a ha-ha, and a Lodge at the gates; a discreet nurses home, from which each shift emerged in scarlet-lined black cloaks, as if in solemn academic procession.

And inside, Ward F1 – F to the right of the building’s central staircase, M to the left – seemed almost cosy at first; self-contained behind an oak front door, its sunny ground-floor rooms opened off a pleasant carpeted corridor.

Creature comforts to ease the mind’s pain. And here I observed:

Ingrid, from Somerville, doing cartwheels on the lawn;
In the day room, big, timorous Mrs Ludwig and foxy Mrs Jameson in a huddle of knitting and whispering;
In the bathroom with the green rubber curtains, Faith’s armpits full of grey hair, with a reek that made you gasp;
Ann, 17, with a tiny, high voice, staying in bed because her legs wouldn’t work (and one hot evening, Dr Durrant shouting at her that it was all in her mind);
in the two single rooms, a poet weeping, and a mother trying to love her baby;
Sister McQueen, razor-cut blonde hair under starched white cap, a Belfast accent she was queen of the trolley with the plastic cups of pills.

But when, from observation, I slipped suddenly into action – when, the clouds having gathered in my darkening sky, the fearful wind began to rise; when I had plunged my fist through a window (satisfying drama of shattered glass, blood, cries of alarm); when I had several times had my bottom pumped full of scalding Paraldehyde; when I had cunningly slipped away from the OT hut, and out of the hospital grounds (bent on buying a large bottle of aspirin and lying down in a convenient wood), but been recovered by a doctor in a car; when I had had 18 goes of ECT without discernible effect on my deepening disturbance; then I and my belongings were marched up three flights of the polished wooden treads, and another front door, triple locked, was opened to admit me,

and I was ushered into Ward F4 – not so cosy –
bars on the windows, plastic cutlery, bath plugs available only on request.
And even here, through the thick gauze of medication, for a time I managed to observe:

In the day room, bolt upright like a stork, Mrs Augustus, knitting;
in the dormitory, Scottish Jeanie pleading not to be taken down to the dementia ward, F3 (but she was);
Elizabeth from St Hilda's, her face as grey as flannel, lying on a mattress on the bare green lino of a side room
(and once, when someone left the kitchen unlocked, running down the corridor with her hair on fire);
little-girl Hannah, in her little-old-lady body, telling with big, round eyes that she had killed her husband and hidden him under a boat on the beach;
Margery, trunked massively like a tree, like a roaring lion in her anger ,
being wrapped up in a sheet by 5 giggling nurses and carted away;
Sister McDonagh, old-maidish and shrewd, fussy grey curls and a hank of keys hanging at her waist.

But when my storm, which could no longer be held back, burst
– when there came crack after crack of giant thunder,
when the earth moaned and split open to engulf, when the seas heaved up in spouting mountains to assault the air, when fire sizzled in the sky,
when there came pelt after pelt of lashing rain,
when I was no more than a fallen leaf whirled by the gale, at the mercy of my mastering elements;
when I had been filled with drugs and put to bed,
waking, after many hours or days, from the shouting terrors, the sly horrors of nightmare, to the hideous dislocation of the present, begging only to be made insensible;
waking sometimes with tears of gratitude for being held safe by the firm, white sheets, for being looked after;
waking once to find Dr Durrant standing by my bed, and to lean up and punch him in the belly;
waking often to find myself sitting on the lavatory, resting my head for utter weariness against the aproned stomach of a nurse;

then, gradually, the storm blew itself out, and I began to get better.

And first it was enough to get dressed and sit in the dayroom for an hour with a magazine;
and then I could do little tasks around the ward, like laying the tables for lunch;
and then – though I was frightened the first time– with a nurse I could leave the ward, and actually step outside the shelter of the hospital, and go for a walk in the grounds.
And although I recognised the world, inside and out, it was as if my way of understanding it had gone,
and I stood naked to it, like a new-born foal that shivers on its sticks of legs.
And everything filled me with wonder – the marvel of people's faces, the sweetness of fresh air, the green vigour of grass.
And I saw there was design in everything; and I had an intimation of such power and beauty, it was almost too much for me.

But it would have been revelation, not emotion, that overwhelmed me, because I was not yet sufficiently re-embodied to have strong feelings.

Like an imago, perhaps, lying damp and crumpled beside the broken chrysalis, waiting for the air to dry it, the blood to circulate, waiting for its tiny sails to hoist, unfurl and tauten, and for their secret pattern to take colour.

There was a mirror in one of the bathrooms. I met my own grey eyes. I thought I could see, pushing up through the plump, pale, girlish features, a woman's face.

And then, with another improving patient, I could go down to Oxford on the bus, and have a cup of coffee at the Kenya Coffee House.

And then I was allowed to go into Oxford on my own.

And it was summer, and none of my college friends was up, and I didn't have any reading to do; and kind Warneford did not make me go home, but let me be its guest, requiring only that I return to the ward every evening in time for supper;

and so I could spend day after day in sunlit Oxford, wandering its peaceful quads and courts

(attaching myself, now and again, to a party of tourists, listening to the guide let drop great names from English history, the founders and sustainers of these ancient cloisters); gazing up into the blue, blue sky with its freight of spires and towers, cupolas and crenellations; drifting through the galleries of the Ashmolean, letting my eye be caught by a delicate French clock with a faery chime, a huge Chinese jar, the enchanted landscape of a Claude;

losing myself in the book-lined labyrinths of Thornton's and Parkers, browsing the dusty stacks for hidden treasure;

sitting on the river bank, watching the happy punters, feeling the cool breeze on my skin, the willow trails stroking my face.

And Oxford healed me. And the Warneford let me go at last,

and I found myself walking once again down Norham Gardens,

to where, beyond the usual north Oxford domestic piles, an interesting procession of buildings extended round two sides of a square:

Lady Margaret Hall (founded 1878 by Edward Talbot, Warden of Keble)

– a sequence of evolvings and addings-on, from venerable Old Hall, through pretty Wordsworth, and Toytown Toynbee, to the Byzantine surprise of Deneke (Giles Gilbert Scott, 1933),

to which time, and common purpose, had nevertheless given a certain unity of character

– a nunnery (all F then, no M for another 15 years) of individual cells, common rooms, old library and new library, hall and chapel

– and all of it backed by gracious, spacious gardens running down to the Cherwell.

And the college welcomed me home, and I chose a room on the first floor of Wordsworth,

with a tree rustling outside the window, and on the narrow divan a worn cream counterpane patterned with brown leaves.

And here were my friends again. And I observed:

Five foot two, with one long thick plait, heart-whole Martine, curled up on her windowsill with a book;

Julia, hunched over her piano, playing with awkward elbows and anxious fingers;

Gwyneth, sick with longing for her wild Welsh valley, getting drunk at the principal's sherry party;

slyly smiling Evelyn, with a man waiting for her in her room;

unfriended Di, cramming her loneliness with food, inserting herself into other people's lives with offers of lecture notes and cups of coffee;

at the far end of her blue-carpeted, book-lined sitting-room, past a maze of spindly-legged tables bearing Victorian treasures, tiny Miss Tod, waiting like an amiable spider to hear me read my essay.

And I disappeared from individual view, borne away on the current of undergraduate life:

dinner in hall, and coffee afterwards in someone's room;

visits to the Camera to excavate a useful article from the Proceedings of the Modern Language Association;

cycling to lectures in the new St Cross building

("Hallo! Don't you remember me?" said Elizabeth from St Hilda's, parking her bike next to mine, pink-cheeked, bright-eyed from the ride);

sitting in my room, in the chilly small hours, struggling to finish an essay. And I observed, among others:

Shelley, his flashing eyes, his floating hair (surely that was him!), who suffered woes which hope thinks infinite, and forgave wrongs darker than death or night;

Keats, that nightingale, and man of melancholy – his soul would taste the sadness of her might, and be among her cloudy trophies hung;

John Clare, labourer's son, ecstatic poet of nature, who knew the vast shipwreck of his life's esteems;

peerless, unknown Shakespeare, who in this harsh world drew his breath in pain to tell his stories.

And I was happy, because I saw that, everywhere, I was surrounded by friends, and all of us engaged in the same endeavour: to endure adversity, and bring beauty out of it; to learn, and try to understand.

(See Article on p.27)

Keith Dyett

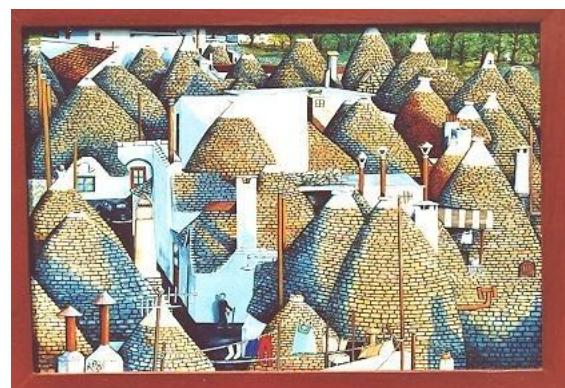
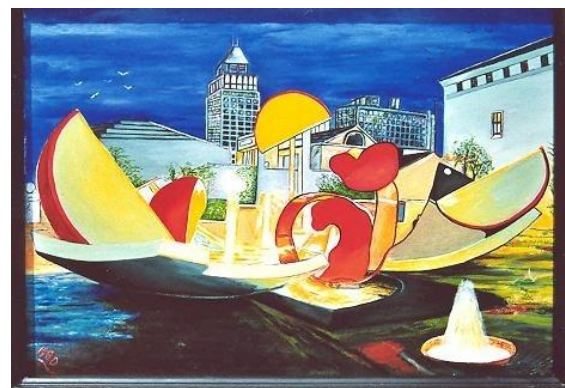
Art is the best form of therapy – at least that’s what Keith Dyett, from Broadstairs, believes. Keith, 67, began painting in 1975 when he was travelling in Israel. He said: “I was exploring my faith, and found myself on top of a small mountain, when I began painting. It was like therapy for me.”

Keith has painted hundreds of works over more than four decades and says he finds it soothing in times of trouble: “I use art as therapy, as a way of release. It is relaxing. I paint sitting down, so physically you are resting all your body.”

A self-taught artist, Keith’s work ranges from portraits to landscapes. Keith says he is inspired by the works of other artists as well as scenes that he has witnessed in his life: “If I like something, I like to produce it. It doesn’t get boring because I do different things. The main thing I look for is fineness. The finer something is, the harder it is and I like that.”

Keith’s paintings include an abstract representation of the Storming of the Bastille, a landscape of Brooklyn Bridge, and replicas of Meso-American codex paintings. As well as painting for his own enjoyment, Keith has exhibited in London galleries and executed private commissions.

(Isle of Thanet Gazette, 20th July 2012)





BLUE IN GREEN

For PJ Fahy

Slanted rain against evening sun.
Depressing, yet this is not despair.
Sun bounces off slick paths. Plangent –
like Miles Davis' *Sketches of Spain*

and my 1961 pilgrimage
to the cemetery wall at Pere Lachaise,
stopped by a detour to Place Clichy
to buy *Kind of Blue* which dominates

my shelf in its original cover, grooves
pitted by ten million revolutions:
Miles' trumpet on *Blue in Green*
and John Coltrane's tenor on *So What*.

Speaking of Coltrane, the rain has stopped
and the sun's reflection now glares; tough
hard-edged sheets of sound, stretched
harmonics, and a tender cry originating

somewhere between Savannah and Sahara.
I lay on my bed for hours, replaying
Giant Steps for that kick in the groin,
hooked on those delicious choruses.

Rain and sun, sun and rain – again.
The velvet grass sings, shimmers, stems
sparkle, spiral the violet-blue sky.
Miles and Trane are dead, but not in despair.

Joe Bidder

With Homage to Clinical Psychiatry

(Acknowledgement to Dave Russell's song)

"They fuck you up your Mum and Dad" wrote
Larkin.

the dead hand of the well meaning isn't
confined to
loving parents, for there's nothing compared
to the arrogance of clinical psychiatry.

Survivor of the Mental Health System is my
label.

Forty years ago I became a member after
shouting
truths at Franco in Malaga's streets. Hauled
into the state asylum,
pumped full of drugs, wearing an ankle-length
white smock,
the monks grinned as they tried narcosis
therapy for a week.

That's how it began. Fourteen years of
institutions,
psychiatrists and ECT before the drug to cure
all: lithium carbonate!
Psychiatry had no cure for my manic
depression (now called bipolar
in the latest version of psychobabble) but it
fucked me up.

Lithium produced a neurological disorder with
mobility impairment.

It also laid seed for more devastation –
secreted like a terrorist's bomb –
incurable kidney disease. The renal consultant
has special terminology –
Lithium nephrotoxicity – they're good with
words, doctors – how Orwellian!

It's wise to have a sense of humour in the face
of such tragedy . . .

Shakespeare made a good living from it and
psychiatrists too!

Survival is accomplished by rejecting the
mental health system,
to laugh at its assumption of superiority, its
subversion of language:
its ability to mask incompetence by never
admitting a mistake.

Joe Bidder

2012

Five Poems

Claire McLaughlin

Extremist

This is what happened to us when I was small:
men came with guns and took my Dad away,
my Dad who laughed so loud and stood so tall.

I could not stop them, because I was small.

And then we had no money left to pay
for things we needed – till soldiers came to call,

and took my grown-up sister out to play.
they gave her money; I saw her big tears fall.
But what could I do? I was only small.

Then other soldiers came, and built a wall
across the waste ground where we children played.

You can't believe how thick it was, how tall,
there seemed to be no gates in it at all,

I couldn't get to school; we couldn't pray
at our old church; we couldn't go and call
on friends and family, now too far away.

What could I do about it? I was small.

My lovely Mum got thin, her hair went grey,
I watched her growing sadder day by day –
oh, how could I help her when I was so small?

At last we wrapped her in her old blue shawl
to make her pretty for her funeral.

And then my sister said we couldn't stay,
and brought me to this strange land far away.

I'm grown-up now, I'm powerful and strong.

My life has dignity, purpose and intent.

I am God's sharp and shining instrument
visiting on sinners his fearful punishment.

I'm not alone; a group of us belong
together; we're all young and strong,

All ruthless in pursuit of what is wrong.

We are God's specially chosen instruments
visiting on sinners his righteous punishment.

We plot in secret; we work hard and long,
to rid God's world of men's defilement –
grown far too gross and vile for amendment,
it must be cleared away like excrement.

We look for little pleasure or enjoyment
in this bad world, but a magnificent
reward is ours in heaven. It won't be long,
for I am God's sharp and shining instrument
visiting on sinners his dreadful punishment.

Abused

under your skirt

above the knee

under your jeans

I always see

the swell of buttock

and the slide of thigh

the yell of sex

that blasts my eye

murders my hearing

razors up my gut

oh door of memory

that will not shut

the small heart fractured

long ago

that could not bear

to have it so

Going to see the Therapist

Waiting at her front door, distractedly,
I saw her through the window of a room;
beyond the dappled glass I saw her loom
as fish loom in the dim vaults of the sea.

Oh, then I felt such love! – but when she
stood

a moment later, smiling, at the door,

and we were face-to-face, my own face wore,
of course, just the bright, empty smile it
should.

But I had seen too much – not eyes, but heart
had glimpsed a world where I could never
come;
swim of a life in which I had no part:
the lit, green rocking of her deep-sea home.

So I went in, to take the client's chair,
hoping to hide my love, and my despair.

Dissociation

I am my own sky.
Boneless, pallid, inert, I hang
over my own landscape. Below,
dark purple colours in a curve of mountains.
A lagoon, *étang*,
unfringed by reeds or trees,
is beached by plains of sand.
Nothing is moving. Nothing grows.
Nothing can happen.

Cardboard country.
Or perhaps we are a world
at a primal stage of evolution,
have been like this for a million years.
Unchanging. Untroubled.

I wish I could ignore the watery glimmer
that is a rent in my cloud, high up,
with a glimpse of clear sky
where a sun may be shining.
It makes me queasy,
like the shifty, one-eyed glitter
that precedes a migraine.

I used to get them
when I was trying to grow up.

There was so much pain.

Goodbye with Love

Caretaker Self
I'll always remember you
how hard you worked
how tirelessly you tried
to make them smile
to earn their approval
to win the love
that would keep Me alive

In my childhood
how hard you tried
how you sat at your books
how you laboured over homework
how meek you were at home
how you toiled to gain friends
to win the love
that would keep Me alive

In my twenties
how hard you tried
to be pretty when prettiness was required
to be elegant when elegance was required
to be sexy when sexiness was required
to be serious when seriousness was required
how madly you flirted
how gravely you frowned
to win the love
that would keep Me alive

In my thirties and forties
how hard you tried
to keep the house clean
to make the bed nice for him
to make the baby smile
to make the children happy
to ease the daughter's path
to win the love
that would keep Me alive

In my fifties
how hard you tried
how you cradled me to therapy
how you coaxed my first steps
how you spoke to my terror
how you dabbed at my rivers of tears
how you stroked me in my despair
week after week how you willed me to endure
to win the understanding
that would help Me to be born

Dear Caretaker Self
you are dying now
your eyes are closing
in your ash-pale face
your hands are thin as paper
you are worn to a gauze
how little fun you had
how little joy you knew
how little pleasure was yours

May you wake
to a kinder world than this
and gentle hands receive you
may soft lips kiss your cheek
and a sweet smile greet your waking
may you walk in green meadows
and smell the flowers
may you have no more work
and try no more

Goodbye with gratefulness
goodbye with love

© **Claire McLaughlin**

About the poet

Claire McLaughlin is a London-based survivor poet who is currently being mentored by Debjani Chatterjee. She was educated in Oxford and worked as a commissioning editor for a major publisher in the late 1970s. After retraining as a counsellor in the 90s, she

worked for a variety of mental health agencies and is now retired. Having lost her eyesight, Claire taught herself Braille, which she uses for reading poetry. Debjani says: "Claire is not only a very talented poet, but is someone open to new ideas who will not let her disabilities stand in the way of pursuing her art. Her commitment to poetry is admirable."

Four Poems

AFTER THE DIAGNOSIS

(For my own 'Mr D'Arcy)

When we walked away from the Breast Clinic, everything had changed in our lives. And yet the August air was teasingly pleasant, the hospital grounds were green, the going-home traffic had the same monotony, Sheffield was still a favourite city, children wore football strips in a triumph of hope or a come-what-may unreason. The world had the gall to go on without shattering into a zillion shards. We walked with slower steps to Brian's car. We did not look each other in the eye, but I quietly slipped my hand in his.

PROGRESSIVE PROGNOSIS

(For Mr Stanley R Kohlhardt at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital)

A merry summer Santa, my surgeon came with a present – a 'good' prognosis. 'You recall the poor prospects you had? I'm happy to say they are now good, much improved!' The change was down to chemo and the op., with radiotherapy still to come. We knew I owed him my life.

His bearded face wreathed in smiles, he
waited
for effect and a drum-roll in my head:
'Fifty percent chance of five-year-survival!'

Suitably impressed, my husband thanked him.
But I was still in an ill-omened place.
Never good with numbers, I blame Dozy-
Docetaxel now for my innumeracy.
But a 'fifty percent' arithmetic
percolates even a chemo-thick brain.
I think I thanked him, grudgingly; I lied.
I envisioned the proverbial glass:
half-full for this good man but half-empty
for me who had hoped to live forever.

CANCER IS...

Cancer is the cat
sitting open-mouthed below
the nest I must fly;

a sly hyena:
a scavenging predator,
dribbling and laughing;

a razored needle,
transforming into a spear
in each painful side.

Cancer is lightning:
picking on random victims -
and can strike again.

CANCER PATHWAY

In what mad moment
did I buy the ticket for
this cancer journey?

The pathway is dark,

there's no map, no directions,
no light to lead me.

Cancer erases
the ordinary wrinkles
of my daily life.

The side effects are
just 'collateral damage',
so-called 'friendly fire'.

Hansel and Gretel
taught me to scatter breadcrumbs,
to survive this ride.

Anniversaries
are milestones on the pathway.
One day at a time...

© **Debjani Chatterjee**

About the poet

Debjani Chatterjee is a survivor of cancer and post-traumatic stress, a patron of Survivors Poetry, and founder of the Healing Word. She has mentored several poets and is active in literary, cancer and mental health organisations. Andrew Motion has called her 'a poet full of wit and charm'; while Barry Tebb says she is 'a national treasure'. A prolific writer, she has won major prizes. Sheffield Hallam University awarded an honorary doctorate in 2002 and in 2008 she received an MBE. A former Royal Literary Fund Fellow, she has had many residencies, including Sheffield Children's Hospital and York St John University. Debjani's latest book is *Let's Celebrate! Festival Poems from around the World*, which she co-edited with her husband Brian D'Arcy.

More from Greece



Syntagma Square, Athens photo © Phil Ruthen

The Tree of Truth

If the tree of truth roots into your soul,
do not say you shall find a hatchet to cut it at
once.

Hit its strong trunk with the axe as much as
you wish
slash its bark all around
and pull it out slice by slice to let the trunk
naked
smearing it with thick whitewash
and even if your mind finds another thought
and may put you in another action
the tree shall not die.

And if you start working from the top
chopping its branches and its buds powerfully
hitting it to the ground and even lower
you only prune it, and nothing more.

And if you put up a destroying fire on its roots
and the fire burns all its trunk and branches
you will destroy all that grows and blooms,
under the sun.

The root remains and deeply nests in the
earth
and deepens juicy, and roots even deeper
and it feeds forked small roots around
among the contrary and the close together
stones
with its body being solid, across the depth...

In spring the tree searches for the sweetness
of an April
with the sun's caress and the dew of the night
struggling to appear high in the sky. Roof of
the whole universe
its vivid foliage, both for the eagle and for the
chaffinch.

Stelios Skarligos

The Poor Neighbourhood

Tonight the solitude's rain exhausted me
wildly
in fruitless and waterless landscapes, like a
lemon tree flower

the memory of my neighbourhood hits me
like snowstorm
and awakes the memory of the beloved
moment of my life.

And there I stare at the dry leaves falling on
the earth
innocent souls whose lips do not smile, not
even for a moment.
Only the storm begins, deadly lightning

as the cruelty hits their hungry mouth . . .
The labour piles up fine palaces all around
not accepting to miss the stare, high to spread
a nursling.
Faithful pair of injustice the naked lie
it throws a handful of dust, within the burning
eyes.

Bitterness, dim drop, the dark chaos rains
the heat of the sun into the soul's flower, that
gets warmed up.
The bitterness buries celebrations and joys
and prime
even for the life's mother there is no source
flowing . . .

A flower fountain with the sacred and
innocent dreams
which wish to seed roses-dawn at the cupola
of her sky.
Slow and moonless nights, its mind's wings
get exhausted and pale in the dust where
hatred dances.

Misfortune and prejudice build a dancing
romance
in its sacred breasts and they steal its flowers.
And while the necessity's snow destroy fruits
and leaves,

they revive weak, to be bathed in the
sunshine . . .

It is a long time ago that deaths celebrate
and the foamy-made lands and the seas
count.

The naked rocks in the twilight, speak of the
crime
within the doubtful moons, that appear like
the deaths.
But the blues and the sighs as they raise to
the stars

to create million winged lightnings in the eyes
the lives capture the long ages
to build upon the losses roses-woven castles.

Stelios Skarligos

Beyond today

Beyond the darkest thickets of the fraud
the truth's garden blooms.
And far away from the dim rivers of ugliness
the clean water of beauty flows.

Even if the day is dark today
and mist spreads around like a veil,
even if the thick fog surrounded the earth
like a familiar face that stares at you as if you
are a stranger,
do not shed a tear for a future form of life.

The tree of today getting dry
throws its pale leaves to the ground
and the root that fertilizes from the leaves
gives birth to the new bud of the century.

With love's inexhaustible source
water the new bud for it to bloom
the imperishable life of Virtue.

Run far away from the mostly dark thickets of
the fraud
and enter into the truth's garden.
And run away from the dim rivers of ugliness
to drink the clean water of beauty.

Stelios Skarligos

Stelios Skarligos was born in Western Greece near
the town of Agrinio in 1922. He wasn't able to
finish his law studies because of the war. He
participated in the Greek Resistance against the
Germans and was later awarded a medal for his
contribution to that.

He wrote poems mainly that were published in
literary magazines of his time and published a
book of poems called "Beyond Today" in 1972. He
also wrote theatrical plays one of which was
staged in the Comedie Francaise in Paris during the
Greek dictatorship portraying the life of Greece at
that time. Stelios Skarligos died in Athens in 2001.

*(All three poems translated by Yannis S.
Anastasopoulos; re-published by kind permission
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THE MAN WHO DISTURBED THE UNIVERSE

By Maria Fafalios

In a recent issue of "Poetry Express
Newsletter" I read an article about
Greece. Indeed, economic depression has
taken its toll on all Greeks and – as
expected – especially on those most
vulnerable. The Public Health Care
System has a hard struggle for survival;
the Mental Health Sector an even harder
one. There is widespread fear that
Sheltered Accommodation Units may
close down, some of them having already
done so. Many Mental Health Service
users face the risk of returning to
Psychiatric Hospitals.

In such gloomy times, I recollect the poems of the late George Kokkinidis and, for some strange reason, I take courage from them. George, who died recently in his sheltered home on the island of Crete, was a beautiful man, a free spirit, encompassing the whole of humankind with his love and innocence. He was, in his own words, “. . . the tear, the man who disturbed the universe” (1).

Let us take a short journey and come to know this man, through his poetry (2). A poetry which reflects extreme pain, helplessness, the feeling of being stigmatised, lack of dignity; and at the same time hopefulness and tenderness, a breeze of fresh air and warmth which we all need so much, especially nowadays.

We shall start with an untitled poem, where George Kokkinidis tries to share with us his notion of “madness”:

*There was a drop in voltage;
I found myself in a well
but I continue sending you information,
now you know where I am,
the well was very deep,
the light of folly, you say,
the folly, the well,
and I am at its edge
trying to heal,
a well with steps, but they are slippery,
without a rope, without someone;
this is the condition of every crazy person
here, you have to understand.*

Agony and helplessness are to be followed by even more painful experiences, inside the asylum: incarceration, fear, lack of care . . .

Incarceration

*White room
headless figures
blue light
red at the end of the corridor
disappearance*

Psychos (3)

*How can they ask
“who are you?”
Without
precious little decency
to look into your eyes . . .
And if they cannot look straight in the eyes
let them look at the tear
running hot
like a crystal on the cheek,
just to see
their reflection cold.
Dressed in white
with subcutaneous intelligence
they ask...
And I cannot remember
neither my eyes
nor my tears.
Only them, in White
white, white
white smile
and those hands.
They work, you see,
with chains
wires
needles
Still...*

The antidote to such agonizing inner pain and solitude is, perhaps, ‘acting’. In the following poem George draws from

ancient Greek drama a similarity to his own personal, contemporary drama.

Mask

*Tragic mask
you laugh
and cry inside.
Forgotten
in time and space
you hold as holy bread
the solution to the tragedy.*

I feel that the poems of George Kokkinidis have a universal meaning. They speak to all of us, irrespective of whether we are users of the Mental Health Services or not. They reveal parts of our hidden selves. They give us courage to face the truth. They touch every human being's special needs: the need for love, for respect, for freedom.

George Kokkinidis stayed in the Psychiatric Hospital for many years. Some time ago, with the emergence of 'Care in the Community' in Greece, he was able to leave hospital and to move into Sheltered Accommodation. Upon discharge from hospital, though, his mind was still on his old time comrades who had remained back there.

Discharged

*Now that I am leaving I will never know
about you Brother . . .
anything more than the fact that I met you
during incarceration
of mind . . . and body.*

*I know, glass in hand
you will be crowding around
the table, three times,
to take various pills . . . and
the guy in white, with a shout,
will be verifying your. . .
special existence.
At night, sometimes
the moon will be strolling through
your ward
to comfort you in silence!
And you, your leg tied on the bed
will know that . . .
freedom cannot be squeezed
behind bars.*

I wish this short tribute to George Kokkinidis could include more of his poems, so that the reader would see for himself the points which I have tried to make. Nevertheless, even so, I wish I have done George some credit, for he was not only a friend of mine, but a friend of mankind – and beyond. He was, indeed, 'the man who disturbed the universe'.

Maria Falfalios

(1) This quotation was used as the title of Stavros Psillakis' documentary film, on the psychiatric hospital of Souda, Crete.

(2) The poems, most of which have been already published in Greek, were translated into English by Katerina Peretzi.

(3) The title given to this poem, deliberately misspelled in Greek, is a pun between the words *psychosis* and *psychos* (i.e. cold)

Bristol Poets

(with thanks to Hazel Hammond)

Was I like Atlas; supreme, tender,
Strong and compassionate?

I harboured your softness
From barbarous uncaring seas.

Provided shallow warm anchorage,
From which to set sail.

But too many storms and harsh spring tides
have left their mark

My defences have been worn thin;
The salt water seeps through

Cracks in my foundations. Fault lines
I can no longer hold against
The weight of your loss of self-love.

Jack Bird, 2013

Happiness

I notice that he is very interested in happiness.

“Some people don’t know how to be happy” he says
“and even when they are happy
you don’t get that energy off them.

I used to work Downs’ Syndrome kids
now they were happy
you’d go ‘whoooo’ and they’d just go off.
It’s not complicated
it’s not complicated with them.”

I doubt he would trade
his own complexity for Downs’ Syndrome.

“Some people” he goes on
“are miserable because they take
more pleasure in being sad than in being
happy.”

I am also very interested in happiness.
“Could be” I say.

He thinks people choose to be unhappy.
I don’t agree.

But really – so what?
We’re just talking to keep warm

Tom Sastry

Fallen Woman

Mud sticks,
sister of Icarus,
under the nails of pointing
fingers,
to the skin of idle tongues.

You can scrub your
treacherous dress,
those voluminous petties.
The prurient breeze still lifts
the hem
and sniffs beneath.

You tumbled before you
stepped
from Clifton’s glittering
parapet, the city
spread between your legs
like a dowry to the wind,
which wrapped itself around
your body
and possessed you,
as you somersaulted
like a clanging knell,

and plumped
the lecherous lover’s bed
that dipped to catch you
as you fell.

Deborah Harvey

15th July 2009

Jilted by her lover, Sarah Ann Henley jumped from the Clifton Suspension Bridge on 8th May 1885, only for her dress and petticoats to fill with air, parachuting her onto the muddy river bank. 1st prize, 2011 Chipping Sodbury Festival Poetry Competition

Closer

They've grown closer
over years,
coupled in the kitchen
as she peels potatoes,
arms encompassing her waist,
his breath on her nape,
on the trace of sweat that sheens
her pliant skin, her soft
accommodation,
hand clasping
the hand that holds the knife,
guiding the blade.

Deborah Harvey
20th October 2010

Iago

'Demand me nothing. What you know, you know.'

I
The dead dogs are starting to stink
forty years after the fact:
the trespasser with its throat torn out;
the family pet
bludgeoned, drowned
in the swimming pool.

Blood in the gutter,
drifting through water,
failed to stain the angel
child with the pointed chin,
fair hair, white hat,

a blinding smile.

Spectral dogs
footstep my dreams,
red-eyed in bristling, brute terror
but it's the glee
in your recollection
that hounds me.

II

After the wedding presents
I'll unwrap you.
Peel off your sheath of shantung silk,
your flimsy lingerie.
Then, when you are naked,

when I've got you
where I want you,
I'll shine a light upon you
as methodically, assiduously
I strip you,

paying attention
to that tenderest of spots
between your ears,
rendering service to your need,
wielding my whetted silver
tongue

exquisitely.
I shall dismantle you and smile
You will not notice how.
I'll only hurt you
as much as you allow.

III

You will not grow gills.
Breathing will always feel like
swallowing knives.

Those iron arms around your chest,
so strict your heart might burst,
will never rust.

A tonnage of marble and suds,
yet with the slowing of body and blood
comes
acceptance.

Your mind will close
like a sea anemone
in deep shade,

tucking away exploratory fronds,
those questing red and purple
feelers of enquiry.

Sometimes you might glimpse
a gaslit face, an intimation
of your sunk and shrunken self,

tarnished,
with darkness in your eyes,
a fractured mirror.

Or a reminder of your life:
rippled sand a furrowed field,
shoals of silvery sand eels

flickering,
like whitebeam leaves
in luminescent summer.

But mostly you'll forget. Amnesia
eases the worst hurting
with poultices of salt.

IV

Words were my protection,
written in silver around my wrist,
and the one that came unbidden
from the place that locks awareness
out of reach.

The pantomime is over.
All our straw is spun to fool's gold.
For now I recognise your name,
I see your lack,
the mark of Cain,

your father's hand
lying on your shoulder.
The diamond love you ground away
was only ever dishclout grey
to you.

Deborah Harvey

Remedy

Numb stump of a thing in hibernation,
stilled beneath the ice of a quiet pond.

It didn't miss the light. It hadn't asked to be
plucked through her mouth and left

to crawl about like some dumb creature,
that feels but cannot think, that doesn't
know

where it's supposed to be going. Don't pick
it up, don't touch it, don't
carry it over the road

like a toad on a spade or in a kindly
wheelbarrow.
Crush it, dry it, mummify it, and string it
around her neck,

hang it over her pap, that vacant gap
where once it beat. And let it be a cure for
contagion

or some other dread disease.
Let it be a remedy for love.

Deborah Harvey

The Coldest Spell

After he left, the coldest spell
in twenty years.
Nine nights of snow,

and frost on the bed

she's sledged
to the window.

There's salt on the path
and in her wounds.
She broods

on the poet
adrift in a winter
too distant for her to remember,

cutting her vengeance
from fire and ice.
She is more Ancient Mariner

sailing her ship,
her failure heavy round her neck,
the waters dreamless.

And the bridge between them
closed to traffic
by icy spears that shatter glass.

He requests his driving licence.
She writes her blessing
behind the stamp.

Deborah Harvey

THERAPY

They offered me Art Therapy
To ease my troubled mind
But a smaller room to 'Therap' in
I'm sure they couldn't find

"Fuck me!! Another prison
to put the one I'm in within
and sugar paper, pastels, pencil!!"
"sorry . . . our budget's rather thin"

So I 'therapped' at home and cured myself
Well at least delayed the crash
Till Conflict Resolution took me back
Uniting me with other shattered trash...
For that was how we saw ourselves

That was what we felt like
The intellectual, the manic depressive
The beaten woman, the drunk, the tryke

But wait! This thing is working...
Progress is being made
Three out of five have come alive
Stepped into sunlight from the shade

It's not so bad this Therapy
That frees us from emotional cages
Loosens bonds from frozen minds
And neutralises rages

Resolution was the name
And resolution was the aim
And resolution was achieved
The conflict put aside

Andi Langford Woods

Happiness

I notice that he is very interested in happiness.
"Some people don't know how to be happy"
he says
"and even when they are happy
you don't get that energy off them.
I used to work Downs' Syndrome kids
now they were happy
you'd go 'whoooo' and they'd just go off.
It's not complicated
it's not complicated with them."
But it's clear he wouldn't trade
his own complexity for Downs' Syndrome.
"Some people" he goes on
"are miserable because they take
more pleasure in being sad than in being
happy."
I am also very interested in happiness.
"Could be" I say.
He thinks people choose to be unhappy.
I don't agree.
But really – so what?
We're just talking to keep warm.

Tom Sastry

The Hanging Gardens

Not sleek and sun-stroked, not today:
the sea a jar of dirty turpentine,
leached browns that rust to grey.

Beyond the shore, steep cliffs stare into mist,
raw-faced, the colour of old blood,
old loves
whose hearts and carved initials
melt in salt and spray,
or are erased in a sudden roar and falling.

Above the edge
the Sidmouth gardens hang
and cling to treasured things:
a fence a bracelet; crumpled walls silk scarves;
and summerhouses, sheds
discarded trinkets,

while on the sand a lost tree,
wrenched from loam,
blossoms unexpectedly with foam.

Deborah Harvey

La Palabra del Alma

If I open my soul
To the endless waste
Of this thrown away life
Will something remain pure?

Like the last white crystal
In a field of nuclear ash
Like the last note of a piano
With perfect pitch
As it falls off a cliff
As the last clear tear
Falls from the eye
Of the dying poet
As the world lapses
Back to silence

Is this pure crystal

The first snowflake
That falls to create a clear glacier
That stretches into the Himalayas
The last note
A reminder of a lost symphony
A feast for the ears
At the start of famine

Or is it a skeleton
Bones stretching
Through sin
As the dry sand blows
Through its dessicated hair
As the wind wafts
Through the empty
Skull of the last conquistador
A dead king
With no kingdom
A broken wish-bone
In an empty dustbin

Tim Burroughs

I am a Musical Monk

I am a musical monk
A mystic with a mantra of quavers
A hymn with Dylan melodies
A cathedral with an apse
Formed by a Martyn's sound hole
I am a canticle with a trilling of notes
A human bird that can fly with sound
My meditation has become
The liturgy of alt tuned strings
Strung out between the beams
Of a secular but spirited vaulted ceiling
A cathedral made of notes
With the chords of past musical masters
The procession of the holy had become
A band of minstrels carrying their freedom
In the guitar-cased caskets of the luthier
Practice and learning have become
The new prayers of the cloister
An arabesque of minimized notes

Slurred with the slender gait of a treble clef
Choreographed for ear scansion

“Open the doors of perception
Open the lips to expression
Pluck the metal strings
To extend the sublime
In the black tailed
Notes of music time”

Tim Burroughs

An Oxford Education

I have such a strong memory of that long-ago life-changing moment – late autumn, 1961. A large, rather shapeless 18-year-old schoolgirl in a grey uniform mac, carrying a briefcase, I came home as usual that chilly afternoon, walked down our road, turned in at our gate, and put my key into the front door. I saw that, untypically, the hall light was on. I peered in through the glass. Someone had pinned a piece of paper to the newel post at the bottom of the stairs. I knew at once what it must be. I pushed in through the door, took out the drawing pin, and read, half disbelieving, the strips of typed lettering on the telegram form. Lady Margaret Hall offers place”.

But I can't remember feeling much. There was relief that the whole Oxford entrance thing was settled, and I had achieved what everyone wanted me to achieve; pleasure in the anticipation of my parents' and teachers' admiration; pride, a sense of having proved myself to be, to those who mattered, in some way excellent. But there was no response from me, myself. I had very little idea of what undergraduate life at Oxford, or any other university, would be like. I didn't know if it was what I wanted for myself. I didn't know

what I wanted. I had no social life, and spent as much of my time as I could, reading and writing essays on English Lit., especially 19th century poetry. I had little sense of the person I was. My early childhood had included traumatic experiences, powerfully repressed, which I would not recall to memory – let alone come to terms with – for another 30 years. Important aspects of myself were deeply submerged, inoperative. I was, in many ways, a disaster waiting to happen.

There were several undergraduates like me on the Warneford Wards, girls who, I suspect, would have had an emotional/mental breakdown at this stage of their lives, no matter where they found themselves. And no doubt there were similar patients on the male wards. There was also, at this time in the early 60s, a large house next to the main hospital, exclusively for students who, while not seriously disturbed, needed for a time more containment than their colleges could give them. I never knew anyone who was a patient there, but I guess it provided a supervised regime of work and relaxation, regular meals, a refuge from the perils of drink and drugs, and – though the formulation and development of “counselling”, as a way of helping people look at their personal difficulties, was only just beginning – meetings with staff members who could offer support and advice

Perhaps there is no period in life, from its very beginning to its very end, which is not one of transition, when we are not in the process of trying to let go of old ways of being, and acquire new skills and understandings; so that every period of life is both full of possibility– new lands to explore, wonderful new discoveries to make – and full of danger – that we may find ourselves not able to go on, may lose our way, or take a seriously wrong path. But, in our Western

culture at least, the years between, say, age 16 and 25, are perhaps particularly testing. It is now that we have to step outside the close shelter of family and school life; and we must keep moving forward, we cannot go back. The “looking after” that parents and teachers did falls away, and we have to find within ourselves the discipline to create our own structures, the wisdom to make good choices, the courage to experiment, the confidence to carry on when things do not go well. We know, unconsciously if not consciously, that the stakes are high: that we are beginning to shape our adult selves, to find out what work we will do in life, and who will go with us – who we will love. The prizes glitter, but the pitfalls also yawn. Inevitably, there will be young people who now discover for the first time that their childhood nurturing has not sufficiently prepared them for independent adult life, or that it has actually done them damage, or that their particular psychic make-up means they need special conditions in order to thrive. There will be others whom life simply deals a swingeing blow they are not yet strong enough to bounce back from. Among my relatively small circle of friends at Oxford were two who, I think, never saw the inside of the Warneford but came to grief nevertheless: a girl from a small rural community who could not cope with Oxford life and developed a serious alcohol problem; a young man who got a very unstable girl pregnant, did the honourable thing and married her, and then – finding himself caught in what seemed an impossible trap, took his own life.

Looking back now, after almost fifty years, to my own undergraduate mental breakdown, it seems to me that Oxford cared for me extremely well. Somewhere at the heart of the Oxford ethos, I believe, is a commitment to the idea that education is for the whole person, not just the mind, and a centuries-

long experience of the needs of young adults. When I was up, there were all sorts of ways in which the university, and the colleges, helped undergraduates feel safe, still “held”, even while they revelled in their new freedoms. The college system in itself – not exclusive to Oxford, of course – gives undergraduates a school-sized community to belong to, a home, an identity. At LMH in the 1960s, you could live in hall for at least the first two years of your course. And when I arrived in college as a fresher, I found I had been given a room on a floor where all the girls were from the same grammar school background as me, and two of them, like me, were from the London suburbs; friendship was easy, in a way it might not have been if I had been put next door to girls from Roedean or Cheltenham Ladies College, and several of those first-year neighbours of mine would become friends for life. Rules – attendance at tutorials, a certain number of meals to be eaten in hall, the midnight curfew – were few, but strictly enforced. The tutorial method, by which Oxford undergraduates were chiefly taught, also wove us firmly into the fabric of college life. We were taught in pairs, or even singly, so there was plenty of opportunity for dons and students to get to know each other. In addition to academic tutors, each of us had a “moral tutor”, whom you had to see at least once a term, and who was there to help you with any personal problems. I am sure none of the dons had any training for this role, and it might be thought that middle-aged or elderly women who had spent most of their lives in libraries and lecture rooms, and were probably unmarried, were the last people to be able to talk helpfully to 20-year-old girls about their emotions. But although some of the LMH dons may have been dry old sticks whose only real interest was research, the ones I encountered seemed wise as well as clever, and genuinely to like teaching me. My moral tutor, Miss Lea, was also one of my

subject tutors, and Vice-Principal of the college. She sent me postcards and letters throughout my time in the Warneford, including a Japanese card of Mount Fujiyama, hand-painted on silk, and a long excerpt from one of Donne's sermons, which she had copied out for me in her tiny, black italic script. I have these still, treasured possessions. She kept in touch with my parents, and comforted a friend of mine who was upset after visiting me in hospital. When I was better, but needed to repeat the year of my course that I had largely missed, she quietly arranged this for me – I never even had to ask. I remember too, after I had returned to college, how another of my tutors quietly insisted that I write an essay which I was trying to get out of on the grounds that I was "feeling rather fragile at the moment". She was right: I was perfectly fit to do it!

I think the Oxford NHS, in the shape of the Warneford, also cared for me very well. Later in my life, when I was training to be a counsellor, I remembered that the hospital had never given me any psychotherapy, and wondered why. The use of talking therapies wasn't nearly as common then as it is now, but some other patients certainly had regular sessions. But I'm sure now that the right decision was made in my case. What inner conflicts I had were simply not accessible at that time. I remember the conversation I had, towards the end of my stay, with Dr McInnes, the Superintendent, when he visited our ward. (Jennifer Dawson's funny and poignant novel "The Ha-Ha", about her undergraduate experience of the Warneford, and which won the James Tait Black memorial Prize in 1961, is dedicated to Dr McInnes.) He told me that my breakdown was "benign" – and when I laughed in disbelief, explained that it would end of its own accord, and that the hospital's job was simply to take care of me while it lasted. This was my first conscious contact

with the idea that a human being, like other living organisms, is programmed for health and survival, and, given the right care, will initiate its own processes of adaptation to damage, disease or adverse circumstances, and find its own way to make sense of itself. Much later in my life, I would understand that my breakdown had been not only benign but therapeutic; it was the way my psyche found of negotiating the unconscious obstacles that stood in the way of my progress from childhood into adulthood. Letting me stay at the hospital for as long as I needed to, even though I was theoretically well enough to go home, was the Warneford's final expression of its respect for me and my needs, and helped me to return fully to myself.

Given that the influence of Oxford on me was so positive, then, is there any way in which it actually contributed to my breakdown? Yes, I think the weight of expectation that fell on me, simply by gaining a place at Oxford, added to the difficulties I already had. If life is a competition, then getting a place at Oxford (or Cambridge, it must be admitted!) puts you automatically on the short list. From then on, I know my parents (whose considerable academic and creative abilities were thwarted by circumstances) seriously hoped I would become either a don or a famous novelist, and so I was always something of a disappointment to them. It is painful to be the focus of such fierce expectation, one's own or other people's. Oh, the blessing of being average, ordinary, inconspicuous! At my age, I'm seldom asked what university I went to, but if I am, I still cringe at having to say 'Oxford'. I do not like the uncomfortable mixture of pride and shame that rises up in me; and I feel – rightly or wrongly – that just by uttering that single word I have almost certainly put a distance between me and the other person, opened the way for envy,

contempt, rejection. Perhaps being at Oxford, or having been at Oxford, is a bit like becoming suddenly famous: there can be a kind of hideous, toxic glamour to it. But glamour has little to do with beauty, and it is the beauty of Oxford that matters, the beauty of it as an ancient place of learning and teaching, dedicated to the pursuit of truth. It was this beauty, as I hope my poem makes clear, which helped to heal me all those years ago, and which still sustains me now.

There is one incident from that Warneford/LMH time that particularly stays with me. I couldn't fit it into my poem, so I shall describe it here. During my last weeks at the hospital I became very friendly with a woman in her late 60s, from a not very privileged background – the Hannah of my poem. I invited her to dinner in hall. At that time there was a fashion for dresses with long transparent sleeves, and Hannah, with her white hair freshly dyed black, came to dinner in a bright pink cotton shift with pink see-through sleeves. She ate hardly anything, but spent the meal looking round, again and again, at the lovely wood-panelled hall with its big portraits of former principals, at high table where the dons sat in state, at the girls chattering all around us. “Oh my!” she said, every few minutes. “Oh my!”

Claire McLaughlin

An Evening to Celebrate the Life and Work of Christopher Logue at Purcell Room, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Tuesday 4th December

An admirable multimediac presentation, embracing live reading, live music, film footage, sound recording and text-on-screen, chaired by film maker and writer **Rick Stroud**.

There was a cracking start with some footage of Christopher's set at the International Poetry Incarnation in the Albert Hall, in 1965, captured on film by Peter Whitehead, and named *Wholly Communion*. He was on top form with his rasping, but ultimately benign declamations acknowledging mankind's self-destructive impulses put appealing to all humanity to 'pull down that wall'. **Christopher Reid** described Logue as an 'unrepentant renegade' and told the audience how he turned down a request to perform at the Albert Hall in 1972, apparently his reply was: "The Arts Council? No! No! No!" Reid later added that Logue once described him as 'comma mad' when he made suggestions for the punctuation of a manuscript.

The focus shifted to a highlighting of Christopher's involvement with music. In the early 60s, he produced a seminal, pioneering work in Poetry and Jazz – the album *Red Bird Dancing on Ivory*, where he recited to the accompaniment of the Tony Kinsey Quintet – very tasty backing, reminiscent of Chico Hamilton! The title track was based on a poem by Pablo Neruda. But he did not stop there; Christopher went on to produce singer-songwriter material, one of which, *Be Not Hard*, was performed by Joan Baez and Donovan. **Kate Dibleby** (vocal) and **Naadia Sherrif** (piano) did a sensitive rendition of this touchingly philosophical song, with the refrain "Life is short and nothing is given to man."

This was followed by the poem *Urban*, performed by Reid. "Christopher was an accomplished ranter" he said, by way of introduction. The poem expresses the anger of a true individualist free spirit outraged by a 30-year-old tree being cut down. He railed against the 'jelly-faced pornocrat' who perpetrated this atrocity. **Craig Raine** read *Elegy for My Father*: his father seemed to offer some extremely solid background and guidance for future life:

*Write what you like,
Do something to make other people laugh.
And if at nothing else – at you.*

An amusing account of his being court-martialled in Palestine for illicitly selling army paybooks. Logue looked back on this incident with philosophical good humour. His imprisonment was relatively privileged and comfortable, and afforded him valuable head space. This anecdote was followed by a reading of the perennially compelling *I Shall Vote Labour Because*.

Tim Dee described some of Logue's involvement with the theatre, outlining *The Trial of Cob and Leach*, done as a 'one-off' at the Royal Court Theatre, involving Barbara Hicks and George Devine. The play concerns a couple who were arrested for making love in Hyde Park – discovered by a mounted policeman. In the stage version, the couple were apprehended by a pantomime horse, and a string of sausages was ejected from the panto horse's posterior. In real life (and recorded in the Fulham Chronicle) a man was arrested for pushing sausages up a horse's posterior.

Sam Berkson, convinced of the durability and resilience of Christopher's work, delivered some of his poems in 'rap' style, starting with *The Ass's Song* from *Ode to a Dodo* – somewhat lugubrious, 'a whip made from an ass's hide. *Lust on a Bendy Bus* is a Brueghelesque tableau of debauched inner city life, overt talk of blow jobs etc; it lent itself perfectly to the rap rendition; Eminem, take heed! This was followed by *Nell's Circular Poem*, concerning a 'ten years after' visitation from a partner. Sam concluded with an acknowledgement of *Edible Gold*, a series of short poems contributed by Christopher to Channel IV shortly after its inception.

Then an outline of Logue's extensive acting career. A sound recording was played of his rendition of Clarence's Dream, from Shakespeare's *Richard III, Act I, Sc iv* – valiant confrontation with the boundaries of mortality: "My dream was lengthened after life." Then back to **Kate** and **Naadia**, with *High Wind*, a collaboration between Christopher and Larry Adler, which formed the theme music of the 1965 film *High Wind in Jamaica* – terse encapsulation of a tragic life, starting with ebullient optimism, ending with the subject 'high on a gallows tree/when his life is turning'.

Brian Patten was introduced with a supreme publicity shot – black and white photo (taken by Caroline Younger) of him and Christopher facing each other in the bath. Brian explained how during his teens he frequented a club in Liverpool next to the famous Cavern, where he was introduced to *Red Bird Dancing on Ivory*. It may have come as a surprise to many that **George Martin**, later collaborator with the Beatles, was involved with this recording. He read Christopher's Neruda translation, *A Song of Despair*, and *In the Orchard after Midnight*, his dedication to Adrian Mitchell.

Rick Stroud returned to read *Promised Land*. Then on to some film footage Christopher's starring as Cardinal Richelieu in Ken Russell's *The Devils* (1971). Great imaginative work on Ken Russell's part, portraying those 17th Century intrigues against a modern, metallic background. Great acting support from Dudley Sutton. Rick then read *Epitaph*.

Kate and **Naadia** performed Kate's arrangement of Christopher's take on *O Come All Ye Faithful*, worthy of being quoted in its entirety.

O come all ye faithful
Here is our cause:

All dreams are one dream,
All wars civil wars.

Lovers have never found
Agony strange;
We who hate change survive
Only through change.

Those who are sure of love
Do not complain.
For sure of love is sure
Love comes again."

Michael Horovitz knew Christopher since the late 50s. He read *Professor Tucholsky's Facts*, and *Second Year in Elysium*, from *War Music*, Logue's inspired adaptation of part of Homer's Epic (which he derived totally from translations; he had no Greek). Michael described this opus as 'a mixture of gravity and waggery'. Referring to the recently published biography, *Prince Charming*, and said "Logue wrote, loved and hated with total honesty." He was proud to have 'got Doris Lessing guessing', disapproved of Trocchi's drug addition, described Becket as 'anegoistic' and railed at Philip Larkin's 'genteel belly aching'. Logue wrote constantly against bombs and war, and took a leading part in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, to the extent of going to jail, alongside Bertrand Russell, as a member of the pacifist Committee of 100. He also took a major part in popularizing poetry by inventing the poster poem. The results of his inspiration remain in evidence on such networks as the London Underground.

Another musical interlude from **John Hegley**, backed by **Alan Bailey** and a bassist. A hilarious setting of *Lumiere et Gaz*, which expressed Christopher's phobias about dentistry: "no-one needs a dentist under the Jolly Roger." This was followed by *The Aard Vark*. I think this setting would have been more effective without the crude histrionics

of Alan Bailey wearing a rubber gauntlet on his head and beating it. I also has some reservations about the 'audience participation in getting the two parts of the audience chanting the complimentary phrases 'Gigantic lips snuff glow-work', and 'Mid plough engulfs mid-air'. Not my sort of things, but the majority of the audience seemed to enjoy it, and Christopher had always wanted to be a populist.

Alan Howard discussed *War Music*; he had collaborated closely with Christopher both on its composition and on its performance. He told the audience that he read this work as if it were a film script, and found that its vitality "can be seen across 3,000 years. He chose a passage which included a detailed description of Achilles's armour, from which some phrases leapt out, such as 'tungsten, round and rich as moon in spring, leaf-shaped, adorned with running spirals.' Some fantastic dynamics in "he jumps and lets the world run fractionally beneath his feet." A rousing finale with one of the *Edible Gold* poems, his adaptation of Francois Villon's *Ballad of the Ladies of Former times*. Christopher had managed to fuse fidelity to the original's form with robust topicality, including a reference to Janis Joplin. Logue could certainly be considered a kindred spirit of Villons, in his bawdy robustness, though his criminality was certainly of a far more benign nature than that of his predecessor.

This event was of special significance to me, as Christopher facilitated my first publication. When he heard me do a reading at the Crypt in Lancaster Road, London W11, under the auspices of Arts and Community Centre Notting Hill, he decided to include me in his Café Books series, in cooperation with Bernard Stone. The title of my pamphlet was *Exacting Modality of the World Web* (1970). This is now out of print, though a small

number of copies may still be available through specialist dealers. Christopher's *War Music* gave me the desire to translate an epic poem. I finally realized this by translating the 16th Century Spanish epic *La Araucana*, by Alonso de Ercilla, which describes the conflict between the Spanish and the Araucanian Indians in Chile.

Dave Russell

Graffiti Board

Once

"Once upon a time, a long time ago,"
Is the beginning of my tale
But, mindful as I am,
That a well-written story has a beginning, a middle
and an end,
I am today struggling to think of a middle,
Before concluding with the time-honoured ending
That "they lived happily together ever after!"

I guess it's because
As I write, I have only just embarked upon the
beginning
And do not, as yet, know the ending,
Although I know how I would like my story to end.
For just as the middle of my story is beginning
So too, I guess, for many are my middle years,
Now that I am forty-five and all that!

"All what" one may ask, as indeed I often do;
Mindful that I was once a boy
But that was many years ago now;
And, in the intervening years,
I have often felt old before my time
Or that I have sometimes missed the boat
To take me to an, as yet, unknown destination.

Today, as I not so much as wander - but drift -

through my middle years,
The grey period of one's life cynics
euphemistically call "the male menopause",
But which I prefer to call "the mid-life crisis"
Made worse by my fast-receding hairline
Cruelly depriving me of any grey matter on top,
I think of past events and long-lost loves
Which were once a major influence, for good or ill,
upon my life.

I struggle to come to terms with letting go
Of all which is no more;
I struggle to embrace the present
As I find myself fearful of the uncertainties the
future holds,
Whether it be about my job or where I am going to
live
And, perhaps most pressing of all,
Whether I should remain single or become civil-
partnered to Lee, the new boy in my life.

Once, everything did seem certain.
But, I guess, that was indeed when I was a child,
Shielded from the then undiscovered woes of
adulthood.
The world seemed much larger then
With many unanswered questions,
Whilst time passed so slowly it almost stopped.

The older I become, the more things appear
insecure with each passing day,
The world appears ever smaller too,
The more one receives the answers to some
questions
The more questions one finds as yet unanswered
And time appears to fly,
Leaving one continually running to stand still
To find time, amidst all those things one tends to
repeat day and daily,
To appreciate those people who appear, and those

events which occur,
Only once in one's lifetime.

Christopher Lukes

Dream Journey

"Forwards into the past; backwards into the future" has long been my adage
So, today, as one thinks of a journey one would like to take
I guess, my first inclination would be to board a train
To take me back in time to a happier place than where I am today,
Surrounded by familiar faces and in a more secure environment
Than that which one faces today in the onward struggle
To continually adapt to change or even keep one's head above the parapet
When, all too often, all one craves is to curl up beneath the duvet and die.

I feel weary of change and tired of fighting my anxiety about things I cannot control.
Sick of being plagued with thoughts of "what if ..."
Which diminishes my ability to appreciate the present,
And causes my future to be overshadowed by ghosts of the past
Which should have long been put to rest
And buried beneath the sod where, today, I feel I belong.

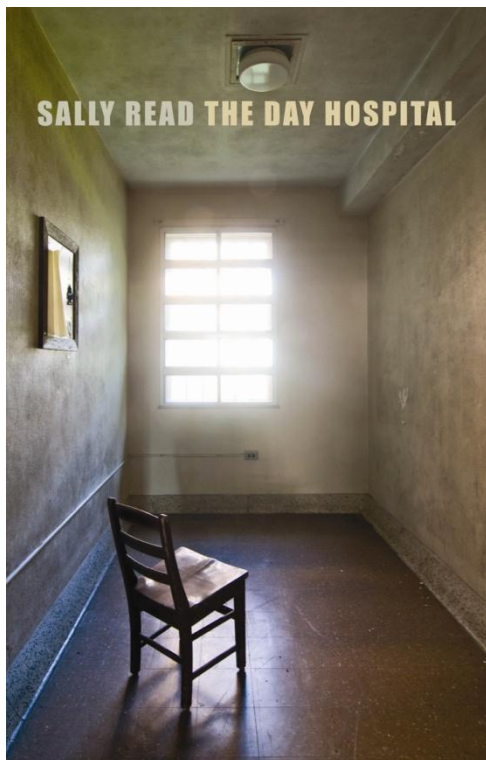
Changing track in a desperate attempt to be positive
I struggle to leave behind all past baggage,
And board a train taking me to an, as yet, unknown destination,
Out of my existing comfort zone if one can call my present rut "comfortable".

I guess, today, I do not know which way to turn
To a brighter future for fear of making the same mistakes twice,
Yet in a mad stampede to escape from the lake of quicksand
I feel I am sinking faster and further than I have before;
I just want to escape, and quit regretting the past or worrying about the future,
To be able to appreciate the here and now!

Returning to the theme "a dream journey" one thinks of a journey
And asks oneself what one would take and what one would leave behind;
Where would one go and how would one get there.
Today it all seems so great an effort,
That I feel any and every departing train may soon leave the station without me
And leave me at best standing, and at worst sinking, alone
Not unlike a piece of rubble no longer floating, let alone swimming with the tide,
But slowly drowning in the, as yet, uncharted waters of the deep.

(NB I wrote these few lines last Thursday when I was feeling beside myself again. Glad to report that I am having a better week this week, but felt moved to share them as I suspect there may be others here who also struggle to go on when things become too much to handle. Writing one's thoughts down and sharing them, however black they may be, does help)

Reviews



The Day Hospital – A Poem for Twelve Voices by Sally Read

Bloodaxe Books 2012 ISBN: 978 1 85224 948 9 £8.95

“Across one day in London, twelve elderly men and women sit in flats, walk, or wait, and speak about their histories, their hopes, their disappointments and griefs – and above all seek to express who they are and what their life has been.”

The work is in four sections, each with an introduction by the authorial voice, then proceeding to the first person utterances of the characters. The author has been a Community Psychiatric Nurse and her depth involvement with her patients is manifest throughout this collection. Excellent opener: bleak but bustling inner urban scene en route to an early start at work: ‘Rats run over empty

pizza stands . . . Words are gunned down by stars.’

Pat: *A 75 year old man with a history of depression. A frontal lobotomy was performed in 1955.*

Through the first person persona of Pat, Sally reconstructs his reminiscences and observations; it feels like an alter ego making a close, analytical observation – obvious affinities with what a Community Psychiatric Nurse has to do. There is a detailed introduction showing the humdrum routine of rolling a cigarette and humming *Danny Boy* on the ward. Then an extremely interesting flashback to his past life as a bricklayer, which reads, to me, like an outstanding example of intact long-term memory. Then there are the wanderings of the homeless in the streets. He then questions his own power of recall: “Was it a chair that I threw . . . It is not/that I don’t remember/but that the pictures/come sideways/at once/and won’t come through the mouth . . . “

Theresa: *A 65 year old devoutly religious woman with a history of schizophrenia*

Religious vision and mental illness always make a challenging combination: it is indeed ‘hard to separate the voices’ while praying. Strange flashback to a partner, Charlie, who hit her when she told him she had visions of green fields, when he expected an industrial landscape. He seems to supervise her attendance at the church; significantly, a down-and-out sleeps there. Charlie seems to leave the church, leaving Theresa feeling like one of the ‘Poor banished children of eve.’

Some time previously Theresa’s mother had died, and the funeral was held in the same church. Theresa felt curiously numb when informed of the bereavement. Strange image

of cleaning 'the statuettes inside my head'. She seems to challenge the effectiveness of religion, of being protected from the devil by regular prayer, of being assured a place in heaven. A variant on the concept of confession. She still feels unclean, that she has done wrong: "They give me pills in a box-contraption now/so they can see my cheating" – confessional truth drugs? She seems to be working as a domestic servant to the priest.

Agnieszka: *A 68 year old Polish Jewish woman with Alzheimer's disease*

The poem starts with routine bureaucratic questioning, then phases into what seems to be by Synagogue ritual, where Agnieszka holds a menorah. Alzheimer's has really taken hold; she cannot determine her age, or whether she had had children. There is an eloquent evocation of elemental struggle for self-expression: "It's walking through a familiar room/but the furniture is smothered in sheets./White space where words/should be,/the tongue a thrashing muscle." She seems to abscond from the hospital. A flashback to her younger, more mobile years, and a sense of the lot of the exile in 'A part of me/in Warsaw, a good chunk/in the East End.' Either mentally, physically, or both, she revisits Warsaw. There she found 'odd twists/like a dislocation of bone'. Later she is told of her father's decease; she does not believe the account. Beautiful visual image: "You could hide in this tall morning,/in London's high deep pockets". She is collected to be taken to the hospital – as a voluntary patient, to be traumatized when confronted with a German doctor. Because of her panic she is seized and sedated – 'my mind a wisp'. She experiences an injection, and the drift into unconsciousness. The poem ends with her coming to, and the nurse asking "can you tell me where you are"?

10am, NW1 – break for commentary. Lovely introduction: "Traffic roars. Fits the head like a balaclava." A brief outline of the stale, fusty clinic.

Maurice – *A 74 year old Jamaican who emigrated to London in the 1950s. Diagnosis is still uncertain*

Great universal image of urine – "the light's urine yellow/and then thick curtains pissing out/the natural thin light of London". He expostulates on his reading habits and his loneliness – longing for a black woman, not wanting a white one. He had felt a deep attachment to Molly, a fully naturalised West Indian who worked as a cleaner at the hospital. Molly had longed for six children. She finally 'leaves the scene', pregnant: "And she walks Archway like she's carrying/a world. Like she barely owns that round pelvis,/like if she sneeze it rolls off." Towards the end of the poem there is a suggestion that she lost the baby. He seems to accept his lot as being permanently hospitalized. "I shake like the Acropolis" is a superb piece of hyperbole.

Jack – *An 80 year old Londoner with Alzheimer's disease*

The poem opens with the hospital's routine punctuation of a cup of tea. Jack had, in the past, been a metal worker, but made the fatal mistake of using a lathe without wearing goggles, so that his eyesight was severely impaired. In his post-operation recovery he feels himself to be in a limbo: "This is all I know when knowing is no more." Reference to a baby, somewhat reminiscent of Maurice.

Bridget – *A 76 year old Irish woman with depression and agoraphobia.*

' . . . a coat,/its pockets stuffed/with screwed receipt' – how infinitely familiar. She feels herself to be on the periphery of mortality: "I feel my innards/disappear and the air/gone through me." Self-sedation: "The light of the television set/washes through me/like a nip of Jameson's." Some 'dreamscape' where the imagined touch of a man's 'five-o-clock shadow' is transformed into the shadow of his whole body which 'goes through me like a cold walk in winter fields'. Startling sensory imagery: "The fields go through me/like a Sunday roast . . . The taste buds drench me/like dead kisses, resurrected. The dead kisses sit in me/like old potatoes stinking/double with their own lost life". Then that universal evocation of a neglected or abandoned domicile: "*The unlocked door is jammed with post/Everything outside will come in.*" Some nostalgia for a missing partner, and for a daughter who has emigrated. The last stanza is an extraordinary statement of resilience in the face of adversity: "Doctor says this is no life./He's wrong. At night my heart's/the loudest thing in this blasted flat./It beats and laughs like a kid/with a torch hid under a quilt./My neck creaks like a door,/my guts squelch out a symphony./My soul trails sorely over every/fibre on the floor . . . I live like I was hanging on/to a horse that throwed me off years ago." What a positive response to agony!

Barbara – *A distressed 69 year old Londoner. Diagnosis still uncertain*

The first prose section in this collection. Very charming, disjointed, quasi-verbatim description, half-phonetically presented, of a largely housebound invalid – in a pretty poverty-stricken abode too: "We got no telly, no hi-fi, no bookshelves, no armchairs, no candles, no papers, no flowers." The very extremity of her condition is a sort of

anaesthetic: "Too dry for sad. Too still for fear. Too much in me head for sick." She has a feeling of affinity with the general lot of mankind. "The whole world's in bed. The whole world's gone dark." Her increasing disability is searingly portrayed: "Don't want a picture. Don't know what a picture is. Wouldn't know how to look at it. Can't read a book, don't know how to try. All them little black lines, thousands of 'em on one page." She is also deprived of tactile contact with a partner. In the background there is some animated activity on the part of urban foxes, but then bleak vacuity: "All quiet. Too high for birds. Nothing above us." All extremely Beckettian. The piece ends with possible dream-transference to a doctor's surgery or hospital.

3pm, W1 – a sense of light after the darkness, some recovery of mobility and optimism – a charming, part-nostalgic recall of the sights and sounds of Soho.

Anna – *An 80 year old Jewish woman with a history of schizophrenia, suicidal ideation and self-harm. She emigrated to London in her early 20s, leaving her mother alone in Nazi Germany.*

Stark opening referring to the rending of clothes in grief. She is a case of extreme debility: "Forty weeks I do not speak./The silence, I suppose,/a package to be undone,/round as skin, packed dense/as gelatinous intestines." But she struggles to preserve her reason and sanity: "I keep all balls in the air/I keep the thoughts from settling." Her compulsive tearing of clothes seems integral to her struggle for sanity. Flashback to her mother walking a Berlin street 70 years ago. The memory makes her speculate on another, spiritual mother ' . . . the godhead voice/amplified through skin'. She seems to have been informed of her

mother's decease, which caused her pangs of angst: "I would feel the word (Mutter/Mother) in my body as I imagine/a woman feels her unborn child". Self-destructive voices yell at her: "They are so real in the room of my skull/I fear they can be heard". There is then a feeling of persecution. A hint that the nurse is trying to extract information from her (although she is [safe] in a London hospital in 1998), then "I am in the first flush of grief/the panic and the jubilation . . ." The nurse takes her to the piano; its responsiveness to her touch is surreally, organically described: "The boned keys arch to meet me/soft as bone,/as soft as bone, alchemised,, can become -/like a woman's belly". She cannot bring herself to play the Mozart Sonata she wishes to play, because she painfully associates that piece with her mother's decease: "I will not deliver/a mother's life,/have her so sonorously/undone."

Catherine – *A 70 year old Irish woman recently recovered from depression following the death of her husband.*

In comparison with the other patients, Catherine is very compus and chatty. She asks when her Nurse is going to get married; she wants to be remembered when the new mother looks at the firstborn. She is devoutly religious, working as an attendant at the church – but 'not a clever prayer in my head'. She reflects on her own grown-up children, and has a flashback to their infancy. Then an acute sense of isolation: "Then the loneliness would find me/as though I lay on a beach and the cold sea//crawled to me on its belly like a snake." Interesting reference to a 'nourishing blackness' which she contrasts with 'the Unlit . . . the winded black of a cutout paper woman'. She seems to want to become two-dimensional to prevail against her pain – 'give the pain less space to dance' The pain centres

on her bereavement, with which he struggles to cope through the graces of the church and the hospital.

5pm, N1 – another piece of inner urban landscape punctuation from the author, with some desperate statements of Suicidal Ideation.

Daniele – *A 65 year-old Italian Jewish man who arrived in London during the war without his parents . . .*

This is described as the reflections of a man standing on the roof of a 14-storey building. Brief verbless phrases; cosmic perspective in 'Higher than God's domes in grubby dusk'. The partial contradiction of 'I am unready; it is time'. Sense of plodding through life 'Dogged steps to get here'. Crazed vision: 'Stop at red man, go with green . . . sea of blunt men and women squinting into blank white sun". The electricity in the building seems to have been cut off; somebody 'clapped a woman's ears as he fell into her' – did Daniele have a vision of him jumping from the roof? Flashback to his mother in Italy, in apprehension of approaching Nazis.

Fall – from the building? A powerful sense of life in danger: 'Blood a cilia of hooks to cling to cling to cling to anything" "Cilia are slender, microscopic, hair-like structures or organelles that extend from the surface of nearly all mammalian cells (multiple or single). They are primordial." (Wikipedia). 'Explosion': nightmarish vision/flashback to the horrors of the war, or a synthesis of the two? "The world in my mouth . . . the world inside me blows open" – imagery of a suicide bomber. Depths of pessimism: "An answer will only be an ending." A last desperate cry is emitted from a shattered skull. Then it is revealed that he has jumped from the roof – 'the police tape around my thrown body', and severe loss of blood.

Ruth – *An 80-year old German Jewish woman who arrived in England during the war, leaving her parents behind in Germany*

She spends considerable time in hospital, but perseveres with cycling in spite of intense pain. Then a flashback to conditions in the Concentration Camp: “God is in the concentration camp/guard’s footstep;” – indictment of the deity indeed . . . “In the guard’s footfall to murder,/there is a vacuum and there is God’s vigil.” Later in the poem their opposition rears its head: “The Guard’s footfall would murder God”. God is then anthropomorphised, crouching like a birthing woman, labouring like a gardener . . . He prays, like one of us” Lurking in Ruth’s present background is the ‘Deus ex machina’ of pills. She feels a desperate sense of emptiness: “What fills (the vacuum), wise girl, is another agent, apart from us,/yet in us (in our tongues, minds and hearts) incarnate from the impossibility/of absence”. Bitter memories come back of the ‘death in life’ of many of her relations. Back to the London of the present, and her struggle to function there, physically: “The trick is to twist each cell/with it and against it, to jostle and refract.” If one masters the trick, one will have attained Grace.

Tatiana – *A 90 year old writer with vascular dementia who emigrated from Russia as a small child with her parents*

A cynical opening about unsatisfactory marriage partners. Then ‘red icons cooking my wall’. A true lament of old age: “Old age is a grief/of lost edges.” She reflects on her past life ‘Past windows, yellow indigoes,/every one a still life . . .’ Evocation of loneliness – “Every city is married/to someone not you”. She is largely housebound, and finds difficulty in dressing properly. She remembers a transitory lover, and makes an eloquent evocation of might-have-been enduring love and marriage. The final stanza seems to refer to some subsidence of personal effects in her room. She would have

the answer to all her personal problems if she could only recall a key word.

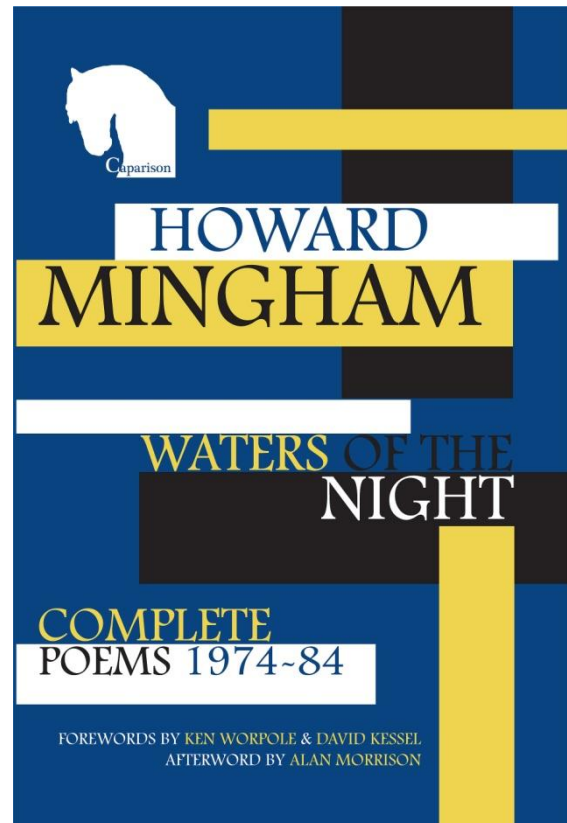
There is an incredible eloquence in this collection, coming from people with truly profound observations, great truths to utter – an eloquence enhanced and honed by their struggling for words through their abilities and, with some of them, the need to transcend language barriers.

Dave Russell

Waters of the Night, Complete Poems 1974-84 Howard Mingham

Caparison 2012 (also available as ebook)

ISBN978-0-9567544-8-6 £8



This is a posthumous ‘Complete Works’, all 27 extant poems by one of the finest

contributors to Hackney Poetry Workshop. Howard tragically fell to his death from a tower block in 1984.

An Eternal Attempt is an extremely in-depth appraisal of Mingham's work from Alan Morrison: "It is ironic that material poverty is the inevitable bedfellow of devastating intensity and richness of psychical perception . . . Mingham's tragically short life wove itself through an ever-thinning social fabric . . ." Alan celebrates this work as a courageous attempt to produce a truly working class poetry.

The aquatic theme dominates throughout, opening with a super-visionary fish, followed by a personal guiding light with an intermediary in the form of a lighthouse. Benign animals follow – a cock and a cat. *June* posits the idea of happy drowning, of being swallowed by June, and such a fate being analogous to relishing the primordial apple.

One of the collection's highspots is *After the Rain*, the idea of the 'song of the drain' gives an enormous dignity to the humiliated and the oppressed. Another is *Broken Water*, where the streams of the gutter and the sewer are used to symbolize oppression and struggle, hope and despair, embracing that polluted water's organic origins. *Rain* celebrates rain's aggressive power: "The sky rumbles, falls,/Machine-gunned to the street . . . the day sings in the gutter . . . its ringing chains hang from heaven". Bizarre animation in 'The town-hall, an armadillo, yawns'. Similarly, in *Tree*, a tree is 'untidy a scream . . . resenting the bargain of growth'.

What the Thunder Meant celebrates one sort of water power – compared to the sun clearing its throat. Molwyn Beach is a treasure-trove of gruesome relics, geological, biological and man-made. *Let us Leave Our Puzzle Behind Us* reiterates Howard's

archaeological obsession; discarded clothes should be left on deserted beaches for the benefit of tomorrow's researchers.

The longest poem here is *Ode*, where Howard honestly faces the relationship between his socialist principles and personal love, with appropriate opening quote from Mao Tse Tung. "I am petrol on the puddle of night,/my little bourgeois night". He is convinced that the true 'workers language' is not inimical to deep feeling; 'I do not wish to construct/the empty box of form/nor bury the coffin/or the body of a poem/beneath dumb and lumpy tons./I do not wish to see my child/smothered with love/and breed a snob . . ." He sees himself as petrol, as pure combustible spirit. He longs for his son to be a total sentient being, to reject the blind doctrinaire, and to experience the totality of emotion, despair and love included.

Thought in Mayola Street Hackney broadens the historical perspective, to the time of the plagues, and earlier to the Roman Legions. In *To Scholars and Ken Worpole*, he makes a savage attack on shallow dismissals of poetic endeavour, and proclaims the exploratory nature of his mission: "But there are mountains, canyons in the mind/where publishers never wandered nor critics ever climbed' *DHSS Poem* articulates Howard's extremely equivocal feelings about his situation as a Claimant. The organization is benign, but to some extent it dumbs down and debilitates. *Elegy for Dead Innocence* is another departure from Howard's predominantly urban focus. Wild nature is somewhat intimidating: "And beauty snapped at me like a guard dog." As one who 'smelled of cities', he feels like an intruder. This impression is reinforced by quasi-biblical words of warning at the end: "Come not here/Who bit the apple and would not see/The shreds of the murdered worm".

Throughout his active life, Howard was acutely conscious of others' tragedies and bereavements. *Cards for All Occasions* is bitterly ironic about the cheapness of consolation cards in relation to a deep personal tragedy. *From Ward F5* relates his state patient to his creative mission: "I am a writer/who cannot express himself/in anything but words./This is his agony/and they are encouraging it."

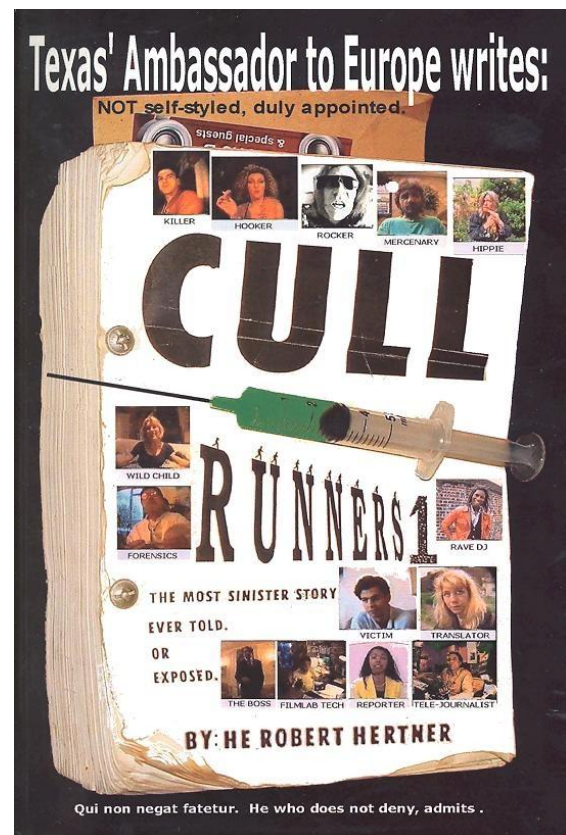
Breath is a declaration of humility of one small, solitary organism struggling to survive amidst a huge mass of others. *If I Am But My Body* is an impassioned assertion of his belief in his soul: "But if I am something like a whisper/Or the pump of your heart,/Then I was a flower,/Something of a beauty. I am a river . . . And in me, humanity". If he is nothing more than 'body', he wants that body destroyed.

I think it would be fair to call this collection 'gutter poetry' of the highest order, if one thinks of the full significance of this term. Indeed the gutter, the conduit is a leitmotiv: it is sordid and polluted in itself, in transit, but is also intrinsic to the cycle of cleansing, and indeed the organic life cycle. *A Cup of Burnt Brazil* describes the 'life-giving' stream of coffee which sustains one poor soul until that person commits suicide (a premonition of Howard's fate). Howard Mingham is a voice of the ecosphere.

Dave Russell

Cull by Robert Hertner

© Robert Hertner 1994; ISBN 1-899555-005



This explosive work has long ranked high in my priorities. Some time ago, I was asked by Robert to do an audio recording of this book, which I did – the text in its entirety, on a then 'state of the art' digital recorder which he lent to me. I did these recordings in small chunks, each 10-20 minutes in duration – quite a marathon task! I am currently investigating the whereabouts of these recordings. The book was produced in just over a year – remarkably briefly, considering its length – a very impulsive affair, riddled with typos (only a very minor drawback as far as I am concerned).

The title refers to bacteriological pruning of the world's population – a process which may already be in motion.

The central character, Tex, 'a cash and carry kind of guy . . . a wild card maverick that was

random at its best . . . a total fluke', has many of the characteristics of Robert as I knew him; he is described on the dust jacket as a 'freelance creative'. Tex spends considerable time as a country and western singer – which included doing 'protest songs' for political rallies. The opening narrative portrays the pleasant but ultimately vacuous and boring life of an itinerant C&W singer touring motels – even though that lifestyle did facilitate his becoming an expert skier. But he became dissatisfied with the lack of depth response to his songs. He had to branch out; then his consciousness and awareness grew: "Tex . . . found himself appalled by the administrative excesses, the intransigence, even paranoia of the charities and churches . . . The never ending spiral of crime and law enforcement appalled him." He saw through the hypocrisies of religion and psychiatry. He was convinced of the innocence of many people in prison, and shocked that many of them emerged from prison as heroin addicts . . . it is conceivable that the law is used not as an instrument of justice, but rather as a selective, arbitrary method of suppressing dissent." Governments are the pawns of organized crime: "The big boys own big politicians who then write the laws that the crooks want.

Then Tex becomes a tele-journalist – almost by accident, when he discovers some 'reject' recording equipment at an electrician's. He gets a major break by engineering an interview with a serial killer who has escaped from prison. The interview, which has to take place in a 'safe' location, is recorded. Tex barely escapes with this life and the recording, which gives him a passport to the highest levels of the media – though technically he might have committed a crime by harbouring a killer. His raw live 'field' recording, had a sense of authenticity totally decisive in its impact: "uncut, unsanitized TV did generate interest at every level.

Tex is sent over to England. There is an incredibly astute appraisal of the state of media communications in this country early 21st century, concomitant to Tex being promoted to absolute senior status, and gaining access to all the most vital confidential data files, via an apparatus called MOTHER – "TO GET TEX INTO THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS OF GREAT BRITAIN'.

Greater things are to come. Tex's penetration attracts a huge number of 'candid' recordings, including testimony from someone with a purported cure for cancer, whose knowledge was suppressed. The suppression made it clear to Tex that the powers that be were not only blocking bacteriological cures, but were promoting bacteriological warfare. In this now, global capacity he meets the challenge of a lifetime: "What if you were the tele-journalist who learned that world War III has already been declared, but it is bio-chemical warfare designed to CULL the people thus reducing the chances of a nuclear holocaust with a 'population/pollution control'? Bacteriological experiments had been initiated by the Germans before and during World War II, and there was a degree of germ warfare between the USA and the USSR. Things are further articulated in an interview between Tex and DJ: "I'm tellin' you they're injectin' this shit . . . it's kind of like a population . . . keep down! . . . they don't wanna well it in their own countries. They're dumpin' it in . . Africa and the Third World and places like that." Tex is forced to reflect on this situation, and rightly registers untested malaria vaccines and the enhanced potential for sickle-cell anaemia. Human vivisection continues.

Robert certainly did his homework on the historical substantiation of this 'fiction/theory'. In the former Soviet Union, "the ethical concerns about testing new technology on human beings, generally

considered repellent to the West, were non-existent . . .” They also discovered ‘probes’ which could be linked to certain locations in the brain, and linked to computers, for instantaneous transcription. The apparatus was wrecked in riots following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and Tex was commissioned to reconstructing it, in full awareness of its globally hazardous potential. Naturally, Tex was suspicious of the boss’s vision of ‘non-volatile all weather molecular bio-chemical storage’. His suspicions were heightened when the boss decided to exclude women from the project for so-called security reasons. Tex gets a warning note about his employers.

In another interview, Monique reveals that the rich and powerful favour germ warfare: “The rich won’t survive nuclear warfare . . . but by having this deadly virus, they could control the people.” (Monique). “They could cut back the population that could lead to war.” Huge damage could be wrought by contaminated vaccines.

There is further danger from genetically engineered and ‘irradiated’ foodstuffs. “One in five Americans has a nutritional deficiency that is proven to affect the mental processes.” Problems of this kind were massively exacerbated by the medical and legal professions closing ranks: “Tex was not amused at the temerity and gall of the A.M.A. policy to expel any doctor that testified against any other doctor in a malpractice suit.” – nor at the vast fortunes to be made through manipulation of malpractice insurance. To protect their profits, pharmaceutical companies suppressed knowledge of effective, ‘non-patented’ medicines.

Tex steals vital, incriminating footage from his employer and sets about its independent distribution, through film and video. Early in

the book Robert made the point that “The problem was that tens of millions of people believed everything they saw on TV. If there was a really bad storm, the weathermen, or weather girls, would actually get death threats from their viewers.” It is Tex’s mission to put real substance before the viewers’ credulity. He does an ‘Orson Welles’ throwing pharmaceutical companies and other agencies into panic: “We are just receiving reports that an insane suicide terrorist has driven a car bomb into the ground floor of the World Food, Chemical and Pharmaceutical Headquarters in London”. The blast also, purportedly, reached MOTHER ONE. The death of JB is convincingly portrayed, but as part of an ingenious plan: “He (JB) knew that Tex was, or could be, the one person on the planet able to locate the files. Thus Tex would gain a position of absolute trust, and gain the power to determine what should be considered truth, and what falsehood. Tex’s life is in danger, but he prevails to become a figure of global significance. There is an effective exposure of the world’s germ warfare abuses, and massive gestures of evasion and assumed regret on the part of the world’s governments.

Such machinations were made ever more attractive by the US having become a debtor state. “Was it possible that the biggest crime of all was the establishment of the Federal Reserve Board to issue pieces of paper that were supposed to be worth more than the paper itself?

Cull contains a brutally graphic description of a ‘stop and search’ with the US police, and a gang-rape at an up-state American University Fraternity House Party. This account was facilitated by Tex doing a very sympathetic interview with the girl who had been hired to do the dancing honours at the party. I feel that all campaigning feminists would read it. He raised the point about the breaking of the

taboo on discussion of sex abuse – as something which could be manipulated, especially by celebrities.

There is love (or erotic) interest with singer Christy, with the additional plot-spicing of a candid video offering a possible break to an aspiring star. Christy is irresistible attractive and materially spoilt: “There was absolutely no challenge in her life.” The band’s manager, Harry, introduces Tex to a wide range of new equipment. I am sure this section could be extrapolated as a piece of genre fiction in its own right. As it is, this well-paced, straightforward narrative and dialogue enrich the texture of *Cull*, showing that Robert could skate surfaces as well as plumbing depths. The ‘love story’ is, however, punctuated by a terse appraisal of the undermining of agriculture in the USA, and their reciprocal overtures are rudely interrupted by the crash of a cottonwood tree in a thunderstorm. There is some ‘hot rod’ driving, encounters with the Police and the High Sheriff. They video each other prior to the grand seduction – prelude by Tex videoing her nude bathing. Their act of love is the expression of Christy’s will, though Tex may have gained the final edge in the power struggle. There is some criticism of US ‘moral majority’ attitudes. In the process of their adventure, they both shoot some highly impactful videos. The ‘love story’ phases into the media adventure. Some interesting assessment of Tex’s social legitimacy when he is considered as a potential marriage partner for Christy. Although the matrimonial issue did not arise, Tex and Christy forged an enduring, supportive professional companionship.

Robert makes quite a strong indictment of the doctrine of ‘Political Correctness’. Though highly male chauvinist at a personal level, Robert did a scathing satire of misogyny in his description of The Church of Misogyny Evangel and Quasi-En-Darkenment”. Brilliant

parodies of the Bible, and a devastating ‘General Waiver on and for Total Release’ whereby the women victims pledged themselves at total slaves of the Church. Understandably, Tex’s boss Harry wondered whether it was a joke. But such is the state of Bible Belt America that jokes can transcend themselves, and become reality. Tex and Harry were bombarded with millions of videos.

Early in the work the mercenary interests behind the American war of Independence are radically exposed. The epilogue fills in the historical background, particularly the ‘information legacy of the Third Reich’ including bacteriology. Robert Hertner had an incredible insight into the world’s power structures – the underside of relationships between financiers and ostensible governments, what he calls ‘The Tryst’ of vested interests. At one point he attributes supreme manipulative powers to the Mafia, considering its intervention vital to the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis. This assertion feels a bit emotive and exaggerated to read about, but there is no coherent evidence to refute the claim. There is a dialogue with a ‘drunk’ who seems to possess a mass of confidential information, which reveals the possible conspiratorial nature of Kennedy’s assassination. Tex wished he had recorded that person on the spot, but realized that the drunk’s life could be put in danger if he did so. He, Tex, had a supreme mission to tell the truth and survive.

Cull shows Robert understood in real depth the art of manipulation of facts: “sometimes newspapers and governments invent news”. He also had a keen grasp of the conditioning power of the media to make vital information feel disposable, go in one ear and out the other. As an excellent illustration, he gave an account of a prisoner of war forced to work for the Japanese propaganda machine: “he

had used a little-known broadcasting technique of using a mix of rapid fire items followed by a repetition of the same in a slower, rather deliberate, awkward manner. Basically a positive and negative effect that simply wiped each other out inside the brain . . . he subtly ensured that even the most undeniably significant items would almost instantly fade from memory, thus seriously negating the effects of the 'mind war' strategy."

"Those who do not learn from history are bound to relive it." His analysis of the manoeuvrings behind US Presidential elections is spine-chilling, as is his appraisal of the US two-party structure: "Democrats seem to want to corrupt big government and Republicans seem to want to corrupt big business. And both want your money."

There are extremely interesting reflections on the aftermath of World War II and the Cold War; interesting concept of the United States and Russia exchanging roles – of collectivization and free marketing. The new Russian republics were lumbered with old Soviet nuclear arsenals which they could not afford to dispose of. "Viet Nam was nothing but a great big money maker that got all those restless 'Rebels without a cause' types off the streets and into the military. My one bone of contention with this generally admirable work is that he seems to vindicate the Atom Bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – on the pretext that the Japanese had a huge plant producing Anthrax germs, which – transported by balloons – constituted a threat to the rest of the world; accordingly, the Nagasaki bomb was a 'clean bomb' which eliminated the danger of contamination. Robert was right to raise this fact, but the Japanese balloon fleet was nowhere near big enough to inflict significant damage. I cannot excuse those attacks. Then there is the plausible theory that the Challenger Space

Shuttle was shot down by a Soviet laser because it was a vehicle of espionage.

I am curious to know the real figures of demographic loss due to germs in Africa, to assess the substance of Robert's hypothesis about clearing living space for European refugees from nuclear war. His views about procreation and overpopulation are severe but realistic.

There is an interesting digression on the role of the toad – one of the world's longest enduring life forms, and the regeneration of spinal tissue; appropriate reference to the destruction of the Amazonian rainforest and the medicinal plants growing there.

The wheel of fate makes a full circle when Tex attracts the attention of another killer – to make an in-depth interview, in the course of which Tex is blindfolded. The interview is an eloquent expression of the hardened criminal mentality; "I was a fucking adult by the time I was born." The killer tries to secure the camera for his own use, but Tex prevails against him. As a sworn in Sheriff, he could have arrested the killer, but decided against doing so because of his personal safety. The Senior Sheriff wants to take Tex's badge, and tries, unsuccessfully, to extract information from Tex about the killer's location. The Senior Sheriff admits defeat, but makes the telling comment: "You coulda been really famous in law enforcement. And ya ended up letting them tell their lies." Tex became a star, and of course had to be protected by a shield of anonymity. He was then confronted by a man who claimed to have found a cure for cancer by altering the chromosome structure and hardening the DNA molecule. But "A simple cure for cancer is a direct threat to an industry that has grown out of 'fighting' it." His team's knowledge was suppressed, their laboratory torched. But they did receive

generous insurance handouts and were able to operate a secret database.

The figure of Tex does, in a way, represent hope for humanity. It was precisely because of his utter averageness that he was able to make his penetrations, and become a true folk hero, a true spokesman of the people – even sworn in as a County Sheriff! Specialists are segregated and constrained by their specialisms, and generally lose the vital quality of openness, particularly when any ruthless and opportunist organization has any exclusivity based on special skills. He sustains his Everyman can prevail, to the benefit of humanity, even though there is ample cause for pessimism, such as the neutralization of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Health and Safety Administration in the USA.

Harry gets a lucrative purchase offer from a major corporation. Tex suggests that he tests the genuineness of the offer by making it *ex gratia* “It means that they agree to pay all of the corporate and personal taxes on our profits.”

Seven years have now passed since the publication of *Cull* which, in my opinion had its finger firmly on the pulse of media technology, with all its political and economic concomitants. Universal audio and video recording has, happily, become the order of the day – at last available to independent individuals when formerly in the stranglehold of power structures, and a dramatically increased margin of possibility of alerting world public opinion at incredible speed. Ahead of his time, Robert announced the imaginative ‘morphing’ of video images, and grasped the conjoint powers of brainwashing media and surveillance, all the more menacing because of its anonymity: “People completely unaware that they were living out a part in a script written by people they never

even met.” As regards the world’s credit bubble, he remains on the mark: “As if everyone . . . could not see anything but a pot of gold at the end of an imaginary rainbow. . . His own country was merrily charging away building on building, more and more upon a house of cards.” Harry is presented with a seemingly unlimited Credit Card and seems to take it uncritically – but the card is earmarked for Tex. He (and the reader) are left to speculate on any possible ‘hidden agenda’ behind this massive windfall: “Tex would have to be given totally free rein, but kept in the dark to insure that the job was a total success . . . World Media Control was not to be associated, directly or indirectly, with this phenomenon!” (Many governments the world over did the bidding of world Media Control’s parent company.” “The video vulture culture’ is indeed a double-edged phenomenon. I here learned for the first time of the tyrannous ‘D Notices’ which suppressed confidential broadcasts.

It is still the case that “many of the various public agencies in Britain had purchased computer systems that were incompatible with each other . . . the mess was either completely stupid, or very cleverly organized.” The Mother system was meant to ensure universal accessibility.

Cull is episodic and loosely plotted; to me it has some feeling of the picaresque novel. There is a certain amount of repetition in the work, totally in keeping with Robert’s attitude of ‘writing raw’ and presenting a first draft as a finished product.

Partly because of the depth intensity of his awareness, Robert was a difficult person to deal with in his lifetime. But this part of his life’s work is a radiant example to us all.

Dave Russell

Reflections on the Slutwalk

by Roisin Lee



Whatever We Wear, Wherever We Go - Yes Means Yes And No Means No!

David: What was it that made you personally join the walk?

Roisin: In order to challenge the rather ludicrous concept that what someone wears justifies rape.

It does sound ridiculous when you put it like that, doesn't it? But it's incredible how many people have suffered some form of sexual abuse in their life.

My own personal outrage is towards institutions which allow and excuse this, how teachers can turn a blind eye to a situation they don't want to get involved in, how a survivor of rape is asked to give a description of what she was wearing when she was attacked, how prostitutes in the North of England have reported a serial rapist only to be told that rape is a risk they take with the job, how the notion of labelling a woman a 'slut' in some way justifies rape and that the clothes someone wears may be deemed as provocation.

Even attitudes within peer groups are a reflection of what is institutionally

condoned, this can only be challenged by raising public awareness about the issue and asking "so what in hell makes someone a slut?"

And even if someone is a 'slut', in what way exactly does that justify rape?

In my head: slut = I enjoy sex, I can sleep with as many people, as often as I like. Not: slut = rape bait.

Oh and just for the record – I LOVE men! The idea that every man is on the verge of instantly snapping into a testosterone driven rape-beast at a glimpse of flesh is a little far fetched and quite frankly insulting.

David: When you were on the walk, did you feel that you were taking a risk/exposing yourself to danger?

Roisin: Well: there's always the fear of an Indecent Exposure charge, but actually no. I've posed in a Body Shop front window for International Women's Day and, as you know from Ugly Sulk gigs, I'm not too phased by walking about in little more than a corset with my stockings & suspenders.

However, it was more likely to be due to the numbers of other people present who were also involved with promoting this somewhat simple concept that IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT SOMEONE IS WEARING, DON'T RAPE THEM, which contributed to my sense of safety.

I didn't feel any intimidation or in danger, a bit cold . . . but then of course it did sadly highlight the feeling that should I have been on my own, walking about at night dressed like that and been attacked, I might have

been 'asking for it' in the eyes of so many. . . although I am still struggling to understand how someone who has been raped can be blamed . . . not the rapist . . .?

There really was a sense of solidarity which culminated at Trafalgar square with many excellent speakers and poets giving their own personal accounts and reasons for being there. You really felt strength in numbers.

David: Was there any aggro on the walk you attended, or any other?

Roisin: No; I didn't witness any trouble: members of the public seemed interested, some joined in the demo, some seemed to find it awkward or comical; they all took pictures, which, if it draws attention to a serious issue, is a good thing. I thought it was well attended, I would just like to see more men on the next march. As far as I'm aware there were no problems with the police and I think it was extremely well organised hence why it was trouble free.

David: Could you give a rough estimate of numbers?

Not a clue. A lot.

David: Did you wear any special outfit for the walk?

By special outfit you mean 'did I go out in my underwear'. Yes I did Dave. Yes I did.

David: You mentioned the speakers; can you elaborate on any points they made?

The 2 which stuck in my mind were the woman whose daughter had been raped, and their experience of how the legal

system had let them down; she said something like 'I've never been involved with anything like this before; I was just a mum, a housewife until my daughter was assaulted. It can happen to any of us'.

Also the woman who was being threatened and verbally abused on a train, how she had gone to the conductor and told him what was being said to which he replied 'I didn't want to hear that' rather than kicking the men off the train! She said being transgender she felt that "if you don't conform to the media stereotype image of what a woman should look like then you don't look like a real woman, but if you look 'too convincing' you're accused of tricking people!" she spoke about the discrimination she had faced and how her gender had instantly been linked in with her sexuality.

All the speakers made me appreciate how important it is for a whole society to keep its values strong in defending an individual's right to be free of fear and harm and that involves everybody. We all have a duty to address discrimination as anyone could be attacked.

David: How effective do you think the walks are in arousing public opinion?

Very. Just the fact that Slut Walk is now happening in 40 different countries evidences a rise in public awareness and opinion. In social media people are blogging and debating and most importantly there is reform and cases being treated more seriously, a change in an institutional approach.

Take for example the huge public outrage in India after a student was gang raped and died, the amount of media coverage given

and the subsequent arrests and trials of the rapists. I think, combined with other movements such as Amnesty International's 'Stop Violence Against Women' campaign and the many other movements going on to actively promote women's rights there will be a change in attitudes.

When people say that there is no point in protest, I see the slut walks as proof a power to drag into the spotlight hard-to-tackle issues and demand reform. It all starts with language and when we start challenging that we can also focus on the connotations and implications.

The walks show that when enough people come together to say 'this should not be happening; we need to do something about it' – guess what? We do have a huge amount of strength in shaping the system which we are all inevitably involved in. Without the suffragettes, women would still be unable to vote, so I feel everyone has a duty to get involved with the walks to stand up for reform and a better society.

David: Did you get much press/media coverage?

Roison: Not as much as there should have been in my opinion. I'm sure in time there will be more and more mainstream coverage, but I think the thing to do right now is create our own media visit:

www.slutmeansspeakup.org.uk

and get involved with the next walk. Get on line and blog your ideas and experiences, use Facebook to share events and information for the Slut Walk. As Amanda Palmer says "we are the media" and she is a rather fabulous slut; but aren't we all?

*(To learn more about Roisin Lee, look up **Ugly Sulk** on the net, especially a song called **Calm**. I had the great honour of participating in the promo video for this number – **Dave Russell**)*

What's On in the Regions?

Folk Word & Whimsy

Folk Word & Whimsy is a monthly acoustic night of music, poetry and other spoken word performances hosted by poet and musician Tim Burroughs on the lovely Under The Stars Boat in Bristol Harbour. This is an open mic event centered around regular performances by Tim, Elliott Hall and Chris Hales. They perform separately and together at the end of the night as the Shiny Blue Demons. Up and coming new bands such as Scarlet Rascal & The Train Wreck, The Delta Sticks and Arc have performed on this night as well as many local poets such as Trevor Carter, the Bard of Windmill Hill, Charles Thompson, Mary Crowder and Doc Sartori.

The event usually takes place on the last Sunday of each month (usually from 8.30-11pm but sometimes from 4-8pm), and shows are featured on **Tim** or **Folk Word & Whimsy** Facebook pages a week before. Tim also has a poetry website on I Page (just search **Tim Burroughs Poetry**). The night is friendly and informal and invites participation by any performers attending on the night. It aims to create a special space where the worlds of music and spoken word interweave to create their own special magic. It is a free event that celebrates Bristol's widespread creative talent.

Regular Survivors Poetry Events in London

2nd Thursday in the month at the **Poetry Café, Betterton St, WC2**, next session April 12th; 4th **Sunday** in the month at **Tottenham Chances, 399 Tottenham High Road, N17**, next session April 26th; **Featured acts + Open Mic.**

Don't just take our word for it!

Here's what the Arts Council said about us:

'The main output of Survivors' Poetry, the quarterly e-zine *Poetry Express Newsletter*, free to download, showcases poetry and other writings of Survivors of Mental Distress and the mental health system to high professional and literary standards. The Director provides strong editorial comment within Poetry Express and also contributes to other magazines on issues related to poetry and the mental health system. A very large constituency of survivors is reached through *Poetry Express*, both in the UK and abroad, with each quarterly issue now receiving 6,500 or more downloads per issue.'

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www.survivorspoetry.org

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We are now taking SUBMISSIONS for #PE42, preferably to be received by April 25th

