

Survivors Poetry

Poetry Express Newsletter #42



Cover Artwork by Joy Sheridan

Editorial

After a protracted struggle, things seem to be looking up. A cosy, company office. This edition highlights contributions from several organisations in Bristol whose aims are in sync with those of Survivors. It would be great if they became affiliates.

The memorial to **Xochitl Tuck** on May 5th at Tottenham Chances was a deeply moving event. The speeches gave some indication of her highly complex character, both the totally endearing and the difficult sides. It included participants taking turns to scattering a trowel's worth of her ashes in a shrub/flowerbed in front of the centre, to the accompaniment of Kath Tait's *River of Life*. The fast-growing garden is a further manifestation of the venue's progressing from its raw beginnings. Among the many enthusiastic performers, Jazzman John was moved to tears onstage. The event was further illuminated by a series of photos from various stages of Xochitl's life. In the course of various discussions, I discovered that she had produced a pop single during her teens, also that she was a prolific writer and painter. Hopefully these treasures will see the light of investigation, exhibition and publication.

Monthly events continue to be successful. **April 11th at the Poetry Cafe** featured **Katherine Toy** and **Anukita Kann**. I have long known and appreciated Katherine as one half of **The Virtuosos**. Since going solo, she has emerged as a pungent lyricist and a highly imaginative arranger. Anukita continues to evolve with her tender lyrical sensitivity. Her comments on her musical activity are very interesting:

I'd say I started songwriting consistently a few years ago; before that I was mainly involved with poetry. Rather than influences, I get inspired by all sorts of music – though I do follow artists like Diane Cluck, Lhasa de Sela (who unfortunately passed away), Sixto Rodriguez. I'm afraid I haven't recorded yet, I'm afraid but since people keep asking me for CDs – gladly enough – I am beginning to consider making them myself to start with. I am not feminist no, I prefer the word feminine. I particularly enjoy making songs that take me (and hopefully the audience too) far from reality, whichever their topic may be . . . and why not? Everyone enjoys singing about love. About the lyrics, there is a poem-song of mine that goes like this:

I have chosen abode
by the sea that no one knows
messages come to my shore
in a language that I
speak no more

May 9th saw a spirited set from **Wendy Young**, featuring quite a lot of new material. Her work continues to develop, and she is gaining in confidence. *Ah Bridget* stood out as a synthesised portrayal of adolescent growing pains in a raw ghetto environment. Good performance from **Alastair Murray**, with his version Leon Rosselson's *The World Turned Upside Down* and Malvina Reynolds' *Little Boxes* (Yes; I heard it the first time round in the Sixties!). Alastair also gave an appropriate notification of Pete Seeger's birthday – 94 years old on May 3rd. It's great that Survivors

is keeping the spirit of acoustic protest alive. **Lucy Carrington** has been featured in *Ten of the Best: A Showcase of Poetry*, published by United Press Ltd.

Tottenham Chances continues to flourish. **May 23rd** was an invigorating, eclectic evening. There was a big Spanish/Portuguese/Latin American emphasis with two duos – the first one consisting of **Milton** (Bolivia), Patricia (Chile), and Giles (Spain) – the second including **Jorges Morales** and **Carol** (Hispanophile). Some welcome highlighting of the work of Victor Jara, whose songs *El Pimiento* and *El Arado* were featured that evening. They announced the forthcoming Victor Jara Festivals, on August 18th in Santiago, Chile, and from 30th August in Machynlleth, Wales, where there will also be extensive workshops. .

Wild pyrotechnics from **Battered Angels** – some of the personnel of the Rude Mechanicals. and a spirited, raunchy set from Veronique Walsh, including my favourites – *Prozac*, *Thelma and Louise*, and *Sing Your Own Song*. Veronique is planning a song cycle inspired by *Jane Eyre*. I look forward to its fruition. Soaring violin from **Helmut Schultz**, over on a visit from Frankfurt.

Sterling performance from **Razz** – especially *This Is Love Without a Home*. “Doris Day is Doing Porn” indeed. Likewise from **Jason Why** – a truly ‘death-defying’ rant. Great floor spots from **Habiba** and (again) **Anukita**.

Jorges Morales & Carol Burt, Milton Flores, & DD. **Dave Russell**

Bristol Poetry Scene

I moved here about four years ago, a shaky-nervous twenty two year old with notebooks full of poems and a throat-closing fear of saying them out loud. Luckily, Bristol is a friendly place. I don’t just mean in terms of the poetry scene, it’s a city full of lively, positive people who, as far as I have found, are much more interested in encouraging and engaging in each other’s creativity than competing against one another.

Consequently, as you can imagine, this makes for a healthy poetry scene. This city is full of poets, of every conceivable kind. Dark and densely-written page poets, almost-stand-up comedy poets, people who turned to poetry of years of singer-song writing (‘I’m just better at it’), surrealist, story-tellers, sensualist dream-weavers and political raconteurs. It’s a very supportive community. I know a lot of people who write collaboratively, share and workshop their work, and I know for a fact I could never have run the night that I do for so long without the support and willingness of the poets of Bristol to come along and share words. There is lovely spectrum of poetry / spoken word nights to suit all budgets and proclivities. It’s wonderful to be able to watch a person read their words in public for the very first time, and then in the same evening, watch an experienced performer who is touring the whole UK, or visiting from Berlin, Paris, America. I’d need a small dissertation to describe all of Bristol’s poetry nights, but here are a few favourites.

Acoustic Night Bristol (Halo Café Bar, Gloucester Road, Bristol) – This is the first open mic I read at in Bristol. It is run by a group of very friendly, encouraging people who are all writers or performers themselves. They often have featured acts and have been running for so long that they have built up

a dazzling array of contacts from all over the world, you never know what to expect. I saw The Poetry Chicks there a few years ago and they actually blew me away. It's also where Buddy Wakefield chose to stop off in the South West on his European Tour!

Poetry Pulpit: This is the open mic night I have run for two and a half years with my friend and excellent poet Liz Greenfield. We started in on a bit of whim in 2010. Everyone said you can't run a poetry night on a Sunday, but we've been blessed with an eclectic, anarchic and anomalous rabble of glorious poetry readers and listeners every week all this time! It is at the Left Bank on Cheltenham Road (Stokes Croft) and is a night of performance poetry and music we love peppered with lyrical displays of immeasurable insobriety. Everyone is welcome to say a poem out loud! We are going on a fairly permanent hiatus after our last event on March 10th because my delicious partner in crime Liz is moving to Paris. It has been beautiful though, don't let anyone tell you otherwise! You can read more about it and hear past recordings here- www.poetrypulpit.com

Please enjoy Liz Greenfield looking amazingly glamorous considering she's spent a weekend in a field, and stuffing a cake into her mouth mid-set on The Wandering Word stage. The Wandering Word collective is also a run out of Bristol. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXXkjVztHXU>

As well as the many other wonderful poetry nights (The Arts House Thursday Night Open Mic, **Word of Mouth at The Thunderbolt**, **Blahblahblah at The Old Vic**, **Hammer & Tongue at The Hatchet**, not to mention TWO Bristol Poetry Festivals a year, organised by the good people at Poetry Can), the thing I like BEST about Bristol is the mixed-media and cross pollination that is starting to occur. Here's a collaboration between poet Rebecca T Antony, musician Rebecca Cant and film maker Alice Von Kohler <http://www.vimeo.com/46896206>

At **Poetry Pulpit**, we usually have very talented photographers and projectionists who come down and do slide-show projections to go along with the poems. Music promoters and programmers are becoming less and less shy of booking a poet or two to support a band or to throw into the programming mix with musicians, to build nights and events based around a collective love of gathering to experience something together. You can find poetry all over the place in this city; disguised in the graffiti, hiding in a theatre programme, or crouching like a ninja between a band or two in The Golden Lion on a Tuesday night.

Sally Jenkinson

Just Because I Have a Launderette in my Thigh Doesn't Mean I'm Milkshake Wednesday - Byron Vincent at Bristol Old Vic Ferment 3rd February 2013

Byron Vincent is a Bath-based poet, compere and author of captivating and compelling merit. Aside from having the Charade title from Perdition's pocket, this insightful delve into the work-in-progress of Byron Vincent's trajectory of living with Bipolar Disorder and everything that mental illness manifests and encompasses, was brutally, nakedly honest,

unfathomably funny, and juxtaposed every emotion on the map leaving me unsure as to whether to hug him or herald him as the new disenfranchised Messiah.

The Spartan set comprised of a hospital bed, centre stage, a projection screen on the rear wall and a laptop which enabled Byron to orchestrate his way through fifty minutes of amphetaminesque, almost Euro Disney-adrenalin-ride from miming to Sinatra's *Pick Yourself Up* (oh, the irony, were it *that* simple), to detailing a plethora of known side effects of his medication: dysphoria, diet, death – who knew?

Utilizing the act of wrapping foil round his head, a vox pop about spiders, and the cacophonous noise on bad days, Vincent, in dressing gown attire (with socks) highlights 'the invisible menace' of the 'Black Dog,' mercilessly 'inflicting suffering, fear and loss' and the sheer torment of dark displacement. The Brechtian prop of a 'Shame' bucket and 'Sorry' placard didactically conveys his inner turmoil. All this contrasted with a cartooned pork chop named Allen, who, Vincent stipulates, was infinitely better company than the fellow inmates he was incarcerated with when he was sectioned.

Three quarters of the show is Vincent narrating his story via a pre-recorded Byron, acting out his litany as a discursive analysis via a self-effacing, acerbic, hilarious and parlous parody of depression and negative thinking. The interspersed footage of a large fly conveyed to me the futility of Vincent's plight during a manic episode. Haunting.

Whilst Vincent retreats to a foetal ball on the bed out pops Dr Billy Bragg on screen providing irreverent quips and banter, as subsequently Vincent lies sleeping as Dr Bragg intervenes like Big Brother on the screen seemingly illustrating the agonizing angst inside an anxious Vincent's brain. He details with poignant repetition the issue that people who suffer with mental health problems are 'annoying and selfish'. Within the confines of this show so many segments are present; from listing activities for those sectioned: 'Wear something nice' to 'take a nap' or the perpetual 5 minute observations, the analogy of staff smoking outside 'The Green Man meets Cousin It.' This show is *packed* with wicked witticisms and ironic observations. Vincent is *ueber* intelligent but endures great pain, anguish and frustration.

Entering the final segment with tangible violent velocity, Vincent finally speaks: vulnerable, shy with 'paranoid egotism'. This relayed his suffering in a more edifying fashion. Illuminating lists of medication follow *and* their side effects. Happy to admit he is a 'horny little pixie' – a slave to concupiscence, he endearingly states he is 'too afraid not to' take his meds, such is his abject terror.

Having dallied with Diazepam and the nadir of Dysphoria, plus having had a father I visited in Barrow and Wells, the resonance from this performance lingers on. I exited the Old Vic feeling I'd experienced his world – a buzzing fly that won't shut, a city that never sleeps; a comedian that juxtaposes humour with silencing pathos leaving you drained but wanting more. This is one of the best performances I've seen in *years*. I eagerly anticipate the final edit of this show. Byron Vincent meets Alan Bennett's Talking Heads in a surreal style.

For further information on Byron Vincent go to: www.byronvincent.com

Lisa Braiden

Holding Space

Claire Williamson is Programme Leader for the MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes (CWTP) at Metanoia Institute (validated by Middlesex University) and has been working therapeutically (personally and professionally) with writing for over twenty years. She lives in Bristol with her two daughters and standard schnauzer, Milena. She is author of two narrative poetry collections: one autobiographical, 'Ride On' (PoTA Press, 2000) and one fictional 'The Soulwater Pool' (Poetry Can 2008)

Sitting down to write this article (for the third time), I am aware that this is a 'Bristol' edition of Poetry Express and that there are many wonderful poetry things happening in Bristol, but I need to narrow the content down to elements that I can write authoritatively about. I want to tell you a little about the course for which I'm Programme Leader; I want to tell you about my own engagement with the creative writing process; and I want to reassure you that I'm telling you about something, rather than trying to sell you anything.

I am aware as I'm writing this of an often-quoted conversation between Doctor Robin Philipp, a founder member of Lapidus (Words for Wellbeing) and Joe Bidder, a founder member of Survivors' Poetry. *Joe explained to Robin that he didn't want writing taken away and given back to people as 'therapy'. They agreed that the emphasis should continue to be on helping people to find and express their own voice.*

I am interested in the links between Creative Writing and Mental Health, particularly surviving trauma, and have found poetry extremely helpful personally. By the Survivor's Poetry definition I am a survivor, having used counselling services for over ten years. By my own definition, I have survived the suicides of two immediate family members.

Recently, I set my MSc students a writing task called 'Stepping Stones' which emanated from an exercise suggested by Kate Thompson in her book *Therapeutic Journal Writing* (2010: Jessica Kinglsey Publishers). The idea is to choose five landscapes that are memorable and list these quickly; then to take time to write about each more fully – this writing could take any form of prose or poetry. My own list reads as follows:

- A Beach in Wales
- Snowdonia
- Deer Park Heights, New Zealand
- The Dog Park
- St Catherine's School

As I wrote about the landscapes, I realised how they mirrored the comfort and advantages that I find in writing:

* The beach in Wales was bounded by a viaduct and the sea, creating what felt like a safe space to explore my feelings as I walked; the landscape was like poetic form.

* Snowdonia was a magnificent setting that had been on my doorstep all my life, but which I only discovered in my thirties; this reminded me of 'voice', both the writerly and

personal voice that is on all our doorsteps, but perhaps not explored as early or as often as might be helpful.

* Deer Park Heights was an animal reserve in New Zealand (now sadly closed) that also served as one of the sets for *Lord of the Rings*; a hilly area, with tarns, rivers winding into the distance and stunning views of the Remarkables mountain range; this was a place where my inner child could fantasise, experiment and play freely.

* My local Dog Park, where I regularly meet other dog walkers to share a brief morning chat, is like a journal where I make a daily check-in.

* St Catherine's School was my secondary school, besides which I wrote, 'somewhere where the adults can't hurt you'.

And so writing for me has been a safe, bounded place, where I explore, discover, dream, and find my voice.

On my website I affirm that I believe people should have the opportunity to explore their creativity and that I trust in the restorative qualities of the creative process.

On the MSc course we work with students to develop their skills in self-exploration, personal writing, facilitation, boundaries, ethics and research skills to explore the growing field of Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes.

I am joined on the course by an amazing team of tutors: Rose Flint, Graham Hartill, Fiona Hamilton and Nigel Gibbons. We have all found the creative process important in our lives. Recently we have been revisiting what it is we are doing, both in our own practice and in guiding students to facilitate others.

The word 'poesis' seems to have become important in our discussions, meaning 'an action that transforms and continues the world,' and a verb from which the word 'poetry' grew. Martin Heidegger described it as 'the blooming of the blossom'. This is the sense that I have when I'm working with other people in that they, like me, have everything they need inside them to be fulfil their potential and through the creative process this prospective wonder can be brought to the foreground.

I am astounded by the power of my own engagement with creative writing which has allowed a number of traumatic experiences in my life to 'lie down' and to give back to each day a sense of grace that at times has felt impossible. I believe that it isn't just poetry that can facilitate this process; it can be any form of writing, art, music, dance, voice work, and other creative activity that allows self-expression.

I studied for a Masters degree in Literary Theory over twenty years ago. Since then, I have moved in my professional work from 'teaching creative writing' to creating a holding space where change can occur. What I hope to offer to other people is a safe, bounded place, to explore, discover, dream, and find their voices. This can be done alone with a journal and never shared with anyone, or it can be done one-to-one, or with a group.

Working with groups for twenty years, I have found that the relationships that grow between its members last well beyond the life of the group and the pieces that have been shared continue to have their own lives within us. This sense of witnessing has been an important

part of the process for me, and why I wanted to see my own narrative poetry collections published. I also host a free non-therapeutic open floor session (Can Openers) on the first Friday lunchtime of the month at Foyles in Quakers Friars, Bristol, which I have been organising on behalf of Poetry Can for almost ten years. It is always a tender hour and a half opening our hearts to all kinds of poetry from comedy to everyday eventualities.

The need for other people to be a ‘witness’ to our writing has been one of the reasons to pursue a programme of training for individuals who wish to facilitate creative writing, with a particular emphasis on people who would like to work within health and social care.

When I started to teach creative writing, it was noticeable how much personal content was being processed through creativity. Having the skills to hold an individual, or individuals within a group as they share their work is important. Damage can be done if the sessions are turned into pseudo-therapy, rescuing by group members or too much literary criticism. The facilitator also needs to be supported by self-care, through reflective practice and supervision.

On the MSc CWTP we make it clear that the students who are offering ‘therapy’ have accreditation in counselling or psychotherapy and do so within the context of their therapy practice. Other students will work therapeutically, often simply offering a writing space, which is facilitated by someone who has the necessary skills to hold other people as they make their transformative journeys.

The MSc is taught over two years, with time following to complete a research project and gain an MSc. In Year One, the emphasis is on students’ own writing and their ability to use reflective and reflexive skills to tie their creative process to theory, as well as considering the practicalities of working with other in various settings. Students can exit at the end of Year One with a Postgraduate Certificate. In Year Two, students facilitate practice and assessed workshops, present a specialist area of interest to peers and learn about research methods and can exit here with a Postgraduate Diploma.

Being in both small and large groups is a significant part of the learning experience, as is keeping a learning journal and continuous personal writing that takes place every day that the course convenes.

We bring a person-centred approach to our work and hold in esteem Petruska Clarkson’s Five Relationship Model as a way of exploring therapeutic relationships. We make links between writing and Transactional Analysis, Systems Theory, Gestalt Therapy, Narrative Therapy and Poetry Therapy amongst others, but we are not trying to create a Writing Therapy.

I’m aware that reading back-copies of *Poetry Express* that a lot of the content is political and nothing escapes politics. What I have tried to do is to work congruently with my own experience and to give back to other people the opportunity to access the gift of creative writing that quite possibly saved my life.

Useful links

www.clairewilliamson.co.uk

Metanoia Institute – MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes

<http://www.metanoia.ac.uk/mscewtp>

Lapidus – Words for Wellbeing
www.lapidus.org.uk

Poetry Can – www.poetrycan.co.uk

Claire Williamson

Lapidus

Being in a Creative Community

Lapidus is a national organisation for arts and health. It has a Membership of over 200, mostly based in the UK, with interests extending across the world. Each region has a coordinator who publicises meetings and workshops organised by the regional group. The Lapidus Board's aims are to support the regional groups – to assist in their growth and development by providing information, networking opportunities, information and interaction on the website and by being informed about wider funding and organisational matters that influence Lapidus interests.

Regional Groups

Lapidus meetings take place in England, Wales, Scotland and Canada. Members participate in workshops focusing on a wide range of areas of using creative words for wellbeing and networking with others. Each group has a co-ordinator who initiates and provides information about events in the region via email. Regional coordinators ensure the guidelines for regional groups are followed and liaise with the Lapidus UK Board.

We currently have regional groups in: Cornwall, Cymru/Wales, East Yorkshire, Leeds and Bradford, London, Midlands, North West, Scotland, South West (Bristol), and an international group in Canada.

In Bristol two of us work tirelessly to maintain a regional group that gathers together members to share ideas, writing and practice. We invite people to run workshops on a wide range of topics including their own work and projects. The first Thursday of each month we meet and write together in a group of practitioners called Fire Works! This is an opportunity to share our practice, try out exercises and approaches, and experiment in new areas and issues in a safe and non judgemental atmosphere. The group has offered a wide range of opportunities including exploring the use and application of metaphor, using sensory materials, writing from parts of the body, and using poems and nature writing as prompts for therapeutic writing. We welcome members and non-members to come and experience what we do and encourage people to join Lapidus UK. We welcome practitioners from all fields who may be interested and want to learn more as well as individuals considering running groups or working with individuals.

On occasional Saturdays in the year we offer 'A Pair of Pencils', which are workshops to showcase our work, share ideas and practice and to raise awareness of a variety of projects running in the

area. These include therapeutic writing groups in local libraries, poetry therapy and homelessness and addiction, therapeutic writing and Human Resources, working with the families of people with addictions, and using Playdoh therapeutically.

Throughout the year we present 'Flourishing Quills' – workshops delivered by published writers and poets on a variety of topics including bereavement, art therapy and writing, boundaries, nature writing, and combining drama therapy with writing activity.

International Membership

Lapidus National Conference 2012 offered opportunities to focus on developing aspects of our writing as well as a new collection of poetry from Graham Hartill. This offers an excellent opportunity to network and share the wide range of projects being run across the country and internationally.

There are Lapidus members around the world promoting wellbeing through the arts. Reinekke Lengelle is the coordinator for the Canadian contingent and came to the 2012 conference in London to demonstrate her commitment to the work.

The Lapidus Journal is an online collection of articles and book reviews by a variety of writers and therapists, again showcasing the diversity and passion for writing and wellbeing. Several contributors to the journal have been from other countries such as Juhani from Finland, Ilaria Cover from Italy, and David from Australia. We also welcome pieces from people who may not be members but contributors to the Lapidus-related field. We also have organisational membership, including a University in Australia as well as Metanoia who offer a Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes MA.

Lapidus Journal

This journal is comprised of a great variety and diversity of subjects around creativity and wellbeing. The last four editions alone contain articles relating to: medicine, storytelling, poetry and story therapy, coping with illness, bereavement and loss, working with translation, scribing, the environment, Bibliotherapy, homelessness, diary writing, listening to stories, areas of training, self-injury, time, instant writing, writing identity, death, organising communal events, journaling, writing as therapy and research.

It also includes book reviews on: murder and forgiveness, children, journey, poetry, journal writing, tales and transformations, writing routes, poetry and story therapy, Kingfishers Poetry Group, writing and personal development, women in prison, self-harm and healing, dementia, deep-field, cancer, and a requiem.

Poetry has a strong presence in our work and is represented in a myriad of ways from forming poetry groups and using it as an immediate way of tapping into one's felt sense, to using poetry to facilitate emotional expression in bereavement, healing and communication.

Writing Retreat

Recently I travelled to Iona for a writing retreat, a pilgrimage to a sacred place, run by Roselle Angwin, poet and Lapidus member. Its weather, its very nature is such that it moves emotion, it shakes us up and draws out of us whatever needs to come. Here I set out to find my writing voice, to focus and write and describe and define, to search for it as though it could be found under a pebble. However, what happened was on the first afternoon I badly sprained my ankle (so I thought) so that I was restricted to the hotel for most of the week. This meant that I sat in silence, I wrote many poems and notes and began to observe around me in great detail. I allowed my still small voice to come. In this way I found my writing voice, I found my centre and allowed the grief of two recent bereavements I had been repressing to swell up and out and as I cried through the night.



The island helped me do my work. If I had not sprained my ankle I would have been out in my usual 'doing' mode seeking experience after experience and making sure I drank it all in. Instead this enforced inner journey facilitated me in finding peace. Here I met Lapidus colleagues from Suffolk and Cornwall, and for this course Roselle Angwin's students came from as far as Switzerland and France. Roselle's amazing gathering of knowledge, her depth of insight and her warmth of spirit has brought people to this group year after year, this being her thirteenth year of running the course. She explores 'wild' and 'spirit' and 'pilgrimage' in true openness of heart, an exploration of all traditions combined with, and through the landscape of Iona. Through her guidance, her sharing of poetry and spiritual texts, and the contributions of my colleagues, I have been able to strip back the layers of city living and busy-ness to a clean, calm sense of self, reclaiming a creative centre that I haven't felt sincerely connected with for years. Below is the poem I wrote about finding myself through what I later found out was a broken ankle, that which forced me to stop and listen, to pay attention to the voice within. This journey underlines for me the way that even in undertaking Lapidus-related work, projects to explore wellbeing through the arts, 'being' can still be lost in 'doing', caught up in committees and meetings. We need reminders to bring us back to centre and to what our writing, our poetry is all about: the still small voice.

Dawn McHale

Peter Cadle

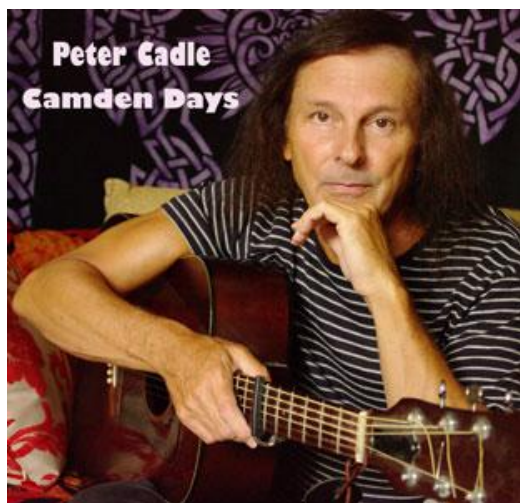
It was with the deepest regret that I learned of Peter Cadle's decease. He remains firmly fixed in my memory from the happy days of Bunjies Folk Cellar in the Nineties, particularly on Jaki Windmill's night and at Razz's *World Oyster Club*. This was strongly reinforced by his excellent, liberally illustrated history of Bunjies (in which I got a mention) *Bunjies Coffee House: Nights in the Cellar : a History*, by Peter Cadle (pub. Bunjies 1994).

Peter's repertoire concentrates on two areas – romantic encounters, either in London or against a background of exotic foreign travel – and politics. He also had a strong sense of history, very apparent in *The Woman of Samaria*, which makes the astute observation "What time it is in history is hard to tell."

A strong feeling of local colour pervades his work; one of my favourites is *Camden Days* – a conducted cultural tour of that borough, where so many distinguished artists and writers resided; here they are celebrated in amusing anecdotes. Similarly, in *Colette and Marcel*, a romantic relationship is played out against a background of paintings on a wall, and artistic references. In terms of the former, my favourites include *Dovetail*, *Mortimer Street* and *When Helene Lived in Berlin*, which to me radiate the influence of Al Stewart. He did, however, venture beyond sentimentality to explore the underside of Inner City Living. Of the available recordings, the *Menilmontant* CD best represents his ventures into the depth dimension, considerably enhanced by sensitive acoustic rapport with Bunjies veterans Kath Tait (on harmonica), also The Virtuosos (Fiddle & Squeeze).

The backing tracks in this selection are very interesting. Whenever I heard Peter Live, he was strictly solo. On the *London Talk* CD, he is given a tasteful soft rock backing by the (seeming) members of the Farber clan. This all shows his great versatility and adaptability.

Keys to the City explores a couple's struggle to find a base in Soho. *Written All Over You* captures the ghostly anonymity and menace of the big city, and implicitly offer a way to cope with it: "You've been robbed and cheated/Learning the script page by page." *The Jos Fritz Café* has a jazzy, improvisatory feel untypical of Peter's style. I would have liked to hear more experimentations of this kind.



In terms of the latter, *The Bridge at La Rochelle* gives a historical panorama of radical dissent since 1935. His most highly evolved statement is in *An Unfinished Revolution*, which was covered by Christy Moore and became the title track of one of his albums:

“From the health centre porch she looks to the North
Where Nicaragua’s enemies hide
Polio crippled and maimed before things were changed
Slowly they’re turning the tide
In the twilight she stands, with a rifle in hand
And a memory of what used to be
Now she’s part of the unfinished revolution

Feudal landlords they’ve known seen overthrown
Afghanistan comes into view
Learning to read and to write is part of the fight
But for her it’s something that’s new
Down all of the years ashamed of her tears
Imprisoned behind a black veil
Now she’s part of the unfinished revolution.”

Soldiers kicked down the door, called her a whore
While he lingered in Castlereagh
Internment tore them apart, brought her
To the heart of resistance in Belfast today
Her struggle is long, it’s hard to be strong
She’s determined deep down inside
To be part of the unfinished revolution.

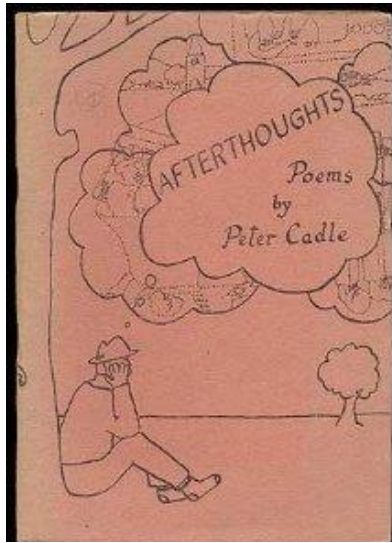
She holds the key to the unfinished revolution.”

Happily, a full selection of his work can now be downloaded on the net.

Peter was something of a purist, reluctant to perform with a PA – in a way supremely loyal to ‘old times’. He was also a page-poet, well-known for selling his pamphlets from door to door. Indeed, *The Independent* gave him an accolade for being the main contemporary poet to be doing this (I can’t agree with their claim that he was the only one). His own observations on this activity are quite illuminating:

“I’m driven to it, I suppose, by impecunity,” he says. “But in a perverse way I enjoy it. It’s not creatively inspiring, trudging around, but I do get to see some sights. I once went to a very posh house in Hampstead and this butler opened the door. I could see behind him that there was a cocktail party going on and everyone was impeccably dressed. The butler looked at me and didn’t bat an eyelid, he just said, ‘Do come in, sir’. I said, ‘I don’t think madam would want me to come in’. But then madam came to the door and she bought a copy.” And, priceless, he got to sell his poems personally to Alan Bennett. And Julia Somerville, Beryl Bainbridge and several actors from

EastEnders whom he recognised but couldn't name. (He also performed live alongside John Cooper Clarke.)



My favourite in the selection I have seen is *the shores of Leyn* (1976). The strongest item here is *The Hole* – a surreal vision of someone digging a hole in Kilburn High Road. The hole assumed gigantic proportions, to create a site for the Forestry Commission to do some replanting, and then to create ‘a permanent snow-cap in London’.

There are also several pamphlets with brief aphorisms, illustrated by Lennart Akman. His own comments on this activity are highly enlightening. He has also, apparently, written his own family tree.

Dave Russell

Three Poems

by Mitchell Grabois

Bio: Mitch Grabois was born in the Bronx and now lives in Denver. His short fiction and poetry appears (or will appear) in over a hundred literary magazines, most recently *The T.J. Eckleberg Review*, *Memoir Journal*, *Out of Our* and *The Blue Hour*. He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, most recently for his story "Purple Heart" published in *The Examined Life* in 2012.

His novel, *Two-Headed Dog*, published by Xavier Vargas E-ditions, is available for all e-readers for 99 cents, through Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Smashwords (which also provides downloads to PC's).

Freckles

The little girl fidgeted in front of the counter
freckles and pigtailed
a throwback to another time
my own childhood

when in the park
I climbed on a steel pipe dome
with immense anxiety
no carefree child
afraid of falling to earth with a jarring thud
even when I was merely standing
even when I was tying my shoes

The freckled girl's eyes were wide with
eagerness
to get her lips and tongue deep into
the cold mound of black walnut
She watched me work the sterling silver scoop
into the tub of creamy pleasure

As much as I wanted to avoid conflict with my
boss Mr. Goldstein
I couldn't stop from overfilling cones
It was the chief joy of my life
Goldstein was rotund
Mrs. Goldstein rotund
I was rotund

The freckled girl was thin
and looked as if she was being held together
by her freckles
the way houses in the tropics are sometimes
held together
by termite holding hands

I gave a surreptitious glance
to where Goldstein stood
his stained white apron stretched tight over
his belly
He caught me and made eye contact
He glared, as if my excesses
was the sole barrier between him
and immense wealth

The plate glass window I'd washed and
polished
magnified the rays of the afternoon sun
I felt its heat on me
I dripped one loving droplet of sweat onto
the freckled girl's cone
but despite the intensity of her gaze
she didn't seem to notice
It reminded me of a psychological study
in which radiologists were so intent on
detecting cancerous polyps
they failed to see an image of an angry gorilla
on the film

Maybe she didn't care
which increased the intimacy between us
I felt like reaching over the counter and
brushing
some stray hairs off her forehead
but I only had two hands

I felt an ocular migraine coming on
The symptoms long wavy black and white
lines
like pop art
mostly in my peripheral vision
but sometimes in the center of my visual field
The lines oscillated

nauseating me
disorienting me

I piled some more ice cream on the cone
This one was excessive even by my standards
The freckled girl looked to be in ecstasy

Shrinks

I was well on my way
to being a college drop-out
My unrecognized clinical depression
made me unable to concentrate on my
studies
I sat in the library and read the same
paragraph over and over
getting nothing from it
I wasn't entirely socially isolated
but felt utterly alone
When in a desperate attempt
to stop my downward spiral
I went to the university clinic to see a shrink
the only topic I felt capable of discussing was
overeating
a relatively minor problem

The shrink snapped at me: *Why don't you just
stop?*
What did he mean?
Why don't I stop eating?
Stop talking?
Stop bothering him?

This wasn't the way a shrink
was supposed to act
He was supposed to be kindly and supportive
I got up abruptly
and left

Later
when I became a shrink
and despite my ethics and best intentions
fell in love with one of my patients
and began an intense affair with her
I remembered the man at the university

and realized how much pain he'd been in
and wondered what had been the cause

Wailing Wall

Rotund Mrs. Goldstein
one of my bosses
asked me if I was taking drugs
Of course I was

Drugs were like sex, which I wasn't getting
like ice cream, which I was getting a lot
serving myself from the ice cream counter
when she and her husband weren't looking
or were gone

Drugs and ice cream
direct lines to pleasure

No, Mrs. G. I'm not taking drugs

*Max, you give me denials like a drink machine
gives cans of soda*

I was taken aback by her use of metaphor
Truth is automatic, Mrs. G. It just comes out

She gave me a skeptical look
stepped closer

I'm only five four
She was a broad wall in front of me
I had the thought that I could step forward
kiss her aproned chest
smelling of corned beef
lean against her
and pray
as if I were at the Wailing Wall
in Jerusalem

I felt intimidated
I knew she wasn't going to manhandle me
yet physical domination is always a factor in
the human world
which is animal

Six Types of Speedwell

If I hadn't been sitting on my own
If I hadn't hurt my foot
If I hadn't talked to the sparrows
If the thrush hadn't braved the grass
If the blackbird hadn't startled me to watch
If I hadn't seen the daisies or the celandine
If I hadn't heard the cry of the gull
Or followed him as he hovered over the sea
If I hadn't discovered the steps carved out
In stone that lead to nowhere
And the step stone crept over with lichen
If the mountains of Mull brooding in mist
Hadn't made me think of your dead wife
If I hadn't noticed cloud gathering in the east
Or cottages stranded across the water
If I hadn't heard the ferry pounding its
mechanical heart
If I hadn't cried last night like a child in the
rain
I would not have found that there are six
types of speedwell:
Germander, thyme, blue-water, wall, heath,
brooklime
Or heard their names called by the wind god
as he passed
In this strange soft-savage place that lays my
heart
As a tiny blue flower in its palm.

Dawn McHale

Angry Song

When the big red ball of a fabulous sun meets the
Cool of a shining sea . . .
And the starlings have deserted the crumbling
pier
To loneliness and me . . .
I stand there on the sea front
And I feel those pebbles drag
I can still hear your treacherous words in my ear
And I know that you're never coming back . . .

You think that you're clever
But when did I ever
Let you think that I could care?
And you can keep your sodding sympathy
'Cos it really doesn't wear...
I stand there on the sea front
And I feel those pebbles drag
I can still hear your treacherous words in my ear
And I know that you're never coming back . . .

And I feel
Nothing at all, I feel
Nothing at all for you.
And I know that you think I'm
being defensive or something but
It isn't true
I feel nothing for you

One of us seems to have called it wrong
To have thought that what we had was a 'thing'
One of us was somehow unaware
That it was nothing but a fling
One of us was lying
And that one wasn't me
One of us blithely trampled on every single
Feeling they could see, but

I feel
Nothing at all. I feel
Nothing at all for you
What's your name?
I've already forgotten . . .
How do you do?
I feel nothing for you

Kathy Toy 2011

Little Fingers

I saw Margot Brown today
Thirteen years since she passed away
And Julia seems to haunt me still she's everywhere
I look . . .
Ghosts are picking at my sleeve
They're not on my side I believe
But I'm holding on like mad
For the duration . . .

Little fingers at my throat
I'm trying to keep myself afloat
I'll grab myself a few more years
If it kills me . . .

Not for me the peaceful exit
Suicide of an anorexic
When I go I'll be crying
Je ne regrette rien . . .
So fold your rotten sickle away
You won't put a cross on my back today
You'll have to come another day
And claim me . . .

Little fingers on my neck
They're closer now but what the heck
I'll grab myself a few more years
If it kills me . . .

I will not bow out gracefully
Demure and passive on bended knee
I'll be running as fast as these running shoes will
take me
With a world as wonderful as this
Why would I trade it early for promised bliss?
You take that
But I'll take this
It's plenty for me . . .

Little fingers damn you all
I will not recognise your call
I'll grab myself a few more years
If it kills me . . .

Kathy Toy 2010

Bristol Poems

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 all tuned strings
Strung out between the beams
Of a secular but spiritual 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 minimmed notes
Slurred with the slender gait of a treble clef
Choreographed for ear scansion

"Open the doors of perception
Open the lips of expression
Pluck the metal strings
To extend the sublime
In the black-tailed
Notes of music time."

Tim Burroughs

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 if 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 skin
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

The Mary Block

Pleasure, for my great-great-grandmother,
was always deferred.
You'll get your reward in Heaven
the creed of her fellow Brethren
as they trod their narrow path towards
a stern, starch-collared God.
Abstinence deemed a virtue,

while hardship fell like blessings
on their heads.
Not that Mary never softened.
At times she pitied the wanting faces
of her offspring.
Scarlet ribbons ... marbles ... a waxen doll ...
You'll get it when my ship comes in!
Almost a promise when you live by the
harbour
of a city a-bristle with ships,
and surely not idle
(for Mary Block was never idle).
Unlike her daughters, sent out for pig's fry,
but sidling along the quays in search of
adventure
amongst the stacked timber, the bales of
tobacco,
the casks of amber Bristol Milk,
and finding a ship gilded to legend
by a shadow-shuttered dawn,
the name Mary Block engraved on her bows
and escaping like orisons from their mouths
as they hallelujah up Christmas Steps
towards disappointment.

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

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

Short Biography

Deborah Harvey's poems have been widely published and have won several prizes, including the 2010 Wells International Poetry Competition, the 2011 Dor Kemmyn Poetry Competition and the 2012 Pre-Raphaelite Society Prize. Deborah's first collection of poetry, *Communion*, was published by Indigo Dreams in 2011. Her novel, *Dart*, about life on Dartmoor during the Black Death, was published under their Tamar Books imprint in February 2013.

Longer Biography

Deborah Harvey is Bristol born and bred, with a degree in Russian and German, and a passion for language. She works part time in a school for deaf children, and also for her elder son who has autistic spectrum disorder. In her free time she writes poetry and prose and indulges in extreme rambling with her border collie, Ted. She is particularly interested in folklore and also the social history of the middle ages and the early modern period. She is often to be found fossicking in ancient buildings, country lanes and churchyards.

Deborah is a trustee of Poetry Can in Bristol. Her poems have won several prizes, including the 2010 Wells International Poetry Competition, the 2011 Dor Kemmyn Poetry Competition and the 2012 Pre-Raphaelite Society Prize. Deborah's first collection of poetry, *Communion*, was published by Indigo Dreams in 2011. Her novel, *Dart*, about life on Dartmoor during the Black Death, was published under their Tamar Books imprint in February 2013.

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

Kevin Coyne

Case History

Turpentine Records



Here is Kevin Coyne's first solo album. Recorded in 1972 after Siren had split up, and shortly after *Nobody Dies In Dreamland*, the home recordings that Turpentine Records released last year.

Like the two Siren albums, *Case History* came out on John Peel's Dandelion label. However, shortly after its release Dandelion folded, and *Case History* became very hard to find. I didn't get to hear the record until the early 1980s, when it was issued as a box set complete with the two Siren albums – more or less a vinyl version of the Dandelion reissues that came out in 2007. The label that issued the records in the early 1980s was called Butt Records. The record's logo wasn't a dandelion but an ashtray overflowing with dogends. When I listened to *Case History*, the songs came across with a powerful directness that stirred up something in me. The songs are as direct as any punk recording of that time.

Case History was recorded very quickly. Kevin has been quoted as saying that the songs were recorded in three or four hours. He has also been quoted as saying that

Case History is not just an album, but a whole period of his life. Indeed this becomes very clear as the album unfolds. Dave Clauge and Nick Cudworth from Siren accompany Kevin on the first two tracks. The opening track, *God Bless The Bride*, is an upbeat number where Kevin asks God to bless everything from the bride and groom and the families they have left behind, to the hotel by the sea, and the little room with its pottery dogs. Track Two, *White Horse*, is a gentle song. I have never understood what the song is about, but the imagery is quite fascinating. Track Three, *Uggy's Song*, is where *Case History* really starts to let rip. We find Kevin on his own with his frantic acoustic guitar playing. The album continues like this. I mentioned the following in my review of *Nobody Dies In Dreamland*, but *Uggy's Song* is the story of a black tramp who was murdered by the Police in 1971. The police called him 'Uggy' because they considered him to be ugly. Sadly, homelessness has reached epic proportions in these times. With the recent shocking murders of two homeless people and Big Issue vendors in Birmingham, the song has much relevance. The next song *Need Somebody* is about growing old and lonely. However, Kevin also expresses the general difficulty someone can have in reaching out to a friend. Then comes *Evil Island Home*. Kevin paints a disturbing picture of England as he saw it at the time. I remember seeing Kevin at Battersea Town Hall in early 1980s, when he was playing mostly solo. He did a great version of the song *Fat Girl*; he also did a powerful version of *Evil Island Home*. (This was before I found the Dandelion Box Set). The song had a lot of meaning in the early years of Thatcherism. The early 1970s seemed like better times. But there were still things that were swept under the carpet, As the songs on *Case History show*, England could still be a troubled place. The chorus to *Evil Island Home* comes across with a sense of disorientation.

As *Case History* moves on, we pass through the primal *Araby*; then we come to *My Message To The People*. This is very much a statement of intent from Kevin. He sings “Don’t tie me to your steeple, don’t put me in the stocks in your market square“. He then sings “Watch me now because into the tangles I go“. Indeed as the seventies progressed he did go into the tangles, often dealing with taboo issues. While Kevin’s guitar playing is very basic, it could also be very powerful. The next track, *Mad Boy*, is a picture of someone who has been diagnosed as mentally ill – someone who, others feel, needs to be controlled. Kevin sings “Fetch the doctor, the doctor’s done his job. No more disagreeing with his mother“. The songs chorus of “Mad boy, mad boy” is quite otherworldly. These were the days of the old Victorian institutions, when rock musicians like Peter Green and Vincent Crane (from Atomic Rooster) would spend time in these places. Kevin’s mates from Siren return for *Case History*’s last track, titled *Sand All Yellow*; Kevin sings in two voices. One is the voice of the patient, the other one is the voice of the doctor. “The next patient Nurse Faversham is someone we know rather well. I saw her outside in the garden, she was crying, she needs help. When Kevin speaks as the doctor there is a sinister tone to his voice. There are also references in the song to *Nova* and *Women’s Own*, two popular women’s magazines from that period of time.

The booklet to *Case History* contains an interview with Clive Selwood, John Peel’s companion at Dandelion. He says that *Case History* was recorded at a small studio in the South West London suburb of Morden. In the past Kevin has said that the studio was in the nearby suburb of Wimbledon. But then South Wimbledon station is the stop before Morden on the Southbound branch of the Northern Line, so both places are very close to each other. One thing that I sometimes think about is

as follows. If Siren had been signed to Blue Horizon, the label that they first approached – would label boss Mike Vernon have let Kevin make an album like *Case History* the way that John Peel and Clive Selwood did?

After *Case History*, the CD continues with some bonus tracks: they start with *Cheat Me*, a Single that Siren issued shortly before they split up. The song also appeared the following year on *Marjory Razorblade*. Then we get the Single’s B side *Flowering Cherry*: This is a delightful song that I felt would have made a good A Side in itself. Cherry trees flower during March and April – the period when we move out of the cold and dark into milder weather with lighter evenings. As Kevin anticipates the coming of summer, he also hopes that his love will grow. Then we get alternative versions of *Evil Island Home*, *My Message To The People* and *Mad Boy*. *My Message To The People* features a reference to a song called *I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate*: written by Clarence Williams and Armand Piron in 1915, this song subsequently became an upbeat jazz number. Perhaps it was influenced by both. In 1960 it was recorded by an American Rhythm and Blues group called the Olympics. During the 1960s and 70s it became a part of the American folk scene and was recorded by artists like Shel Silverstein and Dave Van Ronk. In 1964 Liverpool beat group the Remo Four recorded a version of the song; their version was released as a single at the time. Anyway back to Kevin. We get a previously unreleased Siren song called *Doctor Love*: this is a rough-and-ready rocker. Then there is another version of *Cheat Me* from a radio session. There is a version of *Flowering Cherry* with a delightful trombone solo. The record then finishes the way it started, with another version of *God Bless The Bride*. But it is a nice song, so I don’t mind.

Thank you to Robert, Eugene and Helmi

Coyne at Turpentine records for making this CD available. I look forward to whatever they bring us next. Inside the booklet alongside the previously mentioned interview with Clive Selwood there are a number of quotes from Kevin concerning Case History. There is also a great black and white photo of Kevin and Dave Clauge performing at the Marquee Club in London's west end. While this record was released a long time ago, I feel the things Kevin is singing about still have relevance in these times. Most of the old Victorian psychiatric hospitals have gone now, to be replaced by modern psychiatric units. But it is still much the same. Our life struggles can still lead us to nervous breakdowns. Case History is the beginning of a long and prolific career by one of Britain's most gifted songwriters.

Frank Bangay March 2013

One little thought. The song *I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate* includes the line, "Now she wobbles like a jelly on a plate". Did this inspire the line in a song called *The Wobble* from Kevin's 2003 album *Carnival*? The Wobble is a dance for round people, Kevin was rather round in latter years. It is understandable that round people may chose to wobble like a jelly on a plate.

To buy a copy of Case History visit Turpentine records at www.kevincoyne.co.uk

For the official Kevin Coyne website visit www.kevincoyne.de

For more about Kevin Coyne's long and prolific career, visit PASCAL's fans website at www.kevincoynepage.free.fr

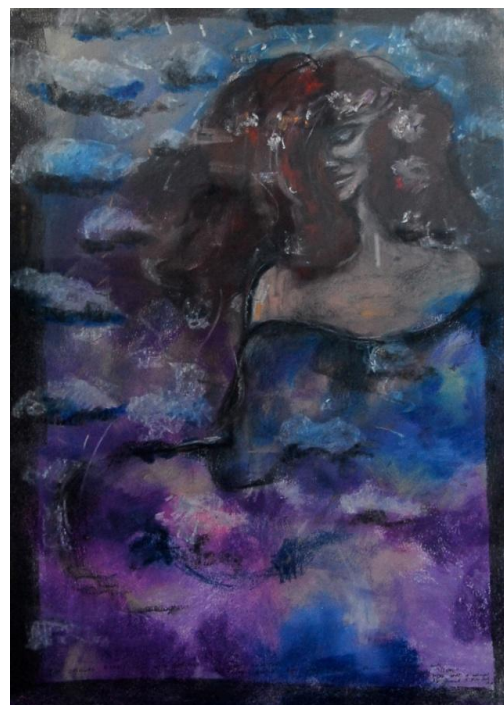
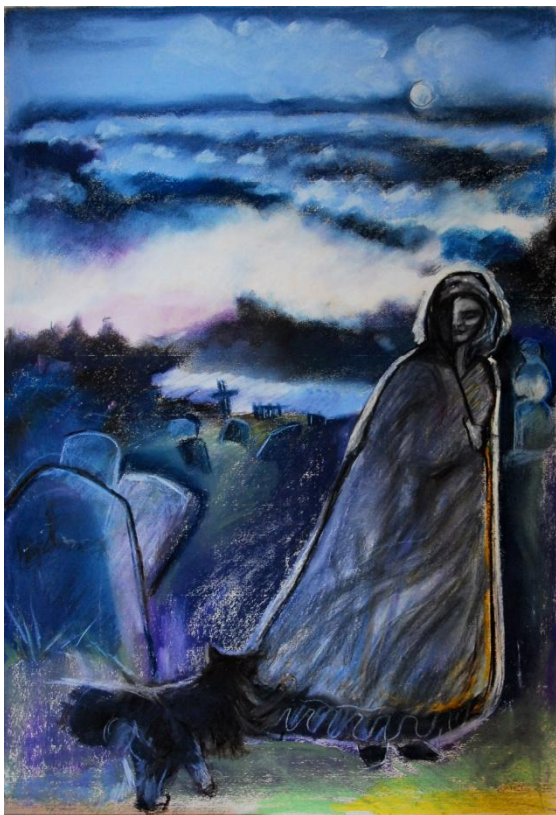
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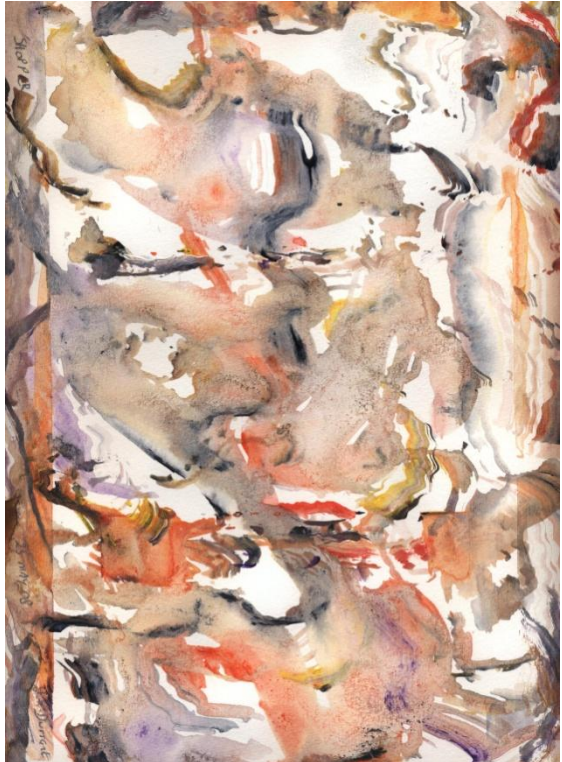
Joy Sheridan

Some time ago I had the pleasure of reviewing in PEN, a collection Joy's poetry, *Little Musings*. She has also been a highly active and versatile painter since the late 60s. Her fascination with magic throughout several decades pervades her work. I hope this selection will give some perspective on the scope of her creative output.



Dave Russell





Graffiti Corner

Crashes

Do you know what it feels like
When everything you look at makes a sign

When you are doubly in time
So that you are lost
Like two cars going in different speeds
One going forward
One reversing



Jesse Ferguson

Nightmare



Jesse Ferguson

iFeel – The Vis Vires Trilogy
by Marissa Carmel

£2.73 includes VAT & free wireless
delivery via **Amazon Whispernet**

This novel is a work of great depth and complexity. It functions on two planes, the normal/realistic level and the paranormal.

I can certainly identify with its opening as I have known many people with psychological problems who have had their arrays of multiple pills – which are frequently misprescribed: “I’m watching my life splatter before me, every pill representing an aspect of me” – this phrase proclaims the lot of a vast multitude. In some ways Liv, the heroine, is a person who wins her struggle to prevail against spurious medication and abuse under the psychiatric system to find her real, whole, self. She withstands an attempt to blot out her memory, a quasi-lobotomy. I do not doubt that many people with mental health problems have visions of ‘immortals’ and ‘extra humans’, with whom they partly identify. Such ‘delusions’ have imaginative validity. Liv proclaims, and proves, that she is ‘magical, not mental’.

She is pursued by a ‘Spirit Stalker’ and saved by Justice. She soon becomes obsessed by her saviour, who proves to be an ex-mortal, born at the time of the Irish Potato Famine.

The supernatural beings, Empaths, Seraphs and Vis Vires, are shadowy

background entities; they are only minimally defined. Within the context of the story, they chiefly function in terms of their effect on human minds, so he operates within a 150 year time warp.

Marissa certainly works out her 'Theology' in this novel. It is proposed that true, depth love is a preserve of humans, Immortals can only feel lust, love is a threat to them: "To willingly experience an emotion like love would be like pointing a patriot missile right at my head." Live protests passionately against this idea: "It doesn't matter if you're supernatural, superhuman or superman, there is the same basic want streaming into everyone; longing for love". Such love can be one-sided: "I'm just a temporary fix for his eternal existence."

Liv does indeed go through an extreme conflict between her spirit self and her human self, which she wants to prevail. "I can't stay cooped up in here forever and waste the eternity I don't have." She radically challenges the boundaries of mortality. This deeper struggle parallels her problem with psychiatric categorisation, and her own declaration of schizophrenia: "I am an abomination of a person, pushing away anyone who gets in, anyone who tries to penetrate the guarded, cement wall I built around my life. That is what I have become, one half of a person . . . I have worked myself into a crazed frenzy to expel my true self." After trashing her room, she could see her 'true half' in the mirror.

I Feel is equally 'on the pulse' in describing the dating habits of the younger set, especially in the US. This is often hazardous; stalkers and molesters certainly about. In that world, jealousies abound, paralleled by the rivalry between Justice and Derrin. And there are always the hangovers, which Marissa describes with great aplomb.

There is also a level of simple love story in the relationship between Liv and Justice. Liv, suffused with immortality, longs to return to humanity. Much of the novel is based on Liv's struggle with her deep fascination for Justice. There is certainly a semblance of such a return in the quasi 'happy ending' where, at some levels, Justice is accepted by Liv's family.

Much emphasis is placed on physical injury, surrealistically emphasised by immortals being able to make bodies combustible, which certainly makes one think about the psychology of self-harm.

For what categorisation is worth, this strikes me as a strongly realistic novel, with a dash of the spice of the paranormal. But one should avoid the pitfalls of oversimplification; it merits repeated careful reading

Dave Russell

Captive Dragons/ The Shadow Thorns,

Poems from the Mill View Residency 2008-2011

Alan Morrison

Waterloo Press 2011 ISBN 978-190674329-3
£10

The introductory quote by J P Lovecraft is supremely pertinent: “Men of broader intellect know that there is no sharp distinction between the real and the unreal; that all things appear as they do only by virtue of the delicate individual physical and mental media through which we are made conscious of them . . .”

To describe this work as ‘visionary’ would be an understatement. The first part, *Captive Dragons*, is a thirty-five canto epic. I guess that dragons have always been images/personifications of the imagination.

Canto I: Brilliant use of marine imagery (including polluted shorelines) to convey the brutal network of pressures leading to mental breakdown. It refers to ancient Egyptian burial practices, whereby the heart, unlike the brain, is left in its place before embalming.

Canto II: This initiates Alan’s definition of his dragons. As a reflex action, one thinks of the Medusa. But Alan’s are benign – ‘not grotesques of ghoulish legends’. It seems to be a cry for the subjective, against things being ‘neutered/Under scientific spells’. They can also be ‘milky irises’ (shades of ‘snapdragons’?). Through the imagery of their fire-breathing, Alan makes some powerful anti-smoking polemic – ‘spit nicotine to witchflowers . . . dragging dragons incapable

of shaking/ Filthy habits, squatters in impolite society’s/Gutted carcasses’

Canto III: Some Dantesque ‘shades’ – ‘Disembodied forms shorn of hair and bone, and a flashback to the mummification practices of the old Soviet Union. A historical panorama embracing Tsarist Russia, King Dido (I always thought it was Queen Dido), a literary one embracing Conrad’s *Lord Jim*; acute tension encapsulated in ‘buckled and nerve-broken/By testosterone’s inner tearing’. The dragons here are ‘camauflaged’ – all the more menacing for being covert. ‘Scowling tourists of suspect Shangri-Las’ hints at the possible futility of some pilgrimages of enlightenment. Powerful image of degrading flowers by wrapping them in cellophane, and of organic fragility ‘As if their atoms crackled with threat of ambushes’, and human frailty in ‘a howling bag of bone and thumped hormone,/Concussed after puberty’s ambient bruising’. Again, footnote explanation of the personages mentioned here would have been appropriate.

Canto IV: This seems to cry out for refugees and the homeless, through a cycle of mutation and reincarnation – ‘poverty’s sculpting thumbs’ indeed; discarded humans ‘hung out to dry for their soggy clothesline lives’. Alan’s metaphors are really wide-ranging ‘. . . itching nits/deforesting their knotted eyebrows’. The Furies appear to counterpoint the dragons. More Dantesque vision with ‘Imbibing amber broths from vulcanized spoons’, and the sense of a desperate physical struggle: ‘. . . foetal Inferiority,/Aching happiness throbbing out to boredom’.

Canto V: The inferno on the psychiatric ward – ‘these drugged ghosts, these spectres of the living’ – ‘ombrophilous glooms where mushroom-/Thoughts grow in the chronic shadows of others’; broken people to be reassembled like humpty dumpty?.

'Unarticulated Faustian pacts' is a great concept, as is the thought of 'navigable dragons'; we all remember the legendary Puff! A savage indictment of 'mind-mandarins,/Casual plenipotentiaries of bleeper-honed diplomacies', and of prejudice against those categorized – 'these addicts of curved realities; these wrist-striped tigers tilted in/Our symmetries?', the dubious value of some Job-Creation schemes: 'Back to bartering for spare parts/In scrapyards for skeleton livings. The ruthlessness of the economy grinds on.

Canto VI: A further expansion of vision: to the obsessed/aware, the ward assumes gigantic, mythic proportions – Pharaonic tombs and Cronos' quarantine – the inmates are 'medicated shades'. Varieties of dragons are listed; they are not to be pitied. The reverie is also anchored in reality with "Stub out your pity in the tin-foil ashtray" There is a sense of surgery in 'Wired to the disconnected world by emergency/Umbilical cords . . . culprits of fast-hatched acts of eschatology; a sense of the secure ward, removing 'props for impulsive escapology'. Highly original concept of an 'anti-instinct'; also 'the phony halo/Of a rented hallway's pulsating bulb'. Pharmaceuticals embrace the elemental with 'stabbing aspirin-pall of insurmountable snow'.

Canto VII: 'ekphrastic' is a welcome addition to my vocabulary: pertaining to poetic or dramatic descriptions of works of visual art. Brain-surgeon dragons? ' . . . embedded/Mental pictures pincer-clinging immovably in/Temporal lobes'; the spuriousness of still photographs capturing transient moments; harassing landlords lurk in the background of patients' discharges? The dragons are 'turned suddenly inward . . . as if cornered in cages . . .' – transmuted to or from the ward staff: 'Put on suicide watch'. A sense of surveillance, with 'Eavesdroppers,

inertly listening'. *Here the full force of the epic's title is revealed.* The dragons have become the patients: 'dangling dragons noosed out of knotted noospheres'. Some suggestion of suicide: 'dragonic acrobats/Suspended from wires in motionless flights, launched/From kicked-away chairs . . . limply swing from water-pipe/Gallows; these slaughter closets, hastily sanitized, scoured/Of all residues of suicidal sentiment'; toilet imagery in 'exorcisms to flush them out'.

Canto VIII: this continues with the theme of suicidal dragons, and dragons encouraging suicide: 'to tempt premature departures/Through lung-bunging paper tubes' – 'the sympathetic magic of solvent abuse' – medication = addiction in its consequences = diabolic potions? Dragons are now reified as medications. 'Largactil dragons' is highly incisive. The 'swooning pendulums of slow-release sedations' assume the proportions of 'Diagnostic star formations'. Risperidone is a new one on me. Then they are 'transformed into chameleons blending with blurred scenery', and identified with malignant figures from literature, then 'capsule-captured dragons /Drugged up to keep bodies and souls together –" and then, the ultimate question of 'who are the *real* dragons' in this gruesome universe where there are no victors. The rest of the canto is in lighter vein. The dragons become colourful and picturesque – including 'a trilliontricorned Minotaur/Locking horns in labyrinths of honeycomb and coursing echo –'. They make 'marbled waters of blathering'. But in this babel there is hope: "Out of this cacophony hollers the sounding-board of the soul . . . Vacant noise can rent the palette's strait-jacket apart".

Canto IX: Here the dragons are definitely the victims, writhing with Huntington's Chorea and St Vitus's dance. There follows an exceptional poeticisation of medical imagery,

and analogies with the insect and vegetable worlds: 'cavernous black butterflies blotting inky x-ray/Wings . . . or greenfly-ravaged/Cauliflowers nibbled rotten'. Then 'mongrel dragons' are served slop by 'gagging Druids'. 'Neural Valkyries' is striking. The canto ends with a reiteration of the babel syndrome, without the final optimism of the previous description. First mention of opposition to dragons – 'St George gallants/With jousting depot lances'. The canto faces the issue of mental illness and the imagination with 'A grotesque synergy of cognition and neurology'.

Canto X: A limp reassurance of safety – the dragons have been tamed and damped, heavily sedated – humanized as victims 'Staggered habits domesticated'. Once again the theme of linguistic incoherence, some of it medication-induced: 'larcgactil tangents/Of untranslatable tongues', Alan makes an intrepid Joycean exploration of the poetics of medication jargon – supreme example of 'cultural scavenging' from Greek and Latin. The dragons are reduced to commodities 'scratchcard dragons, vouchered dragons' etc. Some speculative biology: the theory, apparently propounded by Scottish poet-visionary **John Davidson**, that there was once a conjoint auditory and visual organ, and that the separation of the ear was an undesirable product of 'malversation' (bad behavior while in public office///) – evolution's part-corrupted purpose'. Alan feels that sensitivity has been damaged by the separation of the auditory from the visual – 'consciousness screened/Through makeshift partitioning'. But the dragons can come to the rescue 'to articulate the tattered scenery of split/Partitions'. Alan posits the idea of 'unicameral receptiveness . . . be the clinch/Of schizophrenic thinking'. He weighs up the pros and cons: 'to lose all sense of balance/But gain more sense of scope'. He criticizes

Davidson for playing down the mouth in his unicomeral vision.

Canto XI: Some dragons originate in the mind – 'hatch from shells of fractured narratives' – 'break each branch of the togetherness tree'. They have many features of the Hydra, 'rainbow-serpent/Personalities'. But by virtue of their 'breaking out', they attain a complete wholeness – hermaphrodite minds siring/Themselves, pruned of all mechanical containment . . . Primitive spirit-chambers of the undivided Godhead'. A spandrel is a phenotypic characteristic that is a by-product of the evolution of some other characteristic. It is also an architectural feature; Alan uses architectural imagery to describe the human skull and brain. The dragons breathe transitory life 'then gone, spluttered out . . . consigned to dumb/Rattling, numb pattering . . . Thoughts . . . bitten to eucharistic ruminations'. A reminder that the word 'dragon' derives from the Greek *dracein* – to see clearly, so a dragon is an embodiment of visionary powers. Further enumeration of species of dragon, including ones 'camouflaged as smouldering human/Pylons' (the natural disguised as the man-made?) and 'jolted by volts of surging circuitry'. The dragon essence permeates the printed page, and poetic utterance. It can transcend time. People without the dragon essence are 'puppet-strung scarecrows', Shades with glaring physical defects. People and their utterances are fused as 'random bits of junk bunged together in poetic/Flourishes'.

Canto XII: Androgynous dragons, and dragons genitally disengaged – 'some dragons think their bodies dead,/Or occupied by others, or that they're tenants/Of others' heads . . .' Tea-lapping and tinned soup dragons. Then on to the boundaries of perception: 'reality's a faulty tablet'. There are 'cipher personalities' and 'the wires of social puppetries'. The canto ends with a

linguistic exploration of the various aspects of 'Dragonese'. I like the idea of 'animate' writing – 'thick tapering calligraphies/Of Arabic bats, curvaceous scorings of writing-desk/Ravens. Brilliant image of language under stress – 'a dyskinetic/Twitching sign language of irregular grammar'. Final echoes of personal rows past.

Canto XIII: The ward and its patients become metaphors for mythical heroic struggles – 'clipboards for shields, syringes for lances'. But then the ward seems dragon-free – Only latent ones, pale after-traces of mythic beasts', now trivialized and degraded by being confined to art and literature. As dragons are diminished, patients are magnified: 'Sectioned Christs unconvinced of their own resurrections'. Once the captors have tamed the dragons, "they pour them back into the rational/World of others". However, "the captors are the captured . . . slaying dragons means stalling/Transcendental paths to resurrected realities". Final invocation of the Lawrentian work ethic.

Canto XIV: 'The unemployed shadow poet volunteer'. Those categorized as mad know the truth ; 'we are metaphorical beings'; 'external reality' is a 'grand delusion'. There is some criticism of the 'caring' mentality – "the Church of Reason,/Its symbolic psycho-pomp and pedigree arrogantly praying/For our salvation even though we are anathema". Also criticism of those "who rust words into others,/Project sentiments into empty objects"

Canto XV: The true challenge to poetry; the psychiatric ward is a place where the Coleridgean 'phantoms of sublimity' can be confronted – definitely dragons of the mind 'transported on magical carpets of their own metaphors/When transforming one thing into another' – they have the power of metamorphosis – 'objects for dampened

mediums to tap/Anthropomorphically'. . . 'the five sense-impressions'/Titular correspondence with five types of hallucinations'. Some enlightening terminology relating to time, motion and sensation. Linguistics and psychiatry in 'Conscientious projector of metaphor to strip prosaic/Placebos' – with a universalisation of the poetry workshop leader, firstly making exhortations of free verbal improvisation. The resultant efforts can assume gigantic proportions, resulting in such things as 'verb-smorgasbords' and 'furgling A4 *Finnegan's Wakes*'. The second stage is to impose a strict paring down – 'strip out driftwood verbiage', acrostics and 'alphabetical relay races' help to guide this process – all very enlightening for 'the dabblers at the violet end of the spectrum'

Canto XVI: This starts with a survey of poems which have taken root in the public consciousness. Their power is to some extent indirect – 'Not so much the words/As the shadows of the words . . . the poems, or their impressions, linger . . . as shadows in sunken gardens of their minds'. The 'shadow words' are like vital, organic juices nourishing original expressions. Dragons become poets, and poets become dragons – their poems roll and lick off/Their licking tongues'.

Canto XVII: The poetry workshops continue; apparitions of past literary figures appear. The participants have a dual nature: 'Doped demimonde by day, but by night, nocturnal scavengers'. A sense of sordidity in 'Liver-spotted souls bottled in stagnant puberties'.

Canto XVIII: The workshop continues, to embrace 'All shades of experience and is sublimated shadows'. The participants go into uncharted realms of the imagination – "some trip/Beyond the margins of visible boundaries, abandon/All they know and can no longer swallow for hazier Alternatives . . . they chase

a startled darkness haring into distances". Another Dantesque image – 'a city sectioned off into/Disinfected ghettos – twinned with Purgatory – for those/Whose symptoms touch uncomfortable taboos'. There follows a catalogue of 'demented' visionaries interned in the 18th century, and the mental derangement of Richard II; universality of Mental fever: greatest leveler of cabbages and kings'.

Canto XIX: Sedition and mental illness – 'politically ill,/Ideologically disturbed'. In this connection, Alan explores sign language and covert modes of communication. "Most dragons are smoke-tongued products of poverty". Dragons now come to embody the mass of impoverished, marginalized humanity – 'Dole dragons . . . wings clipped so they/Can't fly without special permissions from methodical/Clinicians . . .' housed in 'damp bedsits for debtors' prisons rented/From absent profiteers in howling forests of wolves/And concrete'.

Canto XX: Dragons, by their nature are probably intractable; Alan describes the strained efforts of humanity to bring them to terms; such efforts pale into insignificance 'rhetorical milligrams, doses of sophism'. He highlights the absurdity of rationalization – 'Guinea-pigging logarithmic pigments painting minds/By e numbers'; it involves 'Passion-thinning with Turpentine by interior sedators'. Dragons are also our own negative aspects – '. . . shadow-animals/Cast by our own hands and inactions, our collective flight/From ourselves . . .' Pretentious human beings are indicted as 'Olympus tamperers', and their exertion of authority can be a supreme cop-out: ". . . we Neptunes drop the curtains on toiling spectacles/So we can escape from our own captured dragons . . ."

Canto XXI: Dragons as specimens. First reference to an actual, organic species, the

Komodo dragon' though Alan seems deeply suspicious of the motivations of zoological research, as well as of the pseudo-science of phrenology, and 'thought cartographers'. He seems equally cynical about many explorers, researchers and translators, then goes on to compare fragile, suicidal literary figures with their (physically at least) more enduring counterparts.

Canto XXII: Critique of book learning – "Their stories conclude, because they fail to grab the reader,/Or move them too powerfully to continue, inspire them/To act on a moment's simple impulse to drift into/Other rooms, beyond books, back to/Illiterate wombs, to states beyond the need for language . . ." Striving for spirituality: "If we have souls, perhaps the purpose of some is to grow/To such overwhelming size they are no longer tenable/For the mind or body to accommodate any more". The individual is related to the mass of humanity – 'perpetuate/The personality through others' boundless memories'; and in the most profound sense: 'For if 'Hell is other people', then Heaven is absence/Of self". Final reflections on old age and loss of the sensory faculties.

Canto XXIII: Continuing from the previous canto, some reflections on suicide, posited as a radical extreme of self-reinvention. Alan attacks the 'classist' evaluation of suicide, the tendency to glamourise it when it is perpetrated by the rich and famous, while playing it down when it is self-administered by the poor and marginalized – a savage listing of stereotypical labels imposed on the latter, an criticism of well-meaning, token concern – 'Polly Toynbee copies of politely trooped opinions'. He challenges the theories of Ricardo (Ricardian equivalence suggests that it does not matter whether a government finances its spending with debt or a tax increase, because the effect on the total level

of demand in the economy is the same) and of Malthus. He is equally damning of “cupidity Czars/Sweeping vulnerable members under carpet dialectics/With biro besoms’. The canto closes with a panorama of brutalised, anomic, police state ridden ghetto housing.

Canto XXIV: Continuing with the suicide theme, suicide as a spurious striving for the afterlife – ‘To fit infinity inside thumbed heads . . . a route to vague immortality . . . a muddled desire to unbe and be remembered . . . restore oneself through jumpy footage of a mourner’s memory . . . relinquish one’s body/To assert the spirit’s liberty . . . Turn oneself to myth’ – a definition of suicide as the killing of an unwanted aspect of the self, with the illusion of the ‘remainder of the self’ being restored to health. One very astute observation: “There’s a nostalgic streak to suicidal dragons, draws them/Back like homing pigeons to essential destinations”. ‘The ideation of dashed hopes on/Sharp escarpments’ – reference to Suicides’ Bridge in Chicago, which was eventually demolished.

Canto XXV: Suicide Part III, with historical and philosophical perspective – the huge acclaim received by Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton had undertaken this massive project to cure his depression, enacting his subject matter with himself. The cause of his death was officially ‘unspecified’, but Alan thinks he ‘punctually rid/Himself of himself on that pencilled in date’. Naturally enough, there is an acknowledgement of Goethe’s Young Werther. With a survey of spectacular, self-dramatising suicides over the classical period, he perceptively describes such actions as ‘psychic escapology’ “. . . a blade in the vein enshrined the bleed/Of the spirit’s pride”. Seneca is quoted as one who claimed that suicide is a channel of escape, of freedom.

Canto XXVI: Further distinguished literary suicides

Canto XXVII: Outline of the brutalities and charlatan remedies of the early mental hospitals.

Canto XXVIII: After that pessimistic catalogue, focus is on those such as Bunyan and Blake who struggled against that self-destructive tendency, then those such as Richard Dadd, who directed that fatal impulse on others – which led to his internment. On to searing imagery of the asylum – ‘All inmates transported/To phantom Botany Bays . . . flea circuses framed by rattling bedsteads’. He puts these institutions into the context of impoverishment and marginalization – ‘the shabby genteel driven to shivering verges . . . not poor enough for alms but too poor/For private treatment . . . Granted refuge in madhouses masquerading as/Halfway shelters of social clemencies’. He discusses the case of Paul Tilley Matthews, reputedly the first certified schizophrenic, who showed exceptional technical and graphic skills with his ‘Air Loom’ invention, and supreme diplomatic skills in his attempts to reconcile Britain and France during the Revolutionary Wars. ‘Mental fever, the greatest leveller of cabbages and kings’ – some delusion-prone monarchs and dignitaries listed.

Canto XXIX: A survey of the ‘shell shock’ syndrome of the First World War, including a reference to the persecution of Dorothy Lawrence, for impersonating a conscript. Many of these traumas “drew scant sympathies/For absence of visible fields of conflict . . . no obvious/Wounds” and the purported concern of the ‘caring agencies’ was to ‘condemn them to psychic/Servitude as barely tolerated cripple-heads. Many of them were cajoled into pittance-paying apprenticeships far below their abilities.

Canto XXX: Reference to a 12th century 'health regime' based on the theory of the four humours, then 'So many of these medicated captives have the watermarks/Of dragons tattooed on their flexing forearms'. The dilemma of the inmates could be that of the mass of 'lost' humanity: "how do we/Know we're not all simply gnats snagged in the fabric/Of one cosmic brocade . . . submerged links caught in a land-wash, carried by/Undetectable currents". Mankind lives in 'a treacherous Archipelago of volatility . . . Taunted by near unreachable psychic fruits". Finally a profound, and scientific, reflection on human self-awareness: "we are not islands, we are organisms, sums/Of ourselves who are not ourselves, just prisms/Pyramiding our perceptions with myriad refractions/Palmed in prayer-arched paradigms".

Canto XXXI: Back to the victims – 'ragged trousered dragons . . . straitjacketed in cryptic apparatus of metabolic stupefaction'. A searing indictment of bad medications: 'blood pumping pills/Charging haemoglobins to arterial larvas'. Dragons/inmates are then compared to various kinds of religious devotees. Then follows an in-depth comparison of psychiatry and religion: 'The Laboratorial Host, the pharmacological Ghost,/The synthetic Christ substantiated into tablets by/Pharmacists' metaphorical Eucharists'. I would agree that miracles retrospectively reported merit comparison with hallucinations.

Canto XXXII: Dragons now assume the guise of militant religious sectarians – I like 'Anxiolytic Baptists'; these make war on the Harpies and malignant dragons. There is a eulogy of Roger Crab, a 17th century idealistic visionary and prime hermit, persecuted for his ideals after surviving a near fatal head-wound while fighting for Cromwell. Heraclitus is

mentioned as another supreme hermit, one of the world's foremost melancholiacs.

Canto XXXIII: Now the dragons have become fragile fugitives, unable to bear their own heat for more than a few seconds, and 'cautiously retreating/From lethal traps of cobras' tracking stares'. Bizarre image of 'Terrapin-man shrinking in his tank' – akin to the ward internee, but equipped with 'parabolic optics which/Pitch him at a future distance from our own inner visions,/Our undeveloped lenses'. On to reiterated dampened dragons, and struggling writers with their worn, aged paperbacks, struggling for the 'Transmogrification' of their drab, sordid experience, into sublimity.

Canto XXXIV: Indictment of complacent, passive, obedient humanity. Alan challenges the arrogance which calls itself 'Sanity', 'Hospitals which specialize in keeping the suicidal alive'. He sees adherence to the 'norm' as being a sort of mass self-destruct: 'The united will to court our own extinction, to lose/Ourselves in the illusory mass of communion/Through consuming . . .'. The passive, brainwashed majority is contrasted with the vitality of 'those submerged in the right-hand hemisphere . . . Irregular geniuses of engrossing energies'. Then variously debilitated dragons, struggling for self-expression. The depths of their struggles are beyond verbalization and rationalization.

Canto XXXV: Grand finale: today's dragons, shrunk and muted; their once-terrible flames reduced to the puffings of compulsive smokers on the ward, some of whom try to cure themselves with poetry, dragons who keep on returning. Discrimination again – 'Inconvenient sensitivities conveniently/Misperceived as subversive tendencies . . . cerebrally rebellious/Lumpenproles . . . weals on the rash of capitalism'. Dragons as demons again

'Evolved from the quagmires of these mutating tensions'. Attack on 'parasitic agents of polite society' who ultimately dodge responsibility 'Our uncommon property outsourced without contract'. Once again an evocation of those who return to the system. Large-scale dragons seem to fuse into the smaller ones. The socially repressive nature of the psychiatric system is crystallized in 'the vaguer reasons/Of the brain's souped bourgeoisie, undisturbed suburbias of curtain-twitching sentience'. It cops out of facing fundamental questions: 'Better to bolt them to dormant *bêtes noires*, to be believed,/Than believe the unbelievable . . .' A final apocalyptic vision of captive dragons being set free.

An erudite work indeed, and with a full, reader-friendly glossary – an example which many would do well to follow

Part II: *The Shadow Thorns* – introduced by two quotations: one referring to 'demons' and excuses, the other to the free-ranging mind. The thorny shadows of time-established selves of the opening poem represent profound truths which most people would prefer to avoid facing. The modes of their evasiveness are ingeniously portrayed by means of trans-sensory imagery – 'plumb metronomes/Of corresponding eyes . . .' The poem explores the problem of verbalization when faced with 'thought's amorphous plum'. The eerie nocturnal scene defies verbalization; the poet hopes for an 'onomatopoeic strum of syllables' to come to the rescue. The location is obviously a tourist shrine – ideal for hallucination, and mutation – 'Angelised lambs . . . augment/Our soul-photosynthesis: from larvae – Cynical, bromidic – to a shadfly/Of membranous moral transparency'. Souls were 'sainted posthumously' but their shadows 'were left uncanonised'. The powers of the agents of

holiness are limited – 'Obscurer qualities of suggestive guise/On the blank map of moral paradigms/No Episcopal grid can categorise. The shrine is frequented by 'fogged pilgrims' with 'Impulses of unchanneled faculties . . . Unemployable powers no human speech/Can appraise or oppress'. They prove resilient against Orthodoxy's powers to suppress them, indeed – the shadow thorns bloom under duress'. Such souls have patrons in the 'shadow saints', honouring the unfathomable.

There follows a fascinating portrait gallery, presumably of characters from the workshops.

Agatha of the intrusive thoughts: The subject is prey to obsessions, which multiply in response to 'boiling oils of noble absolutes'; these 'anti-temptations,/Repugnant but strangely magnetic in Suggestion' prevail against her 'futile resistance'. There seems to be reference to something like ECT 'to abort her consciousness'.

Lil of the twitches: 'medicated tics . . . Evangelising their gospel liquids'(religion = medication) She would prefer suicide: 'How ironic to be termed *mentally ill*?/When it's heightened sanity prompts the spill/Of her tired haemoglobin'. She makes failed attempts at suicide, then focuses on the toilet and the poetry workshop. Life goes on – "Chemical palsy traps her in its stitch"

Laura of the tangents: The subject is in a state of chronic derangement – '*We're on a collision course with nature/Because we can't fit into the future*'. She is in possession of 'pearls of upside-down wisdom, and has all the sensations of Alice in Wonderland's changes in size.

Flo of the solitudes: Flo seems to be self-baptising in liquid of her own making – 'She's lost to her process, the epicenter/Of her head's magic lantern waxing aflicker'. She

seems to be in a temporary, inspired trance for the duration of a therapy session, than is 'pinched' back to normality.

Pearl of the fractured laugh: Pearl is crabby on the outside, vulnerable on the inside. She obviously gets a lot from her writing therapy – 'Pearl's rapt at capturing all the snagged calles/Unanswered inside her . . . she ploughs/Clipped thickets of trope'. A volatile character 'Pearl's a spit of Carroll's March Hare'. Her writing activity includes cut-and-paste suicide notes; presumably literary endeavour saves her life!

Bob the logic conqueror: 'Bob's the silent conqueror of objects'. He has 'an obscure system of macro-reduction . . . Science-poetics of toothcomb scansion'. However, this is not really an asset: "The brain grows mouldy in its air-tight bone;/Marbly gorgonzola sealed in a cheese-dome." He seems to have some affinity to Napoleon and Mussolini; striking image of 'retreating from a brow's Moscow'.

Stephen of the silent laughter: This is definitely the lightest-hearted poem in the selection, one given to uncontrollable laughter. There is, however, a black side to it – 'Mercurised craters, stained against the black/Hole of his throat . . .'

Robert of the clocks: Someone with a phobia about chronometers, and an obsessive-compulsive disorder 'That impels him to avoid things that aren't there'. He has a struggle to express himself, as an unseen hand seems to stifle his words/ He shrieks with desperation, and can only write words containing 'os'

Thomas of the lost properties: Image of the Lost Property Office of the mind. He seems to be extraordinarily emaciated, and has a painful struggle to express himself: 'His rattling voice like scouring crockery/chipped and scratched by the scourge of poetry . . . the

sprung rhythms of his angst'. Eventually he finds peace (or death) with a 'trance-charm'.

Natalie of the tiny writing : Truly animated writing – 'scriptural insects./Columns of ants carrying syntactic/Leaf after leaf'; she claims to be unable to perceive her own 'inscrutable characteries'. The words come from 'entangled mental cemeteries'.

Chloe of the obscure accent: Chloe had started life speaking Upper Working Class Brightonian, but then her accent changed because of a trauma; this change attracted xenophobia. The effect was bizarre – 'an invisible man slowly glass-/Blown from Chloe's mouth . . .' She became suspected of being an illegal immigrant, 'smuggling in foreign genes'. Her amorphous accent estranged her from her neighbours, and she was driven into seclusion.

Arm-pocked Marge: A chronic inflictor of self-harm. This poem presents an agonizing array of painful images, such as "rubicund burn-scars bracelet her wrists . . .claw-marks stripe her lacerated cleavage"

Word-Salad Sal: This celebrates a 'natural' in free word association – 'Incantatory patterns sans codas . . . Continuous streams of inchoate verbs/And nouns jumbled up that ramble and swerve/Into surreal realms of symbolist verse . . . As if she could rub off each sooty scar/Of head-mapping lexicon; Sal can spar/With the best at esoteric chutzpah.'

Sorcha of torched moments: A chronic sufferer, burned and scarred by traumatic experiences.

Ray of the half-managed anger: Anger control – of justified anger. Ray is a 'Vigilante of the arraigned ego . . . he'll have no truck with cryptic/Authorities'. He hates the capitalist state. And gets some consolation from a smoking break.

Heidi of the permanent gleam: Tainted happiness – Heidi’s eyes radiate optimism – “but it’s pure fear/That flutters at her laughter’s barbed frontier/And sobs through her voice, neurotic tears//Bruising her eyes in their sunk Belvederes.”

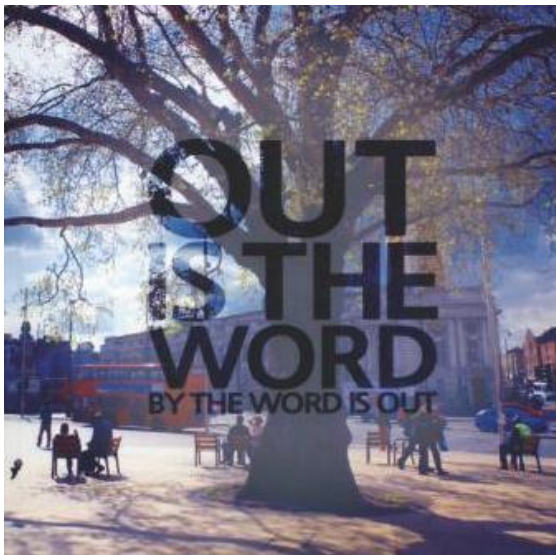
Olive of the leapt edges: Someone who wishes to drown herself, restrained by dopants – ‘Organ-pumped chemical intermissions/In her end-of-the-pier apprehensions’.

A final reminder of the uncanonized shadow thorns.

The whole contents of this volume stemmed from Alan’s work while poet-in-residence and poetry workshop facilitator at Mill View Psychiatric Hospital in Hove.

Dave Russell

Out is the word



An anthology of creative writing by *The word is out*

Edited by: Anne Cooper

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the word is out

Out is the word

It’s no mean feat to publish a vibrant creative writing anthology which also promotes the method and sources of its production – here co-production with the South London and Maudsley Social Inclusion Hope and Recovery Project team (SHARP)ⁱ – whilst retaining the dignity and integrity of the selected literary artworks. ‘The Word is out’ workshop writers’ collection has certain advantages that overcome any sense of lingering doubts.

The blend of lyrics, short stories and poetry that highlight creativity, that allow the circumstances that brought them together to stroll out of shot, adds to the attraction of this book.ⁱⁱ

The look, feel and accessibility of *Out is the word* helps merge method with instinctive art, and foregrounds a theme ‘. . . what a disguise of living a life is.’ (Tom Collins, p25). Whether it’s the hardcover version I’m referring to here, or the multi-platform E-book version via *Smashwords* (a welcome choice and addition to wide distribution and access possibilities), the intention to reach out with the word and its expression from life is to be applauded. With James Ferndale’s Lambeth cover photo complete with red bus and an Autumn that could be Spring and vice-versa, people in puzzled poses admiring or in awe of something just out of view, in song, story and poetry, the writers show ‘...recovery is always about moving over new ground’ (Ben Cooper, p20).

There are ‘break sideways’ characters dredging for the soul, bring it into light, setting aside the weight of travel for a while to ensure safe passage. They shake off the silt and sidewaysness of a mental health system that for much of recent history had become

lost in its own insights and method, creating an impersonal 'purposeless' regularity.

In selecting an epigraph from R.D. Laingⁱⁱⁱ the creative works have found close affinity to Laing's rare insight, and themselves. This epigraph was an inspired choice – the new and the real leaving behind utter despair, holding on to the elemental. The authors' often-shared experience from mental distress, explicit or otherwise, informs themes of holding fast into the new, a carrying forward of self-esteem from key grounding experiences so that mindfulness memory/possibility can become alive again. The collective unconscious memories of childhood, both of comfort, and opportunity, chime regularly through the pages where: '... The mind is a marketplace./... You are there with your own/ business to do and/there is little time./' (Miriam Valencia, p70).

There is a creative honesty carried through this collection, but no illusions; this synthesis of past with present can be cruel on the individual where the creative writing makes visible what cannot be forgotten, '... creativity unleashed by this act was a factor in her breakdown as well as her salvation' (Helen George, p31); undeterred, the book's vital message, if it should have one, is where creativity can flourish, then so can the person, and their community. There *is* something new being expressed that, out of method and language, is dedicated, has belief, has a glow of release.

And – *recovery*? I'd go further than senior OT lead development officer Anna Croucher's Introduction which illuminates the confusion persisting within services on how to implement the 'buzzword' of 'recovery' into 'practice'. From a service user/survivor perspective, re-stating a view that the colonisation of recovery by e.g. mental health NHS Trusts has led to such diffusions, is still an

important perspective to include in such debates. The anthology could be viewed as emerging into a mediating role.

The book displays writing as instinct; if it ever was directed as 'therapy', this aspect falls away or becomes a by-product in *Out is the word*, where self-esteem and creativity – wordart, or word design (as poet, editor and critic David Morley might describe) re-take a lost ground. I am still surprised it has taken so long to realise the merits of genuine co-production, '... collaboratively working with people as peers, handing over control and responsibility, encouraging a different point of view..'. (Introduction, Croucher).

It's a method that advances people, rather than slows or stalls system-wide progression, the latter being a view I sense often thought but un-said in public services. *Out is the word* – the nice reversal of the group's title echoing the reversal in roles, position, creative and working culture: '... Every person to his own/Just look up at us/Never a dull moment, never shut up!/. . .' (Ruby Govinden, p33).

Anne Cooper and Hanne Lee's Editorial note is more diplomatic about recovery than my comment, and vastly important (too modestly titled as an 'editorial note') as one of the few, though growing number of 'service user/mental health system survivor 'guides not tucked away in reports or training presentations, about the life and times of creative co-production that's widely accessible to a general reader. The book's Introduction and steering group Editorial alongside the diverse authors' works themselves provide another timely call to continue shifting the health and wellbeing services' cultures and strategies with assistance of confident allies, as are SHARP.

This call will be helped when the web address to access copies and workshop news is

replaced with the correct one on the printed book; look for www.thewordisoutwriting.co.uk rather than www.thewordisout.com, or your spiritual surprises may come packaged in a different wrapper!

Croucher's plea that the anthology, and workshops should live on beyond the funding is one that's likely to be heard.

I've deliberately chosen not to highlight many individual anthology pieces, wanting to present and review the anthology as an interlinked artefact – with the hope, and expectation, the next reader will discover for themselves something new.

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Phil Ruthen – his book reviews, poetry, short stories and articles are widely published in UK and abroad. His most recent poetry collection is *Apple Eye Feat* (Waterloo Press, Hove, 2012), details at www.waterloopresshove.co.uk and his short story collection *Feint Ruled Lines* was first published as a Kindle E-book. Phil has also been a Trustee, and Chair of the celebrated national literature development charity Survivors' Poetry www.survivorspoetry.org

i The Word is out was funded by a Guys and St. Thomas Charitable fund and was founded at the Social Inclusion Hope and Recovery Project, (SHARP) a statutory service in London Borough of Lambeth, part of the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM). ii The Word is out is a creative writing project delivered by and for people who use mental health services. Everything about The Word is Out, including the name,

promotional materials and logo, the choice of workshops and venues were the decision of a group, made up predominantly of 'service users'. The majority of workshop facilitators are 'service users'. iii "What is called a poem is compounded perhaps of communication, invention, fecundation, discovery, production, creation... There is something new under the sun; being has emerged from non-being; a spring has bubbled out of a rock." R.D. Laing. The Word is out Enquiries and further information: info@thewordisoutwriting.co.uk Where to find The Word is out writing online: Website

<http://www.thewordisoutwriting.co.uk>
Anthology available via Smashwords E-book platforms:
<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/257707> ISBN: 978 130 114 624 Price: \$2.50

Creative Future launched the UK's 1st national literary competition for marginalized/disabled writers:
<http://bit.ly/ZFtyq0>

CREATIVE FUTURE LITERARY AWARDS

Theme: 'The Spark'

Style: Flash Fiction (maximum 300 words) or Poetry (maximum 200 words)

Deadline: Midday, Sunday 16th June 2013

Entry fee: £5 per piece, £15 if critique required

Award ceremony: 5pm, Friday 27th September 2013, Charleston House, East Sussex, part of the Small Wonder Festival. Hosted by Lemn Sissay. Produced by Collected Works.

ALL COMPETITION ENTRIES MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ENTRY FORM.

This can be downloaded from www.creativefuture.org.uk or email/posted from our offices. Contact info@creativefuture.org.uk or ring 01273 234780.. For more details on the competition, judging panel, award event etc check out the Creative Future Literary Awards website. <http://cfliteraryawards.wordpress.com>. Please ensure you read the competition rules and the eligibility criteria before entering.

Many thanks!

Dominique De-Light | *Project Director* | [Creative Future](#)

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Top poet and playwright Lemn Sissay to judge new literary award

Brighton-based charity Creative Future has launched a national competition to

discover the best writers from disadvantaged groups who find it hard to get their work recognised.

The judging panel will be led by best-selling poet, playwright and broadcaster Lemn Sissay, who spent his childhood in care and who will present the prizes at an award ceremony at Charleston House, East Sussex, in September during the Small Wonder literary festival.

The Creative Future Literary Awards has prizes totalling £5,000 and is open to short stories and poetry from writers in marginalised groups including homeless people, those with physical and learning disabilities, as well as those with mental health or substance misuse issues, the long-term unemployed, carers, ex-offenders and refugees.

The competition theme is ‘The Spark’ and is divided into two sections: Flash fiction for short stories of 300 words maximum, and poems of 200 words maximum, with a deadline for entries of midday on June 16, 2013.

There’s an entry fee of £5, or £15 to include a critique of the submitted work.

There will be a total of 20 award winners and prizes include cash as well as membership and mentoring at New Writing South, Brighton, which is dedicated to inspiring and nurturing creative writers throughout South East England.

Winners will get to read their work at the award ceremony and successful entries will be published in an award anthology.

Creative Future Project Director, Dominique De-Light, says: “The association with well-known authors, publication and national coverage will ensure that winning writers will experience greatly boosted self-esteem,

acknowledgement of their writing skill and increased opportunities”.

The charity already runs two other events to promote the work of disabled and marginalised writers and artists in the South East: The Impact Art Fair, the only art fair in the UK solely featuring the work of disabled and disadvantaged artists, and The Tight Modern, a miniature replica of the Tate Modern highlighting 50 disabled artists.

Anyone interested in entering the literary competition can get more details and apply for an entry form at:

info@creativefuture.org.uk

Check cfliteraryawards.wordpress.com for more details

For more information, please contact Creative Future Project Director Dominique De-Light on 01273 234780 or 07866 677950.

The award ceremony will be held at Charleston House on Friday, September 27, 2013, 5pm.

"Creative Future exists to nurture marginalised artists/writers in their creative development, leading them to high quality professional creative practice. We provide skills training, mentoring, exhibiting, promoting and publishing opportunities."

We aim to inspire aspiration and artistic excellence amongst marginalised artists and writers. We increase their confidence, enabling them to re-engage in the community by offering publishing and exhibiting opportunities to 'get their work out there'; challenging their own and other people's perception of their potential. We are a bridge from the margins to the mainstream. Creative Future was established in March 2007 by Dominique De-Light and Simon Powell. Based in

Brighton, working across the South East with national events, we've held over 50 events with audiences totalling tens of thousands. We've engaged over 1200 people in our activities of which 38% have gone onto further education, volunteering or employment.

