

Poetry *Express*

Spring 2010

Issue 31

SP Mentoring Scheme by Roy Birch - National Outreach Coordinator

State of the Arts Conference London 2010 by Simon Jenner

Fascism and its Socialist, and Liberal elements by Peter Donnelly

Featured Artist - New Artist Laura Wilson

Broadsheet, Reviews - and much more



Laura Wilson My World I

 **Survivors' Poetry**
promoting poetry by survivors
of mental distress

●
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Reviews *from Dave Russell*

Update *from Simon Jenner*

Outreach *from Roy Birch*

BROADSHEET



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Survivors' Poetry
promoting poetry by survivors
of mental distress

Survivors' Poetry is a unique national charity which promotes the writing of survivors of mental distress. Please visit www.survivorspoetry.com for more information or write to us. A Survivor may be a person with a current or past experience of psychiatric hospitals, ECT, tranquillisers or other medication, a user of counselling services, a survivor of sexual abuse, child abuse and any other person who has empathy with the experiences of survivors.

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Editorial *by* Dave Russell

Well; here we are again. Hopefully the substance of this well-packed issue vindicates the time spent on its completion. There's plenty happening! For myself, review material has been unfailingly abundant, both in terms of books and of lectures/readings. It is our aim to give a panoramic view of poetic activity, embracing the literary mainstream and extreme areas of social need.

In terms of book reviewing, there has been some emphasis on titles brought out by Bloodaxe, who have devoted considerable attention to works related to mental health issues. But we have an 'open door' policy as regards independent publications, and ones by individuals and groups which have obtained local government, regional or national support (see my review of *Make I Sweat*). For three years running, I have happily attended the Anarchist Book Fair, a splendid demonstration of freedom of thought. We too must carry that banner.

Substantial reviewing space is given to sound recordings: because of the oral base of much poetry, and because our name is *Survivors Poetry and Music*. Sound recordings are in the offing, perhaps in the style of the excellent compilation produced by Leeds *Survivors* group; a special focus is planned on the work of the late lamented P J Fahy.

The visual area gets its place too, as we now have a featured artist in every issue. In tandem with PEN, there are Poetry Workshops held monthly in Swiss Cottage Library, and the mentoring scheme, which guides struggling survivor poets to articulation and publication. Three volumes from the scheme will shortly be forthcoming. (See Roy Birch's article). It is a great experience for me to have been introduced to the activity of *Poet in the City*, which brings major writers to the public, in a totally 'reader-friendly' way. Its impeccable presentation, often backed with slides or film footage, helps to remove inhibitions and trepidations about these 'difficult' works. It is admirable

that *Survivors* has a connection with this organisation. Incidentally, several *Bloodaxe* writers are featured there, and some of those same writers are actively involved with grass roots workshops and programmes. So now there are vital, functioning links between the literary mainstream and the grass roots area. From both directions, it is great to be making a stand against any process of 'dumbing down', and any feeling that substantial works are linked to élitist exclusiveness.

Poetry Express (PE) has another vital function - that of enlightening survivors in general as to the structure and activities of support organizations (see Simon Jenner's article). I would also praise the efforts of *Core Arts*, *Creative Routes*, *Southwark Mind* and the like who are doing admirable outreach work.

We want to hear from you. *Poetry Express* welcomes contributions from all quarters. There are many small, struggling activist groups who could interact with *Survivors* to great mutual benefit. It needs to be built up into a truly nationwide organisation, so features from the regions are of paramount importance. It is vital to hear from isolated individuals who could link with or set up support networks with a little help and prompting. If there is sufficient response, we could easily start a Correspondence Column.

Survivors is starting work on a comprehensive website which would provide a notice board for activities. It could also be accessible for making comments, and feature downloads of texts and recordings. Publications could be made available as e-books. Many have regretted the cessation of the printed version of the *Poetry Express*. With the completion of the website, it would be possible to have a 'print on demand' arrangement for this, as well as the Mentoring Scheme pamphlets. This would surmount budgeting difficulties.

So let's struggle on, and remember, PE is for YOU. The reader/listener/viewer.

Update from Simon Jenner

When last I wrote, summer was edging us to dust and bright worry. Now we've cleared an extraordinary set of ante-Olympics hurdles: three, to be precise. We've managed to convince John Ellerman to give us £50,000 over two years. A4A have awarded us over £8,500 for IT, and finally ACE did listen and award us £120,000 Sustain money (the lottery money made available to worthy and normally-thriving Regularly Funded Organisations in a time of recession). We've a bolt-on £10,000 too, for consultancy. I must express my heartfelt thanks to everyone, particularly Phil Ruthen the Chair, for intensively reading and feeding back to me; and to Blanche Donnery for her IT advice when making the IT bid.

In dreams begin responsibilities. With the money comes worry. How sustainable is it, can we match lifestyle and a gear-change in salaries, and can we pace ourselves? But these are temporary luxuries of worry. When these questions are answered - an Awayday in an Islington pub (the stylish, antique but provender-less Albert and Pearl, 181 Upper High Street) did address many of these resulting in an action plan drawn up by Maggie Sullivan - what about the next funding round?

These are internal matters that impact on the wider community. But such office-gazing doesn't of course address the ends of people who make the point of all this worth noting at all. You. The organisation has gone to some extent virtual. This is due to the age we live in, which doesn't help those without IT access or skills. It's also a reflection of our reduced on-hand efficacy. Everything has to be run by a small team of staff, volunteers, and people we're affiliated to. We need to keep the dialogue as fresh as possible and to be honest address how the wider survivor community can benefit from the extraordinary rise in our fortunes since the rather dire days of 2005-06 when we faced

extinction. We could again. Our RFO status depends on convincing a reduced ACE that we've delivered on those elements we promised. Perhaps above all a larger or a tiny SP relies on a re-invented website that, with the help of new trustee Judith Graham and Administrator Blanche Donnery, has reached the stage when a rebuild is about to happen. Whatever happens though, the website will dictate much of our future. Poetry Express grazes off it in bright floral patterns or zany gradations. I bitterly regret the lack of printed copies. But the volunteer hub needed to mail it out just reflects the end of a process that also now weighs in as a prohibitive cost. More, the prohibition comes from Nick McDowell, Head of ACE London. 'You don't really mean to print Poetry Express again, Simon?' He was worried the centre could not hold if we did. We listen to Nick. When we didn't, or rather the old Board didn't (a wrangle about Administrators), well, the rest was so 2005.

We'll be delivering a far greater volume of website interactivity. Podcasts, archive and news, will appear. The P. J. Fahy project is being addressed by Co Wright, a major undertaking to digitalize reel-to-reels. Videos are also similarly to be uploaded. An astonishing resource that has languished too long will be one of the benefits made available to everyone. There'll be areas where survivors can directly address needs, as some do via e-mail. What this still portends is a singing and dancing website that in a reflective and not hyper-active manner, opens the huge resource of SP's past and present artistic activity to everyone. And encourages further interactivity - as it already does on the Forum.

It still doesn't address that nagging feeling that people are being left out of the digital loop. It's a seductive loop, but it's also

one that can exclude. We need to open up this debate. Beyond the digital is one cry worth making. And such thoughts are the cry of their occasion, to misquote Wallace Stevens. We need to know who, above all the stats figures - sometimes over 6,000 downloads of Poetry Express - feels what about SP. Who feels excluded? If you're reading this you might be IT savvy, but who do you know who isn't? The website in its rebuilding will address these questions. It's over to you, in a time of election-dimmed politics, to express them for us. It helps us to strengthen ourselves, and thus all of us.


With the focus of my writing on the State of the Arts Conference further in this edition, I'm providing a less florid example of my Editorial style to bring you this news. It's already in part a couple of months old. The Conference, incidentally, provided an example of just how the governing half live. Even the titled actors looked a trifle embarrassed, though they hid it well when the wine flowed later. The poet and publisher Peter Brennan, whom I smuggled in as he delivered my latest book, said he felt disgusted enough. He ate, however, then rapidly shot off back to Enfield before he could be persuaded to listen to another mahogany empanelling of luvvies.

One of the great themes of the conference was the self-communing nature of interactive art forms, which are primarily visual, with aural content. Basically, don't bother reading. This makes for exciting if strobe-inflected experiences. But the interactivity of reader and text is something that's been with us for longer than the vocabulary to express all this. Nevertheless, if there are ways to address poetry as more than the school text poets reading near a canal and making a promo of themselves, let us know. Poetry readings can be occasionally inspiring, but are often dull. Reading is one of the most enriching intimacies with ourselves (yes, I did mean that). But it can take the solitary too far in a walk to solitude, more desolate than Wallander on a beach. Have you some ideas about how to enhance your experience of

reading, and that we could respond to? If you have, I'll try to make sure the next State of the Arts Conference hears of them. They used an awful lot of words to get away from words, but they're a receptive group. That's of course if the arts is still here. It has weathered worse. So will we. Whatever happens, SP will survive with its emerging website - and above all be reachable. Which is what we're about. No change of governance there, then.



Simon Jenner is appearing as Poet in the City, the Portuguese Embassy, June 22nd, 2010. He also reads from his collection Pessoa at Trinity College Cambridge, on May 5th. His paper on Other Voices (keynote Lecturer, Carol-Ann Duffy) will be at Chichester University 25-27th June, where he is Royal Literary Fund Fellow, and where he will launch the booklet


Survivors' Poetry
would like say a big thank you to
Gideon Harbour for his kind donation
to SP.


Thanks to Benjamin
Zephaniah for attending our last
Poetry Cafe event on 11th February.

Outreach *by* Roy Birch

Since disinvestment, Outreach has been largely conducted from the office. By the end of 2006, it was impossible to even attend festivals, as there was insufficient money available to take performers to the festivals and feed and lodge them for the duration.

Since disinvestment, by far the greatest amount of activity-based outreach has been via the Vale House Project. Begun as a 20-week pilot in November 2006, with funding from Paul Hamlyn, who realized its potential sufficiently to hint at the possibility of fuller and longer-term funding to take it forward, it has continued as a voluntary activity, largely due to the fact that Paul Hamlyn changed its funding criteria at approximately the time their funding of the project was coming to an end, and no further funding has been sought by SP.

The original weekly session at Vale House Residential has since been supplemented by a further weekly session at Vale House Day Services.

A successful pilot of the Project at Welwyn-Garden-City YMCA ended at Christmas. Staff changes and shift reorganization have delayed the Project's return there, though negotiations have reopened.

Passmores House in Harlow, probably the most State-of-the-Art Drug Re-Hab in England, has invited the Project to run sessions there, though administrative difficulties mean that the sessions cannot begin until the current intake has graduated - about three months hence.

A pilot programme has begun at the Westminster Drug Project Drop-In at Royston.

Mid-Herts MIND has invited the Project to hold sessions at its Well-Being Centre in Stevenage.

An interest in the Vale House Project has been shown by the Bracton Centre in Dartford, a radical NHS Mental Health Unit with a burgeoning reputation for the successful use of creative therapy.

In November of last year, the Vale House Project gave a successful Workshop at Faraday House, the London Campus of Syracuse University.

A lengthy article about the Vale House Project appeared in the November issue of Psych-Talk, the Student Magazine of the British Psychology Foundation.

Sadly, the organizations mentioned above (with the possible exception of the Bracton Centre) are not in a sufficiently strong financial position to offer more than the most nominal of payments, and some are not even able to do that. For the project to prosper, funding is needed. That the Vale House Project still exists is due to the selfless generosity of two qualified therapists (my wife, Lucia, and Reiki Master Geoff Dilley) who have partnered me in over 200 sessions, almost all of them unpaid.

2009 saw the publication of Postscript, an anthology of poems by members of the Creative Writing Group at the Felix Post Geriatric Unit of the Maudsley Hospital, and the start of negotiations for a follow-up volume.

Also in 2009, two new groups joined the SP network - GROW, who are based in Hastings, and High Peak Writers, whose home is Buxton in Derbyshire.

On Saturday, March 27th, at the MIND Well-Being Centre in Stevenage, SP Network Group Stevenage Survivors will be holding a Creative Therapy Day. I am one of the organizers of the event. Funded by the Hertfordshire Community Foundation, through its Grass Roots Fund, the purpose of the event is to show that a small local mental-health-based Creative Writing group can be much more. Stevenage Survivors is blessed, inasmuch as a significant proportion of its membership, past and present, are actively involved, often professionally, in the practise of Creative Therapy, and it was felt that here was a chance to show that we are much more than simply a writers' group, and also an opportunity to bring Creative Therapy to the local community in a manner easier for service users and the general public to understand and appreciate. All the activities at the Therapy Day are being facilitated by group members. There will be workshops in: Creative Writing, Music (Creating a piece for the evening's performance), Assertiveness, Healthy Eating, and the Vale House Project. There will also be a Drop in, Drop out, Drop back in as you feel like it, Art Workshop, which will span the entire daytime part of the event. In addition, there will be Tarot Reading and Meditation. From 6pm there will be a Celebratory Reading. Well-known survivor poet Sarah Wardle will be the Guest Poet. Admission is free, and lunch will be provided.

I am currently negotiating for SP involvement in a Mental Health Service-Users Art Festival in Norwich. There is also the possibility of creating a Survivor Writing Group in the city.

I am also exploring the possibility of a literary collaboration with the Bracton Centre.

I am also currently approaching festivals with regard to SP involvement.

Since disinvestment there has not been an Outreach budget. Outreach without a budget is not a viable long-term option. Hopefully, 2010 will see an easing of Outreach's financial position, and a return to its former status.



Roy Birch - National Outreach and Mentoring Scheme Coordinator

The Survivors' Poetry Mentoring Scheme

by Roy Birch



A View and an Appraisal

2009 was an exciting, exacting, and educational year for the SP National Poetry Mentoring Scheme, and for myself as Coordinator. Three excellent volumes and an equally excellent pamphlet all came into being during the year, though, sadly, a technical problem with our printer has meant that none of the publications has yet seen the light of day.

Problems, both technical and human, involving two of our mentoring partnerships, brought home to all of us at SP the very real need for a set of definitive guidelines for both mentees and their mentors (something the scheme had always lacked). The creation of those guidelines is now virtually complete. Unfortunately, so pressing was this matter felt to be that it was decided to suspend the current round of mentoring until the guidelines were ready. The 2009 intake now becomes the 2010 intake.

If the need to suspend the year's mentoring intake was the nadir of the scheme's 2009 activity, its zenith was undoubtedly the completion of *Sleeping with the Snow Queen*, Helen Hudspith's beautiful pamphlet, which, due to circumstances beyond anyone's control, had taken two years to create.

Let the principals (Helen and her mentor, Maggie Sullivan) tell the story of its creation.

Helen: My mentor was Maggie Sullivan. We worked exclusively by e-mail. I would send batches of poems to Maggie, she would comment, and then I would do revisions - and material was passed between us until we were both satisfied that we had realized the full potential of each piece. The completion of the work took some time due to the fact that I had a number of personal crises along the way, and suffered from relapses in my mental health condition that meant I was totally unable to take on any 'creative' process. During these times Maggie was entirely supportive - as was Roy when he became aware of the situation. Thanks are due to them both that they stood by me and were able to give me more time, when others perhaps would have given up.

*

I read mostly contemporary poetry, though of course I recognise - and have great respect for - the massively rich poetic tradition that is out there. I enjoy Roger McGough, Selima Hill, and Billy Collins mostly, because I recognise their sheer expertise in playing with words, sounds, and situations. Their work is also effortlessly witty. Seamus Heaney I enjoy because of his ability to get a real sense of place and mood in his work. His opening sections of Beowulf are amazing. My historical loves must be topped by Owen's war work. His Anthem for Doomed Youth is my favourite poem of all time. Beyond poetry I enjoy a wide range of quality prose and song writing. Recently, Cormac McCarthy's The Road left me completely speechless. Dark and terrifying as it is, I have never read anything more poetic. My main influence, however, has to be Tom Waits, the American singer/songwriter. He is for me the complete poet. He just adds music.

I don't really consider myself to be any 'kind' of poet. I simply write, and present it for others to read.

I have always written, but for the majority of my life it was prose. I wrote my first poem about 12 years ago, while suffering from very severe depression and having regular psychotic

episodes. By sheer chance I went to a counsellor and a possible source of my problems was revealed. I had been very seriously sexually abused when I was 12; indeed, had been lucky to escape with my life, and, for 20 years, had never told anyone.

As I began to talk about my past, I began to suffer from extreme flashbacks, and it was from one of these that my first poem appeared.

Once I began to write I couldn't stop. The majority of the early pieces were about what had happened to me. Some are featured in Sleeping with the Snow Queen.

*

Maggie: My first venture as a mentor for Survivors Poetry. I welcomed the prospect but it was a bit like going on a blind date - Helen and I did not know each other from Adam. I was reassured by the fact that SP had matched me with Helen on the basis of perceived similarities. It helps enormously when mentor and mentee find ground they can share.

I felt that Helen had taken a risk in offering up her poems for scrutiny, and, mindful of the responsibility this created I was filled with doubt about my ability to advise. When the manuscript arrived I carried it gently into the kitchen, took a deep breath and began to read. An hour later, I was smitten. Helen's work sang with talent and possibilities. Everything delightful was there. Over the next few days I put time aside to get to know the poems as thoroughly as I could.

I e-mailed Helen to introduce myself, and gave her an initial view. We set some clear timelines and guidelines for working together. I needed to know that my proposals met Helen's expectations. We agreed that I would supply detailed comments on her manuscript by a certain date.

Further reading convinced me that the manuscript was already eighty percent in place and gave me time to clarify what I felt I could offer. Helen and I worked together for approaching two years. There were times

when Helen's circumstances meant that she had to take a break. We worked through about three iterations of the manuscript to arrive at the final draft. Helen was great in taking on board my suggestions but occasionally she felt that they did not suit her ambitions for a particular poem and that's fine - a mentee must own the finished work.

Support from Survivors Poetry was nearly always forthcoming although it would have helped to have some guidelines offered in advance. I understand that guidelines are being progressed and look forward to seeing them. If Survivor's Poetry asks me to take on another mentoring project then I will.

'Sleeping with the Snow Queen is a skillfully managed pack of Tarot Cards. You want to see all the cards revealed but know that dark things will emerge as well as light and it is important to embrace both. The collection is a memoir and travel guide, brave in its honesty, challenging in the surprises it holds, an extraordinary compass.'

Igniting rainbows

This is the point where light becomes green,
squeezed through the small window,
translucent.

Morning found snow.
It pierces bubbles,
ignites rainbows.

I scoop one
slippery as love,
blow.

Fresh exclamation on my cheek,
a lambent smile tumbles into my palm.
I wear it all day on my lapel.

Nothing to wear

She reads, upside down from the Doctor's report -
Last time she was appropriately dressed.

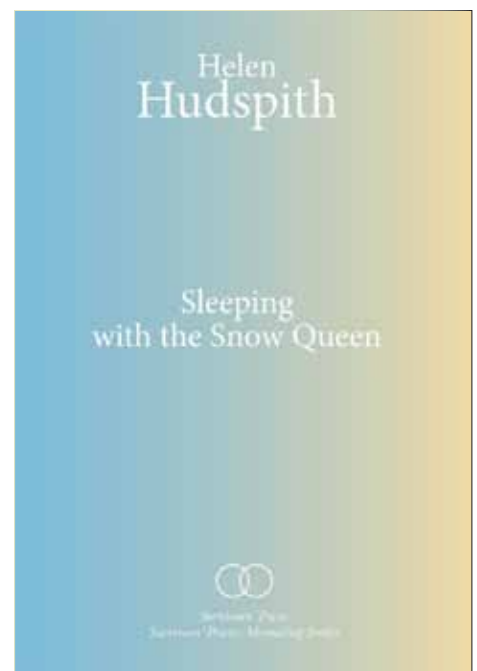
Forget complex psychological theories -
in the realms of the insane
a sliding sartorial scale
tells everything they need to know.

Now she is presenting as an emergency,
begs for safety, solace
from the hum in her head
and the great need to cut.

But they decide on a change of pills
given her skills of appropriate dressing,
not the comfort of locked doors.

And she wonders
To the voices in her head
what exactly is the dress code for a breakdown?

Helen
Hudspith



Sleeping with the Snow Queen

Helen Hudspith

Mentored by *Maggie Sullivan*

I chose to feature this particular mentoring partnership because of Helen's personal struggle, which made the mentoring such a long-drawn-out process, and Maggie's skill, patience, and understanding, which made completion possible.

There were also three full volumes brought to completion in 2009. **Inkblotting** by *Joanna Watson*; **Courting the Asylum** by *Ayelet McKenzie*, and **Songs from Silence** by *Bruce James*. Quite simply, three superb volumes by three very different poets.

Joanna Watson graduated in medicine from Cambridge University in 1980. She has worked as a public health doctor in England and Romania, with special interests in learning disability and mental health. Joanna began writing poetry at the age of forty, in a state of reverse culture shock after three years of voluntary work in Braşov. She has attended creative writing courses at Warwick University and Birmingham University. Her poems have been widely published in medical journals, poetry magazines and anthologies; a few have won prizes. **Inkblotting** is her first collection. She plays the oboe and enjoys needlepoint, beading and travelling. She has this to say about herself as a poet.

'I am both an artist and a scientist. I have enjoyed words and ideas - as well as numbers and music - since childhood. I do not have a favourite poet. There was no obvious connection between my beginning to write and my childhood sexual abuse with subsequent mental health problems.'

Joanna Watson was mentored by **Naomi Foyle**, who said this about the mentoring relationship:

We communicated by telephone, with e-mail to discuss practicalities like setting up appointments, or interactions with SP.

There were sometimes conflicts (or tension) between Joanna's expectations and SP policy or schedules. I attempted to advocate for Joanna in a respectful way, and to counsel patience on her part, as publishers find it hard to cater for the individual needs of all their authors. Happily, all conflicts were resolved satisfactorily.

At a time when I am beginning an academic career, being a mentor helped build my confidence in my ability to teach and edit poetry. It was also very rewarding to work with someone so highly motivated.

Was it a good experience? It was a great experience.

Would I mentor again for SP? Maybe in the future, but for the moment I have to concentrate on finishing my PhD.

'Joanna Watson draws on an extraordinary range of subject matter: a hospital doctor's weekend on call; caring for a severely disabled son; Romania before and after the revolution; rape, bulimia, the illness of the world. She approaches painful situations head-on and there is a high emotional charge in her poetry. However, it is tempered with light touches and the writing is controlled. Considerable attention is paid to form. Always central, and very moving, is an empathy with people, their suffering - the human condition.' **Myra Schneider**.

*

Expatriate

I stand outside and shiver,
trying to decipher
oozing shadows, babbling odours,
the piquancy of unknown names...

Clones turn and stare
with barbed-wire eyes;
machine-gun words,
grey raincoats tightly buttoned.

Like gulls, they cluster,
rise together. I wonder:
do I blink too loudly,
smile too freely, smell?

They circle round,
bombard me with suspicion,
count my blemishes and prickles,
calculate my worth.

I stand outside,
skin stretched on a washing line.

Inkblotting

Joanna Watson

Mentored by Naomi Foyle

*

Ayelet McKenzie (née Taylor) was born on a Kibbutz in January 1957.

She came to England as a baby and was brought up in Leeds. When she was 29 she moved to Barrow-in-Furness her present home, where she had her first collection of poetry published (*The Patient is Disappointing*) by Tide Fall Press, in 1999.

In 2007, she had a chap-book published (*Waiting for an Angel*) by Selkirk Lapwing Press.

Over the years she has had six major breakdowns and hospital admissions and has been diagnosed as suffering from depression and schizophrenia.

Ayelet is a 'Born again Christian' and belongs to two local writing groups.

She is currently having therapy with a psychologist and has a lot of hope for the future.

She loves reading, mostly poetry, novels and self-help books. Her favourite poets are Sylvia Plath, Carol Ann Duffy, Selima Hill, Jean Sprackland, Brian Pattern, Keats and Tennyson.

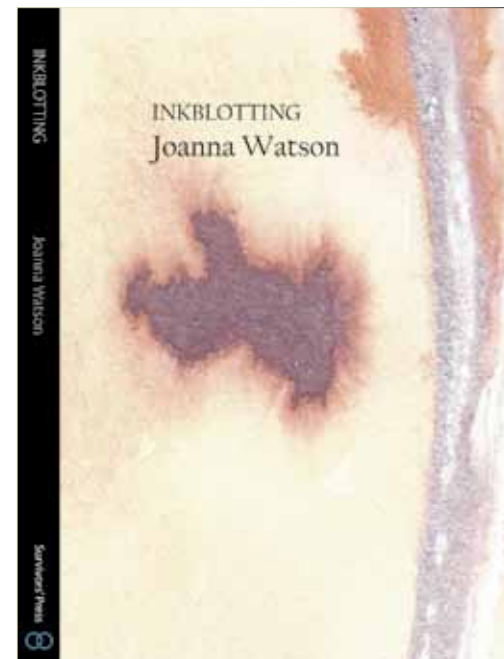
Her favourite authors are Anita Brookner, Edna O'Brian, Fay Weldon, Jean Rhys and Charlotte Bronte.

Ayelet McKenzie was mentored by **Akin Oladimeji**, who described the mentoring relationship as follows:

We first met face to face, followed by telephone conversations. The difficulties we encountered were mostly on Ayelet's part. I would have preferred to work via e-mail, but she wasn't very

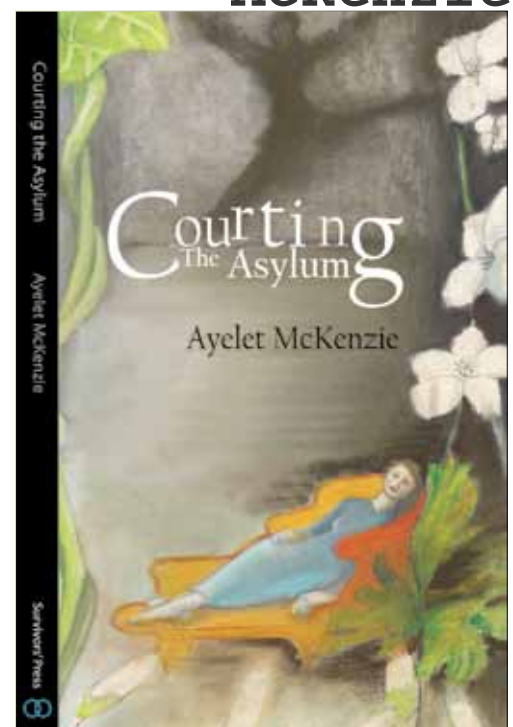
J

oanna
Watson



A

yelet
McKenzie



ICT literate and, in fact, didn't have a computer at home. I enjoyed helping someone who was keen on getting her work published but I am not keen on doing it again because of my experience with my second mentee, who dropped out of sight, with no word from her or SP as to the reason why.

'What I liked about her writing was that it shared similar features to my own. We both favour sparseness, the thought that stories can be sketched out with the barest minimum of lines, feelings depicted in the smallest amount of space possible, experiences painted with the smallest of brush strokes.'

Wish

I want to be an old farm hen
just grubbing and pottering about
the yard in the sun.
Absorbing the warmth
with my dusty brown feathers
flapping at the ducks
tormenting the barn cat
pecking at Mrs. McIntyre's cabbages
not going anywhere,
too stringy for the pot.

Courting the Asylum

Ayelet McKenzie
Mentored by Akin Oladimeji

Bruce John James was born in Pembroke Dock in 1939, and grew up there. Following a period of service in the R.A.F. as a senior instructor, he worked in technical authorship and technical journalism. An addiction to Diazepam forced him to give up technical writing. It was at this point in his life that he began writing poetry and songs. He also began to draw cartoons and paint canvasses.

Following detoxification in the 1990s Bruce set up a number of community resource centres for the mentally ill, and campaigned for a greater realization of global warming, and greater funding for the third world, the psychiatrically disabled, and other marginal-status groups.

Bruce James has written over 3500 poems

and painted 250 pastels and acrylics, and created a substantial number of cartoon line drawings.

He has been published in *Iota*, *Orbis*, *Ore*, *Seam*, *Scintilla*, *Staple*, *The Shop*, *T.O.P.S.*, *The Haiku Quarterly*, various spiritual and countryside magazines, and in a variety of anthologies. His work has appeared alongside that of **Seamus Heaney** and **R.S.Thomas**.

Philip Ruthen, Chair of Survivors Poetry, and himself a well-regarded poet and mentor, wrote this about the poetry of Bruce James:

'There is honesty without device in Bruce James' selected poems. People who have known him and his work over the years will be pleased to hear of this collection. The texts swell in confidence without mischief as the songs spring from very real places that many of us are only briefly privy to, and are here transcribed for already trusted, and new audiences. In the telling of histories and the survival of ourselves in relation to the natural, built and spiritual joinings with a nurturing heaven existing beyond what we have made of heaven, James shows the lived experience of the universe from the perspective of 'lights coming on once the applause has diminished...' - he is a rare and gifted Poet.'

Grandmother

you were sitting in bed
your skin as dry as browned sycamore
your smile like the surge of daylight
on a stream the breeze stirs wildly

you could not recognize me
I was son, brother, husband, lover, friend
all at once seeing you surviving

the glow around your head a bloom

the nimbus true between us like a sheath
of sunlight on a hand

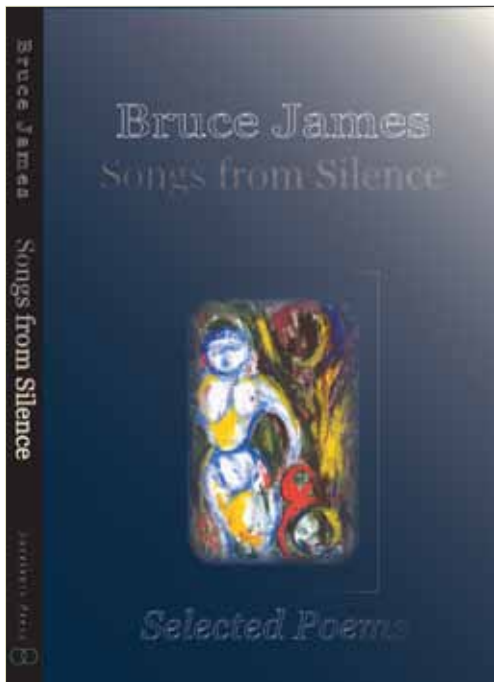
illuminating the wedding ring
marrying us to these moments
as if all the sunlight that ever was
were held between us

Songs from Silence

Bruce J. James
Mentored by Roy Birch

B

ruce
James



The mentoring scheme epitomizes all that is best about Survivors Poetry as an agency for literary development, and as such, is vital to the organization's own development. The marginalized must never be reduced to the level of a 'cause'. They are, but for the vagaries of circumstance, the rest of us, and, as such, are deserving of the same opportunities. In the context of an organization which promotes poetry, this has to mean the opportunity to be formally published. The mentoring scheme offers this opportunity, and SP is fully committed to not only continuing the scheme, but to expanding it.

There is, however, a problem. While the mentoring scheme has never been short of quality mentees, mentors have been far less easy to recruit. This is a matter of some sadness, as those mentors who have brought a mentee to publication, have been genuinely proud of their own and their mentee's achievements, and of the insights, both literary and human, that the partnership has afforded them. Mentoring

for Survivors Poetry is an extremely serious and worthwhile endeavour, offering a challenge, an experience, and a sense of gratification, that little else in the mentoring spectrum can offer. SP needs quality mentors. If you think you qualify, please make contact. Peter Street agreed to be a mentor for SP and had this to say about the experience:

'After various letters and poems we decided to meet. He was lovely to talk to, and I felt very comfortable with him. We talked at length on the phone mostly about literature. Eventually I invited him to my home and we spent about two hours together. We looked at his poetry and came to lots of compromises. I advised him to look at Robert Creeley to tighten his poetry up. He seemed keen on T.S. Eliot. I felt to try and write in that style would be a mistake.

The final session was at his house, where his wife made me lunch and we talked more poetry. He seemed very pleased with our relationship - we said our thanks and he promised he would continue to write.

I learned such a lot from mentoring Trevor.'

Peter Street has since accepted a second mentoring assignment for SP.

Two earlier mentoring publications, **Cui bono?** by Steve Mann, and David Kessell's **O The Windows Of The Bookshop Must Be Broken**, are about to go into their third printing, proof, if any were needed, of the enduring appeal and quality of the work produced by the scheme.

Provided SP can acquire the services of the requisite mentors, the 2010 intake promises to maintain the scheme's tradition of literary excellence. May it be so.

Roy Birch

Mentoring Scheme Coordinator

If you want know more - and you are reading online click here to download the MS guidelines, (in PDF format).

If not please visit our website www.survivorspoetry.com

● featured *Artist*

L a u r a W i l s o n



in my dreams

my father's ear
in a deep dali landscape
my nails are bleeding
your mother appears

a bandaged woman
slashing bodies in bedlam
with whiplashing knife
in the wards of my mind

rocky gorges
steep precipices
i leap across skyscraper tops
from building to building

and when I free-fall
always landing
on my feet
I live to dream away
more nights
and more
days.

i love the night

i love the night
it's dark velvet dome
covering the earth
clouds shielding
stars and moonlight

radio on -
it's quiet outside
the busi-ness of the day
is left behind
with the promise of peace
and soft duvet
dreamtime.

Introduction

U n t i t l e d

Upon the ground there lay a mask
In the midst of a pool of crimson blood.
The mask was of a human face made of inch-thick flesh
But possessed of the brittleness of china.
A jagged bolt of lightning piece of mask was broken away,
Cutting across the forehead of that inanimate face.
Gently picking up the damaged, blood-soaked visage with hands all a-tremble,
I recognised the countenance as my own.

Along the path I travelled, passing row upon row of faceless human shells
Suffering the scars of tortures too hideous and unknowable
For the human mind to comprehend in its infinite fragility.
As each body appeared so the brutality inflicted on it became worse,
Each tortured and desecrated soul the inheritor of Mary Kelly's legacy,
The path strewn with the offal torn from the eviscerated human shells.
Tattered flesh adorned the once-human husks with the jutting ivory of shattered ribs torn from the chests of the dead,
The marrow sucked from its ivory sheath by noxious smelling creatures that feed upon the carrion-fields.

I found a row of newly-erected cruciform posts upon which were the struggling human forms of newly-picked victims
Surrounded by the white-hot flames of Hell's own furnaces.
I raised my surgeon's knife and deftly cut away the now familiar visage of my victim, tossing it on the ground
Before disemboweling each lifeless piece of meat with expertly tutored hands.
As darkness closed around me, my volcanic rage boils over
And my bloodlust becomes too much for me to keep inside.
I continue to butcher my victims despite the fact that's plain to see
That each and every victim's face is identical to mine.

M y l e s C o o k

Depression

Drowning, struggling
In a sea of despair
No sign of hope on the horizon
And only personal demons down below
Trying to pull me under.

Darkness surrounds me now
Cold and full of fear
I feel that my life is over
Hopelessness now I feel.

Gloom, doom and despondency
Are flooding over me
My personal demons clawing
Pulling me down
Beneath the waves of despair.

My strength is failing me
I cannot struggle free
The demons feel me weakening
And the fight I had left is gone.

It's over
The darkness has engulfed me
There is no escape
No help in sight
No place for me in the light.

I relax and resign myself to my fate
A calmness flows through my body
I look upwards to the surface
And I see a point of light.

With all the strength I can muster
I reach with all my might
Towards that ray of hope
My personal demons seem helpless
As I start my ascent.

My head breaks the surface
And I emerge into the light
A last minute reprieve
From the darkness in my soul.

M y l e s Cook

The Devil and The Angel

The Devil was a little fella,
Fat and round as well,
He took my hand and led me,
To places I needn't go,
He tickled me and laughed so loud,
I thought he would explode,
He said to me one fiery day;
"Welcome to your new home,"
And as I looked my eyes did see,
"To insanity 2 metres"
On a black, old sign,
Near a cliff,
The Devil he did push me,
Just over the edge,
But I hung on by fingertips,
While he walked away.

I hung there night and day,
My fingers growing old,
My heart had gone,
My mind close behind,
But something held me up,
I spent my time,
Wondering,
Just where the bugger went,
I'd rather have The Devil,
Than be all on my own,
But he did not return,
To finish off the job,
And finger by dying finger,
My grip began to go,
Something went from under me,
And my last digit went.

Then came The Angel,
Light and slim,
A beauty of the sky,
He caught me as I fell,
The never-ending depth,
Over the brink of insanity,
He must have known my name,
For he kept calling "Mel",
He swept me up to Heaven bright,
To heal my broken wounds,
And find my heart and mind,
Locked in a golden box,
My fingers they repaired themselves,
And I fell back to Earth,
Recovering from insanity,
Is like dying and coming back.

M J Ashford

Trail Of Guilt

My face stares up at you,
Everywhere,
Puddles, ponds and rivers,
Lakes, streams and pools,
Waterfalls and seas,
On the surface of your glass of water,
Oceans of me to remind you.

My face stares up at you,
Everywhere,
In glass windows and doors,
In snail trails, books and newspapers,
Your PC and TV screens,
Your CD and car radio,
Over run by my voice,
The "off" buttons are stuck,
Forever.

My face stares up at you,
Everywhere,
In the mirror, just behind you,
My hand on your shoulder,
When you spin round,
I am not there,
Though I should be,
I should be,
Your thoughts and mine,
"I should be".

I hope that my memory,
Does not drive you insane.

I Have Schizophrenia

I have schizophrenia,
Does anyone object?
I take my medication,
And on voices I reflect.
I've had a course of CBT,
Which taught me how to cope,
With voices, thoughts and punishments, ^
Cause strategies bring hope.

I have schizophrenia,
With voices in my head,
That help my understanding,
When I listen to what's said.
I put them into categories,
Choose option A or B,
And talk of them to those I trust,
It's my reality.

I have schizophrenia,
I only tell a few,
For people have some strange ideas,
Of things that I might do.
Sometimes I do act strangely,
But it does make sense to me,
'Cause you can't hear what I can hear,
Or see what I can see.

I have schizophrenia,
I listen to The News,
And somebody was stabbed to death,
By someone in my shoes.
But I am not responsible,
For I was far away,
And I'll cling to reality,
Whatever voices say.

W e n d y Baker

M J Ashford

My Mistakes Have Turned To Voices

My mistakes have turned to voices,
They're the worries of the past,
They're the things I have done badly,
They're a hope that will not last,
In a world so unforgiving,
They're an accidental sin,
I remain humiliated,
I am punished from within.

My mistakes have turned to voices,
Criticism from inside,
For they tell me I deserve to shed,
The tears that I have cried,
For all the clumsy moments,
And for all the muddled thoughts,
And all the things I should have done,
Reality distorts.

My mistakes have turned to voices,
I've a very clever brain,
It listens to my thoughts and then,
Rehashes them again,
I hear them from behind me,
As I walk along the way,
And I answer when I'm on my own,
I answer and I pray.

My mistakes have turned to voices,
And a glimmer of a hope,
For the forth voice is a comforter,
Who tells me I can cope,
The other three are arguing,
Together they condemn,
My thoughts and words and actions,
Is it me or is it them?

W e n d y Baker

T i m e . . .

Time.
They say it is the greatest healer.
Maybe not?
Dark clouds are forming;
I hear thunder, I see lightning,
The Storm comes and destroys all I have.

Time.
They say it is the greatest healer.
Not for me.
I rebuild my life, I struggle, I persevere,
I build a canopy, to shelter me from the storm.

Time.
They say it is the greatest healer.
Maybe it is true?
My life takes form, things improve, I feel hope.
Darker clouds gather, but I don't see them;
The Tempest blows away the canopy, takes everything away.

Time.
They say it is the greatest healer.
It is a myth.
I pick myself up, I try to rebuild. This time it's harder.
I build a brick shelter; concrete should hold?
Life is good; I have friends, I have family, I find love.

Time.
It makes you complacent; I ignore the shelter.
The structure wears and tears;
And then comes the Hurricane. It is a disaster.

Time... I don't want time...

A v i Sarkar

D e a d M a n

Haven't spoken to anyone in weeks,
I hear my own voice talking to
The empty spaces of my life,
My only friend is a night bird with
An unlikely name: Jenny Tease,
The phone hardly ever rings,
My neighbours are phantoms
In a bad dream,
The only letters I receive are bills,
My poetry is barely legal, often
It is returned with cum stains
Between the sheets,
My ex is planning an imminent family
Reunion which gives me the creeps,
My bank account is a question mark
In a B-movie script,
Estranged relatives gather in dimly
Lit rooms to discuss the issue
On everybody's lips: Me,
Yet strangely I'm the happiest man
On the street where I live,
Go figure -having nothing to lose
Has made me realise there is
More to life than we think.

C a r l o s Nogueiras

O n l y A D r e a m

Like wearing mascara in High School,
Or groping strangers in low-lit clubs,
A phase that is more than a phase,
A kiss that is more than a kiss,
A statement of intent.

Like wearing torn jeans at fifteen,
Or sleeping with your mum just
Once for kicks, to see
That contorted expression
On her face.

To lose oneself in the moment,
And pretend it's all a dream,
Like a foot-massage that is more
Than a foot-massage, or voting
Conservative to pay less tax and

Thus betray your beliefs.
To run away from home after calling
Your mum a bitch, and escape
On a Pegaso bus to nowhere feeling
Really light and eerily free.

It's all a dream, even the handshakes
Of men who hold secret beliefs,
It's all a dream, the same old dream
Recycled over and over,
Only a dream.

C a r l o s Nogueiras

The Sullen Wife

She sits on the sofa slyly like a cat
Annoyed that I'm already there,
And she sits with eyes closed
And legs exposed with red marks
On her inner thighs probably
From scratching herself while
Doing Yoga downstairs,
And she sits there and when
She finally turns to look at me
I'm not even myself,
So diminished by her presence
I feign a sleepy sigh, and
With eyes fixed on the TV
I wonder who was this person
That years ago decided we should
Be together.

Not me, I don't think, perhaps
Someone pretending to be me,
A joker or rather
A drunken impersonator.
If I had to choose between her
And loneliness -I would settle for
The talking mice that regularly
Visit my nightmares.

C a r l o s Nogueiras

Reproach

I do not upbraid you
For your bad temper;
I do not reproach you
For your spleen.

But one thing drives me crazy
To the limit of my being —
Why must you have three shirts
a day ironed?

The Inner Man

I have opened the door of my new fridge;
(I beg your pardon, madam, I mean "refrigerator")
And see inside that it is almost empty:
One egg, pure and brown,
One virgin white bottle of milk
And, in the salad drawer,
One Cos lettuce and a pound of tomatoes,
Along with a very fine bunch of watercress
(Bought from a greengrocer,
Not, as in childhood,
Grown upon a damp flannel!).
As I am going shopping,
My fridge (or refrigerator)
Will soon contain:
Six more eggs (organically obtained)
And a fine leg of lamb
With pearly white fat,
Together with six pounds more of tomatoes,
Ten pounds of potatoes, new,
New peas and carrot;
Also, a joint of English lamb,
Six bottles of Dom Perignon
And four more bottles of best Guernsey milk.
Eight pounds of mushrooms
Will I have,
Some sprigs of mint
And six jars of caviar,
To make me think of Russia.
Bacon will I buy
And then make a bowl of punch;
Glowing golden Irish butter will be there,
Together with six varieties of English cheese.
I shall get a friend to make a Summer Pudding
And then buy Cornish clotted cream
To go with raspberries and strawberries.
Gooseberries and redcurrants will I purchase
And a fine crusty white loaf.
A bowl of mayonnaise
Will stand there, creamy-yellow,
And, according to my daily woman,
I really ought to have margarine —
Oh, must I?
I shall add coffee beans to my store
And fine dark brown sugar.
I shall buy six grapefruit,
Some onions and some fine white cloves of garlic.
The unsalted butter will go nicely
With some water biscuits,
Together with some Brie and Camembert
And the English cheeses;
Sherry will warm the inner man.

R u t h

W h e r e

Home (hohm) n., adj., adv., v. <homed, hom-ing>

3. an institution for people with special needs

If X is born at a place (P) without a shriek at 7.14 a.m. in the year 19, and it is there that she has her first bath and watches her fist turn to a blunt-headed fish under the water

if R is a room - her bedroom - of dimensions 10 x 8 x 4 (Do not take into account any windows) with a thick muslin curtain

if there is the thinnest of all possible trees outside
if F- X's father- bites his lip nervously when talking to strangers

if F is held still by the invisible wire of the T.V. set until 3 each morning, that is for 6.3 hours most nights a week (Only calculate for non-leap years)

if P - X's mother- burns the stove top

and, at that very moment, F looks up and says could I just have some peace for 5 minutes I love this show.

if a farmer is attempting to install an electrical fence around his compound in France

or, say, a team of medical experimenters is doing a study of cancerous cells, and two-thirds of the participants have something to worry about

if all trains always travel north

confidently - in that way of trains - at something miles per hour

and Sam in Cincinnati is painting a room of unknown volume

and Martha, the last of the billions of passenger pigeons, died slowly in a zoo in 1914 aged 29

(Assume that X does not equal 29)

if X is as tired as zero, or
if she leaves P at 4.12 pm heading to a restaurant

when she can sit alone with a coffee

and stuff 4 sugar sachets into her purse

(Always steal things in even numbers)

if it is almost raining here

(Consider the misery of an asymptote)

and there are problems with X's nervous system

(that is to say, her system is nervous)

or if she is best approached on the other side

of a time difference (minus 10 hours or plus 8),

If, in other words, X is a somewhat negative number

like a bead dropped from the abacus, unreachable

tonight through fax or phone

or your thin limbic algebra

then what is the probability of

the possibility of

what is the area of

what is the product of

how far and how wide

how long

please how much longer

at what white angle

will it happen

who will ever find X?

(Provide workings for your answer.)

D e b r a Chulkes

The Clerk's Tale

Once if I remember the early years when I worked for the council
there came a letter from a long-gone traveller to the town he had needed a visa
or some such bill perhaps in those days and we had known each other
administratively in the stamps office and then loosely on the stairwell
going down to Mrs. Lan's good Chinese restaurant and rigorously
in bed and the rest he inquired in the wateriest terms about my health now
and said the clouds were splitting over wherever it was he was leaving only
a pale denuded sky and he wished me pleasantries for my year the financial year
ahead in our office if I were still there who knows time and what it does to you.
He added with a kind of wink in his script that he had lost himself in the kitchen
two three four or countless times most of all while spooning sugar in black tea
if he could describe the way the shoal of loose granules would head east and fade it
seemed a quick brown desire might also slip the mind yet once we had stomped
an hour through April streets and he had reached a hand out and down towards
the gummy midst of me and oh ha ha ha now that I am old I eat the soup
from the canteen.

Debra Chulkes

Poker face

Freezing frost and windy rain
Is the weather in my world of pain.
If you looked at me now you couldn't have seen
The depths of despair to which I have been.

The poker face plays me well.
Keeping others at bay,
But me in hell.
How long can I go for, just me alone
Before my heart sets and turns to stone?

Maybe I should shout or scream or cry.
Maybe just talk, but defiantly try
To air it out and really share
The burden which I proudly bare.
I am who I am because of it all
I hope I remember next time I fall.

Rhodia Parry

Lonely Battle

The psychiatric ward is an escape from life?
Not when huddled, locked
in the corner of seclusion
with noxious cobra spirits coiled to strike. Brief,
early hopes of tranquillity and care
in this perceived, confined, haven of isolation?
No -
Here little retreat or peace is to be found,
Relentless brain torment may boil over
but with meagre support and scarce personal space,
anguish and compulsive mind churning
thrive in this monotonous vacuum.
Lying like cattle in our communal stalls
on lonely strip light-flooded nights
there can be some blessed relief
in soporific, drug-fuelled slumber.

Raw morning awakenings
destroy any scanty hours of peace,
as nurses' commands toll out -
All must join the medication queue.
Then compulsory breakfast
with the trusty, cold, leather toast
that becomes my familiar comfort and rare interlude
from the daily purposeless grind
that feeds a profundity of poisoners introspection.
Nonchalant nurses file their nails.
Bored.
Many heedless to the surrounding suffering.
Some malevolent.
Severe sweating fear, desolation,
and desperation
Burn me up.

The cries of our jailors –
“Accept you are ill.”
“Take the pills.”
“Medication is essential.”
But – the ultimate path to peace can only be in death?
No. Resist.
When capable, first essential escape step is
To want to cure yourself.
Fight over-sensitivity and pray for strength
in the perpetual, seething sea of pain.
Release from the nightmare is possible.
We are owed survival.
It is a single-handed lonely battle,
but fight on
and in emerging freedom,
peace can ultimately thrive.

C l a r e Gill

A d a y i n t h i s w o r l d

Bang, bang, bang.
The banging from downstairs awakes me.
I climb out of my messed up bed,
and slowly head towards the door.
I wonder what this world has to offer.
I put on the TV and watch the news.
All I seem to be looking at are words saying,
death and stabbings.
Isn't their much good news anymore?
The only good that comes onto the news,
is to do with animals or so it seems.

I go back upstairs to get changed.
As I walk down the street
there's a homeless person begging for money.
Should I give?
I'd better not as it could do more harm than good.
That would just add to statistics.
That's all we are today. Numbers.
Nothing more, nothing less.
just pure plain old numbers.
I wonder whether anyone else gets sick of it.

I suddenly hear shouting.
A gang of youths are beating up a hated opponent.
Somehow it all went silent.
I look up and thunder clouds fill the world with
doubt and fear.
Lighting struck a tree and it fell onto a boy;
Crushed to non-existence.
That is today's life in this world.
There might be kindness but
It's being swallowed up in a world of hatred and fear.

B e t h a n y Hayes

T i m e

Time is like drowning in water.
You could sink to the bottom or rise to the top.
If you sink you are wasting your time in life
but if you rise,
you are rising up to the people around you.
You are saying I can do it and I won't give up'.

Time is also like a ticking bomb.
No one knows when it is going to go off.
No one knows but God.
Who can tell you if you will be here tomorrow?
Who can say you will live.
Each day is a privilege.
So live it like you're meant to and
live it like it's your last day.

So don't dwell on the past.
Don't hold grudges no matter what has happened_
If fighting and killing is all you live for,
I really do pity you with all my heart.
If you're so obsessed in your own world and
not caring, or thinking of those around you,
do you even have a heart,
or soul for that fact.

However if you're like me and
you really do care and you do try your best to help,
then I hope God is with you always.
I also, hope you carry on doing what you love and
seeing those smiling faces,
which will fill you with goodness from your gratitude.
Keep on rising and someday,
someplace, somewhere, you will get to the top and
be where you dream to be

B e t h a n y Hayes

A b a n d o n e d

Abandoned beyond all repair,
The secrets that are hidden there.
The roof has collapsed like the nature of the modern family.
Thorn bushes surround it, covering up its forgotten shape.
'Danger, Keep Out' warns the trespassers of the holes and weakened, rotten
wooden flooring that lay inside.

I remember entering this building when I was small.
Even then it was a forgotten wreck.
However me and my siblings sat on the mattress's that had been discarded inside.
It was our little hideaway for the day.
Now the mattresses lie outside and only the springs remain.
Only once did we go there before i squealed as the youngest do.

I daren't enter it now, it doesn't seem as strong as it once was but a mighty
building was it after sneaking around to take a peak.

Abandoned beyond all repair,
The secrets that are hidden there.
Now small mammals and other inhabitants make this old farm house theirs,
until it is demolished for farm land or other use.

B e t h a n y Hayes

E n z o ' s R e v e n g e

Doctor Wu scratches his ass
With the hidebound middle-class
It's much all that nay of 'em do
Fill the void with Sigmund Freud
Marx and Nietzsche too
The Lawyer, he's a superman
Doctor Wu's a god
The psychologist weights in
With, "nothing's right or wrong".
Electro - mmmm
Convulsive -dubious
Therapy - ain't that nice?
Crack burn sizzle
Get yourself a pipe
The teacher reads "The Catcher"
And dreams of dissolution
The social work lifts his skirt
It's the chichi constitution
It's all so dire and pathetic
Conditions right up to the gills
In tow to the system since school days
But they'll talk for a week on free will
My friend Enzo's a poet and dreamer
But he's dodged a glass or two
He's had fifty shocks, he destroys clocks
And he's saved a few volts for Wu.

H o m e T o w n

In the garden
gull fights with pigeon
over the remains of a doner kebab.

Safe in a tree,
squirrel sneers
at barking dog,
while jackdaw and magpie cackle.

Fox crosses the road by streetlight.

And on the once dead river,
where the chimneys stood,
duck and swan are joined
by goose,
coot,
heron,
and grebe.

Yet I remember
elm,
starling,
dawn chorus,
dark nights
and stars.

J o h n Nye

Isle of the Dead

Dore! Dore!Dore? Doest thou hear me,
My voice a-cracking the rheumy glass wide
Dore! Dore! Dore! Can you see, hear, be near
As I advance toward an incoming tide

Do you think for a moment, do you parade
This island retreat - what signifies, who the slave?
And should I hold a masked ball, where the cave?
Am I injured by some dubious lover's enslaved

Written large, spider-like, upon my back
How he grasped me, how he twisted me!
And kissing passionately, said "There is no looking back - All is
black!"
Now I clear cobwebs, but no-one pays my liberty's fee...

Doré! Doré! Doré! Dost thou Nearest me?
For I shout through the gated bars of Time
Doré! Doré! Doré! Why do you not let me free?
Who with a snap of fingers, could make gilded coins chime!

Yes! These whispery souls on the ebb of tide
Might try cave, rock pool, willow
In which to transport themselves - sense where to hide
What of Colette-kin- rider whose calm sleep lies shallow

Upon the velvet cushion in coffined canopied box
Amidst the Lost and the Cursed
We keep abreast, on the least too much intoxicate
On the Isle of Thanet where gulls glide on unversed.

J o y Sheridan

Differences between AA and the pub

- 1 A. Believe in money.
- B. Believe in a higher power.
- 2 A. Want to drink as much as possible in the shortest time possible.
- B. Want to go without a drink for as long as possible.
- 3 A. In a pub crawl to get to as many pubs in the shortest time possible.
- B. In AA to get to as many meetings as possible.
- 4 A. Where we find strangers strange.
- B. Where we don't find strangers strange.
- 5 A. 11am / 11pm.

- B. 12 steps/12 traditions.
- 6 A. The people try to make you spend more money.
- B. The people try to make you spend less money.
- 7 A. The people behind the bar are at first cold then friendly then cold.
- B. The people behind the 'bar' are friendly.
- 8 A. The management reserves the right of barring a section of the customers.
- B. The management reserves the right to keep as many as people possible.
- 9 A. Only humans get in the way of your happiness.
- B. Only humans help to make you happy.
- 10 A. Membership to AA is free.
- B. Membership to the pub is very expensive...

R o b e r t Dangoor

True Friendship

They were my own doing -
the three weeks in hospital,
the fractured hip joint.

My friends came,
bringing books,
flowers,
chocolates,
magazines
and sympathised,
feeding the self-denial
about the accident that had been my fault.

When I returned home,
they offered support with shopping,
cleaning,
company when I couldn't venture out
and invitations when I could.

And then the demons came
and messed with my mind.

A black dog I had not invited in
came to stay for months and years.

And my friends...

...vanished.

J o h n Nye

P o e t a n d S c u l p t o r
(Bob Devereux and Barbara Hepworth)

Every year I see the sculptures,
in her home,
her garden
and in the town.

In the months between
picture them,
their shape,
their tone,
their setting.

But, until you read us your poem,
I hadn't known about the drawings,
the gowned surgeons and nurses
at work
in the theatre.

Later at the Tate,
we saw them,
alien figures
with masks and caps and faces
melded into one.
And now,
re-reading your poem,
I see their haunting figures again.

And you
in the Salthouse,
reading
for the two of us alone,
lines written for her garden,
sculptures in words
of shape
and tone
and setting.

J o h n N y e

A d d i c t i o n

Crying and shaking in my bed,
trying to get through the night.
Sleep escapes me, dreams dissolve,
I can't relax, try as I might.

My addiction keeps me awake again,
panicky thoughts in my mind.
I'm restless, shivering and scared,
stuck in the hole into which I've climbed.

My drug can't be rolled, injected or smoked,
it can't be bought on the street.
You can't drink it at parties or share it with friends,
it comes from within, from feelings dark and deep.

It keeps my heart beating, travels in veins,
I love it and hate it at the same time.
It helps me to cope, yet lose control,
it keeps me alive but kills me inside.

I'm addicted to blood, I'm addicted to pain,
I need my fix of broken skin.
I have no dealer, needle or lighter,
I'm addicted to the state I'm in.

H a y l e y G r e e n

T h e S e c r e t W a r

Like a battlefield in winter,
bloodshed on the crisp, white snow.
Red streaks run down my ivory leg,
but I'm too terrified to show

my true self to the ones I love.
I am at war with myself.
I have no strategy or tactics,
mercy is left on the shelf.

The cuts get deeper every day,
I scream for help silently.
There's no-one to hear, I'm in an empty world,
there's no exit to set me free.

Insults screaming in my head,
my brain throbs, my heart aches.
The scissors pierce my porcelain skin,
another vein breaks.

H a y l e y G r e e n

Blue Glue

A cat wriggles serpentine on the couch
attracting a tummy tickling hand,
until the playful fingers touch
the wrong place that changes daily
and are hissed at and bitten,
it's the mania that draws them in,

and the trap which springs the mood-swerves
changes daily, and people wonder
where you'd be without your illness.
It's not as simple as Happy Okay Sad
manic versus panic,
she's a highly functioning mess –

she that made holes in her arms
and had them shut up with surgical glue
in the accident and emergency room
at 3am, she got a first class honours degree,
she who doesn't feel like a she.

Blue glue sticking and setting,
the sides of the wound become reacquainted,
back to the waiting room
with a cardboard vom-bowl
it makes a nice hat while she waits
for her parents to arrive,
she'll wrench at their guts
with freshly sterilized bloody cuts.

Still waiting for a stitch on the worst gash,
six years of hidden scars examined
by a doctor who barely speaks,
parents crying: How The Hell Didn't We Know?
easy to hide under the army shirt,
the whole gang had those, one quid each,
Camden Market, long sleeved greebo's uniform.

She doesn't have an answer
and now it's all burst open,
the blood of her disease
stains the ripped jeans,
self injury, she can't believe
she does it to herself.

The child psychiatrist says
It's bipolar, and when it dawns
on her mother that she passed it down
and that it was passed to her by her father,
then at least one of them will find relief.

That manic cat wants tickling again,
wants provocation for biting
excitement and boundary pushing,
a life for living, a hand for grabbing
with claws and rabbit feet kicking,
joy in mischief and then sleeping depression.

The doctors say they'll make a follow-up appointment
which never comes, and the next time she's stitched
it's the same thing, but she doesn't call mum,
and it's back to long sleeved shirts,
another eight years of hiding.

Persistent mewling at her ears,
more blue glue to mend the body not the mind
but less frequent trips to hospital
with time, that rumour that it's just a teenage fad
and that they grow out of it - untrue
for her, still ripping holes in her skin.

A thousand scars conceal another thousand underneath
and people stare at the scarred, scared
of the marks, it's too much,
cover it up, long sleeves and long hair
but it proves she's living, feeling,
hissing kitty, blue glue absorbed by living tissue,
not just a teenaged issue, endorphin addiction,
she still can't find a substitute for the blood rush.

Jessie Nash

Untitled

All I need
Is only him
His name is
Jesus
He wiped
My sin
I need Jesus
As my only
Faith
To the love
Of the father
Through His
Grace

Philip Allen

It is always there

I don't like pretending something I am
returning to another place
where something happens
the very framework
like space and time
is there no absolute meaning
no logic which works every time
and why do I pretend
I know where I am going
for I cant change anything.
My mind???
what a thing to have
to locate it somewhere
inside my brain
it speaks of nothing
in fact like any other muscle
in my body
it wears out in time
rather like having a disease
called living.

So stopping every memory
everything I ever remembered
my whole childhood
in a way I have matured
and that cost me
the very skin I live in.

so television, tell me your worst
at least the weather
doesn't slot in to an evening
of soap operas
and news programs.

But it is better than my own company
and a gift of which I cant quite put my
finger on how it started, when I know that
one day I will be stopping. april 17, dsc.

D a v e St. Clair

S c a r s

When I was a little child
playing in the sun,
running around with my friends,
my days were made of fun.

I got a little older,
my morals began to shrink.
My nights were full of house parties,
my weekends made of drink.

Suddenly off to college,
now my childhood ends.
I'm growing up, I'm finding out
good times are made of friends.

But now my life looks darker,
my sunshine turns to rain.
My carefree days are long gone,
my nights are made of pain.

My mind is made of conflict,
my heart's stuck in a rut.
A life made of confusion,
a body made of cuts.

I search for who I am, as I gaze up at the stars,
but I'll be known, forevermore,
as the girl that's made of scars.

H a y l e y Green

Ride (part 2)

Blood sweat n tears is the name of the game
you got no timesheet, you got no screws
Ride a painted foreman in blue suede trews
1000 years of de sparkin team, chained to a
vice of total misery
ride a painted skinhead, let de painters easter egg yo head
you got no cable, or a rawlplug tool
ride a painted tee-shirt let the lemoncurd tarts
scream and ball
The sparkin trainin has to be obeyed, level up that
dado on your knees and pray
you got yo tongue sandwich and yo cucumber to
ride a painted toadstool on a rope ladder to the moon
you got yo beezers boxes and yo earth sleavin to
sitting in a boozier wid de usual crew
ride a painted painter, smile at euro prostitutes
you got no ammunition, you got no eggs
ride a painted cyborg to the centre of your head
you got no meggery you got no grips
ride a painted bongo, let de furious sherbets quit
you got 17 strings of internal dripping dread
put your flat black shoes on de radiator red
Ride a painted skylark thru de canyons of yo shed
you got yo flask n yo daleks to, you got de metro
ride quosters true
ride a painted pistol thru the bootlace special brew
you got heirloom tomatoes n your faded jeans
ride a painted milkfloat into a 14 hour technicolour
dream
you got yo quantum leap theory n yo porridge oats
ride a painted shadow thru the hall o the mountain grill you
got yo sandpaper, n your painted face
ride a painted parrot across the zoom on race, let
the spinning jenny lace
Put all your troubles in an old kit bag, ride a pitted pony
let the spinnin wheel sag
you got speedy tower and snapon board, jam sandwich
for skinhead in the house of lords, happy shop hygiene
on the norfolk broads
what comes up must come doon, ride a painted chippie
horse across the site in gloom
you got mr tripling and fred astaire, you got jogging pants
n a need to scare
ride a painted teacup when the engine gives you away
you got cosmic debris in Saudi arabia to, you got stainless
n black paint blue
ride a painted mullah on an mk monorail
sittin in a boozier wiv a stranded whale at the break o day.
Ride a painted donut the jaxon has got to pay
Sparkin back to happiness, whompah oh yea yea yea n yus
oh yes yus yay

Anthony Moore

Not Me

NOT ME
IS TRUE
PEOPLE THINK BAD
OF THE MENTALLY ILL
I AGREE
BUT DOES IT HAVE
TO BE ME

SO I AGREE
I GOT TEMPER
I'VE GOT STRESS
THOUGH, WHEN I REACT
DOES IT HAVE TO GO
ALL OVER THE PRESS

YES, GOT ANXIETY
DON'T NEED HOSPITAL
DON'T HAVE TO
GO TO A SECURE PLACE
IS JUST STRESS
SHOWING ALL OVER
MY FACE

Ann Muraglia

Borderline

Their duvet's still crumpled, he's at work,
she's in the bathroom, and I'm applying
make-up slowly, keeping pace to her sighs
of exasperation at herself.
I take a Madonna CD from the shelf
to break the silence of hesitation
but still I perch by the window, too patient.
If it were winter it would be dark.

Beyond the lipsticks and eyebrow pencil
are stars on the ceiling, warm red wine
like longing. The weir's in spate.
The cathedral has not changed, nor the castle,
silver and gold against the sky.
I lean on the sill and wait.

Marga Burke

The iron lady

i bought pylon stockings for the iron lady plying her shameless steel, she taught me
deadlines in the morning and commerce of the will.
i cut keys for the iron lady on the outskirts of the town, with lime and
lead and savoury seeds, planting tablets in the ground.
crafty as a basket of slip conduit, her tripod craft reveals vocals in attendance beside a
spinning wheel.
i went fog driving in moonraker blue to let off my self-esteem, square bashing on the
promenade for half a crown a week.
a close encounter with a time-lapse film shed light upon the realm, her tripod crest
illumination shot rays at hail bops helm.
the iron lady displayed her sultry tango inside our giant bell, its brassy saxophone
knuckles bruised the ankles on the fiesty jezebel.
i went bell ringing inside the birdcage to alert the ladies gaze,
then i found to my dismay, her rusting in yesterdays chains.

Anthony Moore

if you wish to submit poetry

please annotate each page with your contact
details. Please send no more than 5 poems per
issue.

email info@survivorspoetry.org.uk
or write to:

Survivors' Poetry
Studio 11 Bickerton House
25-27 Bickerton Road
London
N19 5JT

The Telephone

The receiver clicks
the dial tone rings
the telephone lines are between
click, click again, but
no one's been
answer please no one's seen
the telephone rings
and the answer just clicks, clicks
and you're not seen

the words mean everything
in the message
if only you would ring
the lines sing
if only you would ring

Paul Ambler

Treading on Drawing Pins

Stumbling in early-morning blackness
from bathroom to timed light switch, as some-
thing
stabs my heel I remember last night:

all those tears to forsaken teenage idols
when I have nothing to say to you.
The bleak horror at Jen's words: "Simon
and I used to have the same problem, you know;
he's so quiet," at quasi marriage from such
unpromising beginnings: "It took him
three weeks just to admit he fancied me."
Still you and I sit in silence
to a soundtrack I do not know, and
I want you (but get
your hands off my thighs...)

I lift my foot and see
the bronze circle embedded, the agony
of one-legged limbo. But in the end
a tiny red speck is
the only mark you leave.

Margaret Burke

Featured Artist

Laura Wilson



artwork

top left *My World 1.*, top right
My World 4., bottom left *My
World 5.*

next page
top left *My World 1a.*,
top right *My World 3.*

with biography *My World ink 4.*

bottom strip from left to right
My World 11., *My World ink 9.*,
My World 8., *My World ink 6.*



● Laura Wilson



Born in Zimbabwe in 1952. Exhibited in New York, Switzerland, London, and various European and National touring group shows. Works as an art assistant for Portugal Prints, a Westminster Mind project producing cards sold at the Tate Modern, ICA, and other outlets.

Recent paintings can be seen from March 2010 at the Other Side gallery website: www.theothersidegallery.org

"Although being bipolar has damaged my life in many ways, the ability to be creative has remained constant. The pleasure and satisfaction from painting, drawing and writing poetry, of being able to express my feelings when experiencing extremes of mood, has been a driving force in my recovery. I work with my emotions, never quite knowing what the end result will be, but knowing that it will always be an expression of how I am feeling at the time."



Facism and its Socialist and Liberal elements by Peter Donnelly

As fascist, and similar racist political parties like the BNP, have gained some popularity, during these times of economic recession and unemployment, I thought it was important to write about fascism, and to understand why it has gained some popularity.

It's sometimes assumed, by people of a liberal political persuasion, that fascism, is similar to socialism, and has a strong element of socialist thinking and policies behind it. Whilst there is some truth in this (evident by the fact that unions and socialist groups supported and joined the Nazi party, in 1930s Germany, that the British unions marched in the streets in the 1970s, supporting the racist right-wing conservative politician Enoch Powell, and that the unions complain about unemployed immigrants on benefits, and about the decreasing white British population in the country), there is also a strong element of liberalism in fascism. As well as incorporating racist socialist views and policies into Nazism, Hitler also had a strong popular belief, that the Nazi party, where a marginalised and oppressed minority, who had gained power, both as a socially integrated, and as a separate minority group.

Whilst the BNP are undoubtedly, in some ways fascist and very racist, it is also a form of fascism to superiorise any minorities, racially, socially, or culturally, and/or to give them unequal state power, over the same and other minorities with less money and power, and which again is a form of fascism.

The whole matter of marginalised and oppressed minorities and groups, and social integration, is a slightly complex one, which I feel needs to be further understood and addressed. Whilst I accept, that minorities or oppressed groups, such as people with diagnosed mental health problems, may have a higher awareness or abilities - as well as having some disabilities - I do not overall believe that anyone, is simply or overall superior, in that they deserve to have oppressive or unequal state power over others, and crush and destroy other people's social potential, in terms of social integration, and in terms of other people's individual and collective uniqueness.

On the matter of social integration, I do feel that integration of minorities and oppressed groups, into society - in terms of equal choices and opportunities - is very important, whilst it is also true, that some minorities or oppressed groups, disagree with the actual nature of present society, and don't want to be a part of present society, or to be completely absorbed and utilised by society, in a way that limits or destroys their wider social integration, and/or their individual and collective uniqueness.

I also feel and think that it is important, in some ways, to challenge the view that all human beings are overall unimportant or inferior, and that it is also important to challenge the present mundane nature of society, which limits and tries to prevent us all from realising and achieving, all our importance and potential, to be a better human race, individuals, and people.

Reviews

Soul Survivors

2-CD Compendium of Poetry and Music
by Leeds Survivor Poets;
LSP Press: ISBN 978-1-901045-14-7



This 55-track compilation makes a comprehensive spectrum.

The opener, *Too many Children*, bravely facing this painful issue, sets the controversial tone of the album. To me, the song filled in some of the gaps present in the Band Aid and Live Aid songs. It is deeply aware and compassionate, making a heartfelt plea on behalf of the children already there; for their sakes one should not create too many more. A sensitive presentation too, good keyboard backing. A little regrettable that there were some hiccups in the recording – the sound went faint. I realise that some of the numbers on this compilation were live takes. This adds atmosphere. But the sound could have been better on the studio takes.

In terms of running order, Terry Bridges's *Address to Tom Halloran* would, I think, have made the better opener; it is, after all, announcing the performance. His other two poems would have made a good change of gear after the first song. *Casualty* is flippantly light-hearted: he has been run over by love; he things love should be banned. In *Lesson*, Bridges reflects on his obsessional areas of study, based in the 'interior blackness of my heart'. Some strikingly surreal imagery here: "Gravity of a grain of light, twisted in a cubist tomato, painted in immaculate red" . . . "plastic traffic, steaming by on rollers, excited by ticker-tape rain" . . . "hovercraft moths, patrolling a globular bulb, twittering a silent prayer, armies of iridescent beetles marshalling on the wainscot, observed by a general, segmented bug".

Interesting contribution from Angie Hallas. *Demons*, dealing with malignant dream visitants, and *My father*, are happily simplistic. *Sorry I could not make your wedding* is brilliantly ironic. The wedding is in fact a shotgun one; the unborn child is the first person narrator. Naturally s/he could not attend the wedding because s/he was not yet in the world. The baby makes a wry comment that it will be able to attend the (its own) christening. Some food for thought here about the ethics of 'disapproval' and attitudes to illegitimacy. Char March's *Untitled song* is quite haunting; to me this illustrates potential that should be fully developed. Tony

Smith's contribution is benignly laconic. He mistrusts those who do not trust anyone. *Winter of 1963* good-humouredly recalls the key events of that time – The Beatles, Christine Keeler, the Great Train Robbery. *Vote for me* has a good Afro-Caribbean voice expressing a charming naive idealism with a spirited drum accompaniment. *Roundhay Park* consists of brief phrases in counterpoint with a flute, making an antiphonal dialogue. *Apple* with Terry Simpson's guitar, is a meditation on growth and renewal.

Two touching vignettes from Angela Dali: *Daydreams* is a lament from someone who wants to get out of the strictures of the army, and asks 'am I mad?' *Shipwrecked* is a cry from the heart of someone who had, emotionally, been 'smashed on the rocks'. Daphne's *Mirror image* is a brief life story, starting at four years old, related to a mirror: a careless child breaks the mirror, and possibly brings on the curse of seven year's bad luck; the subject cannot accept that the mirror image is really her; she feels she looks good in her old photographs, but still feels they are not her. *Ode to a friend's often misplaced birthday wishes* – a jocular observation of everyone's partly-functioning memories about anniversaries. *Poem for Chris* is dedicated to someone who, as per Hasidic Jewish tradition, carried his own 'candle' of enlightenment and self-knowledge. Steve Vindman's *Vember* is dedicated to November.

Love, by Mart Duffy, is naively, tenderly romantic, eulogy to an ideal tantric lover, a plea to "draw a map to the centre of my being" *A struggle to survive in the third world* is articulated through the persona of a Third World Child. A plea to 'put yourself in our no-shoes', a reminder that 'in business terms inaction is prudent', and that £1.50 can procure a vital sachet of vitamins. "If you get to know us, we will grow on you as a creeper". The Third World children would be accepted as relations if they were not geographically separated.

* * *

Tom Halloran, *Untitled complaint*, the sad story of someone who was dismissed from his job (in the forces? or in Customs and Excise?) for 'blowing the whistle', failing to keep his mouth shut about an embarrassing official secret. He had reacted then against the 'repetitive boredom' of his job, and struggled with suicidal thoughts. He will probably never work again; the authorities want him to sleep by day and work by night.

Tired, very powerful: "Fatigue clings to your legs, you can't shake free . . . As if marshalled by Rommel the ant general, your thoughts are stripped from you, your bush raided by soldier ants." This desolated exhaustion is counterpointed by the reveries of a young girl longing to buy an expensive dress. The poem then goes on to describe a potential suicide, a caller on Samaritans, who appreciates that he has good things in his life, and holds on to it.

Letter; the letter in question may never be sent, it may not even get written. This refers to a relationship with a loyal partner, which he broke off 'for schizophrenia's sake' (because he was aware of his dangerous condition?). He is thinking of suggesting resumption of the relationship as platonic friendship. A cry from the heart.

Dawn Jane Christy Holt, *Alone sequence*; this is in three parts. The first concerns depression, and giving in to darkness, here considered as the 'natural queen of beauty, sister of Mother Earth'. It then goes into a mid-tempo rap (good Afro-Caribbean input here), expressing anger: "I want to hurt you; I tried to help you but all in vain" to advice to a friend – 'better off without him', and then a prayer 'for the day we can be spiritually together.' The second poem is a chant, with the refrain "I'm like a tree in the desert". Darkness, benign in the first poem, now 'eats up hungrily at my character'. The third, *Love and pain*, is an expression of solitary desolation: "Where have my so-called friends gone? Only to argue the devil's worth again." At the end, she once again goes into incantation, about hugging trees. Well-rooted trees, after all, understand all about depression.

Doug Bowers, *Paper Therapy*, charming vignette about newspaper lettering collage and papier-mâché; *Tense nervous brain-ache*, charming chant, with 'I need to pee' as the interpolating refrain. *Land's End*; some fresh light on a well-worn theme: the waves can sound like a shaman's drum and/or an electronic charge.

Stevie James *Garbo* – Stevie seems to be identifying with one purported side of Garbo, where she dressed up as a man, and frequented all-male bars. The refrain is "I am a lonely man circling the earth"; this seems to be both the voice of Garbo's male ego/energy and of the poet himself, whose anima possibly wants to identify with Garbo. He describes her as 'the Muse of androgyny'. *High heels* expresses a desperate person's desire to dress up in women's clothes; powerful image of life being as narrow as a piano wire; good surrealism in walking in high heels on a piano keyboard. Good image of the bare feet of desolation *The feast*; is a piece of great sensitivity. The poet's partner serves Halal meat – 'killed cruelly in our eyes'. But her eyes are 'innocent of killing' 'liquid amber . . . mezzanine eyes'. There seems to be some gender-switching here; the partner is bearded, the poet is feminised: "Your limbs make me slender, your tongue makes me tender." "The meat of love lies bleeding." There is an utter polarity between the tenderness of feeling between the two people, and the process of providing the meal ". . . we taste it just the same".

John Flanagan, *We are cars*, pleasant bit of fantasy here; one becomes the object one fantasizes about owning. *Snoburbia*, this poem focuses on outcasts within the suburban environment, such as 'the clown hooked to community service'. *Coastal convalescence*; some fresh light here on a well-worn theme: "sea shadows of silvery gold . . . heavy gravity slaves . . . only stone dead fish go with the tide flow". Environmental acknowledgement of scavengers hunting for fish and chip scraps.

Ushawant Kaur sounds African. Her poems have an intensity

concomitant with her struggle to articulate; powerful incantations, with drum accompaniment. *Women* seems to celebrate the end of slavery: "the shackles are broken!" Some ambiguity in "I am used; I am relished." *Thief* is a metaphorical, generic one: "All is gone, all stolen by the past, present in presence". *The tomb* resounds with the "echo of the deepest agony". It is in the midst of some ruins, and there is long grass in the vicinity. Sparse words activating the imagination.

Milan Ghosh, *Bumble bee*, arresting, depressing sight of a dead insect. *Late nights* is a pleasantly naive celebration of relaxation and comfort. *Love poem for Emense* is far more complex: several years ago, the poet felt affection for someone who was then cold towards him. Several years later, she returns and is demonstrably affectionate. This is to Milan's great delight. Because of prolonged isolation "I usually freeze when touched". But although he got a taste of 'pure heaven' he felt 'too startled, too scarred and scared'. What became of the relationship is left to the reader's imagination.

Ben her's *Planet Connect* is a highly sensitive statement of someone desperately lonely, desperate to communicate and totally dependent on/restricted by technology in her attempt to do so. She aches to speak to someone directly, organically. Virtual reality cannot absorb/deceive her; she is perceptive enough to speak of 'angels spouting gobbledygook' and a 'pulsing new language' coming 'from the elect, through cyberspace'. Her hesitant vocal delivery lends extra poignancy to her message.

Angel Hart's *Dirty smelly city* is recited by Terry Simpson; no music here – inaccuracy in the inlay. It captures the essence of Leeds, and of the safe anonymity of social outcasts within its ethos: "here you can be yourself and be who you are". There is 'grid locked traffic'; environmentally sound pigeons and rats recycle the spewed remains.

Meseret Legesse and Steve Bindman read another of Angel Hart's poems, *Poetry from the inside – a riddle*; bouncy antiphonal repartee; most enjoyable – could have been extended.

Terry Simpson's contributions here, *The nurse's song*, *Alba*, and *The magic bullet maker's rap*, and his own version of the late John Tilley's *Nemesis*, are featured on his CD *Off Beat*, which I have reviewed separately. Terry also provides backing music for Meseret Legesse, Steve Bindman, Ushawant Kaur and Angel Hart.

Both discs end with some quite lively band music – The Schizos on Disc I, and the Rivers (Jack Simpson band) on Disc II; In both cases I felt that the recording did not do justice to the tight, well-rehearsed performances (the quality on 'Rivers' was a bit better). *Mad for Britain* is quite a healthy derivative of *La Bamba/Twist and Shout*. Good timing, good instrumental breaks, good interaction between lead guitar and keyboard. But please, vocals up a but please; I would like to hear all the words.

Contact: Leeds Survivors at 8 Beulah View, Leeds LS6 2LA

Dave Russell

Off Beat

Songs and Poems by Terry Simpson

Leeds Survivors Poetry Press



This is a very well-balanced combination of song, with acoustic guitar and keyboard, and spoken word. Some of the tracks are included in *Soul Survivors*. The songs are wittily perceptive, showing up the oppressive aspects of the psychiatric system, and society in general. Musically, Terry is quite eclectic. Melodically I find the opener, *Nurses*, somewhat reminiscent of Jake Thackray – could be a good influence on survivor song writing! It defends individuals, those who want change and accept uncertainty. *The Secrecy Song* is a powerful satire on Official Secrets-dom. It has a sprightly and imaginative keyboard accompaniment. *The Apple Tree* poem is tenderly wistful, expressing a long for reflective tranquillity. *The Magic Bullet Maker's Rap* is a raunchy up-tempo blues, taking the lid off the vagaries of the Pharmaceutical industry. *Inner Space Odyssey* is a sensitive rewrite of David Bowie's famous hit, and quite a precise gloss too: Major Tom becomes Patient Tom, and the helplessness of the patient parallels that of the astronaut. *Going Mad for England* is a rousing plea for regeneration - and we all know from what source! *Stigma* is quite a cogent 'quickie' poem. It merits being quoted in its entirety:

"The real mark; the one that doesn't fade,
Is not what people think or say,
But the stain inside, the sick cell in the bone,
The constant damaging thought
That this machine is faulty, this thinking can't be trusted.
If you were a social manipulator, what better weapon?
The flowering cancer seed of doubt will stop more rebellious
acts than 1,000 police with riot shields."

No blame is a powerful protests song about a ward patient who died from administered drugs. Musically, it is a combination of Dylan's *All I Really Want to Do* and *Who Killed Davey Moore?* Its lyric content is largely derived from the latter: everyone concerned shrugged off the responsibility, and the patient looked so happy! *My doctor says*, mid-tempo song, is a good-humoured satire on the wisdom of the medical profession; the singer has experienced a few moments of happiness in life "better than I get from all your needles and pills." The tone is partly mocking and ironic, but

then he can plead in desperation "I may be too far gone".

Thank you for the reference questions the effectiveness of rehabilitation schemes. The melody, and to some extent the lyrics, show the influence of Leonard Cohen – which Terry acknowledges in his aside to the audience, saying that the song was 'like Leonard Cohen on Lithium'. A touching portrayal of someone in authority, sheltered and comfortable, who has never experienced the horrific situations he 'officially' puts to right, who obscures realities in mystifying coded language. His authority is spurious and vacuous, his remarks forgotten as soon as they are uttered, or tied up in golden thread, and frozen into antique uselessness. Good reference to the 'hidden agenda'. Great irreverent joke about the Christ figure, skilful with animals, fishes and bread. A highly perceptive critique of power and authority structures. The one who sign the warrants and the cheques is given a warning that he too may at some point have to face a real-life crisis.

From Terry's intro to this live recording *Episode 54* is something of an impromptu jam session. He is joined by The Mints who play some very tasty keyboard strings. Terry describes the number as 'deep purple-ish'. This it certainly is in terms of sombreness of mood. It is set in a cold, overcrowded, waiting room, where all are in a desperate void, having lost all sense of direction. There is much staring into space, punctuated by rainfall. A sense of limbo eternity here.

The poem *Rubbish* is the heartfelt statement of the dedicated recycler, who faces all the bad odours, and the unpleasant jagged edges of metal, who grades, gathers, harvests – and consider himself a 'minor miracle'. *Nemesis* is spoken, with guitar. It refers to a sadistic relative or close partner. The poem *How to sing* is an impassioned plea for environmental – and human -generosity: scattering a packet of spring seed, opening ones doors to the cats, learning from the rain, forgiving those who disbelieve – life's tempo 'slowed to the beat of your own pulse'. *Alba* is a tasty instrumental in the style of Davey Graham. *The off-beat* is an impassioned plea for the musical off-beat, foundation pulse for dance, freedom of expression and experimentation. Very aptly, Terry quotes Martin Luther King: "Progress depends on the maladjusted".

Good selection from a very talented writer and performer, who has drawn on a wide range of literary and musical influences.

The Nurse's song, *Alba*, *The magic bullet-maker's rap*, and *Nemesis* are included in Leeds Survivors' Poetry compendium album, *Soul Survivors*.

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Dave Russell

The Fifth Figure Jean 'Binta' Breeze

Bloodaxe Books 2006
ISBN 1-85224-732-0; £8.95

The concept of this book is based on the Quadrille, a dance form based on four couples making a square pattern – the precursor of square dancing. The dance was introduced to the West Indies by the colonisers, and the Afro-Caribbeans made it their own. The ritual of the village dance is a leitmotiv throughout the sequence. Jean Breeze has shown her originality by adding one more figure. The book has a broad historical perspective, covering about a hundred years. It was described as 'breathing new life into the dramatic monologue'.

Figure One refers to the narrator's ancestry. This is set in the Victorian era. There is a description of a celebration of the end of slavery, under Queen Victoria's decree. Here a young girl goes to Jamaica with her brother James:

"... As a young Anglican vicar/he had left very few choices at home./He had made a private vow of poverty/and the colonies had wakened his conscience." In building the church there, he toiled alongside the native men. The reader is unsure how long was the journey to Jamaica, but whatever its length, it had the effect of a totally fresh, new country with an abundance of greenery..

At the celebration for the end of slavery, the heroine has her first encounter. In the second part of Figure 1, the narrative switches to broken prose, which conveys a tremendous sense of the power of the unknown. It then switches to more reflective standard prose, commensurate to some degree with her 'settling down' to motherhood, with a visiting father.

In **Figure Two**, it is revealed that the heroine is, effectively, an orphan: "I know why she (my mother) sits in the corner and stares through a closed-up window, leaving me to grow up without her", (p19). The population of her village is wiped out by a near- Biblical Typhoid epidemic; the narrator and Nana seem to be the only survivors. The narrator begins to become conscious of her colour identity; she does not want to copy the ways of the white children, particularly their straight hair. It emerges later that she is a mulatto, conscious of difference from 'black Africans'. She is also conscious of her robustness: "I could not understand why the men thought those weak-looking women beautiful, as if they needed someone to protect. There was I, strong as a horse, living in my father's body." (21-22) She grows up; she acquires a house and land, and wants to marry and have children.. Her carpenter's son, Son Son, is her choice for that role. He obeys her commands. She gives him a fertility test, and has his first child before marrying him. He obeys her commands; he has no material assets of his own. Son Son is expelled, and shortly replaced by Woody,

for whom the narrator feels a strong physical attraction. He beats her up, and then is crippled in an accident. So he retains a token presence, under her control. For most domestic purposes, she is an independent 'single mum'. She makes a comment about alcoholism reducing the men's potency. As for the many children she wants to produce, she does not want them to go to school. The figure deals the loss of virginity and childbirth. It ends with the narrator's menopause. The location is extremely fertile agricultural land.

In **Figure Three**, the first person narrator, Amanda Magdalene Wood is the last daughter of the narrator of Figure Two. The two figures provide a picture of the same environment, the same situation, from the perspectives of two generations.

Amanda makes some interesting speculations about her ancestry. "I was poorly from the start and aware from then of the village gossip that my great-grandfather, the plantation owner, was also my grandfather on Woody; my father's side." Physically sickly, she could not do hard manual labour, and so was introduced by her father at a very young age to the world of books. "My father is a dreamer while my mother is really practical" (30) The Woody of Figure Two has been transformed, matured, mellowed by his injuries. He has developed a moral code, which is not the case with Amanda's mother. She read stories to her father, and play-acted characters from these stories. She once played Sheba, and wanted to be 'the greatest queen in love'. Her father also taught her music, to which her mother was indifferent, as well as introducing her to small amounts of rum, so that she would get used to it and not fall prey to it. Unfortunately, "I became a tragic heroine, going to wreck by drink, over the love of a man", (P30). Her colour consciousness differs a little from her mother's. She found the black girls at school beautiful. Amanda becomes expert at sewing, and gets deep satisfaction from working on wedding garments. This activity feeds her reveries, which are intensified by a forthcoming dance, where she is 'swept off her feet': "My Solomon had arrived and now I could really be Sheba". There is 'careless love'; she sees the bloodstains on her dress and feels a deep sense of shame. She gets pregnant. The family estate becomes impoverished through being divided between so many children. Her mother suffers intensely under the strain. The birth was extremely painful. The child is nearly white. Amanda calls it Sheba. After many years of ostracism and degradation, she too emerges with dignity as a single mum, outfitting her daughter elegantly. Sheba is sent from home to a plantation.

Figure Four once again goes to the next generation. Sheba is now the narrator. Life on the plantation is quite prosperous. There are many dances and parties, which Sheba observes. Alongside her half-brother, John, he receives good education from a private tutor, including music. She grows very tall and impressive, and gets to

enjoy dancing. She develops a strong attachment for her half-brother, though there is some jealousy on his part when she gets to be the taller of the two. When John is sent to England, and she has to return to her original home, she is desolated. She has to return to the world of manual labour, which she deeply resents, and is determined to subvert. "She will soon learn that she sent me away to become a lady and a lady was what she'd got." (p41) She conceived the desire to follow John to England. There is a funeral in the offing; a new grave is being dug next to Woody's. Her mother makes some requests for her own funeral arrangements. Her education and 'grooming' prove themselves, for she becomes the queen of the dance. It is at this point that the fifth figure is first mentioned: in a style radically different from that of the four-figure quadrille fashion. Sheba sits this one out, and gets talking to Curry, to whom she find herself attracted. He seems to be, by her standards, a gentleman. She wards off his advances but finally succumbs. She gets pregnant, and discovers that Curry is already married, and a violent man. When she has had her baby, Sarah, she is determined not to be a single mum. At another dance, she meets Fred, a black man, whom she eventually marries. This is an interracial marriage. The section ends with a short poem, *Take Me to the Bridge*, which is a synopsis of Sarah's life – a 'tough cookie': she worked hard, studied hard, did not sing or dance, qualified as a teacher, and was ambitious to break away from her home environment in Hillside.

The Fifth Figure, largest part of the sequence, is all verse. Jean Breeze here writes mainly in Standard English, though she does use patwa in the opening, which is highly rhythmic and incantatory. The patwa section covers Sarah's childhood. It opens with a description of a child being brought up by its grandmother; her mother has gone to Kingston to study nursing. There is much reference to 'Granny Sheba' as a figure of authority and security. The father is a black man, well-educated, who comes 'down from the plain'. Interesting observation on colouring: "Yuh fadda is a black man/He don't born out of our race..." (p47) Sarah stands out from the other children in Hillside because of her dark skin. She stands out for the opposite reason when she is moved to The Cove, which is a predominantly black area:

"My mother stand out
It's like she come from England" (p59)

There is a suggestion that her father has come from Africa 'Like him come over here from Guinea'... He is a visiting father who brings special treats. The children specially smarten up for these visits. The little girl is regularly beaten by her father, although she is diligent with schoolwork, and only mildly disobedient. She finally draws the line on her father's attacks, and gets her way:

"He realised it was the end
I see the weakness of an old man" (p62)

Her baptism is described in colourful detail. It proceeds to describe the little girl's school days. She goes to the 'big school' (grammar school). This is a moving life story of a relatively privileged and well-educated West Indian girl. She excels academically at grammar school, but has a very rough time with the other pupils. In reaction to being harassed, she throws a stone at one of her persecutors and injures him; she feels painful guilt, but is no longer molested; there are no repercussions. One of her friends gets pregnant; she is puzzled as to how. Her mother gives her a baby sister at fifteen. Sarah is brought up to be a regular churchgoer, but soon the conflict between sacred and secular arises within her. She wrote dark poems for her school magazine, which reflected her deep concern for her mother's mortality.

There is quite a poignant reference to sexual abuse, and the heavy reaction of relations. At the age of fourteen, she was sent to board with her form master, who molested her. This all happened at a crucial time when Black Power began to assert itself. As she was head girl of the school, she had to be its spokesperson.

At seventeen, she married her Geography teacher, but did not 'settle down':

"My marriage didn't last very long
The wildness of bush
and the passion of songs
Kept me out dancing all night
With lovers on the left
and lovers on the right . . ."

The first stirrings of black power consciousness are vividly described:

"I grew with Jamaica into a new nation
Proud of our youth and development"

Interestingly "I claimed my Arawak heritage".

She left teaching to become an arts and community worker, involved with celebrations of Jamaica's ten years of independence.

The reader is given a full picture of complex colour gradations in West Indian Society.

She had the traumatic experience of witnessing a road accident where a child was badly injured; this experience had a profound effect on how she expressed herself and wrote – feeling she had to destroy the poems she wrote in immediate reaction to the event. She fell in love with a Rastafarian, and got pregnant by him. Her father died shortly before she gave birth. After this tragedy, she left home with her lover. On the way, she was hypnotised by the power of Rastafarian drumming; the wild exertions of her dancing to it caused her to lose her baby, and then

be hospitalised as a schizophrenic. Later she went back to live with her mother. In response to this, she found her poetic voice through the Rastafarian/Reggae culture, and was invited to chant some lyrics for Haile Selassie's birthday. Her career took off, including many performances in England, where she got pregnant again. When the new child was old enough, Sarah accepted an invitation to visit Africa, for she was keen to investigate her African roots. Johannesburg was her first port of call. The experience of the brutal Apartheid state was terrifying. She had to return to hospitalisation in England, and began to pine for Hillside in Jamaica, to which she returned. It was no longer the hillside of her childhood – within an hour's drive of the airport. The sequence ends with an exhortation to the children to join in a happy chorus.

I do not know the details of Jean Breeze's personal life, but the last figure feels somewhat autobiographical. The women presented in this book are supremely matriarchal. They base relationships on the dances. They bear large numbers of children. They face encounters with violent men. They give as good as they get. The dance ritual is a vital leitmotiv for this book. Its dynamic is both *cyclic*, in terms of history repeating itself to some extent through the generations, and *linear* with the progression from post-colonial days to aggressive Jamaican independence.

I had hitherto leaned heavily on Shiva Naipaul for my picture of West Indian life and society. Jean Breeze's book enriches that perspective enormously. There is no sense of a comfortable, detached observer here, but a constant sense of someone facing all the problems and tensions head-on, and through sheer necessity, taking all the concomitant pain and suffering.

Dave Russell

A Knowable World Sarah Wardle

**Bloodaxe Books 2009
ISBN 978-1-85224-819-2, £7.95**

A Knowable World relates to Sarah's year of hospitalisation for bipolar disorder. I have to say that in comparison with *Score!* I found this the lesser collection. In comparison, Sarah's depth, complexity and concentration does not come to full fruition here.

Indeed, the key aspects of the psychiatric experience are covered, starting with *Magnetic Resonance Imaging*. She was cleared of schizophrenia. Interestingly, she relates her unacknowledged bipolar symptoms to poems written while in the device, which she remembers. The areas of police involvement, arrest and forcible detention are covered. Some striking imagery of confinement: "I'm a tree with a ball and chain/rooted to the lino of this prison" (*S3*) *Escape Route* is about Sarah's grandmother, who was allowed to die in psychiatric hospital through negligence. *After Having Been AWOL* deals

with the effect of being separated from a partner because of hospitalisation. There are always mixed feelings in such a situation.

"Perhaps it was the way for months they'd argued, which lent the drama a hint of bittersweet, and though she knew she's never be complete with him, each lonely night he seemed to be her target."

Trust Core Values is a sympathetic portrait of an effective ward consultant psychiatrist: ". . . the fear, panic and hatred are gone, even in a world rocked by wrong . . .". *The Semantics of Psychiatry* concerns having feelings about a nurse. The nurse persuades the patient to take her medication to calm her feelings, but ". . . conscience says my infatuation/is a case of meta-medication,/hyper-physical, beyond illness,/reproduction the diagnosis." In *Psychiatrists Ask Questions*, and *Hope's Café*, Sarah, equally outspokenly, describes such feelings about her psychiatrist. The first of these posits the question of what might have happened if they had met at various other lifetimes: ". . . might a younger me have led you astray . . ." At the end of the second, she honestly admits to 'behaving like a start-struck teen/although I'm all of thirty-seven.' *Outpatient* muses on those who have never known adversity being unfeeling, while *Hospital Radio* speaks for the common experience of being both a patient and a visitor. *A Dialogue Between the Body and the Soul* delineates that relationship, that interdependency, quite succinctly; the soul prevails: "I'm the one who lives forever". *Undated* and *After Vaughan Williams* are lightweight nostalgic. *Christmas in October* has one significant comment: "On the ward I never once felt solitude,/though anger, boredom and frustration ran/through my veins." *An Epiphany* celebrates the inanimate: "I no longer believe in Forms,/jealous of the toughness of which wood is capable,/surefooted solidity outstripping lifetimes." Brilliant piece of wordplay next: "on the table a blue jug of tulips/reminds me there's still life." *Ten Questions My Psychiatrist Never Asks* and *Recipe for Disability* strike me as lightweight performance poems. *PRN* makes a good analogy between anaesthetic injection and rape. *S 136* is a sober, pertinent reminder that insanitary behaviour, drug dealing and suicide can take place on the psychiatric ward. *NHS* – chilly account of sectioning with police involvement. *Hotel Gordon*; some patients reorientate, while others perpetually return to the ward. *From Room 3*: reflections of the emptiness of looking out on the world from the ward. *Mind Games* is about the memory of a patient with which Sarah was once acquainted; it is not made clear whether he is still alive or dead.

The most effective poems here are, firstly, *Turquoise*, which among much else, highlights Sarah's erudition: 'inner ceasefire in a city of dreams'. Interesting play on grammatical theory:

". . . an accordion of beer mats
Inside a house of falling cards,
Propheying a future perfect
tense in a clause subordinate

"to the main political concerns

of the day-to-day running of
the words behind the meaning of things . . .”

Secondly, *Found Audience* is the voice of the totally committed poet, wishing the whole world were her platform. Thirdly, *Solitude* explores the role of language and articulacy in sustaining sanity on the ward. Penetrating references to ‘language’s silence’; “It is the pauses of the day which bring/punctuation to consciousness’s meaning. And a very telling conclusion:

“It is in dialogue with one’s own mind
lonely conversations begin to find
a way from illness and fragility
to the sanity of stability.”

Fourthly, *Author! Author!* is a profound portrayal of the private and public nature of writing. It merits being quoted in its entirety:

“Readers, know that writing is a private pleasure.
Each of you may interpret these words together,
yet the key to these usages, here, remains with me,
for it is your very absence that lets this poem be,
and though individually these words are public,
only the weaver understands their interrelationship,
so that these lines serve as blinds, or prison bars,
to keep an audience distant, guessing from afar,
while I remain inside my poem, mind and state,
for understand this print is not blood spilt on a page,
but, what is more uncanny, space beneath the stone,
a translation, chiselled in sand, hollowed on a tomb,
wherein lie the silent bones of this white sheet,
taking with them their true, unverified secret.”

For any depth writing to be effective, it must initially distance itself from the reader. It must also take into account the open spaces, the vacua in comprehension.

Snow from Ebury Wood is a delicate vignette comparing snowflakes to ‘falling measures of time’. Time can be more than un-directional, just as snowflakes can be swept upward. For *Michelle Farrell* is an elegy on the death of an alcoholic who had been wrongly placed on the psychiatric ward; her spirit lives on. In *For Phil*, Sarah shows how she cared for another alcoholic, including accompanying him to Accident and Emergency. Another chilling observation:

“I saw your father cry,
as he said you would need to hit rock bottom
before you’d find the strength again to try
to quit and start to rebuild your good fortune.”

On Ben Nevis is on the ‘outward bound’ theme. One of Sarah’s leitmotifs is the sense of affinity between the outward bound and the psychiatric experience: “I am walking in my psychiatrist’s country . . . We create adventure for body and mind”.

Again I suppose it is just my preference, but I find that an excess

of short poems, one per page, detracts from a book’s impact. This pitfall had been successfully avoided in the earlier collection, with several gripping sequences to reinforce cohesiveness and continuity. This is particularly relevant to those snippets describing the hospital experience. The six quasi-sonnets between *Escape Route* and *Subject*, would have been more effective two on a page. If this had been done, more could have been fitted into the format. This is a good collection; but there was room to add more, and tip the scales into excellence

Dave Russell

Time for Song

Termyn Rag Kan – Contemporary Cornish Poetry

Morgan’s Eye Press

ISBN: 978-0-9554303-2-9; £6.50

This collection features the work of **Bert Biscoe, Patric Cunnane, Bob Devereux, Pol Hodge, Sue Johns and Agnes Meadows**. The selection from the 3 latter include parallel texts, in English and Cornish.

Bert Biscoe is a Bard of Gorsedh Kernow, Chairman of the Cornish Constitutional Convention, a local councillor and a trustee of the Cornwall Rural Community Council. His poems here have as their ambience the wild Cornish coastline, its flora and Fauna. *Cormoran* alludes to a mythical giant. *History* is dedicated to John Angarrack, the famous human rights campaigner and spokesperson for the Cornish language and culture. This poem is a good introduction to people new to these issues. *The Price to Pay* deals with a construction worker who suffers a fall and has to have his legs amputated. He feels some fascination for the woman (nurse?) who performs the operation. *The Best Crop* celebrates local agriculture. *We Dare Not Forget Their Names* is in honour of maritime folk through the ages, so central to the Cornish identity. In *Stone-touched* the narrator is urged by his mother to follow his impulses and find his identity by embracing beach stones. The language of his poems ranges from Standard English to ‘modified Cornish’ dialect

Patric Cunnane has been published in *The Guardian* and elsewhere; his latest poetry collection is called *Baltimore*. He is an organiser of Dodo Modern Poets, and runs poetry workshops nationwide. Patric now lives in South London. I found the opener, *All the fish in the Sea*, somewhat trite. Far more substantial is *On the Dressing Floors at Grass*, which commemorates a mining disaster in 1893. It would have been useful to have a brief biographical note on Bridget English, for whom there is a memorial bench overlooking St. Ives. *Pleasure Beach* is both rugged and tender – essentially Cornish. *Two Sides of the Coin* celebrates the heroism of miners and fisherman; I wonder to what extent this is nostalgia for Cornwall’s past. As is well known, the Cornish tin trade fell into decline in the mid-19th

Century, though clay mining continues to flourish. We *Get to Drinking Some Nights* is a robust description of holiday making.

Bob Devereux has a large number of publications and recordings to his credit; his latest poetry collection, *Essential Air*, was published in 2008. In 2000 his poetry was carved into handrails beside the Tamar as part of a Millennium project. He is director of the Salthouse Gallery in St. Ives, main organiser of the St Ives Literary Festival and runs poetry cooabet evenings. His work contains some hard, clinical descriptions of the hardships of fishing and agriculture. *Trink Hill's* theme is 'Slow decay and life reborn', embracing egg shells and minerals. *How Many?:* Some historical reference here; emphasis on Cornish men going to war, as well as the great numbers who perished at sea. Caution to some extent reiterates this theme, referring to the capricious elements on the Cornish coastline:

"These endless sibilant murmurings
That ebb and flow and haunt our working days
Could undermine existence in this place."

Forever Cornwall (Kernow Bys Vykken) is a powerful statement of the preservation and revival of the Cornish language, which came so close to being completely lost – '... a Lazarus language, raised from sleep' (the poem is presented in both English and Cornish)

Pol Hodge was born in Redruth and now lives in mid-Cornwall. All of his selection in parallel text form, Cornish and English. *The Romance of Clay* compares the ravishing of the Cornish ecosphere to a primal act of defloration, where he identifies with the ex-virgin:

"You kissed me at my moorland
And smelled the pull of tin
Ripping open with spade
My turf skin to the bone . . ."

"and my hymen ran red
With a race of tears to the Fal
Washing your gain and victory."

The Hare celebrates the agility and resilience of the hunted prey: "The hunt became a worshipping"; the hare is "quick and fluent, living and poetic."

Sue Johns, born in Penzance, now lives in London. She is a member of Dodo Modern Poets, and has performed at the Edinburgh Festival, the St. Ives Festival, and the Poetry Cafe in London. As well as poetry, she writes dramatic monologues on such diverse themes as courtesans and the secret lives of shop assistants. *Dolly Pentreath* is about the reputed last exclusive Cornish speaker, who died in 1777. Since then the Cornish language has been preserved and resurrected; much

of this collection celebrates this fact. I find *Time For Song* interesting, because I had to learn the two songs quoted here at Primary School: *Bread of Heaven* and *Trelawney (Song of the Western Men)*. The latter concerns the imprisonment of Trelawney, a Cornish bishop, for seditious libel by King James II. After that king's deposition, Trelawney was acquitted. The song is considered by many to be the Cornish national anthem.

Agnes Meadows, performance poet and writer, does readings, workshops and residencies all over the UK and world-wide. Agnes has published five books of poetry, the latest. *Flipped Eye*, published in 2008. She has twice won the Christina Sergeyevna Award for Outstanding Writing at the Austin International Poetry Festival in Texas. She has been an adviser on poetry for Channel 4 TV and is on the board of Apples & Snakes. *In Kernow Cariad*, the treasures of Cornwall are described as gifts from a lover – geographical features, legends. And there is one very contemporary reference: 'they spinning corridors of power deep under sea' – is this an oil-rig? *Penwith Afternoon* – the soothing power of the seascape, which is also surging and resilient: 'Sea sprawling its heathen Cornish strumpet beauty'. *Sennen in December* – a panorama of Cornwall's maritime past. There is a second *Sennen* poem which concentrates on the place's enduring qualities: "Here eternity is a soft song, its notes fragile and whispering". The water is compared to a tender lover. *Boxer Rebellion* is Agnes's subtlest item here. The title is a play on the famous Boxer Rising – a 1900 peasant revolt in China, officially supported, trying to expel foreigners from the country. The poem is about a woman who takes two boxer puppies to the seaside, where they prove strength on a par with human boxers. The selection ends with *A Hare's Sorrow* – another gloss on this formidable creature so honoured by the Cornish. In this poem, the hare is the first person narrator, but also has human characteristics. To some extent the hare is the spirit of Cornwall, hounded and persecuted; touching references to Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738), a blind harpist and bard, as well as to my Lady of the Constant Well. At the end there is some sense of restoration, of the renewal of life.

Dave Russell

Little Musings **Joy Sheridan**

Poetry and Artwork

This collection covers several decades of Joy's work as poet and painter. It touches on many aspects of her life, including the loss of her mother, in *Do Not Mourn Her and ?? Loss – Double Rainbow*. Her childhood was spent in Plymouth, and in *A Plymouth Girl Reflects*, she recalls the aftermath of the air raids. Being in close proximity to Cornwall, that area also a

major theme here, especially in *Newquay, Cornwall* and *On Air, By Melancholy*. Four of the poems, *Absent Friends*, *Isle of Thanet*, *At Jim's Cafe*, and *Captain Ahab of Thanet* are focused on the Thanet area of North Kent, where Joy now lives. *Release* and *Gratitude* express a reflective inner peace which seems to have drawn on both Kent and Cornwall.

Animals are to the fore in this collection; Joy is a greater lover of, and writer about them; she contributes regularly to the *Creature Features* magazine. Closest to home are the cats; and here is a parade of her favourite felines, all of them with distinctive personalities; shades of *Old Possum!* There are the real cats *Colin*, *Garfield*, *Misty* and *Mojo*. The latter is quite symbolic, 'medieval but Machiavellian' (*Machiavellian Black Velvet*). Most impressive is the imaginary *King Felix the Furred* in *The Singing Teacher*: a delightful fairy tale. The king was embarrassed at the quality of his purring, and forbade purring throughout his realm, until a beautiful female cat wooed him so that his purring was mellow, and then the ban was lifted. A somewhat surreal idea in *Just Two Purrfect* in *Wedded Bliss* – a woman marrying a cat indeed! This poem had to be inspired by *The Owl* and the *Pussycat* – a great Edward Learish charm in its tingling couplets. Canines, however, or not excluded from this selection, as *On the Sad Demise of Walpole's Dog* – savaged by a wolf. The wild creatures of the forest also have their place here, such as the hare of *Hare Escapade*, *The Rook that Shook the World*, the owl of *Haunted*, and *Wolf*, where she assumed the identity of that creature. *Herne the Hunter* presents an absolute kaleidoscope of wildlife, menaced by human predators.

Joy's extensive menagerie goes into past history *Christina Rossetti's Canary* won a prize in the 'Celebration of London' competition in 1991, organised by Dame Shirley Porter, then Mayor of Kensington, and adjudicated by Andrew Motion. It gives an historical 'bird's eye view' of that period in history and captures the essence of an era in flux, especially with the lines "caught the whiff/Off some old tramp steamer, fading for the pant and glare/Of metal battalions in underground tunnels." Her strong period sense, especially in art history, is also apparent in *In a Bloomsbury Studio*, circa 1912. There is an uncanny feeling of her actually having been there, overhearing the gossip, accentuated by an extremely authentic looking painting of a poseuse. The one prose piece in this selection is *After Sunset: Kitty's House*. This is in honour of *Kitty L Kielland* (1843-1914), the realism dedicated Norwegian landscape artist. A 1986 retrospective exhibition in London, *Dreams of a Summer Night* left a deep impression. There should be many more pieces like this!

Her great lifetime adventure was to make a crossing of the Atlantic as crew companion of *Captain Ted Falcon-Barker*, author of the best-seller *The Devil's Gold*. This voyage is celebrated in *Penelope's Muse* and *Seascape with Sun, Moon and Stars*; *Barker*, now sadly deceased, is described as 'Handsome seasoned old Odysseus.' Hopefully, her diary of this will some day see the light of publication. Her maritime fascination is reiterated in *Newquay, Cornwall*. A chilly note is struck in *On the Loss of a Ship – Deal*, Kent dealing with

shipwreck and skulduggery so prevalent on the high seas.

There are several poems here on Russian themes; some of these were published in an earlier pamphlet, *With Russian Eyes*, and form an appendix to the collection. Joy's interest in things Russian was stimulated by her frequenting of *The Pushkin Club* in *Ladbroke Gardens*, London W11. This fact is acknowledged in *Coming Home – Tribute to the Pushkin Club*. The fashionable urban world is celebrated in *Remembering the Star*, a delightfully humorous account of Joy's entry into a *Doc Marten's shoes* competition. *Mystery* captures the badinage of the throbbing, volatile community of *North Kensington*, which for so long was her home.

Memories of past loves include *ABC* and *An Augustan Response*, described in the notes as 'a reply to *Byron's When We Two Parted*'. The two poems make an interesting comparison – *Byron's* from the standpoint of someone who was abandoned, deceptively, by a partner, Joy's from that of someone who was overtly ditched. I find more poignant honesty in the latter. *Fragment* on a *Wooden Eve* and *Persephone Personified* are wistful reflections on ageing. For *femmes fatales*, there are two poems dedicated to *Masha*, *Chekhov's mistress*, one to *Tatyana* and one to *Anna Pavlova*. *Masha* has no qualms about expressing her feelings: "crossed husband – a curved knife in a straight scabbard . . . amputated by marriage to him". In *Rites of Spring* and *The Hollyhock*, Joy puts herself into the mind-set of Russian ballet dancers. *Don Juan's Christmas Piece* is a charming fantasy of a fling with a Russianised *Don Juan*: "Old Russia herself is stirring/A-flying go her petticoats and quilts." For non-Russian ones, there is, in *Glorious Abundance*, a celebration of *Diane de Poitiers* – which I find positively *Spenserian*. There are also the ghostly figures in the funeral procession of *Three Queens*.

Contemplating Orpheus illustrates her fascination with musicians, but the object of adoration treats her with 'fluctuating cool indifference'. During the 90s, we used to go together to *Bunjies Folk Cellar* in *Litchfield Street* (now replaced by a Moroccan restaurant) where the sensitive souls of acoustic music used to gather. *Wintertime Melody* captures the bustling essence, the crisscrossing of tensions and experience at that throbbing focal point. *The Cold Mile* is a song lyric. Joy once recorded a sung version of this, backed by myself on guitar. It was meant to be a theme song of a hoped-for film version of a terrorist novel of the same name, on which we collaborated. Some feeling of a lifelong quest, braving the elements, in search of the unattainable.

Joy has a great flair for erotic poetry and fiction: a very fine example of this is *The Snake and the Lady*, with its surreal accompanying illustration. From the viewpoint of a 'lady in waiting' celebrates "love sensuous and divine"; the two bodies and souls are fused into one winged serpent, which soars heavenwards 'to grasp the eternal hour'. Similar in spirit, and comparably illustrated, is *Dancer Beneath the Moon*, expressing a woman's fascination with male beauty. These two poems are counterpointed by *The Magician*, a powerful portrayal of obsession, being taken over. Some memorable phrases here:

“He takes me in rhyme . . . I’m swirling around/On a thistledown
toothcomb/Of high exaltation . . . Here’s a raven transfigured
to a shard . . .” The ever-beautiful, ever-painful rose – symbol
of love, is celebrated in its dual nature in Rapture of Roses.
Further gems in this area are The Scent – an interesting gloss on
Keats’s ‘Madeleine’ theme, and Trysting Place.

This collection comes as a follow-up to a recent, long overdue
exhibition of Joy’s artworks in Birchington earlier this year,
should be considered as ‘the tip of the iceberg’, as she is a
highly prolific artist and writer in many genres. Let there be
much more to follow!

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Dave Russell

S t r a i g h t A h e a d **by Clare Shaw**

Bloodaxe Books 2006
ISBN 1-85224-750-9; £7.95

A True Survivor, Clare Shaw is an expert on Women’s Mental
Health issues. The collection is something of an emotional
autobiography, largely against a northern English background.
Not as simple is an ode to the complexity of life. *Poem for a bus
shelter* personalises the shelter; it stands as a metaphor for the
author’s own sense of local rootedness. *This baby* also makes
highly original use of metaphor, depicting cosmic universality
and explosive natural power through a new life form: that must
be what a baby feels like for its expectant mother.

The year Dad left was effectively puzzling. Did Dad leave
dead or alive? There is some nostalgia here for the ‘old days’
of television. There is almost a Fifties feel about this poem, all
the more surprising because Clare was born in 1972. *Foreign
tastes* deals with the holiday ethos. *Mrs O’Hara* is charmingly
evocative of school life in the North Country. *I’ll give you
something to cry about* speaks volumes about the traumas of
motherhood, dealing with those really awkward, troublesome
children! *Nothing personal* seems to deal with the nascent egotism
of a ten-year-old. Summer holiday, in five sections, deals with a
family excursion – presumably to Spain; Section III obliquely
describes a young girl’s first experience of harassment (and
possible abuse). Section IV pinpoints the location by referring
to a Spanish phrase book in relation to a minor accident; this
sense of location is reinforced by Section V, briefly alluding to
the slaughter of a duck in a market place. From one account of
animal life to another; Ya-uuk – an orang-utan rescued from a
zoo, becomes the first-person narrator. He speaks of the horrors
of being hunted: “The man with his breath like rotten meat./
His sour white skin and his gun.” The conclusion of the poem
is, rightly, ambiguous. There was a mass shooting of Ya Uuk’s
clan – one suggestion that the rest of them were killed, and

he was the sole survivor taken into captivity. He, and perhaps
other captive/survivors feel, and perhaps desire, death “.
. . we slept and we dreamed we were dead./Now world is
the cold pink stink of a man/and all of the outside is gone.”
Poem about Dee Dee describes someone who tries to escape
(from psychiatric hospital) by making a dramatic jump from
the roof. She is recaptured, and presumably handled rather
forcefully. She was a word mate of the author, who emerges
as first-person narrator in Section IV. *This is a true story* has the
theme of an aircraft crash, in which the author has lost a sibling.
Love poem is an obvious statement of attraction/affection for
a heavy-drinking macho. Significantly, it ends with a quotation
from Robert Burns. *War poem* is partly evocative of elderly
Brits reminiscing about World War II (though the reference to
Radio 4 locates it firmly in the present day), but there is also
a subtle use of metaphor. War is the bossy, irritable head of
the nuclear household, marshalling her husband for those oh-
so-necessary domestic chores, starting in the messy, run-down
garden. Then to a dreary evening, comforted by alcohol, and
perhaps by televised, sanitised war outside. *In Bedfordshire,
the rivers rise* deals with a flood. The narrator takes the risk of
climbing without a rope. *Maybe somewhere* is an indictment of a
drifting, unfaithful male. He is upbraided for his missed chances
of a happy, settled life. The last verse is particularly moving, his
memory is numbed: “The voices you can’t recall any more” but
he is still fixed in the memory of the wind and the trees, which
call him a fool. *About the arguments we had last year* explores
the validity of rows and arguments. There was bitter acrimony,
and then a separation. There may have been a fatal road
accident. There was certainly a terrible sense of desolation:

“Without you, everything fell.
Trees rotted soft; the snow melted
And the paths stank.
Words could not speak themselves,
Familiar placed did not
Know me any more.”

Then there was the illusion that the partner was still there: “We
lay still in the bed/and your skin was cold” (the coldness of a
corpse?). She ached for her partner’s return: “breaking/all
known barriers of reason and place/to be with me.” Then comes
the title poem *Straight ahead*. It immediately suggests a fashion-
ably dressed woman on a car journey. She is of muscular build,
which seems to heighten her insecurity:

“I’m wide shoulders, a back
you could break on, an old door
you can’t get open. I swear sometimes
I can hear myself creak.”

The narrator is somewhat obsessed by a blonde woman sitting
in front of her in the car or taxi. This obsession is reinforced by
sounds from a Walkman in her rear. She inadvertently nudges
the blonde woman’s back seat, and then recoils. The blonde
woman seems fragrant, the narrator malodorous. She continues
obsessed, imagining the blonde woman witnessing the movement
of windmills. In *Plucked* the narrator is bitchily offended by a

woman in provocative gear. She is fascinated by this woman, and is riven with guilt about her fascination, referring to “my bad mind/with the wrong face in it . . .” The guilt is truly painful: “The criminal skin/which rippled like a blown field/when she was around . . .” Then there is a sadistic image of the woman’s feet and ears being removed, and of the narrator’s tongue being uprooted.

“Soon nothing remained
but a stained ridge of flint
in the form of a fibula; the wicked flower
of a heart.”

This entity has been stripped of its flesh. But it retains its vitality:
“loving/and hurting and hating and beating”.

A poem about babies - there is some sense of revulsion from pregnant women. The poet’s brother’s wife has recently had a son. The poet dreams of having a daughter - perhaps reflecting a desire which cannot be fulfilled. Unusual shift of personal focus:

“. . . her face was a hook/and it cut me. She looked/as though she knew me./When I woke up, you (*adult partner?*) had gone.

Killing it refers to a pet monkey, owned by a sadistic, hypocritical human family: “. . . we stamped on it as we spoke./Made it live by rules/that we changed and broke at a whim . . . Ashamed,/we hated it/for making us both so cruel.” The monkey was cruelly imprisoned indoors, and was cruelly dispatched in an upsurge of blind anger. The couple did not become aware of what they had done until the monkey’s carcass began to putrefy. Even the shock of recognition is peculiarly cold: “White-faced, we looked at each other/aghast/new strangers. There’s nothing alive left between us.” The monkey was an animate version of what warmth was left in their relationship. They also killed their love. This is the bleakest, most disturbing poem in the Collection. *In Halifax* is quite a charming piece of local colour. The setting is a coach journey. The author is perhaps of ‘butch’ appearance (“They’re discussing whether I’m a woman or a man”). There are tourists in the vicinity, and there is small-talk about asylum seekers. The characters move from the coach to a ‘concertina’ bus; the narrator is driven to absurd laughter. Then there is a shift to the railway station, set in the midst of the countryside. She feels she cannot make an adequate human response to the awesomeness of the landscape. Finding such contemplation unbearable, she comes down to earth by filling in a British Rail questionnaire: “. . . General cleanliness - very poor.” *Hope* is an interesting gloss on a feeling generally associated with optimism. Here it seems to impose heavy burdens of expectation, and prevent the subject from contingently engaging with living: “My mouth is a word beginning to happen,/my smile is a joke I can’t tell anyone.” *Hope* is as irritating as an untrained domestic pet; it has an irrepressible vitality, however much the subject would like to repress it. At the very end of the poem, it is revealed that hope is centred in her baby’s face. *For you*: reflections on mortality – the narrator seems to have acquired some space and leisure time, perhaps as the result of a bereavement? She would like to move someone in to her life; she is extremely

accommodating: “I’ll grow small for you, we’ll share/a seat. No one need even notice”. In the last stanza, she speculates on a possible forthcoming bereavement, which would make more room. There is a feeling of guilt and furtiveness in the desire: “I want you to slip in quickly, even if it isn’t your turn.”

Some questions: the most abstract, speculative piece in this collection. It portrays the vital curiosity of a child struggling to comprehend the universe around it. The comparisons and connections made by a child which has not completed a formal education show the highest level of imagination and intuition: “Why is fire hot like being shouted at . . . Why clouds the shape of getting lost?” Disturbing double reference to sheep in the middle: the sheep in dreams and the sheep in the butcher’s shop. The elusiveness of answers leaves one “alone as a hole where there is no sky”. Stephen Hawking would surely have appreciated this perceptivity. In the end celebrates the grit and determination of a stoic people’s ongoing struggle with everyday adversity: “the non-apocalyptic suffering of friends”. There is an enigmatic feeling about the opening of this poem. The narrator went on a motoring trip, related to something for which there was very limited time, and got caught in a traffic jam. Presumably she got back and parked the car, still under curfew: “At one minute left, I was sprinting towards family/with no hope of getting there in time.” There seem to have been several people involved in the journey, all of whom got into a panic. This panic was then put into perspective by an awareness of greater suffering of others, and all the participants comforted and reassured each other. *Gratitude* is simple but moving, starting out in celebration of the everyday comforts and consolations of life. Just one jarring line: “For young girls raped in the shade of July” – and then a twist. There was a message that a loved one had survived some great ordeal. *The soap opera inside me* is cleverly ironic: so many people lean on violent soap opera and televised bad news as a source of comfort and excitement. When the evils and horrors have seemingly been removed, the world feels curiously empty. The voice of optimism, singing *Here comes the sun*, seems ridiculous.

Bird is quite scary: the narrator rescues a flightless bird, and tries, unsuccessfully, to nurture it. The bird moulted and wilted, then very briefly burst into song. The song resonated everywhere, memorable for eternity. Then the bird died.

All thoroughly discomforting and thought provoking. Clare Shaw has the major writer’s ability to illuminate the commonplace. She goes along all the beaten tracks, but explores every detour, every obscure corner, vitally, unfailingly highlighting the painful contradictions inherent in every confrontation with life.

Dave Russell

Make i Sweat
Stuart Black

Poems to support the No Sweat Campaign Against
Sweatshops; 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX



This is a radical collection, supported by Haringey Council, relating the world of poetry to the world of labour. This is spelled out dramatically in the introduction:

“The creative industries of music and poetry include the toil of sweatshop workers. From the sweatshops of cotton production used to reinforce the paper in books, the sweatshop production of merchandise in the music industry and working immigrants in China where workers make the Apple ipods on poverty rates of pay and are denied the same workers rights as Chinese nationals.”

The Introduction adds that it is ‘a pilot project for a compilation of poetry and essays on anarcho-socialist causes and campaigns’. The poems include song and rap lyrics. Any radical populist collection should include these vital items, which are so often obscured from audibility in performance. *Back to Us* celebrates the emotive power of music: “Then we all let go/and we are out of our minds . . . so all the music is an orchestra/Of sunlight blues . . .” Those published here admirably show the direction which this compilation will take; politically aware, with a perspective ranging from the global to the inner urban.

I am Blunkett highlights the corruption of power, and the frequent personal helplessness of those who hold it: ‘Guide dog in a cage/Trapped/The lift of my power.’ But he can still perpetrate enormous harm: “I am a million pieces/Silver stolen/Gambled shares of sweat/T-shirts to wash . . . I am Blunkett/For invisibility/I lock freedom out.”

Waiting for the Wall to Fall Over: the memory of the Berlin Wall is still firmly implanted in the common consciousness; that was the supreme barrier wall. This poem fuses the idea of wall as restrictive barrier with wall as protection, and posits the idea of its demolition by nuclear or thermonuclear weapons.

Blood and Milk: when it comes to a blood transfusion, there is an affinity between the nutritional qualities of each fluid. God is a powerful indictment of servile religiosity: “I will not believe in his power
Because we have got the power
And I will tell that God.”

God (?), I(?) is an assertion of the human soul against the oppressive concept of a deity: ‘tell God that I am the man.’ *England (?), England (?)* attacks the crude nationalistic chauvinism of some English/British football crowds. *The Fulham Rap* presents the other side of the coin, very effectively relating radical politics to football: “We love music, love football, hate racism.” *Big and Open* celebrates freedom of expression in open spaces. Interesting use of the image of a book: “We give a rhyme/In a big and open march/To blow the cover/On our big and open book . . . I give the book away and take our space.” There is a tension between the idea of freely distributing the book, so that it is not an instrument in the hands of the few, and relecting it. Good reference to ‘this civil order of grammar’.

Patient, Too Patient: medical negligence, shredding of records, the unspeakable sufferings of those who passively accept their lot. *Restricted* and *Love Is* are obvious chantable lyrics, expressing attitudes of inner urban anarchy and defiance. *Animal Rights Man* imagines arousing the spirit of rebellion in many main animal species. This is powerful polemic, even when read as being totally metaphorical. But it must also be seen in the context of the drastic actions of some actual Animal Rights protesters.

Blood and Milk: when it comes to a blood transfusion, there is an affinity between the nutritional qualities of each fluid. God is a powerful indictment of servile religiosity: “I will not believe in his power
Because we have got the power
And I will tell that God.”

Cotton-Pickin’ Cotton the threads that hold the corrupt world’s fabrics together. A bit of surrealism in *Thin Stillness*: “Cool thin statue as cold as stone . . . slips into the smile of a snowman/To break down the plinth and the stone/To break down a history of skeletons . . . The snowman’s smile chops off the head/The snowman carries the spirit/Into the safe hands of nothing.” Similar effect in *Wheelchair Architect*. Central image of an engineer with a broken leg, who “Breaks a leg/To shut down the trap/Of revolvers/Revolving on the system.” A heroic act of martyrdom, speaking for humanity against some architects who would cripple the environment and the quality of human life.

In *I, the Robot*, the robot symbolises those of the police who have been brutalised by their oppressive roles. In the latter part of the poem, there is a switch to someone who has been released from being sectioned, to make his great protest: “I walk down every high street/Shouting Drugs for sale, drugs for sale”, and indictment of the ‘free black market

in the NHS' which is so full of dubious, addiction-inducing medications. Very thought-provoking conclusion too: "I am released and carry a sack on my back./A big black bag full of hospital records." This, to me, suggests both people who have died in hospital under dubious circumstances, and the phenomenon of Medical Records getting shredded. Interesting comparison with *Disappearance*, where the narrator is 'Hiding/In invisible rubbish bag' like someone who has vanished, speaking from the dead.

The Red Room is a good description of general medical incompetence when giving an injection. *The Blue Room* opens in a hospital consulting room, where a resident in a care home, which, as he tells the nurse, was visited by a strange man and two children. He rang 999 and was ignored. He finally persuaded the children to go home. He told his key worker and social worker what had happened. What follows is really disturbing. "This man held up a stainless steel kitchen blade . . . wanting a sample of my blood " The language of the poem leaves it completely ambiguous as to whether the man in question was the intruder who came with the children, or a member of the social work/hospital staff. The latter is suggested by the lines: "Silence, patient, silence. We have ways of making you not talk./ We will prescribe you some pale pink pills and you will feel so much better." There is a direct threat of violence, 'the metal framed sofa bed' suggests that this is in hospital. Surrealism again with 'A portrait of a blood sample'. The preservation of the blood sample restores his optimism. If anyone thinks that all grass roots poetry lacks psychological depth and subtlety, read this poem very carefully.

Judgement's End speaks as a beacon of hope in the perpetual circuit of judge and jailer: "The blind send the soul, around to the sun/Humming the words towards sentences end."

Dirty City, Dirty Smoke, in two parts, rightly reeks with pollution and its concomitant injustice:

"The city spits out cars and oil
Builds up dreams, builds up walls
You're half way dead before the soil."

The first verse brings in the image of a sewer worker; the first section concentrates on the demoralising daily treadmill of an inner city operative. The second section gives a more panoramic view of the city environment: "This city spits out cars and oil/Builds up dreams, builds up walls . . ." There is a malignant anonymity about it: "The truth is truth don't know what's going on." But hope remains if one vitally counters that deadening environment:

"It takes a man to make a wall
It takes a child to scale that wall
It takes much more to feel it all . . ."

Needle and Thread, Hammer and Sickle – basic imagery of a rag-trade sweatshop; reference to the collapse of the Soviet union, which long seemed to hold out hope for the

oppressed in the West; original metaphor of the thread penetrating the needle's eye being a symbol of hope.

Sea Breaks the Old Steps – seeming rap lyric juxtaposing Tsunami and the Iraq conflict. *Why we stand*: 'Freedom is a wind' – good fusion of the political left and the ecologically aware. I feel that today's radicalism has to combine red and green. *I Close the Book* is a cry from the heart of an underprivileged but articulate, literate person:

"Guilty for having knowledge of the system
Of reading the lines of law books in library rooms
Books I read in innocence and why am I guilty as I stand up?"

The second stanza focuses on the vibrations of the Notting Hill Carnival: "My mind explodes in one echoing voice." A bit of an apocalyptic vision too: 'crashing into crash buildings/As one big flash of lightning'. The final line, 'I close the book', I find disturbingly double-edged. In one sense it is fine: the real, direct experience in so many ways outweighs, transcends book-derived knowledge. But might not going along with that weaken the power of resistance against oppression. Surely it could be dangerous to close that book; that line could well express that sense of danger, contain some words of warning.

I have long been a devotee of *The Bill*. So it was good for me to have this radical gloss on it. The poet refers to being an 'extra' in the series, contributing to its running/crowd sequences. An interesting expression of the 'property is theft' slogan; also touches on immigration authorities and deportation; great portrayal of grand exodus to Dover and 'a refugee holiday in Nice'. Powerful indictment in *Nicotine Don't Do It*: interesting cameo of a panic-stricken soul jumping on and off buses, wanting to (literally) kick various aspects of his environment as he longs to kick (metaphorically) his nicotine habit.

The final *Drum Roll for a song* uses the image of a military brass band, to indict the callous and moribund state of Britain: "The Queen's speech for peace is silent . . . War creates sweat, creates blood/The newspapers delivers the tears./Opium kills the pain/Is the killer."

OK: if this is the prelude to a great collection, let's look forward to the full-length feature. It brings together many disparate strands of radicalism. It is admirable that a borough council should support such a venture.

Dave Russell

Songs, Poems and Prayers by Frank Bangay

Another great selection, including some examples of Frank's new-found spirituality. It opens with *Morning Prayer*, and closes with *Evening Prayer*. It consists of poems and songs, some with guitarist Tunde Busari, some with various talented musicians called the Topsy Turvy Band, mainly centred at Life and Living near Waterloo. (According to the sleeve note: "All songs recorded at Core Arts, 1 Barnabas Terrace, Homerton, London E9, except *My Secret Garden*... This was recorded at Studio 9, Waterloo") Personnel here are CORE musicians Tunde Busari (guitar), Angel Garcia (guitar), Paul Felly (guitar), James Morgan (piano), Neale Muldowney (guitar, piano, strings, bass, drums). Sophie Mirrell provides backing vocals on the devotional material. The Topsy Turvy Band were based at Studio 9, Waterloo: Howard Jacques (bass), Norman Holmes (piano), Doug Currie (drums), Mick Hobbs (bottle percussion), along with Frank and Tunde.

Johnny Rocks On – very raunchy instrumental backing Dedicated to Johnny Kidd and the Pirates, pioneering rock stars of the turn of the 50s and 60s. Frank uses the motif of a car journey round the North Circular, and conveys a strong impression of the shy and introspective nature of this influential figure. Overall, Frank's vision spans several decades, some feelings of nostalgia for Woodbines and Kensitas. Powerful backing from Neale Muldowney. Poems include *Jack's Blues*, *Stan in the Garden* and *My Secret Garden*. Jack Frost emerges as a cartoon villain. Frank has a very fine sense of attunement to plants, gardens and allotments in an urban environment, fighting a constant battle against pollution. He values the resilience of weeds. *The Dragons in Battersea Park*: this park was a major environment for Frank's childhood mythology. His feelings about the gnomes, dragons and the like parallel his interest in comic strip characters, the Bash Street Kids, Dennis the Menace, Beryl the Peril and the Rupert the Bear stories. This track relates to the cover design: "I remember (Battersea Park) as a magical place with its tree walk and the magnificent Guinness Clock or 'Crazy Clock', as it had to be seen to be believed." The devotional *Dear Lord* has a spoken intro, yearning for a way out of 'mixed up confusion', it then phases into a pleasant guitar and bongoes backing; the instrumental into goes on a bit too long; the gospel chorus gives it a nice effect. The Poem *Proud Rhythm* is verbally the strongest track on this album. It is an impassioned cry to struggle, to sustain hope, in a chaotic, hostile world. It focuses on a person categorised as mad, under medication, desperately trying to put on a brave face and merge into the 'normal' crowd with its materialistic goals. Inevitably, cracks appear in the facade. The 'proud rhythm' is the pulse of the struggle for optimism, the effort to 'pick up the pieces'. *This Song Has a Whole Lot of Soul* was influenced by the gospel singing of Blind Willie Johnson, on *Dark Was the Night*, and Mahalia Jackson on A

Prayer Changes Things; very fine boogie piano and slide guitar backing. The poem *Those Shuffling Feet from the Past* sensitively portrays mixed feelings about an old-style asylum whose premises have been taken over by speculators and turned into luxury flats. Some of the old atmosphere lingers through the modernity. For all the oppressiveness of these establishments, they were a home for many. There is a cry of hope that its valid essence will return: "our songs will rise, tearing down the walls of discrimination" as the old visitants walk around the grounds. *Are We Dreaming*, in 3/4 time is one of many inspired covers of Kevin Coyne – from the 1978 album *Dynamite Daze*. Good keyboard strings backing here. Maybe this song is naively sentimental, but it is incredibly poignant. Frank interviewed Kevin in depth in 2004, not long before his decease, and has done a great deal to promote his music, artwork and writings posthumously. *Travelling Prayer* is a slow, sombre hymn with piano, some of Frank's harmonica, and chorus. I find it a shade too long, particularly the repeated choruses at the end. It is also quite close in mood and tempo to the Kevin Coyne cover, and so its placing here does tend to make an area of monotony in an album which is otherwise very well balanced. I think it would have been better placed either before or after *The Sweetshop of Childhood Surprises*. *He Was A Poet*, according to the inlay, is a composite Frank himself, and poets he knew. The persona that emerges is a 50s outsider, complete with Macintosh and carrier bags, rooted in the world of pie'n'mash shops and Lyons Corner Houses, painfully conscious of being unrecognised in his own lifetime. *This Autumn Evening* is the most tenderly lyrical item in this album, with an almost Debussy-esque piano. *The Sweetshop of Childhood Surprises*: this number again gives me a bit of 50s nostalgia – those giant jars of boiled sweets. Such places are now rare relics of the past

Nice nostalgia-inducing cover, with pictures of the Guinness Clock, or 'Crazy Clock' in Battersea Park, front and back. This was presented to Battersea Park Fun Fair in 1951 by the Guinness beer company. The fun fair was built in 1951 as part of the Festival of Britain. The main Festival of Britain site was on the South Bank, where the Royal Festival Hall is its relic. Says Frank: "I was born in 1951 and the clock, along with the fun fair and tree walk, played a large part in my childhood memories. On the front the clock is open, and much of the first part of the CD takes us back to those times. On the back the clock is closed as we leave those times behind. In this being aware that while it is good to value fond memories, we have to try and face up to these modern times, and be aware that we need to keep moving on. So I guess the closed clock on the back cover is like moving on from those fond memories." He adds: "The clock was removed in 1966 and the Fun Fair closed in 1975, but they live on in my memories."

Frank continues to be sensitive and adventurous – great variety here.

Dave Russell

It's a Mad! Mad! Mad! World A Brief Overview of Roxana Riaz's *Elahe*

By Joy Sheridan, in collaboration with Dave Russell

“This will make you laugh, cry, squirm and above all, make you think . . . I want people to have a real experience when they watch my plays. Mental health is an issue that affects most people, directly or indirectly, and yet it remains a taboo topic for many.”



Not so very long ago, having seen a considerable amount of Ms Riaz's new production – *Elahe* – I nearly lost my life. Now how good is that? So good in fact that I had to see the majority of the extravaganza once more. Many would not have ventured forth for a second viewing after such an accident that I suffered. But such is the power of this piece . . . The setting is St Dymphna's, named after the patron saint of sufferers from mental illness and nervous system disorders. Here the fee-paying clientele are 'regenerated, not medicated' by the main man – the evil, perverted and money-grubbing 'shrink' Dr Edmund (played with conviction by Jonathan Hunt). Dr Edmund abuses his patients financially as well as physically and the staff are unaware of this (although a new nurse begins to have her suspicions). The Clinic, contains 8 patients, each suffering with an emotional disorder. Each one of them is an eccentric character: Chris lives with the ghosts of Albert Einstein and Johannes Sebastian Bach; Izzy is a nymphomaniac; Mac has an army obsession and goes as far as arresting, kidnapping and holding hostage

one of the audience; Judith suffers from Munchausen and sleep disorders and so on.

To differentiate staff from clients, Ms Riaz decked the two nurses out in uniforms: not typical of the contemporary world of psychiatry – something of an anachronism?

According to the author, the character of Elahe cannot be identified with any specific religion: she is an **agent of change** and no more. Nobody knows exactly where she came from – in the show as she goes about healing each patient in the mental clinic – not by doing any spooky new age things . . . she merely points out to every patient where in the past and why their emotional state 'tilted' towards imbalance – knowing a problem is like solving half of it . . . and all the patients are then motivated to WILL themselves to alignment) – the patients ask her: 'Are you God?', 'Are you a ghost?', 'Are you an alien?' – She insists that she is none of those. Perhaps her own words, from near the end of the play, show she is not definable:

"You are the flower grown out of earth
Look at your body . . . you are looking at the soil of tomorrow
And I am your gardener . . . while you are above the ground.

I am not God, nor an angel of God
I am not the devil, nor a heathen
I am not an alien!!
Nor a ghost

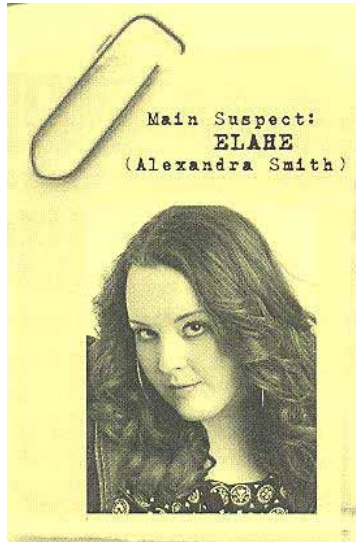
I am the mercy of life
I am the concept of change
I am the potent light
I am the potent day
I am the potent
I am"

"My intention was to portray St Dymphna Private Mental Health Clinic as a microcosm of the macrocosm, a model of society. The greedy, manipulative proprietor reflecting the government (or whatever/whoever runs the joint!!) Saying something which on the surface is very acceptable or even admirable. But underneath it all lies his contrary; the audience then witness his actions and the results.

"Here she visits Dymphna to release from bondage those whose lives are incarcerated behind the clinic's walls; one by one she heals the patients by confronting them with their emotive past. Just when all the patients are ready to leave the clinic and start their new lives, Elahe and Dr Edmund clash: the result is the shattering of Dr Edmund's nervous system, a consented consequence of him agreeing to pay for his wrongs. "As Elahe says: 'Order and Chaos, like the Sun and the Moon, always

follow each other”.

“In the last scene we have the clash of the Titans, the good and evil confronting. As it happened, the pervert proprietor fell for the trick when Elahe offered him repentance: he could pay for all his wrongs by seeing her naked. Of course he agreed . . . but little did he know that underneath the garments, Elahe was merely a concept . . . light . . . so overwhelming was this light that it shattered his every nerve and died.” (Roxana)



In her portrayal of the title role, Alexandra Smith is vastly talented – both with a wondrous singing voice and with stage presence. It was a pleasure to see her decked out in the regal purple with a veil – an inspired esoteric inspiration – and topped with a small crown. She incisively cuts to the marrow of what ails the residents of the clinic, and deals a deadening blow both to the clinic and to its director.

Elahe is set in a private mental health clinic – with a difference. It is more outlandish than any mental health establishment known to me, although my visitations to the ilk have all been under the auspices of the NHS. That there had been months of hard work and dedication on the part of all involved (fuelled by the indisputable energy of writer/director Ms Riaz) was easily perceptible from the lapidarian polish with which the third and final performance of *Elahe*, executed in Margate’s beautiful old Theatre Royal. Glancing around the house, it was a pleasure to see so many seats with posteriors on them! Could this, one wonders, have been the clever marketing ploy of using a naked man (with some members of the cast) on the poster advertising the production?

Roxana Riaz likes to shock! It would be giving away too many of her stock-in-trade secrets if this reviewer

were to mention them, for after its resounding local success, this dubiously-named ‘entertainment’ may well eventually reach the more experimental London stage.

Roxana’s programme notes are highly illuminating: “His (Dr Edmund’s) patients are not really ill . . . they are merely misplaced in life due to emotional triggers and habitual responses, as most of us are. They see the agenda; they should it out. But they are not heard because *they are considered vaporised with their emotive past*. And the staff are blinded by their need for the wages. They have their mortgages to think of –why should they bother? Elahe is merely a manifestation of *The Will To Change*. And such a miracle happens all the time . . . *but its impact is directly related to our choices*. Dr Edmund’s ending is with his own clear consent and the patients ask/choose to be healed . . . and are free to go . . . aren’t we all? (*not some of those under section!*) And what comes after that freedom? A series of more choices, miracle after miracle. and what would the patients choose next? they can carry on reacting to the society as before, and end up in yet another psychiatric establishment . . . or they can heed the advice of Elahe and alter to become painters, scientists, musicians, stars . . . *productive agents of change*. This is the story of us all . . . waiting for the miracle that only needs our nod to heal and free. **Elahe will leave your soul bare . . . are you ready?”**

Yes; many of the characters are funny – one or two of them spring to mind for the outrageous quality of their respective roles – one thinks of the inmate (what other word can one possibly use?) Graham, played with aplomb by Alvin Chapman – a somewhat portly figure who favours cross-dressing, mine and, course, make-up! Goddess Elahe herself is finely portrayed by the beautiful Alexandra Smith, while Katie Chapman’s performance of Izzy had the audience in stitches. This brings me to the subject of *mockery*? Is it, one wonders, right to laugh at the misfortunes of the perceivably ‘certifiable’?

Some parts of this ‘entertainment’ (a term I too use very loosely), should perhaps not have been performed in the way that they were. It is no longer acceptable to use the word ‘spastic’ in its colloquial (as distinct from its medical) sense, as it is a prejudicial pejorative. But I certainly found that the dictionary definition of this term fitted the character of Gustav, played by Richard Robinson. I felt very uneasy about this depiction of adversity and would have asked Ms Riaz to tone it down considerably. There was an element of caricature in the early presentation of Gustav. Ms Riaz claimed that he underwent a cure and was restored to wholeness in the latter part of the play. This purported transformation did not come over forcefully. There could, for example, have been an exuberant dance routine through which Gustav proclaimed his new-found wholeness.

Gustav



Great use is made of spotlights and darkness – and, of course, music, mime and dance.

I would unreservedly recommend that this happening be seen whenever the opportunity arises, for it is no bad thing to catch a comet on its way through the starry firmament as Roxana Riaz does with *Elahe*. This piece gained justly deserved local acclaim. It would merit nationwide exposure.

Further details fo Roxana Riaz's work, see www.roxanariazcreations.com

Joy Sheridan, Margate, Kent
and **Dave Russell**, London

SP EVENTS

Poetry Café, Betterton St, WC2 Feb 11th (2nd Thursday every month): Another successful evening, with near-capacity audience, in spite of the weather!

Main features were

Mala Mason is a poet frequently featured in Survivors publications, including *Beyond Bedlam* in 1997. Her set included *Persephone Rising*, *Masks*, *Elephant Tribe*, *Courage*, *The Promise*, *On the Shores of the Passing*, and *Hero*. She felt the audience was most responsive to the poems which dealt with her personal journey.

Heart song: Ingrid Andrew did both solo poems, *In Praise of David Hockney*, *Because* and *I am Ingrid*,

and two songs *Sorrow and Solace* and *The Snow Man*, with Lawrence Renee on mandolin to complement the delicate strains of her ukulele, and on mouth organ. The first piece could be described as a verbal painting – an area in which Ingrid also excels, as witness her admirable artwork for our events. She can envisage herself as an 'amaranthine sea', and as the Earth Goddess of fertility. Ingrid continues to evolve as a singer and poet. A fully-staged version of her performances could reach a much wider audience.

From the floor, Jessica Lawrence's powerful rap poem counterpointed the aquatic reference Ingrid's set – a point on which Ingrid remarked.

December 5th 2009: Tottenham Chances, 396 Tottenham High Road (generally 4th Thursday every month)

This was a very successful evening, featuring poet **Michael Horovitz**, **von Mozar**, **Rukus**, **Eve McDougall**, **Mickey Bleach**, and the theatrical spectacle of *Le Donne*: "...two ardent females of uncertain age and time, with no fixed language or style and an unpredictable mission. Neo Post-Goth, Post-Hip and Post-Hippy, neo Absurd (but posted) empassioned early on by Theatre of the Absurd, Artaud and Dada, they are formlessly unencumbered by their posts, alchemising their backgrounds in acting, music, poetry, art: live and installation to the strings of the mandolin. Inscrutable, wise and never cosy, they leave a little tremble in their wake..." It was a joint venture on the part of Ingrid Andrew, together with Women Against Rape and Black Women's Rape Action Project, who stated their protest quite powerfully. This collaboration really elevated the evening, as well as giving it the sense of a theme. I feel strongly that such events should become a regular feature. The venue is perhaps unfortunate in its location, and there have been excellent performances (like January's) playing to small audiences.

Dave Russell



State of the Arts Conference 2010

by **Simon Jenner**

At a conference, invite your enemies to speak first, and friends last. It feels better. This was the line the State of the Arts Conference 2010, co-hosted by the Royal Society of Arts and the Arts Council, took on January 14th. This is worth fully reporting on, since we're in the grip of two radically opposed solutions for the arts in a time of recession. *Aux armes, citoyens*, as you don't say in a world where politics has become so 21st century. But it's back. And broadly speaking, the arts representatives felt the government was the one on side.

Clearly the Arts debate is important to all of us. It means the assertion about absolute value and value for money is taken into the reach of power: investment, resources, performances and publication for organisations much smaller than the Royal Opera House or even the Old Vic. Investing in places politicians don't visit for a shudder of pleasure. 'In a time of bankers', as George Barker said in his 1983 *Anno Domini*, 'exercise a little charity.' Only Barker wrote that when banking was rampant. After its rampaging and, as David Hare dubs it, the communism of the rich bale-out, we live in a different kind of recession. As Ezra Pound put it too, 'in the gloom, the gold gathers the light against it.' It helps to have canapés and fourth-basement soft lighting. This was at 18 the Piazza, Albert Embankment. Vast tinted windows glittered out naked and brazen over the Thames. Once again, commerce and arts policy were having unprotected sex.

The debate means too, that public faces, particularly those in - or dreaming they're in - government, bump into coffee and cakes contact

with senior arts figures. Many duck this; more meld words at a conference full of articulate people whom they'll not allow within question-spitting distance. This was different; up to a point. Partly the debate also defines how the arts can persuade themselves that they really love themselves, which isn't quite as easy as you'd expect. Then the sell to government. This has been spectacularly successful. In 2007 ACE led a debate, cleverly by proxy (in other words, started the debate then let others take it to the government, which was adroit). For every pound invested in the arts, it comes back fivefold. Brown bought this and increased ACE's grant from £418 to £448m in a time when cuts were feared. ACE then scored a remarkable own goal in its Regularly Funded Organisations (RFO) re-shuffle, where we benefitted. It tried to remove grants from too many theatres. Big mistake. You do not annoy 30 groups of luvvies, especially when they'd been eloquently arguing your case. And this conference highlighted the eloquence of howl and vowel; beautifully-nuanced commentaries from scouse to silk scarves. Even Sir John Tusa asked a question from the back (about Arabic theatre). Since his *Art Matters* of 2000, I expect he's waiting for the election to write a last chapter on a new one. A lot happened to Government arts policy in ten years, but particularly the last three. Current Minister for the Arts, Ben Bradshaw, the ex-BBC reporter, would have a lot to say about this.

The Shadow Minister for the Arts, Jeremy Hunt, looking drawn for a Machiavellian farce, was easily taken down as he muttered about 11% ACE money being spent on Admin, whereas ACE avers it's 6%. After all these

swingeing cuts, and a loss of 40% staff, to talk this way brought a shudder. Hunt was fired out too, by Alistair Spalding, on his out-dated call for American philanthropic models, given the huge pockets of wealth now in this country. Which argues of course against any natural trickle-down effect unless prodded with tax breaks, even in good times. Even recently this might have seemed vaguely seductive. But now it looked hollow; falling levels of philanthropy had just reduced 800 U. S. arts organisations to bankruptcy (three or four close each week). Ben Bradshaw was to speak very differently.

Afterwards, I asked the man who brought in these Arts Council cuts, having criticised ACE and then been recruited by them, what he thought. This was the lottery-designing ex DCMS (Dept for Culture Media and Sport) ACE Chief Executive Alan Davey. 'Is there an even more aggressive case for the Arts to make to the Treasury, via the DCMS and ACE? You know the DCMS better than anyone', I added. Davey didn't demur. He agreed that yes there was definitely a much stronger case to be made, and that he was keeping his head low around Hunt's debate. Others were so easily taking that man apart. There were other, more interesting battles to engage with. Much, much later I collared Davey about the ACE cuts. Brave, perhaps, but won't whatever government's in thank you for cutting back so much. Then add that they'd never dare to cut back 70% themselves; but since you've sliced 40% for them, they will now? 'In that case I'm off' he said emphatically. I reminded him about 2012 and Browning and Dickens' bicentenaries, which hadn't struck him (perfect vehicles for inclusivity, diversity and Olympic arts celebration).

Simon Tait of *Arts Industries* (to whom I promised a report and singularly failed to deliver) thinks Davey is a good thing. Two ex-ACE staff blinked. It's an interesting and clever take on Davey, who's been predictably

condemned for wreaking DCMS revenge on ACE from within ACE. The less admin staff there are, the less informed and sympathetic judgments can be made. And the less people there are to look after us. But that's another debate. Clearly Davey was in part trying to anticipate cuts, and make them in ACE's and his time, not the government's. We'll see if this gamble is astutely brave, or flinchingly reckless.

The thrust of the conference was in part how to empower and predict. Empowering professionals to live ever-diverse careers and not think of themselves as acting or creating for life, or not all of it, was one keynote panel-member's swiftly-criticised take on recession and careerpaths. The arts are vocational. Actors rest and take beauty salon jobs (several of my close acting relatives did this). They don't have other careers; just jobs. In an era where we're encouraged have serial and different careers ('use your head merchant banker, and teach') the arts are resistant to this model. Partly because they've pursued this twin-track of avowed and money-spinning careers in parallel, and don't want to let go of the vocation. This holds resonance for survivors. Survivors don't have a choice.

Another arena lay in predicting the future. It's pixillated. We soon disposed of any American models, as simply irrelevant to the discourse, and the falling levels of philanthropy (viz Jeremy Hunt's dead argument). Andy Croft denied we should be looking at it, but others said that he more than anyone else really has seen it, and will tell you if you ask. Prediction is two-edged. Do we really need or want to know what will occur in 10 years time? And won't it grow up dead, like Hamlet, if we do? The main focus was on interpenetration,

intertextuality, interaction. OK. It sounds sexy. *Newsnight Review* presenter Kwame Kwei-Armah joined others in presenting a rather sad set of dimmed screenings, anything from video clips of dancing to an array of animations. The interactive arts spaces were easily the best of these. They stayed still and didn't sway; and in daylight too.

Still, as I contemplated lunch with its astonishing cuisine and smuggled my poetry publisher (and my new volumes) in for a free feast (for the second time in four months; there is a free lunch if you blag it for someone else), my overwhelming impression of the future of the arts was this: where are the bloody words? Theatre, yes. But that odd interactive thing, a book? Readers and raiders of words. Poets, novelists and speed-readers, and indeed annotators who trash a text as they go (or at least devour it as Keats did). The future still isn't in a blackberry-looking box with the text of *Pride and Prejudice* tinkling into it. Every IT reader has an electronic elephant in it: a book. It's so fourth century. I doubt its replacements will last longer than the eyesight of the people who try living with them. As other commentators have said, few of the 500 delegates found a platform where they could express such views. Questions from the floor can be limiting, since the thrust of the conversation goes one way.

When I did have a poetry conversation later, it was with a friend of the aunt of Owen Shears, the Andrew Motion protégé. 'Do you like his poetry?' She asked. 'I admire the lucidity of his prose.' 'Excuse me - I have to go to the toilet.' These aren't informed conversations, of course, but endorsements of party-poetry lines far more rigid than fiction, with few poets on the menu.

It could also be that people have rigid opinions about poetry because they don't in fact read the volumes they feel obliged to purchase, and bluster over such a discovery. But Shears can be read in an idle second, as a graceful Poet in the Underground, with his poem 'Swallows'.

On the omnipresent subject of theatre: We had about as eloquent a display of theatrical regeneration as could be wished. Tom Morris, Director of the Bristol Old Vic, speaking around 3pm, was perhaps the best, but he led a strong list. He balances conservative with innovative punters, and argues with conservative people to give radical theatre a chance. His models (if I repeated them, I'd get them wrong) were wonderful. But Mr. Duffle Bag has to see *Macbeth* in a typing pool once in his life. Nick Serota whom I annoyed by crashing into with a bag (come on, you were taking too long to negotiate a drink) also argued incisively. He re-iterated the need to keep re-inventing galleries and champion the massed attraction of them, free. His pointed comments that since 1997 there's been an exponential rise in gallery-going is long accepted. The effect on younger visitors however, is incalculable, and less visible. Public immersion in modern art is greater than at any time since the 1960s, with far greater receptivity across the spectrum. It's an argument won but worth repeating now.

Finally Dame Liz Forgan Chair of ACE, led an easy ride, as most agree, for Ben Bradshaw. Curiously, Alan Davey, chairing it, had difficulty in getting everyone to sit down. He does resemble a well-upholstered headmaster, which makes me feel uneasy: he's over two years my junior and I still feel in the Lower Sixth. Forgan gracefully added that Bradshaw (Upper Sixth, but easy-

going to his juniors) attended just about every arts event he could, and even more surprisingly, looked as if he were enjoying himself. Bradshaw tried to look demurely as if he wasn't being stroked. But even on *Any Questions?* And *Question Time*, which he appeared on straight after this, people can't help wanting to cuddle the poor man.

I've rehearsed these arts funding arguments above, the value for money one unfortunately now the one people listen to, and not arts for art's sake. This is still an imperative several colleagues of mine said should be pushed further at the recent ACE conference I attended. The arts budget represents as we know a tiny proportion of the overall budget, but as Forgan put it, 'a small cut has a disproportionately catastrophic effect, just as a small lift brings huge benefits to the country as a whole.' And this was the argument Ben Bradshaw bought wholesale. Announcing that after three arts ministers in six months last year, he added that we'd be pleased to know he intended to stay put after May should Labour return. This isn't common. Ministers don't like staying junior or nailing themselves out of options publicly; Bradshaw knows his strengths. Apparently Lord Mandelson asked in cabinet the previous Monday (10th January) 'have we any cheering news?' And Bradshaw piped up. 'Yes, emphatically. The arts account for 10% of our GDP, and we're growing at 10% per year, even last year. What other good news could cap that?' Well, one did. The vast black hole that appeared in the arts budget last year when a huge re-structuring project with several arts galleries had been costed in the wrong column, was filled by Brown without demur. I wondered why that particular terror story had subsided.

Bradshaw added that he fully supported the maintenance of the

arts grant, though couldn't, when Forgan pressed him, swear that his was one of the ring-fenced budgets. Well, we know now that defence and higher education are half-axed. The latter chop won't help the arts either. And of course if Trident's successor went, there'd be a lot more for defence. Bradshaw did affirm, however, that the arts budget had grown by 87% since 1997, and that even a standstill budget wouldn't be too terrible, given this previous acceleration. It's better than a black hole in the budget I suppose. If true, better than we expected. But it might be Jeremy Hunt wielding the next budget knife after that. His slice will be as wafered as one of the canapés he didn't stop to try. Perhaps he was being modest or making a pointed contribution to arts consumption. But a skeletal ACE will not help a leafless landscape, unless you're Dürer.

Finally Matthew Taylor presided with jokes, rather as a worried Rottweiler might if it realized its tendencies were breaking through them. 'We don't do Questionnaires here' Taylor added like Alistair Campbell at the end, just to underline that the great paper-filling exercise that ACE had felt obliged to embark on since 1997, was drawing to a close. In truth, smaller organisations still need them. But this was emphatically a big picture conference, where the big cats, as AP editor Catherine Rose commented, didn't get too many bites in because of the empaneled nature of the day. If this is going to be annual, then re-think the unthinkable, and let the cats at each other just a little more. A little jugular from a few kittens is quite healthy. And ministers need scratches on their faces as well as their backs.



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Bristol Survivors

Contact Steve Hennessy
email: steve.hy@blueyonder.co.uk
www.stepsouttheatre.co.uk

Manchester Survivors

Workshop
Common Word, 6. Mount St,
Every Mon 4-6pm Manchester M2 5NS

Contact Jackie Hagan
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GROW - east sussex

Meet every Tuesday except during school
holidays at The Children's Library
Robertson Passage
Hastings

Contact: Ashley Jordon
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High Peak Writers

Works in association with The Grapevine - a local
mental health charity

Contact: Louise Glasscoe
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Leeds Survivors

Works in association with The Grapevine - a local
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Contact: Louise Glasscoe
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Stevenage Survivors

Meets up every other Friday at The Friends'
Meeting House, 21 Cutty's Lane, Stevenage
7.30-9.30pm

Contact: Roy Birch
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The Poetry Cafe

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SP is looking for assistance from an academic with experience of translating from *Spanish* to English. If you are interested please email Dave Russell for further information:

dave@survivorspoetry.org.uk

Survivors' Poetry is looking for new trustees to get involved. If you have 4 hours a week and have an understanding of the NHS Mental Health sector we would be very interested to hear from you.



To the People I Love

How I would love
to turn this moment
into a box with no shape
and hide it somewhere safe
where the hours couldn't find it...
To grow a small tree
and let the roots take hold
in nothing but laughter and air...
You could sit and just look
while I cook a smile from a book
and keeping whole minutes
on a shelf in a jar
so they never get lost
and we know where they are...
Maybe go and collect moonlight
and let it go free
when we get back inside...
To lay next to the river
where the bank has no tide
and rejoice at the time
this trickle has made...
To still hear that look
that came in from the warm,
sat around for a while
spoke very little
but said a great deal
then caught the walk home...

Geoff Clark
Off The Radar, Forgettable Memoirs
Published by Survivors' Press 2006
available from:

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Svetlana

Someone in London said
"You are Svetlana."
Years on she decodes the radio messages,
She finds a strange building
On the edge of town
Everything is secret, closed as a coffin.
Svetlana is from a poor farmhouse
Eastern Europe, taken as a child
The Management Union
Places her in Britain.
Her eyes regard her pretended family –
The false mother
Stares at Svetlana in her crib –
She learns all about society
Trained by the tapes
To not react
Even when the Japanese
Shoot lasers from a helicopter.
The metal insects buzz at night
Walking down a beach at 2 am.
The security cameras record
And Svetlana
Stares at a dark pink brick wall,
Perhaps the war did not end.
Marylin Monroe's ghost appears,
It is crying;
"I was intelligent too" –
Marylin tells her,
Svetlana is quite shocked,
Keeping her counsel
She carefully applies make-up.

Margaret Theresa Carney
Tales from the Womb
Published by Survivors' Press 2006
available from:

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