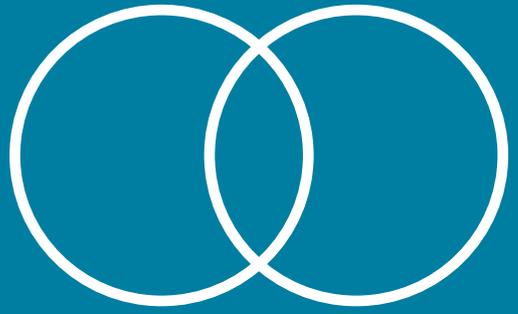


# POETRY EXPRESS

PROMOTING POETRY BY SURVIVORS

OF MENTAL DISTRESS



QUARTERLY FROM SURVIVORS POETRY

spring/summer 2003 number 17

# We Have Ten Come & Russian Through Poets

PLUS

*survivors submit your work!  
new poetry and prose required  
for our new anthology  
(and if you haven't written any, there's time for  
you to write some)*

ALSO

LEE WILSON ON THE POETRY OF MARK DOTY, NEW BOOKS AND  
REVIEWS, AND THE SECOND POETRY BROADSHEET

# who's who at survivors' poetry

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## ... from the Director

**Hello and welcome to the new issue of Poetry Express. It's a bumper issue this time – celebrating the creativity of our members with the arrival of not one but two anthologies from Survivors' Poetry.**

**We Have Come Through, edited by Peter Forbes and published by Bloodaxe, commemorates the first decade of Survivors' Poetry and includes favourite poems past and present with work by previously unpublished survivors of mental distress as well as new pieces by Andrew Motion, Sujatta Bhatt and Roger McGough. It's a good read, short enough to consume at a single sitting but with seven individual sections, any one of which you might dip into, according to your mood. Of course it's available at a discounted price to members of Survivors' Poetry. All members at the time of this magazine going to press, should have received a form from Bloodaxe offering you the book at a special discount.**

**Meanwhile the appearance of Ten Russian Poets, edited by Richard McKane and published by Survivors' Press and Anvil, has marked the long-awaited completion of 'Surviving the Millenium', our Arts For Everyone lottery project. Ten Russian Poets is certainly a thought-provoking book, including lyrical work by Mikhail Kuzmin alongside the more sombre pieces by the anonymous writer from the Arsenal Mental Hospital, and the polished poems of Osip Mandelstam. There is something for every reader here.**

**However, if your life is too full for you to find room for such a big read, then why not refresh yourself by diving into two individual collections by Danielle Hope and Julian Turner, advisor and trustee to Survivors' Poetry respectively? The Stone Ship, published by Rockingham Press, is Danielle Hope's third collection, whilst Crossing the Outskirts, published by Anvil, is Julian Turner's acclaimed first collection, shortlisted for the Forward Poetry Prize for Best First Collection and a Poetry Book Society Recommendation.**

**I hope these books allow our imaginations to take flight, enabling us to escape our diurnal concerns for a while. Certainly I plan to put my feet up, immediately after completing this column, in order to spend an hour with my copy of We Have Come Through. Meanwhile why not take a few minutes for yourself to enjoy the rest of this Poetry Express at one sitting. Surely it must be time for you to take a break? As for me I'm just off to put the kettle on**

...

**Until next time,  
Alison Combes**



## ... from the Interim Manager

Hi.

I've come with the sexy, long-lived title **Interim Manager**, as if every organisation needs one. At the moment we do, as Alison has been on sick leave for several months now. Everyone involved with SP knows how much she's contributed to it, and I know many of you will want to express your own best wishes for her speedy recovery; any mail we receive for her will be passed on.

This key absence has had a predictable knock-on-the-head effect, not least a slightly cobwebbed **Poetry Express**, a benign dragon languorously woken every so often to be fed morsels of news, and occasionally, to have its scales cleaned. As it shambles out of Osnaburgh Street, casually dropping dead events in its wake, it blinks uncertainly at the sodium lighting, realises it's winter again, just like last time, and tries to shamble backwards. Surely it was spring? The editors themselves have begun to feel more like keepers of a dragon, or some flame perennially fattened by sad tending.

Our apologies, in fact a commitment. This edition of **Poetry Express** contains much of course in response to the year's major publishing event, **We Have Come Through**. So Stilton-matured is this edition that reviews and reactions have been already veined in James Ferguson's article, furnishing part of his tangy critique. But we're clearly behind, and attempting to remedy this with another edition of PE as soon as possible. In fact, we're contemplating more than four issues on 2004, and keenly anticipate the result of essaying this foray in over-production. The quality of work in hand alone justifies it. Do remember James's new anthology, to be published in 2004 with major contribution from survivors. Its aesthetic will be, to say the very least, complimentary to Peter Forbes's. But Alison's encomium about the **Bloodaxe** and **Anvil** productions this year must be roundly echoed too. Do buy them at our discounted prices: it's how we survive as a publisher. The **Ten Russian Poets** and earlier **Gumilyev** volumes are revelatory for anyone reading Twentieth century poetry. Several major voices (Kuzmin, Poplavsky, Tarkovsky, the **Mental Prison** poet, two younger writers), emerge for the first time. Only Poplavsky was even marginally translated, and that in Olga Carlisle's long-op'd **Poets on Street Corners (1970)**.

Whether I'll be there to take part (or, reading this, would you want me to be) is in the hands of interim gods. I'll just say it's been an inspiring privilege to work with James, Roy, Xochitl and so many of you in the past few months, putting a hose to the lair at 34 and de-gaussing it so sunlight can discolour more of the walls in future. It's brought a wintry smile to some of our critics. But the song of Roland the rat has risen to a shriek, as the paper trail thins out, and the vague bones of an office emerge.

Simon

**Dr Simon Jenner is our Interim Manager whilst our Alison Combes is on sick leave.**

Poetry Express is a quarterly publication. Its purpose is to publicise events and activities organised by Survivors' Poetry and by survivor-led poetry groups all over the country and to offer a forum for debate in which to share and discuss information and experiences. Please send us poems, articles, small features, photographs, artwork and events listings about your group or about anything that you think may be of interest to our readers. Work should preferably be typed. We cannot guarantee publication and the editors reserve the right to edit any contributions. No more than 750 words please. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily the views of Survivors' Poetry. The next copy deadline for is xxxxxxxxxx 2003 Poetry Express is distributed free around the UK. We welcome contact from survivors abroad, and will send the magazine if cost of postage is covered: contact us for details.

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Printed by: East End Offset

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Registered Charity No. 1040177

# We Have Come Through

## James Ferguson on *Survivors' Poetry's* new anthology

We Have Come Through is an anthology edited for us by Peter Forbes, who edited the Poetry Society's magazine Poetry Review for 16 years. The benefits of using such a well-known editor are that he has produced an anthology that can be expected to be in touch with the general idea of poetry in Britain (a general idea that he helped create: whilst at Poetry Review he came up with the term NewGen to describe poets like Simon Armitage and Glyn Maxwell), and that he has produced an anthology that has appealed to Bloodaxe, the most prominent UK poetry-only publisher. In terms of distribution, your publisher matters. Few specialist poetry publishers can afford the huge discounts demanded by some chains of bookshops, but Bloodaxe can, so their books are stocked by the large retailers, as well as in smaller bookshops. This means that their books are seen by browsers; many poetry books produced in this country are not. In addition to this, Bloodaxe books are always well-produced, with colour covers, good-quality paper, and browser-friendly blurbs on the back. All this means that our new anthology has a chance of reaching more general readers than any of previous *Survivors' Poetry* anthologies.

It's gone down well in the national press too. In the Times, the poet Robert Nye described We Have Come Through as "a powerful book ... Forbes has done a good salutary job". There was a long review in the Saturday Independent by poet-novelist Helen Dunmore, who called the book "powerful and very moving"; and a poem from the book was the Sunday poem in the Independent on Sunday. Local papers have produced favourable notices, and features on one of our members whose poetry is included in the book, Sarah Cavill. The most recent issue of the poetry magazine Solo *Survivors* carried an appreciative review by Paula Puddephatt.

The most considered response to the anthology was Colin Hambrook's long review in the disability arts magazine DAIL. Describing the idea behind the anthology as "one that has been germinating [within *Survivors' Poetry*] for a long time", Hambrook found "some good poems here", but argued that the book "fails totally to represent the dynamism and radicalism of the organisation at its grass-roots level". In Hambrook's opinion *Survivors' Poetry* "has battled long and hard" against the "therapy organisation" label which the anthology accepts. "Parts of us die, rot, lie tortured or smoulder discreetly and anonymously," he wrote, "and we learn to carry on the struggle. But to say that we have come through seems to deny the very ground on which we attempt to make sense of our lives, our distress and the discrimination we face".

But on to the poems. The 100 poem limit makes the anthology reader-friendly, but of course doesn't provide room to represent survivor poetry in all its detail, or complexity. The big names are here: Stevie Smith, perhaps surprisingly but not unpleasantly, is the most represented poet, with four poems included. (*Survivors' Poetry* might claim some of the credit for this valuation: our 'Stevie

Smith: A Celebration' event of last year implicitly claimed her as a serious survivor poet.) Anne Sexton has three poems in here, Elizabeth Bishop and Christopher Smart two, and many of the eighty poets here are represented by a single poem. The anthology contains a number of poets who are usually considered in terms of madness, such as William Blake, John Clare, Ivor Gurney, Gerald Manley Hopkins, Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Arthur Rimbaud and Theodore Roethke. And there are some well-known contemporary poets, such as Gwynneth Lewis, who have publicly come out as survivors of mental illness. Only nine poems are by poets who lived before the twentieth century, so the anthology cannot be considered as a historical survey of writing about mental illness or distress, but it gives a flavour of what pre-twentieth-century survivor writing (if indeed such a thing existed) was. There are seven poems from those directly submitted to *Survivors' Poetry* – by Sarah Cavill, Julie MacNamara, Char March, Anna Menmuir, John O'Donoghue, Colin Rowbotham and Claudine Toutoungi – and a number of commissioned poems.

Moving from poets to poems, one can comment that there are some of the standards of survivor poetry here: Plath's 'I Am Vertical', Roethke's 'Dolor', Clare's 'I Am', and Lowell's 'Waking in the Blue'. All four of these poems were also in *Beyond Bedlam*: I suppose some readers will feel that it's a pity that they take up space here that could have been used for poems that hadn't been in one of our anthologies, whereas other readers might feel that they are such important poems that there is a point to repeating them. Standards that weren't in *Beyond Bedlam* include a section from Allan Ginsburg's 'Howl', two sections from John Berryman's *Dream Songs*, and a poem that has recently been elevated to this status, Mary Oliver's 'Wild Geese'.

As well as these familiar names and titles, there are poems here which haven't been seen in a survivors context before. Sarah Wardle's 'Blues on the Tube' references the recent MIND poster campaign, seeming to point out the paradox that the slogan (unintentionally, surely) opened up to its readers, and almost suggesting that the effect of thinking along these lines is like mental illness itself: "Mental Illness Need Not Mean You're Mentally Ill. / Ever read that poster? Ever lost the thread, / or felt thoughts speeding up, like trains inside your head?" There's an excellent poem on depression by Wendy Cope, which is obviously written from knowledge. There's a pleasant poem by Sophie Hannah on visiting a therapist. Adrian Mitchell's poem 'To You', written before a breakdown, and addressing the attendant fear of madness, rings true, with its desperate reaching out to the 'you' for help, and its repeated refrain "My love, they are trying to drive us mad", which at the end of the poem becomes the more basic "I am afraid of going mad". The poem has a preface by Mitchell which explains that "I thought it was a very private poem. But then I took the risk of reading it in public and found that it always brought a special response, there were

always people ... who had been through similar troubles."

Some of the most strikingly genuine work in this book is poetry about the Holocaust, such as 'Chorus of the Rescued' by the German-language poet Nelly Sachs. Sachs's poem asks the question that Colin Hambrook raised: what does it mean to 'come through' an experience so terrible that it has killed a part of you? The poem's speakers are the rescued ones, the ones who are now out of the range of death, but, having been so near to it, "Our bodies continue to lament / With their mutilated music." The nuanced conception of 'coming through' in this poem includes an affirmation of the idea of survival, and of those parallel beings, the rescuers, and yet a real conception of the distance between those who have undergone some severely traumatic experience and those who haven't. The rescued ask "Show us your sun," and add, "but gradually." They realise that it is important not to come through too soon, "Lest the song of a bird, / Or a pail being filled at the well, / Let our badly sealed pain burst forth again / And carry us away."

Forbes deserves credit for including foreign poets here, a reaching-out that one might characterise as very much in the spirit of user-movements. As well as the Americans, there are translations from the French, German, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Polish and Romanian. Some of these names – Pablo Neruda, Bertolt Brecht, Czeslaw Milosz, Primo Levi – may be known to English readers, and all are well-established writers, but I would guess that most people will find much new here. (I did.) This inclusiveness could even have been taken further, to include non-European poets, as well as those neglected British poets who write in languages other than English.

As most reviewers commented upon, *We Have Come Through* contains some excellent poems. A creatively-edited anthology can prompt readers to see a poem, or poet, they thought they knew, differently. I hadn't either read or noticed George Herbert's 'The Flower' before reading it here. This poem describes mental illness (to use our word for it) as death – "my shrivelled heart / . . . was gone / Quite under ground" – and recovery as rebirth: "And now in age I bud again, / After so many deaths I live and write; / I once more smell the dew and rain, / And relish versing."

Herbert's poem really does do what Forbes wants the collection as a whole to do: address the difficult reality of mental illness in a way that is (to quote Forbes's introduction to the book) "not depressing, but heartening." I think that 'The Flower' does this in the only way possible: not by trying to be light-hearted (like one of those well-meaning friends who, when you're depressed, will try to smile to hide their unease, while trying to make you "be happy") but by admitting what illness and wellness feel like. The phrase "so many deaths" shows a real understanding of what a period of mental illness feels like: it captures the paradox of something so bad, so powerful,

that it feels like death, but that is also recurrent (so that you can say truly, but in contradiction of the rules of grammar, that all the episodes were "the worst").

The recovery in Herbert's poem feels genuine because it is so completely unexpected, like an old tree (one "in age," to use Herbert's words) that buds again. This certainly is far from the idea of poetry as a "charm against adversity" that Forbes advances in his introduction. Herbert shows that it is the other way round: being able to write poetry again is a sign of his recovery. The comfort this poem offers is not about poetry, but about himself (and which is, in my experience, the only comfort that helped, as it is the only one which is demonstrably true) – the comfort of someone saying to you: "I've been at the worst, and I'm not there any more; when I was there, I thought that the deadness would last forever, but it didn't."

On reading any anthology, one of course can always think up poets who aren't here and who could have been. Colin Hambrook suggested Antonin Artaud. Robert Nye mentioned Robert Graves's 'The Cool Web', a poem that suggests that it is the "retreat" offered by language that prevents us all from going mad. I'd also suggest Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode' as a very real portrayal of depression ("I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.") Or among contemporary poets Geoffrey Hill, who has used his poetry to explore depression and trauma almost to the exclusion of other, happier, states of being, and who has spoken in recent interviews about his long-term obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Two tiny extracts from *Hamlet* seem a bit pointlessly included: everyone knows that *Hamlet* was the literary model for madness for a long time. But as Shakespeare never makes clear whether he is mad, or is only pretending to be mad, he is rather out of place here. And why is Blake's 'London' in here? Including it seems just to perpetuate the sentimental notion of poor, messy-minded Blake. Or perhaps Forbes thinks it's a sign of madness to feel the narrowness and injustice that underpins our capitalist society? ("The hapless soldier's sigh / Runs in blood down palace walls" is a compressed image, not an insane one: it superimposes the sigh of sheer unhappiness, that of pity at the horrors of wars, and maybe that sigh of someone dying, onto the building Blake implies might have just been attacked or defended.) Actually, I almost agree: the injustices of this world are so great that anyone who feels them personally is likely to be either unhappy, or mad. Happiness and sanity seem to require that one accept that millions of people are suffering – or that one just ignores the fact. Most people seem to be able to do it quite easily.

Another poem here, Yeats's 'Why Should Old Men Not Be Mad?', is completely untraumatised, and mentions madness only for rhetorical effect. I can't read Siegfried Sassoon's much-anthologised 'Everyone Sang' and feel it is anything other than a comment on the particular

boredom of trench warfare. Its inclusion here seems to come close to implying that if only traumatised people would join in the sing-song they might feel happier. But maybe that means I distrust the poem. I can't help but ask myself whether everyone joined in the music-making Sassoon describes: I certainly don't believe that everyone experienced it as the transcendental moment that it was to Sassoon. With Gunter Eich's 'Inventory', the only depression and trauma in the poem are those we read into it. The 'Inventory' this soldier runs through is not of his army kit, but of his few personal possessions. The tone is one of gratitude for those objects that make the privations of soldering bearable.

Some of the section titles in this book may not please all palates. I'm not sure I even understand what the first one, 'Scenario for a Walk-on Part', means, or what it's meant to say about the poems it introduces. Other section titles, 'Welcome to the Club' or 'Survival Strategies' are clear enough, but rather chummy for my taste. The section title that really goes down my throat with difficulty is 'Aftermath and Redemption'. There certainly can be an aftermath to an episode of mental illness – although for some people, by choice or necessity, surviving is not a case of "after" but of living with an illness – but where does "redemption" come in? If getting well is redemption then it follows that mental illness must be a state of sin. I'm sure that Forbes was just hunting for a catchy way to describe being ill and getting better, but his choice here was unfortunate to say the least. An individual poet may well see their experience of "coming through" as redemption, but to apply it to people generally comes close to endorsing the all-too-common idea of mental illness as something wrong and abnormal. It might also be said that the subtitle in the book stresses overcoming too much, as if the experience of mental illness itself was not interesting, or worthy, and that what was praiseworthy and interesting was the return to "normality".

Looked at as a collection of poetry *We Have Come Through* is not revolutionary, but as a publishing event it's certainly one bigger and more visible than we've ever had. This book has already introduced some newspaper reviews and their readers to the concept of poetry by survivors, and to us. Part of *Survivors' Poetry's* work is to change the perception non-survivors have of what poetry and "survivors of mental distress" mean, and how they are related. Another part is to reach out to those survivors who haven't heard of this organisation that exists for them. Aims like these can best be achieved through sometimes going half-way to meet the general reader, through giving her or him some enticingly familiar names and titles. As far as I can see, there's no reason why a canny *Survivors' Poetry* can't produce such a book and more radical work too.

There's a space for an up-to-date, fat anthology, full of the work of living survivors, not excluding poems that could conceivably make themselves at home in the suburban calm of a "real" poetry magazine, but also containing a wodge of poems that are too unusual, odd, or, frankly, too mad to be published anywhere else. Because that's also what *Survivors' Poetry* is about. A project for the not-too-distant future, I hope. And I'd like to guess that that book, whenever it appears, will contain some poems that have been sent in by people who have come to us through seeing or reading about *We Have Come Through*.

*We Have Come Through: 100 Poems Celebrating Courage in Overcoming Depression and Trauma*, edited by Peter Forbes, is published by Bloodaxe at £8.95. ISBN 1-85224-619-7. Available from bookshops.

Bloodaxe will be sending all our members, at the time of this magazine going to print, details on how to order *We Have Come Through* at a special discount rate.

## Stella Duffy Workshop and Reading

By Rosie Garland

**We were all really excited: thanks to our Arts Council funding we were able to invite author Stella Duffy to visit our group (Manchester Survivors' Poetry Women's Group). Not only to facilitate a creative writing workshop, but also do a reading in the evening as well!!**

**Ten of us were lucky enough to be part of the workshop. Stella had us play a number of deceptively simple word games, building up to an exciting piece of personal writing. We certainly didn't just sit around a table with paper and pen - we moved around the room, and were reminded how physical movement can spark creative activity. As one woman said, 'I got a lot out of it!' Then the evening event, which was supported by the Pankhurst Centre's own independent bookshop, 'Pass the Book'. Delicious home-cooked food was laid on, and we had to work hard to squeeze in fifty chairs for all those who had booked. In the end it was standing room only. Stella read from *Tart Noir*, her latest book, as well as selections from *Wavewalker* and *Singling out the Couples*.**

**It was a memorable evening. Stella is a warm and welcoming woman, a lively and exciting reader, and is passionately open about her recent experience of cancer. It was great to explore our own creativity, and to share hers!**

# Ten Russian Poets

## Roy Holland on Survivors' Poetry's new book of translations

Ten Russian Poets is the culmination of Survivors' Poetry's funding through the Arts Council of England's 'Arts for Everyone' project. Richard McKane, the editor, is himself a survivor poet and accomplished translator from Russian and Turkish. The ten poets represented, one for each decade of the last century, range from the famous to the completely unknown, such as the anonymous poet from the Arsenal Mental Prison Hospital, who gave his poems to the political prisoner Victor Fainberg when the latter was about to leave for the West. They all lived through turbulent times and went through intense personal suffering, particularly during the Stalinist era.

The quality of the translation is very high. Some of Khlebnikov's poems do not read very well in English, but this may be due to the idiosyncratic grammar and word inventions of the original. Khlebnikov might be better suited to prose translations. It is also perhaps a pity that funding could not be found to produce a parallel-text edition. Poets such as Boris Poplavsky, Daniel Andreyev and Leonid Aronson are hardly known in English, and the book may well stimulate interest in their work.

Mikhail Kuzmin's Alexandrian Songs reflect the fin de siècle interest in Africa and the Orient and look forward to Cavafy and Lawrence Durrell. In the city Kuzmin experiences "love that flew away like smoke". Every sense is alert, but everything is experienced from a distance. In 1911 Khlebnikov left the Symbolist fold to become what he termed a "futurian". Poets must be "fishers of the pearls of the Russian language". I remember a Khlebnikov reading at the Voice Box in the Royal Festival Hall, and the sound of the original is very distinctive. He uses Oriental and Egyptian mythology and writes an 'Appeal to the Presidents of the Earthly Sphere.' Sadly he died aged 37 from a disease picked up while with a Red Army expedition to Iran.

Osip Mandelshtam, who represents the Twenties here, made his name as an Acmeist and was a friend of Nikolay Gumilyov, whose volume *The Pillar of Fire*, published by Anvil and Survivors' Poetry, may already be familiar to readers. Michael Basker writes: "Mandelshtam's focus was man and the individual's place in the challenging God-given earthly reality in which he or she is bound to exist." Official disapproval led him to five years' silence, followed by a period of intense creativity and his death in 1938 in a prison transit camp. He feels a "chill tickling the crown of the head" and yet is constantly drawn to the "coarse" and "salty" stars.

Boris Poplavsky, who lived in exile, used hard drugs and was born out of his time, was influenced by French Surrealism and leaves one with an "almost pleasurable melancholy". A poem such as 'Winter' is almost pantheistic. Poplavsky ends 'How Cold It Is' with the lines "Everything is only a snowstorm of golden freedom, / dreamed of pain to the rays of dawn". The spirit of these poems reminds me of Ernest Dowson's life emerging from a dream.

Daniel Andreyev, representing the forties, died in 1957 shortly after his release from prison, and only became well known in Russia in the early 1990s as a visionary, thanks to the efforts

of his widow Alla Andreyeva. He refers in his poems to the "Radiant Mother", the "great spirit's crown" and "the Confidant of the Eternal Rose". He asks "How did [Pushkin] pour the spirit and the flesh into the harmony of Russia?" Nature is mysterious and full of beings from Russian folklore.

Arseny Tarkovsky's poems may be known to readers from his son Andrei's films such as *Mirror*. In fact his daughter Marina gave an inspired reading from her family chronicle *Fragments of a Mirror* at the Pushkin Club in Notting Hill last year. He exults in nature. "We give stars in exchange for birds' clarinets / and flutes, . . . / and the flutes in exchange for blue stamen brushes." Richard McKane has previously translated a volume of Leonid Aronson, who represents the Sixties. He died young, most probably by his own hand, and did not publish a single poem in his life time. His mood varies enormously, whether "strolling along in heaven" or in "sleeplessness all day". The 'Two Identical Sonnets' (which are literally two identical sonnets) form a beautiful love poem.

The poet from the Arsenal Hospital covers traditional survivor subjects in British terms. At the hospital dissidents were pumped full of Largactil and Sulfazine, which violently raises the temperature, as a form of punishment. There is some extraordinary language: "the desert of the autumn peoplelessness / is bloodsucked with the hubbub of greed", "I fly in delirium. / . . . this cell is the door to the expanse of the Odyssey, / the voices and wishes of the people." Richard McKane is of the opinion that the poems were written by one author, and not several as had been suggested.

Victor Krivulin lived in semi-poverty, producing samizdat, but became a campaigner for democracy in the Nineties. Here he represents the Eighties, and most of the poems chosen refer to paintings. There appears to be some difficulty in representing the typography of the commentaries and notes in the original.

Katia Kapovich, representing the Nineties, was a dissident in Soviet times, but now lives in the USA and also writes fluently in English. Her final poem in the book ends "we did not go mad. / Restraining ourselves from words of comfort. / Nonetheless let's give thanks for the time / of the year, for these damp steps / which have counted our footsteps over and over." This is a truly wonderful collection. Do buy it.

Ten Russian Poets: Surviving the Twentieth Century, edited by Richard McKane, published by Anvil Press in conjunction with Survivors' Poetry, 2003. £12.95. ISBN 0-85646-328-0.

### **ONLY SMARTIES HAVE THE ANSWER**

An exhibition by Aidan Shingler

Monday - Saturday, 27 Oct - 28 Dec 2003

11 am - 6 pm, Diorama Art Gallery

Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaurgh Street, London NW1 3ND  
(see map on last pages of this magazine). Free

A critical commentary about the nature of psychiatric orthodoxy. Through poignant and often humorous visual metaphors artist Aidan Shingler, who has experienced schizophrenia, satirises and parodies the mentality of the shrink.

# Did You Think That Joy Was Some Slight Thing?

## Lee Wilson on the poetry of Mark Doty

Glaze and glimmer,  
lustre and gleam,

can't he think of anything  
but all that sheen?

So opens the first of two poems titled 'Concerning Some Recent Criticism of His Work' in Mark Doty's 1998 collection, *Sweet Machine*. Doty, drolly replying "No such thing, / the queen said, / as too many sequins," is able to roll with the critical punch he received, aware of what for some are his limitations; and yet he went on to publish a sixth collection last year, *Source*, every bit as epiphanic as those preceding it. Mark is a gay man whose poems often seek to reconcile the camp aesthetic with spiritual yearning, when the former might be seen to be at odds with this. It is here that, though the poet will rightly hope the reader can acknowledge the specifics of the homosexual's experience, a broader audience can also relate. Those of us who consider ourselves survivors encounter like some kind of demon this temptation to give in to absurdist, camp or blackly comic outlooks. Some of us see off this drama.

How do we do this? How do we with age, despite becoming knowing, still manage to have experiences we might call pure?

It is the poetic instinct that gives us this victory over the baser part of ourselves. I can't go on; I'll go on: this is work, a kind of work magnified in the poet's output. Doty has seen many die of HIV-related illness, including his long-term partner Wally, about whom he wrote an acclaimed memoir, *Heaven's Coast*. Without his poetry, mightn't Doty, like many of all proclivities and ideologies, faced with so much mortality, have succumbed to a nihilism that expressed itself in dangerous ways? Instead, his recent collections, and his second memoir *Firebird*, which deals with his analogous experience as a homosexual and as an arts-inclined person emerging from his brutal childhood home-life, have been self-administered acts of grace we all might be inspired by.

I discovered Mark Doty's books in 2000 when I was beginning to feel jaded and mistrustful of my own pursuit of a life of depth. There are tens of poems among his total output which act as lanterns. Most are arranged in tercets, which despite fashion and ideology, highlights the order the content has constructed from often grave occurrences. That these poems, formal though free and colloquial, should appear now heightens their poignancy and value. In my favourite, 'Visitation', again from *Sweet Machine*, the poet describes a whale which seems at first beached. Though concretely something he'd seen, this whale serves as a symbol of us all in our times of grief; but this whale, far from having been "led to disaster" on the shore, instead is basking, proudly. The whale

would negotiate the rusty hulls  
of the Portuguese fishing boats

– Holy Infant, Little Marie –  
with what could only be read  
as pleasure, coming close

then diving, trailing on the surface  
big spreading circles  
until he'd breach, thrilling us

with the release of pressured breath . . .

and the way his broad flippers  
resembled a pair of clownish gloves  
or puppet hands. . . .

Perhaps this whale's camp flirtation is the best realisation of Doty's aesthetic. Camp, in academic circles, goes beyond the merely effeminate posturing of television comedians; the camp impulse appears to seek a deflation of the true emotional force of experience. If camp was commandeered by gay men – though we can hear it also in for example the songs of Scott Walker and Nick Cave – that's because they comprise a group in whose interests it is to mock normative, straight values. The camp gesture intrinsically critiques straight culture. As a straight man feeling oppressed by others' expectations of what it is to be male, I very much relate to this; but, as for Mark, the camp impulse is not enough. Mark Doty seems to feel that camp is an embryonic impulse better realised in his work. He's saying to his peers, "Isn't this what you've meant all along?"

And he knows when to be solemn. In the poem 'Days of 1981' from the woefully out of print *My Alexandria*, Mark describes a gay club prior to when AIDS first began to hit the news. There is an underlying tragedy in the poet's portrait of his first sexual experiences.

I don't remember who bought who drinks

or why I liked him; I think it was simply  
that I could. The heady rush of quickly  
leaving together . . .

it was so easy,  
and strangely exhilarating, and free. . . .

We can feel for him as his assertion of his true self is being carried out beneath the approaching shadow of a mortality fascinated by the wish for pleasure. And of course his homosexuality is (almost) incidental: gay liberation as an extension of the sexual revolution of the Sixties coincided with the all-halting double-em-dash of disease.

Doty's acquaintance with mortality, rather than cowing him, leads him to celebrate beauty where he finds it; also not to cling so much to it when it is found – an attitude expressed in his take on camp – or practice a puritan denial of "superficial" pleasures. There is often a love of flamboyance in these poems, in clothes and characters. Though the flamboyance may largely be one of levity in the gay community, again Doty wishes to nurture it and credit it as an expression of a deeper impulse. When we inhale a perfume, enjoy another's preening, or gaze at a jacket in a shop window, and catch sight of our furrowed brow in the same glass, we can do worse than acknowledge this writer's aesthetic.

# The Poetry Broadsheet

Poetry Express's Poetry Supplement Spring 2003

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Listen

Issue me with a Minimi  
for my words. 200 rounds without reloading.  
I need the firepower to cover my advance.  
"It's a little beast." said a young Guardsman.

It's hard to explain the complexity, apparently, of diplomatic  
delay  
to frontline troops, thrashing, sweltering, gnashing on the leash.

"Let's Rock and Roll."  
"Let's beat them to it."  
rap the 21st century Crusaders  
as the order  
crackles  
in the headphones.

"I will Baptise 20 men of the Battalion when  
we cross the Euphrates." said the shaven-headed  
padre over a makeshift altar.  
He mentioned the local Old Testament prophets too,  
the nameless cunt,  
at the back of a Humvee.

200 Iraqi troops crossed the frontline to surrender  
when we had a blank firing exercise, said the propaganda,  
we told them go home, come back in a couple of days.

Gonna be a walkover,  
through lakes of burning oil, poison gas,  
gonna be a walkover,  
it's what we really joined up for,  
take Baghdad, sack the palaces,  
street by street,  
behind every rock, tree, and wall,  
over a carpet of corpses.  
"You're gonna get your moustache trimmed, Saddam."

Through grim London streets,  
the anti-warriors gathering silently,  
in irregular order,  
jaywalk,  
holding tight to sticks.  
Rag-tag militia,  
new faces in desert boots  
with rainbow laces, old banner wavers  
for the 4th International, the Soviet Union,  
a pile of black flags outside the pub,  
a bouncy, kitted-up photographer  
from Greenpeace.  
They flock to haunt the City  
like the ghosts  
of imaginary empires,  
lost armies,  
sunken ships,  
faded with the old century  
or blown away by the new.

They want to say,  
"I was there." too.

"Give peas a chance."  
I say to Miranda,  
to comfort her as the flightdeck roared.  
"Bombs in the end fall silent. Poets never do."  
and I pinned the badge to her lapel  
with a kiss.  
"Remember Bob Cobbing and Custard."  
So quietly and gently  
you could almost miss.

Martin Stevens

Aubade

Do my enemies know we are at war?  
Awake before dawn I pace the floor.  
A bird's brief twitter like a car alarm  
has no idea what has been stolen.

The streetlights compete with several hues,  
nervous fluorescence, the wake of dreams  
but I am not the lighting director  
and make no choices in the matter.

The pavements gleam, self-satisfied, untrud.  
Somewhere a computer is changing the world.  
I too have my hidden connections.  
Before I slept I saw the lopsided moon.

Shall I email Nana in Alexandria  
to set up chat, tell lies that could come true,  
like a wizard manipulate her dreams?  
She seeks escape and I feel an absence.

I love my neighbour like I love my nightmare.  
No one is there when we could kill each other.  
We both would wish to laugh away terror,  
our multilateral inactivity.

Surrounded by millions of the confused,  
the dreamers who dream they cannot be of use,  
my thoughts police the fortress of my skull.  
The velvet blue of dawn. A caw of crow.

A car door slam. The city mostly sleeps.  
Something has escaped from inside of us.  
Our souls have transmigrated, tired of us.  
Sleep on my city please and please put off  
the dreadful clarity of your daylight purposes.

Phil Poole

By the 101 Bus Stop I Sat Down And Wept

In Civic Centre Bus Station  
I wiped away my son's tears,  
Never realising the roles would be reversed  
In another twenty years.

Steve Lyons

## Boy Meets Girl

I call it serendipity she thinks it's coincidental,  
we found love in a psycho ward after both of us went mental.  
She was off her scabby head; cannabis psychosis,  
self-mutilation with anything sharp was my diagnosis.  
The first time I saw her, it was love at first sight,  
screaming and cursing, out of a nurse she took a bite.  
Then she kicked the balls of the big orderly  
I said to myself – that girl is for me.

We started playing Scrabble – she was shy at first  
all the time my heart was 'bout ready to burst.  
I asked "Can we date when we get out of here?"  
And for a brief moment I saw panic and fear.  
I thought – she's gonna say no, I've blown it here –  
then I saw her consternation disappear.

She shrugged her shoulders, winked and smiled,  
she said "Why not?" That send my pulse wild.  
Ever since then we've become a pair,  
it's nice to have somebody to care  
and I've not cut myself since those hospital days  
and she's not smoked ganja, or so she says.  
I still call it serendipity; she still thinks it's coincidental,  
we found love in the psycho ward after both of us went men-  
tal.

Steve Lyons

## Psycho Haiku

This mental illness  
slow but inevitable  
comin' to get me.

Steve Lyons

## His Last Dinner

He said "I take nothing from anyone" and allowed us to share  
his favourite smile, that pale one that felt so cool to him but  
fevered to us.

His brother was seated opposite me: the parts of his face cir-  
cled round to save themselves from arrows. The waiter brought  
the wine and more bread.

We sat as still as foxes in a garden seeking an open door.

I started to describe my wife's fig tree but my voice withered as  
he stared and me and I remembered how the figs never ripen.  
They rot every year on the tree.

He leant over, stage whispered "Do you remember Consuelo?" I  
knew the words would be said but I left them scattered among  
the breadcrumbs and thought: "Every day." She was a simple-  
ton we took to the river once. After he had screwed her he  
made me do too. I detested it. Less than she did.

Each winter since I have harvested our black figs. They should  
be burnt but I send them to our friends on his birthday: an  
offering to keep his memory cold.

Beverley Charles Rowe

## See How They Run

Statement taken from a farmer's wife:  
Well, I've always hated those mice.  
We rats work so hard.  
Take my husband, for instance.  
He's out at the sewage farm  
from early to late  
gnawing and fighting and killing.  
Come the end of the year,  
when we've paid our taxes,  
what have we left?  
But those mice!  
They just sit in their holes,  
getting fat and having babies.  
Then at night, out they come  
to steal food from respectable folks  
and scurry back to their warm nests.  
If it wasn't for those dreadful mice  
we rats would rule the world.

Statement taken from a young man:  
The king rat sent out an edict  
that we should deal now with the mouse problem  
once and for all. This was our chance.  
We promised the mice the best cheese  
that money could buy.  
As they crawled out of their nests  
we pushed them onto lorries  
and drove out to the forest.  
What fun we had chasing them  
and hitting them with sticks.  
There were three I remember specially.  
Mike had poked their eyes out.  
How they ran about squealing!  
Suddenly they all ran together  
towards old Mrs Matthews.  
She'd brought a big knife with her  
and she soon had their tails off.  
That stopped them in their tracks,  
I can tell you.

Beverley Charles Rowe

## The Kiss

On the towpath  
couples walk hand in hand  
while I hurry past.

A man alone is dangerous,  
out of step with himself and the World –  
so I've learnt to hurry on.

I sit on the bridge,  
think up all those reasons for a kiss:  
love, betrayed in the Garden,  
the touch of lips on a cold face  
suppressing the last goodbye.

A barge slips out of the night –  
kettles, roses and children blowing kisses  
that fly by me like arrows in the dark.

Iris Caffrey

## The White Room

The hay will not wait  
another day to be cut –  
the snow not lie  
in the winding lanes  
until the children come.

It is we who wait –  
wait for the room  
to fill with flowers,  
night to cover a sun  
still finding ways to stay.

Iris Caffrey

## Julio

I want you to know you were my first love  
Higher deeper stronger and above  
Yet my insides are so empty I can't bear to stay  
And I respect you too much to pretend I'm okay  
I believed you were my earth sun and moon  
It felt so good but finished so soon  
And I never understood how you could love me  
You are so good and so damn sexy  
And I wanted to give everything to you  
To stay close to your hand whatever you'd do  
And wherever we'd travel I really didn't care  
Because I would be wonderful if you were there  
But now all I can do is drink and cry  
Because I will love you until the second I die

Dervla Shannahan

## The Lie

In two cupped hands he held my face  
Leaving kisses behind each finger's trace  
He was so warm that I felt so safe  
And he looked at me with such absolute faith  
He admitted that he had not stopped praying  
Since the moment he heard what the rumours were saying  
I drank in his pupils and shook at his touch  
And I'd never adored any one thing as much  
And I felt the addiction like nothing before  
And I knew if I lost him I'd not survive a day more  
He was so willing and confident simultaneously  
And I felt undeserving at being close to such purity  
I willed to escape into just about anyone  
And be light years away from all I had done  
And I need to scream and to laugh and to cry  
As I looked at my everything and told my first lie

Dervla Shannahan

## Therapist

Shine your torch into my eyes  
You won't reach the darkness  
Hiding there  
Behind my stare  
Of happiness.

Sarah Smith

## The Sound of Smoke

Lay in bed  
She lay beside me  
and the silence reached an all time high

As she inhaled  
I heard a crackle from her cigarette  
Something I had never heard before

Irving

## Valentine's Day

She was my best friend's sister  
and I don't remember choosing  
or buying the Valentine's card,  
but I do remember the moment before posting it.

The feeling of indecision,  
knowing that once something is posted  
there is no stopping it.  
My gut feeling told me not to do it  
and I really should have followed that.

Instead I posted it.  
It travelled in the night-  
mail sacks, sweaty rooms in sorting depots  
and other places.

And on the morning of Valentine's Day,  
several years ago now,  
I happened to be staying at my friend's house,  
had forgotten what day it was  
and when I woke up,  
I found everyone was out,  
all at work or at collage.

On the doormat behind the front door  
lay my small red envelope,  
which I picked up and put in my pocket,  
the end of a pointless exercise.  
I was glad of the chance to reclaim it, though.

Irving

## The Psychiatrist

A witch doctor uses dangerous potions and remedies. A victim is dragged screaming to the medicine tent by bystanders. The witch doctor talks confidently to them of cures. Goats herd the victim into the witch doctor's sight. After a discussion of the tribe's hunting success a remedy is chosen. The remedy is smouldering charcoal tied to the victim's hands. The victim is taught how the remedy works and explains to the bystanders. Over time his hands develop callouses that prevent the passage of heat and his screams change into a careful carriage.

Ian Gorman

## You

I am your psychiatrist.

You say you don't need to see me.

Apparently you hold a belief in letters, words, sentences, sense,

comprehension, perception, and a concept, the English language, within which these ideas have meaning and allow the actions of speech and writing, which themselves comprise interpersonal communication. It does not matter who you speak to or what books you read, they will only confirm that these things, speech and writing, exist. You are suffering from a psychiatric illness. Your illness causes belief in these things.

I know that you do not think that you are ill or need treatment in my hospital. It is for this reason that I am going to make you come into my hospital and force treatment into you.

.....

You have been in my hospital two weeks now and have made good progress. I still see some evidence of your illness. In concert with this instant you obviously still believe that I am communicating with you. This is a delusion. For this reason I shall make you remain and be treated for a while longer.

.....

It is now four weeks that you have been in my hospital and you have fully recovered, so I am going to stop forcing treatment into you. In fact I am going to discharge you from my hospital. I know that this has been an unpleasant experience for you, and if you do not want to repeat it I have only one piece of advice for you. There is only one thing you can do to prevent anyone forcing medication into you. It is this: keep taking the medication.

Ian Gorman

#### Survivors and Sympathisers

A survivor may be one who tries to overcome the effects of cruelty, violence, abuse, or illness and neglect, disability or harassment, depression or personal tragedy, incest or abandonment, or mistreatment by the system –

to name just some of the things that it's difficult to survive from.

Naming ourselves as survivors enables us to create poetry, music, sculpture – art out of what we are. In creating, we become more of what we can be.

The inclusion of "sympathisers" as "survivors" – in the small print – is inaccurate and misleading, and diminishes us all.

Many sympathisers may care, but many more do not. Bureaucracy's full of such people claiming to have our interests at heart when they lock us in, or shut us out, or make us succumb to ECT, or label us as incompetent, or patronise or belittle us, or abandon us or sell us out,

or close down our refuges to build luxury homes or leisure centres that we don't require and can't afford.

Though sympathisers are vital, the definition should be distinct from that of true survivors.

I write this as a survivor who feels empathy (not sympathy) for other survivors – whoever they are.

Eamer O'Keefe

#### After the Air Raid

In the country of Yugoslavia, 1999.  
The family come out of the house.

The returning bombers pass overhead,  
but high, so high . . .  
We can hardly see them,  
only just hear them.

Anyway, they've gone.  
It's quiet now.

And oh! What a glorious day!  
The distant hills all hazy with peace,  
the sun bright on our meadow.

But look! What's that?  
Yes, over there . . .  
Something shining in the grass,  
glinting in the sun.

What can it be?

The little boys race for it.  
Whoever gets there first  
will be blown to bits.

Oh, wickedness!  
Oh, hatred!

June Jones

#### Come Back

In the fading garden  
a blackbird sings  
on the shed roof.

The roof lets in rain,  
but it is not raining.

The bird could be my father  
who also liked to sing.

Orange beak  
opens  
closes.

My bitterness diminishes  
in that movement,  
in that song.

Mark Mayes

# Poetry News

## Websites, Magazines, Competitions, Events . . .

### Poetry Library

Happy 50th birthday to the Poetry Library. Set up by the Arts Council the Poetry Library has 80,000 items, including books, many poetry magazines, videos and audio recordings. Recent readers at the South Bank, where the Poetry Library is based, have included Andrew Motion, Roger McGough, Billy Collins, Carol Ann Duffy and Patience Agabi. The Poetry Library, Level 5, Royal Festival Hall, London SE1 8XX. Open 11 am to 8 pm, Tuesdays to Sundays. Tel 020 7921 0943. [www.poetrylibrary.org.uk](http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk)

People living in Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear can become members of the Northern Poetry Library, which has over 15,000 books for loan, and also will loan postally. The Northern Poetry Library, Central Library, The Willows, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 1TA. Tel 01670 534 524.

People living in Scotland can join the Scottish Poetry Library, with work in Gaelic, Scots and English, and international poetry. The Scottish Poetry Library, 5 Crichton's Close, Canongate, Edinburgh, EH8 8DT. Tel 0131 557 2876 [www.spl.org.uk](http://www.spl.org.uk)

### New Poetry Magazines

*Rubies in the Darkness*. Twice-annual 'spiritual, inspirational and mystical poetry. Submissions in traditional form especially welcome.' Subscriptions £10. Editor: Peter Thompson, 41 Grantham Road, Manor Park, London E12 5LZ

*Poetry Salzburg Review*. Poetry, long in-depth reviews, essays. Subscriptions £9. When submitting enclose an International Reply Coupon. Editor: Wolfgang Görtschacher, Universität Salzburg, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Akademiestr. 24, A-5020 Salzburg, Austria

### Small Magazine Listings

For those interested in submitting or subscribing to small poetry magazines, *Light's List*, edited by John Light, will be useful. Published annually by his Photon Press, it lists UK small press magazines, but also impressively lists magazines from all over the world which publish English-language poetry and stories, and costs only £3. 2003

edition ISBN: 1 897968 19 1. ISSN: 1478-7172. Available from: The Light House, 37 The Medows, Berwicks upon Tweed, Northumberland, TD15 1NY.

Also useful is *The Small Press Guide*, published annually by Writers' Bookshop. Lists UK magazines only, but gives a full description, supplied by the magazine editors themselves, of what sort of poetry they are interested in. £9.99. 2003 edition ISBN: 1 902713 13 3. Available from: Writers' Bookshop, Remus House, Coltsfoot Drive, Woodston, Peterborough PE2 9JX. Tel: 01733 898103.

Addresses of larger poetry magazines can be found in *The Writer's Handbook 2003* (Macmillan) or in *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook 2003* (A&C Black), which can be found in libraries and bookshops.

### Websites

[www.culturalco-operation.org](http://www.culturalco-operation.org) 'London's fastest growing network of artists of diverse cultural origin'. Email or call with details of artists you think should be included: [ldc@culturalco-operation.org](mailto:ldc@culturalco-operation.org) Tel: 020 7456 0400

[www.salidaa.org.uk](http://www.salidaa.org.uk) Website of the South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive. Text and images of British-based South Asian writers, artists, performers and groups. Feedback on the site welcome. Paola Marchionni, Project Director, SALIDAA, c/o Commonwealth Institute, Kensington High St, London W8 6NQ. Tel: 020 7603 0355

[www.workshopfestival.co.uk/wdpt](http://www.workshopfestival.co.uk/wdpt) 'A web-dictionary of arts organisations which provides opportunities for continuing professional development'. Funded by [www.creative-capital.org.uk](http://www.creative-capital.org.uk)

### Literature Training

Survivors' Poetry is one of seven leading literature organisations working in partnership to support professional development in the literature sector. Literaturetraining is developing its work in Wales and Scotland, and is working with the Academi and the Scottish Book Trust during 2003/4 to deliver programmes of training and professional development specifically tailored to meet the interests and needs of

writers in those countries. The two pilots in Wales relate to creative writing in health and social care and to working with challenging young people in out of school settings. In Scotland, the programme covers writing for radio and television, the writer and the publisher, a pilot mentoring scheme and a writers in school conference. For further information, contact Philippa Johnston, Co-ordinator, literaturetraining on 0131 553 2210 or e-mail [p.johnston@nawe.co.uk](mailto:p.johnston@nawe.co.uk).

### Events

John Horder, a critic for the *Guardian* and the *Independent* and a survivor poet, is giving a reading at Highgate Library, Chester Road, London N6, on Thursday 22nd January 2004 at 7.30pm.

### Workshops

Alison Clayburn, one of the regular facilitators for Survivors' Poetry's Camden workshops, is running a day school entitled Writing for Self Discovery at Morley College, Waterloo, on Sunday 15th February 2004 from 10am to 5pm. (course code 128VF). Concessions are available. For further details phone 0207 928 8501 or e-mail [enquiries@morleycollege.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@morleycollege.ac.uk).

### Competitions

The Lions Club of Castle Point are celebrating their 25th Anniversary by holding an open poetry competition which is available to anyone in the UK aged 18 or over. Poems which must be the original and unpublished work of the person making the submission, can be in any style and up to 40 lines on any subject and should be submitted by 30 April 2004. Entry fees are £5 for the first poem and £2.50 for any additional poems. For details send an sae to B. MacDonald at the LCCP Poetry Competition, 36 Burlington Gardens, Hadleigh, Essex, SS7 2JL or e-mail [lionspoetry.comp@virgin.net](mailto:lionspoetry.comp@virgin.net).

The *Envoi* International Poetry Competition is ongoing. £3. 17 Millcroft, Bishop Stortford, Herts, CM23 2BP

# Survivors, Submit Your Writing!

## James Ferguson requests work for our new anthology

As I mentioned at the end of my review of *We Have Come Through*, it's obvious that there's a need for a large new anthology of new survivors' poetry: it has been eight years since *Under the Asylum Tree*, the last of our anthologies to be wholly devoted to new poetry, although both *Beyond Bedlam* and *We Have Come Through* mixed new work alongside old, and we have published new translations in *The Pillar of Fire* and *Ten Russian Poets*, and of course network groups have been producing pamphlets and books. I am pleased to announce that we are taking submissions now for just such an anthology!

This is a chance for all survivors to submit to an anthology that aims to be as wide-ranging as possible and to reflect the diversity of the survivor community and all the different types of poetry they produce.

The bulk of the anthology will be previously unpublished poetry by living survivor poets. We are also inviting prose submissions, although there will only be a limited space for this in the anthology. The expected length of the book will be 260 pages; the expected publication date, 2004.

We will be producing this book almost entirely in house: I will edit it, and typeset it too, and once the book comes back from the printers we will publish it under our own Survivors' Press imprint. Please note that because we are publishing this book ourselves, we cannot afford to offer payment (or complimentary copies) to anyone whose work is printed.

### SUBMIT YOUR POETRY:

\* There is no theme to this anthology. If you are a survivor, and have written poetry, then choose up to six of your best and send them in. (Do read the submissions guidelines before you do that, as I don't want to mislay anyone's work.)

\* I would like the anthology to be as full of the work of survivors as possible. This means all sorts of survivors: those who identify with the original Survivors' Poetry definition ("survivors of the mental health system"), as well as those who identify with the more recent definition ("survivors of mental distress"). I'd also like the anthology to represent those people who have suffered mental illness or distress, but who are unsure about calling themselves survivors for various reasons (as some callers put it, "It's not in the past, so it's too soon to call myself a survivor").

\* I am not looking for one particular type of poetry. All styles are welcome: avant-garde and the traditional; free verse and metrical and rhyming; the complex and simple; "poetic" and street-slangy; highbrow and lowbrow; serious and trivial; the poem written for the page, and the poem which is meant for performance; the visual poem and the sound poem; poems which ask to be read silently or aloud, or chanted, rapped, ranted or sung; the outward-looking and the self-referential; the poem about society and the poem about the self; the poem from the head and that from the heart.

\* I am not looking for one type of survivor poetry. If the anthol-

ogy has a broad aim, it's to revel in the variousness of it all. Poetry that addresses survivor issues directly (madness, mental distress or mental illness, disability, the psychiatric system, asylums, medication, trauma, abuse, to name just a few) is obviously welcome: and I expect to be sent poems in this vein, as this has always been a strength of Survivors' Poetry. (I am definitely interested in including good poetry that is also angry, protesting, politically-charged, crowd-rousing, or proudly mad. Don't hold back. No holds barred is fine if that's where you want to go.) But I am equally interested in work by survivors that address these issues indirectly: work that perhaps never uses the word "madness" but which reveals a distinct meaning to a reader who is also a survivor, or which is written from a survivor sensibility. And equally welcome too is the poetry written by survivors which is completely unrelated to survivors' issues: work which perhaps sees itself as simply poetry, and the survivor status of the writer as irrelevant.

\* I welcome work which is too odd, mad or extreme to be published by other outlets, as well as that which is more mainstream.

\* I welcome work which reflects the diversity of the survivor community: poetry in different dialects, for example, or written out of different poetic traditions (English poetry that draws on non-English-language poetic traditions is an obvious example). I also welcome poetry written in languages other than English (please include a translation into English, even if it's only an basic one).

\* All survivors are invited to submit, both the beginning poet and the published poet who has been writing for decades. Survivors who have never made a poem in their life before are encouraged to get writing and submit along with everyone else: it doesn't matter that you don't see yourself as a "real" poet. Everyone who submitted for past anthologies and was unsuccessful is encouraged to submit again.

\* Please send in unpublished poems only, as I want this to be an anthology of new work. (Self-published work counts as unpublished in this context.)

### SUBMIT YOUR PROSE:

I'm also looking for other stuff, which might provide a context for or background to (or even opposition to) the poems. Some suggestions:

\* factual prose (about something survivor-related or something more general . . .)

\* an snippet of autobiography (including: how did you come to poetry / songwriting / performing?)

\* statements (about madness, poetry, surviving, Survivors' Poetry, etc). What is a survivor? What is Survivors' Poetry about? What has it achieved? What is its future? What mistakes has it made? Briefly: if possible in one sentence or paragraph.

\* statements / rants on survivor issues (...medication ... the mental health system ... attitude of people to survivors ...)

Briefly: if possible from a sentence or paragraph in length.

- \* a dialogue ... between you and someone else, perhaps (a psychiatrist ... a misunderstander ... a doubter ...) ... between you and someone who perhaps you couldn't speak to out loud ...
- \* fiction (there'll may only be space for one, but I'd like to put a bit of fiction in if I can)
- \* what is the poet or survivor poet who has meant most to you? (or the poem / work of art which has meant most to you?)
- \* something else ...

Please keep the prose as concise as possible. You can send up to one page of prose (which can take up some of these ideas, or not, as you please): if you are sending poems, make sure the prose is on a separate sheet of paper marked 'Anthology: Prose'. Remember to clearly put your name and address on this page.

#### SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

Please read these guidelines carefully before you send your work in.

- \* Include a covering letter which says that you are submitting your work to our anthology. Also give the titles of all the poems and prose pieces you are submitting. Make sure all your contact details are at the top of this letter: your name, address, telephone, and email address, if you have one.

- \* You may submit up to 6 poems. If possible, type them up, using a computer or typewriter, on A4 paper. (A4 is the size of this magazine.) If you don't have access to a typewriter or a computer, handwrite them as clearly as you can.

- \* You can also include up to one page of prose. Mark it 'Anthology: Prose'

- \* At the end of every page of poetry or prose, write your name and address.

- \* Include an envelope with your name and address on, and with a second-class stamp on it (or more postage, if your work requires it).

- \* Send the envelope to: "James Ferguson, Survivors' Poetry, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London, NW1 3ND."

The expected deadline for submissions is the end of March 2004, but you can of course send in your poems as soon as they are ready. The deadline is far away enough for those who haven't yet written any poems to get writing.

If you know any survivors or survivor groups who don't receive this magazine, pass on the word about this anthology!

## Synaesthesia

By Roy Holland

**As so many Survivors' events include music, I am taking the liberty of introducing for discussion the relation of the brain to music and colour. When I was studying ethnomusicology at Goldsmiths' College, I was shown two articles relating to synaesthesia and music, one written around 1920 by Erich Von Hornbostel, one of the fathers of comparative musicology, and the other by Merriam in the seventies. Neither has been followed up.**

**Synaesthesia is the phenomenon whereby one sense triggers a direct experience of another sense. Cytowicz in his popular book on the subject concentrates on an acquaintance who visualised shapes when he experienced tastes. But the most interesting aspect to me is the experience of different colours when hearing different musical notes. Scientists have not come to any definite conclusion as to which mechanisms in the brain are responsible. Various Classical musicians and artists have experienced synaesthesia, most famously Scriabin, whose symphonic poem Prometheus uses coloured lights, Messiaen, who insisted that his use of colour was a gift and not pathological, and Kandinsky. In the 1920s there was actually a fashion for colour keyboards.**

**I would be interested to find out if there are any tribal musics which associate musical features with colours and also if there are any correlations between music and colour in Renaissance Neoplatonic musical theory or in the theory of the Indian raga. The notes of different ragas are**

**correlated closely with emotions and moods. I was also introduced to Goethe's theory of colour at Schumacher College in Devon. Goethe used a more holistic approach than Newton had done, and I'd like to know if he considers colour and music together in any of his writings.**

**The alternative contemporary practice of colour therapy does not seem to refer to the link between colour and music according to the texts available to me. Scientific research has been done on the use of colour in healthcare. A Swedish academic, Dr. Helle Wijk, has done research into which colours most benefit Alzheimers patients, and will be presenting the practical outcomes in June 2003 at the Montreal World Congress on Design and Health. It would be interesting to know if music can be combined with colour and design therapeutically.**

**I've heard of one survivor musician who sees numbers in colour, and I wonder if any readers of Poetry Express make use of colour in any special way in writing their poetry or songs. Let's open up a debate. If you have any comments on the above or any synaesthetic experiences (I should add that I haven't had any myself) please do write to me at the Survivors' Poetry office in confidence, and, if anything significant emerges, I'll keep you informed in a future issue of Poetry Express.**

## Not in the Attic, The Space Between, Spring into Fall

By Survivors' Poetry Groups

Reviewed by Carolyn O'Connell

Asked to review three books from different parts of the country, the first I turned to was *Not In The Attic*, an anthology from Manchester Survivors' Poetry Women's Project, a slim volume of twenty four poems ranging widely in subject and style and qualifying for wide promotion. I felt let into the lives of the contributors, their houses and streets.

'Madchester' by Kim Lancelot Taylor plumbs city and mind. The double stressed opening lines reflect the pulse of pacing feet, the insistence of a thought, the commercial rain, enhanced by the refrain 'some things never change...' This is not fashionable Manchester, but something bleaker, older, totally familiar. I love the line 'nose gnarled with alcohol' and Thia Page's 'on returning a magpie disdainfully / chucks away some hard French bread'. Tough and uncompromising, the opposing couplets of 'Why do you like Football?' use the language of the game to chart emotional development, while Honor Donnelly's 'Continuity' celebrates the success of an older Withenshawe woman. Subjects hidden behind doors, literal and metaphorical, are deftly covered. Cathy Bolton's journey is extraordinary in its treatment of the mundane, the understated terror of its conclusion. I compliment the facilitators, editors, participants and guest writers, in particular the author of 'Criminals'. I can only guess why it is anonymous.

Stevenage Survivors' *The Space Between* marks the progress of a well-established group and follows the success of a former anthology *The House That Hope Built*. It is published with the help of a Co-operative Partnerships Award Scheme. I wish it had given enough to laminate the cover. In his editorial, Richard Copeland provides useful contact details, plus a background to the group. Ten poets are showcased, most providing four poems, giving space to individual voices while remaining a cohesive whole.

Patrick Allen's free verse harks back to the romantic genre, especially in 'Autumn Reflection', whilst Lucia Birch has a crisper stressed style. 'Tower of Misfits' with its crickets is both funny and sad. 'Notes, falling down a stairwell come to rest / on a rising bed of cumin and coriander', and Ann Copeland elegantly carves a tower from the domestic to the mythical with panache. Any agoraphobic

will relate instantly to Alison Dady who, in nine dactylic stanzas, recreates this phobia with insight. Look out for 'Becky' and an unusual peace poem. Here is an anthology elegiac and metaphysical with a unity of style, that merits attention.

Scotland offers *Spring into Fall*, 68 pages from the two-year-old Kirkie Writers' Group. Visually appealing, poems, whether prose or traditionally linear, are illustrated by intriguing art that holds attention. The upbeat title poem bears close scrutiny. Although seeming light, on closer reading it holds the key as to the identity, even the age and experience of these writers. A sense of loss permeates, but the sadness is mitigated by hope. Margaret Lockhart's 'My Highland Gentle Giant' and Mark Callagan's 'The Smalltown Blues' epitomise this, while Sandra Sutton's 'Reason' takes an unusual slant. Dugal Downie charts unemployment, tackling pain, humiliation, counselling and care in the community with a refreshing gentle irony, leavened with a taste of traditional verse. Do read 'Tae a (F\*\*\*ing) Mouse', whether you're a computer buff or not, and the work of 80 year old George Hamilton, whose manuscripts have been given to Survivors' for research purposes. The concluding section, 'Goodbye to Woodilee', makes this anthology outstandingly different. Poems, comments, interviews and photos, taken from previous publications, cover life in that hospital and its closure with clear and poignant debate. *Spring into Fall* gives a special insight. *Not in the Attic*, ISBN 0-9536746-1-4, £3 from Manchester Survivors' Poetry, c/o Commonword, The Friends' Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS. *The Space Between: Poetry by Stevenage Survivors*, £2.50 from Roy Birch, 156 Gonville Crescent, Stevenage, Herts, SG2 9LY. *Spring into Fall: Survivor Writing from Kirkie Writing Group and Beyond*, ISBN 0-9529140-1-6, £3 from Survivors' Poetry Scotland, who for the time being should be contacted by e-mail at [sps@spscot.co.uk](mailto:sps@spscot.co.uk).

## The Stone Ship

By Danielle Hope

Reviewed by John O'Donoghue

Do those who follow the twin vocations of doctor and poet – who wear, in Dannie Abse's phrase, the white coat and the purple cloak – share certain characteristics? In her third collection Danielle Hope goes some way to suggesting that they do. In 'Your Desk', written for William Oxley, another poet-doctor, another William (Carlos Williams) is invoked: 'string marks / columns of cabbages, a wheelbarrow / upturned, corrugated fencing / a greenhouse, one pane gone'.

This view is meticulously observed, and

the doctor's method of active looking used to find the poet's epiphany: 'for one moment sunlight / grips the wheelbarrow'. Compassion is at work here, not just for humanity, but for William Carlos Williams's 'things'. There is humility also; in 'Learning a Language' Danielle Hope admits her failings to 'seek shapes in moss', to 'catch words in water': 'Is it this language is indistinct? / Or am I blind / unable to tell line from shadow, green from grey?' Here the purple cloak swirls before the very ineffability of the natural world, where a lost lexicon whispers of mysteries: 'The sea shuffles / illegible scatters of sand.' The admission of failure hints at the beginnings of success.

So doctor-poets, with their bi-spherical approach to perception and its re-ordering, do they possess certain occupational likenesses? Danielle Hope shares with William Carlos Williams a gift for observation; with Danielle Abse a lyricism and satirical edge; and with Chekhov a compassion manifesting itself in elegies and political poems borne out of long acquaintance with suffering.

But there is one further gift of this exact, understated poet which is very much her own: a serenity not usually found in the pockets of the white coat, or the lining of the purple cloak. Alongside these, we may just glimpse the contours of the mystic's robe.

Rockingham Press, 2003. £7.95. ISBN 1-873468-91-1. Available from Survivors' Poetry at our usual address. The royalties from this book are kindly being donated to Survivors' Poetry.

## Between Bamboo

By Carolyn O'Connell

Reviewed by Quibilah Montsho

'Beginning' is indeed an excellent start to this little book of poems. O'Connell has a wonderful eye for detail. The candelabra does not just hang, but is 'grimed'. We can see what she sees. How many different types of night we know there are, and her original 'thin night' warns us of things to come. She gathers in cloths which for us become ominous cloaks as the 'once ... frantic fingers' are now 'owl's claws'. The writer here invites the reader to see the way in which age and time itself have fashioned this lady's hands. A 'nightly toilsome task' is the reason for all of this as she sits sewing; we can imagine the strain her eyes, hands and body must be under, for she does so in an effort full of woe and difficulty.

The title poem is a relish of poetry in motion. We are led into the world of the homeless/street drinker, forever invisible to the eyes of passers-by. O'Connell here gives us insight, indeed vision, of how desperate and desolate those people can

be. The poem's character has eyes that 'reflect raw sparkle, rain', much as we might expect from one who spends her time on the street. But what we do not expect is for her to have a party in which passers-by are welcome to join.

A plethora of animals on a stage of their own is what brings us into 'Westway'. The sun does not cast a shadow, but is just an object. Midges dance. Dragonflies beat a rhythm. Songbirds chant. Squirrels shriek. And traffic sobs. Cars, vans and lorries have a human voice, along with animals. The drama takes place on a stage of trees. Even the horse is a 'doorman'.

Carolyn O'Connell's *Between Bamboo* is aptly titled. She opens up a world where humans and animals have similar properties. We are neither on bamboo nor off it, neither in nor out of it, but between the strands of bamboo. We are stranded in an ethereal world. The poems capture both the eye and the mind. **Hub Editions, 2002. ISBN 1-903746-22-1. £5.50 from the author at 171 Oxford Gardens, London, W10 6NE.**

## Anchoress

By Esta Spalding

Reviewed by Roy Holland

*Anchoress*, a book-length prose-poem by the Canadian writer, editor and filmmaker Esta Spalding, is very topical. It refers to the First Gulf War, and the protagonist, Helen, sacrifices herself in protest against the war. We see her and her sister France through the eyes of her lover Peter, who is preparing the skeleton of a whale in his zoology lab. We also hear the story of Helen's mother Manon, born in occupied France during the Second World War in a cave with Palaeolithic paintings and of her parents' subsequent death in a plane crash. But it is far from being a melodrama and is beautifully paced.

The section 'How We Met' is gently erotic. Helen 'wants someone who knows her / by smell, by her curious geography'. She is spontaneous and reprimands Peter for being 'like my mother with her camera, / a piece of glass, a lens between you and the world.'

The terrorists who killed Helen's parents acted 'in retaliation against terror by the United States.' This builds up within her as she watches the Gulf War on TV. Her final statement is 'My face is for sweet burning, / ... my only gift. / And I am for burning, a black candle lit for you.' Helen's Song ends: 'I am Oroboros: searing, raining majestic rain, honeying, the velocity of my love for this world.' Peter's grief rings so true. He asks: 'Did she reach Baghdad? / ... / say, here I am with you, I know how burning is?' A dialogue ensues: she 'never really believed in life.' She 'believed only in

life'.

*Anchoress* is addictive and unique in North American poetry as a contemporary epic imbued with moral conscience. For those of us at Survivors' head office in the Diorama Arts Centre, where an inspirational group of Iraqi women exiles recently held an exhibition and workshops in opposition to this new Gulf war, it could not be more timely reading. **Bloodaxe, £8.95. ISBN 1-85224-604-9**

## The Poems of Rowan Williams

By Rowan Williams

Reviewed by John Horder

Ted Hughes, our late Poet Laureate, was a more powerful but a less emotionally literate poet than Rowan Williams. In Hughes's small masterpiece of a poem, 'Theology', and the first stanza of 'Logos' – both from his third book *Wodwo* – he shared similar territory with our freshly-minted Archbishop of Canterbury. I quote from the latter: 'God gives the blinding pentagram of His power / For the frail mantle of a person / To be moulded onto. So if they come / This unlikely far, and against such odds – / The perfect strength is God's.'

Rowan Williams's poem 'Penrhys', about a council estate in the Rhondda Valley which is also the site of a medieval shrine, explores the 'bloody stubbornness / of getting someone born.' It is very much a hard-won truth in the Hughes tradition: 'Thin teenage mothers by the bus stop / shake wet hair. // Light cigarettes. One day my bus will come, says one: / they laugh. More use 'n a bloody prince, / says someone else ...'

I love Rowan Williams on the obdurate nature of rain in the first and last stanzas of 'Camelford', in honour of Regional Water Companies. This is the third section of the poem 'Cornish Waters': 'Rain is transparent, irresistible, / extravagant and obstinate, / it never will be wooed, to come or go, / like words, or grace.' Shades of W.S. Graham, the great Cornish poet, and Peter Lanyon, the equally great Cornish painter.

Just as Andrew Motion is a complex mixture of traditional literary man steeped in the poems of Keats and Edward Thomas, and innovator who, 'against such odds', is working harder than any Poet Laureate has ever done to reinvent the post, so Rowan Williams, the poet, is a mix of traditionalist and fierce intellectual. Implicit in 'Simone Weil at Ashford' is her lifelong habit of self-starvation: I would not have known this was so strongly implied if I hadn't read his introduction. Along with 'Nietzsche: Twilight' and 'Tolstoy at Astapovo', which is making me re-read

*Alice in Wonderland*, these are all poems of amazing complexity and intricacy of thought. They need to be read out loud at least four times before one begins to work out their meaning. What Rilke called 'the beauty and terror of what we are still not able to bear' impact with a power comparable to Hughes or Brenda Williams in her most recent sonnets: 'a stiff, gaunt crying, I must not be loved, / and I must not be seen, and if I cannot walk like god, / at least I can be light and hungry, hollowing my guts / till I'm a bone the sentenced god can whistle through' ('Simone Weil at Ashford').

Don't say I haven't warned you. Our new Archbishop of Canterbury writes formidably complex poems. Fortunately he writes simpler ones as well. Like Motion, the probability is that he will have to reinvent his role in order to avoid being destroyed by the machinery that is at the very heart of the C of E. He desperately needs to do this for it to stand any chance of making sense in a world increasingly driven by technology. His 'inner poet' must continue to have its say, come what may. **Perpetua Press, Oxford, £10. ISBN 1-870882-16-4**

## Souls

By Moniza Alvi

Reviewed by Kate Cunningham

Imaginative, intriguing, coming from a real emotional place with sincerity that touches the soul, *Souls* has a surreal, somewhat mystical quality, which is hard to explain in tangible terms. Yet it is grounded very much in what emotions mean and make you feel, exploring depths of the soul in a compassionate and unique way.

I found that I connected with some poems more than others, because of where I am at present. Other poems will mean more to me as I change.

Deep ideas are balanced with a light and fresh approach. The collection is refreshing, enjoyable and meaningful to read as it touches the soul. The poems are fully alive and have a strong sense of personality. I particularly liked 'Hotel', in which the body is a temporary hotel for the soul. I do recommend the book.

These poems come from a genuine emotional place and are expressed with sincerity, imaginative playfulness and sensitivity.

**Bloodaxe, 2002. ISBN 1-85224-585-9**

## Rescue

By Ian Seed

Reviewed by James Ferguson

Ian Seed's selected poems, published two years ago, were titled *The Stranger*. This

pamphlet includes a poem 'after' Pierre Reverdy, that explains this title: 'I need to forget who I am / And everything I have ever been / To become a stranger once again / In a country where I do not speak the language / To scream without being heard / And for no reason.' These lines, which combine an *ars poetica* with autobiography (the author is literally a stranger, as he lives in Poland), also explain the poet's relevance to this magazine: the experience of being estranged from oneself, of living in a country where 'I do not speak the language' will not need explaining to most survivors.

But rescue – to use this pamphlet's title – can make one a stranger too: one may need to 'forget who I am' when the old 'I' was one of unhappiness, and learn the new language of happiness. This can be (what people who have always been happy find hard to understand) a strange and frightening experience.

Ian Seed can 'do' the looking-back-at-a-significant-memory poem, whether addressing a 'father' who can be talked to 'now that you are dead / and it is safe to do so', or recounting 'rage' at being told how to put cutlery away in a drawer.

'As If', another such poem, recalls 'my divorced mother and father' at a family wedding. The poem, characteristically, is objective, in that it is concerned with the outside world; and yet this objectivity (to apply something said about Tu Fu) is so developed that it includes the poet too, seen from outside. A poem that naively aims at objectivity will try to hide the fact that the subjective poet is always present: experiencing the world and writing the poem of that experience. True objectivity is being able to see one's own viewpoint as *merely* one among many – as a viewpoint which the self can observe and comment upon as it would do with any other person's.

Seed (to talk about a related matter, and to quote Paul Celan on it) 'keeps yes and no unsplit'. Larkin, for example, consciously split yes and no, as if embarrassed about their closeness: a 'poetic' patch in a Larkin poem will be followed by a debunking voice that remarks 'Stuff that!' or 'God knows!'; 'unpoetic' particulars will be followed by a 'poetic' generalisation. To keep yes and no unsplit would be to keep particular and general together; would be to allow the poetic patch to contain its own debunking of itself. 'As If', for example, contains both the 'yes' of the imagination (seeing the divorced parents together it can believe that it is 'as if they had never split') and the 'no' to that the world replies to that (because it knows that they are in fact divorced). To acknowledge imagination's

conjectural ability isn't to pretend that conjecture alone alters facts; but neither does an acknowledgement of facts mean that the imagination's conjectures are meaningless. The final lines – 'as if life were finally being / put right by magic' – would please the sentimental reader who wants a happy ending, whilst causing an unsentimental reader to read the title as the scornful colloquialism 'As If!'

The impressionist-lightness of these poems reminds me more of American poets like Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery or Tom Clark (all poets who took something from French surrealist poetry) than anything I've read in the sometimes narrow mainstream of contemporary British poetry. Mention must also be made of the excellent prose-poems in this book (there are some equally excellent ones in *The Stranger*).

After what I've said about surrealism, there's an excellent poem about a toad, which reminds me slightly of Larkin's animal poems, with its implied redemptive ending: 'I set the toad down. I watch him move / into the long grass', and with its depiction of humankind's cruelty towards animals. Unlike Larkin, Seed feels for the children who torture the toad as well as the toad itself ('victims / making new victims'). Those who think poetry should be realistic and not excessive in emotion and diction, could join in admiring this poem. There's also (again a different note) a tiger in bed – 'This is what life's all about / He said out loud to himself / Munching soggy toast' – and the final poem, about stilling a crying baby, the title of which again is in a fragmentary piece of the conditional: 'May It Always Be'. We feel this wish to be, quite properly, directed at not only the baby, but to the man who holding it, and the unspoken conditions that have made this moment possible.

**Moss & Flint, 2002. ISBN 0 905 127 064. £2. Available from Moss & Flint Books, 12 Shepherd Walk, Kegworth, Derby DE74 2HS**

## NEW PLAYS

### Pig Tales

by Julie MacNamara

Reviewed by James Ferguson

*Pig Tales*, written and performed by Julie MacNamara, was commissioned as part of last year's Xposure Festival, funded by London Arts.

Full of sound and fury, the piece starts with a hammer being slammed onto a surface as 'Come on girls, don't be shy / Get your pork from Uncle Bri' is shouted out. We are introduced to all the characters associated with Pig: mother, father, uncle, fortune-teller, psychiatrist.

The drama deals directly with issues: gender is the most prominent. Pig was born female, but brought up as a male by a father who convinces himself that the midwife who cut the umbilical cord has cut off his son's penis. The middle section of the play especially, when Pig is institutionalised, has a nerve-racking discussion by Pig's psychiatrist (talking to the other psychiatrists) about whether to make him/her into a male or a female; this is counterparted with some quotations from medical literature on gender reassignment. Another interesting use of non-fictional material comes when Pig's Irish father gives a nationalist rant uses the words of various Twentieth Century dictators.

Much of the play is violent: there are rows and tensions, the father shouting at the social workers through the door, the clatter of household implements falling on the floor. But other notes were struck too, from the aimlessness of life in the asylum, to the tenderness of the mother holding the baby Pig in her arms, to the energetic posturing of Pig in front of the mirror, Bryllcreaming his/her hair and jabbering to the audience, fake penis in hand

Unlike theatre that drearily keeps one actor to one part, uses representational scenery and effects, as if people have no imaginations, *Pig Tales* demands one actor playing many parts, switching between song and speech, locations and times; the video/stills screen is used to do what the live action cannot, not as a backdrop. There were some particularly effective moments: one where the performer sat on her chair just in front of the front rows, facing forward, with a black and white film showing on the screen. She turned round to us and said, 'I like this one!' her face lit up.

Deliberately disturbing, both emotionally and intellectually, but also tender and funny, the enthusiastic audience reaction to *Pig Tales* suggests that socially-engaged drama is still a possibility in this land of glossy production, US imports and repeats.

*Pig Tales* ran from the 5th to the 8th November 2002 at Jacksons Lane, and from the 13th to the 30th November 2002 at the Kennington Oval.

## REVIEWERS NEEDED

If you would like to review for *Poetry Express*, please write to our Reviews Editor, Roy Holland, at our usual address, given on page two.

If you or a group you belong to have published a collection recently, please send a copy to him, and he will do his best to place a review here.

## London Events

31 January 2004

7:30 p.m.

At D4, Euston Road, London NW1

Lee Wilson, Francesca Beard, John Rety and Mindshop

Admission £3.50. Concessions £1.50. See map on back cover for details of how to get to D4.

### Poetry Cafe

Our regular event at the Poetry Cafe is held on the second Thursday of every month.

## London Workshops

The Garden Studio, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 3ND. 7.30pm: FREE

Survivors' Poetry holds fortnightly workshops for survivors. These provide participants with an opportunity to have work reviewed and discussed in a friendly, supportive environment. Participants of feedback workshops should bring along a poem typed, or clearly hand written from which we can take photocopies. The dates for Spring / Summer 2003 are:

Please contact the Survivors' Poetry office if you would like for further details about the Write on the Edge workshops.

## Ken Smith: An Obituary

Roy Holland

Survivors' Poetry has been very sad to learn of the death of Ken Smith, who was co-editor of our anthology *Beyond Bedlam*, had performed at our Somers Town Blues Night and showed a consistent interest in the work of disadvantaged poets, and we would like to extend our best wishes to his widow Judi Benson and his family. He had the bad luck to contract legionnaire's disease while on a visit to Cuba.

Ken studied at Leeds University and became one of the editors of *Stand* magazine, his first collection *The Pity* appearing in 1967. For the following decade he put out his own pamphlets and supported himself by teaching. In 1982 *Bloodaxe* brought out *The Poet Reclining: Selected Poems 1962-1980* which gave him renewed popularity. In the poem 'To Survive' he wrote 'Each day the last/ each a survivor. A shaft/ other days fall into'. He was one of the first poets to hold residencies in prisons and in *Fox Running* he vividly described the nature of a personal breakdown.

Ken was prolific throughout the eighties and nineties and in 2002 *Shed: Poems 1980-2001* came out from *Bloodaxe*. Sean O'Brien has written of his poetry 'While his way into a poem is often oblique ... the result never lacks the animating charge of real feeling -sympathy, love, loss, delight, longing, political fury.' His passing will indeed be a loss.

## SOLO SURVIVORS

Now on its seventh issue, Solo Survivors is a poetry magazine affiliated to Survivors' Poetry. Founded by John Hirst, who now edits the magazine in conjunction with Becki Mee, the magazine comes out three times a year.

The editors ask for "well-crafted, unpublished work in any style and on any topic, up to a maximum of 80 lines, and between 2-4 poems per submission", with priority given to "first-time, unpublished poets, sufferers and survivors, subscribers and supporters, regular contributors and established small-press poets". (Include a stamped-addressed envelope with submissions.) The magazine is usually around 50 pages in length, with a colour cover, and in addition to poems features reviews and artwork.

Single copies of the current issue are £4; a back-issue only £2.50; and a year's subscription (three issues) is available at the discounted price of £10. Cheques should be made out to "J.A. Hirst (Solo Survivors)". Their address is: Solo Survivors, 37 Micklehill Drive, Shirley, Solihull, West Midlands, B90 2PU.

## COFFEE-HOUSE POETRY AT THE TROUBADOUR

presents the best of contemporary poetry from new & established writers - local, regional & international - in the famous Troubadour basement, one of London's liveliest & best-loved poetry venues since 1961. Readings Mondays from 8 to 10pm at the Troubadour Coffee House, 265 Old Brompton Road, London SW5. Tickets £5, concessions £4, season tickets 50% off. Near the junction between Earls Court Road and Old Brompton Road. Nearest tube: Earls Court. For information, advance booking, season ticket and mailing list enquiries, phone 020 8354 0660, or write to Anne-Marie Fyfe, Coffee House Poetry, PO Box 16210, London W4 1ZP.

Survivors' Poetry is a national literature and performance organisation dedicated to promoting poetry by survivors of mental distress through workshops, performances, readings and publications to audiences all over the UK. It was founded in 1991 by four poets with firsthand experience of the mental health system.

Our community outreach work provides survivors with opportunities to actively participate in writing or performance training workshops, poetry performances and publishing projects throughout the UK. We support the formation of a nationwide network of survivors' writing groups and work in partnership with local and national arts, mental health, community and disability organisations.

#### workshops

We hold regular workshops in London at the Diorama Arts Centre, NW1 and organise many one-off projects in London and throughout the UK.

#### performances

We have regular performances twice a month at two separate venues in central London. These give space for new and established survivor poets to read or perform their work in relaxed surroundings. Survivor Poets regularly take part in literary and poetry festivals throughout the country.

#### publications

We have published a number of poetry anthologies, including *Under the Asylum Tree*

and *Beyond Bedlam* (Survivors' Press / Anvil), both of which are available direct from us. New anthologies are *Ten Russian Poets* (Survivors' Press / Anvil) and *We Have Come Through* (Bloodaxe).-We now publish poems in the Broadsheet inside *Poetry Express*, and welcome submissions for it.

#### support to writers' groups

If you are involved in a writing or poetry group you may find that there are benefits in your group becoming an affiliated member of the Survivors' Poetry national network of writing groups.

We offer workshop facilitator training and other training opportunities for members of your group. There are opportunities to visit or take part in literary festivals and the chance to share skills and information with other writers and writing groups throughout the UK. Contact us for further details.

#### free mailings

We publish and distribute *Poetry Express*, our twenty page newsletter, four times a year. It contains articles, features, personal stories, news, letters, events listings and book reviews, as well as news about Survivors' Poetry and Survivors' Poetry groups all over the country. Through joining our mailing list you will receive this newsletter, quarterly - completely free of charge!

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