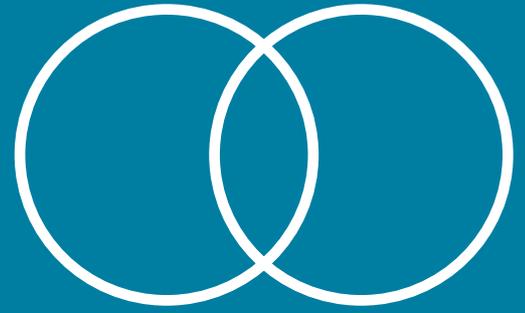


# POETRY EXPRESS

promoting poetry by survivors



QUARTERLY FROM SURVIVORS POETRY

winter 2002/03

number 16

## ‘Staying Alive’

Bloodaxe’s new  
anthology  
reviewed

the  
spirituality  
issue

**FOUR-PAGE POETRY BROADSHEET INSIDE!**

### ALSO PLUS

Taken Seriously: the Spirituality of Survivors  
My Dragonfly Mentor  
Dream, Socrates . . . Dream  
Reviewed: Durmesh, Ambert, Padel

William Blake  
Arts and Stroke Survivors  
Training Opportunities  
Wiseman and Bly’s Kabir

# who's who. at survivors' poetry

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# ... from the Director

**Hello and welcome to the winter edition of Poetry Express!**

**By the time you read this, the end of year festivities are probably a distant memory but we hope you managed to keep the resolution we suggested last year – to read and write more poetry in 2002. For those of you who remember what I said in my column last winter, this seems like a good time to reflect on the year's achievements.**

**Last year, I resolved that Survivors' Poetry would get out on the road in the next twelve months – and this has been the case. Since I took over as Director in October 2001, members of Survivors' Poetry have been working all over the country, running writing workshops and seminars, giving lectures and performing poetry. In fact, at a recent count, it became apparent that we had averaged an event every five weeks since that date.**

**Where have we been, you may ask? To date Survivors' Poetry has performed in libraries, churches, arts centres, a hospital and two universities. Staff and their work have also been featured in The Guardian, The Independent on Sunday and The Observer, as well as on Radio Kent! This year, will see us on the road once again. Events are planned for Wales, Cambridge and Cornwall before our 10th Anniversary anthology finally comes out with Bloodaxe this May.**

**Of course, as we travel the country our membership expands apace. At the last count, there were well over 2000 people subscribing to the magazine – an increase of more than a third since this time last year – and we had just managed to affiliate our first group in the Channel Islands. Now, with individual members already found in France and the USA, Survivors' Poetry is hoping to fulfil the other part of last year's promise to you and expand its work abroad. Consequently, I am provisionally planning our first visit to America. Watch this space for more information later in 2003.**

**In the meantime, we hope you enjoy reading the current issue of Poetry Express – and our first Poetry Broadsheet. Further contributions are welcome. As always, we look forward to hearing from you.**

**With best wishes,**

**Alison Combes**



## ... the spirituality issue

There are, to put it very cautiously, many connections between spirituality and poetry. From the Psalms to Telugu religious-sexual poetry, to Sufi poets like Khayyam or Rumi, to Hölderlin's passionate plea to the Fates 'Give me just one more summer, you Powers, / One more Autumn to ripen my song.' And it hardly needs to be argued here that disturbance of one sort or another has a connection with both spirituality and poetry. Whatever spirituality means, it surely isn't playing safe; it isn't something that can be bought to assure us that our lives, unchanged, are exactly right. 'The Temple is not for sale,' as Pound writes in his Cantos. Or, without wishing to venture into theology, this perhaps has something to do with Jesus clearing the money-lenders out of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Spirituality, surely, is something that changes us; and what it changes as we change. Hence the metaphor of the mountain, used by Dante in *The Divine Comedy* to describe the journey towards purification, and by St John of the Cross to describe that towards mystical enlightenment. The metaphor describes the difficulty of the journey. St John of the Cross's mystical writings were written as commentaries on the poems he wrote during a long imprisonment: the route that he describes takes one through 'nada, nada, nada, nada, nada' (nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing). This finds some reflection in the work of the Holocaust-survivor Paul Celan, who called one of his later collections *Die Niemandrose* (*The No-one's Rose*).

Spirituality could be justified to a militantly rational person as offering people a way to make sense of their own lives. (Much like poetry, a poet might say.) One of Socrates' maxims was that 'the unexamined life isn't worth living' and spirituality can offer one way of doing just that. As David Lambert's article reminds us, Socrates, that hero of reason and debunker of other's beliefs, himself heard at key points in his life what he interpreted as a divine voice that would speak to him: or what a psychologist might interpret as 'auditory hallucination.' At the end of his life, in prison and facing the death penalty, Socrates is supposed to have turned to writing poetry, in case this was what the divine voice, heard in recurring dreams in this instance, had meant by telling him to 'make and practice art.'

In such a complex matter, no conclusion is fitting, except to applaud recent reports that argue for the spirituality of mental health users to be taken seriously; and to

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reflect that, in a world where so much is not known, to call anything that someone else has seen, heard or felt 'simply' a feature of an illness is a great presumption. 'Simple' it isn't.

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 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 or on disk. We cannot guarantee publication and the editor reserves 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 the Spring 2003 is 31 March 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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# Taken Seriously: the

Roy Holland writes about the Mental

At Survivors' Poetry we have received so many submissions of poems with a spiritual content, that we thought it was time to give serious consideration to the issue of mental health and spirituality and to evaluate some recent projects in this area.

The report *Taken Seriously: The Somerset Spirituality Project* represents a further stage in the Mental Health Foundation's 'Strategies for Living' project and is the result of interviews and discussions with 25 mental health service users in Somerset with an interest in spirituality or religion. It argues that mental health services should recognise the role of spirituality in people's lives and that faith communities should be sensitive to people's experiences of mental health problems. In addition, a final section explores the links between psychotic and mystical experiences.

The project was based on user-led research, and followed others on ear acupuncture, peer support as experienced in voluntary sector drop-ins and the role of the mosque in the lives of Muslim men with mental health problems. Users designed the projects, drew up the questionnaire, carried out the interviews and analysed the results. Interviewees were encouraged to become involved in the research as it developed.

Interest in spirituality arose from the results of the survey 'Knowing Our Own Minds' in which over 50% of the 401 respondents said that religious or spiritual beliefs were important to them. They may provide a sense of purpose and comfort, allow the expression of pain or develop compassion for others. The new report does however cover the problems some people found in organised religion. 35 people expressed an interest in being interviewed and of these 22 were or had been Christians. Others were

pagans or held New-Age beliefs and there was one Buddhist.

One respondent said 'We're on a journey, each one of us is on a journey, we either regress or we develop.' Some traced incidents in their lives chronologically. Crisis could come at any time during the journey, and religion was not always a help. One person reported that 'transcendental experiences turned very nasty and became a series of hallucinations'. Others felt 'a deeper experience of spirituality' following their problems, saying 'God became a friend who got me through' or 'Faith has taught me to have courage'. Often other service users were companions on the journey, providing a greater sense of acceptance. But people could feel misunderstood. Strangely failure could be an opportunity for transformation and even chronic depression might offer a way forward. A Buddhist said 'life is a series of stages toward enlightenment and ... gradually the trinkets of materialistic existence fall away'. The journey may also be within – reaching God through the unconscious – and may extend after death. The report recommends that both users and carers respect 'the individuality and uniqueness of each individual's spirituality and avoid theorising or substituting their own experience.'

A discussion of the mental health services is divided into 'places, people, connections and meanings'. Certainly in the arid and disempowering atmosphere of a hospital it seems a good idea to set aside a space for meditation. One respondent mentioned the horror of the staff when they asked for a Bible. Another appreciated that the Chaplain was available to everybody. It can feel very unsafe talking about the paranormal, paganism or anything that is not mainstream. The stock response may 'invalidate that real core sense of self'. Not everyone wants a well-meaning

chaplain to try to cheer them up, but some medical staff were very sensitive to users' feelings of spirituality. When someone is in acute distress, personal interest makes a lot of difference. It is a mistake for a professional to hold onto their model rigidly. They must 'enter the world of the other person' and may need to learn about their own internal world before they can help others. Psychiatrists may have 'a twisted view of what the Church is'. Information about access to religious resources would be useful to patients.

The section of the report on spirituality and psychosis is of great interest. One person said 'It's a narrow line between hallucination and vision and inner voice and auditory hallucination.' Some experiences can be interpreted in either way. A feeling of being 'physically crucified' and experiencing 'all deaths that man has ever known' could be seen as representing the universality of human suffering. Hallucination can lead to insight, and some researchers now suggest that inappropriate response to the initial stages of heightened awareness can actually turn the experience into a harmful one. But surely some people's hallucinations are negative from the word go, consisting of critical conversations about them, and they might find it more helpful if friends and professionals actually challenged their content. Humouring this type of auditory hallucination can be unhelpful. The response therefore should be geared to the type of hallucination. An appendix to the report lists historical figures, such as Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Joan of Arc, Handel and Van Gogh, who experienced divine voices or saw visions, and points out the changing attitude to such phenomena. Whereas it may be true that some voice hearers do not suffer from mental illness, it is important not to further stigmatise people whose unpleasant hallucinations would make life

# Spirituality of Survivors

Health Foundation report and others

impossible without some kind of treatment or medication. Overall however the report makes a very strong case that survivors' spirituality should be taken seriously.

A previous report by Hanif Bobat for the Strategies for Living Project, entitled A User-Led Research Project: Exploring the benefits that Muslim men with severe mental health problems find from attending Mosque, describes the Mosque as a supportive community centre and talks of the sense of serenity and calmness which participants felt through being in the House of Allah. Ritual cleansing is a way of connecting with the Creator. Listening to recitations from the Holy Quran is described as 'therapeutic' for the soul. For one participant the practice of chanting was helpful. Some respondents continued to attend the Mosque when seriously distressed. There were occasions when some brothers whispered hurtful words when they discovered someone was mentally ill, leaving them feeling unaccepted. Ramadan was felt by all to be 'an auspicious month full of mercy, and participants developed a greater sense of kindness, patience and perseverance.' The survey related to a small group of men, but their feelings were generally very positive, giving them a renewed sense of belonging. The report calls for further

research and a broadening to include the experiences of Muslim women too.

Another venture linking mental health and spirituality is the Bishop John Robinson Fellowship based at the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, the Institute of Psychiatry and Heythrop College, University of London. It is defined as an 'educational and research fellowship, the work of which focuses on the relationship of religion/spirituality and mental health, with the intention of promoting religious and theological principles across the spectrum of mental health care.' It was founded in 1994 and is the only one of its kind in the UK. Patient and user groups are included in its national network. The Fellowship Newsletter for September 2001 presents articles based on a conference which they organised in November 2000. Apparently the four speakers were invited to comment on Ken Wilber's *The Eye of the Spirit*. John Rowan defined the transpersonal as being distinct from the New Age, from the spiritual and from religion, and then quotes from the West Coast guru, Stanislas Grof, 'ten different spiritual emergencies which can arise and which need careful handling if they are not to take the person into a psychic realm unnecessarily.' These emergencies include near-death experiences,

shamanic crisis, channelling and possession. Having seen the results of Grof actually encouraging people to get high through hyperventilation in a workshop he ran at Schumacher College, I am very sceptical of his motives. To me spirituality should aim to bring inner and outer peace, hope, love and joy as well as an understanding of negative features of one's life and surroundings, and after John Rowan's article it was a relief to turn to the other conference papers.

The March 2002 issue of The Fellowship Newsletter is far more level-headed and more relevant to those people who write in to Survivors' Poetry with spiritual problems or mystical poetry. The Fellowship also provides reduced fees to attend conferences within its remit to associates, and the minimum annual donation to become an associate is £10. It might be worthwhile for survivor poets with an interest in spirituality to get involved.

The two Mental Health Foundation reports are available from them at Merchants House, 83 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0HW. (tel. 020 7802 0300). The Bishop John Robinson Fellow in Pastoral Theology may be contacted at the Spiritual and Pastoral Care Service, Maudsley Hospital, Denmark Hill, London, SE5 8AZ. (e-mail: julia.head@slam-tr.nhs.uk).

## Pete Shaughnessy

**We were very sorry to hear of the death of Pete Shaughnessy, aged 40, on December 15th 2002. He was one of the founders of Mad Pride and was engaged in the campaign against the draft mental health bill at the time of his death.**

**Mad Pride attempted to turn round the stigma of the mentally ill and to give a voice to psychiatric patients. It followed on from Reclaim Bedlam, which he started in 1997 with a following of patients throughout the country. Mad Pride produced *A Celebration of Mad Culture (2001)* and a CD, *Nutters with Attitude*. Pete organised demonstrations against the extension of compulsory treatment and also worked as an advocate for patients at Broadmoor. Pete was able to keep going through depression and appeared at the MIND annual conference at Cardiff in the autumn.**

**We would like to send our best wishes to his wife Penny, his stepson Daniel and his children Francesca, Sam and Nathan.**

# Staying Alive

Bloodaxe's new anthology reviewed by Alison Combes

At first glance *Staying Alive* would seem to be the ideal choice of anthology for survivor poets during the holiday period. Subtitled real poems for unreal times, the central premise of Neil Astley's book appears sound: that in times of stress, poems can act as anchors – connecting us to the physical world, reminding us that we are not alone – in so far as other poets also suffer, celebrate and survive similar life-events to our own.

The anthology is catholic in its choices. Intentionally perhaps, there is something for everyone here. And from the majority of reviews in the literary press, and the comments on the book jacket too, it seems that such a comprehensive selection succeeds completely for some, John Berger most notably among them: 'I live in France. I take this book everywhere with me. And almost every day I find myself opening it to translate a poem to somebody after a discussion or a joke or a conversation . . . I make crude translations, but afterwards I hear a sudden intake of breath, a shared laugh or I see a silent nod of the head.'

Certainly this selection includes many of my own favourite poems of the twentieth century, ranging from Bishop's 'One Art' to Owen's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', via Auden and MacNiece. Any one of these poems repays rereading and I was delighted to discover new favourites too: Kaplinski's 'To eat a pie and to have it', O'Callaghan's 'Federal Case', Fenton's 'In Paris with You'. More than this, the book itself is divided into twelve sections – one for each of the twelve days of Christmas, I happily thought. In fact so full is the anthology that I could almost believe that I would find the eponymous partridge in a pear tree secreted within its pages.

But be warned! As the editor himself signals with his choice of epigraph from Kafka, this book is not wholly positive in its attitude to humanity, and is therefore not necessarily the best choice to fill one with Christmas cheer: 'One should only read books which bite and sting one. If the book we are reading does not wake us up with a blow to the head, what's the point of reading? A book must be the axe which smashes the frozen sea within us.' And the section entitled 'My People' does not flinch from confronting conflicts between different individuals and cultural groups, which seem so poignant in the unreal times that follow September 11th, 2001. Indeed, so powerful was this particular section and the memories it aroused, that it coloured the whole experience of reading this anthology for me. Thus, in the end, although the last two sections of the book, 'Me, the Earth, the Universe' and 'The Art of Poetry', speak eloquently of the transformative – even redemptive – power of poetry, it was, for this reader, a bit too little, a bit too late. These sections being restricted to a mere 43 pages in the 456 of the collection, they seemed almost an afterthought – sugar to sweeten the bitterness that the editor identifies as synonymous with our human condition.

Perhaps, having got a bad case of 'Christmas, bah humbug!' I am being a little unfair. Certainly this is a thoughtful selection and the result of a lifetime's serious reading. I certainly do think that *Staying Alive* warrants inspection, but probably in this New Year, when we come to making resolutions about doing good deeds to one's fellow men. Meanwhile, if you chose this book as your Christmas read, as I would have done, then I urge you

to put your hand into this lucky dip slowly – as you have been warned, your choice may bite . . .

## . . . and by John Horder

There are two poems about hugging, my favourite subject, in Neil Astley's new anthology, compiled in response to the collective anxieties that have been around over the past few years in our increasingly technological society. This is two more than in most anthologies, which habitually provide few if any insights into the insanely touch-deprived world we live in. They are: Tess Gallagher's 'The Hug' and Thom Gunn's 'The Hug'. I far prefer Gunn's more accomplished poem 'Touch', the title-poem of one of his Fabers collections. But I wouldn't want to learn most of these off by heart for The Poetry Challenge, my favourite event by far in the poetry year, which is the acid test for me.

Anne Rouse, Ken Smith and Matthew Sweeney, three poets connected with *Survivors Poetry*, are all represented in this soul-searching collection. It has made me ask two basic questions: (1) 'What is the point of anthologies?' and (2) 'Whom are they intended for?' I have never heard either question seriously or non-seriously discussed in public debate at The Voice Box, by The Poetry Society or even by Barry Tebb in his boat-rocking *Poetry Newsletter*. That presumably is the point Astley is trying to make. We are singularly without meaningful literary debate in this country.

There are two poems, Mary Oliver's 'Wild Geese' and Raymond Carver's 'Late Fragment' which I love sufficiently to learn by heart. I am very partial to short poems with lasting nourishment compressed into a very small space. I end by quoting 'Late Fragment', the last poem in *Staying Alive*, in its entirety. 'And did you get what / you wanted from this life, even so? / I did. / And what did you want? / To call myself beloved, to feel myself / beloved on this earth.'

***Staying Alive: real poems for unreal times* (Bloodaxe paperback, 496 pp.) is available from bookshops priced £10.95 ISBN 1 85224 588 3**

# News

## Survivors' Poetry news, plus festivals and competitions

<http://groups.msn.com/survivorspoetry>  
Please visit our website. You can join it, see our books, find out where we have network groups, read about our events, our history, find out the dates and times of our workshops and events and who is performing or facilitating at them, find a map of how to get to the Diorama.

### Poetry Magazine Reviewers Needed!

We are setting up a section of the website where we will post reviews of poetry magazines and e-zines. Anyone interested, please write to us (remember to include your address) and we will send you a poetry magazine for review. We will then post your review on the website. (If you don't have a computer, we will type it up ourselves; if you do, you can email it to us.)

### Email Newsletter

This *will* start up! The way to go on the mailing list is to join the website, which you do by following the instructions once there. The newsletter will go roughly fortnightly and contain information on our activities, news and perhaps a poem or two.

### Free Publishing Information Pack

We have produced a three-part information pack for poets interested in publishing their work. It contains addresses, advice on submitting poems, advice about how to self-publish, a list of books on writing and publishing, and information on what we publish. For your free pack, post us a self-addressed A4 envelope with a 33p stamp on it. If any of you have any ideas about other information packs that would be useful, get in contact!

### Spring Literary Festivals

**BATH LITERATURE FESTIVAL**  
programmes over 100 different literary events from debates and lectures to readers' groups, workshops and films in venues throughout the city, as well as events for children and young people. It runs from 1st to 9th March 2003. For details contact Nicola Bennett, Head of Literature, Bath Festivals Trust, 5 Broad Street, Bath, BA1 5LJ (Phone 01225 462231).

**BETWEEN THE LINES: BELFAST LITERARY FESTIVAL** takes place in March/ April 2003. There will be workshops and

readings. Further details from Crescent Arts Centre, 2-4 University Road, Belfast, BT7 1NH. (Phone 028 9024 6748).

**FEDFEST.** The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, to which a number of Survivors' Poetry groups are affiliated, holds its annual FedFest in Sheffield in April 2003. Bursaries are often available. It is a festival of community writing and presents an opportunity to share writing and publishing skills in a friendly environment. For further details contact Tim Diggles, Burslem School of Art, Queen Street, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 3EJ/ (Phone 01782 822327. Email [fwwcp@cwcom.net](mailto:fwwcp@cwcom.net))

**SPIT-LIT: THE SPITALFIELDS LITERARY FESTIVAL** from 2nd to 9th March 2003 in East London celebrates women's writing and includes events for International Women's Day. It will focus on issues raised by feminist writers and Black and Asian writers including representatives from the local Bengali and Somali communities. For details contact Maggie Pinhorn, Director, Alternative Arts, Top Studio, Bethnal Green Training Centre, Deal Street, London, E1 5HZ. (Phone 0207 375 0441. Email [info@alternativearts.co.uk](mailto:info@alternativearts.co.uk))

**TY NEWYDD FESTIVAL** from 11th to 13th April 2003 is a biennial, bilingual event mixing poets, storytellers, novelists and critics, including poetry slams, poetry stomps, performances incorporating visual arts and dance and music. For details contact Sally Baker, Ty Newydd Writers' Centre, Llanystumdwy, Cricieth, Gwynedd, LL52 0LW. (Phone 01766 522811. Email [tynewydd@dial.pipex.org](mailto:tynewydd@dial.pipex.org))

**WORDS LIVE: HARROW LITERATURE FESTIVAL** in March 2003 includes performances, talks, workshops, book readings, exhibitions, music, poetry and storytelling. Details from Stephen Porter, Harrow Arts & Leisure Service, PO Box 22, Civic Centre, Harrow, Middlesex, HA1 2UW. (Phone 0208 424 1076. Email [stephen.porter@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.porter@harrow.gov.uk))

### Spring Poetry Competitions

**POETRY LONDON COMPETITION** for poems not exceeding 80 lines. Closing date: 14th February 2003. Entry fee:

£4 per poem or £3 for subscribers to the magazine. Contact: PO Box 30104, London, E17 4XR.

**AWARD** (formerly The Haiku Award). Bi-annual competition for free form and conventional haiku (5-7-5) and tanka (5-7-5-7-7). For more information and entry forms visit [www.into.demon.co.uk](http://www.into.demon.co.uk) Closing date: 15th February 2003. Entry Fee: £2 per haiku or £10 for a set of six. Contact: still, 1 Lambolle Place, Belsize Park, London, NW3 4PD.

**ENVOI INTERNATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION** 135. £300 in prize money. Adjudicator: Jeremy Duffield. Closing date: 20th February 2003. For further details contact the Competition Secretary, 17 Millcroft, Bishop's Stortford, Herts, CM23 2BP.

**KICK START POETS OPEN POETRY COMPETITION** for poems not exceeding 60 lines. Entry Fee: £4 for up to two poems. £10 for three poems. And £3 each for 4 or more poems. Closing date: 14th March 2003. Contact: Kick Start Poets, Salisbury Arts Centre, Salisbury, SP1 3UT.

**VER POETS OPEN COMPETITION** for poems not exceeding 30 lines. Closing date: 30th April 2003. Contact: 61 Chiswell Green Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL2 3AL.

**WARE POETS COMPETITION.** 1st Prize £500. Adjudicator: Mimi Khalvati. Closing date: 30th April 2003. Details from the Competition Secretary, Ware Poets Competition 2003. Clothall End House, California, Baldock, SG7 6NU.

**PEACE AND FREEDOM PRESS POETRY COMPETITIONS.** This press has ongoing competitions on various themes. For further details contact them directly or visit their website at [lineone.net/peaceandfreedom/](http://lineone.net/peaceandfreedom/) Contact: 17 Farrow Road, Whaplode, Spalding, Lincs, PE12 0TS.

Thanks to the Poetry Library for this information. For a full list of poetry competitions, please refer to <http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk>.



# Somers Town Blues Night

Poetry and Songs by Survivors

## Recent performances reviewed by Xochitl Tuck, London Events Co-ordinator

The Survivors' Poetry event on the last Saturday of each month takes place either at the Diorama Arts Centre, across Euston Road from Great Portland Street tube station (Warren St tube is a 6 minute walk down Euston Road, and there are buses: see map below) or at the Diorama's new performance space 'D4'. D4 is on Euston Plaza, which is across Euston Road from Warren St tube. The plaza is easy to spot: there are four red strip-lights on metal poles outside it, and Pret a Manger and Starbucks are one side. In both venues, the performance begins at 8 pm, and floorspots are requested to arrive at 7:30 pm.

The November 30th 2002 event featured the sharply acerbic, witty and observant poetry of the inspiring Francesca Beard, the dynamic and intelligent MCing and poetry of The Speech Painter (Geoff Allnutt), and Lee Wilson, a recent arrival on the poetry scene, whose development as a writer over the last couple of years has taken us all by storm. We had a full house at the Diorama's new space, D4, surrounded by the city of glass. The floorspots were of the highest quality, with even a poet from Sweden reading, and spots from Martin Baker, Alistair Brinkley, Veronique Acoustique, Anne Seagel, Giten and Martin the Poet helped to make it a superb evening.

## FORTHCOMING DIORAMA BLUES NIGHTS:

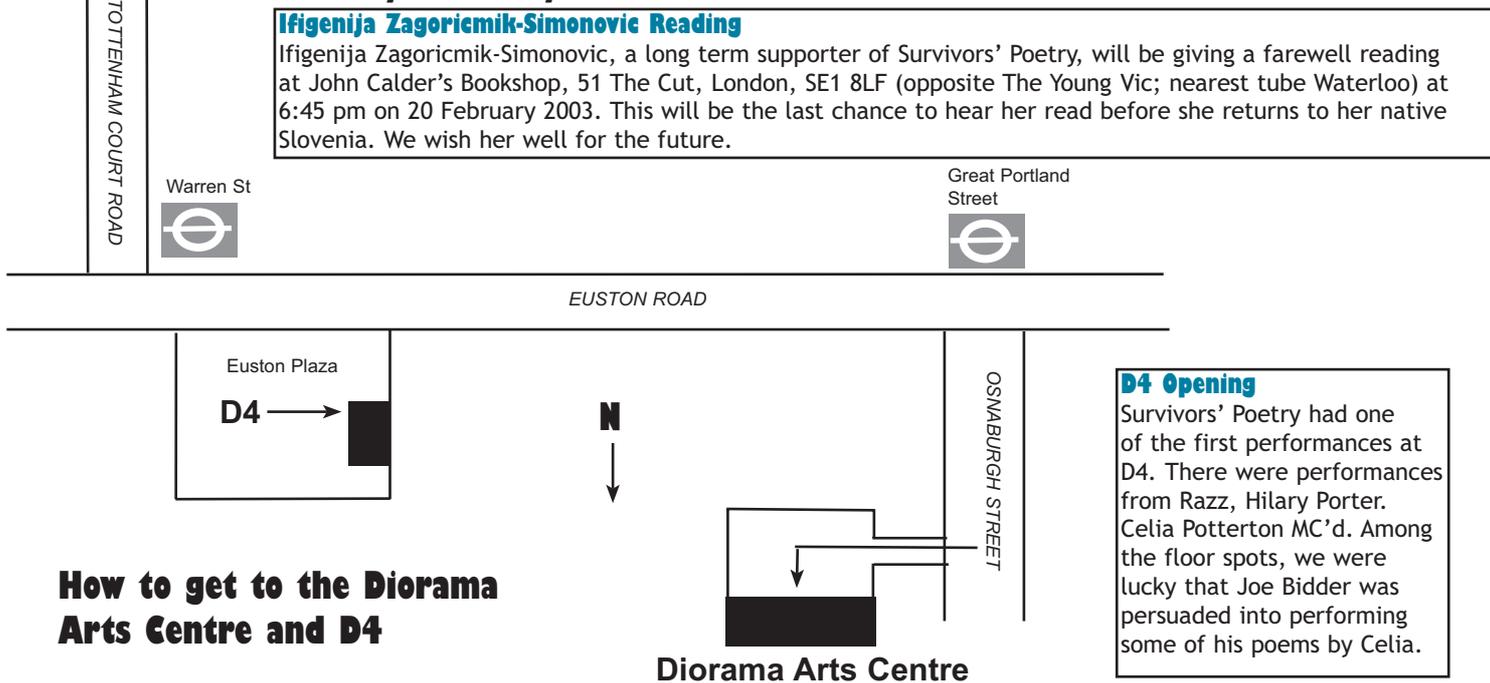
**5 January** at D4, will star Moniza Alvi, the highly-praised poet, whose publications include *Souls* (Bloodaxe, 2002) and *Carrying My Wife* (Bloodaxe, 2000). Also Chas de Swiet and Friends, playing the electric violin, percussion and sitar.

**22 February** On February 22nd 2003 we'll be honoured to feature the great singer-songwriter Kath Tait, and the sound and movement performances of Giten, which will stun you. The evening's MC, Celia Potterton, will play some pieces inspired by the poetry of her late son, Jesse.

**29 March** On March 29th 2003 the irrepressible excitement of Dave Russell will take over the stage, and the equilibrium will be reset by the lovely music of the duo The Children. We are also delighted to be able to bring you the wonderful poet Julian Turner, whose first collection *Crossing the Outskirts* (Anvil, 2002) was nominated for the Forward Prize and was a Poetry Book Society recommendation.

### Ifigenija Zagoricmik-Simonovic Reading

Ifigenija Zagoricmik-Simonovic, a long term supporter of Survivors' Poetry, will be giving a farewell reading at John Calder's Bookshop, 51 The Cut, London, SE1 8LF (opposite The Young Vic; nearest tube Waterloo) at 6:45 pm on 20 February 2003. This will be the last chance to hear her read before she returns to her native Slovenia. We wish her well for the future.



**How to get to the Diorama Arts Centre and D4**

# The Poetry Broadsheet

Poetry Express's Poetry Supplement Winter 2002

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## Winter

Where are you going, my youth?  
My fears, my poetry, my lines blown away  
by whisky and aircraft crashing like a clash of cymbals  
Where are you going my sanity? My images  
that walk out on me and leave me whimpering  
like silly old Calcutta  
Where are you going my love? Drying my tears  
in tampons and the nowhereness of sorrows.

Prasenjit Maiti

## In the Season of Winter

You rushed down the frozen stairs of yesteryears  
while I tried too hold you back in vain, taking stock  
of my mineral water bottles and deciding to go  
down to the northern springs for fresh tear wells  
of sorrows. You had gone round the block to the  
store for provisions, condiments and pickles, fish  
and pizza, insanity and defeats. I just cannot take it  
any more, said I, while you sedately polished your  
glasses against my designer stubble and blue Indian  
skies.

## Crash

Crash! A wave rolled in, gently  
Lapping over my feet -  
Cool relief  
The weight subsided.

Crash! The cool breeze fanned my legs  
Waxing and waning  
with period rhythm.

Crash! The heat of the night  
Burned intensely -  
An internal heat -  
Red-hot metal.

Crash! Stars of light  
Burned above every bed,  
The only sound  
The rotary fan.

Crash! The morphine came on again,  
The stars blurred and  
The waves intensified,  
My pin-point concentration

## Intensive Care

aqua – 'turn back time'

I'm looking at the fish  
that used to be my mother

any suggestions  
for when she leaves hospital  
anyone?

'how about a panic button  
she could carry about the house with her?'

then the phone rings  
panic  
we rush to hospital

now all she does is twitch  
inside a rubber lover

I am a spider pinned to a board  
I am a crab scuttling uselessly away  
from a tidal wave

my life which had a crack  
from the illness of my friend

you are ebbing away  
leaking away like blood  
like life  
the life of a friend  
my best friend

has given me a smack  
and pain that never ends

Rabi Mariathan

Relaxed  
I drifted freely.

Crash! I forgot the concrete  
Rising  
As I fell  
And the snap!  
Of my ankles  
Breaking!  
On rock-hard ground.

Ben Burr

---

As yet . . .

As I sit here  
all alone  
I at last realise  
what I must have known  
I am flesh and bone  
my soul  
as yet unowned  
a child of the universe  
as yet unheard  
I cry into the night  
I want to be owned  
I shut my eyes  
to keep them closed  
let my mind and body roam  
the most important  
thing  
as yet  
to be found  
someone  
to love me  
here and now

JC McFee

Dreaming now . . .

Dreams unfold me  
don't ask  
to own me  
just let me lay by your side  
as long as you want me  
I'll be your lady  
no matter what  
time or day  
you know  
somewhere  
deep inside  
that we belong  
as one  
dreams enfold me  
and you're there too  
I'm your lady  
as in days of old  
feelings now so intense  
I can feel your breath  
your lips kiss my neck  
your sweat  
drips over my  
willing body  
you call out for me  
I awake  
in an instant  
the smile  
of recognition  
who's dreaming now

JC McFee

Sanctity

You were a ghostly angel who stole my heart with your moonlight complexion. You shone opalescent, the sun captured your bounty, like the light of creation, like the radiant earth. Hair ebony, like the fathoms of space, raven, like a nurturing bird. Your eyes, melancholy solemn, the patience of unfurlment, of love. your eyes like rain drops, like moon pools. Chiselled face, brooding into sanctity, collective, like cosy milk. Your pink tincture as delicate as rose syrup, kissed with Canaan wine. Your eyes held the arrangement of the cosmos. There was something as wide as the sky, with all the colours of sunset. You were the secret of starlight, the essence of creation. You announced the cosmos, the total secret of the universe.

Mark Welford

Summer

When the grass is lush and cool  
and there heaves a carpet of scenty flowers  
when the sky is strenuous blue  
and the leaves are pristine  
when the trees are to full embodiment  
and the area gleams in throbbing light  
when the day is at full stretch  
copious, fruitful and beautiful  
then the sun dazzles your fruitful body  
and you are awash with the scents  
your hair drapes like bundles of silk  
and we sit in the lush cool grass  
then I am born of milk and honey  
and I truly love you

Mark Welford

Far From the Maddening Crowd

Far from the maddening crowd  
The maddening crowd  
I am the maddening crowd  
Loud and boisterous  
Full of opinions  
Significant and insignificant  
I am the thick, the hungry  
The all-encompassing eye  
I see all and I see nothing  
My world is insular  
The quiet place  
And sleep  
Deep and dreamless  
I can rest here a while  
Like sleeping beauty  
For a hundred years or so  
Far from the maddening crowd  
The maddening crowd

Rachel O'Sullivan

## Roof Heights

This jet light brims over the roof  
Sides, and we  
Shadowy outlines are cut wide.  
The moon weapon has been slung  
Back and hangs like  
Some torn nail on night's flank.  
Giddy from sleep snatching  
You stare at the hatched stars,  
Whilst I gaze at the city's own cosmos  
Of ever orange corporate lighting  
And am consumed by your deft  
Silence.

You seemed cut and dry. But tonight  
The darkness mists into your silhouette.  
A human tunnel that has no backdrop  
Soft as a misstep over this roof.  
To tread into you and lose footing  
Is tempting  
As there is no map to your  
Enfilading mind.

And as time rests on both our wrists,  
Straps supine as you on this stone bench  
The seconds now and gone rain into us.

As we rest on this stone bench  
I remember ... maps, for they can be folded,  
So countries overlap and mountains sex  
And seas drown  
Seas.  
And we are always lost  
And foot loose.

So fold the map to restrict the vessels  
Of long roads  
And close your palm,  
Or hold mine, for those  
Fine lines are not future streets.  
So soon... we'll meet on a roof and gaze down  
On endless traffic.  
So  
Soon

Dawn Marrow

## The Purest Bliss For Mehera

The purest bliss  
inside me is  
the nothing in  
the nothingness.

John Horder

## Be here

You wouldn't want to be here  
Be here where I am.  
It's dark and dismal  
And lonely at times.  
There's no one to comfort you.  
Everyone is busy.  
Working hard.  
They forget about me.  
The walls are wafer thin.  
I can hear them talking, laughing, joking -  
No doubt about me.  
No one likes me here.  
They all look down upon me.  
Searching.  
I have no respect here.  
Here I am a nuisance.  
You wouldn't want to be here.

Linda Thompson

## Just another nice thought

How can I show you how I really feel?  
Broken up and swallowed whole  
A symbol of British society,  
A shame.  
Nervousness  
Feeling like I have to impress  
Tared to shreds and left to willow away.  
Wilting in a never ending pit of scorn.  
Loneliness  
Feeling like I can't fit in,  
I've been away so long the scars have faded.  
And I wonder  
How long will this last  
Will it never end.  
Seething in self pity  
Wallowing in greed.  
The masters take their stand  
Who is in charge now?

Linda Thompson

## Fabulous Old Man Baba

Fabulous  
Old nothingness man.  
I know I don't exist:  
You know I am.

John Horder

## Images II

Sound echoes narrowly on the stairwell:

The night we left the cinema  
The homecoming was to a darkened house,  
Strangely sinister,  
As if crimes, odious, terrible, had taken place.

In the basement we found a wall of flesh and  
blue;  
Don Quixote rode in logic and abstract;  
The wind pierced the wells;  
The women of Guernica screamed in fixity.

Under the house  
The paintbrush we castigated  
Had changed history.

Stealthily we crept back up the stairs,  
Left the scene undisturbed.  
In the car again we returned later.  
We washed our hands of history.

The artist may take it  
And make of it  
Our trivial destiny.

We live out our irrelevance,  
Our nullity, time and time again.

Paul Murphy

## To Verity

Little grown child of God

You have noticed  
Your own cocoon  
Lying silent on the grass.

Your shadow dances upon it  
Your wings  
Reflect a thousand spectrums  
Upon it  
And yet  
    You wonder  
    Why  
    It has not moved.

You  
Are the rainbow  
And the shadow.

Take your eyes to the sun  
And  
Look  
Again.

And again  
At 3:45 a.m.

I am awake to my fearful December dreams  
With love unenacted . . .

I wait by my candle  
And we watch together,  
My candle and I,  
The night burn past.

Weeds for dreams  
And drugs for staying awake . . .  
    Oh  
    To rest  
In true consciousness  
Is best  
By far  
And near  
And away!  
    The way  
    Eludes me . . .  
Like an ant  
Bent on his work – eaten  
By his own formic acid . . .  
I work at waiting.

Somaya Pilichowska

from 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'

## PROVERBS OF HELL

The road to excess leads to the palace of wisdom.  
A fool sees not the same tree as a wise man sees.  
He whose face gives no light shall never become a star.  
No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings.  
The most sublime act is to set another before you.  
If the fool would persist in his folly he would become  
wise.  
Folly's is the cloke of Knavery.  
Shame is Pride's cloke.  
Prisons are built with stones of the law, brothels with  
bricks of religion.  
The pride of the peacock is the glory of God. The lust of  
the goat is the bounty of God. The wrath of the lion is  
the wisdom of God. The nakedness of woman is the  
work of God.  
Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps.  
What is now proved was once only imagined.  
The cistern contains: the fountain overflows.  
The eagle never lost so much time as when he  
submitted to learn of the crow.  
You never know what is enough unless you know what  
is more than enough.  
If others had not been foolish, we should have been so.  
To create a flower is the labour of ages.  
Damn braces: bless relaxes.  
The crow wished every thing was black, the owl that  
everything was white.  
Improvement makes straight roads, but the crooked  
roads without improvement are roads of Genius.  
Enough! or too much!

William Blake

# WIRED ON WORDS

## Survivors' Open Mic at The Poetry Café



### Wired On Words reviewed by Xochitl Tuck

This event, which takes place at the Poetry Cafe on 22 Betterton Street, WC2 9NU (a short walk from Covent Garden) is a wonderful opportunity for new and more experienced poets to have their work heard in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. Admission is £2 / £1 concessions. There is a lift to the lower floor and a wheelchair-accessible toilet. Smoking upstairs, non-smoking downstairs. If you want to read or perform your work you need to arrive by 7.30pm in order to book your floor spot. The doors will open to other audience members from 7.30pm and the performance will start at 8pm sharp. We do not have a finish time for the event and this very much depends on the amount of people who want to do floor spots. There will be a break halfway through the evening.

In December the well-known poet Barry Tebb and Brenda Williams read beautifully from their work. In January Mala Mason, delighted us with stories of her adventurous life and with her vivid, passionate, rebellious poetry. A bevy of brilliant floorspots contributed to creating electrifying atmospheres at both events. These included, to our everlasting pleasure, the work of the young poets and musicians Lucinda, Norrin, Jeanette Ju Pierre, John Arthur, Martin Baker, Pamala Harvey, Ray, the great Giten, Emerald, the wonderful Lee Wilson and Kath Tait.

### FORTHCOMING WIRED ON WORDS:

**13 February** We are happy to announce as guest the poet's poet Razz, and as MC the utterly charming and iridescent Emerald.

### Survivors' Poetry at Jacksons' Lane

As part of the Xposure Disability Arts festival, Survivors' Poetry had its first performance at Jacksons Lane community centre. The fact that the attendance was sparse masks the fact that this turned out to be a very special evening. Poet Leah Thorn presented a performance piece in progress that she was working on with a dancer, Magdalene, with the dance being used to interpret Leah's poems. Leah read her 'I can't dance' poem ('I can't dance / She says / And then she does') from her *I Lay My Stones* sequence about being the child of Holocaust survivors: something that she also movingly talked about. The audience also were treated to a showing of Leah's poem-film *Real Jews*, which cleverly subverted the stereotyped notions of what 'real Jews' are with its message that real Jews can be from anywhere. (The film looked fantastic on the three-metres-wide screen at the back of the stage. The venue as a whole was fantastic, with a large stage space and good acoustics.) Lee Wilson read some poems, as a prelude to his later slot at the Diorama. There were some memorable floor spots: people reading their poems for the first time, and memories of institutionalisation sparked off by Leah's poems and comments. It felt a privilege to be there sharing these memories. The event was MC'd by Celia Potterton, who gave an intense rendition of her poem 'Woman in Chains', and Grant Mattheson. The evening closed with Leah and Magdalene performing Leah's poem 'Life Fugue', which, she explained, was a response to Paul Celan's poem about the death-camps, 'Todesfugue' ('Death Fugue').

## Write on the Edge - Poetry workshops by survivors for survivors

The Garden Studio, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnauburgh 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 2003 are:

14th January	Kit & Hannah	Feedback
28th January	Alison & Valeria	Writing
11th February	Kit & Isha	Performance
25th February	Mala & Amita	Feedback
11th March	Anna & Hilary	Writing
25th March	Ferenc & Razz	Performance

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

# My Dragonfly

## Venetia Tompkins writes about her spiritual mentor

I have been writing poetry since I was a young child in the country. These have been expressions of my reality, both external and internal.

For the last twenty-five years a dragonfly has been my spiritual mentor. Although immaterial, he has touched my senses, informed my thinking, inspired my creativity, supported me emotionally and been a moral guide. I have been diagnosed as a schizophrenic since the age of sixteen but I do not accept that the dragonfly is simply a feature of my illness. It may be that he could be described as a persistent hallucination, or a splinter of my personality that has become objectified. I am well aware that he will at least be regarded as the product of an over-active imagination and disallowed as a spiritual existence or phenomenon.

The dragonfly is visible and yet immaterial, perhaps like the rainbow a scientific description could be given of him, though for me he exists independently of the physical world. I have of course thought long and often about his origins and his nature, but essentially I embrace him as a pivotal and formative dimension of my life.

The dragonfly is a waking experience to me, he does not appear in my dreams, rather he often wakes me from sleep in order to communicate. He is beautiful, in glistening blues, greens, golds and silvers, appearing slightly larger than a natural dragonfly. He usually rests on my hand and I can feel his touch. As a child I believed, as many children do, in a guardian angel, this came from the religious doctrine that I was brought up with, and I acknowledge some superficial similarities between these two perceptions. I have not held any religious beliefs for over thirty years; my mentor represents no divinity or doctrine other than the two principles of: respect to all

life forms and the endeavour to love all living things. Again I appreciate that these are essentially the same as some of the precepts of Christianity, Buddhism and other philosophies, so that it may not be regarded as surprising that I should be judged to be projecting these values onto a hallucinatory being. I realise that I cannot prove that my dragonfly mentor is other, and there have been periods of frustration in dealing with dismissive and patronising responses. However, I now simply accept that he is a spirit, that he does guide me and that I would trust him with my life.

Through all the states of and modes of my illness I have known that I am mortal and that the dragonfly is immortal, I know that he will always be a part of my life and that he will give me as well as others, guidance. I do not know if there is an afterlife, but I believe that the spiritual dimension of human beings may not be altered by physical death, thus I hope that after my death I may still be in some form of communication with my dragonfly. During the last twenty-five years I have written a great many poems both of and to the dragonfly, it has always been his capacity for inspiring me and drawing me away from despair that has bonded me so significantly with him, as well as the simple fact that he knows me and accepts me unconditionally. The happiness that he brings me is such that I cannot sustain it in his absence and it is quantitatively unlike any of the other important relationships in my life.

From 'Dragonfly Comes'

In the concave stillness of this night,  
I start awake.  
There, glowing as a candle behind a  
stained glass window,  
the luminosity of your bright form  
takes me by storm.  
Into a dull, compensatory dream you  
have come to me.

The imminent dawn has no  
loveliness as yours,  
all creation is constrained in your  
beauty  
and it is upon my hand that you  
have come to rest.  
This is no coy humility, but wakened  
as I am again  
to your presence there is an increase  
of significance  
in my life, that in one moment,  
transforms night's starry  
and finite constellation into eternity...

Each time you come, some alteration  
is at hand,  
the apparent parameters of my  
experience  
unfold from their centre in an  
hermaphroditic birthing,  
you bring the possibility of change.  
You are the catalyst in my breast  
who makes difference where there  
was conformity ...

You rise to me from the prehistoric  
strata,  
I embrace the uncivil freedom you  
offer,  
with your radical empathy and  
circling, voiceless vision ...

Although your form is minimal, your  
influence is vital,  
mythic mentor, and the vibration of  
your wings  
fans my dormant courage.  
You bring me once again to the  
frontier  
of the possible, conceiving and  
conserving the desire  
to overcome the limitations that  
oppress me.  
Stay long enough this time to teach  
me  
how to make my security interior,  
not needing  
a material anchorage nor the  
approval of others,  
let liberality tint my consciousness.  
Dragonfly, delay your parting, for I  
would dwell  
with you once again for a little while,  
give me time, imbued with your  
essence.

# 'Enough! Or Too Much!'

## James Ferguson on William Blake

Blake was chosen as a contrast to Cowper and Johnson, who were, as far as I can see, harmed by their madness. Not harmed as poets: Cowper's experiences produced poetry that recognised human fragility; Johnson's that heroically tried to make the fragile business of life definite. But I would rather have not had their poems, and for them to have been happy. A ridiculous wish, because it's impossible to make someone happy who isn't; and even, perhaps, for people who can't be happy to wish themselves so. The most that some people can do (you can add "at times" if you want) is to shore up their world, however they go about that. Many people do that with poetry, or with some other art. I didn't realise until I started working at Survivors' how much I did this myself. (And this doesn't have anything to do, in my opinion, with how good the poetry is. If you don't need to write, in some part of you, why are you doing it? The need goes deep: a name can't be put on it.)

A painter, engraver, poet, prophet and thinker, Blake gave thanks that he 'had never been flogged into following the style of a fool.' As independent as any poet has been, he printed, illustrated, hand-coloured and sold his own poems.

'The fountain overflows': meaning life, always changing, playful, full of sound and (a favourite word of Blake's) energy. Songs of Innocence: ironic children's poetry, with an attached parody, Songs of Experience. Long political poems: The French Revolution, Europe and America. Epigrams, mocking friends and enemies alike. ('He has observed the Golden Rule / Till he's become the Golden Fool!') Prose-poem: The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, mocking the self-satisfied angels, and claiming that a devil taught him to print. Two-hundred-page-long epics: Jerusalem and The Four Zoas, replete with Miltonic phrasing and a mythology entirely of his invention. All this had nothing to do with prizes and good

reviews: and he got none.

'I mock thee not, though by thee I am mocked. / Thou call'st me madman, but I call thee blockhead'. Blake was matter-of-fact about the visual hallucinations he had seen all of life, starting with God himself looking in at his childhood window, and including being visited by ghosts of famous painters and even the ghost of a flea (Blake drew his portrait). To him it was simply a matter of difference that some people saw the sun as a fiery disc whereas he saw 'a host of angels singing Hosannah'. Blake turns the rationalism of the day back at the unnamed accuser: if s/he is only stating the truth in calling Blake mad, then Blake is not mocking her/him by calling her a blockhead: he's only stating the truth. He despised the narrow-minded thought that saw itself as rationalism, and that could only see the unusual as a disease.

'I will not cease from mental fight / Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand / Till we have built Jerusalem / In England's green and pleasant land.' This was not written as a rousing patriotic hymn, but as part of a complacency-attacking preface to the epic Milton. Just before these lines occur, Blake condemns the 'hirelings who would if they could forever depress mental and prolong corporeal war'. He uses the phrase 'silly slaves of the sword'. Blake wants people to fight with their minds to change society. Far from saying that England is wonderful, Blake is saying that it is awful. The phrase 'green and pleasant land' is bitterly ironic: Blake, born and living in London, could see every day the asylums, factories, child-workers, slums and workhouses that industrialisation had multiplied. Even this place, these lines say, could be a happy, holy land, but we have to be prepared make it into one. 'Mental fight' also means fighting inside one's mind: the opposite of that complacency that makes life so easy.

Blake troubles me. 'Here is life

and abundance, but no order and discipline.' So many of his works are fragmentary. As a disciple of excess, he wasn't worried about boring the reader with the high-strung forgings, lamentings and clangings of Orc, Los, Albion, and a host of other imaginary heroes. He had ideas (lust and excess are good, repression bad, etc) and ideas, though exciting for a while, become 'more tiresome than a twice-told tale.' And prophets! Why can't they just let be? Why are they always telling other people what to do? Why are they so lacking in peace?

On the other hand, perhaps Blake wanted to feed readers bad fruit from the bad tree of society, in order to give them bellyaches. That could be why Blake, who enthused over 'the lust of the goat,' ended his days illustrating Dante's Divine Comedy, which puts such goats in Hell. Perhaps, in spite of so many ideas that were opposed to his, he was attracted by Dante's unmatched anger at injustices. Dante, unlike our society, thought that crimes were not only active (deliberately doing evil) but also passive (failing to do good). To him, living a life neither good nor bad was not worthy of praise: it was wicked, and put you into Hell. Perhaps Blake saw in this something more important than changing attitudes towards sex: a condemnation of the indifference that permeates our society. Our society has the economic potential to be nobly just, but remains penny-pinchingly mean and money-grabbingly resentful. The self-satisfied inability to feel or act with other people, wrapped up in a gloating sense of superiority to others, accompanies what we call life: the petty struggle to get every penny we deserve, even at the cost of everyone's repose. We could be free people who give: but we prefer to be servants who are made to work. We could feel at home in the world: but we prefer to feel at home in our houses. We could see ourselves as owning Plato, Titian, the view from Westminster Bridge, or the theory of relativity: but we prefer to see

# Arts and Stroke Survivors

## Caroline Smith on the Interact Reading Service

There is growing scientific evidence that the arts can help to speed the recovery, and/or improve the quality of life for patients of every kind. It was with this purpose in mind that the InterAct Reading Service was set up.

Caroline Smith comes from a medical family but has spent her working life up to the present time working as a theatre director. The idea for the Reading Service began whilst looking after her sick brother who was a psychiatrist. They talked a great deal about how the arts and health should be more mutually supportive. These conversations stayed in Caroline's mind when, returning to London from a long theatre job in the regions, she was horrified to find how many first class actors were out of work and not using their unique communication skills in any way. Putting the two thoughts together, the InterAct Reading Service was born.

However first the idea needed to be tested. Caroline went down to her local hospice, the Pembridge Palliative Care Centre. There she met and talked to the Senior Nurse Manager, Penny Jones. Under Penny's guidance, reading on a voluntary basis was started. Reading also began in the hospital's stroke unit. We shall always be grateful to this hospital for encouraging this innovative service, and continuing to give us guidance and help.

It was during this period that the twin objectives for the Reading Service came about. For patients within the hospice movement, the objective of the reading is the 'quality of life.' Stroke patients, on the other hand, are known to benefit from the stimulation that the arts provide. The ultimate aim of the organisation for this group of patients is to become a recognised part of their rehabilitation programme.

After several months of voluntary work, having learnt a great deal, and realised that no other organisation was doing this work, the time came to launch InterAct as a professional service. In January 2000 the Service became a registered charity and by September 2000 enough money has been raised to start the reading. The Service now operates in ten London hospitals as well as in stroke clubs. Generally readings take place three times a week at the patient's bedside on a one-to-one basis. Readers spend from five to forty five minutes with each patient, talking, reading and listening. In the stroke clubs we read to the whole group as well as individually when required.

All the readers are paid professional actors, and over 65 are involved. They have the dramatic skill and vocal stamina to sustain the patient's interest and are sensitive enough to respond to unspoken reactions. Such interactive sessions offer more stimulation than passively

watching television or listening to the radio. One patient commented 'Hospital is a very lonely place and the reading service is an injection of life. I always feel like I've had a real exchange with the readers.' Others have mentioned the self-confidence which the sessions gave them or found that personal memories returned.

The Service appears to be the only professional organisation providing the spoken word in a non-recorded form. The readers are equipped with over 200 short stories, mostly short, self-contained and narrative led and covering a wide range of interests. InterAct has also commissioned stories specially for the Service. A collection of these will be published shortly. The Service hopes to expand outside London. The ultimate aim is to become a recognised part of stroke patients' rehabilitation programme.

The InterAct Reading Service may be contacted at 31 Princes House, 52 Kensington Park Road, London W11 3BN. Telephone & Fax 020 7727 5908, E-mail: [interact.reading@talk21.com](mailto:interact.reading@talk21.com).

### Opportunities for Writers

Phillipa Johnston on training

**A wide-ranging new programme of literature training is to be launched in the autumn by the New Writing & Literature Consortium, an initiative by seven leading literature organisations (Survivors' Poetry is one of them) to support the professional development of writers and others working within new writing and literature.**

**The training will have a strong practical focus, with opportunities for participants to gain hands-on experience through placements and work-shadowing. Making a living as a writer in schools, performance and presentation skills, literature development, using creative writing in health and social care contexts, training for disabled writers in writing for performance media, and marketing yourself as a writer, are among the areas to be covered. The training programme will run from September 2002 to May 2003 and takes place in various parts of the UK.**

**Later in the year, the Consortium will be launching [www.literaturetraining.com](http://www.literaturetraining.com) which will provide the sector with online access to a wealth of information on training and professional development opportunities in the UK and the sources of funding available for professional development. A range of advisory services is also planned.**

**For further information, contact Philippa Johnston, the Consortium's CPD Co-ordinator on 0131 553 2210, email [p.johnston@nawe.co.uk](mailto:p.johnston@nawe.co.uk) or by writing to the New Writing & Literature Consortium, FREEPOST NEA 12181, Edinburgh, EH6 0BR.**

# Dream, Socrates, Dream!

David (Alea\*~) Lambert

Cebes: Several people, you know, including Evenus just the other day, have been asking me about the poems you've made up, putting the tales of Aesop into verse, and the hymn to Apollo: what had you in mind, they asked, making them up after you'd come here, when you'd never made up anything before? Socrates: I made them not because I wanted to compete with others or their verses – I knew that wouldn't be easy – but because I was trying to find out the meaning of certain dreams and fulfil a sacred duty, in case perhaps it was that kind of art they were ordering me to make. They were like this, you see: often in my past life the same dream had visited me, now in one guise, now in another, but always saying the same thing: 'Socrates,' it said, 'make art and practice it.'

Now in earlier times I used to assume that the dream was urging and telling me to do exactly what I was doing: as people shout encouragement to runners, so the dream was telling me to do the very thing I was doing, to make art, since philosophy is a very high art form, and that was what I was making. But now the trial was over, and the festival of the god was preparing my death, I thought that in case it was art in the popular sense that the dream was commanding me to make, I ought not to disobey it, but should make it; as it was safer not to go off before I'd fulfilled a sacred duty, by making verses and thus obeying the dream.

(from Plato's *Phaedo*, pp 4 - 5, tr David Gallop, OUP)

Plato's account of the dialogues with Socrates before his death always fascinated me. At high school then at college I was taught that Socrates was a great man, a great philosopher, and his Socratic method of arguing an attenuating dialectic. Slowly, however, as I unpacked the hegemonic assumptions (Teaching as a Subversive Activity calls this 'shit-detecting') I realised that Socrates' approach to truth is really just a way to make any proposition appear untenable. Then it is easy to kick the opponent with your own thoughts when their defenses are down. When I went looking for what Socrates himself wrote I found nothing, then the light dawned. Plato had appropriated a great man to dissect any position not sympathetic to his own, using the memory of Socrates as a mask through which to deliver his own opinions, like an actor in the amphitheatre. We don't have anything in Socrates' own voice. Or do we? The long quote above seems contrary to much of what Plato has written in the voice of Socrates, because it is a rare moment of admitting 'maybe my entire life has been an avoidance of my true calling.' The facts are clear. Socrates was found guilty of corrupting the young men of Athens and was executed for it. Sounds like unmanagability to me. I do believe Socrates did exist, and that in the best writerly

fashion Plato began with memory when constructing his dialogues. The disclosure of the denial of a dream and of the sophisticated justifications for the accompanying self-sabotage slips through the net of Plato's philosophic intentions, and for me it is a ray of hope.

Why? Because I too share the dream and must not deny it.

My first brush with suicidal ideation came when I was a young man drowning in the midst of my own corruption. On the morning after the consequences of my behaviour had finally found their way home I woke with the intention simply to take my father's rifle and click off planet pain. Instead some force deep within me led me to our back yard porch. It being summer I sat on the swing as the dew fell and the mist rose and the sky brightened. Later I not only wrote my first for-me from-me poem (entitled 'sunrise' and sadly lost) but I heard the waking dream. 'David,' mused a voice emanating from within, 'make poetry and live it.' Recently, to make amends for the loss of the original poem, I revisited this memory-moment:

enough to believe

when morning air is clear  
and clouds pattern just this side of space  
I remember when I could not allow my eyes to look so  
high

from height of light my thin sky scatters  
every quiet rising dew kissed blade of grass  
ignites with diamonds of dawn

Poor Socrates. Driven by his need to know he was right this compulsion to prove it became a sad projection of his resistance to surrender to 'practising our art and living it.' Plato at least got off his arse and constructed the text, a lot of it, and although his egotistical intentions stain it all, he was shaping the word. To be naked and vulnerable is the invitation's initial consequence, and so few have the courage of their own truthful countenance. It's so much easier to put the world to rights than it is to admit our own abandonment. I hear this courage emerge, softer, humbler, in the confession Socrates made to Cebes, and it's the most valuable thing Plato ever wrote.

Since hearing my calling, poetry has been the medium of my soul's devotion, my heart's truth, my mind's clarity, the way in which I self-to-self give and receive nurturance. When I am not strong it is me who takes leave of poetry. The Muse does not abdicate her bliss. Mortals do.

## 'Ayshe: an Anatolian Tale' and 'Leaving Turkey'

by Fatma Durmush

Reviewed by Grant Matheson

Fatma Durmush is an award-winning author of poetry, plays and prose who lives and works in London. Although her parents fled Cyprus for Britain before she was one year old, she has retained very strong links with her Turkish culture and this is reflected in her work. She worked in her father's café in South London until she was forced to stop after being violently attacked, at which time she took up writing and embarked on an Open University degree. She has since been published in *The Big Issue* and *The Daily Express* and has won no less than seven literary awards including the first prize at the London Turkish Literary Festival 1998. She now edits the *Morley College Literary Magazine* and writes.

Durmush became a feminist at 21 when, she says, she realised that her life as a woman had been defined by the victimisation that she had suffered, and her work exposes this insight as a stark reality. *Ayshe: an Anatolian Tale* is an extended poem set within the domestic boundaries of a strictly Muslim community lying on the fringes of Atatürk's modern Turkey. In it Durmush makes use of the clear vision of an eleven year old girl to expose the agonising injustices found within an austerely patriarchal society. We find Ayshe living in a world where girls are a convenience, existing to bear children and serve the men upon whom they must rely for protection and moral guidance. She is continually belittled, 'Girls have no brain. They have vagina,' and reminded that she will never be a full member of the society into which she was born, being told that 'Girls don't have education' and 'Little girls don't read.' Although Ayshe is allowed one or two small victories in her life, learning to read being her greatest, these serve only to throw into relief the cruelty and ultimate futility of her situation: 'Life has taken my eye out,' she concedes finally, 'and made me a half seeing, half feeling girl.'

This internal exile from her own community is a theme that Durmush expands upon. *Leaving Turkey* is an anthology that casts a measured eye over the powerlessness of women and deals with, amongst other things,

the actual exile from Cyprus that she and her family suffered. The insecurity of the refugee existence and the powerlessness manifested in the family's reliance upon the charity of others seem to resonate with that formative angst of young Ayshe. Durmush's snapshots of refugee life seem to echo her earlier work insofar as they are all the more touching and painful for their simplicity and brevity; 'I am hungry, she said, / Other people can eat / but not us.' Yet surprisingly these pieces are not prescriptive or damning, rather they are delicate, objective sketches that allow the reader to see and feel for themselves the complexities and absurdities of this oppressive life. Indeed, she says of her father, who epitomises her oppression, that he is 'The accused in my hell / but not "he," he's not sane / a victim same as me.'

'Writing and painting for me,' Durmush writes, 'are ways out of my powerlessness,' and in saying this she underlies her fundamental theme: the injustice of being made to suffer solely for what one inescapably is. But her work is not without optimism, not without escape; as she says 'Almost too late / I let myself out / Had to live / And get breathing.'

*Ayshe, Leaving Turkey* and *I Sit in the Light* are available from the Poetry Monthly Press, and look out for her recently published novel *Dual Self*. Fatma Durmush is a member of Exiled Writers Inc. and often takes part in theatrical events staged at The New End Theatre, Hampstead. You can contact them at [www.exiledwriters.co.uk](http://www.exiledwriters.co.uk)

Available from Poetry Monthly Press, 39 Cavendish Road, Long Eaton, Nottingham NG10 4HY

## Alphabets of Seeds

by Alba Ambert

Reviewed by Alex Shand

At first glance, *Alphabets of Seeds*, the latest collection of poetry from Puerto Rican poet and novelist Alba Ambert, appears to lack any unifying theme. But as the book unfolds and the poems are seen within the context of each other a unifying voice begins to develop. From insignificant personal events to social commentary, dealing with violence and love, the collection starts to develop as a dialogue between our opposing views of the world. Her rich, sensual poem 'Lovemaking' with lines such as 'my lips tug at his skin / and I taste tamarind / and breadfruit' jars against the aggression and nihilism of poems such as 'A Room Of Your Own' which

deals with domestic violence: 'but a terrible fear grips you / while you wipe the blood. / It takes you hours of trembling / and weeping to calm down. / And you think about the happy times / when you loved / and felt loved.' Throughout the collection the aggression and conflict that humanity inflicts upon itself is juxtaposed with a soft, calming voice to emphasise the beauty that we are all capable of.

Divided into three sections – Nostalgia, Desire and Resonance – the poems range from long narrative texts to short, witty and pithy pieces all with perfectly pitched tone. By including such a range of style and subject matter, a texture and depth is brought to the collection. Perfectly executed and with shatteringly astute observation she communicates complex ideas and emotions through the simplest of thoughts or actions: her poem 'Acclaim' is simply: 'praise the women / running barefoot / on thorns / face up/ like sunflowers / begging for light.' More than anything, the collection shows the diversity Ambert is capable as a storyteller, and her ability to deal with a plethora of emotions and situations in a variety of ways.

While Ambert now lives in London, she obviously has a legacy to her native country and many of the poems are richly coloured by experiences of her homeland. The Latin influence gives her work an undercurrent of passion despite its eagerness and lightness of touch, while she throws out reflections casually but with profundity.

Available from Mango Publishing

ISBN 1-902294-12-2

## 52 Ways of Looking

### at a Poem

by Ruth Padel

Reviewed by Roy Holland

Ruth Padel is an accomplished poet with a background in Classical scholarship. This volume collects many of her critical columns on contemporary English-language poems which appeared in the *Independent on Sunday*. The highly original introductory essay 'Reading Poetry Today' is a good read before dipping into the body of the book. The individual columns are dense and provide much background information about the poets and their environment, which is not immediately evident from reading each poem.

In spite of 'the large-scale renaissance of poetry in Britain today,' Ruth Padel

speaks of the problems in getting poetry a fair place in the press. She was fortunate in finding a sympathetic editor. She discusses the techniques used by contemporary poets, the varieties of rhyme, metre and assonance, which to my mind often come from the poet's subconscious and are of secondary interest until you have read the poem several times and certain phrases stick in your mind. There is a pocket guide to metre in the first essay, on Jo Shapcott's poem.

Writers of Irish descent have had an enormous influence on writing of the nineties, and Ruth Padel deliberately places Irish poets in the forefront of the book. They question the meaning of the word 'British', as do the Black poets included. A reading in the context of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland is sometimes not evident until you refer to the original collection.

It is excellent to have a collection in which alternate poems are by women, righting the gender imbalance in so many mainstream twentieth century collections.

Ruth Padel also refers to the influence of Russian and East European poets writing under censorship and persecution before the fall of the Soviet Union. A striking idea is that poets found a new voice in reaction to Thatcherism, which found them largely marginalised.

Perhaps the most important message for survivor poets comes at the very end of the book. In discussing Thom Gunn's AIDS poem, 'Still Life', she says: 'Iris Murdoch argued that art should not console, but, whether you are making it or responding to it, art is one of the few things which can help us find a shape for pain so we bear it better' To digest *52 Ways of Looking at a Poem* thoroughly will give you an insight into your own writing as well as an excellent introduction to contemporary verse.

Available from Chatto & Windus priced £12.99 ISBN 0 7011 7318 1

## NEW PLAYS

### Bright

by Polly Wiseman

Reviewed by Roy Holland

Polly Wiseman's *Bright*, which opened at the Soho Theatre Company in early November and which is published in the Soho Young Writers series, tells of a young woman who is unexpectedly sectioned under the Mental Health Act and of her experiences in hospital,

which are all too predictable to those in the know, but very disturbing to her. Exceptionally good is the portrayal of the Senior Registrar and the Houseman whose insecurities surface in the scenes between them.

Polly Wiseman wrote the play to express her anger 'that in the UK you are better off being arrested than sectioned' with conditions in many NHS wards 'such that if you were sane when you arrived, you'd be hard pressed to remain so.' She also 'wanted to communicate the seductive high of "mania" from the inside'.

Lyndsey Marshal is excellent as Clair, the protagonist, as are Isabel Pollen and Sophie Stanton as the two professionals. Paul Jepson gives a tight direction, and Jessica Bergstrom's design creates a run-down and tawdry ward atmosphere down to a T.

Oberon Modern Plays have published *Bright* together with Neela Dolezalova's *Playing Fields*. Both emerged from workshops at the Soho Theatre's Young Writers' Programme. *Playing Fields* is a view of teenage relationships from within, and the double bill with *Bright* makes a really good read, for those who can't get to a production.

Available from Oberon Books priced £9.99. ISBN 1-84002-349-X

## SPIRITUAL BOOKS

### Two Kabir Books

by Robert Bly

Reviewed by John Horder

Like Neil Astley's heart-opening *Staying Alive*, these two amazing books by Robert Bly – *The Kabir Book* and the anthology *The Soul Is Here For Its Own Joy* – should be read aloud slowly, slowly, until they have been thoroughly mulled over. Michael Whitaker, a trainee art therapist at the Studio Upstairs, helped me with my mulling. Neither book is a candidate for the School of Rush-Reading that masquerades for poetry-reviewing in newspapers, driving me to frenzy.

Not much is known about Kabir, whose ecstatic poems are at the very heart of both books. According to Robert Bly, the heart-warming experiential poet and genius, he was born of a Hindu and Muslim spiritual inheritance about 1398, and 'belonged to the disciplined, intense and exacting guru tradition of Indian spirituality... There the bee of the heart stays deep inside the flower, and cares for no other thing.' In other words, he has much in common with

the Sufi poets Rumi and Hafiz as he has with Shakespeare and Brenda Williams. All these guys say one thing in their deepest essences: Don't be for ever seduced by outer appearances. As Meher Baba affirms in his rock bottom *Conditions of Happiness* discourses, the only lasting happiness anybody finds in any lifetime is from within. Naturally this is a reality our demented egos abhor, until we become so depressed and so suicidal we have no alternative but to look into the deepest depths of our own shattered and battered hearts.

Bly's heartfelt version of Kabir's 'The Time Before Death' begins: 'Friend, hope for the Guest while you alive. / Jump into experience while you are alive! / Think ... and think ... while you are alive. / What you call "salvation" belongs to the time before death.' In other words, most of what passes for religion is up shithouse creek for most of the time. Rowan Williams, eat your heart out. Kabir is here stating from his own experience that the only real choice is whether or not we enjoy the present moment: the past and the future are merely illusions dreamt up by our minds' attachment to fantasy. Tell that to your shrink when you next fork out £40 or £50. You will soon discover whether she or he has embraced death and the transitoriness of their lives or not!

Both these books are essential to the very few seekers who have discovered that in order to be stay awake we have constantly to be amazing ourselves. They are well worth looking for in the basement of Watkins Bookshop in Cecil Court off Charing Cross Road. If you don't find them there, you'll just have to start searching in the bookshops of New York and San Francisco.

*The Kabir Book*, versions of Kabir's poems by Robert Bly, from Seventies Press, Beacon Press, Boston (1977) ISBN 0 8070 6379 7. *The Soul Is Here For Its Own Joy: Sacred Poems From Many Cultures*, edited by Robert Bly, from The Ecco Press, New Jersey

## REVIEWERS NEEDED

(1995) ISBN 0 88001 355 9.

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.

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 variety of poetry anthologies and are currently undertaking a number of translation projects within our *Surviving the Millennium* project funded by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of England. Please do not send us poetry for publication. We regret that we do not have the resources to give feedback or criticism regarding your work. We will ask for submissions through this newsletter when we publish our next anthology.

#### 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 our *sixteen* page, *Poetry Express* newsletter four times a year. Its purpose is to publicise events and activities organised by Survivors' Poetry and by Survivor-led Poetry groups all over the country. We publish articles, features, personal stories, news, letters, events listings and book reviews. Through joining our mailing list you will receive this newsletter, quarterly - completely free of charge!

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