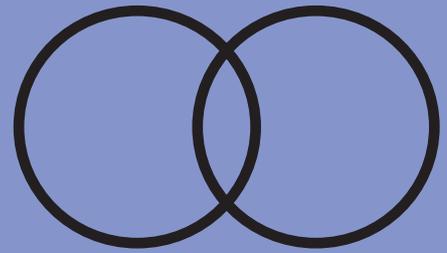


Poetry Express



QUARTERLY FROM SURVIVORS' POETRY

NUMBER 19
SPRING 2004

Simon Jenner on Geoffrey Hill

Elvis via Jeremy Reed

David Miller on Prose Poetry

Alan Morrison on Nicholas Lafitte

Adam Horovitz's Jerusalem

Emlitt's everywhere else

W.S. Graham's New Collected Poems

Broadsheet

Contents

From the Interim Manager – Simon Jenner	3
I'll Give Them Lyric Cry: Geoffrey Hill's The Orchards of Syon – Simon Jenner	4
No Macro Lover: Nicholas Lafitte's Collected Poems – Alan Morrison	6
The EMLITT Project – David Hart & Barry Tebb	7
Letter to the Editor – Joseph Roscian Ephraim	8
The Prose Poem – David Miller	9
W.S. Graham's New Collected Poems – James Ferguson	10
THE POETRY EXPRESS BROADSHEET	
Rainbows Touting Freedom: Adam Horowitz's Next Year in Jerusalem – Dave Russell & Simon Jenner	11
Errata	12
Uh Huh Him: Jeremy Reed: Heartbreak Hotel: A Tribute to the King in Verse – James Ferguson	13
Uh Huh Him: Elvis : Heartbreak Hotel: A Tribute to the King in Verse – James Ferguson	14
Reviews	15
Write on the Edge: The London Workshops – Razz	18

SURVIVORS' POETRY

Staff:

James Ferguson (Editorial), Roy Holland (Information and Editorial), Simon Jenner (Interim Manager), Xochitl Tuck (Events Coordinator)

Freelance Staff:

Razz (Camden Workshop Coordinator)

Volunteers:

Lloyd Lindsay (Office Volunteer), Dave Russell (Dioramanite Flyers), John Weedon (Office Volunteer)

Trustees:

Peter Greig, John O'Donoghue (Chair), Celia Potterton, Neil Swire

Advisory Group:

Paul Beasley, Christina Dunhill, Miriam Hastings, John Hirst, Danielle Hope

POETRY EXPRESS

Poetry Express is a quarterly publication produced by Survivors' Poetry. It is mailed free to members: contact us to join our mailing list. We welcome submissions – poetry, articles, news items, and other matter which may be of interest to our field. We cannot guarantee publication and reserve the right to edit any contributions. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily the views of Survivors' Poetry.

Editor: James Ferguson

Reviews Editor: Roy Holland

Design and Layout: James Ferguson

Printed by: Chandlers, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex

Survivors' Poetry

Diorama Arts Centre

34 Osnaburgh Street

London NW1 3ND

Tel: 020 7916 5317

Registered charity No. 1040177

info@survivorspoetry.org.uk

[Please note our new email address]

Survivors' Poetry is financially supported by Arts Council England

From the Interim Manager

Simon Jenner

Welcome to our new everything. The Dells and bells have arrived in our office, still sparkling with the curious dust you find on new equipment. This is the second of our newly designed magazine, courtesy of James and his Mac, and you've been kind about the first. Next time we'll be larger, too. And a few pictures will peep out when the software arrives and everything is finally installed.

Alison has resigned through illness, and we're in the throes of appointing a new director; I'm one of the candidates. Please send your best wishes to Alison through us, and we'll re-direct as necessary. We're enormously grateful to what she achieved here in her first year, including the lassoing of Regular Funded Organisation status from Arts Council England. In this she regularised the payments we'd hitherto won from ACE and the Lottery, A4E scheme, J Paul Getty and others. She also succeeded in a bid to secure Lloyds TSB outreach funding, and much else. We wish her a speedy recovery and a fruitful career. And happiness.

Two outreach posts are also in the process of being filled in July. One, centred on London, partly encompasses the mentor/mentee programme I outlined at length last time. The other, nationally based, does the same but with a huge remit to contact and visit all Survivors' Groups. Much else is planned, notably poetry publication, and various groups writing their own broadsheet-length contributions for Poetry Express itself. We hope to feature the first in our next. Warwick and Swansea have just started up Survivors' groups and have volunteered: hello! So do please send your group activities and poetry to us.

Something else we've inaugurated, is our Letters to the Editor, since we get several, as you'll see, of exceptional interest and pretty singular expression. Several might come from our outreach activities recently. In March as promised, we visited Literature Training under Philippa Johnston in Edinburgh, where SP and other affiliated groups such as Lapidus, NAWA, Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, Writernet, eight in all, gathered to swap and suggest mutual support and targets. One of these is plain enough. Gary McKeone, the friendly Literature Officer of Arts Council England, addressed us with long-term strategies all regularly funded organisations such as ours must heed. In March 2006, all RFOs, as they are known, will be submitted after long assessment to the criteria of relevance and performance. Some will have their funding withdrawn. We're all wonderfully concentrated by this. It does provide a window of challenge and focus over the next two years, to celebrate our organisation and you, whom it serves. That's enough of the missionspeak, but you know what I mean. If I'm around, I rather welcome it, since there's so much to do. Much of that I outlined last time, so I won't bang on a can again.

Another outreach venue we hit on our wonderful trail was Swansea on 29th April. We met in the Dylan Thomas Centre, warmly hosted by David Wooley, Jo Furber and their staff. I was last there in the same room, droning on aimably about 1940s poetry, six years ago. The food was exquisite and I was so busy chairing that it was wheeled off without my taking a bite. Whereupon I deserted the chair, hotly pursued it to a lift and snaffled back as much as I could. Then chaired again,

munching absently for the rest of the afternoon. It was all wonderfully rounded off by a performance from Leah Thorn, who came down especially from London, and at pretty short notice, to perform for us after a poetry workshop I'd been asked to lead. Several of us were then encouraged by Leah to perform ourselves. Thanks to all who took part in the conference, and those who wanted to. It was a great privilege to chair this event (organised, as ever, by Roy) and re-connect with a whole country.

There was a strong move to found a Survivors group in Swansea, and indeed a Survivors' Cymru. A favourite proposal came from Roy: a poets' bus, not invoking visions of a pea-green Morris Minor estate and megaphone, but a vehicle with predestined ends. Essentially, since we have a plotted graph of our membership, we could sequence a route to embrace as many of you there as possible. Beyond this, is (as Ern Malley, the Australian poet who never was, says) anything. Outlying areas need in particular the kind of contact that can't be provided by a city conference centre a hundred miles away. This all takes considerable organising, and some felt it to be impractical, whilst many others were more excited about it than any other topic. Whatever the outcome, we need such initiatives. Thoughts, everyone?

Finally – since I've gone on quite enough elsewhere too about Geoffrey Hill, may I just add how wonderful it's been working with you: humbling and inspiring by turns. But I hope to be back, with a voracious appetite for my own words. Oh – and yours.

Cocooned

I dreamed that you lay for years, inert, beneath my table.

I wanted to reveal you, I peeled you away, bit by scabrous bit, until there was only pink skin.

I left your eyes, for they were open, ugly and milky, staring at the lid of your strange coffin.

Suddenly you awoke, and you were your old self, though sober for having slept so long.

Still I felt the same mixture of sickness and pleasure and wished that I had left you as you were, cocooned, inert, beneath my table.

LOUISE GLASSCOE

I'll Give Them Lyric Cry!

Simon Jenner on Geoffrey Hill's *The Orchards of Syon*

There's a fragility in self-quotation that renders it touching, but sometimes too flinching so. We hate things that have a palpable design upon us, and yet this is part of artfulness; it can be achingly real. You need to be famous first to quote yourself of course. Otherwise, it perhaps depends on your age, or intensity of experience. No one would blame an 85 year old composer for self-quotation, or a young tubercular writer if they'd written enough in between. So when Richard Strauss quotes his youthful *Death and Transfiguration* of 60 years earlier in his *Four Last Songs* it's intensely poignant. When he did so only a few years after first writing it, touches of bombast weren't wholly excluded in *Ein Heldenleben*, if only because he quotes from most of his other heroic works to date as well.

Geoffrey Hill, nearer his *Four Last Songs* phase, has done just this. 'Through the burling air' Hill erupts early on in *The Orchards of Syon* (2002), and immediately 'Against the burly air I strode' from Hill's first avowed intent, 'Genesis' (1952), pulls his even partly-knowing reader up; with a sharp tenderised shock. Hill bangs on about it, Thor-like, Mercian hymning even (his maroon GT sports car from XVII of *Mercian Hymns* is transformed to his being driven about, convalescent and ailing, in *Orchards*. Alder roots (in poem XX) recall 'In Memory of Jane Fraser' also early, from Hill's first book, *For the Unfallen* (1959). The 'Sour Land' he so learned from Sidney Keyes (1922-43) has been pretty well tilled: a debt he repaid explicitly in *Tenebrae* and *The Triumph of Love*.

The Orchards of Syon completes his tacit trilogy, following *The Triumph of Love* (1998) and *Speech! Speech!* (2000) 'Syon' here follows the archaic form of Zion, root-purged of its too-resonant politics, though not for those elect who look it up. *Orchards*, fruited with Hill's plum-puddings or the autumnal Goldengrove motif of Hopkins he keeps on invoking, is a sort of outer paradise glimpsed through Pennine drizzle. But impossibly, an oxymoronic 'revelation... blurred afresh by rain.' And commentators have labelled it Dantesque, the Penguin blurb christening it, as it were, his 'Paradiso'. As Sting once said on BBC2, playing Machiavelli and giving a paperback copy of his *The Prince* to an acolyte: 'Do not trust this Pen-guin.'

So this is his paradise? Well, *The Triumph of Love* was a happier book than *Speech! Speech!* and far less knotty (Robert Potts told me he researched the latter for six months before writing on it). There, the poet concludes by enacting his own heart-arrested demise, that in fact nearly happened in hospital. *The Orchards of Syon* is certainly less rebarbative, less wholly angry, perhaps, but Hill isn't Dante, even if they were born in the same month. And, after over a decade's silence from 1984, Canaan had arrived proclaiming Hill's late prophet ire in 1996, two years before *The Triumph of Love*. (Canaan was a collection.) Curiously, Hill's tetralogy of sorts was published at two-yearly intervals between 1996 and 2002. T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* were published separately between 1936 and 1942. Hill, who wrote alongside Christopher Ricks to extol Eliot in his centenary year, 1988, would never miss a parallel like that. So he's perhaps being modest, after all.

Not that there aren't references to Dante, in this 72-part sequence of 24 lined poems: in XIX, where Hopkins morphs to 'Purgatorio' XIII: 'could Goldengrove have been at any

time *The Wood of the Suicides*?' Quite feasibly, with the *Terrible Sonnets*. It's contrasted with *Silvertown*, the Essex area that sustained a devastating munitions explosion in January 1917, worse than the Delft one of 1655 that killed the painter Fabricius and many others. Stephen James is right to counterpoint this, one of the few clear counterpoints. And Goldengrove does duty as antipode for *Infernos*, too: soon after, in XXI, 'Can you stand -/cleft-but in the spirit, as a tree/by lightning, close to the shored heart?/ I believe this has been done. Dante/describes it somewhere - I may be mistaken.'

That 24 is a third of 72 makes for some tripartite gesture of sorts, a palimpsest over the quartile nature of the whole. Fusing Dante and Hopkins with Hill's own disturbed pastoral evinces a deeper textual relation with the same process. Though he may be mistaken - evincing a rare post-modern vagary in a determined tract. This instability is Hill's deployment of his querulous, archly joking voice, so hardly (if at all) won, with a genuine bleared vision of redemption that, of its nature must be snatched almost before it's articulated, a glottal stop before heaven, a choked prophecy. This thresholding is quintessentially ambivalent Hill, having his tetraolgy and eating it so it becomes a trilogy.

Still, the new poem lacks the fresh blear of *The Triumph of Love*, though better-tempered. There are outbursts, in XXX, considering critics' notions of affirmative poetry: 'Lyric cry, lyric cry, lyric cry, I'll/ give them lyric cry' or 'Laugh, Damn you!' popping up in LXI after a rather feeble bibliography of a joke on heterogeneous equality of readings, a *vive la difference*, Derrida (well, not quite).

And this fractured set of quotations summons the question of how one can't really quote a section of Hill. Stephen James, in *Poetry Review* only quoted Hopkins at length (about Goldengrove in 'Spring and Fall' and the loss of innocence in *Margaret*, the child addressed); he wrote with an affectionate helicopter view. Peter Robinson, a soured acolyte (Hill has managed to lose several, most recently Christopher Ricks who procured him his Boston post) only quotes the aforementioned laugh and the whole of LIII, which he tricks painstakingly and very accurately apart. One should add beforehand that Hill holds an honourable record in writing 'for the Jews of Europe' movingly in 1956-7 and later, in 'Ovid in the Third Reich'. So his obsession is neither gratuitous, nor perhaps as direct as it was then.

LIII is thus a meditation on the German-Jewish poet Ingeborg Bachmann (1926-73), her affair with Romanian-German-Jewish fellow-poet Paul Celan (1920-70), her possible meeting with Montale who's never named but invoked, and his love of Jewish girlfriends, although the most famous, Dora Markus, he only saw the legs of in a photograph. Bachmann, burned to death by a cigarette fire, is possibly transported by Hill's 'Cantilena /is not a flying boat.' He means that the Consolidated PBY 26 Catalina (like every Airfix kit builder) flying boat might be transformed into a song for Charon. There were a lot of them around Italy c. 1943-45, but so what? The delicacy is there, but it's slightly impertinent, as are Hill's invocings of so many poets (Peguy, whom he wrote his long poem on in 1983, turns up often, finally in LXXI; Coleridge,

a fellow poet-metaphysician, is perhaps most invoked after Hopkins, reduced to the over-familiar 'STC' in XXIV; Barnes and Hardy in LIX, meditating on 'cranky' religious and cursed Englishmen like the 14th century rebel-theologian Wycliff; Gurney is themed as Ivor, and so on). It recalls his address to Mandelstam (in King Log, 1968), stating the blinded obvious: 'Difficult friend, I would have preferred you to them' but there, even sounding faintly absurd (faced to choose between Mandelstam and Zhadnov for dinner) it is touching in its bookish sincerity, even if a little overweeningly ambitious.

The problem with this iron lung of a book is Hill's cursed refusal to give us lyric cry, or any head at all. What he does give us is a litany of names that rise from the pages like an expectorant, the enacting of names self-raising like dusty flour from the dead. Significantly for lyric cry, he gives us composers. Not simply locating them in the black country as he does Havergal Brian (1876-1972) a cursed composer like Gurney, who doubles as poet and song composer. Hill does sound, in fact, as brassily dense as a late Brian symphony (Brian wrote 32, most of them between the ages of 80 and 92, which should give Hill pause and hope; they're as layered as Hill, and even try blares of humour, notably in his opera *The Tigers* (1917-25), about the First War Home Guard, which ends with a fake Zeppelin, which of course turns up in Hill here, as does Immelman in his *Fokker EIII* and his 'spared flame' in a split-arse turn. See how easy it is to become a hillock.)

Or a mention that 'Bela/Bartok is dead. Once more music/and memory move, each to its own/incomparable haven' (XXXV). He died 23rd September, 1945, ten days after Webern was shot dead as it happens. But this staged wonder at the death newly enacted, which rises from a vein of Hungarian musings interleaved with his preference for Polish with Czech, though he understands neither, doesn't address the source of this fresh memory. Hill, often time-travelling back to the war (as in LIII and the whose Coventry section of *The Triumph of Love* or even in *Mercian Hymns*) hasn't striated these 1940s themes to come together. There isn't a compelling discourse. But composers do enact something even more than the poets Hill invokes, old friends or new ones like the French poet Frénaud.

So that contemplation of music inheres the music of the poems. Slivers of this quality exist in each, perhaps, of the seventy-two poems. In XLVII, meditating *In Terra Pax* (not, I think, Frank Martin's piece) he concludes: 'Krenek/or Kurtag I'll scatter around this,/anything from HUNGARATON: I'm not sure Krenek has ever been recorded by that label, though Kurtag, the leading Hungarian composer inside Hungary, is. But from this throw-away litany, a sort of fillet from a composer's alphabet as a kind of joke about trumpet-calls and *Requiescat* (why not Franz Schmidt's *Book of the Seven Seals*? too close to the *Anschluss*?) we're returned rather magically to:

In Terra pax
dark in itself but sighted, as dead stars
that overlook us with a spitting light.

He means the Latin invocation, not the composers, one dying only in 1991, the other, born 1926, still alive. But these odd epiphanies aspire to the condition of music, and barred

musings too. The over-determined thew of Hill's writing, the wholesale urgency, suggests a man desperate to produce his magnum opus before he goes the way of the end of *Speech!* *Speech!*: 'At least pass me the oxygen. Too late.' Hence the incessant self-referencing, the cat's cradle of frantic summing-up, the sturterous verse, like the opening of Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration*.

Hill's overarching debt is more to another explicit music-lover, Milton, whose father was a composer. References to the *Fall* (II), 'Hell's surreal ruins' (IV), 'the Loss of Eden / held to its resolution' (VII) set Hill's own very Miltonic 'great argument' and justifies the ways of Hill to Man, (incidentally, Woman), and probably God. More explicit, LXII makes the pastoral political ('myth, politics, landscape'): 'MILTON's broadcast parable springing up / armed men.' It adumbrates the 'commonweal' theme of *Speech!* *Speech!* and Protestant relations to long-agonised republics. Hill isn't Dante very exactly. He aspires to be, precisely, a muted, inglorious Milton, sprung from just such stock Gray once patronised, eschewing Augustan glories. But he is Milton in a desperate hurry, whistling snatches of a whole.

The poems glint like 'a mineral revealed, a new earth' as he once said in the 1950s. But the mineral has to be hacked out, smelted, annealed, like the 'nailer's darg' that Hill once so movingly invoked for his grandmother. Hill, here, seems 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd' in his literature. America, like Auden before him, (as Robinson hinted) has turned him bookish with Ivy League pastoral. These are the rehearsals for meditation, for something that has to be released. They should be set to the 'grunts, shrieks, and cries' that Hill once awarded to his 'Funeral Music' in *King Log*: 'an articulate music'. And they're still the most oddly compelling music we have in contemporary poetry. 'A sad and angry consolation' as he says, not enough, but sad and angry played against this book yields the reward of desperate attention, terminal jokes, small redemptions of – as Milton said about his College carrier – one 'made of sphere metal, never to decay'. This was Hobson, inventor of *Hobson's Choice*. 'This or none.' OK. Milton's carrier will do.

No Macro Lover

Alan Morrison on the poems of Nicholas Lafitte

Nicholas Lafitte committed suicide at 27 after a long battle with schizophrenia. Arguably this highly gifted poet threw away, along with his life, a greater literary legacy. It's probably best however to refrain from such speculations and resist the temptation to billet Lafitte with the likes of Douglas, Keyes et al. Anyhow, he did live and write for at least three years longer.

Lafitte is more of an obsessional than confessional poet. More Plath than Lowell, with the odd lyrical smatter of Lorca. His poetry swings between polarities of stark intellectualism and morbid religiosity reminiscent of the 'mania' of Smart (the title 'The Madman Compares God To A Great Light' says it all). It would be shallow to put this down to schizophrenia; there's evidence of deep ontological concerns which are perfectly rational, if a little obsessive.

Lafitte's style can be stream-of-consciousness: 'It is the leopard-coloured sand/You see, supine beneath these, ultimate/Fins of the sea-scales I lie/On the sea's edge, a heavy sand to be squeezed/As who would squeeze a flannel with my one/Eye against the sun I see the sheer/Rock face soars up unperspective -/Wise to where trees shatter the sky' ('This, Is The Sea').

It can be casual and direct like the Roman love poets: 'Love is not loving or being good or kind,/is rather a sort of shared disturbance/in the emptiness, ripple in a pool of /bleakness. To say I love you as you once said/to me does not demand a gesture like, say,/a valentine or kiss. Love is'.

It can be supremely descriptive: 'the damson twilight, half creamed clouds/Of smoke hung like laundered sheets from the beamed/Roof tree' ('Evening Over Malta'); 'the trees scorched ochre, chrome yellow' ('And the blue grass taut and dry'). It can be succinct and evocative: 'men,/with freckled hands sip beer in silence' ('To A Sicilian Prostitute').

Typically of many mentally afflicted poets, Lafitte invests a neurotic animism in the anxiety-free natural world: 'The old wasp/Sun stings the window pane' ('To A Sicilian Prostitute'); 'the January sun/Must always dwarf the summer, see/How it stretches skies across the city's black!' ('Poem For Robert'); where the evening is a yellow glass,/And battered crows comment scornfully' ('Seven Last Words'); 'The pathology of autumn synchronises / Breakdowns with the falling of the leaves./A neurotic sun travels round the sky's rim' ('In The Clinic'); 'Climate is mortality' ('Calvin's God').

Some phrases of Lafitte's read like sections of Van Gogh's paintings: 'knives of rain'; or Max Beckmann's: 'oiled existence skins'.

'In The Clinic' is the accessible mental illness piece which had to be written, but still surprises metaphorically: 'November is/ The staff nurse with the clinical smile'. It includes the motif of the head as a helmet which crops up sporadically throughout the collection: 'Schizophrenia's / Worse, that's when you wear a balaclava /Helmet in the summer'.

Lafitte's introspection is limitless: 'I am no macro-lover,/nor even very nice' ('If There's God Above The Blood-Bathed

Heavens'). It verges on the solipsistic: 'I AM MY WORLD' ('Homage To Wallace Stevens').

Lafitte is gripped in a morbid theology, a faithless faith blighted by a questioning intellect: 'There is no final metaphor. Only this,/Inevitable, fidget with the images. Canterbury carried by anthropomorphic/Frenzy demands male ministers'. At the end of this piece Lafitte, as if exhausted with trying to sum up the 'sensed otherness' of spirituality, sighs a final metaphor: 'men fumbling with matches in the night' ('Thoughts At Night').

Some parts of this collection read like a philosophical self-help pamphlet getting in a bit of a tangle. Lafitte is a soldier of doubt who comes through the smoke of the battlefield in spite of himself, in spite of his final act. His mastery of poetic styles is breathtaking as is his descriptive inventiveness. He is only let down by occasional over-theologizing.

So is Lafitte's philosophical epitaph to be: 'My god has gone; we are all/alone now, each in our desperate bed' ('Letter from Mwanza')? Powerfully typical of this poet's gifted pessimism, but I prefer: 'Yet shall/My love endure the summer of my strength' ('Seven Last Words').

Nicholas Lafitte's *Near Calvary: Selected Poems 1959 – 1970* is published by The Many Press, ISBN 0 907326 20 X

The One Tribe Quandary

Based in London, This is a new Survivor's Poetry group. It's specifically for Black and Asian Survivors of mental distress. The Black Survivors group is of broad spectrum and scope. (Without regard to race, other kinds of kindred spirits will be welcomed as our guests). 'The One Tribe Quandary' will be affiliated with the Survivors' Poetry network.

One of the group's aims and objectives is to enhance the multiculturalness of the Survivors' Poetry network.

For further details contact Lloyd Lindsay on: 0208 743 2361

Loads of Foreign Stuff

Two reviews of the Emlit Project

DAVID HART

This big paperback is unwieldy, wonderful, awkward, visionary, the print is too small, the writings and the very act of cross-translating are fascinating. The cover is a disaster: I thought at first I'd been sent a computer manual or an EU policy document. The contents are a precious bundle.

As to the facts, I can't do better than copy them from the back cover. The languages translated from are Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, Bengali, Urdu, Hindi, Sinhala, Picard, Walloon, Lingala, Sorbian, Greek, Turkish, Sicilian, Albanian, Galician, Arabic, Amazic, Gun and Catalan. Six universities across Europe co-operated: London, Liège, Regensburg, Palermo, Barcelona, Málaga.

Thus there are 19 minority languages represented, 33 writers, 48 'short literary works', with 240 translations. The book is 'EU-supported.'

The languages chosen are 'those of ancient origin in Europe and those originating elsewhere'. The book has poetry, prose (fiction including stories for children and non-fiction) and short dramas. Everything (including the introduction and notes) is translated into English, French, German, Italian and Spanish, 'the five most widespread European (now worldwide) languages.'

Background information is given on the minority languages. For some of them, it means present context rather than ancient history. For instance, Greek and Turkish are here in the German section, being migrant minority languages in that country. Bengali, Hindi and other South Asian languages are listed under 'Britain'.

I wonder how many readers will recognise all the names of the languages, let alone know any writings translated from them. Lingala and Amazic are among those new to me.

As a book for use in schools and colleges, the book is an invaluable resource, both to see (and from the CD to hear some of) the languages in action, and not least to compare translations into the 'major languages'.

The book does, of course, beg big questions, one of which might be put like this: If you were asked to put forward a poem to represent English, what would you choose? Closer to the way the book works, how to choose a poem to represent Welsh? The book's choice are three poems by Twm Morys. Why not three poems by different poets? Some languages are presented by more than one writer, some by more than one form.

Another question: Is the book consistent – like a single tree ring – in showing poems and other writings from a similar moment in time? There are notes on the writers, all of them alive when the notes were written, of different generations. I'm not sure what such small samplings can tell us about the cultures that gave rise to these writers whose writings include those shown here.

Is there a culturally significant reason why Welsh and Greek and others should be represented by poetry, while Albanian is represented by a one-act play?

It takes a book like this – which is not 'like' any other that I know of – to make the reader ask such questions. Every school, college and university library should have several copies, and they should be used, not just stuck in 'Reference'. But how to use the book? In what niche of the curriculum? I can hear teachers and lecturers saying, 'Well, it doesn't quite fit into what I do.' Or worse, '... into what I'm supposed to do.' But what is more important now than empathising – I mean being merry and sad together – across boundaries? And how better to do that than through imaginative writing? They're real, those people! Like us!

Note: This review is reprinted from *Writing in Education*, Issue 31, Spring 2004. Survivors Poetry have a reciprocal membership with the National Association of Writers in Education who publish *Writing in Education*.

BARRY TEBB

This volume is a magnificent achievement, a glorious glory-hole of minority language poetry translated into five European languages. The book is haptic and entrancing and taking a poem on its journey from language to language is a sheer joy for those who, like me, are entranced by the sound as well as the meaning of poetry.

I am hardly a linguist but if you take the English language text of a poem and work through the translations the original is hugely enriched by the additional rhetoric and resonance each language adds.

Daisy Abey's 'Woodland Grove' (p. 82) is not an intrinsically difficult poem and therefore the translations are able to create parallels which keep the flavour of the original while building layer upon layer of sound-value. The French version (p. 227) is sheer genius and Christine Pagnouille is, to me, the best French translator. Pagnouille knows French poetry and somehow in her version the voices of Eluard, Claudel, Bonnefoy, Frénaud and the whole gamut of Twentieth Century French poetry is employed to create a series of poems which are individually and as a group a garden of delights. As I read I translated back into English – it is an irresistible impulse because Pagnouille's translations are not only poems in themselves but I suspect, are improvements on the original – however absurd this statement seems. Without checking Debjani Chatterjee's English from Bengali I translated the first verse as

However hard I tried to recall
How that year had gone
Months, days and hours
However long which alone and lonely
I began and ended in exile and in song.

However hard I tried to recollect
The heaviness of my heart, night frost
Had killed the daffodils of carnivals long-gone

Hurled into tunnelled darkness of the underground
The endless abysses which even on the wings
Of birds in song found nowhere to belong.

This is very far from Debjani Chatterjee's translation, of course, it is a 'version,' a gesture of salutation and exaltation which this book triggers – a chorus of many choirs singing Schiller's 'Ode To Joy' as Beethoven used it to bring his Ninth Symphony to its glorious finale.

Karl Thielecke gives Abey's poem a Goethe-like presence that is most certainly not in the original:

Es war der Ort, an dem wir die Jahrtausendwende
verbrachten.
Kalte Winde wehten um a woodland Grove.
Ein Haus mit einem weißen Gesicht auf durchweichter
Erde.

Eleonora Chiavetta evokes the flow of riverine deltas, the liquidity of sparkling Italian wine:

Il giorno dopo, serrammo le porte per l'ultima volta
la mante in fiamme, il cartello "Venduta" fissato allo
staccato.

This multi-textuality creates gateways to the future and to the past simultaneously.

'I am a poem, not a poet' Lacan wrote at his most enigmatic and somehow this strange, wonderful book is like the stars of the firmament shining in seraphic glory, immanent and transcendent as Claudel's exhaltations at their most flamboyant.

A special extra joy is in the CD nestling inside the book cover. I've long been a fan of the Gaelic poems of Crichton-Smith and Derek Thompson but Aonghas Macneacail is a delight to discover:

snàmh anns an eabar ghleadhrach
eadar freumhaichean
mo dhà chànan

('an tùr cailte')

swimming in the clangorous mud
between the roots of my two languages

('the lost tower')

In this volume the reader swims in, I believe, twenty four languages in all: it is for all poets a paradise of passion. The EMLIT Project: European Minority Literatures in Translation, edited by Paula Burnett, is published by Brunel University Press, Department of English, Brunel University, Uxbridge, UB8 3PH (2003). 500 pages & CD. Price £9.99. ISBN: 1 902316 36 3 .

Letter to the Editor

Dear James Ferguson,

Thank you very much indeed for my copy of Poetry Express, which I received today. I do appreciate the fact that you are trying to become the utmost critic in the profound sensual aesthetic art of poesy (i.e. of pure beauty created by the likes of Oscar Wilde and Co.) However, to cover Ben Jonson as, and I quote 'a product of a London grammar school, and a one-time bricklayer' is about as detrimental to the art of poetry as would be a colander in propelling a punt on the river Cam in stormy Emancipation!

My dear old chap, Jonson was not only educated as you so rightly pointed out at Westminster Grammar School, but also at St John's College, Cambridge. Why do you think Shakespeare recognised such an endearing old chap who could not only pen such a wonderful work as Every Man In His Humour, but also create such wonderful scented rhetoric obscuring a hidden code for such an elaborate spy-ring :-)) !! Dear, dear James, it's all right writing about Phoebus and his dust cart but never underestimate the true potential of pure poetical genius such as Benjamin (you should Knowell, my son, at least that's what Shakespeare recognised :-))

With the greatest of respect,

Joseph Roscian Ephraim

– We're not sure that Ben Jonson was at St John's as a student. Fuller says he was, but Jonson says he wasn't. Maybe he went there for a visit. Editor

The Prose Poem

David Miller

The prose poem in English is curiously ignored or distrusted, on the one hand, and yet practised by a wide range of significant poets, on the other. Those who ignore or distrust it often do so because of a conviction – or prejudice – that poetry can only be poetry when it's in verse, or if you dislike that term, when it's written in lines. Alternatively, they identify the prose poem as a peculiarly French form of poetic writing.

The second point is the easiest to answer. It is certainly true that there are an extraordinary number of important French language poets who have written poetry in prose. It's impossible to miss the fact that there is a rich and varied tradition (if indeed we can speak of it as a single tradition), from Baudelaire and Rimbaud through Michaux and Ponge to Jabès and Laporte. The attitude amongst English poets and poetry readers to modern French poetry in general seems to be that it's okay for the French to write that way, but we're English! However, as far as prose poetry in English is concerned, there are important examples from Thomas De Quincey onwards, with antecedents in Traherne and Donne as well as the translators of the Bible. Contemporary practitioners include Roy Fisher, Lee Harwood, Christopher Middleton, Thomas A. Clark, Paul Buck, Alan Halsey and John Burnside, as well as the late Peter Redgrove and Ken Smith. Amongst American poets, one could name John Ashbery, Barbara Guest, Fanny Howe, Michael Heller, Lyn Hejinian, Sheila E. Murphy and Killarney Clary, as well as many others. Some years ago, Rupert Loydell and I compiled an anthology, *A Curious Architecture*, to show some of the diversity of prose poetry by writers in English.

Michael Benedikt addressed the other point many years ago, in his important book *The Prose Poem: An International Anthology*. The prose poem, he says, is 'characterised by the intense use of virtually all the devices of poetry, which includes the intense use of devices of verse. The sole exception to the possibilities... of verse is, we should say, the line break.' Another writer, Stephen Fredman, has written of poetry in prose as involving 'a prosody of syntax in sentences rather than a metrical prosody in lines' (*Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse*). (I should mention that some critics and poets prefer the terms 'poetry in prose' or 'poet's prose', as they feel that 'the prose poem' has become identified with lyric poetry in prose rather than either a wider range or else more 'experimental' work.) At any rate, we can state that rhythm is one of the elements of the prose poem, together with the sound, range and 'texture' of the language. We should also specify such possibilities as metaphor, simile, image, symbol and so forth, as well as the structure of the text. It is also comparatively easy for the prose poem to move towards other forms of prose writing, such as the story or the diary or the essay.

Two examples will have to suffice. Let me begin by quoting an excerpt from the late Robert Lax's extended prose poem, 21 pages (a meditation on the theme of searching for an elusive Other):

'Back to the streets, the parks, the quays. Back to standing and looking, watching, not watching the passers-by. Looking for a face. A face in the crowd. A particular one that I'd recognise and in a particular way. Did I think I'd find it? Did I know I'd find

it? I knew I was engaged in just one thing: in looking. Looking and looking.

'And back to nights of looking, outward and in; not knowing which way I'm looking, but waiting and looking. Back to the night-watch. Day-watch and night-watch. Dusk to dawn, dawn to dusk. Mid-day to midnight. I don't say I didn't tire: I did. I tired, but I didn't give up.'

We might put alongside this an excerpt from another extended prose poem, Rosmarie Waldrop's *Lawn of Excluded Middle*. Waldrop's prose poetry is also strongly reflective, yet more explicitly 'experimental' and the language more complex than Lax's:

'Words too can be wrung from us like a cry from that space which doesn't seem to be the body nor a metaphor curving into perspective. Rather the thickness silence gains when pressed. The ghosts of grammar veer toward shape while my hopes still lie embedded in a quiet myopia from which they don't want to arise. The mistake is to look for explanations where we should just watch the slow fuse burning. Nerve of confession. What we let go we let go.'

Waldrop is justly celebrated as a poet and translator, as well as the publisher (with her husband, the poet and translator Keith Waldrop) of Burning Deck Press. She has mentioned Edmond Jabès' example as focusing her own 'contradictory impulses toward flow and fragmentation.' As she says: 'I tend to think [the fragment] is our way of apprehending anything. Our inclusive views are mosaics. And the shards catch light on the cut, the edges give off sparks.'

This article appeared first in *Poetry News*, the bulletin of the Poetry Society. To join the Poetry Society write to 22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BX, phone 020 7240 9880, or email info@poetrysoc.com. www.poetrysoc.com

References:

– Michael Benedikt (ed.), *The Prose Poem: An International Anthology*, Dell, 1976.
– Stephen Fredman, *Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse*, CUP, 1983.
– Robert Lax, 21 pages / 21 seiten (with a German translation by Alfred Kuoni), Pendo-Verlag, 1984. (Also included in Lax's *33 Poems*, ed. Thomas Kellein, edition hansjörg mayer / New Directions, 1987.)
– Rupert Loydell and David Miller (eds.), *A Curious Architecture: a selection of*

contemporary prose poems, Stride Publications, 1996.

– Rosmarie Waldrop, [Autobiographical Essay], in: Joyce Nakamura (ed.), *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, v. 30, Gale Research, 1999.
– Rosmarie Waldrop, *Lawn of Excluded Middle*, Tender Buttons Press, 1993.

See also:

– David Miller, 'Robert Lax's 21 pages', in: David Miller and Nicholas Zurbrugg (eds.), *The ABCs of Robert Lax*, Stride Publications, 1999.

W.S. Graham's New Collected Poems

James Ferguson

(a)

The sun is streaming through the window. It's hot. Almost too hot. But not quite. Just the right temperature to review this book.

Sea-green the dusk-jacket. Pictureless. Light blue and large the first words on the cover: 'W.S. Graham'. These words in pale blue. And below: 'New'. And below; 'Collected'. And below: 'Poems'. These words in red. – Red! How many reds there are! Of what species is the red? Specify! – Dark red. Blood red, almost. Perhaps darkened by the green underneath, red seaweed floating on deep waves.

So lyrical the cover, with large letters far out and space near, one could hardly stop enthusing, or, once started, tell all, though one were to talk for a fortnight. The texture somewhat waxy, the paper ridged, horizontally, as if waves. In the bottom left hand corner, as if an uneager toe-dabbler on the shore, 'Poetry', tiny, in red. In the bottom right hand corner, 'ff', tiny, in light blue, as if a nugget of rock beckoning the shore-wanderer's newly bare feet.

Spinewards one recalls that cover at 'W.S. Graham New Collected Poems': this time small, though not tiny, colour values unchanged. At the foot another rock, 'ff', unchanged. But one speeds past, pausing only long enough to question whether the words are not too small here, as if barges along a canal, say in Holland, seen from afar, or nearer in Camden, if there the barges were to move, as perhaps they do, under cover of dark? For me, today, not too small. For you, perhaps, depending on your strength of eye: not too minute for a reading moment, but too small to give complete pleasure.

If so, and I may join you soon, I can only urge you to pass by, and on, to the wider delights of the back cover. There one swims unfettered in the same blue-green sea: one rests one's limbs in the cool water, moving idly, in harmony with the stillness of the day, even the birds above silent. Not merely cool to the skin: to the eye, nosing out from its protective burrow of hand as would a tiny mouse, the shade of the water offers restful pleasure, memories of a life supple and green, unhardened by the whirling winds of this world whipping the sand from the roots and stripping the plants' skins straight off. Floating out from the shore is a white-and-green-striped li-lo. – Careful! Don't let the tide take you! – A group of friends stretch out, vacant of articulate speech, 'www.faber.co.uk', 'ISBN 0-571-21015-5' and '9 780571 210152', motionless except for hands reaching for an ice-cold beer or iced cappuccino or latte from the ice-box.

(b)

Here's a poet's life. Born in 1918. First collection of poems, *Cage Without Grievance*, published in 1942. The next volume, *The Seven Journeys*, in 1944. 2nd Poems followed in 1945. Followed by *The White Threshold* in 1949. *The Nightfishing* succeeded this, in 1955. Malcolm Mooney's *Land* appeared in 1970. *Implements in their Places* hit the shelves in 1977. *Collected Poems* sprang into the waiting arms of the poetry world in 1979. Died 1986.

Here's another. Born in 1977, just like W.S. Graham's *Implements in their Places*. By the time W.S. Graham's *Uncollected Poems* was published, in 1990, had written poems. By the time *Aimed at Nobody: Poems from Notebooks* was published, in 1993, had written more. By the time W.S. Graham's *Selected Poems* had been published in 1996, had gone downstairs in G. David's bookshop, and picked up a remaindered copy of *Aimed at Nobody* for half price. Collecting some pamphlets for another poet, the poet met the publisher of *Uncollected Poems* in 2002. They talked, among other matters, of W.S. Graham. This publisher had known W.S. Graham, which was thrilling for the poet. In 2004 the poet ordered a review copy of *New Collected Poems*.

(c)

What do I like about Graham? (Not my friend Graeme, who works in West End Lane Books, West Hampstead! His name's spelt differently. I meant W.S. Graham!) I won't tell! If I did, you might think you know all about him and don't need to read him for yourself.

I won't repeat what I've read somewhere – 'where? for once don't look up the reference' (Geoffrey Hill, *The Orchards of Syon*) – that Graham straightened his language with a sane eye on Samuel Beckett's prose. I won't argue that his early work was beefed up with Neo-Romanticism. If I wanted to talk about that I'd have made notes on the informative series of articles about the Apocalyptic that have appeared in recent issues of *PN Review*. You can read those articles for yourself, if you're interested.

I could pass on the opinions of the press release, like a conscientious journalist. 'Regarded by many' – you're never alone with a W.S. Graham – 'as one of the best Romantic poets of the twentieth century and with a remarkable breadth and richness of vision' – it's right that you remarked on it, then, you hidden prompter, you imaginary cat, you whisperer at my ear (as Graham says himself, addressing *Poetry or Language*)! I'm one of his 'passionate readership' – you've hit the nail on the head there! 'This definitive edition' – a bold statement, my friend, as the author himself edited the 1979 *Collected Poems* – 'brings together [all of his published poems with a selection of notebook poems: here I summarise your words for you]' – that can't be argued with, let's end on this note of agreement, quickly, before we fall out. Smile for the cameras!

New Collected Poems by W.S. Graham is published by Faber and Faber, £25, ISBN 0-571-21015-5

THE POETRY EXPRESS BROADSHEET

Spring 2004

At the Time

a horror movie nightmare
without warning immersed I swear

my mind mince-meated
of tranquil state I was cheated

paranoia, fear and confusion
no amount of reality could break the illusion

for ever this was how it was to be
isolated and convinced I would not be free

frantic, desperate for a way clear
one day as yet again I endured the fear
of a happy thought came into my mind
at that moment the sun a-brighter shined

it felt comforting to believe
it was in friendship directed down to me
how nice it warmed my soul bereaved
the sun to shine just for me!

Dee Light, Jan 1997

Semantic Exercises

For Sari, whose surname translates into English as 'Shade'

Shade as in shelter, shade as in Hades:
Within one name reside two ladies.

Semantics is a shady business:
Shades of meaning, shades of shade.
In the shady world of madness
It's shadiness which must be weighed.

William Myddelton

The No-Go Zone

It wasn't a good night
for her to be on her own.
Alone, with her thoughts,
the seeds of destruction sown.
Stinkin' thinkin'.

It wasn't a good night
for her to be on her own.
Her head a no-go zone
that she shouldn't go into alone.

She might not make it out
in one piece.

Steve Lyons
Gone

Nothing drains the body and soul like grief.
Nothing's colder than kissing a corpse.

Virtuous and dumb: sweet dreams and kept promises.
Sleazy and smart: base dreams and broken promises.

Sweeter than wine, kinder to the liver.
Gone, like my lap when I stand up.
I want my base dreams back.
She can keep the broken promises.
Mine as well as her own.

Steve Lyons

Shell-shocked and Drowsy

I fly like a bird to the doctors,
a worm of illness caught in my throat.
I feed them the pain of eight years
and they feed me a sick note.

I crawl back on the brink of tears
and make a new pot of tea. I drink it
with cigarettes and Eccles cakes,
counting out the currents of my fears.

Each buttery crumb slides on my tongue
and is washed away by bitter-sweet tea,
like the lost years in the fog, trapped
in the memory of dogshit shoes.

Jeremy Young

Saga Holidays For All

Welcome to the land of beige,
the colour that's a colour
without being one.

Land of beige offers tourists
elation without joy,
tears without bedtime.

Experience the thrills
of sleep-walking
and paint-drying.

Stay in the land of beige
and we offer
– well, nothing.

Jeremy Young

Universal Pictures

I have yet to meet
or speak
to anyone without that beat
that stops the breath
and binds the feet
in depression.

We have all had it.

The workday blues
can't ever chose
the voltage for that blown fuse
to make you smile again
and refuse
to give in to depression.

We've all had it.

The bills pile up
can't eat or sup
that strong desire to cut
and run
to slash and burn but
you cannot run from depression.

We have all had it.

Some in milder forms
some extreme, nowhere to turn
some wish to be reborn
to start again.
And some do not return
from depression.

We've all had it.

Jeremy Young

Breakdown

The straw broke –
the camel had enough.
Light as a child's discarded sweet-wrapper –
could you believe it?
Knocked over.
The feather won.
I could not get up
for at least half a year.
My thoughts
muddled
confused
dead.
Me
swaying
like
a
brok
en
grandfather's clock.
Chipped
nipped
unwrapped
exposed

raw
a bloody steak
fed to the
snarling mouth of capitalism.

Wilma Kenny

Odyssey

Torpor set in:
it was the last I saw of you for many months.
These passed like the sun
on an old iron dial.

Like a reptile
I clung to a tree of normality,
fearing to flex one muscle
lest the actor's mask

drop

exposing the illusion.

Wilma Kenny

Oh how the pangs of memory jerk us:
Unwilling
We are willed back
Into the non-existent reality...
The vampires of imagination
Lunge their fangs deep
Into our helpless soul,
Draining our senses
Until we are heady with emptiness –
And still we crave more...
Oh my God!
Dig a groove for me that fits
Grant me strength enough
To grow into it every whit.
I wish to love – to understand
Your creation
The pulse that throbs
And learn to beat time to it
The way I was supposed to.
Let my time by yours
Don't let me waste another second more
In this, your secret box
We call living.
That you for everything.

Hajiya Somaya Pilchowska

Restoring the Cells

The care group was nervously gathering, similar sufferers
in a catacomb circle,

Strained faces pale in the ward's eerie fluorescent light,
Only the shadows of conversations disturbed the stillness.
A collective fear held everyone in its clutches:
Pain was alive here, coursing through all our troubled
veins,
Eager for victims to crush in its funeral embrace.
The healer approached me, smiling serenely with an inner
assurance,
She looked like a typical grandmother, neatly-ironed
blouse and sensible shoes,
Looking directly into my hurt, watching it flaming,
Red-hot in its ominous vision of a limited future.

She sat and held my hand, a cradling gesture of loving
support,
Urging me to rest and relax, breathe softly and let my
imagination flow,
Stop brooding about my cancer as an inexorable malignant
threat
Intent on snapping my brittle hold on life:
I was more than porcelain tissue, fine but fragile,
The whole of me was greater than the mere sum of my
parts,
My illness need not be mortal, I could struggle and
survive,
Emerge successful, a more sensitive complete person,
A doctor's diagnosis was not a life-threatening certainty
The tumour touched my body only, not my vital self.

She would teach my damaged cells to fly
Away to a realm of glacial glowing purity
Where icicles flashed in glittering sunlight
And snowy peaks majestically towered over alpine
meadows
Rich in rippling streams and fragrant flowers
A cleansing sparkling atmosphere where illness faded fast.
Like a soaring summer swallow I would dart and dash
with ease
Flying wherever I chose, not tied to any bruised body,
Travelling through valleys echoing with good health,
A radiant imagine of pristine purity
Obeying an inner voice that called to me of cure.

I close my eyes and became an eager nestling
Keen to fly at last and view the landscape with
independence,
Cast off my anxiety and spread my outstretched wings,
Rush through clouds and settle where I pleased,
Travelling towards the world and all its perfect promise,
Not maliciously tied to molecules that locked me in one
place,
A solitary confinement of despair and lingering
melancholy.
I affirmed her vision and swooped and relished my new-
found freedom,
I was fully living at last, the shackles of disease were
melting into air.

C. Korta

Bag Woman

She was a pavement pariah, a nomad with no oasis,
Well-dressed women frowned at her with manicured
displeasure

Firmly holding onto designer handbags, richly filled,
Whilst the ageing down-and-out nervously shuffled past.

In one blistered hand she clutched a batter carrier-bag
Almost empty, the meagre sum of a life's endeavours,
She was surviving on bottom-line basics,
Bemused children gawped at this urban reject.

In her other hand she gripped an umbilical piece of string
Attached to a plastic toy dog that she patiently pulled
along,
Its head nodding constantly to the rhythm of her chatter
And its tail wagging repeatedly with her every weary
step.

She clearly thought the world of that dog
A casual throw-away she had rescued from a city skip,
But always there for her in the concrete desolation.

C. Korta

Unemployed at Home

His meanly lean cat leaps from off his stiffened knees
And gleefully tears at the split and dust-filled furniture.
The room is heavily curtained in middle-aged gloom,
Only a weary ticking clock disturbs the daily morgue of
living.

Wallpaper slowly peels itself away from moulding walls
Whilst tattered newspapers prop themselves against the
empty grate:
Those carpenter's fingers idly scratch an untrimmed beard
As the baffled radio moans out its endless chatter.

Yet chiselled eyes regard this shrouding gloom
Mocking the empty wine-bottles scattered by the door.
His drill is silenced,
No favoured saw lies neatly in his hand,
Outdoors and tossed aside
The workbench tots in wind and sleeting rain
Alongside a resting tool-bag holed beyond repair.
The garden fills with stubborn sodden weeds
Choking the aching ground that used to stir at his touch.

Meanwhile he lazes through the spring's late afternoon
pallor,
Measuring his steps towards the scream of silenced
thinking.

C. Korta

nocturnal

enchanted twilight
turning white streaky cloud formations
into UFOs and scared ovals
twinkling stardust

with a whole belt of constellations
big dipper
like an amazing
bent frying pan
sizzling radio ham
as the hunter
wields his celestial sabre
to cut down his troublesome
next-door neighbour
the phantom of the night
appears in vision
shadows in the hollows
cower in submission
as the blue hue ripens
i sense the cosmos
on a mission
forces at work, unseen
beyond the midnight screen
navy blue and
clouds as white as cream
resemble an x-ray
of the torso of Pan
spirit of paradise
with magic unplanned
starbeats with the heat of pulse
the essence of a presence
which is hard to divulge
etheric body yet to be formed
on the horns of a moonlit dawn

Alex Warner

from angel to demon

in the confusion of twilight
when the horns of the crescent moon
prick the depths of sadness
saturating a chaotic universe
i have seen the moon weep
yellow tears
her mouth open
to scream a silent scream
i have wanted to kiss her
but could not
her pain was too great
veiled by clouds hiding her from view
she has turned from angel to demon
only her horns are visible
they prick
my wounded conscience
we have both cried
and broke down before
the deep ocean of unshakeable night
there is no moonlight
she is unconsolable
heartbroken
she weeps stardust
across a shaken milkyway
i would kiss her
but my pain is too great
i would embrace her
but she is resigned to her fate

too upset and shocked to speak
her mouth opens
but no words come
see her eyes
dark with grief
who is the thief
who has done this to her?
i am gutted for her
my heart is broken because hers is
i love the moon
she's so beautiful
so deep
i weep, long into the night
she would kiss me
but my pain is too great

Alex Warner

disused

tree hangs
like a disused building
electronic circuit in disarray
wires and steel
damp, limp, vandalised
branches like
a web of brokenglass
spider is a menace
disruptive, uncooperative
tree waits
to be taken away, one day
replaced, having outwelcomed its stay
street furniture people
will unclutter the gutter
unclog the stopper
new tree earnestly erected
and protected
along with bench
and public footpath
near streetlight
like papering over
civic pride

Alex Warner

Rainbows Touting Freedom

Two reviews of Adam Horovitz's Next Year In Jerusalem

DAVE RUSSELL

'This title ... is taken from a prayer at the Passover Feast made in the hope that next year Jews will be able to celebrate freedom in Jerusalem.'

This moving thematic collection shows great reflexive self-appraisal from a Jewish perspective, although, as Adam says in his notes, 'I am not Jewish according to orthodox tradition.' In 'My Invisible Aunt' he explores the 'missing pieces' in his Jewish background, in a close domestic context. He speculates on ancestors whose very existence he is forced to doubt, and these doubts in turn reflect his own problems of estrangement within this background: 'my invisible aunt envisages me... as half-Jew meat or watered milk... or just as unclean animal... as pig'. But in 'Memory' he fully attunes to a bereavement within a Jewish family.

Historically, the poems cover a broad range. The section 'Next Year in Jerusalem' is truly panoramic, making exciting juxtaposition of Biblical history and contemporary reality, mythological rhetoric and the sobering banality of today's real world (with due recognition of its horrors). 'History Lesson' makes an interesting gloss on the story of King Alfred burning the cakes – the contribution of indifference and apathy to the world's disasters. The book's main focus is on the period from World War II and the Holocaust to the present-day situation in Israel and Palestine. 'They Sit in Darkness' and 'Dream' are specific to the wartime period. The latter explores the subject of the First World War holders of the Iron Cross who were subsequently sent to concentration camps.

But the general feeling of this collection is one of timelessness, and perennial problems. 'The Gravedigger' and 'History Lesson' cover the theme of natural growth on war-torn landscapes. In the words of the opening poem. 'Married to the Body', this collection is 'rich with the thought-threads... of generations'.

Judiciously limited in quantity, Adam's collection is incredibly rich in depth and expression – truly riveting and thought-provoking.

SIMON JENNER

Adam Horovitz's well-produced pamphlet *Next Year in Jerusalem* signals more than its provenance in the title: his very name conjures the potential shadow of his poet parents Michael and Frances. They'd be happy to be forgotten by the first few lines of his opening poem: and they are. Born 1971 (so a contemporary of Sophie Hannah, for example) he's very different to either, and very different, too, to the young poet he once booked into his cabaret. This was Lachlan Young, the TV poeticule who'd drawn the wrath of Horovitz Snr, ambushed by not knowing his son had hired him.

Horovitz in fact leapfrogs the immediate family, back to his cultural inheritance. 'Married to the Body' works this in its final lines. Having opened:

Blood, like music

links back into itself
rich with the thought-threads
of generations.

He concludes: 'Blood is a hurtling music / married to the body. // There is no ghetto in blood'. This microcosmic lyricism – he never says blood singing, but this, too, is a root – very adroitly marries the literal amniotic life (no ghetto blood-transfusions, for instance) with the racial overtones suddenly brought up short at the end. Retrospectively, Horovitz has placed sleeping metaphors that now charge up with a new significance. 'DNA shivers and spirals / through veins / mournful as clarinets.' This hint of klezma flips over the predictable preceding two lines.

The next poem, 'History Lesson', probes the deracinating experience seen from the perspective of the older émigrés mourning their children:

There was nothing we could do
but blaze at the fireplaces
and burn the bread with our tears.

It's the arresting conclusion that twists this poem into something other than simply mourning the dereliction of Passover. Blazing at (like guns for eyes) and burning tears takes on a corrosive, sad menace, and in any case has other ramifications that Horovitz does not, here, underline.

'My Invisible Aunt' shows Horovitz attempting the same delicacy with more explicit narration. He questions her or her Rabbi husband's existence, but solidly through the quatrains evidence piles up; and when Horovitz's grandmother states 'She is very orthodox', the poem lifts with metaphoric unease. Horovitz feels himself scrutinised by what he's conjured, the aunt who 'envisages me / as half-Jew meat or watered milk // or just as unclean animal, as pig'. Anger dissolves into sad relinquishment for 'the foundations of her god's house / shifting in the sand she built them on.' This has resolved a strongly charged metaphor, though perhaps Horovitz could compress his quotidian details and building-up. But the nub remains, and is really worthwhile. Poems like 'Gravedigger' again evince Horovitz's neat contemporary way with single attentions: 'All holes // are significant and useful. / I like them for their emptiness, // for the views they afford if change.' The sudden shift of consciousness of someone dying, famous or close (the thrill, as Negley Farson said of his friend and subject Francis Bacon's demise) is rendered as a literal view, molehills of inner being. There's more than a hint of lay Buddhism in this, deftly turned in the worm-eye's view of the gravedigger.

'Dream' is immensely disturbing, literally enshrouding the notion that wearers of the Iron Cross like his grandfather could end in the gas chamber:

a hissing stream of spent gas
touching nothing.
The bullet he had taken
and kept locked in his flesh

for thirty years sang within him
seeping out through scar tissue like light...

Horovitz takes on huge themes, which he has a right to, witness to his heritage. Sometimes the poems, as here, rise superbly to the metaphoric challenge of a particular like the locked-in bullet. In others, the very documenting of facts lies heavily and an elegiac gesture to moving details makes it rise above the documentary, but not lift. Theodore Adorno said that no lyric poetry can be written after Auschwitz, not that poetry can't. Horovitz, confronting this, is essentially a lyric poet, and thus is doubly challenged by his recurring subject-matter. When intimately imagined, it miraculously works, for a few stanzas. And Horovitz has more to say than this, taking in other poems a sure pulse for the epiphanic moment, if one can be doubly blasphemous. He wouldn't mind. His title poem comes last, a bravura performance far better read out than read, unlike the other poems in this pamphlet. But towards the end Horovitz conjures things that deserve to be enshrined in a tighter poem:

Next year in Jerusalem
 an old man with a large beard
 will walk backwards through a hall of mirrors
 chanting,
 dressed only in fig leaves.

And the conclusion, not avoiding whimsy, brushes itself lightly: 'and rainbows lurking on street corners / touting hope.' Three to one, Purple Haze? Horovitz's wry humour will save his lyricism, and point to his growth.

Next Year in Jerusalem: A sequence of poems by Adam Horovitz. Available from Hoohah Press, 29 Horns Road, Stroud, GL5 1EB. £2

Adam Horovitz will be touting more of his peace-touting rainbows when he performs with Leah Thorn at our Dioramanite on 27th November.

If you can't wait until then for your Horovitz fix, Michael Horovitz will be performing with Dave Russell at our Dioramanite on 26th June.

More details of all that sort of thing on page 25.

Errata

It is the policy of Poetry Express to correct errors as soon as possible.

We would like to apologise for a gross inaccuracy in the article 'Arguing with Leeds Library', a review of Barry Tebb's Collected Poems, which appeared on pages 14-15 of the last issue (number 18) of Poetry Express. There it is stated (page 15, fourth paragraph) that certain of Tebb's poems have 'ancient precedent in the Homeric 'War of the Cranes and the Doodleducks', which was translated by Dr Johnson. 'Homeric' here is somewhat ambiguous. The poem we intended to allude to was in fact an imitation of Homer, but one written in far from ancient times, by Joseph Addison, the essayist.

This poem was indeed translated into English by Dr Johnson as 'The Battle of the Pygmies and Cranes', and can be found in his collected poems (pp. 42-47, Samuel Johnson, The Complete English Poems, edited by J.D. Fleeman, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1971). The notes to this edition quote a passage from Dr Johnson's life of Addison in which he comments upon this poem: 'Three of his Latin poems are upon subjects on which, perhaps, he would not have ventured to have written in his own language: The Battle of the Pygmies and Cranes, The Barometer and a Bowling Green. When the matter is low or scanty, a dead language, in which nothing is mean because nothing is familiar, affords great conveniences; and by the sonorous magnificence of the Roman syllables, the writer conceals penury of thought and want of novelty, often from the reader, and often from himself.' A full text of this life can be found at:

<http://www.gutenberg.net/etext03/lvadd10.txt>

This poem of Addison's is distinct from the genuinely ancient poem commonly translated as 'The Battle of the Frogs and Mice', which too may be described as Homeric, being most probably the composition of a follower of the Homer who we know from the Iliad and Odyssey. Coleridge's verdict on this poem was that the humour of it lay chiefly in the names of the animals. A translation can be found at:

http://www.homer.com.mx/Homeric_Hymns_and_Homerica/BATRACHOMYOMACHIA.html

Such a confusion of poems was regrettable, though perhaps forgivable. We are at a loss to explain how these two poems became further confused with the Doodleduck: an entirely different species of poem, and one singularly unrelated to either Addison's or Homer's whimsical mini-epics. The Doodleduck, as described in a short (four-line) poem of that name by John Horder (b. 1936) is explicitly said to 'go with the flow' when faced with difficulty. Such a temperament would hardly lead it to become involved with pitched battles. We apologise for any confusion caused by this mistake; and reassure our readers that we did not mean to impugn this peaceable fowl's spotless character.

Uh Huh Him: Jeremy Reed

James Ferguson on Heartbreak Hotel: A Tribute to the King in Verse

Jeremy Reed's *Heartbreak Hotel*, a collection of poems about Elvis – 245 pages of poems, most of them one page long – has... Look, I want to be nice about this book. Not because I loved Elvis: I'd never listened to his music before reviewing this book. But because Jeremy Reed is an interesting poet, or rather, an interesting number of poets. Like Elvis, he's a self-mythologiser who was blessed with the talent – and the looks, too – to pull it off. He has picked up and subsequently ditched a number of ways of being a poet. In the 1970s, when he was in his twenties, he was a Sturm und Drang Hart-Crane-eating sort of Modernist, published by small presses. With his 1980 volume *Bleeker Street* from the mid-size poetry press Carcanet, he held back on some of that oddness, and put it with a somewhat formal tightness. In his latest phase the subject-matter is stuff that isn't normally found in 'proper' poetry (unironic fanzine-style adulation of popstars and models, for example) with a style that is much easier than his earlier work. The poems are verbally less dense, they set out clear narratives, with recognisable characters, and have clear beginnings and endings. (This book of poems about Elvis really is a book of poems about Elvis – most of them describing him, some spoken by him.)

It's hard to know what to make of this change. Hardline Modernists (and there are some, honourable and strict as Puritans) would describe it as a falling-off. I must confess that I lean towards this: I like poetry that I can get my mind's teeth into. The poetry in *Heartbreak Hotel* reads as easily as prose. There is form – rhythm, occasional rhyme – but they seem to serve quite a basic function: to remind the reader that what they are reading is poetry. Whenever I finished reading one of the poems in here, I tended to experience that immediate sensation of conclusion that I get with well-written poems (one of those automatic responses that, taken together, I base my thinking about poetry on). But at the same time the response felt too automatic: I hadn't felt the poem, and yet I reacted. And I feel a bit cheated when that happens. I want it to be special every time: I don't mind waiting, or putting a lot of effort in. I'm willing to do my share – to make a real partnership between me and the poem – but I'm not so interested in a poem that tells me 'I'm finished' before I've got to know it.

Technical explanation: the last lines of these poems are often iambic pentameters, and so automatically conjure up 'poetry' for someone raised on English literature. 'To bring a generation to its knees.' 'She almost wishes that he couldn't sing.' 'Black country pop song, and each word sung true.' 'There in Arkansas, singing in the rain.' 'Roaring on a trajectory through space.' 'Praying for deliverance from the beat.' Those are the last lines of the first six poems. The first two are completely regular, the poetic equivalent of a perfect cadence in music, but all are ten-syllabled, and (except for the line with 'Arkansas' in, which is unusual) common variations on the pentameter rhythm. They also all are separate syntactical units, which enhances the sense of finality. Some also have other typical features of an ending: the use of a novel phrase (it's unusual for a whole generation to be talked of as 'brought to its knees', or for someone to pray for deliverance from anything other than sin, and therefore striking); of an epigram-like mixture of slight paradox, salted with negatives

(almost wishes he couldn't sing'); or new application of a previously-known phrase (as here with 'singing in the rain'); an solid affirmation ('each word sung true'); a jump to something beyond the subject ('through space').

I can't believe this book was written other than very quickly: the very subtitle (*A Tribute to the King in Verse*) is as bland as a greetings card, the sort of thing that a panel of people would chose.

However, I know other people feel differently, and like poetry that is easy to follow. (The back cover wears enthusing quotes from famous pop singer Björk and famous poet John Ashbury.) Narrative and character always please most readers: the Modernist rejection of them, whilst interesting, can be parochial (in the sense that to reject these is to reject most of the world's literature). Elvis is an inexhaustibly interesting subject. (Having found a way to talk about the what I feel about the book, I'm rewriting most of this article, which was originally merry chat about him.) But I don't know that Jeremy Reed feels that. It's true he's never been a poet of strong feeling – he's a poet of detachment, of absences – but I feel that this book might have been written without any real impulse, and instead be the result of a good idea: a very long collection of poems about a popular subject. (Reed has said that his next collection is about the Rolling Stones.) I could be wrong: maybe Reed is passionate about Elvis, but the Elvis here is defined mostly by externals, and so I feel that I'm only being told what I know already. I know that Elvis was into junk food and had strong feelings for his mother and dead brother and that he lived in a palace of tat – and I'm someone who hadn't listened to him before last month. When I read Camille Paglia comparing him to Byron I was exited: it seemed audacious thought, possessing some of the anarchic energy of its subjects, and I hadn't heard it anywhere before.

The Ancient Greeks went to the theatre to see versions of their myths. The Elvis myth, for Western Europeans and Americans, is similarly well-known. Without some novelty a number of readers will be displeased with this collection, though there are many readers who will want to see the Elvis they already know transplanted from biography or record into a poem, and they'll be happy with it.

Heartbreak Hotel: A Tribute to the King in Verse by Jeremy Reed (Orion, 2002) £12.99 ISBN 0-75285-159-4

Uh Huh Him: Elvis

James Ferguson on Heartbreak Hotel: A Tribute to the King in Verse

El-vis. Two syllables of tenderness and longing: the tongue lounging against the roof of the mouth, rolling against the teeth, and the air finally escaping in a sigh. Elvis. He was Presley, Elvis in the index to *The N.M.E. Rock and Roll Years* that gave suburban teenagers so much to dream about; he was E1vis on the cover of a recent compilation of his number one hits; he was Elvis Aaron Presley when his gravestone was carved; but under the gentle arms of record players he is always Elvis.

Stand in front of the mirror on the inside of the wardrobe, sun streaming in at the window, bouncing off your hair, off your hands moving up to your mouth. Yes! ('If you put it on – if you put it on!') The reddest lipstick! It's almost too hot, but it's just right. Say the words into the mirror: 'Take me in arms, rock your baby!' Reach for the makeup bag again, covered in stars. Decisions, decisions! Take out your mascara. First whiten lashes into threads of frost. Then overdub with sheer black. Superficial depth on hidden light. (He would approve, he would understand.) Glamour's foundation: there's no such thing as too much makeup, if you can pull it off. Pencil the eyes. Pencil the lips. Eyeshadow. Glitter if possible: drop it on your hair, smooth it down your neck. You're ready to read on. 'Aaron's dressed.'

Dance on, beautiful bodies! The music you hear moves those limbs: the music moved by the Geist [spirit, intelligence] of the universe. Music is order! Thrash your heads about in a hail of pom-poms.

Only yesterday, walking down Tottenham Court Road, I saw a man come out of a pub with a t-shirt with early-period Elvis's face on it. And going into a bookshop on Charing Cross Road I saw a man with a shirt with late-period Elvis on. It is perhaps a temperamental difference whether one thinks of Elvis in the one or the other of his personae: and both are the essential. The young turk, the elder statesman. But Elvis never became dessicated in the way, say, T.S. Eliot did coming up to the 1950s, writing dull plays and one of the most boring books ever, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*. As Eliot himself pointed out in his essays, few poets are able to change, most repeating themselves with weakening force. Not that Eliot himself did that: but if only he had lived with the example of Elvis before him, and so had been able to see what could be done to prevent oneself setting off down the thorn-and-daisy-fringed avenue of *Four Quartets*, which manages to make lots of exciting enough things seem platitudinous. (Personally, Eliot's earliest work is closest to electropop, so it's closest to my heart.)

The reason Eliot never succeeded as a playwright is that he had no feeling for popular culture, and yet didn't allow himself to write what he was fitted for, masques, for the court assembled in Bloomsbury or Russell Square. He had no feeling for the trash of life: and without that no one can be truly popular. We live in a trashy age, but most people in most ages are a bit trashy (what are Chaucer's pilgrims? what's Mozart?) Elvis had the advantage of being born to the manor: he had a right to witness to his heritage. But 'it was like he whispered his dream in all our ears and then we dreamed it,' as Bruce Springsteen commented. 'They said you were high class: that

was just a lie,' as Elvis sang in 'Hound Dog,' a vulgar supposed expose of vulgarity that actually revels and identifies with it. (Elvis on one live recording slows the song down to half-time. And the audience are both screaming and laughing: the naturally comic being inseparably linked the vulgar, the melodramatic, the gender-crossing.)

The consciousness that this in vulgarity ('Let me show ya, let me show ya lo-ove!') is power is of course there in the myths that the pop world tells. 'Johnny B Goode,' which Elvis covered, in which Johnny 'never learned to read and write so well, but he could play the guitar like ringing a bell.' Or, a song with a similar myth, 'Guitar Man,' which starts, not unlike Elvis's career, with quitting his job down at the carwash and leaving his Momma a goodbye note, via Memphis, to success. Elvis's cover of this song, as might be expected, captured the brio necessary to such an adventurer. Prefacing it with a snatch of 'Do not forsake me, O my darling,' broken into by the guitar-lick, and inserting a potential patron's dismissal of the young hero ('We don't need a guitar man, son') between verses.

Kenneth Clark observed that the two greatest art critics of the Nineteenth Century, Hazlitt and Ruskin, came from philistine backgrounds, and so were left free to treat art as something important, rather than a matter of good taste and refinement. Ruskin (near the beginning of his autobiography, *Praeterita*) observed that his readers 'must have felt, long since, that, though very respectable people in our way, we [his family] were all of us definitely vulgar people; just like my aunt's dog Towzer was a vulgar dog, though a very good and dear dog. Said reader should have seen also that we had not set ourselves up to have a taste in anything.'

Elvis, to me, is perennially healthy, like Walter Scott was to Ruskin, or like Chaucer was to Coleridge. (Elvis's spirit may be said to be similar to Chaucer's: at base humorous, playful, self-mocking, character-adopting, cunning in ways to enthral an audience.) *Heartbreak Hotel* is a mere reading of the godlike amplitude of Elvis. Here's a French Elvis: a portrait by a English painter dreaming of Verlaine and Rimbaud and decadence: the American health is absent. Or the gospel truth under the street-corner improvisation. But no one part of Elvis is the only part, although some people may only want part (and, after all, we can only appreciate what we know about). 'Poets are chalices in which the wine of life is kept,' wrote Hölderlin in a poem about Napoleon, 'but the spirit of this young man can't be kept in poems: he lives and remains in the world.' The sun streams in the window.

Heartbreak Hotel: A Tribute to the King in Verse by Jeremy Reed (Orion, 2002) £12.99 ISBN 0-75285-159-4

Reviews

Mrs. Perkins and Oedipus
By Elizabeth Bartlett
Reviewed by Alanna Allen

Published on Elizabeth Bartlett's 80th birthday in April 2004, this is a remarkable account of powerful poems, evoking feelings of deprivation, disappointments and loneliness. These works have a natural quality, immediately engaging me. Some are more accessible than others. Each poem has its own feeling, using a frugality of words, yet bold in attention to detail. It is brave and in many instances emotional. This is a compelling journey and a fascinating read.

It is hard to choose a favourite. I particularly liked 'Staring into the Abyss' describing memory and loss. 'I read your novels and journals / which are all I have of you / and wear your socks and jerseys / to keep me warm, give back the zimmer, / the commode, the incontinence pads, / and weep, for what you were; and I have lost'.

Bartlett writes about real, ordinary people who have lived through great distress, some of which she has experienced herself. These are painfully accurate visions into people's lives. She draws on past loves and ill fortune as she faces up to the tragic loss of her husband. Although tough and sometimes surreal, she is also courageous, amusing and mockingly scornful. In 'Photography Class' she shows another side to her writing: 'Mrs. A brings her transparencies / (work that one out) / and Hugo with his nudes.' Then 'The Tutor? He aims / his zoom lens / at landscapes, claims / affinity with rocks and stones, never pins down humans / in their natural habitat. / His topography is erotic, / but his wife is fat'.

A collection of 49 poems, it is certainly a good read. I genuinely enjoyed it, though sometimes the content is raw. Bartlett is an observant truth-teller, and rightly so.

Mrs. Perkins and Oedipus is published by Bloodaxe Books.
Price £7.95. ISBN 1 85224 668 5

Night Calling
By Judy Gahagan
Reviewed by Roy Holland

Judy Gahagan trained as an academic psychologist, journalist and ballet school pianist, and tutored in social sciences for the Open University in Rome before bringing out this, her second collection of poetry. She also runs a course for the Poetry School on Archetypal Psychology and Poetry.

She deals with night and the mystery of darkness, and has a wonderful sense of place, whether dealing with areas abroad she knows, such as Venice, or Russia in 'Funfair near Chernobyl' or 'On the Occasion of the First Russian Quiz Show', or with rural and urban scenes at home. 'Watching the Swifts' contrasts 'Green Lanes with Skateboarder'.

The first three poems lead from a funeral through visiting the garden of remembrance in winter to 'The Lightness of Not Being'. We return later to 'Past Karl Marx to My Father's Grave'.

'Rooftop Protest', 'Saving the Pits' and 'Asylum in Autumn' cleverly use political issues, which Gahagan cares about, as metaphor. 'Solstice' is perhaps the central poem in the book. 'The hinterlands are mystery. Our interiors, / locked cabinets, are unlocked at dusk.' And yet, she says, 'this is a festival of light, / where joy is deep, glittering bubbles to the surface / wantonly'.

Death is often present, but is not something to be challenged. 'The He Orders Up the Moon' begins: 'Tonight I was thinking about death, / just idly... / watching the darkening hills.' 'Field for the Low Season' ends: 'here in seed-packets entropy, among whisps and drabs, / death will be quiet, residual, uncertain.' Yet summer receives a mention. In 'Where the Beeches', 'The beeches / could recall Copernicus or rustling / sweet attics diverting us all the summer / and somehow confusing clear-cut issues.

The overall emphasis of the collection is not of morbidity, but of time passing. None of the Romantics quite provide Gahagan's sense of the flow of nature and, because of the variety of settings, I would be equally at home with this book by a cottage fire as looking over the Metropolis at night.

Night Calling, by Judy Gahagan is published by Enitharmon Press, 2003. Price £7.95 ISBN 1-900564-33-5. £7.95

Charcot's Pet
By Maggie Sawkins
Reviewed by Carolyn O'Connell

Maggie Sawkins is a prize-winning poet, who lives in Hampshire and teaches at the South Downs College. Those who attend venues in the area will be familiar with her poetry, as will the patrons of the new Theatre Royal in Portsmouth and the Troubadour, London. In this pamphlet she explores family relationships that are often turbulent or tinged with the sadness of impending loss.

The opening poem 'A Pair of Small Ears' opens with 'I have come to translate the silence.' And as she 'unwraps' the ears' she uses this metaphor to prepare for what is to come. The tight stanzas of 'Secret Tattoo' open with an image of family fireworks and a frightened child, something goes wrong and the consequences are the secret tattoo but also the breaking of a marriage. The haunting of the child carer is beautifully drawn in 'Celery Soup'. The closing stanza ends 'it feels like a dream /except my footprints are still there /embedded in the blueness /of a blue kitchen chair.' Like the following poem 'The Mummy', which won first prize at the Winchester Writers' Conference, I found they had left me both entranced by language yet troubled by what I had read. That is of course the art of poetry.

Look for the forces that walk at night and in the mind in 'Stalkers' and 'Rouge Gene' their effect is felt for generations. 'American Wake' and 'Famine Dog' will be of particular resonance to anyone who has an Irish background. I am sure that Maggie Sawkins writes from personal knowledge of these,

hence the title Charcot's Pet.

Charlot's Pet is published by Flairstack. Price £3. ISBN 1 900397 52 8

Dream of the Condom
By Nicholas Swingler
Reviewed by Graham High

Nicholas Swingler's poems emerge with a sardonic humour from a world of cafes, blind dates, the daily grind and casual meetings, where mundane realities crush any real exchange, to express a resigned resilience, which, if it does not give much hope for the final outcomes of life, gives some expectation of mitigating enjoyments along the way.

Well written, the poems progress broadly towards death, beginning with 'I Am' and 'Creation' and ending with poems which envisage his own and others' deaths with a steadfast and clear-sighted sense of irony. In 'In Case of Death' Swingler anticipates his own death with a set of instructions and observations which are wry and surprising enough to dispel any sense of bitterness or total cynicism, and in the following very fine poem, 'I Am Burning Now', he imaginatively lives through his own cremation and makes some good social and existential points.

In his tone and subject matter Swingler seems to speak for the unfulfilled and frustrated, for those urban and suburban dwellers of repetitive lives, who have been driven to a cynical outlook through a thwarted and subverted idealism. It seems to be a single man's poetry, based in bed-sit land, an older perspective on a younger more transient life style, where each passing ennui has become a habitual despair. The poet himself seems to have buried whatever beliefs he had, and covered them in humour.

Most of the poems offer passing observation, rather than springing from an underlying philosophy, but through them all there is a very consistent and recognisable attitude. While not unique – one might compare them to the New York poet Daniel Thomas Moran – Swingler does have a distinctive voice. Some poems have topical references to Bush and Blair, such as 'The World Tonight', which presents, as in a series of dissected and disparate newsflashes, various takes on the Iraq war, football or an abducted girl, through the use of montage and enjambments. In 'I Voted Ken', Blair comes in for it again, but while references to 'Tony' and 'Dobbo' may make the poem ephemeral, the energy and immediacy have an agreeable edginess that we might more often associate with stand-up observational comedy.

This is poetry which knows how to deal with the banalities of life without itself being banal. The forms are varied and inventive. 'Telephone' is a poem formed from a list of propositions or statements of disinformation. 'Date' is the reductive analysis of a meaningless encounter, described as if it were a lab experiment. 'In the Café' is a series of short inner questions about an observed woman, reading like a word vignette in a stream of consciousness novel. Swingler's

detached critical humour can seem unsympathetic on occasion, but at his best, directing its sharpness against social situations or in self-observation, it produces lively and original poems reaching out to our shared experiences and recalibrating them with a deft hand.

Dream of the Condom is published by the Negative Press (2002), 18 Donaldson Road, London, NW6 6ND. Price £7.95. ISBN 0-9541311-0-X

Jeff Nuttall's Wake On CD-and Jeff Nuttall's Wake On Paper
Reviewed by Dave Russell

These two productions are excellent samples of, guides and introductions to, Jeff Nuttall's massive contribution to the world of literature, music, the visual and the performing arts. There is some overlap between the book and the CD, as the poems read live and recorded on the latter all appear in the book. The rest of the CD features jazz standards and other material, played with great verve in trad jazz style. Jeff was a truly dynamic cornet player, and was rightly revered in British jazz circles. He was a vital catalyst to all who played with him. I particularly liked the versions of the evergreens 'Crazy Rhythm' and 'She's Funny That Way'.

The food for thought here has plenty of fibre for one to get one's teeth into. To quote the blurb for his collection *Pig* (Fulcrum Press, 1969), it 'weaves elements of nausea and uncomfortable violence into a fabric of lyric delicacy'.

The most powerful poem in the selection on review here is 'The Return', which depicts Jeff's revisit of the landscape of his childhood. Could this piece be described as 'anti-bucolic'? We are all highly familiar with laments about idyllic rural scenes being transformed into ugly industrial wastelands, and we all know the gothic or romantic mode of celebrating crumbling ruins that have become 'organically' overgrown. Very unusually for a poet, Jeff takes the opposite stance, regretting the loss of human intervention which kept the orchards in order, regretting the 'red clay, tender and indifferent'. Let us not forget that the Lake District was once an abandoned mining complex, an industrial wasteland. His attitude to the Industrial Revolution is poignantly highlighted in 'Halifax Railway'.

'Mother and Daughter' has a lot of home environment feeling, but in it Jeff gives his imagination free range, around exotic locations populated with exotic animals. He bravely faces, with highly tactile lines, the sordid and the lugubrious in the environment and its human occupants.

The touching 'Monologue One' seems to crystallise Jeff's feelings about his own impending mortality.

The book includes the transcript of an interview with Jeff in 1984, when he made some reflections on *Bomb Culture*, the epoch-enshrining work he published in 1968, capturing the spirit of Sixties radical protest at its height. In the interview he refers to 'the three strains – the pop strain, the protest strain and the art strain – and the merging of them in some kind of

movement that felt every one of these strains had something to offer in the state of emergency... just for a while they merged'. I was, and will always remain, a confirmed devotee of this book. I long assumed that it was common currency for readers. But I now understand that it is difficult to obtain, that some public libraries refused to stock it because of its controversial content. I would be interested in feedback about anyone's experience of this.

I was equally devoted to The People Show, which started in the late Sixties, largely inspired by Jeff. This drew on freeform jazz, experimental dance and drama to make a vital theatrical form which has sustained its impetus for over three decades.

The selection of artwork, combining landscapes with extremely hard-hitting cartoons, gives some indication of Jeff's enormous versatility.

Jeff Nuttall's Wake On CD ISBN 0 902689 23 1 (£10 + £2 p&p) and Jeff Nuttall's Wake On Paper ISBN 0 902689 22 3 (£5 + £1 p&p) are both available from New Departures, PO Box 9819, London W11 2GQ

Solo Survivors, Issue 2

Edited by John Hirst and Becki Mee

Reviewed by James Ferguson

This is an early issue of Solo Survivors: we hope to review more recent issues later on. The virtue of starting with a look at this early issue is that one sees the starting-point of this magazine. Solo Survivors is very much a user magazine: the editorial policy seems to be to accept a large amount of work. This adds up to a full magazine: this (unpaginated) comb-bound issue seems to fill a generous fifty pages. After two brief editorials from John Hirst and Becki Mee, the magazine is almost all poetry. Poets generally get a page each; so a reader is able to get a sense of each poet's work. An interesting feature is a 'Tasting Poetry' section, a critical commentary on eight of the poems printed for the first time here. There are also a few reviews, including one of Schizophrenia: A Mother's Story. There are a number of illustrations.

There are enthusiastic notes from co-editor John Hirst at the end of contributors' poems, alerting readers to their work: 'This is a wonderful, vibrant, vividly observant collection' (about Carolyn O'Connell's Beyond Bamboo). 'Great value... great poetry' (recommending Geoff Stevens' magazine Purple Patch).

The magazine includes much poetry in it that deals directly with mental distress: 'She smiles so beautifully / Despite her pain / A heart full of warmth / She stumbles in her stride' (Razina Pang), 'Pupils narrowed by morphine haze' (D Parrott) and 'Things and people / keep getting dead' (Eileen Carney-Hulme). Carol Batton has a few sardonic-threaded poems in here, with lines like 'maybe the boredom / will drive you more sane' or 'they see she is smiling / (she is always smiling). / Largactil is working'; and she makes an acid-dyed comment on the inability of those with jobs to understand those on benefits (or of non-survivors to understand survivors): 'Where

do you get the funding for [your poetry]?' someone asks the narrator, to which the s/he answers 'D.L.A.' – 'Perhaps I could apply there: is it part of North-West Arts?' Henry Birtley's expressive poem, which I'll quote in full, runs: 'Bed / quilt / head / cover.'

There's a rather dubious taste poem by John Hirst, 'Anti-personnel', playing and punning around the subject, beginning 'It isn't mine' and ending 'I've put my foot on it? / Haven't I, in it? Haven't I, / And I've... Blown it!!!'

Names that may be known to readers of Poetry Express include Eamer O'Keeffe, Alex Warner, Venetia Tompkins JC McFee and Dee Light. There are six pages of poems by Barry Tebb, the Guest Poet for this issue.

Solo Survivors, Issue 2, Winter 2002, edited by John Hirst and Becki Mee, ISSN 1476-9131. Single copies of the current issue are £4; a back issue £2.50; a year's subscription (three issues) is £10. Cheques made out to 'J.A. Hirst (Solo Survivors)'. Address: Solo Survivors, 37 Micklehill, Shirley, Solihull, West Midlands, B90 2PU.

If you would like to review for Poetry Express, please write to our Reviews Editor, Roy Holland, Survivors' Poetry, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 3ND.

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.

Write on the Edge

Razz on the London Workshops

The feedback workshops are where participants bring their poems to be looked at and discussed, tightened up or left as they are according to the wishes of the author. Poems are photocopied and passed around to the group, the poem is read out and feedback is given which the author can take on board or not. The only criteria is that the feedback should be constructive rather than critical.

The writing workshops are designed to encourage participants to create new poems. Exercises are designed to give a launching pad for ideas and the poems are then read out at the end of the session. These workshops have proved themselves very popular. Many participants have found they have a substantial new work that they can take away and tinker with at their leisure, often bringing them back to be discussed in a feedback workshop.

The performance workshops involve practising the art of putting across our words to a live audience. The first part of the evening usually consists of various exercises to improve the voice and loosen up the body, how to project the voice, use a microphone etc. The second half involves creating a performance space where participants can perform a poem and get feedback on their performance.

There are a few ground rules that are read out at the beginning of each workshop to create a safe and hospitable atmosphere, a must for survivors such as ourselves. Each workshop is attended by two facilitators and a coordinator. Tea, coffee and biscuits are available for a modest donation (20p), and anyone who may get distressed can be supported by one of the facilitators or the coordinator.

The most important people of course are the participants. Without participants the workshops cannot run. This is where you come in! Do come and join us. We look forward to your future participation.

The dates, and the names of the facilitators, are as follows:

Dates of the Summer 2004 season:

All this season's Tuesday workshops will be held in the Garden Studio at the Diorama Arts Centre.

1st June: Performance Workshop
Kit Parke & Razz

15th June: Feedback Workshop
Amita Patel & Hannah McCallum

29th June: Writing Workshop
Razz & Amita Patel

13th July: Performance Workshop
Kit Parke & Carrie Thomas

27th July: Feedback Workshop
Anna Menmuir & Hilary Porter

New: Saturday Workshops in June 2004

Daytime workshops have been a long-standing request of some of our members. We are pleased to be able to offer two workshops on two forthcoming Saturdays. We are using these to test the popularity of Saturday workshops – so if you're interested, come along.

They will be held in the Skylight Studio, a fully accessible room at the Diorama Arts Centre, at 2:30 p.m. on the following Saturdays:

12th June: Writing Workshop
Hilary Porter & Alison Clayburn

A Writing workshop. Bring along a pen and your imagination. Facilitators will provide a number of exercises to get the creative juices flowing.

26th June: Performance Workshop
Razz & Isha

A performance workshop. We will be doing a number of warm-up exercises to relax the voice and body, and will learn how to project ourselves in front of an audience. We will also be working with a microphone. Bring along a couple of poems you'd like to perform. In the evening of the 26th there is a Dioramanite event: attendees of the workshop are invited to hang around and test their new skills on a survivor-friendly audience.

There will be further Saturday workshops

London Events

Xochitl Tuck

Dioramanite

Held on the last Saturday of each month.

Venue: Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London, NW1 3ND.

Nearest tubes: Great Portland Street, Warren Street.

Admission: £3.50. Concessions: £1.50. Floorspots: £1. 8 p.m. start..

Neither the Dioramanite nor the Poetry Cafe require pre-booking, just come along on the night. Both also welcome readers and performers from the floor: speak to the person collecting the entrance money at the door, and they'll give your name to the MC, who will call you to perform.

Forthcoming Dioramanites:

29th May

Phil Poole / Rob James – Dynamic, urban, troubling poetry

26th June

Michael Horovitz / Dave Russell – Two performing legends on one amazing bill

31st July

Cosmic Fruitcake / Sean & Courtney – Experimental jazz & vocals on a bill with groundmaking hip-hop poetry

No event in August

25th September

Moniza Alvi / Pondlife Trio – Poetry sensation and gorgeous ballad folk

30th October

John Hegley / Isha – One of UK's most popular poets on a bill with the sharp performance poet Isha

27th November

Leah Thorn / Adam Horovitz – Epic poetry of two acutely conscious warriors

Poetry Cafe

Held on the second Thursday of each month.

Venue: The Poetry Cafe, 22 Betterton Street, London WC1.

Nearest tube: Covent Garden.

Admission: £2. Concessions and floorspots: £1. 8 p.m. start

Forthcoming Poetry Cafes:

10th June

John Arthur / MC: Pauline Bradley

8th July

Jeanette Ju Pierre / MC: Emerald McKenty

12th August

Roz Kane / MC: Lee Wilson

9th September

Frank Bangay / MC: Lucinda

14th October

Gad Hollander / MC: Jeanette Ju Pierre

11th November

Lee Wilson / MC: Razz

9th December

Pauline Bradley / MC: Roz Kane

Forthcoming Showcase:

11th September

Kath Tait spectacular – Singer-songwriter who makes you laugh and leaves you gaping with wonder

London Events Email List

We are starting an email mailing list for our London events and workshops. If you would like to be added, and receive information about these, send an email headed 'add me to list' to xochitl@survivorspoetry.org.uk

