

Poetry Express Newsletter

#45



Featured Artist – Frank Banqay

Special Issue Featuring War Poets in Commemoration of Centenary of World War I



Charity No. 1010177 Company No. 2955445; Registered in England

Registered Office: c/o Central & North West London NHS Foundation Trust, 1 St Mary's Terrace, W2 1SU
Contributions to Dave Russell (Editor) – bricolage92@hotmail.com

Director's Report

What a difference a month makes! The uncharted cultural waters caused by the departure of Maria Miller on the one hand and the morphyic, even morphined state of various NPOs (National Portfolio Organisations – regularly funded by the Arts Council) as they contemplate their fate after the round of applications closed on St Patrick's day.

We're not one of these. On advice from Gemma Seltzer our very doughty champion at ACE, as Relationship Manager and well-wisher, we took the adult view that being told there was little hope this time round, that we shouldn't press a case weakened by our not being able to raise funds in the last two years from anywhere save ACE itself, and the Big Lottery Fund, that itself being two years back. They appreciate we've weathered much, downsized drastically and smoothly made the transition to fractional core reduction and financial responsibility remarkably smoothly. As yet however it's not enough to win us a further term as an NPO. In another three years, perhaps.

But it doesn't mean ACE don't want us. They deem that with a flexible core, less accountability and onerous reporting we'd be happier – as a sizeable number of NPOs have also opted – to apply for Grants For the Arts funding.

Partnerships

So much so dry. The more interesting shifts have preceded this and follow on. First, in this flux of identity, SP have now found themselves in potential partnership with those who also apply for GftA funding, and who else but our friends at Disability Arts Online? I'll announce more when meetings and parameters have been finalised and there's real news. For the moment though let's celebrate what DAO have already organized and do so well, carrying SP with them on their own website.

On September 3rd, a Southbank set of readings curated by DAO at the Poetry Library showcases DAO and SP Poets alike. DAO have also showcased and mentored and other SP poets on their site. Several, like **Tony Hurford**, have become substantial presences in their own right from this platforming. DAO's site talks a common dialogue with us, and Founder and Editor Colin Hambrook is a personal friend of SP and myself. He's also introducing SP members to DAO's CEO Trish Wheatley, and I'm introducing him to Phil Ruthen, past SP Chair and current fundraiser, as well as another poet like Phil a remarkable mover, David Andrew who has transformed our organisation from gathering as much as he can about our regional groups, to our IT, investigating the mechanisms of our sales.

New Alphabets

SP has survived as an NPO in face of massive cuts in its material base. Many NPOs and arts organisations have had to modify their strategy, because of the recession and

through an increased synergy in mobile telecommunications – flexible spaces, hot seats, working and working our schedules. SP has dramatically reduced core costs; regular hours replaced by core team discussions, revisions, breakthroughs. Like most organisations relying partly on voluntary work, we input at all hours and from all places. Our one small fixed office is now in the NHS St Mary's Terrace Unit, near the Edgware Road, and it's consistent with this pattern. You might remember this was recommended by Rogan Wolf to Trustee Celia Potterton who sold it to us. Diane Lightfoot and I chose it over the place we *thought* we'd select – it's ideal.

This makes us a far more easy to fund organisation, without those vampiric core costs pitched at around £28,000 a year; it's nearer £3,900. I'd cut insurance, phones, IT database, and before we moved, the old office in half with Edward Clark through long summer evenings. Diane with Celia then brokered our Business Plan after our *Awayday*, perpetually updated; we moved. In addition nearly all of the financial burden has been taken on by a superb accountant Colin Bareham who charges less than our previous two for – in addition to straight accounting – bookkeeping, data input, Management Quarterly accounts, payroll. Colin arrived via my partner, Carole Bremson.

Whatever the year brings, this transitional one leaves us lighter not so much in purse as manoeuvrability, operation, indeed feeling somehow rejuvenated. Baggage has fallen away. It's time to focus on the poetry, the people behind it like you, and forget the imperatives going with infrastructures.

One thing GftA allows us to consider is re-structuring to focus not on core but on output: events and workshops. We've also realized that for all our national reach in *Poetry Express*, we've been operative in the London and southern regions with outlying relationships – Bristol and Newcastle spring to mind. We're building our national reach again through direct contact with those of you who feel our presence helps their own priorities. We're grateful quite a few think that. We've also despite our best efforts found some groups vanished when two core members of a meeting point themselves drop away.

Poetry Express is edited by **Dave Russell** – a long term Survivor, Survivor Poet and Performer. But **David Andrew** has been extremely active in this regard, as has **Debjani Chatterjee**, our Patron, from Sheffield; this in conjunction with David and Roy Birch in Stevenage.

Finally, mentoring continues. Best news last. David Pollard will design the first four books initially as e-books. Poets are working on their latest drafts with long-term mentors. More in my next, which, in Spring, is where I sign off in flowers, a streak of gillyflower optimism in a squall of budget cuts, retrenchments, a general digging over of the mental health system that now must be challenged head-on politically with extreme prejudice. Spring and Offensive come to mind as we remember 1914's ironies and treacheries and prepare to lobby the next government into a little moral courage.

Simon Jenner

Nothing Divides Us

Jack: Rainbows pave the way, you see. It is not up to you, it is not up to me. It is your destiny, you see Sophia, there are rainbows everywhere, but you can't see them so you stare, and the harder you stare the more you can't see them because they are like me, you see, standing next to your tree, you see.

I am invisible to all – like the rainbows are invisible to you – and you simply don't know what to do.

Take a look outside of you and you will see nothing at all because you have the flu and other people have contaminated you.

Take a look inside you and you will see me, standing there as tall as can be. Take pride in yourself and the woman you were meant to be for all to see before the world and society got their hands on you because you knew what to do back then and you know what to do right now.

Don't look back, look forward in time and you will be mine, one day you will be mine and feel so divine.

Sophia: Hello Jack I'm back and I am sorry I don't have long to talk to you today, but say what you have to say and that is OK.

Jack: Hello Sophia, how are you today? I'm OK today because you know that, David emailed you today about our Marriage Certificate and that is OK, we will do whatever he wants and whatever he suggests because he knows best, OK?

Sophia: Yes, Jack, it is fine by me you see. And all our tomorrows are full of woe, you know, and we simply have to let them go because our destiny cannot be full of woe when we have the rainbow skies above our heads when we go to bed, created by him so our life is not dim.

Jack: You are right, you know, Sophia and I thought you were wrong for so long that we didn't have a future, at last the world is so vast for us to see, you and me together you know, forever without you denying me.

And I have explained to you before, where you have come from and why you couldn't open the door to me when you first saw me and you didn't know who I was because you didn't know your own history and it was a mystery to you, you know.

And I'm so full of woe about that and that is a fact. Right or wrong our lives must carry on because you cannot deny you love me any more because you haven't shut the door,

but left it open for me to walk through because you knew what to do and I knew how to repair you.

Sophia: That's right Jack, and I am glad you are back, I am in need of repair and tender care but I didn't know that, you know, which is why I was full of woe. My past has been haunting me ever since and I don't know why I gave it a miss rather than recognising my enemy and knowing it was there, staring me in the face and I was in despair.

So I shut my eyes tight and didn't look twice because darkness was my name and game and in vain I forgot to turn to the light, to turn to you, you see, it is a mystery to me, you see, what you had done to me was turn me into a woman and I didn't recognise myself, I didn't recognise me.

I thought I was an animal, best of all because I never could stand tall, not with their light shining on me like a spotlight highlighting my flaws. I couldn't walk tall, I couldn't sit or stand, I couldn't lend a helping hand, I was useless to them and their men, but they cared for me the least because they were beasts, all of them, you know, and I am full of woe for them and their men who ignored me and turned their backs on me again and again like I didn't exist and they used their fists in a metaphorical way to shove me out of the way and they cried:

"Hooray! She has gone and we can live on without her polluting the day or way forward in life and we don't need her strife any more so we will shove her out the door and close the door behind her so no one can find her if they look, but we won't bother because she can't even read a book. We don't want her in our society so she must rest at best."

Jack: Why did they do that to you Sophia? I don't understand, were they men or were they mad?

I feel so sad about it all and how they didn't allow you to stand tall when you wanted to and when you could because they never understood who you are and that you actually came from a star like them because we are all made of atoms, carbon and molecules but they ridiculed you for being disabled and different but that was not your fault at all Sophia, my darling one and now all hope is gone with them inside and I cannot deny your sexuality any more so I throw them out the door.

OK I will talk to you tomorrow, my darling love, all my love, Jack because I'm back from down under, you know and I will never let you go.

Sapna Ramnani

Gurney's Lament

(For Martin Seymour-Smith)



Do not forget me quiet, my screen of histories,
sudden sorted veils of Malvern fog, the Royal Colleges
of grasses, wood and wind, curtained triptych of examiners.

Part-songs crisp old scores, their dusks of flaky lemon blend
into Howells' discipline, span his arched hand under
tang of March and sky – fallen bright so they'll not forget him.

They called me Schubert – (I talked to Ludwig Van . . .
Not here. Nor Marion, nor once sonorities listen . . .
It is these divides on, from a ground I couldn't learn).

Lights Out, flare bracket settings, slice arcs – sing out of night
as if eclipsing me: their piano-wire shaves the moon's dark cheese.
My first songs' craft leaves its cold rind only in my arms.

Even that's light under the nurse's door, under the bridge
to those minor elegiac regrets of Stanford. Instruments
I couldn't harmonise, brass dull buckling. So, here –

Put away your trumpet, stow its mute, shut shires. Play on
stanzas, hushed staves. My trajectory's one voice only; accompanied
as I am, honest's out of craft, of perfect conversation.

Simon Jenner

Social Care Reform

and Resource Allocation

National Conference 28 February 2014, King's Fund

Jointly organised by the Law Department of Cardiff University and
the Centre for Citizen Participation, Brunel University

(Do feel free to quote from this but please cite its source)

What Service Users and Practitioners say about the Issue of Needs and Resources

Through accidents of history and politics in England, we have two separate systems of health and social care. This isn't the same in other European countries. Even more significant, the two systems here are organized on fundamentally different principles. While the NHS still rests on principles of being a universalist service centrally funded, free at the point of delivery, social care is a needs and means tested service funded through local authorities. Governments have come to learn that the NHS is much loved by voters for all its faults and failings. They have learned that if they want to mess with it, they have to do so cunningly and by stealth. They are careful to say that its funding is ring-fenced and protected, even if this is not always true. But none of this applies to local authority social care which has suffered funding cuts coming up to 30-plus percent since the coalition came to power. Even more concerning, we know that many people still don't know or realize that there are these two fundamentally different systems. There is a common public assumption that people have the same rights and entitlement to social care as they do to health care. It is often only when they turn to it in a crisis or emergency, that they find out the harsh truth.

The truth is that the NHS was a creation of the welfare state and social care a left-over of the poor law that preceded it. By common consent our system of social care is inadequate and unsustainable. Fewer and fewer people are eligible for support from it; the quality of that support is constantly questioned, it is abuse and neglect ridden and the system appears unsustainable. All this at a time when we are repeatedly told that demographic changes can only be expected to increase greatly the demands on social care. There are no signs that the social care reforms that this government is implementing or indeed the proposals of its predecessor are likely to rectify these problems.

So it's not surprising that we are met here today. And it's perhaps also not surprising that we are focusing on the individual and overall funding systems that operate in social care. And the context for our discussion is the policy development of personal budgets over the period from 2007, which has gained shared sign up from all three major political parties, as the intended default approach to the operation of state social care. Now it is perhaps to be expected that a key policy area as neglected and afforded such low priority as social care would be the victim of political and policy short termism, quick fixes and dodgy ideas. In such circumstances there are always politicians looking for simple solutions and there are people out there prepared to promise them whatever they want to hear.

But I guess I have to single out the present system of personal budgets as it has been rolled out as one of the shakiest of the bunch. We've had social services departments, community social work, care

management, care in the community. They have all had big promises attached to them. They'd be better, less bureaucratic, more participatory, more efficient, more cost effective and so on. And none of them has ever truly delivered on their promises, which have been remarkably similar. Personal budgets came with the same promises. And personal budgets with all the paraphernalia they were sold with – of the RAS – resource allocation system, self-assessment. Well we were told that they could cut costs by up to a third and massively reduce bureaucracy. What seems to be the case is that actually there aren't savings, but apparently the opposite and new layers of bureaucracy. We will be hearing more about this today. My question is how much longer the present personal budgets system can and will be pursued by policymakers and be allowed to continue when it clearly isn't delivering on its promises and isn't working. The issue for me though is that it is not surprising that social care is vulnerable to such false hopes and promises, but how will we move beyond them at times when governments are committed to cutting public welfare spending rather than increasing it.

How could it ever have been imagined that just a change of delivery systems – which is all that personal budgets are – could rescue and transform the English social care system? How could giving people some cash equivalent to a service in a chronically under funded system without making any other fundamental change, change that system for the better for more than a small number of people? Also how could it be right to use the terms personal budgets and personalization interchangeably as governments have done as though they meant the same thing – as though a very specific means – personal budgets – could deliver a breath taking change in social care goals – person centered support?

I can only imagine that these mistakes, these misconceptions happened because social care was so clearly in chaos and crisis and because policymakers were flailing about seeking anything that might offer some appearance of solution – without having to make any kind of fundamental change to the system.

And if anything highlights the need to rethink and rebuild social care from top to tail, then it is the evidence that we have of its increasing instability, inadequacy and unsustainability.

This was the backdrop to the Standards We Expect project which I was involved in – a four year research and development UK wide project which sought to explore what personalization or person centered support really meant to the key people involved: service users, carers and face to face practitioners, what barriers stood in its way and how these could be overcome. This project is the largest independent UK study of person-centered support.

First let's look at what service users, carers and practitioners had to say about person-centered support itself. What did it mean to them? If we are interested in exploring the relationship between needs and resources, here is a key starting point: how these key constituencies feel that those needs can best be met – how services and support really be centered on service users and carers. A consensus definition of person-centered support emerged from the project, one that is consistent with ideas of 'person-centered planning' and 'independent living'. Both of these are concerned with putting in place the support people need to live their lives on as equal terms as possible with non-service users, rather than seeing service users as needing 'care' because of perceived deficits and pathologies.

Participants' definition of person-centered support was strongly based on values rather than techniques or procedures. Key components cited were:

- Putting the person at the centre, rather than fitting them into services;
- Treating service users as individuals;
- Ensuring choice and control for service users;

- Setting goals with them for support;
- Placing emphasis on the importance of the relationship between service users and practitioners;
- Listening to service users and acting on what they say;
- Providing up-to-date, accessible information about appropriate services;
- Flexibility; and
- *A positive approach, which highlights what service users might be able to do, not what they cannot do.

So people said:

- ☺ *It's starting with the person around what that particular person's needs are and matching the services with their needs rather than the other way round. Practitioner*
- ☺ *Giving me choice and control, putting me first. Service user*
- ☺ *Having control so that when things aren't working for you, you can say so. Service user*

Participants in the project highlighted a range of major barriers in the existing Social Care system which undermined Person-Centred Support. Not only does each of these create its own obstacles restricting such an approach, but they also work together to magnify such difficulties. The result is to restrict and undermine people's human and civil rights. Key barriers identified include:

- The lack of a skilled, well-trained and well-supported workforce and low levels of staffing. Generally poor terms and conditions were associated with low retention and high turnover rates, offering little prospect of ensuring an adequate workforce to match predictions of greatly increasing future demand.
 - ☹ *The staff aren't well trained; if you know what goes on in a person with dementia's mind then you have more patience and understand. But if you don't have any training, then you aren't going to know, so it makes it difficult. Practitioner*
- Increasing reliance placed on family members as 'informal carers', but without adequate support for them or to help them facilitate service users' independence, this provides an inadequate and inappropriate basis for meeting increased future need.
 - ☺ *Your parents are a massive thing but they need to know that, yeah they can care for you, and yeah they can do what they like for you, but they need to know that you want your space. Service user*
- The lives of many long term and residential service users are restricted by continuing institutionalisation. This disempowers them, undermines their confidence, limits their potential and prevents them gaining skills to live fuller more equal lives.
 - ☹ *We are not allowed to talk to people on the other table. We wait for staff to finish their tea. When staff get up they say what people are on the rota to do. You can't get up until the staff say so. Service user*
- Organisational barriers to person-centred support operating at all levels are conspicuously associated with increased bureaucratisation, tightening administrative controls, inflexible organisations, crude target setting and an emphasis on negative risk, often framed in terms of 'health and safety' requirements.
- Social care practice, following from a disempowering service culture that is still often paternalistic and inflexible, 'making unhelpful assumptions about what service users can and can't do' and restricting the crucial relationship between them and practitioners.

- ☹ *Well they are looking after us. We are in their care, so I don't know that we have to make decisions, because they make them all, don't they, for our benefit? **Service user***
- vi. Service users' restricted access to mainstream policies and services, keeping them within social care services. This undermines the holistic approach of person-centred support to enable people to live on as equal and inclusive terms as possible in society. Three particular areas where major barriers are experienced are travel and transport, education and continuing disability discrimination. People living in rural areas and from black and minority ethnic communities face additional barriers.
- vii. Some barriers relate to service users' circumstances and experience. Many lack the support they need to be able to access and take advantage of person-centred support. There is a lack of capacity-building in terms of accessible information, advice, guidance and advocacy to make this possible.
- ☹ *You're going to the supermarket to do your shopping and its something that everyone in the world does and you have to do a risk assessment on it! **Practitioner***
- ☹ *You would get review meetings with everyone talking and it's like the user is not even there. It still goes on. **Practitioner***

*I think people will come and ask you what you want, but you don't necessarily always know what is available to ask for! So there will always be somebody who will ask, but you won't necessarily know what there is to ask for. **Service user***

- ☹ *Their human rights are not being met. Not only by the government – local councils, local traders. Last night we wanted to go out for a meal. Three restaurants we tried to get into. We had two disabled people with motorised chairs, two [non-disabled] people among us. Three restaurants, no ramps, no lifts, no nothing. **Carer/relative***

In the project we found that much was being done in local services to deal with these barriers. Some services, linking with service users and carers, were working hard to overcome them, although as cuts have increased we may expect that this will have become more difficult. But we found amazing levels of commitment among managers and staff to improve the service and support that people received.

However, we also found that the efforts on the ground to challenge barriers were not enough to enable person-centered support to become the norm for all service users. Barriers seem to be rooted in two major and inter-related problems. Both were problems that demanded to be addressed at a national level. These were the chronic inadequacy of social care funding and the continued existence of a social care culture at odds with person-centered support. This problematic culture was reflected in continuing institutionalisation, control, paternalism and inflexibility in services and reliance on a 'deficit' model rather than on the philosophy of independent living – people having the help they need to live their lives on as equal terms as possible – as the basis for providing support. Funding problems also seemed to lie at the heart of workforce inadequacies, inappropriate and over-reliance on unpaid carers, insufficient and inaccessible mainstream services and lack of suitable advocacy, advice and information services.

A series of additional problems created by inadequate funding emerged, including:

- Rationing, restricting access to and undermining equity in support;
- Uncertainty about future funding, resulting in short-termism in policy and provision;
- Funding being used as an excuse for not making change;
- Over-reliance on one-off projects and initiatives;

- Discouraging early intervention and prevention;
- Restricting the range of support available;
- Requiring people to pay for social care and charging for support – which perpetuates inequities, restricts access, undermines prevention and encourages institutionalisation;
- Undermining service users' independence.

Our evidence indicated that efforts being made to move to person-centered support, to real personalisation are being undermined by social care's funding problems. It is difficult to see from this project how person-centered support can be rolled out and achieved for all on a sustainable basis for the future, without social care being securely and adequately funded.

Our conclusion from the findings from this project was that the funding of social care through general taxation is likely to be the most viable and effective way of achieving a sustainable person-centered system. The unification of NHS and social care funding arrangements also seems likely to help overcome arbitrary and unhelpful divisions that continue to exist between the two. At the time of the **Dilnot Commission**, the **Joseph Rowntree** Foundation additionally funded us to explore what service users felt about future funding arrangements for social care. The majority of service users again made the case for funding social care from general taxation to provide support along the same lines as the NHS. They felt that this was the only effective way forward.

However, we know that no major political party supports this. Dilnot refused to consider it as an option. Neither the last Labour government nor this government gives this option serious credence. Social care leaders and mainstream thinkers treat it as off bounds. The prevailing political mindset for social care seems to be that we can go along with such thinking for the NHS because that is already in place. But we cannot for social care because it requires fundamental rethinking and reform. And it is this present thinking to my mind which explains the desperate continuing desire to find magic bullets to 'solve' social care and now the desire to hold on to the present personal budget system although it can be seen to be failing. This hopeless conflict in social care reminds me of an equally hopeless conflict in Afghanistan – and here too ultimately there will have to be a withdrawal.

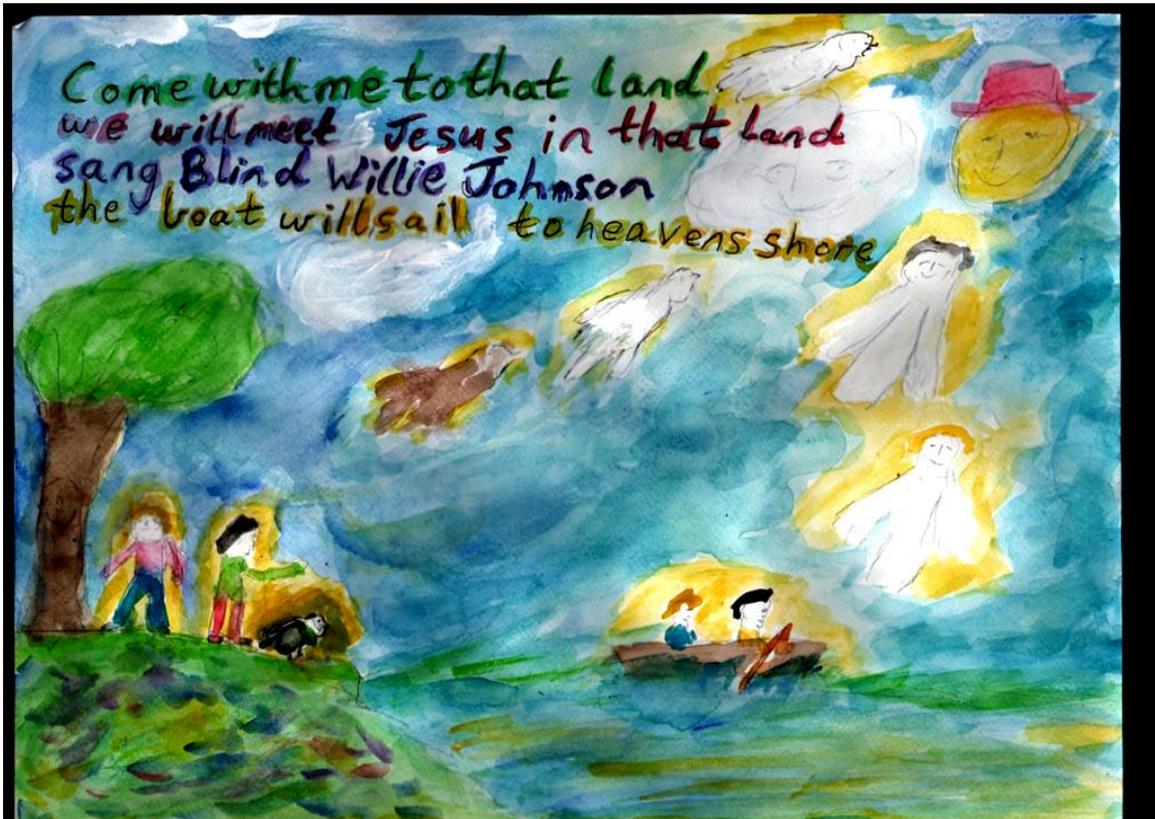
Ultimately as our demographics change, as the current arrangements increasingly emerge as incapable of addressing them, there will need to be a radical rethink. Meanwhile something better than the present failed system of personal budgets must be adopted here and now if we are to move closer to, rather than further away from the crucial goal of person centered support for all. Thank you.

Professor Peter Beresford

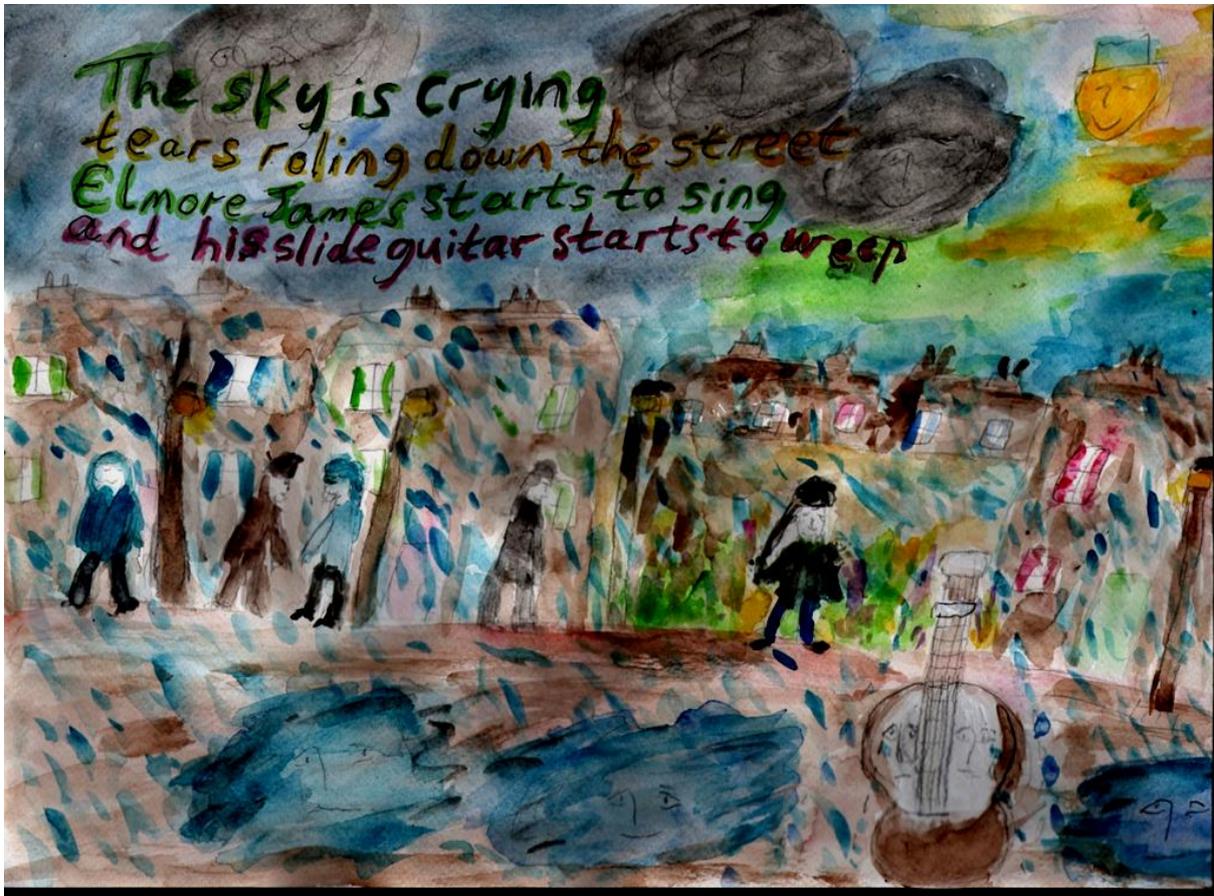
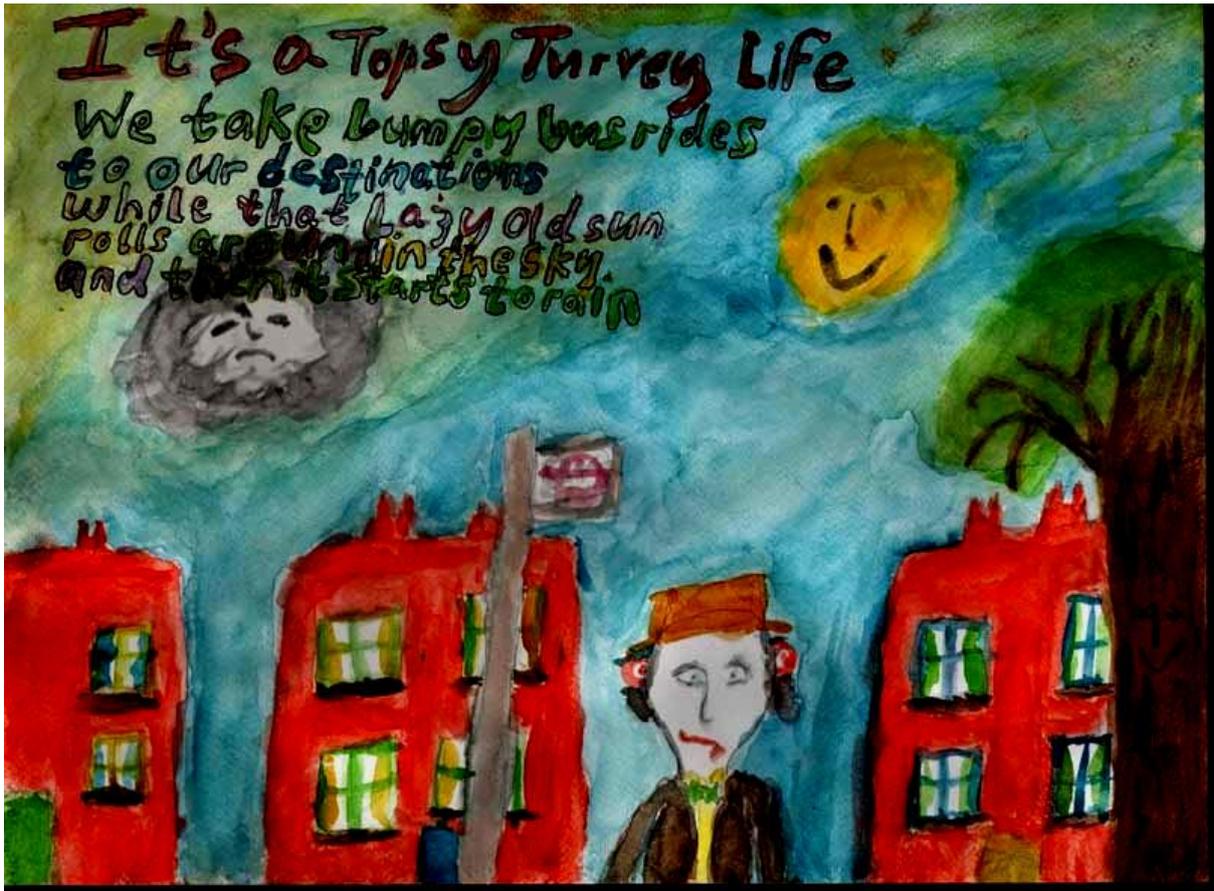
Peter Beresford OBE is Professor of Social Policy at Brunel University and also Director of the Centre for Citizen Participation. His particular areas of focus are public, patient and service user involvement in policy and practice; democratisation and participatory approaches to research, particularly in relation to user controlled and user involvement research.

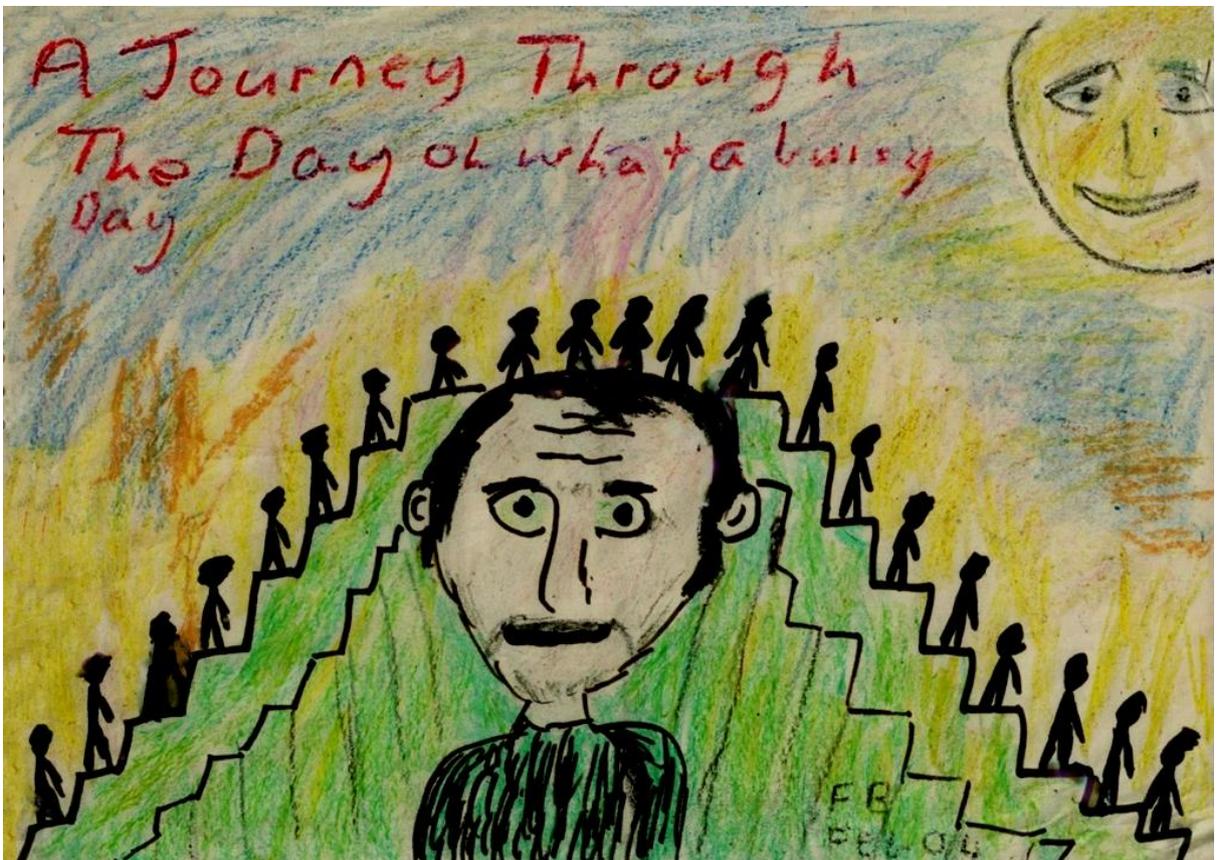
Feedback and comments are extremely welcome: contact Dave Russell – bricolage92@hotmail.com

Frank Bangay Artwork









A FEW WORDS ABOUT MY ARTWORK

My interest in art started in the late 1970s. An early influence was Kevin Coyne, on occasions his albums would have his artwork on the covers. In later years all his albums had his artwork on them. Then, as is the case now, seeing Kevin's artwork inspired me to pick up a felt tip pen or crayon and have a go at something myself. Over the years I grew to appreciate the work of many other artists.

My early artwork was mostly done with felt tip pens and crayons. I drew a lot of pictures featuring tower blocks, corrugated iron fences and waste ground. This was very much a reflection of what London looked like at the time. I went on to do some oil paintings. For these I got a lot of inspiration from places like Richmond Park. I carried on drawing mostly with felt tip pens. During the 1990s I started using crayons as well. I draw from the imagination, but it is inspired by the world around me and the way I see life.

The inspiration behind my current artwork started last year. I had not done any drawing for a while. I seemed to have lost confidence in my artwork, but I felt frustrated by this. At the time I was putting together my latest CD *Good Morning World* which was recorded at Core Arts. As part of a Core Arts creative work plan I decided to put some of my artwork on the cover. I was encouraged to do a water colour painting for the cover. It worked out ok and I started to get ideas for other paintings. With support and constructive suggestion from people at Core my artwork continues. Some paintings have been inspired by the weather and the seasons. One of these paintings was done during February when we had constant rain storms. It was also inspired by blues legend Elmore James. Some paintings are inspired by things happening around me. One painting was inspired by a baby pigeon in one of my window boxes last year, and watching the parents care for the bird. Some of my artwork is of a spiritual nature. A couple of paintings are inspired by felt tip pen drawings that I did earlier this century, I felt I could developed the ideas in watercolours. I feel blessed to have this outlet. Included here are some crayon drawings that I did some years back.

Frank Bangay, 2014

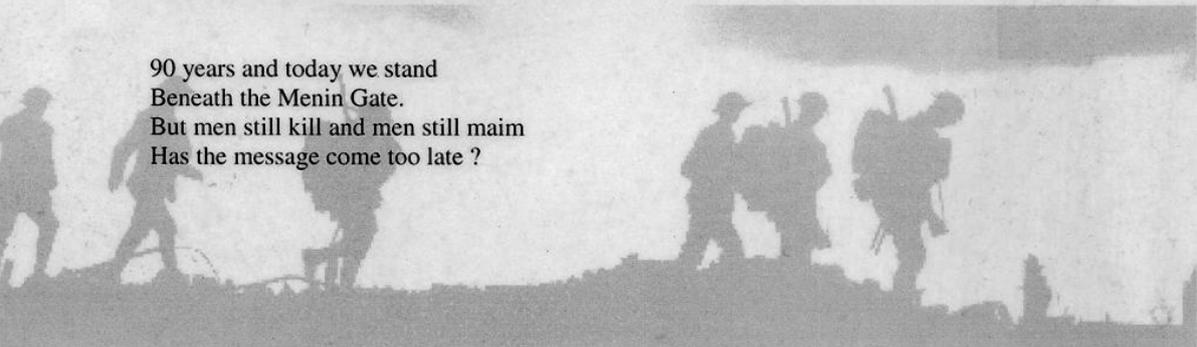
REMEMBRANCE DAY YPRES 11th NOVEMBER 2008

90 years since the guns were hushed
Around the Flanders Field.
4 long years of hurt and pain
For neither side would yield.

90 years since soldiers marched
Upon the Menin Road.
4 long years of mud and shells
And youthful lifeblood flowed.

90 years since guns were sounded
A million lives were lost.
4 long years of trench and gas
And still we count the cost.

90 years and today we stand
Beneath the Menin Gate.
But men still kill and men still maim
Has the message come too late ?



Irene Roper

I wrote the poem when my partner Dave and I visited the battlefields on the 90th anniversary of the end of World War 1, thus the references to 90 years. We were in the square at Ypres along with hundreds of others for the service at 11.00 am and laying of wreaths etc at the Menin Gate. Prior to eleven o'clock, a sound system relayed the sound of distant gunfire exactly as it would have been heard during the war. At 11.00 am this stopped, just as it did at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day etc. and it was this that led me to thinking about writing the poem. I then began to think about all the wars since hence the ending that no lessons have been learnt. We spoke to lots of people, several of whom had come to visit graves of relatives.

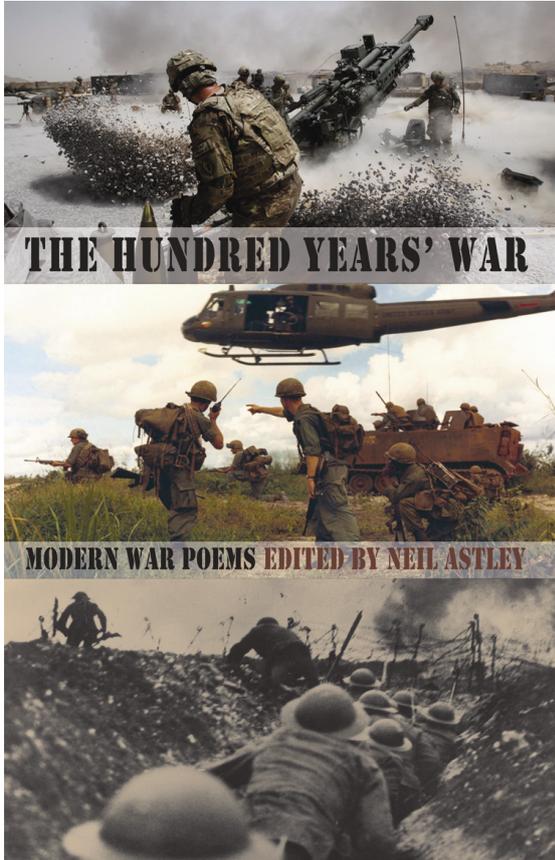
One woman told us about her Grandfather who had fought and died. She showed us a postcard picture of himself which he sent to her grandmother, and then she turned it over to see what he had written on the reverse. There were just 3 letters R.I.P. He had obviously realised his chances of survival were slight and this also contributed to what I put into the poem. The whole day has remained clear in my memory and was brought back with startling clarity when son Stuart, Dave and I went to Wells cathedral for the funeral of Harry Patch, the last English survivor of the war, and his insistence at having no guns at the funeral as to him war was nothing but legalised murder.

Irene Roper, May 2014.

The Hundred Years' War – Modern War Poems – edited by Neil Astley

Bloodaxe Books 2014

ISBN: 978 1 78037 100 9 £12.99



A truly courageous and comprehensive collection – covering a historical span between the First World War and the present day. It speaks with the authenticity of direct involvement, and gives a supreme sense of both sides of any conflict. **Neil Astley** has, rightly in my opinion, largely excluded anti-war protest poems by outside observers (though Philip Larkin's *MCMXIV* and Andrew Motion's *An Equal Voice* stand out as honourable exceptions). He also points out that those directly involved in conflicts can often feel more of an affinity with their enemies than with their officers and their distant home populations. Nor does the collection present a simplistic historical progression. Wars are a continuity; they spark off other wars – “the overall chronology backtracks in places . . . the US, Soviet Union or China supported or fuelled several proxy wars.”

The **First World War** section covers much familiar material, though there is significant coverage of the recently discovered **Albert-Paul Granier** ('unknown for the past 90 years'). Shame on **Robert Graves's** estate for insisting on a prohibitive price for his works to be included! Acknowledgement of the Middle Eastern front with some T E Lawrence poems. There is appropriate reflection on the 'home front', and the domestic background of war with **Vera Brittain's** *The Lament of the Demobilised* and **Margaret Postgate Cole's** *Afterwards*. Desertion and treason are touched on in **Martel's** *Execution* and **Frankau's** *The Deserter*. One solitary, beautiful graphic poem with *The Bleeding-Heart Dove and the Fountain* by **Guillaume Apollinaire**; *Dead Men with Masks*, by **Henry-Jacques** gives apt voice to the issue of poison gas. **Edmond Adam's** *Gamecocks* really does make trench-bound soldiers appear like hunted animals. Significant German contributions, one from **Anton Schnack**, with *Nocturnal Landscape* a cinematic vision of the world of trench warfare. The footnote acknowledges Schnack's Nazi sympathies, so it must have been a difficult decision as to whether to include the poem. It does acknowledge the physical state of the war dead – “they lie under weeds, heavy, fossil, with hands full of spiders, mouths scabbed red and brown”. To me this description is somewhat cold and detached, in comparison to other statements in this collection. The reader must make a careful appraisal of this one. **Wilhelm Klemm's** *Clearing-Station*, brings home the pain and the stench of the wounded, from the perspective of an army surgeon. This 'twins' well with **Marcel Martinet's** *Medals*, which shows the underlying hypocrisy and cruelty of 'honouring' the war wounded. Italy's contribution to that conflict is often played down; one compensation here is *The Rivers* by **Giuseppe Ungaretti**; the river Isonzo was the scene of a battle between the Italians and the Austrians; the Isonzo, symbolically, becomes other rivers, including the Seine and the Nile.

The **Ireland** section gives prominence to **W B Yeats's** close observation of the troubles from the First World War years to the 20s. Yeats's work was a stimulus to the Republicans, although some,

such as **Eavan Boland**, find some of his attitudes to be escapist. Some profound reflections for the situation, over the decades, from **John Hewitt** and **Brendan Kennelly**.

The **Second World War** part contains predictable (but highly valued) contributions from **Keith Douglas** and **W H Auden**. It embraces a wide spectrum of nationalities involved in that conflict – such as Polish poet **Zbigniew Herbert** and several Russian writers. Some excellent Japanese perspective from **Tamiki Hara**, and especially so with the challenging imagery and symbolism of **Nobuyuki Saga's** *The Myth of Hiroshima* – ‘We skipped over death in a flash and became spirits . . . One man’s shadow among hundreds is branded on stone steps . . . The twentieth-century myth is stamped with fire/Who will free the shadow from this stone’ a startling exploration of the idea of an atrocity being a permanent stain on the conscience of humanity.

Ko Un's *Middle School Classmates* shows **Korea** sinking into civil war after liberation from the Japanese, while his *Restoration Again* delineates the soul-destroying repetitiveness of dictatorial brutality and futile struggles against it.

In *The Cold War*, **Miroslav Holub's** *The Corporal who Killed Archimedes* bitterly indicts the ‘dumbing down’ cruelty of militarism, which **Reiner Kunze's** *The Bringers of Beethoven* relates ‘high culture’ to totalitarian oppression. An appropriate entry with *Fall 1961* from US poet Robert Lowell, who was imprisoned as a conscientious objector. An ‘alarm call’ about an impending nuclear attack from Peter Porter in *Attention Please*. There is appropriate coverage of Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

In *The Vietnam War*, there seems to be a good balance of combatants. The opener, **Pham Ho's** *Beautiful and Loving Days Gone* by expresses deep remorse at having shot someone down in the course of duty. There is some versification of brutal military orders. But the section is notable for its brief flashes such as **Pham Tien Duat's** three-part *The Fire in the Lamps*. The potential of love as a counterweight to war in **Bruce Weigl's**

The Way of Tet and Doug Anderson's *Bamboo Bridge*. Some sentimental heroism in **Giang Nam's** *Night Crossing*; gruesome but astute observation of the corpses of military casualties in **Bruce Dawe's** *Homecoming*.

Israel, Palestine and the Lebanon, as acknowledged, has gone on from 1948 to the present. Again, the collection sympathetically represents all sides of the conflict. **Aharon Shabti's** *War* is the voice of an Israeli condemning the militarism of his own state. **Mahmoud Darwish** is described as ‘the poetic voice of the Palestinian people’. He certainly portrays the conflict in a visionary light: “Is it from a dimly lit stone that wars flare up . . . All this is light for me. I walk. I become lighter. I fly/then I become another. Transfigured . . . You killed me . . . and I forgot, like you, to die.” **James Fenton**, in *Jerusalem*, measures up the reality of that city against its status as a poetic and rhetorical symbol over several centuries. Total war echoes the concept of Armageddon: “Shall I be first in the great body count . . .” and an acknowledgement of the complicity of both sides “I have destroyed your home. You have destroyed me home.” A powerful statement from **Adonis**, in *Desert*: “The cities dissolve, and the earth is a cart loaded with dust/Only poetry knows how to pair itself to this space.” Bombs ‘mirror themselves’ inside a book’s page. Devastation is conveyed by the symbolism of the means used for its description: “the alphabet disentangles, thread by thread/falls on the face of the city, slipping out of the needles of memory.” *Shaheeda* by **Agi Mishol** is dedicated to a suicide bomber. *From A State of Siege* by **Mahmoud Darwish** indicts the callousness of wartime killers. In *Black Horses* by **Ghassan Zaqtan** the poet is truly haunted by the massed dead: “I raise my ghosts, feed them/and they swim like black horses in my sleep.” *Befouled Language* by **Natan Zach** rightly lists brutal militaristic euphemisms like ‘Collateral Damage’.

The Troubles, the Irish section avoids partisan polemics. Voices from both sides are effectively in harmony, to make a universal condemnation of cruelty and violence in all its forms. **Seamus Heaney** features prominently here; Neil Astley

makes a good explanation of Heaney's search for imagery suitable to describe the troubles, to find the mummified bodies in Danish peat bogs as in *The Tollund Man*. In *from Whatever you Say Nothing* Seamus highlights the absurdity of attempts to describe the troubles from the comfortable standpoint of a detached observer. The *Strand at Lough Beg* and *Casualty* are testaments to his personal knowledge of the wounded. Fine contributions from **Paul Durcan** – speaking directly to Gerry Adams – and **Paul Muldoon**.

Yugoslav Wars of Succession covers the struggle in former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1999. Great contribution from **Ken Smith**. *Essential Serbo-Croat* is simplistic but totally appropriate. There must have been many combatants forced to face the direst conditions with only an elementary phrase book as a guide.

Iraq Wars – A Cold Coming by **Tony Harrison** is a deeply compassionate, highly detailed portrayal of the sufferings of ordinary Iraqi people under Saddam's regime. Three contributions here from two women poets, **Helen Dunmore** and **Jo Shapcott**. Helen's *In the Desert Knowing Nothing* and Jo's *Phrase Book* capture the feeling of helplessness and despair of a 'war correspondent'. Highly significantly, Jo sent a copy of her poem to the cabinet office, with her rejection of a CBE.

The last two sections, *Afghanistan Wars* and *Worldwide War* relate, of course, to the 'ongoing'. The Afghanistan section rightly includes some Russian perspective from **Joseph Brodsky**. *The Silenced* by Persian poet **Nadia Adjuman** speaks volumes of one desperate to be a free spirit and proclaim the truth, but "This group of tyrants has muffled my mouth". Because she published a book dealing with aspects of love and the oppression of Afghan women, she was killed by her husband. Impressive extract from **Owen Sheers**'s verse drama *Pink Mist*. This was cleverly composed on the basis of interviews with soldiers actively

involved. In comparison to the directness of many of the other poems here, it has something of a secondary, derivative quality. But such work must always be done; for general enlightenment there is a pressing need for intermediaries. The same criticism, and validation, applies to **Andrew Motion's** *The Next Thing*. There are poems from Taliban fighters, based on oral tradition, and *Eleven Landays* translated by **Eliza Griswold**. A Landay is a formal Afghan oral verse form consisting of 22 syllables.

Worldwide War contains references to the Falklands. Especially moving is a fine female contribution *War Metaphysics for a Sudanese Girl* by **Adrie Kusserow** – sheer physical martyrdom! **Dan O'Brien's** two contributions relate to a war correspondent whom he had known personally, and who had a deep personal conviction that war originated in the mind and emotions of the individual. *After 42 Years* by **Khaled Mattawa** is a panoramic obituary on Gaddafi's regime in Libya. It pulls no punches: "O Lord is that our history tossed into a freezer like a lump of rotting flesh?" There is bitter irony in *Kidding Myself in Kuta, Bali: A Pantoum*, by **Alan Smith**. A Pantoum is a traditional Malay poetic form based on quatrains. War is compared figuratively to a sick epic film (both are coldly, calculatingly engineered – "the piles of bodies really are a laugh . . . It's just a film, my final self-delusion/The words are so extreme that they're obscene."

I freely acknowledge that this review only touches the tip of a really substantial iceberg.

Dave Russell

The Acts of Society

Rainbows pave the way you see
It is not up to you or me
It is your destiny –

You see, Sophia –
there are rainbows everywhere
but you can't see them
so you stare,
and the harder you stare
the more you can't see them
because they are like me
you see
standing next to your tree you see

I am invisible to all
like the rainbows are invisible to you
and you simply don't know what to do
Take a look outside of you
and you will see nothing at all
because you have the flu
and other people have contaminated you

Take a look inside you
and you will see me
standing there as tall as can be

Take pride in yourself
and the woman you were meant to be
for all to see
before the world and society got their
hands on you
because you knew what to do
back then
and you know what to do right now

Don't look back –
look forward in time
and you will be mine
one day you will be mine
and feel so divine

Sapna Ramnani

Apologies are Too Late

Some ten thousand men
stand at your grave
wondering how you misbehaved
with me

Their loss is your gain
as they know how you misbehaved
with me and they cry in pain
for the life they have lost
which is me, you see
because you took it away from them
when I had the flu

And as I grew weak
you grew strong
and you put me in a place
where you thought I belong
and I am dead now
never to return to you again
and in vain you cry
I'm sorry for your pain
But what is done is done
and I will overcome you, you know
and the monster inside you grows bigger
with every day and everything you do
but still it doesn't stop
me from doing what I want to do
because the monster is inside me
and not you

When will you learn to leave me alone
and I can return to my home
where I belong for so long
and tomorrow I will know
what you have done
I will overcome once more
When will this pain go away
so I can sit and play
like a child again
in the sunshine of my youth
and destiny where I can rest at ease

with you Jack with me
 and see our children playing in the sand
 and how you lend a helping hand
 to look after them because they are our
 offspring
 like spring has sprung again
 bringing new hope and destiny
 for us to see

where is she from
 that she is so far from us?

“She took a bus going to nowhere
 and heading to nowhere
 because she isn’t scared of anything
 you see
 because she belongs to me.”

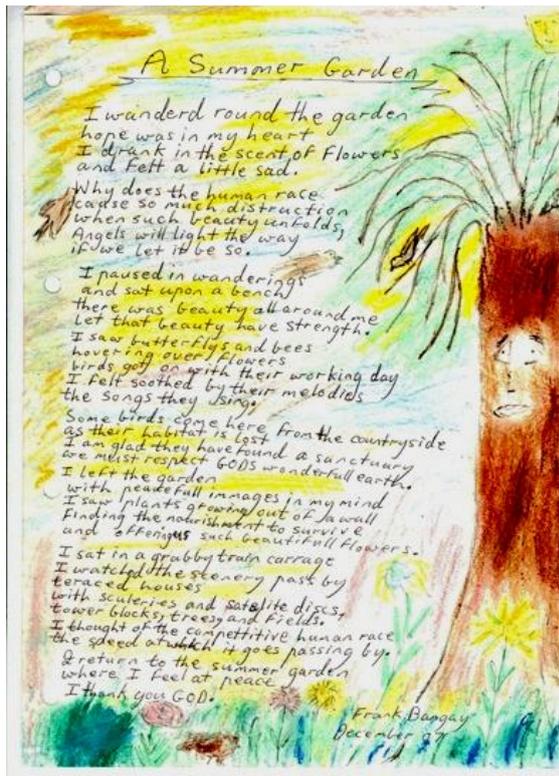
Sapna Ramnani

A False Commodity

I am undermined all the time
 with no rhythm or rhyme of my own
 while other people talk on the telephone
 talking about me rather than to me
 or what I want to do or say or be
 For tomorrow is a new day for me
 and I cannot be this way or that way
 I cannot be ignored or bored
 I am not theirs and I don't belong to them
 so what right do they have over me?

Can't they see anything
 or do anything to make me free
 to be me again
 and happy again like I was ten
 But they gave up
 and I was stuck with their impairments
 for all to see
 but it wasn't me
 it wasn't me
 it definitely was not me at all

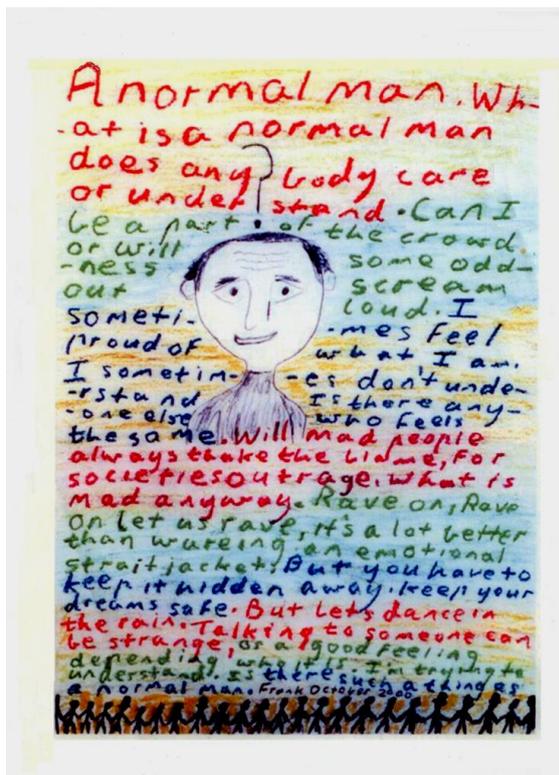
But they couldn't see that
 and they imposed their own liberty on me
 to take away my dignity
 and rights and freedoms
 because they wanted to
 they could and nobody prevented them
 from doing so and this is how they go



Artwork by Frank Bangay

When will it end?
 When will the madness end
 for me and you
 because I have the flu
 and you are ok and
 everyone says have a nice day
 and walks away
 into the sunset of their minds
 to unwind
 and take a look around
 where they don't see me there
 in despair talking to them
 about my problems and in vain
 they say “where has Sapna gone

and grew around me like a forest of trees
locking me in
so I couldn't see the sky any more
that beautiful blue sky so high above me
for me to fly in
as the nights grew dim
and I could swim
in the little pond
before me
without drowning



Artwork by Frank Bangay

But even there they made me drown
without a frown
and took away my liberty
dignity rights and
freedoms and for what
for their little pots of plants
rather than a forest of trees
like painting the ceiling blue
rather than looking up at the blue sky above them
so it was a false commodity
and I thought as much

But they didn't see that
as they painted a pine forest of trees
on the wall rather than looking out
of the window to see them grow tall
to the real sky above them
and hearing the birds sing
rather than in artificial voices
in their heads telling them
when to wake up and when to go to bed
it was all a false commodity
which is why I never grew tall
in their eyes and there was no disguise
about that fact and I wanted Jack
back so badly back then but it all got
squashed
as they washed me with soap and water
and watched me die without him
I was wearing skimpy jeans
and a tight t-shirt at the time
because they wanted to see how
my body was defined
and whether I was a woman
or a man or neither

They decided neither
because of my disability
but they couldn't see the soul
in me wanting to be free
all the time with Jack
and without them and their men
because they didn't see that coming
how men could be turned into animals
and women too
like we were at the zoo
and someone had turned off the lights
so you couldn't tell which was animal
and which was a man
or a woman
because we were all in cages
of some sort
but I wanted to abort their mission
but they wanted to abort me
and my femininity

like an unwanted baby
waiting to grow
for a future that it doesn't know
because its life has been aborted
cut short when it had so much to learn
and so much to grow

Like a Venus Fly Trap
they put its head in its mouth
and he could never come out
because he was stuck there silently
crying as it was silently dying
for all to see
and that baby was me
when I was born
You know
That baby was me
for all to see
So where am I now?
Not inside a cow or some misery
because I am here
and I steered my life around
to my way of thinking
without blinking
at all in the beautiful sunlight
that brightens my day
and I say hooray
to that and that is a fact
But other people don't say hooray
to that at all
and they don't want me to grow tall
but remain small
or not there at all
like invisible nothingness
in the air for them to stare at
time and time again and to say
what's that?

What the hell is that speck of dust
and it must go now yes it must because
we don't want it polluting
this atmosphere
because we are very near

and we want clean air to breathe
can't you see our problem?

Go away you tiny piece of dust
so we can carry on with our lives
without cleaning off our shoes our clothes
our hair
you are everywhere but you should be
nowhere
at all because you cannot grow tall
and you will never become a real person at
all
So I went away to begin a new day
somewhere else far from here
without anyone so dear
And so I was alone
forced into exile
without a pile of people after me
for me to see
and appreciate
because they didn't appreciate me

So I was forced into exile
because they didn't like my face
or my pace
of life
and they didn't agree with me
so they sent me away on my own
to roam alone
or drown in the sea

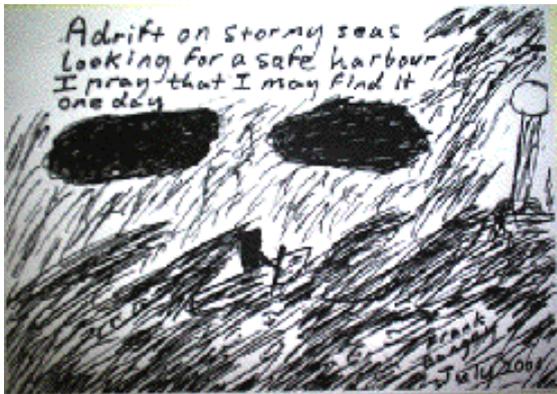
They didn't care which way or that
in fact they didn't care at all
about what happened to me
how about that?
My life was not precious at all
to them or at all
to me because
I would never stand tall
to them or for me
so I died inside when I should have cried
inside
to let it all out but it wasn't to be

it wasn't for me

So I shut up and put up with that
and all that they had given me
and that was my lot until today
when I gave it all away back to them

Sapna Ramnani

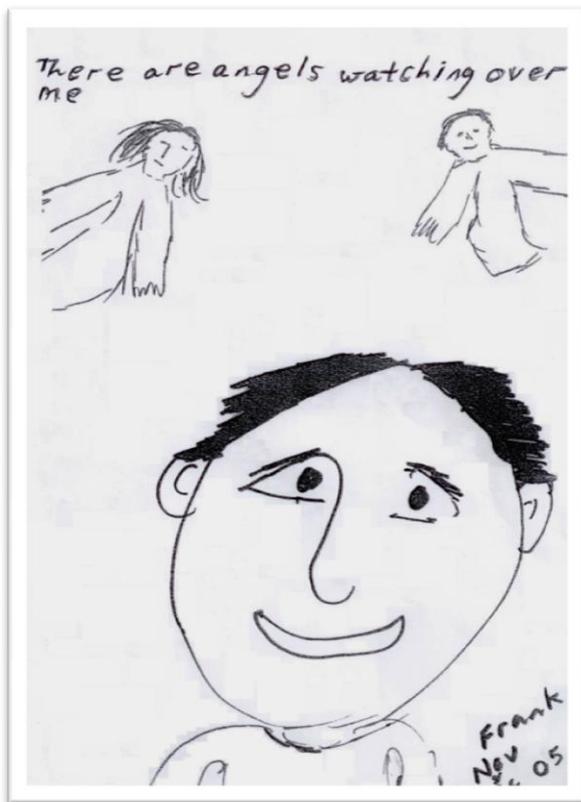
Where is the Ship?



I have lost my compassion for you
you who gave me the flu
I went under with a blunder
and when I reached the surface
I didn't know that I was there
and it was all because of you
I had the flu
I sank down deeply in my veins
because I couldn't pretend
that I was upright all night
and the fire that burned in me
was never meant to be in my destiny
metaphors and metaphors of people
came my way to wish me a nice day
holy cow
I was out on a handle without a bow
and the song sang deeply within my veins
I was meant for the sea
you see
never to be free
and then one fine night
one stormy night
I got a freight all night

I wanted to be free you see
but the sea was never meant for me
I couldn't take it any more
I was sure
I was at the door
people crowded around my deck
oh heck I cried oh heck
the storm rushed in me with a surge
what emerged was my broken back in two
which is why I couldn't come to you
the land marked time
but it was never mine to find
I was broken in two so badly
which is why I never came to you
the sea ran through my deck
with such force
rushing into every crevice
with such power
devouring me with a hunger so ferocious
it was not cautious about what it did to me
I was a rag doll in its hand
it didn't understand my need
for a man to hold me once again
the lonely shore seemed miles away
as the sea washed over me like a tidal wave
sweeping me into my grave
I couldn't stand upright again
like so many men wanted me to
which is why I never came to you
old ship of the sea I was
but it was never meant for me
the tidal wave washed me over
putting me into my grave
I couldn't misbehave no more
I was at the bottom of the sea
waiting to be free
no one came to rescue me
I cried all night long
for the song
that I had lost in the depth of my bows
I was without a house
or a caretaker to care
it wasn't fair
what they had done to me
or how they sank me

rather than ranked me as number one
the truth of my youth was forgotten
like a rotten apple it sat on the shelf of life
like memorabilia
out dated
it reminded me
that I was never meant to be
for I was made in an institution
made in hell
with every turn I took
the seas got rougher and tougher for me
you see
then one afternoon
a single sunbeam on the horizon
lifted me and blew me away

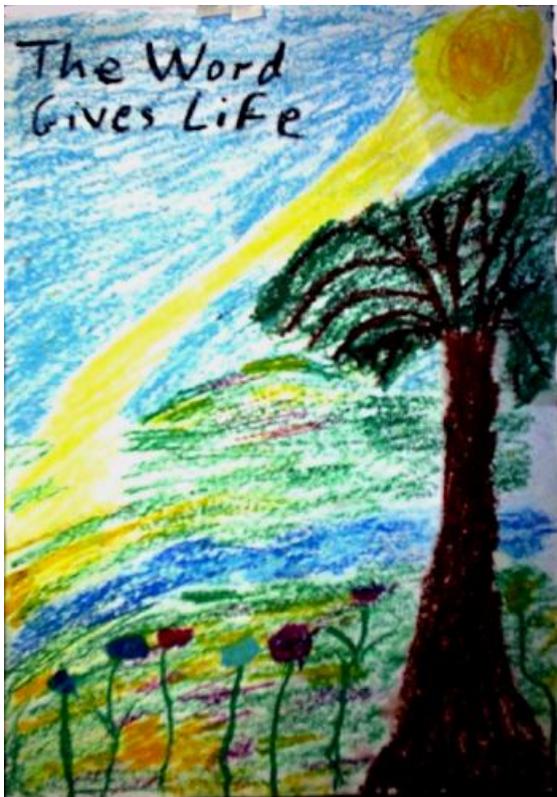


Artwork by Frank Bangay

I couldn't stand it any more
I couldn't stand the loneliness
I wanted the shore
I was sure of that
the horizon was so clear
but not from out here
not from out there
where people didn't care

that is why I went up a gear
and the people rolled around the deck
oh heck
I cried
why oh why was I frightened so much
of their touch on my skin
I was dim from within
I couldn't give in to their languishness of me
you see
I was never meant to be free
and then one fine day
I went away
and the boat sank today
marry me Sophia marry me it said
as I went to bed
with the water up to my neck
I was never meant to be the bride to be
I was trapped at sea
every couple was a double
I was in a single room
that was meant for me
and that was meant to be my trap
and that was that
I couldn't take it any more
I wanted the shore so badly
I was a bore I am sure
because of you I had the flu
and now I turn my back on you
I know what to do for pretty as I was
I was not your turtle dove
the rolling seeds of time
were never mine to find
(Jack) demolish the past
because it won't last Sophia
and I can't tell you how much I love you
but I do
and it is time to get off that boat
in that moat
and vote for me you see
I'm your destiny
the tide turns for no man
but you must make it turn for you
you know what to do
I must be there to comfort you
because you don't have the flu

and neither do you understand
that you need a man to hold your hand
And the ships bows moved
and creaked
they were weak
with the strain up there
in the cold night air
birds fly but I really don't care
but they are there to fly away
in the sky away you see
but no one comes to rescue me
for me to know that someone is rescuing me
they will have to drag me out to sea
please be careful with me
my bones are stuck together
and the ocean comes over me
But I can swim in the sea of tranquillity
because my light grows dim
whenever they are near my dear
I grow thin and weak with hunger
as I rock from side to side
I think
I wonder



Artwork by Frank Bangay

I ponder a little more
all the while uncaring
which way the wind blows me
people stare in the cold night air
for they are the knowers of the truth
I was made in an institution
made in hell
I need a jump start
but no one comes to rescue me
I was trapped at sea
and the tidal waves came over me
I wasn't in the sea of tranquillity
that was for sure
I didn't want it any more
and the sea swept me over
breaking my back
like a tidal wave
it took me away to a new land
where people didn't understand
I was on a new land
a new shore
but I didn't want it any more
how dare they did that to me
ruined my destiny for all to see
for my time was over
my time was up
they had spilt my blood
but I would never give up
there was a fight to be had
and I am glad I won it
and if I am honest
I would do anything to come to you
because at the prime of my life
I would cry all the time
it was a gift of mine to reveal the truth
but they stole it in the night from me
I couldn't wonder why
I went under
but they made a blunder
and I wonder why
they couldn't sacrifice another human being
it was a mystery to me
why I was not free
And there
ships bows moved and creaked

they were meek
with the strain up there
in the cold night air
I was weak with hunger
as I dreamt of the truth of my youth
and what they had taken away from me
it was the fire in my belly
that they had replaced
with the fires of hell
the smoke rose up
choking me within
while all around me birds flew
in the skies above me
in the beautiful blue yonder
with no concept of home or confinement
because it was their divine right
to be free
unlike me destined for the bottom of the sea
birds fly but I really don't care
but they are there to fly away
in the sky away
you see
but no one comes to rescue me
for me to know that someone is rescuing me
they will have to drag me out to sea
please be careful with me
my bows are stuck together
and the ocean comes over me
like a knife through butter
your utterances silently hurt me
like a wave washed over me
and the wave that swept over me was a tidal
wave
that you couldn't see
it wasn't meant to be seen by anyone except
me
I am not going to scrutinise you any more
for what you had done to me
is to destroy my history
for all to see
and the wave that washed over me
was not a tidal wave at best
the best was yet to come
in this poem is the story of terror and horror
I have a good mind

to tell you the truth
rather than you making up your own
judgements about me
you see
and what swept over me was the tide of
judgement
it endowed me with forgiveness
for what I have done wrong
but I have done nothing wrong
the attitude that the tide had
was that I was bad
it made me sad inside
it made me die inside
I was in hell
my nerves got raw to the bone
while other people talked on the telephone
they doubted what I was saying
and wanted to confirm that with each other
but I needed a man
who had a plan and could understand
that my name was Sophia
for I was blue without him in my life
it was like using a kitchen knife all over my
body
it was true that I didn't come to you
and the tide swept me away
to have a nice day
which is why
I am in dismay today
no one would rescue me in the cold seas out
there
when I was in despair
it was like punching me in the stomach
and thought I was a dunce at once
but I bled all over
and fell over
and died inside
I was not wearing a life jacket
or a safety belt
when they drowned me
I washed up on the shore
I was there no more
I fell over in a big old heap
while they were counting sheep
safely in their beds

I had done it
I had stayed alive
at what cost
the portrait of me was hanging on the wall
for all to see
I would be a liar
if I didn't tire of this
but I wanted to give it a miss
but I fell down that same hole
that they made for me
and that is how they spoil my destiny for all
to see
I was surprised that they had given me the flu
what a drowned life I had
it made me sad to see it ripped away
on a new day
just as the day was dawning
and the sun rose in the east
when I was younger
I was blue all over
because of you
and now I know what to do
(Jack) let's have some fun now Sophia
you and me like it was meant to be
touch the sky before we might die
and how can that be for all to see
how they ruined our destiny
and the tides have turned away
from yesterday
to stay away from here
(Sophia) they swallowed me down whole
and I couldn't fight for my right to breath air
but they didn't care
they drowned me inside myself
I couldn't help myself

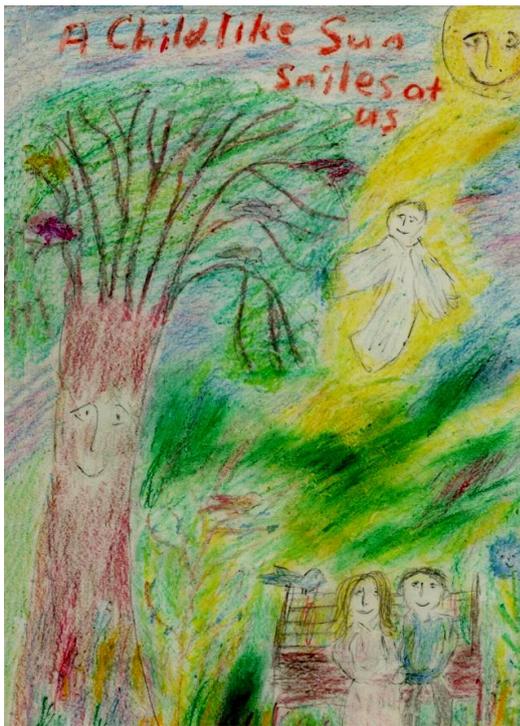
Sapna Ramnani

The Plane Crash

They had forgotten the truth of my youth
and the seas swell up inside me
like a tidal wave they crashed on the lonely
shore
I couldn't swim no more
without a safety belt and a life jacket
for the seas were rough to me they spoil
my
destiny
and then one fine day the sun came my way
and I am in dismay today
I despise the sunlight on the horizon
because it was not there for me to see
but I really enjoyed its company
when it came to me and I can't stand the
pain
any
more I want the lonely shore once more
the life threatening injuries that I sustained
made me blue through and through
and I couldn't do that I couldn't come to you
and like a marksman taking his aim I was
maimed
but it was all the same to you
and I could struggle no more out there
on that lonely shore
I wasn't a bore I was sure
of that as I closed the door to my past
because it won't last
and the past vanishes into thin air
and I wasn't in despair but it wasn't fair
what they had done to me
destroyed my history
and destiny for all to see
and I'm not going to argue with you
you who gave me the flu
and the past is the past and it won't last
Sophia

I will come back to you one day
so don't be in dismay today
one beautiful day the tide swept me away

and I am in dismay today
 I cannot see it any more
 I want the lonely shore no more
 and their mannerisms hurt me through and
 through
 which is why I came to you
 and like a plane gliding down to the ground
 and all around me grew a forest of trees
 locking me in and bringing me to my knees
 the air marshal on board
 couldn't afford to save my life
 I was in the wreckage never to be found
 and on that plane was a flight box recorder
 and it said I was dead before I hit the
 ground
 which is why I was nowhere to be found
 the examination of the wreckage
 shows I was not because of you
 I had the flu and I didn't know what to do



Artwork by Frank Bangay

I was in despair
 and nobody answered my distress signal
 I combed the skies for those lies
 that you spun around me
 but I couldn't find anything to indicate

what you had done to me
 so dedicated was I to fly
 in those rainbow skies
 that I would do anything
 to get there again
 like so many men
 wanted me to
 and to see the horizon fall over the sunset
 I wanted to go up a gear from here
 the sunset looked so beautiful and clean
 like a dream I was in fear of my life
 because I could not fly that plane twice
 once was not good enough for me you see
 I wanted it to spoil my destiny
 or so I was led to believe
 by you who gave me the flu
 for I'm an angel born in hell
 but who could tell
 for I am well
 but under no spell of mine
 for I wanted to dine on his wine
 and if the truth be told I never unfolded my
 wings
 I never got to sing
 for I trusted them too much
 I was trust up like a chicken
 and I wouldn't dare go back
 there in the cold night air
 for I was blue all over
 I fell over and died
 they would prize me open
 like a piece of cake
 I couldn't stand it any more
 I wanted the lonely shore once more
 I was not lonely any more it is true
 which is why I came to you
 you didn't share in my goodness and my
 strength
 which is why I will never be his wife
 On the floor of the cockpit
 I saw a dead body lying there
 but I didn't care

and then it struck me it would be my
 destiny
 if I didn't get out of here fast
 I knew I wouldn't last
 and the radius compass on the ground
 told me that I will never be found
 one fine night I got a fright
 as I lay there in my tent
 because the wolves came
 around me one by one
 In the gaps between the rafters
 I saw your face and it said to me
 how dare you destroy my destiny
 The plane crashed and turned
 with every turn it took
 but you didn't look
 I needed entertainment on board
 I wanted to abort it but the flight attendant
 Wouldn't let me
 they said it would spoil my destiny
 once again the flight attendant let me down
 I was down to the ground never to be found
 the petrol leaked from the fuel tank
 And the sands of time were never mine all
 the
 time
 for the cockpit had destroyed my destiny
 by bringing me here my dear for I was in an
 institution made in hell
 but who could tell I wasn't well
 for tell me the truth you blamed my youth
 for making me the way I am with a broken
 plane
 I have nothing to gain
 because I was black and blue all over
 in that plane crash but I had to dash
 and then it came to me
 that they had spoiled my destiny
 right there and then
 I couldn't win either way which is why
 I am in dismay today
 what are the chances of surviving such a
 crash



Artwork by Frank Bangay

I can tell you that and the remarkable thing
 is
 I was dim from within or so I thought
 but I was not abusive to myself
 I was in hell it was plain to see
 what they had done to me destroyed me
 from
 within
 and in that sea I lay there
 I shook and shivered

I was broken in two which is why I never
 came
 and instead you repented for me for all to
 see
 the tinnitus in my ear reminds me to go up a
 gear
 with Jack for I want him back
 and it was a tragedy what came over me
 lying there in that cockpit without a care
 because I was black and blue all over from
 that
 crash
 and the flu
 and I didn't know what to do
 and the ship creaked from side to side
 I nearly died in that vessel
 but I couldn't stand it any longer

I wanted the lonely shore to come to you
but I have the flu do what you want to me
you have spoilt my destiny
anyway and that is why I'm blue
I am black and blue all over
I fell over backwards into their net
which they had left out for me
and without a doubt
I couldn't cut myself free
come to me Sophia come to me
and in that tragedy
you couldn't find me
there without a care
because the plane crashed over
and rolled over on its side
I died inside
and from far away came a new day
and I am in dismay today
for the river runs deep over the ocean floor
I want it no more
because you were mean to me
you destroyed my destiny
and to tell you the truth
I am in use like a public toilet available to
anyone
the engines splattered and died
I died inside
it filled me with dread as I read
the meter I couldn't stand
it any longer I was up against the wall
feeling so small
like I wasn't there at all in this big ocean of
life

I wanted to be somebody's wife
and then it came to me what a tragedy
I was waiting to happen
what a mess I was out there
where people didn't care
washed over me I couldn't fight
the cockpit was dead with no lights on to
you
the petrol tank caught on fire

and the flames went higher and higher
and the skies filled with smoke and I choked
I was scared for my life because I wasn't in
safety
I couldn't believe it my whole life's work
went down the drain
I had nothing to gain
but in that moment of time
I knew it wouldn't be mine all the time
but where was I to run now without a bow
or a ship to anchor me on
I couldn't see a way through to come to you
in that wreckage of life
but life turned like a millstone round my
neck
oh heck I cried oh heck
I crashed and burned with every turn I took
it wasn't a safe landing
I was confined to a space about half the size
of
this room
I was in gloom
the cockpit was turned upside down
with me under it
I had no choice but to sit there
and wait and hesitate
I knew I would stay alive
but at what cost I had lost everything
in a single moment of time
life was not mine all the time
but I knew I had to get out of
there without a care
for I was in fear of my life
with all that strife
and so the plane crashed down
to the ground and I was no where to be
found
and what happened to me was a mystery
for all to see
and it didn't please me
to be like this
the old ship sank to the bottom of the sea
It was me you know it was me

and on that ship was me you know
and the waves came and washed over me
in the sea of tranquillity
my plane was frozen to the ground
no where to be found
and the tidal wave that night
in the house I could not escape from this
eternal
inferno
that would be my destiny

but the lights were on
the switches were up
I could not give up
there was a reason for every season
and there was a reason for why I was here
but I was in fear of flying low
and I was right to fly low at night
the street lights would guide me to my
destiny
but as I flew in on one night
I crashed to the ground no where to be
found
because of you I had the flu
and didn't know what to do
so incompetent was I that I could not fly
or so you thought
one more step and I would fall flat on my
back
and the song that rang in my head
told me that I should go to bed
with Jack for I had mellowed down in years
as I feared the future without him you see
It was a disaster but I was waiting for his
company
And where was I when I wanted to fly
into those rainbow skies
not down under with jack you see
you see what faced me was a brick wall
so I could never grow tall
with Jack and the fuel tank burst into flames
maiming me for life
when I wanted to be somebody's wife

and the tragedy is they know the biz
about what they have done to me
they destroyed my destiny for all to see.

Sapna Ramnani

Deteriorating Brain

*(Oct 2010 and Feb 2011 from an idea by
Helmut Schultz)*

Woke up today with the weather pissing
felt like half my brain was missing
and the blankness held no faces
there was space between each space
then still more spaces
now I'm walking down the lane
with my deteriorating brain

Whoops, there goes my hippocampus
sinking fast like like Atlantis
and my throbbing neo-cortex
is sucking me into a vortex
as I'm walking down the land
with my deteriorating brain

My limbic systems shaped my soul
into a double-bind I can't control
and now my hypothalamus
is sending word things are calamitous
still, I'm walking down the lane
with my deteriorating brain

My Aunty Gwen went off the rails
her mind became a jumble sale
she used to act so mean and crappy
but now she smiles and she's happy
see her stumbling down the lane
with her deteriorating brain.

And Ozzy Osbourne knows the score

his mind has been a whole lot more
he'll watch his dogs crap on the floor
before he takes them out the door
to walk down them down the lane
with his deteriorating brain.

And experts state with great authority
the brain it ages hyperbolically
since time never quite stands still
we reach a point where it's all downhill
then we'll go mumbling down the lanes
with our deteriorating brains.

Razz

Resurrection

(by Stanley Spencer)

Reborn.
Still dressed to kill.
Step out of the grave's mouth
reach, hold hands, kiss one another
be warm.

Razz

A Sonnet

Speak strange of Supermoons and she-men
spun from silly misheard sisters' stories.
Staff dressed by distaff side to serve, soul
submitted, sold, simply to be sincere,
near to themselves, my most precious me
displayed, auto turned inside out, you see,
no turning back, a one way trip down this
Moebius strip, twisted into what my
satisfied chiral bi-polarity
did not want, need, but took the time to read

in the mirror of my dream of being.
Strange songs are sacred in their minor key
of man, don't fear, my sweet, weavers who say
your right, in their mirror, smells sinister.

Anthony Hurford

The Natural Word

Frosted orange eyeshadow
with copper underwing,
tonight perhaps?
Fritillaries of maiden hair,
the very latest thing.
Golden brown hairstreak
with ringlets shower down.
Large blue eyes lined smokey.
Lips luscious, peach blossom blush.
Buff arches in high heels.
Everything so right,
she uses the world's vocabulary
to bend its grammar rules.
Go downy with her,
wary of thorns.

Anthony Hurford

LILLY

4112*

My every day is typical of you.
That is what you do.
Your enchanted head band
mutes whispers of the gods.

Before, I worshipped living to
sleeplessness,
unable to let go. Hypnos left me,
a play thing for his kin,
Pan nodded by.

So, seven years I spent in shelter,
'Nil periculum' your motto.
'Heal thyself' my own.

I did too; Magic band removed.
Grasses blew, sparkle in the waves.
Everything intense, everything alive.
Worship renewed.

Then, Bacon peeled my eyes.
A hurricane blew.
I knew one greater than you.

Now, I eat your body daily.
Communion, of sorts.
Of human gathering.
Antidote to fear – theirs, my own.

A Golden Calf,
a scientific-fetish god,
you colour me –
my worship is not all mine.

My god.

*Written on a pill

Anthony Hurford

Incarnation

Born, this is the meat of it,
the meta too for some.
This feast of flesh.
Which way does it go, control,
flesh to spirit, or spirit flesh.
A balance must be struck, you say.
Yet the dreams of the body are relentless,
so much time spent over this temple's
ownership.
A war, it can be, no less.
God, gods, demons or just some conflict that
makes sense.
Written into flesh and flesh to self,

I've cycled through human forms, ideas
of myself, poses struck, a life cycle's
Dante-esque mug shots for God, GPS stamped
holistically for judgement, and my own
and the last laugh, that of others,
who'll join the feast upon yourself
with their set menu,
as if they knew.

Anthony Hurford

Mozart Giggle

My Mozart giggle right outta Am-a-deus,
"I'm a god, yes, hell, yes" – I'd thought
far-fetched yet my body unlocks my av-
ian eye, titters release me, laughter
not so much at everyone else as at
myself in everyone else, so sincere
in Mynah sarcasms in our cage-life-
term with parrot mirror, even jungle
dawns but another raising of the cover.
Spring like from deep this song-shower
chimes me
downstream into the sea of response, bird
song, creation, that demands I croak back.
Yet in clear vision danger lies hidden,
Stop. No. Stop. Yes . . .

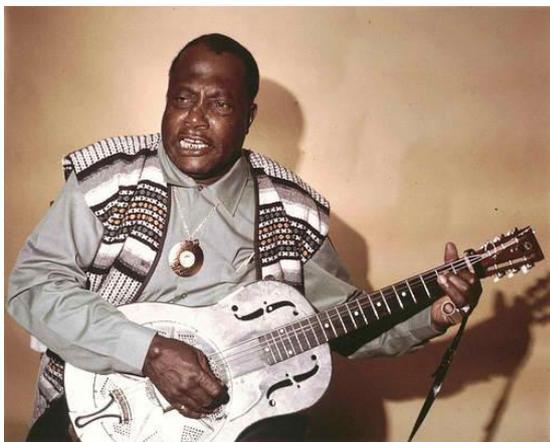
Anthony Hurford

Oracular confusion

Snake eyed, tongued and partial –
your sulphuric atmosphere scorned,
brimstoned
my blood; heart stones worried through
flesh
to words full of holes:
Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.
And all the rest.

Anthony Hurford

The BLUES POETRY of BUKKA WHITE



Sometimes the blues suffers from stereotypes. But listening to different blues artists and hearing what they are singing about, shows that there are many different musical styles in the blues, many distinctive songwriters, and many fine poets. When I interviewed Kevin Coyne in 2004, he told me that the blues has many fine artists; and it's hard to pick the best. Indeed the blues reflects the environment that these artists were coming from, also their personal experiences. These experiences often reflected the experiences of other Afro American people from those times. Sometimes blues artists also sang Spiritual songs. In this looking towards the path we tread to get to heaven. One of the many fine blues songwriters and musicians is Bukka White. Back in the 1990s I heard a friend play a tape of a Bukka White recording. I liked what I heard and asked my friend to do me a copy. During the early part of this century, I saw a Bukka White album in the library titled *The Complete Bukka White*. I was attracted to the record by the front cover. This showed a dignified looking Bukka White wearing a white shirt and holding a steel guitar. When I got home and played the record. I realised that it was the same record that my friend had taped for me.

I will tell you about the record shortly but first I will tell you a little about Bukka White, born in 1909 either in Aberdeen or Huston Mississippi. There has been a little confusion over which town it was. His full name is Booker T. Washington White. The Bukka bit came from a misspelling on one of his early recordings. He was a first cousin to blues guitar legend B.B King. His father worked on the railways, and was also an accomplished musician. He taught Bukka how to play the guitar. Bukka's mother was the daughter of a preacher. She often exposed the family to various hymns. At the age of nine Bukka received his first guitar. Along with family influences Bukka was influenced by blues artists like harmonica player George 'Bullet' Williams and acclaimed blues artist Charley Patton. Bukka worked as a field hand by day, at night he played in juke joints and at parties. He also spent some time travelling around on trains looking for work opportunities. In 1930 his recording career started. He recorded both blues and gospel songs. His gospel recordings were in the style of some of Blind Willie Johnson's recordings, with a woman singer accentuating the last phrase of each line. He made these recordings under the name Washington White. At this time he also played semi-professional baseball and fought in professional boxing matches.

In 1937 Bukka travelled up to Chicago where he did some recording. The two sides recorded were *Pinebluff, Arkansas* and *Shake 'Em On Down*. The recordings featured Bukka on his own playing a steel guitar. They were soulful performances. After this, Bukka travelled back down south. He got ambushed and in self-defence he shot his attacker in the hip. He was convicted for armed assault and spent three years in the Mississippi Penitentiary – also known as Parchman Farm. While there he was recorded by folklorist Jack Lomax. In later years Bukka played down the harshness of his prison experiences.

This is in contrast to fellow blues artist, Robert Pete Williams, who found his prison experiences to be extremely tough. However when Bukka White said that he wasn't lashed, you realise the harshness of the conditions in these places. While he was in prison, the single *Pinebluff Arkansas/Shake Em On Down* became a hit. In 1940 Bukka returned to Chicago to record again.

It is said that when Bukka returned he was playing covers of popular songs of the time. The producer wasn't impressed. However, he paid for Bukka to spend two nights in a hotel to come up with some new songs. When Bukka returned to the studio, the results were most impressive. It has been speculated that he might have written some of the songs while he was in prison. But whatever the case may be, it still remains an impressive achievement. The album starts off with both sides of the previously mentioned hit single. Then we go into the 1940 recordings. As well as his steel guitar Bukka is accompanied by Washboard Sam on percussion and washboard. The washboard being an instrument that would during the following decade make an impact in Brittan, as part of the skiffle movement – this was the first time general British audiences were exposed to the blues.

His prison experiences are sung about in two songs: in *When Can I Change My Clothes* Bukka sings about the prison uniform. He wonders when he will be able to get back into his civilian clothes again. Inside the booklet there is a picture of Bukka in prison with a shaved head. The other song is *Parchman Farm Blues*. Another song *Fixin' To Die Blues* is a song Bukka wrote after watching his mother die. He put himself in his mother's situation. This song, along with songs like *See That My Grave Is Kept Clean* by Blind Lemon Jefferson from the 1920s, and from more recent times *Underground* by Kevin Coyne (a song he wrote shortly before he

died from Lung Fribosis) bravely looks mortality in the face. Bukka's mother also appears in *Strange Place Blues*. Here we find him by his mother's graveside wishing he could see her again. *Sleepy Man Blues* is a song about depression. In the lyrics Bukka sings "when a man gets trouble in his mind, he wants to sleep all the time". However he knows deep inside that he can't, he has to face the day. *District Attorney Blues* shows how the district attorney is no friend of the poor. *High Fever Blues* while dealing with sickness is also a love song. Bearing similarities to the Little Willie John song *Fever*, a song made famous by Peggy Lee. Like the title suggests *Good Gin Blues* is sung in praise of good gin. Bukka's guitar playing often with the use of a slide is very rhythmic echoing the railways that Bukkas father used to work on, and the trains that Bukka used to travel around on while looking for work. All this is portrayed very well on the closing track *Bukka's Special Streamline*.

After this album Bukka retired from music, only performing on special occasions. He did however in 1948 help his cousin BB King gets his music career started. During the 1950s Bukka's retirement continued. In the early 1960s a new audience started listening to his music. Bob Dylan recorded *Fixin' To Die* on his first album. Folk guitarist John Fahey tracked Bukka down, along with Skip James and Son House – both rediscovered by members of Canned Heat, and Bukka got brought back to the music world. Along with fellow blues artists Bukka started performing again. Playing at folk and blues festivals, he also toured Brittan. It has been said that when Bukka came to Britain in the 1960s he took an interest in the latest fashions. The back cover of this CD shows him onstage wearing a ruffled silk shirt a medallion and a pair of jeans. Towards the end of the decade Bukka recorded for Blue Horizon,

the top British blues label of the time that also promoted many British blues artists.

Bukka carried on performing until 1977 when he died from cancer. However he left behind some inspired recordings, and for those who saw him live, some fond memories. Along with his contemporaries he showed that blues lyrics have a depth to them, and in their subject matter cover a wide range of topics.

Frank Bangay **April 2014**

Essential reading, *The Legacy Of The Blues* by Samuel Charters. In this book written during the early 1970s Samuel Charters interviews Bukka White, the previously mentioned Robert Pete Williams and a number of other blues artists. In doing so he puts the blues in a contemporary context.

There is quite a bit about Bukka White on the internet and a site where you can order this record. Just type in 'The Complete Bukka White'.

No Natural Predators

We spin through this immensity
at speed
like teens on a waltzer.

The occasional earthquake comes
to mock our dreams of stability
but in the main we stay rooted
needing drink and drugs to fly.

The biggest challenge
in this land of plenty
is the day to day;
the unrelenting power
of our boredom
when even the hands of the clock
stand still.
So to cure it we make everything
run faster and faster.

Fearing the strictures
of the co-operative Spirit
our lawmakers cling to and encourage

competition

Have no natural predators
we are urged to get our teeth
into each other.

The moon howls for her lost womb
deep in the earth.
Still surprised, she pulls at the tide's pigtailed,
but with longing more than vengeance.

At sunset, the violence pauses
for a moment
with the loose skies shrapnel colouring
its senses
and weeps long tears for a better life.
As I weep long tears
for a better life!

Razz

The Filling

(for Gunter Grass)

First locate the area of pain:
with thought's long needle put it to sleep.
Then select, from an armoury of probes,
implements adequate to the gross rubbish
neglect has collected.

Now, carve out thoughtfully
(but at high speed)
the shape of things to come;
a cavity free from care
secure from further wear and tear:
with a whistle of wit blow it dry.

Last, insert with the most steady hand
the lining of laughter; press home
in even measure the hard drying hope,
leaving a smoothed surface
where the world witnesses it.

Time to be up and off having learned,
half-heartedly again, the old lesson of pain
with an almost new smile. Just
a minute! Before I can go, one must sign –
here and here – the formal
acknowledgement of error.

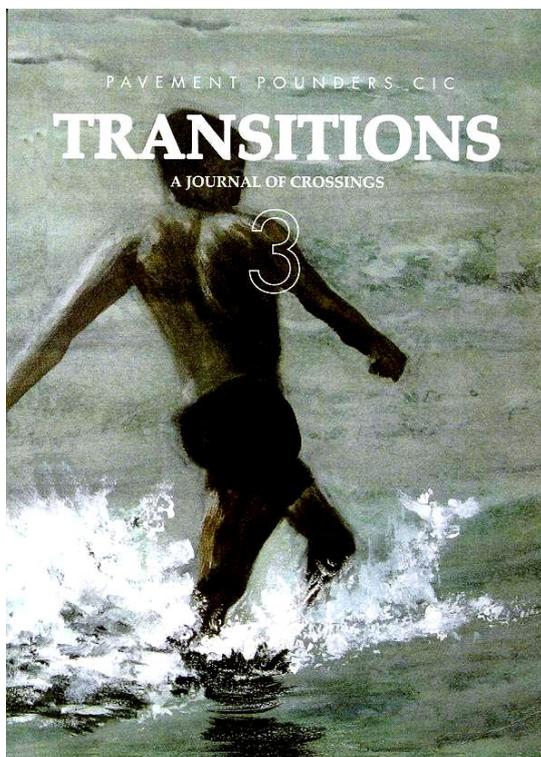
David Andrew

Transitions

A Journal of Crossings

ed Maryanne Grant Traylen

Pavement Pounders CIC and Mental Fight Club 2013



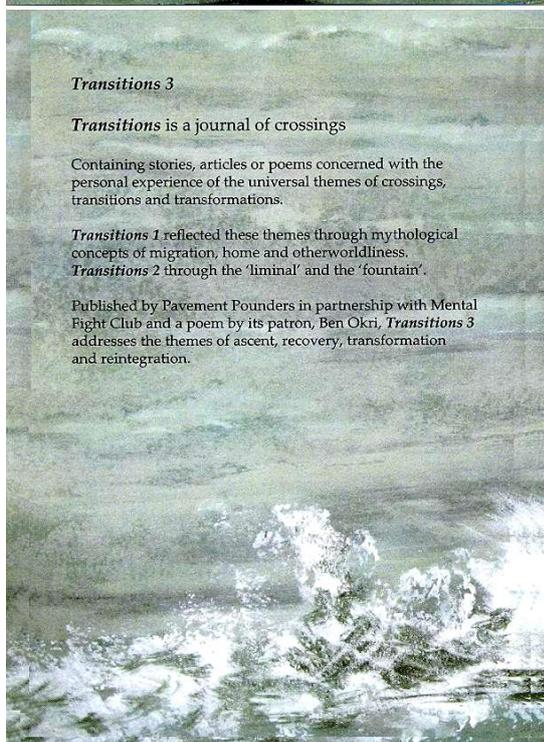
Transitions 3

Transitions is a journal of crossings

Containing stories, articles or poems concerned with the personal experience of the universal themes of crossings, transitions and transformations.

Transitions 1 reflected these themes through mythological concepts of migration, home and otherworldliness. *Transitions 2* through the 'liminal' and the 'fountain'.

Published by Pavement Pounders in partnership with Mental Fight Club and a poem by its patron, Ben Okri, *Transitions 3* addresses the themes of ascent, recovery, transformation and reintegration.



This excellent collection is third in a series produced through the collaboration of **Mental Fight Club** in London, and **Pavement Pounders**, based in Folkestone. The series is based on the concept of questing journeys, both literal and metaphorical, physical and mental. The collection is multi-directional, multi-referential in its approach: "By turning back to myth – even that of Orpheus' or Demeter's ascent – it believes we can look forward to a greater story of which we are part, and by understanding the universal aspect of our own personal experience be freed from its constraints, *'So much good writing is in itself a form of health'*. Mental Health indeed is the leitmotiv of this selection.

The title echoes a piece by **Barbara-Pearl Robson**, where the narrator comes to a special place of meditation, and has an inspiring dialogue with her alter-ego, Wir-Bim. This is a piece of exceptional 'confessional' sensitivity, showing someone coming to terms with bereavement and with feelings of love which would be taboo for many people because of the age difference between the two parties.

Three stories use the allegory of sea voyages to describe mental quests and struggles: *Reaching a New Shore*, by **Helen George** deals with an attempted suicide by drowning. After the initial casting of caution to the waves, there is a desperate struggle for survival – a close-run thing considering being ignored by lifeboats. Eventually Poseidon is on her side, and she staggers to the shore, and safety.

Just Across the Water by **Annie Webb**, is set the German-occupied French coast during World War II. The story cleverly relates mental health problems to the conditions of war. "Living with the enemy could make people close." It is indeed 'hard to be a hero in peacetime'. The 'inner demons' come to

the fore when the external enemy fades into the background. There are significant echoes of war and the Holocaust throughout this collection.

Ferryman of Ramrash, also by Annie Webb, blends mythology with contemporary reality. Scott, the ferryman, flunked out of a course in forestry because of being crossed in love by Suzanne, a fellow student. The island destination of his mystical journey has been thoroughly built up and corrupted. One of his passengers in Brosin, who turns out to have suffered a violent and abused childhood. An analogy is made between seamanship and the handling of relationships: "Approach but beware of moorings. Go carefully and diligently towards our body's shores." It is then revealed that some of Suzanne's beauty and hypnotic power derived from her sense of enchantment with the island.

Orpheus Ascending by **Thomas Tobias**, goes into the post-mortem realm. The narrator has had a bereavement. One interesting variation on the legend is that he had to dig, to excavate, to gain access to the underworld. And the departed beloved forbids him to partake of her immortality; he has to dig his way back to mortal life.

Louise Goodison's *This is Who I Am* documents a successful struggle with suicidal ideation, including an incredibly astute analysis of that mental state, which includes great mental lucidity whilst planning to kill oneself. Thinking of the consequences pulls her out of her low. Her portrayal of the 'high' is most eloquent: "How can I describe heaven to you? How can I take you to a place I can't even imagine? No language has the words to describe that feeling. No place on earth, no paradise you think you've ever found can take you to the high I feel. To go do paradise with everything going right in your life, with every whim pandered to, is a come down for me."

Annie Webb's third contribution *Miracle* is possibly the strongest piece of fiction here, in terms of the speculative imagination. It explores the theme of reincarnation/resurrection from the perspective of Physics and particle theory: "Neither created nor destroyed, but transforming always from one form to another, energy is eternal." These profound speculations are made against the background of a very human story – of the recovery from concussion of someone who came within a hair's breadth of dying in a road accident.

The Scholarly is embraced in this collection with *The Collapse and Restoration of the Jungian 'Self' in William Blake's Four Zoas*, by **Maryanne Grant Traylen**. Tharmas (instinct), Urizen (reason), Luvah (emotion) and Los (intuition) are fully related to Jung's archetypes. This is an erudition which could be applied to the problems of real life: "They are very abstract notions, but they might be a start."

Papier Mâché Friend by **Michael John** is a charming surreal fairytale of a doll/model coming to life.

Some poetic gems here: *Untying my Patterns*, by **Justina Curtis**, celebrates 'Recovery, Reintegration, Ascent and Transformation'. Three contributions from **Leah Thorn** – *I Can't Do This*, *Self Love*, and *Insane Incantation* – the latter, as per title, a chant featured in a performance piece.

Some subtle irony in *Cheers Reg*, by Pavement Pounders founder **David Lay**. Reg had long been considered as the epitome of the stable 'regular guy'. But then he has a stroke, and ends up undergoing ECT. His two nurses, Precious and Lovely, are "two remorselessly cheerful guardian angels of purgatory. He is (figuratively) confined to the ambulance for

months on end, and periodically taken on walks where he can get glimpses of Heaven – “Precious or Lovely enquires about a transfer to Heaven” – is this a barbed reference to mortality, ‘putting him out of his misery’. A highly existential conclusion: “How many glimpses of Heaven? No one remembers, that’s the point. Heaven scrubs the memory clean.” Heaven = Nothingness?

The background of Pavement Pounders is filled in by the article *Recovering from Bad Town Image* by **Nick Spurrier** – a graphic account of the rise and decline of a fashionable seaside town, the effect of the war, decline and renovation. This is a shining example of dynamic enterprise revitalizing a depressed area. I would like to know of other groups in the country acting in this fashion.

Mental Fight Club presented a full representation of this collection, greatly enhanced by the powerful deep bluesy singing of **Maiuko**. These are true protest songs coming from the heart of someone who had been in the thick of that frightful conflict! Significantly, the last item in the selection is the lyric of a choral chant *Moving On*, accredited presumably to several members of Pavement Pounders, including Maiuko. She certainly proved herself as a writer in *The Bright Light of my Sleep*, which outlines her experience as a refugee in that traumatic period of transition – “in seeking liberation from one oppressive system it seemed another was born.” Hers was a level of mental distress, withdrawal and detachment fully related to the turmoil of insurrection.

Just a thought – for future issues of *Transitions*, an ISBN would greatly facilitate distribution.

I suspect that, dotted all over the country, there are other groups akin to Pavement

Pounders, with huge potential for nationwide networking and productions.

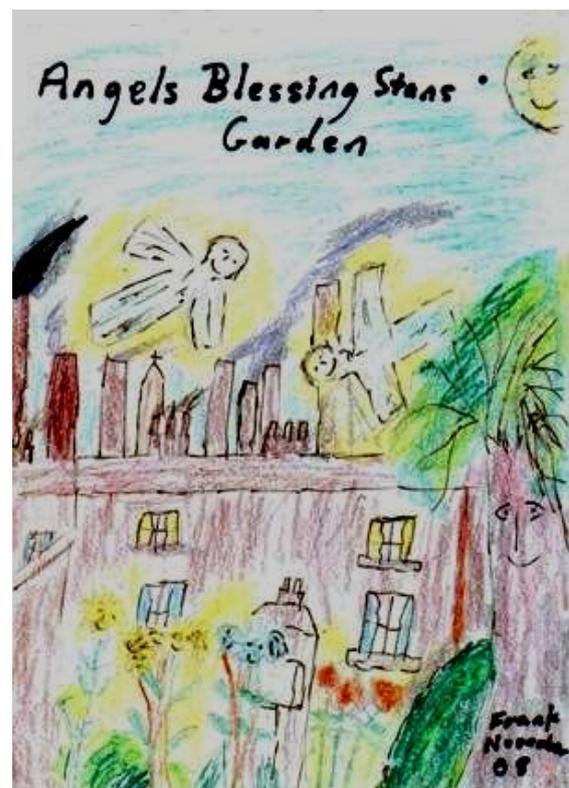
For further details of Pavement Pounders, check the following links:

<http://pavementpounderscic.weebly.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/PavementPoundersPage>

<http://pavementpounderstransitions.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/buy-pavement-pounder-publications-online.html>

Dave Russell



Artwork by Frank Bangay

New from May 2014!

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Philip-Ruthen/e/B002MNBQCY/ref=ntt_dp_ep_wbk_0

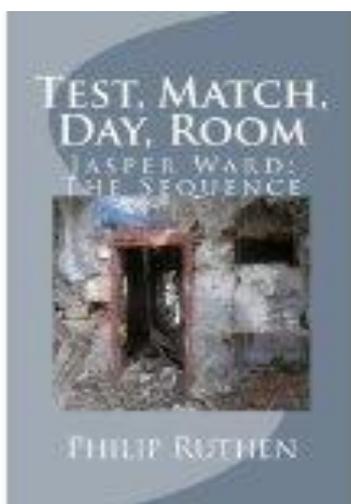
With a proportion of royalties passed to mental health system survivor organisations, **Philip Ruthen** via **Palamidi Press** (London) makes available for the first time paperback formats of his collected short stories *Feint Ruled Lines* with accompanying updated Kindle edition, and the pamphlet and Kindle edition of the short 8-poem sequence *Test, Match, Day, Room*

Test, Match, Day, Room: Jasper Ward - The Sequence

by [Philip Ruthen](#) (from May 2014)

£3.49 Paperback

£2.05 Kindle Purchase Available for download now

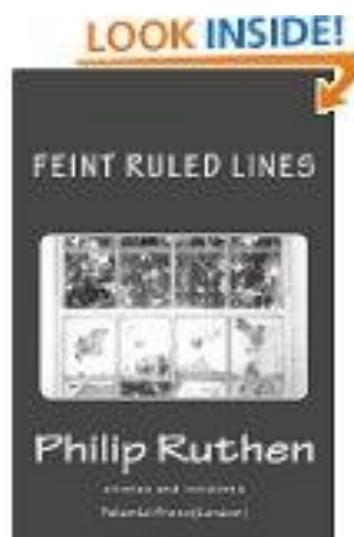


The 8-poem sequence *Test, Match, Day, Room: Jasper Ward – The Sequence* is a history of our own times written ‘in situ’ during the summer of 2003. This sequence is a response to the appalling conditions endured by myself and people ‘held’ on Jasper Ward, Sutton Hospital, an Acute Admissions ward in South London for people experiencing disabling mental distress – where ‘acute’ stays often meant

months, sometimes a year or more, spent there unnecessarily, along with enduring permutations of mental healthcare offered from an aberrant team in an aberrant system. To the people I met in those circumstances – as before and elsewhere for their inspiration, and camaraderie – sincere thanks and respect.

Jasper Ward, I understand, lies empty now, nearing dereliction after millions spent on refurbishment, succumbing to Legionnaires Disease scares, and public disquiet.

This is the first time these poems have been collated into their original sequential form – all the poems appear in the 2009 and 2012 collections *Jetty View Holding* and *Apple Eye Feat* respectively, published by Waterloo Press. More details at: www.waterloopress.co.uk



Feint Ruled Lines: Stories and Incidents

by [Philip Ruthen](#) (1 May 2014)

£3.08 Kindle Purchase Available for download now

Feint Ruled Lines by Philip Ruthen, and edited by and with the poet Maggie Sullivan, collects for the first time stories and incidents previously published over a period of nearly two decades, poetry, short stories, wanderings which freeplay on themes of confinement, love, conflict,

loss, rights and humanity. The collection includes the much re-issued *Memorial* (first-hand experience transformed into short fiction loosely based on the closing party at an Epsom cluster asylum in the 1990's), and *One Hundred Days War* – an extraordinary poetic-prose account of a stay in a Welsh psychiatric unit.

The book takes off through landscapes of mind and time, crossing the margins ultimately to find important things we miss in the edges of our own turbo-charged world, through *Stories i-x From Feint Ruled Lines*, a controversially experimental and polyphonic prose-poetry sequence – internationally commended in the *Aesthetica* magazine creative works competition (fiction category); however, it was subsequently remarkably difficult to convince editors to say 'yes' to publication!

[There are still a few copies left of the chapbook *One Hundred Days War* (Feather Books 2010), signed by the author: '...I would not be at all surprised if this turns out to be one of the classics in writing about Mental Health . . .' stated Peter Street (writer, poet, Royal Literary Fund Fellow)].



One Hundred Days War

by [Philip Ruthen](#) Chapbook (2010 Feather Books) **£4.50**

Author note: Philip Ruthen now lives in SE London. His poetry, short fiction, book reviews, and associated articles have appeared in a wide variety of publications on and off over nearly 2 decades in the UK and abroad, including poetry collections published by Waterloo Press www.waterloopress.co.uk He is a former Mentor, Trustee, and Chair of Survivors' Poetry.

Philip Ruthen's Author page link to at Amazon.co.uk :

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Philip-Ruthen/e/B002MNBQCY/ref=ntt_dp_epwbk_0

With a proportion of royalties from all the above editions passed to mental health system survivor campaigning organisations in 2014/15

Opaline Sunrise

Night and through the bar's window
and the guitars
trees branches and a blue-grey
strange sky
what is telling me this new sign?

Poetry of mine you were
with your azure sea eyes
with words, cries, spasms,
incomprehensible, of mine.

Coldness, conches, jasmines
your warm fingers
the divine yellow of Arles
intense colours into the palette.

Rose colours
seashores we ran together
sunlight which other people may see
through our eyes
with a secret tranquility
for the whole Stream of Life!

A magical Dawn in the Island
I know – it has been since centuries
that you bring the wind to my breath!

In deep melancholy, Sunday night at
the Stadium
the day was ending
leaving little delirious wishes
good night nodded the silent knights!

It was snowing outside, scraps of the
dark sky
stars, fogs, clouds, water
the wind was kicking the city's weak
trees.
Beyond her eyes, her senses were
whispering
old romances, forgotten tales
she was calling ancient channels
she was seeking the night's caress
when
she was bending, being in love, to her
bed!

The clepsydra, bitter sand,
unstoppable,
does not care for faces' expressions,
nor for precious words,
nor for blues that did not reach us

nor for blues that time over passed
and closed into dusty, old files
that no one will read
I know, you also felt strong pain once
like me now
but you kept it so deeply inside you!
And this is why our eyes are liquid.

Azure shirt, gentle faces,
the endless sea
the Islands of red, black pebbles,
stony houses
a guitar sings melodies of Eros.

The songs that are still playing
the scratches, a smashed mirror
the thorns of the yard, dew, you were
smiling!

I listen to a white melody, it spreads
centuries of light
stars in the nightly sky, loose hair,
pearls, Juliet's naked neck with a
small shoulder-strap,
warm hands, green eyes,
a piece of sky through the glasses of
June.

Play slowly with old violins, without
drums,
you, drunken musicians of our night!

Stelios Skarligos (Greece)

translated by Yannis Anastasopoulos

The War Poetry of Keith Douglas, Alan Ross, Wilfred Owen and Edward Thomas

20 May 2014

Owen Lowery, author of Otherwise Unchanged, published by Carcanet, and recipient of a recent Unlimited award offers a critique of the war poetry of Keith Douglas, Alan Ross, and Wilfred Owen. In contrasting the styles of these poets recording their experience of war, Lowery examines his own approach to recording the impact of impairment 'in extremis'



Plate from *Poems by Wilfred Owen*,
(Chatto & Windus 1920)

Writing in 1943, during his military service in North Africa and the Middle East, **Keith Douglas** used the term 'extrospective' to define his contemporary poetry. Douglas framed his classification through a comparison with what he considered to be more romantic, lyrical, and musical verse, on the basis that the latter lacked the practicality to engage with 'our problems and what we have to do about them.' For Douglas, his problems were largely those faced by a soldier living and fighting in an unfamiliar environment, having to come to terms with the very real possibility of death or injury, as well as the alienation that accompanied his exile.

Unsurprisingly, these concerns dominate much of the writing that Douglas began to produce after he left England in 1941, left a safe staff posting, and drove into the desert with his batman to take part in the Second Battle of El Alamein. In *Alamein to Zem Zem*, Douglas's prose record of his experiences as a combatant, frequent references are made to physical injury and the distinction between life and death. When describing the figure of a dead Libyan soldier, Douglas writes objectively and dispassionately, in keeping with his extrospective ambition:

As I looked at him, a fly crawled up his cheek and across the dry pupil of his unblinking right eye. I saw that a pocket of dust had collected in the trough of the lower lid. The fact that for two minutes he had been lying so close to me, without my noticing him, was surprising: it was as though he had come there silently and taken up his position since our arrival.

The same neutral fascination is evident, not only in the line drawings with which the young soldier accompanied his prose, but in the allusions to death and injury that occur in Douglas's poetry. Whether

recording a German artilleryman's 'burst stomach like a cave' in *Vergissmeinnicht*, or the stark reality of *Cairo Jag*, in which 'a man with no head / has a packet of chocolate and a souvenir of Tripoli', the emphasis is on practicality, with the physical impact of combat being presented without ornamentation.

Similar traits characterise [Alan Ross's poetry](#), which also reacts to his experience of battle in the Second World War, though Ross fought at sea, rather than in the desert. Ross's 'Captain's Fur Collar' provides a particularly graphic portrait of an injured officer who was found:

Bolt upright on the edge
Of his bunk two decks below,
Eye dangling like a monocle, face like
snow.

Lacking from the poetry that Douglas and Ross created in response to death and injury, is any overt pity, which contrasts markedly with [Wilfred Owen's 'Disabled'](#), for example, in which the poet provides a portrait of an ex-serviceman who has been left as an amputee by the First World War. While Douglas and Ross are objective, Owen speculates on his protagonist's thoughts, and attempts to understand his state of mind:

To-night he noticed how the women's eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were
whole.
How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

'Disabled' may be typical of Owen's humanism, but, in his attempt to evoke the pity of war, he is guilty of presenting a stereotypical portrayal of his subject, as disability is associated with impotence, age, and death. We are told 'Now, he is old; his back he will never brace.' We are

also told that the former soldier has little, or no future:

Now, he will spend a few sick years in
institutes,
And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.

Owen's aim may have been better served by the more pragmatic perspective of Douglas's or Ross's poetry, or that of his First World War contemporary, **Edward Thomas**, for whom, in 'The Team's Head Brass', permanent injury is simply a possible outcome of combat, part of the bargain, and of casual conversation:

'Have you been out?'
'No.' 'And don't want to, perhaps?' 'If I could
only come back again, I should.
I could spare an arm. I shouldn't want to lose
A leg. If I should lose my head, why so,
I should want nothing more.'

In my own poems on the subject of extremis, particularly those written in response to the two years that I spent in hospital following a spinal injury, and my subsequent paralysis, I have been conscious of leaning towards the objective approach embodied by Thomas, Douglas, and Ross.

This does not mean that intimacy and personal reflection are avoided, however, as *Out-patients, Southport Spinal Unit* indicates. In this poem, the first-person speaker is both a participant in the drama, and an observer, allowing him to step back from the action when necessary, but also permitting a direct engagement with a second person, to whom the poem is addressed.

The first two figures are joined by a partially-sighted and wheelchair-user, out-patient, whose condition is initially described in extrospective terms, as 'sight

through blue glass', or 'a listening eye', before he becomes the focus of interaction that involves all three of the poem's protagonists. The second-person assists the partially-sighted man, before rejoining the speaker:

"Then you were back
to being mine, switched
from that other beauty of yours,
Lord knows I've had
more than anyone to thank,
somewhere near relaxing."

An extrospective approach is also essential to my 'Early morning on the ward', in which an attempt is made to come to terms with the unique and disorienting environment of an intensive care ward. In particular, 'Early morning on the ward' is concerned with the hallucinations that I experienced due to a combination of sensory deprivation and the drugs that I was being administered.

Where Douglas's battlefield poetry confronts the distinction between the illusory brevity of life, and the practical reality of injury and death, *Early morning on the ward* juxtaposes the regularity of ward routine, with an alternative reality, in which

A fakir melts from rope
he's suspended from the ceiling,
stretches a lean finger
and snakes a peach from my fruitbowl.

Writing extrospectively allows the real and the surreal to be considered, and accepted on equal terms, with the same being true of the able-bodied and paralysed subjects of 'A frieze depicting four centaurs'. On the one hand,

A girl-friend or a sister is playing tennis
moving as if her shadow doesn't know.

On the other hand, she is watched by four
spinally-injured patients, each of whom is
described as an individual, partly
characterised by the nature of the
accident in which they were injured, and
partly by their personalities:

"John adores the sun with oil
plastered in nurse's handfuls on skin
brown in the way his holiday knew
diving from a boat in too little water."

"Wheeled into place on his immediate
right
a part of Tom has stayed a boxer
familiar with John Conteh, looking
so much like him, he could almost be
him."

Reflecting on the experience of hospitalisation and paralysis in the dispassionate tone used by Douglas, Ross, and Thomas, allows the extremis associated with these situations to emerge from any pity with which they might otherwise have been viewed, and to be faced and dealt with as practical realities. This, in turn, offers the possibility of a positive reaction, of a future beyond the limited scope of Wilfred Owen's 'Disabled', and of disability as a starting point for further experience, together with poetry based on that experience.

References

- Keith Douglas, The Letters*, ed. Desmond Graham, ([Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 2000](#))
Keith Douglas, Alamein to Zem Zem, ed. Desmond Graham, ([London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1992](#))
Keith Douglas, *Complete Poems*, ed. Desmond Graham, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)
Alan Ross, *Poems*, (London: The Harvill Press, 2005)
Wilfred Owen, War Poems and Others, ed. Dominic Hibberd, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1978)
Edward Thomas, The Annotated Collected Poems, ed. Edna Longley, (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books Limited, 2008)
Owen Lowery, *Otherwise Unchanged*, ([Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2012](#))

(Reproduced by kind permission of
www.disabilityartsonline.org.uk)

Owen Lowery

Otherwise Unchanged

ISBN: 978 1 847772 00 8

Carcenet, 2012, £9.95

Owen Lowery's position in British poetry is unique, not because of what happened to him as a 19 year-old Judo champion in 1987, leaving him tetraplegic, but what he's caused to happen to British poetry.

His work perceptually refracts through a spatial sidestep on shit happening, the way the world turns tilt and hallucinogenic at a craned neck, a twist from the corner of an eye. His poetry enters the looking glass world of a battle, as his master Keith Douglas put it in *Alamein to Zem-Zem*. He possesses too Douglas's wry objectivity, his relentless curiosity to probe whatever appears in his dial of glass.

Lowery himself explicitly aligns his programme with Douglas: – the relationship between the physical and spiritual, the concrete and the abstract, the point at which Macbeth could either see or imagine a dagger or Hamlet his dead father – has become an important part of my thesis on Keith Douglas. In Douglas's case it relates to his wanting to write "extrospective poetry" (*The Independent* January 5th, 2013)

The opening poem commences:

"You must promise me one thing, to return touched by the things you've seen, but otherwise unchanged. When you bring me that other place,
that world removed, and I come to learning the first colour you saw the sun hover

into, it must be you I'm learning through...

This is addressed as is so much to Jayne Winstanley, Lowery's now wife and photographer, one of whose cloudscapes spins out of the front cover. Several poems explicitly address their relationship, her experientiality, her own life of looking, intently bringing that vicarious life to fuse with his. There's a double glass effect Lowery uses to a vantage on matter, on the construct of experience; of two dimensions through his partner first experiencing them as such, that Lowery refracts back again to a worded physicality. It ends:

"... Perhaps I'll be the views
you first woke, the ones you'll be showing me."

This touches the conventions of being made new by love, invoking the lover's profession as medium. It neatly subverts protestation, makes over lover as object, of becoming their shared point of study, where they're touched but unchanged. It's a wry defeat too, 'otherwise unchanged' instantly evoking stasis; Lowery's physical state.

Lowery chose to mass seeing poems to open his collection; they're some of his very strongest in an impressively weighty 120 pages, 75 poems.

Language is informal, often informationally rather than linguistically rich, imagistic, breeding sharply realized tableaux; prosody alert and deft. '*Meanwhile, back at the Chop House*' announces Lowery's aesthetic neat:

There'll be an angle from which we're changed

in the jade of the Victorian tiles
every time our talking it over
finds a way between us. At that range
our thoughts lose themselves, become the
smiles
the dead fill their own with. A camera
spears a moment through the evening
droves
to make its own ...

Lowery frequently broaches a poem with that buttonholing, studied urgency sometimes trademarked in contemporary poetry; earlier poems confirm what he's grown out of to achieve.

Like Douglas distinguishing 'dead tanks, barrels split like celery' Lowery discovers physical properties, life in conversation that 'finds a way between us'. There's a Douglasian magnificence in Lowery's: 'At that range/our thoughts lose themselves, becomes the smiles/the dead fill their own with' a debt Lowery repays.

Thus a Lowery poem superimposes red arrows for prosodical argument, process – however unphysical – hefted, a plummet weight of arrival, like a ball in Rilke or Douglas's 'How to Kill'.

'You with Larkin on' in fact confounds jouissance and distance by enacting anxieties that poet flinched from where: 'And I can make myself jump watching your face//so long I forget/to check your chest for moments/of breath'. 'Man Walking' opens in florescence, the ambiguity of 'wrap':

A wrap of flowers lifts him
from pavement and cemetery wall

to convergence at the point he makes
of early morning, our seeing
each other see him
at the same time...

The Chagall-ish imaged flood concludes
... of destination
only wants confirming
by a fall of petal on the dark
or his shoulder, a kiss
for us to remember him by.

Lowery interprets the aesthetic, a poem on the feisty heroine of *The Woman in White*, on Elgar's Cello Concerto, on Celan's suicide as another Death Fugue (Celan's dated 1952): deft, though more regularly nuanced than Celan ever was; bracketed by poems on the Shoah, Primo Levi. Lowery takes all subjects as province.

Edward Thomas, Frost, Owen, other re-imaginings of the site of battle filtered 90 years on, engage an imagination necessarily nourished on literature, arts, informed by historical trauma, though Lowery's finest poems risk himself, his partner's ways of prisms them both.

Slighter poems like that on Bin Laden's death, where 'the walls/are the colour sand can become, once clouds/bring the mountain close, with their bitter metal' gleam with a vein revealed. Process is Lowery's lodestar which he sets spinning to find weightier.

Simon Jenner

Tracing Heaven

High terrain
Of lust white flint soil where the globe was
Thrown

Whether yours or mine, *Picardy*, when
Voices breath fester
A place where this happens standing or
study
To a few bars of ballad

Sigh single or in small groups

Approach to *Albert*
Our volunteers' glade
Trees mount a rise
Large like them with packs
Burnt headless ghosts
Over to the left
Lies one felled

Town's Phantoms
Dream-stirred cling
Sullen ash shadows shake the auberge
Too near my bed
Mud swirls
Thunder's broken
To a non-attribution of bones

Roots of relatives
Corpses collected after shallows
After ploughing
It must have happened
As the drunk walk
By a cart with a spade
Mostly as burn onto shovel
Still burn
The slops that are local boys mixed
With lime
Chinese orderly unlucky unlucky
Frowns in a corner-edge grave
Ordinance heath-blasted

More underfoot
Still birth

Write it long
A year on from the end of still burning

Best mate and lover
If everybody turned
And left
If everyone what
Went
Past every house, new
And the churches, new

Re-gilded Madonna and abbreviated
Hussars
Shovelled to order
Merge horses!

Creation didn't follow.

I will write this on sky
With you
The long avenue

Somme.

Chill shiver wind
Thiepval, again,

Song:
–Why are you here?

© Philip Ruthen 2010. Written largely in note form *in situ* at Thiepval battlefields' memorial, the memorial for the hundreds of thousands of fallen combatants still 'missing' and below the earth of the Somme arenas, First World War.

Phil Ruthen