

# Poetry Express Newsletter #59

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**'He has to fight to draw nigh to his lady'- John Arthur**



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# Editorial

As we end 2019 on a cliffhanger early December, threshold of change or stasis, it's time to reflect on a year where we've had a continuing upswing in our events and a waiting game with funding.

The latter you can blame on me: two applications to the Arts Council for an enhanced version of our pilot 2017 mentee project. Well – the first got past most of the criteria, was in fact labelled as mostly 'strong' and at the very least 'met'.

That might have easily merited a grant a few years ago but these are horrendously critical times. As it was ACE gave us a great deal of feedback designed to encourage another try. I've duly sent that one off now, with added data and files including one on a Safeguarding Policy. I'm indebted to Phil Ruthen for his invaluable advice throughout, as ever. We'll hear back in early February.

This year has more than ever underlined the vigour of the Survivors' Poetry Events organizing with Debbie McNamara inheriting MC Razz's mantle, and putting it on a professionalised footing, acting wholly as a volunteer.

Anyone coming within Debbie's gravitational field might feel the centripetal force of her organizing powers. Though not MC-ing herself – she delegates to three MCs including Dave Russell – Debbie's imprint has returned SP Events to a vibrant, visible force on the poetry scene.

It reflects the e-zine you're reading too. Dave Russell has tirelessly edited and created each of these e-zines for 13 years. It's a phenomenal achievement.

On September 4<sup>th</sup> we celebrated Razz's life at the Southbank thanks to Debbie and others. It was a remarkable event. Frank Bangay and Colin Hambrook who like Debbie were original signatories to the August 1994 constitution, read superbly too. Particularly memorable was the way photos of Razz revolved in a montage behind the poets as a backdrop. Again we're grateful to the Poetry Library for their generosity.

We know at this defining moment what we've been up against. Now the dust has settled, as you read it (but not as I write it) we can see how far promises for mental health provision will be honoured and kick in. It's difficult, to be honest, to think of much else.

That though would be a disservice to the extraordinary vibrancy and creative verve Debbie, Dave and others have brought to SP for over 18 months. It's proved how vibrant the community, how almost superfluous the overarching organisation.

Yet we do need a structure to grow, to attract funding to keep the Events anchored in a continual dialogue and as I found to attract back Debbie to take on the very organisation she was last involved with back in 2000. So even vestigially, we're sort of needed. Just.

Meanwhile I write in a cold hour awaiting both ACE and the country's shivery verdict. Lucky you, you're waiting on just one, and we can only hope!

**Simon Jenner**

# Events Report

The autumn started with an utterly memorable **Homage to Razz**, held at the **South Bank Centre Poetry Library** on **September 4<sup>th</sup>**. Readings were given by **Simon Jenner, Frank Bangay, Jessica Lawrence, Wendy Young, Debbie, George Tahta, Colin Hambrook** and **Dave Russell**. The sparkling and vivacious MC – who also read some of Razz's poems – was **Cina Rama**, also a close friend of Razz's. And not forgetting the late **Ingrid Andrew's** husband **Rob** who got up last to read her beautiful poem simply called 'Razz' (do you recall Ingrid volunteered to help Razz with the publicity design for all the SP events he ran in later years). An emotional night for all present!

**September 12<sup>th</sup>** at the Poetry Café was graced by inspired extended sets from the **Glynn Sinclare**, a major writer with an imminent new publication and from great emergent poet **Daniel Firoozan**. Other great spots from **Kevin O'Connor, Kingsley Blake, Ama, Richard Downes, Michelle Baharier, John Arthur, Mona Lisa, Ros Kane, Keith Bray, Lucy Carrington** and **Debbie**. A fine mix of spoken word poetry and original songs, plus **Dave Elvis's** startlingly authentic Elvis impersonation, excellently backed by **Rick** on guitar!

Razz's nephew **Mark Shipp** further enhanced the evening by bringing a table-ful of Razz's poetry notebooks to show everybody and tell people about. He is slowly working through them all to transcribe all of Razz's poems that we have between us onto the website, but we would like to ask anybody who has any of Razz's poems to get in touch so that we can collect everything together. Also the family would like anybody who wrote a poem about Razz to send it over for the website if they wish [www.razzpoetry.com](http://www.razzpoetry.com), as – to quote **Diane**, Razz's older sister – 'That is what Razz would have wanted'.

**October 10<sup>th</sup>** was headed by a highly spirited set from **Dolly Sen**, with a dazzling backdrop of visuals. Dolly has been battling valiantly with the system since she was 14. Of the huge wealth of polemic presented, I can pick out some gems: "I was ignored and greeted by flying chairs"; "My arse is getting bigger than my dreams"; "Do not insist your voice is in your head"; "The Revolution will not be medicated"; "Subvert the world and insist it be beautiful". She mentioned the **Wellcome Trust**, and 'took the lid off' Mental Health Assessment procedures. There are masses more on her website, eminently worthy of perusal.

The influx of new faces hearteningly continues. Welcome newcomers included **Gary Foyle** and **Gary Wyatt**. **Robert Daly** gave an interesting account of how his photo was used in a publicity pamphlet for the **Maudsley**, and of his application for Chairmanship. **Maia Magama** recounted her emotional experience with candour and delicacy, with the slogan ‘pleasure not power’. **Jean** informed the audience of the **Highgate Society Challenge**. Nice contributions from **Reema** and **Zara**. **Stephen Jensen** read *The Life of Twain*, a poem he had written for **Suicide Prevention Day**. **Lorette** was admirably assisted by Alastair to overcome her shyness with a sensitive reading. Interesting contribution from **Nathan Carter**.

In addition to the newcomers, some very welcome revisitations. An expressive set from **Richard Downes**; a cogent input from **Michelle Baharier**, including an indictment of the Zero Contract system, an announcement of a film about some Syrian women who built a hospital, and some fine ecopoetry: ‘Sun worship – what blooms when ice retreats . . . sip cocktails of ultraviolet light . . . algae – hidden reserves of oxygen under the sea.’ **Jessica Lawrence** reflected on *Past Life as a Mushroom* – ‘Belly turned upwards/will you see yourself/taller than trees’ – Hmmm! Contributions from **Lucy Carrington** – very politically articulate this time, **Ros Kane** and **Jason Why**.

Tasteful and powerful musical contributions from **Alastair**, **Dave Elvis** – ably backed by **Rick** and ‘Scotty Moore’ Alastair, and some tender lyricism from **Rick and Angie**.

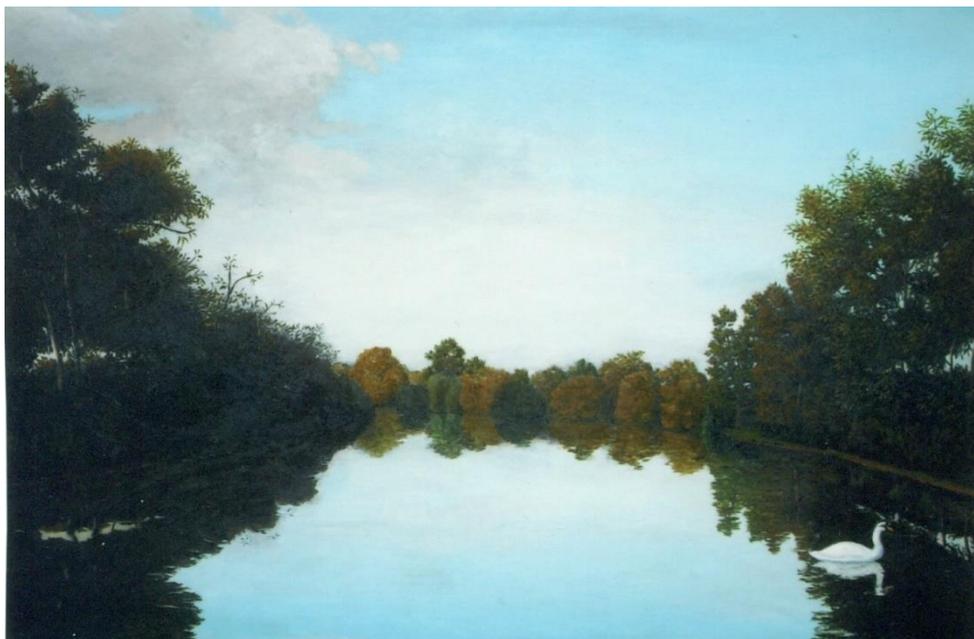
The High-octane level was sustained on **November 14<sup>th</sup>** by the epic intensity of **The Woman without a Name**. New faces continue to turn up, including **Claire**, **Javier**, **Laura**, **Barbara**, **Eleanor**, **Matt Barrell** and **Melissa Doordughter**.

**December 12<sup>th</sup>**: The year’s sessions ended on a high note with a vibrant set from **David Chambers**, ‘publishing activist and mainstay of the Newham Writers’ Group. He certainly proved the resilience of traditional rhyme schemes in a topical, radical context. David also gave an exciting account of his hazardous travels across the Indian Ocean. A welcome return by Alain English and some Christmas spirit, combined with dark protest. We look forward to 2020 with great optimism!

## **Dave Russell**



1. 'Let's not fight. Instead let's have tea and cake'



2. 'Evening on the Severn'

# John Arthur Artworks

## My Painting Life

I always drew as a little boy, mostly Disney-influenced cartoon characters and maps of my fantasy countries, which I later wrote novels about. But people change a lot round about puberty (Rudolf Steiner says they gain their astrality and become who they inherently are –but this is a moot point), and aged fourteen I discovered painting and the history of art. A glorious world of colour and extravagant imagery opened before me. I enthusiastically began painting and when I was sixteen went to the local College of Further Education to do a fine art course.

It was an exciting time, the mid to late `sixties, and I was lucky enough to have a number of very aware `with-it` young teachers. Bohemians all! They accepted me as a kindred spirit, but when I applied to Diploma College I was roundly rejected. I had good ideas’ but my drawing was very sub-standard. I carried on painting for a few years but spent more time writing my fantasy novels and writing songs. When I was twenty-three my painting ground to a halt, and I didn’t pick up a brush for over thirty years.

I’d reached the ripe old age of fifty-five and I needed something for a book cover. I was walking on the edge of Epping Forest, looking at the dark green oaks against the yellow grass of late summer. A leading from above? A something given? As Wordsworth put it. Could I have a go at doing a painting for the cover myself? My efforts at first were pretty bad, but I persevered and improved. The strange things was I seemed to be better than when I’d left off all those years before, as if something had been happening deep inside me. Somehow I’d matured as a person, as a painter.

Now people seem to like my paintings. I recently had a little show in a rather arty cafe and it went down well. One woman on being told who I was came over to me and said, “I’m a big fan.”

So I suppose the moral of the story is if there`s something you want to do simply begin and continue – as the Zen Buddhists say.

**John Arthur Hewson**



**3. 'My garden, summer morning**



**4. 'Hippy Roadsweeper Experiences Beatitude, Woodford Wells, September, 1968'**



**5. 'Croquet Lawns – Victoria loved them all'**



**6. 'The Church of the Holy Innocents, High Beach'**



7. 'Self-Portrait with Cat, Wyvern and Centaurs'



8. 'Young people on the Central Hill in Caradar'



**9. 'A nice afternoon for a bit of flying'**



**10. 'Paul and Margaret in holiday mood'**



**11. 'A walk in the woods?'**



**12. 'What will survive of us is Love I'**



**13. 'What will survive of us is Love II'**



**14. Maggie**

# THE JUJUBE TREE

by Hamza Hassan Sheikh

The old worshipper ended the proclamation for the prayer and then moved inside the Mosque. It was his daily routine that he got to sleep very early at night and mostly got up early in the morning; even nearly at midnight, for *Tahajid* Prayer. After offering his prayers, he happened to recite the holy book and other holy verses all night long; his long prayers lasted till the aurora of dawn, and then he habitually performed his other business. The *Fajir* proclamation of the prayer was in his daily routine and His voice was the first one to echo throughout the town to call for the prayer of God at the earl of the dawn. Later, he slept for a while and then his day started by watching television. Early in the morning the recitation of the holy Quran echoed in their home and when their eyes opened, then mostly the rays of the sun had captured the universe and there was huge brightness. Many times, they were rebuked for getting up so late; but these were the school days, and they were fond of sleep. So mostly they were in no mood to disturb their sleep as they mostly kept on waking late till the middle of the night. The routine remained the same for years without any change in it, except if the old worshipper was absent on a business trip; otherwise life revolved in the same circle.

In the middle of the yard there was a tree of Jujube, small in the beginning – but gradually with the passage of time, it had grown up and covered half of the yard; its branches and the twigs had spread all around. The Jujube was considered as a fruit from the apple family as it resembled apples in shape and taste, but it was very much smaller than an apple. It was regarded as an apple of local species and its seeds were distributed from one place to another. In local areas, there were two different kinds of Jujube: the wild one and the refined one – bred with some another plant. Though the wild one was very tasty and delicious but it was never tidy and full of thorns; mostly very thick, sharp and prick therefore most of the children kept away from it and such kind of trees were found in the villages or jungles. Mostly, the ripe fruit was wasted but this ripened-fallen-wasted fruit was most useful for birds, insects and sometimes the cattle grazing in the area. The modern bred tree was a beautified and modified form: neat and clean from thorns. Its fruit was small in size but had the same delicious taste. The Jujube tree in the yard of their home was a mixed up breed of modern and wild species: therefore the fruit of this specially bred Jujube tree was small, but very delicious and sweet. In his childhood, when there was not enough building, and they still had a long yard on its northern side, there was a huge Jubube tree. This tree existed even before his birth. From his early childhood, he had never liked this fruit and therefore he never tasted it but loved to play with it, especially when it was unripe and green, so hard – like a small ball. He happened to play with it, even its seeds were also like small balls; seemed to be made of hard bony substance and they loved to play with these. That was a huge tree and its widely spread branches and twigs were full of thorns; capturing over a long space. At night this Jujube tree seemed like a huge giant, and presented a horrific scene as the night became darker. Due to its huge size, this Jujube tree had become a den for many different insects. There were many ants of different kinds, abiding in its roots as well as roaming on its stems and leaves all day long. The reptiles, lizards and big black ants were an addition to it. It had many homes for wasps, who kept on roaming. In the summer season, these were very

dangerous and never allowed anyone to get near the Jujube tree. As it was their favourite food, there were a large number of squirrels on it, jumping over its twigs. Moreover, it was a home for sparrows; from early morning till darkness of the night, these sparrows kept on twittering. Woodpeckers, nightingales, parrots, doves, black sparrows, pigeons and many other birds came here in its shadows and then, after taking rest for a while, flew away. He loved all birds but he never liked insects because when these ants cut him they always left red rashes on his skin which burnt irritatingly. He was also very afraid of lizards and always disliked them intensely. It was not a tree but the home of many creatures – a universe of the birds and insects, leading their lives on it. Though he never liked Jujube, the babies of the area were fond of these and were seeking a chance to collect this fruit. There were frequent knocks on the door of their home: these were none other than the babies, desirous to collect Jujube. There was no time for them, so they kept on irritating all day long. Sometimes, at summer noon, when they were having deep sleep, there happened to be knocking – or sometimes, when he was busy doing his homework, the children were there to collect the fruit. It was always very irritating for him and many times he rebuked them for making this disturbance, and never allowed them to enter the home. But the old worshipper always favored them; the little babies were very joyful with the old worshipper because he always allowed them to collect jujube. As he never liked this fruit, and because of irritation from the babies, he always wanted to cut this tree down.

At last his desire was fulfilled when the house was rebuilt: all parts of the house were shifted to the same side, where the Jujube tree was located. It was totally cut off; even uprooted from the land. and on this day he was happy. But many birds were sad because they had lost their roost. All dirty and dangerous insects also lost their place; they flew ran away towards other places. The yard of the home became clean, and now the rebuilding of the house started. The house was rebuilt and he got rid of the Jujube tree. After the completion of new house, he had to leave for another city in search of a job. Now mostly he was out of the home. After few months, when he got back, a small Jujube tree was planted and gradually began to bloom. The next time, when he returned home, he was astonished to see it as a grown-up tree: the same species of tree which happened to be in their yard but now totally on the opposite side of the yard. Once, he had learned in Biology that the roots of the trees travelled underground from one place to the other: so the logic seemed true here – a tree of same species appeared on the opposite corner of the yard. Now it began to grow fruit then again the same routine started and the children rushed towards their home for collecting fruit as well the birds got their roost and now again there happened to be different kinds of birds as well as the insects too got a good place But this tree was comparatively tidier than the previous one because it had fewer thorns; the number of ants, lizards and reptiles also decreased.

Now he had a job and his life was revolving around the time space of the ages of two trees, concealing many years of his life. Now, as the tree was fully grown, the irritation increased too: the children knocked at their door repeatedly; the cleanliness of the yard faded away; the number of insects increased; the twigs and branches of the tree were spread all around. He was much annoyed by this situation, the location of this tree was at such a place

in the yard which bordered on the pathway from the gate towards the home; therefore these twigs and branches were very annoying – they always stopped him in his tracks.

He was much irritated by this tree and whenever he visited his home, he asked his family to cut it down. He expressed his annoyance about the tree but his father liked this tree very much as, due to it, there was a movement of children towards their home. Moreover, there was the chirping and twittering of the birds and from the aurora of dawn to the gloaming of the night, echoing the songs of the birds and refreshing their hearing. The next time he reached home, the twigs and the branches of the tree had captured the whole yard; a woodcutter was arranged to cut down its twigs. The woodcutter was busy in cutting then he said to him,

“Cut it down completely”.

The old worshipper smiled and replied,

“Let it be here. It will be workable for me.” The reply of the old worshipper made him quiet and a wave of pain ran throughout his body. “Both Jujube and dates are available at home. You don’t have to search for these from any other place.”

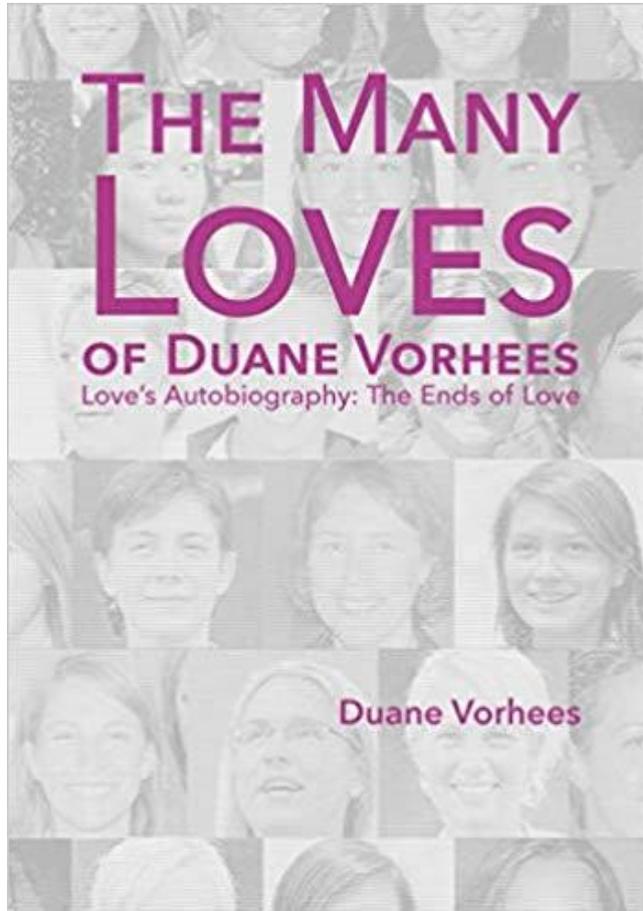
The old worshipper spoke smilingly and he became sad. Its twigs and branches were cut down while the tree remained at the same place. The next year, his father, the old worshipper passed away and started his eternal journey. When his last bath was being done then it was under the same Jujube tree; its leaves were used for the last bath of the dead body while the accompanied date tree was also beneficial in this bath. He was giving the last bath to the old worshipper and his previous sentences were echoing in his hearings.

“Let it be here. It will be workable for me . . . Both Jujube and dates are available at home. You don’t have to search these from any other place.” Until he kept on giving the last bath to the dead body of the old worshipper, these sentences kept on echoing in his mind. When he finished the bath and the old worshipper was confined then he saw towards the Jujube tree then it seemed as the twigs and the branches of the jujube tree had knelt down sadly; even their leaves were quiet as saluting the old worshipper for the last time. The old worshipper was buried in the land but the Jujube tree, having its roots in the land began to dry; and in few months, both the Jujube tree and the date tree were dried out, and died forever. Now the home was clean and there was no more dirt’ but the twittering and chirping birds had also left the yard forever, as those were melancholic too without the old worshipper.

# The Many Loves of Duane Vorhees

Love's Autobiography: The Ends of Love

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This is devoted to the many aspects of romantic (and sometimes anti-romantic) relationships, from start-ups to breakups and unrequited situations in between, from youthful idealism to cynical manipulation to rediscovered vitality. This book represents the early stages of that evolution. It faces all the aspects, often conflicting of this fraught and torrid emotional area.

Duane opens courageously with *Either Alzheimer's or the Lightning Bolt* which at the outset faces the nadir of experience, in terms of old age and physical decay, expressed partly in Joycean word-coinings. *Another Spring Night In Farmersville, Ohio* is in a primordial rural setting, which makes analogies between love and hunting. Similarly elemental is *Ah! Nights* – with a harem ravishment: 'let my shaft/deep into your bull's eye arabesque' then a parallel with mating bees, followed by the Madonna awaiting her Patriarch, only for the poet, in his dream, to do an act of grenade sabotage on the Cathedral. In *Francis Drake* the *Golden Hind* is transmuted from an illustrious ship into a hunting quarry.

*My Fingers* uses the imagery of geographical exploration and geological research: “My fingers have ridden through the forests of your hair/and slept on belly-gold prairies./ They’ve explored your hidden valleys, climbed snowcapped breasts, and on your beach hips have rested.” How much love has been made on beaches, and how often do the heights of passion evoke the making of the world?: it is we who are the layers in the dark, quaking among bedrock,/hardness melting into darkness, joining in new formations,/stalactite buried and unearthed buried unearthed buried unearthed/through the long geologeons of night”. *Without You Beth My Life* refers to a bereavement, but reflection on this fact recalls past splendours: “Breaths used to lift dolphin-like from our depths like frost balloons toward the sun in/and/out, those breaths of lovers with joys unmatched. up/and/down/and/up/an ocean-rhythmed merry-go-round.”

*Jennifer in Two Voices* – some cosmic hyperbole, so adorable is Jennifer that the atmosphere, the waves, the earth, the trees all honour her: “Your appearance is your sermon.” She may be extant; she may be an exquisitely frozen memory. *sAVAnnA* is a graphic and linguistic experiment. His love evokes exotic tropical species. *Atoll* shows some salutary cynical realism. Many fruits are used as imagery for love, but why not the banana (nutritionally sound after all) –“the gold and graceful arc of the taut banana— /O huntsman’s bow before release—”, and why not ‘the coy Thanksgiving yam.’”

*Montana Motel* feels a bit like a song lyric. It is a celebration of adultery, with the great qualification of a magnanimous, tolerant husband. *Queen of Denial* is a truly moving story: Jennifer seems to be in a state of denial/withdrawal, which the poet questions: Are you sure your heart’s hermetic, secure in its canopic jar? It is then revealed that she was a foundling. Startling image of ‘your Alcatraz cheek’. Duane shares her fear. In *For Love* he comes to terms with having to relinquish an unworkable relationship: You know that I adored you./But once I had explored you, I just could not afford you.” He can certainly embrace the polarities of idealism and cynicism.

*The Beast* is a synthesis of lament and eulogy. It honours the memory of someone who has perhaps grown old, or maybe is deceased, or maybe has simply split from the poet. The sense of past glories both compensates for the desolation of the present, or does it intensify the pain? *Her Name is Jenny* . . . suggests the same Jennifer. *Still Strangers* seems to lament the deterioration of a long-term relationship. There were indeed some happy times, but those have now passed. *Volcano* – some impulsive passion can indeed feel volcanic. *Solstices* – beautiful image of the winter’s day becoming an alluring negligée to be discarded on a summer night. Garments can generate cataclysmic sensations when feelings are high.

*This is How it All Begins* makes the sole reference in this collection to a God and Goddess union engendering an offspring. Yes: *But Where Are the Wheels?* This invokes Einstein, feeling challenged by the arrival of a sister. It attempts a cynical, philosophical appraisal of the roles and essences of the two genders. Interesting conclusion: "Why can't women be a syllogism?" At least he does accept that they cannot be so reduced, and that there can be no shallow dismissals.

*Don't Get Me Wrong* is an assertion of optimism. There has been a long-term relationship, with its concomitant stalenesses and irritations, but the partner still wants him to write poems. Although the ageing process has had its effect – "your embrace remains a comforter in the cold winter nights." *Take Me In* – the poems are destroyed, burned. A woman wants comforting. The poet is declared to be dead, but the memory of his utterances seems to live on. *A Poem and After 60 Years a Reply* – celebratory flashback to past halcyon days. The idyll seems to have taken place on a farm. Flash forward to the same location 60 years after, where the animals, wild and domestic, predominate. Again realistic cynicism: 'why not rat on rat?' *Contretemps* – there can indeed be many modulations between contentment, contempt and temptation.

*Busses and Crosses* is another poem with the feeling of a song lyric. The headings 'blues' and 'country' could refer to 'country blues' or to Blues and Country & Western Music. *Evidence for the Mutational Codependence of Time* – magnificent statement of relativity! *What Wanton* – poor human beings are the pawns of chemists who treat them as part of potions, and the whims of astrologers.

*Dowser* – the poet prided himself as being the intrepid explorer of his love, but now he lives 'in exile' from her (was there a separation, or a decease?) She proved inscrutable: "I find it was not your true geomancy I'd learned./For though I'm sure that it was your well I discerned,/ I never divined the source." *Once, Once* honours the intractable essence of love, which in times past seemed mathematically calculable, or tractable, like a well-behaved sea to a mariner. But now not so. *Trad* seems to refer to a humanist 'hand-fasting' wedding which was somehow curtailed.

*Word* is a historical digest of the development of writing. The author was frustrated by clay tablets, quill pens and early printing presses. Tragically, "Word processors came to my rescue /at last! Too late, alas, for my muse." *That Y in Miser is Me: A Melodrama* – the poet had felt that he possessed his Love, "But you crept out through the tower,/and you burst out into World." The poet is now locked in duty (to poetry?) with his memory.

*Eros in Erosion* – a long-term relationship could not escape the effects of change. The two parties and their bonding had some qualities of fragile organic growths: ". . . over time, stubborn assiduity becomes undermined,/especially when connubial cement lacks

reinforcement. So,/by fragile grapevines, over tangled ravines, the values they were hanging onto kept changing: unable to forge a structure anew or to forget old collapse.”

*Conquering Love* – the experience of becoming older and wiser. He thought he was strong and invulnerable, but was then forced to admit defeat. *Loves I Bear to You* and *High Coup* seem to relate to Duane’s teaching experience in the Far East. *(And) Purple Prose* expresses his exasperation with an evasive and non-catalytic muse. *IN SOLITARY – Samizdat* reiterates a sense of creative frustration: ‘like any other virgin—/just another bloody period, and another conception ends.’ *Your Body Tells the Highwayman* – a cynical take on the essence of inspiration: “If prose is just a page running across your face,/poetry is the line lying between your thighs.” *Life/Sentence* – Duane feels enthralled to the ‘Gulag’ of his creative impulses. *In Your Way* – the one true love has all the ageless sublimity of a precious archaeological site.

*And Do You Still go by Beatrice* – a combination here of elevation and bathos. For a Muse to generate eternal poetry, she must first appeal to the poet’s fantasies. *Lillian the Ocean and the Isle of Palms* – a classic beach goddess seduction scenario transformed by some startling imagery: the components of the scene are ‘soldered’ together, ‘fused cubistically like frozen sculpture’; the waves are compared to sheep going to the slaughter, then to waves of Japanese WWII bombers.

*Confessions* is the nearest item to a political poem in this collection. It makes a scathing appraisal of medics, priests and academics. Was much abuse condoned in the course of fine art? “Was Jesus tacked to an easel/so Romans could paint him later?/They staged all the acts of apostles /just to build wings for their theaters.”

*Van/ity* – this is dedicated to a Russian woman, firstly comparing his amorous quest for surgery, and then describing their respective strong personalities through the imagery of Napoleon’s invasion of Russia: Kutuzov was a major Russian military commander at that time. He describes his overtures in terms of military strategy, including the need to break off action and withdraw, and being prepared to sustain (metaphorical) injury: back to the surgical imagery with ‘painful extraction’.

*Just Stupid, I Guess – Or Blind – Or Inattentive, Or* – fusion of the sublime and the banal in a casual encounter. *Mary* is a light-hearted vignette. *Lepidoptourists* is a lovely title: the strivings of true love are compared to the dissections and cataloguings of an entomologist. An eerie thought with the mention of fossils reawakening. *The Engagement* – love = war, highly disturbing. *By Invitation Only* – a fairly crude portrayal of unrequited love. *Don’t Interrupt* – his love leaves him tongue-tied; he really has to struggle to express himself. *Ley Line* – again the beloved is a sacred archaeological site – ‘your body map . . . your phrenology braille’; obviously a quest worth pursuing: ‘mind’s

eye between world's myopia'. There is then a clinical examination of the nose and the lips. Then an appraisal of her conception and birth: "(the corridor chipped from your upper lip/by Night, the Angel of Conception,/that one, who offered a semen drop to god,/who chose a soul from Eden to cradle in your mother's womb." He holds back from the drawing of Cupid's bow. I see one definition of 'phalanx' is a bone of finger or toe. The rest of that stanza seems to refer to the beloved keeping a firm face, perhaps after the shock of initiation: 'the unswallowed remnant of your first man's forbidden fruit'. Then there is a journey down the body to consummation, and a profound reflection thereon: "All existences starts twice,/once with Mind, once with Life . . . any perceptive fool can blindly find the way . . ." Physical exploration goes on – a disturbing image of 'the archaic curvature of Mother Earth.'

*First Night in Thailand* is a celebration of an elusive love in Bangkok, depicted through imagery of exotic animals. *Liquid – Patpong* is a famous red-light district in Bangkok. There follows a graphic portrayal of a truly intense physical encounter. The imagery is far-reaching: the partner is in one sense a doctor or pharmacist; then there is a sequence of hyperbole, drawing on all areas of physical and environmental activity. He felt as if they had both been turned to liquid. Then he wonders if it was all a dream.

*A Feminophile's Plea* – light-hearted acceptance of the career girl, but lust remains. *My Life in Tornado Alley* – tempestuous love. *O Former Lovers* – many regrets for things gone wrong, much desire for replay of old scenes. A bitter edge, expressed by a good eco-metaphor: "Quit filling rivers with corpses and cans." A comparison of love and surgery: "In your life, what was I? Just one more endless hammer on the anvil of your nights?" Love and birth – 'Rusty dull umbilical scissors'. *Her Barbwire Lips*: love continues to hurt; the pain is expressed through a linguistic breakdown experiment.

*Flight of Fantasy* – a profound self-declaration: a 'recovering romantic' writing 'twisted yogapoetry', feeling ridiculous, 'a gooneybird', desperately trying to strike 'the balance between meanly accurate/and the motley's drooling stutter.' *Inanimate Enamorata* – the obsessional lover longs to become his beloved's hair, and her favourite guitar – "if only I could embrace your soul". Then his sublime declarations become coarser, more carnal. He wants to become like her bathroom mirror. The love remains unrequited. *Antikarmic* – epigram echoing the spirit of *Return to Sender*.

*Ergonomics* makes assessments of the physical compatibility of various couples; sport and sex are compared: baseballs and breasts. *French Kiss 1789* – the year of the Revolution: 'A love like a guillotine' – decisively positive or destructive? *In Order to Form a More Perfect Union* – a holy girl and a soldier boy. Their contrary impulses were reconciled by his death: "he was exploded at the front,/and she prays daily for his soul." *Gloved* – tentative caution at some stage of courtship.

*Simple Math* is a conjoined attack on the brutalities, humanity reduced to brutal formulae. *Soul's Advice* describes an inner voice urging an amorous advance, then recognising the futility of that gesture. *Gracelessly Waiting* – the consummation of love has many affinities with blood sacrifice. Interestingly, the calf putrefies. *Dirty Blues* – the imagery of detritus highlights the sordid aftermath of an encounter, and his final feelings: “now I am dirt”. And there will be repercussions in other areas of his life: “One unravelling thread dooms the whole damn shirt.” *Reporting for Duty* – he obeys, he regrets, presumably he retains his sense of duty.

*Dear Departure* suggests someone disillusioned, who has overcome a past infatuation. *She Came Draped in Birdsong* – a beloved avine in spirit, who can cause some disruption of the ecosphere. *Regrets* – about being too shy, too timid to declare his feelings. There may be some post-dated reciprocation: “Keep my rubble./You may require fill material.” *Reverse Metamorphosis* seems to indict a partner for having let herself go – ‘in sudden fear/of Ipsomg touch with all that should be dear’. Enlightenment – do we really grow, profit from experience?

*In An On-One* laments the torture of painting a self-portrait. All reality seems malignantly distorted, the moon is ‘like a frisbee in a cage’. He wonders whether an ugly, ‘warts and all’ portrait will fulfil his aims, but decides not. The end result is depressing: ‘The Naked One in the Vacant Lot’. There is a mysterious delineation of the activity’s context: Silver is the ego-greed that turns glass into a looking glass; and mercury, that poison, makes us mistake temperament for actual temperature; while the iron lasts us through the large littleness of our long lives.

*Nyum* is a mildly wistful reflection on young love. **NB:** Nyun is a Korean homonym that means years or floozies. All things pass, the physical bodies age, but the idyllic memories are preserved. Very poetically, the years, agents of preservation are ‘hanging in memory like leather kites: Time is a upon your birth precious necklace bequested upon your birth.’

*Le Srever S’Efil* – a double warning about ‘the breakers, the banks and the bars’ – the physical ones which one encounters at sea, and the man-made ones which menace everyone on land. The middle stanza reflects the difficulties of adjusting between sea and dry land.

*The Dance: Nancy* – the poet, initially, is highly suspicious of a woman in a dance hall. Against his better judgement, he succumbs and dances with her: “that bandit moon lit the fuse.” He danced with her until ‘out of time’ and ‘out of mind’. The encounter petered out. In retrospect “I dance with memory and death and death and memory.” *In My Defense* – self-justification for succumbing to temptation.

*And Just When I Thought the Earth Was Turning Cold* – the Earth feels rejuvenated by the sight of a lamb’s birth. *Nocturne* – the music of love: a graphic poem, each successive line shorter than its predecessor. *Sally* seems to celebrate the restoration of strength and energy through the power of love: “You renew dry blooms like a spring . . . dead still limbs tortured to bud.” *Apple Blues* – there’s still some life in the old dog yet, in spite of apparent decrepitude. “Let my cardboard walls withstand the world’s assault.” He is the stronger party: “If you break your compass, I am true north.” The old wine is often the most potent.

*We Within the Wheels: Dalit* – the Dalit are the lower-caste Hindus. And the poet indeed does emphasise his out-caste status. This piece definitely does not yield its meaning on the first few readings. It seems to depict a profound dilemma: one Leitmotif “I love you I can’t love you.” Contradiction abounds: Subject-clause by predicate controlled, the halving twins yining and yanging about, plusandminus all at once.” There seems to have been a grisly encounter with a malignant goddess: her heart’s harsh judgment was conditioned by decades and millennia of micromacroforming . . . and all in econocultural context of course, her loving me was always the equivalent of fucking the corpse.) There is a reference to a Koan – a paradoxical anecdote or riddle without a solution, and final mention of offspring from the encounter ‘happy as tadpoles’.

*Whispers* is a plea against nostalgia: “But now the twins are severed –/reminiscences. A bore –”. *No Crosswise Stripes* – je has found his focus, whether in the form of a personal encounter, or locating a geographical base. *Between Two Suns* – Melanoma, also known as malignant melanoma, is a type of cancer that develops from the pigment-containing cells known as melanocytes: a powerful opener. The couple are hedged in and persecuted by ‘competitive conformity’, but their souls are preserved through the liquids of life. This restoration is made at night ‘between to suns’ (one sunset and one sunrise).

*Doubt and Reassurance* – a fairly obvious query to a partner; will she stay with him, or will she resort to a younger man? *Cake’s Consumed, Candles Extinguished, Balloons Popped or Deflated* – he can still feel some optimism at 59.

*Epilogue – There Are Two Sorts of Zebras in this World* stresses the dualism of love, with all its contradictions.

Were I required to apply one word to this collection, it would be ‘unflinching’. If one faces the totality of life, one takes the rough with the smooth. Realisations of painful truths can cause bitterness, but hope must spring eternal.

**Dave Russell**

# Homage to Razz

September 9, 2019 - by [Colin Hambrook](#)



*Colin Hambrook reading from Razz's poetry in the Saison National Poetry Library*

It was lovely to see the Survivors' Poetry crowd out in force at the Poetry Library in the Southbank Centre to celebrate the life of Razz last Wednesday 4 September. Razz kept the survivors' poetry nights going at the Poetry Cafe in Covent Garden and Tottenham Chances for several decades. Since the early 1990s he ran spoken word nights at lots of venues and community centres across London including the famous Bunjies, just off Tottenham Court Road, where a lot of well-known musicians started out. You could say Razz was the glue in the ointment that kept Survivors Poetry running on an energy that evoked compassion and made it a safe space to perform.

For many would-be poets, like myself – who has always shied away from the more competitive poetry nights like Hammer & Tongues – Survivors' Poetry was always the place to go to for encouragement and understanding. Razz provided that in abundance. His passion and commitment to supporting survivor poets, survivors of the mental health system – was a labour of love – something he did readily, without payment, for a very long time. His modus operandi echoed the anti-capitalist politics of the Survivor Movement, although sadly he paid the price for not asserting himself, in terms of his own career as a poet.

Razz should have been up there with the likes of **John Hegley**, **Patience Agbabi** and **Billy Childish** – who all did stints with Survivors' Poetry at some point in their time before getting paid commissions and performance opportunities. Razz performed on stages with the likes of **Benjamin Zephaniah**, **Attila the Stockbroker** and **John Cooper-Clarke**, but never found the acclaim that was his due. His poetry is certainly of quality and although he felt more at home on the performance circuit, his work stands up equally when being read from the page.

The night in the Saison Poetry Library was beautifully produced by **Debbie**, who has followed in Razz's footsteps to keep the spirit of Survivors' alive. Debbie asked eight poets to choose one of their favourite poem of Razz's to perform on the night. It was inspired way of generating memories of Razz and getting a real appreciation of just how good his work is, by hearing it from a variety of voices. I chose *Be Good To Yourself* because for people like he and I – people who habitually put ourselves down and struggle to appreciate our worth, it is a wonderful mantra for self-belief.

Readings from at the Poetry Library, reflected the range and extent of Razz's skill. He was a poet of the people, whose writing explored topics from the mundane and the everyday to more philosophical subjects – and everything in-between – always with a wry and sometimes cynical sense of humour. He had a habit of turning his fears and neuroses into witty poems. *Deteriorating Brain*, for example, is a hilarious take on the inevitability of the deleterious impact of ageing.



*Razz on film, performing 'Dear God'*

I met Razz originally when we both belonged to a housing coop in Tottenham, North London in the early 1980s. He and his partner Sam were both members of the Sannyasin Movement at that time following its practices, valuing the importance of self-expression. I went with them to some intense and wild 'meditations' – lots of uninhibited laughing, shouting and dancing. It was never going to get us closer to enlightenment, but it was fun.

Razz was very encouraging of my poetry. I've not much recollection of what I shared with him, but some of his poems like *People in Pain* and *Be Good To Yourself* followed me as important Mantras for trying to understand the Human Condition. I was a bit too shy and was mostly quite ill during that period and never made it along, but he was always ready to share his poetry at any time. Typically Razz's poetry followed themes on the search for self and exploration of the epic inner journey; I was impressed and very much in awe of him.

Razz had a knack for moaning on a theme till he had nowhere to go but to find the funny side. And then you would hear his unmistakable chuckle followed by further fantastical imaginary scenarios, usually illustrating ridiculous stories of human incompetence.

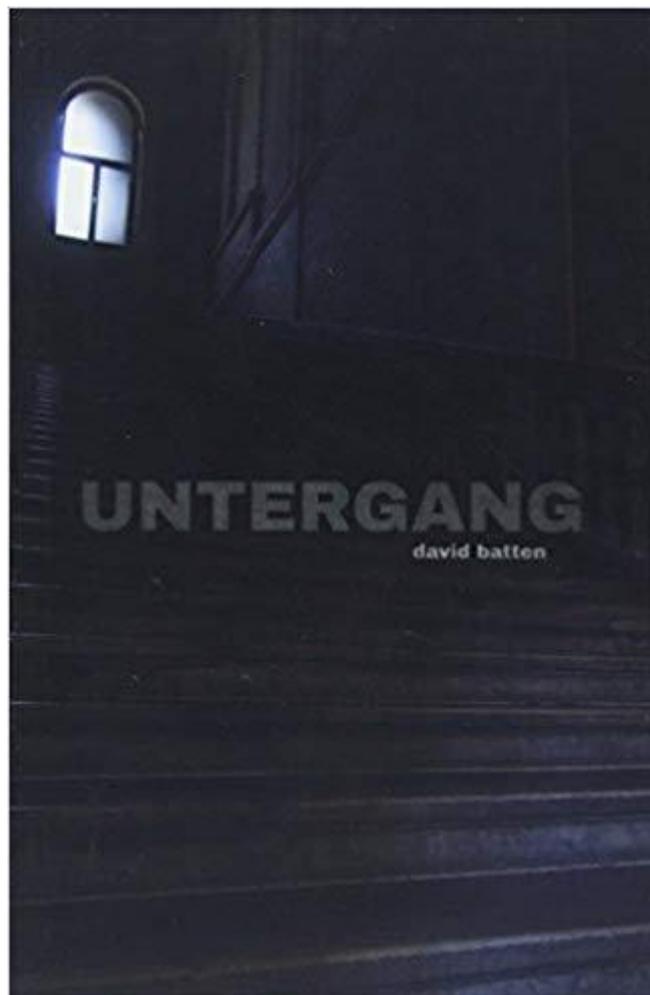
The last time I saw him was at **Loonies Fest** in September 2017, produced by **Nat Fonessu** of **FEEL**. He was joking about playing hide-and-seek with the grim reaper, in a manner that was wholly Razz. He was very ill, but when he took to the stage, some other part of him took over and his performance was as polished as ever.

I'm pleased that Razz's nephew Mark has taken it upon himself to set up a website in homage to Razz's work: [www.razzpoetry.com](http://www.razzpoetry.com). Razz's memory will live on in the hearts and minds of a heck of a lot of people for a long time to come. His poetry deserves longevity.

There is a link to his Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/15995943>

If you have a piece of Razz's work that you would like to submit to the website, please contact Mark via [RazzPoetrysite@gmail.com](mailto:RazzPoetrysite@gmail.com)

## Untergang by David Batten



The title is derived from the German for word for sunset. **(Author's Comment: I've read that there is no direct translation for Untergang: it means a going down, or going under – the German film 'Untergang', about Hitler's last days in his bunker, was translated into English as 'Downfall'. An Untergang also means an underpass.)** The collection certainly explores the areas of darkness. The reader feels threatened throughout by the elements and the cosmos. The opening poem *Visitation* suggests a storm and a conflagration intruding on the complacency of some alcoholic citizens. An astute touch of physics with "Wind whips up the fire, sucking/the spirit from the room –" The storm abates, the balance of elemental power is restored: "-mid-term turbulence/quieted by a cosmic blanket furred/over the wake of powers passing through."

*Sunday Apéro* – A café is an enclave of comfort where the complacent clientele can be detached from the menaces of the world – but only to a degree – 'creased up/like witnesses to the birth/of some awful weapon'. Symbolically, the shutter spans the cosmic and the intimately personal 'from Big Bang to this/private eclipse. Some more brilliant physics imagery: 'light's memory refracted/and spangled in bottles,/crystal's compressed secrets/lined up on shelves. Interesting that 'non-one trusts it'. In the darkness engendered by the shutter, figures dripping in diamond rings. **(Author's Comment: The 'fistfuls of diamonds' are the multi-coloured drinks people are raising to the toast, capturing the remaining rays of light in the bar – 'crystal's compressed secrets')** drink a toast to 'life, light,/the mysteries of a new year. Will doom strike them?

*Fragile Gods* – starting with the mundane, the dangers of worn-down tyres. Startling imagery blending human physical injury with drastic cosmic occurrence: ". . . somewhere a universe collapses/haemorrhaging light and heat/into the bullet's black tunnel'. Another metaphorical extension from an injured physical body to an electric grid – 'circuitry falling,/the whole thing crashing/frame/by frame' then a panning-out to the general environment, 'a mere mild winter/caving in, favouring other life forms'. God is shown as destructive, callous and indifferent.

*Tremor* – the basic setting is that of an earthquake. The house in question is extremely solidly built, but there is the suggestion that its foundation is rotten (**Author’s Comment: Not necessarily rotten but certainly vulnerable**), with a reference to ‘the threat from its submerged tissue’. The earth movement in question is compared to a tumour.

*Schopenhauer says* – the philosopher advised people to hold on to a sense of the past, particularly sound advice since “we’re wired-in to the present” and the future may get totally lost. *You Left* – a close companion vanishes in a primordial Antarctic environment, complete with mammoth relics.

*Portal* – a coastal house buffeted by gales from the ocean. The hapless inhabitants have ‘a punchbag of worries’. Reality substantiates two great works of art. *Lamb* – the ‘big bang’ of procreation. *Giboulée de mars* – I certainly had a memory-flash of ‘ghiblis’ – North African sandstorms: again universal impact – ‘a readjustment/in Lower Ether’. Striking image in ‘tom-tomming bad luck’. As elsewhere in this collection, the storm abates: “In the last lick/of winter’s hopelessness/I sense summer.”

*Firecrest* – affectionate portrayal of ravine life. *Poems* – writing is a reflection of the natural world, and in the poetic context, the natural world is a form of writing, “A graveyard is a book/headstones its pages/true stories a book of lives” . . . “poems/are posthumous/soon as written” (they are frozen when committed to writing).

*Otherworld* – a chance meeting with a stag in a forest wilderness. The terrifying transcends its own power to terrify: “Then a bark, rasp unanimal/repeated, dismantled mantra/too awful to frighten”. The poet progresses from being scared to a sense of the sacred.

*New Ways of Describing Blue* – there is a pure, absolute blue beyond the range of human visual perception: ‘the edge of pure clear black/the realm of zero, vacuum/light years flying in the medium of suns.’ *Solar Power* – the sun seems to be smiling benignly on ancient relics submerged and preserved in the soil.

*Listening to Prokofiev* – listening to that composer provokes awe of Russian redness, and the Westerner’s corresponding awe of Siberia – in view of its immense size, its association with salt mines and Gulags.

*Prospectus* – a personified April procrastinates over the ushering in of spring proper. There is a suggestion that things were better in the old days (before climate change). Some cute, evocative imagery from the 1950s – ‘a bluebird on a shoulder’ – yes: I remember Uncle Remus in the *Song of the South* movie, and the *Easter Parade* song. The next stanza pulls us up to current, bleak, Brexit-ridden reality – grim-set faces await figures/to see what cashflow projections will say/about short-term horizons/the nations cut-and-paste diagnoses. The reader is encouraged to ‘plant if you dare’, just in case April proves to be benign.

*Woodman* – an echo of Gerard Manley Hopkins’s Harry Ploughman. He is a generic figure, fusion of Aborigine, Cro-Magnon and Celt – one of a dying race ‘carbonising . . . into us’; there is a battle with the elements, “flame lingers coldly in the stove”. Brilliant concluding image ‘flame-licked shadows sooted/on a skull wall cosmorama.’

*V.E. Day* is an indictment of hypocrisy. Peace reigns in one restricted area, but in general, conflict is perpetual, continuing ‘heavenwards’; regrets are endless, and the ocean sways in lamentation.

*Fever* starts with a wonderful comparison between a deer and a fish; heady image of ‘countryside drunk on pollen/and humidity’; dazzling physics in ‘the May release//of locked-in life towards its star.’ An oak-beam is in perpetual motion above his head; his meditation is truncated by a fall under the shower and an injury. **(Author’s Comment: Actually, the fall preceded the meditation, hence the ‘single malt, stress-busting/mind medication and painkiller’)** *The Big Six O* lays bare the precariousness of today’s schemes for economic comfort and security – pensions, loans etc. As has happened so often ‘the cloth pulled out/from under standing lives’. The only regular pattern is the planet’s relentless rotation – with not a hint of benignity. *Elections* synthesizes the sense our affiliation with Europe, and our guilt feelings over our imperial past. This poem has a vibrant topicality in the context of Brexit chaos.

*Invasions* opens with the natural ‘air raids’ of the elements, and ravages of animals. Then a seeming flash to World War I (**Author’s Comment: The flash was to WWII. I was thinking of the embarkation for D-Day. At midnight as the soldiers were queuing on the piers for the boats to take them to Normandy at midnight, in silence and darkness. At the end of the piers, priests were giving soldiers the Last Rites before they got onto their ships. Our planners had factored in the possibility of 50% casualties as acceptable – that would have meant 75,000, on the first day**), followed by a retrospective look at the thousand year feud between Saxon and Norman, highly pessimistic: ‘its generations/digging for generations/out of the rubble/of their achievements.’

*Was It You* – touching possible rediscovery of a hatchling bird he rescued. *Repas des Chasseurs* is a gastronomic pastoral scene worthy of Pieter Brueghel. In *Ram*, do I detect an allusion to Greek mythology, (**Author’s Comment: Yes, rams always conjure up comic book images of Jason and the Argonauts for me.**) Poseidon transformed himself into a ram to avoid complications when courting Theophane. In the third stanza I find a feeling of bathos, a farmer struggling with an obstreperous member of his livestock. In *Spore* he feels like a space-travelling entity, acknowledging the universe’s cyclic patterns – ‘turning towards a new death,/certainly. Rebirth – possibly.’ Sublime sense of awe conveyed in “I’m enveloped in a mystery woven/from filaments of a universe . . . I drift across magnetic fields/of its homeland.” *Harvest Festival* is another charming pastoral scene; the reader is left to speculate on how the vanished poem might have distracted him from this tableau.

*A summer storm* shows a sense of awe at the elements: ‘seven levels of darkness/seven of light, writhing’; cosmic proto-writing: ‘Occult forebodings in script//older than words (**Author’s Comment: Should be ‘worlds’. However, I think it works either way!**) . . . Pandemonium of stars//pounding matter’.

*World Cup* – this match is now best known via television; has its ‘globalisation’ emptied it of meaning? The poet seems to think so: ‘the winners//as mystified/as the losers defeated’; at the conclusion, one team has nowhere left to go. *Moon Morning* – wistful ode to an elusive goddess. *Juliette* is a reflection on a bereavement. The bereaved looks into Juliette’s posthumous

life 'from the chilled gloom of a future' (trying to imagine coping with life without her).

*Valkyrie* – **(Author's Comment: 'Operation Valkerie' was the name given to the 'Stauffenberg Plot' against Hitler. The Yeats' poem I was thinking of is 'The Second Coming': 'and what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?')** My interpretation of 'after W.B. Yeats' was that Yeats's first love, Maud Gonne, had the beauty of a Valkyrie. The general reference of the poem is to the *Götterdämmerung* of the end of World War II ('the Wolf's Lair' being a named for one of Hitler's HQs). There is a sense of moral ambiguity about the conclusion of the war. It could not be considered as a one-sided victory for good: "Christ and Satan wait in the wings,/totally committed under their/indifferent God". They remain uncertain as to any sense of direction.

*It approaches* – referring to death. The poet is bewildered by its complexity – 'the obstinacy of life/the randomness of death'. For a human, things can never be as clear-cut as for a simple creature. *Good weekend* celebrates the memory of Guy Vioulac, an obvious source of inspiration for David, having written such works as *The Crisis of Phenomenology: Intuition, Speculation, Spectralization*. **(Author's Comment: Not me I'm afraid. The one you refer to is another David Batten: a real intellectual, not an amateur)** There is the suggestion of a memorial party in his honour.

*August 1914* recalls Russia's disastrous involvement in World War I. *Hen* is a charming vignette of a farm lady tending her chickens. *Close Season* describes the ruthlessness of time and mutability: "The fixed numbers cinematically/fly off the calendar." September is 'like a monstrous seventh wave'. A surge of energy will ensue – 'new projects/from crises gestating/in a pre-season despond.' *Seeing It Through* compares a savage storm to a holocaust of total war. Again an anticipation of calm after the storm/holocaust: "The season's gods take a break while we/negotiate a greying area's greying edge –"

*In the dark cauldron of the valley* – science is described as 'pitiless . . . invoking the heatless reaches of space'. Then there is a panning out to a tranquil rural scene, followed by a sense of foreboding – "behind it all,/power prepares its

regime./Above the river awaiting ice,/ectoplasm negotiates with the stars ...  
(striking surreal figure)

*Scotland 18.09.14, 3a.m.* – great evocation of the spirit of Scotland, perhaps especially pertinent in the light of the recent referendum.

*Cascade du Déroc* – the title is taken from a famous waterfall in Central France: “. . . since ice crashed into/the warm young body . . .” feels ambiguous – is it a human body, or a natural one, such as of water? **(Author’s Comment: I’m referring to the warm young body of the planet (i.e. billions of years ago) being impacted by meteorites of huge blocks of ice that would eventually come out as waterfalls and springs.)** In the process of falling, there would be a sense of suspension, and extremely brief feeling of ‘free fall’. Then the elements are shown to be in dire conflict with each other: “then momentum is ripped from below,/water threatened by light and air/with obliteration, splits . . .” but there is final harmony, reconciliation, the water is ‘diminished but undiverted/from its journey back to the sky.’ The poem concludes with an exploration of the tensions of a potential suicide. Who has not, at some point, felt totally enthralled by the attractions of falling into oblivion, and union with the elements?

*Laying Out the Year* presents a spectral/optical version of the division of the seasons. Then the seasons are shown as having their own menacing power – ‘Winter’s avatar surgeon/probing light with light . . . the banzai charges of the months’. There is a sense of the painful, the surgical – ‘the bright blade of stream/carefully slicing through earth bone’. There is some sense of desperation, of futility: the countryside is ‘laid out in unbearable detail/the thwarted empire of the year//in preparation for annihilation/in preparation for an inferno of ice (both sides of the essential contradiction are embraced)’.

*Arddwyn* refers to a farmhouse in Wales. The poem is multi-layered in meaning. There is some sense of a deceased proprietor having come back from the dead. His spirit could perhaps haunt the place permanently: “Will my spectre-print/outlast my presence here?” But a corpse came back to life, and terrified its bearers. There is a gruesome conclusion referring to twelve children locked away in a safe.

*In the Valley of the Lot* opens with more imagery of the script of the elements – something in which David Batten really excels. He is in awe of his surroundings, “It will take millennia to remember”. The universe seems to be sending him an encrypted message: “encoded stations of the earth/sculpted on walls of a stone passage/from nowhere to nowhere.”

*Contact* goes on where the waterfall poem left off: ‘a gorge, say, or crevasse/that doesn’t stop at Earth’s core –/gorgeous demons call you down.’ But a mass of considerations, personal and generic/historical holds the poet back from that immersion. *The Fall* – there seems to be a truncated fall, in which there is injury but death is averted. An observer seems to feel the fall was fatal, but then is urged to pull the accident victim to safety. *Ribs in Space* is a more literal exploration of the same theme, a broken rib. He sees an X-ray and learns the extent of the injury, he must struggle through with fortitude.

*At Neuville St Vaast* commemorates one of the battle sites of World War I, near which is one of the largest German military cemeteries. A sad reflection on ‘unwitting generators/of graveyards and newtowns’. This site is now a relic of the distant past, but war is perennial, “business going on as usual.” *On the Somme* pursues this retrospective theme, with reference to two key sites, Acid Cope and Queen’s Nullah. He feels projected into the horrors of that holocaust: ‘The thought of my car/and its luxuries/a fogged remembrance/from a faded dream’.

*Rise of the Rat* laments the power of this destructive species. There is an element of injustice about the situation: “the absence of God baffles us.” *Mythic* – the sublime but frightening hoots of owls make them seem extra-terrestrial. *Trig Point* – I am introduced to a new term “An orientation table is a small tourism oriented construction, located at an observation point, which enables visitors to identify the characteristic elements of the view from that location” The poet is following paths of Neolithic significance.

*Moorland Fugue* describes the elements through imagery of musical instruments and recording equipment, and then proceeds to the metaphor of a piloted aircraft. The final stanza expresses a wistful longing to blend the

metaphorical with the literal – ‘a culture to produce/the hands of pianists/to play it all back.’

*In The Great Escape*, the universe seems to be grinding to a halt, but humanity cannot acquiesce: “Only we remain obliged/to carry on.” *Untergang* – I am not sure of the connection with W.H. Auden. **(Author’s Comment: I’m thinking of Auden’s ‘Shield of Achilles’, which his mother commissions from the armourer of the gods for her son. She keeps looking over the armourers shoulder for reassurance of a rosy future reflected in the shield he is fashioning but all she sees are grim vistas of a grim future. I can’t read Auden’s poem without thinking of the James Bulger murder.)** Impressive image of Tchaikovsky’s music taking a dramatic plunge into the underworld. True to the present, the future and the past “I scavenge our post-industrial wreckage for scraps of verse . . .”

*Wintering* is a lament of the nadir season, when almost everything winds down – the lull before the next flurry: “Our familiars, gluttoned with hindsight,//are plotting next year . . .” He reflects again on the healing process of his broken rib.

## **David Russell**

### **Author’s Note**

The book was written over the course of 2014 as a kind of journal. I knew that year would be spent drafting my first collection (*Transhumance*) but what I really enjoy about writing is doing new writing. So I decided it would be a good idea to go to my room at 7pm every Monday for an hour and write up my reflections on whatever came into my head about the week past or the week ahead. That year saw many events that influenced my thinking – anniversaries (D-day, 1914, Stauffenberg Plot), elections (Scottish referendum, European elections with big gains for the far right, and, as Dave Russell brilliantly picks up in the review above, prefiguring Brexit and Trump), and the ordinary and extraordinary rhythms of everyday life as the seasons move through their own routine. In fact the writing became a bit premonitory with poems about brushes with death and falling before my actual near-death fall on Nov 1st – the day Anne Cluysenaar (whom I had been reading as warm-up to writing

the *Untergang* poems) was murdered in her kitchen by her step son. Dark magic indeed.

## Kath Tait – Lentils



It's great that some of Kath's satirical edge has been captured in this 6-track collection. The title track certainly takes me back to the 'alternative society' explosion of the late 60s – did this happen at the same time in New Zealand? The song pokes mild fun at those who followed a fashion which, by some standards, must have seemed laughable. But it is far more cogently critical of the materialist, opportunist ladder of ambition and material gain which claimed so many casualties. The alternatives' survival capacity seemed to have been greater.

*Shrunken Sisters* is a deeply compassionate portrayal of three elderly, disabled ladies struggling with their bulky shopping on board a rather rickety, run-down bus service. The reader is taken on a conducted tour, stop by stop. The spectacle has its funny side. The other passengers have to make way for these unwieldy entities. There is a touch of 'black humour' at the end, where the passengers think they might have died. But one can only be endeared by their reappearance.

In *The Poet and the Engineer*, Kath does a bit of transference, putting herself in the Engineer's shoes. She makes a mock condemnation of the poet's often called escapist and irresponsible attitude, but then qualifies this with a eulogy of a frugal, creative lifestyle.

*Gig Anxiety Dream* faces fairly and squarely the occupational hazards of touring musicians. Who, on that circuit, has not, when under stress, forgotten, damaged or broken some set lists, instruments, or vital accessories. Touring can never be stress-free.

*Star Stalker* is a great piece of emotional honesty. Who does not have closet celebrity fantasies? Surely it is healthy to articulate them.

*Record Contract* is a powerful statement of Kath's revulsion against a ruthless industry which prioritises sexploitation. I have heard various celebrities being described as 'all image and no substance'. Kath is pure substance.

She has also published more of her lyrics and scores in book form in *An Odd Number of Songs*.

For anyone aroused by Kath's material, I would recommend some really raunchy cover versions of four of her songs by Australian prodigy Lin Van Hek (all on YouTube): *Bastard, Moon and the Darkness and You, River of Life and Steel-Hearted Annie*.

If anyone would like a copy of the CD or the book, Kath's website is [www.kathtait.com](http://www.kathtait.com)

## **Dave Russell**

### **National association of adult survivors of child abuse (NAASCA) <http://www.naasca.org>**

I've been asked by David to write an informative article to introduce the above group for those that may not be aware of their existence or purpose. Of which I am only one of the representatives here in the UK. This important group aims to expand further across the US and ultimately across the world which is now becoming a reality. They aim to offer support to those who have experienced the horror of abuse by simply offering a supportive hand toward recovery. In time I will have the honour of becoming a UK ambassador enabling that reach to further expand.

NAASCA was started by a gentleman named Bill Murray in the US who is himself an adult child abuse survivor and this group has continued to grow. Those joining us either through our open Facebook page or those invited to join the closed group are welcomed. There is also the NAASCA website itself and there you will find a wealth of information and the contacts details of all the NAASCA representatives. A live radio show is broadcast daily for those that would like to connect via the internet. To either just listen or ring in and interact with the host or the guest for that evening (US timing) The guest for each particular evening is posted within the NAASCA website well in advance for that given show.

The single purpose of this group is to address the issues of abuse. Be that sexual child abuse violent abuse emotional abuse or trauma and neglect. The group is a non-profit organisation and all that is freely offered or given is always through the understanding of just how abuse affects and destroys so many lives. If we ever stand a chance of eradicating abuse there is a great need to further educate the

public especially those that treat this subject of abuse as taboo. There is a worldwide pandemic of abuse that affects everyone not only the abused themselves as it spans out into areas we would not normally think of as being a factor.

Together we can achieve great things that we never felt as possible and that is never in doubt.....

## **Teresa Joyce**

**Author of “There’s a fine line”**

**<http://teresajoyce.com>**

The original work written by **G. David Schwartz** – the former president of **Seedhouse**, the online interfaith committee. Schwartz is the author of *A Jewish Appraisal of Dialogue* (1994) and *Midrash and Working Out Of The Book* (2004) Currently a volunteer at The Cincinnati J, Meals On Wheels and Interfaith Hospitality Network (International House Of Hospitality).

His newest book, *Shards and Verse* (2011) is now in stores or can be ordered on line.

[DavidSchwartzG@AOL.com](mailto:DavidSchwartzG@AOL.com)

### **1. I Am Not Proud Of My Disability**

I am not proud of my disability  
I do not like the pain  
And if Nietzsche is right (eternal Return)  
I'll still not smoke again.

### **2. I Never Wanted To Die**

I never wanted to die  
I thought about it a lot  
And what my main reason was.  
I'm sorry I have forgot.

### **3. Here I Am**

Here I am  
There I go  
Jumping at the moon  
To get out of the snow,

### **4. My Sister Doris**

My sister Doris  
was very not rich but poor as us  
and then she would always want to bore us  
By telling of her get rich quick schemes  
But holy cherry pie, damn  
*(with a touch of jam)*  
She did really rush  
to end in a hugh rust.

## Fixes and Breaks in the Bathroom



I've found words that have been used the wrong way  
Fix and break  
Their meanings alter but should just stay the same  
See, they're both  
Dacey words given that I made a mistake  
Think it needs to cease

A full stop is all that there is to it  
Let it go  
I reckon that would be a definite fix  
But you see  
Every other one breaks me down I predict  
That this one will too

The stained fingers remind me of when I  
Locked myself  
In a basement for an allotted time  
And the lift  
Only goes downwards, there, the sign's come alight  
Let it take me down

I've found words that have been used the wrong way  
Fix and break

Their meanings seem to me as one and the same  
Neither one's  
Aware of damage 'till the verge of daybreak  
When the sun comes down

My arm sweeps, she sees and then tilts her head  
And she says  
She misreads, misstates and hates things that get said  
And puts on  
Nylon black hold-ups, stays that one step ahead  
As she breaks my stride

The sink's fully covered in leftover dust  
From the night  
I got lost and missed the one four eight bus  
And I'm there,  
Headlights at midnight, just me and my mistrust  
Let me take you there

I'd found words that had been used the wrong way  
Fix and break  
I needed tenners but I only had change  
It was rigged  
Errors of judgement, those were not my mistakes  
At least not this time

I slumped down on the grey grit of the street  
In an arch  
A fire exit poised to fix me with sleep  
My black coat's  
Spotted with powder and I'm in a backstreet,  
Yes, I think of you

How you're warmer former flames in the bin  
So they don't  
Fix a plan and then start breaking you in  
And you're all  
Pretty in Polly, and your dress is unpinned  
It slips to the ground

I find words that I had used the wrong way  
Fix and break  
She's asking questions but I don't know the date  
And the light's  
Flashing and phasing, my eyes start to reflate  
You break through the haze

You stand small, fixed in the gaze of the door,  
Caught and framed  
That troubled double kind of sums me up more  
And so I  
Fixate on heartbreak and how I used to adore  
All the things you do

You stepped over resting on the broken bathtub  
I knew the  
Break you'd give me with some nauseous rub  
And that's when  
Desire and Reason kissed but didn't make up  
And I laid you down

We found words that then went on to tempt fate  
Fix and break  
We needed danger in a breakeven state  
And it's all  
Backing and scratching, we're so quick to conflate  
All the things we've found

She threw me – her baby – out by the belt  
And she said  
The water wasn't quite as cold as it felt  
Now I hang  
Above an ice-block that I'm hoping won't melt  
I fall down her stairs

I can't bandage fractures beneath this gash  
Or crawl out  
From the wreckage of our perilous crash  
It was all  
Smashers and grabbers, and we're doomed to rehash  
The mistakes we made

I've found words that seem to slow the uptake  
Fix and break  
She needed helping but I don't have the traits  
And the tap's  
Dripping, I'm thinking, when will this water break?  
And now this –

I'm knocking holding hat in hands held out straight  
And I guess  
Whether this burden just won't be worth the weight  
Then she's there

She stares and speaks with a delicate hate  
I'll get back  
To you in three to five business days  
It was all  
Gushing and flushing, spit all down the staircase,  
It drained through the grate



I've found words that have been used the wrong way  
Fix and break  
I broke her ciphers and I fixed them in place

## **Ideology Framed by a Sunrise**

We were setting up for sunrise, you and I,  
Lost and found, chemically composed,  
Caked in the dust of a renegade night  
Spread out in your garden's groves  
Blissfully alone.  
We put Fairy liquid on your trampoline  
Slipped about in the soap  
And drew cocks in the foam.  
We reckoned the aeroplanes would see them from above  
As they flew people home.

That was years ago.

Oh, please, go away, not you again.

Sling your hook, the lot of you, you and your isolationist cavalcade.

You took a shit on a bus and now you're in government.

Wedgies and flags are all good gags like the ones in your books;

I've read a couple and I would never deny that you're an intelligent man

But come on, mate, this isn't you.

Is it?

Then again, you're a duper. You're a politician. You're an act.

You say you're breaking free while scratching the Yank's backs

And dancing in time to the boom boom blaps of their baseball bats.

Why don't MPs represent constituencies and actually politic

Instead of wearing principles like suits and making MP stand for massive prick?

Want him to speak?

Forty grand will get you the fashionably flustered entrance and a recycled speech Related in no way to the subject of your meet,

Full of insults like supine invertebrate protoplasmic jellies.

He does that annoying thing with his hands too.

He reckons he's the king of the world and properly hilarious,

Well, tell you what mate, you can kiss each one of my hairy European Economic Areas.

He'll throw in his dishevelled blond mop

For the competitive price of completely free

Until at last he can sit down for what he came for;

To eat, and eat, and eat.

He's holding out for flaky yesterdays

Under the guise of economic and social advancement,

Plans that – broke, alone and embarrassed – he somehow plans to eventuate.

He visits Mrs Pencil's class 6A

Pledging spending and various classroom enhancements

Knowing that he won't even accept their questions when they eventually come to graduate.

I tell you, there better be a parliamentary florist

Because he's leaving behind a trail of hate,

And by the time he's done here he'll owe us lot a fucking forest.

You live your life with him to organise.

You've decided that forgetting to remember why

Doesn't matter if he's there to remind you of your reasons' lines with flaccid lies.

I kind of get it though.

Sometimes I wish the news would just stop.

Stop talking; you'll ruin the ending.

No more treading a line

Between the froth and the fascist finding the faults in each factions' fictions.

Say goodbye to compromise, and quickly understand that you can't change your mind anymore;  
Not without being stigmatised.

But there's more to this than one man and the crap that passes his lips.  
He's as much a symptom as some people's cause;  
Remember that for a while now we've been going down  
In the blaze of glory that is the avocado apocalypse.  
You're opining on international trade deals and calling for heads  
While snapping your salad and sticking it on the Internet.  
You turnip, you just don't get it, do you?  
You genuinely believe that your brand of rainbow flavoured liberalism  
Is completely guiltless and has nothing to do with division.  
Take two people that have just met, leave them in a room,  
Let them do what they will and see what you get –  
'Great idea! Let's assign them a letter of the alphabet!'  
It could have been harmony or hatred,  
But you've exacerbated a chasm,  
Emphasised difference and suddenly there's a distance.

Ideology doesn't deserve to survive, I'm amazed it's lasted this long.  
Make no mistake, Ideology's engrained from the bottom to the top.  
Ideology's a fat man in a headband desperate to finish that marathon,  
A panting plume of BO seeping through its t-shirt  
Hoping against hope that one day it will come first  
But for now it's at the back of the pack  
Trying to stay ahead of that which it lacks;  
The realisation that it's always been suffering relentless attacks.  
Ideology's the salt and pepper sat proud at the table's centre  
Spreading themselves over everything from potatoes to polenta,  
Strutting and smirking with their corrugated crowns,  
Homogenising taste, subjecting originality to censure,  
And masking the nuance of that over which they're ground.  
Ideology's the control that hems you in.  
It's the drip-drip-drip of Ritalin  
Dribbled into your system  
To keep you feeling fair-to-middling  
Nibbling at your decisions with a holistic discipline  
The likes of which makes no sense when you envision  
What it actually means to be living;  
Reproduction, competition and nutrition.  
These are the realities of our plight.  
Why measure ourselves with form-filled gradations?  
Our natures question, subvert and rewrite  
So how can we ballot-box at the polling station  
Thinking that we're actually right  
When all we're good for is

Enveloping relevant revelations into repeatable sensations  
As we fuck, eat and fight?  
Everything gets swallowed by ideology  
From a family to a country.  
I know it can't fuck or fight,  
But Ideology's definitely hungry.

I get it. I get the rage.  
As a wayward son once said,  
It's the calibre of the cage.

Years ago,  
We were setting up for sunrise, you and I,  
Full of pills I can never condemn,  
Desperate to comprehend what it means to be right  
And develop some principles  
That we might grow up to defend.  
We decided in that dreary light,  
That, in the end,  
Principles always mean revenge.

Now, I may have been resurrected since then  
But, Ideology – please don't cross me again.

I get it. I feel hemmed in too.  
I'm so liberal I'm conservative.  
I'm not trying to change anything.  
Are you?

## **My Heart Broke on a Beach in Norway**

My heart broke, my heart broke there;  
This beach in Norway, a grey bird left spare.  
Come to him, white bird somewhere.  
Day's getting darker and I'm starting to care.  
My heart broke, my heart broke there.  
This beach in Norway, God only knows where.  
Come to him, white bird somewhere.  
He's getting older without you, he's scared

This poor bloke, this poor bloke's square,  
This beach in Norway, the grey bird threadbare.  
Look to him, birds anywhere.  
Sky's falling blacker and I'm feeling the air.  
The poor bloke, he's just a square.

He's got four corners, and not much to share.  
Look to him, birds anywhere.  
He's so much colder without you, he's bare.

A white bird, a white bird flare!  
This beach in Norway, lit up like a fair  
Drop to him, white bird – he's there!  
Cliff's looming sterner and I'm sat in its chair.  
Oh, white bird, come down your stairs.  
Perched at the bottom, sure, he's got no flair.  
Drop to him, white bird, I swear;  
Though starving hungry he'd give you his share.

White bird floats, floats right downstairs;  
For her in Norway, my heart might repair.  
March to her, friend, though beware.  
Sea's frothing harder and I'm starting to care.  
White bird floats, floats right downstairs.  
I know he's normal, but this is no snare.  
March to her, make her aware  
You're fucking special at fishing for wares.  
Please don't – oh, please don't declare

This beach in Norway a site of despair.  
Warm to him, white bird, compare  
His asking kindly with your steely white glare.  
Please don't – oh, please don't impair  
This beach in Norway's potential affair.  
Warm to him, white bird, compare  
His growing older and your lack of heir.

His wings stroke, they stroke midair  
This bitch in Norway sees true debonair.  
Rush to her, fully prepared  
For her to embrace you and answer your prayer.  
His wings stroke, his wings stroke midair  
They beat the seashore's sand everywhere.  
Rush to her, fully prepared  
And knowing, grey bird, without her, you're dead.

His voice croaked, my heart choked there  
And I, in Norway, felt my heart tear.  
Please, white bird, please. Don't you dare.  
In flying away how her graceful wings flared.  
His voice choked, my heart croaked there.  
White bird of Norway, you're wanted elsewhere.

Please, white bird, please. Don't you dare.  
It will be harder without you, you mare.

The white coat, the one you wear,  
White bird of Norway, your light was rare.  
What you've done, it isn't fair.  
His body erect, his head revolves and stares.  
That white coat, it's flown nowhere.  
White bird of Norway, was it his grey hair?  
Or, maybe, you don't do pairs.  
When you get to nowhere let's see how you've fared.  
Wait for me, wait for me there.

## **Daniel Firoozan**

# Sleeves

Yeah, I remember that actually.  
Here, show me.  
Yeah – I remember.

The flutters came easy.  
You might know the process –  
But not the misery.  
You can see me there.  
Right next to her.  
In the oversized grey jumper,  
With the chewed sleeves.  
I breathe in her hair.  
I'm hexed to blurs  
And my oversized grey eyelids  
Just about allow me to perceive  
The colours and slurs of the lips and the thighs.  
The dim amber glows of lamps dangle in cordoned dotted pixels  
At the ends of each one of the lashes that line my two eyes.  
'Spare a thought for me,'

I ask unto the world.  
Then again, I don't really care if you don't.  
I guess this insincere self-pity  
Is the shitty substrate of these shabby parties.  
Slouched on this patch of sofa, a self-professed prophet,  
I play chicken with fate,

Testing it to kill me in the night or to allow me to wake.  
If I do rise tomorrow, I'll probably sweat and then spew.  
Vomit is as far as my prescience sees.  
It's just a part of life really;  
A by-product of transpired desire,  
The necessary *and* sufficient penance  
Of a self-exiled and placid pariah  
Who just wants to find something that gives it all a bit of spice, you know,  
A bit of pizzazz,  
To tease life from its cave  
Or at least convince it to let me huddle up with it.  
It's cold outside.

That's where she comes in;  
With *her* oversized grey jumper.  
With *her* chewed sleeves.  
She stretches them nervously  
And at last I get to see her shoulder.

Do I want her or do I want something?  
Is she the end or is she the means?  
Oh, I really don't care right now,  
Whatever makes an echo is all that's listening.

Here, show me again.

Yeah, you can see there, I've looked away,  
I'm staring hard into my eyes' blank backsides.  
But *right* after this moment I'll turn my head,  
You'll see, just wait a second.  
Sorry, yes, you're right. It's a picture, not a movie.  
Good thing too, probably.  
You want a piece, not all of me.

But I'll tell you what I told her.  
'Your beauty,' I said, 'is so recursive.'  
She tilted her head to her right and with it her gaze.  
'We all go round in circles.'  
She aimed those words just to the left of my pale face.

To this day, whenever I sit, I think of that moment.  
The words, I whisper and hiss,  
I self-congratulate and then I regret,  
I begin to incentivise all wrong as this weird, quiet hedonist.  
I think of the kiss that I should have kissed,  
I think of the reprieve I let slip,

I think of the grip I released,  
I think of the scoops of her neck  
And I bite all of that into my oversized grey sleeves.



And this other one – not sure when that was taken.

Another day, another sofa.  
I tilt my head to my left and with it my gaze.  
Another sylphic lover ready to unknowingly  
Mumble heartbreak into my pale face.  
Compared to *her*  
This one's sweater is cut lower  
And, to my delight,  
The collar's ring sits just off the shoulder.

I'll fall in love quickly tonight  
And be out by the morning.  
Because aside from height  
The base of a neck is the only thing  
That makes everything stop.  
Structural like *clavicle*,  
Romantic like *sweeping curves*  
And as colloquial and disposable  
As *dimple* or *yoghurt pot*.

Looking at these two pictures now, what seems clear is –

I think you'll find, every time you live and die,  
That within the folds of each multiply folded mind  
Sits an ideal of beauty  
That each of us is quietly trying to live beside.  
So I suppose, for me, personally,  
What I'm trying to do

Is excavate any kind of identity I can,  
Get at it and put it here,  
Out the way but sat right next to me  
So I can reference it if needs must  
But only ever parenthetically.

And so, the waves roll in with that magmatic ooze  
As they tend to do.  
They pant out their salty haze and drag me under into their hectic eddying blue.  
By their decisive force  
I am finally delivered to that world's shore.  
The world to which you were too soon taken,  
The world by which we were both subsumed,  
The world whose selfishness has left me to pick holes in inadequate replacements.  
I lie at the divide, liquidly beached  
And once more introduced to the theme  
That governs the architecture of my sleep.  
The first things I know and the last I remember,  
Are the pebbles that sift the tide into a fluid crinkled bedsheet.  
Just like that swell,  
Predictable and subservient,  
I will crawl up to you, both dead and alive,  
Fall gently at your feet  
And offer up an eye so you might see,  
And a lung so you might breathe,  
Both cupped in filthy, filthy hands  
That will emerge,  
Reverently,  
From my oversized grey sleeves.

**Daniel Firoozan**