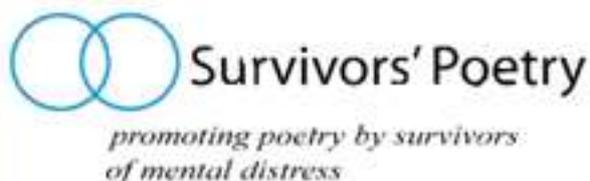


Poetry Express Newsletter #60

ISSN 2056-970X (NB: all back issues of the Newsletter are now ISSN registered)



Artwork by Andy Sargent



Charity No. 1010177 Company No. 2955445; Registered in England and Wales
Registered Office: c/o C/O Raedan, 7 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, England, WC2E 8PS

Contributions to Dave Russell (Editor) – bricolage92@hotmail.com

Editorial

2020 got off to a flying start with **Janine Booth**. A most distinguished main guest spot (see her Manifesto below). This evening, a microphone had been left in the performance area after a previous session. It was eagerly used by most of the performers, though it is general policy in Survivors do be strictly acoustic (no PA). Janine decided that the mike went well with her clothes. Her poems are strongly rhythmic and incantatory, predominantly in trochaic tetrameter, like *The Song of Hiawatha*. She asserted that “I couldn’t be normal if I tried.” This was followed by a dedication to the late Rachel Fink, prominent social activist and Headmistress of the Jewish Free School. The audience was introduced to the concept of ‘Grammar Nerdism’, exploring the ambiguity potential or words with more than one grammatical function. Then an account of a visit to her son in a centre for autism, and fighting Tories – her ongoing occupation. Janine plea for autistic people (whose cause she has always championed) – ‘wearing masks/antennae to pick up the signs’. Finally a wholly justified lament for her situation as a middle-aged woman, having enough natural rips and scratches to obviate any need for a tattoo.

Alastair Murray, who Emcee’d the evening, opened with a reading of Alastair Wendlebury’s *The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*. Among the floor spots, there were several post-Christmas retrospective poems – highly appropriate: the New Year is always a good time for reflection.

Dave Elvis and **Rick** were as animated as ever, with *All Shook Up* and *Devil in Disguise*. **Andrew** recalled the Christmas Saturnalia of the Victorian and Anglo-Saxon eras. **Kevin** spoke of ascending Ben Nevis, the voice of his departed mother, and the New Age Fellowship. **Simon** claimed to come from the Chin states. **Stephen** spoke up for the Australian Aborigines, and against Zoos – he had a vision of the zoo animals running riot. **Richard Downes** introduced his spot as ‘miserable poems at the beginning of the year’. With one poem written at the time of the Jimmy Saville exposure, and one of Stoke Mandeville, he concluded that “abuse remains exactly the same”. **Ros Kane** did a ‘retrospective’ attack on the 2002 invasion of Iraq. Some great sensitivity from **May Moon**, with assertions such “love is not worth dying for” and to relearn “all the things you didn’t say right. **Jessica Lawrence** made a protest against men’s sexist behaviour in the course of Third Class rail travel. **Javier** gave a radical blast – in English and Catalan. **Alain English** painted a magnificent tableau of Scottish fisheries, and of a war veteran, with a sobering reminder: “we were not fighting for Queen and Country, but fighting for our lives. **Debbie McNamara** was vitally irreverent in her description of Christ as a ‘whingeing git’, with references to the ‘apostolic harem’ and ‘galvanised steel stars in our firmament. This was followed by a duet with Alastair on one of his songs. Debbie also has a substantial repertoire of traditional Irish songs, which she is now performing at Survivors. **Sofia** made a plea for daring, for the spirit of adventure; she protested against ‘glass, gloss and ivory towers’.

A grand 'pre-Valentine' spectacular on **February 13th**, with **Andrew Rea** as main act. He made his usual majestic sweep of several centuries of folklore, religion, myth, herbal medicine and an introduction to the 'Hagtessas' – female counterparts of the Valkyries. This was complimented by a contribution from **Eva Rea**, wearing a comparable garland. The flow of newcomers continues, with some intense and spirited work from **Simon, Lydia Tyler, Jasmin Priya** and **George**. Solid spots as ever from the regulars. **Dave Elvis** and **Turn on the Light** gained their unfailing audience rapport. **Jeanette JuPierre** and **Lucy Carrington** proclaimed a raciness totally appropriate to the occasion. **Jason Why** was as provocatively experimental as ever; further musical contributions from **John Arthur** and from **Debbie McNamara**, with **Lawrence Renée**.

On **March 12th**, the audience was, understandably, depleted on account of the Corona Virus scare. In spite of this, vitality was fully sustained. **Michelle Baharier** proved every bit the trenchant radical. She spoke up eloquently on behalf of the **Women Artists' Revolution**. Her opening poem celebrated her playing truant as a 15-year-old to visit the Tate Gallery. This was followed by her poignant topical song *We Ain't Got A Clue* – bitterly ironic: "Here comes the plague again . . . Name your virus after my Corona; I'll have a corona, thank you." Her next was dedicated to a contemporary of Caravaggio, who did a famous painting of the episode of Judith and Holofernes. Madness is a bitter indictment of those who help perpetrate atrocities simply through obeying orders: "I'm just an administrator . . . an instrument of government . . . one pay-cheque away from a Claimant." Some brilliant punning with *Jump the Cunt* – 'Trump the Stump'. Some jocularly in *Dyslexic Rant* – "'voluntree' is not a volunteer." A very moving account of her visit to the site of Auschwitz, identifying with two inmates who loved each other – "We didn't know it was our last kiss", and an exhortation to "do something positive with our inhumane treatment." Michelle ended her set pointing an accusing finger at the monarchy – 'The biggest benefit scrounger of them all.

A substantial Hispanic contribution from **Xavier**. The Night's Emcee **George Tahta** also made his poetic contributions – "delving into the past can be sustaining." He read *My Favourite Dream* and *Plastic Heartland*; in the second half, he did *Love After Love* – a plea for reflective self-contemplation, even at the cost of reopening old wounds. He perceptively contrasted higher education with using one's brain. **Lucy Carrington** was fervently feminist, in the wake of the recent Women's Day.

Some fine music as ever from **Rick** and **Angie**, now known collectively as *Turn on the Light*, first of all performing as a duo on *The Girl from Ipanema*, Fleetwood Mac's *For You There'll be No More Crying*, and Leonard Cohen's *Dancing to the End of Love* – later backing the irrepressible **Dave Elvis**. John Arthur was as incisive as ever, with one song lamenting vows of celibacy and the other laying bare the sadism of a head-shrinker in *An English Reception*.

For the duration of the Pandemic, Survivors' Poetry will be going online/

Janine Booth In her own words: “I am a Marxist, trade unionist, socialist-feminist, author, poet, speaker, tutor, former RMT Executive member, supporter of [Workers' Liberty](#), aspie, bi, [Peterborough United](#) fan!

I have had four 'proper' books published:

- [Guilty and Proud of it: Poplar's Rebel Councillors and Guardians 1919-1925](#) (Merlin Press, 2009)
- [Plundering London Underground: Private Capital and Public Service 1997-2010](#) (Merlin Press, 2013)
- [Autism Equality in the Workplace: removing barriers and challenging discrimination](#) (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016)
- [Minnie Lansbury: suffragette, socialist, rebel councillor](#) (Five Leaves, 2018) I write and perform poetry. As The Big J, I was part of the ranting poetry movement in the 1980s, doing more than 100 gigs before giving it up at the end of the decade. In 2014, I took up the muse again, and am now a performing angry middle-aged woman poet. :-)

My four books of poetry can be bought from this site, here:

- [Mostly Hating Tories: poems by Janine Booth](#)
- [The 3Rs: Ranting Rhyming Revolting: more poems by Janine Booth](#)
- ['16: the age of discontent - a ranting, rhyming, revolting review of the year](#) (also available as a CD)
- [Disaffected Middle-aged Women](#) I am active in the RMT trade union, having previously represented its London Transport members on the union's National Executive. I am Chair of the union's Disabled Members' Advisory Committee.

I am co-Chair of the [TUC Disabled Workers' Committee](#), and post reports and news here about how the Committee is working to organise and speak up for disabled workers.

I particularly work on the issue of autism, including running training and giving presentations to trade unionists about Autism in the Workplace.

I am a former member of the [ETF Women's Committee](#).

Her rhythmic, incantatory set fully vindicated her massive repute.

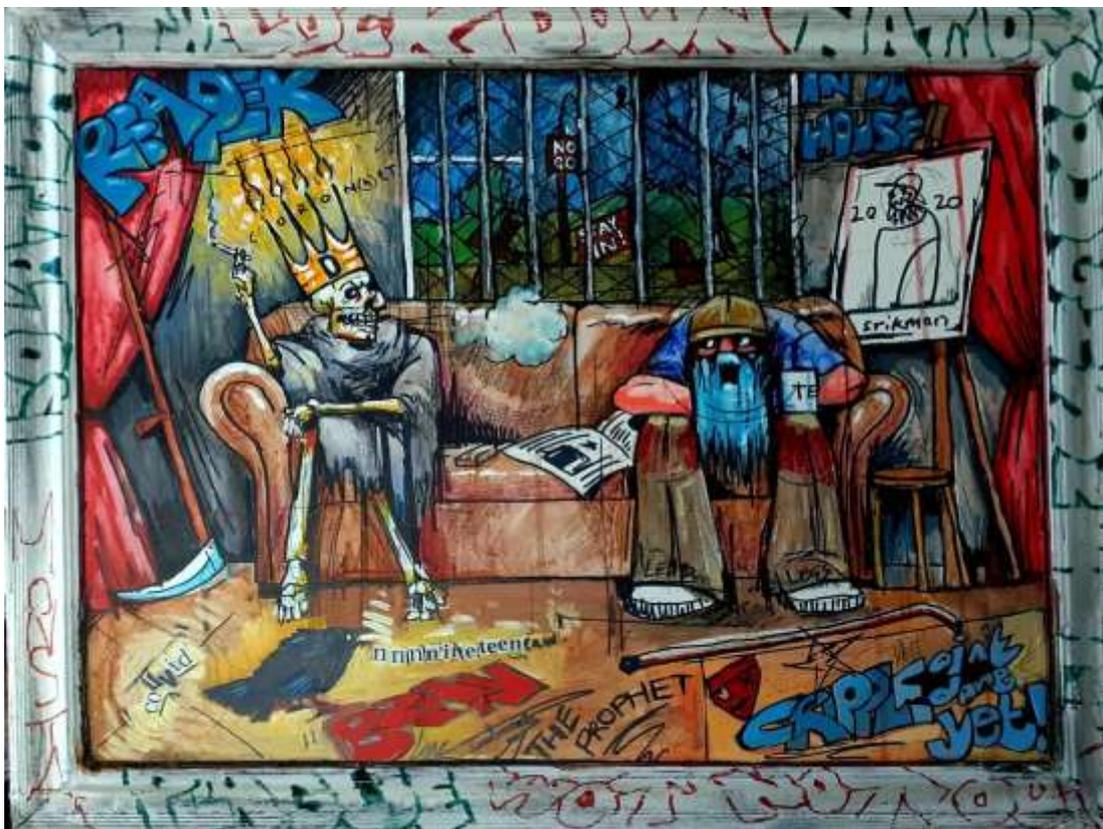
Andy Sargent



Painting to me, is a huge part of my life. It has always been there, the urge to create in pigment something new and totally unseen before. Isolated for the last five years, due to a life changing spinal injury, I work totally alone. I create my work from all sorts of materials, using many different techniques. I have painted many commissions over the years, both private and public. I've been on television, and spoken on radio. My art keeps me going, gives me a purpose, and I am always seeking the next visual challenge! For all potential customers, clients, or organisations, please feel free to message me through this website's contact page.



Apologies for the Inconvenience - Andy Sargent



Keep Your Distance - Andy Sargent



Fallen in the Swell Zone - Andy Sargent



Know Your Place - Andy Sargent



Smile: It May Never Happen - Andy Sargent



Three Figures - Andy Sargent



Sketch - Andy Sargent



Struggler - Andy Sargent

Skyhigh Down to the Ground – Keith Robert Bray

William Cornelius Harris Publishing, in collaboration with London Poetry Books
supporting Mental Health in Performing Arts

ISBN 978-1-911232-26-1 © Keith Roberts Bray 2019 All rights reserved

20 Spenlow Drive, Walderslade, Chatham ME5 9JT

This collection is partly a dedication to those most dear to Survivors Poetry, who have now passed on. The introduction stems from acute personal bereavement, and resentment of the arbitrariness of mortality.

Pages describes the physical/tactile reality of the book, including the function of the book as catalyst, sparking off references to other books, other facts. It seems to make an explicit reference to audiobooks: "Letters and characters/Transformed into audible language, The symbolic marks and signs/Freed of their limitations./The repercussions Far more reaching,/Far more disturbing /Than the printed text. Even more explicit,/Immediate and unimpeded, Jumping out of their confines/Bursting their seams, Breaking free/Of their configurations . . .

What's true? What's false? In this increasingly confused and complex world, it becomes ever harder to distinguish truth from falsehood, the honest person from the criminal, compassion from oppression. One must grit ones teeth and face the problems: "Give a little rough edge to it."

Box Clever – one must learn basic survival techniques and defence mechanisms in the brutal environment of the school playground. The poem draws analogies between the cruelty of that world, and of the greater world outside. A very pessimistic conclusion: "Like little lambs to the slaughter/Or tiny cogs in the machine,/No more than expendable items/That can easily be replaced; mere fodder/To feed and serve society's needs."

Borders – there are many ideals which, although they cannot be realised, are admirable in themselves. He rails against society's oppressive structures, sometimes perpetrated in the name of democracy: "Every well-intentioned wish/Thwarted, undermined/And fractured by conflicting opinions;/Negated at the point of conception.

The beggar and the thief – again, in this complicated world, it is so hard to make clear-cut moral distinctions. *Veil of Masked Intentions* – a lament for essential humanity, hedged in and smothered by interfaces. *Far Reaching Wall* – a wall indeed has great oppressive power, but it is ultimately breakable, and the powers of nature can prevail against it. *Heather Cleans her Windows* celebrates a house-proud woman who takes real care and trouble, to enjoy simple but elemental things.

Triton's Trumpets portrays the richness of the seashore, and the symbolic significance of sea shells. I think there is a reference to the blowing of a conch shell (shades of *Lord of the Flies*?). *Lipstick on the Reed* (in this instance a saxophone reed) is a musician's poem, evoking the tactile sensations of someone very closely involved. The reed is a fragile component on which the firmer, more solid structure, totally depends.

Towards the Thorny Dell paints a not-so-idyllic rural scene, where the poet identifies with a fox desperately fleeing the brutalities of the hunt. Great image with '... the imbrolio mesh of snarled branch And thorny stem.' The flight takes the fox both upwards and downwards. In *Ancient of Days*, the sight of an elderly tramp evokes the most profound thoughts: "His alarming/Eyes speaking out, Without need of words/Of a reality more real than any myth/Could ever hope to relate Or impart." *Chelsea Story* expresses deep compassion for someone – once a model and a beautiful socialite, who is now beset by the isolation of old age, with little but her memories and alcohol for compensation.

Plastic Carrier Bags – these indeed provide a saddening example of mutability – blown aimlessly into the air, trapped and hanging on tree branches, falling back onto the ground and rotting. *I wrote a song for you* is an interesting variant on the theme of the singer-songwriter. He writes a song without words, and challenges his partner to fill in the lyrics. Paradoxically, the partner has parallel feelings of the 'out of reach': "A melody crying out/To be heard./So beautiful/You'd want to reach out/And touch it./But of course you can't. *Anonymity Is Her Name* speaks out for myriads of self-effacing souls.

Rags around the tree is eco-sensitive. There is detritus – relics of human celebration, strips of ribbon rotting, decomposing. There is further detritus in the form of abandoned, corroding bicycle parts. But these abandoned parts once related to deep feelings: "Adorned with deep felt wishes,/Graced by ritual offerings,/By emblems of remembrance." They found their location through "... Simple acts of faith,/Aspirations and longings/That address the fragility/And vulnerability of life,/Making sense Out of the senseless."

Then a charming series of nature tableaux: *Spinner* – bucolic portrayal of spiders' webs. *Who's a Pretty Polly then?* celebrates parrots: nice ironic conclusion re those birds' speech synthesizers: "Copycat mimic/Repeating back/Every word overheard;/Slightly exaggerated/To the point/Of caricature." And then the acknowledgement that they may have far more intelligence and substance than initially supposed.

Dick Todger is my name is an honest personal statement from a cold, ruthless mercenary entrepreneur – generic symbol of entrepreneurs through the centuries. *Stairway to Kevin* is a wry comment on the Soho sex industry, seen through the

persona of a female client. Aunty Doris is a piece of touching nostalgia, triggered off by an old photo capturing a close loved one in her prime.

Shona shake me – identical twins, one male, one female, touching portrayal of a lifelong bonding: “But Shona and me we’ll go down/Together with the sinking ship/Should the whole thing fall apart.” Let me be your whipping top turner presents a sensual fantasy in terms of reification, a flawed physical human being “Transforming/Into a thing of wonder.” Sadly, all good dreams must come to an end: “Brought to heel,/defeated By the very ground I spin upon.”

Mother honours old-fashioned frugality, making things last, avoiding waste. *The Spirit of Aeolus on Brighton Beach* is a panegyric to the sublime music of the elements. (A Clarsach is a Celtic harp). The wind plucks metaphorical strings.

Absurdesque Life – for those desperately housebound, the distinctions between dream and reality are often blurred. Potential malignant entities assume gigantic proportions: “Doubts and insecurities/Rising to the fore,/Ones very own existence/Called into question,/Examined to the very core.

Cinderella gone Suffragette – another impassioned statement, identifying with a female persona: breaking out of degradation and servitude into dignity and independence. And she determinedly rejects the idea of any external agency to free her.

The Dolls House is somewhere which seems idyllic in terms of external, distanced observation. Closer examination could reveal inner darkneses ‘Dysfunctional family . . . skeletons in the cupboard? Should one be content to accept interfaces?*The man with an extraordinary chin* is a morale-boosting Tommy Cooper-ish character whose exaggerated features are an unfailing source of fascination and solace.

Azalea Bush celebrates the balance of nature, in terms of plant growth and pollination, which symbolises how the world should be: “The feel and sense/Of its balance and order./Everything In its rightful place,/Uncluttered, neatly trimmed.”

In a Prince’s Eye is a foray into pure romanticism, the celebration of a mystical lady, focus of adoration. It contrasts sharply with the other material here, but it has its distinctive stamp: “Chalk wan changeling child/Woodland conceived Nurtured and raised In the ways of goatish fauns. The final stanza evokes the lady of Shalott: “She that weaves a tapestry/With spider threads/All fragile, amorphous and delicate/Sits captured imprisoned/In a cell without/Hope of escape.” One big difference here is that the Lady of Shalott did escape – to meet her doom; another that “She is a sorceress’s adversary” unlike the mystical ladies of legend and literature. Finally, unlike dénouements of old, it is “. . . a story that has/No sad or happy ending.”

How blue is blue? Some philosophy and physics here. Many nuances and associations of this symbolic primary colour are captured here: “The cerulean calm/Of its tranquil

hue . . . As blue as blue/As the ultramarine swell/Of a fathomless Ocean . . . A harsh unforgiving blue/That will never go away./A stigmatic blue/Whose scars and stains/Can't be cleansed,/Purified or healed/Or ever finally absolved."

Free of this world: A deceased loved one, who has possibly been cremated, lives on powerfully in memory and spirit. "Your protean presence/The force of spirit/Still lingering in the air,/Somewhere in the aether/Transfigured from flesh/To fire, ashes to earth."

Old rags for new is a wry comment on the world of fashion. Feelings seem a little divided: while trendy, disposable fashions seem in many ways ephemeral, but the durables are viewed ambiguously. Firstly, they are praised for 'Standing their ground,/Sticking around/Caught in the loop/Holding on to their meaning . . .' but then they are denigrated as 'Old withered chestnuts/Way past their sell date'

A goddess no less – 'Arch Priestesses of excess' are valued and revered now more than ever since ancient times. Footprints in the snow are transitory, perishable record of a cross-current of disparate human activity. A wistful reflection on their passing: "Just a vague recalling/Dissolved into words."

Coracle presents more historicism and romanticism: building an ancient craft and using same to transport that special beloved to safety. *Here comes the comeback-comeuppance kid*: just a few pop and film stars have managed to do this. I am reminded of Elvis Presley's 1968 television special.

Skyhigh down to the ground is a searing lament of heartbreak, using the imagery of unrestricted 'free fall' into oblivion. It is also highly eco-conscious. The desolated one is plunged into an underworld both literal and metaphorical: "Right through/To the splintered shadows/That withhold their truths." Personal desolation can indeed give a vision of ecological catastrophe: "Twisting mid flow/Over ocean and stream." Such is the power of the malignant partner that she can blur the boundaries of mortality and immortality: "Left me here/Suspended/Hanging by a thread,/In a no man's land Between the living and the dead."

An extremely interesting and provocative selection. I feel that perhaps the running order could be modified, and the collection divided into thematic sections: perhaps the environment, the rural landscape, provocative women. Well done!

Dave Russell

Poem by G David Schwartz

I am bold
and full of courage
I am also brave
when eating porridge

You Go To Park Your Car
and the jerk behind you left on his light
if you go to turn them off
I guarantee the door is locked

Vickie Has A Son Whose Name Is Nathan
who by all respects, is a strange one
Now you'd think he would cover
But he covered her once with a crayon.
of course this didn't keep her warm
In fact he just used a crayon

I Was Walking On My Footsteps
That's the way I want the best
I don't fall and or hint the ground
Thus I do not make a sound

G David Schwartz is the former president of Seedhouse Interfaith Committee, and author of A Jewish Appraisal of Dialogue, Midrash: Working Out Of the Book and Shards and Verses. Schwartz is a volunteer with the House of Interfaith Hospitality.

Lightning Strike Sanities from the Stratosphere

storm broken mission Prometheus
out of touch
alien alienated alien prey
world seller fallen to earth
strike lit conductor

"trans is a punishment" Pedro Almodovar
"how old are you now anyway" Jack White
"do not choose a coward's explanation" Leonard Cohen
"I listen to Sarah Vaughan" Bob Dylan

struck such to tunes reliable
whilst science denies its poles have switched
horizons fallen weather broken

there is more
truth hurts
it cannot be

'suck the air from its bubble'

're-spin the threads
from as high as we reach
into the roots of the sky'

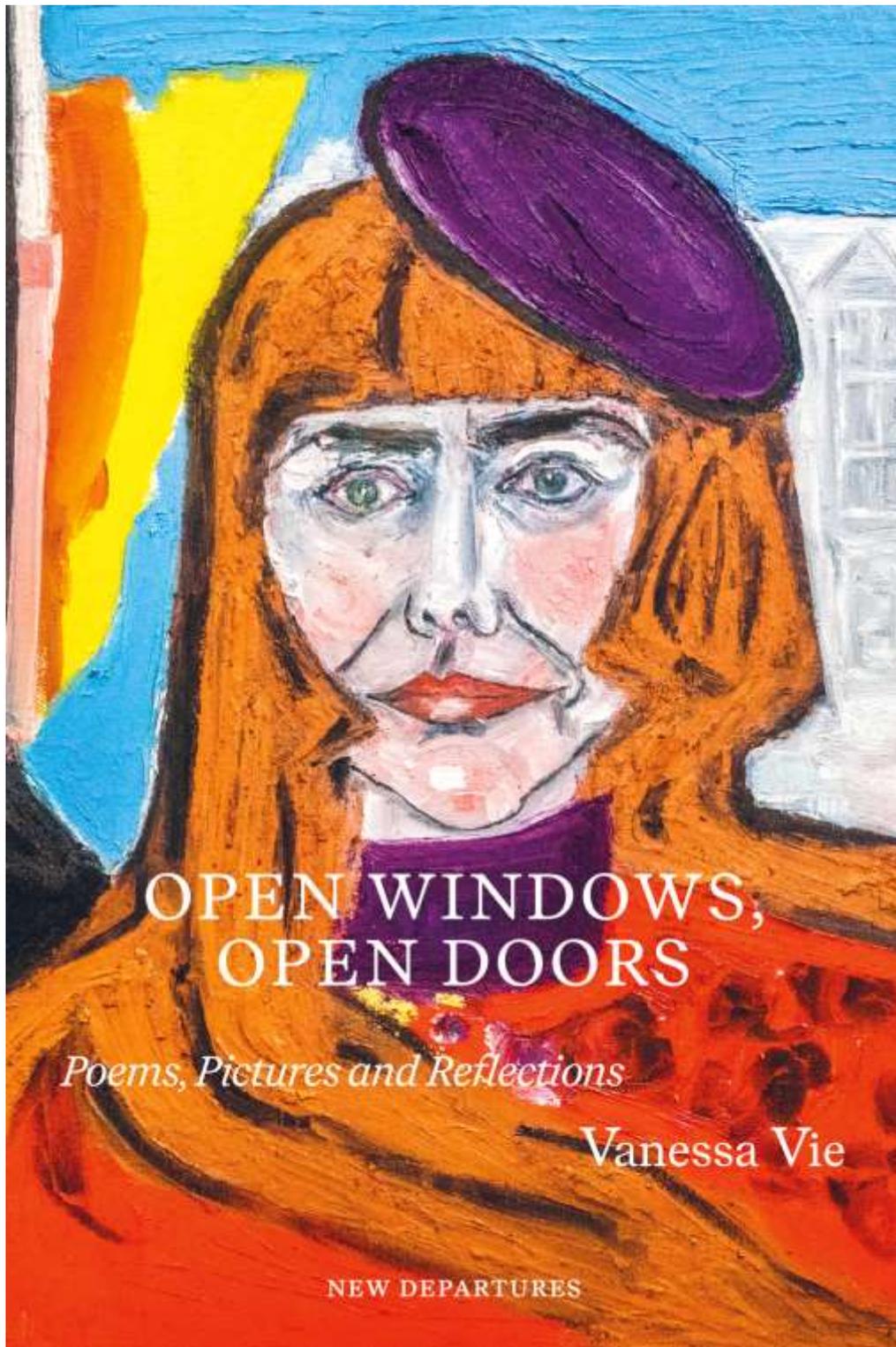
A. Hurford

(13/14th January 2020)

Open Windows, Open Doors – Poems, Pictures and Reflections

by Vanessa Vie

New Departures 2020 ISBN 978-0-9026892-7-5 £14.99



The title for this collection was inspired by a stanza in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *Populist Manifesto*: "Poets, come out of your closets,/Open your windows, open your doors,/you have been holed-up too long/in your closet worlds."

This exquisite cocktail of the verbal and visual makes a broad sweep of Vanessa's years of multi-mediac artistic activity. Her artwork embraces water colours, poster colours, oils and collage. The book is divided thematically into seven sections.

Section I

This concentrates on the ecosphere, very much in tandem with today's environmental awareness. *'Tis Life* is a charming personification of a pill-bug. Is there anyone alive who has not sometimes speculated on how animals, birds and insects would express themselves if they could talk? *In Spring: To the Masters* is preceded by excerpts from *Written in March* by William Wordsworth. Vanessa reproaches 'the masters' for taking a detached, negative attitude towards the advent of spring. The accompanying oil painting depicts dense vegetation, with the suggestion of a green-clad human figure with arms raised rising out of the ground. **(Author's Comment: I had no intention to reproach the Masters but rather to join in with them in their worship of nature and surely Spring. Feeling Nostalgic for their exultation [among our nature-coy city])**. *Black Cat Iconoclast* – a verbally sparse but hard-hitting graphic poem introduces a powerful poster colour painting. *At a Restoration Oak* is an autobiographical piece celebrating her climb up one such tree (apparently her first ever experience of this activity) and its significance. The poem is accompanied by a sequence of monochrome-tinted photographs which have a feeling of timeless antiquity. *To My Daughter Ella on her First Trip to Scotland*: could this have been Ella's first journey away from her mother? Hopefully Ella experienced a rich variety of wildlife while she was there.

Royalties to Sara Teasdale – Sara Teasdale was an American lyric poet, highly celebrated in her own lifetime but later marginalised by critics. Sara's poem *Refuge*, of which a couplet is quoted, celebrates the sustaining power of song and poetic utterance through elemental adversity and feelings of weakness. Vanessa firstly identifies with urban wildlife – foxes and cats, then she refers to 'Nature within, nature without'. There is then the vision of a geological miracle: 'Pebbles turning into sand/into novel shores to approach/with love' and gives some heartfelt encouragement to Sara, her fountainhead of inspiration. *From Out of Tight Buds, Pink Flowers* – there is always a sense of freshness and novelty

whenever new flowers emerge. *Once Upon a Time* – the robin made its sublime appearance in answer to a prayer. *Digitalis Purpurea* – a beautiful, poisonous plant: “In between Beauty/& Death/– There rests my bitterness. At the end there seems to be a reference to migratory birds. This poem is enhanced by a facsimile of the handwritten version, highlighting Vanessa’s beautiful calligraphy. *Being the River Thames* is a poetic journey, starting from the source. In its flow, the Thames takes on many of the qualities of the Styx. Vanessa to some extent feels that she *is* the water. I also sense an echo of *The Water Babies* – wondrous phrase with ‘A newborn Papa tangerine gurgle’. She feels nourished and invigorated by the river’s tributaries. The river does a final act of self-sacrifice ‘Handing over his life/Where the tide meets the stream’. She seems saddened by the sight of the banks at low tide. She wistfully reflects on the fate of the river whilst on an empty train to Leatherhead. The accompanying pencil sketch evokes the tidal river, flanked by pieces of architecture ancient and modern. Anyone who had taken a night-time barge trip along the Embankment should digest this poem as a comparison.

Section II

This section focuses on metaphysics and mythology. *An Apocrypha: Visitatio Sepulchri* – Vanessa envisages herself as Maria Magdalena. She has a ‘Vision of the Golden Host’. On her journey she passes some sad figures – a black tambourine man and a Caucasian virago. A swallow’s tail becomes a devil’s tongue, which blanks off the moon. She feels beckoned equally to tomb and to womb – a complete life-cycle! Natural things may assume supernatural qualities: “Birds may be myths and beasts bardic lovers.” She finds beauty in bees and crows, and feels compassion for a half-squashed fly. She begins to feel some desire for love. Her “Poor mind circumspect queries Walt’s *Song of Myself* . . .” surely it shows sanity and presence of mind to query the overwhelming ebullient optimism of that poem. There is the suggestion of a tryst, then of a spiritual pilgrimage, then of taking a supreme risk. “Triumph melted waxed Aurelia” – golden fulfilment blossomed forth from negativity and annihilation?

An Epiphany Song gives a cosmic background to the Nativity. The terms ‘taxonomic families’ and ‘chromosome chain’ suggest that the significance of the Nativity spreads to all other life forms. Wonderful aesthetic image in ‘a presentation of Turner’s sun ablaze’. *Beard* was apparently dictated to Vanessa by a ‘superlunary voice’. In the views of many religions, it is sacred, a shield, a

talisman, a guide through life. In the accompanying picture, it is shown as a thick cord connecting two souls. *Poet Buried* – it would have been interesting to elaborate on ‘Social aptitude and Pyramidal aspirations’. *18 or 19* – the pains of adolescence portrayed with total honesty. *Snow Like Blooms* – Vanessa switches from being an indoor observer to being fully involved. *Laundry Lines to be Sung* – laundry lines are generally considered to be warming, benign aspects of the inner urban environment. Such an environment without laundry lines may be an illusion. **(Author’s Comment: I miss Innocence; OH! I glimpse Laundry Lines white and pure moved by beautiful Summer Breeze; Suddenly I wake up! there is no Laundry lInes!)** Does ‘Jacob’s bridge’ refer to the novel by Dr John Mouery: “Since 1908, when an object from space exploded over Siberia and caused the Tunguska blast, that same region has been the frequent site of multiple space impacts. And yet, very little research has been done on the objects of the blast.”

Section III

Music, of which Vanessa has an exquisitely extensive and eclectic grasp, is the central theme of this section. She is also well-known as a singer-songwriter-guitarist-harmonica player, involved with many rock groups in the past, now performing solo or in conjunction with Michael Horovitz. *Four Weeks of Jazz Record Requests* – random thoughts elicited by jazz favourites. Instrumental improvisation elicits verbal improvisation, under the benevolent vigilance of a cat: “Jazz on the radio smooths/existential edges and thoughts/travel to alternative minds . . .” The music makes her reflect on her neighbours. Again jazz is related to literary endeavour: “Others write notes to the sky/and invite trumpets to blow/and blow their organs & minds/with minutes of jazz . . .” Jazz has extra resonances: “Charles Boyle’s car is a Honda Jazz/and *Jazz’s* is also the name of a barber-shop. A Chet Baker music track recalls a railroad track. Nice accompanying picture of a tumbledown, homely abode plus a cat inscribed with a heart. In *Tragische*, Vanessa shows she also has a deep love for classical music: this poem extols Mahler’s 6th symphony as ‘wonders of reverie’ and ‘orchestration of reality’. *Kind of Blue* is a fusion of jazz appreciation with the bleak desolation of a hospital waiting room. I know the Miles Davis album referred to in the title. The ‘jazz ringtone’ must be a godsend in this limbo. The quotation from Dryden sums up a state which must feel like a half-way house between life and death. Perhaps it is salutary to have ‘soundtracks for the untuning of pangs’. *Superfood* is an interesting disparate pastiche: a baobab is a tree which grows in Africa and the

Middle East, and provides both food and medicine. A kalimba is an African plucked instrument. Then there is a switch to skateboarders in the midst of motor traffic, then to African wind ensemble musicians. Sansara Shy is a new name for me; my curiosity is aroused. A 'thumb-piano' is another African instrument. *Stiff Upper Deck Dance*, inspired by Ginsberg, Kerouac and Cassady's *Pull My Daisy*, is in the style of a sea-shanty. There is the conflated sense of sailors hard at work on deck, and everyday urban bustle – "Cut the knot splice the dough". The title is an interesting gloss on 'stiff upper lip' bravado. *In Defence of Allen Ginsberg's Nakedness* – we all know the legend of the Beatles walking out on Ginsberg for his 'indecent exposure'. Debate remains about the validity or otherwise of that gesture. Vanessa posits the idea of 'chastity/Of the mind' and 'chaste nakedness' as a goal she has as yet been unable to attain. But nobody these days expresses outrage at life drawing classes. The poem is followed by a totally appropriate collage containing several nude figures.

Section IV

A fusion love and erotica, from the delicate and tender to the most raw and elemental. The preceding drawing suggests a confused mind, or perhaps a confused wardrobe. The section opens explicitly, with *After Seeing a Voluptuous Bosom* and *Pubic Hair*. The first celebrates resilient flesh; the second laces the Sleeping Beauty myth with full physical detail. A touch of technology too, with 'Electricity transmitter' and 'kinetic pleasure'. *After-Effect* is a lament from one who has loved and lost: "The other's become the Opposite to ray of light/And sensual urges decompose in shadow-ray . . ." Notwithstanding, she still relishes the intense experience. *Why Not a Sonnet – For Requited Love* – how great to challenge/invert a stereotype without losing any of the delicacy of the 'unrequited' tradition: 'With grace my words, my thoughts and crudeness none'. Vanessa also shows an excellent command of traditional verse schemes. *Chorus for a White Rose* is quite dense: roses are generally associated with reflective calm. Here there was a storm between the two lovers, which put the white rose on the back burner. But its very intensity leads to a reunion, and a restoration of the white rose's spirit. *Lines for Love – for MH* – warm statements of affection; nice turn of phrase with 'Holding tight/To my drunken/Boat's mast. The term 'Aposopesis' is appropriate here, as the poem suggests times of intense feeling when one is somewhat at a loss for words. *We Tantra* expresses pure passion: "Fluids ooze; cataract . . . I let you in,/Thy will in my well . . . like god, like a demon

raised/in dim light.” Agog Over Sailing to Byzantium is directly inspired by W B Yeats’s poem of the same name. There are also echoes of *Leda and the Swan*. An interesting twist with a tryst between ‘spectres’. She then imagines herself lying on the back of a swan in flight. A vision of all parties being absorbed in the water, then a final plea to Yeats to join her in eternity. In the accompanying picture, she is atop the sacred steps, presumably a goal for Yeats’s strivings. It is marvellous that expressions and sentiments such as these are now acceptable in the mainstream. We must never forget the efforts of the Beat poets and their predecessors to ‘kick the door open’ in this respect.

Section V

Here Vanessa shows her empathy with skilled manual workers, cogently confirming her anti-élitist stance. I heartily agree that dustmen’s work is of more value and substance than that of politicians, the aristocracy and the like. There would certainly be an apocalypse of disaster without them. She is proud to have acknowledged them: “I’ve oft-times bartered/My recognition for your “Thanks!” She always sorts her rubbish to make their work easier. *Scaffolders at Play* – she rightly relishes their physiques. Their operations have a feeling of splendid theatricality; ‘ceux-ci amoureux de la lumière’ – shades of ‘son et lumière’? An exceptionally agile scaffolder evokes the spirit of the Spanish dramatist Calderon. Said scaffolder does an exquisite singing performance in the course of his work. *Afternoon Cloud* – clouds are unfailingly amorphous, elusive, fascinating. Sometimes they seem to be ‘held’ by various phenomena. Their presence recalls the durability of ancient mythology. Very nice to have the accompanying sketches, and the manuscript, with all its amendments. *Demolition in March Revisited* is a commemoration of the demolition of the Gloucester House Council Estate in South Kilburn: stark portrayal of the demolition works complemented by an inventory of the detritus of abandoned homes? Were the former inhabitants given time to clear their apartments before the demolition? *Roofers Flash International* – like scaffolders, roofers radiate grace and agility, through which they create a glamorous spectacle – ‘Aloft like free men!’. She celebrates them as ‘saviours’. The following pictures evoke tumbledown North Kensington of old.

Section VI

February’s Blackbird – to John Lennon – an exquisite song inspired an exquisite poem. There is also a suggestion of some blackbird love interest, and that the

blackbird/s may be harbingers of something significant: ‘High in alarum high in alarum/The frightened and the immaculate/What augury what augury . . .’ ‘Golden beaks/*In excelsis Deo* indeed! *Hoppian* shows Vanessa’s feelings for animal and bird life – a deeply compassionate picture of a wren which has had its wings cruelly clipped, and a plea for it to have a free, natural and mobile life. In a way the wren’s life is contrary to the lot of humanity: “the wren/ birds are free / we are not”. *On Easter Sunday* – a touching Haiku sequence of random features of the urban landscape. *On Ash Wednesday* – a survey of religions, ending on an admonitory note: “Peaceful Jews:/What is Israel doing to you/Staining your virtue.” Two dedications to fruit: Where is the *Shadow of the Bowl of Oranges*, and *Sketch of a Grapefruit*. In the first, it is acknowledged that darkness induces invisibility. In the second, she seems to take pity on the segments of grapefruit awaiting their sacrifice/consumption. *Leonard Cohen is Dead* seems to express equivocal feelings. The discovery of insect corpses, long left to ‘fossilize’ often gives pangs of nostalgia for when they were alive and in their prime – especially ladybirds! *In the Abattoir* – **(Author’s comment: comparing the city particularly London to an abattoir)** does this sympathise with the helplessness of young apprentices in that occupation? *Little Black Girl* is a charming gloss on William Blake’s *Little Black Boy* – with the same theme of whiteness of spirit. *A Toddler Boy* – straightforward whimsy.

Section VII

This opens with Vanessa’s magnificent, stark dedication, verbal and visual to Grenfell Tower: “Ghosts talk to me . . . is a funeral pyre”. The picture utterly captures the sickening spirit of that cinder-coated shell which to me stood as a horrendous symbol of the state of the country. *Arisen from out of my Brown Doc Marten’s Shoes* – a plea for sensible, durable footwear as against disposable glamour and style. **(Author’s Comment: yes, it is a pastiche of impressions told by a publicly declared SOCIALIST. Part five ends with eccentric dialogue inspired by Orwell’s line serving as epigraph to the poem.)** There is then a shift to meditating on Hampstead Heath. ‘Genital Iris’, I am told, means Immune Activation and Inflammation in the Female Genital Tract. There are many who dispute the legend that Jimi Hendrix introduced green electric parakeets to the streets of London. Strange vision: ‘Reflection in pond/Depicting the entire sun/Is an arrow head’. It then registers on her fully that she is wearing men’s shoes. The

poem trails off into random slogans and exhortations, some more substantial than others: “give your present a good past control . . . Fie to the power of two!”

Questions for Eliot – this is a composite of allusions to the works of Michael Horowitz, T S Eliot, Federico Garcia Lorca, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Harry Fainlight, John Keats and John Milton. Some of these poets had truly tragic lives. In their suicides, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, to some extent shared the fate of the Zyklon B victims. Fainlight and Milton died lonely and ill. Part 3 rhetorically exhorts T S Eliot to visit Gaza – ancient, modern and symbolic. There is a final indictment of Eliot’s Anti-Semitism. She advises his spirit that she must pray to Apollo. *Will There Ever be a Lever Long Enough?* Was prompted by some of the terrorist atrocities of 2005. A mighty seagull bears portentous news – of impending bloodshed: a ‘haruspex, apparently, is ‘a person trained to practice a form of divination called haruspicy – the inspection of the entrails of sacrificed animals, especially the livers of sacrificed sheep and poultry. These atrocities certainly recalled the barbarism of animal sacrifice. The ‘lever’ in question ought to be able to lift the world up – “but the wheel spins in gory mud/ in the deepest of pits there is oblivion please look back . . .”. But she still retains some faith and hope ‘*in our Beauty/in the miraculous vibration of Love,/in the phrenological human intellect/still waiting to be unlocked/with a genius-key/not yet wholly/tried before.*’ *War & the Sound of the Park: A Poem for Three Voices* – this poem starts with the light and innocence of childhood games in the park, and then ventures into the sanguinary depths: ‘ichor’ is the fluid that flows like blood in the veins of the gods. Someone, as a child, had a fall from a swing, which caused a lollipop to pierce this throat. Later he became a soldier, who was stabbed ‘with an oxidised blade/of hope . . .’ Hope for what? The enemy’s hope of victory? The horrors of war are lamented by the shrieks of blackbirds. The mother goes to the soldier’s corpse, perhaps longing for his child-self to return. She had a farm which was once struck by cannonballs. The poem ends with the image of a girl on a swing. Is she happy, and unaffected by the horrors?

Vanessa’s Afterword is quite touching. I had not realised that the Roman Catholic Church did not recognise Vanessa as a ‘christian’ name when it came to baptism. She then cultivated her name: the initial ‘V’ expanded into the French word for ‘life’, so her acquired surname proclaims her vitality. She describes how she left her studies in Medicine and Business Administration: “. . . I met my inventor alter-ego. It was in a dream that I saw myself travelling in time, gyring with a spiral.

Straight after that dream I began first painting, and then writing and making music; and I acquainted myself with artists and new friends.” She refers to the assertion of Chögyam Trungpa, the Buddhist meditation teacher, that “our psychological aggressions and hesitations about our creative selves . . . contain prime potential for enlightenment.” She outlines her experience with the rock bands Ithaca and Rockatron, and her activity as a singer-songwriter, catalysed by Jim Morrison of The Doors.

She compares her own writing in English to Samuel Beckett’s adoption of French, as a discipline. If one does not have immediate, easy fluency in a language, one is forced to fine-tune more thoroughly: “The English Language has bestowed me with a new personality and freed me from my mother tongue.” Vanessa was inspired to come to London by William Blake’s *Jerusalem*. After much ado, she became a British citizen, but now feels threatened by the consequences of Brexit. While staying on the Isle of Wight, she came across *The Faith of An Artist*, edited by John Wilson, which provided ample illustration of how some wholesome and successful artists regulate/d their lives. Her involvement with Michael Horovitz has enabled her life’s work to come to fruition. Do give this collection your most diligent attention!

David Russell

HOMES AND GARDENS

i

A south-east London suburb,
a pleasant residential road,
handsome Edwardian villas, ample
gardens,
Modern families leading busy lives.

We brought up our two girls here,
with Granny in a flat upstairs.
No obvious tensions, health or money
worries.
We were well-meaning, principled people.

But into our bland present
crept, from the contiguous past
– our own back-countries running away
behind us,
before, beneath us, lives of our forbears,

like galleries in old mines
layering the fathomless dark -
an influence, a drift, a low, insistent beat,
subtly determining our every move.

As if, in our big garden,
from under lawn and flower beds,
a daemon rose, like smoke, which, though
it seemed to clear,
hung in the air, and smirched each breath
we took.

So, the home we'd hoped to make
of bright, untidy, lived-in rooms,
where countless little times of tenderness
were had
and fun, and interest, and excitement

– this we could not realise,
our inner spaces seemed too pinched;
blankness, impatience, strange
discontents, withdrawals,
like oddly-placed, unnecessary walls,

hampered movement, blocked the light;
impulses of love failed their mark;
relationships, as they flowered, were half
blighted.

One day, Suffering came, and could not
leave –

a dumb, beseeching presence
that followed us from room to room;
suffering of children, suffering of adults,
caught in the meshes that life had woven.

Searching for understanding,
when I looked deep into myself
I saw I – wife and mother – had a wizened
heart;
It was through me that much of our grief
came.

Then I went into darkness,
an inner darkness no one saw,
myself a prison in the prison-house I'd
made,
lost to all sense of natural goodness.

Yet counsellors can be found,
living quietly, like hedge-priests
one in your street, perhaps – an ordinary
house ,
an open gate, a path, a plain front door –

a stranger, who will greet you
more kindly than you could have
dreamed,

will help you loose the old webs tangled
round your heart
and set it free to breathe and beat; to
love,

to sing and to be happy.
But the work is arduous, long.
For weeks, months, years, I trod that path,
went in, came out,
carried my learnings back to our sad
house.

I almost lost hope, often;
THOUGH one spring day, when I came
home,
Granny, working in the garden, stopped to
show me
under our copper beech tree, violets

half-hidden among old leaves,
a little vivid clump of them.
Every April, after that, I looked, and found
them,
a gift from nature, fragile, exquisite.

ii

Our daughters are grown-up now;
It's eighteen years since Granny died;
we've moved – but only a couple of
streets away,
to this small semi, with narrow garden.

Suffering has not left us,
but now it has a voice, and speaks.
I hear; and when it reaches out its arms to
me,
oh, I can clasp it to my loving heart.

Our garden here is scruffy,
the lawn gets only roughly mown,

and growing in the ragged grass my
husband found
a tiny purple-flowered cyclamen.

I wanted to transplant it
cultivate it in a border.
He said, "Some bird of the air has brought
it to us,
Let's not possess it." So I leave it be.

Claire McLaughlin

When you meet a girl and she makes
you smile
She tells you about her life
You ask your self what happened there
she deserves the one of a lifetime
She tells you how sad It had to be how
peoples words fall through her skin
When all she does is makes you smile
and makes your cheeks shine like a
cherry
Why oh why does life need to hurt
Especially to those that mater
Everyone has a life to live if no kind
words to come out say nothing at all
Your words can burn your words can
hurt your words can make you crumble
But please but leave the beautiful girl to
live happily forever in peace

Bradley Young

THE WALNUT

We were a special Christmas treat,
we walnuts, in our silver bowl.
But all nuts are inclined to roll –
I tumbled out at someone's feet.

*Crack me open,
I have been closed so long.*

The feet, not knowing I was there,
shifted a bit, and sent me flying
into this corner where I'm lying
among old dust and wisps of hair.

*Crack me open,
I have been closed so long.*

You've taken down the Christmas tree,
I've watched you from my quiet nook.
Soon now I'll get that wizened look.
Not even a squirrel will fancy me.

*Crack me open,
I have been closed so long.*

But maybe, one spring-cleaning day,
powering across the sunlit floor
with Hoover set at maximum roar,
you'll suddenly spot me in the way.
You'll cut the Hoover, pick me up.
A Christmas escapee! You'll smile,
sit on the carpet for a while,
examining me in your lap.

*Crack me open,
I have been closed so long.*

I'm like a curious little box
that doesn't open; you can trace
the seal all round where lid meets base,
but there's no tiny hinge, no lock.
Or each half-shell, although so small,
is like the ample, broad-beamed hull
of galleon, say, or coracle –

what fills the little holds so full?
Or these long, regular lines inscribed
across the long curve of my shell
are like Druidic runes, which tell,
if you could read them – what's inside.
Or I am like a tiny skull
whose rigid double-cup contains
two scrunched-up hemispheres of brain,
like yours. Could that be possible?
Or I am like a little soul
bobbing on life's unquiet sea,
a speck in that immensity
and yet, at the same time, the whole.

*Crack me open,
I have been closed so long.*

What is inside? You stare at me,
reposing on your open hand.
you feel your sense of things expand,
you start to see me differently.

*Crack me open,
I have been closed so long.*

I'm more than someone's toothsome bite,
within me lies, minutely curled,
a piece of time and space, a world
of leaves and creatures, air and light.
First shoot, frail sapling, forest tree,
and all the growing-time between,
each year of fresh, then fading green –
they're here, held in your hand, in me.
Daybreak, noontide, dusk, then night;
the blazing of sun too bright for eyes;
the silver moon, the starry skies;
the endless play of dark and light.
The wind that always weaves and weaves
the restless branches to and fro.
Misty mornings. Silent snow.
Pattering of rain on a thousand leaves.
High-wire squirrels swinging free,
birds taking off, coming in to land,
twig-beetles smaller than grains of sand –
it is all in here, contained in me.

*Oh, crack me open,
I have been closed so long.*

Claire McLaughlin

Homes and Gardens is an autobiographical poem, which shares an experience which I think may be sadly familiar to others: getting married, starting a family, unaware that one has emotional problems that may compromise the venture into partnership and parenthood, or believing that any serious emotional difficulties have been dealt with – only to find that recreating the family set-up revives old pain experienced in one's natal family. This poem is constructed according to syllable count: the first line of every 4-line verse has 7 syllables, the second line 8, the third line 12, the fourth line 10. I've always enjoyed writing Haikus and Tankas, and thought I would try my own syllable discipline. I like the syllable idea because you aren't tempted to torture the language or your thought in the way getting a good rhyme sometimes seems to require. The Walnut, on the other hand, has a fairly rigid format, which is meant to suggest the hard, tight walnut shell, and reflect the poem's longing for liberation. I guess it is partly about my longing to be free of the imprisonment that blindness creates, but perhaps it is also about the universal longing for release from the limitations of the self into a more expansive, more joyful life, to realise some of one's enormous – perhaps limitless – potential. . .

Medicine's Mask

zyprexa
on top of the weight gain
a rigidity of face (and character)
subtracting the best of me
my added value individuality
more now apparent mental patient
to the quick, loose and/or gifted
I must seem slow
moribund and drifted
why it's how i'd read it
no wonder at all those adult classes
i wasn't really seeming the gifted me
but someone else entirely

there are other masks - risperidone
experimented on with in its early days
a dose way above new max
calibrated by my tears, perhaps
that woke me up each morning for a while
or came when out for a run
so distant from myself, my true athleticism
i felt i was riding a tourist bus of me
feeling neither pain nor gain

keeping the weight off for now
olanzapine always wins
it disables me, makes illness seem true
stuck in it unresourceful to myself
demoted in myself postgradually
to the orthodoxy of semi observant doctors
in their positivist certainties
who take the soul from psyche
related to worse in material's name
since the late 19th century
and who have no idea of me
who do not care, or would not see
how they snuff the very best in me
the quality of myself i cannot state
going, going . . . gone already
two weeks in . . .

A. Hurford

GREENHOUSE WARNING 1970

(This really was written in 1970, before the theory of climate change was any more than a means of discrediting concerned scientists)

What will you do when the sea comes in
When ice-floes melt and the walls grow thin?
What will you do when the sea comes in?
What will you do?

Will you be willing to die for a dream
When roads become rivers and fields flow green
And the cities are peopled with turbot and bream?
What will you do?

What will you do when sea-walls cave in
When hills are but islands and farmers grow grim?
Will you fight for your lives or die for your kin?
What will you do?

Would you be willing to fight for a wish,
For the peace of the farmers and people who fish?
What will you do when the seas great din
Pounds at your heart and comes right in?
What will you do?

Bear Loveday Tyler (Lis Brooks), 1970

GAIA

and if she wakes,
what remedies to find?
what ruthless self-protective fury?
Imagine:
a spirit wakes to find its body threatened.

Analogies are very seldom truly drawn,
but this, the body of our planet,
this is apt:
a woman, diagnosed, is told:
"You had a cancer you ignored.

The secondary stage has now been mapped.
The breasts on which your babes depend
are full of poison. Your lungs erode.
Detritus spoils your ample womb
all this growth is uncontrolled
in multifarious spreading units
pressing hard and sore on vital functions,
consuming and competing for further growth."

No symbiosis here! (So blind,
Oh blind and foolish, to kill the host and die.)

The analogy holds

and when she wakes, the dreamer
in her own womb of space, the life-spinner
alive, awake, aware
and suddenly self-reflective
- the analogy holds -
she will see her breasts, the earth;
her womb, the oceans; her lungs, the forests
that give her life slow breath; and we her blood,
her circulating cells, her children
and her bitter enemies.
A simultaneity of conflicts.

The analogy holds.

Bear Loveday Tyler (Lis Brooks)

The Trouble With Verse

The trouble with verse is it runs round my brain
and colours my writing again and again.
Waltz time's the worst, as it feels so entrancing –
one two three one two three, twirling and dancing.

Jumpy metre's just as bad.
Alliteration drives me mad.
Another problem's punctuation.

Tricky words like "delectation,"
"politics" and "recondite"
have no place in what I write.
And then there's the case of the limerick:

Once thought of it's hard to be rid of it.
It nags to be said
In kitchen and bed
de diddle de dums till I'm sick of it.

At penning songs I have no skill:
just tunes repeat, as some tunes will,
taunting me to give them more
than fiddle-and-bow and folky score.

The englyn in English is angled to tease;
A stately sonnet aims to please
or anger or sadden.
An epic might madden.
Blank verse is my forte, without any doubt.
But, for all my complaining, I can't leave rhyme out!

Bear Loveday Tyler (Lis Brooks)

Back Again (*from a month of writing poetry*)

Not having written a word for a week
What kind of challenge is that?
Bear's fertile brain has said barely a squeak
And all those intentions fell flat.

But here I am penning a rhyme for a change
(Though not much inspired, as you see)
No longer I'll sulk like a dog with the mange;
No longer from verse will I flee.

Though sometimes I'll feel like a bit of a fraud,
Once more will I take up my pen,
And though surely my writing will be somewhat flawed
I'm back in the challenge agen!

Bear Loveday Tyler (Lis Brooks)

On A January Day

Walking down the Mile End Road
I saw some daffodils about to come into flower
They were growing out of a strip of grass
In front of a housing estate.

I said to the daffodils
Be brave
Be proud
Be strong
And when Jack Frost comes round
Don't take any nonsense from him.

You have arrived a little early
Underground your bulbs multiply
I like to see your flowers
They have a friendly smile.

In this busy city
As traffic goes rumbling by
We move towards springtime
When this urban nature will run wild

Frank Bangay, February 2020

Ted's Dark Night Of The Soul

The party had come to an end. The drunken party guests had all gone out into the rain to wait for a cab or a night bus. And how it rained, nonstop, pitter patter pitter patter. The night bus took its time coming; the taxis took their time too. It was cold and damp. Back inside the house the room where the party had taken place was in a right state as was the kitchen. Beer cans and wine bottles everywhere. The party hosts were rather tipsy; they looked at the mess and said we will clean it up in the morning. Off they went to bed. All through the night a teddy bear had been sitting on a shelf, a medium sized teddy bear with short brown fur, wearing the customary red necktie that teddy bears often wear. He watched with amusement the foolish antics

that these humans often get up to at parties. Normally he would be moaning about the mess these humans leave the room in, and how the next day they will have terrible hangovers and will spend the whole day trying to get it together. However all evening he had been breathing in beer fumes and was a little bit tipsy, so he felt quite merry.

Although we don't value teddy bears sense of adventure much they are in fact quite inquisitive souls. When we are not around they get up to all sorts of adventures. And this young fellow was no exception. He had an urge to explore the room. So he got down off the shelf and started to make his way through the party debris that was strewn across the floor. Kicking beer cans out of his way. Squelch he trod in a puddle of beer someone had spilt on the carpet, thinking to himself how stupid these humans are when they get drunk. As he made his way across the floor he came across a bottle of wine. It had been opened. Someone had taken a sip from it and had probably been too drunk to remember where they had left it. He thought to himself, I wonder what this tastes like. He picked up the bottle and took a sip. He licked his lips and said out loud "that tasted nice". Then he took another sip, then another, then another, then another. Before he knew it, he had drunk the whole bottle of wine..Suddenly he realised that he was very drunk. He tried to get up but just fell over again. Every time he tried to move his paws that are normally soft. He heard a loud boom boom thud thud in his head..

Poor Ted, what could he do? He sat there and the room was spinning round. The clock on the wall seemed to be laughing at him, saying "silly ted you're adopting all the bad habits of these humans. Teddy Bears are supposed to be wiser than humans". Then he heard the voice of Wilfred. He was an elderly rather dignified teddy bear who claimed to have aristocratic leanings. Despite his malt whisky habit he liked to show his seniority. "You blithering idiot" he said. His speech slurred by the effects of the malt whisky but still rather commanding, like a sergeant major in fact. "Look at the state you are in, you are a disgrace to all teddy bears. You wouldn't catch me getting into the state you are in, when I was your age I always behaved myself". He continued by saying" the trouble with you youngsters is that you have no discipline. When I was young I knew my place which was at the top of the heap of course.. You can see what a fine upstanding citizen that has made me arf arf." With

that he went back to sipping his malt whisky. You blithering idiot, you blithering idiot. Those words echoed through teds head. It seemed he couldn't do anything right. He thought to himself, this sort of thing never happens to Rupert Bear, though I suppose Poo Bear does sometimes eat too much honey and get terrible tummy ache. He looked around the room. All the other teddy bears were fast asleep. They were probably having wonderful dreams.. Even Wilfred was snoring loudly.

Eventually Ted managed to make it across the floor to a window. He climbs up onto the window sill. The room is still spinning round a bit. He then opened the window hoping that the night air would revive him, the night is black, the occasional car went past. The steady rain continues. Poor old ted he sat there feeling a little disorientated. Then a light bulb started flashing above his head. He had the most wonderful idea."I know what I'll do" he said out loud, continuing "I'll become a poet turn my misery into poetry. If Frank can do it I don't see why I can't, someone might discover me, I might even become poet Laureate".

He looked out of the window, the rain had stopped. The night was calm but a little chilly. The early morning birds started singing in the trees. He found their songs most soothing. The man in the moon gave him a friendly smile. He sat there looking at the stars and planning his first poem.

Frank Bangay

First written 2004 revised 2020

Mean Virus Blues

That mean old virus
Shows its ugly face
That mean old virus
It shows us its ugly face.
It has no compassion
No mercy
And it knows no shame.

Outside in the street children are playing

Traffic is rumbling to its destinations
Pigeons are cooing and pecking on the ground
This old world keeps turning,
Our hearts keep beating.

That mean old virus
It laughs while we panic
That mean old virus
It laughs as we panic.
Can I go out?
Should I stay in?
I can no longer shake hands
With my best friend,
Should I be wearing a suit of armour?

Outside in the world spring is rising
See the trees full of blossom
Daffodils give us their golden smile
Nature is about to run riot,
The world keeps turning
Our hearts keep on beating

That mean old virus
It's always on the prowl
That mean old virus
It's always on the prowl
I mourn for its victims.
I worry about family and friends
I worry about myself,
I feel unsure about self isolation
I know we have to do it,
But many of us have already experienced much loneliness.
All around us GOD'S troubled earth
Sighs and sometimes weeps
But there is still beauty out there
There is still beauty
A reason for hope in these times

That mean old virus
Aint no friend of humankind.

The world keeps turning
Our hearts keep on beating
Let's pray that it stays that way.

Frank Bangay
March 2020

I also wanted to share with you a campaign video made and shared by a close friend of mine it had 2100 views in the first 24 hours of it being shared on social media. You can see a short cut video pinned on her twitter page that is 2:20 long <https://twitter.com/ducksdietcoke?lang=en>. The full campaign video is on youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BB4aCQ4Og>

This is also a link to an article created a few days after being shared on social media <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-7912117/Borderline-personality-disorder-sufferers-discuss-stigma-illness.html> please do share it or show it to people you think would be interested to see a direct video of 4 minutes or less. to see the patient's perspective on BPD from multiple people.

Rendered from the Tsabouna's song cycle of the year

*' . . . and we say that it is possible for earth
to mingle with the stars, like a deep plow with a
plowfield,
and for the sky to nurse the ears of wheat. ' (Angelos Sikelianos)*

After, in the worsening times,
I reach to drape my arm across your breasts
reminded there is more than touch

. . . Iatromantis, heal thy rhyme . . .
I lie encased, an upturned guest
after, in the worsening times,

ignore the piper's vital signs
this time en force, pump-action pressed
reminded there is more than touch

to hold the speech we tried to find –
I can't recall the rest
after, in the worsening times,

buildings breath defined
are gone, take leave as if you've seen the best,
reminded there is more than touch

. . . then try to get another line.

I reach to drape my arm across your breasts,
after, in the worsening times,
reminded there is more than touch.

Philip Ruthen April 2020

Poem Notes

Epigraph: Angelos Sikelianos, lines from *The Sacred Way* (1935), as quoted in George Seferis' *On the Greek Style* (1967)

Tsabouna: the tsabouna is a Greek folk wind instrument of the bagpipe family; incidentally, I understand my third cousin Nikolas plays it very well in the village festivals of Epirus. And e.g. some nice info at: <https://www.symposionsantorini.com/the-tsabouna>

Iatromantis: Iatromantis is a Greek word whose literal meaning is most simply described as "physician-seer," or "medicine-man"; a form of Greek "shaman

Samuel Beckett

The leitmotif of Beckett's work is the state of the solitary and the outcast. He explores both those who are alienated from the bulk of humanity by debility or senile decrepitude, and those who cannot integrate because of peculiarities of speech and gesture.

It would be misleading to describe Beckett's world as a-social. For example, the painfully exhaustive genealogy and family history of the Lynches in *Watt* show a truly in-depth grasp of the 'normal' situation from which any Beckett character could be detached. The labyrinth of relationships he described seems capable of embracing all modes of deviation from kinship norms.

Molloy is deeply attached to a locality, from which he never escaped. Clinically, he does acknowledge that he could not speak of his region without perspectives outside of it. Her concludes: "I prefer to abide by my simple feeling and its voice which said 'Molloy, your region is vast, you have never left it and you never shall.'" The region becomes the universe because Molloy thinks it and wishes it so. Similarly, in *Mercier et Camier*, the protagonists attempt to abandon their 'home town' but feel impelled to return, and stay.

His descriptions are not calculated to arouse sympathy or regret. He has no faith in any so-called 'normal' social/domestic situation. Indeed, his references to such situations – either directly, as in *Murphy*, or in the flashbacks of *Malone Dies*, with its searingly brutal references to the lives of young Sapo and the Lamberts show that their rejection and isolation represents no real deterioration in their condition. Their disintegrations and deceases give the reader no sense of human bereavement: they are a constant factor in the rhythms of the Universe – pure, essential representatives of mankind (a mass collective unit) to the cosmos.

He had a high degree of distancing and alienation with all the contexts and environments he grew up in. His initial situation as a Protestant in Catholic Dublin, his subsequent experience as an Irish migrant in London, and as a naturalised foreigner in France are aspects of this, are are his initial pursuit, and partial rejection, of an academic career.

Beckett's vision is now supremely relevant. The second decade of the Twenty-First Century has seen the crumbling and disintegration of the world's facades and interfaces, political, social and intellectual. His world has the concomitant qualities of pure chaos, into which any individual's identity could be absorbed, and and the state of being analysable, dominated by ordered, mechanical systems. For the latter to be possible, there has to be a coherent mind. Perhaps this could be embraced by one physical individual, or perhaps it would have to be abstract and universal. But the crucial factor is the sense of its existence. His research into Descartes is well known. It could be argued that the body of his work is an application of the Cartesian method of reductive logic, which reaches the ultimate positive of mind-existence.

Beckett's work is both a rejection of reason, and an obsessive desire to apply reason to areas which were hitherto the domain of instinct, prejudice or common sense.

Watt, of course, is an outstanding example of this tendency. Whenever he became aware of facts or phenomena, "Watt could not accept them for what they perhaps were, the simple games that time plays with space."

With reference to *Watt*, Beckett asks "What was this pursuit of meaning?" That question applies to the entire gamut of Beckett's works.

One explanation of the intellectual/clinical obsession is that it opposes superstition, and the fear of the unknown: "to disperse the phantoms . . . to explain had always been to exorcise for Watt. The obsession may, of course, produce results contrary to intention, attributing to commonplace phenomena a significance which they do not merit.

He stretched his descriptive and analytical powers to the utmost, to confront a seemingly intractable chaos. But human beings remain foci, 'beacons of light' in this chaos, even if they are utterly minimalised, represented as the shades and zombie-like creatures of *How It Is* and *The Lost Ones*. His characters have been both oppressed and abandoned by the mechanisms of society, which drives human beings into being ciphers, components in social and bureaucratic systems - dispensable statistics!

The relationship between author and character have some characteristics of those between doctor/psychiatrist and patient. But Beckett definitely does not radiate omniscient authorship. For all their debility, his characters do express themselves; each one gives a sense of his own world picture, independent of the paradigms of a cool, sane, rational consultant. The author functions as a channel, a medium for the character. This state of affairs could well relate to Beckett's intermediary function as James Joyce's Secretary.

The closer the observation, the greater the dependence of observer on observed; exterior standards diminish in focus, and become subordinated to the foci of immediate personal involvement. Common ground, and a common language, must be found.

Beckett wanted to probe deeper into the world of human motivations, and found he could best do so when people were detached from normal living (where life could be lived on the surface), and relationships were physically compelled to become obsessive and intense.

In *Murphy*, Beckett makes an almost clinical observation of someone with chronic withdrawal symptoms, and prone to self-harm. He wants to anaesthetise himself mentally. In the background is Neary who, temptingly, claims to be able to induce a cardiac arrest. But what happens is that the protagonist exteriorises himself, and comes to terms with his dilemma by working as a Nurse at the Mary Magdalen Mercyseat. In real life, I highly value the vision of anyone who has the reciprocal focus of patient and doctor/nurse. In a sense, Murphy's radical, positive action frees him from authorial control, and makes him speak

more for himself, making the author more of a medium. This indicates the direction of Beckett's later works.

The progression is to be found in *Watt*. Here there is a shift from externalised observation of people in the patient or inmate situation (an 'omniscient' doctor or nurse, cf. omniscient author), to one reciprocally shared through the elemental need for action and communication - where an authority learns his boundaries. In this work, interpreting the speech and gestures of a person with debilitated faculties becomes a central theme. Watt's speech is excessively fast, his syntax extremely irregular, and his references obscure. The author went so far as to say he was speaking an 'anti-language'. One important observation: "He had no desire for information, but he desired words to be applied to his situation." (p72) He wanted to be externally described, but to keep his core identity insulated. Watt, in his turn, found difficulty in relating sensory impressions to language: he was beset by ". . . incidents on which he could not impose a meaning, so that he could neither think of them, nor speak of them, but only suffer them as they recurred." (p.76)

The time factor can often distort impressions, and their relationship with discourse. "The shorter fourth section shows Watt arriving at the railway station from which, in the novel's skewed chronology, he sets out on a journey to the institution he has already reached in section three." (Wikipedia)

Watt attaches great importance to his impression of the two men who came to tune the piano in Mr Knott's establishment. It was impossible to make incontrovertible sense of the impression, nor of Watt's response to it:

"The meaning attributed to this particular incident was not the initial meaning, which had been lost and then recovered, and now a meaning distinct from the original meaning, and now a meaning evolved, after a delay of varying length, from the initial absence of meaning." (p.76)

The responsibility of the interpreter, the go-between, is greater in Mr Knott's establishment than was the case in the Mary Magdalen Mercyseat, with its clear framework of routines and regulations. There is a Kafka-esque remoteness about Mr Knott. The real nature of his establishment is ambiguous and mysterious. There is not the clarifying factor of an obvious institution. There is a strong autobiographical factor in this shift. *Watt* was written while 'on the run' in German-occupied France during world War II. In wartime conditions, the refugee factor becomes prominent, the relationships between individuals and institutions disrupted and distorted. Another autobiographical reference is the description of a (Kafka-esque again) undefined and oppressive bureaucratic body, through which someone is hauled up before a tribunal. This probably reflects on Beckett's equivocal relationship with his old university.

The unsupported individual's responsibility to deal with a severe communication problem is greater than that of someone in an institution, the ability to do so correspondingly less. Beckett speaks of the 'scant aptitude to receive of him to whom they (Watt's words) were committed.'

The world of *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* is far more diffuse, enigmatic and ambiguous than that of *Watt*, and the tasks of interpretation far more onerous. Whatever happens to any character mentioned in the novel must be reported; every character has a sense of documentary duty, which is no less cogent for the possibility of being based on illusion:

"We thought of ourselves as a vast organisation, but it seems to me that we were, perhaps, alone in all we did."

This raises a crucial question: where is the boundary between anonymity and non-existence? The organisation, whether real or illusory, has clearly delineated functions. Moran describes himself as an agent, and Gaber as a messenger. He clearly delineates their purported roles:

"We agents never took anything in writing. Gaber was not an agent in the sense that I was. Gaber was a messenger. He was therefore entitled to a notebook. A messenger had to be possessed of singular qualities: good messengers were even more rare than good agents. I, who was a good agent, would have made but a sorry messenger. I often regretted it. Gaber was protected in numerous ways. He used a code incomprehensible to all but himself. Each messenger, before being appointed, had to submit his code to the directorate. Gaber understood nothing about the messages he carried."

The 'Directorate' remains in the background, amorphous and undefined. There is a strong resonance here of wartime intelligence, and espionage. It is always interesting to consider how much of the necessities and mentality of total war persisted after the war's conclusion. He then describes the relaying of confidential information:

"In the meantime, the voice continues, while the messenger goes towards the master, and while the master examines the report, and while the messenger comes back with the verdict, the words continue, the wrong words, until the order arrives to stop everything, no, superfluous, everything will continue automatically until the order arrives to stop everything."

Indeed, coded messages are often 'scrambled'. He posits three mysterious quantities here: the master, the voice, and the possible order. There is only minimal mention of a master in the text, one Youdi, who gives clear instructions but remains shrouded in mystery, as

remote as Klamm and Count West-West in Kafka's *The Castle*. But to some extent he could be Joyce, Beckett's real-life master. As Joyce's health deteriorated, and his paranoia grew more acute, he became ever more heavily dependent on Beckett as a lifeline to the world. At another level, the master could exist as pure hypothesis, an ultimate source of authority, a quasi-God which, whether existent or not, must perhaps be assumed for people to make sense of what they are doing. In spite of the lurking presence of the order or imperative, no decisive orders are ever actually made in Beckett's universe.

The voice is omnipresent in Beckett's world. Significantly, one of the first questions posed by psychiatrists to new patients is "Do you hear voices?" The disembodied voice evokes human activity which cannot be related to any known human being. A voice can also be submerged articulation, which may, at some time not anticipated, erupt into lucidity. It also has some of the qualities of gossip overheard, with all its associations of reproach, guilt and value-judgement.

The autobiographical factor again. In *Malone Dies*, the second part of his trilogy, Beckett gives considerable coverage to the ordering of his own works, sometimes through the medium of a character. He overtly discusses problems of composition, of relating narrative to autobiography, and attempts to put his characters in their place (to what degree of success is a matter of infinite debate):

"I have decided to remind myself briefly of my present state before embarking on my stories. I think this is a mistake. It is a weakness, but I shall indulge in it. I shall play with all the more ardour afterwards, and it will be a pendant to the inventory."

"It must be over a week since I last said, I shall soon be quite dead at last, etc. . . . wrong again. That is not what I said, I could swear to it; that is what I wrote. The last phrase seems familiar; suddenly I seem to have written it somewhere before, or spoken it, word for word. Yes, I shall soon be . . . that is what I wrote when I realized I did not know what I had said."

No person alive has a fully retentive memory. At some key points, some words and phrases must seem to disappear. The most professional actor has the need of a 'fallback' prompter in the wings. Alongside *Tristram Shandy*, and Natalie Sarraute's *Golden Fruits*, *Malone Dies* is the most extreme example of writing about a novel being written.

He pursues this analysis in *The Unnamable*:

"Not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never to stop saying, or hardly ever, that is the thing to keep in mind, even in the heat of composition."

He complains of being dehumanised by his role as a writer, of 'having no thickness' and 'existing (only) in words'. He is concerned about working on when he no longer knows how to work. He knows all too well his need to subordinate himself utterly to a larger purpose:

". . . a cause which, while having need of me to be accomplished, was in itself anonymous, and would subsist, haunting the minds of men, when its miserable artisans should be no more."

The author must lose himself striving for his goal, but at the same time remain a sentient individual. He freely acknowledges the insoluble dichotomy with which he must live:

"It's a lot to expect of one creature, that he should first behave as if he were not, then as if he were, before being admitted to that peace where he neither is, nor is not, and where the language dies that permits of such expressions."

In *The Unnamable*, Beckett dehumanises the narrator, attempting to turn him into a mechanical vehicle for philosophical discourse (301):

Whyat puzzles me is the thought of being indebted for this information to persons with whom I have never been in contact. Can it be innate knowledge, like that of good and evil? This seems improbable to me."

"This obligation, and the quasi-impossibility of fulfilling it, engrossed me in a purely mechanical way, excluding notably the free play of the intelligence and sensibility, so that my situation resembled that of an old, broken-down cart or boat horse, unable to receive the least information, either from its instinct or from its observation as to whether it is moving towards the table or away from it, and not greatly caring either way."

The Unnamable is conscious of having a case-history, being under scrutiny and analysis. He has had a limb amputated, and may be deprived of more of his organs. His human, or sub-human state, is phased into that of a worm in a jar: this progression partly stems from his desire for a body and soul, perishable but immune from deterioration or dismemberment. The state of 'worm' is a concept, an expression of desire, a hypothetical state in which the narrator would like to place himself - a negative Nirvana. He confesses that the description of the state of worm is an aberration from truth.

In his treatment of the individual's struggle for self-knowledge, Beckett seems to have been heavily influenced by Kierkegaard, who acknowledges the inevitability of confusion:

"From the others, one properly learns only what the others are - in this way, the world would beguile a man from being himself. The others, in turn, do not know what they themselves are, but only what the others are."

"In order to be himself, a man must first be expertly informed as to what the others are, thereby to learn what he himself is, in order to be that. However, if he walks into this optical illusion, he never reaches the point of being himself."

Beckett senses the hazards of this 'optical illusion', as when speaking of Murphy and Endon:

"The self whom he loved had the aspect of a real alienation, or, to put it perhaps more nicely, it conferred that aspect on the self whom he hated."

There can only be a divided self if one assumes the role of another while looking at oneself. Some distancing and abstraction is a prerequisite of discourse and rationalisation; it can involve the fabrication of separate selves, separate quantities, for the express purpose of endowing them with aspects. This factor is intrinsic to fictional characterisation. The created character, and the author tied to creating him and operating him (like a puppet), are forever alienated from themselves. This is why Beckett opted for the extreme of the Unnamable. The alienation grew so extreme that the character became inaccessible, intractable by an individual name. He became an entity beyond all names, beyond naming. This is a cause for lament:

"I'm tired of being matter, matter panned and pummeled endlessly in vain."

"I am neither, I needn't say, Murphy, nor Watt, nor Mercier - no - no - I can't even bring myself to name them, nor any of the others, whose names I forget, who told me I was they, who I must have tried to be, under duress or through fear, or to avoid acknowledging me, not the lightest connexion."

Beckett extends his awareness of confusions and optical illusions into the realms of linguistics, in his discussion of the function of parts of speech. After repudiating the identity associations of proper nouns, he then questions that of pronouns, showing that they too are utterly malleable to manipulation:

"There is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that; it's a kind of pronoun too - it isn't that either; I'm not that, either."

The word 'that', as used here, combines the functions of pronoun and adjective. Beckett wishes to combine the functions of the two in order to ensure their subservience to the verb. This effect is accentuated by a savour of random wandering in the progression from 'me', through 'it' to 'that'.

Beckett's characters could be described as showing symptoms of infantile regression. To clarify this point, I recall Freud's appraisal of the infantile state:

"The infant is not yet able to discriminate between self and not-self. He lives, as it were, in his sensations. The mother's breast is no more real to him than his

image of it or than his own feeling of discomfort. He has not yet discovered the difference between image and reality.

Hence there is no reason for him to select any one of the sensations as more significant than the others. He may as readily associate the relief he experiences with the crying as with the mother's breast until the experience is repeated often enough for him to learn the truth.

In the sequence, he has done four different things: a) felt a need; b) wished for previously experienced satisfaction; c) created an image of that satisfaction by recalling the past; d) taken action.

There are two sources of gratification: 1) by imagining satisfaction; 2) by working for it."

(Essays on the Theory of Sexuality)

Compare these observations to Beckett's:

"Murphy's mind pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without. This was not an impoverishment, for it excluded nothing that it did not itself contain. Nothing ever had been, was, or ever would be, in the universe outside it but was already present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it."

Similarly, in *Watt*:

"My personal system was so distended at the period of which I speak that the distinction between what was inside it, and what was outside it, was not at all easy to draw."

Beckett seems to find this state quite desirable. The Unnamable, indeed, would wish to impose it on himself:

"I wish to give myself the shape, if not the consistency, of an egg. I'll dry those streaming sockets too, bung them up, there; it's done. I'm a great big talking ball, talking about things that exist, or that do not exist."

Perhaps he considers that obsessive internalisation can give the subject a clearer sense of his basic relationship with the universe, as in *Murphy*:

He had been projected, larval and dark, on the sky of that regrettable hour, as on a screen magnified and clarified into his own meaning."

Such a state can help evaluate one's own experiences:

"It is in the tranquillity of decomposition that I remember the long confused emotion that was my life, and that I judge it, as it is said that God will judge me, with no less import. to decompose is to live, too."

He does, however, admit the impracticality of such desires, and that the absolutely self-contained, or foetal state, is neither attainable nor fully desirable:

"Even if we have the sensation of being always enveloped in, surrounded by, our own soul, still it does not seem a fixed and immovable prison. Rather do we seem to be borne away with it, perpetually struggling to pass beyond it, to break into the world."

He can even admit, in *Molloy*, the possibility that his conceptions stem from dependence on his mother:

"Of myself, all my life, I think I had been going to my mother, with the purpose of establishing our relations on a less precarious footing. And when I was with her, and I often succeeded, I left her without having done anything. And when I was no longer with her, I was again on my way to her, hoping to do better the next time."

Some argue that Beckett tried to make a philosophical system out of withdrawal, but that his grasp of philosophy was too shallow for him to succeed. However, none of his speculations are without substantial precedents in the history of thought; any adverse criticisms of his approach should be leveled equally at his antecedents.

He does, indeed, give coverage to the idea that the sentient person can be a link, or barrier, between the internal and external universes, as in *The Unnamable*:

"Perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, outside and inside, that can be as thin as foil, I am the partition."

"I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, the Tympanum; on the one hand, the mind, on the other, the world."

"Outside and inside, and me in the middle."

So he believes in the intermediate, rather than the interior universe. He is fully aware that thought and consciousness can obstruct any aims towards real knowledge of oneself and essential objects, as in *Molloy*:

"My thoughts, did they not form a (similar) sort of hiding-hole, in the depths of which I felt I could bury myself and remain invisible, even when I was looking at what went on outside? When I saw any external object, my consciousness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, enclosing it in a slender

corporeal outline which prevented me from ever coming in contact directly with it."

This speculation is partly an exploration of linguistics, and Beckett's approach here seems to be in accord with M Bréal's *Essai du Sémantique*:

"Pronouns are the most mobile elements in language; they are never definitely attached to a single person, but are forever on the go; there are as many 'Me's' as there are individuals who speak."

One might have thought that *The Unnamable* represented an 'ultimate', from which there could be no further progression. However, the minimalisation is pursued, and accentuated in *Nouvelles* and *Textes Pour Rien*.

Beckett's preoccupation here came to full fruition with *Comment C'est (How It Is)*, which abandons conventional grammar and syntax, minimises finite verbs, and gives pronouns full rein. The grammatical use of personal pronouns resembles that of algebraic or logical symbols. But because they are more basic to discourse than are any of those mathematical/logical terms, they are generally taken for granted, considered as capable of standing on their own - without explanatory signs to support them. The narrator of *Comment C'est* indulges in mathematical speculations about the number of 'Me's' who speak, who are 'himself' insofar as they use that word. But he cannot arrive at a single positive integer. He goes on using personal pronouns for the same reason that he continues to speak at all.

Prior to this, the Unnamable is shown as being equipped with a stock of personal pronouns, having had to learn them by heart from his undefined oppressors ('them'). He has no clear idea of what 'they' actually refer to:

"They say 'they' speaking of 'them' to make me think it is I who am speaking. Or rather, there is a silence, from the moment a messenger departs until he returns with his orders, namely continue."

In the world of *Comment C'est* the authority of the power structure has evaporated. The bereft, marooned narrator can only struggle to retain a minimal vocabulary and survive: *Robinson Crusoe/Pincher Martin ad absurdum*.

Going back to *The Unnamable*, the very expression, 'I' could have been imposed on 'him' by 'them', as a deception. Earlier, the 'hero' had decided "I shall not say 'I' again; it's too farcical." But he uses the term even as he rejects its use. Even the Unnamable cannot escape from the use of general names. The 'I' continues to appear in the text. Either the Unnamable has blissfully forgotten something, or the pronoun has been attached to another individual.

"I seem to speak; that's because he says 'I' as if he were 'I', which can't be found; but neither can he; he can only talk, if that much; perhaps it's not he; perhaps it's a multitude; one after the other; what confusion!"

He is an 'I' insofar as he is talking about himself. He does, however, specifically acknowledge that the use of personal pronouns is arbitrary:

"In the meantime, there is no sense in bickering about pronouns, and the other parts of the blather; the subject doesn't matter, there is none. I am being in the singular, they are in the plural, to avoid confusion. Confusion is better avoided, pending the great confusion."

As with pronouns, so with common nouns. The ramblings of the *Comment C'est* narrator are very much in keeping with the infantile lack of categorisation as described above by Freud:

"past moments old dreams back again or pass or things always and memories I say them as I hear them murmur them in the mud . . ."

"I turn to the hand that is free draw it to my face it's a resource when all fails dreams sleep food for thought something wrong there . . ."

Beckett's characters do not really grow up in the course of the novels. They seem to remain, in the Freudian sense, at the 'anal' stage of their development, retaining many infantile fixations. Their relations with each other are predominantly static. No one character is moulded or transformed by another. Murphy and Endon, Moran and his son, Lambert and his wife. apart from the obvious example of Pozzo and Lucky represent the raw duality of human relationships. An eruption such as Lucky's 'think' represented an expressive outburst of something which has been latent, always forming the foundation of the relationship.

It is beyond any dispute that Beckett puts truth and exploration before aesthetics. In *Molloy*, he could say "It is not at this late stage of my relation that I intend to give way to literature." (p.152). He unflinchingly challenges the validity of the very medium in which he is functioning.

David Russell

March 31

from 2020 Virus journal

Coronavirus live news: US deaths could reach 240,000 as UN says world faces worst crisis since WW2



We are facing the biggest public health challenge of our lives. It is already testing our communities and will test us as individual doctors. Dr Anne Tonkin, the chair of the Medical Board of Australia.

It's early.

A red-hot bar is stamped on the horizon, broken blue cloud is tufting, a large bream triple-jumps the lagoon momentarily magnifying light, life, urgency. It's so dark the sea looks dusty, focused on the coal-red horizon I'm surprised by the sea flushing my legs, the warmth of our ancestral amniotic fluid so inviting.

Three statues stand on the river bend fishermen
keeping their social distance.



A raptor flies to the lookout tree, on the next bend
so I head to get a closer look, crossing rivulets dribbling
out of the forest, loosening pleats of available light,
make out a touch of mocca, another Brahminy lands
on the masthead, then with a mew the kites are off,
wings almost colliding, one circles past a swallow
and balancing on the breeze glides straight down
lands on the sand on the far bank lost to sight.

The waves bluster then cruise in gently, in patterns
of motion, lines crossing, meeting, pulling apart
mesmerizing. I remember astronomy, look up –
the stars have gone, the cosmos has simply slipped away.

So much life is invisible and silent, not a matter

of concealment but of simplicity. Microcosm and macrocosm are in a continual struggle. Epidemiologists scribble figures on the back of envelopes the way poets do, statistics has become the language of eternity as well as handling life expectancy.

I haven't lost my job or had difficulty paying the rent, no-one I know has died from the virus – yet, so this precious time before the sun appears should be time enough to see me through another day of lockdown hammered home in broad daylight.

and at a second view a shining disc materialises.



Back through the forest, a loud glimpse of a Swamp Wallaby crashing across a small creek – the dark energy of aliveness. Half way home, the sun breaks cover, a

resurrection catches the first rays glancing off the top of the Bloodwoods and they look glamorous again.



Will poetry be resistant to new strains of cultural engagement?

~

I am thinking that April will be a flaneur's idiosyncratic stroll through the day – what one comes upon – hears, reads, sees or thinks about. Walter Benjamin thought that a work using only quoted material was a fair means of investigation (hence his Arcades Project).

After breakfast I look up German medieval carvings of the Crucifixion. I woke with a vision of my father three years ago, a tortured body, he was dying but desperately avoiding death. His whole torso grimaced as he struggled for air, a preview of COVID-19. I thought I recalled a similar body, much older than 94 years, from a German master I had seen before. Something in limewood and without the long curved talons.



This is the closest image I could find (c1430, Cologne, walnut), but it's not the one. This crucifixion lives in Cleveland. At the time Christ's suffering was a popular theme for meditation and prayer. Suffering is now a crust.

~

In July 1971, the poet Bernadette Mayer on a roll of 35 mm film every day and writing documented her life every day through a stream of consciousness, ideas, observations, feelings, etc. From these materials she created *Memory*, her 'emotional science project' that became an installation piece (1972) and she later revised for a book (1975).

'We take acid before a dinner & then lose track . . .' Bernadette Mayer, *Memory*, July 1971.

That month I was taking a trip too. Listening to Pink Floyd's *Echoes*, in Simon's parent's house, Claygate, (stockbroker belt). The music formed an original atmosphere to breathe in from the opening submarine note. Gilmour's guitar stabbed shards of ice through my body. No pain, an exquisite but intense sense of

feeling the music, embodied in some Arctic planet on the edge of the solar system.
The terrible tale of Syd, a victim of acid was told later.

~

There is plenty of death to be announced in the weeks and months ahead. Should
we always be ready?

*A dishwasher from Nancy, Vital Frérotte,
who had just come back from Lourdes cured forever
of tuberculosis, died Sunday by mistake.*

[Thank God for Lourdes. My father proposed there]

*In the vicinity of Noisy-sur-École,
M. Louis Delillieu, 70, dropped dead of sunstroke.
Quickly his dog Fido ate his head.*

Félix Fénéon, 'Novels in Three Lines'

Fénéon collected odd items from Le Matin in 1906 and reordered them into 3 lines
(haiku! Reminding me of Reznkoff's Testimony)

*The storm came up suddenly
and lightning struck a telegraph pole, splitting it
and sending electricity along the wires.
A quarter of a mile away
a doctor was sitting in his house
quietly reading a book under his telephone -
and was found in his chair
dead, his hair on fire
and red lines across his neck, chest and side.*

Charles Reznikoff's documentary poem, 'Testimony: The United States', consists of
sparse poems, faithful to texts of law reports published between 1885 and 1915.
He worked for a publisher of law books and commented: 'Once in a while I could
see in the facts of a case details of the time and place, and it seemed to me that out
of such material the century and a half during which the U.S. has been a nation

could be written up, not from the standpoint of an individual, as in diaries, nor merely from the angle of the unusual, as in newspapers, but from every standpoint—as many standpoints as were provided by the witnesses themselves.’

I also have in mind of a book I treasure, Michael Lesy’s Wisconsin Death Trip.

James Carr, residing in the town of Erin, Vernon County, was discovered dead in his log house recently, having died of starvation.

Mrs. Friedel had a picture taken of her little baby in its coffin. Then when a fellow came up the road who did enlargements, she had just the baby’s face blown up to a two foot picture. But, since the baby’s eyes were closed, she had an artist paint them open so she could hang it in the parlor.

The problem, is my project to use local news might sputter to a halt at the start given this news item.

11.08am News Corp suspends 60 local newspapers. Not an April Fools joke I’m sure.

April 1. Late afternoon, eating on the top deck. King Parrots are piping whistles from somewhere close, and become radically visible when they fly straight into the Jagun, voice carring. Coming out of the forest two squads of Little Lorikeets fly above our heads, followed by Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, their underwings displaying the rarest of reds, and finally a few Rainbow Lorikeets. I spot three raptors way high beside half a moon, hard to make out even through the glasses. They sail round the updraft, two come together then wheel apart, a hint of white breast suggests Brahminy Kites. This is core magic, colour and mystery.

I find Meddle and go straight to Echoes, play it loud lying on the floor, which is how we listened to music at school and later at university. The sound is brilliant, I can hear things I never heard back then, like dogs. I don’t remember dogs, and don’t recall enjoying it any less. So much music lost and so much more found.

John Bennett

