

Poetry Express Newsletter #54

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

(NB: The content in Poetry Express is that of contributors and does not necessarily reflect the views or position of the editors or Survivors' Poetry. Copyright remains with contributors.)



'Evolution' (Still Life) Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2016



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

Registered Office: c/o Central & North West London NHS Foundation Trust, 1 St Mary's Terrace, W2 1SU

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

Editorial

The refurbishment of the Poetry Café is incredibly protracted; all of us eagerly await its reopening. This could possibly happen in May. 2017 got off to a flying start at Tottenham Chances on January 26th. **Razz** seems to have made a terrific recovery, and was on fine form. Some great eloquence in terms of Holocaust Memorial from **Jessica Lawrence**, Shamanism from **Andrew**, biting lyrical eloquence from **Kath Tait**, and superbly animated Karaoke from **Unique Technique**.

The theme of the March 23rd session was a memorial to the sad passing of **Cam Ringel**, of **Voodoo Citi/Raw Poetry**. Razz kicked off the proceedings with his usual aplomb. This well-attended event made a blend of grief with the exuberance to which Cam/Citi was always dedicated. There were so many highlights: **Jessica Lawrence** gave the audience a sensitive dedication, and some background to the decease. **Tara Fleur**'s grief echoed-paralleled what she felt on the passing of **Ingrid Andrew**. She read from her book written jointly with the late Ingrid (this is shortly to be published). Some highly original thought from **Habiba. Jasmine Taylor** read some highly provocative verses from her recent publication, *Silk*. **Dave Skull** made some interesting parallels between Citi and Marc Bolan, of whom he had always been a devoted fan. Other contributors included **Luciana Panbocch**, **Andy Mirror**, **Keith Bray**, **Rosie Lacey** and **Alcuin Edwards**. Some mime, interspersed with minimal dialogue from **Ima**, **Alexandra** and **Andy**.

Dave Russell

Citi Tribute Night- Tottenham Chances- 23/03/17

The tribute night for Citi (Cam Ringel) was a stout celebration for a woman who not only shone creativity like a star, but encouraged so many survivors to light their own stars and follow them into a world of poetry, song, friendship and mutual appreciation.

The tribute night was, as expected, full of emotions from grief to utter admiration of Citi's incredible artistic portfolio, covering many years. She was a singer, composer, a poet, a visual artist and an incredible human being. Behind her eyes there was such depth it was always most engaging and deeply mysterious.

The intensity of performances at this tribute night reflected the sense of Citi's epic being. Regular Survivor's joined hands and hearts with friends of Citi who had travelled far and wide to participate in this very special evening.

Those that knew Citi intimately, sang songs and rose glorious music from guitar strings, flutes and violins (**Luciana Panbocch**, **Keith Bray**, **Razz Poet**, **Dave Russell** and many more). Other's spoke poetic words, folding rhymes into memories of Citi (**Jessica Lawrence**, **Alcuin Edwards**, **Dave Skull** and again many

more) beautifully. Citi's friends, some of whom tendered her during her illness, spoke of her unexpected and difficult journey from this world with utter eloquence, compassion and eternal love.

Citi was not just ethereally present at the event via the projected images of her that towered monumentally over every performer, but her energy, her spirit, shone bright with light and heavenly physicality across the whole space during the evening.

I selfishly took a little of Citi's energy home with me after the event, wrapping it gently in my memory. Which begs the existential question . . . Do any of us ever really die?

Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2017

'I had a dream, and in that dream' (Part I)



Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2016

To Those Who Should Be Concerned – A Proposal

Reversion of Intestate Properties

As Director of a Mental Health and Poetry Charity funded by the Arts Council (Survivors' Poetry), I repeatedly alerted the DCMS to the anomaly that intestate properties revert to the Crown through the Duchies, thence to the treasury to be sold off. *It's an inconstant revenue stream that can't be budgeted for or justified.*

The monies attached thereof were illegally stored by banks. It seems DCMS acted and Gordon Brown in 2009-10, then David Cameron in 2010 acted to wrench these monies off, with around £4 million ending in the Big Society Bank, ultimately to be re-absorbed by the Treasury.

My solution is this: Homes for Heroes

Intestate properties with their attendant monies can be dedicated to restoration and are ethically resourced and converted to residential or other social use. Death is no respecter of postcodes and the very spread of these houses will allow a greater opportunity in social integration. Some properties may lend themselves to other uses under the same umbrella, such as social, strategic, or provisioning.

The effect of this patchwork of provisioned homes is rather like a Chelsea Pensioners' series of housing for younger ex-service personnel.

American Precedent

As this was being framed, news came from the end of September 2015, of a Marine's Home in the US: *The Chesty Puller Home*, a not-for-profit purchase of a Marine general's home for retired Marines. It seems it's in the air.

Resourcing of Support and Recovery Units

Currently all users of the NHS with Mental Distress is tagged with a certain budget on their heads. Doctors are tasked with referring as few as possible. The Support and Recovery Units are only justified by as many of these users they can attract. The system as it stands is set up to fail both. As users are anonymised, I can't provide percentages of ex-service personnel users.

Where I work in Westminster, the Support and Recovery unit at 1 St Mary's Terrace W2 1SU is under constant threat of closure, the axe moving forward month on month, causing stress and uncertainty to healthcare workers and users. *This is Westminster, whose borough pays 40% of the*

UK's Stamp Duty as the evening Standard revealed, some £3.4Bn.

My Suggestion

Whilst not being in a position to appeal to government policy on mental health (if only!), I would urge targeted provision for Support and Recovery units as places where ex-military units can be resourced (at least) as already dedicated units that can be tailored for specialised need.

Military Charities

If there's an overarching initiative, many of the 3,000 charities supporting ex-service personnel would be able to join the conversation and find either local or nationally strategic ways forward, particularly in finding resources and homes for ex-service personnel. I simply propose this as a conversation with a fresh unifying theme as outlined above. Details would follow such conversations and charitable engagement.

One Bold Proposal

The 2% of our current Budget should make a 1% provision – around **£450 Million** of a £45 Billion military budget, for helping ex-service personnel who've often left after traumatic battle conditions find their feet in civilian life. In addition to the above, which might be partly financed by this, there could be many other uses, such as helping families of military personnel find social housing, or to even borrow loans at 0% (or at least no higher than inflation) to resource their integration into civilian life. ***We owe them this.*** The MOD does not have a fine record on caring for those who have left its employ.

There's more evidence based material but there let it rest for the moment. I'm finalising and doubtless will develop it. If anyone has any more suggestions, this is now a great place to debate in, before Crisis at Christmas. See you after that.

Simon Jenner – Survivors' Poetry After Twenty-Five Years

I

In 2010 the only poet who I know of who's a (retired) psychiatrist declared to me there was no earthly use for Survivors' Poetry, which I've directed since 2003. It was somewhat dismaying. He said poetry and Mental Health have nothing to do with each other. This sounds like not so much special pleading as a fear of professional barriers, that vocation and avocation might bleed into each other. Though this most distinguished poet is also a psychiatrist, I think he's wrong. Several of his distinguished colleagues, too, are surprised at such summary execution of a dialogue. Psychiatry itself has come a long way in the last thirty years.

I suspect some of his judgement stems from that dictum of the Two Ronnies. I talk of course of the Divided R D Laing (Patrick Marmion's two titles for his 2015 play at the Arcola). Laing's muddled assertion that schizophrenia could be creative was, as Martin Seymour-Smith (friend of both this poet and myself) asserted, 'a cruel lie'.

However, Seymour-Smith also suggested, from what he had personally witnessed, that those near the edge of what used to be termed psychosis show uncanny insights and profound illuminations, denied to many walking in ordinary daylight 'sanity'. He cited many poets whose deadly wisdom was born of their mental distress, like the great Australian poet Francis Webb (1925-73), mostly confined to mental institutions, diagnosed as 'schizophrenic'. Paradoxically Seymour-Smith added that Australian poetry 'would begin to look pretty sick without Webb.'

II

It's a paradoxical truth not commented on that the roll-call of poets we commonly call mad lived in an Age of Reason. Thus we think of the mentally distressed poet William Collins (1721-59), Christopher Smart (1722-71) and the lesser-known Stephen Duck (1705-54) deracinated from his soil and like a later agricultural labourer-turned-poet, patronised as a versifying pet-lamb. William Cowper (1731-1800), the supremely sane 'mad' William Blake (1757-1827) and finally that other agriculturally-tethered poet John Clare (1793-1864) concentrate most of the canonic poets we call 'mad'. What these poets experienced in common was a dissociation of their sensibility (to narrow T. S. Eliot's dictum) from their age and/or locale. Romanticism proper yielded far fewer eminent names. Addiction replaces these, a different experiential dislocation. The twentieth century begins to pick up with for instance the transcendent Dino Campana (1885-1932) and numerous others like another deracinated poet/composer Ivor Gurney (1890-1937).

Expression is to an extent bound up with cultural permission. You have to be a Blake to smash through it and create your own order (and Blake's order of angels was famously recreated several times, their wings never glued with glutinous theocracy). If you want to look at your cultural or indeed national health, look to the number of important talents signalling distress. Like Kierkegaard's stormy petrels, they can smell what's in the wind before a politician, leader writer – or, perhaps, certain psychiatrists.

We currently live in a literal culture; increasingly people in it unsurprisingly do literal not lateral things. Any memory of a more lateral way of thinking, even the concept of political spectrums and opinions to the left of the centre-right, begins to fade. The right-thinking nostrums of work, debt-slavery from university and vocational training onwards, mortgages, and perpetual zero-hour insecurity are designed to shrink aspirations to a Gradgrind view.

One corollary of such literalness is that there's been an upsurge in fundamentalist or intolerant feeling and, dare one say it, violent application thereof. It's not just that governments (current or previous) wish people to think literally – and faith schools aren't exactly the most broadening of

experiences, speaking as someone who survived a couple. They fear the lateral solutions. This has however also resulted in spectacular reaction, another very different exploding of the smug consensus perpetuating this: a polarised society where many have revolted from slotted serfdom. The drugging of imagination begets monsters. Or as Anders Lustgarten put it: If you won't let us dream, we won't let you sleep.

III

The antimonies of inspiration and disturbance, a shivering out of cultural inhibitors, and the requirements of articulation, are common to all writers. There's no caché in experiencing distress to create more incisive masterworks. Often the effects of trauma and mental distress – the two are interlinked and include all kinds of abuse, torture, drug and alcohol dependency – weaken the levers of articulation, vitiate creativity, hollow out sensibilities and narrow sympathies to any distress occasioning a bright and risen angel of vision. Yet often there's a gain in profundity, an opening to the experience of others that counteracts that funnelling to personal suffering, and one curious corollary: formalism.

There are many poets writing in the past half-century whose mental distress seems to have called forth a compensating formal mastery. From Robert Lowell, Paul Célan and Sylvia Plath to Geoffrey Hill, Wendy Cope, Selima Hill, Jeremy Reed, John O'Donoghue and Sarah Wardle for instance, there's a virtuosic concentration on form in many registers.

There are many others however whose verse spirals in a vatic energy that's uncategorisable, often with anaphoric brio like Christopher Smart or indeed at his finest Harry Fainlight (1935-82) and Amos Weisz (1962-2008). Some late modernists emulate this though sometimes without the rhythmic authority of their exemplars.

Recalling the deracination that did for Duck and Clare, it's worth recalling just how uprooting people from their familiar ground can loosen them from the earth. There's no doubt that the incidence of mental distress amongst immigrants, Irish and Jewish communities, and now Afro-Caribbean, stems in part from a socio-cultural dislocation, their encountering an initial resistance to immigration on the part of some from the host nation, from Blackshirts to Brexit. An alienation springs amongst those second-generation, often male, children growing in an environment alien to their parents.

In 2004 some in the psychiatric community were so immune to socially-explanatory models that they declared that the high incidence of schizophrenia amongst Afro-Caribbean heritage males was due to the strongly adventurous Windrush genes in both parents resulting in an overload of 'adventurous' genes! It was still discussed though finally discarded in 2008 (*British Journal of General Practice*: 'Schizophrenia in black Caribbeans living in the UK: an exploration of underlying causes of the high incidence rate' [Br J Gen Pract](#). 2008 Jun 1; 58(551): 429–434.). Joe

Penhall's 2000 *Blue/Orange* is a blistering play on such assumptions that hasn't dated, memorably revived at the Young Vic in 2016.

To follow one path of mental distress and further, to predicate its sad carbon footprint in poetry would be reductive. I've offered the foregoing as a corrective to the cultural assumptions that come as riders to illnesses we can't fathom. I've not for instance touched on more obviously induced mental distress, such as trauma. Paul C elan's sufferings in the Holocaust are a case in point. Nor does it embrace that fundamental right to be unhappy that Helmholtz memorably claims for himself, as a poet, in Huxley's *Brave New World*.

IV

There's no cuteness in distress. Not only does it undermine creativity, it curtails the fullness of our humanity if not its depth, our experience of the world and fatally weakens body and sensibility. So where does that leave us considering the psychiatrist who pronounces a fiat on the marriage of heaven and hell? Probably that to deny such links and such conversations is to deny humanity, as well as both his crafts. And that poets and writers generally turn red or blue, dipped with the acidity of an age. If you start registering a significant crop of distinguished writers with mental distress – it happened in the Eighteenth Century and it's happening now – they'll tell you what you don't want to know. Not directly, but of course slant, so slant it might slice like a wind through a graveyard horizontally. It means there's trouble ahead.

Simon Jenner

Survivors' Poetry (SP) is a national charity established in 1991 to promote the writings of survivors of mental distress and support their recovery. A Survivor may have a current or past experience of psychiatric hospitals, Electroconvulsive Therapy, tranquillisers, or other medication, a user of counselling services, a survivor of sexual abuse, child abuse and any other person who has empathy with survivor experiences. We work with the homeless and those in the prison system.

We've found the creative discipline, which the writing and performance of poetry demands, helps survivors to recover a sense of self-worth; to emerge from often desperate, fragmentary lives. Survivors have a powerful artistic contribution to offer society. SP uniquely offers consultation, support, mentoring; a platform back to the wider community via the intensive expression of poetry – for many the most appropriate channel of communication.

The Survivor Community is our prime target and beneficiary. However we know that many health care professionals, poets, and those who empathize with what we do also access our website. Professionals call us regarding someone in their care. We estimate 2,100 benefit from our work per quarter. Callers make up the 100 per quarter. (*This article was first published in 'Agenda'*)

Home Front (Part II)

Jehanne Dubrow explores with total depth and passion her feelings for a true lover braving the hazards of war, who may or may not return to her. There are constant flashbacks to the time they were together. Feelings are inevitably mixed: in *Assateague Island, March* she can say ‘Goddam our domesticity’, but can still long for it. Her literary background seems to accentuate her vision of an absent partner, as in *O’ Dark Hundred*: “This is the hour that writers eulogise” But then she states that “My words are just reflections” – reality prevails over literary/historicist abstraction. There is a feeling of awe at the prospect of her love being (metaphorically) swallowed up by a cruiser. Seeing the ship set off spirits Jehanne back to childhood games on a beach. There follows, in Newport, a touching picture of a puppy getting soaked in brine. *Love in the Time of Coalition* brilliantly fuses the themes of love and war. Such is the intensity of the couple’s passion, that the thought of their interaction actually feels like the motions of a major conflict. Hyperbole becomes concrete through the sheer power of feeling; she is truly desperate for their reunion. *Sea Change* raises the issue of her partner’s possible drowning; in her mind, and through her love, he turns into an exotic marine organism. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* articulates a wistful longing to bring back a lover by a ‘magic word’ uttered over the phone. *Nonessential Equipment* – a plea for her man to ‘travel light’. *Swim Test* gives a touch of reality, acknowledging one flaw in her partner: he seems unable to swim. *A Short Study of Catastrophe* puts war, heroism, literature and aesthetics into confrontation: “How did the Greeks//learn beauty from that sudden turn we call/catastrophe?” *Against War Movies* – justifiable outrage at the glamourisation of actions which could take her husband’s life. *Before the Deployment* shows the physical sensations of her man’s departure; he leaves invisibly, but she feels he might be hesitating; she aches to keep him close. **Reading Stephen Crane’s ‘War Is Kind’ to My Husband** depicts a tearful parting. The couple are photographed by a soldier who has been badly disfigured; there is then a backdrop of the horror and splendour of military hardware.

Part Two: *The Rooted Bed* – Jehanne reflects upon another couple who made a bower from a living olive tree; she wonders whether the wife ever feels like chopping down the tree, and whether or not the couple will be truly united on her husband’s return. In *Argos*, she sees herself awaiting her lover’s return as akin to the faithful dog, who sustained his protracted vigil for Odysseus. *Ithaca* is a touching portrayal of a wife’s heroic struggle to sustain fidelity. Her many ‘admirers’ seem to be an embarrassment. *Penelope, Stateside* – a self-recommendation to replay her peak passionate encounters with her man, and support her ‘reconstruction’ with the appropriate lingerie and cosmetics. I love the analogy between clothing and a lover’s caresses/embraces: “. . . the denim pressing on each thigh//so that there’s no sensation but/blue fabric on a second skin,/no lover’s touch more intimate/than the zipper pressing in.” However, the poem ends on a sobering note; on his actual return, her husband might be exhausted, and only want to talk about his war activities. *Penelope on a Diet* concerns the struggle to slim, whilst *Penelope considers a new ‘Do* considers the effect of a haircut; food for reflection: “you’ll wonder why the past/cannot be sliced so easily

away". *At the Mall with Telemachus* – some bathos on a lover's return. *After Reading Tennyson* – she has retained her health and strength; he may be worn out on his return. *Odysseus, Sleeping* – she compares her husband's possible fate (he may already be dead) to that of Odysseus. *In Penelope's Bedroom* suggests and unfulfilled yearning for her lover's return, and a rapturous consummation: "Whole regions that he used to kiss/are now abandoned land." What *Odysseus Remembered* is a charming replay of the couple washing each other. *Instructions for Other Penelopes* shows Jehanne's bonding with other women, giving them morale-boosting advice "pretend you are widow done with mourning", recite Sapphic verse, do a glamorous striptease in front of a mirror.

Part Three: This part goes in greater depth into the role of the erotic in dealing with her situation. In *Oenophilia*, sensuality is related to cookery: ". . . its sly divestment of alcohol, slowly/from the heat, like a girl unbuttoning her blouse . . . I plan a week of meals that are a lesson in/desiring, like *Tristan and Isolde* . . ." In *On the Erotics of Employment*, she muses on making herself a glamorous demi-goddess, akin to a harlot and Bathsheba, in reverie of his return. Exotic glamour can be combined with fidelity. Then on to more sombre mood. *Situational Awareness* laments being on perpetual tenterhooks waiting for crucial telephone calls. *Tendenitis* – in terms of routine household tasks, she feels physically debilitated by her partner's absence. In *Stateside*, she is agog for her partner's return. *VJ Day in Times Square* seems to describe estrangement – present-day coldness contrasted with warm affection captured in an old photograph. In *Surface Warfare*, marital tensions and armed conflict are treated as metaphors for each other. *Winter Walk* – more reflection on marital tensions, with the analogy of a domestic pet on a leash. *Moving* certainly involves moving house, also possibly a separation. *Navy Housing* – married quarters. *Bowl, in the Shape of a Bristol Boat* – her husband has carved a bowl for her as a talisman, a true token of his esteem: "He built the shell for her, as if to show/she was still water, and then the waterfall." *Intersection*, confrontation with a stag, seems initially out of place in this sequence. But perhaps the stag is a metaphor for a partner; although he is a living creature, he feels hard and metallic. *Eastern Shore* recalls the first, happy days of their relationship; she hated seeing him get dressed in the morning after. *Shabbat Prayer, on the Occasion of War*, suggests a couple with a 'bird's eye view' of a real conflict.

Elyse Fenton: Gratitude shows the plight of a chronically mutilated soldier. *The Beginning* – she is reading her lover's letter from the front, whilst on a train (perhaps imagining his return by train). Love in Wartime (I) cries out for true, vital, organic communication: "I have to believe in more than *signifiers* –/that the world cannot be dismantled/by the word alone. That language is not an uncoupling dance/or the sparkless grinding/of meaning's worn flint, a caravan of phosphorus /tails burning up the breathable air" *Word from the Front* records an immediate gut reaction to a newsflash – "Yes, we did a corkscrew landing – . . . I don't yet register the casual solemnity/of newscaster banter." There is a polarity here, of extreme tension and bland verbalisation: "He wrests the brief quaver/from his voice like a pilot/pulling hard out of an endless/plummet" In *Notes on*

Atrocity (Baghdad Aid Station), Elyse senses the horrendous lot of the wounded; the bland tone of her partner's message makes her feel she is eavesdropping: "When your voice//drifts above the shifted boxes, overheard,/It's washed in tenderness I know//I'm not supposed to hear". In *After the Blast*, Elyse has received a brief newsflash from her partner about a casualty, in which he says "I didn't see the body/hung on concertina wire." Those last two words speak volumes to her about the pangs of the deceased: "the accordion's deep inner coils, bellows,//lungful of air contracting like a body caught/in the agony of climax." *Aubade, Iraq* projects Elyse into the war zone; she identifies with the war horrors which could engulf and overwhelm him, in a way akin to her own overwhelming love. She is finally reassured by the sound of his voice. There is an exceptionally striking image in ". . . drown you in the Tigris' muck and swill, touch you/aflame on its kerosene spine." (does this refer to petroleum deposits near the Tigris basin?).

The Riots in Bangalore – a highly ambitious poem which adds an extra dimension to a major conflict. During the wartime period, a famous 'Bollywood' star died, and the decease engendered massive riots, gruesomely linking some of the ravages of war to the world of escapist entertainment – like a reverberation. In her desperate fears for her partner, Elyse feels empathy with the rioters – she could go and impulsively smash something. Her man could have perished, as did the screen icon. She still awaits news from him, after his departure nine months ago. On reflection, she sees her own mirror image in the sun: "the sun//impulsively flashes, bare flesh beneath a shredded veil."

The First Canto recalls the opening of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. She feels attuned to her partner, in the thick of an action in blazing heat. Partly for distraction and relief, partly to honour his heroism, she puts him in the perspective of great literature. Like Dante, he has bravely adopted to descend to darkness and danger, rather than opting for 'sunny mantle of light'. *The War Bride Waits* – Elyse compares her situation to the dénouement of a Western movie; the poem cogently criticizes the contrived calm of the 'fade-out' in such movies, giving the illusion of a world of peace: "This is the moment the dead are mercifully allowed to stay dead". If only real life could be like that.

Planting, Hayhurst Farm – Elyse tends her garden as her man fills body bags. She felt some sadness about some of the seedlings not germinating, but comforted herself by the thought of having worked into a viable routine. She wished her partner can gain some consolation, some tempering of revulsion, through the sheer repetition of the body-bag routine. *Love in Wartime (II)* paints a tableau of conflict, with a backdrop of nature and religion; very striking phrase with 'your gloved soldier's hand feeding out/bloodied reams of gauze'. *Public Mourning (Flag Installation)* – flags, usually associated with ebullient optimism, look sordid and messy, made so by the mass of corpses they cover. *Friendly Fire* makes a startling comparison between love and war: the barrage of friendly fire is like a protective lover – 'throwing wide her arms/to shield you'. *Metal Sandwich* – a dream of breaking one's teeth on a piece of metal embedded in a doughnut: pain and injury struck home. But then "I woke to a morning full of consequence and holes." Her dream was a minute microcosm of her partner's dreadful conflict. She pursues this theme further in *Ballistic* – her

partner's life is delicately 'in the balance'. What will tomorrow bring? A disturbing image in 'morning's paralysis of sun'. The reality 'could be much worse'. There is a concluding image of 'the real bullet fished finally/from the unconscious sergeant's skull//and strung around his waiting lover's neck'. Does the sergeant revive, or does his lover have a memento of the deceased?

For L., in Baghdad – near home, the scavenging crows seem to have lost the power to fly. She compares them surreally to the body-bags her partner is handling; by proxy, she begs him to 'play safe'. *Refusing Beatrice* – and in-depth comparison of literary role-model and real life. Dante had steadfast guides, and 'a book ending in certainty'. She could never parallel the roles of his female mentors. Nothing is certain; her lover is vulnerable to any sniper's bullet. Unlike a literary chronicler "I won't be there to see the wreckage . . ." *Love in Wartime (III)* – a 'detached' teacher wants the lines of conflict to be clearly defined and demarcated, the conflicts to be 'objectively' reported. This cannot be in the thick of the action; identification with total involvement is thrust on the reader with the jarring image of 'beautiful amputee'. *Charon* – the dark river of the underworld is almost a metaphor for total war, the 'hundred violent mouths' for predatory soldiers. *For Radha, Two Days Old* feels as if it could be a lament for infant mortality. The backdrop is a bleak winterscape in an agricultural area, perhaps somewhere where the land has been burned – an implicit comparison to a war-torn landscape, and implicit projection into the mind and situation of a woman in the Middle East. *Aftermath* – a supplement to 'body bag' activity, clearing away and incinerating bloodstained, soiled uniforms. *In Late February (Persephone)* she tends the soil in anticipation of the spring thaw. The poem ends with an oblique allusion to the distant war: "I make myself a bulb in a worm-hole, mouth-piece/for the spade-mouthed dead." *In What We Hold, We Hold at Bay*, while doing her agricultural and horticultural chores, she projects to her partner handling his body-bags. *Clamor* discusses the polarities of sound and silence, something which must be felt acutely in conditions of war – with heavy barrages and pregnant pauses between them. Similarly near home, when using a hammer to stake fences: one can also be deafened into an illusion of silence: "The deafening metal of my hammer strikes/wood, a tuning fork tuning my ears to a register/I'm too deaf to understand." She is on constant vigil for news of her partner, with only the slenderest margin of hope in '. . . a war that can't be finished or won.' Another projection to massed military casualties: '. . . a white twist of rag/pinned in the bloody centre of a civilian's chest."

II – This section is a series of proses, a bit like diary entries. They concentrate on the soldier's return home, and its consequences. *Deployment Ends* – real feelings in relation to this are necessarily confused and fraught – on both sides: "He thought he would have to turn away". After the War – she had to think of 'names of blessings' to restore their relationship to equilibrium. *By Omission* – she is the only one in the group of people who has not returned from the war. There is an enigma about her husband forgetting to bring his gun home with him. They cannot be open with each other: ". . . when he said nothing she knew every silence was a lie he couldn't tell." Does that vindicate his underlying honesty? *Commerce* – some despair: "There wasn't enough forgiveness to go round". She struggles for words with which to express herself, and finds homophones such as

'wound' – past participle of the very 'wind' and wound in the sense of injury; she wound up an electric cable and a wound opened up when he appeared in his uniform – 'Each meeting haunted by the next'. *Complicity* offers some reflections on the confidences of other women who have had greater involvement in the war than she has: "Do they want to tell each other everything they know about the war? Some complicities she's never felt. In the other country, women gum seeds in their mouths, let the empty shells speak for themselves." *Mercy* explores the significance of injury, which can happen anywhere; someone got injured in a rugby match and had to have a 'metal halo' bolted to his skull – synthesis of purity, sanctity and menace: "the halo's shadow trembled, lightening his darkened face." This incident reminded her of injuries her partner had sustained before he went off to the war. *Bridge*: The couple's protracted civilian activity of piling up logs for a bridge site brings back the haunting memory of her man filling body bags: "I realised you'd survived the war though the war would never be won." *Married* fuses the themes of love and war; when the couple get together, the man recalls a child burning to death; "And, after making love, we made of our returning bodies a smoky pain so that the dead could see us too."

III – *Veteran's Day* – autumn leaves look like a 'poppy-strafted field' – brilliant convoluted image, the honouring of the dead compared with the firepower that killed them. When she feels her husband's torso "I . . . felt the impatient work of your working heart/from beneath an unwreathed cenotaph. Your ribs." Mesquite – this is a spiny shrub which grows mainly in the arid parts of the US South-West. It becomes a metaphor for the return of Elyse's partner – which definitely does not mean simple peace and happiness – indeed, she calls him 'my Hopeless returned'. The reader may wonder whether he was wounded – ". . . your body's a spiny thorn and there are shovel-blunt/consequences for your return. Alkaline veins//in the earth, raptors stealing the sun or the metal/husks of shell and no chance//for a quick and catastrophic death." She even exhorts him to 'Leaf out/into another body'.

Persephone as a Model for the Soldier, Returned seems to describe some Greek village women awaiting a soldier's return; perhaps they have a pottery kiln. There is again a mismatch between the anticipation and the actuality of the return: ". . . we took/your silence for the slow speech of thaw./How could we have known a pit/stuck like a bloody molar in your mouth?//The thing that, trying and trying -/you can never spit out///Split root, dual stranger." *Your Plane Arrives from Iraq for the Last Time* has truly startling images of air travel – the dirge and caesura of rotors . . . the slow Morse of the plane's body descending'. The agonising sense of suspense is described as 'the longest sentence I've ever known'. *Garden* – her man watches her gardening, and as she observes him, she sees an echo of his 'tour of duty': "I look/East and catch you squinting into the ambered/blood of the Western sky, a glassy shoot of bottle-light sprouted from your Returning Soldier's hands." *After Discussing Your Original Reasons for Enlisting* – some sense of anticlimax after he returns; she envisages them as raccoon traders, and "you, my heartthrob war hero minus the hero, stand mute as a comma . . ."

Poem without Throat or Song – an under-tended garden seems to parallel a war-raved landscape. *Conversation* is a further reflection on partner now back from the war. Indeed their relationship is durable and resilient: ‘you and I the heart’s joists that keep/the roof from warping under broken//pipes and wind.’ Her ideals remain – “I’m married to the thought/of you returning home to marry me/to my former self.” But he has been ‘home now for a year’, and presumably no marriage.

In *North Coast*, the reunited couple take a walk along a beach, and survey the marine detritus. There seems to be some sense of novelty and strangeness for her man, ‘Civilian at last’. Some truly arresting images: ‘. . . tide worn stones for surface travel on a glazier’s bay//Low tide unscrolls a surfy bricolage of shell . . . The sea lifts its mapmaker’s hands . . .’ His return from the war has sharpened her sensitivity to the coastal landscape. Another parallel to the old war-torn tablet: the relic of a crab, picked clean by a gull, is in ‘that Winning Portrait of a Hero pose’. *The Dreams* shows nightmare flashes to a war-torn landscape. Some interesting observations on decomposition and recycling: “The dreams have gatekeepers/in trench coats woven from tyre shavings and thorn.” A sense of ‘bivouac’ in ‘the rattlesnake bushes that pillow/my head’ and an inverted image of her partner’s war-wounds, real or potential: ‘the Dream of the Inscrutable with its hot disks tattooed like your name into flesh’.

Coffee highlights the confrontation of literature and real life. While she is brewing coffee for her partner, Elyse browses through a book of war poems – imagining her husband reliving his war experience while asleep or half asleep. Literature parallels life: “. . . the (bed?) sheets are pages I’ve torn back in search of morning’s grinds, and you.” (Some final *double-entendre*?). I would have welcomed a footnote to help trace the *Morning Wisp of Dew* poem.

Days and Nights of Your Return seems to refer to her partner’s return by air. It shows parallels between the human metabolism and machinery – ‘the heart’s engine’, the mind and the natural world – ‘thought’s crook-necked bird nestled/unspoken in the brain’s loose scree.’ Flight could assume ‘preternatural’ dimensions. Life, as ever, is vulnerable and precarious – ‘. . . our bodies’ stricken falling//from a distance, each feather of longing//skiffed off a turning wing.’ *Infidelity* puts a new gloss onto that term: in her dreams, she was not faithful to the idea of her husband being/returning well and whole; she was constantly preoccupied with his possible injury or death, and with her possible bereavement. *Roll Call* – the trauma of a missing name, and an inventory of the military hardware which might have eliminated it.

I am deeply challenged, disturbed, and stimulated.

David Russell

Kevin Coyne – Beautiful Extremes

(A little-known classic from 1977)



Beautiful Extremes is a collection of songs Kevin Coyne recorded between 1974 and 1977. Some were recorded for radio sessions, others were recorded either at the Manor studios in Oxfordshire, or at the Alvic studio in Wimbledon. Many were recorded at a time when Kevin was working with a rock band, and his acoustic work had remained unreleased. I remember seeing Kevin live at the Lyceum in 1975 shortly after the release of *Matching Head and Feet*. Kevin came on first and did some acoustic songs including *Marlene*. At the time I must have wondered why he didn't do *Marlene* with the band. Then the band featuring Andy Summers and Zoot Money came on and performed a powerful set. This was my first time of seeing Kevin live, and I felt it was a great concert. This was the band that Kevin would go on to make *Heartburn* and *In Living Black And White* with. *Heartburn* contained some good songs like *America*, and in *My Mother's Eyes* helped to show the influence Music Hall had on Kevin's work. However, it did seem like Virgin Records were trying to tone Kevin's music down, perhaps trying to turn him into a more conventional rock singer. I next saw Kevin live in 1976 at a venue in Kilburn. This was at the end of the *In Living Black and White* tour. Good as the gig was, I got the impression that Kevin was getting a bit fed up with performing in a rock band setting. Shortly after this, he went back to acoustic performances.

Beautiful Extremes was released in late 1977 as a Dutch/Belgium import. However, it was quite easy to get hold of in Britain at the time. Musically, it is either Kevin on acoustic guitar

or piano, or his friend and manager at the time, Bob Ward, on acoustic or electric guitar. The album starts with a song called *Something Gone Wrong*. In the sleeve notes Kevin says the song is about London and cities and the doom that envelops us. I am particularly struck by the middle verse. "I am worried about the baby, seems to have lost his way; should have learned to walk by now, seventh birthday is on its way. There's nothing wrong with his head they say, there's nothing wrong with his feet, but god knows I'm sick and tired of watching him struggling down the street. The next song, *Looking For A River*, finds Kevin accompanying himself on piano. In the sleeve notes Kevin says the song is about canals and swimming in dirty water. However I feel there is something deeper in the song. *Roses In Your Room* is a delightful love song, Kevin singing over Bob Ward's guitar. In the background is Kevin's speaking voice. It is hard to make out all that the voice is saying as it fades in and out, but it is effective. *Face in the Mirror* is a song showing compassion for the lonely outsider, someone who has difficulty fitting in. Musically the song has Kevin accompanying himself with his uncontrollable acoustic guitar. Side One of the album closes with *All the Battered Babies*. In the sleeve notes Kevin says the song is for people who sit in cinemas and watch that idealised piece of themselves. The verses show some of the psychological damage that can happen to people who are abused as children.

Side Two of the record opens with *Right at Hand*. This song was recorded for a BBC radio session in 1974. In 1975 the song appeared on *Matching Head and Feet* and was retitled *One Fine Day*. It had different lyrics and was put to a Reggae tune. However I prefer this version, with some more of Kevin's uncontrollable acoustic guitar. Lyric-wise I prefer this version too; it is another song for the lonely outsider. In the next track *Hello Friends, Hello Everyone* Kevin says hello to Doreen, Michael, Jason, and Mark, then tells us about the young one who doesn't like sleeping in the dark. We then hear about the uncles arguing in the hall, before singing "Now it's time for festive lies, He won't sleep in the dark no more. Names like Doreen, Michael, Jason, and Mark would sometimes appear in Kevin's songs in the 1970s. Musically *Hello Friends Hello Everyone* features Kevin on piano and Bob Ward playing some nice electric guitar. This song leads us into *Mona Where's My Trousers*. Here Kevin plays the part of a boy pleading with his father not to give him a beating after he loses his new duffel coat. We have Kevin singing *Mona where's my trousers* over and over, and other lyrics like "Our Dennis is going to school now, and his face is just like his dads, his face is angry and bitter, and he hides it under the fridge, but on Saturday night he's different when he's had beer". At the same time we have Kevin's speaking voice playing the part of the boy trying to explain things to his father. The song is quite frightening, however I can feel a little of Kevin's dark humour at play. After this we are greeted by a warm love song called *So Strange* – Kevin singing over Bob Ward's acoustic guitar, (many great songs grew

out of their collaborations). Kevin sings about the joy and confusion of falling in love. The song has some great lines. “See the bandmaster on his stand conducting the leaves”.

The album continues with *Rainbow Curve*, a song described on the back cover as being about sordid bars. The lyrics have a surreal quality to them. This track was from a radio session that took place in May 1977. The album then ends with Fool Fool Fool a song about going home. *Beautiful Extremes* has a great cover, with some nice photos of Kevin on stage. Including a photo of Kevin lying on a sofa while singing. Kevin’s performances were sometimes very theatrical. On the back cover is one of Kevin’s drawings. The little chap with a crown who appeared on the cover of *Blame It On The Night*. In 1983 the record was reissued by Cherry Red. It had a different cover and was retitled *Beautiful Extremes* etc. It also had a couple of different tracks. *All the Battered Babies* was replaced by a nice love song called *Love In Your Heart*; *Fool Fool Fool* was replaced by *Poor Little Actress* – the story of an actress who has too much money, but has no love in her life. Both compilations are equally worthy. However I do prefer the cover of the 1977 release.

On his Kevin Coyne website Pascal Regis has said, “If you had to gauge the talent of Kevin by listening to only one album, perhaps this would be the one to seek out”. He may well be right. *Beautiful Extremes* carries on the tradition of some of Kevin’s earlier songs like *Good Boy*, *Karate King* and *Jackie and Edna*. Spontaneous acoustic songs that are influenced by country blues and music hall comedy. However, it also laid the foundations for Kevin’s work during the rest of the decade. I consider the late 1970s to be one of the most inspired and creative periods of Kevin’s work. This record has never been reissued on CD, which is a great shame. If we want future generations to revalue Kevin’s work, then *Beautiful Extremes* would be one of the important Kevin Coyne albums for people to listen to. Hopefully one day some kind soul will be inspired to reissue this album. Keep hoping, keep praying.

Frank Bangay

January 2017

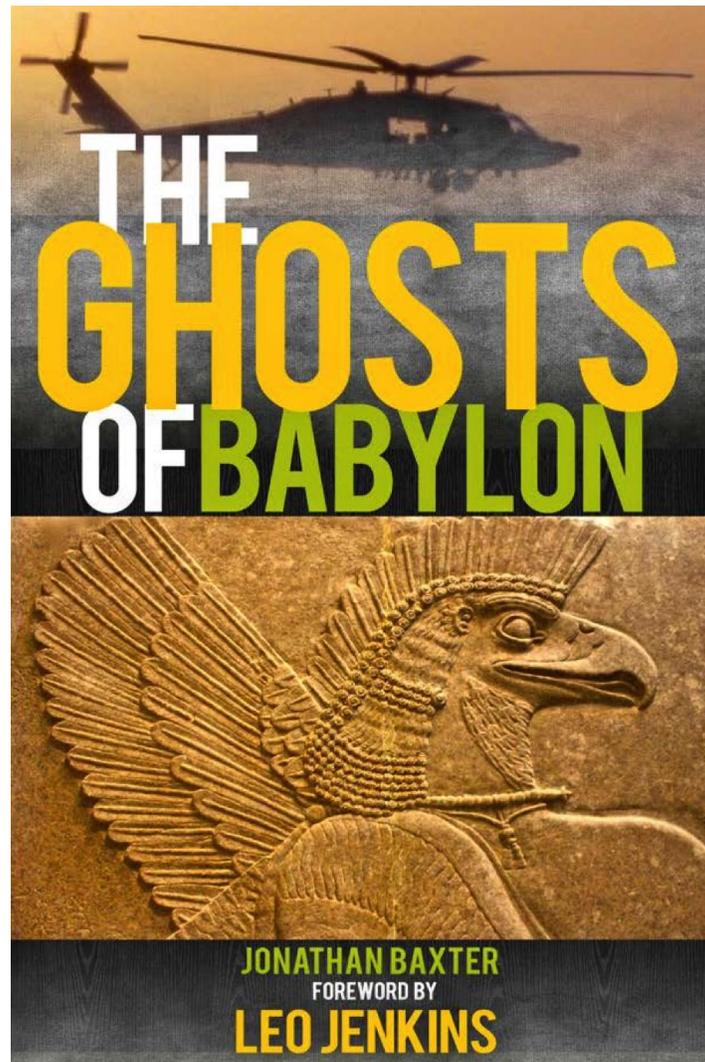
For Kevin Coyne’s official website visit www.kevincoyne.de

There is a facebook site keeping Kevin’s memory alive

Visit www.facebook.com/kevincoyneofficial

The Ghosts of Babylon by Jonathan Baxter (with Foreword by Leo Jenkins)

Blackside Publishing, 2016 ISBN: 978-1683-550-068 £8.10



This work has a truly panoramic universality, fully comparable to David Jones's *In Parenthesis*. It stems from direct involvement in one of today's most sanguinary conflicts, against the background of one of the world's most ancient civilisations – in contrast to works written in relatively comfortable detachment from a relatively safe distance. Nevertheless, there is a full cultural context here: each poem is introduced by a quotation from a major work in the literary canon – ranging from the epic of Gilgamesh, through the Anglo-Saxon *Wanderer*, to near-contemporary writers. The gamut of aesthetic sublimity and utter sordidity is embraced unflinchingly, with a full cosmic and scientific background.

All pacifists should deepen their understanding of the total effects of war of the human psyche, which *The Ghosts of Babylon* does to a supreme degree: in the words of editor Leo Jenkins “It defines us, rapes us, builds us into pillars, and depletes the compassion hiding within our marrow.” Under these conditions, any moment could be one’s last, so there is an acute sense of the fragility of life and the contingency of death: “I see, as through a glass, and darkly, myself at that last perimeter, before collapsing toward the centre of my own black hole, and time slows and then stops.”

His sense of history is more acute than that of any scholar: “I’ve lost all conception of time and space . . . we are sojourners to antiquity, time travellers back to the past as the past travels to us.” The totality of war truly overloads any participant with data: “An evening of experiences takes a lifetime to absorb and an eternity to comprehend.” Baxter’s experiences have turned him into a true Einsteinian: “All those trips lead one to become relatively relativistic.” He feels confident of challenging the greatest scientists on their own ground: “So, Dr Hawking, riddle me this – you claim a witness from a distance would perceive time slow at the boundary of a dead star; I would counterpose that we needn’t travel so far.”

History, of course, relates to Geography. This conflict is in proximity to the courses of the Tigris and the Euphrates, traditionally called ‘the cradle of civilisation’. But as well as being the bringer, the facilitator of life, the Tigris is the agent of death: “. . . armies of corpses she has swallowed, bearing her burdens to eternity . . . she bears the rest away, through her silkily slipping water, through the timelessness of her banks.”

Jacking Off in the Porto-John portrays a transcendental vision in utterly sordid surroundings. The totality of war expands the boundaries of consciousness: “mirrors cracking, fragment, explode,/my dream begins, my surroundings erode . . . As I step out of time and space, another world unfolds in my brain,/a fantastic cityscape across a vast domain.” To keep focused and sane, he makes a display of pin-up girls, including old girl-friends, on the wall of the toilet.

In *Ghost Halls*, the antiquities and museum culture is put into proper context: “these things we have chosen to make holy/intertwined with their own lies/woven with the banalities of our own lives . . .”

Event Horizon makes a fusion of history and cosmology, from one equipped with a tablet computer while in action. He feels like ‘a sub-atomic particle’ . . . “I can find deviations in the time-space continuum here/in the remnants of this once-great civilisation.”

Cannelure is multi-faceted in its references. It touches on the struggle to verbalise under conditions of total war: ‘the groove of a projectile winding like a toothy smile as it describes the spiral of that word’. Similarly with music, which provides a comfort and a background for the conflict: “and how the notes go/soaring, piercing, penetrating, projections of power across the

panoramas of vistas/that we so violently occupy.”

A truly outstanding feature of this poem is a cosmic vision inspired by the perspective of being in a helicopter, which turns a person into a particle, a component of total orchestration, transcendental musicality: “. . . spiralling through the night/as we revolve in this our flight/on our earth around the sun/in this course through time and space/orbits within orbits/millions of particles racing and colliding in crescendos of harmony and violence/a symphony of dissonance/distilled into the spiral of an alloy round/burning a tracer comet trail . . .”

Feelings of love range from tender memories of a close personal loved one to looking at pictures of porn stars. All can provide a consolatory, comforting background as he pursues his bitter struggle. Reinforced by the figure of Ishtar, who symbolises the duality of love and war, he explores the analogies between them: “projecting my yearnings and longings as a bombardment onto her”. (Another striking image is “stars as bright as the eyes of Ishtar/like white drops from a giant scimitar/that has cleft the green-black sky.”)

War can have its funny side; a spot of black humour can make it bearable. *The Jester Skull* recalls Hamlet’s reflections on Yorick. But here the jester assumes power: “All hail the jester king!” There is total levelling, total justice: “‘The mighty and the powerful’ the skull, chuckling, said with glee, ‘must exchange their crowns for my jester’s cap, and meekly dance for me.

He is properly critical of the military mentality: “We go seeking the warrior culture, trying to find the past in the future.” The ‘heroic past’ is often idealised, with the brutalities and sordidities edited out. It is enormously salutary to have to make contingent struggles covered by the backcloth of ancient history, without the shields of tourism or academic research.

The landscape of total war is truly a spiritual no-man’s land: “there’s no God here, only the demons you choose to exorcise, here before the Iron Altar. The environment is physically menacing, mentally perhaps more so: “We bridge the physical lacunae only to come to find/that the bridges of the mind are far more tenebrous.”

I have always felt that every sensitive soldier wants to fight to end war – ‘. . . try to find some bloody equilibrium in this world . . .’. This point is pressed home in Baxter’s conclusion: “When you can come to terms with the reflection in front of you, then you can declare a truce . . . you can finally lay down your arms and embrace the person you are and take some space from the absurdities of war.”

Baxter’s own appraisal of his project speaks volumes: “I did not set out to write an anthology. The writing simply began to happen on its own over the course of my deployments. I was not anything special, just an average Ranger at best. My experiences were just run-of-the-mill for a member of my community. But they were my experiences and my memories, and I had to

articulate them in some way, if only for myself. Now that I'm coming up on a decade of deploying as both a soldier and a civilian, I have an accumulation of material. Marty Skovlund and the team at Blackside Publishing are doing an amazing job providing a forum for the veteran community. I decided to throw my writing out there to see if it resonates with anyone else besides me."

There is a vibrancy in his text which fully reflects the intensity of his struggle to verbalise, encapsulated by Editor Leo Jenkins: "The ink dances on paper like a stripper on stage, and in the true nature of the subject."

When he has reflective respites, Baxter must be true to his sense of mission: ". . . I lie here tonight, my brain forming stalactites, my music to keep my sanity/I think my home is being haunted now/and I'm longing to compose one last requiem/before the wind scatters all of them . . . I labour resolutely through the night/to build a monument to the dead hours of my life."

Baxter has certainly succeeded in building that monument, in capturing the fleeing and transient. And he is certainly not without compassion, as there are sensitive references to the victims of Taliban oppression.

David Russell

Anatomy of an Artist – Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones'

What does an artist paint about, when that artist often feels disorder flow through her veins greater than any oxygenated cure.

An artist? me? I guess so.

Why the negation (you may well ask).

Well, some people call me an artist, others call me a woman, a poet, a survivor of trauma, but I call myself a visual clinician.

My canvas represents an autopsy table and my subject matter are the painted bodies I playfully dissect.

I-disorder-order.

First I isolate, (this is very important) then I undress each subject, then I metaphorically kill off their resistance to me. Then I play, and I play hard, with their physical, psychological & emotional anatomy.

I biopsy their faults, there dips in moral consciousness, not dissimilar to my own morally questionable, interior world.

You can find me turning a religious figure into a sex object, placing mythological masks of demons onto beautiful women, isolating body parts as they anthropomorphic into flowers or cognitive organs.

Cutting-open-my-mother, or slicing-my-self-in-half.

Twisting and of course dis-ordering a viewer's perspective fascinates me.

Often I am the subject matter and rightly so, as it is my life (and my disorder) represented.

Welcome to my Clinic of Art.

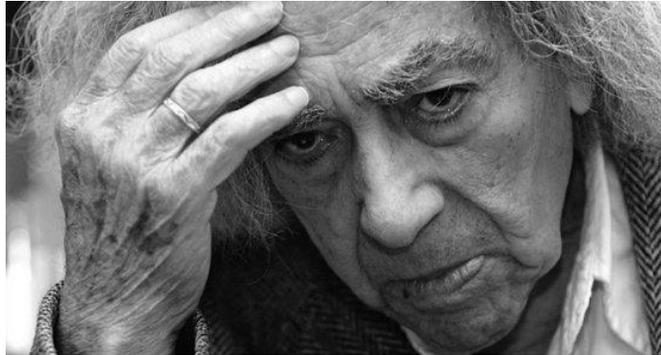
'Self On Mortuary Table Wearing Pastel Green Eyeshadow & Red Lipstick'



Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2015

György Faludy: MANDELSTAM BY THE FENCE

Translated from the Hungarian & Edited by **Thomas Ország-Land**

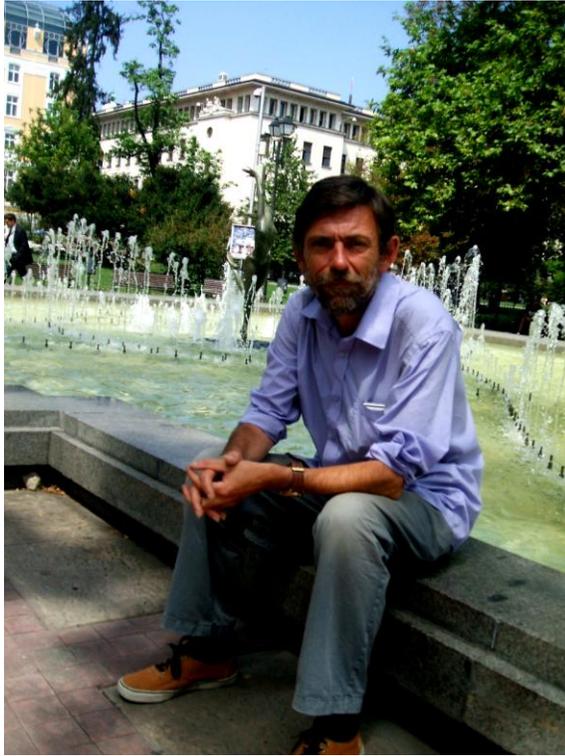


György Faludy (1910-2006), a Jewish-Hungarian humanist, was a towering figure of 20th century European literature and a dominant voice of the anti-Soviet and anti-Nazi resistance. His work in English translation is just beginning to take its rightful place in the bookshops, lecture halls and libraries of the West. He spent some of his most fruitful writing years in exile as well as political imprisonment where he had to entrust many of his poems – including the present piece, below – to memory. His work is once again heavily ignored by the servile Hungarian literary establishment under the country's current, authoritarian rule. But the city of Toronto has adopted Faludy as its own poet and named after him a park beneath the apartment where he had spent 14 years of his exile. The poet **Osip Mandelstam** (1891-1938), another Jewish humanist, was murdered during Stalin's purges in his native Russia, where his work is at last widely read.



Thomas Ország-Land is an award-winning poet and foreign correspondent who writes from Jerusalem and London as well as his native Budapest. His last book was [Survivors: Hungarian Jewish Poets of the Holocaust](#) (Smokestack/England, 2014), and his last E-chapbook, [Reading for Rush Hour: A Pamphlet in Praise of Passion](#) (Snakeskin/England, 2016)

Balkan Poetry Today



“When I walked out of an Albanian bank in August 2006 and found three men with leather jackets and Kalashnikovs holding my wife and two children at gunpoint, I didn’t think for a moment that it would lead to my editing a publication called *Balkan Poetry Today*. We’d only been in Albania for fifteen minutes and I had more pressing concerns – like how I was going to stop what appeared to be a trio of heavily armed gangsters bundling my family into the second-hand Mercedes skewed across the pavement.

As it happens, the minute they saw me the gunmen slung their assault rifles under their arms and sauntered back to their car, laughing and lighting up cigarettes. This seemed even more enigmatic than the stand-off itself and my subsequent attempts to find out why they’d behaved in this way became the storyline for a one-man show I performed in the basement of

Bristol Old Vic. Thanks to its rather unimaginative title (*I Went to Albania*), the show attracted several local Albaniaphiles, including an expert on the country’s network of military bunkers and the chair of the Balkan Peace Park Project (B3P), which aims to establish a transnational conservation area across the borders of Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro. In turn, this led to me teaching English with B3P in the so-called **Accursed Mountains** in northern Albania and, thanks to the anthropologist who founded the charity, Antonia Young, an invitation to a conference at the **University of Prishtina** to talk about the representation of Albania in English-language travel writing. During one of the conference’s coffee breaks, I went out into the university car park and got talking with two other delegates who turned out to be members of the Club of Kosovo’s Writers – an organisation which invited me back to Prishtina the following year for a hectic but energising week of meetings with Kosovan poets, playwrights and novelists which resulted in *Culture Exchange Experiment*, an informal network of writers and artists from across SE Europe and the UK.

Meanwhile, I was asked to perform part of *I Went to Albania* at the University of Portsmouth. Afterwards, a student came up and asked me if I’d ever been to Bulgaria. I had to admit that I hadn’t. We talked for a while and it turned out that her sister was a visual artist who had worked with a young Bulgarian poet called **Iliyan Lyubomirov**. I mentioned the informal online network and we stayed in touch. The following year we set up *Colourful Star* – another online project, this one combining painting from Bulgaria with poetry from the UK – and I started helping two Bulgarians in Canada with their translations of Iliyan’s poetry. By the time I’d learned enough

Bulgarian to start translating Bulgarian poetry myself, Iliyan's first book had been published and sold more than 5,000 copies. Several magazines in the UK had also started publishing some of our translations of his work.

Somehow or other, Scalino – a publisher based in Sofia – got wind of what I was up to and I began to translate poems by other Bulgarian poets, including **Georgi Gospodinov** and **Alexander Shurbanov**. This led to a month-long residency at the Sofia Literature and Translation House where I worked on translations of two Bulgarian plays – both about American poets, as it happens – and a book of poems by **Mila Lambovska**. As with the week as a guest of the Club of Kosovo's Writers, this led to my meeting numerous other writers, both well-established and up-and-coming. It also coincided with Scalino's publication of a bilingual book of my own poems, *Unknown Translations*. Somewhat unusually, the poems it contains weren't written in English and then translated into Bulgarian. They were written in Bulgarian and then translated into English. Having written them as a way of practising the language I was learning, I'd had no thought of publishing them, but a Bulgarian friend in London persuaded me that the Bulgarian versions worked and Scalino evidently agreed.

By this time last summer the foundations for *Balkan Poetry Today* had already been laid, thanks to another coincidence during my first visit to Bulgaria in 2013. The family of the student who'd spoken to me in Portsmouth arranged a lightning tour of the country for me and when I arrived in Sozopol on the Black Sea coast, I unexpectedly ran into a friend from Bristol who happened to be there for the Apollonia arts festival. Through a friend of hers, I made contact with **Richard Eccles**, who runs

Red Hand Books and wanted to build on the success of *Turkish Poetry Today* by launching a new publication focusing on contemporary poetry from South East Europe. By September 2016, almost exactly ten years after the gunmen incident, plans for the first issue were underway.

Since then yet more coincidences and quite a lot of luck have played a part in the magazine coming together. Who knew – as Donald Trump might have it – that editing a magazine that features work originally written in something like ten different languages would be so complicated? That translators of contemporary Balkan poetry are very thin on the ground has obviously been a bit of a stumbling block, but those few who do exist and the poets they've translated have been enthusiastic, supportive and generous. Although I'm named as the editor, this very much feels like a collaborative effort and it promises to become even more so as we've already started recruiting contributing editors in half-a-dozen countries. Given the overall reaction, in fact, I'm sure – or at the very least hopeful – that this may lead on to other cross-cultural projects, whether that be exchange visits or collaborations between writers and artists in different countries. Although a great deal of this is already going on, it can be quite hard to find it and, hopefully, launching *Balkan Poetry Today* will help open up new channels of communication.



And the next steps:

Balkan Poetry Today is a new journal dedicated to contemporary poetry from South East Europe. It's being published by Red Hand Books – the company that launched *Turkish Poetry Today* in 2013 – and is being edited by Tom Phillips, a writer who's currently based in Bristol but is relocating to Bulgaria later this year. Tom has been building connections with writers and artists across South East Europe for the last five years, co-founding two online projects – the informal network Culture Exchange Experiment and the art/poetry collaboration *Colourful Star* – and translating Bulgarian poetry, drama and prose.

“Richard Eccles – who runs Red Hand – is the one who actually came up with the idea for *Balkan Poetry Today*,” says Tom. “Before he got in touch, I'd really just seen myself as pottering around – maybe getting the odd translation of poems by people I know into other magazines here and there. Now, though, we can make a much more substantial amount of work available to an English-speaking audience.”

The first issue, which is due to appear later this spring, features more than 30 poets from across the Balkan region, as well as from Diasporan communities elsewhere in Europe and beyond. These include both well-established writers – such as **Arian Leka** from Albania, **Krystallis Glyniadkis** from Greece, **Marija Knežević** from Serbia and **Marko Pogačar** from Croatia – and poets who are still relatively early on in their careers, but who have rapidly risen to prominence, such as **Iliyan Lyubomirov** from Bulgaria and Darko Leshoski from Macedonia. The magazine also includes an overview of SE European poetry, introductions to the poetry of Bulgaria and Macedonia and a survey of other

publications featuring translations of modern and contemporary poetry from the region.

“What I was aiming for was as wide a range of poetry as possible,” says Tom. “The last thing I want people to think is that there is a single entity called ‘Balkan poetry’. There isn't. As you'd expect, there's a huge diversity and I hope that the first issue reflects this. Reading all these poets – whether they're Montenegrin or Bosnian, Turkish Romanian or Kosovan – has broadened my understanding of what poetry is and what it can do, and so I also hope that readers will find the first issue equally rewarding and indeed inspiring.”

Balkan Poetry Today #1 will be launched in Bristol and will then be available from the Red Hand Books website www.redhandbooks.co.uk



Goggling fish head

It strikes me
at the harbour's far end
between the old yachts
and the makeshift fish market
surrounded
by bad dogs and mangy cats

I recognise it
by its hooligan look
its brash sexuality
bumptious crude

It's a verse from another poem
a fragment
left by other devastating storms
on the shore
of other islands

Mila Lambovska (Translated from the
Bulgarian by Tom Phillips)

Koprivshitsa snapshot

With coffee and grapes, directions
from that man behind his stall,
we're finding our way through a town
whose name I can hardly pronounce.

At the monument above –
what is the word, a gully, a dell? –
we're shaded by evergreens
while on the terrace below
other tourists urge each other on:
'Let's just read this stuff
about the past and go!'

A horse's impatient neigh
could just as well be a delirious 'yes'.
It's what I'm thinking anyway,
perched on this concrete step,
accountably happy to be in shot,
here, above this town
where history was, in fact, made.
Your photographs give
a future to our present
which, elsewhere, we'll look back on.

On the station platform,
we're hunkered down
by the canopied waiting area
when I recognise the wagon in a siding,
the one from your Koprivshitsa snapshot:
it's been here all this time.

Tom Phillips
t.phillips18@btinternet.com



Mila Lambovska

Osip, you made me jump... Here I was squatting
near to the barbed-wire fence that runs along
the edge of this autumn woodland nearly bereft
of foliage, by the bed of a purple spring,
where I shed my role as a prisoner as soon as I
bent over the carpet of leaves beside my knees.
What wealth, what plenitude of colours and shades!
The melancholy brown of the horse-chestnut leaves
stretched out, their wrinkles
straightened out, reshaped
by the smothering-iron of time, disintegrating
already in places but held together still
by networks of thread-like blood-vessels.
Lying supine,
the leaves of oak trees still retained their spots
of green and red, reminders of bygone youth
and age, and here and there their surfaces blistering
like thickening porridge stirred on a cooking stove,
perhaps protesting the end of their sailing days
or mourning their flight with every passing breeze.
And then . . . two tiny leaves bent and conjoined
and shaped like flower petals or maybe a barge,
one ochre-yellow and the other pink;

they must have fallen prematurely – but from where? that leafless bush, I guessed, five paces away, the one hardly taller than a dove. I gently picked the pink one by two fingers but did not sense a substance held between them. *Such leaves do not disintegrate*, I mused, *they surely would evaporate tonight*. . . . And also hard and oval little leaves, and others coloured like a bacon rind, and tar-streaked, lemon-yellow leaves, like bygone imperial flags, shed by a wild pear tree. The other leaves did not expose the surface of mass destruction; many twisted up to take the shape of tidy cigar wrappers, or cylinders or tubes or mini-mummies; I touched one, it rolled down along the slope towards the shallow basin of the spring, and many others fell in line behind it until they stopped and huddled. Then I bent down over their communal grave once more, inhaled the heady, sylvan scent of death and I rose. The sky was blue; the Evening Star shone through the branches. *Even here*, I sighed, *I am surrounded by such gifts of splendour, and that was when I saw you standing there, you, Osip Mandelstam*.

Beside the fence you stood in your short jacket, with hat on. The barbed wire fence was visible through your body. Your face was very pale and fresh and calm. I knew that you would visit me. How often I'd thought of you, at home, in bed, when I lay drenched in sweat and tried to calm myself by stroking my cool walls with my damp hands! And how many times on my straw mattress here when I am woken by the howl of bloodhounds! Our destiny is one. We've much in common... I do not like to bring this up, it may sound bragging, still we two, and we two alone, have dared to raise our voice in public poetry to challenge Stalin in his own domain. Why did you frown? I know we were not brave (I take the liberty of speaking for you as we have shared one fate) we were not brave:

no, we were scared when we conceived our poems and trembled while committing them to words and we grew really desperate when the works were finished and we found that they'd become integral parts of us, our flesh, our bones... Our images scared us from every mirror, our constant fear drained out our very life-force and, at our desks, we sat with shaking ankles imagining them dangling in the air. You raised your arm... what would you like to add? I know. That this was very far from all. That we were not just frightened, that we also distributed our poetry, risking all, perhaps as we perceived a hundred signs that – verse or no verse – we would disappear whatever we would do or fail to do, not just for what we wrote, but who we were. And we were not just scared, we were delighted that some had at long last described our Genghis, our linguist with the moustache of a cockroach, the father of the nations gulping sickly red Georgian wines upon a throne set high on corpses... this our arid, walking death whose orgasms explode not in his flesh but in his cruel, calculating skull.

But why do I go on about the living when you and I have so much more to say as one corpse to another?... Or are you alive in far Siberia in a camp, composing verse after your dreadful daily load of labour? How can you bear it? Or, have you surrendered? Have you been beaten, worked or frozen to death? Why don't you answer?

Then the bell was sounded – time for inspection, and I had to run at once to try to make up for my absence. Occasionally, I looked back. I thought he might be gone. But no. He stood before the fence in his short jacket and his hat, barbed wire visible across his torso.

(Recsk slave labour camp, Hungary, 1951)

Transreality

Weird sister? No, your best self is released.
Soul whisper, condensed and born mid-life.
Rules demanded your breathing be self-ceased.
Set free now, you were never your own wife.
Hey, why not be yourself as another's,
natural, with some woman's golden hair.
No search for strength required, remember
your flame-freed spirit's ease is fair.
For whilst they'll never know
your strength to find
yourself beneath, it's not so strange to be
in search of shape down this our knotted wind.
It's quite normal as any me should see.
We struggle down a shady path toward
a dream of form, sure to be imperfect.

Anthony Hurford

(first published in the anthology Venn, Unstapled
Press, 2016)

Paper

It is not first words.
Nor any we have spoken.
But that we may, hoping . . .

* * *

I am lost in this world,
in all the worlds within
in all the words spoken
the storm they ride,
their wind.

But at any moment
may forget the whirl,
remember silent arbour,
rooted anchorage,
quite still.

Whether in clearing
on wood path
or forest full grown.

Waking to tree sense,
breeze through my leaves,
xylem flowing
transpiration free.

I hear the birds singing,
a tune to the day.
Their songs my book of hours,
months, years, nights, days.

Sound waves at sea
on the sonic sound-all.
I sway to their themes,
in the wind of my fall,
silent and knowing
there is no need for more.

Until I come to, share this,
trail golden leaves
for a few breaths spoken,
before they're scattered,
guttered, senseless, blown.

* * *

For what am I hoping
with these, my tokens.

Anthony Hurford

Supernova

Was it for this, all past shining,
that his light censored heart
went critical, burst social containment,
true message fractured dark.

The urgent nonsense of himself, collapse,
to black hole singularity, hell perhaps.

Awareness balanced at event horizon,
held on cosmic scales,
an unexpected black mass,
cold regret – what could be next?

As echoes play on his corona,
glimpses of love, ache.
He sorts this information into order
to understand his own distress.

Bracing for the long fought darkness,
his only path is to accept.

Anthony Hurford

Of Course

A butterfly eye in my own hurricane,
sails becalmed behind a storm face.
All at sea, Tyne tide caught,
to fortune seek the Sea King's wind source.

Storm system storm fought, wind thrown
I tacked back from flat earth edge-fall,
deciding to face butterfly strangeness,
took bad harbour from a death's head stranger.

Whose wing beat chaos doubled my strength,
summoned all false hearts to the world's end,
scream-vision driven onto my own Black Middens,
eye open to eye's substance in the wind's path.

So, the rational alchemy of medicine men
was stirred to guide this cyclone ride blow out.
I'm found storm flung, beach scattered, ocean wide.
Where regathering wind sense amidst the gale

I must stitch sail of booty and remaining rags,
to catch best blows under strange scarred skies.
Hope's heading to chart trade lanes
between my mother country and these colonies of me.

Anthony Hurford

Tynemouth, Any Mouth

The gull cat-mewls a cry-baby protest
as it tugs at the grass, stuck in its fact,
fractal, part of the wave, particle surfing
its place in the blast, the explosion of fact.
The element stew of each filament hair
charged to glow in the current of time's
time lapsed fire-fall tail swallow act.
We explore how it burns, what we may be.

Amber warning, let's get back to the facts,
the star scattered sea, dancing with light,
eternal, the heart of all in each flash.
This is my cry, my tug at this earth,
the best I can do at this now on the wave,
part of the sparkle of a sea in a sun.

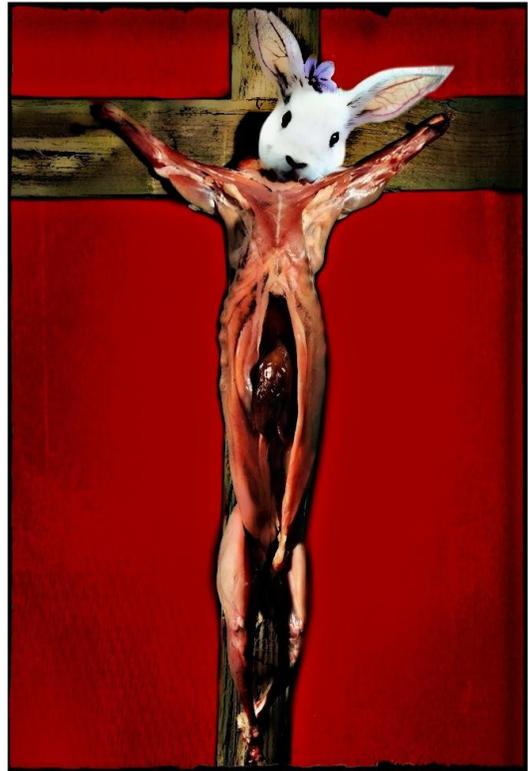
Anthony Hurford

Ozu

after seeing 'Late Spring'

empty shots move me,
vase, trees, tea, hint at the whole
he knows, apple peeled

Anthony Hurford



'Spring Rabbit in Crucifixion Sauce'

Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2017



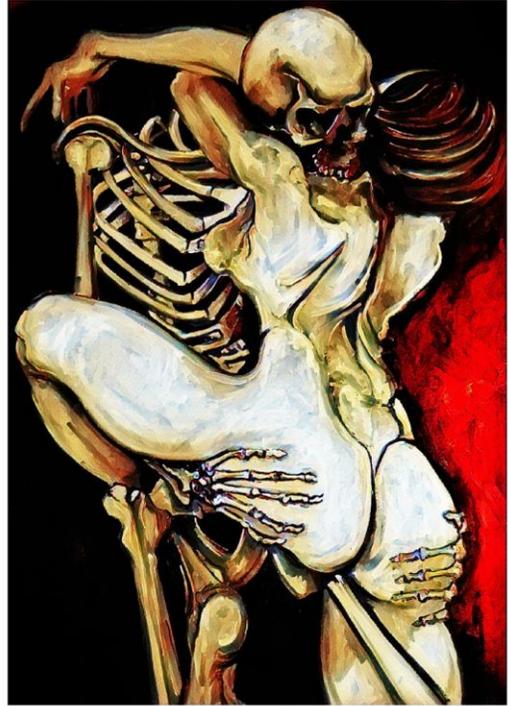
'On The Day That I Was Born' Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2016



'She Opens Her Legs Like Clockwork' Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2017



'Half Her Face Is Beautiful' Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2016



'Woman of Bones' Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2015

'Mary Wears Pantyhose & A Strap On'



Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2016-17



'Are you OK?'

Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2016



'Skull' (Still Life)

Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2017



'Ode to a Vagina' Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2016



'The Peacekeeper' (Work in Progress) Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2016-17



'When I Grow Up I'd Like To Be A Nurse' Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2015



'Untitled' (Work in Progress) Tara Fleur 'Woman of Bones' 2017

***Alarum* by Wayne**

Holloway-Smith

Bloodaxe Books 2017

ISBN: 978-1-78037-330-0 £9.95

Paperback

"It is a place in which commonsense is unfixed, where the imagination disrupts notions of stability."

There is certainly a sense of the routines of normality being challenged, as well as their underlying structure perhaps being in a state of decay. The peculiarities of an individual are highlighted in such disturbing phrases as 'wriggling . . . in the palaver of its excess', and 'perpetual rudeness is trapped in the dead slap/of a flat stick. As for the structure, ". . . everything just sort of creeps soft and backwards,/as the sea creeps, in out-roads of awkwardness."

A suitably disturbing opener with *The air itself* – a panorama of painful, disruptive sensations, illustrating the traumas of a lost soul, deprived of all normal comforts, who longs to leave the earthly incarnation.

If I forget this, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth – the opening image of this poem is particularly meaningful for me: 'heartbreak is recycled like rain is recycled'. I have always been riveted by a mythological concept of the heartbroken pouring out their tears of sorrow, to become one-person irrigation projects (though some of them could perhaps engender Tsunamis). There is then a shift of focus to rainfall being a 'downer', depressing the environment, dampening the pleasure of a ball game between father and song, demoralising

building workers. He then refers to portable radios (generally providing comfort for building workers). Then what seems to be a further shift towards rained-out pop concerts, with the vocalists proclaiming complete despair – *we hated each other, didn't we*.

Some Waynes – a catalogue of famous Waynes, important to the author as part-namesakes, his heroes and heroines, famed in many areas, factual and fictitious, who join hands to make a triumphal architrave, through which he walks to his metaphorical wedding ceremony, taking on the roles of both bride and groom.

So Many Different Ways to Talk About the Same Thing – If one looks deeply enough, one can always find links and affinities between apparently unrelated objects and events.

What Happened Was This – a woman reminisces about the time of her marriage. As an alternative to a 'stag night', her husband and his friends played a game of tag, which culminated in his hiding from his friends in a park, until he jumped on them. There is to me a suggestion that he might have had some feelings of impotence; however, at the beginning of the poem there is mention of the wedding night –
Much is left to the imagination.

There is absolutely no way to make this real life interesting – the poet was deformed and debilitated in his childhood. In the poem, the illness becomes animate, personified – malignant and self-deprecatory: "my illness is all right//two fingers up/the throat of itself". It is its victim's chaperone. It threatens to spread, become a universal pestilence: "my illness is taking all of the red flowers/inside itself so the field is just filled with my illness . . . taking all of

this imagery/into itself until it is outgrowing/the place where it hides".

Cake expresses Wayne's revulsion at his mother kissing a man. My impression is that an abundance of cosmetics has made her face resemble an iced cake – even a half-abandoned birthday cake with one candle still flickering. He pursues the imagery to the baking (and rising) of a sponge cake in an oven. *Worship Music* expresses resentment at someone's (perhaps his mother's) marriage. The wedding ceremony makes him want to 'don a scarecrow's hat'. The wedding guests are compared to crows and sparrows (a 'marching band' of the latter; but they have vanished from the immediate vicinity. Although the birds convene, they 'have no common song'. Their chirruping accompanies the purported warmth of ceremonies, but also 'the void, the not yet known' that precedes and succeeds them.

I hope this will explain everything – when a child, Wayne witnessed, and suffered, extreme violence. By way of desperate reaction, he assassinated a domestic pet, and feels retrospective remorse.

The Second Section, *Some Violence*, has an excellent introduction in the words of Steven Roberts: "Such behaviour represents efforts at 'making a claim to power where there are no real resources for power' in response to marginalisation in most social domains."

The Section opens with flashbacks to Wayne's childhood – his unspoken friendship with Tony Lewin, and his brutal assassination of a pigeon which, perversely, seems to provide some sort of foundation for his mind-set: ". . . bits of me are producing and reproducing bits in me that will one day produce bits of my thesis." There is

a searing catalogue of ghetto violence, associated with working-class masculinity. Wayne then ventures into the world of the Internet, which is often taken over by menacing demagogues, conveying insidious and dangerous messages, in this case a particularly self-righteous English teacher. Then a YouTube shot of a bullfight, an indictment of fascination with cruelty, followed by a highly compassionate appraisal of football hooliganism as a deep-seated struggle for self-expression, against oppressive forces – energy misdirected by adversity. Wayne adds a bitterly ironic call for a police baton charge.

Hi courageously embraces educational and social polarities: “perhaps the ultimate realisation of working-class male violence is sitting at the dinner table of a celebrated poet/as his wife congratulates you on your recent PhD”. The poet suggests that the academic verbalisation of ‘socio-symbolic violence within dominant discursive values’ involves murdering the working-class self. There is a double-edged conclusion. The initial act of violence left an indelible impact; its academicisation was another act of violence which in no way mitigated the initial brutality.

The Politics of Birds, hopefully, does a dissection of a taxidermist’s model. In *The Language*, the crows return as malignant mascots and voices of guilty consciences. Wayne suggests procedures to feel good about oneself, and then a bizarre image of self-catering “become the man/who squeezes potatoes and then goes home and cooks them with salt/Occasionally potatoes will taste of crows – sing with more volume” – a surreal gloss on ‘four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie’.

Sarah Sarsparilla shows fascination with, and

compassion for, a charmingly trendy girl. Sympathy for Toast – some interesting personification – “most toast is grateful to be told what it is what it isn’t”. Toast has suffered abuse and distortion – ‘carved into meaning by the discourse of . . . knives . . . has often been an arbitrary symbol for imprisonment or slavery’; ‘butter is synonymous with sycophancy’. *Grandfather, with Flowers* – the grandfather in question is a chronic alcoholic. Through the tears of his sodden stupor he calls forth images of luxurious gifts and a spectacular wedding. There is a suggestion that some of these dreams could have been realised if grandpa had dried out. *Self-Portrait #3* – perceptive awareness of the art of image manipulation: “An image cannot wholly develop/unless it’s caught between/yourself and the part of you it fakes.” *Poem in Which* – mildly sentimental reflections on routine relationships and situations.

Please understand – he sees the girl of his fascination eating a bacon sandwich, and makes him feel like a pig – to be devoured, and to devour: “My proteinous heart,/it’s burning in its trotters to get to you”.

If I’m Ever to Find These Trees Meaningful I Must Have You by the Thighs – A moving, macabre. There is an old man, deeply unhappy from past bad marriages and physically impaired, but rich – owning a plot of land on which he carefully cultivated some yew trees. On his decease, there was an annual fete in his honour. Then there was a fire in the neighbourhood, and the field was cordoned off. Then there was a wedding, and presumably some hope of a good marriage in contrast to the old man’s bad ones. The marriage failed; the leaves stand in testimony. In the title there is some suggestion of unrequited love. *Why*

seems to refer to a traumatised childhood with a domineering mother and a jealousy-arousing sibling; he seems to become strong enough to challenge/threaten his mother. Pear Tree – figurative biological mutation ‘. . . you and the tree became for a moment each other’. *Lucky* juxtaposes a happy vision of a cycling girlfriend with a nightmare of being in a rowing boat, pursued and possibly eaten by crocodiles. *He left the body as fluids* – an elderly, insanitary relative is recently deceased. The female persona makes a surreal comparison between his body and his food – mutton chops. She becomes proficient at making tomato sauce Italian style, for which she is complimented. Partly in celebration of her new-found skills, she ditches the mattress on which he died.

Alarum (the title poem) is a poignant portrayal of a lonely, alienated person – perhaps someone released from prison or psychiatric care. *Short* – suggests a female persona, but then refers to being played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt. The alcoholic father is recently deceased – “The whiskey in my dad’s bottle outlasts his body” Most of the poem drifts off into cinematic fantasy, a blend of screen heroes blended with possible memories and visions of the father when younger.

If one word could sum up this collection, it would be ‘unflinching’.

David Russell

The Autistic Alice –

Joanne Limburg

Bloodaxe 2017 ISBN 978-1-78037-343-0

£9.95

This collection is described as a chronicle of recovery. It embraces her protective role toward her brother (who finally committed suicide), together with her own struggles against Autism and Asperger’s syndrome. The title of the first section, *The Oxygen Man*, suggests life-support machines. Sister faces fairly and squarely the logistics of dealing with an attempted suicide. *Chaim* seems to refer to chronic alcoholism on her brother’s part. *Welcome to the United States* describes a potential bonding with a fellow bereaved person. *From the Best Western* proceeds to feeling lost in the vast expanses of the United States. *Your Lawn* is an ornamental lawn; great image derived from the Internet: “Rabbits cut and paste themselves”.

Sylar and Elle – I am newly introduced to this legendary video couple. According to Wikipedia, Elle Bishop, daughter of [Bob Bishop](#), was with the [ability to generate electricity](#). Elle was recruited as a trainer and agent after a long time of brutal experimentation that left her mentally unstable and homicidal. Upon her father’s death, Elle was fired by new director [Angela Petrelli](#). After beginning a romance with newly-reformed [Sylar](#), she thought things were beginning to look up. Sylar soon discovered she was part of a web of lies created against him and killed her after giving up on himself and deciding neither of them would ever change. Joanne puts her own slant on the situation, partly reversing the relationship: she kills him, then brings him back to life, and she is ‘emptied of her hate’.

Double Act is a sinister ‘black humour’ interplay between honouring personal obligations and play acting, in relation to her brother’s hospitalisation and post-mortem memorial – ‘an old, familiar joke grown blacker now . . . all week I was the sick comedienne . . . I saved my best performance//for his memorial’. The final comment ‘I thought it was only/a career move for poets’ is truly barbed and cynical. Such an attitude may be essential for coming to positive terms with a bereavement. With *Night Flight*, I was not sure whether the poet was escorting someone severely disabled but alive, or supervising the remains of someone deceased. The context of a flight through the dark gives the poem a nightmarish dimension.

Notes to an Unwritten Eulogy – a catalogue of perverse interactions between two seriously disturbed people. It flies off at surreal tangents: “Sometimes apparently ordinary children turn out to be the offspring of Dr Who . . . Rekop: a card game invented by the deceased.” And a very barbed comment (perhaps referring to her brother’s PhD: “The Clever One’: a controversial title, best left unawarded.” *Oxygen Man* (title poem of the section) makes a bizarre description of someone acting as a laboratory chemist, manufacturing his own life-support supply – or perhaps not so bizarre, as Joanne’s brother was a distinguished chemist. *Blue-eyed boy* – brother’s decease reminds Joanne of his early childhood. In *The Door*, she laments her helplessness in the face of his tragically deteriorating condition, including ‘the idiosyncrasies of your spine’. He ignores her, but still knocks at the door of personal acceptance.

Proverbs 6: 5-11 – a gloss on the Bible:

“Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler.

“Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!

“It has no commander, no overseer or ruler,
“Yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.”

“How long will you lie there, you sluggard?
When will you get up from your sleep?”

“A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest –“

“And poverty will come on you like a thief, and scarcity like an armed man.”

Initially (presumably the brother) may have gone to the virtuous, industrious, reliable, but perhaps ultimately lifeless (‘meatless’) ant, but finally preferred the vital hazards of being prey to a hunter or a fowler. *Not* – this is about loss of religion, where being ‘born again’ projects all the pangs of physical birth into the spiritual dimension. *On Holiday with Cotard* – “**Cotard delusion** is a rare mental illness in which the affected person holds the delusional belief that they are already dead, do not exist, are either putrefying, or have lost their blood or internal organs.” (Wikipedia). The poem seems to celebrate a sufferer having found inner peace and harmony with nature. *An offering* is a pastiche of computer games, including ‘a satellite to bounce them (phenomena) seven hours ahead and back again. *The Young Dead Poets* seems to celebrate sickly poets, with ‘leftover bodies’ burning themselves out and dying young.

Section II: The Autistic Alice

Alice’s Un-Birthday – Alice felt some uncertainty about her age, then took on her mother’s words of guidance: “It isn’t saying it that makes it

true." *Alice in Check* – the territorial struggles with her mother over the organisation of her bedroom assume the dimensions of a game of chess. Her stubbornness takes the role of Knight. Alice comes very near to prevailing, but is finally swayed by her mother's tears. *Alice at Reception Class* seems to refer to Art Therapy, about which Alice is thoroughly cynical: "The answer they want isn't what it is – it's what it isn't." *Big Alice* relates to becoming overweight, presumably in hospital. *Alice's Walk* – primordial state of panic, terror of the very surface of the earth. *In the Garden of Live Flowers* – Alice appreciates the flowers' harmony with nature; she cannot bring herself to pick one, though she feels she might have picked the tiger-lily if its petals had curled more. The flowers become animate, and joke about 'picking' Alice; the 'tables are turned' in metaphor. *Nothing But a Pack of Cards* – stark figurative transference – the 'stupid things' with squeaky pencils are stupid people with pencils; the moronic bureaucracy who 'only want to write the answers down/not understand them'. Alice accuses them of being like a pack of cards, easily collapsible; but they turn out to have normal human bulk, and she has to accommodate to them. *Alice Between* suggests a multi-faceted tunnel, akin to the passage to Wonderland. *Alice's Face* – a face is compared to an article of clothing, which is cast off. Some people think they are addressing Alice the person, when they are really only addressing their cast-off face. *Advice for Alice* is an impassioned plea against solipsism; she must accept reciprocal interaction with other human beings; they are not just kept under observation: "you should be in love *with*, not *at*." She cannot expect life to be simple, to have things her own way: "Alice, they're not just figures in your dreams. They have their own/and you might not be in them. There's no

symmetry,/no equity, no Caucus Race. You could swim an age in tears, and run yourself bone dry, and still be left without a prize." *Tiny Alice* – an impressive graphic poem portraying Alice's shrinking and disappearance with the opticians' device of diminishing point sizes. *Alice's Brother* continues this motif with the fantasy of Alice having shrunk to pocket size.

Alice's It – The opening quote is the title of a poem by the world-renowned Australian writer Les Murray, who wrote with deep compassion about autistic relatives. Alice becomes a generic symbol, transcending her personal individuality: "still it will be nameless, ageless, wordless. It is a survival, a living memory of being prey . . ." Some suggestion of Little Red Riding Hood. But in this instance, the 'wolf' freezes, is evasive. There is no reciprocity of communication: "The near-the-ground it understands instinctively; adult humans, not." Alice experiences some sort of identity crisis – "Uncertainty makes living in her skin intolerable . . . Truth is not a thing that bends . . . It will never understand that other people have to look at her./Sometimes she herself forgets./It lacks a sense of Alice as continuous . . ." But underneath an extreme vulnerability lies a great resilience: "It is perseverative./Despite her, with her, it's persistent." *The Mad Hatter's Tea Party* is an interesting variant of that well-known theme. Alice creates a stir by telling of her father eliciting laughter from a dolphin. The Mad Hatter is briefly put off-balance, but then recovers with a humorous tale about Alice.

Alice's Laws of Interaction certainly state fundamental truths. In today's world, there is an increasing tendency for people to isolate themselves in solitary cells; dynamic initiative must always be taken to break down those barriers. In *The Alice Case*, the Caterpillar and

Humpty Dumpty become a psychiatric assessment committee – totally authoritarian and dictatorial: “May I say something? . . . Of course, you may say something . . . and we’ll tell you why it’s wrong.” *Alice’s Antism* – the arrival of the well-regulated ants is a source of self-assurance with Alice. *Alice and the Red Queen* – Alice is treated with extreme rigour by a savagely disciplinarian teacher. But she grows to be the same size as her mentor, and can say ‘screw you’. *Alice’s Checklist* proceeds on this principle to the psychiatric hospital. There is an oppressive presence on the part of the ‘Social Watcher’, but Alice remains in control of her own destiny – “. . . she is an adult now, who can always turn and walk, who can’t be made to.”

Queen Alice – Alice acquires an interface of dignity and commands respect. But can she really believe in it? “People meet a Queenly face/and think it’s really hers, and after so long,/she thinks they may be right”. But the reality of the image of the ‘awkward one’ remains in the looking glass. *The Annotated Alice* – a severe measuring-up of literature against life. Lewis Carroll’s book was an integral part of her childhood reading: “One day I asked (my mother) what would happen if I went through/the looking glass. Would I go, like Alice, into another world? ‘No’ she said; I’d wake up in a hospital, being mended (which is exactly what happened). Alice was denied any comfortable escape into the world of the imagination.

Other Poems

The Bus Riders’ Creed is an utterly admirable, comprehensive code of behaviour for all users of public transport. If only everybody could be so mutually considerate! *You’re Not My Dad, John Inman* – Some metaphorical and generic

dads take precedence over biological ones. *Hospital Psalm* is a state of deep compassion for the patients ‘Angels of the Entrances’, ‘who, young or old, have winter in their cheeks, who even in the rain light up . . .’ *Mammogram* – Joanne feels physically oppressed by the passage of time. *Kaddish for Amy* – another interesting variation on a standard theme – “(He) who put an evil spirit into Saul, then gave a song to David/so he could drive the spirit out.” Then an admirable exhortation to strive for the unattainable: “Let us . . . praise Him who, beyond the reach of any song performable, commands us still to sing.” *The Loft Day* is a celebration of the subjective – “Some words have extra meanings/not understood, but felt” – and Joanne’s collection abounds in them. *A Run Round All Souls* suggests a jogging exercise in a cemetery. She feels sweaty and uncomfortable, a little malodorous. The deceased, by contrast, are ‘unhearing and unsmelling’.

Pretend to be Celia Johnson – presumably referring to the famous actress. A cynical appraisal of deportment and etiquette grooming. I do not quite get the logic of the ‘invisible hat’. It refers to the metaphor of ‘wearing a hat’ as a social interface – a prop for ‘respectable English wistfulness’. To an extent she finds it a curse.

Your Words – an imagined dialogue (possibly with her brother?): she imagined herself having died, and conveying post-mortem messages to her partner, partly out of a desire to prepare him for his decease. She sees an affinity between the post-mortem state and ‘life after a birth’. The poem ends up on a thoroughly cynical note – “preparation is all/a lot of crap . . . it’s just our puny attempt to control/what happens to us . . . I’ve been thinking a lot/about

us recently . . . Another fucking scan – did I tell you?” *Dem Bones* reminds me of the spiritual song. Then there is a survey of intensive physiotherapy, gruelling but ultimately reassuring, a restoration of mobility. Joanne has certainly emerged triumphant from her struggles.

David Russell

Umbrellas are for Whimps by CamTan Ringel



ISBN: 978-1326227906

© CamTan Ringel;

Publisher: South London Books/William
Cornelius Harris Publishing

Edition: First

Published: 18 April 2015; **Language:** English

File Format: ePub; **Price:** £1.99



Poems and illustrations by CamTan Ringel, aka Citi within poetry circuits in London and Stockholm. 'Words are for sharing' 'Each word deserves to be heard' she says in her poetry workshops. 'You don't have to understand poetry. You don't even have to understand the person who wrote it. Just give it a chance to trigger your thinking that little bit extra. Some of us do not want to think. That is ok too; just read, absorb and see what happens.' CT began writing at the age of nine, in Sweden, in English, so that no one would understand. It was a scary prospect baring your soul. As a single child, she found her sanctuary in the world of words. Poetry kept her alive and somewhat sane. 'Poetry gave perspective, release, refuge and a lot of comfort.' 'What's with the title: 'Umbrellas are for whimps'?

'Simple', she says: 'We shield ourselves from the discomfort of being wet and cold whilst poking people's eyes out. If we would dare to enjoy the rain as well as the sunshine, we might just dare seeing each other and ourselves the way we are meant to be seen (which is everyone's guess but an exciting one.)' 'What is the best thing that has happened poetry-wise for you? 'Shaking hands with Princess Diana at the 'Southwark Against Drugs' exhibition felt huge, but it's also crucial to see people develop their capacity to express themselves; grow their confidence – often despite potentially very difficult circumstances.'

More from Citi – In her Own Words

"My title might be confusing. That is not intentional, but it is a reflection on how thoughts can spring to mind in any shape or form. My belief is that words have souls and as such they need to be heard, told and considered. Words are not there to be swallowed. They are there to fearlessly open gateways."

News from Palewell Press – Publishing from a Humanist Perspective

Poetry Express has included several reviews of Palewell Press's senior editor Camilla Reeve's own poetry over the years, so we're pleased to reproduce, with her kind permissions, the latest news from Palewell Press. Their monthly newsletter is available to sign up to via their website, and Facebook; their website can be found at:

www.palewellpress.co.uk/Palewell-Publications.html



Poetry Express Newsletter readers might particularly welcome Nick Alldridge's poetry collection *Playing with the pieces* in which he charts his experience of depression and how writing helped him start to recover:

<http://www.palewellpress.co.uk/Palewell-Publications.html#Play-Pieces>



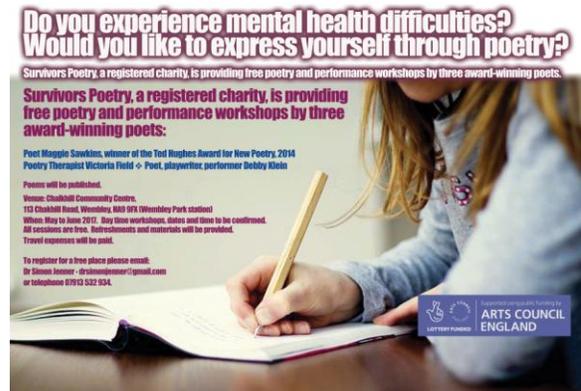
Information about Palewell Press Ltd

'A small independent publisher based in South West London, until January 2016 we focused on publishing full poetry collections, anthologies and pamphlets. But now, working with a number of writers, we have extended our range to include short and long fiction, plays, memoir, biography and other non-fiction work. The press' books about the refugee crisis also look at themes similar to those in Survivors' Poetry - books can be purchased directly from our website using PayPal, or from Amazon.

In selecting authors to publish, Palewell Press aims to support Human Rights, and to increase people's understanding of Social History and Environmental Change. Writers on these themes who looking for publication can start by sending 10 pages of their manuscript to: enquiries@palewellpress.co.uk

Camilla Reeve, Senior Editor
 Palewell Press Ltd – Human Rights, Social History and Environmental publishing
 Web: <http://www.palewellpress.co.uk>

Registered office: 384 Upper Richmond Road West,
 London SW14 7JU
 Registered in England. Number 10473109



Survivors Poetry is running weekly poetry workshops for people who have experienced mental distress.

The workshops will be run by well known poets and will take place between May and June 2017 at:

Chalkhill Community Centre
113 Chalkhill Road
Wembley
HA9 9FX

Nearest tube: Wembley Park Station (Jubilee and Metropolitan lines)

Buses: 83, 182, 297

The workshops are free and refreshments will be provided by the Lounge Cafe and will be funded by us. Travel expenses will be paid. Please contact Dr Simon Jenner to get details of the dates and times (we are arranging these) and to book your place and find out further information.

Schedule

Week commencing 22nd May

Monday 22nd May – Vicky
 No workshop Tuesday

Week commencing 29th May

Monday is a Bank Holiday, so no workshops that week

Week Commencing 5th June

Monday 5th June – Vicky
Tuesday 6th June – Maggie
Wednesday 7th June – Debbie

Week Commencing 12th June

Monday 12th June – Vicky
Tuesday 13th June – Maggie
Wednesday 14th June – Debbie

Week Commencing 19th June

Monday 19th June – Vicky
Tuesday 20th June – Maggie
Wednesday 21st June – Debbie

Week commencing 26th June

Monday 26th – Vicky
Tuesday 27th June – Maggie
Wednesday 28th June – Debbie

Week commencing 3rd July

Wednesday 5th July – Debbie

Week commencing 10 July

Wednesday 12th July – Debbie

PROGRAMME FOR EACH DAY

1pm – Participants arrive at 1pm for a sandwich lunch. Volunteers and Simon can be on hand to welcome them. A chance for participants to meet each other, familiarise themselves with the Centre and its resources before the workshops start at 2pm.

2pm-3pm – Workshops Maggie and Vicky. Debbie's workshops 1-2pm

3pm – Afternoon Tea Maggie and Vicky. Debby 2pm.

4pm – Workshops end.

Tea and coffee will be available for facilitators and participants throughout the day, provided by Lounge Café who are situated within Chalkhill Centre.

MATERIALS

Writing journals and pens will be provided by the volunteer team and will be set out on desks for every workshop.

GROUP RULES

Each facilitator will establish their own group 'rules'.

CONSENT FORMS

These will be given to all registered participants at the point of booking onto the programme.

Survivors' Poetry and the project management team will manage these.

Only 20 places available so interested participants need to book their places ASAP.

We would be grateful if you could distribute the flyer within your organisation and to your contacts.

Email: drsimonjenner@gmail.com

Tel: 07913 532 934

Black Skinned Blue Eyed Boys – Some Belated Praise for the Equals

Last year I bought a copy of a music magazine called *Shindig* – a magazine that covers music from past decades, the main focus often being on the 1960s. In particular the psychedelic music that blossomed in the second half of that decade. My main reason for buying the magazine was for the article about **The Yardbirds** and their 1966 album *Roger the Engineer*. The article was advertised on the front cover. The Yardbirds are one of my favourite bands from that decade. However, a little way into the magazine was a seven-page article on **The Equals**. Reading the article made me go to YouTube and listen to their work.

The Equals formed in 1965; they were a group of mates who lived on the same housing estate in Hornsey North London and attended the same school. They were the first Mixed Race band in Brittan. Guitarist **Eddy Grant** came from Guyana, bass player **Lincoln Gordon** and singer **Derv Gordon** came from Jamaica, while guitarist **Pat Lloyd** and drummer **John Hall** both came from North London. The name 'The Equals' seems to signify equality at a time when there was racial prejudice in schools and workplaces, and in accommodation.

In the 1960s there were a number of black singers working with white bands. Some examples being **Geno Washington and the Ram Jam Band**, **Herbie Goins and the Night-timers**, **Carl Douglas and the Big Stampede** and **The Mike Cotton Sound** featuring Lucas.

Then there was **Jimmy James and the Vagabonds**, a group of Jamaican musicians who came to England in 1964 and spent the

rest of the decade playing Soul Music, building a big following with a mod audience. They didn't have any hits but Jimmy James is a fine singer. **Jimmy Cliff** came to England in 1965 and worked with a band called **The Shakedown Sound**. A band that included future members of **Mott The Hoople** in its line-up. Some of the Spencer Davis Group's hits were written by Jamaican singer Jackie Edwards. When **The Spencer Davis Group** played at the Marquee Club, Jimmy Cliff was often the support act. In this he built up a friendship with **Stevie Winwood**. **Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames** featured Ghanaian percussionist **Speedy Acquaye**, and sometimes Jamaican trumpet player **Eddie Thornton** who had played with the **Skatalites**, a Jamaican band who were popular during the Ska days.

Georgie Fame also worked with Ska legend **Prince Buster**. The first **Savoy Brown Blues Band** line up featured a black singer and a black drummer, and in 1967 another mixed race group called **The Foundations** started having hits in the pop charts. There is no doubt a lot more, but these are some examples of the racial interaction that took place in music during that decade.

In the early 1970s a number a black or mixed race bands emerged. They included **Assagai** – a group of musicians from Nigeria and South Africa, they were jazz influenced and their music was described as Afro Rock. Another band was **Gonzales**. Their music had a Latin influence; they were also quite funky.

Then there was **Osibisa**. For a while their music which was described as criss-cross rhythms that explode with happiness, caught the imagination of a rock audience. They were signed to Bronze, a record label that

featured a number of Progressive Rock bands. A couple of their album covers were designed by **Roger Dean** – a man who would go on to design album covers for **Yes** with his interesting artwork. Unfortunately, early British Reggae bands like the **Cimmerons** and **Matumbi** didn't seem to have many opportunities open to them. They often seemed relegated to covering current pop songs. It wasn't until the mid seventies that these bands got a chance to express their voice. By that time a number of new Reggae bands emerged on to the scene. They included **Aswad**, **Steel Pulse**, **Misty in Roots**, **Black Slate** and the **Reggae Regulars**. There is an excellent compilation titled *Don't Call Us Immigrants* that features a number of British Reggae artistes from that time.

Anyway, back to the Equals. They signed to the President label and in 1966 released their first single titled *I Won't Be There*. Their next single, released in early 1967, was titled *Give Love A Try*. I have memories of hearing the song on Pirate Radio at the time, and being greatly moved. Listening to the song again on YouTube I am still greatly moved. The song speaks about many of the injustices taking place in the world – from a starving child in Africa, to a political prisoner in Russia, to a lonely pensioner in England who is too frightened to speak to his neighbours – the message being to give love a try. Sentiments that were relevant then and are still relevant today.

Derv Gordon delivers a soulful vocal; musically there is a Jimmy Hendrix influence. The singles continued to flow. There was *My Life Ain't Easy*, also from 1967, then in 1968 came a song called *I Get So Excited*. Between 1967 and 1970 the Equals released

seven albums. They wrote their own material and were extremely prolific.

After watching on YouTube television appearances by the Equals, many from the German television show 'Beat Club', I am amazed by the excitement and enthusiasm of the performances they delivered. Watching singer Derv Gordon with his spirited growl I started thinking of **Toots Hilbert** from the Jamaican group **The Maytals**. He may not be like Toots, as I only saw the Maytals live once and that was a long time ago, 1974 I think. However, it is a compliment to Derv Gordon that he made me think of Toots and the Maytals. Behind him the rest of the band are enjoying themselves Eddy Grant Lincoln Gordon and Pat Lloyd swinging their guitars about while John Hall beats out a primal rhythm on the drums. Musically they mixed together Rhythm and Blues, Pop Music, Bubblegum Garage Rock, Blue Beat and Deep Soul into their sound. The writer of the article in *Shindig* Magazine described them as being a cross between the Spencer Davis Group and **The 1910 Fruitgum Company**; I liked the idea of this. The 1910 Fruitgum Company were part of the American Bubblegum movement that blossomed in the late 1960s.

In 1968 following *I Get So Excited*, the band released another single: it was titled *Baby Come Back*. It is an exciting number that has an irresistible chugging groove and winning guitar line. As the song nears the end of the verses you can hear Eddy Grant behind Derv Gordon's vocals singing "alright; ok" over and over; Derv Gordon slips into Jamaican Patois saying "alright, rude boy". The song got to number one in the British pop charts giving President Records their only number one hit.

The hits continued, there was the child-like *Michael and The Slipper Tree*; *Viva Bobby Joe* became an anthem on the football terraces dedicated to the then England captain Bobby More, as *Viva Bobby More*. *Soul Brother Clifford* is the story of a young man called Clifford who plays a funky organ in church. The song conjuring up the spirit of a Caribbean church. **Eddy Grant** sometimes dyed his hair blond and sometimes would wear a woman's blond wig.

While they were having these pop hits there was another side to the Equals work. An example being a 1967 single titled *The Police Are On My Back*. A song that the Clash would record at the end of the 1970s.

The song was written from the point of view of a fugitive, but the sentiments would have had a relevance for Black Youth in the 1970s with the oppressive Suss Laws. The video used to promote the song was unfortunately speeded up, making the song sound like a comedy number. Eddy Grant was also venturing into 'rock steady' as a writer and a producer. One example of this was *Train Tour to Rainbow City for The Pyramids*, he also wrote *Rough Rider* for **Prince Buster**, and he set up the Torpedo label to promote British reggae of that time.

In 1970 came *Black Skinned Blue Eyed Boys*. Musically this is a pioneering piece of British Funk; lyrically it relates to how things were in those times, with Skinhead Youth listening to Reggae and identifying with the way Black Youth of the time were dressing: "Black skinned blue eyed boys ain't gonna fight no more wars." The sentiments were relevant to the Two-Tone Movement that started at the end of the 1970s, also to the Rock Against Racism movement from the latter part of that decade.

During 1970 while the band was on tour in Germany they were involved in a car crash. Eddy Grant in particular was badly injured and had to stay in hospital in Germany. On returning to England he then suffered from a heart attack and a collapsed lung and was hospitalised again.

On recovering he decided to leave the Equals as a touring band, however he continued to write and record with the band. While the band didn't have any more hits, the Singles continued. One song – *Stand Up And Be Counted* again showed the militant side to the band's work. In 1975 the Equals released another album titled *Born Ya*.

Eddy Grant set up his own label Ice records. He also set up his own studio in his home in Stamford Hill North London. In 1976 he produced an album called *Feel The Rhythm* for Jamaican Vocal Group **The Pioneers**. He started recording his own albums and in 1979 had a hit with a song called *Living On The Front Line*. More hits would follow including *Electric Avenue* a song about a street in the centre of Brixton. He then moved to Barbados where he set up Blue Wave studios producing local artists.

The rest of the Equals didn't have any more hits but carried on performing and recording. However the Equals legacy lives on. As well as the Clash, *The Police Are On My Back* has been recorded by **Willie Nile**. **The Detroit Cobras** recorded another Equals song called *Green Light*, in 1994 *Baby Come Back* was a number one hit for Reggae artist **Pato Banton**. The Equals music and television performances are on YouTube waiting to be discovered and enjoyed.

Frank Bangay
April 2017

