

# Poetry Express

the Survivors' Poetry Quarterly

Winter 2005/06

Issue 23

**John O'Donoghue on Robert Lowell**

*A Postcard from Pitsea from John Weedon*

**Lucía Moral Baena on Juan Ramón Jiménez**

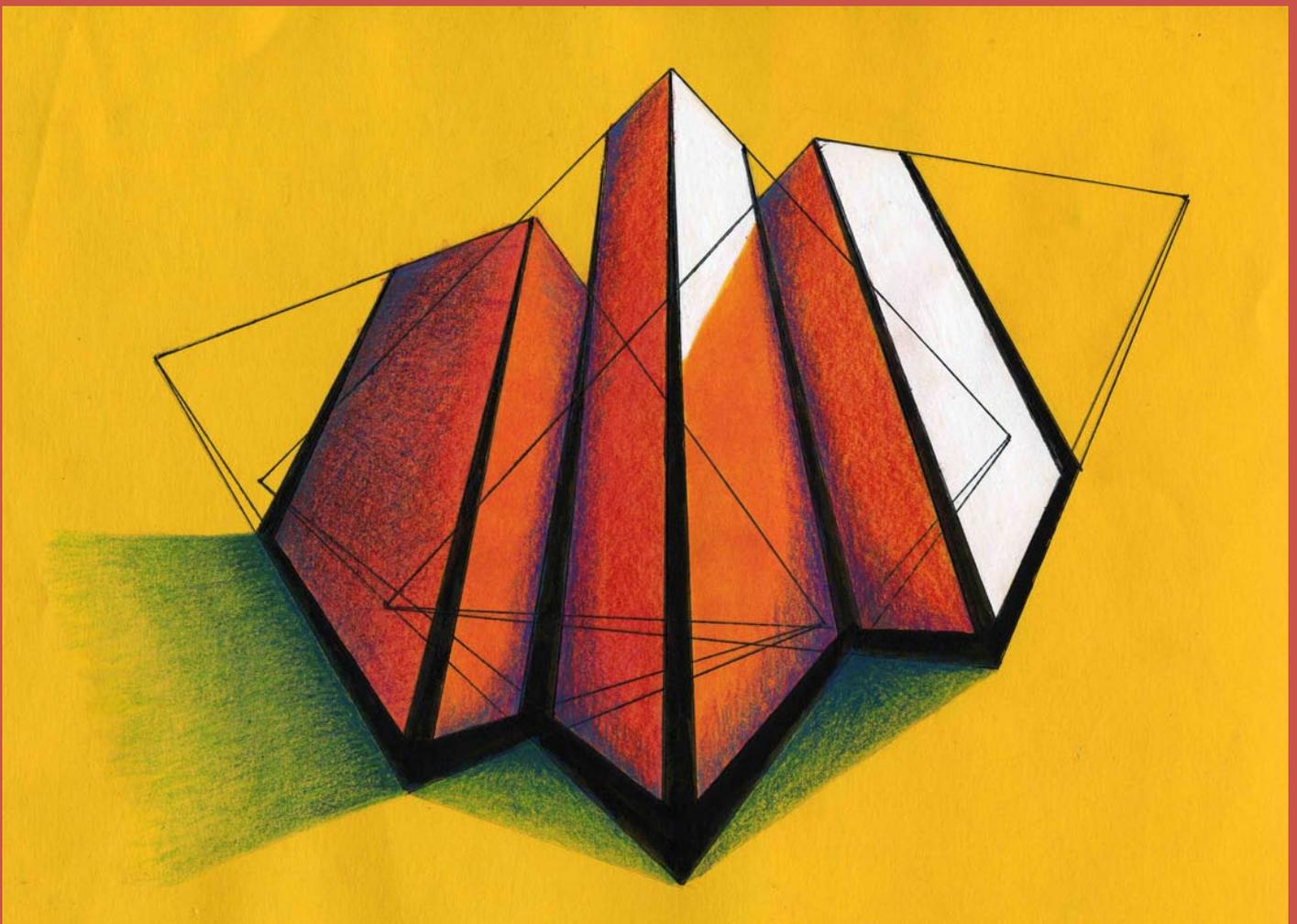
*Dave Russell on the literary journalism of Lorna Sage*

**Alan Morrison on the Sixties Press mental health series**

*Peter H Donnelly – A Brief Personal History of Hearing Voices*

*Buzzed Off With Meher Baba – an interview with John Horder*

*plus Broadsheet, Reviews and Letters Pages*



**The Survivors' Poetry February Bash!**  
**Write to Survive! Campaign Update**

*promoting poetry, prose, plays, art and music by survivors of mental distress*

DINO  
CAMPANA

SELECTED  
WORKS

TRANSLATED BY  
CRISTINA VITI

Survivors' Press  
Translation Series



“

ONE OF  
THE  
GREATEST  
POETS OF  
THE  
CENTURY  
IN  
ANY  
LANGUAGE

MARTIN  
SEYMOUR-  
SMITH,  
MACMILLAN  
GUIDE  
TO  
WORLD  
LITERATURE

”

*To celebrate the re-launch of Survivors' Press, Survivors' Poetry are proud to announce the forthcoming publication of The Selected Works Of Dino Campana, translated by Cristina Viti. This beautiful collection is the first full volume ever published in the UK of this highly gifted Italian survivor poet – keep an eye on [www.survivorspoetry.com](http://www.survivorspoetry.com) for launch date and venue announcement. To order a copy in advance of the launch please send a cheque for £9 including £1.50 p&p to the address on the opposite page.*

## POETRY EXPRESS

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## SURVIVORS' POETRY

Survivors' Poetry is a unique national charity which promotes the writing of survivors of mental distress. Please visit [www.survivorspoetry.com](http://www.survivorspoetry.com) for more information. A Survivor may be a person with a current or past experience of psychiatric hospitals, ECT, tranquillisers or other medication, a user of counselling services, a survivor of sexual abuse, child abuse and any other person who has empathy with the experiences of survivors.

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# Carry on Campaigning

Dr Simon Jenner, Director



*...it seems that Survivors' Poetry – which has worked nationally, for over a dozen years, with poets and poetry linked to distress and disadvantage – may face the loss of its core funding: with all that would entail of uncertainty, provisionality and the footslog of the fundraising round. We live in anxious times.*

*Fiona Sampson, Poetry Review*

**E**ver felt like leaving history to the defeated? Or politics to losers? There's so much going well with SP, I'm tempted to leave history alone. But it won't always leave us; it meddles, tinkers curses with us. It wants to be found, like the Ring. We need to thrust its curse from us into some annealing flame. So I'm breaking off from another round of fund-raising and mentoring a superbly gifted poet to look back through an elvish (amber?) spyglass at the curse itself. No, it isn't ACE. It's ancient chemistry that neither I, nor our current Lead Officer for instance, have anything to do with. Yet we discover these odd whitish deposits on our jackets. Alum, Gollum, Dust? So a dust-up. Then I'm moving on to 2006 where I'll meet most of the books we're just publishing, and probably you. More later.

When I arrived at SP, I found something akin to the dwarves' Mines of Moria. Literally; it was dark, had to be entered tunnelling through another organisation's room where dragonish stand-offs weren't unknown. We entered on tip-toe. Then we got on famously. Still, what confronted me was a pyred heap. Lists of missing scrolls jumbled with the dead. Was this the Director's tomb, like Balin's? I'd never had a job, but oddly felt this lifestyle, with its Mordor-like (though false) legend for leaving Directors in the land where shadows lie, wouldn't leave me there.

And 'they are coming' – the landlord cometh. I had to deal with him too, by turning on the light. Then the final Balrog-like confrontation: ACE and its compliances. All our fault.

**T**his is what ACE's 2003 Appraisal found, which anachronistically formed the basis of their 2005 disinvestment. It's also how they sashay out of their rejection of our Stage 2 Complaint, to which Peter Hewitt, CEO ACE, has responded. Of course Hewitt is at two removes, and has to protect his own. The mutual tone was what Sir Christopher Meyer and his kind might call frank and decked. Perhaps being Christopher would have helped, though his being less than kind recently inspires me to mimic home office truths with gently demonic laughter. I'm not frank, not frankly. What I'd like to address is all the positive ways ACE have actually contributed to SP's life, and many other RFOs. I think they themselves feel extremely uncomfortable with their shuddery methodology, or at least their tactical withdrawal. Based on experience, I'd like to suggest a few solutions, given an irreversible decision on any RFO (see below).

Realistically, axing RFOs could involve tapering off a grant, rather than slice it dead. There simply isn't time in a few months to secure alternative funding. It often takes nine months from a *successful* initial submission to grant. The 18 months initially earmarked for *Talawa* at least recognized this. But smaller RFOs with full-time staff should be given a far longer lead-in. It hits them just as hard, whether you employ four or forty. Any RFO over £50,000 p.a. should be given a like warning; certainly any over £100,000.

Expiring RFOs should be offered

some real on-hand guidance too, perhaps through a consultancy and/or a fundraisers' ten-day stint, to help themselves. They'd need to show willing and frame a proposal (like the Transition to Disinvestment Document they have to produce in any case). This would show they had the structure and personnel in place capable of benefiting from such a final investment.

Consultancies, then, offer a negotiation, perhaps even to a re-structuring; certainly a clean bill of health for other funders. The subsequent report can be excerpted and quoted to advantage. This is quite apart from the actual purpose: to address the often painful process of re-structuring itself. Core fund-raising skills are something ACE could help enormously with. At an average of £4,500-5,000 per ten days (this sounds very little time, but can be strategically extremely helpfully paced), it's not a great deal to confer on an old RFO, with an accredited, pre-vetted firm.

And perhaps it should be generally available, since all RFOs bar the Royal Opera House are threatened in any case. Not by ACE ultimately, but by what the Government choose to visit on ACE. ACE then have to choose the next batch for the one-way carriages, though as I've written before (so won't again) they could choose a freeze-dry. You can reconstitute those. ACE could instead show solidarity with say 80% of those otherwise to be axed (the £3m sum is trifling). This would mark a greater resistance to the Government's starving ACE to death bar a few tokenisms (like the ROH, as 'we go there, minister'), and having the blame heaped on them. ACE as scapegoat, always at one remove from blaming the Government, might be the single reason for its survival.

No, there are a lot of miserable people at ACE. I don't envy them their decisions. The Ring is heavy; it's time it was hurled into a smelting oblivion. So here goes.

A footnote to my ruminations last time remains. The black theatre organisation *Talawa*, whose fight with ACE I reported last time, did have their disinvestment overturned; though at the cost of board and director. Horse-trading takes place often enough for all these sudden 'never never' reversals to be commonplace. ACE never admit driver error, but suddenly find a hidden reverse gear.

They themselves at the Arts Council of Northern Ireland are extremely upset at having their funding actually cut from 2006-08. From £14 million to £13.2 by the end of this period (*Arts Professional*, Issue 110, 21 November 2005). This is important. Northern Ireland, since it's further out of view to most on the mainland, is often a testing ground for disinvestment, like the BBC Northern Ireland Orchestra being axed in 1981, and surviving heroically as the Ulster Orchestra. The BBC's decisions are analogous to ACE's. Someone with a long memory in government remembered this happy experiment. Yes, minister?

And it's Europe-wide: Italy is to have a proposed 35% of its performing arts and film budget cut (*Arts Professional*, Issue 110, 21 November 2005). Opera and film, two of their three living national institutions (the last, of course, is football)! Furore is ensuing, however well-supported these mediums were, even under Berlusconi's Italy. Angela Merkel's Germany has inherited a cut *Kultur* where the opera houses and museums were already being pared back from their handsome subsidies. Crisis emerged in 2003, and is lurching into freefall as *File on 4* reported two years ago. Merkel's already embattled cost-cutting might start with the zones Schroeder dared

to shave. In case we might feel this is *zeitgeist*, *Arts Professional's* headline reads: 'Thatcherism Italian style'. We in the UK created it. We can resist it, as the Italians and Germans certainly do. The French Government knows it would lose, and hasn't tried it on with figures like Pierre Boulez about, even if he did repeat after twenty years that blowing up opera houses was still an elegant solution to a bourgeois art form. Ministers would find themselves suspended from the outside piping of the Pompidou Centre. Gently tapping in the breeze; the echoes recorded for IRCAM's electronic music samplers.

A wider frame emerges, too, when you consider what other Directors are telling me: first they'll hit disabilities, then ethnic minorities. It's what Ken Livingstone has been raging about recently. The Commission for Racial Equality is being abolished, downgraded into a monitoring and advice board, a kind of un-glorified CAB with glossy logos. Some see the whole DDA compliance as a kind of privatisation of disabilities: everyone but the Government pays for it. Time to get Equalisers?

It's time for the Arts to speak out. If we don't, who'll be there when they come to axe us? And which soft target's next? Each reduction diminishes us, reduces the grounds for arguing the absolute, not comparative social, need for the arts; its efficacy, its generation of wealth, the quality of life it brings. This isn't quantifiable in outcomes, in measuring it as a kind of band-aid substitute for a disastrous under-investment in the social services and education. Or as a soft-spread option for squashing against hospital beds. But when the arts reduce, the society it comes from does too. And eventually a dust-bowl of scratchy living emerges, where there'll not even be room for politicians. There won't even be a closing time for the 'Gardens of the West', as Cyril Connolly put it, closing his great *Horizon* magazine in 1949. It'll be the dead mid-West of the Western

world. A third sector world not fit for cattle to live in. Let's not be put into cattle trucks. Or be branded for trash.

So how is SP in itself? Well, well. There's the Campaign to get ACE to overturn or at least re-schedule their disinvestment; to make them find that magical reverse gear. We'd love everybody to get involved in the campaign. The best way is to write to ACE, tell them all that SP has done for you (like the viaducts); otherwise click on our website [www.survivorspoetry.com](http://www.survivorspoetry.com), to find the campaign 'click' and then press. It goes to all the right people. And brightens their day. You can write to the *Guardian*, keep up the steady trickle of letters received since our article and letters went to press in *Society Guardian* in August. Attend our great Bash at RADA, on 22 February, from 7.30pm; the first of what we hope to be an annual event, and not a 'Save SP' farewell gig. We've even thought of one outside Pear Tree Court in Farringdon, opposite the *Guardian*. You'll hear about that. So will our friends inside.

If you're in and around London, listen in to *Resonance fm*, where once a month from January we hope to showcase half an hour. Do listen out for details, or phone up. They'll be posted on our website for those of you waiting to tune in, turn on, drop out of official language. Sometimes *Resonance* broadcasts windscreen wipers. Don't be put off. It's wipe-art. We can send all this to you in a CD, £2.99 for our two CD set, or £1.50 per CD for our shorter shows...

Now I can announce our real achievements this autumn. First is the publication of the *Selected Works* of the great Italian survivor poet Dino Campana (1885-1932). He's one of the two or three greatest Italian poets of the last century, alongside Montale, Ungaretti, Quasimodo, Saba, Betocchi and later, slightly lesser poets like Pasolini and

Sereni. He is, as my late friend Martin Seymour-Smith put it authoritatively, 'one of the greatest poets of the century in any language'. He simply matters, and yet this extraordinary vagabondish scholar, of chemistry and literature, who logged in South America and was discharged from the army and finally his own dangerous logic, has no volume in the UK. This is hardly through lack of regard: The old *Penguin Book of Italian Verse* accords him almost equal billing with Montale. Yet the old Penguin Translation series, which became entrenched, focused on Montale himself, Ungaretti because of his modernism, and Quasimodo through his almost accidental (but deserved) Nobel of 1959. He got it as a sop to communists, incidentally, being one himself, after the previous year's prize going to the quasi-dissident Pasternak. And not quite for a volume of his poetry being spotted in an Italian footballer's haversack during a match in Sweden.

Campana was a one-off visionary, and is pretty difficult to translate. It's to our eternal debt that Cristina Viti has undertaken and so consummately completed the task. Her identification with the poet is total, her own commentary frequently astonishing. She begins:

Ever since crashing into the Italian poetry scene like a suicide bomber giving his life for the right to worship No God, Dino Campana has been at the centre of endless diatribes.

Not for comfortable pundits of culture, then. Campana's heightened nocturnal world is also precise, tender, exalted, despairing. It asks, like a few great survivor poets, the dangerous question of what poetry is, and what it does to us and for us.

The other great roll-call is for nine of our mentored poets. This has been by turns a humbling, inspiring, ultimately uplifting experience for mentors like myself, and I hope a beneficial one for mentees, with the often irritating niggles that mentors provide by means of meaning well, even the best, for their gifted

proteges. Several poets seem fit for volumes, let alone pamphlets. There'll be far more on these poets next issue. Samples of their work, how to obtain them, and perhaps comments from the poets – and mentors – themselves. I must hugely thank Alan Morrison above all, whose co-ordinating has extended well beyond the call of duty; and the quiet counsel (as always) of Roy Birch with some of the initial stages of the programme. Suffice it to say through Alan's efforts we've secured our second year's funding early, which is also a way to thank Hilary Hodgson of Esmée Fairbairn, whose support has remained unstinting, and generous in the terms of its provision. As well as pretty trusting!

Next year, please start applying! You might come across us through the untiring networking of Xochitl Tuck, in her Events at the *Rustique* off Tufnell Park, or the Poetry Café's Thursdays. Or through Razz and his team's gently-led but inspiring workshops, which, again if you're in London, should entice you. We're working on what we can do, once stabilised, for the rest of the UK.

But we're always here, particularly Roy Holland who enjoys responding to people even over much of the Christmas period, volunteering outside his hours: Phone, write, email or log on to our web. Not just for campaigns, but through Co Wright's superb work as Webmaster, an ever-spiralling menu of works including film, means we're getting 5-7,000 visits per month, depending on what section people are attracted to. There's a moderated Poetry Forum, where poetry chat can be had. You can download all *Poetry Expresses*; the University of Buffalo in New York State does this on acid-free paper. And like many organisations, is cheerfully paying us for doing so, offering unstinting support for our current plight. For addressing that, too, I must thank our incredibly dedicated fundraising research volunteers: Dan Nelson and Matthew Hackett. They work

at the coal-face of fund-raising, coming away quite cheerfully with unnaturally bright VDU faces. If they're there at 7pm they might get hauled off for drinks; occupational hazard. Ezra Williams you'll encounter as reviewer. Bet you didn't know he wields a mean drill, and has partly transformed the actual office. Drilling, musically, on Sundays. *Rock Drill?* He once had a piece conducted by Peter Maxwell Davies, but this wasn't it. Then there's everyone outside the office, which is where each group comes in, contributing its section to this magazine.

Here the list remains, and must remain, an endless fade-out. But I must record the death of the fine poet Margaret Walsh (Godmother of Damien Hirst), whose death was a scandal others will address. I hope to publish a proper obituary.

I must also record my indebtedness to *Arts Professional* who tactfully pointed out their article on Sports and the Arts (which I attributed to *Arts Industry* who also carried it) was originally theirs. I'm a great reader, admirer and stealer of both, as you'll have gathered. We need such compatriots on such a journey. Like, of course, Fiona Sampson for obvious reasons quoted above.

**F**inally I must, at last, introduce the person who's done much to transform SP over the past six months by the time you read this. ACE were quite right to suggest we needed an Administrator. We were able to offer the position to Blanche Donnery. She's qualified as a ceramicist (with design prizes), product manager, carer, social services administrator; and has taken on our finance – even to becoming an intern with our accountants. She's mainly to be heard pointing out that the f-ing cups could do with washing, and that she's had to do it yet again; will get on with desktop publishing, and cheerfully reminds us of office protocol – as if we'd ever forget it. Happy Christmas and New Year!

# Winter Warmers

## Roy Birch with the latest from *National* and *London Outreach*



**D**uring the last quarter I seem to have been mostly occupied with the London side of Outreach.

In September I visited the Newham Centre for Mental Health to advise an Occupational Therapist as to the best way to change a single-ward writing group to a cross-ward group. This gave me a great deal of satisfaction, as I had not expected the NHS to ask for my help.

In October I created links with *Exposure*, a training scheme for disadvantaged youth, based in the Muswell Hill Centre, and with the Harington Scheme, in Cholmely Park, Highgate, a charity using Horticultural Therapy to help young people with learning difficulties and mental health problems.

Also in October, I liaised with Jo Silver and SP Events Organiser Xochitl Tuck, to provide SP poets for *Normaliz In Notebooks*, a female-centred event being run by Jo in Kingston, Surrey. Sadly, none of the SP poets turned up on the day.

I also arranged for SP to perform at the *Mental Health Today* exhibition at the Business Design Centre in Upper Street, Islington, on November 2nd, as part of the *Creative Routes* event. In the event, the SP contingent consisted of Razz and myself, performing in a difficult and somewhat fraught atmosphere, as the management of the Design Centre had browbeaten *Creative Routes* into lowering their volume (they are essentially a loud organization) to the point at which they were virtually inaudible at a distance of more than a few feet from the stage. Bizarre but still beautiful.

Frank Bangay's *Topsy-Turvey Band* was well worth the aggravation, and Razz not only performed superbly (in spite of a bad cold) but also connected with *Creative Routes*, a union which will hopefully be of mutual benefit. I also managed to reconnect with the *One Tribe Quandary*; so, all in all, a worthwhile participation.

**O**n November 10th I attended the Islington Mental Health Forum AGM as part of a panel of three (the other panellists were Claire Ward-Thornton, Development Manager of the Islington Music Forum and Karin Charlesworth, Project Co-Ordinator of the *Other Side Gallery*, a charity which promotes art by homeless artists).

The event was highly enjoyable, with a lively discussion and good interaction between the panel and the floor. I made a number of useful connections and hopefully laid the groundwork for a workshop collaboration between SP and the Islington Mental Health Forum.

**D**uring this period I have also been working with Lynne Clayton of Southwark MIND, to set up a Creative Writing group at the Castle Day Centre at Elephant and Castle and to set up a Creative Writing group in the Children's Ward of the Mental Health unit at Guy's hospital.

Further initiatives are developing, but are at too embryonic a stage to be viably reported at this juncture.

**W**ith regard to *National Outreach*, there is considerably less to report.

In September, I visited Paula Brown publisher, and co-ordinator of Portsmouth Survivors, to discuss a possible collaboration between SP and music students at Bath university, with a view to creating a poetry/music CD. This initiative has yet to bear fruit.

In October, I represented SP at the *Gael Force* festival in Lockerbie, an evocative location for anything connected with survival. *Gael Force* is not yet a large festival, being still in its infancy, but it's fun, and hopefully an increased SP presence will be found at a larger *Gael Force*, beginning with next year.

Earlier this month (the third to be exact) I gave a talk to the University of the Third Age in Stevenage, as part of Stevenage Survivors' annual U3A performance—a most enjoyable event, I have to say, and one which the Stevenage group looks forward to eagerly each year.

I have also taken the first steps toward setting up SP International. There has long been an overseas interest in SP, there being nothing of the like outside the UK.

Sadly, ACE has decided to persist with its ill-conceived disinvestment of a totally unique and valuable organisation (SP) but I sincerely hope there will be many more outreach reports. Have a great Christmas and hopefully talk to you next year.

# The Twenty-Fifth Hour

## Bristol Survivors' Stepping Out Theatre Company's staging of Per Olov Enquist's *Hour of the Lynx*

**O**n Thursday October 22nd I attended a performance of the *Stepping Out Theatre* production of Per Olov Enquist's *The Hour of the Lynx*, at the old Red Lion Theatre, Angel, Islington.

Set in a secure mental institution in Sweden, the play tells the story of a young man (a double murderer) who is given a cat as part of a psychological experiment. What transpires is not at all what anyone expects.

Though *The Hour of the Lynx* is undoubtedly a work of genius, it is not the easiest work to define. While addressing such major issues as love, hate, death, faith, redemption, and the eternal search for understanding, it actually goes much further. In fact, it is really only through the cat, forever centre-stage by virtue of its referential absence (much like Beckett's *Godot* and Behan's *Quare Fellow*) that we truly touch the essence of this Nordic masterpiece.

Blessed with a compelling script, a minimal yet highly effective set, superb lighting, appropriately atmospheric music (in this instance Arvo Pärt), and virtuoso performances, *The Hour of the Lynx* is everything I have come to expect of a Steve Hennessy production. This particular play has, as a bonus, Steve's own directorial debut. For those who do not know, Steve Hennessy is the Co-Ordinator of Bristol Survivors' Poetry and the founder and lynch-pin of the *Stepping-Out Theatre Company*, which, in turn, is the country's leading mental-health-based theatre group.

With regard to the performances. Swedish-born Seb Steiger, who plays The Boy, is quite electrifyingly superb.

Ros Lidiard is at her effortlessly brilliant best as the Pastor, and as for Rebecca Adamson, who plays Lisbeth, the psychiatrist, it was only when I met her after the performance and was able to contrast the real person with the stage persona, that I fully realized how good she was.

"Do not fear the twenty-fifth hour"... More importantly, do not fail to see this wonderful play!

*Roy Birch*



**T**he *Hour of the Lynx* is the kind of play that though written in 1988 is the prototype of similar themes and extremities seen from around a decade later. Some of the newish wave of Irish playwrights (*The Weir*, *The Deserted Bar School* as I've called it), or Ariel Dorfmann's *Death and the Maiden*, furnish the tonality. The setting, a psychological hell that morphs to a shell for three, is masterly, layered, persuasive and ultimately heartbreaking. Ros Liddiard excels as the Pastor called in by her niece, a stiff-necked psychologist, to theologically stiffen a patient. The niece is superbly fielded by Rebecca Adamson; ironically, the only one named: Lisbeth. Adamson later commented that this was an out-of-character role; sounding naturally stilted is astonishingly difficult, a feat

she pulled off consummately.

The plot, adumbrated eloquently by Roy Birch, winds around Liddiard's being skinned into a labyrinth by the obsessions of the Swedish-born Seb Steiger. Killing the new owners of his grandfather's house and burning it down form a painterly and very funny backdrop to this intensely realised heaven, full of Spitfires and iconographies pulled in by Steiger from his boyhood's anecdotage. It is

he who ultimately cat-cradles the Pastor in his arms, after relating how he's mercy killed the cat, who is God, before they can be separated. God, the ginger cat, flips over the ancient Egyptian cult; though this implicit grammar, never mentioned or ritualised is powerfully absorbed into Steiger's personal mythos. Direction is taut but evocative and breathing, spotlit and stripped but expansive through the actors' very gestural use of space. Someone must hear the praise for *Stepping Out*; they realise virtually all of this shuddering masterpiece.

*Simon Jenner*

*The Hour of the Lynx* by Per Olov Enquist. Produced by the Stepping-Out Theatre Company in association with The Jigsaw Ensemble. Produced and directed by Steve Hennessy



Photos courtesy of Stepping Out Theatre © 2005

# Nine Types of Acuity

## Alan Morrison *reports on a productive first year of the National Mentoring Scheme*



**I**t's been a mammoth challenge overseeing the mentoring scheme in tandem with taking on *Poetry Express*, and since doing so, I've not had time to maintain the same level of input into the mentoring as I was able initially.

My first task as co-ordinator was to select eight 'mentees' (a new entry for the OED perhaps?) with the help of Roy Birch. We sifted through many submissions, all worthy in their ways, and narrowing them down to a manageable nine or so was no mean feat. Roy and I selected on an instinctive criterion: we weren't looking so much for technical polish (polishing would come through the mentoring) as emotional intensity, and, above all, poetic potential. Simultaneous with this: the daunting task of finding the mentors, established poets who would be willing to lend their services voluntarily to help largely unpublished survivors work towards their first substantial publications. I was amazed to find the majority of poets contacted agreed without condition to take on the nine month correspondence programme. Face-to-face mentoring was the ideal scenario, however, we matched mentees with mentors on the basis of stylistic rather than geographical compatibility; apart from anything else, in a national scheme the chances of a mentee and mentor living close enough to meet regularly was unlikely. As it turned out some matches shared (mainly London) postcodes as well as poetics.

David Kessel requested I mentor him after we'd met and found we had a natural affinity in poetic styles and tastes, not to mention a strong personal rapport. I've grown so impressed by David's harrowingly

expressive work that I feel it merits full volume publication – this will be appear under the Survivors' Press imprint early in the new year.

At a tender eighteen, **Tim Pearson** is our youngest mentee and a prodigious find: he's already enrapturing audiences at The Poetry Café with his blistering words, and his pamphlet promises to be a real eye-opener. It was felt only one person was poetically equipped to mentor Tim, our own **Simon Jenner**, a highly accomplished poet of great intellectual prowess. Simon was delighted to be matched with a protégé whose imagistic lyricism reminds him of Rilke and Trakl.

**Dave Russell** has done sterling work mentoring **Kate Evans**, even going so far as to practically produce her entire pamphlet himself – somewhat beyond the call of duty but evidence of his enthusiasm for her work.

**Peter Campbell's** mentoring of satirical poet **John Exell** will reach fruition a little later than the rest, with a pamphlet in early 2006.

It was **Geoff Clarke's** request on being accepted for the scheme that **Roy Birch** mentor him. Subsequently Roy has worked very closely with Geoff and both are en route to produce a very strong collection.

London-based mentee **Anne Cooper** has said her pairing with Brighton-based poet and performer, **Bernadette Cremin**, has been a real confidence-boost to her writing.

In spite of geographical barriers, the partnership of mentor **Robin Ford** and mentee **Bear Tyler** has developed into a strong friendship as well as collaboration. Bear visited Robin on

several occasions at his home on the Isle of Wight, and the results of this particularly interactive association will impress, I promise.

Poet and publisher **Paula Brown** has performed wonders for the scheme: having started mentoring highly promising poet **Margaret Carney** half way through the year (the two having replaced mentor Pete Morgan and mentee Jane Esson – both of whom dropped out due to other commitments), Paula astonishingly completed Margaret's collection well before the November deadline.

Prize-winning poet **Debjani Chatterjee** also merits a special commendation: having initially mentored **Amita Patel**, and then taken on **Gail Campbell** on Amita becoming ill, she agreed to continue mentoring both mentees when Amita recovered. Amita's pamphlet will appear next year.

It just remains for me to say a huge thank you to Hilary Hodgson of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for providing the funds to make this extremely rewarding scheme possible. One which I hope will prove a springboard into publishing for its gifted beneficiaries.

**The Survivors' Poetry National Mentoring Scheme pamphlets 1 – 8 will be launched at The Poetry Cafe on 9 February and 9 March 2006 (details tba on website). David Kessel's volume will be appearing in the new year, launch to be announced.**

*For entry into the 2006 leg of the National Mentoring Scheme, please email 15 poems to [alan@survivorspoetry.org.uk](mailto:alan@survivorspoetry.org.uk) or post to the usual address.*

# A Postcard from Pitsea

## Survivor Artist John Weedon takes a return trip to Greece to talk about painting and sculpting projects

**A**t last I've arrived on vacation in Greece. The weather's perfect. So is this island of Kefolonian. I wrote 'One Day I Went Walking' here seven years ago. Now at last I can begin to write a few thoughts for *Poetry Express*. Alan Morrison suggested I tell you some of the things that have been happening to me in the Essex art scene this year and I decided to feature some of the people I've met. There are some surprises for you too. Here we go...

It all started at a Seminar at Writtle College, Chelmsford, the County Town of Essex. Some 100 artists gathered together on 5 April to 'think tank' the ingredients necessary for a major strategy to provide studio spaces throughout the County. To use art to attract tourists into heart of Essex which is truly underated in its wealth of history and natural beauty. Comets from all visual arts disciplines collided and blended. A fantastic cocktail of combined intellect and talent!

My first important meeting occurred during coffee before the start. Juliet Martin, the Regional Arts Development Officer, came out of the crowded foyer to invite me to attend the first Masterclass tutored by Francis Bowyer PPRWS. "He's a friend of mine" I said to Juliet, "from the Bankside Gallery in London." The RWS were coming to Essex with a remit to help by instructing "artists who are especially gifted and talented". Forgive the blurb but I was very proud that morning. The Masterclass was held on 17 June, the subject Figure Drawing. It was a very intense day's study and I worked very hard.

Now pin back your listening devices for a special surprise.

During August Danielle Hope ('The City Fox') telephoned the news that she had written a script and had at last begun writing poetry again. The play, a satire, was to run at Waltham Abbey. Survivors' Poetry had come with a remit in drama and music to help Essex artists! "WOW..." was my response.

On 17 September we met for drinks before the last night performance and I showed Dani a selection of my newer paintings. After some discussion with two friends from Prague she decided firmly that *Eclipse – A Song from the Sun*, my last painting, was the best picture. This is very reassuring because I believe this new series is very exciting. *A Song from the Sun* is quoted from my poem 'And There Came A Man', which I have decided will be the title of my one man show at Rayleigh Arts Centre in Essex during March next year. (I am hoping that Survivors' will be well represented at the Private View 'bash'. The show will combine pictures with poetry).

During the evening many friends of Danielle's gathered round a large table. I lit the candle and we shared an enormous ploughman's supper before watching *Weddings Of Mass Destruction*, a satire written in the form of a musical. It was extremely entertaining. At the last curtain there were bouquets for Dani and photographers.

At Rayleigh too I have become very interested in a National Trust project to renovate a windmill, providing museum and gallery space. It was built in 1796 by Dutch settlers and I am researching. "Tall Mill Of

Rayleigh" is on my poetry notepad. A new friend, Spencer Nugent, is the opening artist. I've been invited to show there too.

I met Spencer at the Space to Work seminar. Spence has given me new ideas broadening my vision and he has helped me to expand my metaphysical skills. This has been a very exciting experience and it is surprising since our philosophical backgrounds are so very different. Standing in the countryside one day he demonstrated his African ideologies of "giving back" using a fern leaf which he picked from below a hedgerow alongside the footpath. With, as he describes it, his studio all around us, he held the fern upright. He broke off the bottom right hand spur and said simply "Look! It is the same..." Then he repeated this again and again until the leaf in his hand was minute. Then he said finally "This is my media..." The symbolism of geometry within our own countryside is clear but Spence has lived and worked with native artists in the rainforests of Africa.

For Wat Tyler Country Park, a huge sculpture project to bring fun and involvement to teenagers from nearby Pitsea where poverty has become a major problem, I have submitted three sculpture designs. One is entitled *Rebirth of the Planet*.

During July I visited our new offices at Archway and was delighted to find that at last our Director has an office of his own (Congratulations Simon). With Alan Morrison and Simon Jenner, some very exciting ideas were developed. One of them is on the front cover and I am very proud of this. This picture is from a trilogy entitled *Structure a Poem in Three Projections*, which was inspired

by the new architecture of London Town.

**A**fter the achievements of that day, I decided to attend the very next Poetry Café event, to read some of my new material and to help Xochitl Tuck, our Events Co-ordinator, like I used to. Part of coming back to Survivors. A kind of homecoming to my real London town. That night I befriended a new member who told me he was homeless. A young London street poet who lived on the pavements of London; the pavements of London which we all know are hard and uncompromising if you are homeless. I call them “the pavements of Gold”, but in reality I know its only sodium light reflected when its raining and cold. He asked me if I had ever been homeless. I said “To be honest with you, no I haven’t.” But then we began to share some of my history. The long, long journey which also was hard and uncompromising. At times there was real terror during madness. But now there is Structure, there is Order and there is Purpose. Later, the same poet asked me for a pound. “What’s it for?” I asked him and he told me “I need food for my cat”. He came back later with a tin of cat food.

On my way home that night I sat in the train thinking about it. His cat was hungry. His first priority was to help a fellow helpless creature he loved. I’ve experienced the same feelings when things were bad for me when my son was in trouble with depression in Hastings. At the time I needed a third verse for a poem. I was pleased with this poem but it wasn’t working. It needed more building up to support the triumph in the final verse. And I am remembering now how Hannah McCallum complimented me for it at a Feedback Workshop once.

“The thing I like about this poem is that it contains no punctuation,” Hannah said. I’ve never forgotten that remark.

I’d like to dedicate the poem to that new member and ALL my friends in Survivors’ Poetry:



### Clawing Out Of The Catch Can

Clawing out of the catch can  
There  
Where the dark mind tunnels  
cannot issue a bright stone  
of any kind  
The only bright stones  
to be found  
are outside this town  
Here not there

Clawing out of the catch can  
to find something of mine  
now found at last  
with glasses of beer  
Then  
giving bright words  
sharing bright eyes  
Here not there  
Clawing out of the catch can  
to climb into the sunlight  
where the air is clean

Then  
breathing is easier  
my moist eye can see  
where I am  
Here not there

Greetings Survivors from Greece!

**P**.S. I have read with passionate concern Simon Jenner’s article ‘ACE Of Clubs’ in the last issue and would now voice that I strongly support Simon in his campaign. At Rayleigh Mill a Draft Bid which I thought to be a flyer was suddenly rejected with 30 points to answer in excess of the 25 point criterion requirement. “Desk top politics” was my first observation when Spence rang me with this astounding news. Rochford Council are seeking alternative sources for money but it has severely affected plans to open during October. Spencer, ably supported by Carol Coates Rochford’s ADO, wrote his own bid for set up costs to open The Mill bedecked with Light Sculpture. In this area of visual arts Spence is astounding. I was going to help him with his set up.

Communications throughout this project have frankly been appalling! I stand in the wings but Spencer has often been in my studio with tears of frustration whilst the bid was under preparation.

In the meantime, give me a desk and a telephone Simon. I wouldn’t mind pushing my weight around on this one at all.

# Survivors' Poetry Broadsheet

## Feeling Peevish

Feeling peevish, I went to a doctor.  
He said: 'The soul seems fine  
and your heart is in the right place;  
even your ears are either side of your face  
but you appear to be having problems with your spleen.  
If it continues you will become vile!  
Bile is the product of bitterness,' he said.  
'Is it to do with something you have seen?'  
'I see too clearly,' I replied. 'We are lied to and misled.  
All around I see selfishness and greed.'  
'Avoid electronic media and newspapers' he advised.  
I said 'Okay' and obeyed the Doctor's orders.  
From that day my sense of well-being revived.

*Jeremy Gadd*

## Capital Liberty

Historically grouchy,  
gladly keeping its distance,  
forgetting the name of everyone who passes,  
the city is a language in details,  
a compact dictionary, a population  
of words, less active than suppressed,  
testing raw nerves, never seeing, never the same.

The sky is like white ointment rubbed into air.  
I walked into the city, with parks, gardens, water,  
appearing like hallucinations at lunar intervals.

There is nowhere in the world I want to be.  
I think where I grew up, where I live now, is nowhere.

I sit weighed down by storms, on the corner of ashes,  
where the centuries vibrate, where brown water flows.

The scaffolding erected to clean stone is coming down.  
I follow the river, measuring the distance, the squalor,  
of tribal conversations, clamouring dialect,  
insubstantial prints, the worldless silence of unhappy  
nations.

I claim this to be real, otherwise I would convert to  
stone.

I squeeze out of the humid afternoon a place to stand.  
I tip over, not content with the motion of the universe.  
I shake hands with silence, rub shoulders with air.  
I growl my joy, a broken compass pointing in all  
directions.

*Austin McCarron*

## My Paintbrush

I keep my paintbrush with me wherever I may go, in case  
I need to cover up so the real me doesn't show. I'm afraid  
to show you me, afraid of what you'll do – that you might  
laugh or say mean things, I'm afraid I might lose you.

I'd like to remove all my paint coats to show you the real,  
true me, but I want you to understand. I need you to  
accept what you see. So if you close your eyes, I'll strip  
off all my coats real slow. Please understand how much it  
hurts to let the real me show.

Now still love me with all that you see, you are my  
friend pure as gold. I need to save my paintbrush though  
and hold it in my hand. I want to keep it handy in case  
someone doesn't understand. So please protect me my  
dear friend and thanks for loving me true, but please  
keep my paintbrush, until I love me too.

*L. A. Sadler*

## I am Me

I was I  
and now – I'm me.

I was the cow,  
I were meant to be.  
But I've become  
the object of my verb...

I am a rump steak now,  
or so I've heard.

Yes, I am Me;  
a murdered cow...  
A transitive verb?  
Yes, I am, somehow.

You can try and try  
to re-conjugate:  
Some doubt such a verb  
can have a fate:  
I'm a verb to be  
in an altered state:

The first person  
will consume me now.

*Carol Batton*

relative to the fact that we are always staring at some end

for richer or poorer  
(that's for fucking sure)  
a death did I part  
for us then ended thereafter  
and as always never changes  
i have begun again

*Ewan Mearns*

### Natural Philosophy

Like clothes, we try ideas on  
though fashions seldom linger long –  
you'll notice if you stand and stare  
how few smart folk there are.

Before he delved, or Eve had  
spun,  
a naked Adam took the sun  
and who was then the  
gentleman?  
Forget to think and start a tan!

*Kevin Saving*

### A Photograph

A while now since we snapped  
this glossy mirage of your hair  
which stills you – though  
escaped –  
both framed and cornered  
there.

Recollection leaves me lonely  
as the pigmentations fade  
and negative the only  
reproduction that we made.

*Kevin Saving*

### Epitaph

While there's still time to sing and laugh  
I shall attempt this epitaph:  
He was a jester and a king,  
and at his best he was much more:  
a child, enjoying everything.

*Thomas Land*

### Stained Glass

The leaves fall  
Watching the 'life she once had'  
Seems inevitable  
Seasonal clockwork rigorously perpetuates  
Whilst inside  
Suspended animation  
Leaves wither, flowers fade  
Their destiny and hers inexorably bound  
Yet divorced from each other

She feels her life sap  
Energy expelled  
Giving way to weary frustration  
Sees evidence of years passing

With the "few extra greys".  
Another year another 'expect'  
If anyone would think to ask  
She was the bloody expert!  
Familiarity feeds knowledge

And so the mindless struggle  
The tedium of solitude  
Mixed with her daily dose  
Of mundane routine  
Her pain her fatigue her loss her  
dependence  
Her bed!  
Inevitably – spring comes  
But  
Does it?

*Sally Richards*



### Burst

History foams at the mouth,  
sprays fantasies; fate's aura, crushing reality.

The blindness of words, seeking a clear path.

There –

the tabernacle in the snow is lit;  
the whole world gathers in forgiveness.

All language is untied; the trees in the forest stir.

*Austin McCarron*

## Decisions

Sometimes...no. Quite often  
I have trouble getting to sleep.  
Lying in bed negotiating the problem  
of medication. Which, if any, to choose.  
Weighing the options:  
a guilt-free herbal slow drift down,  
or a pharmacological  
no-questions-asked-and-I'm-gone.

*Amanda Geary*

## Man in Black

He used to sit her on his knee  
And tell her that she was  
pretty  
Then as she grew  
He "liked her smile"  
Said "stay please, just for a while"  
  
Her youthful eyes were  
"Deep, so deep"  
Her teenage head thought "what  
a creep"  
  
Where once she smiled with  
adoration  
Her cooling heart  
Saw aberration  
She had no choice but 'keep him sweet'  
How in the world could she retreat?  
  
She used to think he was supreme  
In innocence  
Of him she'd dream  
  
Now in the chillness of her bed  
His septic words  
Rang in her head  
Her youthful heart mature and strong  
Felt bitter that his thoughts were wrong  
  
How could he? in his position  
Mislead her so  
With no contrition  
  
He used to sit her on his knee  
And tell her that she was pretty

*Sally Richards*

## On Their Way To Wherever

Borrowed, bought or sold, now turning cold  
their souls turned to iced membranes so salt.  
He bolts the door, fearing assembling tears  
is it something buried deep within  
attached to someone else's learning?

They come and they go as the tide flows,  
pulled this way and that.  
He mimics, she mimes so beholden so unconscious.  
Unknowingly. Patterns. Heart of clay.  
Waiting for the smelter, to unwind the wedge.

*Jo Silver*

## Lennon from a Train

Lennon looks out at me lyrically  
meaningfully  
Certain of solitude, Uncertain of the  
love force  
Shot down at forty New York  
soliliquy  
Have you gone to heaven now? Were  
you in heaven then?  
Re-incarnated? Too much feted when  
on earth. Re-birth  
Over-stated someone hated you  
enough....Xsmas song..  
What have they done?

*Jo Silver*

Aeon

I blinked  
The sky turned over  
A wave of starlight  
Rolled  
Through my hair

*Sally Richards*

## The Turning

The grey gull of the northern land: forlorn in the gloom  
Swoops over me from time to time.  
As months stretch thinly into years  
Whispering their demise in a refrain of leaves blowing  
up the country lanes  
And the orb spins silently on its onward, meaningless  
voyage  
A scratched and frosted blue marble spinning in a  
vacuum.  
  
Slowly, steadily  
Rotates the orbit of a human life.  
Its trajectory an imprecise orbit measured in wasted  
opportunities,  
It's arc unresolved.  
Only the sense remains much desolation lurks across  
the empty plain,  
Where stands aging, a wizened, hapless tree,

Clawing vainly at the sky, a bent exclamation mark,  
While the lithe young birds  
Peck, hop, swarm tauntingly  
Towards moister, less barren soil.

I am in that musty tent,  
That nebulous, undesired territory  
Between youth and middle age,  
A borderland where the cry of impotence  
(At the disparity between soaring hope and tangible  
achievement)  
Forms fractured in my throat.

Those nights when all endeavour, all action, even the  
thought of movement  
Is futile.  
And the sleeping millions are alternately blissful or  
troubled in their limbo

And there is no one to hear  
me,  
No warm body to embrace.

Only the crepuscular quality  
Which comes with this  
darkened room: invaded by  
precise shafts of moonlight  
Shining on the dust and must  
of this garret  
Where the floor creaks and  
ghosts swirl invisible,  
hanging on the air,  
Snagging on threads of  
discord which one emits like breath.

Dreams coil and whisper, trailing from your brain,  
The dreams of fulfillment,  
Which must be coaxed to sleep  
Or else be smothered without sentiment or ideal.  
If there is any peace to be had at this hour,  
Or any hour,  
It resides in realism's last fatal sigh.

And so I turn towards the slope  
Rearing from my back window,  
On which the tree stands  
Supplicating to that forlorn grey gull  
In a time without frost  
An atmosphere without wind  
And I speculate for the first of many times  
In this era of lengthening shadows  
Where uncertainty ploughs its furrows  
On the brow of that hill  
And the grooves above my eyes  
Become more visible with each passing day.

*Leon Brown*

## Letter to Milan Kundera

Scent of Parisian Autumn blown in by the wind  
A doorstep mottled with white and Prioritaire  
Inscribed upon the lid; I imagined him  
Opening my message in the country:  
An escape from the horrors of the everyday world  
And other people; in a garden in sunlight  
Sundials peppering the lawn, amber peacocks  
Strutting in a cornucopia of light and shadow  
And defecating on the roses, the roses which  
Stretched in military lines through the garden  
And beyond, basking in sunshine, my few words,  
Hypocrite, I reader, my brother.

*Paul Murphy*

## A Still Life of Dead Flowers

For he travelled by bus, rail and tube  
To earn his pay for fifteen hours –  
A pittance paid to blood-red nails  
And a crumbling grave among dead flowers.

*Spencer James Jeffery*

## Cats

*After TS Eliot*

The perfume-stained  
cushion  
A copy of the *Iliad* sitting  
on it  
Lamp in the window  
Betrayed  
The next day is rushing in  
Cats, cats, cats, cats, cats,  
Odour of piss – stains of  
piss  
The fetid smell of cat's piss  
Cat's faeces, cat's claw.

Nip Nip Nip Nip  
I fed the cat.

*Paul Murphy*

## Human Hope and Hackney

Roots stronger than hope in the shabby streets.  
A seagull flies from mid Atlantic to the broken doors of  
our dreams.  
Walking us to dole-poverty and aborted love.  
(This November rain against dirty windows.  
Suffering the morning street with the freshness of its  
pain  
A sweet cuppa' and a long, slow, bitter drug).

*David Kessel*

*Broadsheet continues on page 37...*

# Survivors' Prose

## *Life in Meadowlands* by David Krisman

**A**s I enter the asylum everything is a blur. I'm surrounded by inmates who are staring at me, or else staring and climbing the walls. I notice their newly bandaged wrists, glazed expressions, blank looks, all with a story to tell; drugs, abuse, depression, voices etc. with a smile thrown in for good measure. I hear and observe the constant clanging and clanking of the ubiquitous keys held by grinning nurses, as they open and close doors in sequence. Always at hand and watching are young nurses, forever grinning, wearing clinically clean white short sleeved uniforms, looking down at us inmates. Conformity is the name of the game, or else it's a "section" and a quick sharp depot injection in the behind – or even worse, electric shock treatment; not for the faint-hearted.

I walk alone, along the dark archaic wooden corridors that leave you feeling isolated and bewildered as I head for the OT Department – I'm told it's good therapy... I'm asked numerous times by Zoe, the paranoid schizophrenic, for a fag, as she picks up yet another dog-end from the newly polished floor, already littered with ash. And no, I haven't got a light, or any bloody change, as I stare blankly at the walls. Am I going mad? Oh, I forgot, I already am.

It's lunch-time, so we queue up like cattle, before "Happy Time", when the nurses, still grinning, administer to the inmates their mood stabilisers, anti-hypnotics, tranquillisers, anti-depressant pills, or if you're really lucky, a laxative for the meal you've just eaten.

Then I meet or rather confront the "Big Boss", the almighty, bespectacled Consultant, not grinning like the nurses, but looking deadly serious, wearing a smart tweed jacket instead of the standard white uniform. On entering his office, I am greeted by a number of professionals, dotted around the room, smiling like innocent children, as they introduce themselves. It's still a blur. Only the "Big Boss" talks and writes, enquiring about my life history, asking some pertinent questions about How? and Why? I've landed in this mess. It's like an interrogation and my mind goes blank, and I have no answers, but he carries on writing regardless. Finally, he informs me condescendingly of my medication and says in "parrot fashion", "We will meet in a week's time!" It means nothing to me as I meekly thank him and leave, observing all the smiling faces of the professionals. Have I just won the lottery? I vaguely remember my days in the city, as a wheeler-dealer in the stock exchange. Gone now forever! For Heaven's sake, I can't even concentrate and watch television or read now!

At last, it's the highlight of the day: "Visiting Time" and I prepare to pour out my troubles and feelings to my nearest and dearest. But instead, I say nothing, as I

don't want to hurt them and besides they have heard it all before and it's a secret. They might inform the "spies", the grinning nurses. They now look as depressed as I feel as they leave. I try and think clearly; is this a hotel, a prison, an asylum, my new home? Where the hell am I? I want to go home, but the door's locked and I can't even remember where home is anyway. I go to my dormitory, bed 6, and the sleeping pills soon take effect as I fall asleep amid the manic sounds of my fellow inmates. Peace at last – without dreams. For my dreams have gone, like my mind, without notice or warning. However, tomorrow's another day, but I realise it will be just like yesterday and the day before.

## *Up The Republic!* by Paul Murphy

**T**he North Central Spanish plain is something like an endless car factory, a desert, and various Visigothic, Christian and Moorish castles thrown into a pot. Inhabitable it is not, although it has its inhabitants. The administrative centre of Spain, Madrid, is supposed to bind the regions together. Spain's Parliament, El Cortes, is in Madrid, as are many art galleries and museums, most famously El Prado, flanked as it is with statues of Goya (pronounced 'Goja') and Velasquez (pronounced 'Belafqueth').

"What do you think of King Juan Carlos?"

"I think he is an idiot!"

I leant back in my chair as the air conditioning whirred. Intense sunlight poured through the window. Later on I sat in the internet café. A song was being played about how a young man from Donegal had come to Spain to fight (and die) in the International Brigade.

As I walked back through the town centre that peculiar dry heat, typical of Spain, saturated my clothes, my hair.

One day I walked to the edge of the town and found some old field artillery and heavy machine guns. The spot was dignified with a board which had the word 'Military Museum' spelt out in black acrylic paint. All the guns seemed to be pointing towards the offices of the Guardia Civil. Perhaps with a little reactivation I might carry off the last battle cry of the Republic!

In those heady days (what else can one say about La Guerra Civil – The Spanish Civil War – except 'those heady days'!) General Yague's Army of Africa, the core of veterans that constituted Franco's elite troops, and Andre Malraux's fighter squadron had operated in this area. Andre Malraux (1901–1976), a French novelist famous for his work *Man's Estate*, an account of the Communist Revolution in China in the 1920s, and *Days of Hope*, an

account of his actions in the Spanish Civil War. Later he fought for the French Resistance in World War Two and ended up in de Gaulle's Post-war Cabinet as Minister for Culture from 1959-1969. By this time his left-wing idealism must have worn off, for he compromised his views rapidly and joined a quite far-right government. I had assumed that Malraux was an adventurer in the Ernest Hemingway mould, but was surprised to find out that he'd been involved in various art scams, selling major artworks bought in China at inflated prices in Europe. Furthermore, some doubt has been cast on the actual efficacy of his leadership in both the Civil War and World War Two. One account I read mentioned that Malraux was the kind of man that lost the war for the Republic, alongside a further account of his military incompetence.

Speaking of Ernest Hemingway. I realised that the Republic was a fashion item for intellectuals of the period, for no intellectual or artist dared to call him or herself a fascist (in fact there had been quite a few that had done just that, G.B.Shaw, H.G.Wells, Ezra Pound, W.B.Yeats, T.S.Eliot, Wyndham Lewis and many others had flirted with fascism for at least part of their lives; in Pound's case this proved to be near-fatal as he found himself broadcasting radio programmes for Benito Mussolini – after World War Two he ended up in a mental institution, narrowly avoiding execution as a traitor). Ernest Hemingway was the Republic's trumpcard, a famous American novelist and anti-fascist, who lent the Republic credence and respectability on the world stage and penned off a novel about the conflict, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Other intellectuals lent the Republic vocal support (when asked for his views on the matter, Samuel Beckett simply replied 'Up the Republic!'), George Orwell fought for the Anarchist militia POUM (supposedly Trotskyites or Anarchists; in reality the militia of the party of Left-Communist Reconstruction whose secretary had happened to have been Leon Trotsky's) in the Barcelona area, and the poet John Cornford who was killed in action with the International Brigade. Some 40,000 foreigners ended up fighting for the Republic; on the Fascist side there were only 1,000, and virtually none of these men came for adventure, they fought for a cause.

In the great football match that is history, it was FC Fascists 2 FC Republic 0 until the two Western democracies, Britain and France, came to the painful realisation that Fascism as a political movement was eventually going to overthrow them too, and moved to defend their buffer in the East i.e. Poland, against Soviet Communism and German Nazism. But it was Britain specifically that had opposed support for the Republic, whereas France's Socialist Popular Front government was naturally sympathetic, preferring to wait on the sidelines, for the Republic was packed full of 'dangerous Socialists and Bolsheviks'. Had Britain aided the Republic the Second World War might have been pre-empted or curtailed. As ever it was a case of a house divided against itself and collapsing: Britain's ruling classes had too much in common with the Fascists, and not enough

in common with the Spanish masses to countenance the arms shipments that would have guaranteed a Republican victory.

In the pub *Alto Rey (High King)* I had gone to look for Dave the ESL teacher, but found nothing but a dope-sodden haze. Not unusually the barmaid offered me a free drink. Sizzling heat in mid-summer, the sour smell of marijuana was flowing plentifully among the *compadres*.

At the College I discreetly asked some of my students about Guadalajara, for that was the town that I was teaching in (Mexico's second city is also called Guadalajara). They told me that Guadalajara was one of the only towns in Spain still to have a statue of the dictator Franco and one of an even earlier Spanish dictator, Primo de Rivera. They indicated that there were some fascist symbols left on government offices in the town. These men seemed to be surprised at this. Many of them were workers from Madrid, and regarded the eccentricities of the townspeople as a sign of their dire lack of sophistication and political education, which was unsurprising, since the authorities in Guadalajara controlled the education system and therefore the minds of the people. Most of the locals had quite recently come from the *pueblos* (villages) of the surrounding area and pronounced words with a thick peasant dialect and alternative pronunciation. For instance, 'Madrith', 'Amistath', 'Bajadoleth', instead of Madrid, Amistad and Bayadoled ('Valledolid').

But not all of the people of Guadalajara were controlled by the authorities, as I discovered in one dimly-lit pub. A sign with an Anarchist symbol and the slogan *Reclama los Calles!* (Reclaim the Streets!). Many of the banks had Anarchy symbols and slogans daubed on them, there were punky types with Mohican haircuts, and the all-round regalia of the Punk. In many ways this town seemed to be a short step away from the 1970s, which either meant the UK had silently evolved, or, more likely, reverted back to those former Imperialist practices before the ascendancy of the post-war Labour Party.

Back in the pub Dave the ESL teacher was bantering me with his latest conspiracy theory and account of world history. In brief he argued that the rulers of the world (bound together as the New World Order – what a fascist titling that is! – and their latest ideology of Neo-Liberalism) were all related to each other and could trace their genes back through the Knights Templar to Jesus and beyond. After telling me that I would certainly not be welcome among Britain's ruling classes (because, as he explained, I would not have the right genes...), he slipped in the fact that he was an ex-public schoolboy. Which is what the novelist and political journalist George Orwell had been (a graduate of that great bastion of the English ruling classes, Eton College).

Sobriety had replaced recklessness as I wandered back to my *piso* (apartment) with a fair awareness of what was going on around me: that the streets were virtually empty even though it was quite early on a Friday night. Things get busy late in Spain, with the early evening period regarded as a mealtime. I passed the *Plaza de*

Toros (bullring) on my left (a great pleasure in Southern Spain, though less popular in Northern Spain; I never went to see a bullfight, apart from its obvious exotic appeal it seemed to me to be very boring. I tried to read Ernest Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon* but it left me indifferent to the sport, though I empathised with his fascination with this primordial 'blood and sand' event).

In the main Plaza (square – pronounced 'platha'), *Pablo Iglesias*, I stood to make a phone call. Suddenly someone grabbed my ankle. I looked down and a little gypsy girl crawled out from under the phone box. She came at me somewhat aggressively, and, surprised, I backed off. The town had a small gypsy population. The gypsies were clearly not of Spanish origin but Romanies, originating from South-Central Europe. Other distinct ethnic minorities in Spain were, most notably, the Jews, (known as Sefardic Jews, i.e. those Jews from North Africa and Spain as distinct from European, Russian or African Jews), the Basques in El Pais Vasco, and the 'Moros' (the term the Spanish gave to those North African Moroccans, Berbers or Tuaregs, who today use Spain as a tourist destination, often in winter). Until recently, scholarship had suggested the Arabs of Medieval Spain practised a good deal more tolerance than their Christian counterparts, though this view has now been questioned. (In Medieval Christian Spain, Jews were made to wear a compulsory red and yellow badge of identification – eerily echoing the coloured triangles for the various groups imprisoned by the Nazis in their concentration camps; depictions of Jews wearing this badge can be found in the chapel of Santa Lucia in Tarragona. The Jews were later expelled from the peninsula in 1492 by Ferdinand and Isabella, King and Queen of Castile).

The little girl ran away. With no social security in Spain anyone who is unemployed, or very young and from a poor family, has to construct a placard and put their hand out. Afterwards I regretted that I hadn't thrown her 100 pesetas, or taken her into the café for a soft drink.

In the café *Canas y Tapas* I spoke to the Polish waitress. She couldn't speak English, so we communicated through Spanish. I wondered why she was so far away from home. She told me she'd had to come to Spain to seek work because after the fall of the former Communist regime in Poland the economy hadn't recovered, and the Poles had been made many promises that weren't fulfilled. In Poland *Solidarity* had left power and the Communists, re-modelled as a Social-Democratic Party, had slipped back into power. A sad realisation of the caprice of Capitalism had been gained, because this was a gain.

I walked back to the *Alto Rey*. In Spain place names tell their own story. *Plaza Pablo Iglesias* named after Pablo Iglesias (literally 'Paul Church') a 19th Century Spanish Socialist and one of the founders of the orthodox Spanish Socialist movement. But the orthodox Spanish Socialist movement was not to be the dominating factor in Spanish politics. Karl Marx and Frederic Engels had once remarked, 'we must leave Spain to him!' This

'him' was the Russian Anarchist leader Prince Mikhail Alesandrovich Bakunin (1814-1876). Bakunin was Marx and Engel's main rival in the First International. Bakunin espoused Anarchism, a political philosophy that dispenses with any form of Vanguardism (the Marxist belief that the proletariat need to be led by a core of professional revolutionaries organised in a party structure) in favour of spontaneous action and wildcat strikes, and in Spain, notably, anti-clericalism.

Anarchism has its roots in France, its most famous exemplar there being Pierre Proudhon with his timeless epigram 'Property is theft'. France was an agrarian society for much longer than Britain, where social upheavals such as Chartism had normally been of a non-violent character (the Peterloo massacre is one notable exception). The two other countries enraptured with Anarchism were Russia and Spain, each positioned at the opposite ends of Europe and both partly belonging to another Continent, Spain being the only Western European country to have been once occupied by a non-European power, and most of Russia having been submerged in Asia. The non-European or semi-European nature of both of these countries is one explanation for their fervour for Anarchism, and for left-wing political movements in general.

Spain had also taken its eccentric route on the Right, with various groups and factions, two competing groups of Monarchists, Carlists and Alphonsists, right-wing Catholic organisations such as *Opus Dei*, the Falange, who were not recognisably Fascists. Franco was very much an orthodox right-winger in that his main enemy was the Left, he had none of the obnoxious racial theories of Hitler in Germany. Franco kept Spain out of World War Two, sending the Blue Legion to fight and die on the Eastern Front. He stayed in power until 1975, abdicating then in favour of Rey Juan Carlos. Juan Carlos then established, what he called, a constitutional Monarchy. A Republican might have called it a bourgeois democracy.

In the pub Dave's lighting up his umpteenth spliff, while Bernhard is playing with a huge bottle full of beer. Soon everyone is covered with Spanish beer.

Spain is a landscape where ideals and realities meet, and are somehow entwined. Looking beyond the red flags and the black flags there is a landscape with an inkblot seeping through every tree, every blade of grass, every Moorish turret, the red clay, the limpid eyes of each bird, donkey, horse and through the Andalucian peasant who sits for a day dreaming up every Picasso painting in existence, and then forgets them at the end of his siesta. It is a world of casual genius, uncompromising ideologies, of comedy, of abstract and round images, illogical routes to supremely simple goals and solutions, and of confusing routes to inordinately insane and obtuse non-answers. It is still best summed up in Miguel Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote*, and in the abstract summation of the dichotomy in man between the dreamer and the realist, between the madman Don Quixote and the cynical realist Sancho Panza. Everything else that Spain has offered the world seems to be a further fugue on this original theme.

# A Brief History of Hearing Voices

## John H Donnelly *on the Hearing Voices Conference*

### *The yearly Hearing Voices Conference – a critique of style and presentation*

Some of us from my local Hearing Voices Group, attended the Hearing Voices Conference on the 7 December 2001 at Christchurch University, Canterbury. One voice hearer commented afterwards that he felt the speakers mainly addressed a professional audience in their choice of humour and presentation, chiefly because they set out to convert professionals over to an acceptable, entertaining, common image of a person diagnosed with mental health problems.

Otherwise, the talks would have been based upon a fairly sound user or survivor recovery model, but I agree with the other voice hearer that in humour and presentation, the speakers created a very similar stereotypical image to the old one of the psychiatric-diagnosed person, and which perhaps also showed their professional aspirations in terms of who the talks were largely aimed at.

I was pleased with some of the actual content of the talks, but would have preferred it if they were entirely user or survivor speakers.

The overall general theme of all three main conference talks, was that dissociation is a coping-mechanism, and a symptom of being sexually abused, and a cause of self-harm and hearing voices; along with some admission by the speakers that the psychiatric mental health system participated in setting up different versions of reality.

Dissociation basically means that the abused person makes the pain of being abused go to another part

of their brain or consciousness, so that they are not consciously experiencing it, and this involves distracting or imagining one is absent from the reality of the abuse and the situation.

As a way of describing how hard it is to dissociate from abuse, the first speaker asked the audience to think of the word “elephant”, and then asked the audience not to think of the word “elephant”, emphasising how hard it was not to think of the word, once it had been suggested, thought of, and experienced.

The three d’s were mentioned by the speakers: dissociation, distraction, and depersonalisation. It was also mentioned that an event or action in adult life can trigger memories of abuse, and onset mental and emotional distress which can lead to hearing voices.

The matter of dissociation wasn’t questioned, discussed, or debated, other than by one participant in the audience at the very end of the talks, who asked the speakers if they were using some sort of cognitive-behavioural model to describe sexual abuse, self-harm, and hearing voices; to which it was replied that the speakers take an approach which integrates the mental, emotional, and physical aspects of analysis and recovery.

There were three main talks: one on Sexual Abuse, one on Self Harm, and one on Hearing Voices, followed by a choice of three workshops on each subject matter. I was disappointed that all three workshops were on at the same time, because I was interested in all three workshops, but I chose to attend the Hearing Voices Workshop because I thought that, a more general theme, it might be more relevant to our local

hearing voices group. I was also disappointed that no draft copies of written information based upon all three talks was not available.

The first talk on Sexual Abuse, described how abusers set up different-versions-of-reality, how abusers groom and control their victims in order to sexually abuse them, and then convince them to buy into different-versions-of-reality - that the abuse is their fault, or that they in some way wanted, needed, or deserved to be abused. This whole area only concentrated on sexual abuse, and not on other types of child abuse and domestic violence, that are not overtly sexual, but may have similar control patterns and psychological consequences.

The first speaker described how some of the myths of different-versions-of-reality can be social and cultural, and she described the dissociation strategies or mechanisms which are used for coping with the intolerable mental, emotional, and physical pain of being sexually abused.

The speaker described mental, emotional, and volitional distraction very well, and emphasised that distraction and dissociation take up a lot of time and energy of the person who is trying to cope with being sexually abused, and that physical distraction as a coping-mechanism can be misinterpreted as so-called behavioural problems.

The first speaker more or less concluded by saying that we need to be in equal relationships in order for us to have creative relationships and live and thrive creatively, and without someone else’s professional power and control over us, and that we need to be strong together.

**T**he second talk, on Self Harm, started off with the speaker talking about his experiences as a psychiatric nurse, his experiences of being sexually abused as a child and being a self-harmer; and he then presented a critique of medical psychiatric diagnosis, talked about the dissociation strategies of self-harmers, and described how he saw recovery in terms of therapeutic relationships, and the eventual autonomy of the person from mental health services.

The third speaker, on HearingVoices, talked about his experience of being sexually abused as a child, his experiences of being psychiatrically diagnosed, how being sexually abused was connected to his experiences of hearing voices, and how he used dissociation in order to cope with the mental, emotional, and physical pain of being abused. The Hearing Voices workshop looked into an understanding of hearing voices as to do with people's life-experiences and belief systems, and the speaker took questions from the audience, and described how he had worked with others in order to help them understand, recover, or come to terms with their experiences as voice hearers.

I agree with the speakers that some dissociation exists, but I also think that it's a bit of a myth and a mentalism, and I'm not convinced how effective it is as a coping-mechanism, because depersonalisation and derealisation can go along with dissociation, and can still involve much mental, emotional, and physical suffering. The theory of dissociation, may therefore be used to deny the reality of a person's suffering, and in itself sets up a different-version-of-reality. It also occurred to me that setting up different-versions-of-reality might in itself be a form of so-called dissociation.

Dissociation is not merely a psychological concept, but is also a social and political one, and

can therefore be a euphemism for marginalisation and coercive distancing. The whole area of dissociation didn't make a distinction between dissociation as a cause (violence, abuse, and coercion) and dissociation as effect (as a coping-mechanism and symptom).

Some of the coercive aspects of so-called dissociation can be best described by referring to the film *G. I. Jane* where upon entering the army, a woman finds that the people who are supposed to supporting her are corrupt, as they urge her to distance herself from the social and political reality of things.

### A Brief Personal History of Hearing Voices

**I** first started hearing voices when I was in my early twenties. This was brought on by past abuse, trauma, and stress, and by being insulted and undermined when I became diagnosed as mentally ill. The voices started off as negative and undermining in my early twenties, and I was initially not believed by a social worker when I told the person that I heard them. I was also called a liar when I disclosed information to the social worker about my childhood. When I did convince the social worker that I was abused as a child, the social worker said that maybe the person was right to abuse me. When I did convince the social worker that I was hearing voices, I was then labelled as "psychotic" and told to take anti-psychotic medication.

I was prescribed a high dose (20 mg) of Stelazine, and which caused me to have major side-effects, but was years later changed over to Olanzapine, and then onto Risperdal which I am currently taking. Whilst Risperdal quells the voices when they are quite audible and negative, I have found that Risperdal also gives me bad dreams, and I have wondered whether its sedating effect has contributed to my depression. From

speaking to many people in mental health chat rooms over the Internet, I have found that many people who are taking or have taken Risperdal, have said that it gives or has given them nightmares.

After receiving counselling, and then writing the content of my voices down as I was experiencing them, I was able to hear positive, friendly, and supportive voices – two voices of which were the voices of some of the counsellors I had received therapy from. At the time, I heard both negative and positive voices, but I found that by reading what I had written down, and then by only writing down the positive voices and afterwards reading them, I was able to experience only the positive voices. After concentrating more on the positive voices in my writing and with my mind, and ignoring and defocusing on the negative ones, I only heard positive voices, developed more positive voices, and then all of the voices stopped altogether for me for a few years.

I was after a while missing my positive voices, but found that by concentrating and focusing (by using my memory of how I experienced the positive voices with my mind) I was able to activate and create the positive voices again. Whilst I hear positive voices, and can activate this freely with my mind, my voices can also become beyond my control and negative. The positive voices can become beyond my conscious creation and control as well, but are not distressing like the negative ones, although the positive voices can sometimes turn into negative voices and turn nasty. When the voices are negative, they repeat and chant the same phrase over and over again, taunt and torment me, and insult and undermine me.

When the voices become negative and beyond my control, I become very unwell, and this often adds to or causes my depression. I also sometimes become a bit unwell and depressed when I can't hear any

voices at all, as my positive voices are often a comfort to me, and offer me a type of support, friendship, and counselling. This, and the fact that actual counselling in-part helped me to transform or transfer my voices from negative to positive, and to eventually be rid of the voices altogether for some years, makes me think that good counselling is in-part conducive to some recovery.

Overall, I am glad that I hear voices, partly because of the positive experience of it, and partly because I am trying to figure out all the factors that cause and cure hearing voices. I have cured myself in the past, but because of my enquiring mind and wanting to experiment with the experience for both support and knowledge, I have sometimes become unwell with voices again and need help and support from my local hearing voices group.

## Hearing Voices and Public Awareness

**P**ublic awareness is both a political and a mental health phrase and concept. It is also a psychological one. Whilst public awareness and social consciousness are usually described as something external to the individual mind and objective, there's also an internal and subjective experience of public awareness, which is absorbed and exists in a dialectical relationship to the intellect; to thought and to feeling.

I sometimes have discussions and debates with my positive voices, and one main function of these voices, is that they ask me questions about things that are based upon common sense and public thinking, and which I would otherwise not think of asking myself. The positive voices, critique and ask me to clarify some of the things I have written in my mental health articles, for the benefit of both subjective and objective public and intellectual understanding.

The questions the positive voices ask me are unlike intellectual thinking, not of an individual nature, but are much more of a collective way of thinking, and when I'm asked these questions by my positive voices, I'm asked by a group of many positive voices, and these questions are then asked or represented individually by one, two, or three voices at different intervals.

As an intellectual, I am a lateral and not a common thinker, but I need this inner public awareness in order to think more in terms of how the actual public might or could respond to my ideas, discoveries, and writing, and to both bring knowledge to the public, and to bring some of my thinking, consciousness, and awareness more down to earth.

My positive voices often ask me very common sense, relevant questions, and which again, I would otherwise not think of asking myself.

Ideally, I need this kind of public debate in my actual social life in response to what I experience, think, and write, but I find the actual public are usually not willing to debate intellectually at all, or not willing to debate with intellectual people.

It's sometimes assumed by medical psychiatry that hearing voices is due to low intelligence, or due to a lower form or level of consciousness. In my experience of my own voices, and my experience and understanding of other voice hearers, I think that hearing voices can be due to both a higher and lower form of consciousness and awareness – simultaneously, and at different times.

Whilst politically in mental health, we are often told about raising public awareness and social consciousness, and whilst I very much agree with doing this, I think we also need to be realistic about it, and to realise the higher process and dialectical interaction of higher and lower

consciousness psychologically and socially.

I find that I have to lower my intellectual consciousness and awareness, in order to think in terms of common sense, and to debate and discuss with my positive voices, and which are like the voices of ordinary people. As a result of this interaction between my intellectual thinking and feeling and a common sense form of debate, I am able to once again raise my consciousness and awareness and come up with more intellectual thinking, discovery, and ideas.

## The Key

Knowledge drives me like a secret  
mile  
Carrying me through madness and  
experimentation  
Linking and then spraying us  
through sunlight  
Clasping and releasing my mind as I  
smile.

Diagnosed people hold the key  
Although we do not always cast the  
spell  
For like shadows we laugh and weep  
Pecking through the tortoise shell.

We struggle to cure ourselves  
together  
Against the curse of ignorant bliss  
Rejecting the academic world of  
shallow text  
Our emotions breed like hungry  
insects  
Swarming towards liberation.

## Hearing Voices and Creativity

**T**he voices I hear and perceive are female voices, and some of them are positive, educative, friendly, and supportive. I'm glad that I hear these voices, because they are very much a part of my true nature, they improve my knowledge, social skills, and communication, and keep me in touch with the creative and learning spirit.

All voices are in a sense all aspects of every human being, as we all internalise our social and interpersonal experiences to some extent, but they are also very real and definitive differences in society, and which can become internalised by the individual voice hearer to meet his or her needs and requirements.

Some of my female voices can act as a muse, able to both inspire, respect and appreciate the emotional and intellectual skill and ability of a voice hearer. The very strange, but very beautiful, hypnotic and trance-like receptivity of some of my female voices, filters, transforms, and reciprocates the social and interpersonal experiences of other people into the mind, social interaction, and creative imagination.

Whether the fact that I have intellectual discussions and debates with my female voices, means that I'm not being adequately stimulated or represented intellectually in my social life is an interesting point. In some ways this is very true. From my experience, interaction, and observation, I think that a lot of psychiatrists in particular, are jealous of the knowledge and creativity of psychiatrically diagnosed people, and very envious of the fact that we have a spiritual and creative realm of our personal and social experiences, which are not controlled by church and state, and which psychiatrists cannot adequately experience, accept, or understand.

I was very interested and intrigued by what a hearing voices group facilitator said about a member of her local hearing voices group, who also had female, helpful voices, but that the voices eventually said goodbye to him when he was engaged to be married. This raises the question of whether hearing voices is caused to a great extent from love and relationship deprivation. On the one hand, I think this is true, as most members from my local hearing voices group

– including myself – are single and very much need and would like relationship partners in our lives, although obviously, some people in satisfactory social relationships hear voices too.

A friend of mine who also hears voices, recently said to me that a person can still be alone in a crowd, and that maybe when he was surrounded by other people in the Nineties he was isolated after all. He added to this, agreeing with this article after reading it, by saying that he doesn't think that voices do develop through isolation at all. Whilst having a love relationship with two people in the nineties, my friend said that he heard lots of voices, and when he was very mentally unwell at the start of the nineties, he was living with friends with whom he used to party quite a lot, and he still heard voices then too. It was when he became more solitary in the last 6-7 years that his voices stopped.

I think it is a mentalism, and a very common misconception amongst a lot of mental health workers and hearing voices group facilitators, to believe that voices develop solely through emotional, intellectual, and social isolation, because whilst there is obviously a lot of truth and accuracy in this, this rather reductionist viewpoint, can also fail to understand the necessary interaction between inner and outer experiences in order to love and learn, and it can also deny and invalidate a persons inner and outer experiences of their past and present life in general.

It can also deny and invalidate the unique processes, experiences, knowledge, wisdom, and culture of psychiatrically diagnosed people, and deny the healthy and creative interaction between inner and outer experience which are required to earn, share, and exchange knowledge and love, and to function in society to our satisfactory or full potential.

It also fails to acknowledge and

realise the social interaction strategies, actions, and behaviours, which are oppression, and which can be coerced and enforced upon peoples lives without our individual and general choice, agreement, consensus, or consent.

In my mental health articles, I try to write concisely and with a flow, much like a piece of music or a song, and I write in a manner that reveals glimpses of light, reveals some of my ideas and findings, but which also subtly encourages and inspires people to think for themselves. I don't by any means reveal all of my own social and interpersonal knowledge and findings, as I don't want my knowledge and findings to become elitist and institutionalised.

One difference between psychiatrically diagnosed people and other people in society, is that we are often more emotionally assertive and receptive, and struggle to be more emotionally free or liberated. Because of emotionally repressive English culture though, we often have to suppress our emotional expression and receptivity with psychiatric drugs, which reduces our imagination, creativity, emotions, desire, thinking, consciousness, and awareness.

## STOP PRESS!!!

Following the retirement of John O'Donoghue and Neil Swire as SP's Chair and Secretary, we are seeking applications for these two key positions. Full details at: [www.survivorspoetry.com](http://www.survivorspoetry.com)

Closing date: Fri 3rd Feb 06  
Interviews Fri 10th Feb 06

*We are particularly interested to hear from applicants among the ethnic minorities.*

# Good As Gold

## Dave Russell on the literary journalism of Lorna Sage

Lorna Sage (1943–2001), critic and author, left behind her a legacy of highly respected literary journalism; she was the first critic to bring the gifts of Angela Carter to the general public's attention. She also edited the consummate Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing in English (1999). In the year of her death, her autobiography *Bad Blood* won the Whitbread Biography Award. Survivor poet and songwriter Dave Russell pays tribute to her critical works...

**B***ad Blood* is far more than an autobiography. It is a chronicle of English provincial life in the Fifties and, as such, an essential complement to works written in that period. Lorna Sage is writing about that time from the intimate standpoint of having grown up in it, not being a fully-formed adult observing it. Obviously, her time perspective did not give her any rose-tinted glasses.

It has the bonus vision of being initially located in the village of Hanmer, in Flintshire, a backwater within a backwater: "this little rounded isthmus of North Wales sticking into England". There, conditions in some ways dated back as far as the 1880s.

*Good as her Word – Selected Journalism*, is a powerful sequel to *Bad Blood*, Lorna's greatly, and justly acclaimed autobiography. I did have the pleasure of meeting Lorna and Vic Sage during their undergraduate era, and throughout the subsequent decades have always been stimulated by her unfailingly hard-hitting journalism. Leaving no stones unturned, flinching from no issues, *Good as her Word* is wholly incisive throughout, setting out, in Vic Sage's words, "to delve underneath and challenge that ready-made

perspective." For all her depth of scholarship, Lorna Sage never built any comfortable academic shelters. Quite the contrary: she revealed to the general reader all the flaws and inconsistencies of the academic world. The 'ivory tower' is shown, in true Sagean fashion, to be utterly crumbling and corroded. No antiquarian exclusivity here, no hiding of the weaknesses: "The language of theory gives its users the illusion that they are in charge, somehow, riding this authoritative discourse, when most of them are closer to being its creatures. Talking about power becomes a kind of vicarious trip, especially when the prestige of intellectual life is so low outside" (p188). Indeed, she is outspoken about the role of derivation and copying in all literary creation (p137). Creative writing courses at universities often result in "a triumph of rhetoric in the perfectly traditional sense" (p189).

She faces writers like Gore Vidal who have 'on-going' relationships with the media, political trends since the Sixties, the sexual revolution, pornography and turn-of-the-millennium image-consciousness ("Greenham women acting as real-life understudies of the statuary stars" [p155]). As stated in the preface, "She writes for what's left of the common reader in us." The banal and the sordid are given their fair, proportional due in the spectrum of consciousness. She valued what she acknowledged in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, what is "sublime and approachable, splendid and vulgar" (p136). No flinching from pornography either: Lorna has the courage to evaluate Keatsian aesthetics in comparison with Soho glamour photo parlours; they both have the common root of voyeurism, after all (p225).

What she did vis-à-vis Gore Vidal was developed to a far higher degree in her article *Freedom Fighter* (Interview with the Italian novelist Oriana Fallaci): this is a best-selling writer with pop-star acclaim, adored by general readers, suspected and vilified by critics and other writers. An interesting comparison with Umberto Eco, whose *L'Isola del Giorno Primo* is reviewed in the penultimate article in this selection – supremely erudite and ultra-reader-friendly, selling like hot cakes on the news-stands: "Fiction... enables us to understand something of the mechanisms by which we overinterpret the world" (p357) . . . "with Eco you can have your postmodernist cake and eat it" (p358). Fallaci hates her 'role' persona: "she prefers to think of herself as someone in a sense invisible, outside the frame, her own woman" (p347); she loathes the act of writing as masochistic. Fallaci's works are mainly centred round the theme of war and conflict. But it is no 'black-and-white' clear-cut conflict: "Her people are citizens of now, caught up in the contemporary kind of civil war where there are not two sides but – as she nastily says – a whole cathouse of factions" (p352).

As her life progressed, Lorna became increasingly involved with journalism. To some extent she welcomed its strictures: "I have always preferred to be a hack, it seems less of a mystification." So technically, most of the articles in this selection are reviews of biographies and critical works. But predominantly, they represent Lorna's views on the subjects of these works. I have concentrated on her observations and opinions. This is because of working within the limits of my review, not out of any desire to belittle the works of the authors under review here.

Lorna's journalism places a strong emphasis on the biographical factor, which she treats as inseparable from the text produced (she is opposed to "male modernists separating work from life" (p29). "I can see that there's at least one virtue in literary biography: a 'life' can demythologise the work in the best sense, preserving its fallibility, which is also the condition for its brilliance." She outspokenly portrays trends, over four decades, within academic literary circles, showing all the flaws of the deadening new orthodoxies which arise in the name of 'progress': "It starts to look like a Nineties conspiracy, disseminating ignorance" (p188).

In reviewing a study of Richardson's *Clarissa* by Terry Eagleton, she sees through the sanctimoniousness of Marxist critical dogma (a 'pious duty' for Eagleton), and can add the barb that "...English Departments are very short on working-class students, but full of middle-class women in danger of being seduced by Lovelacian theoreticians" (p286). At several points she seizes on the dynamics of contradiction as a key factor in any writer's (or other creative person's) metabolism: "a natural association of creativity with destruction" (p3).

There is an article on one crudely glamorous character, Emma Hamilton: "she had no social identity to speak of, and could impersonate goddesses partly because she was 'nobody' or worse" (p21). Hamilton's increasing weight and predatory nature do not escape Lorna's binoculars.

*Good as Her Word* is a supreme statement of demystification. Having been brought up in much of the archaic mandarinism which Lorna Sage so vitally exposed, I was overwhelmed by the totality and fearless strength of her opposition to it (good point about D H Lawrence's "monotonously respectable presence on A-Level syllabuses" and "colleges-of-education pieties about

organic wisdom!" [p148]). I have long been repelled by idolatrous attitudes towards 'great writers' – the public being given, through classical portraiture and slanted biography, a sanitized image as a facile basis for infatuation. Idols, of course, are much easier to construct after their 'life models' are dead.

Lorna faces, fairly and squarely, the influence of posthumous recognition on the attitudes of the readership. An outstanding example of this is her exploration of the senility and decomposition of Jean-Paul Sartre. And when writing of Sterne, she could say "He was an intellectual, but he refused to sweep out his mind or spring-clean his imagination" (p25). Lorna Sage is truly contemporary in that she is aware of present-day writers' relationships with the mass media. This is especially marked in her article on Gore Vidal. Reflecting on the Sixties sexual revolution and its aftermath, she expresses regret that "our fashionable thinking about liberation . . . has been gruesomely impoverished by the stripping away of non-sexual politics." (p179). But she presents a fair balance sheet. There is no spurious nostalgia about old exclusive bohemianism, whatever its concomitant 'intensity'.

*Good as her Word* has a global perspective, demonstrated by the features on Christa Wolf – a major (formerly East German) writer operating in the environment of a now-defunct communist orthodoxy, and the translations of Japanese writer Haruki Murakami. Lorna's interest in the latter was perhaps prompted by her close friendship with, and championship of, Angela Carter. *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter* was a major factor in Carter's gaining general critical recognition. Carter (as well we know – largely through Lorna) was forced to re-evaluate her self-image and self-perception by her migration to the 'mirror' environment of Japan.

Lorna bravely defends Anne Stevenson's attempt at a balanced appraisal of Sylvia Plath, at the cost of detracting from an incredibly appealing romantic legend: "Stevenson measured out her sympathy, counted the cost of Plath's apotheosis. She gave space to hostile witnesses . . . This, combined with sympathy for Hughes . . . earned Stevenson her critical roasting. She threatened to spoil the biography game" (p107).

Lorna is especially acute about the effects of feminism on her academic field. She is circumspect about "trendy Women's Studies" (p147), but then she can rightly value the "conciliatory public languages of feminism" (p164). There is a struggle, against enormous odds, to get a coherent picture, saying, quite rightly that ". . . no one has managed to combine partisanship with criticism at all consistently" (p135). And is Margaret Drabble "a mere shuffle across the carpet"? – Plenty of food for thought there!

The article *Sisters of Sisyphus* deals with the wish of successful women to change society rather than just be assimilated to the existing fabric. The title of the article was inspired by Doris Lessing's phrase 'boulder-pushing' (the hill is Patriarchy; the boulder is sisterhood. BUT "the boulder itself has to be constantly redefined" (p159).

In discussing Romanticism, Lorna is critical of "sensibility snobs" (p175) Her discussion of Andrea Dworkin's *Intercourse* spells out ". . . an impasse in feminist thinking. The reformist strain is wearing itself out (this is almost a definition, in any case: it's about wearing oneself out) in conflict with both consumerism (which makes use of 'liberation' for its own purpose, and the various forms of fundamentalist backlash. At the same time, there is a retreat, a green retreat into separatism, with the stress on feminine, nurturing qualities" (p162). Naturally, she is opposed to the idea of "the powerless,

fey poetess” (p140). The problems of feminism are explored in relation to linguistics: “Metaphors redraw the map, and put the boundaries in different places; these metaphors, in particular, make women into territory that has a boundary drawn not round its edge, but on the inside, in the name of nature (NB: this in Lorna’s gloss, not Susan Dworkin’s text)” (p163).

The survey of the Hite Report shows Lorna Sage to be fully attuned to topical public opinion and social surveys, and the study of Sally Bowles shows her to be fully up-to-date as regards the area of cross-dressing and gender ambiguity. Interestingly, Shelley is ‘revalued’ for his freedom from gender categorisation, though not, of course, without recognising the concomitant problems: “But in actuality, surely, the breakdown of gender boundaries (such as it is) spawns . . . variegated monsters . . . people not only divided from each other, but psychologically motley in themselves” (p242).

Lorna makes a very full statement about this issue in her article *The Women’s Camp*: “Feminist theory is in fin-de-siecle mode: self-fashioning (‘constructivism’) is winning out everywhere and anywhere, and drag, cross-dressing, travesty are the metaphors. “So after twenty-odd years of feminist theorising what’s the big Difference? In a way it’s a non-question, since that sense of returning you to the conviction of the unreality (and finality) of representations is what the project is always about. The process seems to work like a spiral or a gyre, though, so that each return is a turn of the screw – yet more self-conscious, more knowingly perverse. “Feminist theory is lesbian feminist theory is ‘queer’ theory and so on – which is one reason why in terms of style and tone you can hear the accents of camp on every side. Mimicry, parody, travesty, appropriation are almost inevitable” (pp175-176).

“Women attack pornography and write it, sometimes even the same women. Could there be a better demonstration that feminism has joined the ‘real’ world to serve the powers that be?” (p189). There is also some sharp analysis in Learning new titles: “Feminist academics first got jobs and tenure, in significant numbers ‘at exactly the moment when the profession itself came under pressure to downsize (Lorna’s quote from Susan Gubar)’. The result was that competition, the pressure to publish and the need to distance yourself from your predecessors in the name of originality, were all savagely increased . . . the very consciousness-raising that brought so many women and previously excluded minorities into higher education itself led to the rationing. Women in women’s studies programmes came up against the limits of official inclusiveness with particular force” (pp210-211).

Again, in *Mother’s Back*: “What’s been lost is the sense of connection with utopian politics. Part of the fiftyish feeling is to do with having to recognise that the future – that future, the classless, melting-pot, unisex, embarrassing one – is now in the past. Or, more painfully, that it has been hijacked by obscurantism and academic careerism, which often amount to the same thing . . . Feminist theory took a wrong turn almost at the moment of its rebirth in the 1960” (p215).

**T**hroughout her life, Lorna Sage had a deep attachment to Italy, to which the last section of *Good as her Word* is devoted. Her attraction there is understandable; the upsurge of radicalism in a formerly traditional/repressive society has incredible verve: “the time-honoured separation of sex-roles makes it much easier for them (women) to think in sexist terms on their own account” (p137).

The article on the *Madonna of Montenero* shows her acute sense of

history, and of iconography. Literati are all prone to idolatry to some degree, and this portrayal of a valid icon, fulfilling real needs and functions, is an exciting supplementary backcloth to this selection. As ever, it is ‘warts and all’. The power of this figure is crumbling and fading: “Montenero is a ‘human document’ and like many things cushioned and sanitized by that label its fascination is rather grubby. It’s not about the dignity of suffering at all, but about the craven and utterly natural desire to escape it” (p327).

“Perhaps when the Madonna of Montenero became the patron of Tuscany in 1947, it was already a sign that she was losing her power as a local deity who could counteract the malice of events. And perhaps the visual world has changed too much – everyone with a camera; newspaper and television close-ups of worldwide random violence – for local craftsmen to get calamities down the street or round the corner into focus any more” (p328).

The points I have made here are in no way exhaustive. This book is so invigorating; just pick it up, and you’ll find yourself, insatiably, wanting more...



*Bad Blood*, Lorna Sage (2000, ISBN 1-84115-043-6) and *Lorna Sage: Good as her Word (Selected Journalism)*, Eds. Sharon Sage & Victor Sage (2004, ISBN 0-00-715779-7, H/B £16.99; P/B £8.99), are available from **Fourth Estate Books**

# Hard-Won Light

## John O'Donoghue on *The Letters of Robert Lowell*

**P**oets cannot be truly laid to rest until the proper ceremonies have been observed. This is a reference not so much to a place in Poets' Corner and the attendant requiems, but to what the Life was all about, what any poet's life is about: the Work. The publication of Robert Lowell's *Letters* brings to a close a process begun five years after his death with the publication of Ian Hamilton's *Robert Lowell: A Biography* (1982); continued with the *Collected Prose* (1990), edited by Robert Giroux; and brought to a climax with the *Collected Poems* (2003), edited by Frank Bidart and David Gewanter.

We now have what may constitute the Complete Works, although we can be sure that Lowell's bibliographers – the real Hamlets to his Yorick – will not have had their final say just yet. Lowell's body of work throws up problems which are sure to keep the professors busy, and the books cited form an interim report on Lowell's oeuvre, rather than a final inventory. Taken together, however, they aid our understanding of this complex and often embattled poet, and we owe a debt of gratitude to his biographer and editors.

Lowell first became mentally ill in 1949, at the age of 32, and was hospitalised for 'acute manic episodes' and 'depression' on twenty-one occasions, at such various institutions as the Payne Whitney Clinic, New York; the Military Hospitals of Salzburg and Munich; McLean Hospital, Boston; the Institute for Living, Hartford, Connecticut; Greenways Nursing Home, St John's Wood, London; and last, and perhaps most poignantly of all, St Andrew's Hospital, Northampton, where John Clare had been a patient over a century earlier.

Lowell's manic depression is as much a part of his poetic persona as Keats' tuberculosis or Blake's visions and perhaps it is now possible to discuss the inter-relation between his condition and his art without the kind of sneers Larkin was fond of making about 'the boys from the asylum', or allegations of reducing Lowell to a pathology or a case study. No one can be defined by a diagnosis, but manic depression is a fact of Lowell's life and something about which he wrote in new and powerful ways. The question of how his illness affected his art, and how he created art despite his illness - or perhaps indeed at times because of it - is, then, a valid critical enquiry. What contribution do the *Letters* make, therefore, to our understanding of Lowell and his experience of manic depression?

*Life Studies* (1959) is Lowell's most striking achievement, a book of portraits of his family and his experiences in the various institutions he had been detained in up to the date of its publication. Of course, Lowell sometimes blurred the lines of his 'Life Studies', so that the volume's autobiographical tone is not to be taken strictly at face value. Lowell is not under oath in this collection; nor are his poems and the prose memoir '91 Revere Street' acts of perjury.

*Life Studies* explores Lowell's journey through the existential crisis which beset him in his middle years. From his first breakdown in 1949 to the publication of the book a decade later, Lowell lost his mother and father (1950 and 1954 respectively); published his third volume, *The Mills of the Kavanaghs* (1951); was hospitalised eight times; secured employment as a university professor (Boston, 1956); bought a house (1956); became a parent (1957);

and taught Ann Sexton and Sylvia Plath (1958 and 1959). Nor was he unaware of this Noche Oscura: 'This is the dark night... My night is not gracious, but secular, puritan and agnostical. An Existential night...'

Do the *Letters* help us to see the way in which Lowell endured his trials, how he made lasting poetry out of transitory sufferings, however debilitating and prolonged? Do they give an indication of the processes which led to the composition of *Life Studies*? Are they in any way preliminary vignettes, a sketchbook where one can discern outlines of the finished portraits? Can the reader catch a cadence, a line or an idea in the day to day correspondence which finds its way, honed and polished, into the poems?

In a reply to Richard Tillinghast, a doctoral student at Harvard, written in August 1969, Lowell writes: 'Let me finally give the order of the autobiographical part of *Life Studies*.' He says that 'Uncle Dev' ['My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow'] was 'First in 1954 (?) after a long depression in the Payne Whitney Clinic and possible [sic] the little poems after 'Commander Lowell' ['Terminal Days at Beverly Farms', 'Father's Bedroom', 'For Sale']'.

This sequence of three poems comprise portraits of Lowell's parents, which started off as 'very rude sketches, to be worked up into what I don't know'. Two further poems, 'Sailing Home From Rapallo' and 'During Fever', written in 1957, complete this sequence of family portraits. These poems are all in the first section of Part Four of the book, which ends with 'Waking in the Blue' and 'Home After Three Months Away'.

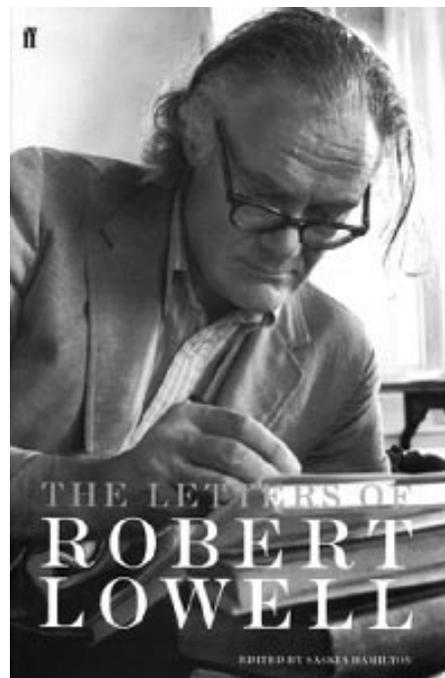
**A**fter Lowell's initial burst of work in 1954, he tells Tillinghast that he wrote 'the long prose piece' ('91 Revere Street') in 1956. Then '...1957 the poems began'. 'The first part' of 'Man and Wife', 'Skunk Hour', 'Commander Lowell', 'Words for Hart Crane', 'Terminal Days', 'Sailing Home From Rapallo', 'Memories of West Street and Lepke', and 'To Speak of Woe That Is In Marriage' were all completed at this time. 'Man and Wife' and 'Words For Hart Crane' were further revised towards the end of Lowell's creative surge in '57. Lowell then had a 'breakdown' (he was admitted to McLean Hospital in February 1958). He says: 'It took almost the rest of the year to write the remaining poems: 'Waking in the Blue' – done most while sick, but not the ending which makes it a poem.' Three further poems followed: 'During Fever', 'Dunbarton' and 'Grandparents'.

This window into the composition of *Life Studies* shows Lowell feeling his way towards not just a collection of poems, but a book with various thematic unities. His family history, his personal history, and the history of his times are all reflected in *Life Studies*. In order to write of new subject matter – a frank portrayal of family, mental breakdown and incarceration in institutions – Lowell developed new techniques and a new tone. Lowell broke with his style and with the traditions he been born into, both as a patrician son of Boston, and as a poet.

Gone is the gorgeous bombast and formality of 'The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket', 'Between the Porch and Altar', and *The Mills of the Kavanaghs*; Lowell uses a more casual tone in *Life Studies*, those 'rude sketches' behind many of his poems. As his technique develops – from the early family portraits through 'Waking in the Blue', '91 Revere Street', and the final compositions which complete the book: 'Skunk Hour', 'Memories of West Street and Lepke', and 'To Speak of Woe That

Is In Marriage' – a franker poetic emerges and is perfected. It is as if the intensity of his experiences, of his journey through the Dark Night, has burnt away ornament and rhetoric to leave a flatness of statement, as though he had moved through the dark glassily to arrive at a day bleak with hard-won light.

Some of these 'rude sketches' are also evident in the *Letters*. Here's an early sighting of that Lowellian trademark, the triplet, in a letter to Randall Jarrell from Baldpate Hospital, Mass., May 21, 1949: 'I'm poor, helpless, conceited here' Compare this to: 'Cured, I am



frizzled, stale and small' ('Home After Three Months Away'). This dying fall usually rises and is Lowell's gift to the language. His letter to Elizabeth Bishop from McLean's is full of the same kind of 'rude sketches' he draws on in 'Waking in the Blue':

The man next to me is a Harvard law professor. One day, he is all happiness... But on another day, his depression blankets him. Early in the morning, I hear cooing pigeon sounds, and if I listen carefully, the words: 'Oh terror, TERROR!' Our other male assembles microscopically exact models of clippers and three masted schooners. (March 15, 1958).

Echoes here of: '... Stanley, now sunk in his sixties/once a Harvard all-

American fullback,/... still hoarding the build of a boy in his twenties/as he soaks, a ramrod/with the muscle of a seal/in his long tub/vaguely ruinous from the Victorian plumbing'. The people whom he encountered in hospital and briefly noted but never 'worked up' are perhaps the most intriguing. In a letter to Elizabeth Hardwick from Payne Whitney in 1949 he mentions the 'arrival of a Catholic priest (a patient) full of facts about the Navy, Missions and St. Paul', which makes him sound like Lowell's doppelganger, perhaps the reason he left only a thumbnail sketch of this poor cleric rather than a portrait in *Life Studies*.

There are also stray lines of poetry in his *Letters*, grace notes amongst the commonplace prose of correspondence: 'It's tough sledding not seeing another poet'; 'It looks rough at first, but it was written with a world of pain'; 'Little Harriet will never see the shadow that has darkened us and gone'.

Lowell was prescribed Lithium in 1967. This slowed down the rate at which he fell ill, but did not cure him. Is it a coincidence that the next four books he wrote contain only 14-line unrhymed sonnets? Was he desperately trying to turn into poetry the quotidian reflections so evident in his correspondence as the upswings and the downswings of manic depression flattened out into a monotonous sublime?

Robert Lowell's *Letters* are a triumph of the editor's art. They shed new light on the poetry, on Lowell's 'world of pain'. Ultimately, they are his triumph, work the life bequeaths us, hard-won, and wonderful.

*The Letters of Robert Lowell are published by Faber & Faber, £30*

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# Outpatient Polemic

## Alan Morrison on the Sixties Press mental health series

**H**arrowing is the word which comes to mind regarding this extremely insightful and important series of mental health-related pamphlets from Barry Tebb's indefatigable Sixties Press. That a read should disturb one is most often a constructive thing, if done didactically, as it opens the mind more to itself and, more importantly, to the minds of others; that essential empathetic function of good writing. As C.S. Lewis once said, 'something has to drag us out from the nursery into the worlds of others' (sic), and these first three of the Sixties Press' mental health pamphlets do just that, uncompromisingly.

The first in the series is 2004's *Kith and Kin – Experiences in Mental Health Caring*. It comprises three first person accounts of caring for loved ones with mental illness. In 'One Carer's Story' Barry Tebb lays bare the profoundly distressing sink into 'insanity' (presumably paranoid schizophrenia) of his father-in-law Cyril Williams, and in turn of his and Brenda Williams's son, Isaiah.

Cyril's story is made all the more vivid through Tebb's powerful prose with its painterly splashes of description; he tells us that Cyril had enjoyed a briefly contented period 'as a collector of broken typewriters for city centre offices'. Tebb then speculates: '...perhaps the seeds of his paranoia were growing and festering and in the casual glances of typists and office boys he somehow sensed that they might know his secret frenzies so instead he took to digging graves at Lawnswood and Killingbeck Cemetery, in sight of the wards where Kathleen [his wife] worked nights'. This deft prosaic portraiture of a man on the brink of mental breakdown is chillingly vivid:

I wondered what strange thoughts filled his mind as he toiled among the harvest of bones and rotting flesh and heaped wreaths and footprints of mourners and the tyre marks of innumerable hearses? What metamorphosis did the blurred contents of his mind undergo as he sat night after night drinking himself into blind stupefaction, staggering home to scream hallucinatory hatred at his timid and terrified Irish Catholic wife in the presence of four bewildered children?

And;

...the night when the madness made fires burn in his eyes and he wrote in huge letters over the sink MURDER IN SEACROFT HOSPITAL and he hurled everything he had through the open window in a crazed whirligig and pounded his television on screen until there was nothing left but a fine grey powder...

Disturbing indeed, as is the blank-faced, two-way-mirrored impunity of GPs and psychologists, typified in Tebb's razor-sharp observations of inanimate minutiae: '...countless ballpoint pens with cryptic messages on the barrels, "Flossex b.d. - the peace of heaven" and "Ditrol makes for the mile-wide smile"'.

Equally heart-wrenching is the ensuing story of Cyril's grandson's similar plunge into this arguably inherited mental disorder. In Isaiah's story there is again a similar pre-breakdown erraticism to his grandfather in his impulsive swing from pursuing an M.Ed. in Classics at Balliol to using his £5,000 Newcastle Scholarship to study Bengali at the University of Shantiniketan in Calcutta. For the following four and a half years Barry wrote to his son in India, receiving nothing in return all that time. On returning to England Isaiah left for Leeds where he lived in a '...damp and depressing bed sit in a back-to-back in Beeston. No other tenant lived there for more than a night but Isaiah grimly remained,

declaring it to be wonderfully suited to his needs. ....He lived out of tins and drank too much and gradually changed days into nights'.

But the crucial vicissitude in Isaiah's harrowing story comes with the forboding line: 'On May 16 2001 he phoned me to say that he believed his head was coming off his body'. Swiftly following was a swift diagnosis of 'gross psychotic delusions' and the inevitable sectioning. But as soon as Isaiah showed signs of recovery, he was billeted to a halfway house run by 'Community Links' (no doubt an offshoot from Thatcher's Care in the Community cop-out policies), a public-private-partnership chimera of New Labour's ever self-dismantling NHS. Here Tebb observes what he terms as a 'Parent Blaming' culture, which he feels leads to his son's accusation that he and Brenda practise witchcraft: '...and in this state [he] was discharged into the community'. What a surprise. Isaiah then progressed, or rather deteriorated onto delusions of being 'Christ's middle-man' and after a significant struggle to find him an acute bed in Leeds, is now finally back on an appropriate ward.

Barry frequently tells me of his ongoing, inexorable commuting rounds to visit Isaiah, and I can only say I greatly admire his courage in coping with schizophrenia's relentless grip on his son. Barry's deeply moving poem 'Our Son' follows this profoundly honest and affecting account, as does a series of Brenda Williams's inimitable and highly accomplished sonnets on the breakdown and suicide of ex-senior social worker Christine Blake, who was scandalously barred from attending the Fordwych Road Day Hospital, under the ever – apparently – unwatchful eye of Camden and Islington Mental Health

and Social Care Trust Board (going by the shenanigans of a certain Social Care & Health Trust in a more southerly region of the UK, who organised their meetings of summer 2001 around the World Cup match schedule, this comes as little surprise to me). A preceding section of text also tells of Brenda's own seemingly unmitigated neglect from same authority, which she has been famously petitioning against for some time now, as chronicled in the *Ham and High*. Brenda deserves particular commendation for her courage in defiantly fighting this institutional stoicism, as does she for producing such powerful and memorable sonnets through years of largely un-alleviated depression – as Tebb notes: 'A survey showed that the diagnosis of schizophrenia in an adult child impacts more severely on parental health than would the same child's death in a road accident'.

'A Journal by the Father of a Son with Schizophrenia by Mike' is a series of blisteringly honest emails charting the course of a son's lapse into schizophrenic breakdown. The medium of emails making it all the more real and immediate. An important sequence well worth reading. The final inclusion, 'Schizophrenia: A Mother's Story By Georgina Wakefield' is a deeply moving account, again, of a son's schizophrenia, this time from a maternal viewpoint. This is compulsive reading, in no small part due to Georgina's incidental awakening to the therapy of writing. She also pens a crucial legend which emphasizes how essential it is for sufferers, sufferers' families and therapists to engage on a broader empathetic forum with one another:

'I also hope that professional people read it and they may be helped by seeing things from an entirely different angle. It's so hard for all concerned because the nurses know what's best, but, inevitably, feelings get in the way and parents can't always carry out what's best'.

This is Important.

*Life and Death in Camden* (2005) contains relentless rounds of correspondence tennis between Barry Tebb and sundry luminaries of responsibility-deference, including Rob Larkman, Chief Executive of the Camden Primary Care Trust, and The Right Honourable Chris Smith, Chair of The Committee for Standards in Public Life. This correspondence is both eye-opening and sociologically pertinent. The rest of the pamphlet is flowing with irresistably polemical poetry from Tebb and fellow Sixties

“ A survey showed that the diagnosis of schizophrenia in an adult child impacts more severely on parental health than would the same child's death in a road accident ”

Press stalwart, Brenda Williams. As always, a rewarding read. But *Censored In Camden – The Closure of Jamestown Day Centre* is polemic with a capital P; a further, more comprehensive tirade against the inadequate and ineffective 'services' of Camden Council, Camden Mental Health Liaison Group and Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust regarding in particular its continued refusal to provide treatment for Brenda Williams, arguing she should seek care in Westminster. The suicide of Damien Hirst's godmother, writer Margaret Walsh, is also cited as another example of Camden and Islington Trust's apparent inability to provide a proper service to its service users. This chronicle of systematic neglect is illustrated through a series of correspondence between Tebb and these organisations' representatives, predictably closing ranks against the facts. Scattered among these cuttings are other Tebb-penned letters, and news stories from various editions of the

*Ham and High* during September this year. Tebb praises this paper whilst criticising the apparent political complacency of the *Camden New Journal* in its reticence to publish any directly contentious details on these issues on its own pages, in spite of its radical reputation. It seems in this particular area, the *CNJ* has not answered Tebb's rallying call, and he goes on to laud the launch of the *Camden Gazette*, a new paper produced by the *Ham & High's* owners.

This is polemically gripping stuff, and one can only admire Tebb's courage in naming and blaming those he feels responsible for Camden's woeful mental healthcare record; one which can boast "...the highest suicide rate in the country..." – '1 every 10 days', he states in a letter to the Lord Chancellor. This shocking statistic is all the more disturbing when one confronts proposals by the Social Services' Press Office to close down vital day centres for the severely mentally ill in Camden:

'The rationale used as an excuse is a report of the Social Exclusion Unit but this simply says that the mentally ill should not be excluded from the mainstream of society, e.g. they should not suffer stigma. The Council carelessly conflates this with the DWP's intention to move 1 million of the less ill on incapacity benefit into work over the next decade...'

It's indeed a disgrace that under the eyes of a supposed Labour Government, emotive issues are twisted in order to justify cost-cutting. Will there ever be a stigma against political immorality?

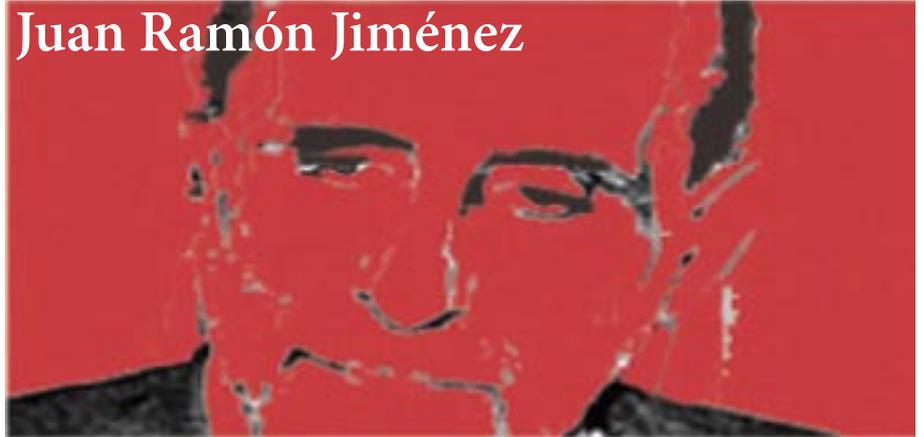
The Sixties Press mental health series are must-reads.

*Kith and Kin* (£2), *Life and Death in Camden* (£6) and *Censored in Camden* (£4) are all available from Sixties Press – to order please email [sixtiespress@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:sixtiespress@blueyonder.co.uk).

Coming soon: *Beyond Stigma – Experiences of Mental Health Survivors*, Sixties Press.

# The Universal Andalusian

Lucía Moral Baena on the Generation of '27's figurehead, Spanish Nobel poet Juan Ramón Jiménez



**J**uan Ramon Jiménez, “the universal Andalusian”, was born in 1881 in Moguer, Huelva. He came from a middle-class background in conservative and traditional Andalucía. His hometown was crucial not only in his poetry but in the way events took place in his life. Moguer, an idyllic place where time never seemed to change, is intrinsically linked to his childhood, or as he himself put it: ‘I live with my best friend: solitude’.

Jiménez moves to Seville to study law but his interest is in painting and writing. His family encourage him to follow his heart in poetry when he leaves his degree unfinished. Already in Seville, he discovers the romantic poet Bécquer, who is the first and strongest influence on his work.

In April 1900 he moves to Madrid on the invitation of the modernist poet Francisco Villaespesa, and Ruben Darío who suggests the title *Almas de Violetas* (*Souls of Violets*) for his work-in-progress. Here he enjoys a life of bohemianism with his fellow poet friends.

However, after only two months in Madrid, Jiménez returns home as he claims he feels very sick. It is in Moguer that a catalytic event of his father’s death tests Juan Ramon’s intrinsic sensitivity to the limits and plunges him into a state of deep depression and neurosis from which he will never fully recover. His ensuing obsession with death triggers a lapse into mental illness and in 1901 he has to be admitted to a psychiatric sanatorium in Le Bouscat, France.

During his in-patient stay he first comes into contact with French poetry, and the literary currents at the time, symbolism and

parnasianism, which influence his future work greatly. By this time he is composing *Rimas* (*Rhymes*), which is later published in Madrid in 1902. He also has various love affairs that inspire him to write much erotic poetry; but in 1913 he meets and falls profoundly in love with Zenobia Camprubí. It is during this time (some literary critics call it his ‘sensitive period’) that Juan Ramón finds his real mission in life: “I am not a man of letters but a poet who made his dream come true. For me there is nothing else but beauty”.

“ I am not a man of letters but a poet who made his dream come true. For me there is nothing else but beauty ”

By the end of 1901 he is transferred voluntarily to another psychiatric sanatorium in Madrid until 1903. The publication of *Arias Tridas* (*Sad Arias*) confirms his reputation in the literary world.

A new crisis in 1905 makes him return to his hometown where he writes the classic novel *Platero y Yo* (*Platero and I*), while inspired by symbolist poetry, and the famous poem ‘El Viaje Definitivo’ (‘The Definitive Journey’). From 1905 to

1907 his depression worsens as a result of economic problems with his family.

In 1911 he returns to Madrid, inspired by Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s publishing of his poems in the journal, *Prometeo*. Juan Ramón stays at the Residencia de Estudiantes where he becomes one of the most important literary focuses for what was later termed ‘the Generation of ‘27’.

In 1916, he and Zenobia travel to the USA where they are married. Juan Ramón promises Zenobia that he will write the most beautiful book of love ever, and starts sketching *Diario de un Poeta Recién Casado* (*Journal of a Man Just Married*).

On his return to Madrid Jiménez finds himself at the centre of all the avant-garde movements in poetry, a position earned by his seminal work, *Eternidades* (*Eternities*) (1918).

Juan Ramón’s generous nature is reported widely by his fellow writers. However, his refusal to participate in the homage to the classic poet Góngora, and some misunderstandings with Unamuno about the order of his poems in a magazine, brings him a sour reaction from his “disciples”. This estrangement from the Generation of ‘27 is even more accentuated by a telegram sent by Buñuel and Dalí,

both cruelly unaware of the poet's sensitivity. Furthermore, the argument between 'pure poetry' (the only possible poetry for Juan Ramón) and the 'impure poetry' developed by political changes in the country, concludes with Jimenez irreversibly severing his attachments from this group of poets.

It is in 1935, that Pablo Neruda inherits leadership of the Generation of '27 and publishes the manifesto of 'impure poetry' in his magazine *Caballo Verde Para la Poesia* (*Green Horse for Poetry*).

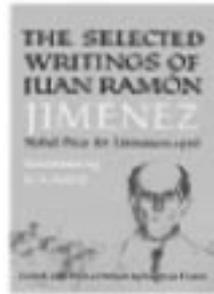
When Juan Ramón publishes his *Cuadernos* (*Notebooks*), his attitude becomes more suspicious and lonely. On the outbreak of the Civil War, he embraces the Republican cause. He puts orphans up in his own house and leaves all his savings to them before leaving Spain to settle in Washington, where he becomes Cultural Assistant at the Spanish Embassy. His plans of returning to Spain vanish due to the triumph of General Franco.

Juan Ramón's life grows more isolated and he creates his own ideal world, ignoring the ugly reality of life and all its social structures. He and Zenobia move to Puerto Rico where he writes his definitive books: *Romances de Coral Gables* (*Romances of Coral Gables*) (1948), *Dios Deseado y Deseante* (*God Desired and Desiring*) (1949), and his long poem *Espació* (*Space*) (1954).

In 1956 he receives the Nobel Prize for Literature. However, in the same year Zenobia dies from breast cancer. Now completely alone, Juan Ramón's neurotic character intensifies irreparably. Two years later he dies in Puerto Rico in total desolation. Solitude follows him to the grave.

## Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958)

### *Poems*



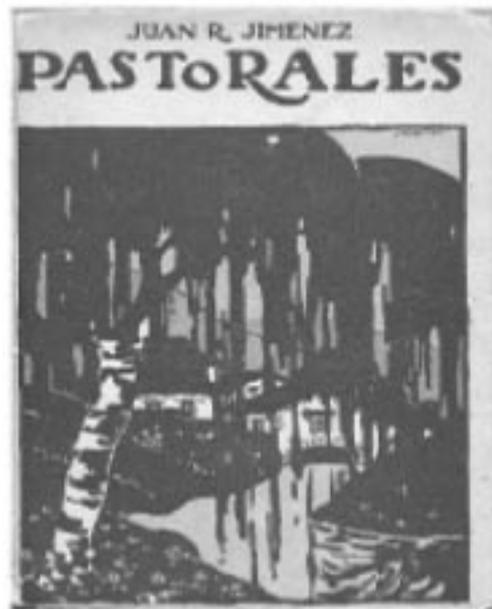
### **The Shepherd's Star**

Shut up, for God's sake, because you  
won't be able to tell me;  
let open all my  
dreams and all my lilies.

My heart hears well  
the lyrics of your affection...  
the water is telling it  
amongst the flowers of the river;

the fog is dreaming it,  
the pines are crying for it,  
and the pink moon and  
the heart of your windmill...

Don't turn the light off, for God's sake,  
that burns inside myself...  
Shut up, for God's sake, because you  
won't be able to tell me.



### **The Definitive Journey** (from *Country Poems* 1910-1911)

...And I will go away. And birds will stay  
singing;  
and my back garden will stay with its green tree,  
and its white well.

Every afternoon, the sky will be blue and placid;  
and like this afternoon, bells will chime  
from the church tower.

Those who loved me will die;  
and the village will be new every year;  
and in that corner of my florid and blanched back garden,  
my spirit will linger, nostalgic...

And I will go away; and I will be alone, homeless,  
without green  
tree, without white well,  
without blue and placid sky...  
And birds will stay singing.

## The Blue Rose

What sad joy this, doing all things as she used to!  
My hand turns sky blue, I become infected by other poetry  
And the scented roses, which I arrange as she did, intensify its colour;  
and the beautiful cushions, which I arrange as she did, flower its gardens;  
And if I put my hand – as she used to – on the black piano,  
it emerges as if on a faraway piano, but with its deep melody.

What sad joy this, doing all things as she used to!  
I lean towards the glass of the balcony, with one of her gestures  
and it seems my poor heart is not alone.  
I look at the afternoon garden, as she did,  
and both sigh and stars fuse in a romantic harmony.

What sad joy this, doing all things as she used to!  
In pain and with flowers, I go, like a hero of my own poetry.  
Through deserted corridors she awoke with her white pace,  
and my feet are made of satin – oh! Cold and hollow absence! –  
and my footprints leave sparkles.

## When I Was the God-Child

When I was the god-child, as in Moguer, this  
village,  
a white wonder; the light with time inside.  
Each house was a palace and each temple a cathedral;  
everything in its place, the earth and the sky;  
and through those green vineyards I jumped with my dog,  
cheerful as the clouds, like the light winds,  
believing the horizon was the line of the end.

I remember a day in which I returned to my  
village,  
after the first absence, it seemed to me a cemetery.  
The houses were not palaces, nor the temples cathedrals,  
and everywhere loneliness and silence reigned.  
I felt very small, little ant of the desert,  
with Concha the shopping woman, all in black with black,  
who, under the torrid sun and through *Inbetween Street*,  
was stooping and pulling from the god-child and his dog:  
the child all deeply absorbed,  
the dog considering him with approval and care.

What time the time! Did it go with the god-child  
running away?  
And who could always be what he was  
in the first place?  
Who could not fall, no, no, not drop old;  
to be again the pure dawn, to live with the whole time,  
to die being the god-child in my Moguer, this village!

All translations by Lucía Moral Baena © 2005

## I Am Not Me

I am this one  
who goes by my side without me seeing him;  
who, sometimes, I come to visit,  
and who, sometimes, I forget.  
This one who keeps quiet, serene, when I talk,  
this one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,  
this one who will stand on his feet when I die.

*Introducing...*

**Janett Plummer**

*our new Diversity Coordinator*

*I have extensive experience as a workshop facilitator and poetry performer (aka Melted Demerara). I have over ten years experience of policy development and diversity work: I set up Inspired Word, a Women's Survivors writing group that also explore issues of violence and sexual abuse in a safe space. I've also worked in community development and health. I was a founder member of JAWA Theatre collective and am an active member of the London branch of Malika's Poetry Kitchen.*

*My first aim as Diversity Coordinator will be to develop Black and Minority Ethnic groups within the Survivors' Poetry community. Initially I'll be working with the already established One Tribe Quandary. In Spring 2006 I'll be launching a Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Writers Group (name to be announced) – keep your eyes peeled on [www.survivorspoetry.com](http://www.survivorspoetry.com) for a date and venue to be announced soon. For more information on the group and how to join, please contact me at [janett@survivorspoetry.org.uk](mailto:janett@survivorspoetry.org.uk) or call 07818616489.*



# Buzzed Off With Meher Baba: An Interview with John Horder

From Meher Baba and hugging to Stevie Smith and music therapy, Alan Morrison finds out what makes John Horder tick

“



John Horder in Ford Maddox hat stepping out of 13 Carlingford Road, Hampstead NW6, Nov. 1968 (© Bruce Milburn)

When I first bumped into John outside the Survivors' Poetry offices at the Diorama over a year ago, I was struck by a larger-than-life apparition: stood before me was a figure of almost Dickensian proportions, an impressive-faced word-veteran beset with giant pale eyes, wearing a 'little boy lost' expression on his face and – as I've now come to learn – a characteristic wide-brimmed green hat on his white-haired head. I instantly warmed to this likeable and amenable veteran of poetry and journalism. I also felt a tingle of almost juvenile awe at meeting someone who had been a lifelong friend of the now legendarily inimitable Stevie Smith (well, I didn't come from a literati background).

Over the past year I've come to know John more intimately, both of us often sharing our experiences of OCD and the highs and lows of being 'word-obsessed', one of

John's trademark phrases. John's sartorial uniqueness has never ceased to amaze me: on one occasion he slumped himself in a chair in the Survivors' office

replete with a tall, floppy hat reminiscent of the Sugarloaf style (c. 1470) and an orange and brown striped sweater; which made him rather resemble a giant bumble bee. I felt it was high time I enticed John to buzz down with a bump and tell us all what exactly makes him tick...

**W**hich came first John, the journalism or the poetry?

I had to perform to survive and I'm only just finding out how hard I worked. Often putting on a false performance because that was the only way I found I could get the attention or approval of Molly and Pearson, my two dysfunctional parents. Poetry didn't come at a critical time...at the usual time...The first poem I wrote, which I've since lost, was called *Mocio Among the Litmus Trees*. It was written on a train.

I had a hideously unhappy time as a schoolboy at St. Paul's School in Hammersmith. A really unbelievably unhappy time. And I had an unbelievably unhappy childhood; isolated. Even my father knew, my alcoholic father who was slow on the uptake, that I went actually from the frying-pan, after my mother's death, tragically at the age of 40 Molly had died, I was thirteen/fourteen, and I sort of compensated by becoming the star of a children's television programme on the BBC called *Junior Wranglers* and it went to my head, of course it did. It was May 1951 and I was called 'the second Dr Joad' - because I used to wave my fingers at the camera and say 'it all depends what you mean by that word' -, which was a very mixed compliment because Dr Joad had been imprisoned several times – he was a philosopher – for not paying his railway tickets.

Putting it bluntly, I've always been a kind of media prostitute and that's not surprising given my father's ambitions for me which were completely out of proportion to what I could deliver. There was a writer called Arthur Calder-Marshall who in the Thirties

and Forties was a pretty famous novelist, published by Jonathan Cape, and my father knew him as a friend and Calder-Marshall had been to St. Paul's, so I was sent to St. Paul's.

**Was his daughter the actress Anna Calder-Marshall?**

I think they were definitely related yes. You can't have a long name like that and not be related.

**When was your first journalist job?**

Well the first thing that really kind of made any impression and made so much impression I actually couldn't cope, was...I'd been an Ordinand in the Church of England to be, you know, ordained. I worked from 1961-62 as Assistant Press Officer to two Archbishops of Canterbury in Church House in Westminster and had a pretty nasty crack up at the end of it. I was very very much chaste of mind. I had a very bad relationship with my physical body. So surprise, surprise, I had to spend six months in a mental hospital called St. Luke's Woodside, which is still in Muswell Hill. I was very lucky because in my second month there I actually arranged to interview Stevie Smith and they were very keen and even though I was twenty minutes late to arrive at Broadcasting House – this is all documented in Frances Spalding's biography of Stevie, *Stevie Smith – A Biography*, just reissued by Sutton Publishing – it was a tremendous success simply because we'd never been mirrored by a mother's unconditional love, which was the phrase that comes from – very emotional territory for me – it's mentioned at the end of the Stevie pamphlet (Greville Press) – I got this phrase from Alice Miller's exquisite book, *The Drama of Being a Child*, in which she describes the gifted child's grandiosity and depression being two sides of the same coin. The nurses put me on a 134 bus; I was only in my second month and on quite a lot of medication – Librium and sleeping pills and sodium – so the fact that I did that in my second month of my six month stay in that hospital is quite enlightening...

St. Luke's was in Muswell Hill and the interview was taking place at BBC Broadcasting House. At that time I – I've always – had a very difficult relationship with the world and for me to get on a 134 bus... They put me on the bus, I got to Broadcasting House to interview her about her *Selected Poems*, and I was twenty minutes late – this is all in Frances Spalding's biography.

But that wasn't the only bit of luck actually; there was a nurse at St. Luke's Hospital and she had a partner who had a really good job on *The Guardian* and she volunteered to introduce me, and she did, and the first person she introduced me to promptly died. So that

was a bit of a disconcerting thing. I was all right in the end because I actually started my career as a literary journalist writing a piece about Gabriel Fielding the novelist – who wrote a wonderful book called *The Birthday King* about the Germans and the Nazis and the Roman Catholics – he was a Roman Catholic; he was a Roman Catholic in the hysteric sense and always very in awe of other Catholic writers like Muriel Spark, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene – and my article in *The Guardian* resulted in... one of my first articles, another was with Bridget Brophy, a forgotten figure but a very excellent writer...

**How did you get the commission to do the BBC Radio interview at Broadcasting House?**

I think it was just sheer...I've always been lucky. I mean I had this track record, I'd done a lot of broadcasting while I was at St. Paul's School; I was on *Children's Hour* quite often and I'd done interviews when I was 18 or 19 with Jane Gaskell who was a novelist, Michael Hastings the playwright; I'd done all these interviews for a part of the BBC called Network 3, which shared the same wavelength with Radio 3. It actually started from the fact that I...I'd been on a television programme at the age of 12 from Alexandra Palace. So I'd been a real media junkie...from a very early age, and it's no coincidence that I became – because I couldn't cry or show my emotions since Molly died, she was 40 and I was 13 – a star of *Junior Wranglers*; I tried to compensate for her and not being able to cry.

**Of all the poets and writers you interviewed, which stood out for you and why?**

Oh I think Stevie by a long way.

**You became good friends with Stevie didn't you?**

Well we met at Broadcasting House in Portland Place and we landed up in the foyer again and she said to me, 'Ah, our club John', and it was the nearest both of us came to a Gentleman's Club. But I didn't realize at the time that this was the event of a lifetime. She was an extraordinary performer – that was I think what really got me. There's always been a frustrated actor/performer in me and certainly at that time – 1963/4/5 – when I was not yet thirty, certainly that performer hadn't had much of a chance even with all the broadcasting I'd done; I mean I haven't even told you that I chucked up the chance to take up a six-month contract to do interviews for a ghastly programme called *Calendar*, which was in the *God Slot* – a religious programme, 7pm Sundays 1964, ATV – I had the same agent as David Frost and I blew it by being a raving perfectionist...so great was my self-sabotage that I did one programme for them and tore up the contract.

That I wouldn't do again.

**Did you stay in contact with Stevie till her death?**

Oh yes, until her death. She paid me the highest compliment: there's a poem of mine in *A Sense of Being* called 'Little Willie' – which was published in *The Observer* – and she said 'Oh, I could have written that'.

**That's a very big compliment...**

Yes. I didn't realise this at the time. I was very slow with that penny dropping. None of the poems in *Meher Baba and the Nothingness*, which was 'After the party the poor poet laments/ Ah woe is me/ Ah woe is me/ Said the poor poet/ Throughout eternity/ Why is that I am forever/ Searching for my soul/ Outside of me?' – now that's a refrain that goes all the way through – they're more Stevie than Stevie.

Compared with all the men poets, Stevie was so much more easy for me to fall in love as a performer, as a poet, as a woman – I mean my God she was an awkward woman because she was even more un-hugged than me.

**One of my favourite films is Stevie starring Glenda Jackson. From the point of view of someone who knew Stevie, was that a good portrayal?**

Well the trouble with Glenda Jackson is that nobody could get the wounded three-year-old omnipotent little girl, it was impossible, and Glenda Jackson was much more confident. My fantasy with Glenda Jackson is she had a few hugs to set her on her way.

I didn't really realise but the emotional illiteracy of the men poets, like Ted Hughes and Larkin and Peter Porter, Alan Brownjohn, I mean they were all so well thought of but you know what are they compared with Stevie Smith? And Ursula Fanthorpe, the best poet laureate we've never had, and incredibly well-grounded, both of them, in the Classics, Grimm's fairy stories, in the Bible...the women poets know their stuff. Stephen Spender, you can see in his translations of Rilke, who wrote those *Duino Elegies* - 'the beauty and the terror of what we're still not able to bear' – he's just not done his homework. He's like a naughty schoolboy waiting for his bottom to be smacked. To be honest with you, Spender was another media slut. The assumption was Spender could translate Rilke, but I'm not sure he could.

**Of course arguably poets like Stevie Smith have stayed more in the public consciousness than poets who are more critically acclaimed...**

People just don't have the honesty or the courage to say look, if it's a choice between *The Wasteland* or *Not Waving, But Drowning*, I'd go for *Not Waving, But Drowning* any day. The human condition is there in *Not Waving, But Drowning*, but *The Wasteland*...

**Not Waving, But Drowning is universal isn't it, whereas The Wasteland is fairly esoteric and you need to be appropriately educated to fully understand all of it...**

Yes. There's a whole drama of all sorts of facts about – why does there have to be this mystique about men poets? We know by no means all the facts about T.S. Eliot's first wife and there's an incredible lot we don't know about Ted Hughes ('wives?') that won't come out. I do feel strongly about this thing of the poet's false persona. The thing about Stevie that really tickles me pink is that she was actually a dab hand on the Stock Exchange. You would never have thought it.

**I suppose she had to get some money to keep herself in secretarial work...?**

But she was very good at it; she was very good at stocks and shares. That's not something that is

commonly known. She had this incredible close relationship with the Lion of Hull (her aunt). I was very spoilt in a way. Having met Stevie for the first time in 1961, then I go on to interview Marianne Moore for *The Sunday Times* in 1964. She was equally intriguing.

What is so heartbreaking is the lack of insight into the unconscious self-brutalising habit patterns of so many poets. Marianne Moore paid an incredibly high price and left this wonderful poem called 'What Are Years?' and she was a most fascinating person, had a closer than close relationship with her mother. There's a real fascination with Marianne Moore with her relationship with Elizabeth Bishop, who was a lesbian, and of course Marianne wasn't; she wasn't sexually operational.

**Do you think that was the case with Stevie as well?**

Stevie had her flings. There's quite a story about Stevie having a relationship with George Orwell and both of them being caught on the kitchen table. I believe that

“ Stevie had her flings. There's quite a story about her and George Orwell being caught on the kitchen table. ”

is a true story. Many writers are torn by shyness on the one hand and the wish to be notorious. They both had a very wounded part of them, Orwell and Stevie you know. There's another scoop.

### **Other notable interviewees?**

I was working pretty regularly by 1965 for *The Guardian* and I went up to Hull to interview Philip Larkin. It was an odd moment – it was his breakthrough time in 1965 and I interviewed him on a cricket field in Hull. Emotionally he gave absolutely nothing away. The piece was run. It was a prize-winning piece called 'Poet on the 8.15' and it got a lot of admiration. I think in a certain way that was as much to do with Larkin as it was to do with me. Often at that time I happened to be in the right place at the right time but unlike with Stevie Smith, it was opposite as with Stevie Smith – as soon as I met her for the first time in February 1962 or '63, we were friends for the rest of her life; nothing such happened with Larkin. He was another very touch-deprived, un-hugged poet I think.

### **What's your opinion on the relationship between creativity, particularly poetry, and mental illness, from your own life experiences?**

When I have my birthday I usually insist on them putting 'To John Horder, Poet and Storyteller'. I have a great love of the oral tradition of storytelling; there is this task, if we're poets, this acknowledged or unacknowledged task of us loving, honouring, cherishing and respecting our own stories, we help other people to love, honour, cherish and respect their stories, and I still feel it is the dark ages. It's not really acknowledged. I find it unbelievably frustrating that there is a book by Julia Cameron called *The Artist's Way*, which is a bestseller by word-of-mouth, and that has a most marvellous technique to help novelists, poets, playwrights, artists of any age from 9-90, just by writing two or three pages of A4 stream-of-consciousness fashion, and I think doing that for over seven years now has helped me – I mean I don't think I would have got into Music Therapy if I hadn't been writing these Morning Pages beforehand because it's actually been the only way round but I'm by no means there. I was brought up to be such a brutal perfectionist, to have impossibly high standards by my parents Pearson and Molly, if it hadn't been for the Pages, and I think Diorama... – and I was there for ten years and that was a long time – and I had to learn some pretty difficult lessons, I must have partly wanted to be taken advantage of financially, I'm talking of Alison Coombes; St. James's Picadilly was my baby to celebrate Stevie's birth, in 2002, and I wasn't rewarded in any way, and that was a blow...



**John Horder replete with Sugarloaf hat and bee-stripe jumper, 2005 (© Co Wright)**

**Born:** 20th November 1936, Brighton

**Educated:** Downside Preparatory School, Purley; St. Paul's School, Hammersmith; Selwyn College, Cambridge

**Acting:** *Children's Hour*, 1950; *Junior Wranglers*, 1951

**Journalism:** interviews with Gabriel Fielding, Stevie Smith, BBC Radio 4, 1963; Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, *The Guardian*, 1965; William Empson, *The Guardian*, 1969

**Poetry publications:** poem in *The Cambridge Review*, 1960; *The Child Walks Around His Own Grave*, Giles Gordon, 1966 (two Arts Council of England Awards); *A Sense of Being*, ed. C Day Lewis, Chatto & Windus/The Hogarth Press, 1968; *A Sense of Being* (second edition), The Menard Press, 1981; *Meher Baba and the Nothingness*, The Menard Press, 1981 (three poems made into a film, *Baba Is*, by Pete Townshend); *Stevie – A Motley Collection of her poems* by John Horder and Chris Saunders, Greville Press Pamphlets, 2002

**Plays:** *Cakes and Carrots*, King's Head Fringe Theatre, Islington 1976; *The African Who Loved Hugging Everybody*, Anna Scher's Children's Theatre, 1976

### **What are the Morning Pages?**

I have a friend, a Buddhist, called Sara Bowman, and her sister Anna, they both write these Morning Pages. The idea is you write them quite fast, and as early in the morning as possible – sometimes I write them ridiculously early, like three or five or six in the morning and you write about anything and you don't show

it to anyone...I carry this to rather extremes because I hardly ever re-read what I write, so I've got masses of stuff... It's the most powerful therapeutic tool I've found in my life. If you have a girlfriend or a boyfriend you never show them. It's frustrating for me because it's another un-mined field of gold...

**You've often used the phrase 'word-obsessed', what exactly do you mean by that?**

I had an incredibly important dream. I know when a real plum of a dream comes along. It was about two months ago. It was about a boxer, aged 25, called Jack Austen. It's very rare that names should stick in your mind...and he's actually related to Jane Austen in the dream. In the dream his teeth have been absolutely mashed to a pulp and the fighting part of him at the age of 25 is destroyed, which is why they had this obituary of him in *The Independent*. Now my Music Therapist – who I'd say is in his thirties, maybe forties – we haven't discussed this in words and for a word-obsessed person like me that has actually sent me bananas in the past two months or so...

**I know Music Therapy has had a profound effect on you...**

It's been a shock just to realize just how...I'm 69 next month on 20 November and obviously as one gets older I'm having to confront my mortality which has been a lifetime's obsession – I didn't need Peter Porter to remind me that the literary man's biggest guns are to do with death – nothing has prepared me for the – in the Sixties I was very lucky, I went to see a Jungian psychotherapist, a White Russian, a very self-effacing man who was a brilliant midwife, Dr Sacha Alexander Dunnington, who died about four years ago, and he put me on first to the oral tradition of storytelling, and if it hadn't been for him I wouldn't have written either *The Child Walks Around Its Own Grave* or *A Sense of Being*. He was an absolutely ideal midwife to get those books out of me. My Music Therapist, Donald Wetherick is very much in that tradition, he's a very intelligent and intuitive man, but he is not obsessed with words in the way I am, so from time to time there is a complete breakdown in our understanding. He's much younger than me and we're as different as chalk and cheese. I know that the key part of my whole life, I know now, was because Molly didn't allow me to socialize or mix or have any social contact with any other little girls and boys between the ages of two/three and seven. It's a wonder that I've survived.

Because she (Molly) was a woman of her time, she could fight for herself, she could assert herself

– why do I have such a deep friendship with Brenda Williams? Because Brenda is the opposite to Molly in some ways, she's a great protestor, a fantastic protest poet, my mother in many ways would only row with the shopkeepers in Brighton and Hove – or Hove and Brighton really – when she was smoking herself to death with Craven A cigarettes. We moved to a really horrible suburb called Goldston in Surrey in 1944, when I think my sister Caroline was born – she's eight years younger than me. The Music Therapy has been the most shocking experience for me. I've been involved with more therapists than most people have had hot dinners and I've tried to follow these teachings of Meher Baba for thirty-seven years and I'm still in a group with a Sufi Meher Baba teacher, Don Stevens, who's 87 now, who knew Meher Baba and who is the leading Meher Baba authority in the world and has written many books on him. And I'm with the same group of hugging women and men for nearly thirty-seven years, and like a marriage it has its ups and downs and I'm afraid I'm a bad boy for most of the time. I get very resentful and very pissed off and very angry with Meher Baba for some time – and you can put that in...and depressed with him.

**A possible title for this interview?**

Yes. Angry, depressed and [buzzed] off with Meher Baba.

**Of all the poems you've ever read, which one would you say has stuck in your mind as particularly poignant for you?**

The poem by Anonymous which is *Christ's Lovesong*, which is the perfect fusion for my passions for poetry and music – it has this line 'I have thee one in fight', it's about the lover and beloved buried in all our hearts. Because Meher Baba says – it's something the Churches can't get their heads around – that if God exists anywhere it's in our own hearts.

**I like that sentiment – one of my favourite poems of Stevie Smith is *The Christian Doctrine of Eternal Hell* and I identify with her wish to believe in a Christian God but finding it difficult because she sees Him as too judgemental and condemnatory – so I can understand that quote from Meher Baba.**

As I call them, the Meher Babarians – I call them that to their faces. There is a very dark side to 'God', which Jung knew all about, and Sacha Dunnington, my first psychotherapist who I think I was very lucky to have – I think I was with him until about 1972, so I was with him for a long haul – I've been two years with Music Therapy and I'm in deeper shit than I've

ever been in in my whole life. It goes up and down all the time. I'd love you to see the session of me singing 'Before the World Began'.

The biggest struggle in my life was not only being with so many theoretical, emotionally illiterate men at an all-male public school and then going to an even worse institution where there were no women unfortunately, I went to Selwyn College, Cambridge where the likes of John Selwyn-Gummer and Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford were, it was very easy for me to be conned by these people who became famous because they were really all theory and not so much experience; Cambridge at that time from '57-'60 was and I think it still is, the terrible thing about Oxbridge, is it breeds theoreticians, because aren't we trying to build a bridge, all of us, certainly most of us who have anything to do with Survivors' Poetry, we're trying to build a bridge between the theory of how we would like our lives to be and the experience of how it actually turned out.

**Which poem would you choose for your epitaph - and that can include one of your own?**

Yes, it's a poem called 'The Time Before Death' and it's about one of Meher Baba's favourites – his favourites were Hafiz, Kabir and Rumi – and Kabir just says, don't fantasise, don't be under any illusions, death doesn't solve anything, enjoy the moment while you're here, forget about the past, forget about the future, and enjoy the present moment as much as you can. I burst into tears when I read this at a Meher Baba seminar about two or three years ago...but my own poem which I think comes nearest to what I would want as an epitaph and it goes hand in glove with 'The Time Before Death' – so in other words, 'The Time Before Death' is saying to people of all religions, don't bank on anything – and I think this is why people who commit suicide have a fantasy, the suicidal part of all of us, that death will solve something, that it will be better, but according to Kabir, Rumi and Hafiz, pretty unlikely, you know, it's merely I think we go – if one believes in reincarnation, which I do – one dies and then you come back with the same three big problems which most people have to try and sort out in any given lifetime. The other poem which is an epitaph for me, 'After the Party the Poor Poet Laments and Unshed Tears', and I think 'Why do they Never Cry, Why do they Never Weep?' (in *Meher Baba and the Nothingness*). I'm giving you rather too many poems for an epitaph.

**It's a long epitaph... What would you like the future to hold?**

I'd be more thrilled than you would ever know if you

were able to see that video of me singing 'Before the World Began', and if that was able to be on BBC 2 or Channel 4, or somewhere...It's not just poetry I'm passionate about, but storytelling and music too...

**Any comment on the possible disinvestment in Survivors' Poetry?**

I don't want Survivors' Poetry to shut down. My hopes for SP are that there will be more people who will work on self-esteem. My self-esteem gets very easily wounded or crushed. I would like to do more performances with musicians and with young actors. I think we are only at a beginning. Even in a year or two we'll look back, in 2006/7 – I've had to tell Tony Rudolph (of Menard Press) that if he wants to publish my *Collected Poems* in 2009 that may be pushing his luck. But he's so dotty about Paula Rego, and who can blame him, she's the greatest painter. The one good thing Alison Coombes did was get her to illustrate one of Stevie's poems in the leaflets for the SP celebration.

**If you had a chance to write your own obituary, is there anything in particular you'd like to say in it?**

'He tried hard to be compassionate and self-forgiving, but found it mostly uphill all the way'.

**Could you explain a bit about your experiences of OCD?**

Meher Baba has a word for habit patterns which he calls sanskaras, which is the same as cravings or lusts. My OCD cravings are just so almost unbearably volatile. One week I have an OCD structure to my life, then along comes the Music Therapy at quarter past four on a Tuesday, and I sometimes take 24 or 36 hours to recover because my structure for the next day or so has been completely catapaulted.

**How do you try and cope with that?**

Usually by collapsing into bed. I have habit patterns of either being over-gregarious or over-active one moment, or by collapsing... I was kept in bed by my over-protective mother Molly virtually for the first five or six years of my life.

If life got difficult at all, even after 5/6/7 or 8, Molly just packed me away into bed all the time.

**Well John, thanks for getting out of bed to do this interview.**

”





## Dawn

Light breaks the blackness  
Of another dark night.  
It beckons us to another day.  
The sunshine slowly creeps  
Across ploughed fields  
Like some sort of imaginary film.  
God, the director, and each scene  
Is lit perfectly.  
Blue skies gradually lighten  
To the cold realities of the day.  
In our own dark security,  
Topped up by drink and cigarettes,  
And T.V.,  
It infiltrates the room.  
Overpowering the light bulb,  
Making a mockery of our own  
Dark little world.  
Slowly it creeps into our room,  
Another day dawns and the  
birds  
Are calling for food.  
They're up and about.  
Cawing, singing and  
chattering,  
Another day dawns.

*Derek Harris*

## The Garden Nursery Café

*"Lasciate ogne speranza, voi  
ch'intrate" - Dante*

I see myself a virtuous pagan  
stirring tea in the hem of my life  
by way of slowing the clocks.

A bright vestibule, the aura of beige  
percolates through trellis divides.

Unsleeved in aran,  
surrounded by Angel Wings  
I recount my change – something to do,  
indulge the nervous tension in my legs.

A young waitress goes round me,  
greasy head, gripped;  
my smiles are grappling hooks.

When the gates open the air shifts.  
I am not ready for that.

So I wait in this wickerworld  
irritated by half-emptied confiture jars  
and unwiped trays,

desirous without hope,  
insignificant and indecisive,  
neither good nor evil,  
tagged for dead-heading.

*Nigel Humphreys*

## Paranoid Connections

Think of anything to do with rejection and the electric  
meaning trail is started again.

We are zooming towards panic.

Fate finds slight and subtle ways to remind me of the  
obsession.

At the tiniest little clue to a paper trail of culpability I  
shudder with fear.

I have become expert in connecting meanings which  
have dark implications.

The dark implication – that I  
am guilty of something foul  
The implication... connected  
words and ideas that my brain  
digs out and highlights in red  
For your special attention, we  
are here to persecute.  
even me writing this exposes  
me to risk of incriminations  
is this what it means to be  
paranoid?

Aware of dark secrets and the  
fear of their exposure  
policeman's gun ... BANG  
or is it the presence of evil?  
An abstract disembodied  
force alive in my mind – the  
devil !

White hot burning terror fizzes in a suffering brain,  
pins and needles and an indrawn breath.  
you have been busted (by the rejection police!)  
Help me avoid this torture of blame,  
disclosure of secrets, meltdown.

*Luke Dunn*

## Self Harm Haiku

She cuts herself so  
Her spirit will be released  
Pink petals let go.

*Grace McKie*

## Loneliness

The empty room, the television chattering,  
Four walls lit by a dim light.  
Looking around at objects from the past,  
All silent and still,  
They cannot speak to me,  
Or tell me their stories.  
I have stories to tell,  
But no-one to tell them to.

*Derek Harris*

# Reviews Reviews Reviews...

Commissioned by Roy Holland



Barry Tebb – *The Fiddler and his Bow* – *The Autobiography of a Poet*, Sixties Press (2005)  
Reviewed by Mark Floyer

Barry Tebb's latest autobiographical publication is subtitled *The Autobiography of a Poet*, which gives the reader a firm steer as to the distinctive quarry he is pursuing in this particular volume of memoirs. This is not just a colourful and exact reminiscence of growing up during the austere and closely communal working-class living conditions of post-war Leeds but a search for the defining twists and turns (with analogy to Wordsworth's 'Prelude') in the growth of a poet's mind and psychological make-up. As he phrases it on page 46: "Does knowing derive from being or is it the other way round?" – a philosophical chestnut which Tebb explores through an obsessive re-working of his past with all the attendant problems of sifting real memory from screen memory, fact from myth, subjectivity from objectivity.

The success of the book is rooted in the early chapters where Tebb disciplines the 'adult' voice to the margin and focuses on connecting up to the fresh and uncluttered sensibility of the young child. This is frame-worked within a very palpable, factually correct and (presumably researched) re-call of the geography and impedimenta of the Leeds of his childhood. Details such as these are highlighted when describing the annual holiday train journey to Yarmouth: "Over the seats were pre-war photographs of Yorkshire coastal resorts in sepia tones, rather like the illustrations of H.V. Morton's timeless travelogues" make for a realism that helps to verify the writer's search

to 'place' those mundane but often numinous moments that trigger an artist's imaginative growth and become the subject of his lifelong quest for a unique self identity.

Tebb's early childhood would appear to have been as 'paradise' as could be expected, living in a working-class neighbourhood that was materially spartan but blessed with proximity to family and community (a far cry from today's sealed off and fractured 'virtual' reality lifestyle, marooned on the Information Highway, simultaneously glutted with data and starved of connection) and lit up by his first muse Margaret.

The fractures to this 'Eden' occurred both internally and externally. Recall of being terrified at watching a film called *No Room at the Inn* about a "gin-drinking" woman who incarcerates young orphans in a "rat-infested cellar" indicated the possession of a highly sensitive mind that would need more sustenance than could be provided by a life of ordinary routine. Meanwhile setbacks to the family such as redundancy and illness, the destabilising effects of moving location laced with the corrosively depressive awareness of a shift up (in status? down in well-being?) from upper working-class to lower-middle class, revealed a world out there which was competitive and utilitarian, waiting to pounce on and extinguish any predilections for individuality that a youngster might possess.

Education, Education, Education! This is the other main theme running through this volume. Like his hero, Stephen Daedalus from Joyce's "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man", Tebb needed to widen his experiential parameters in order to begin the long process of

becoming a writer. Post-war British education ushered in a decade of grammar school/ secondary modern dichotomy, designed to prescribe an apartheid of professional and vocational educations on the basis of a single 11 Plus exam. These grammar schools were often run on unimaginative, militaristic 'Gradgrind' principles by second-rate teachers of middle-class extraction who had probably pickled themselves in envy at failing to secure a post at Eton on de-mob from the Services.

Apart from exposure to a gifted and necessarily subversive History teacher, J.M. McNeil, who gave Tebb much needed time and support, life at school seems to have been an extended tramp through a cultural desert. Nevertheless, Education became an obvious way forward and Tebb's time spent training to be a primary school teacher at City of Leeds Training College coincided with the arrival of more liberal pedagogical practices in the 60's as well as his first sustained spell of poetry making, culminating in his inclusion in Michael Horowitz's ground-breaking *Children of Albion* anthology. Ironically, this era in British education (perhaps only experienced by those, as the adage goes, "who weren't there" though Tebb seems to have been very much there) was only a temporary idyll and since the seventies British education has clawed its way back to a polarisation between examination results obsessed private schools and inner-city 'sink' schools deprived of all vestiges of civic pride and discipline. Much of the latter parts of the book dwell on Tebb's ideas formed on Education forged partially through his own experiences with schools as a pupil, teacher and parent, and partially from his wide and eclectic reading of 'key'

contemporary psychoanalysts who have radically influenced his ideas on the links between education and psycho/ spiritual health. As he ruefully mentions, the first need for most schools today is to install a psychotherapy unit - too true!

The latter stages of the book are concerned more with recent events in his life. Whilst Tebb has been writing, editing and publishing his Sixties Press imprint at a furious rate, he has also been shuttling between Leeds and North London, caring for his brilliant but mentally ill son Isaiah and ex-wife poet Brenda Williams, fighting battles against NHS bureaucracy to get the right service and support on their behalf. There is a very moving section of the book which recounts the sudden decline into mania of Brenda's father Cyril and one is made very aware of the fragility of most of our lives, teetering precariously on the edge behind seemingly safe front doors.

Overall, this latest contribution to Tebb's autobiographical oeuvre is a brave and wide-ranging achievement. Apart from the pedantic check for typo errors and minor lapses in sentencing sequence that a commercial publishing house would run the script through, I don't see what holds it off from squaring up in the same company as other recent mini-masterpieces in the genre such as Lorna Sage's *Bad Blood*. Furthermore, one senses that Tebb hasn't finished with this material - more poems, prose and meditations are surely in the pipeline from a writer still engaged in the creative processes of establishing his authentic voice. And just in case we take him too seriously, the book ends on a note of 'nudge nudge, wink wink' double entendre in which another 'muse' accuses Tebb of having less than honourable intentions: "Well, it's not all but it's enough to be going on with, or off with..."

***Pulsar, Poems from Ligden Poetry Society, September 2005, Edition 3/05 (43), Editor: David Pike, ISSN***

**1361-2336 £3.00 UK \$7.00 US**

**Reviewed By Roy Birch**

**P***pulsar* is a quite beautifully produced quarterly magazine. Sadly, I found the poetry something of a muchness. In fact, without the authors' names, it would have been easy to believe the bulk of the work on display had emanated from the same pen. That is not, however, to say that I didn't like it. In fact, there was much that I did like. For instance, a wonderful passage in Elizabeth Birchall's 'Role Reversal': 'I fancy/ An aeon or two in black underwear, an orgy/ with a hundred swarthy Heathcliffs'. This from 'The Course' by Duncan Fraser: 'He sought out the soft discourse of the wind/ in the tree-tops. This gave him a feeling/ of peace, he said./ He saw that that word unsettled me'. The climax to 'Suicidal Attention Seeker' by Chris Kornacki: 'hanging up/ the phone/ to call/ another ambulance/ felt no different/ from ordering/ a pizza'.

My favourites in this particular collection are 'The Great Love' by Kate Edwards - 'They met at a gallery. Again, in a garden open to the public,/ eventually at a party given by an accountant....they made love on top of a goosedown duvet.... He bought her oils and perfumes and silken bras....They shopped at Sainsbury's....They argued about the washing up....He took up golf again....they lay apart beneath the goosedown duvet..One morning she packed her bags and left,/ leaving a note which said nothing about their great love'; and Ivan Wallace's Homage to the 'Older Woman'. "You look very young for your age," I said..... "Can I ask, how do you explain it?"..."embalming fluid," she said'.

Middle-of-the-road, uniform, safe. Obviously, *Pulsar* was not produced with me in mind. But possessed of sufficient charm to make it worthwhile. I enjoyed reading it but I wish it were a little more daring. Except for the review by Ingrid

Riley, which suggests that the work of Dino Campana is over-burdened with fevered imagery. To say such a thing about such a brilliant poet is daring indeed. Campana's work is indeed filled with fevered imagery, but it is certainly not overburdened.

***The Spoken Word Poets, British Library Board (2003), ISBN 0-7123-0516-5***

**Reviewed by Kevin Saving**

**W**hen people speak of a particular poet's 'voice', they appear to have in mind some characteristic combination of syntax, form, vocabulary, subject matter and revealed philosophy - a kind of idiosyncratic literary modus operandi. But, of course, there is another 'voice' which speaks more directly to the ear, which affords some acquaintance with its owner's physicality, cultural exposure, even psyche.

This recent release, a compilation of early recordings by many of the great figures of English Literature (all born during the nineteenth century and all reading from their own work) makes available to the interested layperson archival material which previously might have been obscurely inaccessible or entirely unsuspected.

The collection opens with an 1890 recording of Alfred, Lord Tennyson declaiming sonorously (if sometimes unintelligibly due to poor sound quality) his 'Charge of the Light Brigade', and showing as well that there are few 'ps' or 'bs' in the text. One commentator, Montague Eliot, later spoke of being put off poetry for life when, as a child and seated in the front row of a Tennysonian recital, he and the other children "were regaled with a shower of spittle".

This is followed by Robert Browning, caught in the year of his death from bronchitis (1889), by now well into his mid-seventies but sounding remarkably chipper. He seems the

more likeable too, for first fluffing his lines and then apologising with an “I’m sorry but I can’t remember me own verses!” Sir Henry Newbolt recites ‘Vital Lampada’ like the archetypal product of a plummy parsonage, inciting us to ‘play up, play up and play the game’. In later life he’d come to dislike this, his best known poem.

We can catch William Butler Yeats discussing and then reading his ‘Lake Isle of Innesfree’, accent not in the least Oirish, which is unsurprising when we know that between the ages of two and 16 he was brought up largely in Hammersmith. We can eavesdrop on a strangely anonymous Rudyard Kipling, perhaps in 1921 still guiltily grieving his son, John, whom he’d encouraged into enlisting, under-age and fatally, during the First World War. We catch Laurence (‘age shall not weary them nor the years condemn’) Binyon sounding half-asleep. Eventually, with Walter de la Mare, we hear the first fully competent recitation: rich, cultivated voice, well-modulated tones. Much how we feel a poet should sound.

We hear Robert Frost with miles to go before he sleeps, workmanlike and with a pleasant, New England twang; Alfred Noyes, putting his heart into ‘The Highwayman’; John Masefield in 1941, by now every inch the lettered poet laureate, no longer the waif who’d run away to sea. We hear Ezra Pound - a quite dotty performance, this, featuring a cod-Scottish brogue, booming balderdash and comic self-accompaniment on the timpani. We hear Siegfried Sassoon, very much the gentleman-player, at ease with his material, if not yet his memories. And we hear the old mandarin himself, Thomas Stearns Eliot, the merest inflection of the trans-Atlantic about his delivery – dry, but engagingly disinclined to treat ‘The Love-Song of J. Prufrock’ too portentously.

These are some of the highlights on an impressively compiled CD, which can be resourced via your local library. There is a certain magic to

be found here, if you’ve a taste for such things, akin to finding a virtual-reality Scheherazade in your living room, telling her tales. For all that, these are not, for the most part, polished performances – certainly not by actors with extensive training in intonation, pitch and the strategic use of pause.

What this collection does bring us is the immediacy of some of the world’s greatest writers speaking some of the world’s greatest lines, using whatever wit and nature lent them. Not necessarily the finest interpretations available, but assuredly, the definitive ones.

**Kevin Coyne – *That Old Suburban Angst*, Kevin Coyne Books (2005), £9.99 + £1.20 p&p, [tonydonaghey@kevincoynebooks.co](mailto:tonydonaghey@kevincoynebooks.co)/ [www.Kevincoyne.de](http://www.Kevincoyne.de) Reviewed by Frank Bangay**

**K**evin Coyne is probably best known in England for a series of fine records that he made on the Virgin label in the 1970s. However, right up until his sad death from lung fibrosis last December, he carried on making interesting records. He also pursued separate careers as a painter and as a writer. His later career started with the publication of *The Party Dress* in 1990. *That Old Suburban Angst* is Kevin’s first book to be published in English since *Showbusiness* in 1993. Subsequent books were translated into German. Kevin made Germany his home in 1985. Sadly, Kevin passed away before the book was published.

Like the title *That Old Suburban Angst* suggests, a number of the stories are set in a troubled but often surreal version of suburbia. The narrator in the title story drops his trousers in public. After a two week spell in an open prison near Biggleswade, he finds himself ostracised by all around. He is left trying to understand the reason for his behaviour. *Life Story* features seven different characters, four of whom are from

professional backgrounds. But be it Dickie Dorset the depressive body builder, or head psychiatrist Dr Ramsbottom, all seven characters are as mad as one another. All have an equal amount of hang-ups.

Another story, *Parrot*, is a look at human life through the eyes of a parrot in a cage. What the parrot sees is quite disturbing. *Days By The Sea* is a humorous look at sheltered accommodation and some of the people who live in it. Some of the other stories have a darker edge to them, relating to Kevin’s struggle with ill health. For example, in *Alive* the main character dies and is thrown into a disorientating afterlife that he struggles to get used to. Some of the characters in the book have disabilities that make them feel like outsiders. In some stories such as *Rabbit Teeth* and *Alan’s Search For True Love*, there’s a sense of tragedy. However, you get the feeling that these people can laugh at themselves.

*That Old Suburban Angst* also contains some of Kevin’s poems. ‘To A Sibling’ is dedicated to his brother Arthur. ‘On The Riverbank’ finds Kevin in a reflective mood: ‘In the dusk in pyjamas,/ Feeling spiritual./ Watching the waters for mallard,/ Yearning to wash the past away’.

I won’t spoil things by telling you more about this book. Discover it for yourself. You won’t be disappointed.

[Visit [www.lifeandliving.net](http://www.lifeandliving.net) for Frank Bangay’s interview with Kevin Coyne]

**Marianne Hieb – *Inner Journeying Through Art Journaling*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £14-99. ISBN 1-84310-794-5 Reviewed by Roy Holland**

**T**his book gives practical instruction in recording your feelings from day to day in a visual diary with words as a supplement and aide-memoir. This process is regarded

as a spiritual practice, almost a form of prayer, and is geared to people 'who are encountering loss, grief, resistance, or discernment issues' as a therapeutic tool. Marianne Hieb also deals with the difficulty of avoiding intellectual constraints to spontaneous creativity.

She does give a welcome intellectual framework in terms of design theory, and her definitions of marks, line, shape, texture, form and colour use a simple language and are beautifully clear. The chapter on 'The Principles of Design and the Creative Process' contains sections on balance, movement, rhythm, contrast, emphasis, pattern and unity as an introduction to forgetting and remembering, compassion, befriending the creative process and faceted prayer, which she calls 'a blank openness into which you invite the voice of the Holy'.

Hieb suggests using the drawing or modelling, gazing and writing of art-journaling for ongoing devotion and organic growth. The only drawback of the book is the limited number of practical examples with interpretation. As I understand it, the art-journaling could be practised with a therapist or on one's own for personal satisfaction. It is good to find a therapy which is not too prescriptive and which uses both artwork and writing. The book, unlike many of this publisher's art therapy studies, is a genuine teach-yourself guide.

***Aurelia's Oratorio* created by Victoria Thierree Chaplin with Aurelia Thierree, at the Gardner Arts Centre, University of Sussex, Brighton, as part of the Brighton Festival in May 2005**  
Reviewed by Roy Holland

**A**urelia's Oratorio is devised and directed by Charlie Chaplin's daughter, Victoria, and enacted by his granddaughter Aurelia. This visually stunning and musically seductive piece of

theatre creatively builds on their famous heritage of mime, humour and emotion immortalised in silent movies in the 20s, bringing a contemporary twist to the tradition of burlesque. In the programme notes David Gothard places the performance in a direct line from Fellini's *Clowns* and *Franca Rame and Dario Fo*.

The mixture of surrealism and calmness gives just the right therapeutic mix for an enjoyable spectacle. In the very first scene Aurelia's legs and arms emerge from within a chest of drawers. The audience is at once perplexed and amused by her dexterity, for example lighting a cigarette with her feet coming out of the bottom drawer! Later in the performance her face peeks out from the red curtain at various heights as she balances on the trapeze behind. She creates moods with an absolute minimum of props.

Victoria Thierree Chaplin's routine grew out of *Le Cirque Imaginaire* and took off in Paris at the end of the seventies. Her children were brought up in the circus environment and her husband, Jean-Baptists Thierree, was the model for their clowning. In this production Aurelia is supported by the dancer Timothy Harling.

When I go to dance or circus performances, I often feel it is best to get in touch with my own body first by doing yoga or exercises shortly beforehand. Then I can experience the show as an extension of my own space and enter into the stretching of my feelings. The performance has a healing function. But for *Aurelia's Oratorio* I had no such preparation, and I felt the wit, the empathy and the bravado took me right out of myself. Do look out for Aurelia Thierree's future productions and if you get the chance to see *Aurelia's Oratorio* then I would highly recommend it. The Brighton Festival is to be congratulated on its choice.

*Next issue a major review of the Poetry Olympics POT! anthology, edited by Michael Horovitz...*



*Introducing...*

**Blanche Donnery**  
*our new Administrator*

*May I take this opportunity to introduce myself to Poetry Express readers and contributors and the Survivors community as a whole. Survivors' Poetry needed an Administrator and lucky me got the post.*

*I've joined the organisation at a dramatic juncture with disinvestment looming and a fight in hand. All the staff at SP have made me very welcome and regularly express appreciation for my contribution, which is lovely and I thank them all greatly.*

*As this is a campaign issue it takes the heat off me from writing witty and lyrical riposte which is a relief as Administrators are not known for their devastating stand up. Therefore, I sincerely hope that for all the survivors out there who feel strongly about ACE's decision to disinvest, that they write not only to Sarah Weir at ACE, but also to their local MP and make as many people as possible aware of the vital work Survivors does and its need in the community.*

*It is a rare privilege to work for such a unique organisation that touches marginalised individuals in a such a personal and inspiring way. May it long continue.*

*Blanche*

# Workshops

## Razz



**A**nd so we come to the end of yet another hostile year. War in Iraq, bombs in London, the threat of disinvestment hanging over Survivors' Poetry's head. Famine, flood and Geri Halliwell, as I said once in a poem. But the workshops have chugged along in a creative and stimulating fashion. We've moved around quite a bit this year. There was the physical move of the whole office from the Diorama to the new offices in Archway. We've held quite a few workshops there since the move, mostly feedback and performance ones.

A quick refresher for anyone unfamiliar with the terminology. Feedback workshops are a space for people to bring their unfinished pieces, so that more than one pair of eyes can take a look and "feedback" to the participant, in a friendly and constructive way, ideas to strengthen and tighten the poem and make it more effective. Of course, all feedback is optional. Performance workshops give people the opportunity to hone the delivery of their poems, to learn breathing techniques and recently we have combined this with turning up for the monthly open mike sessions, run by Xochitl at the Poetry Café in Betterton St. (second Thursday of each month).

On top of this we've managed writing workshops at Swiss Cottage library; poetry picnics on Hampstead Heath; a visit to the Science Museum, the Natural History Museum and Tate Britain; we took wing in the Wetland Centre in Barnes; and visited Keats' House and wrote about the experience. For myself, I think a lot of trust and camaraderie has built up in the nucleus of the group. As the bond has grown stronger, the numbers of participants has built up.

For our final workshop of the year we are planning a visit to the Museum of London. In the New Year, we have plans for more surprise visits alongside regular sessions at the Bickerton Rd office and Swiss Cottage library. If you are interested in joining us, you will be very welcome. Meanwhile, have a great Christmas, Survive into the New Year and pass us a visit!

### Upcoming Workshops January - March 2006

#### Bickerton Rd

Tuesday 10 January, 7.30pm  
Feedback

#### Museum art gallery (venue tba)

Saturday 21 January, 2pm  
Writing

#### Bickerton Rd

Tuesday 7 February, 2006, 7.30pm  
Performance

#### Swiss Cottage

Saturday 11 February, 2pm  
Writing

#### Swiss Cottage

Saturday 25 February, 2006 2pm  
Writing

#### Bickerton Rd

Tuesday 7 March, 7.30pm  
Feedback

#### Swiss Cottage

Saturday 11 March, 2pm  
Writing

#### Museum art gallery (venue tba)

Saturday 25 March, 2pm  
Writing

## Gail Campbell

### SP Tate Britain workshop

**O**ne fine Saturday afternoon a few weeks back, the Survivors' Poetry workshop was held at the Tate Britain. It was to be the first workshop where I was facilitating, so I was very nervous.

After we had done Razz's exercise and read back our poems in the garden, I gave out 12 hand-outs for the second part. The writing exercise was about finding our muse, using three Pre-Raphaelite paintings as inspiration: *Ophelia*, *The Lady of Shalott* and *Lament for Icarus*. It was good to focus on one of three, as the paintings were full of colour and detail, crammed into the gallery as they were. There was a slight danger of sensory overload. I asked them to consider in their own experience someone who had died young, or been taken from them too soon, and perhaps someone who still remained at the back of their mind as a kind of inspiration.

I was concerned that perhaps I hadn't been clear enough, but wandering through the gallery, I found the writers all busy. After about 25 minutes we went outside to read back, sitting under a strange sculpture of a gong with a face. It was a wonderful turn-out, but because not everyone there attends regularly, we had a bit of trouble tracking them down for their poems. So, here are four poems from the workshop, only a sample of the good work we did that day. I recall Kate and Sue both saying they'd been unwilling to write about something so personal, but in the end were glad they had done it.

### Untitled

The candlelight hovers  
On your skin  
Paper thin  
Covering the bones

Seated on the bus  
Suddenly immersed  
In a ceaseless cauldron  
Of tears

To a shapeless present  
Amorphous time-zones

I feel  
Diminished by  
Your loss  
Tho' your  
Passing was a release

*Vera Kryshek*

**Stephen**

No golden boat or dawn  
To ferry you across the river Styx.  
No myth to make your death significant  
Just chemo, hair loss and the faith of Jehovah witnesses  
I loved the way you spat your truth  
Into their faces  
As your world collapsed  
Caved in around you.  
I loved the way you tore up the oncologist's office  
When he told you you had relapsed;  
That the chemotherapy wouldn't help you anymore.

You were eight and a half

When you died the undertaker  
Pumped you full of embalming fluid  
Left you in a room that had no refrigeration  
BIG MISTAKE!  
YOUR BODY REACTED TO THE CHEMICALS!

But you were no Icarus having struggled for the sun  
You'd faced no Medusa who could turn you into stone  
Unless it was your mum!

On the phone I was told  
It was best I didn't see you  
You weren't a pretty sight

You had to be buried in a man-sized coffin  
I never really got to say goodbye

Your grave had a stone, a genie and a colourful  
Spinning wheel on it  
Vandals came and smashed the graves to pieces

But they weren't Giants dreaming of Valhalla  
But Portsmouth jobs dreaming  
Of cans of stella  
Paulsgrove toughs.

*Razz*

**The Lady of Shallot**

Her river of flowing life stopped barren.  
It rushed on the desert of death, turned red  
And seeped through sand.

Her river of flowing life crashed.  
The vessel that carried her, abruptly ruptured by  
Rocks.  
Her heart bled, her head fell back.  
She cried through crimson lips.  
Her grail cup cracked and the elixir seeped!

Her river of flowing life mashed  
She was so young in the spring of life,  
But something ate beneath the beauty mask.  
Her life became a nasty task!  
Wine soaked pills washed down her throat –

Her boat lost course and it crashed

Her hair swept back she reached aghast and was  
Swept up by swallow's wings to heaven's light!

And I wonder what made her crave the night?

*Nigel J A McHugh*

**After The Lady of Shallot**

She's dressed like a hippy  
Floating in a boat  
On a lake  
In the early morning haze.  
Her boyfriend is out cold at the camp  
Their nighttime party ran on for days.

She's all alone in the cold morning light  
Hung-over and stoned  
Wanting to move away

The big estate has this large lake  
And she tries to paddle  
With an old stick she found.

She's leaving the Sixties behind  
Sailing into day and reality  
A baby leaps in her womb  
And she heads into the seventies  
Into the new dawn.

*Gail Campbell*

# Events

## Xochitl Tuck



### Survivors' Poetry & Music Open Mics!

#### The Salisbury Pub

1 Grand Parade, Green Lanes, London N4  
(Between Manor House/Turnpike Lane)  
4th Thursday of every month, 9pm  
Admission Free  
Floorspots: 10 minutes each  
Buses: 29, 141, 341  
Tube: Manor House/Turnpike Lane

### No Margins –

#### Survivors' Poetry at the *Café Rustique*

142 Fortess Road, NW5  
Last Saturday of every month (bar Dec), 8pm  
Admission: £1.50  
Floorspots welcome  
Tube: Tufnell Park  
Buses: 4 & 134

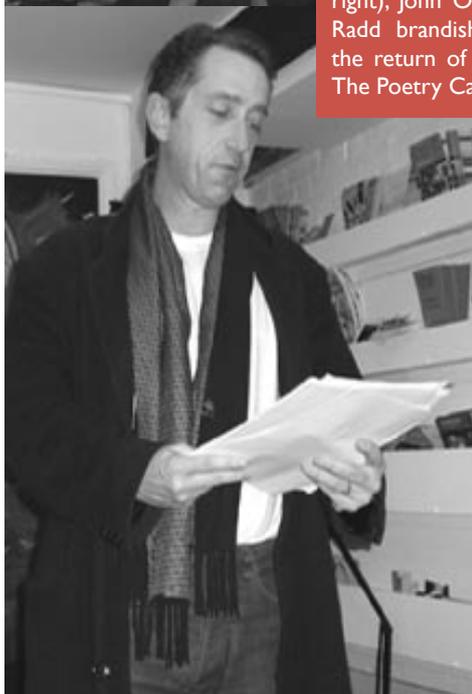
### Saturday 31 January 2006

### Survivors' Poetry Open Mic at The Poetry Café

The Poetry Café  
22 Betterton Street, London WC2  
(between Drury Lane and Endell Street)  
Second Thursday of every month, 8pm – 11pm  
Admission: £2.00  
Floorspots: £1.00  
Tube: Covent Garden



**Latte Laureates:** Cristina Viti, David Kessel and friend taking pre-reading refreshments (top), David Kessel (above left), Cristina Viti (above right), John O'Donoghue (left), Norrin Radd brandishing guitar (below), and the return of Mr Kessel (below right), The Poetry Cafe, Oct/Nov 2005



# P.S. S.P. Letters, Emails, Vox Pops, Soap Box...

“...thankyou to you and everyone at Survivors’ Poetry. I received the latest issue with my story plus poem included and was absolutely thrilled and I must also say what a great job you have done on putting the magazine together keep up the great work...

*Vicki Hartman, Bognor Regis*

Your attractively-produced Poetry Express (Autumn 2005) has indefatigable “cutting edge” to it.

*John Horder*

Brilliant edition received today, Alan!! So much good stuff in it and so professionally produced. I’m proud to be included. Many, many thanks. Nice to be able to appear in such a prestigious publication.

*Nigel Humphreys, Aberystwyth*

I saw yesterday at my final session at the Big Issue (the funding has been cut for the writing group - very sad after it has been going 8 years) a copy of Poetry Express with my article in it. Martin and Barry certainly enjoyed seeing their pieces in print...

*Dominique De-Light, Brighton*

*Our sympathies Dominique – it seems this Arts holocaust is blitzing the whole nation presently. Is no one safe from disinvestment?*

Very sorry to hear about the Arts Council’s looming disinvestment. Dr Jenner’s editorial was – rightly – long on indignation, but short on what needs to be done in the way of practical opposition. ...Liked ‘The Water Shallows’ (the issue’s second best poem, I thought, after my own ‘Dis-Illusionment’!!!). By the way, many thanks as Broadsheet curtain-raiser.

*Kevin Saving, Buckinghamshire*

*Thanks for your support Kevin. The intro Simon had to undertake*

*last issue was a daunting task, and I think he rose to the occasion brilliantly, in his inimitable style. Nevertheless, I’m sure you’ll find his introduction to this issue lays more emphasis on what Survivors’ members can do by way of practical opposition to the disinvestment: sign up to our Write to Survive Campaign via our website at [www.survivorspoetry.com](http://www.survivorspoetry.com) which will be directly forwarded to ACE.*

Many thanks for Poetry Express received this month – wonderful! I’m enjoying reading it very much.

*Anne-Margaret Moy, Hove*

...the review was wonderful – really thoughtful and generous – thank you! I thought Simon’s editorial too was brilliant – I hope the right people read it.

*Victoria Field, Cornwall*

I really appreciated the review of my pamphlet *Going Back* (Firewater Press) in PE 21, however, the typesetting computer spelt my name Grossman, it is actually Crossman.

*Clare Crossman, Herts*

*The computer sincerely apologises for the error Clare.*

What an excellent edition, a tour de force of human experience, sometimes disturbing! At last I got my name printed between your pages in Issue 22 of PE, even if it was only on your feedback comments page. One day I will progress to the Poetry Broadsheet. We survivors need ambition to keep going. How come Sally Richards gets her poem ‘On The Edge’ published twice? Just one once would be nice (only joking).

*Grace McKie, Stafford*

*Well Grace, you’ll be pleased to see that you have finally made the Poetry Broadsheet – your powerful*

*Self Harm Haiku is on page 38. Congratulations. I’ve only just noticed Sally’s poem On The Edge was entered twice in the last issue. Oops! I’m sure she’ll accept my apologies for repeating her poem! A genuine error – despite the poem’s quality. Oh, she must have burning ears, here comes Sally now...*

What can I say? I’ve been on cloud nine since receiving my copies of PE 22 and finding two of my poems – ‘Invisible’ and ‘On the Edge’ inside. I blinked, then gasped, then cried! – with happiness I must add. Thank you so much. It really was fantastic to be in print in a journal with which I feel so much empathy. I am **thrilled** to be sitting alongside such fantastic poets and poetry! All the poems are wonderful, and some have particularly moved me (far too many to mention) to name but a few: ‘A Mirror in Pieces’ by Zachariah Rush; ‘Autumn Haiku’ by Hannah Inglis; ‘Untitled’ (‘I am a portrait...’) by Roy Birch; ‘New Arrival’ by Paula Brown; ‘Untitled’ (‘my mother told me’) by Roy Holland; ‘After the Silent Running’ by Maureen Oliver; ‘The Water Shallows’ and ‘The Blackboard’ by Alan Morrison. I seem to have exceeded ‘a few’; sorry! There are just so many I love...

...On a completely different note – I am horrified! How can ACE even contemplate disinvesting Survivors’ Poetry? I see it as a life-line, a voice, a friend. Too often people with mental health issues are marginalized, isolated and forgotten...**Keep taking the pills... Get some therapy....Keep away until you are ‘better’...** This thread of discrimination, ignorance and basic lack of respect runs through most of society. Yet so many people who have these difficulties are the most brilliant, creative, talented, decent, hard working (when able) people you could find. Oops a touch of ‘soap box’ there. Now

once again we are to possibly lose something so valuable for so many.

As I write I am planning to find out about the Petition and will be adding my name to the list with gusto!!! Thank you again for all your work at *Poetry Express*. I'm keeping everything crossed.

*Sally Richards, Shropshire*

*Well Sally, so are we, and thank you for such an enthusiastic letter. See my reply to Kevin Saving for what you can do support us.*

...am just so thrilled you included two of my poems 'Ipsos Facto' and 'Postcard' in *PE 22*, thank you it means so much – also very thrilled to see two of Sally Richards' poems in same issue and very moved by so many of the poems – especially Sally Richards' 'On the Edge', Hannah Inglis' 'How poems start', Martin Edwards' 'Dragon, Flower', Hermann Hesse's 'Psychology', Roy Birch's 'Untitled', Alan Morrison's 'The Blackboard', Sarah C. Smith's 'Half-Way Down the Glass', and Alan Collins' two vignettes – ACE are SO WRONG!!! – will sign petition.

*Steve Mann, via email*

Many thanks for *PE 22* and for the generous cover you gave to Hippopotamus Press books; it is much appreciated, I would ask you to convey my thanks to the reviewers concerned. I am sorry to learn of your funding crisis. I have never understood how these things work, as for most of Hippopotamus' history, it failed to secure any grants. How it survived from sales alone is still a bit of a mystery. I wish you well in your confrontation with ACE. There's nothing much I can do from down here in Somerset.

*Roland John, Hippopotamus Press*

*Thanks sincerely for your support Roland. But you can add your voice to our Write to Survive petition by logging on to our website down there in Somerset.*



# Some Contributors

**Frank Bangay** is one of the founder members of SP. He is a poet and songwriter who has regularly broadcast on Resonance *fm*.

**Leon Brown** was born in 1973. He works as a TEFL Teacher in Portugal. He used to be part of the Highgate Poets group. He is currently working on a novel.

**Gail Campbell** is one of the SP National Mentoring Scheme 'mentees' and her pamphlet will be appearing early next year.

**Peter H Donnelly** is 38 and from Kent. He is a survivor of domestic and psychiatric abuse.

**Luke Dunn** studied Physics briefly at university but enjoys using the English Language. When he is ill he thinks all sorts of strange things. He lives in Ramsgate and goes shrimping sometimes.

**Derek Harris** is a survivor of severe depression. He lives in Weston-Super-Mare.

**John Horder** has been publishing poetry and journalism since the early Sixties. A lifelong friend of Stevie Smith, he edited Greville Press's pamphlet *Stevie* for the 2002 SP Stevie Smith event. His *Collected Poems* will be coming out from The Menard Press in 2007.

**Spencer Jeffery** is from New Zealand. He spent three years living in Brighton. Previously appeared in an Anchor Books anthology in 1998. His illustrated children's book, *Little Ben's Big Time*, is published by Trafford, available from [orders@trafford.com](mailto:orders@trafford.com)

**David Kessel** is a member of Outsider Poets, who perform every last Wednesday of the month at the George Tavern. His poetry volume, *Hungering*, is forthcoming from Survivors' Press. [Note: David does

*not reside in Hackney as I said last issue, but sunny Whitechapel - Ed.]*

**Vera Kryshek** lives in Queens Park in London and regularly attends SP workshops.

**Lucía Moral Baena** was born in 1978 in Granada, Andalucia, Spain. A trained translator, she lives in Brighton and is currently working on a collection of Spanish poet Juan Ramón Jiménez for Survivors' Press. For freelance commissions please contact [morallucia@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:morallucia@yahoo.co.uk).

**Paul Murphy** was born in Belfast, 1965. A stint as writer-in-residence at the Albert-Ludwig Universitat, Germany. Poetry, criticism and travel writings published internationally. Publications include, criticism: *TS Eliot's Post-Modernist Complaint* (Postpressed, Australia); and poetry: *The New Life* (Lapwing Press), *In the Luxembourg Gardens* (University of Salzburg Press, Austria).

**John O'Donoghue** has contributed poems, essays, articles and reviews to *The Observer*, *The TES*, *PN Review*, *Acumen* and *Ambit*. *Letter to Lord Rochester* was published by Waterloo Press in November 2004.

**Dave Russell** is a songwriter and poet who has broadcast his music frequently on Resonance *fm* and is a veteran SP performer at The Poetry Cafe. He is mentor to Kate Evans.

**Kevin Saving** is a regular contributor to *PE*. He lives and writes in Winslow, Buckinghamshire.

**Jo Silver** is a regular performer at SP's Poetry Cafe events. She is currently co-ordinating poetry, music and play workshops at *Clusters* drop-in in Wallington.

**John Weedon** is a long-standing SP painter and poet, currently working on a series of SP postcards.

# Survivors' Classifieds

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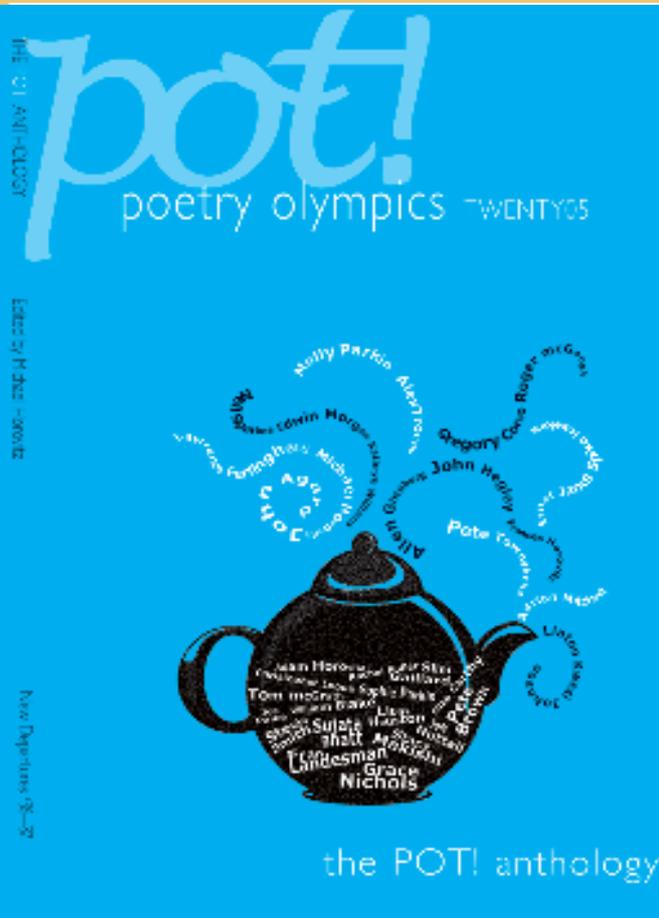
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*Don't let 2006 be doomsyear for*  
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**Write to Survive**

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*Alan Bennett*

*Paula Brown*

*Ralph Brown*

*Peter Campbell*

*Debjani Chatterjee*

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*Michael Horovitz*

*John Horder*

*Roland John*

*David Kessel*

*Edna O'Brien*

*Andrew Motion*

*Paul Murphy*

*Jeremy Reed*

*John Rety*

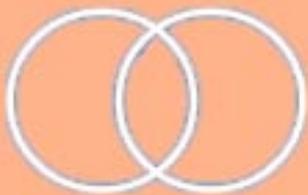
*Anne Rouse*

*Penelope Shuttle*

*Iain Sinclair*

*Barry Tebb*

*Cristina Viti*



*send your message straight to ACE via...*

**survivorspoetry.com**

*And don't forget!!!*

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