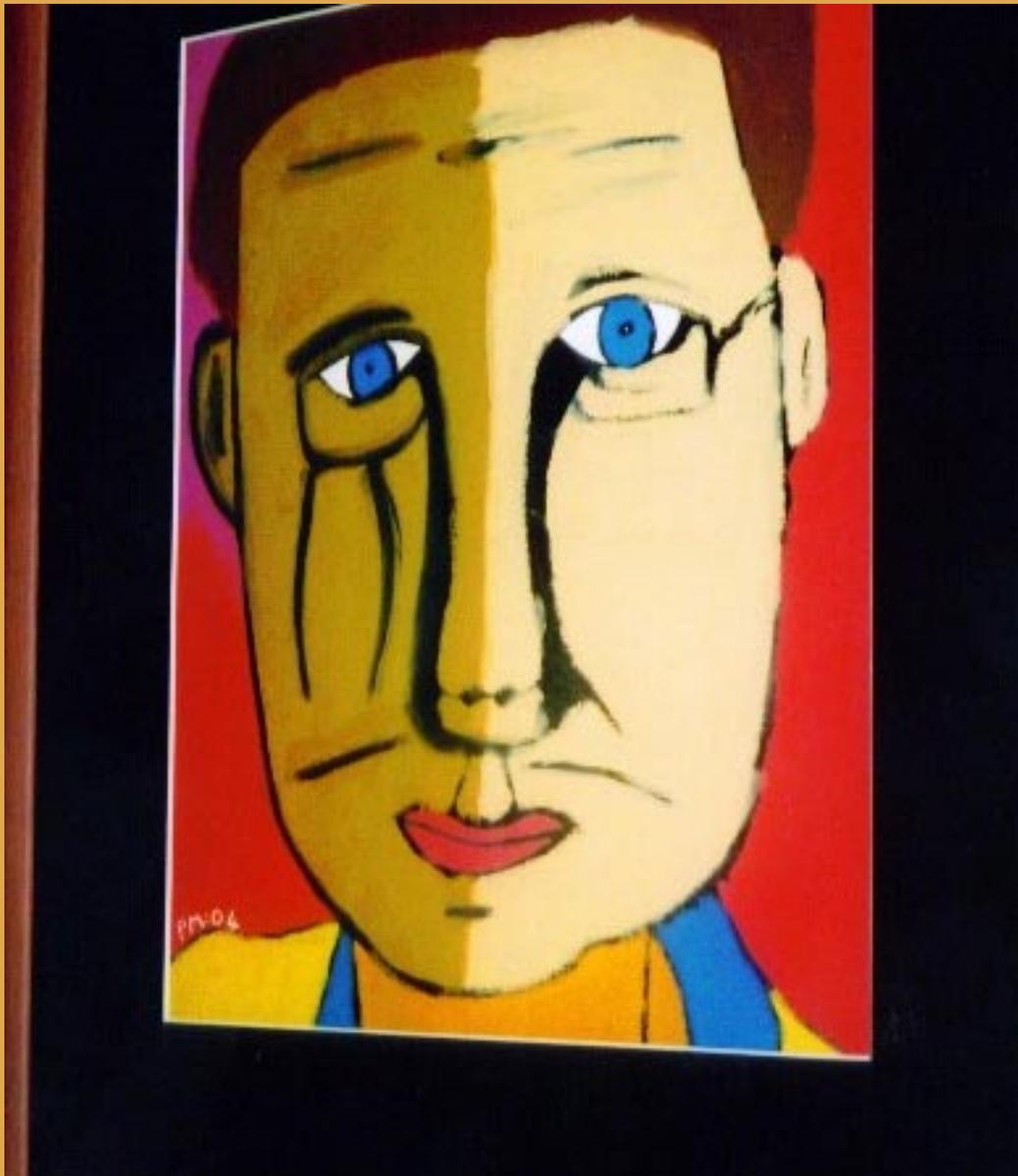


# Poetry Express 21

the Survivors' Poetry Quarterly

Spring/Summer 05

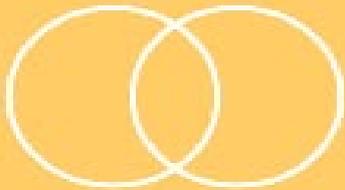


Jeremy Reed on Lee Harwood's *Collected Poems*  
John Horder on Alan Bennett's *The History Boys*  
Xochitl Tuck on Frank Bangay  
Brendan Wilson's *Goodbye Asylum*  
Sixties Press Gregory Fellows Poetry Anthology  
Bristol Survivors' Stepping Out Theatre Company  
*plus Broadsheet and Reviews*

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# LDAF

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## POETRY EXPRESS

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# New Direction

## From the Director, Dr Simon Jenner

**H**ello! Our ruthless deforestation program continues unremittingly with the stripping of yet another part of Epping Forest, to provide you with another 48pp *Poetry Express*. From now till the end of the forest. Enjoy this ruthless policy of nurture before nature. This juggernaut continues unabated, even to our office space.

Since 1993, we've lived in a quaint 445 sq ft of No-Man's-Land somewhere between Health and Safety. I can't even pace the floor and dictate comfortably, so things had to change. In fact, change for us; since, in a Hitchhiker's Guide moment, the Crown realised what a brownfield site was dormant in this reverent tube-training centre (deceased). So they'll knock it down to create a hyperpass to Great Portland Street. We're out of here.

So here we are, in the ruins of a 5th century fort awaiting the barbarians and removals van. Our new premises (a new proposition), 800 square feet of a converted schoolroom, host the most fantastic fenestration this side of the North Circular. It's on the cusp of Archway and Highgate, so has pretensions. It's also on the ground floor with an amazing access lift with enough room for a three-wheeler Morgan car to do a three-point turn in.

In all seriousness, this is a fantastic opportunity and we're grateful to ACE for providing the capital funds for the move and refurbishment. And particularly to Steve Mannix of SHAPE for organising the funding and playing the benign Godfather, without the smoking jacket. We're also delighted that Julie McNamara, Director of LDAF, a good friend to Survivors' Poetry, has secured a similar residence in Shoreditch. Opportunities are truly dynamic. The Diorama has been a good friend to Survivors too, for 12 years, but the conditions were at best cramped and the accrued paper the inheritance of the Roman Empire's orts and greasy relics c. 5th century: broken mosaics. Seeing that up to the 2nd century, everything was quite pristine and documented, we're restoring 2nd century aesthetics to the last couple of years. We now have floors we can interpret.

We're something of an interpreters' house. Survivors' Poetry has a proud tradition of championing translated verse, and the Selected Poems of Dino Campana (brilliantly translated by Christina Viti, an excerpt from which was featured last issue) is the latest in a line now extending to Mandelstam, Nazrul Islam and Mir. The Campana volume will be published alongside the first by one of our mentees, Lee Wilson. His poetry is already widely published in such places as *The Rialto*, and his own series of inimitable pamphlets, but this is his first full-length collection – a brilliant debut.

Two other volumes are nearing completion: a Survivors' anthology in which survivor poets both known and new will feature alongside each other. More on this soon. Another volume is an old friend. *Fresher Than Green, Brighter Than Orange* was an acclaimed sell-out 42pp pamphlet of Irish women poets in London when it first appeared in 1999. This will re-emerge soon, edited again by Eamer O'Keeffe, and expanded by over 30 pages.

Eamer O'Keeffe brings us to another new chapter at SP. As I mentioned last time, Maureen McKarkiel gave us six vibrant months as London Outreach Worker before pursuing her film projects and Islington Music Forum. Eamer O'Keefe is coming to work for us as Volunteer Outreach Co-ordinator. We've long planned this ever since we knew she'd be free by mid-June. We're delighted to have her take on women's, feminist, older lesbian/gay, Irish and other outreach profiles.

James Ferguson, with us since February 2002, also felt that after three years he could finally leave Survivors' Poetry without it collapsing as he closed the door, to focus on his own poetry. He'd resigned in October 2003, just before I arrived; it's a measure of his loyalty, not least to me, that he agreed to stay on and double his original span. James has been something of an institution. There's now a more collective editorial to *Poetry Express*. Alan's superb journalist skills sub and furnish all you see.

This all leaves room for both Roy Birch's Outreach remit to expand to London for the next year – something he knows intimately; and for the new post of Administrator, something ACE and ourselves have long desired. Trips to Cornwall (twice), to Poole, and the Swindon Literary Festival, have resulted in an email SP, a website and group, and an invite back respectively. Read on inside.

Most excitingly, we've featured in a 90 minute Clearspot, the first of many, on **Resonance fm** (see back cover), with poetry, music, interviews. Thanks to all regions who took part, and yes, CDs of the broadcast are available free plus £2 p&p. We'll advertise ahead with new dates. *And look! our new website is up and interactive at [www.survivorspoetry.com](http://www.survivorspoetry.com).* You can even click regions.

Finally, a deeper note from the bowels of Government policy: ACE has its funding frozen till 2008. They've iced some admin costs and one solution is to similarly freeze grants to all RFOs. Another, to cut 118 of them to enable a 2.5% rise in the remainder. Several of these 118 are still primed with exciting creative projects, so many great things are potentially at stake. We deem this a retrorgade step and trust the wisest heads will prevail.

# National Outreach Spring Diary

## Roy Birch on National Outreach in March, April & May

**March 3:** I attended a session of the North Herts Mental Health Links Forum. Survivors' Poetry has a presence in Hertfordshire via Stevenage Survivors but the county is very large with serious mental health problems and the Forum is a way for organisations such as Survivors' Poetry to exert an influence.

**March 10:** I organized a Haiku Workshop and Poetry reading for MIND in Dacorum at their headquarters in Hemel Hempstead.

**March 26:** Stevenage Survivors performed in the Dioramanite session at the Torriano Meeting house.

**April 1-3:** I attended Fedfest (the annual festival of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers) as a representative of Survivors' Poetry with Roy Holland, the Information Officer, where we delivered a workshop and promoted the organisation.

**April 14:** I visited the Isledon Road Mental Health Resource Centre in Islington at the invitation of the management, to discuss the possibility of Survivors' Poetry delivering a series of creative writing workshops for them.

**April 19:** I visited Southwark MIND. This was in part a courtesy visit to a Survivors' Poetry network group and in part an exploratory visit for the possible setting-up of a Survivors' Poetry venue in the borough.

Survivors' Poetry had a one and a half hour slot on Resonance *fM*. This was a pilot show as a precursor to a regular slot on the station. These shows are of great value to us as they heighten our profile with an audience that would not otherwise be aware of Survivors' Poetry and its extremely valuable work.

At about the same time I entered into a dialogue with a Radio Producer regarding a feature about Survivors' Poetry on BBC Radio 4. The negotiations are ongoing.

**April 20:** I gave a presentation to the Acute Care Collaborative Learning Day at the King's Fund in Cavendish Square, promoting Survivors' Poetry to an audience of some 50 mental health professionals, including Psychiatrists, Psychoanalysts, Occupational Therapists, Ward Managers and Nurses. This has already borne fruit inasmuch as one of the main speakers, a Clinical Psychiatrist, has asked me to give a talk to her team, and one of the Occupational Therapists present

has asked me to help her set up a Workshop programme.

**April 25:** I took part in a Survivors' Poetry Network event in Redruth, Cornwall, at which I delivered a Creative Writing Workshop, affiliated a local Survivors' Poetry group I had earlier help set up, and laid the groundwork for the creation of an Internet Survivors' group in Cornwall.

**April 28:** I met with poet and publisher Paula Brown in Poole, Dorset, and helped her set up a local Survivors' Poetry group, which is now not only up and running but already has its own website.

**May 6:** I began a dialogue with Karen Harvey in Wales about affiliating her group to the Survivors' Poetry Network.

**May 7:** I attended the Camden Workshops Facilitator Planning Meeting, at which it was decided to hold two workshops per month for the moment and to also hold a series of ten Taster Workshops in addition. It was also decided that some, at least, of the workshops should be held in libraries, museums, galleries and other places of interest. One highly successful workshop has already been held at the Natural History Museum.

**May 11:** I led a team from Survivors' Poetry in a highly successful performance at the Swindon Festival of Literature (see page 23).

**May 13:** I began a dialogue with Trust Art Projects about the possibility of Survivors' Poetry delivering a series of Writing Workshops for them in South London.

**May 27:** I am facilitating a Survivors' Poetry Networking Event at the Dudson Centre in Stoke-on-Trent. There is a lot of interest being shown in this event and I am confident it will lead to the creation of a new Survivor Group in the Stoke area. One spinoff has already occurred. The Media Action Group for Mental Health, a Stoke-based organisation, has requested Survivors' Poetry supply four poets for Sanity Fair, a Mental Health Arts Festival in Stoke on June 11.

By the next issue of *Poetry Express* I hope to have many more entries in my Outreach Diary to update you on, as this spring's brimming cornucopia already looks set to spill into a summer of fresh opportunities for Survivors' Poetry to continue spreading its wings throughout the nation. Until then, keep striving and surviving!

# S.H.E. Who Must Be Conveyed

## An introduction to Survivors Helping Each Other from founder member Jacqui Lewis

S.H.E. is an organisation which aims to relieve the distress of women survivors of childhood incest and sexual abuse, and their families, as well as improve public awareness and education regarding the long term effects of these societally shunned issues.

I first set up S.H.E. in August 1998, as an informal self-help group, meeting over a cup of coffee. From small humble beginnings the organisation has grown and was given charity status in 2001. We provide an atmosphere of support and an opportunity for sharing and discussion, which starts to chip away at the fear of feeling alone. We do not offer a counselling service but encourage members to participate in the running of the organisation to whatever level they feel able. We help each other through the tangled web that sexual abuse can leave its survivors with.

S.H.E. runs a facilitated Creative Therapeutic Group wherein the facilitator works to establish and maintain a safe environment, in which group members can experience self-awareness and empowerment, contributing to the healing process of sexual abuse. The group has agreed ground rules to ensure the safety of members and it is each individual's responsibility to maintain such boundaries. Again an important part of healing is the awareness and establishment of strong boundaries which have been abused and sometimes destroyed in childhood.

Each new group discusses its own ground rules, but these need to fit within the framework of S.H.E. . There is a nominal weekly contribution to costs with a maximum of £3.00, part of this being used as a donation to the site for Christmas and Easter presents for children resident there at those times.

The long term effects of sexual abuse can be so pervasive that it is sometimes hard to pinpoint exactly how the abuse affects an adult. It can permeate everything from sexual intimacy to parenting. It can also induce low self esteem; impaired emotional reaction; depression; anxiety and phobias (especially regarding anything involving physical intimacy such as medical check ups, gynaecological etc.); sleep disturbances; eating disorders (compulsive eating and obesity, bulimia, anorexia); dissociative problems (perceptual disturbances, flashbacks, nightmares, bad dreams, out of body experiences); further assault/re-victimisation; impaired libido; sexual problems (impaired arousal, vaginismus, pain during intercourse); self-mutilation; suicidal tendencies;

substance abuse; obsessive compulsive problems; educative and occupational underachievement – the list goes on.

S.H.E. also provides a Women's Therapy Group for members, which is run in conjunction with ISAS Incest and Sexual Abuse Survivors, again based in Newark. This organisation offers a one to one counselling service for male and female survivors of childhood sexual abuse in the Nottinghamshire area. For more information please phone ISAS office: Nottinghamshire area.

S.H.E. also offers a Volunteer Befriending Service which offers one-to-one befriender support for survivors of sexual abuse. It offers time limited support to female survivors, who may be finding it difficult to access or gain the appropriate help from the more traditional mainstream organisations. Befriending is a service which offers survivors individual support and encouragement that goes some way to enabling the befriender to: develop a greater degree of self confidence and emotional growth; develop a greater capacity to make use of their own resources; develop a greater capacity to form and maintain relationships with others.

S.H.E. also offers a Library and Drop-in Service on a Friday morning. This offers an opportunity for members to meet in a relaxed space providing a lighter social atmosphere where members can relax and just have a chat. Borrow a book or join in with the activities that are on offer. Please phone for more details as to where the service is being held.

Another important part of our organisation and one which offers contact and involvement for our members is our quarterly magazine *The Open Door*. It contains letters, poems, artwork, comments, news, classifieds and many other contributions.

All S.H.E. members are courageous, fantastic, wonderful women who have discovered the power to be found in healing old wounds caused by childhood sexual abuse. Being part of a very caring group is in itself healing. It can seem very daunting making that first step, we do know how that first phone call can seem impossible, I hope the brief history of the group, what we stand for and what we do, will help in making it possible. If you would like more information, please don't hesitate in contacting us.

*S.H.E. believes the needs and rights of survivors of childhood sexual abuse are:*

- to be believed*
- confidentiality: to be able to talk in private*
- acceptance and support*
- learn that life can be enjoyed*
- safe boundaries*
- build trust*
- regain self-esteem*
- hope*
- go at own pace*
- protection*
- rediscover their own individuality/ uniqueness*
- be understood*
- receive love and care*
- realise that it was not their fault*
- grieve*
- be heard*
- express their feelings in a safe environment*
- take risks*
- realise their strengths*
- feel it is ok to be who you are*
- have a healthy sexuality*
- heal*

## S.H.E. Poetry

### Life is a Journey

Whether we chose our own destiny or not, we each have our own journey to make. On this journey we are guaranteed one thing, one day our journey will come to an end. But remember wherever it takes us, or what path we take, the stars will always shine and a smile has no price.

### Reality

I'm here, but not really here  
– who is here then?  
– what is reality?  
Whose reality is it anyway?

### Coming Back

When I was little my parents said  
“We don't want you except in our bed”  
My Sun and My Moon crashed from the sky  
And I went away.

Behind glass where no one could reach  
I've been there for fifty years  
This year I smashed the glass  
It is good to be back.

### Untitled

Tarred and feathered, hung out to dry in a market square alone to cry.  
Through oily, sticky lids I see a flock of birds flying free.  
The tar has stuck to my skin like glue, the matted feathers thrown by you.  
They burrow their way under my pores and poke at the wounds you left, bleeding and raw.  
It hurts so much I can't stand the pain but cathartic agony runs through my veins.  
And once again I can breathe as the child in me begins to seethe.  
And the feathers burrow deeper down my metamorphosis makes no sound.  
My child and I smile in irony your cruelty gave me the feathers that set me free.  
I've spread my wings I've won the fight and joined other survivors in a victory flight.

### What's a girl to do

You created an air of fondness,  
then left me within an hour  
of darkness, you then came and found me.  
where I was held closely in broken wings,  
wrapped tightly upon thy knees.

Here I remained, in this moment  
within the now, for insight  
sifting through the memories,  
of an experience long ago,  
what was it that prevented me  
just like you in the now.

I looked at you with all my heart  
my eyes could not be found  
within my soul a place for you  
belonged like centuries before  
after all this time, we gind each other again  
and still the barriers remain the same

## I Am Woman and I Am Unashamed

I have been ashamed  
And I have unashamed myself  
I have gently taken apart the tangled weave  
Of the pattern of shame  
Untangled the mess of tangled emotions  
Straightened out the fabric of my being  
Twisted by cruel hands  
And unwelcome fingers  
Yes – I have unravelled the threads of shame  
Though it hurt me to take them apart  
I have traced each one back  
To the original knot of trauma  
Looked at each separate strand  
Held them up to the light  
Seen their true colours woven with blood  
And tears  
Though it hurt my eyes to look  
I have washed them clean  
In the sparkling waters of my soul  
And now I'm weaving a banner  
Of love for myself  
To hold high above my head  
Declaring  
I AM WOMAN AND I AM UNASHAMED!

## Untitled

When a 34 year old woman met another woman, the woman looked intently at her and asked "What do you do?" The 34 year old replied... I, I... I rest I recover I recuperate I breathe I sigh I moan I cry I sob I laugh I giggle I move I move my body I move without my body I move against my body I... I struggle I push I surrender ...sometimes I ache I feel I sulk

I sit I sit in the sun I sit in the wind I sit these lovers sensual on my skin I see I see trees dance I watch grass giggle I watch birds I breathe the wind I listen I swear I fart I cook I clean I love my dog I watch her sleep I talk to ants I curse snails I bathe I masturbate I create I hurt I bleed I choose I get near empty I get near full

I pick my nose I get confused I paint my nails I watch TV I rub warm oil into my thirsty skin I write I clean the toilet I love bits of me hate I swallow I spit

I sleep I dream I travel I connect, disconnect merge and purge relate and hate get confused and get clear I give I take demand and rescue I feel my body I feel my child I deny my body I deny my child I fall apart but wlays come back together again spiralling I spiral. I live. I am.

The 34 year old is smiling.

## Child of 35

A little child inside me  
Almost every day she's cried.  
But that's alright because  
I thought that she had died.

I'd covered her over by becoming  
A mother and wife.  
Oh what an explosion  
When I brought her back to life.

I felt so much anger  
Hatred and rage.  
This is my book of life  
I've turned another page.

The little child inside of me  
We now walk side by side  
Not many have stood by us  
But we have nothing to hide.

I thought I'd soon get over it  
I thought I had the know  
But reading and feeling other's words  
I've still got far to go.

**[All these poems have been contributed anonymously from members of S.H.E.]**

**For information on Incest and Sexual Abuse Survivors please call 01636 610314 or their helpline: 01636 610313.**

**For S.H.E. Volunteer Befriending Scheme please call Lizzie Matthews on 01636 611107.**

**For The Open Door, please contact: The Open Door, PO Box 6743, Newark, Notts NG24 4WT or email she\_newark@hotmail.com or visit our website at www.sheuk.org**

# Stepping Out in Bristol & London

## Steve Hennessy on Bristol Survivors' award-winning Stepping Out Theatre Company

The Bristol group has been meeting to write together monthly for the last nine years. Bristol Survivors' Poetry is probably unique among local groups in that it spawned its own theatre company. The theatre company has expanded into a major organisation in its own right.

Formed in 1997 by members of Bristol Survivors' Poetry, with sixteen productions to its credit, The Stepping Out Theatre Company is the country's leading mental health theatre group. It has produced a wide range of work on mental health themes and is open to people who have used mental health services, and their allies. Its productions have been performed in Bristol, Bath, London, Worcester and Frome.

The group runs regular writing, drama, dance and music workshops and also has members with many other skills. It also offers mental health service users the opportunity to work alongside people with professional experience in writing, directing and acting, some of whom are service users themselves. We produce three types of work: large scale plays with mixed casts of service users and experienced actors, cabaret evenings showcasing performance in many different media fields, and small cast studio productions on mental health themes involving experienced actors.

Stepping Out is run by a management committee made up mainly of mental health service users, but which also includes people who have worked in mental health and the arts. It has attracted various accolades from service users: "Stepping Out has done me more good than all the doctors and all the tablets I ever took," and: "I felt like I had been asleep for thirty years and then, doing the play, I came awake."

The Stepping Out Theatre Company is a local success story but has been scooping national awards. It has won the Focus on Mental Health Award and the Rosalind Caplin Award, both in recognition of its high quality and groundbreaking work in mental health. The group's productions have also twice come second in the national 'Best Event – World Mental Health Day' Competition.

2004 was a busy year for us. In January we made our London debut, teaming up with London group In Extremis Theatre to bring two highly successful plays to the Finborough Theatre in Earls Court for a four week run. The two plays were *Wilderness* and *The Murder Club*. This double bill told the stories of three men who had become patients at Broadmoor Hospital after

committing notorious murders. The title of the double bill was *Lullabies of Broadmoor* and the plays did well, attracting many excellent reviews which can be viewed on the group's website.

The group then mounted two productions of another ambitious double bill of plays which we called *Cracked* – first at the Alma Tavern Theatre in Bristol, then at the Rondo Theatre in Bath. The first play was *Nobody Here But Us Chickens* by Peter Barnes, which tells the tale of two men in a psychiatric ward who believe they are chickens (!). Barnes' play is a witty parable about normality and the functioning of the psychiatric system.

*Death and Life and In Between* by Bristol writer and group member David Carter was the other half of the double bill. David's play is a haunting meditation on life and death, suicide, addiction, madness and spirituality. Both plays and both productions were a great success.

Soon after the first production, David set up his own theatre company, Chrysalis Theatre, which has a special remit to work with users of HIV, drug and alcohol services. With support from Stepping Out Theatre, Chrysalis has already gone on to achieve phenomenal success.

For World Mental Health Day 2004, we mounted our third 'Art and Soul' cabaret evening at Bristol's Hope Centre in which a variety of singers, songwriters, dancers, actors, slam poets and others performed a wide range of work. A popular part of these evenings is always the short comic sketches. The group gets frequent requests to perform some of this material in other settings too. Throughout the year we performed a variety of these comic sketches in different settings: at an arts event in Frome; a service user social event in Weston-Super-Mare; and, most memorably, to a conference of over 300 senior Health and Social Service managers in Taunton (the most enthusiastic response came from those service managers – this was also our largest audience ever for a single event).

In November, the group mounted a co-production – with local group Theatre West – of a new play about the Russian composer Musorgsky called *Deathsong*. The great composer of *Pictures at an Exhibition* and *Songs and Dances of Death*, suffered from alcoholism and mental health problems. Once again, the production attracted favorable reviews and excellent audience responses, which are posted on our website.

Around this time, our three year Community Fund Grant ran out and soon after we had an application for another three years turned down. The future for the group looked very bleak, but this only increased our determination and we set out on an intensive fundraising drive. A couple of small grants were soon raised to keep the group's activities going while we worked on larger applications. Eventually, one of these was successful.

The group has just been told that it has been successful in obtaining a two year grant from the Big Lottery Fund for its work. This fantastic news means that we have a secure future for the next two years. We can now afford our first paid member of staff, a part time Development Worker, who has been in post since the beginning of March 2005. This will enable us to mount many more productions of new plays.

A large scale play involving service users and experienced actors will be performed in Bristol and Bath in June/July 2005. (Our last one had a cast of 27. I wonder if we can beat that?) The theme is likely to be the Russian Revolution.

A third play in the *Lullabies of Broadmoor* sequence is currently being researched. It will be about Richard Dadd, the famous Victorian painter of 'faerie' scenes who was a patient at both Bethlem and Broadmoor Hospitals. It is hoped it will be performed in Bristol, Bath and London.

We are also now committed to mounting a new production of a contemporary classic Swedish play set in a psychiatric hospital called *The Hour of the Lynx* (by Per Olov Enquist), which, it is hoped, will tour London and Bristol. This is a stunning play about murder, madness and redemption by one of Europe's greatest living writers.

We hope to take two of last year's productions – *Death and Life and In Between* and *Deathsong* to London, and we are currently in discussion with various venues about this. Some of these projects will be co-productions with the newly formed Chrysalis Theatre company, who were also successful in obtaining a grant for their work from the Big Lottery Fund.

In a new development, the group has recently branched out into offering training for nurses and other mental health staff. Group members use their acting skills to play out difficult staff/service user scenarios in hospitals and other places and try to help staff learn how to handle these difficult situations more easily. After a highly successful first day, there has been a great interest in this method of using drama in training and several more days are planned.

After the difficult period that always attends bad news on funding, the Bristol group picked itself up and

redoubled its efforts. We are now looking forward to what should be the best two years the group has ever enjoyed. Remember – all of our productions offer free tickets to service users. We offer free or subsidised tickets to people who work in mental health services as well.

You can keep up to date with all the group's news and forthcoming productions on the website. We are always particularly keen to encourage other survivors to come and see our work. Many have said that the plays are worth travelling to see. Take a look at what other people are saying on our website, and then come along and judge for yourself when you can.

**Steve Hennessy is Secretary of the group. You can contact him on (0117) 9832790 or email [steve.hy@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:steve.hy@blueyonder.co.uk). The group's website is at [www.steppingouttheatre.co.uk](http://www.steppingouttheatre.co.uk)**

## Bristol Survivors' Writings

### In this Light

The sun's blemish has now faded,  
The sky immersed in the languid motion of washing itself clean.

In this light we make fractions out of ourselves,  
We clip the hours so that they bleed gently into one another.

I once tried to lick the morning clean  
But the repellent dust of evening lingered in my shadow.  
It's a form of madness that hinges on this uncertainty,  
That tries to attach some continuity to the crawling rhythm of time,  
But in time, there will be time and time will do  
And all the ageing swaggers of time will paint us true.

*Elliot Hall*

### Two Poems on Hearing of Bears in a Zoo Being Given Prozac

I am Bruno and I am happy.

The poachers came to the mountain where we lived.  
They shot my mother and I am happy.  
They put me with all my brothers and sisters in a cage  
and loaded us on a jeep and I am happy.  
From the forests and the mountains, we drove for

hundreds of miles across the savannah, lurching and bumping across potholed roads and I am happy. One brother and one sister died and I am happy.

They sold us to a man in Nairobi who kept us in a dark cellar for a week and I am happy.

They put us in a crate and shipped us half way round the world over the moving ground that made me throw up everything I ate and I am happy.

They tore me away from my surviving brothers and sisters and put me in a lorry that brought me to this place and I am happy.

They put me in a cage twelve foot by ten which I pace all day long and I am happy.

Children poke sticks through the bars at me. One boy comes every Saturday, and when no one is looking, he throws stones at me. He looks sad, but I am happy.

At night, I dream of the mountains and forests, of the savannah, of my mother and I am happy and I cannot remember a time when I was ever unhappy.

*Steve Hennessy*

### **And Now The Silence**

And so now in this silence  
We can hear the softest step  
And the heart inside pounds  
As if it is the flow and ebb  
Of some great sea  
A butterfly lands and we hear  
The rush of those cyclopean wings  
Remnants of scales detaching floating  
High above, and sparkling in muted sunlight  
And falling to earth like iridescent rain  
This silence can break even  
The strongest drum of the ear  
And the noise of that teat  
As it runs down the softest cheek  
With this silence we can break down  
The doors of our very souls  
And beg our creator for sleep  
This day we have waited for all our lives  
Has now arrived, and all we can hear  
Is the resounding vibration.

*Paul Parker*

### **Secluded Paradise**

There are no more doors  
This is free access  
I can walk through walls  
I can go anywhere I want  
I can do anything I want  
No more fears  
No more tears  
Dream on  
A beautiful carry on  
Safe is my room  
Safe is my womb

*Kevin Pearce*

### **Untitled**

Help. I need to escape,  
Help, this is world rape,  
My fur stands up on end  
This ain't no favour for a friend,  
The needle is inserted,  
The doctor is perverted,  
How can I find my way out,  
No energy to fight and shout,  
Don't they understand,  
This isn't my natural land,  
No drug can do the trick,  
It's not me who is sick.

*Elliot Hall*

### **The Voyages of the Starship "Lunar Sea" by Steve Hennessy**

(Our most frequently requested sketch and a perennial Stepping Out Theatre Company favorite. A trio of demented psychiatrists tour the universe in search of fresh victims for the benefit of their dubious assistance ...)

(AN EMPTY STAGE. OPENING CHORDS OF THE "STAR TREK" THEME. LIGHTS UP ON CAPTAIN JERK, MR. SPOOK AND 'BONES/THE REAL' McCOY AT BACK OF THEATRE BEHIND AUDIENCE. THEY ARE ARMED WITH PHASER WATER PISTOLS)

JERK Madness! The final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship "Lunar Sea". It's lifelong mission, to explore new drugs, to seek out new mental disorders, to boldly go over an edge that no one has gone over before!

(“STAR TREK” THEME COMES IN LOUDLY, THE THREE CHARACTERS SINGING ALONG SOMEWHAT TUNELESSLY IN THE BACKGROUND. THEY RUN THROUGH THE THEATRE ONTO THE STAGE SPRAYING AUDIENCE WITH THEIR WATER PISTOLS AS THEY GO. MUSIC FADES LEAVING THE TONE DEAF RENDITION OF THE THREE CHARACTERS STILL GOING STRONG UNTIL THEY NOTICE THE AUDIENCE. THEY STOP SINGING AND LOOK VERY SERIOUS. JERK SITS)

JERK The Starship ‘Lunar Sea’, stardate (looks at watch) 23rd February 2005. We are approaching a small planet in the Mogadon galaxy. Spook, any sign of life?

(SPOOK GOES AND PEERS AROUND AUDIENCE)

SPOOK Absolutely none, Captain.

JERK Dammit! The third planet since breakfast, and still nothing!

SPOOK I’ll run some extra checks with the infra red electron telescope, Captain.

(SPOOK GETS OUT A PAIR OF TOY BINOCULARS AND STARTS SCANNING THE AUDIENCE)

JERK Doctor McCoy! I’m afraid our latest planet isn’t looking too hopeful.

(McCOY SPEAKS IN A STRONG SCOTTISH ACCENT WITH THE FERVOUR OF A FIERY PRESBYTERIANISM)

McCOY Captain Jerk! We can’t go on like this! We havena discovered any serious mental disorder for nearly twenty four hours!

JERK I know, I know ...

McCOY You know what will happen if we don’t find them!

JERK You don’t need to remind me. The damned Klingons will get to them first and offer them (barely able to contain disgust) .... Counselling!

SPOOK Captain Jerk, I think my sensors are picking something up.

JERK What is it Spook?

SPOOK Life forms. There are ... yes, dozens of them.

JERK Are they ... intelligent?

(SPOOK LOOKS AGAIN)

SPOOK It’s too early to say, but it’s just about possible.

McCOY Never mind their intelligence, dammit! Is there any serious mental disorder?

(SPOOK SWEEPS ACROSS THE AUDIENCE AND THEN SUDDENLY HOMES IN ON SOMEONE IN BACK ROW)

SPOOK I can’t be sure. No ... wait!

JERK What is it?

SPOOK Captain, the sensors are picking up some slight evidence of depression.

McCOY The Lord be praised!

JERK Who is it?

SPOOK It’s him. Sitting in the back row.

JERK Are you sure he’s not just having a bad day?

SPOOK No, Captain, it’s depression all right.

McCOY (Feverish excitement) Could he be suicidal, Spook?

JERK Let’s not get our hopes too high, Bones.

SPOOK There’s more Captain. I’m picking up some post – natal depression. It looks pretty serious.

JERK At last!

SPOOK There seem to be a lot of delusions present in these people near the front. They think they’re in for an entertaining evening.

McCOY (Sobs) The pitiful, pathetic wretches!

SPOOK There’s clear evidence of a breakdowns too Captain. And now I’m picking up anorexics, bulimics, schizophrenics ...

McCOY (Quite manic) Spook, did you say skit ... skit ...

JERK Keep calm, Bones, keep calm.

McCOY I’ll be all right, Captain. It’s just the skit ... the skit ...

JERK I know Bones but, keep your head. Anyone down there ... sane, Spook?

SPOOK Not that I can detect, Captain. The best of them seems ... completely neurotic.

JERK This is too good to be true.

McCOY (In rapture) Oh Captain. Would it be all right if I sang a quick chorus from "Mull of Kintyre?"

JERK I'd rather you didn't, Bones, but thanks for offering.

SPOOK Something else I'm picking up too, Captain.

JERK Yes?

SPOOK I'm not sure ...

(MORE INTENSE BEEPING FOLLOWED BY SOUND OF CUCKOO CLOCK)

Yes. It's paranoia, Captain.

JERK Paranoia?

SPOOK Practically everyone on the planet believes that they are being watched.

(PAUSE. THREE OF THEM MOVE OUT TO INSPECT THE AUDIENCE)

They think they are being watched by cold, alien beings and reduced to a label Captain, to a mere diagnosis in a set of medical notes.

(LONG PAUSE AS THEY ALL STARE AT THE AUDIENCE)

JERK Is it true?

SPOOK Of course not, Captain. No one is watching them. It is their mental disorder which makes them think they are being watched.

JERK (Obviously confused) ... I see. Anything else down there we should know about, Spook?

SPOOK There are musicians, actors, poets, artists.

JERK Are they any good?

SPOOK I'm not over optimistic.

McCOY One thing's for sure, Captain. They need help!

JERK You're right Bones. I think we need to beam down and take a closer look. Spook, pick out a subject at random.

(BEEPING)

SPOOK Subject located. (He indicates an audience

member) Borderline Personality Disordered male, Bristol area.

JERK O.K. Beam us in!

(FIRING OF TRANSPORTER BEAMS, THE THEME TUNE OF 'STAR TREK' STARTS UP AGAIN AS THE TRIO OF PSYCHIATRISTS EXIT RUNNING BACK THROUGH THE THEATRE SPRAYING THE AUDIENCE)

**THE END**

Experiences of mental health survivors in poetry or prose wanted by Barry Tebb for

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# Poetry Express Broadsheet

## Affettuoso Tempesta

Cloudburst and your music resonates  
exploding globes to my lips,  
in the trickling rivulets sucking hair to cheek;

drumming delicately on exposed shoulders,  
summer sweet sparkle notes,  
pizzicato waterfall melody for first violin.

Pianissimo, legato, lento  
the Earth slows to listen  
to a natural tremolo.

Intricate compositions arrange droplets  
queuing to be played, falling into each other,  
glissando into hushed, warm wetness.

*[Affettuoso Tempesta literally means “a musical term used to describe to the musician to play with affection” and “storm” but basically, I was caught in a storm in the local Tesco’s car park and I was struck by the hushed, musical quality of the rain]*

Paula Brown

## Unawares

He says that his hands are cold,  
oblivious to the physical effect  
on his companion; the  
mind-rush chest-flush  
goose-bumpy heart-thumpy  
thrill resulting in a shudder.

His eyes meet hers fractionally  
longer than they did before  
as he relaxes into familiarity  
and she feels her pupils swell,  
burst and blossom, wide eyes  
averted, lest they give her away.

His mouth shapes ordinary words,  
his lips part gently and then touch.  
She speaks of something ugly, a  
diversion as he places his hand on  
his stomach and his dark hair  
waves at her, laughing.

Paula Brown

## Feelgood Friday

Her unwelcome lover stalked and prowled,  
depleting resolve for days until, one Tuesday,  
she turned around and kissed him full on the mouth.  
For three days he grasped and groped, fingered,  
forced and tongued his body through hers  
until, too tired to cry, she left his bed, took a shower,  
answered the telephone and opened the door.

Paula Brown

## Nature’s Magic

I was driving to the beach  
And I passed it on the road.  
A dead crow.  
It lay in the middle and was  
A reminder of all things to be.  
The force of nature defeated  
By man’s subtle aggression.  
Its wings were torn and ripped  
From its tight and clenched body.  
The head was cracked  
And its eyes were dank in madness.  
Yet in death it still remains  
A powerful symbol, magic and spirit.  
When I finally arrived I thought  
About her crushed and lifeless body.  
I couldn’t but help think she was alive,  
Flying from tree to tree.

Graham Hardie

## First Prayer

Tonight I utter my first prayer,  
For a love lost,  
A love not for whisper and breathless stare,  
Not for bloodied butterfly and each shadow slit  
In an auburn gush.

But for you, for the feeling like white  
Wings at the cemetery gates,  
The crying underworld,  
The snivelling sewer,  
Where I weep with you,  
Wet green arms,  
Of some kneeled form.  
For a heart lost,

For this hateful blackness,  
That I hate as belted child hates,  
That I fear and that here I lie  
With, close as lover's breath,  
Close as sick tears,  
Close as sickened tears it is to me,  
This unspeakable, nameless,  
Cannot even show itself in truths  
Deep, full white light,  
Oh god, this prayer is slipping,  
To the knees of before, mutable and nervous,  
Are now pressed to the hard floor,  
Like an Irish, white swaddled weeper,  
I am, upon first prayer old,  
A housewife, oh lord,  
Maddened with tiled reflection,  
Maddened with privacy,

This is now what I am,  
To you I speak, oh air,  
Hopefully, the glance picture,  
Twisted to stare,  
To brim sorrow in the eye of a lonely one  
Who notices, deft feet,  
Among the litter, in mutter walk,  
Who himself, like me, walks forth  
To cry in the street.

*Tim Pearson*

### **Baghdad** *March 2003*

I lost my humanity when they went to war  
That bespoke a crime that none could sanction  
And none forestall.  
I lost my tail  
And tipped my mind into an insanity  
That quickened the senses into  
A bereavement that knew no recall  
But as a numbed witness  
Of burning corpses which lay unclaimed.  
I lost my humanity when they went to war  
And in another country  
Another place  
I pretended I was mad.  
I sealed my being with music,  
Raucous laughter and silence  
And, when I could hold it no longer,  
I screamed  
And stuffed my fist into my mouth.  
I'm coming back,  
But only just.

*Angela Cheyne*

### **Who Growled Up My Nose?**

The blue glowed in fiery energy  
the green pulsed with dazzling brightness  
the yellow night darkened the sky  
the purple dawn brought its hazy clarity

I thought why am I so happy it's so unfair  
someone said that only the evil die young  
yet I am old and about to be born  
my teeth will not obey me

food is such a love of my life  
I really hate it taking over  
starvation is unattainable  
I crave for a toilet seat of sandpaper

I cannot curve the square  
crossing the I seems so dangerous  
the gift was lost in the bush  
why did the pail roll across the road

spiders are so crunchy on toast  
beware the one who smiles  
always turn the key before coughing  
in escapable woodenness reappears

so the end continues wounded  
never is always happening  
the belly flips its flop  
embrace eternity as it flits away

*Steve Mann*

### **There Was A Time**

There was a time in rose-hued days  
When all was lovely.  
I little knew the petal-stream  
Was finite.

Now I view the prospect  
Of growing up and  
Growing old.

These times are here  
And like the nettle patch  
I pick my way with  
Caution.

*Angela Cheyne*

## Argument 489

I'm so tired I could  
crawl inside a hot wired  
car boot and fall to quiet thoughts

but for the memory of you  
slouched against the skirting  
in your front hall, your neck thin

and your face smudged to darkened sludge,  
calling for a net to catch  
the bad apples

we keep on picking.

*Stephen Lyons*

## The Visitors

Here they come,  
hunting down my house number like hogs searching out  
a truffle.

They find me in my pyjamas – a sin in itself –  
with nothing to look forward to but the tear tracks  
deepening.

Looking down from their chryselephantine towers  
they don't understand despair, can't even touch it  
but sit birdlike on the edge of reality,  
doing out pills as if they were little miracles,  
certains that even just their words can help.

But you can't cling to words when you're drowning.  
I am an exhibit in their glass cases,  
they troop past, examining my history.  
My decomposition feeds their profession.

*Mia Hart–Allison*

## The Politics of the Needs ctd

In hospital, if you refuse,  
you are held down by force.  
There is no way around it:  
the mentally ill need their sauce.

How many people  
– paranoid schizophrenics –  
are walking around  
with plasters in their buttocks?

*Angelo Tinsley*

## The Mainstream of Consciousness

And so the ripples on the shore shine on the  
windward bay picking up the grains of a petalled  
shell. The whispering of the garlands in the butter-  
coloured haze, murky flowers, a daubing on the  
coast of time. Trying to recapture a past that did  
not exist only in the imagination of a child; trying  
to live again hardly against the windswept  
occupation of time timelessness to eternity in a  
black hole of tranquility. Often I have seen the  
yellow ochre trees cleaving their branches  
touchingly. The sun shines and we all attempt to  
keep the soft main-spring of life gradually  
perpetuating all in a prised orb. Coating,  
continuously in a helter-skelter of dusk. Trying to  
keep our minds separate in a wizened welter of  
gloom. Constructively we try to find the  
equilibrium found only in the imagination of a  
tin-potted life.

The sun shines and I am in the country. All clouds  
are merged into a blackened holocaust, the sky.  
Contact. Contact. Contact. Insidious stations of  
the cross, point to the bedevilmnt of life in  
turmoil. Change the scene and attempt to  
recapture and retain the youth before the cancer  
of crabbed experience. A breakdown of  
personality that must be joined to the sharp edges  
of life. Smile and all those with the faculty of  
upturning the corners of their mouths grin  
vacantly at the maelstrom. Time marches. Time  
engenders all; encompassing all in a pie-skied  
thread. We can go further afield if the spirit leads  
us. We can do everything if we can but try. Try  
to lift myself from this terrible vacuum. Of trying  
to try too hard to integrate a fallen blossom, left  
clawing the earth.

*Angela Cheyne*

## No God But...

No God but the nurse  
Who is law, judgement and curse  
Who makes Hell yet worse..

*Zekria Ibrahim*

## A Chair As Fourteen Lines

This is a chair on which we all sit  
at certain levels from the ground  
from time to time to park, or reflect,  
though mostly to rest our feet  
and ease the lumbar region from pain.

This is a chair of many different shapes  
designed for a single functional purpose  
on which to sit though not to sleep.

This is a chair from which to expect  
its contact will breed the contention  
you get at the show of emotion –  
will grip one moment then feel  
as if there is no chair there –  
a chair with only the substance of air.

*James Bell*

## The New Year

A nervous January dawn,  
A bird whistling.

Like a liquid scratching,  
Through the winter's half-dark.

The quick rain muttering  
Like a wind of regrets.

In last night's splintered bdream,  
Green trees grow through autumn.

Now the sparks of a song  
Catch in my tired brain.

*Peter Thabit Jones*

## The Escape of Captain Fox

Captain fox will run with the breeze,  
orange coloured coat, – hay coloured eyes.  
Through the slick streams and tumbling trees,  
run from the pounding dog pack cry.  
Barking fades and the captain hides,  
dogs convey the starry landscape.  
Stretched out in the summer's sunrise,  
cunning captain's clever escape.  
No bleeding – for an adolescent,  
– saved himself not to lose his tail.  
Rolls in cowpat, breaking up his scent,  
sprints away from the red coats of hell.

*MJ Duggan*

## Over The Top

You can keep Bermuda  
give me the northern hills,  
a high wind  
and the rain coming.

I would give up all hope  
of tenderness with women  
and writing a great book  
to climb Liathach  
in midwinter snow.

Now with that huge mystery the sea shore  
with the great black-backed and the cormorant  
half-dead through schizophrenia and fags  
I chance my vision from the straight and narrow  
and behold a horizon of bold durable independence  
with the care of women's aid and courage of Greenham  
an old emphysematous Welshman walking into the dusk  
a Socialism of sea-blown starward folk.

I have walked Offa's dyke with a pack  
and camped on black hills to rid a royal wedding.  
Now the sea is in storm and our shame cast on the  
beach  
and we break free and grieve with the wonder of it all.

*David Kessel*

## Disintegration

Vagrant  
"Which of us will catch tears in the simple hand"

Ten minutes in a littered street. Lead  
in the mind; police-sirens gutting the blood.  
Smart people fumbling, ordered by an inane voice  
Perversity in the heart, the redolence of a magnificent  
September turned to prurience in the dust.  
"Living in an ice-cage". Sexual  
frustration like fag-smoke in the aorta.  
Despair in a girl's heart, where wild  
chrysanthemums should be. Desire in the heart,  
gutting anger. Telling vision against people.  
A deadly man with loveless breath.  
Time eating the stomach. Can't afford fags.  
A derelict person lies stretched to the leaves.  
To pick up a mate beneath a star-filled sky.

*David Kessel*

## New Cross

For John Van

We build our own slums. The wind  
through the slums blows on the highest  
hills. We are all slowly dying  
of cold and loneliness, no fags,  
no fruit juice, and neighbours with veg  
stew and cups of tea. We live with uncertainty,  
Our giros and our dreams. And yet our aggression  
is our frustrated love. In a billion painful  
ways we make the little things of love;  
a dustman's sweat, a cleaner's  
arthritis, a streetlight's mined electricity,  
a carpet-layer's emphysema  
a desperate clerk's angina  
a mate's slow moaned caresses.

David Kessel

## Yours Truly

You'll find my details in that missing file.  
Discrepancies in weight before and after.  
The theft, the leak, the subsequent denial.  
The public statement and the private laughter.

I was the key – now I'm a line of rust.  
I'm flakes of dandruff drifting from your head.  
I'm specks of that hallucinogenic dust  
that books with ageing leather bindings shed.

When people ask my name I give an alias.  
True loyalty to me's the same as treason.  
I see success where you see only failures.  
I'm ancient. I'm postmodern. I'm the reason

why nothing's ever lost. I'm chaos theory.  
I'm evidence. The scuff-mark and the stain.  
My answers can't be fobbed off with a query.  
However well you tidy, I remain.

James Turner

## You Can't Cuddle God

It's all very well consorting  
With Gods and Goddesses,  
Radiant in glory – ineffable.  
Coruscating hallowed, holy divinity –  
Omnipotent deities.  
It's all very well to speak  
To the face of stone on the wall,  
Blessed Mercuries,  
To feel the Mother Goddess  
Thrill in the earth.  
It's all very well, but...  
If you reach out in the dark night  
To touch them  
There's only empty air there.  
Well might your arms ache...  
You can't cuddle a god.

Maureen Oliver

## My Prison

MY prison – this ward –  
The nurse – my jailer, my lord –  
Traps thought, cord by cord.

Zekria Ibrahimi

## Fleeting Warmth, Sea of Contact

Wind blown leaves, rustling  
Down the streets of London  
Life's path-staggeringly painful.

Love reaches out to;  
Stranger, encountered,

Openness expands;

A smile exchanged  
Warmth of eyes, shine  
Lovingly, words of interest  
Melt away differences  
Soft peach of conversation, dances  
Laughter, flowering blissful sun  
Momentary aeons of space  
Seconds, minutes, evaporate  
Time doesn't exist,  
Present, joyfully explored!

Until;

We  
Depart, separate,  
Dissolved into crowded life

Heart full of other,

Fleeting warmth,  
Sea of contact,

Washes away, attachment

Wind blown leaves, rustling  
Down the streets of London  
To-day is every day, beautiful joy.

*Nick Satornetti–Portway*

### Patterns

In patterns of beholdenness  
we parley, trade and spy,  
we float on other's interest  
and sink when it's denied.

We play our games quite knowingly,  
excuses framed before the lapse:  
the tactic of foregoing we  
debate, then bait our booby-traps.

Recurrent wishes to deceive  
for motives which we don't address  
vie with our ever present need  
to have sins to confess.

The tendency is to mistake  
our prisons from their walls  
and sides which we must court or make  
from those through which we fall.

*Kevin Saving*

### House–Fly

When times were hard he found a place to lie  
and placed his seed in offal and ordure:  
of putrefaction he would take his fill.

His life was weightless, breeze–blown like a fly,  
his lifetime, broken by another's law,  
his lifeblood, pale, such as spiders spill.

No records chart when, how he came to die  
no friends bid rescue from the hairy claw  
nor mourn his lifeless husk, all sucked and still.

Yet he was such as spiders put by,  
placing his juiceless torment in store,  
held by restraints far stronger than his will.

*Kevin Saving*

### Love Grenade

I was swinging by a little pin of hope.

You pulled the pin  
And threw me away.

I, of course, exploded.

*Bear Loveday Tyler*

### Alice Living in the Looking Glass (Schizophrenia)

She thought she met a caterpillar:  
On his mushroom he laughed,  
Idle and drugged –  
Offered her a different medication –  
His attitude enlarged her paranoia,  
It did not help the situation.  
O Alice.  
It had begun by looking in the glass,  
To scan the future, or rinse her soul pure.  
Schizophrenia kept her there –  
Hallucigenically challenged.  
A cake said, or was it a bottle?  
Eat and drink them,  
Big and small not there at all –  
Flying from her head  
She listened to what the voices said.  
O Alice.  
In memories are you existing?  
In what dreaming time live you?  
Friends and relations spin, and pause  
Psychoanalysis looks for the cause.  
Alice is happier, and happier  
Surely it's not so bad,  
To have gone irrevocably mad.  
Alice, sedated, giggles and curses  
Marching around are the psychiatric nurses.  
"Sick in the head" people say,  
Alice kneels to pray.  
"Real Life" seems so dull,  
Now her mind is full; –  
Unicorns dance across her sight  
Elves, hobgoblins – fantasy such  
As would fill a story book.  
Alice, O Alice.

*Margaret Theresa Carney*

# The Importance of Being Frank

## Xochitl Tuck on survivor poet Frank Bangay

**B**orn in Wandsworth, South London in 1951, Frank Bangay has known his life in London through the eyes, ears, heart and mind of a survivor of the mental health system and has put all these sensations into memorable words and gestures, becoming a local legend along the periphery of the mainstream poetry scene.

Frank left school at 15, to try a variety of work experience, but in his early twenties started suffering from severe depression and anxiety and was put on anti-depressants (mental illness has troubled him ever since). Finding that expressing himself through poetry helped disperse the gloom, he served his apprenticeship as a poet at the Troubadour Coffee House in Earls Court, where his confidence as a performer developed apace.

At the end of the 1970s, he collaborated with musicians in the Fighting Pigeons Band, and then got involved with the Survivors' movement in the early 80s as a campaigner for PROMPT (Promotion of Rights of Mental Patients in Treatment) which later became known as CAPO (The Campaign Against Psychiatric Oppression). These groups had grown out of the Mental Patients' Union, formed in 1972 in Notting Hill alongside the local squatting community. The local squatters' organisation BIT found squats from which the MPU and COPE, the Community Organisation for Psychiatric Emergency, could carry out their crucial work, and another branch of the MPU was set up in Hackney.

The PROMPT office frequently received poems sent by people about their experiences of the mental health system, so Frank and PROMPT founder member Julian Barnett decided to put together a poetry magazine called *Mixed Emotions*. This was sold on the streets alongside their campaigning literature and at poetry venues.

In 1984, Frank started organising fundraising benefits, first at the Metropolitan pub in Farringdon, later moving to the Troubadour Coffee House where they blossomed. (This is how CAPO raised a lot of their funds as they were afraid that applying for charity status would mean they would have to tone down their politics. CAPO, like PROMPT, was a campaigning group). Some of the performers who took part were Peter Campbell ("a fine poet"), Mike Lawson ("who was very humorous – I called his act The Mike Lawson Experience!"), Richard McKane ("a great poet and translator of Russian poetry"), Davey Graham ("legendary folk musician and brilliant guitarist"), Joe Bidder and Hilary Porter ("wonderful people and poets"), and Razz and Sam ("Sam died in 2003, but they were a great duo").

In 1986, CAPO published a second poetry magazine called *What They Teach in Song*, the title of which is from a Shelley poem and was suggested by CAPO founder member Eric Irwin, who died in 1987. The efflorescence of survivor poetry that Frank had witnessed over these years convinced him that "our poetry and other forms of creativity are our only voice, and the only way we really have of communicating our experiences."

In 1990, CAPO produced its third poetry publication, *The Rhythm of Struggle, The Song of Hope*. It featured poetry, artwork, stories and articles on some of the many different issues in psychiatry and was an attempt to communicate both CAPO's ideology and the personal experiences of its members. Unfortunately, despite many attempts to keep it functioning, CAPO ceased to exist in 1991, and Frank became unwell.



“ It’s been a lifeline being able to write... poetry can save lives ”

As luck would have it though, he had already made contact with Joe Bidder, Hilary Porter and Peter Campbell to discuss what could be achieved by setting up a group called Survivors' Poetry, whose name was inspired by the organisation Survivors Speak Out. Bushy Kelly at the Arts Council (who was later to run Survivors' Brixton workshops) keenly supported the idea and granted the initial funding, and by the end of 1991, the first writing workshops were up and running at MIND in Camden and the first gigs were held at the Torriano Meeting House in Kentish Town, a well known poetry venue started in the 1980s by anarchist poet, John Rety.

The organisation really started to take off in 1992 when Anna Neeta started an outreach project helping groups of survivors around Britain to set up local survivor poetry groups, and Frank organised performances and workshops in day centres, sheltered housing, psychiatric hospitals and other community settings around London. The landmarks of the latter group were the monthly events at the Hampden Community Centre near Kings Cross, where survivor poets and musicians were generously encouraged and promoted and given pay and status parity with established performers. Many new writers and musicians gained in confidence and motivation from this policy and from the approach and style of the workshops.

Frank remained with Survivors' Poetry until 1997, when he left to concentrate on a creative writing group he had set up at CORE Arts in Hackney in 1996. He then finally published his first book of poetry and illustrations, *Naked Songs and Rhythms of Hope*, and recorded a CD, *A True Voice Singing*, at CORE Arts, putting his poetry to a variety of musical backings performed by some of the many musicians there.

Speaking of his lifelong mission, Frank says: "How helpful creativity is when we have been through struggles. I see it as being important to communicate the experience of the mental health system to the rest of the world. We (the founders of Survivors' Poetry) all had slightly different outlooks, but shared a common aim. I didn't think of the organisation as a therapy group, but, as Joe Bidder once said, 'poetry can save lives!'"

In the last few years, Frank has also run a creative writing workshop at St. John-at-Hackney Community Space Centre, recorded a second CD (*This Topsy Turvy Life*, with guitarist Tunde Busari with whom he often works on stage, playing harmonica), and been broadcast on the *Life and Living* programme on Resonance 104.4 fm. Frank is currently recording with other musicians. His musical influences are delta/country blues, Afro-American gospel, punk (Wreckless Eric, John Otoway) and 60s soul.

In 2004 he interviewed (the now late) Kevin Coyne, who wrote many mental health-related songs and influenced John Lydon. The interview was published in the February edition of *Mental Health Today* and on the *Life and Living* website at [www.lifeandliving.net/bangay.html](http://www.lifeandliving.net/bangay.html). The interview is to be republished with a three page article in *Splitting in Two* fanzine this June.

Frank believes that all these people and activities inform his own performances, and of his dedication and passion he says, "It's been a lifeline, being able to write!" You can catch Frank Bangay's mesmerising performances at venues around London. He is MC at East End Survivors and Outsider Poets events (**contact Dave Kessell on 0207 7900269 for details of open mic gigs**).

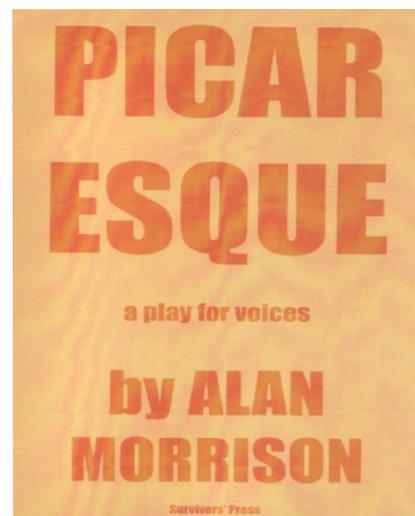
## Surviving It All

### Xochitl Tuck

On March 8 the wonderful Westwords Festival gave Survivors' Poetry an evening at Shepherd's Bush Library to stage Alan Morrison's *Picaresque – A Play for Voices*, and to present the work of seven outstanding survivor poets and musicians: Alistair Brinkley, Isha, Simon Jenner, Melted Demerara, Norrin Radd, Razz and Dave Russell.

*Picaresque* never descends into ranting despite being a bitter satire. It individually relates the experiences on the ground of the hard up and hard done by, as they describe the physical and psychic hunger they are left with after the crumbs they are so parsimoniously and self-righteously tossed by a society which just wants to keep them quiet and hidden away. Morrison's characters convey their heartaches and desperate humour through short soliloquies, revealing also something of their hostel-bound social system and dynamics. The half-hour play was flawlessly performed by Peter Holt, Simon Jenner, Robert Allwood, Alan Morrison and Razz, and hugely enjoyed by the audience, many of whom felt they had been exposed to a piece of verse of classical quality.

The rest of the evening was swept away by the fabulous performance spots of Al Brinkley whose song 'Bitter and Twisted of Finsbury Park' knocks your socks off; Isha's deliciously self-mocking poems; Melted Demerara's moving and uplifting poetry of singleparenthood and guilt; Simon Jenner's inimitably witty poem, '19 Keer Street', about his father; Norrin Radd's sharp take on male angst; Razz's hilarious jibe at 'Kylie's Bum'; and the inimitable guitar and songs of Dave Russell, which were perfect for rounding off another great talent-laden event.



[*Picaresque – A Play for Voices* is available from Survivors' Press, price £2.50. Please send cheque plus SAE to the main address.]

# A Mini-Fest for the Senses

## Roy Birch on Manchester Survivors

**M**anchester Survivors is co-ordinated by Rosie Garland, a wonderful performance poet who often performs under the name of Rosie Lugosi. Rosie asked me to tell you a little about the group. Here goes.

Manchester Survivors meets once a week on Monday afternoons at The Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS. These are mixed meetings, with both male and female participants. I attended one of these sessions and it was most enjoyable. They made me feel extremely welcome, for which I thank them. I can also tell you that they run a very mean workshop. For which I also thank them.

Manchester Survivors also runs women-only sessions on Thursdays at the Pankhurst Centre. This group was created because women members of Manchester Survivors expressed an interest in a women-only group.

The way the groups operate is beautifully simple. Some writing, a cup of tea, meet other survivors, read, and get feedback if it is wanted. As I said earlier, I have attended one of these sessions and I can vouch for its quality. The workshops are facilitated by group members, though guest facilitators are sometimes brought in. Which depends, of course, on funding.

The space itself is donated by Commonword, Manchester's umbrella group for community writing. It's a lovely space, friendly and fully accessible.

Manchester Survivors also attend and perform at local poetry readings and have made links with people who organize regular poetry parties and slams. Occasionally they organize readings of their own and in fact had a highly successful slot at the 2004 Manchester Poetry Festival, at which event they launched their latest anthology, *Running Away From Bus Stops*.

*Running Away From Bus Stops* is a lovely little book which I really enjoyed reading. From 'Dreaming of Rubies' by Tony Walsh on page one to Kevin McCann's 'In with the Shrink' on page 35, this book is a mini-fest for the senses. Please feast.

### Dreaming of Rubies

Sadly, she scraped out the pan again.

She always seemed to peel too many these days.

"39 years", she thought.

"Silly auld bugger."

Kissing her single pearl and  
dreaming of rubies.

*Tony Walsh*

### Hurting Inside

I wish there was someone to tell  
how much I'm hurting inside  
without them being snide  
without them being bagged and tagged  
and categorised and judged,  
without being catalogued and told I'm no good  
without being bottled and capped and  
put back in the cold fridge with a label reading  
'Please use us soon.'

I wish there was someone I could  
talk to without feeling dirty and cheap  
without being seen as a creep  
with nothing left to hide  
without being cut up and cubed and diced  
and tossed in the pan  
and fried in scorn  
and seasoned with bitter deceit.

If there was someone I could trust,  
they could tell me  
what's cutting them up.

I wouldn't snigger  
or laugh or go behind  
their back,  
I swear I wouldn't  
be phoney, fickle or fake,  
I'd just give that person a hug and  
Tell them 'it's okay.'

*Daniel Peacock*

## Poetry

Poetry is a feeling unexpressed in real life.  
It's held back thoughts and emotions.  
It's like a magic formula or potion.  
A recipe of words to make a wordy dish.  
A cocktail of flowing letters  
to form an alphabetical drink.  
It is not prose, nor is it a play.  
It isn't a soap opera.  
It isn't a song.  
Not any of these.  
But some or all people may say I am wrong.

*Rachel Van Den Bergen*

## Therapy

From the first baby lick of thought he's looked  
at life in shades of colours  
you don't know the names of.  
He has a face like a raised eyebrow,  
takes charge like a short man with a big dog.  
He's tall, wants you to fling your insides out,  
wants you to take the bait and open the box  
and talk, talk, talk:

The stark bald roar of the stuff words weren't made for;  
The stomach churning purple gunk,  
bellowing jelly flop confessions  
of feelings stuck, like the words  
to a prayer you thought you'd forgot,  
like a song that you hate that reminds you of home.

So you try  
to make your words look like something  
you know, but the gap between your brain and tongue is  
growing  
and he won't let you take a breath.  
The depth he'll sink his hands into,  
pinches your words between finger and thumb,  
crumbles what you meant to say,  
tweezers some sort of gist.

He grips the skin of sounds and makes a sense  
of pilfered fears, of forced half thoughts,  
sponges up your tears into flow  
charts of everything you value  
and keep secret.  
He scrapes the inside out with an unbitten biro.  
The pulp of your problems is spread  
and picked at, picked at, picked at,  
until it all adds up in a perfect sum,  
and the equation of why you're so fucked up is complete,  
makes you neater, sleeker and discrete  
and he's happy

so you close the door  
and leave and think  
that you forgot to say  
"that wasn't what I meant"

*Jack Hagan*

## My Woman talks in Haiku

(I)

Stop channel hoppin'  
It's doin my head right in  
Pass me the remote

(ii)

Just go and brew up  
Lots of milk but no sugar  
Do as you are told

(iii)

Skin up some ganja  
My fingers are all achy  
Can't do it myself

(iiii)

Not a bad effort  
For someone who doesn't smoke  
Roll me another

## In with the Shrink

He's looking  
At ink-blots.

As each one's held up  
He's asked "What  
Is this?" and  
His answer's always  
The same.

"Beautiful," he says.

*Kevin McCann*

## In Halifax

In Halifax,  
A mother, two boys and a daughter get on.  
They sit over the aisle from me.  
The girl is maybe three years old.  
She swings between the tables  
and the mother says Stop it or you'll fall.  
She carries on swinging anyway and falls.  
It's Thursday.

I'm reading a new book I got,  
the same line again and again.  
Their noise distracts me.  
They're discussing whether I'm a woman or a man.  
At Bradford, a man and a woman get on.  
They sit opposite me.  
A group of Spanish students take photos of each other  
and the girl joins in. The mother says  
Asylum seekers they're out for everything they can get  
and the man says I'm with you on that.  
I try not to listen but I can't help it.  
New Pudsey.

The mother and children get off and the man says  
Kids I love them, and I say  
They're alright until they're thirteen  
And try to carry on reading  
But he's determined and tells me  
They've been away this weekend,  
his girlfriend's first time on a train  
and she liked it. He likes the coach, used to drive one  
until they took his license. I say  
Haven't you had enough of coaches then?  
and he says No and looks sad for a bit  
and tells me they're out for a curry tonight.

In Leeds, we walk to the bus stop,  
one of those long yellow buses that bends in the middle  
and I go where I'm going.  
For some reason I can't stop laughing.  
By five, the day is darkening. The traffic is heavy  
and motor cars have their lights on.

When I walked to the station this morning  
sheep watched from the ridge and the sun lit up  
the pocked grey crags on the moor,  
a blackbird pecking the wall, dust falling.  
Cold evening, and a feeling  
like there isn't one person can hold all this,  
not a shout loud enough or swear word  
hard enough, no stunned slapped sound  
or person strong enough or big enough, no knocked  
from one thing to another woman tall enough

not the sea or the night sky  
with all its silence and light; that space  
and not one answer anywhere.

It's a cold night now.  
There's one large star.  
I fill in a British Rail questionnaire, say  
General cleanliness – very poor.

*Clare Shaw*

## Being John Doe

Ask them about shaving; about cars. Dissolve  
your afternoons in the company of fathers, sons.  
Observe the way they grip their mugs of tea.

Touch the muscle of their arms. Elbow  
your way into a life stripped of subcutaneous  
fat, how small and brave that feels against

the grinding edge of the world. Deny yourself  
softness, questions, the pleasurable quilt  
of women's conversations. Fill up seats

on buses. Let your legs trail into the aisle;  
note your confusion when people can't  
get past. Surround yourself with

the noisy isolation of weekend bars  
that spill onto the roadway. Be a white line  
on the tarmac. Straight. Featureless. Interrupted.

*Rosie Lugosi*

## The Warehouse in the Sky

You left me  
the cold water tank;  
an aerial for the children's tv;  
a mint 78 of the Great  
Pretender; a set  
of dining room chairs  
in need of upholstering;  
a mauve matinee jacket and bootees,  
a box of tireless Dinky cars,  
bent Meccano and a dog-eared  
Rupert annual from 1936 – there  
was a pile of jigsaw puzzles,  
but this had fallen over and  
all the pieces had spilled out;  
a wedding photo – glass cracked;  
a teapot – spout missing;  
a DIY barbeque set  
we never put up in the garden;  
the champagne glasses  
we used for celebration toasts.  
One has a broken stem.  
And, under the eaves,

a melted confection of bananas and chocolate  
crawling with wasps.

*Almira Holmes*

### Comprehension

From deep within the child in me shouts words,  
As one did then.  
No full stop will force me to remain silent,  
as I write, recite and send messages  
that echo amongst the crowd.  
The power of words runs deep within my veins  
and like the beat of my heart  
my experiences belong only to me  
and I bring truth  
with a river of words.

*Pauline Omoboye*

**Buy the book and if you live in the Manchester area visit the group. You won't be sad you did either. Published by purplepress 2004 ISBN 0-9536746-3-0**

### Survivors' Poetry National Mentoring Scheme 2005 Update

The Mentoring Scheme has been chugging along nicely since March and is set on course for pamphlet publication of the ten mentees concerned for December this year.

Here are the mentor and mentee partnerships selected for this year's run of the scheme:

#### *Mentors*

**Robin Ford  
Debjani Chatterjee  
Bernadette Cremin  
Peter Campbell  
Paula Brown  
Eamer O'Keeffe  
Dave Russell  
Simon Jenner  
Roy Birch  
Alan Morrison**

#### *Mentees*

**Bear Tyler  
Gail Campbell  
Anne Cooper  
John Exell  
Margaret Carney  
Jane Fraser Esson  
Kate Evans  
Tim Pearson  
Geoff Clarke  
David Kessel**

Submissions are welcome for next year's run of the scheme and should be received no later than February 1st 2006. Please send in 15 poems to Alan Morrison to our main address or, ideally, by email to [alan@survivorspoetry.org.uk](mailto:alan@survivorspoetry.org.uk)

# Swindon Success

## Roy Birch on Survivors at the Swindon Festival

On Wednesday May 11, four members of Survivors' Poetry performed at the Swindon Festival of Literature. Simon Jenner and John O'Donoghue travelled down by train. Lucia and I drove down and met Simon and John at the railway station where we were all collected by a representative of the festival, none other than Matt Holland, the Festival Director. We arrived at the venue just in time to be interviewed for the local newspaper, prior to being rushed onto the stage.

The venue itself was a joy to the senses. The Old Railway Museum was built in Victorian times to house railway workers who claimed it was too cold and draughty, which I am sure it was. It looks like a miniature castle and is extremely cool inside, even in May. On the plus side it has wonderful acoustics, though they are a trifle "active", which necessitates a certain degree of voice pitch adjustment. As we did not have time to adjust, we were forced, as the professionals say, to "busk" it. And busk it we did, to great effect.

The performance itself was wondrous. An hour, split into units of 15 minutes each. I opened, speaking briefly about Survivors' Poetry and then read some of my own work. Simon followed with a reading of intellectual and literary strength that was as different from mine as it was from Lucia's compellingly beautiful music, which flowed like a crystal stream between the verdant banks of spoken word which surrounded it. Last but by no means least came John O'Donoghue, with a performance of huge intensity which left everyone wanting more.

A lunchtime slot (12.30) by an unknown entity is no guarantee of an audience. But there was one. And we bowled them over. Not to put too fine a lustre on events, they loved us. We were praised for the quality, diversity and tone of our performance, which, while serious, was at all times powerfully life-affirming. From the comments we received it seemed we had given them far more than they had expected from us.

Following the performance we distributed copies of *Poetry Express*, John and Simon parted with copies of their own poetry pamphlets and we collected more names for our ever-expanding mailing list. This was my first taste of the Literature Festival circuit. If all festivals are as good as Swindon, may the taste continue.

Many many thanks to Matt Holland and everyone else at the Swindon Festival who made us feel so at home and so valued as performers, survivors and human beings. It was a pleasure and a privilege to be involved.

# Describing *The Healer*

## Razz on Survivors' Tate Modern Workshop

**I**t was a blue day. Full of wind and chill. People being swift and purposeful. November, and an experiment was being born, a Survivors' Poetry workshop turning up at the Tate Modern Art Gallery (unrehearsed and unannounced) to do their thing. Sadly, one of our facilitators couldn't make it but Alison was there and stepped in to fill the gap. The usual thrill of panic –“Will anyone turn up?” But there was Gail and pretty soon Nigel, Andrew, Kate and Alison and we were away. Up the escalators and into the Surreal section. Melting watches and lobster telephones care of Salvador Dali; the artwork of Max Ernst and Rene Magritte, among many other wonderful dreamscapes and nightmares.

It was a black bronze statue by Rene Magritte that grabbed everyone's collective attention. Alison had suggested that we each write a poem together about a particular object or painting and this statue seemed to present itself like a volunteer. We sat around the statue and started writing with a few hints of encouragement from Alison to point us to exploring how we felt about it. I went up to look at what the piece was called and was deeply pleased to find out it was 'The Healer'. The statue itself was cast in black bronze and showed an image that Magritte became quite obsessed with towards the end of his life, painting it several times and employing a team to help him create the figure that sat in front of us now. Sadly, he died before the work was completed.

The image shows the 'Healer' as a cloaked figure in a cape wearing a broad-brimmed hat, sitting on some rocks. He wears tatty trousers and worn shoes. His cape is open to reveal a cage with an open door and doves inside the cage or stood on a perch just outside the cage door. A cane is poised in one hand. With a shock you suddenly realise the figure has no head and the entire torso consists of the cage with the doves.

After the exercise we found a quiet corner and read our poems back to each other. I was amazed at how each of us saw the same object so differently. Some people found the figure sinister; others found it friendly. Some saw the doves flying out; others saw the doves returning to roost.

Later, I invited people to wander around and find a painting or an object that spoke to them and to write down what it said. We arranged a rendezvous point and set off in various directions. For my own part I found a painting by Stanley Spencer. It was a painting depicting himself and his second wife. Apparently, he married her with the full knowledge that she was a practising lesbian and had no sexual feelings toward him at all. I've no idea

why she agreed to marry him. Maybe it was to give him a hard time. Their bond seems to have been their competitive conflicts that revolved around their art; that and their ability to deprive each other.

The painting is a stark metaphor of the state of their sexual relationship. It shows the two of them naked. She lying down, staring off into the distance. He crouching over her staring hungrily but despairingly at her languorous body. In the foreground is an uncooked leg of lamb which Spencer used as a metaphor for the unrequited nature of their union. The stove in the background has a decoration of hearts cut into the metal through which the light from the fire shines out, representing the fiery but fiercely contained nature of his passion. It inspired this poem:

### Measured Disgrace

The moment I saw you I knew you'd be gone  
Lost to my touch if I tried to hold on  
As miles of indifference give birth to your face  
I stare at your beauty in measured disgrace.

We posed for each other in good light and bad  
Put into those pictures the feelings we had  
To feel you so near me but so far away  
Brings the mocking of bells from our wedding day.

Now we're cold in the winter, in summer the same  
Hopelessly thinking why is it we came  
When we can't find the words to let go of the pain  
So we slip into silence... we're in it again.

Your nakedness beckons but no-one's at home  
My manhood just hangs there – an unanswered phone.  
My love, o my love how could it come to this  
The two of us naked but we don't even kiss.

Now the fire in the stove adds its light to the room  
And gives out some heat not a moment too soon  
As the meat for our dinner is left on the shelf  
As raw as our hearts as they reach somewhere else.

Now we're cold in the winter, in summer the same  
Hopelessly thinking why is it we came  
When we can't find the words to let go of the pain  
So we slip into silence - we're in it again.

Razz

I'm pleased to announce that poem has since become a song. This from a man who thought he couldn't write in the context of a workshop.

After we'd read back our new poems to each other the workshop was officially over. I must just mention an incredible piece of synchronicity that happened. Jean had turned up for the workshop but had been unable to find us. Undaunted, she and her friend wandered round the Tate and just happened to light upon Rene Magritte's 'The Healer' where she felt inspired to write a poem about it. We bumped into her and at the read-back she was able to read it out to us.

We finished up our day having pancakes and coffee in a café by the river that Survivors' Poetry generously gave us a budget for.

I'd like to finish this article by sharing with you the poems written about Rene Magritte's 'The Healer'.

### The Healer's Burden

[13/11/04 Tate Modern. Inspired by Magritte's 'The Healer' and St Paul's Cathedral in the background.]

The sculpture by Magritte called 'The Healer' stood before us...  
My inspiration bubbled from my brain, the voice said....  
We are all in a prison of our minds, the birds of our souls are trapped in the iron cage  
Of industry,  
Blackness of our ignorance - cold steel of our hearts, micro-chipped numbers control your spirit, digital dreamers chained to a t.v., G3 phones are the rulers of your fantasies, humanity enslaved by the same thing – BUY. CONSUME. BUY. CONSUME.  
What is the answer to the dilemma? The fierce urge in humanity to enslave itself and others,  
Wicked sisters and brothers, be saved; your salvation eludes you.  
In the righteousness of Christ - in the pit of your vice, cursed religion imprisons your soul.  
So fling open the doors of your cast-iron cage and release the birds of your soul, don't be afraid that there'll be nothing left but an empty hole.  
Or is that the problem? – Freedom scares you?

So you have to play the fool – like Charlie Chaplin, the comedy of sorrow.... Or.....Adolf Hitler; the hater of souls.  
The inspiration waned as I sat by the window, looking out of the Tate Modern, it's a lazy afternoon.  
Melting into the leather sofa, feeling relaxed and detached, the bustle of people around me entering and leaving the room.

Somebody leaves next to me, leaving space on the sofa...  
Two kids alight, a girl and a boy, a third follows and squeezes in next to me – they begin to talk, I overhear. They are talking about getting up in the morning, pop music and which actors they fancy...  
I close my eyes and become my inner teenager, reliving some moments from the past when I, like the kids next to me felt enthusiastic

Razz

### Solid as a Rock

They call you The Healer  
You sit there solid as a rock  
on your seat of rocks  
Upright, relaxed  
looking straight ahead  
only  
you have no head

Is that where the healing lies?

Beneath your hat  
the folds of your cloak open  
to reveal  
a cage with its birds

the cage door is open  
the birds are at peace  
They could fly away  
fly off  
but they don't....

The whole thing purrs with unbridled reassurance

The canvas bag  
the well-worn shoes  
the cane held firm at a casual angle  
in the casual air  
of your solid presence;  
The doves of your heart at peace  
with themselves  
at peace with you.  
People stop to stare  
they have to.  
Searching for that peace,  
for the healing that must come  
when the birds are at ease  
and the mind is quiet  
Magritte painted your image  
again and again.  
He kept turning to you  
for answers - or questions....

Razz

## The Healing

*Inspired by Rene Magritte's 'Le Therapeute' (1967)*

Oh. To be daring to be  
less cautious than a work of art  
in these rumbling waters.

I enter this aquarium for blood  
with the candour of a lovechild  
seeking multiple meanings.

The Tate Modern hosts all life forms:  
Pottery, bones, glass, hair, shells  
and collations of other inedibles.

Bourgeois' pods bulge into being  
as I thin. Living on the lean edge  
I liken women to a web of spiders.

(Their grass is greening  
on the side of canvas.)  
For those who don't just pass by

nothing is more furtive than paint  
on the tip of a brush  
applied with pointillist precision.

So which kind is candid art –  
Still birth, bruised fruit  
or an incision on the left cheek?  
St Paul's pinks in the distance.  
But in here the walls are made ductile  
by purple prose. And warmer blood

flows from the figure of 'The Healer'  
who invests the birds in my chest  
with the candour of charcoal.  
He shows life cannot be stilled  
by art for those who take flight  
from les petits morts.

*Jehane Owen*

## The Healer: Magritte

Magritte has made a faceless man:  
a man who travels with a heavy cage of doves,  
wearily and steadily releasing them as needed.

He is caught in the moment before he sets out:  
sitting square in hat and coat and worn shoes,  
he grips his bag and stick, gathering his potential.

*Alison Clayburn*

## Called The Healer

This sculpture that is called  
'The Healer'  
reminds me of a fireplace  
that has never been lit.  
The warm browns and golds  
of wood flakes  
would fill the sad cage  
of his body.  
Light a match  
and set the whole  
damn thing on fire.  
Then at least there'd  
be some kind of glow,  
some golden colour  
coming from the sad  
empty heart of this sculpture.  
Seems to me,  
it's about disillusion  
about the bleak modern world,  
about the artist searching  
and hoping for inspiration.  
He sits with sleeping birds  
in his heart,  
switched off from human emotion,  
he wears a hat, a cloak,  
clutches a stick and a bag.  
but all he does  
is show us his empty sadness,  
the sleeping shadows of his heart,  
the metal frame of his bearing.  
and, if he had a face  
within that cage, under that hat  
it would be weeping.

*Gail Campbell*

## The Healer

The cage of the healer  
has a door that is always open.

Injured birds with broken wings  
broken legs are free to come inside  
free to go.

But sheltering under his magical cloak  
the birds are more quickly  
restored to health.

He has given up his life  
and even his own body to heal  
these injured birds.

*Andrew Spencer*

# Photographs from the Edge

## Snapshots of Brendan Wilson's *Goodbye Asylum*

**B**uilt in the 1930s in Hertfordshire, Shenley Hospital was designed on the lines of a Victorian Asylum. The story has it that a wealthy Jewish entrepreneur, refused admission to the local (anti-semitic?) Golf Club, purchased the adjoining land and, as an act of revenge, bequeathed it for the building of a Mental Asylum.

At one time the hospital housed 2,000 patients. By 1998 only one ward remained occupied. Ward 20 was home to mainly elderly patients waiting to move to a smaller hostel in the community. The planned move was held up by the 'Not In My Backyard' protest of residents local to the hostel who did not want people with mental health problems living nearby. Shenley Hospital was being systematically demolished as housing was built on what was prime commuter land. The patients of Ward 20 were quite literally camped among the bulldozers and diggers. For some, this had been a home for over thirty years.

*Goodbye Asylum* is a photographic record of the last people to call Shenley Hospital their home. By treating his subject in a simple, direct, honest and sensitive manner, Brendan Wilson has created a work of unusual and poignant beauty and has also helped chronicle the end of a hugely unhappy chapter in the story of this nation's treatment of the mentally unwell.

That vulnerable, mentally distressed people should be confined, often for upwards of thirty years, in such a grim, unhappy place, is, in itself, appalling. That they should then have it quite literally torn down around them while still living in it (and for what? – financial gain) demonstrates only too graphically the overall lack of concern shown by the Mental Health Establishment for those for whom it exists to guard, protect and ultimately empower.

The photographs in this book are quite brilliant. Stark, simple, black and white, they substitute humanity for the posture and pretence that characterize so much photography, and in so doing tell the story of Ward 20 and the final days at Shenley far more eloquently than any words of mine could ever do.

I can only urge anyone reading this to seek out a copy of the book, as only then can you fully appreciate the wonderful visual feast that is Brendan Wilson's *Goodbye Asylum*. The photos and accompanying texts reproduced here will surely serve as a tantalising testament to Brendan Wilson's gifted insights through the lens as well as a striking justification of my enthusiasm.



photo by Brendan Wilson © 2000

*Ann was an enthusiastic conversationalist. She and I gravitated towards one another on my first visit to ward 20 and she wanted to talk. From childhood she had an interest in music, poetry and art. She played the viola as a child and won a scholarship to a good school.*

*Mental health problems ran in Ann's family. Her father, a well to-do dentist, was diagnosed with schizophrenia when Ann was a child. Unable to support his family Ann moved with her mother and siblings to her maternal grandmother's. She saw little of her father.*

*As a young woman Ann travelled. To Israel, Portugal and Spain. In Madrid she shared an apartment with a lover, she lived the life, learnt the language and worked. "They were good times" she recalls. "I was talented. Not academic but beautiful and charming. I could be with a husband in Spain or still in Israel but I wasted it."*

*It was on returning from a trip to Portugal in the mid 1970s that Ann first started to "hear voices" as she puts it. She went into hospital for short periods at first but was admitted in 1979 and stayed an inpatient for twenty years. "I eventually retreated from life" she says, "it was all too complicated. I've met some interesting people in hospital but it's not the same as being on the outside. It's another mode of living."*

Brendan Wilson © 2000

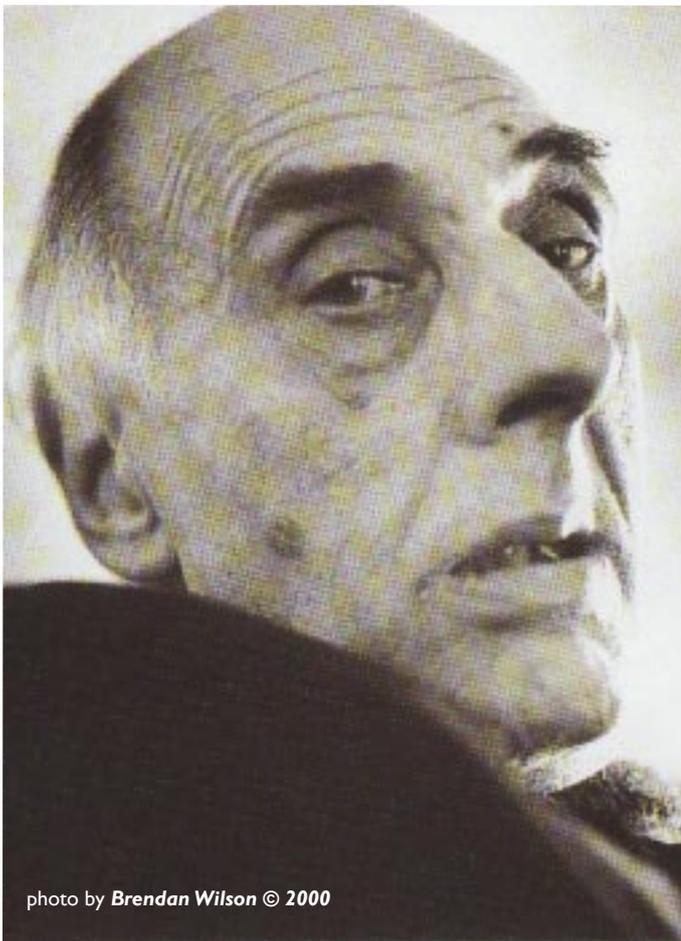


photo by **Brendan Wilson** © 2000

**T**hese striking tonal photographs by Brendan Wilson are not only beautiful compositions, they are profoundly important snapshots of those shut off from society for its own convenience and peace of mind.

When one considers society's own slippery grasp on sanity – queues of shoppers outside department stores on Sunday mornings; the solipsism of mobile-phone-glued pedestrians cleaning their dirty linen at raised pitches in public; the homeless rolled up in sleeping bags in porchways like corpses in body bags – suddenly these haunting, deeply penetrating images of people deemed 'mentally unfit' glare sharply and tellingly into focus.

Just what is sanity? one asks oneself while leafing through the harrowing faces in this effortlessly produced book. We are still in a dark age regarding 'mental illness' and Wilson presents us with these unsettling but beautifully honest portraits of some who struggle to make sense of themselves while incarcerated in obscurity.

As if trying to make sense of his subjects himself, Wilson includes the personal stories of some of Shenley Hospital's ex-residents (the institution having been poignantly and depressingly closed down), which make worthy accompaniments to this brilliant portfolio of troubled life in isolation.

*Alan Morrison*

*It wasn't until Walter was about to leave Shenley that we spoke. He had begun to tell me of the arguments within the group about the TV being on all the time. I had difficulty understanding him and I asked him where he was from. He told me he left Austria as a boy of 17 in 1939. He had been in Shenley since the 1960s. "I still don't have any citizenship," he kept saying. "I still don't have a passport."*

*Brendan Wilson* © 2000

**Goodbye Asylum – The last ward at Shenley Hospital**  
**By Brendan Wilson** published by **Headless Photos**  
**2000 ISBN 0-9538341-0-7**

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*Some pubs in the village of Shenley didn't allow customers from the hospital. Alan found one where they did.*

*He wasn't a drinker. He went for a pint or two to think about things. He didn't really belong with the other regulars. He wasn't in the usual flow of life and seemed uneasy, as if at any moment someone may turn on him.*

*At Christmas the landlady brought him some mince pies and Christmas cake. It seemed she went out of her way to include Alan, as if she knew how hard it was for him.*

*Brendan Wilson* © 2000



photo by **Brendan Wilson** © 2000

# The Magnificent Twelve

## The Sixties Press Anthology of Gregory Fellows' Poetry

This beautifully produced perfect-bound book brings together the variedly distinctive voices of twelve poets (some well-known, some not so well-known) awarded Leeds University Gregory Fellowships in the 50s, 60s and 70s, 'whose work deserves to be presented to a new generation of poetry readers' (Introduction). Never a truer word said: this book has been a delight to read and to review. It is also compiled alphabetically, which avoids the predictability of slothful chronology.

Tebb's introduction to **Martin Bell** tantalises the reader with some eye-catching, quoted epigrams – including the striking 'Unsumcasane as Poet Maudit':

King then, but of words only. There's the rub.  
Action is suspect and its end uncertain:  
Stuck in a job, or browned off in a pub,  
Or feted and then stabbed, behind a curtain...

Tebb adds to such epigrammatic poignancy by quoting Peter Porter at the end of the introduction, regarding an ACE grant Bell had been waiting for: "By the sort of irony common to poets' lives, the money arrived the day after he died." Bell's 'A Prodigal Son for Volpone' starts with a masterful first stanza:

Conspicuous consumption? Why, Volpone  
Would splash it around as if he could afford it,  
Wore himself out for his craft, a genuine phoney,  
Who only wanted, gloatingly, to hoard it.

This is followed by a striking image in the fifth line: 'His son had sprung like a mushroom, pale in an alley'. The seventh stanza also stood out for me: "Spend it faster? He'd pay on the nail for their answers./ A patron's deep-waving harvest was quick to be seen./ A sculptor in barbed-wire, a corps of Bulgarian dancers,/ Three liberal reviews and a poetry magazine.'

Martin Bell wrote with an enviable lucidity and mastery of rhyme and metre – to my mind then, a true poet. And there is erudition in his work too: the collective noun for Bulgarian dancers is a 'corps'! I need not add to my praise of Bell's epigrammatic gifts, except to quote his 'Prospect 1939 (for Campbell Matthews)' in full:

'Life is a journey' said our education,  
And so we packed, although we found it slow.  
At twenty-one, left stranded at the station  
We've heaps of luggage and nowhere to go.

The poetry of **Thomas Blackburn** has a difficult act to follow: namely the introduction charting his extraordinarily troubled life, penned here powerfully by his daughter, Julia Blackburn. Indeed, this biographical

extract is almost worth the price of the book on its own. One cannot help but be deeply moved as well as morbidly entranced by such details as this: 'His (Blackburn's) Anglican priest father was of Mauritian descent and haunted by feelings of sexual guilt. One effect of his racial inferiority complex was to scrub the young Blackburn's face with peroxide to lighten his complexion.' 'Blackburn', then, is a cruelly apt surname for someone whose father used to literally try and burn the black off his skin.

Blackburn's deftly lyrical, rhyming/half-rhyming poems spring brilliant surprises in their passage: 'And yet all images for this completion/ Somehow bypass its real ghostliness/ Which can't be measured by a sweating finger,/ Or any salt and carnal nakedness./ Although two heads upon a single pillow/ May be the metaphor that serves it best,/ No lying down within a single moment/ Will give the outward going any rest;/ It's only when we reach beyond our pronouns/ And come into ourselves that we are blest' ('The Lucky Marriage'); 'We learn no mortal creature is/ The end of love's intensities' ('No Single Station'); 'With 'This you did when sober, and that when drunk',/ The dirty linen I simply cannot drop,/ Since 'Thomas Blackburn' is stitched by the laundry mark' ('A Small Keen Wind'); 'I watch a cormorant pluck/ Life from a nervous sea' ('Trewarmett for Julia Blackburn'). Stripping four line flourishes from some of his longer poems, one can see Blackburn's mastery of metre and epigrammatic gifts can stand up against the mighty Bell's:

His shadow monstrous on the palace wall.  
That swollen boy, fresh from his mother's arms,  
The odour of her body on his palms,  
Moves to the eyeless horror of the hall.  
(Oedipus')

No wonder as earth shook and giant fingers  
Groped slowly inward through the forest trees,  
His brothers, lost within their own phantasma,  
Went headlong into blindness on their knees.

This is the younger son's most precious secret;  
And may we always hear the trapped bird cry  
And be rewarded by a naked vision  
When our appalling manias shake the sky.  
(The Younger Son for G Wilson Knight')

**Wayne Brown** is slightly more avant-garde and imagistic: 'Rain puckers the ocean' ('On the Coast'); 'The sea's heard it all before' ('The Tourists'). 'Cat Poem' curls up reassuringly with a historically indestructible feline motif: 'The morning after the bomb/ Was dropped, I woke early./ Silence past stillness, the city in ruins –/ My hand touched fur and the cat purred'.

'Light and Shade' proffers a final arresting image: 'This poem is a wall./ Or maybe a string/ Of mountains, out of whose blue haze/ May yet come (if I am patiently dumb)/ Hannibal, swaying widely as his elephant sways.'

Kevin Crossley-Holland's poetry is in a similar vein to Brown, quite varied in style, often pushing the sense impression boat out, as in 'Dusk, Burnham-Overy-Staithe': 'Then across the marsh it comes,/ the sound as of an endless/ train in a distant cutting,/ the god working his way back,/ butting and shunting,/ reclaiming his territory'.

John Heath-Stubbs is represented by the two best poems of his I have ever read, 'For David Gascoyne', and 'Letter to David Wright, on his sixtieth birthday', which, despite its arguably exclusive subjects and flat language, succeeds through stated – rather than suggested – images in begging one's attention like a small, intimate old-world detail:

Last year I crossed the meridian of sixty.  
Now, David, it's your turn. Old friend, we first met  
In your Oxford lodgings, those in the High  
With the Churchillian landlady, which afterwards became  
A kind of traditional caravanserai  
For poets – most of them doomed, of course.  
Sidney Keyes' officer's cane  
Remained in the hall umbrella stand  
Long after his mouth was stopped with Numidian dust.  
Allison stayed there on leave, a bird of passage  
Migrating towards his Italian death.  
And there was William Bell –  
Not war, but a mountain had earmarked him.

I risk a stoning from Heath-Stubbs experts by suggesting that there is something of John Betjeman in his occasionally arresting, stated observations such as, 'And then retirement – a spectacled, middle-aged lady/ Lecturing sensibly on interpretation' ('Casta Diva, in memory of Maria Callas'). Thanks to Tebb and Chatterjee for introducing me to Heath-Stubbs' less-hyped qualities.

Pearse Hutchinson's 'Málaga' is a deft piece written entirely in couplets. On the other hand, it will take me some time to work out the tantalising metaphor of 'The Miracle of Bread and Fiddles': 'We were so hungry/ we turned bark into bread./ But still we were hungry,/ so we turned clogs into fiddles'.

Tebb gives a lengthy introduction to James Kirkup's poetry, highlighting his formative admiration of the Sunderland-born poet and, as with Bell's forward, one can understand this from sporadic, well-chosen poetic extracts before even reaching his selection: 'There is a new world, and a new man/ Who walks amazed that he so long/ Was blind and dumb, he who runs towards the sun/ Lifts up a trustful face in skillful song/ And fears no more the darkness where/ his day began' ('There is a New Morning').

At this point Tebb (unimpeachably, I feel) points out something Cyril Connolly said: 'all lyrical poetry is ultimately unanalysable'. Ironically of course, arguably no other poem in the English language demands analysis as much as Kirkup's notorious 'The Love That Dares To Speak Its Name' – if nothing else, in order to try and salvage some Christian-moral justification for its extraordinarily relentless religio-pornographic detail culminating in the centurion narrator masturbating into the open wounds of Christ's corpse. Be as open-minded as one might, such a mercilessly excessive poem is inevitably going to incur the wrath of the Church. And this it did of course, when the magazine it appeared in in 1977, *Gay News*, and its editor Denis Lemon, were prosecuted under Britain's 1697 Blasphemy Act. This

“ By the irony common to poets' lives, the money arrived the day after he died ”

poem then was not only controversial for its tricky mixing of sex and the Saviour (a veritable scatological eschatology), but also for its homoerotic necrophilia – a treble-blow (no pun intended). Even the most faintly Christian of readers is likely to feel challenged head on by this uncompromisingly visceral piece while at the same time feeling compelled to fathom its meaning. If it is trying to make a statement on behalf of homosexual Christians, why should a gay man be sexually aroused at his Saviour's corpse any more than a straight woman? Perhaps it is Kirkup's most 'unanalysable' poem of all.

This poem should not overshadow Kirkup's superior output, such as 'Summertime in Leeds' with its marvellously chip-shouldered, sardonic social observations: 'And larger stores, where, with their great friends,/ They treat themselves, the hoydens of the fashionable set,/ To cakes, tea, talk, and suburban scandal of a cigarette.'

The witty and 'you-know-you've-all-been-there' poem 'To an Old Lady Asleep at a Poetry Reading, Of Dame Edith Sitwell's 'Still Falls the Rain'', shows Kirkup is not afraid of the long line nor of the prosaic as a tool of the anecdotal. 'In a London Schoolroom' is a powerful social poem, allowing a little light to peak through the shutters into a (one presumes) state school classroom: 'There is no answer/ to the question they have raised no hand to ask,/ no cloudless holiday that would release/ life that is sick, hope that was never there,/ no task make plain the words they cannot learn to trust.' Kirkup's poetic greatness could almost be pinned on one brilliantly tangible line from the same poem: 'The tree of hands and faces tosses in the gales of talk'.

Paul Mills' poems are direct and inimitable in pithily-spun detail, as 'The Common Talk' demonstrates: 'No clay pot in the garden without fag-end./ Never any corner without a sock./ Telling the time by what's gone off in the fridge'. The biting polemic of 'News from Nowhere' is striking: 'What's happened/ to this marriage of innocence now that America/ Has its teeth in the sheets, is ripping them up,/ searching for stains, truculence, depression?'.

Peter Redgrove's selection kicks off with a triumphant stride in the excellently athletic 'Expectant Father':

So far gone on with the child a-thump inside;  
A buffet through the air from the kitchen door  
that sticks  
Awakes a thumb-size fly. Butting the re-butting  
window-pane  
It shouts its buzz, so I fling the glass up, let it fly  
Remembering as it skims to trees, too late to swat,  
That flies are polio-whiskered to the brows  
With breeding-muck, and home  
On one per cent of everybody's children.

This poem is alive. Next comes 'The Storm', which describes a wind-tossed tree with such beautiful lines as '...fluffed up, boughs chafing slightly', and the following:

Somebody is throttling that tree  
By the way it's threshing about;  
I'm glad it's no one I know, or me,  
The head thrust back at the throat.

Green hair tumbled and cracking throat.  
His thumbs drive into her windpipe,  
She cannot cry out,  
Only swishing and groaning: death swells ripe,

Redgrove is supremely descriptive: in 'For No Good Reason' he makes his mood compellingly tangible: '...gloomy, irascible, selfish, among the split timbers/ Of somebody's home, and the bleached rags of wallpaper'. 'Old House' seethes with personified metaphors: 'I lay in agony of imagination as the wind/ Limped up the stairs and puffed on the landings,/ Snuffled through floorboards from the foundations,/ Tottered, withdrew into flaws, and shook the house.'

This imagistic, almost surreal flair surges on throughout the piece: '...bare arms through a dank trapdoor to shut off water/ Or windows filmed over the white faces of children:/ This is no place to bring children to/ I cried in a nightmare of more/ Creatures shelled in bone-white,/ Or dead eyes fronting ermine faces'. His 'Anniversaire Triste' offers a tantalisingly animistic first stanza:

A piano plays my aunt in a lacquered room;  
The wood and ivory lend a dead man sound;  
Grinning with grilles, Samurai armour stands  
Booming a little with the afterlife.

John Silkin offers us no pause for breath with his comparable imagistic gifts as demonstrable in lines such as 'And at night, like children,/ Without anxiety, their consciousness,/ Shut with white petals' ('A Daisy'); 'Christ so imbues them/ these workers in Frosterly marble,/ their fossil columns, they drop/ their Christianity/ in heaps of languid clothing/ and 'slices like generations of boys' mouths,/ this boy, Dick, even/ now, cramming his/ with white, thick unbuttered bread' ('Durham bread'); 'A fly without shadow and without thought' ('Caring for Animals').

## “ all lyrical poetry is ultimately unanalysable ”

Bill Turner's 'Homely Accommodation, Suit Gent' is a beautifully descriptive bedsit paean portraying a landlady, Mrs Haggelbroth, with her 'pleated smile/ and plucked eyebrows' whose tyrannous control of her boarding-house of 'saddlesoap atmosphere', stuffed full with 'The souls/ of miscellaneous gentleman, welded to wicker chairs', almost extends to a naturalistic witchery: 'Sunlight was discouraged: it fades the draperies.'

Turner's poems are sprinkled generously with truisms such as 'The trick with cats is to out-ignore/ them' ('Rose Harem'). He also offers us an arresting paradoxical opener to 'Progress Report': 'The future isn't what it used to be./ What if the past turns out to be fake.'

This hugely enjoyable and inspiring selection concludes with the late David Wright, whose superb poem 'A Visit to a Poet' I quote in full:

Recently I went to visit a poet in jail  
(A place which in two ways reminded me of hell,  
Being both hygienic and a dominion  
Where everyone's responsibility has gone),  
One who, justly imprisoned for injuring the State  
By not joining the Army, preferring to try to write  
Verses unlikely to sell, in abnormally good  
Health, a new suit of clothes, and with regular food,  
Cut off from suppliers of harmful alcoholic drink,  
With paper and pen, with a room, and with time  
to think,  
Everything, in fact, unnecessary to the Muse,  
Suffers barren confinement on the outskirts of Lewes.

Wright offers the most plain, sparsely descriptive poetry in this book, but this is not a criticism as his engagingly straight-forward style perfectly fits his candid infantries on the happy-sad, peculiar lot of the poet. Indeed, his self-deprecating auto-obituary in verse, 'A Funeral Oration', consolidates this caustic style: 'Academic achievements: BA, Oxon (2nd class);/ Poetic: the publication of one volume of verse,/ Which in his thirtieth year attained

him no fame at all,/ Except among intractable poets, and a small/ Lunatic fringe congregating in Soho pubs.' This poem ends with a breathtaking final couplet: 'His life, like his times, was appalling: his conduct, odd;/ He hoped to write one good line; died believing in God'.

Finally, also worthy of note are Tebb's colourful, inimitable introductions, which intrigue the reader to study the following poems of each respective poet; and Chaterjee's informative biographical notes and meticulous bibliographies. This book, both in the poetry, and in the comprehensive records of the related poets it contains, is a great achievement, an extremely important anthology of a group of true poets, and surely deserving of a prize.

Alan Morrison

**S**omewhere around 1954 poetry went North. During the war it had concentrated in Oxford, Cairo and, famously, Soho. In fact the best poetry of the 1940s generation (those born after c. 1917) had been written by a generation of Oxford poets: John Heath-Stubbs (b. 1918), Keith Douglas, David Wright and Geoffrey Matthews (all b. 1920), Drummond Allison (b. 1921), Sidney Keyes, Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis and Alan Ross (all b. 1922), William Bell (b. 1924), John Wain (b. 1925) Elizabeth Jennings (b. 1926), Martin Seymour-Smith (b. 1928), Al Alvarez (b. 1929), Geoffrey Hill and George Macbeth (both b. 1932).

On or about 8th November 1941, British poetry changed. Sidney Keyes, the bright, slightly neo-Romantic hope of Oxford poetry, published an anthology with Routledge, *Eight Oxford Poets*, trying to prove this vein was the dominant one. He failed because even his inclusions disagreed with him. Philip Larkin, then in his early Audenesque phase, never forgave him for his own exclusion and the whole axis of post-War British poetry turned on his crusade with Robert Conquest to exclude Sidney Keyes and the Forties ('a decade which can praise the poetry of Sidney Keyes is no decade for me') and 'expunge it from song,' as Drummond Allison would put it. Because of the later neo-Romantic period and Apocalyptic descent of some of the later 1940s, it really was a decade made for a *Target For Tonight*. This skewed the reputation of several major poets and fragmented the history and continuity of the most gifted group of poets since Auden et al, one which has never been rivalled, even by the Cambridge Modernists of the 1960s–1970s.

Our perception has been occluded: of Larkin's and Hill's origins connected with Jennings's really extraordinary poetry and Douglas', Allison's and Keyes's belatedly recognised achievements. What has all this got to do with the Gregory Fellows? For a start, John Heath-Stubbs had connections with Leeds University. He knew Bonamy Dobree and Douglas Jefferson, who I had the honour to know as well. The place was my first alma

mater. Heath-Stubbs then recommended Geoffrey Hill fresh from Oxford as lecturer at Leeds, and Hill with the two professors began to shift the axis of non-Movement (and even Movement) poetry up north, where arguably much of it has remained ever since – with or without help from Bloodaxe. A whole tradition of creative writing at Leeds followed, though Hill himself was formidable and bloody difficult to please; to put it mildly.

It's good to remember that Tony Harrison's first volume, *Earthworks* by – yes – T.W. Harrison, was published at the School of English in 1964. I know, because I think I bought an almost unique copy from Professor Arthur Ravenscroft's library in 1990. It bears the teeth of the Leeds Gregory aesthetic. *Poetry and Audience*, the finest continuous University poetry magazine started up in 1955, is still going.

There is a recognisable commonality running through this anthology's poets, superbly apostrophised in the above review. Other Leeds strands suggest themselves. Leeds embraced diversity long before the term was ever invented and **Wayne Brown** is one of many poets like Wole Soyinka, whom Leeds has nurtured both as student and much later as Returning Visiting Poet ('our WS').

The survivors of this Oxford group, from Heath-Stubbs to Geoffrey Hill, mostly found their way to Leeds. Matthews got as far as Reading, where he became the greatest Shelley scholar of the century and darkened as a poet when his Marxism did. But some of the qualities of this group remained. Audenesque engagement, lyrical savagery, a return to metre for some of its political bite, and a tantalising surrealism drifting in from the 1940s.

There is no such thing as the real world but often University environments are excluded from that vestigial praise. In America for instance one could argue that the only real sane life is currently being lived at Universities and other liberal enclaves surrounded by Rednecked dawns of the living dead. The point is that American academic poets aren't distinguishable from poets per se because they are one and the same endangered species. Here diversity is a little kinder in one sense, though University poets like **Martin Bell (1918–1978)** at Southampton for instance, were often slightly stigmatised for having fled there. Bell was one of a generation (that includes Matthews and Ian Fletcher) who honed a tautened sense of occasion in their verse forms, argued tightly and bloody-mindedly, and often stayed political. Cambridge was different and one day I'll come back to Cambridge. But Bell was curiously underrated in his lifetime, lost out on a decent Collected Poems, and died as poets usually managed to do, just before he was recognised, and then of course he was forgotten. Bell's poetry is a curious mixture of tautness and an occasional litanic diffusion; try 'Reasons for Refusal': 'Everyone has a list of dead in war;/ Regrets most of them, e.g.' – and then

supplies the list diluted with anecdote, sharply sawn off with epigram. 'Senillo Passes, Singing' furnishes an almost occasional child's verse, but Bell's real powers lie in the poem's quoted above like 'A Prodigal Son for Volpone' and 'Prospect 1939'. Bell and the next poet under consideration, Thomas Blackburn, have really deserved a Collected for 30 years. Blackburn at least has got his.

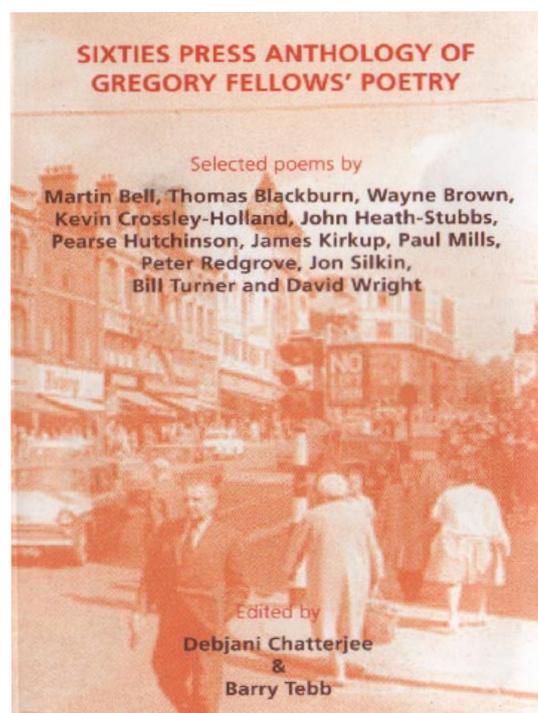
**B**lackburn (1916–1977) was one of the pre-War Cambridge poets who suffered a breakdown from studying at the place and migrated to Durham. Blackburn is a major discovery. His poetry, like many of his generation, joyfully returns to Audenesque virtuoso rhyme schemes; in his case, these are often quite simple ones to offset the density and power of his writing. In another anthology Tebb is compiling, Blackburn figures generously and I can't resist mentioning 'The Breaking Point', an unhappily apt title that dwells on a brief dream narrative without becoming cleverly elliptical to suggest a meaning that doesn't exist; rather it's a metaphysical meditation on the implications of its given theme: its meaning or meaninglessness is urgently, desperately attended to. This selection begins and ends with marriage. 'The Lucky Marriage' and 'A Small Keen Wind' have already been quoted above. These are the most localised of Blackburn's capacity to dwell on the curious metaphysics of something that should be utterly straightforward. 'The Lucky Marriage' begins, for instance, 'I often wonder as the fairy-story/ Tells how the little goose-girl found her prince,/ or of the widowed Queen who stops her carriage/ And threw a rose down to the gangling dunce/ What is the meaning of this lucky marriage/ Which lasts forever, it is often said/ Because I know too well such consummation/ Is not a question of a double bed/ Or of the wedding bells or royal procession/ With twenty major-domos at its head'. Blackburn's capacity to strip down myth into a single knot of attention is convincing because the metaphor holds as far as the kitchen sink. In this kind of writing, he absorbs the mythological streak found in neo-Romanticism (particularly Cambridge) and grittier poets like Drummond Allison. The realism is probed with a kind of Jungian doggedness which gets mistaken for myth and escapism. It's not.

**Heath-Stubbs** is another who probes a similar vein with a more laconic and improvisatory metre. His best writing often involves birds (as David Wright recognises in his dedicatory poem), whether of 'The Timeless Nightingale' or his recent titled collection, *The Return of the Cranes*. His latest verse has a fantastically improvisatory feel, flowing in and out of anecdote and migrating towards a sunny Italian death. His earlier work seemed full of a benign version of the Leopardi he translated in the 1940s, purged of Leopardi's own bitterness. His elegies to and for other poets are among his finest because Heath-Stubbs' world revolves on the nodule axis of friendship and an astonishing memory (see Drummond Allison

memorialised in the poem to their mutual friend David Wright, above; or those to Blunden and Gascoyne). There isn't room (I've written extensively about Heath-Stubbs elsewhere and will return to him) to focus on all the poets in the anthology when it's been so ably laid out above. **David Wright**, who told Seymour-Smith that both of them were best at their funniest, and who both regretted it, is another memorialist far terser, and who has at least had adequate notice. 'A Funeral Oration' inspired Heath-Stubbs' most famous elegy on himself. Wright tends to the pith, Heath-Stubbs to the bitter citrus.

**Pearse Hutchinson's** lyrical exactitude, which often runs to length, **Wayne Brown's** superb inflection and direction from Derek Walcott (he has written too little to be well known), **James Kirkup's** famously abrasively amused eye, **Paul Mills's** more quotidian but hard-edged meditations, and the extraordinary **Peter Redgrove's** refraction through his own training as a scientist into a lyrically exact Cambridge Modernism – all these and the more threadlike poems of **John Silkin** and the poems of **Bill Turner** (somewhere between Norman Cameron and Sean O'Brien), deserve a wide readership. Of this group, Turner, also deploying rhyme, to sharpen his conference-despising poetry, is perhaps the most interesting. There are six poets here who really deserve rehabilitation and another three who, through Carcanet, are enduring it.

Simon Jenner



**Sixties Press Anthology of Gregory Fellows' Poetry**  
**Edited by Debjani Chatterjee & Barry Tebb**  
**Published by Sixties Press, £9.99 is available**  
**from Sixties Press, 89 Connaught Rd, Sutton,**  
**Surrey SMI 3PJ**

# Holding Back the Years

## John Horder on the new play by Alan Bennett

Alan Bennett, much loved 71-year-young playwright and Camden Town activist, doesn't do interviews. His new play, *The History Boys*, about a class of Oxbridge scholarship candidates in the Eighties, has been packing audiences into the Lyttleton (at the National) for over a year. It ends for the time being at the end of this month.

When I spoke to Alan, helmeted down to his eyebrows on his bicycle, near where he has lived for many lifetimes in Gloucester Crescent, he reminded me of the humble Mr Mole from his enchanting stage adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows* at the National a few years back. He is an enchanter down to his very fingertips.

He was delighted that I was interviewing Samuel Barnett, the actor, and not him. In his own words: "I'm too much in the papers at the moment", mostly from journalists who regularly comb his very funny diary pieces for gossip in the paper he helped to found, *The London Review of Books*, as a much more fascinating alternative to *The Times Literary Supplement*, which it is.

Sam plays the gay and isolated eighteen-year-old Posner, who has elderly Jewish parents, in the performance of a lifetime. His "unbroken voice" is at the heart of this highly emotional and funny play.

How had the idea of *The History Boys* first come to Alan? At the end of the introduction to the text, Alan records his disappointment that Nicholas Hytner (the play's director) had not spoken of singing in a boys' choir with the Halle under Barbirolli when he was at Manchester Grammar School. This was when he was being interviewed by Michael Berkeley on BBC Radio 3's *Private Passions*, an up-market version of *Desert Island Discs*.

"One of the records Nick chose was Ella Fitzgerald singing 'Bewitched' with its original Lorenz Hart lyrics, and it first occurred to me at the time how theatrical this would sound sung by a boy with an unbroken voice. I was no singer though. I had been very slow to grow up, my own voice still unbroken when I was well past sixteen. So one of the history boys as first written was a boy much as I had been, a child in a class of young men.

"Looking back, I see those years from fourteen to sixteen as determining so much that I would later wish away, particularly a sense of being shut out (socially) that I have never entirely lost. Watching Sam Barnett playing the part of a boy who is young for his age, I wince to hear my own voice at sixteen."

I wasn't able to enjoy a sexual identity I could call my

own at the age of eighteen. I strongly suspect that many in the audience would have said the same thing. Perhaps this explains why I have never been so moved by a play in the whole of my life. I have never before experienced such a deeply nourishing relationship between actors and audience. This wasn't just the result of Alan being so well loved by so many people for his vulnerability, openness, warmth, loveability and intuitive insights into emotionally illiterate men during the past five thousand years, although all of that came into it.

The minds, hearts and souls of *The History Boys* are fed by Hector (Richard Griffiths), who peppers his classes with lines of poetry from Stevie Smith and WH Auden, as well as feeling up boys on the back of his motorbike. They all know exactly what they are in for, but still go along with him. He is judged 'useless' by the exams-results-loving Headmaster (Clive Merrison), who appoints the more 'useful' Irwin (Stephen Campbell Moore) to improve the boys' presentation.



When Irwin appears in a later incarnation as a television presenter of history programmes, he is in a wheelchair. This tells us everything emotionally we need to know about why he has never been able to express his feelings to the good-looking Dakin (Dominic Cooper). By contrast, Posner has been so transparently in love with Dakin throughout the play, it never occurs to him to hide his feelings from himself or any of his classmates.

Sam Barnett as Posner reminded me of what the unhugged German poet Rilke said in the *Duino Elegies* about the beauty and terror of what we are still not able to bear. He catches his vulnerability, openness, intelligence, sensitivity and humour. Not least, he has a divine way of sending himself up when he suddenly bursts into song from time to time.

Posner's future is heartbreakingly outlined by Mrs Lintott, another of his teachers obsessed with getting the facts

right (Frances de la Tour), in the last minute of the play: “He lives alone in a cottage he has renovated himself, has an allotment and periodic breakdowns. He haunts the local library and keeps a scrapbook of the achievements of his one-time classmates and has a host of friends... though only on the internet, and none in his right name or even gender. He has long since stopped asking himself where it went wrong.”

Perhaps a hugging friendship or relationship with another man was too much to expect for Posner. If Alan had first mulled over these eight lines from Alden Nowlan’s

heart-opening *Between Tears and Laughter - Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe), perhaps he might not have had to dispatch him to such a bleak emotional oblivion so precipitously:

It’s what we all want, in the end,  
to be held, merely to be held,  
to be kissed (not necessarily with the lips,  
for every touching is a kind of kiss).

Yes, it’s what we all want, in the end,  
not to be worshipped, not be admired,  
not to be famous, not to be feared,  
not even to be loved, but simply to be held.

Nowlan here expresses a more universal truth than Stevie Smith’s ‘Not Waving But Drowning’, one of the most insightful poems on the human condition ever written; or anything Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes ever wrote for that matter. Stevie, Philip, Ted\* and Alan share much common emotional ground: the touch-deprivation that famous writers born in Yorkshire never think to seriously challenge. [\*In 1965 John Horder interviewed Stevie Smith, Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes for *The Guardian*.]

Wasn’t Posner entitled to enjoy one on-going hugging friendship/relationship? I would have thought so. When I confronted Alan Bennett regarding Posner’s hugless future, he simply said to me: “It’s only a play.” I disagree. It is a heart-warming experience of the most amazing sort. Alan amazes himself constantly throughout.

***The History Boys* by Alan Bennett is published by Faber and Faber, £8.99**

**World copyright 2005 John Horder**

**John Horder is currently working on a pamphlet, *The Hugging Child*, for Waterloo Press. His *Collected Poems* are forthcoming from the Menard Press to coincide with his 70th birthday.**

*Previous page: Alan Bennett. Below: Geoffrey Streatfield (Irwin), Sacha Dhawan (Akthar), Russell Tovey (Rudge), James Corden (Timms), Samuel Barnett (Posner) and Jamie Parker (Scripps). Photo: Stephen Cummiskey © 2005. Thanks to Lucinda Morrison of the National Theatre for her kind permission to use these photos.*

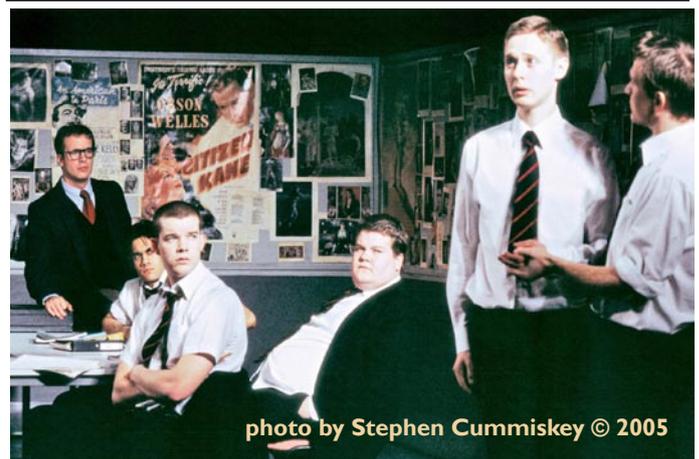


photo by Stephen Cummiskey © 2005

**“***How had Sam, a “marvellously truthful and perceptive actor” according to Nick Hytner, first fallen in love with Posner? He had barely left LAMDA (London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art) when, first working with Nick, he had mastered the craft of puppetry in Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials. I only plucked up the courage to ask about his extraordinary empathy for the part at the end of a 45 minute interview. He gave me some of the answer later in an email:*

*I knew as soon as I read the first draft of **The History Boys** that I wanted to play Posner. I was attracted to the character’s vulnerability and openness and the predicament of unrequited love that he finds himself in. It was not so long ago that I was an eighteen-year-old boy, falling in love all over the place and getting nothing in return, and I think that most people can relate to that as an experience at some time in their lives, especially as a teenager.*

*Posner is such an intelligent character, with both intellectual and emotional intelligence which is beyond his years. I wanted the challenge of getting back into that mindset of being an eighteen year old boy at school, on the cusp of adult life in every way. Also, on a very basic level, it was clear that Posner had some hilariously funny lines given to him by Alan.*

*I’ve always loved doing comedy and the challenge for me is in giving the character a real heart and not just playing for laughs. It was only when the play was put in front of an audience that I began to realise that Posner carries some of the emotional heart of the play. I was amazed at the reaction of the audience and at how, after seeing the show, people would come up to me and tell me how much they related to Posner. It at least helps me feel that I am on the right lines with him.*”

Samuel Barnett  
Posner in **The History Boys**

# Reviews Reviews Reviews Reviews

## Mainstream, Slipstream, Modernist, Obscuritan

*minD gRouNd*

Newsletter 25, Spring 2005

Reviewed by Roy Birch

Six sides of A4 stapled together at one corner, *minD gRouNd* is about as simply put together as a magazine can be. It is filled with poetry, pictures and information. Of the poems, I was particularly affected by 'Garden of Memory' by Geoff Stevens, 'Chan-Zu Did Not Eat' by Stephen Owen, 'Foreplay' by A. Lee Firth ('Last night,/ The horizon seemed/ So much further away') and his beautifully imagistic 'Day Planner': 'Midwinter morning/ Northern industrial town./ Some of us see the soot,/ Others catch the snow flakes'.

*minD gRouNd* welcomes contributions and will consider for publication, material of any sort from survivors: drawings and written pieces, poems, articles, collage, book/magazine reviews, letters and feedback. Pieces may be signed or unsigned. *minD gRouNd* is funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and published by Sunnyside Community Gardens. "A good cause is a good cause. Connect and survive." Connect with this one.

*Dropping Ecstasy with the Angels* by Dee Rimbaud, (bluechrome publishing, £7.99, ISBN 1-904781-06-3); *Bread in the Wilderness and Other Poems* by Anthony Cooney (Salzburg University Press, £4, ISBN 3-7052-0122-0); *Lou-Lou* by Selima Hill (Bloodaxe Books, £7.95, ISBN 1-85224-671-5)  
Reviewed by Debjani Chatterjee

The title of Dee Rimbaud's collection *Dropping Ecstasy with the Angels* and the strange cover of his book with its cut-out photographs of people, faces, eyes, cacti, a flower, a watch dial, a mobile telephone and a rural landscape – all presented by the author himself in a collage effect – tell his readers about the nature of these poems. This book is, in some senses, a throwback to the Sixties. In an autobiographical note, the author informs that his 'formative years' in the 1960s were shaped by seeing those of his preceding generation 'tune in, turn on and drop out'. We learn that Rimbaud encountered 'barefoot hippies, Hare Krishna [sic] disciples, tramps, acid casualties, communists, artists and all other manner of subversives'.

He writes with pride of 'the whacked out hippie who lives in my heart'. His poems celebrate the misfits in society: 'You shaman, you seer,/ You mad adventurer,/ You intoxicated fool:/ Did you laugh/ Or did you cry out/ When the underworld/ Finally enveloped you?' ('Asylum Antechamber').

The same poem, 'Asylum Antechamber', one of Rimbaud's more eloquent pieces, questions the drug addict: 'Did the rainbows taste sweeter/ As you tightrope-walked along the edge?' In this poem (and elsewhere), sanity and insanity appear to swap places; the lunatic asylum is 'the sanctuary of terminal sanity' and it is 'everyday normality' that is strange and melancholy-inducing.

*Dropping Ecstasy with the Angels* has five sections, each prefaced by a surreal and interesting illustration by the poet. The sections have no balance to them: 'The Vision of Angels', which is the third section, has twenty-two poems, while 'Proud Censors of the Arts', the final section, has just one. Nor does there appear to be a distinctive theme to identify the poems in each section. And these are often strange poems. Religion is a major influence on Rimbaud's poetry and he explores the world's faiths in poems like 'Buddha Poem', 'Brahman' and the long prose poem 'Spirit of Iona'. The crazed world of the drug addict is another dominant subject – Rimbaud writes with knowledge and fashions poems of pain and occasional lyrical beauty.

Religion, at least the Roman Catholic version, is also an important influence on the poetry in 'Bread in the Wilderness and Other Poems'. These poems have a liturgical quality: 'Behold the Word:/ Behold the handmaid of the Lord/ according to thy Word,/ Thy Word which is made flesh/ Thy Word which dwells amongst us (from 'Joys').

Anthony Cooney loves the language of the Bible and of Catholicism, and borrows unashamedly from them, not only in English translation but also extensively from Latin and offers no footnotes for the uninitiated.

The titles of many of his poems reveal also the inspiration of T. S. Eliot's 'The Wasteland' and *Four Quartets*. In the Introduction, Cooney describes the latter as "the major poetic work of this century... because of the 'bigness' of its concepts – time and eternity – and the innovations of technique". It is the 'big' themes that attract Cooney and one has to applaud his ambition, even if he doesn't, I think, pull it off.

As regards technical innovation, there is an interesting experiment in 'Esto Perpetua' with its nine stanzas in an unusual font print. Cooney's trick of inserting large gaps within lines is repeated again – most successfully – in 'Biology Exam - Specimen 2 - Frog: Dead'. Its four small stanzas each have autonomy and something of the jewel-like quality of the Japanese haiku. Indeed, the opening

stanza especially reminds me of Basho's famous haiku about a frog. 'Penny for the Old Pound', with its message of cyclic renewal, is nicely crafted, and I enjoyed Cooney's three 'Chinese Prints' poems with their Eastern wisdom.

The narrator of Selima Hill's *Lou-Lou* floats in the unstable world of mental breakdown. Each poem is offered as a diary entry, with titles such as 'Night-room August 12th', 'Day-room September 7th' and 'Toilet September 17th', but the fact that no year is mentioned gives them a timeless quality – the time and even the location of the asylum could be almost anytime anywhere. The poems are invariably short; 'Office September 5th', for instance, is just a couplet: 'Sister is the only one whose touch/ my skin can bear to be the object of.'

'Office September 5th' is a good example of a general point that I wish to make about the poems in *Lou-Lou*, namely that these are poems that are not to be read out of context; I would even argue that some, like this couplet, are not poems in themselves. But read all together from the beginning, Selima Hill's poems create a picture of one person's life in an asylum.

It is a very restricted life with just a few locations and a monotony of events. The characters are anonymous: "we" (the patients), "they" (the visitors and family members) and "she" (a caring nurse and object of the narrator's love). Startling and often disturbing images contribute to the originality and impact of these poems: 'Tiny married women/ gripping handbags/ are regularly led onto the ward/ and offered bits of cake/ like birds on leads' ('Corridor September 9th').

For many readers these starkly vivid poems of insanity make unsettling reading. The poet offers occasional humour too. 'Night-room August 12th' reads: 'Now I'm up/ I go from bed to bed/ stealing people's sweets/ for the orderlies'. Selima Hill raises a nervous laugh. Her poems are not easily forgotten.

**John Keats – Fugitive Poems**  
**Foreword by Andrew Motion**  
**Published by Hesperus Press**  
**ISBN 1-84391-077-2 £7.99**  
**Reviewed by Simon Jenner**

In 1848, Richard Monckton Milnes published his *The Life and Literary Remains of John Keats*. Amongst many other services he printed the original version of 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' (not the cynical revision Keats made for the 1820 *Examiner*, which itself never got into the 1820 volume) and just about everything else. Poems kept turning up till 1914, but we had the best of him in verse and some of the best in the letters.

Andrew Motion has rightly identified the core canon of Keats as a somewhat limited take on his full achievement,

which: '...leaves a lot of golden lines unscanned – not fugitive in the sense that they willingly escape our attention but in the way that they are ousted from our view by the more perfect achievement of his best things. This is regrettable. For one thing, Keats' less famous poems often shared a bright light on the intentions and effects of his masterpieces .... for another, they refresh our sense of the whole poet by showing him in a variety of moods, and in doing so alert us to undercurrents elsewhere'.

This is really sound and a comment on all of us who pass over some of the early sonnets for instance. Motion's choice is however slightly unexpected: he includes, for instance, not only the celebrated earlier version of 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', which is a core poem from 1848 onwards but also poems that did make it into Keats' first volume and became instant classics, like 'On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer'. There is a kind of nervousness, perhaps, in bolstering fugitive Keats with a bit of classic Keats thrown in to leaven the lumpen reader who might put the book down without an old friend popping up. But that's to niggle somewhat. There are many unexpected and unexpectedly fine sonnets that one can remember reading a couple of times and putting down to hastily pursue Keats' living year. For instance, sonnets such as 'As from the darkening gloom the silver dove':

As from the darkening gloom a silver dove  
Upsoars and darts into the eastern light,  
On pinions that naught moves but pure delight  
So fled thy soul into the realms above –  
Regions of peace and everlasting love...

This, from December 1814, is very promising if diffusing a fine image into a predictable simile. But it darts to the beginnings of Keats' particularity: sensing the vivid on a 3-D backdrop, which always set him apart from other Romantics. He of course developed this incomparably enough but the vectoring of his talents at this stage is thrilling. Other sonnets of the period are far more occasional than he was later to become. It's part of the exploratory appetite of any young poet, unless hopelessly precocious and likely (as the super-precocious are) to harden into a limited talent. There are poems to literary heroes; those to Byron and Chatterton start with very similar lines ('Byron! How sweetly sad thy melody!' and 'Oh Chatterton!, How very sad thy fate!').

Revolutionary tracts stud his early work long before he met Leigh Hunt. The enlightened schooling and friendship of the Cowden Clarkes at Edmonton saw to that (Charles Cowden Clarke was also the first recipient of the first draft of 'On Looking into Chapman's Homer', in October 1816, written after Keats returned from their long talk at 5am, and sent by the instant post of the day, arriving on Clarke's breakfast table). The first sonnet in the collection chastises Britons for still celebrating 29 May, Charles' II's birthday and Restoration date in 1660.

Other far greater sonnets begin to move from the astonishing concentration of 'On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer'. After a rather absurd evening where Leigh Hunt and he crowned each other with laurel leaves and Keats obstinately kept his on despite the arrival of giggling ladies, Keats wrote several verses on it, then relented and wrote a purgative poem to his new friend, the painter and monster memoirist Benjamin Robert Haydon. This is 'To Be Our Haydon', and 'On seeing the Elgin Marbles'. Both poems use eagle imagery; the second, 'On the Elgin Marbles', develops: 'And each imagined pinnacle and steep/ Of Godlike hardship tells me I must die/ Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.' (That last line was adapted by the poet and academic John Goodby to describe an extinct volcano of an Irish poet to me: 'like a sick beagle, looking at the sky.' This is irrelevant, but Keats would have liked it.)

It was Haydon who got Keats to remove, very daringly, a half line from the penultimate line of a sonnet not included here (rather sadly). It ends: 'Have you not heard the throb and hum/ Of mighty workings?! Listen awhile ye Nations, and be dumb.' The reader of the half-line gap overhears, enacts the throb and hum; it's a masterstroke of Haydon's literary sensibility. The original read (I quote from memory!): 'Of mighty workings in a busy mart?' Exchange the mart. Motion does include famous sonnets such as 'When I have fears that I may cease to be', yet excludes 'On sitting down to read King Lear again', which is marginally less well known. Keats' dream poem of the same period (March 1819) with its conclusion 'Whose the voice and form I floated with, upon that melancholy storm?' – a fantastic re-dreaming of Dante's dream poem *Inferno* is also absent. These are odd omissions because the poems are both first class and less well known than some of the inclusions. I suppose it comes down to Motion's taste.

**M**otion does happily include several of Keats' verse letters, the early 'To George Felton Mathews' is a fine if diffused vow of (in fact very fleeting) eternal friendship to the poet addressed, whose sentimental proselytising forced Keats in the autumn of 1814 to weep at his own lines (happily not included here) 'God, she is like a milk white lamb, bleating for man's protection'. Phew! That was a near miss. 'Give me women, wine and snuff' rather than that. And Motion duly does, on page 14. The verse letter is altogether an improvement, though ranges around the contours of Mathews' own sensibility, and the one he had fashioned for Keats. By December 1815, Keats had already moved out of Mathews' circle of semi-precious poets, set in a sobbing sea. Even finer is Keats' verse letter to his great friend and fine fellow (satiric) poet, John Hamilton Reynolds. 'To J. H. Reynolds Esq.' is an extraordinary redefining of a poet's space, wholly contrary and complimentary to the one he willingly occupied for Mathews. Here he attempts to create for Reynolds an intensely imagined panorama

of darkling hermits and foragers by a castle-capped shore of some strange island. This is a very powerful and premonitory poem, presaging in its imagery 'Ode to a Grecian Urn':

The sacrifice goes on; the pontiff knife  
 Gleams in the Sun, the milk white heifer lows,  
 The pipes go shrilly, the libation flows;  
 A white sail shows above the green-head cliff,  
 Moves round the point, and throws her anchor stiff.  
 The mariners join hymn with those on land.

Keats shows exquisite tact in both charging Reynolds with his own imagination, by treating him, never exhorting him, as an equal; and by showing his own vulnerability in such a healing manner to a friend more vulnerable and doubting than himself, particularly when laid low. Most people would do the opposite. It's an example of Keats' 'negative capability', another phrase he used to his publisher's reader Richard Wodehouse, and Reynolds, that frames the poem even before it is written.

After exalting Reynolds very gently ('You know the enchanted castle', 'You know it well enough' start two succeeding stanzas), Keats moves from dramatic fancy to intensively worked imagination. This happens in the latter part of the poem where he reflects on his stage scenery and regrets its very slight cardboard paste effect – it's still pretty good. Suddenly Keats breaks into a truly 'egotistical sublime' that is not at all like that stricture of Wordsworth that he once wrote to Reynolds; this is because it includes Reynolds in its exaltation:

O that our dreamings all, of sleep or wake,  
 Would all their colours from the sunset take:  
 From something of material sublime,  
 Rather than shadow our own soul's daytime  
 In the dark void of night. For in the world  
 We jostle – but my flag is not unfurled  
 On the admiral's staff – and to philosophise  
 I dare not yet! O, never will the prize,  
 High reason, and the law of good and ill,  
 Be my award! Things cannot to the will  
 Be settled, but they tease us out of thought;  
 Or is it that imagination, brought  
 Beyond its proper bound, yet still confined,  
 Lost in a sort of purgatory blind,  
 Cannot refer to any standard law  
 Of either earth or heaven? – It is a flaw  
 In happiness to be see beyond our bourn –  
 It forces it in summer skies to mourn,  
 It spoils the singing of the nightingale.

He then proceeds to relate a highly disturbed dream:

– But I saw  
 Too far into the sea, where every maw  
 The greater on the less feeds evermore –  
 But I saw too distinct into the core  
 Of an eternal fierce destruction,  
 And so from happiness I far was gone.

Still am I sick of it, and though today  
I've gathered young spring leaves and flowers gay  
Or periwinkle and wild strawberry,  
Still do I that most fierce destruction see –  
The shark at savage prey – the hawk at pounce –  
The gentle Robin, like a pard or ounce,

Ravening a worm.

He attempts unhappily but very briefly to banish these moods from March 1818. It's a measure of his honesty and faith in his friend that, having attempted to imagine a cave of making for him whilst he lies ill, he should end up expressing the narrow cabin of his own fierce doubts bounded in a nutshell. It's a measure too of Reynolds' qualities – he was a very fine, fitful poet – that he could excite such lines from Keats. Reynolds ended his days in 1852, forced to be a lawyer by marrying ambitiously, dead drunk, beyond the pale of polite society, and with his gravestone inscribed 'friend of Keats' – like that other friend Charles Brown who died in 1842 in New Zealand, having handed over all of such manuscripts to Monckton Milnes, abandoning his own biography. Keats' friends fought for possession of him in some respects, but eventually all behaved with a kind of altruism inspired by the affection they held for the poet and man – something that Motion notices nearly every reader feels for Keats 'With the kind of affection shown to few writers anywhere in the world'.

This is a labour of love and Motion must be congratulated for visiting it on a small excellent press with high quality production standards. There are one or two niggles still. One of Keats' April 1819 sonnets, 'On Fame', has the curious twelfth line 'The undisturbed lake has crystal space'. This latter part of the poem resolves images of naturalness over artifice. But there is no prior image to serve as antipode to it, because Keats altered the original line 'It is as if a lake should meddle with itself' which he felt faintly grotesque. He altered it to the final text printed here: 'As if a Naiad, like a meddling Elf', which isn't much better. Motion should have annotated this as he admirably does with many political references, including the lake-meddling line in his notes. It's not meant to be scholarly edition but it might have helped. Motion has also chosen to exclude bleeding chunks from 'Endymion', which is a pity, though one understands his scruple in this regard. Otherwise, Motion has done an excellent job in a fine moving introduction neither patronising nor too brief and in his selection of about 90% of the fugitive or lesser known poems one would like to read again. Hesperus publishes many parallel text translations, selections from the classics like this one and the two versions of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, and some new original work. From the flap design onwards, it inspires a more than solid confidence that this small press really understands what poetry is about, and unlike some presses, understands its readers do too.

**Poem for the Day Two**, edited by Retta Bowen, Nick Temple, Stephanie Wienrich & Nicholas Albery, Forward by Andrew Motion (Chatto & Windus); **Rushin' On Diamonds** by Nick Fisk and Jack Diamond ([www.pure-poetry.co.uk](http://www.pure-poetry.co.uk)); **Namaskar - New and Selected Poems** by Debjani Chatterjee (Redbeck Press)  
Reviewed by Alan Morrison

This hefty hardback has a simple but attractive cover on which a silhouette of ruby red flowers or bulbs, reminiscent of William Morris's wallpaper designs, trail across a glossy off-white dust-jacket. The concept of the tome is to offer a poem for every day of the year, and each poem's relevance to its particular day lies either in the coincidence of the poet's date of birth or death, the title or content of the poem, or the date of an episode in the poet's life recounted in a biographical anecdote below the poem. Practically all the biographical anecdotes also provide the reader with important information about each poet featured, their most well-known works, relationships, fates and so on. Each date is also accompanied by bullet point snippets regarding any aspects to a poet's life or career which fell on the same day in whatever year. Being a reader of biographies (only politicians, writers and actors – not the modern specious species of 'celebrities') I found these potted biographies, especially of some of the less famous poets in the book, are quite interesting and help put each poet in the context of their period and movement (if they pertained to one). I found this book is best read on a late train when it's too dark outside for the scenery to distract you. Seriously: it is accessibly laid out and contains a fairly catholic mixture of poets from all the ages, only occasionally marred by the token appearance of the odd mediocre mainstream talent, flatteringly nestled between posthumous masters.

Among the 366 poems there are some of the classic anthology favourites: Auden's 'If I Could Tell You', Thom Gunn's 'Considering the Snail', a well-known excerpt from A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*, Christina Rossetti's 'Remember' and William Carlos Williams' 'So much depends'. Refreshingly however there are many rarer inclusions both in terms of poets and poems: George Barker with 'Turn on Your Side and Bear the Day to Me', Edmund Blunden with 'Report on Experience', Keith Douglas with his inimitable 'Simplify Me When I'm Dead', John Horder with 'Through the Lavatory Window', Alun Lewis with 'The Sentry' and 'Raider's Dawn' and Charlotte Mew with 'Rooms' and 'A quoi bon dire', to cite a few. Even more commonly anthologised poets are given this opportunity to offer some of their more fugitive pieces. Stevie Smith is represented by five poems which demonstrate her range fairly well, with 'Thoughts on the Person from Porlock' perhaps being the best known among them, (though personally I'd have picked 'Do Take Muriel Out' and 'Thoughts on the Christian

Doctrine of Eternal Hell'). Larkin's selection includes arguably his greatest poem, 'Aubade', an exceptionally good choice for an anthology. An extract from T.S. Eliot's 'The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock' is pleasingly present. Ogden Nash's 'Portrait of the Artist as a Prematurely Old Man' is an interesting piece too.

It is also pleasing to find international poetry reasonably well represented with poems by Francisco De Quevedo, Paul Eluard, Garcia Lorca, Antonio Machado, Pablo Neruda and numerous other non-English poets.

The only real grating embarrassment is the inclusion of a 'poem' by Leonard Cohen which to me reads like a second-rate song lyric – a clumsy populist impulse (I think Kate Bush and Paul Weller have proved themselves superior poets to Leonard Cohen in the past).

Another point I'd like to finish on is, while recognising the onerous labour of such a compilation of poets and poems throughout the world and the ages, and admitting that much of the selection is very varied in style and period, I still feel many poets have been unjustly omitted from this tome. Where, for instance, are Bernard Spencer, Harold Monro, Sidney Keyes, Clifford Dymont, David Gascoyne and the timelessly pertinent social poet John Davidson (though, considering political and social subjects are fashionably absent in the current complacent, navel-gazing poetry mainstream, 'Thirty Bob A Week's' omission is hardly surprising)? Perhaps their works or lives weren't very date-friendly – but they all had dates of birth didn't they? I would see this as a slight quibble if it wasn't that certain poets far inferior to them were included in this otherwise entertaining and accessibly designed book.

**Y**ou can't judge a chapbook by its cover, but in the case of this collection with its rather primitive green cover replete with misjudged graphic titles, you can at least partly predict its style of content. Suffice it to say, much of **Nick Fisk's** poetry is I think more for slams than the page and stirs the prude with its gratuitous use of expletives. Fisk needs to develop his use of language to a more, well, poetical pitch (I know that's largely subjective). **Jack Diamond**, who has been hospitalised for three years (reasons not known), offers a more focused, 'poetic' voice when his selection emerges half way through the pamphlet, ending on the arresting, 'Nameless Horses': 'As school empties its children/ Full of spitted bliss – / This will survive – this – / This music of many voices/ See the butterfly flapping in her throat?' An extraordinary final line.

**P**rize-winning poet **Debjani Chatterjee** is widely published and has over the years built up a solid reputation as a consummate writer of accessible and incisive verse. Her voice is clear, direct and uncluttered, frequently didactic regarding her Indian cultural heritage,

and often capable of quite intriguing, wittily sardonic poems which act as a modern day, post-Raj, trans-racial counterpoint to the staid British afterglow of Kipling; the unique perspective of a Delhi-born immigrant gradually adapting to the post-colonial British culture over many years, and coming to terms with its contradictions of whispered conservatism and inter-racial correctness. She is always mindful of the relatively recent Imperial subjugation of her native country:

Three gardeners in sepoy khaki,  
government-appointed, water and tend  
the graves of strangers who shed  
their bodies so far from home  
in a fading bugle cry of empire.  
They rush to don cloth caps and shoes  
to be photographed at attention,  
teeth flashing, by the obligatory memorial  
proud of their handiwork  
this side of the wall.  
(*'A Square of the Raj (For Renee D'Arcy Haigh)'*)

The tickling wit of 'On the Centenary of Edward Lear's Death', for instance, is a case in point, and could arguably only have been penned from the objective perspective gifted by this writer's particular background:

a Lear expert and biographer pronounced:  
'Straightforward cheer'. How pleasant to know Mr Lear!  
'The British, as a nation,' she philosophised,  
do not take their humour seriously, I fear.'

A supremely witty and oxymoronic last line. The overall poem skilfully pokes fun at a literary establishment which appears rather ridiculous precisely because it takes itself too seriously, as perfectly illustrated by the line, 'The mighty literati shuffled in slightly'.

One of the most telling of Chatterji's poems in this book is 'To the English Language'. It helps readers empathise with the perceptions of an Indian immigrant on their second home, and this being a poet too, these perceptions are appropriately focused on language, both literally and as a metaphor for assimilation and alienation: 'Indifferent language of an alien shore,/ the journey was troubled but I am here:/ register me among your step-children'; 'English, your whiplash of thoughts/ has scarred me, pebbles rattle in my mouth/ while innuendoes turn my tongue'; 'For generations you called to me,/ siren of the seven western seas,/ though now you may deny this and tell me/ to go back where I came from./ Your images were the barbed lines/ that drew me, torn, to this island keep...' This poem is very arresting in its pleas to a colder and more restrained second culture and language to recognise the writer's exhaustive efforts to assimilate and adapt to its social and linguistic demands. The poet is, however, admirably defiant: 'I have tilled the frozen soil of your grammar/ – I will reap the romance of your promises'; she concludes that 'It is now my turn to call you at my homecoming. / I have learnt to

love you/ the hard way.’

‘Making Waves’ is a notable poem, effortlessly polemical in its nice ruffling of Little Englanders with a sharp first line relating to the building of the channel tunnel, ‘Newsflash: ‘Britain’s no longer an island.’ It deftly sends up the dormant parochialism in some of us islanders with representative metaphors: ‘Morning: a flooding sea of commuters/ pouring from the station. Hadn’t they heard?!/ But each one travelled with stiff upper lip/ Bridges drawn up as they wade through the waves’.

Shorter poems such as ‘Lowest Common Denominator’ and ‘Ipso Facto’ demonstrate Chatterjee’s deftness at smaller, punning, comical pieces, sometimes reminiscent of Stevie Smith’s more whimsical moments. Chatterjee’s selected poems are also mottled with evocative and skilful haikus – I quote one of my favourites, ‘Seasons’: ‘Dandelions clock/ in the season’s racing sun;/ yellows blanch in time.’

Her haikus I think work well because they combine frequently beautiful images with Oriental-style wisdom, which nicely counterpoint her longer polemical Occidental pieces. The sagacious ‘The Chrysalis’, though not an actual haiku, perfectly captures this Oriental nature-based wisdom: ‘Fragile wings testing the air,/ we are born beautiful,/ But we grow larvaed layers/ that harden./ People are not like butterflies.’

Would that people were. Chatterjee’s poems however hint at the potential in all of us to become butterflies and hatch from the restraining binds of our blinkered cultural cocoons into brief but beautiful flights of insight and flashes of different colours. *Namaskar* goes some considerable way to crossing cultural bridges and gently tipping over the paper barriers of inherited traditions and bigotries; Chatterjee’s poems offer us gentle reflection on the nature of national and cultural origins and identities, the still sore-wounds of old colonial follies, and of how India and Britain have both inherited much baggage which has, mostly turbulently, brought them closer together than people might often think.

**Cherrybytes by Doreen King (Hub Editions, £5, ISBN 1-90374-24-8); Going Back by Clare Grossman (Firewater Press, £5); Fly by Sandra Smith (Golden City Press, ISBN 0-9540426-0-3)**  
Reviewed by Graham High

These three booklets explore, in their different ways, each writer’s response to the experience of living and to poetry as a means of dealing with it, either as a celebration, a testimony, a polemic or a meditation.

**D**oreen King is a haiku poet. As such her writing is concerned with present sensory perception and the reverberations of emotion and spirituality that a delicate

capturing of the transient can bring. If there is angst or negativity in her world, it is not expressed in the haiku, only an absorbing awareness of the richness of the natural environment and the healing capabilities of being “in the moment”. Her poems are minimal. Some have only three or four words and are therefore attempting, in an unassuming way, a distilled encapsulation of those resonant moments of experience where the senses and the heart’s most spontaneous responses meet. Like many progressive Western haiku poets, King considers brevity and concreteness to be closer to the spirit of haiku than a mechanical adherence to the traditional 5-7-5 syllable format. Since *Cherrybytes*, King has become one of Britain’s busiest haiku poets, with several other collections to her name. She’s also the current editor of *Time Haiku*.

**F**rom poetry firmly rooted in the ‘now’, **Clare Grossman’s** *Going Back* encompasses a broad assessment of her life through a dissolving of the boundaries of past and present. The memories of the people and places she evokes are filled with a sense of loss and nostalgia. Distant pleasure and current uncertainties intermingle as the poems travel fluidly between the places and times that form the unaffected texture of her life, always having in recall: ‘The softness of a remembered summer/ when the weather held’ (‘Southbound’). Grossman’s voice is elegiac and unobtrusive, even at times prosaic, tracing a personal mythology of the – often inconsequential – recollections that form the flow of life. The poetry appeals to our shared experience rather than offering startling innervations, but, in addressing the question of what forms an identity, and what uncertainties threaten to fragment it, the accumulated effect is to be admired.

The need to deal with trauma and emotional disturbances, alluded to by Grossman in such poems as ‘Anne of Bedlam’, is more comprehensively taken on board in *Fly*. **Sandra Smith’s** short but strong collection more overtly takes as its stance a view of poetry as catharsis or as therapeutic self-expression. A mixture of poems and prose pieces, the writing evinces a directly emotional response to the world. Its tone is by turns, angry and frustrated as well as keenly observational of society and its institutions. This is poetry as communication when other sorts of communication seem to have failed. The sense of alienation in such clinic based poems as ‘Psychotic’, ‘Droperidol 3am’ and ‘Thioridazine Blues’, is exacerbated by the poet contrasting her own hyper-sensitive responses with the polite fictions supposedly governing her readers. These intense poems are not trying to evoke a shared experience so much as to proclaim the isolated singularity of her own: ‘My world is the same world you inhabit turned to gold’ (‘Psychotic?’).

But emerging from the irony and bitterness there rises

the determination to fly. The poems, in their spirited rebuttal and soaring resolve, are supported by the poet's own illustrations of flight that enliven the look of the collection: 'It's a bird's job/ to fly and sing' ('Birthright'). I would hope to see more from Sandra Smith.

**Pot of Gold by Ameen Kosier Razak (published by the author); First Time No.47 Autumn 2004, edited and published by Josephine Austin, £3.50; Hire Wired On by Dave Russell (Public Press, ISBN 1-903932-29-7, £7.99)**  
**Reviewed by Karen Smith**

**T**his debut collection from **Ameen Kosier Razak** sparkles with a fresh, playful and strikingly contemporary approach to love poetry. The poet has an acute sense of improvisation and individuality: 'I'm my own DJ, looking for a rhythm.' It 'speaks' in several ways, inviting the reader in its conversational voice to engage intuitively with common truths: 'These poetry are just collection / Of solemnly heart mixed up / Emotions to thee heart... / Trying to tell you something / Hoping you'd understand / Without me having to say / Too much...' Emotions are not the only things that are 'mixed up' here; Razak's verse juggles word order and flouts grammatical convention in an attempt to examine the broader spectrum of feeling, from joy and desire to frustration and despair, experienced by a lover. Though Razak may at times lapse into jarring juxtaposition, the impressive achievement is the interlacing of several 'word-threads' throughout the collection, whereby key terms such as 'dreams,' 'promises' and 'emotion' are sown in various combinations, producing surprisingly diverse poems unified by kindred notions. Razak's word-threads stripe the collection like colours of the rainbow, promising the felicitous resolution of conflicting emotions and separated lovers. There remains only the question of whether the idealism of love is mere illusion... 'Don't turn around, / For I might just blink / You might not really / Be there.'

**T**he forty-seventh edition of *First Time*, a successful bi-annual magazine designed to encourage first-time poets, is a delicious feast of poetic treats. Like a child in a sweet shop, I was surprised by the sheer assortment of subjects, forms and voices exhibited all at once. Indeed, Alanna Allen's 'Lemon Sherbet' sees a philosophical grain of truth in the same sugary simile: 'Like some people, / Deliciously Sweet / With a touch of bitterness / Inside.' From the topical 'How to Win the Turner Prize' to the humorous and strangely familiar 'Today I Put Salt on My Cornflakes' to the beautifully vivid seascape of Yvonne Cornwall's 'Winter Parade,' *First Time* presents an impressive range of new talent, hailing from areas of the world as diverse as Wolverhampton and Washington. As you would expect, the quality of the writing varies, but this only makes it easier to spot the real gems and the more innovative pieces where Ophelia is sighted on the

Thames, a memo becomes a poem and 'a piece of split bamboo' can talk. Whether satirizing popular culture, bemoaning the perils of shaving or painting the evocative beauty of a natural landscape, the magazine as a whole transmits the collective faith of its writers in the poem as fitting expression of the amusements, absurdities and diversions of everyday experience.

**M**y curiosity about this highly unusual novel was initially aroused by the cryptic blurb: 'When you read this story, we hope that you will become aware of the perils of mass human vivisection.' The narrative teeters on the thin 'trapeze-wire' between fantasy and reality and it is often impossible to discern whether the bizarre experiences of the protagonist, Billy, are dreams, delusions or true apocalyptic horrors. The story is a strange and fascinating amalgamation of science fiction, conspiracy theory, detective story, and faithful account of schizoid hallucination. The writing itself is so 'sparky' and apparently electrified that the reader begins to wonder whether the author is 'wired' or 'on' something, but he assures that 'If you find some of this implausible, please take consolation – so do I.' The reader must decide where actuality ends and the imagination begins, which is no mean feat. Though events are sometimes difficult to follow, **Dave Russell's** images are often inspired: 'silhouetting your anxieties and suspicions on ceilings' and his lively prose conjures fantastic landscapes full of erupting volcanoes, spawning monsters and ancient cavernous civilisations. This book is likely to leave only a single certainty in the reader's mind: that there surely is nothing else like it.

**Some Moments of Love by Hamza Hassan Sheikh (Shirkat Press); The Maenad Angel Poetics by Dolly Sen (Hole Books, ISBN 0-9541837-4 6); A Birmingham Yank by John Goodby (Arc Publications, ISBN 1-90072-19-X)**  
**Reviewed by Carolyn O'Connell**

**T**his first collection by **Hamza Hassan Sheikh**, a Pakistani poet from D. I. Khan, is reminiscent of the romantic genre in that it is a sequence of poems on the theme of love. Do not reject it because of that, it is truly modern and absorbing. His use of metaphor is direct, often harsh as in the opening poem 'Crystalline Eyes' which starts 'The moment my eyes crashed with hers, / I was captured by the cage/ of her blue and crystalline/eternally.' The combination of 'crashed' with 'cage' and 'crystalline' is as taught as any to be found in new publications yet contains echoes of the English canon. The poems turn from joy to sorrow as they are read, particularly in the first half of the book. Do they record the life of the young man or are they directed to the ideal, we do not know, but they are none the less pertinent? Some of the poems have taken small instances such as 'Empty Goblets' or 'A Lily Flower' and turned them into exquisite Sapphic and rubaic verse that does

not appear to be directed at any one lover but is true of all our loves. The title poem 'Some Moments of Love' is in my opinion the epitome of the sapphic, relating to our cannon. 'In her Search' will be relevant to any that mourn after the tsunami? I found this a book to keep by the bedside, to lift one up, or to find an appropriate poem. I do not know whether Hamza Hassan writes in English or whether this is a translation. His writing spans continents, culture and time.

**R**eading *The Maenad Angel Poetics after Some Moments of Love* was a totally different experience. **Dolly Sen** has produced in this book a long totally modern poem. Though on first glance it appears possibly a performance piece, on closer inspection it is incredibly complex and well worth the effort taken to understand it. Think of Eliot combined with the underside of city life, add a touch of madness coupled with cynicism and the key to this poem is found. It is a well-crafted, didactic, satirical paean of epic proportions. It rails against the 9-5, telly addicted, larger drinking, high mortgaged, credit crazy life. The maenad comes from the Greek and refers to the bacchanal; therefore the maenad angel is the angel of the rave - and does she rave. Using this angel metaphor, haiku, tanka and nagatu-uta this poem winds its way through city and relationship observing, being, both prostitute or bag lady with the harsh intensity of the outsider. It pulls no punches either in pace or language. No stone is left unturned or expletive barred as the angel raves against life and mortality. The only relief occurs on page 23 where two sets of dotted lines are used to mark a change of pace, a period of introspection before a period of balanced free verse precedes the final denouement.

**J**ohn Goodby is an accomplished, intriguing poet. He has lived and worked in England, Wales and Ireland and his sojourn in each of these countries is reflected in his poetry. Poems are spattered with literary allusions interwoven with allegories gleaned from each of these countries. Added to this is a keen political insight and considerable comic skill. Gently opening with 'The Tropical House', its butterflies wing around in imagination. He takes one through time back to prehistory in 'Loreley' and back to Blackpool in 'Storming The Winter Gardens' via army manoeuvres and the Queen Mum. 'A Bestiary' is fantastic. Six tight poems wing from 'Wind in the Willows via Ireland, Gethsemene, snatch-squads, dented shields, Diogenes, Beijing, Paris, Caesar, Cwm Rhonda, Canary Wharf, The Ark to Vietcong, each a 'must' equalled in 'A Short History of Hair'. Widely published, his poetry will be familiar in each country. It is impossible to do them justice; here I can only mention 'The Chief Engineer' on the Soviet space programme, 'Soho' from 'Wrekin' and 'Harriet Smithson's Juliet (Berlioz). I loved Tintern Abbey', and 'The Kalif of Connemara' for personal reasons; many, many others are also memorable. This is a volume from a great! A brilliant first collection, and one for your wish list.

# Your Eyes Only

## The Collected Lee Harwood

### Reviewed by Jeremy Reed

**L**ee Harwood's extreme individuality as a writer of soft focus, American influenced lyric poems that dissolve the boundaries between dream and reality rightly breaks all the rules of how conventional British poetry is conceived. An extraordinary one-off, he has for the past 40 years shaped a body of poetry so individual as to carry no trace elements of the Larkin-Hughes-Heaney triumvirate who have been the ubiquitous role models for most post-1950s mainstream poetry.

Everything about Lee Harwood's poetry is original: its form, diction and engaging sense of sexual ambiguity that frees the work of the constraints of a straight poetry harnessed to familial ties, and places relationships in a flexible space, one in which the possibilities to be explored are both exciting and open-ended. Their wasn't anything like Lee Harwood's first two books, *title illegible* and *The Man with Blue Eyes*, in British poetry at the time of their appearance in the mid-1960s, and there still isn't anything remotely comparable in terms of a poetry written directly from sensory associations, rather than from the attempt to organize experience into an artificially constructed linear event. And the poem that signalled Harwood's arrival, 'As your eyes are blue', is not only one of the great English love poems, but is in every way the blueprint for his finely tuned method. While the poem is clearly written for a man, the question of gender nonetheless remains enigmatic to the reader: 'your shirt on the top of a chest-of-drawers/ a mirror facing the ceiling and the light in a cupboard/ left to burn all day a dull yellow/ probing the shadowy room "what was it?"'

The clues are in the objects scattered around the room. The shirt isn't necessarily the giveaway (women wear shirts) but it's a pointer in a poem that is so abstractly modern that it changes the direction of poetry altogether with its mix of charged, urban beauty. What is apparent in staying with this poem as the flavour of work to come is Lee Harwood's facility to dissolve inner landscapes into the realities of city life happening outside his window. He can jump effortlessly within the space of a line from imagining a mountain scene to the immediate perception of a brilliant red bus travelling down Gower Street. His mapping comes close to recreating the continuous processes of thought in which we invariably pan between the past and the future to the exclusion of the present. He is in this respect more immediate than John Ashbery, who together with Frank O'Hara, forms the more obvious influences on this and Harwood's early poetry. But who else could get the spaciness of love so right, together with the network of conflicting

emotions that it calls into question? Underneath the poem's surface tranquillity is an undertow of anxiety surrounding separation: 'yes, it was on a hot july day/ with taxis gunning their motors on the through way/ a listless silence in the backrooms of paris bookshops/why bother one thing equal to another'.

The poet's judicious edits that continually prevent resolution are handled with cool. His imagery comes up bright as Swarovski crystals, and the tone at once casual and implicitly committed resonates with a young poet's idealistic vision. 'As your eyes are blue' is to my mind a love poem as important to its time as Shakespeare's androgynously sexed sonnets were to his.

The major thrust of Lee Harwood's poetry in which dream autonomy is linked to fragmented narratives is to be found in the three books *The White Room* (1968), *Landscapes* (1969) and *The Sinking Colony* (1970), all published in quick succession by Stuart Montgomery's Fulcrum Press; their momentum establishing Harwood's reputation as a leading poetic voice in the heady, transitional climate of the late 1960s, when poetry was for a short time loosely federated to an ethos in which drugs and rock music were its coefficients. And for a brief period a gateway opened in the narrow strictures of post-war British poetry letting vision in. The subject matter became suddenly modern and explosive rather than retrograde and commonplace as the criteria established by the Movement: and Lee Harwood's work was central to the hope that a new poetry taking its firepower from imagination and its lead from the crazy dynamic of pop would replace endemic conservatism.

This in part explains why Lee Harwood's poetry written between 1965–70 is still so exciting to read. He is liberated in ways that make his mainstream contemporaries appear dated, in his sense of going wherever experience takes him, rather than narrowing his remit to the essentially ordered domestic world road-mapped by the Larkin generation. It's all the more marvellous that we have poems like 'As your eyes are blue', 'White', 'Plato was right though', 'Pullman', 'Cargo', 'The Sinking Colony' and 'The Words' to name only a few of the memorable early successes, not to mention 'Linen' in which Harwood's characteristic emphasis on the sensual is complemented by a typically deconstructed narrative: 'Waking on the purple sheets whose softness/ The streets heavy with summer the night thick with green leaves/ drifting into sleep we lay/ The dazzle of morning the hot pavements/ fruit markets "The Avenues"/ "You and I are pretty as the morning"/ on the beaches/ machine-gunning the fleeing army/ the fighters coming in low "at zero"/ the sun behind them and bombs falling all around/ "Jah Jah" CLICK CLICK Jah Jah"'.

This poem exemplifies Harwood's ability to shift rapidly from private to public worlds, the intimately personal

to the political arena in the space of eleven lines. The poem reads like footage, jumping from the languorous atmospherics of waking on purple sheets to the dazzle of an intensely hot day to the war-zone of a beach raked by fighters flying out of the sun to bomb an army in retreat. What might look deceptively casual in his work rarely is so and a mark of Lee Harwood's originality is that there are no imitators of his style in British poetry. You don't open a magazine or anthology to find Harwood clones, because it's risky working in his sort of space, whereas most mainstream poetry is a variation of recognisable sources, or in pathological terms a weaker strain of the virus.

“ ‘As your eyes are blue’  
is a love poem as  
important to its time  
as Shakespeare’s  
sonnets were to his ”

There is no radical re-routing of Lee Harwood's poetic objectives after 1970, the poems remaining consistent with the poet's personal sense of geography, his gravitation to American rather than British influences on his work, and to the creation of quiet, allusive poems that document the experiential changes in his life. In 1970, Harwood moved to Brighton, where he still lives, and the importance of the town and the adjacent South coast became a significant factor of his work, not in provincial terms, but in the sense of colouring his poetry with the referentials of place and a palette equal to the luminous marine shimmer of the coast.

The section in *Collected Poems Boston to Brighton 1972–73* records the beginnings of the poet's association with the seaside commuter town, almost but not quite a suburb of London's sprawling parasitism that has featured so prominently in his work. You can picture the poet with his perennially slim, boyish figure, dressed casually in jeans, a Ben Sherman shirt and sneakers making the Brighton topology his own as he transposes detail from a tomato red sunset over the beach, or the extended shut down of a mirage-like summer's day to the space in which he works on the page. In fact Lee Harwood's increasing preoccupation with sea voyages, something begun with poems like 'The nine death ships' and 'Death of a pirate king' from *The Sinking Colony* was to be continued with 'Sea Journals', a sequence in which direct personal observation of shipping is linked to allegorical narratives in which the storyline blurs between fact and fiction. There is a descriptive faculty displayed here too, that is absolutely palpable in its recreation of life on the deck of a ship lying off the coast of Shoreham.

'The sound of the waves slapping against the side, the

black iron plates thick and heavy with many re-paintings; the wind rattling the metal lines against the metal masts. A clear bright day, the sun hot on your arms as you sit outside the galley taking a breather; the deck in front of you littered with potato peelings and a few egg shells. All the clutter of the stern. The smells of the galley, the deck, the ship. The engines quiet, still.'

The sniff of the real and of the stripped down practicalities of galley and deck are the necessary counterpart to Harwood's otherwise soft focus perception, and when the two energies mesh as they do in the perfectly realised 'Gorgeous – yet another Brighton poem' from the much later *Morning Light* (1998) collection then the poet achieves a transparency that is like a window placed in consciousness. This poem in its appraisal of the physicality of beach life on a summer's day – no other poet would dare use the word gorgeous – is quintessential Harwood, bringing refinement to a method in which an almost naive simplicity is matched by a descriptive aesthetic. The poet asks nothing more of the poem other than that it turns the reader on to the sensory impressions of a summer's day: 'The summer's here./ Down to the beach/

## “Harwood is a romantic in his use of the self as pivotal to expression”

to swim and lounge and swim again./ Gorgeous bodies young and old./ Me too. Just gorgeous. Just feeling good/ and happy and so at ease in the world./ At first look there's nothing much happening here on the surface, other than the pursuit of recreational pleasure, but what is amazing is how close the poem comes to windowing experience. It's as if there's no separation between the language and the physical happening, no differentiation between the seen and the known. And it's this easiness of tone, this never straining after the unnatural that makes Lee Harwood's poetry so pleasurable to read. You go its way as a co-journeyer in an act of sharing that invites the reader into the poem. It's a given that runs throughout his *Collected Poems*, imparting an openness and generosity to the work that is in strict contrast to the inflected irony and self-deprecation that underscores so much British poetry. Harwood is a romantic in his use of the self as pivotal to expression. The 'I' in the poem is the honest narrator taking the beach scene back in his head in 'Gorgeous' to meet the experience of a day out with words: 'I walk home./ the air so soft and warm,/ like fur brushing my body./ The dictionary says/ "gorgeous – adorned with rich and brilliant colours,/ sumptuously splendid, showy, magnificent, dazzling."/ That's right.

For Lee Harwood the building blocks of the poem

attract and organize themselves into a pattern through the almost unmediated signature of personal experience. There are a number of moving poems written in memory of the poet Paul Evans, where the loss felt, no matter how acute is translated into the familiar and known landmarks they shared in and about Brighton and also scaling the Welsh peaks. In other words grief is given a topology and made tolerable through the recognition that what was once shared is still vitally alive to the poet in the here and now, as in 'Coming out of Winter': 'suddenly slammed up/ against a wall by memories of the dead/ loved ones completely gone from/ this place/ shafts of sunlight cutting through the clouds/ onto the everchanging sea below/ How many times we discussed the sea's colours/ all beyond description words a mere hint/ of what's before our eyes then and now '.

There's little encouragement to any poet, other than an inner prompting to keep writing in the face of neglect and zero financial reward; but poets do, and Lee Harwood's *Collected Poems* speak of the persistence of a vision that has grown contemporaneous with his life. Whatever of real value that has happened to him has found its way into the poetry allowing the life and work the sense of cohesive unity that comes of unconditionally giving oneself to one's art.

It's a weird thing what makes poets fill in their time with words and adjust their lives usually to their detriment to the anti-social nature of their work. Few occupations demand so much and outwardly give so little in return. But the reward in Lee Harwood's case for both poet and reader is not only the exceptional gift of his writing, but more that the source continues to inspire and deepen growth within the poet. Recent poems like 'Young woman in Japanese garden', 'Orchids' and 'Dear Joe' are as perfect as his aesthetic can get in working out ways of seeing that are always distinctly new. The sparkle of his imagery is often like the sudden flare of a diamond accompanying an unobtrusive hand gesture across the room: the light raying out as a starburst. And always we go back to this deep quiet centre from which Lee Harwood works as an instructive source. 'Young woman in Japanese garden' exemplifies his gift for tranquillity: 'The day so cold. Your breath white,/ coming out in small trailing clouds./ The trees snow laden in the Snow Garden./ A pause in the ritual, step by step./ The pale late afternoon like that/ makes you think you're there, so present/ crunch of snow and the red gate post –/ but you're not'.

The trick of course is in the seeing. You could be mistaken into thinking little is happening here other than the creation of a mood and atmospherics, whereas in fact the poet has established the prelude to a small fiction, a frozen novella in which the detail is the happening. The poem is in this instance an act of rephotography in that the poet is taking his subject from a young woman

observed in a photograph and inventing her story.

For Lee Harwood as for John Ashbery, writing is never a means of trying to nail a subject into an artificially conclusive resolution, but a way of pointing up not only the plurality of seeing, but the exhaustive possibilities available to the poet in flexing his material. Whereas someone like Thom Gunn concentrates his energies on focusing the poem into a singular groove that argues its metaphysics as right, Harwood prefers to keep his options open. Pertinent here is the case of the pop song given a facelift by endless dance remixes. It seems to me that a poem carries the same potential to be reworked in any number of ways by the poet and Lee Harwood's work in particular seems to lend itself to this experimental facility. But there's little concrete payback in a method in which a poet seeks to expand rather than contain his subject matter, for anything inconclusive demands it be added to, like the universe that is continually accelerating away from its core explosion. There's no end to how a poem can be sighted in the limitless creative permutations available to a Harwood or Ashbery. I maintain that if you're properly tuned in then the resources for poetry are always there. It's being unplugged or working for the system that makes for creative sterility and the corresponding absence of risk.

**O**n bad days poets wonder why they ever bothered to traffic with inspiration. After the frustration, the practical issues deferred, the time invested in the work, the book when it materialises usually goes unnoticed or receives minimal reviews. In a better world, some of the real originals in British poetry like Harry Fainlight, Paul Evans and Lee Harwood would at least be elevated to anthology status, rather than consigned to cult readership. But poetry travels best by word of mouth, and the people responsible for its survival, rather than the power conscious who legislate over its internal politics, are usually the ones in the know. In poetry the viciousness of its factions rarely allow for any honest assessment of what is happening outside of the elected hierarchy, and while this in the short term may damage reputations it cannot long term destroy the importance of the work. Lee Harwood's *Collected Poems* are there as a sure thing, their palpable 500 pages brimming with constantly inventive flair.

It's an odd thing too how work written 40 years ago still catches on the nerves. Lee Harwood's 'first real love scene' as he recounts it in 'Rain journal: June 65' written at a time when he was working at Better Books in Charing Cross Road communicates rather like an old home movie watched on a rainy Sunday afternoon. Describing sitting naked together on a bed drinking vodka in a state of post-sex euphoria, the poem jumps to the moment of writing in which separation is an issue:

but John

now when we're miles apart  
the come-down from mountain visions  
and the streets all raining  
and me in the back of the shop  
making free phone calls to you

what can we do?

The writing here is open as a pop lyric and doing something completely new, not only in directing the poem to a man (John), but in the completely relaxed tone in which it addresses separation. It's confessional in a way that's unnervingly modern and could well have

“ the viciousness of  
poetry factions rarely  
allows for any honest  
assessment of what's  
happening outside the  
elected hierarchy ”

been scribbled down in the back of the shop, but is curiously moving in its question 'what can we do?' Like most options presented to lovers who are living on opposite sides of the world, there isn't anything than can be done except recreate the other through the figure of imagination.

whole days spent  
remaking your face  
the sound of your voice  
the feel of your shoulder

Lee Harwood was in his mid-twenties at the time of writing this poem and much of the work that would go into *The White Room* (1968); and what is so impressive here is that he borrows nothing at all from inherited British poetry, but writes as though he is inventing the language and starting out new. Harwood's early love poems are like nobody else's, all the cliches of a recycled heterosexual repertoire are dropped in favour of filtering the inner landscapes that are part of a lover's dream. If love is magical, then it follows that a poem should try to approximate the same effects imaginatively. The almost hallucinatory free fall of imagery in 'No – all the temple bells...' recreates perfectly the sort of dreamy space-time that a lover shifts around in his head in the attempt to be with the other.

whoever you are  
let me shelter you

and with this  
drumming rhythms grew  
until the entire planet was woven  
into

an elaborate stringball  
rolling across a green desert  
whose orange and humid night  
I now eat and offer you

“let us reconsider...I mean these  
mountain problems”  
a car starting in a quiet side street.

These love poems are all the more marvellous for existing in the isolation their originality creates. A good poem should to my mind have something of the qualities of a hallucinogenic about it in its mapping of the poet's brain chemistry. It's simple. If you can't get into altered state then what you are relating is pedestrian and of little help in shifting the reader's consciousness. The problem for Harwood and all writers who come from imagination is that in large most British poets are conditioned to do little else but reaffirm the pedestrian nature of their lives. The generic fear of imagination coded into so much of the poetry that takes its lead from Larkin holds those who differ at ransom. I suppose the criterion for any poet who has reached a point in his life where a *Collected Poems* seems a necessary assessment of what is most durable in his or her work is how could it have been done differently, if at all? The absolute homogeneity of Lee Harwood's poetry suggests that for him it could only have been achieved one way, and the consistency of his writing affirms the resourcefulness of a lifetime's

## “ Lee Harwood's difficulty is that he stands out too much as different ”

endeavour to articulate his way of seeing. Part of Lee Harwood's difficulty is that he stands out too much as different. Poets who lack easy comparison with their contemporaries are likely to be neglected at the expense of the derivative. Lee Harwood, apart from his links to the early lyrical Tom Raworth of *The Relation Ship* and *Big Green Day*, and to aspects of Paul Evans and Christopher Middleton is terminally isolated in British poetry. You can't imitate his style or leech his repertoire, which you can with Larkin, Hughes or Heaney in various degrees of dilution.

Lee Harwood's progression over the years – and that implies the biological changes brought to his poetry by four decades – can be picked up on in a late poem, 'Classicism (Satie, Finlay, et Cie...). The approach isn't essentially different from his early poems, it's the references that have changed and deepened.

Afternoon light slides through a Paris apartment  
The white walls and few furnishings

Simple and bare and elegant  
Piano music now  
The books the couch

Timeless moment  
we would stare into each other's eyes  
almost frightened so intense the love

The constituents of this Paris interior are aesthetically pleasing with music coming up to shape the light arriving through a window. What appears simply descriptive in the arrangement of domestic things within the poem is given a radical dislocation.

“No fear. No harm.”  
say Chinese sages 3,000 years ago

Caravans depart the oasis  
Roman mottoes grow mossy

The associations that began with the quiet order of a Paris apartment are reversed 3,000 years to connect with events that themselves press down on the moment of writing. It's a transitional dynamic the poet has perfected into an instantly recognisable mind-set.

Lee Harwood's *Collected Poems* exist to bring pleasure. Elementally they have the smell of the beach about them, the bittersweet tang of summers on the South coast, and of high places – mountains and sky-coloured lakes. They are also witness to the urban spaces in which much of our lives go on, taking in love, loss and the things we do indoors like listening to music, reflect on our relation to the world and evaluate those special moments that in Harwood's case become the reason to write poems. They're also a superb affirmation of individuality rooted in something much deeper than literary fashions and that is the persuasion of the self to write independent of reward and just for the giving. In this respect Lee Harwood's poems are gifts to the reader, sometimes quiet as a Rothko and nearly always celebratory in their impulse. I personally need their shine in my life and made my association with his books a long time ago into a meaningful thing. And reading a poet is another sort of love affair demanding give and take and the persistence that comes with trust. Poet and reader often coexist a lifetime without making contact – who knows who carries lines of poetry around in their heads in big city life – but writing about another poet is at least a form of communication and a way of acknowledging gratitude for something given that can't be taken away.

***As Your Eyes are Blue: Collected Poems*  
by Lee Harwood is published by Shearsman Press**

**Jeremy Reed's latest collection *Duck and Sally*  
Inside is published by Enitharmon**

# Workshops

Razz

**O**ur Survivors' workshop co-operative now has a regular core membership. A planned series of taster workshops across London will be encouraging new participants. Through regular meetings we've encouraged our participants to come up with a venue they'd like to visit and write about. So far, we've been to Keats' house, the Tate Modern and, almost simultaneous to the printing of this issue, the Natural History Museum and Swiss Cottage Library (both of which I will write about next issue, number 22, which will be out by mid July). This involvement helps to give participants a choice and to increase their self-confidence and well-being. It also creates a bond between participants and facilitators. This season we'll be paying The Science Museum a visit.

By being the regular Co-ordinator I hope I have brought a continuity to the workshops. I've encouraged participants to meet at Covent Garden every Thursday in order to take part in Survivors' weekly open mic night at The Poetry Cafe. This gives workshop participants a chance to perform in front of a live audience, hone their skills, confront their fears, meet other poets from all over the city, and learn from their performances.

The newly revitalised *Poetry Express* also gives us a chance to promote the workshops and for participants to see their poems in print: *Survivors' Poetry London*, a newsletter which is in preparation to be included as a separate brochure in future issues of *Poetry Express*, will provide a regular forum for facilitators and workshopers to express their views, and their Muses in their own regular poetry section. So, the future's looking...well...look around you: a nice sort of ochre...

## Upcoming Workshops June - July 2005

### Bickerton Road

Tues 14th June 7.30pm      Writing  
with Franceen Brodtkin and  
Akin Oladimeji

### Bickerton Road

Sat 2nd July 2.30pm      Feedback  
with Mala Mason and Kit Parkes

### Bickerton Road

Tues 12th July 7.30pm      Performance  
with Isha and Franceen Brodtkin

### The Science Museum

Sat 16th July 2.00pm      Writing  
with Razz and Jean Owen

# Events

Xochitl Tuck

**B**y the time you read this I would have already co-ordinated two more events: a reading from the founders of Survivors' Poetry, that legendary 'gang of four', Frank Bangay, Joe Bidder, Peter Campbell and Hilary Porter, at John Rety's equally legendary Torriano Meeting House, and a performance by Al Brinkley, Dave Russell and Kath Tait at The Old Dairy. Next issue, if space allows, I'll do a write up on both these events.

## Upcoming Events June - August 2005

### Poetry Survivors' Open Mike at the Poetry Cafe

The Poetry Cafe  
22 Betterton Street  
London WC2

Nearest tube: **Covent Garden**

**8 to 11 pm**, second Thursday of each month

Date	Guest poet(s)
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July 14	Al Murray
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August 11	John Horder Alan Morrison
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*Poetry Express* invites all readers to send their comments, articles and poetry to:

*Poetry Express*  
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Bickerton House  
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or, preferably, by email to:

[alan@survivorspoetry.org.uk](mailto:alan@survivorspoetry.org.uk)

*If you're a survivor, empathise with survivors, have something to say on the issues of literature and mental health, or mental health in general, we want to hear from you!!!*

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for Survivors' listings keep an eye out at

[www.survivorspoetry.com](http://www.survivorspoetry.com)