

# Poetry Express Newsletter #58

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Celebrating the Art of the Mural



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# Editorial

**March 14<sup>th</sup>** featured venerated veteran **John Hegley**. The Dynamic was sustained on **April 11<sup>th</sup>**, headed by those brilliant social media satirists **Jasmine Pender** and **Jonas Golland**. This was a grand foray into the multi-medica area. The set opened in darkness, with a comment about having had an awful night. It then proceeded into the 'daylight' media nightmare. There was the great feeling of a computer crash or jam, with the various channels crossing, interrupting each other – Notifications, Friend Requests – in which there is thinly veiled surveillance in the form of 'citizenship ranking' enquiries. In this sketch, the Social Media channels are animated and personified, starkly similar to a pair of petulant, squabbling adolescents always desperate to interrupt each other. Many sites are offensively intrusive, asking for users' intimate personal details for registration purposes. Social media are also saturated with generally spurious medications and cosmetics. The absurdity of one of the latter is highlighted by the inversion phrase 'mountains into molehills' and the 'brand name' Instaplump. After the first interval bell, Jonas assumes the role of investigator/spy. The couple then seem to assume the roles of adjudicators, monitoring each other's performances, and effects on the audiences. After the second bell, there appears a whole gallery of other characters, somewhat resembling an interrogation committee. This is followed by a simulated home interview. After the next bell, dialogue proceeds to ecological issues – especially that of overpopulation. This is a highly complex and fraught area, taking into account the possible exhaustion and wreckage of the world's resources, and the ethical dilemma of proposals to restrict the breeding of the most numerous parts of the world's population. One incisive comment: "They feel too many stupid people are making babies while the intellectuals of the world look to employ and/or destroy the common man." This sketch rightly quotes 'responses' to sites – often expressing immediate emotional responses to this issue, showing fear and confusion. Because of the overall attitudes of the public, there is some tendency to treat these spontaneous emotional utterances as authoritative and final, and to discourage depth investigation of the facts. But sometimes they can make incisive points, clearing away the evasions of sophisticated terminology, and demanding just such a depth investigation: "How do people fall for this BS! F'g save the planet with a f'g tax and you lemmings just fork over the money without a word. You pay the f'g carbon tax. The minute I have to, I start suing you and drag your junk science into court where you can't lie anymore."

This was a superb performance; link to the live set:  
<https://youtu.be/XDPi3x2NHKw>

**April 11<sup>th</sup>** – featuring **Jasmine Pender** and **Jonas Golland**. Some trenchant satire on Internet bureaucracy: ‘Confusion is Free: Comment threads tangle many conflicting viewpoints, sharing the theme of internet disillusionment and true stories . . . The next stage of Confusion is Free is a light-hearted workshop for testing and demonstrating the polarity of labels, mostly those that have more than one definition, and that have developed online. We expect to laugh and have our minds confounded or changed. Stay tuned to Fools Harvest channel for updates.’

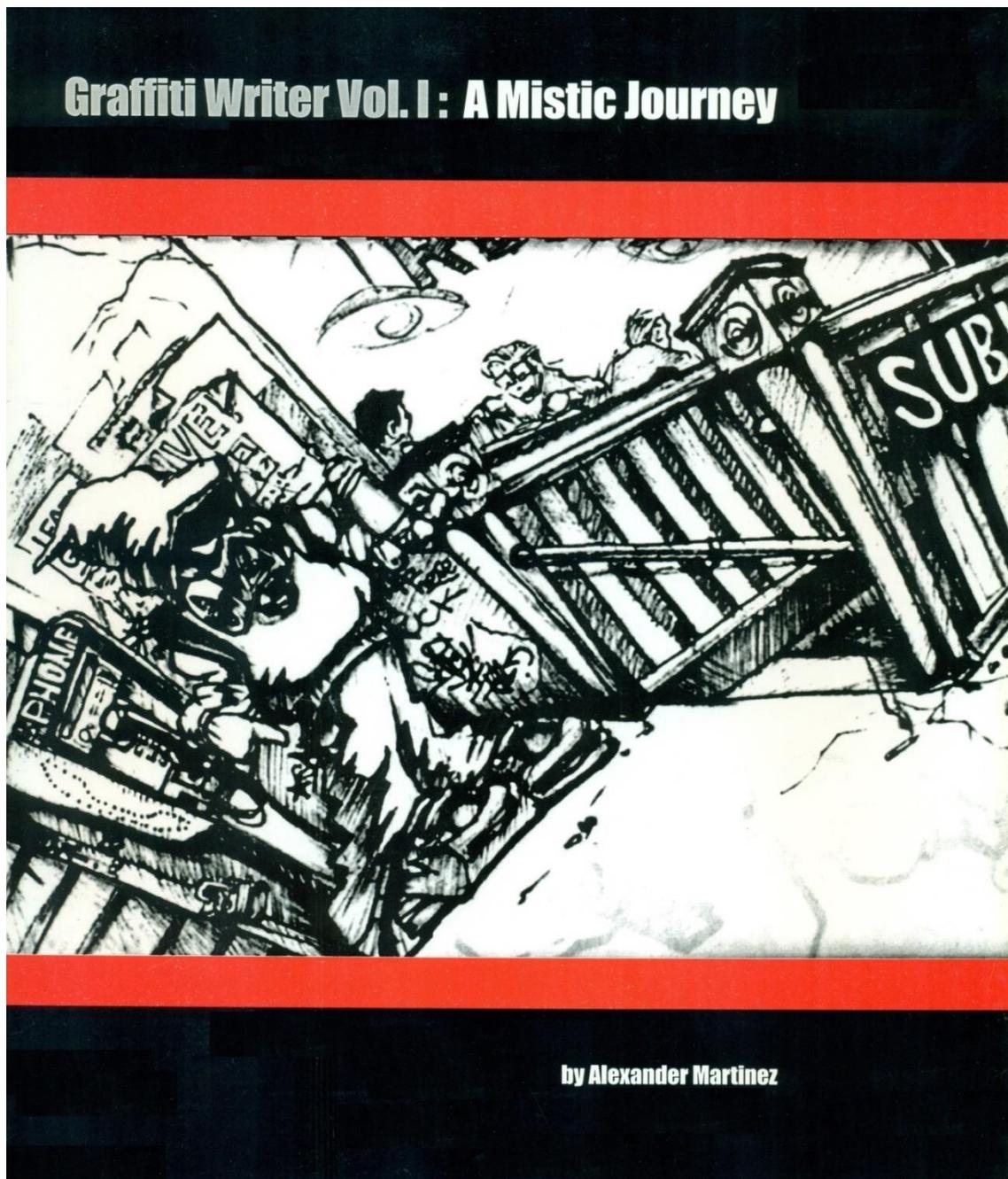
**Jonas Golland** of **The Tiger Lilies** and **I am Meat**, and **Jasmine Pender** of **Seventh Day Adventists** treated us to an intriguing experimental spoken-word live set performed in the dark, read from phones as a text conversation that gets perplexingly confused, and sung live. They aimed to show how internet communication, while free, is rife with misunderstandings and tainted by fake news that finds its way into our psyche. A couple attempt to have a transatlantic conversation and find that their story is interwoven with spurious news stories, making their conversation surreal and ultimately isolating as they struggle to understand each other.

Great spots from **David Batten**, **Jeanette Ju Pierre**, **Daniel Perusa**, **John Arthur**, **Margo**, **Bebe**, **Gary Coyle** and **Jessica Lawrence**. **May 9<sup>th</sup>** – A spirited set from **Wendy Young** – Survivors should be really proud of having enabled her to find herself expressively. Ever fresh faces and dynamic sustained.

**Dave Russell**

# Graffiti Writer Vol I: A Mystic Journey by Alexander Martinez

Nuclear Books 2006 ISBN 0-9553491-0-9



This fascinating study puts the art of murals and graffiti fully into a social context, including the ways in which it was persecuted, and treated as a deviant/criminal activity. Alexander Martinez shows a truly global perspective, whilst placing substantial focus on the North Kensington area of Inner London. He is also thorough in describing the practicalities of using paint sprays in graffiti and mural work.

A provocative introduction showing attitudes in the USA: “. . . if it gets you a stretch on Rikers Island, it’s probably art.” There is a dramatic account of a ‘chase’ by the New York Police Department. There is also an astute analysis of US inner urban decay and redevelopment:

“A hilltop pagoda sits like a stoic sentinel watching over my old hometown, Reading, Pennsylvania. In time, it’s seen the place go from industrial powerhouse to sputtering statistic. Many ethnic groups passed through seeking and often achieving the American dream. By the 1960s’ Vietnam windfall, military-industrial companies had their last hurrah.

“In the environment of plenty, those of African origin who were least likely to join the feast rose up and Civil Rights arrived. The populace swallowed the fact that, like it or not, the African-American was part of ‘their’ society, but headed for the hills.”

Alexander delineates the hardening of persecution post-9/11, and its ineffectuality: “. . . the authorities, instead of telling people to be calm and brave were more interested in being seen to quell the self-inflicted panic.”

He cites the case of Reading, Pennsylvania as an example of mismanaged redevelopment: “Perfectly sound buildings got knocked down in the hundreds and soon parking lots abounded . . . Choking off the main traffic artery promptly put a stranglehold on local commerce . . . Gradual decay invited random acts of vandalism including the usual graffiti.”

He is acutely sensitive to the heady instability of the American Inner City Environment – ‘the block-long canyons, seemingly landscaped for a mugger’s convenience . . .’ This environment was a perfect incubator for a black market. It also included supervised playgrounds which both kept children out of trouble and nurtured their creativity. The kids began to make their marker scrawls on the walls of underpasses. Interestingly, by this point graffiti had become synonymous with rap music. Mount Penn, a sheer cliff face, had been painted with a peace symbol dating from the ‘Summer of Love’. This was allowed to be obscured by trees.

Martinez found a demand for his ‘doodles’ from the children of the neighbourhood, which give him a sense of direction/vocation. He benefited from being introduced to some new technology: “Alex Ortega changed all that the day he gave me his latest sketch, a spray can complete with pointy lettering gushing from the nozzle.”

Puerto Ricans were a prominent force in the graffiti movement: “The first Puerto Rican illustrators I’ve ever met had grown up in dire circumstances that drove them to correct on paper the imperfect world around them . . . the progression from letters to accompanying images can be better attributed to the quality of new paints and nozzles more than anything else.”

Then came the great global shift, when Alexander and his brother moved to Belgium. Interesting appraisal of education in relation to creativity: “Looking at today’s standards of turning kids into memory machines, I realise our fractured formal education was the greatest of blessings.” Antwerp, being a central EU hub, had an excellent record for Inner Urban refurbishment and renovation. He became aware of other mural painters in the city, and longed to emulate their example.

Belgium, free from the repressive measures prevalent in the USA was an ideal environment for the development of graffiti: “These were the kids who had the whole graffiti phenomenon loosely

packaged and imported to them, and once they had familiarised themselves with the fundamentals, they were able to steer it in a completely different direction based more on the artistic aspect.”

He later moved to Greece, then returned to the USA. In his struggles there, he discovered new techniques: “I saw that, by adapting the style of twisting a certain letter’s form, templates handed down to us were reconfigured to our own whims and others expanded on those.” As time passed, he felt as if he had run out of ideas. Alexander then gravitated towards London, where he produced a great deal of work, then returned to New York, then the global focal point of his art medium. Always a stickler for the truth: “Some illusions we should part with while others are better demystified, framed and nailed to the back of the toilet door as the cold hard facts.” The scene was vitally stimulating, but felt intensely precarious: “There was a premonition that played over and over in my head that the exact moment I was going to ‘make it there’ would also be the time of my downfall. He found some outstanding artwork in the Pelham Bay industrial area of the Bronx.

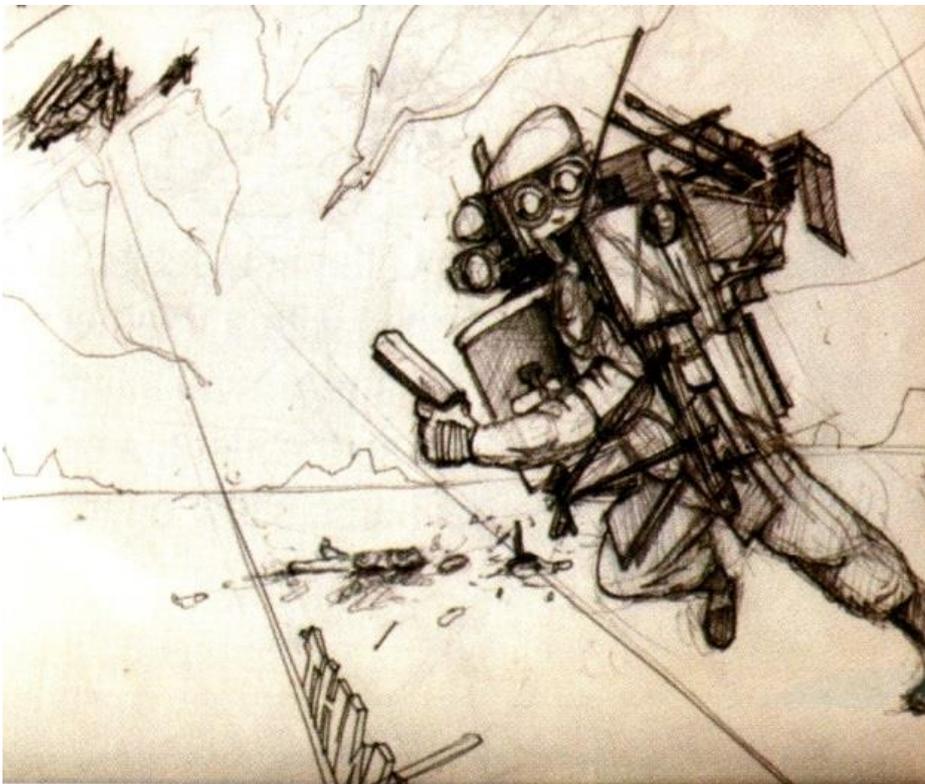
Predictably, he was arrested – as a ‘first offender’ with no previous criminal record, he was treated with exceptional severity. He reacted dynamically to this mistreatment: “My commissions always take first priority so painted revenge became more of an irritating yet near unstoppable hobby for the better part of a year and then the shit really hit the fan.” His situation was deeply affected by 9/11. In the general panic, the police tended to treat Graffiti writers as potential terrorists. A wry comment: “Sadly, there are plenty of people willing to trade liberty for an illusion of security.” His career began to make headway, in ‘mainstream’ terms – a fact about which Alexander had reservations: “The role-playing aspect of graffiti is a volatile mix of ego, panache and guile . . . Dan and I achieved some measure of ‘fame’ among our peers and got the chance to paint with some of the best in the city. The downside was that our names were there at the expense of others and they too met the challenge.” ‘Gang warfare’ ensued, culminating in a gang attack. Another observation: “The police always arrested me on the street with a look of trepidation in all their eyes. Too right, anyone else who’d been dealt with harshly as I was might have been armed.” He was threatened with prison if any of his graffiti work was found ‘tagged’. Understandably, New York had become too ‘hot’, and he fled to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, where he ‘lay low’ for a while, until getting a commission from a local patron, getting arrested and then released.

He returned to New York, to find it changed, and then gravitated to London, where conditions proved far more liberal and tolerant than in New York: “To avoid with local police, I came up with a letter signed by proprietors that said I’d cover up all the unsightly scrawls with a work of art. The writers of those old tags I covered appeared from nowhere, as I’d expected. At first, they moaned a little but accepted that I was painting on private property. So long as their other tags are left alone, we have détente and a few legal collaborations. His conclusion is exceptionally decisive: “The absence of rules in street art means that everybody feels like a sell-out when bail-out’s the more accurate term because there’s nobody there to tell you when all your dues are paid . . . From the vantage point of the Grove, I’ve contemplated the options of my own case but what vexes most is imminent administrative revenge. This being an American speciality, I’d rate a caning in some form whatever the plea. As any sensible person will tell you, graffiti is a crime but then so is baiting people to anger and spontaneous protest.” I heartily endorse this appraisal, having been an ‘eyewitness’ to this activity in North Kensington for many decades.

**Dave Russell**



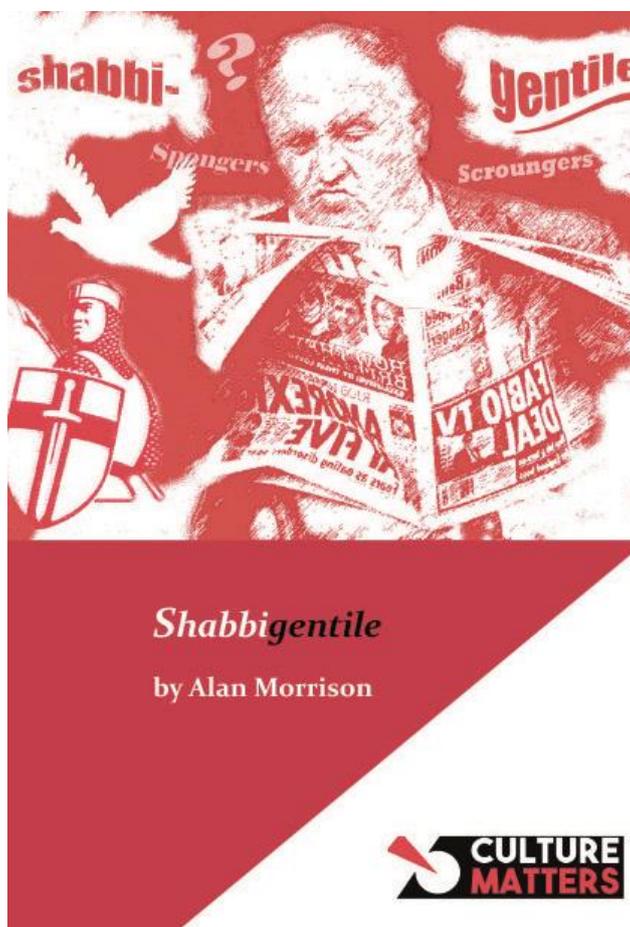
**Murals II**



**Murals III**

# Shabbigentile by Alan Morrison

Culture Matters 2019 ISBN: 978-1-912710-10-2 £9 (plus £1.50 p&p)



A synthesis of passion and political analysis. ‘Shabby-genteel’, describes the impoverished upper middle and upper classes. With his modification, Alan suggests bonding of Rabbi with gentile. He attacks ‘tunnel vision’, and reactionary attitudes to social mobility: “. . . the self-made man/Who’s helped himself up with invisible hand/Then kicked away the ladder . . .” Incisive rewrites/parodies of jingoistic odes demolish the façade of our ‘heritage’.

*Viva Barista!* indicts complacent café debate, in the spirit of Emiliano Zapata. The Espresso dispenser is ‘a Hydra’; coffee is the ‘poison of public opinion’. *Wood Panel Parliament* uses imagery of organic decay to mirror parliamentary corruption, and money-laundering.

*Common Music* – the ‘under-layer’ of music proclaims stark truth – reversal of the concept of reification: “commodities impressed upon us/Are . . . promoted instead of us . . .” Demagogues are hammered: “Brutal solutions marketed as miracle cures/With the quickness of quackery to obfuscate/Long-term impotence . . .”

*The Battle of Threadneedle Street* evokes Brexit: ‘the Royal Bank of Babel’s vacated altars’. Thatcherism resembled Tsarist Russia in its totalitarian brutality. *Wood Panel Parliament* – corruption is verminous: “Woodlice crawl out from the smouldering nooks . . .”

*Thirties Rut – Clocks Back Britain* refers to the Depression. Itemised right-wing propaganda is punctuated by the refrain: “Lies told for long enough become the truth they say . . .” A litany for the Brexiteers’ ‘Little England’ mentality – explored further in *Blood of the Dole* – on inadequate welfare provision for World War I wounded.

*Times New Roman* compares recent chaos with Nero’s complacency. *Not Paternoster Square* diagnoses Britain’s decay: “A cash-strapped Capital in spectral taxes,/Encrusts its subterranean arteries of punctured/Under-lungs with atmospheric residues . . .” Olympian struttings are set against the hobblings of the deprived and disabled. The poem celebrates a street occupation.

Alan criticises fashionable Leftism: “Gradualist dusts — mothballed in Fabian platitudes . . . snookered Trotskyite/Resigner lenses, Bolshevik bifocals . . .” Evocative archaic terminology of ‘the great unwashed’. Protesters assemble in front of a venerated, but tarnished monument. Society’s palliatives are unmasked: “. . . a nation’s toxic upholstery on Antidepressants . . .”

The abuses of the world are enumerated and confronted: “Scrape salubrious asylum from valorised/Jerusalem’s sieving visitations — ” Organic politics: “prime sprawl of pawn-Brokered democracy’s Stockholm Syndrome..” Parallel between wartime bombing and wreckage of the Welfare State; inventory of evils such as ‘Bottle tots weaned on Methadone’s green milk —” plight of the homeless and the caring agencies: ‘. . . choked community outreach . . .’

Alan remains optimistic: “. . . a sea-change/Is brewing . . .” He delineates parasitism: ‘Capillaries siphoning patriotic profits offshore . . .’ Christ personifies the Homeless: ‘. . . Crown of thorns sculpted out of claim forms . . .’ He senses Britain’s imminent collapse: ‘one last royal hunt of sunset /Enterprise before this island’s capped to size . . .’ Optimism survives through trust in ‘unevictable ideas’.

*Ru-Ri-Tannia* – (cf. *Rule, Britannia*) lampoons the ‘tin-pot kingdom’ of ‘little England’. Acerbic takes on prejudice: “Brussels sprouts bureaucrats all mashed up . . .” Echo of Swift’s *Modest Proposal* – iconic prophecy of ‘ethnic cleansing’. ‘Reputable authorities’ recall Hitler’s eugenics policies: “there does need to be some sort of final solution to the perennial societal problem of malingering incapacity . . .”

*Drain the Swamp* provides a US background – Trump and all. *Salted Caramels* suggests an all-too-feasible poisoning policy.

*The Pigeon Spikes* – bird-scarers and instruments of laceration symbolise the oppression of the homeless – “. . . So man and pigeon cooperate . . . human head/And shoulders for perches, mangy pigeon/Plumage for feathered umbrellas . . .”

*Kipling Buildings* reappraises Rudyard Kipling’s *If*. For Alan, the subject is the sufferer rather than the doer. That theme is explored further in *Work* – propagandised in all its degrading, ‘dumbing-down’ aspects. *Rudyard Digs* makes cutting wordplay on virtuous blind excavation and sub-standard accommodation.

*The Bricks of Henrietta Street* celebrates Victor Gollancz’s Left Book Club, flourishing in the 1950s. “. . . print-antidotes /To right-wing hegemonies are returning.” *Claimant Christ* compares the Claimant’s sufferings to Christ’s rejections during his lifetime. The powers that be ‘know not what they do’ – or do they?

*The Problem with Jeremy* relates Corbyn’s ‘unpopularity’ to his candour. “*St. Jude*” & *the Welfare Jew* unmask the ‘free press’. “. . . the press keeps us/In perpetual presentness as a surplus/Populace of shopaholic schizophrenics . . .” The mental scenario reflects a backcloth of climatic disasters. He attacks “. . . Comfortable/Glumness in our bloated sofas.” *St Jude*, ‘the patron saint of lost causes’ is also the name for a curse, and a gale force wind. *Waiting for Giro* is a gloss on Samuel Beckett. How many have experienced the limbo of waiting rooms? Surmounting boredom through excess of it is an interesting concept.

*Another Five Giants* surveys the Welfare State, criticising the Beveridge Report. Beveridge admitted his ideology was ‘eugenic in intent’. “. . . its compassionate camouflage/Of gradualism . . .” He referred to “Five Giant Evils” — Want, Ignorance, Disease, Squalor & Idleness”. Alan asserts otherwise: ‘Ignorance’ can ensue from poor schooling; ‘Idleness’ may not be self-imposed. The old giants/monsters of ‘Spite, Scrounger-Mongering, Stigma, Judgementalism and Resentment’ are replaced, in Corbyn’s terms, by ‘Neglect, Inequality, Insecurity, Prejudice and Discrimination’. He protested against the attitudes of Lloyd George, emphasising what happened to the poor, rather than any of their own choices. The formation of welfare structures is outlined, likewise their dismantling: “this beneficent safety net has been steadily/Unthreaded through the decades post-’79.” *Occupational Health Doublespeak* updates Orwellian prophecy, with lame excuses for benefit cuts and psychiatric closures; he lays bare unscrupulous privatisation – to ‘rationalise’ the system.

*The Notes to the poem* are impeccable. *Shabbigentile* is no ‘easy read’: it embraces unflinchingly the tortured complexities of the issues involved – radically challenging boundaries between ‘Literature’, ‘Poetry’, ‘Politics’ and ‘Economics’.

## **Dave Russell**



Mural IV



Mural V



**Mural VI**



**Mural VII**



Mural VIII

# OUR ENGLAND

## ACT ONE

Just inside the sliding doors as they close  
My favourite seat at the end is already taken  
There is only one other available in the middle of the carriage  
A choice of two things  
Take that seat or stand  
I sit down  
At eye level, a line of strangers face me  
Like them, I make no eye contact

I avoid the overhead advertisements for vitamin pills and beauty creams  
Promising the impossible  
I've read them too many times  
I can't block out the harsh lighting.  
Other people don't exist if you keep your eyes down.  
I take my book from my rucksack – as conditioned as the rest of them.

## ACT TWO

Don't talk to strangers on the tube unless you want to be thought strange  
It's 'just not English.'  
I've heard from friends who have lived in other countries  
That people DO chat to each other when commuting  
Us English have a reputation of creating walls and barriers whilst we travel  
So as not to impose or be intruded upon  
Old-fashioned English reserve  
Perhaps the childhood rule of not talking to strangers  
Stays with us in adulthood  
In these small island nations  
My eyes are down engrossed in my novel  
But, I'm distracted by soft crying from the young woman sat opposite  
Her shoulders are gently shaking, overwhelmed by uncontrollable distress, tears rolling down  
her face

We are social beings apparently, yet I don't know what to say or do  
The man in the seat next to her looks embarrassed and escapes the situation by moving away  
Preferring to stand

But then a person three seats along  
Smartly dressed, with long auburn hair, picks up her bag  
Moves to the vacant seat beside the weeping female and asks  
“What’s wrong?  
Has someone died?  
Has your boyfriend left you?”  
Somebody actually spoke on the tube  
She shakes her head at all questions

We may not chat with strangers but when someone was in need  
An anonymous commuter – was there  
She could have been anyone, but she was the only one  
The stranger holds the crying woman’s hand for the next three stops  
Showing compassion and sharing her pain  
Making me feel less awkward, and a little proud to be human.  
But ashamed of my own inability to help

I did want to help  
But I feared that if a man had upset her,  
I would automatically be another enemy adding to her injury.

I’ll never know the cause of her anguish  
The caring Samaritan was brave enough to reach out  
And give comfort and support to a stranger  
In this England, where no one has time for anyone else  
In this England, there is such a thing as society

### **ACT THREE**

The girl crying reminded me of myself many years ago, on a packed commuter train,  
Tears falling, on my way to a job that was giving no hope  
Unacceptable for the other busy travellers to see a man cry  
They looked away and I felt ashamed

Every blank faced, suited, robot, was my enemy.  
Because they were coping, when I couldn’t  
How English of them and inappropriate of me?  
To show my trembling, not so stiff, upper lip.  
I was just another Englishman.  
Who was just not quite English enough  
In our England

**Gary Coyle**

## **‘What A Load Of Rubbish’ by Fiona Branson**

My small fingers grasp through the cold wire diamonds of the galvanised wire metal fence, which marks the bottom of our garden. We’ve just moved in, and in our new council house, my mum and dad, and one of my big sisters, are unpacking boxes. I’m only little.

Out in the garden, by the bottom fence, I’m watching entranced, the dance of these huge dumper trucks, which are opening up their backsides, and spewing out what seems to me, like the kaleidoscopic detritus of the entire world.

I feel their vibrations, see their movements. Stop. Open. Evacuate. And the multi-coloured treasure trove of trash, that we all forgot how to use or value, cascades like a waterfall, nearly to my feet. The trash mountain grows higher every day.

At dusk, the rats come. Running over the waste in packs, high pitched calling, swarming, swarming. Grey shadows forming. Terrifying.

After the topsoil was dumped n the bank, wrapping up the rubbish, the rats retreated to where pickings were easy, migrating with the trucks to the freshly dumped trash, back across the land fill site.

It was then we crossed the fence for the first time, into that forbidden land, me and my big sister, and she said ‘this was a river course once’. Showing me the shape of the old bed that lay alongside the galvanised wire metal fence, and how the shape and size of the stones in the ground told that ancient tale. She was studying Geography at school, and was into that kind of thing. We found a huge flint, and I espied a fossil, attached like rock pustule, and we tapped it off with a shoe heel. We took it to the Natural History Museum. Exciting! Yes! We HAD found a REAL fossil!



**Echinoid, found Abbots Langley, Herts**

Of course, all our parents told us children not to go there. We weren't allowed. But, like children everywhere, we saw it as our special place. Made even more special and secret by prohibition. We would go there, after school, when the diggers had stopped dumping. We knew better than to tussle with the diggers – and if the men were still working there, they would shout at us, and tell to scarper. But, after they'd gone home, we would go there, secretly, and build dens, in the hedgerow between the tip and the cornfield, which we lovingly furnished with the treasures we had furtively picked from the tip. Sometimes next day we'd find evidence of a tramp having spent the night there – there were several who regularly camped out in the adjacent woods. Sometimes a rival 'gang' (usually the big boys from our road it must be admitted) would have trashed our precious decorations overnight, removed the broken dolls head from their pride of place at the entrance to our camp, pulled down the fabric we'd attached to branches to furnish shade. The broken necklaces hanging from the twigs.

It was around this time we found the BLUE CUBES.

The BLUE CUBES are a mystery still.

There, amongst the trash, about 2", solid, BLUE. Cubes. About six of them, we found, I remember. A couple a bit smaller. Slightly worn and whitened with wear on the curved edges, and cold to touch. Were they ceramic? Were they plastic? We could not figure them out. They became a magic talisman. We imagined they had come from space. That they were alien seeds. We feared they might be the product of a mad scientist's research, that they might explode, that they were radioactive, toxic. We imbued them with the capacity to grant wishes. It is amazing how they fired our imaginations, and perhaps...perhaps they still do.

Realistically, the best theory I can come up with, is that they were test materials from the (relatively) adjacent Building Research Establishment.

Treasure was in our blood though. We could not help looking for it.

And that meant scouring the local jumble sales as well.

I think I was about 5 or 6, when I picked up a lovely treacley glazed tankard, with a beautiful curly end to its handle, at the scout jumble sale. I paid something like two old pennies for it – pretty sure this was pre-decimalisation.

My friends and I had started by this point to assemble our 'museum'. The museum took over one of

our neighbour's outdoor sheds, and here we carefully curated things we had found on the tip, and displayed treasured possessions. We gave tours, and acted as guides. The treacle glazed tankard became 'medieval' and a 'valuable archaeological find. Some 40 years later, I finally figured out that the 'medieval' tankard was in fact a Bernard Leach standard ware tankard, from approximately 1949. There is another in the V and A. Our museum contained more quality than we knew!

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O19481/standard-ware-tankard-leach-bernard/>

I am telling you this tale to explain why I have this irresistible urge to trawl through old junk

wherever I find it. It all began with that rubbish tip – and our museum.

We live in a world, where so much amazing, useful and precious stuff, is thrown inconsiderately and casually away, to cause untold misery for those who are – perhaps as child labour in China – forced to pick through the detritus we produce. Or those who literally have no other choice or means of survival, other than to live on rubbish dumps around the world.

Us 'naughty little council estate children' chose to go to the tip – but we had safe warm beds at night, clean running water, decent basic food, and school. But because I WAS naughty and went to the tip, I carry all those people around the world who live on one, in my heart. I understand how entirely grim that must truly be. I remember those swarming rats.

If we all took a little more time over our waste disposal, and ensured we disposed of what we no longer need, more ethically, then the world would surely be a better place.

But . . . amongst the trash, is treasure too!

Maybe 17 or so years ago, I found an old etching, standing in a damp corner of a local junk shop. It was really dusty and I wiped my finger across the glass, and saw a signature I didn't recognise, and some beautifully drawn flowers – poppies and evening primrose. It reminded me of Aubrey Beardsley, so I asked the dealer how much he wanted for it – I think I brought an old saucepan and a frying pan at the same time – and he asked for £15 for the lot.

I brought the picture home, lovingly cleaned it, removed its original internal cardboard frame which had got water damage, reframed it with new cardboard, and put it back into its original frame.

For years, I tried to figure it out, but I couldn't. Then having finally managed to figure out the signature, eventually, thanks to the worldwide web, I worked out that it was in fact an etching by the Pakistani Artist Chughtai, 'the father of Pakistani modern art' – but I had absolutely no idea how it could be in London, in its original frame.

I contacted the Chughtai Museum in Lahore, who very kindly verified the print, and sent me several of their books about Chughtai – revealing that he had in fact travelled to London in the 1920's and 1930's to study dry-point etching!

So this is the treasure that was recently featured on the Eltham Palace Antiques Roadshow, in which I recently appeared. An etching of 'The Green Willow' by Chughtai.

I have a beautiful (now allegedly quite valuable) picture hanging on my wall. I am a disabled tenant living in a council flat, where court ordered disrepair works have been left incomplete due to the withdrawal of Legal Aid by the government. I can't insure any of my property, in my home, to include this picture, because these works have not been signed off as complete by the court. Even if I sold it, (and I personally think it might have been somewhat over-estimated on the programme), it wouldn't cover private legal action to address my housing issues.

Like anyone who has ever experienced catastrophic mental or physical health problems, I am TERRIFIED of being so incapacitated, as to be 'taken away', my rented home swiftly lost to me – and worse still – have some idiot who knows NOTHING about art, come and chuck all my belongings – to include this beautiful picture - on a skip, and dump it landfill, or worse yet fly-tip the lot down a beautiful country lane.

Because that would be a criminal waste.

**© Fiona Branson 24/06/2019**

**See more of Fiona via the link below:**

**[Antiques Roadshow - Series 41: Eltham P](#)**

# Michelle you know me so well

## (Open letter and poem to my Councillor)

Michelle you know me so well

Over the past 6 months, you have got to know me better than anyone else  
Thanks for the opportunity to talk about my rapes.

When I told you my story, I could really see the empathy in your face  
Which is what I lacked from the police and NHS.

You are the first and only person, who knows all the details about my rapes.  
Only we will ever know the full story which makes us have quite a special bond.

I have finally learnt no matter what I was wearing, how much I had drank, how and drugs I  
had taken or if I was in a manic episode.

I am a victim and a survivor of rape  
Not just once, not twice but 4 times by 5 different men.

Luckily half of the scenarios, my conscious memory does not remember what actually  
happened. Either because of being drunk or date rapped.

But my body always knew and my body still reacts occasionally

The other two I do remember, I didn't manage to stop them like my friend Emma did.

I honestly thought I was stronger. As much as I hate to admit it, men in general are  
physically stronger than women.

I have finally realised who I should blame, not myself, Tracy or even John the second time  
but the rapers themselves.

I am a victim and survivor of rape,

But don't want that to define who I am.

Luckily I still enjoy sex with the right people.

Even though I still struggle to cum, I am working on letting go and learning to trust men  
again.

Thanks so much for teaching me about the Amygdale. The part of the brain that deals with  
fear and trauma.

I only thought there was fight and flight. But you taught me about freeze, flop, friend and  
foe. Which really helped me understand my responses to my attackers.

I really appreciate how you learned to read behind the lines of what I was saying. And  
wouldn't let me get away with anything.

Even complementing you on your dress didn't get me off the hook.

You really challenged the way I saw my rapists.

Like you say – I didn't choose to be raped. They consciously or unconsciously did not take no for an answer.

No always means no.

Even if I initially consented and even propositioned. As soon as I withdraw consent it becomes rape.

Regardless of what the fucking police say!

The police and court attitude to rape needs to change. It is too much in favour of the attacker rather than the victim.

In the end I reported all of my rapes to the police. Even the last guy in Green Park, I had forensic evidence CCTV footage of us in the Holiday Inn lobby trying to get a room.

The police still did fuck all about it and none of them went to court.

The hardest thing I am struggling to deal with is. I will never get justice or revenge!

Although chopping off the geezers cock, putting it in the freezer, while drinking a Bracardi breezer was a great thought.

I can't thank you enough for all the help you have given me.

I hope we meet again under better circumstances

If not, keep up the amazing work you do.

I wish you all the luck in the world.

I look forward to hearing more about you in our last session next week.

I'd also like to thank the Women and Girls network.

Kuda my Mental Health advocate who helped me get PIP, talk through my complaints and accept when to keep fighting and when to let go.

And of course the amazing Indigo Project which has funded these past 6 months, and got me one step closer to accepting what happened.

I hope we can come up with some good goals for the future. To hopefully help other people who have had similar experiences.

Either through my poetry or writing a book about my experience of Rape and Mental Health Issues.

**Margo McShane**

# FISTFUL MILLET

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**BY: HAMZA HASSAN**

He had watched Ali Bhai from a distance while he was wearing his shoes and was ready to go. After many days, he had visited his native town, having had no meeting with him for several weeks. He rushed towards him, leaving all other people he had been busy talking to. He went near him and then waited for him to be free. As he became freed and stepped back from the Mosque, he went behind Ali Bhai and greeted in an excited voice;

“AOA brother...” On hearing his exciting voice, Ali turned back surprisingly and hugged him.

“You are here... General Sahib...” He always called him General Sahib as his uncle (his father) called him by this name in his school days, as wishing that he might become a general in the army.

“I am fine and I just got today....” He told him; then, all of a sudden, the happiness on his face faded and he addressed.

“Do you know the condition of the city? Just now a man has been killed. You can't stay in your area. No need to come here.” There was a pain behind this anger in his voice; then they began to discuss the general matters of life. They moved out through the main gate of the Mosque: near it, there were graves of their family, including both of their fathers – all of them in their eternal sleep. They offered Requiem; while doing so, his eyes were chasing the dome of the shrine in front, built as a Memento to Imam Hussain (AS), resembling his holy shrine. The pigeons on the dome of the shrine were fluttering; their beautiful voices echoed in the atmosphere. The corners of his eyes were wet while watching the dome. “Hopefully it will be completed till this Arabaen”, he soliloquized and judged the dome again with wet eyes. He was a lover of Hussain (AS) and wished the dome of the shrine to be completed as soon as possible, since he was one of the donors for its completion.

“Any order for me.....” He addressed him while departing, “Don't come here any more until I feel revived; you don't have to worry about anything.” After uttering these last words, he moved towards his jeep and headed towards his nearby home.

Life became busy and for both of them; they were both caught up in their own routines, and could only keep in touch through occasional phone calls. He was living in other city due to his job, while his social life was centred in his native town. He visited the Mosque regularly; on all these visits, he kept on judging the construction of the dome – where pigeons warbled their blessings to God and all day, constantly fluttering from one shrine to the other, or even sometimes sitting on the gravestones. As all people were desirous of completion of the shrine, as the pigeons too wanted its early completion to enjoy the cool shade of this Holy Shrine. Visitors to the graveyard and the shrines brought grain – wheat, maize, millet – and pulses, which they threw on the floor in front of shrine; the

pigeons enjoyed this food. They were so habituated to humans that they constantly walked on the human pathway without any fear. The pigeons were not afraid of humans, but the humans were afraid of each other – and this became a tradition of the city. They had no right to trespass on each other's paths; anyone who did so was made trackless; sometimes even his right to living was snatched from him. He was sitting near a freshly-dug grave, lost in deep meditation. All of sudden, the beautiful voice of a child disturbed his thoughts;

“Uncle..! Would you like to take these wreaths of flowers?” He raised his head, to see a small boy standing in front of him, holding wreaths of flowers on a small stick, which he was gracefully waving.

“No.” The words slipped from his mouth.

“Please take these. Just these few are left.” The small boy requested him.

“But the mud of the grave has not yet dried, and the flowers would be stick in it.” He replied.

The small boy repeated his request. “Please would you take them from me; the grave will soon be dried.”

“If I take these, then what will you do?” he asked the simply after looking into his innocent and apologetic face.

“Then I will go back home; just these few are left.” He said again with a requesting tone in his voice. Watching that innocent face, his heart was filled with love and he replied;

“Ok give all these to me.” As he said so, the face of the boy was gleeful; he took all the wreath from the stick, and handed them over. A grateful recipient paid the little boy, who then headed off happily towards his home, giggling and laughing; a smile waved on his lips.

It was Friday, and his brother stepped out of the Mosque after offering his Friday Prayer. He stood on the family graves to offer Requiem, while his eyes were fixed on the dome of the shrine where the pigeons were fluttering. Now only a little work remained to be done on the dome, and this would soon be completed soon. The land under his feet was calling him for the coming day, but he was unknowing about this call of destiny. Tomorrow, he might be going to meet his whole family lively and today could be the last Requiem he sent to them. He felt a strangeness in the atmosphere, as all the pigeons of the dome seemed gloomy. He stepped forward after offering the Requiem with his eyes on the dome. The guardian of the shrine met him on the way and told him that the funds had been exhausted; therefore the work had been slowed down. With a promise of payment tomorrow, he left the place and it was certain that tomorrow he would be returning to the graveyard.

It was Saturday; he got up very late and was having the last sips of his breakfast tea. The cup of tea was in his hand when he received a phone call from his home. He answered the call and on the other side was the voice of none other than his sister. He paid

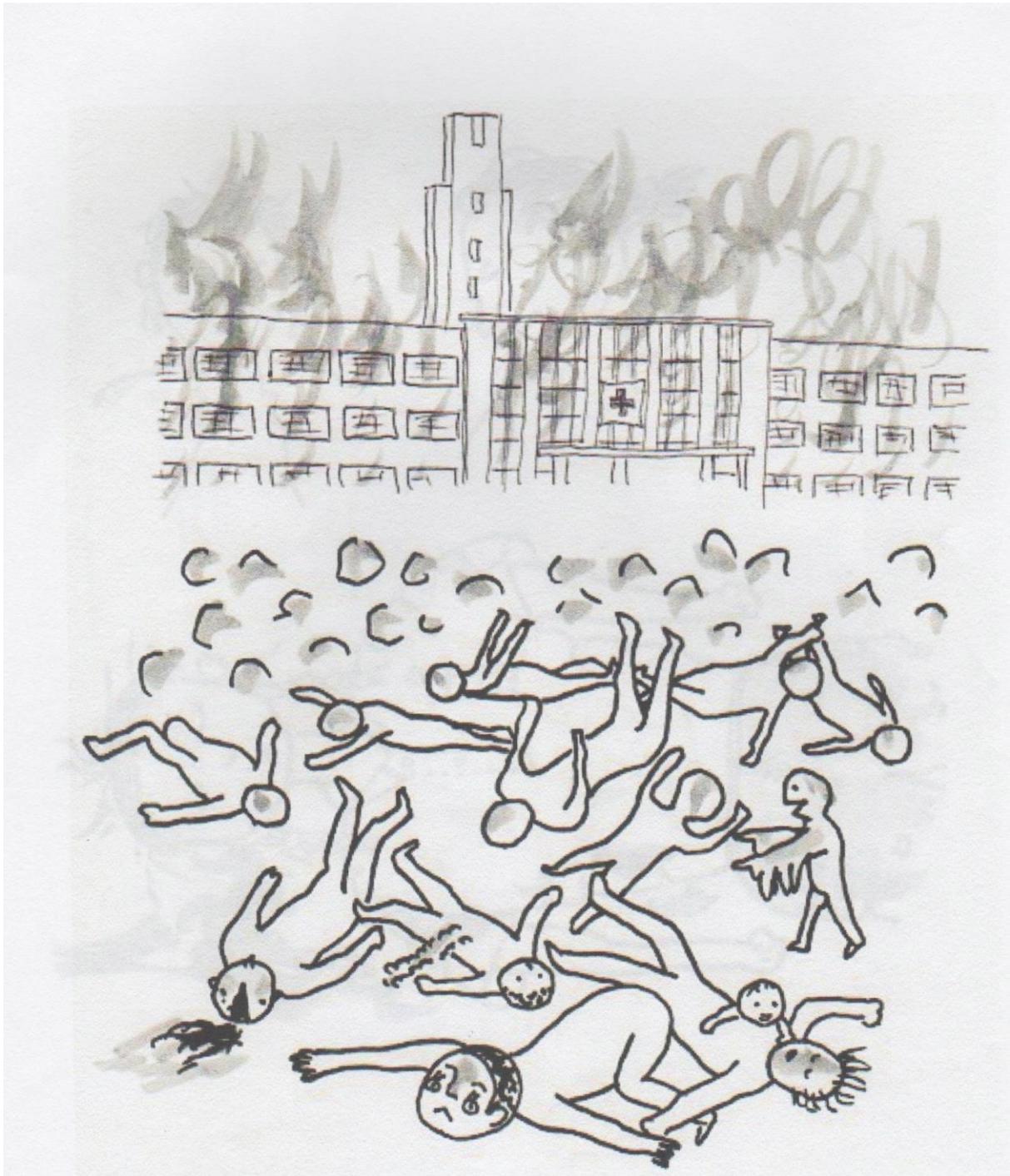
compliments but there was no response – just a trembling, confused, raucous voice echoing on the phone;

“Your brother has been killed. Please come quickly.” Just as this sentence was uttered, the phone was cut off. He was frozen in shock, feeling as the world had become still. For some moments, he was in a state of disbelief, still at one place with an empty mind. The phone was hung up, and he could not even ask, “How...? When...? Where...? Why...?” all his questions were left in his mind with no reply. He was taking it as a whim, as if he had heard something unbelievable, totally beyond reality. More than ten minutes passed in a state of shock; he felt as if his mind had lost its thinking power. In a condition of semi-consciousness, he forced himself to believe that he was still in this world. It took him a long time to get out of the shock. He took two suits in his bag, and immediately headed for his native town. All the way the , he was in doubt: was this news true or false? During his journey, he received a phone call of condolence from one of the people from his town; then he was convinced that this news was true. All way, being in the plight of unconsciousness, he was feeling uneasiness in his heart, wishing that this van might have wings to reach his town as early as possible. His heart was trembling in disorder, so intensely that he could listen to his own heart-beats. The anxious heart, brimful of pain, was making him anxious. When the van stopped for a while, he became more restless – as he wanted to continue his journey non-stop. During this tense journey, his cell-phone kept on ringing with condolence messages from different people, which pierced his heart. All the sentences of that last meeting were revolving in his mind – now that smiley face was no more.

He was preparing his heart and mind for the last rituals. He was still in shock; while he was travelling on, his mind was wandering somewhere else. All meetings in that lifetimes, all jokes and laughter, all shared moments and conversations were flickering before his sight like images on a screen. After a journey of six hours, he reached his native town and rushed towards his brother’s house. The pain concentrated in his heart wanted to burst out. The dead body of his brother was in front of him but he was still in a plight of disbelief. There was that same smile on his face after facing seven bullets in his chest and face. Yes, the same smile, he shared after every joke – and then his echoing laughter touched the sky’s height. The smile on his face... the magical smile was mocking his killers: that after having so many bullets in his body, he was still smiling, to give them a message: they were the losers while he was a conqueror. He kept on watching that smiling face and then burst into tears. He kept on showering tears for a long time, and then started his last journey.

He had made a promise about tomorrow and that tomorrow had come: the promise with the guardian to come tomorrow with money. But instead of money, he had bought the treasure of his life. He was being buried in the same place where he had offered Requiem one day previously. He turned his eyes to the dome but today the dome was looking at him while he was going to hug the land. There were dark shadows on the dome; all the pigeons were sitting silently, looking at him sadly as they were grieved that the guardian of their dome was no more and one fistful of their food was lessened

## Fellow Humans! Let us Foster Love & Wisdom – From Hiroshima



I am a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

On the 6th August, 1945, I had gone as usual to Hiroshima Post Office Savings bank where I worked under the student mobilised labour scheme. At the time, all the healthy young men in Japan had been drafted into the army and women and students were forced to work in their place. I was fourteen years old.

I arrived at work just after eight o'clock, and was standing by the window on the second floor of our concrete building when there was a sudden flash of light – so bright I thought the sun had fallen at my feet. A thousand rainbows all at once seemed to explode in my eyes. I must have lost consciousness immediately.

When I came to, I found myself sitting in the middle of the room next to the central pillar. In the event of a bomb attack, we'd been taught to lie down on our stomachs to prevent injuries to the abdomen and intestines, to protect our eyes and cover our ears with our thumbs. I tried to do as we'd been taught but it was pitch black and there seemed to be no room to stretch out. There was an eerie silence. I felt something warm and moist coming down the right side of my head and assumed that it was oil dripping down from a fire bomb which must have hit our building; towards the end of the war all of Japan's major cities were hit with fire bombs by the American air force.

When my vision began to clear, I gently removed my hands from my head; they were covered in blood. Remembering the First Aid bag in my desk, I got to my feet. To my astonishment, desk, chairs and bookshelves had been thrown all over the room and lay in a heap on the floor. I eventually found my desk among rubble, and had just bandaged my head when someone yelled: "Get out, everyone, quick!"

One by one my co-workers got to their feet and made their way in the smoky darkness to the exit. Part of a high-voltage power line which ran past our window on the second floor had been blasted into the room and lay in a coil on the floor. One of my fellow workers was caught in the wire. Always referred to by his nickname, he had been liked by everyone. He was dead. His ashen-white face turned me cold in fear. But this was only the beginning; what I was to experience later could only be described as a living hell.

I had been showered with glass and was bleeding particularly heavy from the gash to the head. In no time, I was surrounded by a pool of blood. Ms. Tomoyanagi, one of my co-workers there, let out a cry at the sight of me, and practically carried me to the Red Cross Hospital nearby. On the way, I saw flames licking the bare earth.

The hospital was thronging with people: people covered in burns, their faces oozing and swollen the size of pumpkins, and skin trailing at their feet or hanging on tatters from their outstretched arms; people desperately trying to push their eyeballs or intestines back in place, or, lacking strength to do even that, walking about with their intestines hanging out; people burnt so black and raw it was impossible to identify their age or sex. It was just as if I'd stepped into hell.

Gone was the tranquil city which had been there in the morning; now, nothing but rubble. 'What on earth has happened? This has to be a bad dream,' I thought in bewilderment before losing consciousness again.

Ms Tomoyanagi must have fetched a doctor. "She is losing a lot of blood. You mustn't let her sleep or she'll die." I heard the sound of footsteps departing. Ms Tomoyanagi began loudly call my name. A delicious drowsiness overcame me; I could feel myself being dragged down to somewhere dark and far away but would be brought back by the sound of her voice. I'm not sure how long I floated in and out of consciousness. I vaguely remember hearing the heavy pelting of rain and enemy planes flying overhead.

It seemed I was going to survive. Relieved, Ms Tomoyanagi departed to look for her parents. After she left, the hospital was engulfed by fire. A sixteen- year-old youth, Yoshiaki Iida, then came to my rescue.

Yoshiaki had been at home with his younger sister that morning when the bomb was dropped. He had managed to crawl free from their wrecked house but his sister was buried under the debris. He could hear her calling but couldn't get her. The house started to go in flames.

"Ah, it is so hot!" his sister screamed. "Throw some water over me, please!"

He threw bucket after bucket of water over the area where her voice came from. The fire was closing in on him.

"Thanks, Yoshiaki. Now run, run for your life!" she cried.

Surrounded by flames, he had no choice but to abandon his sister to fire and flee.

His sister was fourteen years old, the same age as me. Perhaps I reminded him of her for he stayed behind at the hospital and tended me after everyone else who could escape had done so.

All that day and night Hiroshima City burned. At the hospital, the fire roared out of control; huge tongues of fire leaped from the windows. Those who could walk had escaped long ago, while those who could crawl, crawled to safety. Only the dead and dying remained. We lay on the ground outside in the dazzling, golden light of the fire while hot ash rained down on us like gold dust. My hair burned and crackled.

Throughout the night, Yoshiaki went round giving the dying sips of water. He was the only one of us who could stand or walk.

August the fifteen: heath scorched the desolate city of death. In my area there were ten or so survivors. We built shelters from unburned scraps of wood and corrugated iron to keep us dry at night. We were all starving and badly wounded but so extreme was our condition we were oblivious to hunger and pain. No help in the form of food, clothing or medicine came. Later I found out that the devastation caused by the atomic bombing was so great, that the American and Japanese government hid the truth from the outside world, out of fear of international criticism on the part of the America and of public shock and disillusionment on the part of the Japanese government.

On the 15th of August, I was wondering aimlessly in the searching mid-summer heat half in a daze when suddenly I noticed something white and shiny floating down from the billowing white clouds which were blowing across from distant hills. Looking up in surprise, I caught sight of a plane. After scattering leaflets, the plane disappeared. I picked up a leaflet which had fluttered to the ground nearby: it was a notice announcing the end of the war. Physically and emotionally dissipated, I felt no emotion whatsoever. Throwing the notice to the ground, I wandered on through the burned fields. Not one of the few other survivors camping on the edge of the fields mentioned the notice.

At night we built campfire from unburned from unburned scraps of wood, and huddling around the fire, we would laugh and chat until late into the evening; we had lost our homes and possessions and were devoid of any hopes or ambitions but for the moment every one of us was just overjoyed to be alive together.

Sometime later, when life had started to return to normal, I heard through the grapevine that Ms. Tomoyanagi had died from radiation sickness. Mr. Iida died, too, in a traffic accident.

Every year, when August the sixth came round, I felt a heavy weight on my shoulders and would spend the day in deep depression. Thirty, then forty years passed. 'I am alive but the 2 people who saved me are not,' I would think. I felt that I should be doing something but I couldn't get over the trauma of my experience the day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. So painful was my memory, it would fill me with nausea.

A decade or so ago, an American submarine suspected of carrying nuclear arms planned to visit Yokosuka Port which is not far from Kamakura City where I now live. One of my sons informed me that he was going to take part in the sit-in which was planned in opposition to the submarine entering Japanese port. He was sixteen years old, the same age as Yoshiaki Iida had been when he saved me. He made me wonder once again, what I could do as an atomic bomb survivor. I was a poet. I began to write

poems about the bombing of Hiroshima. Strangely enough, the weight which I'd suffered under for some forty years was lifted off my shoulders.

Little by little, I came to talk and write about my experience of the atomic bomb; I was able to discuss the death of my younger brother.

My younger brother was seven years old the day atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. That morning, he was playing on the jungle gym at school when the blast hit him from behind. Apparently, his clothes were a ball of fire when he ran home.

Despite her own wounds, Mother hoisted him onto her back and fled with him to the river where she found a huge crowd already gathered. She sat down on the river bank with my brother cradled in her arms. Close to death, he kept asking for water. People were passing water from one to another by hand. By the time the water reached my mother there was barely any left but she gave him every little drop she could.

"I am scared," my brother cried when night came, and begged for something to cover his nakedness. His back had been badly burned and the skin on his hands and soles of his feet had peeled back, curling up like a large, well-grilled squid.

The evacuation site for our area was Tozaka Primary School, four kilometres north of Hiroshima City. It was decided that we would all make our way there the next day. Those who were badly injured were to be transported by boat while everybody else went on foot. Among seriously injured, my brother was evacuated by boat but the rest of my family, despite our wounds, had to make our way through the smoke and fires on foot. By the time we arrived, my brother had already risen to heaven.

When Mother ran to his site, a critically injured young man who had been watching over him said: "Call to him. He only just passed away this minute." As Mother held my brother in her arms and went, this young man also rose quietly to heaven.

When I talk of my experience, people say: "Ah, so you are an atomic bomb victim." But what I have to say has nothing to do with victims or assailants. That day, I was confronted with the meaning of life.

War – the Twentieth Century has been a century of war  
War turns humans into madmen  
War – an inexcusable crime

In Hiroshima there is a small stone memorial carved in the shape of a boat. Etched in the stone are words "We Shall Never Repeat The Same Mistake." These words are an apology to humanity by today's people for committing the crime of war and the

violent act of dropping an atomic bomb on fellow humans. They are also a vow to never again repeat such foolishness.

Several years ago, when I had an opportunity to visit Hawaii, I went to see Pearl Harbour. Off shore, beyond the harbour, is a white stone monument erected in memory of those who died in the Pearl Harbour Attack. Before visiting it, we were shown pictures of the brave Japanese army, a close up of the Japanese Emperor on horseback, and a film of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour – some say it wasn't a surprise and there is strong evidence to support them; it is an established fact, for instance, that the Americans had broken the Japanese army's secret code and were keeping a record of the army's movements. Furthermore, Washington had already evacuated the aircraft carriers to the mainland. But Hawaii was kept in the dark. This would indicate that Hawaii was sacrificed by the American government for greater political ends.

After that we were transported by boat in groups of twenty or thirty to the white monument offshore. The monument stands over the warship Arizona, providing an excellent view of the sunken ship's exterior. Oil still floats on the water around the ship's large funnel which pokes out above the sea's surface, and we were told that the bodies of the dead seamen had been left submerged within the ship's rusty interior; they have been lying there now for half a century. Picked and nibbled at by fish over the years, they must have long lost their original appearance. I shuddered at the thought that it could be my own sons lying down there and wondered why they would leave bodies in a ship lying in such shallow water so close to shore. All I could see was the foolishness of those power mongers who justify war and incite people into battle. Was I wrong?

Gorgeous flowers adorned the monument. I stood before it for a long time, gazing at names of the dead etched on its face. And in my mind, I spoke to the dead soldiers, spoke to them as a fellow human. Flowers adorn the memorial in Hiroshima, too. But they are not like the elaborate bouquets placed before the monument in Hawaii by the US Navy. These are small, meagre bunches, placed there by plain people as an expression of love and compassion.

I have one last matter on which I wish to write. After the war, the American Occupation Forces built the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (A.B.C.C.) on a hill overlooking Hiroshima, city of death, and began conducting research on the effects of radiation. Most Japanese even are not aware of the fact that they gathered those of us who had survived the bombing but who were struggling to exist, and, without offering any medical treatment, conducting various tests and research on us, taking photographs of our wounds or keloid scars, samples of our little blood we had left, or recording the development of pubic hair or breasts in children who had reached puberty. And

whenever any victims of the bombing died their internal organs would be removed for tests. We were not treated as humans but as objects for research.

Furthermore, in order to monopolize all research on the after effects of the atomic bombings, America prevented anyone from entering Hiroshima or Nagasaki, and banned all news coverage on the two sites. Thus we were left without any aid whatsoever. Those of us who had survived had to relieve our thirst and hunger by collecting rain water and edible plants, and to rely on nature to heal wounds. It is hard to believe that this was happening after the end of the war.

Nuclear weapons are a threat not only to the whole of humanity, but also to animals, plants and all other forms of life on Earth. Radiation robs planet of the future. Thus the use of nuclear weapons must be considered the greatest of all crimes to creation – a crime which should never be committed.

Fifty years have passed since the United Nations Charter was written extolling human equality, yet still there continue wars brought about by discrimination and the desire for power. And despite knowledge of their horrific power of destruction, the belief in nuclear weapons is still strong with large nations continuing to conduct nuclear tests and people arguing for nuclear non-proliferation or wanting to feel safe and secure under the nuclear umbrella of the nuclear powers. How foolish!

Each and every one of the survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, has to live with the painful memory of that experience for the rest of their lives. It has taken me some forty years to be able to talk about my experience of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and no matter how much I now write, it is impossible for me to express in words the full horror of the experience. But when I think of many victims of the bombing and of the huge threat posed by nuclear arms to the present and future world, I feel that as an atomic bomb survivor, it is my mission to keep telling of my experience.

The day after the bombing, I walked home northward across the city. There was no sign of life and a deathly silence hung over the city. Hiroshima was a city of death. But plants gave root in the blackened earth and life sprang anew. (With today's immensely more powerful and highly developed nuclear weapons, however, I don't believe there would be any hope of rebirth.)

I want to believe in human love and wisdom. And little though it is, if I can make succeeding generations aware of the preciousness of life, then that will affirm my existence as a survivor from Hiroshima.

**Hashizume Bun** – *Translated from Japanese by Susan Boutery, 1993*

## Balustrade

I.  
Me.  
Key.  
Lock.  
Stumble.  
Turn and tumble.  
The fall down was long and slow.  
I smacked my face on the hard balustrade  
Where it leaves the first newel post,  
Wringing my head to a stillness  
That I had not known since you.

Alas, as is the way of things,  
That rare serenity was lost  
As my fall began its trough.  
Tampered eyes can't see;  
Nerves will always yearn for clarity  
When they're unnaturally jarred  
In the bonds of chemical autocracy.  
Mellow tones and Hi-Fi groans  
Had secretly dumped their pulses  
In the lonely lanes of my lowly-lit mind,  
A place of quiet and red-raw ulcers.  
How those moans pounded now;  
They throbbed at odds  
To the clastic clip-clap of my own heart  
In a perfect syncopation.  
I continued my descent;  
Neck twisted, throat blistered,  
Unaware of my temple's dent.  
The floor never came to me.  
Certainly, I deserved to find it.  
My skull's pain was delayed  
As a confluence was gently made  
Between my body and the carpet.  
My head lay on the bottom step  
Beneath the balustrade,  
Broken, bloody and numb.  
Stillness returned once more.  
So did you.  
A facedown book, wrenched  
Open at its middle page with  
Much more to give, I sprawled,  
Motionless,  
At the foot of my own stairs,  
In my own home,  
Where I am supposed to live and do.  
The bottom step did not judge me  
For what I'd done – the balustrade  
Remained diligent and dutiful,  
Ready to suffer as I;  
You removed my mind's silence  
And left me to limply undulate  
With the ebb and flow  
Of what little I know which  
Brought me before the balustrade.  
O, sweet living room, how you  
Dwell at the stairs' base, poised,  
Ready to receive days' weights,

Inviting my friends, my bruises and I  
 To spend some time wasting time,  
 As we try to do what Prufrock could not.  
 Yet enough time has been lost;  
 Down that sofa, stamped into  
 The carpet, dulling the gaudy gloss  
 Of a Hollywood dream wedding, infecting the curtains, staining walls  
 And reddening faces, lurks  
 A graveyard of dead memory and  
 Misguided desire, overflowing with  
 Smoke, irrelevant revelations and  
 Misremembered conversations. Yes.  
 Enough time has been lost for now.  
 I know not how long I stared to my  
 Right with my left cheek pressed  
 To the bottom step, ready to burst.  
 I know not how hard I tried to take  
 Flight and be rid of worldly mess,  
 Playing the corpse, coffin and hearse.  
 I know not how far I lied to make  
 Tight my case that this is what's best;  
 A cracked screen and one per cent  
 To light the shadows of Love's inverse.  
 I saw that I do not know things and  
 I saw that I never have but relatively.  
 I saw that knowing was just  
 An awareness of being,  
 Before rejecting the other mental  
 Dregs and pseudo-wisdoms falling out  
 Of my head's solution as I lifted  
 My cheek back into the coolness of  
 The air and let it rest there.

The hazy legato of my fall through the front door was no longer important,  
 I thought; resigning control of my eyes was that night's truly significant heave.

Having followed them to the darkest corners of rooms  
 In search of reprieve perhaps now they suggested belief?  
 They seemed to be enforcing the near-paralysis  
 Which had me kissing the feet of the newel post.  
 Sagging and dilated, the eyes began to look skyward  
 Yet, with a bleeding head recalling what you said,  
 Only so much could be accommodated;  
 The eyes looked through their brows to the top step. I resisted.  
 Sick of ambition, tired of excellence.  
 The defiance triggered bodily wincing. My neck wept.  
 The eyes fought hard to coerce my hostage gaze  
 Yet, under your absence's weight, I could only  
 Trace the smooth grooves of the balustrade,  
 Down, down, down. Slowly.  
 Each ornate indentation offered to house  
 A wandering hand and the balusters beneath,  
 Shoulder to shoulder, yearned to support and creak.  
 Roses need rain, poets need pain and I must find the rhyme.  
 As surely as the words will never be found, once more was I in the hands of the ground.  
 I knew not a sound. Door open, this is how I was found.

**Daniel Firooza**

## Clear

Tests come, though she  
Renders useless the gradations  
Of the instruments attempting to  
Weigh love or click the statistics  
Of us.

She frees a heart panting with  
Desire, caged in bone bars that  
Would see it silenced; these  
Lines are for her to know and others  
To imagine,

Not to abuse, not to etherise.  
My proclamation to nobody  
Must be kept safe from the  
Throes of niceties, the straits  
Of intellect

It belongs with its subject, with  
The heart that forged it, in  
The skilled hands of the one  
Who will search the pages for  
Memory.

Her smile, yes. Her eyes, quite.  
Yet her attraction is inseparable  
From my vanity, in that her beauty  
Manifests itself in the way she  
Loves me –

Cautiously and without restraint,  
Truly and unbelievably, her love  
Remembers its roots and flowers  
Its bloom, sustaining, sheltering  
And hiding.

Framed by the blank video wail of  
Day to day, she is the product of  
Colour and texture, she recalls  
Halcyon times and paves the  
New way,

She at once exists as and depicts  
A scene, as a painting holds a hall;  
With accessible grace and exceeding  
Allure – floor to ceiling and wall  
To wall.

The sentences that accompany  
Require deliberation too great for  
Face to face. She necessitates  
The organisation of words into  
That which

Brings readers to repose and  
Stethoscopes the heartbeat  
Of her own, internal prose,  
For it is through reading  
That text,

Through learning those lines,  
That I know what little of love  
I have learned. Stuttering and  
Stumbling, I shall read on until  
The final page has been turned.

## Daniel Firoozan

### Neck

Not wanting to be there, we stared,  
It and I.

I was invited to be an extension  
To a house with a name,  
Full of people whose names have names,  
Who like to kill for fun,  
Wearing fifty shades of green for *their*  
game.

It twitched.

'Go on then' was what was said.  
Go on then.

A tourniquet of a phrase.  
A phrase that ignored the blue swimsuit  
adorned with yellow suns.  
That swimsuit that was gently replaced  
with shorts,  
A phrase that ignored my reliance upon  
Friday's jam sandwiches,  
That tortured out the importance of  
corridor football,  
That strapped my childhood into the front  
seat of a Nissan Micra,  
Dwarfed it with the seatbelt and the  
footwell's chasmic shadows,  
And sent it off a cliff into the waves  
below,  
Watched by berries and foxgloves,  
As the Now was inexorably severed from  
Before.

Another spasm flapped up the dirt's dust.

'Go on then' rattled round the trunks  
As a rifle's shot had moments ago.  
The collar of feathers brimmed with  
Muddy orange blue-browns,  
Glinting quietly, Aztec in symmetry,  
Ringing the neck that I was  
Expected to break.

Its body locked, its eyes rolled.

It was reared to be broken,  
It was educated to give, it was shot  
For a fare, it would be eaten for a price.

It looked at me from behind its face.

Choice is everything, so it was a choice.  
A man and his dog waited for me to  
choose,  
With smoking guns and steaming jaws.

The pheasant tracked my nearing self  
Until its stare could only register the  
Gravity of the help that it required.  
Having watched this happen twice  
That day, I snatched up its neck  
That dripped with a central warmth.  
I saw everything I had never killed  
And pumped my arm up – and down –  
and up –  
It settled like a Tesco's bag of pennies,  
Suspended from the hand of a chemist.

## Daniel Firoozan

### Nose Ode

The world is circular to its white end;  
As spirochetes we swirl our cycles each.  
So looped are our fates and the river's  
bend,  
That this tramp here  
begins to reek of bleach.  
Writhing in that grey stench, grey as  
pavement,  
It curls, unfurls and hums,  
thin and rag-dressed,  
Wasted denial in the face of libel.  
Shopping trolley vagrant,  
The metal mesh grates out your viral zest  
Of dirt that Time has mopped as an aisle.

From your mop-head that white  
hydroxide jet  
Cuts up my nose  
but creams to something round,  
Reminds of caustic burns, hepatic debt,  
Yet spreads out into something quite  
profound.  
Sharp, grey and white at first,  
but then yellow,  
Shiny yellow like the loud proud bottle,

An ultra pleased to clean by stifling life.  
Crust is its sole echo.  
Whether it settles to cleanse or throttle,  
The surface will ultimately decide.

A Saturday night brings some cigarettes,  
A Monday morning, commuter coffee,  
Friendly gestures from other spirochetes  
That fill the air better than their money;  
Here comes a vial of it crossing the road,  
Each scent an end to one more living cell,  
Those coins were bent on death when  
they were cast.  
It's Marilyn Monroe.  
'Un petit peu de Coco Mad'moiselle!  
Stinking on, as solutions to stinks past.

**Daniel Firoozan**

## **Photographs for Her, Her and You**

Imagine holding me like that now; I'd  
crack a back,  
Ruin some ribs, with all of this data, this  
experiential weight,  
Knowledge I was free of locked into your  
hip's grip on  
Shrove Tuesday 1998. If only I'd not  
dropped your gaze.  
I'd still be hilarious in a baby blue bucket  
hat, squeezing  
Your cheeks' raspberry with the laugh  
seen echoing here.  
That cookbook's buttered with spattered  
splashes now,  
Softened to rips with stains of wine on  
Pancake Page 209.

Imagine that; the love poem, dropped

And dribbled, that could italicise that  
Colonnade and suspend us in its shade,  
A swinging kaleidoscope of gently spilt,  
Midnight ink, tilting before the still, fat,  
Benched woman in red, her body turned,  
Her mind ignorant of two smirking  
Iconoclasts suffused with romantic intent.

Imagine you now, now.  
Blue jeans, black shoes, black shirt too.  
Nothing to see here,  
feet shoulder width apart, a lazy smile  
That could be mistaken for something  
sincere. It's unclear.  
There's an inane disinterested stare.  
It breaks and rebuilds.  
It assesses, waiting for you to misspell,  
deviate or impress it.  
You're rarely aware of this photograph,  
though it's always there.  
You perceive yourself as if reading the  
letter you once sent in passion;  
You see it as she did.  
You see the history of your action.

**Daniel Firoozan**

## **Seizure Burette**

You can't know, dear coquette,  
The funnelled drip-drops of pain  
That spoil and solve this vignette  
Behind my hostage gaze;  
They spurt down in fluid lines,  
Cranked and noted, phase by phase,  
Until the shades change – why?  
It's a kind of rehearsal  
For the moment that I die.  
This point of reversal

Indicates that every curve  
 Will always come full circle.  
 I know for I've observed.  
 I've tracked my burette's dashes  
 Up until my tangled nerves  
 Leave my body battered;  
 The message is afforded  
 But irreparably fractured.  
 Gradations recorded,  
 I await the change of state  
 That leaves me feeling sordid.  
 Clamp, stand, beaker, substrate,  
 I'm my whole experiment.  
 I'm the one who self-titrates  
 With glazed irreverence.  
 You bite your lip opposite  
 Signalling development;  
 I drink because of this.  
 I've got you showing your line  
 So I can step across it  
 And forget all of mine,  
 And forget how they corrode  
 Even though they've been defined.  
 Tomorrow, I'll implode;  
 With intoxication comes  
 Paroxysmal episodes  
 Of shuddered strangled hums  
 That cough and froth like a drain  
 Or the blood from my chomped  
 tongue.  
 I've no right to complain.  
 I test your love as I test  
 The chemistry of my brain.

**Daniel Firoozan**

## **Spiritlands** by Sarah Wardle

**Bloodaxe Books 2018**

**ISBN 978 1 78037 434 5 £9.95**



This work makes a tight clinch of politics, history and ecology, and – yes – the hospital experience. The title poem has the tone of a TV documentary, embracing her grandfather's experience of the First World War, and her mother's of the Second. The aftermath of the latter, in the form of 'bomb sites' and half-ruined cities, is an important backdrop, expressed in *First-hand Evidence*. That historical slot is also explored in *Reminiscence at the Community Centre*. This is complemented by a tableau of a contemporary industrial waste land in *On Empty Street*. Her regional roots are emphasised in *Midlander. Mill-hands Conversing, 1919*

celebrates a Suffragette rally, and rightly expresses the debt owed by Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May. The Winifred Knights painting referred to is probably *Deluge* (1920). *Blue Rosette* shows her party political involvement, whilst *Out on the Hustings*, 1974 shows a child's perception of a politician's behaviour.

Sarah has a strong feeling for deceased relatives; her *Spirit Horse* takes her on a conducted tour of their graves. In *May Morning*, she contemplates potential motherhood at a relatively advanced age.

In terms of contemporary strife, *Amina's Truth* makes an eloquent lament, speaking for a refugee woman with a baby in arms, and a struggle with her English. Ironically, her namesake was the legendary African warrior queen. Human Spirit is another tale of a refugee in an anonymous metropolis – but one partly rehabilitated by the Salvation Army, 20 years ago. Now she sees her 'younger self' in today's refugees. *Cassie at Six* shows a child's prophetic vision of its adult life; consistently with the mythical Cassandra, she is cursed by never being believed. In addition to her African references, Sarah's focus is mainly based in the UK, Sarah reaches out additionally for global perspective in *US*.

*Schoolgirl to Teacher* emphasises the elemental necessity for historical perspective – including a full respect for ancient relics. This point is reiterated in *At Home with the Celts*. *Modern Classics* shows the permanence and adaptability of ancient culture in the modern age. Sarah also expresses a strong sense of the

future in *Letter to the Third Millennium*. *Lotus* portrays the meditation of past and future: "My past life is healing//My next reincarnation/will be as a dragon." *Still Life* expresses an expanded time perspective, via Vanessa Bell, a Bloomsbury painter who did portraits of both her mother and her daughter – another true intermediary between past and future. *City Rain* celebrates the perennial permanencies of the weather, which acts as a 'leveller of time', washing away the distinctions between past and present – "that could be now, or years ago . . . the rain/hangs overhead, as transatlantic/passages change from boat to plane . . ." *Dreamtime* gives an excellent guide to an archaeological expedition.

*Oxfords of the Mind* suggests that Sarah is an alumna of that institution. There is a predominant sense of assurance and comfort, but not without some criticism, some warning against complacency: ". . . a shared youth of architecture/and armchair morals". Still, she seems to value speculative reflection: "he . . . thinks of a way epistemology/might be used to conclude a rhyme is temporal/and spatial at once, both ephemeral/and eternal, written and read on a spectrum,/referencing his imagined self in this poem."

*Mr Wales* is a true Survivor poem, honouring a surgeon who had the courage to cancel a bad operation. *Art Therapy* cogently describes the creative self-rehabilitation activity of a young offender. *Careless Whisper* is a powerful indictment of hotel-trashing pop stars. Perhaps the

most visionary, prophetic piece in this collection is *Soraya and the Spider*. The progress of technology creates the ultimate monster Arachnid who threatens to devour humanity. But the heroic Soraya neutralises it by the power of the human mind: “. . . the world wide web returned/to its proper place in the aether.”

Her concluding poem *On Woodland* self-transcendingly honours the eco-sphere: “I’m struck by world’s connectedness, how all is one system . . . am taken beyond individualism/to the heart of what inhabits habitat. Dare I describe this collection as a master celebration of relativity?”

## **Dave Russell**

### **Contact**

Pulled up on the brink of catastrophe –  
a gorge, say, or crevasse  
that doesn’t stop at earth’s core –  
gorgeous demons call you down.  
Your heart leaps. But something  
holds the rest of you on this ledge  
unlaunched still  
grappling every part of you  
something beckoning  
crackling  
through family fibres  
like shocks  
moving through time  
to nerve endings  
this moment of danger  
making contact  
chieftain and druid  
soulmates  
dream whisperings

through your bones  
genetic codes  
your mind's eye  
all your moments –  
a whispering

*be careful*  
*we are also here*

## **David Batten**

### **Hashizume Bun – Poems**

#### **The Young Boy**

Here on the outskirts of Hiroshima  
In the military parade grounds overgrown  
with grass  
At a quarter past eight  
A young boy  
Has come looking for insects  
So early in the morning?  
Suddenly  
A flash of light strikes the boy  
Turning him into a pillar of fire  
Instantly reduced to charcoal  
He falls to the scorching ground  
Legs sprayed, arms outstretched  
Black, hollow eyes glaring up at the sky  
Mouth gaping upwards in a silent scream  
Is he calling out for his mother?  
For his brothers, sisters or friends?  
Or screaming in agony?  
Not one single tooth  
Or fingernail even, remaining  
Still the blazing inferno continues to burn  
The charred remains of the young boy

## School Playground

*Sakuma Kazuko!*

*Sakuma Kazuko!*

Lying among the piles of bodies  
scattered all over the playground  
Kazuko hears her father calling her name  
His voice comes closer

and closer

He stops at her feet

But her burnt,

festering eyes

can not see him standing

there

Her arms and legs are lifeless

Not knowing how to find his beloved child  
among the bodies strewing the ground like  
rags

with their burnt,

peeling skin

her father simply wanders round

and round

calling out her name in anguish

Kazuko cries out too,

again

and again

But no sound will come

from her scared and swollen throat

The sound of her father's footsteps

and his voice

gradually fade

away

into the distance

Tears stream down Kazuko's cheeks

The only sign she is alive

## Little Brother

Dear brother

You were just seven years old

Bright, button eyes

Short cropped hair

A first grader

You trust a stick in your belt and boasted

'Look at me;' I'm a sergeant!

I am a sergeant with a big long sword!

Hiroshima City was a large military base

Only the soldiers were healthy

The air raid shattered the sky

You would scream in terror

And flee into the raid shelter ahead of  
everyone

Your body all a-tremble.

Never to know the sweetness of candy

Or to savour meat

Day after day nothing but soy beans

Or the soy-bread

our mother resourcefully made

But even that you would push away

With skinny arms like withered branches

'Not this again. I don't want any.'

That fateful day

My brother was in the school playground

When it fell

He ran home

His clothes a ball of fire

In an instant the city was rubble

Birds fell from the sky

Trees razed

Even the earth breathed fire

All living creatures scorched in the inferno

Hiroshima is a city built on water

Seven beautiful rivers embrace it

In spring, their waters shine a pale green

In summer, rippling in a cool breeze

In autumn, ablaze with colour  
In winter, snowflakes dancing upon their  
surfaces  
So the water colours the people's lives  
Mirrors their joys and sorrows

Bereft of their homes and families  
Burned raw  
Dazed  
Skin trailing in tatters  
People fled to the rivers  
To the water – their mother's womb  
For protection

But then  
The Seto Inland Sea  
Surged up into the rivers  
The rivers rose up  
Engulfing the people on the banks and  
sweeping them away

Dear brother  
Mother held you in her broken, mangled arms  
Held you close to protect you  
From the water

Later  
We laid your burnt, weeping body  
on the riverbank  
Terrified, you cried  
"I am scared, so scared! Put something over  
me, please!"  
All night long Father picked grasses to cover  
Your writhing nakedness

That night the moon shone so brightly and the  
sky was aglitter with stars  
The starry sky gently reached down on us  
So close it seemed we could reach up  
and touched it  
A fine white mist descended to earth  
Tenderly wrapping people's scorched and  
aching bodies in a soft  
Cool blanket of dew  
Scooping up the souls and

Guiding them to heaven

Dear brother  
You too ascended to heaven  
Before the light of dawn

Oh my dear little brother

## **Living Together**

Stars twinkled at the bottom of the tub of  
Rainwater we collected to cook  
Our tiny morsels of food

Starlight reflecting off the water  
Stung our eyes  
As we bathed  
Beneath the starry sky

Raising my arms high above my head toward  
the heavens  
I heard the stars whispering  
"I am alive!"  
The stars twinkled down at me  
'Yes, you're alive!'

Beneath the heavens  
At the bottom of the water tub  
Lived a worm  
The warm and I  
Together, alive

*Translated from the Japanese by Susan  
Bautery (199??)*

## **Hashizume Bun**

## Fruitcake Creative

Poetry meetings workshops discover  
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This workshop is open to all, run by  
@DysxicRant... there is Disabled  
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details. Car park and Disabled Access  
have different entrances. I have the  
space on Monday's from 11am till  
12.45pm: Let's make experimental art!  
Join me....this workshop is not funded  
Come and create....DM or email

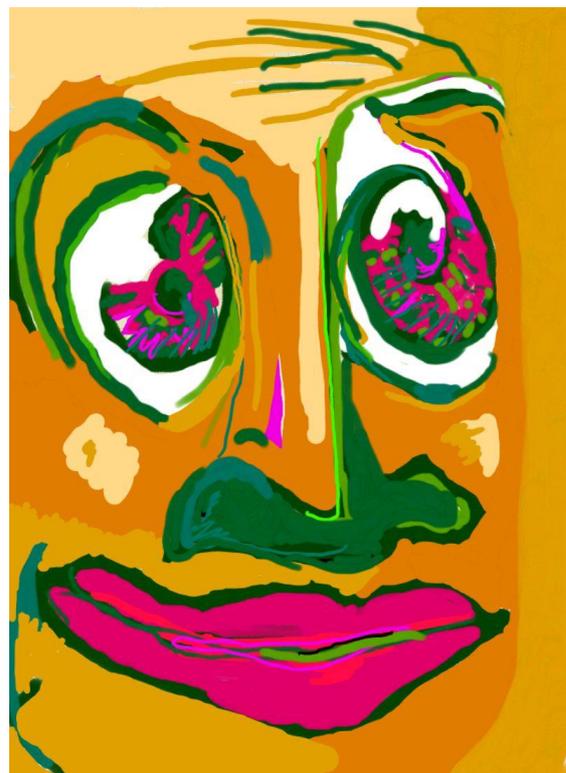
### Art Exhibition of Michelle Baharier: Slates Paintings 'Spirit'

Opening on **27 July 2019 5-7pm @  
Cafe DeliFelice 40 Albion St SE16;**  
Nearest tube Canada Water and  
Rotherhithe; all welcome.

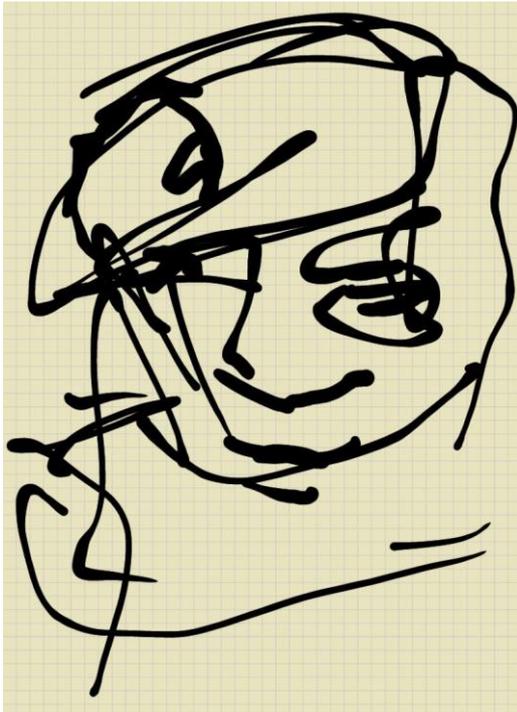
Michelle has been working though her  
autobiography and has put together a  
show that will open up your heart to  
the humanity we all have inside us.  
this show celebrates the spirit of our  
life force – **which cannot be killed**



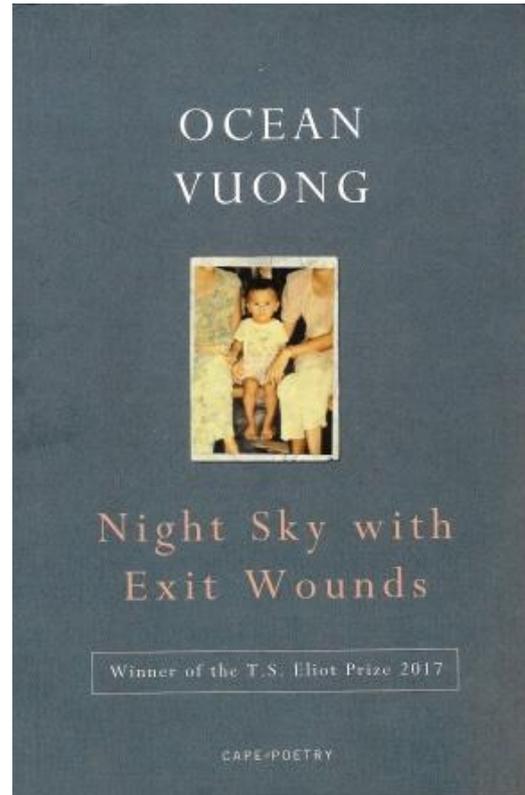
**.Michelle Baharier – Portrait Study 1**



**Michelle Baharier – Portrait Study 2**



Michelle Baharier – Portrait Study 3



## Ocean Vuong - if you dare to close your eyes...an overview

by Philip Ruthen

As 2019 has just delivered Ocean Vuong's first novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, (Jonathan Cape)\*, into the hands and screens of a tremblingly anticipating global audience, it may be timely to explore again why and where the acclaim and intensity of feeling has originated.

The attention paid to Ocean Vuong's work worldwide cannot be only accounted for its emergence in a technological and media-orientated age. That various



Michelle Baharier – Reflected Figures



inventive in its form.[3] The poem - set as prose, but with line break slashes included (a baggy, hybrid form Vuong uses elsewhere) – appears as a series of footnotes’. The poem’s sub-title is better described I think as the poem’s headline, being a quote from an unspecified Dallas Voice (the multiple pun on the word ‘Voice’ is subtle and effective), the news or newsprint headline becoming the poem as much as, and as powerfully as the ‘footnotes’. The form brings the loud and near inaudible together, filling the large white space between headline and footnotes, which at first is seemingly empty, but is populated only with numbers where the Real stanzas’ narrative should be:

*On 27<sup>th</sup> April 2011, a gay couple, Michael Humphrey and Clayton Capshaw, was murdered by immolation in their home in Dallas, Texas.*

#### Dallas Voice

-----  
 1. As if my finger,/ tracing your collarbone / behind closed doors, / was enough / to erase myself. To forget / we built this house knowing / it won't last. How /...

[from SEVENTH CIRCLE OF EARTH](NSWE)

We can sense something new, urgent is in play, with big subjects, big myths, gathering to challenge audiences that dared not fully address these before. Performed by a poet adept at representing the world he finds himself in with *le mot juste*, Vuong has a command of device, feeling and creativity that demands closer attention. Through the soft-voiced convincing recordings via on-line platforms, Vuong draws us closer still;

on occasion the language is ordinary, brief – reminiscent of the New York School of Poets he admires, yet idiosyncratic. Said Vuong, ‘Dyslexia . . . I had a lot of difficulty. I had ESL teachers, and only when I was 11 was I able to sit with a book by myself.’ Through voice, the poet’s relation to the word, and to the written word, is questioned, and resolved.

It is the prominence of, at times, the effectively stateless, and/or traumatised that Vuong additionally evokes, reminding us of his anti-capitalist positions, and perhaps a political unconscious influence from Frantz Fanon in the turning from wretched to hope: “. . . My family has a long history of dyslexia[], and mental illness, and learning disabilities, and a lot of it is traced to war trauma.” [4] Making, breaking, stretching boundaries of recognition to feel and survive - the resistance acted out in the poetry, whether it be sexual power scrutinised, or, in tender moments, familial existence. [5] Voice, tradition, and what can be recovered from origins are further themes in an investigation of power and place: "...From men, I learned to praise the thickness of walls. / From women, / I learned to praise..."

Conceits exist in the acclaim received for his work. Vuong is praised for producing poetically the very subjects that otherwise frighten and remain tacitly segregated, opening the space and time in the poems’ vividness, then sharing the fear in the world both writer and reader/listener have now entered, sharing the fear of the worlds both have left behind:

There's a joke that ends with—*huh?*/  
It's the bomb saying here is your father.//

Now here is your father inside/  
your lungs. Look how lighter//

the earth is—afterward/

[from Deto(nation)](NSEW)

Vuong therefore exchanges an unspoken search for resolution, salvation, peace, enlightenment in a space held in the sound and word-scape, if only for the moments of the poems, which prompt a need to re-visit, re-find, find out how to stay, if you dare...

. . If I close my eyes/I'm inside the piano again/& only. If I close my eyes/no one can hurt me.//

[from QUEEN UNDER THE HILL](NSEW)

**Overview©Philip Ruthen 2019**

Philip Ruthen's most recent poetry collection, *Familial* (2018), is available via Waterloo Press: [www.waterloopress.co.uk](http://www.waterloopress.co.uk)

\*For a recent review example of Vuong's novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, (Jonathan Cape 2019):

And just some of the on-line sources accessed re Ocean Vuong:

[1] [How a Poet Named Ocean Means to Fix the English Language | The New Yorker](#)

[2] [Interview-ocean-vuong 2013](#)

[3] [2017 Forward First Collections Reviewed #4 – Ocean Vuong | Martyn Crucefix](#)

[4] [Ocean Vuong – Tribach: for those who love \(or would like to love\) poetry](#)

[5] [this What Scares Writer and Zen Buddhist Ocean Vuong - Tricycle: The Buddhist Review](#)