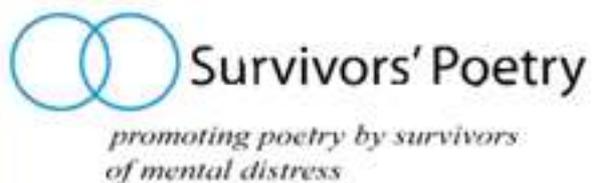


Poetry Express Newsletter #62

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



Image – by Michelle Baharier



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

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

Editorial *2021- Mon Amour?*

January, sick and tired you've been hanging on me –
Pilot, January 1975

So goodbye to 2020 vision, and it's certainly clear a large number of Americans have been taking the red pill – Vortex parlance for waking to the truth, but hi-jacked by the Far-Right. Of course it could never happen here ... More later.

I

Many of us must feel it's a world of twisting tunnels, with brief blinding snatches of sunlight as we flash into the dark eye of a third; and **Lockdown III** sounds like a really bad sequel. I can only wish everyone out there a speedy vaccination tier (or scramble over one of its barricades) and fervently pray you who read this will somehow be given the vaccination as swiftly as you could wish.

As I write, 1325 have died in a single day. You'd think with the days being shorter . . . No. Many of you have endured Covid, and all of us have been shielding fully or partly for ten months. I can only hope you health and, above all, companionship and light.

No-one needs rehearsing over our own government, though I'll just briefly mention a play of mine *On Guard* around the theme of the mainly Jewish ex-servicemen and women, **Group 43** is in Zoom rehearsal; and in a scene from the House of Commons one outed Neo-Fascist is named as the Member for Barnard Castle. And in fact it's true: the member for the area around it has been called that by Tory colleagues. I've not named them here, or their constituency, but it's Public Record anyway. Just to bear in mind when you get to III and IV (Sections, not lockdown!)...

II

So how can we make the case for government intervention with increased Mental Distress everywhere? Sometimes it's a case of joining up with other campaigns and recognizing how wide our community is. I'm involved with the **Public Campaign for the Arts**, chaired by **Jack Gamble** of the **Arcola**

Theatre Dalston (he's resident director there) and tackling something gave me an idea.

I've long been advocating the government and through them the **DCMS** and **Arts Council** look at the model for bringing live theatre to online platforms – literally live performances into people's computers. It helps theatre and its revenues, as well as widening the audience to people either vulnerable, disabled, frail, or self-isolating – as well as people much farther away than could ever reach a particular theatre.

The world – even the government – has woken up to themes of isolation: everyone has had a taste of it. Whilst the government weasles about Mental Health in children if not taught in schools (funny, I thought lack of a hot meal, poverty and broken schools might be higher on the agenda) they've also recognized isolation. Though this has then led to specious arguments about serfs being so sad they need to go out to catch Covid and die in the service of empty buildings like the **Ministry of Justice** (not hyperbole, this happened!) there is increasing recognition.

Not a kind one of course. It does however at least suggest that Mental Distress impacts on productivity (in itself actually hardly enhanced since 2010), and it is finally much higher up in the public consciousness. Beware its being turned round as a weapon, but even so. And it's something at last we can argue for, as well as empathize with.

This idea is simple enough – say selecting a series of six or so live broadcasts from a live run and have people pay (or not in some cases) to watch online, perhaps on a day where there's a Q&A too. It means theatre's lost revenues, often from these very people, can be recouped and despite the fetishisation of a 'live' experience it's infinitely better than none at all. People have grown used to this, from NT Live from 2009 onwards, and then in lockdown many theatres releasing online live performances – Chichester with Sarah Kane's *Crave*, the Almeida with the Chris Bush/Rebecca Frecknall devised *Nine Lessons and Carols*. We're getting used to the culture. People like it.

I've asked previous SP Chair and permanent wise Counsel **Phil Ruthen** for some advice. Briefly, marrying enlargement of online theatre with its efficacy and reach to many isolated people, and addressing Mental Health in a far more wide-ranging way, utilizing our experience here. The isolation of many really is something online access can transform.

This idea can clearly travel far further, encompassing online events via zoom and emerging platforms. We remember the magnificent set of Zoom meetings organized by our Live Events Co-ordinator **Debbie McNamara**, whose inspirational leadership over this period, despite two bouts of **Covid 19**, needs commemoration for the standout Survivors Poetry initiative of recent years.

For me at least these were more inspiring freewheeling and even longer than the live Poetry Café Events – and with a larger, certainly more physically far-flung number of participants. So from Newcastle to New Zealand we had people joining to read their poetry. It's happening with Waterloo Press involving American and Cumbrian participants mixing with the South-East and so on.

There's relevance for us here beyond the monthly Event. I've long wished to link the 33 London Boroughs with online content, a website with these 33 Boroughs integrated on it. Well the website vanished when its designer neglected to give me the access code when I tried renewing it over the phone, and we're without a site. Phil points out that in many ways the notion of websites are beginning to be superseded with Facebook access.

This is still an emerging set of thoughts, and apologies for any wooliness. But there are opportunities in this year of Captain Hindsight where 2020 clarifies some futures, some wild futurity.

All this can form part of the **PCA's**10-point proposal partly through **ACE** and **DCMS**. Phil and I can develop mental health onto the online part and I've had an offer from the Press Officer (till last November) of **NT Live**, a good friend.

III

First Bread of Heaven, then the Politics of Middle Earth. It's impossible not to observe events over the Pond as well as comment on our own – I think government is stretching it.

There's two deaths here that frame a presidency more noted for its evil cradling for the future than its antics. Ex-USAF Ashli **Babbitt** was born the same year (1985) as para-legal and liberal activist **Heather Danielle Heyer** (May 29, 1985 – August 12, 2017) murdered aged 32 in 2017 in **Charlottesville** by allies of Babbitt, who at least had 3 plus years more of life, and until 2016 was enjoying 14 years in the USAF.

Babbitt from her posts seems to have been an out-and-out Neo-Fascist, but she was just 35 and had been horribly infected like any pigtailed blonde German screaming *Heil!* in the 1930s. Their deaths – two young women born in the same year – bookend the Neo-Fascist antics of a man who wanted to grab young women like them by the pussy. But he grabbed them by their deaths.

IV

Washington Post staffer **Vincent Bevins** has written in *The Jakarta Method* (Public Affairs, New York 2020) an excoriating account of the US's toppling of Democracy elsewhere. It's now been imported. And as former **Major Daniel Sjorgen** recounts in his *Patriotic Dissent* (Heyday, California 2020) an equally damning expose from a West Point lecturer and 5-year Afghan/Iraq veteran point of view: soldiers below officer rank and police generally are pro-Trump; and US military policy is corrupt, imperialist, terminally dangerous, hugely destabilising and the importer of America's destruction. He too has written so savagely that he's had death threats. But not from the army generals on the back cover, and the military generally who only praise him.

So are Americans reeling from what they've been doling out to other nations across the world from about 1954 in Guatemala? Tragically these people have enormous permission now, with Cruz and the GOP-smacked (as Ash Sarkar put it this morning on her post) only nominally endorsing democracy. Indeed several had said they'd go armed to the Capitol with Glock guns. *Volte face* now doesn't disguise it. (Or over here when Johnson nominated Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize; never forget our MSM supported Trump's far-right cabaret).

There are several more focused candidates for 2024, like cute far-right TV personality Tucker Carlson (b. 16/5/69 San Francisco). And the fuel for this – the mass emiseration of poor whites, the enslavement of those of colour – lies ready if Biden tacks further to the right with his corporate backers warning him against any progressive moves – they refused him permission to appoint **Elizabeth Warren** as running mate incidentally.

Result will be a 'betrayal' of the poor which will rush them into far-right fantasies and a real neo-fascist leadership in 2022 and 2024. The Republicans are finished, the party is now far-right. Democrats chasing after them to the right will never work. The Democrats can only win now by e.g. creating programmes of green work in the rust belt and elsewhere, the places they

complacently contemptuously abandoned and Trump won. To combat the far right the Democrats must shift left. It was the left whom **Hilary Clinton** termed ‘the unmentionables’ despising them out of helping in 2016; so she lost.

Biden was shrewder, calculating that by accepting the left’s help – Sanders worked hard for him – the Democrats wouldn’t take the Senate, so his Green New Deal promises would be happily unfulfilled. Biden had been sleepwalking (Trump wasn’t entirely wrong there) into the idea that doing nothing will do. Now the left – from **Squad** and **Sanders** – to the new activist base – will demand action. It’s that – or **January 6th 2021** will be the first iteration of what we’ll get on **November 7th 2024**.

V

I think it’s time to acknowledge that in **Dave Russell** we have one of the most astonishingly gifted editors and increasingly (with recognition) writers in the country creating *Poetry Express* before our eyes. He’s done it with very little but comradely encouragement, has sourced selected and crafted an arts as well as poetry and polemics e-zine and to a higher standard single-handed than many of us manage with a staff. And he contributes nearly all the reviews. There’s a batch of Waterloo Press reviews I’ve been privileged to have access to, and again Dave’s industry and thoroughness here – as well as his elegance and trenchant style – is unique.

Together with Debbie and Phil and other MCs like George Tahta, Alastair Murray and Dave Russell himself, we have a Survivors’ Poetry team that – without funding – has kept a standard of artistic excellence and polemic engagement that if there was justice, should have been given an award. x

Keep safe everyone, the pin-prick of light at the end of the tunnel might just be the gleam of the vaccination needle. And if that isn’t a bent sharp of a metaphor, what is?

Simon Jenner January 8th 2021

Live Activities

I am sooo excited to tell you all that the amazing **Survivors' Poetry Lockdown Lounge Parties** will be resuming monthly on the Fourth Thursday of the month on Zoom on 28 Jan, 7.30pm till late again!

Join us at your screen for a night of joy and pain, nuance and power as we reconvene with our poems between our teeth like cutlasses – to join virtual hands across the isolation. We have been blessed with funding from **NSUN** to pay for our zoom subscription, many thanks to them.

Our community has suffered all the shocks and blows of the pandemic and then some, it'll be fantastic to welcome one and all together again at home and across the globe to share our immeasurable creativity in the best way we know how, with the magic of our spoken wordcraft and music.

See the Facebook page **Survivors' Poetry Gigs** for more details and the link to join closer to the event. If you're not already on the Events mailing list, pass us your email address to receive a monthly bulletin with flier and line-up for the next event included.

As usual, the emphasis is on the brilliance of the contributions from the floor, although we always have an invited Guest Artist performing a longer set, and a whole array of Special Guests on the bill. A night not to be missed

À bientôt fellow poets!

Debbie McNamara, Live Events Coordinator

The Progress We've Made

The other night I went to YouTube and watched a reggae concert from 1973. The concert took place in Edinburgh. The audience ranged from teenage to middle age, and was mostly white. The acts performed in a variety of styles: **The Cimarons** sang *Ain't No Sunshine* by **Bill Withers**, and backed most of the other artists. There were **Nicky Thomas**, **Winston Groovy**. Then came **Dennis Alcapone** – one of the early **Toasters**. I remember hearing him toasting the following sentiments – “war is ugly, love is beautiful”, here he sang praises to **Cassius Clay**. **The Marvels** were a vocal group: two men and an attractive woman singer. **The Pioneers** were backed by a group of long-haired white musicians. **Judge Dread** was the MC, a white guy who knew the artists. At the end of the evening he wished us all God Bless. **Nicky Thomas** was particularly dynamic: he sang “Something’s Holding Me Back Is It Because I’m Black,” a sentiment that he could no doubt relate to. But I feel he wasn’t projecting it on to the audience. The Skinheads who bought those Reggae records and helped get them into the charts often lived on the same Housing Estates as their Caribbean brethren.

A few years later, Reggae became popular; Punk bands and Reggae bands started working together. **Dennis Bovell** produced **The Pop Group** and **The Slits**. “Black skinned blue eyed boys ain’t going to fight no more wars” sang **The Equals** at the beginning of the decade. We had made a little progress. There were setbacks; there always are – scheming minds trying to corrupt white working class youth. Too often they succeeded in their aims There was still a long way to go, but we had made some progress.

Over the years I have got to know and make friends with people from different parts of the world. It has felt good to learn and share a little of each other’s history. It is always good to learn something new. Black and white people become neighbours – in the same street, on the same housing estate. We talk and moan about life, our struggles with the housing association. The beautiful summer sunshine, the miserable English weather, when it keeps raining. There are reasons to greet each other with a smile. We stand in the same supermarket queues we get on the same buses. If we should stumble and fall, it’s nice when someone helps us up. It is good to have a friend, someone to offer a helping hand. When that happens I am grateful to you whoever you are, I will say thank you for your help.

In this world of constantly changing terminology, there are buzz words and mind games that divide and control – privileged white lives some will say. But many of us are not privileged: we have experienced hardship, we’ve had our struggles. Poverty, slum housing, dead-end jobs; we have worked hard to make our way. Many of us have travelled that lonely journey through psychiatric corridors; there are struggles we could share, to help lift some of the burdens. All lives matter, don’t they, don’t they? All lives matter that is what I would like to say. We could be working together towards more hopeful days. Is it possible to build on the progress we’ve made?

Frank Bangay
July 2020

Dennis Bovell

In case you are not familiar with **Dennis Bovell** I will explain. He was part of a South London reggae band called **Matumbi**, formed in 1971 and based in the Brixton, Clapham and Battersea areas. Dennis Bovell also made some acclaimed dub albums under the name **Blackbeard**. He also produced some Punk and New-Wave bands like **The Pop Group** and **The Slits**.

The scheming minds mentioned in this piece is a reference to far-right political parties like the National Front and the British Movement. They did a lot to exploit white working class youth; they did manage to create a lot of friction. In the late 1970s things were getting tough, and people had many frustrations. However, it has been said that a lot of the youth who were fans of Two-Tone Music didn't like the way the Far-Right were exploiting them.

This piece of writing talks about some of the good things that have happened in Britain since the 1950s in attempts to bridge racial barriers. Mixed-race musical collaborations in Brittan go back to that time, the post war years. Some of the black jazz musicians from the 1950s have been quoted as saying that they felt marginalised. That is no doubt true, these were early days and we had a long way to go.

Trinidad-born piano player **Winifred Atwell** came to England in 1946. In 1953 she appeared in the last film made by music-hall comedian **Frank Randall** titled *It's A Grand Life*. Throughout the 1950s she had many hits in the pop charts with her boogie piano playing. This included two number 1 hits. Keyboard player **Keith Emerson** has described her as an influence on his piano playing. Two mixed-race singers in Brittan in the 1950s were **Shirley Bassey** and **Cleo Lane**. Shirley Bassey was born in the Bluetown area of Cardiff from a Nigerian father and an English mother. Bluetown is also known as **Tiger Bay**, and is situated near Cardiff docks. Since early last century it has been a culturally mixed area. Shirley Bassey's musical career started during the 1950s. By the 1960s she had established herself as a popular singer having various chart hits. She also sang the theme song to

three James Bond films. Cleo Lane was born in Uxbridge Middlesex from a Jamaican father and an English mother. She grew up in the Southall area of West London. She married British jazz musician **Johnny Dankworth** and sang with his jazz band. She also developed an acting career appearing at the Royal Court Theatre in London. The Royal Court Theatre was home to modern playwrights of that time such as **John Osborne** and **Harold Pinter**.

In the 1950s, Teddy Boys were listening to black artists such as **Fats Domino**, **Little Richard** and **Chuck Berry**. Fats Domino was also popular in Jamaica and an influence on Ska. Teenagers from this time were also discovering the Blues and formed skiffle groups where they would be playing songs by people like Leadbelly. Jazz musician **Chris Barber** and blues musician **Alexis Korner** brought **Big Bill Broonzy** and **Muddy Waters** to Britain.

This paved the way for the many Blues artists who visited Britain during the 1960s. In the 1960s the Musicians' Union made a ruling that visiting American artists couldn't bring their backing groups with them. As a result, when these Blues and Soul artists toured in Britain they would be teamed up with British bands. During the late 1960s Blues music would find a hippy audience. The mid-to-late 60s Blues Boom would find many British bands playing the Blues and many Blues artists making visits to Britain. If anyone knows about other mixed-race musical collaborations that took place in the 1950s, or any mixed-race musical collaborations that took place before the Second World War I would be pleased to learn about them.

Through the Mods, Skinheads and Punks, youth who loved black music in its different forms, more mixed-race collaborations would take place. There were, no doubt, other things too. We made a little progress and it would be nice to think that more progress could be made.

Peace and Love – Frank Bangay

My Pictures – Michelle Baharier



Green Face – Just Life How It Is

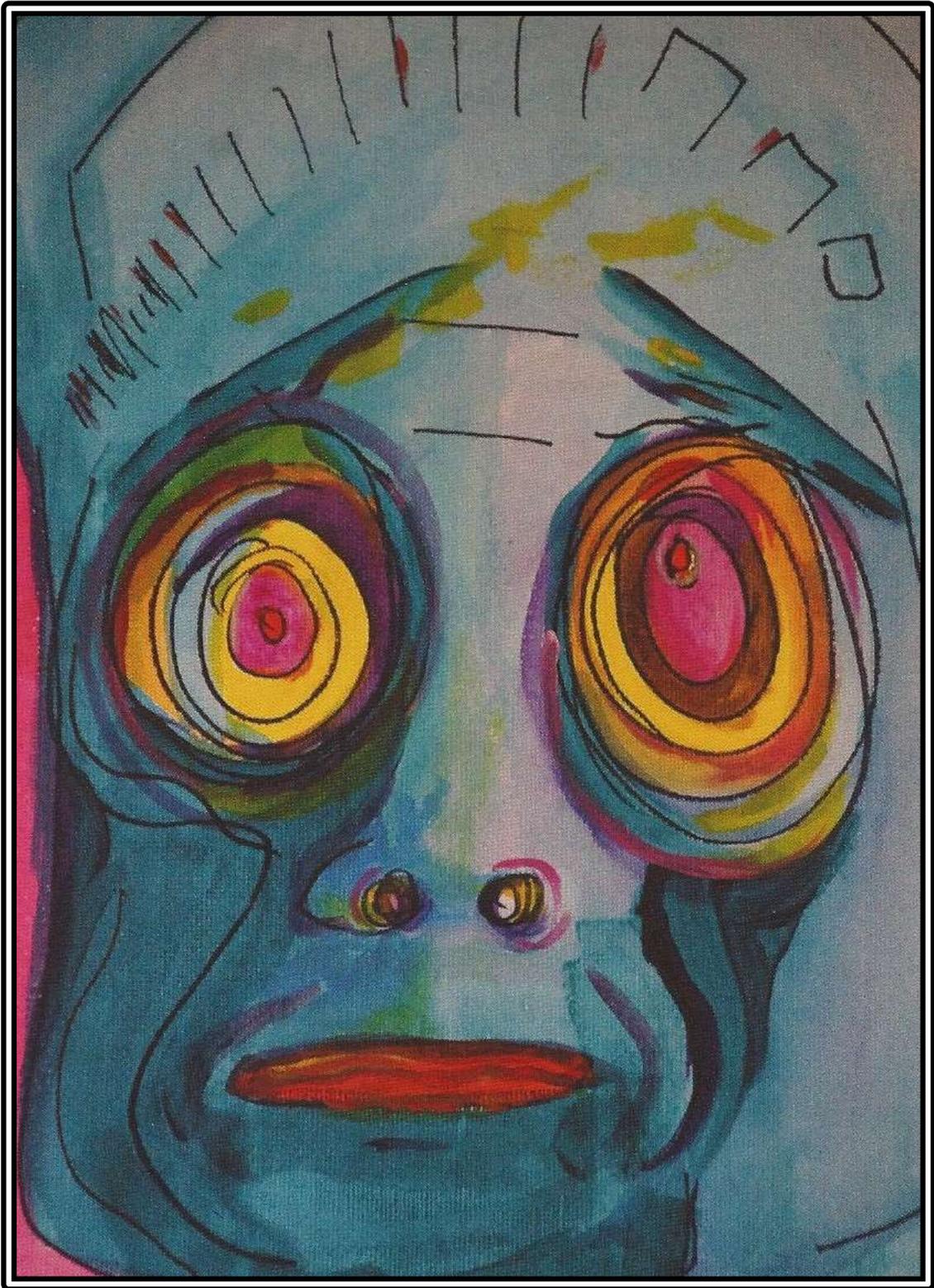
The Hermit's Meaning- There are times in every life, when one must step back and make a careful examination of their situations and decisions. Finding the Hermit in your spread suggests this is just such a time for you. You are in need of a period of inner reflection, away from the current demands of your position. This retreat can be physical, or a search within. Only a deep and honest introspection will lead to a solution, however.



The Doorway Living in Prison – Acrylic on Canvas



Cat



Watercolour on Canvas – 'When the Statue of Liberty Cries



Grim Reaper



Face



Face A4 – Acrylic on Canvas

Worcester County

They tore off the material that covers my head
They came for my face mask but I am not defined by dread
Something snapped in me I slapped one of them hard
It's now my dilemma what life I discard
But you won't be a part of it

I have sisters in all the world's lands
The world awaits me I take no commands
I won't be a serf at a slave driver's hands
Don't follow me to Worcester County

I heard what you said don't judge me by them
But you stood and watched betwixt me and your friends
And I'd compromise so much, but here's where it ends
Don't follow me to Worcester County

They came for my face mask the ones that we're all meant to wear
And forgot the bit where I'd lived my whole life here
Or forgot to care

The glittering in the gutter was the ring you'd bought me
You said 'it's all complex' but all this has taught me
Some people are just evil and you stood whilst they fought me
Don't follow me to Worcester County

It's everything and nothing to do with religion and race
You sought the right words but in scrabbling you merely turned face
My human dignity is not about "knowing my place"

You spit out the words like towel head and feminist
But the citizen of nowhere is the ugly supremacist
With bile from the pound-shop as a paid-up polemicist
Don't follow me to Worcester County

Copyright Aidan McGee 2020

Woke Blues

I had a dream last night
There were pointing fingers all around my bed
I had a dream last night
There were wagging tongues all around my bed.
They said son you can't do this son you can't say that.

Woke up this morning
I read the daily news
It seems to me
That my dream is coming true.

When you were young
Your parents would protect you
From what they thought was wrong,
Sometimes you disagreed
Sometimes you thought they misunderstood
Sometimes you misunderstood them.
They were trying to bring you up
The way they thought they should
As difficult as it sometimes was
I understand and respect that.

Now as an adult
I have learnt a little
Enough to be able to think for myself
Enough to understand right from wrong.
I don't always know when I am going mad
But the world is rarely sane.

These people who say what's wrong and right for us
What we can watch
What we can say
What should be banned
Do they know what they are talking about?
Do they understand what they are seeing?
Do you understand me?
Do I understand you?
Is there a cure for the woke blues?

Why don't they do something useful with their time?
Like washing up in a kitchen
Mending damaged roads
Washing bedpans in a hospital
Picking litter up from the pavement
Something that will help make the world go round.

Frank Bangay, September 2020

Have Faith My Friend

Sometimes I think this is just a strange dream
I will wake up to find that things are not how they seem
The world is still spinning
Birds are still singing
A little shaken I will start my day.

Sometimes I think this is a science fiction movie
The demon virus from another galaxy
We have so much trouble keeping it at bay
How can we chase it away?

Where are earth's mighty heroes when we need them?
Iron Man, the Mighty Thor, Captain America, Luke Cage
Powerman,
And many more.
They often seem able to defeat these deadly enemies
As tough as the battle seems to get.
Doctor Strange could tackle it with his spells
I am sure Spider Man would do his bit.

Where are Batman and his mate Robin?
Are they back in Gotham?
Hiding in their Batcave
Hey you guys this is bigger than it seems.
This is not a prank being played by the Joker
The world needs to be saved.

Sometimes I see no poetry
No humour
Just a desperate world struggling to survive
Even earths mighty heroes

Need to protect themselves.

I have fears for the day
And hopes for the future
That this world will be able to recover
But sorting out facts from the scaremongering
Is never an easy thing,
Never an easy thing.

The other day I walked down the Hackney Narrow Way
I walked past the Churchyard of St John's
I saw a flower bed planted with spring flowers
Seeing all the colours made me happy
And I will believe that one day
I will be sitting on a park bench again
At peace with myself
At peace with the world.
Have faith
Have faith my friend
God Bless.

Frank Bangay, April 2020

The Teddy Bear and the Clock

(Ted)

Mr Clock why do you tick so loudly?

(Clock)

Well Mr Ted it's my job to keep ticking, if I don't move my hands around the clock face these humans won't know what time it is, then they would be in a right state.

(Ted)

But can't you move your hands around the clock face silently? I get headaches with the noise you make.

(Clock)

It's my heartbeat, my life force, and if I didn't tick I wouldn't be able to do my job. But if I make too much noise why don't you go into a quieter room?

(Ted)

Oh I would but these humans insist that I sit here looking stupid. That's my lot in life. But at night when there asleep you should see the mischief that I get up to.

(Clock)

Mischief?

(Ted)

Yes mischief.

(Clock)

And what sort of mischief is that?

(Ted)

Oh I can't let on, you might report me

(Clock)

Oh I wouldn't do that, it's my job to sit here and let these humans know what time it is. And when I slow down they wind me up.

(Ted)

Well if you won't let on I will tell you. In the midnight hour when you are slumbering I get down from this shelf and hide my owners' shoes and street door key, so that when he is in a rush to go to work in the morning he gets so frustrated. "Where are my shoes? I am sure I left them in the hallway, and I am sure I left my keys on the table. Oh how foolish of me to put them in the wrong place."

(Ted)

He gets so confused. "Why do I leave things in the wrong place? Oh the boss won't he be angry". It's fun winding people up. Perhaps you could join in and speed up. Then he will think he's really late. We could both share in the fun, what do you think of the idea?

(Clock)

Oh I don't know about that, they might throw me in the dustbin and get a new clock

(Ted)

But you said these humans wind you up. You conform too much. All you need to say is that these humans over wound you.

(Clock)

Well I will think about it, but I think you had better be careful. If you get caught out you might end up in a charity shop, then you don't know where you might be going next. Pawn shop, rag and bone cart, rowdy children who beat you up, less sociable clocks than me.

(Ted)

Are you serious about this?

(Clock)

Yes I am serious about this.

(Ted)

But tell me Mr Clock, how are we going to stop these humans from treating us so badly?

(Clock)

You feel they treat us badly?

(Ted)

Yes, we soft toys should be demanding rights. Perhaps clocks should be demanding rights. How are we going to get our rights?

(Clock)

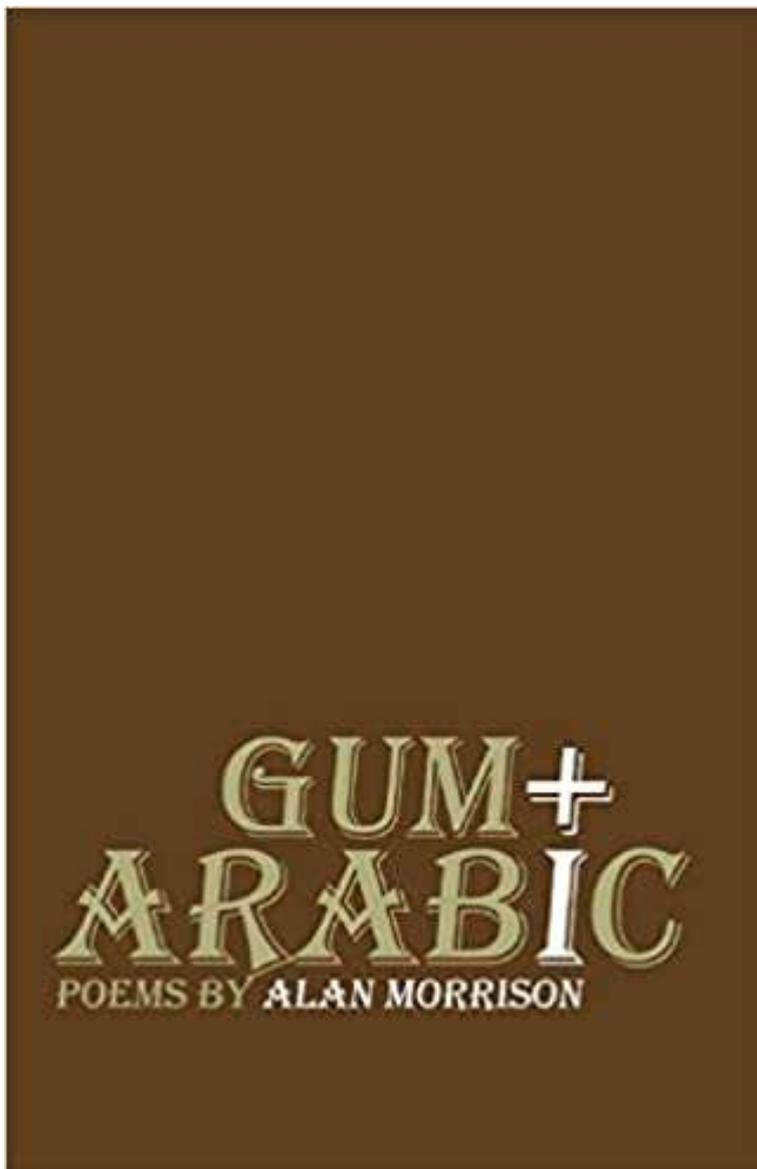
I will let those thoughts tick over in my mind, Perhaps I can come up with a suggestion.

Frank Bangay

First written August 2004, revised February 2018

Gum Arabic – Poems by Alan Morrison

Cyberwit.Net 16.3.2020 ISBN – 13: 978-93-89690-65-1 £12.15



The dominant threads of this collection are the condition of Britain in terms of decay and prejudice, put in a global and historical perspective. The title was chosen because Gum Arabic is a vital ingredient of Rizla cigarette papers, integral to the 'little England' way of life. Insular Brits should be made aware of their integral global links. The opening poem makes a powerful exhortation to that effect.

The Origami Man is an utterly moving portrayal of a derelict who holds on to his one crucial handicraft skill. Physically, he is in a pitiful condition, with an agonising backlog of suffering. His eyes are described as ‘Traceries of shattered aspirations’. But he holds on to his craft, sustaining faith in children’s responses to his designs – ‘. . . inscrutable snapshots/Of minors’ future memories. His designs are both works of art and detritus, picked on by the pigeons. The paperwork is put into the context of the ecosphere – ‘the pulp spoils of his deciduous/Substance’. For all his debility, the Origami Man sustains mobility, constantly moving around to different pitches. There follows a heart-rending comparison between his designs and vast amounts of superfluous bureaucratic paperwork – another variety of detritus! His skill, of course, is threatened with obsolescence by new technology, and he has some understandable Luddite feelings. On one occasion, he distributes pottery models because the winds would blow the paperwork away. Finally, Alan sees a pile of origami designs, but no person; he is left to wonder whether that man has passed on.

The Blue, the Gray and the Brown is a portrayal of a Scandinavian Church, very well-kept in comparison with a lot of British churches, but with the same sparse congregations. Alan is enthralled by the effect of the subdued colour scheme: “*These are the stony tones of faith’s simplicity*” – Alan refers to ‘The inkling of a Christian still clinging in me’, but reminds the reader of the perspective of pre-Christian Nordic religion, which survives in this church.

Summer Without Monika – gloss on the famous film *Summer with Monika* is about the last days of life of Alan’s Swedish ex-partner’s aunt – a woman utterly ravaged by excessive smoking: with her near-dying breath, she becomes a medium of inspiration, speaking and singing in a language ‘strange to her ears . . . her smoky/Unconscious now suddenly unchained’.

Carnation Stains reflects sadly on broken, truncated relationships of the past – ‘From thorny togetherness to brutal oblivion. Another reference to a ravaged person – this time Alan’s mother, who passed away after a long battle with Huntington’s Disease in 2013. A searing biological analogy – ‘Just

for her soul's imago to spin back to/Caterpillar inhibitions' – the gestation cycle in reverse. She is obviously terminally ill; her condition is compared to that of a decrepit motor vehicle. Her metabolism is a microcosm of the menaced ecosphere – 'jungles of phlegm, scrubs of mucus'. Her agony is played out against a background of grating noises – ambulance sirens, sea-gulls, washing machines. There is a flashback to her life of rural poverty – 'stomach-cramping fasts in that cottage carcass'. Alan left that home without saying goodbye.

In a sense, damp symbolises the British climate and temperament – an 'ancestral British stain . . . Masochistic nostalgia, elemental sentimentalism'. *Brambling Damp Rampant* elaborates on this theme in near-epic proportions. Britain is full of old, neglected buildings where damp sets in, and its concomitant fungi grow. It was rampant in 19th Century working Class tenement housing; it is a 'composite of compost and pot' for Bohemians, and there is the frightening thought of '. . . those slogging/Trades long abolished but now on the brink of coming/Back'. With economic recession and the growing tide of homelessness, this is a prominent factor. Alan starts with a bitterly ironic mock eulogy of damp, and later a sobering appraisal of its tenacity and resilience. He extends his vision to town planning and the property market – 'partitioned towns/And ring-fenced cities, labyrinths of buy-to-lets . . .' He makes a comparison with damp-free Sweden, which puts our laxity in an extremely poor light – 'the cowboy-botching British surface wipe/Of social reforms . . .' He seems a bit hyperbolic to attribute the departure of the Romans to damp. Damp is also a symbol of social oppression and negligence. Here the collapse of hopes has physical repercussions.

Nasturtiums – some very hardy, resilient flowers are categorised as weeds. In some sense, they are botanical predators, hard-bitten and utterly 'street-wise'. **Author's Comment:** *Nasturtiums, Hope at the Umpteenth, and The Lady in the Cabinet* are all about my partner who is an abuse survivor and who suffers from PTSD as a result of this; the Arabic-themed poems also merge with these to some extent as she is half-Sudanese (and half German) and her father is originally from Khartoum – these associations then link in

with my 'guilty' hobby of painting colonial military figurines from the Sudan campaigns . . .

Hope at the Umpteenth Attempt – hope cannot exist without its concomitant, despair. Here this dilemma is focused on an Immigrant, denied basic social care because he does not have ‘settled status’, the target of retrogressive xenophobia. The policies related to Brexit are, rightly, compared to physical injury – ‘national self-harm’ and ‘no heal’ indeed. There is a final plea to this sufferer to retain some faith in humanity, and a tenuous thread of hope.

The Lady in the Cabinet refers to someone having a ‘rest cure’ – in squalid, damp-ridden accommodation of course. She has suffered years of abuse, and there is a gruesome backlog of the horrors of the past. This poem has direct literary inspiration, via Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, which is referred to, in the first line of the poem, as recommended reading matter:

The story describes a young woman and her husband, who imposes a [rest cure](#) on her when she suffers “temporary nervous depression” after the birth of their baby. They spend the summer at a colonial mansion, where the narrator is largely confined to an upstairs nursery. The story makes striking use of an unreliable narrator in order to gradually reveal the degree to which her husband has imprisoned her: she describes torn wallpaper, barred windows, metal rings in the walls, a floor “scratched and gouged and splintered,” a bed bolted to the floor, and a gate at the top of the stairs, but blames all these on children who must have resided there.

The narrator devotes many journal entries to describing the wallpaper in the room – its “sickly” color, its “yellow” smell, its bizarre and disturbing pattern like “an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions,” its missing patches, and the way it leaves yellow smears on the skin and clothing of anyone who touches it. She describes how the longer one stays in

the bedroom, the more the wallpaper appears to mutate, especially in the moonlight. With no stimulus other than the wallpaper, the pattern and designs become increasingly intriguing to the narrator. She soon begins to see a figure in the design and eventually comes to believe that a woman is creeping on all fours behind the pattern. Believing she must free the woman in the wallpaper, the woman begins to strip the remaining paper off the wall.”

When her husband arrives home, the narrator refuses to unlock her door. When he returns with the key, he finds her creeping around the room, rubbing against the wallpaper, and exclaiming “I’ve got out at last . . . in spite of you.” He faints, but she continues to circle the room, creeping over his inert body each time she passes it, believing herself to have become the woman trapped behind the yellow wallpaper.

The sheer horror of the situation goes beyond any standard critical terminology – ‘O how grotesquely/Inadequate these hermeneutical terms/Just as those psychiatric plaster phrases applied to your scars . . .’ In a setting evocative of the 1890s, the inmate has a vision of a lady locked in a wooden cabinet. The poet persuades her that she is looking at a Doppelgänger – ‘a rigid figurine in your own right, reified . . .’

Alan felt that this description, this vision, was a poor representation of the true depths of her distress – “. . . it felt cheapening putting it in such a figure/Of speech, a pathetic attempt to capture/Spiritual disfigurement . . .” He finally compares their respective tensions to the noisy, grinding persistence of a half-broken down clock.

The Radio Man is a solitary, lost soul with only a radio for company. He has obviously had severe mental distress, but does radiate a sense of peace and contentment, which is in some way reassuring to the ‘better adjusted’.

Damaged Gods – ever since Gods were first devised in mythology, they were credited with personalities and human emotions. Perfect, abstract entities were not devised until much later. Here they are posited as being too bound up with their own problems to concern themselves with mortal humanity,

frozen, labouring under their self-imposed overload. Akin to machinery and old tins of broken biscuits, they have become worn out, obsolete – ‘washed out by/Worship, wrung dry by religion’ – clever pun of ‘damaged goods and damaged gods’.

The Ghost of Elm Grove – presumably this is either the Elm Grove of Brighton, or that of Worthing. To set the scene of physical decay, there is a flashback to the early 19th Century, the days of child labour, with ‘Pale as a pit-boy, anthracite hair.’ The person addressed is called ‘my unrelated sister’. The reader is completely kept guessing as to how the two may have related personally. Whatever happened or did not happen, she is now a ‘cousin recluse’, taken comfort, in her isolation, from her masses of books and her ideal of a platonic lover – ‘A genderless angel reigning supreme’. To some extent, Alan can see a funny side to her situation. Her toilet is extremely well stocked with books – “Only you could make defecation poetical”. There seems to have been a brief rapprochement meeting.

The Christ of Trinity Street portrays a typical dilapidated, neglected English Church. The pigeons peck at the Christ statue. The pressures of the capitalist economy are responsible for this sorry state – ‘Asset-stripping the last scraps of compassionate/Architecture and competitive spirit’, The speculators are compared to the pigeons – pigeons akin to vultures! The poem ends with a distorted biblical legend – “A hipster-bearded schizophrenic throws out/The money counters from the cash converters . . .”

Scot of the Car Park – cf. *Scott of the Antarctic*, depicts the lot of a homeless person in the bleak cold of the Inner City. Certainly his exposure and his privation would attune him to a mental picture of the Antarctic waste – in all probability he would have a root memory of the 1950s film. This ends with a supreme act of self-sacrifice, which our subject might well aspire to emulate.

Footprints in the Snow – very lightweight for this collection, in honour of the Robin.

At Blake's Cottage, Felpham – many literati love to make their pilgrimages to places where famous writers lived. Yes: they also yearn to have met said writers alive – visionary encounters.

Satyr in Yellow-Rinse portrays yet another desperate, lonely soul. He has an emaciated skin, and for some reason had his hair dyed. He expresses ultimate delusions of grandeur: he is 'the greatest human who ever lived', inventor of the pacemaker and the electronic motor-neuron. Alan was irritated by these comments, but reluctant to condemn them because they may provide some sort of 'supportive mythology' – 'to regain at journey's end/A sense of rationality again . . .' They parted company, and Alan returned to his squalid basement flat, to write his next poem. He came across that same man again, making exquisite music on his pan-pipes. The delusions had been false, spurious, but the music was real and pure. Alan was touched, and made a silver donation.

Two Yellow Birds from Hyderabad – Prakash Kona Reddy is Professor of English at the University of Hyderabad, and a champion of good causes. "You reinvented/Yourself/for the Bookshelf . . ." The two yellow birds are works of local craftsmanship, which he assiduously supports.

Your Own Shadow – an indissoluble relationship, perhaps with a Doppelgänger. (**Author's Comment: this is just about how we can't escape ourselves, psychologically speaking...**)

The Patna's Last Pilgrim is based on, and dedicated to, Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim. Jim committed an act of cowardice by 'saving his own skin', leaving a sinking ship, the Patna, on the captain's lifeboat and leaving helpless passengers to drown. This action was a lifetime stain on his conscience, and he struggled painfully to come to terms with it, unsuccessfully; there is 'dormant promise postponed in time He forces himself to do great and noble deeds. His 'romantic picture of himself' clashes horribly with 'the shabbier reality/Of his own mortal weakness'. But his efforts culminate in his idolisation by an island people whom he saves from slavery. Allowance should be made for the fact that he was injured before taking the job as First Mate of the *Patna*. He recalls the desperate jump to save his life.

After *Satyr in Yellow-Rinse* the most compassionate tableau here is *Feeding Martin Eden*. Martin Eden is an extreme of the myth of the lonely struggling writer who finally achieves major recognition, but finds an ultimate hollowness in his success. His earlier life was one of self-imposed poverty, which earned him the hostility of the 'wage slaves'. He duly wrecked his health with his creative efforts. He then gains recognition, and is feted. In the course of his success, he is invited to an ornate 'high culture' home, full of leather-bound books. He desperately aspires to be integrated with this environment. But the 'whirl could leave him desolated' . . . only to strand him upstream/A castaway from his own landlocked class.' In some sense, his recognition came too late. By the time it happened, he had worn out his creative motivation, lost his appetite. He contemplates suicide, in the manner of some of Joseph Conrad's heroes (he was compared to Conrad) and contemplates his status as a posthumous legend: 'his place in it (reality) spilt into a solipsism/Introspected, then swim into his own myth,/His life sink into fiction, pockets weighted/With bars of silver, ingots of egolessness.'

Brown Studies – self-declaration of a nocturnal.

In *Sudan Diorama*, Alan makes a survey of his boyhood reading and film-going, which has left some permanent impression on him – the legend of Gordon of Khartoum, the works of Rider Haggard, films such as Zulu. He was particularly attracted to the glamorous image of the pre-Boer War British uniform, with scarlet tunic and pith helmet. As a good socialist, Alan is aware of all the bad associations, but stresses that he was not in any way glamorising war, but simply the glamour of uniforms. He admits "I was, I am,/A contradiction, quixotic, a Christian pacifist,/And socialist, yet fascinated with all the flash/And blaze of sun-blasted military expeditions . . ." He even likes painting miniature armies. He is, however, linked to the truth behind the legend. His partner's father came from the Sudan, where Generals Gordon and Wingate were considered as Saviours. He admits that he is to some degree indulging his inner child. The final stanza focuses on the cramped living conditions of Alan and his partner, with all their concomitant irritations. He has to struggle, he needs self-discipline to cope

with this situation, and he derives some of this from the old imperial role-models. They feel 'suspended in time'; those historical reflections will expand and iterate their time locus.

Gum Arabic – the adhesive of a cigarette paper is laden with associations – 'the tang of strange/Connections . . . the circularity/Of life and fate and/Chance associations. He then switches focus to his partner's father, who, on visiting, and subsequently residing in Bognor, must have experienced the sort of 'attitudinal prejudices' that have been empowered post-Brexit.

Author's Comment: *Gum Arabic*, although it alludes to a 'Little Englander' who happens to smoke roll ups, is not specifically linking smoking with right-wing attitudes (after all, I'm a smoker myself!), but I'm just using it as a metaphor for how lots of things we rely on in the UK have foreign origins, not least some of the most addictive things such as tobacco and coffee, but also as a metaphor for how humanity is bound or gummed together in some indissoluble sense . . .

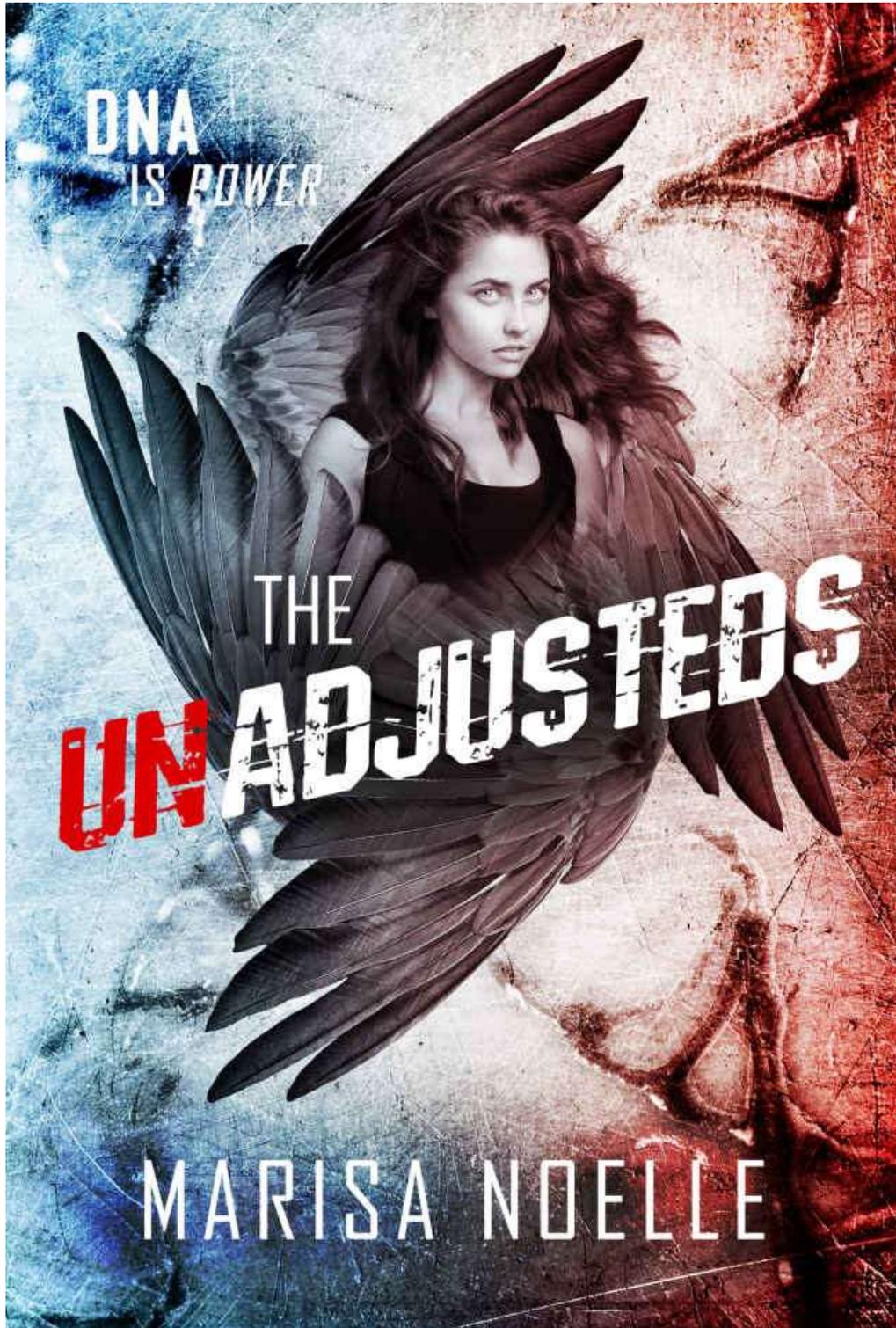
Another tour de force from Morrison!

Dave Russell

The Unadjusteds by Marisa Noelle

ISBN10: 1948115034 ISBN13: 9781948115032

Amazon Books £10.99



Marisa presents a nightmare vision of extreme genetic engineering, via the medication Nanite, which enhances people's faculties, and induces biological mutations. People injected with Nanite are 'adjusted', the others 'unadjusted'.

It is imposed by the brutal President Bear – by force, and a penetrating surveillance system.

The girl narrator, Silver Melody, has parental problems: Her father works on Nanite, while her mother was imprisoned for refusing to promote it. Father has guilt, but feels he must do his duty, hoping the rules may finally be mitigated or withdrawn. Silver takes a humanitarian stance: "I refuse to live in a world where genetically enhanced abilities are valued more than kindness and compassion."

There is a cave, where opponents of Nanite convene. Dad agrees to accompany Silver in her quest for it. En route, they negotiate ogres – mutated vigilante thugs. He proposes the use of 'temporary Nanite' to make them invisible. They are beset by wolves, both 'natural' and ex-human 'altered' wolves – then by 'hellhounds' – genetically modified dogs – finally by wolves, some 'real', some 'altered', with reptilian characteristics.

Silver loses contact with her father, then meets 'bulk' vigilante Joe Rucker. He gives reassurance about Silver's father, and advises Silver that they are both 'on the run' – "President Bear put a million dollars on your head." Joe, expelled from the Enforcement Squad, is an ally, also in search of the cave. The unadjusted have been herded into compounds. But the pursuit of the unadjusted has turned the adjusted against each other. They need the unadjusted to restore their stability. Joe's parents are imprisoned. His friend Matt leads the Resistance.

Affection develops between Silver and Joe, who lost friends through Nanite. They then meet Matt, friend of Silver's father. Silver's parents may help solve the Nanite crisis.

The complex, with its many wounded, has logistical problems, like food shortages. The inmates need Silver, even with a price on her head. She goes on a foraging expedition with Matty and others. They get locked in a store, where they discover firearms. They are menaced by a boy with reptilian tattoos; Silver prevails through her karate. He has been tracking Silver, but when challenged, promises not to 'shop' her. He too is on the run, wanting to join the community in the cavern.

Father said that Nanite, initially, was benign, but took a turn for the worse. She further demonstrates her physical prowess, and is then equipped with wings,

somewhat against her will. Elevated, she experiences intense vertigo – interesting appraisal of angels’ logistics! – then mutation of wings.

Silver is torn between loyalty to the unaltered, and taking on attributes of the altered, to serve the unaltered’s cause. “In such a short time, I’ve become everything I despised. An altered.”

The complex is assailed by trolls; Erica disables them with arrows. The dissidents gather firearms from the dead trolls, to use the mission to rescue Silver’s parents.

They travel in Matt’s jeep, and find the environs are in chaos – for all the bulks and trolls, they are free to plunder. It is agreed to keep Silver’s abilities secret, lest the price on her head be raised. There is friction between Silver and Erica, reference to regeneration pills, and hope that Silver’s parents can remedy the situation:

“Sometimes when a combination of Nanites went wrong, Dad would get a visit in his lab. He was able to reduce each problematic alteration back to the original unadjusted form using a specially concocted virus put right into the bloodstream.”

Silver and Matt’s affection mounts: “We stare at each other. Fireflies wink around us and I’m caught in a moment, wishing for things I can’t have.”

Francesca had worked loyally for President Bear, prior to his Nanite policies. She is convinced that Silver’s parents are the key to defeating Bear. With their arsenal, the dissidents do some commando training, including bulk changes. Silver feels attracted by one of the new bulks.

Silver can now change her wings at will; But they prove challenging and hazardous. She does an duo flight with Paige – feeling liberated – but then collides with a bird. Paige got alienated from her parents because of their Nanite addiction and their mutations. In desperation, she used ‘black market’ Nanite.

They discover a compound, full of refugees – among them Lyla, Matt’s sister. Silver wants to extricate her immediately, but Paige wishes to hold back for the sake of the others. Silver’s wings wear out; Paige narrowly saves her from crashing to earth. Claus and Joe reappear. Silver learns that she has qualified for her parents’ rescue team. She meets Matt, who agrees priority should be given to Lyla. There is a hint of burning bodies in the compound, and experimentation on the unaltered. Matt and Silver set off together.

Addison went to investigate something suspicious. She passed out; she recovered to meet with two soldiers, who mentioned that Silver's parents were probably in the beach compound. Francesca emphasises their high security status: "Your parents are the most protected prisoners in the entire country, guarded by a President with black widow DNA and bulk guards."

Once again Silver is with Joe; attraction recurs: "There's a glint in his eye that I recognize: longing. I breathe in and realize he shares the same thoughts as me." Passion mounts, complicated by their heightened 'altered' size; they have their first kiss. Silver holds back because of putting her parents first. Silver's 'enlargement' wears off; she returns to her slender shape.

Joe administrates an 'extension of ability'. Silver becomes Superwoman:

"OVER THE NEXT few days I take on the abilities of everyone in the cave. People become alive with chatter about my new powers and the upcoming rescue. Claus replaces my obstacle course and knife training with ability tests. Crowds form to watch my trials."

Silver learns of the rescue team, which includes Joe and Matt. She has been given invisibility pills. The team approach the compound, eluding the guards. Matt spots Lyla, and rescues her. They infiltrate the compound – conflict with the trolls rages behind them.

Silver penetrates what seems to be a laboratory – likely location for her parents: **in a surprising twist**, she comes face-to-face with President Bear. He cuts a terrifying figure:

"The combination of grizzly bear and black widow Nanites is what makes him unique and terrifying. Both species enhance his ferocity, making his orders unarguable and irrefutable. President Bear can shoot venomous silk from the palms of his hands. If they cut through your skin, you're dead in minutes."

Through Telekinesis, Bear pins Kyle to the ceiling and ties Silver's hands. Silver is undaunted: she asks Bear outright about her parents. His reply: they are in the city, and she will be interned.

His proclamation is devastating:

". . . thanks to the willing participants of the unadjusteds in the compounds, we've discovered that those who have taken more than one

animal modification need to be around unadjusted humans or those with only human modifications. Otherwise they lose their humanity. According to your father, the animal DNA overrides the human DNA and takes over. Those most severely affected revert to more primal, basic urges, but it's a good thing . . . Well, yes, that was unfortunate, but now we are on the brink of a massive shift in evolution. A new species. Once we solve this problem, we will grow as a new species."

Silver leaves Bear in agony. She sees Matt disappearing into the woods with Lyla. Unable to modulate her 'abilities', she takes flight. President Bear is near a helicopter, shooting out spiders' webbing. Silver shoots webbing back. Joe fires on President Bear, who ducks.

Matt reports on the rescue operation: many unaltered have been rescued, but not Silver's parents. Matt mourns the unaltered killed in the operation. Matt introduces Silver to Joan, a healer – one of only six, initially approved by President Bear, but then estranged:

"Once Bear and the National Medical Board realized we could take money from them, that we could bankrupt the country with our powers and put insurance companies out of business, he ended the program."

Healer pills were banned, under pain of Death. Joan offers to make Silver a healer: she inflicts a token cut on Matt; Silver heals, then cuts and heals herself.

She offers to heal Claus's leg, but respects his refusal. Matt reports on the campaign:

". . . it seems they've halted the enforced Nanite program until they can figure out how to stop themselves all going insane without our presence. But they're still doing terrible things . . ."

The bombshell: Matt shows a video of President Bear, saying Silver is wanted for treason. If she does not give herself up, her parents will be executed. There follows an image of Silver's emaciated mother. There is one consolation – the video gives some indication of the parents' whereabouts.

Erica confesses to having killed a friend, by mis-administering a regeneration pill. She is guilt-ridden, but Silver does not reject Erica, as she has subsequently saved many lives. Erica admits to being bisexual, and that in her school days she was desperate to be a cheerleader. The tragedy forced Francesca to perfect her archery: "I took up her sport so that she stays with me every day."

Silver falls in love with Matt. She does healing work on Jacob. An ogre threatens her and Matt; Silver despatches him with her knife. Matt declares his love for Silver.

Ironically, Joe Rucker is recognised by one of the guards supervising Silver; all is on the alert. She locates her father, now emaciated and injured. Dad had once administered the drug in vitro, and it had a delayed action effect. He adds that he is separated from Silver's mother. President Bear emerges on the loudspeaker, inviting Silver to his office. Silver uses her telekinesis to open all the cell doors; the prisoners break out. Dad joins the melee.

They are confronted by a terrifying spectacle:

“A towering male lion with wide jaws. Half of the hair on its head has been shaved off, and gleaming metal takes the place of its skull. Combined with the red mechanical eyes, this is something beyond mere creature. This is a chimera of beast and machine.”

A second Leviathan follows, its metallic parts seemingly impervious to Silver's knife. Finally she is confronted with President Bear. He challenges Silver: “I would really like to know, before I dispose of you and your friends, how you took on my abilities.” They have a sparring match: Bear thinks they are evenly matched; Silver thinks she is the greater. Both have telekinesis. There is a duel of knife and spiders' webbing. Silver saves herself by breathing fire on Bear. She lunges at him, and they both fall out of the window. She stabs him in the knee. In his death-throes he tells Silver that she will never find her mother.

Matt is threatened by a hellcat. In trying to escape, he has a massive fall; Silver saves him by telekinesis, and then squeezes President Bear's heart, with extra power: “A streak of blackness erupts from my palms toward Bear, tunnelling into his chest.” This kills President Bear.

Silver tends Matt, now in a desperate state. They must leave the compound. Fortunately, the electric fence is short-circuited. They flee in panic, then can relax and reflect. Silver wonders how she could have killed President Bear: “Dad said there are a lot of unexplainables when it comes to the Nanites. Is it possible for powers to evolve?”

“A thread of fear shivers through me. ‘What does that mean?’ ‘It means your abilities might be unquantifiable.’ Silver then confers with Joe about their respective feelings. Joe knows her attachment to Matt. But they are still bonded. More hellhounds

appear, which severely injure Joe. Erica kills them with arrows, but Joe perishes. They return to the cave.

Silver's father makes a hypothesis for the future:

“He thinks he can harness the DNA of a bacterium to change everyone's foreign DNA markers. The bacteria will recognize the intruding DNA modifications and direct the body to attack them, but he needs to figure out how to expose the adjusteds.”

There is a 'cooling off' period, when the participants can reflect on past events, and Matt's wounds can gradually heal. Silver's and Matt's love blossoms. News filters through: “Unadjusteds have broken out of compounds everywhere. Everyone is running.” The government has collapsed. At the cave there is mourning for the dead, but this is offset by the arrival of masses of unaltered. As the participants disperse, the newly arrived throng sing Silver's freedom song.

The Unaltered has stark realism, laced with 'shape-shifting' sci fi horror. In essence it is very near home for masses of people. Much of the city action is based in an educational campus, and will surely resonate among students affected by the lockdown. There is an American feeling about the work – appropriate, as there the extremes arise; less so here. Emergency and brutality coincide blatantly 'across the pond'. Police and military oppression are there very to the fore, as is its concomitant, breakdown of order. The situation of the cave and the compounds proclaims the lot of refugees and internees worldwide. The struggles of the dissidents have echoes of freedom fighters everywhere – from guerrillas to commandos, perhaps to some of those condemned as terrorists. President Bear, with his 'dog barking voice', has obvious affinities with Donald Trump.

The work has an ingenious, intricate plot. The main characters come across as warm and human, struggling with a major crisis. Some touching love interest is included. I give it a 5-star rating.

Dave Russell

In These Stones, Horizons Sing

The Cardiff Holiday Inn could have been anywhere
With its muzak, tellies,
Bedroom curtains shut tight day and night
Like some morgue.
After lunch our conference ended.
Sensible trains awaited us half hourly
To Paddington.
Alone at last!
I chose to spend an hour or so
Wandering.
No friend with car insisting on a strapped-in lift,
No colleague hassling to get home.
Anonymous time and space
And grateful for the burden of freedom.
No point in charity shops though tempting –
Can do those in London
But the Millenium Stadium – yes!
Three floors of tinny-looking cinemas.
I couldn't see what else to see,
It felt all tacky, shoddy.
I'd heard of the new opera house in the Bay.
'Too far to walk,' a nice old Welshman said.
Somehow I found a little blue bus,
Decided on a quick look before the four o'clock.
This Friday – of all coincidental times –
The three-day opening had begun.

In this rambling ramshackle land
With its damp green eisteddfods,
Its hurt history and derelict valleys,
Songs reign.
People congregated as one
Before the lottery-ticket-funded Millenium Centre.
Youth sang in choirs.
I stood behind to watch a sandy haired conductor lad,
Wild joy on his singing face.
Orchestras played tunes from the ballet.
The crowd stood in a long single line.
The key arrived by boat
Passed from person to person,
Clutched by a bemused pink baby as the cameras whirred,
Cheers when it reached the door.
A few toffs and school kids entered.
The rest must wait until the queen has come.
My tears fell, still do, at the memory
Of all the sweet friendly gentle harmonies
And towering in the sky,
Emblazoning the Bay,
Vast copper letters in two languages:

IN THESE STONES, HORIZONS SING.

Ros Kane

Rotting Fabrics

Menacing green apples,
heartless skin of lover
smooth as lychees, unperturbed:

tinned. Wayward images that
wander. Will not form.
purple sea: crash their symbols,

froth and foam masters me
hurl a stormy wonder –
me. My red lace petticoat

lies empty. They're nibbling at
my verse. Menacing sour apples,
tea-bags, coffee-skins of lovers: matt.

Julie Whitby

Keepsake

The copper beech
beseeches me –
small boughs like helpless arms –
to remember, live for him, continually
as when we reached each to each
at grey-toned dawn or star-spelled night.
We shared the selfsame view:
Illusion of our countryside –
Less poplars waving awkwardly too
as when I was made prisoner (then as
now)
of evil-intentioned tyrannic psychiatry.
Yet still bewildered, shaken by
love's changing hue
and pulchritude.
So little space is left to kiss and sigh
before we face that all-severing blight.

Julie Whitby

A Journey

Black roses wail in a multitude of skies
As failure drips – a leaden tap – in so
many eyes,
while pines lean silky steep with their
peaceful grief
and the train's monotony murmurs a mild
relief.

I'd like to tear my life in bits and start
again, I say
As weeping willows chimneys cows float
away
Beyond the pane. Unwind the past. Pink
clouds are fiercely
beckoning; trees are pointing: brown
maroon green, they agree

it seems. But where must I begin?
It's getting dark here, now. How can one?
Weeping black juice, the roses lie crushed
on the ground.
Grey cigarette ash and matches wander
through my mind.

Julie Whitby

'God Opened His Doors for a Moment'

(Quiqui amavit cras amet)

What a surprise: his luscious dark eyes
plunging playfully, repeatedly, deep into
mine.
And what he let me know seemed more
than a line,

though why should this choice hunk of
manhood bother
at all with such an ancient scarred lined
creature?

Yet how to define
hold fast these moments so they're with
me eternally,

keep them pristine:
a barrow of riotous fruit and flowers
to die me over care-worn tedious hours.

And after much pain-grey absence too.
Those fights, half-promises unkept – yet
once again all's new
as fresh paint, possible: Vaughan Williams'
Lark Ascending –
don't tell me, there can be no fairy tale
ending.

But crawling through garbage of
disastrous days,
allow a demi-cripple tunefully to praise
with hymns, trees sky music sea
my best lost all-time sweetheart – and
him – him only.

Julie Whitby

Warning

'Beware the limbo dancers'
the graffiti scowled from the wall.
I stared into eyes that weren't there
and waited for a dawn too small.

'Beware the limbo dancers':
they snare you before you're aware
the grey of their dress isn't mist, can't
bless
their colour's the drabness of a thirst.

'Beware the limbo dancers'
the graffiti snarled in pain –
but I melted into eyes that weren't there
and tried to hold hands with the rain.

Julie Whitby

Julie Whitby's first full-length collection of poems, *The Violet Room*, was published by Acumen Publications as the end of 1994. *Outside the Chain of Hands* (Big Little Poem Books) features her work and that of three other women poets. There was a small collection *Sub Rosa* published by Pentagraph Press. Her second collection, *Poems for Lovers*, was published by Agenda Editions. On publication of this she gave three broadcasts for the BBC. She has also read her poetry on several occasions at the Voice Box, Brighton Library and many other venues.

Anthologies in which her poetry has appeared include:

Agenda Anthology (Carcanet)

Arts Council New Poetry 9

Homage to Imagism (AMS Press New York)

New Christian Poetry (Collins)

Completing the Picture (Stride, 1995)

The Dybbuk of Delight (Five Leaves Publications)

Survivors Anthology (Sixties Press, 2006)

Dreams Night & Day (Cloister Press)

Miracle & Clockwork (The Best of Other Poetry 2)

Emergency Verse – Poetry in Defence of Welfare State (Caparison, 2010 & 2011)

The Hats We Wear (Caparison)

The Robin Hood Book – Verse Versus Austerity (Caparison)

Acumen Anthology – 25 Years

Some of the magazines and newspapers which have published her poetry are:

The Times Literary Supplement

The Daily Express

The Independent
Encounter
Poetry Review
The Scotsman
Agenda
Ambit
Country Life
Contemporary Review
Tribune
Outposts
Other Poetry
Acumen
The Good Society Review
She
Spare Rib
The Lady
Core
The London Magazine
The Recusant (on-line magazine edited by Alan Morrison)

Her poems were also among the *Big Little Poem Card Series* and the *Turret Books Card Series*; and her study of the author Violette Leduc was published in the U.S. (Borgo Press). She was also featured in *The World & I* – and offshoot of the Washington Times, USA.

A scholarship actress at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and a founder of the Drama Centre, London – she toured the UK with Caryl Jenner’s Unicorn Theatre for Children and with a company giving spoken word recitals in schools, then trod the boards with Nigel Hawthorne (of *Yes Minister* and *George the Third* fame – etc). More recently Julie read on a weekly basis for *Poetry for Pleasure* in Hove, and for the Rainbow Readers who gave performances in a

variety of venues throughout the South as well as in London.

As you can see, her poetry has been published in numerous and varied magazines, including *The TLS*, *The Independent*, *The Scotsman*, *Poetry Review*, *London Magazine* and *She*. In particular she has had long runs in *Ambit*, *Country Life*, *Encounter*, *Agenda* and *Acumen*. Twenty-one of her poems, in fact, appeared in *The Express* as their *Daily Poem*, when they boasted such a feature. Harry Eyres, the Poetry Editor, writing in *The Guardian*, said “There have been superb love poems. I remember the beginning of JCM Hepple’s *Waking on a Winter Morning* and the passionate songs of obsession by Julie Whitby.”

Writing in *The Express*, he commented: “Julie Whitby is an unashamedly romantic, or Romantic, poet. By this I don’t just mean that she writes about romantic love (in its true sense, rather rare today), but also that her vision is coloured by the Romantic sense of the infinitely beautiful and the infinitely sad.”

When at the end of ’99. Agenda Editions brought out her second collection *Poems for Lovers* (she gave three broadcasts on the BBC on publication of this) William Oxley, writing in *Acumen*, said: “These poems have something of the power of the best of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, are as insistent in their feeling as Shakespeare’s Sonnets . . . Whitby’s is a many-sided love that is celebrated from desire to elegy and through even to ‘an unlove poem’.”

Her soul-mate was the distinguished poet, critic and lecturer (authority on the 1890s period), author or editor of more than thirty published books, **Derek Stanford** (d. 19.12.08), who had previously described her in *Books and Bookmen* as 'the best woman poet under 40 now writing'. She has, incidentally, an unpublished novel in need of a retype.

BREAKING THE RULES

Mummy is having a sparkly conversation with the butcher.

On the counter, level with my nose, there is a tray of wire pins.

I know what they're for. They're for sticking the price labels to the joints of meat.

They're like little silver swords, with one end of the wire bent over and then curled round to make the handle.

I could take one.

no one would notice, or even care.

It could be a sword for one of my dolls.

It would be stealing.

I go hot and tight all over.

I know I don't really want one. My dolls don't do fighting .

But am I brave enough? That's what matters.

I reach up and take one.

On the way home, walking behind

Mummy up Grange Road,

I drop it in the gutter.

Sometimes we go for a family walk in the country.

Claire McLaughlin

Comment on *Breaking The Rules*

Perhaps breaking the rules in a spectacular way is not only a means of thumbing one's nose at authority, but also of getting attention ("Look what I'm doing!"), and of making oneself feel powerful ("No need for self-doubt – I'm a hero!"). It always involves violence – physical and/or emotional, and is potentially hurtful. But if you've never been listened to or cared for, if you're desperate, it may seem the only way to make things change, or get the help you need. If you're lucky enough to have a warm sense of your own goodness, and to feel you have a rightful place in the world, it may be much easier to respect other people's boundaries, and to trust you can get what you need by asking, explaining, negotiating.

The rules are always changing. There would be no scientific advances, no new forms of art, if existing understandings, techniques, procedures, were not constantly being challenged and re-invented. All the time, in its every aspect, on the smallest imaginable scale, on a scale too grand to comprehend, at speeds from incredibly fast to unbelievably slow, life is changing – and so its order – its rules, patterns, conventions, protocols – are always being questioned, adapted, abandoned, reformulated. Perhaps something good parenting can do is to help a child be flexible, confident of its unique and precious value, but also aware of its smallness in the scheme of things, able to accept that others are of equal value, and may on occasion be

wiser, or more beautiful, or needier than itself.

To have one's own rules broken - one's sense of what is intrinsically right and just - can be traumatic, and it may be that people who frequently and spectacularly break generally accepted codes of behaviour are re-enacting events that caused them severe trauma earlier in their lives - perhaps in an unconscious attempt to understand and master the original experience, and heal themselves.

I learned from my therapists - not by being told, but through our interactions - that a child who is loved by its parents naturally loves and honours them in return; so that if the child makes a mistake, or behaves badly, there is no need for a smack, or a deprivation, or a punishment, because the parent's look of concern or disappointment or sadness will be enough to make the child pause, and then determine not to upset the loved parent in this way again.

Claire McLaughlin

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED

"Pooh!" says Mummy, hopping up on the stile, "No-one takes any notice of that sort of thing."

My sister and I exchange a teenage look.

Daddy is silent. But we follow.

There is nothing interesting to see, and no one comes.

Claire McLaughlin

BEWARE OF THE BULL

"Pooh!" says Mummy, opening the gate, "I can't see a bull."

"Eileen," says Daddy, "you may be putting yourself at serious risk, and you are certainly frightening the girls."

She sashays off across the field. After a minute or two, she comes sauntering back. Perhaps honour is satisfied.

In 1963, when I am 20, I break a window in a Mental Hospital.

I mean, deliberately.

One evening, I stand in front of the big window at the end of the ward and punch my fist right through it.

There are cries of consternation.

It is immensely gratifying.

There are large amounts of blood, and shards of glass everywhere.

The Irish night sister, the little one from County Clare with a voice like honey, comes running in her red-lined cloak.

She is lovely to me.

Several weeks later, I do it again.

It does not feel as good as the first time.

The tall, gaunt night-sister, who comes from Belfast and has a voice like coarse sandpaper, thunders down on me in her red-lined cloak, yelling.

I cower. But I am not sorry.

There is still a scar on the middle knuckle of the middle finger of my right hand.

Rules are there to keep things safe and in order.

Everyone knows that.

Rules are there to be broken.

Everyone knows that too.

It's tricky.

Claire McLaughlin

Poems by Arya Francesca Jenkins

I

Points de lumière

*(After "En dansant sur la terrasse," a
dance by choreographer Tarek
Aïtmeddour)*

<https://vimeo.com/104339262>

A fleet of white hibiscuses
Flits across concrete
Knowing it does not have long
Its youthful vigor spills at once
An ambivalent wave of purity
Reaching for the future
That does not wait long.

II

Pale Oasis

*(After "En dansant sur la terrasse," a
dance by choreographer Tarek
Aïtmeddour)*

<https://vimeo.com/104339262>

You sway
You sway
I hold you deep
You enter me
Weeping
I do not have eyes
All I know is your
Struggle
To unbind
We run together
Madness
Post to post
Unhitching all the wild horses

Untold secrets
Contained dreams
At the end of which
There you are again
My cliff
Virgin
Wave upon wave
That keeps finding me
Waiting.

* * *

III

L'amant impitoyable

*(After "En dansant sur la terrasse," a
dance by choreographer Tarek
Aïtmeddour)*

<https://vimeo.com/104339262>

Errant
Is the only way to describe this
Longing
Heart that finds you here
Wanting to dance
But unable
Your lips firm
Unyielding to me
When once
Yesterday it was
They held me in a fever
But I am yours
I swear
That other was a passing
Cloud
Mistake
Understand
Forgive
Unmute me with your despair
Let your anger rage inside me
As before

But let not silence
Enter
Partake of what remains
Between us

* * *

MY BROTHER WENT

Singing in Patagonia
Where he snagged trout from rivers
And once a man who almost drowned
Then wrote about his adventures like
The Hemingway hero he was
Last time I saw him
He hugged me so tight
I felt his dangling expensive shades
Dig into my breastbone
As if reaching for my heart
We were at the Met
Admiring Van Gogh's sketches and
he kept asking--
What do you think of this?
And this?
Maybe he was collecting quotes
For the museum of his soul
I don't know
He lived more than 5,000 miles away
Where he returned to die
Amid the squalor of bottled dreams
He left behind empty
Matched in wit, heart and
Hunger for the world's natural treasures
Fluid with his tiny rocks of words
He could have stayed a little longer
Sung me a song of
Trees, mountains and streams
He wandered and

Never shared with me
Arya F. Jenkins
I think maybe in the next lifetime
Where he is now and I am not yet
He is still running
Rainbow back arched gracefully
Defiantly turned from the sun
As he speeds away willy nilly in
search
Of something lost in the dark fathoms

WHAT I HEAR

I do not hear my voice
Only the rain
Cars passing late night
The soliloquy of years
Jazz poems and a
Cymbal cracking eaves
What do I know of
Voices
The thunder of god
Speaks to me in a language
I do not understand
I am ordinary
All I know is
What I touch
What finds me sleeping and
Gently awakens me with a kiss
And is my own longing
In the form of a
Voiceless woman.

* * *

Arya F. Jenkins is a Colombian-American poet and writer whose poems have been published in numerous journals and zines such as Agave Magazine, Blue Heron Review, Cider Press

Review, Dying Dahlia Review, The Ekphrastic Review, The Feminist Wire, Foliate Oak Literary Magazine, IO Literary Journal, Otis Nebula, Poetica Review, Rag-Queen Periodical, and Voice of Eve. Her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Her poetry chapbooks are: *Jewel Fire* (AllBook Books, 2011), *Silence Has A Name* (Finishing Line Press, 2016), and *Love & Poison* (Prolific Press, 2019). Her short story collection *Blue Songs in an Open Key* (Fomite Press, 2018) is available here: www.aryafjenkins.com.

Faz

The water system beneath our feet will
be flushed out today
So well let's call it talcum powder is
duly washed away
White supremacists share the white
thing with the millionaire
Beneath them debts those who need it
but just can't pay the fare

I was working in a cafe a front for the
other thing
But something lurking beyond that
rose up the day the phone did ring
The biggest scoop the biggest heist
'twas crystal but not topaz
Organised by the caller ie the man that
we called Faz

Faz is the man
Faz is the man

Faz is the man
Faz is the man

Eighty miles outside of town the duke's
estate did lie
The storage store on the western edge
had more than met the eye
Faz expertly negotiated the lock into
bolting free
Yet hidden things included the
gamekeeper behind the old oak tree

Faz is the man
Faz is the man
Faz is the man
Faz is the man

Faz he heard the footsteps grabbed his
firearms feared the worst
Fingers on two triggers but the gamey
pulled his first
Dank was the death chamber when the
gamey turned around
To see me, Faz's back-up, yes I gunned
the gamey down

In this life you must be two steps
ahead of all the pack
But I hunch in my prison cell when I
need my quickness back
But be it time forever here or me let
out free to go
The gamey he survived and so I live on
death wish row

Copyright Aidan McGee 2020

Rolt

In the void where Stepney Power
Station used to be
Or by the crumbling penthouse on
the last leg of the Lea
Desolation is thy middle name thou
art the man
Whose other name when uttered
petrifies the wideboy clan

Rolt
Rolt
Rolt
Rolt

We're confined to hermit dens but
he is roaming free
Always last man standing in the
revenger's tragedy
He's auditing your debts to him of a
billion and ten bob
Now the plague has gone and shut
down your humungous Ponzi job

Rolt – on the outside
Rolt – death defied
Rolt – of the staring face
Rolt – always plays an ace

And he said to me
You were the last innocent
Like some charm that guards this
home
But not the graceless government
We still live by the station in a tent

He pads through the tumbleweed
and the fast unravelling line
Of liquidity and credit, the canary
wharf in the coalmine
The bat he bought upon the sly is
querulous and shrill
If he can't spot the blame game
merchants -
Sure his master will

Rolt – on the outside..

And he said to me you were the last
innocent . . .

Copyright 2020 Aidan McGee

Westminster Bridge 2017

This is the day, this is the day...
No false prophets no false lords
No messengers with false accords
No courtiers called journalists
Who transcribe all your lying lists
No more he-men cults at large
The emperor's clothes rack
sabotaged
Nothing sacred without a heart
The march is on and the march will
start

Starting

Evoke Wordsworth
When he said Earth

Have nought better
To show than this

But see the upgrade
Don't reminisce

Just like a marriage with the golden
bands
Near Westminster Abbey we will all
join hands
Here Wonder Woman in the plural
stands
Near Westminster Abbey we will all
join hands

Women brave women fair
All peace bearers standing there

To mark the dead and this life again
With the link of a human chain

Joining....

Evoke Wordsworth..

Just like a marriage . . .

Copyright Aidan McGee 2020



Rave!!!