

Poetry Express Newsletter #50

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Jimmy Rogers, by John Gibbens



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Editorial

(This issue marks the Newsletter's 17th anniversary; the first issue came out in 1998, with Victoria Field)

Well, Osborne blinked. The cuts didn't come. They're still there, waiting quietly to snip at our heels. I feel we now need to keep up an Watchdog on the Government. I'd be very pleased to hear from those of you who have stories and experiences they can tell us how they fare in society as a results of various cuts, or how some things have been miraculously saved. Our own Support and recovery Unit, for instance, has been reprieved till at least December 2016.

There have been three major strands obsessing me this autumn. One is a potential major collaboration with a trust, which must wait on outcomes of several discussions we've had. The other two are more slant as they say, one about a proportion of mentally distressed people, and the other the remarkable number of plays dedicated to mental health and addiction. Alzheimer's and other more expected areas of mental distress.

Of these plays, the most mesmerising are (so far) two on the AA and on dementia as seen from the inside rather than outside. The latter, *Plaques & Tangles* a play at the Royal Court by Nicola Wilson ambitiously tackles the social effect, with flashes of repeat narrative that suggest alternative or fractured reality. Florian Zeller's *The Father* at Wyndham's though inhabits that space so completely you don't know whether the whole play's dreamed by the suffer in question, even when offstage with others talking of him.

Duncan Macmillan's play *People, Places & Things* more masterfully depicts a journey to recovery troubled by nightmare, relapse and failures, as well as a kind of triumph. I've written reviews of all these plays.

Now there's a challenging play at the Arcola Theatre in Dalston. *The Divided Laing, or The Two Ronnies*, by Patrick Marmion. It's about the self-healing commune psychiatrist R D Laing set up in the 1960s where he claimed to alleviate – some say cure – Schizophrenia by loving attention. This is in all senses of the word, heady territory. Whether Laing's position had merits, you can see how the establishment closed ranks. By denying chemical imbalances, medicalised illness etc, Laing was questioning the societal construct of mental distress and its true roots. Too dangerous by three quarters. Laing would have to go, and he did, through exploding ego and drink ('Ronnie wasn't an alcoholic, he was a Glaswegian' a friend noted). It's been well-received, though some scenes have caused concern through their trying to weigh in with editorialising judgement, according to critic Michael Billington, always worth noting. However, I'll go with an open mind and report next week, as will others to this periodical.

Simon Jenner

Events

September 10th's Poetry Cafe had a good start. **Razz** opened by reading Leonard Cohen's poem *Too Old*. **Wendy Young**, in inimitable style, read *Still Falling*, *Cradle Styx* and *Bright Yellow Rape*. With *Bark Like a Madman*, **Tara Fleur** sustained her customary pitch of intensity. This lays bare the traumas of all those involved in ECT operations. It raises the question of erotic feelings being aroused in the course of painful operations, and honestly asks the questions: "Why do I think about erotica at the worst moment?" and "If I am in hell, why am I trying to impress the possible dead?" Further powerful intensity from **Sophia Jackson** (read by Razz), with *Despite Being Hard Wired to Fly*. Musical interludes from **John Arthur** and **Paul Riley**, the latter augmented by **Helmut Scholtz**, who, with others, also backed Razz on *Naked in the Sunlight*. Helmut also contributed his own spot, poetic and musical. Sally Smith read *Vagaries of the Moon*, plus *The Actress, the Artist and the Cabinet Maker*. A welcome new arrival with **Mark Thornhill**, including the powerful *Metazapine Street*. **Jessica Lawrence's** spot included a song – *A Disabled Blackbird*, and a plea for the threatened golden frog species, whilst **Ros Kane** read *Bookshelves*, a commentary on the Left Book Club, *Fiddle Frenzy Festival*, about a poetry workshop, and a poem about her daughter Olive. Other contributors were **Kevin Laing**, with *A Woman on a Train Said I Love you*, and **Laura Steven**.

Fantastic evening in honour of Razz on **October 8th** at the Poetry Cafe, with main spot from **Helmut Scholtz** – a splendidly anarchic, and utterly inspiring evening! Great contributions from **Ingrid Andrew**, **Steve Dowsett**, **Sally Smith**, **Frank Bangay**, **Wendy Young**, **Tara Fleur**, **Ros Kane**, **Kathy Flower**, **Jessica Lawrence**, **Kath Tait**, **Sally Wyatt**, **Tony Laing**, **Clarence**, and **Cam Ringel**. Razz himself played with Helmut and **Paul Riley**, and he sang a song in memory of his late wife Sam.

Another highly animated evening at the Poetry Cafe on November 12th. **Razz**, noticeably frail from his current illness, valiantly managed the evening. All thoughts go with him for his forthcoming operation. A stirring main spot from **Grassy Noel**, who has considerable acclaim through his activities with the APE anarchist poetry collective. He read his long poem *Seventh Seal* – a wild journey, forwards, backwards, sideways in both directions, and round in circles, making pinball registrations with most of the world's civilisations and mythologies. This sterling effort was paralleled by Tara Fleur's *Conspiracy Theory* – a veritable 'chamber of horrors' of state-of-the-art techno demons. **Sophia Jackson**, intense as ever, was represented by **Razz** and **Kath Tait**. **Sally Smith**, indefatigable environmentalist, made her appeal to save the Chris Street Market in Poplar. Some tasteful music from **John Arthur** and **Steve Dowsett**, first airing of *Mr Lloyd*, a profound new song from **Veronique Walsh**. Great reading of **Robert Service** poems by **Alain English**; some black humour from **Wendy Young** with *The Blood Sucker* and *Let's Talk About the Hydra*; **Ros Kane's** racy *You Came to Fix My Doorhandle* lent fun and humour to the evening, contributions from **Brian Morrison**, **Tony**, **George Stephenson**, **Keith Bray** and **Lucy Carrington**.

Dave Russell

Survivors Poetry at Tottenham Chances 28th July 2015



Razz Poet commenced the evening's creativity, with two hugely uplifting poems. The first titled: 'Write a Poem'. . . 'When the world's at your shoulders not your feet, write a poem, write a poem, go on, write a poem'. The second poem 'Gentrification' . . . 'A friendly face means everything, a face without a mask'. **Habiba Hrida** then took the stage, reading three poems. One I particularly liked was titled 'Where Do They Go?' . . . 'I blew a kiss to the universe'. Habiba commented on her poetry, saying sometimes it's 'Fluffy'. I disagree; it is poetry that touches on the metaphysical. Always looking at the bigger picture within this human existence.

The first feature of the night was **Sally Smith**, who performed a series of poems titled *My Family*. I felt such empathy with her poems 'Television was a mother to me' and her third poem 'Picture this' . . . 'Where did she go to? Long before she died'. Sally then read a series of 'Punk Poems' – vibrant and anarchic in content and performance. She was followed by **Steve Jones** taking an Open Mic spot. Steve disclosed the loss of his partner in 2012. He performed a powerful poem about this tragic experience . . . 'Orange, lemon, lime, viewing time through a kaleidoscope vision. Pink, green, tangerine, I was a caveman, you brought me in'.

Mala Mason read three poems – one inspired by a favourite quote that took us into a place where the past remains fervently present 'I sit by a fire, sparkling upon past memories'. Mala's poetry is always deeply moving, beautifully written and read with such honesty. **Dennis** took the open mic spot next, reading just one poem, but a powerful piece about unrequited love 'leave me here delusional'.

The next feature of the night was **Alain English**. He performed several poems including *Love Is, Depression is a Most Unwelcome Guest* and one of my favourite Alain English poems 'Here's to the beggars on their knees, these people are survivors'

Vos Malone were the second feature act of the evening. All I can say about this band is . . . their music and lyrics are just incredibly beautiful, moving and stunning. True journeymen of the soul. **Wendy Young** then took her feature spot, and took all of us on a ride through tragedy and humour. She read several poems including *Memory Stick* about her relationship with her mother . . . *I want to live, Jango* and a hilarious observational poem titled *Can't cook, wont bloody cook* . . . 'wine, fish, fish. Bloody two fat ladies' about TV chefs. She had all at Survivors in fits of giggles.

Baffled Angels then performed a powerful set of songs, including my favourite song 'Dislocated' . . . 'My body is falling apart, dislocated from myself'. Awesome! The next feature of the evening was **Pauline Seawards**. She read several poems including *Commuting* and a powerful poem titled *Date with an absent lover* . . . 'We almost slid past each other'.... 'covering our arses with rhinoceros hide' . . . 'data, data,data'.

Unique Technique then performed a new rap, 'Music is my therapy'. **Julius Howard** read the lovely '*Poem for a friend*' . . . 'ease the doubts in your soul' 'remembering times in waves of words'.

I (**Tara Fleur – Woman of Bones**) performed a new poem titled 'Bark like a Madman/ECT 1'. Another difficult poem to listen to – about my experiences working in psychiatry, having to take patients for their ECT treatment. A clinical practice that never sat right with me . . . ever! I have recorded this poem on YouTube link here: (but be warned it's dark and a little technical blippy) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voR6F2MrvJw>

Then **Pippa** took an Open Mic spot and read a really interesting poem *Python Love* from the viewpoint of being a python . . . preying on 'bird bones'. I really enjoyed hearing this poem. Unfortunately I had to leave after Pippa's performance. The night went on very late and continued with a performance by **Casper** and a set by **Voodoo Citi**. I heard both rocked T. Chances till 1am! All in all, another super night at Survivor's. Full of diversity and oozing with creativity. Bravo!

Tara Fleur-Woman of Bones

STOP PRESS: I have to make the painful announcement of the departure of **Ingrid Andrew**. This came as a terrible shock to all who knew her. Poetry Express and Survivors Poetry express their deepest condolence. Two recent Survivors events celebrated her memory, A full memorial for Ingrid should be organised in the near future. On pp13-16 are some of her poetic collaborations with **Tara Fleur**.

Dave Russell

Great Cat

Ma'at speaking said

respect these animals that share this world
with you
they are deities your own best selves and in
highest esteem The Cat
miu he who mews *miut* she who mews *miw*
to see the eye of ra

hear these words write them in your sacred
scrolls
"I am the cat (Mau), who fought hard by the
Persea tree in Annu
on the night when the foes of Neb-er-tcher
were destroyed"

hear these words of Sa write them on your
sacred walls
"Who is like (mau) unto him?" and thus his
name became "Mau" (cat).
Ra himself the male cat Mau the Eye of Ra

"You are the Great Cat, the avenger of the
gods, and the judge of words,
and the president of the sovereign chiefs and
the governor of the holy Circle;
you are indeed the Great Cat."

Steve Mann

brief companionship

crumpled affably, supinely resting, watching
generational perambulation.

there – what is that?
an infinitesimal little
one, quietly and reverently observing her
and now more and now less, often none, but
usually.

they appeared, arrived but a moment before,
in another moment they are everywhere.

noisesome scurries fill her vista,
even on her back,
constancy of miniature stars surrounding her
with irritating flashes of movement across
the sun.

some allow her heart feeling's emanation to
surge,
sense vague reciprocal stirrings,
then the unresponsive;
empty, where are they?

in her now loneliness,
Caradoc, most beautiful dragon of
Shropshire hills,
mourns those, here so briefly.

Steve Mann

Forthcoming: 'brief companionship' – Steve Mann

In *brief companionship* Steve Mann ably
moves with respect and good faith through
the landscapes that are only remembered
when the poets bring them back to our
attention. For readers of Mann's innovative
first collection *cui bono?* – arguably one of
the most impressive Modernist chapbooks of
the previous decade, in my view, and those
more familiar with his poetry of the elements,
time, past and future events, the explorations
in the forthcoming collection provide
passageways to other vistas that were
offered from more fractured states before. A
moving collection, the poet having heard the
emotions of the mountains and with them
relates our own condition in universal terms
that can be understood, deeply'.

Philip Ruthen, writer and poet

Clarendon Recovery College

Going to college is about learning. Learning new skills, creating new ideas and gathering together resources to live a meaningful future. Taken in this way, the experience of going to college is very similar to that of recovery, where hope, curiosity and meaning all come into play. Recovery from a mental illness is not as simple as treatment from a professional being administered to a patient to switch them from unhealthy to healthy. It's a journey, and one that must be personal, collaborative and meaningful if it is to be sustained and of benefit. The Clarendon Recovery College students is a space in which individuals are helped to develop their skills and understanding, identify personal goals, learn in a positive environment and gain the confidence to access opportunities. Education allows people to use their own strengths, and make use of their talents whilst developing new skills, rather than focus on problems and changing people. At recovery colleges individuals are not patients, having things done to them, but students, active and engaged in their own recovery.

By promoting sustained recovery, independence and integration, the college works with individuals to enhance their social, educational and work. There is a huge benefit to having someone have confidence in you to recover, and encourage social inclusion, and results indicate that those who attend a recovery college are far more likely to become mainstream students, gain employment or become a volunteer, and there has been a significant reduction in the use of community mental health services from students. The aim is for students to become experts in their own self care and setting the direction of their lives, the colleges being just a tool to enable this. Since it's opening in October 2013, Clarendon has worked with local groups including Young Minds and Tottenham Hotspur Foundation to help tackle stigma around mental health, encouraging mutual support and community integration.

There are now over 20 recovery colleges in the UK. Using the principles of hope, control and opportunity, these centres have a robust curriculum of courses, covering all areas including creativity, health, managing mental health, technology, employment skills and self help. Central to the recovery college model is the idea of peer learning and lived experience, where those who have experience of mental health difficulties are encouraged to bring their stories to the courses and facilitate groups, and the vast majority of courses at Clarendon are co produced.

The college is also a social space where individuals can meet new people and form friendship groups. The Kingfisher group meet regularly, and the Hideaway Café is a perfect place to relax and refuel, open to the public as well as students. By nurturing relationships and creating a supportive environment, students have a place in which they feel welcomed and feel comfortable to visit and draw upon resources available – which include an IT Lab, Library and

Art Facilities space Studio 306. Recovery is about rebuilding lives. Clarendon is a space in which individuals have the time, skills and resources to do so, making choices and building up hope and resilience to live life with success and satisfaction.

For more information visit **Clarendon Recovery College, Clarendon Road, Hornsey, London, N8 0DJ** or call **020 889 4860**.

Francesca Baker

Bibliotherapy

For avid readers, the idea of Bibliotherapy is not new at all. Many people feel better after curling up with a good book. There's a feeling that they are good for the heart and soul, and it's not unusual to find a feeling of friendship within the page, looking to them for guidance and perspective, asking questions such as 'What Would Jane Do?'

Using words to soothe the emotions and alter thoughts is the root of Bibliotherapy – the use of literature to help people deal with psychological, social and emotional problems. The concept dates back to 300 BC when ancient civilizations placed inscriptions over library entrances that stated that within the building was healing for the soul. Aristotle considered literature to have healing benefits and reading fiction to be a way of treating illness and in *Titus Andronicus* William Shakespeare encourages the audience to 'Come, and take choice of all my library, And so beguile thy sorrow . . .'

Although stemming from ancient cultures, one of the first times it was applied to medical care in the UK was after World War I to help treat the emotional trauma suffered by returning soldiers, when engagement and occupation with books in psychiatric institutions was seen to be beneficial for the patients' general sense of wellbeing. More recently it has been recommended by the [National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence \(NICE\) UK](#) as a useful start in treating mild and moderate depression, anxiety and panic and some other mental health problems. In Ireland GPs suggest specific titles through the [Power of Words scheme](#) and on the other side of the world, Central West Libraries in New South Wales has developed a [Books on Prescription](#) scheme.

Different forms of Bibliotherapy exist. Some is very much within the self-help genre, whereas other therapists 'prescribe' personal reading lists based on the type of literature a person favours, whereas others still offer guided group reading sessions, known as creative Bibliotherapy. This is what Sharon Dunscombe, who runs [Tales for Tea](#) offers, via the practise of sharing great works of literature by reading them aloud, together. She describes this as a

‘deeply personal and social experience’ where the text and pleasure of reading is enough in itself, but can be enhanced by the experience of engaging with it in a group. Sharon believes that ‘It is my duty as a Bibliotherapist to make connections; personal connections between the content of the books and the people I read to, thus promoting a therapeutic response.’

It was after running reading groups in a junior school whilst studying for her Level 3 NVQ that Sharon came to Bibliotherapy. She discovered that the children responded very well to the stories being read to them by unconsciously relating their lives to the works she was reading. She describes herself as ‘a complete bibliophile and [I] have eaten books and words like bowls of warm nourishment from a very early age!’ Reading is not just something that children benefit from, and groups are starting up all over the country for people from all walks of life.

Rachel, author of [Black Rainbow](#), a writer and Bibliotherapist, who, amongst other workshops, works with prisoners at Wormwood Scrubs, knows first hand the value of using poetry and prose as an aid to psychological healing and wellbeing. When faced with depression, suicidal thoughts and hospitalisation, ‘an illness that left me inconsolable and tormented by pain and fear’ her mother began to read to her. The poems and passages she read became props for Rachel. ‘I clung to particular lines and phrases as if they were carefully constructed life rafts: a particular favourite was an excerpt from Corinthians: “My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness” which I repeated to myself in the style of a mantra or prayer. As I began to recover, I grew to rely more and more on the healing power of consoling poetry and prose. As I gradually re-learned how to focus my attention and read for myself, I sought out texts with a compassionate voice that helped me feel less alone; as well as pieces of writing that transformed my perspective.’

Experiments by **Professor Philip Davis** from the **School of English at the University of Liverpool** suggests that complex prose and poetry increases electrical activity in the brain. Rachel believes that ‘We can draw a relationship between reading poems and increased focus plus the ability to engage in something outside of oneself, thereby separating oneself from the ‘ego’: an important component of mental health. Reading is a personal endeavour using internal processes but featuring external voices, and therefore useful in focusing the reader on examining their ‘self’ and coming to terms with their emotions and challenging accepted but unhelpful thoughts, via prompts from others in a safe and contained environment.

Samuel Crothers, the man who coined the term Bibliotherapy, described its stages as Identification, Catharsis and Insight. Essentially, the reader identifies with some aspect of the story, finds release in sharing with the character’s feelings, and gains insight into how to apply that to dealing with their own emotions.

There can be no doubt that literature transforms us and the process of reading is a very healing process, but the way in which it does so can vary significantly. Words can help people realise emotions, and the result can be that emotions deep inside are then able to be expressed and shared. Books can help to provide different perspectives and the suggestion of an alternative course of action. They may be inspiring, through the story or character. For some it is the actual doing, the practice of devoting half an hour a day to a regular activity, which can help provide a sense of solidity for some people, as a safe place unchanging and apart from difficulties faced in the world and a place of escapism. Others may simply respond to the rhythm of the words and the flow of sentences, finding themselves absorbed and in an almost meditative state.

The exact benefits may not be rigidly defined, and we may never be able to conduct laboratory experiments or collect reams of data to prove the case for Bibliotherapy being of medical assistance, but it certainly is another tool in the world and an asset to support mental health. As Rachel writes in *Black Rainbow* – ‘Words were what I knew, what I had always relied on.’

Francesca Baker

Keep Looking Outside

Drooping leaves quivered on the despondent looking branches, whilst those that had already fallen were being rustled up by the November wind. It was surprisingly mild for this time of year, the colour not having transformed into the voluminous blur of flame colours that childhood autumns always seemed to. The ward was quiet, most patients on weekend leave now that their weight had been boosted enough to be trusted with a few precious hours outside.

Eleanor sat up on the window ledge, just for a change of sitting on her bed. Wrapping her legs beneath her, she traced her name on the pane of glass keeping her from the outside. She rolled her shoulders back consciously, trying to stop the aching body. She was unsure whether the ache was a result of having not moved for a good few weeks now, or was a physical symptom of her psychological state. She ached to be outside. Walking through the leaves. Feeling the breeze nip her cheeks, inhaling the London air, making her feel alive.

Birds flew in the tin coloured sky, as though they were emblems of freedom in the canvas wrapped in her window frame. To the left of her window was the secure unit, where the ‘really crazy people were’ as she said to herself. This was where Eleanor had feared she would be, fenced in with high steel structures and in white robes. She never saw anyone in there. Now the only inhabitant seemed to be a small grey squirrel hopping across the unkempt grass, preparing

for winter. Every year she could see the leaves fall from the trees. Knowing its inevitability she still harboured the fairytale that it might not happen.

Happiness could be a thing hard to come by, she knew that, but sometimes it was as though the tools were not even being offered. She felt as though she would have to make due with whatever was available and at reach. Pills and a pencil. Blue earplugs to block out the voices that rang along the corridor, and those that chimed in her head.

Before, there were days when the weight of despondency was so heavy that Eleanor felt like she physically could not get up. It was holding her down, heavy on her body. Sometimes the head might say that time passed, but she would roll over and read her wrist to find that only a few minutes had passed. Thoughts would shine like soft lights and nourish her deep, but there was only so much they could do. Bodies and brains would one day fade into invisible relief she knew, but surely something could happen before then. She wanted to unload her mind and unburden her body. Before the rest of time unfolded and faded away she wanted to hold onto the life that she had. There was a beating, there, deep inside of her chest, an anxious hum that brayed in her being.

There was a scream from the room next door and the rumble of books and toiletries being thrown against the wall. 'Get me out of here.' She thought. Salty water trickled onto her cheek, cheeks that were becoming less severe as the weeks went on. She was not well enough to be outside, but she did not belong here. A misshapen puzzle piece struggling to fit in anywhere.

As much as she hated being in hospital, she knew that in some ways she was benefitting. 'I've never been jealous of a squirrel before.' Eleanor thought to herself, aware that an appreciation of the simplicities of life was crucial to contentment. Bed rest for an eating disorder was not conducive to busy days and a full lifestyle. Being unable to show what she loved through big grand events and activities, her love of living was starting to show being the lines.

She giggled as she remembered yesterday, being yelled at by that evil nurse Carl for exercising – exercising being walking with a bounce in her step. If walking happily was a crime, she wanted to sign right up for membership. Damn it, she'd exercise her face muscles by smiling and her stomach muscles with big belly laughs if that was what was needed to keep her character.

Some people expressed a feeling of being more awake within the confines, unsure which side of the fence is the dream. Outside could be a whirlwind of difficult choices and fluxing emotions, the body becoming a shadowless wisp caught up in the substantial traumas of a life in the real world. For Eleanor the outside was where she was awake, but inside was her easy dream. There was no feeling, no reality, no life, no substance. Just a steady timetable and a numbing of the pain. A dim sense of a reality existing, but being unable to participate in it.

It was so tough, to keep looking out of the window. To remember that every bite was a bite closer to freedom. To not get sucked in. To leave the lifers here and break out. Voices whirled around her. She wasn't listening, and she didn't want to be. Outside pigeons tiptoed down the tiles on the sad looking roofs. The sky was heavy, a grey handkerchief all creased and sodden with tears. The wind blew through the branches with little leaves flickering like coins in the glint of the wet raindrops. Towering chimneys and severe brick walls made it look like factory, not a place of warmth and nurture.

Her spark was being snuffed out, not like a candle; nothing so poetic. More like she had been a sizzling firework threatening to skid in any direction, uncontrollable perhaps, but exciting. And now, now a dog pissed down on her to keep her quiet. Her head hurt. The autumn murk outside seemed about to burst through the window panes as the dense pressure built in the room. Eleanor panicked. She was going to turn crazier here surely.

What would home be like at the moment? There would be a pile of letters and newspapers around, and Dad would probably be sat reading *The Independent*, agreeing with some of the comments, passing critical comment on others, and pretending to read still more. Her younger brother would be in bed, as he always was, suffering from that narcoleptic condition known as 'being a teenager.' There would be a couple of mugs dotted about the place, half drunk cups of lukewarm tea or coffee left as someone had rushed off to a domestic task. The rumble of the washing machine would be blending in with the hum of the television, occasionally punctuated by a car starting outside, all in the symphony of everyday life. Funny how she missed the banalities she had for so long dismissed.

The poorly tuned radio crackled as the introduction to 'Walking on Sunshine' kicked in. Eleanor felt a surge of positivity ignited by music. She started to tap her feet, a surreptitious piece of defiance.

Francesca Baker

The Blueprint

This wasn't how the dream went. Not even the dream. The assumption of life's blueprint. She wasn't so naïve as to think that life's course would run smooth and all that, but did have the vague notion that the direction it would take would be one of forward momentum.

Not that she would end up here, despondently fallen on her brother's childhood bed, because hers was long gone and her bedroom the study.

Slashes of sunlight streaked across the floor, let in by the half open blinds. The room was warm and pressured, like soup in the microwave, but still she curled up tight, feeling her belly on her legs. When she tried to stretch out her legs she kicked at a pile of books, pillow cases and letters that had been left at the end of the bed to deal with later. That mythical time that never came. Or came, but without the gifts it had been promised to arrive with.

She suddenly noticed that her jaw was tired and her hands clenched, overwhelmed by an anger that fizzed through her veins and caused her to vibrate under her skin. A rage at the world had become twisted and strangled until it aimed like a barbed wire arrow back within.

And it hurt. Frustration rubbed and rubbed like someone sandpapering her sunburn. The exhaustion of a desire to change left her rendered incapable, a tormented and inadequate lump of unloved flesh tarnishing the freshly made bed.

It started with just one tear. She felt the drop trace its way down the curve of her eye socket and along her nose, stopping and teetering on the end before it fell to the quilt like an inky blotch.

The bed quivered as she convulsed with sobs.

This was not how life was meant to happen.

Francesca Baker

When Woman Created the World

When woman created the world, she expelled the universe from her womb,
unwound the galaxies from her navel; her belt was a line of stars;

the jewel at her throat was Mars; she
unrolled the fiery sun from her right heel.

When woman created the world, she kick-started the earth into orbit,
when she saw how far away the sun was she plucked, then dangled the moon
from her left hand, to wax and wane with the pull of the tides, her own internal rhythms,
and the bodies of future women.

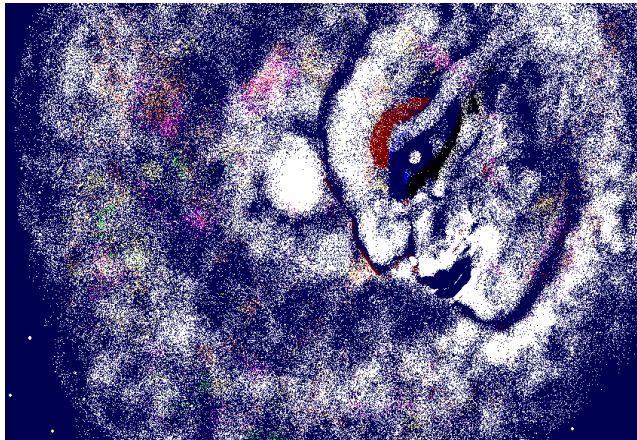
She exhaled the first clouds, clapped her hands for the thunder,
and when she ran along the rim of the horizon, lightning crackled.

When woman created the world; her eyes held constellations,
planets glimmered at the end of her long fingers,
the stars at her heels, moved with her dark silhouette
and galaxies poured from her breasts.

And after dark and light; she made morning afternoon and night;
first light, sunrise, dawn, mid morning, mid day, noon,
then afternoon, late afternoon, twilight, dusk and early evening,
mid evening, midnight, the hours before dawn.

**After midnight - before dawn a very long time before she found rest
or the need for first suppers.**

**She dipped her exquisite brushes of creation with womanly satisfaction
in a black hole.**



Cleaning up the first days work was her desire, but dirty her brushes returned.

**Mother of intuition thought for the first time -
is nothing quite the same after visiting darkness?**

She dipped her brushes again, dirty in drops returned.

**Heavy was the first worry - falling -
messy.**

**This is when woman created fervour;
mopping in angst the first signs of frustration - off - get off - her
perfectly natural drawn brow.**

**Pressing in naked folds -
brushes now cold & old,
tight between her creative thighs she wiped and wiped,**

staining clumsy, a red address joining her distress.
Her first reflections were correct.

Mother of intuition thought for the second time –
be sure she'll visit this pain 'again and again' and again: Pain.
This is when woman found her other name –
– Universal woman – signed in starlight across the blue,
a deeply transparent signature made up of tiny scars,
found trembling
in molecular structure . . .
bloody blood – bloody grim and bloody blame.

A message for all of us for who can hide all that is uncomfortable in our bodies
behind an ever searching for mystical analgesia?

Listen as she secretes our secret reflected on her many lips, for she is all of us . . .
so let's huddle together with her . . .
let's be impossible – let's be difficult –let us be heard
with chattering – bloated placentas
"Oh my! Every woman – will fucking hurt".
They fell, these dirty drops from brushes clogged with despair,
dripping far this uncomfortable blood & brown, new and old teary squirts,
travelling down – down slower than light,
so much slower, so much s-l-o-w-e-r.
Drip,drips f-a-l-l-i-n-g deathly s l o w, dull and rigid.
Heavy all these journeys, squeezing along lunar paths, a cosmic trip.
But like all women who try one is tripped up, one by one – unbalanced
falling – clashing – falling, deathly s l o w drips drop, calcifying a fossil –
like sight,
dirty red drip drops, turned to pretty in pink –
plops, turned to sallow in yellow –
sops,
turned to white in bony –
pops, skeletal sockets formed – in the first nights.
Fibula, tibulas, ribulas, deathly slow,dropped in drips, and glued with guts.
Knee-bones – thigh-bones –
hip-bones –back-bones,
eye-bones – smile-bones –
tear-bones – fear-bones,
all connected to the earth-bone,
all connecting to the earth-bone.

Left to settle in the invisible.

When woman created the Earth
She let her gaze spread over the jewelled globe.
to keep her company at first light.
She twined herself around the first tree and made its branches, buds and fruits.
She laid herself down to rest and made the first deserts in the dawn of life;
and where she had lain mountains and valleys appeared.

In a Dark Wood

In a dark wood, a nightingale sings.
A nightingale sings in a dark wood.
*Would a nightingale sing in a dark wood;
Would a dark wood, sing a nightingale?*

In the beginning was a note,
A note that swelled up in God's throat.
She handed it to a mottled frog that passed it on to a howling dog.
It became an elephant's cry and then it reached us by and by.

If you can find your heart in a song;
you'll be in good spirits all day long.
In a dark wood, a nightingale sings.
A nightingale sings in a dark wood.
*Would a nightingale sing in a dark wood;
Would a dark wood, sing a nightingale?*
In the beginning was a note.



Ingrid Andrew & Tara Fleur
(Ingrid's parts are in black, Tara's in red)

TTIP, PFIs and Government Acronyms

“. . . TTIP the most boring thing we’re supposed to get angry about since – ooh . . . was it PFI schemes that nobbled hospitals, eviscerated schools and left Britain £222bn in debt?”

<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/aug/03/ttip-what-why-angry-transatlantic-trade-investment-partnership-guide>

Yes, we need to focus on TTIP, as that’s very much in the balance and about to happen; but we also need take half a moment to keep our peripheral vision intact too. So, here’s a passing thought, then, on that PFI issue, because it overlaps with TTIP in terms of the long-term nature of its impacts:

“Each UK citizen has amassed a debt of £3,400 (\$4,976) without even knowing about it. This is due to a UK government scheme that signed controversial deals with private companies to borrow money on behalf of the public and pledging to pay it back later . . . The system has proved to be fantastic for private companies, who are managing to reap large profits from investing in public infrastructure. However, financial experts have labelled the government’s policy a ‘*financial disaster*,’ due to the high amounts of interest accumulated . . . Though PFIs have paid for assets worth £56.5bn (\$82.70bn), the UK will have to pay more than five times that under the PFI’s leasing agreements. By 2049 the total bill for PFIs will be £310bn (\$453bn). Since 2012, London has managed to pay just one percent of the total cost owed to paying off the PFIs.”

<http://www.rt.com/uk/249085-uk-tax-payer-debt-pfi/>

Taking TTIP and PFI together, and assuming all the above figures are broadly correct, may I posit three loose observations?

[1] Society is currently under assault – a systematic and brutal assault – to preserve and promote a free-market-centred, capital-based global economy, at all costs. Yes: *at all costs*. Many such activities aren’t really ‘free-market’ in nature but are biased, subsidised and skewed under the guise of representing the free market in some vague way. I’m sure that later generations will also prove [when one has done the proper accounting to include the many social and ecological costs] that most if not all of these initiatives turned out to be intensely costly and counterproductive re our basic assets as human beings living on a finite planet. Free market proponents, in their basest form, despise democracy: with a few exceptions, most companies and their profiteers are necessarily self-interested organisms switched off to the wider impacts of what they do, who use all their power to advertise, lobby and influence in ways that run counter to what many of us would prefer. Is it going too far to say that, taken simplistically as a single entity, such corporations and their lobbyists tend to undermine and destabilise civil liberties? The ‘Free Market’ [aka the Global Agglomerate Eco-Monopoly] is not, and can never be, [in the fullest sense of the term] democratic. Like it or not, see it or not, we’re all caught up in an insidious, almost silent, internal war.

[2] Can someone please work out how many years of UK arts funding could have been supplied with the £222bn the PFIs have reputedly cost us? Just think of all the ballet, the refurbished theatres, the orchestras, the small presses, the disability provision, the alternative and experimental arts support, the marginalised art communities, the mentoring schemes, the youth initiatives, the writers in schools, the urban arts regenerations, the practical support for aging [even Anglo-Italian] writers struggling to pay rent [yes, it's personal] . . . [. . . *add your own items here*] that could have been covered, easily, with that £222bn. How many decades, indeed centuries, of expanded investment and intense long-term support would it have met? £222bn. It's staggering. But no, we still see minor organisations who (usually) do sterling work having to trim 5k here or 10k there, or lose their 41k altogether, or getting pressed to tighten their care-worn belts until they're nipped clean in half. It's almost like a nasty household where the bully arrogantly gambles both his and his partner's earnings away on the gee-gees, then smacks everyone around to extract a quid for the baked bean dinner. Except that's a poor, working-class metaphor for what happens in broad daylight between us and the people in corporate suits.

[3] I'm close to having to assume [and I hate generalities as a rule . . .] that all government [especially economic] initiatives carrying a neat little acronym will inevitably CUAAAAAL [Cost Us All An Arm And A Leg].

Of course, nothing is quite as simple as any of the above might imply – e.g. no amount of arts funding *necessarily* guarantees artistic excellence [indeed, many would argue the opposite] – but I think the broad strands of thought hold in this case, with the caveat that until we address the more underlying causes of this kind of thing [which have to do with consciousness and connection, indeed with some kind of genuine vision [rather than ideology or (dare I say it) 'spirituality', see below] we'll be fighting battle after battle after battle UTCCCH [Until The Corporations Come Home].

So, good luck with opposing TTIP. Go online and sign petitions. Keep up the pressure. It's all at the TTIP-ping point right now. I'll leave you with my original correspondence on TTIP . . .

“Well, this is what happens – what *inevitably* happens – when power is gained by those of virtually no psychic or spiritual awareness. The problem here is that it's hard to find a way to actually talk to such people: what shared language can we find when those on all sides of government are so askew, so closed up in worldly manoeuvrings? I once sat behind a famous MP in a plane and overheard his conversation with his PA. There'd be a book in it – but no one would believe it – and if it were poems no one now would buy it! Stay awake, so much of the world is so violently asleep . . .”

In those who see, there resides the true power.

Mario Petrucci

Homes for Heroes – Distressed Ex-Service Personnel, Intestate Properties

I'm writing to propose an innovative, principled way forward for the housing and sheltering of *mentally and otherwise distressed ex-service personnel, an ever-increasing number of whom end in prisons, and many of whom end up homeless. It's now estimated 10% of those in prison are ex-service personnel.* It involves the use of **intestate properties**, leading to an integrating outline for the **3,000 charities** working with ex-service personnel, and bolstering of specialised **support and recovery units**. Finally I propose a novel use of 1% our military budget.

Evidence

Sue Clifford, of **No Offence**, said: "We estimate that 10 per cent of prisoners are military veterans, from samples of the prison population . . . cuts will have a significant effect on prison numbers, as thousands of troops return to civvy street before they were anticipating – so they have not had a chance to plan." The **Howard League for Penal Reform's** Inquiry into Former Armed Service Personnel in Prison originally estimated 3,000 Ex-Service Personnel end there, many offending years afterwards. Costs to themselves, their families and dependants and ultimately the country, spiral directly out of proportion to normal social provision. PTSD plays some part in this, but civilian maladjustment is a factor too, including financial and alcohol mismanagement. As elsewhere in prison, mental distress plays its part, as well as with homeless ex-service personnel who aren't in prison. *Prince Harry has himself recently drawn attention to the plight of mentally distressed ex-service personnel.* It might be possible to engage with him in this conversation. Mental Distress affects 25% of the population. The arguments have been well rehearsed elsewhere; my suggestions are practical.

Proposal

Reversion of Intestate Properties

As Director of a mental health and poetry charity funded by the Arts Council (Survivors' Poetry), I repeatedly alerted the DCMS to the anomaly that intestate properties revert to the Crown through the Duchies, thence to the treasury to be sold off. *It's an inconstant revenue stream that can't be budgeted for or justified.* The monies attached thereof were illegally stored by banks. It seems DCMS acted and Gordon Brown in 2009-10, then David Cameron in 2010 acted to wrench these monies off, with around £4 million ending in the Big Society Bank, ultimately to be re-absorbed by the Treasury. *It's possible Prince Harry would be interested in this anomaly and wish to make a particular argument for ethical disposal of such properties.*

My Solution is This: Homes for Heroes

Intestate properties with their attendant monies can be dedicated to restoration and are ethically resourced and converted to residential or other social use. Death is no respecter of postcodes and the very spread of

these houses will allow a greater opportunity in social integration. Some properties may lend themselves to other uses under the same umbrella, such as social, strategic, or provisioning.

Resourcing of Support and Recovery Units

Currently each user of the NHS with mental distress is tagged with a certain budget on their head. Doctors are tasked with referring as few as possible. The Support and Recovery Units are only justified by as many of these users they can attract. The system as it stands is set up to fail both. Where I work in Westminster, the **Support and Recovery Unit at 1 St Mary's Terrace W2 1SU** is under constant threat of closure, the axe moving forward month on month, causing stress and uncertainty to healthcare workers and users. *This is Westminster, whose borough pays 40% of the UK's Stamp Duty as the Evening Standard revealed, some £3.4Bn.*

My Suggestion

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

Military Charities

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

One Bold Proposal

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

Conclusion

I hope you feel this might open up a conversation leading to concrete proposals with housing ex-service people, and opening up other avenues and opportunities for their leading enhanced and fulfilling – not to say supremely useful – lives.

Dr Simon Jenner, Survivors' Poetry Support and Recovery Unit, 1 St Marys Terrace, London W2 1SU



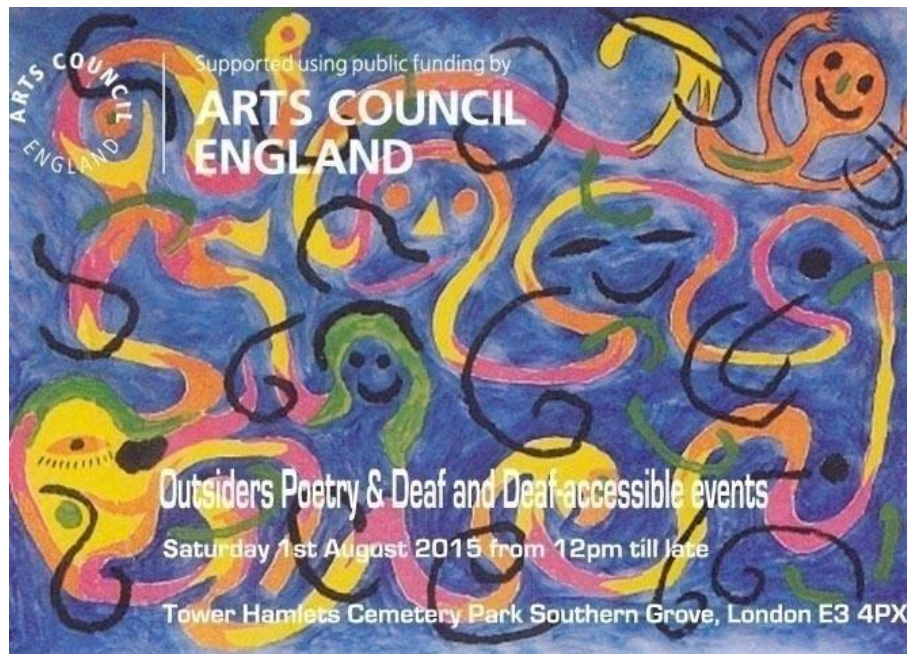
The Three Kings by John Gibbens



Bird by John Gibbens

Outsiders Poetry and Deaf-Accessible Day at Shuffle 2015

By [FEEL Campaign](#) · Updated on Wednesday · Taken at [Shuffle Festival](#)



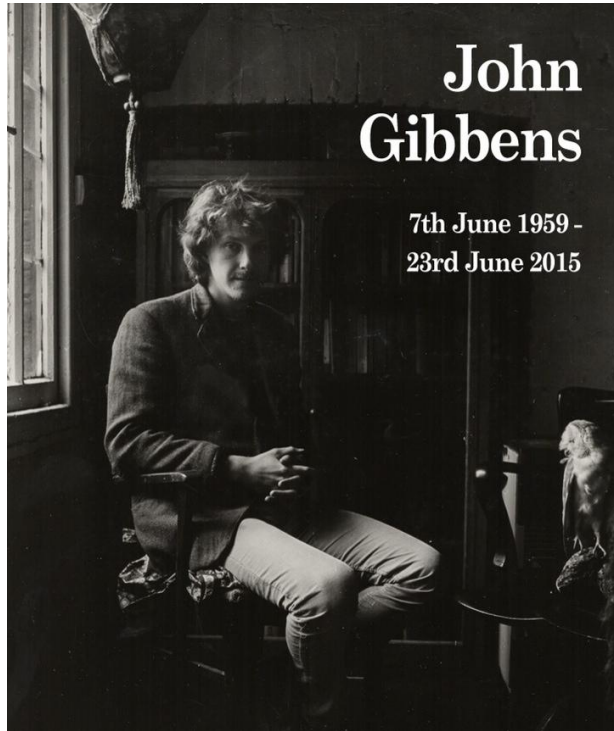
Thank you to ALL kind souls that have contributed in making the Shuffle Festival a memorable experience again this year. What an amazing time we've had and plenty to do for everyone! Superb activities and entertainment, wonderful location and such a diverse and special assemblage.

Did you attend one or more days? What did you enjoy the most? **Sat 1st August** was an intense day and we can't thank enough all helpers, artists, performers, technicians, team of communication support, audience, the fantastic **Shuffle Team** and **The Boyles** of course.

We are sorry for the several artists that, due to unpredictable health conditions, were not able to join us for the Outsiders Poetry. We are also sorry for being unable to fit all willing performers each time, and were very glad for the new added visitors to the show. Our compere **Jazzman John Clarke** did a grand job as always.

We regret we had to cancel **Tori Lee's** Deaf Rave, music set and shorten artists' performances for the **Sparks Show**, due to time delays. Certainly left all craving for more . . . and thinking of 2016!

John Gibbens Obituary



Thelonious Monk by John Gibbens

John Geoff Gibbens was born on The Wirral in 1959; very much the youngest of three brothers. John's father, Geoffrey G Gibbens after Oxford became an English teacher, and the family moved to Germany, where his taught on a British military base throughout John's early childhood, latterly relocating the family to the Lake District. John met Armored Weston in the Lakes when he was 15. "When I met him he was all beauty and silent contemplation" She later become his lifelong creative partner. Having resolutely deciding to become a poet at a young age, John dropped out of school and in 1977 travelled in Europe finding a home in Deia, Mallorca where he worked in one of the local bars, meeting **Robert Graves** and a community of creative musicians, artisans and writers.

In 1978 John returned to the UK, moving to London, where John and Armored, set up home, she becoming his lifelong creative partner, sharing not only in the body of his art but John also helping in the raising of her children **Esme** and **John**. His ability to reflect both the lightness and darkness of living came through Johns Poetry from his sensitive intellect as well as the daily challenges of family, and survival as a poet.

John's Mother Elizabeth taught the skills of Journalism at Wyndham Comprehensive in the Lake District, where John was schooled. She passed on to John her skills, which he used to become a Typesetter, and eventually a highly respected Journalist on numerous major magazines and papers.

John's mother died when he was just 22 yrs old, and in that same year he became the youngest Poet to receive an **Eric Gregory Award**, proving his road was always that of poetry and song. He remained aloof from the wider poetry scene, seeming to prefer looking out from the shadows whilst at the same time engaging with a wider community of artists, travelers and storytellers – always writing prolifically through the inevitable cycles of submissions and rejections.

Despite this, John's poems were published in *Poetry Review*, *Ostinato*, *Stand*, *Fire* and in anthologies devoted to **Elvis Presley**, **The Beatles**, **Bob Dylan**, **Edward Thomas**, bicycles and peace, areas with which he was deeply connected.



Lucky Rankin – Guitarist



John's **Collected Poems** were published in 2000 by Touched Press. Comments are below:

"If you care about English language poetry and want to discover one of this generation's best poets ahead of the crowd, buy this book."

Tony Grist, *New Hope International Review*

"A magnificent book."

Michael Horovitz

"I can do little else but heap praise on Gibbens for his impeccable diction and use of language which holds surprises round every corner and is never at ease with the easy."

John Mingay, *Stride*

Smokestack Books published **Orpheus Ascending** (2012):

Like **Salman Rushdie**, **Nick Cave**, **Rilke**, **Cocteau** and **Tennessee Williams** before him, John Gibbens recasts the Orpheus myth in contemporary terms: this time in a strangely altered version of the London music scene in the late 1980s, a retro-future where violent unrest meets government backlash, and where pastoral idyll becomes a refuge from the currents of history.

The Inkjet Books, launched in 2002 now numbering a couple of dozen titles. Amongst them are several illuminated pamphlets.

After 10 years of work and 3 rewrites John published *The Nightingale's Code*, (2001) with original photographs by **Keith Baugh**, Touched Press – an in-depth Poetic study of Bob Dylan, which received many accolades.

"John Gibbens's passionate advocacy of one of the 20th century's greatest popular artists belongs among the best Dylan books"

Kirkus UK

"A gem amongst a lot of current fibreglass . . . essential reading"

Paula Radice, *Freewheelin'*

"Perception without pretension... studded with sharp images and insights"

Emma Hagestadt, *The Independent*

The creative partnership with Armored Weston, produced **The Children**, music written by John and Armored, which they recorded and performed over 12 years, their debut album, **Play** (1999), Subsequent releases include, **Come Aboard** and **Rockingham Street** (2002), **Love Walk** (2003) **Equals** (2007) and the double album, **Memory of**

Grace (2012). And Johns only solo album *Songs from the Red Note Book* (2014) details and recordings found on **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (a website build by John with a Lay for each day till 5 days before his death, the last poem being a song from the first album *Play: Meanwhile I'm Alive*)

John has left a legacy of 15 years of Poetry since *The Collected Poems* were published, and over 100 songs yet to be released.



The Entertainer by John Gibbens

My thought's a melody
and my body all a thought,
till on the farther side
those waiting arms give weight back,

the spirit's open place
being built on breath of trust.
Though I'm young still to know,
where could I fly but to you?

Pisces



John Gibbens

JOHN GIBBENS

Collected Poems



John Gibbens was born in Cheshire in 1959 and grew up in West Germany and West Cumbria. He moved to London at 18, where he worked as typist, secretary, typesetter and, latterly, journalist. He was deputy editor of *The Oldie* for a while, and was for many years a freelance newspaper subeditor. He won an **Eric Gregory Award** in 1982 and was **Southwark Poet of the Year** in 2005. He published a *Collected Poems* in 2000 and *The Nightingale's Code: a poetic study of Bob Dylan* in 2001. 'Shelf-Life', a column about his adventures in second-hand bookshops, appears occasionally in the *Sunday Telegraph*. There are eight CDs of his songs

with *The Children* available. His art has appeared as illustrations to his poems in the Inkjet Books series of pamphlets, launched in 2002. Aside from self-publication, his first published artwork was a drawing of the saxophonist in *The Sound of Squirrel Meals: The Work of Lol Coxhill* by Barbara Schwarz (2006). His second was the print 'Norwood' in *The William Blake Birthday Book* (2007).

John Gibbens – Artist's Statement

I learnt at school that I couldn't draw, but still as a youth I loved to look at art and learn about it. In my first years in London, in the late Seventies, I had friends who were at Hornsey Art College, and a brave few of them were painting and drawing, so that fed my addiction.

Then, some time in the middle Eighties, I'd been staring hard at some of our paintings in the National Gallery – Cézanne's, especially, as I remember – and something got into me that couldn't seem to get out any way except by making pictures myself. Inept or not, the time spent on them showed what Blake meant: "The hours of folly are measur'd by the clock, but of wisdom: no clock can measure."

Around '87/88 I was involved in an improvising musicians' collective which meant that I was seeing improv gigs at least once a week. I started to draw the players, though I felt I had no skill for likenesses. When I could forget I had no skill and drew with the music, sometimes it was a likeness too.

I don't remember who suggested lino-cutting to me, but its immediacy seemed to make it a good medium to take the music pictures a step further. I printed with cheap Chinese watercolours from tubes, because that was what I had to hand, painting onto the block with a brush, so that each print is effectively a monotype.

I still like to draw at gigs if the music gets me in the spirit.

In the early 2000s I began to make home-produced pamphlets of my poems, which I call the **Inkjet Books**. Some of them are illustrated with prints and drawings. Three of those are about music: *The Improvised Version*, Volumes 1 and 2, and *Septet*. They mostly match poems and pictures that were made independently. A series of poems called *The Entertainers* was started for someone else to illustrate, but when that didn't happen, I decided to make my own prints for them.

These days I use proper water-based printing inks, slightly watered down and applied with the brush, for colour images; a roller and oil-based black for mono.

Recently I wrote another set of poems, on motifs of the old-fashioned popular cinema, which I projected specifically to go with linocuts. Those designs are the next task.

I've only done a little wood-engraving, and still find it daunting, especially when I consider the precise technique of traditional engravers. When I worked at *The Oldie*, though, the magazine used wood-engravings by John O'Connor. He'd bring in a few prints each time, and if you wanted one of the spares, it was yours (if you were quick). They're a liberating example of what a fresh, direct approach can get out of a block.



Apple Blossom by John Gibbens



Hoopla by John Gibbens

Etruscan Books

By Deep Water, In Deep Water

Poetry Library, South Bank Centre, November 6th 2013

This programme, part of a series celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Poetry Library, featured **Nicholas Johnson**, director of **Etruscan Books**, and poets **John Hall**, **Carlyle Reedy**, **Helen MacDonald** and **Stuart Montgomery**. A significant proportion of was imbued with the spirit of **Roy** (he lives in Derbyshire, but was unable to travel).

John Seed opened the evening by reading a paragraph by the late Bill Griffiths, who was published three times at Etruscan, and indeed, gave the press its name. This brief explanation evoked Etruscan Books. Etruria was a region in Italy whose population was fiercely independent, and whose language was impossible to translate in toto. It was a focus of fascination for both Josiah Wedgwood and D H Lawrence. Etruscan Books grew out of the *Six Towns Poetry Festival* (1992-97) in Stoke-on-Trent. When first organising the festival, Johnson had been deeply affected by a magazine containing an interview with Roy Fisher. This was truly inspirational, and led him to develop the Etruscan imprint.

John Seed read a letter written for the occasion by Roy Fisher, about the birth of the Six Towns Poetry Festival 21 years ago. Seed had read at the first festival, and a poem by him was published in their anthology, 'Peacocks was Really Great'

The first reading was from **John Hall**, with a rendition of Roy Fisher's *The Trace*. He followed this with some of his own poems, such *Poems for Dreamers* and *the slender meanings*, originally published in *Between the Cities* (1968) and included in the Etruscan Books publication, *Else Here* (1999). Also featured were *The Jeweller*. From *Meaning Insomnia*, he read *7 Variations*. His most recent collection is *Keepsache*, which contains what Hall calls 'page notes' – brief philosophical reflections – to me somewhat reminiscent of Pascal.

He did one variation from *Changing Lines*, originally published in the Shearsman Books publication, *Couldn't You?* (2007), and included in *Keepsache* (2013). The variation he read is the one beginning 'A listening you . . .'

Nicholas opened his set with a reference to **Barry MacSweeney's** *Book of Demons*. He had found MacSweeney to be a great source of inspiration. In his own words: "The poet Barry MacSweeney was a contrary, lone wolf, self-styled the 'prince of Sparty Lea'. He was proscribed from official records of poetry for 25 years. *Pearl* (1995) and *The Book of Demons* relaunched his reputation. He won a Paul Hamlyn Award in 1997. MacSweeney was a boy wonder, in the Romantic tradition, who turned lyricism on its head and made it a very dark place to be."

He began his set with a 1931 poem by **Sean Rafferty** which Sorley MacLean had recited to him from memory, published in *Poems, Songs and Revue Sketches* (Etruscan, 2005), then two short lyrics from *Poems*. He evoked Rafferty because he encouraged the festival, although he would not come

to read. And because he'd pushed a sack truck loaded with new books by his authors across Waterloo Bridge, from Charing Cross, passing the Arches where Rafferty had worked at the Players Theatre in the 1940s. Rafferty never gave readings, but like many who took part, and indeed MacSweeney, (persuaded to give his first reading in 4 years, who dedicated the chapbook that resulted from the festival, *Hellhound Memos*, to Johnson) had endured silence and neglect.

Johnson would by default become editor of Rafferty's posthumous *Collected Poems (Carcanet, 1995)*, then *Poems (1999)* at *Etruscan*. He rounded off his set with an excerpt from *Haul Song*, completed above the bookshop where the Six Towns Poetry Festival originated. This is finally published in its full, reconfigured version as part of his folio of long poems *And Stood Upon Red Earth All A Round (Etruscan, 2013)*, which has a foreword by John Hall. Nicholas made a significant comment about Roy Fisher: "His encouragement was calmer than Bill Griffiths'. Both were important. Griffiths had tattoos on each hand: **LOVE – HATE** – and saffron fingers. When I introduced myself after a London reading he ground his foot into mine; a kind of dominance dog game."

Stuart Montgomery outlined his roots in Rhodesia. He reflected on the past conflicts there with the poem *Forgive and Forget*. There was a moving tribute to Princess Diana. His final poem *14th July*, was a lament for a young Iranian, brutally beaten into unconsciousness and set on fire by a xenophobic mob in Bristol. Stuart also read from *Handsworth Liberties* which explored the epic aspects of the uprisings of the black community in the Midlands, as well as *On Hearing I'd Outlived My Son, the Linguist* by Roy Fisher. Surprisingly he read nothing from *Islands*, Etruscan's first publication for Stuart in 35 years, but in referencing the cover by **Patrick Caulfield**, given Stuart by hand signs as Caulfield was stricken with throat cancer, he then read his 4 line elegy to Patrick.

Helen MacDonald read three poems – the most outstanding of which was *Partridges*, a sterling example of her erudite, allusive style – tonality reminiscent of Gerard Manley Hopkins, but with much more intrepid, searching challenges to grammatical categories – a potent blend of erudition and obsessionalism. Apparently **Barry MacSweeney** told her her leg shook like Eddie Cochran's, at the ICA reading they shared with Johnson, **Wendy Mulford** and the late **Gael Turnbull** (November 8th, 1997)/ Like **Roy Fisher**, her reading evoked the earliest days of the Six Towns Poetry Festival, a pub called the Jolly Potters, where the poets spent epic periods of time.

Carlyle Reedy, after a brief initial hesitancy, really got into her stride as she read from her *Sequentia de Tuscania*, to lend some dazzlingly authentic local colour to the evening, a Tuscany truly akin to Etruria, reflecting the incredible depth of her absorption in Italian culture. The description of a local person offering her a rabbit is particularly powerful. She concluded with a dedication to her late publisher **Alaric Sumner**.

Excerpt from the film directed by **Tom Pickard** Birmingham's *What I Think With* was shown in dedication to **Roy Fisher**. As its location, it has the industrial landscape of the Hanwell/Whitton area, as its soundtrack, some tasteful jazz piano. This was shown before the readings by Stuart, of his work and Roy's. Then John Hall came back on to read the Fisher poem.

David Russell

Some Background on Etruscan Books

Etruscan Books is 17 years young, and has published concrete, Gaelic and modernist poetry with an ear for the lyric and the made up word. They give attention to spatiality, experiment and the lyric. The books are carefully edited, and still sewn on good papers. The books are often made as artist / writer or film maker collaborations.

They have included **James Ravilious, Basil King, Colin Sackett, Patrick Caulfield**, the teenage **Nicholas Dunbar, Maricarmen Felices, Rebecca E. Marshall, Sarah Simblet** and **Brigid McLeer**.

Some of the books have had essays, paragraphs and forewords by writers including **Robert Creeley, Tom Pickard, John Hall, Andrew Crozier, Paul McCartney, Maggie O'Sullivan, Iain Sinclair, Andrew Kotting, Roy Fisher** and **Hamish Henderson**. Etruscan Books are book makers, rather than orthodox poetry publishers. Many of their titles are sold at the London Review of Books Bookshop, and Tom Leonard's, at Edinburgh Word Power. Yet to get them, if you want to read them, you often have to declare an interest and order them, as they are not available in bookshops.

Etruscan Books grew out of the *Six Towns Poetry Festival* (1992-97) in Stoke-on-Trent, and its first book work was by Ed Dorn. Its work represents a continuum of the way of bookmaking by presses like **Fulcrum, Goliard, Black Sparrow** and **Grosseteste**.

Since 1999 Etruscan Books has irregularly yet persistently run mini festivals in London, *For The Locker and The Steerer*, which has featured writers including Rachel Lichtenstein, Gael Turnbull, David Gascoyne and Douglas Oliver.

We have curated tours, readings and festivals across the British Isles, including a residency at the Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol for the exhibition *Black Mountain: Starting at Zero, 1935-1957*. Etruscan Books runs *Black Huts* festival of writing, film and music in Hastings Old Town. Its third festival will take place from October 31st-November 2nd 2014

Nicholas Johnson

HOPE

I hope I don't go crazy again
I hope I don't lose my head
I hope I don't have to bite the bullet
or go creeping through the land
of the living dead.
I hope I don't waste the moment
I hope I don't waste your time
I hope I don't have to keep returning
to the scene, to the scene,
to the scene of the crime!
And I hope that I live on an island
Just a stones throw away from the sea
I hope I can dig up some answers!
A sandcastle left there for all to see!
And I hope that I get to survive this
I hope I can live through the lie!
I hope I can prove my endurance
right up to the point when I die!
But the birds & the bees, they're not bothered.
They don't have to swim or to sink!
Right here at the top of the food chain
we stand
Blessed & cursed with the thoughts that we think!
So aware of our own brief mortality
So aware that we're doomed from the start.
The only creatures who can detail
the tick-tocking depths of the heart!
So I hope I don't go crazy again
I hope I don't lose my head!
I hope I don't have to bite the bullet
as I creep through this land
of the living dead!

Razz

MIRRORS

I've always been uncouth
Especially in my youth
I've taught myself almost everything
and that's the truth!

But the Middle Class have always sensed
my lack of education!
And the Working Class have let me know
I've got ideas above my station.

So, I never fitted anywhere
And nowhere fitted me!
I grasped I needed to be punished,
for getting seasick
on this seasick sea.
I cried out, "Liberation!"
but my freedom wasn't free!
I was trying to please everyone . . .
to get away from me!!

Now I stumble into consciousness.
To the how & what & why.
To the people that I care about
who help me to get by.
We feed on art & music!
That's the way that we get high!
Sometimes, the odds seem stacked against us!
Sometimes, we break right down & cry!

I guess we're all hallucinating
painful fragments from the past!
I guess we're in the right location
to be waking up at last.
In this endless hall of mirrors
where the truth is hard to grasp.
Where a friendly face means everything!
A face without a mask.

Here, in this endless hall of mirrors
where the truth is hard,
the truth is hard
the truth is hard to grasp!
A friendly face means everything!
A face without a mask!
July 2015.
Don't know if it's finished yet.
I might have cut it short!

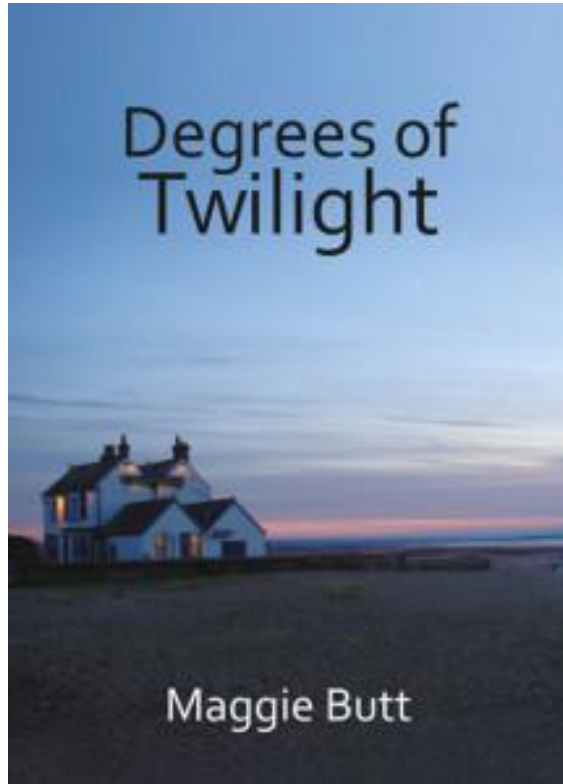
Razz

Degrees of Twilight

by Maggie Butt

The London Magazine 2015

ISBN 978-0-9926061-5-2 £6.99



This collection could be described as ‘time-obsessed’. *Time Travellers* suggests bi-directional time travel, a theme reiterated in *Travelling Backwards* – through the generations, to a time when all the retro gear was pristine and new. In *Comfrey* she honours the manual skills of her forebears. For Maggie, the whole world is a museum, emphasised in her opening poem *The Archaeology of Hotel Rooms*. *Mapping Bow Bells* honours a monument/institution which stands over, and implicitly monitors, the passage of generations.

In *The Photographer Predicts*, she looks

ahead into the future – a happy family group later to be transported to a Soviet Labour Camp. *Go Gentle* seems to be a plea for the acceptance of mortality. I am very interested in knowing the full details of the argument with Dylan Thomas! *Survival is a Survivor* poem par excellence; the doomy figure of death is sent packing by the saviours. In a way it is complemented by *The New Mothers*, which conveys the total pain of a difficult (and it almost feels like potentially mortal) childbirth. *Lying In* further explores the analogies between birth and death: “Which labour is the hardest work, the deepest pain . . . both leading to an unknown work. In the mother’s dire extremity, roles are reversed: “it will be my turn to carry you/furled safe inside me . . .” *Death Valley*, literally and metaphorically, portrays the painful journeys. *Ellis Island, New York* and *Top of the Empire State* show Maggie’s well-travelled cosmopolitanism, as do the extensive *Cuba 2008* and *The Other Holy Places of Umbria*. *Unfinished* speaks eloquently of martyrdom to fine art. *Burning Bush* is a savage indictment of fundamentalist religion – men who say/they’ve heard the voice of God/are playing with fire’. Why did God choose something so banal and ugly to convey his message, when he could have used a dignified, elemental channel such as snowfall and

thunder? Maybe he was fallible after all, with ‘a grudge against a particularly ugly shrub,/designed just before tea-time on the sixth day/when his concentration wavered.’ *Pain* ingeniously uses the device of personification; the malignant entity assumes the forms of various vicious animals, and explosives.

After the Holiday – a highly perceptive analogy between the bustle of the working world and storms at sea. Marine imagery is highly prominent in Maggie’s work. *In Praise of Beaches* is a brilliant exploration of the beach’s function, as a refuge from the inhibitions of normal life, and a repository – “the unwanted and forgotten is washed up on them”.

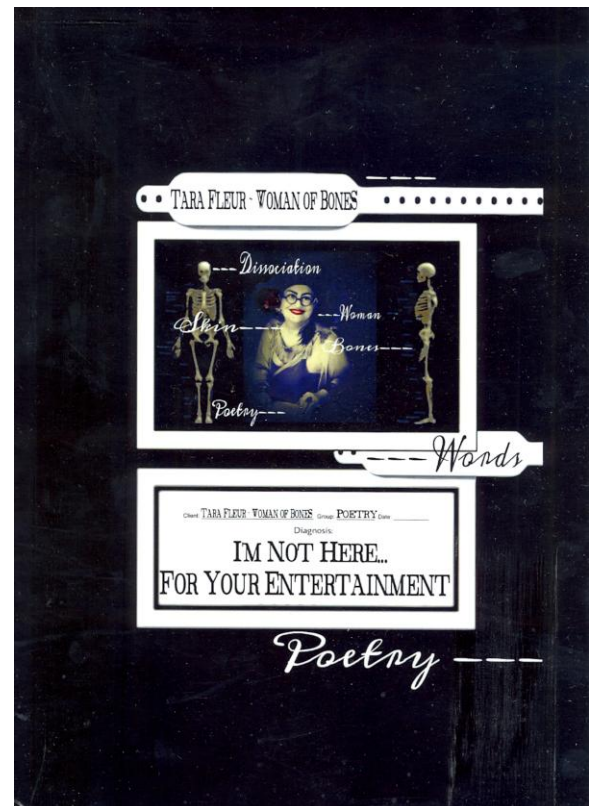
Great biological/geological perspective in *The Why of Shells*: for Maggie, the ‘where’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ are lucid and self-explanatory – but the ‘why’ ‘falters and wavers before the why of shape, the why of beauty’.

In *Naming*, Maggie reveals her need to go beyond the verbal to intuit reality: “Words lose their currency, strung/like a hammock between two languages . . . Language stutters and defeats me./I listen instead to the secrets of the wind/in the leaves;” so language can be both ineffectual and oppressive.

Dave Russell

I’m Not Here for Your Entertainment – Tara Fleur – Woman of Bones

William Cornelius Harris Publishing,
in collaboration with Second Chance
ISBN 978-1-326-30216-0 £12



The title is totally appropriate. This collection vitally challenges, confronts, provokes – flinching from nothing, pulling no punches. For me, ‘woman of bones’ means woman of hard resilience, no yielding softness. She refers to ‘the bone deep pages of our poetry’. Tara’s work flouts every taboo I can think of, and peels away sanitised pretences. The opening poem, with its succession of **don’ts**, catalogues a mass of prejudices and taboos to be defied.

In *Tell Them*, she posits herself as a medium for her ‘lost girl’: “She is my goddess too. My dark side, my light, my essence, my you.” *Hush Little Baby* has a bitter, ironic tone. The newborn will have to learn some predatory survival skills to

cope with an often malignant adult world. A further twist with a barbed ending referring to possible infant mortality.

Garage presents an array of detritus in a neglected, and now seemingly abandoned, abode. The 'relics' speak with total eloquence of the tortured lives and minds of the former inhabitants, tragic victims of a brutal consumer society. In similar vein *Chicken Fat* examines the real, sordid underside of a wedding anniversary celebration.

Politics and Penises – the desperate lament of someone abused, whose rage against her mistreater knows no bounds: "I wanna be stupidity,/insanity . . . I wanna be ungrateful,/hateful –/and refuse to be debatable. She has urges to do anti-social acts as a grand gesture of defiance, and an assertion of her independent identity: "I wanna high five/Madonna,/Mary Magdalene –/and Medusa". This leads on to Tara's Goddess concept in *Lilith's*. Lilith here is savagely predatory and vindictive. But partly because of these qualities; he is irresistibly fascinating; there may be a benign aspect to her: "Capturing her prey, she closes down./Tight, tight, tight – *the wound then heals forever.*" This 'Goddess' seems to want to project herself into mortal life, and be subject to ageing and decay.

Borderline – a desire to be evil, an extreme of masochism, condemning her partner for being too soft and gentle; and a strange twist at the end: ". . . under this snarling masochistic scream,/I fight with an even dirtier, sadistic dream./Wanting to purr like a contented pussycat, warm played/and loved in Daddy's three long arms again."

Will You? Won't You? Puts a difficult relationship into the context of dubious psychiatric diagnosis: "Thirteen parasitic personas who live, thrive./Feeding alive off one lost and lonely host." There is also a suggestion of 'sex therapy' as a psychiatric treatment. Then there is a bizarre hypothetical proposal – for a

'holiday expedition' which involved a sexual/sadistic orgy of which the participants have no recollection apart from their scars. The 'You' figure is challenged to face dramatic mood-swings, but finally begged to stay. The boundaries of life and sanity are again faced, head-on: "I trip – over the edge of a memory./I fall, fall backwards into a place./Where I never wanted – to be me."

I'm Sorry relates to Tara's most traumatic experiences as a psychiatric nurse. She was forced by her professional role to act coldly and clinically with patients for whom she felt affection. This included forced injections, and a suicide about which she felt guilty. Her pain is double edged: "I became a nurse because I know your pain./I felt your fear as this was also mine."

Judge and Jury indicts hypocritical institutions, which sometimes wantonly condemn benign or harmless actions. In all honesty, contrition should be reciprocated: "Yes, I do believe sorry's . . ./In equal nods, suckles and winks./Work so much better – each way."

Fuck – brilliant play on the famous four-letter word; a riotous piece of black humour, expressing exasperation, frustration, vindictiveness. Great to be able to laugh at relationships really gone sour!

Speculum – I am convinced that any totally honest person would admit to having had, at some time, sexual feelings towards a doctor or a nurse. "Pulling her gently apart, with a knowing gaze . . . filling her with cold, stiff, steel". Of course there are physical analogies between the erotic and the medical.

Fifty Shades of Filthy Poetry – the title an obvious parody of the best-seller, feels profoundly ironic to me – as someone with no first-hand knowledge of bondage, sado-masochism and corporal punishment. I cannot finally say if anyone really does get pleasure out of pain. It partly suggests a sex industry worker doing something she hates in

order to make a living. The barbed mock-sycophancy of the reiterated *Sir* is hard-hitting, as is the hyperbole of begging him to take her life. But she does say “I can be disobedient when you are not here.” So the ‘client’s’ power, unlike that of a domestic oppressor, is limited to the duration of a ‘session’.

Dirty Sex gives the impression of exploring a subculture to its depths – from telephone and video sex, to sex shops and possible experience. As a relative ignoramus in this area I was kept guessing as to whether this was a matter of real experience or of nightmarish fantasy. I tended to think of the latter as not being explicit in physical details. Tara always makes one think again!

One Zero Three Three Zero Two is Tara’s proclamation of her Jewishness. The title is based on the number of an identification tattoo made on Tara’s grandmother during the Holocaust – great phrase in ‘grandmother’s holocaustic transparency’. Collectively, the wounds have not healed: “What light we find in ritual/was and is, always crudely interrupted/by the denied bones of our ancestry.” Tara can project herself back into that period of history. She can also face the present, with its undercurrent of Anti-Semitism, and the future, with the vision of her granddaughter being violated as was her grandmother. This poem is an admirable inclusion in the selection. I feel that the extremes of politics are rooted in sexual politics, including the necessity to be furtive and secretive. In saying ‘I am not political, but emotional’, Tara shows the breadth of her perspective.

4am bravely explores the world of insomnia in conditions of squalor, including spiders, and the admitted hazards of comfort eating – a situation of desperate loneliness, combined with anxieties about ageing. Direct tactile gratification is out of reach, so there is the resort to virtual reality: “Yet I’m needing, bleeding to communicate//Shall I pop a middle

age pill or three?/Or dress like a lamb to titillate. My mutton psychology can, with ease, capture a youthful kill . . .” The glamorous cyber figures remind the poet of her younger self.

In the concluding *Dead Woman is a Walking*, Tara shows her total courage in wanting to cross the threshold of mortality: “. . . remove *me/* from this spastic grip of life’s absurd banality.” Her image of that banality is a psychiatric or geriatric ward – ‘neurotic psychological ventilators indeed’. Although she sees death as a liberator, a release, she says “I choose **not** to rest in peace” – determined to sustain post-mortem awareness.

Tara has always had the courage of her convictions, and sometimes has faced being barred from venues because of their intensity. Her work is multi-textured; there is frequently, in her words, a ‘poem in a poem.’

Dave Russell

**I live here –
so I don’t have to live here**

I want to live in a place
Where sections are pieces
And unit means number.
Doors unlock, windows open, taps run and
Showers flow.
Lunch time is fun time and
I can pour my own tea.
Where shaving my legs and
Going to the toilet
Is seen as person hygiene.
Not viewed with suspicion.
Walking is a way to get from A to B
Rather than 90 to 80.
CPA, TTA and OT are just letters and
Ensure means to make sure.
Fish is served in a fillet,
Not perfectly round measures,

And dropping a chip in the floor is an accident,
Not a triumph.
No ringing bell wakes me up
And no torch shines in my eyes.
Where I'm not a patient,
But a person.

Francesca Baker

Thanks for sharing your thoughtful newsletter. I just started a website to help poets promote their work, including newsletters and poetry news. It's called Promote Your Poetry, <http://www.promoteyourpoetry.com>.

Beauty

Beauty – how do I commemorate you?
So many torn and conflicting feelings;
so many regrets, so many tormented thoughts
and feelings;
so much time I wish I could take back.

I'm sorry I did not fight harder to save you;
then again I feel relieved that your suffering was
not prolonged,
and is over.
I even thanked the vet that killed you;
please forgive me – I did not mean it as a betrayal:
I just found it so hard to see you suffer,
know the right thing to do.

I'm sorry you had an owner that had such a
troubled past;

I'm so thankful you came and stayed;
you bought such beauty into my life,
and please know I truly loved you from the
deepest place in my heart.
Rest well my friend; you will forever leave paw
prints on my heart.

Jayne O'Neil

The Sense of *Jamais Vu*

'I have seen too much'
The Bishop knew he would
see no more
beaten
by whims
modern and ancient.

The background streamings expertly
dispel myths
create
with fervour
yet more.

And I wanted to ask the mad Consultant
'if sociopaths can get depressed
(contrary to received indifference)
then with your wise and cultured voice
perhaps you'll tell from whence and whom
depressive traits do emanate
and what purpose do they serve?'

And when we say we feel
we mean we think
and when we say we think
we are not sure
and if we say we know
we feel something,
or nothing.

I feel the need to ask
the mad Consultant
'can you feel everything,
and nothing?'

If he senses that he knows,
why doesn't he feel for us?

Philip Ruthen

*(20/06/15 from latest manuscript version of
'Familial' Waterloo Press)*

F.E.E.L.

(Friends of The East End Loonies)

I'm a Friend of the East End Loonies
You can take my word for that
I was told that I was mental
As in the loony bin I sat

I'm a Friend of the East End Loonies
I'm more batty than a bat
Due to the rising hate crime
Kindly keep that under your hat

I'm a Friend of the East End Loonies
We've always been treated bad
Nothing ever changes for the better
It's no wonder that we're mad

I'm a Friend of the East End Loonies
And that is no word of a lie
I'm a Friend of the East End Loonies
Will be one till the day I die

At the Friends of the East End Loonies
There is a welcome on the mat
I'm a Friend of the East End Loonies
Quis Separabit? and all that

Kieran Bradley (2015)

Loud Silence by Bill McKnight

ISBN 978-1-4717-3563-9

A supreme example of truly inspired minimalism. The guideline laid down in **Ward Stothers'** Foreword can be applied like an 'acid test' to Bill's poems:

"His initial line tells a story of what exists on his footpath for change. The second line carries a brief

nugget of truth and recommends a last sentence of collision and conclusion looking for an answer in a convicting target. We are repeatedly showered with suggestion, implicitness, subtlety and expressions of heavy and hard truth. All three progressive lines delve out true truth, and not the old standby of love and beauty."

Graham Thornicroft's introduction should also be taken on board: "He poignantly parodies the common stock phrases that others use, intending to be comforting but experiences as profoundly beside the point. He softly speaks of the ill-lit area between the public front of 'normality' and the back story of the real sense of self, which can feel like 'a meltdown of the heart and mind'.

"The poems are sometimes brutally honest, and the writer admits that 'reality comes at a cost.'" Thornicroft senses an underlying optimism in Bill's work, which the reader must sound out.

The title (and the title poem) epitomises the irony and contrariety of this collection. Silence can speak more loudly and eloquently than words. Through all the cynicism and irony, there lies an ebullient optimism: "I was insane./But at forty/discovered/I have a brain!"

mental illness (a glimpse) presses home the point that some mental illness is simply a greater extreme (though to painful proportions) of a 'normal' condition. *Riddle* exposes the emptiness of clichés such as 'making it'. What actually constitutes 'it'? "You'll know who I am. Who am I?" *Making life easier* – creature comforts are so reassuring, and feel so permanent and all enveloping, but in a full perspective they are a facade; behind them is desolation and deprivation – "The cracks are appearing."

A query/reservation about *suicide* – does it unnecessarily denigrate the courage of those who struggle to hold on to life? *Comfort zone* sums up the necessary self-protectiveness of the vulnerable.

Jim'll fix it highlights the futility of 'pat on the shoulder' catchphrases about self-discipline and stamina – many a person truly suffering is understandably impervious to such exhortations. Mentally ill (but not stupid) is a great aphoristic quatrain, worthy of any graffiti board – castigating those dismissive of mental health problems.

Mountain summit – great incantatory piece, reiterating overwhelming fear of the insurmountable. But then a twist: "It's too frightening to be frightened" and there is comfort and reassurance looking at a valley below. *Schizo-affective disorder* – witty wordplay highlighting (bipolar?) mood-swings.

Front versus up-front goes beyond haiku in expressing the way someone achieves independence of mind against the surveillance and censure of others. *Hope* shows the dynamic juxtaposition of contraries: "growth and change/can be gained/at the moment of greatest pain." *Acute illness* is powerful verbal shorthand, with a sense of someone trying to make a crucial point under a stringent word limit – such as a telegram or text message.

At the hairdressers – some casual comments, often without conscious malicious intent, can be extremely hurtful. *Dr Who?* Is an indictment of the frequent lack of reciprocity in psychiatric consultations. 'Unfairapeutic' is a fantastic neologism!

Schizo-mania – many a lost soul is 'buried above ground' – unwittingly, perhaps, through the prejudices of 'norm' Mrs Smith. Mr Brown. *The Daily Gob* – the tabloid press suppresses truth to give priority to sensational stories.

The mental health professional – the psychiatric profession is full of cold, calculating careerists. *What's the point?* Life must finally take precedence over poetry and art.

World Mental Health Day – well-intentioned terminology can sometimes turn into deadening

cliché. *Burning the midnight oil (on my P.C)* – nocturnal insomnia can sometimes give a great sense of peace, especially when days are difficult.

Flexi-bill-ity! Indeed, the more compliant organisms, bending rather than breaking, often have the greater survival capacity. Friends – humorous inversion of the 'don't ring me, I'll ring you' principle. Labelled by you – really skilful punning of 'tattoo' and 'taboo', with 'branded too' clinching the two!

Reality for sale? Equivocal feelings – "How can I know reality/if I'm unwilling to be real . . . Reality comes at a cost –/dearer but better than anything bought."

There's a fine line between – indeed: doodles can be totally meaningless or profoundly meaningful. *Fear* – essential, existential fear, underlies, and is greater than, its concrete foci. *Laughter* – laughter can be double-edged; sometimes it can heal, but frequently it can wound. *Mad man* – there's always a funny side to delusions of grandeur!

The man who ran away from himself – sufferers from mental health problems must have intense internal conflicts and contradictions. 'Running away from oneself' can be a sort of anaesthetic. But what, exactly, is 'running in the opposite way'. Does this involve facing pain in its totality? *Terminology* – a life term, with the stigma of a life sentence? Ch "Sticks and stones may break my bones/but stigma really hurts me." Typical of his underlying optimism, Bill, in *Stigmata* resolutely refuses to go under any bad-naming. A couple of whiplash ripostes in "nothing sticks like stigma" and *Stigma* – "Insight/that is skin deep."

Recovery – of course I remember *Unchained Melody*.

"Bill McKnight has an unusual ability to see beyond the surface . . . His clear vision creates poems that talk to our hearts as well as our brains." Celia Brain, M.D.

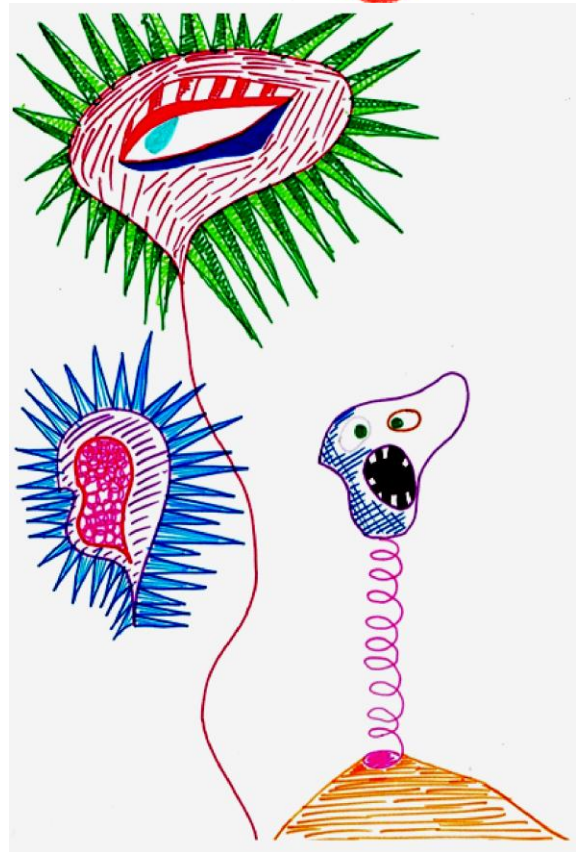
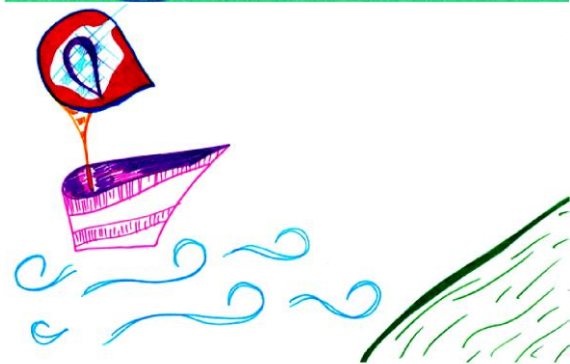
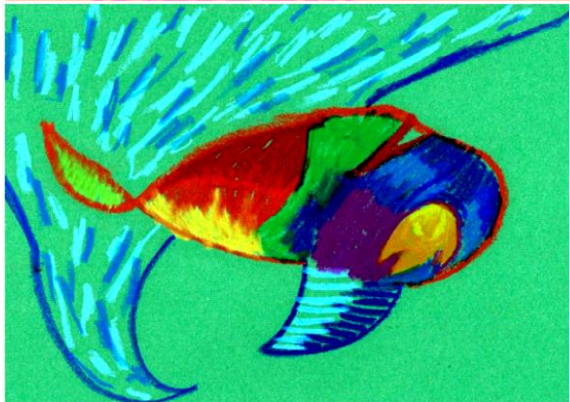
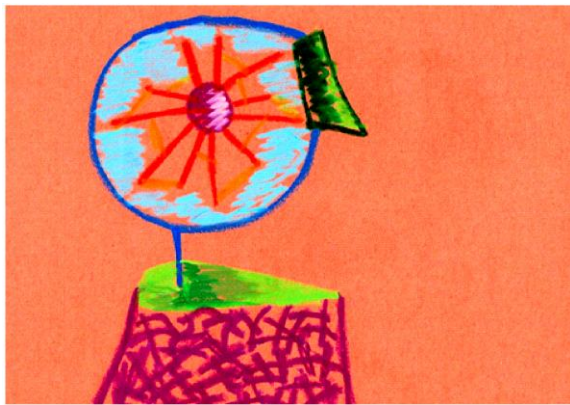
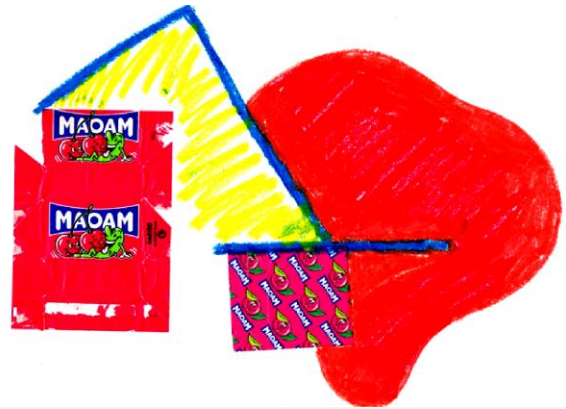
Dave Russell

Sarah Gonnet

Appendix – The kind of art

Thomas might produce

These are my drawings in an outsider style (I hope you will judge my writing not my drawing skills). To see the work of a real outsider simply Google image search: **Henry Darger, Karl Brendel, Richard Dadd** or **The Pitmen Painters**. I based the character of Thomas on these. Some art historians even speculate that **Van Gogh** was an outsider artist.



In the Psychiatrist's Chair

Mam took me to this man
Junior School offered this service
For a Junior School, it was innovative
Mam couldn't hear most of it
Fiddled with her aid, bleep gloop blurp
Held her ear piece and nodded attentive
'Why did you bring your daughter here?'

(I caught her father having sex with her in the kitchen chair)

'Well she gets nervous and bites her nails'
I just sat and stared in the usual saucer way
'Well you seem fine to me – get some link puzzles to play – could help you stop you biting your nails'

Confirming the past 20 years later
After the old man died
I asked her who she told
She looked to the floor
'I didn't tell anyone, I thought they'd take you away'
To my shame I said 'I wish they had'

But looking back Mam, you had insight
I wish you were here so I could thank you
Now I've heard the horrors of children's homes
Now I've seen Oranges and Sunshine
And for not being persuaded to take Thalidomide
'I wasn't going to take something I didn't know what it was!'
Your treatment was sick
The old man said you were a stupid, deaf and dumb cunt
Big bro Al said you were thick and that's why, you had so many kids

Oh my dear Mother!
I wish I could tear you from your grave
Bring you to life to tell you
How amazing you were
How you never got recognition for your foresight, your efforts, your beatings
How you never were allowed to grieve for your son's death
How you never were thanked by your sons and daughters you tried to save
How you regretted all of your life not reporting the old man's abuse and violence

How you were so sensitive and caring
How you survived
There you go psychotherapists, psychiatrists, healers
While I fiddle with puzzles, get a crystal ball,
Wave a wand and tell me, how do I now deal with it all?

Wendy Young

Not Goodbye

My Love, I want to let you rest
but I really don't know how
I'd love to go and tuck you in above,
on those plump and downy clouds

I need to know that you're at peace 'up there'
I don't know where to begin;
I long to feel you in every drop of rain,
every whispered gust of wind.

I hope that you're looking down on me with love,
The way I look up to you.
Please talk to me through rustling leaves,
sweet birdsong;
I need to feel your presence in all that I do

I hope that you are full of love
of warmth, of peace, of joy
And know that there's nothing that we
wouldn't do,
to see you again, our precious boy.

For every tear that rolls down my cheek;
For every hop, skip of my heart,
I am holding on to that one treasured thought
Of that day where we'll no longer be apart

Gazing at the stars that sparkle
And the early morning light
I wonder how you bide your time,

and send you our love for every day and night.

This is not a parting,
An end or a Goodbye.
It simply sends you my hopes, my wishes;
The words behind my cry.

I know that you are safe up there,
and are as happy as can be
For all the strength in all of my bones,
I wish I could bring you down to me.

*(In memory of Alfie James – this poem was
written in the course of therapy for
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)*

Amy James

An Ally's Anniversary: 20 years of The Poetry Church Magazine Feather Books.

The Poetry Church, under John Waddington-Feather editorship, I found, was the most all-embracing and broad-minded of publications, more often than not including social-political lyric poetry which had yes, a spiritual context but of a style and content not necessarily to be found in any equivalent major contemporary Christian poetry publications; long may The Poetry Church continue with the baton now ably handed on. The magazine has published poetry and occasional comment from many writers deeply involved with Survivors' Poetry over the same two decades, including that of one of our Patrons, Debjanee Chatterjee, the no-longer with us Bruce James – many others – and there's a camaraderie from such involvement, a reassurance. Feather Books has also produced several hundred highly

fascinating and important works on writing and literature, biographies, literary academic studies, politics and philosophy. It has a reach and backlist which has arguably enriched society and culture where other presses have not gone, issuing writers' works, including my own memoir of times in the Welsh mental health system, that other publishers would not or could not produce. The subscription base is large and truly international, another plus.

Philip Ruthen

July 2015

Dear All, it's just twenty years since I launched The Poetry Church magazine; so below are some details of its early editions. Also a new hymn.

Blessings

John

Two Decades of The Poetry Church

In 1995, I was approached by a group of Christian poets to launch a magazine under my Feather Books imprint devoted entirely to religious poetry; the reason being that the editors of secular poetry magazines were understandably reluctant to publish religious verse. So in the Spring of 1995, "The Poetry Church" was published as a modest 20-page quarterly magazine.

By coincidence, it accorded with my ministry in Shrewsbury Prison where I was an assistant chaplain. I'd been ordained into the Anglican non-stipendiary priesthood twenty years earlier and helped out in the prison the odd night a week after school and at weekends. I'd established a strong rapport with prisoners who were writers like myself, and encouraged them in their

work. It was an informal part of a wider rehabilitation programme, for each week a team of writer-teachers sponsored by the West Midlands Arts Council came into prison and ran writing classes. They were a great success, socially and educationally.

So, from the start “The Poetry Church” published work written by men in British prisons, and it wasn’t long before it also published poems by American prisoners. To the present day, poetry is still published from abroad written by men and women in prison, providing a link with the outside world and rehabilitation.

For one man, the magazine was a vital link with life outside his prison cell. He was Sean Sellars, in solitary confinement on Death Row in Oklahoma State Penitentiary for eleven years. At seventeen he was sentenced to death for shooting his mother and step-father who’d abused him terribly from childhood. In prison, ministered to by a chaplain, he converted to Christianity from a satanic cult he’d joined as a teenager. He began writing and compiled a book of short stories and poems. A selection was published by Feather Books and “The Poetry Church” in 1998. It was called “Imprisoned Realities” and Sean wrote a moving introduction. The following year Sean was executed by lethal injection aged 27.

Ten years later after a bout of ill-health and aged 75, I handed over the editorship and publishing of “The Poetry Church” into the very capable hands of Tony Reavill and his daughter Olivia Egan. Under their guidance, the magazine has gone from strength to strength and is now over 200 pages long, published twice a year by Tony’s imprint “Moorside Words and Music”. His address

is: Eldwick Crag Far, High Eldwick, Bingley, W. Yorkshire BD 16 3BB. E-mail: reavill@globalnet.co.uk Tele: 01274 563078.

Trinity Praise Hymn

*(Based on Fanny Crosby’s ‘To God be the glory.’
Tune by W. H. Doane)*

To Christ be all honour, the fight he did win
‘Gainst all that is evil and given to sin;
He hung on the cross to restore us to life,
Redeem us from evil and all earthly strife.
Praise our God! Praise his Son!
Praise the Spirit within!
Praise our God! Praise his Son,
Who saved us from sin!
Oh, give God the glory for sending his Son
To free us from evil! The vict’ry is won!

We start life anew
With the Lord as our guide
And his Holy Spirit stood there at our side;
Leading us always the way that is right,
Seeking the Lord’s way with all of our might.
Praise our God! Praise his Son!
Praise the Spirit within!
Praise our God!
Praise his Son, who saved us from sin!
Oh, give God the glory for sending his Son
To free us from evil! The vict’ry is won!

So let us give thanks for all that’s been done
Throughout the whole world
By our God and his Son,
For the Holy Spirit who came down to earth
To make us all free and to give us new birth.
Praise our God! Praise his Son!
Praise the Spirit within!
Praise our God! Praise his Son,
Who saved us from sin!
Oh, give God the glory for sending his Son
To free us from evil! The vict’ry is won!

John Waddington-Feather

I CAN'T STAND

I can't stand jeans that are way too big
Or blue rinses that look like a wig
People who moan about whatever they see;
Coffee's too strong
or there's too much sugar in my tea

Things that have more than four legs
bug the hell out of me
And people who have problems
with dunking biscuits in tea
The cold of winter the heat of summer
And those for which using manners
is too much of a bother

People who to your face are sugar and spice
As soon as your back is turned in goes the knife
Waking up on mornings on a cold winter's day;
Under the duvet I want to stay.

Vicky B

BOXES

People say
That you learn
To put it in a box
Well I can honestly say
That I've searched and searched
And I just haven't got a box
Anywhere
At all
That big

Lily Pickles

COLD FEET

Gather round me ladies,
I've got a tale to tell
of love, marriage and abuse –
make sure you listen well!
Don't ignore your friends
if they say he is no good,
my friends they tried to warn me
but I never understood.
If you get those cold feet
on your wedding day,
run for the hills young lady –
just leg it far away.
If he tries to fix you,
to correct your 'dreadful flaw',
there's only one good option –
show that man the door.
If he tries to punch you,
don't listen to his lies,
there's no excuse for violence –
it's time for your goodbyes.
If he holds the purse strings,
that really isn't right –
save some money of your own
for the dreaded legal fight.
Now I know that you won't listen,
we women never do,
but after what I've been through
I would if I were you!

Lily Pickles

LET ME REST

Take me to your safe place
and let me rest awhile
Let the strength of your arms
shelter me from this pain
Let a whisper of breath
quieten my restless mind
And the heat of your skin
seep in and soften me
Let the warmth of your smile
melt weariness away
While I rest awhile

Lily Pickles

HOLD MY HAND

When your friend has been abused,
it's hard to understand –
the one good thing that you can do
is tightly hold their hand.
“You must do this, you must do that,
“you need to do it now” –
this really doesn't help them
as they really don't know how.
They have been to hell and back,
you haven't got a clue –
you've never been where they have been,
don't tell them what to do.
Love them, spoil them, hold them,
give them all the time they need –
their wounds will take some healing,
with your help they might succeed.

Lily Pickles

DAO Outside-In Festival Pallant House, October 8th, 2015



Disability Arts Online's Outside-In Festival at Pallant House, Chichester is emerging as a happily embedded institution, in a brightly-welcoming gallery environment. Before taking a lungful of festival you gaze on the 20th century collection of paintings: two each by **Bomberg, Fedden, Richards;**

examples by **Sickert, Vaughan, Hodgkin, Caulfield** and some discoveries by e.g. **John Hubbard**.

This year it fell on a Thursday, not Saturday, and Pallant House staff under Director Mark Steen, who began the movement, must be thanked for opening three further hours especially for us. Jenny Gilbert now cheerfully heads up Outside In and introduced **Colin Hambrook**.

Colin read a stirring piece by prolific, well-known Dolly Sen. ‘You can't take dignity for times a day’ graphically evokes the Largactil shuffle affecting her mobility, sex-and-social life as well as dignity embedded here. It deserves status as a torch anthem.

The artwork shifts: striking things went up. It was impossible to keep pace with those and catch words; immersion is best.

Derek Collins' poems arising from ‘the space between fantasy and indolence’ made that space a savage consolation: ones I'd have gladly seen: like the following poet he needs to gift himself in projecting his work.

David St Clair has the requisite fury, ending memorably on ‘you're not in my favour’ inverting royal patronage, though I'd like him to favour himself a bit more too. Some good things stifled, though he'd retort he's been doing this forty years in ‘his well-lived life’.

Vicky Milner is herself attached to Outside In, having finished a Fine Art degree at

Northbrook. Her imagistically lucid poems really promise something. 'My Skin' flinches at itself memorably imaging her four-chambered heart. 'Rubble' wrenches a dystopian personal landscape, 'Roadkill' was a striking ruminance. 'My Knicker Draw' scrawls a lariat sequence of images rendering it intimate, slightly sexy and spookily private, as if we're rummaging it.

Martin Myers' poems are – as you'd expect from a sociologist exploring inequality in gypsy lives – lyrically detailed. For instance 'Kebab Town' with its nagging refrain, and the memorable rewrite of Hilaire Belloc's Hannaker Mill from 1940 with its opening: 'Hannaker's down' predicting defeat. Myers takes the final half line 'we're all done for' as a fermata for a fantasia involving the crucifying of Belloc in exuberantly gruesome measure.

Anthony Stevens produced *Austerity Bites*, prose fantasias, with this life in skinny latte making, and a fine coup where even fairies are sleeping twenty to a room.

Julia Oak's images beautifully expand her writing, which puns to a head where she writes of Oaks, entwines their fadings with her own and artfully doodle-meshed uses of green and brown in her projection. She pursues sharp-rhymed aphorisms; I wish I could quote one.

Gary Goodman is a sovereign performer travelling with his daughter as far as Japan, distantly recalling John Cooper Clark. 'Everyone Sounds Like a Burlesque dancer'

with 'tattoos like scars' and movingly a 'daughter-shaped hole' when separated.

Two featured artists followed the interval. **Allan Sutherland's** work is consummately poised, lucid as taurine. It opened with the rousing 'Difficult People' society would be rid of 'Which gives us a lot in common –/we'd like to get rid of you.' There were fine things too in 'Memory' 'Two years old/Lying in the dark/Legs bound/Because I was the wrong shape'; 'You Don't Stop being Disabled' which ends with 'And now I open /A letter from the past/Written in my own blood/And what it says is...' Parodying Sinatra fuels 'Song for a Recalcitrant Bus Driver': 'That's why the lady needs a ramp.' 'Leaning in a Lamppost' riffs a youth menacing him whilst ill, varying George Formby's refrain. 'You Don't Stop Being Epileptic' shivers brilliantly; 'Mary Had a Wheelchair' releases epigrammatic laughter. 'The Big C' savages those who told Angela not to write from cancer experience. 'Disabled and Sexy' precluded moving verbatim transcription poems framed from people's lives. We ended on 'Bite the Hand That Feeds You' another torch philippic.

Vince Laws balances excoriating wit. 'I am a poem' ruffles an exilic litany of transformations squeezed out – like 'badger-dog'. He's self-savagely brilliant on his mother Gladys killed driving: he'd survived swaddled, sharded with glass flukes. 'No-one can blame you because you're dead/I'll blame my new mother instead.' Images of stolen items sold immediately for £750 flashed up; and his gay-marriage costume precluded legality on a

bus. ‘Lily Livered’ trumps with his ‘inner drag queen’ we need a text for. Vince produced a bike-helmet emblazoning all words of ‘Mental Health Poem’, a sublime trouv . Bar killing IDS there’s nothing he can’t manifest.

Richard Storey slotted in train-delayed with ‘Salvation’s Law’ ‘Dagger’ with ‘blood turning from red to green... the gold hound’. ‘Know the odds/never to wind up at the table of the false gods.’ Some poems might be projected. We need an illustrated anthology of this moving, feisty, truly creative experience.

Colin Hambrook

An Interview with Ida of ‘Ida’s Diary’, a New Film About Borderline Personality Disorder

October 10, 2015

By Adam Forrest



Ida Storm

Great highs and deep lows are often difficult to communicate with the outside world. The life of Ida Storm, a 28-year-old woman from Norway, has been shaped by the struggle to adjust to borderline personality disorder (BPD), and a powerful new video-diary documentary reveals the inner turmoil – the mood changes,

impulsive behaviour, suicidal thoughts and self-harm – Ida has endured since she was a teenager.

The Norwegian started to record her own life using a small HD camera at the age of 18, and it's these clips that have been crafted into the documentary *Ida's Diary*. The film follows the next eight years of adult life: snorting speed at parties to self-medicate, trips in and out of psychiatric care and the big emotional breakthroughs as she gradually comes to terms with the condition. We have an exclusive shorter cut of the film on VICE, *Being Ida*, which you can [watch here](#).

Ida's Diary is often a tough watch, but it's also utterly compelling, full of tender moments of philosophical reflection. Few films have ever captured the internal whirlwind of a serious mental health condition so well.

I caught up with Ida over email recently to discuss the recording of her formative years. (Some of the topics we spoke about aren't included in *Being Ida*; to see the full-length version of the film, *Ida's Diary*, on Vimeo on Demand, [click here](#).)

VICE: Hi Ida. How have you been since finishing the film?

Ida: I've been up and down, but things are moving forward. There are still some battles every now and again, but I handle it a lot better than before. I've learned a lot of good ways to deal with my illness.

Why did record a video diary?

I bought a standard digital camera to take pictures. I happened to find a video function and started filming and talking to myself. After a while it became a friend I could always talk to when I had something to say.

How have family and friends reacted to the film? I imagine it's been difficult for them to watch you at such low moments.

Some were pleasantly surprised because it was milder than they had expected. Others were surprised how much I struggle, even though I don't self-harm any more to cope with the painful thoughts and feelings.

What about people who have been through similar struggles?

I've got feedback from families who say they understand their loved ones better, and health professionals who say they learned something from watching the film. And it means so much to me to get feedback from young people who are struggling and say they greatly appreciate the movie and my openness.

You say in the film, "You never hear people tell a cancer patient 'Get a grip – can't you see you're hurting us?'" Are mental health problems more difficult for people to understand?

Most people understand that cancer patients can't get healthy just by pulling themselves together. But I've had many experiences when people both in and outside of psychiatry have asked me to pull myself together. If healthy people without

illnesses don't have information or experience, it's harder to understand.

Did being diagnosed with borderline personality disorder help you understand what was going on in your brain?

Yes, it did help me to gain more insight into the illness. It helped me get some tools to cope with the illness and taught me thinking techniques and other alternatives to self-harm.

How do you feel about the way in which we categorise mental health problems and personality disorders?

I feel that a psychiatric diagnosis can be like a stamp. That diagnosis is perceived as if the diagnosis is more important than the person is. But a diagnosis is not an identity – a person is not pneumonia even if they have pneumonia, just like a person is not borderline even if they have borderline. But getting a correct diagnosis did help me. There is help and hope. And there are tools. There are many different ways to live with the disease. You can feel less guilt and shame. It is possible to get much better.

Self-harm is still difficult for a lot of people to understand. How would you explain to people what the self-destructive impulse feels like?

I would describe it as a coping mechanism to deal with painful thoughts and feelings. You can't just stop self-harming. To replace this destructive way of dealing with things, you have to learn healthy alternatives. When I have moments when I get the urge, I try to feel a sense of

empowerment. I switch focus. I tell myself that I've been good. I think it's very important to feel a sense of achievement. Even if people outside don't recognise it, you can try to feel it yourself.

READ: [The VICE Guide to Mental Health](#)

The film shows you had a "special place" by the sea. How did it feel being there in the woods, in the dark?

When I go there, to Spornes, in the dark, it provides an outlet. Especially during a storm when the waves come towards me. It gets my attention off of my need to self-harm. But I do it mostly because I love the ocean, especially during a storm.

You've enjoyed moments of great, joy too. Does that make the lows more painful, knowing what happiness feels like?

The tough times are hard no matter what, but I've experienced several times that it will pass. When everything is at its worst I think it will never be over, but deep inside I know it will be better if I continue to fight. The moments I feel good, I try to enjoy as much as possible. I find a lot of pleasure in things that others might easily overlook. Like picking flowers for others, spreading joy to random people.

How do you look back at your drug use – smoking weed, taking speed? Was it unhelpful when you were first dealing with BPD?

Yes, it was a form of self-harm also. Self-harm is not only scratch and cuts. Self-injury may also be substance abuse, for example, or through eating disorders.

You mentioned "living in the moment" in the film. Has it helped not to think too much about the future?

When I think of the future as something positive, it helps to think ahead. If I think that the future will be hell, it doesn't help. But, as I say in the film, it's important to have dreams.

What do you hope people take from the film?

I think people need to recognise themselves in someone else. Someone who understands. I wish I had someone who understood and had someone to recognise myself in many years ago, but I knew nothing. What I hope people get out of the movie is that it's OK to say that you're suffering from mental illness. It should be OK to tell it like it is.

Newsflash from David Malin

Dear Dave, Thank you for any help you have given me – and let me thank you in advance for any trouble you may take, or have taken, on my behalf – eg: the kind review you gave me in PEN – and your referral of London Armageddon, to International Times. I now have some more good news: We can add to the list:

Waterstone's of Hampstead, whose manager is, this morning, trailing *Man of Peace*, on the poetry shelf, for a fortnight, to start with. I have also been accepted, I believe, on the shelves of The Book Warehouse, Golders Green Road, (as well as the other stores I already mentioned to you.