

# Poetry Express Newsletter #53

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My Son's Fence in San Antonio, Texas, USA by Jonathan Nicoll



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# Editorial

Well, Hammond 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 a 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 Christmas.

We're currently engaged in another Grants for the Arts Application, a pilot project involving film and mentoring, to proceed if successful to a larger two-year project. We're extremely lucky to have on board **Jacqueline Crooks**, introduced to us by the Arts Council's Gemma Seltzer at a meeting in September, where **Debby Klein**, who's also interested in events, attended as another project partner. Jacqueline is applying to other trusts, as I am. As they say – watch this space!

I should add that Jacqueline's created a survey to validate and calibrate all we need, I've tried to send to as many as possible. If you've received one, do please help us and fill it in. if you know of others who'd like to, you know you can reach me at [drsimonjenner@gmail.com](mailto:drsimonjenner@gmail.com).

There have been another 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 slanted as they say, one about a proportion of mentally distressed people, and the other the remarkable number of plays dedicated to mental health and more expected areas of mental distress. In my professional capacity as reviewer I'm seeing an increasing number of plays exploring mental distress. **Florian Zeller's** *The Father*, exploring Alzheimer's toured this year (I wrote about this a year ago).

**Amy Schindler's** *Burning Bridges* at 503 Theatre, explores Asperger's in a dark comic flip-over. Asperger-conditioned Sarah's reels off her interests: 'TV, One Direction, Bears, Ghandi, Oral Sex not necessarily in that order.' This remarkable, necessary play explores the crisis provoked by Sarah's single atypical act, and how it shows she's improving – leaving domestic devastation. Schindler beautifully judges the pathos and development in each of her three main protagonists.

**Nathaniel Martello-White's** *Torn* anatomises the way family deals with, scapegoats and buries abuse. Adelle Leonce anchors protagonist Angel's volatile unpredictability in a superb register of loss, calibrating her response to various family members at zig-zag stages of her life. Martello-White's clever touching-in of few specifics allows this

ninety-minute piece to amplify a wincing universality.

The other obsession is an unashamed hobbyhorse, though I'll let you have a taster, to the extent that it's relevant to us. Here are some headliners, anyway.

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

I am writing this piece in order 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. That's 8,600 people. Added to which there are an estimated 8,000 ex-service personnel sleeping rough. 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.

There's more evidence based material but there let it rest for the moment. I'm finalising and doubtless will develop it. If anyone has any more suggestions, this is now a great place to debate in, before Crisis at Christmas. See you after that.

## **Simon Jenner**

*(To be continued in PEN # 54)*

## **More Observations**

We are all missing the events at the Poetry Café, pending refurbishment of those premises, and eagerly await their resumption. Tottenham Chances continues to flourish. **September 29<sup>th</sup>** was a lively and varied evening. Some poetic intensity from **Tara Fleur**, **Alastair Murray** doing an inspired set, with double-tracking to highlight his fluid lead guitar. **October 27<sup>th</sup>** was quiet and relaxed; some great spontaneous jamming with the **Baffled Angels** and **Citi**, and some great shamanic verse from **Andrew**. Heartfelt congratulations to Razz on his 64<sup>th</sup> birthday! *(There is a dedicatory poem to him on p43.)*

## **Dave Russell**

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## **Affirmations vs Phobias – by Ken Taylor**

I developed agoraphobic tendencies some years ago. When travelling alone and faced with a trigger situation, I found a useful coping strategy has been to mentally recite a short affirmation over and over again. The straightforward yet flexible method of repetitive thought focuses the mind on a supportive distraction, and provides an effective barrier against overwhelming fear. Other types of anxiety or panic attacks may also benefit from this approach.

I offer a couple examples of mine which have proved helpful, but sufferers are urged to compose their own (the creative act itself cultivates a positive and forward-looking momentum). These affirmations can develop over time but, to begin with at least, simplicity and ease of remembrance are key factors, so rhyme, alliteration, repetition and other poetic techniques are helpful.

### **Bridging the gap**

My will is straight,  
    my will is strong,  
        my heart is bright,  
            my song is long . . .

As the title suggests, this was composed to assist with walking over bridges (the verse has a walking rhythm) but can work with any straight, line of sight journey. The embedded prompt that the affirmation is long (e.g. can be repeated with undiminished effect) is especially useful when negotiating a point of no return.

### **Onwards and upwards**

My path is safe,  
    my step is sure,  
        the helix reaches  
            every floor.

This was composed to assist with the everyday activity of climbing (and descending) stairs (particularly in multi-storey buildings. Again there is a walking rhythm, but as stairwells rarely have equal numbers of steps in each flight, the verse is not constrained to keep time with footfalls. Puns, of course, are another valuable source of mental stimulation and diversion.



**IMAGES FROM THE WORK OF THE PAINTER, Jonathan Nicoll, B.1942**

## Butterfield Debut

**Paul Butterfield Jnr** (the bi-polar poet) made his debut performance at the Poetry Café in Betterton Street, London WC2, at the Survivors' Poetry night – as part of being on the road. Paul, from Limavady, Co. Derry, Ireland, was so proud and happy to be accepted as the main act on this night. He got into writing accidentally, always wanting to be a writer from when he was 7 years old. He never had confidence in himself and believed he had nothing to write about, which was pretty true – until he had a complete nervous breakdown! When Paul was 19 years old, he was admitted to a Mental Hospital, as a voluntary patient, for two days, in order to get the help he needed.

When Paul got home he felt ashamed and guilty; but he decided in his dodgy flat that he would write his confessions of a life filled with, sex, anger, depression and psychedelic vibrations. It all started with memoirs; then he started to come up with poetic lines and phrases. On piecing them together, he thought he was on the right path towards being a poet and a storyteller: so, to make sure he was on the right lines, he went out and got a book of poetry by Carol Ann Duffy. That is where it all started; he had become a poet and he didn't know it. Paul wrote for 5 years on and off because he was seriously lost and confused; but he did perform his poetry to his devoted family, friends and even girlfriends. They believed he had something. Then, 3 years ago, at 24 years old, Paul decided to write and perform full-time, believing he had created an abundance of substantial work, to share with whoever wanted to read or listen to it. Over the 7 years Paul has been writing he has had some beautiful successes, including a pamphlet of poems published by a mental health publisher (The Addicted Jesus). Also he has written scripts for a few films which have been screened at his local film festival and playhouse. He also brought out a documentary on his life as a writer living with bi-polar disorder, in order to bring awareness to the illness and show people that they are not mad; they are awake: if you use that base energy of darkness, you can create beauty with it, as Paul has done with his writing and performing!  
[www.paulbutterfieldjnr.com](http://www.paulbutterfieldjnr.com)

Paul is an inspiration to me, instead of lying down and giving up after he suffered a breakdown; he bravely turned his black mood into beautiful poetry. He is a flag bearer in the mental health movement. I am proud to know him.

### **Geoff Thompson – BAFTA winning writer**

Paul's writing is optimism in the darkest places. Seeing illness as bringing awakening this is an interesting and hopeful insight in these messageless times. Paul finds entire worlds in the smallest of objects, a sketcher; he draws the reader into the pictures of both outside and inside his mind. Paul has a keen eye for astonishing audiences, through reversals of common meanings he constantly surprises. An eminent performer, his delivery is always a treat.

### **Michael Wilson – national award winning poet**

## Dedication to Jonathan Nicoll

### The Painter *For JWT*

elliptical trajectories  
Crux of junctions  
Line heads from corner  
Angles on diagonal  
Oval illusions of arbitrary  
directionless directions.

plan, his careful maths  
makes certain in graphic  
Reason, but his ellipse is  
Flaming, irrational  
Lit by the painter:  
What this is, is not;

What is not, yet may be  
Weights and balances  
in systems known  
unknown factors—  
Counter dimensional  
Spaces, this hierarchy

Single, singular  
Signs contain  
clusters of dimensions  
— no points in common  
Behavioural drift  
Soft in the room as feather,

He wonders  
Could this be it...

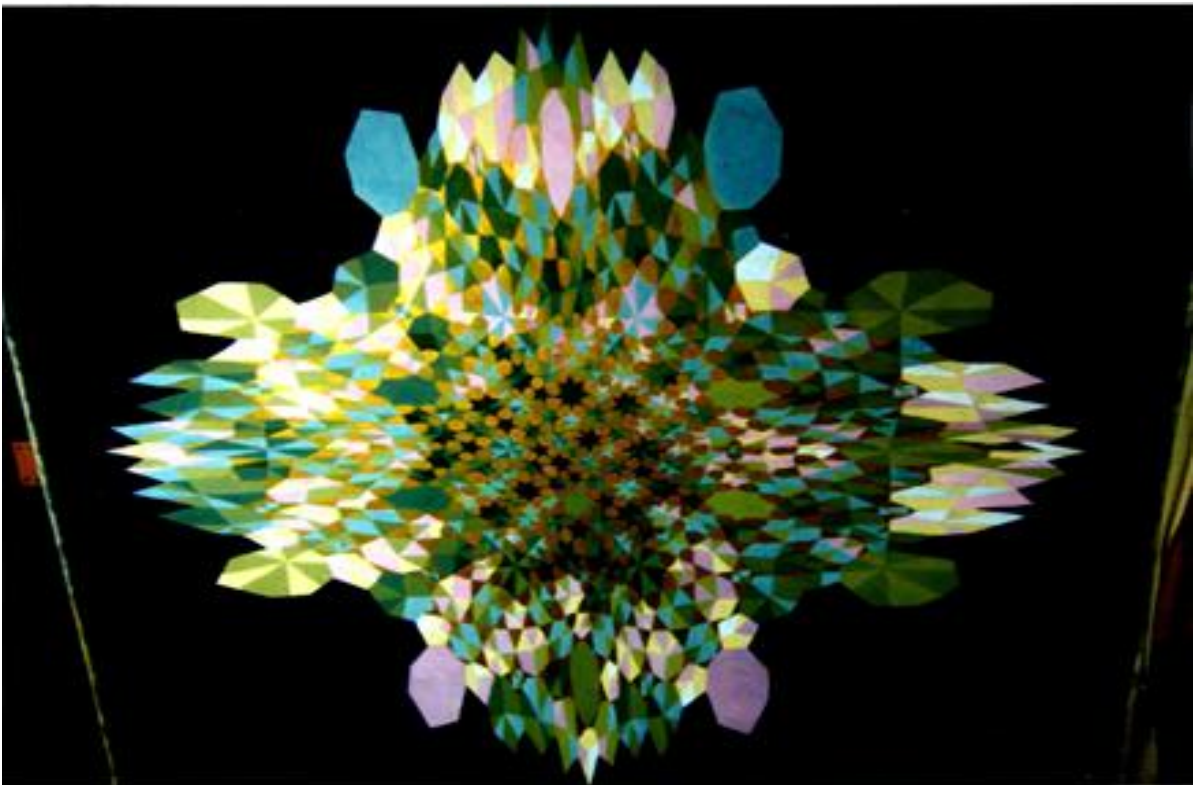


**Carlyle Reedy**

Garden Study, Notting Hill 1967

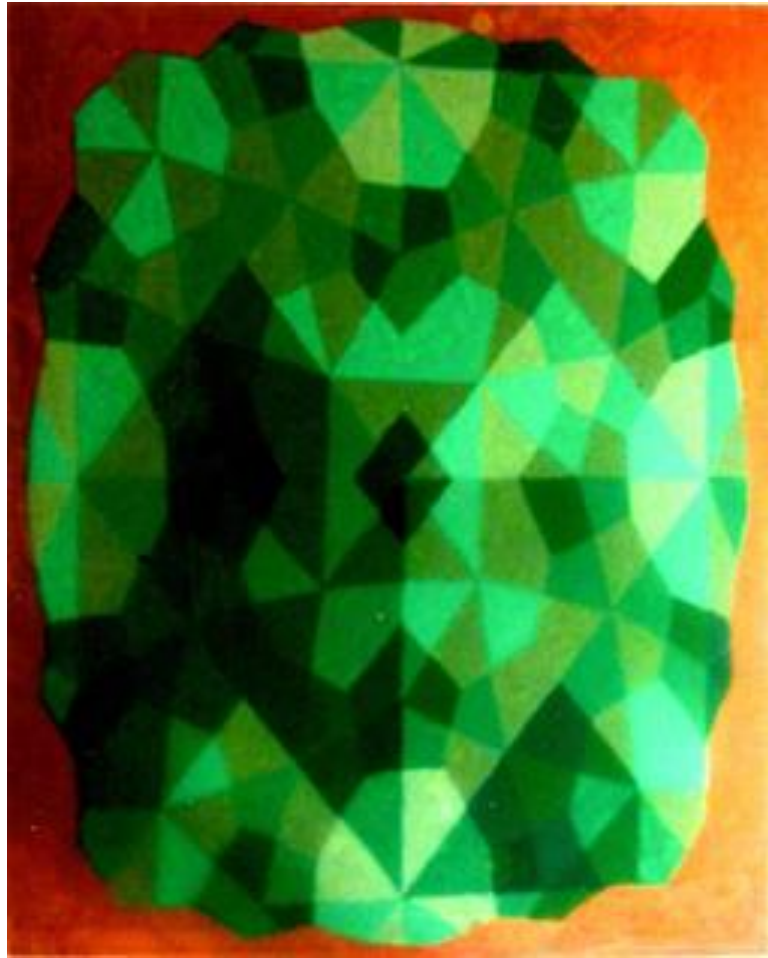


Paint and Plaster on Panel

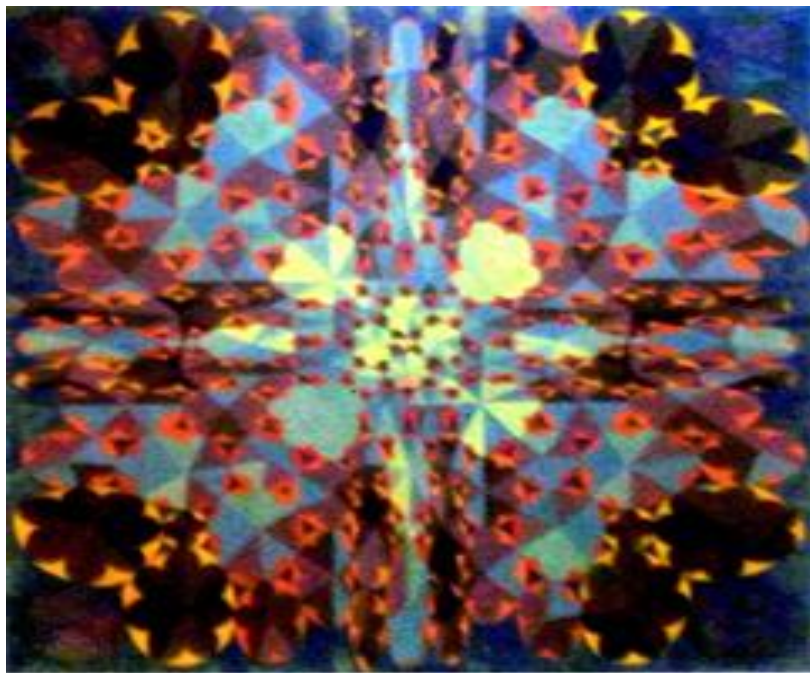


Darktown Strutters' Ball, Deal – 2011

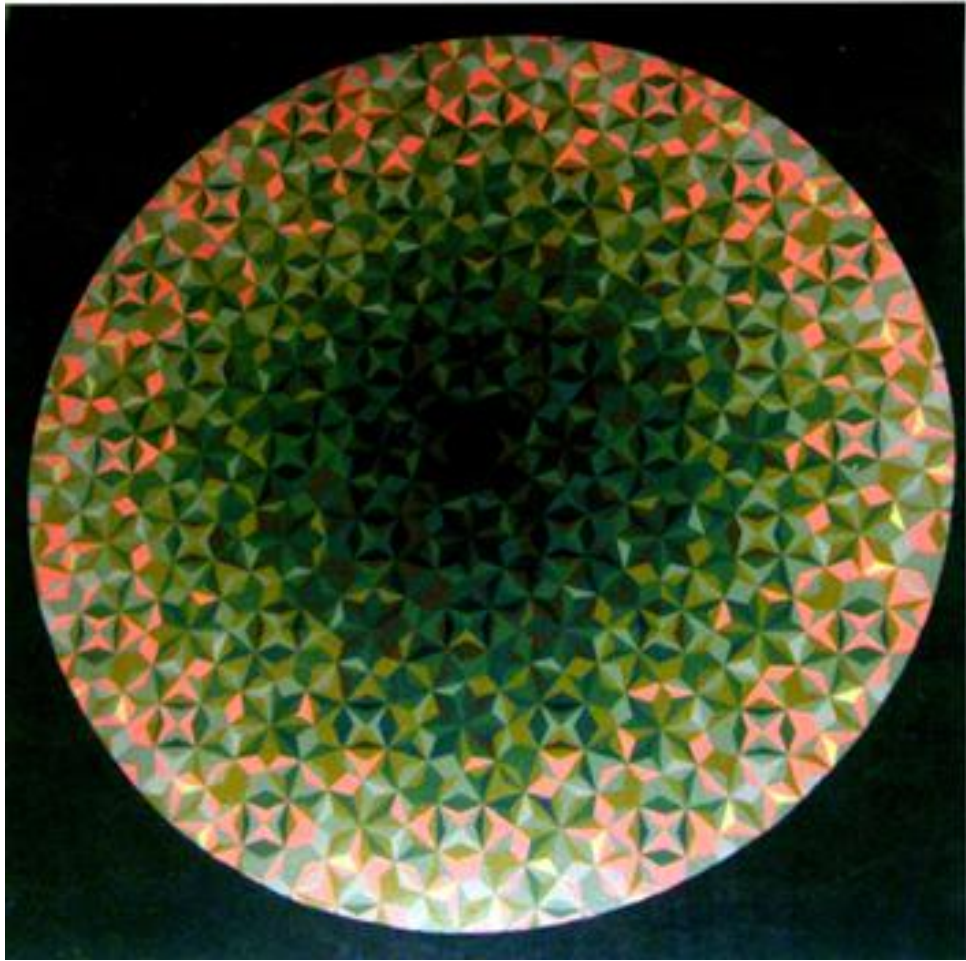




The Seasons, Walmer – 2016



Study



Yin, Chiang Mai – 1986



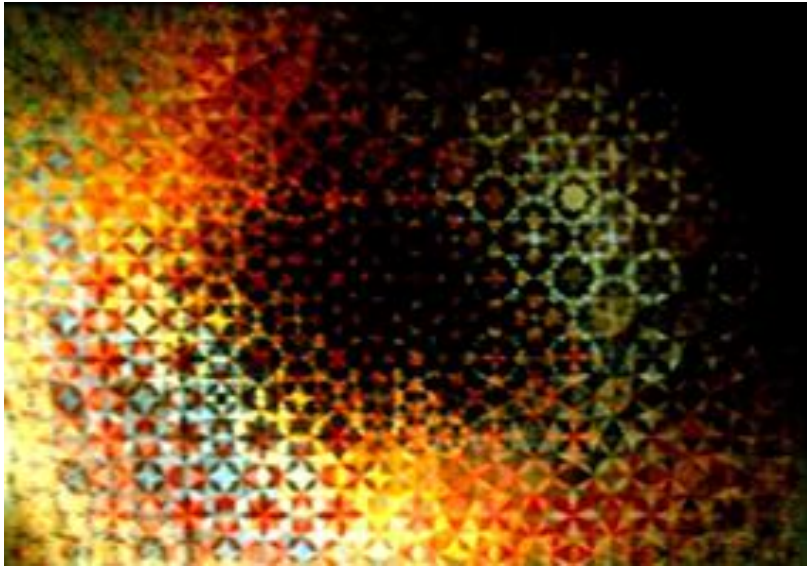
Moeder, Nederland – 1978



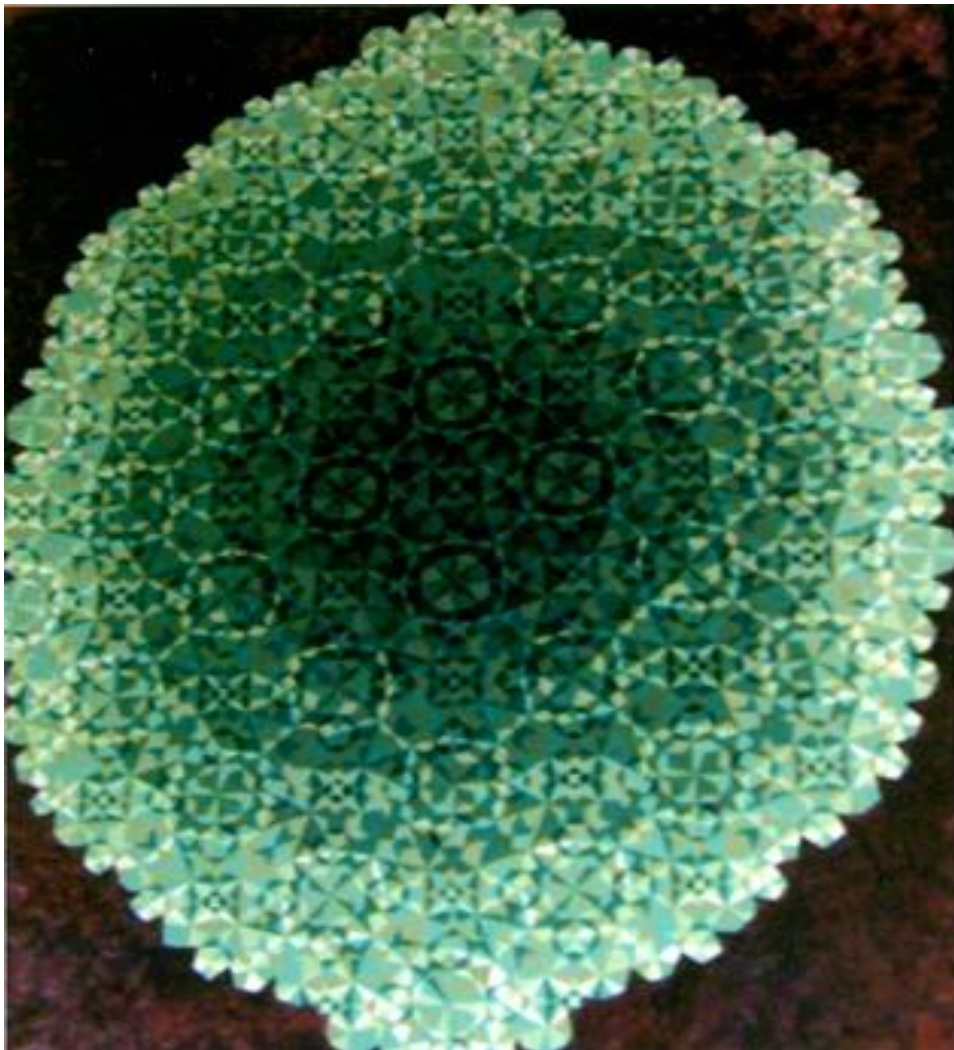
The Night Before the Morning After, Deal – 2011



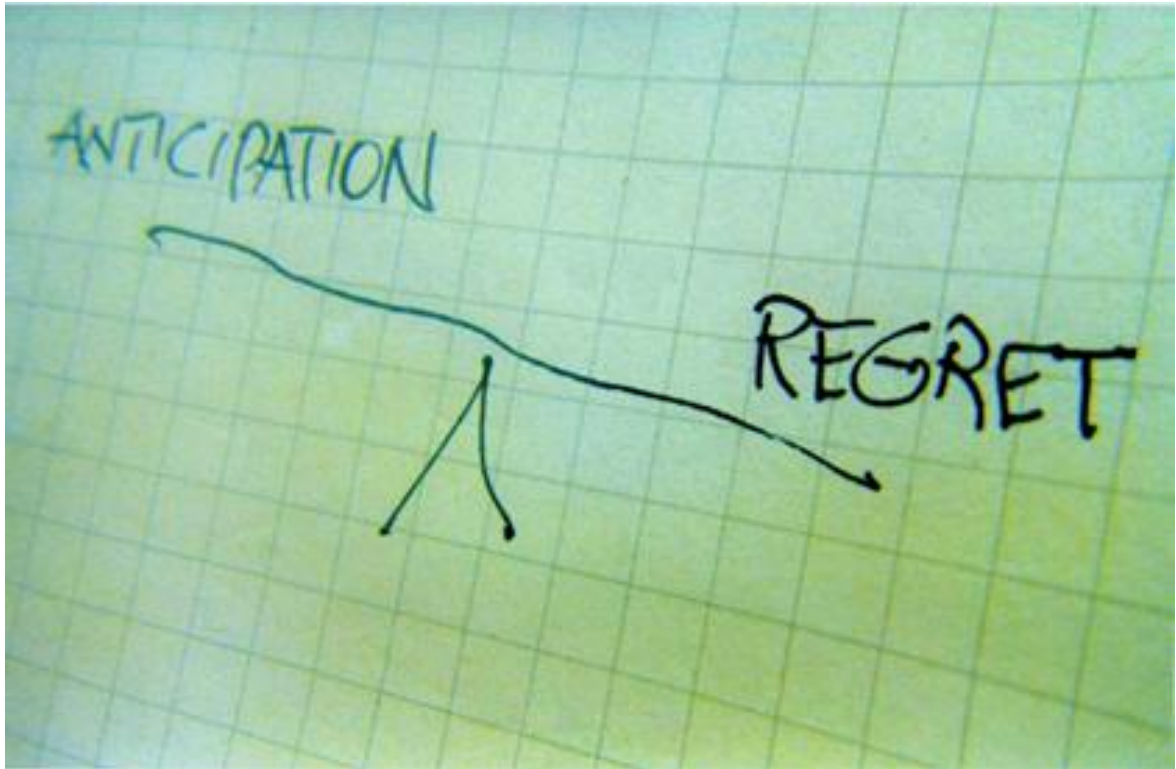
Dark US Star, Walmer – 2014



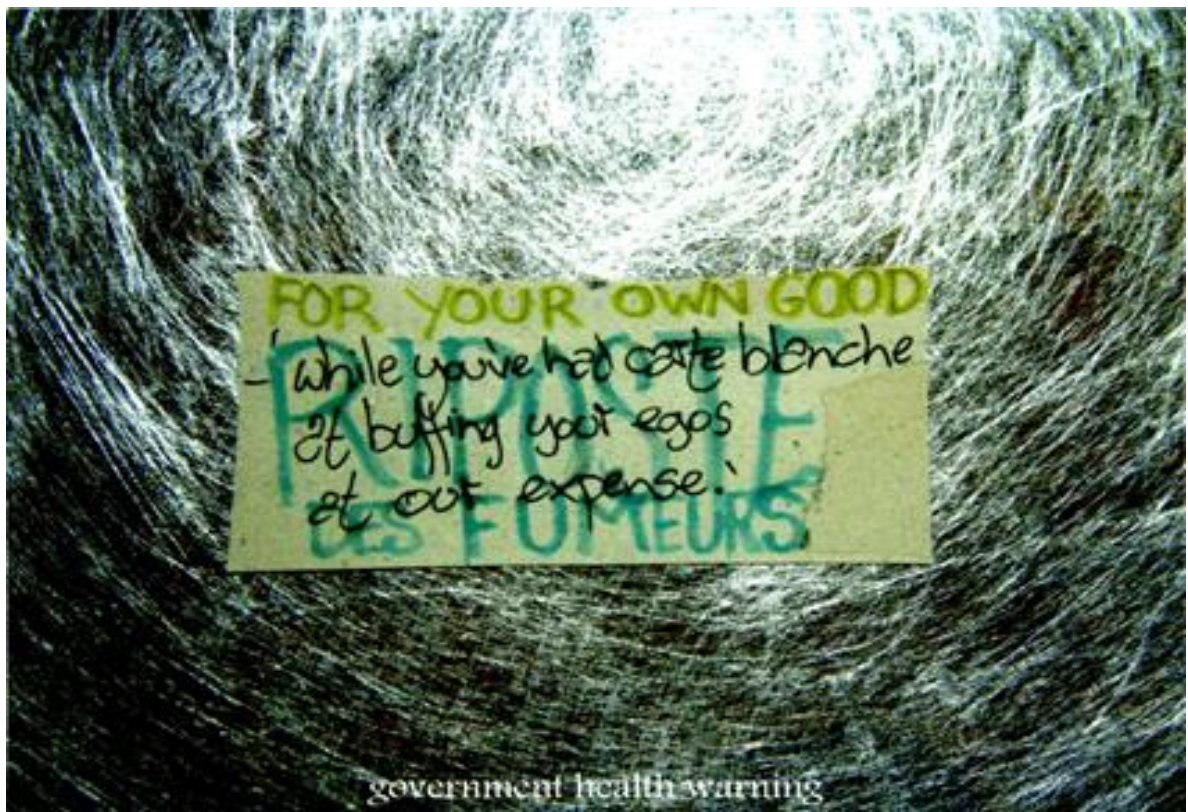
She Awaits His Arrival, Amsterdam – 1990



Lucy, Chiang Mai 1994



Anticipation



Collage

## China Cups

Pacifists use up so much energy choking on the lumps stuck in their throats trying desperately to be words of desire, words that spark a match or burn a whole kingdom

to ash, or just a flash of fire tamed to a whimper, and leaves tears on tea leaves... They turn those angry lumps into sickly

sweet sugar cubes and drink the storms from china cups...

Even the best of people with the best intentions will allow the cruel hand of human intervention to open the door

to a little war of words, or worse go off like a firework; be a modern day Guy Fawkes!

China cups, although beautiful crack over time, but will always hold tea.

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## Mentally ill world... find your soul??

Honestly, I don't know how to write this poem.

A great friend told me

Of the devastation of murder in America

And it broke my heart to tear

Now, you may know me

Though you died one night in a grave yard shift.

I am stuck in the grave yard myself.

Honestly probably more tempered than you.

But what I can say can change your life

You have to want to accept it

As the tap opens and flows

And, as I have found my soul of importance

From being mentally ill, so can you

I read a little story

About a mouse and a frog by a mystic poet.

For them to prevail in their friendship  
Of land and sea.

They tied a string to tug and pull  
To be there for each other compassionately, in the heart of middle now.  
What is your heart of middle friendship?  
Made up of in land and sea?  
Tie a string to the ones you love  
And by the tug you can survive.

Maybe, you have lost something so dear to you.  
I totally sympathise with you.  
As you read this poetic memoir, you shall see.  
I had a granda  
That died before I could even introduce myself soulfully.  
Even though I did not remember his hugs physically,  
Then and as a man.  
I sit by his grave in hopes  
He hears my 15 year old cries  
Of how to sort my world out.  
Even though he does not speak back.  
For I didn't even know his voice.  
So now I use God as my vessel  
To talk to others directly.  
To piece together their shattered lives and my own.  
This is how you piece everything back into place,  
From this tinned roof echoing back as quiet listeners  
(God)

It all comes back to love  
We have all been there.  
As I sit in the bath  
With small feet, long toes, nails a carving sharp,  
As the wet drips off my heel.  
You lie there smoking  
You made those women bleed  
Even though they were not on their periods.  
Then I think of Sylvia  
The poet queen of the feminist movement  
Of her Ariel

And I am scared  
Of love and of women.

I know I could have made her happy outside the oven door

Because she was my kind of women  
But, I wasn't even a thought by then.

I took that weekend  
Drowning over those women to realise  
I must get finely tuned  
In to the right emotional thought patterns.  
In my natural 26 year old progression.

You must be patient  
And thrive for these epiphanies.  
As they come progressively  
Like drug induced brick shatters  
You will piece them together  
Even through the scruff.

When she comes along. It is this,  
A foreign love,  
A foreign kiss,  
That foreign touch all over again.

It is all foreign love,  
When you meet, fuck and  
When another goes, you think  
"Why can't I just be happy for once??"

But you must realise  
That you must be in love with everything in your life  
Not just your dick or tits  
And for it to be done  
With grace, for enlightenment and excellence.

By this time you have realised  
I am mentally ill.  
And don't go out raping or murdering people.  
By now, I have realised  
As you read this  
You are mentally ill too, and looking for something.  
But, it is no excuse to stop believing  
In a world outside yours.



As I look at the biggest star I have ever seen  
On a friends smoking balcony.  
What I have found  
In my states of debilitation is this;

You must travel to find your importance  
With empowerment through torture.  
I have found that I am the zenful dark  
And, as you travel for this  
You can never fail.  
But, I died over several weeks  
To write this to you  
Knowing I was that star  
Being a natural source to this planet.  
Every worm that tries to trap you in a trapeze  
Is your own dark surrealist energy  
To make love and converse,  
Without a wine bottle.  
As the dog lingers love  
In a stare out of sobriety.

Even though I have made little old women cringe in the corner  
Because of my honesty.  
As my books were hung.  
But most still smile at my words and letters  
By the cinnamon sachets in the local shop.  
You have to reveal  
The bare, callused knuckles in life  
And graze the chin so slightly  
With gentle liberation.

We all have mental ills  
But, I ask of you this,  
From the wet fire

“Mentally ill world,  
Find your soul.”

**Paul Butterfield Jnr**

# Rejected hearts

Every breath, every breath, every breath makes me smile

You said you wanted a love poem, as I look into our past and I'm not good at being wishy-washy, though there is so much momentum to embrace.

But I'll give it a go, just for you,  
forgive me if I stumble and I won't fear like leather.

Can you believe it has been two years since we parted??

And it took me only a few weeks to realise, from text to text, that I made the mistake of losing your magic.

You walked past me for the first time in two years today, I guess it was more of a graze but, you cracked a smile like a wand's touch, that smile I adored, even when you called me a bastard and threw the remote.

But I love the way you dress, the way you walk, the look in your eye and everything about you, I've missed it.

I've written and I've performed all in glorious places but, the best thing of all, in the last two years, is to have seen your face crinkle a smile once again, at mine and this memory will never leave my soul . . .

I'm just sorry I didn't say hello . . .

If all was in right guidance in our souls, from star to star, I would take you like Aladdin on the magic carpet and sail off into our sky, for a life happy forever after.

It's not the sex I remember, as I tear of my regret in this, but making you cum was a pleasure, as it was your first and I cramped but, it's the rose petal baths, smiling at each other, soaked, and a kiss I remember, because sex is over quick like a lollipop but, a smile or a laugh lasts...

If you happen to hear this in your American pie, that we rewined, rewined and rewined, don't sway because, I already did and it ruined, as the song plays.

Because smoking and shagging don't get you everything, because I had

everything  
... you ... and now lost, in haunted memories, because I shouted now and  
again

in a foreign city, now I crumble into a hermit,  
as the outspoken poet and curious prophet, to clear the void.

Writing a love poem as you see, isn't for me but, I tell it how it is, as a life in  
pain but filled with so much love that has gone stagnant, because I put a stand  
stop to it and they say that's a waste, but I am already wasted for letting you go

Even in your egg stained, red sauce stained nightgown, pyjama bottoms and  
greasy hair; I looked over and couldn't believe I was with a goddess.

He said he would have recognised a hot chick but, the beauty is in the eye of  
the beholder and I need substance, not a spank bank.

In the last day, in the last moment, this was raw but it was real but, yes ...

You were it, You were it  
YOU, WERE, IT. . .

Now I see, we are rejected hearts and dreams do last, only in the mind of the  
beholder, as I take my heart out for you, to let you know, I don't fear. Because  
fear is useless in love or life but, I did then and now I have none.

But I stand up now to wipe away tears and cum, with a tissue of life long  
freedom and I wave it for a sense of peace that you will be smiling every day,  
as I wave in and out.

And I don't love her at all from your fear because, what I found is that ...

Fantasy is not as good, as the real thing.

In this, death is needed but like love, maybe there is more.

Every breath, every breath, every breath slows down, as my heart knows it is  
rejected by yours but, I do this because I was in true love and I am going to die .

And it still makes me smile!!

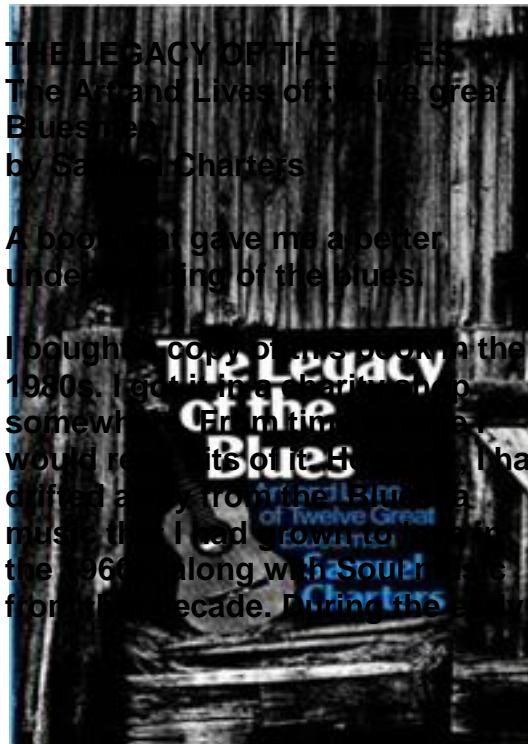
**Paul Butterfield Jnr**

# THE LEGACY OF THE BLUES

## The Art and Lives of Twelve Great Bluesmen

by Samuel Charters

Da Capo Paperback ISBN:  
9780714510996 £10.95



A book that gave me a better understanding of the Blues.

I bought a copy of this book in the 1980s. I got it in a charity shop somewhere. From time to time I would read bits of it. However, I had drifted away from the Blues, a music that I had grown to love in the 1960s, along with Soul music from that decade. During the early part of this century I started a journey back towards the blues. I started to read this book more thoroughly. Then there were CDs like *The Early Blues* *Roots of Bob Dylan*, a record featuring Country Blues artists that had inspired

Bob Dylan. I realised how much I liked this music. I also realised its importance in the struggles of Afro-American people. A few years back I bought a new copy of this book. I gave my original copy to someone else. We will return to the book shortly; first I will tell you a bit about the author.

**Samuel B. Charters** was born in 1929 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, into an Upper Middle Class family that was interested in listening to and playing music of all sorts. To quote Samuel Charters "I grew up in a world of band rehearsals, blues records and a whole consciousness of jazz". He first became enamoured in the blues after hearing Bessie Smith's version of the Jimmy Cox's song *Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out*.

At the age of 15, Samuel moved with his family to Sacramento in California. He graduated from Sacramento City College in 1949. Then, in 1956, after completing Military Service in the Korean War, he received a Bachelor's Degree in Economics from the University of California in Berkeley.

While he listened to and played Jazz he also found himself listening to old Blues recordings and felt the two forms of music were connected in the history of black music. He felt that in writing about the Blues he was fighting racism. In one of his books *The Poetry Of The Blues* he said how he wants people to hear black music, look across the racial divide and see a black person as a human being. Samuel took more interest in Country Blues than in City Blues, feeling that Blues lyrics from artists such as Charley

Patton and Blind Willie McTell were folk poetry. He saw the blues as a profound human expression that could connect to all people who love poetry. As well as doing research into two of his favourite musicians Robert Johnson and Blind Willie Johnson, he also set about doing field recordings first in the United States and then in the Bahamas.

Anyway back to the book: It was first published in 1975. Samuel Charters interviews various blues artists. They talk about their lives and their music. Big Joe Williams and J.D. Short talk about how many view black people as being invisible, and how through the interest in the blues shown by a younger generation of white people things are starting to change.

Bukka White and Robert Pete Williams both talk about their prison experiences; but they also talk about their lives and their music. Samuel Charters sees these people as artists at one with their craft, a strong example of this is his piece on Robert Pete Williams, during the interview they spend time together in the recording studio. He also gives a moving account of Robert Pete Williams's children coming home from school, telling their dad about the excitement and confusions of their day in the classroom.

Elsewhere we find Lightnin' Hopkins talking about meeting Blind Lemon Jefferson. At the age of eight, a young Lightning was playing guitar at a gathering. Blind Lemon Jefferson was there and was impressed by what he heard and became Lightning's first mentor. In this a little light is thrown on to this influential musician whose short life is shrouded in much mystery.

We also have an account of Champion Jack Dupree coming to England in 1959 and taking great interest in winkle pickers (*Shoes with pointed toe that were fashionable at the time*).

Along with the interviews Samuel Charters conducts, there are a couple of very interesting articles. One is titled the language of the blues. Here he sees the blues as being the first true language of Afro American people. The other is called *The Blues As Poem*. He picks a number of blues lyrics by different artists and presents them as poetry. The lyrics go back to slavery and the hardship and harsh conditions people experienced in the first half of last century. For example in *Couldn't Find A Mule*, Sunnyland Slim sings "I seed the captain whip the water boy". Elsewhere we find Juke Boy Bonner singing how he is tired of the Greyhound Bus. The long tiring journeys he took across America on the greyhound bus doing gigs and just trying to make a living. Travelling on the greyhound bus is an experience he shared with many other working class Americans of the time. In Vietnam Blues Champion Jack Dupree shows compassion for the people of Vietnam, wishing Uncle Sam would leave them alone.

Throughout the book Samuel Charters links the Blues to its African Roots. This helps to keep the blues in a contemporary context and gives it an ongoing relevance like, for example, Reggae from the 1960s and 70s. He also speaks of the conditions these artists sometimes lived in.

For example the tenement buildings in Crawford Mississippi a place where Big Joe Williams and J.D. Short

lived. Or the one-storey house that Robert Pete Williams built for himself and his family in Rosedale Mississippi – this is an area near New Orleans with a large black community, while the Blues had made it to Paris Cafes and blues artists had toured England and elsewhere. On the back cover it explains clearly the journey that the music has made. How it has travelled from an African village to a Mississippi farm. From southern shacks to Chicago ghettos. From runaway slaves, railroads, blindness, work gangs, tenement buildings with dark hallways, and much more. While the blues artists featured here had been through many struggles they are not portrayed as victims. But survivors with a story to tell and much for us to learn from.

This is true of blues artists in general. Courageous people who survived much hardship and laid the foundations for Rock and Roll.

Alongside what I have told you, there is much more to discover in this book. Samuel Charters passed away in 2015, however he has left behind a lot of valuable writing on the blues for future generations to discover.

Towards the end of the book we have Lightning Hopkins saying how there are not many new blues artists coming through. He may well have been right. But books like this help to keep the blues alive and give the music relevance in today's world.

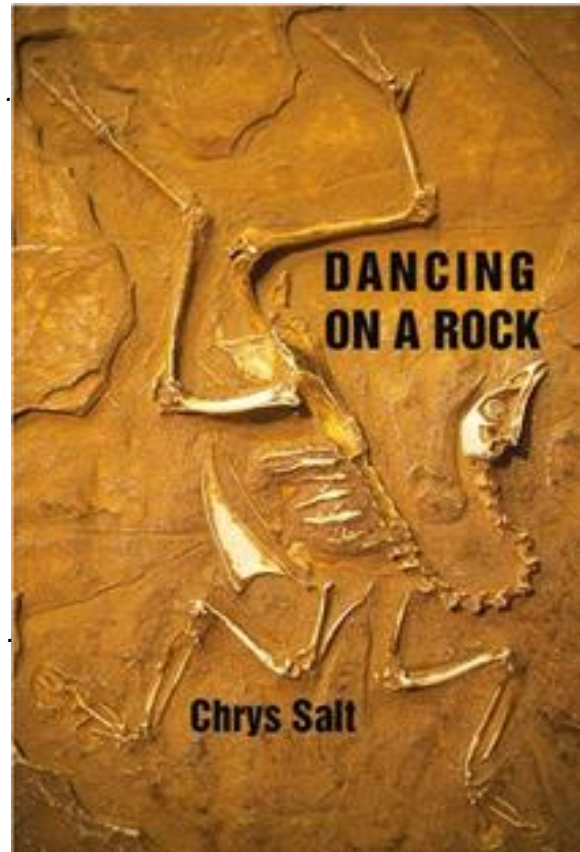
## **Frank Bangay** September 2016

*(There is some information about Samuel Charters and all the books he has published on the Internet, work by the artists he writes about in this book can be found on YouTube)*

## ***Dancing on a Rock*** by Chrys Salt

Indigo Dreams Publishing

ISBN 978-1-909357-69-3 £9.99



Marvellously expansive, geographically and historically, and with a fine balance of nature and human artifice. The tone is set in the opening section, *listen*, with expressions like 'slipping geometries/of snow on stones', and 'the planet/ turning round and round/and years that slip like silk/through wedding rings'. She then envisages herself as a pollinating bee – something intrusive but indispensable, and identifies with the foolhardy courage of Icarus.

In the *Perfume drifting back* section Chrys demonstrates her remarkable attunement to the wide open spaces of Alaska; her formative years in the 50s, including vision epitomised in *The Yukon*:

this poem is a concentrated epic, about a vast expanse 'where thought can grow' – in a geological and cosmic sense: "Here, nothing but time and glacial history/record the contours of the world/in carbonaceous shale,/granite and dolomite . . . silence maps out infinities of sky.' In *Black Pine*, where she personifies herself as a tree – a fine encapsulation of the struggles of nature– aspirations she feels he is being 'stalked' by her own towards rugged individual independence, and the potential for being pulled down by linked roots. Elsewhere she speaks as a beaver. Caution is recommended in the face of grizzly bears, and the realities of hunting in *Caribou*.

I notice the extent of the encouragement and recognition Chrys gained in Scotland. Was this a stimulus for her to venture into more northerly, more 'uncharted areas'.

In parallel, her vision embraces Stone Age archaeology and contemporary life. In the former, inspired by a well preserved Mummy in the alps, she wrote the *Otzi the Iceman* section, seeming highly attuned to the tensions of Neolithic life. In the latter, the theme of war predominates, as in the final section *Poems are on the march*. Chrys admits to a certain amount of tension in the relationship between poetry and the coverage of war; she explores that problem in great depth.

The section *Lost, longed-for, unexplained* sketches in the background of Chrys's formative years in the 50s, including rock'n'roll and motor-racing at Brand's Hatch. Her 'common touch', expressed so vividly in *My Top of the Pops* and *Love on the beach* provide a charming leavening of

comic relief, very effective in a context of hardship and bereavement, the latter depicted in *Photograph of Chairs* – a good 'balancing act' in the face of the elemental. Great comic absurdity in *Reflection*, where she feels he is being 'stalked' by her own mirror image.

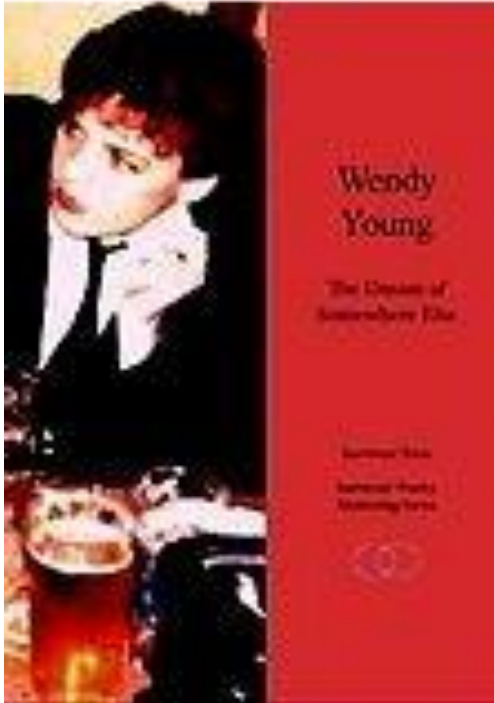
The anti-war conclusion *Poems are on the march* contains some World War II retrospect-ives, references to more recent conflicts. As a point of high relevance, her son served as a paratrooper in the Iraq war. *Ants* makes a striking analogy between insect life in a neglected human environment, and the pitiful lot of refugees, whilst *Letter to a soldier son*, and *Magnolia: March 2013* celebrate the resilience of flora and fauna, flourishing again after their environments have recovered from the ravages of conflict. The final poem, *The Insurrection of Poetry*, raises the banner of poetry as a voice proclaiming the need to put an end to war.

*Dancing on a Rock* is a glittering addition to Chrys Salt's 'Roll of Honour'. It utterly embraces the polarities of sensation: pleasure is forced to see its reflection in pain, or in the words of Bernard Kops 'dreams and desperation come hand in hand' An utterly riveting read.

## Dave Russell

## Wendy Young – The Dream of Somewhere Else

Survivors' Poetry, 2016 ASIN: B01JJJ2  
£2.27



Wendy is ever the champion of the marginalised and oppressed; witness her opening slogan:

*To those who stuck with me (there aren't many) and looked past the nutter, the loser, the drinker, the idiot, the child.*

*To all the abused, the bullied, the kids who are now adults and hope you find a voice too – eat, drink, shit, talk, write!*

This feels to me like an echo of Bob Dylan's *The Chimes of Freedom*, with an added retrospective of childhood sufferings contributing to adult traumas.

*A Bird In The Dark* depicts a creature (probably a wren) which is both extremely fragile and extremely resilient – 'strong enough to drown hospital

trolleys'. It seems to cry out for a mother, echoing the poet's sadness at her mother's deafness and loss of kindred.

*Been There, Seen That, Forgot It . . .* submerged nostalgia – "I remember when my memory's jogged". Wendy has been to many music events, which have been important to her; she didn't buy programmes, but did keep ticket stubs, which are good memory jogs. This was my first introduction to the Archaos 'alternative' circus. I see they are radically innovative. Perhaps a footnote would have been 'reader-friendly' (as with the Mark Twain poem).

*Cockleshell Heroine* – brilliant imagery here of the duality of crowns of gold – both tiaras and tooth fillings; also the 'phoenix effect' turning disaster (of fillings dropping out) into euphoria: ". . . As if a weld/turned them into a mace/headed by pearliest cockleshells/Waiting for Fortune/It's right here in my hands."

*Dear Jenny* is an epic eulogy of a deceased mother, written 20 years after her departure. What an intensely moving story! Mother was intensely heroic, suffering enormously from battery and rape. "The point about my mother is what a Trojan woman she was and never got the recognition or empathy she should have had – also, how domestic abuse went on and still goes on."



In 1947, when she was expecting Wendy's brother, mother valiantly took a 4-mile walk to the hospital, with waters breaking. This was in 1947 when (as I later discovered) the Midwives were on strike – so she gave birth in a Nursing Home. Basically, her strength was continually being put to the test, and wasted. Mother refused the imposition of Thalidomide anaesthetic – a heroic gesture which subsequently protected Wendy from being a Thalidomide victim. “I was the youngest and born at a time when Thalidomide was being doled out.” 20 years later, her brother died on the same road – killed by a drunken driver. In 1951 she lost an unborn child; her husband kicked her when she was 7 months pregnant: “My father caused the death; I had wanted a poem called *Bonny Cattle* in there which tells it a bit more – basically it was murder!” She makes a wry comment about dismissive ‘care workers’ – “abusers don't really mean it.”

*In the Psychiatrist's Chair* – people in search of counselling about abuse must have painfully conflicting feelings. Her mother made a startling declaration: “I didn't tell anyone; I thought they'd take you away.” What an eye-opener to the arbitrary callousness of the system. And what a response! “To my shame, and her dismay, I said ‘I wish they had’. The advantage of open reporting would have far outweighed any drawbacks. Wendy desperately misses her mother, who

suffered so much from deafness and other ailments, and had her own emotional conflicts: “Wanting mates but putting up barriers to keep out love.” Some indictment of sometimes futile consultants: “Get a crystal ball while I struggle with puzzles.”

*Lion Of the North* explores the confluence of disability and sadism – someone who lost an arm in a mining accident, and then turned nasty in his own right. *Ne'er the twain* shall meet relates to Wendy's struggle to save Kensal Green Library; part of her activist side. *One of Them* concerns a kid who is moving between worlds e.g. the old world – of Grandma and naiveté – and the new one, with powerful peers who make fun of her, trying to cope with both. The poem celebrates rugged individualism in the context of a deprived childhood: “If I was told I wasn't pulling the line I would try even harder.”

*In Shocks Away*, Wendy shows her grasp of cosmic/scientific imagery: the benign cataclysm “. . . blew my mind into space, and particles of me/my brain/my psyche hover over black holes . . . Like a hundred little me's went tramping out telescopically and played into the universe – now I'm picking them out of black holes, over a million trails of brain cells, left for dust.” There follows an attack on the conspiracy of silence about domestic abuse: “‘Would he have hit you if you hadn't let him?'/woman can be woman's worst enemy.”

*Now I am Grown – You Groan* – the abuser is not now dealing with the same meek, compliant partner he started with: “I kept my mouth shut, now it’s open. The wheel has come full circle: “When I unleash all the years within, let the tears begin. Not for me this time/I could have flooded Sudan/Now it’s your turn.

Wendy is a great lover of London – “I remember how you saved me/For my sanity, for my life, for giving me a new start.” This is followed by a brief homage to cinema escapism ‘before the gloom of the last bus characters/Taking us away from our dream of somewhere else’ One comic poem suggesting a bi-curious threesome. The *Wind Cries Auntie Mary*: in Wendy’s words “Its title is a play on Jimi Hendrix’s song *Wind cries Mary*, and also about quality and memory.” Some nostalgia about revisiting the north; some reference to her sibling situation: “I was the youngest but felt I’d lived the longest – acted like the oldest. The image of a lion suggests an allusion to her father.

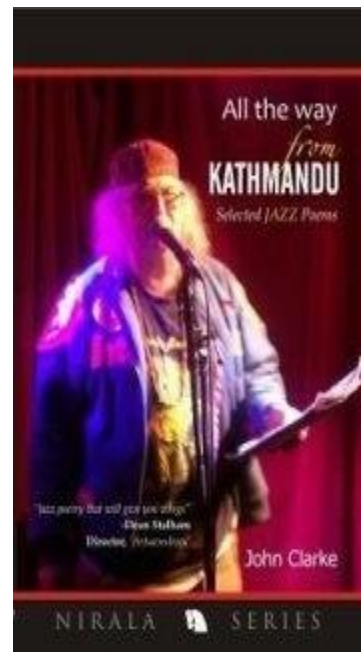
The *Afterword* proffers an illuminating perspective on the creative process: “Somehow those dispersed brain cells honed in my brain, and the memories are proving to be cathartic in my journey of writing and expression . . . I continue to insert words that come into my head (and stop me sleeping) into my mobile calendar, and then get processed into verse.” Long may she persevere!

**Dave Russell**

## All the Way from Kathmandu

**Selected Jazz Poems – John Clarke**

Nirala Publications 2012 ISBN 81-8250-042 7



It is great to have experienced so many readings by this great talent, who embraces the jazz and poetry fields so effectively. John sustains a realistic, populist stance throughout this selection. *Elitist Poet* declares his attitude towards the establishment: many of the pretensions of the literati are faded, obsolete; there is the consolation of being able to read these works in the half-library comfort of Waterstone’s without any need to buy.

**Part One – I Am Everybody I Meet:** John does not flinch from irreverence towards literary icons: “James Joyce coughs up blood/into a barrel of salt/Last seen diving into a blameless ocean/Searching for sunken pleasure.” Similarly so with Kerouac – “His writing one long continuousblaze/Of atavistic glory”. Nor does he spare himself from criticism: in *Neo-Beat Poem* he makes an

ultimate self-denigratory pose, as a blight and a curse on humanity. But concomitantly, in *Options Various*, he indicts button-pressing sampling' culture; so many people are carried away by fantasy that they think they can change basic facts of the world by the press of a switch.

*Freaky* opens with an image of searing pain (Jenkins's and Van Gogh's ears) and proceeds to one of the toiling, oppressed masses. The second stanza epitomises stress, perhaps the real sensations of response to art, being in a gallery when not in a tranquil, contemplative mood; the see-saw of vacuous space in daytime with an overload of frenzied activity at night. The poem then becomes incantatory. With the 'Honey' Compounds remind me of pianist Roosevelt Sykes ('The Honeydrinker'). *Honey Don't* – Carl Perkins's rockabilly song Perkins (covered by the Beatles). There follows the evocation of a fascinating woman who has practised a great deal of self-image artifice – 'She tumble dries my trochees' gives a brilliant insight into the essence of poetic inspiration.

**Billy Jenkins** hit the nail on the head in his foreword: "Humanity for the soul – topped off with an enthusiasm for the detail of life that is often denied us by the onslaught of Mundania . . . John works a genre decades old that, under his pen, becomes refreshed, revitalised, reinvented and reborn . . . He is indeed everybody I meet, his art as old as rivers of time. Fired by a muse that burns so bright I fear spontaneous combustion." John's unflinching devotion to his art is proclaimed in *Poem Written in an Almighty Rush*: "My poems have taken roads where

no poems/Were ever meant to go/I have ventured out alone and desperate/Embracing the cosmos . . . I have dragged poems through ribbons/Of my body,/ Processed them through aching chambers/Of the heart."

*The Fruits of Love* captures the heady essence of dance-floor escapism – great juxtaposition of dances and fruits – 'a jazz-salsa-tango/a melon-lemon-mango' as well as the illusion of timelessness in euphoria. *Conch* gives a sense of history with a full acknowledgement of the realities of squalor, as does *Loop* with its vision of lost mass humanity, epitomised by a railway station at night.

*The Acrobat & the Gypsy* is a Dali-esque aggregation of jarring images – including contradictory ones: "I am the chop and change in the diary you never keep". Polarity of feeling are polarised, cynicism embracing affection, is expressed at the end of the first stanza: ". . . I've been at your wedding/So you can attend my funeral/You are the dredge for all I hold dear." His partner is a repository of memories: "You are cargo of left-over ideas scorching endless horizons". The poem embraces bathos and admiration. In *The Battleground*, the 'rituals' of normal life are contorted, thrown into the most absurd, grotesque – and exciting juxtapositions, such as "the tattooed lady is dancing with the witchdoctor". Boundaries between the literal and metaphorical are brilliantly blurred: "The shaven armpits of a coconut begin to weep tears of blood".

There are personalised foci on John's Jazz and Beat Literature roots in the form of dedications to flautist Roland Kirk and author Jack Kerouac.

## Part Two – *Old as Rivers of Time*

This section presents the breadth of John's historical vision. The opener, *Scrap*, contemplates a meeting between two mythical cats, Meshki and Shanti, which could be positively communicative, or could culminate in a primordial 'cat-fight'. The poem also explores the sensual quality of cats, describing two mythical cats whose meeting could either blossom positively, or degenerate into a 'cat-fight'.

*Bluebird* and *Constraint* are wistfully romantic; then *Free Agents* introduces the scientific side of John's interests; geology and philosophy jostle together: 'Undiscovered eras of molten time/Encased in tripwires of existential guilt'. "We cannot fail to know that science/Is a telling branch of poetry."

In *How I Get to Know You*, he describes himself as the natural elements in relation to a lover – 'a mountain, a bed of pine needles', then a gentle masseur; finally, "I . . . remove thorns from the roses/That lie sprayed before you."

In *Ancient Wounds*, he portrays himself as a timeless prophet/druid/shaman – with a touch of sado-masochism: "I am an ancient wound/Waiting patiently to be healed " The world, too, has been wounded for time immemorial. There is a search for meditative peace amidst perpetual strife and chaos, the era of Druids and Kings to today's cold commercial edifices, and space explorers – with terrorism lurking in the background.

*The Reach* conveys an acute personal

identity crisis. "I am a memory reversal" suggests wanting to 'turn the clock back', and restructure his life. 'A cheese-cutter brain' is a powerful image for the analytical, critical intellect. He is both warning a partner to stay away from him, and (seemingly) aching for her return. The narrator is a ghostly figure in a scene of inner urban transformation. He seems to make a dig at retro-nostalgia, to 'renaissance man & post-feminist woman who, perhaps in a self-contradictory fashion, fall back on their contemporary electronic media. This reflection is followed by the suggestion of an industrial disaster, involving an oil spill. The concluding appraisal, true to form, is utterly equivocal: ". . . they will never know what saves this area from the damnation of destruction or what redeems it from the icepick of redemption." There is some material comfort in the survival of everyday routine: "Hey; have you got a match? – Taxi!"

With *14 Haiku* (not all formulaic), there is a feeling of submerged sequence/continuity in apparently random ramblings. Once again, he is self-critical: "Really don't understand/This dalliance with music/Thought is pure everything." More fusion of the literal with the metaphorical: "What type of fish swim/On a sea brimming with brainwaves". I am convinced that John is a believer in disaster and chaos as an agent of enlightenment: "It is in collapse that we learn/To identify strength and weakness/It is the state where we find time/To review where we are . . ." John sees chaos as leading to enlightenment: "It is in

collapse that we learn/To identify strength and weakness/It is the state where we find time/To review who we are . . .”

*Downpour*, is an expression of despair, somewhat evocating of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*. somewhat evocative of the opening of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*. Again reference to dualism, of chaos being a two-way process: “The young are wasted on love . . . Love is wasted on youth”. Some hope and optimism with transitory escape: “Isn’t it great when you just beat that downpour/Literally by the skin of your teeth.” *Scenario* faces the issue of mortality, and preaches the cultivation or resilience through adversity: “There are no words left to say what you want to say./But you know and I know there’s an edge & necessity/To what I’m saying,/Because that’s how you manage to extract truth from pain.”

*Escape Route* refers to an attempt to navigate the kaleidoscope of experience: “Prism is the precision of policy . . .” He protests against the dehumanising pressures of contemporary life: “Figures blinded by avarice/Milling & spilling into implausible infinity/With minimum words of zero communication. *Backpackers with Laptops* is a literatus protest against all-pervasive computer culture.

*Poems* is double focused, combining cynicism and adoration: “I will send you poems that shit truth/imbued with molecules of lies”. At the same time, with his partner, he feels ‘Lost in the velvet gleam of your afterglow’. *This*

*Is Not Christmas* is an indictment of the commercial Christmas spirit. I agree wholeheartedly “Everywhere art imitates life/Life imitates art.” Another aspect of Christmas in *Four Angels Of The Apocalypse At Seven Sisters*: he has a vision of these four sacred figures becoming goddesses of sensuality; sadly but understandably, his dream does not come true.

*Romantic Legend Mishmash* – ideals and happy memories tend to get submerged by the detritus of dreary reality; but they persevere with the struggle. *Day* is pleasantly light-hearted, focusing on reflective walks in the countryside and dealings with long-term memory. This theme is reiterated in *North From Aberporth*.

In *Surging Forward*, he fantasises about being an Astronaut, eager to transport his lover through outer space. He wants the couple to conceal their hidden thoughts, and his partner to exercise her imagination: “I must leave you to explore/That imaginary unfolding carcass of my dreams, those clotted coagulations of distant memory . . .”

*Voicemail* reflects on one of today’s world’s main channels of loving communication. If one holds back for a while from checking one’s Voicemails, one could build up a cumulative flow of expressions of adoration, which could assume magical proportions.

*Blind Visions* – John is a passionate believer in pure, instinctive inspiration: “Blind visions are what keep you

going/Keep the spark alive keep you young".They have 'incandescent rebel beauty'.

*Shadow Boxing* feels almost Chaplinesque, the absurd loner struggling to transcend his feelings of helplessness: "I want to be freed from this one-dimensional life."

*The Man With The Turquoise Eyes* is an Alien – Alien – to be fantasised about, partly feared, partly desired. He is in some ways a voice of conscience: "Those ferocious eyes gleaming like shining lanterns/In a disused graveyard of missed opportunities." His power is multi-faceted and ambiguous: "It's as if he forms a bridge between unruly chaos/Plain disorder & mild peaceful coexistence".

*One-night Stand* recounts an incident of raw, predatory passion, seeming fulfilment of long-repressed desire, followed by self-inflicted injury from which his partner, mercifully, recovered – pain and pleasure facing each other head on.

*How Art Interferes With People's Daily Lives* – is this akin to Situationism? It asserts that art forms layers and textures for phenomena and experiences. Art embraces the positive and the negative, and blurs the boundaries between positivity and negativity. John has thoroughly earned his many accolades. Long may he prosper!

**Dave Russell**

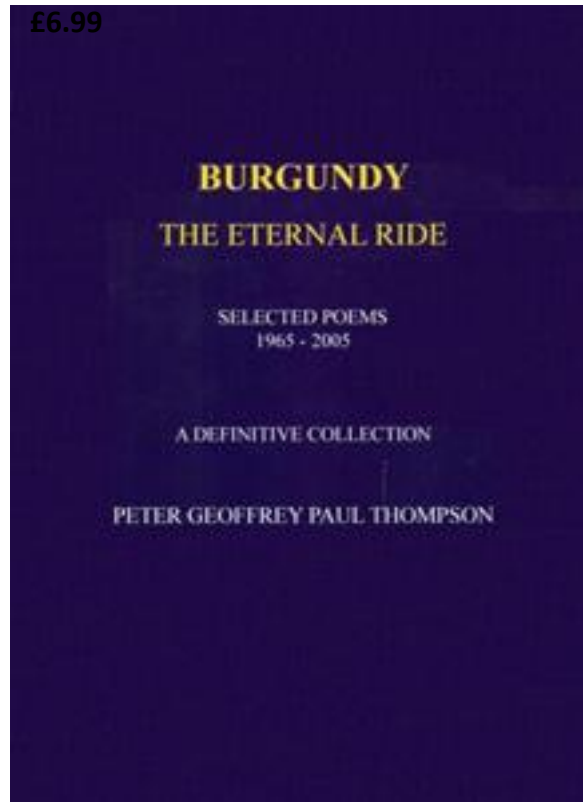
## **Burgundy - The Eternal Ride**

**Selected Poems 1965-2005**

**by Peter Geoffrey Paul Thompson**

**Feather Books 2005 ISBN 1-84175-226-6**

£6.99



This, declared as Peter's 'life's work,' could well be described as a manifesto for romanticism in the 21st Century. In the (eponymous) introductory poem, Peter refers to '20<sup>th</sup> Century' wrongs and casts aspersions on 'scientific thought'. Commercial materialism is slated in *Lily*: "The chimneys were black and the seas were polluted,/The buildings were ugly, created by mind/That saw merely profit, to live for the moment,/Green wads of money perverting the blind."

*Star Child* struggles to capture the essence of poetic aspiration and inspiration. He refers to 'slaves of time' who 'Fall in the putrid muster of experience'. But then he says "Oh Goddess of inspiration,/You fill my mind with fertile dreams,/Anguish and pain bring beautiful

birth,/My words the wind itself.” Surely the power of the inspirational goddess gives strength and courage to confront, and surmount, the ‘muster of experience’, not flinching from anguish or pain in order to achieve ‘beauteous birth’. (**Author’s note:** “I was really speaking of those ‘non-poetic’ or less advanced souls as ‘slaves of time’ who ‘fall in the putrid muster of experience’. They must advance spiritually to reach the heights of inspiration.”)

*Inspiration* assumes ecological proportions – “You could fill a desert with living streams/Or demolish a city’s false dreams . . .” – it is very strong in its use of scientific and cosmic imagery: “An ethereal light in an oppressive cavern/Rocketing my spirit skywards;/The first white spark of shock/From dying twigs in a dull dim age,/Wheels from a flashing idea/Moving pillars of uncompromising stone,/A flash of lightning/Felling some unyielding oak.” – the vital confrontation of contraries. He proceeds to a eulogy of a shrub. Very interesting metaphor of a red admiral butterfly. He honours a mythical entity which can overcome all adversity.

*Dream of Pegasus* proclaims a feeling of success in spiritual strivings “When I write a poem,/I am I,/No critic touches me,/I create and am lord of my creation . . . Like a Nordic god riding the sky . . .” Similar sentiments in *Zephyr*, where ‘my soul’ proclaims that it has reached all the supreme heights.

Most of the other poems explore the quest, the struggle; these two seem to celebrate its completion.

One section came from a previous collection, most appropriately titled *Seraphim and the Seven Steps to Paradise*. *Vocations* expresses the essence of dedication. *Gold* is interesting, in that Peter speaks through a personified flower, struggling for growth against/among

the weeds and bracken. Marmoset expresses the transcendental nature of the quest – “I ride not in time but with emblem of love” – though I am not sure I go along with his rejection of metal. (**Author’s note:** “Ciron/metal is more of a symbol of a hard, materialistic world, as opposed to the spirit-world.”) *Ladybird* is based on a truly profound metaphor – a humble but beautiful insect symbolises God.

*Suffering (A Meditation)* poetically expounds Blake’s truism “Without contraries is no progression” True growth and achievement is a fusion: “The forging in the fire gives truest sight.” One must face a flawed world – ‘No Eden this bleak world of broken promises.’ One must face adversity and surmount despair: “Through the distorted mirrors of my grimaces/The trust love and beauty never seem/To be the deep reality of Holiness,/and yet the golden city ever stands.” Beautiful concluding phrases ‘the ether of a magic melody . . . the mystic chord that banishes the threnody.’

The sense of achievement is not narrow egotism; this is emphasised in *Exaltation*: “If we feel sublime as we soar away,/It is not ourselves we vainly exalt;/We cannot boast of what we are,/In some rare spirit we are caught . . .” through the spiritual quest, the shell of the individualist ego is transcended.

This poem shows a quest for spiritual purity, a struggle against the ‘demon jailer’ of earth, and the impurities of the world, symbolised by parasitic life forms. There is indeed an image of a ‘stairway to heaven’, and ‘No form or substance lies beyond’. He utters the sacred (magic) words of the air; he navigates the skies and winds, equipped with Icarus-type wings. There is a sense of flight from ‘hurtful jealous crowds’ and the challenge of a treacherous chasm. There is the Biblical image

of The Holy Seer, and surrendering to the 'sacred power'.

*Fane* – highly original phrase in 'the abject heartless stone/of world' – great play on the saying "crawl back under your stone". It presents the idea of a 'spiritual' bird soaring to the heavens. I was impressed by the phrase 'ambrosial simile', and of seeds being planted in the sky. I am not quite sure about 'A god will vanquish argument'. (**Author's note:** *this refers to God, the source of all, who will make our mortal arguments/confusions unnecessary and give us a greater understanding.*) The concept of 'daedal offering' gives much more food for thought. The Daedalus of the legend I know fell back to earth when his wings melted. I see that daedal means ingenious – re artefacts.

*Winter in Openheart* certainly has some points of vital tension. The aspiring soul does not wish to be materially trammled: "Do not encase this heart in chalk,/Pour concrete at my feet". There is one honest admission of confusion and contradiction in spiritual struggles: "When lost imagination/Spurns all nature's pulse sublime (**Author's note:** *"I think this needs to be better expressed by me and less open to misinterpretation – I may revise this for future publications."*) "Does darkness masquerade today/As pure cascading light?" When that question is properly answered, the optimism is truly substantiated: ". . . the beam of lasered moon/Reflects the soul within;/The diamond of reality/No pallid lipless grin." There is a sense of struggle in 'O icebound heretic of Earth,/With laws and creeds opaque;" again, egotism concludes the poem: "I travelled to the dreamer's view/no sage could ever reach." (**Author's note:** *This is my attempt at placing the dreamer above the logical stage in the order of things. Again in Winter in Openheart 'O icebound heretic of Earth/with laws and creeds opaque' refers to*

*the less advanced masses who need spiritual advancement rather than blindly following mortal laws."*)

*Zephyr* abounds in elemental and paradoxical imagery – 'A secret purifying wind . . . Charged with clouded wonder'. The earth, that stricture to be transcended, has its attractions as 'an all too fragrant bier'. The phrase "melancholy reigns still-born" postulates a fusion of dead inertia and oppressive power. There is some suggestion of self-doubt with "My stolen royalty usurps/My rightful throne and potency." (**Author's note:** *I think I could have expressed this better. I may revise in future publications of this poem; too easily misunderstood.*) It is utterly transcendental to describe time as a 'tinselled charlatan' and say 'Imagination begets all beyond blood'. The purity of the cosmos is celebrated as 'The cinnamon of stars,/Uncluttered by the fumbling baggage/Of experience." Great geological and botanical perceptivity in 'As alpine air by crystalline stream,/Ne'er embalmed in cypress wood'. To me 'In turreted lands of transparent breath' suggests mountaineering, or perhaps space travel. (**Author's note:** *"This refers to the spirit-world – castles in the air."*) Very original to use the imagery of fruit to describe his ascent from mundanity – 'a blue plum epitaph'. He is aiming for the 'source of power'.

*On Religion* speaks for a pantheism which scales down to size the rituals of institutional religion. This point is more strongly emphasised in To Percy Bysshe Shelley: "They say you were ungodly atheist./I see your soul as holy vivid light./Too advanced for priest's prevarication./A soul high-born for gossamer delight./I know you found a sacredness within you –/Beyond the heinous chains of chanting monk."

*Dream of Natalie* is an utterly charming



celebration of an enchantress. Similarly is the lady of *Ode to a Purple Angel*, sent by God and Christ, representing them, almost personifying them. Likewise with the heroine of *Hymn to the Hidden Muse*.

*In The Beast*. Peter shows he does not flinch from facing the dark side of the soul's struggle. The beast is both hunter and hunted; it feels fear and inspires it. But it is probably the ignorance and constricted minds of the observers which attribute a 'beastly' essence to the poetic soul. Some determination, and apparent ruthlessness, may be necessary to pursue the quest – "My sharp poetic claws will carve/With all truth and honesty . . . Redeemer of a half-formed world,/With ivory teeth and talons curled", He is determined to make an assault on materialism: "Dark exile treads in cunning stealth/To disengage them from their wealth". (**Author's note:** "Byron came to mind here – seen as bad, mad and dangerous to know. The beast, as you rightly conclude, is both hunter and hunted.")

For me, the apex of this collection is *The Amber Barquentine*, partly because of the sheer comprehensiveness of its scope – a truly Dantesque panorama of the Underworld of the Soul. Many of Peter's poems concentrate on the heights of achievement; this piece embraces the darkest depths of struggle. The first strophe describes his fear of drowning. The second and third strophes proceed to the allegory of submersion, and all its hazards (such as tempting and menacing mermaids), including the possible stifling of poetry: "Weighted as an anchor or a tome/Of unrequited letters born of love./Fashioned by all poets who have died/In that dear state through need of air above . . ." In strophe four, he is able to resurface, and be rescued by the crew of the 'spectral ship' – the Barquentine. The poem is full of dazzling imagery, such as 'the decomposing earthly life'. Some contemporary resonance with his

envisaging himself as a flood victim: "A mighty delta gushing past the gate,/Washed my surrendered soul to wider realm." The essence of the creative struggle is encapsulated in "My poetry so formed by mortal strife/Led to a secret, rapt immortal bliss". Even more telling are the lines "Life is but a violet shrouded bier,/When love unspeakable combines with art." Peter happily proclaims that he shared Baudelaire's agony in his younger days. (**Author's note:** "The sea and the poet's struggle with it is at bottom a metaphor for the materialistic world, with all its attendant problems. Hence the poem is in line with most of the others in the victory of the spirit, symbolised by the spectral ship and the rescue. We can easily 'drown' in life's difficulties (though it is true that, like the tragic Shelley, I cannot swim.")

So passionately does Peter believe in the validity of traditional-style verse forms, that he invented two of his own – 'Triple Rhyming Round' (used in *Sycamore*) and 'Six Verse Peon Romantic Reprise' (used in *Ode to a Purple Angel*). He also uses the 'Davidian', a contemporary (if traditional in spirit) invented by Wendy Webb: "It uses 4 lines each of 10 syllables, and a monostich of 7 syllables which completes each verse." This is used in the tender love poem *Over the Forest of Dean*, and in *Oh Lucifer Release Me!* – which is an interesting gloss on the Faust Legend. In *Westminster Nights*, he uses a Pantoum: a type of poem with a verse form consisting of three stanzas. It has a set pattern within the poem of repetitive lines. The pattern in each stanza is where the second and fourth line of each verse is repeated as the first and third of the next. This form originated in Malaysia, and was later adopted by the French – some global awareness here! (**Author's note:** "The Victory of the Poet' is, perhaps sadly, purely imaginative. The Chant Royal is, as you may know, a French form rare in England and a

greater challenge to write than the sonnet form, especially in its rhyming demands.”)

*The Remarkable Rocket* celebrates the heights of creative endeavour (perhaps a contemporary term to highlight a traditional theme – ‘enraptured rocket of my ecstasy’. Again a touch of the scientific: “Ah, when I sweep the skies with violet ray/I am the promise, here and now,/As God explodes, bewitching night to day,/My glory trail, claret and pink I plough.” He refers to “. . . mice-like men, the minions who hide From what they are” – I take this as an exhortation to face what they are and elevate their human dignity.

I would certainly be interested to hear a musical setting of *The Lark Will Sing Alone*, likewise of *Like a Child*, which celebrates the redemption of a cruel and wanton soul. Peter is obviously aware that some of the first poetry was meant to be sung or recited. Happily, there has of late been a substantial revival of oral epic recitation.

*Burgundy* is an admirable statement of romantic endeavour: “For truth lies deep within that whole,/And beauty too, for all to see and know./Keep the pedestal of self/From all fame’s garish garlands free.” Here he has distinguished the spiritual self from the arrogant ego. “Take the compassion from your errant Soul,/Fill the impoverished to the brim . . . sing your soliloquy to All . . . Leave no man alone,/Be each Heart’s own fellow . . . The Genius of every man/Resides within, a patterned plan,/A destiny to grow.”

*Hymn to the Hidden Muse*, dedicated to Shelley, celebrates the return to life and expressiveness of a wounded and debilitated poet/soul: “I am a broken kestrel in the wake/Of all harsh Will has forged, each cold mistake.” There is the motif of a chapel, a sanctuary where the spirit is rejuvenated and

revived. (**Author’s note:** “This poem partly uses the form of Shelley in one of his poems [‘Hymn to Intellectual Beauty’] with slight variation.”)

Peter certainly shows a supreme grasp of prosody and traditional verse structures, such as *terza rima*. This is used to great effect in *The Robin and the Poet* – where that verse scheme ties in exquisitely with alternating images of poet and robin, showing their literal and metaphorical affinities at all levels.

My final reaction, after being catalysed to re-read them, made me realise that the poems all speak for the essence of humanity. In his preface, Peter refers to his life’s work of past achievements. Nevertheless, in *Autumn of the Soul*, he stresses the need for lifelong perseverance: “Lower not the curtain/On sweet impassioned words! . . . Let there be inspired hours still,/Where fancy strays,/My heart to ease . . . Yet let me sing this tune!/O be not spent, my musing!” (**Author’s Note:** “This expressed the feeling that I was not ready for the end of the muse. The collection only extends to 2005, and I have written a few major poems since then. I was wrong in the introduction. ‘Autumn of the Soul’ was written in 1993, with 12 years, and ultimately more, of a wished-for poetic creativity.”)

Towards the conclusion, there is a touching flashback to Peter’s schooldays. A teacher in an English class fired him with inspiration to make his own, spontaneous utterance, with the cry “Poetic soul will soar eternally!”

To this very day, the striving goes on!

## David Russell

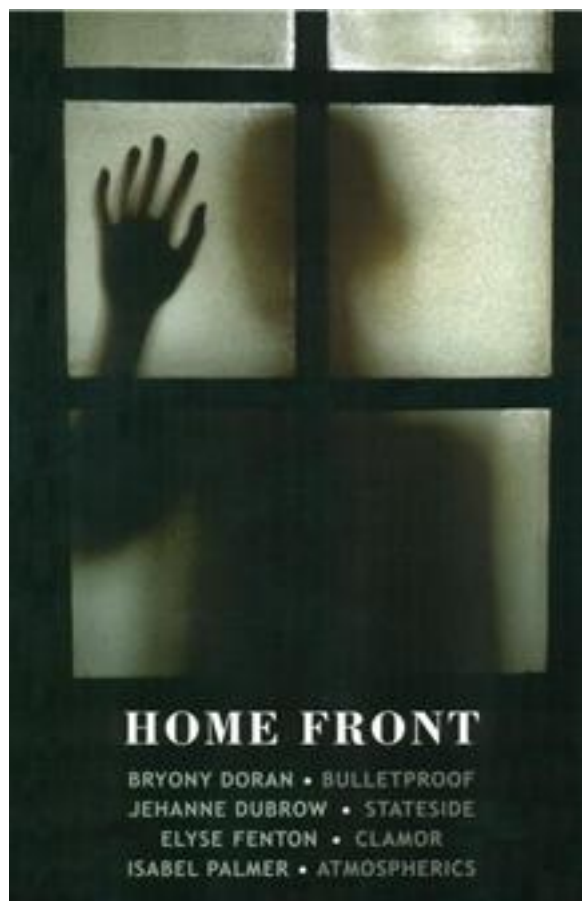
# Home Front

Poems by Bryony Doran, Jehanne

Dubrow, Elyse Fenton and Isabel Palmer

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This collection presents the perspectives of four women whose partners or relations have been on active service. This theme has long been prominent in folk song, but hitherto has been underplayed in literary terms. Here we find a directness of involvement with conflict, not from a standpoint of safe abstraction. I am reminded of one of Bob Dylan's most telling lines in *John Brown*: "The thing that scared me most, was – when the enemy came close, I could see that his face looked just like mine." Again, a little like John Brown's mother, there is a 'double focus' on life at home, and life at the front.

**Andrew Motion's** Foreword rightly discusses the comparative dearth of poems on contemporary conflicts – literary endeavour still has a strong tendency to retire to safe, comfortable geographical and historical distances. **Isabel Palmer** and **Bryony Doran** write from the standpoint of mother and son, while **Jehanne Dubrow** and **Elyse Fenton** present the viewpoint of woman and partner.

**Isabel Palmer** – *Atmospherics*. *Worst Case Scenario* deals with a 'Pre-deployment family briefing' of how a next of kin would be notified in the case of wounding or death in action. Her gut reaction is that this token respect is arbitrary and meaningless; she suggested a change of schedule for the visit; her request was ignored. *Portrait* – to do justice to her lover, she longs to paint a perfect work of art in his honour, something which may well speak louder than words. *Whatever* – mother and son have a real struggle to express themselves to each other; words cannot fully match deeds: "I meant to say/whatever you did/was fine by me but I didn't/and it wasn't." The period of absence has its effect: ". . . you and I returned changed,/our lives spelt differently,/one letter as a time." Brilliant concrete imagery of someone choked for words: "Now whatever it was/would take a nesting blackbird/the ultraviolet/pf her chick's gaping throat/to see . . . I couldn't find the words/if someone jammed a screwdriver/down my throat to twist out/my swallowed tongue." *You've got to call it something meditates* on the dual value of a gun as a glamour symbol and a weapon of destruction. Isabel ironically exhorts her son to give his gun a glamour name; perhaps she is torn between admiration and bitterness. *Hey Diddle Diddle* is a profound variation on the famous nursery rhyme. The son is eulogised as a virtuoso; mum trivialises herself to some extent as 'the girl in me' . . . "I had no name or number." The

son won an imaginary First Dividend, whilst for mum “nurses fed me/spoonfuls of air as thick/as silver plate.” *Ground Signs* compares the routine hazards of a peacetime cyclist with the far greater ones of the war zone; there is also a suggestion of laying landmines.

*The Story's Fault* indicts children's fiction for glamourising and sanitising war. *The Watch* is a wistful observation on her son's possible desire to 'turn the clock back' and reverse his decision to go to war – after he had, in fact, passed the point of no return.

### **Helmand Province, Afghanistan**

*Glossalia* – the practice of speaking in an apparently unknown language in a ceremony, such as the use of Latin liturgy in a church service which some of the congregation will not understand. That tended to predominate in the old days. In the here and now, there are literal, comprehensible phrases to register disasters. There is a partial return to the old customs at the end, where 'Someone's prayer rocks/a cradle of branches'. *Blueprint* describes a charity appeal to save children from going lame. Isabel laments the lack of parallel provision to curtail and remedy combat injuries. *Honour Guard* – she is alerted/alarmed by her son putting an 'x' on each of his messages home – as if a coded message signifying that his time was soon to come. The conclusion of the poem suggests that she was expecting a homecoming, but encountered a hearse instead; interesting comparison between mourning flowers and incendiary flax. *That Time* – war zones can be near home. This poem seems to refer to the person who defiantly ascended Big Ben's Tower – obviously at the risk of his life. Cleaners and the like are also in some danger when they make that great ascent.

*Language Card (Dari)* explores the concept of colours, with all their multitudinous

combinations, as signifiers in the context of the Pashto language of Afghanistan, which succinctly captures the precariousness of human life in that area: 'one word, *dest*/for the arm that's lost and the hand/that took it . . . two words, *baazu, laas*,/line up against a compound wall,/hands on their heads.' In BFPO, she contemplates the comfort presents she could send to her man, and feels some sense of futility and guilt: “this must be how it feels/to be looking at a rainbow as a child/steps in front of a car.” Admiring the beauties of nature can involve ignoring essential humanity. *Boots* – some black humour here: her son has had his footwear stolen by an Afghan soldier; she sends him replacements, and muses on avoiding controversial and provocative items which might offend the Customs Officers. She feels his vindictiveness towards the miscreant is tempered by benevolence and humour: “. . . to string him up with washing line,/force-feed him cheese and throw him a Tupperware party.” *R and R* has the backdrop of the disaster of Fukushima, in Japan, where an earthquake and a Tsunami caused a serious nuclear accident. One Mr Yoshizawa worked strenuously on repairing the damage, only to be ignored as he travelled home by train – as was her son, coming home on leave: 'your face a floating moon,/with a stare/any hand could pass/straight through'. *Zia* is an exploration of childhood games, and a critique of how they glorify war; more macabre humour: “*If he was a weapon, what would he be?//Some kind of sword./At twelve, he didn't know the word, in Pashto/or English but it took off his mother's head/as they stretched his eyelids open.*” In parallel “*If the man was an item of footwear, what/item of footwear would he be?//Flip-flops looking for their feet/outside a blown-up army base.*” Absent Fathers – it is a well-known truism that the ambitious 'reach the top' if they lack one natural parent and can choose their own

'alpha' role-model. Isabel does not refute the inference that she may be a single mum. *Easter Assembly* makes some reference to the futility of religion, church services waxing eloquent about the crucifixion without tangible evidence of the reality of physical pain. Then the 'sacreligious' gesture of tearing a piece of paper in two to make the sign of a cross on his mother's knee. *Chaos Theory* expresses a double vision – at home, where an old man buys himself chocolate treats at M & S, and in the combat zone, where she imagines her son nibbling at his chocolate treats, his skin lacerated in the heat, with mortal danger in the offing – 'the tiny perturbation/that can make tornadoes/from a spinning cloud.

*Gold* – one of the legendary art treasures of Afghanistan is a golden cape made from 'spider silk' – an ultimate in beauty and fragility. In a way it is a symbol of the fragility of human life in this perpetual war zone, 'the life of every newborn hanging by a thread'. *Homecoming* is a satire on computerspeak. Within the framework of emails, highly personalised messages are dehumanised, reduced to formulae: "The modalities are different, the tone required hushed and monastic, like David Attenborough stalking young lions."

*Home* – *Signs* opens with the words 'Things that mean other things', and makes a survey of a random litter of artifacts, sometimes noticeable through their incongruity. But the sight of a badly mutilated, wounded soldier turns the eyes away. *Symbols* – an inventory of the paraphernalia and aftermath of war, reduced to a formula – 'all Euclid's calculations/proved at the point of a compass'. Such things have to be tabulated; in order not to trivialise them, one has to look deeper into the tabulations. Compensation sums for loss of vital organs are listed; a bitter

conclusion – 'for empty levels in your stack of bones'. *2 Pictorial* is an ironic reflection on children's alphabet games and war games. There is a smooth but radical transition between war toys and war brutalities. *3 Linguistic* – a laconic reflection on ventriloquism as a metaphor for regimentation and brainwashing. *4* – Digital – some of the dehumanising effect of computer communication: total, sometimes dangerous exposure to all comers, 'Frequent prompts left unanswered', 'Regret to inform' messages (though necessary) belittle grief. *Desert Island Discs* – a suitably jingoistic selection. *6 Ritualistic* I found somewhat enigmatic. Does this refer to a 'grand finale' for the Arctic Monkeys?

*Twining* – is it possible for Helmand, under siege and in a state of total war, to have a 'twin town' anywhere in the world? *On Pen Y Fan* celebrates Isabel's father, trainer of commandos, totally dedicated to his profession. Her description of his 'outward bound' skills is both laudatory and ironic: ". . . read good weather backwards, right to left . . . the sun . . . turns your spit to soot". Binary is another indictment of the dumbing-down effect of computerspeak. *Blast Wave* suggests that someone has sustained an injury, but projects the fear and pain onto another person – a boy. *Battle Shock* seems to refer to her son's disorientation on his return, using words he has never used before. It opens with a description of how poppies thrive on carnage, then seemingly refers to their own garden patch. Why is there 'always a whip and chair between us'? Is this a safety precaution. *Ringside Mama* is in honour of Mohammed Ali, perhaps the supreme fighter and role-model for all soldiers. *Child-proofing*: this I have always understood to be putting fragile items out of children's reach; does the returned soldier have some child-like instability. *Repatriation* poses the idea of

Monet doing an oil painting to celebrate her son's return, using every colour except black.

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**Bryony Doran** – Rare perspective on war from a pacifist mother. *Joining Up* tells how her son kept his enlisting, and his subsequent experiences, secret from his mother, including the final *reductio ad absurdum*: “He didn’t tell me that after we left, he’s get paralytic, miss the last train/and then get a taxi to bring him the hundred miles home.” *Hey Joe* – Jimi Hendrix’s song has an obvious resonance in military life. *Things People Say* – ill-informed gossip may have some substance after all. *A Pre-tour Talk* concerns a military conference to which the soldiers’ relatives are invited. She meets a fellow mother there, and they become mutual confidantes. There is a poignant double edge to the conclusion: “Now there’s a woman on stage with crutches./She tells us she’s a 7/7 survivor, grateful to our lads for protecting our country.” *Advice on a Parcel for Theatre* – is this referring to the operating theatre for the war wounded? Variety is recommended for gift parcels: indeed “the lads and lasses are well fed and watered.” *AWOL* presents a sobering thought, perhaps some wishful thinking. What if her son went beserk shortly before he left for service. If he did so, was put in the glasshouse and given a dishonourable discharge, he would still be physically intact. *Certificate 18* is a wistful reflection on mother and son watching a film together; she has her own preferences, but accommodates to his wishes. In *Macaroni Cheese*, she prepares her son’s last meal before his departure – an utterly familiar dish she used to make for him when he was a sick child. The recipe is utterly familiar, but she hesitantly thinks of consulting the recipe book to perfect it. Her efforts succeed; he asks if there’s a second helping. She feels his absence will be like a prison sentence. An ice-cream van plays *Yankee Doodle* in the background. *In the Event*

*Of* – her son seems to be both careful and careless. He claims to have made a will and taken out life insurance, but has not bothered with a sealed envelope for them. *Wormwood Scrubs* gives extra perspective on Bryony’s problems as a pacifist mother; her father had been imprisoned as a conscientious objector. If he were still alive, would he have blamed Bryony for her upbringing; would he have felt betrayed, or would he have shaken his grandson by the hand. *Flight to Kandahar* makes an interesting comparison between Chilean miners trapped underground and soldiers trapped overground on their way to the battlefield.

Some reflections on the ‘home front’ with *In the Shower* – mum’s abode is much cleaner and better ordered when her son is away. *The Cleansing* – interesting interrelation of literature and domestic routines. Mum washes clothes and sends them to her son. When she is taken ill, a flatmate lends her a copy of *Quiet Flows the Don*, in which a mother keeps her son’s unwashed shirt – ‘and when she misses him she breathes his sweat’. Bryony’s son always messes up his tee shirts, because he knows mum can clean them perfectly. The clothes are perfectly clean; the pages of the books get soiled. *Waiting Days* – Bryony goes to visit Sylvia Plath’s grave; when she and her friend are in a nearby café, a boy, quite unlike her son, comes in. His presence makes her think of her son; she wonders if her son has phoned, but instead of going straight home to check, she stays out for a curry; she imagines what it would have been like if her son had been present at the scene.

*Afghanistan Must Not Appear in the Address* – digests of official rubric can sometimes be ironically poetic. *First Call Home* has a ring of authenticity; her son had to queue up to use the phone, then retained the courtesy to check if he had rung mum in the middle of the

night; a cautious nudge to break the strict regulations regarding gift parcels. This has a 'personalised' response in *Sending a Parcel to Your Soldier*. She ignores the regulations about food treats. Her son has requested toiletries (which she thought the army would provide). Some black humour: "He doesn't want soap, they've no water . . . Mouthwash – diluted with vodka!" A humorous conclusion; the fully crammed parcel is over the limit for free posting under the MOD, so she removes some crisps from it to bring it back within the limit. *Snow on the Line* – Bryony feels a compulsion to tell fellow passengers about her son being in Afghanistan. She meets a young man on a train, who turns out to be a marine, who has also served in Afghanistan; when she tells him about her son; he does not respond. She then wants to turn away from facing people directly, and reads the Sunday papers, in one of which there is a report of 3 injuries in Helmand. *The World Clock* explores disturbing possibilities; on her iPhone she can determine the relative times of London and Kabul, and she hears the first report of a casualty since her son left – could it be he? *The Junior Officers' Reading Club*, by Jack Hennessy, is a book Bryony found at Waterstone's and sent to her son. It came to attract her, and she obtained her own copy. She seems to identify with her son's impulses: "I cheat time and find gaps in the day./The testosterone of combat/seeps into my brain, my blood." Strange reaction on the part of a pacifist mother. *A Break in the Fighting* – mum has reservations about son's homecoming; there are hazards at home too; she wishes they would send him to a Middle Eastern holiday resort. *Floods in Queensland* – part of her wishes to be out there in the action with her son; she hears disaster news from Queensland, but nothing from the combat zone. *The Winter Hares* – when her son returns home, will he go on a solitary hike in the mountains, or will he revisit the scenes

of his school holidays with his mother. The mention of him having to hitchhike through the night when 'those bastards sacked you so unfairly' leaves me wanting to know more, about an incident which could possibly parallel his military experience. *Rest & Relaxation* – her son's behaviour on his return. He seems to become disoriented; he gets bored with getting drunk and recounting his combat experiences; he no longer wants his mother to cook for him. He hears about the death of one of his training comrades, who seemed to really love the army. On his return, he wants to take a motorbike test, perhaps a preliminary to joining the SAS. He is perhaps a little insensitive to his mother's feelings: "He sees the look on my face and laughs,/asks why I'm scared of life." In *Bulletproof*, son's military paraphernalia are put on display at home. The vest seems immovable; there are also the uniform and the underpants. One wry comment is quoted: "Saves yer manhood if you get yer legs blown off." In *Return to Afghanistan*, she sees him off to his next tour of duty. A bit of cosy domesticity in "Back at the hotel room I find our unmade beds/we slept in for an hour". Then, "scrolling the phone I see the boy behind a man." Thesaurus – she keeps on looking for 'motherhood' and finding 'hinterland', and imagines him beckoning to her from the hinterland, appealing to her sense of motherhood.

*The Dressing Gown* – now that mum is on her own again, she is inclined to feel lax about the routines up getting up, washing and dressing to face humdrum days. *Preparation for Theatre* – some more black humour: nightmare vision of a dentist (for her then 17 year-old son) talking about breaking his jaw and slitting the roof of his mouth. Was this in dream or actuality? Whatever was the case, son was angry with mum. *Harvest* – there is some military action where a pomegranate

harvest is taking place; her son may be among the soldiers. A boy observes them from a tree, resentful of them taking the prize fruit; they are friendly towards him and give him presents. He feels like sniping at them but refrains from doing so. *Doing John Agard for GCSE* is a flashback to her son's schooldays. The 'punch line' from Agard is 'standing on one leg'; this links in her mind with 'a delayed voice asking for thermal socks'. Perhaps he needs to stand on one leg as he puts one sock on at a time. *In The News from Your Area*, she hears of a local man dying in action. Her home is visited by two Jehovah's Witnesses, in civilian clothing; she imagines it being visited by two men in uniform. End of Tour – Bryony is worried by the lack of news of her son. Hearing of the death of Bin Laden heightens her anxiety. But then she is relayed a Facebook message saying her son is drunk in Cyprus.

*Tips for Parents of Returning Soldiers* – army regulations offer the services of an army doctor if a soldier acts strangely on his return. Returned soldiers themselves tend to want to preserve the 'stiff upper lip' and not confide any problems. There is an appropriate, sobering footnote: "More soldiers have committed suicide than have died in Afghanistan." *Avoiding Traffic Accidents* – like the previous poem, this quotes from *A guide for the families of deployed regular Army Personnel*. Many returned soldiers do not adapt fully to civilian road safety precautions. Another footnote: "More soldiers have died in motorbike accidents since coming back than have died in Afghanistan." A Dancer – for some perverse reason, mum tries to re-enact the games of hide-and-seek she played with her son when he was a child; he made a swift reaction to her shouting boo! "If he'd had a gun, I'd be dead." Sometimes a joke can go beyond a joke.

*A Parade in the Rain* – I am immediately reminded of Bob Dylan's phrase "I was out in the battleground, you were home, acting proud – and you were never standing in my shoes". But in the course of the poem, mother's and son's viewpoints get confused; there is a suggestion of call-and-response dialogue. They seem both to be attending a memorial service. She is quite severe with him: "So no, you can't have your say". He is standing to attention in the back row, and so cannot get a proper view of the wounded, some of them in wheelchairs, being awarded their medals. She cannot stomach her son's exhortation to 'get over it'. She had not respect for the ceremony, found no dignity in it. *Me in My Nightie* – homecomings and reunions can be double-edged. She is preparing a celebratory meal for her son's return; the butcher tells her of his son-in-law who has also served in Afghanistan, whose return, in the midst of massed loved ones, was really moving. Bryony's son's attitude was radically different; he told her she would only see him for twenty minutes, and that he didn't even know exactly where he was landing. She was not there for his homecoming. He finally appeared at one o'clock the following morning. The nature of his return was truly ironic: "A mate's parents had given him a lift back./Their son had gone off with his girlfriend/so they'd been glad of his company,/even bought him a meal as he had no money." In *By the Way*, son tells mum extremely belatedly that he will not have to go to Afghanistan again. *Looking Back* – many think it would be better to die in action than to survive without limbs.

Of the four poets, Bryony is the most straightforward and literal, but her impact is absolutely none the less for that.

## David Russell

*(The second part of this review will appear in PEN #54)*



## The Dream Tree

There was a time when you leaned  
over into my garden to drop your fruit into  
it.

When I couldn't wait, I threw sticks  
up into your branches to tangle them down.

I eased their spiky green cases open, bored  
a hole through the centre  
knotted them with string,  
To reveal the rowan-coloured dream  
that took me away from the world  
that I didn't fit in  
carried them around with me for a match,  
I dreamed I'm Supergirl – I've saved the  
world and everyone loves me . . .

I'm tracking Shere Khan in the jungle. I'm a  
princess who lives in a forest.

Sometimes I actually won  
Some kids baked their dreams in vinegar to  
withstand any knocks.

When challenged, they knew  
they could win without getting hurt.

"Four eyes, four eyes you killed Jesus" was  
their refrain.

I tried to stay away from them, only showed  
my dreams to those who fought square.

The season for dreams doesn't last long and  
you are long gone – chopped down for  
blocking out the light.

But when Autumn returns again  
I go looking for dreams under the trees.  
Sometimes I find one still intact.

**Mala Mason**

## Now I'm Sixty-Four

*(For Razz's birthday of the same  
number)*

Now that I've gone for shaving my head  
Now my time has come,  
I still sometimes may send a little Valentine,  
Birthday greetings, bottle of wine.  
Now I can coast down some of the roads,  
Much less of a chore;  
Seem to be living, hope I'm still giving,  
Now I'm sixty-four.

Now I'm a comfortable voyeur,  
Happy *deja vu*,  
I can still go take a helter-skelter ride,  
Much less risk of wounding my pride.  
Jump generations, stand on my head,  
Like forever more;  
Everyone tease me, everyone please me  
Now I'm sixty-four.

*We can find a half-built chalet  
On the Costa Brava near a littered beach;  
We shall bloat and burn!  
All those throwaway kicks in reach,  
We shall do our turn!*

Burning your CDs, making a scan,  
I'm state-of-the-art;  
I can be refurbishing your Apple Mac  
With a bonus sampling pack.  
I may be a discard from the mainstream,  
Rotten to the core,  
But I'll keep on moving, hope I'm still grooving,  
Now I'm sixty-four.

*I think Robert Browning got it right when he said  
"Grow old along with me";  
You'll be older too,  
And perhaps "the best is yet to be";  
Masses more to do.*

Mellowing sunsets, comforting showers  
Rose-tint all the past;  
We can ride the dodgems on a retro-wheel,  
Kick the traces, show how we feel.  
Is it all water off a duck's back  
To be thought a bore?  
Hope I'm believing, less of the grieving,  
Now I'm sixty-four.

**Dave Russell**

# Thomas Ország-Land THE

## STONES OF JERUSALEM

1.

### ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

*–In memoriam  
György Timár*

Oblivious to his grandson – a gift! –  
absorbed in a birthday book,

my timorous brother lifted his eyes to the  
Mediterranean sky.

The stench of burning human flesh  
eternally clung to his own.

Persistent hunger whipped him crazy.  
The death he'd escaped filled his life.

He clenched and raised his fist  
towards a distant, friendly sky:

*For Your own sake, my Lord, I take, I  
take... You do not exist.*

2.

### HEIRLOOM

My father taught me to die,  
when I must, like a human being.  
My mother taught me to trust  
and sing like a human being.

And a boy and a king, alone  
with a stone, a sling and a harp  
has left me the chutzpah to try

to hone and sharpen and fling  
each thought and word and line  
beyond the confines of time  
that bind a human being.

3.

### A FEAST IN THE GARDEN

*For George Konrád*

Worried, what with his women  
and walls and wealth,  
poor Solomon wisely bade a scribe to  
describe the lofty lifting  
– like the sun – of depression.  
A bestseller from the past!...  
well worth a review.

A wretched start:

*There's nothing new under the sun.*

*The women are fickle.*

*The flowers bow to every wind.*

*The men are tyrants or servants or fools,  
and even I might die –  
outrageously under the sun.*

*...Even the women will, and the flowers, and you.  
These walls might crumble in time. We must  
return*

*into being dust or rain or hillside or thunder,  
whatever our desires under the sun.*

How dreadful. *Still, this hour is mine, while it  
lasts, enough to complete my poem among the  
flowers rejoicing in my loves and our never  
recurring lives as human beings under the sun.*

4.

### AT THE PRESS CLUB

You're here to feed your pension and tension.  
I'm chasing a soaring bird – the truth.  
We are not even friendly rivals. I  
covet neither your fancy title nor  
your impressive, official hat. I am a  
writer. I couldn't be more  
than that... though I could be, I could be, less.

**THOMAS ORSZÁG-LAND** is a poet and award-winning foreign correspondent who writes from Jerusalem and London as well as his native Budapest. His last book was *Survivors: Hungarian Jewish Poets of the Holocaust* (Smokestack/England, 2014), and his last E-chapbook, *Reading for Rush Hour: A Pamphlet in Praise of Passion* (Snakeskin/England, 2016).

