

Poetry Express #43



Leonora's Death Bird in the Valley of the Shadow of Elisabeth Frink [c] Colin Hambrook



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Editorial

Colin Hambrook's double launch on Saturday 12th October at the Pallant House Gallery in Chichester was – it's too easy to use such vocabulary – the most inspiring Survivor event since the 21st Birthday bash last year. Partly it was the event itself, curated by Deputy Director Mark Stein who spearheads the Outside In series of galleries and outsider, survivor-led art.

Mostly it was Colin's twin arts on display here. The volume of poetry, *Knitting Time* (Waterloo Press) astonishes with its harrowing journey, through surviving the attention of Jehovah Witnesses and in this case (as alas in many like the silencing of fine poets Lynette Roberts and – it's suggested – Rosemary Tonks) their catastrophic effect on his mother. She ended up destroyed by ECT and the wrong kind of care in the NHS.

The book was illustrated in monochrome with the extraordinary polychromatic paintings and drawings on display at Pallant House (alongside Eduardo Paolozzi) – remarkable works half-way between Arthur Rackham (as Carole Bremson pointed out) and Cecil Collins which I noted. I'd no idea that Colin was taught by Collins, an extraordinary visionary neo-Romantic like David Jones in some ways, but nearer to the 1940s school. What Colin does with these influences and phenomenal technique is by turns breathtaking, touching, terrifying and ultimately affirmative.

Beyond all this, however, and the show of loyalty to Colin (also an original SP Constitution signatory in 1994) from so many survivors or those who work with survivors, was the meeting of minds, ideas, and plans for the future. Joe Bidder and Hilary Porter were there, on hand to listen to my tribulations and offer advice and a few corrective notes. Dave Russell played a suite of his finest songs just preceding Colin's final flourish of poems, and in the generous inclusiveness we know Colin for, there was an invitation alongside Mark Stein to make this a survivor-led event with a first half showcasing many survivor poets.

Monika Richards also contributed with a reading of her own poems from her Waterloo Press *Ink on My Lips*, a black writing anthology just out from Waterloo alongside *Knitting Time*. Poets like Dave Sinclair (editor of *Outsider Poems*), and Alan Sutherland a witness of survivors and archivist of witness and turning this to poetic form, concluded a very strong first half. Several other readers arrived from London and farther out – not so easy when negotiating Chichester at the weekend.

Also present and reading her fine work was Victoria Hullatt, from the Blake Project at Felpham, also linked to DAO and now to SP. SP's library is on its way to the project via DAO, when arrangements and due care and process completed. SP's resources are increasingly at the disposal of joint DAO/SP initiatives where we hope to stream them for general survivor use. There were discussions with Victoria and mark too and subsequent exchanges. For instance, my having been a recent Royal Literary Fund fellow at Chichester is proving helpful to Victoria in discussions with the University, and that gambit is well and truly sprung on the English Department.

Survivors and survivor discussions are indeed knitting time together. A new chapter for us is opening, one of collaboration and dovetailing, aesthetic quickening and the chance to secure refuge for archive and a secure place for the archive itself, from recordings to library to board minutes. I don't quite know what the future holds for SP as an Arts Council recipient of NPO status, but as an organization – and above all a vision – it's repositioning itself where its life will be: back with its roots – its founders and curators; and even more where it has always been, with users, artists, supporters, enthusiasts and witnesses.

Simon Jenner

Down with Atos!

The Mental Health Resistance Network (MHRN) welcomes the judgement handed down today (Wednesday 22nd May 2013) by judges in the Upper Tribunal in the case of the two claimants with mental health problems who have challenged the manner in which people with mental health difficulties are assessed for their fitness for work through the Work Capability Assessment (WCA).

The court held that the WCA process disadvantages people with mental health problems because they have greater difficulty than others in explaining to the Atos assessor how their condition affects their fitness to work. The solution is for Atos and the DWP to seek evidence from the claimant's doctors and others in the community that know what they can do. But the DWP have consistently refused to take this step.

Those who have been claiming that the WCA significantly disadvantages people with mental health problems have been vindicated by today's judgment. The court has ordered the DWP to put forward proposals for how they will go about ensuring that they have obtained further medical evidence from claimants' own health care professionals to ensure that any difficulties people have with self reporting are properly taken into account. It is also vital that no one's health is put at risk by any decision made by the DWP due to failure to obtain appropriate evidence.

In order to assess a person with mental health problems fitness for work it is necessary to obtain such evidence and this has not been the practice of the DWP and Atos in most cases. The judgment is clear: to routinely fail to consider evidence put forward by their own health care practitioners (the DWP current practice) places people with MHPs at a significant disadvantage which means that the current practice has been – and remains – discriminatory. We believe that many people would be spared needless distress if the DWP and ATOS sought and understood the medical histories of the individuals they seek to assess, rather than simply assessing a person's short term functioning without taking into account the myriad of handicaps and difficulties they face in surviving on a daily basis.

The MHRN has supported the claimants' case throughout as we believe that the WCA is not fit for the purpose of correctly identifying those people who should receive benefits. ATOS have not shown itself to be capable of fairly assessing people who are significantly disadvantaged and subject to high levels of trauma and distress. Following on from the court's decision, it is imperative that Atos assessors cease making inappropriate assessments, and put into immediate effect significant changes to their practices, to prevent further avoidable distress, trauma and suicides, and we call on people to continue to work together to fight against subjecting vulnerable people to this cruel process.

We are concerned at the language which has come to dominate this debate, and are outraged that unfounded DWP claims about levels of fraudulent claims are often simply parroted, resulting in claimants being increasingly viewed as scroungers. Time and time again the DWP has been shown to be misusing statistics in order to advance their ideological assault on the services that have been integral to making society in Britain fairer and more civilised. The misinformation that has surrounded the so-called 'reforms' to welfare undermines our democracy in so far as the public are agreeing to huge changes based of false perceptions.

We call on journalists to challenge this ideological assault and to ensure that those who are in genuine need are not subject to further trauma and distress as we all seek a way of making things bearable.

We do not believe that these so-called Welfare Reforms were ever intended to help disabled people back into work, or could ever achieve such an outcome when they are implemented so harshly and callously. Rather it is increasingly clear to us that these 'reforms' are part of a drive to bring down wages by creating a pool of desperate impoverished people who will be forced to accept the unacceptable in order to survive. In addition they are trying to boost the interests of the business owners and corporations such as the insurance company UNUM who have been instrumental in designing the WCA.

The MHRN intends now to focus on setting up a local centre where those who are affected by the myriad of cuts to services and benefits can come together to offer mutual support and to find ways of resisting the Tory onslaught together.

We remember those of our friends who have been driven to despair and suicide by the actions of this government, the DWP and Atos. We will continue to struggle in their memory in order to try and prevent needless deaths and trauma in the future.

Mark Roberts



Pallant House Gallery

The Disability Arts Organisation prides itself on taking the middle way, according to ancient Chinese Dao-ist philosophy and as part of its endeavour wishes to encourage SP members to make comment on the poetry blog at <http://www.disabilityartsonline.org.uk/Survivors-Poetry> and to contribute your own experience of the process of writing poetry with the support of the Survivors' network

Tony Hurford Shares his experience of Survivors' Poetry

I've always loved poetry, but have been woefully bad at knowing that, not to mention getting to know it. In fact part of my survivor journey has been about realising I love it and how important it is to me. Mad eh? Some people around me dismissed it and my liking for it, and most of the people that didn't seemed quite clear that it might be beyond me – not everyone – but then it gets complicated, my lack of connection to it may be part of how I came to be a Survivor.

Anyway, I did start to get it. Then sometime after my surviving the mental health system began I trained as a counsellor, basically in a very Person Centred department (outrageously closed by the University it sat in shortly after I completed) and informed by other humanistic approaches – there is a lot that could be said about the link between such therapy and poetry. This is one of the very best things I ever did and easily my most satisfying educational experience. Totally unexpectedly whilst I completed my research I found I could not sleep one night until I had written down a line that had come to me and then I started to play to make a poem. Not great as a poem, some nice lines, a bit of a pastiche of a poem from someone that was pretty badly read of poetry and had not given a thought to poetics; I've never been able to change it, to make it more publishable or acceptable or refined. When I completed my research I made straight for my first poetry class, everything seemed possible. Then reality hit, ill health returned.

This is where Survivors' Poetry came in. When my confidence to attend classes in person fell, [the SP online Forum](#) was a lifeline I came to grasp more and more firmly. Whilst I had felt full of creativity that also diminished, I don't think I wrote anything for a year at one point, but I could check in with the forum, read others attempts, and I started to share some poems I had already written.

Having come to writing poems via counselling and my mental health experiences lead me to value creativity and just that act of attempting – damn the results, damn what is seen as good poetry, just try... sometimes I need to remind myself of this. As my poems become refined I want to remember that, what it means, self expression, despite and sometimes because of.

Earlier this year I wrote a short piece summarising my few poems that feel quite complete and said that in some ways mine were a dialogue with myself about 'what is a poem'... and again I don't really want to know the answer to this. I hope I never do, but I can be tempted to start to feel I have an idea. (I just learned the term 'wind-egg' yesterday, from [Wikipedia](#), not from actually reading about Socrates... but I like this strange phrase, it does exactly what it needs to – wind-egg being a theory or feeling). So when I have an idea I think it's probably a wind-egg - the poem is in the feeling perhaps, beyond 'wind-eggness'. Survivors' Poetry is of course a great reminder and force for the importance of this self expression – and it blew on the flame of my own writing during my struggle, still does.

The feedback I got on the forum from Simon Jenner, and the exchanges and example set by fellow Survivors were a lifeline – and also not only as a writer that struggles to write authentically, as seems our lot, but struggles to write authentically about stuff that really a lot of people would prefer is not said. Despite all my counselling and support through my friends in that field, the forum, the example of others and the recognition of others helped me see that it is possible to be open. The only drawback about the forum is that sometimes people are slow to respond, at present the traffic can be small, and I think given the nature of our issues a lot of us are reluctant to say much in response to others. But when we do interact, when you are a long way from any groups, it is so helpful, sustaining. Get the hint?

I've mentioned Simon Jenner's feedback – his short responses to some of my poems (silence to others can speak volumes at times) consistently got my poems in an encouraging and generous way. My experience of groups had never given me such full attention and detailed reaction. In fact I may not have so openly started to examine some very personal issues if it had not been for Survivors' – for all my counselling training.

More recently I sent Simon some poems he had not seen and having learned about their mentoring scheme asked if he thought applying may be a good idea. He and Survivors' were positive and I gave it a go. Part of this also came from a decision. I've never tried to publish, to do so is part of myself testing out some of my fears. I can still be unsure. But then I have made very slow progress – I tend to write when something really hits me. I am bad at sitting and trying. Simon has been patient, so have Survivors' in general.

It was good last August to be able to meet him and Roy Birch and Andrew in the office (I live some way from London and am remote from Survivors' groups). Simon has continued the listening he had done with my poems to listen to me in many a phone call and my discovery of poetry. He's encouraged that reading which I have worked quite hard at widening (and by attending adult education classes (a massive thank you to the North East Centre of Lifelong Learning in all of this and their literature and writing courses. It is sad that this excellent scheme has been given the chop just in the last two weeks). Simon continues to encourage me, to listen and talk in a way that is rare to find.

We're aiming at a pamphlet – part of me will still believe this when I see it, this is not the sort of thing that happens to me. I am a good part of the way there and growing further into writing more. Much thanks to Survivors' Poetry for providing a forum for others as well to say things that are often so hard to say even in supportive groups. Here is a poem I put onto Survivors' forum and took down saying it was rot, to have Simon post it back and set me right about that, in a generous way.

Beginning

Sometimes I feel
my lines uncover
my humanity
That I stop
where sanity begins
Nothing special

just remedial
Now that's clear
let me begin

The Holocaust & Reconciliation

POETRY MAY SALVE THE WOUNDS THAT HAVE REFUSED TO HEAL
An Interview with THOMAS LAND



The wounds inflicted by the Holocaust are still refusing to heal – but they are not the only burden of human rights abuse inherited by the 21st century. **DAVID CUSCÓ I ESCUDERO**, editor of the Catalan cultural magazine *El Funàmbul* (The Tightrope Walker) serving a country that endured unspeakable atrocities during the Spanish Civil War, questions, **THOMAS ORSZÁGLAND**, a Jewish-Hungarian poet, translator and foreign correspondent, on his attempt to look beyond the Holocaust.

David: We are about to publish some of your Holocaust poetry in Catalan translation. We are also very interested in your English translations of outstanding Hungarian Holocaust poetry. Did you write them because you thought that the Holocaust could be fathomed only through literature since the basic facts of that crime were so huge and its premises so horrible that they could be described comprehensibly only in fiction? That would be just the opposite of Theodor Adorno's dictum that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" – although he later qualified that, after reading Paul Celan's poetry.

Thomas: Adorno looked at Auschwitz and despaired. But humanity must look to its future, and cannot afford to despair. I recently attended a meeting of Holocaust survivors, old people who

had looked evil in the face as young adults, somehow survived and dedicated their lives to warning the world against attempting such madness ever again. They agitate, they write, they lecture, especially to the young.

But they see that the very occurrence of the Holocaust is vociferously being denied by people who would like to repeat it. These aging witnesses know that they will be silenced soon by illness and death. They fear that, when they are gone, no-one will be left to defend the world against such renewed barbarity.

I do not fear that. I believe that, as Odysseus will sail the seven seas of imagination in Homer's hexameters for the rest of history, so the passionate warnings of the Holocaust survivors will resound through the ages in the voices of the poets of our own time.

David: In your poem *Caution*, a child summons humanity from Auschwitz. He reminds me of Hurbinek, that unforgettable child in Primo Levi's "The Truce" who mumbles instead of talking. Despite the pain conveyed by your poem, I sense a spark of optimism here, in the dignity of the child's response to his own suffering . . . Is there, to you, room for optimism after the Holocaust?

Thomas: Probably the most important thought in that poem is "hold up your head ... while you've got it." It radiates optimism even beyond death. I did not invent that. I found it in a surviving poetic fragment from a slave-labour camp. I've just managed to identify its author as Jaroslav Ježek (not the composer of that name), to whom the poem is now dedicated.

Primo Levi and Paul Celan both committed suicide after the Holocaust, perhaps because they saw no room left for decency, let alone optimism, after Auschwitz. Both turned to poetry to shout out their astounded grief and rage at their incomprehensible humiliation and abuse at the hands of the Nazis, for which they had been totally unprepared. But the subsequent generations are not unprepared. They are all survivors, and their enduring capacity for love and decency originates from within.

David: Does your personal experience of the Holocaust justify such optimism?



Thomas: My own Holocaust culminated in the three-month Soviet siege of Nazi-occupied Budapest, one of the bloodiest city sieges Europe has ever endured. I was a Jewish child hiding from both the Nazis and the Allied bombers. I had just turned six when the Nazis smashed my idyllic childhood, the very age when a child must confront the wider world, beyond the protective circle of parents and family, and learn to manage it without assistance. That is the mother of all adventures.

The world as perceived by a child then is unpredictable and dangerous even at the best of times. Challenges may appear from any direction, and the child must learn to dodge them.

To me, the shouting Nazis staging their brutal raids on civilian shelters hunting for Jews in hiding, like me, appeared as dumb, cruel, homicidal monsters pretty low on my scale of threats, after the continuous aerial bombardment, the ubiquitous disease-carrying vermin and the contaminated drinking-water supply that got me in the end. All this has made me more optimistic than most people I know because I have come to expect myself to survive a crisis, and happier too as I still cannot believe my luck of being alive.

David: In your poem *The Name* you even speak in the name of Eichmann's son. It is a daring poem, very brave and impressive, which seems to share the controversial concept of the "banality of evil" that Hannah Arendt introduced after Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem. Was this poem influenced by her?

Thomas: Eichmann had a surviving nephew in Austria, who chose to hold on to that infamous surname. My poem enlarges on some of his attitudes that do not directly address Arendt's thesis. That had arisen from her shocked realization during the 1961 Jerusalem trial, which she covered for *The New Yorker* magazine, that ordinary, sane people can be oblivious to their personal culpability for dreadful deeds if they commit them under a higher authority. That is a very uncomfortable notion. Some people even responded by calling Arendt a "Nazi whore".

A decade later, by the time I covered for "The Nation" magazine of New York the Düsseldorf trial of Franz Stangl, commander of the Treblinka and Sobibor extermination camps, her proposition had become widely accepted. Stangl even tried to defend his innocence by maintaining that he had 'merely' followed orders.

He earned a life sentence – and managed to do just one great service to humanity that he had so enormously abused. In an exhaustive prison interview with Gitta Sereney, an extraordinary Austrian/English investigative reporter, Stangl admitted hours before his final, fatal heart attack his personal responsibility and remorse for mass murder.

The principle that we are all individually responsible for our actions, even in the face of unreasonable orders, even on the battlefield, is now enshrined in international law and increasingly also in the constantly evolving human conscience. That is the hope of the world.

David: Imre Kertész, the Jewish-Hungarian Nobel Laureate, often reminds his audiences that he has survived both the Nazi and the Soviet dictatorships and that his experience has absolutely

shaped his work and vision of life. To what extent do you think that the same events have shaped your poetry and life?

Thomas: All humanity has survived those two dictatorships, and a lot more, irrevocably shaping all of us. There were Hitler and Stalin and also Mao and Franco and even Idi Amin. The world is not the same that it had been before Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Technological advancement has now enabled the religious/political élite of any state to attempt genocide, and some openly fantasize about it. We are even destroying nature, of which we are part. My own experience tells me that humanity's one chance today lies in total dedication to survival, untrammelled by the grief, the guilt, the resentments of the past.

We must literally talk and cry them out of our system. Poetry is a great vehicle of post-crisis reconciliation. Modern Germany has managed that, to a great extent, and built a resilient and decent society. That is why Kertész now lives in Berlin, of all places. Much of formerly Soviet-dominated Europe has not even begun to do that.

Which is why I have returned to Budapest from the West, in the hope of encouraging that process.

David: Do you prefer writing in English or your native Hungarian? Can one write poetry in a second language?

Thomas: There are precedents of writers producing sound work in their adopted languages. In poetry, every word should sound so fresh, anyway, as though its author had only just used it for the first time.

I have lived by freelance writing (as well as a scholarship and occasional casual labour in the early years) since the age of 16. I stopped writing in Hungarian at 18 when I left the country after the doomed 1956 revolution against Soviet rule, in which I had participated. In the last 50 years, I have only written love letters in Hungarian, and only because their recipient does not understand English.

David: Apart from your own writing, you have translated much poetry into English. Why? Do you believe that the translator of poetry must be a poet?

Thomas: I started translating poetry as a young man seeking to learn from my betters. I saw myself as a fine-art student in a public gallery copying the works of great painters in order to master their techniques by re-creating their compositions.

Eventually it gave me huge pleasure to dig the literary remains of deceased friends out of their premature graves and give them new life in English – a language accessible to all the world.

Dead masters make good teachers. But on reflection I believe that translators must be poets in their own right and preferably equal to the authors of the poems that they translate.

David: Some of the Hungarian Holocaust poets whom you have introduced to English literature have now been taught by British and American universities in your translation for years. One of them, Miklós Radnóti, has gained a robust international reputation (see *Deathmarch*, the last edition, published by The Penniless Press and Snakeskin, both in England, in 2009). What makes Radnóti so special? Was he well known at home before the Holocaust?



Thomas: He was hardly known anywhere before his murder at the age of 34. His last poems describing his experiences in a slave-labour camp and a *Deathmarch* was found on his body in a mass grave after the war. The poems recording the chaos and brutality of the Holocaust in magnificent classical metre have made him a beloved national figure in Hungary, despite the current upsurge of anti-Semitism prevailing in that poor country.

David: Radnóti acknowledged his Jewish origins but rejected what he termed his 'race and blood and roots', much like Franz Kafka. Why do you think he did that? And did the Holocaust make Radnóti and others like him more aware of their Jewishness?

Thomas: Hungary was among the first in the modern world to emancipate its Jewish population in the 19th century. Many Jews responded in an enthusiastic wave of assimilation. This was part of a Central European trend that in previous generations embraced such quintessentially Jewish pre-Holocaust masters as Kafka, an alienated Jew, and Heine, a Christian convert.

Radnóti also converted to Catholicism. He was shot wearing a white armband identifying him as a Jewish-born Christian. There is nothing in his surviving poetry to suggest that his clearly anticipated fate had shaken his sincere religious conviction.

But a retrospective view of the Holocaust has given the survivors food for thought. Some

have recovered and defended the land of Israel. Some have re-built Budapest as a vibrant Jewish cultural capital. Some have sought safety by burying their racial/cultural identity even deeper.

A foulmouthed, young, racist Hungarian politician has just learned that he is a Jew – a fact hitherto kept from him by his loving family of Holocaust survivors. He was of course booted out from his party. He went to share his astonishment and grief with a leading Hungarian Hasidic Rabbi of the same age. The rebel and the rabble riser had lots in common. For the rabbi too had discovered his own, similarly concealed Jewish identity only at the age of 12...

David: András Mezei, another poet you have introduced to the West (see *Christmas in Auschwitz*, Smokestack Press, England, 2010), is still unknown in my country. Please describe him.

Thomas: Mezei, who died aged 78 in 2008, is as important a poet as Radnóti, but very different. I first met him in a post-war camp run by a Socialist-Zionist movement then called *Dror Habonim* for Jewish children recovering from the trauma of the Holocaust. We were also being prepared for emigration to Israel on board rickety ships like the famous *Exodus* running the British blockade.

Mezei went, but eventually returned to become one of the most prominent poets and literary journalists of the country. He put his faith into building a just society free of racial, religious and class prejudice, under the Communist banner. We found ourselves in the opposite camps of the 1956 revolution. I met him again after the collapse of Communism when he became an influential publisher. He commissioned me to translate his Holocaust poetry, I joined the editorial board of his literary/political journal and we became close friends. The poems are based on his personal experiences and subsequent interviews as well as medical records and post-war testimonies. They combine the startling immediacy of an injury just inflicted with the controlled passion and attempted detachment of the professional observer.

David: We have already heard about your next collection (*The Survivors: Holocaust Poetry for Our Time*, to be published by Smokestack in 2014). How will it be different from the thousands of other books on this topic published everywhere as the world struggles to look beyond the Holocaust?

Thomas: This book will be about life, not death. “Caution” will be included in it and probably “The Name.” It will be an anthology including György Faludy, my teacher most of my life and my close friend towards the end of his, an outstanding 20th century poet equal to his beloved Lorca, Mandelstam and Yeats. And there will be such other masters as Emőd, Forrai, Gergely, Heltai, Karinthy, Láng, Székely and Szép, who are yet to claim their rightful place in the bookshops, lecture halls and libraries of the West.

Their poetry may perhaps help the post-Holocaust generations – the descendents of the perpetrators, and of their victims, and of the passive bystanders – to face our dreadful joint inheritance together and learn to heal the wounds of the past.

Poems by Thomas Ország-Land – discussed in this interview:

CAUTION

In Memoriam Jaroslav Ježek

“Our civilizations
have sown new notions
of treating unwanted
populations,”
thus reasoned
a seasoned
child of Auschwitz,
thus entreating
you, and the future:

“You’ll lose all you own.
Even life is on loan.
Don’t cry. Be cautious.
Be canny. Be clever,
and never, but never,
but never forget it.

And, boldly
hold up your head
... while you’ve got it.”

THE NAME

“Hunt down the killers and respect the innocence of their offspring”
– *Randolph L. Braham*

My name is Eichmann the son, I’m not the monster.
You may relax your face. I am your age
and you and I both share my father's shame.
D’you think you’re innocent? I’m responsible

for my father's deeds just as you are for yours.
I am condemned by my inheritance,
the trains and Auschwitz. So is all humanity.
I must embrace my place and role, and bear
my name for I can rearrange the past
no more than you can change your skeleton.

He looked like me, though younger. He was warm,
he loved his children, women, fun and flowers.
He obeyed in full the exterminating state
and thought in terms of tame processing quotas.
Perhaps he managed to avert his eyes
from the purpose of the national enterprise – perhaps he was,
like his entire nation, hysterically drunk with fear and hatred –
or, like me, he thought he must fulfil his role –
He is condemned for lacking exceptional courage.

And did he love the stench of burning flesh?
He was a man of the stopwatch, not the gun,
an author only of railway timetables,
an architect of ovens only and chimneys, a planner translating
the people's will to kill into detailed instruction,
a man of industry only doing his job.
He thus extended human experience by learning
to channel rage and passion into detachment
and patient dedication to a purpose
beyond a person's modest comprehension.

Today we know we all need exceptional courage,
and all of us must answer for our souls.
I am a German, an heir to Goethe's poetry,
a European, heir to the dream of Erasmus,
a Christian, heir to the faith of Jesus the Jew.
I am condemned to keep alive the name
that must confront humanity
with our fearful capacity for suicidal detachment
as well as love. My role is to enhance
our common inclination to choose survival .

Robert Hertner

We were most honoured by having Robert Hertner as a Trustee of Survivors Poetry for a short time before his tragic demise. He is a writer of significance (witness his novel *Cull*, reviewed in PEN #41, copies of the limited edition are available from Dave Russell);

Robert had a dynamic understanding of all aspects of the media, and a solid background in PR. His appointment was most timely, when Survivors' Poetry was desperately concerned about its own survival because of withdrawal of funding.

The funding situation is no longer quite so desperate, but none of us can afford to be complacent. Potential funders would have quite a strong case in saying that the volume of Survivors' activity is not commensurate with funding sought. That volume must be increased, as a matter of urgency.

With this aim in view, Robert suggested stunning low cost/high profile projects and indicated means of improving and developing current projects. He also identified simple improvements in the website such as the "donate" function which does not allow for the 'tax free' (UK tax deductible/assignable) donation in a user friendly way. He has made innovative suggestions to solve these problems. With luck, these can be retrieved from his laptop database and implemented.

The late Mr Hertner has associates who are skilled at fundraising. They would merit appropriate remuneration 'on spec' and a commission basis as we do not have the funds employ/pay them directly.

Survivors Poetry must try to realise his vision of a 'viral' and 'global' organisation.

Dave Russell

Current Activities

a) Survivors Press and Mentoring Scheme Publications

These must be far more dynamically promoted. Has at least one major writer emerged in recent publications? Faber & Faber have had a high public profile for their mentoring scheme. So Survivors (who, I think, pioneered the idea) should push for comparable publicity. At positive step has been taken in this direction via our Essay Board site and by our collaboration with Colin Hambrook at Disability Arts

b) Poetry Express Newsletter

This should become global in reference, radiating from the London hub, but not confined to London. Dynamic investigation of kindred organisations, nationwide and worldwide, should elicit worldwide contributions. With recent technical innovations, articles can be enhanced by videos – illustrations can now be animated. If contributors, and authors/artists reviewed, are given full individual coverage on the search engines, more browsers could be directed towards the newsletter as a whole.

c) Notice Board

There is scope to improve navigability on this site. There should be, placed prominently immediately obvious, a 'donate' facility, such as is used by the Red Cross Charity. The Mission Statement needs to be rewritten so as to make it more engaging.

d) Vimeo Site

This could be developed into a global broadcasting channel. In addition to Hugh Ellacott's material, there is a large amount of Survivors archive material which merits posting, which could be vastly augmented by thorough circularising of poets/musicians/artists to promote their pamphlets, books and CD – perhaps to be supplemented by a Skype facility, whereby participants on line could do 'on the spot' live poetry and musical performances, plus get an instant feedback/reaction. Contact should always be properly developed with those who come to survival events with their own digital recording equipment; this will help to extend the archive

e) Workshops

These should be formalised and fully publicised. There are at least two published writers, with a fair level of recognition, who are keen to do this. More sustained, dynamic approaches should be made to Libraries and Arts Committees, nationwide, and to such organisations as Poet in the City, for conjoint programmes which would raise Survivors' Profile. We need to 'think bigger' in terms of venues, enhanced publicity, and pushing ourselves as components of larger programmes (organised in the manner of Poet in the City).

f) Monthly Events at the Poetry Cafe and Tottenham Chances

The Poetry Cafe continues to attract good audiences. Many artists featured at both the Poetry Cafe and Tottenham Chances are well known and have important connections in the literary and musical fields. These connections should be maximised via their press releases, videos etc. to show that our venues are vitally 'on the hub' as far as current talent is concerned – something which could be developed in the Newsletter Editorial.

Audiences at Tottenham Chances have tended increased of late. The centre itself is a hive of activity taking which offers potential for collaboration with Survivors to make Chances into a really thriving venue. There is also some video equipment, which could be used to make imaginative backing for spoken word and musical performances.

Newsflash: Mentee **Wendy Young** has taken full advantage of the facility offered by Colin Hambrook at Disability Arts. See: www.disabilityartsonline.org.uk/Survivors-Poetry

Proposed Projects to Attract Fundraising

- * A subscription/donation scheme related to the newsletter and the vimeo/broadcasting channel.
- * Fully Comprehensive canvassing, from chugging to venues and outdoor events to global outreach on the www from LONDON. We must always remember the years of voluntary effort made by Joe Bidder, that laid our foundations in the early 90s. These principles must be emulated by current Survivors. The enhancement of current projects and the development of new ones would be an exciting platform, as a basis for fresh grant funding bids.

Mission and Vision

We have The Power of Positivity

Our Vision is a world which celebrates the creative expression of survivors through poetry. Our Mission is coordinating artistic activity; publishing and promoting poetry by artists and survivors; supporting and developing survivor poets and establishing communication networks; challenging and changing the social and cultural definitions of poets and poetry; making and developing connections between creativity and mental health

Survivors Poetry & Music exists to provide a creative support platform for Survivors of Mental and Physical Distress and Trauma, embracing, assisting and encouraging those who have been hospitalised, those personally close to them, and those altruistically concerned for them. We believe that their discovery of their own creative powers in the course of suffering, treatment and recovery – the assurance that they have a voice – can enable them to refocus more positively on the world. We provide a vital (interactive) intermediary area between institutions and the outside world, facilitating their readjustment to normal life through publications, recordings and readings. Through workshops and our newsletter, we provide a supportive critical framework for Survivors' efforts. A significant proportion of the work which emerges has positive literary value, by any critical and academic standards. It is our intention to break down category barriers in creative expression

Survivors Poetry, a registered charity, has some support from the Arts Council and the like. But in view of the current economic climate, cuts always loom menacingly on the horizon in spite of recent improvements in the funding situation. For Survivors Poetry to be assured of its survival, support is vital from all Survivors and all sympathetic parties.

Our Strengths

- * Based in the nerve-centre of London, we are an outreach organisation
- * Our contacts must be fully nationwide, and progress towards being fully global
- * **Please reach out to us, so that we can reach out to you!**

Make regular donations so we can give back to you!

Celia Potterton
David Russell



Where We Are At

Survivors' Poetry is a London-based national arts charity that works to support, promote and publish the poetry of people who have been through, or are currently in, the UK's mental health system.

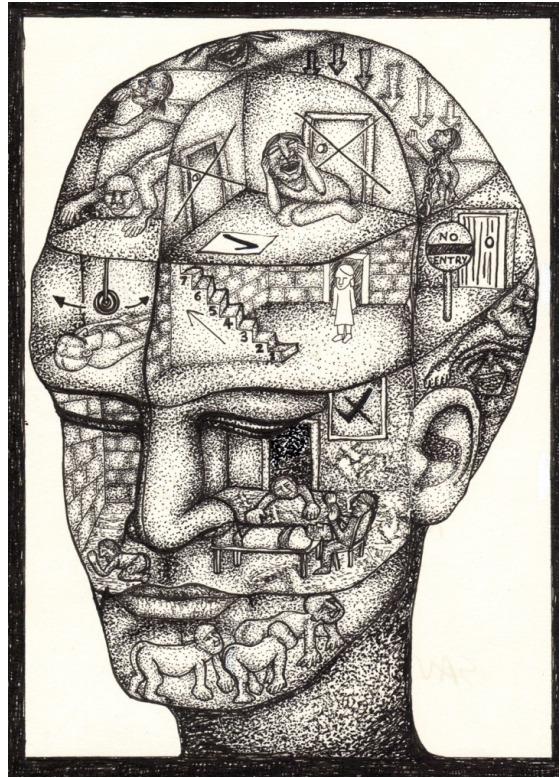
We work with 'survivors' of psychiatric illness, drug addiction, sexual abuse, and mood-altering medication. Many of our clients have experienced the dark end of life in psychiatric hospitals, prisons, rehabilitation units, or counselling centres; all are trying hard to get their lives back together again.

We believe that survivors of mental distress have a unique perspective on life and that by using poetry as a means of self expression, are able to take control of what and how they feel about their internal world and the world around them. Thus they find a vehicle which can enable individuals to cope with and survive the daily challenges of living with mental illness.



Outside the Mental Institute by Colin Hambrook

THOUGHTS



Sins of the Fathers by Colin Hambrook

Sometimes we feel uncertain and unsure of everything,
Afraid to make decisions – dreading what the day will bring,
We keep wishing it were possible to dispel all fear and doubt,
And to understand more readily what life is all about

We feel so lost and lonely, so tired out and confused,
It's not just a state of mind though, our bodies feel bashed and bruised,
They say, "Be strong for your family!" or "Remember how lucky you are!"
Oh please don't make us feel more guilty; for we've pain enough by far.

Broken legs are more visible; the discomfort's there to see,
But if it's not obviously physical – such as depression or M.E.
The person may look healthy with no outward sign of pain,
But inside they are aching with fatigue, guilt and shame.

The people with these illnesses are the ones who won't say "NO",
Who go to the aid of others – active, always on the go.

But one thing about these folk – they're seldom heard complaining,
Because the nature of their ills might be considered feigning.

So please don't jump to judge us and say rather martyrly,
"Oh I just have to struggle on; bed is not the place for me",
"We all get tired sometimes, can't lie down at every whim",
Implying we are weak willed and enjoying being grim.

They think we are looking for sympathy and say, "It's all in the mind",
"You need something else to think about; new interests you must find",
"Keep going and you won't feel tired", Oh give us all some credit,
This type of attitude upsets me so that this bit, "*****" I had to edit.

They don't see the struggle we face to overcome,
Everyday simple chores which seem so easy to some,
But there are days when even lifting the kettle or walking from room to room
Takes such physical effort – honestly, there's more life in an old broom.

To know how active we once were seems so long now in the past,
Just a few will know the problems of everyday routine tasks.
These people suffer in Silence saying little of their plight.
Few will ever know, as I do, fatigue felt not just at night.

A fatigue which sleep does not allay;
You wake shattered every day.
This is a real illness of chemistry
Not just some mood swing from which one can snap free,
Feeling sorry for ourselves is not par for the course,
Though others just might think so – their opinion of course.

Someone is always caring although at times that's hard to do!
It's the quietness or their sharing that will mean so much to you,
True friends in times of trouble are the ones, who are sincere,
Who don't mind the tears and self-doubt, because they understand your fear.

Your energy will at last return, your thoughts once more be clear.
Don't give up just yet; you'll lose that awful fear.
We gain one thing from experience
Of an illness, which has shattered,
Our 'good days' are used to their fullest, and not carelessly scattered,

You will emerge from this much stronger and more understanding too,
Of others who in times of trouble may need you – YES YOU!!!
When you see somebody quiver, PLEASE curb the urge to say,
“Come on pull yourself together”, because this could be YOU someday

© 1988 Wilma Robertson

Featured Artist

Colin Hambrook has 20 years experience as a manager/ editor/ researcher/ sub-editor for a variety of web and print based disability arts and mainstream publications. He established DAO Ltd (www.disabilityartsonline.org.uk) in 2004 and has striven towards a vision for the journal as a place which publishes professional arts writing, arts media and discussion, giving a voice to arts practitioners who identify with disability and the issues which underpin arts practice from a disability perspective.

As an artist he is currently embarking on *Knitting Time* – an exhibition and poetry collection exploring the relationship between grief, psychosis and fundamentalist religious belief to be published by Waterloo Press. The book and exhibition will be on show at Pallant House Gallery, Chichester from 8 October – 3 November 2013.

In the early days of *Survivors' Poetry* he co-edited and contributed to *Under the Asylum Tree* (Survivors' Press 1995). *Knitting Time* [ISBN 978-1-906742-65-2] is his second illustrated poetry collection.

To find out more please go to www.knitting-time.com



WELCOME TO SOUTHWARK ASSOCIATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH

After fifteen years of high-profile activity as a leading user-led mental health organisation, "Southwark Mind" has ceased to exist as it was previously known. We have now reverted to our original, constitutional name "Southwark Association for Mental Health (SAMH)." This has been registered as a new charity, and as a company limited by guarantee.

Three of Southwark Mind's ongoing projects – Southwark User Council, the Women's Forum and the Hearing Voices group – are now under the management of the newly constituted "Lambeth and Southwark Mind (L&SM)." The formation of L&SM allows the pre-existing projects of both Lambeth Mind and Southwark Mind to continue under one management structure, streamlining management resources.

Southwark Mind's ongoing BME project, Kindred Minds, is now managed by Social Action for Health, a well-respected charity whose headquarters are in Tower Hamlets. However, Kindred Minds' offices remain in Cambridge house, adjacent to SAMH's offices, and we hope their activities will continue to be documented and advertised in this newsletter.

All of these projects are continuing their activities in much the same ways and in the same premises as before. While the reconfigured management structure has been necessary to ensure the projects' continued survival and success, we do not expect the changes to have any significant impact on the way that they are run, and how service users experience them.

Although much is still to be discussed and worked out, it is envisaged for now that SAMH will become a grass-roots campaigning organisation, free from some of the restraints involved with more mainstream services provision and management. We remain based in Cambridge House in Camberwell, and we also hope to continue the popular magazine "Southwark Mind Newsletter," under the new name "Southwark Mental Health News." We are hoping that the newsletter will, in the future, evolve as a resource which will detail and publicise all and any decent user-led activities and projects working in Southwark, regardless of who manages them. We also hope that the magazine will continue to be a lively space for debate and information, and that it will promote our creative talents in the form of artwork, poetry, news, views and reviews. We also hope that it can be a focus for campaigning about the issues that affect us.

All of Southwark Mind's members will now be invited to become members of SAMH, and we also hope to attract new members. Sent with this issue of this magazine, there is a simple form for you to fill in and return to us so that you become a member of the newly constituted group.

In the near future, we will be organising SAMH's first general meeting, where we hope new people will become involved in steering the charity. As a limited company, we now have new safeguards in place allowing people to be trustees/ management committee members without being at risk.

We look forward to being involved with, and stimulating what we think will be positive developments in user-led services, activities and campaigns in Southwark and indeed beyond, and we hope that you will want to be involved!

Robert Dellar

Jehovah's Witness

We knocked the doors up the street
My mum and me on our feet.
She'd peddle the Witness mags, a smile
to get the devil riled.

Told the punters she was God
come to save them from their lot.
The Brothers said it was a sin;
a woman pretending to be Him.

The Church showed us all the door;
preached Satan had us within his claw.
With a pact of silence they threw us out,
as the Dark Lord's Messengers of Doubt.

Mum, she lost her marbles then,
made enemies of God and men.
A psychiatrist came to leech the truth,
interrogated me to find his proof.

Got me on my childhood bed
Got inside my frightened head
promised a cure with a sad, sad smile,
and led mum away; his mouth full of bile.

Tortured her with electric shocks;
blanked her mind with their dark black box
broke her back and damned her life
condemned her to endless strife.

Injections and drugs; a slow, slow death
thinned blood and shallow breath.
He sent her mad, stopped all the pills;
each cure a curse, a curse that kills

Down she sank into psychosis
With no redeeming diagnosis.
After twenty years a heart attack;
her final journey into dawn's grey-black.

Colin Hambrook

Breathing In

(For Kreaen)

You led me to a field of breath
with all its intricate possibilities
for addressing the quandary
of being alive; this forever moment
forever here, forever gone.

I followed your promise of liberation
down through the rhythm of breath,
absolved by its motion from the nostrils;
into the lungs and further
to the depths of the belly; the centre.

You never learnt to breathe with kindness;
sadly, fell into dangerous cavities
made foolish by a cool intelligence;
and a weapon-like facility for reason.

Years later you said you had never been
loved
in the way that I loved you:
a pasture ripe for forgiveness
straining for air under an implacable sun.

Colin Hambrook

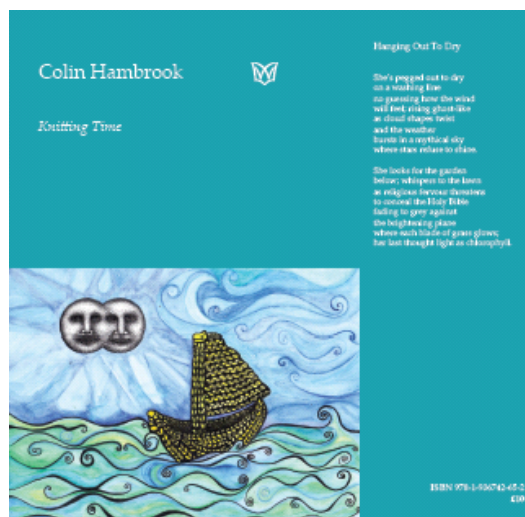


Knitting Time

Colin Hambrook

Waterloo Press, 2013

ISBN 978-1-906742-65-2 £10.00



In the words of Ivan Riches, “Hambrook really does take the reader on a personal and painful family journey through three generations with strong yet careful guiding hands.” This collection centres on Colin’s mother – a Jehovah’s Witness who considered herself to be a god, for which she was psychiatrically committed – graphically illustrated in *Jehovah’s Witness*. The nightmarish poetics are punctuated by equally powerful pictures, and counterbalanced by a prose account of Mrs Hambrook’s life.

Part I

All Along the Watchtower fuses Dylan’s song with the Jehovah’s Witnesses magazine. It is rooted in the political crises of the Sixties, which ‘tipped the scales’ for Colin’s mother. *Dirty Linen* depicts Colin’s parental roots during and after

World War II. *Judgement Day* indicts institutional religion, which treats children as ‘imps of Satan. The boy and girl enjoy Judgement Day ‘outside religious walls’. In *The Invention of Childhood*, a ‘war baby’ grows up as bomb damage and old relics recede.

Unknitting – the theme of knitting dominates this collection, and Colin’s paintings – literally with knitting as a meditative activity, and figuratively, knitting together past experiences.

Furniture For a Room of Loss and Mourning – nostalgia about a dilapidated parental abode. An abandoned piano is ‘playing/an out-of-tune silence’. *The Mirror That Refused To Look Back* gives post-mortem perspective to a crumbling home. *Death and Rebirth* centre on Colin’s own anxieties about immortality: he was ‘mailed to the dark side of the moon . . .’ on ‘. . . a journey with no beginning or obvious conclusion’.

Part II

Freedom resembles a gloss on the legend of expulsion from Paradise. *Dream of an Impossible Knitter* knitting describes the human condition – ‘the weft and weave and what of a life . . . pulling the edges of the universe/back under themselves . . . leaving a trail of family’. *The Call of the Ancient* emphasises knitting as a means of controlling thoughts and a stimulus for self-improvement. *Knitting Time* penetrates the mind of someone truly anguished, inhabiting ‘a raw time’ where ‘Hell takes over’. Her hope lies in ‘the knitting vessel/carrier of her soul into the living land’.

When the Scissors Cut Her Sky encapsulates the tensions of ECT or a lobotomy: ‘. . . it was not her personality that split//but lightning fissures/that invaded her psyche with meanings/beyond the gates of the imagination.’ Set adrift in the cosmic elements “she’d navigate celestial waters/searching the horizon for the soul’s resting place.”

The Music Box – for Colin’s mother, this apparatus has magical powers – it ‘releases gifts wider than madness’. Satan has designs on its clockwork. Sleep drives Colin’s mother out of her body. *Outside the Mental Institute* suggests a long-term patient’s dependence on the factory ‘where dreams are made’, while long-term memory – ‘spills seamlessly into far-off intimacies’. *Malkuth* is a term from the Kabbala: “The word Malkuth means ‘Kingdom’, and the Sephira is the culmination of a process of emanation whereby the creative power of the Godhead is structured and defined as it moves down the Tree and arrives in a completed form in Malkuth. Malkuth is the sphere of matter, substance, the real, physical world.” I do not understand the significance of the flight from Malkuth during the culling season. Is this a cull of birds in the tree?

Nineteen Eighty-Four – I was introduced to Orwell’s book during my teens, and experienced its deep impact on the public; later I experienced the real 1984. I felt that some of the book’s prophecies were realised. Colin’s mother somewhat resembles a truly oppressed citizen of one of those monstrous superstates. Some psychiatric hospitals are totalitarian states in microcosm. But she stubbornly struggles to sustain her independence of

mind: “She shakes buckets despite the Thought Police . . . her mind evades *prolefeed*.”

Hanging Out To Dry – Colin’s mother is, metaphorically, pegged out on a washing line, totally exposed to the elements.

The Watchtower Revisited

This is Colin’s prose account of his mother’s life; she was 9 years old at the beginning of World War II. She made an ‘advantageous’ marriage, and moved from a close-knit inner city community into the suburbs. This caused some problems of adjustment. The year 1958 was traumatic for her: she delivered Colin on her own, without a midwife, and got involved with Jehovah’s Witnesses. That coincidence had profound, far-reaching effects. Colin’s father eschewed the sect, but Colin himself suffered severely from accepting their doctrines until well into his teens.

In 1967 he was led off the ‘straight and narrow’ by *Sergeant Pepper*. Mum’s fervour turned into her believing she *was* God. This led to rows with neighbours and her committal to mental hospital. She was arbitrarily administered ECT, which severely damaged her memory. Then mum’s obsession with knitting developed: her knitting patterns “. . . were ‘univexes’ – new worlds in other universes where we would find safety when ‘the end’ finally came.” Colin sustained his sanity through his art, and subsequently music – the challenging qualities of punk. For him, Siouxi Sioux’s song *Jigsaw Feeling* ‘became a mantra for controlling the voices’. One phrase from this strikes me as poignant: “The impulse is quite meaningless/*In a cerebral non-event*”.

Colin's mother always encouraged his creativity. Her situation deteriorated under the destructive influence of medications, and she died aged 60.

Part III

“Part III is about my own experience of psychosis. There was a blurring of ego boundaries between my mother and me from when I was very small and I carried that sensibility with me into adulthood.” (Colin's Comment)

Bird Song – the birds are a benign presence at the hospital, in harmony with patients' and friends struggles to sustain sanity. *Beyond Grief* shows the search for transcendental vision through observation of everyday things – house spiders ‘tell of a mountain-top outside time’. *Am I Jesus?* I took this to be a description of mum's feelings about being a God, but according to Colin, it “Actually describes my own wrestling with feelings of being a God that were projected onto me from a young age.” Being stretched out under the psyche-camera can certainly convey a sense of crucifixion. *Dreaming the Absurd* – one can sometimes feel like an amorphous entity “. . . my atoms are dust/and I am a memory . . .”

The Meaning of Psychosis – that condition has affinities with cosmic vision – “. . . that yearning to see again/the first splitting cell re-enacting its magic.”

In *Blue Black Feather*, the poet assumes the persona of a Jay bird, in fear of crows (with affinities to ‘jay walkers’?) and wanders, lost, round the streets of London.

A policewoman apprehends and cautions him. *Drowned* – could the ‘suicide bird’ be a human being? Her story ‘. . . flown on some black feathered arm’ – is this a reference to a carrier pigeon? Human beings have bird essence and vice versa.

Ontological Security – bleak interfaces of institutional buildings, purportedly set up to support and sustain, but often seeming to have the opposite effect: “. . . those halls of no conscience,/that breed paperwork . . . a resistant wind pushes doors/closing on sanity . . .”

Blind Light – the psychotic's cosmic vision ‘. . . it's as if the cap on this moment/were released and everything . . . were to all come rushing into grasp’. Then some human physics: ‘. . . being made of atoms . . . blending into that curve of blind light/exploding the culpable ego . . . the trajectory/of the self-reflective glass . . .’

Breathing In – ‘Kreaen’ is a ‘Low-output writer and Mental patient’ based in Brighton who seemed to have been done Yoga practice with the poet. Although he “fell into dangerous cavities” and had a “weapon-like facility for reason,” he is also deeply compassionate.

“Sadly Kreaen committed suicide this summer 2013 – although the poem was written late last year. We had been lovers when we were in our 20s and he introduced me to meditation and yoga – but was a victim of a form of Catholicism from which he never recovered. We shared a struggle to overcome our religious upbringings.” (Colin's Comment)

Part IV

“Most of these poems are about my son who has been in and out of hospital for the past five years – since he was 17 years old.” (*Colin’s Comment*)

Man Suit – the suit belonged to someone (now deceased?) who inspired the poet: “All-consuming, you transformed lives;/brought the seemingly impossible within reach . . .” In his quest, the poet became a new Medusa: “I grew several heads in a bid for reinvention;/searching each face for self-belief as a father.”

The Joys of Fatherhood – an infant saves a lost soul – “I became solid/at the touch of your tiny hand . . . I held you closer than infinity”.

Playing Soldiers – probably the most complex poem of this collection – a fusion of Physics and Biology: “The self splits, like some strange amoeba,/part beast, barely human.” Awareness of ‘glazed truths spirited by a thousand years of war’ strengthens the subject’s willpower.

Dedication to Poetry expresses struggles to verbalise: “Words hang, limb-like . . . Often invisible they hide . . .” It then defines poetry’s function: “It isn’t the content that counts, but whether it allows you in/to feel the quality of the chords’ vibrations.”

Where the Sins of the Fathers Begin To Fade – fatalistic/deterministic: we act on impulses determined by chattering angels. While other poems proclaim faith in free will, this one stays with the victim: “I melt

into the ridiculous man with hands made of water.”

Anticipation – the tension of the poet’s awaiting the arrival of someone supremely important pervades his metabolism: “. . . Flesh turns liquid, flows from the bone/to the rhythm of an insensible beat.” The potential meeting evokes the common lot of humanity – “The road moves to a pulse of countless generations/calling a tombola of genes into play.”

A Bird Out of Hand – parents may never succeed in attuning to the child mind. A nine-year-old sinks into drug addiction and mental distress. “The poem is dedicated to my young daughter who has had to grow up fast in a difficult climate intensified by psychosis and drug addiction. It is her brother’s drug addiction with which she has had to come to terms.”

This collection, which spans three generations (with truthfully blurred boundaries, covers a broad emotional spectrum.

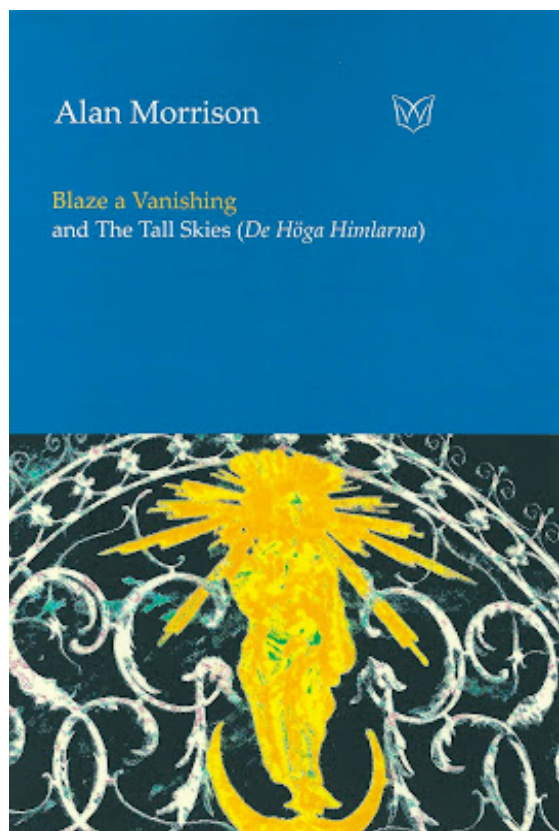
Colin fulfils his premise: “The poetry takes images from specific hallucinatory experience and gives those moments a metaphoric sensibility.” It has what Alan Morrison calls a ‘proletarian spontaneity’ – combined with erudition and a solid grasp of the sciences. It has an admirable ‘double perspective’ of social and historical awareness, and the central nucleus of the interior of the sufferer’s mind.

Dave Russell

Blaze a Vanishing/The Tall Skies (De Hoga Himlarna)

by Alan Morrison

Waterloo Press 2011; 978-190674259-1



This may well be the most significant Swedish based work to be published since Bloodaxe brought out its collection of Tomas Transtroemer's poems in translation. In the two parts of this work, Alan Morrison explores his love of things Swedish, and uses Sweden as a critical yardstick to evaluate contemporary England. Sweden is appreciated for its unpolluted environment, its egalitarian social structure and excellent Welfare services, the abundance of great writers and thinkers it has produced. Its progressive attitudes contrast sharply with Britain's island mentality. In the introductory *The Tall Skies*, he really does consider Sweden a Utopia – unlike 'that ragtag land' – 'This sprawling land's no truck with strata . . . No room for small talk in the long country of runic signs . . .

no appetite to fetishise/Vain individuals' arrogated talents'. Throughout the collection, there are superb poetic landscape paintings, supremely capturing a sense of spatial expanse and a full spectrum of blazing colour.

The Dala Horses celebrates the skill of Swedish wood carvers, which Alan sees as epitomizing the egalitarian essence of Swedish society: 'Togetherness that can't be/Lassoed and broken in with stirrups of Class, nor gripped with/Wrangling saddles of ermined deference'. The woodcarving craft is celebrated for its individuality and its variety. The theme of woodcarving continues with *Bitter Almonds* and *Dalecardian Carpentry* – this time figurines of humans, with special respects to the craftsmanship of Trygg, who brilliantly animated pieces of wood.

Postcard from Norrköping celebrates a textile town, a model environment: "Swedes share civic spaces, both the pleasure and the upkeep;/Hold municipalities in common . . . Nature and urbanity are both to share". Sweden is idealized, as being opposed to 'the plastic aspiration/Of the American Dream. He honours the traditional Swedish Working Class, but claims that the Swedish Welfare State has made the country classless and egalitarian.

Strykjarnet: An industrial museum, described with an incredible eye for architectural niceties – surreal too 'chimneys launched from the water'. I like 'An anthropomorphic weathervane'. On into the magical world of figurines – the Moomins (trolls) – "who loved nature and/Diversity, yet depicted forever on the verge of melancholy". Some fine details of Swedish art and craft detail, which would merit an entire book in its own right. 'The Satirical Floor' refers to a periodicals museum. Fascinating account of the chequered history of the radical newsheet *Aftonbladet*. This is my introduction to the work of satirical

cartoonist Karlsson. Arbete: reflections on optics – “Each place my shadow falls another plants itself,/Casts centrifugally, ever taller, with the intensifying/Light”

Paper Wraps Bone: The poetics of the print shop ant print museum, including ‘pulp spoilage’, and ‘a book that’s been drying for a century or more’. Such exquisite details as ‘page-edges/Calendared with a curvy effect like half-moon icing/On a marble cake . . . naturalist studies of static amphibians shaded in/Obsessions of inked lines by innumerable densities of nib . . . paper-/Slicer, ferocious as an antique Inquisition apparatus’. The antique print shop becomes a metaphor for the poet’s mind: “Something presses in the gammy machine of my head,/Clamps my mind in its vice till it bruises slowly” – a place of ‘indecipherable anti-feeling’. It has the effect of ‘Sublimely numbing ambivalent inhibitions’. Although there is ‘No psychical menace in inanimate things’ he feels some fear, and some impulse to wreck the machinery.

Knoparmoj – photographs of Swedish chimney-sweeps in the early 1900s, a reminder of that country’s harsh proletarian past, of *Inferno* dimensions – ‘Refuseniks of Loki’s fickle gift . . . So to most this daily workplace was a charnel-house in waiting’. A historical flashback, then a survey of their jargon – ‘language of the ravens/Untranslatable to other mortals’. This fell out of use when their material conditions improved; Alan feels regret about its submergence. He cites the terms *pants* and *sneakers* as survivors of this idiom.

Flight of the Albatross – ???????

Moa: The Lone Crow of Norrköping: Moa is the outsider, the leader, the pioneer. This one explores the uncharted areas of the environment, and the inner recesses of the mind. Moa does an intensive survey of

architectural history and industrial archaeology. She perches on a sculpture of an alter ego ‘moulded to an anthropomorphic shape’, and has a ‘bird’s eye view’ of hard, poverty-stricken life in Sweden of old. *Kristina the Crow-mother*: human beings are alluded to in bird imagery. Kristina is a radical free spirit, struggling against the Swedish depression, and against repressive religious orthodoxy. Against the odds, she became a radical writer. *Karl and the Crow-children*: on to Kristina’s guide and mentor Karl Johansson – described ironically as a ‘castaway father’. *Kristina’s Roost* outlines her rise as Sweden’s first female working class novelist.

Her creative development related to, but clashed head-on with, her attachment to the chronically self-destructive Karl. *Flash Harry* – a further tortured involvement with equally wayward literary acquaintance Harry Martinson; Moa had to be hospitalized for depression. She was forced to ask herself “Was her cursed feminism a thorny hem with which/She unwittingly entrapped, then ruined sensitive men?” The answer was firmly in the negative: she was highly supportive of Harry, but he remained perverse. *Moa the Mother of the Swedish* – her marriage (to Harry) ‘withered into wintering’. She became involved with writer Karl Gunnarson; she wrote on – ‘her heart was always tied to hungry women of unemployed/Men’. She could not quite match Kristina, but came very close. Thought-provoking gender concept at the end: “. . . her broom of womanhood/Thrown down . . . the sempiternal neuter of true personality grows . . .”

Oro: The title is an imitation of the call of the cold Norrköping crow, which seems to have the function of mentor and judge – profound ‘astral’ reflection on the nature of inspiration – “It was as if my groundless thoughts had

launched themselves,/Not into flight, but anticipation of flight, suspended/Somewhere vaguely in the atmosphere, glaring down at my/Improvising body anchored by weights; moving, speaking,/Conducting itself routinely, but on automatic pilot;/Neurotic trajectory motored by atrophied thoughts.” There follows a survey of the physical manifestations of writer’s angst – “Nausea/That courses through the bone . . . sensitizing every nerve essential/To surviving, but which, once activated, agitates against/Its own mechanics”; reflections on immortality – ‘. . . there are those living, who wonder if the spirit can last/As far as death . . .’) Reference to Kierkegaard and the *dizziness of freedom*

Strindberg’s Midnight Sweden: Red on Green – This opens with Strindberg’s reflections on the Swedish flag; he thought that the cross should be coloured green rather than gold, but Alan emphasizes the centrality of gold to the Swedish consciousness – the pellucid luminosity of the northern sun. He proceeds to reflect on the concept of nationhood “nations/Are unsatisfied fantasies, demotic compromises between/Legion incompatible utopias.”

Now, Ivar Was A Traveller ????????

The Quiet Immensities – concerning the epic science fiction poem *Aniara*, by Nobel Prizewinner Harry Martinson. In this epic, the earth was atomized, and the spaceship crew expelled from the solar system – “The stranded crew condemned/To eternal reproduction of their endless odyssey./A culture with no history, no hope, only the sordidness/Of boredom, despair, decadence and desperate/Distractions”. *Aniara* was to some extent an allegory of the Hungarian uprising in 1956. Alan certainly extols Martinson’s imagination: “So his fictive feelers/Prickled with trepidations sufficient to build a poetic tension/Bristling beneath the

surface of his stark imagination”. *Aniara* is both politically involved and linguistically experimental: ‘Gilted with semantic mystifications, glossaries/Of neologisms, phantom nouns, strange projected jargons/Of future days’. Martinson is praised supremely as a socialist writer who was utterly true to the imagination, confounding the prejudices of bourgeois literati who considered that socialist, egalitarian attitudes involved ‘cultural deflowering’: “But Martinson’s/Polemical space poem chills in this new century: reads/More as a proleptic metaphor for capitalist atrophy/Of standards once freed from the leash of moral degradation”. He imaginatively captures the essence of being in a space capsule: ‘The imperceptible movement of an air-bubble trapped/In an untouched glass’. The poem trails off into a eulogy of Swedish coffee, the quality of which Alan attributes to that country’s soft water.

Blasting Cap – in memory of Alfred Nobel – duly appreciative.

The Colours of Stockholm – “This is a country not afraid of colour” – Alan gives a kaleidoscopic spectrum – including ‘cylindrical pink brick’ and graphically describes architectural splendours such as Stockholm City Hall. *Infractions of a Camera Eye* is dedicated to Ingmar Bergman. *Autumn Cloudberries* celebrates Swedish vegetation and cuisine – ‘Arboreal beads for the unstrung rosaries/Of dwindling twilights’. Great imagery of struggle with the elements: “Some inoculate themselves against the long dark night/Of winter, by turning from the light before it turns from them” The berries are a metaphor for the human condition: “They are the pilots/Of anxieties; the pallbearers of our agitated bodies, nerves/And deep depressions”. II: startling organic analogy with the psyche: ‘Amorphous dreamscapes/Of replayed traumas captured in ambers of

memory's/Glutinous isinglass'. 'So much of life/Is painted in autumnal hues, amid dark winter chiaroscuro'. The universalisation of colour: 'Spectrums of self-contained tensions . . . Phantasmagorical acrylics of neurotic dreams'. III: tribute to the free thinking of Bergman and Nykvist; light and colour symbolize human endeavour: 'a visual literature of arrested catharses . . . Elliptical penumbras of human pages'. Reference to Yggdrasil – the giant ash tree that links and shelters all the world. Eloquent expression of the 'divided self' – 'We suicidal playthings . . . cloudy vessels of distilled anxieties . . . Our ruptured spirits papered in/Tortured politesse' 'A schizophrenic Scaramouch whittled down by faintly tapped/Taboos'. Alan makes scientific analogies: 'Edged surge of emotional metallurgy; an electric current/Travelling the nervous verge that lights up everything in its path'. IV: Broad historical reference: Vikings of passive civilisation . . . Cutting-room conquistadors/Of the Nordic unconscious'.

'Cinematography/Choreographed through spools of existential poetry'. Alan makes a careful appraisal of Bergman's cinema, with all the reservations about them – "Dismantlement of personality framed in a camera's calloused lens . . . Many have vilified these feverish films as morbid,/Spiritually barren, unendurably intense . . . aghast at such abundance/Of angst displayed against the backdrop of a placid country/So attuned to natural harmony". He mentions Bergman's self-exile from Sweden. In V, he vindicates Bergman's communicativeness: 'the thoughts that dare/Not think their names, committed to grains; catalogued/In elliptically scripted shadow-plays'. The daunting intensity of Bergman's work may be vital in breaking down psychological barriers: "So much of our conscious lives are left uncommunicated . . . The fear of ourselves is/The one last frontier

for us to conquer". VI: Still heavily under the influence of Bergman, Alan explores, partly scientifically, the nature of communication: "The clouding aphasia of awareness and observation./Speech is processed noise; whispers in a foreign tongue./Schizophrenic echoes in the labyrinth of the fluid ear." It ends with a eulogy – "Ingmar the magician, the conjurer . . . As are those harrowing films grainy guides in our wilting times . . . Disembodied from/Sensation, taste, sound. When everything seems unreal,/Yet unbearably profound."

Swedenborg Gardens – eulogy of a truly immortal spirit – "Affections that ruled his heart when mortal now describe his/Numinous looks on the other side . . . And he'd been privy to the mooted Second Coming . . . Under the influence of the music of the spheres he'd communicated/Easefully with the spirits of other worlds . . . In the baroque bowels of reason, rococo calluses of// Science, he hit on immaterial enlightenment."

Swedish Grace – the definition I found is: "A design classic in six colours. This tableware still evokes the same emotions as when it was unveiled at the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930. Louise Adelborg succeeded in conveying the sensation of ears of wheat swaying in the summer breeze." He explores the significance of 'a secular land's ancestral Christianity'. Then a vast array of numerical and architectural symbols, including the Modernist Temple and the 'Resurrection' sculpture of John Lundqvist. Alan's reaction to the latter is deeply heartfelt. "But to me, these striving, stretching figures seem too rooted/To ever be free, grasping for gaps of light, for flight/From off the crushing rock of humanity . . . Dantean shades of marinated suicidal human salmon". II: The purpose of the visit was to honour a ghost in a 'crematorium of trees' – presumably a forested crematorium. III:

Historical perspective – “all the paths we follow/Through our human time are spoors of former odysseys”.

The Large Rust Direction – a celebration of the work of novelist Gustav Hedenvind-Eriksson, one of the first Swedes to write about railroad workers; he spent much of his life working as a lumberjack, and his credo was ‘self-education in everything/Naturally taught: authentic rustication from mental rusting’.

Bastugatan – This is a district in Stockholm, containing historic buildings, which were preserved with a struggle. It is now a hub of creative activity. Alan went there on a pilgrimage to ‘the museum of a proletarian pioneer’. The curator is ‘a living, breathing barrel-load/Of his autodidactic ideals’, an embodiment of the proletarian writer – ‘. . . an artist’s riveted/Head attached to his lumberjack frame’.

Klarabohemerna seems to refer to a Bohemian brotherhood. This section is focused on one Ivar Lo, another distinguished working-class novelist; it makes an excellent survey of the literary scene surrounding Lo. *iii The Primrose Apartment* – ‘the chamber of his (Lo’s) labours’ – ‘mummified tomes’ is an interesting concept, as ‘Old records in sleeves with his image on . . . A dormant black metallic Halda typewriter crouched inertly like an insect husk’. Reference to Dan Anderson, ‘the nation’s mature Chatterton’. *iv The Prosterity-Seeker* – Lo longed for the ‘rootedness of history’ He wrote ‘iron-wrought words . . . He believed that true socialism was grown within’. Hard-hitting social appraisal: “Ivar Lo was Loki of his working class: stole ambrosial/Fruits of imagination from the bourgeois gods and scattered/Them among the common mortals, knowing only quiet/Revolutions in the hearts of people could ever bring lasting/Transformation of the system. Lo also

worked as a stonemason; the rigours of hard physical labour honed his creativity ‘drinking in the sobering /Medicines of torrid labouring’. . . “He would grow his own opportunities/In the furrows of his notebook’s line-ruled fields . . . discover his own villages/Of creative privileges, unpopulated by people but/Inhabited by bristling ideas”. “Like a prophet, he could only/Grow by setting aside those who loved him”. Alan fully acknowledges Lo’s personal shortcomings, concomitant with his writing ability. *Vii The Able Cain* – more of the dark side of Lo, fratricidal complexes and all. Alan is honest about the ruthlessness of the totally dedicated artist: “He could never put down roots for knowing in his soul/They would sprout into human obstacles”. His attitude was vindicated by the sheer depth of his books, which transcended barriers between comfortable bourgeois readers and those struggling with true elemental hardship. Alan uses the imagery of runic stones which would ‘mark milestones for paper travelers, the words of wisdom forming ‘portals into other worlds.

Star boys & angel maids – music now: a ‘choral trance’. There is a survey of religious music, including the celebration of St Lucy, seemingly the last ‘permitted’ Saint to be allowed homage. *Svensk Vanster* is a beautiful panorama of Stockholm, with train journey perspective; on to a museum of Swedish labour history, and the ‘people’s heroine’ Kata Dalstrom. *IV* – celebration of the global impact of Swedish rustic architecture. *V* – a survey of the Land Enclosure Movement and Workers’ Educational Movement in Sweden: “The drooping penis of Sweden was circumcised into/Dessicated municipalities”. Interesting to discover that the set-up of the Swedish welfare state was roughly simultaneous with that of the British one. *VII* – a brief survey of recent developments of the

Swedish and British left, and its increasing marginalization. Alan is treated as harmless now that he no longer brandishes the Hammer and Sickle.

Swedish Folk-Song Suite – Sweden is put into the context of the post-romantic folklore revival. Lovely description of Ralph Vaughan Williams as ‘A rock troll well travelled in ravelling vocabularies/Of Nordic syncopations’. Cross-cultural reference to Gustav Holst, who “wrought his Scandinavian/Mark on the brittle British bark. Wore England as easefully/On his symphonic gown as arch-magician Ralph”. Alan found it so tragic that Holst had such a low estimate of his own work, and went against his transnational spirit through anglicisation; he was quite scathing about *Thaxted*.

II: Blaze a Vanishing

A statement of the universal, corporate nature of utterance: “Our voices are transmitted salvages of ancestors’/Thicketed whispers; oral aggregates of homecoming ghosts./And though our thoughts and choices of words might be our own,/Our elocutions are honeycombed in echoes thrown/Through revenant ventriloquists . . .”. There are several flashbacks to the First World War, and then one to Annie Besant, the 19th Century suffragette, spokeswoman of all aspects of rights, also a visionary, inventor of ‘A parallel thought-world appared in florid eruptions’. Odes to Charlotte Perkins Gilman and T S Eliot.

The Mark opens with a quotation from George Orwell’s *Road to Wigan Pier*, and explores the perpetuation of class stereotyping and social polarization since Orwell’s time. *Terpsichorean Rhapsody* celebrates dancer Nijinsky – ‘the sheer/Power of this rangy Ganymede whom the impresario/Could not possess . . . Each

performance an epiphany . . . ‘ Then an interesting observation: “For poor Nijinsky didn’t actually exist! He was a figment!/Simply a funnel through which all this refulgence crept.” He had ‘no sense of self, only a sense of oblivion/In movement . . . nothing and everything in one’. Alan points out that Nijinsky refused filming ‘to brine/His sublime alchemy of motion in cinematic can’. He preferred mystifying his miracle of movement.

A dedication to W H Auden, followed by an unglamorous, demystifying evocation of Sylvia Plath’s suicide – “That centrifugal negative energy that always beat back her/Frail attempts at becoming something other than a thought-filled/Superfluity of refrigerated flesh . . .” A series of memorials – to Martin Bell, Harold Monro and for dying-too-young working class poet Howard Mingham – ‘anticipated tombs of posthumous/Obscurities’. This is a highly perceptive appraisal of literary aspiration: “Its practitioners . . . itch/For print’s salvation . . . cataloguing/The fossilized rags, brown bones and ceramic fragments/Of buried vocabularies”. Some appropriate acknowledgement of myriad sublime utterances lost to the elements, and the plea ‘Were there ever tsars appointed to preserve the poetry/Of the poor’, indictment of ‘inkhorn Tories, enemies of the promise springing/In the lower orders’. Alan rightly laments the eclipse of independent broadsides and pamphlets by mass circulation publishing. But he takes some hope and consolation from ‘Lingual ingenuities glimpsed through embrasures in/Turrets of establishments.’ ‘The Butchers’ Boys’ outlines working and lower middle class poets who challenged the Establishment’, ‘Hood of Cheapside’ honours the spokespoet of the deprived. Keats is quoted as a breaker of social barriers.

On to the end of the 19th Century: the Yellow Decade refers to the 'Yellow Book', a poetry journal initiated in the 1890s. Then Alan focuses on balladeer and materialist tractarian John Davidson – an alienated, tortured soul – 'A monstrous contradiction, Davidson always swayed/Against the waves'. Recognition eluded him, partly because of his own inclinations. He committed suicide, and had written in his will that 'No word/Of my writing is to appear in any book of mine as long/As the copyright endures . . . It was as if he wished to court obscurity; to kill/His own posterity, but on *his* terms . . .' George Gissing had a truncated academic career, and suffered from his devotion to unstable women. He slowly gained recognition, to be 'rusticated . . . into Toryism'. Alan's account of Thomas Hardy is sound, but has nothing new for me. However, his appraisal of *Jude the Obscure*, vilified in its time, is extraordinarily penetrating: "The only offence committed by Hardy/Was to reflect in fiction how civilization was built on stones/Of historical misconstructions moulded from the bitumen/Of a twisted strain of Christianity that offered no/Salvation . . ." Excellent point in 'The educated complicity in the acceptable sin/Of inequality'.

I am newly introduced to Arthur Morrison: 'Without sentiment, glorification, or preaching, but with complete detachment, Morrison describes the lives of charwomen, pimps, and workers drifting down to destruction; their shabby attempts to retain respectability; and the perpetual danger of slipping into a life of crime for those living in the mean streets of London's East End.' Robert Noonan remains justly famed for *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*. This book encountered extremely adverse reaction at its outset, to become common currency some 50 years later. Alan then covers some fairly familiar territory re W H Davies and Vachel

Lindsay. On to the First World War poets: Ivor Gurney, Isaac Rosenberg, David Jones – the names of Ellis Humphrey Evans, Francis Ledwidge and Simon Evans are new to me. "Other rankers weren't so lucky" indeed. *Verse Wives* is an understated plea for the role of women in that conflict – 'War's bit-part sex who also hailed from bit-part classes'.

Between Two Burnt Book-Ends – the tides of change in the 20s, including the first Labour Prime Minister and the appointment of non-privileged John Masefield as Poet Laureate. During the 30s, the progress of the working classes was somewhat set back by the Depression. Alan mentions the seminal works *Love on the Dole* by Walter Greenwood, and Howard Spring's *Fame is the Spur*. He is critical of the ill-starred idealism of the International Brigade volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, which led to such a tragic waste of life. Working Class poets and writers seem to have been under-represented during the Second World War. The Casual Agents paints a bleak picture of the present – 'the autumn of our welfare state' and the re-gentrification of literary endeavour – honourable exceptions with "Firebrand presses". An indictment of 'pulp reading' tastes and attitudes to 'scroungers'. The final poem *Blaze Away*, looks gloomily into the future – 'Poets will be the first to prioritise sterility . . . forgetting themselves in the clamber to be remembered.' Many poetic efforts have to be in the mind 'in phantom spines of invisible shelves'. The conclusion seems to go to the depths of pessimism – "market/Your mortality, make bonfires from obscurity. Blaze a vanishing". Surely there must be some beacons of light apart from destructive fires?

I had some feeling that this survey of Swedish culture and life, and its British counterpart, might have been better presented as a critical/documentary work. I find a certain

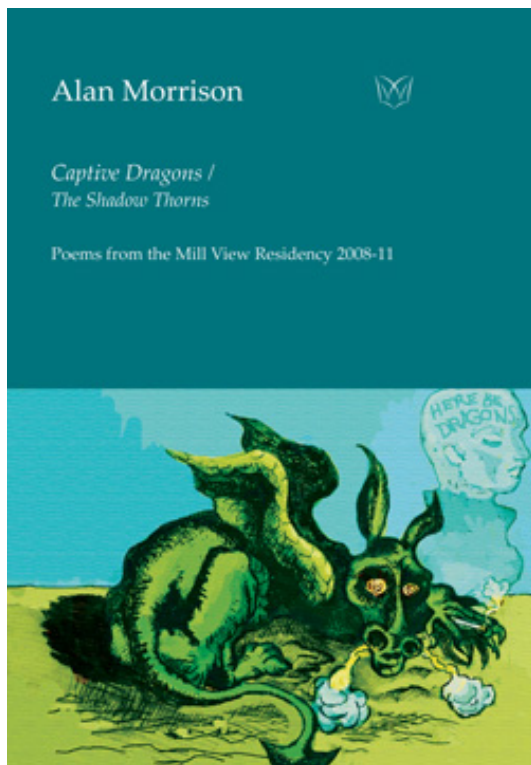
unevenness in the combination. Alan really explores the depths in dealing with the Swedish area; his survey of British literary life does not have the same intensity. Nevertheless, It is a radical step to tackle these issues in poetic form.

Dave Russell

Captive Dragons/The Shadow Thorns,

**Poems from the Mill View Residency
2008-2011, Alan Morrison**

Waterloo Press 2011 ISBN 978-190674329-3 £10



The introductory quote by J P Lovecraft is supremely pertinent: “Men of broader intellect know that there is no sharp distinction between the real and the unreal; that all things appear as they do only by virtue of the delicate individual physical and mental media through which we are made conscious of them . . .”

To describe this work as ‘visionary’ would be an understatement. The first part, *Captive*

Dragons, is a 35 canto epic. I guess that dragons have always been images/personifications of the imagination.

Canto I: Brilliant use of marine imagery (including polluted shorelines) to convey the brutal network of pressures leading to mental breakdown. It refers to ancient Egyptian burial practices, whereby the heart, unlike the brain, is left in its place before embalming.

Canto II: This initiates Alan’s definition of his dragons. As a reflex action, one thinks of the Medusa. But Alan’s are benign – ‘not grotesques of ghoulish legends’. It seems to be a cry for the subjective, against things being ‘neutered/Under scientific spells’. They can also be ‘milky irises’ (shades of ‘snapdragons’?). Through the imagery of their fire-breathing, Alan makes some powerful anti-smoking polemic – ‘spit nicotine to witchflowers . . . dragging dragons incapable of shaking/ Filthy habits, squatters in impolite society’s/Gutted carcasses’

Canto III: Some Dantesque ‘shades’ – ‘Disembodied forms shorn of hair and bone, and a flashback to the mummification practices of the old Soviet Union. A historical panorama embracing Tsarist Russia, King Dido (I always thought it was Queen Dido), a literary one embracing Conrad’s Lord Jim; acute tension encapsulated in ‘buckled and nerve-broken/By testosterone’s inner tearing’. The dragons here are ‘camauflaged’ – all the more menacing for being covert. ‘Scowling tourists of suspect Shangri-Las’ hints at the possible futility of some pilgrimages of enlightenment. Powerful image of degrading flowers by wrapping them in cellophane, and of organic fragility ‘Asd if their atoms crackled with threat of ambushes’, and human frailty in ‘a howling bag of bone and thumped hormone,/Concussed after puberty’s ambient bruising’. Again, footnote explanation of the

personages mentioned here would have been appropriate.

Canto IV: This seems to cry out for refugees and the homeless, through a cycle of mutation and reincarnation – ‘poverty’s sculpting thumbs’ indeed; discarded humans ‘hung out to dry for their soggy clothesline lives’. Alan’s metaphors are really wide-ranging ‘. . . itching nits/deforesting their knotted eyebrows’. The Furies appear to counterpoint the dragons. More Dantesque vision with ‘Imbibing amber broths from vulcanized spoons’, and the sense of a desperate physical struggle: ‘. . . foetal Inferiority,/Aching happiness throbbing out to boredom’.

Canto V: The inferno on the psychiatric ward – ‘these drugged ghosts, these spectres of the living’ – ‘ombrophilous glooms where mushroom-/Thoughts grow in the chronic shadows of others’; broken people to be reassembled like humpty dumpty?. ‘Unarticulated Faustian pacts’ is a great concept, as is the thought of ‘navigable dragons’; we all remember the legendary Puff! A savage indictment of ‘mind-mandarins,/Casual plenipotentiaries of bleeper-honed diplomacies’, and of prejudice against those categorized – ‘these addicts of curved realities; these wrist-striped tigers tilted in/Our symmetries?’, the dubious value of some Job-Creation schemes: ‘Back to bartering for spare parts/In scrapyards for skeleton livings. The ruthlessness of the economy grinds on.

Canto VI: A further expansion of vision: to the obsessed/aware, the ward assumes gigantic, mythic proportions – Pharaonic tombs and Cronos’ quarantine – the inmates are ‘medicated shades’. Varieties of dragons are listed; they are not to be pitied. The reverie is also anchored in reality with “Stub out your pity in the tin-foil ashtray” There is a sense of surgery in ‘Wired to the disconnected world

by emergency/Umbilical cords . . . culpris of fast-hatched acts of eschatology; e sense of the secure ward, removing ‘props for impulsive escapology’. Highly original concept of an ‘anti-instinct’; also ‘the phony halo/Of a rented hallway’s pulsating bulb’. Pharmaceuticals embrace the elemental with ‘stabbing aspirin-pall of insurmountable snow’.

Canto VII: ‘ekphrastic’ is a welcome addition to my vocabulary: pertaining to poetic or dramatic descriptions of works of visual art. Brain-surgeon dragons? ‘. . . embedded/Mental pictures pincer-clinging immovably in/Temporal lobes’; the spuriousness of still photographs capturing transient moments; harassing landlords lurk in the background of patients’ discharges? The dragons are ‘turned suddenly inward . . . as if cornered in cages . . .’ – transmuted to or from the ward staff: ‘Put on suicide watch’. A sense of surveillance, with ‘Eavesdroppers, inertly listening’. *Here the full force of the epic’s title is revealed.* The dragons have become the patients: ‘dangling dragons noosed out of knotted noospheres’. Some suggestion of suicide: ‘dragonic acrobats/Suspended from wires in motionless flights, launched/From kicked-away chairs . . . limply swing from water-pipe/Gallows; these slaughter closets, hastily sanitized, scoured/Of all residues of suicidal sentiment’; toilet imagery in ‘exorcisms to flush them out’.

Canto VIII: this continues with the theme of suicidal dragons, and dragons encouraging suicide: ‘to tempt premature departures/Through lung-bunging paper tubes’ – ‘the sympathetic magic of solvent abuse’ – medication = addiction in its consequences = diabolic potions? Dragons are now reified as medications. ‘Largactil dragons’ is highly incisive. The ‘swooning pendulums of slow-release sedations’ assume the proportions of ‘Diagnostic star formations’.

Risperidone is a new one on me. Then they are ‘transformed into chameleons blending with blurred scenery’, and identified with malignant figures from literature, then ‘capsule-captured dragons /Drugged up to keep bodies and souls together –“ and then, the ultimate question of ‘who are the *real* dragons’ in this gruesome universe where there are no victors. The rest of the canto is in lighter vein. The dragons become colourful and picturesque – including ‘a trilliontricorned Minotaur/Locking horns in labyrinths of honeycomb and coursing echo –’. They make ‘marbled waters of blathering’. But in this babel there is hope: “Out of this cacophony hollers the sounding-board of the soul . . . Vacant noise can rent the palette’s strait-jacket apart”.

Canto IX: Here the dragons are definitely the victims, writhing with Huntington’s Chorea and St Vitus’s dance. There follows an exceptional poeticisation of medical imagery, and analogies with the insect and vegetable worlds: ‘cavernous black butterflies blotting inky x-ray/Wings . . . or greenfly-ravaged/Cauliflowers nibbled rotten’. Then ‘mongrel dragons’ are served slop by ‘gagging Druids’. ‘Neural Valkyries’ is striking. The canto ends with a reiteration of the babel syndrome, without the final optimism of the previous description. First mention of opposition to dragons – ‘St George gallants/With jousting depot lances’. The canto faces the issue of mental illness and the imagination with ‘A grotesque synergy of cognition and neurology’.

Canto X: A limp reassurance of safety – the dragons have been tamed and damped, heavily sedated – humanized as victims ‘Staggered habits domesticated’. Once again the theme of linguistic incoherence, some of it medication-induced: ‘larcgactil tangents/Of untranslatable tongues’, Alan makes an intrepid Joycean exploration of the poetics of

medication jargon – supreme example of ‘cultural scavenging’ from Greek and Latin. The dragons are reduced to commodities ‘scratchcard dragons, vouchered dragons’ etc. Some speculative biology: the theory, apparently propounded by Scottish poet-visionary **John Davidson**, that there was once a conjoint auditory and visual organ, and that the separation of the ear was an undesirable product of ‘malversation’ (bad behavior while in public office///) – evolution’s part-corrupted purpose’. Alan feels that sensitivity has been damaged by the separation of the auditory from the visual – ‘consciousness screened/Through makeshift partitioning’. But the dragons can come to the rescue ‘to articulate the tattered scenery of split/Partitions’. Alan posits the idea of ‘unicameral receptiveness . . . be the clinch/Of schizophrenic thinking’. He weighs up the pros and cons: ‘to lose all sense of balance/But gain more sense of scope’. He criticizes Davidson for playing down the mouth in his unicameral vision.

Canto XI: Some dragons originate in the mind – ‘hatch from shells of fractured narratives’ – ‘break each branch of the togetherness tree’. They have many features of the Hydra, ‘rainbow-serpent/Personalities’. But by virtue of their ‘breaking out’, they attain a complete wholeness – hermaphrodite minds siring/Themselves, pruned of all mechanical containment . . . Primitive spirit-chambers of the undivided Godhead’. A spandrel is a phenotypic characteristic that is a by-product of the evolution of some other characteristic. It is also an architectural feature; Alan uses architectural imagery to describe the human skull and brain. The dragons breathe transitory life ‘then gone, spluttered out . . . consigned to dumb/Rattling, numb pattering . . . Thoughts . . . bitten to eucharistic ruminations’. A reminder that the word ‘dragon’ derives from the Greek *dracein* – to

see clearly, so a dragon is an embodiment of visionary powers. Further enumeration of species of dragon, including ones 'camouflaged as smouldering human/Pylons' (the natural disguised as the man-made?) and 'jolted by volts of surging circuitry'. The dragon essence permeates the printed page, and poetic utterance. It can transcend time. People without the dragon essence are 'puppet-strung scarecrows', Shades with glaring physical defects. People and their utterances are fused as 'random bits of junk bunged together in poetic/Flourishes'.

Canto XII: Androgynous dragons, and dragons genitally disengaged – 'some dragons think their bodies dead,/Or occupied by others, or that they're tenants/Of others' heads . . .' Tea-lapping and tinned soup dragons. Then on to the boundaries of perception: 'reality's a faulty tablet'. There are 'cipher personalities' and 'the wires of social puppetries'. The canto ends with a linguistic exploration of the various aspects of 'Dragonese'. I like the idea of 'animate' writing – 'thick tapering calligraphies/Of Arabic bats, curvaceous scorings of writing-desk/Ravens. Brilliant image of language under stress – 'a dyskinetic/Twitching sign language of irregular grammar'. Final echoes of personal rows past.

Canto XIII: The ward and its patients become metaphors for mythical heroic struggles – 'clipboards for shields, syringes for lances'. But then the ward seems dragon-free – Only latent ones, pale after-traces of mythic beasts', now trivialized and degraded by being confined to art and literature. As dragons are diminished, patients are magnified: 'Sectioned Christs unconvinced of their own resurrections'. Once the captors have tamed the dragons, "they pour them back into the rational/World of others". However, "the captors are the captured . . . slaying dragons means stalling/Transcendental paths to

resurrected realities". Final invocation of the Lawrentian work ethic.

Canto XIV: 'The unemployed shadow poet volunteer'. Those categorized as mad know the truth ; 'we are metaphorical beings'; 'external reality' is a 'grand delusion'. There is some criticism of the 'caring' mentality – "the Church of Reason,/Its symbolic psycho-pomp and pedigree arrogantly praying/For our salvation even though we are anathema". Also criticism of those "who rust words into others,/Project sentiments into empty objects"

Canto XV: The true challenge to poetry; the psychiatric ward is a place where the Coleridgean 'phantoms of sublimity' can be confronted – definitely dragons of the mind 'transported on magical carpets of their own metaphors/When transforming one thing into another' – they have the power of metamorphosis – 'objects for dampened mediums to tap/Anthropomorphically'. . . 'the five sense-impressions'/Titular correspondence with five types of hallucinations'. Some enlightening terminology relating to time, motion and sensation. Linguistics and psychiatry in 'Conscientious projector of metaphor to strip prosaic/Placebos' – with a universalisation of the poetry workshop leader, firstly making exhortations of free verbal improvisation. The resultant efforts can assume gigantic proportions, resulting in such things as 'verb-smorgasbords' and 'furgling A4 *Finnegan's Wakes*'. The second stage is to impose a strict paring down – 'strip out driftwood verbiage', acrostics and 'alphabetical relay races' help to guide this process – all very enlightening for 'the dabblers at the violet end of the spectrum'

Canto XVI: This starts with a survey of poems which have taken root in the public consciousness. Their power is to some extent

indirect – ‘Not so much the words/As the shadows of the words . . . the poems, or their impressions, linger . . . as shadows in sunken gardens of their minds’. The ‘shadow words’ are like vital, organic juices nourishing original expressions. Dragons become poets, and poets become dragons – their poems roll and lick off/Their licking tongues’.

Canto XVII: The poetry workshops continue; apparitions of past literary figures appear. The participants have a dual nature: ‘Doped demimonde by day, but by night, nocturnal scavengers’. A sense of sordidity in ‘Liver-spotted souls bottled in stagnant puberties’.

Canto XVIII: The workshop continues, to embrace ‘All shades of experience and is sublimated shadows’. The participants go into uncharted realms of the imagination – “some trip/Beyond the margins of visible boundaries, abandon/All they know and can no longer swallow for hazier Alternatives . . . they chase a startled darkness haring into distances”. Another Dantesque image – ‘a city sectioned off into/Disinfected ghettos – twinned with Purgatory – for those/Whose symptoms touch uncomfortable taboos’. There follows a catalogue of ‘demented’ visionaries interned in the 18th century, and the mental derangement of Richard II; universality of Mental fever: greatest leveler of cabbages and kings’.

Canto XIX: Sedition and mental illness – ‘politically ill,/Ideologically disturbed’. In this connection, Alan explores sign language and covert modes of communication. “Most dragons are smoke-tongued products of poverty”. Dragons now come to embody the mass of impoverished, marginalized humanity – ‘Dole dragons . . . wings clipped so they/Can’t fly without special permissions from methodical/Clinicians . . .’ housed in ‘damp bedsits for debtors’ prisons

rented/From absent profiteers in howling forests of wolves/And concrete’.

Canto XX: Dragons, by their nature are probably intractable; Alan describes the strained efforts of humanity to bring them to terms; such efforts pale into insignificance ‘rhetorical milligrams, doses of sophism’. He highlights the absurdity of rationalization – ‘Guinea-pigging logarithmic pigments painting minds/By e numbers’; it involves ‘Passion-thinning with Turpentine by interior sedators’. Dragons are also our own negative aspects – ‘. . . shadow-animals/Cast by our own hands and inactions, our collective flight/From ourselves . . .’ Pretentious human beings are indicted as ‘Olympus tamperers’, and their exertion of authority can be a supreme cop-out: “. . . we Neptunes drop the curtains on toiling spectacles/So we can escape from our own captured dragons . . .”

Canto XXI: Dragons as specimens. First reference to an actual, organic species, the Komodo dragon’ though Alan seems deeply suspicious of the motivations of zoological research, as well as of the pseudo-science of phrenology, and ‘thought cartographers’. He seems equally cynical about many explorers, researchers and translators, then goes on to compare fragile, suicidal literary figures with their (physically at least) more enduring counterparts.

Canto XXII: Critique of book learning – “Their stories conclude, because they fail to grab the reader,/Or move them too powerfully to continue, inspire them/To act on a moment’s simple impulse to drift into/Other rooms, beyond books, back to/Illiterate wombs, to states beyond the need for language . . .” Striving for spirituality: “If we have souls, perhaps the purpose of some is to grow/To such overwhelming size they are no longer tenable/For the mind or body to accommodate any more”. The individual is

related to the mass of humanity – ‘perpetuate/The personality through others’ boundless memories’; and in the most profound sense: ‘For if ‘Hell is other people’, then Heaven is absence/Of self”. Final reflections on old age and loss of the sensory faculties.

Canto XXIII: Continuing from the previous canto, some reflections on suicide, posited as a radical extreme of self-reinvention. Alan attacks the ‘classist’ evaluation of suicide, the tendency to glamourise it when it is perpetrated by the rich and famous, while playing it down when it is self-administered by the poor and marginalized – a savage listing of stereotypical labels imposed on the latter, an criticism of well-meaning, token concern – ‘Polly Toynbee copies of politely trooped opinions’. He challenges the theories of Ricardo (Ricardian equivalence suggests that it does not matter whether a government finances its spending with debt or a tax increase, because the effect on the total level of demand in the economy is the same) and of Malthus. He is equally damning of “cupidity Czars/Sweeping vulnerable members under carpet dialectics/With biro besoms’. The canto closes with a panorama of brutalised, anomic, police state ridden ghetto housing.

Canto XXIV: Continuing with the suicide theme, suicide as a spurious striving for the afterlife – ‘To fit infinity inside thumbed heads . . . a route to vague immortality . . . a muddled desire to unbe and be remembered . . . restore oneself through jumpy footage of a mourner’s memory . . . relinquish one’s body/To assert the spirit’s liberty . . . Turn oneself to myth’ – a definition of suicide as the killing of an unwanted aspect of the self, with the illusion of the ‘remainder of the self’ being restored to health. One very astute observation: “There’s a nostalgic streak to suicidal dragons, draws them/Back like homing pigeons to essential destinations”.

‘The ideation of dashed hopes on/Sharp escarpments’ – reference to Suicides’ Bridge in Chicago, which was eventually demolished.

Canto XXV: Suicide Part III, with historical and philosophical perspective – the huge acclaim received by Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton had undertaken this massive project to cure his depression, enacting his subject matter with himself. The cause of his death was officially ‘unspecified’, but Alan thinks he ‘punctually rid/Himself of himself on that pencilled in date’. Naturally enough, there is an acknowledgement of Goethe’s Young Werther. With a survey of spectacular, self-dramatising suicides over the classical period, he perceptively describes such actions as ‘psychic escapology’ “. . . a blade in the vein enshrined the bleed/Of the spirit’s pride”. Seneca is quoted as one who claimed that suicide is a channel of escape, of freedom.

Canto XXVI: Further distinguished literary suicides

Canto XXVII: Outline of the brutalities and charlatan remedies of the early mental hospitals.

Canto XXVIII: After that pessimistic catalogue, focus is on those such as Bunyan and Blake who struggled against that self-destructive tendency, then those such as Richard Dadd, who directed that fatal impulse on others – which led to his internment. On to searing imagery of the asylum – ‘All inmates transported/To phantom Botany Bays . . . flea circuses framed by rattling bedsteads’. He puts these institutions into the context of impoverishment and marginalization – ‘the shabby genteel driven to shivering verges . . . not poor enough for alms but too poor/For private treatment . . . Granted refuge in madhouses masquerading as/Halfway shelters of social clemencies’. He discusses the case of

Paul Tilley Matthews, reputedly the first certified schizophrenic, who showed exceptional technical and graphic skills with his 'Air Loom' invention, and supreme diplomatic skills in his attempts to reconcile Britain and France during the Revolutionary Wars. 'Mental fever, the greatest leveller of cabbages and kings' – some delusion-prone monarchs and dignitaries listed.

Canto XXVIX: A survey of the 'shell shock' syndrome of the First World War, including a reference to the persecution of Dorothy Lawrence, for impersonating a conscript. Many of these traumas "drew scant sympathies/For absence of visible fields of conflict . . . no obvious/Wounds" and the purported concern of the 'caring agencies' was to 'condemn them to psychic/Servitude as barely tolerated cripple-heads. Many of them were cajoled into pittance-paying apprenticeships far below their abilities.

Canto XXX: Reference to a 12th century 'health regime' based on the theory of the four humours, then 'So many of these medicated captives have the watermarks/Of dragons tattooed on their flexing forearms'. The dilemma of the inmates could be that of the mass of 'lost' humanity: "how do we/Know we're not all simply gnats snagged in the fabric/Of one cosmic brocade . . . submerged links caught in a land-wash, carried by/Undetectable currents". Mankind lives in 'a treacherous Archipelago of volatility . . . Taunted by near unreachable psychic fruits". Finally a profound, and scientific, reflection on human self-awareness: "we are not islands, we are organisms, sums/Of ourselves who are not ourselves, just prisms/Pyramiding our perceptions with myriad refractions/Palmed in prayer-arched paradigms".

Canto XXXI: Back to the victims – 'ragged trousered dragons . . . straitjacketed in cryptic

apparatus of metabolic stupefaction'. A searing indictment of bad medications: 'blood pumping pills/Charging haemoglobins to arterial larvas'. Dragons/inmates are then compared to various kinds of religious devotees. Then follows an in-depth comparison of psychiatry and religion: 'The Laboratorial Host, the pharmacological Ghost,/The synthetic Christ substantiated into tablets by/Pharmacists' metaphorical Eucharists'. I would agree that miracles retrospectively reported merit comparison with hallucinations.

Canto XXXII: Dragons now assume the guise of militant religious sectarians – I like 'Anxiolytic Baptists'; these make war on the Harpies and malignant dragons. There is a eulogy of Roger Crab, a 17th century idealistic visionary and prime hermit, persecuted for his ideals after surviving a near fatal head-wound while fighting for Cromwell. Heraclitus is mentioned as another supreme hermit, one of the world's foremost melancholiacs.

Canto XXXIII: Now the dragons have become fragile fugitives, unable to bear their own heat for more than a few seconds, and 'cautiously retreating/From lethal traps of cobras' tracking stares'. Bizarre image of 'Terrapin-man shrinking in his tank' – akin to the ward internee, but equipped with 'parabolic optics which/Pitch him at a future distance from our own inner visions,/Our undeveloped lenses'. On to reiterated dampened dragons, and struggling writers with their worn, aged paperbacks, struggling for the 'Transmogrification' of their drab, sordid experience, into sublimity.

Canto XXXIV: Indictment of complacent, passive, obedient humanity. Alan challenges the arrogance which calls itself 'Sanity', 'Hospitals which specialize in keeping the suicidal alive'. He sees adherence to the 'norm' as being a sort of mass self-destruct:

‘The united will to court our own extinction, to lose/Ourselves in the illusory mass of communion/Through consuming . . .’. The passive, brainwashed majority is contrasted with the vitality of ‘those submerged in the right-hand hemisphere . . . Irregular geniuses of engrossing energies’. Then variously debilitated dragons, struggling for self-expression. The depths of their struggles are beyond verbalization and rationalization.

Canto XXXV: Grand finale: today’s dragons, shrunk and muted; their once-terrible flames reduced to the puffings of compulsive smokers on the ward, some of whom try to cure themselves with poetry, dragons who keep on returning. Discrimination again – ‘Inconvenient sensitivities conveniently/Misperceived as subversive tendencies . . . cerebrally rebellious/Lumpenproles . . . weals on the rash of capitalism’. Dragons as demons again ‘Evolved from the quagmires of these mutating tensions’. Attack on ‘parasitic agents of polite society’ who ultimately dodge responsibility ‘Our uncommon property outsourced without contract’. Once again an evocation of those who return to the system. Large-scale dragons seem to fuse into the smaller ones. The socially repressive nature of the psychiatric system is crystallized in ‘the vaguer reasons/Of the brain’s souped bourgeoisie, undisturbed suburbias of curtain-twitching sentience’. It cops out of facing fundamental questions: ‘Better to bolt them to dormant *bêtes noires*, to be believed,/Than believe the unbelievable . . .’. A final apocalyptic vision of captive dragons being set free.

An erudite work indeed, and with a full, reader-friendly glossary – an example which many would do well to follow

Part II: *The Shadow Thorns* – introduced by two quotations: one referring to ‘demons’ and

excuses, the other to the free-ranging mind. The thorny shadows of time-established selves of the opening poem represent profound truths which most people would prefer to avoid facing. The modes of their evasiveness are ingeniously portrayed by means of trans-sensory imagery – ‘plumb metronomes/Of corresponding eyes . . .’. The poem explores the problem of verbalization when faced with ‘thought’s amorphous plum’. The eerie nocturnal scene defies verbalization; the poet hopes for an ‘onomatopoeic strum of syllables’ to come to the rescue. The location is obviously a tourist shrine – ideal for hallucination, and mutation – ‘Angelised lambs . . . augment/Our soul-photosynthesis: from larvae – Cynical, bromidic – to a shadfly/Of membranous moral transparency’. Souls were ‘sainted posthumously’ but their shadows ‘were left uncanonised’. The powers of the agents of holiness are limited – ‘Obscurer qualities of suggestive guise/On the blank map of moral paradigms/No Episcopal grid can categorise. The shrine is frequented by ‘fogged pilgrims’ with ‘Impulses of unchanneled faculties . . . Unemployable powers no human speech/Can appraise or oppress’. They prove resilient against Orthodoxy’s powers to suppress them, indeed – the shadow thorns bloom under duress’. Such souls have patrons in the ‘shadow saints’, honouring the unfathomable.

There follows a fascinating portrait gallery, presumably of characters from the workshops.

Agatha of the intrusive thoughts: The subject is prey to obsessions, which multiply in response to ‘boiling oils of noble absolutes’; these ‘anti-temptations,/Repugnant but strangely magnetic in Suggestion’ prevail against her ‘futile resistance’. There seems to be reference to something like ECT ‘to abort her consciousness’.

Lil of the twitches: 'medicated tics . . . Evangelising their gospel liquids'(religion = medication) She would prefer suicide: 'How ironic to be termed *mentally ill*?/When it's heightened sanity prompts the spill/Of her tired haemoglobin'. She makes failed attempts at suicide, then focuses on the toilet and the poetry workshop. Life goes on – "Chemical palsy traps her in its stitch'

Laura of the tangents: The subject is in a state of chronic derangement – 'We're on a collision course with nature/Because we can't fit into the future'. She is in possession of 'pearls of upside-down wisdom, and has all the sensations of Alice in Wonderland's changes in size.

Flo of the solitudes: Flo seems to be self-baptising in liquid of her own making – 'She's lost to her process, the epicenter/Of her head's magic lantern waxing aflicker'. She seems to be in a temporary, inspired trance for the duration of a therapy session, than is 'pinched' back to normality.

Pearl of the fractured laugh: Pearl is crabby on the outside, vulnerable on the inside. She obviously gets a lot from her writing therapy – 'Pearl's rapt at capturing all the snagged calles/Unanswered inside her . . . she ploughs/Clipped thickets of trope'. A volatile character 'Pearl's a spit of Carroll's March Hare'. Her writing activity includes cut-and-paste suicide notes; presumably literary endeavour saves her life!

Bob the logic conqueror: 'Bob's the silent conqueror of objects'. He has 'an obscure system of macro-reduction . . . Science-poetics of toothcomb scansion'. However, this is not really an asset: "The brain grows mouldy in its air-tight bone;/Marbly gorgonzola sealed in a cheese-dome." He seems to have some affinity to Napoleon and

Mussolini; striking image of 'retreating from a brow's Moscow'.

Stephen of the silent laughter: This is definitely the lightest-hearted poem in the selection, one given to uncontrollable laughter. There is, however, a black side to it – 'Mercurised craters, stained against the black/Hole of his throat . . .'

Robert of the clocks: Someone with a phobia about chronometers, and an obsessive-compulsive disorder 'That impels him to avoid things that aren't there'. He has a struggle to express himself, as an unseen hand seems to stifle his words/ He shrieks with desperation, and can only write words containing 'os'

Thomas of the lost properties: Image of the Lost Property Office of the mind. He seems to be extraordinarily emaciated, and has a painful struggle to express himself: 'His rattling voice like scouring crockery/chipped and scratched by the scourge of poetry . . . the sprung rhythms of his angst'. Eventually he finds peace (or death) with a 'trance-charm'.

Natalie of the tiny writing : Truly animated writing – 'scriptural insects./Columns of ants carrying syntactic/Leaf after leaf'; she claims to be unable to perceive her own 'inscrutable characteries'. The words come from 'entangled mental cemeteries'.

Chloe of the obscure accent: Chloe had started life speaking Upper Working Class Brightonian, but then her accent changed because of a trauma; this change attracted xenophobia. The effect was bizarre – 'an invisible man slowly glass-/Blown from Chloe's mouth . . .' She became suspected of being an illegal immigrant, 'smuggling in foreign genes'. Her amorphous accent estranged her from her neighbours, and she was driven into seclusion.

Arm-pocked Marge: A chronic inflictor of self-harm. This poem presents an agonizing array of painful images, such as “rubicund burn-scars bracelet her wrists . . .claw-marks stripe her lacerated cleavage”

Word-Salad Sal: This celebrates a ‘natural’ in free word association – ‘Incantatory patterns sans codas . . . Continuous streams of inchoate verbs/And nouns jumbled up that ramble and swerve/Into surreal realms of symbolist verse . . . As if she could rub off each sooty scar/Of head-mapping lexicon; Sal can spar/With the best at esoteric chutzpah.’

Sorcha of torched moments: A chronic sufferer, burned and scarred by traumatic experiences.

Ray of the half-managed anger: Anger control – of justified anger. Ray is a ‘Vigilante of the arraigned ego . . . he’ll have no truck with cryptic/Authorities’. He hates the capitalist state. And gets some consolation from a smoking break.

Heidi of the permanent gleam: Tainted happiness – Heidi’s eyes radiate optimism – “but it’s pure fear/That flutters at her laughter’s barbed frontier/And sobs through her voice, neurotic tears//Bruising her eyes in their sunk Belvederes.”

Olive of the leapt edges: Someone who wishes to drown herself, restrained by dopants – ‘Organ-pumped chemical intermissions/In her end-of-the-pier apprehensions’.

A final reminder of the uncanonized shadow thorns.

The whole contents of this volume stemmed from Alan’s work while poet-in-residence and poetry workshop facilitator at Mill View Psychiatric Hospital in Hove.

Dave Russell

The Ice Queen

Deep in the icy mountains
A wondrous cave to be seen
Wondrous in ice-cold beauty
Where reigns – the Ice Queen –
Such splendor, such breathtaking beauty,
As under the vaulted glass dome
Carved by the God of Winter
She sits – upon her throne –
The cold, clear blue of ice
Flashes, in her frozen smile’
Glints, in her frosted hair –
Diamonds of ice caress her neck,
Icicles crown her head,
She sits and waits for you to come,
But if you do – you are dead –
Just one touch, from her hand so cold
As her beauty holds your spell,
Your heart will splinter, as fragments of ice,
And there, with her, you will dwell –
To stay there for all eternity,
With the other statues of ice,
For to gaze on such beauty as hers
You have to pay the price.

Betty Else

More Artwork

by Colin Hambrook





PRIDE AND THE FALL

Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall

Alice went up to him expressing concern.
"Won't you fall off this wall
If you keep sitting there?"

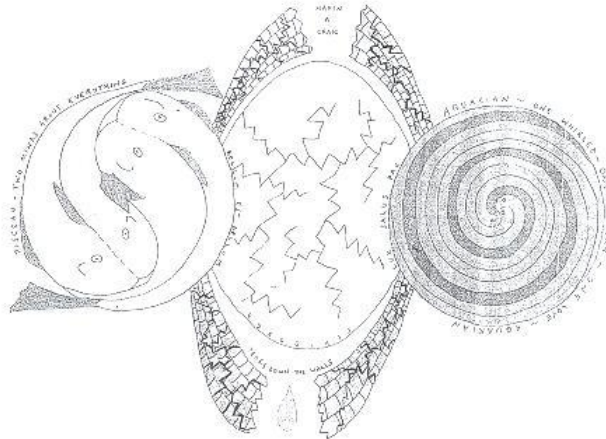
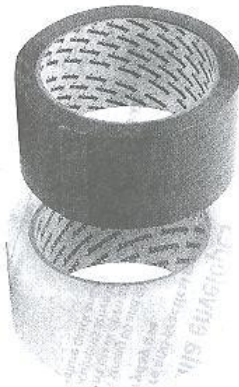
Humpty Dumpty Looked at Alice indignantly
"No, if I fall I will be important
Because the King's horses
and all the King's men
Will come along and put me
back together."

Unfortunately the King's horses
And the King's men
Were both on strike,
The men for a pay rise,
The horses were complaining about the conditions in their stables.

So when he fell
He went to pieces
The ambulance came and they sectioned him.

Alice did try to warn him
But he wasn't going to listen to a mere child.
Now he sits on walls
In the grounds of a psychiatric hospital
He tells the doctors that he was once an important person
But they don't believe him.

FRANK BANGAY



Rock

of Ages

Missing Pet (6)
and Accident
Feelings plus continual noise harassment
also Visual Pollution, CO CARBON VERY VERY
Depressed. The above problem indicated
the accident and I was at St Thomas for
a week where they diagnosed Schizo Affective
Disorder as we previously predicted and why
did I meet? A member plus other peoples
Pet(s) Fairy stories and where did the
Wales family (Lucy) go members on
Cafe walls



DREAM THERAPY
PRINCESS AURORA'S
CHRISTENING
or could've been a princess could've been
a Queen, Oh Oh Oh "You stole my STAR"
D'you Kinky MALUKU's Birthday (Tylor)
AURORA'S FAIRY GOD MOTHERS
WIZARD "TRICK OR TREAT?"

(The picture at the top of the page is by Madlin Brinton; the handwriting and the picture beneath is by Joanne Lowther-

