

A Classy Pair of Knickers

and other Poignant Pieces



of politics and love from

LONDON VOICES POETRY WORKSHOP

A Classy Pair of Knickers

BROADSHEET No.34

A Classy Pair of Knickers



and other Poignant Pieces

of politics and love from

LONDON VOICES POETRY WORKSHOP

LONDON VOICES

Introduction

THE HORROR ON THE PAGE

In the dusty, dark, faded ink of pre-history, before Writers' Handbooks, there lie such nightmarish tales that folk fear for their souls, should they commit such iniquitous parchments to print.

They would quiver, wilt and curl up dry, before allowing knowledge of their ancient cult to ooze, steaming, yellowed and striped with canker across the pungent pages of decent people's poetry books.

But it is ... too late.

London Voices have released a further infliction upon the suspecting public with their latest book, 'To the Devil and Back'.

Thank the Angel Typeface, we have variety within London Voices. There are many faces of the demon, yet not all show themselves immediately. Some require attention! Some spit it right out at you and some hover over the nether between life and whatever else lies in store.

Never let it be written that what we say in this book is under the influence of anything except our imagination; to the Devil with *his* kind.

S. Spartak
20.10.96.

Acknowledgements

Art work by -

Richard Bell	pages 26,45,71,81
Gertrude Elias	pages 41,86,111
Greta Sykes	pages 13,37,47,50,89
Diana Dunwoodie	front cover and pages 91,92,93
Maureen Scott	page 25
Jane Deakin	pages 42,48,59,85,98,104
Michael Aitkin,	pages 38,60,74,77,95,96,99,100,107,108
Alison Clayburn	page 14
Esther Oxford	page 17
Juliette Oxford	page 20
Remasiri	page 129

Edited by Gill Oxford
Layout by Diana Dunwoodie
Typing by Barbara Tucker

Printed by **Intype**

Input Typesetting Ltd., Unit 3 & 4 Elm Grove Industrial Estate, Elm Grove, Wimbledon, London SW19 4HE

Copyright rests with the individual authors and artists.

ISBN 0 950 9479 9 X

You are welcome to come to our reading and discussion evenings. London Voices Poetry Workshop meets on the last Friday in the month at **The London Spa** pub, Exmouth Market, EC1 (near the junction of Farringdon Road and Roseberry Avenue; tubes Angel or Farringdon).

The Group is a member of the Federation of Worker-Writers and Community Publishers.

We are sponsored by the Co-operative Retail Services SE group.

Available from London Voices (c/o FWWCP), PO Box 540, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 6DR

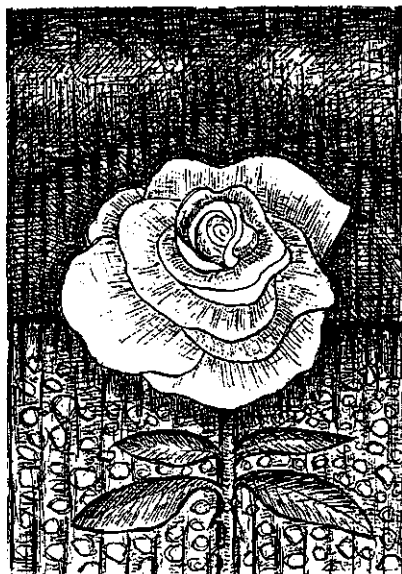


CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	5
Dan Melchior	A couple 11
Greta Sykes	Salmon-coloured seaweed 12
Alison Clayburn	Tobago poem 14
Iain Freeborn	a woman 15
Gill Oxford	Golden frame 16
Dan Melchior	Auntie Dobbin 18
John Paul O'Neill	Texas 3. (Well Maggie you <u>did</u> ask) 19
Iain Freeborn	Turtle Island 21
Kay Ekevall	Progress? 23
Mogg Williams	The Blood of Mog's People (Excerpt) 24
Dave Davis	Electoral choices 28
Greta Sykes	I stifled a yawn. After 29
	Pasteur Niemoller
Maureen Scott	Unemployment balance sheet 30
Bob Dixon	Games 31
Kay Ekevall	Incredible 32
Yvonne M Poulson	Money 32
Lucy Collard	Check-in 34
Bob Dixon	In a BBC Radio 3 news summary 35
Bill Deakin	A limerick 35
Ian Cameron	Elsie Knott lingers on a little longer 36
Michael Aitken	The poet's life that never was 38
Bryan Lynch	"Riding on the coat-tails of your 39
	madness"
Bryan Lynch	"Reduced" 39
Rosemary Phillips	I will not leave now 40
John Oxford	Beauty and the Beast 41
Dan Melchior	Woman on a bench 42
S Malik	Past thoughts 43
Alison Clayburn	Rose in a dark forest 44
Bryan Lynch	"Sister - Citrus" 46

		<i>Page</i>
Alison Clayburn	The record player	47
Jane Deakin	The Wedding Party La Creatura	48
Greta Sykes	Carriages in green	49
Greta Sykes	It must be Sunday	50
Diana Dunwoodie	An Argentinian courtship	51
Jane Deakin	From the Train	53
Margaret Stewart	If Love is the Same	54
John Oxford	The dying cowboy	55
Dave Bryant	Pub girl	56
Steve Spartak	Forget what?	58
David Preen	The telly	60
Jane Deakin	Switch off the telly	61
Rab Cowan	Pen-in-hand, go for it!	62
Ian Cameron	Touched by White Light'ning	63
Rosemary Phillips	Breast-stroke	66
Richard Bell	They said	67
Richard Bell	Prognosis	72
Richard Bell	In the cancer hospital	73
M Aitken	Brighter than the city lights	74
Pat O'Gorman	Christmas time is drawing near	75
Pat O'Gorman	It's peaceful here	75
Gill Oxford	Pygmies	76
Gertrude Elias	The Qarmates. An early socialist movement in Iraq	78
John Oxford	The Christmas Pudding	81
Bob Dixon	Don't mention it	83
Dave Davis	Old duffers arise	84
Peter Oakeshott	Like some comets my tale may run ahead of me	85
David Preen	Mathematics	86
Dave Davis	The X quotation	87
David Preen	Making conversation	88
Ian Cameron	Great news for BT users!	89
Diana Dunwoodie	A classy pair of knickers - A moral tale	91
Ian Cameron	'ROMA' at 'Bivio Buonanotte'	95

		<i>Page</i>
Steve Spartak	cat miaow	97
Bryan Lynch	Letting the cat out of the bag!	98
M Aitken	Oh Starling can't you sing	99
Ranmal Vander Poorten	Tsavo National Park	101
Siobhan McVeigh	Music tumbles from your hands	102
Gillian Oxford	The last song	103
Ian Cameron	Ten pink roses today	104
Bill Eburn	To Florence	105
Bill Eburn	After you	105
M Aitken	Oh the silence of my grandfather	106
Deborah Lavin	Lily's mother (2)	109
Deborah Lavin	Lily's mother (4)	110
Maureen Scott	Russian lament (Excerpt)	113
Tom Durkin	Female Legend Number 2. Dolores Ibarruri or "La Pasionaria"	115
Gertrude Elias	The Missing Files	118
Lawrie Moore	Roots Autobiography Chapter 3	122
Remasiri	My Father	128
Ilse Meyer	Michael	130
Dan Melchior	Unclenching the fist	134



R. Bell.

Dan Melchior

A couple

They walk together
looking fairly happy

There's no big show of affection
or mad lust in their eyes

They look fairly happy
and they hold each other's hands
quite limply

He opens the door to his car
and she waits for him
to open her door

Then he starts the car
and they pull off
with expressionless faces

There are hundreds of cars on the road
like his
with hundreds of stony faced couples
perched inside

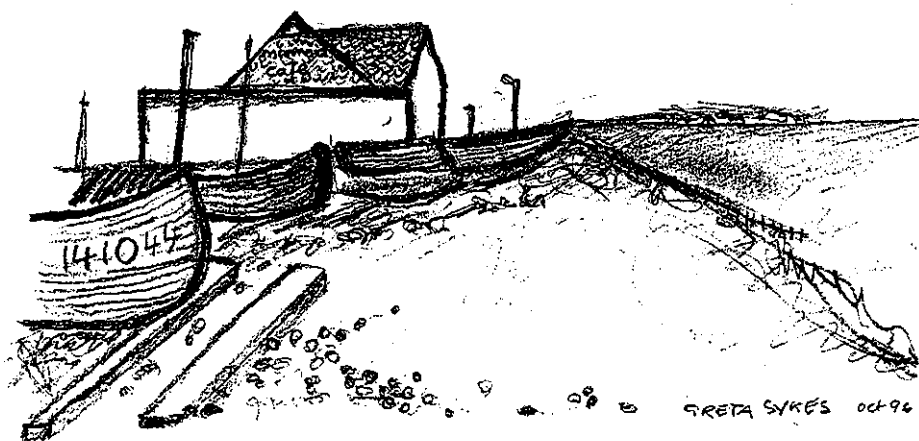
It all works out pretty well
this lack of made lust

Salmon-coloured seaweed

In the evening
the pale-blue skin
of the sea
wraps itself
snake-like around the pebbled beach,
testing it out for size and shape
in search of memories in
speckled white, smooth greys and shiny anthracite -
is it a coming home,
a beach of roots,
belongings and laughter?
A beach that smells of childhood seaweed, jellyfish
and stranded goods?
Hush: the waves' dark tongues whisper foreign words
into the sand.

In the long evening
the rose and reseda coloured light
rolled itself out
along the path,
a subtle carpet
catching the straddling walkers unaware
and lost for words;
a couple stood in tight embrace,
unable to let to.

In the slow evening
the mermaid café beckons bright in red and green
like a ship going out to sea:
come with me!



salmon coloured seaweed

In the low evening
I push the tip of my sandal
into the burnt stones
to look for words
left by the waves
with the shape of the future,
the smell of the past,
and the glow of salmon-coloured seaweed
that entangled us
the night before.

Alison Clayburn

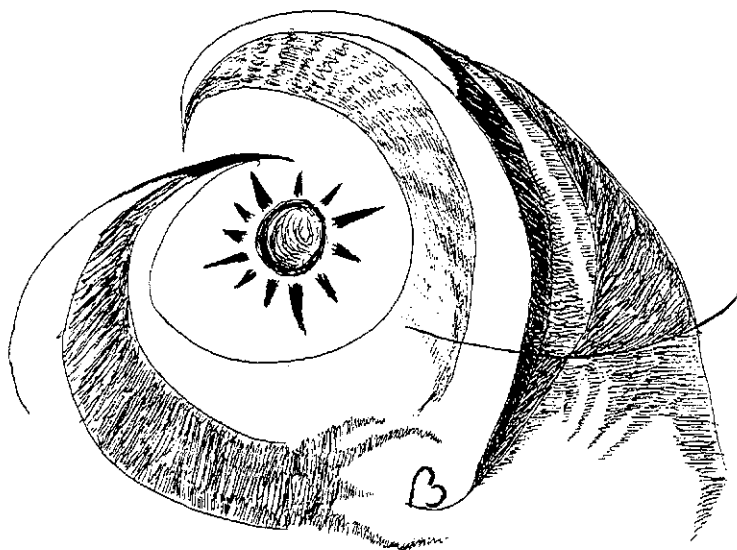
Tobago poem

I should like to be at the point where the edges meet
To feel the unbearable tension in the pull of the waves
Below the ocean's surface

As *my* surfaces intertwine and sometimes meld
Their colours delicately arching around each other
In a water blown dance
And an ecstasy of longing

Alison Clayburn
April 1996

Tobago poem



a woman

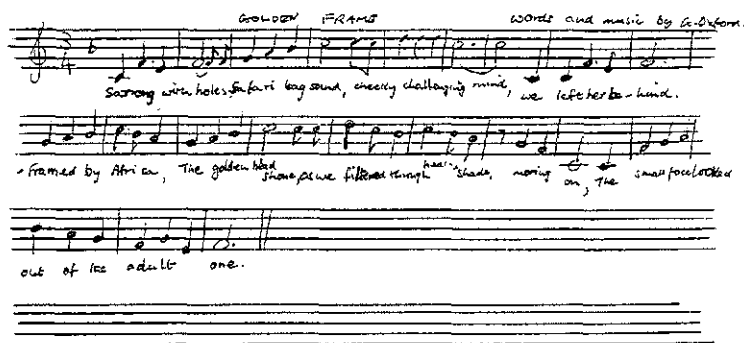
there was a woman felt her sides
curled her body palest pearl
between the tusks of tampon tides
a river red as the richest ruby
purified, she purrs, waiting for her man
whose brain bleeds under the strain
of his cumbersome design.

i was a woman,
honest,
in another time
in another place.

i was a doe
i was a fairy queen
i was elegance
someone to be seen

i was that creature
comforted by stillness
and the strength
that embraced
my warm soul.

Golden frame



Framed by Africa
the golden hair shone
as we filtered through
heat and shade, moving on.
A small face looked out
of the adult one.

Sarong with holes
Safari bag sound
cheeky challenging
mind - we left her
behind.

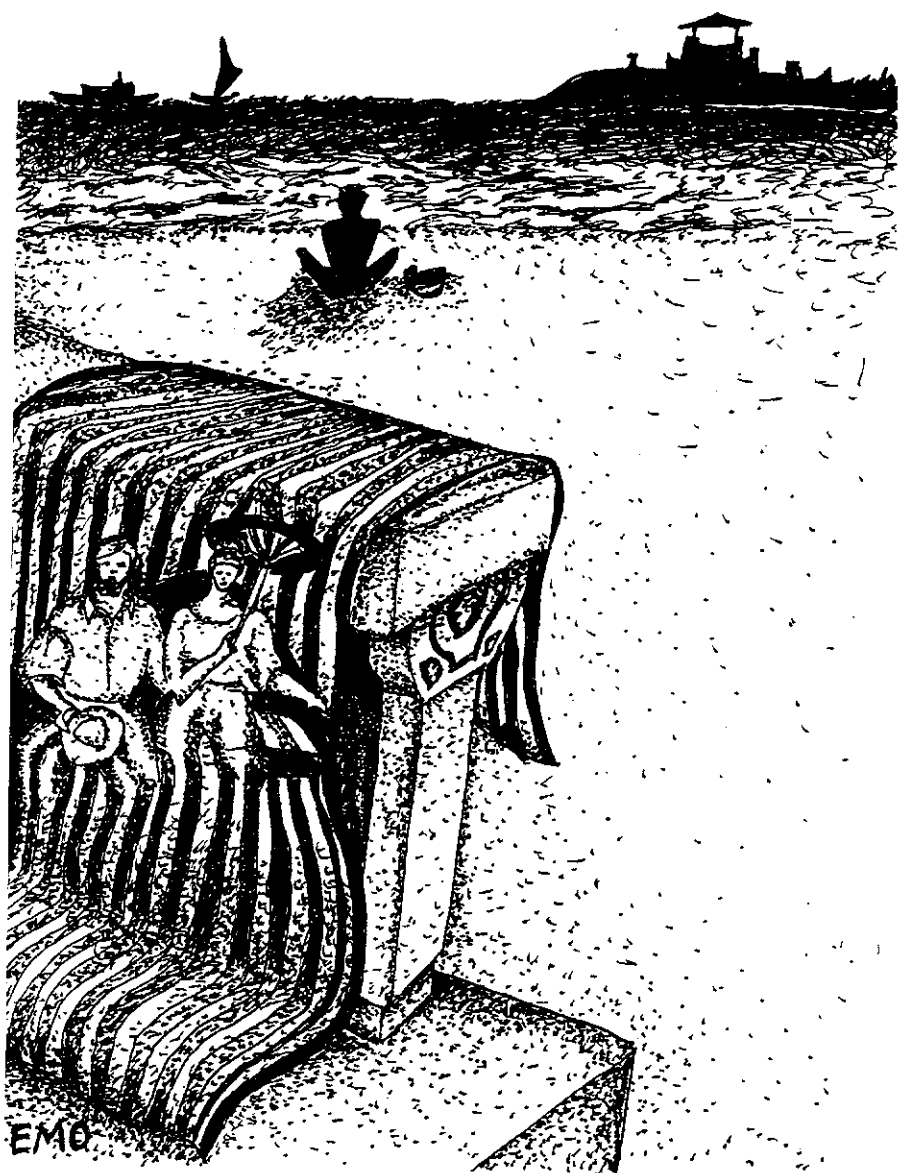
Kind black faces glisten
with smiles they listen
to Esther's demur.
She returns to their comfort,
soup and protection
and only her.

Sarong with holes ...

Ethiopia beckons with
trudging she thrives
looking and laughing,
moving through lives,
tracks stretch on,
thoughts lengthen.

Sarong with holes ...

We imagine next meetings
hold her in mind,
she turns, tall
and stately, shoulders
her pack and
leaves us behind.



Auntie Dobbin

Auntie Dobbin had about 4 chins
and wore huge floral dresses
drawn tight
over spare tyres of fun

A fag would hang from her lip
as though
it were a natural appendage
and she had moles
the size of mountains
on her face

We emptied her flat
one winter
it was right in the middle of Brixton
and I sat in the back of the van
with a
hammer in my hand

There were streaks on the windows
where nappies
had been dropped
from
the flats above

And I thought of Auntie Dobbin
the spirit of Christmas parties
living in that grotty little flat
without the smile
on
her
face.

Texas 3. (Well Maggie you did ask)

Three bad desperado
Women from way out west
Californ-i-a to be precise

Late night
Find myself hanging with
Them West Coast dudes
As they cruise around
The city of Austin

Women are hungry
kinda beautiful, intelligent, bright
Young women are hungry
Hungry for roote beer
And ice cream floats

Austin downtown
6th Street and all,
this late anyways
is distinctly ice cream unfriendly
Luckily we find a 7 to 11 open

To do it well takes a whole lot of style
First you need brown glass bottles
Of roote beer
Some cheap plastic cups
And a bloody great big tub of Hagen Das

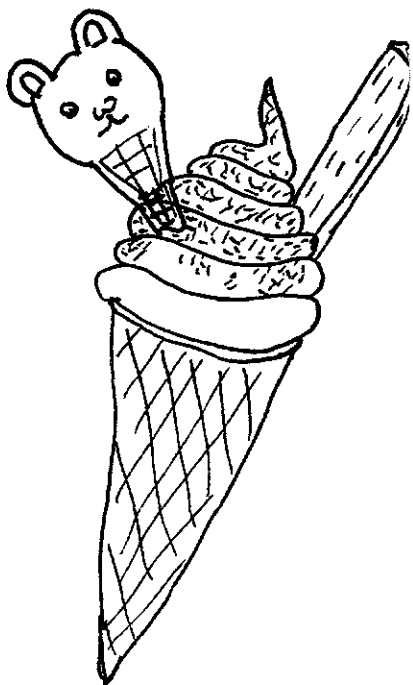
Oh yeah!

Them West Coast dudes,
Too cool, on a roll
Hungry for it, up for it
Even have time between slurps
For news from England

Then discarded,
after alien abduction style
bemused, I watch
Them desperado women
Disappear into the early morning light

Only to be sighted
Once more again
Next day
In a San Francisco
Poetry trio incarnation

Them California dudes
Awesome!
Root beer and ice cream floats
Say again, say again
Awesome!



Turtle Island

She caresses the flowers and dances with a cherry tree
Her mind is free and her mind is crazy

Her love is pink and her dress is laughter
She declares: you can do anything in America

Hollywood releases an inflatable brain
The mundane becomes magic albeit somewhat insane

The theme park is coming to life all over the world
Will the mushroom lose its poison when fully unfurled?

Oh Turtle Island, oh Turtle Island, listen to the shaman

Reading through the Wall Street Journal on an exercise bike
While volcanic mud nebulation garnishes his wife

Trooping the colours so the glory doesn't fade
At the Second Battalion fancy dress parade

Coffee, coke and cookies in Mississippi
The joke's on old Cardiac Tennessee

Streaming through Central Park is all very grand
But they left the swamp behind and said goodbye to the land

Oh Turtle Island, oh Turtle Island, send for the medicine man

There's a hobo sitting alone on the station
He's watching the morning sun cross the horizon

He must be wondering where his people have gone
He looks down to make sure that he's still got his shoes on

She wins hearts by evangelical flirtation
It's her life-long dream to have her own TV station

The ceiling is sky blue and synthetic clouds drift by
Take part in paradise, Praise the Lord on High

This is the land where your dreams will unfold
Make your own reality out of Third World gold

Anything goes it seems in the land of dreams
Anything goes it seems in the land of extremes

Oh Turtle Island, oh Turtle Island, listen to the shaman

The Budding Belles learn finesse and visual poise
In the pink marble mansion of Illinois

The Three Mile Meltdown has become a cartoon
And cheerleaders chant it on a sunny afternoon

Well you can fool anybody any of the time
Hear what I'm saying and slip me a dime

Welcome to the Underwater Extravaganza
But be careful of the Klu Klux Klan and stomach cancer

Oh Turtle Island, oh Turtle Island, send for the Medicine Man.

Progress?

A convoluted ball of nerves
Which Science calls the brain
Can comprehend the Universe
The stars, the sun, the rain.

Millenniums were occupied
With progress slow and frightened
Until with creature comforts
Existence was enlightened.

Brain conjured through the ages
Ideas for Humankind
Philosophy and poetry
Expanded in the mind.

We then became more civilised,
Discovering exploitation
And sowing seeds of violence
To split us into nations.

We reached the final expertise
When robots were invented
To annihilate the human globe
With skill unprecedented.

Evolving through the centuries
From savage to barbarian,
The species has the gall to claim
Its growth humanitarian.

Excerpt from *The Blood of Mog's People*

Written by Mogg Williams and composed by Brian Breeze, '*The Blood of Mog's People*' is a word and musical portrait of life, as once lived, in the coalmining valleys of South Wales. The tape will hopefully soon be available (see box no.).

NB. Mogg, now terminally ill, was a miner for 24 years in South Wales. He has published 14 poetry collections from 1969, and written two stage plays. He has made several radio and TV programmes. We are proud that Mogg has read poetry with members of London Voices on several occasions, including the launch of "*The Changing Tide*" anthology (1990).

Running errands for half a pence

Narrator:

There were twenty houses in Heol-Alefryn,
Over twenty boys and each was a king,
But the boy he once was
And the boys he once knew
Are buried forever, in a fourteen Summers street.

And Mog's mother and father, who lived in that street, were always there, watching and waiting for their brood of children to return safely home, but the portrait of his father fades away into a boyhood scene of a soldier who had left part of himself, somewhere, in that war to end all wars. He died in the autumn of nineteen forty two and his mother was left to walk through another war and the long cold winters, which never quite reached the warm summers of her life. But she was there through all her childhood seasons, close, the eternal sentinel, which gave her children a legacy of time that will never die in hearts beating with so many happy and sad memories.

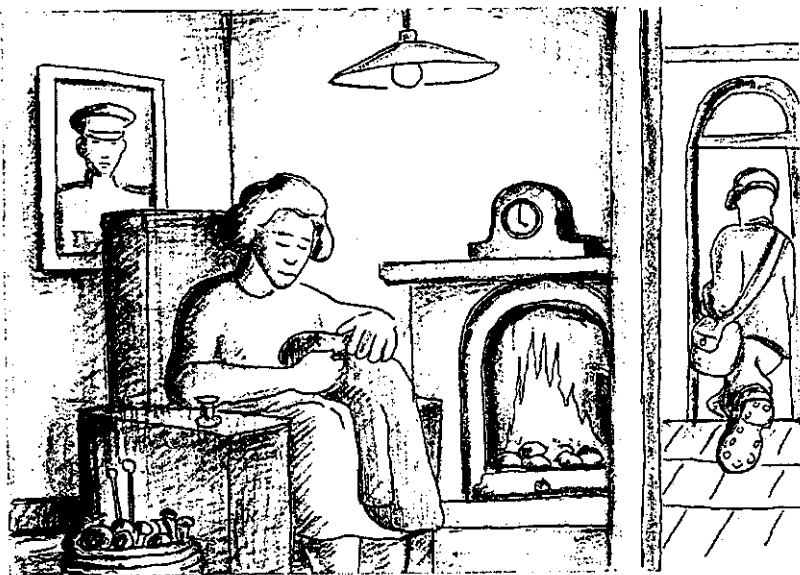


Mam:

I was always sewing.
Mazed in coloured threads and wools
I observed my world
Through the cruel eyes of needles,
Which stitching and patching
Hand me down clothes,
Stretched another day's wear
Into the poverty of tomorrow's hours.

Riches for me
Was the means test man,
His calling card
A double rap on the front door
With a co-op voucher for clothes and shoes,
That briefly released the state's guilt
But never fully clothed my kids
Or coloured my threads and wools.

Happiness for me
Was a family day by the sea;
Means tested again
By measures of church attendances
Offerings for the harvest festival
And halfpennies subversively placed
Into the stipend-man's begging bowl,
Which dressed his church in reluctant souls
And made poorer my poor hands.



Mog:

Peace for mam was the cold ground
Where the reflected colours
In her eyes were stilled
To the stipend-man's begging bowl
To the means test man
To coloured threads and wools
And the cruel eyes of needles,
And the angry tears of this midnight hour.

Narrator:

And in the doorway of memory, he can still see her face and hear the echo of her voice.

Mam:

"Be a good boy now, and be careful"

Mog:

"I will, Mam."

Narrator:

Waving his hand in a tremulous goodbye, Mog turned the corner of the street and headed for the mouth of the colliery, that awful, alien place where men were crushed and killed. It was a Monday morning and his classroom friends and his teachers had gone. It was his first day at the pit, he was fourteen years old, a child, he wanted to go home to mam.

Mog:

But as a consumptive follows his cough
I followed my hobnailed boots
Into the darkness of the underground,
I wanted to chase the echo of my boots
and return home to mam,

But mam was many summers away.
I wanted to play marbles
And go bent-pin fishing again,
But the boys of my yesterdays
And the boy I once was
Had vanished along with the summers.

Orphaned from the past
I walked away from the boy
I would never see again.
Robed in man-made darkness,
In one day I became a man.

Dave Davis

Electoral choices

At last, Whitehall opens its windows
And breathes the smog we all know chokes
Perhaps, we may hear - that smoking substances are condemned
Despite sacred profits, new law health provokes.

Only the vigilance of the green and protest "Mob"
Can balance the commonsense of life
A battle we all have to approach
In face of the establishment's cutting knife.

I stifled a yawn
After Pasteur Niemoller

When they talked about making
commitments for socialism
a future with hope,
I laughed about their naïveté and ideals and said
"it can't be done".

When they were talking about hunger and poverty,
I stifled a yawn, thought I heard it all before,
it's not the kind of thing I talk about, I like to go out and
be cheerful, share a joke or two,
enjoy myself
and not be miserable.

When they were talking about unemployment,
I did not bother to join in, I was bored with the subject,
after all I had a job and earned good money,
my problem, quite honestly, is finding the time to spend it!

When they talked about homelessness, I did not get involved
I'm not homeless, it's not my concern.

when they talked about injustice,
I did not get worked up, it's not down to me
to get things sorted out,
I'm just an ordinary man, there's nothing I can do.

But when I lost my job, my home,
my wife walked out on me,
the banks were threatening to get me,
my friends deserted me,
I was alone,
and when I talked about my plight,
I saw the others walk away and yawn.

Unemployment balance sheet

Late night rationality in
the face of irrationality.
I am unemployed, I hang
in trying to live in
this illogical system.
My Giro pays the household bills.
I have nothing to live on,
effectively. I go in for economic
cleansing, do not repair,
get rid of consumer goods.
I can't afford the cleaners,
I sling the tat. I am down
to ethnic hair shirts.
I want to rid myself of
consumerism, I have no
alternative, it doesn't
go with the position.
I shall live on potatoes,
anything, so desperate I am.
Bloody incredible, becoming
the fag end of Weimar Germany
now in Britain in 1993.
I am a Marxist, I know these
things, I draw on past experience.
I have a lot of candles, a
hammer, a saw, and if it
comes to the crunch I can
do as they do in Moscow,
go out and rob the corpses
of those who succumbed to the
economic winters of discontent,
sneak off their shoes and
recycle them. When they

wear out, and the glut of
corpses have no shoes, what then?

I shall think up the answer
in some Neanderthal cave.
I shall be truly primitive,
then, in developed capitalism.

Bob Dixon

Games

1 HIDE AND SEEK

You can be too good at this game.
If you hide yourself too well,
nobody will find you.

2 BLIND MAN'S BUFF

(Women can play this game, as well.)

Gropy, gropy -
feely, feely -
squealy, squealy
- but glad you caught me!

3 MUSICAL CHAIRS - OR, CAPITALISM

In this game,
there are always more people, than chairs.
So, grab a chair, if you can, Jack.
Bugger the others!

4 CAPITALIST CARD GAME

I bait you with diamonds,
I break you with hearts,
I beat you with clubs,
I bury you with spades.

Incredible

I wonder at the diggers
Uncovering mankind's past.
I marvel at the astronauts
Who dare the rocket's blast.

I wonder at inventors
Who seek to ease our toil,
And medical discoveries
The viruses to foil.

I marvel at our heritage
- The centuries of thought;
The drama, music, dance and art
That human minds have wrought.

But most of all I wonder
How the minds of Powers that be
Remain content to see it end
In world catastrophe.

Yvonne M Poulson

Money

What connection could there possibly be
Between Money (money Money), and emotion recollected
in tranquility?
Out of my debt of guilt I dream there are no taxes, no investment,
monetary funds.

One coin in my hands of service to my people, love and life abundant.

No charge to answer, forms to fill or form to follow, just cash flow

And appropriate response to all formalities when I am called to Account

For my -- Income -- and -- Expenditure -- Oh -- and Capital, of course!

My ASSETS are:- a flat, cooker, typewriter, bed, washing machine, needle & thread.

LIABILITIES:- upkeep of said flat, paralysis, confusion and a past.

CASHFLOW (daily):- pension money in a cigar box for food and petrol.

CAPITAL:- energy of various kinds

Government investment of taxpayers money in a Motability leased Vauxhall Astra Merit

Remnants of a functioning body

Memories of skills in a strangely cross wired mind.

CASHFLOW (annually) Enough in the Bank for standing orders and Direct Debit

Income:- Disability Living Allowance

Expenditure:- "At this point in time" (a fashionable phrase)

I'm into depreciation of my assets

Personally

And in the way I feel about the lost ideal

Of service to my country, community and friends, of passing on eternal values

A joke when I note

That taxpayers keep me, the country forgets me, communities avoid me

And friends are nonplussed.

I can't even support the economy by buying things I don't want and can't afford

CASHFLOW FORECAST:-

Rising costs, Diminishing returns

Forced fund raising initiatives

Charitable status - and Community care.

What about declaring bankruptcy? I'll go joyfully into liquidation. I'll live on air.

If that will Balance my Accounts?

Check-in

They weighed me and measured me
frisked me for harmful objects

and suspicious thoughts, took
my pulse, name and date of birth

counted the pieces of hand-luggage then
inspected the contents of my mind.

They drew a dotted line around my head
and a tiny pair of scissors in one corner

They said in case of an emergency
we forward the top section to your

next-of-kind and the bottom to our
clinic records. They completed all

formal procedures gave me a diagnosis
and weak cup of tea then ushered me

into the lounge where others were
waiting for their flights to be called.

Bob Dixon

In a BBC Radio 3 news summary

on the 6 October, 1995,
it was reported
that the queen had suffered
a bruised shoulder
from a falling grouse.

(These grice have no respect for one.)

Bill Deakin

A limerick

There once was a Bishop
named Roddy,
Whose soul was less strong
than his body.
Though mitred and coped
He abruptly eloped -
and the church thought
his morals were shoddy.

Elsie Knott lingers on a little longer

Cold. Early February
and getting colder.
Darkness falling.
Rush hour traffic
building up, heading south.
A thousand miles or so
might just about do it!
The eve of my dear departed
mother's 87th birthday.
Would that it was life's Springtime.
come round again for her too.

In a kerbside council waste bin
outside the second-hand furniture shop
at Clapham North
a large format, torn,
dusty old brown envelope.
Inside are Elsie Knott's remains.
She didn't have a long innings.
Sixty eight years.
At her demise, I wonder
whose eyes shed tears?

Aged sixteen, she left
the Holy Trinity Church of England
Central School, December 22nd, 1943.
With a Certificate for French, awarded
by the Royal Society to Encourage
Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.
A nicely bordered London County Council
general Certificate of Education
signed by her head-mistress
beneath the old LCC emblem -
the wavy blue Thames flowing briskly
below a Crown of Gold.

A testimony, handwritten on
Dorset Education Committee stationery,
by her Head-Mistress F.M.Fuller, MA.

"Elsie Knott has been a pupil
at this school for 4½ years
and was head girl during the last term.
She has received a good general education,
also specific training in shorthand,
typewriting and book-keeping.

"A good and steady girl
of good intelligence
and careful habits,
loyal, trustworthy and obedient
she can be relied upon
to carry out orders faithfully".
Elsie Knott, binned and gone.
Rescued from oblivion
for just a little longer
by a total stranger.



Elsie Knott lingers on ...

The poet's life that never was

The poet's life that never was
Because of the armed guard
That led him from the art school
Into the scrapyard of industry

The poet's life that never was
Because of the continuous trial
The struggle to be proved innocent
Of education's handcuffs of lies

The poet's life that never was
Trapped in childhood, in memories
Green mirrored sunlit cube
Flying in eternity's shadow

The poet's life that never was
Because of struggling against the landing craft
The armada of doom and destruction
Sailing this way from Parliament

The poet's life that never was
Because of the black tears of students
That flowed like a river of angst
Into the sea of oblivion



"Riding on the coat-tails of your madness"

After months of new discipline and different
defences

something sore in me has been set free

- riding on the coat-tails of your madness

But riding on the coat-tails of your madness
there is not only the soothing breeze
of companionship and the refreshing
gust of release to be savoured
but also, the bitter-cold memories
of yesterday's races when I rode
alone, mute and slow

And thus now we needs the reins
believe me I will not pull and squeeze

just direct a little

- a calmer pace

for breakneck speed will cast you out
lost forever
and a constant crawl will leave
you buried behind.

"Reduced"

Relentless days of silence and struggle

Jabbing

Poking

Tearing at you

Your head to your knees

Forcibly foetused
until you broke and sprang

Coming out to the pain as a child
and engaging it in childish combat

Giggling at it
Mauling it
Touching it inappropriately

and crawling all over it
and soon hopefully through it

- to walk steady steps again.

Rosemary Phillips

I will not leave now

I can feel the blood pulsing around my body
There is a tingling in my wrists
My blue/grey veins are bulging crying out to me,
To show their hidden beauty of deep red blood.

But I will not give in.

The motion of the train echoes along the track
In a sharp, high pitched hiss
As the shiny white pylons reflect my image
The electric tracks are calling me to fall off balance.

But I will not give in.

The river flows vibrantly beneath me
Gushing and splashing as it bounces off the rocks
Swirling in all directions whilst still travelling in unison
Craving for me to join it on its journey.

But I will not give in.

Beauty and the Beast

As I was rushed across the Whitechapel Road in the morning tube crush with every nationality under the sun, the long and the short and the tall, the begruntled and the bedraggled, the jostling and the discontent I saw her, illuminated, ethereal, beautiful, floating down the steps of The Royal London Hospital. Blue jeans, T-shirt, her hair dark, short, her face perfection, her body slim like Venus de Milo. She came down the steps, gently and oh so carefully. The shouting milling crowd had seemed to disappear. It was just her alone with that faint halo around her wonderfully dainty shape. In her hand was a golden goblet and behind her a trail of white. It was as though she passed through me, and through the others too, as if we were not even there. She crossed the pavement on minute feet and stopped before him. He raised a rheumy eye, a begrizzled dirty face and a dirty beard. He smelt like poo, his Mac was covered in grease, he was sitting on a pile of plastic bags with horrible clothes and sticky dirty cans, his trousers were half undone, his shoes mismatched, one sock off, the other one on. I was watching "Beauty and the Beast". He grimaced into her angelic face. She smiled, touched him on his arm and gave him the goblet to drink. Her voice was like a thousand tinkling bells soothing and caressing. "The hot tea will do you good". "You're a beauty", he stuttered. "You're an angel".



Woman on a bench

Hair like candyfloss
and a face caked in paint
she was screwed up on the bench
like a dirty rag.

She'd made the big mistake
of catching the wrong train
and ending up
far from all the money.

Everyone was seething
she was dirtying their bench!
donated by so-and-so
of the local
round table.

It's true
she was ugly!
but nowhere near as
ugly
as the looks
on the passing people's
faces.



Past thoughts

I feel strange and empty now that she's gone;
Sadly, we did not part with a 'miriamite-kiss' this time,
Which gave me an encompassing feeling of warmth.

I realise sometimes things do not aspire to how
they are planned, but they are often temporal
items, which are trivial.

Step aside from your situation and look at what
other things make your life what it is,
Enhancing it and nurturing those components,
I think you know what I am saying.

Hold onto the reins of your destiny.
I will always remember you.
I know not where my destiny lies
Or with whom? I thought I did?
But maybe I was under a shiamana
Created by my own sub-conscious.

As time swirls my mind, I reflect on life.
Each 'moon-cycle' alters my thoughts
As I age another month (more).

Rose in a dark forest

The red rose, raw, bleeding
Shoots up and out from her fortress
Feeding on her own lost pain
She transforms it to clear juice

She grows and grows
Protected by green spikes
Framed and companioned by moist leaves
Until her petals are each
A damask cloak

How she longs for her cloak petals to be used
How she yearns to dip her mighty head
Back into the forest
And enfold

"Take me" she says
"Use me, I can grow and grow again."

Her heady perfume rises
Her brilliant heart shines out

Glistening

She draws a wanderer
To her open heart.



"Sister - Citrus"

You are and always have been a very
special citrus fruit

sent to us right from the sun
- beaming.

I know citrus fruits are sometimes
bitter to the taste
and near as I was, I never
did give you that lovin' spoonful
of sugar
- to complement your zing
- or to take the edge
off your fizzy frenzy.

No, I was more the type to gaze
lovingly up at you
hanging delicately - invitingly
from your tree
- that huge green mainline
to life

And when you were plucked by a
braver more certain hand
I stood back a little hurt
and wrote about it!

But now these lonely days don't
seem as soothed by pen and
poem and I really could

Eat you!!

The record player

That box was my release. Large, clumsy lidded and blue plastic covered, it sat in the space between mine and my sister's neat twin beds. Under it lay a pile of shiny black discs in tatty paper covers. Above it the poster of my love wet dream. A portrait of the men who sang "I wanna hold your hand" to me all day in the airless room with the large windows. Listening to the voice in my head, not the voice in the room as I gazed at a strip of yellow sky behind some spindly trees. Escaping from a hard edged, hard voiced world to one of comfort and passion, barely understood, unbearably felt.



The record player

The Wedding Party
La Creatura

Tonight you were as
always wild and
Unbearably beautiful.
when you are there
There is no-one else
in the room.
There is no-one else
in a vast space
with warmed steel
and huge machinations.
There is no-one else
But this divinity
Enchanted.

A poem to all that
is animal & all that
is human, and all that
is divine.

Thank you for a heavenly party
Near you I am alive again
Up high with the great machines
I sing for you an aria &
In my heart I at last
Find peace.
Go well wild woman.
A thousand blessings:
On this
Your wedding day.



Carriages in green

And trains were passing,
carriages in green, while she was pressed into a
velvet seat,
transfixed by trance,
as if a sudden lightening had struck and melted her
into a permanence.
But outside trees and houses, whole pastel coloured
landscapes sailed along,
like birds, uplifted by a wind and searching for the
shore.
They came and went and did not matter, no-one
observed them.

She watched the signal box:
the railway guard was pushing down the lever,
moving the message: it was green for go ahead.
Yes, go ahead, she thought,
I have absorbed you in my bloodstream, my
stomach lining,
our closeness is pulsing through my lungs, my
heart.
She felt the furry texture of the seat
and sensed his warm hands
touching.

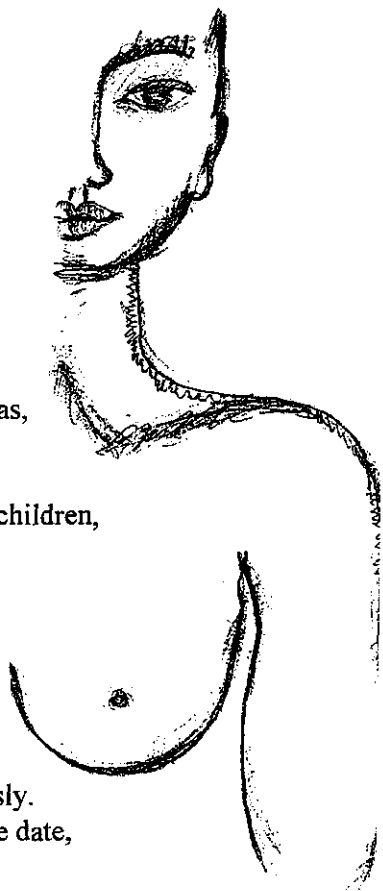
The station was freshly painted, red and white,
doors slamming,
as people boarded or departed,
a small, white dog was barking
and children, fluttering ponytails,
were flying by on bicycles all green.

The whistle blew,
the train moved off, not far to go,
she would curl up and kiss his scented armpits
and the soft skin on his Adams apple.
Outside the yellow flowers turned their heads.

It must be Sunday

Are these my legs or yours?
my arms or yours, your nose or mine?
And was I holding you,
or were you holding me?
My caress turned you on,
or me?
Where did we travel;
Along internal streams
lit up by flashes of bright lights and lightening,
red poppies,
cornflowers blue along the emerald banks,
then velvet and silken darkness,
words whispered in Morse code
and pressed into my skin
or yours?

Something inside me says: Emerge
Awake!
Sort out your body parts and name them,
neck, shoulder, breast, tongue.
Name the world about you:
The bath is running, a smell of chestnut badedas,
the radio is quiet until I find the switch,
the curtains drawn -
an afternoon out there, I guess, with dogs and children,
a bedroom and the kitchen:
the kettle is for boiling water.
I'm doing well, I know most of these things,
a table and a rug, all crumpled up.
Half-empty glasses left of resin wine,
the butts of cigarettes and joints,
and on the mantle-piece a clock:
I look at it and work out what it says relentlessly.
There hangs a calendar, I understand it tells the date,
I study it with curiosity: what day is it today?
It must be Sunday.



An Argentinian courtship

I was living - precariously - in New York. I had left my job as au pair with a family in Connecticut, for though secure, my days there were essentially domesticated, and I decided to depart for wilder shores.

I went to New York armed with the address of a friend of my sister's. She lived in an apartment of six girls on the Upper East Side, and into this I moved. There was no real room for me, but on the nights that Martha spent with her boyfriend, I slept in her bed. The apartment was no charity, for life for those girls was a matter of survival; I paid rent for Martha's bed. At night the cockroaches lumbered hungrily from their corners in the kitchen, and the ice-box was filled with curious brown paper bags containing each girl's private food.

So there I was, ensconced, after a fashion, in the great melting-pot and open to possibilities.

I was having lunch with a friend in a restaurant in the Village one day, when I became conscious of being watched. The owner of the gaze was a menacing-looking man of about thirty, with long black hair, black eyes and skin like a Corsican bandit. As we got up to leave he came over to our table and invited me to dinner. I accepted, for when in exile, you tend to be experimental. We spoke little more that day, except that he told me his name was Rolando and that he was Argentinian, and I gave him my address.

On the evening of our date Rolando arrived at the apartment to collect me. His appearance was terrifying. He was dressed from head to foot in pitchy black, except for a heavy silver belt which curved down to a point above his crotch. This belt exerted a magnetic pull; my eyes being drawn relentlessly to the area in question. Further up, Rolando's own eyes smouldered like activating volcanos in his black face. I was left in no doubt about his plans for that evening, nor that I was part of them. My instinct was to opt out there and then, but instead, I went along.

We were to have dinner with some friends of Rolando's. Our host for the evening was a professor at New York City University, who lived with his family in a loft downtown. Lofts at that time were fashionable places to live. This one consisted of one vast room with an immensely high ceiling; a ledge ran all the way round near the top where the professor's children did their own thing - indeed, they never descended to the ground at all that evening. A powerful smell of marijuana filled the room, for one of the professor's students had given him some home-grown grass. This everyone was smoking, including Rolando and I, and it was heady stuff. In fact it was the strongest grass I had ever had, and it produced in me an instant and extreme paranoia. The vibrations which reached me from Rolando were magnified to an unbearable pitch, and by the time we sat down to dinner I was unable to speak, eat or drink, for I felt that if I opened my mouth a high scream would escape. The rest of the guests kindly ignored my condition and continued merrily with the meal. Worse was to come. An appalling amusement had been planned for after dinner. The professor had devised a kind of electric platform on springs which vibrated at a great rate when switched on. Onto this contraption the hilarious company clambered, plus wine glasses. We shivered and shook and vibrated, wine spilt, our faces became blurs and everyone except me dissolved into fractured laughter. I shut my eyes and concentrated on not exploding all over the walls. At length I could bear it no longer and managed to ask Rolando to take me home, which suited his agenda well. We walked back to my street in sexually-charged silence and, when we reached the apartment, I let him in as in a trance.

The scene that followed was more than inevitable. I don't know how much time passed while the Argentinian applied his Satanic powers of seduction. I felt like a rabbit with a black and silver snake. The urge to submit and be swallowed up by the serpent was strong, but there was something about Rolando which I knew I wanted none of. Eventually he decided to withdraw his forces for another occasion, and left.

I remained on the sofa for a while, until I became aware of acute hunger pangs, brought on by the dope. I moved towards the ice-box where I knew something highly desirable was hiding amongst the

brown paper bags. I found it: an untouched carton of Howard Johnsons Chocolate Chip Icecream, with 'PATTI'S ICECREAM - KEEP OUT' written on it. It was a simple matter to read this as: 'Help yourself', and without a moment's hesitation I took it back to the sofa and demolished it, spoon by spoon.

Shortly after I returned to England I received a letter from Rolando. It ran to several pages of great obscurity, illustrated by cabalistic signs. These could have been spells to enable him to ravish me at long distance. But nothing happened; and that was the last I heard of him.

Jane Deakin

From the Train

Windswept willows
Burnt smoke.
In the station
arched iron,
forests and the
approach of trains.
Trees and their
outer lining,
leave grey
green
sweet mud.

If Love is the Same

You take me skin deep only,
Well that's no fuck
Know me top slice only,
That is no fuck,
Laugh with me only on the far left side of me,
Hardly even a beginning.

No sad, no known, no quirk, no same.
No gentle, no perversion, no challenge, no change.

Flat lands, paddy field, prairie, plain.

What of gulley or mountain or tree, flower and stone?
What of sky and sunlight or torrential rain?

Where are beasts and children
Or muck or hearth place,
Roaming, running, kindness, skill?
What of honing, or flying?

Empty nothing, back again and again
Driven down - floating - driven down,
Futile forcing fading away.

If fucking is love that has no name,
No finish
And love is the same

The dying cowboy

We were standing next to each other in the video viewing room at a scientific meeting in Washington.

He was dressed like the 'Lone Ranger'.

I was besuited with shirt and tie.

The RAP video was on.

They were recruiting drug addicts and prostitutes, male homosexuals and drag queens and the video explained it all: shooting galleries, derelicts, abandonment, despair and, ever there, the infection.

He fidgeted.

He was tall and dressed in a black cowboy outfit with metal and leather chains across his bare chest.

His spurred boots clanked.

Around his waist was a studded belt with holster.

On his head he wore a large black Stetson.

Under the hat he was completely bald.

He had a small goatee beard, like Ho Chi Min.

His accent was strong New York.

"Do you have respect for me Professor?"

I was taken aback.

"I admire your hat, I've got one at home."

"Not an Australian one?" he said. I nodded.

I could see he was amused at the thought of me with my hat. We had connected.

"You're the first scientist who has talked to me" he drawled.

I rejoined, "You're the first ... you're the first ..." As I hesitated he provided the word "addict?"

"Yes" I said "you're the first addict who has talked to me."

He smiled to me thinly.

"Actually I've fucked black ass for 20 years but I never thought I would end up here."

It was the National Institute of Health.

We were surrounded by every expert under the sun, but none of them could save him.

He had now volunteered for the canary pox AIDS vaccine.

"I've always had a fondness for birds."

"Well I've got parrots in England".

He knew all about canary pox - in fact he was quite a scientist

The young woman in front of us turned around.

Her face was scarred but angelic, her hair in dreadlocks and dyed brown.

In her nose, ears and lips were rings.

She faced me now squarely.

We need help and respect.

"I'm not just a fuck hole street girl. I'm like you."

And I knew she was right.

Dave Bryant

Pub girl

You'll never fit in here -

You've no time for pretence.

You'll tease middle aged bachelors

Before you approach the bar,

Their beer guts slopping

Defensively over unused tackle,

Its aim forgotten.

You'll whisk their evening away

From thoughts of egg and sausage with Mum.

Instead, they'll look at your lips,
Consider buying a dinghy,
Painting it red,
And leaving it on the coast
As a reminder of you.
They'll stare in fascination
At layers of exposed skin,
Tanned, worn and
Slightly freckled -
Corroded by the vanity
Of hired sunlamps -
And your legs,
Long stems of wine glasses
Reminding us there's
Euphoria between them
Better than drinking fermented grape.

Still, you'll never stay long,
And when you make your exit,
Hand in boy's hand,
His figure almost ripping
Through the tightness of clothes
As if he cannot wait
To shed the unnecessary skin -
The murmur will rise
In the corners
And swell to the furthest region,

They'll utter the word that
Sounds like wet leather
Hitting a window pane,
They'll hiss it in corners,
Laugh it aloud -
"slut".

Forget what?

I thought it was the morning, but the light told me it was not
The dark was still running, so I dropped another coin in the slot
The metre was a little slow, but soon I began to see the room
The place was a mess, as my mother would have said, don't you own
a broom
There was a time when I would not forget.

I crawled out from the bed and slumped down in an armchair
I couldn't go back to sleep, I needed to know who I was and where
Did I kiss you last night, was that my hand across your face
Did we make love, is that the reason you're not in your usual place
There was a time when I would not regret.

Your picture lay upon the floor, its glass was in a hundred pieces
Your clothes were strewn across the bed, was it us that made those
creases?

The candles that we got from church had burnt down to the stem
And the bottles were all empty now, did we drink all of them?
There was a time when I would not forget

In my head was pain, to think was a strain and I reeked of sweat and
dirt

I reached out to touch something, maybe you, but it was just my old
striped shirt

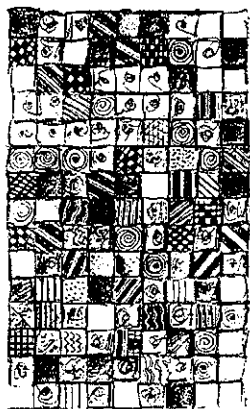
Were you the one who tore it off and threw the best cups at the wall?
Did I get this slice into my lip from a fight or just a fall
There was a time when I would not regret

The loneliness will break my heart, like you did every day
The beating and the shouting and the make-ups, was that why you
had to stay?

Did I curse you before or after you had gone
I know I was right, I know I was wrong
There was a time when I would not forget

The home we had was smashed and it was only us to blame
You with your job down at the yard and me, well, much the same
Incompatible harmony, that's what our friends all said
No breakfast, no radio on, I guess you really must be dead
There was a time when I would not regret.

But that time's gone and so are you, in that corner, lying cold
Now I'm the only one who's going to be afraid of growing old
Knowing that I killed and I can never get you back
I might as well close my eyes and wait until the black
Now's the time for me to try, but I cannot forget
Now's the time for me to start on the long trail of regret.



The telly

Bugger the bleeding telly, I'm finished, I'm through with crap,
Another night's studying wasted watching that rotten pap,

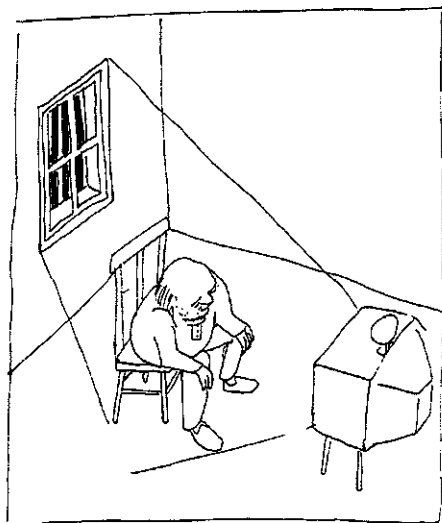
When I think of the hours I wasted
Of the time that's gone for good
Fuming at the adverts, or watching Pogles Wood.

I've watched bilge from noon till midnight
And the thing that's really sad,
Is that most of the time I've enjoyed it
I must be bleedin mad.

Well tomorrow it all will end
Here's one viewer they've soddin lost,
When Matt Dillon rides Dodge City again
In my studies I will be engrossed.

You can tell by my terrible rhyming.
What effect it's having on me,
My genius will never flower
While I'm watching the TV.

So tomorrow I make a new start
Friends I tell you no lie
But I'll have to finish this poem now
Cos I want to watch FBI.



Switch off the telly

I switch off the telly
And from my vantage point
I can also see the window
Very high up an aeroplane
Is the same size
As a fly on the window.
It snakes upward leaving
A clear crescent trail.
Curved and perfect
The wind comes
And changes the trail
Clear as day
Into a seahorse
A magical creature
It mates for life.
And the male has
The babies.
What bliss.
When I watch the
Planes soar past
The sky trail
I think of the captain
And his cockpit
And I smile
It's great when you
Turn the telly off.

Pen-in-hand, go for it!

Take up your pen, and now begin ...
Use your brains girl: that's the right thing!
Never mind what's wrong or right,
What's important's what you write!

Go on! Do it! Make a start!
As long as it's coming from the heart.
What's your trouble? What's your yearning?
Think girl! That's it! Now your learning ...

Don't let the "bastards" get you down!
And don't be worried if it doesn't rhyme ...
But it's rhyming! rhyming! it's rhyming, yes!
... Though' some will say it makes, no sense?

They'll shake their heads and hold their brow,
And give the impression they're in the know ... now!
... Pen-in-hand away you go,
Don't be hasty, take it, slow ...

You will find, that you'll get better,
As you strive to compose each "letter" ...
Keep it simple, keep it modest,
Do your best! And most important? Keep it honest.

Touched by White Light'ning

Today has brought horrific
news: at Kings Cross, youths
gang-raped a woman and,
then threw her into a canal.

On that same Saturday night
surrounded by eight youths
'heading up west'
on "The Clapham Omnibus" -
a single decker - I was
touched too, though in a
totally different way.

Several of them carried
bottles labelled:
"White Light'ning".
They got off
at Trafalgar Square.
From their talk I knew
that they weren't angels.
They were lively, spirited
and, as they headed off
the last of them,
one of the oldest
(maybe aged 13)
looked back into the bus for me
and gave a knowing thumbs up.
I reciprocated the gesture.

They'd got on near Vauxhall.
Their ages ranged from
7 to maybe 14 years.
Two sat alongside me
on the back seat.
The only girl,

sat to my right,
one vacant space between us.

Their bottles of "White
Light'ning" had caught my eye
early on. What's that?
I'd wondered
but not for long.
I was looking away,
out of the window
when I heard a voice:
"Do you want a drink, mate?"

I turned. It was
the young girl
offering me a drink.
I declined but thanked her
and, asked them what kind of
drink "White Light'ning" was.
They said proudly:
"It's 8 percent! Cider!".

What had really touched me
was the unaffected way
in which the young girl
had offered me a swig.
I mused the likely childhoods
of some rather stuffy
researchers on the staff of the
Victoria and Albert Museum
I'd recently encountered -
my preference by far
was for these kids.

My heart's wish is that life
could be resolved that simply.
I'd like to burn really white,
brilliant magnesium bright
but last night being touched
by these "White Light'ning"

youngsters was the best
I could manage.

She was maybe eight
with a pleasant face
and wore a wide-ribbed olive
green padded 'Puffa' jacket.
Her dark hair was neatly
trained into a long pony tail
and, she had her prized bottle
of "White Light'ning".

Two of the youngest
were sat two seats ahead
but facing my way, talking.
They did not have bottles.
They wore neat plain olive
green long-peaked caps.
One had an ear-ring
and, a nice round face -
I wondered about this boy's
parents and guessed
they loved him lots.

The two immediately in front
were in their early teens.
They each had bottles.
So did the other three
sat across the aisle
in the back three seats
over to my right.
One was black skinned with
hair styled into curly knobs.

As we turned up Whitehall
one of the latter group
blurted out loudly:
"New Year I'm goin'
to Trafalgar Square

getting pissed 'n' everythin'.
I'm really goin'
to enjoy meself!"

Rosemary Phillips

Breast-stroke

A deep blue ocean with chlorine aroma,
and miniature waves of cool soothing water.
Soft muffled voices that bounce around your head
A paced stroke and controlled breathing that calm the soul

UNTIL

A breath in the wrong place and rhythm is lost
A lung full of chlorine water that cuts through the throat
Blood rushes to the head as the voices get louder
Struggling to reach the end as your lame stroke slows you

UNTIL

You've reached the end and calm returns
The strong fast beat of your heart echoes in your head
As the water cools your flustered body
In that deep blue ocean with chlorine aroma.

They said

"She's slipping away", they said
Were they really so sinister?
Those district nurses,
or was it that the dimmed
lights in the room were unflattering
to them.

They looked like the guardians
of some ancient path to the
underworld;
One tall and gaunt, the other
short and fat.
Both standing erect, straight
backs, hands clasped,
like votive statues
watching the bed where she
heaved and gasped for breath.

The doctor arrived, a
neat petite woman,
nice pageboy haircut,
very efficient.
"Yes she was in no pain"
"Yes it was the end."

Then they all bustled off,
giving rapid instructions.
Leaving an oxygen
cylinder and mask,
me, a bed,
and a crisis I thought
would pass.

"No" I thought.
"It's you that's wrong!
You don't know my wife.

Her sister arrives from
Australia at 6 a.m. tomorrow.
She'll be there.
She's beaten it before!"

So I set to with a will,
plying the oxygen when
needed, bathing face and
hands,
encouraging, talking bollocks,
anything to keep her alive.

And so it went on.
For how many hours
I cannot say, in the peaceful
dim light until I knew
I was losing.
She was losing.

Dark shadows began to
flow, shimmering from
behind the cupboards and
curtains and creep across
the yellow lit floor
and into the corners of my
eyes.

The intervals of quiet
became longer,
and then she sat up and
tried to talk.

I could not hear what she said.
I could not hear what she said.

And suddenly I needed help
and people about me.
Not doctors and nurses
but people I knew.

Who?

I named all my friends nearby.

Too young, too young!

I needed older people.

People who had seen this
through before
and knew what to do.

But they are too old.

My dad and mam, aunts, uncles.

And too far away.

Finally I phoned the
couple next door,
her friends and mine.

In they came to man
the oxygen,
make tea,
give kind words,
and share in my despair.

But she slipped away
from us,
So easily,
finally,
like custard off a table.
So simple,
so elemental.

"What a fight" I said,
looking at her.
Looking at her.
Feeling like a scarecrow.
All wooden limbs and nerves
falling out like straw.

We had a cup of tea
and murmured quietly.

Dawn came, ultramarine and black
through the lighted kitchen
window.

The doctor came back and
"yes no doubt, yes no doubt,
she was quite dead".
Certified, signed,
I had a receipt for my wife
from the other side.

My friends left,
numbed, tired, sorrowing.
I washed her.
Put on clean sheets,
dressed her in a nice dress,
covered her with the best
eiderdown,
combed her hair and
called the children
telling each
"Your mother is dead".
Poor child, poor child.
They melted into balls of tears
and I waited for them.

We sat for a long time
quiet,
just looking.
Then we went down into the
garden in the gentle new
morning of a warm spring
day.

We picked all the flowers.
Dahlias, daffodils, tulips
and went back up the stairs
and put them all round her.

And then we cried
and waited for her sister
to arrive from Australia.



Prognosis

I had a dream about you.
We were in our bed.
I was about to embrace you,
but they had typed all over you.

Just below your neck
forename - Christian name,
born, etc.
place, etc.
parents, etc.

Over your breasts
a word that began with M
that meant cancer.

Over your stomach
a word that began with P
that said terminal.

Just above your mount of Venus
the date of your death
and down your thighs
line after line
of details
I could not make sense of,
and then I could not see
it clearly.

Tears get in your eyes,
they asked me how I knew.

In the cancer hospital

The visitors room of the
Royal Marsden is empty but
for us.

The T.V. is off,
its screen a grey shiny void,
and the bright afternoon
sunlight has drawn the
shadow of the window
on the red tiled floor.

At the old yellowed, brown piano
you are teaching my daughter
to play the Barcarolle.

The notes rustle the
specks of dust
sparkling and dancing
in the shaft of sunlight.

Here on the edge
where life and death
are dispensed.

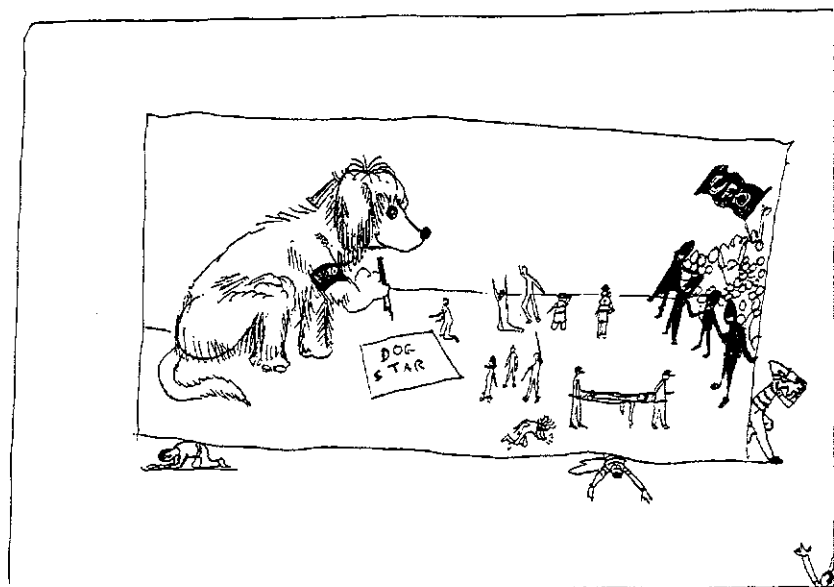
Brighter than the city lights

Brighter than the city lights
The dog star is shining
Over all awful human plight
Never resigning

Over blood and dust and tears
Caused by man for all these years
Even at you they shake their spears
If their heart's inclining

I'm glad to see you way up there
Dog star, almost smiling
Cleaner than this earthly air
Your light keeps shining

Over people sick or dying
In their graveyards some are lying
While the dog star gives its light
To the world untiring.



Pat O'Gorman

Christmas time is drawing near

Christmas time is drawing near
But in the promised land
There's bitter fighting
For the right to live you understand
They say that rubber bullets cannot kill a man
But three men have died of something
Or wasn't that the plan?

Pat O'Gorman

It's peaceful here

It's peaceful here though crowded
But it's not far to the trouble
Here it's throwing horseshoes
There it's petrol bombs and batten rounds
Amongst the rubble.

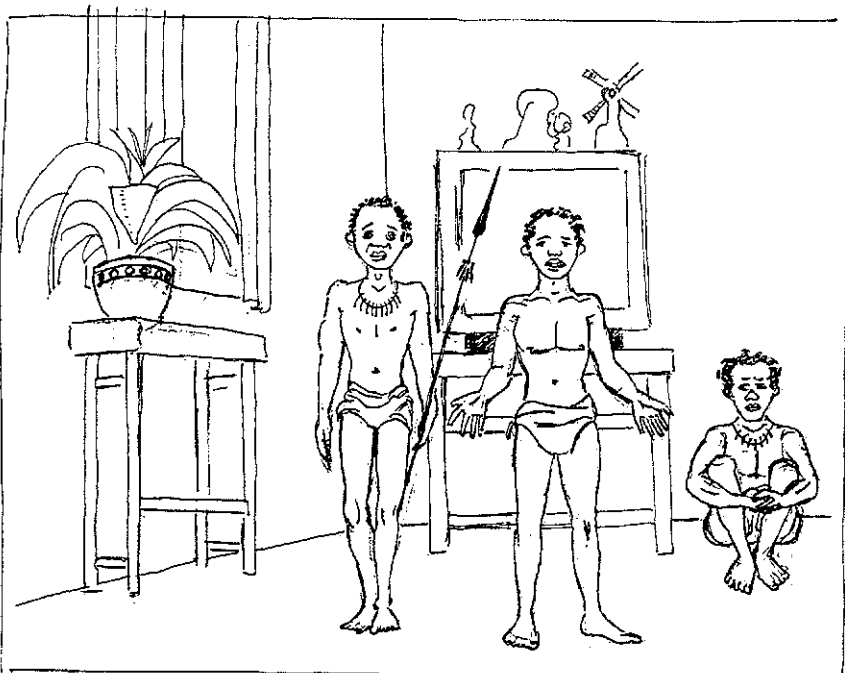
Pygmies

A black and white photo from schooldays long ago
A people locked away in Africa
Race of small humans, hardly known
One small plucky, jungle hunter.

Years later in colour all aglow
The Pygmies came to us 'cross miles unknown
Into our living room out of the green jungle
Buzzing with life and raining, raining so.

They speak of raising children, kind
Unhurting, always helping - even
The gawky young men, till they are nearly grown.
Mature and shy the father speaks for the tribe,
The young ones smile and flirt, just the same worldwide,
Children run through the trees, no school for these -
But jungle hunts for caterpillars, - the staple summer diet
Boiled, fried and chewed, and found by all high up,
In trees - or falling on the ground -
The greatest delicacy around.

Owned, by the local tribe - large Africans -
The Pygmies work to gather grubs for them.
Thought inferior by the black tall men, chastised by their women,
They huddle in the jungle rain and
Play their life to ours - secure and tame.
Only one thing - the caterpillars are scarce this year
Why - the reason is not clear.
Logging - they vaguely say, but the grubs have gone away,
A paltry few making a tasty stew - ever tried baked rat?
Any food will do!
The rains came early; is their weather, too
Amisss?



The Qarmates. An early socialist movement in Iraq

To my Iraqi friends and comrades

The history of the Middle East is veiled in theology and oil imperialism, and nothing is every heard of the class struggles of these old societies.

Mesopotamia - the present day Iraq - was a Persian province for four hundred years before being conquered by the rising forces of Islam in 635 A.D. With the foundation of Baghdad, in 762, it became the seat of the empire of the Khalifs and developed under the enlightened rule of Harun al-Rashid - eternalised in the stories of "A Thousand and One Nights", into the most beautiful and advanced of all cities, with exquisite libraries and colleges, where scholars from all parts of the world met.

A wealthy cosmopolitan merchant class which controlled the trade route between India, China, Africa and Greece regarded it as their privilege to foster science and the arts.

But the egalitarian and democratic message of early Islam which was the cause for its rapid expansion was soon forgotten. As in ancient Athens, democracy was strictly confined to the well-to-do in the big towns while the peasantry and the slaves lived in utter misery. And so in this highly stratified society a peasant revolt broke out in the ninth century in the marshes of Southern Iraq and on the shores of the Persian Gulf. The rebellion became even more powerful when the Zendis, the black slaves who were brought from Zanzibar joined the movement. These slaves had to work roped together to prevent them from escaping, when they were made to dig the soil for nitrates in the Shatt el-Arab,

The emergence of the Shia the protestant sect of Islam, produced a revolutionary creed which expressed the needs of the damned of the earth.

The early qarmates. After one unsuccessful rebellion, the Shia elected Ali al-Burqa in 868 who set up a revolutionary government with his close friend Rashid Qarmati, a miller and lemonade seller, who became the theoretician of the movement.



They defended the people against the soldiery of the Khalifs (religious secular rulers of the Arab world) and against the greedy merchant princes of Basrah. They made even incursions into Baghdad where Ali was killed in 883, and where his head was carried on a spear through the streets to intimidate the people.

It took the government over fifteen years to put down the revolt which Ali's incorruptible personality had been able to mobilise, and he remained a legend into our own time.

In spite of ruthless countermeasures, like hanging and torture, revolt followed revolt, and the callousness of the ruling families was directly responsible for the downfall and disintegration of the society. It could not resist the onslaught of the Mongols, who brought an end to the splendour of Baghdad - that most beautiful of all cities, by setting it on fire in 1258.

The Qarmates were strongly influenced by Mani the eminent Persian revolutionary thinker who was crucified in 273, whose ideals transcended race, religion and nationality, and who stressed foremost equality and charity. In spite of the fact that the movement was again and again drowned in blood and suppressed with unrivalled cruelty, it emerged again under the leadership of Hamdan Qarmat, about 900, a peasant who founded the House of Refuge, where the oppressed could find a haven. Everything was common property. Women were nobody's property any more. On January 12, 930 the Qarmates took Mecca.

The people of Iraq and on the shores of the Persian Gulf have remained conscious that there in their midst had sprung up the first communist societies. The Arab Trade Unions and the whole popular movement of the area have remained faithful to the Qarmates, and it is due to their teachings that Islam has preserved its progressive elements.

It is a sign of deep ignorance to assume that the democratic ideas of Iraq are imported from abroad. They are profoundly indigenous and they could neither be rooted out by the Ottoman bureaucracy, nor by the British military; least of all by the Anglo-American oil companies and their local henchmen.

The Christmas Pudding



Key words: Aborigines, Queen Victoria, strychnine, genocide.

The gift

It came as a gift - sweet, solid, homely, full of hope, appeasement, friendliness and at a joyous time of year. It sat admired in the camp and they danced to it, during those hot evenings under the Southern Cross. To the recipient family it came as a totally unexpected preserver.

The problem

Their food had been meagre and the kangaroos had long departed, hunted out by settlers and replaced by sheep and cattle, by fences and grassland. Hunted out by settlers, ruthless men armed with rifles and steel traps. Everyone was uneasy. The long spears lay propped nearby. It had become, inexplicably, a violent society. One by one their friends had been killed in only small incidences.

The solution

But perhaps at this time, the most fecund period of the year, a new time was approaching. A time for new friendships, stretched out arms across two worlds, the old to the new. Perhaps, after all, the newcomers wanted help, advice, neighbourliness? Perhaps they could be persuaded to remove the new cattle sheds from what had been, before, a family grave? Everything seemed possible. The small family sat around the pudding and admired it. It was distributed by the mother with such care, equal portions for the four children and the parents. They ate it with delight, hope, but during those final moments gazed at each other with growing realisation, horror and ultimate despair.

Don't mention it

In London, the night throbbed with the silver jubilee
as the duped people of Britain
celebrated the twenty-five year reign over them
of, probably, the richest woman in the world.

At the bottom of Charing Cross Road,
in one of those small, unused doorways
that theatres seem to have
you could just see, leaning,
the grey, huddled figure of an old woman
- plastic bags beside her feet.

And, from one of these bags,
there was sticking out, a little, paper flag
- the Union Jack -
as if to say, 'I'm a part of all this, as well'.

And, truly, she was
because it couldn't have happened without her.
Their royal gain was her loss,
They owe everything they have to her,
really owe everything,
and they didn't even say, thanks
- nor did she think to demand it.

Old duffers arise

Thousands of us "senile old duffers"
marched to Trafalgar Square.
We've often done that over the years
when we knew things were not so fair.

Nothing is "fair" again today.
With a Tory government we won't let stay!
Ten million of us could be a decisive vote
and we want a rise in pay.
To say there is no money
is the rubbish we've heard before.
"They" always find money for armaments
as they did in days of yore.

We haven't got all the time we'd like
"They" owe us thousands of quids
and we want help also the young
cos we feel they are still, our kids.

The term "senile" and old duffer/buffer was the remark made by a
Tory Councillor of another retired one who had dared to resign and
join the Liberal Democrats (signs of the times! left and right).

Like some comets my tale may run ahead of me

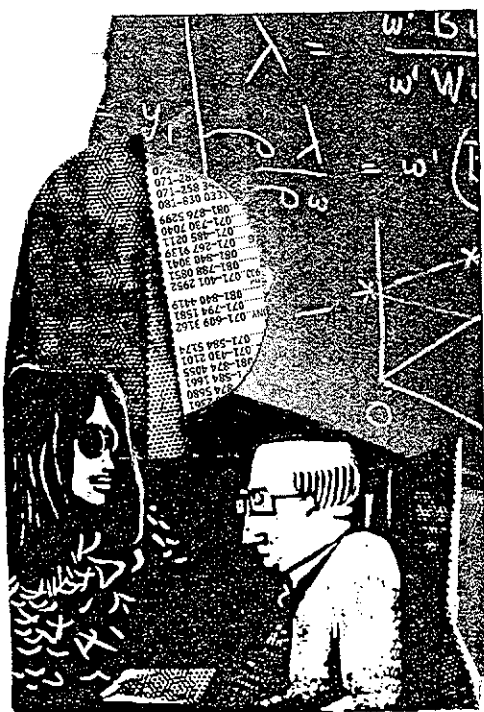
Everything that ever was
is
Everything that ever
will be
was
Everything that
can happen
has
and all that is
was and has
is now in this endless moment
of the Big Bang.

Now from the centre
of my universe
do I look forward to my
beginning
or backward
to my end?



Mathematics

Mathematics is a measure of the uniqueness of man
It is the tool and the instrument
Of the completed cosmic plan.
If the universe is running mathematically
Then they that have a knowledge of this art,
Are touched a little with divinity.



"applied statistics to psychology"

ELIAS

The X quotation

Two and two make four - said the science teacher
(well most of the time!)
But in Einsteinian times - who knows
And are there eternal snows?
What of anti-matter
Does it float in Black Holes?
It's true all things seem in a state of flux
Shall we collapse inward and become fleshy white dwarfs
Or seek escape, momentarily in a bottle or white powder?
Perhaps listen to an old bard's advice and "take arms against a sea of troubles"

Will we see only the Ying
or raise our eyes to the Yang?
Is the equation
what both will bring?

Making conversation

It's my birthday today
I'm 63.
It's bloody frightening ain't it
Yesterday and all last year, I was 62.
Yah! Pooh! I don't care
Today I'm 63, that's me, 63.

"Oh Christ! I don't care if you're 63,
Not me.
Cos by chance it's my birthday as well
And what's more I'm 64, see!"

64 eh? teh, teh, teh, teh, 64?
Still never mind, many happy returns to you at 64.
Now tell me, what's it like to be 63?
Cos that's what I am today, me, 63.

"I know you're 63!
I know, unlike me, you're 63.
So what's so great about being
Like I used to be, 63?"

Well there's nothing great about it, except to me
And others at 63.
It's just that we would simply abhor
Being 64, see!

"Well it's better than being 65
And of this you can be sure.

You can't change how or when or even if
"You'll" ever arrive at 64 or 65!

Well thank you for that jolly thought pal
You've cheered me up no end.

I was happy, cos I'd found someone, who was even
Older than what I am today, me, 63.

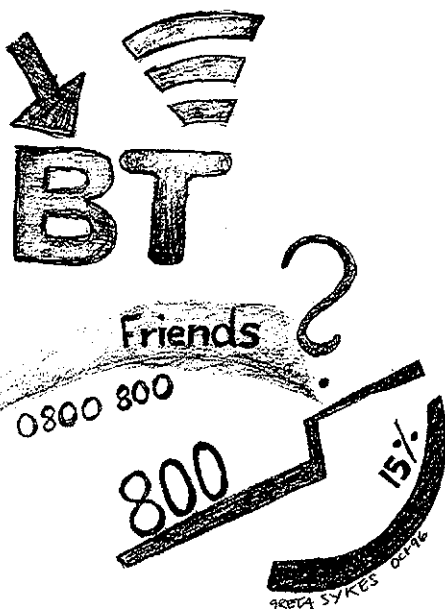
"Well not to worry
Happy birthday son. Enjoy your 63rd.
And, if by chance you're still above the ground
This time next year.
Come round and see me
And I'll buy you a beer!

Ian Cameron

Great news for BT users!

Dear BT Customer,
You can now save AT LEAST 95%
on all your BT phone bills.
Choose just five phone numbers
of friends you phone
most frequently - and it doesn't
even matter what their ages
or sexual orientations are!

Notify those numbers to BT by using
your International BT Charge Card.
All notification calls are charged
at your local FLORA EXTRA FINE
REDUCED FAT RATE - plus 15% VAT.
What could possibly be more simple
and straight-forward?



When those lucky friends'
numbers have been logged into
BT's 'Five Chosen Friends Computer'
you will be given a PIN number
and a 'Five Friendly Phone
Numbers Single Person Sized
Freebee BT Fridge Freezer;

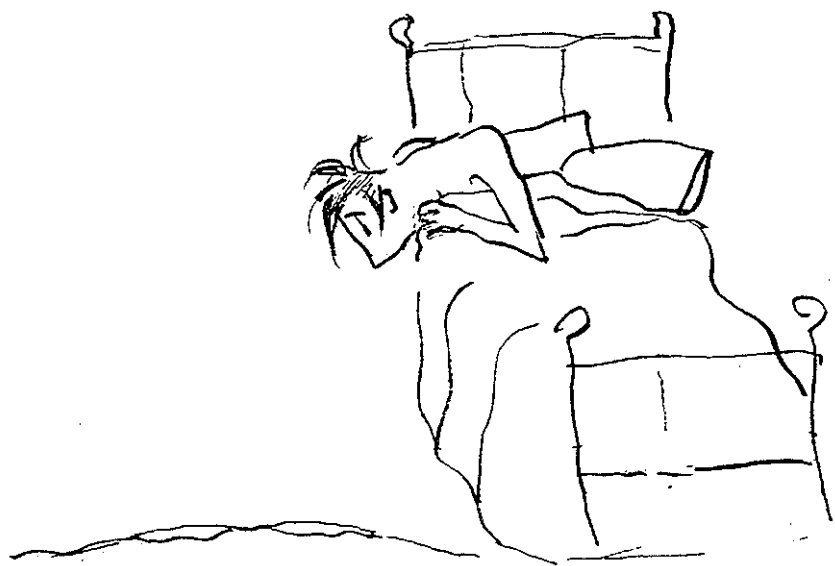
Climb into your BT Freebee
Freezer and close the door -
depress the pillow and a
light WILL come on - then
dial all your chosen numbers
till your heart's content.
You are now set to reduce all
your phone bills dramatically.
The only stipulation made by BT
is that you must remain in
the Freebee BT Freezer until
JUST ONE (the youngest) of your
chosen friends dies of old age.

It's good to talk in a rich
cockney brogue to ageing friends!
So don't delay, save at least 95%
off your BT phone Bill today.
Our deliriously happy Customer
Services Advisors can answer all
your worries on: 0800 800 800

A classy pair of knickers

Marks & Spencer sell very good underwear at excellent prices and now have fitting rooms to boot. There is no need at all, therefore, to subject oneself to the black arts of salesladies in the lingerie salons of department stores.

But that, for some reason, is what I always do. This is what happens: I catch sight of my bra on the floor one morning, looking very unsexy. I think: this garment will not help me to defy the laws of gravity, nor to pass the pencil test, indeed. (As if I would.) It has lost its *joie de vivre*. It is not aesthetic any more. I will go forth and buy a new one. I look for the label to see the make - for it served well in its time; but this I have cut off. (Not that it matters, for as soon as you find a style you like the manufacturers get wind of it and immediately discontinue the line.)



*I catch sight of my bra on the floor
one morning, looking very unsexy*

Lingerie departments are very special places. In spite - or perhaps because of - the saucy nature of their wares, they have a hushed and exclusive atmosphere. Their staff are particularly visible because of the contrast between their dark, sober suits and the frilly nothings all around them. They are also, unlike the staff in other departments, anxious to help you; and they pronounce 'lingerie' firmly as if the word had nothing to do with the French. They have unusual powers: they can flick through a dozen apparently identical brassières on a rack and recognise your size without reading the labels: they have become super-sensitive to cups. They know how to put bras on (not the way you would think). Theirs is a vocation; they are the cognoscenti of lace and Lycra; and they are fully conscious of their calling.

So when I walked into the lingerie department of Harvey Nichols I thought I'd let the ladies do the looking for me, '34B, underwired, in white, please,' I said. Three saleswomen turned to look at me and assessed me for a second. 'No, Madam,' they said, to my surprise. I repeated my request. 'No, Madam,' they said again. 'You are not 34B.' I was astonished, I had been 34B ever since I could remember and I told them so. 'Not any more, dear,' they said. 'More like . . .'



I shouted for my proper size

and suggested some monstrous dimension. Had my chest suddenly expanded without my noticing? 'How old are you?' they continued impertinently. I told them., 'Ah. Are you on . . . ? Ah. That would explain it. I had hardly any bust to speak of till I went on it, and look at me now - 38 Triple D.' I gazed appalled at the dramatic balcon of this otherwise petite woman. Thoroughly shaken, I entered the fitting room armed with some upholstery the like of which I'd never thought to be associated with. Deeply distressed, but obedient, I tried them on. They were vast! They were outrageous! They flapped about me, ballooned out in hollow mockery, their cups and straps bore no relation whatsoever to myself. I poked my nose out of the fitting room and shouted for my proper size - which I had asked for in the first place. Tried them on, paid, and escaped. I'm not going there again. I thought.

But what do I do the very next time I trip over some unlovely garment on my way to the bathroom? I forget all about my traumatic experience in Harvey Nichols and head blithely for Barkers like a Pascal lamb, forgetting, too, that M & S is two doors down the road. This time I did not ask for my size, however, but



I was festooned with straps and hooked
to bustiers 93

set-to boldly to tackle the racks myself. It quickly became apparent that the racks were not to relinquish their treasure without a battle. Hangers became hopelessly entangled, I was soon festooned with fiendish straps and hooked to bustiers, while matching briefs fell to the floor like dead snipe. A black-haired saleswoman watched this mayhem with a glint in her eye, and only when she deemed the moment right did she come to my assistance. She gently unravelled me from my lacy harness, then she moved into top gear. She whisked desirable bras of perfect size from out their hiding places on the stands. From gliding drawers she magicked tempting variations on the theme, with replicas in black for sultry occasions. She was dynamic. I floated into a fitting room on a wave of lycra, and half an hour later emerged with two garments instead of the one I needed, since I knew they were not to be had again. I went to the counter where the saleslady was waiting like a sphinx. 'How would you like to pay, Madam?' she asked. 'Visa, please,' I said. Her black eyes opened wide. 'Don't you have a Fraser Card?' 'I'm afraid I don't,' I said. 'Why not?' she asked, and her colleagues looked as shocked as she did. I could think of no adequate reason why I did not have a Fraser Card. She leaned towards me. 'Did you know that if you open an account with Fraser Card, we give you ten per cent off all the purchases you make that day? It's a Special Promotion we're doing this month.' I made a calculation and reckoned it would definitely be worth it, even if I closed the account tomorrow. 'You talked me into it,' I said. her teeth gleamed and her eyes looked like hot plums in brandy. 'Our target is, in fact, forty pounds . . . Now that leaves you just a little short to qualify for the discount, Madam. Would you like to look around for something else for two or three pounds? A pair of briefs, perhaps?' Two or three pounds? There was nothing in this department for two or three pounds. The cheapest pair of pants I had seen were over nine pounds. Still, I told myself that with the discount, I could afford to go for a different class of knicker from the usual two-for-a-quid jobs from the Portobello market. I chose a pair in white cotton which cost £21.99. In a state of shock, I took them to the saleslady at her counter. She eyed the purchase mistily. 'Lejaby,' she murmured.

I left Barkers in possession of two new brassiers, a Fraser Card with a considerable amount debited to it and a very expensive pair of

knickers. When the cold air of Kensington High Street hit me I realised I had been hypnotised by a saleswoman in a lingerie department. I just hope I get tipped upside down in a few accidents to make it worth it.

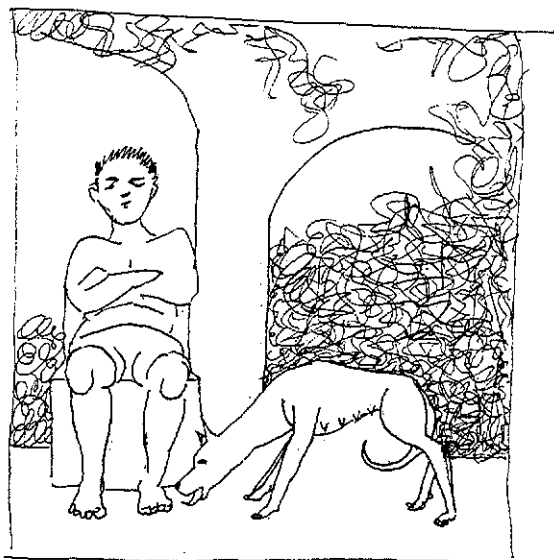
Ian Cameron

'ROMA' at 'Bivio Buonanotte'

Good afternoon crazed,
fiendish, barking,
baying, snarling Sicilian
Madonie Country Dog,
with very sharp teeth,
eight hanging teats and
a severely underslung
tailpiece. So sorry
I didn't quite
catch your name, pray
please speak more slowly.

You are thirteen minutes too
late for a share of my ham
sandwiches. This afternoon,
under this lovely shady tree,
you have the luxury of
two remaining choices.

Firstly, you may forage
here in the brushwood
and get stung on your nose
by a Bee or some other
miserable miscreant!
Ah ha! You didn't like that
at all - you were too quick
off the "Choices" mark.

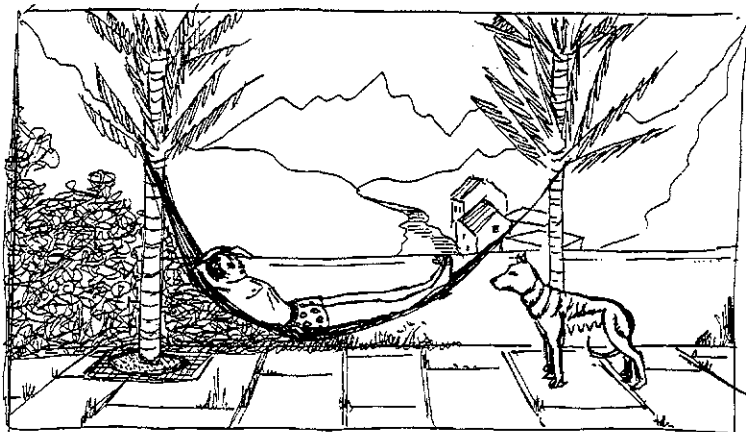


Secondly, as I repose,
slyly watching through
eyes seemingly closed,
you may sneak up, sniff and
then lick my bare tip-toes
though gently as it goes!

Ah, silently circling Sicilian
Dog, now closing-in very very
tentatively on tip-toes with
your eight hanging teats, you
have finally chosen the latter.
And you lick so gently too!
I throw myself at your feet
tho' this desire I dare not
speak: for I could never be
a true caring friend to you
for very soon I know I'd have
to cast you off unkindly.

Sicilian Bees B-Off!
Vamoosh! Viva Sicilia!
Viva Sicilian Tip-Toeing
Toe-Sniffin' n' Lickin' dogs.
I still didn't get your name!
Ah, never mind - next year
perhaps. Till then I christen
you:

"ROMA!"



cat miaow

cat miaow
dog can't bark
took it for a walk
disappeared in the park

cat miaow
budgie don't speak
had no bird seed
for a week

cat miaow
no sound from the rat
legs in the air
lies on its back

cat miaow
hamster alert
shed its skin
face in the dirt

cat miaow
salamander bereft
under the sand
never left

cat miaow
fish tank dry
been so hot
that's not why

cat miaow
gerbils fled
left no note
just an empty

cat miaow
chick's asleep
lost its mother
closed its beak

cat miaow
goat in the gutter
hit by a car?
sliced open like butter

cat miaow
horse's rump
on the plate
missed a jump

cat miaow
hungry as hell
eaten all my pets
wants me as well

Bryan Lynch

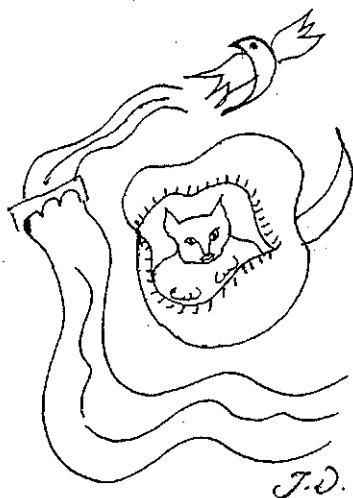
Letting the cat out of the bag!

What are you doing letting the cat out of the bag?

Don't you know it's in there with good reason
and you trying to drive it berserk with a hint of fresh air and
freedom.

Look at it now will you? A demented lumpen shape, paws kicking
little head butting the bag.

Jesus, if it tears that bag ...
and you know that they're fine bags
for storing turf in the winter and drowning cats in the summer.



Oh Starling can't you sing

Oh Starling can't you sing,
Oh Starling can't you sing,
Was it you I heard today
With a song of suffering.

Perched high above me
About to serenade
All I hear is a croak
A sound like a frog in the throat.

Oh Starling can't you sing,
Oh Starling can't you sing,
Was it you I saw today
Full of the joys of spring.

Sunshine on your spangled wing,
A breeze to glide and play in;
The plumage of a hundred stars
Scatter as you flap your wing.

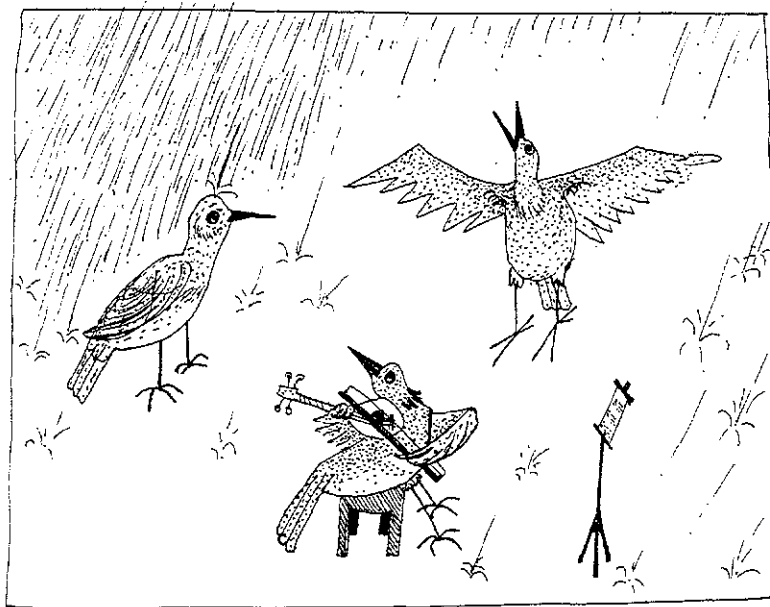
Oh Starling can't you sing,
Oh Starling can't you sing,
Is it you who tries so hard
But can't make music ring.

Perched high above me
Your wing a star filled sky
About to perform a love song
With a twinkle in your eye.

All the land anticipating
As you opened up your throat
Your starry feathers quivered
All you did was croak.



Oh Starling can't you sing,
Oh Starling can't you sing,
Though all the stars of night
Are stardust in your wing
Oh Starling can't you sing,
Oh Starling can't you sing.



Tsavo National Park

A dewdrop on the edge of a leaf
reflects the azure blue sky
and the wingtip of a serpent
eagle passing by.

The droplet clings to the leaf
as the plant to the crumbling
earth.

Both perched precariously
Keeping a delicate balance
on the edge.

Beyond, the cliff dives down,
down, down into the dusty
plain

The plant, the leaf, the dewdrop
survey the endless miles of
grey green scrub and
sunbleached dust below.

There, life teems beneath the
canopy of acacia trees.

Yet, on high
all seems still, silent
But the eagle with his beady
eye
detects the slightest movement
and swoops, talons outstretched
into the dust.

A moment, and it's gone
soaring up into the blue.
Gone.

Siobhan McVeigh

Music tumbles from your hands

Music tumbles from your hands,
Deft fingers shape and create
A melody
Harmony sweeps over us
As I listen to your tunes
Go outside in,
Sounds soothe and amuse my mind,
Too eager to think about the coming day.
You play your guitar raptly,
Wrapped in possibilities
Each note a choice
Whose limitations vibrate
in sympathy with my own,
Now chased away.

The last song

Yesterday my
singing teacher
died.

So, I would like to be like her
with children in her mind.

"She's so musical that child."

"How do you know?"

"She feels and loves the music so."

Children stood at my teacher's elbow
singing for countless years before I stood
learning again.

A watchful pupil

I looked her in the eyes.

She observed me, listened

knew just what to show -

she'd sung herself - "Oh yes, the
audience knows."

Not one word out of true

she persisted till she knew

her knowledge had filtered through
my mind. Now

complete, our hour had come

I sang one more sweet Irish song

"Mind ends of words; that's very good" she said

encouraging, and with last brightness

admired the orange lilies that I'd brought

in thanks for what she'd given

to so many children.

Ten pink roses today

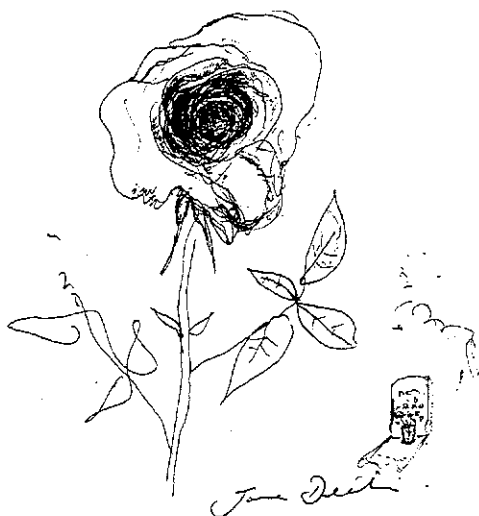
Ten pink roses today
laid crossed in pairs
from one who cares
to whom you gave
life and love from birth.

These kisses of remembrance
placed upon
the silent earth
are for you.
dear Eily and Jim.

I know that you are there
but it's hard to bear
that you can't unlock the door
to let love in
not any more.

After all our years together
those dearly remembered days
those always welcoming ways,
alas,
are gone for ever.

(8th Sept. 1996)



Bill Eburn

To Florence

Let me not lie
in the dull earth
where tireless worms
go their relentless way

But let my ashes
be borne by
the four winds
that I may join
their dusty discourse
in the high places.

Bill Eburn

After you

"What will happen to us?"
She asked, "That's what worries me."
"We shall die", said I.
"Doesn't it bother you", she said
"Not to know,
who will be the first to go."

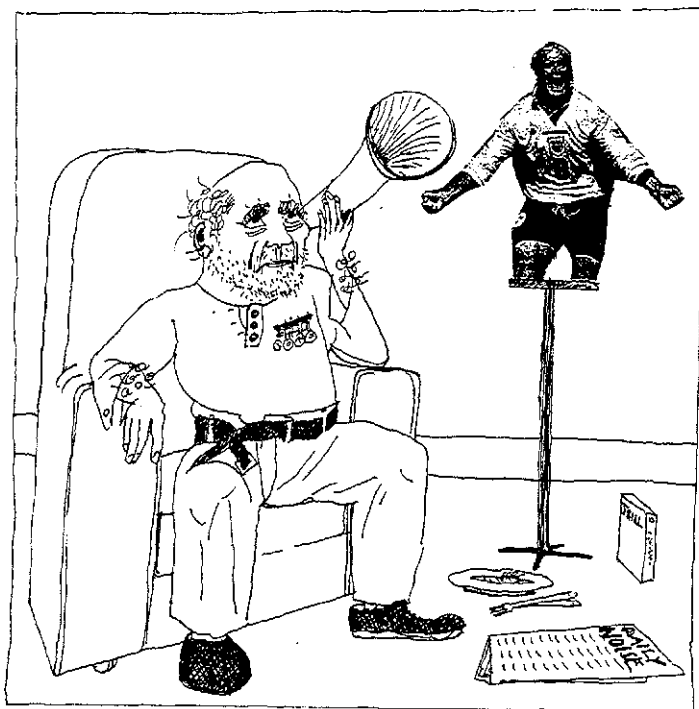
"I had rather hoped,"
I said dutifully
"It would be me,"
"That's what I mean," said she
"Just like a man, self first,
self second and self again!"

Oh the silence of my grandfather

Oh the silence of my grandfather
All I can do is listen
To the big noise of the world.
If noise were a plague infested rat
Every one would be dead by now
From HiFi's to tanks
From Atom bombs to Yanks
The big noise is growing, deafening, frightening.

I love the sound of children playing
I love the sound of the wind on a winters night
I love the sound of birds singing
I love the sound of cats fighting.

Oh the silence of my grandfather
All I can do is listen
To the big noise of the world.
We have the biggest world leaders
to ever exist in history
We have the biggest politicians
the world has ever seen
Politicians bigger than Zeppelins
bigger than big rock candy mountains
We have the biggest film stars
the world has ever known
the moon will become a billboard
for their next blockbuster
And they all make noise
More noise than a creaky door in heaven.



Oh the silence of my grandfather
All I can do is listen
To the big noise of the world.
The big noise symphony
Of T.V. set, cat and C.D.
Of bullets and bombs
that come as free gifts in newspapers.
Of fierce needle poison drug pushers
showing off to school children
in video glitz sales talk
Of latest disaster, coup, murder, scandal
winding its' way to a screen near you.

While you sit listening for the postman
While you eat breakfast
While you kiss your children goodmorning
The big noise of the world is growing
It climbs all over you
It lurks inside of you
It gets under your feet.

Oh the silence of my grandfather
All I can do
Is listen to the big noise of the world.
I hear its' siren wailing
on a vehicle going nowhere fast
through traffic jams of road rage
I hear its' car alarms go off
to the sound of breaking glass
I hear the rattle of garbage
blown along the road
I listen to the big noise everyday
The big noise is growing in every way.



Excerpt from **Lily's Mother** (1) (published in "Disturbing Power")

"She'd come from Lithuania by way of Ravensbruck on the killing
road to Belsen, her luck
not good. She met some big strong
Russian guy
and they got passage to Canada
taking only her dark crude
memories, of what she'd had to do for warmth and food.

Deborah Lavin

Lily's mother (2)

She caught Lily smoking
and she hit her, hard, bashed her around the head
screaming in Lithuanian, the words choking
her. "What the hell had she said?"
I asked Lily, who was still shaking an hour after the virago
had finished. We were out by then in Queen Street, Toronto
waiting at the street car stop by Lansdowne
going clothes-shopping Downtown.

"My mother said that it was dangerous to want to smoke
the women in the camps used to have sex with the guards
for cigarettes". I laughed "Is that some kind of joke?"

We bought the stuff we wanted and went for a hamburger and fries
Pensive after eating. Lily said "You know, my mother often cries
I sometimes find her weeping, by herself, about the Old Country
and the things that happened" and Lily looked sorrowful at me.

"She seems to think that things like that could come again"
"To Canada! Your mother's crazy! How! What and when?"
Then we talked some more about the coming High School dance
and of all the guys we liked, and were planning to entrance.

Lily's mother (4)

Away from the distraction of the telly
we were doing some homework in the kitchen
at the back of the Lily's mother's deli

In the distance, we could hear Lily's mother
her voice like a kalashnikov in some kind of race
arguing with a fat customer
swaddled in musquash
Then this other
woman began to really shout
curious I asked. "What are they going on about?"

Lily looked away, embarrassed and said
in a quiet, unconvincing voice,
so quiet, it was ghostly dead
"Oh just about how clever I am and hope they hope I don't meet
some jerk and ruin my life, before I get on my feet."

Then, all of a sudden, the shouting got crazy loud
and we heard things knocking
over, so we rushed into the shop, to crowd
around Lily's mother
and this other woman.

Lily's mother was pushing and punching
the fur-fat woman out of the door
banging over, in her fury, some boxes and a chair.

I'd never seen Lily's mad mother quite so sore!
"Is the woman a shoplifter or something?" I asked



By this time, Lily's mother had the fur-fat woman by the hair
holding it fast
and the woman was screaming
tears teeming
down her face
as she shouted in broken angry English to us standing there
"WHY DO YOU PEOPLE HATE MY RACE?"
Lily's mother had got the women to the open door
by then, and Lily was weeping, trying to implore
her mother, to take it easy, Lily spoke in Lithuanian
but I understood how mortified,
she was. This horror-show wasn't very "New Canadian*".

Once the door was open, Lily's mother let go her grip
and the fat customer ran off, on her swollen legs
And Lily's mother, triumphant, took a large sip
of the brandy, she always carried at her hip

And she went back to sitting
behind the till, and took up her knitting
like everything was OK, and she smiled at me
showing her big front gold filling
- and she told Lily, to make some Russian tea.

I went back with Lily to the kitchen
at the back of the delicatessen
shocked, at first we didn't speak
then after a while, as she prepared the tea
Lily said, in a voice unlike hers, soft, sad and weak

"I've never told you about my mother's attitudes, her views
that woman, in the shop, was Jewish, my mother won't have Jews
in the shop. My mother hates the Jews, she's confused
she blames everything, she blames Hitler on the Jews!"

We went silent for a while, as Lily
made the tea, normal sounds of talking
and of movement, came from the deli
From upstairs we could hear The Flintstones on the telly
"I sort of understand" I lied,
as we sat down to drink the Russian tea
--- and Lily cried and cried.

and we went back to do our homework, some history
assignment about the total victory
we'd all won in 1945
and how "it" could never happen again
while we keep the memory alive.

* New Canadian; the term used in Canada after the Second
World War for immigrants

Excerpt from **Russian lament**

So Communism has collapsed.
Capitalism had Macdonalds'
cash tills spinning roubles
in its eyes before the
ink was dry on the contracts
drugs had rolled over
the Berlin Wall and the
frontiers fell to the
onslaught of the Mafiosi.

To those of us standing
on the sidelines clutching
our Marxist textbooks this
was a scenario we did not
have to write or watch.
It was as clear as day
Capitalism means crime,
poverty, homelessness, want.

In the event the world
is worse than even
Marxists could imagine
but we cannot avoid
seeing what is happening.
It is a simpler world
to get straight. No false
models any more, just
exploiters and the poor.

Time and experience float
around trying to piece
it all together. Bits of
the past drift over the
airwaves, a Russian girl
who resisted the Nazis
to the end, a free spirit
who danced her way into
the concentration camps.

It happened a long time ago.
Some survived the war and
the purges to tell of her.
"You will not forget me,
you will tell the people
who I was". Yes, we remember
you, for all that is worth now.

We have that feeling that
you are glad to be dead in
that hell hole that was
Belsen, for you believed
your sacrifice would matter.
But now they are tearing up
the heritage of your sacrifice,
ripping down public palaces
for wood to burn to keep warm ...

Female Legend Number 2. Dolores Ibarruri or "La Pasionaria"

Really, there is no shortage of legendary and indomitable women fighters for sex equality, social justice, human rights, national liberation, world peace and a New International Economic Order.

When the unrivalled 'Mother Jones' died in 1930, another female figure, to become an international legend, was emerging onto the world scene where she was to play an outstanding role until her death in November 1989 at the age of 94 years.

Her death was then mourned worldwide but especially in her native Spain and by surviving members of the never to be forgotten 'International Brigade' who went from many lands to Spain during 1936-38 to defend its Popular Front Government against the military attack led by the fascist General Franco, backed up by German and Italian forces provided by Hitler and Mussolini who were later to play the major part in unleashing the World War 2 holocaust.

Ibarruri was born in 1896 into a coal miner's family in the Basque Region of Spain. She grew up in conditions of great poverty and privation. She married a coal miner in 1919 and, influenced by the Russian Revolution led by Lenin in 1917, she became a Communist as did most of the poor people in the village where she lived.

Ibarruri joined in the struggles of the poor and downtrodden Spanish workers and made her way to Madrid. Like her counterpart Mother Jones in America, she was constantly being hounded, persecuted and jailed for her activities.

In 1933 she attended a 'World Womens Conference against War and Fascism'. There she spoke about the emerging fascist menace to Europe and the world, the menace that was to result in World War 2 and 60 million dead, 90 million mutilated, horrifying Concentration and Death camps, the massacre of Jews and the atomisation in seconds of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan.



From her mining community Ibarruri was elected to the Spanish Parliament in 1936 where one of her first acts was to go personally to a prison to release Asturian miners. (perhaps there is something about coal mining and its constant risks to life and limb that gives women in mining communities enormous courage, determination and fighting spirit as 'women against pit closures' here in Britain have shown).

1936 was also the year in which the Franco led fascist rebellion was launched. During the following 3 years, Ibarruri's organising activity and inspiration became a legend.

The British Tory Government of the day, and its counterparts in France and the USA, refused to aid the Spanish Republic by pursuing a policy of "non-intervention", whilst fascist Germany and Italy were pouring in aid to Franco.

It was Pasionaria who uttered the rallying call "No Pasaran" and repeated the slogan of Jim Larkin during the bloody Dublin strike of 1913, "Better to die on your feet than live on your knees".

But the great 3 year long struggle was defeated. Franco succeeded and controlled Spain for 36 years.

Like thousands more Pasionaria was forced to flee abroad. She went to Moscow where lived for 38 years and continued her activity for a working-class ruled Spain. Her son, Rubin, a Soviet Airforce pilot, was killed in action during World War II. Following the death of Franco, she returned to her native land to continue her struggles.

Pasionaria got her name because she was regarded as one of the most moving speakers of all time. She spoke straight from the heart, reflected people's needs and could get right inside their feelings.

Some 20 years ago as a member of a trade union delegation in Moscow, I entered the lounge of the October Hotel. Among a group of visiting Canadians, I noticed a woman with a lean face, hair combed tightly back, dressed in black. She had very noticeable eyes, as if illuminated. Something clicked in my head. I pointed and said to out interpreter, "Pasionaria surely!". And so it was.

The Missing Files

Little Alois was the son of Clara Schickelgruber, a country girl who worked as a maid with the Rubners, the household of a Jewish doctor in Graz, a small Austrian town where everybody knew everybody. On Sundays when Mrs. Rubner took the children to the in-laws, Clara and Dr. Rubner were carrying on a secret love affair. At Christmas Clara was rewarded with an envelope containing an unusually large amount of money and a letter from Dr. Rubner that she has to understand the problems of a family man and the promise that he would never forget the lovely Sunday afternoons he had spent with her.

Clara too, had problems. With five periods missing, she decided to accept at once the offer of a certain Herr Hitler, an elderly customs officer, a freethinker who had no misgivings about Clara's past, and the prospects of receiving regularly discreet payments for the upkeep of little Alois, gave him the feeling that everything was in good hands.

German Nationalism and racism were not yet promoted, and over the door of the pub where the customs officer spent his evenings was a large board saying: "Whether Christian, Pagan, Jew, We've a drink that waits for you."

Little Alois grew up but to the disappointment of his parents he didn't do well at school. He was sure that the schoolmaster had found out about his Jewish background, and therefore always gave him bad marks. The customers officer, the elderly Herr Hitler, was infuriated about such medieval views which he wouldn't tolerate, and working himself into a rage he fell over and died of a heart attack.

Clara was now left on her own, and she went to see Father Ignatius the Vicar of St. Mary's who had christened her son, and she implored him to change his name to Adolf, a good German name, and also his surname Schickelgruber - a typical Austrian peasant name - to Hitler, the name of the customs official, which sounded more impressive.

Though such alterations were not allowed, Father Ignatius' kind heart won over the rigid rules of the Church and he gave Clara and little Adolf his blessings for their way through life.

Neither Clara nor Father Ignatius were aware that it was not the name Alois but his family name Hitler which irritated the racist schoolmaster who knew that this name was very frequent among Polish Jews (deriving from those who were hut dwellers - the Yiddish word for hut being Hitl a small hut). Many Polish Jews began to change their names when a Jew-hater of the name of Hitler became known. (see: Olden: Hitler the Pawn, London 1939).

Clara decided to move to Vienna, but before leaving, she bleached Little Adolf's hair flaxen blonde, hoping that this would hide his 'race' and improve his school records.

In Vienna, she went to see a famous surgeon about whom she had heard some time ago, who performed discreet operations such as restoring trivial things which make all the difference between a virgin and a loose woman, when a young lady felt that her defect might interfere with her chances of a rewarding match.

Perhaps he could also restore foreskins which pious Jews and Moslems regard as obstacles to enjoyable intercourse. (His practice, by the way, became extremely lucrative in later years, when many Jews wanted to "cover up" their background.)

Well, Adolf's mother did all she could to help him on his way to success, but at the end of the term alas, he came again home with bad marks, and explained eloquently 'that these Jews wouldn't give us a chance ...'.

After his mother's death Adolf came into possession of a modest legacy, and he gave up attending school to pursue the career of an artist. He developed into an ambitious loner, looking for a ready-made solution to fulfill himself. When his money ran out he found work on a building site helping to paint the façade of a house, but his social arrogance and contempt of trade unionism and the labour movement enraged his workmates and they threatened they would throw him down the scaffolding if he didn't shut up.

He hated the multi-ethnic crowd of Vienna, the capital of the multinational empire: despised Czechs, Slavs, Jews, women, etc. He was a sinister creature. He started his evil career in 1914, when the first world war broke out. He managed to get himself into the German Army where he pursued the contemptible career of a nark, which ultimately led him to become the instrument of the most satanic forces our generation had to face.

Hitler's relationships with women were not only enigmatic but even sinister. The only girl he kept company with while in Vienna was Geli Raubal, his niece, who was found shot dead in 1930 in a flat in Munich.

When in Berlin, he made friends with Renate Mueller, one of the most popular movie stars of the thirties. Suddenly in 1937 she was found dead, having 'fallen' from the window of the house she had been living in. Allegedly suicide was the newspaper comment.

Another woman, a small time actress named Suzy Liptauer was found hanged in a Munich Hotel after one night with Adolf.

Even the wife of one of his closest collaborators, the Labour Front leader Robert Ley, (who maintained that his wife had been madly in love with the Fuehrer) committed suicide for no explicable reason.

In 1939, soon after the outbreak of World War II Hitler's most famous admireress the Hon. Unity Mitford, daughter of Lord Redesdale a leading member of the pro-Nazi circle was found shot in a park in Munich. Again it was presented as suicide and a gun was found in her hand. Though she recovered her brain was damaged and she couldn't communicate any more. The whole affair was treated as top secret both in England and in Germany.

I am not one of those who explain fascism and racism as the brainchild of psychopaths. I rather believe that a certain type, of psychopath may lend itself as the instrument of policies which the establishment wants to be carried out. No doubt a man of pathological ambitions resulting as it often occurs, as the consequence of a deep inferiority complex, may serve this purpose exquisitely.

The question why Hitler, a conformist to the bone, didn't marry and found a family puzzled many. His own family background was of course anything but orderly, but he paid lipservice to traditional values in his book *Main Kampf*, which every young couple had to buy as a marriage licence.

The fact that he had contracted syphilis which had affected his potency and his eye sight were state secrets. In the end he was mentally deranged. The fact that all his medical files have disappeared like the archive material about his family, hint that there was a lot to hide about that sinister man.

Chapter 3. Roots

Both my father and my mother were the children of immigrant Polish Jewish families. Both families came from the same village in Poland, but I have no surviving relatives who know the name of the village. My maternal grandparents had settled in the West End for many years, living variously in Marylebone, Bloomsbury and Soho; and they were relatively well educated. My grandfather, Wolfe Levy, was an official interpreter at Marlborough Street Police Court, and was a poor man's lawyer and advisor to the local immigrant Jewish community, well-known and respected among them. I never knew him or my maternal grandmother as both had died before I was born. My older brother, Stanley knew and loved grandma, but I am not sure whether he knew Wolfe.

The Yiddish words for grandma and grandpa were 'boobah' and 'zeider'. Those were almost the only Yiddish words regularly used in our home, which was very anglicised compared to most of the Jewish families we knew. Most of these freely mixed Yiddish and English, and their children grew up knowing at least a smattering of Yiddish. My own parents rarely spoke it at all, and when they did, it was usually to refer to something they did not want their children to understand.

My father was a member of the synagogue - that was almost something that went without saying for all members of the Jewish community. But religion played a very small part in our lives. Attendance at synagogue was normally something that happened only twice a year, at the two most important holy days. One was Rosh hashonno (the Jewish new year) and the other was Yom Kippuur (the day of atonement and fasting).

The Jewish dietary laws were followed only very loosely at home. I grew up with a love for the taste of Jewish cooking, especially such delicacies as gefilte fish, spiced herring, chopped liver, salt beef, chicken and lockshen soup, and of course apple strudel. And I could not bear the taste of butter in meat sandwiches. However, we had no compunction about eating milk rice pudding after a meat course; and although we never ate pork, ham sandwiches were not unknown, while eggs and bacon were much enjoyed.

Our home was home for an extended family, which included not only my parents, my brother and myself, but also the girls who were 'living-in staff' of the public house. There were the barmaids Rosie, Hilda and Peggy, and since my mother was serving behind the bar too, there was a nursemaid, Emily, to look after me, and a housemaid, Billy to do most of the household cleaning. The cook, Kitty, who prepared about a hundred luncheons every weekday, lived out, in Betterton Street, Covent Garden where her husband Bill worked in the fruit market. The potman, Jack, who shared the cellar work with my father, lived out too.

It was a very happy extended family. I grew up having known all of them for as long as I could remember. No-one ever left except to get married, and after that, they always came back and visited us. Kitty, the cook, was with us from before I was born (1923) until my parents left the pub.

Owing to the demands of attending to and serving in the bar, my parents were rarely able to eat together, but had to take turns like the barmaids in a short meal break. The big exception was Sunday dinner. After the pub closed at half past two on Sundays, the whole (extended) family gathered for the social occasion of the week, Sunday dinner; and that was always a real feast, usually chicken soup or tomato soup, followed by roast chicken or roast beef with roast potatoes and other vegetables, and often finishing with apple strudel and cream. It was an informal and friendly gathering, full of noise and laughter and everybody talking excitedly but relaxed.

The only 'boobah' I knew, my paternal grandmother, died when I was about 6, but she spoke little English, and was already too old to be very communicative and I cannot remember anything she ever said to me other than patting me fondly on the head and muttering 'Sheinah Kopf! (pretty head), which even at that tender age I found embarrassing. Worse than that, she usually chose to call and visit us on Sunday afternoons. Why worse? Well, because she would often arrive just as the strudel and cream was about to be served. If this happened the cream would be quickly hidden, as my parents did not dare to offend her by letting her see them treat the dietary laws with contempt. It just wasn't kosher! The result was that she was never a star attraction for me.

My 'zeider' was an even more remote figure from me. He died when I was about four, and almost the only memory of him which I retain is a curious but vivid one. It was an occasion when we must have visited the uncle and aunt with whom he and boobah lived. For some reason or other he and I were left alone together in a room which had a small oval table in the middle with a fair space around it. On it was a bowl containing biscuits. Zeider was a short man with a long beard and wore some kind of black coat or gown. He never said a word during the time I was in the room with him and I sat regarding him with some curiosity and perhaps a little nervously.

He was executing a slow pacing up and down from one corner of the room to its opposite corner. The pacing was slow and deliberate, and he appeared wrapped in thought and oblivious to my presence as I sat quietly on a chair and watched. As he passed the table he would pick up a biscuit, which he munched quietly as he paced up and down. I watched, fascinated by what seemed to me to be a kind of magical synchronisation, since he always finished a biscuit so that his arrival back at the oval table was just right for unhurriedly selecting another biscuit (without pausing) as he passed. How long this lasted I cannot say, but it was burned indelibly into my memory. It is absolutely all that I remember of my grandfather.

My only other knowledge of him comes from what I heard in later years when my uncles were reminiscing, mentioning that he had served (as a regular) in the Tsarist army. Of this, apparently, he was fiercely proud and was wont to boast of his military prowess.

However, bearing in mind his small build, his sons (my uncles) were evidently sceptical, and had cultivated the habit of teasing him about it, demanding that he tell them about how he had "killed two dead Turks"! At this he would become angry, and angrier still when they laughed.

The main events which emphasized our Jewishness were family gatherings. My mother had three sisters and five brothers, and my father had three brothers and three sisters; and there were regular and frequent visits to one another. Needless to say there were lots of cousins. Every known relative attended whenever there were family weddings, and these were celebrated with much of the rich carry-over of tradition from the ghetto days of the preceding generation.

Some of the philosophical attitudes of Judaism seemed to me to be healthy and down to earth. The idea of appreciating everything that is beautiful or good or useful in the world around us, so that failure to enjoy it is like a slap in the face to the Almighty who provided it, seemed to me an idea which could only promote happiness. Then there is a strong tradition of tolerance, a sort of liberal tradition, which I imbibed very readily, especially from my mother, who taught me that every person is an individual to be respected, regardless of appearances. Our customers in a pub in Soho included all kinds. I got to know local businessmen, local dustmen, tailors, policemen, confidence tricksters, prostitutes, bookies and race-course gangsters. When you get to know these people personally, it is a mind-broadening experience to find what kind and pleasant people so many of them are, and what utter bastards a few of the others are. The education comes in learning not to judge character by occupation, social standing, religion or race.

When I was twelve, my father suddenly entered a religious phase, at least on my behalf, as the time for my "bar mitzvah" approached. This celebration of the thirteenth birthday of a Jewish boy is supposed to mark his 'graduation' to manhood, in the religious sense of accepting his religious responsibilities as a full member of the congregation.

From the practical point of view, what this meant to me was that I was obliged to attend evening classes for religious instruction. The syllabus was dull and the instruction was lifeless and uninspiring. I learned to read Hebrew, but without understanding more than an odd word or two. I learned a little of the historical origin of each of the Jewish holy days; and I learned to read and sing or chant in the special traditional style a selected "Portion of the Law" which I would be called upon to read from the rostrum, in synagogue, on the occasion of my bar mitzvah. On top of everything else, I was compelled to attend morning service every Saturday during that year.

The orthodox service was conducted entirely in Hebrew, and lasted nearly three hours. Women were segregated and sat in an upper gallery. They were not regarded as qualified to be members of the congregation. The custom was for the rabbi and the congregation to take turns at gabbling through the (unintelligible) prayers at breakneck speed. Failure to keep up with this speed performance was regarded with some contempt. The whole business was utterly boring and gave me a deep contempt for religion and its ritual. The prayer book had the English translation of each page on the facing page, and I remember on one occasion amusing myself by trying to read the English text as quickly as the rest of them polished off the Hebrew text. It was quite impossible, and the speed I was reading it made a nonsense of any idea that I could follow the sense of what I was reading, even in English. None of the congregation could understand Hebrew. For most of them English was a second language. Yiddish was their native tongue. I felt I had little in common with their ideas.

At no time during my infancy had I been very impressed by the idea of God, Heaven, life after death, or the effectiveness of prayer. I had given prayer a fair trial, and found that it failed miserably. I quickly classed religion in general, both Jewish and Christian, together with superstition and mythology. My experience of synagogue attendance during my barmitzvah year merely confirmed my complete rejection of religion.

This raised something of a moral problem. If you have been brought up as a Christian (or a Moslem, or a Hindu) and you decide you are an atheist, you are easily able to "come out" and say, "I am no longer a Christian".

But if you are born a Jew, you inherit ethnic and cultural traditions which are inseparable from religious beliefs. There is the further complication that for centuries there has been a campaign of vilification of Jews. For the anti-Semites, if you are born a Jew, then you are always a dirty Jew! To deny that you are a Jew (even though for religious reasons) is merely to run away from anti-Semitism, to hide from it, to proclaim that you are ashamed of being a Jew!

No Jew with any guts can adopt such a position. But this means you are constantly having to explain, to make a speech about it, or you will be misunderstood, both by fellow Jews and by non-Jews. And why should you be under an obligation always to be making a defensive speech about where you stand? Well, that, I suppose, is part of the price you must pay if you are a Jewish atheist who wants to maintain intellectual and spiritual integrity.

From 1936 onwards, as the fascist movement in England became more prominent, and as German Nazism and Italian Fascism came more and more into the limelight, it became clearer and clearer to me that the fascists were not merely being anti-semitic. They were racist.

To my horror I found that some Jews, including some of my own relatives, opposed the fascists for their anti-Semitism, but not for their racism! Their attitude to non-Jews was as racist as the attitude of the fascists to the Jews.

Of course, racism is deeply imbued in the prejudices of many peoples, arising initially perhaps from a cautious distrust of strangers. But it has been deliberately used by the exploiters of all oppressed people, to provide a means with which to deflect their discontent away from their exploiters, and redirect it against a convenient, vulnerable and defenceless scapegoat.

An inverted form of racism is expressed also sometimes in the reaction of oppressed minorities themselves towards their own oppressors. Thus opposition to mixed marriages across a social, cultural or religious divide often comes from both sides of the divide.

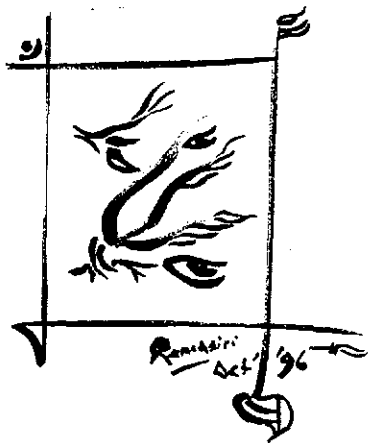
Until the Nazis put racism on the agenda for everyone, I had seen only slight signs of it in the small world in which I lived. But soon I was to experience its pernicious influence even in my own family.

Remasiri

My Father

Far away in a foreign land
looking out through my window
I am thinking of you, my dear father
from my centrally heated flat
in the midst of these gloomy cold surroundings
But father,
my thoughts for you are the warmest
purest
and the deepest
from your son
you've always trusted
I know you are well looked after
yet my heart sinks
every moment
when I think of you
whose life has changed so much
progressively, irrevocably
A dignified man
one who stood by his fellow human beings
with sympathy and understanding
who lent his hand selflessly
But now you sit there
with your usual bright smile
inside in your own prison
not knowing your surroundings as one should
in a muddled and baffled state

my mind wonders while my heart cries with pain
I know you were not perfect
you had your snobbish ways
"care free" but strict with your son
Still your greatest respect, love and kindness
to me your beloved son
you showed by your deeds
while I argued and blamed you
for every step you had taken
whether in your business or in your personal life
Now I wonder how you sat by my side
listening to this young man
foolish but arrogant, YOUR SON
smiling and saying
"You will understand one day my son"
while I was growing deep red in my face
Father, my beloved father, with your wife my darling mother
you have shown us the way
guided us through the difficult days
with affection, care
patience and understanding
Now you are on your own, forgetful with a changing persona
Here I am thinking how I argued with you
"I want to be INDEPENDENT, to be away from you all"
Now not knowing whether you will ever know
how much I adore you and love you
Let me ask you
to be my father for ever and ever again.



Michael

Michael sat by the window, his homework in front of him, but he wasn't looking at it. He was staring out of the window, his mind miles away. It was an unusual thing for him to be so deep in thought. In his mind's eye he was seeing the past years go by: the village near the Rhine where he had been born and had spent the first years of his life. He thought of his father, mother, elder brother, younger sister and the baby who had been only one year old when he left. With a start he realised that by now she would be five years old, and next year she would start going to school - they started school at six years old in Germany. He had himself, and he supposed that it was still the custom.

Since he had been taken to England to live he had never gone home to visit; indeed, when he used the word 'home' nowadays it no longer meant the small old thatched cottage where in still nights you could hear the Rhine - it meant the flat in London where he now lived with his aunt and uncle. He remembered how they had come to Germany to visit. His aunt was his mother's sister, and before he was born she had married an English soldier who had been stationed nearby. And when the British Army had moved him to London his aunt had gone with him. His aunt and uncle had no children of their own, and he had thought that he would never forget the day when he had been asked by his parents and his aunt whether he would like to go to London and live with them. But already the memory was blurring. He only remembered that at first he had been excited at the prospect of such a new adventure, and flattered that out of all the children in the world in general and the four children of his parents in particular it was he who had been chosen. He had been told that London was a big and wonderful city, that his uncle had a car in which he could ride every time they went out and that as soon as he was old enough he could have a bike.

That day he had been annoyed at his bullying elder brother, and it had seemed a good idea to get away from him. Looking back now he was surprised to realise how little attention he had paid to his parents' feelings. He wondered now whether they had found it hard to let him go. His mother had not come to the station, she had been busy with the baby who had been ill at the time. When she kissed him good-bye she had cried, but then he supposed that all mothers cried when their children went away. His father had seen him and his aunt and uncle off at the station, he had shaken each one by the hand and said over and over again: "Mach's gut, auf Wiedersehen!" But he had not seen any of them again, he had not been back, and they had not come over. Next year his parents would come to London during the summer holidays, and he wondered how it would feel to see them again. Would he even be able to talk to them in German? He had forgotten a lot. It no longer came naturally. *At first it had been quite difficult to learn English.* The boys at school had been friendly. They had been a little surprised to find that it was possible for a boy not to know English. But soon after him Ali, an Indian boy, had joined the class, and he had not known English either. So the class took it for granted, and he and the other new boy had quickly picked up enough English to get by.

A cuckoo began calling on the heath, and absent-mindedly he remembered how he and his brother had been out in the woods one day and when they had heard the cuckoo they had counted its calls, believing that they told you how old you were going to get. At 120 they had given up counting as they didn't think that they were going to live 120 years or more, but the cuckoo had gone on for a long time. The present cuckoo also went on and on, and suddenly its calls startled Michael out of his thoughts. What had made him remember all these things? He looked down at his homework - oh yes, this was his first German homework, he had had his first German lesson at school this afternoon. It was strange to hear the old familiar sounds and words again, this time not as a matter of course in talks with the family and friends, but sitting at a desk with English boys, having German taught as a foreign language.

How difficult the other boys found the pronunciation. He remembered how when he first went to school in England he had been glad that his name, Michael, had been both a German and an English one although of course the boys had pronounced it the English way. He himself had found it difficult to get used to that pronunciation of it and to realise that he was meant when anyone to pronounce his name the German way. The lesson that afternoon had made him realise how much he had forgotten. It wasn't only the spelling that looked unfamiliar; after all he had been to school in Germany only for two years before coming away. No, but the words! Nowadays English words came more readily into his mind than German ones - it was surprising how one could change so much. The change had been very sudden, for his uncle who himself had no German had forbidden him to speak German with his aunt. But now that the school had introduced German lessons his aunt had suggested that he should take part. She said it was a useful language to know.

Now he was no longer one of a large family, bullied by an elder brother. On the other hand, it was sometimes very lonely, although never for long. He was an only child now, to some extent the centre of attention in his new small family, and he enjoyed it.

He sighed and put down the pen he had been chewing. He got up and stretched. He would do his German homework later, but first of all he would go down for a while to play with his English friends.

The weeks and months went by. Michael had German lessons every week, and the language gradually became more familiar again. German was not in the school curriculum; he and some other boys stayed behind of their own free will when the others went home at 3.30. He thought he would probably be able to talk in German with his parents and siblings when they came - he would be a teenager then. And by that time the new baby sister whom he had never seen would be able to walk - she'd be older than the other baby sister he had left behind.

He was looking forward to seeing them all - one day more, one day less, sometimes he felt quite uneasy with anticipation. Of course he

loved them, there was no question about it, but the daily contact had stopped four long years ago - how had they changed? How had he changed?

And now they had been and gone. They had greeted each other with affection and with a very slight awkwardness. His new sister was a lively little girl, he felt quite protective about her.

His parents had marvelled how much he had grown. Going out every day was a help. All the famous sights of London that his aunt and uncle had shown him over the years he was now able to show his family; his parents were pleased to see how well he knew his way around, and that he could talk in English to all the people they met. His uncle had to tolerate talking in German, for the visitors had no English.

Germany had stopped being a monarchy many years before Michael was born. His parents said how big Buckingham Palace was, and how accurate the movements during the Changing of the Guard. His brother stared at the soldiers on horseback in Whitehall who were not allowed to speak but had to stay motionless all the time. His young sisters giggled at the strange dress of the Yeomen at the Tower.

Seeing so many things that were new to his family, and talking about what they say had made it easier for them all to get on with each other.

And then the visit was at an end. They parted with love and regret. And they promised each other to write; now that he had heard German spoken again all around him he would be able to write to them in German; and when he was a few years older he would visit them. "Visit" was the word. He had enjoyed their stay, but he was quite glad that he could remain in England.

The first two pages written in Denver/Colorado on September 25th, 1964.

The third page in London on March 21st, 1994.

Dan Melchior

Unclenching the fist

Throwing water on a fire
smelling the ashes die
turning,
and slowly walking
away.

Catching a train
to somewhere
far away from here
and
finding a single bed
to
sleep in.

Waking up alone
full
of
big ideas
and
brushing away
the ashes
from
my shoes.



London Voices celebrates 20 Years of Active Poetry

Highlights

- 1975 Inaugural launch of group at Marx House, Clerkenwell Green, London to promote Voices, a national magazine for working-class writing, published by Ben Ainley in Manchester.
- 1978 Poetry reading at the Half Moon Theatre, London, and formation of London Voices Poetry Workshop.
- 1978 onwards Poetry readings at workshops at FWWCP AGMs at Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Birmingham, Skegness and Co-op Stanford Hall, Loughborough.
- 1979 onwards Publication of 31 Broadsheets, each with at least 30 current writings and illustrations by members of the group.
- 1979/1980 Outdoor readings at the People's Festival, Alexandra Palace.
- 1979 London Voices joins Federation of Worker-Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP).
- 1982 Readings at Co-op Women's Guilds at Stratford and elsewhere.
- 1983 Performance at University of London Union Festival of the Left.
- 1984 Launch of the anthology "The Rising Tide" at Crown Tavern, London, with guest artist Peggy Seeger and miner poet Mogg Williams.
- 1985 Performance at the Royal Festival Hall, Purcell Room, in the London Poetry Festival, also with Peggy Seeger, folk singer.
- 1986 Reading at Women's Festival in Barnet.
- 1986 Workshop at Leeds History Conference.
- 1987 Reading at Bromley CND
- 1990 Launch of group anthology "The Changing Tide" at "The Betsy", London.
- 1991 Co-op Rainbow Festival performance, London.
- 1991 Shortlisted for Raymond Williams Community Publishing Prize.
- 1992 "Apples and Snakes" Performance with other London poetry groups.
- 1992 Performance with Approach Poets, and other groups, Bethnal Green.
- 1993 Cuba support evening, London.
- 1993 Launch of three books by individual author members at London Spa Pub.
- 1994 Performance at Oxfam Global Fete, Battersea, in the Co-op Arena.
- 1995 Finalist in Farrago Poetry Slam Competition at Chat's Palace, February.
- 1995 Poetry performance lead by Kay Ekevall at Chat's Palace, March.

List of Authors

	<i>Page</i>
Michael Aitken	38, 74, 99, 106
Richard Bell	67, 72, 73
Dave Bryant	56
Ian Cameron	36, 63, 89, 95, 104
Alison Clayburn	14, 44, 47
Lucy Collard	34
Rab Cowan	62
Dave Davis	28, 84, 87
Bill Deakin	35
Jane Deakin	48, 53, 61
Bob Dixon	31, 35, 83
Diana Dunwoodie	51, 91
Tom Durkin	115
Bill Eburn	105
Kay Ekevall	23, 32
Gertrude Elias	78, 118
Iain Freeborn	15, 21
Deborah Lavin	109, 110
Bryan Lynch	39, 46, 98
S Malik	43
Siobhan McVeigh	102
Dan Melchior	11, 18, 42, 134
Ilse Meyer	130
Lawrie Moore	123
Peter Oakeshott	85
Pat O'Gorman	75
John Paul O'Neill	19
Gill Oxford	16, 76, 103
John Oxford	41, 55, 81
Rosemary Phillips	40, 66
Yvonne M Poulson	32
David Preen	40, 86, 88
Remasiri	128
Maureen Scott	30, 113
Steve Spartak	58, 97
Margaret Stewart	54
Greta Sykes	12, 29, 49, 50
Ranmal Vander Poorten	101
Mogg Williams	24

Other publications by LONDON VOICES

Jim Ward - *Trains of Thought. Poems and Prose by Jim Ward, Railwayman* : £1.00. Jim was a founder member of our group and is still missed. He never ceased to be enthused by the upsurge of poetry and song from trade union and working roots.

Lawrie Moore - *Guided Missiles, Poems of Social Anger, Love and Hope* : £3.50. We are pleased to be serialising another portion of Lawrie's unfinished autobiography in the current Broadsheet, in Broadsheet 32, and future Broadsheets.

Gertrude Elias - *The Suspect Generation, My Life and Times* : £6.50. Brilliantly reviewed autobiography starting in pre-war Austria, spanning Gertrude's career as an artist and book illustrator, and finally expert writer on the Middle East.

The Changing Tide 1990, Anthology of Poems and Prose, illustrated : £2.50. An illustrated selection by many writers from London Voices.

Bill Eburn - *Be my Guest, The Autobiography of an ex-Japanese PoW* : £2.70.

Kay Ekevall - *Kindling Memories for the Future. Poems and Tributes* by Kay Ekevall : £3.50 (£2.50 members). Poems from Kay's active life showing her steady foresight and wisdom.

Steve Spartak - *An Unguilty Rabbit in an Empty Hat*. £4.50 (£3.50 members). An exciting selection of short stories in quite a different vein - humorous, zany, surreal even, including some tales for children (grown and otherwise)!

Broadsheets:

I-31 A4 size (from 1980), illustrated with current work by London Voices (each volume contains approx. 30 pieces of poetry and prose). Add to your collection; just send to the address below £1.00 + 50p p&p.

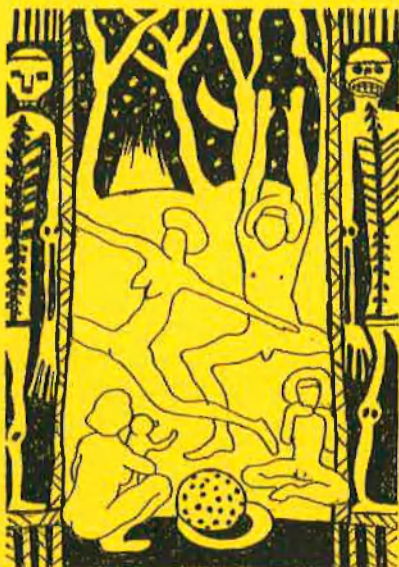
Real Memory, and other Poems and Prose (Broadsheet 32). A5 new format £3.50 (£2.50 members) 85 pages, illustrated. Over 50 poems and prose pieces - as far ranging and different as the people who wrote them.

The Disturbing Power of Motherly Love and other Stories and Poems (Broadsheet 33). A5, 96 pages, illustrated. £3.60 (£2.60 members). Takes a hard look at events this century, and explores and describes personal loves and other relationships, new, experimental and evergreen.

LONDON VOICES

The Christmas Pudding

R. Bell.



This mammoth edition from London Voices presents stories and poetry from more than 35 contributors, illustrated by six of our own "artists-poets". The writings range through the world, from Sicily and Germany to the Middle East, from Africa to North America and back to love, life and temptation in England, past and present.

It's Christmas time and the pudding is being eaten:- Old Duffers arise, it's your election choice!

This varied collection tells of song and of the silence of our Grandfathers, of love, and the grief for our lost ones.

If you've something to write, try coming to our workshops, held on the last Friday in every month.

Price £3.60 + 50p p&p

ISBN 0 950 9478 9 X