

# INTRODUCTION

*Poetry and music are about as compatible as fire and water* is the essence of what one of the Red Poets once said. ^

Bearing in mind events like our Clwb y Bont gig many years back with the much-missed Merthyr band Original Mind, his argument would seem to be valid. Almost all the poets left before the rock band played. Only a few remained to witness Chrissy Mod and the boyz do a stonking , if roof-shattering, set.

Of course, since then the Red Poets have often performed alongside excellent singer-songwriters, notably Riff Williams from Cardiff. Both poetry and songs consisted of all the elements, not just passionate fire and melancholy water.

A gig a few months ago at Neath brought home to me the importance of combining poetry and music more often. When the two work together it can be truly uplifting and this happened there, when many excellent readings culminated in a great set from Tracey Curtis, an Englishwoman who has settled in Ammanford. She sings about war, family, history and friends with such humour and feeling that it was a fitting end to the evening.

As well as more events such as this, there's a crying need for music and poetry to embrace each other more closely as one expression. The 80s seemed to be the highpoint of this with the likes of John Cooper-Clarke, Gil Scott-Heron (though he rose to prominence earlier) and Linton Kwesi Johnson. Anything to do with double-barrelled names, I wonder ?

Scott-Heron's classic satires like 'B Movie' and calls-to-action like 'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised' make him the original rapper (albeit with jazz backing ). Johnson used reggae musicians to create an angry, revolutionary dub, while Cooper-Clarke was very much the bard of Salford, who could be hilarious, surreal and imagistic, or as direct as punk.

Today there are few who reach these heights. An exception is Ed Hamell, who records as Hamell On Trial. Three tracks on his classic 'Choochtown' sum up his narrative approach.

These are more like prose-poems, in fact. The tracks 'John Lennon' and 'Blood Of The Wolf' are very witty observations on human frailties, whereas 'Vines' describes the total pointlessness of a lot of work.

So, my manifesto is for poetry and music to exist side-by-side as comrades and also to become much closer, to co-habit under the same roof, as long as it's not the one blown off by the sheer volume of Original Mind !

**MIKE JENKINS**  
**(CO-EDITOR)**

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# ASHLEY JONES

## WORKINGMAN'S CLUB WINDOW (PONTYPOOL)

Beyond redundant faces you can see it all,  
the town's bloated corpse buried in plywood and steel  
the llywydd's mouth angry, foaming disinfected dreams  
the sports centre in its infancy cradled in the arms of a  
crane.

The carriageway that bypasses the town's heart,  
leaving it breathing like a fish on sand.

# MERRYLYN WILLIAMS

## THE WHISTLE BLOWER

for Jean Charles de Menezes

Out of the sunlight, into the Tube;  
innocent crowds strolled by.  
This was my job, retracing his steps,  
that brilliant July.

Cameras filmed him, ticket machines  
fell back to let him through.  
He walked like any other man  
(I thought he was guilty too).

This was the bit that nobody likes,  
to dive down out of the sun.  
No doubt he was young, male and dark.  
(They said, I saw him run).

But then, no dot was on my screen  
and mobile phones went dead;  
nor I, nor those who ran could read  
the map inside his head.

Witnesses chorused, yes, it was him.  
I say, believe your eyes.  
I saw the state of the carriage seats,  
the blood. And then the lies.

# PHIL KNIGHT

## CITY LIVING

It's not the dead  
calling on your cell phone  
they leave their messages  
in a bottle marked  
No deposit. No return.

The past is never found  
on the internet super highway  
that road is further out  
and the tourists never stay.

A lap top is not a dancer  
and little pleasure  
will it bring  
but work is always there  
and the boss is the golden  
mean.

The tube is not the telly  
but the start and end  
of every day,  
the music there is fast  
in a sad sort of way.

In the hypermarket  
you can buy a bone jar  
which never walked the land  
and the sand of the hour glass  
was no place you could stand.

The dead man's ship  
has slipped its moorings  
it was carried on the tide  
out to an ivory ocean  
where the gulls circle  
far and wide.

So let us pray  
to the gods of Anarchy  
for a day of rain glory  
then we shall sink in the sky  
and rise in the sea.

# PHIL KNIGHT

## UNDER NEATH

By day it's a picture  
    postcard town  
but underneath  
it beats to a  
    bleaker song.

All day reverent tills ring  
in benediction of  
    the happy shoppers  
but come the night  
    the town is a wall  
of steel shutters.

Queen Victoria would not be amused  
when her pleasure park's gates  
    are locked,  
it's the place  
for drunks, drug addicts and  
true sad romance.

Our town has got the lot  
supermarkets, a castle  
and banks out of ancient Rome  
where each weekend Centurions  
guard the Mr Hot Potato stand.

The CCTV eye sees all  
on a Saturday night  
the fights, the fun  
and the vomit left to dry  
under the Moon  
under my town  
under your town  
and always under Neath.

# ALUN HUGHES

## MESSAGE TO BUSH

One.  
Mr Bush,  
kill one.  
And two (at least)  
will rise against you.  
Son, daughter.  
Father, mother.  
Brother or sister.  
A weary uncle  
or a cousin, distant  
but not lost.

Work out a sum  
and multiply it.  
A family, whichever,  
caught without cause in the trap  
of power and petroleum.

Let Mr Bush calculate -  
if he knows how to calculate -  
the day and the hour  
when an ordinary person  
goes into action,  
imbued with fury  
against the emptiness of life;  
because this is how it'll be,  
today, tomorrow, a year on,  
inspired by history,  
by dreams, of wondrous times to come;  
a year ahead, or two, or three.

A colonial war never ends.  
And this one is just beginning.

*Mensaje a Bush (2004)* Jaime Augusto Shelley (Mexico)  
(Translated by Alun Hughes)

# ALUN HUGHES

## BLACK PLANES

Black planes fly by  
slashing the clear sky,  
The drone of their engines  
is made of moans.  
Their wings are in mourning,  
the land is left grieving;  
from terrible explosions  
stem moments of tragedy.

In the stricken houses  
children scream and weep,  
women driven to madness;  
the crumbling walls still stand  
with entrails devoured  
by gnawing grubs  
of fratricidal steel.

Black planes fly by,  
wrought of lamentations;  
their wings are in mourning,  
the land is left to grieve.

*Los negros aviones* - Inocente Lopez (Spain)

(Translated by Alun Hughes)

# MIKE CHURCH

## BATMAN FOREVER

I will remember this day  
When I stopped to read the newspaper  
reclining in the radiant sunshine of a neglected garden:  
Friday July 14th 1995.  
In a week of Live Aid memories,  
Batman Forever and Bosnian barbarics

I will remember this day

I want to read Batman before Bosnia,  
But conscience aroused,  
I am moved to tears without action:  
by reports of whimpering, broken girls  
repeatedly raped  
and disappearing men casually murdered,  
of human beings begging for the gift of life.  
And a mother who lost sight of her 16 month  
old baby  
loaded onto a truck with her husband  
before he was taken off elsewhere to be shot.  
The mother says she does not know what happened  
To her 16 month old daughter.  
Parting glimpses amidst herds of refugees.

I will remember this day

I am moved to tears without action  
ashamed to be a human being any more  
as my smiling chubby children will watch  
me elbow my way through Lottery fever on  
Saturday evening  
I must have my fix, my feeble failure  
I support Live Aid but not with the gay  
abandon  
with which I greedily consume my Lottery  
fantasies

I will remember this day

A raging bull in Pamplona  
killed an American tourist  
tossing him 23 feet  
like a limp lightweight lettuce  
slicing his kidney and penetrating his liver

I will remember this day.

# MIKE CHURCH

## BATMAN FOREVER

And I read of isotropic radiators  
not heating for care in the community  
but hi-tech weapons that burn people's eyes  
out  
and leave everything else intact,  
sold around the world by slick, smooth salesmen  
in shiny cars and shiny ties  
and air-conditioned showrooms

Arms dealers cut through waves of refugees  
but where are the alms for the poor?  
Who cares any more?

When Rome fell centuries ago  
it caved in amidst opulence  
and lavish self obsession.  
If this was so then I too will cave in,  
with the decadent West.

I will remember this day.

I would not deserve to make Schindler's List  
for I am moved to tears without action.  
Concerned only for falling house prices,  
insurance premiums and tripping round lanes  
of Corn Flakes boxes in my supermarket  
trolley;  
lulled by jingles and special offers  
at the mercy of shiny suited salesmen.

I don't want any trouble,  
ignoring the persistent mugging everywhere  
I don't care to be a human being any more  
picknicking on the M25 alongside veal calves  
and hunt saboteurs.

"Worry not because Pat Eddery rode Lake  
Causton  
to a majestic victory at Ascot"

I will remember this day  
But resign myself to tears without action  
Bosnia has stopped believing in Batman Forever.

# MIKE CHURCH

## GODS, THE UNIVERSE AND EXISTENTIALIST PROFANITIES

In the snug room of the three trinities pub  
Jehovah, Allah and Shiva  
were arguing with the Buddha  
about who could save the World  
and Jehovah, after one too many Guinness,  
had already called the Buddha a fat twat  
but the Buddha sat serene,  
paused and said:  
"It's all about making your pitch,  
finding your angle.  
Would it make a difference if I'd read Herodotus  
or was 19 or 79 years old?  
Would it make a difference if  
a tin of evaporated milk  
ready had disappeared,  
or if SATS targets pressed home Potterism  
and 78% of the population  
could name all the Prisoners of Azkaban?  
Would it make a difference  
if an eco-terrorist committed suicide  
suffragette style  
on Big Brother  
skillfully disguised as a one-legged Bangladeshi lesbian  
quoting Gandhi and Bobby Sands  
renouncing the cult of celebrity,  
boob jobs, botox and hip-hop hoodlums.  
Would it make a difference  
if we balanced the 160,000 people who die annually  
from climate change with the 5,000 who die each year  
at the hands of terrorists  
or if the assembled £115 million Chelsea 10  
financed 115 million who are starving to death  
what if obesity and starvation  
walked the same catwalk?  
Would it make a difference  
if this were a poem or a political speech  
or if I could reach  
my own consumerist desire  
before I expire  
or if I renounced my greed

# MIKE CHURCH

## GODS, THE UNIVERSE AND EXISTENTIALIST PROFANITIES

for global need  
and a collective sense of earth  
for what its worth  
would it make a difference at all what I did  
in a bid to save the world."  
At which the three gods all turned as one and  
told the Buddha to shut the fuck up  
so they could prove the existence  
of the one true God:  
Zeus!

# MIKE CHURCH

## A PRISONER'S SPEECH TO A MAGISTRATE

You tell me to stop stealing  
while you eat my slice of cake  
you tell me not to drive cars  
whilst you coast home in a spacious new saloon.

Home for us is a crumbling council estate  
until you decide to punish us with prison  
unaware that many of us were incarcerated at birth.  
Birth.

What birth?

It's like asking a flower  
to flourish in a dark room.

Home for you is bijou blinds  
shag pile carpets and a roaring imitation fire,  
watching the 9 o'clock news  
and panicking about the sinking morals of society  
frightened that we might take something from you.

On Sundays you sleep late  
before you peruse the quality papers  
while we always sleep late  
because there is nothing to get up for  
to keep us illiterate, illegitimate and illegal.

You punish us, you fine us, you imprison us  
but, most of all, you despise us  
you want to keep us a breed apart.

You tell me to stop stealing  
while you eat my slice of cake  
you tell me not to drive cars  
while you coast home in a spacious new saloon,  
Well we will not obey your laws  
until we eat off the same plate as you.

# MIKE CHURCH

## BIRTHRIGHT

Two years old, blue-eyed and blonde  
an innocent wide-eyed cherub.  
How can I tell you what lies ahead?

That the beefburger I eat comes from your 'moo cow',  
fattened, milked and slaughtered by the bloodied hands of  
men.  
How can I tell you that if you'd been born African  
then it's twenty times more likely you'd already be dead?  
And had you been born into poverty  
you'd feel the dampness of a cardboard crib bed,  
wanted but neglected, loved but ill conceived.

How can I tell you what it means to be a pretty girl  
when the world is run by greedy, lusty men  
who'd photograph, prostitute and peep at you,  
for their pleasure.  
How can I tell you that?  
How?

That the same men might then cry 'war' to prove their  
machismo  
and leave us charred and corpsed by their almighty fire show  
how can I tell you then that there is God?  
How?  
And is there one God the world over that's not another man?

If I tell you all these things how can I impart hope?  
How can I tell you then that there is such a word as love?

# LETITIA ANN RHYS

## HATE WAITS...

Hate waits...  
in mean  
midnight streets  
in the sunken eyes  
of the homeless  
lying dank  
like dogs  
below the kerbs...

Hate waits...  
in midnight streets  
where the needles  
plunge  
prime Welsh  
flesh  
on the road  
to a slag  
Post Mortem...

Hate waits...  
in murky  
midnight streets  
in the mugger's  
muffled thud  
lost  
in a pool  
of pumping  
blood...

Hate waits...  
in moody  
days  
shuffling down  
the line  
for a weekly  
on the ghost  
train to  
Job Search...

Generations wait...  
in Thatcher's shadow...

# LETITIA ANN RHYS

## SAVE THE EMPIRE

The  
Orange  
still march to  
the old tune sung  
by black-hearted men with golden purses.

## BELFAST WITNESS

The  
British  
bullets were  
only plastic  
chunky like a film cartridge with added  
nails  
to blast deep inside:  
do not fret child  
it's not a real hole that killed your eyes.

## SINS OF THE FATHER

The  
Orange  
lick the boots  
of R. U. C  
who shoot to kill their ancestor's feet.

# JACKIE CORNWELL

## THE LOST CITIES OF ARMENIA

*Et je m'en va  
Au vent mauvais  
Qui m'emporte de ca, de la  
Pareil a la feuille morte.*

Paul Verlaine, Chanson d'Automne.

Speaking of cities, after the last time I saw you,  
I drove to the docks. All was cold-frozen;  
Dark and shuttered walls, as brigands  
Menacing the misty evening;  
And music on the radio was Armenian.  
Its discords, half-chords sang forlornly,  
And once when I was there,  
I wept over the ruins of a fallen city.

And earlier that night, I'd looked straight through you  
Into the silence of a cancelled conversation.  
Some of the greatest cities ever built have died;  
Others still greater never lived but in the imagination.  
I turn for home, uncertain if I cry for you, or  
For the sad, lost cities of Armenia.

# JACKIE CORNWELL

## THE LAST OF THE ROMANI WELSH

*In the early 1900s, John Samson discovered that a family in Wales still spoke the 'deep' or inflected Romani that had died out among the rest of the gypsy groups in Europe.*

Under dripping trees, wild from the mountains,  
The horses shelter. There is nothing for them here.

A dog noses the earth, scenting the old fireside.  
Ashes dissolve into clay.

No history, no book, yet you were a people.  
Fleeing hot India, Mohammed at your back, you spoke of  
*Kuro, Xanro, Busht* - horse, sword, spear. You ran

Straight into the arms of rainy Europe: you were  
'*A people only fit for slavery*'; '*Lives unworthy of life*';  
Unregistered, annihilated, you called it  
'*O Porrajmos*', the Gypsy Holocaust. No-one has ever offered  
Compensation for what you lost.

No leaders, no lawyers, no poets; you passed  
Like the wind on the lake, leaving no trace,  
Eating hedgehogs in October, bilberries in July,  
Poaching salmon in November;  
Starving in February, *y mis bach du*\*.

Your horses paced the lanes, your daughters  
Leaped over broomsticks to be wed; made love in daylight,  
Staring straight into their husbands' eyes;

Eyes as dark as night, my brothers,  
As though cut in diamonds, their voices borne from the stars.

And your deepest tongue was cherished in Wales,  
Shouted at fairgrounds, chanted round fires  
Till it became no more than a family code;

A generation later, it was dead.

Now in this blank, flat field, silence  
Whispers to us through the trees.  
The horses shake their ears,

The rain continues.

\* *the little black month*

# ALAN PERRY

## MAYDAYS

(for Michael Davies)

Dressed and ready to cycle home,  
the sun going down on that distant bay,  
on a spur-of-the-moment schoolboy whim  
we scribbled two SOS's, screwed them  
in empty pop bottles  
and tossed them in the sea.

You, the sole survivor of a doomed  
airliner, in mid-Atlantic, clinging  
to a wing; me - far more convincingly -  
trapped on the Worm, with shattered  
legs and vertebrae, spread-eagled on rocks  
cut off from the mainland.

My plea found three days later by a man  
walking his dog six beaches away,  
the police and Coast Guard alerted  
the guilt eventually traced to me.  
But yours, still out there somewhere  
circuiting the globe, half a century on

and you, for all I know,  
still lost and clinging to that wing.

# CHRIS WILLIAMS

## TWO BEAR EPITAPHS

**An Epitaph for George W. Bush**  
**6th July 1946 to Not-Soon-Enough**

They say a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.  
Well, you had the world in your hand  
But you set fire to your hand,  
With the world in it,  
Leaving no bush big enough to hide behind.

**A Suggested Epitaph for the Tomb of the Unknown Conshy**

You died too.  
You died carrying a stretcher or fighting a fire.  
You died, although you would not kill.  
Every year, on Remembrance Day, you are forgotten again,  
But you died too.

# CHRIS WILLIAMS

## NOT AN ANGRY POEM

This is not an angry poem;  
what is there to be angry about?  
Should I be angry with the Israelis,  
destroying the countries that surround them?  
Should I be angry or just say they've the right,  
self-defence against murdering terrorists?

This is not an angry poem;  
why should that emotion fill me?  
Should I be angry with Hizbollah  
kidnapping soldiers and firing missiles?  
Are they just terrorists, mindlessly killing  
or is there an argument about supporting the oppressed?

This is not an angry poem;  
this is just a confused one.  
Do I despise the Palestinians,  
with their suicide bombs and random death;  
or do I just wonder what else they can do  
while surrounded by walls and treated as pariahs?

This is not an angry poem;  
this is an undirected one.  
Should I support the West  
with its money made from armaments,  
supporting all regimes that might favour its own?  
Can I bask in my "freedom"?

This is not an angry poem;  
what is there to be angry about?  
I'll sit with my pint,  
in the midst of my friends,  
while we discuss the world's ills  
and feel good about ourselves.  
**THIS IS NOT AN ANGRY POEM!!!**

# ALUN REES

## BIG C

If I had three wishes  
I'd wish with a will  
and will my three wishes  
to the top of the bill.

I'd wish all the untutored  
could figure and read.  
I'd wish all the world's hungry  
a bloody good feed.

Then with my third wish  
should I wish murder away?  
Or wish for a law  
against slave rates of pay?

Or wish for the weak  
to be proofed against harm?  
Or wish for all children  
to be happy and warm?

Would I wish for the humble  
the chance to be proud?  
Would I wish for the mighty  
to make peace with the crowd?

You have to be choosy  
with one wish to spare,  
wish a big wish that wishes  
dismay on despair.

So the finest of options  
left open to me  
is to wish up a cure  
for the dreaded Big C.

This Big C's a bastard  
who dishes out grief,  
stealing joy where he finds it.  
He's a sadist and thief.

He'll do for your neighbour,  
your lover, your wife,  
he'll do for your brother,  
he prays upon life.

There's a Big C that's cancer,  
but there's truth in the rumours  
that another Big C  
is the Dark Lord of tumours.

We can battle the first  
with potions and pills  
but who'll cure the second,  
mass producer of ills?

He enslaves and he slaughters,  
he's a foul cataclysm.  
That's the Big C I'm after:  
Capitalism.

# HERBERT WILLIAMS

## ROAD TO RUIN

stockpiles of arms  
pillocks of leaders  
dealers in death  
breath of corruption  
deception of people  
ripple of scandal  
vandals of earth  
birth of distrust  
lusting for power  
hour of revenge  
lunge to oblivion  
thus Armageddon

# LORRAINE PARKER

## IF ANIMALS COULD WRITE

Dear Prime Minister,

I'm writing this letter on behalf of all the animals in Britain. From pet shops, circuses, farms and laboratories. From the hunted and the endangered.

I'm sure that you won't be surprised that we strongly disagree with the Government's commitment to support Animal Testing in laboratories.

The reason animal testing continues is not for the benefit of mankind, it is because the law states that ALL products will have to be tested on animals. We could give you literally dozens of reasons why animal testing is not only unnecessary, it is also irrelevant.

We hope you don't mind us outlining to you personally some of the suffering and torture we animals are subjected to on a daily basis. Please bear in mind that not all testing is related to medicine.

If these laboratories are treating animals well and working for the benefit of man, then why aren't they open for the general public to view? Why is research on animals done behind closed doors and in apparent secrecy?

How about an open and frank admission about the type of testing done and what it hopes to achieve? Testing on rats, for example, has little relevance to human beings as our physiologies are so different.

As a race of so-called Intelligent beings you regularly do the following to us animals: burn, electrocute, mutilate/starve, psychologically disturb, deprive us of our infants, strip us of our skins, hunt us, derive pleasure through using us for entertainment, forcibly impregnate us so we will produce milk, eat us and give us deadly human illnesses that aren't natural to us.

If you treated your fellow human beings in this way you would rightly be condemned for it. Animals need to be given rights and to be treated with the respect that we deserve.

Why do you hate us so much?

Yours in fear and in hiding

The Animals of the UK



# FIONA OWEN

## WARTIME POEMS

and  
    take off  
        practising  
for the real thing

(the daily deafening  
of machine roar  
in service to the strut  
and spin of war) -

I say: no  
we don't get used to it  
at all.

### 3. Worm Moon

18/3/03

Under the full March moon  
we stood

        listening  
to the sea  
        and the geese  
on the lake.

We lit two candles  
        and sang  
about peace in the world  
and how it starts  
in the heart -

# PATRICK MCGUINNESS

## BLACK BOX

Every crashed marriage has its black box, the blow-by-blow account of what went wrong and how, the crescendo of mistakes that peaks, is for an instant quiet on its crest of trauma, then drowns itself and us

in a cascade of static. The black box is what survives; anthracite gleaming in the wreckage where, preserved in anger, the voices that it holds replay their lifetime of last moments and speak of how, until the very end, it might all have been

so different; and how, right from the start, they knew it never would.

## *SPLEEN: CARDIFF MATCHDAY*

### BLUES

(some way after Baudelaire)

These arcades are no *Arcadia*; steel glades  
whose girdered glass matches the angle of the rain;  
matches, too, its colour - the colour of pigeons,  
tanks, the dishwater sluicing the drains

as the streets gargle their litter.  
There's a shop closed on every corner.  
There's a shop cloned on every corner.  
In all the papers, deficit, terror, loss,

and at home, deficit, terror, loss.  
Plastic bags ride the wind in torn surrender.  
Here it is always half-time, where the stopped  
clock gets it right  
pretty much all day.

# TIM RICHARDS

## PAPER WORK

If paper work  
proves on paper  
that proper work  
has provided work  
for paper-pushers,  
how much paperwork  
should proper workers  
provide to paper-pushers  
to prove they are proper workers  
and to provide them with work?

## SAFE MEMORIES, SAFE FUTURES

Remembering colliery disasters  
is the new black,  
but these official memories  
are the safe ones.

We are supposed to remember  
the victims, not the criminal capitalists,  
the coal-owners who profited  
while cutting corners on safety.

Nothing changed there, then.  
The apologies are history  
and have no bearing on today.  
Today's apologies will be made tomorrow.

# IRENE THOMAS

## HOLDING ON

We lie together,  
playing spoons, for it is only a single bed,  
intertwined with little room for two.  
I am cuckoo in his warm nest,  
for I am always cold.  
I grip his strong hand,  
a gardener's hand,  
but now veins stand out like blue mountains,  
parched skin wrinkles in the valleys below.  
He has made many gardens,  
moving earth and stones  
to clear a path for me  
and heaving boulders, hindering my path.

My hands are Elizabethan gloves,  
white and narrow,  
smooth suede with tightly fitting fingers;  
an embroidery of veins  
now visible through a curtain of fine doe-skin.  
Perhaps divination could reveal the truth  
about our life-lines.  
How long will we be together?  
We touch and I remember  
how his thicker skin protected  
me from barbed tongues and hurt.

I soothe him now  
as memory fails  
and he cries,  
but I will hold him  
until he does not remember my name,  
and cannot warm me any more.

# PETER GRUFFYDD

## THE VISIT

There was a gardening crew  
trustee cons and a screw:  
flowers all in order  
for some nob's' visit  
flared a stiff calligraphy  
secured by a concrete border.

In that autumn's heat  
grass, unpainted,  
went to ground in pale retreat.  
Always a dog's beady attendance  
its wall-faced handler.

They made an inner garden  
with a pond and seats  
for Who? to sit and ponder.  
Way beneath saggy heli-mesh  
you could look down  
from surrounding blocks  
where only bird;sheds  
livened, and water's tidied splash.

Sometimes a watched man came  
to tend imprisoned birds.  
Doors banged, gates clashed  
sent iron signals along muted  
corridors into woken silence  
ruptured by a single voice  
"Coming through!"

Dust glimmered on the shammied  
Mercs cooling in the VIP slots  
The prison stirred its muggy heats.

# ARNOLD RATTENBURY

## THREE PRENTICE PIECES

In the car-boot sale, a wooden pulpit,  
large doll's house size, even the silliest  
detail exact. "Load of bullshit"  
says a glancer-by. But a stander-still  
"That's prentice work. Man, it's brilliant".

Sixty years back and you could watch  
the Master Builders' apprentice pass-outs:  
young lads quarter-scaling, from a batch  
of blueprints, risers, half-landing, next  
three risers, all bannisters, rails,  
newel; and gawp at youth so expert.  
Then the event went missing. Masters  
saw no need of the skills, blind bastards.

Here's an eight-sided box: seven  
by seven, the height built up in fourteen  
square-cut half-inch pieces, uneven  
in length but once in each the important  
octagon angle. Abutments a miracle,  
tighter than the blocking on the Pyramids!  
And glows for the old man now, in this dusk  
of skilling, belief, programme, just  
those reds-with-darknesses mahogany musters  
from love. A keepsake, a tower, a keep  
on history's motte. While the people sleep.

# JACQUELINE JONES

## TIL GIRO DAY

Having no money  
prevents you from  
doing so many things.

It's not the big things  
that bother me

I'm not arsed  
about having good food  
or good clothes,  
it's the little things  
they're the ones that get to yer.

Things like  
avin to eat dried toast  
and water for breakfast,  
havin to wash your clothes in the bath  
cos you cant afford  
the fuckin machines in the launderette.

Foldin the bog roll  
over the shitty part  
afta you've wiped once,  
sos you can ave anotha  
clean surface to wipe on.

stuffin kitchen roll between yer legs  
cos you've run outta tampons.

The cat shittin everywhere,  
cos u cant afford any more gravel..

Heinz beans  
without the varieties.

Findin everyone else  
is broke as well,  
so's you cant get a sub,  
for a drink or smoke,  
and you sure as fuck  
could do with both.

Fuck it,  
four days till Giro  
an not even thirty bastard pence  
for a carton of milk.

# GRAHAM HARTILL

## FLOWERS

A woman met another woman  
in the churchyard

she was scattering flowers  
in not one spot,  
all over the place

they buried her  
I don't know where  
my grandmother,  
my workhouse  
grandmother

without a place of her own

she is hungry for flowers

\*

Her ghost is peering through  
the window of my life

they all wore badges of course  
the unmarried mothers,  
the indigent of Crickhowell,  
Llangattock,  
Blaenavon

the workhouse was self-contained  
a kitchen garden,  
woods and a well  
to meet its needs

window sills,  
too high to see over,  
sloping,  
so you couldn't put anything on them

because they weren't supposed  
to have a thing  
anyway

because they were  
no-one

\*

I don't know where they put her  
and so I am scattering flowers,  
the poem is spring here

the flowers release her  
from what we think

from being unthought about

# RAYMOND HUMPHREYS

## NANXING ROAD JAZZMAN

He makes love to that brass idol,  
pouring his being into the yielding curves.  
The people look up, charmed by the artist  
on his tenth-floor balcony stage,  
tilting high above the Shanghai shopping street;  
he doesn't need them.

No, he's lost in some private reverie  
of Basin Street mid-century;  
a time when he himself was a child of Red Guards.  
Down with the Western Imperialists!  
Death to the capitalist running dogs!  
Can he still hear them? Does he care?

You see a faraway glint in eyes half-closed  
behind shaded glasses,  
and know that it doesn't matter;  
that the hard times have been blown away by the melody;  
that now he cares only for the sensuous strains.

That music, a pretend-cool hat, and something that echoes  
of a Zoot Suit with its rock-candy stripes,  
are the only homage he can make  
to his true heroes;  
musical icons from a land he has never seen;  
that nobody will ever see.

A surety at the root of his soul  
tells him that they had a warmer obsession  
than this Mao Zedong, the man from yesterday.

And the crowds know that the Nanxing Road Jazzman  
makes a warmer music, too.  
And he knows that boss-men come and go  
but that Blue Notes are for ever.

# PETER THABIT JONES

## THE BOXER

You dreamed yourself away  
From the Klu Klux Klan,  
The cross on fire,  
The noose and the gun.  
You ran yourself away  
From the angry mobs,  
The riots, marches  
And the streets aflame.  
You talked yourself away  
From the cotton fields,  
Where men and women  
Toiled beneath the sun.  
You rhymed yourself away  
From the bloodied whip,  
The 'Yes sir, no sir'  
Of the daily shame.  
You danced yourself away  
From second-class man,  
Away from the trees  
Where the strange fruit swayed.  
You punched yourself  
Away from Cassius Clay,  
The name that tagged you  
To the slavers' trade.

# PETER THABIT JONES

## PARABLES OF GRIEF

(for John)

And now there are others darkened  
By the pages' sudden print,  
The wasteful hieroglyphs of hate  
That push all thoughts towards the edge.  
It's history controlled and made.  
The TV screens act out the games  
Again. It's the subtle play  
Of them and us. Our tears are  
Wetter tears, our dead more dead.  
The parables of grief unfold.  
'Trust me,' the grim-faced leader pleads  
As flashing lights attack his face.  
He beats the drum of fears to come  
As words fly off his warning tongue.  
The enemies are here to stay.  
The tank and bomb achieve the same,  
They flower grief before our eyes:  
The weeping mother's earth-quaked breath,  
The rag of child she holds to God,  
Whose name is smirched with modern death.  
O the slow, slow genocide of love.  
Truth hides its face as if in shame  
And time delays an insane scream.  
Blood is blood. It seeps from so-called  
Them as it seeps from so-called us.

# PETER THABIT JONES

## THE MAN

In the time he's brushed his teeth,  
He's taken a thousand lives,  
From a town in some distant land  
To an unspoilt countryside.  
His smiles are bright as stolen gold,  
His eyes disturb the ice  
Inside the freezer for his beer  
To cheer his secret files.  
His women think that he's all man,  
His children call him Dad;  
He doesn't dwell on slaughtered tribes,  
For war's an ugly word.  
His shoes go with his well-made suit,  
His suit goes with his tie;  
He shakes the hand of priest and star,  
For evil is his foe.  
The world waits for his T.V. face,  
His hatred wrapped in truth;  
He tells them that they fight for peace  
And never must lose faith.  
In the time he's stretched out in bed  
And closed his settled eyes,  
His ordered death has scorched a sky  
And claimed a thousand lives.

# DAVID HUGHES

## DAI THE DOG

*Dai the Dog airs his knowledge of Ancient Rome and makes what he hopes will be a salutary comparison*

In the Roman Empire  
the plebs, it is said,  
were kept in their place  
with circuses and bread.

The theory's the same now  
I'm sure you realise,  
only today we have the House of Windsor  
and a Big Mac with fries.

*Dai the Dog welcomes the proposal to modernise the House of Lords and, having made a happy but obvious discovery wishes to celebrate the development of the democratic process with a minimalist poem.*

Ermine rhymes with vermin

## THE ANATOMY OF A TIME SERVER

He clenched his teeth  
stiffened his upper lip  
bit his tongue  
knew when to keep his mouth shut.

He kept his nose to the grindstone  
his shoulder to the wheel  
he had his finger on the pulse  
and kept his ear to the ground  
so knew when to turn a blind eye.

He was a safe pair of hands -  
but when asked to stand up and be counted  
he found he didn't have the balls.

# IFOR HUGHES

## THE HOTTEST DAY

Today is the hottest day,  
gritter lorries are out  
to stop our roads melting away.

Water tankers are deployed,  
transfer deals are not closed,  
the radio proffers stern advice -

Don't open the windows  
Keep the curtains drawn  
Drink fluids before you get thirsty

The woman from the department is quizzed  
should breast-fed babies drink water?  
what happens if they stop breathing?

Somewhere, somebody has been watering a lawn.  
He has been detected on CCTV  
and will be incarcerated until the ice caps melt.

At the edge of the motorway on a bank  
a makeshift awning is constructed  
to shelter children from the sun's roar.

At night the house sighs  
sounds and smells trickle like hot sand  
through the fingers of a clenched hand

The television man is blurred  
in a haze of static,  
his throat is thick with war.

# PHIL CARRADICE

## NAPALM IN THE MORNING

When Marlon was a little boy  
He loved his games of war,  
He loved John Wayne and Errol Flynn  
In movies that he saw.

America triumphant,  
A fight for truth and right,  
Bringing peace and comfort  
With easy, gentle might.

So come on bless the USA  
And keep us safe till Judgement Day!

Then after school, the army -  
There really was no choice  
And Marlon roared allegiance  
In warlike, martial voice.

He earned his combat jacket,  
His AK 47.  
He thought that when the action came  
He'd died and gone to Heaven.

Let's sing God Bless the USA,  
Let all our trials, Lord, slip away.

Now Marlon's winning medals,  
They range across his chest,  
A rainbow arch of crimson  
And Marlon knows he's blest.

He's led no combat missions  
Like Errol or Big John  
But he's become so very skilled  
With leather belt and thong.

Oh sing God Bless the USA,  
John Wayne is dead and gone away.  
Only sometimes, in the silence  
Of his lonely midnight dream,  
Can Marlon smile and tell himself  
Things aren't always what they seem.

Come morning, all the doubts have gone  
And Marlon's back on task -  
In body armour, green fatigues,  
Black hat and cowboy mask!

So sing God Bless the USA,  
The dollar rules the world today.

# ANTHONY JAMES

## THE CAPITAL OF MY COUNTRY

*In memory of Jean Charles de Menezes,  
Brazilian citizen shot in London*

This is the Summer of the Machine Guns,  
They flourish on the streets of our cities,  
They make me recall my earlier self,  
Imagine what my fate might be now if I dared to look  
As I did thirteen years ago and walked across London,  
Dared to walk through the capital of my country.  
Thirteen years ago I stepped off a plane in the drizzle,  
Returning from two years in another country,  
That day I came back from southern Spain, skin deep brown  
From the sun of Andalucia, arriving hardly noticed in London  
And on that day my beard was long and dark and sinister.

What if I went into an underground station today  
With that beard and that skin and wearing the jacket  
Which protected me in the mountains of Puerta del Oso?  
What would they make of me in the capital of my country?  
I took a book to Spain, a green binding embossed in gold,  
In fact nothing more than an American novel.  
Today it would look like the holy book  
Of some alien and unwelcome creed  
And catch the attention of the armed police  
In a station in the capital of my country.  
What if I walked down the carriages of some train,  
Turning the pages of that book, murmuring to myself,  
Then suddenly in a panic refused to stop when I heard a shout?

And if I kept running would they shoot to kill?  
Bullets in the head from a Glock 17 pistol -  
Met Pol protecting us all - in the capital of my country.  
Perhaps if they killed me, a sceptic with no religion,  
Perhaps if bits of my teeth and brain tissue  
Littered some floor in the capital of my country,  
Then I would die a meaningful death  
And the filthy vegetation which is choking this strange season  
Would begin to shrivel and retreat.

# MIKE JENKINS

## LAS' FACTREE

Live from Treorchy,  
the death of ower industree.

Coz yer we go agen  
marchin out into the sun  
with the gates shuttin be'ind us,  
with a brass band playin  
an a Male Voice Choir, o'course,  
speshlee fr-a telly.

An all them big noise slebritees  
couldn do nothin arfter all  
fr this dead-end Valley  
with-a las' factree closin down.

This is dead from Treorchy,  
companees like Burberry  
movin from countree t' countree  
leavin be'ind an empty factree  
like a corpse rottin on a battlefield.

Coz yer we go agen  
wavin ower flags like victree  
an cryin inta the wide sky  
as if the owners ad any pity.

Aye, it'll be a story  
an then it'll be a burial groun',  
flat as where-a mines ewsed t' be.

# MIKE JENKINS

## BUSES ALL DAY

Spent's all is time, see,  
all day long  
I seen im down-a bus station -  
jest travellin a buses f' free.

All roun' town ee goes,  
summin t' do  
an a place t' be -  
keeps im warm.

I seen im eight thirty,  
ee's there ev'ry mornin,  
someone t' talk to,  
summin t' see.

Bloody ell, imagine that!  
Tour of-a Gurnos estate,  
t' the summit o' Dowlais Top,  
waiting forever at-a traffic lights.

An arf-a time  
ee'd see nothin  
coz-a windows ud be filthy  
or it'd be pissin down with rain.

Ee'd ave a map o' Merthyr  
glued to is brain,  
is fore'ead would be Cefn Viaduct,  
is left an right, Heolgerrig an Twyn.

An then at night ee'd dream  
about-a bus crashin  
inta Cyfarthfa Castle, releasin  
the ghost of a slavin maid.

What ee does Sundays,  
no buses. God knows -  
problee lies in bed plannin  
routes up an down -a Valley.

Is air like bracken on-a Beacons,  
ev'ry vein ave got a number  
from the Giant's Bite of is mouth  
to below is Fiddler's Elbow.

Spent's all is day, see,  
one day it'll be yew an me -  
drivers like fren's f companee,  
dreadin them ewge snow storms.

# BRENDAN CLEARY

## THE CARDIFF TRAIN

restless at every station  
I just can't leave it  
& it's making me panic  
the image of you  
posing in the doorway  
that dark afternoon  
so I shift in my seat  
& glimpse some trees  
trying to let clouds  
make it feel better  
as if you'd go away  
even with Canetrader rum  
& loads of strong drugs

# STEPHEN C MIDDLETON

## UNDERGROUND RAILROAD (HAVE WE LEARNT NOTHING?)

Raw protest  
as raw as Shepp  
as raw as J. B. Lenoir's  
Vietnam Blues

'Lament' from 'Birmingham Sunday'  
an unearthly metallic howl  
for murdered children, burnt

edge of seat  
edge of cymbal squeal stuff  
as we are about to consign more  
to the fire  
(Have we learnt... nothing?)

...and I hear muezzin  
turn to roar  
the shenai and Langston Hughes

shrieks and scream  
all too human  
for those who cannot speak  
an ever-swelling roll call  
...and response?

# DAN DRUMMOND

## SAME SHIT, DIFFERENT DAY

choppers at dawn. wagner. little bird, hunter/killer, huey. miniguns, m16s, singing with your fury. smoke grenade, mellow yellow, groovy grape, purple haze, all in my veins, all in my brains, stalking the jungles, plantations, stalking the paddies in tropical rainstorms, stalking villages in treacherous valleys, dribbling sweat, flowing pores on your head, sticks crackling underfoot echo cricks in your neck, helmet lopsided, graffitied. gun in hair trigger grip. frowning mouth, gritted teeth, clamped behind a cigarette, waiting for that pair of eyes, searching for that trick surprise, the one that signals med-evac, morphine drip, bloody stump for a leg. agent orange clearing glades, you got point in clearing raids, that could be just a villager, but now his house is a bonfire, surely becomes viet cong. ? napalm, roasted flesh, woman corpse, burning dress, L.S.D hides in those trees, bad trip flashback, knocks you to your knees, kneeling in your misery, pleading on a foreign beach, screaming in this new L.Z, a jungle that has turned against you, people that will rise against you, orders be the death of you, trusting young draftee.

checkpoint at dawn. kevlar armour, M4 pointed at approaching car. unsure, sunglasses hide your eyes. deindividualised. you issue commands in unfamiliar language, distrust is sown. you're after terrorists but what exactly do you see here? children, lips curled and quivering in fear, salty sweat cakes your face, the racist words of the captain replaying in your brains. recruiters, back in the states, they made an offer you couldn't turn away. the army will get you through college is what they said. they lied - the army takes your liberty and replaces it with bullets in your head. white phosphorous illuminates fallujah. the new my lai, turkey shoot, burning, murdering faceless women and children, the man whose house is rubble, surely will get himself in trouble, carbine, mechanical whine of tank tread on desert floor, forty years, same war. different theatre but a similar enemy: the man who has been invaded, helpless as the fires grew. the man with nothing now left to lose. a city that has turned against you, people that will rise against you, orders be the death of you, trusting young recruit.

# DAN DRUMMOND

## THE CHILD OF THE BOMB

there's someone who i would've known who ain't around today. we'd have met each other on the internet and chatted and eventually walked beneath blazing autumn trees with leaves like sheets of flame and a sky like a basin suspended upended and radiating day. our conversations would've been partial and awkward at first, with that odd feeling you get from a friend from the net of knowing them and yet not. but given a few hours and the wind and the trees and the cinema screen we'd have been mates already exchanging details, already arranging our next meeting; this one already fleeting as the evening creeps in and steals the time and the kiss and the feel of the lips and the skin. and the txts from the moment i've left to the next day to say how you doing? where are you? where you been? when can i see you again? and we'd have got to know each other better: our food, our talk, the way we walk and think and how our thoughts work and when to say what and how to spot the change in the mood, and where we're from. her family's Japanese - hiroshima to be exact - the place the americans nearly attacked back in the war with a split uranium hit, but thought better of it, and dropped their bomb out to sea as a scare tactic to watch their enemy withdraw, and thanks to that, there she would be, holding my hand, the soul mate i never had. see her grandparents were caught in the flash as little boy went up downtown, the huge fireball writhing and boiling down to the ground as the mushroom cloud arose over the flattened, cremated, annihilated town. and their shadows were burnt into the pavement from the shade they gave from the blaze, and my friend that never existed, the child of the bomb, i see her some days, in my house or out and about smiling sadly, at memories never made, at love words never said; a melancholy spirit. she was never conceived, so she can't really be dead.

# MARY THOMAS

## 1917

Merry Xmas Tommy Atkins,  
Merry Xmas.  
Though the trenches run with blood,  
And your boots are full of mud,  
Still, Merry Xmas Tommy Atkins,  
Merry Xmas.

You beat them on the Marne,  
You beat them on the Seine,  
You beat them on the Maginot Line,  
And here you are again.

And when this conflict is over,  
And the fighting it is done,  
Will you go to war again?  
Oh yes you will my son.

There will be another war,  
And another,  
And then another one.

# JOHN D DAVIES

## WHISKEY AND CHANGING THE WORLD

Sometimes  
we would sit around the whiskey bottle,  
singing songs and telling stories.  
If there were tears we would hug,  
we would hear the hyenas  
laughing at us in the distance,  
we never saw them but knew they were there.  
One night you wrote down all we spoke about,  
told us that you were going to write a book  
and this was your research,  
but you never got round to it.  
Like most of the other plans we made  
somehow they got left by the wayside,  
we were the ones who really were going to change the  
world,  
but practically nothing changed at all,  
except, there are only two of us now  
and the whiskey seems to last that much longer.

# PATRICK JONES

## INCURSION

i

a bomb is not a bomb until it lands in your living room,  
again,  
religion gets off its knees,  
and attacks,  
like sand thrown into eyes,  
it blinds,  
flags stab borders  
and dialect drowns intellect  
as the bomb-bloated thin line  
marks our space, our place  
you and i  
becomes us and them,  
"the birth pangs of a new middle east" says condoleezza rice  
but the baby will never be born,  
as children lay dazed in wrecked hospitals,  
oh father, which art in heaven, we praise you  
"we have the right to self defence"  
but a warplane knows no morality  
just another precisionned target on a silent road  
in another country, another country.....

ii

you fire  
cowardly rockets sneer into small villages  
then run and hide  
pray to your god,  
of your good deed  
and yearn for a fake paradise

as retaliation cannot find you  
only the family fleeing their home, unsheltered,  
innocent victim  
to a crucifix game  
they did not begin....

# CONTRIBUTORS

**ANDREW BARTZ** - created the cover picture. Previously, he has had cartoons in 'Red Poets'. Ace Tapeman and Heckler in Chief. Hails from Merthyr.

**ASHLEY JONES** - lives in Barri. This is a debut poem in the magazine.

**MERRYN WILLIAMS** - lives in Oxford, where she edits the excellent literary mag 'The Interpreter's House'.

**PHIL KNIGHT** - a Red Poets regular, who is active with the SWP and Respect in the Neath area.

**ALUN HUGHES** - poet and translator who lives in north Wales. Secretary of the Communist Party of Wales.

**MIKE CHURCH** - juggler, actor, stand-up comic, clown and Luton Town fan (well, someone's got to support them!)

**LETITIA ANNE RHYS** - fine performer from Swansea and Red Poets regular.

**JACKIE CORNWALL** - playwright and poet from Cardiff whose plays (including the latest 'Revolution Square') have been performed in Chapter.

**ALAN PERRY** - artist, story-writer and poet from Abertawe. His latest book of stories 'Days of the Comet' is out from Moonstone Press. Get a copy, it's a gem!

**CHRIS WILLIAMS** - librarian and excellent performer of his poetry who lives in Bridgend.

**ALUN REES** - Former award-winning journalist, originally from Merthyr. His great book of poems 'Yesterday's Tomorrow' (Y Lolfa) is a must for anyone interested in political poetry.

**HERBERT WILLIAMS** - broadcaster, novelist, poet and story-writer who lives in Cardiff. Latest book of poems is 'Wrestling in Mud' (Cinnamon Press).

**LORRAINE PARKER** - animal rights activist and artist who lives in Cardiff.

**FIONA OWEN** - poet and prose-writer from Ynys Môn. Along with her husband Gorwel, she has brought out a CD called 'In Between'. Her book of poems 'Going Gentle' was recently published by Gomer.

**PATRICK MCGUINNESS** - lecturer and astute political commentator, whose latest book of poems is '19th Century Blues' (Smith/Doorstep Books).

**TIM RICHARDS** - law lecturer, journalist and Red Poets stalwart throughout the years.

**IRENE THOMAS** - poet, artist and local historian, who has broadcast many times on BBC Wales.

**PETER GRUFFYDD** - a Welshman who lives in Bristol and another regular in Red Poets.

**ARNOLD RATTENBURY** - lived in Blaenau Ffestiniog until his death last year. The poem included in one in a sequence of 'frigger poems' based on working-class artifacts.

**JACKIE JONES** - poet and artist (exhibited in the John Moores Gallery), making a welcome return.

**GRAHAM HARTILL** - poet and lecturer, whose most recent book is 'A Winged Head' (Parthian).

**RAYMOND HUMPHREYS** - writer of fiction, essays and poetry. Latest book is 'Checkpoint'.

**PETER THABIT JONES** - editor of the fine little magazine 'The Seventh Quarry'. His latest book of poems is 'The Lizard Catchers'.

**DAVE HUGHES** - social worker and poet from Swansea, who is retiring to concentrate on his writing.

**IFOR THOMAS** - superb performer of his work. His latest book 'Body Beautiful' was long-listed for last year's Wales Book of the Year Award.

**PHIL CARRADICE** - poet, story-writer, novelist and historian. Recent books include 'Black Bart's Treasure' (Pont) and 'Highlights of Welsh History' (Gomer).

**ANTHONY JAMES** - writer of fiction, essays and reviews, also a translator of Finnish poetry.

**MIKE JENKINS** - father of left-wing Plaid Cymru AM Bethan and 'Golwg' columnist Ciaran Jenkins.

**BRENDAN CLEARY** - hails from N. Ireland; lives in Brighton. One of the best performers of his own work around.

**STEPHEN MIDDLETON** - reviewer of jazz music and former editor of 'Ostinato'. Now runs The Tenormen Press.

**DAN DRUMMOND** - appeared last year as 'Hangetsu'. Great performing artist who also heads a rap band.

**MARY THOMAS** - retired civil servant from Port Talbot, making a welcome return to Red Poets.

**JOHN D. DAVIES** - one of the top performers around. A Red Poets star from Maesycwmmwr.

**PATRICK JONES** - playwright and poet. His plays include 'Everything Must Go' and 'Unprotected Sex', both produced by the Sherman Theatre Co.