

INTRODUCTION

Last June I walked past the Senedd and was startled by what appeared to be sheets of aluminium foil in the windows. More secrecy, I wondered.

On a closer look, they proved to be Dylan Hammond's infamous installations of Margaret Thatcher and Nye Bevan, both just about resembling their subjects, though the latter was more like Benny Hill!

I'd been astounded and incensed by the Assembly's decision to locate the Thatcher one in this building, a place that should belong to the people of Cymru, not the whims of politicians. I was all the more disappointed because some politicians and writers I admired supported this because of artistic freedom. 'We must never censor!' they cried.

Yet, was anyone asking who made this decision in the first instance and why an artist of so little standing as Hammond (husband of BBC Wales political editor Betsan Powys) had been the chosen one.

Try googling Hammond and you'll get more links with Bob Dylan and the Queen's Jubilee than his works of art. The cross-party committee that instigated this seemed to be set up with this sole purpose and it was disgraced Tory AM Alun Cairns (an avowed Thatcherite) who lobbied fervently for the Iron Lady alongside Nye.

It all smacks of the kind of cliquey closed-club behaviour associated with Westminster. It is a gross insult to the many in Wales who suffered so much under her: miners whose jobs were destroyed, trade unionists whose rights were taken away and the mass unemployed. An insult to those who struggled against her pernicious poll tax and had the bailiffs at their doors and to those who fought in her war with Argentina and died or were injured in the Falklands/Malvinas. The list seems endless.

What's galling is that those images have meagre artistic merit. It was a matter of a very dubious decision on our behalf by politicians in Cardiff Bay and supported by the likes of historian John Davies, who should have known better.

Tyrone O'Sullivan (of the now closed-down Tower Colliery) had the right idea covering 'Thatcher' up with a miners' banner.

Let's have art with shock and wit. Is there a Welsh Banksy out there?

Mike Jenkins

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EDMUND BATON 1931-45

It's pleasant here at Huisnes-sur-Mer,
a green mound of flower and shrub,
until you reach the ring of stone,
the concrete mausoleum.

Born in the wrong year;
living in the wrong place;
dying among the wrong people;
lying now among the soldiers;
this son of the vanquished victors.

Denied his youth;
denied the life-giving crumb;
denied any requiem but the whistling wind;
denied even a few feet of French soil.

Young bones locked in a block of concrete
can give no laughing warning
of those sombre, war-clad years
to his children, or to theirs.

But then it was his side
that marched the streets of France.
His fathers were the ones who took their women.
This was the child raised to the sound of war parades.

An eye for an eye;
a tooth for a tooth;
a life for a life;
a child for a child;
a hate for a hate.

That's why twelve thousand lie here,
entombed, not to touch the ground,
shouldering the burden of a nation's shame.
And he shall bear his child's share.

Raymond Humphreys

ALL THE TALENTS

It's not right you know.
They shouldn't mock
to see the Witch-Queen photographed
on the steps of Downing Street.
After all, we want a Government
of All the Talents.
It's a great idea;
it doesn't go far enough.

Stalin could be put in charge
of production
for seven years or so.
He'd get the wheels turning.

Why not Mugabe
for Minister of Food?
He'd make just a little
go a long, long way.

Attila the Hun
might become special adviser
on foreign policy.
He'd bang a few heads on the table.

Adolf Hitler
would bring something to the debate
on immigration.
He's a very thoughtful man.

Or we could just make
Tony Blair
Peace Ambassador
in the Middle East.

Raymond Humphreys

LETTERS TO CHE GUEVARA

Letter Number Six: La Habana

Hello again, though this one is the last;
I think I've tried your patience quite enough.
We finished last time on a tragic note,
Remembering some pretty dismal stuff;
The message this time isn't quite so tough;
Would it amuse you if I said
That many people don't believe you're dead?

It started on the night after they killed you;
A message on the wall across the street;
Someone had scrawled it there as louts or children will do;
'Che alive as you never wanted him to be'
An abstract statement, as it seems to me,
But many really thought some miracle or spell
Had got you out of there quite safe and well.

So if you were around today
And knew the Internet as I do,
You'd probably be startled and amused
To read about the folk who say they knew you;
Some Californians claim you as their guru;
A man called Mario, who says you're gay,
Claims to have lived with you for thirty years in Monterey,

A cellphone would have helped as well, I guess,
In the mountains of the Sierra Maestra
And you were not the man to turn from progress,
Especially when confronting powerful neighbours.
A laptop in your knapsack would have been of use;
You could have surfed the net for companeros through the night;
And spread the revolution gently, via your website.

And fair enough if people want to say
That what you tried to do was indefensible;
The task you set yourself was crazy;
Romantic; quixotic; breaking all your own rules;
The final, futile gesture of a holy fool.
All you wanted now was home - alas for you, that meant
You'd have to overthrow the Government.

So why is it that in the Imperialist West
You won such admiration and fidelity?
People are often stupid about this;
Falsely attributing your power to your beauty,
Citing romanticism and naivety;
They don't seem to see that even here, not everyone
Likes the way things are done.

You, who read almost everything that was ever written
And chatted with Sartre and de Beauvoir
Understood internalised oppression,
The marginalisation of intellectual and worker;
The tiny minority who hold real power;
The trash that's offered to the poor as substitute;
Goodness commodified and ethics prostituted.

I know you disapproved of us imperialists,
But I think you'd agree
That an addict on the streets
Or a family on Social Security
Are not exactly free;
Not like the ones who control the money,
And fence us in with mediocrity and three-piece suits.

Even here in Cuba, you can see
We believe we are only worth what we own;
People will never agree to want only what they need.
It isn't easy to create the New Man.
Everyone's tried, from Jesus and Mohammed down;
To dissuade us from materialism and greed;
As long as we have advertising, none of us are free.

But one thing I have come to realise;
Events inexorably close in upon us
Today is not a time for compromise
Foolish in many things, in this one you were wise;
Though heroes die and revolutions sometimes fail,
The future of humanity is not for sale..

The final chapter of your story
Took place in 1997.
Finally, they found your body;
Made the correct identification -

All the larks were singing
The day they found you there
In Vallegrande, where you'd lain for years.
So from that quiet, modest resting-place
They brought you back to rest in Santa Clara.
There was such ceremony and celebration
Such a clamour and a brouhaha;
Fidel made a speech that lasted hours,
To celebrate the friend
Who went away and now was home again.

And nothing they can ever do to you
Will taint your mystery now, or dull your power;
Though they may satirise or commodify you;
Whatever rubbish you are used to sell,
Whatever insults are heaped upon you
Nothing can touch you now, dear rebel angel;
You have become inviolable.

I started my first letter thinking you
Might fight for us, if sometime you'd return.
But in all honesty, it's probably true
We find the icon easier than the man.
Besides, I haven't told you half of what you'd need to know;
In line with your percipient forecast
In '89, the Soviet Union collapsed
And left Cuba in a mess;

And though as you predicted, China's doing fine,
In Serbia and Bosnia, there was fighting.
The news has been awful from the Argentine;
Things are unspeakable in Palestine;
And nastier still in Iraq and Iran;
And whether you're in hell or heaven,
Even you'll have heard of 9/11;
And frankly, dearest,
If you've got any sense, you won't come near us:
So let your image urge us on to absolute resistance,
According to the dictates of our conscience.

And so I spend my last day in Havana
Sheltering from a raging tropical storm,
Watching the prostitutes flirting at the bar;
Adjusting to the thought of going home.

Knowing it won't be long till I return.
So until then, a revolutionary greeting;
We'll speak of this again at our next meeting.

Jackie Cornwall

THE CITY AND I

in ivory dreams
armed creatures guard doors
corridors windows
over the central square
a couple of hawks
flying in stifling watching circles

the city is a hostage
 in accordance with the law
the important decisions are made by all alone
in a high babylon tower
 bombed with messages of cosmic dust
the end of the world is classified information
even inside wars are strictly forbidden
travellers caught by the storm of wonder
record in water air
underground writings
that the next days are devoted to survival

the error is sublime the city does not die
 but its dwellers do
with the only difference that everything seems otherwise
I cast dice with triumphs and failures

Aurel Stancu

Translated from the Romanian by Dr Petru Iamandi

WAR GAMES

Displaced chess pieces are forced to live on a circular tray of hyphens. Misery and longing reduces them to mere silhouettes. It was tough where they lived before but for them it was a land of milk and honey. Here they don't even know where to look. They've been accused of every crime and vice imaginable and some they never dreamt of. They attempt a coup and to their amazement the coup succeeds. Using the resources of their new situation they have a choice, adapt or die or inflict a retaliatory war on the doorknobs who stole their chequered landscape. They do both. Doors become a thing of shame and are banned. While in exile the pieces learned to be ruthless. Now when they see a territory they just take it even if it means going round and round in circles. Those who colonise the tray develop peculiar turns of phrase and colorful idioms that eventually annoy their cousins so much that a second war breaks out. The trouble is there are two kings and even though they are worlds apart, if you're a chess piece, you have issues, even with simple prepositions; you see the world in black and white and as a British Bowler Hat once said, up with that you will not put.

David Greenslade

KAPELA WOLVES

Whispered screams condense
on the unheated hotel room's windows,
whilst replaying a nightmare scenario,

of wolves that close in on their quarry
focused like in the sights of a sniper.
One entering a seemingly deserted building
detects from the cellar
the sound of a rapacious Serbian soldier
smothering a young girl's whimper then,

without warning he has a bite like-grip
on the throat of the soldier,
serious intensity burns in his eyes
as he draws him closer,
like a devouring phagocyte
pouring onto bitterness,
and in doing so: a lamb
is spared from certain slaughter.

Waking, as if covered in blood but
it's just cold sweat, in revolting actuality
of this Dog of Wars re-enactment
like earlier that evening in that bar in Rejka.

David Alun Williams

*Rejka, Croatia. February 1993.
Before the fall of the former Yugoslavia.
Kapela, mountainous range between the Croatian coast and
Bosnia.*

AS I LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP

As I lie in my shop door boudoir
'Neath my newsprint duvet
On my cardboard carton divan
I wait for sleep to claim me
I tremble.
I try to ignore the cold.
The bitter cold,
Insistent cold
Damp cold,
Clinging cold,
Penetrating cold
That Insinuates Itself
Under my clothes
Under my skin
Under my flesh
Past my bones
Deep into the core of me.
Then slowly, the white cider
White Lightning,
White Ace,
White Acid
While etching my stomach lining
Dissolving my liver
Poisoning my kidneys
Sends me at last, blissfully to sleep.

Bato

CITY STATE

A granite grey city
is our Capital town.
The only other colour
is red burger bar.

Tiding it over
the now tamed bay
is our Parliament
of Sand.

I walk through a valley
of Tarmac, surrounded
by mountains of corporate
steel and glass,

but behind the facade
the back streets
stink of cider, vomit
and torn bin bags.

On the corners the cops
glow yellow under the
flickering lampposts,
their bibs seem to light

the urban night of fun,
fights, blood in the gutter
and half sung songs
of love and despair.

I find a shattered
Rank copier in the road
is it modern art
or more decay?

Then I behold a flash
of silver in the sky
but it is no rainbow way
but a wonder of man,

built for the Millennium
it awaits in vain
the second coming
of Welsh rugby.

I only wait for
my train in one
of the city's many
Firkin pubs.

Phil Knight

WILLIE BRINN

We all knew Willie Brinn;

a constant in our lives,
yodelling his way along the road
or swaggering a tuneless whistle
across the hill. This idiot boy
who squatted at the top end of our street
where town and country met,
easy in either environment.

We pitied him his childish ways,
prodding at the cowpats with a stick,
roaring his demented ditties to the stars.
We pointed, laughed behind our hands.
Willie smiled and whistled on, rolling
like a schooner, out of view.

Not for him our worries
about Castro and the Bay of Pigs,
the Cold War tensions that might
some day blow into a hurricane
of whirlwind terror.

Frank Ifield's latest hit
was more the fare
of Willie's addled brain.

And so we worried; Willie sang
"The Wayward Wind" or "I Remember You,"
as happy as the day was long.

Oh yes, we all knew Willie Brinn.
but only now, with hindsight,
can we admit how much
we envied him.

Phil Carradice

THIS IS THE TERROR

Strapped, helpless, to a board,
dipped down to drown, but not.
Waterboarding is virtual drowning,
a modern torture
for the 21st century.

When the water is poured down,
the cellophane over the mouth,
is there to cover
the laws that say
you should not be drowned.

Vice President Cheney
says it's a no-brainer
because it's not torture
and anyway they don't do it
but if they did it would be OK.

But it's not a dunk in the water, Dick!
It's not swimming backstroke, but drowning.
Gagging for breath is real terror,
the terror of dying by drowning,
over and over again.

Like witches
in medieval times,
today's suspects cannot win
as they drown until
they admit their wrongs.

This is the secret war
of wealth and power
of terror against terror,
waged in our name
to protect "civilisation".

Tim Richards

OUT OF TOWN SHOPPING

Round and round new estates,
find that Tesco replicates.
One step, two step,
I'm just about done.

Round and round the motorway,
doing my best to get away.
One step, two step,
I'm back to square one.

Round and round the Little Chefs.
Its as if I'd never left.
One step, two step,
s'just another bun.

Round and round, lost in space,
Miles apart, a common place.
One step, two step,
nothing new 'neath the sun.

Round and round I'm driving
travelling, never arriving,
One step, two step,
My reality has spun.

Round and round and round I go
nowhere else for me to go,
One step, two step,
Monopoly has won.

Tim Richards

LABOUR MP

It's a laborious job being a Labour MP,
Always on the look-out for you, and for me.

With a working class dad, and a working class mum,
He grew up with values like "kick out the scum."

After going to Cambridge, after leaving school,
He'd already decided he wanted to rule.

Got a job in the council and worked his way up
As his greed increased, he just couldn't stop.

A few years later he decided to stand
In the general election for fifty grand.

He believed in the old, he believed in the poor,
Or that's what he told all those at the door.

He believed in the rights of the common man,
Or that's what he said from his campaign van.

He supported women and the unemployed,
So he said in the streets he'd normally avoid.

He loved children and animals, pledged more money for health;
He believed in everything that would get him more wealth.

He reminded us all of the Conservatives' lies,
And we had to believe his convincing bright eyes.

And as for the voters who couldn't decide,
He won them over with his working class pride.

When he got elected with record numbers of votes,
Of course he was modest, refusing to boast.

And of course we were happy to have Labour at last -
We all had a party, we all had a blast.

But we soon found out there would be no revolution,
And we started to doubt if Labour was the solution.

For now they were saying reform would take years,
After the mess they'd inherited from their Conservative piers.

Privatisation, which Labour once had abhorred
Would have to continue as it had done before.

Young unemployed were given a new deal -
A full time job which could pay for one meal.

University students would have to pay for their fees,
And the party for peace brought Iraq to its knees.

And now Labour MPs got involved in scandals
As Elton John sang about short-lived candles.

People suspected, as waiting lists grew,
That the colour of New Labour was a dark shade of blue.

So the moral of this long and laborious story
Is that every MP, at heart, is a Tory.

Nick Fisk

THE ELECTRONIC ZEITGEIST

cables and plate steel.
electronic eyes.
their skin is metal casing.
an infection blooms inside.
watching me from control rooms,
each glassy lens their spy.
shielded and mirrored;
cunning circuitry disguised.
bionic chipset system.
sinister.
precise.
sinews veins and diodes.
retinas and wires.
my every keystroke's monitored
from the moment i'm online.
my every blog is analysed,
line by fucking line.
my dna's to be databased,
labeled and defined.
my children will be tracked from birth,
their first moments scrutinised.
genetic i.d.'s compulsory,
anonymity is thoughtcrime.
biometric is eugenic's bro,
and they want me to comply.
autocracy, technology
bureaucracy and fear -
this is where we're heading;
the terror grows each year.
and when i'm in my seventies
with dreadlocks down my back,
i'll still be shoutin' at the tv
and i'll still be on the attack.
but now cross legged in the desert,
the storm is yet to arrive.
i'm counting seconds before thunderclaps
as lightning sears the distant sky.
my future's cast in shadow,
and i can see that ol' dread die,
but while he still had life he still despised
the electronic
zeitgeist.

dan drummond

FROM A NATIVE AMERICAN SONG

*I see them moving & bending,
they come up just like people*

the girl says
in her world, where everything is people -
talking of trees

a forest of people
rolls along the motorway west each morning
clogging the access to cities

in her world, things can be spoken with -

I'm on my way to work,
delighted that the traffic-jam
is heading the other way

idealising her world
full of the space that clouds are,
forest is,

I remember -

but how the way forward?
what poetry (for example)?
how?

I see it, moving and bending,
coming up just like people

her possible world

Graham Hartill

UNDER AN ACID RAIN

For Terry Hetherington 1935-2007

Your Porsche screams
silver in your drive,
your double-barrel gate speaks
of prosecution.

Your model-machine stings
as you stripe
your acres.
Discreet in your country tweed
you clip my trees with a stride.

Who gave you the right
to annihilate Lady Blue
and spray the Peacock so rare?

Who gave you the right
to silence Thrush with poisoned Slugs,
and ramble-boot the Lapwing?

Who advised you
to claim the Hazel and plough a by-pass,
then sell the Cothi for Corporate Fishing:
to slice the Bluestone for M4 spectators
who fool in chalets of Swedish wood:
to sack the locals on minimum wage
and pay even less to builders from Poland?

Over the years you've changed my name,
and continue to rape my language
— when you know its phonetic alphabet -
sound the name of your barn conversion.

You've painted Mam's cottage beetroot-sick,
to let for all with a regular job.
Parochial? Not guilty my Lord.
Not guilty. I beg
for handouts eight months of each year,
and wait on the tourists for four.

My glass calls on Gwyn Aif
and his struggle to voice the truth
from our history —
lechyd Da. Good Health.

This dragon has two tongues.

Letitia Anne Rhys

FOOTPRINTS

In the window
of a Rodeo Drive
boutique — soft pink shoes
circled with pearls
and fine gold lace.

Pearls
the gift of oysters
driven
by grit
to create
on ocean bed:
child divers
paid in pence
dice with death
to harvest a jewel
precious as moon-mother's milk.

Gold
ugly nuggets
hewn in the black
for a hammer
from highest bidder:
molten metal
rolled and beaten
woven by infants
sold to designers
to ruff
and twist.

Leather
soft as a calf
stolen from her mother
sold for a penny
into the juggernaut
alive in France
slaughtered by noon
skinned in a barrel
tanned with care
tossed in dye
for the pattern-maker's cut.

In the window
of a Rodeo Drive Boutique
soft pink shoes
at a crazy price.

Letitia Anne Rhys

THE REALM OF IF ONLY

If broken hearts were bread, the yield
of this land's fields of sorrow
would be sufficient to relieve
a starving world from want and leave
plenty for tomorrow.

If our ideals and hopes were blooms
the consequential flora
would flood the latitudes with hues
so brave and brilliant, and infuse
the age with choice aroma.

If lives destroyed by greed were bricks
the wreckage of our valleys
could be piled into a tower so high
it would punch a hole clean through the sky
to where God drools and dallies.

Alun Rees

A BALLAD OF BARON MERTHYR

Baron Merthyr was a ferocious foe
in the fierce industrial fight.
He bashed the workers all day long
and most of the bloody night.

He left maimed and murdered miners
strewn behind him pit by pit,
transmuting the lives of thousands
into steaming piles of shit.

For transmutation was his game,
and he played it with panache,
transmuting colliers into corpses
and lovely piles of cash.

He was a loftier genius
than any alchemist of old,
who'd have killed for the trick of turning
base elements into gold.

And while he was busy transmuting
Welsh workers into goners
he transmuted his own life into
titles and riches and honours.

But we should praise bold Baron Merthyr
for whatever his intent
he gave us the clearest lessons
in what exploitation meant.

Karl Marx was much too wordy
in his efforts to make us free.
Most of us quit Das Kapital
by page four, or maybe three.

But Baron Merthyr's living book
woke us up with a fearful thud.
No pen, no ink, no waste of words -
just a masterpiece in blood.

Alun Rees

MINERS

(last shift at Tower Colliery)

They were slaughtered at Senghenydd,
at Cilfynydd, Porth and Maerdy.
Where miners went Death went as well,
and he was never tardy.

He was dead on time at Abercarn,
when his hands were rarely redder.
Whenever he was dead on time
miners were even deader.

He killed with gas and killed with fire,
or slowly killed with torture.
He planned his long-term murders with
the patience of a Borgia.

For many a miner longing for
retirement growing roses
found his last years a martyrdom
to pneumoconiosis.

Most cruel of all was Aberfan
where Death dealt devastation
to hopes and dreams by wiping out
the younger generation.

And just as things were looking up
with Death pushed back apace
along came Thatcherwoman bent
on wrecking in his place.

Where Death wrecked whole communities
by blowing men to bits
she simply plunged them into grief
by closing down the pits.

But here's the thing: at Tower the men
did something more than hoping.
They used their wits, their strength, their faith
to keep their colliery open.

Now Tower's coal has had its day
but the men have had theirs as well.
They chose their clocking-off time themselves
and Thatcher could go to hell.

Alun Rees

PUCK FAIR

1

One August night outside Kilgobnet,
my ancestors heard the bite
of Roundhead boots.
Clickity clack of their English craic
come up the briary road.

I knew of their treachery
New Model Army
War of the Three Kingdoms.

A warning
scattering through town
we, billies, bucked and roared.
and woke the dead.

And so it was, Lord Lieutenant and General
for the Parliament of England
was routed from Cill Orglain.

I am Pagan Puck
in God's own country.
I am King of Kerry now.

2

Till then
I was no-one
grazing
near the banks-
salmon like a dream
beneath the surface-
I wish I was no-one again

Julie Smith

IN THE COMPUTER STORE

The screen is supersized, so there is no trouble seeing
the action, while we stand waiting our turn
at the Advice Desk.

The man playing has a broad back
and a tattoo that ripples along his bare arm
as he fingers the controls. Heavy rain is pounding
the glass doors, but he won't hear its local drama.
Would even the shout of 'Fire!' remind his body
of its location? For he is a soldier in the virtual drama.
The barrel of the gun poking forward is his. His mission
is to kill the enemy and he must run, clamber and duck,
dodging bullets, as he did in school-boy games.
He clocks up a score for each enemy that falls -
and aren't the graphics good, so believable, except
there's no blood. He can mow down those baddies
without compunction. The killing is safe and clean
in this game boy world of so-it-seems.

Time's up.

The pictures freeze. The player rolls his shoulders,
stretches, flexes his knees to pick from the floor
his plastic bag, flicks a glance at the row of us,
still waiting, then heads for the door.

Fiona Owen

THE ISRAELI WALL

'Gesus, give him a scwpful of sand,
we'll get some aggregate later,
an' deel wid de problem on Munday.'

'Wather?
Oh, water.
Let me see now,
we'll work that out somehow.'

'So what dyasay?

The wall?
It's just a bloody wall,
not weight bearing is it?
Don't worry about the mix.
Just make sure no one steals me trowel.

'We'll need cement.'
'No problem Paddy, they probably own the conglomerate.'

'What dy'e mean...
What's the wall for?
Gesus we never ask'd before. So why now?

It's just another bleeding, bloody wall.'

Dai Jenkins

MODEL CITIZEN

Am I a clone?
Should I dare to stand alone?
Society taught me long ago
How to look and where to go,
Follow the trend, go with the flow.
The Media screams, "The way to win
is to have page 3 looks and be Kate Moss thin.
- Read the details in our middle-page spread
and YOU won't get a middle-aged spread.
- We have the recipe of a Miracle Diet,
part with your pounds, you'd be a fool not to try it!"

...But I won't get fat.
I can eat loads of this and lots of that.
I can eat anything I like -
I don't need to diet or use an exercise bike.
And if I feel ugly or under stress
If I can't fit in that size ten dress
Well, I have a secret, a magic trick,
Fingers down my throat and make myself sick -
But I'm not bulimic or anorexic -
I'm in control.
I know what I'm doing -
I just don't want to swallow
The food that I'm chewing.
Be slim, be happy, synonymous with success,
And who cares if my insides are in a mess.
I've been conditioned from birth on how to conform,
- I'm a Model Citizen, I'm part of the norm.

Sylvie Crocker

SECOND FORM

A schoolgirl who sprouted rather than blossomed
Who autumn term returned with more up top
Than most other peers, and in games lessons
Drew stares and sneers from the griddle-chested lot.

An object of mirth, subject to derision,
Her artichoke breasts and dinosaur thighs;
But boys looked her way more than once in revision,
And the male teachers ruled her with their eyes.

Twelve years old, but belly and bosoms like fruit
On the vine, her unsexed limbs still growing,
Feeling their way into the light: a square root
Alright, her virginal mind not knowing

How those marrow hips distracted, disturbed
(More so, somehow, under the thick grey pleats
Of the uniform skirt). Her body all curves
But she sat in the playground eating boiled sweets,

Or reading and scribbling cartoons at her desk.
A cloud-headed girl despite the earthy weight
Of her new form, as if that female heft
Was unconnected to her mental state:

A butterfly floating above a swede.
A clumsy elephant in class and slow;
But in her work sometimes there was a seed
Quite strange indeed, and if allowed to grow

Might have made, despite her form, a poet.
But as it was, they never let her sow it.
On chalky ground she spilled each acorn word
And works in a laundrette now, last I heard.

Mab Jones

EVER, AFTER

Imagine Snow White with her colours mixed up:
Eyes black as coal and lips white as snow,
Hair red as the rose that blooms in the glass,
That once filled her throat: the colour of stop.
Her bracelets are scars, her necklace a rope
Of clear plastic beads that look just like tears;
Seventeen years but her body's fresh snow
Marked by deep tracks, by the burn of the rope
She pulls to bring the shy vein singing up
Like a river from the arm, to fill the glass
With its red plume, via the needle that tears
At the flesh. She has no power to stop

Using, or being used. They bind her with rope
And sit there like kings, commanding her tears,
Music to them as they move mounts of snow
Through trumpeted notes. They drum beat her up
And laugh like bassoons when she begs them to stop.
And after their play, her face in the glass:

Eyes black as kohl from the swift flowing tears
That only the needle's puncture can stop.
With sharp steel she'll prick the thin vein like rope
And swoon into a blank of television snow,
The static that storms behind the glass
At transmission's end. Turn the volume up:

Silence. How quickly the needle can stop
All sound, as if she's been laid under glass;
Can with its cold point stem the hot tears
And with the same touch slice the slick rope
That binds body and mind. Strings of patched up
Memories, thought threads, buried beneath a snow

Drift. The grim reader's ticking hour glass
Momentarily mute. She'd never wake up
If choice was hers; if she could bring full stop
To this mortal world of blood, sweat and tears
And remain a princess asleep in the snow,
Pulled to her casket by the tight rubber rope.

A fairy tale fuck-up, she tells snow
White lies sometimes to the glass: that she'll stop,
Soon. A rope that she clings to; that easily tears.

Mab Jones

CAPITAL SHITTY

Cardiff's a capital capital city
The Paris of Wales, the celtic Vienna
You can enjoy it for minimal fees
Women and meals are both less than a tenner
There's cafes and pubs, there's nightclubs a-plenty
A fat open wallet will guarantee entry
There's hundreds of shops selling imported tat
There's arts and gay bars for the sensitive chap
There's casinos for wanabe 007s
There's schools if you fancy some under 11s
And anyone's yours if you go down the Bay
They'll go down on you if they know you can pay
Cos Cardiff's a capital capitalist city
It's only the poor who find living here shitty
The homeless the helpless the Welsh working classes
Who spend their time wiping the rich people's arses
A.K.A. giving good customer service
We hate you but seem really nice on the surface
We serve in the shops, the bars, the cafes
And rarely feel free even on our free days
But if you're rich then the whole city is yours
A few coins and Cardiff will pull down her drawers
A few notes and Cardiff is down on all fours
The city's a hooker and we too are whores
This capital capitalist capital.

Mab Jones

STATE

if Wales was a face
'd be pockmarked and pitted
old acne scars from the picking and scratching
and plucking of blackheads with
bright metal tweezers that clipped at and nipped into flesh

there'd be pimples like slag heaps
and sore broken rivers
raw spotted patches and grey built-up areas
the odd bit of growth from trees
that were taken and transplanted into our soil

if Wales had a mouth it'd be a deep scratch
a valley brimming with tombstones

if Wales had a nose it'd have to be hacked
to clear the way for a ring-road

the eyes in this face would be two empty pits
the chin would be weak and covered in zits
the forehead a wasteland
of wrinkles and ridges
carbuncles pustules and boils

there'd be wounds not from battle
but years of abuse
the regular beatings, the showering fists
the trample of boot heels and backs of the hand
there'd be bruises like flowers all over this face
each of them coal-black and blooming

and if made a face
Wales'd have no expression
the blank empty look of a recent rape victim
an orphan, a cripple, a child born in famine
an old man now dying
with everything taken
everything stolen and used

if Wales was a face
it could turn left or right
but would still be a poor, sorry state

no power to fight
no time, it's too late

if Wales was a face then I'd spray it with mace -
and have done with the fucker.

Mab Jones

BROKEN VOICES

The moon wants to weep
On a sea of black bodies,
Let its face of deep mirrors
Startle the fables

That settle like dust
On the brows of the slavers
Who left coils of their language
On floors of sunlight.

The night wants to sulk
In the wounds of their victims
Let its vast ghost of sorrow
Tremble through their pain,

Unload its black cry
In the eyes of their children,
Leave the birth pangs of the stars
In broken voices.

The trees want to grow
Through the times of strange silence,
Let their leaves of shame cover
The ruins of truth,

Where nightmares still bleed
In the fractured villages,
Where the unsettled faces
Drown into the dawn.

Peter Thabit Jones

THE LAMENT OF A MOTHER

Why did they come like thieves in the night
To take my son like a bird from the nest?
Why did the dawn let in all the strangers.
Their skin as white as the bone of the moon?

Why did they come as sly as the leopard
And wrench from my chest the breaths of my life?
Their voices were flames shredding the village,
Scaring the livestock and waking our children.

We mothers screamed to the edge of our world.
Why did they beat my son to the ground
Until petals of our blood unsettled the dust?
I watched them set out their ropes of iron
And tie my poor child like a beast to be killed.

Why did my own kind show them the paths
That brought this cold evil into our dream?
Why did the silence not question their whispers?
Why did the grassland pretend they were spirits
Who had come from the sweet depths of the earth?

I've forgotten the days that have gone to the sea,
I've lost the nights that the sky has stolen.
The green trees tremble when the wind sees my grief.
The village is silent, a place for the dead.
It's like all our young men have gone to a war.

My son, oh my son, where are you now?
Your loss is a mound of stones on my life.
Will you come like a ghost or a free man of flesh?
The knot of your birth is a snake in my throat.

Peter Thabit Jones

STARS

(in memory of Terry Hetherington, Welsh poet)

Stars shine,
flowers of broken glass
on the mind's black carpet.

The prayers of gods
solidified,
romantic notes

written by time's
slow burning. They snag

the deadened eyes
of the loneliest
of men.

The night's burrs,
frosted codes
of the earth-palaced

kings of Egypt,
how they scratch
the stares of silence,

wound like fine dust
the emptied-out soul,
the universe of being.

Snow cobwebs
of shining thoughts,
brooding

with eternity,
unfinished elegy
on the page of the sky.

Peter Thabit Jones

REAL REVOLUTIONARIES

STAY AT HOME

& mend holes in jumpers
 weaving thru patterns
 that are already there
warp & weft while wishing
for a better world: watching the leaves
turn yellow then red then fall.

You need to know how to knit a jumper
before you can mend it, they are made
 from the bottom up so you
 unravel from the top down.
What does this say about politics:
start by toppling the people on top

with power to begin mending from
the bottom rising up thru the pattern.
 Some jumpers breed holes
 great gaps in the conversation,
slips of tongue Left, Right & Centre
forgetting how to make good.

The longer you leave a hole
the harder it is to mend -
 your faults made visible
 knowing you are vulnerable
& capable of so many mistakes.
Recognising faults as strengths

your patches could be a feature,
 a quilt reducing your guilt
 about not doing enough for the world.

Larry Butler

A WALKING CONVERSATION

In life
out of systems
a nobody in a place nobody
knows
letting the spirit say
unrestricted
upon land that teaches
all that cannot be learned
elsewhere

Becoming a part of land
with feet grown in inclines
sunk in mire
drowned in water
making sure decisions
upon the way

If I said anything else
this is what is
most important

Ric Hool

KEYS TO YOUR KINGDOM

(for Reg Keys)

privilege provides protection
from all the bombs and the hate
and affluence buys you abstention
from the battlefields of the occupied state

an accident of birth or
a victim of geography
the rules are not the same
for soldiers Keys, Tom and wales, prince harry

it is strange how harry's father and grandfather
parade like pariahs on poppy Day
drenched in medals
splattered in ribbons like stapled cadavers

as,
tom's father, only wears one,
the face of his murdered son,
where no tomorrows grow, today
as the holes gape like a cenotaph sunday

so, pride is indifferent to suffering
and suffering must be for the chosen
or so we are told
or led to believe in educational history lessons
in a coalition of the willing
it is only those chosen, ripe for the killing

oh wilfred your words
stick in my throat
nearly 90 years ago you wrote
"pro patria mori, the old lie"
you warned us yet no one heard
and your words drifted like ash in the november sky
as now, today, still,
young men are sent to another trench
in another country
for another man's pride
to fight another man's war
but
only if you don't matter
to the country you're fighting for.

Patrick Jones

THE WANDERER

I'm come from the highlands here,
Misty the valley, raging the sea.
I wander mute, with so scant joy.
And time and again I sigh and ask, where?

The sun here seems to me so cold,
The flowers withered, life stale,
And what folk say, just empty sound;
I'm a stranger everywhere.

Where are you, my beloved country?
Sought, sensed, and never known!
The country, land so green with hope,
The land, where my roses bloom.

Where my friends go a-roaming,
Where my dead come back to life,
The country, that speaks my language.
O land, where are you?...

I wander silent still, with so scant joy,
And over and over sighing I ask, where?
The spirits whisper back to me:
'There, wherever you're not, there happiness is.'

Der Wanderer - Georg Philip Schmidt von Lubeck (1766-1849)
Translated from German by Alun Hughes 2008

EPITAPH FOR AN INVADER

Your great-grandfather rode through Texas,
Raped golden-brown Mexican maidens and stole horses
Until he married Mary Stonehill and set up house
With oakwood furniture and God Bless Our Home.
Your grandfather landed in Santiago de Cuba,
Saw the Spanish warships sink, and took home
The reek of rum and a veiled yearning for white-black women.
Your father, man of peace,
Merely paid the wage of twelve young lads in Guatemala.
Faithful to these your own,
You got ready to invade Cuba, in the Fall of 1972.

Today you're compost for the ceiba trees.

Epitafio de un Invasor - Roerto Fernandez Retamar (Cuba)
Translated from Spanish by Alun Hughes, 2008

LADY SINGS

She sings from what's known as the dead zone -
the place the sun can't reach,
oxygen-leached,
too deep even for skeleton ships,
for carcasses of whales.

She sings in spite of the crush of the sea
and the writhe of its creatures -
giant tube worms blind shrimp
bloated coffin fish
and those nameless ones, all mouth and gut,
that consume whatever they
 crash
into.

She sings with a heat
the scientists won't believe
as they squint at their pages of data.

Her voice is mineral-rich
volcano of the abyss
billowing black smoker.

Susan Richardson

WHO'S AFRAID?

Wolf wanders.
Wolf wonders what's happened to his tundra
and his snow.
Wolf overheats,
Wolf sweats his way down skinny streets
and grabs the sky between his teeth to try and widen
the horizon.
Wolf's hunger sends him hunting twice a day:
Wolf slinks home with shrink-wrapped Asda prey.

Wolf's pack bonds over drinks.
Wolf's supposed to sink beer and laugh at jokes
about eating grandmothers
and girls in red cloaks.
Wolf's meant to join in with football talk
and follow his favourite team but Wolf can only dream
of following caribou on their migration north.
Wolf must never raise his tail
higher than that of the alpha male
with his fast-cars-sharp-suits-huge-desk-vast-wealth.
Wolf wants to know when stealth
went out of fashion.

Wolf's passion is for a lair that's bare and austere
for Wolf's idea of fun has never been stalking
flatpacks in the depths of IKEA.

Wolf's sick of being blamed
by the boy who claimed Wolf was here
when Wolf was not.
Wolf's pride hurts like permafrost.

Wolf tries to whistle
but Wolf's lost the tune.

Wolf howls at red traffic lights
instead of the moon.

Susan Richardson

CATCHING THE CONNECTION

Twilight. Platform at Crewe.
A space among eddies of people,
enough for a man,
alone in a sea of Christian culture,
to stop and say to everyone, to no one,
It isn't fair, this hatred of Islam.

I stop like a wave
reaching an unexpected shore.
We talk of politics
but our eyes say human, *salam*.

A rush-hour tide starts to part us
but his smile stays with me.
I carry it on the train for Bangor,
into the hills, along the coast,
a candle in the growing darkness.

ONE PER CENT ISLAND

Most remote island, planet Earth,
lying in an ocean larger than any Pacific -

if you zoom in, you see pre-Cambrian folds,
houses, as if blown there by a storm
or put in straight lines to appear secure,
perched on a thin skin of soil,
the lighthouse flashing a warning.

You find rats gnawing where the saint lived,
paradise sunsets. You learn that if your floor
is more than earth, you represent
the top half of the population and if
you have a fridge, a tele, computer and a car,
you're in the top one per cent,
and with Titanic carbon footprints.

Earthrise: we see a fragile blue shell.

Marianne Jones

REGULARS

There are some
Who come here wearing dead men's clothes

And faces that fill red label
With forty-five per cent black bush,
Voices that open the brothel door of talk
As the barman slides a sweat of beer

Some will stand here forever
The gravel getting caught in their words
Tattoos fading to blue, nicotine eyes
Staring anciently through smoke
Leaving carbonised traces on trays

The last pint, a grime
Then a toothless smile, a cough
Drowning in stone dust
Last orders on the menu

Their wall-chained dogs
Howling at the night skies

Jacqueline Jones

SPIN

Moses, that old magician,
had it right, of course.
He laid it on the line. Made ten
commandments.

The trouble is, interpreting.
'Thou shalt not kill.' Did it mean
precisely that? Or were there
exceptions?

He did not add, 'Except in war,'
or 'When your life is threatened.'
Perhaps want of space
on tablets of stone
leaves no room for riders.

In time, one Jesus came along,
putting his own spin on it.
But no-one had much time for him.
Not even Christians.

Herbert Williams

KATRINA BLUES

...map the territor'
Cleaving to the left
Ginsberg said Dylan
Had become "a column of breath"

But, in what register
To tell of floods,
Made biblical by neglect
Blame deflection
And, heeere's Halliburton

That snake creeping in my home
And nothing makes sense any more

Falsetto and voices like angels
Robert Johnson, Skip James, Blind Willie McTell
Voices from heaven
But sang about hell

And see Amiri Baraka re Trane
Wrought a musical change
But, flooding in the Delta still
And the hill country beyond reach
As ever

So map the territor'
As dust devils map the storm
Next stop Paris
Or, more realistic, Chicago

And nothing has changed since 1927,
When Bessie and Charlie saw the floodwaters rising
No surprise there
We're running guns in long, long distant lands
(Attention, always, elsewhere)

And Dylan's prescience was Charlie's song
And last fair deal has gone down
Water in Charlie's town
Seventy-eight years on.

Stephen C. Middleton

DEBIT WHERE IT'S DUE

*Tony Blair and Gordon Brown -
money kings of London town.*

Tony Brown and Gordon Blair,
taxing roles with perks to share.

B & B ruled, but had no flair;
smug juggling-act, damnable pair

worth our contempt: new votes aren't there
for war, collusion, lies, hot air.

*Useless to uphold Blair or Brown -
monkeying hucksters all fall down.*

Alexis Lykiard

PLR CHECK

The more books the more writers publish every year
the less income comes in, as calculated here.
Proliferate yet be short-changed - the problem now applies
across the scribbling board quite equally. In my own sphere,
60+ titles earn me peanuts, feed one grim idea:
for every scribe who registers, ten more will soon appear,

to share fast-growing angst. New Labour still says life is grand;
authors know industry and indigence go hand in hand.
Borrowers, not of books but cash, increase. And libraries?
For lack of funds they sell up stock, shut down. It's no surprise
if literacy and literature decline. Hard lines. There is
a Democratic Principle at stake: free enterprise!

Alexis Lykiard

GOD'S CODPIECE

How well hung is God?
I mean,
we are talking of the father of all creation here.
The one whose seed has populated a cosmos.
All are His sons and daughters,
all come from Him.
From the smallest disease to the greatest star,
all are His offspring.
So,
what has He got between His legs?

Maybe we can get a clue from his rivals.
Jupiter now,
what do we think he sports beneath his toga?
I don't know what you think
but I reckon on a lightning bolt.
Old Jupiter was fond of lightning,
as fond as he was of tugging anything he could find,
always in disguise of course;
think of Leda.
Now birds aren't well known for their equipment down below,
being more into rubbing vents than anything more penetrative,
but Leda must have found something in that swan,
something to give her a bit of a shock,
perhaps,
in her nether parts.
You can just here his cry:
"Pass us another one Vulcan,
I spy another maiden!"

Then there's Osiris.
Now we're talking.
He could procreate after he was dead.
Not only dead mind, but cut up and scattered.
His wife, Isis, had to gather him together again,
but she never did find his doodah,
she had to design her own,
I'd love to see what she came up with.
Worked though:
dead God, no dick, dead sperm,
result: Horus.

I'm impressed.

And so on it goes,
loads of Gods with loads of sex and violence;
but what about Him,
the big boy,
the God of the Jews, the Christians and the Mohammedans,
what is He sporting,
under the robes,
or the vestments,
or the blinding light?
What are the wings of the Seraphim hiding from sight?
What rough beast lies curled in the Holy Codpiece,
waiting to carry on with its work?

Chris Williams

DANGER MAN AND THE INNOCENTS

I

The hand that shakes mine
has planned war.
The man who owns the hand
knows secrets;
has been on covert missions.
The hand that shakes mine
has used weapons.

Yet there is charm.
There is intelligence.
There is humour.

Did I expect otherwise?
Did I anticipate Cohen's green saliva?
Was I dreading a monster?

No,
I expected charm and intelligence.
I anticipated an assured performance
although I dreaded my reaction.

I find myself liking him,
this man of war,
yet I don't envy him his experience.

II

Now I sit,
listening to beautiful adolescents
reading their own words of war;
teenage emotion interpreting Private Ryan.

They talk, from their innocence,
of the end of it.
He writes, from his experience,
conspiracies and thrillers.

He is magnetic and attractive;
I hope they never learn what he knows.

Chris Williams

A TIME T CELEBRATE

Ey, innih great
to ave Nando's an Frankie'n' Benny's :
it's time t celebrate.
We orready got Pizza Ut,
Muckdonal's an KFC,
coz we're the fat crapital
o the whool o the countree.

Soon we'll be too plump t move
we'll afto jest order take-ways,
sit on ower sofas an balloon
till we pop an all-a fat
gets re-cycled an ewsed
t power them WOW lorries.

Ey, innih great
to ave the biggest ole
practiclee in the whool o Ewrop,
coz ower kids'll be able
t get designer asthma,
work it off in-a new pool
till they grow up
an afto go on disability.

Issa fancy cocktail
a dust,diesel an noise,
call it 'The Merthyr Slammer',
drink it on an easterly
capped with masses of ice
what'll melt rapidly.

Mike Jenkins

Note : WOW - War On Waste

TINPLATE THATCHER IN THE SENEDD

Now we've got a rusty image
of Thatcher in the Senedd -
why don't we go the whole way?

why not a miniature of Hitler
at every war memorial
to remind people what they died for?

or Bush in the Temple of Peace,
a grand statue
to the invader of Iraq

and Blair could adorn
the empty Burberry factory
in the form of a huge, smiley poster

better still, a Winston Churchill mural
at the very point in the Rhondda
where miners were set upon

let's have John Redwood's bust
at the College of Music & Drama
as a tribute to his anthem singing

Guest and Crawshay could join hands
on a new logo for Merthyr
celebrating the slums and cholera

we should name our hospitals
after English queens and princes
and bow like servants at their openings

oh yes!.....too late!.....that's already been done.

Mike Jenkins

REMEMBER TO FORGET

Here's a twenty pound note landlord,
Set me some beers up on the bar
With a few whisky chasers,
Do us a favour, look after the keys to my car.
Will you take care of my wallet,
If my twenty runs out, take more
But just keep those drinks a coming
Till I pass out on the floor.
So just keep setting them up landlord,

I've got a long way to go yet
Cos I'm drinking to remember,
To remember to forget.

I've been to a lot of places,
I wish I never been
I've seen a lot of things,
No man should have ever seen,
Of death and degradation
And despair all around,
I've seen women, children and babies
Lying dead in the gutter face down.
So just keep setting them up landlord
I've got a long way to go yet,
Cos I'm drinking to remember
To remember to forget.

So I ask you bear with me landlord
Please don't show me the door,
My brain is running on overload
I don't think I can take any more.
I need to drink myself into oblivion
For my sanity's sake
I can't sleep through my dreams at night
And I get the same dreams when I'm awake.
So just keep setting them up landlord
I got a long way to go yet,
Cos I'm drinking to remember
To remember to forget.

John Davies

FREecycle

Wanted - blow-up beds for camping
Offered - Silver toaster
Received with thanks - telephone table
No such thing as unwanted on Freecycle

Debra from Mold wants fishing equipment for children
but can collect anywhere

They're moving house in Mancot,
a pine double bed needs taking apart.

All yours, all free
as the weave is woven
by people who recycle
on Freecycle

A small mound of topsoil awaits in Glyn Ceiriog
where Beth has dug out her flower bed.
Ominously "there will be more come".
What is she digging?

Mel wants greenhouse glass - a dozen panes
"if anyone has any they no longer need"

The white cot has now been collected
by "Carole and her beautiful grand-daughter".
No longer gathering dust in Llay,
Debbie's baby will now use it.

But my favourite is Chris,
who wants for nothing really:
"Just got some chickens and looking for
a bench to be able to sit and watch them".

All yours, all free
on this online community
of people who recycle
on Freecycle

Marc Jones

ABANDONED CHURCH

(Ballad of the Great War)

I had a son named John.
I had a son.
He disappeared between the arches on a Friday of death.
I saw him play upon the topmost stairs of the mass
and throw a little tin bucket at the heart of the priest.
I pounded on the coffins. My son! My son! My son!
I pulled a chicken's foot from behind the moon and then,
I understood that my daughter was a fish
through which the carts roll away.
I had a daughter.
I had a dead fish beneath the ash of the censers.
I had a sea. Of what? My God! A sea!
I climbed up to ring the bells, but the fruit was wormy,
the burned-out tapers
were consuming spring wheat.
I saw the transparent stork of alcohol
shave the black heads of dying soldiers
and I saw the rubber huts
where the goblets of tears spin round.
I'll find you, my heart! in the offertory's anemones
when the priest with his vigorous arms raises the mule and the ox
to frighten the night-toads who patrol
the chalice's frozen landscapes.
I had a son who was a giant,
but the dead are stronger, they can eat bits of heaven.
If my son had been a bear,
I would not fear the alligators' cunning,
I wouldn't have seen the sea lashed to the trees
to be raped and mangled by armies.
If my son had been a bear!
I'll wrap myself in this hard canvas not to feel the cold moss.
I know very well that they'll give me a sleeve or a necktie;
but in the centre of the mass I'll break the rudder and then
the madness of penguins and seagulls will come to the stone
and make those who sleep and who sing on the street-corners say:
he had a son.
A son! A son! A son
who was his and his only, because he was his son!
His son! His son! His son!

*Iglesia Abandanado - Federico Garcia Lorca
Translated from Spanish by Merryn Williams*

WHITMAN - POET OF HOPE

Walter (Walt) Whitman (1819-1892) is a major American poet of the embattled nineteenth century - the era of the 'moving frontier', mass immigration, the War between the States, and the rocketing development of capitalism.

His parents were Walter Whitman and Louisa Van Velsor, daughter of General Cornelius Van Velsor and Naomi Williams, descendant of Welsh seafarers. Others of Walt Whitman's antecedents were Quakers.

Successively printer, teacher, journalist, editor, psychiatric nurse, clerk in the Indian Bureau of the US Department of the Interior. In 1865 he was sacked from this last post by the Secretary of the Interior, who objected to the 'immoral' poems in Whitman's **Leaves of Grass** (1855).

Between 1865 and 1873 Whitman worked as a clerk in the office of the State Attorney. Though stricken by paralysis in 1873, he went on writing poetry, publishing several more books, notably the prose **Memoranda During The War** (1875) and **Goodbye, My Fancy** (1891), his last collection of poems and prose.

Leaves of Grass was revised, again and again! From its outset, Whitman's work, influenced by many European writers and by American thinkers such as Emerson, in form and content, struck a new note in American poetry, pioneering new paths and new attitudes.

He likened his simple style to liquid, billowy waves'. Free verse, in fact.

Of himself, a man of diverse experience. Whitman wrote (in the 24th section of his **Song of Myself**):

"Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,
No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them,
No more modest than immodest.

Through me many long dumb voices,
Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves,
Voices of the diseased and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs,

And of the rights of them the others are down upon,
Of the deform'd. trivial, flat, foolish, despised,

Through me forbidden voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured.'

Walt Whitman exalts men and women of no property, the oppressed, the afflicted, the unsung heroes, the offended and despised, the exploited masses - "I know every one of you, I know the sea of torment, doubt, despair and unbelief."

His is a passionate poetry of true democracy, of optimism, of empathy, of encouragement:

"... nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is, ... And there is no trade or employment but the young man following it may become a hero, ... And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes".

In so many ways, Whitman is par excellence the world's most explicit iconoclast, unafraid to shock and offend, *épater les bourgeois*. His is the poetry of revolution, of bitter struggle for the Rights of Man:

"My call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion,
He going with me goes often with spare diet, poverty, angry enemies, desertions.
... Allons! The road is before us!"

Some of his poems have been read as homoerotic exultation.

Whitman sings, innovatively and uniquely, of every aspect of American nature. His is unequalled in his intimate descriptions of landscapes across the continent, of birds and animals, of trees and rivers.

The world of work, in field and factory, and that of war, is portrayed in beauty and in horror.

"One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person,..."

"the word Democratic, the word En-Masse. ..."

"of physiology from top to toe...", "The Female equally with the Male...", "Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power, ... The Modern Man I sing."

In short, Whitman sings of America - and in so doing of men, women, children worldwide and in all times. *Leaves of Grass*, of universal relevance, much translated and never out of print, has had countless emulators, not least the admirable poet of Chicago, Carl Sandburg.

Of the countless translations into many languages, Welsh readers will cherish the brilliant versions by Professor M. Wynn Thomas of Swansea in his *Dail Glaswellt* (Gwasg Gomer, 1995), enhanced by an erudite, comprehensive introduction and by illuminating notes on the poems.

"... untold latencies will thrill to every page."

Alun Hughes
Cerrigydrudion

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

John Davies - staunch member of the Red Poets through the years, he has produced CDs with his band and also conducted many creative writing workshops.

'Bato' (aka Paul Simmonds) - a native of the Valleys, he is making his debut this issue.

David Greenslade - has been living and working in Oman and writing in response to visual graphics. Latest book 'Adventure Holiday' (Parthian).

David Williams - from Neath and has read many times at Red Poets events, but this is his first time in the mag.

Phil Knight - also from Neath, where he is an SWP activist. His work has appeared in 'Images of Past and Present' (Aramby).

Phil Carradice - broadcaster, children's author , poet and story-writer. He recently edited 'People's Poetry of the 1st World War'.

Tim Richards - law lecturer, journalist and script-writer from Abertridwr.

Nick Fisk - Bluebirds fan from Cardiff, who edits the new poetry mag. 'Square'.

dan drummond - rapper and poet from Monmouthshire, who's spent a lot of time in Thailand recently.

Graham Hartill - poet, lecturer and workshop facilitator from mid-Wales. Latest book 'A Winged Head' (Parthian).

Raymond Humphreys - reviewer, translator and poet. Check out his website www.benybont.co.uk

Aurel Stancu - a journalist living in Galati, Romania, who has published several books.

Letitia Rhys - Swansea based story-writer, poet and story-teller who is a Red Poets regular.

Alun Rees - Merthyr-born poet who used to be a sports journalist with the 'Western Mail'. His collection 'Yesterday's Tomorrow'(published jointly by Red Poets and Y Lolfa) is a must-read.

Julie Smith - another poet who is making her debut in this issue.

Fiona Owen - poet and singer-songwriter from Ynys Mon, whose latest book is 'Going Gentle' (Gomer). Her CD 'In Between' was released with husband Gorwel in 2002.

Dai Jenkins - makes a welcome return. He lives in Penparcau, Aberystwyth.

Sylvie Crocker - comes from Bargoed, where she is a local government worker.

Mab Jones - runner-up in this year's John Tripp Prize for Spoken Poetry, Mab is from Cardiff.

Peter Thabit-Jones - children's poet, workshop leader and editor of the excellent mag. 'The 7th Quarry'. Peter lives in Swansea.

Larry Butler - lives in Glasgow. This is his first time in the magazine.

Ric Hool - is a Primary teacher. He has been involved in the Collective Press for many years and organises regular events at the Hen and Chicks pub in Abergavenny.

Patrick Jones - poet and playwright. His latest play 'Revelation' was performed at Chapter. Next book of poems due out from Cinnamon Press this autumn.

Alun Hughes - prolific translator, poet and literary critic who has never lost sight of his Welsh internationalist politics.

Sue Richardson - lives and works in Cardiff. Latest book 'Creatures of the Intertidal Zone' (Cinnamon).

Marianne Jones - lives on Ynys Môn. Her first collection of poems 'Too Blue for Logic' and a novella are both due out from Cinnamon next year.

Jackie Jones - poet , painter and former DJ. Her work has been exhibited in the Muni Circle Gallery, Pontypridd.

Herbert Williams - his novella 'The Marionettes' was published by Cinnamon earlier this year.

Stephen C. Middleton - former editor and founder of 'Ostinato', a mag. about jazz and with jazz-related poetry, which he hopes to revive.

Alexis Lykiard - lives in Exeter. His latest collection of political poetry is 'Unholy Empires'.

Chris Williams - librarian and native of the Rhondda who lives in Bridgend. A fine reader of his work.

Jackie Cornwall - at present a lecturer in Mexico. Recent stage productions include 'Letters to Che Guevara'. Her latest play 'Ozbek, King of the Turks' is about people trafficking.

Merryn Williams - a renowned poet in her own right, here she's translated Lorca's work

Mike Jenkins - unofficial poet laureate of Cardiff City FC. Latest book 'The Fugitive Three', a novel published by Cinnamon.

Marc Jones - one of the four new Plaid Cymru councillors elected in Wreccsam this year. Former editor of 'Golwg'.