

The Word's the Thing

The Poems

Collection 6

Background

These poems were written in deliberate attempts to cover a range of lengths and styles. Some are meant to be taken quite lightly; others are meant to be lingered over. The people involved in bringing these poems together have donated them to promote reading in Birmingham, and beyond.

A Presidential Death

Our meal was interrupted
by brought-in news of a president's death.
The American girl howled
as many more were doing in other towns.

In him, some of us
saw the best of ourselves
held out in hopefulness.

For now, his TV death
by an unknown, arm's length,
left on celluloid.

The start of history's changing
in ways we could not fully understand.
The American girl mourned
and we began to wonder what had been lost.

Guinness: Plain and Simple

I felt a bit feverish.

The doctor wrote 'febrile'.

I said I was bleeding a lot.

The doctor wrote 'non-coagulant haemorrhaging'.

I told him I needed a Guinness.

Which left the doctor lost for words.

Poetry Competition

This is a poem because:

- A. It was written by someone who thinks they are a poet
- B. It is being read by people who think they are reading poetry
- C. It makes a sort of sense, but on its own terms
- D. It conforms sufficiently to the criteria listed in textbooks on poetry

Please select one answer only and send on a postcard to

Poetry Competition

World of Poetry

Universal Publishing

- together with your attempt to complete the sentence "Poetry is " in not more than three words.

[Please note:

- Standard terms and conditions apply
- Only one attempt per poem
- Writers of poetry are not eligible to enter
- A winner will be picked at random
- The editor's decision is final
- The deadline will have passed before the end of this poem
- We may wish to contact you for marketing purposes]

What was lost is now restored

Last night I was visited by a minor saint
whose specialism was as patron of all things lost.
Through his influence, miraculously heaped
back on me in an instant
was every item I'd ever misplaced.

Books lent out but never returned,
Those neverfound socks, rings, and umbrellas;
that old familiar jacket left on a bus
and an ever multiplying mound
of smaller items that were now of absolutely
no value to me at all.

Barely time to catch a breath, when stacking up
came lost opportunities and choices passed over;
every decision I'd never made
laid out in fragile clarity
for me to regret all over again.

Jobs adverts sent for, but deadlines missed;
untaken journeys; letters unanswered;
heartrending leavings and jiltings and loss
with a mesh of complexities
from all the endless consequences of things
that might just possibly have been.

Shocking and awful
the troop after troop of
every poor soul I had ever neglected
parading slowly, hands outstretched,
prepared to offer just one last chance.

People who had asked but never been given,
those seeking comfort, or money, or love;
the hapless, the luckless,
broad auras of sadness
for all that was broken
and never put right.

Then clocks, and watches and tumbling hourglasses.
Ticking, tocking, dripping and filling
to measure out life's lost timescales;
stretching odd minutes into hours and
into all the days of my life.

So this is where the time goes.
The misspent youth, the dozing retirement;
the lie-ins; the catnaps; the drifting attentions
off into an manic whirligig
as the end of all things
seemed all too uncomfortably near.

Breaking up on a train

... I'm on a train ...
... need to tell you...
... we should break up...
... sorry, you're breaking up...
... then again...
... since I first met you...
... sorry...
... Sorry.

.... Can't hear you...
... you're breaking up...
... where are you...
... say again ...
...didn't quite get you...
... breaking up again...
... can't hear you ...

It's crazy

Rumours had been edging around for some time
of a startlingly new guitar track
bulging with underlying themes.

We would fall in love with explosions
of well-spaced frequencies,
each demanding that we make our own reappraisals.
Musings on the worlds of meagre icons,
with their cracked-up desires to be finite.
Wanting it all, despite the consequences.

There was to be hidden, deep within it all,
some distant prospect of understanding.
New theories of everything, looping us in knots,
as if all the world's hypotheses
no longer made any sense at all.

If we still don't know what it all means at this stage,
so be it.
Hope doesn't always have to make sense.

Still, in another place

Somewhere, feet in the sands,
one hundred naked men
set their steely stares
out to sea,
a homeless tribe, settling
for a view of container ships.

This unwarranted intrusion
secured in place,
limited as company,
exposed to light and waves
eyeing the horizon
and the migrating birds.

Real men stare back
trying to make something of it,
contemporaries holding their own
stances taken up gormlessly,
whilst others look on and wonder
if it's all just simply not worth it.

Complete Surrender

Wanted:

Home for baby boy,
Age one month.
Complete surrender.

Wartime:

Born of an affair,
Given over.
Ad in newspaper.

Adopted:

A railway station,
Handover.
Onto separate tracks.

Memories

Drifting along unlit roads,
dew-soaked,
images in a dripping railway arch
and a privileged glimpse of the river
clouded in distant acrimony.

Those famous ponytails of the number 50 bus route

Braided; cascading.
Colour of fresh straw
or maybe jet blacks
or with gorgeous streaks of purple.

I collect ponytails.
Not literally, of course,
but snapped off close
by the camera on my mobile.

There's something philosophical
about the way each strand
hangs separately, and yet
tightly bound to the gathered knot.

There's something quite, quite erotic
about the way each tail
sways all together, and yet
holds still enough to catch the light.

There's something over-familiar
about the way the whole
is so tightly clipped, and yet
falls so freely from its frill-less band.

There's nothing wrong with it.
Some people collect train numbers
or spot new kinds of buses.
I collect ponytails.

I collect ponytails.
Not physically, of course.
That would be wrong.
And however great the temptation gets
to stretch out and stroke them
or sidle up and ask
'Could I maybe just touch your hair;
just for a moment?',
I would never do it.
Not anymore.
Not after last time.