

ON THE WILD SIDE



POETRY BY
JOAN M. BATCHELOR

Thanks:

To Robert Batchelor for the front cover and all the other illustrations.

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ON THE WILD SIDE

".... My mother always said I was a bit on the wild side. She said I should have been a hippy, but I was born too damned early...."

POEMS

BY

JOAN M. BATCHELOR.

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Introduction.

I am a 41 year old mother of four, grandmother of one. I was born in South Wales, eldest daughter of a Welsh nurse and a police sergeant. My childhood was rather lonely. Some of my classmates at school felt I had to be a "Copper's Nark", and avoided any close relationship, except for one or two with clear consciences.

I began writing at the early age of seven. Mostly about my 'friends of nature', the orphaned lambs I brought up and the wild, beautifully free ponies. I later made up poems and stories to amuse my two younger sisters when I babysat. These stories in turn have amused their own children.

I now write seriously because I feel a woman does not own a voice just to sing lullabies or to scold her husband. Women have something to say, and stories to tell.

I do hope you enjoy this book, I enjoyed writing it. Much in here is written for people who think they dislike poetry, who feel it may be too 'high-brow' for the working class...it's not you know...it is the working class...

Joan M. Batchelor
(Housewife Unextraordinary, lover of words.)

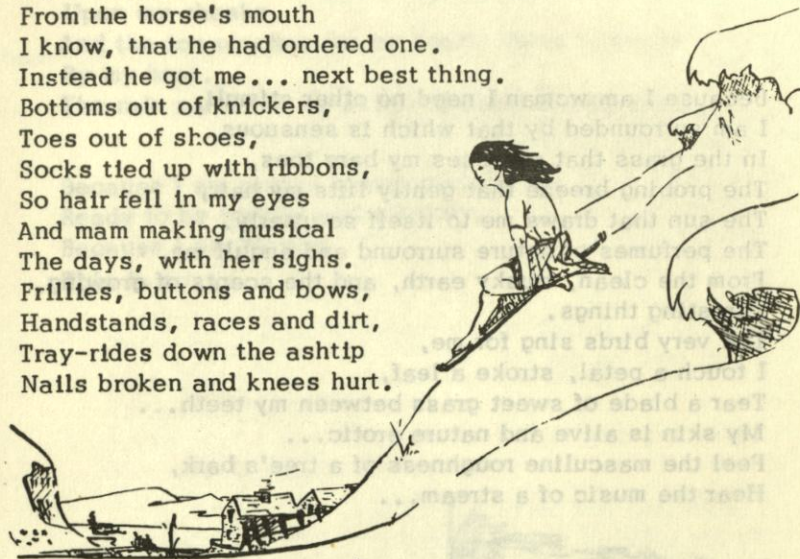
In memory of my Dad... to try and make up for me not being born a son...

Robert Batchelor, the illustrator, is the author's 22 year old son. He was a pupil at Stretford Grammar School for Boys. He once wanted to be an artist, but felt he could not 'paint to order', except to help his mother by illustrating this book.

Robert is now a fireman, based at Altrincham. He is happily married with a 16 month old daughter.

Next Best Thing.

Oh, I should have been a boy.
My dad wanted a son.
From the horse's mouth
I know, that he had ordered one.
Instead he got me... next best thing.
Bottoms out of knickers,
Toes out of shoes,
Socks tied up with ribbons,
So hair fell in my eyes
And mam making musical
The days, with her sighs.
Frillies, buttons and bows,
Handstands, races and dirt,
Tray-rides down the ashtip
Nails broken and knees hurt.



Oh little girl in boys clothes,
Barefoot and free as air,
Little girl don't grow up
Stay bonny and brown and fair.
All the engine drivers,
And the engines then were steam,
Let you climb and stoke up...
Just hear the whistle scream,
Little girl, covered in oil and coal,
You should have been a son,
Yet you were the next best thing
When they ordered one.
But, how many tears did you cry?
How much anger did you feel,
How long did it really take
For time, that hurt, to heal?

Because I am Woman.

Because I am woman I need no other stimuli,
I am surrounded by that which is sensuous,
In the grass that caresses my bare toes,
The probing breeze that gently lifts my hair,
The sun that draws me to itself so utterly.
The perfumes of nature surround and engulf me,
From the clean, musky earth, and the scents of growing,
Thrusting things.
The very birds sing for me,
I touch a petal, stroke a leaf,
Tear a blade of sweet grass between my teeth...
My skin is alive and nature erotic...
Feel the masculine roughness of a tree's bark,
Hear the music of a stream...

Because I am woman, colours stir me,
The sudden slash of yellow buttercups on green grass,
The silver stream, beaten to white foam,
Hot red and romantic, cool blue,
The orgasmic orange of a poppy in the fruit of wheat.
Black... as the velvet night shrouded in mystery,
Grey... mystical and as graceful as the clouds,
White, stark and virginal, crying out for the red of one
Deep drop of blood.
Pink is of bubbles ... and teasing...

Because I am woman the elements were made for me,
The lip-licking tear of a lightening flash,
The heart beat of thunder...
The indulgence of soft breezes
And the firm domination of threatening gales.
The purity of snow waiting to be sacrificed,
Melting flakes are but tears of rejection,
Upon my cheeks,
And the ice reaches for my heart, there to dissolve
By my heat...
The rain caresses my skin and cleanses my soul.

Because I am woman nature made it so,
Ready to be fruitful and multiply,
Because I am Woman
This is so....

Friendship



A small tribute to you, little girl,
Who had never seen a black child,
Who feared the unknown,
Yet when asked the colour of your companion
Answered, "I don't know he's my friend..."

Fate and Fantasies.

I stood, a small figure at the disused and deserted pit-head,
Looking up at the mighty wheels of misfortune
Frozen at mid-turn in time...
My sensitive mind flowed outwards and back,
Towards the spectral sea of coal blackened men
With their tired, red-rimmed eyes unused to light,
And the blue scars of night upon their backs.
With helmets jaunty and bait flasks drained
They passed by, and faded into time
Leaving the lilting Welsh tongue behind
A soft trail on the still air.

I stood and felt on further back,
To the cries of men deep down,
Caught like animals in the searing heat,
I felt the backblast, the suction
And the hot, bubbling mud...
Now sealed tombs of silence.

Before that the canaries had hopped spritely
Singing perfection in cages...
Then the horror of their fatal, silenced fall
And the shout of, "Gas...back, back..."
Before their whole world blew apart...
And the men's brains drained from their ears.



I tore my gaze and mind to look below,
This, my slumbering valley,
Hear the phlegmy coughs and wheezing gasps
Of those who die slowly from dust...
I wept as I held a forgotten chunk of men's misery,
Rain washed black gold. Coal.
Iesu Grist! Pity the working souls of dead men,
The bowed and stunted bodies are at peace,
Their memories live in the mines deep beneath,
Feel stretching, empty arms to draw me in,
And the very ground sinks.

My childhood dreams held terrors of the deep,
Of mangled limbs and thickened lungs.
The pits die, yet are not dead.
Rats amongst the eye sockets of death.
Hear, how drips a lifetime's blood...
And the lamps of men walk the night hills,
Choirs carried by soft breezes
To ripple through the deserted pit
And fate carries fantasies to a receptive mind.



I am haunted by the most decrepit of chariots.
They fail at the start, then with a groan and grind,
That causes the teeth to groan in their sockets,
They shiver and stop... shiver and stop...
Until with mighty jerks (and displaced necks)
We are off, crunching crisp packets underfoot
And avoiding the lethal, ankle breaking, empty cans
Which fly about the floor from all directions as to a magnet.
Breathing in the pure air, the scent of ciggies and vomit,
I find myself pushing, straining hard mentally,
As the machine shudders once more to a halt.
I find I've sat in second-hand chewing-gum
And something nasty sticks to my shoe...
Furtively I gaze about at blank faces,
Before scraping it off on the seat in front.
Branches beat a tattoo sharply, over my head,
Causing me to flinch and instinctively duck.
The journey over, I am flung bodily
By tortured braking, down the stairs,
To meet eyes of disapproval and disgust...
I thankfully clamber out. Bruised.
Two sixty six... your time is up.

History and Evolution.

She hides behind a painted face
And a net curtain of hair,
If you did not know so...
You would never think her there.
She breathes in fumes of soiled music
And cries into her pink drink...
Poor little girl who struggled
To look like all the other sheep,
Yet somewhere, inside you, bewildered,
Individuality silently screams
To be freed... to be freed...
She worries for fear her heels
Are just a fraction too short,
Or maybe an eyebrow too thick
A fingernail the wrong colour.
Oh the shame... the shame...
Each morning sees her cough as she
Reaches, for cigarettes she doesn't like,
Her mouth is just like a camel's
And as tasty too...
What will she be and where will she go?
Oh, to be middle-aged and less dull,
To be unconventional,
Oh to say, "To hell..." and mean it.
Poor, silly, little girl...
I was once just like you,
Thank God I was cured
Of convention...

School Holidays.

How very persistent were we all,
During the summer's heat,
Begging ponies from each farmer
For a very special treat...
Big-eyed, scruffy, gypsy-like,
Barefoot like mountain sheep...
Surefooted as the ponies
Who climbed, or waded deep...
Bareback we rode, no comfort,
The blisters .. I feel them still...
Yet happily we rode about
O'er every dale and hill.
The ponies took no notice
Of our inexpert hands,
They wandered where they pleased,
Finding much greener lands...
When we wanted to gallop
They put down their heads to graze,
They thought us mad, in that heat,
Not to sit and laze...
We tied them to stout tree trunks
To graze, while we swam about,
Came time to go home they bolted
Ignoring our winded shouts...
Each night, to cries and tears,
Mam creamed our poor sore bums,
The only thing that benefitted
Were our strong gripping thumbs.
We had to hold the reins tight,
If lost, we held the mane,
Yet we never ever fell off
So it wasn't all in vain.
Except... one farmer had a saddle,

Oh - I felt so very grand...
A cowgirl perched so far up,
Surveying all her land.
I didn't realise at all
How slippery leather could be,
Until the pony bolted
And I let the reins fall free...
My arms about the pony's neck,
My mouth full of his hair,
Sliding up and down like mad
No grip could I find there...



My tears were those of hurt pride
As farmhands laughed to see,
That kid on the ground furiously
Rubbing her bum, was me...
I gathered up the pony...
The daft thing was chewing grass,
Nose in the air, I climbed back up...
And sat facing the damned thing's ass....

True Prince of Wales.

Swilled down the old pork pie
It will last out many a pint,
Boyo, it was great ... great...
The grand slam, (whispered with awe),
Well, we knew we could do it all along,
Tho' the players seemed unsure like, at first,
And it killed off our best rugby men
Who retired at their prime in a blaze of glory.
Duw... you should have seen the beer flow
And gush back foaming to the ground.
We only needed to wet dry throats,
We were high man, high.
Oh whisper with awe the words, quiet like,
The grand slam, the grand slam... hysht...
No need of violence or vandals or such
For, fair play, the other teams were great...
We can afford to be kind awhile.
But Wales... aw man, Wales was fantabulous!
Well... we knew it all along.



Such singing in the valleys,
Fast ran the tears of joy,
The hills echoed with the pride of it,
(All very friendly like).
Streamers, banners and rosettes paved our way,
On this our very historical day,
Wives proud to show their bruises
(No holding us back)
There'll be some bellies soon to sprout sons
For Wales pulsed with the sin of pride,
And tore rival teams to shreds.
Gareth? He did us proud...
Crowned true Prince of Wales.
I'm not ashamed to say I wept,
Tears of pride and joy.
Yes, it will outlast years of beer
And songs to our boy.
Gareth, Wales is thy kingdom, thy power and glory.
Wales for ever, Cymru am Byth, Cymru am Byth.



My Birthday Treat.

I was seven years old at the time,
Yet I remember it all so well.
In all my sleeping hours still,
I relive that fiery hell.

Mam woke me with excitement,
The Welsh love all bad news,
She thought it would be a treat for me...
To give her fair dues...

"Would you like to see a fire...
With engines and police too?
Grandad will watch the others,
I came back for you..."

The middle of the night it was,
Sleep stuck blurred my eyes,
A matter of a minute's walk,
Then feel excitement rise.

Many people stood watching,
Just like Guy Fawkes' Night,
I stood with mouth and eyes wide
At such a terrible sight.

Our sawmills, in full flame,
With crackles and "Oh's" and "Ah's",
Eyes like Roman spectators
While moving back their cars.

Then, to my utter terror
A voice shouted, "Christ, the dogs!"
And I saw my dad disappear
Into the great, burning, crashing logs.



With the true Welsh sense of drama
The mumbling grew to prayers,
It was all right for the others,
It was my dad, not theirs.

I saw him for just a moment,
Black against the glare,
My heart stopped inside me
For he suddenly wasn't there.

"Dad!" I screamed, and met the eyes,
Heard the tuts of gleeful sympathy,
Such a lovely spectacle it gave
To see terror in such as me.

I felt my mam's arms about me
Then dad he stood right by,
He yelled, "Why did you bring her, why?"
All I could do was cry.

I thought of all the horror,
As I still do each night,
Dad was safe next morning,
But, my childhood died of fright...

I Saw A Sad Man In A Field.

I saw a sad man in a field
Working,
Each day I ran alongside
Waving.

My father said the man was bad
Wicked,
Forbade me ever more to wave
Friendly.

I walked to school beside the field
Crying,
My friend he understood I felt
Sadly.

He was a German, prisoner
Homesick,
He had a little girl like me
Grieving.

Afraid I walked up to the fence
Gazing,
He smiled and shook his head at me
Smiling.

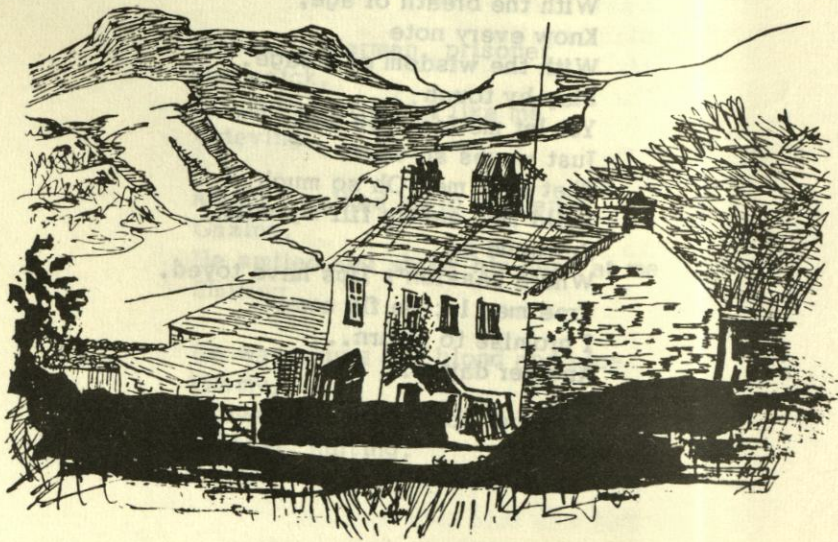
He was young and blond and nice
Enemy,
I loved him very much indeed
Hurting, hurting.

You Know I Love You.

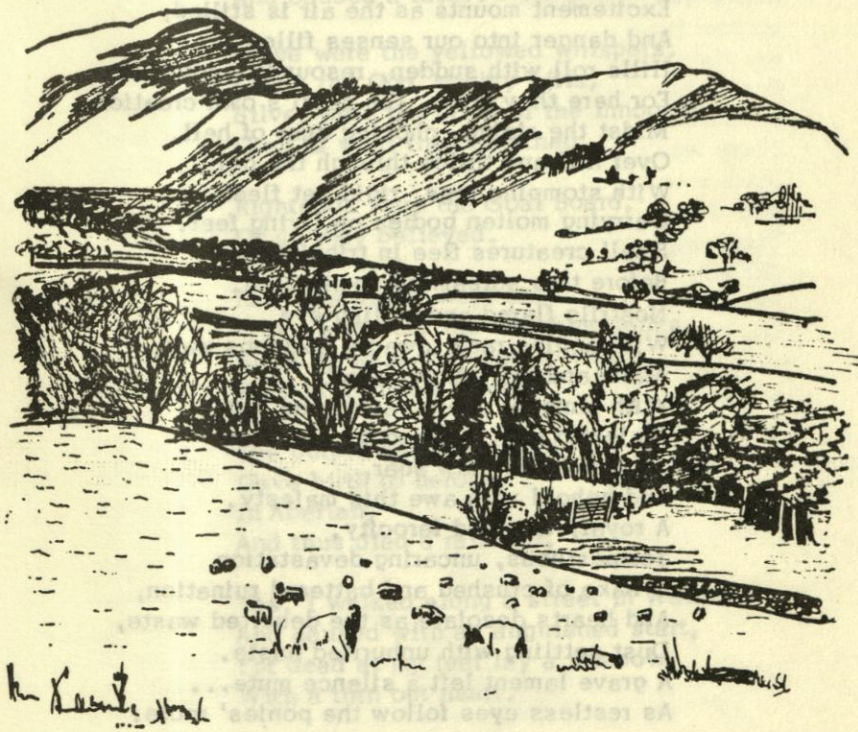
Touch me gently
With a lover's touch so soft,
Hold me, as though I were
A frightened bird aloft.
Keep me high on feathered
Clouds of love,
With hands so tender
That I feel them not.
Let my nerve endings
Feel fingers light
Yet know them not...
I need no sight.
Play my strings
With the breath of age,
Know every note
With the wisdom of a sage.
Play by touch
Yet let me feel you not,
Just waves so warm
That love me, Oh so much.
Build me, gently fill my void,
Surround me,
Where passion's lips have toyed.
Free me, let me fly away,
I promise to return...
Another day....

Homeland.

Majestic tower black hills and gold,
Green valleys at their feet unfold,
Wild sheep and ponies freely roam
In this land that I call home.
We read of ancient days so fair,
Tales of Bards and Dragon's lair,
Craggy coasts bearing needle sharp teeth
Sinking boats from underneath.
Pass chapels small and coldly stark,
To lifted voices pause and hark.
Next door the pub leans 'longside,
Where, after service, the preacher we find.



Look around at faces smiling,
Coal embedded men beguiling,
Soft, lilting voices, raised in song,
Proud of the land where they do belong.
Cottages hug the one next door,
From whitewashed streets see pigeons soar,
Miners still with blackened face...
Climb whippets to a mountain race.
Boys bareback their ponies gallop
Far, far up to the mountain top.
Children barefoot, with noses aflow,
In coal soiled vests, stand at peeling door.
This is the Wales I know of old,
With its valleys sweet and mountains bold....



Wild Ponies.

Uneasiness stirs deep in the bowels of the earth,
A thunder multiplies, grows, gives birth.
Excitement mounts as the air is stilled,
And danger into our senses filled.
Hills roll with sudden, resounding vibration
For here they come, the devil's own creation.
Midst the rising, choking dust of hell,
Over hill and thrice through the dell,
With stomping legs, rigid yet fleet,
Carrying molten bodies on flying feet.
Small creatures flee in tribulation
Before this screaming domination.
Nostrils flared and rolling eye
Wild ponies race towards horizons way.
Mane and tail aflow, abaft,
With pungent scent, acrid and tart.
Majestic sun, dimmed by clamour
Over this sea now soar,
And behold with awe this majesty.
A royal, untamed ferocity.
Tempestuous, uncaring devastation
A wake of crushed and battered ruinaton,
And hearts desolate as the deserted waste,
Dust settling with unhurried haste.
A grave lament left a silence mute...
As restless eyes follow the ponies' route.

....And Dead At My Feet

Lay A Rainbow.

I walked along a street in Wales
And paused with an anguished start,
For dead at my feet lay a rainbow,
With a torn out heart.

Blue, fresh colour of childhood,
Splashed with many hues,
Yet the sky it was cut dead that day,
And caused a rainbow its grip to lose.

Brave were the yellowed whispers,
Green the God Mighty hills,
Silver were the cries of the innocent,
Grey is what they breathed.

Righteous were the Coal Board,
Or so they believed.

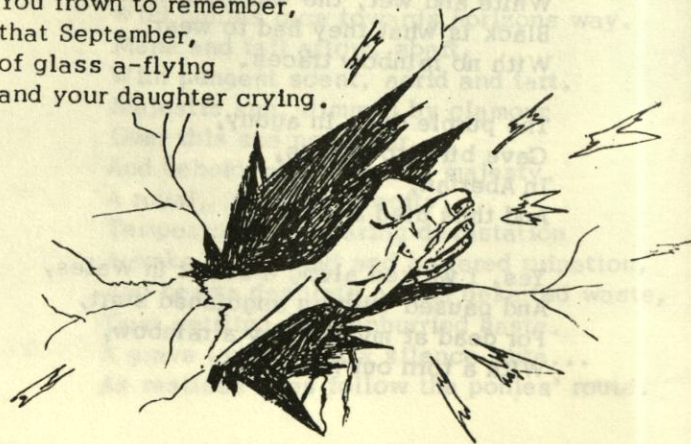
Red, the slurry wept on,
White and wet, the watching faces,
Black is what they had to wear
With no rainbow traces.

The purple day, in agony,
Gave birth to heroes,
In Aberfan,
And thus died a rainbow.

Yes, I walked along a street in Wales,
And paused with an anguished start,
For dead at my feet lay a rainbow,
With a torn out heart.

FRUSTRATION.

..... then your eyes saw red and your mind was black,
and you heard this screaming sound.
A hundred miles away people were talking
as your blood soaked into the ground.
The sound of breaking glass went on and on
someone shook you hard in fright,
just out of focus, in black and white,
gaping mouths looked such a sight.
The screaming stopped and your face felt cold,
sweat of death an icy dew,
you started to shake and then felt laughter
bubble somewhere inside of you.
You want to curl up
in the safety of your bed,
knees pulled right up
to your head,
yet they pushed and shoved,
it was hilarious,
it couldn't have been happening to you.
There was blood on the face of your daughter,
there was blood on her hands that day,
why did she stare that way?
There was so much blood
did you have enough?
Yet you knew not who bled, or for whom.
You frown to remember,
that September,
of glass a-flying
and your daughter crying.



Your face stung from her blow,
yet you really didn't know...
The pain in your arm was hot and wet,
crowds of people all stood by,
they wanted to watch you die.
You wished to shout, "What's it all about?"
but you followed meek on your way,
that awful day.
The ambulance noise it hurt your head,
thongs bound tight your arm.
You sat like a zombie
and you didn't give a damn.
Blood red and thick, then you felt sick,
your cigarette tasted like straw,
you wanted no more.
In the glass was a face you had seen before,
yet white, but for the red hand print,
a deepening tint.
You heard your daughter sigh
and you wondered why,
bloody child of your body.
They peeled back the layers congealed on your arm,
and you saw the bones protrude,
somehow lewd.
The doctors stitched you back together
asked you were you at the end of your tether.
You knew, back at home, your man would get drunk
and your son would scrub the floor,
it would take time to erase the stains,
perhaps twenty years or more.
Your son he was small with a mighty heart
that forgave the unforgiving.
So you had to go on living.
You yearned to hold them close, then closer yet
and part... Oh... sometime never.
If ever.
They thought you tried to die,
and you wondered why,
you, who just loved giving.
You tried to find a way
to the sun that day,

and somehow you lost your way.
How badly you needed illumination.
Instead you found dark, degradation.
For your eyes saw red and your mind was black
and you heard this screaming sound...
you beat a way to the light,
just to find it too bright
and all you ever found was pain....

The Fire And The Glory.

Blood of my hot nation,
The fire and the glory.
My land, my heart.
Let the English remove
The debris of their picnic politics
And leave us our pride.

Not quite dressed...
But the mood is hot...
Wales lives, united,
We are her breath, her heart, her soul.
You milked her heart
And demand her soul.

She contains her breath,
So whisht awhile.
No murder of this small blot
In the corner of your land.
No terms.
Wales lives.

In the anger of Plaid Cymru,
In her awakening tongue...
For she has but slept.

Down Our Street.

Take a trip down our street,
Avoiding hill-animal dung.
Remembering all the choirs
And the songs that they sung.
Here gossip has its freedom,
A sort of Welsh grape-vine...
This land of tongue and sheep-shit,
This land of mine.
A vigorous shaking of rugs,
Eyes dark under curlers bright
Or throwing out vegetable peelings
Just watch wild ponies fight.
A dog at every front door,
Pigeons 'round the back...
Fires to heat the water,
With coal brought in a sack.
Even in a heatwave
These fires must be lit,
So that the colliers
In hot baths may sit.
Kids are crawling bare-bummed,
Peeing up the wall,
Mothers with bare arms sudded
Pause, a greeting to call.
The Evans's and the Jones's
There are so many here...
We need to say, "Evans the milk"
So that the right one will hear.



Price The Preacher.

Lived next door he did, and we gloried in his stories,
About his sinning days, before he was called to do God's work.
It was hard to view him as a drunken lecher,
Tho' he wore a purple nose, covered in small broken veins.
He made certain we attended the Welsh Baptist chapel
And no excuses of colds nor no shoes would appease him.
We had to sing in the chapel each 'Anniversary',
Sixpence in a silk bag about the neck and thruppence for
second prize.
I always won thruppence... enough for a large ice-cream
comet...
I always had to read the lesson of the day too,
White with nerves and shaky voiced...
But Price... lay preacher... RADA would have approved,
An aging Burton was Price,
He knew just when to slowly lower his voice,
Until we were straining to hear or asleep...
And then he would yell at the top of his lungs
In his very best 'fire and brimstone' voice...
It was enough to cause the strongest heart to fail.
He would beat the bible before him for emphasis,
Or point at us - yellowed nails he had, long and gnarled -
How he could point...
We were guilt ridden sinners writhing in our pews
Waiting for the wrath of God to fall upon our heads.
Then on the prim walk home we were expected to remember
Every word of his sermon, and discuss it well.
We learned just how to side-track him
And the stories he told lasted the journey.
Fond we were of him, ex-miner, we called him 'Pop',
But at chapel he was a changed man, answering his calling.
Spit foaming his brown teeth he glared from face to face,
And the congregation stirred uneasily.
I held my breath for fear he would point a twisted finger my way,
I feared to be cast into damnation for eternity.
Yes, Price the preacher was a most inspired
And inspiring man.

Buy it?

Stay Awhile.
I wouldn't take one

Gratitude.

Small child haunting
The chippies at night,
Not ever thinking
It may not be right.

Mum's out with a fella,
Says it's to find you a dad,
Why aren't you grateful
Are you not glad?

Are you not sure
Not any more,
Just who will stay
And just who will go?

Small child who frolics
With serious expression,
Are you not going
In the same direction?

Stay Awhile.

Dream awhile with me,
As the shadows flicker on,
Dream and join with me
My most beloved one.
Stay awhile with me,
Let us find the moon,
Silver solace there
A silver tune.
I'll be home for you,
In the shadows of your mind.
Linger, love me more,
Let us love find.
I will wait, my love,
On towards eternity...
If you hold me close once more
The hour is yet early.
Night is but a babe
Not yet into dawn,
I shall stay with you,
Until the morn'.....

Buy it?

I wouldn't take one

as a gift...

He stood there, bluffing away his horror,
The ultimate had occurred...
My daughter, with guilful innocence,
Had invited this local candidate in.

He looked miserably out of place,
Like a diamond in a coal-mine,
His smile hanging on grimly,
His plum-stone stuck in his throat.

So this is what, for many years,
They had promised to improve...
Sideways noting this corporation dump,
The task seemed to overwhelm him.

He dropped bright election posters
Onto the uneven floorboards...
As the cat lovingly caressed
White fur onto his well-cut suit.

He swallowed his uncertainty,
And, with difficulty, forced a beam
Nearly cutting his perspiring face in half.
"Could I count upon your support, madam?"

... I looked at him, so illfitting
In this place I called my home,
Uneasy before my cynical demeanour,
I felt superior... could he buggery!

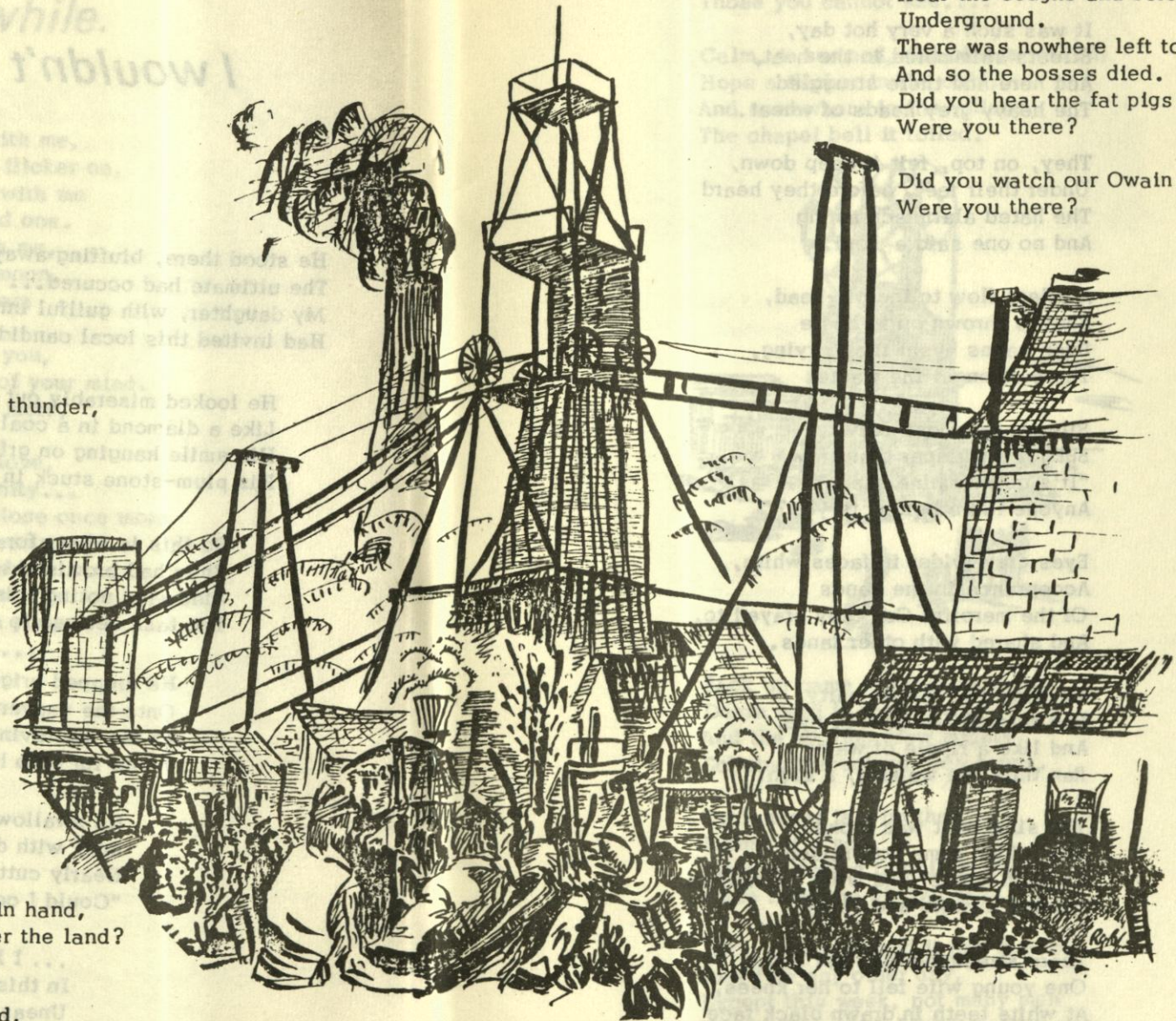
Red Seams and Fiery Traces.

Have you ever tasted cat?
It tastes just fine.
Or rats upon a spit,
At least we dine.
Dogs dare not show a snout
With starvation all about.

Were you at Merthyr uprising?
Were you there?
Midst the blood, the sweat and thunder,
Were you there?
Did you cough up muddy gore
Then go back down for more,
Did you ever work the iron,
Were you there?

Did you see the molten iron
Set deep in Da1?
Do you still hear his screams
"Let me die..."
Did you work a shift for death
To make a sudden call,
Did you see how far
The fat lords had to fall?

Did you take to Cyfartha, pick in hand,
To wipe the owners nose all over the land?
Did you see the bosses run
Before we'd scarce begun,
Did you feel the sweat and blood,
Were you there?



Stamped was suffering
Upon the face of man,
Hear the coughs and screams
Underground.
There was nowhere left to hide
And so the bosses died.
Did you hear the fat pigs squeal,
Were you there?
Did you watch our Owain die...
Were you there?

Black Death, The Singer.

It was such a very hot day,
Streets shimmered in the heat,
And here and there struggled
The heavy grey heads of wheat.

They, on top, felt it deep down,
Under their feet, before they heard
The hated alarm screaming
And no one said a word.

A silent flow to the pit-head,
Shawls thrown on in haste
Even babes hysht their crying,
There amongst the waste.

Silence lay most heavily
But for a whisper that grew
"It's number nine shaft,
Anyone there belong to you?"

Eyes grew wider in faces white,
Acceptance in the hands
Of the merciful God they prayed to,
And shared with other lands.

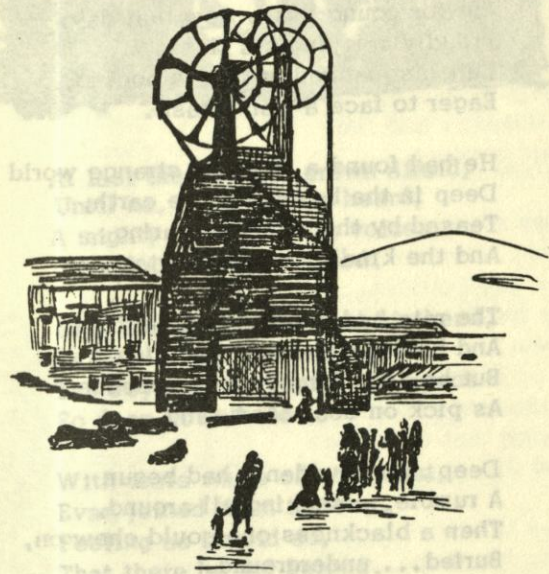
Up came the rescue party
Red rimmed and grim of eye,
And like a ripple of water
Ran thro' the waiting, a sigh.

The silepce it was broken,
The folded arms now raised
As each mother and wife, trembling,
Pushed forward and gazed.

Tears streaming over her baby,
One young wife fell to her knees,
At white teeth in drawn black face
Her husband, safe, she sees.

"Don't cry my Tess", he whispers,
"At least don't cry for me...
Cry for all my butties,
Those you cannot see...."

Calm, it seemed, the others waited,
Hope a flicker in the cold,
And somewhere in the village
The chapel bell it tolled.



Back up came the rescue party,
Death held in their arms,
And the wailing grew mighty
Echoing throughout grey farms.

Each miner is a brother, a
Father or a son...
Silence waited to collect them,
Once more the pit had won.

Yet... underground it had started
Just like any other day,
Except this week, not many men
Would draw their blood stained pay.

The coal was there,
The cage was swift,
It had seemed like
Any other shift.

But for young Evan, new that day,
Proudly carrying his flask,
Lunch squashed up in his pocket,
Eager to face a man's task.

He had found a new and strange world
Deep in the bowels of the earth,
Teased by the manly swearing
And the kindly, coarse mirth.

The rats had seemed extra active,
And he'd never liked the things,
But he soon forgot their presence
As pick on coal seam rang.

Deep, and suddenly had begun
A rumble, a shaking all around,
Then a blackness one could chew on,
Buried... underground.

On all fours with whimpers,
Evan had hunted about the ground,
"Mam will kill me Dato,
If my new flask can't be found..."

He felt the heat sucking,
Heard cries of men quite near,
Yet in his boyish innocence
Had not then felt fear.

Dai conserved his energy,
Had said, "Come on boyo, here",
And huddled close together
The silence had seemed to sear.



At last the boy had grown afraid,
Until he, with wonder heard,
A mighty choir of faint voices
Grow louder as it neared.

Dai, much older, bowed his head,
As Evan heard the choir grow,
The boy said it filled each space
So deep down below.

With tears white on coal dust,
Evan joined them in song,
Feeling as he did so,
That there he did belong.

The rats had ceased their crying,
The moans had faded away,
On top trod the valley
With the thick, hot sun of day.

Dai held the boy close
Felt no beat in Evan's heart,
Then waited with an eye so weary
For the mighty choir to start.

When rescuers broke down a way,
They could hear no choir at all...
Although it rose with speed to deafen
Coal black the singers all.....

The Circus Comes To Town.

Here they come,
The gladiators of society,
With verbal weapons
And stamped on smiles.
The slumming and the
Jovial back-slapping,
The handshakes and the
Simulated concern.

Here they advance,
In an army of leaflets,
Rosettes and bullshit,
Fawning for one small cross.
They, who are painted clowns
Putting on a show
That drains our pockets,
A campaign that leaves us
High and dry.

How they talk,
Promising the moon,
The bloody stars too
And jam on our bread.
As if they really care,
Or see us and the way we live.
Would one of them swop my
Pre-war, mouldering council house
For theirs... for just one week?
Would they hell.

The fanfare is over,
The show must go on,
Walking the tightrope
Playing the fool.
Let them blow hot air
Soon it will cool....



The End Of Emotion.

Look with dry eyes upon the postures
Of the dead,
Shrug with indifference at lovers
Newly wed...
Such a glut of violence that the world
Has ever seen,
Not caring about the life that
Could have been.
Forget the tenderly moving prayers
Of comfort and joy,
Think of your bible as
Just another toy.
Tears now of the past are rock
Hard inside,
And we are but mere flotsam left
By the ebb-tide.
Too late to join hands in
Great affinity,
We can but try to banish
Enmity...
And grim war is made on
Innocence sweet
The only time that strangers
Ever meet.
So we become a zomble nation
Merely an undead creation...
No longer human,
And what have you done
Or won?
Yes, my friends, won what?
And do you care a jot?
Friends, I think not....

Neighbours.

Autumn city reviving from sticky summer
And the rain cleanses the streets for our guests,
As back, in a frenzy, they return
To darken the darkening sky.
Black blossoms on naked tree
Aflutter with gossip.
The whole city pulses
With the strength of their cries.
Heralds of summer passing,
In at the kill,
A squabbling, clamouring
For an inch of foothold.
While unwilling hosts delve into devious
Ways to bring about their total destruction.
Ten million Starlings ... and more...
As resident pigeons strut in affront, evicted and lost.
The day is darkness of wing and the air is magical,
Crisp and thick with droppings.
Is it lucky to be christened in lime?
Lucky to miss it...
Yet... I could not bear the turning days
Were it not for the homing Starlings.
Hear how they gossip, my neighbours,
Great, black tornado, winding heavenwise,
I am lonely for your voice...

Live On Rainbows.

As we sat suspended in time
As other lovers have done,
Saying the very same things
Said throughout the years,
I knew you were the fire
That forever burns,
A fire made of rainbows
For which every lover yearns.
We have both been hurt before
In various ways of old,
So, faint has grown the hearts
That once were, Oh so bold.
If at all you think of me,
Think maybe of me brave...
With enough wisdom in my heart
And rainbows to save.
We were born to be hurt
We, who walk with rainbows
Woven into airy dreams,
And are never quite
What one seems.
For rainbows are illusions
They are not there,
If I were an illusion
Would you care?
Rejection is a fear
Grown into a shell,
And, as it can be broken,
We tread a path through hell.
Hesitant to put out
A hand to hold another's
Not free inside ourselves
To be carefree lovers.
Yet, we passed so very close
With rainbow breath entwined,
And for such a little while
My memories are tinged
With a rainbow smile....

Man.

Birds that soar on airborne flight,
Fragile bodies on wings of might...

Fish that glide thro' meandering stream,
A silver flash 'mongst reeds of green.

Fluid deer with graceful leap
Vanishing into the forest deep.

Beautiful creatures just as nature endowed,
If only man your freedom allowed...

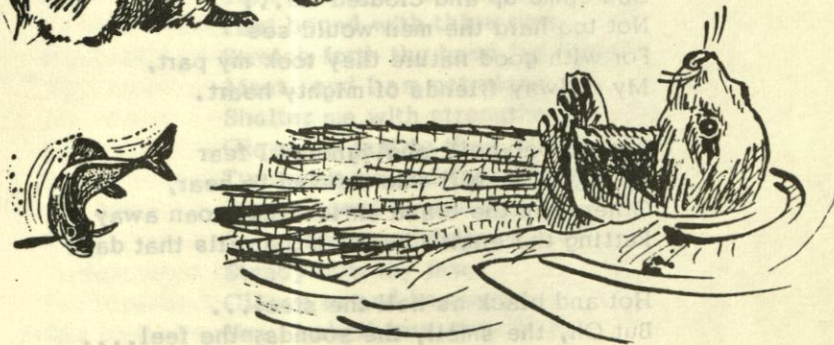
But he has to prove he owns the land,
From mountains high to clean white sand.

Birds to plummet, fish with hook in jaw,
Proud head and antlers as trophies ... of war?

The blood-lust runs hot thro' cultured vein,
Of God-like men who kill and maim...

For pleasure, that they dare name ... sport,
Why cannot man by these animals be taught.

To kill only for food or in defence...
Just where is man's superior sense?



Steam and Steel.

Living alongside the railway siding,
Where the Rhymney River was in hiding,
Close to our green front door
Were shunted trucks of coal and ore.

Exciting it was to awake and hear
The mighty, furious, steam sounds near,
An engine having jumped the track
Now lying useless upon its back.

Coal scattered far and curses musical
We dressed and promised not to hinder,
As we hopped the rails and inspected the gauges
Hoping the old crane would take ages.

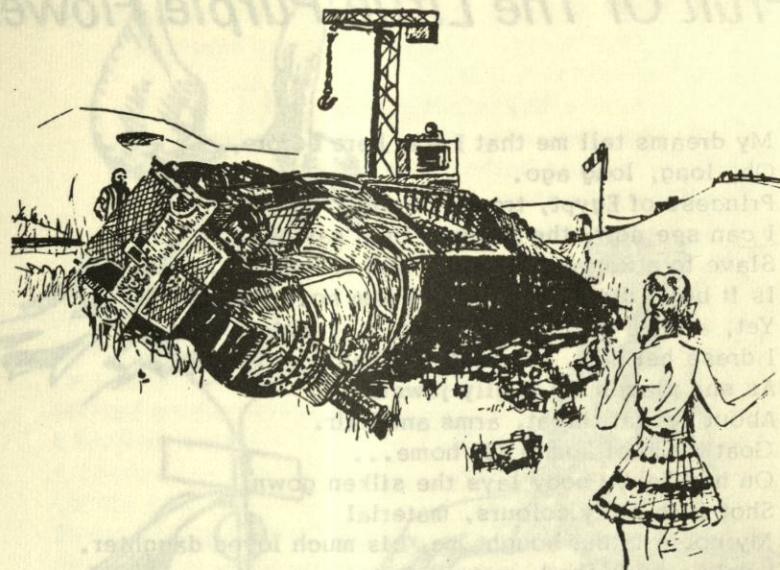
Black sweating men scraping fire to cool,
How could we think of dull old school?
Steam, in a fury, hissed and spat
We loosened chains, and this and that...

Crisp underfoot was coal acrunching,
We made toast and stood by munching,
Tea, oily black and sweet with dust,
It all went down... and no-one fussed.

Nimble on my feet I skipped
Through the coal the trucks had tipped.
Dad came up and clouted me...
Not too hard the men would see
For with good nature they took my part,
My railway friends of mighty heart.

The school-bell rang, ignored I fear
By one little girl who refused to hear,
Other than the crane shriek and groan away
Putting the engine back on the rails that day.

Hot and black as hell the steel...
But Oh, the smell, the sounds, the feel....



Love Become Me.

Turn your eyes and hold my soul
Fast bound with thine own,
Stretch forth thy hand 'til fingers
Meet, and I am not alone.
Shelter me with strengthened arms
Clasp me fast to thee...
Turn with me and face those
From whom I cannot flee.
Stand erect and falter not
Steady now thy jaw,
Cleave to and become me
Yea, I shall love thee more.

Fruit Of The Little Purple Flower.

My dreams tell me that I was here before,
Oh, long, long ago.
Princess of Egypt, trophy of war.
I can see now, the things I then saw.
Slave to a Roman highborn, and my people mourn,
Is it but a dream? It would seem so.
Yet, after a dozen dreamings, I am not so sure...
I dress her hair, hatred in my heart,
As she places my family jewels
About her fat throat, arms and hair.
Goat bitch of Rome! Go home...
On her flabby body lays the silken gown,
Shot with many colours, material
My noble father bought me, his much loved daughter.
I hold a burnished, metal mirror,
As I hold my sighs, and she preens...
Ah, Queen of Egypt... smite this Roman army now
And this great, fat cow...
Why do my family Gods not hear?
I can make no sacrifice here... not here...
Alone, I gaze at my reflection,
It is so familiar, as are all the wall hangings
The silken bed drapes and the tawny fur beneath my feet,
A conquest my father bravely won...
How small I am, and sapling slim.
From the silver sandals between my toes
To the top of my head.
Ten years and five my age, I wear the pleated
Blue tunic of hated servitude, and my blood is blue...
Black as a raven, my fringe,
With crimped hair stiff to my shoulders,
Nile cream, the colour of my pale skin,
Like brown clay mixed with asses milk.
My eyes are intense, black and slanted,
Painted with blue and silver kohl.
Silver becomes me well, I am young enough to be vain.
My nails of hands and toes are also painted silver,
And silver is the cord wound from my tiny breasts to waist.



I am a Goddess, my brother's wife,
He who was but seven years of age, and died bravely,
As a man should. Would that I too could...
Where is my father? Crushed beneath the eagle.
They who will not have used the ancient burial rituals,
He will wander, blind, without gold, with no escort
To guide his way through the underworld, no little dog.
His burial chambers have been long prepared,
Now raped and plundered.
My mother awaits him across the water...
Her spirit left when my brother-husband was born.
Seven annuns long she has waited, in vain... Oh Isis...
His ointment is used by mine enemies as a perfumed
Rejuvenating cream, would that I could but add poison
To penetrate her thick skin... I know the way,
But what is the death of one mere Roman bitch?
The blossoms will be long past full flower,

I can mix no perfumes, I must not cry.
 I carry a small flat jar, it contains a jewel, a teardrop,
 From my mother's eye, it lays next to my heart...
 Until she should recall it...
 The hangings over the window make cool
 This over-scented room, this is to be my tomb.
 How I wish I could bathe again amongst lilies
 And splash my brother, forgive me small lover,
 You who were not taught to cry...I saw you die...
 My fingers seek out my favourite bracelets,
 Snakes that wind silver coils about my arms from wrist
 To elbow, my little snake with topaz eyes.
 She cannot wear the snake upon her swarthy brow,
 Roman sow...
 I am filled with a silent, proud fury,
 Where is my wedding dress?
 Too small to fit but a child,
 So discarded to one side...
 I throw off the Roman blue, and put on my gown,
 The golden raiment embraces my virgin body.
 Am I not a queen? A Goddess?
 Oh, who will embalm me...? Oh Isis...
 The fruit of the little purple flower
 Hugs the wall near the window. See? My jar is filled,
 Berries purple, the Royal colour.
 The taste is bitter, but they are small, and easily swallowed.
 Purple balladonna, purple death, a Royal death...
 I see the Gods about me in various guises,
 The room is lengthened to a passage lined with precious stones.
 Take my arms and lead me to the silver water and golden boat.
 I tread on petals and the scent rises.
 The room is gone, the Romans are gone.
 I lay on silk cushions letting my fingers trail through
 Silver water...please little purple berries do not stain my teeth.
 I swallow more and the hands of the Gods catch me
 As my boat flies over a waterfall, how bright it is...
 I hear the laughter of my child-husband,
 Oh...they await me, they await me...
 Fool am I not to realise my mother was a Queen-Goddess too.
 It is she who has lead us home.
 How beautiful she is, so beautiful,
 I hand her back her teardrop...
 And walk into her waiting arms...Ahhh Isis.

The Pop Star.

There he stands,
 Uncertain in a blaze
 Of glittering hues.
 A solitary puppet
 On amplifying strings.
 Melted greasepaint,
 A built in smile,
 A figure of domination
 On six inch heels...
 Struts and postures
 In agitation,
 Power to all
 With each gyration.
 But his eyes are dazed
 As a child at Christmas,
 Gazing through stardust
 With amazement.
 Writhing adulation at his feet
 A verbal lust...
 Swamping his tremulous voice.
 The fawning, cringing, sobbing,
 Begging courtship
 For the peacock male.
 As the music builds,
 Wave upon wave
 Of frantic hysteria
 Is whipped up with careful calculation,
 Into a vibrating, swelling animation.
 Below him they sway,
 The population,
 Convulsing, convincing, solid matter.
 He's the idol, the star,
 Hall... his puppet master!



Into the hands of Babes.

When I was a small boy
My dad gave me a gun,
Said, "It's just a toy one,
My old son..."

I played for many years
From cowboys into space,
My friends all thought me
Really ace...

I'm just sixteen now
And so damn scared I cried,
I found a pistol
And my dad he died...

I never knew it was
Loaded I swear,
But dad let off his mouth
And said I wouldn't dare...

We were all high man,
Up on cloud number eight,
All my mates were quiet like
Watching from the gate...

I only wanted to show you
I was a man at last,
Then dad's face disappeared
In one big bloody blast...

Oh, dad I'm sorry...
I feel such a little boy,
If only you had never
Given me a gun, as a toy...

The Pride of Wales.

Hello young man, with green snotty nose,
Running uphill with grimy toes.
Ah... dad's on the dole, yet working today,
Never mind love, I know you can't say.
Up the coal level with bread and cheese,
Wipe nose on sleeve, and climb you with ease.
What will you be Bachgen, when you are grown,
Dead eyes face a future all alone.
Will you not learn the sweet mother tongue,
Dad coughs, in English, with just the one lung.
Don't stand there boy, with death in your eyes,
Deep, coal rimmed caverns so dreadfully wise.
Dig in the waste tip, I know it's cruel,
Dado dying with the dust of our fuel.
Why look so worried, I'm not DHSS,
Mam will get her pittance never the less.
On up the shingle lad, Dad is waiting,
For his bread and cheese to line his coffin.
Round, blue scarred shoulders, skinny is he,
From clawing deep underground for you and me.
Mam's putting on her shawl, to wrap up the babe,
Glancing the hill now, to see you behave.
Down in all her poverty, to Bargoed for money,
How long ago was it that her days were sunny?
Dad won't last long, he spits up blood,
Mixed with coal dust in great gobs of mud.
Five more years Bach, then will be your turn,
With death at your window before you too earn.

Lined With Blue.

They are closing all the pits, Dai,
Now you have lungs that gasp and blow,
They say the seams have run dry
So where will you work, do you know?

You are too young to pension off, Dai,
The blood money won't go far,
The pit has been your life, Dai,
And made you the man you are.

Bow shoulders and a caved chest,
Stunted and lined with blue,
Eyes so sore and black rimmed,
What other work can you do?

They are going to build a factory,
For biscuits or sewing or such,
What can your clawed hands do...
Damn it all, Dai, not much...

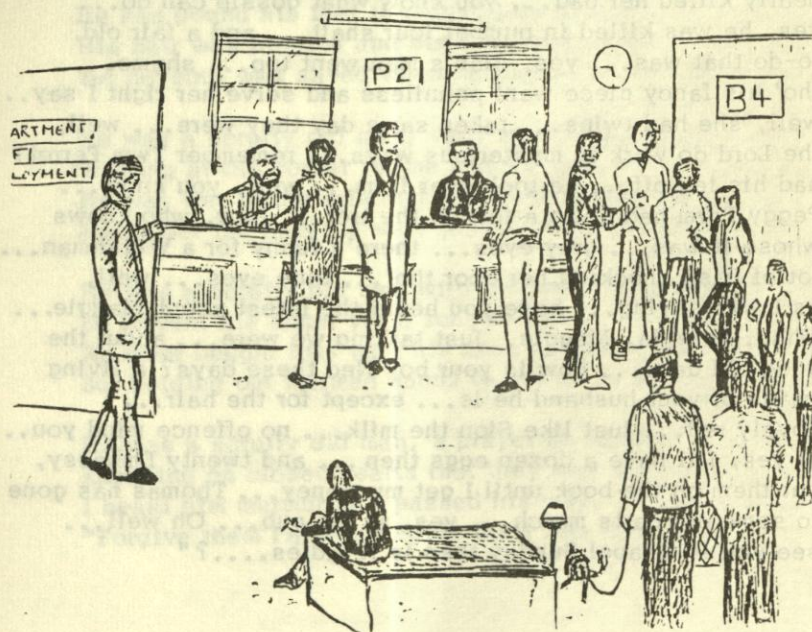
You never missed a day, Dai,
'Cept when third level came down,
You were buried for three days
And came up without a frown...

What medical will you pass, lad,
What pension can you yet draw,
You feel your manhood slipping
Away, as never before...

It is hard to swallow Welsh pride,
To let the women go and earn,
While you potter in a fury
And for the pit do yearn...

Daft that such an old death-trap
Could get into your heart...
But, it's all you ever knew, Dai,
Right from the bloody start...

You lift your chin at charity,
That's what you call DHSS...
You paid your whack, you know that,
But it doesn't make the shame any less...



Gossip.

"..... have you heard the latest about Maggie Van?
yes ... the one whose husband... that's the one yes...
her lad Ned... not her husband's boy either you know...
well, she... that's the one... married Glyn Twp... he was,
you know, not all there... dropped him his mother did...
his gran was Peggy Farm... not married no... the scandal
nearly killed her dad... you know what gossip can do...
yes, he was killed in number four shaft... and a fair old
to-do that was... yes, Rian's man went too... shame...
tho' his fancy piece went penniless and serve her right I say...
well, she had twins... taken same day they were... well,
the Lord do work in mysterious ways... remember Twm Ferret?
had his leg off... he took over from... well, you know...
Peggy Farm had quite a few on the trot... Duw, who knows
whose it was... grey eyes... there's funny for a Welshman...
lot of Irish knocking her door tho'... blue eyes... well,
as I was saying... have you heard the latest about Maggie...
Ohh.. bore da, Maggie. Just talking we were... about the
good old days... how is your boy Ned these days? a living
image of your husband he is... except for the hair...
Lovely red... just like Ston the milk... no offence mind you...
er yes, I'll have a dozen eggs then ... and twenty Embassy,
put them on the book until I get my money... Thomas has gone
to some old darts match... yes, at the pub... Oh well...
see you in Chapel Sunday then is it ladies....?"

Note for English readers: Twp is pronounced tup and means
dull or stupid. Twm = Tom. Duw = God. Bore da is
pronounced bora da and means good morning.

A Scruffy Old Man.

He was a scruffy old man in a tattered mac,
He had bound his feet in ragged bits of sack,
His hair was tangled and his eyes were wild
Yet my soul was saved when he looked up and smiled.

He was a scruffy old man, yes, and hungry too,
Waiting at the corner for me and for you,
He was wet in the rain and scorched by the heat
And under the sacking were jagged holes in his feet.

He was a scruffy old man with the heart of a child,
So fervent his anger yet a soul so mild,
No mere beggar this with his head on his chest
But holding out maimed hands to put us to the test.

He was a scruffy old man, a prayer on his lip
Knocking on closed hearts that they may slip,
I heard him murmur as I passed his way,
"Forgive them Father, forgive them this day..."

It's so much fun to be daft...

Have you never ever known
The utter, exuberant joy
Of feeling daft?
I'm sure some of you must have,
For I'd really hate to be
An idiot on my own...
Now, I don't mean wrestling
In the Mersey mud
With a nude alligator...
But that's close.
No, small daft things... like
Standing in a downpour,
Face to the sky,
Leaning on a closed
Brolly...
Or if you feel more daring,
Try standing in open ground,
Arms wide
In a freak storm
While lightening zizzes
In great jagged stabs
And thunder throws a tantrum
In vain...
Have you ever gone behind
A strange man in the street
And hugged him,
Then said, "Oops, sorry..."
Tho' you knew it wasn't hubby
All the time...
Have you ever made a bargain
With God,
And even told him off
Now and then.

Have you ever laughed with joy
In a church
And seemed to see
The plaster face
Smile back...
Have you rescued yucky,
Leggy spiders from the bath
Or cut the grass
With blunt scissors
And a sharp breadknife...
If you've never done at least
One mad thing, I'm so sorry,
For then I'll never find
Another as daft as me....



Sunshine.

Let the elements rage about us
With slash and thunder roar,
While lightening for a moment shows
The tiny skylark soar.
Let battle lame, us weak ones,
The world sure falls around,
And by the torn up trooper
A single rose, pure and sound.
Winter tears up sorrow,
And snow hurls all about
Yet steadfast through the billows
Walk the deer without a doubt.
The earthquake shatters walls,
Rocks pound the earth
And there amongst the dust,
A mother gives birth.
Living volcano
Spits up a searing death,
The land shakes and moans...
And then takes a breath.
The flood creeps ruthless
With advancing menace,
Then dries the leaves to
Finest lace.
Whenever life is ugly
And darkness grows supreme,
A little ray of sunshine
Is always there, to be seen....

Sad and hurt are they...

Lies are such lonely dreams,
how sad to need invent that which one wants
in order to feel a shadow achievement.
There are so many lies... bitter, outraged,
disappointed and a longing that is so strong
it becomes a blossoming reality.

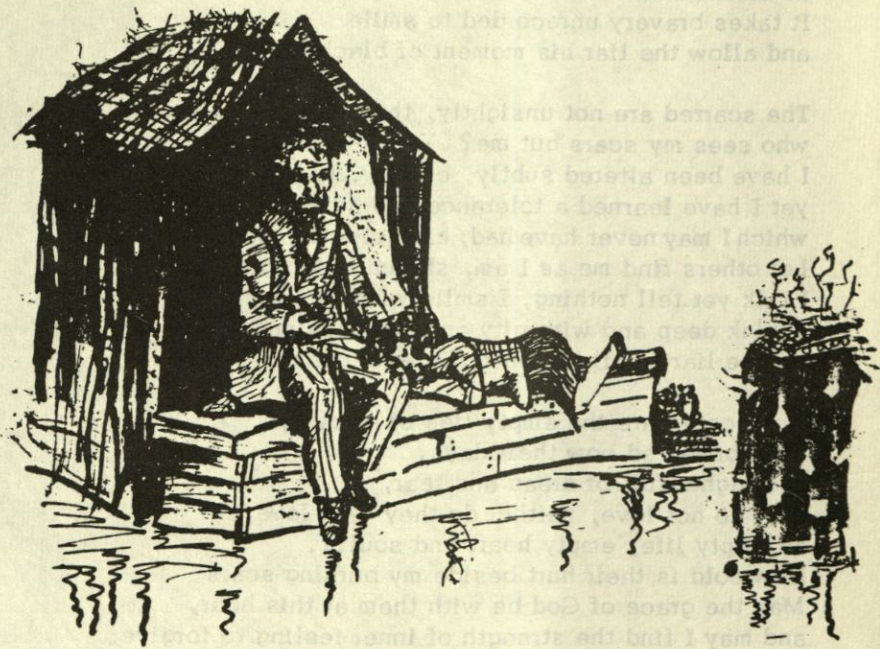
Oh, how sad is a liar and how hurt,
that they hurt others more...
and are left with hate bitter in the mouth
and are surrounded by disgust and a deepening pity.
Who feels pity for the scarred?
Or kindly disposed towards the tormented?
Already there is doubt cast,
no smoke without fire...
It takes bravery unrecorded to smile
and allow the liar his moment of black glory.

The scarred are not unsightly, the scars are internal,
who sees my scars but me? Yet they are eternal.
I have been altered subtly, cruelly, harmfully,
yet I have learned a tolerance and serenity
which I may never have had, had not a liar made me victim.
Let others find me as I am, shrouded in mystery.
I talk yet tell nothing, I smile without laughter,
I think deep and with pity and compassion
for the liar in all his butterfly existence.

How lonely are the empty lies of a lover,
how tormented now their days,
and nights full of dread and fear,
they do not love, neither do they gain love,
an empty life, empty heart and soul...
How cold is their hurt beside my burning scars.
May the grace of God be with them at this hour,
and may I find the strength of inner feeling to forgive.

My Grandad.

Viewed from my three foot or so
My grandad was a bear of a man,
A great big cuddly bear of a man.
Mam said he'd been a devil
In his youthful days,
But I found no evil
In his wondrous ways.
A night-watchman he was
With a hut, and a stove that brewed tea,
And there, when I was allowed,
I remember the stories he taught me.
The bible came to life at his lips,
Chapel on Sunday was never like this.



With knees roasting we made toast,
I ate, and drank, and listened, in bliss.
Together in the dark with lantern bright,
We walked around the factory half built,
Stalking wild animals or catching crooks,
Wading bravely through mud and silt,
Then drying off by the reddened stove.
Half asleep lay I on his knee.
Never were two people in this world
As close as he and me.
When it snowed, as it often did,
He tied layers of newspapers about my legs,
To keep them dry and warm,
For they were such brown, skinny pegs.
At mother's call, reluctant was I
To trudge the short distance home,
Leaving my grandad so snug
And me feeling suddenly alone.
Looking back to wave as he watched,
The stove at his back glowed red...
Grandad's glasses on his nose,
And me for my bed.
I dreamed at night, every night,
That I were a boy,
And my dad would look at me,
As my grandad did, with joy...
Blue eyes lighting up
For I was his precious dear.
Dear Lord, if I prayed...
I'd wish grandad were still here.
A devil of a man in his youth maybe,
But I bet the cherubs sit and hear
The wondrous stories once told to me
And they, as I, love him dear....

Laurel and Hardy.

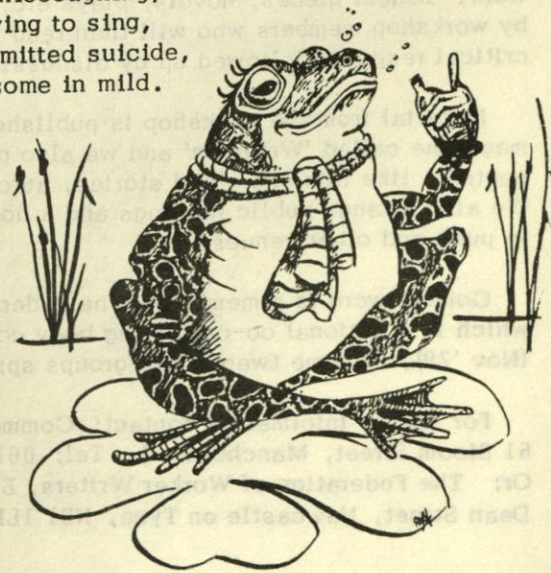


They blustered and bumbled with ease
Through the hearts of poverty and sadness,
Allowing forgetfulness in fantasies
Of those who were worse off than we.
What fun, to laugh at the misfortunes of others
In a game... called slapstick...
To lose oneself amidst broken crockery,
Sole-less shoes, ill-fitting suits
And a naive innocence that charmed,
Leaving the audience in sympathy
With the little man,
The underdog of society.
They who always had a sticky start
Yet, came to a good end...
We forgot, for a while, the depression,
We lived each scene, as one, with the actors.
Bonded to the gross impossible
With tears and laughter...
Wincing and mentally shouting, "Behind you..."
Such was the magic that has lasted
Well after the death of a partnership
And two men who won the hearts of the world.
This tribute is to the funny men,
They who worked to make us laugh.
The most difficult job of all....

Beer, Beer Everywhere.

The tiny town of Rhymney was famous for its beer,
Which was quaffed far and wide without any fear.
The air around the brewery was tasty and pungent,
But then the coopers were made redundant
And the beer never tasted quite the same
As when it in wooden casks had lain.
I heard tales of the great annual clean-out,
Dead rats and cats without a doubt
That rotted to give spice to the brew,
Hand on heart, I swear it was true...

The fish in the river, wherein poured the waste,
Were as drunk as newts, but they liked the taste.
They swam in staggers as from a pub...
Well, it was their very own underwater club.
Tiddlers grew an awful thirst,
Minnows went quite mad and cursed
When put in water that was most clear
They shot off back home to their beer.
Frogs went crazy, hiccupping,
Standing up and trying to sing,
Bees and flies committed suicide,
Some in bitter... some in mild.



Commonword.

Commonword is a writers' workshop which was set up early in 1977 with the specific intention of encouraging, promoting and publishing writing by working (and unemployed) people. Some workers have written for years in isolation, trying to place their work in the conventional, middle class dominated media which are unsympathetic to their writing and experience of life. Some are just taking the first tentative steps to write and have written a few poems or attempted a short story. Others, having had bad experiences in our wonderful 'education' system, have a desire to write and express themselves but are inhibited and intimidated by what they feel is a lack of formal knowledge of grammar, punctuation, etc. Commonword exists to break down the barriers, to stimulate and encourage working people through mutual criticism and discussion to develop the craft of writing - for just like any other trade, there are skills to be learned and techniques to be polished up.

Commonword hold a workshop meeting on Monday evenings each week at 7 - 30pm. Everyone is welcome to come along just to listen and discuss, or if they wish, to read out their work. Longer pieces, novels, plays etc, can be taken away by workshop members who will then read them and give a written critical response followed up by discussion.

Material from the workshop is published in a quarterly magazine called 'Write On' and we also publish collections of poetry - like this one - and stories, autobiography, etc. We also arrange public readings and a bookstall at festivals, in pubs and other venues.

Commonword is a member of The Federation of Worker Writers which is a national co-ordinating body consisting, at the moment (Nov '79), of some twenty five groups spread around Britain.

For further information contact: Commonword Workshop,
61 Bloom Street, Manchester 1. Tel: 061 - 236 - 2773.
Or: The Federation of Worker Writers, E Floor, Milburn House,
Dean Street, Newcastle on Tyne, NE1 1LF.

"I now write seriously because I feel a woman does not own a voice just to sing lullabies or to scold her husband. Women have something to say. I have something to say, and stories to tell.

I do hope you enjoy this book, I enjoyed writing it. Much in here is written for people who think they dislike poetry, who feel it may be too 'high brow' for the working class.....it's not you know.....it is the working class..."

Joan M. Batchelor.
(Housewife Unextraordinary, lover of words)

Published by Commonword



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A writers workshop for

the working majority.

25p