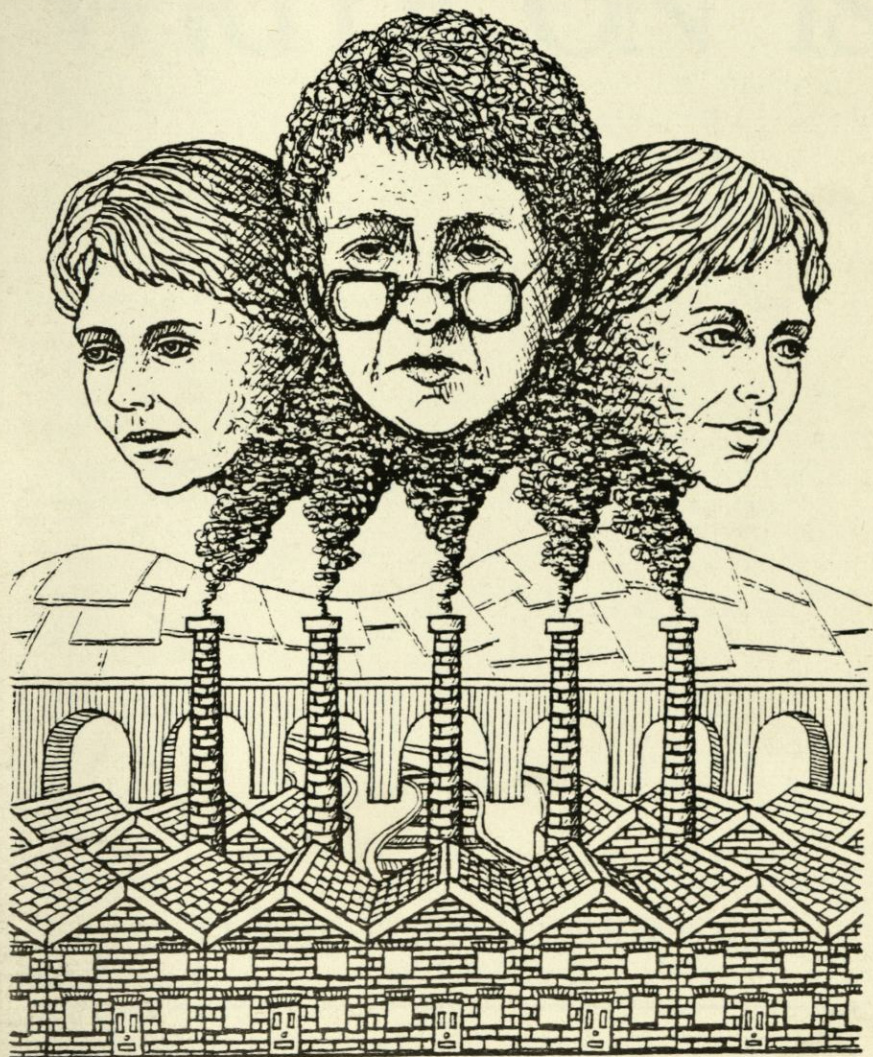


# WRITE ON 18



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# WRITE ON 18

seven years ago... of such... to a workshop... some... skills, some... what... have... an editor and publisher.

A publisher said to me... world... anyway... point of it.

'All... the public, we... are our readers... If we... its... people... PROGRAM...

fact  
with  
COMMONWORD WORKSHOPS

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# Introduction

The other day a fellow writer asked me: 'How is Commonword these days. I've always been meaning to join over the five years I've been in Manchester.'

I told him: 'We have six workshops, now, seven soon. We are struggling with the problems of success.'

A sceptical prose writer told me: 'If I went to a workshop then surely my work would become the same as everyone else's.' I said: 'It's up to each writer in a workshop to give what she can and take what she is able to; from whether a mixed group or woman's group.....at Commonword some folk pass on confidence, others bring along skills, some perpetrate and provide ideas. Often what seems like a finished manuscript or poem can have flaws which a workshop can spot and put right either in its capacity as a workshop or as an editor and publisher.'

A publisher said to me: It's the same the world over, the stuff we put out; who reads it anyway, who determines how it is sold, what's the point of it.

'At Commonword,' I said: 'We are integral to the public, we ARE our experiences, our friends are our readers, we are our own sales folk, it's us. If we print a thousand of something we guarantee its sale. We write what we want to read, we the people.'

A broadcaster asked me: 'If we had a regular programme on North West writers how would we contact all the writers without being bogged down with manuscripts.'

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I was able to say: 'Commonword could find you fifty good poets and writers at a pinch, from our books, past and present.'

Commonword has always been there, it seems, providing something unusual in the arts and welcome amongst writers; that is: fellowship. To write and feel a member of a family is marvellous, to feel your own writing is part of a greater whole, to feel it's not only you banging your head against the wall; to perform in public and in print whilst amongst friends, instead of competitors, is something not previously known to writers. Yeah, to evade the rejection slip and the writer's attic of loneliness, the sideboard full of unpublished and unheard poems; to cut out the London based editor. To compromise less. To be given an opportunity of writing for each other instead of for big publishers. To hear of yourself read in libraries.

For those who buy and don't write, Commonword means: a woman's voice, a working man's voice, the voice of a neighbour you always wanted to know more; the words you always meant to put down yourself, the celebration of the joys and heart-aches. The voice of the majority and the minorities. The chance to hear the immigrant's story, the woman's viewpoint, the social concious, the entertainer, the protest writer. For this is all of what writing is about.

The Wythenshawe and two Rochdale groups fall into the bag of local community based workshops in which all angles of life are revelant to write about.

Secondly Commonword's centrally based Monday night workshop is more specifically male-orientated; but not on purpose, for it falls into the same district as our two women-only groups. Monday is also, through the history of Commonword more tied in with socialist and working class

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writing directly, retaining close links with why Commonword was originally set up.

Our third category revolves more specifically around themes and fields or writing, necessarily so. Home Truths and Womanswrite are our two women-only groups which seek specifically to encourage work by women for women.

Our latest group also deals specifically with a field. Our Northern Gay Writers workshop is bringing out writers and writing from and for the gay scene up-north. For at Commonword making this break is part of our tradition, to break the silence, to add as much to society or a group of people, as much as we take out as writers. We hope to give back life something in return.....a voice, a sense of identity, a mirror, a vision of our own qualities. So that in the rush of life we do not forget ourselves and each other.

JOHN GOWLING

## I should have loved

I should have loved  
to have cartwheeled with you through the snow  
fought with polar bears  
and left in our laughter things best left unsaid  
unspoken

I should have loved  
to have ridden with you the white sky  
drifting round our feet  
and left in our wondering things best left unsaid  
unspoken

I should have loved  
to have fingered with you the frosty buds  
of a winter blossom  
and left in our touching things best left unsaid  
unspoken

I should have loved  
to have burnt beside you in my room  
sipping a glass of grappa  
and left in our tasting things best left unsaid  
unspoken

I should have loved  
to have recalled for you a Piedmontese peasant  
uncorking firewater and conversation  
but in our drinking nothing would have been left  
unspoken

---

PHIL BOYD

## True Love

My mind is tormented  
There's a mist in my eyes  
My bodies distended  
And pains in my thighs.  
My hiatus is ruptured  
Oh, what can I do  
It wouldn't be fair  
For me to love you.  
I know you remember  
The days long ago  
When I was so fit  
I'd never say no,  
But please I beg you  
Try if you can  
To understand darling  
I'm just an old man  
This ailing old body  
I cannot renew  
Bad tempered and cranky  
With the pain I go through  
So look around darling  
I'm sure you will find  
A man you can love  
Who is gentle and kind.

---

ALF IRONMONGER

## It isn't fair

Let me stay up  
The young one said  
It's not fair  
I'm to go to bed.  
Mother with a  
Condescending smile  
Said alright darling  
Stay for awhile.  
But elder sister  
In her rage  
Said go to bed  
You're not my age.  
Then father  
Put his paper down  
Looked at them  
With a frown.  
This constant bickering  
Every night  
Of what is wrong  
And what is right  
I'll tell you  
What you must do  
Get to bed  
Both of you.  
Mother rose  
From her chair  
The eldest cried  
It isn't fair.

ALF IRONMONGER

## Commonword

## Paul

It had not shocked me, his death; I mean obviously it had come as no surprise, but also it had not upset me. His final month of suffering this life had been physically painless, more tiring, I suppose: alarming, within that last span of knowing all humanly possible had been done, and that then he had a mere fortnight to live, a fortnight of growing dirty inside, like he had got used to over the years, but this time he would grow worse without ever being bodily cleansed, until his spirit left the body and us on the world.

I was in the porters' common room when he died, a late shift. The phone had rung. George told us there was a stiff to collect on Ward 12. We had all froze, as usual, but continued to pretend to read our papers or throw darts. But this time it was my turn. Besides, I had an idea it would be him I would be taking.

"You're alright, I'll do this one."

"Need any help?" Victor volunteered, looking guilty.

"No I'll ring if there's anything."

The dead were no trouble and the easiest to handle. The only precaution we had to take was with fragiles, to make sure there was no mess without dropped along the corridors. Or to get it cleaned up pretty quick. I was soon down the mortuary and collecting the fake instruments trolley, and putting the clean white sheet over it. I often thought how nice this 'car' would look with a vase of flowers on top. But of course that would give the game away.

I soon wheeled it down the ward. Sister led

me and the wagon to a screened bedside. It was his alright. And there he was in his sheath, his white shroud, like laundry, except it was his young man's nose that poked up at the head, his big feet. The orderlys had done their jobs, there was nothing more to do but to take him and lay him out. How I wish the dead were cold with the spirit leaving. I temporarily took the sheet off the trolley and lifted the cowl, opening up the death wagon that the sleeping patients would not see. We worked in robotic clockwork silence, the night sister and orderly gestured in nods and movements. The young student nurses that fancied the dead boy were sat away in the sister's office.

Sister mouthed to the orderly: "His feet."

I brought my arms out in cartoon style to his head and shoulders. She got round the other side of the bed. How many times had we lifted him from his bed for theatre and X Ray or manoeuvred him whilst the students had fitted the tubes to his limbs. I got my stomach behind his head and lifted his arms, me under his shoulders. That warmth, he as warm as I, yet dead, put me in mind of cannibalism. Yet it was not wrong to take care of business, to quietly and seemingly without feeling remove the dead from the midst of the panicky living and apprehensive dying.

Sister brought her arm forward above his chest to catch my eye. She mouthed:

"Careful, he should be alright."

Paul, the same weight as ever, no lighter without his soul; and if anything: heavier, with him not using his muscles to help us off the bed. The deads, the easiest to carry, not hindering by trying to make it easier for you.

He was in the trolley now with the lid closed down and sheet on top. The bed curtain was pulled back slightly whilst she helped me manoeuvre him out. We pulled the curtains closed again as if the wagon had merely called to administer him drugs

as if he was still in bed sleeping. It would be after breakfast tomorrow before the curtains would be removed, and the news would hit the patients' grapevine.

And out of the ward I wheeled him up the polished corridors, the bright fluorescent tubes marching us across black meadows of hospital land, I alone with him left alone to me.

The living made me bitter with my homosexuality and the hospital hierarchy, me being the most lowly, the porter, the fetch-it; the one with the carefree job who attracted jealous abuse from the technical, nursing and medical staff. But this one was dead. I was glad I could have one to look at and be with briefly, who would cause me no trouble. The dead were the best of all.

And yet there was a time when Paul had fallen into the second best category too: the second most likeable: the dependant invalid, the one who could not afford to deal you abuse. He had been the brave young man on the kidney machine, the converted throne of hope. I was imagining him as he was: sat up there, his bottom half partly covered by cut pyjamas and by the grey steel housing of the pump machine. His pipes of dull in-filtered blood ran one way into the plastic sheet filters, and out the other side, again, like from a highly complex music centre, the deep red and refreshing blood pumping back into him.

This is how, without speaking, I had first got to know him, lifting him up, his arms round my neck, my arms round his chest, whilst they took out the tubes and replaced them with puncture plasters. Then I would help them ease him down into the bed whilst the machine was taken away for a period. I guess I would have fancied him, had he been well, I mean all thoughts of that are gone when helping the sick. A compassion melts the soul, a desire to do one's job without causing pain or fear in the patient. A hold which is too

warm and tender can frighten him to lose all confidence in the hospital, horribly so. It's important that touch should not arouse the patient's feelings in that way, to do so would only confuse him.

The machine would be rolled back into the centre gangway and his sheets pulled up, his bed made around him. And me taking the long PVC gloves from my overall pocket would prepare to gather up the polythene radiators of blood, gather all the pipes and needles and wrap them inside the filter, whilst one of the nurses held the black plastic sack open. I would wheel the bag directly to the incinerator, through the hospital grounds to avoid spillage. In the chamber the bag would hiss and explode sending its needles pinging against the metal incinerator hood.

There was hope whilst a patient was on the machine, hope of a donor within the secret time, before he had taken his span, and a new hopeful would take his place on the machine. Meanwhile I would be assigned with shift rotation to wheeling him between hospital departments, me obeying procedure not to stand and chat with others whilst I had him. For the kidney disease was an unknown quantity, and could be contagious and dangerous to those who might not suspect, were not monitored. I could not allow him to mingle, nor to let him know of this by any awkward gesture or embarrassing incident. With Paul in the wheelchair I had to say 'hello' to friends as if to say:

"Nice to see you this morning, just a bit tied up at the moment, see you later."

In these errands we talked very little, the most rudimentary of conversations about football and the weather, pubs and localities. These details I forgot with his passing. I suppose I make it sound like I was detaching my soul from the ill and dying; but to become attached would have been tearful, heartbreaking, would have intro-

duced say me and Paul to talking about things on a 'drinking in the pub' level, on such topics of the fairness of death and whether those with everything going for them should die, or if someone else should take their place. To me it is just life, and so is death.

Well, summer had been poor for road accidents. Donors are scarce enough, but an anti-drink campaign had kept the potentiality of donors to a minimum. In fact over Paul's summer our hospital did not receive one kidney from outside, whatsoever Time marched on and the boy's relatives were contacted. I say he was a boy, he was twenty, the same age as I was. Unknown to him the day had arrived, the big chance. His twenty-four year old sister had been admitted to Ward 19, Women's Surgical to lose one of her kidneys for him. I was glad that it was his trolley and not hers that I had to wheel down to the adjoining theatres.

He was calm like a zombie, in fact we all were. But I could also see his undertone of hope and excitement. I guess he was like the man who is afraid of aeroplanes: being given a gift ticket for Majorca, at the last minute. We all took it as said that he must not know the origin of the kidney, that the donor must remain a secret. He was not allowed to become agitated, no scene to involve the other patients. If we, the staff, could not be brave and sensible, then how could he be. And yet we were scarcely cautioned on such occasions, I think we knew that it would be a crime against humanity to behave subjectively. Yes, they had prepared him when I wheeled the trolley into the kidney ward. I say we were calm, we were full of: "What a beautiful morning, the sun shining, fields full of buttercups. Today you take your test and pass with flying colours. Sister and I had held our breath outside before we burst in on him.

He co-operated wonderfully. It is indeed



ironic but understandable that it is only hospital staff that make the most unbearably cowardly and fearful patients. He held his fear very well. On our way up to theatre sister held his hand out the side of the trolley, her saying nice things about his confidence being on top form. She stayed with us whilst we waited outside the theatre entrance, then me and her slipped back behind the head of the trolley as the theatre porter pulled him into reception.

She walked off and I waited, first changing the sheets on another trolley, then sitting and reading the daily paper. Then I spied on the goings on in the ward kitchens, through the window.

He was fast asleep to the world when he was brought out. I had been for lunch and come back. It had been bangers and mash in onion gravy and I was struggling to keep the wind in.

I was putting him to bed as he came round, him slightly shocked by the double vision the anaesthetic was causing, me careful not to hold this type of patient above the buttocks, me lifting his thighs, just above the knee whilst she took his head and chest. I remembered taking the trolley back and waiting till the corridor was clear before I changed his sheets. No blood on this one, the watery pink chemical stains exactly where you'd expect them to be. I wrapped up the sheets and put them into the bin to be burned, along with his plastic knives and forks and plates and paper cups, and all else that once went into the kidney ward, except staff and equipment and many of the patients, all else that never came out.

It was three days before they were absolutely sure, and the news spread that the kidney had not taken, his sister's kidney had been rejected by his own body. She had discharged herself prematurely, and his skin was as brown as ever. There was nothing for it, he was wheeled out of Renal and put into the newest and most stylish ward in the hosp-

-ital, this ward was like Seventh Heaven. It WAS the Terminal ward.

And yet within that day he was back in Renal and on the machine. Another donor had been found, his mother. The nightmare went on, you know it never finished for us, not even after we had clocked off. Once again Paul must not find out, not even have it explained to him whilst his nearest and dearest relatives were avoiding visiting him in such hopeful days. We had to tell lies about wounds and injections, and he cursed his own mother and sister bitterly for abandoning him to this horrible terror he was having to face alone. We played along. We had to, had to stand it. Reason with ourselves that 'how could he know better?' we prayed that we might not snap and let the cat out of the bag. THEY would be alright, they would survive even with one kidney each. Why, his sister had even felt well enough to discharge herself to a home bed prematurely. No way could we tell him how good his female relatives were being for fear it would bring about an unreasonable and premature decision in his mind, to sacrifice his life and reject the transplants out of hand. We had to be skilled liars with him whilst there was still hope.

The most atrocious trip we took to the theatre with him was to have the rejected kidney taken out very quickly. This happens on one of those days that God sends along, a rainy, windy, squally day where nothing of any good consequence gets done, a day when it's best to put things right and then forget.

The third trip he was the worse for wear and just accepting that even though he was too tired and sick of the whole damned thing that we might just see it through, if this might be the answer, the way out. It WAS his last chance. And his body loused it up. His mother's kidney was rejected pretty soon after. Pretty automatically.

He was brave as we wheeled him up to take it out, he was brave for our sakes and yet bitter. We

could see it. We both held his hand as we wheeled him to the theatre. We gripped the hand of a dying boy because this time it was us who needed strength and bravery. Us who could carry on living, coping with his death, hoping we could find strength through holding him.

It was a couple of days later when he snapped. If only hospitals had the staff to temporarily replace the flagging. It was me who was assigned to gaily push him around the hospital grounds, the remoter areas, overlooking the hills and the city, it was to avoid others unnecessarily coming into contact, to keep him out of earshot of those struggling to live; and to at least let him see a portion of the outside world through the hospital railings, before he died. We were on our way when he snapped and stood up kicking the wheelchair back into me as we were alone on the corridor. I crumpled between the radiator and the wheelchair.

"It's alright for you, making a living out of it. You can watch News At One, see the outside world; knowing that it will be there for you to see tomorrow. How would you like to be told you've only a fortnight left to live? Your family come round and tell YOU what they've done and none of YOU had the nerve to tell me. How would YOU feel, how?"

I was shocked and afraid.

"I don't know, I don't know. It's some time isn't it? Let's see what we can make of it." I trembled. "Let's see. Come on, let's sit down. I do know about a bit of what you are thinking....."

"Yeah, you know 'cos you're hardened to it, you don't care. You've seen them come and go."

I was miles away, still thinking about this queer guarantee of a fortnight. Cycling back and forth to the hospital each day and disposing of the poisonous wastes. I was living from day to day whilst this guy had a fortnight promised in air-conditioned wards.

"Please sit down. In a minute we can go out

in the garden and talk."

"Sod your fucking chair, I don't need it. I can walk like you. I don't even need your bloody hospital now, it's you that need me here."

I ran in front of the door and held it shut, leaning against it. I feared he was going to make a panicky run from everything. He pulled at me, trying to pretend he wanted to go through the door, but his emotions were too far gone, he needed even pathetic me now. He was pulling weakly at my stomach and groin, through my loose grey coat. With his head down and his blond hair over his eyes he was pulling in at me and also trying to tear away as the tears came fast. I softly put my arm on his back and touched his side rib, his heart beating under my hand, trying to lift his head up with my other hand. A slobber and teardrop hit my palm.

He pulled back and ran blindly towards ward 12 where at the door two nurses met him; and their arms around him; led him inside. One of them motioned up the corridor to me that everything was alright. They closed the ward door behind them. I took the wheelchair into Renal and told them to keep it till I returned later. I went back to the porters shack and helped Victor do the sanitary rounds.

I was on a fortnight of different shifts after that, during which time he had been confined to ward, either of his own choice or the sister's sense. I don't know which.

Then on this final night of his life I was back on terminal and kidney and wheeling his corpse up-hill to the mortuary. I stopped the waggon at the corridor door to unlock it. Then led us across the greens to the death house. Both me and a dead boy, just my own age or slightly younger by an hour. Yes, I had won. I was going on getting older whilst he remained the same, just his guts slowly working down inside his shroud. Through the cool sharp night I pushed him under the watchful eye of the cynically smiling moon; why did it find it so ironically

funny as I wheeled them beyond death.

The mortuary was a cool place, a tiny old chapel, Paul's shrine, where his parents would come and see him in the morrow, their first glimpse of their dead son, their new dead son. They would never imagine him being carried through his duties by a homosexual (me); of finally being laid out with a smile on his face by a PUFF; of his corpse being left alone with this queer, they would not see. His fiancée would never see how I finally claimed him; how over the last month of his life he had surrendered his co-operation to one of us, as only through helpless, sick and dying he might allow; to finally trust one of us so much, to have to find out he could trust us. And finally though his orifices had been stuffed by those on the ward, how I would perform his penultimate offices before his cemetery and funeral.

I opened the wagon up next to the slab, which lay where the altar should have received charges from heaven. And outstretched my arms to take him up and deliver him to the slab. My knees bent and back straight, arms under him, that horrible off-warm feeling of the fresh-dead enveloping my skin. Holding my chin against his stomach to steady us, and I lift him and turn us around, and raise him onto the stone.

And now the unveiling of the dead, the exhibition of the young man on his death bed, where at his head and feet will be brass urns of flowers. I untied the shroud about him, then pulled it from under him to reveal him in a priestly nightshirt. Thank God he could not see me now after how he had gone crackers in the corridor. I straightened his legs first, determined to get as much done before I focussed his face in its loose form. The dead can pull such hideous faces, they can be ironically startling.

I pulled one of his arms from where I had trapped it under him, and placed the hands one

over the other, the right on top of the left, in a secular, yet semi-religious style, not quite praying but restful. I checked his back was straight and lifted his leg again to unravel the bottom of his gown. And then the neck, with the head, both hands under the chin to straighten the head, pushing the jaw without looking. Feeling for the eyebrows and shutting the eyes. The coins. Two ten pences out of my own pocket till I look for the hospital's tuppences. Keeping my hand under the jaw whilst reaching to the floor for the little sand-pack. Jaw shut with sand-pack above adam's apple.

Now it would be polite to look. Ah Paul, so restful; John you've done a good job, so tranquil; they look so nice when they're sleeping. The brown whiteman, Paul, dyed with the impurities of his own blood. Paul, a Cheshire lad who looks like an Indian, lying there in state. When they come to see him he'll look beautiful. He won't move now, he'll set and resubtle in that pose.

They'll say; "My Paul, my beautiful Paul," and weep into the beautiful long blonde hair I'm combing now with my own comb, as I remember how his style was, searching for his parting in his dead scalp. Not a hair or lip or eyelid out of place.

The dead Paul.

JOHN GOWLING

## In Bed

Time passes, and the sun begins  
 Its course across the night-blue sky.  
 Lying awake, I hold your hand,  
 A lion's paw clutched by a mouse.

Your head near mine,  
 Your hand in mine,  
 Your legs round me entwined -  
 Ivy wrapped round trees.

Sigh, turn, stretch and say hello,  
 But don't wake up.

Dawn breaks, as dark hair tumbled,  
 Sleeping face, brave and innocent  
 As a young soldier's -  
 Before the war - you  
 Nestle down heavy and comforting,  
 Head between my breasts.

A bag of myrrh.

Let me lie wakeful,  
 Unalarmed if sad,  
 When you wake up,  
 You only worry.

BETH GAYLORD

## Holiday Trip

Chugging to the Farnes  
 we lunge on the swell  
 To see the ruined seals  
 and St. Cuthberts' ancient cell.  
 Cinies lean on breeze  
 as Longstone swims to view,  
 Old Billy Shiels at helm  
 stares on sunscorched  
 With a catch of fifty souls.

Engines cut we almost grate  
 on cormorant cliffs,  
 Where swart birds boo  
 and squark abuse.  
 Spread scraggy wings  
 to shoo us from nests  
 On foul ledges where they live  
 with last weeks dinner.  
 Our National Trust.

Swollen lollers posture on rocks  
 and roll to flop in funnels,  
 Swim round our boat  
 like doleful hounds,  
 And paddling rise to peer,  
 before they chose the waves;  
 Veteran fishers too skillful by far  
 honk to hail us  
 From their happy hunting ground.

Windslewed we peeped  
over whinstone sills  
To see rare gulls in sanctuary,  
and thought on Cuthbert  
Shutting out the world. Here  
he fasted, wept and prayed  
Until he became incorruptible.  
Exhumed  
Five times to make certain.

Hands trail in cold surf,  
sailing back for seahouses  
In the faith that he found.  
Saffron the sun sinks  
Over Bamburghs' castlecrag,  
where the pagans were repelled  
By a holy change of fiery wind,  
and light streams across the waters  
Like our pathway to paradise.

BOB WOOD



## Babylon Station

There was no rain  
and graffiti sat like a pain,  
chained to red walls  
and all the calls of a stillborn night,  
faded to jaded hours  
when everything was alright.

Black boys turned to black men,  
grown lithe again  
to a hybrid beat of cushion feet  
when thicker lips whispered 'neat',  
complete with eyes of another light  
that burned when everything was alright.

Bastard children flickered fixed smiles  
on shattered aisles  
as midnight whiles through Babylons stone parks  
where, in a new dark  
kid rockers ran thin fingers through a culture,  
like vulpine vultures, perched in the lowest  
heights  
when khaki skin pierced like a pin,  
everything that was alright.

Now the quiet cars are purple with a sleepless  
haze  
and a rusted memory of days raised from a  
grave

## Shakedown Style

of paving slabs and doorways  
where towering dreams died in ugly ways  
that was colour etched on stretched  
senses

staring through glass fences  
left - then right,  
and Babylon station burned tonight.

All hour every hour radio,  
smashing the repeated video  
a hidden dream ridden audio  
when mono, stereo and quadraphonic sound  
treads deep steps through shoe-box chasms  
and rhythmic spasms call the shots  
when dawn is hot with a chilling blight  
singing dumb songs that say alright.

Words pushing now like unconscious drums  
beaten with tired thumbs  
on an empty glass that was once stale  
wine  
that passed heavy lidded time  
over bottles cracked in screaming time  
when the light flamed too-too bright  
and Babylon station burned tonight.

CARL HOLT

## Shakedown Style

Juke box was playing blue beat  
when white boys tapped their feet  
dub style - to the rocking drum  
and rastamen were hanging 'round  
waiting for the shakedown  
bass was the culture - skanking down.

and yeah - the cop was kicking door  
laying down a ghost town law  
to families of the poor - and thief  
in no belief  
and bad grief sound  
in the ghetto tears run down  
waiting for the shakedown

midnight youth has burned the books  
for lack of bread  
in a town turned dread  
take it to the judge man  
go right ahead  
"What is the charge here  
take him down"  
waiting for the shakedown

CARL HOLT

## The Leather Hierarchy

what's black is black  
what's done is done  
when the lawman smile  
your time is come  
with a different style for the rich man's son  
all your bridges burning down  
waiting for the shakedown

rastafari - rockers, black and white  
they hound you down  
fuck you around - alright  
is now the time to turn and fight  
or wait until they kick you down  
to the dreadbeat sound  
of the shakedown

CARL HOLT

# The Leather Hierarchy

A heel click,  
a strychnine dip,  
into the acid world of letters,  
belated correspondences to lovers that died  
slung trussed and tied into ashen forgetfulness.

A new world  
of pretty girls,  
the curly hair, deck chair, tee-shirt, be like me press  
gangs,

lingered in darkness,  
grooved out in parks,  
sustenance and lust  
slung trussed and tied away.

A changing scene,  
live hard, die fast,  
drip-drop-drug tabs,  
into the purple dreams.  
Leather hierarchy emerge  
on a darkened stage,  
to turn the page  
into the dead age.

Full of joy for the course I'd chosen,  
'leave me alone' was interwoven  
with ice cream dreams  
left behind  
in the mind.

Choked on words half understood,  
nude manling, stripling.

Phones ring, in the outside car park of a Parisian cafe,  
where couples mark their rise and fall,  
a footfall in the hall,  
the acrid smell of the door bell chime,  
saves nine,  
stops time in its tracks.

The barefacts,  
reduced now in photo sequence,  
eloquence leak resolved, removed,  
the rising shriek is smothered, regroomed,  
to fit in place once more  
with the hard core, staunch denials  
designed to change the mind,  
"it's not times that change,  
it's you that stops."

CARL HOLT

ELIZABETH ANNE SPENCER



## Sonnet

And turn the page, the time of man is past  
The rhyme begins : now is the time of man,  
We are the first amongst the last, the last  
Amongst the first, survivors, if we can  
But speak the words that make the unseen seen,  
Unite a million with the single soul,  
Build bridges between men where none have been  
And make the fell fragmented cosmos whole.

As lovers' touches shake the deepest dream  
And actors asked the question choose 'to be',  
Like singing stones we must push 'gainst the stream  
That simply seeks oblivion in the sea.  
The surest way towards the commonwealth  
Is to remember this: 'Become Yourself'.

BILL HOPKINSON

The Monday Night Group, meeting on a weekly basis,  
provides both fair criticism and a good sounding  
board for its member writers. The work produced  
ranges from surrealist poetry to short stories  
drawn from personal experience.

The group meets at Bloom Street.

## Insomnia

Can't sleep and the night drags on  
I think of lovers I've had,  
When one merely thinks, it's sad,  
A sign one's old, have it, done.

Funny thing, love, sex  
They call it now. Wonder what  
The ancient Egyptians called it? not  
Sex, that's sure. I perplex

My mind with too much happenings.  
Jesus! It's quiet, lonely, so still.  
Can't stand this. Perhaps another pill?  
Where are the bloody things!

Must get some sleep. I just can't lie  
Awake all night, alone and wondering why.

PEGGY DUNN

ELIZABETH ANNE SPENCER

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## Soul /Self Preservation

Whoever the next man is  
However he attracts me, enralls me,  
I must not give him my soul self  
Not my whole self

Something I must keep back  
For my own safety's sake  
I have suffered so much,  
I must keep that core within me

That hard kernal of independence  
No man again shall crack.  
Fortress of self-serenity  
Within which my soul/self dwells.

ELIZABETH ANNE SPENCER

## Cold Comfort

Here it comes again O' Lord  
Please give me strength to smile  
And hide the angry pain I feel  
For just a little while.

If you've none to make you laugh, they say,  
You've none to make you cry.  
Why don't these people stop and think  
Just what these words imply.

These words of so-called wisdom  
Are used by young and old,  
You'd never think that comfort  
Could prove so very cold.

They wouldn't tell a starving man,  
Hungry cold and weak,  
If he's had no food to nourish him,  
He's had none to make him sick.

PEGGY DUNN

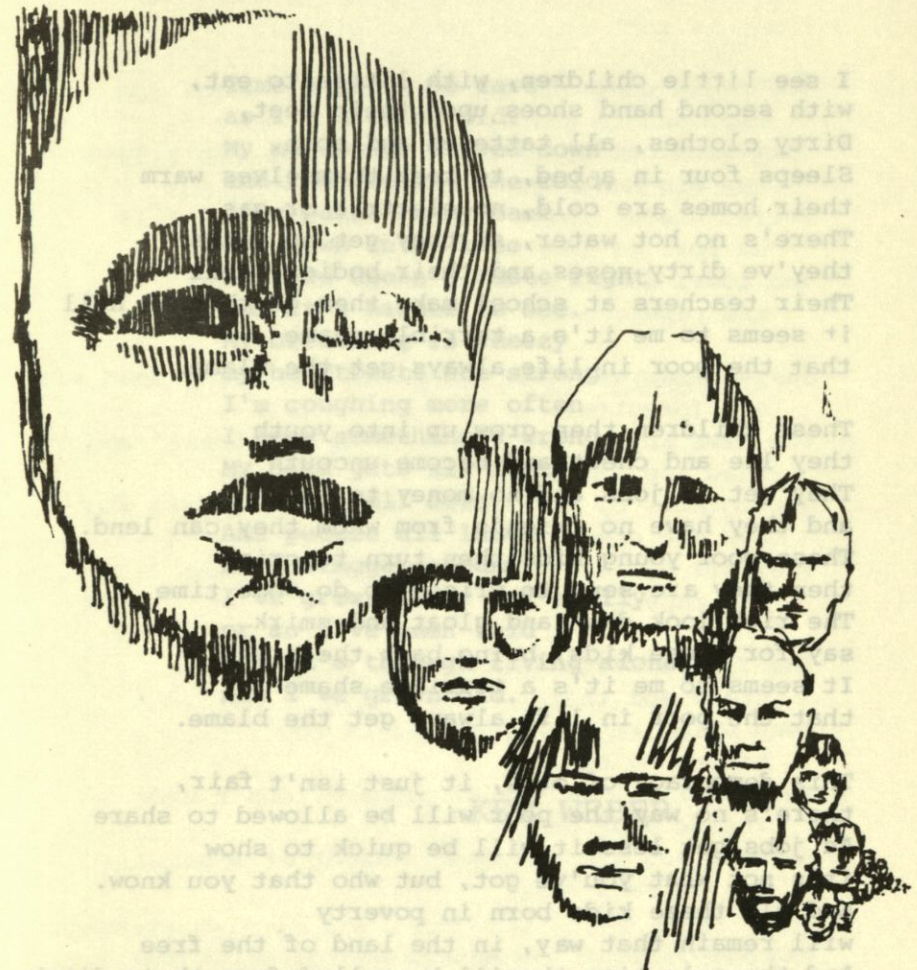
## Vanishing Breed

Two thousand years, before my time,  
An Indian left his land behind,  
He came to Europe, just to roam,  
To find a place, to call his home.  
He travelled to many places in life  
Each country he went; he had a different wife.  
His sons in Europe, they travelled too  
And quickly the name of gypsy grew.

They slept beneath the stars at night  
Under leaves and grass and clothing bright  
They stole and killed, wherever they went  
Lived in barns and payed no rent.  
To rape decent women, for them wasn't wrong.  
For these brown skinned men were cruel and strong  
They were evil and cunning, this everyone knew  
And from these men their legend grew.

As the years moved on, to modern times,  
They've settled down and stopped their crimes.  
This Romany man has disappeared from view  
One could be living next door to you.  
These once great men who lived in the past  
Would take orders from none while they could last  
Whose left of these men, who lived to be free?  
One could be you. One's certainly me.

KEN WEBER



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## I See

I see little children, with little to eat,  
with second hand shoes upon their feet,  
Dirty clothes, all tattered and torn.  
Sleeps four in a bed, to keep themselves warm  
their homes are cold, no electric or gas  
There's no hot water, so they get no baths  
they've dirty noses and their bodies smell  
Their teachers at school make them go through hell  
it seems to me it's a terrible shame  
that the poor in life always get the blame.

These children then grow up into youth  
they lie and cheat and become uncouth  
They get no jobs and no money to spend  
and they have no friends from whom they can lend.  
These poor young kids then turn to crime  
then they are sent to prison to do some time  
The rich look down and gloat and smirk.  
say for these kids, bring back the birch.  
It seems to me it's a terrible shame  
that the poor in life always get the blame.

This democracy of ours, it just isn't fair,  
there's no way the poor will be allowed to share  
As jobs get less it will be quick to show  
it's not what you've got, but who that you know.  
And all these kids born in poverty  
will remain that way, in the land of the free  
And the only time they'll be pulled from their ditch  
is to give their lives in wars for the rich.  
It seems to me, it's a terrible shame,  
that the poor in life always get the blame.

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## Growing Old

Time's going so fast  
as I'm growing old.  
My movements slowed down  
and I'm feeling the cold.  
I've pains in my back  
and down in my knee  
My food doesn't taste right  
and it's harder to see.  
My breathing is wheezy  
my heartbeats not strong  
I'm coughing more often  
I know something's wrong.  
My head gets all fuzzy  
I often fall down  
And people all laugh  
as I stagger around.  
I've grown dirty and smelly  
or so I've been told  
But it's through living alone,  
now I've grown old.

KEN WEBER

## The Media

The media controls our lives, we're not  
supposed to think,  
They wash our brains with headlines, it's just  
one big hoodwink.  
Whilst diesel fumes pollute the air and fill  
us full of lead  
The level is quite tolerable, that's what  
the papers said.

The Vietnam war has long since gone, the dead are  
all forgotten,  
The news across the U.S.A. " We are great" and  
they are rotten.  
Now mothers by the thousand mourn the boys who  
now are dead,  
They all believe the headlines, and what  
the papers said.

The T.V. adverts tell us all to use this  
cream and that,  
Keep slim, it's anti-social if you  
happen to be fat.  
Your family love you as you are, don't hide  
inside your bed,  
Be what you are and cock a snook at what  
the adverts said.

Put flouride in the water, do you think you  
have a choice?  
Faceless men decide for us, I cannot  
use my voice,

## The Plain Coloured Room

But force opinion down my throat until  
my face turns red,  
I'll make up my own mind in spite of what  
the papers said.

WINIFRED EDWARDS

*Rochdale Writers are a prolific group of writers,  
writing for pleasure and sharing their everyday  
experiences. Their writings have a strong local  
flavour. At the moment they are in the process  
of editing a new book of short stories and poems.  
They hope to bring this book out in the autumn.*

## The Plain Coloured Room

I opened the door to my plain coloured room, dressed only and filled only by a bed and cube-shaped boxes still unpacked. Drifting from now to then we used to arrive home late from our night out, but prepared for the marshmallow quilt, the crimson sheets and inadequate pillow stuffed with a cushion. We undressed separately, like two shy schoolgirls afraid to show the same anatomy. She would talk to me in her native accent, her voice warm and relaxing, soaking into my body like a sponge.

Her touch, like no other, moved me, passified me. Her kiss was like a slow-motion movie which lay before me. A kiss that enfolded itself into a pattern that filled the room with laughter and pleasure. An intimacy had grown between us.... in the dark of the night and the early morning dawn light. I whisper words in my head, I-love-you, I-love-you - between the laughter, I-love-you between the warmth and the tenderness of your embrace. I am saying words without emotions that speak, words without speech. I close my eyes and let my mind glide from the soft fluffy clouds of marshmallow quilt and I then transform myself to a plane, to a bird that dips and glides without a sound but the sound of my heart beating and the slow deep exhaling of my breath. I am a child, fragile and helpless in this woman's arms, and for these few, lingering moments do I allow myself to be conquered and held by this woman. I press myself against her body, warm, soft, real and alive! But, like some magical dream I feel I am a spirit visiting a room with

wonderous magic and enchantment.

In the cold harsh light of reality, I touch the grey floor tiles. The cold reaches the warmth of my feet. In this room 'we' are safe, in this room with no curtains and the square shaped view, there is another world outside. A world that does not fit us, nor we the world. Touch is strictly forbidden..but for the 'normal', the 'accepted'. Eyes do not want to see the 'unaccepted'. There is no place, no neatly set category.

Sometimes their mouths become ugly, their fingers point and, only when anger has reached their body does light begin to shine through (to the accepted) and another world dawns on them. But for those who do not reach the light, they hide behind darkness and sweep the 'unaccepted' under the carpet of ignorance and fear. But life goes on for the 'unaccepted'. In the supermarket the 'accepted' places himself before me. I imagine myself in some primitive form of mating. I feel as if I have been stripped and my nakedness of a woman stands before him. My lover powerless to protect me because she too has been stripped and put before him, the 'accepted' male, as the object he desires as his. My identity gone, and all that lies before is a piece of meat, a piece of flesh to be devoured. I want to return to the safety of the plain coloured room, where restriction is barred and belongs to the WORLD with its conformity.

I go now from today to when I enjoyed her company, and was enthralled by her presence. I met her at a bleak women's disco, trying to edge her way in. I was collecting money at the door, a job I volunteered for. She literally thrust a ten pound note at me. All I heard was a voice asking me if I had change. Without looking up I said, "Yeah, I've got change." She then thrust the ten pound note nearer my nose. "I can't

change that!" I exclaimed, with that she made a hasty retreat back to the bar. She asked me to 'wait', well I wasn't aware that I was going anywhere, so I stayed at the round table thinking, 'that's another woman to exit that door and never return.' She surprised me by returning and sat in a corner hoarding drinks by her side like a mouse. Boredom made me glance at her face and study it briefly. She was neither plain nor pretty and her cheeks decisively red. The country look or too much alcohol? I couldn't decide nor could I about her looks. Her black, healthy coloured hair flopped over her face. Intrigued by her a little I went over to talk to her. I wasn't on the 'make', I was just being friendly to an obvious newcomer. We didn't get many new women with definite mellow Irish accent.

She was living in Manchester. She came to the disco to see what it was like. It was her first time out since she left Ireland. Her first time to a new area, to a new disco and to an all women's disco. She asked me if there was anywhere else to go in Manchester. I told her I was going to the club next door. I invited her to come along, if she wanted to.

I had been lonely for some time and in need of some company. I needed a friend and she came to my rescue. She hadn't become my friend until she had disillusioned me with all thoughts of alluring strangers meeting for the first time.

That night was a 'mistake', a failing of inarticulate hands and too much alcohol consumed. I hoped to meet her again because up to then I felt we'd been thrown together like fried eggs in a pan. I got my wish and we came from the plain coloured room today, like total strangers.

I return to the end where I left her propping up the wall in a disco on New Year's Eve. I had looked forward to New Year's Eve and all its festive spirit,

She had changed. I couldn't get near, and what hurt more, she ceased to acknowledge I existed. She had discarded me by telling me nothing with words. But those eyes that had once shown tenderness and warmth, now showed me disgust and contempt. I wasn't the one she wanted to spend New Year's Eve with, I knew that when she had returned from a short visit to Ireland, but I tried to hide the truth by pretending she was homesick. But, knowing that I needed her company, her warmth, her friendship and support, I was feeling alone and lost with the world. This terminated our relationship. That and her apparent reluctance to phone or write.

I felt anger and bitterness and said as much in a letter I wrote to her. Though the reasons were hidden by sardonic words to save 'my face'. I've seen her once and I wanted to rush over to her and hold her.....and to say 'hello..... friend', but pride stuck in my throat. If she could hear my words now I'd like to offer only kind and tender words, and most of all friendship. The only gift I can give.

ELAINE POWELL

## Elly's Story

Elly never played with dolls when she was a child. It wasn't that she didn't like dolls; it was that she preferred live babies or children. She would spend many an hour as a child nursing the neighbours' babies or taking the children to the park. She longed for the day when she would have her own children to care for. She thought how wonderful it must be to be a mother, and how loved. A mother was always loved. That's what all the books that Elly read always said; mothers were definitely well loved.

Elly herself came from a poor home where there were eight other children, and she was right in the middle. Her mother took in washing and sewing and had very little time for loving, and poor Elly was very lonely. She was not a pretty child, and because she did not have all her school uniform the teachers looked down at her. She did have one or two friends at school, but not the type she could cuddle. So Elly spent most of her school time dreaming about the children she minded and when she could take them out at weekend.

As Elly grew older and began to have boy-friends, she thought of them in terms of fathers, and must have been so anxious to put them in that role that she frightened most of them away after a couple of meetings. But eventually there was one that stayed. He was a soldier and after a couple of years' courtship they decided to get married.

Frank was away quite a lot and Elly found them both a little flat, and gradually began to furnish it. Then she waited for Frank to come

home and provide her with the babies she always longed for.

The war ended, he came home and life became wonderful to Elly. They kissed and cuddled and made love at every opportunity. Within three months Elly realised she was to become a mother. But although Elly was delighted and could talk of nothing else, Frank wasn't as pleased as she had hoped. He didn't want extra responsibility. Frank had been a soldier for most of his adult life, he didn't have a trade, and he realised Elly would have to give up work, and her money had been very useful. A baby would need a lot of things. He began to worry about where the money was going to come from. He became depressed. Elly knew Frank didn't want the baby - well, not yet - but she was almost thirty and didn't want to wait any longer. Besides, once Frank had a son she was sure he would adore him.

It was going to be a boy. Elly could feel it in her bones. Christmas came and went, and finally with the New Year came the new baby; and it was a big, bouncing boy.

Life can be so funny. A baby of her own had been an ambition for as long as Elly could remember, but somehow it wasn't so exciting once it became a reality. There was so much work attached. Clean clothes every day, and the nappies - oh, the nappies....Somehow all the loving and cuddling she had been looking for were not there. The only time she seemed to pick up the baby was for feeding or changing. She turned back to Frank hoping to recapture that loving they had shared when he came out of the army, and it wasn't long before she found there was another baby on the way. Elly accepted it. She had wanted lots of children so she was pleased. Might as well get the baby part over quickly and then she could look forward to their growing up.

Her life went on as before, there were four



babies, one after the other. Elly enjoyed her children but they were very demanding. Not at all what she had expected. But there was always Frank. Or was there? He had never really wanted one baby but four? Elly was so busy. Time she enjoyed a sex life but she didn't seem to understand that he worked hard to keep the family, seven days a week, and he got tired. When he got home from work there was always some washing hanging around. The children were noisy, and Elly always busy. It was so easy to call in the pub for a drink on the way home. Then one drink led to another and so Frank began to spend all his evenings drinking. He would come home just in time for bed. Then he would fall asleep. Poor Elly was so confused. She thought of all the things she had expected. A loving family. An adoring husband. It was all so different. She was more lonely than ever. Was this to be her life? Washing, cooking cleaning. After all, she wasn't yet forty. Half of her life lay ahead of her. She could see it stretching out in front of her. Years and years of boredom.

Time dragged slowly by. Frank found some work that paid more money, but it meant him being away from home for weeks at a time. Elly was left at home to cook, wash, clean, look after children. Day after long boring day, and long lonely nights. Elly hadn't made friends in the neighbourhood. Most of the other girls were mothers like herself, and although they would all have a chat on the way home from taking the children to and from school Elly very rarely joined in the conversation, except for a brief yes and no. To tell the truth, she found it repetitious, like her life at home. All they ever seemed to talk about was when they made the beds, what time the baby woke in the night and what they were having for tea.

Surely there must be more to life, than this

thought Elly. She didn't go into the other girls' houses for coffee and never invited any of them into her house.

After the youngest had gone to school Elly found she had some time on her hands, so she thought about getting a little job. Although Frank was earning more money it was all getting spent and a little more money would come in handy. But the trouble was finding something to fit in with the time the children were in school and it was difficult. They had so many holidays. They seemed to be more at home than they were away. No sooner had they gone into school in the morning than it was time to pick them up again. A term would start and finish in no time. What could she do? Oh; children.. they made life so difficult. She had wanted them so much and now she had them. That great step from wanting children and getting them was such a big step. A step Elly was beginning to wish she had never taken. She had not been prepared for the way her identity was being swallowed up into the children's lives. And Frank didn't help. When he did come home for a weekend, he would spend most of the time in bed or in the pub. She tried to talk to him, to tell him how she felt, but his only solution was for her to go down the pub with him. But when she did make the effort he didn't talk to her but would join his mates playing cards or darts or snooker. Something Elly couldn't do. The other men would do the same and Elly would sit with the wives and listen to their conversation. What was wrong with her? Everybody else seemed content to go on day after day, happy to clean out their houses and tender their little gardens and chat about the price of food and clothes. Elly was the only one that was different, or so it seemed. Their lives were in a rut and they accepted it. In fact they liked it that way.

One night sitting with the wives and not

really listening to the conversation, she began to clear the glasses off the table and she took them over to the bar. The lady behind said, "There's a few more over there love.." and Elly went to another table and picked those glasses up too. She could see that the lady was busy and thought she might as well do something. There were so many tables, all with quite a lot of empty glasses on and for the next twenty minutes Elly walked from table to table collecting glasses and taking them to the bar.

"Got a new girl?" said one of the men, and Elly laughed.

"Any time she wants a job I'll take her on", was the reply.

That night Elly told Frank about what had happened. He seemed to think that it was a good idea. Somewhere to go, someone to talk to. Of course it would mean finding a baby-sitter.. Surely there would be somebody who would be willing to earn a couple of pounds just to sit in and watch the television. Funnily enough it was one of the other wives who offered to stay in for Elly.

## EMMA PETERS

*WOMANWRITE was originally known as MUM'S THE WORD! and met in Longsight. We now meet in Gorton, but welcome any women who would like to come to a daytime group, whether women with children, pensioners or unemployed women.*

## Ernest

Forty years old chronologically,  
In his mind a permanent teenager,  
Been in the army, the East,  
Knows what real work is.

He would snarl with his  
Teeth and eyes:

"A bet thah thinks arm a reynt cunt,  
Dun't tha?  
Dun't tha?"

Didn't do a thing on the ward,  
All the staff knew.

A working class caricature,  
Sacked from its last job  
Because it borrowed off people,  
Now it borrowed off the patients.  
Sex mad, a constant topic on his mind,  
Fucked one of the cleaners in a field;  
Made her bleed,  
She was off work three days.  
I'm sure she was never the same,  
It was as if she knew I knew.

Queers were sick,  
But a constant topic of interest  
And mythology.  
Wanted to fuck me,  
Give me five pounds,  
When 'e won it on the horses.  
'Is wife was terrified of 'aving another kid,  
She wanted 'im to wear summat.

Got a month's notice,  
That made 'im more paranoic  
Than ever.  
Knew there was a conspiracy  
Against 'im. He 'ad that much sense.

My last week,  
I was free.  
The ward was split into two,  
Didn't need t' see 'im ever.

'lard'e waz workin' in  
A factory with Martin.  
'Why do people like 'im come to work 'ere?'  
I asked Joe.  
"Security". He said.  
'They can't get it anywhere else.'

IAN EVERTON

*Commonword Northern Gay Group has been a year in emergence and now we are seeing some long awaited results. At the moment the group has eleven members, in Manchester, Yorkshire and Derbyshire.*

*Meetings are held fortnightly either at Commonword or the Gay Centre, (phone office for details). We aim to encompass all the north country in order to bring gay writers and their writing out of isolation. Therefore, as well as meetings, we will keep in touch by phone, letter, meeting around other writing and gay events and socially to provide a writing grapevine and sales base up north.*

*I can promise that you will hear a lot more of us in the future, we've a lot of good stuff in the bag. If you are homosexual and want to write about the gay scene, get in touch with us at the Commonword office.*

## Backwell Church

At the gravestones  
I noticed one - the saddest  
A family where each child  
Had died in turn.

First the daughters  
Within a month  
Before the age of adulthood  
Had arrived.

Then two sons  
In the years to come  
Went before their parents;  
The dates of their deaths were recorded.

By the gates  
Appeared a man bent older  
Than the church tower  
Had aged.  
He slipped past  
As we turned  
The borrowed key  
In the old west door.

From his face  
It seemed his church.  
By the light thrown on  
A tudor plaque

A knight prayed  
His lady knelt beside  
And behind them  
A row of infants.

---

Saxon bones  
Had been buried  
Beneath new boards  
In the aisle.

Carved panels  
Waited while  
A huge chandelier hung  
On its uncertain chain.

Solid bars held  
The medieval door  
By a Norman font  
Three times restored

From the graveyard  
Where the grandfather  
Of the old man  
Was resting.

He had made  
The coloured glass  
Carved in the window  
Above his grave.

He had always lived  
Near that church  
He said, going out  
Through the gates.

SARAH WARD

---

## Depression

Depression is a state of anarchy.  
There is no power. There is nothing  
Needing control, except to twiddle  
Or turn the knobs of the machine.

A microscope tuning  
An inward turning  
An amoeba blurred  
With analysis.

The particle becomes  
An ideal vision of ugliness  
Khaki green lurking in a swamp  
With the jaws of crocodiles

Lashing their indolent tails  
Staring slow eyelids  
Failing to conceal  
The laziness of their indifference.

Every word is an asp  
Eating its poisonous bite  
Into the mercuric cell  
Blurred beneath the microscope.

SARAH WARD

## Bluely from my Eyes

I look long to feel  
My own colour  
A blueness beaming

Italian skies, a child's eyes  
Locked in silence  
By the burden of apathy

Its aimless activity  
A widening hole  
In greyness.

I look longer  
A softness lingers  
Like a mother's tones

The silkiness  
Of brown curls  
Brushed into shape

Like the words I see  
Shyly emerging  
Bluely from my eyes.

SARAH WARD

## Audlem 1981

Have I been here before?  
Canal locks look the same.  
Midland salt town, village -  
Is this where I came?

So many summer holidays  
Passed on the waterways.  
Someone else walked in my shoes  
In those distant days.

Now I walk on the muddy tow-path,  
Bright glow the berries here  
And brown the canal water  
Though the sky is blue and clear.

The chugging long boats pass me  
In Autumns red and gold.  
Audlem! I do remember -  
The memories unfold

Of a time that I have lived through  
And yet as over and done  
As ancient civilisations  
Once proud beneath the sun.

Youth had aspirations,  
But middle years are kind  
And there's no going back there,  
No solutions to find.

Nostalgia! Impossible  
To describe just how I feel.

---

Audlem in the sunshine  
Is now and real.

RUTH ALLINSON



---

Home Truths

## Trains in the Night

A little child,  
I would waken to hear  
Steam trains in the night  
And start up in fear.  
Was my mother on such a train,  
Leaving me here -  
She who never left us?  
Every year, we'd leave  
(for one whole week)  
The soot-ridden town  
And travel, by rail, to the sea.

Mother still did the shopping,  
But the landlady made the tea.  
The clean sharp tang of salt sea air  
Was all trains ever brought to me.  
Cattle trucks with their human cargo,  
Crossing Europe's war-torn plains,  
Were still for a future tomorrow.  
I knew of no such trains.

So why the dread foreboding  
At that rhythmic noise  
In the dark  
For a child  
Who knew no sorrow  
And would rise  
To the song of the lark?

## Trains in the Night

The sounds of steam are silenced,  
The voices of childhood too,  
But I still remember its terrors.  
Only the trains are new.

RUTH ALLINSON

## Home Truths

## Extract from Sleep Autobiography

Wrapped in black velvet  
floating deep  
in a dark pool of sleep.  
Body still, devoid of will,  
weightless and free.  
All thoughts cease to the heart drum's peace,  
beating slow as you sink below  
the surface flow  
down the rivers of unconsciousness.

Choked in black terror,  
bat wings beat muffles running feet  
through an empty street.  
Nightmares' freak in a silent shriek,  
sweating and turning  
body burning in a chaos of fear,  
something's near.  
Heartbeat bursting, vampires thirsting,  
someone's calling  
someone's falling into a bottomless pit.  
Body's hit on blood soaked grit, and bleeding lies,  
as someone cries  
and someone's prayer for morning dies,  
smothered in a fog of dead silence.

## Sleep

Away from black madness,  
you struggle to rise, open your eyes.  
Reach for the light that can tame the night  
and banish fright.  
Listen to the sound of your breathing heaving,  
hearing the fear come rasping and gasping,  
light up a fag with fumbling fingers,  
pull in drag, the lunacy lingers.  
Calmer now, but only just,  
stay awake, you know you must.  
Afraid of the dark, afraid of sleep,  
the shadows creep  
while nightmares' pain waits again  
in the desolate plains of your aching brain,  
so you listen to the clocks' slow tic-toc,  
fag in hand while the sands  
of time run on till dawn,  
then you can turn off the light that tames the night,  
and dare to sleep once more.

CHRIS CARSON

## Home Truths

### Extract from an Autobiography

*Louise Willner was born in Manchester, but lived in the United States for many years. In this extract from her autobiography she is remembering her childhood in Failsworth, which at that time was an area combining industry with farmland.*

I loved the farm and in the following years it seemed as if I'd never been happy since I'd left it. But it was an archipelago set in a sea of trouble. Outside the gates was a council house estate and the people who lived in those houses were, for the most part, workers in the cotton mills. One of my earliest memories was of hearing them going to work in what seemed to me, the middle of the night. They wore leather clogs with iron rimmed soles which clacked on the street and pavement. In the evening they came home long after I'd had my tea, pale and tired with cotton puffs in their hair, men and women. The women often wrapped up in big black shawls. You could, if you wanted, tuck a suckling babe in one of those shawls and feed it as you did your shopping.

Then a terrible silence set in and one by one the factory chimneys stopped bellowing smoke and men sat around smoking and talking. Most of the men in those houses were veterans from WW 1 and they, I suppose, had had priority. The rents were reasonable and the houses nice. Modern red brick - sunshine houses I believe they were called,



with living rooms having large windows that opened onto the front garden and the street and in back onto the vegetable gardens. In the summer the front gardens were massed with flowers such as nasturtiums. Each room had a fireplace except the kitchen. I was not supposed to play with the neighbourhood children in case I began to eat with my mouth open but mother was not home most of the time and Dad played poker with the local men so it was fairly easy to escape.

The farm was an ideal place to play, however. All those empty buildings, numerous pigstys in a long building all brick and concrete, a chicken house I converted into a play house. It was about 9' x 9' I suppose. Stables where you could climb into a feeding trough. It was actually a pig farm but our pigs all died. We always had a few cows but gave the milk away since there was no-one to sell it to. Once we had a lot of chickens, then in a large loft Dad decided to raise angora rabbits and then another time racing pigeons. This loft was his favourite place for playing cards. He also played billiards with the neighbours at the local billiard hall. When he won he would buy me a chocolate bar. At fair time he would take me to the shooting galleries and load me down with prizes. Not only shooting but throwing balls into buckets, rings onto pegs, or coconuts at shys. He won them all so that the guys saw him coming they'd bribe him with a big prize not to play their stall. What I didn't like was going to dog races with him because when he lost he threw a fit. He would swear, blaspheme, tear his tickets up and throw them into the air. Yet often he'd say, "Americans, they don't know how to lose a game. No idea of sportsmanship at all."

Sometimes I'd run off with the kids to a park and get a spanking if mother was home when I got back. I gave away my toys to the other children. Every Christmas I would get a china doll that

mother would crochet clothes for. Either I "lost" it to a neighbouring child, or I broke it and it had to go to the doll's hospital at Lewis's downtown. Finally mother started to buy celluloid dolls for me. I also broke china tea sets. Once at Grandad's in Shropshire he bought me two sets while I was staying there and I broke both. In desperation Grandad came home from Shrewsbury with the problem solved - a set of tin dishes. They were quite a novelty; no one in our family had ever seen tin dishes before. Off I went to play with the dishes outside. I found a lovely place to play with them beside a well. I tipped the tray and the lot went down it.

D. LOUISE WILLNER

## A Day Not To Remember

Nothing exciting has happened today.  
It just went along in the same old way.  
An earthquake and a thunderclap  
(That wasn't as loud as the downstairs flat)  
Then we had a typhoon and a tidal wave  
Followed by an outbreak of bubonic plague.  
But nothing exciting, nothing profound,  
Like Liptons bringing their prices down.

BRENDA LEATHER

*Home Truths is a splinter group of Commonword, meeting once a fortnight in Stretford Library. Housewives, single parents, young and not so young women get together to share their poetry, short stories, and autobiographies.*

*While some of us write about listening to the baby screaming as the toast burns and the milk boils over while the M.C.P. (Male chauvinist pig) in our life sits with his feet up reading the papers, grumbling about the cost of his new car.... much of our work is simply about the changing world around us, childhood, war, poverty, growing old. In short anything and everything we feel we want to write about, but sharing one common bond - that is life as seen through the eyes of a woman.*

## The Moth

A moth flew over my son's head  
While I kept watch for sleep to fall.  
Cautious of his flickering lids,  
I swept it softly through the door.  
Ringed round with sleep, a safer beauty  
Held him still, arm's length away,  
Than that which raged awake throughout our  
To-ing and fro-ing of terrible days.

I dragged myself free from a share in the slumber.  
I made my coffee and took my time  
At my desk, still mindful of three fierce years  
Whispered hot through his tender limbs.  
Later, awake from the buzz of aeroplanes,  
Noises and dreams of insects in the night,  
For once I was glad to hear a patter,  
A voice call my name and an opening door.  
Sweet as warm bread, we held on to each other,  
Beneath the thin sheets and the jittering dark.  
We are not afraid of sleeping or waking  
Or the brushing of wings against our deep breath.

AILSAX COX

# Meetings

Mondays, 7.30 p.m. : COMMONWORD WORKSHOP, 61, Bloom Street, M1. Everyone welcome.

Tuesdays, 10.00 a.m. : Womanswrite meetings at Gorton Library, Gorton.

Tuesdays, 7.30 p.m. : HOME TRUTHS, women's group, at Stretford Library, every other week.

Wednesdays, 7.30 p.m. : ROCHDALE WRITERS at Balderstone Community School, Queen Victoria St., Rochdale.

Wednesdays, 7.30 p.m. : PERFORMANCE GROUP meets at Commonword, 61 Bloom Street.

Thursdays, 7.30 p.m. : NORTHERN GAY GROUP meetings at 61 Bloom Street.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

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Thanks to the North West Arts Association, Manchester Cultural Services Dept., and the Gulbenkian Foundation for their continued financial assistance.

# Commonword Books

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WRITE ON is a regular magazine published by Commonword, a working class writing and community publishing project. The stories and poems contained in it are written by working people in the Manchester area. Commonword is not a commercial publisher: we make no profit and the writers are unpaid. Our aim is to encourage writing by people who have been traditionally taught to think of literature as something best left to their 'betters'.

We hold regular workshop meetings, at which writers and would be writers get together to read and discuss their work. We publish books and booklets of this work and we organise public readings. At present we run or are in contact with six writers' groups all of which welcome new members. For details see inside the magazine or phone our office for information.

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