

Collected Poems

Tom Dylan

Presented by

My poetic Side 



About the author

Tom Dylan has been writing short stories since he was a child. These days he writes both stories and poems.

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On His Retirement

Everybody crowded round Derek's desk
on the day he was retiring
the Office Manager said 'a few words'
thanking him for his hard work over the years,
and handed him the massive card
everyone had signed.

He was presented with the silver watch,
a token for all his efforts.

His colleagues clapped and cheered
calling for him to make a speech.
Derek gushed that it had been a pleasure working here
and would never forget the friends he'd made.
He wished them all the best for the future
and said he'd keep in touch.

In the days that followed his retirement
when his old phone would ring
the telephone conversation was always the same.
I'm sorry Derek doesn't work here anymore. He has retired.
Yes, he was with the firm twenty-five years, he really will be missed.
But all too soon the replies would change.
I'm sorry, I don't know anyone who works here by that name.

In My Life

When I listen to the Beatles
I see my dad's old record player
and going through his LP collection
my seven year old self begging
Please please let me listen to the Beatles.

When I listen to the Beatles
I am a young teenager on holiday once more
in the back seat of the family car
driving rain on Welsh mountain roads
cassette tapes playing, our ticket to ride.

When my dad listens to the Beatles
his grey thinning hair once again a mop of dark curls
sharp-suited in the smoky clubs of his youth
the Sixties music is fresh, brand new and exciting
and he meets my mother for the first time on the dance-floor.

I want to be a rock & roller

I want to be a rock & roller
rocking out to classic rock tracks
cruising along on my Harley
full throttle and not looking back.

I want to be a rock & roller
clad in leather jacket and jeans
just like the great on-screen heroes,
like Brando in the Wild Ones, James Dean.

I want to be a rock & roller
it's in my nature, I was born to rebel
getting drunk with the rock musing blaring
rocking out, living fast, raising hell.

I want to be a rock & roller
and keep rocking till the day that I die,
but I work nine-to-five at the office
at my desk wearing this shirt and tie.

The Other Dog

The other dog
darts across the field
before leaping high into the air
to catch the thrown Frizbee
in its mouth.
My dog looks up from sniffing
a particularly interesting
blade of grass
and gives me a look
as if to say
nobody likes a show-off.

Next week I'm gonna write a poem

Next week I'm gonna write a poem
that will blow the reader away
there will be wonderful word-play
and astounding alliteration.

Next week I'm gonna write a poem
that will reduce readers to tears
that will make them belly-laugh
at the dry wit and humour.

Next week I'm gonna write a poem
that blends the nostalgia of childhood holidays
and the hopes and dreams for the future
that we all share.

Next week I'm gonna write a poem
that will wander lonely as a cloud
and compare thee to a summer's day,
if you can keep your head.

Next week I'm gonna write a poem,
actually, I'm rather busy for the next week or so.
If I don't get round to writing it next week,
I'll hopefully do it the week after.

An Irish Family Funeral

On the day of the funeral rain the fell from gloomy skies
cousins and family friends we hadn't seen for years
made their way over, descending on our town,
some arriving by ferry, others catching early-morning flights.

After the church, our eyes still red with sadness,
we headed to the pub where the wake would be held.
We spoke of our loss and what she had meant to each of us.
Sharing our memories both funny and sad.

Raising a glass of whiskey, *a drop of the pure*,
Somebody pulled out their phone, let's get a photo.
We all joined in the scrum, hugging, arms linked,
sad smiles for the camera. Click. Click. Click.

The Irish music started playing, the whiskey flowed still,
we sang *The Auld Triangle* at the tops of our voices,
and told stories of the past, tall tales and family legend.
We spoke of here and now, our lives, family, work.

The whiskey kept streaming, my voice becoming slurred,
speaking to a relation about books, art and film.
Then it was time to leave, saying good-bye, keep in touch.
The exchange of phone numbers and updated addresses.

The next day my head hurt and the bedroom waltzed around me.
Snap-shorts of the day poured back in double-measures.
My singing, the bad jokes I told where nobody laughed,
Breaking my heart in the church, then drunk at the wake.

I called my mother, letting her know I'd survived.
Asking if I had disgraced myself with the Irish relatives.
She replied saying that the family had already been in touch,

and that my name had been *mentioned in despatches*.

From getting emotional at the service, to slurring, singing drunk,
talking broken biscuits, of how writing was my art.

How had that gone down? What had they made of all that?

They say, she replied, that you have a good heart.

The Poetry Champion

I want to be the poetry champion of the world
winning all my bouts by way of knock-out.

I want to be a second Dan black-belt in poetry
with stanzas that can break wooden boards.

I want my poetry to win the Super Bowl, the World Series
and World Cup, scoring touch-downs, home-runs and hat-tricks.

I want my poetry to climb the highest peaks of Mount Everest
and then sail around the world single-handedly.

Actually, I'd be happy if I managed to write a poem every now and then
and if anyone actually read it.

When Dad Jokes

When his dad tells the same joke
for the hundredth time,
he groans, wishing he wouldn't.
So embarrassing, heard them all before
and not very funny the first time.

When he brings his new girlfriend home
his dad reels off his naff jokes
revelling in the new audience,
he apologises to his girl.
I think he's funny, she says.

His dad jokes about the hospital and the doctors
You have to laugh, don't you?
He calls it gallows humour
but for his son it's another bad dad-joke
and in awfully bad taste.

After the funeral service
he raises a glass of whiskey
realising that he would give anything
to hear one of his dad's jokes one more time.
And I'll laugh this time, he says, I promise.

The Hospital Visit

We drink vending machine tea
while our hearts shatter
silently into a thousand tiny pieces
we discuss football and the weather
when all we really want to say is
how much we love you.

Night Terrors

You were shouting out in your sleep
again last night, he says,
another night terror.
What were you dreaming about? He asks.
She says she can't remember
but she recalls every horrific moment of
the nightmare
of losing him.

Modern Day Hero

When I was seven years old
I wanted to be the Batman
all caped and crusading around Gotham,
the mysterious hero in the Dark Knight.

When I was seventeen years old
I wanted to be John Lennon
round glasses and army-shirt cool
protest singing about peace and love.

These days I find it's a daily struggle,
when everyone wants you to be just like them,
to be and to remain, and to stay,
true to the person I am.

My Dad Has Never Told Me

My dad has never told me he loves me
but he used to help me with my maths home-work
and used to play football with me on the park.

My dad has never told me he loves me
but when I ask for a minute of his time to help
he gives me an hour, a whole afternoon.

My dad has never told me he loves me
but that time I had car-trouble the week before pay-day
he silently handed me a cheque.

My dad has never told me he loves me
but he's the only one who has read all my stories
marking and scoring them in blue ink.

My dad has never told me he loves me
but the more I think about it as I get older
he's telling me all the time.

Ask a writer

Any ideas? My wife asks.

A poem with the title *I almost wrote a poem today*,

I reply. A story about a guy who gets out of prison
and wants to go straight. A story that has a Film Noir
vibe. A poem about growing up and not quite
fitting in.

I meant, she says, about what we could get your parents
for Christmas.

Christmas Marketing

The television advertisements show Christmas
as this wonderfully perfect time of the year
where large families all get on splendidly
and smile lovingly at each other.

The turkey is the size of a Rottweiler hound,
fully cooked and all juicy and gold,
everyone receives the perfect gift,
wrapped in red ribbons and bows.

The whole family joins in the board-games
and carol singers perch on the door-step
Christmas puddings and log fires burn
and stockings hang over the fire-place.

Has anyone ever had a Christmas like that,
like the ones the television adverts sell?
They heap on the stress and pile on the pressure
in the run-up to the big day itself.

Christmas in real-life is not perfection,
things don't always go as we plan
and the image of the snow isn't right either,
it tends to rain more than snow around here.

I wish you a perfectly imperfect Christmas
where things may not always run smooth,
the turkey may be burnt to a crisp
and the singing isn't always in tune.

Sh*tty Butty Night

(Note: Butty is Northern English slang for a sandwich, and tea is what we call our evening meal.)

When we were kids on those hot summer afternoons
when nobody feels like cooking
and the house itself is like an oven
we headed inside for tea.

My mother told by brother, my sister and I
that it would be a put-you-up kind of tea.
When we asked what that meant, she told us,
bits of everything, this and that.

We came to the dinner table that evening
and stared at the cold food piled high,
pork pies, sausage rolls, pickles and meats,
flavoured crisps, and crusty cob bread rolls.

We tutted and huffed our disappointment
at the lack of hot, home-cooked food on offer
and half-heartedly picked at the trimmings
barely hiding our disgust.

Get stuck in, you lot, it's a good spread, all this,
insisted my father, piling his plate with cheese and crackers.
Sh*tty butty night, is what this is, I whispered
to my sniggering siblings.

A week or so later, my parents dished up the same.
Sh*tty butty night again, my brother said with a nudge,
as we reluctantly grabbed our plates,
feeling malnourished, under-fed and hard-done to.

These days, many years later, when I have nothing in for tea,

there's nothing I like more than bits of everything,
a put-you-up wonderful feast of food,
just don't call it sh*tty booty night.

Written With The Ashes

On a recent day when life was really tough going,
and I found myself at an awful low
I reached for the book not the bottle,
for the thin of poetry.

The words, the lines and the stanzas
seemed to speak directly to me.
Could poetry once again be the answer?
To read and to write in verse form?

I had dabbled and experimented a few years back,
before putting those books back on the shelf,
declaring that it's not for me, all this,
and stopped reading and writing poetry.

And yet here I was flicking through the pages,
the very words touching my soul,
like an ancient magic spell,
I was hooked, I was in, I was back.

I had stayed away for over five years,
refusing to acknowledge or engage
with the poetic side of my nature,
distracting and distancing myself.

But now here I am, drenched in words
once again, it feels like I'm moving back home,
the instrument feels familiar in my hands,
its music bringing tears to my eyes.

I am not calling this a come-back,
I want to draw a line and start anew,
I am not getting hung up on my previous attempts,

now fully focused on the future, not looking back.

No, this is not a poetry come-back,
this is a fresh start, a new beginning,
a clean, blank page, starting at this very moment,
going forward and moving on.

I am going to gather up all my old poems,
and build a bonfire of the pages and set them alight,
and compose brand new verses,
written with the ashes.

Poetry Analysis

The poem is dragged into the interview room
in hand-cuffs.

The officer points to the chair
ordering the poem to take a seat.

What have you got to say for yourself?
The cop asks the poem.
The poem replies,
you have my statement.
It's all in there.

The officer dons a pair of reading glasses,
and reads out a line.
What is the significance of colour?
Does green mean youth? Innocence?
The poem shrugs.
You tell me. It could mean everything,
it could mean nothing.

I want you to tell us
what this all means.
It's about death isn't it?
It's always about death
with you lot, the officer says.

You are going to have to co-operate,
you know? The cop insists.
The poem smiles and repeats
the opening line of the statement.
Tell me what that means, says the cop.

Can you not just enjoy beauty
for what it is, for how it makes you feel?

The poem says.

When you watch the sunrise,
you don't ask why the sky is blue.

A verse can be wonderful
and make you feel things,
you don't need to scrutinise
every little detail.

The officer sighs and gathers up
the stack of papers on the desk,
before removing the hand-cuffs
from the poem's wrists.

Okay, the officer says,
you are free to go.

The poem stands on shaky legs,
rubbing its sore wrists,
and staggers from the room,
a weaker poem than when it walked in.

Lost for Words

To speak or not to speak, that is the question.
Well, it's too late now, I've put my name down.
I sit at home trying to come up with something,
trying to find just the right words.
Margaret Atwood once said:
a word after a word, after a word
is power.
But what if my words need recharging?

I wander lonely as
the first time poet up on stage,
wanting this to be perfect,
to have all the wonder of a Dylan Thomas childhood,
to dig with my pen like Seamus Heaney.

My dad gave me words of advice,
write something witty,
write something edgy,
write something dark.
You're from Salford, son, he said,
just like John Cooper Clarke.

It's only words, as the song says,
but words are everything,
words are life.
Words *count*.

From will you marry me?
and congratulations it's a girl,
to my letter of resignation
and I'm sorry for your loss.

I work on these words
late into the night

writing these pages,
telling myself over and over,
that I *can* do this,
that I've been writing stories for years,
and that poems are simply,
the other side of the same coin.

Dead Day at the Office

In between Christmas and New Year
the office is open for what
management assure the staff
is a normal working day.

Those who have not saved
enough holidays, or have to come in
to cover for those who have booked
Christmas off first,
trudge into the office, feeling as festive
as a broken clock.

The clock on the wall seems stuck
at ten to eleven
and we're all here until
four.

Drinking cups of tea,
checking empty email inboxes
for new messages and to answer
telephones that are not ringing.

All office conversation and small-talk
has been exhausted.

We all know who has had a good
Christmas, who got roaring drunk
on Boxing Day, who had a cold
all over the holidays,
who burnt the turkey.

Nothing to do and
nothing to say and
four hours left of our shift.

The rest of the world will not return

to normal until next week.

But we are here.

But we are here.

Born 2nd Jan.

He would have been a hundred years old today.
my grandfather, the one they named me after,
the man who I played with as a child,
playing rough, the way that only grandad's do,
who made me the wooden cricket set,
who would fill our glasses with ice-cream and lemonade,
and white paper-bags crammed with sweets.
They say he filled a door-frame with his stature,
and that's where I get my height from.
I will raise a glass for him tonight.
2nd Jan 2024.

Making My Debut

I was making my debut
last time I was here.
My brave resolution
the first week of the year.

Like that sixteen year old lad
who was smashing the darts,
could I stand on that stage,
and speak from the heart?

Clutching my poems so tight
in these trembling hands,
really wanting to be the poet,
and live up to my plans.

My eyes fixed on the paper,
I couldn't look out at the faces,
but I think it went well,
they laughed in all the right places.

Now I've read out my poems,
does that make me a Bard?
They call it Speak Easy,
but, man, that sh*t is hard.

A Good Summer

We had a good summer
spending time in the countryside
looking out over the lush green fields and trees,
sitting out in the sunshine, sipping wine and reading.

We had a good summer
catching up with friends and family
hosting lavish garden barbecues
burnt burgers and sausages, tinned lager and laughter.

We had a good summer
so good that you could almost forget,
forget about the diagnosis,
the treatment, the hospital and the doctors
and the twelve months you were given.

We watched with horror and sadness
as the leaves turned yellow, falling from the trees,
falling like tears and breaking our hearts
as our good summer, the best one ever,
and our last, was drawing to a close.

A Remembrance Promise

I promise not to remember
the diagnosis, the doctors.
I will remember summer barbecues
and caravan weekends.

I promise not to remember
the agony, and getting affairs in order.
I will remember Boxing Day parties
wine and signing ABBA.

I promise not to remember
the oxygen, morphine and tubes.
I will remember the tapas and the fine dining,
and one more round of drinks.

I will remember.
I promise.

Reality TV

I was in the office canteen the other morning,
chatting to a colleague while making a cup of tea.
Did you see that reality TV show last night? I asked.
No, she said, what was it about?
Well, there's all these people in this big house,
some are traitors and some are loyal,
and they don't know who the traitors are,
who is not quite what they seem,
who they can trust,
who will stab them in the back.
Actually, I said,
it's a lot like work.

Don't be like me, she says.

He goes around to see his grandmother,
for his weekly after-school visit.
She offers him a cup of tea
and they settle down at the table.

How's things? she asks.
Yeah, okay, I suppose, he shrugs.
As they sip their mugs of tea they chat
and put the world to rights.

She mentions a new art exhibition
at the Lowry gallery next month.
We should go during half-term.
That sounds like a plan.

Are you okay, love? she asks.
You don't seem yourself today.
He explains about the school restructure,
how he doesn't fit in with his new class-mates.

Don't be like me, she says.
Stop worrying about what people think,
stop worrying and do what pleases you.
Don't be like me, she says again.

He says nothing, merely nods in agreement.
It's only when he's alone on the bus home,
that the words start to flow,
what he should have said, the reply that didn't come.

Don't be like me, she says.
But he *is* like her, he has her interest
in history, in art, in literature,

in museums, in writing and language.

She taught him about the Second World War,
about Shakespeare and Charles Dickens,
she has taught him more than any teacher,
in any class-room, ever could.

Don't be like me, she says.

As the bus nears his stop, he shakes his head.
Way too late for that, he says aloud,
and I wouldn't change a thing.

On a clear night like this

On a clear night like this

The moon is glorious and white
in the sky
the stars shine and sparkle
above the Tesco Extra
and the kebab shop
the milky white moon-glow
reflecting on the shutters
of the bookies
on the corner.

Dear Reader

A lot of writers have
the one,
this one reader,
the one they are writing for.

Some write for their wives,
passing them crumpled pages,
others for their closest friends,
reading their work aloud.

For me it has always been
my father, my dad.
He's read every single story,
and marked each one
with a school-teacher precision.

He's always on hand
for writing support and advice,
over a glass of whiskey,
and to insist that this one
particular story
didn't quite make sense.

Don't ask me, I reply,
I don't know what it means.
I just wrote the thing.

If he says my story is *good*,
that is high-praise indeed,
a glowing five-star review,
and that it has
a beginning, a middle
and end.

My one man reading panel,
what would he say if he
ever read this poem?
He would look at me
over his reading glasses,
a wry smile on his face,
and insist that
one man
should have a hyphen.

To A Lesser Degree

I never went to university
I do not have a degree,
I would have loved to study
literature, history and art.

Without a clear idea
of direction or occupation
I drifted into the shackles
of the office nine-to-five.

When I hear people talk of campus,
degrees and graduations,
I feel a deep yearning
for the student years I missed.

I never attended freshers' week
never stayed in student halls,
never wore the cap and gown,
in a graduation family photo.

Had I gone away to university
I would have got it out of my system,
scratching that academic itch
and obtaining my degree.

But the fascination lingers still,
for learning, literature and poetry
for history, for language,
and lectures I never attended.

These days I can't help thinking,
had I gone to university
I would have spent three years in study

instead of a life-time.

The Poet's Birthdate

The great Robbie Burns
the ploughman poet himself
was born on 25th January,
every year I raise a wee dram
of Scottish whisky.

Another of my poetry heroes
and the reason I got into poetry,
the Bard of Salford,
Dr John Cooper Clarke
was also born 25th January.

If you think that is an
astonishing coincidence,
wait until I tell you, that, I myself,
this aspiring poet, was born
about three months later.

With Phone in Hand

I was in the city centre the other day
when a woman walking towards me,
mobile phone in hand,
eyes glued to the screen,
scrolling and walking,
walked right into me,
bumped straight into me.

She looked up from her phone
stared at me, like I was in the wrong,
for getting in her way,
for blocking her pavement,
she then side-stepped around me,
eyes back on her phone,
and stropped off down the street.

Shocking, I said, out-loud,
looking around for some support,
for someone to have seen
the incident, to agree and roll their eyes
at the rudeness of some people.
Instead all I saw was people
head bowed, staring at their
mobile phones,
walking and scrolling.

I decided to get away
for an hour or two,
away from the city,
out into the country,
to the green Lancashire hills.

I walked and climbed,

hiked and trekked,
before finally,
breathing hard,
I reached the summit.

In front of me stretched
the wonder of the Lancashire countryside.
On the wooden hill-top bench
a young man was sitting,
mobile phone in hand,
busily tapping away,
oblivious to the rolling green splendour
all around us.

What are you doing on your phone?
What could be so utterly fascinating?
Why aren't you inspired by all this?
I ranted, waving a hand at the scenery.
He looked up and spoke with a smile.
I'm actually writing a poem about it.

A Burns Night Poem

On the twenty-fifth of January,
this magical night of the year,
celebrating all things Scottish
and the Caledonian ploughman poet.

We toast the great Robbie Burns,
raising a glass of fine single malt,
reciting the Address to a Haggis,
O what a glorious sight.

When I look out my window this evening
the Lancashire hills are transformed
becoming the Scottish Highlands
of my distant descendants.

I can hear the bagpipe tunes playing
ringing down through the generations,
calling out to me in whisper and in song,
speaking to my Highland heart.

I'm Closing The Books

I'm closing the books,
keeping the covers shut tight,
recently I've been
tearing out the pages
handing them out
to passers-by.

I'm closing the books,
rather than letting people
leaf through this thin
dog-eared, yellow-page volume
and criticise the character,
the plot and the story.

I'm closing the books,
from now on there will be
only the black and white author photo,
and the blurb on the
back-cover to reveal
a brief summary
of the contents.

A Mantra of Life & Death

The brochure for the retreat
promised to give us
peace of mind and tranquility.
I was shown down to the main hall
and instructed to sit cross-legged
on the carpet.

You need to repeat a mantra, the guru said.
A word or phrase, to repeat to yourself,
for relaxation and to focus your mind.
There are lots of ancient words in Sanskrit
I will give you your own mantra.

I explained that I would prefer a term
I could comprehend, that I understood,
rather than repeat something
I didn't know the meaning of.
I'll give you until the end of the day,
my guru said,
if you don't have a mantra
by the morning,
I will give you a word to chant.

In the small bedroom chamber
that night,
on the hard single bed
I lay in the dark
and thought it over.

Names and phrases went around
and around in my mind,
lines from poems,
bits of film dialogue,

trying to find the perfect
word or phrase to
use as my mantra.
And then I found it.

I repeated the words to myself.
Yes, it was perfect.
It spoke to me of relaxation,
of calm, of unwinding,
of switching off,
and zoning out.
Just perfect.

The following morning,
my guru found me in the retreat
kitchen, where I was eating
my muesli and sipping green tea.
Good morning,
he said with a smile,
do you have your mantra?
Oh yes, I grinned.
And what have you decided on?

Strawberry Fields Forever.
I declared.
For a moment he said nothing,
closing his eyes and
trying my 60's psychedelic mantra
out for size.
Then he opened his eyes
and nodded.
Perfect, he said.

A Lesson Learned

I signed up for an online writing course
forking out a fair amount of money.
On the morning it was due to start,
I clicked on the link, excited,
feeling like a kid on the first day of term.

I joined the video chat,
with the tutor taking the course.
I was raring to go, eager to get started,
to learn, to write, to develop,
to hone the craft of writing.

We were told to spend an hour
writing in our notepads.
After that came a twenty minute break
before another hour of writing on our own,
and finally ending with ten minutes
meditating, collecting our thoughts.

The only thought I was left with
was how the course was
a complete waste of money.

One of the Lads

He wants to be one of the lads
and although football bores him to tears
he watches all the live games on TV
so he can join in the talk with his friends.

He hates the taste of lager
but he downs pint after fizzy pint,
enviously eyeing the old man in the flat cap
as he sips his pint of real ale.

He listens to loud lairy rock music
with all its swagger and machismo
but classical music speaks to him
in ways he can't explain.

He refers to his local Indian restaurant
as the curry-house and always orders
the hottest dish on the menu
even though he'll suffer the next day.

He wants to be one of the lads,
he ticks the boxes and wears all the brands
but inside there's a hollow emptiness
he finds it best not to dwell on.

Poetry Competition

Sometimes when I read
a poem that truly takes my breath away,
I wonder why I even try when
I will never compose
anything of such magnitude.

And then I remind myself,
I play the guitar,
happily strumming chords,
my foot tapping away,
without comparing my playing
to Clapton, Harrison and Hendrix.

I read best-selling novels,
with earth-shattering plot twists,
and yet will happily while away
an afternoon writing
random short stories
that I myself don't understand.

I lace up my battered trainers,
and go out for a half-hour jog
without stressing over
my chances of completing
a marathon or 10K.

I tell myself that I should
adpot this attitude about
the verse I try and compose,
to just relax and go with it,
but I can't help wearing
my art on my sleeve.

Monday morning office...

Grey skies, cold and bleak,
white shirts and dark trousers
under harsh fluorescent lights
and the pale glare of computer screens.

Across the open-plan office,
the photo-copier has a paper jam,
the grey machine giving up
refusing to take it anymore.

Trudge to the kitchen for a cup of tea,
heaped spoonfuls of sugar
and splash of milk,
tired colleagues needing their caffeine shot.

Good weekend?

Yeah, you?

Yeah.

Back to the desk and the drudgery
wishing it was weekend
just hoping to make it to lunch-time.

Initially Speaking

I've decided to add my middle initial
as people call me by that name too,
I find myself answering to both,
forgetting who is who.

They call me by my middle name,
I forget how it all began,
I try not to let it bother me,
I'm still who I am.

I tell them to call me Tom
but people never change,
they keep on calling me C
but what's in a name?

It's a little known fact that
Paul McCartney's first name is James
but whether he's called Jim or Paul
the music's still the same.

I'm adding my middle initial
so it will feel like the real me.
I hope my friends on this website
don't get lost at C.

Tom C Dylan.

The Clear-Out

The skip I'd hired arrived
early on the Saturday morning
dirty yellow and rusty,
dressed in scruffy jeans
and a faded t-shirt
I set about filling the skip.

In went the old TV set,
bashed up suit-cases,
decades' worth of junk
from the loft,
instruments that I couldn't recall
buying let alone playing.

I gathered all the rubbish
from the garden, broken spades,
brushes and deck-chairs,
swept up all the fallen leaves
I'd been kicking through for months.

There was something so therapeutic
about the process, this spring clean,
a clean slate. This clear-out
would do me so much good.

They took the fully-loaded skip away,
I gave the driver a ten pound tip,
the least I could do,
and waved the skip off
down the street,
as though it was a ship
going off to sea.

I went back inside smiling,
satisfied at a job well-done,
looking around my
newly clutter-free home.
It felt like a new house.
It was perfect.

My hard-work complete it was
time for a nice cup of tea
and to work on my latest poem.

The smile faded from my face
as I noticed the nice, clean
tidy empty space
where my poetry book
had been.

I swore and cursed and fumed,
raged around my lovely empty room.
Spic and span suddenly feeling
like a chain, a noose around
my neck.

All my notes and jotting and ideas
were on their way to the junk-yard.
Months and years of scribblings
and half-thoughts, that would
one day be turned into poems
and stories,
sent away with the trash.

What on earth would I write about now?
Would I even be able to write?
My muse had been packed up
and thrown away.
It felt like I'd gathered up

my lover's belongings
in bin bags and dumped them
out on the street.

I grabbed a pen and paper,
needing to write something
anything, craving the process,
the feel of the words forming
sentences and lines on the page.
And so I began.

*The skip I'd hired arrived
early on the Saturday morning
dirty yellow and rusty,*

Spread Too Thin

I spread myself too thin
I don't know how it happens but it does.
I have too many interests
and seem to be adding
more all the time.
I go from writing stories and poems
to films and TV series,
to Karate and Martial Arts,
and then there's the American sports,
I've been into the NFL since I was a kid,
and there's the baseball all summer too.
Can a person have too many interests?
Maybe I should drop some of my hobbies,
maybe I should leave the NFL and focus on
my writing for a while.
But then I remember its Super Bowl
weekend and my 49ers are playing.
Maybe I'll keep going but I just worry
that if I keep with all these interests,
even the poem I'm currently
working on will not be
fin

Prophets and Losses

Prophets and Losses

I decided to take a year for my writing,
and went to the bank
to ask for a loan.
If I didn't have the stress of work
I could devote myself to my writing.

I hoped that by the end of the twelve months
I would have something I could publish,
a novel, a collection of short stories.
enough poems for a volume.

I was shown through to the bank manager's office
and told to take a seat.
As he glared at me, I detailed my plan,
for pouring my soul into my writing
to get it all down and out of my system
and then to attempt publishing.

What's your estimated turn-over for year one?
He asked, peering at me over his glasses.
About two hundred and fifty. I replied, proudly.
Is that pounds or Dollars?
Pages. I said.

No, you're misunderstanding. What's your margin? he asked.
It's a narrow column that runs down the side of the page.
I said.

It was at that point I was thrown out of the bank.

Monday, I can't do this

The five days of the working week
stretch ahead in front of me
like twenty-six marathon miles
and my ankle is broken.

I feel your hands around my neck,
Monday, choking and squeezing,
I can't breathe and am
losing consciousness.

Our relationship is toxic, Monday.
Your demands are impossible
and you're becoming a bore.
Monday, you are a bully.

I'm done with you, Monday.
I quit, I'm out, we're through.
I've had all I can take from you.
See you next week.

I'm that kind of tired

I'm that kind of tired
that would transform even
the fondest birthday wishes
into the most offensive
insult imaginable.

My whole jaw hurts like
a shooting tooth-ache,
my limbs are heavy,
my zombie feet drag
along behind me.

Tiredness turns the
afternoon office into
a black and white film,
a European movie,
in a language
I don't understand.

It feels like I'm drowning
in a sea of exhaustion,
a yawn brings tears to my eyes,
and if I closed them
I'd be snoring within seconds.

I check the clock.
hoping its nearly home-time.
Three o'clock. After what
feels like an hour,
I check again.
Five past three.

For My Teachers

This is a poem for my teachers,
the people who almost
knocked my love of literature
out of me with a
black-board duster

Who were bigger bullies
than any of my class-mates,
who would always report
that I *could do better*,
even though I was trying
my absolute best.

This poem is for those teachers
who thought it more important
that we walk in the right direction
down the correct corridor
than what we actually learned in class.

This poem is for the teacher
who spent most of the lessons
drunk, taking hits of whiskey
in the stock-cupboard,
before teaching us last year's
syllabus by mistake.

The teachers may have ruined
Charles Dickens for me,
by throwing the book at us
and telling the class to have it
read by the end of the week,

But Shakespeare and stories

and poems, they are still mine.
My brother still cannot hear
Seamus Heaney without having
flash-backs to horror days at
high school.

This poem is for my old head-master
who on our last ever assembly, as we were
about to venture out into the adult world,
still addressed us as *boys and girls*,
and without a shred of sentiment.

Today I read books and poems,
and attempt stories and poetry
of my own, and all this is
in spite of, not because of
my teachers.
I might actually write about it
one of these days.

It's Not Cool. It's Rude.

I text you but you don't text back,
I make you a brew, you don't say thanks,
I say good morning, you just look blank.
It's not cool, it's rude.

You drive like you're in a race,
can't keep that look of disdain
from your face,
when it comes to dating, you don't chase.
It's not cool, it's rude.

You ask a question and ignore my replies,
when I talk you roll your eyes,
you'd ruin your best friend's
birthday surprise.
It's not cool, it's rude.

On the times when you did not respond
I felt like I'd done something wrong,
now I see I was right all along.
It's not me, it's you.

On Meeting the Poet Laureate

I once met the Poet Laureate,
attending the reading in a
city-centre library.

The inspirational figure
recited verse that moved
myself and the entire audience
to tears.

The poems he delivered
cast a spell over everyone
in the large room.

He seemed to capture
the beautiful ugliness
of life itself in words.

At the end of the recital
I joined the line of people
queuing to meet the
great man and to express
how much the poet
and his words meant to them.

I don't know if he was having a bad day.
or was feeling under the weather,
or had signed too many books that afternoon
but when I said I'd really enjoyed the reading
and loved his work,
he told me to f*ck off.

Making A Night of It

Come and help us celebrate
our ten year anniversary,
the flyer declared.

The Indian restaurant over the road
was celebrating
a decade in business.

We decided to go along,
and show our support,
hoping for a great evening.
The flyer promised
traditional music,
drums and dancing.

As the waiter showed us
to our table for two
he explained that the
dancers had phoned in sick.
No worries, I laughed,
we're here for the food anyway.
The waiter said somebody
would be over shortly
to take our drinks order.

It was then that we took in the chaos
going on all around us.
The hostile atmosphere in the
busy restaurant resembled the
scenes of picket-lines
you see on the news.

Angry customers storm
to the bar, waving their

hands in frustration
saying they've been sitting
at their table for an hour
and nobody had been
near to take their drinks order.
The waiter behind the bar
dishes out an apology
like it's the house special.

Waiters arguing and snapping
at each other, running around,
collecting glasses,
taking orders,
dishing out
poppadums, chutneys
and apologies.

The family on the next table
have been waiting ages for their food,
all hungry eyes and rumbling stomachs.
They watch the waiters as they pass,
expectantly, the same way you hope
that slowing car is your late-night taxi-cab.

Finally the waiter approaches
with a tray laden with hot food.
Who ordered the Rogan Josh?
the waiter asks, lifting a silver dish.
The group look at each other and shrug.
Nobody has. They groan and tutt.
The waiter says he'll check,
and retreats, taking the food tray with him.
The family starts to drool,
like Labradors wanting wafer-thin ham
and crank their annoyance and protests
up a notch.

A stressed-looking waiter
finally approaches our table,
pad and paper in hand.
What would you like?
he asks, pen hovering over the page.
Actually, my wife says,
I would like to go somewhere else.

The Man in the White Coat

I went down to the chemist
to see about getting some cream
for a rash on my arm.
I joined the queue of people
and finally reached the front.

The pharmacist leaned over the counter
and asked what he could do for me.
I pulled up the sleeve of my anorak
and showed him my rash.
You should go and see your doctor, he said.
I rang them and they said to come here. I said.
Go back to them and tell them I sent you, he insisted.
But they were quite adamant I come here,
I explained.

I know what I'm talking about,
the chemist said,
I'm the one in the white coat.
I raised the sleeve of the anorak
I was wearing, also white.
I'm wearing a white coat too, I said.
My coat suggests I study pharmacology,
he said, while yours suggests
that it might rain later.

Out of Earshot

I would always wear earphones
when I'm walking,
listening to the radio
and my music,
while making my way
along the street.

The chatter of the DJ's
and the radio tunes
becoming my soundtrack,
I'd feel like I was
starring in the
opening scenes
of my very own movie.

I used to joke that my
legs wouldn't work
without my earphones.
But with my music
I could walk for miles.

I would put my earphones in
and set off, my feet beating
the pavement in time
to the music,
clicking my fingers,
as I briskly walked along.

One day, as I set off on a walk,
marching along.
I reached into my pocket
for my earphones.
I swore under my breath.

My pocket was empty.
I'd forgotten them.

I could have gone back home
but I knew that if I did
then the pull of the sofa
would be too strong
and my intentions of
a walk would go out the window.

Fuming and annoyed,
I stropped down the street,
in angry stomps,
cursing my forgetfulness.
I debated how far I should go,
on this tune-less silent stroll.
Maybe half-way, three-quarters,
before turning back.
In future I would keep my earphones
in my coat pocket.

My anger subsided as I went on,
and I started noticing the sounds
all around me.
A couple walking by, sharing a joke,
laughing at the punchline,
a helicopter thrumming overhead.
a dog barking at it's owner to throw the ball,
ice-cream van chimes ringing out
from a near-by street,
a man across the road,
wearing shorts despite the cold,
whistling to himself as he walked.

These days when I go for a walk
I leave my earphones behind,

my wonderful soundtrack is
the world around me
and all that's in it.

Of Irish Descent

She goes into the Irish bar
and orders a pint of Guinness,
and a double whiskey,
Irish of course.
She turns to the man next to her,
who is leaning on the bar,
drinking a pint of lager.
Slainte, she says raising her glass.
Cheers, the man replies.
I'm actually of Irish descent,
she says proudly,
my grandparents were from County Mayo.
He nods and smiles politely.
Are you of Irish descent?
No, he says.
I am so very proud of my Irish heritage.
It really is something special,
to be connected to Ireland.
I haven't missed a Saint Patrick's Day
parade in years. Did you go this year?
No, he says.
Where are you from yourself? she asks.
I was born in Dublin, he says.

Of course I am

Are you coming with me
to the appointment?
she asks.

As if I'd leave her
to go on her own.
I squeeze her hand.
Of course I am.

Am I worried about her
how she's feeling
about everything
how she's sleeping?
Of course I am.

What about you?
she says,
turning to face me.
Are you okay?
I give her my most
optimistic and
upbeat smile,
and tell the biggest lie.
Of course I am.

The Waiting

It's the waiting that gets you,
while you swim like crazy,
thrashing and kicking,
for the relief of the air
at the water's surface,
the waiting is the hand
that grabs your ankle
pulling you back down.

the waiting, while
you can see your life
veering ahead in two
very different directions,
the path to two futures,
the new job and that promotion,
house sale going through,
the doctor's appointment.

The week stretches ahead
as soulless and lost
as a rainy Sunday afternoon.
It's the waiting
the not knowing
the agony
the ache
the knot in your stomach
the voice that whispers in the night,
what if?
what if?

World Poetry Day

Here's to World Poetry Day
when words count
and stanzas stand tall,
dressed up and showing off
playing up to the flash of the cameras
like film stars
at an awards ceremony.

Let's raise a glass,
beer, whiskey,
or a nice mug of tea,
to the words
that touch our souls,
that speak to
that small space
in each of us.

and says
I undertsand,
I hear you,
you are not alone,
there are others
that feel the same.

Tomorrow poetry
will be tired and hung-over
craving junk-food
and regretting that
argument with a
haiku.

The Surprise Gifts

On my birthday this year
my family call over,
each one bearing gifts
and gushing with birthday wishes.

I am handed the gifts in turn,
all beautifully wrapped,
tagged and bowed.
I accept the offered presents
with a *you really shouldn't have* look.

My uncle buys me a bottle
of fancy American liquor,
I nod and thank him,
feigning delight,
while thinking,
I prefer Scottish and Irish whiskey,
and am not a fan of Kentucky bourbon.

My sister buys me a CD by the Who,
she's bought me their albums several times
over the years, it's become as much
a tradition as getting socks for Christmas.
I don't recall ever telling her
I like the band.

I force a polite smile on my face
and enthuse about
how each gift is just perfect
how *I love it*.
How did you know?
I ask, while thinking,
do you not know

me at all?

When the family have left
and I have washed out
the mugs and glasses,
I turn to the random pile
of presents.

I pour out a measure of
the American bourbon
and put the CD in the player.
As the rock band kick in
I sniff the liquor with suspicion.

The Who album
turns out to be a classic
live LP of the band in their prime.
I sip the bourbon warily
and as it wonderfully burns my throat,
I can't help thinking,
how have I never tried this before?

When my family were leaving
the gifts had seemed
perfect presents
for somebody else,
it was only afterwards
that it dawned on me,
they know me better
than I know myself.

The Line

I don't feel great right now
like I'm all lost at sea
I need to take some time,
some time just for me.

These seas are so rocky
it feels like my ship is sinking,
my head hurts from lack of sleep,
I wish I could stop thinking.

I throw myself overboard
and swim for the beach,
tossed around by the swell
the shore looks so far out of reach.

Exhausted and drained
I crawl out from the sea
soaked to the skin,
but feeling more like me.

Bare-foot in the rain,
drawing the line in the sand,
I've had all I can take,
and all that I can stand.

Yesterday was theirs
but tomorrow is all mine,
I'm standing on the beach
and I'm drawing a line.

I can't take this much more,
I can't go on any longer,
so I'm marking the line

and I'm coming back stronger.

Fourth of the fourth, Twenty-four,
tomorrow is the date,
I start all over again,
and I cannot wait.

Birthday Wishes

On the afternoon of my birthday
I approach the packed pub table
taking in the familiar faces.
Ernest Hemingway regales the group
with a tale of his Paris days
James Joyce shakes his head,
declaring that's not how it happened at all.
Simon Armitage sips his pint
insisting the best beer is made in Yorkshire
and don't get me started on Yorkshire tea.
Ted Hughes adds that there is magic in the Yorkshire rain.
Emily Dickinson shares a poem
beautiful moving and sad.
Charles Bukowski says its time for another round
of drinks, and he'll have a double.
John Cooper Clarke checks the time on his watch.
He'll have one for the road
before catching his bus back to Salford.
When it is time to leave
I pack up all my poetry books
Happy birthday
I say to myself.

First Day Back Syndrome

After a week in the Spanish sunshine
the Monday morning alarm
kicks my door down
like armed police
with a warrant for my arrest.
I throw my arms in the air
insisting I'll come quietly.
And it's back to work,
like an escaped prisoner
being dragged back to his cell,
I'm back in the confines of the office,
my orange jump-suit
a shirt and tie.
By ten o'clock I'm on my
third cup of tea,
Spain and the week before
seems like
a million miles away
and a decade ago.

Off the Beach

I have a pebble on my desk
from a holiday years ago,
if anyone asks, I tell them
it's a paper-weight,
a small souvenir,
but when the job
and life in general
gets on top of me
and I feel the dull ache
of stress and tension
gripping my shoulders
and crushing the
back of my neck

I pick up that pebble
closing my fingers
gently but tightly
around it
and breath slowly
until I can
hear the crash of the waves
and feel the sun on my face.

Sixty Poems

This poem will be number sixty
I don't know why that matters
but it seems rather significant.
Something of a milestone,
like completing a 5 or 10 K run.
A modest but personal achievement.
Why is it we celebrate turning twenty-one
but not twenty years old?
Sixty seems a nice round number.
The Sixty is the motorway ring-road
around the city I live.
I count the number of poems
like the guy in the Great Escape
marking in chalk the tally-count
of the tunnels he's dug
or like a footballer recording
caps for their country
or a competing quiz team
totalling up their score.
How should I celebrate
completing sixty poems?
I think I'll celebrate
by writing
sixty one.

The Doctor Will See You Now

On a cold bright April evening
I had an appointment to keep.
I showed the doorman my printed ticket
and dashed down the aisle to my seat.

I rubbed my hands together in delight
as the Lowry theatre went dark,
the sell-out crowd all gathered
to see Dr John Cooper Clarke.

With his jokes, poems and one-liners
the good doctor regaled the crowd
and recited all his greatest hits
while we cheered, whooped and howled.

The crowd spilled out onto the streets
our ears still ringing with rhyme
still laughing and repeating his words
all agreed, we'd had such a good time.

His rapid-fire words stayed with me
as I rode the late-night tram back home
feeling motivated and so inspired
to try and write verse of my own.

I would try and write a few poems
of my own, and try to make a mark,
just like my Salford-born hero,
here's to you, Dr John Cooper Clarke.

But Sleep Won't Come

Lying in the dark room
eyes closed, waiting for the lull of sleep
my mind races
random worries about future events
and nagging thoughts about the now

did I lock the front door?
is the hob turned off?
Embarrassing incidents
from a decade ago
replay and haunt my exhausted mind.

My mind is like a television set
that will not switch off
despite the plug being pulled,
the volume is loud
enough to keep me awake.

I roll onto my side
tutting, huffing, stuffing the pillow
up under my head
slowing my breathing

and then it happens
sleep comes to me
the visiting angel,
the night breeze
ruffling her feathers.

The needle of sleep
drifts through my grooves,
I give in, dancing to its tune,
unclenching my fists.

Then the morning alarm goes off
and feeling more tired than
when I went to bed
I get up and head
for the shower.

Inner City Poetry

Where Wordsworth had Ullswater,
Dove Cottage and Grasmere,
I look upon the industrial glory
of the Manchester Ship Canal
and the rolling River Irwell.

Where the Romantic poets would
meander through green fields
and hear the nightingale sing
I ramble down graffiti city streets
to the police siren song.

Where the greats would compose
their works with swishing quills
at fine desks in grand writing rooms,
I note ideas on my mobile phone
and scribble away in office lunch-hours.

The Romantics would gaze upon
great beauty, their hearts all a quiver
but to suggest my urban back-drop
is any less charming and poetic
then I would beg to differ.

There's poetry in the every-day
in winter dog walks and open fires
the summer beer garden with friends
in funerals, Christenings and whiskey,
and wherever you feel inspired.

A Dabbling Poet Visits the Lake District

We headed over to the Lake District
one Bank Holiday weekend in May,
to walk where the great poets had tread
meant more than words could say.

We found ourselves down by the lake
in a small town called Bowness,
where the marvellous views of the lakes and hills
just took our away our breath.

Clutching my thin volume of poems,
I stared out at the lake, feeling so inspired,
my wife yawned and stretched her arms,
come on, love, she said, I'm tired.

I said, I can't believe I'm standing
on the banks of Wordsworth's lake,
a man passing by with his dog replied,
I'm afraid you've made some mistake.

While Windermere is a wonderful sight,
Wordsworth was not inspired here,
he lived miles away up the road,
at Dove Cottage on Grasmere.

Disgruntled I headed back to the car,
so sorry I couldn't stay,
and while the great poet hadn't lived here,
he may have visited for the day.

Wonderful Weekend Weather

All week the talk had been how
it's supposed to be nice at weekend
wall-to-wall sunshine, twenty plus degrees,
the summer was finally arriving.

By Friday evening there's not a cloud in the sky,
the sunshine makes inner-city Salford
feel like Spain or the Sahara,
the beer garden is packed,
loud chatter, lager and laughter.

On Saturday the whole country is having barbecues,
sizzling sausages and sun-burnt skin,
children have water-fights in the street,
and the tinny pop music playing
can be heard three streets away.

On Sunday the sun still shines,
people bask in the wonderful weather,
the last of the barbecue food
will be burnt to a crisp later
as the summer parties continue.

Late Sunday afternoon the skies darken
churning to grey-black as
dark clouds loom overhead,
then the rain starts to fall.
Minutes later its a down-pour.

I stand in my doorway, transfixed,
looking out at the lashing rain,
I extend a hand, catching the rain-drops
in my palm, smiling to myself, happy at last,

that the weather has finally improved.

Summer Sun

The summer sun beats down
from clear blue skies
I sit out, enjoying the glow
on my skin. I close my eyes
and it feels like recharging,
like therapy.
Then night falls
and the dark room is like
an oven.
Sleep is a concept I can't
comprehend
like chemical equations
I can't solve.
Lying in a room
plus the lateness of the hour
does not equal sleep.
Not tonight.
And I long for the hypnotic
falling of the autumn rain
and those cold winter nights.

Unfinished

I'm working on this story
and this poem
and this painting...
but I have
a quandary
a dilemma.
How will I know
when its finished?
I dab a bit more paint
on the canvas,
hoping I haven't ruined it.
I add a twist to my story,
that the killer is actually
the driver, not the hitcher,
if that makes sense?
Does the story end there?
Maybe I should add a police chase
and a shoot-out.
I write another line
of the poem
adding astounding alliteration
but does it work?
Is it finished?
I'm working on this story
and this poem
and this painting...

From Him To Me

My father sits me down at the table
a deadly-serious look on his face.
He hands me a thin package,
a brown envelope
that looks older than I am.

I slide the item out of the paper,
and recognise the face immediately.
His hero and mine,
John Lennon.
Is this what I think it is?
A book of John Lennon's poetry
from 1964.

He explains how he's had
the book since the Sixties,
buying it as a teenager,
obsessed with the band,
and just as he's passed
his love of the Beatles
on to me, he would
now like to pass on
this book, this artefact,
as treasured as
Shakespeare's First Folio.

Are you happy? he asks,
as I flick carefully through the
sixty-year old pages,
lost for words.
I nod, smiling,
tears in my eyes.
His most treasured possession

has become mine.

My reason for valuing the
book as priceless
is different than his.
For me, the fact that my father
had the book for so long,
and is now handing it down to me,
gives it such significance.

For me, my father's story is
the extra chapter,
the epilogue,
the missing last pages,
that the book was his,
that he has carried the volume
for over half a century.

I can't find the words to
explain how special this is.
This book, for all these reasons,
should be handled with white gloves,
spoken over with hushed reverence,
and kept behind glass somewhere,

and so I'll try to write a poem about it,
to try and capture just how much it means.
Perhaps sitting pen in hand,
trying to process it all,
maybe then the words will come,
and then,
maybe one day,
I'll read it to him.

Good Week / Bad Week

He goes out with friends, a few drinks and a bite to eat,
he skips the starter, going straight for the steak and then picks at the dessert.
He has a lovely evening, always good to catch up.

At the office, it's Tony's birthday, and the
home-made lemon drizzle cake is out of this world,
washed down with Earl Grey tea served in a China cup and saucer.

On Saturday morning he goes along to his meeting,
the group leader peers down at the scales reading,
and the pound that he has gained.

Have you had a bad week? She asks.
No, he says with a smile,
I've actually had a lovely time.

On spotting the famous writer

I recognised him as soon as I saw him,
the famous writer across the road,
he used to set the literary world on fire
with article, poetry and prose.

I crossed the street and approached him,
hurrying eagerly along the pavement,
wanting to exchange a few words
and tell him how much his work meant.

You used to write for the Guardian,
you've had articles published in Time
and I just loved your debut novel,
I could quote you line after line.

But then you seemed to disappear,
everyone wondered, where did you go?
The writer became a legend, a myth.
There's one thing we all want to know.

Who are you writing for these days?
You don't publish, as far as I can see.
At this he stopped and with a smile he said,
The answer is I write just for me.

Our Grandparents' War

When I was young it was well-known to all
that our grandparents had been in *the War*,
that our grandfathers had gone off to fight,
leaving our grandmothers at home.

To us it was the stuff of 1960s movies,
Steve McQueen, the camp cooler king,
Charles Bronson was digging tunnels,
an action and adventure story.

It was all camouflage, dog-tags and the Battle of Britain,
Spitfires, Hurricanes and Lancaster Bombers,
hand-grenades and Sherman tanks,
a computer game played out in real-time.

But in real-life, war is not as portrayed
in some Hollywood blockbuster film,
not the game of Army we used to play
where twigs and branches become machine guns.

I cannot even begin to imagine
the terror of what it must have been like
to have been called up to go off and fight,
leaving all that you love far behind.

They traded shovels and briefcases for rifles,
the family-man becoming the soldier,
swapping steam trains and delivery vans,
for steering battlefield jeeps.

They landed on the Normandy beaches
to do what needed to be done
while our grandmothers struggled on back home

raising their daughters and sons.

It was at dawn eighty years ago today,
the Allied troops landed on Normandy shores,
on the day forever known as D-Day
the 6th June 1944.

6/6/2024

New Age Thinking

At twenty years old I was a man, an adult,
I knew it all, and was living through
the greatest decade in history,
Manchester was the centre of the universe,
the music and films and the whole vibe
of the 1990's was out of this world.

To my twenty year-old-self, fifty years old was *old*,
my father at that age, was ancient,
his grey thinning hair and middle-aged fashion
pegged him as an old feller,
when I would show off my brand new shirt
my mother would say with a smile,
your father used to have one just like that.

Now as I near the big five-oh myself,
sixty doesn't seem so very old,
Seventy is getting on a bit,
and I refer to octogenarians
as being a good age,
rather than detailing the hill,
and how far over it they are.

These days I look at twenty year olds
as though they are still in the playground.
I scoff when they say they have never seen
Trainspotting or heard of Jarvis Cocker.
I talk of the 1990s with fond nostalgia
the way my father would speak of the Sixties,
my playlist still crammed with 90's indie bangers.

I find myself wondering just when it happened,
when did modern music become a noise to my ears,

when did they stop making TV shows
like they used to,
when did my day, my era, my youth,
my glory days, when did they finish?

Soon enough, and before they know it,
the kids singing the latest pop tunes
and going along with today's trends
will themselves pine for this era
and its soundtracks.

They will give the complaint that is
passed down to each generation,
that *things were better in our day*.

The Word That's Spoken

Reading poetry from the page is delightful,
but the thing about poetry of the spoken word,
it's not meant to be read in the hush of a library
it's supposed to be performed and to be heard.

Like the difference between Rugby League and Union,
they're the same game but with different codes,
with the spoken word and performance poetry
you're in the spotlight when you read out your odes.

It's one thing to dedicate time for my poems
and to work on writing these rhymes
but another matter to stand up on this stage
all alone and reciting these lines.

I arrived at the venue clutching my poems,
and when the time came for me to read
I felt the panic kick in and I started to shake
I just wanted stand up and leave.

I reluctantly headed to the stage
wanting to be back at home reading my books,
but when I was done and everyone clapped
that was it, I was in, I was hooked.

I enjoy reading and writing these poems
but never used to read them out-loud
but ever since I discovered open-mic nights,
I love to perform to a crowd.

Spoken word is the modern way to do it,
we've moved on from the poets of history
performance poetry is like takeaway pizza,

it's all about the delivery.

Election Night Special

Good evening, folks, and welcome
to this Election Night special.
The country has been heading to the polls
all day to have their say.

Who will be in charge of the Government
once the public have cast their vote?
Who will be running the country?
Will it be the Cats or
will it be the Dogs?

Will the people vote for the Cats,
these self-centred felines,
cool, cold and calculating?
And look out for their claws,
just when you think they're
playing nice and purring,
they'll scratch your eyes out.

Or will people vote for the Dogs?
Loyal and true,
brave and honest,
but will they simply
tear the sofa to shreds
and then give us those
sad puppy-dog eyes
when we get mad about it?

Hold on there, folks,
the results are coming in.
The people have decided.

Neither party has the majority.

We have a hung parliament.

The leader of the Dog party,
the new Prime Minister,
a black Labrador,
has announced he'll be forming a
coalition government
with the Hamsters.

A Man Like Me

I like whiskey with ice
and hot Earl Grey tea
donner kebabs with chilli sauce
and the poetry of Dylan Thomas.

I like the Beatles and John Lennon
and the 90's Manchester bands,
and Jazz music of all kinds, including
Bebop, swing and Trad.

I like mint choc-chip ice cream
and rugby football,
both league and union,
and spicy Indian food.

I like real ale and IPA beer,
and the films of Martin Scorsese,
and Jelly Babies and cherry cola,
thriller novels and Charlie Chaplin.

I like Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen
and playing the ukulele
and walking my black Labrador
apart from when it's raining.

I like reality TV and documentaries
about world history and the Mob,
dry-roasted peanuts and Spam,
and reading a poem a day.

Now I know what you're thinking,
in actual fact those two words are
also the name of my favourite

Miles Davis track, *So What?*

Football Fever

For yet another summer football fever
has gripped the nation,
everyone talks how it's coming home
and how we'll win it this time,
I didn't realise we were all playing.

For the tea-time kick off
everyone clocked off work early
heading for home or the pub
to watch the big game,
while I covered phones that didn't ring
and read a couple of chapter of my book.

The next game kicks off tonight at eight,
the streets are already empty, quiet
apart from the England flags
flapping in the summer breeze.

I won't be watching tonight's game
I'll be at home reading my book
when they say but it's a must-win match,
I'll say, I couldn't give a damn.

Poetry Interpretation

I went along to the poetry reading,
at a city-centre book shop,
in the hushed cathedral quiet,
a couple of poets performed pieces
from their latest releases.

I took the offered glass of white wine
as there was no lager being served,
but declined the cheese and olives
in tiny ramekins.

The first reader described the Norfolk Broads
the nature and wild-life of that area,
the deer, the foxes, the pheasant,
in wonderful words that oozed like honey.

As the second poet shared poems about
the rivers and countryside of their native
Northumbria,
I could almost hear the rush of the water
and feel the drops on my face.

The descriptions and details
painted perfect pictures
of the backdrop and glorious scenery
of the regions the poets inhabited,
their lovely corners of the country.

I left feeling deflated rather than inspired.
How could I consider myself a poet
when my home soundtrack consisted of
speeding cars and police sirens?

As I rode the bus back home
staring out at the Salford city streets,
the betting and charity shops, shutters pulled down,
like eye-lids sound asleep,
the harsh neon signs of the takeaway shops
working the night shift.

The message of the evening had been clear,
poetry was the art of the gentry,
the craft of the middle and upper classes,
what could I possibly add?
what did I have to contribute?
where was the poetry in my neighbourhood?

I looked out the bus window at the city night,
a nurse sitting at a bus-stop on her way to work,
sipping an energy drink,
a man walking his Alsatian dog, wearing shorts
despite the freezing temperature,
fast-food delivery riders zipping in and out
of the traffic.

I placed my finger-tips against the cold glass,
there it was, there was my poetry.
This modern-day Lowry masterpiece.
It wasn't wandering down by a lake,
it was here, with the bus driver humming to himself,
with the young man talking to his friend,
describing a recent football match
with the all passion and attention of a TV sports pundit.

I stepped off the bus and out into the cold night,
my breath hanging on the air in front of me,
feeling determined to stick with verse,
to make my own poetry,
and to make poetry my own.

As I passed by my local pub,
passing the smokers huddled in the doorway,
I spotted a handwritten poster
tacked to the frosted glass window.

Spoken Word Poetry, Thursdays at 7.

A man in a football shirt took a long drag
on his cigarette, watching me with curiosity,
he pointed to the sign in the window,
Are you a poet, mate?

The usual lie, fib, and cover-up
was about to leave my lips,
every poetry book I ever bought was
'a birthday present for a friend',
but I stopped myself,
it was time to come clean,
time to shout and recite it from
the rooftops.

Yes, I said with a grin,
yes, I am.

An Anniversary

Not the best day of our lives
like the well-worn cliché says
the day we got married,
eighteen years ago today,

like the day spent airline-travelling
for that holiday in the sun,
it was a day we had to get through
to start what we'd become,

a sweltering summer day in July
ideal for Britain's beaches,
we were dressed in morning suits
and practising our speeches.

Not the best day of our lives
all that tradition, something blue and borrowed,
for us the truly magical days,
were those that directly followed.

The best day of our lives?
Who are you trying to kid?
Not the best day of our lives
but the best thing we ever did.

Limerick 1

There once was a man from Eccles
made up of all glasses and freckles
he thought he would die
to give poetry a try
he just hopes nobody heckles.

Where The Wild Grass Grows

I push open the creaking wooden gate,
my black Labrador squeezing through beside me
and trotting off ahead.

We follow the well-trodden footpath
across the field.

On either side of the path
the wild grass grows free and unkempt
as tall as my waist,
swaying in time with the breeze
like all-night ravers with their hands in the air.

My boot splashes through a muddy puddle,
the dog scamps and sniffs
head buried ears-deep in the long grass,
birds sing and warble in the trees
all around me.

As I lose myself in this perfect pocket of countryside,
it's almost possible to ignore and tune out
the whoosh and rush of the cars
whizzing down the dual carriageway
on the other side of the trees.

WFH

I am working from home this week
until the builders are gone.
I find I'm much more productive at home
I always get so much more done.

I get a shout out on breakfast radio
from the bubbly morning show host
who mentions that I'm WFH
while having my tea and toast.

After breakfast I start on the housework,
whizzing the Hoover round, then bring out the mop.
This working from home is so hectic,
it really just doesn't stop.

In the afternoon I weed the garden,
then book an appointment for my hair,
then I call a few friends for a chat,
and then just doze in my chair.

After a few hours of day-time TV
I quickly pop to the shops,
I use the express till before dashing back home,
in case there's a call from my boss.

It's back to the office on Monday
I'll back working at my desk
when they ask how I found working from home
I'll say I've come back in for a rest.

The Best Medicine

With the room spinning around me
I clutch the bedsheets tight in fevered hands,
sweating, yet freezing cold.
Can I get you anything? my wife asks.
I need, I mutter, p-p...
Painkillers? She suggests.
No, I need p-p...
A prescription? Should I call the doctor?
No, I need p-p...
Pillows? Do you need more pillows
to prop you up?
I gesture to the thin book on the night-stand
pointing frantically,
like a man stranded on a desert island
waving for rescue.
Poetry, I say,
I need poetry.

The Seat by the Fire

There's something wonderful
about sitting in a pub on my own,
it feels like bunking off school,
or throwing a sickie from work.
A pint of ale,
savoury bar snacks
and a good book.
Another chapter,
another beer,
same again.
If I was a cat I'd be curled up
and purring.
It's a delightful way to
spend a couple of hours.
I know I've had a good night
when the only dialogue
has come from
fictional characters.

A Genuine Fake

This guy comes up to me in the pub
asks if I'm into poetry.
Yeah, I say, I dabble.
He looks around,
to make sure nobody's listening.
Want to buy a Dylan Thomas? he asks.
Genuine. It's legit.

Intrigued, I follow him outside
to the pub car-park,
where all the dodgy-deals go down,
he shows me the hand-written paper
in a plastic wallet.
I check out the document
in the street-light glow.

And it's definitely legit? I ask.
The guy nods, guaranteed, mate.
I hand over a fistful of cash
and we part ways,
he shuffles off into the night,
disappearing into the shadows.

The next night in the pub
I proudly show off my purchase,
passing it around my friends.

Do you think it's authentic?
The debate begins.
It is studied, scrutinised
held up to the light,
each swirl of the handwriting looked at
under a magnifying glass

finally someone says
yes, it's genuine alright.
A genuine Dylan Thomas?
My goodness, that's amazing.
Erm not quite, they say,
what you have here is
a genuine Tom Dylan.

On Hearing the Sea Gulls

There's something rather haunting
when I'm on the inner city streets
miles away from the ocean
and I suddenly hear the sea gulls caw,
the high-pitched screeching
takes me back to childhood beaches,
running across the sand just for
the fun of it, like Labradors
let of the leash,
to buckets and spades and sunburn,
to visits to brooding Welsh castles and
the flashing lights of the amusement arcade,
to sea-side picnics where sand gets everywhere,
in the sandwiches and our shoes and socks,
for days we'll be crunching when we walk.

Prolific

I want to be a prolific writer and poet,
like a chef working in the restaurant kitchen
preparing dozens of wonderful dishes
then ringing the bell and calling for service.

I want to be a prolific writer and poet,
like a football player on a winning streak
scoring a hat-trick of goals every week
with my team at the top of the league.

I want to be a prolific writer and poet,
like those space-programme scientists
designing the gleaming rockets that send
astronauts up to the stars.

I want to be a prolific writer and poet.
I once asked a famous author
for advice for an aspiring writer.
His reply has stayed with me.

Don't aspire.

Write.

Steaming

We join the queue at the station
all excited to ride the steam train.

We file out onto the platform
gasping in unison at the sight
of the bottle-green engine
and the Pullman carriages.

We stare in wonder and awe at
the engine and the carriages,
these relics from another era,
like the ruins of an ancient castle
or the dusty findings of an
archaeological dig.

Clouds of steam erupt from the engine
billowing into the air,
suddenly filling the narrow platform
stinging our eyes as we cough and laugh.

Still grinning like children about to finish
for their summer holidays
we step into the carriages.

The tables are covered in white table cloth,
the cups and saucers bear the red railway logo.
I could imagine a Belgian detective
investigating a murder
in such a carriage.

As the train pulls away I spot
a couple walking down the platform
wearing coats and hats, arm in arm,

their brief encounter
either starting or ending.

The man sitting facing me has grey hair
and tears in his eyes.
I sense it is not the engine
smoke making his eyes water.

As the train chugs away down the tracks
he says with a sentimental smile
'This takes me back.'

with a little boy glint in his eye.

A Special Breed

There's a lovely little pub across the field
where I walk my dog,
a selection of draft ales, a large beer garden
and a glass jar of dog treats at the end of the bar.
I often stop for a pint and a sit.

The dog always gets a lot of attention.
Children stop running around the grass
to ask if they can stroke my dog.
As they pat him, my dog gives me a look,
implying he definitely deserves a treat after this,
for being a good boy.

A lad in a baseball cap stumbles up to our table,
slurring that my dog is 'an absolute legend'
and tickles his ear before staggering away.

People passing on the way to the bar,
pause and fuss over the dog.

They ask his name and how old he is,
and enthuse about how he is so well behaved.
He's a proper pub dog, I say, he loves it here,
flaking out on the grass, watching the world go by.

They tell me about the dog they had,
that they lost recently,
how they become part of the family,
and how it breaks your heart
when you have to say good-bye.

I nod and try not to think about that day.
On my next trip to the bar

I pick up a few extra treats for my boy.

Final Word Count

Scientists say the human heart will beat
only a finite number of times.

A writer has only a finite number
of words.

How many words will a writer get down
in their life?

Will we know when the last words fall
from our pen?

Will we know when those two words
The End are upon us?

Will we be devastated
at being unable to complete
that last story
that final stanza,
that we leave the final composition
unfinished?

The 1990s were my 1960s.

Oasis are my Beatles,
Manchester my Liverpool,
The Hacienda is my Cavern,
Tony Wilson is my Brian Epstein,
Definitely Maybe is my Please Please Me,
Knebworth is my Shea Stadium,
Liam and Noel are my John and Yoko.

Definitely, maybe not

For me Oasis were *the* band,
they were from my city,
and my decade,
like the punk bands of the 1970s,
they reminded us that
we could do something
that mattered.

And now, in August 2024,
so many years later,
a life-time some might say,
the warring brothers
made their peace,
to the delight of music fans.

There would be the inevitable scramble
for tickets, as those who were there
back in the day, and who were not born,
competed for a chance to see the band.

Having seen the band live decades ago
in what was arguably their prime
and mine,
I would not be partaking
would not be joining in the melee,

For me the band will always be
twenty-something scallies,
hope and hatred in their glare,
that tambourine jangle
as dangerous as a rattle snake.
In my memory,
those rock n roll stars

will live forever.

The Write Crowd

I was sitting at my favourite spot,
in the coffee shop, books and notebooks
stacked on the table, like a student
all-night cramming for an exam,
looking forward to a few hours
of reading and writing.

A figure approached my table,
poring over my writings with interest.
I looked up from my papers with a
can-I-help-you? smile.

You're on your own, I see. They said.
Where is your writing group?
Where are your fellow writers?
Surely you meet up for coffee
and a catch up,
to compare notes with
your fellow scribes?

Not really, I find writing is something
I enjoy doing on my own, I said,
hoping they would take the hint
and leave me to my fictional characters
and worlds of my own imagining.

But you must meet up with other writers,
to discuss and exchange ideas.
There will be a writers group in the area,
maybe meeting in this very coffee shop.

I mumbled and shrugged,
trying to come up with an answer.

Well, my dad reads and critiques my stuff,
my mum *doesn't* and says they're great.

But where is your crowd, your clique,
your group of like-minded souls?
I pointed to my stack of books on the table,
Dylan Thomas, Wordsworth and Kerouac.
Shakespeare, Ray Bradbury and George Orwell.

There is my writing community, I said, right there.
Now you're just being silly, they replied.

Could you ask for better company? I asked.
You have to admit, that's a fine circle to mix with.
It was their turn to be lost for words,
as they finally left me to my tea and my writing.

What's In A Name

Benny Fishery is sorting out his will.
Helen Back has been through so much already.
Ed Ucation has a Masters Degree from Oxford University.
Warren Peace sends me these really long messages,
but Peter Out stopped texting after a while.
I didn't get a reply to my text to Noah Vale.
Christi Anity goes to church every Sunday.
Geri Atric isn't as young as she used to be.
Mal Nutrition should check his diet out.
Terry Fied is scared of his own shadow.
Vic Torious always plays to win.
Alan Key is busy doing DIY this weekend.
Phil Anthropy does a lot for his local area.
Paul lte always says good morning.
Pat lcular likes things done a certain way.
Anna Notherthing has something she would like to add :
Thank you and goodnight.

The Sell-Out Gig

He couldn't believe it when he heard,
the rock band of his teens,
his favourite 90's band,
were back together for a come-back gig.

As soon as the concert was announced
everyone was suddenly a massive fan
of the 90's rock band,
despite most not being born at the time,

people he had known for years
were suddenly declaring they
had always loved the band
and couldn't wait to go and see them,
despite never having mentioned them before.

The gig was the hottest ticket in town,
the event even made the news headlines,
music reporters were dispatched to Manchester
for the latest on the scoop.

He dug out his vinyl collection and record player,
listening to the classic albums
of the great band in their prime.
All that week as he listened to his records
he hoped, imagined and prayed.
Maybe, just maybe.

Not that anyone needed reminding,
but tickets would be going on sale on Saturday morning.
Even the TV forecasters when detailing weekend weather,
wished fans good luck getting tickets.

At nine o'clock on Saturday morning,
rather than having a lie-in,
he was at the kitchen table,
laptop computer booted up and ready.

At first he thought the long number displayed
was a telephone number to call for tickets,
then he realised, that was his position in the queue.
As he waited and waited, the number counting down
as slowly as the weeks to his summer holiday,

the hours dragging by, the figure slowly ticking,
he scrolled through social media posts,
endless smug posts of screen-shots,
Congratulations you have tickets.

Then it happened, the computer screen changed from listing
his place in the queue to detailing the tickets available.
This was it. He could select his ticket. He was going.
He was in. He would be seeing the band.

He stared for a moment. The only tickets left
were 'deluxe' and cost £500 each,
excluding booking fee, of course.
The website didn't say exactly what was deluxe
about the tickets, apart from the price.

He stared and stared at the screen,
not wanting to shut it down,
to admit defeat,
but unable to fork out what was more
than his monthly mortgage payment
for a one-night concert.

The screen then changed, updated,
making the decision for him,

'Event Sold Out' displayed in bold letters.

As he switched his computer off
one of his friends, a branch manager at their firm,
messed to gloat that he had bagged a deluxe ticket
for himself and his wife.

When had the working class band left their roots behind?
How could they justify those prices?
When had rock music become an elitist sport?
His phone pinged with a message from a friend.

Have you heard? The band have sold out.
Yes, he replied, it rather looks like they have.

Everything's Alright

There's a phrase from a song or musical
that comes to my mind
when I'm stressed and worried,
Everything's alright,
everything's fine.

When life threatens to get on top,
when things are getting me down
I find myself repeating this mantra
Everything's alright,
everything's fine.

I cannot recall which musical film
gave to me the words that I repeat
over and over to ease my mind,
as time went by the words became mine,
Everything's alright,
everything's fine.

When work stress gets to me,
or the queue seems to last forever,
when life seems to be a battle I can't win,
the words appear, clear through the fog,
Everything's alright,
everything's fine.

I stress about writing this poem,
does everything have to rhyme?
I take a deep breath as the words come to me,
Everything's alright, yes,
everything's fine.

I am writer

I am writer, I am poet, I am ideas
I am words, I am stanza, I am paper
I am pencil, I am pen, I am ink
I am fountain pen, I am Bic pen
Iambic pentameter.

My poems are...

My poems are my mind trying to process,
to capture a feeling, a moment,
to take a Polaroid snapshot,
to paint a picture,
to frame an abstract work of art,
to translate something inexplicable
into a language I can understand.

My poems are my speaking aloud,
the ordered words of the chaos
bouncing around my head,
like a ball on a roulette wheel.
I'm going all in, but who knows where
it will land, the wheel is still spinning.

My poems are my taking for a walk
the black Labrador of my imagination,
across uncharted fields,
with stormy skies overhead,
I throw a stick for the dog and walk on.

My poems are talking to myself,
arguing, debating, laughing, rambling on,
whistling along to the tune in my head,
but you know what they say,
it could be verse.

Hopes May Rise Over Grasmere

On Visiting Wordsworth's Grave

The open-top tour bus meandered its way down by the lake,
framed with the wondrous green backdrop,
I stared out at the view, trying to take it all in,
to soak myself in the splendour.

The commentary over the speakers droned on,
the tinny voice pointing out interesting landmarks,
on your left, and on your right,
and coming up ahead we have....

I tried to tune out the commentary,
repeating lines of practised verse in my head,
wanting to wander lonely,
and see those daffodils for myself.

I stepped off the bus at the village,
finally here, in Wordsworth's Grasmere,
delighted to be walking the same paths
the great poet had tread.

The tourists gathered by the church-yard gates,
suggested I was in the right place.
As I neared I noticed the direction of the queue.
They were not spilling in and out of the cemetery gates,
but filing along the pavement in front of them.
I let my gaze follow the queue to see what
could be the focus of all this attention.

A moment later I had my answer.
The people were gathered in lines
not to pay their respects to the poet,

but for the famous shop selling gingerbread.

I slipped away silently through the gates,
and along the stone path by the church,
birds singing softly from the trees as I passed,
on my way to pay my respects at the grave of
William Wordsworth.

I paused a long moment by the graveside,
searching my mind for just the right words,
unable to tear my gaze from the poet's name
carved upon the faded tombstone.

I closed the church-yard gates behind me,
and was back on the winding picture-box street,
amidst the tourist throng,
with their baked biscuits in paper bags.

Back on the tour bus, I felt inspired and recharged,
motivated beyond words, on the verge of tears,
while my fellow tourists rummaged in paper bags
and munched on their gingerbread.

If I Could I Would

If I could I would
carry the heavy burden for you,
or at least grab the other end
and help you lift it.

I would walk in your place or
sweep the broken glass from the path,
or lend you my shoes,
and help you up when you fall.

I would let you change into
my dry clothes, hand you a towel for your hair,
I'd tell you over and over
that this storm will pass.

I would play relaxing music
while patching up your cuts and bruises,
then show you to my spare room,
for you to get some much needed sleep.

Instead I hand you a cup of tea
and ask how you're doing.

Another One of The Lads

He drinks pints of lager and
watches the football with the lads,
he tips and flirts with the young barmaid
and tries his best to make her laugh.

He boasts about how many beers he drinks
and how rough he feels the next day,
I didn't get home until two, he says,
you should have seen the wife's face.

He tells the boys how much he wins on the horses
but says nothing every time that they lose,
he knows it all and you can't tell him anything,
he's always got a point to prove.

His so-called banter borders on bullying
but he's only having a laugh,
he always orders the full English breakfast
in the local greasy spoon caff.

He tells jokes down the pub with the lads
and most of his punchlines offend,
but if anyone complains, he always insists
he's just having a laugh with his friends.

He wakes one morning with cuts on his face
from when he fell drunk, banged his head,
the truth is that somebody punched him
for something offensive he said.

He loves lager and football with the lads,
and is always good for the craic,
but he tries so hard to impress

that they laugh at him behind his back.

100 Not Out

I've written a hundred poems in a year
but I'm still unsure exactly what you use a *metaphor*,
similarly with a simile,
and I'm still concerned that
everyone expects astounding alliteration,
but I still want to water and grow
and prune the leaves on
my poetry.

Everyday Rarities

We still have the odd plates we bought when we first moved in,
before the matching dinner set and the Wedding List,
we still have the plastic chip-shop forks
from that first evening
when we sat in the empty living room
on hard-backed second-hand dining chairs,
eating fish and chips from the papers.
When you grumbled about the mismatched wonky plates,
that you wanted everything in our new home
to match, and to be nice, to be just-so,
I pointed out,
these are the plates that we'll be heartbroken
when they break, years from now
as they were the plates we had
when we first moved in.

The Art in Martial Arts

For me Martial Arts, Karate in particular,
has always fascinated me.
The techniques seemed almost magical,
mythical, mysterious.
When I was running through the forms,
I was no longer in inner-city Salford,
but in another world,
another realm somehow,
far off in the Orient.
When a friend sneered and asked
what was the point?
Adding that Karate was useless,
and would never save my life,
my mind went back to the hours
spent practising and perfecting
technique and Kata,
these moves and routines that
dated back hundreds of years,
to the island of Okinawa,
of the many hours of enjoyment
I'd had training in the Dojo,
How do you know it hasn't already?
I asked.
When he said he didn't understand the answer,
I said he didn't understand the question.

National Poetry Day

Today is National Poetry Day,
all across the UK poets
will be pouring their hearts
and souls on to the page,

today is National Poetry day,
today people are listening
today people will hear our words
and take them to heart
and heed our craft or art.

Today poetry is headline news,
like that 90s band getting back together.
Poetry is the hottest ticket in town,
but poetry doesn't come
with a hefty price tag,
or dynamic ticketing.
Poetry does not sell-out in minutes.

Poetry will never forget her roots,
Poetry has a kind word and a massive hug.
Poetry has the kettle on
when you've had such a bad day.
Poetry knows how you feel.

Tomorrow, the day after
National Poetry Day,
when everyone has moved on,
to the latest five-minute fad,
we'll still be scribbling away
on these spindrift pages,
hitting the typewriter keys
until our fingers bleed.

Tomorrow, the day after
National Poetry Day,
when the world has a brand new obsession,
poetry is going back underground,
and will be our little secret
once again.

This Day Last Year

This day last year, I was having a tough week,
you know those days where your head
is scrambled and you feel like screaming
shouting crying, throwing your hands up
and tapping out?

This day last year was hard, the emotional
equivalent of those athletes who run
seven marathons in a week, except
I was in bare feet and sleep-deprived.

This day last year, I stopped by the book store
on my way home from work,
you can never have too many books,
despite what my wife says.
It's not a spare room, I say, it's my library.

This day last year, I wandered up and down
the aisles of the book shop, stopping to read
the back of a few books. Should I try crime?
Fantasy? Thriller? Spy? Self-help?
So many genres to choose from.

This day last year, I was drawn to the narrow shelf
at the back of the book-shop. The shelf was tucked
away as though it stored illicit material.
I reached for a volume, eager to see what this strange
shelf contained. I flicked through a few pages,
turning to make out the words in the faint light-bulb glow.
Was that poetry? Yes, the words were laid out in stanzas
and seemed to be speaking just to me.

This day last year, I tried another page, another poem,

feeling the excitement and adrenaline of a new discovery,
I rushed to the counter and paid for the book
with a crumpled ten pound note,
before heading outside, eager to delve deeper
into this new world.

Standing on the pavement, the rain started to fall,
the name of the book seemed to speak to me too,
Staying Alive.

One With Everything

or Stark Raven Mad

I sometimes wonder how I can have
so many wide and varied interests.
What connects all these things?

But then it strikes me that perhaps
there *is* a connection,
a thread connecting everything,

like those police investigation boards
you see on television cop shows,
red ribbons linking the suspects to the crime.

How can there be a connection between
poetry and literature, American sport,
rock music and martial arts?
What connects all these things?

American sport has its roots in university and colleges,
with links to higher education, literature and the arts.
The NFL team Baltimore Ravens were named
after the poem by Edgar Allen Poe.

The founder of Shotokan Karate
called his martial art *Shoto* after the pen-name
under which he wrote poetry.

Elvis was a black-belt and blended Karate
moves as part of his stage routine,
his jump-suits more than resemble a Karate *gi*.

Ian Brown of the Stone Roses band

is 1st Dan in several martial arts,
he can be seen spinning kicks on stage.

Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan consider themselves
to be primarily poets rather than entertainers,
in fact Cohen started out reciting his poetry.

John Lennon wrote poetry, publishing two volumes
when the Beatles were at the height of their fame.
And in his song I Am the Walrus, he mentions Edgar Allen Poe.

What connects all these things?
To quote Ted Hughes in his poem Crow,
Me, evidently.

The Reading

Every time I do it
the nerves gnaw at my stomach,
tired from the disturbed sleep
of the night before,
I have been practising my poems
every night this week,
but still there's the dread
that I will mess this up,
that the words will stick
in my throat,
that either my poem
or myself will fall flat,
excitement mixes with anxiety,
as I buckle myself in to the fairground ride,
and my name is called,
Next up we have....
and so clutching my papers
I step out onto that stage
and into the bright white glow
of the spotlight.

The All-Inclusive Breakfast

Once they have put their beach towels out
on just the right sun loungers
in that exact spot by the pool,
they rush inside to the all-inclusive breakfast.

The serious business and the jostling
in the hotel dining room
reminds me of going through airport security.
I like a cup of tea but have never
queued post-office style
for my morning brew.

They huddle in silent concentration
around the toast-machine
watching their particular slice
going round, while also eyeing
other diners in case they push in
or try to pinch their toast.

I sit at a table nursing a hangover
from last night's cerveza,
the clattering of cutlery
jangling through my head.

Maybe I'll try again tomorrow
I tell myself before retreating
back to the cool hush of my room.

A few days later an octogenarian
from Yorkshire shows me the trick with the toast.
You put it on one side and then the other.

This Time Last Year

We lost you this time last year,
the months have slipped by so quickly,
I raise a glass and remember

the good times, images roll through my head
snapshots of Christmases and parties,
laughing and joking and hugs.

How has it been a year already?
This sad anniversary we're marking
with Irish whiskey and music.

And sometimes when I hear a certain song
I forget for a moment and it's like
you are still here with us.

One of my friends sent a joke,
and the punchline was your name,
I smiled sadly at the coincidence.

The Last Word

There's a saying around here
I don't know if you've heard
they say never p*ss off a writer,
we always have the last word.

Swaggering around the golf course
that's just you to a tee,
with your fancy friends all dressed the same,
and you dare to poke fun at me?

You dine in the city's finest restaurants
and sip your champagne on ice,
you're a nasty piece of work,
would it kill you to be nice?

You read the morning papers
while your cleaner does your chores
and critique and slate my poems
well, let's hear one of yours.

You look down your nose,
passing comment on the way I look,
this poem is me telling you
I don't give a damn.

To Me Poetry

To me poetry is not
performing at open mic spoken word
for claps, clicks and cheers,
it's not posting social media screen-shots
with hashtags, trends and likes.

To me poetry is not
wearing turtle-neck jumpers
and glasses I don't need,
writing in the window of coffee shops,
on display like a mannequin
in a store window.

To me poetry is
trying to capture the beautiful
and the mundane, to seek out the
essence of a Wedding Day, a funeral,
or a rainy Sunday afternoon.

To me poetry is
the whisper in the dead of night,
a walk in the countryside stopping
press the most precious flower,
a pebble taken from a faraway beach,
the city streets at dawn.

Words On Paper

We are all words on paper
like characters in a paperback book,
scenes, dialogue and plot-twists
on the pages yet-unread.
The words on paper
telling our own story,
a wedding invite,
driving license, birthday card,
newspaper obituary, the love letter,
the exam results, speeding fine,
the divorce papers, the job offer,
the secret diary, last will and testament,
the birth certificate.
Just words on paper.

Friday Night Hockey

We follow the crowd across the dimly lit car park
and in to the bustling arena.

The Friday night game is the perfect way
to end a long stressful working week.

Inside the air is cold and bright from the ice.
It feels like Narnia and our breath hangs in front of us.
The die-hard fans wear XL hockey shirts
over their coats and hoodies.

The players storm out onto the rink
with flashing lights and fanfare,
their skates scraping along the ice.
We clap them on with gloved hands.

The players line up in formation,
leaning on their sticks,
eyes locked on the other team.
The buzzer sounds and the puck hits the ice.

Players push and shove, slam and slap,
the gloves coming off for a moment,
tossed to the ice,
as blows are exchanged,
before order is restored.

The puck is slapped and thwacked
around the rink,
hitting the glass with such force
it makes me jump.

When the buzzer sounds for the end of the game
we clap and whoop and cheer

as the players leave the rink.

We head back out across the car-park,
my brother turns to me
and says with a satisfied grin
I really needed that.

The Mingle Classes

I am mingling with the middle classes
this weekend, having been invited
to a wealthy relative's swanky dinner party.

I am mingling with the middle classes
where there are rules and etiquette,
like we're playing chess rather
than socialising for fun.

I remind myself not to swear,
to drink my beer from the glass
not the can,
and not to get so drunk I slur.

If I take my jumper off I will remember
to knot it around my shoulders
rather than tie it round my waist.
I will remember to pronounce
the letter G at the end of my sentences
even though the conversation is boring,

I will remember that talking about holidays
is a competitive sport, like playing poker,
destinations visited are laid down like cards,
that long-haul trumps a package holiday,
and that a vacation in this country
isn't worth the jet-lag.

I will remember to bid even the most
rude and pompous of guests
a good evening, adding that it was lovely to meet them,
even though they look down their nose.

I will be travelling by bus, but, I assume,
the others will ride over on their high horse.

I will remember to go to my local pub
and meet with real people next weekend.

Getting To That Age

I'm getting to that age
my knees click when I walk,
my back aches after a lie-in,
my eye-sight is getting worse,
I have to squint and concentrate
when the bus approaches
to make sure I get the right one,

my throat and my stomach issues make
dining out a mine-field or
like a game of chess,
my next move plotted with care,

like a beat-up car with weird creaks
and patches of rust,
and not as fast as it used to be,
where doctors are finding things,
nothing to worry about they insist,
but then in the most unromantic way,
they say they'd like to see me again.

Test. I am struggling to post. (Without The Words)

I want a shed just to write in
with a rug, and a desk and
an old-fashioned typewriter,
but for now I have a dog-eared notepad
and a ballpoint pen.

I would retreat to my shed
every morning,
commuting across my garden lawn,
with my cup of Earl Grey tea
and nothing to do with
the day but write.

If I had this magic shed
would the words still come
or would they dry up,
drifting away on the breeze
like flakes of snow?

Having the wonderful shed
and the typewriter and tea,
and the time,
but without the words,

Paternity Test

I show my dad my new winter coat
I raise my arms 360
so he can see the back too.
He unzips it and peers inside
like a cop patting down a felon,
inspecting the coat like he's buying a horse,
checking the teeth and hooves,
and the zip-up pockets.

I hand him my printed stories and poems,
he puts his reading glasses on
and I'm twelve years old again
and he's helping me with my maths homework,
I never could get the hang of maths,
words not numbers always came more easily.
He likes my story as it has a beginning,
a middle and an end, but we disagree
if a word should be one word.
two words, or hyphenated.

Then comes the real test,
two glasses and a bottle of single malt whiskey.
We sip the fiery liquor,
sighing in delight as our throats burn.

Reading Poetry

Reading poetry in the lamp glow
on a rainy afternoon
as a storm whose name I forget
taps its fingers on my window,
is just a delight,
is like waking from
the best night's sleep
to find it's Saturday,
like sitting up after the well-needed massage
you've had booked for weeks,
like when your awful
hangover shifts,
and you feel like yourself
once again.

American Sport & English Poetry

There are two things that fascinate me,
that add a dash of summer sun to those bleak winter days.
Those things are the excitement and adrenaline
of American sports,
and the wonder and wit of English poetry.

There is something almost magical about American sports,
the Quarterback throwing a Hail Mary pass for the touchdown,
the Dodgers winning the Series with a cracking home-run,
the slam-dunk that almost shatters the back-board,
my friend in Arizona going wild when the Cats play football.

English poetry continues to casts its spell over me,
as I read the words and the verse on the page,
in the wonderful setting of Wordsworth's Lake District,
or walking the same Salford city streets,
as my hero Dr John Cooper Clarke.

When I mention to my father in passing
where my two main interests lie,
he looks over his glasses and says with a grin,
'You know Manchester has an ice hockey team,
and we've had basketball here for years.

And America has it's great poets,
from Whitman's Leaves of Grass,
to Frost's Road Less Travelled.
Not forgetting Emily Dickinson,
Sylvia Plath, and Edgar Allan Poe.
And Ginsberg's Howl still rings in my ears.'

My father went to his bookshelf,
running his finger along the dusty spines,

like a wizard looking for a particular book of spells,
until he found what he was looking for.
He handed me the book of American poetry
with the enthusiasm of a high-street preacher
pedalling his pamphlets.

My father's words just scrambled my head,
like that trick with three cups and a ball,
so I head off to a Manchester hockey game,
with my father's volume tucked in my back pocket.
In the break I flick through the pages,
tapping my foot in time to
the Beat of American poetry.

This Is My City

I am the industrial estate
and the factory chimney
stretching its fingers to the skies,
by the grey misery of the
Manchester Ship Canal.

I am the late-night, last bus home,
where a drunken sing-song
could lead to a punch-up
or a Donner kebab
the size of a roll of carpet.

I am the coat zipped up tight
to your chin, hood pulled up,
head down as you march along
through the driving Northern rain.

I am shock of the cold-water
splash as the double-decker bus
ploughs through the puddle
soaking you to the skin.

This New Year

Last New Year,
I made all these resolutions,
I wanted to lose weight,
to exercise regularly,
to cook from fresh,
to learn a language,
to play my ukulele
and my guitar
for an hour a day,
to write more stories,
to read more poetry,
to stop trying so hard
with people,
to stop with the bad,
dad-jokes,
to get more fresh air,
go for more walks,
to read a novel a month,
and keep a list.
This New Year,
I have only one resolution.
I want to be easier on myself.

The Over-thinking, late-night drinking, aspiring writer, insomniacs Club

I can still feel the burn in my throat of
the last hit of single-malt whiskey
as I lie in the midnight darkness,
I need sleep, I need to drift away,

but rather than delicate slumber
what comes to visit is
visions and voices,
an endless list of things,
things I need to do
things I should have done
things I should not have said.

ideas for stories and poems
bounce around my head
characters chatter away to each other.
Guys, I say, can you keep it down,
I need to sleep.

As I lie in the smothering darkness
the rest of the world
seems far away, on the other side
of a vast ink-black ocean.

As the sky lightens and the sun softly rises
a line from a Pink Floyd song
pirouettes around my head
Is there anybody out there?

Couple Goals

The couple sit on the wooden bench
at the busy shopping mall.
Young couples, their grandchildren's age,
parade along swinging designer
shopping bags
and either talk over each other
or stare at their mobile phones.
The couple say nothing.
When you have been married as long
as they have,
what is left to say?
On Christmas Day
their son asks what they bought
each other
for Christmas.
Nothing, they reply.
We don't need anything.
While their son calls them miserable,
they exchange a glance.
Their unsaid words
hanging in the air between them
like tinsel,
we've got each other.

January Snow

My wife peers out of the curtains
It's snowed, she says.
For children that's a day of fun,
snowball fights, sliding, sledging
and building snowmen.
Outside the world appears to be a
magical landscape
like Narnia.
If the snow had fallen in December
it would have
felt festive,
a Yuletide backdrop,
a Christmas card scene.
In the drudgery of January
it just feels bloody cold.
A man walking his black Labrador
struggles to stay upright,
as his hound pulls him onward
like a sled-dog.
A car skids on the ice
back wheels spinning.

Poetry Called

On a snowy January morning
when the festivities felt
so long ago,
there was a knock on my door.
Poetry stood on my doorstep
smiling.
I invited her in and
put the kettle on.

Still ill

Feeling queasy, uneasy,
stomach churning, room spinning,
I would say I'm hungover
but last night's tea leaves
wouldn't make me ill.
I have this awful feeling.
I cross the office floor
reeling, staggering,
like I'm on the deck of a tall ship
adrift on stormy seas.
I cling on to my desk
as I'm thrown around.
The waves swell and crash,
I expect to be drenched,
soaked in sea-water
any second.

I'm sticking with you, poetry

I'm sticking with you, poetry.
I think we should work on our differences,
we should forget the fact that
we move in different social circles,
that none of my friends like you,
that they all disapprove of our relationship.

I'm sticking with you, poetry,
even though sometimes
I'm not quite sure of the point
that you are making,
and sometimes I wish
you'd just spit it out,
and say what you mean.

I'm sticking with you, poetry,
because when it's good,
it is out of this world,
we have a connection
that's like family,
like falling in love,
like having a backstage pass
to see the best band in the world,
because there are times when
only you understand me,
times when you speak
the truth that I desperately need to hear.

Dart and Soul

I hold the dart like a pen,
taking aim at the board,
an image comes to my mind,
as sharp and clear
as a black and white photograph.

I see my grandfather standing at the oche,
a young man, his turn to throw,
throwing the arrows,
playing darts with his friends,
sipping pints of bitter and smoking cigarettes.
Flat-caps, suit and tie, pencil moustaches.

I hold the dart like a pen,
Working-class mathematicians
perform high-speed calculations
over a few pints of beer
and throw some darts.
Good arrers is a the highest compliment
you can be paid.

The darts thud into the board
with hypnotic rhythm.
One-two-three. One-two-three.
Treble nineteen, bull's eye, double-top.
What does that leave?
What do I need to check-out?
The dream of a nine dart finish.

I hold my pen like a dart,
while others are at the board,
I scribble away in my notebook,
eventually attracting curious glances

from my fellow players.

You don't have to keep score, you know?

The machine works it out for you.

I'm actually writing a poem, I answer.

He gives me a confused look then replies:

There aren't many dart players who write poetry.

I look up from my notebook and say with a smile,
there aren't many poets who play darts either.

On Writing

Writing is my life-raft
on these crashing seas,
Writing is the antidote, the vaccine,
to that life-threatening disease.

When I dial her number,
writing always picks up the phone.
When I call round unannounced
late at night, writing is always home.

Writing is the person I turn to,
when there is nobody else.
Writing is that much-craved cigarette,
that will not harm your health.

Writing is my therapy couch,
my mental-health assessment test,
when life fires a volley of shots my way,
writing is my bullet-proof vest.

The Uninvited Guest

My oldest friend clapped her hands
for attention, she had news to share
she would be holding her birthday party
on Saturday and she wanted me to be there.

Oh please say you'll come, she says,
you really would be missed.
When I get to the party that night,
my name isn't on the list.

As the door-men re-checked the guest-list,
I was filled with dread,
when I repeated and then spelled my name,
they just shook their heads.

Maybe I should have called her,
maybe I should have said,
maybe then finally I'd be allowed to pass,
my face burning red.

But it was so embarrassing and so awkward
I will never live down the shame
of standing on the nightclub doorstep
while they searched for my name.

I'm sure it was some oversight
that she never meant to offend
but these things always happen to me,
and she's supposed to be my friend.

I am going to throw quite the party
when my birthday comes around
and I'm going to invite her along,

but her name will not be down.

Of course not, I wouldn't dream of it,
that feeling was just the worst,
Instead I'll write a poem about it
and have my revenge in verse.

Taking Poetry Back

I decided to put myself out there,
to break up the awful January gloom,
I went along to the spoken word poetry night,
climbing the stairs to this little room,

where gathered fellow poets and scribes,
who all took turns to read from their books,
I listened and waited for my name to be called
but it turned out I had been overlooked.

I headed for home, absolutely raging
done with poets, poems and pen,
annoyed with all of them and myself,
vowing never to come here again.

Back home, I mentioned to my parents
that I was giving up writing poems and rhyme,
my dad said I don't bloody think so,
my mum said that it would be a crime.

My folks succeeded in talking me round.
They encouraged, persuaded, cajoled.
I went to bed that evening a poet
for life, with no chance of parole.

This is me taking poetry back
and making it a thing of my own,
I'm staking my claim on poetry
but I'll be reading and writing at home.

Poetry Shouldn't

Poetry shouldn't be read
like a shopping list
or a text message,
like a newspaper headline,
or that recipe for spag-bol,
or a social media post.

Poetry should be read
like wedding vows
or raising a glass for a funeral toast
or congratulations it's a girl
or when my wife says
love, I've been thinking.

Peace Off

You float around the office in your kimono
bidding people Namaste,
but you're the nasty office gossip,
who always has something to say.

In the evenings you teach meditation
showing people how to breathe,
but the way you treat your work-mates,
it's no wonder they all leave.

You practise meditation and mindfulness
teaching Yoga and Tai Chi,
but you growl and snarl at colleagues
while sipping your green tea.

Actually I think I've got it figured out,
while you aren't quite the hippy you portray
you are a little ray of sunshine
as long you're getting your own way.

Poetry isn't for me

Poetry isn't for me
because I'm working class
because I never went to university
because I like dining on
kebabs in their wrappers
and drinking beer from the tin

but then I see the pinks
and pale blues
of the morning skies
and that spring is on the way
and I feel that

poetry is for me
because I live
I breathe
I feel
I exist.

Don't Call This A Come-Back

I don't know if you've heard
but I'm picking up that pen
and letting the words drip like honey,
I'm writing poems once again.

As I climb back on the saddle,
I find poetry is like riding a bike,
you've just got to peddle like f***
and try with all your might.

I'm writing poetry once again,
I'm getting everything off my chest,
but this isn't some kind of come-back
because the truth is I never left.

My Parents & Poetry

My parents don't do poetry,
they read novels not poetry collections,
preferring chapters to stanzas.

My parents don't do poetry,
yet they point out every spoken word night in the area,
sending me screenshots and saving newspaper clippings.

My parents don't do poetry,
or so they tell me, when I excitedly recite
wonderful lines from my new favourite poet.

My parents don't do poetry
yet they come along to each of my readings,
whooping and cheering, clapping and pointing,
that's my boy.

My parents don't do poetry,
but on each bookshop and library visit,
they scour the poetry section
so they can buy me a new book for my collection.

My parents don't do poetry
yet they have a favourite poet
who shares their last name,
and who wouldn't be a poet without them.

On St Patrick's Day

I will sip a drop of the pure,
And raise a glass of porter,
Slainte Mhath.
Some of my friends are going along
To parties in bright green hats
And silly glasses.

I stay home and listen to the songs
My grandfather taught me,
The Rocky Road to Dublin,
The Auld Triangle,
A family funeral comes to mind.

My grandfather who I'm named for,
Taught me so much about Ireland,
About that little bit of Heaven,
And about life too.

He taught me to count in Gaelic,
And these wonderful phrases and sayings,
And how to say goodbye.
As the song comes to an end,
I wipe the tears from my eyes.

Membership of One

I retrieve the boxes of books from the loft,
unpacking with all the care and attention
of an archaeological dig,
I blow the dust off the volumes and flick through the pages
as though to wake the poets from their slumber.

I sit cross-legged on the carpet
surrounded by books, by words,
immersed in the splendour of poetry,
the words dancing before my eyes
to a tune only they and I can hear.

I feel the warmth of a fire-side
from centuries past,
I read in the glow of flickering flames,
flames long turned to ash
that still burn and glow hot.

The Dog Ate My Poem (An Ode to World Poetry Day)

Here's to World Poetry Day!

It's World Poetry Day this month,
how very exciting!
I'll have to see about coming up
with a little ditty in honour of the day.

I will write a sonnet, perhaps a series of haiku,
or maybe a villanelle.
I will try and capture in verse
just what poetry means to me,
how the 'best words in the best order',
have given me so much over the years,

about how the greats have inspired me,
I will wax lyrical about the
wonder of Wordsworth,
Whitman, Dickinson and Keats,
Dylan Thomas and John Cooper Clarke.
How their words move and motivate
more than I can say,
how they shine like a light in the dark.

When is the big day exactly?
World Poetry day is Friday 21st March.
Excellent.
I check the calendar.
Friday 21st March?
Wait, that's today?
Today?!

I scramble around for my pen and paper,
like that late-for-school school-kid

who hasn't done his homework,
like a husband who has forgotten
his wedding anniversary.

I arrive at the venue as the event is starting,
clutching my feeble scribbblings,
these crumpled pages,
my last-minute poem,
the literary equivalent
of petrol-station flowers.

Match Highlights

I'm not the biggest football fan
I don't have a season ticket
but if I see that ball on the penalty spot,
then I'm gonna run up and kick it.

I don't have a season ticket,
going week-in week-out would be a chore,
so I watch most of the matches on telly,
and always tune in to Final Score.

There have been certain moments in football
looking back over the years and I find
that I'm quite over-come with nostalgia
and certain memories come to mind.

The FA Cup final used to be such a big deal
streets empty, everyone home watching the game,
I can still see the Wimbledon keeper saving the day,
but I just can't remember his name.

My earliest footballing memory
was in my living room and not in the stands,
when England were playing Argentina,
and Diego knocked it in with his hand.

I remember the World Cup in Italy,
with everyone glued to the screen
and when Ireland beat Romania
it all felt like a wonderful dream.

There was one player who really was special
they called him Gazza rather than Paul,
the things he could do with the ball at his feet,

he was so much better than them all.

In Euro 22 the Lionesses roared
beating Germany two goals to one,
Lucy Bronze and the team brought home gold,
and finally England won.

But by far my favourite moment
in what they call the beautiful game
is the over-head kick by Pele
in that movie starring Michael Caine.

On a bright cold Sunday morning

On a bright and cold Sunday morning
I set out on my all-important quest,
the roads and pavements are empty
at this early hour,
the shops all have their eye-lid shutters
pulled down tight.

My breath hangs on the air as I walk.
I wrap my coat tighter around me
and quicken my pace.
The blue morning sky over-head
hints at a warm afternoon,
an image of cold beer and
garden furniture
comes to my hopeful mind.

I walk on to the only open shop,
jangling the change in my hand,
lured to the glow of the welcoming light.

The glass milk bottle is cold in my grip
as I return home to the boiling kettle.

Tinkering

My grandad is outside
under the bonnet of his green
Morris Marina,
tinkering and fixing,
battered metal tool-box at his feet,
screwdriver in hand, spanner tucked
into the back pocket of his jeans.
I am eight years old,
sitting at the coffee table
writing poems and stories
and eating ice-cream from a pint glass
filled with lemonade,
my grandad's special treat.

He turns the key in the ignition
and listens to the sound of the engine
like an orchestra warming up.
He switches the engine off.
Not quite satisfied.
He wipes the oil from his hands
and tries again.

Here I sit all these years later
different table, different notebook,
but the ideas remain the same.
The summer Sunday afternoons
of over forty years ago come back to me.
I read the scribbled page over.
Not quite satisfied.
I wipe the ink from my hands
and try again.

WIP (Work In Progress)

For the uninitiated, WIP stands for
Work In Progress, it is the project
a writer is currently working on.

As I delve deeper into the
craft and art of writing
stories and poems,
studying seminal works
and setting out for the foothills
of the mountains the greats
have ascended,
it occurs to me that my WIP,
my work in progress
is something more,
more than this chapter
or that verse,
that the plot-twist
is happening right now
and in my own life,
that the work in progress
is me.

The Return of Mrs Muse

Poetry showed up on my doorstep
all suitcases and black bin-bags.
She has tears in her eyes
and I'm crying too.
She says this time she'll stay
and I believe her.

Under Pressure

I feel the pressures and stresses of life,
of the everyday, money worries, work problems,
continuing car-trouble,
family commitments,
everything seems suddenly so complicated,
life in general.

I find myself stressing about everything,
even my writing which was always
the crutch I lean on,
my emergency pull-cord.
Am I writing enough,
as much as I used to,
as much as I should?

The words writer's block bounce
around my head.
Writer's block.
It sounds like a cocktail in a swanky
city-centre bar.
I'll have a diet Coke and a writer's block.

Are my poems original?
Am I plagiarising and ripping off everything?
The title of this poem, even that's the name of a song.
I'll change it.
Yes, I'll call it *Help!*
Oh, hang on a minute...

Thank you and goodnight

I'd like to thank everyone for coming along,
I've been your host for this evening,
at this Open Mic poetry night,
now it's time we were all leaving.

People have come from across the North West
to join us here tonight,
From Fallowfield, Failsworth and Farnworth,
and Irlam of the Height.

We hope you have enjoyed this evening,
this is poetry, if you please.
So join us again this time next month,
here at 96 Degrees.

Big Bank Holiday

We've got big plans for the Bank Holiday
we're taking the dog to the beach,
picnic sandwiches
and blankets,
and pork pies
then home to the beer garden,
pints of beer on benches,
summer sun.

The bank holiday Monday arrives
all dish-water skies and drizzle,
my wife points to the storm settling in outside,
we'll do the beach and the pub another day.
Typical bank holiday weather,
she tuts, before heading to make the tea.
I smile to myself as the rain batters
against the window pane,
and reach for my pen.

I'm Not Waving

I feel the current pull and drag me,
jerking me this way and that,
I tilt my head back and gasp for air,
cold water fills my ears.

Life's waves and worries and stresses
crash over my head and push me
down towards the dark depths beneath.

I kick and thrash as hard as I can
fighting against the current and the tide,
still gasping for air, can feel myself going under,
uncertain how long I can hang on for.

Poetry grabs my wrists and pulls me towards the shore,
her grip soft but firm, reassuring.
As I lie coughing and spluttering on the cold sand
poetry gently sits me up,
wrapping a blanket tightly around me,
telling me I'll be okay.

Modern Music Is Rubbish

Modern music is rubbish, I declare,
as I sit drinking a beer with my work-mates
in the busy city-centre bar, the pop music blaring.
Just a tinny, tuneless racket.
At least bands in the 90's played their own instruments.

A few days later, I pick my dad up
to take him for the weekly food-shop.
As we set off the 90's radio station kicks in.
My dad shakes his head in disgust.
Call that music? It's just a noise.
The Beatles, now there was a band!

As we're pushing the trolley up and down
the supermarket aisles, a question occurs to me.
Did grandad like the Beatles? I ask, referring to his father.
My father laughs as the memories come back to him.
Did he heck! He always said they were far too loud and couldn't sing.
He forced me to listen to Sinatra, Dean Martin and Bing.

On the drive home I smile at the realisation.
I can't stand today's music, but then
my father feels exactly the same
about the soundtrack of my youth,
and in turn, his father thought the Fab Four
were Far From It.

Modern music might not be rubbish after all.
It might just be that modern music is
Modern.

Poetry is My Present

Poetry is my present, my gift,
and if you don't think that's true
then it might just be,
this gift is not for you.