

'INVENTIVE, RISKY,  
SERIOUS, AND FUN'  
JEANETTE WINTERSON

PATIENCE AGBABI  
TELLING  
TALES

SHORTLISTED FOR  
THE TED HUGHES AWARD



## Adaptation

- modernise
- change context / audience / form
- reinterpret

# TELLING TALES

Patience Agbabi was born in London in 1965 and educated at Oxford and Sussex Universities. She has performed her poetry live, on TV and radio all over the world. Her work has also appeared on the London Underground and human skin. She has lectured in Creative Writing at several UK universities including Greenwich, Cardiff and Kent, and is currently Fellow in Creative Writing at Oxford Brookes University. She was Canterbury Laureate from 2009 to 2010. *Telling Tales* is her fourth poetry collection. She lives in Kent with her husband and two children.

‘An energetic compendium of familiar stories translated into the contemporary idiom of street slang and slam poetry’

*Times Literary Supplement*

‘Patience Agbabi’s *Telling Tales* is a brilliant, virtuosic take on Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* as spoken by a dazzling list of contemporary characters . . . If *Telling Tales* is not one of the books of the year or in line for a major prize it will be proof the world has grown very dull indeed. This is a landmark book that extends the domain of poetry’

George Szirtes

‘*Telling Tales* is a carefully constructed wonder tour. Agbabi is a genius. And this is her best work yet’

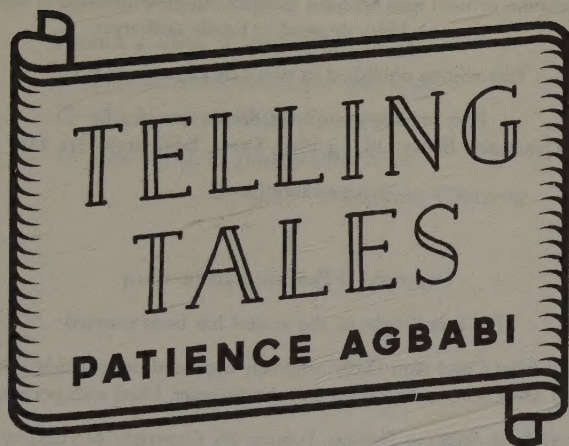
Lemn Sissay

Also by Patience Agbabi

R.A.W.

*Transformatrix*

*Bloodshot Monochrome*



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... Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,  
He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan  
Everich a word, if it be in his charge,  
Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,  
Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe,  
Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe.

Geoffrey Chaucer



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# TELLING TALES



## Prologue (Grime Mix)

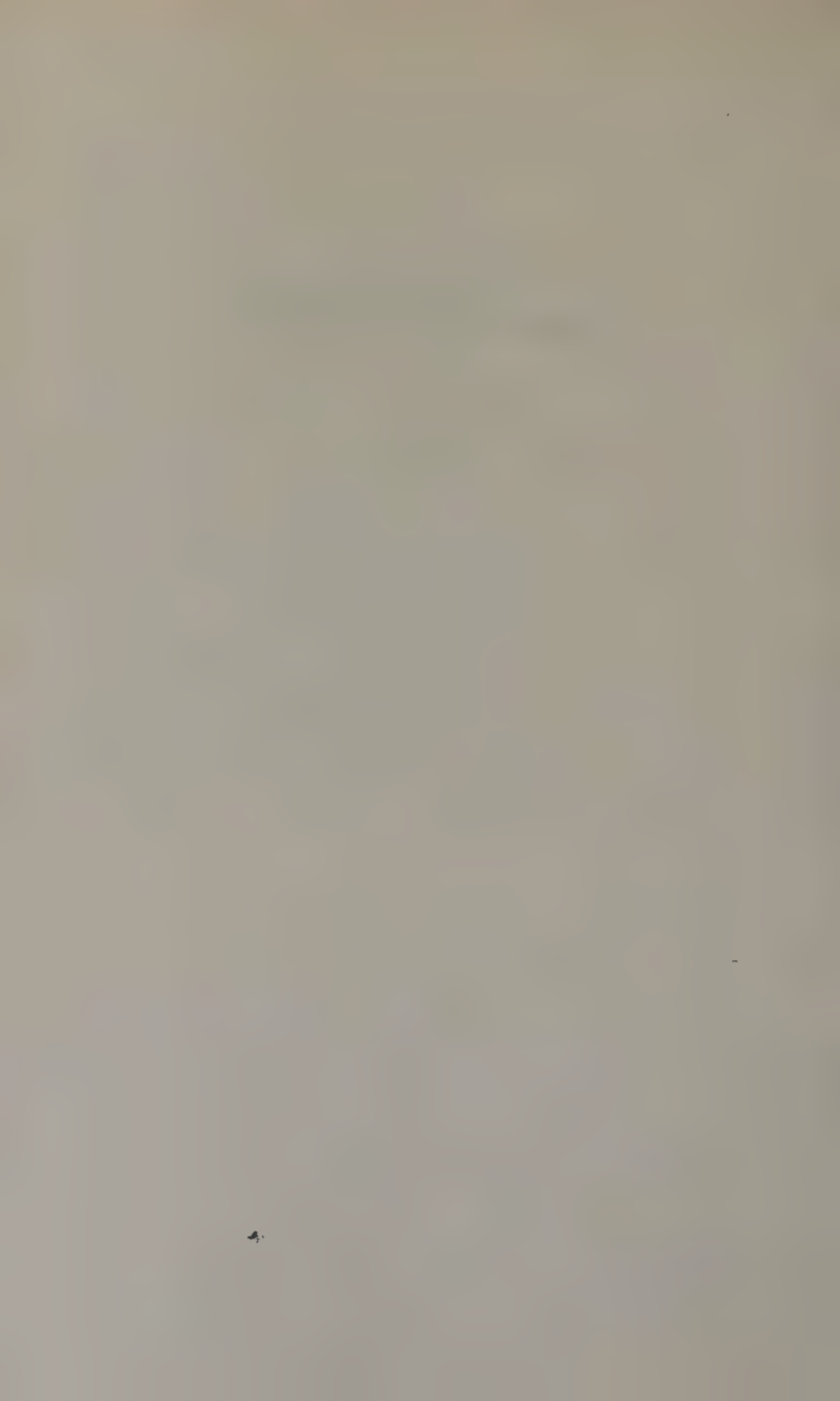
Harry 'Bells' Bailey

When my April showers me with kisses  
I could make her my missus or my mistress  
but I'm happily hitched – sorry home girls --  
said my vows to the sound of the Bow Bells ?  
yet her breath is as fresh as the west wind,  
when I breathe her, I know we're predestined  
to make music; my muse, she inspires me,  
though my mind's overtaxed, April fires me,  
how she pierces my heart to the fond root  
till I bleed sweet cherry blossom en route  
to our bliss trip; there's days she goes off me,  
April loves me not; April loves me  
with a passion, dear doctor, I'm wordsick  
and I got the itch like I'm allergic  
but it could be my shirt's on the cheap side;  
serenade overnight with my peeps wide,  
nothing like her, liqueur, an elixir,  
overproof that she serves as my sick cure,  
she's as strong as a ram, she is Aries,  
see my jaw-dropping jeans, she could wear these;  
see my jaw dropping neat Anglo-Saxon,  
I got ink in my veins more than Caxton  
and it flows hand to mouth, here's a mouthfeast,  
verbal feats from the streets of the South-East  
but my April, she blooms every shire's end,  
fit or vint, rich or skint, she inspires *them*  
from the grime to the clean-cut iambic,  
rime royale, rant or rap, get your slam kick.

## PROLOGUE

On this Routemaster bus, get cerebral,  
Tabard Inn to Canterbury Cathedral,  
poet pilgrims competing for free picks,  
Chaucer Tales, track by track, here's the remix  
from below-the-belt base to the topnotch;  
I won't stop all the clocks with a stopwatch  
when the tales overrun, run offensive,  
or run clean out of steam, they're authentic  
cos we're keeping it real, reminisce this:  
Chaucer Tales were an unfinished business.  
May the best poet lose, as the saying goes.  
May the best poet muse be mainstaying those  
on the stage, on the page, on their subject:  
me and April, *we're* The Rhyming Couplet.  
I'm The Host for tonight, Harry Bailey,  
if I'm tongue-tied, April will bail me,  
I'm MC but the M is for mistress  
when my April shows me what a kiss is ...

## **OLD KENT ROAD**



Ahh

## Emily

Robert Knightley

*In Chaucer's story there are two heroes, who are practically indistinguishable from each other, and a heroine, who is merely a name.*

— J R Hulbert

Arc? Dead. And if you're sniffing for his body  
you won't find nothing: ransack the Big Smoke  
from Bow to Bank. Arc fell for Emily  
ten feet deep ... I'm Pal, Emily's alter.  
Think ego. Arc and me, we shared a cell  
for months, it was a shrine to her, a temple.

I miss him, like a gun to the temple.  
Too close. Two men locked in a woman's body,  
her messed-up head. When I say shared a cell  
I'm talking brain. *She* became *us*. Arc smoked  
the Romeos, and me, I smoked all tars,  
we breathed out on her name, ah! Emily.  
Blonde with blacked out highlights Emily.  
Our host, the goddess. Looks are temporal.  
Who reads her diagnosis? It don't alter  
the facts. She made me up to guard her body  
from predators, the silhouettes in smoke.  
It's when she wears the hourglass and plays damsel,  
she lets me out. It messes with their brain cells,  
my voice, her face. All men want Emily,  
they think they have a right. It don't mean smoke.  
She acts like growing up was Shirley Temple *modern*  
and don't remember nothing, but her body *modern*

## THE KNIGHT'S TALE

knows what happened happened on that altar.  
Think bed ... Arc's dead. Broke his parole, an alter  
crazy on id, he starved us all to cancel  
me out for good. It's written off, our body.  
He fought to win: I fought for Emily.  
I'm dead beat, but I won up here, the temple,  
the messed-up head. Sent her a ring, of smoke.

Having a big fat Romeo to smoke  
don't make you Winston Churchill. Arc was altered.  
He won the war but lost the plot. The temple  
became his tomb. And me, I got the damsel.  
She don't know yet. We're stitched up, Emily,  
one and the same, one rough-cut mind, one body ...

*Must've blacked out ... This body ain't no temple  
but what's the alternative, a padded cell?  
Got anything to smoke? ... I'm Emily ...*

# The Kiss

Robyn Miller 101

Get me a pint of Southwark piss!  
It all took place in a pub like this.  
My tongue is black as licorice,  
my tale is blue an it goes like this: 7

I'm just eighteen an newly wed.  
My husband's old an crap in bed,  
my lover's fit, well hung, well read, 101  
his rival's mad, a musclehead.

Three loves I have an two are thick:  
My husband John's a jealous prick,  
the rival, Abs, thinks with his dick.  
My lover's French, il s'appelle Nick,

in his final year at Greenwich,  
Engineering Astrophysics,  
he's proposed but I'm a bitch,  
I'd leave my husband, but he's rich.

A carpenter, an 'ancient oak'  
with a heart tattoo, a real bloke's bloke,  
crashed out on what he thought was coke  
an fifteen pints of ale. Nick's joke.

## THE MILLER'S TALE

John owns the pub. We live upstairs  
an every night he says his prayers,  
while Nick, our lodger, flirts downstairs,  
where Abs, our bouncer, sells his wares.

This Abs comes on to guys and girls.  
He pushes weights an class A pills.  
Grey eyes, blond hair with baby curls  
an a bod as hard as the drugs he sells.

He buys me wine, real ales an Pimms.  
He likes his women weasel slim  
with eyebrows plucked till they're pencil thin.  
His gear is class: I put up with him.

But Nick's more subtle, tweets an texts,  
no kiss-me-quick with a pint of Becks.  
*Belle femme, je t'aime*, he says, an necks  
those pills Abs recommends for sex.

Three men walk into a pub like this  
but only one can kiss the kiss.  
What is it makes my bottle fizz?  
Je ne sais quoi my arse, hear this:

What's in a kiss? I'll kiss an tell.  
My husband's kiss is Southwark ale,  
my lover's 'baiser', 'fuck' in braille  
an I'm his fucked-up femme fatale.

✱

So John's upstairs an proper pissed.  
 I'm in the bar with Nick. We've kissed  
 in English, French an every lisped  
 linguistic twist, you get the gist.

High on the pills that kick like tabs,  
 we crawl around the floor like crabs,  
 Adam, Eve, on hormone jabs,  
 we got The Knowledge like black cabs.

Nous faisons l'amour all night,  
 an by six o'clock it's still not light  
 when Abs knocks on the window, tight,  
*Kiss me, babes. I say, Alright.*

Window's open, total geared  
 he's tongueing me but something's weird:  
 too right, cos I ain't got no beard,  
 stead of my lips, he got my rear!

*Fuck you!* Storms off down the alleyway.  
 Then tap, tap, tap on the central bay,  
 Mr Am-I-straight-or-gay?  
 back for his petit déjeuner!

*À moi!* Nick winks, bares his behind  
 for Abs's probing lips to find:  
 then farts a fart, the deadly kind,  
 a blast that almost makes Abs blind!

## THE MILLER'S TALE

We laugh, but Abs laughs last, the sod,  
Abs has a hard-on, like his bod,  
he grabs Nick's arse, I swear to God,  
in goes his red-hot iron rod!  
*or...*

*Bordel de merde!* Well sick, that kiss  
cos Abs is built like an obelisk.  
John wakes, falls headlong, slips a disc,  
slurs, *What in great God's name is this?*

My husband's so in shock to see  
the men, he sobers instantly  
an doesn't even notice me  
until I'm dressed. So I'm Scot-free

*slips  
the disc*

but Abs an Nick, he throws them out.  
It's made him even more devout.  
Now, when I see them, *Kiss?* I shout,  
raise my eyebrows high, an pout.

So, I got fucked; John's a fuckwit;  
an Nick my lover, fucked to shit;  
an Abs scored hard, he's fucking fit;  
both men were fucked by the fucked-off git.

If you drink your beer in a tulip glass  
an kiss the air cos you think you're class  
but draw the line at this French farce,  
bon appétit – French-kiss my arse!

# Tit for Tat

Ozymandia Reeves

*Katz?*

Retro-Glasto-Dogs-on-String:

I'm *Bad Dog*, me, with dykes on speed,  
 musky, milky, masculine,  
 Butch Al, Fem Jen and Little Weed  
 pitch Magic Mushroom, down some mead,  
 and Weed were whizzing, off her tits,  
*Gimme grass or die you shits!*

Off we sped in sniff of grass  
 from Psycho's Psychedelic Plants:  
 he guards wife, bairn and Moll, his lass,  
 with Stanley Knife in underpants.  
 With boxer nose and bulldog stance,  
 sells dried-out lawn as Purple Haze  
 but stoned, he'd share whole spliff with gays.

Women's Lib stands for libido! lol  
 Fist in air, a Goldsmith First,  
 our Al; our Jen, a Frida Kahlo  
 femme with fist to outshake Hirst;  
 best mates, they oil and lock my fur,  
 I'm in good hands, me, sniffer dog,  
 laid off, *Bad Dog*, for sniffing drugs.

## THE REEVE'S TALE

I scent the gorgeous and grotesque  
at mudbath where all hips hang out.  
There's Mrs Psycho, Rubenesque,  
her six-month bairn; I roll about,  
Dog's paradise, I want for nowt.  
There's Molly, *Venus at her Mudbath*.  
Psycho, sober, on the warpath ...

Tent? More yurt, is Psycho's yard.  
They tie me up outside front porch,  
sweet smell of Purple, I keep guard,  
bark twice to rate this grass top notch.  
Psycho bags up. Like hawks, they watch.  
Keep cash, while he leaves tent for change,  
tugs at knot that keeps me chained

and I'm unleashed! I'm off, *Bad Dog*  
*Seeks Dirty Bitch* for fun blind date  
but don't let cat out of the bag  
to dykes, I've not come out as straight ...  
They find me fields away, gone eight,  
no strings attached, up to no good,  
drag me through seven field of mud

back for grass (now switched for grass).  
A Psycho spliff ... their heads, their feet  
turn Alice-Through-the-Looking-Glass  
till Psycho offers bite to eat  
and feeds me scraps of veggie meat.  
Dykes guess he freed me, swapped our batch:  
Psycho beware, you've met your match!

*Sleep*, they slur. Three blow-up bed:  
 dykes first; Psycho and spouse take next,  
 bairn's cot stands at end of bed;  
 Molly takes third. But I smell sex  
 and Dog in dark has X-ray specs ...  
 While Psycho and his wife snore phlegm  
 like philharmonic, Al pokes Jen:

*Got an itch I gotta scratch!*  
 I noted way she eyed that lass,  
 no psychedelic psychopath  
 will stop Butch Al when high on hash,  
 she's on that Molly in a flash  
 who's up for owt and understands  
 and yields like putty in her hands ...

And look at Jen, our lump of lead!  
 The wife gets up to piss, Jen grins  
 and moves bairn's cot to foot *their* bed.  
 So on way back, wife bangs her shin,  
 confused, she mounts *their* bed, gets in:  
Jen mounts her, wrists her, hard and deep,  
 mad as a dog while Psycho sleeps!

Still dark, when Al yawns, stretches, wakes.  
 Moll tells her that our dope were muddled.  
*I swapped it back, made cosmic cakes.*  
*Check the porch.* Then, one last cuddle,  
 Al gropes round for cot, befuddled,  
 jumps inside the cotless blow-up,  
 pulling Psycho's earlobe. *Wake up!*

## THE REEVE'S TALE

*Three times I've gloved up Psycho's lass  
whilst you've been having purple dreams.*

Psycho roars, pull out his cutlass,  
missus hears him shouting, screams,  
*Si, there's a man on top of me!*

Meaning Jen. Grabs Shepton Mallet  
in pitch dark and raises it,

strikes down on what she thinks is Jen,  
and hits her husband! Jen and Al  
grab dope, the space cakes, t-shirts, jeans  
and me – I leave a parting growl –  
and run through site, au naturel,  
to tent to tell our saga of  
free food, free dope, free cakes, free love.

## Roving Mic

Roger of Ware

Roger on the mic,  
host, take a hike,  
bards, on yer bike ...  
used ta have acne  
worked in a factory  
till the boss sacked me,  
now I'm the chef  
of a city caf  
but the riffraff  
don't get a look in  
if they don't book in.  
*Roger, what's cooking?*  
Here's what I'm spitting  
out of my kitchen  
hot and hard-hitting  
none of it written.  
Rhymes rough and raw  
weeping like a sore  
bruised and ruptured  
rude, interrupted,  
but if you lick the spit  
you'll get a taste for it ...  
If you can't flow, sing,  
this mic is roving  
passed like a baton  
till it gets spat on ...  
First up, The Reveller,  
raves like a traveller,

## THE COOK'S TALE

he can tell a tale  
for a yard of ale,  
cunning linguistics  
vital statistics  
of the cash he owes  
and the blondes he knows  
every time he flows.  
So put your hands together,  
let's hear it for The Reveller ...

Girls say I look Italian  
I wear a gold medallion  
they ride me like a stallion:  
bet on me daily  
Kirsty and Kayley  
Kylie and Hayley  
Millie and Mai Li.  
I have fun and games  
remembering their names  
but cos they sound the same  
they never notice when  
I cheer another femme  
when I'm on top of them.  
Talking of horses  
bets and racecourses  
cards and casinos  
ask H if she knows  
if they pawned my phone,  
waiting on a loan,  
crashed on my credits  
dashed on my debits,

lend me fifty quid  
won't ya jelly squid,  
Kylie'll lend me  
she owes me plenty  
for her boob job  
cost a few bob  
what a huge flop,  
now she can't stand up  
cos she's a triple cup  
but her affliction  
fits her job description.  
Talking of wages  
I been owed ages  
from the corner shop  
where we used to pop  
pills and wine tasted  
we were well wasted  
battered and basted  
then we'd mob the pub  
then a city club  
to rub-a-dub-dub  
up against a Kirsty  
who is hot and thirsty.  
Best of all parties  
Stop the City marches  
bang outside my work,  
see me go berserk  
door wide open  
latest slogan

## THE COOK'S TALE

windows broken  
end up in a fight  
in a cell all night  
an my purse was light,  
but I wasn't hindered  
always been light-fingered,  
boss got heavy-handed  
challenged me red-handed  
spent a fortnight stranded ...  
Then I moved to Southwark,  
shacked up with a brother,  
missus is my lover  
rents a shop for cover,  
only say I love her  
so I get the sex free  
but the blonde suspects me,  
every day she texts me  
says she wants my baby  
and her name is Hayley.  
Ello ello ello  
here comes the ho  
to get the cash I owe,  
but *I'm* the gigolo  
and *you've* got the dough  
which means a battle so  
the mic is fighting fit  
to hear you spit some shit  
on how I tricked your clit:  
play the game, sister,  
lay the blame, mister,  
say the name, it's The ...

## **SHOOTER'S HILL**



# Joined-up Writing

Memory Anesu Sergeant

1.

My son's a writer, aye, but he'll not write  
to me, his poor old mam. I could be dead  
these twenty years, sat in this chair, bone white.  
Detective novels. *Crime pays*, mam, he said.  
Only in books. In life, you pay twice over,  
you cannot close a chapter, purge a sin.  
I wronged my laddie, Ollie, Oliver.  
Oliver Robson. Have you heard of him?

You've not? You're not from Tyneside are you, pet?  
Milk, two sugars, boil the kettle, mind!  
Ollie wrote seven books for Coronet,  
his last one's autographed, see here, it's signed  
Oliver Robson. Every paragraph  
pure gold, a fortune in that autograph.

2.

She read her fortune in his autograph,  
that Constance, but he'd not believe it, Ollie.  
He got a grand advance for *Epitaph*  
and bought this foisty townhouse to console me  
after he married her, out of the blue.  
Wouldn't let me arrange it, his own mother,  
church wedding and all. He said 'I do'  
knowing I disapproved. How could he love her?

She wasn't bonny, always overdressed,  
I'd never understand her when she spoke.  
Not that I'm prejudiced, some of my best  
friends are foreign. These days folk are folk *reversal*  
but then was different: Constance was coloured, brown,  
a name so long you'd sweat to break it down.

3.

Didn't belong, nigh verging on a breakdown  
and Ollie such a softy. African.

She'd not talk much, her face a constant frown,  
must have been pity made him take her hand –  
raped, or so she said. We were dead close,  
Ollie and me, until she came, from nowhere:  
whole house smelt of sadza; all his clothes  
designer labels; cut his bonny hair

and marched him off to church twice on a Sunday!

Ollie, the atheist, who had no shame.

She must have used Black Magic that dark day  
to make him say *I do* and sign his name.

We all lived here, I had no choice, she'd won.

Aye, Constance gained, and me, I lost my son.

4.

That year, she gained three stone, gave birth: a son.  
Maurice: the image of his da, abroad  
plugging his latest book, but back home soon.  
Only said three words, Constance: *Praise the Lord.*  
The flowers arrived first. Chrysanthemums,  
delphiniums. I treated them as mine,  
pretended that his note had said, *To Mam,*  
and saw her eyes well up, dark as the Tyne.

Next day, that slim blue envelope, first post.  
I steamed it open, read his spiky hand:  
*My darling wife, Bless you! Now I'm the most  
happy soul alive since God made man ...*  
To see it written down, his love, his faith,  
stabbed by his pen, I felt. Stabbed in the face.

5.

A stabbing pain the left side of my face,  
 I took a fresh white sheet and scrawled the line:  
*Dear Constance, Whore of Babylon, unchaste,*  
*you lied about the rape, the child's not mine ...*  
 I knew his hand, his long flamboyant 'I',  
 the exact angle, leaning to the right,  
 the mild slope of his 's', his loopless 'y'.  
 How could I not? I taught my son to write

his name when he was four. I trained his hand  
 to copy mine, letters with tiny tails  
 dying to be joined up – *You must leave England*  
*and take your bastard with you* – cut his nails  
 to help his grip. Raised him for literature.  
 That fateful day I signed *his* signature.

6.

She fainted when she saw his signature ...

I helped her pack her suitcase, paid the fare –  
it cost a fortune, flight to Africa.

I would have topped myself. What saved her? Prayer.

Poured myself a Scotch, if truth be telt,  
when I got back, sat in this armchair, pet,  
the chair she fed the laddie in that smelt  
of milk and sadza. I still smell it yet.

I let it ring when Ollie phoned that night,  
headache so bad, I couldn't take to bed.

He rang to say he'd just got off his flight –  
each ring was like a stab wound in my head.

I heard the key, stood up, I don't know how.

If there's a God, I thought, God help me now!

7.

There is no God. Only you home helps now  
who make weak tea and ask about my son.  
There's dust on the computer screen. God knows,  
I'm fast forgetting how to switch it on.  
It hurts my hands to use a mobile phone,  
he'll never ring it anyway, no doubt,  
they'll not have phones in Africa. Alone,  
I'm dying a slow death since he walked out.

I trawl the bookshops searching for his name,  
gold embossed letters lighting up a spine,  
five hundred pages full of guilt and shame.  
But naught in there comes equal to my crime:  
I signed his name; betrayed, in black and white,  
my son, the writer. No, pet, he'll not write.



# **DARTFORD**



# What Do Women Like Bes'?

Mrs Alice Ebi Bafa

My name is Mrs Alice Ebi Bafa,

I come from Nigeria.

I'm very fine, isn't it?

My nex' birthday I'll be ... twenty-nine. *not nearly*

I'm business woman. *as old*

Would you like to buy some cloth?

I've all de latest styles from Lagos,

Italian shoe an' handbag to match,

lace, linen an' Dutch wax.

I only buy de bes'

an' I travel first class.

Some say I have blood on my han's

'cause I like to paint my nails red,

but others call me femme fatale.

My father had four wives

so I've had five husband.

I cast a spell with my gap-tooth smile

an' my bottom power! lol

Three were good and two were bad.

The first three were old and rich

an' I was young and fit.

They died of exhaustion!

The first from Ghana, second Sierra Leone,

the third was white Englishman.

Short or tall, black or white,

I had race relations with dem.

They were quiet simple men

so I told lie to pepper de marriage.

## THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE

*Why you drink Guinness in my neighbour's house-o?*

*Is she so fine in her Jimmy Shoe?*

*You go vex if I meet Justice Bafa*

*in Lagos bar and off my phone! Ah-ah!*

*Am I Delilah to cut off your head?*

I accused them of fornication

when they could barely stand on their two legs.

To enter my good book, they go beg!

The fourth one was ladies' man,

I could not count his women on one han'

but he'd rage if I looked at another man.

He puff his ches' like King Solomon

with wife and concubine

but woman must be faithful and sober.

Such talk is not worth one kobo!

I am not a feminax,

I do not believe women are equal to men,

women are better!

Our chamber of Venus

is for both birth and pleasure.

I was very wild when I was young.

They called me Miss Highlife,

I was not considered a good wife

but I always respected my husban'.

He died when I returned from dis London.

accuse  
of cheating

no  
let the  
wicked  
be  
book

The fifth one I married for love.

Chief Justice 'Aboniki' Bafa.

He was studying law at University of Ibadon.

He was not yet twenty-one,

wicked in bed and so handsome

but he liked pornographic magazine.

His favourite was *Playboy*.

One day I threw it on fire

NUM

to teach him a lesson.

He turned into wife batterer.

He was to regret his action.

I beat him till he begged for his ancestors!

Now we get on like house on fire.

Some say I'm a witchcraft

'cause I did not bear dem children.

They do not understand the Western medicine.

Since my first husban', from Ghana,

I had freedom of procreation.

He wanted ten children to pass my hip

but I learnt how to wield de whip.

Ghana is very advanced,

the female owns the children not de male.

This is their folktale

I tell in my own tongue:

'What Do Women Most Desire?'

no separation

## THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE

A big man soldier  
resided in king's household.  
But outside de compound  
he saw small girl, fourteen years of age  
and took her by force!  
He was disgraced and sentenced to death!  
They must cut off his ... head. 10/  
In Ghana, woman was goddess.  
But the queen pitied his sorrow,  
she would spare his life  
if he could answer question  
*What thing is it that women most desire?*  
in a year and tomorrow.

The soldier went on his two legs.  
What do women like bes'?'  
Some said gold coin, or fine cloth,  
some said man be chilli-pepper hot,  
some said freedom, some said marriage,  
some said we want husband think  
we can keep secret to chest.  
None were correct  
and he failed the brain to guess.

The year end he mus' return.  
Off road he heard beating of drum  
an' saw plenty women, fit and young,  
dancing in kente cloth,  
traditional dress of Ghana.  
They must give him answer.  
But they disappeared into hot air.  
Only an old old madame  
suffering from eyes, leg rough like yam.

*Greetings, Nana! I beg you your wisdom.*

*What is the greatest desire of women?*

*She smiled, I reveal secret!*

*But sozaboy, promise*

*to grant my bes' wish.*

*He gives her his word.*

*The old madame is elated.*

*Nex' day old and young congregated  
to hear soldier response.*

*Even mosquito quiet for his reply:*

*Women desire to have sovereignty*

*over their husbands, or lovers.*

*They want to have mastery over him.*

*If I lie, I forfeit my head for sin.*

*The palace sings jubilation.*

*No woman can contradict him,*

*wife, widow or virgin.*

*But the old madame with eyes*

*must have her wish:*

*That he must take her hand in marriage!*

*He think say it worse than death*

*but soldier mus' honour his debt.*

*That night old madame be smiling in bed.*

*It pain him to look his newlywed.*

*Husban', pay your dues to wife!*

*Am I too poor for love?*

*I can amen' myself, Sir,*

*but you must amen' yourself also.*

*Your family not give virtue, dat from God.*

*Your pride not worth one cedi!*

*You say I old. Respect your elder!*

*And if I ugly, I not take lover.*

*Ugliness an' age keep me chaste.*

*Still he refuse to look her face.*

*I make amen', my husban'. Choose!*

*I remain ugly an' old*

*an' faithful to your body,*

*or young an' fine and flirt any body ...*

*What a dilemma!*

*He frown till he resemble old papa.*

*My wife, he says, Choose for your husband.*

*I place myself in your capable hands.*

*This so pleases the old old madame.*

*Kiss me, my husban', so handsome!*

*You have given me power you should.*

*I shall be both beautiful an' good.*

*Look my face when cock crow,*

*I am very pleasing to you.*

*Her prophecy came to pass*

*and the marriage consummated in bliss ...*

*So she married a rapist*

*but he learnt his lesson.*

*May God give us young submissive husband!*

*you  
choose  
for me*

*reparative  
therapy*

You like my headtie?

It's de latest fashion.

They sell like hot cake on Victoria Island.

Fifty pounds.

I give you discount 'cause I like your smile.

The quality is very good.

If I take off more I will not make profit

an' I travel to Lagos nex' week.

Make it my lucky day.

Please, I beg you!

trying to  
sell her  
clothes

*Incarnate*

# The Devil in Cardiff

Huw Fryer Jones

*to Hell*

D'ya hear Robbo got sent down again?

When a snitch gets sent down

what chance for the rest of us, eh?

Allowed one call and he calls me,

the div. I ses, *Where are ya?* He ses,

*Hell! No signal down 'ere. Can't bloody text!*

I ses, *What you doing down there, moron?*

Ses he met a man in the Dragon,

asks him what he does and Robbo

ses he's a bailiff, helluva sly, Robbo.

Man ses he's a bailiff too, for his sins,

an' Robbo gets the bevvies in.

Talk breaking, entering, weapons,

*brags about sins*

summonses, like, repossessions.

Sell his nain for a pint, Robbo.

Pint of bitter for me ... Robbery

but he got a suspended ... So they're playing pool

an' man says he's not a bailiff at all

he's the Devil Incarnate! \.

Robbo ses, *I was the devil in Cardiff* \.

*meself last weekend. Broke the ASBO,*

*banned from South Wales, me ... Robbo,*

*Robert Owen.* They shake hands like

they're arm wrestling an' Robbo winks.

Ses he's got a job on the side selling

dope to the cops, raking it in.

Thick as thieves, they were. Ta!

Closing time, there's a lad in a Lada,  
 won't start. He's revving it hoarse,  
 cursing it to hell. Freezing cold, it was.  
 Car's choking like an old bag  
 then comes back to life. *Thank God*, ses the lad,  
 drives off. Robbo laughs, *If you're the Devil*  
*you shoulda taken the car, you div,*  
 but the Devil ses no, he only takes what's his  
 when the curse means business,  
 none of your half-baked.  
 Robbo ses he'll teach him the tricks of the trade.

They're well out of town now  
 an' Robbo stops at this bungalow,  
 peeling paint, leaky roof,  
 knocks on the door with his leather glove  
 and this old dear opens up, *Oh, it's you!*  
 tries to slam the door but he pushes through.  
 She says, *I owe nothing, I'm a poor, old woman.*  
 But Robbo's got this fake summons –  
 non-payment of a fine with interest. *evil*  
*Pay up or pay the price*, he ses,  
 and the Devil's laughing in his overcoat  
 like he just told an old joke.  
 Nothing on the shelf but a teapot  
 full of old coins. Robbo grabs it,  
 empties the coins on the carpet.  
*Mine*, he says, *To cover an old debt*  
*I paid for you, on a street corner.*  
 Helluva sly, Robbo. She says, *You're*  
*wicked, Robert Owen, I only*

## THE FRIAR'S TALE

knew one man, my late husband, Dai,  
then starts speaking Welsh, like. *Repent*  
or the Devil take your soul and the teapot ancient!

Robbo tells her where she can put  
her repentance and the Devil bags him and the teapot  
non-stop to Hell! Dying for a pint, he is.

Only serve tea down there, and bloody biscuits ...

Bitter for me ... He'll be back here

in less than a month, though, bet you a fiver,

they'll be beggin' him to go. Hell want

Get an ASBO from Hell, Robbo. *even want*

*him*

# Arse Dramatica

Geoff Sumner

Door-to-door salesmen? Scum!

I should know, use ta be one.

Me an' this geezer John worked North London

where the Newtons is. Pensioners in semis,

read the *Guardian*, give to charities,

know the type? We was the bees knees *low the bus reference*

*ragging* in bullshit. Gift of the gob.

Commission-only and we made a few bob

on the stain-free carpet job

but wasn't enough. John had a plan.

Fake insurance, our first scam.

Made a few grand.

Then NADA, for dumb people

who can't act. John turned on the babble,

quote the Bible

from Eve to the ark

if it helped with the big ask.

Straight from the devil's arse

I leave him to it, go down the boozier.

He looks up Thomas, old geezer,

bedridden, East End miser,

## THE SUMMONER'S TALE

cash-wadded mattress,  
made masses,  
John 'knows' the missus:

*now*

*Morning gorgeous. How's the old man?*  
*She winks, Bent as a white van. ?*  
An' John says, all deadpan,

*Collecting for me charity, NADA.*  
*National Academy for Dumb Actors.*  
*Thomas, be our benefactor!*

Sits on the end of the bed,  
missus brings sliced meat, sliced bread,  
Thomas shakes his head:

*Fuck off!*  
*I've given a grand to you and your 'staff'.*  
*Enough's enough!*

I'd scarper. Not John.  
Knows how to turn it on  
an' the wife crosses her bacons.

*Sounds like a good cause, luv!*

*she likes  
the finer*

Every line you could think of,  
John pulls it off:

how they got to build new offices,  
how it's giving jobs to the jobless.  
Load of old cobblers.

If you got no charity, Thomas, know what?

You're nothing Nada. Diddly Squat.

Now show us what ya got!

Plonks the form on the eiderdown, ?

Have a butcher's at this. Come on,

sign your name in neon!

take a stab at it

Thomas smiles, Alright, I'm smitten

but you know I don't do nothin' written.

Got somethin' better I keep hidden.

He gestures to the cover, Put your arm

behind me, an' John's groping round his arse,

hoping for a windfall 'for the arts'

when Thomas farts! Loud as a carthorse,

Share that with your workforce!

And John's a whippet off a racecourse,

you won't believe the stench!

Now he's sitting on the pub bench

plotting revenge

while the whole pub's trying to decide

how John'll equally divide

that blast from the backside!

lol

To this day, John's pissed off

but you can't argue with the pay-off

He had it coming. End of.

lazy



**STONE**



# I Go Back to May 1967

Yejide Idowu-Clarke

*POV of  
bride*

*After Sharon Olds*

I see them standing outside their family compounds.  
 I see my father wearing a white agbadan and  
 crocodile shoes, instructing his driver by the  
 spiked iron gate of their complex, he is just  
 twenty-four but already a big man in Lagos. It is  
 rainy season, the air heavy with his looming proposal. I  
 see my mother walking barefoot on the red dust road to her  
 village, a calabash on her head, wearing her only cloth and  
 crucifix, she has just fetched water from the well.  
 They have not yet met, today they will be married.  
 My father will arrive in his Cadillac to  
 translate her into his bride, adorned with gold.  
 I want to approach them and say Stop,  
 I am begging you—you are not a bad woman,  
 he is not a good man, he is going to put you on trial  
 like Job: you will bear him a daughter, and later a son,  
 and each time he will say his people have turned against you  
 because you are from a small village and not educated,  
 each baby must be removed by force from your breast  
 (but he will secretly place us in care of my aunt  
 to attend the best schools in the country)  
 and you will draw the sign of the cross on our heads,  
 your womb will cry out but you will not disgrace him  
 for you promised to honour and obey; in time, he will claim  
 he wants a new wife, believes in one man one wife  
 and wants a divorce, will send you back to your village

*father is  
24?7 or  
driver*

## THE CLERK'S TALE

barefoot and bareheaded with barely a cloth to cover  
the belly that bore him two children; then order you back  
like a housegirl to manage the house and the wedding feast  
for his beautiful new wife from a good family  
who resembles you, because it is I, your daughter,  
standing before you, young, adorned with gold;  
and only when you say, *Oga, please I beg you,*  
*do not treat your new wife the way you have treated me,*  
will he reveal his deception to test your faith  
in him and your love of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to  
approach them, there in the late May heat and say it,  
her hungry pretty face turning towards me  
slow motion with the weight of the calabash,  
his arrogant handsome face turning towards me  
slowly with the precious weight on his mind.  
But I do not say it. I want to live my life. I  
take them up like Shango and Oshun  
mahogany dolls and rub them together  
at the hips, wood on wood, as if to  
make fire from them, and I say  
Do what is God's will and I will bear witness.

different  
attitude  
+ feel  
from other  
poems

## That Beatin' Rhythm

Soul Merchant

interesting  
form

Once Upon a Time, in the Land Of 1000 Dances, January married May. What is This Thing Called Love? Some say, Love Is a Serious Business; some say, Love Is a Trap. He's The Bachelor, She's Not The Marrying Kind. He's Mr Big Shot *Got My Mind Made Up* and she's a Country Girl *Talkin' 'Bout Poor Folks, Thinkin' 'Bout My Folks*. He says *I've Struck It Rich* but some say *she Cashing In*. He's Too Old for her and yet, they (Just Like) Romeo and Juliet. Adam and Eve.

Capitalize  
And I'm Damien, Agent oo Soul from the Backstreet, the Image Of a Man. Saw a Job Opening for a Mr Clean to Lend a Hand to Little Old Man, January. He bought the House For Sale, The House Next Door, huge as a Haunted Castle. I fell The Big Oak Tree to make furniture an' sing The Work Song as I'm clearing Bricks, Broken Bottles and Sticks outside. There's a Storm Warning and I Run for Cover from the Spring Rain, the first Time I see May, the Lady In Green. She's a Flower Child, a Wild One. I say *Stop Girl*, but she Keep On Walking, Surrounded By a Ray Of Sunshine. Am I Cold, Am I Hot. I Got the Fever. I Love Her So Much (It Hurts Me).

not fourth?

January puts the Band Of Gold on her Third Finger Left Hand an' they Sign ● on the Dotted Line. Then we Dearly Beloved Come Back to bass. Ain't Nothin' But a Houseparty. There be Soul Food: Sliced Tomatoes and Green Onions. There be Apples, Peaches, Pumpkin Pie. There be Street Talk, Sweet Talk and Melodies.

## THE MERCHANT'S TALE

—*There Was a Time*, says January, *when I'd Philly Dog Around the World but I'm Tired Of Running Around. Since I Found My Baby, Home Is Where the Heart Is. When you're old as The Big Oak Tree, Make Sure (You Have Someone Who Loves You), a Little Young Lover or Time Will Pass You By. Some say Ain't No Soul Left In These Old Shoes but I'm forever a Night Owl. I'm Com'un Home In the Morning, Pity My Feet.*

January, you Keep On Talking, I've Got My Eyes On You, Blushing Bride. Ain't laying my Cards On the Table but My Heart Is Calling. Music, The Beat, That Beatin' Rhythm. January leads May Out On the Floor and it's Getting Mighty Crowded. I Can't Be Still, gotta Dance, Dance, Dance: The Horse, The Boston Monkey, The Cool Jerk. I'm Where It's At, Look At Me, Look At Me, girl, What's My Chances? When they left, I Just Kept On Dancing but my Shoes got the Cold-Hearted Blues.

Love Love Love, I be Love Sick. Heart Trouble but Nobody Knows What's Going On In My Mind But Me. This Love-Starved Heart (Is Killing Me). I S.O.S. so she know Something's Wrong. Here She Comes, my Black-Eyed Girl, to Help Me.

—*Only Your Love Can Save Me*, I whisper. Call Me, Call Me Tomorrow!

—*I Must Love You*, she smiles, *I Dream Of You. But January's a Jealous Lover. Keeps a Shotgun.*

—*Don't Worry 'Bout Me. I Can Take Care Of Myself, but Gotta Have Your Love, Can't Wait No Longer, It's Torture.*

We plan to find some Love Time. She'll Joe Tex me. It's our Deep Dark Secret.

Are <sup>him</sup> <sup>50%</sup> songs?

101 Then, All Of a Sudden, January's struck blind as Ray Charles.  
Be's That Way Sometimes. A Blessing In Disguise, If You Ask  
Me. They call Dr Love but January says to May,  
—*I Don't Need No Doctor. I Need You! Don't Pity Me.*

Mister Misery for weeks, sees nothing but Ten Shades Of Blue.  
Only Sweet Soul Music make him Keep On Keeping On. He'd  
die for Suspicion.

—*They're Talkin' About Me. They say You Don't Love Me Anymore.*  
*Tell Me It's Just a Rumour, Baby.*

*always  
has  
his hand  
on her* —*Why Picture Me Gone? Baby Can't You See, I'll Always Love You.*  
Before he'd never Let Her Go Out Of Sight, now she Serving  
Sentence of Life in a Prison of Love. He says,  
—*Baby Let Me Hold Your Hand. Never Gonna Let You Go. What Good*  
*Am I Without You?*

How can I Love My Baby now she Never Alone? Calls for a  
Whole New Plan. Got To Find a Way.

January got a Top Secret room, he call 'My Garden Of Eden'  
where they Do It. Vinyl Heaven In the Afternoon, Wall To Wall  
Heartaches. Raised stage made from The Big Oak Tree, decks,  
A Lot Of Loving Goin' Round the turntable. Nobody Knows  
where it's at, Nobody But Me. She cut me a Key To My Happiness  
from the Master Key so we can get A Little Togetherness.

And today Sweeter Than the Day Before cos January says,  
—*Let's Go To That Lovin' Place,*

an' May Joe Tex me. I Run Like the Devil to that One Room  
Paradise and Up Jump the Devil on stage like I Playing Hide and  
Seek. No steps to climb Step By Step. I'm Waiting for you, Lady  
In Green, to open the Green Door, an' I'll Open the Door To  
Your Heart.

They Walk On In. January Just Can't Trust Nobody since he blind. Thinks She Got Another Man.

—*May, Do You Love Me or are you Somebody Else's Sweetheart?*

—*What Kind Of Lady you think I am? I'm a Good Woman, Still True To You and I Keep the Faith. What More Do You Want?*

—*Little Darlin', I'm So So Sorry. What Can I Do Just To Prove I Love You? An' May says,*

—*I Feel an Urge Coming On for That Beatin' Rhythm. Gotta find The Right Track for Our Love. I'm Not Strong Enough to Get On Up onto the stage, it's Ten Miles High. If You Love Me, Get On Your Knees so I can climb Up and Over to the decks.*

—*For You Baby, I'll Do Anything.*

Some say, Love Ain't Nothin' (But a Monkey On Your Back) an' that monkey Keep On Climbing up to where I'm Standing. She play '~~I Really Love You~~' real loud. We gotta Take a Chance, Time's a-Wasting. Temptation Is Calling My Name, Girl, Don't Make Me Wait. She's Turning My Heartbeat Up, Oh My Darling! No Time for Interplay, I'm The Snake In Paradise, Oh, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah ...

And Suddenly January yells,

—*What? Oh No Not My Baby! I Can See Him Loving You!!!*

No Fortune Teller predict this. I'm In a World Of Trouble. And I think, Be Careful Girl, Better Use Your Head. Say It Isn't So and May says,

—*Sweetheart Darling, a Last-Minute Miracle! I'm So Glad your sight's Come Back. Baby Can't You See, Damien's teaching me the Love Hustle? Don't deny me One Little Dance!*

—*Who Are You Trying To Fool? I Can See Him Making Love To You, Baby! But May says,*

—*You're Barkin' Up the Wrong Tree. I love oldies not newies. I want a Big Bad Wolf not a Baby Boy. You Too Darn Soulful, That's Why I Love You. And January says,*

*—If I Could Only Be Sure. I Was Blind, maybe Something's Wrong With These Eyes. Just a Little Misunderstanding. If You've Been Cheatin', I Don't Like It (But I Love You). I'll Forgive and Forget. May, We Were Made For Each Other, Like Adam and Eve. Do I Love You (Indeed I Do).*

Now we Right Back Where We Started From. It's Torture listening to A Lover's Concerto, Standing In the Shadows Of Love. Give me The Real Thing. I'm Hung Up On Your Love, May, He'll Never Love You Like I Do. I'm Stepping Out of the Picture, I'm On My Way, I'm Gone. But I'll Never Forget You. My Heart Is Calling You Baby. Every Beat Of My Heart.



# **GRAVESEND**



## Fine Lines

### Jeu'di Squires

You

knew

blue

was my colour the blue-black

of an old tattoo you drew

blood with your sword-pen-gun

I want you

back

No one-night-stud

on a shire horse

seeking princess in chintz dress you were the

### Fire Horse

wild steed I rode bareback

held your hair for reins as you bolted like a stud

each strange steel stud

on your right ear gleaming in the true-black

*Don't touch my metal, you spat*

so I held back

from your rook tragus lobe

three steel globes

though my tongue longed to lick

those flickering glittering ellipses ...

No striptease

    baring of the soul      you were

    pierced thick as chainmail

        metal where you should have had a heart

I couldn't read the body art

    infiltrate the ink of each tattoo

        mine a fine line      get

through

to

you

Your body spread out like the map

    of a falcon in full-feathered-flight

        wanting to be unicorn

one breath on your rook and you bucked

    your tragus and you flew

I rode you halfway round the globe till I was saddle-sore  
and never coming back

You scratched an outline    on my bare back

    your sword-pen-gun

        blackened ink in my skin    deep as melanin

you carved my back a gold frame

    ornate with leaves

    but left before you filled in the picture

so my back became the mirror mirror  
     on the shelf  
 you looked into its glass and saw yourself  
 in the future   leaving  
     now I'm sitting here rekindling your memory  
 like an old flame

You backstabbed  
     but I healed      scabbed  
     like an oil painting  
 now I'm reflecting  
     on this old gold ring  
     you left on my finger   the day you left

With this ring  
     I opened your mind a book and read  
         in fine gold letters  
         *Don't touch my metal*  
 déjà vu   but the urge was too strong  
     I put my tongue to your lobe  
         and you bolted  
         leaving me      singed   the wild bird  
 who  
 flew  
 too  
     close to your fire and scorched her wings

## THE SQUIRE'S TALE

Betrothed to a future perfect you

I read the minds of gold-studded unicorns

with fake horns who

see their fate framed in the fading blue-  
black of my back

when I turn my back

on them

for not being you

# Makar

Frankie Lynn

*If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.*

— Henry David Thoreau

To Denmark's Freetown Christiania

my mind transports me when it's overcast,  
when there's a thunderstorm or night draws near

I close my eyes: the heady hit of grass  
from hash stalls; houses honed from wood and glass,  
one flaking door, its mirrored hall, the spiral  
staircase: on that battered sofa – Arild,

his purple dreads engrossed in his own story,  
Arild, who flew too close to gold, dropped out  
and landed here, the tumble-down, three-storey  
Sesame House, home of the down, the out,  
who come to learn how to survive without:  
to make do, make things, make things up, to dare  
to fabricate a castle out of air

under a master, aka The Artist,  
whose learned thoughts flow deeper than a fjord  
and made of Arild's mind a palimpsest  
on which he wrote three notes that formed a chord  
till Arild knew the world within a word  
and one long night, through spelling out a spell,  
cobbled a cabin made of cockle shells

## THE FRANKLIN'S TALE

with seven caves, each cave singing the sea  
and when the sun came up his cabin shone,  
everyone marvelled at his sorcery;  
but Freetown states you can't create a home  
without consent: a clash, and Arild's gone,  
squeezed out, forced out, pushed out down Pusher Street ...  
now here we meet him, crossing Princes Street,

Edinburgh: now an actor, single, shaved,  
who slept on someone's floor two years ago  
till luck ran out; homeless: then one night caved  
a home inside the Mound, its walls aglow  
with books, books, books, except for one framed photo  
where you'd expect a mirror: Hogmanay,  
Deirdre and Angus on their wedding day,

his dearest friends: Angus, bleached blond, well-built;  
Deirdre, brunette, petite; she made his outfit --  
bubblewrap jacket, seersucker kilt  
to match her jeans bejewelled with pomegranate  
seeds, her bubble shoes the perfect fit:  
made for each other -- Deirdre wears the trousers,  
Angus, the kilt -- they're solid, safe as houses

till late midsummer's eve, Angus away  
in England for a month, everyone high  
on homebrew except Arild who today  
must spell it out, confess to Deirdre why  
it's agony to look her in the eye  
for every time he looks at her, he's cursed,  
must say those words a thousand times rehearsed:

*I must make love to you. Two years he's made  
 light of it, nothing of it, forged, invented  
 a virtue of necessity, betrayed  
 nothing, but love, drunk on itself, unwanted,  
 made a pass, yet Deirdre's strong, undaunted:  
 I will, she laughs, if, for three weeks, my Danish  
bookworm, you can make the Castle vanish;*

---

not knowing at that instant Arild texts *magic*  
 The Artist in his hammock out in Freetown  
 who knows, this master artist-architect,  
 both how to build things up and pull things down;  
 how the right words, verb, adjective and noun,  
 in the right order, uttered in the air  
 can turn a sandstone castle to thin air

for the small sum of a thousand euros  
 which isn't much when love feels more like death  
 so Arild learns the craft and each day grows  
 as well versed as the witches in Macbeth  
 predicting destiny with sound and breath,  
 till August brings the Festival: day one,  
Edinburgh wakes to find her Castle gone!

---

Tourists, their eyes set on wide-angle lens:  
 actors drop fliers, workers, shoppers dazed;  
 Angus and Deirdre coming back from friends  
 stare at the huge blank empty space, amazed  
 that overnight, history's been erased.  
 Throwaway sentence uttered on the solstice,  
Deirdre chokes, remembering her promise.

---

*I gave my word to Arild, she tells Angus  
who pales and holds her hand to keep from shaking,  
The Royal Mile indifferent to their anguish.  
There's no way out but take the road not taken –  
if Arild knows the art of dark unmaking  
what more can he unleash, unearth, undo:  
Make love to him, but let your heart be true.    ☹*

A stone's throw from the Castle to the Mound,  
each painful step as heavy as a stone  
and each stone building weighted to the ground,  
each cobbled wynd is whispering *Run home!*  
A kiss, she takes the final steps alone,  
her mind reverting to their wedding day,  
that photograph. But now her lips are grey.

Arild, who caved a home inside the Mound,  
is squatting deep inside its entrance, Arild,  
who sees in Deirdre's bearing how profound  
true love can be; his monumental oral  
feat has spelled out love's double-headed arrow:  
physical, headstrong, passionately selfish,  
psychical, heartfelt, passionately selfless.

*You're both too good for me. Go back to him.*  
Arild is spent and yet he owes The Artist,  
who, hearing of his pupil's altruism,  
cancels the debt. Now Arild knows that art is  
the making of him: art is his catharsis,  
through words, words, words, he'll purge the pain, the doubt.  
The cave erupts and pushes Arild out

to reinvent himself again, a makar:  
to make a poem; hone it, room by room,  
stanza by stanza; form, on one blank acre  
from bricks and mortar, breath and metre, home;  
to mount the spiral staircase of his poem,  
take a battered volume off the shelf,  
open a random page, and read himself ...



**STROOD**



## Reconstruction

Kiranjeet Singh

*The 'honour killer', Gino De Luca, has today been convicted of manslaughter of his teenage daughter. Photographer De Luca, 44, was suffering from severe depression at the time of the killing. He beheaded his daughter, Virginia, 14, then delivered her severed head to alleged blackmailer, Tony 'The Ape' Ferraro, 37. Ferraro faces allegations of child abuse. De Luca will serve his 8-year sentence at a secure psychiatric hospital.*

— *The Echo*, 20 June, 1984.

Had her dad's red hair but wild as if I  
 ragged it. He snapped; she <sup>knew</sup>  
 how broke his lens was, gave <sup>what</sup>  
 it wanted, a game of <sup>he ...</sup>  
 But *he* became real. My Gino <sup>did</sup>  
 some shots for that man, **Ferraro**: had <sup>to</sup>.  
 He, The Ape, Warholed his flat with <sup>young</sup>  
 redheads, would call them his 'girls'.  
 Had her headshot; wanted to have her. <sup>He</sup>  
 dealt in photos, lies, told Gino she <sup>had</sup>  
 no De Luca blood, **found** his Achilles <sup>with</sup> <sup>that</sup>.  
 My man lost it. Not his <sup>baby ...</sup>  
 Not the man I married in this <sup>photo</sup>  
 snapped on his way to court, <sup>and</sup>  
 the headline, **MANSLAUGHTER**, <sup>the</sup>  
 thrust of it. My Gino <sup>only</sup>  
 said one word, *Sorry*, that was his <sup>way</sup>,  
 to leave it **hanging** cold. He had <sup>to</sup>.  
 I couldn't face him, or the knife. I <sup>save</sup>  
 the papers where I still see <sup>Virginia ...</sup>  
 They said each time Gino faced the mirror, it <sup>was</sup>  
 her pale face his eyes belonged <sup>to ...</sup>

## Profit

Yves Depardon

Radix malorum est Cupiditas. Ad Thimotheum, 6°.

*honest*  
Ladies and Gents and Miscellaneous,  
is how I start my Feel-Good talks, Tonight  
my lecture is on Greed, yes, Avarice,  
the deadliest of sins. I stand before you,  
guru of Gordon Gekko, 'Greed is Good',  
a liar, forger, thief; thigh-deep in sin.

Oh yes, I've had my innings and my outings –  
more than once, I've peaked, top of the hit list  
and lived. I'm vicious, too wicked to die.

You want to know the consequence of sinning?  
Don't ask a saint, O ladies, ask a sinner.

And then I cast my eye upon the crowd,  
nodding my head as if remembering  
a heinous deed for which I paid twice over.  
And after this dramatic pause, my punchline:  
Radix malorum est Cupiditas.

A pinch of Latin to add gravitas:

Love of money is the root of evil.

Already, some are squirming in their seats  
and one or two are weeping. I take pains  
to look the part, my greying hair dyed yellow,  
stringier than Stringfellow, greasy  
and shoulder length. I dress androgynous,  
a velvet robe, touch of the Vatican  
but don't mention the G word or the J word.  
As for my voice, I camp it up an octave,

*intentional?*

*God?  
Jesus?*

to freak old ladies out, and thrill the queens,  
address my business partner as 'my partner' lol  
and roll my eyes a lot. They love the act.

*You see this volume here?* I hold it up,  
You Wouldn't Want to Go There: A Confession,  
*my life, my death in print. Read it to learn*  
*how NOT to go to Heaven. Me, in hardback.*

*You won't see me outside the pearly gates,*  
*I'm going somewhere hot by Business Class – hell*  
*Radix malorum est Cupiditas.*

*It's hot, hot-off-the-press, singed by the fires*  
*of Hell, self-help with bells on. See this water?*

*Cloudy as a Welsh weekend, it's blessed*  
*with healing properties, the minerals*  
*will cure all ills from asthma to depression.*

*Who'd like a sip? Take care, it's medicine,*  
*not Evian. You may be wondering*  
*why I wear a diamanté wristband?*

*Crims Against Crime. Follow us on Facebook.*

*For a small sum, you too could raise awareness ... lol*

They lap it up: the doggy rainwater  
in bottles, and the sparkly rubber bands,  
they've come to spend spend spend. When they've suspended  
all disbelief, I raise my crystal glass:

*Radix malorum est Cupiditas.*

*And then I roll my eyes: 'What shall it profit*  
*a man, if he shall gain the whole wide world, and*  
*lose his own soul?' Mark 8, verse 36.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, I lost my soul!*

It's then I pause to drink the glass of claret  
and eat some dry white bread. You want a story?

## THE PARDONER'S TALE

This is the tale I tell them: I grew up  
somewhere not in London nor in Kent –  
believe you me, you wouldn't want to go there.  
I formed a gang, we swore blood brotherhood,  
shared the same scar, called ourselves The Lifers.  
Just three of us, the twisted twins and me.  
Handbags at first but then we graduated  
to break-ins, made a thousand pounds a week,  
not to mention all the benefits  
under false identities. We spent it  
on wine, women, William, as in Hill. ? online betting  
Oh, I could tell you, on St George's Night  
how we paid homage to the red, the white!  
And how we swore allegiance, how we swore  
'Fuck this, screw you!' until the air was blue  
with uniforms, the rest of it's a blur,  
but time is cash ... One night, the twins and I  
were in the local wine bar, when we heard  
that Baz, a virgin member we were grooming  
had been done over fatal by the rival  
gang, The Deathwish, led by Death. We were  
tooled up, our hand-cut suits lined thick with knives  
and bored as hell. I smashed our empty bottle  
of red against the bar, 'Death, thou shalt die!  
and off we sped. We found this ancient geezer,  
smelling of piss, face like a fist. I kicked him,  
felled him like a deck of cards. 'Fuck you!  
Ain't you lived long enough? Drop dead, you bastard!'  
He turned his head to face me, 'Go on, kill me!  
I'm fucked, nothing but flesh and blood and skin.  
At Death's door. Death, you wanker, let me in!'

'Where's Death?' I kick again, 'Death,' croaked the tramp,  
 'condemned block. Number 4.' And there we found him,  
 not Death, but something far more entertaining:  
 the suitcase, crammed with filthy dirty lucre.  
 Someone's gold, someone who didn't make it,  
 so hot it hurt our eyes to look at it.  
 'Brothers,' I cried, 'this calls for celebration.  
 Champagne's not good enough! Some Charlie Chaplin!'  
 And off I sped to get some choice white powder  
 from my associates, murderous arsenic.  
You think I'd share my profit with those arselicks?  
 And back I sped to that dark place lit up  
 with *all that glisters*. There, the twins embraced me,  
 with grunts and grins and then the stranglehold  
 from one, and from the other, seven stab wounds!  
 They watched me bleed to death in that foul squat,  
 forming the arsenic into two fat lines  
 and me, I watched them snort like no tomorrow  
 and twist and writhe and die a young man's death  
 before I fell into a ten-year coma.

The wages of sin are death. I flat-lined twice  
 and twice they called the priest. When I woke up,  
 the nurse looked shell-shocked, ancient, and addressed me  
 as Sir. I stretched my arms to yawn and noticed  
 my scar, raised, red. And then I spoke. My voice  
 raised like a preacher's, organ, bass and brass:  
*Radix malorum est Cupiditas ...* hike

If people want to read the uncut version,  
 it's in my book, *You Wouldn't Want to Go There*.  
 Sold out. I have a few deluxe editions  
 at thirty pounds, each one signed by the master

## THE PARDONER'S TALE

of motivation, M, who ~~wrote~~ <sup>double meaning</sup> the foreword,  
and me. I take all credit debit cards.

Of course you may be steeped in avarice,  
too miserly to part with such a sum?

Perhaps a wristband, sir? You look like you're  
in need of moral guidance. Go to hell?

Already been there, thank you. Water, madam?

You could drop dead tomorrow, there's no future,  
only now. It's *your* life, make your choice.

Two for a fiver. Don't all rush at once.

# **ROCHESTER**



# Things

Klaudia Schippmann

*I don't need love*

*For what good will love do me?*

*Diamonds never lie to me*

*For when love's gone*

*They'll lustre on*

– 'Diamonds are Forever', Don Black

My wedding ring? I never take  
it off. I once made the mistake,  
and paid for it. The money stopped.  
I took the bus and window shopped,  
seeing in the window's filth  
the dull reflection of myself  
till something caught my eye, a spark:  
I stared stock-still till it grew dark –  
a necklace with a ruby clasp,  
if I could plunge my hand through glass ...  
Nothing else mattered. Hubby paid  
to keep my name from the front page ...

My wedding ring. Its antique gold  
understatement leaves me cold,  
its clean cut vowels that say, I'm rich.  
I much prefer the nouveau riche,  
stone-encrusted blatant bling  
that sparks from my engagement ring,  
such sparkling wit – such repartee,  
these diamonds winking back at me –  
this emerald-cut centre stone

takes centre stage at each At Home.  
Let bling deliver blah de blah  
to save me from my next faux pas,  
I have no time for metaphor:  
I make my statement with Dior  
and diamonds but, beneath these clothes,  
I'm plain Octavia who loathes  
Society. I prefer things  
that catch the light, designer rings.

See this? I keep it in the shade,  
I've never worn it. Custom-made.  
It gleams so loud it might express  
my secret to the gutter press  
how once I blagged the total of  
a thousand pounds to pay it off.  
Both our joint accounts were closed  
since hubby got me 'diagnosed'  
and bloody jeweller wanted cash.  
Ever since the credit crash  
he's hounded me. That night I shone,  
talked with my hands, I turned them on,  
Octavia, the talking doll,  
has learnt her lines, the protocol,  
I flash these lovely diamonds at  
The Money Monk. And he winks back.  
I state my debt: he makes a bid.  
I don't do small talk: he talks big.  
Says he needs to check some data,  
says he loves me two days later –  
hubby's cousin, business partner,  
Money Monk, renowned for barter,

says he only wants one thing  
 and covers up my wedding ring  
 with twenty notes all crisp and new:  
*A thousand, for a night with you!*  
 I'd rather not become involved  
 but Money's spoken: problem solved.  
 I acquiesce and realise  
 the Monk has malachite for eyes ...

Hubby's away, a business trip,  
 he left that morning. When I strip  
 for Monk, he says his body aches.  
 I love the sound his Rolex makes,  
 its subtle tick, as we embrace  
 I marvel at its jewelled face.  
 And when we're done, I call a cab  
 and pay the last instalment, cash.  
 Perfecto. Who needs money, love?  
 I prefer things, I always have.

And that would be the end, had not  
 hubby returned and spoilt the plot  
 by asking for the, now defunct,  
 thousand pounds I got from Monk,  
 the thousand pounds I thought my own  
 The Money Monk procured on loan –  
 he borrowed it from *hubby's* stash  
 but paid it back through *me*, in cash.

I hate surprises, and my gut  
 response is blunt confession but  
 my therapist often asserts,  
 sometimes it's good to lie: truth hurts.  
*I spent it.* Not untrue, I can't

## THE SHIPMAN'S TALE

quite lie but hubby's adamant,  
eyes sparkling with anger. I  
widen my lapis lazuli  
and lip, through 'Dazzling Amethyst',  
an offer that he can't resist:  
to pay my debt to him in bed ...

    This ring, I keep deposited –  
some things are better left unsaid.

## Sharps an Flats

Missy Eglantine

*Yet spak this child, whan spreynd was hooly water**And song O Alma redemptoris mater!*

– Geoffrey Chaucer

Dear Mum,

It's your son, J, chattin on a mix made  
 in Heaven, don't hit the fade switch b4 it's played:  
 remember, used 2 have perfect pitch but my pitch paid  
 a rich trade when I got cut off by a switchblade. *extra circ?*  
 No need 2 pray, U ain't hearin voices, this score is  
 the same voice age 7, spoke like a thesaurus,  
 wrote long stories, opened my throat like the dawn chorus  
 in God's gang, my chords sang Alma redemptoris.

Mum, I woz singin O Alma when the blade blast,  
 tune makes broken windows rainbow like stained glass,  
 not lookin out 4 the snake in the grass  
 gets a boy slain in the vein by the caned class.  
 I took the short cut, a door shut, I woz deaf, blind  
 2 *Shut the f\*\*k up!* Yeah, I mucked up their dead line.  
 I woz stuck up and my throat woz a red line,  
 at 7, hit Heaven b4 I hit the headlines.

2 1 7

24 / 7

*gung like*  
*Mater?* Made a martyr 4 backchattin in Latin  
sharps an flats, I had no idea what I woz chattin.  
2 boys from the back flats, thought I woz backstabbin  
so they stabbed with a sharp, 2 cut me off from battlin  
like a rich kid. So the switch did the talk, then the mans lied,  
boys in blue twisted your words till U were hands-tied  
in prayer, the nuns held U up like when dad died,  
grief crashin down your face like a landslide.

Mum, smile, it's me, J, broader and far taller  
than the boy whose voice broke before he could call for  
help, the star scholar who grew far from squalor,  
Do Re Mi Fa, with my spar, Damilola.  
Got my chords cut but I'm singin like it's Sunday,  
boys got shut up, an I know this, that one day  
you'll come stay, so peace! Remember what the nuns say,  
Love conquers all. I sign off,

Your loving son, J.

Artful Doggerel:  
***Sir Topaz vs Da Elephant – Round 3***

Sir Topaz & Da Elephant

*... grime sounds as if it had been made for a boxing gym, one where the fighters have a lot of punching to do but not much room to move.*

– Sasha Frere-Jones

I be

Sir Topaz, E3 bling king  
so dazzling you be blinking  
pack punches till they sink in  
I be Twitter, you be LinkedIn  
online the girls I reel in  
it's pep-talk that I deal in  
but Pepsi's not the real thing  
ask your homegirl how she feeling

(applause)

*Da Elephant, I'm eloquent,  
the heavyweight of grime,  
me rhymes are sick, I'm gonna pick  
your pocket full of rhyme,  
South London's king, so I'm linked in,  
you're out to lunch on bhang,  
like David slew Goliath, you  
will slay yourself with slang*

(applause)

You be

so slow you slump on the bassline  
I jump off the beat, don't waste time  
hundred kilos, watch your waistline,  
I tasted your girl, she taste fine  
I'm hungry, speaking of lunchtime  
I burn up cals on the frontline  
your trunk's defunct, her cunt's mine,  
you be out for 9 on that punchline

(mad applause and booing)

*You double dealt below the belt  
but I will bust your screen,  
you shoot your load in virtual mode  
cos you're a fairy queen,  
you stole my girl, she said you smell  
your dick's a Bic, a biro,  
you write your rhymes and learn your lines  
and gamble all your giro*

(mad applause and booing)

You be

breaking up in your nearly new style  
mess with me but you know it's futile  
I got your girl, she's nubile,  
you got three heads, look at you, vile,  
one says I'm gay but you retrieval  
one says I shafted your female  
one says fuck-all cos it's penile!  
Stick that up your trunk for a freestyle!

(mad applause)

*You got no creds, I got three heads,  
they're body, mind and soul  
but dickhead, you have only one  
that's why you're on the dole*

(applause)

I be

Sir Topaz, claiming my last dole  
just signed a deal in charcoal  
not a fat cat sitting on me arsehole,  
shoot rhymes from a metaphor arsenal,  
one step ahead, metatarsal,  
up there with Wiley & Rascal,  
you be doggerel, I'm artful,  
Elephant, fuck off back to your Castle ...

(mad applause ...)

## Unfinished Business

Mel O'Brien

*Conveniently, cowardice and forgiveness look identical at a certain distance.  
Time steals your nerve.*

– ‘Memento Mori’, Jonathan Nolan

That night, it rained so hard  
it was biblical. The Thames sunk the promenade,  
spewing up so much low life.  
It's a week since they beat up my wife,  
put five holes in my daughter. I know who they are.  
I know why. I'm three shots away from the parked car  
in a blacked-out car park. My wife cries,  
*Revenge too sweet attracts flies.*  
Even blushed with bruises she looks good. She's lying  
on the bed, next to me. *Honey, I'm fine.*  
Tonight I caught her, hands clasped, kneeling,  
still from a crime scene.  
I didn't bring my wife to Gravesend for this.  
What stops me, cowardice?  
None of them, even Joe, has the right to live.  
How can I forgive?

How can I forgive  
 none of them? Even Joe has the right to live.  
 What stops me? Cowardice.  
 I didn't bring my wife to Gravesend for this  
 still from a crime scene.  
 Tonight I caught her, hands clasped, kneeling  
 on the bed next to me. *Honey, I'm fine.*  
 Even blushed with bruises she looks good. She's lying.  
 Revenge too sweet attracts flies  
 in a blacked-out car park. My wife cries.  
 I know why. I'm three shots away from the parked car  
 put five holes in my daughter. I know who they are.  
 It's a week since they beat up my wife,  
 spewing up so much low life  
 it was biblical. The Thames sunk the promenade  
 that night, it rained so hard.

100 chars

monkey@puzzle

wen a mn opN fires hs wa 2 d top thN  
loses all overnyt blastN hs 3rd eye W a  
fulstop dat's nt tragDy

tragDy's d lot of d nvr-left-d-blocks Mr  
Nobody whose pebble- lyf is intrrptd  
b4 he hs d chnc 2 rise

he wz no tragic hero hitN glasses W d  
bosses til hs tragic flaw or f8 md him  
free-fall frm a hi plce

2 cordon off hs larger-thN lyf as f it  
wr a sculpture on a pavement framed  
W blk n yellO dntnta tape

no 666 disgraced bt lucifer w/o d angL  
status bringN lyt 2 r lacklust lyfs W a  
tweet or status ^date

since tradin widescreen 4 smallscreen  
ment mor tym tweetN thN livN nt noing  
he wz ritN hs own r.i.p.

ea bite-sized scene of hs soap opera  
buzzed n beeped on r fons wen he broK  
d speed limit on hs =o&o>

nt d boy frm dat estate hu gru ^ 2 hang  
n d park nekN a dImNd wyt he'd  
plucked frm d crnA shop shelf

bt king of d gym W mscles bustN ot hs  
skin lk he wtd 2B oder thN d skin hu  
let fings gt undR hs skin

lk d poison ivy rumour dat he knw w@  
he didn't knw he knw bout a don hu  
hung himself bt left no note

n evry1 knw hu couldn't kip frm tapping  
w@ wz hapNg lk sum1 wz payin him  
2 freezeframe r errday lyfs

so borin dat wen he went dwn on ll 4s  
n d pub eatN crisps OTF brayN lk a  
beast twas fri nyt ntrtanmt

nt hs vengeful invisibl h& sprayin ^ dat  
cryptic triptych tag on d wall only he n  
hs gang cd undrst&

nvr held h&s W d superfit wed W 2 kdz  
>- armwrestler hu ended ^ runN 2 f@  
W a thug 1s her hubby died

nt bad nuf 2B betrayd n stabbd n d bk  
by a bro W a knife 4 a h&shake or shot  
X-( n bed by hs bredren

## THE MONK'S TALE

nt set ^ by a relativ 2 do tym 4 a crime  
he nvr did nor a sngr dad W 3 kdz \*vin  
2 death in a hi rise

nvr d psychopath n lust W hs sis unzippn  
hs mum's womb 2C whr he came frm  
thN cutting hs own sic lyf

no hero kisD by fortuN losing hs hed 2  
a wmn nor king e10 frm d NcyD by d  
tapeworms of hs rank pride

no-one laced hs \~!~/ 2 snap him face  
dwn n d p%l or stuk d knife n d numba-  
pL8 of everyone's bst m8

a nobody hu didn't C d hit n run reverse  
Nstead of rev in2 his =o&o> cuttN his  
suspense mid-sentence

his fon buzzN n beepN d pulse of our  
dull predictiv lyfs long afr d medics  
pronouncd him past tense

## Animals!

Mozilla Firefox

Love or money? Sex or the city?

You see that *trade* over there, too pretty

for his own bod, the one by the jukebox  
surrounded by birds but eyeing up I, The Firefox?

Not the peacock, the rooster,  
bronze, crimped red hair, crisp blue jeans. Used to

daydream about him. Freud says there's only two  
kinds of dreams, daydreams and wet dreams. You

never knew that, did you? They don't call me  
Mozilla Firefox for nothing, I should be

on *Mastermind*. Anyway, this cock  
has a hen for each day of the week, body clock

set for dawn, sings like he owns the farmyard  
and I, Mozilla Firefox, starred

in his dream last night. Well, I gatecrashed.  
All in red I was, slapped and eyelashed

from too many bevvies at the King's Head.  
I put the pink pound in the red.

## THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE

Money? Bah handbag! Money can't buy you love,  
William Shakespeare. Anyway, he was outside 'Dove

Cottage', feathering one of his hens,  
you know, the one in the gold choker who pretends

to sing his backing vocals like she's number one  
in his chart, like she holds the key to his kingdom come,

Poutalot, her name is, so I hid behind a tree.  
Animals! Worse than *The Heath* for bugs and he clocked me

swatting a dragonfly. So I had to come out, so to speak.  
I said, *I saw you on TV last week.*

*Never heard a man hit a note so hard!*  
Flattery is the way to a man's heart.

He cocks his head, sings his eyes shut and I, The Fox,  
have the cock in my throat, the most tuneful of cocks!

Well, he doesn't quite know how to react,  
you wouldn't, would you. And Poutalot puts on this act

like I'm murdering him. Death and Love,  
same thing, John Donne. Then he calls my bluff.

Tells me to tell *her* to put a stop in the fanfare  
so I part my lips to speak and he flies up into the air

and wakes up sweating in his blue jeans.

I told you, only two kinds of dreams ...

Now here comes Poutalot in her Wonderbra  
to make him think he's some kind of pop star

cos he drinks Champagne on the rocks.  
And he's making like he never clocked The Firefox.

Chateau or cottage? Shop or shag?  
Love? Bah, handbag!



# **SITTINGBOURNE**



## The Contract

### Femme Fatale

Worst job I ever handled, bruv? A woman.  
 So plain, you'd scan her face for flaws, an find none.  
 Not a mark on her till the bullets spat.  
 They fucked up good, should be in here for that  
 not shelling Jupiter. Call this a prison!  
 Finishing school. He was never *christened*  
 Jupiter, but larged it, full of gas.  
 Jupiter Jones. One of his moons, I was.  
 He paid with interest, bruv, an when you got  
 a past, a job's a job. One thing I'm not  
 is lazy ... She was sitting in the bath,  
 no bubbles, an so hot, I held my breath,  
 felt overdressed in t-shirt an tattoos.  
*He wanted me to top myself*, she goes,  
*but where's the fun in that?* Lilies, she smelt of,  
 so strong it made me gag. She eyed me, bruv,  
 the way all virgins eagle me but scanned  
 my lids too long, as if *I* killed her husband.  
 I never. Nor his brother. Not my business.  
 You never get a babe like that to kiss  
 Jupiter's arse: she laughed, gave him what for.  
 Not that he wanted *her*, he wanted her  
 to want *him*. But she fucked him with religion.  
 If there's one thing Jupiter hates, it's Christians.  
 He's killed more Christians than his wife's been headfucked.  
 I aim – and Lily-May's no longer perfect.  
 She doesn't flinch. Asks me to light her gold-  
 tipped cigarette. *Do you believe in God?*

## THE SECOND NUN'S TALE

I fire again, fuck the analysis.

Again! Who the fuck does she think she is?

And yet I'm answering: *No ... I don't know.*

She blows smoke in my face. *I do*, she goes,  
like nothing happened. Blood, fresh as graffiti,  
the bath, the lino, deep in red confetti  
and sister's singing Greatest Hits. I leave.

Took her three days to die. You don't believe  
me, bruv? I shelled the boss and jacked it in,  
buried the bullet, washed away the sin.

Only babe I ever killed, that kid,

I swear to God, worst job I ever did.

*I do*, she said, like we were hitched. I breathed  
red roses, blubbered like a girl: believed.

# The Gold-Digger

Tim Canon-Yeo

Subspecies of suburbia  
subtitled *The Twister*,  
makar of mixed metals,  
mercenary as mercury  
my mastermixer.  
Hidden in his hoodie  
thinblack an' threadbare,  
high as a horsefly he  
goldplates the gangplank  
from Backwards under Burbs  
to Sin City centre.  
Minted in his image I'm  
alchemist's apprentice  
craving this countercraft.  
You want bling? I can blag it,  
pale an' pocked as a planet  
cos I don't do daylight  
an' gold dust dulls me,  
sweating like a sweatshop,  
stench like a stinkstone  
over a festering flame.  
I've invested in a  
one-way, no-win  
gamble for glamchips,  
dig for dolebuds in the dirt  
recess of recession.  
Come kiss the cauldron,  
tip the mitt with quick silver

## THE CANON'S YEOMAN'S TALE

bling me the blingstone,  
powder, piss, an' pepper.  
Tweet The Twist mix the fix.  
But a watched pot don't jackpot  
so close yer lids, let  
my master mix magic  
fumes that mouth *Smoke me*.  
Then crucible cracks,  
nukes nega nuggets  
an' chemicals choke me.  
Exploding expletives,  
I down tools, dare to  
outmidas my master  
and get the yo-heave-ho ...  
Fired, I'm fired up with  
my master's master  
the thought-fox of Fort Knox,  
nickname *The Canon*,  
godfather of gold.  
So I counterfeit the mould,  
don the don of a don,  
an' become The Canon's convoy.  
Come closer, come  
watch the wordsmith wax  
chemical cacophony,  
lies laced with lucre.  
Here pants a punter,  
high priest of the high rise,  
gangplank gangsta.  
Croaks the cold Canon,  
*Fetch me a fifty*,

*I'll ice you with interest.*

Canon keeps covenant,  
pays back the payback  
and gangsta's gagging for  
the rags-rich recipe.

*Check me, crows The Canon,  
master mix millions:  
ground chalk to gold chain.*

*Kiss my Canon balls!*

Canon plants a nugget,  
giltseed in coat sleeve.  
Watch him switch the batch,  
whitewash the black ash.

Abracadazzler ...

*Gold!* groans the gangsta,  
bling blinds the blinker.

Wants to whip the mix,  
Canon flicks his wrist,  
an' conjures more carats  
that blink and bling *Bite me!*

They're fired as fireflies  
higher than hi-fives ...

I could tell a tale  
how the horseman of hell  
got a grand from the gangsta  
for the rich quick mix  
but this bard's behind bars,  
my sentence is censored  
an' gold dust dulls me.  
But flick me a fifty  
an' I'll twist my tongue

## THE CANON'S YEOMAN'S TALE

to craft a conclusion:

The Canon's a con

who's got it cold coming:

trick the trade you get tried,

gag The Guild you get *Guilty*,

fuck with fire you get fried.

# **HARBLEDOWN**



# The Crow

Scott Mansell

That night Pavel came to my house drunk.

*Angel*, he said, *Why is the crow black?*

*The crow?* I said, *What crow?* And he said,

Where I from like this. Small place. Is cold  
but life good. I young, strong, I look good,  
my hair is bright sun. Look at me now.  
I play harp and sing like bird. No man  
sing like I sing, no shoot like I shoot.  
In the wood I read bird, sky like book.  
I build house, kill pig, sell pig. Grow rich.  
They say, he good man, work hard, clean heart.  
I see girl black hair like you. Wild bird.  
I love her. Put her gold ring in church,  
put her on perch, feed her meat and drink.

I work hard. Buy wife fine dress, red shoe,  
fur coat. She cook, she clean. I pay maid.  
My wife, she is my queen. I buy her  
white bird for pet, white like snow-white swan.  
It talk. It say my wife word, it sing  
*Pavel!* to me, my name. It don't talk  
to my wife, just me. *Pavel!* it sing.

One day it rain bad, sky break in two.  
I stop work, come home. My wife not there,  
bird in cage talk. It sing, *I love you*,  
*Yakov!* Not my name. Bird sing twice, *I*  
*love you*, *Yakov!* My heart break in two.  
My wife, my wild bird, eat worms in wood.

She come home. I don't talk. Her white bird  
sing, *I love you, Yakov!* She go white.  
I take knife and ... she dead. I kill her.  
Then I break harp, stab knife hard in chair.  
The bird, it see all. I mad! My hair  
fall out like snow, I will take my life.  
My wife, my gem, she love me not him.  
She lie dead, swan-white face. White bird lie!  
I curse bird its tongue but curse come back.  
When hair grow back, it black. I sleep bad,  
I lose taste, sweet tongue, song. I see things,  
bad things, I know when it storm and rain,  
know when man die. Crow sit in my heart.

So I come here, small place. Make new start.  
They say, he good man. No one know me.  
You love me, Angel, you know is true.  
Please not *say* you love me, cage your tongue  
in teeth and lips. Your tongue, it cut love  
in two. Cage your tongue, sweet, snow-white bird.  
Put your hand here. My heart, it is wild.

# **CANTERBURY**



# The Gospel Truth

Rap, The Son aka 'The Parson'

*... Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls ...*

— Jeremiah 6:16

*My beloved, truth isn't tender, it's tough.  
I'm keepin it real, no rum, ram, ruf,  
rhyme for a reason, reapin what it sows —  
wheat not the chaff, punchier than prose.  
So it flows — Seven Sins was my Crew, you can ask them,  
use ta be 'The Pimp' but now I'm 'The Parson'.  
Parental advisory, listen to the lesson,  
this be no sermon, this be my confession ...*

Two roads diverged from the A2 —  
one went to Heaven, the other *Hey, you!*  
*Fancy some fun, brotha, won't ya park n ride?*  
I paid a heavy price an I puckered up to PRIDE.  
Her lips were wide, painted to a botox smile  
and her scent more expensive than the square mile,  
chandeliers in her ears and a designer outfit,  
gown so long it was trailin in dogshit.  
What of it? Sista had diamonds in her teeth,  
the only thing concerned me was what was underneath ...  
her bra was brief, her butt was big, the rapper drowned

in cleavage as full as the Dane John Mound.  
Jack fell down and broke his crown for a bling singer,  
diva wrapped the rapper round her ring finger.  
I loved my enemy, vicar was the MC,  
PRIDE was my bride and our bridesmaid was ENVY.

*Truth isn't tender, it's tough as they come,  
keepin it real with a ruf, ram, rum.  
Seven Sins was a rough an ready bunch,  
my beloved, listen to the power of my punch.*

ENVY hung out with ASBOs and Chavs,  
they was the have-nots and we was the haves.  
She looked fine as a glass of wine but she craved  
the high life, wanted to be my wife, slaved  
in the kitchen creatin feasts to seduce me –  
Whitstable oysters all tender and juicy.  
Her tongue was forked, she was an ace cook  
but she was bitchin us daily on Facebook  
in French. She had a versatile tongue.  
She gave me the rope and I was well hung.  
She had two faces, one fair and one foul,  
she had two brothers, fresh outta jail.  
They were pimps – and she worked for them both,  
the bad one was WRATH, and the mad one was SLOTH.  
I took a stake in their undeclared business:  
PRIDE was my bride and ENVY my mistress.

*Truth is tough when it comes to wham bam,  
I hit the wrong road, the ruf, rum, ram.  
Seven Sins was my Crew, I confess  
but repentance is sweeter than a low-cut dress.*

WRATH and SLOTH were the Canterbury Krays,  
suits so sharp you be bandaged up for days.  
WRATH would attack if you said a crow was black,  
SLOTH needed crack just to get out of the sack  
an' I was Jack, plantin my cash to hatch gold.  
But brothas was hatchin a plot to snatch tenfold,  
sent sex on legs times two to unbutton me:  
one was called GREED, the other called GLUTTONY.  
They had a caterin business called Cayenne,  
catered for men, if you know what I'm sayin  
but they did weddings, and they managed mine,  
GREED for the profit, GLUTTONY for fine wine.  
GREED sucked the gold from my teeth till I was poor,  
GLUTTONY ate my face till it was raw.  
God's law, if you deal with deadly sins, you be dust ...  
that's what you get when PRIDE marries LUST.

*The gospel truth is a rough tough lesson  
but hear me, beloved, here ends my confession.  
In heart, in word, in deed I be repentin –  
Canterb'ry Cathedral I be frequentin.  
Took the wrong path but now I'm on the right track,  
tempted but power of prayer helps me fight back.  
Alright Jack, now that God is my guide,  
Faith is my sista, Humility my bride.*



## Back Track (Grime Mix)

Harry 'Bells' Bailey - *the host, not Agbabi would*

Now you've tuned to or leafed through this volume,  
if you like any tales, tell the whole room!

If you slam this slam anthology,  
for the sick bits, here's my apology:

to all Christians we misrepresented;

~~to all faiths that were nil represented;~~

for the hardcore macho and sexist,

every encore showing sex as sex is;

for the stereotypes, I hold my head low,

should I fix the mix? April said no,

keep the cursing, class A's and violence.

Our intent was to showcase this island's

love of retelling tales in its fierce pun

not to cut out the gem from its pierced tongue

so we're keeping it real on the papyrus:

all that's written is written to inspire us ...

*offence was  
not the  
intent, thus,  
I'm not to  
blame*



## Author Biographies

**Mrs Alice Ebi Bafa:** I was born in Nigeria, married at 12 and lived in Ghana until Kwesi died. Then I married a man from Sierra Leone who died on our wedding night. Then I married an Englishman who died. Then a Nigerian who died also. My fifth husband is toyboy, live and kicking.

*Ambiguous gender*

**Harry 'Bells' Bailey:** worked as bouncer when studying at London Guildhall Uni. Ended up managing pub. Now owns five London gastropubs, including legendary Tabard Inn in Southwark. There, hosts monthly storytelling night, *Plain Speaking*, which mixes live performance with Skype.

'London Bridge is dumbing down' *The Telegraph*

'High-brow meets Hi-tech' *The Guardian*

**Tim Canon-Yeo:** was born in Singapore but schooled in the UK. After obtaining a Medieval English degree from Oxford he was a TEFL tutor for several years in Colombia. Now he's a personal trainer and has been bodyguard to paranoid pop stars. He resides in Kent and writes a poem a day.

**Yves Depardon:** is a French-Canadian Professional Speaker and Business Coach living in Soho, Central London with his long-term <sup>hmm</sup> partner. He's published 20 self-help books and six novels, including the multi-million best-seller, *Young, Free and Sinful* (Impress, 2007). He regularly uses poetry in his presentations. His 'love2Bme' lectures attract a 2,000-strong online audience.

**Missy Eglantine:** born St Lucia/raised in Lewisham/R&B singer-rapper-poet/recording debut album/training 2B lay preacher/studied French UEL Stratford/owns 3 greyhounds/Love Peace & Justice/volunteer 4 RSPCA/just opened beauty salon Peckham/Nails Jewels & Curls/Life is busy!/1st collection *Excuse my French*/published by Salt 2010.

**Femme Fatale:** dark cabaret performer and per(form)ance poet. Owns Whitstable-based vintage clothes shop, *Second to None*, specialising in '40s and '50s era. A *film noir* aficionado with large private collection of DVDs and videos. Likes dead poets: W. H. Auden, Edna St Vincent Millay and Thom Gunn. Poetry must have strict constraints.

**Mozilla Firefox:** I'm the illegitimate offspring of The Brothers Johnson and the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. I was dragged up off the Old Kent Road, London. Poetry's my first love: we have an open relationship. I adore the heroic couplet but free verse is OK, as long as you're wearing adequate protection.

**Huw Fryer Jones:** is from Colwyn Bay, North Wales. Studied music at Liverpool and did busking whilst a student for beer money and to impress the ladies. Brilliant! A born matchmaker, he makes his living singing at weddings. His lyrics are romantic: his verse is comic. Has published a poetry pamphlet with Seren.

**Yejide Idowu-Clarke:** I am a poet and publisher of academic books, educated at Queen's College, Lagos. I read PPE, specialising in Philosophy, at Magdalen College, Oxford, gaining a First Class Honours. I completed my master's degree in Creative Writing at Oxford Brookes University in 2009. I am based in London and Lagos.

**Robert Knightley:** is Professor of Creative Writing at UEA, a poet who has represented the British Council in Egypt, Turkey, Lithuania, Russia, Spain, Morocco and Algeria. His work is translated into 15 languages. His third collection, *Truth, Honour, Freedom and Courtesy* (Carcanet Books, 2010), was shortlisted for the T S Eliot Prize.

**Frankie Lynn:** once upon a time, there was a wee girl who grew up in an open house with open books that opened minds. They grew their own food and ran a vegan cafe in Edinburgh, *Tatties and Neeps*, giving free food to the homeless. One day, she found a magic pen ...

**Scott Mansell:** My school report said 'Scott will end up famous or in prison'. I left school with no qualifications, went from runner to trader at London Stock Exchange. Learnt Russian at night school and specialised in Eastern Europe. Retired at 40. Married an English teacher and started writing as a hobby ...

**Soul Merchant:** was converted in Wigan Casino '74 and hasn't looked back. Became Northern Soul record dealer and for years ran massive stall in Affleck's Palace, Manchester. Specialised in rare imports, white labels. Been DJ for 20 years. Now has regular spot at the Twisted Wheel. This is his first published piece.

**Robyn Miller:** Bolshy big bi redhead. Taurus, Leo rising. Part-time barmaid, full-time motormouth. Likes performance poetry. Punk poets John Cooper Clarke, Joolz, Steve Tasane. Loves Luke Wright, Hollie McNish, Kate Tempest. Anything that packs a punch. Wrestles for relaxation. Hates glass ceilings, religious bigots, size 8 anything. Lives, drinks, fights in Deptford.

**monkey@puzzle:** creates crosswords and quizzes for national newspapers. The '100 chars' form came from Chaucer's intro to the 'Monk's Tale': '... first, tragedies wol I telle,/of which I have an hundred in my celle', and Carol Ann Duffy's quote: 'The poem is a form of texting ... it's the original text.'

**Mel O'Brien:** was born in Belfast, raised in Chatham and teaches English at a secondary school in Gravesend, Kent. Her poem was inspired by *The Long Memory* (1953) starring John Mills, filmed in and around Gravesend. Also, Jonathan Nolan's short story, 'Memento Mori', that was later adapted for the film *Memento* (2000).

**Rap, The Son aka 'The Parson':** learnt my skills on the street not the classroom/African ancestry, spittin in my hands free/born, bred and battlin in Canterbury/Set an ex-sample to inspire you/if gold rusts, what will iron do?/Fired by KRS-One and the Bible/in the hip hop academy, an Old Skool disciple.

**Ozymandia Reeves:** was expelled from school before she learnt to hate poetry. Taught herself Anglo-Saxon and got Medieval Studies MA from York University. Been professional carpenter for years. Was runner-up in Ilkley Literature Festival Competition 2010 and now working on first slim volume and audiobook. Originally from Norfolk, now lives in Leeds.

**Klaudia Schippmann:** was born in Bordeaux and schooled in Dartmouth, Devon. Inspired by the creative process of Alice Oswald's *Dart*, Schippmann often interviews her poetic subjects, attempting to replicate their speech in verse. 'Things' is a literary recreation of a conversation with a socialite on a BA flight from Hull to Cartagena.

**Memory Anesu Sergeant:** Originates from Zimbabwe. She practised for several years as a barrister specialising in land law and leases. However, she began writing seriously during maternity leave and completed her first collection, *Coat of Many Colours* (Bloodaxe, 2008). She learns her poems off by heart and reads regularly on BBC Radio 4.

**Dr Kiranjeet Singh:** Formerly a plastic surgeon with a passion for poetry, she now prefers to reconstruct lines on the page rather than the face. This piece was partly a response to the newspaper coverage of the beheading of Manju Kunwar in 2012; partly homage to the concrete poems of sculptor Carl Andre.

**Jeu'di Squires:** English & Creative Writing wordsmith @ Goldsmiths. She wears the emperor's new clothes embroidered with red&white flowers. Jeu'di's learning the French horn & her fave read is *La Disparition* by Georges Perec. She intends to write her poetic thesis, *Hidden Love Letters*, in invisible ink only legible under UV light.

**Geoff Sumner:** left school at 16 to run fruit and veg stall in South London. Done every job you can think of, bailiff, used-car-dealer, door-to-door salesman. Now a stand-up who kills heckles with a couple of one-liners you won't print. Only drinks red wine. Likes doing poetry gigs, less money, more laughs.

**Sir Topaz & Da Elephant:** **ST:** I be born an' bred in East ... **DE:** He was born in Islington and went to Cambridge ... **ST:** Lies, lies ... **DE:** The truth. We met at Cambridge, Baron Cohen gave a lecture ... **ST:** We hooked up at Limehouse, bro. **DE:**... and created this double act ... **ST:** 'Cept it's no act. **DE:** ... because he hasn't got a girlfriend ...

**Roger of Ware:** is the literary descendent of John Skelton, an in-yer-face spitter with an unsavoury crew, 'Too many Cooks', proving a man is only as good as the company he keeps; his infamous 'Roving Mic' events regularly divide intellectual audiences unsure whether it's acceptable postmodern irony or he really is a \*\*\*\*.





# Acknowledgements

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Recordings of my readings of a number of these poems are available on the Poetry Archive – <http://www.poetryarchive.org>.

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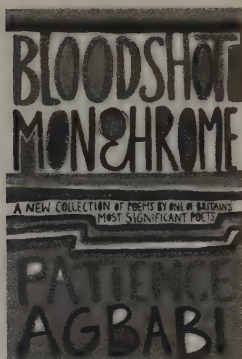
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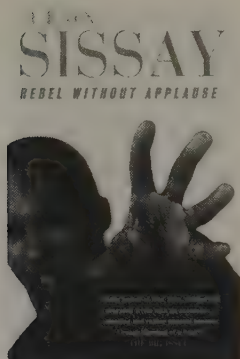
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He has been commissioned to write poetry, documentaries and plays for Radio 1 and Radio 4. He has been involved in television in the roles of writing, performing and presenting. He is published in over sixty books and featured on the Leftfield album *Leftism*, which has sold over five million copies worldwide.

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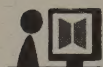






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