

# Awen

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## The Labours of Hercules

By Phil Knight

(A misheard poem, written in cooperation  
with members of Neath Writers Group)

The mother of Hercules was Alcmene  
and his father was a man she met  
in a Greek restaurant,  
who may have been called Zeus.  
Hercules performed many legendary  
labours, including finding a boy  
who was lost in a telephone kiosk.  
He then went to the Argos Exhibition  
there he rescued T.S. Eliot who  
had been overwhelmed by a crowd  
of angry Lesbians who were all  
in female clothing. Then he carried  
him on his shoulders to the plume  
of Mount Etna. There Eliot would write  
his masterpiece the epic poem;  
*The Waste Land.*

Hercules would then make a voyage  
to the great temple of Delphi,  
there he made off with a tripod  
dressed in women's clothing  
and he returned with a girdle.  
For this he was enrolled among the Gods.  
after overcoming many obstacles  
including Hydra and a farm manager  
who owned a bull, he at last took  
the elevator to Mount Olympus.  
But Hercules would never be forgotten  
in particular by T.S. Eliot who  
would send him a Christmas card  
every year and name a cat after him,  
who would be the subject of a famous  
painting by Rembrandt.

## Moles

By Heather Buswell

Resplendent in black velvet,  
Though blind by light of day,  
He is happy underground,  
Keeps tunnelling away,  
Working it out in secret.  
What does he uncover?  
Deeds which are done in darkness,  
Name of phantom lover.

And if he digs up the dirt,  
Brings it to light of day,  
Exposed, they'll pursue him,  
So he must hide away,  
Dig him a secret tunnel,  
And live there underground.  
Call him a spy, or hero,  
They'll kill him if he's found.

Yes, there are still molecatchers,  
Proud of their moleskin suits,  
Unshamed by their livelihood,  
Their dastardly pursuits.  
Those who bring secrets to light,  
Must tunnel in the dark,  
Whether they are right or wrong,  
Or did it for a lark.

Tunnels seem so romantic,  
While one is a child.  
Only later do we see  
That they house the exiled.  
That they must live there always,  
Stay hidden from the light,  
Never to feel the sunshine.  
Their world is always night.

Do they tunnel in darkness  
Because of evil deeds?  
Tremble, yet long for daylight,  
Tell the rosary beads?  
I found a mole this morning,  
Lying dead on the lawn.  
He had perfect human hands.  
Above ground, so forlorn.

## Cause and Effect

By Gordon Scapens

They embrace each other,  
tightly, ardently, sharing  
this special moment.

There is not much time  
before events will overtake  
what they feel right now,  
so ecstasy grips faces  
in hope of repetition.

Observers will not formulate  
a significant legend  
for what has taken place.

No. 9 has scored a goal.

# Jacob

By Geoff William

As Jacob slowly replaced the receiver that bleak February morning, he realised he would have to make a decision that would probably affect the rest of his life. The call was from Rosanna in far-away Andalucia – Would he take over her school, now she'd got that new post in Tashkent?

Jacob had been slowly aging in his stone cottage somewhere in the north of England, selling the odd antique, doing odd jobs, but mostly out of work. However, he had a teaching certificate which he felt he should make use of, and, when he'd met Rosanna again, she had mentioned that, if she were successful, she would need someone to take over her private school from her.

"But, No habla Espanol," he had stammered, using the few words in Spanish he knew, when she first put the idea to him. "Don't worry; you'll soon pick it up. The students will help."

A few weeks later, he loaded his battered car to the roof, with all the possible things he might need in his future life far to the south. Three days later, tired and drab, he drove cautiously up the narrow isthmus into the Ciudad Blanca. Even in February, it felt hot, deliciously hot, and the sea stretched deliciously to the west.

Somewhere in the narrow canons that formed the Puerto del Tierra, he found Rosanna's piso, high up in one of the anonymous marble-floored apartments. She was in a hurry. She handed him a pile of papers, lists of students, telephone numbers, and the flat in a mess, and, the next day, she left incongruously from the Aeroporto in Jerez, loaded with huge trunks and a caged cat which clawed angrily.

Now, he was alone in a country he hardly knew, not speaking the language. The students began to come, pressured by ambitious parents, pressured in return by Jacob to pay their monthly course fee. When they had gone, hurriedly, never stopping to chat, to explain the mysteries of Espana to him, he would wander alone into the Ciudad Blanca, and, then, through the Puerto, into that mystery of tiny calles. Paved with huge pebbles brought as ballast in ships from American rivers 200 years before.

He would sit in the Bar del Faro beside the vast white cathedral like a wedding cake and watch the pigeons and the Gaditanos walking, talking, the constant movement of life, or he would wander in the delicious cool evenings by the sea, which folded itself constantly onto the golden sand to end its long journey from America.

At the weekends, he would go to the beach to swim. He hated swimming, in fact, but from the huge rolling waves, he could watch the beach boys, golden, bronzed as the sun and sand, sweeping in like seals from the ocean on their boards. Then, he would wander the white streets, the calles, where the ancient buildings flung their balconies across to each other, it seemed, to embrace across the narrow gap.

He would wander, often lost in a haze of fino, past Iglesias, theatres, and through palm-swept plazas in the cool evenings when the gente, the people, would walk and talk and the children played past midnight; where ancient black-clothed women sat out in the calles, only just wide enough for the nightly refuse truck, talking, talking all through the night, it seemed. So, the affairs of state were sorted out.

On the Plaza del San Francisco, he found the white boy, dressed in a white silken strip, playing football. He had gone there to meet Domenica, one of his students, but his attention had been focused on this dancer of the streets, performing a ballet upon the marble pavement. So, each weekend, he would watch the Paso Doble of the football

toreador until night drew in and Jacob would move to the Del Faro to contemplate over a fino or cerveza.

As the years went by, Jacob would return less and less to England. He sold his house in the hills, which left him without financial problems, and, so, became a permanent estanero of the Ciudad Blanca. He had few friends amongst the ex-pats and the white boy had long ceased to dance in the plaza, but other boys came and went, driving like ghosts through Jacob's simple life.

He never spoke to any of them, but lived his fantasy life, retreating as darkness fell, to a bar or to the cinema to create further fantasies. Sometimes, he would go to the bizarre Moorish theatre, where the shows started at 9pm, from which he would wander at midnight, deliriously, through the canon calles beneath a silent moon.

He lost interest in returning to Britain in midwinter, but would catch the coche south to board the ferry to Ceuta or Tangier, and, then, catch the crowded bus up into the Rif to the pale blue walled town he had discovered, the colour of the sky, beneath the bare brown hills.

There he would stroll endlessly through the Souks to the Mdina, photographing colours, whites and blues, reds and browns, and the stripes of djelabis, and, of course, the children, whom he loved but never spoke to.

For Jacob was obsessed by beauty, now – the beauty if places bathed in sunlight, of sea and sky, of rivers and mountains, of dancers, of villages clinging to the hillsides, of music and song, and above all by the cries and shouts of children of which the white boy had formed only one small piece of his life's jigsaw.

He moved from his expensive piso in the Puerto del Tierra into Ciudad Blanca itself, into one of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century palaces that adorned the calles, like white icing on a wedding cake – lived suspended above the city's life, above the shouts of the streets, above the balconied courtyard with its well, and always within sound of the great sea which rushed upon the narrow isthmus that formed the city's foundation.

He taught less, now, and spent more time away in the distant floating mountains across the marshes, the unbelievable verdant mountains of Grazulema with their white houses clustered on incredible slopes. He spent long periods in Chaouen across the narrow strip of sea in Africa. He was measuring his life in finos, in glasses of sweet mint tea.

"But, why am I telling you this, pretending not to be myself, baring my heart of all the secrets I have always retained deep within myself? Because, I regret, I am not Jacob; I am merely myself. I have not abandoned my past to become an eccentric, to live a naked life in the Ciudad Blanca.

"No, I, the real I, am still here, in the old stone cottage, somewhere in the north, selling antiques and going for the odd walk in the comforting hills. There are no narrow calles, no women gabbling endlessly at midnight, no flamencos, no mdinas, no kif, no white boys, not even a small fino in my life.

"I am a dreamer, not a doer, and, when I put down the receiver that blank February morning, I never called Rosanna back. Somehow, I forgot and the students are still waiting for their new professor.

"So, I live out the cold winters of my life in a stone house in a stone village in a stone country, looking at travel brochures, travelling in my imagination to Maroc, to Andalusia, to Tunisia, and Sevilla. But, I never do, and the stone walls of my life press upon me, turn me into stone, la pierra, squeeze life relentlessly from me.

Ends

**Glossary :** calle – street, coche – coach, canon – canyon, piso – flat, souk – market, djelabi – Moroccan cloak, fino – a dry sherry, iglesia – church, cerveza – beer, kif – raw marijuana.

## Please Call Again (When I'm Not In)

By Phil Knight

I am Mr Knight, not Mr Light,  
Mr Bright, nor Mr White.  
My first name is Philip  
Not Dilip, Burlap or Phar Lap.  
I am a writer, not a Waiter,  
A welder, an Angler, nor a Wrangler.  
I live in Neath, not Nice,  
Meath, nor Beneath.

I am satisfied with my electricity supplier.  
I am happy with my electricity supplier.  
I am in fact so deliriously delighted  
By my esteemed electricity supplier  
I am planning to dance through  
The streets of Neath, Niece and Meath  
On my way to sacrifice a dozen oxen  
In the name of their greater glory.

I am pleased beyond all measure by my  
Beautiful, bountiful broadband supplier.  
As for my gas company I adore them  
And every year I send them a Valentine's Day card.  
So they can luxuriate in my love and loyalty.  
I have not had an accident  
I always talk this way.  
I am not owed money by my credit card company,  
The bank, the Mafia nor the Man in the Moon.

I don't want :  
Double Glazing, double points,  
Double indemnity or any of your  
Double Dutch double talk.  
You can stuff your free estimate, free quote,  
Free service, free survey and free evaluation;  
I value my FREE TIME.

If you want to know who I am voting for  
It is none of YOUR F\*\*\*ING BUSINESS.

So please call again when I am not in.

## Butting Rhinos

By Chris Andrews

Two Rhinos touching face to face  
Are they in love,  
Or are they in for a dangerous embrace?

Two Rhinos touching face to face  
Are they happy,  
Or are they on a path to a mad chase?

Two Rhinos touching face to face  
Are they friends,  
Or are they set for disgrace?

## When Sparrows Tame The Wind

By Gerald F. Heyder

Hearts know not where to go  
but know where they have been  
as wings fly the bird  
and spirit rides the wind!  
Autumn's dancing leaves  
are on a journey where they go  
and blizzard's swirling flakes  
creates a blanket of snow.  
Waves are the ceiling  
of ocean depth below,  
clouds drift through space  
of azure sky we know.  
“Je ne sais quoi” through the mind  
may tease our mortal brain  
while notes waft through the air  
as dulcet sweet refrain.

Artist coloured canvas  
is story book of paint,  
steeple bell ringing  
doth call sinner to saint!  
Be we simple Simon  
or of genius mind,  
philosophy will end  
when sparrows tame the wind!

## Somedays

By Gordon Scapens

There's no second chance  
to make a first impression  
so I calculate nakedness  
one day at a time.

All that I can carry  
is the dust on my shoes  
which is really time.  
I pray in my own way.

A statement I can't make  
is the only truth  
I can take with me.  
There's no cure for silence.

Some days are a day  
within a day.

snow falls thick, steady  
a real salt shaker frenzy  
smothering the land

## **Clearing Out**

*By Ed Blundell*

Disposing of the evidence was more difficult than she had imagined. Killing him had been easy, easy both motivationally and physically. He had been such a swine for so long that she felt no compunction in doing it. Tapping him on the head a few times with a hammer while he slept was all it took.

Getting rid of the body was the problem.

Her first thought had been to pop him in the car boot and tip him in the river, but she quickly dispensed with that. The corpse would wash up somewhere, be reported to the police and traced back to her. Cutting him up into bits, which could be carried in plastic supermarket bags and left around the countryside for wildlife to consume, was an attractive, green solution, but too time consuming, with too many chances of discovery.

While she contemplated a more efficient option, she stuck the body in the freezer. She had to empty it first, of course, but as if was largely full of his junk food and joints of meat, it didn't bother her. It all went into black plastic sacks and down to the local tip. In future, the freezer would be full of her veggie food and frozen fruit from the allotment.

It was on her third trip to the tip, when she was struggling with a heavy bag of frozen pork joints, that one of the men offered to help her.

"This is heavy love!" he gasped. "What have you got in here?"

"It's old frozen meat. Out of date stuff that's not fit for human consumption."

"No worries." He grinned. "I'll chuck it in here and it'll go for landfill."

It was then that she had a brilliant idea.

*Ends*

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

## **Maidstone High Street circa 1890**

*By Joseph Reed*

A moment captured,  
An instant saved forever.  
Gazing down the High Street,  
Towards our Victorian ancestors,  
As coaches come and go,  
And horse-drawn carts rumble along.  
Unknown men in bowlers standing silently,  
Stare out of the glass-covered frame.  
A moment captured,  
An instant saved forever,  
Looks down from the wall,  
On to a twenty-first century vista.

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## **Xmas Bards #6**

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## **Puppet Show No. 6**

*By Jane Stuart*

"A carpet rises  
in the shadows  
of tonight's frosty air –  
it floats over moonlit trees  
through a twist of winter clouds"

"I can hear you whispering goodbye –  
you will find the golden fruit on crystal boughs  
ripening under a jewelled sun –  
trees of ebony, the meadow's silver light  
and a river filled with kissing frogs"

"The owl cries to find his wren  
on starry nights –  
sleepy shadows cross our horizon  
looking for another galaxy  
and the deer pushes his nose  
through winter's snow"

"When the sun  
is almost visible  
when dawn crushes night's sky  
I can see small birds  
in sudden flight  
across many mountains  
to the nests they left behind"

## **Old Man's Lament**

*By Joyce Walker*

I would that you still had the breath to breathe,  
That your death dimmed eyes would open and could see.  
That I could to you, my very life bequeath,  
So you could stand alone and weep for me.  
The coffin on my shoulders weighs me down,  
But does not feel as heavy as my heart,  
How light you were, when in your wedding gown,  
We kissed each other, vowed we'd never part.  
So many years we shared, so many dreams  
And some of them we almost made come true.  
What happens now to all those plans and schemes?  
What will the days be like, not shared with you?  
As your body lowers slowly in the ground  
I fear that in my tears I will be drowned.

## **Wotan's Anger**

*By Joseph Reed*

The thunder rolls in the east,  
So loud that it shakes the trees,  
As the All-Father rides into the night.  
Wotan is angry,  
Black rage fills his heart,  
As he wildly rides over forest and field,  
Seeking his daughter who disobeyed his will.  
An enraged father looking for his errant child,  
As the stars shine and the clouds roll,  
Wotan rides away with only his wrath for company.

## Night is full of stars...

*By Jane Stuart*

A red meteor  
Flashes in the southern sky –  
Night is full of stars

A whippoorwill's song  
Fills night's air – the owl responds  
To wind in dark trees

A halo of light  
Circles earth – the star-filled sky  
Breathes in morning's mist

In the moon garden –  
Pale incense of sleeping flowers,  
Whispers in the dark

## My Dream

*By Joyce Walker*

Man's hand is not able to taste,  
His tongue to conceive  
Nor his heart to report  
What my dream was.

In the hand of the Lord there is a cup  
And the cup is red.

Now they ring the bells  
But soon they will wring their hands

For the souls of the righteous  
They are in the hands of God  
And there shall no torment touch them.

## The Typewriter

*By Diane R. Duff*

I'm just a humble machine,  
Battered, worn and old :  
Now I've got a new lease of life,  
And feel worth my weight in gold.

For years I was in a corner,  
Discarded and neglected :  
Nobody ever looked at me,  
I felt lonely and rejected.

Then one day my owner picked me up,  
And carried me downstairs :  
She put me in a prominent place,  
An answer to my prayers.

I still have my uses,  
That much it is plain :  
Now her computer's being repaired,  
I'm needed once again.

## Hooks

*By Gordon Scapens*

Your cat, playing,  
pulls its claws  
gently on your hand  
to hook attention.

You don't even notice,  
your face a dress rehearsal  
for an enveloping tragedy,  
and the day collapsed  
into small deaths.

Pulling our shared hooks,  
parting from relationship,  
is a theatre of pain.

## Toy on the Shelf

*By Chris Andrews*

I'm the toy on the shelf  
Yet I live in a Castle.  
I'm in the early learning shop  
Right at the top.

I'm the toy on the shelf  
And I live with Cinderella.  
I want to be put in a parcel  
And escape the confines of this Castle.

I'm the toy on the shelf  
You can call me Prince Charming.  
I now cost 45% less  
Please take me to a new address.

## Our Circus Day Out

*By John O'Malley*

Weather conducive to little other than  
Keeping - little ones in out of noonday sun  
Flyer in my hand- Circus in Rochford-  
First come- first served-walk up to Prittlewell  
Last year washed out of it-took train now  
To Southend Airport-Tickets in my fist  
No sales talk -tales go on we are on mystery tour  
Walking and on train to Anne Boleyn-in Business-  
No animals -all the old acts -copies on my phone  
Just to see their faces-bus home -successful outing  
Did what it said on tin -clowns -trapeze artists  
Big top-real old time fun- back to school Monday

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## Four Walls

By Geoff William

(A poem written when I was sixteen;  
my first attempt at free verse)

"Four walls with no upward limits.  
Right-angled and bare they stood,  
dark and dull – just four walls."

Four walls, they towered above me,  
four walls without a door,  
thick and strong and stable,  
holding me within.

The sky was far above me,  
the walls, they had no roof.  
They stretched for ever upwards,  
stretching to no end.

I screamed, I kicked, I struggled,  
I tried to reach the sky,  
hoping, pleading, faithless,  
my lost soul cried for air.  
Sometimes they came in nearer  
and crushed me merciless,  
or they spread out further  
but never disappeared.

I paced about and lay down to rest.  
I tried to climb, and I tried to break them,  
prayed to a God, but God was not within them :  
a soul gasping like a fish in the hand of a giant.

One day I woke to find that  
no walls bound me and I  
walked into a new world with  
no limits to my soul.  
Freedom made my mind clear in  
a mysterious land of a dream.  
The walls had gone for ever  
the fresh breeze swept me away.

A brave wide land of liberty, flowing ever onwards –  
like the wind blows over the hills and the valleys and oceans, always returning;  
like the water that flows down from the fields to the seas and returns;  
like the light that comes from the sun and warms the world with a cautious flame :  
not only without a roof, but without a floor or wall  
only a great wide expanse like the clear night sky, free and boundless.

## The Farm

By Jane Stuart

Rumbling  
angry thunder  
wakes the sleeping wood owl,  
shakes his rafters, leaves his old barn  
sagging

## A Moon over Carcosa

By DJ Tyrer

I called the painting 'A Moon over Carcosa'.

It had taken me an afternoon and an evening to complete. Unlike most of my work, it had not taken weeks or even months of preparation; rather, it had sprung fully-formed onto the canvas as if it had already existed in my mind's-eye. I was not sure why I named it thus, but I did; that was its name; I could not contemplate another. It showed a towered city, *Carcosa*, my title implied, the towers of which must have soared miles high for a moon, that of the title was passing *before* one, while, in the distance, flew a byakhee. Byakhee? Again, I just knew that was what the winged monstrosity was called.

The night after I finished it, I dreamt of dim Carcosa, dreamt I was there walking its dark, beshadowed streets beneath its massive towers, whilst, overhead, I could see three moons (two more than in my painting). I heard the distant, raucous calls of the byakhee and shivered at the sound.

I made my way to the lake edge, the surface of the lake reflecting the dim light of the moons like a burnished obsidian mirror marred only by strange lights in its depths, like the lights of some sunken city.

With a sigh, I turned away, knowing that it was not yet time for me to come to Carcosa. I awoke and burnt my painting, knowing that it showed what the living were never meant to see...

Ends

## Out Now!

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DJ Tyrer and many others.

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Hatred burning bright  
A summoning for the King  
Yellow is the hue

By DS Davidson

DJ Tyrer's pdf fiction collection **Black & Red** is available for free upon request from the Atlantean Publishing email (donations may be made via PayPal).

Awen will return in February 2017.