

Awen

Issue 115 February 2022
Free for SAE (\$2 overseas) or as PDF download:

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Imagine the Beijing Winter Olympics....

By DJ Tyrer

Imagine there are no Uyghur
It's easy if you try
A genocide success story
No more left to die
Imagine all the women
Being raped today
Oh-oh-ohh

You may say the CCP is evil
But, before you begin
It's just more sports-washing
Same as in Nazi Berlin

Imagine all the people
Who are suffering
But, that would ruin
This sports gathering
Imagine its not happening
Not again today
Oh-oh-ohh

But, remember sport's apolitical
Just entertainment and fun
Joyful complicity
Tainting everyone....

Stone Reflections

By Jane Stuart

Reflections made of stone –
chiaroscuro moments
silenced by
the tapping of
a red and silver drum

The Guardian

By Pamela Harvey

Skyscraper city and just like the rest –
All the world over, the East and the West
Look the same.
Only at first glance the London I know
Still holds its secrets from so long ago
When they came.

Now hardly noticed near buildings so tall
Proud ancient sentinel, once London Wall
Stood alone.
Over the centuries weeds of neglect
Twisted about it but still had respect
For the Wall.

Demolished city, attacked from the air –
Grimly the Londoners – close to despair
Stood their ground.
Battle of Britain – hard fought and hard won –
Then Peace at last – and a new age begun
All around.

Slowly the buildings rise, do not aspire
To outmatch Wren's landmark, do not rise higher
Than St. Paul's.
Then change – the skyline, truncated, is cleft
By monolithic shapes dwarfing what's left
Of the Wall.

Tribute to riches – for some who can thrive
Beneath their shadow, the desolate live
Through it all
In 'cardboard city' for that's what they name
Home for the homeless, propped up like remains
Of the Wall.

Yes – we still fail the despairing, the sick
This upbeat city so modern, so slick
Walking tall.

Roman Londinium saw its folk fed –
No money needed for 'Annona bread'
Right for all.
Has the Millennium's Sun shone as bright
As the first glow of dim Roman lamplight
By the Wall?

From The Dawn of Tomorrow (Pamela Harvey, Q. Q. Press, 2016)

Planet drum. Listen:
deer wishes of hunting
dilating nostrils.

By Daniel de Culla

Happy to protest
Black Lives Matter, injustice
Silent in Beijing

By DS Davidson

Two Metres

By Zekria Ibrahim

'Two metres' has been the medical rule –
The distance needed between me and you,
In a queue for a shop, or in school,
Whoever you are, whatever you do...

The distance between the wise man and the fool,
The distance between night's fog and dawn's dew,
The distance between the warm and the cool,
Between a guess, and what you really knew...

But, London always has meant such honed *distance*
This sharp separation from any neighbour.
You don't talk to me, don't want my assistance,
You are aloof, however hard I labour...
We *all* are bad, in our stinging resistance
To closeness – we're as icy as a sabre.

.....

Another Variant – Another Scare

By Celine Rose Mariotti

On comes the morning news,
"Good Morning America"
CBS Radio, CNN, NBC, etc.
"Another new variant-the Omicron!"
More to be scared of,
Keep our masks on when we go out,
Sanitize! Sanitize! Sanitize!
Fantasize! Fantasize! Fantasize!
Of a world without this Pandemic,
Why is everything so hectic?
So much doom and gloom,
Take me to the Moon,
I need to get away
Far, far away,
From Earthly cares and woes,
To relax and dream and have no
Worries or cares,
Please make this Virus disappear!
Dear God, wherever you are
On High,
Take away this heavy burden
So, we can all let out a big sigh!

.....

The Virus

By Zekria Ibrahim

The virus! It's the current megastar,
Interviewed daily on the BBC,
Boasting that it will go so fast, so far,
Both apocalypse and celebrity.

It does not play the keyboard or guitar,
And it refused to sing prettily,
It lacks a chauffeur in a shiny car,
But, this vain rock idol wants a *huge* fee...

Pay, pay again, with panic and with fear,
Shriek in your seats as, on the microphone,
It deafens life, for a week, month, and year,
It locks down your existence, while you groan,
It is the Number One, which you can hear,
It is Showbiz – as Death, and the unknown.

Follow-My-Leader

By Geoffrey Taylor

"Are there earthquakes in these parts?"
He asks from where we stand on the brink;
at the very edge of a pit that's vast,
the far side has a darkened chink
and ledges a thread of scrub links.
I fill my pipe to make it clear
that here is time for us to think.
"As for those pages you mentioned earlier,
we could gather round to learn them here."

He was warming to our exercise.
MacVittie, I knew, must give the verdict.
He is short in stature and tired around the eyes,
a moustache that's regularly clipped;
and a reserve of energy in conflict
with a career that's been quite sedentary.
"Ignorance is at odds with vigorous leadership!"
I've the map whilst he's paces ahead of me,
cordially he asks, "How's the writing of 'pear tree'?"

"If you look, you can see a block for the monitor
which refines the stone for china-clay.
Could this be that referred to in chapter four,
ere the hero sets sail and is on his way
with porcelain marked with a crossed staff?
It outwent the monopoly with new routes;
where both Bristol and Sèvres held sway."
I knew the mention of his home would suit
my purpose, and he'd have another look.

Originally, he scoffed, "This story is for boys!
It'll never serve as a draw."
Being dismissive is one of his ploys;
ere he'd gather our people for a tour,
once he'd seen for himself and was sure.
The bit about writing was to put me in my place,
noting my sandals where I slipped before
on the washed stone of the hill's face,
which have begun to pile at its base.

.....

The Scout Shop

By Chris Andrews

My Dad is a volunteer at the Scout Shop
Therefore Scout uniform boxes get sent to his house
Vans drive up to the house every other week
But, there's never Amazon goods or something that you and I seek

My Dad is a volunteer at the Scout Shop
he used to be in charge of all the badges
The badges were in cabinets in small boxes tied in elastic bands
He had thousands of badges for Scouts all over the land

My Dad is a volunteer worker at the Scout Shop
On a Monday and a Wednesday he's on their rota
He goes to the Scout Shop to sell their wares
Sometimes, he goes and no customers are there

My Dad is a volunteer at the Scout Shop
When no-one's there, he washes his car
He's 78 and Mum wants him to give it up
But, he seems happy, so it's our tough luck

.....

Send us your letters of comment!

Engine Shop Sing Song

By Nick Armbrister

The heavy metal fan worked in the engine shop. He went mad due to the heavy metals used in the production process. Was it something to do with the mercury dip bath used to galvanise the cars and engines? It rotted his brain. Heavy metal brain rot but not the music.

One day, the guy painted the complete inside of his house white. He emulsioned the walls, carpet, windows and doors. Then, he went to work with his guitar.

“Right lads! I’ve got my guitar. Into the engine shop now. Let’s have a sing song!”

They all lined up by the engine assembling machine. Danny got his guitar ready and strummed a few chords. It was out of tune and had a broken string which hung uselessly down. The other five strings sounded okay. He began to sing an out of tune song and increased in pitch. It sounded like a dying cat caught under a car tire. Poor Danny was losing his mind!

He sang Oasis going from hit to hit without finishing a full track. His strumming was mostly the same rhythm and he sang on. Oasis giving way to Joy Division. Danny perked up when doing their most famous hit song. Love emanated from the damaged guy. His work mates clapped sang and danced. Some even embraced and pirouetted across the shop floor. It was surreal to see big guys dance to Manchester music.

Then, Danny slowed down and started crying. He sang several Smiths songs doing the famous verses in a stuttering voice while shaking his head. He was losing it and just aimlessly strummed his old guitar. Another string snapped and his eyes focused a thousand yards away. He was elsewhere.

Danny became an automaton his hands played and his voice sang the words. The Smiths moved into Simply Red and slow love songs. His tears became weeping and his voice broke. On and on he sang a terrible scene. His work mates just stood watching him. Some also cried others shook their heads. All watched Danny sing. None stepped in to stop or save him. None could save him. For he was them and they were him.

Now, he moved onto the Chameleons darkly gothic music. He only sang their biggest hit and did it from beginning to end. His tears flowed and his eyes were now shut. He nodded his head while he sang. This actually sounded like a song. When he’d finished people started to clap. That’s when Danny acted.

He turned round and ran full speed to the heavy metals bath. This is where complete car bodies were dipped in to make them rust proof. He climbed up a ladder, stood on the edge and looked at the hundred guys there below him. They gazed up at him like he was the new Messiah. With a wave and nod he held his guitar up by one hand and then leapt into the bath of evil heavy metals. He galvanized himself and was painfully dead. Shouts and screams echoed through the engine shop. There were no more songs.

Ends

Plains of Science:
converge up in mountains.
A whole of work.

By Daniel de Culla

Auberge

By Geoffrey Taylor

Like a fair-weather figure
steps Fanch from his door;
his full voice has the measure
that’s as unthinking as a bore.
“I have watched where you made for,
you all are most welcome indeed!”
He wears pomaded hair that some abhor
In loose raiment big limbs can feed,
tho’ mayn’t the round shoulder recede.

He presents a relief from neutrality.
I watch him go and raise mirth with each
– this isn’t always easy with a party.
Beyond his form the observer meets
with a steering-cab with step to its seats.
We are to have our lunch alfresco,
where an intermittent sun beats.

The front of the auberge is stucco,
with its two doors thro’ which they go

below an arabis with spreading habit.
There are other curiosities to one side;
coop and hutch for poultry not rabbit.
A granary upon their stones ride,
where doves are wont to perch and glide.
“Yours is the first visit à la groupe.
You see, during winter there is a high tide;
the river expands from walls at its loop,
for fourteen weeks in mire we droop!”

We think on a tumble of stones midstream;
broad at the margin a shine of silt.
“You deem it low from what you’ve seen,
yet beyond a dyke houses are built;
whilst here, our caravans stand on silt.”
We turn to see those long domains
whose walls are thick ’gainst storm and tilt.
A flight of stairs the front door gains;
thro’ its legs could any man who deigns.

Golden Eagle

By Colin Ian Jeffery

High above a Scottish Glen
Golden Eagle drifts on outspread wings
Eyes searching the heather far below
Feathers caressed by cooling wind.

Nervous hare, nose twitching
Stands high upon hind-legs
Peering around looking for danger
Not seeing death on wing above.

Folding wings the Eagle drops
With talons open
Hooked beak to rip and tear
Snatching up the hare to eat.

Submissions sought for future issues!

Orchestra

By Mark Hudson

Come now, to the classical chamber,
which is really just a torture chamber!
Hear some Orcs play some Bach,
the symphony sounds like Ragnarok.

Here, the cymbals sound so symbolic,
here is a Tuba that is played by a Trolloc.
A violent violin sounds like Halloween,
a Martian plays a trombone-face so green.

An elven child plays a haunting harpsichord,
an opera is sung on high by a Dragon Lord.
A narcissistic nebula of musical notes,
a ghost hovers in the air and floats.

A female vampire doesn't cry for Argentina,
a headless body becomes a ballerina.
The Sound of Music sung by a mummy,
vile vocabulary from a ventriloquist dummy.

A timid tooth fairy plays a tambourine,
a giant slaughters with a guillotine.
Face it; this is one concert that is super,
they've totally outdone Alice Cooper!

A monster plays the mandolin,
A snake charmer does snake handling.
Bring the whole family, to the concert hall,
you won't be returning at all!

Island Earth

By Pamela Harvey

It streaked throughout the Northern skies
A searing, pulsing flame.
It caused a flashing wild sunrise
Although no morning came.
This visitor, dissolving ice
Yet came as surprise
To land where cold is commonplace,
From where the Northwinds rise.

Though no man saw it hesitate –
This unexpected Sun,
Already, it had fragmented
Ere Earthview had begun.
But, still it threatened human fate
Although its bulk did yield.
But, is there yet a Mystery
Beyond our Earthly field?

Or, might perhaps this meteor
Which could lay waste our world
Have known a mightier check in Space
And just debris unfurled?

Could other hands – not human – touch
This fireball, bid it slow?
And can it be we dwell upon
A world more precious than we know?

Limos

By Duane Voorhees

With her hardball knees
and basketball abdomen--
Hunger never plays

The Greeks knew Hunger well,
daughter of Discord, sister of Ruin.
An amalgamation of bloat and emaciation,
she once inhabited Aethon's innards
to make him devour himself whole from within.

But the Greeks knew Prometheus too.
He gave men writing, math, and agriculture.
He gave them fire, and he even restored
the hope his sister had withheld.
All to keep insatiable Hunger at bay.

Hunger's bony snowshoe feet
bear her shambling ramshackle corpse,
spindly jolly roger crucifix protruding.
Her empty burlap tits hang from pegs,
her skin a crisp parchment
lettered by visible veins,
tightly bound to volumes of bones.
Her cracked and crusted lips
mouth equations of halitosis and dust.
Her cheeks sprawl like abandoned adzes,
her nose like a rusted plough.
The ashes of apathy show from mineshaft eyes
after an unremembered fire.

The Greeks knew, of course,
that Prometheus would be
punished for his impertinence,
fettered on Hunger's barren Caucasian mountain,
Aethon dining on his liver.

Stargazing

By Celine Rose Mariotti

Since the early astronomers,
Like Copernicus,
Like Galileo,
Man and woman have stargazed,
Up there in that dark night sky,
Seeking low and high,
What planets and stars are out there,
Some are easier to see through the telescope,
Their location can be seen through
The lens more clear,
Now Mankind will return to the Moon
In 2024,
And then to Mars,
That red planet we all have
Our sights on,
Out in that huge great beyond.

Tabloid moon story
Predicting end of the world
Hardly imminent

Ephemeral Legacy

By DJ Tyrer

“So, you are the infamous Commandant Fleischmann? You aren’t quite what I expected.. barely a shadow of your portrait.”

The elderly withered man was slumped in a wheelchair before me. On the wall behind him was a large oil painting of a tall, stout man dressed in a smart black uniform. The same man, seventy years earlier.

“Who are you? Go away?” His voice was a whisper. Once, I am assured, it was loud and harsh, barking order and spitting bile. “This is private property.”

That was true. Although the building was the small town’s old people’s home, it was Fleischmann’s private property. As, indeed, was the entire town. For six decades he had ruled the place with the same cruel authority with which he had overseen his camp. Even his loyal followers had come to fear and loathe him, becoming his ersatz victims to torture and abuse.

“I will not go away, Fleischmann.”

“How do you know that name?” It was not the one he had used here, not in public, at least. “What do you want?”

“I wanted to meet you, just once, before you died. I hear you have very little time left to you...”

He was dying of an aggressive and widespread cancer. He was suffering terribly. I was glad of that.

Fleischmann stared aggressively, impotently up at me with rheumy eyes.

“Do you like children? Of course you do. Small boys, preferably drugged so they can’t resist and their screams shan’t disturb your dreams. I’m afraid I don’t have any nasty pictures of boys for you, but I do have a picture I want to show you. Girls, not boys. I only have daughters.”

I took a wallet from my pocket and opened it to show him a photo of three young girls smiling on a beach.

“Why are you showing me this?”

I put my wallet away. “My father was Jakob Harz.”

“Should I know the name?”

“Indeed. He was in Ellberg.”

Ellberg Concentration Camp had been smaller and less well-known than others such as Auschwitz, but it had been just as horrendous. The dirty secret of the place was that its Commandant, Fleischmann, had ensured that young boys composed the bulk of its population. Some, like my father, were separated from their parents, whilst others had been seized from orphanages. All so that Fleischmann could satisfy urges that even other Nazis would have regarded as depraved. As elsewhere, most of the camp’s inmates died – of starvation, from the abuse, through suicide or in an improvised gas chamber reliant on trucks’ exhaust fumes. Somehow my father survived.

“Ahh... so you want revenge?”

“No, actually.”

“No?”

“I just wanted to show you that, despite all you did, my father survived and went on to have a good life. A long and happy life with children and grandchildren who love him. He’s in a home, too, only he isn’t alone and reviled. He’s cared for by people who like and respect him and visited by family who love him. He had friends, not lackeys who feared and despised him. He will be missed when he’s gone, unlike you.”

He looked at me stupidly.

“Do you believe in God?” I asked him.

“No.”

“I didn’t think so. Yet, I can’t help but wonder if there is some corner in the back of your mind which does believe, just a little, which wonders what awaits you on the other side. Certainly no Valhalla, eh? Not for the likes of you.”

He twitched, just a little.

“Even if not, I think you fear death. I believe that my father will have a good death and so shall I. But, you... you will have a terrible one. Maybe God will be waiting there in some manner to judge you. Maybe it will be that you will look back at your life and realise what a futile and pathetic waste it was. Or, perhaps, you will hear all those screams you stifled down the years, condemning you.”

“But, why...?”

“Did I come? I wanted to make sure you knew that your toxic legacy is but a shadow, ephemeral. All the evil you did has been overcome and the good will live on long after you are dead. You see, we all die in the end. It’s the life you lived that counts...”

“Goodbye.”

I turned and left him, alone and dying.

Ends

*Originally published in Memento Mori
(JWK Fiction, 2014)*

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My Gold Suit

By Chris Andrews

My Gold Suit

I’m sorry, but it’s time to give you the boot
You’re a twenty-three inch waist
And, I have grown, although I’m not a disgrace.

My Gold Suit

I’m sorry, but it’s time to give you the boot
Wearing you to work, I was so proud
Wearing you, I was so very loud.

My Gold Suit

I’m sorry, but it’s time to give you the boot
I looked the part on my graduation day
With matching orange tie and sash, I was happy
and never grey.

Food Security

By David C. Kopaska-Merkel

Sally says she has a black hole in her lunch box,
none of the boys better steal her lunch today,
if they do, they'll be goners, she says,
she's sick and tired of going home hungry.

Recess, and Big Bobby grabs her lunch box,
runs out laughing "Loser!"
I ask her how she trapped the black hole in there,
she's telling me about the special gravitronic coating,
invented by her aunt the mad scientist
when we hear a loud bang:
there's a short scream
and a flash of light.

A bunch of emergency vehicles
show up a few minutes later,
and we get to go home early.

The next day Bobby isn't in school
and Sally has a new lunch box.
Another black hole? I ask,
Nah, my aunt's on an expedition to Venus;
I have a tiger today,
that's all my big brother could manage.

.....

Death of a Sperm Whale

By Colin Ian Jeffery

With her calf she dives
Into the darkness a mile below the waves
Where great squid abides
Ferocious Goliath monarch of oceans deep.

Singing lilting lullaby to her calf
In darkness she swims in playful mood
And for an hour remains down in the deep
Swimming side by side with her son.

Largest of toothed whales
The sperm whale comes to the surface
Spouting water through her blowhole
Smacking her great tail upon the waves.

Japanese harpooner takes aim
Deadly bolt plunges home
Explosive charge detonates
Mortally wounded she calls to her calf.

Hauled up dying by her tail
Against the side of the whaling ship
In agony she dangles with head in the sea
Bleeding slowly to death.

Her calf calls out in anguish
Following the ship for hours
But there is no lilting answering lullaby
Only blood in the water.

Before Spring Is Here

(short poems)

By Jane Stuart

In our valley
deer are sleeping –
moonlit shadows
cross the pines

We remember
perfect moments
all our dreams
from yesterday

The bittersweet wind/fills my face/with tears

A few raindrops fall
through a gathering of clouds
under painted skies –
scarlet streaks of broken light,
summer shadows, lonely stars

A transparent moon
circling swirls of leaves
floats above the trees

Lingering shadows
dance across the ground...
after winter, a cold minuet

Silver stars, dark wind
heavy thunderclouds –
in the desert, sleeping sand
and a full white moon

.....

Blowing Wild

By Sally Plumb

My rough words
are as deep
as eloquent dialogue.
They strain at
the chiselled throat
like the best
of any voice,
never faltering.
They are not slippery
but come from
the beginnings of the earth
and nourished
by raw emotion.

I cannot speak more
because you are borne
on the wind
and can only hear
it's whining.

.....

Awen will return in May