

# raw

26

# edge

magazine



Final Issue [ FREE ]

new writing  
in the west midlands

- Radio Wildfire: the fire is Lit.
- A tribute to the Late Roi Kwabena
- Farewell for now from the Raw Edge team  
+ poems, stories & details of  
online reviews supplement



[www.radiowildfire.com](http://www.radiowildfire.com)

## Editorial statement



Raw Edge Magazine has sought to publish the best new writing from the West Midlands, plus news and comment of use to readers and writers in the area, since 1995. Work from both established and new writers has been considered on its own merits, with contributions welcomed from all sections of the community, in any style of writing and on any subject. This the final issue in the series.

## Raw Edge Magazine for the Visually Impaired

People with visual impairment are advised that a copy of this magazine can be downloaded as a .pdf from our website [www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk](http://www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk). This will allow you to enlarge the print size or access the magazine in other ways on your computer.

Raw Edge Magazine is published by The Moving Finger and is funded by Arts Council England, West Midlands.

Raw Edge Magazine would like to thank our readers for the support they have given us over the last 13 years.

## Friend in Need

(inspired by the meeting with Karim Meesaq, an Afghan Poet.)

After inflicting the fatal blow  
The deepest injury  
She is offering me salve now  
Being a man of honour must be a curse  
I can feel it happening all over again  
The history repeating itself

I thought she was my friend  
I let her come inside my house  
I let her enjoy my hospitality  
Serenity and bliss of my innocent world  
In return she robbed me of my valuables  
My belongings, my treasures, my happiness  
I wondered why she tortured me  
Gave me so much pain

Then someone shouted to me  
She is not your friend  
I am  
Let me help you in your trouble  
Let me take away all your pain  
I let her help me  
She walks in stark naked  
Dazzles my eyes  
I am totally beguiled by her earthly beauty  
Mesmerised under the spell

The next minute  
All the comfort is gone  
She was to bring comfort and ease  
But why am I so hot  
Am I sizzling  
Yes it is my house of fire  
I had been robbed of my jewels and gold  
Now my house is on fire too  
I look at the garden, also ablaze  
Tulips, roses and pomegranates  
Oranges, lemons and date palms  
Sunflowers and grapevines

Everything withering  
The ruins are smouldering  
I wail, I curse  
What an ominous beauty you are  
You have brought death and destruction  
She holds my hand  
Don't worry, let it burn  
Let everything in it burn  
Your loved ones I cannot save  
But I can offer you  
A shelter  
A small hut  
In the valley of daffodils  
Away from your burning world  
I wonder would she, after my death  
Lay a wreath of daffodils  
On my grave.

Saeeda Younus (*Birmingham*)

Saeeda Younus was born in Pakistan and has lived in the UK since 1960. She is a member of Writers Without Borders.



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## Raw Edge magazine Festival appearances

Raw Edge magazine will be running workshops at both Ledbury Poetry Festival and Warwick Words festival in 2008.

### Ledbury Poetry Festival 12th July.

**The Dark Write of the Sole** is an Extreme Writing Workshop starting at 11.15 pm on Saturday 12th July and taking place through the night. It will include a walk across the Malvern Hills and will be run by Dave Reeves with support and navigation from Lucy Lomas. Details can be found at [www.poetry-festival.com/](http://www.poetry-festival.com/) or contact the Ledbury Poetry Festival box office on 0845 458 1743.

### Warwick Words 2nd October.

**Guerilla Publishing** is a 3 hour workshop starting at 10.00am on Thursday 2nd October 2008, which will look at alternative ways of getting your work published and finding an audience. Those attending will also participate in a little instant publishing and distribution of their work. Details from [www.warwickwords.co.uk](http://www.warwickwords.co.uk) Or write to Warwick Words, The Court House, Jury Street, Warwick CV34 4E Tel: 01926 427056

*You will also be sent details of these workshops if you join our electronic mailing list by contacting us through our website [www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk](http://www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk)*

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## The Good Life

The good life comes by slow degrees  
B.A., M.A., D.Phil.  
And if we pay the rising fees  
No doubt it always will.

**Fred Holland** (*Coventry*)

Fred Holland is chair of Coventry Live Poets.

[www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk](http://www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk)

# Editorial

In a letter dated 12th December 2007 The Moving Finger, publishers of Raw Edge Magazine received notification that the officers of Arts Council England were recommending to their regional council that funding for the magazine should not be renewed. The Moving Finger were given a month to appeal against that decision. Like many other Regularly Funded Organisations who were notified of a similar decision at the same time, we attempted to get the word around that the magazine was under threat and ask for support from readers. Inevitably, with a magazine distributed in the way that Raw Edge Magazine has been since its inception, with many people picking their copy up from a library or arts centre, this will be the first that some of you have known of that decision.

In the little time that there was between our being able to get in touch with people and the end of the appeal period, over 100 people made individual responses directly to the Arts Council. Some of these were long and heartfelt and we thank you all for the comments that you made, both those that we have seen and those that were made without us being copied in. We thank you for your efforts and are only sorry that they have been in vain. The appeal did not succeed and this seems destined to be the final issue of Raw Edge Magazine, certainly in the form that it has taken for the last 13 years.

The Arts Council stated in their letter that they 'do not consider your free publishing model to be a priority for our regularly funded investment over the 2008-11 period,' and continued, '... although Raw Edge achieves a 16,000 circulation through free distribution' they believed that we should '... move to a more targeted subscription or print on demand model exploiting the audience development opportunities afforded by online distribution. Therefore we believe that your work reaches too limited a number of readers and writers in the region to justify regular funding'.

Although we had tried to raise other money towards the magazine we have not, to date, managed to source any significant amount, but have always believed (and this seems to be borne out in the comments that we have seen from people) that by distributing the magazine free we would not only involve people who were already a part of, or aspiring to be a part of, the literary world, but folk who might never otherwise benefit from reading the wealth of creative output made by writers in the West Midlands.

I could spend a long time in this editorial looking back over the last 13 years and taking stock of how the magazine has grown and established itself. I could also analyse the change in policy and funding priorities that has led us to this point. What I have chosen to do with this issue though is continue what Raw Edge has always attempted to do, positively reflect the excellent work that is done

with the word in this region. Therefore, although this is a much slimmer issue than normal it looks towards the future with some new voices taken from the bulging postbag that we have to choose from.

If we do find some way to continue publishing Raw Edge, and we continue to investigate possible sources of income, we would like to be able to let you know, but due to the cost of postage the only practical way we have of doing this is by email. If we don't have your email address please go to our website [www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk](http://www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk) and get in touch with us. We will only use your email address to let you know of future projects that we are involved in, or, in the spirit of the Network section of the printed magazine, that we think you might be interested in.

And do keep us informed about what is going on. We mightn't have the time to reply to every email but we are still interested in what is going on, which is why we have been involved in the magazine all along.

On behalf of everyone involved in Raw Edge Magazine, I'd just like to say thanks for all your support, and we look forward to bumping into you at events around the region.

Enjoy your Reading And Writing ... and keep taking them to the Edge

Dave Reeves – Editor

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**p.s.** Many people have said to me that Raw Edge's going will leave a hole in the regional scene, but knowing that nature abhors a vacuum I'm sure that other things will take your attention. I thank those of you who have taken the time to get in touch for your kind words and look forward to seeing many of you and working with you in various ways, manners, places, times in the future.

We will still be involved in publishing initiatives in the community and in running workshops, both in publishing and the Extreme Writing Workshops that we have been running in places such as working factories and dungeons in the last couple of years. You'll find details of forthcoming events elsewhere in this magazine.

Although we know that many of you read this magazine for the Network section, due to the financial restraints we have in publishing this issue we are not able to bring you details of events and opportunities, and are severely limited in the amount of creative work that we can produce. We have, however, thanks to the generosity of some of our regular reviewers, been able to review a number of publications. Details of these reviews can be found in the rear of this magazine and the full reviews can be found in the on-line version of this magazine, available as a pdf from our website [www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk](http://www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk)

# Dragonrider

I look at the picture on my daughter's bedroom wall and I see strength.

I pause. The room recedes. The woman's brown thighs, glistening and firm, are too long to be in any reality save that of our own hopes and desires; the thighs we are supposed to want. Her modelled arms brandish a sword as she rises from the saddle of the dragon; her costume – I can hardly call it clothing – is a mere tangle of leather strips.

It is a ridiculous painting.

It has pride of place on my daughter's bedroom wall. There are other posters here; a horse, some bands in black moods and scowls, a comic image of some cartoon characters. But this one, in its psychedelic riot of purple and red, dominates the room.

I pause, and I wonder. She leaves school tomorrow. Starts college in a few months' time. It can be seen as symbolic. Ah, but I see symbols everywhere. Show me a budding bulb and I'll wax on about new starts and spring time until every cliché has been whipped to a point. So I see this picture and I also see strength, and freedom, and independence, and hope. It calms me to think that my daughter looks to this image for inspiration.

I move away, collecting the plates with a wry smile. But then I stop and look again.

It is escape, too, of course, and for a moment I am sad. For of course, she's the rider on the dragon and she's leaving me. Already she is taking flight, already her eyes fix on a further horizon.

I remain.

We all stay behind, don't we? I am supposed to feel sad, and grieve a little, and watch my daughter ascend the skies and pray she does not fall. I stay here, on the ground. For it would be wrong to leap aboard as she passes, and insist she carries me too. My weight would drag her down.

I have never done what I am supposed to do, I am proud that my daughter dreams of dragons, and proud she does not look back. My heart swells as she reaches up to slay monsters.

She caught her dreams from me, of course. I have my own dragons to ride.

**Sarah Morton** (*Redditch*)

Sarah Morton has preciously been published in *People's Friend*, *Woman's Own* and a number of small press magazines. This marks her return to publishing after a five year break.

## The Abyss

Darkness does come creeping through  
In those misty moments, in a soaked soul, as I search  
Your smiles, everywhere, stars and suns, eyes and lips

No one, nothing can fill, the void that pervades my life  
I dare not believe, you are no more around me  
That you will never come back  
In this life of mine, so much yours that is still

You are there, I know. Your footsteps  
Mark the drops of dew behind me, on doorway,  
I recognise it's you. There you walk beside  
In disguise, playful for my eyes swollen and hazy

Flowers, you loved, bloom and sway  
Around me, they touch and say  
To find you in the infinite and unfathomable sky

Clouds bear your dreams and take them afar  
I just wish to be with you, in your dreams there

Darkness does come creeping through  
Without you, there is always night anyway  
I just do not sleep,  
Lest I might miss you a moment.

**Nilamadhab Kar** (*Wolverhampton*)

Nilamadhab Kar, a psychiatrist by profession, has been writing since school days and has been published in many journals including a previous issue of *Raw Edge*.

## 9 Windermere House

Number 9, 3 floors up, 11 floors in all: A high-rise  
Where the corridors smell of dinner and cannabis.  
The elevator groans in the night, metal anguish  
up and down the throat of the building.  
I hear the ringing of the intercom in my dreams.  
I listen to the wind whistling through our keyhole.  
Sirens outside flash into our living room  
and create strange and scary shapes on the wall.  
Everybody knows each other, but they do not care.  
I watch the ghost-ship moon sail through the night  
as the ceilings shake with orgasms and arguments.  
We are living inside a brick limbo.

But from my bedroom window  
I have seen views of clouds melting into the dusk  
like marshmallows made of fire:  
I have seen stars shimmering like magic tin-foil  
and heard the trees' leafy conspiracies:  
I have seen snow drifting through the orange air  
like angels were having pillow fights  
in the light of the streetlamps –  
from a poet's lookout, from the belly of the beast  
I have built a home amongst the lost  
and found myself.

**Bobby Parker** (*Kidderminster*)

# The Wildfire is LIT...



Dave Reeves discusses [www.radiowildfire.com](http://www.radiowildfire.com) a West Midlands based internet broadcasting enterprise.

Late in 2006 a website appeared at [www.radiowildfire.com](http://www.radiowildfire.com) announcing a new internet-based venture shortly to be transmitting a mix of material based around the spoken word. This was itself the culmination of a long period of discussions and conversations by a small group of people, involving some of us at Raw Edge Magazine, about the best way to bring a different kind of spoken word broadcasting into being.

Many of us listen to spoken word cds and many of those recordings feature work which has a backing track of some description, whether that be music or an ambient soundscape. And just as the printed word can cover everything from graphic novels to concrete poetry, so the recordings of spoken word we listen to take in talking books and hip-hop. It was an interest in this potentially massive, but largely unbroadcast, well of material that prompted us to begin the process that ended up with *Radio Wildfire*.

Just as Raw Edge Magazine has attempted to cover all kinds of writing styles (always depending on what was offered to us) so *Radio Wildfire* is an attempt to cover as many different styles of spoken word as possible, to not get bogged down in one style or genre, to offer a listening experience that will challenge preconceptions rather than pander to expectations. The eventual aim is to play comedy alongside poetry, playlets alongside monologues and talking blues, original recordings alongside the commercially available, and in some of the private test broadcasts we have undertaken, that is exactly what we have done. Does it work? According to the feedback we have received, yes it does.

## Central City Broadcasting

On Monday February 5th 2007, in conjunction with Trilby Multimedia, *Radio Wildfire* began to experiment with a three hour, once a month, live transmission, emailing a small number of people that we knew were already interested. There were some technical hitches that needed sorting, but once those were ironed out we discovered that most people were able to log on and receive the stream of sound immediately. So, news of the Central City Broadcasts (CCB) began to circulate.

Having had a constant unchanging station ID broadcasting between the live transmissions, we decided to create a one hour programme which loops and repeats and streams that so that people had

something more substantial to listen to between the live offerings. Then, much to our surprise we began to get emails from outside of the UK, some from the USA. This broadcasting without reference to the UK timezone was drawing in a geographically wider audience.

The increased time taken up organising *The Loop* meant that for purely practical reasons we took the decision to shorten the length of the live shows to two hours. These now run from 8-10pm (UK time) on the first Monday of every month, and audiences are gradually growing as the word spreads about the station.

## Programming

While many spoken word broadcasters concern themselves with creating marketable options for cataloguing, fitting programmes into headings such as poetry, literature, play, story, and lumping everything else into the dangerous hinterland of 'experimental', the *Radio Wildfire* team works to deliver to the listener a mix of material, some enhanced by music, in a highly listenable but unclassifiable way. Producer / Curator Vaughn Reeves, who edits the live broadcast, puts it this way, "A transmission might follow a piece of storytelling with a singer-songwriter, with an interview, with a poem, with a musical soundscape, with comedy recorded live in our studio; blending material that we have created in-house with tracks from cds that have been sent to us for transmission. With the internet being a 24/7 culture you can drop into *The Loop* at any time of day and get an eclectic mix of quality material, and if it's a certain piece you particularly want to hear you just wait for it to come around again. People inform us that they stream *Radio Wildfire* in the background while they are working on their computer, listen to it while reading ... and now that you can buy internet radios ... well, that's the next chapter in the story."

## How do I listen?

'It's easy,' says Ben Stanley, *Radio Wildfire's* Technical Director, 'All you really need is a broadband connection. Log onto the website and you'll find a direct link to *The Loop*, or you can access the Listen page. Then you'll find 4 separate options to click on if you are a PC Windows user - you just work your way through until you find one

## Dave Reeves discusses [www.radiowildfire.com](http://www.radiowildfire.com) (continued)

that works for your computer's particular set-up – and for Macintosh users it's even simpler, just click onto the Mac button and our transmission will open in i-tunes.' And should you have any problems listening, *Radio Wildfire* positively encourages you to get in touch. 'Just email or ring us,' says Ben, 'And we'll help you get connected.' The contact details are there on the website.

### Want your work transmitted?

What Radio Wildfire is looking for now is good quality recordings of poetry, prose and storytelling, very short plays, spoken word and music tracks and some original music to mix into the brew. Tracks can either be sent via email, by first getting in touch through the website, or through the post to *Radio Wildfire* c/o Raw Edge, POBox 4867, Birmingham B3 3HD. The recordings should not be registered for PRS or any other kind of broadcasting payments for which *Radio Wildfire* might become liable, and a statement to that effect included with the recording would be appreciated.

Although transmitting across the internet and so the world, *Radio Wildfire* is based here in the West Midlands of England and the team are very interested in reflecting this in our programming. But if you are interested in sending in your material do please note that the station is completely self-funded and so no payment can be made for any contributions at the moment. And please do take the time to listen before you contribute, to get a feel for the way it works.

### Where next?

It is hoped that *Radio Wildfire* will, in the longer term be able to transmit an even more varied and changing output, and may even be able to commission work. "Obviously," adds Vaughn, "this depends on finance and one of our main tasks at the moment is to identify and tap into sources of income. In the meantime, come and join us by listening to *The Loop*, and show us your support by sending us examples of your work and getting in touch by email. We do try and answer all mail received and look forward to hearing from you."



Radio Wildfire's live transmission can be heard between 8.00pm and 10.00pm (UK time) on the first Monday of every month at [www.radiowildfire.com/](http://www.radiowildfire.com/)  
The loop transmits continuously 24/7.

To date, people who have been into the *Radio Wildfire* studio and transmitted live include the poets Spoz, Kim Trusty, Roz Goddard, Emma Purshouse, Roy Mcfarlane, Jane Holland and Charlie Jordan; the short story writers and novelists Maeve Clarke, Will Buckingham, Wayne Dean-Richards and Richard Bruce Clay; the spoken word dj Derrick D; storytellers Maria Whatton and Clive Dennis Cole; comic and front man of the band Goats Don't Shave, Ian The Goat and writer and anthologist Dr Eric Doumerc. **Works have been specially written and recorded for *Radio Wildfire*** by Heather Wastie, Michael Blackburn and Brendan Hawthorne; and pre-recorded material and commercially produced cds by individual writers and spoken word artists have been received from Nick Toczec, Todd Swift, Julie Boden, John Edgar, Michael W. Thomas, Dez & Ali Quarrell, Richard Rathwell. **Pre-recorded spoken word material has also been received** from the following organisations and companies: Cheltenham's Buzzwords, Wolverhampton's City Voices, MythStories, Writers Without Borders, Ragged Raven Press, Poetry Wednesday, Crystal Clear Creators and Blue Orange Publishing. Finally we have been sent music tracks to play by Earth Hum, Memphis in the Meantime, Manni, Albarz, The Whirled Service, Zaza Ginz, Stereogram and Chris Rowley, amongst others.  
**We look forward to hearing yours.**

[www.radiowildfire.com](http://www.radiowildfire.com)

# Body Of Work

by Simon Kewin (Ross-on-Wye)

Simon Kewin has had a around 20 short stories and a number of poems published in a variety of small press magazines. He lives deep in Rural Herefordshire.

She was standing in the queue for Saliman Rushdie when she noticed him. Her feet were aching. She was thinking about giving up and going home. She wasn't that big a fan. Water dripped off the canvas awnings in fat drops after the recent rain, turning the ground to mud. She turned around and there he was, some way behind her in the queue. He was dressed in a black leather jacket, a white tee-shirt underneath, a look she had always liked. His hair was unruly, as if he had run his hands through it once too often and it had stuck. He was very pale, like he was about to faint. He didn't see her, his attention caught in a book he cradled in crossed arms, like a baby. Something he read had amused him. He had a nice smile. She glanced back at him several times. He was definitely alone.

After the signing she caught a glimpse of him in a corner of the busy tent, reading his now autographed copy of *Midnight's Children*. She hacked her way through the throng towards him, her own copy of the book visible in her hand.

'Crowded isn't it?' she said.

He looked up. There was a pause, as if his eyes were taking a moment to focus upon her. He smiled, looked surprised at the same time.

'Yes.'

'Seeing anyone else?' she asked.

'Ah ... Just Le Guin.'

'Oh really? Me too.'

This time, as the summer rain came down again, they queued together.

I was seventeen when I first noticed the change. I was scratching a patch of dry skin on my chest when I became aware of how smooth, how cold and lifeless it was. I remember thinking that it felt just like paper, silky but hard. I remember smiling at the notion. I remember my smile fading soon afterwards.

I tried to ignore it at first. I told myself it was nothing: it was a phase; it would go away. But each day, when I lifted up my tee-shirt to check, I found that the patch of dry skin was a little larger than the day before.

'Hi Russell.'

'Come in.'

His house was just as she had imagined it would be. One of the old, black-and-white houses found all over Herefordshire. It leaned and it sagged, as if it was slowly deflating. The horizontal wooden beam that stretched above the windows and door was bent into the shape of an ox yoke.

Inside it was a mess. No, that wasn't fair, it was tidy enough, Spartan even. But it was filled with books. From gaudy novels to old hardbacks, their covers a faded red, like dried blood. They were arrayed in double rows on the bookshelves, piled in teetering columns all around the floor like stalagmites, stacked, she could see, up each side of the staircase so that only a narrow channel could be used to get up and down. The air was thick with the dusty smell of paper. There could be no doubt that he lived alone.

'A lot of books,' she said.

He looked nervous, like a little boy caught in the act of something.

'Oh, you know, I can never throw any of them away.'

'I'm the same.'

'A glass of wine?'

'You read me like a book.'

It was a very bad joke. She was more on edge than she had realised. A quizzical look crossed his pale features, then he smiled.

'Red or white?'

She had the distinct impression that he was following instructions he had read in a book on how to be a host.

'Red, please.'

She wandered around the room, stepping between frayed scarlet rugs that were laid directly on top of the stone flags. There were no photographs to be seen; the only ornament a small gold vase on his mantelpiece, like an urn for someone's ashes. In one corner of the room, a tangle of some creeping plant had found its way inside between a window frame and the wall. Now it hung in mid air, as if trying to decide where to go next. From the kitchen, she heard the plunk of a cork being pulled from its bottle. She smiled to herself. He'd obviously missed the bit about opening it to let it breathe.

She picked up a book, a copy of *Great Expectations*, and sat on his sagging, red sofa to flick through it whilst she waited.

As they ate he became quieter and quieter. She

understood. They both knew where this was going didn't they? He was probably still a virgin. Depending on your definition of the word, so was she. She finished off her chocolate tart whilst he merely played with his. In truth, he had barely eaten at all.

'Dawn,' he said, 'when she had finished, 'I'd like to show you something.' His voice was a whisper.

'OK.'

She thought it was going to be a book, but he crossed back to the sofa and sat down, waiting for her.

She followed him. He didn't move. Up close, she could see that he was quivering very slightly.

She placed a hand on his. 'Hey, it's all right Russ.

Whatever, it's OK.'

He paused for a moment more, then lifted his tee-shirt off, not looking at her. There was a crackling sound, like paper flexing. She was about to comment on it when the sight of his chest stopped her.

It was covered with closely packed writing. Tiny black letters in regular columns covered his skin, like a page from a broadsheet newspaper.

'When you said you were a writer I didn't think you meant this,' she heard herself say. 'It's beautiful but ... they're tattoos?'

'Not really,' he replied. He turned to show her the side of his ribcage. 'It kind of explains here.'

She moved closer to look where he was pointing. There was the faintest smell of sweat mingled with the tang of ink. She began to read.

After six months I began to write. I remember mixing the pot of glutinous, black ink with a matchstick, the smell of it sharp and a little sickly. I remember the perverse desire to drink from the bottle, to slug down the thick ink, stain my lips, tongue and throat with it until I gagged. I remember wondering whether all the ink would affect me in the end. Poison me.

I had a steel-tipped lithographic pen, its nib long and sharp like the head-parts of a weevil. I still use it. It made a noise like a small, gurgling pond-creature as it sucked up the ink, drinking until it was bloated like a leech. I held the pin-fine point against my chest and began to write. I knew I had to push the nib in deep to make the letters permanent, drawing tiny cobweb

scratches of blood, the pain sharp but brief. Because the pen was always moving on, it was bearable. In fact it felt wonderful. It took me an hour to write the title. Body of Work.

She broke off and glanced up at him. He still couldn't look at her.

'I don't understand,' she said. 'You write on your own skin?'

'It isn't skin anymore,' he whispered. 'Feel.'

She touched his side gently. It was like vellum, very smooth but not soft like skin. It was too cold. Too unyielding. Up on his shoulders, she could see, it was rougher, something more like blotting paper, until, on his neck, he had normal skin. She didn't know what to say.

'Sometimes, when my skin is changing, bits come away,' he said. 'A whole leaf peels off.'

'And what's underneath?'

'Paper. Just more paper.'

'But ... how?'

He just shrugged, the skin near his shoulders corrugating.

'Do you still feel pain? Bled?'

'Yes. It's strange. I'm more sensitive to heat but less to cold. If I'm cut deep enough, the blood runs. I thought at first I'd bleed ink, but that would just be stupid. Sometimes the paper tears and there's no blood. And then it heals back up.'

'And the writing?'

'It's the story of my life. I'm catching up on being a boy over here on my left forearm whilst covering my adolescent years down my right thigh. I add current events onto my chest as they occur. I aim to fill the last patch of bare skin with the words The End on my very last day.'

He glanced at her, daring a smile. She had imagined lots of ways in which the evening would go. None of them had been like this.

'So, you're still changing?' she asked.

'Slowly. Hopefully my face will go last.'

The cold weight of disappointment filled her, burying under its rubble her previous excitement. If she was honest, she could have put up with a lot. He didn't have to be David Beckham. She liked bookish. But this? The word freak came to her.

'Here's the chapter I'm currently working on,' he said, enthusiasm clear in his voice. 'Across my chest. I started it when I got home that night.'

Not knowing what else to do, she carried on reading.

There was a chapter there called, simply, Dawn.

A new chapter. If I could, if such a thing was possible, I would start a whole new volume.

I've always imagined that I'd fall in love slowly, over a period of weeks or months. If at all. Yet with Dawn the process took seconds. Perhaps less than a second. I was at the Hay Festival of Literature. I hadn't spoken to anyone for hours. She talked to me and I looked up at her. That's all it took. Here was the woman I loved. I can't explain how I knew this, but I did. One life ended and a new one began. Just like that.

'I was up all night doing it,' he said.

The image came to her of them in bed together. When their bodies parted, her front was covered with the writing too: a mirror image of his life all over her.

'Russell I ... I mean I'm not ...'

She ran out of words to say. Neither of them spoke for a moment. The light had gone out of his face as he reached for his shirt.

They said brief goodbyes standing in his doorway. It wasn't even properly dark yet. She was turning away to leave when he stopped her.

'Here's that book.'

He held out Great Expectations to her. She hesitated for a moment, then reached out to take it. For a moment, they both had a hand on it, holding it there between them.

She walked past his house three times, more and more conscious of how she must look. She told herself, repeatedly, not to be so silly. She wasn't a girl any more. But each time she spoke, the drifts of dead leaves through which her feet ploughed told her to shush, and she carried on walking, clutching the book, her fingers turning slowly to ice.

Finally, angry at the cold, kicking the leaves aside, she marched up to his black wooden door and knocked. It took him a long time to answer. She was about to give up when it swung open unexpectedly. He was thinner then ever, wearing only a scarlet dressing-gown. His eyes were shockingly red within his wan face.

'I brought your book back,' she said.

'You didn't need to.'

'I think I did.'

He shrugged, as if it was unimportant.

'Can I come in for a minute?' she asked. 'Please?'

He hesitated, then, relenting, stood aside.

Nothing had changed within except that, on a small stool next to the sofa was a jar of ink, a shaving mirror and a delicate silver pen that rested on a small mound of tissue paper. The paper was stained a purple-red colour, like the juice from blackberries.

'What are you writing?' she asked, as if he was merely

scribbling in a notebook.

'Nothing.'

'May I see?'

'No.'

'Russell, please. I know I hurt you badly. I was ... surprised, that's all. But I've come back. I wanted to come back.'

'No.'

'Please? I won't run away again.'

He smiled, without humour, and pulled his dressing-gown suddenly open, like Superman revealing his true self. 'OK then, Dawn,' he said. 'Read away.'

He had filled his entire chest and stomach with writing now. She could see the same word repeated there, over and over, running in regimented columns down his body. She looked closer. The word was agony, written thousands and thousands of times upon his skin.

'Oh Russ. Why?'

'Didn't I explain?' he said, his voice rough with the strain. 'Don't you see? This is the story of my life. When the pages are full my life will be over. So I'm filling the pages. I'm getting to the end of the story as quickly as I can.'

She took his hand in hers.

'Come on,' she said. 'Let's go to bed.'

He was silent for a moment, shocked. She could feel his pulse beating distantly through the cold smoothness of his skin. He dared to look up into her eyes.

'Bed?' he said, as if he didn't know the word.

She nodded.

'But ...'

'I know.'

'We'll have to wait until the ink is properly dry,' he whispered. 'I don't want to smudge.'

Afterwards, she made him turn over and lie on his stomach.

'I'll try not to hurt you,' she said.

'You won't.'

She took his pen and held it over the space he couldn't reach between his shoulder-blades.

Carefully, she began to write, cutting into his skin with each stroke. Tiny rivulets of blood ran from each incision. She dabbed gently at his wounds with a tissue, revealing the hard lines of her words.

'What are you writing?'

'A new volume.'

'Tell me what you write.'

'I'm calling it ... Dawn's Tale.'

# Appreciations

## Roi Kwabena 1956-2008

The poet and cultural activist Dr Roi Ankhkara Kwabena was diagnosed with cancer and died in hospital on 9th January 2008. *Roy McFarlane pays tribute:*

“When an elder dies, it is as if a whole library had burned down.” This African Proverb seems fitting at the moment, with Raw Edge closing down, it feels like a whole library of work has been burnt down. An institution that provided up and coming writers with opportunities, and a platform and space to show their work.

Synonymous with Raw Edge passing away was the unfortunate demise of one of Birmingham’s Poets Laureate, Dr Roi Ankhkara Kwabena, a friend and mentor. A walking institution who provided opportunities for writers to perform, to write, to develop and to network with other poets, Roi Kwabena was the elder statesman for poetry, a son of Africa, born in Trinidad, who considered the world as his school playground.

Roi embodied the essence and tradition of the griot, a global traveller, teacher, musician, writer and poet. He kept things simple with his Djembe drum and words; here he would invite you into his library and share with you. Roi was always inspired. Every time we would meet intentionally or unintentionally he was always sharing what he had just received, always excited. And when he finished his discourse, he would look you in the eye and say ‘you see what I saying, eh, I wonder if you know what I telling you, eh.’

Like the word stanza he was a room full of knowledge, history, and an observer of the times (past, present and future); a room that was glowing with his spirituality, humbleness, and passion for the word (spoken or written) and open all hours.

Roi was most of all a great poet, whose words inspired and challenged. Poems like ‘Forgive us our debts’, ‘Hang Man’, and ‘y42k’ inquired and critiqued the world we lived in. ‘Westindia’ provided us a history lesson and ‘Obeahman’ was a spiritual challenge against all formats of oppression. Fortunate for us as this elder takes his seat with the great ancestors; we still have access to his library.

Roy McFarlane – Writer and Poet

## Brian Morse 1948-2007

The poet and publisher Brian Morse died on Friday 12 October 2007 from a heart-attack while out walking his dog. Brian was 59 and his widow, Wendy, subsequently relocated to Stoke from their previous home in Worcester. She has kept the narrowboat they bought together. As a poet he was known for his writing for children and he was Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Coventry University, 2001-03 and at the University of Worcester, 2004-07. Dagger Press which he ran took its name originally from Dagger Lane in West Bromwich, where he was living when he began the imprint. *Poet Roz Goddard, one of the people published by Dagger, adds:*

Brian Morse was an exacting but gentle editor. He would point out the problems with one’s grammar and expression courteously but firmly. He published ‘Girls in the Dark’, my second collection of poems, under the Dagger imprint. His publications - short collections of thirty or so poems – were beautifully produced, usually set in Goudy with brilliant illustrations on the front cover by Frans Wesselman. Brian was interested in making a collection a cohesive piece, so out went maverick pieces written to make up the numbers however interesting the poet thought they were. ‘Is it right for this collection?’ was always his criterion. The Midlands has lost a scrupulous editor, an excellent writer and man full of integrity and humanity.

Roz Goddard – Poet

## Won’t Take Long

The water felt warm as it washed over them.  
Fern held on for dear life. She could hear the  
cries for help all around her. How I wish this  
would stop. Then nothing. All around her lay  
the remains of what she once knew. Fern got to  
her feet, steadied herself, then it struck: a mass  
of darkness, giant claws swept through again  
and again. Soon there was nothing.  
Hannah’s mom pulled back her hair into a plait.  
Bed now, you lady. We’ll check your hair again  
tomorrow, I think we got them all.

Sharren Bennett Faulkner (*Kidderminster*)

## The Guitar

### ECG

Your heart's signature in lime  
p-q-r-s-t then curlicue,  
like signing endless cheques apace;  
as if your love were waving too,  
or signalling distress in mime.

As adoration starts to waver  
muscle cells still undulate,  
beating out each second's grace;  
half-moon valves still syncopate,  
now minim, rest, now semi-quaver.

A cipher in each peak and trough,  
scratched into your cardiograph;  
to read the runes within the trace  
I need no help from nursing staff –  
hearing the rhythm's stutter's clue enough.

**Beth Somerford** (*Solihull*)

Beth Somerford has had poems in *Magma*, *Equinox*, *Obsessed with Pipework*, *Iota*, *The Cannon's Mouth* and the *French Literary Review*. She is a member of the Cannon Poets.

Sir is obviously a connoisseur  
his eyes have alighted upon  
the finest object in out collection  
made by the hands of  
the master himself  
Antonio De Torres  
in eighteen-sixty-two  
with all the sought after marks  
of his most splendid early work  
See the rosette – what a miracle.  
the shape, the headstock,  
and the tone – ah!  
Like the sigh of angels

Its provenance is most good  
A history is full and eventful  
In the eighteen-seventies  
the bottom was replaced  
after an accident  
the upper bout too  
was damaged in an  
Argentine brawl  
The back had woodworm  
in nineteen-twenty  
but was tastefully  
replaced  
The soundboard alas  
fell prey to civil war.  
The cedar neck,  
fine and delicate  
had to be rebuilt  
after the attention  
of a jealous lover  
took its violent toll.

Otherwise it is complete.  
Examine the label  
Just like the original.  
Strum a gentle chord  
the sound is as fresh  
as the day it was made,  
the smell of the master  
still upon the strings.

**C J Patten** (*Leamington Spa*)

## Over the Edge ...

In order to keep up to date with future publishing plans please visit our website, send us your email and we'll add you to our mailing lists.

### Reviews

There are a series of reviews included in the downloadable version of this magazine that we simply did not have the space for in print. In electronic version of issue #26 you will find reviews of the following:

Ugly Stories for Beautiful People by James Burr, The Yasen Tree and Other Poems by Milorad Krystanovich, The Elephants of Aberystwyth by Mark Storey reviewed by Julie Boden; Careless Talk by Michael Richardson and You Are Here by Simon Turner reviewed by Michael W. Thomas; The Writers Toolkit -visualisations for writers by Sue Johnson, The Banker's Daughter by Caroline Thonger and The Standing Ground by Jan Fortune-Wood reviewed by Dave Reeves.

### Plus Also received:

The Writers Toolkit 3: how to create sparkling novels by Sue Johnson, and Something Stirred: in search of greenness by Bob Woodroffe, both from Greenwood Press.

Coachlines issue 8, 2007/08 edition. Envoi magazine issues 148 October 07 and 149 February 08.

...we go ...

# raw edge magazine

After 13 years & 26 issues,  
Raw Edge Magazine  
is ceasing publication.

COPIES OF THE FINAL ISSUE # 26  
CAN BE DOWNLOADED FROM  
[www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk](http://www.rawedgemagazine.co.uk)

In issue 26 you will find articles on Radio Wildfire; tributes to poets Roi Kwabena and Brian Morse; a selection of poems & stories; plus, in the downloadable version only, a series of reviews.

To register for email updates on future projects being organised by the team that brought you Raw Edge Magazine, please contact us through the website.

*Please copy, circulate & display this poster.*

A reduced run of the final issue has been printed and distributed, working within the available funding. Please download and distribute further copies as widely as you can.

# Reviews supplement

*The Yasen Tree and Other Poems*  
by Milorad Krystanovich

ISBN: 978 1 906038 16 8 £7.99

The Heaventree Press, Koco Building, The Arches, Spon End, Coventry CV1 3JQ

In the Foreword of Milorad Krystanovich's fourth collection of poems David Hart tells of the increased confidence of Krystanovich's work and of an *unEnglish in English*, that will, he thinks, *come to rank with translations of notable poets in ... East European languages* and may also lead to Krystanovich's being credited in the future with a *fresh Englishness*.

This new collection of longer sequences written in English is in many ways different from the shorter Croatian poems with their English translations found in his first two collections, *Easel and Ashes* and *The Language of Wounds* but the *good ear, good eye and good heart* that Jim Crace noted Milorad had applied to the *challenges and opportunities of poetry* in his third collection *Where Spirits Touch* are just as evident here in *The Yasen Tree* as in these earlier works.

On the back cover of this third collection I was quoted as saying, 'A treasure box' of images, tender and bitter sweet, written in the language of an uprooted tree between two bridges. This sensuous collection of mouthwatering images allowed me to wander and wonder in its vivid landscape.' It was difficult then to try to tell in ordinary words what Milorad was doing in his writing and so that, perhaps confusing but hopefully illuminating, metaphor seemed the best way to try to show where I felt Milorad was at that time. This was a man with a past in Dalmatia and a present in Birmingham, caught between Croatian and English in his speaking, writing, thinking and - perhaps the last to change-dreaming. In a place between two worlds, he was questioning, always questioning, exploring his surroundings, experimenting with new images ... finding fresh ways to express himself.

In his work so far we had witnessed through his skill for observation, imagery and understated poignancy the private journey of a Birmingham émigré poet trying to make sense of a turbulent past, of sorrow, of loss and to feel his way onto his feet in a new world. It is difficult to describe the latest subtle and exciting changes in Milorad's writing, his images continue to be fresh and strong, the writing sometimes borders on what some call surreal and our minds continue to be teased, as John Alcock wrote, in *Where Spirits Touch*, with *hints of what may lie outside the frame*.

*The Yasen Tree and Other Poems* is divided into four sections. The first section, *The Yasen Tree*, is a lyric sequence which forms the nucleus of this new collection. This was written when Milorad returned on a visit to Croatia ten years after the wars and following the break

up of Yugoslavia. With Englatian eyes and with Croatlish questionings his journey continues set against the background of Dalmatia and of *three frescoes: my brother's grave/my mother's nursing home/and my father's abandoned cottage*. In holiday home and airport the wandering and wondering continues. When he arrives home in England he brings with him : *a pine-bristle in bud/ a bunch of Yasen-blossom/the catkin of a walnut tree/two sprays of lilac/two sprigs of wisteria/two twigs of jasmine/a laurel branch in bud/an olive branch with its budding olives/a fir-tree branch with its cone in bud...* in his Birmingham home, *the flat renovated/and filled with the smell of fresh paint*, he witnesses them *wilting, drying/scenting, dying*. His publishers at Heaventree describe this poem as a quest realised in *haunting images* as he chases the *ghosts of his family in an attempt to express his own feelings of being a ghost, laminated between two cultures, two languages*. Perhaps words of the poem express this best:

To Remember what was left of me  
I keep my index finger  
Where a bookmark should be.

*Leaf-Catcher*, the second poem, is, I think, showing us insights into the life of a painter and his nurse but I had to work on this one a little more and I'm not sure if I've fully understood all that lies beyond the frame here as yet. When reading the third section *Miniatures* I could hear Milorad's voice in my ear reading his series of haikus from his earlier collections and pausing between each of them. I read these poems out loud - pausing in between them - as I think he would have done. Perhaps I'll take these poems for a walk and stop to read each of the miniatures on different benches when the sun comes out and the sky gives up its raining... I think these poems would like that.

The final section, *The Tree Duet*, consists of a series of three poems *Piano: Burying Daylight*, *Harp: Wandering Serenity* and *Flute: Inherent Whisper* which I had already read in a much earlier draft some years ago and had heard performed, set to music for piano and voice, at The Garden Cafe in King's Heath recently. It has been a privilege to witness the journey of these poems. Working with poetry in translation and experimenting across art forms are activities having much in common. I have been intrigued by this when witnessing my own poetry being translated into Gujarati and from my various music and poetry projects, including those relating to my residency at Symphony Hall in Birmingham. I felt at home with a kindred spirit as I read *The Tree Duet*, a series of three poems in which Milorad connects poetry and music. The second of these poems, *Harp: Wandering Serenity* begins:

Symphony Hall  
On stage she sits in the second row:  
the line of chairs like a train  
among pillars of snow-curtains,  
everything is white and remembered  
by the birch trees  
apart from two railway tracks.

Having listened to a performance of these poems without the book in hand and then having read the poems on the

page without music, I now look forward to taking the book with me to a future performance and listening to and reading them again.

*With The Yassen Tree and Other Poems* came the music of fountains, flowers, the memory of candles and of birthday parties. In the collection as a whole we find a confident *unEnglish in English*. This is no longer the language of an uprooted tree between two bridges but a language grafted from two worlds, a sapling growing strong, a tree putting down unusual roots and what new buds will there be, which blossom shall fall, what other new fruits are to come from the tree *Krystanovich*? I think this is something else we can look forward to.

Julie Boden

*The Elephants of Aberystwyth* by Mark Storey

ISBN: 978 0 9557077 0 4 £5.00

Flemish Old Masters Press,  
56 Queenswood Road, Moseley,  
Birmingham B13 9AX

Mark Storey is Emeritus Professor of English Literature at the University of Birmingham. His former publications for the OUP, Clarendon, Macmillan and Routledge presses include explorations into the lives of John Clare, Byron, Henry Ryecroft and Robert Southey and titles such as: *Poetry and Humour from Cowper to Clough*, *Poetry and Ireland since 1800*, *The Problem of Poetry in the Romantic Period* and the forthcoming book published by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, *Selected Poetry of Ebenezer Elliot*. *The Elephants of Aberystwyth* is Mark Storey's second volume of poetry: his first, *Lines*, was published by the Flemish Old Masters Press in 2006.

His latest collection of poetry is divided into two sections: *Dramatis Personae* and *The Elephants of Aberystwyth*. In the opening section of poems we encounter interesting characters such as Blondin, the French funambulist whose weird and wonderful feats across Niagara Falls included cooking an omelette in mid-crossing. Others include Count Guido Monzino in the poem, *The Count at Villa Balbianello*; in the voice of the Count, Storey lists many of the artefacts that make up the museum display in the Count's villa and wonders why, this being such a beautiful place, he hadn't stayed at home instead of travelling on his various adventures around the world. The elephant from Aberystwyth must wonder why he didn't stay at home too as the dentist, on a visit to Leamington Spa, places him under anaesthetic:

Sucked into the earth like  
One of my own teeth.  
Is this what death is like,  
No pain, no purchase on the world,  
Just leaving without a farewell wave?

There is humour in *The Moustache Man*, a darker humour in *Burglar's Wife* and the disillusionment of a priest in *Soufflé*:

The holy wafer  
Wholly unfulfilled, a flat  
Pancake of despair;

There is world weariness in *Crying Woolf* too as Thomas Hardy, towards the end of his life, offers tea and plays the reluctant host to various young writers; on this occasion the Woolfs.

Storey continues his travels in the second section of this book: to *Villa Carlotta*, to Burda, in the poem *Tipping*, and to Esztergom in *Bells of Esztergom*. But this is no mere travelogue. In his journeying through Europe and through memory he notes, as many of us do, the guilt we feel when looking back with hindsight on particular moments of our lives. Here, a holiday without his children:

... missing those five days of their young lives,  
And then that later stretch of years, for shame  
And guilt and sadness and suchlike things,  
Those baleful wounds, all those dropped stitches,  
A sweated life slowly unravelling.

There is guilt in *Punctuation* too, guilt for escaping to the fields instead of remaining to look after his landlady's old cat:

Since then my life has been  
Punctuated by the death of cats:  
Commas, colons, semi-colons;  
Presumably, one day, a full stop,  
Period, the end.

The thought of death and the feeling of being redundant sings out in *Bells of Esztrgom* as campanologists pull, ... *vainly/at thin air*. Such thoughts echo again in *Road works (due to Water Mains Rehabilitation)* as we feel for the water tank as it,

Gropes in the roof-space  
For its identity,  
Wondering how  
It came to be there,  
Out of reach and  
Out of touch.

In *Tipping*, a poem written on a trip to Burda (The tipping city) I found myself looking my mortality in the face again as I read of a city that may,

Decide to gently slide,  
To tip, ever so quietly,  
Into the brown sludge  
Of the Danube that  
Long ago, gave up  
Any thoughts of a waltz,  
Of a 'lady's excuse me.'

I enjoyed the flow of these poems, the elegant glide of their assonance. A minor criticism, and this is a matter of personal taste, is of the use of higher case letters at the beginning of each line. I know this is often standard practice for traditionally styled poems but Storey's poems seemed to travel freely on the page and to flow in a way that, I felt, may have been better served without the capital letter braking effect. I loved the original book

cover by Jonathan Storey and the way in which Mark Storey's love of family, of travel, of books and of life shone through these poems whilst at the same time observing those many small guilts in life that come to haunt us all. Long may his travels continue.

Julie Boden

*Ugly Stories for Beautiful People* by James Burr

ISBN: 978 1 4303 2037 1      £11.99

Corsega Press, 3Forest House, Kinver DY7 6DX.

James Burr's first short story (BobAndJane) was published in *Raw Edge* some years ago. He acknowledges this in this first collection, *Ugly Stories for Beautiful People*. Had he not acknowledged it I would still have remembered the story appearing in the magazine as it made a memorable impact upon me at the time. Eleven of the thirteen stories in this collection have been published in previous collections and magazines and so it is no surprise to see them come together here in Burr's first collection. No surprise, that is, as far as their merit is concerned. However, despite the short story form suiting the busy lives of many modern readers publishers are, I'm told by short story writers, not too keen to publish short story collections. It was therefore a happy surprise to discover that this first collection had been published by Corsega Press, a small West Midlands based Independent Press hoping to specialise in their own variation of weird fiction. James' collection is their first publication so far.

How do I describe these stories? They do not fit easily into any particular genre. Bizarro Fiction? ... perhaps. These tales are urban fiction with pain, conflict, intimations of horror, fantastical social dramas, satirical humour, on occasion a little pornographic but always with excellent observations of the mundane; a turning of the ordinary into the extraordinary, sometimes disturbing and often disorientating. Although they are a collection of stories that can be read independently and in various orders, they were intended to be read in the order in which they are presented in the book. The poet in Burr is concerned with the rhythm of the journey his reader takes and the shifting pace and tone. I could see the merit of this and thought it an interesting experiment but a part of me wanted to be free to choose my own way through. I also felt the need to see the title of each story at the top of each right hand page rather than the title of the book itself. I know the stories were intended to flow on from one to another but I would have liked to have had a contents page too and it would have been good if the one or two typos that had crept into the manuscript somewhere along the line had been ironed out before publication - but these are petty observations. I felt the need to get these minor quibbling out of the way before discussing the body of the stories

The collection begins with 'BobAndJane: A Fable in two Indistinct Parts', a strong beginning to the collection. When I first read this story some years ago it brought to mind Ted Hughes' *Lovesong* and the power of that image hit me again as I read the story in this collection. The love

of Bob and Jane for each other is all consuming, differing somewhat from Hughes' lovers in that the love of Bob and Jane is sickening in its cutesiness. *Foetal Attractions* is told through the eyes of a pregnancy testing kit who witnesses Avril's disproportionate and disturbing jealousy of her friend Harmony. *Blue* opens with a quote from Goethe: *And here, poor fool, with all my lore/ I stand no wiser than before*. The story tells of a character called Kate who meets, amongst others, a character called Ash. Ash gathers a strange body of disciples around him in his mission to release people into an ability to empathise with others; but first they and those who need to be enlightened must encounter suffering. Following on from this tale comes the lighter, *It*. This is a shorter, humorous story that has the intellectually constipated disappearing up their own arseholes - should their mouths utter the post-post-modernistic piffing phrases of many a pretentious festival in-conversation or dinner party word feast. Read this story if you'd like to see how Tom Paulin saves the day!

*Life's What You Make It*, was quite a complex and intriguing story once I'd got into it. Many of James' stories involve drug abuse, paranoia, schizophrenic outlooks on reality and this particular story also had my mind playing with ideas of a parallel universe; perhaps there is a nod here to Phillip K Dick. *Menage a Beaucoup* explores the strength of first love and the impact of its loss; *Mutton Pie*, the varicose veined antics of a leap year baby out on the pull while celebrating her 16th Birthday; *The Dada Relationship Police* pick away at the stitches on the jumper of Love's young dream and who can escape them? In *Blot* we are served up with Rorschach blots to interpret and are shown how a rapist, who knows how to play the game, confesses to seeing flowers and trees whilst the hapless psychologist begins to see blots everywhere and in them he finds a host of hidden and disturbing messages that lead him to.... well, read the story and you'll find out. Bernie does Camberwell in *Bernie Does Camberwell* in ways Bernie himself had never expected to and Desdemona, a female porn star, changes her outlook on life and love too.

I wish James hadn't included the BobAndJane Postscript at the end of the collection. I can see why he did this as it makes a lot of sense if we're journeying through the stories - but my mind had already made that leap by itself and, to me, that's part of the fun of being a reader. After reading the Dada Relationship Police's story I'd already projected that knowledge onto BobAndJane and had wondered how they'd cope if such a note should come their way. It was disappointing for me to see the connection had already been made by James at the end of the collection in the Postscript. *It serves me right, you may say, for trying to be too clever!* I was enjoying being clever though, in my own small way, and making the link - even at the risk of contracting *It* was an entertaining exercise.

Okay, minor grumblings aside, these stories are well written, original, quirky and well worth a read. In fact, I'd go so far as to say it was the best short story collection I've read for a long time. I'll be interested to read *Deus Ex-Machina* when James Burr's first novel comes out and will

keep an eye out for new examples of Corsega Press' style of weird fiction. If you fancy reading some unusual, imaginative and well crafted short stories then this collection is well worth a read.

#### Julie Boden

Julie Boden is Poet in Residence at Symphony Hall and Town Hall in Birmingham, she was Birmingham Poet Laureate 2002-2003. Her website can be found at [www.julieboden.co.uk](http://www.julieboden.co.uk)

*Careless Talk* by Michael Richardson.

ISBN 978-0-9551384-6-1. £7.99.

Tindal Street Press, 217 The Custard Factory, Gibb Street, Birmingham B9 4AA.

Picture a thirteen-year-old boy whose imagination is febrile at its calmest: a boy who feels more comfortable being someone else—preferably foreign—than himself. Place him on the eve of life at a new school. Place the school in a Birmingham where the echoes of VE and VJ Days have finally subsided. Then you'll have Morley Charles, fledgling student at Balsley School of Art, at precisely that time in history when Brum—and Britain—could have gone either way, towards a postwar 'land fit for heroes' (hadn't we heard that one before?) or the tenements and 'Victory Gin' of Orwell's famed dystopia.

Morley Charles is the prime mover in *Careless Talk*, the new novel from Michael Richardson, winner of the 2001 Sagittarius Prize for *The Pig Bin*. In that novel, the boy Charles began to hit his stride. *Careless Talk* sees him – well, not coming of age, perhaps, but certainly proving ever more adept at yarn-spinning, fantasising and – quite a feat, this – simultaneously digging his own grave and hoisting himself on his own petard in all manner of circumstances. It is tempting to call him the latest in a long line of romancers – and, yes, 'Just' William Brown, Billy 'Liar' Fisher and Adrian Mole are all in the wings, cheering him on. But Richardson has a deft way with character: Charles, Morley of that ilk, is completely his own creation.

*Careless Talk* sees Morley battling, in a sense, with the old and the new. The old concerns his family, particularly his father, a clownish patriarch who was presumed dead in action but subsequently returned, wearing a scratch or two, to become the prime object of Morley's desire for acceptance and approval. As for the new—well, there's a positive wonderland waiting for the young fantasist: Balsley School of Art, where he must make his mark with his peers (and open up a second front in his search for approval); the art classes themselves, which lead him to dream about a sort of cut-price bohemianism; and Dawkins, his particular friend at Balsley—and, in various ways, the catalyst for Morley's ever wilder excursions into delusion.

*Be sure your tales will find you out.* This, in the end, could act as the epigraph to Morley's progress. Chafing at the mismatch between glamour and the humdrum, he shares a problematic nugget of his father's history with his friend,

Micky Plant:

'Dad's not quite what he seems: he's from quite a powerful . . . influential family, but some of them, well, had dangerous political ideas.' He couldn't resist giving his dad a bit of a social leg-up. 'They were very well off, but because he . . . opp-posed their ideas, he broke away from them and lost what was rightfully his.'

Broadcasting a Mosleyite connection is not, perhaps, the surest way for Morley to secure his father's love, even if he has promoted Dad to the bowtie-and-cocktail tier of society.

In the end, Morley's birds of fancy all come squawking and clattering home to roost. But he does live to dream another day. Given Richardson's skill in drawing character and sustaining narrative pace, it's to be hoped that this isn't the last we see and hear of young Charles. More, please, and heavy on the yarns.

Michael W. Thomas

*You Are Here*, by Simon Turner.

ISBN 978-1-906038-05-2. £7.99.

Heaventree Press, Koko Building, The Arches Industrial Estate, Spon End, Coventry CV1 3JQ.

Savage Nuneaton  
munters in glottal-stopped rain

There used to be an informal competition, jovially endorsed by reviewers in literary magazines such as the *TLS*, to see who could track down the most explosive opening to a piece of writing. The winner of the month (or week, or day) would be awarded the 'Bloody hell! said the Duchess, banging her Wooden Leg' prize. The above lines, from Simon Turner's sequence 'Geographies,' would certainly earn him a place on the 'Bloody hell!' shortlist (not least because the collision of Nuneaton and savagery is as alluring as it is unlikely). Throughout *You Are Here*, his first collection, Turner seeks to arrest and repay the reader's attention, his jagged language alternating with stretches of quieter meditation. He's not afraid of form, either: the lyrical and the concrete both take their turn throughout the pieces, as do densely-wrought prose poems and, in the case of '*what they say*,' a scattergun portrait of swifts in flight, all '*poplarish apostrophes*' and '*doodled ampersands*.'

The poems here can be playful, such as '*Bibliogenesis*,' which echoes Edwin Morgan's wonderful forays into concrete forms and word-slippage:

In the beginning was the word  
In the beginning was the worsted  
In the beginning was the wraith  
In the beginning was the wreck

Equally, they can offer a striking precision, such as in the lingering view of Moseley Bog, where a lost past and a crowded urban present are offered side by side, the language sliding between Anglo-Saxon echoes and



*The Standing Ground* by Jan Fortune-Wood

ISBN 978-1-905614-41-7 £8.99

Cinnamon Press, Meirion House, Glan yr Afon, Tanygrisiau, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd LL41 3SU

[www.cinnamonpress.com](http://www.cinnamonpress.com)

From the very first issue of *Raw Edge Magazine* we have used the same criteria to choose the books that we review as we have for other contributions to the magazine – that they should either be by writers with a connection to the West Midlands, be about or with a strong connection to the region, or that the publishers be based here.

So when *The Standing Ground* arrived in the post, a book from a North Wales publisher and seemingly set in that area, it was out of a personal interest in the landscape and culture of North Wales that I began to read it. It soon became apparent that the book did have a very strong connection to the region and that I would be writing about it.

Set in a near future of totalitarian conformity, this is the story of some of those who choose to adopt mindsets and lifestyles other than the one centrally prescribed, those who exist outside the system completely and those living within it whose lack of conformity is brutally corrected. Told simply, and winding Welsh myth into the fabric of the telling, it is easy to empathise with the world described where divides between the strata of society are more extreme and where those 'in charge' control and engineer society with their favours and patronage.

Here, the do-it-our-way-or-else, momma-knows best attitude of career administrators and state apologists is simultaneously enhanced and subverted by an artist whose success within the system funds their attempts to bring the whole soulless edifice tumbling down. I was aware of a rye smile on my face as I recognised situations and places, and I was intrigued by the fate of my own native dialect as a kind of robbers' cant of the future. By the end of the book and I found myself rooting for the main characters as the story reached its climax.

Entertaining along the way, *The Standing Ground* is a cry for individuality in a world where we are increasingly observed and evaluated. As did filmmaker Peter Watkins, it seems to shout '*death to the monoculture*'.

Dave Reeves.

*Notown* by Garrie Fletcher

ISBN 978-1-906099-04-6 £5.00 (inc. p&p)

Blackheath Books

[www.blackheathbooks.org.uk](http://www.blackheathbooks.org.uk)

A beautifully produced little book this. It feels good – matt in the hand – unpretentious – then it has a glorious blue fly-sheet which makes for such an uplifting start to the reading.

The first two poems set up a disarming mix of playfulness and seriousness, and the twin moods continue throughout the collection. When they wind together there is some strong writing, but at times it is either one mood or the other on offer. Because of this there are some pieces in the collection to which I have to admit indifference and, in general, the intensity and rhythm of the prose pieces made them more memorable than those which were consciously presented as free verse poems. Of the latter, I did enjoy the sentiment of '*Tourist*', where the protagonist feels superior to the tourists who mill around until the moment when '*A girl speaks to me/ I realise that/ I'm the tourist.*' But it's when, as in the title poem *Notown*, Fletcher gets to the heart of the matter:

'... walking the prefabricated closes of  
idyllic Cornish villages, streets named after  
middle class planners favourite holidays...'

that mixed in with the observation, the anger and frustration is controlled and on target.

What I can in 2008 perceive as a lack of coherence between some of the pieces in the collection somehow reminds me of my own first offering, and I think I'd be just as happy as I was to see that published back then to have a booklet as well produced as this one is published now.

Blackheath Books describe themselves as undertaking 'artisan publishing for discerning bibliophiles' and *Notown* is a limited edition run with each copy signed and numbered, so get your order in quick while there are still some available.

Dave Reeves

*THE WRITERS TOOLKIT – visualisations for writers*

by Sue Johnson cd £7.50

from [www.writers-toolkit.co.uk](http://www.writers-toolkit.co.uk)

The strange thing was that I sat down to review this cd and I found myself straightways lulled into a place where I noticed how cluttered and chaotic my desk was. I closed my eyes to concentrate and didn't even fast forward through the silences left for you to do the visualisations - I'd been warned about them and fully intended to skip through them, just getting the meat so to speak. As it was I did nothing but participate - the meat it seemed was in the silences.

Not so long ago such courses would have been on cassette and we'd have been instructed to 'pause the tape while you ...' imagine a journey, or a place, or an episode - here we are quite simply given the space in real time. In that sense it is just like being in a workshop where a tension is created by the silence. Sometimes you are engaged/ sometimes you drift off. Sometimes it works for you/ sometimes it doesn't.

The process of using this cd is a little like engaging with the exercise that a workshop leader asks you to take home and finish for the next meeting. In that situation, though,

people are always writing it down wrong, don't listen, come back next time with something completely unlike anything you've asked for. For me as a workshop leader, that's the part I've come to look forward to - the unknown that keeps the process interesting. But it can still be problematic for the writers themselves, I know, being unsure of what is wanted (especially when they are just starting out). This way you get to take the workshop leader home with you.

The addition of guitar and other sounds to the tracks certainly makes the workshop element more accessible, stops the fact that you are sitting there listening to silence becoming too embarrassing with their being no shuffles and coughs from others physically present at the workshop, and indeed it is obvious that much more could be done with this technique.

I can't imagine that all of the subject matter of these visualisations will appeal universally, but if a sign of a good work is that it makes you approach it on its own terms then that is exactly what I was forced to do by these: 35 minutes in I finally went to retrieve the cup of tea that I'd left brewing.

As a starting point to get people to observe their daydreams, their own visualisations, to imagine situations and then record them it is a very handy tool, and at that price a useful addition to any new writers toolkit.

*The Writers Toolkit – visualisations for writers* can be used in conjunction with Sue Johnson's Greenwood Press booklet *The Writers Toolkit: banish the curse of writer's block*. Investigate the other two books in the 'Toolkit' series. Full details and contact details at [www.writers-toolkit.co.uk](http://www.writers-toolkit.co.uk)

Dave Reeves

Dave Reeves is a writer, performer and editor and details of his work can be found at [www.textician.co.uk](http://www.textician.co.uk) He is currently presenter of the monthly live literature and spoken word programme streamed by the internet broadcaster [www.radiowildfire.com](http://www.radiowildfire.com) from 8.00-10.00pm (UK time) on the first Monday of every month.

## Also received

*The Writers Toolkit 3: how to create sparkling novels* by Sue Johnson.

Isbn 978-0-9521165-6-1                      £4.50

Greenwood Press, 10 Woodward Close,  
Persnore, Worcs WR10 1LP

Many books that try to tell you how to write are so packed with information that they are almost unreadable. This one takes you by the hand and makes suggestions in very simple and supportive ways.

*Something Stirred: in search of greenness*  
by Bob Woodroffe

Isbn 978-0-9521165-7-8                      £4.50

Greenwood Press a/a.

A collection "... to celebrate nature and the spirit of the greenman that is always there," poems that, by turn, investigate the green within a Cathedral (Worcester), and the cathedral within the green. The one line introduction to each poem works remarkably well as a guide through this world of the public where someone 'spans the world/ measures with sticks/ like the dodman/ and the ley' and the private where 'the spiral of midlife crisis' has '... always been there under the surface/ smouldering like a deep peatland burn'. It's that – dare I say – 'natural' use of green imagery, the love of the language of the land, that make this book a joy to read

*Coachlines issue 8, 2007/08 edition*

£2.50 plus p+p

Coachhouse Writers, 72 Arundel Road,  
Wordsley, West Midlands DY8 5EJ

Dedicated to Elizabeth Kirk and Megan Robertson, two members who recently passed away, this is a fitting tribute to their memory. The usual eclectic mix of styles, the group keeps itself alive and active with the regular publication of these collections which act as a showcase for the individual members and a calling card for new blood. If you are interested in knowing more about the group take a look at [www.coachhousewriters.co.uk](http://www.coachhousewriters.co.uk)

*Envoi issues 148 October 07 and 149 February 08.*

Issn 0013-9394                      £5.00 per issue.

Cinnamon Press, Meirion House, Glan yr afon,  
Tanygrisiau, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd LL41 3SU.

A pleasure to hold and to read, this magazine is crammed with poetry that has room to breathe on the page – and that in itself is no mean feat. Add to that the fact that the consistently high quality of the poetry itself and as issue 148 saw the magazine celebrating 50 years of publishing, it looks totally fresh and good for another 50 years at the moment. Help them to achieve that, go buy a copy.