

Painted, spoken

edited by Richard Price

number 32

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Twenty years of Painted, spoken

Richard Price

Painted, spoken reaches its twentieth year with this issue. It once had several issues a year plus a substantial supplement devoted to criticism and wonder. In recent times it has become a slender annual magazine with very little reviewing or thinking out loud, less a mysterious forest than a minimalist tree with yearly zen fruit.

I'd like to say this is because I am very choosy – and I am – but its reduced frequency and scope has really been down to various crises in my life (don't ask) and a more and more demanding day job. I have been on the verge of closing the magazine completely several times but, stripped-down as it is, there is something larger-than-itself to *Painted, spoken*, something I see as hopeful energy sending out new work to fresh eyes, and yet continuing long slow conversations over the years.

The particular times I've thrown up my hands, Candi Staton singing "You've Got the Love", declaring I don't have time for it any more, are also the times I've discovered by persevering it has made time for me. I'd like to thank all those who have appeared in it over the years – be they regulars like Peter McCarey and Robin Fulton Macpherson – or those writers who have appeared far more fleetingly, alighting in the branches before the journeys they've made to homes elsewhere.

In the last few years I've found a more active way back into contemporary poetry unexpectedly. When the Poetry School approached me to lead a weekly workshop I said Yes, thinking that I could share my experience of poetry and its worlds and give something back, since I benefited so much myself from workshop and mentorship in younger days. I hope I do now contribute in that way – the workshop continues – but I underestimated how much it would re-engage *me* with the big questions of poetry, politics and culture, as well as the craft. My 'students' teach me every single week

new ways of seeing, new questions to raise, and they bring a range of traditions and contexts which I feel lucky to experience. It is because of their earnest intelligence, among other qualities, that I have felt a kind of re-entry into a constellation I had thought I had left by one-way ticket.

This in turn has made me re-think *Painted, spoken*. Shouldn't it re-energise itself, too – increase its frequency, increase its coverage, increase its reach?

I think so. I don't know what can be achieved yet, but that is the direction I want to take *Painted, Spoken* from now on. I think that means having a proper internet presence as well as a printed one (which I think is still important). It probably means opening up the magazine to calls for submissions (while maintaining commissioned and requested work), and it means increasing the reviewing aspect (which will require reviewers more numerous and more articulate than me myself I). The reviewing and feature infrastructure in the UK is woeful for poetry and if *Painted, spoken* can help it will. You have been warned. If you think you would like to be part of this let me know and we can talk. I hope it will not take another twenty years to meet these ambitions....

Simon Barraclough

Pangolin Heart

A razor-petalled artichoke,
tongue belly-tethered,
heart never knowingly not
in mouth
but never on gauntleted sleeve.

Let it be,
you stalker of exotic meat
with blowpipe pupils
and arrows of desire
dipped in keenest
disappointment,
infatuated sap.

Infatuated sap.

Taser Heart

The manual said there would be

“unavoidable incapacitation,

not based on pain,

that cannot be overcome.”

They just need to change the part about pain.

Orca Heart

I feel safe because I know
your teeth will bend right back
as they encircle me

but in they go.

And now the quicks of all ten nails are gone
from scraping the splintered deck.

You have the better half of me.
Who thought you'd be so inflexible?
I'll never put on a life jacket
again.

Patrizia Longhitano

Ode for the City of London

Bring me high rents! Tiny flats! Mouldy walls!
Basements with only two windows!
Bring me the mirage of a cemented patio
and *Hear! Hear!* ... a living room!
And I will show you the meaning of 'gratitude' and 'devotion'.

Let's have scones with strawberry jam
and Rodda's clotted cream at the V&A
while the Italian pianist plays Piaf's tunes. Let's wet our feet
while crossing the shallow pool – our minds still
on the jewellery behind the glass.

Bring me to Highgate Cemetery
and let's try to find Karl Marx's tomb.
Bring me marching bands playing in the pavilion
in St James Park
on a dewed Sunday morning. Bring me vegan brunches
at the Palm Vaults
while I tell to myself '*I am not a hipster!*'

Let me buy you a French dvd from Fopp,
let's walk to the British Museum
and cross those streets where once
the Stephen sisters walked too.
Let's go for a black & white movie
at the BFI and have a gin & tonic at the bar.

Bring me to the pier
when it's dark and windy.
Let's be silent.
Let's listen to the voices of the women who built the bridges,
the streets and the buildings of our city.

Bring me in front of the Globe
when all the lights are off.
Let's be silent.
Let's listen to the voices of Boudica
and her daughters while they were killing
your ancestors (or mine?) and burning everything to ashes.

Let me close my eyes.
Let me breathe deeply.
Let me turn towards Southwark,

towards home – where,
if I can only find some change for the milk,
I can make you an Italian hot chocolate before bed.

A Sunday Afternoon in an Italian Mountain Village (Vajont - 9 October 1963)

The guys were drenched in cologne
stolen from their father's cabinet
trying to impress the girls
wearing all the same lipstick borrowed
from the oldest one and passed from one
to the other in the bathroom of the dance hall.

They were all lined up waiting
for the next twist song to come
when all the lanterns shook leaving only
some yellow and orange ones lit up.

Some skirts blew raising laughs
but soon they faded leaving all those bodies
looking in the same direction.

The trees were shouting
through the branches and the leaves to run
as fast as they could but it was too late
when they understood that the walnut tree
and the cypresses weren't just shaking.

The wind stopped howling and everything went silent.
For a second they all thought it was over
but then the rain started to come down.

It wasn't just water:
it was mud and sticks and pebbles
and more water and more mud
and branches started falling
and suddenly nobody could see anything
or even open their eyes -
the debris started to scratch
the skin and their Sunday's bests.

And the wall of water and nature
and living things came down
leaving them incapable of moving
– gasping for air and oxygen –
that weren't there anymore,
but somewhere else,
in another mountain village
where life was needed
where life was continuing to live.

Early September in London

Nevins runs along the pond
making music with crunching leaves
the wind keeps calling me
through branches of chestnut trees
I see fungi growing on trunks
I imagine my father going out in his garden
in the early hours this morning
to have his breakfast
- handpicked figs with a slice of bread
my family probably is out harvesting grapes
my cousins will be soon sweating
on top of the tractors driving
to the wine cellar while the cars
behind keep honking angrily.
I try to remember the smell
of the logs full of resin
piled up on the back of my house in Italy
but the dog suddenly barks
to the ducks who fly away
without turning back.

A p r i l Y e e

genealogical bewilderment¹

a girl a father so pale
can't be seen
illness's manifestations
(1) ask the clinic (2) go to yale
(3) *maybe that would make him*
(4) stare at a blue bathroom door
(5) photo only
(6) records only
(7) *what colour eyes and hair*
his grandparents had
what they died from
what his parents
died from
legislating yea/nay
model of the body cut
growth seed concrete
limbless organless
type bloodstream
bootlegged great grandfather
four wheels no helmet
always wanted to say i
can see that human
in me lies the wild
femur broke
bound carried
15,000 years

¹ Quotes adapted from 'Finding the Lost Generation of Sperm Donors' by Ashley Fetters (*The Atlantic*, May 2018) and "'I Always Wanted to Look at Another Human and Say I Can See That Human in Me": Understanding Genealogical Bewilderment in the Context of Racialised Intercountry Adoptees' by Ravinder Barn and Nushra Mansuri (*Genealogy*, 2019)

Management Consultant: Exotic Holiday #4

I see men beating cream in a frozen box
in the market, singing, pressing mastic
into a good visitors will pay to lick.
They fire on columns lined like crops,
hack angled wounds in walnut blocks,
salve them with gleaming mollusk slips
to hawk to women murmuring *fantastic*
as caves powder with the bang of a clock.
My suggestion for rapid monetisation
(given low local costs) is to concentrate
on pricing active experience. The slide
of dollars is about customer co-creation.
Survey what the market bears: \$308
A village of grandmothers

What's in the boot? Making the connection between Black Lives Matter, Cultural Property, and State Power / Richard Price

Most of his grown-up life my son's Grandfather on his mother's side was often stopped by the police. The first question he would be asked was about the car: "Is this yours?"

This happened again and again. Maybe, he would have thought, as a black man in Britain, with all its history of slavery, he was still not meant to have possessions: he was just meant to be one.

The next thing the police officer would do is tell him to get out of the car. There would be another question. Always the same: "What's in the boot?"

What is in the boot?

Surely stolen goods? As the police officer walked with him to the back of the car, Grandfather would remember his ancestors and how they were stolen – actual people, stolen – from the west coast of Africa. How they were forced into the 'boot', the hold, of a ship and transported to Jamaica.

Or it's drugs, that's right, drugs could well be in the boot. 'We all know about black men' – that would be the underlying concept.

The officer might even say 'there have been reports of drug use in this area,' so he would know this was all 'above board' (which sounded like a seafaring phrase). Any reasonable person would understand.

**

Later in life Grandfather would see police helicopters overhead in the neighbourhood, though they never surveilled the rich districts or the white-flight suburbs where so much drug-taking took place.

Nevermind illegal drugs, my son's grandfather would reflect on the white addiction to tobacco and to sugar. These addictions had fuelled the enslavement and murder of his ancestors and many others. Then he would recall the white addiction to cocaine which fuels the deaths of black people to this day. 'Coke is a racist drug' was a phrase he'd heard, which had made him chuckle it sounded so daft and so true. But now, with the police officer looking, wasn't the time to be chuckling. You couldn't even smile with your eyes.

But wait, if it's not stolen goods or illegal drugs then it's a weapon, yes, a weapon could be, must be, in the boot.

That's what the police would be looking for. He could see that the police didn't need to hide their weapon, the baton hung from their belt. They didn't need to say how much of a threat they were, everyone knew about the deaths of black men in police jails, the

beatings black teenagers took in the backs of police vans.

So the police officer must be trained to think, stolen goods?, drugs?, weapons?. A little mantra.

**

In this act of reconstruction I imagine my son's grandfather letting his imagination have full reign, too. He imagines Britain as a Person and Britain the Person would know an awful lot about stolen goods and drugs and weapons.

Britain the Person had had its fair share of the stealing trade, taking resources with threats and menaces – it could be oil from Nigeria in the boot, it could be furs from Canada, it could be silks and spices from India. It could be a soul from West Africa in the boot.

Drugs? Britain the Person knew about them. It had been a drug lord in the Opium Wars, using narcotics to force China to open its ports to Britain's advantage, forcing China to give up a territory as significant as Hong Kong. Britain the Person liked a drink, so much so that alcohol, one of the most damaging and addictive narcotics on earth, wasn't considered a drug. Pubs were regarded as more temple than trap, 'wine o'clock' was an aim not an admission of coming to an accommodation with addiction.

And Britain the Person had many times made and used weapons to kill for advantage. A bit of a weapons-obsessive, Britain the Person. There were jobs in death. It was funny peculiar and sourly funny ha-ha that so many of its 'humanitarian' military interventions – Iraq, Libya – were followed up with Jobs for Brits in lethal weapons. The interventions themselves seemed more like live trials for experimental armaments than good faith operations: the arms manufacturers could boast their kit had been tested in combat.

But, the 'sensible approach' said we mustn't be overly historical as if history was something that still had a bearing on personal lives today. That was all a long time ago – and Britain wouldn't be doing those things now, would it? Even if it was – at scale, in an organised and cleanly bureaucratic way, a middle-class way, approved by the Parliamentary process – that's not the same as a person, with personal responsibility, doing those things, is it? (But Grandfather knew a death is a death, whether it's the result of a vote or an argument on a street-corner.)

**

The lid of the car boot was carefully opened.

All the police ever found were bits and bobs of shopping.

If there were wrapped Christmas presents they would have to be unwrapped

Once, a tool-kit was queried. Could they be weapons? "What are these for?"

"They're in case I have a breakdown."

**

As if this wasn't a breakdown. As if this distrust – often leading to violence against black men – wasn't a national emergency (one kind of breakdown) and a white sociopathic episode (another kind of breakdown) rolled into one.

The waste of the country's resources used to keep black men under hyper-surveillance, the waste of black men's energy to survive as if this was normal.

**

And then a secret compartment is discovered in the car boot.

The secret compartment is opened: just the spare wheel.

"No harm done, sir," the police officer would say, allowing the man to close the boot. He would say it as if any person, white or black or any colour, would find this incident entirely rational and its frequency without malice or prejudice.

(Just as the police, in the wake of IRA bombings in London, found it entirely reasonable to stop a disproportionate number of black men coming into the City of London as part of their crackdown on suspects from that black enclave Northern Ireland).

"No harm done, sir." The police officer would say it as if the whole practice of hyper-surveillance was proportionate and untargeted.. It was certainly not designed to keep black people wary, afraid, was not designed to make sure the energy of their life-force was consumed in the heartbeats of fear, of untrustedness, and the continuous mastery of justified anger.

"You understand we have to check."

**

It wasn't just the police. Family remember it was all kinds of authority. Once, Nan and Grandad went on a special holiday to Jamaica. My son's mother, the writer Hannah Lowe, then a teenager, went, too. It was the first time all the family had gone to Grandad's

homeland. They took their time to see relatives and when it came time to return they splashed out a bit on some souvenirs to remember how special it had been. These were not last-minute low-grade efforts bought hastily at the airport. They were two sculptures, carved delicately by artists: two heads, one male, one female. Both of the heads wore dreadlocks – the style of course of those who worship in the Rastafarian religion. They were beautiful, proud. They were carved from one of the hardest forms of wood known to humankind, *lignum vitae* ('the tree of life').

When the family landed at Heathrow the family were quickly stopped by officials. That Grandfather was black and Grandmother was white seemed to make the authorities suspicious. It was as if this could not be the natural way of things, as if there had to be another reason, a serious reason, a criminal reason, for a black man travelling with a white woman and family. "What's in the bag, sir?"

When the authorities found the wooden heads, they immediately saw the quality of them. "Lovely loot, sir!" the man said, with a little smile.

Loot.

"These must have cost a pretty penny."

"They're beautiful aren't they," Nan replied, ignoring the insinuation that a black man could not possibly have afforded them. She had decided it was best she were the spokesperson, white to white. Grandfather quietly accepted this, he had the experience to suggest this was best.

The officer picked one of the heads up, sniffed it. He picked the other one up, sniffed that one too. "I have reason to believe there may be drugs in these objects," he said.

"I am going to saw one of these heads in half."

**

(Yesterday I was walking back from a friend's in my north London borough, Haringey. There was an argument across the street happening between a black traffic warden and a white man. It was heated on the side of the white guy and maybe it was the shock of his vehemence that made me 'hear' his words without actually understanding them until I'd walked further down the street. Maybe I was in anger-avoidance mode in any case: I am not a brave person.

"I'm coming back and I'm going to find you," the white man had been saying, I realised. "I'm going to get some milk, four pints of milk, the biggest container I can find, and I'm gonna drench you in it, you -- " He called the traffic warden the c- word.

I stopped as I realised what I had heard. The white man was already walking away, and now he was standing beside his van some distance away, still shouting, a South-East English accent. The traffic warden was shaking his head, holding his ground, and then turning to walk away from all this. I went up to him to see if he was OK, to say it was disgusting, that he was just doing his job. He said, "It's OK, I'm OK, I get this a lot.")

**

The driver's racism is not, of course, an exclusively white English trait. One of my best friends as a child was an Indian Scot and I remember the almost daily taunting and threats he got, too. There is an enraged astonishment among all white classes and nations in the UK that black and Asian British people should presume to have equality with them. When a black person is in any kind of authority, as a traffic warden briefly is, that anger is doubled.

**

Well, the family story relates that somehow Nan persuaded the officer at the airport that the heads really were 'just' special souvenirs. Without further challenge the whole family were allowed – allowed – to enter England, their home.

Decades have passed since then and nothing much changed in those years. Some things even got worse – if Grandfather had been alive today he may well have been one of those deported for not having the right paperwork. The capricious law as far as black British people are concerned means those who haven't been deported still live under the threat of it. Grandfather wasn't one for paperwork.

But now there has been a change, a change in one world at least, and a world I, as a librarian in a national library, have a passing familiarity with. This is the world of books and manuscripts and statues and beautiful objects, a million miles it seems from the life of Grandfather (though remember those beautiful objects which were almost destroyed when he and the family tried to bring their own 'loot' into the country).

Through Black Lives Matter, an international movement, a new authority, briefly, has arisen, a new kind of investigating force. It's a moral authority, founded on, among many other things, outrage at the killing of black people by the old 'authorities' – the police and the society which has created and supported the police's patterns of behaviour.

There have been protests against the murder of George Floyd in

America which have come back across the historied Atlantic, back to one of the nation-originators of slavery in the Americas. The protestors, overwhelmingly black, have protested against the police and they have gone on to make the connection between the white murder of black people and those cultural artefacts which still celebrate white supremacy.

The toppling in Bristol of the slave-merchant Edward Colston sent an electrifying shock-wave through the administrators of galleries, libraries and archives of the UK. Although I wish it had gone higher up the beach – to the power that directs the ‘heritage’ institutions, the government and its slippery connections with Old and New Money alike, it was an exhilarating shock wave. I will remember forever the joyful ritual and dance of that effigy being taken down by collective action, being drowned in the Bristol Sea, as so many black Africans were actually drowned, whether as punishment or ‘collateral casualties’ in the Atlantic slave trade. It brought the awful lived experience of black British people right into the world of ‘culture’. Heritage culture is disproportionately paid for by working class people – and black people are disproportionately working class people – and culture is disproportionately managed by and made accessible for white middle class people (in fact, white middle class women are the majority consumers).

But now black people and others have taken a look at museums and galleries and libraries and the white people controlling them – including, as a manager of curators, myself – and they’ve asked them, just as Grandfather was asked so many times about his car, “Is this yours?”

White people all over the country are in shock and the custodians especially. (I’m one of them, though as a person with a mixed family I have a slightly different tale to tell). How could they be questioned on this? How could their absolute authority, their version of lived experience – a tightly circumscribed ‘expertise’ – be challenged? And there seems to be a presumption of guilt. Just like the police, the new authority is beginning to talk about ownership. Who possesses the possessions?

**

An initial response from the white custodians has been: There’s clearly been a misunderstanding, maybe you don’t understand these complicated things? It is only ‘theirs’, the culture managers are saying, in the sense that they have been kindly looking after it, all these things of International Significance, for a higher purpose, for All Humanity.

Looking after all these beautiful and interesting things for everyone, and though there are not many black faces in the buildings, either visitors or staff ('not counting security and cleaners, of course – do they count?'), that's just *normal* for culture, they say, you can't blame us for that. And no, there aren't books by black achievers on display, or paintings of them, or, or – but let's not get ahistorical, they say.

But it turns out that they are not as expert as they said they were – there are many works of excellence by black writers and artists, there are many images of black achievers that could have been displayed but weren't. It is not expertise that is under threat by Black Lives Matters: on the contrary it is the great gaps in the established expertise that have been revealed and have so exposed 'expertise'.

But the custodians do not like that. They remember that 'kindness' and 'generosity' are among their favourite words. Oh, they love those words. Then perhaps they remember they are people of refined sensitivities after all, so the insinuation is preposterous, nasty, so full of ignorance, of unearned resentment.

They also know, because they are not complete fools, that there is something in the accusation, something that gnaws at them, perhaps to do with their own sense of being a cog themselves in an apparatus they don't fully understand or can control (or, perhaps, they hope, could have much responsibility for). A small few have even been asking the same questions of themselves and their institutions and they don't like the assumption that they have been silent. They feel ashamed that it has taken more death and the toppling of a slave-trader's statue into Bristol's harbour to scare, and perhaps shame, the hierarchy to change. Yet, they also know that hierarchy are servants to Government, which is intractable on this, to the point of pushing the public impression that the laws governing cultural property are a matter for museums, galleries, and libraries, when they are in fact wholly in the power of Government itself. That Government knows that there are enough racists (the I-norbs, "I'm not racist but...") in the key marginals to keep the Government and its pale opposition in power, one way or another.

Those higher up the beach – the government and its supporting Establishment – remain untouched by the tidal wave of outrage. Without their positions threatened and the *nature of how those positions are forged*, not least the finance and education networks which sustain them, what will happen in the culture institutions can at best be only be 'heartfelt'; thorough-within-limits; redecoration.

**

As it happens Grandad worked in the railway goodsyard my workplace, is built on, the goods-yard the new building in a sense obliterates. Working class people, often black like Grandfather, worked there at a yard which was part of a national network. Making sure goods travelled back and forth across the country, it was part of an international network, too, connected to the ports, bringing in the ingredients for the food cultures that have become part of the incredible range of 'British' food, bringing in those and other resources taken, often under duress, from colonised places.

He didn't have the job for long, or any 'proper job' for long – if they were offered a regular job in the first place, many black people were laid off first when times got rough. In a version of that structural racism, fixed-term contracts today are still all too common for black British men and women. Even so the goods-yard would employ more black people than you see in the 'cultured' building that has replaced it. Like heritage place after heritage place, it's an institution that struggles to bring black visitors and working class visitors into its white-dominated middle-class exhibition spaces, into its public spaces with its smart cafés, though it is in the heart of a multi-racial city (and staff would say, and are genuine when they do so, that this is not at all deliberate). Like all these places until now it has found it, with some notable exceptions (which prove it can be done), oh so difficult to present black history and its braidedness with British history in its permanent exhibition spaces, or give over exhibition real estate to contemporary black British culture.

Black British people, like white British people, don't only want to see their lives reflected in heritage institutions (though that is the least they should expect). They are not a single group, for a start, and are in any case, just like anyone else, potentially interested in all manner of other historic artefacts and events and ways of understanding, without them being 'just' for black people. And yet the institutions, for decades unengaged and broadly unconcerned with working class and black cultures, struggle to reach working class and black audiences for the activities they maintain day in and day out.

Now this new investigating authority, which seems so angry for some reason – 'why are people so angry these days!' – asks a new question. The new authority asks the white people, the chief officers (ah 'officer' that word again!) and all who work for them and it asks their political masters, too (but they seem more hidden, more difficult to shame) to 'get out of the car', to step away from the building.

That feels menacing, frankly. It doesn't feel like a request that can be refused. Then the next question comes, which Grandfather would know was coming, which perhaps every black man in Britain would know was coming, but no white person seems to have expected.

“What is in the boot?”

**

What exactly do you have in those basements, in that off-site warehouse, in those back-room storage rooms?

Again, the hurt-looking faces, the confusion. Remember, Grandfather was asked this so many times and he was able to take it all his life. And here are the answers: There’s nothing taken without permission! There are no drugs there! There is no evidence of a violent crime!

But ‘the boot’ is opened, the store-rooms examined, and what precisely is in there? The equivalent of a blameless tool-kit? Some harmless shopping? Something innocent like Christmas presents for the family? Just a spare wheel?

No. These heritage institutions are stuffed with stolen objects. They are stuffed with the drug of gold. They are seeping with the blood of the conquered and the enslaved whose work produced these clever, exquisite things.

The lid is open and in daylight everyone can see the golden objects taken by a state addicted to seized ornament. There were no officials trying to stop them coming into the country, no-one questioning this real plunder. On the contrary, the British Army has been an active force of looting, as the Magdala objects distributed across the UK’s heritage collections testify. They were taken by force by a British punitive expedition in 1868, where many in present-day Ethiopia were killed (the Army received bonuses for the success of the mission, essentially for their deaths). Perhaps the act of force, the brute assertion of authority, is even part of loot’s beauty to ‘the Brits’.

All the constituent nations were involved in these multiple acts of white supremacy. Scotland, too. (How I loathe the holier-than-thou attitude of some of my compatriots, as if Scotland occupied a permanent moral high ground). Scotland’s Henry Dundas persuaded the UK Government to delay the abolition of slavery for decades. The poet Robert Burns – whose words and songs we rightly celebrate with a special evening each year – had a ticket to Jamaica and was all set to go. If his poetry hadn’t suddenly been an extraordinary success, making him think he could have a life in Scotland, make no mistake he would have boarded that ship and become a slave-master. Why do you think so many Caribbean and Afro-American people have Scottish surnames? Their ancestors took the names of those who owned or ‘managed them’. At best, the slave-masters had relationships and raised families with women who were still their possessions (or the possessions of their bosses), which is surely a kind of rape; at worst

the slave-masters raped them without the niceties of a 'relationship'—black women and black men. (In a tragic twist, the widespread homophobia in Jamaica can partly be traced back to the punitive rape of recaptured male slaves). As in war, rape was used systematically in slavery.

The lid is open. Across the country, museums, galleries and libraries are exposed. The store-rooms are crammed with the stolen prayers of cultures more pious than ours. And it is a wonder that the locks haven't seized up with the coagulated blood.

I hope the new authority is looking further, higher. Maybe this new authority is something like Grandfather's ghost. Because this is not about material things alone, or even mainly. The new authority should, as well as pressing to utterly re-shape the heritage institutions, be taking a hard look at the 'decent' businesses which so 'kindly' give jobs to white British people but keep black people at the bottom of the ladder, those 'decent' businesses who give white British people jobs to make weapons that kill people of colour across the world, to the 'civilized' universities who are not civilised enough to let black people of talent in without a struggle, whose well-heeled white alumni so disproportionately populate our privately-owned media and our state broadcaster, our approved culture and arts, our senior police cohorts, our senior military, our senior civil service, our judiciary, our management consultant firms, our parliament (all deluded they are there because 'we live in a meritocracy' — "I can't breathe" is both an existential cry of pain in the face of police violence and an analysis of the whole suffocating establishment).

We know that it's not just about things. Most especially, it's about how those who weigh down black lives, must be changed — their roles and positions and power must be changed — and, because in changing them, all will be changed, the whole power relation transformed.

What we don't know, yet, is how the injustice can be so comprehensively righted or even if there is truly the possibility now to make that change. Already some have called this a mere 'moment', as if it is something that will be given its head and subside soon. If so, the new authority born of Black Lives Matter will have to find further means of changing control, of bringing the shock-wave higher, up, up to well-known but well-protected places of power currently for all practical purposes beyond scrutiny. As the black abolitionist Frederick Douglass said: "Power concedes nothing without a demand." That urgent question Grandfather knew so well, for the sake of my son's generation if not for our own, must be directed further up, all the way, to the layers of the canopy at the top, and, finally, with pin-point accuracy, the question again: What is in the boot?

R o b i n F u l t o n M a c p h e r s o n

I Step Outside, Late

Street-lamps could be as far away as stars
and stars could be as close-by as street-lamps.

The night universe sweeps me with freshness
as of a quiet wave breaking in sunlight.

Some Things Great and Small

Alive, in its way,
a cactus, tiny
as a push-button
and chasms beneath
the attention of
upper pine-levels.

At my own level
my eyes are too big
to see eightsome reels
whirled by particles
in the solid rock
I think I stand on.

Loch and Star

The loch once had a Gaelic name
but chose to lose it, preferring
anonymity.

The star which on very clear nights
had a hesitant reflection
never quite whole, never quite lost
in the dim wavelets — it once had
a Latin name but preferred now
to shine without name or number
in a non-heaven.

So many years ago I spent
so many hours out on the loch.
I came away with stillness learnt
from restless water.

And I've dreamt that my passport gives
as my country of residence
a non-country with a non-loch
sometimes reflecting a non-star.
My lips smelled of peaty water
and my hands of trout.

A Morning to Watch

A peaceful start to a new day.
Look once: an over-sized pale moon
has paused behind the white birches
and seems unlikely to move on.
The bedrock I share with the trees
has always been there, always will.

Look twice: the pale moon's in free fall
through space with neither up nor down
and the bedrock the white birches
share with me is turning its back
on the lost moon at frantic speed.
It can't get far enough away.

Neighbourly

Each time we look at the universe,
what we can't see of it gets bigger.

What a relief then to catch sight of
that neighbourly crow watching his world
from the topmost twig of a beech tree.

The crow must be late medieval
and the tree early medieval.
Such neighbourliness, centuries deep,
protects us from the empty light-years.

P e t e r M c C a r e y
from **The Syllabary**

14.1.11

PoMo generation of Blowjob Bill
The unsubdued elect and the electric
Swang along to Hey Jude and catcalled
Judas! Unplugged
Unpleasant.

15.1.11

Two days at the kitchen table with Ushakov
(Moscow, 1938), 4 vols, dark,
Dark green cloth cover, I chewed
At Pasternak ("Parsnip")'s early books of verse.

Russian-English: brazier, brocade,
Girt, adze, muzzles, sleepers, oven door, vitriol,
Biscuit barrel, eagle owl, door curtain, abscess,
Salt pans, Tatar tax collector, runrigs, ingot,

Misfire, mapping pen, Adam's apple, alder,
Weighman, buffalo, farthingale, meltwater,
Catkin, fibril, crossbill, stilts, zinc white,
Firebox, systole, crossbow – straight syntax,

Strong, simple beat of a young heart, constant
Fretting about the weather. Pagan
Pilgrimage for me, who dug the lexical landscape
More than the shiny CIA facsimile

Of the legendary 60s Soviet edition. Still,
The smart thing to do back then
With your Dylan Albert Hall concert bootleg
Was swap it for this and learn some Russian.

15.x.1 **Poetry?**

Apart from a tune or a chinwag, nothing
Interests me more that doesn't
Pull my chain or churn my groin,
Skew my chine or somebody else's
Gristle to the charnel mill.

16.1.9

Five Chilean bishops
Appealed to the Brit justiciary
On behalf of their dictator.
Behold the black bulbs
Of their ten shoon
Peek from under cyclamen soutanes.

16.10.5

From my dad
I inherited
Not a shive
Of bread but a manner
Of counting coin
Like a day labourer
Just given his fee.

Is this
What they think
I'm worth?

16.10.1

Shy! He stands at the touch line
An inverted question mark
And all his team mates shouting out the answer
Here! Here!
They're doing the twist, or tango, in reverse,
Not looking at their partner but at him.
This is a nightmare.

16.9.1

Who's She?
The cat's mother?
The Queen of Sheba?
The sheer
Cheek of her!

16.9.3

Kempy, dusty karakul sheep
Hungering for clusters of grapes
Follow the good shepherd
Who knows your sufic secret.

15.9 3 **Socrates**

Each is a cheap
Imitation of the next, until my
Death, when death will die.

A i s h a F a r r

Spring

There was according to the hymns a flower which from its own root bloomed a hundred more so strong in smell that the girl (here she is) wanted only to breathe it. She was growing. As she went to break its stem, recognising narcissus from a picture, the whole earth made a hole from which rose Hades, a man called host who controlled many. The girl was taken (as she is).

The search for the girl (where is she) doesn't end or begin but defines her in the dictionary. Demeter, her mother, became a wild bird looking for her over the firm land and yielding sea. No one would tell her the truth about her daughter. Not even the birds of omen flew to her. In the hidden depths of the earth the girl waited, picturing the surface of the world from a memory of one page of the encyclopedia.

Perhaps without the dark smell isn't as strong. When spring returns the darkness starts to leave, the leaves begin to grow, petals happen in repeats. Rose is a noun and a verb. The girl known only beneath the earth (here she is) once picked a flower so was picked. She'd seen somebody doing it in a picture or was it on the television. The fact of being here was reintroduced to her as considerable.

Nisha Ramayya

Sketches of Poets by Richard Price

Nisha Ramayya's work operates at the rich intersection between theory, performance and print. It's informed by process-focussed practice. Ramayya, from Glasgow, studied at Royal Holloway, University of London, her PhD in feminist poetics supervised by the poet and artist Redell Olsen. Ramayya combines an interest in Indian religious ritual, especially Tantra, as a formal interest as well as a subject interest, with feminist and anti-racist concerns.

Here is an extract from "Ritual Steps for a Tantric Poetics" (from *correspondences*, published by the English small press Oystercatcher). First the opening:

this is the way to north
the honey love of air
poetry and myth lick your ears
this is the way to northeast
the drunk eyes of air-fire
forgetting you slip into dialect
this is the way to east
the hurting hold of fire

and then, facing this, a second column:

come away from the north
assume the contemporary
you have access to more words than you are using
come away from northeast
try on as many voices as you like
impressions imply re-making
come away from east
your bones, your blood vessels, your eyelashes
how astonishing, astonishing

The play of the two columns in this strong-rhythmed poem suggests not so much an internal (gentle) argument between two world-views – though it does - as a joyfully irrational manual of celebration, underlined by the acceptance of emotional and intellectual layers and opposing directions co-existing in the same perceiving entity. There is a lot of humour here, a playing with the audience, too, and this exists disarmingly easily alongside a seriousness of intent.

As with Fiona Templeton's work – though achieved in a very different manner – Ramayya presses the bodied, including the sensual, up against the abstract and ethereal – the “honey love of air” and the “licking” of poetry and myth – with an economy of language, a pivotal torque, I find at times breath-taking.

Books by Nisha Ramayya

States of the Body Produced by Love (London: Ignota Books, 2019)

In Me the Juncture (Bristol: Sad Press, 2019)

Threads, co-authored with Sandeep Parmar and Bhanu Kapil (Clinic Press, 2018)

Correspondences (Norfolk: Oystercatcher Press, 2016)

Notes on Sanskrit (Norfolk: Oystercatcher Press, 2015)

It's a Record

Darren Hayman's new long player Home Time (order from hefnet.com) is stripped down, rueful, and as able to get emotional torque from domestic detail as ever. Closing the joint account, dispersing the pattern plates, admitting serious failings – it's a classic record about breakup, a breakup from a long relationship. There's warmth and tenderness here, charm, and a delicate use of backing / co- singers; and it's very danceable. Hayman is still pulling melodies out of the bag and some lyrical surprises, too. See my interview with DH in Prose Supplement 4 here: <https://hydrohotel.net/mags> .

Julia Jacklin's Crushing (on Transgressive) begins broodingly with “body” a song which begins with a devastating character sketch of a boyfriend ‘more kid than criminal’ who has ruined a romantic weekend by being caught smoking in flight. What has a kind of queasy humour to it at the beginning moves by the end of the song to profound distrust, a now ex-boyfriend who the singer fears will use intimate photographs in revenge. Out of proportion or fair assessment? We'll never know, but we surely do feel both the vulnerability and, especially, strength of Jacklin's voice; her lyric and musical drive make this a masterpiece of a record. Jacklin's ability to be so concise in articulating righteous anger at the same time as caringness, yes, of course, even for the ex-Significant Other, is another measure of Crushing's emotional sophistication. **RP**

L a r r y B u t l e r

Green Man

Light but robust with thin spokes of green
edible green diuretic green-green stickywillie
velcro stickyjack catchweed sting rascal
beggar's lice wraps around the runner beans
fruits of cleavers dried for roasted coffee
relief from poisonous bites and stings
a poultice for wounds dried leaves for a tea
assists the lymph nodes cleaning out toxins
bitter sweet scent of fresh mown grass
geese consume this goosegrass gratitude
it clings to jumpers and ankles and hair
it belongs everywhere : by railway lines
with robin-in-the-hedgerow back alleys
and gutters : climbing it sticks to everything
dreams of taking over the world making
us all green like when Lee and Bob and Oscar
Gerry, Donny and Keith covered my whole
body in cleavers, then I went to boy scouts
as the GREEN MAN – the future has to be green
or we will all die
YES we will all die.

Rosaceae and Lionel

Rosa o Rosa dainty and sweet and early to bloom
budding forth in cluster balls of green on bare branches,
delicate but strong survivor of frost and wind – Lionel
longs to lie along her canopy gazing up at the afternoon
half-moon in the grey blue sky rocked by a gentle breeze.

He sucks her scent of crimson and gold oblivious to passers-by,
as she roots deep – he's half-asleep not caring who comes
who goes. She knows – she knows how to grow strong and free
spreading her colours like wings to attract a solo bee: Lionel.

Lionel longs to float beyond time suspended by white petals.

Last Text to Tom Leonard

*YumYum and Latte 3pm at your house. Text me if you prefer
something else*

Larry

Simon Barraclough is a poet and writer who has published and edited several volumes and pamphlets, most recently *Sunspots* in 2005 (Penned in the Margins). He devises and performs in multimedia projects involving filmmakers and musicians (Psycho Poetica in 2010, The Debris Field in 2010, Sunspots in 2015, Vertiginous in 2018). **Larry Butler** grew up in northern California, and has lived in Glasgow since 1981, where he teaches Tai-Chi, movement and leads improvisation workshops. He co-founded the Poetry Healing Project out of which he founded and developed Survivors' Poetry Scotland and Lapidus. **Aisha Farr** is an artist and writer who lives and works in London. **Patrizia Longhitano** was born in Brazil and lived most of her life in Italy until 2005 when she decided to move to the UK. Since then, she has been living in London working as a nanny. Some of her poems have appeared in *Harana Poetry Magazine*, *The Rialto*, *The South Bank Poetry Magazine* and *The Delinquent* and her work is included in *Un Nuevo Sol: British LatinX Writers*, ed. Nathalie Teitler and Nii Ayikwei Parkes (Flipped Eye). **Robin Fulton Macpherson's** *Northern Habitat: Collected Poems 1960-2010* is published by Marick Press. Some of the poems featured here appear in his new collection *Arrivals of Light* (Shearsman). See Allan Riach's account of Macpherson's remarkable work here: <https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2018/12/a-northern-habitat-collected-poems-1960-2010-by-robin-fulton-macpherson/> **Peter McCarey** is the author of the study *MacDiarmid and the Russians* and many poetry collections, including *Collected Contraptions* (Carcanet). His collection of essays on poetry, *Find an Angel and Pick a Fight* is published by Molecular Press, as is *Petrushka*, a hybrid novel which, written before Covid19, is a shocking prophecy of a pandemic. He lives in Geneva. **Richard Price's** latest collection is *Moon for Sale* (Carcanet). He has also recently produced *Digital* an artist's book from Julie Johnstone's essence press. With Roberto Sainz de La Maza and Elisa de Leon he forms the band The Loss Adjustors. His reflections on lyric poetry, artists' books, and small presses are collected in *Is This A Poem?* (Molecular Press). **April Yee** writes about colonialism, climate change, and other effects of power. In 2020 her work was commended or shortlisted by *Ambit*, Live Canon, and the Bridport Prize. She reported in more than a dozen countries before moving to London, where she serves on the Refugee Journalism Project at UAL and tweets @apriyee.

Painted, spoken

Simon Barraclough

Larry Butler

Aisha Farr

Patrizia Longhitano

Peter McCarey

Robin Fulton Macpherson

April Yee

and Richard Price on "What's in the Boot?" –
Black Lives Matter, Cultural Property, and State Power

plus a brief introduction to the work of Nisha Ramayya

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