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 Growth

Editorial by Bixby Monk

Outside my office window, each spring a tree would blossom.

As I write this I'm watching the remains of the communal gardens below me being cleaned up by two men in fluorescent smocks; I don't know flora or fauna, I mean I'm not intimate with their names - at a bonfire party in Islington, in the eighties Islington, so no coffee bars and clubs and new wave artists, an old hippy cornered me with treacle toffee. He was mad as hell, around the time they were cutting down some trees near there because the roots were tearing up the road, and he felt everyone should chain themselves to the trees and save them (I can't imagine anyone doing that nowadays, too radical and just too much effort). I remember someone had put Wham on the turntable (yes, that's vinyl, folks) and this hippy told me all about the trees they were going to tear down, their names and everything. Now, I'm not talking about ash or willow, he'd actually given them names, it was one of the surrealist moments of my life, a tree called Gary and George Michael trying to rap. Years later and I understand why that old hippy gave them names, it was to remind him, and I suppose us, that they all have distinct personalities and lives, and that it's better to talk to a tree called Bob than listen to George rap.

The blossom in spring would have been lovely but most of the trees are gone from the garden below my flat, great vents in the lawn mark out each root torn up, the branches are a macabre barb wire on the edges of my vision waiting to be burnt or pulped.

January has been the cruelest of months in Scotland and the North. I returned from Czechoslovakia just in time to catch the main show of gales pounding my flat windows, there was a moment at four in the morning that I had the terrible fear that the window would give out and suck me out into the maelstrom, thirty minutes later and a tree branch took out my bathroom window. I prayed for the first time in years, I am an agnostic (I've always been cautious) but there I was praying that the walls would stand, that people would survive, that everything would survive and that the blossom

tree outside my office window would not fall over in the winds and destroy a lifetime of work. There was also a moment of pure fear when three trees went down with the most terrifying sound, for a moment I thought the joists had given, the foundations had failed and that I was on the way to Oz on the back of a twister. The idea of munchkins has always scared me more than the witch, it's the way they sing, so goddamn creepy.

Now dawn has come, the winds have died away and we're still here and as I look out the office window, the blossom tree is still there, all the other trees didn't make it but this one did - maybe it wasn't the power of prayer that did, maybe it was the power of hope, maybe it was just sheltered enough by the building.

But either way, we can all hope for the best.

 The Mama Dada: An Interview with Gerry Potter aka Chloe Poems
 Interview by Andrew Oldham

Chloe Poems first appeared in "The Beige Experience" - a Liverpool-based cabaret double-act in the late eighties. Born again, a fully rounded, impassioned visionary in gingham in 1993, Chloe has since followed her emotional mission to make the world a better place. Chloe has toured nationally over the last seven years with her full length theatre shows, Knockers, Chloe Poems Healing Roadshow, Universal Rentboy, Kinky and ME. A stalwart of the cabaret circuit, Chloe has performed and hosted a diverse range of events, from hosting Gay Pride in front of 100,000 people, to being ushered out of a Bristol pub whilst being told "Bristol isn't ready for you". Her anthology Universal Rentboy, was published in 2000 and her latest book, Adult Entertainment is now available. Gerry Potter, creator of Chloe Poems, is also a playwright, director, actor and workshop leader. He talks here about his work, his career and his creation.

You brought two strong traditions together with Chloe Poems, the creation of a Dada like character and stand up. Where did this 'ideal' first come about?

I think I'm rather more Mama than Dada, don't you? But I see what you mean. For me the whole essence of Chloe is about a cross-pollination of creativity, fusing a myriad of theatrical and lyrical styles. A lot of entertainment formats, such as stand-up, drag and dare I say it, even performance poetry, have become staid in their presentation. Chloe is an opportunity to invigorate and enliven, whilst at the same time obeying the traditions of performance. I believe Chloe is as Rabelaisian as she is simplistic - a guerrilla in the minimalist shall we say. And why? Because as writers and entertainers we owe it to whichever artform we work in, to challenge the perceptions it surrounds.

Critics of your work never sit on the fence; neither do your audiences, what has been your most positive and negative experiences on the road? Critics, 99% of the time, are fine, whether they like my work or not, but there is 1% who should never have become literary critics and instead, if they ever could have married, would have been as happy then to beat up their wives instead. Get over your childhood trauma and stop using the page as a place to abuse artists.

There have been a number of occasions where I have been threatened with violence. Once I was nearly arrested by the police on a public order charge at a Manchester people's festival (what price free speech eh?). However, even these seemingly negative experiences have their plus points. A drag queen being hassled by a policeman is an image I find intriguingly compelling. The most positive aspect is, of course, audience appreciation. I get the most fantastic response from people who come to see me. For most of my audience, I think Chloe is a life-affirming, joyous and entertaining

spectacle. These aren't my words, these are reactions I hear on a regular basis. Also, the diversity of my audience is a constant joy, from professors of Literary Criticism at Harvard University to people who've never been to a poetry event before in their lives.

What processes do you go through to create new work?

The process is continuous. There is never a day that doesn't spawn another ten ideas. I will then take one of those ideas and let it percolate, coffee-like, at the back of my mind, until it is ready to be poured onto the page. There are ideas I've had percolating for many years, which still haven't found the right moment to appear, and then there are some which are newer, who find their space on the coffee-stained page quite quickly. If I could write as fast as I think then there would be an international library full of work.

How hard was it for you to initially get your work published?

Very. A lot of people's perceptions at that time were of a silly drag cabaret artist, understandably so, because I did a lot of silly drag cabaret venues. So I knew I had to take the character away from those environments and instate her somewhere else - on the performance poetry circuit. As you can imagine it was quite a shock to both them and me, but gradually, and with a lot of time and effort, I managed to cement Chloe firmly in that world, including the Literature Festival circuit. It was only then that publishing could become an option, so thank you Bad Press for being aware enough to take the chance where so many others didn't. After the first publication "Universal Rentboy", and an increasingly higher profile, Route came forward with the second book and accompanying CD "Adult Entertainment". A limited edition box-set of poetry "I'm Kamp" (not to be confused with Meine Kampf) also by Bad Press, and inclusion in anthologies such as Apples & Snakes Anniversary Compendium "Velocity" are steadily building up my publication catalogue. I'm very happy with the freedom smaller independent publishing houses can give you - it feels a bit punk in its energy.

What advice would you give to other poets out there looking to get published?

I would advise any writer who wants to say something different to approach a small press and not be smothered by the dogged rules and insinuations of the larger poetry-by-numbers companies.

You're also a playwright, how does this work differ from poetry for you on both a private and public level?

It's much easier being a poet. Putting on a piece of theatre can take years from inception to production. Although very rewarding, the process can be frustrating and tiring. With performance poetry it's almost all set up for you. You just have to supply the material. It's quicker and more immediate, and if you have the skills you can make a performance poetry space as dynamic as a theatre, without the incumbence of props and bitchy actors.

Poetry is often seen as personal, both being written and in many cases performed alone, but as an actor you effectively become public property, how have you dealt with both having to direct your own work and in turn be directed by others?

I think it's the performance and not the actor that is public property, which is where Chloe, as a costume, is very important to me. I, as Gerry Potter, have no wish or desire to be recognised in public. I would find that distressing and rude. Having the artifice of Chloe is a very useful tool for me, as both a writer and performer. I have a compulsion to perform, not to be a celebrity. I direct the Chloe concept myself, but have been directed by others, namely Gary Padden. Those early shows were a joy and helped cement Chloe as a national touring figure. I'm very seldom

directed now, and if I am, it's with other people's work. For example recently I played J Edgar Hoover in Mayhew & Co's Mania at the Contact Theatre, Manchester. Being directed in that production was a delight and an inspiration, and of course, I bring elements of that into my own performances as Chloe.

When Chloe Poems becomes too much how will you be rid of her, will we be looking at a Sunset Boulevard ending or Who Killed Baby Jane? At this moment in time I can't see Chloe becoming too much. Paradoxically it would be too much for me if she wasn't there. If that day should come, it wouldn't be anything as melodramatic as a camp movie cliché, but perhaps something rather more subtle, like blowing up the queen. I think Chloe could only go if she committed the ultimate sacrifice.

Adult Entertainment (Route) was an independent success, how hard was it for you to write and then promote the collection?

There are moments in "Adult Entertainment" which were very difficult for me. I still wonder if I should ever have written Are we Myra Hindley, but I did write it and because I don't believe in absolutes I felt it should be included. I sometimes don't live comfortably with my work because I know it has affected people on any different levels. Some of those levels aren't pleasant. But most of the time it was a joy to write. It allowed me to play with the structure of language and make malleable what most intellectual purveyors of the craft would scoff at. It cemented my belief that language belongs to everybody and not the chosen clichéd cliques. It follows no form that any other poetry book has been written in.

I think people's recognition of the freedoms, as opposed to the restrictions I write within, contribute to its success. Much poetry at the moment, no matter how technically brilliant, feels constrained to me and lacks a certain instinct that I find essential. To me, many different poems by different authors feel like they've been written by the same person, or students at the same school. Route's support certainly helped boost its visibility. Promotion is easy - it means I put a frock on and perform.

What do you think defines funny?

An absence of guilt. The freedom to command language without remorse.

What do you think defines poetry?

The freedom to explore the intricacies of language, the ability to restructure language and an ear for the language you grew up with as well as the new languages that will always surround you. Language is ever changing, ever brutal, ever delicate. I think what defines poetry is the poets compulsion to possess this.

There is snobbery in the poetry world about performance poets, if you had the chance to answer your critics what would you say?

Grow Up! The people who want to imprison language should themselves be locked up for crimes against humanity. Performance poetry is the human voice communicating to today's human beings, not yesterday's librarians. I agree with some critics that performance poetry can topple into its own cliché, but can't that be said for every form of entertainment? I've seen it at its most powerful and overwhelming, gob smacking an audience into silence, laughter and applause. It is a valid art form, which is finding an increasingly wide audience - an art form that belongs to the people, an art form that will produce and is producing performers and writers of the highest calibre. Its critics are now sounding as hackneyed and as clichéd as they are. Jump on board; explore the art form before you condemn it. I stand proud in my gingham gown, as an out-and-out performance poet.

Tinkering with the Edges: An Interview with Chrissie Gittins
interview by Bixby Monk

Chrissie Gittins was born in Lancashire and studied at Newcastle University and St Martin's School of Art. She worked as an artist and a teacher before becoming a full-time freelance writer. She writes poetry, radio drama and short stories for adults, and poetry for children. She was awarded a fellowship at Hawthornden Castle in 2001 and has received awards from the Society of Authors and the Royal Literary Fund. She lives in Forest Hill in South London and frequently travels north to Ramsbottom.

How would you explain your job to someone who doesn't know what writer does?

I write poetry for adults and children, I write radio drama and features for BBCR4, and I write short stories. I make my living from radio drama, readings and from giving workshops in schools. I'm currently Poet-in-Residence with Croydon Libraries, and I'm on the Poetry Society's poetryclass training team. I published my first collection of children's poems - 'Now You See Me, Now You ...' - so I also do the publicity and marketing for that.

'Driving in Adisa's Mercedes' appears in Velocity: The Best of Apples & Snakes, what's the tale behind this?

How it came about is actually written under the poem.

How did you start the poem and what kind of editorial process did it go through?

I started to think as we were driving along that it was a very smooth ride - like taking making a journey by boat. I imagine I tinkered with the poem for a while before I was happy with the final draft.

When did you work with Apples & Snakes and what did you do?

I've worked in schools for Apples and Snakes, and in a women's prison.

What are your influences?

My mother, my niece, Carol Ann Duffy, Edward Albee, Ionesco and Alice Munroe.

What kind of writer are you?

One who refuses to be pinned down.

How did you start writing?

Seriously, on an Arvon course.

What excites you about writing?

The way it helps me to know myself and my world.

What do you think of British Poetry in today?

That it is vibrant and flourishing, but that there still aren't enough women in the places that matter - editing magazines, running publishing companies, and writing and being published for children.

If there is one question you'd wish someone has asked you in an interview what would it be and what is your answer?

What would improve the quality of life for writers in this country? The system which operates in Ireland whereby artists don't pay tax. It would help to increase the value we have for artists as well as their income!

What kind of things are you working on at the moment?

My second collection of children's poetry - 'I Don't Want an Avocado for an Uncle,' my first collection of short stories - 'Stepping in the Dark' and a radio play - 'Life Assurance' which is commissioned for BBCR4 for Saturday afternoon; also a feature for R4 which uses the first section of poems - 'Pilot' - from my adult collection 'Armature'.

Do you have any advice for other writers?
Read.

Spinning with Jack: Lowell Kerouac Festival 2004
Column by George Wallace

Lowell Ma, Oct 3, 2004 - once again in Massachusetts, to be part of Lowell celebrates Kerouac, that mad holy weekend of celebration and instantaneous vortex for the moveable feast which is post-beat America in the 21st century, I have come for the third year running, ploughing up New England highways in a late model Cadillac with 100 thousand plus miles on it, upcountry Friday and back down again to New York on Sunday, into and out of and through the turning leaves of warm winesap October sun, I achieved Lowell early Friday, Lowell eternal way-station in the underground railroad for those on their way to the literary and spiritual freedom of the beats, for those who love the music of the beats and cannot resist another shot at the redemption and communion of it, especially in 2004, a year in America when confrontation with the established political and social order by those of bohemian spirit and mind is an inevitability.

So it was that Friday evening kicked off with a vengeance of joy, poetry and music in a warehouse-converted bar space called *caffe paradiso*, in the Milltown part of town -- what part of Lowell is not mill town, though, with its spinning mills and generations of textile workers, farmgirls, Irish girls, French, Greek, Laotian, Cambodian, the sad determined world of factory work reflected across generations in the expressionless riverwater -- a broad friendly scene with a funky young jazz trio from New Hampshire rousting an audience of yuppies and transplanted Boston artistes, the gentrification of Lowell continues but the Kerouac spirit prevails, there was of course a lot of beer drinking and young smiling waitresses, cop cars cruised past over the cobbled streets, an Italian owner hovering over each plate and every table, women were too well dressed by half, the men had too much pocket money, so it goes. About ten p.m. John Cassady showed up in Jerry Cimino's beatmobile, having driven from clear across country, John Cassady who I hadn't seen since I was stranded at his house in los gatos the weekend of 9-11, that was two days after his fiftieth birthday party, John Cassady the son of the man who went on the road with jack, he was red faced and unchanged, three years later unchanged, eternal gleaming smile like a spotlight always on him, white shock of hair and trim white beard, polar bear white, he was in rare form, which is normal for him, he hustled chicks and guys like he'd been trained to by the master, his own pool-hustling car stealing tale spinning devil be-charmed father Neal Cassady. Maybe the chicks and guys were hustling him, or life was, if anyone knows what's really what in this world I'd like to meet that person. We read poetry and laughed and drank beer and after six hours of that stumbled into the Lowell foggy night, we were amber-lit and lost at 3 am searching for an all-night diner to sober up in with coffee and runny eggs, found one finally below the sign of a red kicking donkey, haffners, kicking gas, it said, but the diner has a different name.

Saturday woke to more fog over the canals and spilling dams of the Merrimack, magical river, dawn in October 'when fog rises like grape musk over the concord, and the Merrimack rushes darkly to the east,' and I had breakfast again, this time at the 'four sisters diner,' I remember the sign with a red owl on it, it is one of the classic old dining cars of Lowell, been there fifty years or so, mobbed like all the diners in the Lowell morning always are, millworkers, families of scrubbed screaming children, young lovers lost in the mist of their anxious love or waiting impatiently by the window, rough knuckled men in white shirts and ill-fitting white lies, a paycheck away from freedom and always having to explain something to the old lady. One of the four sisters was behind the counter and she

says to me what are YOU doing in town, how she knew I was from elsewhere is beyond me but she knew, and I said for the Kerouac festival and she said jack used to come in here, I was only little but I remember, and I said well after a night out drinking you don't have to be Jack Kerouac to appreciate a good breakfast and a good looking waitress. It was me trying to be Neal I suppose, and it didn't stick, but she smiled and called me hon, and it was all right, a good breakfast and I have no doubt that once in her life, she really was very good looking, and anyhow that's how she still thinks of herself in her piled on hair and uneven stockings and flat flat shoes.

They held a memorial event at the Kerouac memorial around noon, a large public square riverside next to the movie theater he used to frequent for Sunday matinees or playing hookie from school, at the end of a long row of mill-town monuments, festival organizer Larry Carradini read from visions of cody, the passage about the hurricane of '38, said 'jack always came back to Lowell, now Lowell has come back to jack.' Janet Hamill who used to be a roomie of Patti Smith did a poem there, with her mystical magical touring band, she closed her eyes and wailed 'I didn't have anything then - but I had a t-shirt, with the letters k-e-r-o-u-a-c,' and maybe I was hungover but it brought tears to my eyes to see a grown woman yield to the word and the world like that. And David Amram spoke about Jack's legacy, how there had been a poetry contest for kids in the Lowell schools, so many of the kids in multi-layered immigrant working class town have English as a second language, and it was just like Jack, he said, French Canadian, Jack, and then he said 'as long as these stones stand' Jack will be remembered, and I thought 'so long as his books stand in the hearts of the young.'

While David spoke I wandered through the marble tablets reading each one of them, with Jack's words written on them, from tristessa and Gerard and lonesome traveller, visions of the golden eternity, the names of his books and his words spinning out like inevitable teardrops on a pearl necklace, the monument a gyroscope too of jack's complex life, with a mandala of circular marble stones and his disparate words carved in them, resting on a path laid out as a catholic cross, and I realized how David is, how like a gyroscope jack's life really was, Buddhism and Catholicism, Tom Wolfe and Marcel Proust, the perplexing diction and primordial wisdom of fellaheen and Breton fisherman, galloping down mountain paths or strolling through workaday San Francisco, terrorized in big sur and beat in Saint Petersburg in the heat, transported beside little muddy western creeks and among Carolina pines, waking up cobwebbed on a hillside in ghostly wet Northport, a man of football fields and the mad jazz streets of crimson nirvana, this big word tathagatha he liked to sing and say, and I thought of the men and women he loved and could not love, his father mother sister brother lost to him and yet always with him, the wives and strange women, the men who inspired him, the muggy Kansas city night, the high Denver chills, waking up in the face of hozomeen dawn or only an angry alley in Chicago, the tripping hallucinogenic dance of words in Mexico city and Tangiers, the things he could only make sense of at 100 mph and things he just couldn't explain at any speed.

There were other things that happened over the weekend but it was the memorial and the monument and the spun logic of all the things that happened and were said there that stick with me now. The festival was like that, a kind of model and monument and celebration of Jack's life, a disjointed pastiche of movies and walking tours, nouveau beat poets hailing from Montreal and new jersey, New York and Maine, Worcester and Lowell, one or two from California and even someone who blew in all the way from Amsterdam, all the mad poeticizing, musicians deep in their wailing jazz. And in the middle of it all this year's star and central point, John Cassady, with his Neal stories and his Jack stories and his Allen stories,

and his Jerry Garcia Ken Kesey Lew Welch stories, every time I saw him he was lost in a crowd of those who wished to see and be seen, and true see-ers, John Cassady was blind to it all but all-seeing, perhaps by virtue of just that, knowing the actual story and the exact point of things quite actually and exactly, John Cassady greeting Lowell with his unquenching unquestioning beatific beam of smile and yes, the festival was like that, uncomposed, a spun stewpot of parts, all of it incongruent and essential and raw and real, all of it achieving organic wholeness and logic in the ephemeral moment of its spinning.

 Journey to Omagh
 Column by Dave Wood

Didn't get much sleep. I won't go into the whys and wherefores but it affected me the rest of the day. Already I feel I have written myself out of words and I've done enough writing for three weeks, not just three days. I've been complaining that I've never had the concentrated period for writing that I've needed and now that I've been presented with it, I cluck like an old hen.

It's strange the difference between what we perceive and what happens with a simple cheap camera lens. Even from two mile distance of Belmont Road, where I'm staying, the eyes see the two cranes Samson and Goliath looming paternally (and majestically) over the Belfast water. The eyes draw the vision in, considers the full picture, notices the yellow, concentrates, produces metaphor, is satisfied with outcome. The camera lens flattens and dulls the picture down. I fear for my photographs but not for my memories.

Belfast's Belmont Road dog-legs onto the Holywood Road, which is pronounced Holly and has no significance or relation to the American Film Industry. Although, Holywood, though he may not have known it at the time, was an album title from schlock rocker Marilyn Mansun.

It's a different bus today - a number twenty. It's rush hour and I am forced, like a typical Englishman, to waddle upstairs for a seat on his own rather than share a cushion with a complete stranger.

For the first time during my return to Belfast, I was caught off guard. The overhanging branches on the Holywood Road cracked against the windows. For a milli-second something jumped. There was nothing logical about it. But the crack was as sharp and crisp as gun-shot. It must have been a morning thing. It happened again as we passed through the estate and I never flinched, so there.

Anyway, the bus took me along the same route as yesterday. Along Belmont, past the gloriously old fashioned independent cinema on the right, down Holywood and passing the estate where the Union Jack flags still desperately cling to their poles. Some seem more resolute and to attention. Some just look like sad old dish-rags.

The vision of Samson and Goliath got closer, the cars still with lights slipped easily on. It was just before nine o'clock and I expected the place to be gridlocked at least.

Today I was to visit Omagh. Part of me was already writing the piece honouring it. Part of me was panicing as to how I should compose the piece and another part (the realistic part) waded in and told the rest of me to wait until I got there.

piece one

branches hammer at my morning
 from the bus the flags are yawning
 the only sign of life's toward
 the centre now where dreams are shored

the covered mountains
 smoking far ahead
 still lazy and in bed
journey to omagh

just past dungannon signs
 already hints of omagh
 these are like any other roads
 it is not a spectacular journey which is fine

enough - if it wasn't for the label subway
 (it is not macdonalds here)
 ireland's meat no longer
 sits on two warm halves
 but is wrapped in soft white dough

Omagh seems thriving. Like Armagh some years ago, it had very little to offer - it seemed even lower that down at heel. The town rises up on a hill and swerves round in little off shoot roads. Northern Ireland seems to have either a glut of rhubarb or an overflow of jam jars; I've never witnessed so many jars of rhubarb jam. Of course, one has to sample the local cuisine. Ahem.

I spent a good hour and half chatting with the representative of Omagh Writers about the project. She was keen on poetry and keen on everything to do with creative language. I love doing that - just talking about poetry. There's something refreshing in the discourse. My intention was to create a twinning between an English and an Irish writers group. I've put them in touch. Whether it's happened or not yet - I've no idea.

After two standard coffees (the bliss of having a standard coffee with no offers of macchiato with shot of caramellato etceterato) I asked for directions to the memorial building to the site of the bombing. There was something which kicked against me when I made that request - like I was some kind of dark tourist. There seemed to be no problem.

The memorial building sits close by the river and reminds me of the Waterstones branding of high glass walls. Inside is white, white, white broken up by a photographic exhibition of someone's trekking holiday. It was impressing the only colour onto the space.

The worker there were incredibly friendly as I explained the project. I was deftly swept upstairs where I talked through my intentions on N.Ireland again to the manageress. She was, as is usual with the voluntary sector, up to her neck in funding applications. The high staircase led me back to the ground floor

I sat in the welcome space and scribbled a few notes to build a more tightened poem later.

to omagh (section)

glass (though fragile)
 now built for seeing through
 just like the letter o (in omagh)
 is solid
 circular (un-ending)
 will see you through

the river bed is fed on dreams...

the world is drawn on
 blood and sand
 (omagh sand and blood)
 one pumps into the veins
 one props the vision up

It wasn't worth me staying in Omagh that night. The bus would have taken me back to Belfast as the first part of my expedition, so I returned to the Belmont Road. Although I was worried that the hostel would be annoyed, I cancelled my stay there. No problem, they said. If I'd cancelled a minute before I'd arrived, they'd have probably not batted an eyelid. Good old N.I.

Getting back to my hosts' house was a stinker. The grumpy bus drivers didn't help me find my way back; they offered no suggestions that I should get one to the cinema then take a short stroll up to where my accommodation was. Instead, it was a local that told me exactly what to do and I was home (well, not literal home) in twenty minutes.

Friday 28th August

I take my moans back about the Belfast city bus drivers. I think it was a tetchy tiredness moment of mine yesterday. Though the man that did finally help me get back said 'nobody cares around here.'

That morning, loaded down with stuff I no longer needed (tourist info, brochures, umpteen copies of the same map etc) I felt like the proverbial snail with someone else's mortgage on its back. I needed swift directions to Laganside (bus station) again. 'You can stay on here', he said, 'No problem'. I'd bought a seven day travel pass (£47) which has served me well and was just about to serve me here too. There are two bus stations in Belfast, Lagan side and the Europa. The latter with a pub opposite called the Crown, is all glitz and shopping mall. Whereas the former faces to the water and the shipyard. When planning a journey, you have to make sure which one you need to kickstart from.

It wasn't desperately early (about 8.30am) but the café was closed. Ireland looks after its travellers and commuters. The television was on serving a good opportunity to catch up with the Olympics. Not a great passion of mine but a service like this can't be taken for granted. The travel information desk was open and I quickly found out how to get to Cushendall on the east coast. A beautiful area that I've been told resembles or is even as stunning as Canada. Seeing as I've no experience (would books count?) of either, I had to create my own vision, but without Yogi, Booboo or the Hair Bear bunch raiding my sandwiches or chocolate supply.

Leaving at 9.03am on the Portrush Express towards and completing its journey to Ballymena.

past signs for kells
 through antrim then
 a flag that wheels itself
 a pole
 high on staff a union jack

clouds dragging back
 towards the right
 we trundle on

and after roundabout
 flags increase manifold
 at ballee

flip flap
slap

There were strange squat houses painted in two colours, usually cream and another hue. They were like Hansel and Gretel houses.

black and cream
cream and green
blue and cream

each one a keeper of a union flag

are they hanging out
the bunting just for me?
(i am after all an englishman)

At Harryville there was a promotional offer for the UVF through the production of a mural.

I wonder if Northern Ireland had bought in a glut of L's and over the centuries, they had to use them up before the sell by date. The bus centre at Ballymena, sitting at a strange angle to the train station was a long line of docking spaces for blue and cream buses seeming to drive out of the 1950's. The font on the signs seemed stencilled on; Ballymena (of course) Larne, Ballyclare, Kells, Cullybackey, Londonderry, Limavady, Ballycastle, Cloughmills, Clough, Corkey, N'Crommelin. Oh - and the sun comes out at 10.15am.

The place was pretty much deserted. This may be because of my time of visit being during the holiday season or maybe buses just aren't used much. Perhaps it's a demise most places encounter.

I waited about twenty five minutes for the bus to Cushendall. Not quite on time, but ten minutes after the due leaving would probably have the I told you so bods of the guides smirking in their lunch bag. Ireland is still painted as a tomorrow will do or as just you wait for the sheep to get off the road. The Irish tourist offices and the postcard producers do the place a disservice. What's friendliness is not laziness. I'm hoping the myth dies along with the thick Paddy label.

so seventeen miles to cushendall
past signs for clinty
a43 warms us along
(even in the middle
of the countryside
houses have numbers)

just three of us
and a bunch of maps
I'd been sent directions to the hostel as well as talked to Nathalie, someone over for the past five weeks to enable her time out to produce her dissertation. If I stayed on the bus and alighted at the coast, I would have had a five-mile walk up to my accommodation. With a bit of struggle and brain scratching, me and the bus driver worked out the way which only demanded a ten minute walk along the edge of a road which drivers seemed to think was a race track for 4 x4's.

So, surviving the short trek, I realised I wasn't expected until much later in the day and spent the next hour keeping the cats and the goat company. I even discovered a fairy ring at the back of the building.

No one could deny the beauty of the area. Looking over towards the other side, the fields stretched out and stretched onwards. Though picturesque, I did feel I'd seen equal in my home county of Derbyshire I'm a restless soul, particularly after spending time in Belfast, its vibrancy eking into my tourist sensibilities. The converted barn, had a couple of stables attached. I left my main rucksack tucked in there. I don't normally take risks like that by the way. I'd heard about and seen hitchers in Ireland getting lifts as easy as pie. It was time to put the culture to the test. Within five minutes I was away and along the road to the centre and so the shores (it's important when talking of the place, the emphasis should be put on the a in Cushendall).

I hate doing the tourist talk, that's not my *raison d'être* for being here, but here goes. Cushendall has pubs, posh hotel, a Spar, local ice cream and corner shop, pizza parlour and chip shop. It's also got a tourist information building pretty much opposite the bus stop for the Antrim Coaster. But could I find an off-license? That's a rhetorical question I believe.

The Spar has the Post Office as a bed partner. Under the same roof, there's also (another) ice-cream parlour and all seemed to be doing fine. I know at least one Midlands Co-op sharing its shop space with the Post Office. If it wasn't for the growth of supermarket chains springing up, there would be an even greater feeling of achievement for the union.

The beach lies like a drawn out s bend. The pebbles grate sharply on each other as the water pulls back. There are strands of seaweed, stones jammed into wormed out other stones and an occasional burst of detritus. Most of the area is clean and unspoilt with a fairly new looking bank of houses perched about fifteen metres back. There was a real problem getting a mobile signal. Eventually it came in then disappeared as soon as it arrived, probably rowing a boat over from Mull just across the water.

History is part of Ireland's gene pool so even in a place like this there are a couple of reference boards. I wonder when the history plates in Belfast will start to pop up. Sorry - that sounds insensitive.

here by the fringe of cushendall
 lap waves that strike
 the stones
 and roll its tiny boulders back

it is the noise which fascinates
 the pebbles want to roll away again
 retreat into the sea

some seaweed then
 the guts of the world
 throw up its dregs
 in green
 and brown
 and gloopy
 strands

i see its fathoms in
 these broken fingers

i walk on

rock pools

thin yellow moss
green coverings
high mound

the sea is trickster
liquid
unmanageable

i am out of my depths

sea knows i'm english
(sees my limited mind)

perceives my poetry as false

sea weed - no more
no less

A hitch back and the broad based hostel welcomed me in the form of Nathalie and the German shepherd dog, Nancy. After two hours, the three of us, wellington'd up, set out walking.

Cushendall used to have a railway. One part of me is glad it doesn't. There are few green and peaceful spaces in the west that are dedicated to the foot as a mode of transport.

I told you I hadn't finished talking about the majesty of the place. Sometimes, the only constancy in the walk was the curiously orange river which either pushed along slowly or raced frantically at our feet in valleys or as a frothing crashing waterfall.

What follows is a series of Haiku* based on our hundred and twenty minutes.

haiku walk

here's gap in fence
old brickwork fallen trees moss
beginning the walk

it has been raining
we jump across while we talk
of how far we go

thin strands of water
squelch squelch - trying to keep up
our green wellingtons

dead wood snapped falling
i keep falling behind her
nancy! you're calling

across a short ditch
we both walk on this new path
wide open spaces

you point to the barn
and it seems a long distance
o purple heather!

by a wide river
shallow and with orange water

we take photographs

continue up hill
small yellow flowers tall grass
always surprises

and crossing the road
you left the dog lead behind
nancy makes her way

forest country park
paths laid out round waterfalls
we talk of music

coming back around
nancy is still off her lead
and crossing the road

back to the river
i have to stop for a pee
and you walking on

finding the lead there
i wave to you - well done!
now we return home

two hours walking
but it doesn't feel like it
you cook while i write

*pronounced ha-i-ku. The anglicised version of this Japanese poetic form asks the writer to use three lines of five, seven, five syllables respectively. Contemporary Haiku-ists demand only the capture of its idea and not the strict count of beats.

Reviews

A TASTE OF LIQUORICE: poetry & short fiction by writers of colour in the north east £5.95 ISBN 0 9546515 1 0 Published by Dogeater, P.O.Box 990, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE99 2US www.dogeater.co.uk on behalf of Identity on Tyne www.identityontyne.co.uk

A vivid, Chagal-like painting on the cover by Dee Rimbaud (www.thunderburst.co.uk) is immediately appealing for this collection of work by eight writers 'of colour' portraying 'the reality of our diverse lives and culture' (Sheree Mack's introduction). There's predominantly poetry - including the seven page 'A Taste of Milk' that maintains both strength and conviction - but also featured are two prose poems, a performance poetry piece, and a theatrical piece.

Thematic spaces are created by the various sections 'Cost of dreams' 'Love' 'Colour me Bad' 'World Visions' and 'Search for Self'. The individual voices are confident and adept, making observations without overstatement. At times the urgent register of the mood is passionately expressed, with rawness, rhythmical immediacy or clarity of line demonstrating the writers' differing tones and styles.

The immediacy of the intent behind some of the poems was limiting and one-dimensional - mostly, though, there's buoyancy here, directness, and an exciting array of unfettered imaginations. It would be unfair to select a quote from just one or two amongst the eight writers - all featured are

worth reading: Peter Kayode Adegbe, Crista Ermiya, Farah Khan, Ufoma Komon, Sheree Mack, Wayne C. McDonald, Nkosana Mpofu, Yve Ngoo. WP

 KEVIN CADWALLENDER: BAZ UBER ALLES - THE COMPLETE BAZ POEMS £6.95 ISBN 0 9546515 0 2 Dogeater Press, P.O.Box 990, Newcastle upon Tyne NE99 2US
www.dogeater.co.uk

This book comes with a statement on the cover: 'Parental Advisory Explicit Poetry'. It's a refreshingly entertaining read - a sequence focusing on 'Baz' and various other friends and characters. The line breaks rely on the good ear of the poet, and the mode of expression is conversational, direct, and at times incisive: 'in dreams, a cloak of skulls,/rows of incisors like claw hammers/all the violence in him/cowering. (Baz and the Black Rabbit.)

Baz pokes fun at the poet's learning: 'Din't use nee/big words mind/and nowt too puffy/just enough to, yer knaa,/get me end away. (The French Connection.) That learning is questioned in 'Julian and the Orbilian Stick' (after 'Orbilius', flogging schoolmaster of the Latin poet Horace) where Julian is 'In the library surrounded by lies' and is caned 'every day with ignorance'.

What's impressive throughout is the poet's ability to write with exactness within relaxed, informal structures, consistent in voice, timing, and spontaneously humorous. If more poetry collections were like this, people would be reading more living poets.

How man, yer've seen nowt like it.
 It was bliddy great man, hundreds of us
 Nah, thousands, rampagin' ower the Tyne Bridge.
 It was like a revolution man
 in chicken suits and nike shorts.
 Aye, a do the Great North Run every year

It keeps us off the streets. (Baz and the Ram Raiders.) WP

 LINDA FRANCE, BIRTLEY ARIS: WILD. £5. ISBN 0-9545241-3-6 Sand Chapbooks
 P.O.Box 1019 Sunderland, Tyne & Wear SR2 8WD www.sandwriting.co.uk

The work in this modestly produced but attractive chapbook from SAND is inspired by visiting various place in the North East of England, one chosen for each month of the year. Linda France's poems and Birtley Aris's drawings do complement each other - the drawings, though simple and unremarkable, create restful pauses between the 12 poems, which move forward with pace and energy:-

It's a sweet relief
 to see the green trinity of wood sorrel,
 fresh in the lee of dolorite and larch:
 the modesty of its white petals, fine veins
 of purple, smudge of yellow at the heart. (from 'Wood Sorrell')

There's more than descriptive observation in WILD - the theme is one of wildness in people and nature: 'looking for empty spaces to ignite in,/to burn with beauty and rise/like the smoke of the earth' (Yellow Fumitory). Sensory experience is vividly evoked: 'All the tumbled rocks are splashed/with yellow lichen, tangy to the eye' (Thrift). Vibrant and expressive language engages with nature as a living force: 'Each stem is a magenta taper,/the colour of memory. Its lost flowers/smoulder on quills of scribble and lint.' (Rosebay Willowherb) WP

PETER KAYODE ADEGBIE:TREACLE TRICKLES £4. ISBN 0 9545241 5 2 Sand
Chapbooks, P.O.Box 1091 Sunderland, Tyne & Wear SR2 8WD
www.sandwriting.co.uk

These poems work well when they're allowed to present a picture simply, in straightforward terms:-

Young freckled faces click the coins
in their hands, disguised under headphones
drag bulging sacks of gifts
into the stuttering bus. (from 'Eldon Square')

Sometimes the sentiment strains for effect, instead of allowing imagery and portrayal to do the persuading - 'Your courage touches my core' for instance, from 'Deborah Perfect' about a survivor of an acid attack. Or: 'her stories beyond price/she ignites my darkness' from 'Story Teller'.

Occasionally, too, the writing is slack and banal: 'Pointed boots/pointed nose/making what point' (Mirage) or: 'As you smile in the clouds/of a new dawn' (True Colors). But, at their best, the poems in TREACLE TRICKLES have verve and immediacy:

Coals glow, crackling the dawn
pots and pans dance under
my Mama's Sunday pancakes.
I taste it in the air,
Mama's pancakes make Sundays sweet. (Sunday Morning Blues) WP

PAUL SUTHERLAND:SEVEN EARTH ODES £9.95 ISBN 0-9543247-4-9 (Endpapers, 15-17
Grape Lane, York YO1 7HU www.endpapers.co.uk)

This is an attractively produced book - but given the density and ambition of the work, it might have been helpful to have had an explanatory (short) piece by the author, instead of the foreword by Joolz Denby. The opening ode 'By the Grave of Naheebahweequay' a search for the grave of a native American princess in Ontario, contains the most musical, succinct lines:

After, with soil-claggy fingers, we'd thumbed-in
hollyhocks, and nocturnal earth was compacted,
beyond the first killing frost they still exist,
green, wavering by a Princess' grave. (II. 3-6)

Thereafter, including the rest of the first ode, the next 50 pages or so descend into lengthy explication and occasional bathos: 'Known but a short hour, from where they met/the air continues cracking/not solely from the onus of time/diffusing inside a heritage tea pot' (Ode IV 'The Beloved')

Innovative language isn't necessarily characterised by clarity - the musicality of Eliot's poetry can be appreciated without fully understanding the text. But the discipline of poetry, whatever the form or intended audience, calls for skilful revision and expression. While there are many varying styles of poetic writing today, Seven Earth Odes labours in the realm of obfuscation.

Congested, rather than incantatory, Sutherland's style is slow, soporific. The overburdened detail finally gives way to a clearer musical note at the end of the last ode 'Another Country's Hills': 'Earth, this dust-fine love and oldness,/always whole, always wandering, like glass.'

The scope of this work, 30 years in the making, is wide-ranging. Unfortunately, Sutherland's opaque language narrows the focus considerably:

Beside the cornice of melancholia
 across the table of the agape
 out from the phalanx of battle
 (whatever the site of genius)
 can't the words of singers transform to reverence
 lead tellurian thoughts towards the sublime? (Ode V: The Words. ll.79-84)
 WP

 Contributors:

Zoe Artemis

Zoe Artemis, who is organizing the course, is a New York poet and dancer. She has performed and lead dance workshops for over 20 years throughout the U.S. Greece, Spain and the U.K. In her very first job she worked at the White House during the Carter Presidency, as an executive assistant. She is currently organizing 'Ode to the Sidewalks of New York Poetry/Jazz Reading' at the Bowery Poetry Club on May 15, hosted by David Amram. For detailed info about the Greece Writing Retreat and to registration visit <http://www.zoartemis.com/>

Bixby Monk

Bixby Monk his half Scottish and Half Czech, he was born in 1968. Named by his father after the jazz musician, Bix Beiderbecke, he spent a disappointing childhood in the Edinburgh school system before leaving for the army. He splits his time between Edinburgh and Prague. His claims to fame are being the last war correspondent to cover the Gulf War and being the first war correspondent to leave Kuwait. He writes for several press agencies and writes under various pseudonyms in the UK and European Presses. He is the editor of Incorporating Writing (ISSN 1743-0380).

Andrew O'Donnell

Andrew O'Donnell was born in Blackpool in 1977 and spent his youth drinking Kestrel lager on the streets of Bromley Cross and Egerton, the 'posh end' of Bolton, Lancs (where the moors creep in on the urban sprawl that is Bolton and Manchester.) He studied Literature and Philosophy at Staffs University before travelling around India and Nepal. He has (sometimes tenuously) lived in Kobe, Osaka (Japan), Pokhara (Nepal), Vancouver and London. He has been writing poetry and prose since he was about sixteen and has had poetry published with a handful of literary magazines and websites in England, Canada and the U.S.

Andrew Oldham

Andrew Oldham writes for Stage, Television and Film. His credits include BBC1's Doctors, BBC R4 Go 4 it, Piccadilly Key103 BTCC Christmas Campaign, the short film Divine Blonde and The Charlie Manson Room (showcased by Theatre and Beyond at Brighton Pavilion, part of The International Brighton Festival 2002). He is prior recipient of a Writers Award from the ACE NW (UK), a Peggy Ramsay Award (UK) and a nominee of the Jerwood-Arvon award (UK) and has been nominated for the London International Award. Publications include the crime story, Spanking The Monkey, in: Next Stop Hope (Route ISBN 1 901927 19 9). Poetry in The Interpreter's House (UK), Gargoyle (USA), Poetry Greece and Poetry Salzburg (Europe), Grain (Canada) and Dream Catcher (UK) to name a few. He is an academic and journalist.

Ian Parks

Ian Parks is a Hawthornden Fellow 1991, he has travelled through the United States of America on a Fellowship in 1994. His poetry has received accolades and awards, including the Royal Literary Fund 2003, the Oppenheim Award 2001 and 2002 and the John Masefield Award 2001. Ian was a National

Poetry Society New Poet in 1996 and was a prior Poetry Editor for Dream Catcher (issues 7 -11). His collections include, *Gargoyles in Winter* (Littlewood, 1985), *A Climb Through Altered Landscapes* (Blackwater 1998), *The Angel of the North* (Tarantula CD 2000). *Departures and Rendezvous: Love Poems 1983-2003* is due for publication in 2005. His next collection, *Shell Island*, will be available from Way Wiser (USA) in 2005. He teaches at Leeds University.

William Park

William Park was born in Hillingdon, West London, in 1962, and grew up in High Wycombe. He now lives in Preston, where his interests include Buddhist philosophy, World Cinema and Jazz. In 1990 he was awarded a major Eric Gregory Award, and in 2003 he gained an MA in Poetry from Liverpool Hope University College. His poems have appeared in *Critical Quarterly*, *Observer*, *Poetry Review*, *Stand*, and many more. His latest collection *Surfacing* (Spike ISBN 0 9518978 7 X) is available now.

George Wallace

George Wallace, author of eight chapbooks of poetry, is editor of Poetrybay www.poetrybay.com, co-host of his own weekly poetry radio show www.wusb.org, and the first poet laureate of Suffolk County, New York. A regular performer in New York City, he frequently tours America with his poetry. Internationally, his work has been read in Paris, Copenhagen, Vienna, and particularly in Italy and the UK - including Italian appearances in Rome, Parma, Verona and Trento; and in the UK, London, Cardiff, Belfast, Bury St Edmunds, Norwich and the Lake District. His work has been translated into French, Spanish, Italian, German, Korean, Bengali, Russian and Macedonian. Forthcoming collections are *Burn My Heart in Wet Sand* (Troubador, UK) and *Fifty Love Poems* (La Finestra Editrice, IT).