Love Plus Anarchy

Picture Poems by Heathcote Williams

Clare Brant

INTRODUCTION

Not all contributions to the Creative Section need be explications by their authors or makers, though the editors like to think the genre of explanation is a good way to explain life writing’s creative forms in creative terms. An explication is not quite the same as an explanation: etymologically it holds a ghost of the Latin word plica, meaning a fold. So an explication may unfold creative work – and indeed fold it back up.

‘That’s just what I’m not much good at! explanations, H’. said Heathcote Williams when sent an open invitation to introduce his picture poems. The editors thought they might need an introduction, or something by way of alerting readers to provocative content. Here’s something to offend everyone – which should make us think about grounds of taking offence. In that invitation to self-reflect, these poems ask more of readers than usual: it’s part of what makes them so interesting for life writing.

A Wikipedia biography of the author is also a compelling instance of life writing tested by extraordinary gifts, riotous experiences and challenging politics; it also flirts with parody, polemic and the mischievous joy of excess. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heathcote_Williams. Actor, fire-eater, magician, poet, painter, playwright, sculptor, film-maker – his polymath life whirls around different arts without losing a core and recognisable identity. Maybe he makes one out of the whirling, an uncommon art. One might also describe him as endlessly inventive, a stirrer-up of the complacent, a magnificent railer against monarchy, an eloquent denouncer of imperialism, a revolutionary who challenges even the conventions of subversion and who leaves no familiarity unturned. Award-winning and acclaimed, it can be uncomfortable reading, his work is also funny, clever, trenchant, bold, uncompromising, passionate, jaw-droppingly provocative and so agile in critique it is acrobatic.

Welcome to Heathcote Williams’ picture poems…

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Credits

Many of these were published in the form of ‘open mic’ performances by Roy Hutchins and went on to feature in a collaborative show, ‘Zanzibar Cats’, which won an Edinburgh Archangel Award in 2011.

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BEES

Wise bees will tell you:
“Natura in minima
Maxima” – kindly

Translating it
As “Nature is the greatest
In the smallest things.”

Almost each mouthful
Of food owes its existence to
Pollinating bees.

Einstein said “If bees
Disappear, man has only
A few years to live.”

Bees are eusocial –
Meaning their life is ordered
For the benefit

Of everyone in
The hive: construction workers,
Nurses, guards, grocers,
Housekeepers,
Foragers, and gigolos
And undertakers.

Man’s society
Is largely anti-social.
A kleptocracy.

So man steals from bees
Paying them with pesticides –
Yet they dance to work.

Emma Goldman once
Said that all revolutions
Should involve dancing.

Though revolution
Hasn’t produced anything
As great as bees.

No society
Is producing anything quite
As sweet as honey.

Alexander the
Great was embalmed in honey
And lasted for years.

When bees’ stamina
Is scaled up to human level,
Man is quite outclassed.

One ounce of honey
Enables a bee to fly
Round the whole world.

A bee beats its wings
Over eleven thousand
Times in a minute.

Its brain’s a cubic
Millimetre whose wiring
Beats silicon chips.

The bee’s venom is
The most powerful substance
In the natural world.

Bee acupuncture
Can extend man’s lifespan by
Curing arthritis.

A bee’s venom can
Open up neural pathways
Following a stroke.

Honey can dress wounds –
Since microbes can’t live in it,
It’s antiseptic.

Bees have made honey
For 150 million years
And the Pyramids,

When rediscovered,
Revealed that honey was placed
Near Pharaoh’s body –

An immortal food
Which still tasted good after
Five thousand years.

Bees defend themselves
Without paying someone else
To do it for them.

They don’t think flower-
Power is out of date and
Their flying’s for real.

’Where the bee sucks there
Suck I, in a cowslip’s bell
I lie.’ Paradise!

The buzzing of bees
Indicating contentment
Is archetypal:

Take the land of milk
And honey that man yearns for –
A sustaining dream.

Each bee has five eyes.
Mystics reckon a third eye
Bestows occult powers.

Five eyes could give you
The ability to see
Some things that man can’t.

Heathcote Williams
All bikes are weapons
Making cyclists warriors
Who kick pollution

With miraculous
Machines that recycle greed –
Revolutionary

Wheels spinning around
Trillions and trillions of times,
All on empty tanks

And an airy lungful
Pumped tightly into two tubes
Causing nothing but

Exhilaration
And liberation, instead of
Trails of filth and death.

On their bikes, wise clowns
Keep pneumatic hoops gyrating
In perfect balance.

Oil rigs aren’t blown up.
There’s no spillage in the seas
From bicycle wars.

Bicycle power
Produces no exhaust fumes.
No carcinogens.

Man-powered machines
Are anti-capitalist –
You can’t meter air.

Two kilometers
Per hour which, by rights, should make
Oil quite redundant.

While big oil clings to
Motorised suicide-bombs
For man’s transport,

On a recumbent
Bike the top speed is
A hundred and thirty-

Revolving bike wheels
Postpone the end of the world –
Second by second.

Heathcote Williams
Immodesty Blaise

Blaise Cendrars, poet,
Could trailblaze backwards through time –
Orgasms lighting his way.

Blaise said he recalled
His father’s penis thumping
From within the womb.

He’d often cackle,
“|I kept trying to bite it|”,
As he brought to mind

His parents mating
After Blaise had been conceived,
Genealogies

Of the human soul
That would defeat most people,
Blaise could trace them back.

He was conscious of
Mother’s egg and Father’s sperm –
Their thoughts colliding,

Thus producing Blaise.
A Jungian friend of his
Swore that this was true

And I believed it.
Once, I’d asked a small child what
Being born was like:

“Go through a tunnel,
Then come out. It’s red and black.”
(Anarchist colours)

Some soulless skeptic
Said, ‘She couldn’t remember!’
‘She must be lying!’

‘She’s making it up!’
But no, if you can retrieve
These last few seconds

Then your memory
Can be stretched back centuries:
Through worm-holes in time,
To revolutions,
Plato, hunter-gatherers,
Mesopotamia.

When rules are dissolved
You’ll meet Gilgamesh, trying
To be immortal...

Blaise’s father’s prick
Broke through the convention of
Infant amnesia.

Neuro-transmission
Picks up thoughts from unending
Synaptic cables.

Cellular memory,
An embedded hologram,
Is etched with aeons.

Heddle Williams
If Blake repeated
That he’d seen God watching
Him through a window

At the age of four –
Richard Dawkins would be there
To tick them both off.

Heathcote Williams       Photo: Tom Hoemeke
Books

The first flash mob in Europe
Met in Rome on 24 June 2003.
300 people entered ‘Messaggerie Musicali’,
A large book and music store.
To ask its staff either for non-existent books,
Or for the most obscure books
By untraceable authors.

One flash mobber asked for a copy of the New Testament
Translated from Coptic into Latin by David Wilkins
And published in 1716 by Oxford University Press.

The book took till 1907 to sell its 500-copy print run.
It was the slowest selling book in human history.

‘Have you got it?’ a book-lover excitedly giggled,
Eager to serve the cause of surrealism and fun.
The assistant scrutinized Messaggerie’s database then said:
(In Italian) ‘It’s not coming up. I’m sorry. It’s gone.
But maybe you just missed a copy...? I’ll double check.
No, it’s gone. But you must come again.
We’re always restocking. We’ll have it in very soon.’

She smiled, an old smile to warm your hands on.

Maybe it’s the smell of books —
That crisp mustiness that mixes past and present,
Combined with the fumy glue in their bindings
That makes even the most impossible dream
Seem completely achievable, a commonplace...

Just one amongst many in the rows of dream-weavers
Each with an immortal shelf-life and no sell-by date
Whose books open like butterflies for the pages to flitter
Until something rises out, fanned by two floating minds
For the reader’s soul to lose weight as it hitches a ride
On a tandem freewheeling through time and space.

‘Will that be all sir? Thankyou sir... Next?’

Heathcote Williams
Descartes knew that apes
Talked but decided not to.
They could avoid work.

If you ever say,
‘I don’t think, therefore I’m not’
Who is it talking?

Heathcote Williams
Desperately wanting to be famous
Herodotus ran into the Temple at Ephesus,
Which was then the seventh wonder of the world,
And he set it on fire while shouting out his own name.

Appalled by a criminal trying to manipulate posterity
The city outlawed all mention of Herodotus on pain of death.
Yet soon he was better known than those who'd built the Temple
Or even the Goddess Artemis to whom the Temple had been sacred.

Flash-bulbs now echo all those destructive flames;
Dazzling electronic altars seethe with media-mad moths –
Each of them scorning the eye of a God for the eye of a camera
With every one still dying to be immortal in the same uncaring void.

Who's ever heard of Herodotus now?
The question's met with a shrug or a blank stare.
In space, where even Shakespeare or Christ are unknown,
The nameless drift unnoticed through stardust and moonshine.

Heathcote Williams
As a child. Swinging.
The split second you’re weightless.
That’s eternity.

Heathcote Williams
Evolution might never have been sniffed out
Because of the shape of Darwin's nose
Thanks to which its owner was initially rejected
By The Beagle's selection committee.

A Mr. Fitzroy, who studied the candidates' noses,
Was a disciple of Lavater who believed
You could judge people's character by their looks,
And Fitzroy doubted, in Darwin's words,

That "my nose could possess sufficient energy
And determination for the voyage.
But I think he was afterwards well satisfied
That my nose had spoken falsely."

When Pascal considered Cleopatra's large nose,
Wondering what if it had been an inch shorter,
Pascal decided that "The whole face of the world
"Would have been changed beyond recognition."

The size of the Queen's nose gave her confidence
And this, Pascal thought, paved the way
For her to nose her way blithely into Caesar's bed
And screw up the entire Roman empire.

Likewise Darwin could screw the Creationists,
Snorting at their fundamentalist beliefs.
Man's secondary sexual characteristic told him
There was a world before Adam smelt it.

Heathcote Williams
“How are you, father?”
“Not buying any LPs.”
It was his deathbed.

“Welcome, son,” he said,
“This is the Departure Lounge –
Going through Customs.”

“What will you declare?”
“Nothing, as always. But now,
Nothing plans to pounce.”

“Death’s rubbish. Sod all
Back on the empties then they
Make you disappear.”

“There’s nothing in store.
It won’t turn into something,
However you try.”

“How do you know, Dad?”
“Am I shitting the bed at
The thought of heaven?”

Not one animal
Laughs so loudly as man does,
Beside the gallows.

“But your death rattle
Can be a chuckle – if you
Learn to tune it right.”

“Laughter.” His last words:
“Sunshine in the cucumber.
Never fails you. Bye.”

Leaving hospital
I saw a graffiti, “Get an
Afterlife.”

Did they know something?
I heard Dad, “Get a life, son.
I’m boarding the ‘plane.”

Heathcote Williams
Downing Street

‘So now we are going over to Downing Street,’
Says a TV front man, ‘for their reaction.’
Though no one, in fact, goes anywhere at all.
The TV audience remains just where it is.

A Number Ten spokesperson then reads a prepared statement
Upon which the commentariat duly comments.
A fanfare of false hopes plays out, only to fade upon the wind,
For the building itself has betrayal in its fabric.

Sir George Downing, Oliver Cromwell’s spy, changed sides
At the first indication of Charles II’s restoration
Then proceeded to track down his old colleagues, the regicides,
And had them all arrested and taken to the Tower.

For having had his former friends hanged, drawn and quartered
Downing was rewarded with some lush acres in Whitehall –
Upon which he erected several rows of gimcrack buildings,
Which the cunning Downing would rent out at high prices.

***

History’s CCTV cameras swivel away from the past to the present
Catching each new PM saying, on entering Downing Street,
‘I’m grateful to the British public for the trust it’s placed in me’
Only to exit as treacherous failures with burgeoning pockets.

Heathcote Williams
Dying's Annoying

Dying's annoying.
You're enjoying the party
Then you have to leave.

You can ignore it
But death can be insistent.
Here are some options:

'Do not go gentle
Into that good night'. Meaning?
Shout on your death-bed?

They'd tranquilize you.
...Try to sublimate your fear
Of death by killing?

Soldiers enjoy this
But it's counterproductive
To keep cloning death.

Here's an old stand-by:
'I believe God will solve it
I won't really die.'

Well, some grief-stricken
Wishful thinking on gravestones
Isn't really proof.

Try re-thinking this:
You've always wanted to be
A worm and you'll ensure

Mutant, brain-eating
Worms take control in future
And run everything;

Or, here's a novel
Way to get an afterlife
Without quite dying:

Crematoria
Fill the skies with powder which
The living inhale –

So, how about this...
If people have died happy,
Their happy powder

May have its uses:
Take a deep breath at the crem
So that X or Y

Have a fresh innings
Inside your lungs and blood-stream

And then in your brain.
Some won't care for it
But others might, 'Sounds a gas -
Sharing consciousness'.

Alternatively,
Your last hope of life is to
Apply to this club:

The 120 club.
No need to change your life-style
In any fashion.

All its rules are lax.
No one minds if you die
At 117.

As soon as you join
Just say: "I'm not going to die"
Adding, "So far, so good".

But, should you cave in,
Get up and hide your body
So no one finds it.

Heathcote Williams
Elvis Hasn’t Left The Building

‘US Witches Use
Deep-Fat-Fried Cheese-Sticks as Wands
To Conjure Elvis!’

Runs a headline in
The National Enquirer.
‘Diet Cola with
Peanut-Butter Jelly
And Organic Crack Smough
His Blue Suede Spectre.’

Then they warn of some
Elvis-lookalike ghosts who
Have proved deceptive –
Some disembodied
Elvis impersonators
Who are fraudulent,
Readers will be helped
Spotting fake ectoplasm
To find the real King.

Mediums on tap
Will compare the spirit voice
With his recordings
Though they’ve proved frauds too –
For everyone knows full well
He’s happily employed
As a dish washer
In the centre of the moon...
But not on his own:
Aliens help him out.
They do the drying for him.
In future issues
It is planned to ask
Readers to subscribe to a
Large dishwasher.
Readers may have their
Photos taken with the King,
Plus his dishwasher.

Before visiting
A crater full of lizards
Running the US
By mind control, you
Can find how to stop them
In our next issue.
If you’re lonely, buy
Our kryptonite goblins which
Are blessed by the Pope
These are retailing
At ten thousand dollars each and
Each one’s guaranteed.

Heathcote Williams
Einstein on a bike

When the Titanic
Sailed into New York Harbour
Time-travellers cheered.

The Booking Office
Of 'Marie Celeste' Travel
Opened for business.

Shergar reappeared
And won another Derby.
Time's a bicycle.

Albert Einstein thought
Up the Special Theory
Of Relativity

While riding his bike.
"Bicycle cyborgs
Are man's future."

He said in 2012,
"Unless you wish to go back
To the Dark Ages."

He also said: "Life
Is like riding a bicycle:
To keep your balance
You must keep moving."
And fellow visionary
H.G. Wells pronounced

That "Cycle tracks will
Abound in Utopia.
Every time I see

Someone on a bike
I no longer despair of
The human race.

Who can there be left
Who doesn't see it's the machine
For the planet's future?"

And the Grateful Dead
Said they were "better than guitars
For picking up girls."

Bicycles go forward
Without wasting anything,
Suiting runaway hearts.

Heathcote Williams
The Last Foreskin of Christ, or a Piece of God’s Gone Missing

The theology of this celestial carcass became complicated. It was said to cover up the son of God’s penis but God had no penis. Genesis was clear. The creator of the universe didn’t need genitals organs.

And although the Vatican would staunchly insist that its predecessor had never had any kind of sexual relations with anyone, People’s love for the prepuce now got out of hand.

St. Bridget claimed to have received the relic from an angel And she would place bits of it on her tongue, which would result in [her experiencing orgasmic-like sensations throughout her body.

St. Agnes of Valence would always weep on the Feast of the Circumcision — Contrary to the earliest example of Christ’s suffering and his first bloodshed And then, on her wondering where the popes might actually be, she had a vision.

St. Agnes “felt a little skin on her tongue, like the skin of an egg And she gaped it down. Hardly had she swallowed it. When she felt the little skin again,” it was recorded.

And so she swallowed it once more. And she did so a good hundred times.”

This was according to the Franciscan monk Fr. Enrichi, her confessor Whose graphic account stated that, “So great was the sweetness

When she swallowed this little skin that in all her limbs and in all the muscles of her inner and outer skins a transformation.”

Tales of St. Agnes’ visions of Christ naked

And his foreskin in her mouth were wildly popular in the Middle Ages Though viewed with appalled horror by the Jesuits and Leo XIII And so any books mentioning them were ordered to be burnt.

But of course, there’s never been any real mystery about the foreskin, It was nothing but a piece sold to the gallicled by religious hustlers, Along with vials of the Virgin Mary’s milk, or Jesus’ Sweat.

The final foreskin, the last papally-approved version of the relic — Given by Charlemagne to Pope Innocent III on Dec. 25, 800 — Vanished from an old priest’s handkerchief in Vienna, in 1883

A conspicuous object might point to this as an intriguing coincidence: A foreskin, full of divine DNA, vanishes at the dawn of cloning. When Christ’s resurrection might disrupt the eternal status quo.

For Christian states would dread a Second Coming, closed or un-closed. They’d be horrified by the arrival of a madman bearing any resemblance To the anti-capitalist, poacher, ascetic that they’d been pretending to admire.

Asensio, a man noticed how snakes shed their skin. And that by doing so they’d enjoy a new lease of life. So was imagined that he too might enter his ikwapu —

If he could imitate the snake by cutting off his own skin. But all he achieved was to numb his own pleasure by his folly

And Edouard’s snake was banned for raising maine sera at paradise.

Jesus’ phallic prepuce is the remnant of a pre-historic snake cult. A phallosity, whereby man celebrities being birled into reproduction By his eroticized skin triggering his seminal organs and sparking off orgasms.

Man is still searching for the ultimate organ that lasts longer than a few seconds. A taste of the spiritual orgasm overwhelming that sustains his quest for the Holy Grail. Where, ‘new man’, will make earth wilt and have you tingling all over with divinity

So the foreskin of a man who boast mentality might be the ultimate sex aid. Though strappily the foreskin of Jesus Christ has discreetly faded from view.

But there is something else too that’s missing: what the original kind of the rings — These fleshy rings — He preached. It was universal love and forgiveness. A contempt for profit, total freedom from priest-craft and all official central And the joyful belief that life is enviable and not a moronic, sadistic racket.

In some traditions the foreskin of an infant is consumed by a canibal father Or burnt in a temple sacrifice. To the secular it’s no more than hospital waste. While others gold-plate it as a momento, and some men wear it as their missing halo.

In anthropological studies the prepuce is the feminine part of the male genitalia. Etching the patient and thus it should be referred to as Christ’s mm—y or, as set. But its removal was caused to patriarchal values: not penis-pludens need to un-care.

Ironically, prepuces are now farmed commercially for anti-aging and feel-good properties. Cosmetic products which use their fresh skin cells are paired with suitable scientific jargon. Purchasers watch wrinkles briefly fade as their stretched, baby-faced faces stiffen with immortality.

Rachel Williams

‘Is the glass half-full
Or half-empty?’ ‘Why choose
A confusing glass?’

Heathcote Williams
**Hermit Haikus**

Hermits aren't alone.
Each one has ten trillion
Human cells and a
Hundred trillion
Microbial cells, 
Co-operating
And contributing to 
Their mental activity –
Producing at-lines
Or euphoric joy.
Every man’s neurons echo
The whole universe:
Big bangs; mass fusions;
Wild, black holes of consciousness;
Emerging novas
Or endless, blank voids
Made of minus nothing – dead,
Dark anti-matter
Stung the future
With particles from space's 
Immortal corpses.

It makes each man’s brain
The epicentre of a 
Mystic multiverse.

Solitary bees
Outnumber those in bee-hives
And they live longer.

Sharks eat each other
When swimming inside the womb.
Are there hermit sharks?

Are you more yourself
When alone, or when feeling
Some peer group pressure?

Are you in a gang
Consisting of everyone
Who has ever lived?

*Heathcote Williams  
Photograph by Gerard Bellaart*
Nineteen sixty-nine -
Two linked computers sent and
Received ‘L’ and ‘0’...

Then, lo and behold,
The first letters of ‘LOGIN’
Spawned the Internet

‘L’... ‘0’... Then they crashed,
So man logged onto the Moon
And Manson’s murders.

But soon the net would
Produce a billion brainstorms -
High and low minded.

Nineteen sixty-nine
Was when man’s interbrain got
A new frontal lobe

Though it’s still confused
By just one analog choice:
To make war or peace.

Heathcote Williams
An Angel You know

Every day, without a second thought,
You wish someone goodbye;
Then, out of the blue, there comes a time
When you call out and there’s no reply.

The person you knew has disappeared
And their warmth has turned to ice.
Cold shadows confirm an unspoken fear:
The life that seemed free had a price.

But when you lose somebody you love
You gain an angel you know.

At first every twist and shock of remorse
Is only relieved by more pain;
But then slowly the atmosphere changes
And a still, small voice in your brain

Tells you there’s someone familiar nearby,
Maybe even in the same room,
And the air seems charged with their presence
Softly melting away the gloom.

Because when you lose somebody you love
You gain an angel you know.

They’re around all the time, dying to live,
And to give you the life they never led.
Just listen quietly and you’ll hear someone say:
‘I’m not dead. I’m not dead. I’m not dead.’

For when you lose somebody you love
You gain an angel you know.

‘I’m surfing across the River Jordan
Communicating through ultra-sound.
I’m at the invisible end of the spectrum.
Open your inner eye and look round.

‘Where I am is the place you once lived
In the dream-time before you were born.
The spirit enters a shell and then leaves -
Linked by a thread that can never be torn.’

Their end is a new beginning
Where grief gives way to a glow;
And they gather up light through time and through space
With someone they care for in tow.

When you lose somebody you love
You gain an angel you know.

Heathcote Williams
Martin Wilkinson
CCTV

Walking through London
You’ll be caught on camera
Some 300 times.

Big Brother’s robots
Will follow your every move.
Star on State TV!!!

Do you know yourself?
Other people think that they
Know all about you

Solely by sticking
Their electronic noses
Into your business.

Banks of cameras
Are logging all your movements:
‘Here, follow that one.’

Invisible sneaks
And electronic tell-tales
Exchange your data:

Secretive software
Sells your profile
To security

Or market research.
Mapping your behavior
Twenty-four seven –

Forcing money’s rule
Over the regulated
Lab-rats in their maze:

Don’t step out of line,
Interfere with the traffic
Or look suspicious –

Uniformed goblins
Will appear out of nowhere
And freeze-frame your life.

Yet you can subvert
All this high-tech surveillance
With a low-tech mask.

Real terrorists,
In any case, hide behind
Banks and governments.

Heathcote Williams
Art Trouble

The Leaning Tower of Pisa
Laid the Mona Lisa.
She broke into a smile;
He broke into a pile
Of rubble.

Heathcote Williams
PALESTINE

Israel is the colostomy bag
Of a dying empire, America.

It’s emptied out each day onto Gaza.
Everyone can then settle down
To relax and enjoy
A continuous firework show
Which costs thirty billion dollars a year.

There are cluster bombs,
Thermobaric missiles,
Depleted uranium shells,
And white phosphorus,
All carefully choreographed
To light up Palestine’s sky.

These novelties are regularly despatched
To a clientele hungry for pyrotechnics
From the Pentagon Incendiary Company;
Though it has a poor safety record
As its products routinely kill
Anyone who gets too close.

Resenting those who stage this spectacle
Of flying limbs, and spurting blood
And tiny corpses with napalmed flesh –
Gaza residents occasionally
Strap home-made fireworks
To their own bodies; leave
Their open-air torture chamber –
This coliseum of exploding sewage –
And put on a display for their captors.

Heathcote Williams
Prayer Wars

Nothing wrong with prayers –
Telepathic weapons which
Meet with no defense.

Are there prayer wars?
With mind-altering ammo
Fighting it all out?

Prayers could be working.
The world might be even worse
With no one praying.

Stalinist atheists
Could sew up their lips and
Try to shut them up,
But to no effect.
They can’t be stopped or disproved,
Working through stillness.

Trappist headbangers –
Deafening you with silence.
Are they at it now?

Heathcote Williams
MEETING A SOLDIER IN WALES

Soldier X announces, “I bet I’ve come further than you”
As he’s giving me a lift from Carmarthen.
He spits out blasts and flashes of his life-and-death story:
Twenty-eight and back from a tour of duty.

“When I was in Basra I lost my bastard bessie mates
Now I’m due to go back to Afghanistan.
But, guess what? They can frig themselves sideways
I’ve had it with polishing shite in hell.”

“What did I think I was there for? Sodding’ Bambi’s lies.
Blair taking it up the bum from psychotic Yanks.
Brown was shtum, but he paid every single butcher’s bill,
‘Here’s ten billion, Tony, to wank off Wanker Bush.’”

Glimpsing the gas gauge he puts fire-fighting with his past
On hold; clicks his tongue as if urging a stubborn mule
Then pulls the car over to dart around the back in the dusk
And shift two muddy number-plates from out the boot.

He does it as if on automatic pilot – no explanation –
That stoic, hard-bitten grief at the loss of friends
Freezes almost all questions, however well intended,
As on his knees he fixes the plates back and front.

We get back in, and just make it to a flood-lit garage
To fill up, treating the CCTV to a hasty V-sign;
Then, cap back on, the soldier stabs at the accelerator
And we leave doing sixty and owing £41.16p.

We unscrew the false number-plates in a side-road
Sling them back in the boot with a larky flourish,
“Often think I’ll have the letters spell out something
Like ‘FUCK POLITICIAN KILLER CUNTS’”

“Or ‘NO BLOOD FOR OIL – YET AGAIN’ or maybe
‘IT’S NOT YOUR OIL BENEATH THEIR SAND’
Too much for a plate – but not too much for the world.”
We take off. “Fact is,” he says, “I’m not going back.”

“The desert’s for deserting. So sod off ‘Quim and Cuntry’
Ex-Soldier X is doing his bit for climate change.
Liberate the oil, son. Sooner you see each drop of it’s free
The sooner all that filthy fuckin’ sludge is gone.”

Hours later the motorways drain the tank and we top up again
Using his plates as credit cards in unsuspecting cities –
Exhilarated by a recreational crime with a philosophical angle
Roaring slogans at passing trees, feeling like Robin Hood.

Heathcote Williams
Though St. Francis preached
To the birds, they may have known
Much more than he did.

Ken Campbell’s parrot
Used to say, “I was an egg
Until I hatched out”.

Even wittier
Was, “I can talk. Can you fly?”
(St. Francis couldn’t.)

Heathcote Williams
Vincent’s Ear

‘Two German art historians, who have spent 10 years reviewing the police investigations, witness accounts and the artists’ letters, argue that Gauguin, a fencing ace, most likely sliced off the ear with his sword during a fight, and the two artists agreed to hush up the truth’.

Guardian, May 4, 2009

Van Gogh wasn’t mad,
He saw things differently:
Gauguin slashed his ear

Out of impatience,
Vincent took the blame to save
His friend from arrest.

When Gauguin cut him,
Vincent passed the evidence
To someone to hide.

In their last exchange
He swore an oath to Gauguin,
“I will be quiet.”

On sketching an ear,
He wrote ‘ictus’ beneath it.
A ‘hit’ in fencing—

HINTING AT THE TRUTH
To Theo, but still keeping
His pact of silence.

“Luckily Gauguin,”
Theo would comment, “is not
Armed with machine-

Guns and other
Dangerous war weapons”
For Gauguin declared

That he wanted to
Get rid of this “madman”
And he’d meant Van Gogh

Who’d then kill himself –
Hurt by his beloved friend’s
Angry rejection.

Gauguin had sailed off,
Exporting syphilis to
The South Sea Islands.

He wrote to Vincent
To send on his fencing gear,
But Vincent was dead.

History prefers
Portraying Van Gogh as mad,
Not noble and kind

And his inner voice,
In tune with his inner ear,
Told him he was sane.

It said, “I feel that
There’s nothing more artistic
Than to love people.”

Reducing his love
To an investment prospect,
Vile art racketeers

Contaminate it
With money-grubbing – though love
Can still grow sunflowers.

Heathcote Williams
Walking the dog

Two thousand pranksters
Walked their invisible dogs
Through Brooklyn, en masse.

They walked down the street
With a stiff lead and collar
But nothing inside.

They made dog noises
Hoping someone would respond.
Some did. Dogs didn’t.

It was unsettling
To passers-by, confused by
This empty display:

People in charge of
Nothing; people led around
New York by nothing.

The world began when
Something felt wrong with nothing.
Nothing’s gone right since.

Though such ghostly dogs
Can set us an example:
No carbon paw-print.

They can levitate.
Their diet’s undemanding.
Effortless Buddhists.

You may not see them,
But they’re not just for Christmas.
These dogs are for life.

Heathcote Williams
**X-ray Death**

"I'm looking at my own death", Bertha Roentgen said, Glimpsing the jointed bones inside her fingers' flesh. Wilhelm Roentgen had led her towards his X-ray tube, Taking her by the hand – but not in order to kiss it.

After impregnating it with a dose of ionising radiation He imprinted its image on a photographic plate So that his wife could see through her skin to her digits – Like spindly witches' hats in a fluorescent mist

When ‘Know thyself’ was written above the oracle at Delphi Man needed a whole lifetime to attain self-awareness. Now, thanks to Herr Roentgen's X-rays, this became instant: ‘Look, there's my rib cage! See my spine! See my skull!’

Unfortunately, to know yourself proved dangerous: Gamma ray exposure caused blisters, burns And grisly cancers, requiring limbs be amputated. Roentgen's assistant would end up with no arms.

Clarence Dally couldn't carve his Christmas turkey Nor hold onto his wife as they made love; Nor close his hands to pray when his number was up Though Dally still knew himself, inside out.

The X-ray machine caught on and now it's used at airports To trap those concealing explosive in their clothes, Though the most notorious terrorist is still evading capture – With his X-ray eyes, watching skeletons dance.

He's stalked you with his radiant grin since you were born, Sneakily taking pictures for the darkest dark-room, Before forcing you to keep dead still for his final exposure, Coldly cackling as he snaps – only to fog the film.

*Heathcote Williams*
Barracking Obama

The US President
And his Secretary of State
Are watching snuff films.
US Navy Seals
Line up their chosen victims
Then kill them, one by one.

On a Seal’s helmet,
There’s a hidden camera
So that images
Of those they’re killing
Are fed back by satellite
To a viewing room
Inside the White House
Where the US Navy Seals’
Performance is judged
By the President.

Sheikh Osama bin Laden
The great and the good
Watch intently; savoring
This death-orgasm –
The buzz the powerful
Get when causing death, claiming
That they’re still human.

When the audience
Has had its fun, the body
Is dropped into the sea.
Cheers and back-slapping
Follow, ‘USA! USA!’
‘God loves the USA!’
‘The greatest country.
‘In the history of the world!’
‘High fives all around.

The US Emperor,
The first black President,
Has ironically
Invaded Africa;
Libya, Somalia, Sudan,
As well as Asia.
But can’t stop himself there –
Just as all schoolboys enjoy
Pulling wings off flies;
As in ancient Rome,
Where crowds bayed for blood
And death,
There’s ecstatic applause.

Where’s the ‘rule of law’?
No one’s captured, Or tried.
The victim’s unarmed.
‘Let’s watch someone die!’
The commandos are equipped
To please a voyeur –

‘Kill all his women’
‘Wave to the White House, baby,
‘We’re filming your last breath!’
‘Hate our freedoms, huh?
‘Hate our Right to Happiness?
‘We’ll jerk off while you croak.

“Geronimo EKIA!” –
Enemy Killed In Action –
Was how they announced
Sheikh Osama’s death,
Forgetting Geronimo
Had fought colonists
And was a hero
To indigenous peoples.
He died a prisoner
Of the USA.
Without being given a trial
But his ghost danced on.

Democracy then
Was triumphant genocide
In pursuit of land;
Now democracy
Is triumphant genocide
In pursuit of oil.

Yet no one can see
The future has no future
When high on killing.

“Obama has no way to conceal that Osama was executed in front of his children and wives.”
Fidel Castro Ruz, The Assassination of Osama bin Laden,
Reflections by Fidel, ‘Cuba Debate: Contra el Terrorismo Mediatizado’, Havana May 6, 2011

“We might ask ourselves how we would be reacting if Iraqi commandos landed at George W. Bush’s compound, assassinated him, and dumped his body in the Atlantic.”
Noam Chomsky

“US President Obama watched the raid in which Osama Bin Laden was killed in real-time, according to White House Counter-Terrorism advisor John Brennan.”
BBC News, 2 May 2011

Heathcote Williams
The secret of life

Can evolution
Be cleverer than we are?
What's revolution?

Why have both these words
Got the letters L.O.V.E. in them?
Takes time to see it.

Heathcote Williams
photo: Alex Eflon
The Thousand Mile Stare

Heathcote Williams

Someone’s photographed
Soldiers - before, during and after
Their fighting in war.
Each picture’s similar.
You don’t notice much difference
Till you look closely.
In the first photo
You see a strong face: someone
Kindly; wry; polite -

But uncomfortable;
Seeing no point in wasting time
On arty projects.
The next photo shows
Them disguised by camouflage –
And looking macho,
Though their misgivings
Can’t be buried by greasepaint.
Second thoughts surface:

‘Have I thrown my life
Away? What if I get shot?
Or should kill someone?
How will I feel then?
Come on, you can handle it.
Yeah?... yeah!... I don’t know.’

In the final one
The same person’s now seen death.
Blank indifference

Has taken over.
They’ve no swagger; they’re sullen,
Callous and vacant –
Their last expression
Toys with a defensive smirk
But then gives way to
The deadly symptom
Of war’s disease of the soul:
The thousand mile stare.
Llanidloes Fire Department

In a Llanidloes
Lavatory I saw a line,
At eye-level. I was drunk.

‘It's the horizon',
I thought, ‘I'm going
Abroad. That's why I'm swaying –
I'm at sea... that smell.
It's very smelly.'

Then I looked round about me:
The 'sea'... was white tiles.
I wasn't at sea.
It smelt different from the sea.

The line was there though.
A black, felt-tip line.

‘It's a line of black cocaine,
Left by an evil junkie,
Who's going to appear soon
And quickly snort it all up,
Then he'll get angry
Because there isn't
Any more of his black stuff!
I must rub it out,
Before he arrives.'

I was talking to myself.
I didn't care much,
There was no one there.
‘...Why would someone just blow in
And draw long black lines,
All at eye-level?’
(Sherlock Holmes was kicking in)

‘Think of what people
Mostly think about
When aiming to draw something
In a lavatory...
They don't just draw lines.'

Then I looked more closely:
Someone had written,
‘If you can hit this line,
Llanidloes Fire Department
Wants to recruit you.’

Heathcote Williams
Forbidden Fruit

As a child, Alan Turing used to bury his broken toys in the hope that they'd miraculously be mended, but on digging up a precious train he was upset to find his wheels were missing and his bear was still eyeless.

When Alan grew older he was intimately drawn to another boy called Christopher Morcom. Alan and Chris would sit next to each other in class where both were passionate mathematicians.

When Alan told the maths master he was studying for the inverse tangent series, his teacher, a Mr. Randolph, pronounced Turing to be a genius; while Alan credited Chris as his muse.

Two shy schoolboys at Sherborne in Dorset fell in love for the very first time—With a virginal passion like a bomb in the head—Transforming the fibre of their being.

Chris engendered feelings in Alan he had not had before. Their minds met, then their bodies, then suddenly amid their fevered ecstasy Chris died of tuberculosis—at the age of eighteen. Alan thought he had died too...

When the war began Alan joined up. Now a maths don, he was hired by Bletchley Park where British intelligence was desperately trying to crack the naval codes of the Nazi's Enigma machine.

After Turing's ingenuity was credited by Winston Churchill for winning the war in the North Atlantic, Turing had moved on to envisage mechanizing thought itself by concentrating on a machine that could learn...

Alan Turing pioneered Artificial Intelligence as a way of dealing with his grief. He truly believed he could recreate Chris's mind but not, he admitted, his soul.

When Arthur C. Clarke, 2001's science fiction author, revealed that HAL was modelled on Alan Turing, Clarke was soon asked if the feline-voiced HAL was gay. But he discreetly replied that he had 'never asked him'.

Not only HAL, but Silicon Valley and indeed the whole IT world would grow out of the fumblings of two schoolboys. For Chris and Alan's exchanging a kiss would change everything: while other boys played football oblivious—

But no iPads, no iPhones, no iPods, no Macbooks can replace flesh and blood or reboot them back to life. They're broken, like Alan Turing's buried toys. On a visit to this statue in Knoxville Street Park, Manchester there was no one there save an exuberant sheepdog racing around the stationary figure; it did stop to look up at Turing's statue expectantly as if believing he could throw it a stick.

Heathcote Williams
Abridged for performance by Roy Hutchins www.iOpen.org.uk
A Town Called Fucking

The town of Fucking
In Austria has its sign
Stolen by tourists.

It happens often.
Its magistrates demand, Why
You needed Fucking?

You planned to take it
As a souvenir of your
Holiday fucking?

We need Fucking signs
For visitors who ask us,
Where is Fucking please?

He adds, in German,
It is not a joke you know
Fucking is looking

That’s how it’s pronounced
So you see it’s not funny.
Not funny at all.

Fucking disappears
Ten times a year, and the town
Has Fucking free days.

The local tourist
Guide, Andreas Behmueler,
Says it’s only the British

Who are fascinated
To see the Mozart house

In Salzburg, and then
Americans care only for
The Sound of Music

Filmed around Salzburg.
The Japanese want to see
Adolf Hitler’s house.

“Put for you British
It’s all about Fucking. No,
We don’t sell postcards.”

‘Fucking’ has aroused
The attention of German
Sociologists.

One did a study,
Oddly noting an increase
In Fucking’s birth rate

When there’s no Fucking,
The reason being: no signs.
No tourists. More fun.

I saw ‘Fucking’ once.
And beneath the road sign was,
“Bitte - nicht so schnell!”

Which is German for
“Please - not so fast!”
A Tantric road sign.

Perhaps to keep time
With the Slow Food movement
That’s big in Fucking.

A man called Focko
Founded the town of Fucking
In the sixth century.

Fucking meant the place
Of Focko’s people, now known
As the Fuckingers.

People like to have
Their photographs taken with
These Fuckingers,

And to canoodle
Beside the signs, when they’re there,
As verbal Viagra –

This town called Fucking
With just ninety-three people,
It cheers people up.

Mysteriously
No other crime takes place
In ‘Fucking’, Austria –

Just the road signs’ theft.
The municipality
Of Tardorf region

Once proposed to change it
But the mayor Siegfried Höppl
Said “It’s existed

For 800 years
And everyone here knows what
It means in English

But we in ‘Fucking’ –
For us – Fucking is Fucking so it’s
Going to stay Fucking!”

The fact however
There’s no crime rate in ‘Fucking’
Is worthy of note –

Think of the places
You could rename, then lower
The amount of crime –

In New York, London...
A crime-free world called ‘Fucking’!
‘Fucking’ Tokyo

Free of Yakuza;
‘Fucking’ Naples no Mafia:
‘Fucking’ Bogota

With no drug cartels...
‘Fucking’ Washington DC
With no CIA...

Fuckin’ Ada! as
Ian Dury and the Blockheads
Would say, Fuckin’ Ada!

Heathcote Williams
Live like a poet
And save the planet, because
They leave light footprints
On their surroundings
Compared with corporations.
Their suicide rate

Is unfortunate:
Poets' deaths are career gold,
But don't be put off.

Poets have no rules.
Suicide's not essential.
You can write stuff first.

Poetry's problem
Is, it makes you feel more alive –
If not immortal.

Its footprints may stay
In the mind for ever and
Change its direction.

Heathcote Williams
Poems Are Easy

Poems are easy:
First break into the cash point
On Mount Parnassus

Where the Muses live,
And enroll in their course in
Unicorn herding.

If they don’t run them
Any longer, then beckon
Their huge flying horse.

Grab hold of its reins.
Tell it you’re writing poems.
It’s called Pegasus.

Sit between its wings,
Then rise up into the air
To study the clouds.

Ask them what they’re for –
Sculpted mists tinged with gold light;
Expired breaths of trees.

There may be treasure
Deep in their thick, white layers.
A concealed nugget –

Something no one’s seen,
A nucleus of nothing
A sense of wonder.

If you can catch it,
Maybe it’ll change the world.
You’re levitating.

Clouds disintegrate.
You’ll have to catch it in time
To fit words to it –

Whatever it was:
An ethereal beauty,
The secret of life,

Some immortal kiss
Or was it in your mind’s eye
This elusive thing...

Each poem written
Has something hidden in clouds
Of floating language –

Something no one knew
Before it flew into their mind
And they wrote it down.

A special something
You go on dreaming about
When you’ve woken up.

Heathcote Williams
Guy Fawkes’ Lantern

Guy Fawkes’ lantern
Is a surreptitious
Point of pilgrimage
For anonymous
Armies of anarchists who
Visit the glass case
Where it is preserved
In the Ashmolean
Museum, Oxford.

‘What if?’ they wonder,
‘What if Guy Fawkes had done it?
‘Had done the business –
‘For what’s changed?’ they ask,
‘Kings and Parliaments spend tax
‘On wars no one wants.
‘There’s still a Monarch,
‘Most of whose Parliament
‘Is unelected.

‘Twenty-six Bishops
‘From the national religion
‘Sit there as of right:
‘The Invisible
‘Sky Wizard has favored them
‘Over other cults,
‘And eight hundred Lords
‘Outnumber them all, making
‘Voting meaningless.’

Boisterous voices
Then frighten the life out of
Japanese tourists:
‘Guy Fawkes, Guy Fawkes, t’was his intent
To blow up the King and Parli’ment.
Three-score barrels of powder below
To prove old England’s overthrow.’

Heathcote Williams

With 792 members, the House of Lords is the only second chamber in the world which is larger than its first chamber. The elected House of Commons has 650. The only other State legislature which includes representatives of its state religion, as of right, is Iran.

Guy Fawkes’ lantern was given to the University in 1641 by Robert Heywood, son of the Justice who arrested Fawkes on 5th November, 1605.
A street hoarding asks,  
"IS YOUR MONEY WORKING?"  
(It's a huge Bank ad).  
In spray-paint below  
Is written, "No mate, it works  
For you fucking sods."

Is money black magic?  
'Behavioral Economics'  
Suggests that it is.  
Their experiments  
Show that one glimpse of money  
Can cast evil spells.

In an experiment,  
A screen-saver is set up  
Showing dollar bills.  
On seeing banknotes,  
Floating hypnotically  
Across some water,

The subjects are primed:  
They behave more selfishly;  
It's subliminal.  
It's like black magic:  
They've only to see money  
To become selfish.

In the experiment's  
Next stage someone walks past them,  
Spilling some pencils.  
Those who saw the screen  
With all the dollar bills on  
Are slower to help.

Is Money Black Magic?

They're more reluctant  
To pick up any pencils.  
They pick up fewer  
Than those who've not seen it –  
Not seen pictures of money.  
'Pick them up yourself!' –

They're tempted to think.  
Their unconscious reaction is,  
'I've seen some money!  
'I'm close to success!  
I'm a potential millionaire!  
I'm not spending time

Helping idiots!  
Why should I co-operate?  
'I'm too important!' –  
Whereas the others  
Are free from this inhibition  
And pick up pencils:

The unexposed ones  
Are effortlessly helpful  
Expecting no thanks;  
Which is healthier –  
People doing things without  
Expecting reward.

If just seeing cash  
Can freeze the instinct to help,  
Neurologically,  
Then money is mad;  
It's psychotic black magic,  
Which it's sick to want.

It seems rich people  
Lie and cheat more than others,  
A survey reveals,  
Which shows there's a curse  
Which takes its toll on the rich,  
Changing their nature.

But if they should want  
To have this foul curse lifted  
The poor can help them.

Heathcote Williams  
Illustration by Elena Caldera
For Christmas, the Queen
Requests new nipple tassels
Then, on Boxing Day,
She sets herself up
With a portable podium
On Brighton Pier
And begins swivelling
Her sparkling accessories
To a thinning crowd.

It's a tradition
Stemming from the recession.
There's no TV crew.
She plays childhood songs
On a wind-up gramophone
Then smiles at those left.
There are only two:
A bag lady, and someone
From an actors' home
Who wants to show her
His press cuttings, then hand her
A dusty meringue.
"Miss it all dear, do you?
Christmas at Balmoral – with
Those kilts and sporrans?"

"Thanks to Christ's message:
'Give away all that thou hast'.
I can smile real smiles!"
Still spinning her tassels
And without a care in the world
She grabs passers-by.
"Christmas is magic
So, borrow my bank account
For as long as you like.
It still has trillions
Last time I looked. Jesus saves.
So please help yourselves.

This Christmas, banknotes
Have poor people's faces on –
Hope you've all noticed?
Every one was mine
But now the poor have first dibs –
Christmas, eh? What larks!"

Then, in frayed slippers,
She walks towards the care home
For her Christmas lunch
And the people's ghost
Of Christmas past disappears
Into the mists of time.

"No, I've had all that," says the Queen.
Who's now giggling
"The penny dropped.

Heathcote Williams
Photomontage: Adrian Arbib
Coates interrupted
To whistle it correctly.
This was a bad move.

“It should sound like this,”
He snapped imperiously, then
Dug himself in deep

By whistling the tune
From the beginning to end.
‘So what’s it to you?’

A rough voice called out,
Needled at this intrusion
By a nerdy spoilsport.

‘Because I wrote it!’
Coates said pompously.
‘And ‘The Dam Busters’

And the theme music
For ‘Desert Island Discs’ Mine.’
‘Well, this is yours too’

A philistine fist
Then toppled the hapless Coates.
The assailant left

As Coates’ bygone hits
From a forgotten era
Fell briefly silent.

The jaunty French horns
From the land of lost content
Were left to memory

As poor Eric Coates
Lay unloved on a wet floor,
His head full of stars.

The moral being
If someone wants to whistle,
It’s best to let them.

It’s their joy of living,
So they can be out of tune
Whenever they want.

Heathcote Williams
‘Mr. Eternity’

There was a writer,
Called Arthur Stace who only
Ever wrote one word.

He wrote it again
And again, and again and
Again. In Sydney.

In Australia.
For thirty-five years Stace just
Wrote, ‘Eternity.’

He wrote nothing else.
Five hundred thousand times he
Wrote it in chalk,

On public buildings,
On the steps of the law courts,
On police stations,

On football stadiums.
On libraries, pubs, restaurants
Public lavatories.

Up church bell-towers
And on the Sydney subway;
Paving stones and roads.

And when arrested
He’d claim to have permission
From a higher source.

“‘It’s a glorious word—
Travelers to eternity
Is all that we are.’”

This is what he’d say
By way of explanation.
He’d use yellow chalk

To echo sunlight
And the warm glow he believed
Lay in store for us;

Or he’d use blue chalk
To indicate the blue skies,
Suggesting heaven.

They didn’t last long—
Unlike their infinite theme—
They’d be washed away,

But mysteriously
This one word spoke to people.
People were intrigued.

His parents were drunks
And Stace was illiterate.
A state word at 12,

Then he took to crime,
And drinking raw spirit and
Getting into fights,

Till tea and rock cakes
In a homeless shelter led
To the Rock of Ages.

He’d heard a preacher
Mention eternity and
Liked the syllables,

And its copperplate—
The script’s swirls and flowing curls—
As carved on grave-stones,

Where eternity
Outlives everything there is.
Stace fell for the shape

Of the word itself:
Whirling spirals, just like a
Galaxy in space.

Someone carries on
Mr. Eternity’s work:
There’s a graffiti

In just the same style
At Byron Bay, Australia
It reads, ‘Eternity’

On a plywood fence
Near a large caravan site.
‘Wait for it’, someone’s

Written beneath. Then
Someone’s written below that,
‘Why wait. You’re in it.

Heathcote Williams
Turner’s Subversive Boat

The painter, Turner,
Hid in a boat on the Thames
In 1851.

He moored it mid-stream,
So those taking the Census
Couldn’t question him.

But, nevertheless,
While avoiding the State snoop –
Keen to publicize

His life’s intimate
Details to all and sundry –
He’d become famous:

For his dream landscapes;
For ‘The Fighting Temeraire’;
For his red-gold skies;

Stonehenge at sunset;
Salisbury Cathedral’s spire,
Wreathed in brooding mist;

Wreckers’ rugged coasts;
Seascapes of Northumberland.
Turner froze all night

To catch a day’s dawn,
Then he’d paint it as timeless –
The light of the world,

While he kept hidden
From authority and State power,
Avoiding capture;

This man in a boat,
J. M. William Turner,
Freeborn Englishman –

Who chose to live by
Spurning the powers that be –
Just rowing his boat,

Looking for beauty
In whatever caught his eye,
As well as for truth.

In Turner’s painting
‘The Slave Ship’, bodies in chains
Are thrown overboard

By the slaves’ masters
To be set upon by sharks.
A routine practice

When the slave owners
Found their cargo troublesome,
Or too ill to treat,

Unprofitable to feed
Or just pining to be free.
The snares of the State

Are now much subtler,
But slaves are still rounded up,
Farmed for their taxes,

Spied on by cameras,
Questioned by nosy strangers
Filling in long forms

Such as the Census,
So the State can know who’s who
If there’s civil unrest.

But, bobbing in his boat
And never to be enslaved,
Turner ruled the waves.

He disobeyed –
Was disaffiliated
From Queen and Country

And in ‘The Burning of
The Houses Of Lords and Commons’
It’s painted with glee –

He paints fire and light,
Liberated from the gothic gloom
Of power and privilege.

Heathcote Williams
A face in the clouds
Appears and disappears –
A simulacrum,
Like faces in trees,
That seem to suggest Nature
Is personified,
That it has presence,
That it can make itself known
As if it was Pan.

Such faces appear
When you’re least expecting them
ImPLYing Nature
Is perhaps hiding,
Just like seeds in Arctic ice
Which can germinate
Thirty thousand years
Later, meaning that life’s strange –
Stranger than we think.

But it wouldn’t tease
Atheists with sudden signs,
Or taunt Christians
With pagan spirits
That have no rhyme or reason?
Or can it play tricks?

Heathcote Williams
MOKUSATSU

Asked what he'd do first if called upon to rule a nation
Confucius replied, 'I'd correct language.
If language isn't correct
Then what is said is not what's meant
And what ought to be done remains undone.
Morals and art deteriorate
And justice goes astray —
And if justice should disappear
Then people will stand about in helpless confusion.
So there must be no arbitrariness in what's said.
It matters above everything.'

Asked to surrender in World War II
The Japanese used the word 'mokusatsu'
In their response to an Allied ultimatum.

'War' is mistranslated
And means a seething stalemate instead of calm;
Strength is mistranslated
And means paranoid force instead of right-minded confidence;
Defence is mistranslated
And means the compulsive accumulation of profitable weapons
Rather than the thoughtful exercise of skill;
'First strike' is mistranslated
And means last strike;
'Security' is mistranslated
And means danger;
'Block' is mistranslated
And we are invited to believe
That war means peace.

Heathcote Williams
I Want To Be Beautiful

'Whenever she smiles
Her legs jump up in the air
Is a cruel jibe

About the ageing,
Devastated beauty
Now partially plastic.

'I was adored once...'
Rigid muscles mount the words
With unnatural jerks.

'You look marvelous –
You've had nothing done at all!
Friends tell her, fibbing.

Poor little rich girl
With botulism in her
Forehead, collagen

Tautening the slack
Lips that once upon a time
Impelled her body

Towards other lips.
To throb, quiver and become
Aching inflamed –

Filling the air with
Infatuated nothings.
"Hey, what's your star sign?"

"Did you read that book?
Did you see that film?
Hey, how weird is that?"

And "I'd die for you."
"I'd die for you too. We're so
Meant for each other."

Feeling things no one
Ever, ever felt before,
Then eroticized

And infantilized
By needly gazes into
Each other's eyes,

They'll enter dreamland.
She'll play her special music
Over and again –

Sit on cloud nine with cherubs
And roses and chocolate
With her blood racing

On a natural high
Of pain-killing endorphins.
Her life climaxes,

Love's sugar coma... Then the 'phone calls start to fade.
Fewer heads turn.

Everything goes wrong.
'Time's winged chariot – No, it
Can't crash-land on me.

No one's who's happy
And sexually fulfilled can
Ever grow old. No.

It's not happening.
Everyone knows I'm perfect.
Love's my destiny.

It's all I've lived for –
Love. I'm entitled to it –
That flawless beauty –

It makes me feel real
Bathes me in a different light...
Her friends edge forward.

At pumping parties
They produce hypodermics
To puff up her pout;

Smooth out wrinkles so
Her beauty can lure lovers
With a Bambi look.

They exfoliate
Her bottomless bank balance with
Their favoured methods

Of falling victim
To unscrupulous quacks:
'Get rid of dead skin

By plunging your feet
Into a New York fish tank
So they'll eat it off.'

'Let a beautician
Snare your eyes with snail oozes
For elasticity.

Or try gold facemasks:
"Ultrasonic nano mists
Of gold enter the skin

To lift it, firm it
Make it glow and reduce all
Signs of aging."

Hair's, a Knightsbridge
Salon, offers bull's semen
As conditioner.

"Aberdeen Angus
Bulls are used. Their semen is
Refrigerated

And it doesn't smell.
It leaves your hair soft and thick."
Says its promoter.

Sheep were sacrificed
As offerings to the gods,
Now Debbie Harry

Has sheep embryos
Injected into her face.
"They take calls from them –

From the liver, and glands;
From the bone and whatever
And I feel just great."

There are no limits.
In 2009 the BBC
Reports four people

Arrested in Peru
On suspicion of killing
Dozens of people

To extract their fat –
Selling human tissue as
Anti-wrinkle goo.

The liquidized product
Fetches fifteen thousand dollars
For every litre

Sold to cosmetic
Companies for collagen:
'To give flesh body.'

As costly ointments
Are smeared on Park Avenue
Flesh, third world peasants,

Kidnapped then killed, find
Themselves consumerism's
Innocent victims.

Snared by job offers,
They were turned into corpse-cream
So the rich could get laid,

Though there's no lip-gloss
That could glamorize dying –
Dying for beauty.

Beatz said 'behind
All great fortunes there always
Lurk the greatest crimes."

Surgeons gouge at their
Fleshly goldmines while angels
Of death beat their wings.

Keats believed beauty
Was truth, but beauty can lie
And roses draw blood.

Heathcote Williams
Love Plus Anarchy

There’s a graffiti
That has a heart in red paint,
Then the letter ‘A’ –
Inside a circle.

After love plus anarchy
A bright, smiling face
Follows the sign for “equals”.

It’s on dull concrete.
It’s just done with a few strokes
To remind people
That free of bullies,
School bullies or state bullies,
Life isn’t chaos.
Only leaderless,
Cooperative, and more fun.
True revolution
Is to be happy.

Love plus Anarchy means Smiles.
Taking your life back.

It’s only natural.
Babies are born anarchists.
Why lose the habit?

‘Anarchy won’t work’,
Says every misery-guts,
Forgetting history.

On Tristan da Cunha,
A lone volcanic island
In the Atlantic,
Its inhabitants –
The survivors of shipwrecks –
All lived together
For two hundred years
Without a single murder
Or even fist fight.

Everything was shared –
No wealth accumulated.
They were quite happy.
They had no leaders.
As shown by a curious fact:
Letters were sent there
Addressed to “The Chief”
Or to “The Senior Official”
Or once “To the King”.

But no one answered
Because no one opened them.
There were no leaders.

A British frigate
Which landed there once
Found all these letters.

When the islanders
Were asked about the letters
They said that no one
On their volcanic
Island paradise had fitted
Any such titles.

The islanders tried
To explain they were all leaders
And, to the island,
Mainland society
Seemed a quaint rebellion
Against anarchy.

Beneath dull concrete,
Paradise may be simmering
Like a volcano.

Heathcote Williams
The Irish Giant

Charles Byrne was seven Feet and seven inches tall.
He came to London
From County Tyrone,
And was quickly persuaded
To join a freak show:

'Roll up everyone!
Come and see the Colossus!
The Irish Giant!'

He was twenty-two,
And was driven to drink by
The humiliation.

Soon he was dying
In a house in Cockspur Street,
Near to Charing Cross.

Before so doing
He made his last wishes clear:
'Burial at sea'
To ensure that he
Would avoid the curious,
And any doctors

Keen to dissect him,
"I want a lead lined coffin
To preserve myself,
At the sea's bottom."

However, word of his death
Attracted London's
Medical circles.
It was reported that, 'Whole
Tribes of surgeons
Put in a claim for
The poor departed Irishman
And surrounded his house,
Just as harpooners
Would an enormous whale."

Dr. John Hunter,
A London surgeon,
Avid for rare specimens,
Won through bribery.

He left with the corpse,
Spending five hundred pounds
(Fifty thousand today),
And boiled the body
Down to its enormous bones.

Now Byrne's skeleton
Is in a museum:
The Hunterian, Royal
College of Surgeons,
Where it's earned its keep,
In the interests of science,
For two hundred years —
Thanks to John Hunter,
The medical grave-rober.

But a Belfast lawyer,
Called Thomas Munro,
Has told the British Medical Journal
It's time for a change.
Professor Doyal,
The medical ethicist,
Supports Muirnzer's view
Saying, "The fact is
Hunter knew of Byrne's terror
Of him and ignored
His wishes for the
Disposal of his body."
Yet the Royal College
Still clings to the bones
They've had for two hundred years —
Bones they've now picked clean.

They've scraped his DNA —
Analyzed Tyrone family
Pituitary glands
That overproduce
The growth hormone
In Byrne's relatives
Accelerating growth —
The Byrne acromegalic
And ancestral gene
That's led to myths that
Byrne built the Giants' Causeway,
Or even Stonehenge.

"And there were giants
In the land in those days," Byrne
Overlapped with myth.

Romantic Ireland's
Dead as fairies, yet surgeons
(Who'd chloroform fairies
For their College),
Keep a pet giant patiently
Standing in their box.

The friends of the giant
Insist that it is high time
Byrne's wish was granted,
That he left the glass case,
As befits his dying wish,
For the Irish sea.

The Royal College
Says no; 'there's a scrap more meat
On the giant's bones'.
Newspapers
Facetiously call it a
"Bone of contention."

Medicine's purpose
Is to free mankind from pain,
But always for a fat fee,
And Byrne will earn more
For the College of Surgeons
Than he will at peace.
Charles Byrne's growth hormone
Is still invaluable to
Doctors' bank accounts
So giants must wait
Patiently for two hundred
Years for fair treatment.

The Queen of England
Once came to stare at the giant,
And then she passed on.

Royalty's rogue genes
And medicine's greed are both
Weird enormities,
But they're protected
By privilege, and exempt
From imprisonment.

The lonely giant —
A colonial victim
Of market forces —
Still stands in his booth,
Scrubbed by visitors
From an alien world.

Heathcote Williams
Anyone so dim
That such harsh words defined them,
So they’d go unused.

Nor was there, "A face
Which was long enough to wrap
Twice around his neck" –

This expression too
Stayed in his notes, since no one
Turned up to match it.

It’s good to know that
Some worst-case scenarios
Have no one in them.

But words aren’t things, just
Vehicles for breathy sounds,
Expelled and then gone…

Yet worlds turn on them
And they measure out your life,
Like marks on a ruler.

Lose sleep over words?
Your last breath might be a word.
No need to draw it

Your last breath, that is,
Until you’ve found the right word
Exactly. Take your time.

In Raymond Chandler’s Notebooks he stored up similes
To describe people.

“So tight” – he’d jot down –
"His head squeaks when he takes his
"Hat off." Good to know

That he never met
Anyone quite mean enough
To apply this to.

Someone else was: “As
Smart as a hole through nothing”
But he never found

Heathcote Williams
If you say Jesus’ name backwards...

If you say ‘Jesus’
Backwards it sounds like ‘sausage’.
High Mass would be more
Like a barbecue,
Had Jesus been burned to death;
With the religious
Experience from
Eating Christ’s body enhanced
By adding relish –
Bearing in mind that
Spilling the mustard or onions
Or ketchup would be
Thought blasphemous, since
Christ’s transubstantiation
Would have to cover
The condiments too.
Careless customers at holy
Hot dog stands in the
Middle ages would
Have been charged with heresy
And fed to the flames.
If they’d already
Eaten a holy hot dog,
They’d still be condemned
For being sloppy
With these bits of Christ’s body
Spilled onto the ground.

Which could mean that Christ
Had the doubtful distinction
Of being cooked twice.
When communicants
Were burned to death as sloppy
And disrespectful.
The theology
Would be complex – sausages
Being Jesus Christ.
Should you eat a lot?
Or sparingly? What if they
Made you put on weight?
Would the Pope conduct
A facetious Easter mass
In the Vatican?
If you dictated
Where would the bits of fat that
Were Jesus Christ go?
No crucifixes.
People would now be wearing
Small hot dogs on chains
To show devotion.
The resurrection would be
Extremely tricky –
Rising from ashes
Of fried onions, ketchup and
Processed, rendered meat.
But the rosaries
Made from strings of sausages,
Could prove popular.
The Second Coming
Has never occurred before,
As Christ was put off
By crucifixes –
Reminders of past torture...
But a barbecue...?!?
This might lure him back
To cannibalize himself
Evangelically.

A ‘Zombie Jesus’
Who lets you eat his own flesh
Might name a food chain.
This fast-food Jesus
Could help Christianity
To rebrand itself,
Except for one thing,
One indigestible fact:
Christianity
Has a recipe
Which has been the same for years,
Yet there’s a problem –
No one’s followed it.
To pretend to eat Jesus
In a dry wafer
Or, to think his blood
Is in some very sweet wine
Is less demanding
Than turning the world
Upside down by not paying
Taxes for weapons;
Trying to forgive
The unforgivable; or
Loving your neighbour,
Or sharing what you
Have with people you don’t like.
Without these things,
Christianity’s
At least two sausages short
Of a full breakfast.
Jesus was okay.
A pacifist anarchist
With crap followers.

Heathcote Williams
Time Travel

The one thing we know
About the future is that
There’s no time travel.

Otherwise people
Would be here telling you,
“I’m from the future!”

But there is no one.
No one who says, ‘I was born
In twenty-three ten.

‘My name is Zarzar,
And I have a second home
In the Milky Way.

‘I commute from there
To here, and I’m bilingual
In Alpha Centaurian.

I bring you Greetings
Stranger, from my world to this!
Tell me, who are you?

There just aren’t people
Like that, from another time,
Though there’s a film-clip

Which looks like someone’s
Talking into a cell phone,
In a Chaplin film.

It’s called ‘The Circus’.
It’s black and white. A zebra
Stands at the entrance.

To the box office,
Then a woman walks past it.
She’s holding something.

She talks into it,
She even turns to look at the camera,
In a knowing way.

She’s a large woman.
Her fingers are curled around
This thin black object.

It’s pressed to her ear
As she bustles down the street;
She talking, half-bumping

Into everyone;
Not quite looking where she’s going,
Just like ‘phone users.

Yet there weren’t such things
In Charlie Chaplin’s day.
Not in 1928.

‘It’s a time traveller!
It’s claimed in an Internet
Posting from someone

Eager to believe
In such things, or to persuade
Others of such things –

Or with time to kill
(Instead of travelling through it)
Or, who needs to get a life.

But in it you do seem
To see someone in a crowd,
Holding this ‘something’.

It’s hard to explain.
Maybe it’s windy; and they’re
Just holding their hat.

Maybe it’s earache
And she’s holding a poultice,
Or ice to her ear;

Or it’s photo-shopped
Or it’s done by CGI.
Whatever it is,

The clip is silent –
You don’t hear a cell ‘phone ring,
She just walks briskly

Talking to the air.
Chaplin’s subtitles don’t read:
‘Hey, that’s a neat phone!

Hey, look everyone
There’s a phone that has no wires!
Must be the future!’

Bustling past she seems
To be holding a cell phone
In a silent film.

No one notices
This odd hiccup in the space-
Time continuum.

But it’s intriguing,
And you want it to be true.
If the time barrier

Could be broken, then
You could go backwards in time
And forwards again.

Knowing what you know now
You could take that knowledge back –
Back to your own past.

Undo your mistakes.
You’d see that forked path again,
Take the road less travelled

But would you be you?
You’d be another you, and
One you might not know.

Every second counts
When you are time travelling,
Which everyone is.

You’re in the future
The particles that make you,
The Muons, and Tauons.

And weird Tachyons,
Can go backwards and forwards
In time with quantum leaps.

And you’re in the past
Now was the future. It’s gone.
And now it’s the past.

If anyone hears
Of genuine time travellers
The first thing to ask

Would be why they chose
This particular moment
To make their entrance?

Will you recognize them
By some distinctive feature,
Such as looking lost?

Heathcote Williams
Vultures That Stalk Children

In the southern Sudan
Near the village of Ayod,
A tiny, naked
And wizened infant
Crawls across dusty scrubland.

Her face is hidden;
Her despondent head
Has fallen limply forward;
Her parents aren’t here,
They’re hoping for food
From a food drop in the bush.

A couple of yards
Away from the child
A vulture stands, silently
Waiting to benefit
From man’s lack of care

Kevin Carter

A photographer, Kevin Carter, captures them
And those who see the photo
Flood the paper with queries,
‘Where is the child now?’

Editorials
Attack Kevin Carter for
Wasting precious time
In “Finding the right lens
To take just the right frame of
Her suffering”. They say
The photographer,
“Might as well be a predator;
Another vulture.”

These papers, of course,
Had published the photograph
For their own profit
Then it won prizes,
Which Carter couldn’t enjoy,
“I’m really sorry

“I didn’t pick the child up,”
He’d tell all his friends,
Telling anyone
Who’d listen, until Kevin
Carter killed himself.

•

Profits from war
Are a greater threat
Than overpopulation.
Most of the bullets
Tearing Africa
To bits add to her entrenched
Inequalities;
All of them are increased
By high-yield arms investments
That cause migration,
And mass disruption,
And un-useable land.
Divisions are worsened
By commodity
Speculators; by
Gamblers on the price of food,
Financing cash crops
That help feed no one.

Gold, diamonds and oil
Are prioritized.
Bling, bling and black gold –
The bullets protect
Such investments:
Investments that grow

While people shrivel;
Bullets that say, ‘we’re not sharing’.
The bullets that protect
The bulging portfolios
Of corporate land-grabbers

Who silently bide their time,
Indulging their economies’
Bestiality,
Whilst in their hunger
For Africa’s resources
They starve the unborn.

In 2006 the U.S.
Spent $4 billion on international aid
And $680 billion on weapons,
War and military research.

Hypocrisy rules.
Those who tacitly support
Warfare States with their taxes
May express disgust
At seeing a lone bird recycle
A corpse their State has made –
But man’s nature is
As red in tooth and claw
As any vulture.

Heathcote Williams
Mudita

Buddhists have something
Called mudita. It’s to rejoice
In others’ pleasure.

The West has something
Called schadenfreude.
It’s the opposite –

To derive pleasure
From someone else’s suffering,
Or capitalism:

‘Take that you bastard
Now watch me polish my gun
And screw you right up

While I eat your food
Then salute the US flag
And count my money’.

Unrealized souls
Can’t be fully-fledged members
Of the legion of joy

If they scorn the fact
That no one can be happy
Till everyone is.

Mudita’s foreign
To Western ways of thinking.
There’s no word for it –

To derive pleasure
From someone else’s success,
For the media

Are geared to gloating
At anguish, horror and pain:
‘If it bleeds, it sells’

Therefore mudita’s
Ignored. There’s no profit in
An unselfish joy –

That unsung secret
Which is hinted at in the
Buddha’s stress-free smile.

Heathcote Williams