



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 explication 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.

'Meeting a Soldier in Wales'; 'Van Gogh's Ear' and 'Immodesty Blaise' appeared in print in The Raconteur. 'Poems are easy'; 'Palestine' and 'Live live a poet' were published by Cold Turkey Press, and 'A Traditional Christmas' was published by Five Dials, the Hamish Hamilton/Penguin online magazine. 'Palestine' also appeared in the Palestine Chronicle.

An extended version of 'Forbidden Fruit' is the title poem of a collection published by Huxley Scientific Press in 2012, which also included 'Bees', 'Darwin's Nose' and 'Mokusatsu'. The latter first appeared in Whole Earth Review in 1988 and in Peace News on the anniversary of the US bombing of Hiroshima.

'Is Money Black Magic'; 'Love Plus Anarchy'; 'Vulture stalking a child' and 'The Thousand Mile Stare' appeared in International Times in 2012.

'Downing Street' was first published as a postcard by John Hall of www.gatheredimages.com

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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.

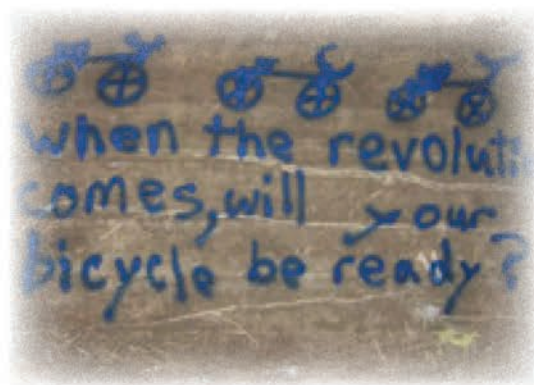
On their bikes, wise clowns
 Keep pneumatic hoops gyrating
 In perfect balance.

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.

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



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

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

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

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.

Heathcote Williams



If Blake repeated

That he'd seen God watching
Him through a window

Heathcote Williams

At the age of four –

Richard Dawkins would be there
To tick them both off.

Photo: Tom Hoeneke

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 fummy 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 flutter
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

CELEBRITY

Desperately wanting to be famous
Herostratus 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 Herostratus 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 Herostratus 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.

Darwin's Nose

Heathcote Williams

Departure Lounge

"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 tranquillize 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 Summon
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 cy-borgs
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

After the circumcision of Jesus of Nazareth
His foreskin was covered with spikenard ointment
And kept in an alabaster box, to become a religious relic.

While the Church would stick to its prudish belief
That Jesus was born of a virgin and was celibate all his life
It would permit his prepuce to enjoy a two-thousand-year frolic.

For it was claimed that the original packaging of the Savior's penis
Could cure impotence, female infertility and assist erectile dysfunction
And the prepuce became a handy tool in exciting the religious imagination.

St Catherine of Siena believed the ring she wore – symbolizing
Her marriage to truth and beauty and to the master of the universe –
Was Jesus' mystic foreskin, her ring finger standing for Christ's member.

The 'Purse Reliquary of the Circumcision', the pouch housing this relic,
Set a fashion in accessory design: 'Oh, you have a purse just like that purse!
And several churches in France were designated 'L'Eglise de la Saint Prepuce'.

One foreskin from Charroux was taken to Rome and paraded
Through the streets – alongside pieces of the True Cross
And a cobbled-together version of Christ's sandal.

After it had been presented to Pope Innocent III the parish of Calacata,
North of Rome, then claimed that they possessed Jesus' foreskin,
As did the abbey of Coulombs, in the diocese of Chartres.

Other claimants included the church of Notre-Dame-en-Vaux
Then churches in Puy, Metz, Anvers, and Hildersheim.
The churches of Europe wanted a piece of the action.

The replicating prepuce was invaluable to the church's recruitment drive:
Being a tangible proof Christ came, as he'd left behind this severed souvenir –
But uncontrolled catering to foreskin fever prompted the mass production of fakes.

At which the Pope saw it as his apostolic task to purge all the spurious prepuces:
Vatican doctors placed scraps of gristle in their mouths and after mastication
They'd decide whether or not they were of heavenly origin or just human.

The Pope would delegate such a task to Italy's medical profession,
It being thought chomping on infant foreskins was unseemly
Although priestly tastes were then, as now, questionable.

But soon the sacred prepuce became the subject of such 'irreverent curiosity'
And crude imaginings about the use which the rest of Jesus' genitalia were put to
That the severest form of excommunication was imposed on every prepuce profiteer.

Anyone involved became a vitandus, one who deserved to be shunned:
If you allowed the smallest mention of the prepuce to pass your lips
Then you were cast out of the church – as was the foreskin itself.

The theology of this celestial carapace 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 generative organs.

And although the Vatican would staunchly insist that its redeemer
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 Vienna would always weep on the Feast of the Circumcision –
Overcome by the earliest example of Christ's suffering and his first bloodshed
And then, on her wondering where the prepuce might actually be, she had a vision.

St Agnes 'felt a little skin on her tongue like the skin of an egg
And she gulped it down. Hardy 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 Ermenrich, 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 limbs she felt a sweet 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 ruse sold to the gullible by religious hucksters,
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 shoebox in Viterbo, in 1983.

A conspiratologist might spin this into an intriguing coincidence:
A foreskin, full of divine DNA, vanishes at the dawn of cloning
When Christ's resurrection might disrupt the entire status quo.

For Christian states would dread a Second Coming, cloned or un-cloned.
They'd be horrified by the arrival of a radical soul bearing any resemblance
To the anti-capitalist pacifist anarchist that they'd been pretending to admire.

Aeons ago man noticed how snakes shed their skin.
And that by doing so they'd enjoy a new lease of life,
So man imagined that he too might extend his lifespan –

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 Eden's snake was blamed for ruining man's sexual paradise.

Jesus' phantom prepuce is the remnant of a pre-historic snake-cut –
A phallosocracy, whereby man celebrates being bribed into reproduction
By his eroticized skin triggering his seminal organs and sparking off orgasms.

Man is still searching for the ultimate orgasm that lasts longer than a few seconds –
A taste of the spiritual orgasm everlasting that sustains his quest for the Holy Grail
Which, when found, will make death wilt and have you tingling all over with divinity.

So the foreskin of a man who beat mortality might be the ultimate sex aid,
Though strangely the foreskin of Jesus Christ has discreetly faded from view.

But there is something else too that's missing: what the original lord of the rings –
Those fleshly rings – had preached: it was universal love and forgiveness:
A contempt for profit, total freedom from priest-craft and all official control
And the joyful belief that life's miraculous and not a mercenary, sadistic racket.

In some traditions the foreskin of an infant is consumed by a cannibal father
Or burnt in a Temple sacrifice. To the secular it's no more than hospital waste
While others gold-plate it as a memento, and some mourn it as their missing halo.

In anthropological studies the prepuce is the feminine part of the male genitalia,
Echoing the pudenda and thus it could be referred to as Christ's mini-vagina; or not.
But its removal was crucial to patriarchal values: no penis-pudenda wanted on voyage.

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

Heathcote Williams

Ermenrich's account of St Agnes' ecstasies derives from Agnes Glanbein, Viennese beguine. Life and revelations'. Edited and translated by Ulrike Wothaus. (Library of Medieval Women.) Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002.



**'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

Stuffing 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 Bellart

LO

Nineteen sixty-nine -
Two linked computers sent and
Received 'L' and 'O'...

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

'L'... 'O'... 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 always say no one ever comes back
From the kingdom of the dead
But there's no need since energy can't be destroyed
And their memory's alive in your head

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.

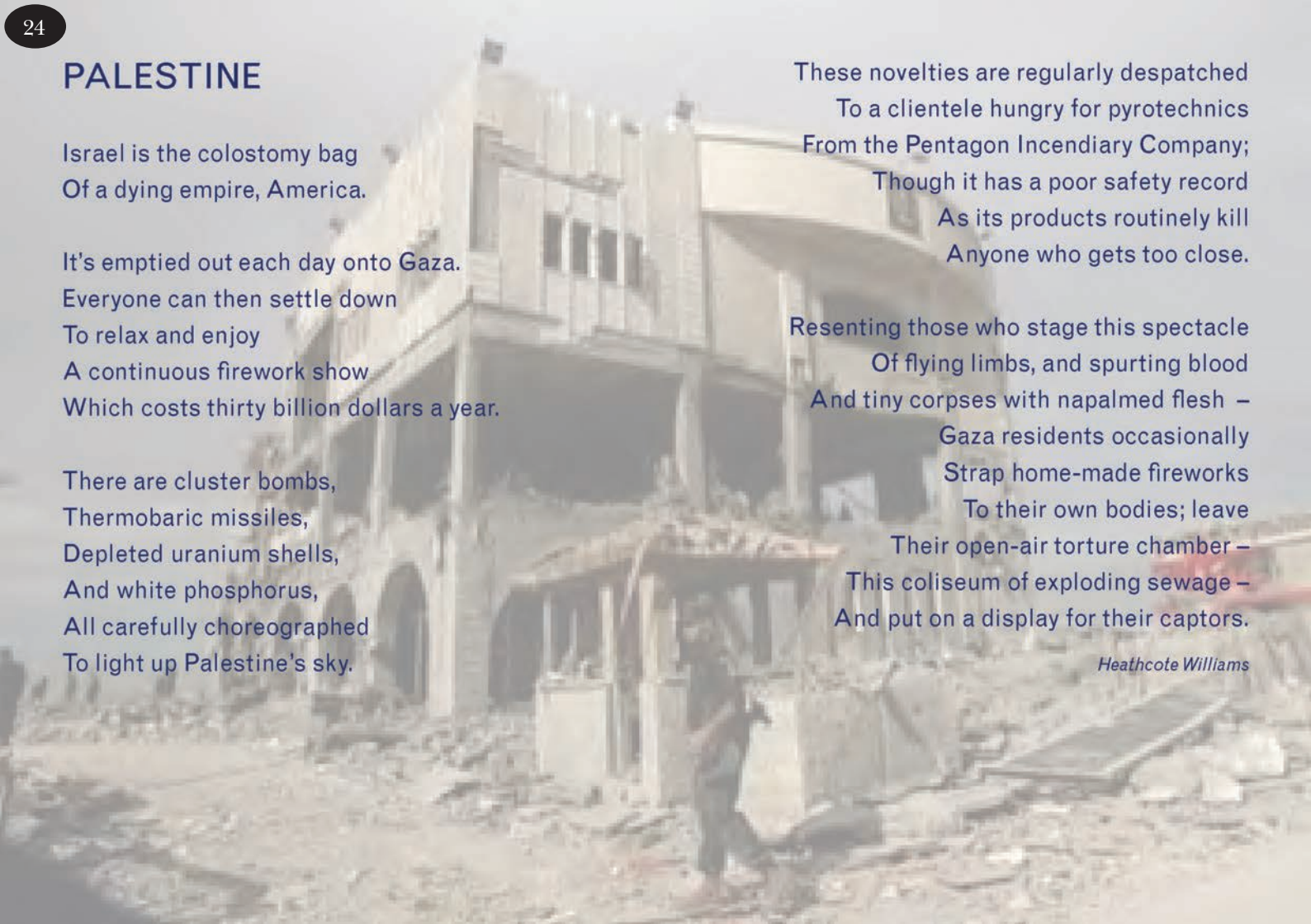
It's emptied out each day onto Gaza.
Everyone can then settle down
To relax and enjoy
A continuous firework show
Which costs thirty billion dollars a year.

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?

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
Topples. Blood squirting.
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 commandoes 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
Mediático', Havana May 5, 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?

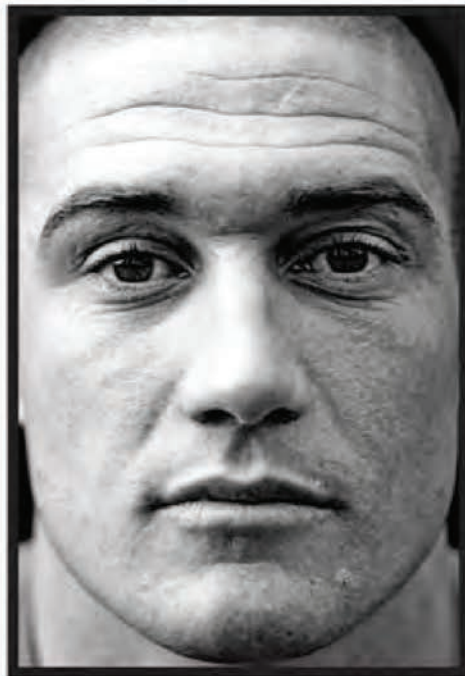
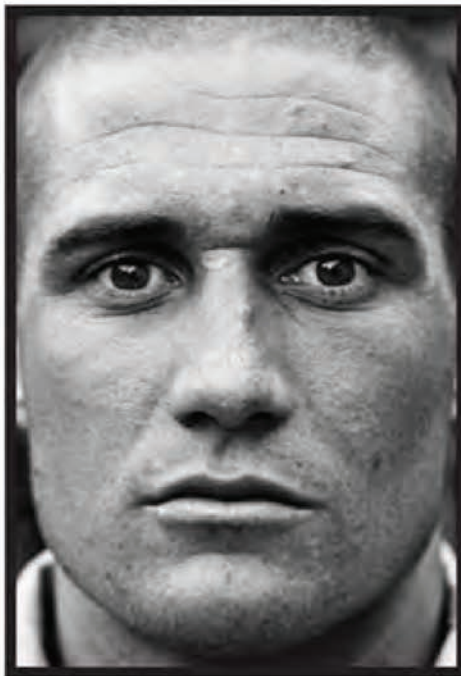
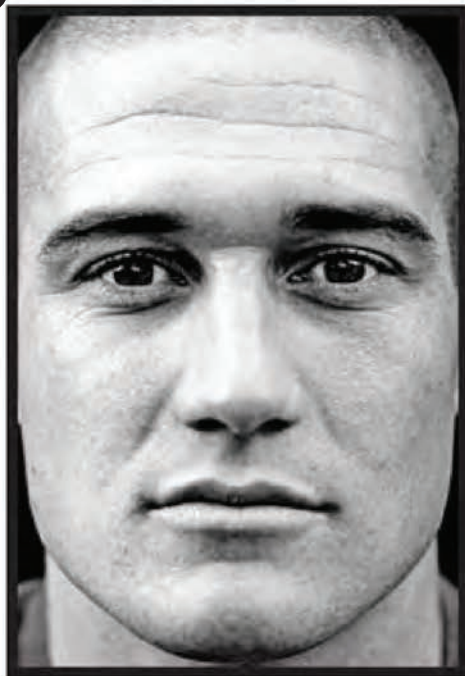
Why have both these words

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

Claire Felicie clairefelicie.com

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 peer forward. I'm wobbling.
'No! it's a bit of string!
Now why would someone
Draw a long bit of black string
In a Welsh lavvy,
Miles from anywhere?'

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
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'd 'found the infinite series
For the inverse tangent function',
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'd 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'd died too...

When the war began Alan joined up.
Now become 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'd 'never asked him'.

Not only HAL, but Silicon Valley and indeed the whole IT world
Would grow out of the fumbleings 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'd 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

ALAN TURING
1912 - 1954

Pioneer of computer science
and cryptographer, whose work
was key to breaking the
German Enigma code
lived and died here.

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 'fooking'

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 Behmueller,
Says it's only the British

Who are fixated
With 'Fucking'. "The Germans want
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."

"But 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 Tarsdorf 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

Is Money Black Magic?

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.

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

A Traditional Christmas



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?"

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

"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.

Heathcote Williams
Photomontage: Adrian Arbib



Sometimes it's good to
Let things be, even if in a
Public Lavatory.

When the composer
Eric Coates happened to be
Caught short in London

He found a public
Convenience. In the stand-ups
A man was whistling.

Coates recognized it.
The tune was his 'Knightsbridge
March',
But with one note wrong.

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 ward 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 snoops –
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. Mallord 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.

A face in the clouds

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.

黙殺

The Japanese word meant

'We withhold comment – pending discussion;

When their reply was sent to Washington

The crucial word was mistranslated:

Is correct meaning being changed for

'We are treating your message with contempt'.

The Americans claimed that their ultimatum had been rebuffed

So they were free to play with their new toys.

Two atomic bombs nicknamed 'Little Boy' and 'Fat Man'

Were then dropped upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



A hundred and seventy-five thousand people
Either stood about in helpless confusion
Or were turned into radioactive dust.



Today 'peace' 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;

'Testing' is mistranslated

And means the deadly detonation of a nuclear device

Instead of a tentative experiment;

A disarmament treaty 'is mistranslated

And means junking obsolete weapons' because of economic restraints

Rather than abandoning technological violence;

'First strike' is mistranslated

And means: last strike;

'Security' is mistranslated

And means danger;

'War' is mistranslated;

And we are invited to believe

That war means peace.



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 mouth 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
Achingly 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 needy 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 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
Smear your eyes with snail ooze
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."

Hari'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 cells 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

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

Surgeons gouge at their
Fleshy 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-robber.

But a Belfast lawyer,
Called Thomas Muinzer,
Has told the British Medical Journal
It's time for a change.
Professor Doyal,

The medical ethicist,
Supports Muinzer'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
Byrnes built the Giants' Causeway,
Or even Stonehenge.

*"And there were giants
In the land in those days,"* Byrne
Overlaps 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.

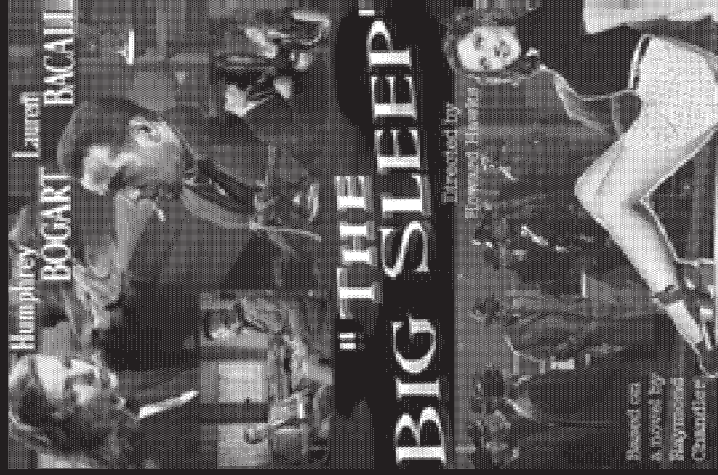
The Queen of England
Once came to stare at the giant,
And then she passed on.

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,
Scrutinized by visitors
From an alien world.

Heathcote Williams

Raymond Chandler's Notebooks



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.

Heathcote Williams

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

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 Fatcan?

If you dieted
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 war

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 unforgiveable; 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 Zarzan,
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 filmclip

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, halfbumping

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



Kevin Carter

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

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