



PARALLEL PATHS

WORKS BY JOSEPH SINCLAIR

BOOKS

Refrigerated Transportation (Container Marketing) -1988
Refrigerated Containers (The World Bank, Washington DC 1989
An ABC of NLP (ASPEN - London) -1992
Arteries of War (Airlife Publications, UK) – 1992
An ABC of NLP 2nd Edition, with Stephen Bray (ASPEN) - 1998
Peace of Mind is a Piece of Cake (With Michael Mallows) - 1998
Refrigerated Transportation (New edition, Witherby) - 1999
Publishing Your Book (ASPEN - London) 2001
The Torturous Scheme (ASPEN - London) - 2001
Peace of Mind is a Piece of Cake (Chinese edition, 2004)
Did I Really Say That? (ASPEN - London) - 2009
Uncultured Pearls (ASPEN - London) - 2014
Metaphors and Matzo Balls (ASPEN - London) - 2016
Let Us Then Rejoice (ASPEN - London - 2017)
Lament for Emily (ASPEN - London - 2018)
Whistling in the Wind (ASPEN - London - 2020)
Fevered Times (ASPEN – London – 2022)

DRAMA

Now Another Day; No Contract for Love; Account Rendered;
The Pit Digger; The Bahrat Tender.
Your Humble Investigator (A TV series with Lory Alder)

MUSICAL COMEDY

Two Hours of Happiness (With Malcolm Knight) – 1966

MAGAZINES

Sea Containers Confidential
IPN Newsletter (For the Independent Practitioners' Network)
HUG – for the London Co-Counselling Community.
GROUPVINE – for the Group Relations Training Association.
NEW LEARNING – for the Association of NLP.
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PARALLEL PATHS

**A collection of poetry
from 2023**

by

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**This book is dedicated to
Sue Fraser and the
Walk and Talk French group
of Beckenham Place Park in
South-east London.**

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BLOCKHEADS

Let blockheads read what blockheads wrote,
Lord Chesterfield once said.
Thereby inviting us to judge him
As a dunderhead.

Let wise men read what wise men wrote
Is what I say instead,
And you may judge me for yourself
Since my work's quite widespread.

MY FIRMAMENT

There rest too many phantoms in my world:
Stars that were too soon obliterated.
Too late alas for them to be revealed,
To have their spirits once more liberated.

One consolation is that I will pose,
At some uncertain date, a memory
To haunt the reminiscences of those
Who share these weird and wayward thoughts with me.

That with the dying murmur of a sigh
And life's last lazy lingering regret,
Through the dull vista of a hazy sky
The ill-intentioned trap's been rudely set.

How mordant is that view so desolate?
From where I sit, the whole world at my feet,
A view too lachrymose to contemplate:
The steadfast owner of a vast conceit.

LAMENTATION

If I had simply left my fears unbound,
I could have shown you in a more profound
and moving way how my inchoate love
spiralled, far more characteristic of
the mawkishness that I deplored,
than wantonness for one that I adored.

PARALLEL PATHS

Life at my age
Is death defying
and musically
a swan may be dying
while dancing
to a different tune.

Meanwhile in a parallel universe
an orchestra is playing
a gay tarantella
and an obscure Cinderella
is performing
by the light of a different moon.

How am I to distinguish
the virtuosic
from the mundane?
How may I separate
the nobility of one champagne
from the jejune?

THE NORMALCY BIAS

(The Silly Sally of a Sceptic)

If you would maintain
The status quo
Do not disdain
Coincidence, although
The likelihood of hazard
From the antics
Of a wizard may
Inspire a frantic scene.

No need to be so formal,
See! Because it never happened,
It can never happen
To a buzzard so impious,
And that's the bias they define
As normalcy!

RENAISSANCE

Drifting down the stream of grim uncertainty,
Having discarded the weighty oars of obduracy
I feel myself immersed in vitalizing freedom.

The knowledge that my future
Is no longer subject to self-determination
But is as aimless and as formless
As a mass of autumnal fallen leaves
Fills me with immense insouciant joy.

And as the slowly growing warmth of Spring
Follows the chilling wintry fogs
I know that a new life will be reborn
In the boracite lucidity of reawakening dawn.

I THOUGHT OF HER

I thought of her again today
And that may seem surprising
But she has never really left my heart
To which she is so frequently re-summoned,
The memory re-awakened by
A phrase of music faintly overheard,
A whiff of fragrant herbs
That used to grace her fabulous cuisine,
The swiftly vanishing view
Of something undefined
Yet surprisingly familiar :
A nostalgic vision from our history.

But I go on in the ever hastening
Passage of time and occasionally,
Now and then, I wonder:
Wherever she may be
Does she sometimes
Think of me?

THE IRONY OF PEACE

The stench of death pervaded
Every putrid, pestilential molecule
Of flesh that littered the ground
That yesterday had been a haven
Of tranquillity.

And all they had intended
When first they stepped
Upon that placid place,
Was to assure their concept
Of peace . . .

Or so they said!

MEANINGLESS

I suffered an intolerable provocation
That seemed irrelevant to my situation
And then it struck me with the jolt
Of a Lee-Enfield rifle bolt.
The answer would be obvious
If the question weren't so devious.

In me past, present, future never meet
The junctions of my life are incomplete
They avoid each other tangentially
And result in anguish circumferentially.

IF

If your God,
(By which I presume you mean
A superior intelligence)
Designed and deigned
To produce such beauty
As the flowers and the trees
And the countless wonders
Of the skies and the seas and
All that live therein . . .

Who then designed
And deigned to produce
Such ugliness and spite
And hatred and anger
And suffering and pain
And utter desolation?

Was that Man?
And was not Man then
An equally superior intelligence?

Or was he an
inferior intelligence
Produced by your God?

And if so . . .
Why?

GETTING IT ON

Do not confuse
getting on with it
with getting it on.

One is carnal
the other is eternal.

No, don't ask me
for a clue;
the choice is up to you!

GONE, ALL ARE GONE!

I miss that book of verses underneath the bough.

Where is that book?

What has replaced it in the here and now?

Perhaps a pruning hook?

Indeed, where are the trees?

I search for answers from a source celestial,

But all I get are trivialities

And vaguely fanciful ideas terrestrial.

The gaily coloured sunshades

Planted on the desert wide

Cannot replace the countless blades

Of grass that filled the countryside.

The brightness shimmering

On the hand-held kindle screen

Is a poor substitute for the glimmering

Sunshine to enhance a page's sheen.

HOW LONG, HOW LONG?

How long, how long, dear heart
must we endure the turpitude
that keeps us thus apart?
The need for all that fortitude
on which we brood?

How long, how long, withal
before we can ignore the pain,
that keeps us both in thrall?
And we can to that life again
return freed from concern,
a lesson proud to learn,
no more to wane?

How long, how long, my love
must we shrug off the bitter truth
that time cannot disprove?
With ache of an impacted tooth
forgetting through our sorrow,
there may be no tomorrow?

No hopes to gratify our schemes
or satisfy our wildest dreams,
or stars above.

ELEGY

Turn about. Turn about.

Turn and face the endless road,
where the night hawks swoop
and the wild geese unload,
and the ever-threatened shrew
joins the disappearing toad.

Turn about. Turn about.

Turn your back on the flaming cross
that marks the spot where the martyred foe
that once our friends were, no longer toss
disdainful heads in disbelief
at so grotesque a double-cross.

Turn about. Turn about.

Listen not to reason
despite the evidence that preys on your eye.
You have not learned the lesson
and now perhaps you never may.
Forgiveness now is out of season.

The tyrants show determination
to aggravate the hastening rout.
The seasons lose reliability
and shed their worth without a shout,
but ignored on the brawny breeze:
Turn about. Turn about.

DIES IRAE

I placed my soul soft in your keeping;
I said “I beg handle it kindly,
it has spent too much lonely time weeping
and moving hither and yon blindly.”

The shadow regarded me baffled;
a request such as that was unknown,
but it followed me up to the scaffold
“I am naught,” it replied “but chaperone.”

It was a response that gave solace
where comfort was robustly needed
with no hint of a poisoned chalice
and I went on my way unimpeded.

The scaffold of course was bombastic,
the sadness, however, was not.
The journey far from orgiastic,
the darkness no more than a blot.

WHEN DEATH

When Death, the dark deceiver, crooks his finger,
Inviting my participation at the feast,
Resenting my determination thus to linger,
Resisting the fate of the bubal hartebeest.

I'm at a place in life where peace is paramount
With no time left for choler or chagrin;
I'll place all doubt into a suspense account
And optimistically trust that truth will win.

I will not die; I'll cling tenaciously to life;
And emulate the pattern of the shepherd's purse.
I will continue to survive the surgeon's knife
Compressing ninety-plus years to one final verse.

IT'S ONLY POLITICS

Feed me with those falsehoods, baby,
Dazzle me with those eyes
Drowning in their brown depths, maybe
Will minimise those lies.

Take me to the cleaners, honey,
I'm a willing slave
Though you're spending all my money
I'll give no royal wave.

Hold me to your ransom, buddy,
Fill me with false dreams
I'll be lost in a brown study
Where nothing's what it seems.

Enfold me in your arms, old copemate,
Free me from those migrants
Maybe you must ease the floodgate,
But please avoid the violence.

Promises you make, old crony,
Clearly exaggerate.
We know it's simply hype boloney
But it really does frustrate.

No love is lorn in politics
The fallout's quite excessive
When you jam-pack your bag of tricks
With measures so repressive.

TRIBAL NOT THEOLOGICAL

The conflicts that persist
these days throughout the world,
particularly those that are dismissed,
where vengeful epithets are hurled,

as being no concern
to people in the West;
suggesting that the rest of us should spurn
aligning ourselves with obsessed

tactical fanatics
who wish to realise
by the blatant usage of dramatics
an attempt to destabilise.

In many of those countries
hatred is just tribal
rather than belief in the boundaries
set by the theological.

We are wrong to confuse
Muslim confrontation
as terrorist, and need to disabuse
ourselves of the degradation

resultant from the fear
that confirms they have won
and merely reinforces all the drear
uncertainty of what's been done.

Why don't we just recall
the Ulster shocking years,
atrocities that had their curtain call
yet still persist to foster fears?

Or very recently
Jerusalem's disgust
with Gay Pride's march that oh, so decently,
and peacefully in legal trust,

was interrupted by
a zealot's evil hand.

Both Ireland and Israel give the lie,
for both were tribal and both banned.

Yet mayhem does persist
and uses religion
to justify the evil they insist
on showing to politician

and cleric both alike
in their insistence
on the righteousness
of causes they blindly espouse.

TREAT THE SYMPTOM NOT THE VACUITY

A cure may be
as elusive as the alchemist's gold,
or the scientist's discovery
of a perpetual motion machine.

But before seeking
A solution
It may be as well
To look for the problem.

Sometimes the answer
Is simply that
There is no answer
Because there is no question.

DREAM OF DELIGHT

Dad came to me in a dream last night.

I was totally amazed.

“You can’t be here,” I said.

“You are gone.”

He smiled.

That wonderful warm smile

And gathered me in his arms.

“I have not come to you,” he said.

“You have come to me.”

I have rarely known

Such happiness

As then suffused me.

SHADY DEALINGS

I'm fed up with your constant carping.
Why on earth must you keep harping
On my – what you call – bad behaviour
When we both know that I'm no saviour
Of another person's suffering?
So please desist from muttering
And take control of your own feelings.
Release me from your shady dealings.

I've issues of my own to handle
Compared to which yours hold no candle.
The tenets of my irreligion
Just come back like a homing pigeon,
Telling me to brook no hooey
From somebody so plainly screwy.
So ape the answer of Miss Muffet:
Turn your back and bellow "STUFF IT!"

PALINGENESIS

The day after the night before
Is always one that starts with recrimination
And fights a lonely battle between
Translucence and incomprehension.

The bitter landscape of hungover dawn
Transforms itself into a precious moment
That endures for far too short a time,
But forms a boundary line that stretches
Between primitivism and original sin.

I press my brain into service and ask myself:
Surely there is something that is better than this?

It is a question to which I have yet
To find an answer.

FREE ASSOCIATION

I allow my thoughts to flow
without censoring.

I prefer chaos to order
and change to stasis.

It's the over-thinking
and over-analysing
that would keep me trapped
within the cycle of anxiety.

The lesson to be learned
is to go with the flow;
to release obsessive thoughts;
discard the search for answers.

And simply enjoy life
as a flow of
change, chaos
and beauty.

JUST CROSSED MY MIND

It's the end of the world as we knew it
The values of our past have disappeared
Or possibly they lie simply buried
Beneath the rotting carcasses of those revered.

Where have they gone? Why have they vanished?
Is our guilt that honour passed has been neglected?
The terrifying acts we had thought banished.
The horrors of history now resurrected.

FLOWERS FLOURISH IN COMPOST

I recall that agony of indecision based on fear
The remnants of an upbringing that was so austere.
How was I so naïve as to think myself well-behaved
When conduct such as mine was clearly so depraved
How could I have persisted in a performance so intense
That I might fail to recognise the gravity of my offence?
The efforts to disguise; the failure to expose
The thorn-laden dangers beneath the fragrant rose:
Detritus and damp hidden midst the blossoms and spice
While the stench of deceit haunts the purity of paradise.

WHAT UNITES US, DIVIDES US

Are we more distantly divided
by that which unites us
than by that which keeps us apart?

Does whatever holds us in thrall
exert more influence than
the freedom for which we
and our forebears
for so long fought – and died?

I ask myself these questions
When I am obliged to choose
Between equally undesirable ends.

I seek to balance the scales
that apply to my set of values
derived from the beliefs of my youth,
and modified by my subsequent
study of politics, ethics
and historical morality.

I try to place this in the context
of the slaughter being faced
by my brethren in the European
and the Middle Eastern conflicts.
And all within the over-riding
context of my unalterable belief
that all men are brothers.

My head and heart ache as I seek
the answer that is not there.
Or is it that there is
no simple congruent question?

ASYLUM

They landed on that dark forbidding shore,
Though fugitive, they were at least alive.
They considered what the future days might bring
And were reluctant to think of it.
They fled from terror to deliverance.
But where's emancipation to be found?
Desperation had brought them to this pass
And desperation marked the full extent
Of the bleak promise of their future hopes . . .
Which were to be denied.

MY BODY – MY CHOICE

I recognise the foreboding that appears,
The hesitancy that it heralds in the call,
The inadvertent buttress of the fears,
Reluctance to admit to the outfall.
And, all the while, the heav'nly choir gives voice,
The prayers devout as any that were heard
But yet recalcitrant insistence on pro-choice,
Determined to maintain faith undeterred.

MY FUTURE IS MY PAST

The past is not dead.
It lives in us
As long as we survive
And potentially
it reflects
Our future

Those memories
That we believed
We had forgotten
May be recalled
With little effort
In our dreams.

And when we say
That we can
Forecast an event
From a dream
It may simply be
Historical.

We need however
Avoid the risk
Of stepping on the
Trap and
Mistaking the dream
For the nightmare.

AGAIN ONCE MORE – AND GONE

I see myself at Felinfoel again
The blood still thundering in my fevered brain
Kissing Maggie by Lliedi river
Whose cachu smell will stay with me forever.
My whole life flashing by as I recall
Morning assembly in neuadd yr ysgol.
And voices ringing as we wend our way
Above Swiss Valley at the close of day,
A voice perhaps from a homebound miner;
Did Cwm Rhondda ever sound much finer?

THE ROUTE TO SELF- ENLIGHTENMENT

There is a vast chasm between knowing and believing
And there is no map that reveals the path;
And there is no bridge when you get there;
There is only the spontaneous acceptance
Of your own self-belief and the knowledge
That the path has never failed to emerge.

So hand-in-hand let's start upon the way
And together we will scale those rocky heights
To self-enlightenment and beyond;
Traversing every chasm that appears
On the journey between knowledge and belief
Forever choosing the rarer of the two paths that diverge.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Communication is a messy muddle,
we might as well just smile and touch and cuddle,
avoiding talk, or kick and scream and shout:
no one can really know what we're about.

Whatever I say really presages
the role of media and messages.
It's time perhaps to go into reverse
before this doggerel gets any worse,

displaying double-entendres every line
while honest verse does further intertwine
with such as drivel, dross or detritus
and other forms of mental pharyngitis.

One was taught the simple lesson when at school;
we English must needs learn a single rule
it's thought non grata to be over clever,
do not indulge in bragging, or whatever.

You may believe that two and two make four
but to assert it is to be a bore.
And any other, be he boss or minion
is entitled to a different opinion.

Dreams are the sustenance of fools
And other psychotherapeutic tools
that we employ to get the upper hand
by subtle use of mental contraband.

Time perhaps to take a different tack
and open up a somewhat larger crack
with body language as the main approach
wide enough to drive a horse and coach

You may not know the best of words to use
if you would impact on substance abuse,
thus words alone may not be quite enough
as Italians dumbstruck when in handcuffs.

Speaking loudly can be quite dismaying
if no one hears whatever you are saying.
And your credibility's at stake
if you should find it hard to stay awake.

For, after all, what is communication?
An obvious rhetorical request
which really puts both sides of the equation,
While failing to suggest what is the best.

So let's suppose we're on some lonely plateau,
conversing by a campfire in the night.
And, since we're, more or less, in the same bateau,
we'll sink or swim with metaphoric might

I've raised a glass while thinking of an option
or one that may be worthy of adoption
and as not one has proved to be ideal,
I've discarded all with alcoholic zeal.

IMPENITENCE

If a bad deed must be done
then do it speedily.
Do not dwell upon impiety.
Gloomy penitence
is madness turned upon its head.

Be a sinner redeemed
rather than a saintly man lost.
If you must sin,
beware of the consequences
and live decently with your sins.

THE BROAD'S PRAYER

Our Harlem which art in Manhattan

New York is thy name.

My Will has gone

To earth

In some weird chromatin.

Give me my Fred, my daily Fred,

Without him I have nothing.

And lead me not into New Jersey

For that is where I

Lost Percy.

And forgive me my outgasses

As I forgive Harry

Who passed gas before me.

For then there was Clarence,

And Philip and Godfrey,

And Freddie, dear Freddie.

Aah men!

IF THE CAP FITS

He holds
our future in his hands.
I hope he is aware
of the responsibility
he bears;
of the trust
that we
invest in him.

He holds
all his tomorrows
in his hands.
I hope that he
does not allow
his own security
to blind him
to our needs.

THE QUIXOTIC POLITICIAN

He enjoyed a reputation
Quite merited
For a love of humanity.

He sympathised with
Those poor, those huddled masses
And sought to improve their lot.

He was known, alas,
Within his circle of intimates
For his lack of empathy.

RIDDLE ME THIS

There is always something to be done
and there are always several options.
Here are two of them.

I can take pleasure from the journey
from the here and now
to my final destination.

Or I can postpone my joy
until I am able to view
the completed task in all its glory.

This, then, is the riddle.
Am I task-oriented
or am I process-oriented?

Do I concentrate
on completing the task?
Or do I relax
and enjoy the journey?

THE TOOLS OF A POET

I know of little that can beat
the creative joy of metric feet,
that march in perfect harmony;
proof of Nature's verdancy,

lest it be the joy sublime
attached to an effective rhyme.
These tools a poet carries with him
along with a most cogent rhythm.

And he will be much better for
the use of an apt metaphor.
Then as if to lift his spirit higher,
he might find comfort in satire.

And finally, you might agree,
he'll top it off with imagery.

MISGUIDED SYMPATHY

Why can they not realise
that they do one no favours
in trying to help,
when the better part is to encourage
self-reliance, and reinforce
the stubborn persistence
that keeps old age at bay?

A GARDEN OF LOVE

“What I love so much about you,” she said,
“is that you are a man who shares his feelings,
and that is so rare.”

I guess that must be so,
and yet I have never thought it remarkable.
It has always seemed to me
that if one wishes to gain anything from life,
it is necessary to contribute something.
It is only by opening the secret places
of my soul and my heart
that the poetry of my being can
be danced alive.

It is essential to ask
before others will listen
and it is necessary to open a space
for love to enter,
no matter how timidly.

Love does not flourish
on ill-prepared ground.
Before you plant the seed,
the soil must be readied
and then the garden of love
will yield up its fruits.

THE DEADLY EYE OF THE STORM

I neither know nor care how my beliefs
may change with time.
I merely know that in this instant
all that does concern me
is the satisfaction that I get
in the knowledge that my thoughts are pure.

All my convictions rest on the foundation
of a steadfast belief
that I have fought and maintain
a lifelong battle against the forces of reaction.
Against the madness that has sought
ever and over and again
to defeat and to destroy
the natural goodness and the virtue
of the human spirit.

My battle nonetheless remains unfulfilled
while the madmen
and their female counterparts
continue to snuff out the light
of humanity's right to freedom.

I shall continue to rage
against the encroachment of my own demise
while civilization's death-inviting acts
are laid clearly at the doors
of those several megalomaniacs.

SOLACE

I can sympathize with pain but not with pleasure.
There are those who prefer suffering to sympathy;
Who would exchange solace for sensuality.
It is not my wish to offer them a choice

I seek to bring you comfort;
To bring you to a resting place.
But will I bring solace to myself?
Will I find a refuge?

And if not me, then who?
And if not here, then where?
And if not now, then when?
This is no recipe for scant solace.

HARMONY OR CACOPHANY

She played on the strings of my heart.

Was it a melody?

Did it harmonise?

Was it sensual or sensuous?

Who can say; but at the end of the day

It was naught but a vast discord.

THE CLOTH OF DESTINY

Of such strange things do we weave the cloth of destiny
With threads drawn from the past,
And motes retrieved from the dust
Of passions restored inexorably.

We can be trapped inside the weird design,
Spun from the fabric's immateriality
And fate's impartiality
Through which life's woof and warp entwine.

Perhaps it is less destiny than destination;
Less how the cookie crumbles,
More how the footfall stumbles.
A matter of interpretation.

But call it kismet; call it serendipity;
Call it the fickle finger of fate,
Or whatever else might seem to coruscate
The shining stone of consanguinity.

One thing we know that cannot be denied
The vicissitudes of life may always be obscene
And incapable of cure by any known vaccine,
But the cloth they weave may well be sanctified.

I SING THE SONG PRIMEVAL

I sing the song of my heart.
I am a lyricist of the basic emotions.
My sense of unease and disquiet
Is more greatly provoked
By arrogance
Than it is by ignorance.
The failure of a Corbyn
To acknowledge an evident wrong
Is more distressing to me
Than the flaunting of another's
Outmoded song.

And justified is such disquiet
As statesmen nowadays put on their masks
To disguise a rapacious fallibility;
Seeking to avoid the brush
That tars the misery and suffering
Arising from their vagrant misbehaviour.

The murders – and there cannot be
A word other than this –
That seeks to hide and not betray
The blatant actions in the past
Of such as Castlereagh.

Where have they gone?
Where are they now
The ghosts of yesteryear?
The Bevans, Churchills, Laskis,
And all that motley crew
Whose politics we might abhor,
But never doubt their honour.
The memories of such as they
Pursue me down the years
And, through the anguish they provoke,
Exacerbate my fears.

THE BLEAK PASSAGE OF SEASONS

I could construct a journal to describe
The bitter memories of times now gone,
Those several acts for which I would atone
And they would merely serve to circumscribe
Through the parched Summer that I now must face
The recollection of so very little
Love that came so fine and turned so brittle,
With Autumn's dearth to add to my disgrace.

Too great a time has passed since I was born
With far too many trials that never wane
And so much loss that chills both heart and brain,
To leave me feeling silently forlorn.
Yet I may hope that I will know again
Rebirth that Spring rekindles in my frame
And sweetens with no taste of aspartame,
Nor any ling'ring chill of Winter's reign.

REFLUX

These matters that appear to plague us,
and vaguely stimulate my vagus
become more wearisome as time grows less
and hasten ills, but in the process
strengthen my resilience
and endow such a brilliance
as Milton with his fading sight
might have greeted with delight.

MEMORIES OF SKYROS

Sometimes I close my eyes
and allow myself
to be carried back
to those tranquil
and benign days
on Skyros.

And I can draw a deep breath
and recapture the scent
of chamomile filling the air
as I walked through the fields
down the hillside to the beach
with my Walkman playing in my ear,
the strains of Delius and Brahms
recaptured as easily
as the scents and the sights.

Gone. All are gone.
Along with the friends.
But blessed are
the recaptured memories
and the residual senses.

THE ILLUSION OF EXISTENCE

Americans call them heat monkeys:
the illusion of moisture evaporating from the ground.
Carl Sagan wrote about
a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.
I believe that no matter how we identify
those visual illusions,
that haunt our skeptical and nihilistic hypotheses,
the time must inevitably come
for us to succumb to the irrefutable,
and admit there is more in this existence
than we can genuinely comprehend.

COME WITH ME. EXPERIENCES OF AN EVACUEE

“Come with me”.

She crooked her finger.

“Come with me”.

An invitation that I’d never had

and, in my innocence,

I simply did not know how to respond.

“Come with me,”

her tone had suddenly

become quite sharp,

impatient,

glaring at my downcast eyes,

intolerant of my delay.

What do I do?

I elevated my gaze.

What do I do?

A quite unknown experience.

I could not look at her,

my eyes returned to my feet,
my mouth was filled with sawdust,
and in my chest
a palpitation.
A beat, beat, beat
that I was sure
she could hear.

“Did you do this with David?”
I asked.
“He was older than you,”
she said.
“But yes,
we both enjoyed it.”
“I thought so,
when you showed me his letters.”

His writing was
execrable.
But I couldn't think
why else she would
want me to read them.

And then of course
there's the way she sits
in the sofa,
while I'm reading on the floor,
crossing and recrossing
her legs,
letting me see her bloomers.
I always think
one day she won't
be wearing any bloomers.

And finally she changed the game
and upped the stakes
and led me to that hidden place
where, in my adolescence,
I longed to be.

"Come with me,"
she crooked her finger.
"Come with me."

That was the first time.
It was not the last.

BITING ONE'S TONGUE!

I wish that I could take them back,
those words I spoke so hastily.
Such rank impetuosity
ill become one who has sought,
throughout his life, to be perceived
as gracious and forbearing.

How important then to be aware
that words survive in memory
beyond their brief delivery.
The recognition of that truth
would go a long way
towards avoidance of regret.

THE PANDEMIC'S WARNING SHOT

We have our exits and our entrances.
It has been said before.
But in the lifelong scheme of things
The next farewell will likely be our last.
The Earth itself will one day die
And return unto its frozen, lifeless state.
A finality that is perhaps not too far off.
Without a sigh, without a whimper
Even without an ultimate warning blast.
We made our entrance, enjoyed our stay,
Played our part in the performance.
And soon it will be time to say goodbye.
Farewell, adieu, exit left or right.
But leave the stage. Just go!

MY MUSICAL ODYSSEY

A love of music
has enhanced my life.
It has been an extension
and enrichment
of my love of words.
My childhood joy
My adolescent stimulant
My adult rejuvenation
My epitaph.

THE ETERNITY OF WAR

No power had we, nor patience, nor impact.
We fought our wars because we knew not how
To separate the spectre from the fact,
And recognise that what was then is now.

He once was at the very heart of strife
Sullen in the sodden rotting earth
Beside a comrade who had lost his life
Before he had distanced himself from birth.

Describe him as a victim if you must
Who never had a chance to make a clout
Whose motto had been motivate or bust
Before the vengeful spirits found him out.

The battlegrounds have shifted, not the war,
Though names and faces may not be the same.
The enemy however as of yore
Through all eternity still plays the game.

LIFE'S KALEIDESCOPE

I thought I had found the answer.
I lay there looking
at the pattern of experience
that constituted my existence.
The shapes and forms and contours
of all life's weird designs
possessed the superficiality
of a patchwork quilt.
Then all at once the patterns seem
to merge into one shape
and the overall effect
is to threaten my identity.
The dizziness that conflicts
with my previously hard-won
relaxed resilience
is bewildering.
What is the answer? I ask myself.
How can I comprehend?
And then I find the right reframe:
"What is the question?"

THE SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION

(dedicated to His Disgrace the Czar of Russia)

You do not hesitate to mask your shame,
Invoking tyrants in whose odious name
Your falsely-called special operation
For illegitimate annexation
Knows no bounds in its illicit manner
Of using mercenaries and their banner:
Those convicts from your prison cells excrete,
Your stock of roubles further to deplete;
By wielding their metaphorical swords
To the strains of grim Wagnerian chords.
Rivers of blood are there, and mounds of slain;
An age-long progress lost in one campaign
Pressing onward, giving pause, pushing back,
Each shattered city reeling from attack,
Whose few remaining walls viewed from afar
Rise up in accusation . . . such is War.

The Godless leader, like the Czars of past
Has, over all, his ghastly shadow cast.
The countryside by rusting tanks defaced;
Detritus of their tracks laid battle-waste,
While pressing onward, yard by yard, they broke
Through sulph'rous atmosphere and choking smoke;
And slaughtered regiments the spaces fill
Where innocent civilian blood does spill.
What dreams of glory set you on that throne
And gave you fancied notions that you own
A divine right to territory lost
By others in their private holocaust?
Thus then shall be your station dearly earned
A multitude of homes to ashes turned,
An obscene carnage from but one campaign.
And lives of thousands sacrificed in vain.

[Inspired by Joseph Addison's THE CAMPAIGN (1704)
a poem dedicated to His Grace the Duke of Marlborough].

TRIVIA

ADVICE TO OUR (SOI-DISANT) LEADERS

If you would dispel all doubts
Discard those leveraged buyouts.
Swings and roundabouts
Are more desirable than
Stings and gadabouts.

CHIVALRY

You may think it passé
You may find it fun
A gentleman should always
Tip his chapeau to a lady,
Even when he isn't wearing one.

CRI DE COEUR

Some people's problems are greeted with sympathy
Other people's concerns are greeted with empathy
Why are my issues always defeated by apathy?

A POETIC SEARCH

I love the word malodorous
And wish that I could find
A genuinely unforced rhyme
To elevate my mind.

HARVEST OF HATRED

You who showed us how to hate
Will reap the harvest you have sown.
The very creed that sealed your fate
Will be inscribed on your tombstone.

MISDIRECTED SYMPATHY

Why can they not realise
That they do us no favours
in trying to help,
when the better part is to encourage
self-reliance and reinforce
the stubborn persistence
that keeps old age at bay.

POLITICS FROM THE BACK PASSAGE

Gone are the days when madness was confined
To evil-minded statesmen undermined
By misanthropic dupes of humankind
Content to leave unrefined
The sounds emanating from a taut behind.

WANTS AND NEEDS

When will I learn that
What I want
Is not to be confused
With all I need?
When will I learn that
All I need
Or all I believe I need
I already have?

A POLITICAL PLAINT

How pitiful to have a grievance
Based on an obvious malfeasance.

AMBIGUITY

I love the delicious ambiguity
Contained in the suggestion
That I might exist in perpetuity.

SUSURRATION

I am fascinated less
By the sound of silence
Than by the sound of sibilance.

CRUSTY ODE

Alas the world's in such a mess
And honour simply does regress.
Sadly too, I must confess,
We value honour less and less.

SHE WHO IS NOT TO BE TRUSTED

Competing egos and malicious rumour;
Wherever she goes, seek the tumour.

POETIC EXERCISE

Walking to the steady beat
Of entrancing metric feet,
Taking care to keep up with 'em
Is best done to a throbbing rhythm.
While marching on the spot in time
Is quite as sublime as a rhyme.
Engaging in a tug-of-war
Is perfect as a metaphor.
And what on earth is sweeter
Than a Sapphic pentameter?

SHE PLAYED ON MY HEARTSTRINGS

She played on the strings of my heart.
Was it a melody?
Did it harmonise?
Was it sensual or sensuous?
Who can say?
But at the end of the day
It was naught but a vast discord.

ONE DIET TOO MANY

I mournfully gaze through margarine-coloured eyes

And balefully view the tangerine skies

In surprise.

Too long have desiccated coconut eyes

Of climate change resembled French fries

In disguise

While to gluttonise the radish hearted guise

Of politicians' fragrantly-flavoured lies

I despise.

And to simply revise and gourmandise

A diet of promises dispensed crabwise

Is unwise.

DISTURBED SLEEP

There's something so nefarious

As to waken in the dead of night

When the silence is so absolute

And the world feels mummified.

HAIKUS AND SENRYUS

Forget world order
My bag's word order, cos I'm
A syntactician.

ooo OOO ooo

Proactivity
May be reactivity
In bizarre disguise

ooo OOO ooo

The older I get,
The more my astonishment
At how young I act.

ooo OOO ooo

Craft of the haiku
Resembles the art of life:
Knowing when to stop.

Who's the aggressor?
As opposed to the victim?
It's irrelevant.

ooo OOO ooo

In the war of words,
Given today's combatants
There are no winners

ooo OOO ooo

A tree without leaves
A nightingale without song
A life lacking love.

ooo OOO ooo

Dispense facts fairly
Refrain from embellishment.
The truth should suffice.

Trust integrity
Failure to do what is right
Is the greater wrong.

ooo OOO ooo

When writing's improved
Is it plagiarism
Or paraphrasing?

ooo OOO ooo

Keep your mind active
By exercising your brain.
You hold age at bay.

ooo OOO ooo

Who is the greater,
The original artist
Or the parodist?

**APHORISMS, EPIGRAMS
AND MANTRAS**

EPIGRAM ON POETRY

I believe the main distinction between the poet
and the writer of verse is the ability of the former
always to choose the right word.

OCCAM'S RAZOR REVERSED

It is easier sometimes to search
for a more complicated explanation
than to accept a simple truth.

CONUNDRUM

I waited too long for an answer
Before it occurred to me
That maybe I had
Asked the wrong question

OBSERVATION

It is better to feel part of an experience
rather than a mere observer;
It is better to live through something
than outside something.

A PASSING THOUGHT

If you arm yourself with a screwdriver
It's surprising how many
Loose screws you will encounter.

STICK IT TO THEM

If you can't find a solution
Find someone to blame
It's almost as satisfying.

WAR MANTRA

To kill the weed
One must locate the root
The cost of victory
Needs be absolute.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Words are not things
Words are the symbols for thing;
Problems arise when we start confusing
The symbols with the things.

APHORISM ON POETRY

A poem is a form of expression

Which patterns a thought

To naked emotion

And then clothes it with words.

THINK!

Even a mirror reflects before projecting an image.

ZEN RIDDLE 1

I believe I do not believe.

I doubt but I have no doubt.

ZEN RIDDLE 2

“What is the answer?”

“What is the question?”

“I have asked you the question.”

“I have given you the answer.”

Sometimes life's greatest lessons come from life's most unexpected experiences.

All feedback (by definition) is positive. The only feedback that might be described as negative is NO FEEDBACK.

If you're unhappy with your conclusions, check your assumptions.

In my entire life, I can think of only one person who really knew me. And I'm not entirely sure about him.

When you approach the crossroads of life look both ways.

Ignorance is not a sin it is simply a state of not-knowing.

Always ask yourself "Can I do this better?"

No one can insult you if you respect yourself.

The past is a mirror to the future from which the glass has been removed.

Originality is anticipated plagiarism.

The greater fool is the one who produces aphorisms and then believes what they read.

The law of averages guarantees that even a politician may sometimes be right.

A half-truth is more insidious than an outright lie.

Stop thinking of yourself solely as the victim.
Recognise that you may also be the transgressor.

Humility is an exaggerated virtue.

Prose demands detachment.
Poetry is most authentic when it is subjective.

Burnout is the price you pay when your brain ignores the
messages your body feeds your compulsive need to work
harder.

If I look miserable, I will feel miserable.
If I feel miserable, I will look miserable.

I used to hate the thorns on my rose bush,
Then I discovered a thorn bush that bore roses.

Some are critics, others mere iconoclasts.

Given the choice between madness and sanity, the sanest option is to choose madness.

I would like the ship of my dreams to sail under full canvas.

THE POET

The heat of his emotions
Melts the rawness of his words.

A ZEN THOUGHT

Whenever you disabuse yourself of whatever is not,
whatever is left . . . is.

STAND-UP COMEDY

Laugh?

I thought they'd never start!

And then it began

At first a steady rumble,

And then awareness grew

And I realized

It was my stomach.

Laugh?

I thought I'd never stop!

ENIGMA

This is a puzzle that has me baffled

The answer's one I simply cannot see;

If I could choose to become someone else,

Who might choose to become me?

POSTSCRIPT

A BACKWARD GLANCE AT 2023

SOME LAST-MINUTE THOUGHTS

OUR POLITICAL ETHICAL BALLAST

“We are sailing without ethical ballast” said Rubashev in *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler, 1940. Any ship without proper ballast loses control, say I, to say nothing of an absence of crew, steering, rudder and effective leadership.

TREATMENT OF THE BOAT PEOPLE

Acts of atrocious aqueous aggression.

CORONAVIRAL CLEANSING ADAPTED

To remove yourself from a stifling relationship, I suggest the following prescription borrowed from Covid-19:

Stock up on a fortnight’s supplies and put yourself into self-isolation.

A REFLECTION ON THE COVID-19 ENQUIRY

They sacrificed honesty and trust on the altar of expediency.

CULLING

The knee-jerk reaction that would cull dogs whose breed has not been properly identified, is typical of politicians who are quick to make political capital out of shocking incidents.

Much more appropriate perhaps would be to cull some of the owners. (Or even, dare I suggest, some of the politicians.)

DEMOCRACY

The simplest definition of democracy is probably the literal translation from the original Greek: “rule by the people”.

My favourite variant on this remains the Churchillian epigram that it is “the worst system of government in the world, except the others”.

Giving the lie to both these statements, one has only to examine the recent record of democracy in action in the two major democracies of the western world, separated by the Atlantic Ocean.

I am reminded of a third definition that has long pleased me by its simple apparent truth:

“Democracy is the system of government that ensures the people get what they deserve.”

CLICHÉS

A cliché may be an excellent tool. Indeed, were it not, it would probably never have become a cliché. However, as with most tools, excessive use will result in bluntness and loss of effectiveness. So shun overindulgence!

A DOG’S DINNER

Gaza has for decades been the pimple on Israel’s backside. Now it has “moral justification” on its side to excise rather than relieve the symptoms. It is a device that was used most effectively in Golan and the West Bank. Why expect a far-right leader such as Netanyahu to resist such a tempting opportunity?

HARVEST OF HATRED

You who showed us how to hate
Will reap the harvest you have sown.
The very creed that sealed your fate
Will be inscribed on your tombstone.

SOMEWHAT ABSTRUSE PERHAPS

When anyone refers to my age, I simply remind them we are sharing the same moment. “At this moment in time, we are the same age.”

IT'S SO SAD

What a pity that so many with so little to say feel obliged to say it!

LEVELLING UP

This is not the same as being on the level.

CONSIDERATIONS OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE?

To soil the pasture

Adumbrate the sky

And nebulize the sea.

YIDDISH MAXIM TRANSLATED

Man plans; God laughs!

PROSE VERSUS POETRY

Prose demands detachment. It is best served by distancing oneself from one's subject. Poetry, happily, does not. It is most authentic when it is subjective.

IDLE THOUGHTS RE BORIS JOHNSON (OR POSSIBLY DONALD TRUMP)

I take full responsibility for my actions – except those that are the fault of someone else.

Seeking a solution is too arduous. Much simpler is to find someone to blame.

Finding someone to blame is almost as good as finding a cure.

So who can I blame for our problems? Just give me a minute . . . I'll think of someone.

POLITICAL NECESSITY

There are times when opinions may be more momentous than facts.

HAVING HAD A RECENT BLOOD TEST

I must admit it means a lot to me
that the fantastic British N.H.S.
is able to secure me a phlebotomy
without delay or even an excess
of prayer to the blessed Trinity
for any loss of my sanguinity.

RANDOM THOUGHTS ON LITERATURE

Currently reading (re-reading) those books on my home library shelves devoted to literary criticism and *belles lettres*, the thought occurred to me that my taste in literature has always exceeded Catholicism and bordered on profligacy.

Then followed the further thought that I am more entertained by the ideas expressed by authors than the route they may have chosen to arrive at those ideas.

Too many literary critics, I find, choose form over content.

Far from pride or satisfaction at an apparently considerable body of work, there lurks the suspicion that it conceals more an absence of that one fulfilling item of perfection than it reveals.

I am reminded of Scarlet O'Hara's final thoughts that conclude Margaret Mitchell's monumental *Gone With the Wind*.

CYNICISM

I'm very proud of my modesty. Humility may not be a virtue, but if it is then it is a very exaggerated virtue. Moralising about oneself is something to be abhorred.

I was born wise and have spent the better part of a century trying to constrain buffoonery

CLIENT-CENTRED CONUNDRUM

Client: Do you agree with me?

Counsellor: No.

Client: Oh . . . you don't think I'm right?

Counsellor: Oh yes, you are right.

Client: But you don't agree with me?

Counsellor: No.

Client: But that makes no sense.

Counsellor: You are right.

Client: But we can't both be right?

Counsellor: You are right.

Client: So you agree with me?

Counsellor: No.

Client: But you said it's right.

Counsellor: I said you were right.

THEY CALL IT PHILOSOPHY

“Are you an existentialist? Do you believe that existence precedes essence?”

“I'm a nonsensialist. I believe that nonsense precedes them both!”

THOUGHTS ON UNITY

The need for a total united front in the face of the Ukrainian aggression has thrown up into vast relief the unconsidered dangers that are now demonstrated by our exit from the EU.

WHAT PRICE HUMANITY

The UK Government's responses to anything that involves humanitarianism reveals a total lack of humanity.

Any organisation mirrors its leader, and in the absence of all evidence of humanity such as the failure to admit an Afghan who fought for Britain as a genuine immigrant, Rishi Sunak has to be held to account. Since taking on the mantle of Prime Minister he has demonstrated nothing but weakness.

He has been nobly supported by his weak-kneed Cabinet members.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2024

CONSIDER THE LILIES

I am of less significance than a flower in a field,
Though the fairness of the field itself cannot be denied.
Within my heart and world a deeper beauty lies concealed,
A burnished loveliness that is forever sanctified.

The inner elegance that has been nourished from the start.
Cherished and abraded through vicissitudes of life,
Whilst aware of sullen hypocrites tearing me apart
And the sodden field displaying rank purple loosestrife.

How long, how long must this despairing inquiry persist,
As I journey far from childhood's sacred innocence?
Do I continue to ignore the words of my theosophist
And the repeated abjuration of his immanence?

The flowers of my heart are regularly ploughed under,
with no consideration for the promise that they bear.
In equal vein my waning dreams are slit asunder
As easily as if they are composed of maidenhair.

My shattered world is stripped around me leaf by leaf,
As Nature blends its ways as casually as those of men
Imposing itself in subtle counterpoint as leitmotif
Along the blossomed path that leads to a known antigen.

At last, at last I need confusedly to ask the magus
How and where am I to find the true interpretation
Of these botanical inferences that come to plague us,
Before being constricted in mental constipation?

And since this mere frivolity may induce a cavil
That all flesh is grass in manner metaphorical,
Let's elevate these questions to a higher level,
Revealing the buried fabric allegorical.

The scriptures tell us that both man and grass inevitably
wither,
And it is natural that as the flowers they fall away.
More important though is how myself and every other
May blossom and bloom in loveliness until that final day.

BONNE ANNÉE À TOU(TE)S!

And so the time has come to bid farewell
To twenty-twenty-three and what befell
Our world in every single continent
On which disaster and despair were rent
By evil-hearted tyrants whose sole desire
It seems: an ever-bigger funeral pyre.

On one last positively happy note
I have at least succeeded to devote
My time and actions so as to achieve
The resolutions of last new year's eve;
And therefore I inform you once again:
I have made none that I need to maintain.

So, with that personally selfish tone,
Enduring all that Nature may have thrown,
I raise my glass of solitary cheer
And toast the brightest spot of the New Year:
To that fine group that lightens up my dark
On weekly walks in Beckenham Place Park.





