

Songs of Another Age

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2024

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Saeby Haiku Diary

Saturday, 5th July 2014

There's chess on the Square;
the newcomer starts with a
sweet back-row checkmate.

Sunday, 6th July 2014

Crowds round the harbour
silently appreciate
the red trumpeter.

Wednesday, 9th July 2014

On his bike to work
the red trumpeter almost
runs into my dog.

Friday, 11th July 2014

The helicopter
prepares for take-off. My dog
sits a long way off.

Saturday, 12th July 2014

The cyclist pretends
she isn't totally pickled,
unsuccessfully.

Sunday, 13th July 2014



Sky, sea, seagulls, shore,
sea rocket, grass – a furlong
from our new front door.

Thursday, 17th July 2014

My dog suddenly
scrambles backwards. There it is –
a green grasshopper.

Tuesday, 22nd July 2014



Escaping the heat,
I dwell in the stillness of
gurgling waters.

Saturday, 1st November 2014



The scrawny toadstool
stands at the edge of the world,
a tower of strength.

Tuesday, 4th November 2014

A cabbie toots at
a cyclist, who takes his hands
out of his pockets.

Sunday, 25th January 2015



A house under snow
makes a beautiful picture –
the model village.

Thursday, 14th May 2015

The seaside circus
camper says: “It’s beautiful!
Such a lucky spot.”

Saturday, 4th July 2015

Winding her way through
the tall grass in the meadow,
my dog sneezes thrice.

Tuesday, 20th September 2016

Leaves spin from the tree
to the ground, transcend into
22 sparrows.

Four Letters

i) Oxygen, Oxygen

Oxygen, oxygen,
you dreamed up porridge in
casseroles made without lead.
Oxygen, oxygen,
spirit of origin,
you're in the earth that I tread.

Oxygen, oxygen,
you're taken hostage in
hydrogen, carbon and zinc.
Oxygen, oxygen,
essence of frosted gin,
you're in the water I drink.

Oxygen, oxygen,
you fry my sausage in
style so it's ready to eat.
Oxygen, oxygen,
when winter locks us in,
you're in the fire that gives heat.

Oxygen, oxygen,
you can be toxic in
all the bad stuff I bequeath.
Oxygen, oxygen,
bless your white socks again,
you're in the air that I breathe.

Oxygen, oxygen,
you are encouragin'
when I lie ill in my bed.
Oxygen, oxygen,
make this poor ostrich in
fear a wild tiger instead.

ii) *Internal Memo*

I've hardly begun to make good-natured fun
of the vegetable Scots call the neep,
when an errant green pea I've ingested at tea
has put paid to postprandial sleep.
Too tiny to chew, it refused to go through
my oesophagus, shot up my nose,
an', just my bad luck, it's now hopelessly stuck.
I resolve to eat fewer of those.

Unaware of one more that's adrift on the floor,
I demolish it under my heel,
inadvertently slip, an' relinquish my grip
on the plate that I've used for my meal.
I land on my back with a terrible thwack,
an' – hey presto! – the force of my fall
in a twinkle's expelled the green pea I've withheld.
Now it's hanging to dry on the wall.

As I lie there appalled at the way I've been mauled
by a couple of pesky green peas,
I'm inclined to allege that this dastardly veg
has no business outside the deep freeze.
In a world where it's rude just to shovel your food
on your fork with the prongs pointing up,
eating peas takes an age. Am I crazy to rage
when my tea's all but cold in my cup?

If a pea goes astray from the table, okay,
you can look for it under your feet.
But it's worse when you're fed mushy peas ill in bed:
the tattoo they designed on my sheet
is a nauseous mess. I'm relieved to confess
I look forward to throwing it out.
I admit my mistake. From tomorrow I'll bake
thin-sliced turnip to go with my trout.

iii) Letter to an Employee

The Board regrets to have to say your job has disappeared.
We've looked at your credentials; it's exactly as we feared.
You've lived too long in Denmark to be useful to us here,
and Danish operations will be closing down next year.

You might have heard this piece of news already in the press.
If that's the case, we hope it hasn't caused undue distress.
We had to make it public while the Chairman was at home.
You know how much he likes to spend the winter months in Rome.

It's partly rising interest rates and partly that the pound
has hit the roof, while Danish kroner haven't come around.
We feel we haven't any choice. At times one must be hard.
And that is why we're cancelling your business credit card.

The Board is full of gratitude for everything you've done.
And looking back, we have to say you've had a decent run.
If you should find yourself in need of anything at all,
we'll do our best to help you. Please don't hesitate to call.

iv) Collect Call

I gather you're quite the collector, John D.
You won't mind if I tell you you're very like me.
Is it matchboxes? Postage stamps? Football cards? Conkers?
An' do some people think you're a little bit bonkers?
You should ignore them, Jack. Just trust yourself.
It's you who decides what to put on your shelf.
An' d'you know what I think? I think they're just jealous
coz we've found a mission in life, an' we're zealous.

All right then, John D., it's your turn to ask
what your uncle's been given as *his* special task.
*Well, I've got this whole heap of around 60,000
extremely old letters I carefully browse and
arrange as I please. An' then there's the part
where I put them to music an' learn them by heart.*
"But where did they come from?" I hear you exclaim.
From wherever it was that the alphabet came.

My Homies

i) The Bad Dancer

Left alone, I often danced,
so they sent me to a dancing school.
“He’s no good at dancing,” they were told,
and that was the end of dancing school for me.
But still, when left alone, I often dance.

ii) For Paul Stevens

It’s no surprise, yet still a shock
that you, my friend, have passed away.
You taught me how to turn the clock
around: each night it’s someone’s day.

iii) The Wee Wifie

Now in her eleventh lustre,
she’s still nippy with a duster.
When she goes to town, I trust her.
All in all she passes muster.

iv) Valentine

You let me moan an’ let off steam;
you know my heart is gold.
You never ask me where I’ve been;
perhaps you’ll soon be told.
You’re sweet an’ understanding, an’
you seldom moan at me.
You give me space; you know I can
be true; you set me free.

My Heroes

i) Erato in the Wings

for Jayne Osborn

Come join us on our roundabout.
No more dread an' no more doubt.
Your average critter might
have little left to write
an' every reason to refrain.
The only fee is Poetry.
The muse we choose
comes in the warm an' winning form of Jayne.

Why did I schedule seven shows
alone at St John's? Heaven knows.
While I was still in bed
pretending to be dead,
the cavalry was on the train
to Waverley, thus saving me.
The star by far
came in the warm an' winning form of Jayne.

*Regardless of why inspiration runs dry,
no matter what Nemesis brings,
I'll still have the friend I met at the Deep End.
There'll always be Erato in the wings,
Erato waiting in the wings,
Erato in the wings.
There'll always be Erato in the wings.*

She carried me that afternoon
from hateful Hades to the moon.
She gave me so much space
things all fell into place.
An' then she let me pick her brain,
a pantomime of rant an' rhyme.
In short, support
came in the warm an' winning form of Jayne.

*Regardless of why consternation runs high,
no matter what Nemesis brings,
I'll still have a friend on whom I can depend.
There'll always be Erato in the wings,
Erato waiting in the wings,
Erato in the wings.
There'll always be Erato in the wings.*

The best advice she gave me was
to wink at my mistakes because
the audience was blind
to what I had in mind.
This tactic helped to lift the strain.
An' even though I'd Steve & co.,
my chief relief
came in the warm an' winning form of Jayne.

*Regardless of why affirmation runs shy,
no matter what Nemesis brings,
I'll still have this friend whose poem I, D., penned.
There'll always be Erato in the wings,
Erato waiting in the wings,
Erato in the wings.
There'll always be Erato in the wings.*

Come join us on our roundabout.
No more dread an' no more doubt.
Your average critter might
have little left to write
an' every reason to refrain.
The only fee is Poetry.
The muse we choose
comes in the warm an' winning form of Jayne.

ii) Thin Rags Seek Love

I'm broke an' I'm stuck in London. I've gone busking every day
at a pitch outside Embankment where I book a spot. I play
a rash of tunes for a fiver on my cheap Chinese trombone
an' my silver harp in search of grace, an angel all alone.

Perhaps I'll go see Papsie: "Dad, can you make me an advance?
I want to travel in Italy. Please give me one last chance!
Busk in Venice an' Perugia, trace the art of love in Rome.
I could stumble on the perfect place to turn into a home."

*I've got to do something amazing or die.
I will defy death with my secret eye.
Hung up on this branch of my family tree,
it's easy to see I need to break free.*

*Though the enemy are many, an' work hand in glove,
they'll never be as clever coz thin rags seek love.*

I haven't busked in thirty years. It's a blow that Papsie's dead,
but to some extent he's still alive as part of me instead.
Who better to sing my songs with me on my Chinese guitar
an' my silver harp in search of grace, an angel from afar.

*I've got to do something amazing or die.
I will defy death with my secret eye.
Hung up on this branch of my family tree,
it's easy to see I need to break free.*

*Though the enemy are many, an' they're hand in glove,
they'll never be as clever coz thin rags seek love.*

iii) *The Stuff of Dreams*

Just a mo, I'll go an' fetch my coat.
Some nice fresh air might be the antidote
to all the flak I hear
directed at my friend, Samir,
who reached the west aboard a rubber boat.
If only half the nation could agree
dissent is not a crime,
we'd telegraph the notion that we're free
throughout the rest of time.

At twenty-two I also flew away.
I felt like someone's parrot on display.
Fed up with being sent,
I took my coat, an' off I went,
not worried lest there'd be a price to pay.
A gin-soaked sleuth could accurately trace
my footsteps in my prime,
but in my youth I sacrificed my place
to make the best of time.

*I'll stay true to my decision,
not be shy of a collision,
keep my cool if someone calls me scruff.
I'm relying on a vision
that's immune to their derision.
Let them try to call my bluff.
Doesn't matter if they treat me rough.
The stuff of dreams has made me tough.
To want to change the world is not enough.*

One afternoon I packed my street trombone
an' wandered off to meet the great unknown.
I had a good disguise,
this silly solo enterprise,
but my true quest was not to be alone.
An', quite by chance, there's Venus on the bus.
No need for pantomime.
A single glance between the two of us
would stand the test of time.

*I'll stay true to my decision,
not be shy of a collision,
keep my cool if someone calls me scruff.
I'm relying on a vision
that's immune to their derision.
Let them try to call my bluff.
Doesn't matter if they treat me rough.
The stuff of dreams has made me tough.
To want to change the world is not enough.*

iv) Soon To Be Sixty

I discover a favourite writer
with every new decade that turns.
At ten I would gladly recite a
“Some hae meat...” by Rabbie Burns.

At twenty Bob Dylan disarmed me
with “Tangled Up in Blue”.
“Simple Twist of Fate” really charmed me.
“You’re a Big Girl Now” turned the screw.

At thirty I chanced on a master,
an Orcadian, George Mackay Brown.
He mingled success with disaster.
He knew that the king was a clown.

At forty I heard Kenneth Steven
bring a Christmas Day in at Dunkeld
with a story he seemed to believe in
of a baby that he almost held.

At fifty I witnessed Ben Okri
in Edinburgh at the Book Fair.
Perhaps he’ll be on at Pitlochry
one of these days while I’m there.

I’m due to hit sixty next summer.
Whose talent will thicken the plot?
A poet, a singer, a strummer?
I love all of these guys a lot.

Four Celebrations of Barbie



18 February 2024

50th

Best wishes on your Birthday,
Barbie, *never* Barbara Anne!
Who knows, the Belle of Perth may
win the Golden Palm at Cannes,
an' then we'll have another
lass besides Jane Campion.
According to your brother,
you're already quite a champion.

You've always been inventive
– you insist on having fun –
an' yet you're still attentive
to the needs of everyone.
You've never lacked incentive
to go out an' get things done.



Wedding on the Shore

They didn't need a preacher,
no, they didn't need a kirk.
They didn't need a teacher
to tell them what would work.
They threw this great big party
aback of Ballimore.
Our Jeremy and Barbie
were married on the shore.

The bride arrived stage centre
and met the leading man.
Belinda was their mentor,
and the nuptials began.
As clouds collected darkly,
we witnessed deep rapport.
Our Jeremy and Barbie
were married on the shore.

We luckily found refuge
ahead of heavy rain.
It turned into a deluge.
We toasted with champagne.
The speeches simply charmed me,
and the Ceilidh filled the floor.
Our Jeremy and Barbie
were married on the shore.

The kitchen crew were gracious.
Phoebe keenly shone her light.
We somehow stayed vivacious
till late into the night.
Next day it was so balmy
we knocked on heaven's door.
Our Jeremy and Barbie
were married on the shore.

With coffee served by Harry
from his Maclaurin's bar,
the aunt he'd just seen marry
had her surname on his car.
And, as she hinted smartly,
it's what it was before
our Jeremy and Barbie
were married on the shore.

So now I'm all excited
about them coming here.
They're openly invited
at any time of year.
We'll gaze on fields of barley,
then we'll go out and explore.
Our Jeremy and Barbie
were married on the shore.

Sweet Suzanne

On the beach one night in Greece
I met an Ozzie man,
an' just to please my sis an' me,
he sang a sweet "Suzanne".
An' he opened a door,
an' I saw I'd play guitar.

*Sweet Suzanne,
I'm your man.
I don't need
no other plan.*

Since that day I've learnt to play
a pretty mean guitar.
I think the sun shines out my bum.
I'm such a superstar.
An' who could ever deny
my sister is a big star too?

*Sweet Suzanne,
I'm your man.
I don't need
no other plan.*

Sweet Sixty

Now that you're sixty,
here's some advice
from someone who's been there
an' thought it was nice.
Embrace your retirement,
lay down your load,
an' leave all that stress
by the side of the road.

You'll thank yourself for it,
an' then you'll thank me
for helping you out
an' for making you see
it's time to be happy
like never before.
You'll be basking in leisure.
An' who could want more?

My Lessons

i) Catchin Yer Eye

after Sappho an' Catullus

How the fuck kin anyone dae whit he dis?
Jesus wept! The divil disguised, ah'll wager.
Seated facin you, fur the umpteenth time he
watches an' hears ye

laughin sweetly. Ahd iv been left a total
fuckin zombie. Catchin yer eye, ah cannae
breathe; ah jist, like, flounder, a fish oan land, an',
gaspin fur watter,

cannae speak. A tinglin flame then trickles
doon ma limbs. There's suddenly this crescendo
buzz ae bagpipe drones in ma ears, an' ma eyes are
plunged intae darkness.

Icy avalanches ae sweat run doon me.
Noo ahm shakin badly. Ah turn a paler
green than grass an' seem tae hiv only cheatit
death by a whisker.

ii) On Paper

According to a recent test
the Danes are those who like life best;
without a doubt they're happiest,
 on paper.

But did they ask the prostitute,
or him next door with just one foot?
Or did they think the new recruit
 was safer?

And who's to say they aren't all mad?
Perhaps their "happy" means "not sad"
and many Danes just say they're glad
 routinely,
while folks from other countries think
they're blue unless they're in the pink.
Perhaps in Danish "mope" means "stink
 obscenely".

To judge by rates of suicide
there's not much ground for Danish pride;
and here it's certain no one lied
 about it.

And somewhere else I've also read
that Prozac's selling like hot bread.
So are they happy like they said?
 I doubt it.

iii) Evolution

Chimp,
 champ,
 chump.

iv) The Poetry of Chess

Where I used to write poetry, now I play chess,
 but the difference is hardly resounding;
as a rule I end up in a horrible mess,
 with my ego receiving a pounding.
So why, you might ask, am I writing some verse?
 I intend it to be prophylactic.
Quite resigned to my fate, I've no need to rehearse
 an excuse for my opening tactic.

The Psychology of Chess

i) Composition

based on something Gary Kasparov once said

Chess is meant to be a game where chance
is never king. But, be that as it may,
one feels quite different sitting down to play.
Of course, it's true I make the pieces dance
the way I want, but now I'm left with so
few choices. Should I castle left or right?
Arts are for farts. I've got to keep things tight.
Where might I land a devastating blow?
Composition brooks no oversight.
Takes, takes, takes. I must be cynical,
place myself in my opponent's shoes,
simultaneously be black and white.
With such a single-minded, clinical
performance, I should win. And then I lose.

ii) Deception

Sergio Negri, "Nabokov looks at chess as deception"

I play the odd game of it, suicide chess.
Think how to lose, and you'll be a success.
A whole new perspective's both healthy and fun,
good chess puzzles those where there's no more than one
combination that works, but the way they turn out
should give us occasion to entertain doubt;
always to question: Might well-trodden ground
contain subtle sequences yet to be found?
A pawn may look weak, but she's only pretending,
certain of strolling towards that transcending
element giggling just round the corner.
Of course, reason says we'd be stupid to scorn her.
Deception is key to both nature and art.
Nabokov thought so. Not bad for a start.

iii) *Competition*

after Richard Fenton

A grandmaster means trouble: he coolly combines
man and machine; in a twinkle he guesses
that you've been dissecting his recent pet lines.
Will he bask in the glow of his well-earned successes?
Take time out to muse? You can bet that he won't.
Back to you, no doubt hellbent on suddenly wrecking
a winning advantage, just praying you don't
move one of your pieces without double-checking.
At heart, it's a matter of pure competition;
chess is no different from snooker or poker.
Will you be able to weigh the position?
Pick a new card, and... by Jove! it's the joker!
A chance in the tiebreak. You hear someone cough,
pocket the black, watch the white go in off.

iv) *Detention*

after Aaron Nimzowitsch

The day will come when it hits you: Tomorrow's
passed already. You'll start sleeping rough,
pawn your possessions, learn a lot of stuff
is nothing but a cache of crazy sorrows,
a token of your imminent decay.
Criminal the way the young aren't told
that they can choose, ridiculous that old
should be the yardstick for the present day.
Be bold and break the mould! Don't be controlled,
kept in detention, singled out for grief,
under the sway of yesterday's mistake.
Lock up your worries, spurn the Greek gift, gold,
and run away to sea! Daring's the chief
key to success. That, and staying awake.

Notes

p.15, “Erato in the Wings”

DGM: “I made the acquaintance of Jayne Osborn at the beginning of 2010 when she joined Eratosphere, an online poetry community set up and generously run by Alex Pepple of the Able Muse Press. I myself joined in August 2005. It has benefitted me enormously. And not just in the quality and quantity of my verse. I have learnt a lot that I have subsequently used in my teaching and prose writing. I have also heard about publishing opportunities and made the acquaintance of many other poets, some in person. Being part of a community of poets was something I’d previously lacked, mainly because I had chosen to settle abroad.

Eratosphere is not a back-slapping forum, and beginners are discouraged from posting poems. There are two boards for workshopping metrical poetry. The regular one is called Metrical Poetry, while poems posted at the Deep End ‘should be well developed, not an early draft’, and commenters there are encouraged to remove their kid gloves.

I met Jayne in person when she came to my first two shows for The Festival of Spirituality and Peace in Edinburgh in early August 2012. (The Festival changed its name to Just Festival the year after.) After a poor preview performance in St John’s Church at lunchtime, she helped me prepare for the late afternoon concert in the Chapel, my first ticketed show ever. Thanks to her, I was in a good state of mind when the curtain went up. Another poet from Eratosphere I hadn’t previously met, Nigel Mace, was there with his wife, the actor and playwright, Vanessa Rosenthal. And at the last moment, unannounced, my cousin Steve turned up along with his wife, Helen, and their son, Ben. My small, supportive audience lifted me, and I was happy with how it went. Steve made a recording.

At the beginning of 2017, a member of Eratosphere, William A. Baurle, was working on a poem in lavish praise of someone. Jayne jokingly remarked that she was waiting for someone to write a poem for her, and I was inspired to compose this piece. It is not only a tribute to her, but also to the muse of lyric poetry, Erato, as well as to Eratosphere itself. Although Eratosphere is usually called the Sphere on the site, another abbreviation for it is Erato, as in the site’s web address. As Jayne was its administrator when this song was composed, the forum is also invoked by the repetend in the verses of the song (‘in the warm and winning form of Jayne’).”

p.17, “Thin Rags Seek Love”

Ben Okri’s piece, “Obsession”, begins: “I’ve got to do something amazing or die.” And it ends: “I will defy death with my secret eyes.” It is the third part of the five-part “Dramatic Moments in the Encounter between Picasso and African Art” in his collection of poetical essays, *A Time for New Dreams* (2011).

DGM: “While performing the song in its early stages, I sang ‘silver’ instead of ‘secret’. This inspired me to use ‘silver’ elsewhere. I then noted that Ben Okri’s parents’ names were Silver and Grace, which prompted me to include his mother’s name as well. I later found an interview with him by Kate Kellaway, where she writes: ‘What Okri loves is his parents’ names together. ... They came from different tribes (Grace from a royal Igbo line, Silver, a democrat, from the Urhobo people). ... He asks: < What is it with all these boundaries? That got cracked before my birth by Mum and Dad.>’

Ben Okri shares his birthday with DGM’s mother, a painter and opera fan. And the names of both DGM’s mother (Anne) and his wife (Ann, a writer he met in Perugia in 1986) mean ‘grace’.

Ben Okri was down and out in London around 1980, five years before DGM was. Ben describes this period as ‘very, very important’ to his work. It was for DGM too. It was here he began to write poems and songs. His father (Papsie) had a big hand in his love of words and music. He had a good singing voice and enjoyed solving cryptic crossword puzzles.”

p.18, “The Stuff of Dreams”

The refrain/chorus was inspired by a sentence in Ben Okri’s introduction to the section, “Vision”, in his anthology, *Rise Like Lions: Poetry for the Many* (2018): “It is not enough that we want to change the world.”

About the Author



Duncan Gillies MacLaurin was born in Glasgow on 22nd June 1962.

He attended boarding schools in Perthshire from the ages of 8 to 18 and won an Exhibition in Classics to New College, Oxford. He passed Classics Moderations, but left soon afterwards without a degree, disappointed with Classical Philosophy's dictum, "Poetry does not exist".

In 1984, he signed up for reading French, Anthropology and Psychology at London University, but took to playing trombone on the street instead. In 1985, he busked in Gibraltar for three months. Back in London, his home patch was the subway (AE: underpass) beside the Hammersmith Odeon. He began to write poetry. In 1986, he went busking in Italy and met a Danish writer, Ann Bilde. They ended up in Belgrade together, where he purchased a guitar. Settling in Denmark, he began to turn his poetry into song. He and Ann were married in 1987, and they were a couple until her death in 2020.

He took degrees in English and Latin at Aarhus University and taught both subjects at sixth-form-college/high-school level, first in Esbjerg (1995-2014) and then in Frederikshavn (2014-2023). He quit after several of his students had complained about him expressing his grief for his late wife in class.

His poetry has been published widely, including three collections of poetry and twenty pieces in three American anthologies, *Extreme Sonnets I & II* and *Extreme Formal Poetry*.

DGM's poems are often also the lyrics of songs, which is the case with many of the pieces here. Recordings can be found on his blog: <https://gists.wordpress.com>.

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