





Photo: Jane MacNeil

'Patastrophe!

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Alchymical Theatre

Kathleen O'Leary

alembic | \ ə-ˈlem-bik

1 an early apparatus used for distilling, consisting of two connected vessels, a typically gourd-shaped cucurbit containing the substance to be distilled, and a receiver or flask in which the condensed product is collected

2 something that refines or transmutes as if by distillation

If you want to experience the truly marvellous then you would do well to look at Shakespeare's late plays: *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* (all written between 1608-1611 – probably). Whilst many are familiar with *The Tempest*, this play of voyage, magic, death and recovery is made all the more wondrous if we consider the three plays written shortly before.

Plot-wise, these texts strain one's narrative expectations but on stage they just seem to work. Take *The Winter's Tale*, which has one of the most extraordinary endings where a statue of someone thought dead comes to life; or *Pericles*, where a mother, after having given birth aboard a ship in a tempest, seemingly dies, is coffined, thrown overboard and is washed ashore at Ephesus, where the coffin is opened by a magus who conjures her back to life. In *Cymbeline* a young girl is thought dead and again, miraculously, comes back to life.

What's going on? Why these resurrections, these impossibilities? There is a definite mood to these late plays that encourages us to believe in actions we know can't happen in the real world but that we wish possibly could. And in a sense they *can* happen in the theatre, where anything is possible. Characters can 'die' at every performance and the actor (and the character) gets up at the end, takes a bow and repeats exactly the same at the next performance.

But there is something else going on in these plays. Shakespeare is drawing on a contemporary cultural resource that helps to underpin these ideas of regeneration and wonder: alchemy. The philosopher's stone that can transmute base metals into gold was of great interest to Shakespeare's contemporaries; even an important advisor to Queen Elizabeth I, John Dee,

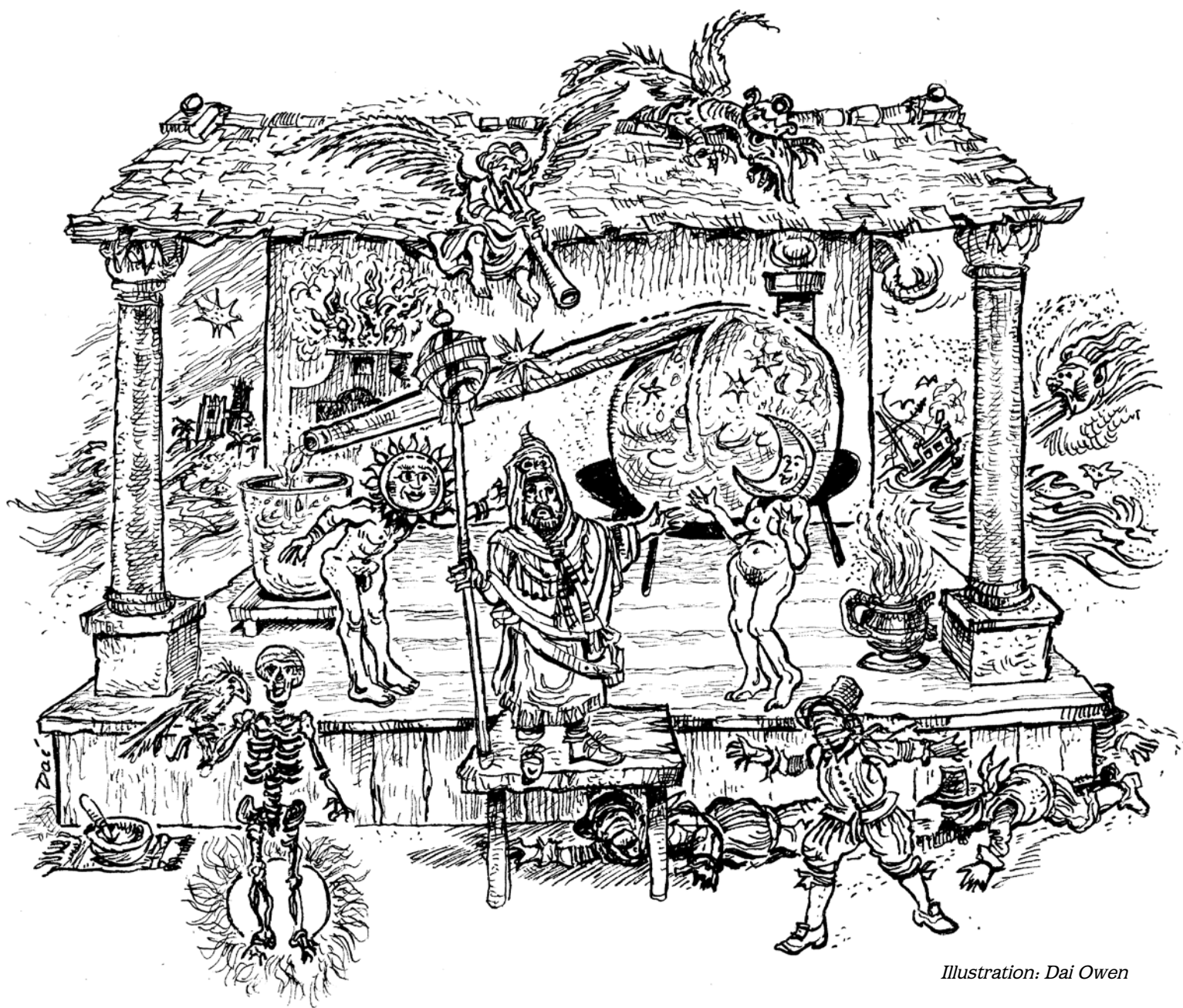


Illustration: Dai Owen

was a professed alchemist and may have been the model for Prospero in *The Tempest*. The process of changing base metals into gold was thought to be a series of chemical reactions, enabled by a catalyst, including the stage of the *Nigredo* where the *prima material* is purged of base or poisoned matter, the *Albedo* where it is purified, and *Rubedo* where the *Coniunctio* – chemical wedding takes place, uniting Mercury (symbolised variously as the Queen, the Moon, the Eagle) with Sulphur (symbolised as the King, the Sun, the Lion). From their union the Philosopher's Stone, the Quintessence or Elixir, is born, which is itself the catalyst for transmuting base metal into gold, the mortal into the immortal.

All these processes are performed in an alembic – the vessel into which all these are distilled.

If we examine the late plays metaphorically then Shakespeare is adopting this process to produce 'gold' – 'something rich and strange' as Ariel says – something magical. Poisons, in the form of base/evil characters are erased from the texts; catalysts are found in the heroines of the plays: Marina, Perdita, Innogen, all of whom play redemptive and transformative roles; and joyous weddings (usually between the male protagonist and his lost, presumed dead, queen) are in abundance at the close of all these texts.

But there's more. *We* are part of the process. The audience. The theatre *is* the alembic.

In Shakespeare's day the theatre was circular, signifying the eternal, the world – the main theatre of the time was not called 'The Globe' for nothing – but also a 'container' in which are placed people, ideas, language, communal energy; if theatre works effectively then all these things come together to generate change. We see 'magic' performed and the audience emerges renewed, passing on social energy outside the theatre walls.

Drama allows us to imagine, or dream and these plays allow a reading of existence beyond the 'real' and challenge definitive editions of what we perceive life to be. We are asked to re-evaluate a chronological vision of birth, life and death as time shifts and lost bodies are recovered. 'Let your imagination hold', 'marvel at these things', 'there is in this business more than nature was ever conduct of' are just a few of the wondrous lines from these extraordinary plays.

They enliven us as 'alchemical' transformations take place, reminding us that harmony may arise out of diversity – like gold distilled from lesser metals.

Two connected vessels – the theatre and the world beyond. If theatre does not show us the marvellous, then what is it for?

'Only the theatre is capable of creating the new society.' (Hugo Ball, Dadaist, *Flight Out of Time* 1927)



Image by Kate Alderton

“Houses are really bodies. We connect ourselves with walls, roofs, and objects just as we hang on to our livers, skeletons, flesh and bloodstream. I am no beauty, no mirror is necessary to assure me of this absolute fact. Nevertheless I have a death grip on this haggard frame as if it were the limpid body of Venus herself.”

Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*

Baudelaire and The Flâneur

Raymond Saxment

For all his Symbolism, Aestheticism and Decadence, Baudelaire never lost his radical engagement with the physical world. Faced with the demolition and rebuilding of Paris in the 1850s, which replaced the rabbit warren of old Paris with new boulevards (relocating the troublesome lower orders out of the city centre and confining them to the suburbs), Baudelaire rejected the allure of nostalgic mourning in favour of *flânerie* (idling, strolling), by which he could both embrace and subvert the modern world. The *flâneur* walks the streets, among the crowd, with the eye of an artist, noting the changes in the palimpsest of the cityscape, apprehending the new in its dialogue with the past history of place, drawing on their own personal recollections and fleeting desires, demanding the right of the citizen to go anywhere with total freedom.

In contrast to the Romantics – Rousseau in his *Memoirs of a Solitary Walker*, Wordsworth wandering ‘lonely as a cloud’, fleeing the city and the crowds to solitary reverie in the lap of Nature – the *flâneur* refuses escape, preferring to contest the urban space, challenging commercial imperatives to commute or trade or shop with their own agenda of indirect social action. The *flâneur* thus brings together in one identity the social critic, the artist/ poet, the bohemian, the modernist and the political citizen – a figure of comprehensive resistance to the commodification of life by materialistic capitalism.

It is *flânerie* that lies behind Louis Aragon’s *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926), André Breton’s *Nadja* (1928) and the psychogeography and dérives of Guy Debord and the Situationists.

But one might go further. Can we make a connection between *flânerie* and the alchemical transformations of the theatre described earlier? If the theatre is an alembic in which the marvellous traffic of the play incorporates the audience into an alchemical reaction, if ‘The Globe’ is a microcosm of the world (‘as above, so below’) and if ‘All the world’s a stage’, what happens when the audience leaves the theatre and goes out into the street? Does the city itself become touched by enchanted transformations? Does the *flâneur* walk the streets as a participant in the living work of art that is the city, acting ‘to realise the collective art of our time,’ for ‘the future belongs to the passerby’ (Debord 1967).

Les Foules (The Crowds)

It is not given to everyone to be able to bathe in the multitude: enjoyment of the crowd is an art; and he alone who makes, at the expense of the human race, a revelry of vitality, is he whom a faerie has inspired in his cradle with a taste for dressing up and masque, a hatred for domesticity and a passion for travel.

Multitude, solitude: two equal and interchangeable terms for the active and creative poet. He who does not know how to populate his solitude, will not know how to be alone in the bustling crowd.

The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege, of being as he likes, himself or others. Like errant souls searching for a body, he enters, when he likes, the personage of each. For him alone, all is open; and if certain places appear to him closed, it is because in his eyes they are not worth the trouble of visiting.

The solitary and thoughtful stroller derives a singular intoxication from this universal communion. He who easily weds the crowd knows the feverish ecstasies, eternally deprived the selfish, locked like a coffer, and the lazy, incarcerated like a mollusc. He adopts as his own all professions, all joys and sorrows circumstances present to him.

What men call love is very small, very restrained and very weak, compared to this ineffable orgy, to the sacred prostitution of the soul that gives itself entirely, poetry and charity, unexpectedly, to the unknown passer-by.

Charles Baudelaire (1869)
(trans. Roland Saxment 2005)



Image by Michelle Watson

Waterways

Words and image: Shelda-Jane Smith

Yours is a city built on violence.

The colonised are still having muscular dreams. Dreams of dismantling the soaring glass towers that turn the eye away from what is raw, what is uncooked. Wood, grass, woven and loc'd.

The colonised are submitting to the aches of their ancestors, whilst benefiting from their labour. Identify a culture – attach your psyche. With a fever. That is what they have been told. That is their practice.

There may be visions of an arm, bent at the elbow, rubbing oil into GHD tracks. These hot iron roads burn away the keratin that coils and kinks and spirals out of control. Wild and chained. Does burning hair equate to burning flesh?

There may be wishes to deny that even they have flourished from what the Atlantic waves brought ashore.

Workers. Empire. Shifting tides.

If their ancestors were farmers then why do they no longer dig? Daughters of merchants are sold, whilst a son of the priestess hails gods from the New World. They conjured multiple identities before empire gifted them a new one. Empire. Imperial busy bodies. Builders of offices.

Yours is a home without borders.

Remember praying, in secret, to Mami Wata; for what, you have long since forgotten. Not to identify as a heathen, a savage or a beast.

Remember tributes that were paid to the ocean and what she returned to you in gifts, plentiful and rich. “Blue. Colour me the colour of the tropics.” Wrap her in silks and feed her honey. These are memories for her children now spread across the Earth.

(The water has children in you).

You walk by the water's edge and look northward.

You think of the river giving way to the Irish Sea.

The Irish Sea flows into the Atlantic. A home that was never yours.

You think of your beautiful grandmother seated atop of her garden island. Cherries, chocolate and tea leaves from afar. You think that you don't belong there.

Or here.

Yours are keloid scars.

In facing down a curse, you open your mouth wide and you swallow. Down falls the history of those ancient monoliths until they settle. It was painful to stretch your lips and bare your teeth when devouring a curse that grew between the land and sea.

It's a curse that is dying to be forgotten; but demanding to be remembered.

The darkest place of your bowels is where fear lives. Is this a new home?

In their dreams, the colonised are still swimming and running. Still chomping and clawing, still remembering and forgetting. Still violent.





VeloJarry by Slim Smith

The Carnival is the Social Institution

Hubert Huzzah

In Carnival we are holistic, organised in defiance of traditional socioeconomic and political organisation. All are equivalent during Carnival. This is no Mob, defiant of Authority: Church and State and Law. There is Carnival. The barriers of caste, property, profession, and age dissolve and become unenforced and unenforceable. At Carnival the unique spacetime sense annihilates the social construction of “individuality” and we become holographs, authentically, of ourselves together. The individual ceases to be the Individual and becomes integrated with the Whole. It is at this point that, through costume and mask, an individual exchanges bodies and is renewed. At the same time there arises a heightened awareness of one’s sensual, material, bodily, unity and community.

The Pataphysical Life is one where that which it is to be is embodied in the Carnival of that which it is to do and for that which it is to do is embodied in that which it is to be: being lives in Carnival. The Carnival is the Death and Resurrection of all not merely the privileged offspring of any deity. The Carnival is also more than Death and Resurrection it is Being and Non-Being. Pataphysics abolishes the privileges of being a deity and renders blasphemies meaningless except as satire. Much the same as the Alchemist dissolves all in the Alkahest: satire dissolves all in the fart and belch.

Pataphysics has a place for both the fart and belch of Dada and the analytic powers, discipline and introspection of Surrealism. The capacity to move between being the Carnival and the Person: this is what Pataphysics contributes: the capacity to bring together Dada and Surrealism into the Carnival of Invisible Convocation. Bataille understood this. Breton understood this. Ernst understood this. Duchamp understood this. Living is

best where unperturbed by thinking. The Clinamen of Pataphysics. The swerve of Clinamina, according to Lucretius, provides the “free will which living things throughout the world have”, in defence of the atomistic theories of Epicurus. It is, at once, an acknowledgement of the Materialist and Immaterialist underpinnings of Pataphysics. Living is best where unperturbed by thinking does not advocate wanton existence. For being, living is a virtue, arete, an excellence. Excellence is nothing to be admired or striven for but to be attained. In the words of Beckett: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” We neither become the Elect by achievement of Virtue nor are we ever the Elect.

A note on Virtue as arete. Imagine. Tethered to a centre. A Sisyphean Circle can be trodden about that Centre of Virtue. Vincent van Gogh, in 1890, coloured the 1872 Gustave Dore image of Newgate Prison in the Prisoners’ Round. Both reiterated, by anticipatory plagiarism, the behaviour described by Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*: of being made to “itty round and round the yard for like exercise”; and, visualised by Beckett in *Quad*. This image is a point for striving towards or avoiding: the Dread Virtue. Dread Virtue is nothing more, or less, than non-figurative expressions of Virtue. The Circle around that Point of Virtue is Metaphoric and the Sphere about that Point of Virtue is Pataphor: as far beyond Virtue as Metaphor is beyond the non-figurative. The Pataphysical tendency is to rise to the surface of the sphere through the willing application of Levity: the mysterious paradox of force counteracting Gravity. The means by which the Pataphysician rises instead of falling. Falling towards the point of Virtue is a serious matter and one that demands much engagement in reductive thought. It is an analytic Virtue bound to Gravity. Levity ascends.

Exchange Station

Jeff Young, Tom Calderbank and Claudia Boulton. (Edited extract)

Soot black train station, shadow dark, gloomy as a lost cathedral. A man wearing an overcoat made of moons lights up the night-shadows, carrying a railway-man's lantern. It is not today, it is some time in the past, but a past that exists inside the present moment. I am waiting for a train to arrive. I am not going on a journey, I just need the train to be here for the world to be complete.

Each train station shadow conceals a tunnel, and each of these tunnels is a portal into an altered state – or rather, the altered states arrive into the train station through these shadows. It is as if the altered states are the trains and they will transport whoever lives in the train station into other worlds.

We live in the train station. No one else wanted it and so we have taken out an eternity-lease. We are the station-masters of a miasmic zone of transformation. We can hear the trains – the altered states – rattling down the tracks, echoing down the tunnels, approaching through the shadows but they never quite seem to arrive.

We wear station-master's hats and overcoats. We wear fob-watches on chains.

We wait for the passengers, but the passengers never seem to come, so there are no departures or arrivals.

In the waiting room lives the Queen of the Soot Black Train Station. She wears robes woven from birds that no ornithologist has ever encountered – not the feathers of birds, but the birds themselves. This woman is the centre of the universe and we are there to serve her. Sometimes she is the conductor of an orchestra of steam trains we can hear in the shadowtunnels, and as she conducts she sings, a strange angel, howling lullabies.

We three keep the train station alive, we wait for eternity's trains to come. We wait forever.

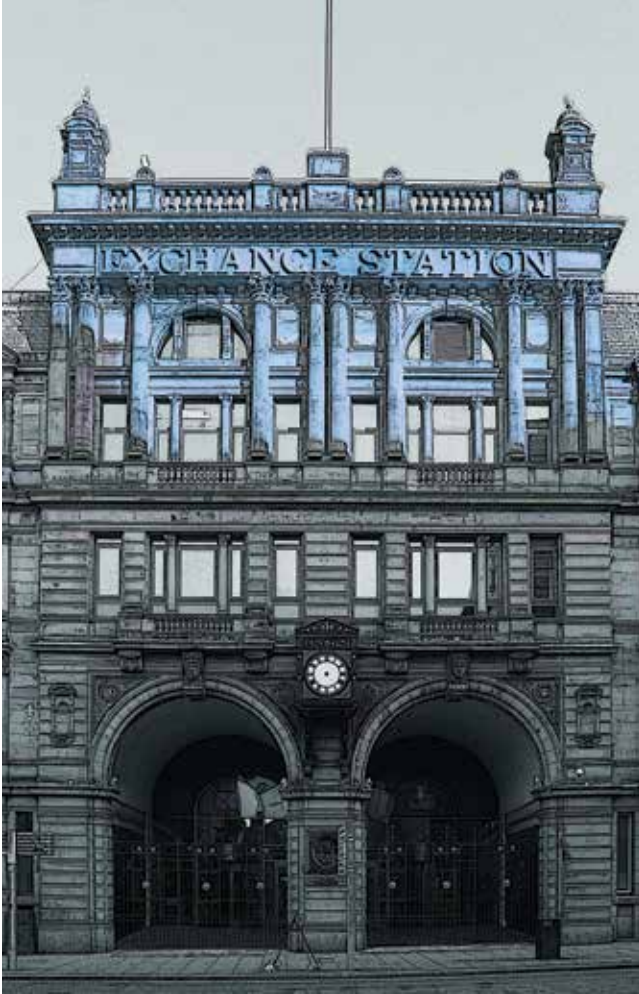
Exchange Station is aptly named. Better to think of it as less a railway station and more a Palace of Transfiguration. An alchemical place where things and people were literally and metaphorically exchanged. No-one ever came out the same person that went into Exchange Station. It is a junction box for all humanity. It is where we all meet, in the intersection between dream and awakening. It is a place at once as familiar as your face and as strange as a dog walking backwards reciting Kafka.

The building itself hadn't always been there, of course, but the site had been considered sacredly wyrd for millennia. There was a kind of magic imbued in the crust of the land itself that the station sat imperiously upon. That it was to be a railway station to occupy the site, and not a church, was considered baffling at the time. But back then, most people hadn't heard of the Synchronic Lines.

In the gathering gloom, the coat of moons began to pulse with light. Closer inspection of the coat reveals that the moons, each gleaming with its own imperfection, were set amidst a sky of stars. The coat rewarded deeper viewing, revealing a myriad of gleaming lights in the endless night.

Unmapped constellations of distant galaxies shone from every fold. He'd had it made by a mystic seamstress from Scotty Road way, and she poured into it all her skill, craft and spells. It contained mysteries in and of itself, and may come to play a critical role in the unprecedented moments yet to be.

He put down his railway-man's lantern. As he did so, the very moment it touched the ground, the lantern changed into the shape of a small house. Still a lantern,



but in the very definite shape of a small, thin, terraced house, made of paper mache, glowing with light beaming out of the windows and the house's thin skin. Inside, the shadows of little people danced on the curtains, as they went about their business.

He looked up at the huge clock above the ticket hall: it was now o'clock. Ever since persons unknown removed the hands on the station's clock, it had always been now o'clock. This was Eternity's waiting room...

He checked his fob watch instead, tilting his hat as he turned his head and regarded his fellow station-master. The dreamer. The writer. The bearer of a flame brighter

than the lantern house. Who checked his fob watch, too. He nodded. It was time.

'Hmmm', said the man, his enigmatic smile betraying a profound sense of doubt as to where this was all heading. Knowing somewhere deep down, that he'd lived all this before.

His colleague looked up over the rim of his glasses, concern etched in his face, holding up his ticket.

It said: 'Everywhere.'

At that, the doors of the waiting room burst open, and out came the Queen of the Soot Black Station, her cloak of birds spreading its magnificence in her wake, singing its many impossible hearts out. Then they were suddenly silent. And she said: "Well, at least now we are getting Somewhere!"

"Don't worry, you ain't going Nowhere. You may have tickets to ride gentlemen, but the trains don't run on time, as you know. They run on for ever and if you miss the moment," she paused, "you may never get another one. Now, here comes the express from Otherwhere!"

As she spoke a waft of heated metal blew down the platform, there was a squeal of brakes and a sigh of steam. In the deafening silence that followed the only sound was a click klikklikigg of machinery cooling. The birds stirred restlessly creating shifting shapes around the Station Queen.

She reached under the flying cloak and produced a small silver whistle on a chain. She blew and the sound pierced the heavy atmosphere. The birds began to stir and spread their wings." "See," she cried, "The only way out is up, up to the top of the cupola and through the smoke hole. Off the tracks! It's a one-way ticket, no return. Are you ready for the ride of your life?"

The Drum Recruit

Patrick Dineen

Freddy went to the backyard
with his anger in a bag
he said:
“I’m gonna burn it”
so he soaked a filthy rag
in yellow mustard petrol
and a dose of olive oil
then he took out his anger
and unwrapped the foil

observe his youthful anger
like a set of poisoned teeth
when you extract the poison
see what’s lying underneath”
all the pain
and all the suffering
that is lurking in his head
and his politics is no better
than an unmade bed

So he took out his Anger
and he cursed his world
yes he took out his Anger
and he hurled hurled hurled
but still he was not satisfied
as he saw it burn
Oh Redemption is a thing
you gotta earn boy, earn

Chorus

Oh bang a drum at midnight
drum for all you’re worth
and we’ll bury both your drumsticks
in the cold dark earth.

The boys and girls were standing
by the little wooden gate
with their ash white drumsticks
and their Hymn to Fate

and this made Freddy frightened
and this could not be ignored
and so he threw his head back
and he roared roared roared!

Their Leader strode toward him
and he swung his wooden drum
he said:
“anger is a melody
you got to learn to strum”

his eyes were glinting fiercely
like shiny kitchen knives
he shouted:
“none of us here will ever lead
ordinary lives”
this boy is filled with anguish
a fact we can’t ignore
did you not hear the way
he tried to roar roar roar?”

The Leader handed him a drum
The Leader was astute
oh tum ti tum ti tum ti tum
see how they do recruit

Chorus

Oh bang a drum at midnight
drum for all your worth
and we’ll bury both your drumsticks
in the cold dark earth.

Now a bird is cooing softly
by a smouldering funeral pyre
and listen to him singing
and the rainfall is his choir:

‘they fill your soul with anger
until it is for hire
they fill your soul with anger
until it is for hire’

Chorus

so bang a drum at midnight
drum for all your worth
and we’ll bury both your drumsticks
in the cold dark earth

Rue Paradis

Words: Susan Comer. Image: Slim Smith

One bad day in the most unspecified of times, Josephine the Urban Diva was throwing shapes in the air – raving and wailing and stamping her boot clad feet at having to make her own tea as the watched kettle refused to boil. Her high-pitched lamentations reached the ears and curdled the fluids of Cecil the Flying Monk who, on the downwind leg of his daily exercise rose spectacularly into the air, catching the tail of a passing rocket in order to loop the moon in a daring escape. Miss En Bouteilles strolling to meet her lover shadowed her eyes to observe the spectacle (her eyes refused to ever un-see the terrifying occurrence ever again – this is the story she relayed for years to those visitors to the village buying her Pinot Grigio by the glass as she sat slumped on her stool in the Green Dog Arms). Hearing and seeing this astonishing orgy of noise and movement caused Marion Toreador to fetch her gaming cloak out of retirement to shepherd this disparate crew to the holding pen manned by a disinterested Norman Partisan, who not giving a damn for life unwritten in his broadsheet, continued his uncurious read and failed to notice the calm, contained skirt of Ann Garnate promenade away. Away and ahead, imagining his eyes there, on the wall.



Red Star Falling

Bill Bulloch

As she left the car, rummaging in her handbag for the front door key, she heard the dog barking. It was a tinny, echoing sound edged into panic. Gritting her teeth, she grasped the key firmly between index finger and thumb and stabbed it viscously into the lock, imagining it was his pale, cataract-ringed eye.

Inside, the house was filled with dampness, steam hanging in the air, leaving tanginess on her dry lips. Without removing her coat, she stamped to the parlour and swung open the heavy door. As she suspected, the massive acceleration couch was empty, the padded lining peeling and encrusted with the oil and grime of decades.

The dogs' barking was reaching a crescendo now, angry reports shading into hysteria. This was just what she didn't need, not after the day she'd had. It had only been a month since the trainee had been taken on to operate the punch card machine, Majorie had every confidence in him, until she had come in late to find him feeding twenty gauge punch cards into the machine instead of the standard IBM fifties, jamming the input completely. Since then she dared not allow him out of her sight, lest she be the recipient of another tirade from head office.

She turned on a kitten heel and headed into the kitchen, where pans boiled angrily on the stove and the walls ran with condensation. Ignoring the frantic barking, she hastily turned off all four gas burners and wafted a damp tea towel – one of the set of four her dead husband had brought her as a wedding present from the Isle of Man – to try and clear the air. The hot stink of alcohol burned her nostrils now and she saw the makeshift still hissing in the corner of the room, near the larder.

She cursed and flung the back door wide, heading into the small yard and narrowly missing the steel dustbin

as it dopplered past, frantic yelps echoing from within, the rotary washing line whirling in its concrete socket. The bin was tied to two of its arms by what looked like leather belts. At its next pass, she managed to grab it as it sailed by, the weight of its impetus almost taking her off her feet, but she held on and felt a weight shift inside the container. The cries were immediately replaced by a furious scratching and as she slid one of the belts away from the lid, it burst open – a mass of teeth, spittle and fur erupting from within, to speed away across the yard. She sighed heavily and let the empty dustbin fall back against the washing line with a clang.

“Yuri!” she bawled. Behind the house, the long garden was shielded by hawthorn on three sides, blocking her view of the distant M20 and the incessant flow of traffic bound for the capital. In the centre, her husband had set a wooden seat (now rotted away) around the base of a huge spreading lime tree, on which he insisted on taking afternoon tea from a china pot as he read the Sunday Mail. Now the garden was unkempt and the tree had grown to considerable height in his absence, lower branches some twenty feet above the crab-grassed lawn.

As she rounded the corner of the property, the shadow of the tree fell across her, but did not manage to detract from the brightness of the orange pressure suit worn by the cosmonaut dangling beneath.

“I feel fine!”

The figure twitched on the straps holding him aloft, the too large cycle helmet wobbling on his head, like a cracked eggshell. He kicked his legs for effect and a brown fur-lined boot flew across the lawn, bouncing to a stop at her feet.

“Yuri, for Christ sake, I thought I made myself clear!”

She was furious now, first a day of spoon feeding the idiot trainee in correct data input and transfer with a view

towards maximum efficiency and computational veracity and now the first man in space wanted to relive his finest achievement in the back garden of the one place she liked to think of as home.

Ever since he had appeared at her door, twenty-something years ago, dressed in his green army greatcoat, a pink woollen bobble hat and a pair of pyjama bottoms that he had lifted from a neighbour's washing line, she knew he was going to be troublesome. It wasn't enough to have faked his own death and fled Moscow in a wagon full of turnips, but to tip up at her door, a fugitive from the Politburo was too much.

How he found his way down into Europe and across the channel was something of a mystery, as his peasant mother had perfected a technique for distilling vodka from potato peelings and with some ingenuity, he had built a makeshift still and had rendered himself insensible for the best part of twelve months while in hiding. After his luck and meagre funds ran out, he had eked his way across France and found passage on a boat across the channel to Tilbury.

His rough native charm, complete lack of fear and hands the size of hams had found him work on a farm and once more brought him into contact with the raw material for his 'rocket fuel' as he called it and he had subsequently taken to the road with a rucksack full of spud wine as he felt the state police may have got wind of his position.

At this point his eyes would often glaze over, as he recounted his story, usually just before 9pm, when he would be strapped safely back into his acceleration couch – catheter fitted and thigh packs freshly emptied – he would begin to mumble and hum a wordless soviet melody.

Marjorie could only imagine what depths of despair he had reached at this point, suddenly realising that he was

in a foreign country, all hope of seeing his beloved Vostok evaporated and nothing but his greatcoat and medals to remind him of home. Perhaps it was the potato farm that had put him in mind of Mother Russia, before he stepped up to be a candidate for the new soviet space program, or perhaps it was something else, something deeper.

Marjorie could see no trace of the handsome, bland face of the man who had appeared on her doorstep that August evening, to brush past her and throw himself down on the settee, rucksack clanking and spilling a rogue potato across the floor. Now the grey eyes were rheumy and clouded and if there was any spark of recognition for her in them, she could not detect it.

"I am Eagle!" he giggled, and spasmed awkwardly in the harness, his twisting so violent this time that there was a loud crack and the Major tumbled out of the tree onto the grass, in a heap of military surplus hardware.

"Do svidanya comrade"

Marjorie bent down and made to help up the fallen cosmonaut, but he batted away her aid and dragged himself to his feet. "Niet" he growled, yanking the harness down, leaves fluttering around them as he did so. Marjorie watched as the Major limped back to the house, muttering and cursing in broken english. At this point her dog appeared from beneath the hedge and dashed toward him, lip curled.

"Laika крощка!" On hearing his cry, the dog paused and began wagging her tail, ears dropped as she approached him. "Laika, Laika" he repeated and the dog began to bark excitedly. Marjorie shook her head resignedly and followed the unlikely pair back up the garden, towards the house, picking up a green seed potato from the long grass beneath the tree.

Freewheeling

Lucy Granville

Like an ape swinging fast and sure from the treetops of a derelict memory,
I bike at speed through the streets from here to there,
There is a hidden world I am free-wheeling on top of.
I cannot fully feel what is gone, and yet it is always shimmering
Beneath the surface of my experience:
I am the only seed who hasn't strayed
But in my mind I have strayed so far from the past
That I can't remember who I was.
I just freewheel

El Desdichado

Gerard Nerval (1854)

I am the one in shadows, – the widower, – the disconsolate,
The prince of Aquitaine of the tower destroyed;
My sole *star* is dead, – and my spangled lute
Bears the *black Sun* of Melancholy.

In the night of the tomb, you who consoled me,
Give me back Pausilippe and the sea of Italy,
The *flower* which so pleased my desolate heart,
And the harbour where the vine and rose entwine.

Am I Amour or Phébus?... Lusignan or Byron?
My forehead is still red from the kiss of a queen;
I have dreamed in the grotto where the siren swims...

And I have twice victoriously traversed the Achéron,
Inflecting in turn on the lyre of Orphée
The sighs of the saint and the cries of the fay.

(trans. Roland Saxment)

Bigger Game

Susan Comer

The padded silk hangers glided over the rail as Stevie searched for Dan amongst the soft amber hues of the females, and the heavier darker flesh of the males. Finding his perfect form, she slipped him from the hanger. He was oiled, bronzed, firm – still as smooth as the day she'd peeled him from his flesh – she took care of Dan. She eased his power over her own ageing frame; an appreciative rumble reverberated deep inside her.

*

Stevie had been stood at the bar waiting when Dan had swaggered into the Watering Hole – an apex predator. She'd watched him over her martini glass – enjoyed his awareness of the spines shivering in his wake. Hands stroked him as he stalked – shifting the weight of his massive frame with feline grace.

Stevie had been wearing Joseph that night. Joseph had been pretty, delicate, and really quite exquisite. He was her first who was, by then beginning to wear – fraying in places she'd neglected to oil. She'd been learning with him.

Dan had prowled closer, so she'd draped Joseph across a barstool, oozed pheromones and waited for Dan to pick up the scent.

*

The sex had been savage and raw; she'd raked his beautiful back as he mounted her. Later, Dan lay face down as she'd gently licked his wounds. Tell me a secret she'd whispered. I'm afraid of growing old he'd said, of crows' feet and créped skin, of becoming invisible to the herd. She'd smiled and purred, stroked his salted flesh.

*

It had been a while since Stevie had visited the Watering Hole, the thrill of a hunt rattled through her. She smoothed Dan's mane, adjusted his skin as she pushed open the bar door, and prepared for battle.

The Robing of the Bride

Roland Saxment

The Robing of the Bride (*La Toilette de la Mariée*) is one of the masterpieces of Surrealist art, ‘a screaming exotic bird in a cathedral’ (Jones 2003). Painted by Max Ernst (1891-1976), arguably the greatest of the Surrealist painters, it is a touchstone to themes throughout his work.

On one level a demonstration of decalcomania (pressing paint between two surfaces and then letting the chance effect trigger unconscious associations to produce images), one of the techniques, along with frottage, grattage, sfumage and so on, used by Ernst and other artists to render painting as responsive as poetry to ‘automatism’ and chance – *hasard*.

The painting centres on a female figure – the Bride – cloaked in a red feathered gown, and crowned with an owl’s head (a mask through which her eye can be seen, looking out).

In Alchemy, the red cloak is the garment of the King (the Sun, Sulphur, the Lion), in the Rubedo stage, when he unites with the Queen (the Moon, Quicksilver, the Eagle) in the Chemical Wedding, the conjugal union that gives birth to the Elixir or Philosopher’s Stone, the agent of transformation of base metal into gold, of mortality into immortality,

(the merely ‘real’ into the Sur-Real?).

At the point of union, King and Queen become an androgynous whole, regaining the original state of human completeness (according to Aristophanes in Plato’s *Symposium*) – and the owl head recalls Athena, goddess of Wisdom, born motherless from the head of Zeus, an androgynous goddess, invariably depicted with spear and helmet.

In Ernst’s personal mythology, as a result of the coincidence of the death of his cockatoo and the birth of a baby sister in 1906, ‘a dangerous confusion between birds and human beings become encrusted in his mind and asserted itself in his drawings and paintings’ (Ernst 1942), and from 1930 he was visited by the Bird Superior, Loplop, who became his familiar, even alter-ego.

And Loplop, who himself echoes Ibis-headed Thoth, the Egyptian god of Wisdom (revived in Hellenistic times as Hermes Trismegistus, supposedly the fount of ‘Hermetic’ philosophy and Alchemy), stands phallically armed beside the owl-headed Bride, in a tableau reminiscent of the seduction of Leda by Zeus in the guise of a swan.

But perhaps there are echoes

here also of a witch trial in progress (prompted by Ernst’s recent experiences of internment as an enemy alien?), with the Bride’s handmaid (she with the decalcomanic hair) in the hysterical contortion of possession (referencing Freud’s insight that ‘witches’ confessed, voluntarily or otherwise, in the voice of hysteria?), and Loplop as inquisitor, with a spear to prick the body of the ‘witch’, and expelling an androgynous demon in the lower right of the painting – a figure that is alchemically ambiguous : is it a stage on the way to to Elixir, or impure matter being expelled during the alchemical process, or even that process derailed and shunting backwards from purity to corruption?

Moreover Loplop’s phallic spear is broken – suggesting the failure of seduction and/or ‘witch pricking’, and the Bride wears a Medusa head between her breasts – psychoanalytic symbol of castration anxiety.

Perhaps what we have here is a depiction of female Wisdom – of the *jouissant* libidinal body, released and triumphant, while masculine intellectual Hermetic knowledge nurses a broken spear of impotence by comparison?



The chessboard floor recalls Alice's adventures in 'Through the Looking Glass', and through the

looking glass on the wall (a route to another world, like the window in Leonora Carrington's *Self Portrait*:

Inn of the Dawn Horse, 1938?) we see the Bride in decalcomanic glory, unencumbered by Loplop or hysterical handmaid or demonic offspring.

The moment for the creation of the painting, 1940, is when Ernst, finally released from a series of internments, returned to the house in the Ardèche he had shared with Carrington, to find his 'Bride of the Wind', literally at her wits' end and convinced he was gone forever, had fled to Spain. This work is undoubtedly an evocation of her (but is it also a recollection of his encounter with Leonor Fini at Tristan Tzara's party in Paris in the 1920s, when she was clad in boots and an owl mask and nothing else? Fini and her owl masks would become significant in women's erotic literature a few years later...)

Choucha, Nadia: *Surrealism and the Occult* (Mandrake 1991)

Ernst Max: *Some Data on the Youth of M.E. as Told by Himself* (View 2, No 1, April 1942)

Hopkins, David: *Max Ernst's 'La Toilette de la Mariée'* (*The Burlington Magazine*, vol 133, no 1057, April 1991)

Jones, Jonathan: *Max Ernst's 'The Robing of the Bride'* (*The Guardian* 6/12/2003)

Mundy, Jennifer ed.: *Desire Unbound* (Princeton University Press 2001)

Warnick, M.E.: *Max Ernst and Alchemy* (University of Texas Press 2001)

Jane's Invisible Secret

The reader is invited to fill in the word balloons and create a narrative.



Would You Open The Door?

For five or more players, each will need a pen and paper. Players are asked to imagine this situation:

They are dreaming there is a knock at the door, they open it and, recognising the visitor, they must make an immediate decision to either let the visitor in or close the door. What do they decide and why?

Each player takes it in turn to announce the visitor's name, and the others, write either yes or no, plus a brief comment on which must be the first thing that occurs to them. The visitor may be famous, infamous, living or dead; or perhaps someone known to all the players. Results are read out and compared.

(The identity of the players in the game, is given by initials)

Examples

GEZANNE

No, consigned to the textbooks (J L B)

Yes, through wanting to get it over with (R B)

No, nothing to say to each other (A B)

No, too caught up in his theories (E B)

Yes, suppose so, but conversation might well wear a bit thin (J G)

MARX

Yes coolly (J L B)

Yes, out of obligation (R B)

No, from weariness (A B)

Yes, but in silence (E B)

No, gloomy evening predicted (J G)

From *A Book Of Surrealist Games*, compiled by Alastair Brotchie, edited by Mel Gooding

Definitions

Linda Bromilow

The rules of the game are one person writes a question that starts with 'What is...' on a piece of paper. They fold the piece of paper over so the question cannot be seen. The piece of paper is passed to another person who writes an answer. The paper is then unfolded and the definition is revealed.

What is silence?

It is broken into four pieces and sold for scrap

What is generosity?

It is a pork pie at the vegetarian famine

What is evolution for?

It is always near 234

What is the reason limes do not taste of lemon?

The smell of oranges

What is beauty?

It is all I want

What is sadness?

It is the pomodoro method

What is the sound of the universe?

Is a jumping lunatic dressed as a nun

What is passion?

It is because the sea decreed it thus

What is a nose?

It is moonbeam bright smiles



Unheimlich Home

In German one word for ‘home’ is ‘heim’. So ‘unheimlich’ is ‘unhomely’, but it is also ‘uncanny’.

Join Surrealerpool in their unheimlich home, for an uncanny experience of surreal games, elements of surprise, unexpected juxtapositions – unifying dream and reality into surreality.

Unheimlich Home was to have been held in the mayor’s suite at Liverpool Town Hall as part of Light Night

‘Home’, but is now an online event:

- Explore the unheimlich home, room by room.
- Download and play games such as Three Blind Dice, Jane’s Invisible Secret, and more.
- Read The Surrealerpool Little Book of New Superstitions and Proverbs and invent your own proverbs.

www.surrealerpool.online

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Email: surrealerpool@gmail.com Website: www.surrealerpool.online

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Photo: Jane MacNeil

