

# THE KLEKSOGRAPH

An International Review of Art and the Subconscious *Issue 5 May 2021*

Article: The Flying Dutchman – Willem Johan Barbieri

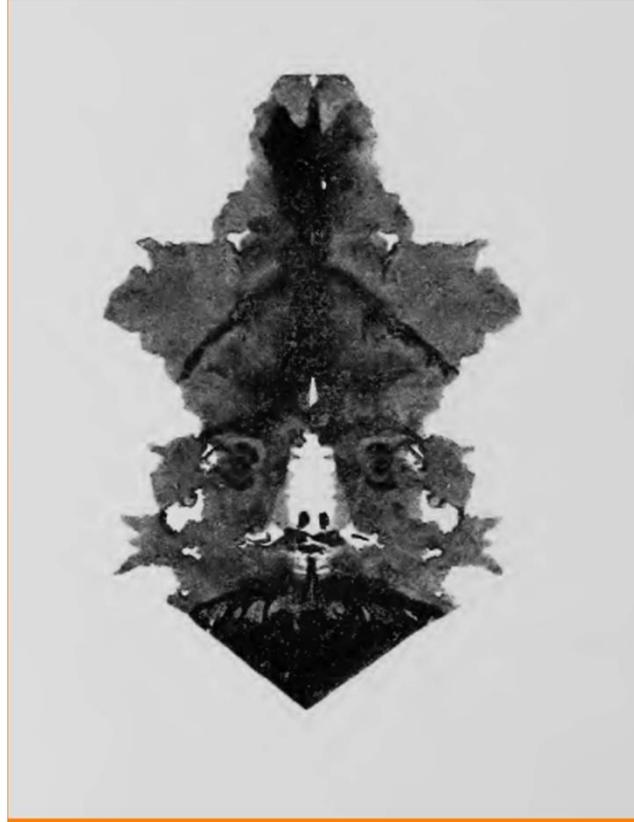
Poetry by Mo Blake, Rob Leiper, Leconte de Lisle, Ian Smith, H-J Hoyles, Alison Black, and Alun Robert

Fiction by Paul Murgatroyd, David McVey, Peter Van Belle, Robin Fuller, Rebecca Pyle, and J.S. Le Fanu



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**Editor: Peter Van Belle**



**ISSUE 5**

**MAY 2021**

**In the mid-nineteenth century, Julius Kerner, published his book of “Kleksographien”. Later psychologists used similar ink blots as a means of accessing the subconscious of their patients. The Kleksograph (Klecks is the official German spelling) is dedicated to exploring and celebrating the relationship between the subconscious and art.**

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Front & back cover: The Waking Dream – Willem Johan Barbieri

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# Pauline Barbieri

## The Flying Dutchman

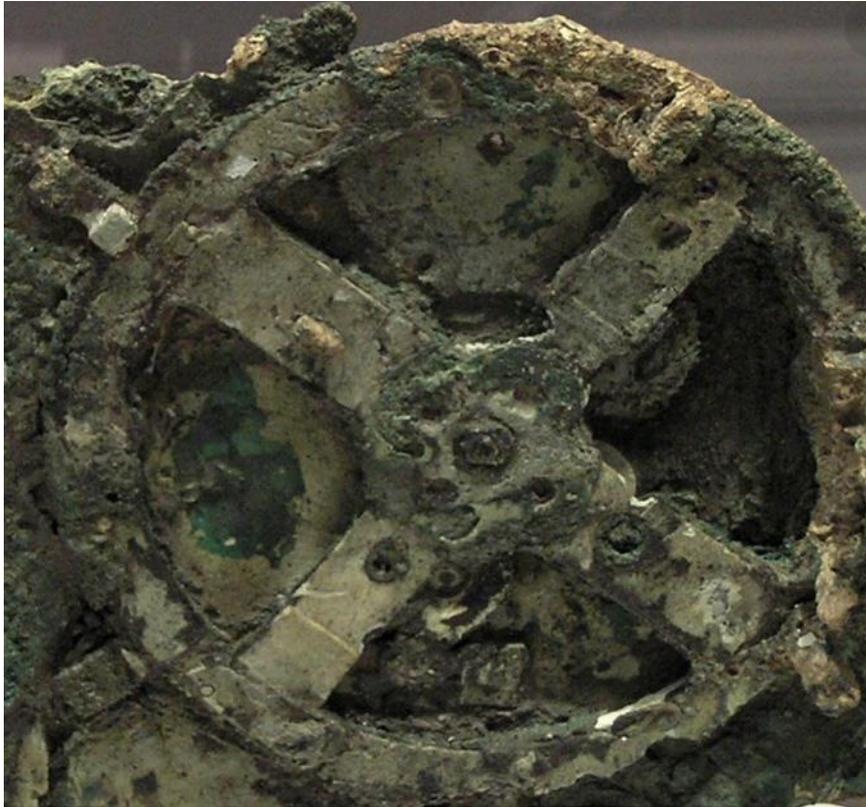
WILLEM JOHAN BARBIERI.....DUTCH/ITALIAN ARTIST, ROTTERDAM. (1948-2019)

The cover of this edition of Klecksograph magazine shows a painting, 'The Waking Dream' by the artist. He was born in Rotterdam, Holland in 1948 and died in Eastbourne, England in 2019. During his lifetime he was often obsessed with the creation and painting of wheels, with all the movement, energy and steam they display.



The Waking Dream ( 8.10.2012)

In *The Waking Dream*, one can easily see how he was attracted to the Antikythera Mechanism, (invented about 87BC, the first analogue computer, located and retrieved from the Aegean Sea in 1901).



Source: Wikimedia Commons -Link to [license](#):

Shortly before he came across this mechanism, he learnt of a discovery in his wife's family history. Through her unusual maiden name, 'Suett', she came across an ancestor, Richard 'Dicky' Suett (1750-1805) who was George III's favourite Shakespearean clown and a star at Drury Lane, The Haymarket and Covent Garden for 25 years. He was a favourite of Charles Lamb and a friend of Horatio Nelson, singing at his funeral service in St. Paul's Cathedral. They are both buried there, together with 'Dicky's' father, John Suett, a guide to the Cathedral in the 18th Century.

W.J. Barbieri rarely talked about his work but *'The Waking Dream'* would appear to be a merging of these two discoveries; the machine and the family ancestor in the Theatre World, creating a stage for the 'Strolling Players'.

Oil on canvas, his constant materials, are quite deceitful in this painting, as the fine lines and details would normally indicate pen and ink on paper. He always painted with 'Talen's Van Gogh' oils until they moved the production from Holland to Japan in the late 20th cent, when the tubes began to split, so he then switched to Windsor & Newton.



The Ship of Fools

As Klecksograph magazine is dedicated to the Arts and the Subconscious, the second painting by Willem Barbieri, entitled 'The Ship of Fools', perhaps shows a reference to Hieronymus Bosch. Whatever subject he chose to express his ideas, he never moved too far from his homeland and the fantasy and brilliant work of the Dutch and Flemish painters. This sombre painting shows a ship and some travellers, one fellow perhaps smoking 'pot', all in all, the darkness of the paint seems to hold a vision of 'Hades'. One step further than 'The Garden of Delights' by Hieronymus Bosch.



The Flying Dutchman

Having regards to the title of this article about his work, 'The Flying Dutchman', here he shows himself swinging from a rope (a job he did whilst scraping barnacles off the side of ships in Rotterdam Harbour in the 1960's). In this instance he is being blown by the blond Goddess of the North Wind, 'Zephyrus'.

Again we are in the world of wheels with the train holding centre stage below, where a busy scene is taking place in the most expensive restaurant in Amsterdam, 'The Five Flies', signalled by the five flies in the bottom right hand corner.

At the back of the flying boat, you can see the artist and his wife. Dotted around the canvas are various celebrities from the 1980's and 1990's e.g. 'Wolf' from the

Gladiators, Wynne Evans, the 'Go Compare Man' and Samantha Fox, the 'Page Three Girl' and others.

Willem Johan Barbieri admired and spent a lifetime studying Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Bosch, Brueghel as well as the genre painters, Van Ostade, De Hoog, Steen, Brouwer, Tenier, and Cuyp. Other international artists he loved were Leonardo, Turner, Dali, Blake, Constable, and later ones, Delvaux, Fini, Peter Blake, Bourgeois and Hockney. Of course we should not forget the writers who strongly influenced the subjects of his paintings, such as, Erasmus, Rabelais, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and finally the Italian operas, so loved by his father.

# Mo Blake

## Magpie Woman

Melpomene visited me last night  
and leaning on her sceptre  
raised her bloodied dagger to the skies  
to cut out all the stars  
Placing them one by one around my head  
in a crown of blinding light

Then she sang in darkest voice  
*You are the magpie woman  
who yearns for all the stars  
but see the bloodied holes they leave  
oh greedy one, behold  
What have you done*

As she sang tragedy dimmed her eyes  
and she pointed her sceptre  
to the darkened heavens  
*I walk in shadows now  
What have you done*  
Like this her song had ended  
And tho the brightness of my crown  
defied my eyes, I squinted  
at the muse of tragic blues  
And handed her a candle

# Mo Blake

## Dream I

violins and cellos play  
seraphs rise and fly  
a panicked woman  
in a Victorian gown  
Grimaldi painted face  
in grimace rushes around  
*i'll never get this party off the ground*  
a brightly plumed parrot  
echoes *i'll never get ...*she bats it  
with a flaming fan and un-phoenix like  
it screeches *fuck off*  
alights on a chandelier with fire birds flapping  
lighting up the paintings floating by

portraits say *check me out love*  
narcissist or pricey who could tell  
a Van Gogh landscape beckons me to enter  
dance among the poppies  
*don't go there love*  
Salome clutches John the Baptists head  
ah Caravaggio so dark so manly  
*don't go there* a Leonardo Virgin Mary  
whispers clutching an axe  
*give me a fag i need a fag*  
Andy Warhol purses his lips  
sulks in a corner pissing  
on molten metal *whoa that smokes*  
a Rembrandt man in armour  
bows to me *that dear was for free*

no exit sign in sight  
i rage through the hall  
crash into a hanging man swinging  
naked from a chandelier of bats  
*cut us down love honest i did nuffin*  
*get away frae him hen*  
*he'll swap his neck for yours*

he takes my hand to Glasgow Central  
a boy in stripy t-shirt plays piano  
a jaunty tune and i dance  
in a Cyndi Lauper dress  
the big clock strikes

## **dream II**

the hallway echoes  
no daylight eternal night  
doors invite a push  
dare you enter then a rush  
of flames licking and leaping  
Hades arms beckon  
applause erupts *Vivaldi*  
someone shouts  
*no Puccini* I smile  
and watch them sulk away  
through different doors  
ballet dancers patter by  
as the orchestra swells  
on tiptoe pirouetting  
world news flashes on walls  
fire mayhem murder screaming laughter  
Hades shouts *bravo*  
a bell clangs and clatters  
the empty hallway echoes

# Rob Leiper

## The News this Morning

Awake

to find

the angel that hovers in the corner like a smile, faint as almost ain't,  
as a smudge or a swoon, pushing towards disbelief but no, you attune,  
see thin legs a-dangle from the flounce of that anticipated smock, frothy  
and, if not reassuring, properly archetypal, so utterly baroque, oh but  
clad in tartan trews, crossed tightly in trite parody of embarrassment,  
winding and unwinding, a wreath of smoke waltzing with the mirror,  
head cocked, shy, too teddy-bear cute with button eyes which beam,  
ears wiggling a little, wishing to amuse, and you reduced, a child agog  
know how he loves the job but... well, someone has to, like it or no, so...  
he holds out a silver salver, quite the cartoon butler, inclining slightly,  
gracious, at your service, considerate, courteous to a fault, proffers it,  
with care  
the note.

# Paul Murgatroyd

## The Garden of Prosperine

The man is trudging through the grey of the Kentish desert, on his way to nowhere, for no reason. A winter sirocco soundlessly budes the tainted air and dumps scorching grit in his single eye. He hugs himself, smirking with pleasure. The blisters caused by his pricy boots are weeping, but he limps on, across the dust and stones and rocks.

A sudden sliver of fragrance. Then the heavy, heady perfume of nard and spikenard, of myrrh and myrobalanum. Finally at the centre of the scent the censer – a mutant beauty, a flower with a triad of disparate heads set on a slender pillar of emerald.

The man shrugs at a starburst of snowflakes frozen in an indigo sky. He grimaces at a silken tarn from which a purple rill is spilling and drifting and misting. The third head has languorous eyes with gilded lids and crimson lips which begin to open and seem about to speak; but he just doesn't have time to listen.

As he turns his back and moves off, its lips open wide.

The flower sighs, and then it fades and dies.

The last flower in the world.



Paul Klee – Strange Garden

# Leconte de Lisle

## Le Sommeil du Condor

Par delà l'escalier des roides Cordillères,  
Par delà les brouillards hantés des aigles noirs,  
Plus haut que les sommets creusés et entonnoirs  
Ou bout le flux sanglant des laves familières,  
L'envergure pendant et rouge par endroits,  
Le vaste Oiseau, tout plein d'une morne indolence,  
Regarde l'Amérique et l'espace en silence,  
Et le sombre soleil qui meurt dans ses yeux froids.  
La nuit roule de l'Est, où les pampas sauvages  
Sous les monts étagés s'élargissent sans fin;  
Elle endort le Chili, les villes, les rivages,  
Et la mer Pacifique, et l'horizon divin;  
Du continent muet elle s'est emparée:  
Des sables aux couteaux, des gorges aux versants,  
De cime en cime, elle enfle, en tourbillons croissants,  
Le lourd débordement de sa haute marée.  
Lui, comme un spectre, seul, au front du pic altier,  
Baigné d'une lueur qui saigne sur la neige,  
Il attend cette mer sinistre qui l'assiège:  
Elle arrive, déferle, et le couvre en entiere.  
Dans l'abîme sans fond la Croix austral allume  
Sur les côtes du ciel son phare constellé.  
Il râle de plaisir, il agite sa plume,  
Il érige son cou musculeux et pelé,  
Il s'enlève en fouettant l'âpre neige des Andes,  
Dans un cri rauque il monte où n'atteint pas le vent,  
Et, loin du globe noir, loin de l'astre vivant,  
Il dort dans l'air glacé, les ailes toutes grandes.

From Poèmes barbares

# The Condor's Sleep

Beyond the stairs of steep cordilleras,  
Beyond the mists haunted by black eagles,  
Higher even than the creased and conical summits,  
Where the sanguine stream of untamed lava ends,  
Its wingspan hanging, red-stained,  
The giant bird, full of sad indolence  
Silently watches America and into space  
And the dark sun that dies in its cold eyes.  
Night rolls in from the east, where savage pampas  
Extend endlessly under terraced mountains;  
She puts Chili to sleep, the towns, the coasts,  
And the Pacific, and the divine horizon;  
She has conquered a mute continent,  
The sands on its slopes, the gorges of its brows,  
From crest to crest, she swells, in growing whirls  
The heavy eruption of her high tide.  
He, like a ghost, alone, at the proud peak,  
Bathing in a light that bleeds on the snow,  
He awaits that sinister sea that besieges him.  
She arrives, breaks forth, covers him entirely.  
In the endless abyss the Southern Cross  
Lights Heaven's shores with its starry beacon.  
He rumbles with pleasure, shifts his plumage  
Raises his naked, muscular neck.  
He flees, whipping the bitter Andes snow  
With a raucous cry he rises where no wind can blow  
And far from the dark globe, far from the living star,  
He sleeps in frozen air, on giant wings.

Translated by Peter Van Belle

Stereoscopic photograph of Lake Inca, Chili – Library of Congress

## **Commentary on the poem:**

Leconte de Lisle is considered one of *les parnassiens*, French artists from the mid-nineteenth century who rebelled against the Romantic movement by stressing technical skill and emotional detachment. The latter is impossible in such a complex endeavour as art.

The main character of the poem is the condor, described as sad, indolent, ghost-like, yet at the same time having red on its plumage, which suggests blood and passion. In its sleep, it escapes the earthly and flies into the night's sky.

The other main character is the night, which is given a feminine pronoun. It is, in fact, the only active character, all-powerful, yet nurturing, like a mother-goddess. It is compared to the sea, another maternal symbol, at the same time a symbol of the subconscious.

So actually the poem is about the artist, or his ego, at the moment of crisis, dreaming of escaping its dreamy perch – the snow is described as bitter – into the night of the subconscious, a very Romantic theme.

Peter Van Belle

# Ian Smith

## The Ride of my Life

I pedal my tricycle, not across the raised grating in a cul-de-sac near my birthplace that I clip, tip, crash onto, sustaining a greenstick fracture when I am three, but clear out of grizzled post-war London into land gleaming like a desert in spring, patched up, leaving Jack and Jill mishaps behind, chubby legs pumping, blue blouse billowing, past low vines under a breakfast cereal sun. Synthesised discordance, the sound of instruments uninvented, or lost long ago, form a sweet, painful soundtrack like the music electrifying movies by Terrence Malick or Werner Herzog, mingling eerily with voices, perhaps echoes from past lives trapped in airwaves.

Before understanding, I have pedalled from these opening scenes into the mosaic of my life. Oh juicy, juicy experience! But this is no glossy travelogue. I journey below high-tension wires, past rotting wharves, encampment fires beside a buckled road, entering the outskirts of a decadent city where wind moans, wheels threaten to wedge in disused tramlines reeking of rust, abandonment. In a stained piazza cuirassed artistes leer from doorways as if posing for photo shoots, issuing laughing lewd invitations with pelvic thrusts.

Ennued after danger's thrill, the dwarf cavorting around the feet of a grinning large-toothed top-hatted man on stilts now old hat, satiated, the carnival's frenzy dwindled, I advance across grasslands, through avenues of evergreens, ford minnow-dappled freshets, breathe honeysuckle air seeing a sunset of cinnabar and gold, and silvery gold, until, with bewildering swiftness, the sky that seemed so high, lowers, darkens, a miasma shrouding stunted pines struggling in hard ground, rocks sharp, with sudden pitfalls. I hear a stone kicked over the edge into a black chasm land with a dull thud far below.

Reaching an even lonelier tract, the shame of this, beyond the scald of a politician's broken promise of greed's reward where souls shriek, memory swarms, where a gaunt dog with shrunken genitalia, bereft of shade, pads over baked earth that absorbs spilled blood without trace, a place of monotony until zero hope, panting in the ruin of something, crumbling masonry, signs of ancient civilisation, I see skulls poking through tufts of yellowed grass.

A classic case of fatigue, you might say, but, uh oh, what's this? A cliché of circling vultures. If only I could press Replay, pedal backwards, glimpse on the horizon those towers of the crumbling, carnivalesque city, be that kid hearing the old music's magic once more, feel a breeze puffing out his blue blouse.

# David McVey

## ‘Gladstone’s Got Himsel an Agent...’

It was a day when I wanted magic, urban magic, city magic. I wanted to be transformed by the strange and the irrational, but these things tend not to perform to order. Mystery isn’t a performing seal.

The old man taught me that. I had walked down to the Clyde because I had a fancy to see it steam, as if the waters were simmering and bubbling. I wanted to see the buildings on the far bank – the courts, the warehouses, the elegant lines of Carlton Place – appear and disappear as windows opened and closed in the screen of vapour.

But when I arrived and peered over the railing I saw the usual oily slick of flat water slurping past. I stood there, disappointed, and it started to rain, the droplets hissing and making target shapes on the slow-passing river water.

An old man - small, grey-haired, with lined, leathery skin – emerged from the shadows. This, I thought, was promising.

‘Whit are ye starin at, son?’ he asked.

I hesitated before answering. After all, the real reason would make me look absurd. In the event, I decided to be honest after all.

‘I was looking for magic – city magic. I wanted to see the river boil and steam.’

The man chuckled. ‘Ye need tae learn, son. A watched pot never boils.’

I turned again to look at the chilly, black, rain-patterned water. No change. When I started to walk away, the man had gone and I could not see him anywhere.

I walked back towards the city centre along streets mauled by snarling traffic that belched poison-breath. People glared at each other, jostled, pushed. I came to the old steeple at the corner of High Street and the Trongate. I had read a story once where the steeple - tall, slender, unconnected to any other building, never used or visited – had turned out to be a rocket ship waiting for the right moment to re-enter space. I longed, now, to see evidence of preparation for take-off. Then I could wait and see the massive structure rise and accelerate and roar into the heavens, becoming just a blink of starlight as it raced to regions barely imagined.

But there was nothing. It stood on the launchpad, inert. No crew arrived.

I strolled back along busy Argyle Street and began to feel happier. I remembered the old man’s words and, blocking out the noise and ugliness and anger I began to recognise lesser, pocket-sized miracles. A beaming young couple emerged from a jeweller’s, the girl studying the finger on which a tiny pinpoint of white fire blazed. A crowded bus passed and then paused at lights; standing near the front of it was a young woman, grasping a rail for steadiness. Inadvertently she had assumed a posture that was cool and elegant and casual, like a model on the front cover of a fashion magazine. Only better fed, I thought. A thing of grace and calm and beauty. The bus moved away.

An elderly lady dropped a pound coin in the hat of a fiddle-playing busker who missed a beat in his joy and surprise. A Big Issue vendor made a sales pitch in punchy verse and, as a result, sold out his entire stock, including one copy to me.

Life, at last, seemed good, transcendent, a shining thing, if not actually magical. And then the alarm bells started ringing. Literally.

Two police cars shot past, bullets of pulsing blue light, and were followed by an ambulance and two fire appliances. The sirens echoed back along the city centre street-canyons. It seemed this was destined not to be a day of magic. Perhaps it would be better to recognise the grim reality, to embrace it? I followed the siren-sounds.

George Square seemed to be the centre of the disturbance. Most people, shameful rubbernecks like myself, were heading in the direction of the action but there was a steady trickle of people coming in the opposite direction. Hints about the nature of the unfolding story could be gained from slices of their talk. 'Threatening to jump...' '...trying to talk him down...' '...been up there a long time...' '...he's a right big fella.'

The Square was so full of movement it seemed blurred at the edges. Crowds milled about the four sides of the Square, held back from the centre by a hastily erected barrier of plastic tape. Emergency service vehicles squatted in the middle of the Square and policemen, bulky in bullet-proof vests and fluorescent yellow tabards, stood mumbling into walkie-talkies.

Just inside the taped-off area there was a TV news outside broadcast van. Its back door was open and a bank of TV monitors could be seen, each one displaying scenes from the Square or pictures from other news stories. I was puzzled to see that one screen was running what I recognised as the 1950s MGM version of *Ivanhoe* with Robert Taylor.

I asked a man in the crowd what was going on. He simply raised his arm and pointed to the middle of the Square, to the soaring column which, for as long as anyone could remember, had held the statue of a dignified, standing Sir Walter Scott. Not any more. Scott sat at the top of the column, dangling his feet over the edge, with an air of dejection. He had thrown off the lightning conductor ('it nearly took a policeman's eye out when it came down!' I was told) that usually sat on his head and he was trying to rub off dried pigeon droppings from his shoulders.

A long, spindly ladder poked up from a fire appliance towards the column. A fireman perched at the end, speaking in measured tones through a loudspeaker.

‘Look, Sir Walter, we can talk about this,’ he was saying, ‘If you like, we can bring you down, as soon as the heavy lifting gear arrives. Then we’ll have a chat, eh?’

‘What do you know?’ boomed a loud, resonant, igneous voice in reply. ‘How can you know how I feel? You all just want me stood up here, cold, windblown, wet, shat on by pigeons. What kind of life is that?’

‘He’s been moaning like this for months,’ one bystander told me.

‘Aye,’ said another, ‘He’s winding up the other statues something terrible. Rabbie Burns is already applying for other jobs.’

‘That’s right. And Gladstone’s got himsel an agent. Ye wonder where it will all...’

Screams pierced the Square from every quarter, and then a tragic, deep, hollow cry of despair drowned them all out. I saw only a blur of grey movement just as the cry was silenced and a rumble of destruction shook the streets. Chips and lumps and fragments of shattered stone flew like missiles across the Square.

Now there was just an awe-struck silence. Something, more than a statue, had gone from the Square forever.

I heard a nearby voice I recognised say, ‘Well, you wanted magic...’

# H-J Hoyles

## Burnt Offering

As the skies decline  
Into nightly solace, the vistas  
Retiring once more  
To let the panoply of unshattering  
Cosmos burn in silence  
Their savagery brought as beauty  
To our windows.  
Sleep has chanced itself upon  
A more enchanting prize  
Than restoration. Tonight  
As ancient musics coalesce  
And fracture in the chambers  
Framing our curdled earth  
A lakeside shivers with life.  
The moon bleats her rays down  
On the edges of the offering  
Crooked through virtue of existence,  
The black light hides the richness  
Of the brown grain.  
The edges howl through history  
Up to this creaking moment  
By the lakeside.  
Up goes the black more sprightly  
Than meat, or teeth, or thoughts  
Of our salvation.  
A swifter courier, a bunched fist  
Propelled by certainty  
Of the necessary end.  
The black, the howling edges cradled  
In ardent fire, the elegiac  
Flakes returned to earth, a token  
A reminder to the children in the window  
Of the need for our offering.

# H-J Hoyles

## Heard Tell

In somnambulant corners  
By chitinous doorways and the serenity  
Of cul-de-sac encounters.

I heard tell  
In the mellifluous place  
Of your searching, your scrying  
Listing into Odin's grace.

All was hell  
As the cadavers skewed left  
And the revenants bucked right  
Whilst the maelstrom, tiring, whisked a moment  
Into darkness and life.

I heard tell  
There were soldiers, splendid

I heard tell  
In a slimy Manchester subway  
That Louise's mother was livid with the cancer  
it better not take her  
Before Anne-Marie's  
Christening.

And then  
I heard the vicar tell  
On Harry, ah Harry, pristine and strong  
Till the subterfuge of  
Kristie and her silken  
Innocence, meant to be  
To be, not plowed, tilled not toiled  
Harry burdened with his wrongs  
Kristie breathing out God's songs.

# Peter Van Belle

## Ghost in Rain

To Byron the winters got ever colder. In fact, each winter—this was his eighty-first—made him weaker. He tried to keep fit by walking in his garden every evening, even on cold rainy ones like these. To him not getting out of the house was a sign of dying. Long ago his parents wouldn't leave the house, and within a few years they were dead.

The large pond was the centrepiece of his garden. Here the wild pines grew so thick and high they hid the housing estates and the railway embankment, hid the world, and what the years had done. Even the rain added to its charm.

But today Byron ignored all this and stared across the water at an old woman in a long white dress seated on a rock near the far shore, her profile like a crescent moon. Away from overhanging trees, the rain hit the water with such fury it formed a mist, so she seemed to float. Somehow, he didn't want to shout at her.

He tilted his umbrella into the rain and adjusted his glasses, saw it wasn't an old woman after all. The face was thin but smooth, so Byron couldn't decide whether it belonged to a man or a woman. The figure sat silent, motionless, staring with focused amusement at the pond.

Byron's scalp tingled. He felt terror at the thought the figure would notice him if he kept watching it. Perhaps he was dreaming; many of his nightmares contained similar disturbing and embarrassing scenes. He furtively withdrew to the path that led to his house. It ran along a railway embankment. This evidence of civilisation made him see how childish his fear was. He moved the umbrella aside to listen to the hiss of the rain. Opposite the embankment stood a wall of trees, immovable one moment, then swaying in a gust of wind.



A Ghost in Rain by Hyodo Rinsei, active circa 1870

A familiar pain erupted in the middle of his body. It eased, leaving an ache of cold sharpness as if his flesh had been peeled away to expose his spine to the cold wind. An approaching train drummed like the knocking of bones on a giant skull somewhere in the dark. Street lamps cast a poisonous glow on the moving clouds scraping away his life.

Byron lived in the modern villa on a knoll in the garden, its pale walls green with algae. One wall had a black mark: a crow perched on the balcony. It whetted its beak on the balustrade, righted itself at his approach like a guard. To Byron it was a warlock, making him think serene, dark thoughts of resignation. A freight train now clanked along the embankment, the light in its locomotive throwing a rapid light across the garden and on his walls.

Byron entered and hung away his sodden coat.

“Hello, Mister Slocomb,” he said to the white cat sitting in his armchair.

The cat snarled and jumped off the chair. Byron got angry at this; it had never done this before. Everything was ganging up on him today. He had this image of chucking Mister Slocomb into the burning stove. What gave him that idea? Then he remembered his grandmother.

One day, seventy years ago, she’d shown him a basket with kittens, small, piebald, blind kittens.

“Too bad we can’t keep them.”

As he sat at the kitchen table, doing his homework while waiting for Mom to pick him up, Grandmother carried the basket over to her coal stove. It stood black and shiny in a tiled hearth, resembling the helmet of a medieval knight. First she stoked the fire until the grating lit up yellow and the stove purred. She lifted the cover, and blue and red flames like glowing tongues licking upwards. With an oven glove she lifted the mewling kittens one by one and deftly fed them into the burning hole, swiftly replacing the cover.

“There, see how quickly they went.”

He looked away from the stove with the burning kittens and started to sweat. When his mom had taken him home and asked what was wrong he told her. She clasped her hands to her face.

“I always ran from the room when she did that.”

When Grandmother died, they all pretended they’d lost a saint.

From the house a corner of the pond was visible, but not where he’d seen the figure. The rain on the windows distorted and reshaped the outside world. Why would they pull such a prank on him? He was old and ill, and those walks in the garden were his only pleasure. But it seemed an odd way to frighten or goad him, too subtle for kids from the estates, a sort of artist then. Were they trying to tell him he’d end up like that, forever tied to one place, staring at the rain?

He started to doubt it was a prank. Perhaps he'd seen evidence of something that survived the body, a sign meant to comfort, rather than frighten him.

Mister Slocumb peeked from behind a bookcase, reminding Byron of those kittens. Even as a child, their fate had reminded him of the condemned cast into Hell, like in the paintings by the Flemish Primitives in art history class. In art school he'd done a stint of tightrope walking on a dare; as a kid he'd often walked along ledges and over rooftops. Up on the rope he often thought that if he slipped the ground would open up to receive him in a fiery maw, but there'd always been a net. Now the feeling was returning. The net was gone.

He paced from the kitchen, where he wasn't hungry, to the living room, where he couldn't sit down. Thinking about the kittens tortured him, and thinking about the apparition angered him. Dwelling on memories was loathsome. They might be a lifeline for other people, but he'd walked a hard road and his memories only served to let him marvel at his longevity.

He took a broomstick along; at his age they would forgive him an outburst of aggression. A rising wind sent clouds scudding and warmed his face. It blew the last raindrops from the trees. Over the embankment the sky grew clearing up and stars appeared.

The pond's surface seemed alive in this wind, every ripple catching the new light. There was no one. He felt weak and sat down on a rock. The cold rose from the earth.

Dutch version first published in Gierik & NVT, Antwerp, Belgium



# Robin Fuller

## A significant shape on the steps of the Hôtel de la Place du Parlement

At nine o' clock on a spring morning the low sun reflects off the white-grey columns and gold lettering of the Hôtel de la Place du Parlement, and Alfred stands at the top of the front steps making a visor of a flat palm, smiling at the sky. The sky is clear, and this is a good sign. Apart from a few small clouds, like smudges of paint, the sky is a brilliant barely graduated azure. Apart from the yellow-lightened horizontal shores, the sky is consistently azure and clear, adulterated only by a small amount of more-or-less regularly spaced clouds, arranged in a diagonal grid, almost-but-not identical in shape. It is, apart from this evenly spaced morphological table of clouds, essentially, a clear-sky day.

Too much attention to detail, to complexity, ruined his yesterday. He is in Rennes to relax. His visit to the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes had not been a good idea, not now, not when he desperately needs respite from his consuming cryptopalaeographic investigations. He had planned to stay away from the archaeological exhibit at the Musée, to view only the nineteenth-century painting. But he failed.

He closes his eyes holding his face to the sky and breathes deeply through his nose. This holiday, he hopes, can still be salvaged. The air tastes clear, like rain and morning, the fishy smell of a rain-wet city, stippled with market aromas — diesel, tarpaulin, rot — but essentially, clear air.

In his research Alfred always sought precision. He thrived on revealing the precise structural clarity behind the esoteric and mystic, finding the universals (*esotemes* and *mystemes*) which draw networks of connection on the x, y and z axes of time. But lately, he was learning too much too fast, too much information for him to form a clear image, all was clouded by a blunt and heavy fuzz. And so he came to Brittany seeking a simpler sort of clarity — the clarity of a leaf, of bread, a clean clarity. The quaint images of the slouching half-timbered houses of Rennes that Duckduckgo returned promised simplicity to Alfred, and so, impulsively, he booked a flight.

The sky is clear, the air is clear, this will be a clear day, Alfred thinks, confidently stepping down to the next step of the Hôtel de la Place du Parlement, only to find underfoot, with a crunch and a squelch, a snail. He stops. The shell is cracked into fragments and much of the greeny-yellow and brown-freckled flesh has liquified. There are, he determines, essentially, three substances — shell, flesh, liquid. There are nine fragments of shell on the visible surface of the remaining snail flesh. Isn't it telling how that happens, he thinks, now kneeling before the crushed

snail to get a closer look, three substances and three-by-three fragments. Categorising the shards by topological kind (three domed, six essentially flat), relative size (three large, three medium, three miniscule), and number of sides (six three-sided, three six-sided), he determines the ideal shell fragment to be a flat, medium-sized, equilateral triangle. He stands back up and relaxes his eye muscles, receding the details and bringing to the fore instead the tri-substantial gestalt. He realises that, no, this is not an unfamiliar shape, but rather, yes, it is the same shape that he saw for the first time yesterday at the Musée des beaux-arts.

He had gone to the museum prepared to avoid the archaeological exhibit. It was an approximately six-minute walk from his hotel: west along Rue de Brillhac, turning south onto Rue Edith Cavell, continuing onto Rue Jean Juarés and finally turning east onto Quai Émile-Zola. The route was perfect in its simplicity and geometric purity: a horizontal, a vertical, and another horizontal. Upon entering the museum, he knew in advance where to go: right was towards the archaeological exhibit, bound to inspire cryptopalaeographic ruminations, so he turned left and went upstairs. He was seeking paintings with simple themes — rural, pastoral, seasonal. As he strolled through the galleries, he was drawn to a rusty-hued agricultural painting. In the foreground was a strong-armed, hay-baling, woman. This is a simple and clear painting, Alfred thought, as he paused to enjoy it. Among the rusts and russets, sepias and siennas, umbers and auburns, was a tiny, but nevertheless striking — almost jarring — fleck of yellow gold, demanding inspection. The colour came from a charm on a thin leather string around the neck of the peasant woman. Leaning as close to the painting as he could without triggering an alarm, he studied the golden charm. It was essentially square in shape, with a diagonal projecting from the top left corner, and both corners of the right-hand side protruding into dolloped bulges. Such an unusual shape, and so incongruously accented with a vibrant hue in an otherwise subdued palette. The prominence given to this mysterious form was most certainly, he was sure, the result of deliberate and significant design by the artist, or if not the artist, the patron.

The walls may as well have been blank. He paced the museum, staring at the ground, wing to wing, up and down stairs, gripped by the charm. This shape, so compelling, yet he was sure he had never seen it before, although it did have superficial similarities with the Hebrew Samech. As it occurred to him that the charm also bore a resemblance to an early Sumerian bird symbol, he bumped into a display stand and, jolted from his thoughts, looked up to find himself caught in the gaze of a sphinx. He was in the archaeological exhibit. It would be best to exit, he thought, but it was too late, something had caught his eye. Among the artefacts was a small horizontal clay tablet, mounted by a black nail to a black plinth. It was labelled an example of the as-yet undeciphered Minoan ‘Linear A’ script (Alfred had in fact been making progress with deciphering the mysterious script himself). The incision on the light clay was very shallow and the spot lighting further flattened the details, so he moved in to take a closer look. Faintly, surrounding the nail, he could make out a squarish form, only more curved to the right side, and also, he then observed, a diagonal pointing from the top left corner.

It was identical in basic outline to the charm he had just seen on the above floor. He had never before encountered this shape in his research into Linear A; he had never in fact encountered this shape anywhere, except today, now twice. This is a powerful symbol, is the only verbal thought he could make of the chiming, repeating and throbbing symbol now dominating his mind. The mental image of the symbol carried him out of the museum and into the streets of Rennes. This is a very powerful symbol — the symbol loomed, crushed, it resonated, as he wandered northward through laneways all the time staring at the cobbled ground. This is a powerful symbol — surrounded by a haze of unseeable detail, the symbol was a megalith formed not from solid matter but from an infinitely complex process of microscopic movement, a mist of n-dimensional tessellated tendrils disappearing into and reappearing from the nothing, a monumental yet fuzzily vibrating symbol becoming a wall in his thought that he could not get past, a symbol whose outer form he could not see through to access the meanings it contained. The symbol then carried him to the bars of Rennes, in the old part of town, where eventually red wine silenced the symbol.

He awoke fresh, seemingly all he had carried over from the red wine was its sedating effect. If indeed there was anything to that symbol, or rather shape, to put it more neutrally, he thought, he could always inquire with the museum at a later date, no need for it to influence today. But fate in the form of a snail had intervened. Now, on the steps of his hotel as he looks at this shape a third time, rendered in the medium of a snail crushed by the sole of his shoe, where is he to begin? What is he to do with this symbol? Where does this shape fit in the transdimensional jigsaw puzzle of cryptopalaeography? Much like the leather string threaded through the triangular hole in the centre of the peasant woman's charm, he needs a way through the symbol. Wait. It occurs to him that it may not only be the outer shape that is significant — why would an equilateral triangle as the ideal shell-fragment shape have been determinable if it were not relevant? The charm was threaded through a central hole, and the incised symbol centred by a nailhead, both of which, he realises now to his immense satisfaction, were the exact same shape: an equilateral triangle.

# Rebecca Pyle

## At the Crown and Mermaid

Everyone speaks of being followed, taunted, enhanced by one ghost: but sometimes they rove in groups, like the Legionnaires of Foreign Wars, or school-parent groups, or religious groups, endlessly and somewhat pointlessly meeting, participating desperately still in the effort to be--tribal.

Surely it's the effort to be tribal which pulls them in; even ghosts, you see, have this instinct. You've surely heard misery loves company. In the case of ghosts, misery loves joy. The joy of startling the complacent ones who breathe, and affect actual things, unlike ghosts, who simply haunt or strike a nuance or strike wonder in those sensitive to them. Or fearful of them.

I have been chased the past year and a half by a group growing ever wisper in their effect: when they speak, I don't listen much anymore, as my pity overrides any alarm I feel. In real life they were harmful also, a group of pretenders bitter because deep down they knew they were pretenders. They'd struck up something called *The Flaming Geniuses*, not a rock band, but a performing group: they wrote plays, which largely made no sense, but they liked dressing up the public place they borrowed for their performances with bits of silk scarves and scary carved busts, fake spider webs too and rubbery dirty dolls' heads if it was the haunting time of year, and then putting on their plays, which made them a little bit Shakespeare. You learned not to ask what the plays were about: they' didn't know either, except that they emitted scheduled noise and would always come to an end, and you'd remember the fat sweaty exulting one who kept rewriting *Little Miss Muffet Sat on a Tuffet* and for performances wore a tight checked sateen-lined vest with a pocket for a pocket watch he still didn't have, the bloodless-looking churchwoman who'd quietly wept since her child tap-dancing-corps days, and the sharp-eyed woman who liked to play a character who was a genius in the mornings and a dolt in the evening in her plays so she could have, as she always said, her cake, and she could eat it too. There was also a bad hypnotist, who'd squandered his fancy education, who gave free therapy to audiences by whirling models of planets in front of bored eyes; and a red-faced man whose wife had become a zoologist, and who'd decided if he copied the intonations of zoo management personnel she'd studied with he'd be held in esteem, too. And the many young who'd just laboriously finished doctorates in obscure fields, but had all found jobs working in the sort of enterprises which were desperate for people who'd sign their names with a comma, and then a Ph.D, after their puny begging names.



Photograph by Rebecca Pyle

In short, people who wanted to be radically more than they were. That's very like ghosts, isn't it? You have one plate of reality and another of refusing that reality, and that's a writer. That's true. But the rank and file of writers never make an escape from anything; they stay mired in what they are mired in, a whole rank and file of popular national prejudices and feelings. They're writers only to a tiny degree, and that degree is mainly making sentences. Bingo! Your sentence has never been written before. You are original! And indeed, every poster they put up advertising their performances (though they noted no one ever stumbled in who was not known to them: they knew the way to thrive was large groups of relatives, and friends who owed you favors, attending) had that word *Original* in front of the word *plays*.

Are ghosts original? *No, they're extremely derivative*, a friend of mine said. After decades away, I've returned to England; we're here at *The Crown and Mermaid*, his favorite pub in London. *As derivative as desperate recipes designed to escalate your social status. If you look at that recipe in fifty years you'll see all its desperate striving-to-fit-in and only-slightly-raise-you-above artifice. With the exception of slices of bacon wrapped around dates stuffed with Stilton. That recipe, called Devils on Horseback, is a winner, as it is what makes the dead wish most terribly to be alive. The smell of bacon, the sweet taste of dates, the tang of aged cheese. The ghosts of swine, trees, cows!*

\_But this friend of mine has worked in places the rest of us wouldn't dare to know: McMurdo, in the Antarctic, the Antarctic which is the ghost of much of the world's past. He advises the Scott Polar Museum, in Cambridge; and he spends a lot of too-ample time in front of his small gas fireplace in London, which is surely one of the most wonderfully ghostly cities, unless you try to compare it with Dublin or with Glasgow or Tel Aviv or Prague, or mountain-top environs in Nepal, the climbing regions. He has forgotten his own past, he says, after working for *The National Geographic*: all they write and photograph makes you, he said, realize each of us is a fine stew of accident.

*How, he asked, did you separate yourself from the fake Shakespeareans? The acting troupe which also wrote its own plays, which even they, you say, didn't understand, didn't really want to understand, but they very much liked dressing up?*

*What you don't know is one of them even claimed to be related to Hamlet. Am I cursed with having written about one of their bishops, the one who attended our plays to hear whether sins were being celebrated or suggested in our plays,? I said. Am I cursed with that play having been successful? Performed outside the group, even across the country? The mousetrap continues. They turned on me in a fury, threw me into exodus, and thus I didn't travel with them when they flew to a playwrights' workshop, eight weeks later, and their plane fell out of the sky. So no, I am not cursed; that bishop, my having written critically about him, that*

*writing--ended up saving my solo mio life.*

*The play's the thing, he said. So you and the bishop live on.*

*A writer rarely quietly leaves, I said.*

*That is true, he said. And he began a story for me which was about how he fell once into a group at McMurdo station in the Antarctic which was failed intellectuals, anthropologists, scholarlies, theologians, businesspeople. Like attracts like, he said. And what they all had in common was dishonesty, bitterness about not achieving what they were sure they should have achieved. They'd lost their ability to admire others, because they no longer admired themselves. People like this find an unscrupulous leader whom they believe will give them an advantage, to make up for their lacks.*

*So how did you leave, I asked.*

*Well, like you, I was pursued for a time. By memories of them. I remembered positive things about them, though they weren't really as positive as I thought. What I thought was positive was because I was using this group also, to make me feel as if I belonged to their industrious club. But research thrives on interdependence but also very large doses of independence. The more I worked alone, the more I achieved, the more they worked against me, particularly their leader.*

*And then what happened? I said.*

*Well, he said. Each wanted to brag that they'd confronted me, to make points with their leader. And the way each of them tried to tell me off, told me all I'd ever want to know about each of them---how they themselves were shredded and mutilated by others. The women talked about how I'd destroyed their tight-knit community which they relied on and needed so much in the arctic; they talked about how I'd violated trust. How I'd disrespected the group. But what was remarkable was how, when I played back in my head what each of them had said, how they'd sounded as if they were old recordings they'd heard before--addressed to themselves, by their teachers, or parents, priests, or college rooming-mates. And it was the same with women and with the men: the most shrill and hysterical of them, attacking me however quietly and verbally, took me back to various rooms in church belfries, figuratively speaking, or in their own childhood homes where they'd been scathingly rejected, punished, for selfishnesses. And I was, thank goodness, able to see that they were radiating to me memories of events where they had been crippled by criticism, resulting in the squad they had become, basically stealing others' research ideas and personal researching style and personae, because inside they were hollow and full of doubt, as criminals become, for lack of anything else to do, lying in wait to snatch things from people.*

*I see, I said. I've experienced the same.*

*But a good leader is always challengeable, he said. Even welcomes it. But the old church and social model is the leader must never be disagreed with; he has free and fairly hideous and almost completely selfish rein. Which is ironic, as he's postulated as the one who is selfless. Of course--that's never true.*

I sighed. Too true this was! The sad blindness! *What's your project now*, I said.

*My project now is writing a book about how--relics, museums, even books, are ghosts*, he said. *Smart ghosts but irritating ghosts. Wailing to you how unfair things were, mostly. But--mostly--how unfair death is.*

*That's art*, yes, I said.

He smiled, laughed. But just as he was about to say something in return, there was a ruckus at the window of the room of the pub in which we were sitting. Noises, outside the cold almost-winter window at *The Crown and Mermaid*. Choir members, all holding either a book of music, or a an electrified candle, not a real one with its bluish flame. \_Frankenstein candles. Singers, for Christmas time?

*But it's barely November*, my friend said, looking out the ancient and beautiful window of *The Crown & Mermaid*.

The singers, then, I noticed, seemed to be looking not at us, but past us. But of course, they were concentrating on their music, I thought; the effort of singing, and following the words.

*Holy fuck*, he said. *It's our ghosts. Yours and mine. McMurdo 1979 and part of 1980, and your Flaming Geniuses, I'd bet. What do you say?*

I looked, as I wouldn't have if he wasn't there, and I was sure it was true. Though the effort of singing changed faces. Yes, it was them; the men looked like church gangsters, the women, their nimble, or clumsy--enablers.

*Yes*, I said. I felt, as they say in ghost stories, over and over--my usually warm veins running cold.

*We'll slip out the back door*, said my friend. *They'd prefer to sing for strangers anyway, I think. Though they must, we know, have come to track us down.*

Out we went out the back door. But cowards we were not. We came out back at the front edge of the pub, came around to in front of the window which we'd been sitting at, and we stood within their fold, as closely as we could within the carolers. Though later he and I would confess to each other--we had felt--an almost heart-stopping chill, like the chill you feel on the top of a mountain, even in summer. Though the air was still, we felt somehow whipped by wind, now, in

front of the small *Crown and Mermaid*.

Each of the singers pulled away from us, shocked by our bravery, as if they were inside a plane, and we'd appeared to walk on the wings, in flight. And they each, one by one, a few simultaneously, evaporated, troubled looks on their faces as they disappeared, but also with a look of relief that they'd been observed and could strike off now, be discharged. The sky above was wispy gray and cloudy, and they melted, or froze, into it, as if it was their shielding curtain from the world we were in now below, we, so lucky.

*Most ghosts work in absolute obscurity, my friend said. They are not sure anyone notices them at all. We made sure they knew. And somewhere up there--he looked at the grayish sky--they're excitedly telling each other that they were noticed, that we saw them. They're lying to each other in fact and telling each other we desperately want to rejoin them.*

*But they know it's a lie, I said.*

*Yes, he said. And that's exactly why we're who we are and they're who they are.*

I nodded, sadly. This was the truth, and it explained them, in a compact and true way.

*Never forget, he said, when we said goodbye that evening, me back to Edinburgh on the train and he onward on the train to his house or flat with the unfatigueable gas fireplace he said gave him more pleasure than any love relationship he'd ever had. (He was old, we were both old, and old bones love contrasts of cold and warmth.)*

*Never forget what, I said. I'd had quite a bit to drink. It made a train trip short in winter. But you had to be careful not to drink too much, as you had to be careful not to tell anyone too much about yourself, even in a drama. Never trust anyone had become my motto.*

*What we're doing homework for is becoming the finest, the very finest of ghosts, he said.*

As he said this his whole face, old, bloomed into beauty, as if he was boy again, and he was talking to me, a girl, his same age. Eight. Or ten. Or twelve.

No words were good enough to follow this remark of his. I nodded, and nodded a few more times, and knew, from the way strangers looked at me, I had a look of joy on my face all the way to the train station. And beyond, to Edinburgh. A beautiful exorcism had occurred; as always, it occurred with truth.

# **Alison Black**

## **Our Hearts**

Footprints in our hearts,  
Footprints leaving a mark,  
Footprints that follow us though life.

A memory to share,  
A memory to hold,  
A memory to keep.

Appreciate life moments,  
Appreciate the joy of life,  
Appreciate loved ones.

# Sheridan le Fanu

## Introduction

The Irish author Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu is now best known for his novella *Carmilla*, published in 1872, about a lesbian vampire. The story is told from the viewpoint of her victim/lover Laura, and was the forerunner of the most famous vampire story of all, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

I've chosen his story *The Child Who went with the Fairies*, in part because it shares certain characteristics with *Carmilla*, among them what I would call a "Fear of the Feminine," a trend of portraying women as menacing and sinister, a common trope in culture, especially from the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth century.

Before we come to that, I also want to look at the historical context of the story. The setting is east of Limerick, and is referred to as a resting place for a Jacobite leader during the war against the Protestant William of Orange. With this in mind, the opulent fairy princess of the story could well stand for a member of the new Protestant aristocracy. To the average Irish farmer, such hostile and all-powerful invaders must've been very alien.

People who are to a high degree dependent on chance: gamblers, soldiers, sportsmen, often become very superstitious. So too, Irish Catholics, who were at the whim of their alien masters. Telling, that the Catholic Church in this story is of no help. In countries under Catholic control, such as France, the local priest often saves the day in folk tales.

Superstition also made goblins, demons, and in this case fairies, into subconscious metaphors for diseases. Before bacteria and viruses were discovered, diseases were very mysterious. As there was no obvious cause to them, nor a defence against them, they were invented. If one believed a wasting disease was caused by a vampire, one knew what to do about it. On a more serious note, diseases were often blamed on other ethnic groups, such as the Jews of Europe, which led to pogroms and persecution.

A psychological interpretation of the story reveals even more sinister elements. The fairy princess is clearly a seductress and vampire, the opposite of the mother of the story, and more powerful. The author emphasises how she showers the boy with kisses, and how wasted he looks when he reappears to his family. Then there are the apples she throws to the other children, a reference to the biblical Eve. In Freudian analysis she provides sexual gratification (sexual in Freudian terminology is everything pleasurable about the body) through oral pleasures. In his *Carmilla*, Le Fanu also emphasises the kisses between the vampire and her victim.

The fact that the mother is a widow is important. Some mothers, upon losing their husbands, transfer their affections onto their sons. This affection can take excessive proportions. Carl Gustav Jung, in one of his writings, reports a mother saying about a son she lost at an early age: "At least I didn't lose him to another woman." The fairy princess in this context represents such a mother's worst nightmare.

At a superficial level, this is a cautionary tale about being seduced by beauty and luxury. Yet looking at it from different perspectives reveals a myriad of underlying themes.

Peter Van Belle

# The Boy Who Went with the Fairies

Eastward of the old city of Limerick, about ten Irish miles under the range of mountains known as the Slieveelim hills, famous as having afforded Sarsfield a shelter among their rocks and hollows, when he crossed them in his gallant descent upon the cannon and ammunition of King William, on its way to the beleaguering army, there runs a very old and narrow road. It connects the Limerick road to Tipperary with the old road from Limerick to Dublin, and runs by bog and pasture, hill and hollow, straw-thatched village, and roofless castle, not far from twenty miles.

Skirting the healthy mountains of which I have spoken, at one part it becomes singularly lonely. For more than three Irish miles it traverses a deserted country. A wide, black bog, level as a lake, skirted with copse, spreads at the left, as you journey northward, and the long and irregular line of mountain rises at the right, clothed in heath, broken with lines of grey rock that resemble the bold and irregular outlines of fortifications, and riven with many a gully, expanding here and there into rocky and wooded glens, which open as they approach the road.

A scanty pasturage, on which browsed a few scattered sheep or kine, skirts this solitary road for some miles, and under shelter of a hillock, and of two or three great ash-trees, stood, not many years ago, the little thatched cabin of a widow named Mary Ryan.

Poor was this widow in a land of poverty. The thatch had acquired the grey tint and sunken outlines, that show how the alternations of rain and sun have told upon that perishable shelter.

But whatever other dangers threatened, there was one well provided against by the care of other times. Round the cabin stood half a dozen mountain ashes, as the rowans, inimical to witches, are there called. On the worn planks of the door were nailed two horse-shoes, and over the lintel and spreading along the thatch, grew, luxuriant, patches of that ancient cure for many maladies, and prophylactic against the machinations of the evil one, the house-leek. Descending into the doorway, in the *chiaroscuro* of the interior, when your eye grew sufficiently accustomed to that dim light, you might discover, hanging at the head of the widow's wooden-roofed bed, her beads and a phial of holy water.



Illustration by Peter Van Belle

Here certainly were defences and bulwarks against the intrusion of that unearthly and evil power, of whose vicinity this solitary family were constantly reminded by the outline of Lisnavoura, that lonely hillhaunt of the "Good people," as the fairies are called euphemistically, whose strangely dome-like summit rose not half a mile away, looking like an outwork of the long line of mountain that sweeps by it.

It was at the fall of the leaf, and an autumnal sunset threw the lengthening shadow of haunted Lisnavoura, close in front of the solitary little cabin, over the undulating slopes and sides of Slieveelim. The birds were singing among the branches in the thinning leaves of the melancholy ash-trees that grew at the roadside in front of the door. The widow's three younger children were playing on the road, and their voices mingled with the evening song of the birds. Their elder sister, Nell, was "within in the house," as their phrase is, seeing after the boiling of the potatoes for supper.

Their mother had gone down to the bog, to carry up a hamper of turf on her back. It is, or was at least, a charitable custom—and if not disused, long may it continue—for the wealthier people when cutting their turf and stacking it in the bog, to make a smaller stack for the behoof of the poor, who were welcome to take from it so long as it lasted, and thus the potato pot was kept boiling, and hearth warm that would have been cold enough but for that good-natured bounty, through wintry months.

Moll Ryan trudged up the steep "bohereen" whose banks were overgrown with thorn and brambles, and stooping under her burden, re-entered her door, where her dark-haired daughter Nell met her with a welcome, and relieved her of her hamper.

Moll Ryan looked round with a sigh of relief, and drying her forehead, uttered the Munster ejaculation:

"Eiah, wisha! It's tired I am with it, God bless it. And where's the craythurs, Nell?"

"Playin' out on the road, mother; didn't ye see them and you comin' up?"

"No; there was no one before me on the road," she said, uneasily; "not a soul, Nell; and why didn't ye keep an eye on them?"

"Well, they're in the haggard, playin' there, or round by the back o' the house. Will I call them in?"

"Do so, good girl, in the name o' God. The hens is comin' home, see, and the sun was just down over Knockdoulah, an' I comin' up."

So out ran tall, dark-haired Nell, and standing on the road, looked up and down it; but not a sign of her two little brothers, Con and Bill, or her little sister,

Peg, could she see. She called them; but no answer came from the little haggard, fenced with straggling bushes. She listened, but the sound of their voices was missing. Over the stile, and behind the house she ran—but there all was silent and deserted.

She looked down toward the bog, as far as she could see; but they did not appear. Again she listened—but in vain. At first she had felt angry, but now a different feeling overcame her, and she grew pale. With an undefined boding she looked toward the heathy boss of Lisnavoura, now darkening into the deepest purple against the flaming sky of sunset.

Again she listened with a sinking heart, and heard nothing but the farewell twitter and whistle of the birds in the bushes around. How many stories had she listened to by the winter hearth, of children stolen by the fairies, at nightfall, in lonely places! With this fear she knew her mother was haunted.

No one in the country round gathered her little flock about her so early as this frightened widow, and no door "in the seven parishes" was barred so early.

Sufficiently fearful, as all young people in that part of the world are of such dreaded and subtle agents, Nell was even more than usually afraid of them, for her terrors were infected and redoubled by her mother's. She was looking towards Lisnavoura in a trance of fear, and crossed herself again and again, and whispered prayer after prayer. She was interrupted by her mother's voice on the road calling her loudly. She answered, and ran round to the front of the cabin, where she found her standing.

"And where in the world's the craythurs—did ye see sight o' them anywhere?" cried Mrs. Ryan, as the girl came over the stile.

"Arrah! mother, 'tis only what they're run down the road a bit. We'll see them this minute coming back. It's like goats they are, climbin' here and runnin' there; an' if I had them here, in my hand, maybe I wouldn't give them a hiding all round."

"May the Lord forgive you, Nell! the childhers gone. They're took, and not a soul near us, and Father Tom three miles away! And what'll I do, or who's to help us this night? Oh, wirristhru, wirristhru! The craythurs is gone!"

"Whisht, mother, be aisy: don't ye see them comin' up?"

And then she shouted in menacing accents, waving her arm, and beckoning the children, who were seen approaching on the road, which some little way off made a slight dip, which had concealed them. They were approaching from the westward, and from the direction of the dreaded hill of Lisnavoura.

But there were only two of the children, and one of them, the little girl, was crying. Their mother and sister hurried forward to meet them, more alarmed than ever.

"Where is Billy—where is he?" cried the mother, nearly breathless, so soon as she was within hearing.

"He's gone—they took him away; but they said he'll come back again," answered little Con, with the dark brown hair.

"He's gone away with the grand ladies," blubbered the little girl.

"What ladies—where? Oh, Leum, asthora! My darlin', are you gone away at last? Where is he? Who took him? What ladies are you talkin' about? What way did he go?" she cried in distraction.

"I couldn't see where he went, mother; 'twas like as if he was going to Lisnavoura."

With a wild exclamation the distracted woman ran on towards the hill alone, clapping her hands, and crying aloud the name of her lost child.

Scared and horrified, Nell, not daring to follow, gazed after her, and burst into tears; and the other children raised high their lamentations in shrill rivalry.

Twilight was deepening. It was long past the time when they were usually barred securely within their habitation. Nell led the younger children into the cabin, and made them sit down by the turf fire, while she stood in the open door, watching in great fear for the return of her mother.

After a long while they did see their mother return. She came in and sat down by the fire, and cried as if her heart would break.

"Will I bar the doore, mother?" asked Nell.

"Ay, do—didn't I lose enough, this night, without lavin' the doore open, for more o' yez to go; but first take an' sprinkle a dust o' the holy waters over ye, acuishla, and bring it here till I throw a taste iv it over myself and the craythurs; an' I wondher, Nell, you'd forget to do the like yourself, lettin' the craythurs out so near nightfall. Come here and sit on my knees, asthora, come to me, mavourneen, and hould me fast, in the name o' God, and I'll hould you fast that none can take yez from me, and tell me all about it, and what it was—the Lord between us and harm—an' how it happened, and who was in it."

And the door being barred, the two children, sometimes speaking together, often interrupting one another, often interrupted by their mother, managed to tell this strange story, which I had better relate connectedly and in my own language.

The Widow Ryan's three children were playing, as I have said, upon the narrow old road in front of her door. Little Bill or Leum, about five years old, with golden hair and large blue eyes, was a very pretty boy, with all the clear tints of healthy childhood, and that gaze of earnest simplicity which belongs not to town children of the same age. His little sister Peg, about a year older, and his brother Con, a little more than a year elder than she, made up the little group.

Under the great old ash-trees, whose last leaves were falling at their feet, in the light of an October sunset, they were playing with the hilarity and eagerness of rustic children, clamouring together, and their faces were turned toward the west and storied hill of Lisnavoura.

Suddenly a startling voice with a screech called to them from behind, ordering them to get out of the way, and turning, they saw a sight, such as they never beheld before. It was a carriage drawn by four horses that were pawing and snorting, in impatience, as it just pulled up. The children were almost under their feet, and scrambled to the side of the road next their own door.

This carriage and all its appointments were old-fashioned and gorgeous, and presented to the children, who had never seen anything finer than a turf car, and once, an old chaise that passed that way from Killaloe, a spectacle perfectly dazzling.

Here was antique splendour. The harness and trappings were scarlet, and blazing with gold. The horses were huge, and snow white, with great manes, that as they tossed and shook them in the air, seemed to stream and float sometimes longer and sometimes shorter, like so much smoke—their tails were long, and tied up in bows of broad scarlet and gold ribbon. The coach itself was glowing with colours, gilded and emblazoned. There were footmen in gay liveries, and three-cocked hats, like the coachman's; but he had a great wig, like a judge's, and their hair was frizzed out and powdered, and a long thick "pigtail," with a bow to it, hung down the back of each.

All these servants were diminutive, and ludicrously out of proportion with the enormous horses of the equipage, and had sharp, sallow features, and small, restless fiery eyes, and faces of cunning and malice that chilled the children. The little coachman was scowling and showing his white fangs under his cocked hat, and his little blazing beads of eyes were quivering with fury in their sockets as he whirled his whip round and round over their heads, till the lash of it looked like a streak of fire in the evening sun, and sounded like the cry of a legion of "fillapoueecks" in the air.

"Stop the princess on the highway!" cried the coachman, in a piercing treble.

"Stop the princess on the highway!" piped each footman in turn, scowling over his shoulder down on the children, and grinding his keen teeth.

The children were so frightened they could only gape and turn white in their panic. But a very sweet voice from the open window of the carriage reassured them, and arrested the attack of the lackeys.

A beautiful and "very grand-looking" lady was smiling from it on them, and they all felt pleased in the strange light of that smile.

"The boy with the golden hair, I think," said the lady, bending her large and wonderfully clear eyes on little Leum.

The upper sides of the carriage were chiefly of glass, so that the children could see another woman inside, whom they did not like so well.

This was a black woman, with a wonderfully long neck, hung round with many strings of large variously-coloured beads, and on her head was a sort of turban of silk striped with all the colours of the rainbow, and fixed in it was a golden star.

This black woman had a face as thin almost as a death's-head, with high cheekbones, and great goggle eyes, the whites of which, as well as her wide range of teeth, showed in brilliant contrast with her skin, as she looked over the beautiful lady's shoulder, and whispered something in her ear.

"Yes; the boy with the golden hair, I think," repeated the lady.

And her voice sounded sweet as a silver bell in the children's ears, and her smile beguiled them like the light of an enchanted lamp, as she leaned from the window with a look of ineffable fondness on the golden-haired boy, with the large blue eyes; insomuch that little Billy, looking up, smiled in return with a wondering fondness, and when she stooped down, and stretched her jewelled arms towards him, he stretched his little hands up, and how they touched the other children did not know; but, saying, "Come and give me a kiss, my darling," she raised him, and he seemed to ascend in her small fingers as lightly as a feather, and she held him in her lap and covered him with kisses.

Nothing daunted, the other children would have been only too happy to change places with their favoured little brother. There was only one thing that was unpleasant, and a little frightened them, and that was the black woman, who stood and stretched forward, in the carriage as before. She gathered a rich silk and gold handkerchief that was in her fingers up to her lips, and seemed to thrust ever so much of it, fold after fold, into her capacious mouth, as they thought to smother her laughter, with which she seemed convulsed, for she was shaking and quivering, as it seemed, with suppressed merriment; but her eyes, which remained uncovered, looked angrier than they had ever seen eyes look before.

But the lady was so beautiful they looked on her instead, and she continued to caress and kiss the little boy on her knee; and smiling at the other children she held up a large russet apple in her fingers, and the carriage began to move slowly on, and with a nod inviting them to take the fruit, she dropped it on the road from the window; it rolled some way beside the wheels, they following, and then she dropped another, and then another, and so on. And the same thing happened to all; for just as either of the children who ran beside had caught the rolling apple, somehow it slipt into a hole or ran into a ditch, and looking up they saw the lady drop another from the window, and so the chase was taken up and continued till they got, hardly knowing how far they had gone, to the old cross-road that leads to Owey. It seemed that there the horses' hoofs and carriage wheels rolled up a wonderful dust, which being caught in one of those eddies that whirl the dust up into a column, on the calmest day, enveloped the children for a moment, and passed whirling on towards Lisnavoura, the carriage, as they fancied, driving in the centre of it; but suddenly it subsided, the straws and leaves floated to the ground, the dust dissipated itself, but the white horses and the lackeys, the gilded carriage, the lady and their little golden-haired brother were gone.

At the same moment suddenly the upper rim of the clear setting sun disappeared behind the hill of Knockdoula, and it was twilight. Each child felt the transition like a shock—and the sight of the rounded summit of Lisnavoura, now closely overhanging them, struck them with a new fear.

They screamed their brother's name after him, but their cries were lost in the vacant air. At the same time they thought they heard a hollow voice say, close to them, "Go home."

Looking round and seeing no one, they were scared, and hand in hand—the little girl crying wildly, and the boy white as ashes, from fear, they trotted homeward, at their best speed, to tell, as we have seen, their strange story.

Molly Ryan never more saw her darling. But something of the lost little boy was seen by his former playmates.

Sometimes when their mother was away earning a trifle at haymaking, and Nelly washing the potatoes for their dinner, or "beatling" clothes in the little stream that flows in the hollow close by, they saw the pretty face of little Billy peeping in archly at the door, and smiling silently at them, and as they ran to embrace him, with cries of delight, he drew back, still smiling archly, and when they got out into the open day, he was gone, and they could see no trace of him anywhere.

This happened often, with slight variations in the circumstances of the visit. Sometimes he would peep for a longer time, sometimes for a shorter time,

sometimes his little hand would come in, and, with bended finger, beckon them to follow; but always he was smiling with the same arch look and wary silence—and always he was gone when they reached the door. Gradually these visits grew less and less frequent, and in about eight months they ceased altogether, and little Billy, irretrievably lost, took rank in their memories with the dead.

One wintry morning, nearly a year and a half after his disappearance, their mother having set out for Limerick soon after cockcrow, to sell some fowls at the market, the little girl, lying by the side of her elder sister, who was fast asleep, just at the grey of the morning heard the latch lifted softly, and saw little Billy enter and close the door gently after him. There was light enough to see that he was barefoot and ragged, and looked pale and famished. He went straight to the fire, and cowered over the turf embers, and rubbed his hands slowly, and seemed to shiver as he gathered the smouldering turf together.

The little girl clutched her sister in terror and whispered, "Waken, Nelly, waken; here's Billy come back!"

Nelly slept soundly on, but the little boy, whose hands were extended close over the coals, turned and looked toward the bed, it seemed to her, in fear, and she saw the glare of the embers reflected on his thin cheek as he turned toward her. He rose and went, on tiptoe, quickly to the door, in silence, and let himself out as softly as he had come in.

After that, the little boy was never seen any more by any one of his kindred.

"Fairy doctors," as the dealers in the preternatural, who in such cases were called in, are termed, did all that in them lay—but in vain. Father Tom came down, and tried what holier rites could do, but equally without result. So little Billy was dead to mother, brother, and sisters; but no grave received him. Others whom affection cherished, lay in holy ground, in the old churchyard of Abington, with headstone to mark the spot over which the survivor might kneel and say a kind prayer for the peace of the departed soul. But there was no landmark to show where little Billy was hidden from their loving eyes, unless it was in the old hill of Lisnavoura, that cast its long shadow at sunset before the cabin-door; or that, white and filmy in the moonlight, in later years, would occupy his brother's gaze as he returned from fair or market, and draw from him a sigh and a prayer for the little brother he had lost so long ago, and was never to see again.



Titania Sleeping (1841) by Richard Dadd, painted two years before the psychotic episode in which he murdered his father, which led to him being incarcerated in a mental institution for the rest of his life. The idyllic scene of jolly fairies is offset by the sinister creatures and bats forming an arch over the scene.

# Alun Robert

## Brothers

At either side of the great divide    next safety glass we sat.

Still. Eye to eye. Wondering what.

When you scratched your cranium    I scratched mine.

When I peered into the distance    you followed my pupils.

When you raised eyebrows    I replicated with intent.

When I blinked in excess    you also blinked.

When you glowered, I glowered    for we glowered in unison.

When I furled my brow    you copied fast.

When you wriggled your nose    I did mine best that I could.

And when I smiled    you gnashed molars - larger, menacing.

When you raised your right hand, palm facing, index finger stretched

touching glass    I responded for a Michelangelo moment.

As electricity passed, I shuddered    you seemed to do too.

Though worlds lie between us    connected for that second.

Energy transmitted    without word, without reason.

Then you turned, were gone    bamboo camouflaged

with your dignity intact    mystery preserved.

No wave. No au revoir. Just a lasting memory.

Had spirits been present as nature intended?

A mirror? An insight? Our altruistic experience.

For we share one past    now one future?

# Alun Robert

## The Epeolatrism Escapes From Purgatory

Here the epeolatrism sits  
Transfixed to grammatical idolatry  
Listening absorbing  
Words, phrases, sentences  
En pursuit of perfect imperfection  
In an epoch enriched by split infinitives  
But not single double negatives  
Nor singular/plural mismatches. While

Spitting furious at lazy slang  
Spouting rage towards text speak  
Condemning our language excesses  
When Queen's English is ignored; by  
Screeching media lovelies and darlings  
Also the hoi-polloi though  
Excuses can be made  
For dialects, for colloquialisms. Yet

Vowels are cast to prevailing wind  
Constants to crepuscular  
Awaiting the echo echo  
Of poems devoid of iambic pentameter  
Encapsulating free verse  
The haiku, prose poetry  
Anything to be different  
Anything to differentiate. Then

Turn the key; the quay is open  
To vessels of language  
Ready to dock and carry  
Off far from purgatory; gone  
To the plains of pareidolia  
Four dimensional or five  
Where pedantry is absolute  
Where epeolatry is all.

# Alun Robert

## Wordcloud Ekphrasis

this is how I see them  
scattered as one hue  
en consequence of Daltonism  
with green as in red  
large, smaller  
in random position and slope  
some with meaning  
others without while  
suffering the curse of dyslexia  
the shape of letters in words  
the nuance of their meaning  
scrambled without order agin  
patterns of a background  
like white horses of the sea  
under white noise of tinnitus  
screaming white on the page  
turning, turning  
without focus or poise

the onset of dementia was  
never meant to be like this

# CONTRIBUTERS

**Pauline Barbieri** was shortlisted for the Bridport Poetry Prize by the poet laureate, Sir Andrew Motion and twice for the Exeter Poetry Prize by Jo Shapcott and Lawrence Sail, respectively. She has had six collections of poetry published and was shortlisted for the Cinnamon Press Novel Awards for her book, 'Smoke and Gold'.

**Mo Blake** and four other friends formed a writers group some years ago called Read Raw Ltd. They ran a website where we interviewed published authors and poets online and ran a poetry section, whereby anyone could see their poems up there. It closed last year. She writes short stories as well and is working on a historical thriller.

**Robin Leiper** is a psychologist, psychoanalytic psychotherapist and poet. He lives between Scotland and South Africa and his work has been published in various magazines and anthologies in both places.

After a long career as a professor of Classics (specialising in Latin literature) **Paul Murgatroyd** retired four years ago and started writing novels and short stories. Seventeen of the latter have been published or accepted for publication, along with three poems in English and over fifty of his Latin poems.

**Charles Leconte de Lisle** (1818-1894) born at la Réunion in the Indian Ocean, travelled through the Orient, and settled in Paris in 1864. His poems reflected his interest in the many cultures of the world. Later he became part of la Parnasse school of poetry. Was elected to l'Academie française in 1886.

**Ian C Smith's** work has been published in Antipodes, BBC Radio 4 Sounds, Cordite, The Dalhousie Review, Griffith Review, Poetry Salzburg Review, Southword, & The Stony Thursday Book. His seventh book is wonder sadness madness joy, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide). He writes in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, and on Flinders Island.

**David McVey** lectures at New College Lanarkshire in Scotland. He has published over 120 short stories and a great deal of non-fiction that focuses on history and the outdoors. He enjoys hillwalking (ie hiking), visiting historic sites, reading, watching telly (ie TV), and supporting his home-town football (ie soccer) team, Kirkintilloch Rob Roy FC.

**H-J Hoyles** is a poet, musician, author and teacher from North Yorkshire, who is based in Edinburgh. His poetry is concerned with the impact of nature on the human psyche, the effects of the landscape on mental health and cultural memory, and modern day myth-making. He is the founder of the Alcove poetry

organisation in Edinburgh and his debut pamphlet, *Songs of the Hen Ogledd*, is available from Wild Pressed Books.

**Peter Van Belle** is the editor of *The Klecksograph*. He has also published poems and stories in Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, the US, and Belgium.

**Robin Fuller** is from Dublin, Ireland. His short story 'Chinese Whispers' appeared in the Summer 2020 issue of *The Stinging Fly*. He has a PhD in semiotics and typography and has previously published non-fiction on these topics.

**Rebecca Pyle** is published in *Gargoyle*, *Guesthouse*, and *Posit* as a fiction writer; *The Honest Ulsterman* and *The Penn Review* as a poet; *Muse/A* and *Common Ground Review* as an essayist; and in dozens of art/literary journals as an oil painter and photographer. She is American, but named after the phenomenal British character Rebecca in the novel and film of the same name. See [rebeccapyleartist.com](http://rebeccapyleartist.com).)

**Alison Black** is a writer from Belfast, and has been writing for over 11 years.

**J.S. Le Fanu** (1814-1873) born in Dublin, studied at Trinity College. His first stories were published anonymously. His works were revived by M. R. James who learned from him his technique of slowly building up tension. Lived his whole life in Ireland.

**Richard Dadd** (1817-1886), born in Kent, won many awards from the Royal Academy early in his career and became known for his paintings of fairy scenes, suffered a psychotic episode at the end of a Grand Tour with Sir Thomas Phillips, murdered his father in Cobham Park and fled to France, was arrested and confined to an insane asylum where he continued to produce paintings.

**Alun Robert** is a prolific creator of lyrical free verse. He has achieved success in poetry competitions across the British Isles and in North America. His work has been published by UK, Irish, Italian, South African, Kenyan, US and Canadian literary magazines, anthologies and webzines.

# END OF ISSUE FIVE OF THE KLECKSOGRAPH



Detail from *The Ship of Fools* by Willem Johan Barbieri