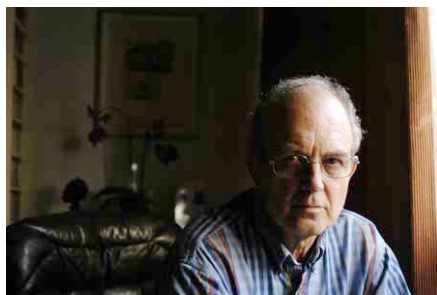


POETRY

John Fuller



John Fuller is an Emeritus Fellow of Magdalen College where he was Tutor in English from 1966 to 2002. He is the author of *W. H. Auden: a commentary* (Faber, 1998). He is also a poet and novelist, winner of the Forward prize in 1996 and a Whitbread Prize in 1983. A *Collected Poems* was published by Chatto and Windus in 1996. Among his recent works are *Dream Hunter* (an opera with Nicola LeFanu, 2011), *Who is Ozymandias? and other puzzles in poetry* (Chatto, 2011), *New Selected Poems 1983 to 2008* (Chatto, 2012) and the forthcoming *Sketches from the Sierra de Tejada* (Clutag, 2013). The prose poems published here are part of a collection of such pieces called *The Dice Cup* and to be published by Chatto and Windus in 2014.

The Dice Cup

Of the cup itself, a sort of bone-shaker, it may at least be said that it is a perfect model of the human skull, since within its bone is a willed juggling of the few known symbols that begin to map the world. And the pictures of these symbols are their own model of our subjective foolery, for they too are made of bone. Its great subject then becomes ourselves, for in it we are the creatures of circumstances that we go on investigating in the hope that we might control or at least predict them.

Fine chance!

To revise these circumstances to a mere skeleton of their possibility suits our macabre imagination. It's as though we might claim nothing more than the poor crook of a joint, the sad tumble of knuckle-bones, as if there were after all nothing in life grand enough to point to with any hope or determination. In the dice cup, then, life becomes not a design but a wager; not an adventure but a game; not a cry but a smile. It claims only the limited success of our knowledge of those limitations, for naturally only what is shaken within it can be shaken out of it. And of course we ourselves will in the end be nothing but bone, and not that for always.

The French have a more hopeful view of the matter, as may be suited to their rational sentiments, for the 'cornet à dés', the cone for dice, may also be the 'cornet à dès', the trumpet of 'from', the heraldic announcement of a henceforward that is always about to happen. Like the gambler, who is forever saying: 'But I will be lucky tomorrow,' we play the game of imagining in our play everything that it should really be in our power to enact. Perhaps that is enough. Or at least better than the worst.

Dunce

The wall coming from behind my left shoulder meets the wall coming from behind my right shoulder: if it didn't, I might be staring down some plastered passage to infinity. As it is, that option is closed. Each of the walls stops dead with nowhere to go, and the line of their meeting is therefore a dual and dusty ending. It creates a private space in front of me that narrows to a dim apex, a dwindling of hope for any hangings, a tight frustration for furniture, a place of utter closure. The walls have run across each other with all the

stubbornness of traffic at a crossroads. It's a gridlock of immovable plaster, any future entirely cancelled. It's called a corner, and I am its genius.

But looked at in another light, this line of joined surfaces, this completely vertical finality that I find myself with much leisure to ponder, unable to think beyond it or outside it to any consequence whatever, may not after all be an ending at all. Why should it not instead be a beginning, a point from which two planes have made a conspiratorial decision to set out? Not in opposite directions, of course, nor in companionship (how fickle would either of these projects have seemed, mere featureless extension or needless duplication!) but in that exactly half-way manner of all squared determination that seems to intend two wildly disparate destinations at a significant angle from each other?

Yes, that seems a much more hopeful way of looking at things. Outwards and onwards! Although the spider has had time to spin its casually receptive web, and dust gathers at the point where the two surfaces meet a third one at my feet, it must be that this is in fact the point of departure and that all possible outcomes are already accumulating behind me. I must look to it!

The Marmoset and the Elephant

A young marmoset tormented an elephant by throwing rocks at it from a small cliff. The elephant looked up in exasperation.

'Do you not know,' it said, 'that I am the Maharajah's elephant, and that all the Maharajah's elephants are well-cared-for, and have names and jewellery?'

'Of course I know that,' said the marmoset. 'Why do you think I am throwing rocks at you?'

The Owl Proust

He sits on the telephone poles above I Costi, as if to eavesdrop on the dialogues of the night. The car will disturb him, so that he flies over us above the valley a brief way, before fluttering back, curious about the crude vision of the headlights and our apparent lack of interest in the prey momentarily transfixed by them.

A great distinction, to be a bird with a face. The ringed sleepless eyes breed Egyptian meditations. If he had a hand, with fingers and knuckles, it would always be at his cheek as he stared down at us. It is his valley, and he is alert to its ironies.

Noon

The terrace is blessed with stillness, an accumulating withdrawal of purpose. Beyond the black shadows of the high hedge there is a small theatrical display of sea like a glittering cloth, with one transfixed sail, its unread menu of choices. There is no casting-off today. The horizon is merely a line of satisfying completion.

The cricket is motionless on the wall. There is nowhere it would rather be. The glasses and the bottle are trading their inches of air and liquid. The lily flames in the sun, content in this moment between unfolding and falling.

Nothing stirs but the imperceptible, the black figs that will split and ooze in an afternoon, the roughness of a cheek in slumber, protected by a fallen wrist and already thinking itself an old salt's beard.

Marshal Zukhov

The gesture that the sculptor gave him was the ambiguous one of the right hand slightly raised above his horse's neck, the palm tilted back from the wrist. It was either warning or pacifying. It said either 'No further' or 'For the moment be still,' depending on who was addressed, the advancing German army or his patient horse, portrayed at a

slowing trot. It is a convention of the triumphal equestrian monument that a leader be shown as having something to lead, and his horse may represent his people as much as anything. To say to them so quietly, almost with the motion of the Buddha dispelling fear, that they have power enough to bide their time, to stand sentry at the inviolate gates of Moscow, to watch their enemy retreat, is to trust to the mandate given and the absolute power assumed.

And for us, looking up at this bronze recreation of a defiant moment, it is an adequate warning. We know what it is like to have marched through the snows suffering every hardship and deprivation, our line thinning with attenuated ordnance, the motive forgotten, the object less and less likely to succeed. In our frozen delirium we may even have forgotten who we are. Are we the vain conquerors, truly? Or are we perhaps the equally deprived citizenry, shivering in our assailed redoubt? Perhaps in the end it does not matter, and the Marshal is merely our version of the Archangel who forbids any return to the garden where men may have once supposed themselves entitled to be happy.

It was only recently, therefore, and in wonder, that I saw the Marshal brought on his bier through the half-lit rooms of a wine cellar. He was one of a succession of bodies carried on simple trestles that perhaps designated them as traitors, or men defeated by political fashion. As he passed me, the Marshal's mouth (and indeed the whole of his head) was flipped open for me, two circles side by side like the hinged lid of a Kilner jar, as if to demonstrate the irrevocable shame. Though the mouth seemed to be entirely filled with metal teeth, some of them centrally placed and interlocking with the others by a mechanism of cogs with deep workings, like an old watch, beneath them was surely a tongue still glistening. And when the mouth was opened, had there not come to me a deep sigh, as if in weary hope of release?

'Stop!' I exclaimed. 'He's still alive!'

But they closed the head again, and went on their way. All his great services to his country! His place in history! Was this torture performed at someone's vile and thoughtless whim? I knew it was not my place to make a scene.

Snails

At three o'clock the sea in the pebbly shallows has warmed to the still-tolerable temperature of the third breakfast coffee. The sunlight, even in the further depths, moves in interconnected patterns of elastic skeins and rhomboids that contract and expand above the stones and boulders, illuminating the fine vegetation that clings to them like down on surfaces of skin. The light is a tender caress as if from another world that has only imagined them. It is only at this time of day that the snails emerge, drawn by the afternoon warmth to bask on the stones. Each stone possesses its tiny snail, like a coiled castle on an eminence, with only one entrance to the spiral summit. Or like the nipple of a breast, insentient but expectant, urged by the sunlight to a solitary indulgence in exposure. Perhaps they are grazing now, these creatures, driven to feed, and careless of danger. Each on its stone, each the still point of the ever-moving reticulation of sunlight.

The Village Sage

Every time there is a need to pass through the dolls and windmills to reach the fruit rotting on the branches. I packed just too many books: I could leave one carelessly in the café where the girl flapped the wings of an indigo eagle printed above her coccyx every time she returned to the zinc counter. Like a votive constellation, its body was a mere plotting of pinpricks, and it floated in the minds of the idle customers.

'Monsieur,' I said. 'I can see that you are a man after my own heart. You can sit here, day after day, barely noticing the fresh headlines on the news stands or the water cart slaking the dust at your feet. You have better things to think about.'

His two eyes were trembling pools of disquiet, held with precarious self-control on the brink of spillage. His mouth opened slightly, even with the memory of an habitual truculence, but he did not speak.

Was this choked emotion the result of a long-reasoned metaphysical enquiry? Or was it the simple projection of a personal despair? To be the acknowledged sage even of a blind-shuttered village straggling the highway is a great state of affairs, but there is not much daily satisfaction in it.

I could move on from here, or I could stay. As perhaps he once had.

The Armed Hatband

The explosions were almost hard to hear, intermittent percussive sounds with the colourful effect of the feathers of tiny birds tucked into leather. Passers-by looked round to see where they might be coming from, but saw nothing. Except, possibly, the wearer of a broad-brimmed hat turning into a doorway with a secret smile.

Who could be threatened by such squibs? They were so small as to sound distant, like Chinese festivities two streets away. But it was soon noticed that pedestrians were stopping suddenly and clapping a hand to their cheek or back of the neck, as though stung by insects.

What did it matter? And where did the perpetrator go?

After every unexplained event a mystery remains, and it not unnaturally occupies the idle hours of the great detective, toying in a café with a torn empty tube of sugar. We believe, he suggests, in the absolute significance of trifles. They are like games that we might play ourselves. And perhaps even win.

What links the victims? What is the meaning of the choice of weapon? Is there any discernable motive? Before his coffee cools, the great detective has sketched out a solution, which conforms to his perverse theory that the magnitude of a crime lies in inverse relation to its means and purpose. It becomes a terrible weakness that links us all.

The Names of Fields

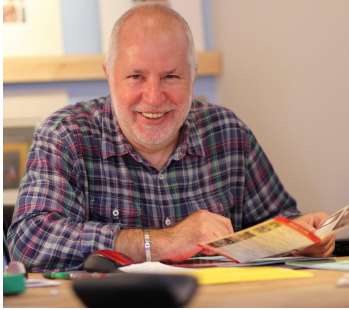
When we first stumbled back into those uplands, the farmsteads of our ancestors had already collapsed. Thistles stood sentry over grassed boulders. Thorn crowded cracked hearths. But was our dawn resolve any stronger? Hardly. Not far from cae rwyn, field of the ruin, lies the pant y diogi, hollow of laziness, with not a stone lifted unless it were further to reduce the shallow turfed remains. Or perhaps to divide the portioned fields among the hopeful kin, walls radiating from that remembered patriarchal centre.

But no one can be idle for long, and the land must be prepared for an age of maps and saints. To name the fields as cows are named is to expect something of them, or to yield a point, like llain randres, strips to be shared with cousins from a distant valley, or cae cyd, held in common with Cwm, but nonetheless jealously guarded. Oh, we know our territory! Like the bird on the wall, with its bright scouring eye and its dipping tail.

From hen gae ucha, the old upper field, we see the whole extent of the demesne, as a sheep sees it, should it bother to look. The eye runs from the stone that no force of men could move, down to the hendre, which of course is entirely made of moved stones. And just by the house is the best field of all, stubbled with leeks, where a figure in black comes walking, cae llidiard offeiriad, field of the priest's hurdle, to take his tithe.

What will our children do? If they forget the names of the fields, they may escape both their uses and curses. And though even new building may fall into disrepair, who knows what strange plantations and machines will take their place?

Nigel Walker



Born in Liverpool in 1950, **Nigel Walker** began writing poetry while young. The vibrant Liverpool poetry scene of the 1960's introduced him to a wider style of writing and a teacher who introduced him to Hughes, Causley and Heaney helped ensure that his appreciation was deep as well as broad. He began reading poems in and across the city and became a member of the Merseyside Poetry Committee, helping to organise readings including the *Big Poetry Nights* of the early 1970's at the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. He presented the first local radio poetry broadcast on Radio Merseyside (*No Holds Bard*), ran readings in Southport and helped establish Glass House Press.

Three publications followed. Walker entered social work in the mid 1970's and writing took a back seat while he developed his career. He now lives in Beverley, East Yorkshire, where he ran the successful *Subtle Flame* readings at Nellies between 1994 and 2000. He is a supporter of *poetry PRO* and the postgrad translation course at Bucharest University, regularly polishing a range of translated work. He has now retired from permanent work, but still undertakes some consultancy as well as owning and curating Creation Fine Arts gallery.

Absolute

1.

some words convey
more than one meaning
all the words the King uses
possess this quality

so your translation
better be right.....

2.

it is autumn
the air is filled with the smell
of burning leaves
a time of remembrance

it is winter
the air is filled with the smell
of burning tyres
a time of reformation

it is spring
the air is filled with the smell
of burning paper
a time of re-assessed allegiances

It is late summer
the air is filled with the smell
of burning flesh
a time of teasing out the traitors

3.

the King is discussing land reform
his map shows that
the land to the right is his
the land to the left is his
the land to the centre is his and
the land to the top is his

the land at the bottom
that small patch, marshy, peaty with
sparse and miserable grass,
starving cows
is for the towns people
who are applauding the King
with vigour and loud praise for his wisdom

4.

the King is outlining his ideas
on the role of religions

the Queen yawns

the scribes are writing the word divorce
into a dictionary
even though they are unsure
what it may mean

5.
the King is discussing a new war
with his advisors a new
opportunity of acquisition and
the prince is assessing his chances

the King notes his interest
beckons him closer
a head rolls down the steps

6.
the physician is pale and grim
the medicine bottles are empty of hope
the flags are being lowered
a parade is in the planning stages
the crown is already being collected

the people wish for enlightenment
but prepare for a new assault

Claudia Doroholschi



Claudia Ioana Doroholschi is a senior lecturer at the West University of Timișoara, where she teaches English, literature and creative writing. She wrote her PhD on literature and the visual arts in the 1990s, and she was one of the co-ordinators of the Creative Writing MA in English which ran in Timișoara between 2004 and 2010. She is a member of the *Timword* group, a group of young writers who organize workshops, writing meetings, and public reading events.

Swimming

You were teaching me how to swim
you were saying: feel the water
as though it were air
Imagine you've jumped without a parachute
and hold your hands together like this
in prayer
then move them slowly apart
see? that's a start
this is not a river
look
this is a gust of wind
you are a written page
tossed around
a poem
ripped from a book

I said let's not make it paper
with all this water around
please

But you were the one
with the expertise
you said
now move in rhythm
keep your eyes open
don't mind the sting
watch your breath
don't scream
concentrate
think
no – don't think,
feel
shut up
don't swallow
watch your knees
this is what it's like
when the water is shallow
try to think ocean

But I wouldn't learn
wasn't up to the task
I was drowning
way too fast.

Bloody Me

- a poem in the manner of Wendy Cope (b. 21 July 1945), who, like me, is a Cancerian, not that this matters in the least, but is worth mentioning, as we don't really have many other things in common, except, of course, the wit, and the general attitude to men -

It's hard for a guy not to like me
For the sex or the talk or for both;
If I wrote poetry, it's quite likely
I'd be funnier than Wendy Cope.

I would welcome my dates with a sonnet
To sip with their ale or their Coke.
I would wave them goodbye with a haiku
And two limericks for the road.

It's hard for a guy not to like me –
There should be no reason to mope:
I'm not published and I'm not all that pretty,
But still prettier than Wendy Cope.

She published her first book at 40,
So I've still got ***** years to go.
Yet with both men and poems capricious
It gets harder and harder to cope –

Hence I often indulge in self-pity.
However, there still may be hope:
Even if I'm not half as witty,
I'm far younger than Wendy Cope.

M. K.

[on a theme from Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*]

I have piano fingers
that are dumb
two piano hands like two mutes
stranded on opposite sides of me
as I walk through the streets
each babbling its own sign language
one treble
one bass
both numb

I crouch beneath an open window
the only radio in town
runs a fugue through the air
I put my arms round my knees
freeze biting into my knuckles

and as I sit with my back to the wall
the light goes dim and
the square is a concert hall
and the houses have white garlands of mould

and the windows are silver mirrors
and Jem's flower stand is a grand piano
and the balcony railings have linings of gold
and the stores have closed down but are all serving champagne

and they've laid out for me a red carpet of dust
and I step in
on a beam of orange streetlight
that gives me neon hair and sepia skin

and the cypresses in their evening dresses
bow their heads as I pass
and there's a rustle and an ooh that go through the grass
and there's large moths that crash against lamps
flapping wings like clapping hands

and I sit at the piano and the concert hall goes quiet
until there is just a cough or two from the stalls
and the swish of silk on velvet
and then nothing but wait

and then the radio breaks into static and the evening goes bland
and the street has gone still
and there are husks of moths in the sand
and there's nothing awake
except this tempo that lingers on like an ache
in my piano fingers

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Humanistic Foreign Language Teaching and Learning I. Innovative Methods and Approaches, Nitra, Slovakia, 14-15 September 2012

Luisa Bozzo
Università degli Studi di Torino, Italy

Under the auspices of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts at 'Constantine the Philosopher' University in Nitra, Slovakia, the local Department of English and American Studies¹ organized and hosted the first international conference on "Humanistic Foreign Language Teaching and Learning I. Innovative Methods and Approaches" on 14-15 September 2012. As stated in Kiššová (2012), the conference was dedicated to the latest trends in the field, providing an opportunity for language teaching professionals and researchers to share current research results, innovative ideas and experience in the areas of foreign language teaching theory, of the concept and representation of humanity in teaching literature, cultural studies, and linguistics.

Hosted on the modern, spacious premises of the Študentský Domov ('Student Residence') in the university area of Nitra, an ancient city in western Slovakia, the conference included plenary talks by five keynote speakers, 36 parallel sessions, 5 workshops and 3 poster presentations; the majority of the presentations were in English and some were in either Slovak or Czech. The

¹ <http://www.kaa.ff.ukf.sk/index.php/en/>