

Burying October



By Jamie W Spracklen

Introduction

If a novel can be likened to a movie, and a short story to a snap shot, what metaphor can we apply to a poem? To me, good poetry is the soul's graffiti, like initials carved into the trunk of an ancient tree, linked by a moss-encrusted heart. The marks are scant, but a greater story can be divined from their simple existence. Jamie Spracklen's poems are carved with care.



Many things contribute towards a good poem: the words themselves, the rhythm the poet conjures when he or she puts those words together, and the general mood created by the words they choose. But there is another amorphous thing beyond this: the music of the poem, indefinable and personal. I believe it is the music that speaks to us most clearly, that touches our hearts, makes us pause and actually *think* for a moment. A true poet understands that the art is not about crowding a lot of image-charged words into a space, but about using the space between the words - carefully chosen - to create a pure and simple image, loaded with meaning. A good poem contains the heart of stillness, which allows its message to sink softly into our minds. When I first read Jamie's poems, I was carried initially by their carefully-crafted rhythm, the ease with which my eyes travelled the words, but then the meaning came through, like the echo of a plucked string.

As co-editor of the small press fantasy magazine, 'Visionary Tongue', a lot of poetry passed across my desk, most often describing in morbid Gothic tones the heartache of young love. Poetry seems to be the medium most aspiring writers turn to in the throes of romantic torment, but, harsh as it may seem, I always thought these angst-ridden odes really belonged to the secret pages of a diary rather than a magazine. Poetry is a language of love, yes, but so much more than that. It can be a sword-thrust into the heart of our culture, our world, our spirits. A few of the poems you'll find in this collection touch upon the subject of love, but Jamie is always spare with his words, conveying a meaning with which we can all identify. For example, the last from 'Tonight, My Heart is Broken': *'After the first touch, can there be*

another?' Understated and clear, this simple couplet brings us up short, makes us pause to *consider*.

The poems in this collection reflect the poet's journey through life, the observations he makes about many aspects of his and our existence, whether that's his thoughts about a young beggar on the streets ('Penetration') or his feelings about time passing ('Birthday Dissection'). The hard-hitting 'Elegy for the Condoned Killer' does far more to describe the horrors of war than any visceral description of actual fighting. 'Conversation With a Forgotten God' invokes the melancholy of a dispossessed pagan deity, but also conveys the enduring immanence of natural spirituality, however much mainstream belief may have changed.

These are only a few examples. In every poem, Jamie's gaze rests briefly upon an image, and with deft strokes, he draws a sketch of what he sees and feels. But his work touches more than one sense. After each poem is read, an echo lingers after, and an evanescent scent that presses upon our memories, makes us remember things we might have forgotten.

After publishing several of Jamie's poems in 'Visionary Tongue', I'm pleased to see he now has a collection of his work which I'm sure will be the first of many. Turn the page, walk into the forest and gaze at the carvings upon every tree. It might be that more than one of them bears your secret name.

Storm Constantine
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BURYING OCTOBER

Down the alley that I walk each day,
The raping winds have stolen the leaves,
And made thin whores of all the trees.

Far off, a workman's hammer rings
a sad and brown lament for these,
the ancient boughs with bare-bone twigs.

And when the work is finally done,
these trees will not be moving on.

ELEGY FOR THE CONDONED KILLER

After the noise
and the killing was done,
my father, the condoned killer,
returned to his shattered streets,
and now only unworn medals
remind us of the meat he slew.

For my father, this condoned killer,
winter's icy fingers ever felt
his frost-bitten toes.
The autumn winds chilled somewhere
near the old shrapnel's wounds.
For ever are Hitler's hopes retained.

After the love,
and the fathered children,
my father, the condoned killer,
fought against a better, stronger foe.
Between sweating sheets,
nature's killing tools worked well.

The battle's done,
and now the raging heart is cold.
And long after,
I found a picture of a German boy,
some father's son from a far-off shore.
A victim of the hands which raised me.

LAST NIGHT I DREAMED OF MY FLAME

Last night, I dreamed of my fame.
Riches and lips service, cars
And false grins were my bedfellows.
And eager were my hands
Around the stinking gold cup:
With bloated lips and pallid skin,
I slurped the unnatural juices
Of my elevated position.
Then halting, heart stopping,
My abused face falls slack.
Large is the monument
They build over this lice-infested brain-box,
And large are the lies they say over the
Muddy plot that covers the worm's nest.
Last night, I dreamed of my fame -
And woke up sweating.

THE BEGETTING

This night, my child,
Your father has not made you.
Your count of days
Will stand still,
At none.

RUIN

The weakness in my veins
Clots with neural meanings,
And speaks to generations
Of strokes against the living flame...

Or

The fungal fears or the winning bullet
Will spell red, assuring ruin
To the pole of my immortal genes...

ODE TO YOUR CREMATION (FOR PHOENIX)

I heard after your box had been burnt,
after the ashes came me:
a tear resting on a late cheek.
When the sky heard your last fragile breath,
my veins beat in time to the world's angry sigh.

This voice stung the air:
that last letter never did get written.
And I'll never know how the sad funeral faces
watched your last, young cremation.
For after the ashes, came me.

THE DEATH OF THE FAN'S HERO

At the death of the fan's hero,
the sky curled with frowns
of bruised sorrow.
Her steps were as heavy as his words
were fine as sand.
But now the song brings only tears,
crashing clumsy as a clown
on her white, unkissed cheeks.
She stares unmoving,
while the song, for her, finally ends.

The sky cries out.
Somewhere a smoking poster curls,
as the girl with fire in her eyes weeps -
but moves on.

COLLOQUY TO TIME

When I arrived early,
I let ten minutes of my life
slip to somewhere in the future
I might not find again...

SHADOW OF CONFORMITY

Some tell me I should imitate
the lives that others lead;
move on, tune in,
turn out in something
(or someone)
that I can wear well.

And faced as I am
with a skinless nose to the
all-devouring grindstone,
my mimic shadow is
a poor reflection -
and a flawed conformist.

For,
on the world's stage,
my acting may be accepted,
but never can I silence
my vitriolic hopes.

BEFORE THE BELOW

I'm waiting for the morning sun
To wake me, wake the sleeping one;
To shake, to bring me wakefulness
And take me to the world of Man.

I'm waiting for the morning light
To bring again those living days
When the sleeper was awake enough
To cry, to laugh, to love, to fight.

I'm waiting for a devil's whore
To break me, make me start before
I'm finished - let me walk above
The grass, before I go below...

CONVERSATION WITH A FORGOTTEN GOD

“My once proud warriors lie dead.
My broken body builds the mountains,
And some can hear my whispering voice.
I’m in the shadows of streams,
In the quiet of the woods,
And my bones can still be seen
In the ridges of the earth.”

“My skin, my flesh can still be felt
By seekers or dealers in the by-gone years;
My unsung tears still rain
From my new-found temple in the sky,
And the eye of the sun still moves by my will.
But my back is broken, my warriors gone:
Torn from the land, I grow silent...”

BELIEF POEM

OUTSIDE
OF
NATURE
NOTHING
OF
GOD
REMAINS.

INTIMATE CITY

From your throbbing heart to your
alleywayed toes, I’ve known you.
From the night-club’s sweat to your
widow’s tears, I’ve shared you.

Intimate city, you’ve watched
the larceny of years bleeding by;
watched, but said nothing -
until the warning came too late.

TONIGHT, MY HEART IS BROKEN

Tonight, my heart is broken.
Tonight the darkness hides the shame
that my eyes have ceased to shine.

In the humped black,
the jangle in my mind
is echoed by the rutting cries
of animals, unseen.

After the first touch,
can there be another?

TO VIRGINIA POE

I wish I could have held you
while you coughed and died,
with your sad-eyed poet at your side.
But time is massive between us,
and your bones, so long in resting,
are gone to dust.

But still I dream of your nightly sweats,
your awful moaning, your deathly rattles,
when in Fordham's Cottage,
under his coat, and your cat, you died.

All I have is your husband's words,
a poor, pale picture of dead Virginia,
Propped upon a pillow wet with Raven's tears.

His mad and dreadful sobbing
still rings on down the years.

SEX REVISITED

After the performance,
the players, now sober,
walk free.
Some go to warm others' beds,
with affected smiles,
chemical laughter, abortive teases.

Others make mean with their gifts,
and intimacy becomes a words
for smoking old drugs
in a narrow room.

THE LAST BUS CROWD

White, artificial light
comes to a stop in the road.
It's a cold and bitter day alright
for the last bus crowd.

Some are tripping, some are stoned,
some just say they're drunk.
Old men with the breath of whiskey misery
stare unsurely at the number,
while young men on social drugs
view the growing hoard
of ill
hungover
vague humanity
that makes the last bus crowd.

WEAK SOUP (PORT TALBOT '94)

I am passing by your city.
I see the flames belching forth,
the oiled smoke and tiny lights
that mark cheap sex in houses,
or the smoking of the joints
in cold December parks.

The huffing, shaven-headed boys
smile hopefully at the girls in black.
And the girls in black wink back,
faking dreamy looks of gothic love.

I am standing with the begging boys.
At the bars and clubs, beer-flushed
faces fumble at pints, shorts to order.
To please, to lull, to bed.

Outrage is forgotten
In the offal we are fed upon;
the weak soup of fags and booze,
the dog-faced shame of Giro-queues.

So I'm passing by your city,
going to and from the lights.
The gothgirls hold my hands
as another country goes to war,
and my call-up papers come
by second post...

RECUMBENT LOVERS

The night was almost made for us.
Our bodies moved so sinuous
Beneath its grieving veil.
I screamed,
Tried to execute the demon of desire -
For your touches brought affliction,
And your kiss, a closer thought of Eden:
Because our flesh chimed melodies of youth.

But now it's six in the morning.
Passion surrenders to the coolness of pain.
I kiss once,
Then twice your blackened lips -
To see them crack and fall
Into the shades that lie
Like scattered clothes across
This bedroom floor.

My eyes close finally.
A tear finds a grave upon my cheek,
Remembering the last of you I see:
Your back.
Hereon, I will awaken every night,
Reaching out with sickly hands,
To find nothing; no impression
On the funeral which is my bed.

PENETRATION

Samantha breathes in the sickness
At the turning of the switches
In the private rooms
Of the beasts in silk
Who question continually
About the twilight lusts.

Samantha falls against the cold flames
Of these mocking ones
And hurts with the penetration
Of their well-worn words.

Samantha, like her ragged blanket,
Writes her future in cardboard,
Nameless now in the pavement gold city.
The new decade mouthpiece of the masses
Is refused to none
Except her peers of the street

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE EARS TO HEAR

For those who have ears to hear,
there comes words unbidden
from the mouths of creation.
For I see a world that speaks
in long words, full of noise;
It is shouting, but I hardly ever
hear its voice so strong and clear.

For what messages come to the deaf fool
who resides here?

SELF-PORTRAIT

The dark-shrouded eyes
Of self-loathing
Mirror the guilt
Quietly in dark waters.

But looking left in hope,
I scare the dreams
Within these hurtful harmonies,
Leaving nothing but the hate.

For in these memories of sin,
Now residing in my shadow,
I find by the waters
My bitter reflection.

SHAKE!

No birds sang as they dragged me away,
screaming the infamies to empty ears,
beseeching them to stop the infection,
the growing purification of the heart-strings.

The answers were blows only,
for the empty ears had brains
but did not wish to hear
the ravings of a lunatic,
ever alone in his bleak cell of reflections.

“Shake!”
They spat at me.
“Dance like a puppet for all to see -
for the more you moan,
the more we beat you!
So shake, God curse you, shake!”

THE PASTA-EATERS

The pasta-eaters eye each other with concern,
haunted with shadows under their eyes,
hunched horrid over the cheapest option
that tastes as good as any lordly meat.

Now watch as the pasta-eaters laugh,
like drains with food-ropes
hanging on unshaven chins.

However, now the plates are empty,
or filled with the offal of the over-eager.
Red-stained mouths speak five minute objections -
about places where washing-up doesn't figure...

BIRTHDAY DISSECTION

Friends come, friends go,
The Solar power drives
The days to make my birthday come again.
The years are measured by human strides,
laughter, sun, tears and rain.
But life is measured by the bloodied tide,
Sickness, strength, health and decline.

The clock that speeds the hands
Marks the turning of the year in stone.
But I consult my condition,
By the stars or the autumn sun,
The dimmed leaves or the slowing sap in trees.
And with my answers,
I map my scratches on the living stone,
And deify the tides and winds,
Marking time with the ticking years,
Resenting, yet respecting,
Laughter, sun, tears and rain...