



Title	Featured Writer (Preface + Four Prose poems and three lyrics): Republic in a Rule, Come Together (for Geiger), The Art of Confession, Scale, Plastic PassionFly Blue Bird, and Calendar on Fire
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PUBLISHED- FEATURED POET lyrics and prose poems Nerys Williams *Icarus* 2021
LYRIC POEMS

Calendar on Fire

Hedd Wyn

To hope till hope create/ From its own wreck the thing it contemplates
(PB Shelley *Prometheus Unbound*)

I am trying to memorise the words
returning the manuscript to its author.

Your hero tells me
of undreamt life

writing songs of anvil
bodies caged in steel.

Your hero, a goodness
that exceeds the self

before it became a word to hijack
a nation's claim on its poor.

Tradition strains
buckles and whimpers

yet, you fastidiously force
syllabics, suturing sound.

Faces scoured by fear

warlords do not tremble
in poetry's presence.

This you know
but still persist

if only to replace horror
with a slim chance

of deliverance.
You believe in the word.

Your hero tells me
The Calendar is on fire.

If there was an addendum
a space for other lives

I would walk you to Horta's house
up the gilded stairwell

so you could slip into
cool starched sheets

enter tomorrow again.
I believe in the word

for better or worse
its intention is true.

Fly Blue Bird

after Maurice Tourneur

We could build a mausoleum
an arch inscribed with names.

Poems to right all wrongs
monumental elegies.

Except your eye catches
the essence of other things:

Fabric of moonbeams
a buttercup under a pale chin,

the fire's shudder in the grate
the joy of loving.

"Which branch did that bird
rest upon?"

You ask, as if the vocabulary
of a song

could move us to consider how
tone and refrain

form a pact for the living
and denied.

Away from shade and terror
the blue bird beckons.

It cries
Come follow me.

Cold star, dark star
the blue bird's flight.

Sepia, gossamer bound
your wingtip trails across

powdered ink, indentations.
claws touching clean paper.

PROSE POEMS

INTRO

Republic in a Rule

These prose scatterings began from a need to commit an oral history to paper. Stories told, overheard, handed down, mostly in Welsh. It was no coincidence that these prose poetry sections began as a response to the imminent UK referendum in 2016. Many of the sections are attempts to sift through my relationship to a Welsh as a minority language and understand what others make of linguistic difference. Many sections were written against a background of increasing attacks made against Welsh. Indeed it still seems to be a time when anything culturally different to an imagined consensus is presented as a “drain” on resources or threat to stability..

I set myself a basic rule - each section was to be twenty sentences. The paragraph as a unit of thought; the sentence became a measure which enabled departures into *melos*, play, lyricism, sometimes humour. Rule-governed writing offers a paradoxical freedom. The format enabled writing “to begin again and again” (instances of completion became a closer possibility). Rules oddly generate chance, associative word patternings make for narrative errancies.

And the *Republic*? This is the tentative title of my draft collection, inscribing an experience of naturalisation- Irish citizenship and the possibilities of a nation looking at itself from afar- with (wry) independence.

Scale

“All the new thinking is about loss” wrote the poet who introduced her to American poetry. Entering debates on deconstruction, presence as an illusion and meaning always deferred. But the present always seemed Janus-faced finding appreciation in past events and recollection. How loss offers a linkage to a community of ghosts, a legion of voices. The synapse of earlier perception surely leaves a residue in cognition? Unwritten in collective memory on social media, she remains reticent, unwilling to make the past a public forum. The school photo retains its clarity, others are puzzled over familiar names. Is it a burden to feel the asphalt of a warm summer’s day and the roll call? Communal recollection overrides personal history. Some continued their education; others fell away after the first formal exams. The woman who posted the photo tells how she was kicked out from school, pregnant. Faces become fleshier, they blur with age around the cheeks, eyes, neck. Fearful of a loss of love, of health. Attending to loss, she is wire brushing a metal weight used in her grandmother’s shop. She handled the weight many times, one of many objects in a shed she felt were keening, needing new purpose. An old metal file removes orange indentations. Washed and dried it should be painted, the flat black paint protecting the iron. Holding that weight, she held the balance of a former load. The final tilt of the scale, a small sack of potatoes that a farmer picked up every Friday, walking, not having car or tractor. Bailing twine belting his trousers, he would grunt and cough, there were rumours his cows were starving.

Plastic Passion

This year there is music in your house, your parents move awkwardly to disco beats. Careful in crimplene and long polyester dresses, shiny shoes and ruffled shirts. Lurex on the TV, the body in plastic, you drink from melamine mugs, your nightdress crackles against sheets. Two years before “Video Killed the Radio Star”, two years after Abba’s “SOS” you have fallen in love with Elvis Presley. At six you curate your wardrobe to match the Elvis film on Saturday TV. The deep red embroidery of a rose on a tight denim jacket, watching him in *Roustabout* on a Honda 350 Super Hawk attempting the wall of death. Forty years before you find the broken Elvis. Hawaiian shirts in Technicolor, he tinkered with engines, songs which seemed spontaneous. His sneer, hair, hips, oil on his hands mirroring your uncle working in a homemade car inspection pit. Shovelled from earth with no joists he hit the riverbed, it flooded and crumbled. That year you were happy to be taken for a boy, you wanted to walk like a boy, bouncing long strides on the pavement. Friendships with boys meant violence on the playground. Running fast, colliding into bodies, hair pulled, bruises became badges. Until four boys were taken to the headmaster for the “dap”, the black plimsoll. They had given one other love bites on their shoulders; you did not fully understand but knew it inappropriate. Like the secret shared that summer with a ten year old girl. Your mothers were exchanging district nurse duties: a woman homeless in a shelter, the transfer of case notes, supporting the aged, the lonely. “Come here” she commanded obediently you did; she held a jar - a pickled foetus. “Don’t tell” she whispered - “the mother doesn’t know we have her baby”, she slipped the bobbing foetus back under the sink between the *Emo* washing powder and scouring pads. You are only reminded of this story when Esther Greenwood tells us in *The Bell Jar*: “I liked looking on at other people in crucial situations. If there was a road accident or a street fight or a baby pickled in a laboratory jar for me to look at, I’d stop and look so hard I never forgot it.”

The Art of Confession

She learnt quickly that Americans had a way of revealing, considered in her culture as slightly narcissistic, but described here as art. "Literature & Art" included a creative writing assignment. A mature student told her that she was relishing the opportunity. Their friendship was made tangible over coffee and an elaborate story about being in a hut on Bali Beach with an ex, immobilised by opium. Unsure whether this was intended to shock or whether she was co-conspirator in the confession, she nodded throughout. Wearing a 1970s zipper red jacket and blue trousers from *Savers*, she was inexperienced and very young. They read and studied self-portraits, two works changed her: John Ashbery's *Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror* and Hayden Herrera's *Frida*. This being the early nineties, Kahlo was yet to be on a Prime Minister's wrist, while negotiating Britain's exit from the EU. Her favourite paintings were "Frida and Diego" and Rivera's 'The Flower Carrier'. The latter showed the burden of work, a man on his knees, an enormous basket of flowerheads strapped to his back. A woman attempts to help him, at first glance the flowers could be plums. Later, she becomes alert to the ghost of *Treasure Island* in the bay where Rivera designed a mural *Pan American Unity*; he kept working even after the Fair closed in 1940, and it was boxed in crates. Other works such as Woolf's *Moments of Being* felt overwrought, she was tired of epiphanic spots of time. She worried about her uneventful assignment, did it capture her biography? It could in fact be told in a couple of sentences: working hard, overachieving into mobility. Her friend found it easy, she relished writing about her troubled brother, the mother-daughter dyad, her affairs with lecturers and philosophers. She in turn could only think of her community, the people who wished her well on her year abroad, the bad-tempered neighbour's gift of a red dragon tea towel. Her grandmother at the centre of the village trading petrol, pink paraffin, stamps in a tin, loose potatoes, a slab of cheddar. The madness her grandmother tended to, the community's peculiarities, and petty vendettas – how to inscribe these dynamics in a thousand words? The grades back her friend with an A+ and her own middling B; the bald comments "nice portrait but surely such sentimentality cannot be true?"

Come Together (for Geiger)

“Recall the 1980s in the small town, don’t wax lyrical about music the making of dresses the eyeliner on the boys you love.” There were strikes, protests– *When the Wind Blows, Z for Zachariah*, “Two Tribes” a nuclear bunker built by the council. A woman lost her finger on the fence protesting the half-made bunker, everybody wore CND badges, older sisters went to Greenham for the weekend. Anti-nuclear protestors made friends with the peace people, the religious people made friends with the peace people too, the Welsh language protestors made friends with everybody, since all wanted the world to breathe more easily. The bunker features in an undercover history of Wales. A manhole in a carpark, metals rungs to the control room, the camera lingers on a shelf of broken A4 folders, two feet of water. You cannot see any Welsh on signage. How quickly the technology of loudspeakers and control panel ages, the bunks are rusty. You wonder if they had a Geiger counter and which counsellor would operate it. The only councillor prepared to defend the bunker (live on S4C) was a family friend. You did not see the programme but glean a narrative from overheard adult conversations. A discussion about radioactivity and water after fallout, your grandmother’s praise “those CND types are educated, they were having none of it.” The councillor said he had his own well water. Which brought catcalls of “I’m alright Jack” from the panellists expert in half-lives, poisoning and carbon 14. Before Chernobyl. Your childhood was about fighting for things, banners and placards, adults circling a carpark. A satirical Welsh pop song about Margaret Thatcher: “*Let the unemployed move to Kent and get a job*”. Elfyn Presli shouting “Thatcher’s Jackboots” into a mic, fascism was royal blue and bouffanted. The sad-eyed councillor came to pick up groceries at night, you were tempted to draw a CND circle on his muddied car. Pausing, you pictured the heat of studio lights, his failing language, moved away from the bonnet knowing the battle was won.