

A book of poems written in 2023/4, some of which rhyme and use regular metre, some of which are free verse. A range of topics, tending towards Romanticism. Supplemented with eight short stories and eleven essays about art and poetry.

Digging For Water

By Alan Brayne

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DIGGING FOR WATER



poems, stories & essays

alan brayne

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DIGGING FOR WATER

Yet we dig for water,
All these long years on
The well is dry.
Still no one wonders why
We dwell in deserts.

Life skins and scalds the heart
To forge a pebble smooth as glass:
The tears don't pierce the flesh like in the past,
The winters bite less sharp.

Yet we dig for water,
Then in our shame we'll wash
The dark earth from our hands,
But it remains.

The well stays dry.
With blunted paws we scratch the earth
To quench this endless thirst.

Life rolls and scalds the heart
Till all is dry: like dust, like sand.
Yet still we dig for water,
The dark earth on our hands.

SNOWMAN

Sometimes life just stops,
and we stand like children at a window
watching the snow,
and then, like little children,
we have no grip on who we are
and slip outside the flow,
and I want to build a snowman
with a carrot for a nose,
like I did those years ago.

But did I really build a snowman?
These are things we imagine we did
Because that's what childhood does
And what it is.

Sometimes days drift by,
elusive music calls,
half-remembered song,
and, as we feel ourselves fall,
we lose all grip of who we are,
where we belong,
and I want to hum a melody
from a dark place deep inside
in an ancient tongue.

But did I really hear that melody?
Memory plays tricks like melting snow,
And we're nothing except our memory
So never truly know.

SNOWBLIND

you can't imagine, he said,
what it feels like never to sleep,
that cold eye constantly watching,
that sun which never sets, never
to stroll through that garden of
luminous orchids, their somnolent aroma
in the air, hanging limply, while
a soft rain kisses and swaddles
willowy skin. I looked into
his eyes and I went deep and I
caught him counting stars, this boy
who couldn't dream, I caught him
counting one two three in marble halls
and I knew how terrible it must be, the weight
of this avalanche of consciousness,
this world of icy peaks which had left him
snowblind. So later, when the moon
slipped through the window so grateful
I felt as I tucked myself up in bed,
head on fluffy pillows scented with
petals, sand sifting through my mind
as my fingers ran through fur,
cuddling calm and warm my teddy bear.

CONDEMNED TO MEANING

Arabic script speaks only of beauty
To my eyes; they wander through its
Spiderweb, its curls and curves
And gentle, lazy scorpions, its twisting
Merely shapes, and I'm a baby newly born
With sparkling gaze, agape with foolish
Wonder on the first day of creation.

Not even the most natural things
Can bring me the same innocence.
I stand adrift in a forest
Of names; they tower tall above me
And all I see are their mighty trunks,
Implacably thick, a blindfold
Iron-tight around my eyes.

This forest was planted long ago.
Not by me or those of us
Now walking these ancient woods, but
A chorus of voices long forgotten,
Long since dead. Their manuscript
Fails to illuminate, simply points,
And all I'm able to do
Is read the map.

We are verbs, not nouns.
This is what my thinking tells me,
But it's far too slow-witted for my eyes
And at once the nouns slot into
Their requisite boxes. The time when I
Might remain a Fool has long since passed,
No pathway out of this jungle,
For this writing on the wall
I can never unlearn.

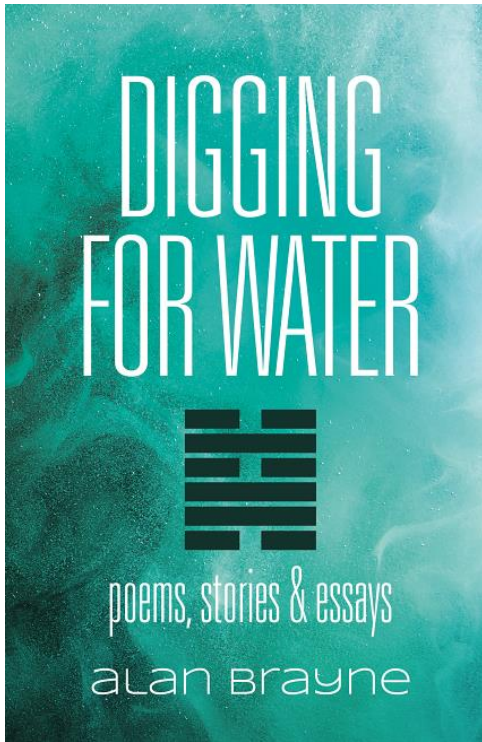
VETERAN'S DAY POPPY

The simple white crosses of the fallen
In tidy row on row, a world of order
Those poor young frightened boys
Would never know.

The wild red fields of poppies
Decamping free ahead, an anarchy
Those poor young frightened boys
Would come to dread.

The thick brown mucus of mud
On top of rotted green, a pelt of slime
Those poor young frightened boys
Would never clean.

The simple white crosses of the fallen
Naked in the rain, mislaid prayers
Those poor young frightened boys
Would never pray again.



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