

sunglasses
at midnight

heartlines

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sunglasses at midnight

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Inspiration behind the poems

Preface

Without the virus, **sunglasses at midnight** would not exist.

Back at the beginning of 2020, we had no thought of publishing any of our work – we were a creative writing class who met weekly at HEART (Headingley Enterprise and Arts Centre). It was a fantastic and vibrant group but when lockdown hit and the class moved online, we discovered that the social side was just as important as the creative side.

So, like many other groups, we established ourselves on Zoom for a weekly get together, to share work and escape from the reality of life in lockdown. It was a wonderfully relaxed, inspirational space – just the thing for relieving stress and for supporting creativity.

With our usual activities suspended and time on our hands we began to discuss new outlets for our work. Soon www.heartlines.uk was established and now attracts visits from around the world.

Our next project was to be a printed collection and while we were considering the options, we reconnected with the lovely people at Headingley Lit Fest who suggested a Zoom performance to tie in with Leeds Lit Fest. We chose a loose theme of light and dark which feels like an appropriate refrain for the times we are living through.

sunglasses at midnight includes all the pieces from the Lit Fest performance and you can see the video of the performance here on Youtube

https://youtu.be/kNPQ1K_hQ70

Any proceeds from sales of the pamphlet go to HEART, Headingley Enterprise and Arts Centre, where we used to meet up and where we all hope we can return soon. It can also be downloaded as a free PDF from

www.heartlines.uk

We hope you enjoy our work,

Liz McPherson,

On behalf of all the Heartlines writers.

Birth

You were born in the early morning
I touched the soft ginger down on your head
rested your head on my cheek confirming
your warmth was real and here on the red stained bed

And I traced your crumpled face still sticky with blood
and your cheeks like fine spun silk, rose pink
Your mouth puckered like an unopened bud
and I was falling, stretched, suspended on a brink
of something strange, transformative, as a tiny hand
wrapped fingers around my finger, and gripped me tight
with minute pearls of nails, and that oversized
wristband.

A switch, an incandescence flooded me with light

I burned, I melted and reformed. I too was born anew
enraptured how this body, mine, had grown such
beauty – you.

Eileen Neil

Skylight

Pale pink hues fading into winter blue skies.

My sanctuary has always been the ability to raise my eyes to the sky, searching for the light.

The act of lifting your chin and tilting your head to open your eyes to the celestial dome instantly brings a calm to mind and body.

A reflex to release a sigh and transport for a short second to the horizon beyond, above.

Throughout my life I've been unconsciously coupling with the blue yonder connecting to the heavenly space on high.

Abandonment and rejection soothed by glorious hot salmon summer evenings.

Finding solace and sanctuary in fresh icy blue of a March sky.

The spring light tempting me out to wander among new buds bursting.

All creatures detect the light, you can hear it in the bird song you can see it in the smile. Light connects us.

Karen Byrne

Uluwatu

If you should go by any chance
to see the Bali Monkey Dance
in distant Uluwatu.
Do not into the temple stray.
The Uluwatu sun sets fast
and you may find yourself the last to leave.

The ancient cliff edged temple clings
above a restless sea that sings
through courtyards hung with
jasmine and ylang-ylang.
Seduced by these exotic scents
you'll stumble under moonlit blooms
lured onwards to your certain doom.

The dancers will have all gone home
but through the temple monkeys roam.
Long tailed macaques, a sacred tribe,
in darkest corners plot and hide with
white faced General Hanuman,
son of wind god, Vayu.

Listen hard and you will hear
feet skitter round about you. Nearby
shadows follow in your path.
They watch, they wait, chatter and laugh
as they weigh up your fate.
Thumbs up, thumbs down?
Your future in their hands.

So dear friend and confidante
Do not into that temple stray.

Turn your back and walk away.
Leave what's sacred to its gods
its conspiratorial simian squad.
You'll live to see another day
far from Uluwatu.

Cate Anderson

Inner Light

Eyes wide open I stare into the pitch-dark room
and strain to find a point of light.

All around the darkness presses in,
surrounding me in swirling night.

Out of the darkness words drift through the air
and settle like the leaves from Autumn trees
in the hidden landscape of my mind,
creating shapes and sparking inner light.

All sight is swallowed by this inky darkness
and yet behind my eyes I see
a kaleidoscope of dancing images
conjured by the poet's incandescent words.

Dru Long

Love's Cost is Love

Love weighs a heart,
That piece of flesh, that token;
It steals the heart
And all it holds.

And all it holds,
Should it remain unbroken,
Is full of light
When it's returned.

But what has love
To do with me, in darkness?
She stole my heart
With knowing hands,
She hid my heart
In distant lands,
Love's light is lost;
That is the cost.

Out of love I write,
For out of love I am.

Howard Benn

sunglasses at midnight

All that was between us
Has fallen away to a death.

The waters of well-wishing
No longer quench.

I cannot put my lips
To the cup you do not offer.

There are no drops of affection
Left in its shallow curve.

Accost me, ask after me
In the unlikely future

And I will reply,
“It’s sunglasses at midnight.”

You will look puzzled,
Wonder why I’m hidden.

And I will reply,
“To meet darkness with darkness.”

Linda Marshall

Light and Shadows

In her mind's midnight
the darkness drops
like black gauze,
shutting off her light.

Alone in silent shadows,
no thought coheres,
no vision clarifies.

Behind the vacuum of her eyes
lie memories remote
from her empty present.

Where has she gone,
the lady I loved—
and still love—
where is she now?

A stranger has entered
her mind: an alien presence
with whom there is no
communication.

Sometimes I weep, sometimes I rage
in sheer frustration.

Sometimes I shout at her,
and am consumed
by shame and sorrow.

I do not even know
if she remembers me,
in her twilight world
of scrambled fantasy.

I do not know if I can cope—
I only know that I must try.

Bill Fitzsimons

Small Pleasures at Dawn

I like to wake up at dawn,
watch as the lilac skies fade
and the blackbirds feed on the lawn.

With curtains widely drawn,
smelling the air fresh with silent dew,
I like to wake up at dawn.

I may well stifle a yawn
as the sky turns blue and gold,
and the blackbirds feed on the lawn.

The cool stone windowsill I lean on
feels like a caress of silk on my palms.
I like to wake up at dawn.

As the sun rises on the horizon,
gratitude for life fills my heart,
and the blackbirds feed on the lawn.

The East now bright with vermillion,
I savour this small pleasure. That's why
I like to wake up at dawn,
And watch the blackbirds feed on the lawn.

Marie-Paule Sheard

Sunshine in the Darkness

6.15am Monday January 25th 2021.

The lights on the monitor flicker.

He stirs and listens.

He wrenches himself from the bed,
opens the blinds to let the day in,
forgetting it is still dark.

He crosses the bedroom,
turns on the light

hearing the protest from the bed.
Descending the stairs in the glow
of the all-night light
he shivers.

Winter, early morning,
darkness outside,
light inside, artificial.

Cold out and in.

Covid claustrophobia awaits...
again.

He turns on the heating,
warmth, slow to come.

Turns on the kettle,
the red light shines
heralding a warming, welcome cup.

Unnatural sounds, continue, from the downstairs
bedroom.

He opens her door, a little.

The blue light from
the monitor pierces the darkness.

Alice stirs and makes that familiar noise.

She looks at him.

She smiles, she laughs.
Not many would rejoice at such a rude awakening.
It lights up the room.
It lights up his life.
No electricity is needed.
She is sunshine.

Malcolm Henshall

On a Sundial

The sundial
basked in the open field.
On the main stone, I stood,
and from the light behind
my shadow cast
onto the stones from the past,
and told the time.

Then looking up, to the very heavens,
I dreamt of a voice -
'It's strange in these heavens,
the worlds that we've found,
that we have made.
If you knew, your eyes would be wide
and your mind muddled with mystery.
We have journeyed to stars,
uncovered valleys of riches, hills of affluence
and - a new beauty.
Our wizardry takes us faster, racing,
to worlds beyond ours.
And you, stuck in 2020, won't believe this.
You don't leave the village, nor the country, nor the
planet.
You don't travel, let alone travel through time.
But if you were free,
I believe
that your mind would wander and would wonder
and stray into a glimmer, a ray of light
and see in that ray, a glimpse.
The strangest thing is, though time has lost its scale,
you and I are one.'

And on the sundial telling a temporal time,
the ageless words remained
as they have all through time.
Hours fly, Flowers die. New days, New ways, Pass by.
Love stays.
Come along and grow old with me; the best is yet to be.

Rosie Cantrell

Captured by the Light

Red crepe paper over a lampshade
A Johnson's spiral developing tank
A print floating in a dish of developing fluid

The image emerges, a faint pattern, shades of grey
Darken as ghosts swim to the surface,
A drying lake giving up its dead.

They would have faded again into a sea of black
If I did not rescue them in a tray of fixer
A cleansing stream of water.

A moment captured, light reflected, an instance in time
Frozen, to be preserved in an album
Like a butterfly from a killing jar
Pinned to a specimen tray.

Terry Wassall

Early Morning Walk

Come let we walk
Watch the morning rise
Pulsating Cicadas
drowsy fireflies

Shrub alive,
last bit a shut eye

Come let we walk
Past Miss Eliot house
Veiled in luminescent grey
Vacant, veranda chair waiting
For occupancy

Come let we walk
Listen to the thud,
thud of mango trees
As fruit roll free

'Keep away from the gate!'
Too late...
Snarling, growling dogs
Pitch against the gate
Pull against their chains
Setting off a chain reaction

Come let we walk
Middle a the street
Heart a beat
'gainst rib- cage
Howls real close and distant
Cacophonous

Velvet darkness a drift
Rounded stone building
zooms into view
'Oh that... the old sugar mill.'
From morn to night,

Witness to
unspeakable suffering
Vestige of another time

Come let we walk
Bells approach,
See man trek with tethered goats
Greet all with toothless smile
Light oozes sprinkling its warmth
Dazzling
Startling light

Come let we walk
See
Amber, lemon, russet
Hibiscus, Lantana, Cordyline and Yucca
Skirting the Mahoe tree
Abuzz with birds and insects
Our eyes feast on
Bejewelled blue fronds

Come let we wait
Iridescent
Shimmering green
Humming birds
Hover
Flash
Feed
And are gone

Myrna Moore

The Winter Moon



The scars on the moon
Are like ink blots on paper
As they hide away
Beneath dreams of space vastness
In prisons of open skies.

Jim Mallin

Shivering in Moonlight



What manner of goddess or grim gargoyle
projects their wordless gaze
from a watchful sill?

Long baked in sterile clay,
they writhe and surge in anguish
for a message lost,
a tale untold
while serpents climb and swirl.

For decades they have taunted me.
I have introjected their thoughts,
ingested their scorn

and followed their blank eyes,
but they have not brought me truth
or candour;
perversely, they stifle it.

Periodically, I think I'll discard these imposter Furies,
and reclaim my shelf,
yet they remain there, shivering in moonlight,
like some repeating invention of myself.

Barbara Lawton

Nocturne

It is St Lucy's Day or, as the poet wrote,
the year's midnight, the day when darkness rules,
when folk like us lock out the cold and shut
our curtains tight against the dim grey days.

In endless night, as phantoms prowl and shadows
lurk and dismal souls are lost in gloomy deeps,
St Lucy's light creates a welcome glow
for fearful humankind while nature sleeps.

And one by one, inside and out, we deck
our homes and take the light outside,
rejoice with glowing lamps and candlesticks
to show ourselves (and them) we're not afraid.

And there's a truth of which we can be sure
that - come the dawn - the sun will rise once more

Liz McPherson

INSPIRATION BEHIND THE POEMS.

Birth *Eileen Neil*

Women's memories of giving birth are often very strong, even many years later. We all begin our lives inside another body, and birthing a new life can be a powerful part of human experience. My poem, written as a sonnet, was inspired by the memory, still vivid, of my daughter's birth in St James' Hospital in Leeds.

Skylight *Karen Byrne*

Every day I need to look up to the sky. It's my therapy, my space, my body and spirit just need it. I crave the light.

Uluwatu *Cate Anderson*

Many years ago, I first experienced the dark side of Bali, embedded in its myths, legends and ancient beliefs. Pura Luhur Uluwatu is a sea temple and one of the six sanctuaries of the world.

Inner Light *Dru Long*

Inspired by an exhibition at the National Poetry Library by artist Sam Winston, called Darkness Visible, my poem reflects the strangeness of being in utter darkness and what an impact the poet's spoken word has coming out of the invisible and silent surroundings.

Love's Cost is Love *Howard Benn*

This is about the nature of love, and the loss of someone far away. Inspired by the woman who left for Myanmar.

Small Pleasures at Dawn *Marie-Paule Sheard*

A NaPoWriMo 2020 prompt "small pleasures" was the inspiration for this poem. I like to write from personal experience and this is about how much I enjoy seeing the dawn break when everyone else is asleep, and the moment is just for me.

Light and Shadows *Bill Fitzsimons*

Although the theme of this pamphlet is light, I have written my poem about its opposite - darkness. Specifically, the darkness of a mind where the light has dimmed due to dementia.

sunglasses at midnight *Linda Marshall*

'sunglasses at midnight' is about a broken dream, a fictional friendship that didn't last and the sadness that ensued.

Sunshine in the Darkness *Malcolm Henshall*

This poem started off as one thing and ended up as something else. An impersonal poem became very personal after I read an article by Rory Kinnear. He wrote about the death of his sister who was physically disabled and had learning difficulties. She died of coronavirus at the age of 48. In the article he says, "Karina was sunshine". The poem evolved to become an amalgamation of my imagination, my experiences and the thoughts I was left with after reading Rory Kinnear's piece.

On a Sundial *Rosie Cantrell*

Sundials are all about time. This poem is about time and how, though times change, some things remain the same.

Captured by the Light *Terry Wassall*

As a child I was fascinated by the magic of photography. I spent many happy hours in the cupboard under the stairs developing and printing my own. Later in life I thought of photographs as art and in more recent years I see them as portals to the past, lifelines to lost worlds.

Early Morning Walk *Myrna Moore*

After 40 years of living in England, my parents retired back to Jamaica, Montego Bay. My father's routine was to have an early morning walk to experience the sun coming up. On our visit, we joined him and were overwhelmed by the Paradisal beauty and reminders of a brutal past.

Shivering in Moonlight *Barbara Lawton*

Shivering in Moonlight, is an ekphrastic poem – a poem inspired by a work of art. The work of art is a clay sculpture about 15 inches tall, which shows a group of ethereal figures and serpents merging into each other. I purchased it about 25 years ago and it sits on the window sill in the room where I do most of my writing.

The Winter Moon *Jim Mallin*

This is a Tanka (a Japanese short poem) about a winter moon that I photographed in my back garden a couple of years ago.

Nocturne *Liz McPherson*

I think it was Stephen King who said stories happen when two ideas bump into each other. Well, it happens with poems too. In this case, the first idea came from John Donne's poem, Nocturnal. The second came from the incredible light displays I saw in my neighbours' gardens during winter 2020. Because phantoms take many forms.

Sunglasses at Midnight explores themes of light and dark. These 15 poems for our times, written by the Heartlines writers, cover birth, life, death and everything in between.

These are verses that will simultaneously give you a hug and make you think hard.

'The Heartlines 'collective' have produced a pamphlet full of joy, celebration and light. These poems are hymns to what we share, a consolation in dark times and a rekindling of hope'.

James Nash

'A Bench for Billie Holiday' {2018} and 'Heart Stones' {2021} both from Valley Press.