

Volume 1 in the Galloway Poets series

John Hudson



Medusa Muse

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Poems by John Hudson

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" . . John Hudson enjoys a . . robust and playful verse, wrestling with language, pushing it towards new boundaries, always experimenting . . "

Douglas Lipton, Galloway Standard

". . amusing and scathing . . poems that discover light in the strangest darkness."

Anne Darling, Galloway News

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John Hudson has lived in Kirkcudbright, Scotland for the past nine years. He was born in 1958 and brought up in Walthamstow, East London, and has also lived in France and Orkney. As well as poetry he writes drama and has a regular arts column in the Galloway News. He is editor of the poetry anthology "Round About Burns," and co-editor of the arts and literary magazine, "Markings." His other activities include constructing "concrete" poems. He has exhibited at Gracefield, Dumfries and undertaken large-scale outdoor works. He is a partner in "Wider Eye," a contemporary art gallery, and he holds extra-mural poetry classes for Glasgow University.

Medusa Muse

Medusa Muse is on the move,
She loves ta break the Big Taboo;
Crossin lingua's no-man's land,
She bops n screams mang bairns n booze.

Auforities send sodgers oot ta silence er,
The saps, poor sods, ken nicht her spiel
But crazy run o stan stock still -
Stone still witness to er raucous gab.

They need an ero, some brass academe,
To codify her snakin thochts
An cast er in an awesome bust o bronze.
Then Ah might die alane n spare.

Our Lady

Weight of stone,
weight of glass,
weight of light,
weight of shadow;

here men found
the black virgin,
(no bride
and burnt by fire)

here men show
the virgin's veil
that hid her face,
her pain and anger;

here men chant
Ave Maria,
emptying discord
into the rock,

here men ask
pity
of a woman
they must hate,

here men praise
spirit
and push a witch
into the flames;

here men founded
Our Lady,
wring blood from stone,
cursing life.

One-Eyed Jock

I mind me ol man in frae graft,
white-faced as the froth on a jug a Ben.
E muttered ta muvver summink about
"One-Eyed Jock", then scrubbed, ad is grub
n went straight ta kip, mum's eyes
clockin is every move.

Years later, when e'd lost that Superman swank
sons strap their farvers wiv,
e got ta gab over a pint a Guinness.
It came out. Droppin
the dome o the Odeon, Camberwell - one of those
glitzy affairs wiv tinkly chandelier -
e'd come an and away frae plummetin
to the pit. One-Eyed Jock ad cut roofin cable
n the twang ov it twisted dad twenty foot aloft
any ol way. Someow e managed ta grab
an edge, ang on.

Ta me, One-Eyed Jock were a white-faced pirate
wiv a black eye-patch oo tried ta stripe me.
I ated im, n I ate im still.
E came again - me dad in Whipps, on the ospital bed,
overing over a fousand foot drop.
I saw Jock, is bad eye fixin dad for aye.
Dad's and flexed, jerked - I stretched ta grab it.
The nurse rushed in
but e fell.

Touching Goodbye

I held your hand -
the first touch for twenty years.
It just never happened before:
hellos, goodbyes, done the man's way,
big irrelevance, sign of weakness,
no show of the overwhelming love in us.

Yet I held your hand today
and felt stupid for doing so.
Deep in your coma you probably disapproved.

One of us had to make a move,
and you were hardly up to breathing
let alone touching

so *I* held your hand.
It was cold and weak
yet sweet to hold,
so good to find you again,

not to say "goodbye"
but "hello."

After the Funeral

I march along the windy prom
Then stop. My ghost is on the pier.
Afraid to leave it stranded there
I call it back. It doesn't come.

Night in the Hills

Walking among the clenched fists
Of Galloway basalt and schists,

I count the stars that spray the sky
Then think to play a bird and fly.

(Why does imagination take
Funny turns reason wouldn't make?)

Arms flail in space and vertigo
Draws its deadly undertow:

I crash with that enormous hearse
Astronomers call the universe.

Mother's Visit

It's as if all my books
are emptied out, dashed at the floor
and the shelves left hollow,
bare boards.

Buttressed by an armchair,
smile faint as irony
and so fragile,
depressed like the cushion her buttocks
suffocate with sitting,
she remembers
accusing her husband
of turning my head
after he handed me the "Odyssey",
his only gift,
my first book.

I watch her buying sweets
as we head for the telly,
her dentures machine-gunning:
What do you want?
What do you want?

Tsatsiki

First peel garlic cloves, two large or three small,
pummel each crescent to a shining pulp
and scrape this pithy cream into a bowl -
make sure the texture's juicy, white yet crisp;

grind peppercorns to powder fine as dust
and sprinkle sneezy clouds into rich oil
then add the garlic, stirring to a paste
with vinegar till bright as emeralds;

skin cucumber and dice to glistening cubes
then fold in yoghurt strained through muslin sacks;
allow to meld - leave the sauce to cool,
divide and serve on decorated plates:

the queen of Greece that rules all other dishes;
as warm as love, as sharp as winter kisses.

Bees

Deep in thick hedge-growth
that dark, bombus jive,

pollen heavy oaf
bumbling among its loves,

a cinder heart on ash wings,
lifts off for the hive.

I met several on a pike,
one crossing a glacier.

Find a far-away pasture,
lie prone and listen:

an infernal drone!
The result sweet nectar

spread like a picnic
for the planet's pleasure.

Improbabilities

What if . . . ?

What if poetry became peak-time?

What if I didn't die?

What if politicians were all Zen masters?
And Zen masters got God-struck?

What if artists bought a round of drinks?
What if the Arts Council gave the moolah to do so?

What if businessmen became humane?
And what if sheep refused grass?

What if the night flared up like
a catherine wheel? All the watches stopped?
The foot of Kali flattened mountains?

What if schools stopped teaching?

What if the dead came back and told a different tale?
What if the living knew tomorrow?

And if you could sing like Callas?
And I like Caruso?

What if I turned round and you weren't there?

What if breasts bled pitch? Babies ate their parents?
Men refused to fight wars? Women refused to back men?
Governments told the truth? Syndicates surrendered guns?
What if fags were good for you?
What if medicine made us happy?
If religion was Truth?
And philosophers never erred?

What if we saw ourselves as others see us?
What if we enjoyed it?

What if everybody knew a little more?
And wanted a little less?

What if we all gave up pretending we were interested in anything but ourselves?
What if the do-gooders were given truth drugs?
The charity collectors?
The helpers? The royals?
The managers? The workers?
The claimants? The saints?
The Brahmins? The rabbis?
The social workers? The scientists?
The sportsmen? The poets?

What if God exists?

What if I cried, "Up yours daddy, I'm doing what I want!"?
And I did?

What if we grew to know love?

What if we grew to know love?

And the tortoise beat Achilles -
which we know he never really did -
and Zeno's arrow found its mark?

Birds in a Cage

My name is George, I'm sixty five
My daughter lives in Cheam;
I practised medicine all my life,
Now my hobby's steam.

My wife, poor June, her back was sore
But that's the way with age;
She lay for hours on the floor
Beside the budgie's cage.

I hate the smelly budgerigar -
A present from my daughter.
I'd rather wash and wax the car
Than give it food and water.

But Joey can't be left to die,
(Doctors are humane)
I hope, therefore, that it might fly
Into a window pane -

And break its little neck, of course:
There's nothing I could do;
Medicine doesn't have recourse
To miracles. Do you?

June watched the cricket on TV,
Planted acres of lobelia,
But truth to tell ('tween you and me)
I had good cause leave her.

She mocked aloud my model trains,
Denounced them childish trash
Then told me to unblock the drains
To save our useless cash.

She wore her cool, self-righteous glow
(I slipped her warfarin pills)
When *Mallard* - Hornby triple 0 -
Derailed its bogey wheels!

I pitied her, her spiteful mind,
Her life stuck in the house,
And duty states I must be kind -
So I *healed* my ailing spouse.

And now I'm off to Istanbul
Upon the Orient Express
To feel the southern sun grow cool
Through evening's wild excess,

Then cross the snowy Urals
Sipping vodka all the way
With a quack who's selling cure-alls
And makes his medicine pay.

What's wrong with me? Am I depraved?
A doctor cannot kill!
The telly's off, the garden's paved,
But Joey needs his Trill.

Song of the White Settler

Ahm sneekin up on you,
Ahm gonna take yer over;
Theres nufin you can do,
Yerll never shake mah cover.

Ahll scoff yer tongue fer brekky,
Translate yer eart by noon,
The night Ahll trap yer by the balls:
Yer end is comin soon.

Ah got aa the big guns,
Yerve got nought but pride;
Ahm flushin oot yer culcha Jock -
Theres no place it can hide.

Ah dinnae come as armies,
Ah tried that yince afore;
Now its wi mah chequebook
Ahm chappin at yer door.

At first Ah filched yer kings,
Then bribed yer lairds n nobles;
Nah your drinkin frae this hand -
Scotch whiskys on *mah* table.

Ah am schools, Ah am committees,
Ah run yer sports, yer trains
Ah run Dunedins festival,
Ahm out ta run yer brains.

Ah ken no why Ah want ya -
Perhaps its cos yer there,
But nah the Norfs mah Englands toy
Yerve damn all else ta fear!

At Wull's Grave¹

A second search found yer Wull,
A yew tree sproutin oot ya heid
And on yer stone a line so dull
I bet ya glad yer wi the deid.

It says yer name will last fer aye,
But tourists hadna heard o you,
An a geezer living by the brae
Didn't seem to ave a clue.

Ya were a loner then as now,
You upset all propriety
Yer sang but wouldna scrape n bow
Ta satisfy society.

But lowly fowk gey prized yer rhymes,
Yer girled the pipes into a heat,
And there's the why despite the times
Blue speedwell blooms aboun ya feet.

¹William Nicholson, poet 1783-1849, known as Wull to his friends, now buried in Kirkandrews churchyard near Borgue.

Luminous

Last night the lights flickered off
on the back road. I got out
of bed and stepped over
to the window, expecting blackness

yet the bricks of the shed shone,
the grass tufts on the alley edge
were greener than green of day,
and the dog shit glistened.

I remembered autumn storms,
the sudden lightning spark
that ignited the bedroom mirror
to reveal itself on the hills,

and thinking, “that must be
near Jeff’s.” Next day we straddled
the fallen spruce that crushed
his garden killing three hens.

Today finds other strangenesses:
black sand in Brighthouse Bay and
the cola-coloured sea frothing
over a glow from nowhere;

the yellow hands of my sick father,
their x-ray aura at lights-out;
a blackbird brassy at night;
the sheen of the starry sky.

1 A.M.

Not night. No, not yet. Gloaming of summer.
Has the tide turned? Salt air moves in.
Golden gorse like ghosts with coconut scented breath.

Juggernauts from the Irish ferry hammer
Black tarmac; gears scream
Up the long hill. Why do I dream of her chill skin?

A blackbird's shrill, alarming stammer
Announces dawn, astounds the earth.
The sun climbs from the mountain's awful mouth

But day can't erase the crude slut death:
The sea rushes in with a din,
Choruses on rocks with a cold clamour.

Night Music

She asks if he can hear
The crackling stars and hissing nebulae
That to a quiet ear
Sound near, to a dull mind burn silently.

Such plain questions perplex,
Like asking him to feel the fire of Love;
Chatter is his reflex
To drown in words that passion played above.

New World Song

Ahm gonna cross the salt-blade sea
n wash ashore a ragin beach;
Ah wanna liberate ma thochts
n lung em loud tae restrung arps.

The land Ah leave is stony-dumb,
words a paupers, poems unsung -
a vagabond, heid hid in muck,
a careworn yonker, lackin eart.

Yon newlands wild s unpaddocked nags
o puddocks croakin neaf the lune;
its codes unfathomed - changelin snake
curlin like a demon billys orns.

No dictionry, no gramma strappin me,
Ah willnae weave reports o files
but suck on lasses bulgin brists
n dance amang the hurdlin burns.

The knifin waves chop at ma hull,
the busty mounts draw intae ee;
the smell is sexy - Ah leap ashore,
sing canticles on cunt-sweet soil.