

Errant Musings

**Writings suggested by
*The Errant Muse***



16 November 2019 - 2 May 2020

<https://vgm.liverpool.ac.uk/exhibitions-and-events/special/theerrantmuse/>

The Errant Muse is an exhibition at The Victoria Gallery and Museum created and curated by artist, Charlotte Hodes, and poet, Deryn Rees-Jones. The exhibition is a collaboration which features visual art, poetry, and artefacts chosen from the archives at the V G & M, as well as items from the personal collections of the curators.

The exhibition explores ideas of inspiration, imagination, fragmentation and connection. It includes literary work by and biographical references to Felicia Hemans, Virginia Woolf, Helen Thomas and Elizabeth Bishop. It is a beautiful, engaging and enigmatic exhibition. It can be viewed online at:

<https://vgm.liverpool.ac.uk/exhibitions-and-events/special/theerrantmuse/>

This anthology collects work developed from 2 writing workshops which explored the exhibition. The workshops were open to anyone interested in writing and art. In the first December workshop we discussed concepts of 'the muse' and looked closely at the collaborative artwork, *Perpetual Night*. In the January workshop we explored the artwork and artefacts that made up *The Orchard of Lost Things*. In March we planned to discuss writing by Felicia Hemans and Elizabeth Bishop and to finish our tour of the exhibition by looking at the films, poetry and banners in the former common room of Liverpool University's female students. We also planned to read some of our work in the gallery. Due to the developing corona virus pandemic, our workshop and plans were cancelled. Nevertheless here we have a selection of work from workshop participants.

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My Muse

My muse is Sefton Park, the eyes of many childhoods,
Observing them in their teenage years,
Growing into adults, bringing children of their own.
The café reigns supreme, though altered
From the days of metal tables, ice cream cornets
And colour changing juices flowing.
It holds the spirit of my Grandma
Who said the cornet was like my budgie's tail.

Late afternoon, the scented wallflowers just outside,
The sun setting on their muted hues,
Signalling that it was home coming time.

Then the next day began, the summer air calling.
A new morning adventure, making for the Palm House,
Weaving between the tall fir trees.
Statues of famous men, explorers, guard the glasshouse.
Inside, tropical palms of fragrant blooms,
And hot humidity.

The Peter Pan statue is nearby,
All the little animals sculpted in metal,
My favourites – the squirrel and the mouse.

The aviary is no longer there, but no loss.
A stark contrast to the freedom of the park.
Grey, prison-like, barred cages,
Image of incarceration echoed by
The gloomy trees which loomed above.

Brenda Roberts

My Muse

Toils over papers,
Sweating words,
In blue ink.

Arms and heart,
Open to comfort,
While running.
Always running,

I wish to be her,
As she sits,
Nonchantly.
Sleepless,
But full of dreams.

Julia K. Price

My Muse

is myself.

I am Macclesfield.

I come out of the earth,
sunshine through my hair.

Caroline Barden, Sheila Jones and Alison Little

My Muse

is a Mersey mermaid
khaki under skies of blue
trailing a thousand tangled jellies

is Hunts Cross Station
the boys on their bikes
and the *Metro* on the seats

is Asda
and its great green sign saying 24 hours
(which is a lie)

is Old Swan's errant apostrophe.
Beneath a snipping scissors logo
Boy's & Curl's

is the echo, a few steps along
in a school uniform shop:
'Short's in Stock'

is round the corner, a wall
and a love-struck graffiti artist's irrepressible outburst:
'Penny's from Heaven'

is water on my arms,
the slow rhythm of the swim;
sun on the surface

is air moving in the trees,
the park nurturing our wildlife;
the kingfisher swooping

is people on the bus;
what they look like, what they say,
the things I hear

is the GP's receptionist
managing to crack a smile while
I fix an appointment
(In my dreams)

is a Friday night's feet up
with Prosecco *and* Pringles,
a packet of Minstrels thrown in.
Perfect!

Shirley Jones, Sheila Jones, Elspeth McLean and Andrea Power

Bemused

Musing at the Vic
about next door red brick
building, Walker's engineering
1866 .

Location of learning,
inspiration, aspiration, yearning.
Built on beer, brewery benefactors
with cash to spare, cash to share:

public servants, respecters
of convention and Public Houses.
Money made from men
who blew their wages down the ages: -

The un abstemious, unprudentious,
Un ambitious, unpretentious.

And isn't it mysterious, like some sort of theorem,
the continual ratio, the balanced equation,
the salient point that always prevails -
that the many support the few.
Never fails.

Flora Small

Perpetual Night

Sits in a dark lonely chair,
Black crows fall on broken wings,
Blue water forever swirls,
Time slips away,
Thoughts hidden in a closet,
Daring to open drawers and speak the words,
Seeking a womb's reassurance,
Will freedom come,
From precisely cut paper,
Not for dolls Virginia.

Julia K. Price

Wallpaper

Holding up the chandelier
time slips
a wheeled chair

Wardrobed
not daring to speak
all she had -
two skirts, three dresses -
velvet burrowings
a snail's trail

Ripped out
falling from
A sack full
of leaden legs

Run wild!

**Caroline Barden, Suzie Sinclair Wood, Peter De Lane,
Sheila Jones, Shirley Jones, Alison Little, Elspeth McLean,
Julia Price, Brenda Roberts, and Flora Small**

Unspeakable Dreams

Sleep comes with difficulty to the troubled mind –
And doesn't arrive alone.
Unwelcome images play out
Scene after scene –
No use begging them to stop –
The nightly ritual has to be worked through –
Like Scrooge's phantoms
Paying their night-time visit.
Crouch in the corner,
Hide in the wardrobe,
Do what you will –
The relentless journey goes on,
Like a malevolent merry-go round,
The hideous horses
With their ghoulish grins.

Morning brings blessed relief,
For a short while, at least.
You'd take anything, you'd give your soul
If you could only block
These unspeakable dreams.

Brenda Roberts

Perpetua Knight

(née Eileen Brown) was born in Salford in 1889. Her father died when she was 3. Her mother and older siblings worked in the local cotton mill but Eileen escaped this fate because she was adopted by a maiden aunt. Life with Aunt Maud was not easy but Eileen went to elementary school and won a scholarship to Binding Ivy Grammar School where she became the favourite of head teacher, Honoria Blackett. With Miss Blackett's help, Eileen won a scholarship to Oxford, where her intelligence and charm drew the attention of tutor, Alice De Vere-Woolf. After graduation Eileen became the companion of Alice and together they toured Europe. Alice developed her skills in photography and Eileen kept the journals that would provide the background to her future novels. During WWI both women worked, Eileen as a VAD, and Alice, as a manager of medical supplies. After the war, they moved to Devon where they kept a small holding and became part of the Sapphic community at Wicken Cross. Eileen became Perpetua Knight in 1922 when she wrote her first novel, *The Scars of Love*. Her greatest success was *Tear Me to Pieces*, which was made into a film, starring Hermione Popp, in 1932. Knight wrote another 10 novels; all were best-sellers but critically panned. However in the 1970s, the novels were reissued by Virago as examples of 'surprisingly subversive popular fiction where the desires of women characters drove the narrative to entertaining extremes.' Knight died in December 1965, just one month after the death of De Vere-Woolf.

Shirley Jones

I lost

I lost my love
More than once
I lost him to an unknown force
When he leaves I become undone

I lost my little toe
Sprinting in sandals in the rain
So you wouldn't be wet on the train
And I had to learn to walk again

I lost half of myself
I hid it on his bulging bookshelf
I offered it to him without disdain
And I had to learn to live again

I perpetually lose memories

Emma Lloyd-Jones

I Lost

The spring in my step ... usually I get up oh-so pleased to be me
A cat . . . never have tears come so easily, even to people in the
street.

The patience to find a light-bulb that fits . . . and there's never
anyone available to ask at B&Q!

Three pounds in one week but found a tenner in the next.
My zest for life when the lemons in my bowl turned mouldy.

Two grey gloves from different pairs.
My lightweight fold-up shopping bag made from a recycled
parachute.
The last jumper my mother knitted for me; I left it in a pub.

My heart in Llandudno
to a girl
on the Pier
with slot machine eyes
and arms
like a bandit.

**Sheila Jones, Andrea Power, Elspeth McLean and Shirley
Jones**

LOST

The day she passed her eleven plus was the day she lost her friends, her sense of self, her confidence.

Before, she'd attended a small rural school and out of her class of twenty-nine, five had passed the test that would define their futures, three girls, two boys, their destination the local grammar school.

Instantly, a class divided by us and them, defined by the simple words pass and fail.

I was lost. School uniforms defined us. Mum made my school dress, the 'posh' girls got theirs from George Henry Lee.

The lost years 1970-75.

Suzie Sinclair Wood

Things

I lost my handbag. I was so upset and horrified. It contained vital objects. What was I going to do? In retrospect, it's a good thing I was only 8 at the time, and my little bracelet was plastic, and my purse held a few pence, and my key was for a little wind-up dog.

I lost my favourite woollen hat. It was warm on the bus, so I took it off, putting it in my shopping bag, or so I thought. The shock when I reached home and went to take it out of my bag to put it away, and it wasn't there!

I lost my cassette player. The 'record' button stopped working but all of the other buttons were okay. A neighbour said he could fix it for me. Foolishly, I let him take it. As time went on, I called and said if he couldn't fix it, I'd have it back, as I could still *play* tapes with it. He showed me he'd dismantled it to work on it. That was 3 months ago. I've not only lost my cassette player I've lost my trust.

Brenda Roberts

The Loss

Sunlight brands the remote beach. She lies stretched out on her front, body twisted towards the horizon of the sea. Hand raised above her eyes, blocking the sunlight attempting to obscure her vision.

Eyes scanning the scene for him, she has lost sight into the expanse of the ocean. Only out of sight she assumes, hidden between waves lashing against the rocks of the coastline. Her rear is arched slightly, enhanced by the slender fit summer dress. Knees encased by the warmth of the dry sands. Earlier, her feet had kicked up joyfully towards her rear, playfulness re-connected in adulthood, now tensed. Below her, the sands burn a deeper orange.

A hand crochet blanket, hours of pain, distraction-seeking hooked yarn, covers the sands she rests on. It was the only thing for her to do, removing her mind from the loss. There was no point in making any more baby clothes, she didn't know what to do with the collection she had already made, laid out in the drawer she had lined. They would decide in unison after the negotiated break.

Vision streaming further into the ocean, she could still not see him. They had waited four weeks since the miscarriage to get away; both needed to arrange time off work. Making the blanket had kept her mind occupied, kept the tears from flowing full force. They had come to Swanage in Dorset, easy to book a B+B at limited notice. The main town beach had been packed full of babies and children, grown into what their foetus would have become. He had taken the initiative to suggest walking to a more remote beach around the coast. He was trying to be strong for her but he was grieving the loss in tandem.

Further, into the ocean, a long boat jammed full of tourists heads towards deeper waters. All the trips they would never take their unborn child on, the picnics they would never consummate, the family games they would never play. Into the abyss, the no-more, her hand fell onto her reduced stomach. A light tear joins her face, panic sets in. She couldn't see him. What if she had lost him also, drawn out to the infinite seascape. As she is about to stand several petals drop down onto her smudged checks. Looking up, he is scattering wildflower petals over her, their eyes connect and they smile in unison. He joins her as they wrap into each other, minds and bodies link, they know everything will be okay again.

Alison Little

The Dolphin

The rebel dolphin swam
into the bay. I whispered,
please, stay.

She came alongside.
Flesh brushed,
succour, solace.
Like her I was lost.
Like her, my time limited.
Please stay.

The dolphin whispered,
don't be afraid, come and play.
Please stay.

We did, with barracuda
translucent fish and sting-ray.
Then, she was gone.

Like shards of glass
shattered into millions
of memories then ground
Into a deep dark sea,
Lost.

Suzie Sinclair Wood

Paper Boat

Thick, gnarled fingers by dint of lugging
wood and steel
for years
now gently create softer angles,
smooth down folds
from yesterday's *Echo*
and press into shape
a paper boat,
to float.

Studied meticulousness.
Perfected patience.

Wide eyes look on
in awe and expectation,
simple fascination.
Precarious on a plastic stool,
clumsy fists itching to reach out
and grab,
but the merest raised eyebrow
comes like a warning shot
across the bow.

'Nearly ready Granddad?'

'Takin' ages Granddad.'

There. Done.

No bread for birds today,
straight on to the lake.

Andrea Power

Based on *The Lovers* by Charlotte Hodes, 2019, Papercut

Gift

When I left Dundee, a friend gave me a heavy glass cream jug;
she was good at picking things up at Dens Road Market.

I didn't think I needed a cream jug,
but over the years it added style to strawberries
and apple crumbles, and as I poured I thought of her.
Last week my partner put it in the microwave and broke it.

These old jugs are huge;
people must have loved their cream
(or are they named for Cream the colour?)
The illustrations feature departures and women who hope that
hope springs eternal in the human breast.

Elsbeth McLean

Jug featuring quote by Alexander Pope c1780. Creamware, made in
Liverpool.

Jug with Black-Eyed Susan, from a verse by John Gay c1800

Portrait

Virginia Woolf's arresting profile in black and white,
such delicate bone structure.

She never bade farewell to anyone's departing ship
but put boulders in her trenchcoat pockets, strode into the
River Ouse,
without waving goodbye,
her cascading associations would never more reach out in rippling
waves.

Sheila Jones

The Wedgwood Pegasus Vase

I was really attracted to this elegant vase – its size, its smooth shape, and the white relief design on the black background is very striking.

It looks like the outline of a Temple, and a Palm Tree. A model of Pegasus crowns the vase, 'the icing on the cake', he looks ready to fly away – I wonder to where?

A bunch of deep red roses would be perfect in this vase, enveloping it in warmth.

I could imagine it displayed on a fire surround in some stately house, admired by visitors – but, most importantly will we ever learn the secrets of Pegasus' travels?

Brenda Roberts

Found

It was 1976. She was intent on transformation. She got a curly perm, courtesy of Herbert. Life changed overnight.

From a hermit to a socialite. Punk had arrived. She bought plastic pants and a see through top, danced in ERICS, stalked Pete Burns of *Dead or Alive* around town. Hung out in the record shop, Probe. Found herself after so many lost years.

Suzie Sinclair Wood

Swimming

Apparently, you're paper,
light to lift.
I'd thought you
heavier, and made of clay.

Whatever ...
you shine under LED sun,
glitter over sandy waves,
held aloft
by skinny arms.

A mammal out of water,
sealess,
chipped,
and missing half a fin,
you still affect a jaunty tail,
grin tiny moons,
suggest *O c e a n s*.

Shirley Jones

Diatoms

Dull light shines through a window of education
To be enlarged on a wall by projection
Or looked at closely through magnification

The windowpane shows diatoms
Small and plenty
Unique in their structure and can be used for identity
Inside the lungs of a moved body that drowned in a lake
They're usually round and split in some sort of way

Their stories are preserved here in epidiascope lenses
Fitting as these algae live in houses
Made of intricate silica glass
Containing chlorophylls which function as
A means to make the sun taste sweet

Most importantly the beautiful eukaryotic phytoplankton
Give the world half her oxygen

Emma Lloyd-Jones