

Poems: Lunatic and Loving

**POEMS:
LUNATIC AND LOVING**

Anne Smith

'The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact'.
Thus Shakespeare shows he thinks us poets barmy,
Expressing it with all his usual tact.

Rainbow Valley Books



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FOREWORD

Though I wrote a lot in my adolescence, this body of work dates from after my husband's death in 2006. I wrote a lot about grief and mourning at first, and later added poems about writing poetry and especially about my great literary love, Shakespeare. Spreading my wings, I write about nature and the seasons, the passing of the year, and my family. There is, understandably, much about ageing and death. Finally, I sometimes like to take on the persona of someone else and imagine what it is or was or would have been like to be them.

Poems: Lunatic and Loving

**This book is dedicated to
all those who have encouraged me to write
and all those who have inspired me
to write about them.
You – if you are still alive – know who you are.**

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Attracts attention, asks to be set down
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They live in memory;
They, with our childhoods too,
Are part of who we are.

POEMS: LUNATIC AND LOVING

**'The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact'
Shakespeare**

'I'm not mad,' the lunatic said.
'Hearing voices inside my head.
They're made up of all that I've read;
I'll listen to them till I'm dead.'

The lover to this: 'Nor am I.
It's my passion that leads me to sigh,
And emotion so strong that I must cry
All that I feel to the sky.'

'I stand between,' says the poet.
I feel what you feel but don't show it;
And when you hear voices, I know it.
This love that you have, I'll bestow it

On all those who read what I write,
Keeping my memory bright.'

When Gods Grow Old

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Shakespeare and The Globe

You strutted and fretted your hour,
Shakespeare, on a stage like this;
Knowing your actors you wrote for them.
Though they are gone your verse remains.

Shakespeare's Globe

Bawdy, noisy, smelly, dirty –
Robustly vulgar – that must have been
The early Globe on rip roaring Bankside.
Now the South Bank is a centre
Of culture and art and history,
Pricey housing, swaying bridge,
Jogging professionals intent on fitness;
No stews or bear-baiting these days.

Yet in the modern Globe we can
Sit as they sat or as groundlings
Stand by the stage in the sunlight,
Join in the action, eat, drink and chat,
Wandering in and out of the theatre.
The actors can see us and act at us,
And we can shout back (and we do).
Some actors love this; some hate it.

We don't sit, reverently silent,
Remembering school, to hear
The Words of the Bard. No, we're here
For a theatrical experience
Whether we're scholars or not.
Maybe it's no longer dirty or smelly
And there are sprinklers on the thatched roof.

Sensible, since the last Globe burned down -
But it's still noisy and bawdy,
Robustly vulgar and full of laughter
And – what they had but never named it –
Audience participation.
What they had and we've not retained
Is the simultaneous ear:
The ear for outrageous puns which hears also
The heart-stopping music of verse.

Sunt Lacrimae Rerum

With our sublunary nature we can only
Make the best of things, put a brave face on them.
The jester's red and yellow antics ward off shadows;
Our hands applaud man's brave romantic gesticulations,
So death-defying, so frequently dead all the same.
It's worth it, it keeps us going, but it's sad.

Under the high romance, the improbable beauty,
The bawdy punsters and the spate of weddings,
The clown bleeds, dry-eyed, while we laugh.
Between the courtly ideals, the extravagant friendships,
And the rough vitality of the boozing mob,
Are the villains, who come to no happy ending.

Only he could make us weep for his villains:
Shylock a Christian, Malvolio madly-used,
Caliban, the monster with an ear for music;
And Falstaff, gross fraud, fat comic without an audience,
Kneeling bare-headed in the cobbled street,
Travel-stained, alone in the oblivious crowd.

We all need something to look up to, to dream about.
That's what we think we go to the play for:
We go to be taken out of ourselves, for our pleasure.
But to his credit we remember most clearly,
Meeting our just deserts, the clowns and the villains:
Laughter with a lump in the throat, the tears of things.

The Poet - Shakespeare

The sculptor fights the ugly block
Of hard grey stone before him
Seeking the imprisoned shape.
Sleeves rolled up, sweat-streaked,
Coughing, dusty, exhausted,
He labours while rough-hewn at first
A figure emerges.

But the bronze-worker
Taking the mould from the fire
Waits for the cooling and taps
Till the plaster falls away
And shows, detailed, complete,
Red-gold sparking off it,
All at once the incarnation
Of his private mission.

Was he sculptor or word-smith?
Did he sweat and toil, waiting to see
How it turned out? Or did he gamble
On that final, finished moment?
If he chiselled and chipped in words,
How did he find time to do it?
But how could he fashion such splendour
In the hidden mould of his fancy?

Poetic Fantasy

The Comic Muse knocked on my door.
Wearing a tutu over black leggings,
And a mediaeval liripipe.
She also had a black eye.
'I was told you were kind' she said.
So I invited her in
And gave her a steak for her eye,
Reducing my calorie intake.
Before I could get her to talk
The doorknocker called me again.
With tearstains all down his cheeks,
And wearing black jeans and a hoodie,
There stood the Muse of Tragedy.
'Is she here?' he asked. 'I was told so'.
'You'd better come in' I replied,
'And explain that black eye to me'.

They agreed over their cuppa
They'd had a row about Shakespeare.
He said the comedies weren't funny
And were really quite tragic in parts –
Falstaff's rejection for one,
And Shylock's loss of his daughter.
She claimed there were too many laughs
In the tragedies, which ought to be sad:
Juliet's Nurse for example,
And Cleopatra's servants at play.
The debate got quite heated, they told me,
With plays and plots tossed about
Till finally fisticuffs flew.
The Comic Muse came off worse,
Since Tragedy'd had more to do
With fighting (just think of the dead
At the end of one of his plays).

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Hence the black eye.

He was sorry about that but wouldn't
Go back on his earlier grievance;
And she still felt she was right.
So I couldn't let them go home
With their argument still unresolved.
We sat for a bit eating biscuits
And silently drinking our tea

Till the doorknocker sounded again
And would you believe? There was Shakespeare!

Like the Droeshout engraving to look at –
Though perhaps that was only because
He knew I would know who he was
From that portrayal alone.
I invited him in (as who wouldn't?)
And told him about the affair
And asked if he'd act as the umpire
For the sulky and still silent Muses,
Comedy with a steak to her eye.
So Shakespeare sat down between them
And tasted his tea with suspicion
As he'd never had it before,
And decided he found it thirst-quenching
And soon even asked me for more.
He looked at the Muses quite gravely
And yet with a twinkle I thought
And addressed them as his inspirations
Which got their attention at least.

He explained that he needed both Muses
To do what he wanted to do
Which was to write plays about people
And make them seem real to those
Who came to the plays to experience

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Escape but also emotions
They'd recognise from their own lives.

Through a mouthful of biscuit he said
That life wasn't all games and fun
But that even in desperate times
We could usually laugh through our tears.
So he needed them both as a playwright
And please would they stop making war
And bring back the balance they'd brought him
So that modern playwrights could draw
As much as he had from both of them –
And please please said Shakespeare with passion
Tragedy mop up your tears
And Comedy chuck out that steak now
And wash all that blood off your face.
And both of you, get back to work.

A grin crossed Comedy's face
And even Tragedy smiled;
They finished their tea and departed,
And when I went back inside
Shakespeare had vanished as well
Though I'd hoped against hope for a chat.
I might have supposed it a dream
But for three empty cups on the table
And all the biscuits had gone.

Death of the tragic hero

Most men fear death:
Whatever hardships they've suffered
They do not want to die.
A minority
Cannot bear evil, unkindness, poverty.
They kill themselves.
There are some men who choose death
When life was an option,
Who die for a cause, a country,
A friend, a relation.
And then there's the tragic hero.
He is a king, a general, a leader.
His world is filled with lies,
Wickedness, filth, deceit.
He is doomed to die
Through his own fault –
The moment predetermined
By fate or wicked plot –
We see it coming from the start.
If it's his fault why are we so sad?
If we are sad for him why don't we
Rebel against this death?
Each tragic hero represents ourselves
But at his death he's somehow purified
As we are not – he's come to accept
That he's responsible for what he's done.

He knows himself at last, makes no excuse,
And dies because he cannot bear to live
With this self-knowledge.
We are uplifted in our turn though sad
To realise what isn't true of us:
That man is capable of facing up
To what he's done, to talent thrown away,

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To death and to destruction brought upon
Himself and those he loves.

This weight of knowledge cannot be endured,
Yet as he dies the hero's also freed
From all the dirt and pettiness around
In which we all must live.
His death ennoble him as noble birth could not –
We feel his death ennoble all of us.

Not only the tragic hero

We must also remember -
Not the villains, Iago, Edmund –
And not the victims either,
Desdemona, Cordelia,
And all those young children,
But those most like us,
Not hero material at all.
They are left behind
To restore order to the chaos
The hero leaves when he dies.
Enobarbus and Kent, now,
They couldn't face it.
They died too, almost
Stealing the scene.
But cold Octavius,
The much-wronged Edgar,
And widowed Macduff
(not counting Malcolm
Who's too young to matter)
Pronounce the epitaphs
And help us acknowledge
What we've always known,
That hard as it is
Life must go on
And we, the survivors,
Must go on with it.

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Poems Poetry And Poets

Discussing the art and mystery
Of making poetry,
Sometimes when it is inconvenient,
And sometimes it doesn't come at all.

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Question

If the poems of my youth were
Adolescent

Are these scribblings of my age then
Senescent

Or merely like myself – you too -
Obsolescent?

Wysiwyg

I like poems which are surreal,
Existential, impressionist;
And poems without capital letters
Or the support of punctuation.
I like poems containing images
Which carry an emotional punch
Even while you realise that in them
Many metaphors mean nothing.
I like excited poems
With compound adjectives and
Ejaculations in mid-line.
I like poems written in a form –
A sonnet, say – which nevertheless
Reflect rebellion or anxiety
By bursting through
Metrical restrictions.
I'd like pointilliste poems
If I could think of any.

But my poems are none of these:
Representational and
Anchored to the here and now,
They do not aspire to
Philosophical speculation
Or transport the reader
Into new and different worlds.
Small scale, domestic, they are
Not really what I admire;
Best described, perhaps, as wysiwyg –
What you see is what you get –
They are, simply, what they are.

Poet

Leads a humdrum life, cooking,
Cleaning, shopping, gardening...
Suddenly a poem has you by the throat
Which you have to deal with, get it off you
Now, at once, before it strangles you.
Ideas bubble up, red before the eyes, and always words.
You have to let the poem have its head
Before it has yours – and the shopping,
Cleaning, washing, and the dinner
Are put on the back burner.
Even – if the poem gets there first –
Getting dressed, whatever the time of day,
Takes second place to capturing it on paper,
At least the first if not the final draft.
These seizures, this continual abuse,
Make the humdrum extraordinary,
And rich, and valued, though it does not show.

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Poetry is electric

Poetry is electric: it tingles in the head
And crackles down the arm.
Words scamper to the page,
Jostle in line for the right place.
Meanings change; lines disappear
Though some may come back later.

Where does it come from, this itch,
This fizzing in the blood
Which cannot be ignored?
It's all restlessness and feelings.
Exciting or sad, stirring or elegiac,
It is electric. It is how life is.

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Memories

Little, sharp, unbidden,
Snapshots of memory
Come into the mind.
No photographs remain
Of these small moments.
Only their bright images
Inside the head
Beg for immortality.
Poems can do it –
Act like photographs,
Capture the minute,
Share remembrances.

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Concentration...

As a meat stock cube
Encapsulates in little
The goodness of beef
So a poem may
Condense meaning
In a small – but perfectly
Framed – metaphor.

Poems

Poems are like, and yet unlike, crosswords.
They are puzzles which involve finding words
And putting them in the right places.
But whereas with crosswords you know
You are looking for the right answer,
With poems you are never quite sure
That there is a right way to describe
Your mood or emotion, to clothe your idea
In the appropriate words.
Perhaps another could do it better
(Usually Shakespeare) or maybe
The right words are in another language
Which you have never learned.
And yet we go on spending time
Which we owe to other activities
Poring over paper, correcting on computer,
Searching for rhyme and rhythm,
For the right answer.

Language and reason

Language and reason tie us to the earth;
In hackneyed phrases our desires congeal;
Accurate words have only worldly worth –
Meaning betrays the truth of what we feel.

For voiceless is the music of the spheres,
For ever changing and always the same;
Unsayable how beauty moves to tears;
The colour of the heavens has no name.

And all man's yearning cannot help him reach
That state in which he has no need to explain:
What would he learn if anyone could teach?
What would he find though never would attain ?

For words are very often all we have
To save us going lonely to the grave.