

**NATIONAL POETRY
WRITING MONTH**

APRIL 2018

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A POEM A DAY FOR THIRTY DAYS

~ ~ ~

01 Apr 2018

i.
Bob, can I borrow your time machine?
I want to play NaPoWriMo
but I didn't write anything on the first day.

ii.
Yes, you can.
But, be bloody careful this time.
Trying to persuade Jesus he was deluded
just drew attention to the poor bugger
and you got him crucified.

iii.
That was a shame;
he seemed like a nice bloke,
and one hell of a caterer.

iv.
Ho hum.

~~~

**02 Apr 2018**

Bob the alien

put a tentacle around my shoulder,  
patted my head with another,  
and handed me a tissue with a third.

The tissue was gloopy with Bob's slime  
so I sniffed up my own snot  
and wiped my eyes on my sleeve.

The news report on the screen  
told of the farmer, who'd killed his sheepdog:  
hung him from a tree  
because he wouldn't work the sheep.

Shall we fly to Wales in my spaceship?  
Shall we find that farmer?  
Shall we hang him from a tree and kill him?

Yes please, Bob.  
How I wish we could.

~~~

03 Apr 2018

Dear Warner Brothers

I'm writing to complain
about your latest Looney

Donald
J
Trump.

The character totally lacks
verisimilitude.

Love from

Bob the Alien

~~~

**04 Apr 2018**

WTF

When I got home from work  
Bob the alien greeted me in the hall.

He bobbed up and down on his foot  
and waved his tentacles around like Medusa  
on a bad-hair-day.

"Do I

have a surprise

for you!"

I looked around for Zak. Weird ...  
not being welcomed with a bark and a waggy tail.

"Where's Zak, Bob?"

"Well

he got bored with his squeaky rubber sausage  
so, I taught him all about bio ethics. Then we read

Animal Liberation

and now, he's sorry he chased  
rabbits and hares and squirrels and he may become  
a vegetarian."

...

I found Zak under my desk, wearing a beret  
and looking morose.

"I need you to fix this, Bob.  
Use your alien magic  
to put Zak back  
the way he was."

If he'd had shoulders, he'd have shrugged.

"OK,  
if that's what you want.

And, shall I put you back too?"

~~~

05 Apr 2018

Lady Bower's Bellmouth

Eighty feet in diameter, built of stone
it sits incongruously in the water. The pipe
below descends hundreds of feet vertically.

When the reservoir is overfull
millions of gallons of water
pour down this gigantic plughole.

I imagine being lowered by winch
from a hovering helicopter
into the mouth of a man-made Niagara.

I hang in the centre of a 360 degree
waterfall, deafened and drenched,
then cut the rope and I'm a droplet.

I plummet past the drowned village of Derwent
and the church, its clock-tower's tip,
last seen in the drought of 1947.

Then, woodlands, a squire's country house,
the ruins of Ashopton where The Snake Pass meets
The Snake Valley: all submerged, unseen.

Soon the stone pipe narrows and bends.
My voyage over, gravity spits me out:
discharged, and surplus to requirements.

~ ~ ~

06 Apr 2018

Like lizards, we bask in the sun, protected
from a cool northerly breeze by the Saxon church.
Indirectly God gave us this handy spot,
to break our hike, eat packed lunches,
admire the rolling dales.

In silence
the greedy dead
surrounded us.

Not warriors who saved us from tyranny
and thus worthy of stone, but ordinary
country folk, like millions of others before and after
who did
not very much
but claimed their piece of earth nonetheless.

My dog sits upright and alert, his shoulder
against my leg. It is his nature to piss on things
and he eyes the memorials hopefully. Of course

I won't let him do that, not even on the unloved ones
that lean like old men waiting at the bar.
These have yellow signs attached by tape
that warn of ... of what? Some clip-board-hugger's
perception of danger. I can't be bothered

to go and look. We stuff things into our rucksacks
eager to reach the river Dove and its banks of daffodils.

As we dawdle through the churchyard, easing
gently back up to hiking pace, birds twitter
and tweet hymns to their own god. Then, before we leave
Zak has a crafty pee
on a yew tree by the cast iron gate.

~~~

**07 Apr 2018**

What it is to not be a twat

I'm in the orchard  
with Zak the dog and Bob the alien.  
Astro, a chestnut gelding,  
trots over to us hoping for carrots.

I have none.

As consolation I scratch behind his ears.  
He tilts his head back, and I breathe gentle  
into his right nostril. He exhales slowly  
into my mouth.  
Our kinship acknowledged, he nudges  
my shoulder with his head, then wanders off.

Zak took advantage of the horseplay  
to Hoover up a couple of nuggets  
of green and white  
chicken shit. I didn't witness it  
I just know by the way he licks his lips  
and his expression

I am what I am.

Bob points a tentacle at a chap  
walking by in the lane.  
"That man looks like a twat."

I ignore Bob. Sometimes that works.

"Do you want to know  
which twat he looks like?"

I say nothing.

"Michael Gove.  
He looks just like Michael Gove."

For a moment I pause  
and enjoy the sound of Astro chewing grass:  
crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, gurgle.

"That's not how things work, Bob.  
Looking like someone who is a twat  
does not make you a twat.

Zak! Leave that bloody chicken shit."

Bob harrumphs.  
Aliens with blow-holes are great at harrumphing.  
"I didn't say he was a twat  
I said he looked like a twat."

Astro stops munching and looks over at us.  
He shakes his head, maybe astounded  
by Bob's lack of understanding of idiom  
or maybe just flicking away a fly.

~~~


08 Apr 2018

The Orange Seagull

In the summer of 2016
at a food processing factory in Wales
a scavenging seagull slipped and
fell
into a vat of chicken tikka masala.

Rescued by the workers
rinsed and towelled dry
he emerged the colour of saffron
and reportedly
smelled delightful.

He was rushed to middle England
in an animal ambulance
where they scrubbed his feathers
and restored his plumage to a tedious
white and grey. He retained though,
an oriental aroma.

Meanwhile millions of chickens
were killed, cooked and eaten;
indeed, some were eaten
by the orange seagull's rescuers,
probably with poppadoms
and mango chutney.

~~~

**09 Apr 2018**

It started with an argument.

Bob the alien said he'd read the play  
and it was stupid, and anyway,  
nothing written 120 years ago  
would make modern humans laugh.

I said bollocks:  
    it was ball-bouncingly funny.  
He said prove it.  
I said I bet I could ...

And that's how we end up at the theatre  
watching  
    The Importance of Being Earnest  
with Bob disguised as a fat Frenchman with burn injuries.

I suspect I've won the bet;  
I feel Bob strangling his guffaws from the off.

But as Jack Worthing admits  
    he's lost both parents,  
and I feel the entire audience breathe in  
    ready to be amused by Lady Bracknell's reply  
I know I've nailed it. Bob's blow-hole flutters under his beret  
    and he squeaks with delight.

~~~

10 Apr 2018

Aged 93 and with 2 false knees,
my dad plays badminton twice a week
and fights for every single point as if
the world's future depends on it.
I admire that about him.
But one thing troubles me greatly. That is

when he plays Monopoly he refuses
to buy any properties bar
the stations,
the electric company
and the waterworks.

Of course, he has never won and will never win
a single game. I asked him once about his strategy,
why did he not buy Mayfair and put up a hotel?
He shrugged, thought about it, replied:
Like eating broad beans, it is just something
I do not do.

~~~

**11 Apr 2018**

Do you have a plan  
for the Zombie Apocalypse?

I do.

Weapons  
"Mercy" a few farmers  
and grab their shotguns. Until then,  
the axe will suffice.

Transport  
A helicopter of course.  
Benefits:  
Looks and sounds cool.  
Zombies can't fly.  
I think I know where I can get a Huey.

Support Team  
Helicopter mechanic/door gunner.  
Jazz guitarist.  
Veterinarian (with primate experience).

This could be fun.  
I have skills.

I'm not some regulatory auditor  
who'd sit writing a risk treatment plan  
or citing zombie non-conformities  
as their friends and family got eaten.

Any down-side?

We'd run out of humous after day 5  
(best before date)  
that would be a bummer.

~~~

12 Apr 2018

The second rule of poetry club:
never write poems
about writing poems.

After my walk
I make toast and tea
and settle down to read
(that is read, not write)
NaPoWriMo-ems

Slurp.
Crunch.
Slurp.

I feel my buzz cut bristle
as some of the stuff whizzes
over my head. Clever though!

Slurp.

Gyppo the bastard:
I will not well up at his
starkly drawn nostalgia.

Crunch.

Is it OK to mention
other writers? I better check with
indar or Linda.

Slurp.

It's day twelve.
Some have fallen by the wayside.
I miss Amie.

Crunch
Crunch

Will I
make it to the end?

Crunch

After all, this is a very big
piece of toast.

~~~

**13 Apr 2018**

A True Story

At the age of fifty-three  
I taught myself to savour tea.

I feel you pause and cup your ears  
what happened in the previous years?  
Why forsake the joy of tea  
until the age of fifty-three?

It started back when I was three  
my nanny made a pot of tea.  
I was so young; she made it weaker,  
put it in my favourite beaker.

Back then I really loved my tea  
but trouble's brewing as you'll see.

Nan made her tea with leaves, not bag,  
I got a mouthful, made me gag.  
That warm and leafy acrid brew  
struck my throat and made me spew.

The leafy tea shot down my nose  
and splattered on my teeny toes.  
I choked and coughed and I vowed right then  
I'd never drink the stuff again.

For decades thence, ne'er a sip  
of Indian tea got past my lips.  
Darjeeling, Assam, Lady Grey  
never once came my way.

What happened then, at fifty-three,  
why teach myself to savour tea?  
I'll tell you, though you'll think me dim;  
I simply did it on a whim.

I still hate Earl Grey though!

~~~

14 Apr 2018

Bob the alien
is using at least seven of his tentacles
to look for a pen.

"Bob!
For God's sake,
you're getting slime
all over my office."

I cringe as he finds my Montblanc
Meisterstuck LeGrand
hidden under the iPad
and yanks off the top.

"Whoa. Careful, Bob.
That cost almost a grand."

He holds it up and peers
his monocular iris zooming in and out.

"A LeGrand for a grand.

Does it have a GPS tracker,
so you can hide it in your girlfriend's handbag
and find out where she goes
 on a Wednesday night, or,
perhaps a concealed poisoned dart
 for killing Russian spies, or,
does it just write wonderfully well?"

I grab the pen: "No.

No tracker
(she goes to yoga, or palates, or some such
 bendy thing).
No poisoned dart
(though I admit that would be useful).

Yes, it used to write wonderfully well,
but now the nib's covered in slime, who knows.
Why do you need a pen?"

I hand him a Bic with a chewed end.

"I want to sign up for a special offer from the BBC:
Ten alcoholic drinks a week in exchange for
six months off your lifespan. Best deal I've ever seen."

"Bob, Bob, Bob, Bob, Bob.
How many times do I need to explain about the news?
It's all twaddle
made up by a cretin
 with too much time on his hands.
It's not true, it's not news
and it's certainly not a special offer. "

I breathe in, hold my breath, and wait
 for Bob to harrumph.

~~~

**15 Apr 2018**

Glorious

This spring is one of remarkable green,  
except for the brown bits. Put a couple  
of ponies on an acre of meadow  
and within three days it looks ploughed.  
Covered with hundreds of hoof-sized ponds  
each filled with rain water, the sod refuses to drink.

During a hiatus in the rain, I march to the tune  
of squelch, squelch, squelch. The ground  
feels like sponge, and belches and pops as it warms.  
I stop to listen. Underfoot the entire field rumbles  
like a kettle seconds before it clicks off.

The chicken coop in the orchard is ringed  
by chocolate brownie batter: slick, emulsified.  
It looks delicious. But I pause too long  
and sink just enough for the gloop  
to take a fierce hold on my wellie. I pull free  
leaving the boot in the mud and me hopping.

Eskimos have 50 words for snow.  
When it comes to mud  
the English resort to adjectives.

~~~


16 Apr 2018

On the Topic of Women Who Tidy

Do you know
where the key to the oil tank is?

No.
You had the key last.
I never touch the key.
I've never even seen the key.
I don't need to deal with keys.
I didn't even know we had a key.
I'm unaware of the concept keys ...
Um ...
It might be in the floral patterned
cardboard box on the bookcase.

~~~

**17 Apr 2018**

How to eat

after a gas (nerve/blistering/choking agent) attack.

Break off a small chunk of biscuit  
(inner and outer gloves make this a challenge)  
take a deep breath, and hold it ...  
Pull the mask away from your face.  
Place the chunk of biscuit between cheek and gum.  
Use your facial muscles to hold the biscuit in place.  
Replace the mask, wiggle it, check its seated and airtight.  
Breath out hard to force the gas out of the mask.  
Chew the biscuit.  
Swallow it.  
Repeat.

We practice in a room filled with CS gas,  
soaked with sweat having run 3 miles in mask and suit.  
Get the food drill wrong  
and you won't die. You will though, benefit  
from the best nasal decongestant known to man.

Eventually, I mastered it. Along with the skill to:  
drink  
change a mask filter  
self-inject atropine in upper thigh.

These are skills I no longer need  
hopefully.

~~~

18 Apr 2018

How to become a journalist

i.

Have the operation.

It is painless. Your integrity will be removed;
sucked out through a convenient orifice.

There's no going back. But, at this stage,
you still have options.

You could become:

a politician, a lawyer, a banker.

Set on a career in the media? Go to step ii.

ii.

Take a meat tenderiser

and batter your sense of proportion.

Bash it, thrash it. Imagine a carnival high striker,
try to ring the bell. When your sense of proportion
is out of proportion, progress to step iii.

iii.

Practice makes perfect.

Take handfuls of bland events

and fashion them

into steaming piles of asinine hyperbole.

Until.

iv.

Queen fears

World War 3 tensions

could JEOPARDISE

final Commonwealth meeting appearance

v.

Bingo.

You've got it.

~~~

**19 Apr 2018**

All The Teeth Were Brown

I listen to the rumbles of Sally's tummy.  
The gurgles and burbles  
fade in and out  
in sync with the machine.

I try not to swallow.  
In my head, I say the special word  
that helps me relax. *Elephant.*

She grafts like a stone mason;  
chips and scrapes, pokes and prods,  
blasts with water jets;  
removes six months'  
of espresso and Merlot stains.

Finally a buff with whirring brush  
and chalky paste. All Done.  
She tells me my teeth look great.

She means great  
    in an English sense of course,  
more functional than fashionable.  
Capable of chewing a Werther's Original or useful  
    in a brawl,  
        if I need to gnaw off an enemy ear.  
But not great in the American sense:  
    so startlingly white, that like the sun,  
it is harmful to look directly at them.

Apropos of nothing  
    on the drive home,  
I sing along to The Mamas and Papas.

~~~

20 Apr 2018

At some festival or other

I sit in the summer heat
wearing a shoulder-length wig
and watch a hippy wash his bollocks
 in a cattle trough of water
while a hippy chick fills a kettle
 from the other end of the trough.

My head itches.
I look around, try to spot
athletic looking lads with short hair.
Yeah, I know how that sounds,
but it's soldiers buying drugs I'm interested in.

I sigh, wonder if I can scratch my head
 without dislodging the sodding wig.
I'm bored by undercover work, in fact, I'm bored
by anything drugs related. I'm a fraud specialist.

Give me a sharp pencil and a calculator
and I'm as happy as a sweaty hippy with his balls
 in a trough of cold water.

But it's the 80s
and it's all about drugs these days.

Fuck it;
perhaps I'll give this new computer
 malarky a shot.

~~~

**21 Apr 2018**

Andiamo

I am told that I speak Italian  
with a strong Sicilian accent.

That's interesting, isn't it?

It surprises me: how quickly  
I arrive in a cul-de-sac.  
I say Buongiorno  
to an old Italian woman in black,  
she replies with something vaguely familiar ...

at this point, I should shake my head  
non capisco  
and beat a hasty retreat. Instead

I blag it. We hold an entire  
conversation in Italian  
and I have absolutely no idea  
what we are talking about.

My girlfriend, impressed,  
asks what we discussed.

I shrug:  
just chit chat.

It troubles me;  
not my own casual and trivial deception  
but the thought that others, maybe pilots,  
surgeons, world-leaders are also  
blagging it.

~~~

22 Apr 2018

Bob the alien sits
mesmerised by a leaflet
while Zak the dog
with tug-toy in mouth
looks up at him hopefully.

Lynda's
Hair & Beauty Rooms
Treatment Menu

Without taking his eye
off the menu
Bob unfurls a tentacle
grabs the tug-toy and tugs.

The room fills with sound:
fierce growls, clacks of claws
on wooden floorboards,
the crackle of green synapses
trying, I assume, to make sense of

Detoxifying colon cleansing wrap
£40
55 mins

I head for the door.
A tentacle shoots out and grabs my ankle.

I try a pre-emptive strike:
"I have no idea about any of it.
And I certainly do not know
what a

Men's Executive Treat

entails. But,

for twenty quid, I suspect,
my penis wouldn't be involved."

Bob gives me a monocular wink.
"I've googled it.
I've googled them all.

I was just wondering if Zak
might like his back waxed."

The growls turn to whimpers
and we get a demonstration
of how dogs can move
at the speed of sound.

~~~

**23 Apr 2018**

Canine Agility  
(seesaw / teeter-totter)

The first time.

For Zak, it's just any old ramp.  
He hops on, eager.  
Then it tips. Ears go back, eyes widen.

What the ...  
I'm out of here. He leaps off the side

and looks up at me.  
It moved, Dad.  
Now he's tentative,  
as if the board might bite him.

Calm words, and meaty rewards  
encourage him slowly up the ramp.

Bang. Rattle. Bounce. Bang.

The far board hits the ground  
as thirty kilos of dog  
push past the pivot point.

He darts off the end and looks back  
at the noisy monster. I make a game of it,  
roughly rub his sides,  
good boy.  
He relaxes into the rough and tumble.

Twenty minutes later he's a seesaw master.  
He runs up, slows, edges over the pivot,  
bang  
trots down the far board,  
and with no other obstacles ahead,  
dances a quick pirouette.

Session over,  
we sit together on the grass.  
I tell him he's clever, and I'm proud of him.  
He looks at me as if he understands  
then sneakily licks the end of my nose.

~~~


24 Apr 2018

Patches of slime
dot the lounge carpet.

When Bob the alien
watched The French Macaroon
kiss The Orange Overlord

he'd decided to take ROFL
literally.

Projected onto the ceiling
Bob has a screen grab
of Trump's
startled expression
and weirdly puckered lips.

He stops laughing
takes a deep breath
and shouts up at the picture:

Do you want a mint?

I mop up slime with kitchen towel
and think myself lucky that Bob
is unaware
of the term LMAO.

~~~

**25 Apr 2018**

Two Weird Anatomical Facts

i.

The green woodpecker's tongue  
is so long (one third body length)  
that to fit in its head  
it must coil around the inside of the skull  
behind the eyes  
and down into the right nostril.

ii

Canadians have luminous testicles.  
I'd like to think they evolved  
through natural selection,  
for use in frosty mating rituals,

but not so. They are simply  
a safety feature.

These incandescent silicone  
bike balls  
attach to the back  
of the rider's saddle  
where they dangle and sway

like a gentleman's scrotum  
on a warm summer day.

~~~

26 Apr 2018

I was never able to explain
to Bob the alien

the point of:

marriage,
the queen,
Thelonios Monk,
toupees

but I did teach him Tai Chi.

I watch him now
as he stands on one foot
(easy as he only has one foot)
slowly moving his tentacles
up and down
side to side
measured breaths through
 his blowhole
and a smug look on his face.

~~~

**27 Apr 2018**

All Good

The icing on my perfect cake  
would be  
a friend for Zak  
a cat  
a pair of Kunekune piglets  
and of course  
a seagull.

Perhaps when I retire.  
I can almost smell it.

```
aside {  
Bob the alien says  
we should get a cat now.  
And because we love animals  
we must:  
immediately let it out of the bag,  
never swing it, no matter how much room  
there is, nor skin it  
in any of the innumerable ways.  
};
```

Those braces are relevant BTW  
I live in a time when society rewards those  
who speak to machines.

I'm grateful.

I'll pause now  
in late-middle age  
contemplate the future;  
maybe wonder why it is  
we have no English word  
for denouement.

~~~

28 Apr 2018

Under a pink dusk sky
Zak races around the chicken orchard
on the heels of an imaginary hare.

Daisy and Saffie ignore him.
(scratch peck scratch)
He skids to a halt beside them.
Daisy, squawks, flaps and skips away.

The farmers have been muck spreading
and the air has a taint; not hideous,
but you know you're in the countryside.

Bob the alien's word of the day is:
insouciant.
He leans on the fence, says nothing,
tentacles folded in 4 pairs.
Breathes in the shitty air as if he likes it.

I step towards Daisy,
raise my arms in the air
 like a bullfighter
and hiss: zcrzshz.

She, crouches, moves her wings
ever so slightly, away from her body ...

I dip down and scoop her up,
stroke her neck,
complement her on her wonderful eggs.

I place her in the coup
and call Zak to come and guard the pop-hole.

Saffie needs no chicken whispering.
She's as tame as a cat.
Before I put her to bed, I squat,
and set her beak-to-nose with Zak.
He gently licks the side of her face;
a bedtime kiss.

Bob harumphs.
"Those birds are evil.
If they were bigger than you
they'd crack your skull with one peck
and eat your brains."

He's jealous I suppose.

I take a biscuit from my pocket
flick it with my thumb.
It tumbles through the air ...

Zak leaps, catches it
and crunch crunch it's gone.

~~~

**29 Apr 2018**

Am I boring you?

I'm not yet fully awake,  
have not had my first coffee.  
I sit on the floor, with Zak,  
fuss him  
and unconsciously yawn.

He follows suit  
gives a wide-mouthed dog-yawn;  
eight inches of pink tongue  
stretched and curved like a kid's slide.

Scientists say  
the contagious yawn  
inflicts humans and chimps  
(no mention of dogs, Zak)  
when they see  
or hear  
a yawn.

Thinking about yawning  
can make you yawn.  
Even reading about yawning  
can make you yawn.  
And I've just discovered  
(please note, New Scientist)  
that writing about yawning  
can make you bloody yawn.

~~~

30 Apr 2018

Bob the alien said:

well, Mark,
you seemed
to enjoy
national poetry writing month
far more

than you did

go sober for October.

~~~