

**MAKING A SHOW OF MYSELF
2020 - 2021**

The Tour That Never Was



Poems by Jim Bennett

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of each year I select a set of poems, some recent, some older that I feel will work together and enable me to present them in a reasonable order at events and public readings, through the year. During this time some poems are added, and some taken away so that by November the poems and the way I perform them is established. This booklet contains the poems that were planned to be part of my 2020 reading series which due to the Covid 19 Pandemic had to be cancelled. So this same reading would be in place until normal service can be resumed. These poems were those due to be read in those shows. I hope they contain something of the flavour of how those readings would have been. So here it is in all its glory 2020 and 2021 and how I would have made a show of myself.

JIM BENNETT

Jim Bennett lives near Liverpool in the UK and is the author of 76 books, including books for children, books of poetry and many technical titles on transport and examinations.

His poetry collections include.

Drums at New Brighton (Lifestyle 1999)

Down in Liverpool (CD) (Long Neck 2001)

The Man Who Tried to Hug Clouds (Bluechrome 2004 reprinted 2006)

Larkhill (Searle Publishing 2009)

The Cartographer / Heswall (Indigo Dreams 2013)

He has won many awards for his writing and performance including 3 DADAFest awards. He is also managing editor of www.poetrykit.org one of the world's most successful internet sites for poets. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Award on 7 occasions and shortlisted for the Basil Bunting Award in 2013.

Jim taught Creative Writing at the University of Liverpool and now tours throughout the year giving readings and performances of his work.

READINGS 2020

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Liverpool is
radio days
when Monday smelt of linen
on the day that the Pope came to visit
I have no poem in me
stories

Part 2 – Poems

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Q&A Session

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poetry day at Tesco
the day the poets went on strike
the legislators of the world take coffee

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from end to beginning
Cool as the sound of jazz

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priorities
once a cartographer
incident in the cinema

Workshop (if used)

a geography lesson

Part 1 – Born in Liverpool

I was born in Liverpool and it is that City that informs a lot of my writing. This first poem was used as the poem to celebrate Liverpool becoming the European capital of culture in 2008.

Liverpool is

town on Saturday
football and beer
Pierhead and ferries
Dale Street Church street
Sefton park and the rec
it's places and people
accents and buildings

Liverpool is

old and new
the Tate and the Walkers
the Spinners and the La's
Christians and McGough
The Liverpool Scene
and the Dead Good Poets
sarcastic and funny
using words like daggers

Liverpool is

a bevie with your mates
having a laugh
the Albert Dock and Canning Street
the Rope Walk Roads
the good old days
the bad old days
poverty and tears
making do

Liverpool is

cathedrals and religion
mosques and temples
chapels and churches
the red, and the blue
the orange and the green
Goodison and Anfield
universities and shopping
students and the homeless
side by side
shoulder to shoulder

with the Pope
in Hope Street

Liverpool is

naan bread and pita bread
chips and Chinese
pizza and bagels
an Indian and McDonalds
it's every colour and tradition
it's white and black
brown and yellow
England and Ireland
Wales and Scotland
Pakistan and Bangladesh
India and China
the West Indies and Hong Kong
Somalia and Cameroon
it's every place
its a kaleidoscope
of mixed living
loving colour

Liverpool is

That poem grew from my memories of Liverpool as I grew up. These next two poems are also memories from my childhood, both written over the past few years and part of a collection called Radio Days.

radio days

in my parents' home
there was a radiogram
given as a gift to my mum
it was a treasured item
on Sunday at lunch time
we would sit round the dining table eat
while dad carefully tuned to distant voices
and the Navy Lark
but on Friday night
the big bands played
and the table would be pushed
into a corner while I helped roll
the carpet to one side
and the room they called the parlour
became my parents ballroom
they would dance with grace
years would fall away from them
as they held each other turned
leaned feet moving never tripping
and when the music ended
they would sit down take a drink
rise when the music started
but dance only to a waltz
and they had a favourite
which must have been everyone's
because it was often played
years later as she was living out
her final days a little confused
but kept comfortable in a hospice
a nurse came
placed a cassette player by her bed
we find she responds a little to this
she said as she turned it on
a low and far off sound of Fred Astaire
playing piano and singing
the way you look tonight
my mother smiled
do you remember she asked
but she wasn't speaking to me
it was Friday night
and I was rolling back the carpet

when Monday smelt of linen

on Monday's the laundry smelt of boiling linen
it is a smell that once you experience
is never forgotten nothing else is quite the same

I bought a fragrant candle once called linen
but that was nothing like it like fresh tree glade
is nothing like a glade of trees or fresh

remembered with the smell is the sound singing
the words of many songs are lost with time but
row your boat and in a mountain greenery remain

at other times it was Christmas songs
and my mother's voice singing to the rhythm
of the wash board as she rubbed

this was washing day a collected memory
days the same until grandma grew ill
and I got to agitate the dolly tub

This poem recalls the visit of the Pope to Liverpool for the opening of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King.

on the day that the Pope came to visit

me mam put out cakes
and butties and cheese
and stuff that was stuffed
up in folded up leaves
and the crockery
was laid out
that nobody sees
on the day the Pope
came to visit

we watched on TV
knew he wasn't too far
as he smiled and waved
from his funny white car
I thought things were strange
just a little bizarre
on the day the Pope
came to visit

the priest had been round
bless this - bless that
bless mam's suffering legs
and her blest Sunday hat
and no one was allowed
to sit where he sat
on the day the Pope
came to visit

there were people in the garden
who stood on the swing
there were nuns lined up
getting ready to sing
but I wasn't going to kiss
anyone's ring
on the day the Pope
came to visit

I have always enjoyed writing poems inspired by paintings, photographs, music, all forms of art. This sort of poem is called ekphrastic, so here is a recent ekphrastic poem inspired by the painting Cape Cod Morning by Edward Hopper.

I have no poem in me

(After *Cape Cod Morning*, by Edward Hopper)

I don't know why I came to do this workshop
it is all so awful paintings of people with lives
this one of a woman in a New England house
looking out on what is a bright sun lit day

What am I supposed to write about that
That can't be said in one line like I just did
She has so much the house the weather
It looks so *rich* what do I say about that

I wonder if the artist was envious
wanted to capture her imprison her in a frame
hold her motives to ransom make them plain
for all the poets to make up a back story

who is she why is she stooped over
who is she looking for is someone missing
a child a husband a pet why does she look out
is she trying to find a lost ship a swimmer

a child swept away the window is open
bringing in the breeze the scent of hibiscus
the sound of waves and the birds singing
as they nest in the new spring hedges

all of this in one awful picture
I am supposed to write a poem about
capture something of the human condition
I'd love to I really would but I have no poem in me

stories

lend me your story
tell me your lies
of times and places
the whats and the whys

a man once a soldier
now lives with a ghost
another who drinks
builds his life round a boast
there's a woman
who left her children to burn
and another who teaches
things we don't want to learn
and the smoke that is writhing
from memories pyre
twists as it turns
getting higher and higher
your conscience is dead
and bar rooms are open
it's easy to drink
to create an illusion
trading a drink
for the tales of a lifetime
knocking it back
as you grab for a lifeline

so lend me your story
tell me your lies
of times and places
people and faces
judgments and cases
the whats and the whys

you carry the guilt
you can't pass away
for you it returns
to haunt every day
you try to point fingers
find someone to blame
but slowly the story
turns you insane
so many people
get fed on the crumbs
they try to exist
but end up as bums
it's a moment away
it's in everyone's story
a toss of a coin
damnation or glory

so lend me your story
tell me your lies
of times and places
people and faces
judgements and cases
tracks left and traces
decisions and graces
the whats and the whys

Part 2 - Poems

A world tour in lockdown

last week I was in London tomorrow New York
I have ordered the food pizza and burgers
printed off the photographs of familiar places

Times Square Central Park The Flatiron
all as they were as I know them full of people
the Babel of the modern world screaming with life

tonight I will prepare remove the pictures of London
replace them with New York while everyone else
is in lockdown I travel the world visit the places I know

and some I don't tomorrow I will wake up in New York
to the sound of Alicia Keys Bob Dylan and Billy Joel
videos that show the last time I was there play all day

on the big screen while two electronic picture frames
show the city and constantly change as I walk the streets
in the afternoon I'll visit MoMA take the virtual tour

walk through the familiar galleries and soak
in the post-impressionists and the POP artists
later a tour of the city graffiti and the subway

I will stay there for a few days before I move on
I'm not sure where I will go next perhaps Egypt
sail down the Nile listen to the sound of Salah Ragab

watch the sun set behind the pyramids
sleep out in the desert in the chill of night
while the ancient sky spins across the ceiling

the last of my kind

I watch shadows on the cave wall
the dark sheet slides over rock
there is no detail beyond the edges
and they are broken by the surface
what light there is comes from outside
sounds and movement from far away

one shadow sits next to the water
a fisher man who looks like a man
and nothing much like a fish
sits tying bits of string together
capturing air in small squares
to take away with him to sea

on a mantelpiece a square shape
that ticks as shadows move
the distant smell from the sea
from fields and roads
sounds of children playing
none of it leaves a shadow

in a dark corner I imagine
a woman on a couch her legs
pulled up into a foetal shape
on the wall a grey rectangle
is the ghost of a frame that held
a picture of a family

I was in that world once moved
made noise eat drank made love
cast shadows that fell on strangers
walls I reached out to them
the way I hope one day soon
a shadow will reach out to me

this poem

(after Billy Collins)

this poem is a wounded hog
seeking refuge in the woods
a cracked brown pot
that will not hold water
it is not a piece of coal
that lay for 250million years
waiting to be burnt
for you to warm your hands
neither is it a haiku
 it started out as a haiku
but then out of control
it grew and grew and grew
this poem is a wander along
a country lane to a picnic site
infested with ants and wasps
it is a roof with a hole
 a very large hole
it is a car with no engine
a bike without a wheel
it is permafrost melting
releasing methane
like an old dog at dinner time
this poem is also a tear
running down your face
after I read you a love poem
and you couldn't stop laughing
it was intended to take your breath away
but in a different way
it is not a familiar song
sung at the last night of the proms
or a perfect day
or a night of bliss
neither is it rum baba
or a crème caramel
and although it might be a strawberry trifle
it will never be a jam butty
no it can never be a jam butty

post hoc ergo propter hoc

today I started working on tomorrow
decided that it should look different
rather than just another version of today
today had not been successful in fact
quite the opposite of the day I had put together
planned to live through and experience
so in the small time left before it arrives
I will add value to tomorrow
tomorrow I shall discover something
of great importance to the world and myself
write something that everyone will want to read
put it on a blog with add-sense
watch the money grow in my account at a penny a pop
tomorrow will also be the day that I prove some things
first that I can design a memorable and splendid day
and second that I don't need anyone's help to do it
I can make a day work just fine on my own
So I don't need help I definitely don't need *her* help
after all it was her that turned today into a failure
sorry I didn't mean to use the F word
but she did I had it planned and she wanted to talk
talk though I ask you we could have been in town
a river trip a drink a meal instead she wanted to talk
well I didn't want to listen and I told her so
that was it off she went saying *it's all over*
I still don't know why but tomorrow will be better
she'll be sorry because it will be a fantastic day
and she's not going to be in it

Part 3 – Love

Here are some love poems with a twist. Or twisted love poems

the other side of love

no early night no candle light no bath for two
no standing under stars to count them all
no more doing those things that only lovers do

no extra place kept in case there's one too few
no standing by the phone in case you call
no early night no candle light no bath for two

no seeing rooms in shades of duck egg blue
or watching you while painting half the wall
no more doing those things that only lovers do

no picking curtains shelving or the brand new loo
no holding breath to hear who's name you call
no early night no candle light no bath for two

no reading of a love poem written just for you
no retelling of the story how I save you from a fall
no more doing those things that only lovers do

no soundtrack to our lives to play and listen to
no way to hear I love you or feel I'm ten feet tall
no early night no candle light no bath for two
no more doing those things that only lovers do

yesterday at noon

life ended not in a whimper
or a slow phut of air but in a conflagration
that devoured the planet

busses melted into boiling tarmac
skin fell from bones leaving skeletons
to watch with silent screams until eyes melted

what was left fell into piles of dust
like Lot's wife before that too blew away
flags fluttering on poles became ash

shop windows exploded
church doors closed as they took off
for heaven yesterday at noon

in the heat of the moment
people tried to pray
but the words melted on their lips

in a fireball that would rival the sun
the whole world burned
until it was a a lump of molten rock

the oceans evaporated
the white face of the moon toasted black
as space and time warped in the heat

that is how it was yesterday at noon
as I sat and drank tea in Ruben's realised
for the first time you really are going to leave me

because of you

my car pours fuel down a hole
as it goes ten miles an hour
things are living on the dog
and there's weevils in my flour

the bus is always running late
the trains don't run at all
there's never anywhere to park
cabs ignore me when I call

my plumbing makes a terrible noise
and apparently I snore
and every bill that goes unpaid
gets posted through my door

if I seem a little down
well I'm sorry but its true
my life has simply come apart
and it's all because of you

the radio keeps itself un-tuned
no one comes past my gate
good news is always missing
and the bad news always late

my windows are all cracked
and the roof is letting in
my gardens full of weeds
and I've barbequed the bin

every phone call that I try to make
is a voicemail or a song
or else a voice repeats a lie
we won't keep you long

if I seem a little down
well I'm sorry but its true
my life has simply come apart
and it's all because of you

my central heating doesn't
my water's always cold
thought I'd take up origami
but my paper just won't fold

even in the supermarket
helpful staff won't give me help
and everything that I want to buy
is missing from the shelf

people just avoid me
dogs treat me like a pole
as I trip up on the pavement
every bag has got a hole

if I seem a little down
well I'm sorry but its true
my life has simply come apart
and it's all because of you

advice to those about to blow a kiss

don't blow kisses
they might hang in the air uncollected
then fall like leaves in autumn
to decay at the road side
or the next time it rains be swept away
into drains and out to the river
with all the other rubbish

don't blow kisses
they might
strike some random passer by
and for a moment
make them wonder
what it was that brushed their face

don't blow kisses
then you will not have to wait
to see if it is returned
you are not a child to catch it in your hand
or pat it into place on your face
so don't blow kisses
you will be sorry if you do

4 Recent Poems

These next two poems were completed recently.

in the wood

someone built a Potemkin village
a façade a row of cottages
a small smithy a church and here a clown
police officer in full slap and motley
truncheon spinning around his finger

while she in full panoply claims
the Parthian shot she turns smiles
& wishes me gone but her Cheshire cat
smile is left to mollify and confuse

everywhere is this false place
the casual glances the nuances of misandry
love once a Pascal's Wager now vestigial
my time alone with her
when I would sing my songs
on balmy mornings
a memory perhaps a mirage

Periwinkle sky

when you are looking for evidence of life
you won't find it in a mirror
or in the desperate energy of fear
or alone on a quiet street at midnight
I saw it once in the fevered moments of conception

and again in replays of the Hiroshima bomb
as it mushroomed behind the glass of my TV
I always thought that pain proved something
so it was there in the grill of a car moments before
it hit me and gave me a measure of life

just because I think it did not serve as proof
it could still be all a fading dream in the head of a corpse
in an existential bubble I could be fooling myself
believing that actions have repercussions
and that the comfort of strangers meant anything

so I move through whatever this is
believing that there is a before and after
that time is something measurable in some way real
just like money may be in some way real
a currency to be used and used up and in that case
never to be replaced

Part 5 - what would the world be like without poetry?

it's Poetry Day at Tesco's

the poetry came
squashed in a van
side by side
with beans in a can
now on shelves stacked high
there's books of verse
sonnets and haiku
crapsey's and worse

a book by McGough
that makes people smile
found next to milk
on the dairy isle
Betjeman, Hughes
and the poet laureate
can be found by the veg
with the last courgette

special offer poems
around the store
great deals
have people looking for more
buy a rhyming couplet
get another one free
read about Prufrock
as you have a cup of tea

post modern avant guard
is hidden on a shelf
while Pam Ayres is on a TV
marketing herself

there are ballads
in the bakery
odes to toilet rolls
there are limericks
with the lychees
all waiting to be sold

Ginsberg's Howl is in
a freezer
Adrian Henri by the door
we're sponsoring a happening
writing poems
across the floor

while poets come
to read poems
other poets write
it looks almost like a secret vice
done in the dead of night
but we don't sell very many
though there's nothing that we lack
but after poetry day is over
we pack them up
and send them back

the day the poets went on strike

on the day the poets went on strike
planes had to be diverted from Heathrow
the people were trapped in lifts
the bins did not get emptied
the dead were put in neat piles
hospitals cancelled operations
and the schools closed
it there had been any mines
the miners would have flown to picket
bookshops without fear of intimidation
because the police all stayed at home
on the day the poets went on strike

on the day the poets went on strike
not a single couplet was written
no villanelles sonnets or haiku
rude rhymes were scratched off
toilet cubicles vandals over sprayed
poetic street graffiti with the colour of wall
cats and dogs were silenced
in case they made an onomatopoeia sound
and children banned from skipping rhymes
or making choices
green bottles were hidden just in case
on the day the poets went on strike

on the day the poets went on strike
no one really noticed
nothing really happened
a few poems did not get written
and maybe the world was a better place
for just one day
on the day the poets went on strike

the legislators take coffee

motorbike engine
breaks into the quiet morning
a breeze moves the grass
far away a bird calls

sunlight drives off
the overnight frost
patches remain in shadows
and on bare trees

it could almost be Paris
in those years between wars
or Grenwhich Village
when people thought it mattered

outside a coffee shop
six poets sit around two tables
reading to each other
no one listening

Part 5 – Close

on the morning of my death

the busses will still run into Lime Street
people will get off and make their way to the Library
museum and art gallery
and all the paintings, books and objects
I looked at touched read
and loved will still be there
for everybody else to see

people will sit in cafes and bars in Liverpool 1
discuss news plan holidays
lives together or figure out how to say goodbye
others will watch them scribble notes for poems
later try and find the right words
to write up their vicarious lives

flags will fly at mast top
people will dance sing make love
the concert that I had tickets for will go ahead
the one or two empty seats unremarked
there will be no announcement from stage
few people will notice

the ferry will still cross the Mersey
playing Gerry over and over again
a whole bunch of things I always intended to do
will have to be done by someone else
that is how it will be
no clash of thunder final trump of angels
just another day on the morning of my death

This poem is a bit like my manifesto.

from end to beginning

from backwards to front
it all makes sense
in a none sort of way
we're all bits of a puzzle
without a solution
perhaps or because
it's quite hard to say

there was a man
who went backwards
when he should have gone
forwards
who turned the wrong way
whenever he could
said it was just
the way that he did things
said that was all
if he couldn't he would

there was a man who turned
sideways
another who hopped
and one who's
a dancer
then there is he
who gets it all right
in his own sort of way
without ever a no
a yes or maybe

there's a man
writing numbers
from trains that go past
and another
counts birds
as he jumps on the spot
but he can't tell you why
he's incredibly different
writing poetry that can
but mostly can not

I have been closing my readings with this poem since it was written 15 years ago. Just because I like it and it says goodnight.

as cool as the sound of jazz

it's late, gig over, I should be on my way home
I suppose I can convince myself that I am
but the roads are mysterious and the night air
is as cool as the sound of jazz
drifting from a basement club in Basin Street
the car takes me down roads to see where they go
some place I know but different
shadows like a sheet
change familiar shapes into strangers
ghosts of friends
here the sound is the rhythm of tyres
clipping on the edge of concrete road slabs
another time it will be the slap slap slap of windshield wiper
and another the distant sound Dave Brubeck
on the CD player
volume turned down low
and maybe some words will come and I can speak them like a song
to the slap slap slap slap slap slap of the tyres
or maybe not
but it must be time to find some familiar place
time to find my way home
out of the seductive never ending streets
away from the music
away from the cool air
away from the comfort of night
back to the room where the sound is imprisoned by walls
swallowed by carpets and curtains
back to the place where tomorrow
demands to be organised
back to the place where darkness is trapped
and night holds its secrets behind a closed door
where dreams wait
but just for now the road is empty
yellow street lamp lit
traffic lights all on green
the car window open brings in the scent of early autumn
and for now just for now
life is as cool as the sound of jazz

GOODNIGHT.

Additional Poems – added for longer readings or for Q&A Sessions

priorities

I know you think I should write
about the way I left the garden in a mess
the way grass was not cut
bagged and taken to the waste depot

you don't want to hear
about the time I took
to watch magpies
rub their heads together

or the way the air smelt
so fresh first thing in the morning
or how I sat on the undusted
garden chair on the unswept decking

put my magazines on the unpolished
table and read my new copy of Reach
as I drank tea and thought about
all the things that really matter

in time someone else will cut the grass
make things tidy but only I will remember
how good it was to sit and read
while I waited for the first drops of rain

once a cartographer

I found my two old maps
in a drawer at my mother's house
hand drawn on greaseproof paper
one showed carefully drawn roads
with an arrow to a broken fence
a hidden short cut to the park

hatch shading for the embankment
a small rectangle for the old car
I used to sit in before it disappeared
and still marked in place and not forgotten
all the paths leading to my dens
and hiding places

next to the railway line
abandoned after Beeching
a signal box
it's rusting leavers disconnected
on the map it says *the club house*
but no one ever met me there

the second though was drawn
in a cafe on Llandegla Moors
to show the off-path cycle route
that took me there
over tank track and path
off road and on

you could track these routes
on Ordnance Survey maps
but they would not be the same
my maps show a geography
unlike any other special places
full of hidden treasure

the incident in the cinema

(for Keara)

in the cinema today
a drunken woman
stood shouting at the screen
its rubbish she said
no one has a head that big
she was asked to be quiet
but continued shouting
everything is just too big

the nice lady manager
asked her nicely to be quiet
but she wouldn't
so she asked her nicely to leave
eventually when
the nice policeman asked
nicely she did

the nice lady manager
gave out apologies
free tickets
and wrote a report
in the incident book

the drunken lady went home
turned on her television
where the people
were all the right size

Workshop poems – Some readings have a workshop element preceding the reading.

This is the basic workshop I use at the moment. I also include other poets examples.

I like to find different element to bring together in order to use juxtaposition and surprise in the denouement, I see this element in your poetic construction to, so I thought you might like to write a poem using this device.

Here is a poem I wrote;

a geography lesson

you cannot see the slowly moving land
that creeps down mountainsides
leaving the hard rock tip bare and pointing
or the sediment that forms into fans

swept into place by an age of rain
and fields look flat and featureless
until it snows and then it's clear
reveals more detail than it hides

the shape of things the undulating land
the terraced mountains the hills
the glacial tracks that scooped out rock
and carved a valley a Roman road of ice

the sunlight helps as its blue shadows
enhance and show the rise and fall
the burial sites of ages a geographic time
in this temporary geography

when you lay here naked under
a single white sheet you became
that landscape for me to be observed
explored but never truly understood

There are a number of elements brought together here, but I would say that I wanted to contrast geography of a landscape with the geography of a person's body, this is a theme I have used quite a few times over the years in different ways. Anyway I hope you see the point. I would like you to consider two different elements that you could juxtapose in a way that is fresh interesting and hopefully insightful and engaging.

Good luck.

50min total introduction and writing and interaction

plus 15 minute reading of poems after my reading.