

## SIX DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND POETRY

A poem cannot hold your hand  
Or hug you, no matter  
How many times you write the word  
Kiss Kiss Kiss  
You cannot feel it on your lips  
No matter how vividly you conjure  
The flesh of a loving caress  
Or describe the smell of fresh armpits  
In pen and ink, you cannot  
Capture the exhilarating stink  
Of your beloved's body odour  
A poem has no pheromones  
Its bones are only metaphors  
Props writers use to give their work more substance  
And if you physically fall  
Off the balcony  
Your poem-lover will never catch you;  
To extend its simile like a male boast  
The bones have osteoporosis, they're porous  
As the paper they are written on  
Though the ode may move you it will never say  
'Move in with me'  
A poem cannot hold your hand  
Handle your hold-all  
Or hug you, no matter  
How hard you write the words, a pen is  
All you hold in your hand

## PHYSICAL RELATIONSHIP

Every atom of my being  
He said, was formed inside a star  
Which was the most romantic thing  
Anyone had ever said to me, until  
He explained it scientifically

Every cell in my body  
He said, is made of carbon and  
There's only one place carbon is made  
A white hot furnace in  
The centre of a star

I come from the suns of  
Distant solar systems and  
Every atom of my being  
Has travelled across the universe to Earth  
On a comet, he said

And though he meant it scientifically  
It was the most romantic thing  
Anyone had ever said to me

## ON THE MARRIAGE OF ART AND SCIENCE (I wrote this for my actual wedding!)

There was to be a contest  
Science versus Art  
To see which one was cleverest  
Which one was not so smart  
Who had more beauty in her soul  
Or more truth in his heart  
And which one played, on a global stage  
The most important part

The first task was the fastest  
They had a race to run  
Science had almost finished before  
Art heard the starting gun  
He ran in a straight line  
She hopped and skipped and spun  
I'm more aerodynamic, he said  
That is why I won

The second test was hardest  
When she heard the news  
That they'd be doing maths next  
Art cried and asked her muse  
To help her solve the problem  
Of the hypotenuse  
I don't do numbers, it replied  
That is why you'll lose

The next job was to write an ode  
To the bees and birds  
Science took out his microscope  
But all that he inferred  
Was plain facts. How I wish I had  
Your pretty way with words  
He said to Art, who wished she'd known  
His type were not all nerds

When the umpire pointed to  
The mountain they must climb  
Art's imagination  
Got them up there in no time  
Science's apparatus  
Told them it was made of lime-  
Stone. He gave her the reason  
And she gave him the rhyme

Then there was a wrestling match  
And when the referee  
Saw they were enjoying it

He made his last decree  
Keep up the Ju-Jitsu you two  
Fight but as one team  
Add those two half-nelsons up  
For total victory

There was to be a wedding  
Science marries Art  
Together they are cleverer  
And shouldn't be apart  
Two hemispheres of one great mind  
Two chambers of one heart  
Two feathered wings for high flying  
Bullseye for Cupid's dart

(My husband is not a writer but the poem he wrote for this occasion is easily as good as mine:

'Violets boast what Alison is.  
Angels host what Alison is.  
Roses are close, but Alison is.')

## TEA, CHOCOLATE, CIGARETTES

If there were no more tea in the world  
Getting up in the morning would be  
Meaningless, the first hour of the day  
Dry. If there were no more tea  
We'd never sit down for a minute  
Or put our feet up and chat, we'd never  
Get warm after a walk in the rain, or happy  
After a hard day. If there were no more  
Strong sweet tea, we'd never  
Get over the shock.  
The only possible alternative would be  
To drink hot chocolate

If there were no more chocolate in the world  
Popping out to the shops would be  
Pointless, and petrol stations would never stay  
Open all night. If there were no more chocolate  
Gangs of pre-menstrual women  
Would roar around like Hell's Angels, and  
Everyone would forget how to  
Celebrate Easter. If there were no more  
Boxes of chocolates, we'd never  
Fall in love.  
The only possible alternative would be  
To smoke more

If there were no more cigarettes in the world  
Going to the pub would be boring, the evening  
Uneventful. Without cigarettes we'd never  
Gasp or sigh or wave our hands about  
In heated conversation, we'd never get excited and  
Need to calm down. If we couldn't smoke afterwards  
No one would ever finish their meals  
Relationships or exams. If there were  
No more cigarettes, we'd all be able to breath  
Deeply, slowly and evenly.  
The only possible alternative would be  
To have more sex

[NB. I wrote this when you could still smoke in pubs!]

## WOLF-MOUTH FANNY

One full moon  
The wolf-mouth in Fanny's pants  
Opened wide and howled so loud  
That everyone could hear it when she walked  
And see it when she sat  
Even with her legs crossed

Once a month  
The wolf-mouth in Fanny's pants  
Got hunger and anger so confused  
It bit the tops of Fanny's thighs  
And made her bleed  
Even through a muzzle of cotton wool

Many moons ago  
The wolf-mouth in Fanny's pants  
Was just a pup  
And boys were not afraid to pet it  
But when full-grown  
It whistled as men passed in the street  
And shouted out obscenities

Once in a blue moon  
Fanny could hardly sit still  
For the wolf-mouth's snarling and snapping  
So she was forced to make a kill  
And feed the animal  
The stiff flesh it needed

If Dick had volunteered  
A length of himself  
Wolf-mouth Fanny would have done no harm  
Honestly, the teeth aren't real  
Only her desire is incisor-sharp  
And her wolf-mouth an 'O'  
Edges smooth as the moon

## PHILANTHROPISSSED

Behind me in the queue  
Was a man who smelt of whisky  
Who slept on the street  
And sat in the shop doorway  
Where I often hurried past him  
On my way to work  
First in the queue  
I reached into my purse  
To buy a pint of milk  
And spilt money on the floor  
Only small change  
A tiny shiny five pence  
Which rolled between the shoes  
Of the man who stank of booze  
And was lost at the feet  
Of the ragged-trouserred piss-head  
The man of the street  
Who bent to pick the coin up  
And put it in my hand  
With a dignified bow  
Though he could hardly stand  
Holding up the queue  
In our local shop  
I finally met his eyes  
And felt another penny drop  
When I saw the vagrant's  
Expression, I knew he  
Was closer to Home than me  
So I took the five pence piece  
Which was never really mine  
And left it on the counter  
In a collection box for the blind

## KISSING ON PAPER

Because I cannot kiss with real lips  
The legal rosebuds of your married face  
I pucker up a pair of inky nibs  
And plant a literary kiss in place  
As I love writing, my heart's an inkwell  
As I love words, my tongue's a cheap biro  
As I love you, but dare not spell it  
This osculation's done in ballpoint  
Kissing on paper, like the lipstick-black  
Pouts I used to punctuate teen poems  
Now the only marks I'll make are shadow  
Butterflies, Bic-blotted on your roses  
But though my kiss is stamped in virtuous ink  
It has a vicious twin in flesh, I think

## FOR MY MOTHER ON HER SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY

My mum knitted me  
Out of pink wool  
Pearl and plain for perfect skin

If she got a stitch wrong  
My mum unpicked it and started again  
To get me just right

My mum knitted my arms and legs  
Sausages she stuffed  
With pairs of torn up sheer tan tights

My mum knitted my body  
Knotting the tummy button firmly  
So I would never unravel

I may have been soft  
But I was strong  
My mum gave me knitting needles for bones

And a heart-shape cut out of  
Her cosy old dressing-gown  
Quilted for protection

Then she sewed my clothes  
Smart things so I could be someone important  
Pretty things so I could be someone special

My mum gave me golden hair  
Neatly plaited yellow wool  
Which, as a teenager, I tangled

My mum made my eyes  
Nearly as blue as hers  
The brightest beads in the trinket box

Lastly she took red silk  
And embroidered my rosebud lips  
So I could say this:

My mum made me  
Out of her love

## FOR MY MOTHER-IN-LAW ON HER BIRTHDAY

I will paint her as a rainbow  
Red of the great rift valley  
Deep rose-dust bassinet,  
I will paint her orange  
A citrus seam, crystalline  
In the darkness of cake,  
And yellow like the fire of a dragon  
Made by grandchildren from recycled packaging  
Fanned by glitter-glue wings,  
I will paint her green as the garden  
In a jungle, cultured lawn  
Bordering on the wild,  
And blue like her lapis-lit eyes  
Pools of mosaic, petals of  
Purple iris in Tiffany stained-glass,  
I will paint her as a flute of lilac wine  
Sipped, for her seventieth

## ULTRA-VIOLET

Violet, as an old lady,  
sucks talcum powder sweets  
and waves a pale hanky  
in her lace-skinned, vein-embroidered hand,  
that wafts the same perfume.

Violet, menopausal,  
whose underwear stains fade from red to blue  
sits on a mood swing, grimly thinking  
the next time someone brings her flowers  
will be her funeral.

Violet, the teenager,  
wears eponymous eyeshadow  
and a steely skirt which shifts over her thighs,  
concealing the site of her first  
violent motorbike rides.

Violet, as a child,  
dips her imperial paintbrush in a pot of colour  
and creates another fantasy landscape  
instead of making friends with her classmates.

Violet, as a child,  
hides her face in a book,  
and finds at the end of the rainbow  
realms of colour the naked eye can't see;  
ultra-violet is on a different frequency.

Violet, as an old lady,  
threads the colour of her veins  
through the steely needles  
of her still-moving fingers  
and sews a story which only  
Violet, as a child, can read,  
in the light of ultra-violet.

## KNITTING IS A NOVEL WITHOUT WORDS

Every thought in my head  
Has gone to my body  
All my bright ideas  
Are turning into bones  
For the baby  
And my creative fingers  
Have turned to knitting needles  
Instead of computer keys  
Knitting is a novel without words  
Every stitch of the  
Tiny cardigan  
Every row of its back and sides  
Tells another line of the story  
In pure white  
Instead of black and white  
Sentences only a pregnant lady can understand  
As I finish each sleeve  
And cast off  
With a flourish like I used to finish each chapter  
It's a bit of an anti-climax  
This sense of achievement  
Any mother can feel  
But then  
I haven't got to the part where I sew the pearly buttons on yet

## THE PLOUGHMAN ON SUNDAY

I hear Earth's wordless call to prayer, and bow  
To the unvoiced Mass that augers each dawn  
Yoked to the mute land, through noon's stifled hour  
Till dusk's silent liturgy of the sward  
A mud-made man, boot soles inlaid with clay  
In sackcloth shirt and ashy hair, I plough  
The frowning field every livelong day  
And toil the furrowed soil of hill brow  
Save for the Sabbath when I tend to church  
Between ploughed rows of pews I bend my knee  
Yoked to the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*  
A farmhand turned to the *Agnus Dei*  
I hear Earth's call for six days of the seven  
But soft, on the day of rest, I hear heaven

For lark's first note of morning I exchange  
The choirboy's *sotto solo* at Matins  
And lunchtime's hush beneath the haystack change  
For cadences of silence in Latin  
In the held breath of twilight, evensong  
Rings out across a field all fallow  
The ding of tenor and of bass the dong  
As bells speechlessly praise the all-hallowed  
Then do I hear monks in ox-brown cassocks  
With ploughman-like devotion to the sod  
Chant a path of prayer between the tussocks  
Walked daily by this mud-shod country clod  
But on Sunday a fieldhand turns to God  
I kneel in church to sow the wheat seed for  
The bread for the feast that lasts forever

## THE REAL KING OF ENGLAND LIVES IN OZ

See! There's his highness, by the barbecue  
But look five hundred years, you'd never guess  
His genes were royal, if not for the words  
decreed in sweat on the back of his vest:

This is the shocking truth Dame Cicely  
Herself confessed in 1428  
And Shakespeare publicised in history plays -  
Edward IVth was illegitimate

While Richard of York gave battle in vain  
His wife was conquered by his best archer  
Who shot rainbow spunk into the bloodline  
Of the monarchy. It made colourless bastard

And all the kings and queens who followed on  
The endless reign of Georges in descent  
Henry the Eighth, Elizabeth the First  
Were not a hundred percent fair dinkum

But see, him at the barbie; silver haired  
With golden beer-can an orb in his hand  
Know what's so xxxing special about him?  
It's writ in condensation on the can:

Edward's younger brother, Duke of Clarence  
Should rightly have succeeded to the throne  
Had the same fight with Richard III, then started  
A proper royal family of his own

From Margaret the First to Henry the Tenth  
Till Good Queen Barbara was succeeded  
In our times by her eldest son, the duke  
From down under, the ex-patriot regent

He rules the barbecue with sceptre-tongs  
Some call him Pom, some know he was a lord  
Back home, but his genetic pedigree  
Is sketched as faint as frost on king-size prawns:

Micheal Hastings, by right of succession  
Should sit on the British throne fair and square  
Purer Plantagenet, truer Tudor  
Than the current incumbent or her heir

"I'd abolish myself!" he'd laugh, if the  
Historic truth were ever known, because  
He's been republican since he got here

The Real King of England Lives in Oz

See! There's HRH by the BBQ  
His wife, Noelene, five kids, grandchildren too  
And by the law of primogeniture  
The little prince Zak will be next to rule

Struth! There's more royal secrets than this on  
Walkabout; sunburn, bum crack and beer gut  
Mike strolls among his Australian neighbours  
Better off with less English archer in his blood