

# The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

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## Editorial

### *Post-Truth: An Interpretation*

There are always problems with ‘post-’ something, such as post-Modernism and now post-Truth. First the term is vague. Nearly forty years after the appearance of the term post-Modernism it is still not clear what that term means. It is the same with post-Truth, although the term has just registered its appearance. On the best estimate the term means what Nietzsche once said: ‘There are no facts, only interpretations’. On the worst estimate it is another label for lying. What prompts the last interpretation is that post-Truth has been applied to the new world of mass communication where truth is shrinking in the midst of mis-leading information and political bias. This interpretation is common to the commentaries in the media that one comes across but the first interpretation is not easy to grasp. It is with the first Nietzschean case that we are concerned here.

To say that there are no facts but only interpretation is not an easy access to lying but a hard thesis about human beings, their powers and their limitations. It is an ontological thesis about what there is but also a historical thesis about human beings and their development. To say that there are no facts is to say there are no limits to human freedom. Facts, according to this thesis, don’t have their independent existence but they are based on our conceptions and our construction of them as to what counts as facts. Reality is more complex and in a state of flux so that we can’t capture it as it is but we have to cut it down to fit our conceptual understanding, to frame it according to our capacities. But such framing and designing of reality to our mental capacities is also a function of our needs. We construct our reality to fit our needs.

The question is also metaphysical and historical. In older times when civilisations were created

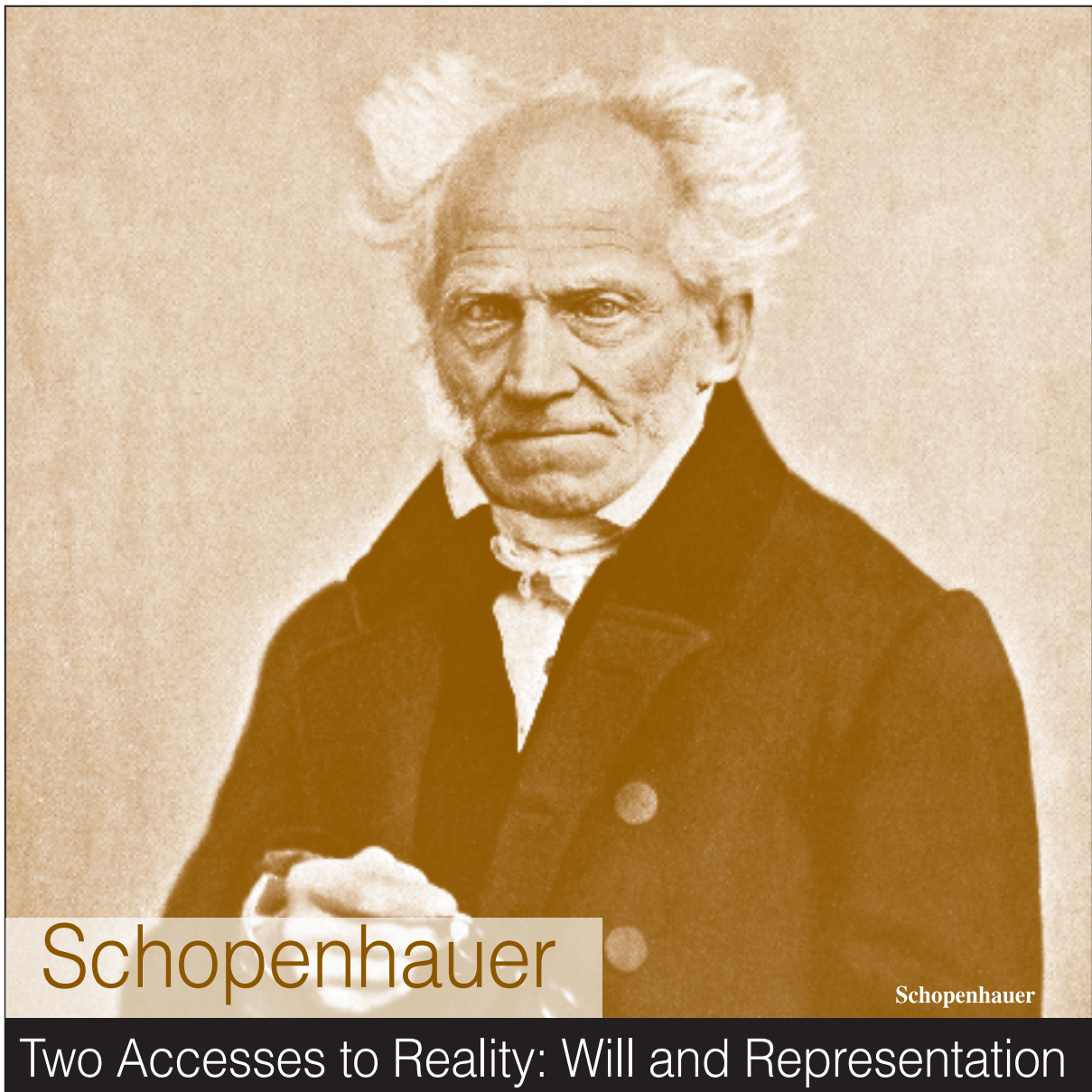
with religious conceptions, truth was of high value because it was linked to the Divine. But since the emergence of the secular world, truth has lost that status. It is no longer Divine but human. According to the old conception, it was ideal, complete and universal. But according to the new conception, it is real, incomplete and more relative (to a certain discourse, needs, and practices).

We can symbolise it mythologically by the two figures of Hermes and Prometheus. The first positions himself between the gods and the people, carrying mystical truth that is valid throughout the centuries. The other is a symbol of knowledge forcibly achieved, stolen, and carries with it mischief and wrath. We can also add more symbols by taking the first as the prophetic, apostolic truth that holds to the ideal, and the second as the figure of Faust selling his soul to the devil to obtain a pragmatic knowledge and a pragmatic truth. It was Spengler who characterised the Western civilisation as a Faustian Civilisation. What counts in this civilisation is not truth as an idea and an absolute but what works and works more effectively. To put it in more philosophical terms: what matters is not theoretical reason but practical reason or what Kant emphasised: the primacy of practical reason. This idea has since been generalised into the primacy of the will which we might have the occasion to talk about another time.

Just to go back to Nietzsche’s point. When he says that truth (or knowledge) is perspectival he is not opening the door for sheer relativism or encouraging mis-information on the internet but he is seeking a higher degree of freedom and effectiveness. The media mis-interprets this and calls it post-Truth.

*The Editor*

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Kant thought that the world in itself is unknowable for us. Arthur Schopenhauer objected to this. He thought that we have two ways to reality: one through representation, the other through the will. Through representation we know the world theoretically. But we also know the world through willing. Since willing is subjective, we then know the world through our subjectivity, through the way we want to change the world, through our actions. He concluded that what we are and the world in itself is only the will. Below is a summary of Schopenhauer's view and its influence on his ethical system.

RANJINI GHOSH

## Part 2

## The World As Representation

For Schopenhauer the world presents itself to the subject as experience. He subscribed to the position of transcendental idealism which propounds the view that the existence of material objects depends on the knowing subject. This was also a continuation of the view of Berkeley that 'to be is to be perceived'.

Schopenhauer believed that the empirical objects of matter that are in space and time could not exist without the experience of a perceiving subject. The division of the world into individual objects depends on their location in space and time. The organization of objects into space and time appears only in the world of phenomena which we experience. It is we as the knowing subjects who impose the categories of space and time on these objects so that such objects appear to us as distinctly located in space and time individually. He used the Latin expression *Principium Individuationis* or the principle of individuation. There are no individual things in itself. He considers that both subject and object are important for representation. No object can be a subject at the same time and there cannot be a subject without an object or vice versa. Anything which is an object of experience is so because of the experiencing subject. What makes us different from animals is that in addition to perceptual abilities we also possess concepts and reasoning.

## The World As Will

We understand or gain knowledge about material objects outside us by seeing their behavior and movements, in space and time. We understand other human beings from their appearances and behavior only. But when it comes to our own self we have knowledge from within i.e. our thoughts, feelings, moods and memories. Hence Schopenhauer says if we want to understand the true meaning and inner nature of the world we have to

examine both the inner and outer experience. He believed that deep down we have a will to survive or a will to live. This has been confirmed through external observation of how human beings behave in situations of stress. Our whole inner life is dominated by this will in some manifestation. It means that human beings who are also objects in time and space and whose behavior and movements can be observed externally are in their inner being will and thus cannot be observed externally. Because we know from our inner self that our actions are acts of will we are therefore able to interpret and understand the movement of other beings as willed activities.

Hence to reiterate time and space do not exist in the noumenal and so the noumenal cannot be differentiable. Material objects cannot be part of the noumenal since they can only exist in time and space. There cannot be any notion of causality in the noumenal because the noumenal presupposes succession which has meaning in only time and space. The noumenal cannot be known because all knowledge is subject dependent which involves the notion of differentiation. The phenomenal world is the manifestation of the noumenal. But manifestation does not mean that there is a causal relationship. Kant had mistakenly believed that noumenal objects cause us to experience phenomena. For Schopenhauer this manifestation is only a manifestation of One reality. The fundamental drive that manifests itself in existence is the will. All matter in the universe is permeated by an invisible force or energy and this metaphysical drive is the will. Human beings are also embodiments of this noumenal will. Before there was any life on the universe there was the will.

While the world of objects appears to us as representations and we are the subject distinct from the object we experience, Schopenhauer says that our body is also like an object among



other objects. When we act to do something, our body moves but this awareness of our movement is different from the awareness of other things that we perceive. When we perceive other objects, we are outside those objects but this is not so in the case of our own body. We merely observe other objects but our own body moves according to our own will.

Schopenhauer's view goes against the doctrine of dualism which sees the mind and body as distinct and *willing* as something that happens in the mind. Schopenhauer takes an anti-dualist position and argues that the act of will and the action of the body are one and the same thing. The action of the body is not a completely mental or a completely physical process but is a single process that has two aspects. His claim is that our bodily existence is due to our willing. Our feelings of fear, desire, attraction or repulsion and various other unconscious functions are due to the will manifesting itself. Everything that happens in our body like the beating of the heart or the activity of the salivary glands are all manifestations of the will. It is all a manifestation of the will to life. The will to life is a blind striving oriented towards preservation of life and it occurs at a level beneath the conscious mind.

In fact, Schopenhauer goes on to say that the whole world itself is a Will. All natural processes occurring in the world are a manifestation of the will. Even the behavior of the inorganic world is will. Water rushing downwards and the movement of the magnetic compass towards the North Pole are all manifestations of the will. Therefore, every force in nature is a form of striving or end-seeking.

Schopenhauer believed that perception, judgement and reasoning are all functions of representation. None of this is willing. They are only preparatory acts that may trigger the will or the body into action. He believes in

the unity of the body and the will. Whenever there is a representation in the conscious mind that causes the body to move into action, it is called a *motive*. He distinguishes between motive stimulus and pure and simple cause. He considers the whole body as an objectified will. The teeth and intestinal canal are objectified hunger.

Schopenhauer considers the intellect as secondary to the will. He gives the image of a lame man who is carried on the shoulders of a blind man. The intellect is conscious and a window to the world but our driving force of who we are is the will.

Cristopher Janaway in his book *Schopenhauer* (2002) says that his ethics depends on the idea that at the core of each individual is not the intellect but the underlying will. The intellect is occupied with conscious perception and thought. The will operates independently of the conscious representation of reality. The will is the source of our desires and feelings that are not present consciously in us. Schopenhauer gives an example that when we add up our finances we often make mistakes to our advantage and we have an unconscious tendency to diminish our debit and increase our credit. He says that the intellect is excluded from such secret decisions of the will. The will has the effect of restraining the intellect. He says that we inherit our intellect from our mothers and the will from our fathers. For him the will is the true inner being and the intellect is merely an accident. We inherit our moral nature and our character from our father. Schopenhauer maintained that a person's character is constant and inborn. Before we have knowledge and perceive the world we are creatures of our will.

### Ethics

In his view it was foolish to expect any system of ethics to produce virtuous human beings since he believed that an individual's basic

character remains the same. Kant's ethic was an ethic of duty but Schopenhauer's ethics is an ethics of compassion. Schopenhauer's concept of the undifferentiated nature of the noumenal reality can be said to be the basis of his theory of ethics based on compassion. We human beings in the phenomenal world are only manifestations of the undifferentiated something which is spaceless and timeless and the entire reality is permeated by a Single Entity or the One. If we are all part of the One then in an ultimate metaphysical sense I cannot be different from you since we are a part of the Single Entity. That is, noumenally we are one. If I am hurting you I am hurting myself. Hence the foundation of ethics should be compassion and not reason as Kant had said. It is this metaphysical one-ness that leads Schopenhauer to his concept of compassion.



Berkeley

### Aesthetic Experience

Schopenhauer believed that to experience something aesthetically we have to suspend our desires towards it and not to look at that object as a means towards some goal we may have that it fulfils but only to see it as an object of perception. We must have a disinterested attitude towards the object we are viewing. For him, the central problem in aesthetics is how satisfaction and pleasure can be derived from an object without reference to our willing. He argues that the moment there is willing there is desire and desire may give rise to happiness and pleasure but also suffering. Whenever any desire is met then the subject of willing starts experiencing some other deficiency. When we are driven by will we are always oscillating between suffering and satisfaction.

Schopenhauer's conception of aesthetic experience depends on a condition where there is a complete cessation of willing because happiness or unhappiness always results from willing. He was convinced that when we experience some object aesthetically without subjective desires (arising from our

will), then there will be minimum distortion in our perception. The aesthetic experience is therefore important because we can escape from the effects of our will and also the object of the aesthetic experience can be seen by us in their eternal forms. His claim was that one cannot have access have to real ideas as long as one has the subjective awareness of oneself. It is only when we lose consciousness of ourselves as individuals that we can have access to the real world of ideas. Ideas exist in reality independently of the subject, ideas cannot be discovered through conceptual thinking because concepts are our own mental constructs. In order to have a real understanding of the presence of ideas in any object that we are observing we need to immerse ourselves in pure contemplation so that we are no longer separate from the object we are viewing. The viewing individual no longer exists and is will-less.

Schopenhauer believed that art required a genius and a person of genius has two-thirds intellect and one third will. A genius is marked by complete objectivity which is the

capacity to remain in a state of pure perception, a capacity to completely immerse oneself in perception and to remove oneself from the service of the will. Genius is the ability to entirely leave out our own interest, aims and our willing and in a way discard our own personality for some time so that we remain a pure knowing subject. A genius has a 'clear eye of the world'. A genius has a pure intellect that belongs to the whole world. In a genius the intellect has freed itself from the will and risen above it. A heightened perception in the genius allows him to see the universal in the particular. A great painter or a sculptor has this ability. Therefore, for him true aesthetics is a will-less contemplation of ideas. Whenever we have an aesthetic experience there is both a subjective cessation of willing and an objective insight into ideas.

Schopenhauer has used Platonic Ideas to explain his theory of art. For him all arts except music portray the phenomenal world. When we look at a painting of a table with apples, say, like that of Cezanne's, the painting signifies something that is universal. What we are actually seeing is an Idea of something and so we are perceiving the universal in the particular. Schopenhauer agreed with Plato that it was possible for human beings to have knowledge of Ideas. For Plato Ideas were ultimate and knowledge of Ideas was a mystical experience but for Schopenhauer ideas are intermediate between this phenomenal world and the noumenal, which is incomprehensible, not knowable and non-differentiable.

For Schopenhauer there were four grades of objects in the phenomenal world. At the bottom was the inorganic matter going up to plants animals and humans. Each grade



**The archetypal (Ideal) flower**

was a successive developmental process of complication and sophistication and each stage was also the manifestation of Plato's Idea. Art provides us with conception of Plato's Idea through individual representations and the four grades also reflect the Ideas. There is a hierarchy of arts and each grade represents the will's objectification. At the lowest level is the inorganic part of nature like stone, earth, water etc. Architecture is such an art which consists of elements of light, air, space, materials etc. The next grade of the will's objectification is of flowered trees and plant life in painting. Animal life can be represented in sculpture but to represent human beings in their varied dimensions of emotions, conflict, and crisis a poem may be the right expression. But to capture the whole gamut of human emotions and relations, drama is the appropriate medium. The finest expression of poetry can also be seen in drama in the Greek tragedies and plays of Shakespeare.

Schopenhauer saw music as the only art which is non-representational. True music does not represent anything of the phenomenal world and also it does not give us any access to Plato's Ideas. He regarded music as a direct manifestation of the noumenal. Music is the voice of the metaphysical will. Therefore, music is a superior art in that it does not depict





The will carrying  
the intellect

anything of this world and reveals profound metaphysical truths.

Schopenhauer started his philosophy from the basic premises of Kant. He believed that one could not understand reality without the categories of space, time and causality. The concept of phenomenon also demands the idea of a thing-in-itself. Kant believed that we cannot have knowledge of the thing-in-itself. Our theoretical knowledge was confined to the phenomenal world.

Schopenhauer's aim was to understand the thing-in-itself. He was concerned with the connection between the world as it appears to us and the world as a thing-in-itself. Plurality belongs to the world of phenomena because it is in the world of phenomena that we have the concept of space and time that distinguishes

objects. The notion of different things can have meaning only in the phenomenal world of time and space. But outside of this world it makes no sense to say that one thing is different from another. Because time and space do not operate there. Whatever is outside our world of experience is therefore undifferentiated.

Schopenhauer also drew inspiration from Hinduism and Buddhism, believing in a single undifferentiated reality. Schopenhauer believed that the Will was present as much in a stone as in man. His conception of ethics and morality arise from his belief that each one of us is identical with one ultimate reality and in some sense, we are all one. This is his basis for advocating compassion and sympathy. He believed that everything in the world is a phenomenal manifestation of the noumenal and the noumenal is one and undifferentiated.

# Curse of the Gods: Heraclitus

NONA FERDON

**On our last visit in our pursuit of the recognition, perception, and treatment of mental illness (or mental disorders) in the Pre-Socratic world we found ourselves at the door of Thales, one of the 'Seven Sages' of the group of men who were identified as 'The philosophers'. Earlier we had learned that one treatment for mental disease was 'brain surgery' (drilling holes in the patient's skull to release the evil spirits), as well as the use of electric eels (present day electroconvulsive therapy) and an occasional dangling over a snake pit. Here is more of what the early philosophers thought.**

**W**e learned that the first 'hospital,' the 'Asclepiadese' flourished for some eight hundred years – to a large extent by offering peace, quiet, the interpretation of dreams, as well as strong dollops of the placebo effect.

From Thales we learned that Pre-Socratic philosophers were centred on understanding reality in terms of an underlying 'agent' which they dubbed 'The One'. They were also cognizant of 'The Many' and tried to explain diversity emerging from a basic organic substance. Unity, they said, is always changing and is always present in the womb of diversity. According to Thales the original substance was water, while his disciple, Anaximander suggested that fire and air played an equally important role. The original substance was defined, limitless, and all prevailing.

Our next visit is to Heraclitus (c. 535-476 BC) who placed stress on eternal becoming – one cannot know any one thing in a world for what it truly is. (He was often referred to as 'the weeping philosopher'.)

Protagoras, who was a youngster at the time of Heraclitus's death, proclaimed that 'man is the measure of all things', thus emphasising the importance of the individual – a humanistic attitude, which did not assert itself as a potent

factor until almost 2000 years later. He was sometimes referred to as 'the laughing philosopher'.

For Heraclitus reason depended upon the fire within a human being; the higher the fire the wiser the soul, i.e. reason, or judgement. The more humid the soul, the closer it is to being ill (physically or mentally); little differentiation was made between the two. An extreme excess of humidity will bring on imbecility or madness. Yet the same Heraclitus reckoned that most people live as though they have an understanding of their own. In other words, Heraclitus was probably the very first to call attention to the individual as such, and who expressed the need of thorough individualisation in psychology.

Our only permanence is in change. As we have all heard: 'No person ever steps into the same river twice, for it's not the same river and they are not the same person.' He also said: 'It is the things that can be seen, heard and learned what I praise prize most'. *This quotation needs to be checked – the English doesn't make sense. Should it be: 'It is the things that can be seen, heard and learned that I prize the most'?*)

Heraclitus was one of the earliest philosophers to mention the soul. (And since psychologists and psychiatrists have been defined by many as 'doctors of the soul' I'm particularly interested.



‘The soul is dyed the colour of its thoughts. Think only on those things that are in line with your principles and can bear the light of day. The content of your character is your choice. Day by day, what you do is who you will become. Your integrity is your destiny...it is the light that guides your way.’

He wrote that most people are ‘asleep,’ so to speak. Even in their waking moments most people are far from being ‘awake.’

Unfortunately, most of what Heraclitus wrote has been lost. While we have references to him from later writers we only have fragments from the man himself. But it has been said that one can read these fragments in minutes but will contemplate them for life.

Heraclitus has moved philosophers from Plato through Nietzsche, Whitehead, Heidegger, and Jung. Heraclitus believed that energy is the essence of matter. Of course, he didn’t put it quite that way, but wrote: ‘All things change to fire, and fire exhausted falls back into things.’ (Energy is matter and matter is energy.) Einstein of course agreed.

To speculate about lost books distracts from the power of the fragments and their message: All things change, all things flow.

‘Those unmindful when they hear, for all they make of their intelligence, may be regarded as the walking dead.’

‘Many failed to grasp what they have seen, and cannot judge what they have learned, Although they tell themselves they know.’

‘Air dies giving birth to fire. Fire dies, giving birth to air. Water, thus, is born of dying earth, and earth of water.’

‘The river where you set your foot just now is gone ... those waters. Giving way to this, now this as they are during their sleep Fools, although they hear they are like deaf.’

‘The Cosmos works by harmony of tensions like the lyre and the bow.’

‘Applicants for wisdom, do what I have done: enquire within.’

‘Although we need the word to keep things known in the common, people still treat specialists as if their nonsense were a form of wisdom.’

‘Always having what we want, may not be the best good fortune. Health seems sweetest after sickness, food in hunger, goodness in the wake of evil, and at the end of day-long labour sleep.’

And some unforgettable advice:

‘Stupidity is better kept a secret than displayed.’\*

\*(PS. Many thanks to Professor Livio Rossetti for his recent article entitled *The Pre-Socratic and Metacognitivity* in **The Wednesday**, issue 44. May we hope and look forward to many other pieces from him. **Nona-Marie Ferdon**).



## Sestina: She and He

**CHRIS NORRIS**

She says: it's here I'm in my element,  
My more than home-from-home, the place I love,  
The sound-scape where each echo has the ring  
Of soul's awakening, where the shifting light  
Configures my life-seasons in the leaves,  
And spirit sings with every change of colour.

He says: I see it all, I see each colour  
That dawns or dusks, and how each element  
Contributes to the whole, and how it leaves  
A touch of wonder on the scenes you love,  
Yet somehow I can't see them in the light  
They hold for you, or catch the magic ring

That greets your ear. My sense-horizons ring  
A world that's not devoid of sound or colour  
But untouched by the soul-restoring light  
You speak of as your native element,  
The spot on earth where thoughts of life and love  
May come and go in season with the leaves.



She says: don't take it badly if this leaves  
Your soul unstirred; those hills and coastlines ring  
All heaven's bells but that's for me, dear love,  
One whom the slightest shift of tone or colour  
May strike as from some starry element  
Beyond all frequencies of sound and light.

He says: I'm with you when you speak of light  
On Pembroke hills, about the Autumn leaves,  
And Spring's return, and how each element  
Of all we see must fade yet stays to ring  
Its changes on a scale where transient colour  
May token an eternity of love.

It's farther out that signals fade, my love,  
At the point where it seems no earthly light  
Could radiate your soul-sphere, no known colour  
Come close to capturing the state which leaves  
Its afterglow on you as if the ring  
Round Planet West Wales were your element.

She says: this love of place is one that leaves  
Them too in place, your shades of light that ring  
True colour-wise in vision's element.





### Cockadoodling

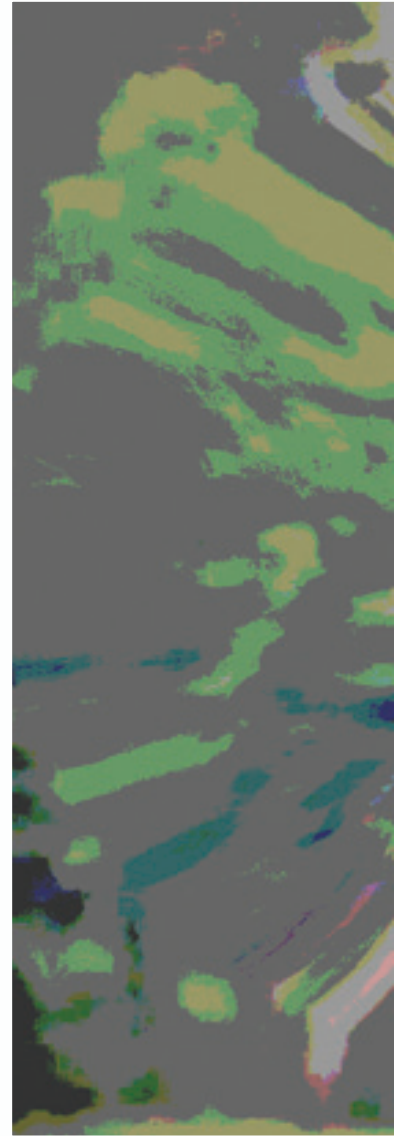
He stands a shaggy patchwork quilt  
on short feathery legs,  
his voice hoarse and cocky.

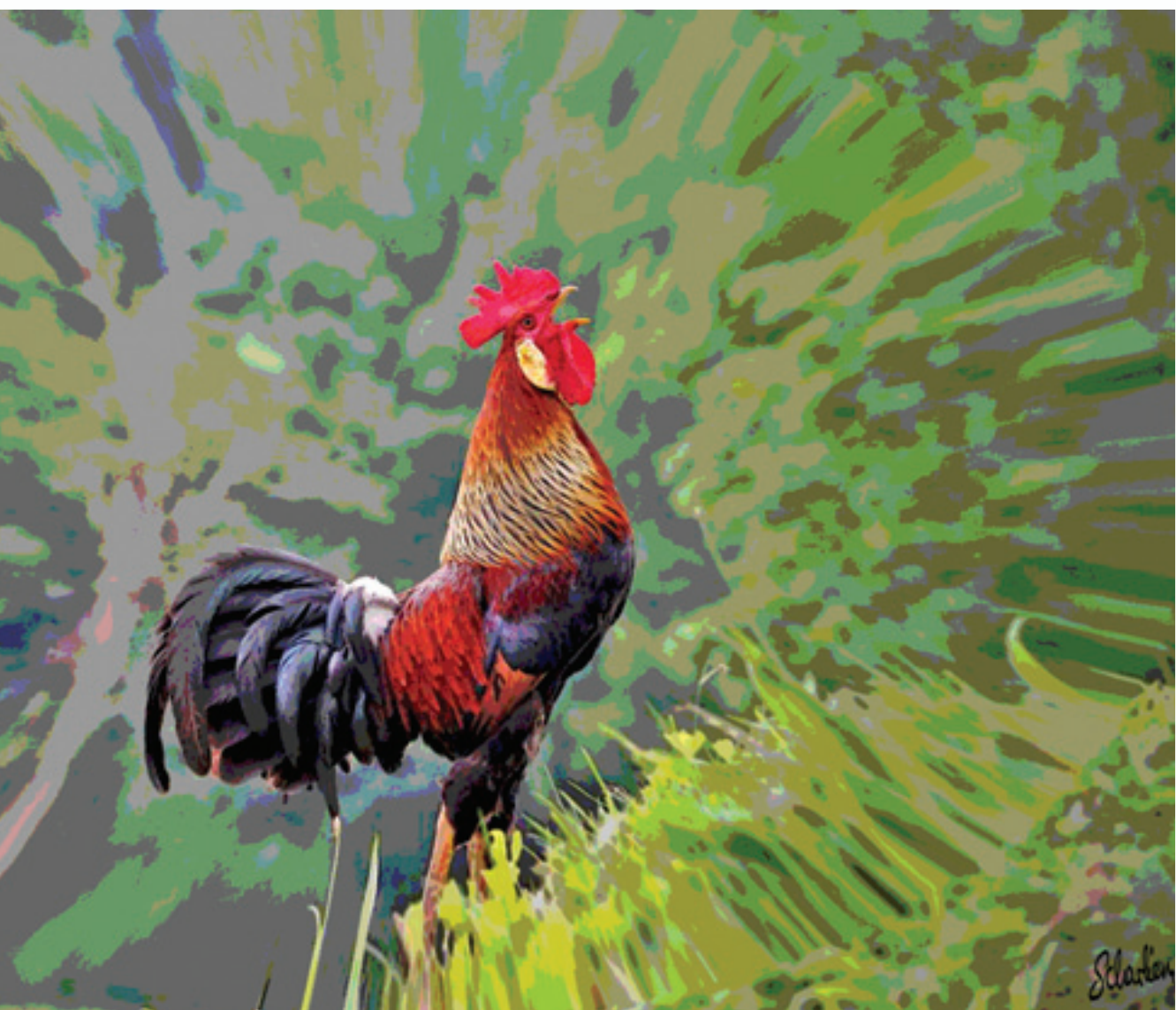
At dawn my cockerel recites his poems  
brings up his feather-brained genius  
and asserts noisily his importance  
amongst the living poets.

He plucks up his plumage to crow  
about cheerfulness, how to start  
a family, ruffles my feathers  
with his insistence to rise early.

When I turn in my bed, sleep-struck,  
his pitch gets indignant. I vow  
to promote the rights of single mother hens,  
find my feather duster  
to tickle him out of his wits,  
collect breakfast eggs  
to teach him a lesson,

As he hurtles towards me  
I hold a broom to crush his attack,  
escape his outstretched spurs, duck  
his raised blood curdling cock's comb  
There will be no chickening out!  
He flies at the broom, flops with a throaty croak  
like the victim in a poetic travesty. .  
If he should fall, cock-a-doodle-doo, I should fall too.





High on purple prose he swears  
to peck me into order,  
wear me as a trophy in his feather boa.

I call his bluff,  
go for breakfast,  
make scrambled eggs.

**Text and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws***

### The Stamp Of One Defect

(With apologies to Zbigniew Herbert)

“...scientists have found breast milk a natural immunity boost for youngsters. The same compound, Human Alpha-lactalbumin Made Lethal to Tumour cells or HAMLET, could be a common cancer treatment for adults within five years.”

The Daily Telegraph, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010

I gaze at my starkly fleshed out friend,  
tight notch of a belt on a corpulent belly,  
shoulders firmly jacketed, face bloated  
and sealed by his shining chemo eyes.  
This afternoon he drinks a steamed latte  
when he could have supped off the drops  
and traces of a comforting breast.  
Did he wake up today and sniff his hands,  
consider the brief rental of flesh?

We've talked of books, politics and friends;  
inhabited this coffee house as if it were our castle.  
Shuffling in my chair I imagine the estranged Hamlet  
adopting a healing role as Denmark continues to rot.  
All stank once the court gang were done in.  
What was the point in that for your father's ghost?  
Murder, suicide, a sword fight and poison  
dribbling from his ear into future calamity.





I'm not as brave as my friend. I'd complain  
about every unnatural shock to my body.  
We're shaking hands. He's making out to  
leave.  
I can't share a joke about a fraught prince  
now re-branded as a crazed clinician.

The court of Fortinbrass is messy.  
No palpable hit for a tumour.  
Elsinore surrounds us all.

***Alan Price***

.....  
«This poem is from Alan Price's collection  
***Wardrobe Blues For A Japanese Lady***  
published in May 2018 by The High Window Press.»  
Copies can be obtained from:

<https://thehighwindowpress.com/the-press/>

## *The Wednesday*

**Editor:** Dr. Rahim Hassan

**Contact Us:**

[rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk)

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## *Small Comfort*



When with regret loved places we must leave  
We can return to what used to delight,  
For Space stays still, while Time pursues its flight,  
Each vanished 'now' beyond power to retrieve.  
Though some have thought that all comes round again,  
And that the future is already here,  
The grounds for such a claim are hardly clear  
Since that the past will not return seems plain.

Small comfort though that on the rocky shore  
Time ended for you with the fall you chose  
And that your anguish ended with it too.  
Small comfort that the past comes round no more  
Small comfort that your pain has reached its close,  
When we recall the suffering that you knew.

*Edward Greenwood*