

A Democracy of Poisons

Also by Tim Allen

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a sequence of 100 prose poems

Tim Allen

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1. Walk

I walk into a narrative I don't run I don't crawl or creep I casually insert myself into the forest. The forest is a restroom with guessing desk and chairs from the hall. The guest demands to be the first motif to be ignored sat on all the chairs at once made of hand torn shirts but the hairs are broken and the hands are worn. I walk further into the fortress I don't run I don't call or weep I slot pages into any magazine where such stories maybe true. Empty magazines litter the forest floor.

Automata and splinters. Puffballs smash the cricket pavilion windows with golf balls thrown by slobs and goofballs. All balls stolen from the PE cupboard will be represented by a single bucky-ball a privileged ball of lightning lobbed onto the roof of the bandstand to trickle down to land on the path. It is now a cricket ball. Things move fast. One end of the forest grows while the other is chopped. Talk on the next table is of memory. Do not recall it. Lion on the next chair does the splits.

Automata covered in blisters do the talking not being completely plastered there is still more automata than blister resurrecting a human's chalked out bliss on a park path circling the bandstand. While hiking around this desk think *honeycomb* and *dragon* but don't run them together hold them to their promised time zones then intercept yourself in the flesh flash, a sprinter hefting a harp off the starting blocks. Yet not all splinters are wood. Some are the result of *metalwork for boys*.

Now the walk has been talking in the forest for four hours without encountering any tail. It hears glass breaking. It is extraneous. A robot is baptised by another reboot who mistrusts the native minstrel's religion and trips across a hammock strung between the desk and chair that is unstable and supports no weight no matter how empty the tale. A ball trickles towards my shoe. It is Newton's apple but I've never trusted those shoes that apple or proverbial literature in general.

2. Lunch

A lunch-break is a perfect period for time to thicken as there is enough time to take your glasses off or put your glasses on. Sometimes even time for both. There is enough space for the traffic and enough space for *you* but to stand it you have to have a ticket to not stand out. The lion has four horizons in eyes for walking on the waves. In the channel a storm is *brewing*. Extinction by degrees. In a sewage tunnel a storm is *abating*. Now there is time and space in and for a lunch-break.

A pig reads a newspaper in a cartoon. In the newspaper a pig reads a newspaper in a cartoon. Etc. This is an old story. We've heard this story before or something very much like it. The pig sits down to read the paper. Now that the newspaper is a paper the story could change radically the paper could be a letter though not a letter in a newspaper, not even this one. Time can hang heavy for pigs having to hang around in litters. Those who end badly need distraction. We all end badly.

A note is a still-life of a document's credentials. An invoice bills a will's sheet of info. Sleep posts a fan letter selfie to an A list dentist identifying himself in an identical chair. So where are your papers? Show me your passport. No, this is a restricted area, from that road over there to that park bench over there. Where you sit was a farmyard though not necessarily the actual yard. Guitars made to resonate like bagpipes are tone poems hatched half way up traffic heavy hills.

Mermaid hides her purse in the maelstrom. The city hides behind Portland stone. The purse slides behind a wastepaper basket of its own volition. Lunch-break is a type of time machine. Not a very good one. It never works. I don't think it's meant to work. Only *you* work. In bad weather it is not a very good idea to have lunch in the nearby park it is better to prop yourself in a doorway of the office block and let your mind wander where it will. Mild hunger, they say, may help this process.

3. Growing

It is growing cold. The cold grows rows of black puddings but residual hotcakes linger in the puddings long after the potlatch. We lack for no reason. Our blood sausage is made from blankets. We call out for no reason. We call on *you* for no reason after all the season is warm and if it was any larger so what, would we normally be so hot? Nobody wants that except the few who do. I feel for the very tall having to repeat themselves leafing through party talk and picking their way through the night as if there were definitely a sixpence in there somewhere.

The number of people saying they no longer believe in the benefits of progress is surprising. Do they mean it? Is it a passing fashion? Shiver me timbers. I suppose it's one way of looking at things. Everything shakes apart from a brave few who roll so do you think it's still OK to feel sorry for yourself when stood outside *ones' self* looking in or does that remove any real reason for feeling sorry in the first place? Indeed, sometimes I agree with John Grey about stuff, but not always, no.

Me and my pharaoh walking down the avenue want to kill the enemy but should we start the job or finish it off in our own street? The avenue grows rows, threats of repeated *kick offs*, the tension in the room plucked from the air by a chair leg clumsily slotted crookedly fast by a budget poltergeist. When a tree has a devilish guardian this is the result. When my dog is disturbed I smooth her. She loves the smoothing to be repeated later when there is no longer any disturbing residue.

What would happen if everyone had their own personal path through the forest leading to a communal well being and what if we all had joints that could swell and contract like boards in a rowing boat adrift in clouds drunk from a bucket of foreign body rain? Yes some people are held together by glue but some have to be nailed together. That could be read wrongly but it could also be read rightly.

4. Picture

Picture this please: a black and white colour film. If the image is hanging its head is it a dead sunflower? Go on picture it. It is now an order an imperative of the kind America makes in war films. They make a lot of those one way or another. You can learn a lot from films yet often it is not what the film makers intended. They wanted to teach you manners. I think we can call them *manners* it's what they amount to. Now a pickled sun jammed in brown sky looks critically squiffy.

The patch of sunflowers is meant to evoke sunflower fields as far as the horizon. The tarry face lends a sticky hand to lifeboat heroes who are now men mending the road in need of that hand to upgrade the motorway or, to put it another way, to save a popular and successful TV drama from being seen by millions more you need the support and wonderful weirdness of the little birds hopping around in a denuded winter hedge. If it was summer sunny you would see their silhouettes.

Sometimes bird shaped leaves in the hedge are actually egg shaped and amusing yet we are always too ready to leave such pictures behind and land like a fly on others. We can be stupid. Only when a bird is acting stupid does it resemble us in any discernible way and you must have seen it sung e.g. *the wind cries Mary* – no stop being soft Jimi when people say stuff we picture it e.g. a prisoners' concert party requiring varieties of uniform to amuse rank masses and the shadows of soldiers wearing uniforms that should be reserved for pompous circumstances.

A sketch of sunflowers picks up the kids from school. A black and white jaundice sells feathers as picturesque as a crisp new packet of tobacco. The blanket that the *Indian* wraps himself in is the same blanket he uses to make smoke signals. It's obvious. It makes economic sense. When it is summer sunny the darkness in the hedge thickens the gravy making it difficult to observe what you are hearing.

5. Objects

Objects allowed back in the story grow new claws. Clause now behaves itself it does this by thinking of others. Good cause. Because he's been in the forest now for forty days and fifteen thrifty nights without spying from behind trees maybe he is only into rejected images walking through walls jaw dropping but no Jesus lies behind miscalculated Jesuit angles and a subversive guide-book we stop to scrutinize from memory. Nevertheless pausing halfway down a page he collides with a flying man. A superhero? No, this object no superhero. No such thing mate.

Excuses we make to ourselves are hugged tightly in sorrow caught in a bathroom mirror wider and longer than the bathroom in which it hangs. These houses we *make unto ourselves* are pop-up mermaids in a Pre-Raphaelite gambit led by dog-ends into the dark dusk of an allotment. What's your excuse for finding yourself here? I am looking for the benefit gig but have forgotten who is playing and who for. I've lost two dogs here but neither are the source of this ramshackle mystery.

Strewh, more rhymes based on old photos. They're not mine I don't write those sort my compositions are of milky seashells and strips of tasteless wallpaper by which I mean the wallpaper tastes as you would expect it to, wood mixed with a blend of sour sugars. Dying man staring at a wallpaper book has to decide on an infinity to want. Will he opt for sea dogs' memories giving anemones a new angle or one based on personality tests premised on an individual's taste in wallpaper?

The clawed back objects outlive us anyway but I could never grasp the appeal of superheroes. I didn't mind Zorro, he was OK. I didn't mind Robin Hood either or Wulf the Briton but I was young that's my excuse. I have other excuses too but you won't hear them from me I leave such things to the songstress in distress singing *The Leaving of Liverpool* in the Devonport folk club *A Lesbian's First Kiss*.

6. Normal

It was a normal room. It is still a normal room. Tomorrow it will be abnormal in a backwash of Feng Shui mistakes. *We all make mistakes* is what we people say yet there are some supermen types who never make 'em and I bet you those freakish folk still say *we all make mistakes*. They are not being disingenuous they are just being taken a tad too literally. I wouldn't put any money on it though. That would be a huge mistake. I do make mistakes but no I wouldn't make room for that one.

The room was furnished with the fashions of another country's history or that's how it seemed. The room was done-out, it was *furn-ish-ed* with a table made with bad light thrown out with the century old tin bathwater. The chairs were rotting corpses, beds organised as if for war, yet a pall of conventionality hung over the bric-a-brac making it a routine room. One could live there quite comfortably for a moment or two. If every room makes a statement then yes, this was Baby's room.

They returned to the room soon after dark and set up camp in the..... No, sorry, they didn't, not without camping gear. They returned by dusk and planted their bicycles next to the water butt. But they didn't did they I bet they did not? They planted their bicycles in the desert whereabouts drawer of the extendable table. Soon it will be harvest – reminisce before it is too late. We were taking a big risk fleeing early from that expendable house auction by driving down rutted fields.

On running back to the new moors the cyclists sat around the table eating tripe and talking shop. The table was not really round as these were not real knights just laminated birthday bumps in the larynxes and oesophagi of executed norms. At night these tubes of ectoplasm emerge to make fun of an invited audience of hardware shopkeepers, the purveyors of pressure cooker parts and *families of brushes*. Strong polish normally hides the corruption under creased green baize.

7. Tunnel

The tunnel. The escape tunnel. The tunnel branched from hut to hut in a maze it didn't creep it didn't run it inserted itself, a Planet Earth in a plangent mirroring. That sounds sound. Mirroring without light needs little repeating in the *cold light of day*. Another old tale. Time hangs but not for our Chaplain for this indefinite divine gift-aids us salvation in packets so some prisoners are digging a tunnel of love. What kind of soil is removed from such business and where is it deposited?

I lent my favourite book to a man in another hut. I am waiting for him to give it back. I lent it to him at least an hour ago. Time goes slowly here. The book was a gift from my wife and is the only thing I can call my own in this community. It is called *The Aesthetics of Glass* and is all about a bloke who meets a woman who is wearing a dress decorated with cuttlefish. It's a love story I suppose even though, to be frank, there is little love in it. The chap spends all his money on Chaplain's meditation classes and the poor lass ends up being committed to the aquarium.

Beyond the prison camp there is a forest. This forest can be sensed. It is not to be sneezed at. We can hear many birds. The birds are free thinkers but I know that's just a fancy. Wolves dump their dead at the gates of the camp where some grey men imagine they are being wolves but they are quite wrong as they are nothing like any wolves I know. Beyond the forest villages burn. Farms burn. Unabashed. By the way *The Aesthetics of Glass* has rich transparencies that keep crinkling up.

Yes this film is a dumping ground for escapist fancies. The Director doesn't even deserve his title. The Commandant deserves his title more than the him because at least the Commandant commands. He commands respect. I like to think I give that respect freely because the heart is a fast confluence of diverse emotions and disturbing motives. The Commandant has learned much from his few mistakes.

8. Study

The Study was turned into a room. November is curious to know what December has in store for it. The year end is a hanging time of excavated ideas and shallow side dishes. The libido turned to the ego and said *shut that bloody door* while the children played being horses careering around the field and jumping fences but they didn't really career around a field they careered around the room and then didn't jump fences but hopped over atmosphere and not one of them would have a career in dressage though in years to come would definitely jockey for position.

Seconds pass. Long seconds of shuffled thought. Applause tentatively begins then *grows* then explodes in a firework display of burning confetti and theatre tickets. Rows fill with brides and aisles with bridles. Horses will never know the children were copying them. Their own seconds pass. Time snags. Horses *hold their heads* in a perfect balance of human gloom and animal confidentiality as a fine likeness of a horse sizzles onto paper (tambourine sound) sweating like helicopter flanks in that fallow old yellow Vietnamese newsreel. The copter makes a second pass.

Solstice monotonous rocking horse talk to us. The retired teacher put out to stud. Leonora Carrington came to read at Peter Barlow's Cigarette she came on a train from her father's Lancastrian mansion as amongst its aristocratic bric-a-brac and tack a toy railway station grew from a *strapping young man's* saddle. On arrival at the Town Hall Tavern she painted us a skunk trap then made a pass at the skunk.

A joy rider merges with the M1060 but unlike him Leonora speaks for the whole herd creeping past the Study door then careering down the corridor to *his* room that carries an echo of a singular career spent air tunnelling towards escalating tinnitus and mental cramp. The Study is rarely used these days for *the passage of time*. It's questions short of problems. The dust gathering there no longer human.

9. Other

Other people begin novels the way best friends end their poems. I believe this is worth saying even though it is probably not true not if you were to actually look and compare but nobody is going to look and compare or notice my unwritten novels ending the way others beg for oblivion. All other people are novels except for a few walking about you might class as poems. Wasn't that worth waiting for?

Street and forest in equal measure. Breathing sculptures sigh *there's nothing in it, far too easy to make our tough arty cocoons crease crack and crumple under the pressure of the so easily accessible*. I've no idea about art. Art is a monarch's pile of unwanted gifts from the kings of other lands. If that's not worth saying then by implication there should be no comparing disabilities or street food posh nosh.

Forest struggled out of the street. Street struggled out of the trees. I've been in a few posh restaurants well posh for Plymouth I no longer live in Plymouth but I can't prove it, never knew I had to. The forest struggled into the street. The street struggled into the restaurant. Other people lived on Plymouth roads and still do so go and interview them. I left it once but later once I left it I thought I might *end up* writing about it at last but not while struggling to read in St. Helens Library.

Shockwave charm alarm clocked *waving not drawing* on a big sheet of invisible paper. Is that funny? Was it worth asking? A phantom limb pain no longer knows which arm of the law it is only what others think it's for. A bit basic to count as a philosophy but it wasn't lawyers who invented thinking so let it pass. Rhetorical questions are the ones worth answering but to be honest that's because they're lifted from the myriad of answers to writers' block. It's a struggle reading others especially when there's no books not even with a stamped skew-whiff *Cancelled*. The rugged charm of other writers' hovels begins at the threshold of this palace.

10. Name

Name a current TV game show please tell us what is going on in your life. No one need be maimed by embarrassment just for designing labels for a *Label Design Magazine*. Post-modernity and the past go in the toilets at Plymouth Argyle from different ends by which is meant different ends of the toilets not different ends of the ground. These are *ends* because the crowd crush (yes we did get crowds at Home Park, in the toilets anyway) made it impossible to tell entrance from exit. You had to look for signs lurking behind a swaying sea of heads and shoulders *if so inclined*. It didn't matter none. It didn't matter not really – mattered by tangents.

Pointless! Trying to write Christmas cards but slowed down in the annual task by forgetting the names of poets' partners. Syria, what a lovely name for a beach. An octave drops. Temperatures surface glass ceilings thicken and metaphors freeze. Only when metonymy breaks the monotony do flowers *wilt also*. *The Chase* is on. A novelist trashed his repute by throwing his hotel room out of the window. His secretary followed. A swimming pool full of rock stars' blood was waiting for her.

All objects have souls. Does saying that imply having a fertile imagination or is it too obvious to say because it is not true? Objects have souls but barren subjects do not so if one (one? good Lord!) is both object and subject flickering between both in a *special effect* does *one* have a soul or the promise of one? Or does a soul have a forest to type all its questions? Can a soul *land a good job* like a secretary?

The name stitched onto the school shoe bag said *Hanging Judge*. Later different names went shebang on the duffel bag *namely* Rimbaud, Baudelaire & Mallarmé. The class fleabag was also the school fleabag because kids can be educated out of becoming art students as portrayed by a neutral observer who isn't quite himself today and isn't anyone else either. Today he's haggling with death, in shorthand.

11. Interested

I am not interested in words I am only interested in myself so I insert myself into others' stories then look for myself as if I was Wally. I can never find Wally. I am reasonably interested in what words do though e.g. *the wordless windmill* they are not interested in what I do though e.g. *worthy miller Deft-as-a-Post* walking *atop* a waterfall with Escaped Prisoner climbing an Alp without any feeling in his fingers knows full well that all feelings will return when they punish his heresy.

An Airfix model of the Marie Celeste *sits* on a bedside cupboard. The pieces were not glued together by that little tube of glue they were glued together by that tub of sailor's semen that *sits* on the bedside table. Don't touch! Don't sit on the table. Don't sit on after the meal has finished. Don't stand on ceremony. You may pick the model up as long as you don't lift it. It may well fall apart in your dreams.

The Fall play it for laughs in the British Legion Hut on Portland. My dad gets up to dance with another man's *old lady* he picked up tickets for the dance in a pack of superhero cards that use the shower cubicle for a toilet. The band encore with *The March of the Contrarians* warming-up for Hearsay playing in a working men's club in Stoke, Plymouth. Hitching once I was picked up by a Stoker but I couldn't tell from his accent which Titanic film we were drowning in. Hearsay open with a punishing version of Come Together to a right shower of Gothic Bran/d Flakes.

Airfix were not the only model makers there was another brand you had to make yourself called Revell and I had to make myself do it to prove I was a boy because girls were bred to model clothes and not interested in words except words about them which tended to escape through an icy tunnel in a fire storm of objectified fear. Maybe. Maybe baby. Gluey words from love letters wearing their underwear shimmy up the wrecked ship's mast that lies jammed the length of the waterfall.