



Poems

Tony Ullyatt



Being Frank

in memoriam Frank Cameron, my maternal grandfather

1.
He went to the First World War not much more
than a youth like the rest of them.
He returned a man, volcanic with the fury
of war erupting in his stone-deaf ears
the upshot of a shrapnel wound
- or so the story goes.

His seven children were badly wounded too
on the battlefield of his domestic rage.

2.
Each morning, like a sacrament
he dressed tidily, latched the wooden gate
of his dull and dowdy dwelling
then, relentless as a Mark I tank, rumbled
to the corner shop for twenty cigarettes:
Wills Woodbines, State Express 555
or Player's Navy Cut. In his dour existence
they were his daily ration of pleasure.

In the toilet at the top of the stairs
an ashtray overflowed with butt-ends.

3.
The corner shop closed years ago;
my grandfather and his children have all since died
in their own time and manner; but his grandchildren
carry that wrath in their genes one way or another;
their injuries invisible but no less incapacitating than his.
I've never known who cleaned that ashtray.

My Grandmother's Oven Door

in memoriam Frances Cameron, my maternal grandmother

My grandmother had an oven door
she kept on the tea-rose quilt of her bed;

she would point to it with hands
that fluttered like rare birds eager
to land and rest in some soft place.

From time to time, she would ask me
- then a child of only three or four -
to take the door back to the kitchen.
I couldn't see it, of course; I lived well
beyond her delusional world,
but she would guide me to it
with her tremulous bird-hands.

Pretending to carry the oven door
to where it belonged, I thought she was
magic; she could see invisible things.

Now, I know otherwise: her terrible illness
was no illusion, just one of life's tricks
that took her mind wandering gently
further and further away, into that place
where her hands could be still as sleeping birds
and the oven door hang on its hinges for good.

You are the Music: A Birthday Poem

for Gisela

you are the music/ While the music lasts

T S Eliot

My mouth floods with words from the well
of my artesian heart. Desert flowers bloom
in your eyes fed by every poem's rain.

The ancient person of my soul kneels before
the grace of your luminous psyche's dance.

The music and the movement of your mind
leave me blessed like the single bird knowing
it's not alone as it throats its song to the delicate day.

But I have lost the instructions for building dreams
now roses sprout from the wound between my ribs.

Read online:



Scan this QR
code with your
smart phone or
mobile device
to read online.

Affiliation: Research Unit: Languages and Literature in the South African Context, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa

Corresponding author and email: Tony Ullyatt; chinkoa@vodamail.co.za

How to cite this article: Ullyatt, T., 2016, 'Poems', *Literator* 37(1), a1240. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/lit.v37i1.1240>

Copyright: ©2016. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.



Bloemfontein Sunday Blues: A Satire

*The feeling of Sunday is the same everywhere,
heavy, melancholy, standing still.*

JEAN RHYS

Early Morning

Woke up this morning just after dawn
the sun blazing on the horizon.
I had breakfast early, victimised
by a long night's insomnia. I realise
it's about 1 a.m. in New York
as if that matters
and about 6 p.m. in Auckland
as if that matters either.

Insinuating rain some melancholy clouds
hunched over the hills until a brisk breeze
bustled the grumbling thunderheads away;
another failed promise: clouds and people
so similar ...

I watered the desiccated lawn, patchy
as a chemotherapy patient's skull;
the plants perked up afterwards
the grass too. In the process
I stood on a snail by mistake and killed it;
its slime-silver path drying to powder
where it had tried to make its urgent way
across the backyard's hot cobbles.
I felt guilty for a long while.

Mid-Afternoon

I bought a Sunday paper, soon wishing I hadn't:

rapes, escapes, parliamentary japes
divisions, revisions, misprisions, suspicions,
corruption, disruption,
strikers, bikers, brutalised hikers
massive pollution, no solution,
fornication, copulation, ever-increasing population
the greedy, the speedy, the needy galore
spiralling debts that no one regrets,
the lies and spies no one denies
all desperate to please the voracious Chinese
secret discussions when speaking to Russians
cruising, schmoozing, copious boozing
drugs, bugs, hypocritical hugs
hit-men, shit-men, utterly unfit men

bores, whores, endless wars
vanity, insanity, no one says it cannot be
blue lights through lights no one else has any rights
the crack ou, the wacko, the profiteering frack ou
playing lotto, getting blotto,
ducking, trucking, fucking whatever's to hand
Woema, Zuma, another vicious rumour
Amandla, Nkandla
feckless, reckless
A million woes, and so it goes ... *

I made coffee, ate a rusk or two, caught
the drift of acrid braai wood firing up.

Late Afternoon

Checked out the emails, nothing but spam
from Bongo Maggi; apart from a Heinz
I've never met anyone christened after a soup
Maggi wanted my bank PIN to fill my account
then the blessed Saint William wanted that number too
promising me an inconceivable amount
shortly thereafter God himself offered me the same deal.

How strange! God, Saint William, and Bongo Maggi
live at the same address and make identical
spelling mistakes: The new theology: Father, Son,
and Unholy Scam? Risking the brutal retributions
of Judgement Day and the certainty of eternal
bankruptcy I deleted their pleas. But still I wonder
why God's laptop doesn't have spellcheck.

Evening

Now, it's lunchtime in New York
and almost Monday morning in Auckland.

And I'm here. Still
as if that matters.

Next Sunday will be much the same I suspect
but

I'll take particular care not to tread on any snails.

* The last four words in this line are taken from Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughter-House 5*.