



SALLY
RICHARDS

EMPEROR

DRAGONFLY

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Richards

*Emperor
Dragonfly*



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By the same author

Through the Silent Grove
(Caradoc Publications/ Masque Publishing, 2008)

Sally Richards – The Bards No. 22
(Atlantean Publishing, 2008)

Stained Glass
(Survivors' Press, 2007)

Waiting for Gulliver
with Steve Mann
(Caradoc Publications, 2005)

Contents

Forewords by Alan Morrison

Poems

Tree Speak, 1

Snowdrop, 2

Emperor Dragonfly, 3

Dawn, 4

Blue-sky-days, 5

Hedge Life, 6

August, 8

October, 9

A December walk at dusk, 11

Four Journeys – past Caradoc to Llandrindod:

The Heart-of-Wales Line, 12

A view of the future, 14

Sigh of the Forest, 15

Silver, 16

Grey, 17

The silent grove, 18

From the Gate, 19

The Cottage, 20

Stationary, 22

The Calm, 23

Aftermath, 24

Abandoned: Mogolinio Children's Institute, Bulgaria, 25

The Underpass, 29

How Can You?, 30

The Bigger Issue, 31
Steep Hill, 33
Invisible, 34
Shell, 35
just how it is, 36
and so to bed... 37
part of the bigger picture, 38
Fair Trade, 39
All the answers, 40
Darwin's lost world: Galapagos, 41
There is light ... where is the tunnel?, 43
Aeon, 44
A glass or two at the weekend, 45
The Button Box, 46
Thinking About Thinking, 48

Foreword

Emperor Dragonfly by Sally Richards

It is with a sense of completeness that I am now publishing the hypnotically naturalistic poems of Sally Richards under my own imprint. I have been mentoring Sally (whom for literary propriety I will refer to from here on in by her surname) on and off now for around five years, ever since she was accepted for a solo pamphlet under the Survivors' Poetry imprint while I was its editor (2004-6). The publication of that debut collection, *Stained Glass*, in a way also marked my swansong from SP, following a myopic and poorly justified 'disinvestment' by the Arts Council. But through that swansong I assisted the release of a new and harmonious, refreshingly compassionate and humanistic voice into print. *Stained Glass* was an accomplished and affecting debut, and also proved a popular SP title, succeeding into reprint.

A second chapbook followed fairly swiftly from Caradoc Publications of Richards' native Shrewsbury, the hauntingly titled *Through the Silent Grove*; and once again it was a pleasure to be asked by Sally to write the Foreword to it. *TSG* – curiously echoing the titular letters 'SG' again – marked a further figurative maturation of Sally's distinctively druidic voice, one nervously occupying a psychic and poetic limbo between domestic angst and naturalistic rapture, a fascinating potion of thought and tone which makes for both unsettling and uplifting reading.

A Bardic sensibility adumbrates an ongoing dialectic between the stifling forces of material existence and the slow restless growth of spiritual awareness which itches to liberate itself – its triumphant palliative: self-expression through the tension of heartfelt and doubt-confronting poetry. The results are poems of incantatory charm which sometimes hold a hypnotic effect as the eyes pendulum-drowse the page. Rather like a medium – which in many senses poets unconsciously are – Richards, a moon-pulled Cancerian (as myself: we ironically share the same birth date, 18th July), both thrives on and tussles with her acute powers of empathy, not simply for fellow humans, but for animals, trees, all natural life. This is both emotional and cerebral poetry – perfect verse-medicine (a modern *Regimen*

Sanitatus) prescribed with healing qualities for those who sense some truth in recent holistic theories that the heart itself is an extension of the brain and thus also a *thinking* organ. Hence the essential tensions of Richards' oeuvre; most markedly, a thanatophobic (death-fearing) rankling for mystical truths beyond the prosaic nihilism of the scientific age, as poems such as 'Darwin's lost world: Galapagos' and 'All the answers' boldly express at a time when poetry and science are in fashionable fusion. Richards is the unassuming verse-shaman of Shropshire, casting her compassionate spells through empowering metaphors. This ebook, which collects together some of the stand-out poems from the two previous chapbooks with some new uncollected poems (some of which have appeared on *the Recusant*), displays an increasingly assured lyrical and tonal talent which, crucially, never fails to move one on a profound emotional level – the most essential ingredient to any poetry that aspires to last in the heart, as well as linger in the mind.

Alan Morrison, 2011

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Tree speak

There's music in the trees;
this morning a lilting fluidity
hushes, soothes –
the calming lull of ocean on sand.

The sky, a perfect canvas
for the soft-fronzed branches
of False Acacia,
sweeping the paint-splodge clouds
over ricepaper crescent, and away.

Their communication is intimate:
Birch and Acacia, deciduous neighbours,
branches drawing closer, closer
with each year of growth.

Now, after July's response
to 'St Swithen's' legendary rainfall,
their verdant, abundant, foliage
strokes, brushes, lashes
across the boundary fence –
sometimes gentle, musical,
at times forceful, stormy,
as if in defence
of their now mutual territory.

In calm moments their branches rest
entwined,
not yet problematical,
almost playful, as if, after so many years

of growing and spreading
they have finally met,
and now negotiate
their new found connection.

Snowdrop

Green spears pierce the earth –
your determined journey made
through the frozen, dark, ground.
Up to the light you push
resolute, undeterred.

Tiny globes appear
suspended on fragile stems,
delicate heads bent,
as you herald the coming of new life.

A few drops is all it takes
to help soothe away our winter blues
as we smile, exclaim ... 'look!'

A diminutive beacon,
you mark the coming of spring.

Emperor Dragonfly

Pirate nymph
stalking the watery underworld
ready to strike
unsuspecting victims:
small fish, water snails,
falling foul of your extendable jaws

from beast to beauty
rising from depths
to morph on a lily stalk
till pumped-up
you emerge
magnificent.

Predator on the wing, scooting along,
devouring all smaller than yourself.
Winged crusader,
monstrous mini-beast, defending your domain –
youth versus maturity,
challenging all adversaries
in dog-fights
some to the death.

Capturing maidens,
ruthlessly grabbed by your claspers,
for urgent mating
before time runs out
on your roguish antics.
Life cut short
after ten manic days
on the wing.

Dawn

The wind chases:
singing, whispering,
as teasing fingers of lace-mist
caress
in chill-thrilling energy.
Sombre trees reach out
through the veil
as if to own her, make her theirs.

White cotton hugs contours
moist with dawn-dew;
vamp-hair, damp, weighty
over shoulders, down her back
as she runs, runs silent through,
feeling the brush of leaves,
the generous give of spongy moss.

Then wood is lit with early glow
from Earth's waking star –
shrugging off night's shutters,
stretching rays, breathing life
into the glade.

Eyes meet
in this still moment of awakening –
a fleeting connection:
fawn and women,
wild and breathless,
in the early glow of daybreak.

Blue-sky-days

It's the same sky – rich cobalt,
deep and clear,
that makes me want to lie back
in deep, clover, meadow-grass, drink it in;
this sky stirs romantic summer's past,
evokes clear images
of so many other blue-sky-days ...

... Youthful fun in exotic climbs:
lapis of a Tunisian summer,
Pool with inviting cool-blue mosaic –
flirtatious water games, tentative glances;
a sprinkling of freckles on my nose,
sun-gold highlights, flush-pink cheeks.

Periwinkle sky
set against a field of Shropshire gold.
Sat beside me,
his hair as blond as the corn sheaf's,
eyes to match sky.
There, under blazing August sun,
moments shared – shy teens –
sun-warmed arms touching;
my heart dancing, ... dancing.

Teenagers' holidays spent with friends
on some Celtic coast;
long walks along the softly curving bay.
Shy giggles
as young Welsh lads follow

three skinny, long-haired brunettes:
chronological triplets!
Amazingly it was hard to tell us apart.
I still remember one day vividly:
smitten by one of the guys –
something about his eyes

blue-sky-days pass
all too soon.

Sally Richards lives near Shrewsbury in Shropshire. Her poetry has appeared in the journals *Awen*, *Carillon*, *Cauldron*, *Chimera*, *Countryside Matters*, *Country and Border Life*, *The Dawntreader*, *Decanto*, *The Delinquent*, Dogma Publications, Earlyworks Press, *The Journal*, *Mindlink*, *Monomyth*, *Orbis*, *Poetry Express*, *the Recusant*, *The Shropshire Star*, *Splizz*, *The Strix Varia*, *Touchstone*, and on Warminster Community Radio (WCR) (featured poet). She has been shortlisted in the Earlyworks Press 2006 national poetry competition and was subsequently published in *Routemasters & Mushrooms* (Earlyworks Press, 2006 winner's anthology) and won third prize for her poem 'Steep Hill' in the *Carillon* magazine 2007 Open Poetry Competition. Publications: *Waiting for Gulliver* (with Steve Mann; Caradoc Publications 2005), *Stained Glass* (Survivors' Press, 2007), *Sally Richards — The Bards No. 22* (Atlantean Publishing, 2008), *Through the Silent Grove* (Masque Publishing, 2008). She has had a regular poetry column in *Country and Border Life* magazine and has recently composed commissions for the Montford Church Flower Festival and as a Poetry Champion for Shrewsbury Library (Shropshire County Council Library service). She is a practising Reiki Master & Reiki Teacher, Bard (qualified in Bardic Studies with OBOD), and currently nearing the end of her second year studying for a Foundation Degree in Clinical Complementary Therapies (part time), with Staffordshire University. Website: www.sallyrichards.co.uk.

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by Sally Richards

Caparison e-books

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www.therecusant.org.uk





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“ Richards’ poetry actually says something which is quite rare in modern poetry... She creates very successfully a doubt in the mind of the reader... ”

Nigel Humphreys

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