

# **Foibles, Frolics and Phantasms: Illustrated Poems (1995-2005)**

**By Paul Catherall  
PublishAmerica, 2006  
ISBN 1 4241 1399 7**

**Reviewed by Ruth Rikowski**

This is a wonderful, moving book, which takes us to a world far beyond our every day existence. It contains a variety of poems, all written by Paul Catherall from North Wales, who by day works as an information professional in higher education. The poems have been written over a 10-year period. There are also many illustrations throughout it, also all by the poet, and this includes the captivating cover itself.

The poems cover a variety of themes, and as Catherall says, they:

*...deal with a range of themes ranging from the simple to the complex and from the transcendental to the macabre... (p.7)*

A unifying theme that runs through them though, I think, is the way in which the poet compares and contrasts urban life with nature and rural life. The poet has been inspired by poets such as Sylvia Plath, Francis Berry and Al Alvarez.

The book contains different types of poems. There are 'Haiku-style poems' for example, which are:

*...a traditional Japanese verse form often conveying wisdom or an allegorical story within a short length. (Catherall, p.66)*

I did not know that so much could be said in 3 lines! Take this 'Haiku-style' poem, for example:

## **'Gift'**

Birthday party gift  
Lovingly wrapped in paper –  
Already got one. (p.69)

Then there are 'Englynion-style poems', which are an ancient Welsh verse-form and:

*...they are typically composed of any number of short three-line stanzas. (Catherall, p. 59)*

Here is an extract from **'Walking in Cader Idris'**, for example:

"Hard to recall in the silence of mists,  
Urban sounds, whir and frenzy –  
Other-worldly it seemed and ethereal. (p.61)

I was also particularly moved by the poem **'Tendon'** (p.45), which is about Repetitive Strain Injury. Catherall describes how the tendon in his hand first incurred his woes, but now he feels sorry for it. He points out the fact that he must be patient. RSI is a common problem today, and we must be careful not to put unnecessary demands on our bodies, as we try to deal with all this new technology.

Then, there is **'Monoglot'**, which begins:

"I approach a dull mountain;  
below me,  
figures distant  
on an innate horizon  
wave inscrutable gestures." (p.13)

This poem conveys something to us, perhaps, about feelings of alienation, and being an observer of society, engulfed in silence, rather than actually being part of society in some fundamental way.

Whilst **'Poem for a Poet'** makes the point that: "The poem is our consciousness come alive" (p.31)

The final section is entitled **"Excerpts from 'The Legends of Ossian'"**. **'The Legends of Ossian'** is a novel in progress by Paul Catherall, which is set in a fictional Dark Age British kingdom, called Beltain. One of the poems, **'The Lay of Vir'** begins:

"Sons of Bailto harken!  
The long years pass like leaves blown in the autumn wind,  
Dry are the bones of the founding sires of Ilyrion  
Iron citadel of the High Kings of Beltain. (p.81)

Catherall thinks that poetry is sadly in decline. Yet, surely the arts always struggle to survive in capitalism – money cannot easily be made from the arts, and the arts cannot readily be transformed into saleable, tradable commodities. Indeed, it is fascinating to realise the extent to which the genius Mozart himself seemed to feel this.

In a letter that Mozart wrote to an Italian friend on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1776, he said:

*Most beloved and esteemed signor, I beg you to tell me what you think of my most humble music. We live in a world where the arts should be encouraged so that we may enlighten one another. But in the country where I live music must struggle even to exist.*<sup>1</sup>

Hopefully, Catherall's book will inspire others to think further about the value and beauty of poetry, as well as the value of the arts more in general. Also, that it will encourage and inspire others to read and write more poetry themselves. Indeed, my own children are all keen on writing poetry.<sup>2</sup>

Let poetry and the arts continue to thrive in one way or another, and in various shapes and forms, and let beauty and wonder shine through in our lives.

## **NOTES:**

1. The genius of Mozart: a personal exploration by Charles Hazlewood, a 3-part BBC Drama Documentary on the life of Mozart (part 1). First broadcast between 19<sup>th</sup> March and 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2004, on BBC 2, Friday, pm. Written and Directed by Andy King-Dabbs. See:  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/classicaltv/mozart/theseries/eTV.shtml>

2. And there is a selection of their poems on the Rikowski website, 'The Flow of Ideas' – see:  
<http://www.flowideas.co.uk/?page=articles&sub=Poems%20by%20Alex%20Rikowski>  
<http://www.flowideas.co.uk/?page=articles&sub=Poems%20by%20Gregory%20Rikowski>  
<http://www.flowideas.co.uk/?page=articles&sub=Poems%20by%20Victor%20Rikowski>

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Visit the Rikowski website, The Flow of Ideas, at: <http://www.flowideas.co.uk>

Another version of this review is available on [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk) and [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).  
See:

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/Foibles-Frolics-Phantasms-Illustrated-Catherall/dp/1424113997/sr=1-3/qid=1159377714/ref=sr\\_1\\_3/026-6260269-3891667?ie=UTF8&s=books](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Foibles-Frolics-Phantasms-Illustrated-Catherall/dp/1424113997/sr=1-3/qid=1159377714/ref=sr_1_3/026-6260269-3891667?ie=UTF8&s=books)

And:

[http://www.amazon.com/Foibles-Frolics-Phantasms-Illustrated-Catherall/dp/1424113997/sr=1-1/qid=1159377577/ref=sr\\_1\\_1/002-4186075-9369655?ie=UTF8&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/Foibles-Frolics-Phantasms-Illustrated-Catherall/dp/1424113997/sr=1-1/qid=1159377577/ref=sr_1_1/002-4186075-9369655?ie=UTF8&s=books)

Also, on the Rikowski website, 'The Flow of Ideas' – see  
<http://www.flowideas.co.uk/?page=articles&sub=Foibles,%20Frolics%20and%20Phantasms>