

# ***Here Comes the Night*** **by Alan Gillis**



'At first I thought I would write songs and be in a band, which never happened' writes Alan Gillis of his teenage years in *The Edinburgh Review*, a publication the Belfast-born writer edits. 'Poems came later'. Across three poetry collections, Gillis' adult self demonstrates the imaginative grip on contemporary culture that would surely have made him a notable lyricist, but he plays it out through the constraints of the sonnet not the 7 inch. 'Open Facebook and update / all trace of yourself' he exhorts in the opening to [\*Here Comes the Night\*](#), posting the status of the modern moment.

## **In a Nondescript Town**

Gulls cawk and cry over rooftops and sirens,  
evacuated schools, outraged streets, fire engines,  
while families hunch and huddle in their drives  
watching TV crews, news reporters gather.

Tight-lipped plainclothed officers sip coffee  
on a floral sofa. A neighbour explains:  
'When he stared at you. As if he'd cat's eyes.'  
His mother slumps alone in the kitchen.

A tap drips. Light glades her still head.  
Upstairs on the landing a detective  
breathes deep, pushes the 'Do Not Enter'  
sign of the bedroom door and takes it in

as if standing on the threshold of hell,  
trying to make sense of a small made bed,  
flat screen, consoles, notepads, posters,  
so many books stacked neatly on their shelves.

## **In a Glass Darkly**

Look into my eyes. You're vicious  
letters on a furious page, feverous  
black ribbons and ravens, dark angels  
of cloud-scowl in the sky raining down

hatchets, spanners, Stanley knives, claw hammers,  
each raindrop a dropped elevator's scream.

You're a smoker's lungs. You're beaten  
meat: cleavered, hung. You're gelatinous  
fat on a cold kebab. You're porno music,  
a syringe beneath the railway bridge,  
a weeping condom squished on the girders  
glistened like a swimming lizard's skin.

You're a supermarket aisle packed  
with pus-leached, glooping fruit  
on shelves that ooze like rancid gums.  
You're worms in the puke's tomatoey ghee.  
You're an arse-licker's tongue. I'm your mirror.  
Look into my eyes and love me.

You're the desert. You're the rizarred  
skin and river blindness of the dying,  
so you are, the rape of the foreign policies  
of the west. I'm your diminishing bent  
towards remembrance and kindness.  
Look into my eyes and love me.

You're gonorrhoea. You're the beating time-  
bomb behind the breast. I'm the dissolution  
of all you hoped to be, and you hoped to be  
the best, so you did. You're eco-scuzz.  
You're all but excuses: 'Because... Because...'  
Look into my eyes. Behold me.

I'm your ghost, so I am. You're the niff  
of a turnip fart in a train carriage.  
I'm who people think you are, but you'll never be  
me, so you'll never. Yet when you go dead water  
will drown me. Numb silence and lonely.  
Reach through the glass and hold me.

### **The Blue-ringed Octopus Found on South-Australian Shores**

It may bring music to the living  
room and light,  
but the electric cable lies calm across the floor  
like slack rope,  
like an eel adoze in waters barely living,  
if eels ever doze.

Like a tentacle dangled from a dying  
conch shell, having turned  
the colour of the conch shell at low tide:  
an octopus  
is hidden like a lung. And he is dying,  
who trod there,

toeing the strand's surf and suds and kicking  
over speckled pebbles,  
over the conch shell that lit to livid yellow  
and sudden blue  
rings that leapt and bit and left him kicking  
his bucket in the sand.

And you skin was pale, but brightly,  
like the living  
room lit by that cable abuzz with the venom  
of its voltage,  
and your neck was tethered nightly  
by the stark rope

of my self-regard, as I lay back to sing  
Take That songs  
until your tongue unlippped electric  
and I crackled  
in your milted eyes' yellow-blue rings  
in the dark.

### Discussion Ideas

- Which nondescript town? Dunblane, Hungerford, somewhere else? What is meant or implied by the phrase 'nondescript town'? What would be the opposite - a 'fulldescript' town? What would be an example of a fulldescript town? Manchester, Glasgow, London? Nothing meriting sirens and fire-engines ever happens there, surely?
- What might be contained in all those neatly stacked books? Does this poem suggest that writing – or description – a guard against 'the threshold of hell'?
- Alan Gillis is not the only artist or writer to have co-opted and adapted the Biblical phrase 'through a glass darkly' for his / her own purposes [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Through\\_a\\_Glass\\_Darkly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Through_a_Glass_Darkly) . What's happening in his poem? Is it thrillingly disgusting, or just ordinarily disgusting? Would a person – or a mirror version of a person – with this level of self-disgust lavish this amount of care and craft on the language used to describe his or herself?
- Read 'In a Glass Darkly' aloud to each other. What do you need for a successful performance of it?
- Blue-ringed Octopus facts - <http://www.uwphotographyguide.com/blue-ringed-octopus> . Is this poem an accusation or an apology (to the pale skinned person) – or something else altogether?

Alan Gillis was born in Belfast and lives in Scotland where he is Lecturer in English at The University of Edinburgh. His debut collection, *Somebody, Somewhere*, won the Rupert and Eithne Strong Award for Best First Collection in 2004, and was shortlisted for the *Irish Times* Poetry Now Award. His second collection *Hawks and Doves* was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation in 2007 and was shortlisted for the T S Eliot Prize. *Here Comes the Night* was published by Gallery Press in 2010, and his fourth collection, *Scapegoat*, is published by Gallery Press in October 2014.

### **Other books by Alan Gillis**

- [\*Somebody, Somewhere\*](#) (The Gallery Press, 2004)
- [\*Hawks and Doves\*](#) (The Gallery Press, 2007)

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