

The Brand New Dark **by Mark Waldron**



Mark Waldron's poetic self is as a guest at a demented cocktail party where he is surrounded by all manner of riotous and peculiar behaviour which will later be recorded and relayed with a deadpan indulgent smile. Both his collections [*The Brand New Dark*](#) and *The Itchy Sea* combine precise observation of previously overlooked circumstances and individuals with a surrealist's extrapolative imagination. 'The itchy sea' he writes 'being eternally discomfited, / seeks an original arrangement'. Waldron has also had a long career in advertising, notably inventing the classic 'Daddy or chips?' conundrum for McCain.

For Them There's Nothing

They can never ride from Karlova Ves to Spitalska,
watching other trams and pale stones of faces

sunk under the glass; they can't have an itchy insect bite,
an awful cold, or let their sleepy, humid gaze

rest upon their feet beneath the water in the bath.
The things we make, the TV shows that leave

these muted traces of their colours on our clothes,
the foreign films that float below

the stripped out letters of their subtitles,
the songs we listen to and sing, none of these are for them.

They don't go out to eat, not even in the sullen,
almost empty cafés, where the world's bright juice

runs in hell-bent rivers between and through the tables
and shines on the floor and goes out onto

the green-grey street where it will rain later
and the false ceiling of cloud is lit from above;

they can't go out into the garden and turn to look up
at the curtained windows of the bedroom;

they never smell the plain wood of the boxes

we install them in and never even see the only true dark.

My Friend Marcie is on the Insensate Beach,

or by the dinking pool, or in the triumphant park.
She's sliding over pages of a magazine,

her scent is the scent of the sun: that stark and naked mistress,
who in her blinding coruscation, burns off her very own bikini,

who'll flash off underwear, a business suit and overcoat
quicker than she can summon them, already smouldering, to mind.

She's up there, bare as you like, her hair blazed to ash
and ash itself, in this blank heat, flared back to scratch,

before a damp and follicled root could jibber, blinking, into life,
before the quick, initial sting could even muster

to the judging pole of self. The alopecia sun, her porn star muff,
buff as these soft dreams I entertain of her,

my immolating, self-cremating angel,
who turns my coal-black words to molecules of slag,

whose salted tears cannot even jig as spit upon a frying pan.
She's squatting in her protest, her hollered rage at me,

her blasphemy, is in the shine on the magazine.
Its gloss is bouncing up all over Marcie like a rash.

We Think We See Richness, Said Dougal,

but in fact it's as thin as... as thin as...

Paper? ventured Florence, crossing and winding
her pretty legs. Her dark eyes

are ovals of infinite charm.
And Dougal felt, as he often did,
that he might topple into them and be wholly unfound
and that he'd find in there the other lost mutts
who fly and go in undulating packs,
forgetting why and longing
in a putty coloured piece of brain,
to be owned again,
and be more than what they have become —
nothing but her foaming happiness
rising in her as a swarm of barking pooch.

*No, thinner than paper, said Dougal sadly.
I'm afraid there's nothing there at all,
we make it all up,
it forms in front of us as we go.*

Discussion Ideas

- Would you read 'For Them There's Nothing' at a funeral?
- What do the 'we' in 'For Them There's Nothing' feel about the 'them'? Sadness, guilt, something else? Is the poem an attempt to expiate those feelings? Does it succeed?
- Poet John Stammers (who calls Mark Waldron 'the most striking and unusual voice to have emerged in British poetry for some time') once said that he writes because 'I have an aesthetic that I am keen to explore to its limits'. Might something similar be going on in 'My Friend Marcie is on the Insensate Beach,'?
- Many poets use classical myths and legends to articulate contemporary experience; not many use *The Magic Roundabout*. What's the difference between the two approaches? Which do you prefer, and why?
- Re-introducing us to the characters of our childhood tv (here's a recap in case you weren't a *Magic Roundabout* fan in the 1970s <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcnKvqDMnKU>) could be an exercise in charm and nostalgia. Is that what's happening in this poem? How closely are Waldron's characters related to the actual characters? Where do the differences lie?

Mark Waldron was born in New York and works in advertising. His first book, *The Brand New Dark* was published by Salt Publishing in 2008 and his second, *The Itchy Sea*, came out in September 2011. His work appears in *Identity Parade: New British and Irish Poets* (Bloodaxe, 2010) and *Best British Poetry 2012* and *2013* (Salt). He lives in London with his wife and son.

Other books by Mark Waldron

- [The Itchy Sea](#) (Salt, 2011)

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