



TIME

Panic! **Brixton Poetry**

Brixton Prison Poetry Project

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Poets

- M.J. H** If time had a color¹
Time stands still
- Eddie E** Nothing to do, nothing at all²
- Elroy P** Behind the charade of our
brave face³
- Magee M** Hard Times⁴
- Chris W** A Suite of Poems
- R. B** Time
- William W** You're like a lovely flower
No one know the loneliness
- Mark O** Insomnia
- Terry St** Days seem like years
- Mark R** Checking in time
- John A. W** Prison-Time
- Hugh Stoddart**⁵ Change

Acknowledgements:

1 - If Time had a color
was the winner of the Panic! Brixton Prison Poetry contest (2001).

2 - Nothing to do, nothing at all
won second prize in the Panic! Brixton Prison Poetry contest (2001).

3 - Behind the charade of our brave face
won third prize in the Panic! Brixton Prison Poetry contest (2001).

4 - Hard Times
won an Honourable Mention in the Panic! Brixton Prison Poetry contest (2001).

5 - Hugh Stoddart
as the Writer in Residence at HMP Brixton at the time of the contest.

Panic! Brixton Poetry would like to thank:

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Preface

The fragile walls of your isolation, which comprised the multiple stopping-points, the obstacles of consciousness, will have served only to reflect for an instant the flash of those universes in the heart of which you never ceased to be lost.

Georges Bataille, Inner Experience⁶

The current volume sets out poetry of prisoners from the Brixton prison – against the background of images of the interior of this labyrinth of incarceration – HMP Brixton. Brixton Prisoners – Prison poets... poets, Brixton poets. The voices of those of us on the inside once again can be heard and read – on the outside.

The inclusion of these voices in the midst of the myriad voices already always surging in Brixton creates the chance for a dialogue which could in the end bring down this regime of inside and outside, to deconstruct this punitive regimentation of daily life.

Panic! Brixton Poetry has been a forum for free expression for Brixton poets and artists since the early months of 1998.

Panic! initiated its Brixton Prison Poetry Project in order to unearth the hidden voices of incarceration – of people who share the same air, sky and land with the rest of us. The response of the poets and prison staff to the Project has been overwhelming. All of the entries to the Contest and Project have been included in this volume.

The theme of the project – Time – arose due to the suspicion that prisoners would have a more intense apprehension of 'time' in light of a situation in which control and surveillance prohibits them from forgetting their own incarceration. Time is not however merely considered as the cliché of a prisoner marking time on the wall of his cell, but more significantly, as the lived temporality of his personal existence, in this case, his lived temporality of incarceration, of embodiment.

This temporality of incarceration is expressed in the poetry and art in this volume. None of the poets is very interested in the calendar conception of time, but, each expresses, in his turn, his singular vision of the world, of his specific situation of incarceration, his deep emotional void in the wake of separation from loved ones. There is remorse, but also anger and frustration on how slow time seems to go – anguish, despair, joy and remembrance – and laughter – of lived temporality, not a mere mechanism on the wall.

Jim Luchte

Editor

Panic! Brixton Poetry



M.J. H

If Time had a Color

If Time had a color
What hue would it show?
Will it be light blue
Like the color of the sea?
We are told that Days ebb and flow,
Years are washed away.
"The sands of time are running out".
And Months sail by.
Maybe time would be green.
To match the color of grass.
Or sparkle like icicles,
Upon an old man's hair.
Time might be black,
Like a raven's wing,
Because Time flies,
But never fast enough.

Time Stands Still

I watch the changing of the seasons through
my window,
and still time stood still

My face got hairy and my nails grew
and still time stood still.

The spider made its web and the tap dripped,
and still time stood still.

Sun rose, waned and rose again,
and still time stood still.

I counted the days without you and realised,
time stands still.



Eddie E

Nothing to do, nothing at all

Nothing to do, nothing at all
You sit and stare at that cell wall.
To survive this place takes an iron will
Life ebbs away but yet stands still:
Your life is on hold, you wish it away
Till the time comes, your release day.
You took for granted so many things
It's funny, now, what your mind brings -
To release the anguish, to ease the pain -
A simple thing like a walk in the rain
To see clear skies and the beautiful stars
Without the hindrance of these prison bars:
Better pictures these, through a lying eye
Of grass, of trees, of wonderful sky -
They take away that purple haze
That clouds your mind through drawn - out days...
But it's all false, it's just not true,
Reality steps in, you're left with just you.
You're back in your cell, you stare at the wall
With nothing to do, nothing at all.

Elroy P

Behind the charade of our brave face

Behind the charade of our brave face
The wild and free, caged in this place
Our only comfort is when the day is gone
Time is passing, that keeps us strong

Time is the answer to our prayers
The ultimate prize for the stayers
But for those of us at the beginning
Punishment looms heavy for our sinning

So you might feel you're on the brink
But you're not alone so stop and think
Brothers in arms together we'll pull through
Every day someone goes home, soon it will be you.

Magee M

Hard Times

Time means little,
Time means alot,
Time will always be here,
Like it or not.

The hands of Time keep ticking,
Tock tick tock tick tock,
It's relentless & eternal,
A never ending clock.

If – like my myself – your spending
Time in jail,
Time's a wicked, ruthless enemy,
Try & fight it & you'll fail.

Time wait's for no man,
It's an unstoppable force,
Police, army, judges, even the queen,
They can't put Time off course.

Time's the boss that rules the world,
It's more or less a god,
Don't be offended, religious man,
Just read, digest & nod.

Time can have a bright side,
But Time sure ain't my friend,
You can use it to your advantage,
As it will follow you to the end.

We don't get any younger,
Just closer & closer to death,
Time just keeps on going,
Even after our final breath.

Life revolves around Time,
It decides when night meets day,
It's dominant & cruel, makes the rules,
But Time is here to stay.

I hope I haven't depressed you,
upset you in any sort of way,
But Time's not on my side at the
mo', so I've got nothing more to say
...except, what time is it?

Chris W *A Suite of Poems*

Many have eyes

Many have eyes but still not see.
Jail is one continuous conflictment
In a battle of war.
They say "Who knows, feels!"
So can you see my scars?
Trapped within
Behind an iron door.
Bars at my window
With surrounding walls.
Where do I see grass?
Where do I see green?
Only when my eyes are shut
And I start to dream.
I see the life I should be living
In that time I am free
I see the smile
Of my wife and child
In place of the tears
That they shed for me.

Ambitions with Ambitious

With life there are so many questions
But so few answers.
And the truth is with so many questions
Only time can answer them.
So here I am - waiting.
Waiting on the ones only time can answer
And catching those observation can give me.
Just waiting - waiting with my anxiety
And ambitions.
Ready for all I've got and will achieve.
Where my words will not just be words
And my dreams will not just be dreams
But be reality.
And I add this:
The winners are the survivors
The losers are the ones with no hope
No faith nor confidence within themselves.
They are the ones
Who have no tomorrow
But who had yesterday.

The Knowledge of Time

Every man has weakness
Even the strongest of men.
Yesterday, I was at my lowest
But today I'm at my best.
And to take that from me
You must take simply
All that I've lived
Seen and know.
Like from the people we've known
And the people we meet, and the different
Experiences of different
Situations we have with them
Is what makes you and me
The people we are.
And one cannot see
When they are changing
But can only look back
And see how much
That they have.

Prison

Prison is prison - no matter
Which one I may be in.
And in this place
I've cried in anger
I've cried in pain.
And worst of all
I've cried because here I am
Powerless to the ones who play
Their games. But I always remind
Myself this: that nothing good or
Bad lasts forever.
Apart from love.
And as there is a beginning
There is always an end.
And why be strong in the beginning
Only to become weak anywhere
near the end.
Serves me no point, nor
Anyone.

How I Feel

I am a foreigner
In a foreign place.
I do not suit this place
Neither does this place suit me.
I am a foreigner
Being held captive
Waiting and longing to be freed.
This place is not my home,
Neither will it ever be.
My home and place
Is with the ones I love
And the ones who love me.

When I am Dead

These questions I must ask
Which is the truth
And no lie.
Who will remember me
when I die?
Who will shed a tear for me?
And to know even
That every tear one day will run dry.
Just the way time flies
And life carries on
Today we mourn
Tomorrow we dance
And sing another song.

R. Boughton

Time

Hours of boredom
or hours of fun
Stare at the ceiling
or stare at the sun
Work in the office
or toil on the land
Type at a keyboard
or toes in the sand
It's all up to you
your life is to live
sometimes to take
and sometimes to give
Make time for another
and time for yourself
and in time you'll find
you've found your true self.

William W

You're like a lovely flower

You're like a lovely flower
 Blooming in the park.
The sun shines on your goodness
 like a halo in the dark.
Your smiling face is like the sun
 It warms my very soul.
My love for you, it knows no end
 You're love it keeps me whole.

No one know the loneliness

No one knows the loneliness.

No one knows the tears.

No one knows the bitterness
of the long awaiting years.

No one knows just why I cry
as each day passes by.

No one knows the pain
hurting me inside.

You tell me on the visits,
how well I seem to be -

Yet, the heartache that I feel
inside eats away at me.

My false smiles on the visits,
my holding back the tears,

I do it just to con you
to take away your fears.

I tell you I will see you soon,
then watch you walk away.

And I know I must go through
it all again another day.

But the time will come one morning
when I'll go through the gate,
and it's many months away
and I know I will have to wait.
but we will all be back together
as god meant it to be.
No bars, no chains, no handcuffs,
it will just be you - and me...
No more I will be lonely or
even feel alone, and the
only favour I will ask
is that you will take me home.

Mark O

Insomnia

There's a buzz in my head. It's like a trapped fly.
How do I let all this time pass me by?
Sleep doesn't come to those who wait
I'm counting the sheep, not closing the gate
I hear my own breathing, like wind on the hill
All the time begging my mind to be still
There's a world of dreams but I can't connect
I need golden poison's soporific effect
If I strike a match with the devil below
What wonders then in my mind will show?

The thought doctor's coming. Show no surprise.
The smoke screen clears as I look in his eyes
The thought doctor wants to look at my mind
Am I his essay? His clock, to unwind?
What's his game and who makes the rules?
I'll be a contender, I'm nobody's fool

Am I being processed? Am I being prepared?
(Keep hold of consciousness, don't run scared)
A doctor of thought, does the doctor speak true
Has he ordered for one but reserved for two?
I'll sit at his table, I'll chew the fat...
He holds up a mirror. Do I look like that?

Terry S

Days seem like years

The days seem like years but the years seem like days
As I dwell on the past and the memories that raise
I can think open meadows and hear the birds in
the trees
Taste the salt on my tongue as I voyage open seas
Time disappears when you voyage in your soul
You can fly in the breeze, swim with a shaol
The journeys I've taken in the depths of my mind!
There are no bars of a prison, the chains I can unbind
I can sail on a ship and again I'm a child
Taste a kiss on wet lips, remember the way that
she smiled

My first ride on a bike and on only two wheels
My hair blowing wild, I re-sense how that feels
As we lie in our cells thinking back on the past
We can ebb away time, it can even go fast
We can relieve the pleasures, drink in how it feels
Enjoy a whole banquet of our favourite meals.
When you return to the present, life seems a bitch
So remember your soul and you'll always be rich
But don't go there too often, if you know what I mean -
You may become lost in there, and miss your canteen!

Note: "Canteen" is the chance to buy the things a prisoner might be wanting for the week ahead - coffee, tobacco, soap, etc.

Mark R

Checking in Time

Last call for Mr. Rennie
Flight Sq. 8851 to Singapore,
Now boarding - Gate 6".
I remained at customs, where
two armed tour reps. extended my stay
Giving me a rough guide to,
"Korydallos"
A little known tourist destination
in the Greek mountains, which,
with a 24 hr. curfew imposed,
attracts only single men, seeking solitude,
But remains open for business 365 days a year.
Checking in, I left my passport at reception -
for security.

And was shown to my room by a bald cat and
a large Greek, who
Reminded me of Harry Enfield's "Stanros"
only not so funny.
Accommodation was based upon up to 45 sharing
depending on availability.
No beds.
In the morning I awoke before dawn for breakfast,
dropped into the en suite
hole in the ground - scratched, went to the bars
and got fed through one of them.
The bald cat, brushed past, scratched
and collected back her fleas.
Check out time was not discussed.

John A. W

Prison-Time

Time stands still or at least it seems,
It drags it's feet making inmates scream,
Why won't our time speed up and go fast,
So we can be released from here at last.

Why does time fly on crooked wings?
Which makes all the prisoners in unison sing,
Help us please whilst inside for our crimes,
show us how to relax, whilst doing our time.

Why does our time seem to go so slow?
Why can't we speed it up so we can go,
Right back out to the world outside, and
Try our luck going straight this time.

So please, please time won't you hurry up,
So we can get out there and try our luck,
At keeping on the straight and narrow
Working as a painter, pushing a wheel-barrow.

We have truly has enough of doing time,
It's damaging out brain cells, it's damaging
Our minds, so won't you hurry up please,
Grandfather clock, give us back our freedom,
Now open the locks.

Hugh Stoddart

Change

You can measure time by the rings in trees
Or counting your bloody heartbeats.
You can measure time by changes and exchanges
Of homes, of lovers, of cats that come and go.
Calendars, clocks, and time-sheets wind us round
Their little fingers... You can measure time
By loss of hair, maybe, or muscle tone. Or
By the mistakes you made.
Disappointment's drip can form stalactites
In your mind - calibrate them inch by inch
But do you want to? You'll likely lose the capacity
Won't you - to be surprised? Are you ready, baby,
To be carried off by white horses?
Leave your watch on the beach
With those clothes you bought too long ago
Neatly piled.

