

# Poetry Reviews

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Edited by **Julian Nangle**

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## Spirituality versus Religion

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**Leo Rutherford**

CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011, 238 pp

ISBN: 1461007941

Price: £11.99

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## Towards the Sea... a Journey...and Then Came the Poetry, 2011

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**Jean Clark**

Available from: [jeanclark26@btinternet.com](mailto:jeanclark26@btinternet.com)

Price: £10 post free

Reviewed by Julian Nangle

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You know which side of the argument Leo Rutherford is coming from in his new book *Spirituality versus Religion* without opening it. At the top of the front cover we read, 'For all who seek the truth beyond church/bible dogma'.

The chapter on the many God-Men before Jesus is particularly illuminating. Horus, Mithras, Dionysus (also known as Bacchus) Sol Invictus, Attis (born of the virgin Nana) were all, reportedly, born on the 25th of December. Then there was Virishna 'born of a spotless virgin who had "never known man", impregnated by a spirit' who 'was put to death on a cross between two thieves'. Familiar?

Rutherford is especially exercised by the suppression, over the aeons, of women, sex and any interest in the human body. He quotes paragraph after paragraph from the bible to illustrate his point(s), and not only on the male-monotheistic attitudes pervading the culture, but also to illustrate the incredible hypocrisy and brutalities that lie within the pages of 'the good book'.

*Spirituality versus Religion* is a testament to serious, prolonged and detailed research which sweeps away millennia of deceit and misinterpretation (Rutherford would say misrepresentation) of the Jesus myth, among others, for reasons of self-aggrandisement and power.

This is an angry book which pulls no punches. When you have finished reading it, or even if you just dip into it,

I confidently predict you too will feel angry, not with the author who bravely goes where few have gone before, Richard Dawkins (who misses the point: spirituality does not necessarily need to be dressed in a 'religion' to have reality) notwithstanding. No, you will feel angry for having been duped so thoroughly, for so long. As Rutherford says continually in this book: it is time to WAKE UP.

It is not often I find a book of poems where I have to keep turning the pages, but Jean Clark's new book *Towards the Sea...a Journey...* is such a book. It also has, as its main artery, honesty. Clark's poems are so refreshingly honest, it is a mystery, and a travesty, that no mainstream publisher has picked it up and published it. As it is, the book is published by the author.

There is a fittingly approving foreword by Brian Thorne, a figure familiar to readers of this journal. Light is thrown on Clark's background, as a leading psychotherapist of her day and as friend and colleague of Carl Rogers, with whom she worked for the last decade of his life. There is, obliquely, an aliveness to global issues, which increasingly occupied Rogers' thoughts and views towards the end of his life; racism being a particular issue. The poem 'Celebration' which I quote in full, illustrates the point.

### Celebration

This morning early  
I saw, beyond the flowers  
in my window, colour  
floating into my room.  
I saw history being made  
in America,  
there on the screen  
in my room. Tears filled my eyes,  
a joyous relief  
as hope gleamed.  
Outside red leaves celebrated,  
birds sang, and on my shelf  
fourteen orchids danced  
along their stem,  
like ballerinas.

Traditionally, books of poetry stand or fall by the poems

themselves, naked statues to the author's thoughts. Clark takes another route and drops in lines of prose giving background to the writing of the poems. 'Telling my husband that I must leave him was perhaps the most difficult moment in my life'. This sentence sits like a bomb between the poems 'Broken' and 'Battered', and it adds to, rather than detracts from, the punch of the poems.

The poems which deal with the break-up of the poet's marriage illustrate something familiar to all on 'the journey' to the sea of enlightenment. To evolve, to be true to one's self, sometimes one has to cut free and leave others to go their way as you go yours. It takes great courage. To record the journey in the way Clark does is reminiscent of how C.S. Lewis recorded his journey of bereavement in 'A Grief Observed' back in the 1940s.

A fork in the road demands choice. Jean Clark was brave enough to take the road less travelled and records this, painstakingly, along with other poems of a more celebratory nature, in these beautiful, simple, unpretentious poems. ⑤

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## Selected Poems: Crackle of Almonds

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### Gabriel Bradford Millar

Awen Publications, Stroud, 2012, 80pp

Price: £11.99 (order it from Kevan Manwaring, Awen Publications, 78 Daisybank, Bisley Rd., Stroud GL5 1HG)

Reviewed by: Julian Nangle

The author is an American who has lived in the Cotswolds for many years. Reading these poems one cannot mistake either of these facts. The approach to the matter in hand, writing a poem, is feisty, uncompromising and impassioned; representative of the confident American spirit. But there is also a no-nonsense earthiness in her writing, reminiscent of an English country spirit. This can be seen in the very short poem which I quote in full, 'What shall my Magdalene do':

*What shall my Magdalene do  
who longs for a Christ-man  
to lavish her love on?  
What shall she do with  
this full jar of spikenard?*

The last word, spikenard, describes a costly perfumed ointment much valued in ancient times which hails from the Himalayas. Thus, in this one short poem, the author shows us her faith, her wild, human passion, and her width and depth of interest and knowledge in matters eternal and universal. It was written in 1976. Moving through the book chronologically

one encounters many references to ancient times in Greece and Egypt, but then one falls on 'Love Poem to my Husband' which, while appropriately affecting, pulls no punches.

*I am not your way through,  
but I will go with you  
through the deserts of the soul,  
the weeks of ennui  
when the only distraction  
is the hoofprints of strange camels.*

There is a toughness to many of the poems in this book, but my favourite, 'Coherent', sheds light on the author's desire for self-effacement which I suspect underlies her urge to write. She shows a wish to get out of the way of the muse and yet to allow others to encounter it – to be the channel, unseen, egoless.

*... my brain  
is a jumble sale,  
a great-gapped colander  
through whose plural holes  
slips my life's purpose,  
split into pleasures  
and the long postponement,  
as though the body  
were itself immortal.*

Contrary to what Millar says here, reading this book one gets a strong sense of the author's purpose in life. And yet, inevitably, there is a difficulty, if one attempts to pin her down like the tail on the donkey, of knowing exactly where she will come from next. The breadth of her contexts – from animals (read *Giga* on page 45); to place: Scotland, New York, France, Spain; to the ancients in Greece and Egypt; to the mystical –

*I love the one she has not yet  
discovered in herself (from Thera);*

to the mess the banks have made of our lives –

*The High Street bank,  
the daylight bandit,  
claims to give interest,  
but the disinterest in us is insulting;  
inflated lending rates and tuppence  
for the use of our money.*

*Legalised piracy  
in a respectable setting. (from Legal Brigand);*

to the intimate and personal; this breadth of context leaves one breathless but also, strangely, emboldened and empowered.

As I have said elsewhere in this short review the author pulls no punches and is the better writer for it. *Crackle of Almonds* is a cracking read and pays better dividends than the banks, by far. ⑤