

POEM



'Truth Games' by Geoff Bamford (2017): Excerpts

Geoff Bamford

INSIDE STORY

Fifty years?

If you say so.

History blinks.

The great beast swings
unsteadily.

We see our way,
head off —

then suddenly forget,
and stop.

What was it, then?

Probably nothing —
never mind.

But life won't be denied,
for all that we pretend we can

re-write it —
can hide

from what is there for us
inside.

WRONG TURNS FIND A WAY

In 1960s Britain,

an understanding spread
in the collective consciousness
to do with

sometimes not worrying
how to prove

you have the solution,
just doing what you do
truthfully.

Youngsters got this vision.

They stumbled into it,
across the country,
and insisted

it was there for anyone
who would let go,
begin to flow,

open up and say hello —
 who would welcome
 all things made new
 in a moment.
 It was there for you,
 a fresh way to live,
 if you paid attention,
 and it changed everything,
 (though some
 got it better than others,
 you could tell).
 It grew with sharing.
 So you needed friends
 on the same wavelength.
 We were sensitive
 to each other's space,
 saw with each other's eyes,
 and so explored together
 ways to be and know,
 to extend ourselves, to grow.

Exploring
 was always worth the effort —
 the world was full of meaning,
 if you let it be.
 Existence is a teacher —
 this was the vision.
 It came from living
 well back in the head,
 looking over distances.

Some folk, close to us,
 couldn't get it. Sad —
 they'd built themselves
 all sorts of abstract realms,
 to get lost in.
 Anxious they were,
 torn between imponderables.
 'What do you know?', they said:
 'Present credentials!'

It was no good telling them.
 They lost patience
 when someone said:
 'A machine
 you can define, yes,
 but not
 a state of being —

that, you may describe,
looking back,
(while remembering
we live forwards,
so what matters is:
watch what comes up,
see what's there for you
and get behind it).
There is no One Right Answer,
no winning formula.
There are no leaders.'
That just annoyed them.
They suffered
from the spirit of the age.
Techno-speak
sees only
things and pointing to things,
things you can touch,
or can pretend to,
by measuring or by paying.
It stops you thinking
how all those things may
fit in, where,
or that words
are for us to play with
in many ways and various,
some more and some less healthy.
Such thoughts make people giddy,
and they get cross.
I liked this guy,
tried to welcome him,
to talk about what helps
when you want to settle in
to just being here,
breathing away,
pulsing and sensing,
opening
to the flow.
But he couldn't trust himself,
clung to his blessed crutches —
made something else
of what I'd said
and dared me to refuse
to play by his rules.
He was full of stories —

of what is so and how it goes,
and all the instruments you need.

Well, straight people
were a bring-down,
so generally best left be.

That's what we all said.

We kidded ourselves, royally —
we'd never have got away with it,
turning everyone's heads,
without all sorts
cheering us on.

The well-meaning liberals
often didn't mean well
but it was lazy

just to walk away
and leave them there,
distressed.

They already felt
they were losing the thread,
not responding well,

so for us to give up on them
unexpectedly

was too unsettling.

What if it wasn't
just a bunch of kids,
this thing,

what if it really did
have to do with
civilisation?

They envied and resented us
coming from nowhere,
swarming all over,

with gormless, beatific looks
and pompous claims
about living your experience.

Was that it, then —
where they'd been trying to get to,
all along,

with their fancy theories
of what it meant
to be human?

We sensed their anxiety
and didn't like it,
so we twisted the knife.

We went astray —
 we lost it
 with the straights.

Left to ourselves,
 we could build
 a hobbitty little scene
 and cultivate some wisdom,
 but we were young and
 other people's problems
 were beyond us.
 When they had digs at us,
 we blamed them.

Foolishly,
 we abused
 the in-group/out-group game.
 We slipped into this falsity,
 so when the straight world
 came roaring back,
 angry and more complicated,
 many of us flipped
 and bought the package.

PRACTICE

When confused,
 we begin, collectively,
 to do ourselves in —
 violence afflicts us
 when we're mystified.
 So the thing is not to be
 mystified,
 but to be de-mystified instead.
 That made sense.

Only, the Dialectics Congress
 was not so into
 demystifying us,
 more them —
 they are hooked on violence
 and spread it.
 We must show them up.
 If people knew,
 they wouldn't go along.

It was good to have a conference
 on what was going wrong
 and ways to deal with it.
 It was good to talk

of understanding
 the back and forth
 of people's stories,
 and of how
 stories and people get stuck,
 like a vinyl record —
 and of how this
 comes out in complex rituals
 where we project
 our denial of ourselves
 onto each other.
 Yes — and, still,
 it was all somehow out there.
 We rarely looked in.

Ginsberg did,
 in his fashion,
 with his squeeze-box and his patter,
 cobbled together from here and there,
 and that crass, cynical
 New-York-Jewish wit.
 Busy with his career,
 he worked the room —
 and sometimes told a truth.

What's in the mind unrecognised
 gets projected randomly
 onto whoever's there —
 and soon we all
 fall to fighting shadows.
 So, best pay attention,
 get a focus,
 build a little wisdom —
 all it takes is practice.

A SUMMER

The pundits snigger:
 'If you can remember it,
 you weren't there.'
 Why they won't remember
 is —
 they don't dare.
 Somehow,
 the mythical 1960s
 scare folk witless.

The thought of a free spirit
 is strangely distressing.

That's not an option, surely?
 To step away
 from reassuring gloom?
 To start afresh?
 Oh, stop it!
 We love our victim status,
 you can depend on it.

That's one take
 on civilisation —
 it keeps us safe
 from the terror
 of starting each new breath
 with no clear sense
 of where you'll end.
 'Protect me, Lord,' we pray,
 'from freedom,
 from taking what comes,
 and making my way
 as well as may be, day by day.'
 So: people choose defeat.
 Then they put on a brave face
 and claim they're strong, because
 they refuse
 to be at anyone's mercy —
 even the universe's.

And these folk
 then proclaim
 they want to help
 to keep the show on the road —
 the current show, with a role for them.
 It's got to be better
 than breakdown, they say,
 (and if the policy hurts,
 that's inadvertent).

They're caught in the game —
 money, status, competition.
 If life has more to it,
 they don't want to know,
 and don't think people do, generally.
 Likewise,
 there was no flexing-point
 in the 1960s.
 Forget it — never happened.

It did, though.
 It was a strong, sudden,

collective experience
that soon faded
but had been so different
it sticks in the subconscious —
a memory that's
difficult to articulate, but throbs
when the pressure gets too strong.

Notes on contributor



After the Dialectics Congress, Geoff Bamford studied Indian philology. Later, he did cross-cultural communication training and consultancy. After downshifting, he ran the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies and established the Oxford Mindfulness Centre. Now retired, he would be happy to send anyone the full version of 'Truth Games' and discuss it.