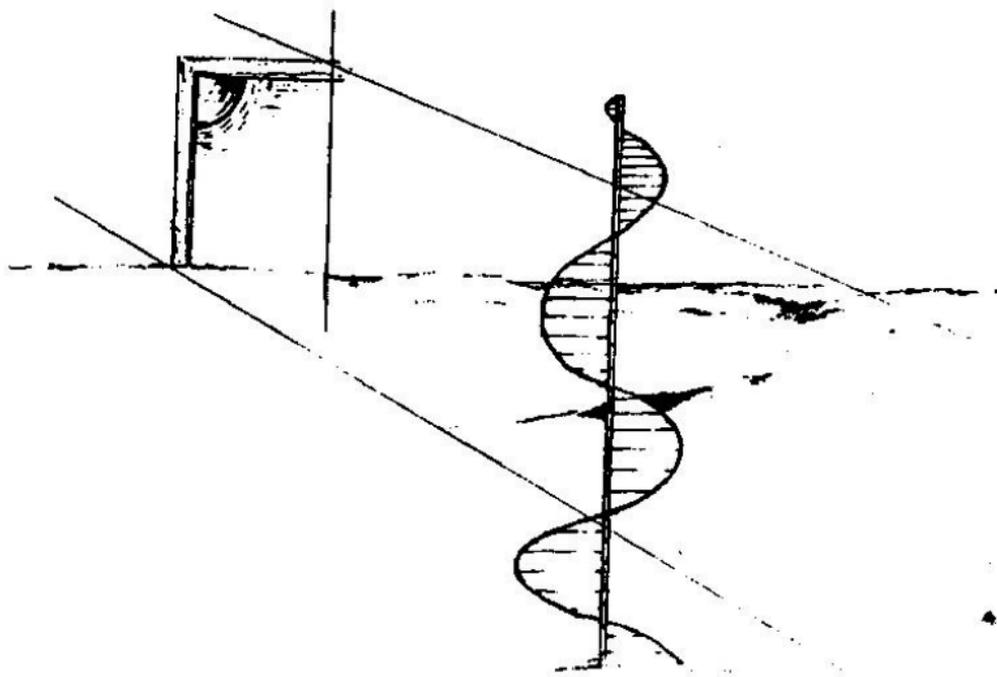


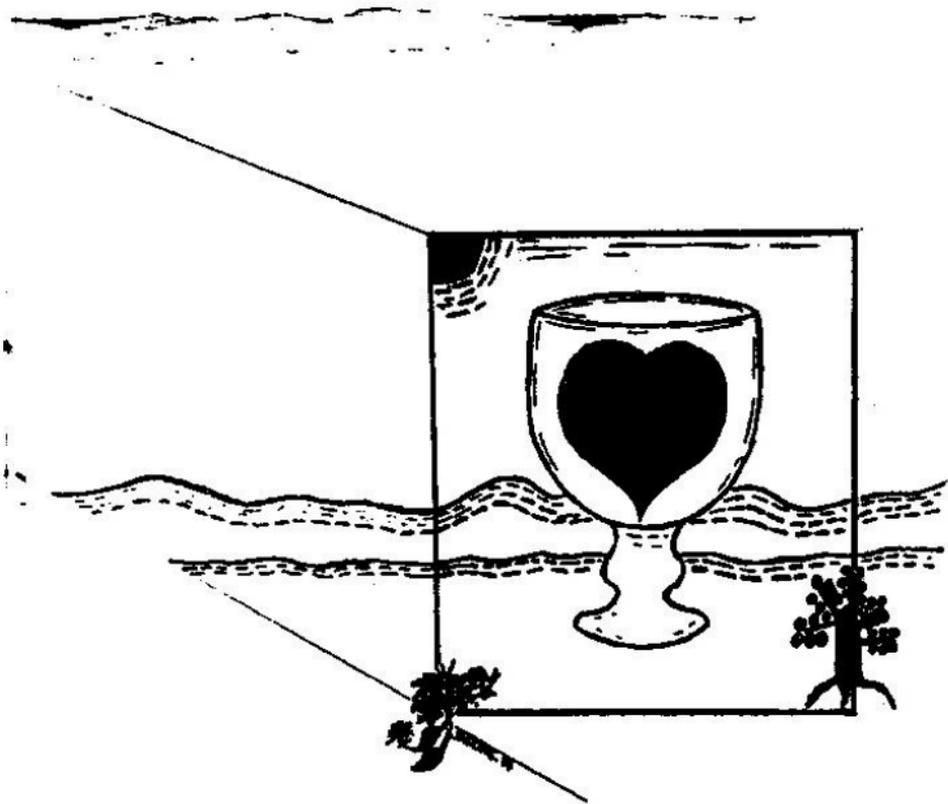
## The Outcasts



# Sylvia Hikins

---

## The Outcasts



The Outcasts: Sylvia Hikins

Merseyside Poetry Minibook Series No. 24

First published by Windows,  
22 Roseheath Drive, Liverpool L26 9UH, Merseyside.

Copyright © Sylvia Hikins, 1985

All rights reserved.

#### Acknowledgements

Some of these poems have previously appeared in *P.M.*, *Tops*, *Smoke*, *Link*, *The Women's Paper*, *Fall Out*, *Medicine and Society* and have been performed on *BBC1*, *Radio Merseyside* and *Granada TV*.

ISBN 0 907950 25 6

Windows receives financial assistance from Merseyside Arts.

## THE OUTCASTS

Seals bask upon sunlit rocks  
like couples who have just made love;  
the sea surrounds, its darker blue below,  
unseen, rips out cliffs; we are on show  
as strangers treading lightly as we go.  
We spawn in waters warm and deep  
deflected by a sun willing to shine on outcasts  
as they come.

Some might judge us wrong, finger the machine gun;  
fearless, we sing our song. Seals know  
the sea has laws alone. They set their jaws.  
We join them.

## MORNING

Through warmth and kindness  
love surfaces  
to open us slowly  
one petal at a time  
full and beautiful  
like blossom on the bough of a tree.

The gentle breeze  
blows without violence,  
penetrates where it wishes.  
Lovers do likewise.

## SCOUSE SOUP

for Liverpool City Council (with apologies to  
Marx and the Marx Brothers)

What this city needs is  
Rufus, D, Firefly.  
When his country was bankrupt  
he secured 20 million dollars  
and also shut a strong faced woman up.

Yes, Rufus. D. Firefly.  
When the clock on the wall struck 10,  
All the loyal ladies and patriotic gentlemen  
Sang the National Anthem when  
The clock on the wall struck 10.

*Calling all nations, calling all nations.  
This is Derek D. Firefly coming to you through  
the courtesy of the enemy. We're in a mess folks.  
We're in a mess. Where's my secretary. Take a letter.  
You are cordially invited to attend my teaparty,  
Signed Mrs. Thatcher. Tell her I accept.  
Have you ever had kittens?  
No, of course not, you're too busy running around  
playing bridge.  
The train, to the train. We have an appointment in  
Westminster again!  
I can't go with my trousers up?  
Well, they'll never catch me any other way.*

*Jenkin,  
here's the Treasurer's report  
I hope you find it clear.*

Why, a four year old child could understand this report.

*O. K. Jenkin. Go out and find a four year old child.  
Now Jenkin.*

*The meeting - once more,  
we'll take up old business.*

**I WISH TO DISCUSS YOUR BUDGET**

*Sit down, that's new business.*

*No old business? Very well, we'll take up new business.*

**THE MATTER OF YOUR BUDGET.**

*Too late, that's old business, sit down.*

*How about lending this city 20 million pounds you old  
skinflint.*

**20 MILLION POUNDS IS A LOT OF MONEY**

*O.K. In the meantime, can you lend us a fiver 'til payday?*

**GENTLEMEN, YOUR AUDITOR.**

*The auditor is out of order. Come to think of it,  
so is the plumbing, take a note of that. Never mind,  
I'll do it myself.*

*Don't look now, there's one man too many in this room  
and I think it's you.*

*Jenkin, you haven't stopped talking since I've been here.  
You must have been vaccinated with a gramophone  
needle.*

*Jenkin, enough is enough,*

*This is the bottom line You won't shift us Jenkin.*

*We won't move an inch*

*We won't flinch.*

*It's war, it's war.  
This is a fact we can't ignore.  
Harness the horses, gather the forces,  
hi de ho, hi de ho  
to war we're going to go.*

I AM WILLING TO DO ANYTHING TO PREVENT  
THIS WAR.

*It's too late. I've already paid a month's rent on  
the battlefield.*

*What did you say - dig trenches?*

*And ruin the factory gates?*

*We haven't got time to dig trenches,*

*We'll buy them ready made.*

*The general reports a gas attack*

*and doesn't know what to do?*

*Tell him to swallow bicarbonate*

*and stand well back from the loo.*

*And now gentlemen, we've got to start looking  
for a new treasurer.*

BUT YOU APPOINTED ONE LAST WEEK.

*That's the one I'm looking for.*

*Jenkin, would you like to join the mint?*

*The last man nearly ruined this place*

*He didn't know what to do with it.*

*If you think this country's bad off now,*

*Just wait 'til they get through with it.*

## BREADLINE BRITAIN

18 million of us are in a hungry state,  
18 million of us want somewhere to live,  
18 million of us want clothes and heat,  
18 million of us want meat.

Waving from a Whitehall window  
they say, lobby your MP  
they say, write an article for New Society  
complain to your local authority  
they say, demonstrate - that's democracy.

18 million, like 36 times my city,  
Like, everyone living in London,  
Like, the population of East Germany,  
18 million of us are in a hungry state.

Oh mandarins of Whitehall peeping behind chintz  
and blue rinse,  
does the delicate green moss  
grow on your papered walls  
and fungus sprout like candy floss?  
Do you lie awake at night  
and listen to the panic of a bronchitic child  
coughing into the candle light?  
Do the rats run squealing from your lift shaft's rubble,  
does your toilet bubble?

Oh Prime Minister, and Deputies, Chancellors and  
Exchequers,  
are your waistlines getting thinner,  
do you put on your Oxfam togs for dinner?

Oh economists and treasurers, fingers on the national till,  
when the confetti post comes in the morning,  
do you dread the final bill?  
Could you manage to pay  
the rent, the golf club, the wife, the Egon Ronay grub,  
American Express, BUPA, VISA and Access,  
on less than a fiver a day?  
IX> you wonder how you can buy your next meal?  
Are you forced to steal?  
What's the language of poverty, Mr Minister of the arts?  
Where's the War on Want, Mr Minister of Defence?  
How's the nation's health, Mr Minister of Wealth?

Always the incomplete statistics,  
the speeches that side step the truth,  
always the inept apology,  
that it's all in the interests of the economy.

18 million of us want clothes and heat,  
18 million of us want meat.

## FROM HARPO TO GROUCHO

*(for those who can't communicate)*

I am your quiet one,  
I hold my tongue,  
drunk as drunk on all sweet things,  
hair in disarray,  
I am the dark, deaf mute,  
with bird song.

You dance and whirr  
forge iron wit to seize  
a lion's share of the wisecracks  
to measure and fightback  
underneath that irreverent moustache,  
specs and giant grin,  
would you encourage me to speak,  
would you let me in?

I am softer than marshmallow,  
gentle as maiden's fern,  
would you be glad,  
would you let me try again,  
would you show concern?

As day's end falls into night  
I flow outwards to dreams  
where future kisses lie,  
a child of light,  
a child of light.

Most recessions of the heart are numb,  
devoured with unspoken words  
disguised delirium,  
a toy earth, a toy sun.

Someday I'll run  
loose woolly curls streaming  
and just for fun  
turn stones to birds,  
statues into screaming herds.

But now,  
I am your quiet one.  
I hold my tongue.  
Yes, I hold my tongue.

## **IT'S A FREE COUNTRY**

A 42 year old collapses  
with cardiac arrest,  
A young man gets blown to bits  
in Northern Ireland,  
A child opens its mouth  
to breathe out death

They say, it was the 42 year old's fault  
- ciggies, obese, suffering from gout.  
They say, the young man should never have taken sides.  
They say, the child's father should plant grain  
instead of prayer.

A worker is crushed on a picket line,  
An unmarried mother blows her head off,  
A man hangs himself at GCHQ.

They say, police must keep law and order.  
They say, the girl was temporarily unbalanced.  
They say that a man lives in a free country -  
he has the right to hang himself.

*"The incentive for girls  
to equip themselves for marriage  
and home-making is genetic. "*

**Crowther Report**

- I. Pack up all my cares and woe  
here I go  
to the disco - ho,  
bye bye blackbirds,  
when somebody waits for me  
saccharine's sweet  
but spoils my tea,  
bye bye blackbird,  
no one seems to love and understand me,  
oh what hard luck stories they all hand me;  
shut the door  
put out the light  
I'll be home  
    late  
tonight  
    blackbird  
        bye bye
  
- II. Once they were parallel doves  
winging together in the same direction,  
two mobile loves, twinned and flying.  
Now she wants to send him black flowers,  
make a wreath to crown his impassive forehead,  
pile on the black flowers  
until his head cracks  
and his mouth cries out  
with sharp remembrances.  
She wants to hurt.

III. Between them  
waters like a motionless current  
his shoulders  
twin pillows of snow,  
he stands naked, shivering in her room.  
She cannot help him.  
His words send her into exile.  
She feels separated, adrift.  
The motionless current does not take  
her to him.

IV. It's over now.  
She has returned to his bed.  
She feels a pain of arms wind round her,  
it lifts her slightly upwards;  
she has given in.  
She has let him occupy her eyes,  
watched his body come breaking across  
a noiseless landscape,  
to possess, re-affirm, regain control.  
Everything seems set for tragedy.

I. No one seems to love  
or understand her,  
oh what hard luck stories  
they all hand her,  
shut the door  
put out the light  
she'll be back  
late tonight  
blackbird - bye bye.

Heady Sunday,  
too much wine (and truth)  
to sing, women, no longer winging,  
waiting, singing old wartime songs.

*Don't turn away the W.A.A.F.  
They will be needed by and by.  
We are the girls of the barrage balloons,  
Ready to do or die.*

If sixty were young and death uncommon,  
All the same disconnections connecting again,  
The crazy southern households with their smoke  
unfurling,  
Must not forsake the idea or the failing year.

*Don't turn away the W.A.A.F.  
They will teach the boys how to fly.*

Which demons with wings pitched at this ceiling,  
John Big with his trigger, his push button bigger,  
Where are the lines, where are the trenches,  
Where do we play?

*Right behind the lines (pushing a pram)  
Right behind the lines (pushing a pram)  
If it wasn't for the W.A.A.F.  
Where would our Airforce be?*

A few lost songs,  
a little lost innocence,  
Peter Pan's promises to Wendy's lost boys,  
the webs are out at Greenham,  
women are ringing,  
the same disconnections connecting again,

as autumn hits the suburbs,  
let's remember that,  
as hands clench empty glasses,  
let's remember that.  
as the sky grows red with terror,  
let's remember that.

## **DREAMS**

Dreams are like fireflies you chase  
but can't catch,  
you can see them  
but they never get you anywhere.

Animals don't dream; daylight  
on the boulevard  
they fuck outright,  
yet in rooms where men and women embrace,  
flames burning up the sky,  
the animals are chaste.

Like broad lines of medals  
you can wear dreams in your head,  
and stay intact, the action over  
and someone else dead.

We all need dreams.  
When we set fire to our lives  
dreams keep us sane,  
stand out like stones in the rain.

Dreams keep us in chains.

## MERSEYSIDE POETRY MINIBOOKS SERIES

---

**SYLVIA HIKINS** leads an active life because she believes that health, politics, music, poetry, education, peace, art and science all overlap and deserve action.. She also tells silly jokes, is prone to talk in a Japanese accent, chairs some committees, teaches at Mabel Fletcher Technical College and runs Toulouse Press.

She shares events with a piano, a guitar, the phone, a bed, a dog, a cat, a rabbit, B.B., SPA, MFTC, the CHC, , the Why Not, CND, the DLP, the DLP/EC, the DHA, NATFHE, OSC ANFIELD Helen Sharon Jennifer, Harold, Billy Doux, Pinky, Penketh, Mr Ross, Scanlon, and other numerous people too beautiful to mention.

She also writes poetry. Her previous publications include **Empty Sheets with Poems on the Back**, **A Black Look on the Bright Side**, **Book of Revelations** and **Just Me**.

**WINDOWS**

ISBN 0 907950 25 6