

## Poems

**Brendan Moohan**  
**West Lothian Council**

*Hailing originally from the 'honest town' of Musselburgh, the young Brendan was a punk who started his working life as a Miner in Monktonhall Colliery in 1982. He took an active part in the miner's strike of 1984/85, which had a significant effect on the future direction of his life. Amongst other things his experiences developed a strong interest in the Labour and Trade Union movement, poetry, literature and education. He returned to full time education to study for a degree in Community Education 1997 and has worked in the field since his graduation. He currently works for West Lothian Council as a Senior Community Education Worker with a responsibility for youth work.*

### **The background to the poems**

The three poems attached were written as a reflection of events which have shaped my life. The first poem *High Street* is written to rap rhythm and is a performance piece. It was composed whilst walking up the High Street from Moray House and it was an observation of the various aspects of life and history in the street. It is also a protest against the term Royal Mile which gives ownership of the place to the ruling class and aristocracy. The High Street is home to the homeless and the poor as much as it is to the wealthy. And the last lines reflect the suffering 'greet' and rain at feet (wet feet!) angrily reclaim the territory.

The second poem speaks for itself and was written about my experience of union rallies during the miner's strike. The banners were works of art and dedication which reflected the gratitude of the miners for the achievements of the NUM in safety at work, wages and conditions as well as the social and community aspects of union involvement. Most importantly was the standard 'education' which adorned all banners. Miners saw education as a way for their children to escape from the pits and have a better life. They also, via the union, saw it as a means to challenge their bosses and fight collectively and more effectively when protecting or improving their lot. It was no accident that many of the most articulate men in the pits were the Union men.

Finally the poem about Orgreave was composed after much deliberation, it was a difficult memory to capture the essence of. The poem is deliberately pacy and chaotic to depict a scene which can only accurately be described as a police riot. The part at the end reflects the moment of truth for me that the BBC was not the neutral observer of events, which it was presented as globally, but a manipulated arm of the state to be used to protect the interests of the Tory government of the time. It also reflects the fact that I am one of the few people in this country who has actually heard the riot act read out.

I hope these provoke thought.

Brendan

## High Street

Rattlin' rain and a piper plays  
And drunks doss on the streets  
And the wind and the howl  
And the bagpipe drone  
And the cobbles beneath my feet  
And the Hackney cabs  
And an open top bus  
And the smell of chips in the air  
And the scowl of a man with an angry face  
Says look back if you dare  
And the cashpoint queue  
And the souvenir shops  
And the Celtic craft creations  
And the court and the council  
And the Saltire sits  
Aspiring to a nation  
And pizza places  
And the coffee cups clank  
And the tourist traps and talks  
And the Tolbooth, the Tron  
And Midlothian's heart  
And the house of John Knox  
And the beggars and the tellers  
And the Big Issue sellers  
In the shadow of the esplanade  
And the toffs and the toughs  
And the top hat and tails  
And the hostels of the Canongate  
And those with riches  
And those with style  
Will call it the Royal Mile  
But we who greet with the rain at our feet  
Will call it the high street  
Will call it the high street  
Will call it, the high street.

**Banners**

Grandly they flash  
Like sails in the squall  
Held strong by proud men  
Each one rich in colour  
And history  
With portraits of leaders  
And pit wheels  
And golden threaded edges  
From places like Polkemmet, Kinneil  
Monktonhall and Longannet  
They are the essence of pride  
And their words  
Unity, Solidarity, Strength, Dignity  
The soul of man in the modern age  
But one word is on every banner  
And it stands above all:  
Education.

## **Orgreave**

Marching in the warm sun  
From the bus in Sheffield to Orgreave  
In this battlefield we arrive  
Like Cossacks meeting tanks  
There is something in the air  
This is not good  
Then hell is unleashed  
In horses and dogs  
And batons and shields  
And visors and stones  
In the tramp of feet  
In the screams of kids  
In the shouts and taunts  
And I smell fear  
I feel terror  
And it is not my feet  
That take me  
But another, unearthly force  
And all day the charge  
Forcing further back  
No cameras can record  
We are here to be smashed  
And the riot act is read  
'Any more than three persons ...'  
And we build a barricade  
And fight from behind the fire  
A stalemate of cops and young men  
It is not about fuel anymore  
It is personal  
Slowly in ones and twos  
We leave  
To the sound of sirens  
Along the motorway  
Slowly we return to  
The BBC news  
Twisted to attest  
To our aggression.