

Review

Edinburgh Recovery Activities, (2020) *Letters from Lockdown*, pdf available from Concept website

Letters from Lockdown is proof that even the ominous cloud of Covid has a silver lining. Six writers were asked to respond to the theme in a creative way, and they have risen ably and admirably to the challenge with a collection that is, by turns, prophetic, wise, clever, funny, poignant, prescient and vital.

I felt particularly moved by Stephen Christopher's piece *Shielding*. Though written in the third person, the truth and authenticity of what he has written makes for compelling reading. The sort of detail and empathy with a character that can't be manufactured. It made me cry. I think everyone working in health/care or public services should read it - in fact we all should. It would help us understand and treat each other with more dignity and kindness. Likewise, Ruby Tuesday's satire *Judgement Bingo* is a scathing indictment of the top-down society in which we live where, it seems, everyone points the finger of blame at the poorest and most vulnerable among us for their own misfortune and the ills of the world in general. Using the metaphor of a game, she deftly conjures the one-upmanship that pervades our flawed mindset, showing how, for some, corona has become a convenient bandwagon from which to sling mud at benefit claimants, young people, and even those mistaking queuing protocols in supermarkets. Signed by 'The Ministry of Faultfinders' it reminds us how those in power seek to distract us with a strategy of divide and rule.

Dear Manic Pandemic 2020 by Jeanette Cousland is a whirligig of panic buying, house arrest and unlikely myths surrounding the virus; the hilarious proposition that 'you can catch it from a fart' for example. In this world 'even the seagulls ken there's something sketchy going on!'

Seagulls also feature in The White Rabbit's *Some Birds Are Real* – a fantastical foray into an underworld where they are surveillance and guidance devices. It starts out innocently enough with a character we can all relate to called Marigold, who 'had decided she was absolutely, definitely going to do something useful during lockdown'

and is haplessly led down a portal where it is revealed to her she's the custodian incumbent for the 41st simulation of the human race!

On the subject of time travel, Karen M's *Lockdown – In History and Present Day* provides a sobering perspective to our predicament in the First World War, The Spanish Flu, mad cow disease and the millennium bug. Whilst here in 2020 'people were walking their dogs, and the dogs looked completely confused as to why their owners were muzzled instead of them!' Karen's piece documents bizarre and positive aspects of lockdown for a futuristic audience, and concludes with a touching epistle that 'the new 'normal' be a better, more caring, thoughtful 'normal' than perhaps we had before.'" In a similarly poignant tone, *Your Time is Running Out* by Annabel Crimson is an urgent call on humanity to live in harmony with nature, in which she tells us in the voice of the virus that 'the whole conscience of the universe is within each of you'. Reminding us we have the power to make a choice to live ethically, she puts the challenge starkly to the reader: 'what will it be?' – a fitting place, if any, to end the book.

All in all, this is a collection that will surprise you, delight you, and above all make you reflect. Like all good journeys, I returned from its pages feeling inspired, invigorated and eager for more.

Jo McFarlane, Poet and Activist