



An Open Invitation to Review for *LIRIC*

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Author Note

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Introduction

The white policeman who shot the Black child and was acquitted... I was really sickened with fury, and I decided to pull over and just jot some things down in my notebook... And that poem came out, without craft. (Lorde, 1984/2007, pp. 106-107)

Audre Lorde's words from decades ago could have been written yesterday. Racial injustice and police brutality are not new, and this year's outrages have brought protests, such as Black Lives Matter, to the fore.

COVID-19, now a global pandemic, and its economic impact, environmental catastrophe—and actions around anti-racism—have certainly got me out on the streets again, face covered and socially distanced.

As well as reading and writing, I have found radio and podcasts a calming way to take part in different 'conversations.' Here I plan to share some of these audio treats, and one video party, with *LIRIC* readers.

In the references at the end of this short essay, I have listed some poets, memoirists and essayists whose work might be new to you: Angela Davis (1971), Jackie Kay (1998), Audre

Lorde (1984/2007), Natasha Trethewey (2020), and Louise Fazackerley (2020). Some of it was new to me. I have now incorporated some of these creative resources into writing workshops and research.

Critical voice: Huh, I don't know who you think they are, these people who might be the *LIRIC* readers?

Me: Shhhhh

Growing up, BBC Radio 3 was not family listening in our house. One friend said that our mix of singalong and pop was 'low brow.' These days, listening to more radio and podcasts from BBC Radio 3 maybe means I am going more 'hi brow.' I think it is more that their spoken word programmes and presenters have changed—and for the better. There is something about a voice in your kitchen, your home, taking that voice out with you on 'allowed' walks during these very strange months. A voice that has been very important to me is Jackie Kay's.

'Maw Broon Visits a Therapist,' and More...

When the Scottish Makar (the national poet or laureate for Scotland) and activist Jackie Kay (1998) writes satirically about therapy in the poem, 'Maw Broon visits a Therapist,' a lot of the students where I have taught counselling and psychotherapy do not get the references. Kay mocks the therapy industry's rituals, the clock, and 'the wee box of tissues' (p. 47) from the point of view of Maw Broon, a cartoon character who wears a headscarf, and carries a shopping bag as battered as she is, or more usually, a mop and bucket. Maw Broon is a Scottish comic icon from 'The Broons' in the *Sunday Post*. The dialect is thick and it does not take long to 'translate' but that is not the point. How welcome would Maw Broon, or any woman of her age and class, feel in your writing groups? How have you achieved that?

Louise Fazackerley, a performance poet from Wigan, facilitates writing groups in places where Maw Broon might feel at home. Fazackerley calls them 'a United Nations of women' around a table in a women's refuge in the North of England. In a YouTube clip she performs her spoken word poem, 'Writer's Group at the Women's Refuge' (Fazackerley, 2020, pp. 47-49). Her other recent print collection *The Lolitas* (2019) also featured on the *The Verb* (BBC Radio 3), in an outstanding episode this summer.

The Verb is unusual. Hosted by Ian McMillan, the Bard of Barnsley, the accents are Northern British, Caribbean, and South Asian. It is full of humour, where appropriate. In July, one episode focused on ‘Domestic Violence in Language, Myths and Fairy Stories.’

The episode was so good I have listened to it twice now, not at 10 o’clock on Friday night when it is broadcast in the UK, but on BBC Sounds. Listening on demand at any time of day is a particularly good thing. In addition to introducing me to Louise Fazackerley, I had also never heard Natasha Trethewey read before. In a low voice, Trethewey chose extracts from her new book, *Memorial Drive: A Daughter’s Memoir* (2020). She is a former United States Poet Laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner and, in keeping with the focus of this episode of *The Verb*, her mother was murdered by her stepfather.

Debbie Cameron, meanwhile, a feminist linguist who describes herself on Twitter as ‘word spinster’, pointed out how abuses of language, particularly the way violence against women is reported in the media, needs to be challenged, very urgently.

And finally, Kathryn Williams used song lyrics to tell very personal stories.

The Verb is always worth listening to by anyone who loves language, but this episode highlighted the power of words to change the writer, the reader, the listener and even the world. How are you working with these moments and movements in your writing, listening, and reading?

Words Transforming the World

As a teenager, apart from reading the Broons, Jackie Kay grew up with a picture of the imprisoned black American activist, Angela Davis, on her bedroom wall. She laughed about it when they were filmed recently, talking together about racism, universities, misogynist violence, and feminist sons (Cambridge Sociology, 2019).

Part of the Black Power movement in the 1960s, and accused of being accessory to armed robbery, Angela Davis was known worldwide and campaigned for, as a political prisoner, before she was acquitted on all charges. She edited *If they Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance*, soon after her release, and it was published in the UK in 1971 (Davis, 1971).

Angela Davis talks about being a witness to a historical moment when many people did not expect to survive. The depth, humour and warmth of this conversation bears multiple viewings. Both Jackie Kay and Angela Davis have written autobiographies, under some duress

from publishers in Davis' case, and this programme caused me to wonder if their writing was a therapeutic process or more like twisting knives in wounds? You might want to ask yourself about that.

Angela Davis and Audre Lorde are American activists, poets, and essayists. Audre Lorde, whose work forms a trajectory from the early 1970s poems, speeches, and essays, in *Sister Outsider*, re-issued in 2007, to the *Cancer Journals*, published in 1980 and now a Penguin Classic, died in 1992. Self-described 'black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet,' Lorde's work has resurged again in writing workshops and research. If you have not come across any of Lorde's work, you have a treat in store, starting with an episode of *Free Thinking*, another BBC Radio 3 programme.

I love being read to, and when poems are spoken out loud, they come alive. In this programme, Audre Lorde's children read from some of her poetry. Jackie Kay reads from letters she'd received after meeting Audre at the first Women's Book Fair in London in the 1980s. Hearing their voices read, their comments on what reading the words mean to them, is a powerful and moving experience. The performance artist, Selina Thompson, comments in the same programme on how Audre Lorde's writing is her legacy for young black activists *now* as well as in earlier movements.

Critical Voice: This is hardly a review is it? You have enthused, no critical thinking at all.

Me: Shhhhhh. There's no need for all reviews to be 'critical.'

Angela Davis (1971), Jackie Kay (1998), Audre Lorde (1984/2007), Natasha Trethewey (2020), Louise Fazackerley (2020). Would you like to review any of these authors' works, with their latest books ranging from memoir to poems? Do you have your own list of great works and would like to review one of those? We would love to hear from you.

References

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Jeannie Wright PhD has been a member of Lapidus almost since its beginnings. Now in a Lapidus group based in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and South Yorkshire, we identify with Robin Hood. She has taught and researched in several universities and practised writing for wellbeing in community agencies internationally. She has been a reviewer and editorial board member of journals mostly connected to talking therapies and is delighted to be part of the new Lapidus journal, *LIRIC*. *Reflective writing in counselling and psychotherapy* is now in a 2nd edition with Sage. Editing books like *Writing Cures* and producing other publications that show how fantastically useful creative writing is will continue and she is now writing more poetry and fiction.
