Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru

O Ben'groes at Droed Amser

by Karen Owen
with Maggie Ogunbanwo

A Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru and National Theatre Wales production

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O BEN'GROES AT DROED AMSER (FROM PEN'GROES TO THE FOOT OF TIME)
by Karen Owen

Opens on a chiming Bangor Town Clock

Then cuts to home, looking down Heol Buddug . . .

(Karen comes out of the house and gives it a bit of an angry slam)

I know it's my fault – I remember too well. And nothing makes me angrier than someone who remembers things wrongly. Misremembers. Or even tries to remember as they go. Of course, some can't help it, and I've got nothing against them, as long as they don't try to twist their version of events and call it the truth . . .

A SHORT SERIES OF TEXT MESSAGES BETWEEN KO AND MAGGIE
Karen: Hiya. Going for the bus now. See you in about seven minutes.
Maggie: OK. Looking forward to it.
Karen: Me too. I hope we remember our words!

I'm lucky. I've got a really good memory. Most of the time, it comes in handy. But not when you need to forgive. Take this street, where I was brought up and you can't expect people who've moved here to remember all the quirks and history of the place. The house that I live in now was the first house to be built in 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee – and that's the reason for the royal name. Shame that they translated it as 'Heol Buddug''cause Boadicea was a Celtic queen who took her fight to the Romans quite sharpish after they conquered the ancient island of Britain.

We lived in number 9, Anneddle (two 'n's', another mistake) – Dad, Mam, me and my sister . . . . . when Nesta would cut hair in County Salon (*she points to the shop now called Siswrn Bach)* before there was a surgery in Llys Meddyg and when the old Capel Saron was there (where the new chapel is now) to remind us that once upon a time there were such things as places of worship for poor people.

That's where Gareth Bwtsiar's butcher shop was, that's where the Co-op was, and Cae Ffair was here, and that's where Fair View shop used to be. Someone thinks that they've been clever in translating 'Fair View' to 'Fine View' in Welsh. But it was Fair Field! And from here you could see the fair. Was remembering things easier in the past?

Bears left and over the crossroads towards the old Fic pub

It's funny how nowadays everything's written all over the place telling us what to do. Clap for the NHS. Keep your distance. Remember Tryweryn. But what I remember about the Fic is the morning after the fight the night before, and a big old snooker table been chucked through the window **A** It was there for days, if not weeks, reminding us of what would happen when a mini-bus of lads from Town come up intent on stirring things up for the new landlord on his first day . . .

How could I not remember that all-day session that led to Emma Bach being stabbed in front of her house in Trem. That's an all-dayer that will live forever . . .

I love the squeaking sound the Fictoria sign makes as it swings on its hook; I'd recognise that sound anywhere in the world

Reaches the bus stop, Ffordd Llanllyfni

Performance of BEAT POEM 1 while waiting for the bus

THIS PLACE IS ON ITS KNEES

This old place is on its knees,
the country, it's in pain,
but yet it's us, the down and outs,
who are set upon again.

The temperature keeps rising
as the small man's put to bed,
and somewhere, there are men in suits
who make sure they get ahead.

"And now, look out, we're coming
to close your paper factory down!"
as they threaten to steal the tissues
which wiped away our frown.

But we must bite the bullet
and we should know our place,
and never mind the cutbacks
that deepen our disgrace.

And I remember reading
one night, a truthful book,
which told of politicians
and the easy paths they took.

Much easier is to pull the rug
from under the Welshman's feet,
just as an Iron Lady
tried once, before defeat.

Today, they try to tell us
that we live too far away...
"But far from where?" we ask them
in a social distanced day.

Each hour I feel the fever
of a world that no-one knows,
but I listen for the heartbeat
that no cold suit can close.

The bus arrives and Karen alights and buys a ticket with her card (buses don't accept cash during the Covid-19 period)

Single to Bangor, please . . . Thanks.

Bus starts travelling along Heol y Dŵr

I always opt to turn left at the square and go for the bottom stop, so that I can enjoy the sound of the bus's efforts as it gathers speed up the hill. I try not to get annoyed when I see Yr Orsaf on what was Siop Griffiths – there was never a station there, just a hotel called Stag's Head, and the tram that came down from the quarries slowing down sufficiently for people to hop on for a ride down towards G'narfon . . . I wish people wouldn't re-write history.

Gets to the top of the hill with the Red Lion to be seen on the right

My great-great grandfather, Harro Bach, used to go to the Red Lion to wet his whistle, with the excuse that he was going to read the Daily Mirror to the illiterate! He was the bass drum player for Nantlle Brass Band for forty years, but god knows how – keeping time and reading small print when his veins were full of whisky? Genius . . . or one of those people who makes the right moves at the right time and fools everyone.

Stops at the Red Lion – Maggie comes on the bus and sits next to Karen

K: And we're on the bus!

M: We are. I have to remember . . . We're on the bus!

K: I want to sound natural throughout, y'know. I've got no script or anything but . . . how's business?

M: Ah. Yes we need to start with "how's the business. Yes . . . Yes!

K: It's been . . . um . . . a strange, a strange month this last month since the . . . um . . . swastika. How are you . . . um . . . how do you look back on that now?

M: I don't look back. I'm very, very, very busy doing orders so I don't think about the swastika. Well, I don't have time to think. But but . . . but from time to time I think . . . it's like a shock it's like a dream . . . dream, so . . .

K: And you're at it making the sauces. That's why you're busy.

M: Yes. After the swastika event I got too many orders, so I've got to just make the sauces . . . and I've been very, very busy.

K: Yeah. And you do that from the Red Lion?

M: Everything at the Red Lion, yeah.

(*Pause. The bus moves on*)

K: Has the . . . has this whole business with the swastika changed your life?

M: Er . . . errr . . . mmm . . . not not . . . well . . . changed . . . well, yes, to be honest, yeah, yes. Because we talk, we talk more as a family about Black Lives and things like that. Sometimes . . . usually we don't talk about race and we don't think, we don't think in colours you know, to be honest, the swastika issue has meant a lot, a lot to the family, a lot to the business. It's meant a lot to me because now I'm . . . I've been an ambassador of not Black Lives Matter – black issues to be honest. You know.

K: And then, at home now, in Pen'groes, there's Femi . . .

M: My husband.

K: And you. Your husband, yes. And Toda.

M: A-ha. My son. And Ilieri.

K: Yes. She's still at home as well, is she? Yes. Mm.

M: She's been home since the . . . ha . . . since the lockdown. The four of us have been through this experience.

K: And are you . . . are you experiencing it in the same way, or have different people in the house . . . reacted in a different way? Have they reacted differently?

M: Ha . . . erm. My husband, Femi. Femi is . . . er . . . ha! . . . he just starts laughing when he's, when . . .

K: Mm. You do laugh don't you, you all smile and laugh. You're a family that . . .

M: Yes. We're a really happy family. But it's . . . I showed . . . I showed the erm . . . the picture, the swastika to Femi and he just laughed. Haha . . . and I was just oooh. And my son Toda, he, he said "doesn't matter, it's it's . . . it's not deep" he said. Ilieri wasn't home at the time. She said, "I just want it over now."

K: It's . . . left its mark, hasn't it, it's hurt you. What . . . what shocked a lot of people in Pen'groes was that, that these Black Lives Matter things were happening on the television and stuff and then something happened in our village as well. That was . . . it had come from a big thing right down to our high street, y'know . . . So, has it changed the way you think about Pen'groes?

M: No, not really . . . erm not really, it's . . . it's true Karen this Black Lives thing . . . or the lives of black people is, is a big issue so, so for Penygroes . . . for things to come to Penygroes, was a shock. But we've come to see where we stand, in the village with people, because there was a lot of support, a lot of, lot of . . . haha . . . people were coming to the door and they were . . . crying! I think that we're part of Penygroes now . . . Penygroes is our village.

K: You're wearing a mask . . . erm . . . on the bus. The Red Dragon.

M: Haha.

K: Why did you choose that out of every other pattern or design?

M: Well it's, it's just me, OK, so I'm originally from Nigeria and now I'm from Penygroes so I'm just saying, I want to say I'm Welsh, I'm a Nigerian Welsh woman. Yes.

K: Is that how you'd describe yourself because a lot of people try to define other people, don't they, but erm . . . if you say Welsh woman-Nigerian, Nigerian-Welsh?

M: I'm a Nigerian Welsh woman.

K: You know when you first came to Pen'groes, you'd had a dream . . . about the place, hadn't you?

M: Yeees!

K: Well, y'know I think that this is an amazing story.

M: You've got a long memory. Haha!

K: Well, too long sometimes, y'know, too long . . .

(*They both laugh*)

M: When I was . . . forty, we went as a family to Pentra Felin, just for a little holiday.

K: Near Criciath?

M: Near Criciath. I was wandering around, just walking, in the morning. And I had a – not really a dream because I was, I was awake . . . I started crying, crying erm right from my heart er . . . aaaand . . . I was wondering what's happening . . . OK, I'm talking to God. I heard – praying, shouting for my people in Wales and I said to . . . ha! . . . to God, "why aren't I, why aren't I living here, why aren't these my people . . ?"

K: Because you were living in Essex at the time, weren't you?

M: At the time I was living in Essex.

K: And there was no connection at all. You had no connection to Wales at all, you didn't know anyone here or anything, did you?

M: I didn't know anyone just . . . Yeah. No connections with erm . . . with Wales.

(*BEAT*)

K: So you went home after your . . . holiday in Pentre Felin. You went back to Essex? Did you? The whole family.

M: Yeah, yeah. Back to Essex. And just . . . forgot.

K: Yes. But you moved here to live! So what happened next then?

(*Maggie laughs)*

M: Well . . . well . . . Well! Two years on, things had changed in Essex. One day my husband said "we're going to live in Wales". "I'm not going!" I just . . . And then . . .

K: You didn't want to? You didn't want to come?

M: No, no, no. I have, I had a life in Essex. Erm . . . I was running three cafés, I was happy. There's family, there's friends in Essex . . . To be honest, I started to lose my hair just at the thought of moving**.**

K: No!

M: And I just remembered the sign two years previously, the crying and the shouting, and shouting for the people of Wales and . . . erm . . . I heard from God again . . .

K: What was the plan? Was Femi arriving with, did he have work, when you came up here? No, you were just coming . . .

M: Just answering the call from God.

K: Yes.

M: So, just like missionaries, to be honest.

K: Yes.

M: It was a big thing – moving. It was a big thing to move to Wales. "Where's, where's Wales?" or whatever . . .

K: But do you, do you regret coming to Pen'groes?

M: Err . . . not . . . well. Well! Well there's a question . . .

K: Some might say, y'know, "why am I bothering to come to this place . . . and . . .?"

M: No regrets at all now but at the time I . . . I . . . not happy . . . yes, yes.

(*Beat)*

M: I've got roots in Penygroes. My, my father was . . . he died in Penygroes and is buried in Penygroes. And I have a business that's moving forward and there's lots of chances, lots of opportunities in Penygoes so . . . we've talked about moving but I . . . I'm not. I'm not sure. Penygroes is . . . is home now.

K: What d'you think make that's happen? Y'know, you've learnt the Welsh language, you've established a business, you've brought up the children in Pen'groes and stuff. Is it . . . is it things like this that make you feel as if you properly belong, so that you can say "Pen'groes is home" or, what is it that makes someone feel . . .?

M: I want to ask . . . to ask you a question**.**

K: Yeah, yeah. You can if you want.

M: . . . but I'm not sure. Um, so, you've lived in Penygroes since . . . since?

K: . . . since I was born.

M: OK, so**.**

K: Yes.

M: What do you . . . d'you . . . So, erm Penygroes is "home" to you.

K: Yes. Although . . .

M: Why?

K: . . . I've lived in other places . . .

M: OK.

K: . . . in the world. Erm, y'know, I've lived in Austria, I've lived in erm different parts of Europe, and spent time in places all over the world y'know but, and sometimes . . . erm . . .

M: So why is Penygroes home? Erm . . .

K: Maybe because . . . well, I don't . . . I don't know because sometimes I want to leave and I do go and I come back, y'know, erm, and . . . there's a feeling erm . . . that I don't have to explain myself . . . erm . . . they know the good things about me and the not-so good things and I don't have to explain erm, y'know there's that . . . and sometimes I feel that they know too much about me . . .

M: OK.

K: . . . and then I swing like a pendulum from one point to the other, y'know, it goes from one extreme to the other aaand, there's something that's comfortable but then there's something sometimes that makes me want to run away.

M: I ran a business in Harlow but in, in . . . it was only in Wales that I got the support aaand the opportunity to erm grow my business so that's important, so it's it's working together just to make . . . I feel as if I'm home. It's erm . . . harder to live in Nigeria at the moment because of problems, because of the government, so . . .

(Maggie laughs)

K: But Nigeria's an independent country. Has been for sixty years. Independent**.**

M: Oh!

K: And some say that Wales should be independent. Have you lived in Nigeria since independence? You never lived there . . . in the time before, did you?

M: No. And . . . erm . . . I remember the place as a child after independence. Independence. Erm . . . there's a story there, to be honest. Nigeria has its independence from Great Britain but there are still . . . roots aaand stuff, so we're not completely independent, to be honest**.** That's a long journey I think aand even now we're just trying to break the links, the links and . . .

K: You speak three Nigerian languages!

M: Well, I speak a little of the three languages, because there are three main languages in Nigeria. There are more than six hundred languages in Nigeria, all told**.**

K: But in *pidgin English . . .* ?

M: Oh! *Pidgin English!*

K: You know what I mean**!**

(They both laugh)

K: How much of a shock was it, arriving in Penygroes, and y'know . . . no-one of colour living in Penygroes. Was that a shock? I'm sure a lot of people would've found that hard, wouldn't they? Erm . . . you know was, was . . . how were things in Harlow? Were there a lot of black people living in Harlow, then . . . when you were there?

M: Firstly, in Harlow, there aren't many . . . erm black people . . . but, but before coming to, to Penygroes I . . . I did my homework *(laughing)* erm . . . we knew there weren't many black people, so we were prepared really. I think that our family are a little bit strange because we're happy just to go, whether I'm black or white, I'll just move. Not, not erm moving and then looking around and "are there . . . are there any other black people?" So . . . so . . .

K: Are white people racist, without knowing that they're being racist?

(Maggie laughs before answering)

M: I think that white people are a little bit erm sheltered, they don't . . . don't have a lot of experience of other people, and I think that schools don't help because they don't teach people the true facts or erm . . . history or . . . because in history, within Welsh history there are lots of stories of black people. I've, I've learnt since coming to Wales. Erm . . . I didn't . . . know before, so I just think that there's the problems of ignorance. I. Erm, I've heard say "people fear what they don't understand" and that's, y'know, that's . . . I think that, I believe that that's people's problem. But there are racist people, but just – not many. For instance, the person that draws a swastika on my garage door. That's just . . . racist to be honest

K: Yes, it is. But it was the wrong way round wasn't it?

(They both laugh)

M: Yes it was wasn't it? But . . . but I didn't think "O, that swastika's done wrongly", I just thought – that's a swastika – and that's a hate symbol, y'know. Y'know**.**

K: Yes. And it's the intent isn't it . . . you know . . . yes.

Arriving at Stand A, Caernarfon Bus Station

PERFORMANCE OF BEAT POEM 2

MY WHITE SPOT

If all of us were born on a hill
ond the mountain of life, ponder we will
one random morning, untimely and tame,
we wanted so bravely to make our own name,
and in that anonamous village we smiled,
we craved for adventure and death that was wild,
where the laughter was drunken and tears full of brine,
the steepness of loss as addictive as wine.

There's never a choice but to follow the road
and search for the viewpoint that's brighter than broad,
as I climb to the top of my own, white spot,
climb without resting, because that's my lot;
my hobnail boots, my socialist trends,
and god looking down on my mess and my friends,
and he'll smile as we struggle to find our way,
but i hope he will also blow my tears away.

Yet how will I know, with no signal or sign
whenever I have reached the finish line?
Around me there will be no anchor or clue,
apart from the clouds and the sky's own blue;
but if I shall see the old garrison town,
and if I should see Anglesey's crown,
I might glance to Dublin on a clear day,
but maybe it's the fog that gives it away...

that's when, all alone, I might understand
that the closest I'll get to a helping hand
is in crying the tears, and making a stand.

KO's journey on the second bus, between Caernarfon and Y Felinheli

(The English voice on the loudspeaker notes that we are at "Caernarfon Asda" and then immediately at "Caernarfon Morrisons")

Why do all the big things have their own bus stop in Town? McDonald's, Tesco, Asda and Morrisons . . . it's like the system makes it easier to support them. A great ugly 'M' that you can see for miles . . . Tesco, that started out buying and selling the product of the plantations . . . Wal-mart in Wales . . . and the supermarket that skins us by giving us petrol vouchers as a reward for buying food – think about it . . . It's no surprise that the first thing to open after Lockdown was the Big Mac drive-through with its chicken nuggets. Mind you, the bus wouldn't take you there – so people would pay £25 for a taxi to fetch their six quid's worth of Happy Meal. What happened to us, eh . . .

(The English voice chooses to translate "Môr Awelon" as "Waterloo Port" as it passes that stop)

Bloody hell! As if the Castle itself wasn't bad enough, do we have to commemorate every battle that every captain and slave owner ever fought too? Granted, perhaps the Duke of Wellington was a good bloke, but I read somewhere that the Battle of Waterloo was fought and won on a Sunday. Playing soldiers on the Sabbath? We weren't allowed to do that in Pen'groes!

(The English voice again declaiming "Feroooodo" and this brings a smile and an impersonation to KO's lips)

"Feroooooodo"? This fella never smelled the old car brake factory, or he wouldn't be saying its name in such a posh voice. The smell of eggs and smoke and burning plastic, all mixed up together, hovering heavy and long in the air, and its reach wide, depending on the direction of the wind. And this is where there was talk of building a prison for local criminals that otherwise get carted off to Liverpool . . . but there was no chance. Too many expensive houses round about, and we couldn't have the mothers of Welsh-speaking thieves and drug dealers visiting their offspring here, could we? Now they've asked for permission to build a heritage centre on land that's still full of asbestos, for the 'new normal' tourists . . .

(The English voice again, declaring "Plas Menaaai" as the bus turns towards Y Felinheli)

I know that I say this every time I pass, but this is where Dic Jones said, in answer to my question after going for a walk by the river, "What did you see, Dic?" and he answered, "*Plas Menai plys mynwent*". (cemetery). Classic. He'd come to adjudicate in the eisteddfod of our cynghanedd writing evening class, that night . . . The cemetery is Llanfair-is-Gaer and that's where Nain and Taid, Mam's mam and dad, are buried. Nain – Enid Siop Bren, the woman who loved so much that she married twice. And was happy. That's one hell of a feat.

(The English Voice struggles with "Cerrig yr Afon", the care home near the sign for Y Felinheli)

You'd have thought that he'd have learnt how to pronounce these Welsh names. He's been murdering them on this bus for years . . . But it does make me laugh. What else can you do, eh?

(KO thinks on this, before reflecting philosophically as she speaks)

It's just struck me that maybe the incomers who haven't bothered to learn Welsh wouldn't know where they were if he pronounced them properly . . . Maybe that's where we're at . . . people who are untouched by the Welsh language . . . living amongst us for so long that they have their own names for our places. Not in English or Welsh, but in say, Marinaese or Incomerese . . .?

Mind you, Mam used to say that she and people she was in school with didn't recognise the Portdinorwig of today. So many media types that have moved in living like English people, but in

Welsh. Big houses. Cars and boats. You only need look up at one of those houses by the Church that's got such huge flat-screens in the window, you can read its subtitles from the bus stop!

Mam was brought up in Wern. Number eight. Funny, we went up Tafarngrisia in order to pass it on the day of the funeral. Not that anyone much would remember, but Mam could relay who lived in every house from 1 to 96 right to the end . . . and faithful old friends like Joyce could remember, and Doctor Helen, and Alwenna and Einir, Gareth, Ieuan and Alwyn Philips . . . because they were 'Old Felin'.

Down that way, towards Garddfon, is Menai Street. where my great-grandmother, Frida was murdered in cold blood. By a Welsh-speaking man. Frida lived on her own and would go on the ferry every day to work on the HMS Conway that was moored in the middle of the Menai . . . and she spoke three languages because her father came from Sweden. I've been into 24 Menai Street, and into the bedroom. I went to Sweden once as well – to 'Hwtenboi', or Gothenburg as we mistakenly say – looking for her father, Wilhelm Bruin's home. He became William Brown after landing here on the boat. But the Masthugget area had been turned into some kind of dock full of flats – very like the G'narfon of today, to be honest. Arthur Wynne killed Frida in December 1949. Another one who should be in that jail in Ferodo, but instead he's living in a huge house worth £400,000 in east Sussex. But that's a story for another day . . .

I wonder halfway between which two places the old Halfway lay? Billy, the owner of the Garddfon pub has done a good job of converting the old pub into housing. When I lived on the Marina for a while – yes, and I had an invisible cleaner called Barbara who would drop in twice a week and do a quick wipe of the surfaces when we were out – the Halfway was somewhere between tremors and sleep . . . when Haul ar y Môr's fridge was empty, Iwan would have to pop over so that he could get a good night's sleep. The day after, he would make sure that he'd bought four bottles of white wine so that he could make it through the night without the shakes . . .

(The English Voice mispronouncing "Nant y Garth" and KO despairing again)

He's getting worse, not better! The signal's so bad in this spot, that otherwise I'd phone the bus company. I'll write to them. To complain. I must remember to do so.

Passing the wall of Y Faenol

Some say that Dyffryn Nantlla could have done with their own Faenol or Penrhyn Castle. I say "be careful what you wish for". As it was, we didn't have just one boss of all the quarries, but rather more of a free for all, with loads of businessmen from outside the area flocking in like they did in the Wild West and started to compete against each other. Sometimes, it feels like that old strain is in all of us. But in the quarries of Dinorwig and at Bethesda, there was one lord, one common enemy that all the workers could despise . . . and it has to be said that this united the quarrymen . . . It does make you think about how much stronger people are together – that's fine on paper, isn't it, but then, who, in truth, wants to share their *bargen,* their allotted section of rock, when things are going well?

Of course, there's no such creature as Lord Penrhyn nowadays – no-one wants to carry the burden of the name of a former slave trader. People DO remember their history, good and bad, as long as they get to understand it. And yet . . . it's as if selfishness has colonised us deep inside, and no-one gives a damn about that. We should be painting "Remember who you are" on every long stretch of wall.

Turns at the top of Allt Faenol for Penrhosgarnedd

We're not far now. Nant y Mount is a strange name . . . but not as strange as the wonkiest roundabout in Wales. This one. Who thought to put a camber on a roundabout that Ysbyty Gwynedd's ambulances have to navigate tens, if not hundreds, of times a day?

I've only ever once been in an ambulance. And that was the night of Mam's resurrection. It was a cold, odd old experience. The ambulance journey, not Mam's resurrection. I found the ambulance to be a cumbersome, noisy old thing, from the minute the back doors opened and the stretcher was lifted from Heol Buddug's tarmac, and then fixed firmly to a bed trolley, with me sitting feebly in one corner while the paramedic did his job. We were at Ysbyty Alltwen in no time and everyone was prepared for us. The light in the room was a dim flame. The bed was neat with two, three, four pillows there already. Good god, I can't even bear one. I sleep flat, always. But that night at Alltwen, there were pillows as far as the eye could see. Something to make the end a little more comfortable than just lying there and expiring. It was midnight when I phoned my sister to tell her that she should try to get to us . . . and she did. And hours later, when Time was drawing towards quarter to three in the morning, Mam sat up in bed and said "I don't want to die". I was holding her hand and I said, " I didn't think that we had a choice in the matter, y'know," and then she said, "No, I've seen your Nain (Enid Shop Bren, that's at Llanfair-is-Gaer cemetery) and she's said that I have to come back and fight." And I could believe that, because Enid Shop Bren was Enid Shop Bren and there was no big show or nonsense with her.

And then, as if sitting perpendicular in her bed were the most normal thing in the world, Mam announced that she wanted ice cream. In the middle of the night, that is. Don't ask me to name names, because I won't, and it wouldn't be fair getting the salt of the earth auxiliary into trouble, but one of them went and broke into a fridge somewhere in the building and came back with a tub of vanilla. Frank's ice cream it was.

Bus stops at Ysbyty Gwynedd

(KO now in the front seats of the bus – a hint of being on the front-line, and of the threat of Covid-19 to us all. The feeling here is grim.)

PERFORMANCE OF BEAT POEM 3

AFTER ALL THIS

When all the items have been bought and sold,
the songs are sung, and my salt tears will flow,
when we will resume to love and hug and hold
without the doubting of a panic show;

when all our travels, halted aa by death,
are now restarting, amid strain and stress
we will remember, as we hold our breath,
how we did promise once to re-address;

when all financial towers have collapsed
and we will loan the air to stay alive,
did I remove my mask before it lapsed
and nature got to breathe and grow and thrive?

when politicians all resume their place,
by then, the truth shall penetrate and grow,
my selfishness will not give me the grace
but rather my own death, and now I know

there'll be a new tomorrow in each star,
its plastic weapons a redundant cold,
and even though our peace will falter far
it won't be nuclear, like the days of old.

when pain and distancing shall be no more,
the Earth I know shall also be so new,
and in my memory I will still store
the months I waited before holding you.
.

The bus leaves Ysbyty Gwynedd in the direction of Bangor

I wonder what the difference is between a pan-demic and an epi-demic? I know that 'demic' comes from the Greek word for people 'demos' – like 'demo-cracy' . . . not that COVID-19 is democratic though, because it appears that you're far more likely to get it if you're a man, are old, are black or Jewish or Asian. And far more likely if you're poor, or already weak. I wonder how it knows the difference when we're all pink inside?

(At the bottom of Ffordd Penrhos, there's another awkward roundabout, and the bus has to take a difficult turn up to the left to Ffordd Belmont)

It's a shame we're turning . . . if we'd carried on down the hill, I was looking forward to hearing the fella who speaks Immigranese getting to grips with Penchwintan!

(*But the voice on the speaker says "Pen-chwint-en" and KO laughs, but it's a combination of humour and being startled as she takes a peek over her shoulder and considers the possibility that the speaker is secretly listening to her and all her thoughts, before responding to them)*

That's where Gwilym Owen, the "arch-prober and mischief maker" lived, and he wouldn't like to hear me saying that round here is the former posh bit of Bangor. Eithinog, Lôn y Bryn and Ffordd Ffriddoedd. And this is a good name – Fardre (or Vaaaaaredre) – but the little shop that used to sell sweets to schoolchildren has changed its name now to Beauty Bomb! He obviously didn't get the memo *(as The English voice persists in announcing Vaaardre*).

The old Friars School building is beautiful . . . and up there, when I was at university trying to do Maths, is Neuadd Reichel where I would go to the Clay Pigeon Shooting Club. Students from JMJ, the Welsh hall of residence, weren't supposed to venture up here where all the English were, and some questioned me as to why I would go and spend my Saturdays with a twelve-bore in my hand. But I would enjoy aiming and firing and watching the clay shattering to smithereens in the air. Maybe it was a change to have a target, rather than to be one. There was also a boy there who took me out for a date one time, and I happened to say that I liked tea after he'd made me coffee – not that it mattered, because I liked coffee as well. More than I liked him, to be honest. But the next time we went out and went back to Reichel, I got the shock of my life when he produced a pack of 260 PG Tips teabags. I fled, and hid for weeks when he'd come to look for me in JMJ. I don't like men that are too keen to get hold of me in that way. A soft, needy possessing.

Mind you, I don't want you to think that I've been fleeing from commitment ever since. I received two marriage proposals, and I refused both. Looking back, I was right to refuse the first. But I ran out of time and set too many conditions with the second . . .

And here's another Morrisons, where a lot of the lads who beg speak Welsh. And up to the left, in the direction of Tŵr Gwyn, the place where I left so many of my brain cells behind on nights out. Where I learnt that drinking gin makes me cry; that downing tequilas makes me, for some reason, buy a lighter and set beer mats on fire; and that it was worth investing in high heels that wouldn't let me down at the end of the night. Because everyone else *did.* I was never a big drinker after that – maybe because you learn that nice poison can get a hold of you exactly as pure ethanol can. It's Chemistry.

(Silence. Maybe some want an explanation. I'm reluctant to, or can't, say why)

The bus passes Pontio

We've just passed it. Glanrafon. Number 46. Not much of a place, but a place still, and I'm SURE that places remember, you know. Exactly ten years ago, that's where I found Iwan's body, between the bed and the BBC World Service radio, between sleep and the shipping forecast. And yes, his fridge was empty. Gosh, Pontio is a big old place to be locked down, isn't it . . . and to think they spent a fortune bringing over that white stone from Portugal. It's strange how you can feel that white emptiness, even through the glass.

The Post Office was a beautiful building, in its day. And look at it now. That place is bound to remember. Names and addresses. Kisses on letters. It remembers the souls that try to remember things. And trips and postcards and passport photos. It remembers places like this – Neuadd y Penrhyn.

The bus arrives at Stand A, Bangor Bus Station

(Karen texts Maggie)

KAREN: I've just arrived. Are you here?

MAGGIE: I'm by the clock and it's lovely and quiet. See you in a minute.

(Karen gets off the bus, and walks through the high street)

According to Wikipedia, which remembers everything, the Clock was a gift to the people of Bangor from the Mayor, Thomas Lewis, in 1887. He wanted to show them that he was thinking about their health and welfare. Today he'd have bought a bulk order of plastic watches from China and given one to anyone without a phone so that they could tell the time.

Thomas Lewis had trained as a chemist with Meshach Roberts and had opened food businesses at the top of the High Street . . . but there's no sign of those shops today. He built a mill, the Snowdon Flake, where he would grind flour. Would have been handy in this year's pandemic, wouldn't it? Everyone's been 'Cooking to Beat Corona' and flooding Facebook with pictures of their sponge cakes and focaccia. Everyone wants to show that they're doing their bit. Mind you, some just want to show off their worktops.

Thomas Lewis built Bangor Pier as well, to make it easier to brings grain over in boats from Anglesey. It's odd how the hands of the clock turn – there he was, furiously feeding the Bangor Ayes during the 1882/83 typhoid epidemic. At exactly the same time that Florence Nightingale, of all people, was writing letters to the great and good of Bangor, like William Rathbone, offering guidance on how to

look after patients and how to stop the disease from spreading. Strange. During the pandemic of 2020, this is the city that houses the Betsi Cadwaladr health board – named after the nurse who worked alongside Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War.

(Karen walks round to the back of the clock to look for Thomas Lewis's name)

There's a plaque to Thomas Lewis in the middle of these red bricks somewhere, if you can be bothered to search . . . Maybe he didn't want a fuss made. Which makes you think, doesn't it, how some people live IN their life, while others share every little detail of their existence, so desperate are they to be noticed by someone.

I can understand why it's time for so many statues to come down, and even fewer new ones to be erected . . .

(Karen meets Maggie in front of the clock)

M: You're here, Karen!

K: Hiya. How are you?

M: Fine thanks.

K: I see that you've taken your mask off. I'd better do it too.

M: Well, remember . . .

K: . . . to keep two metres apart . . . two metres.

M: Remember to keep . . . two metres.

K: Hey, thanks very much for setting the camera up.

M: I've set everything up!

K: Yes. So . . .

M: In there! *(pointing at the camera)*

K: . . . they're in there, are they . . . the 'new normal' theatre audience?

M: The new normal!

K: I hope that they're there . . . Erm. So, what have you got?

M: I've got a little song. In *Yorba Onyorba.* A Nigerian language.

K: And what's it called?

M: Ah. *Ya nyura.*

K: *Ya nyura.* And what does that mean?

M: OK. It means in . . . Mam is golden.

K: Mam is golden! That's nice. Nice idea.

M: Aha. . . because Mam is, is carrying many burdens, she keeps us for nine months in her belly, and then for three years on her back.

K: She carries you for three years . . .

M: Three years . . .

K: Wow! Good idea. And does every child in Nigeria learn this song?

M: Yes. As children. We all learn . . . erm . . . *Ya nyura.*

K: That's good.

M: So, what've you got?

K: Well, I've got a traditional Welsh poem, because I was telling you that what **I** wanted to do as well was a traditional poem, and it's a *cywydd.*

M: OK.

K: And I haven't told you till this evening, but it's a *cywydd* eulogising you!

M: Ah! Woo-hoo!

K: Yeah. So, *Maggie's Eulogy . . .*

M: Woooo!

K: . . . is the title of the poem, and I hope . . .

M: Exciting!

K: . . . that you enjoy it. Yes. So, shall we do it, then?

M: Let's.

K: Yeah. OK.

(They step back from the camera to prepare. The music begins)

PERFORMANCE POEM 4 – MAGGIE, KO AND THE AUDIENCE

M: Mother you are a precious gem that money cannot buy.
You carried me in your womb for nine months and 'nursed' me for three years.

Thank you mother

K: PRAISE TO MAGGIE

I still recall the story
that tells of how you were called -
it tells of a dream you had,
of a force like god itself
telling you to hit the road
and bring joy to Red Lion;
to take your smile, although sad,
and bring your Lagos outlook.

M: Mother you are a precious gem that money cannot buy.
You carried me in your womb for nine months and 'nursed' me for three years.

Thank you mother

Songs and faith of a mission
would bring god closer to us,
Africa filled your cafe,
old spices of your youth;
Maggie in your free kitchen,
you're the words of difference
and in the cauldron of faith
your heat's hotter than fire!

M: Mother you are a precious gem that money cannot buy.
You carried me in your womb for nine months and 'nursed' me for three years.

Thank you mother

Even when we have to face
today's village vengeance,
when Bibles are used to hate
and Wales is too white to love;
a swastika could divide
respect between black and white,
but white and black are equal,
a smile's a smile in old tongue.

M: Mother you are a precious gem that money cannot buy.
You carried me in your womb for nine months and 'nursed' me for three years.

Thank you mother

Two prayers at the Foot of Time
we send to the stars in faith,
with no place for distancing
or the smashing of spirits;
as we recall the story
of the way that you were called.
as we recall the story
of the way that you were called.

M: Mother you are a precious gem that money cannot buy.
You carried me in your womb for nine months and 'nursed' me for three years.

Thank you mother

(Maggie and Karen move up to the clock as the music still sounds, and two tribes of people join from the side and join Maggie and Karen under the clock to close the show)