



Confessions of a Poetry Virgin

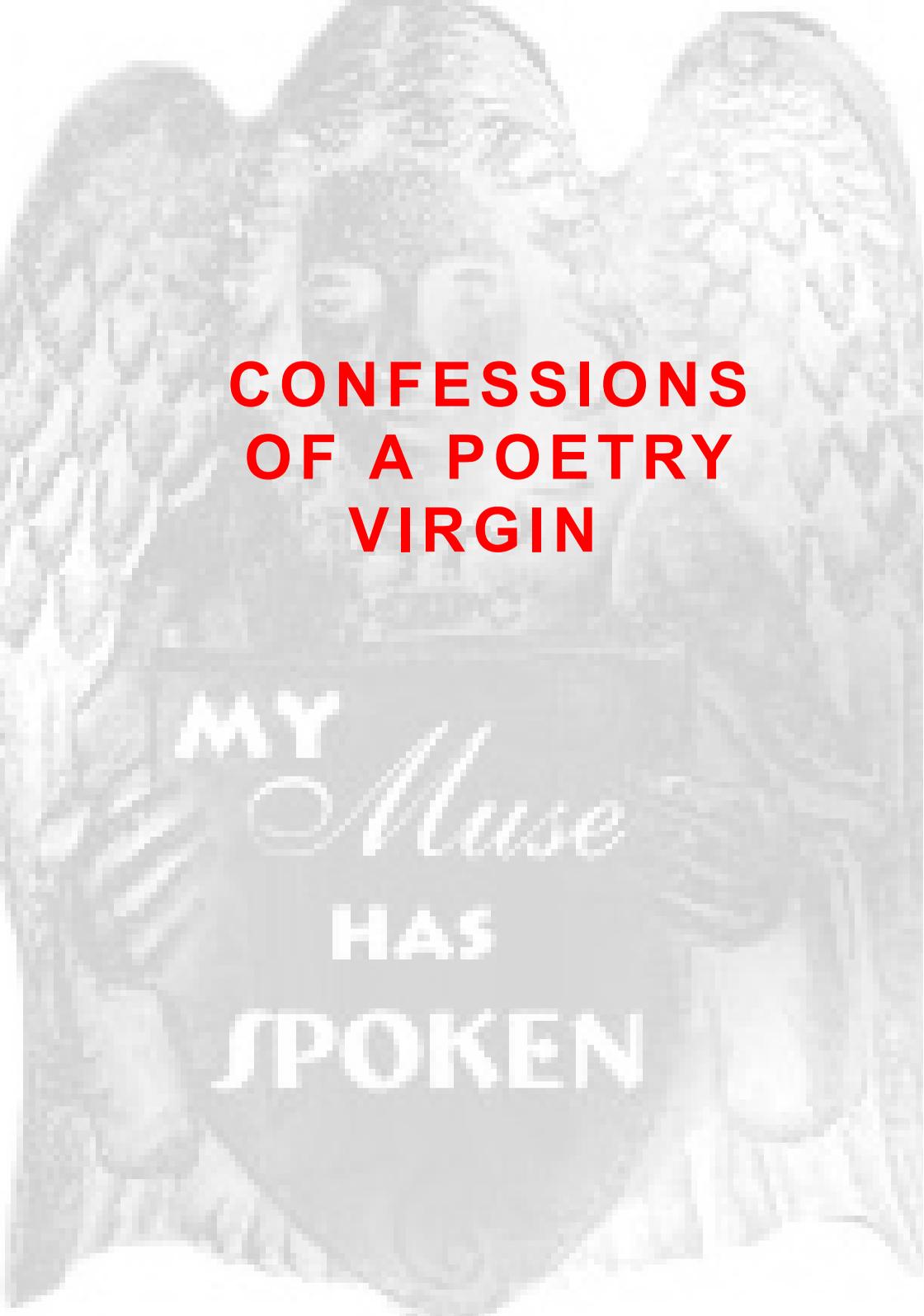
A Debut Collection

[Third Edition]

By Mark Cantrell

'Redhack Press'

Typesetting and design by Mark Cantrell



**CONFESSIONS
OF A POETRY
VIRGIN**

MY



Muse

HAS

SPOKEN

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Email: tykewriter@supanet.com
Web: www.mark-cantrell.blogspot.com

Typesetting & Design by Mark Cantrell

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Confessions of a Poetry Virgin

Foreword by the Author

HANG out among poets for any length of time and you'll eventually encounter the chapbook. This is a self-published tome, typically an A5 staple-bound home made effort, that has long been an essential element of poetic circles. One might almost say they are swapped around like business cards.

These days, the words of a poet have so many other potential outlets, courtesy of the internet and digital publishing, but when it comes to mingling in the social milieu of the poet – at lit fayres, open mics and writers' groups – the chapbook remains an important tool. Call it harcopy file-sharing if you want, but one where at least some kind of fair trade is partaken if not an actual cash transaction.

So, like many a social poet, supping beer at the venues, I self-published a handful of poetry chapbooks. I did the same for some of my essays and prose writing, cheaply binding them, and touting them to peers. I published, they sold in the small numbers I produced (as is par the course for chapbooks – their rarity is perhaps an essential aspect of their purpose), and then they passed into the backstory of time.

Until now.

It seemed an apt time to dust off the old DTP files and re-issue the old paper chapbooks in a PDF ebook format, retaining the old look and feel as much as possible. There's more where this came from, so why not give them a try?

**Mark Cantrell,
Stoke-on-Trent,
4 January 2010**

Foreword To The First Edition

EVER since I first picked up the pen to write, I have yearned to be a poet, but somehow it eluded me.

Occasionally I dabbled, baffled by a form of writing I didn't comprehend. During the first ten years of my writing life, I managed to write around ten. Then this year something strange happened. I started to scribble poems.

More and more flowed from my pen, until I was left wondering what the hell had happened. At the time of writing, I've managed to get around 80 under my belt. I know it's not the quantity, but each new piece of work gives me the sense that I am progressing into something new. My literary activities are expanding like a newly hatched butterfly's wings.

Perhaps it's something I picked up from fellow scribes at the Interchange (Bradford Writers Network), like a cold. If so, then it's a virus I am happy to nurture within my body, and I can only trust my immune system will not take the trouble to eradicate it.

Since then I have been encouraged by the group, and somewhat unnerved by the positive reaction my work has received. Here I am, taking my first steps into the poetry world, and hearing the cooing praise of old hands. Inspiring perhaps, but unnerving when anticipating the inevitable poetic pratfall.

That hasn't come. *Yet.*

Not even when I took to the stage for my debut performance at the Interchange @ the Melborn event. Knees shuddering, heart pounding, stomach trying to crawl out through my mouth, I clambered up on stage and succeeded in not making an idiot of myself.

In a way it was my tribute to Ruth Malkin. Her last gig as MC of the Melborn was also my first as a performer.

They say you always remember your first time. Not me. Not here. The moment that I lost my performance virginity is lost to me; drowned in the backwash of adrenaline. No more than the light gleaming off the microphone, an image of expectant faces in the audience, the beginning of the words. And then the applause as I walk back into the comfortable obscurity of the audience, ready to hear the next poet.

There's a first time for everything. That was mine. Have I got the bug? Possibly. Potentially. I like my audience, I crave attention, but paradoxically I loathe it when I get it.

Here's another first to celebrate the loss of my poetry cherry: my first anthology of poems. Be gentle with me, this is my first time after all.

Oh, by the way — I still don't comprehend this art form called poetry but I am learning.

**Mark Cantrell,
Bradford,
29 June 2001**

Cadence

I'm looking for the cadence,
That resides within our speech.
I'm told it holds the clue,
To poetry *sans* rhyme.
That's my biggest problem,
Rammed into me at school.
Those damned English teachers,
Are certainly no muse.

Bradford, 2 February 2001

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Inspire

Inspiration is the key,
To poetry most free.

Bradford, 2 February 2001

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Reds Under Their Beds

Sleep tight, Mr Bourgeois,
In that bed that looks so fine.
Did you enjoy your feast,
How was the wine?

A good vintage, don't you think?
It was fermented from our blood,
Seasoned with our sweat,
And bottled by our toil.

Did you lap it up, Mr Bourgeois?
The essence of our life,
The stuff of our dreams.
Dried out like winter husks,
We give you all that we are.

Like a vampire you suck our blood,
Like a demon you steal our souls,
Like a twisted Oliver,
You forever cry out for more.

Thousands starve,
Or are put to the sword,
While you whine as you dine.
Our planet is plundered and raped,
Bought and sold like a bauble,
While you feast like a Lord.

But watch out, Mr Bourgeois.
There's something in the shadows,
Have you checked out the closet?

Don't forget under the bed.

That's where you'll find your worst fear.

You must have heard of us.
Fairy tales and old demons, of course,
Long put to rest.

Think again,
As you climb beneath those fine silk sheets
Reds wove them.
Reds sewed them.
Reds made everything you are.

So sleep tight, Mr Bourgeois.
Pull the sheets up over your head,
Because there are Red Bugs under your bed
And they're coming out to bite.

Bradford, 25 July 2000

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Humungous Fungus

My flat is so cold.
The walls wet and dank.
I looked at the place,
And knew the deal stank.
But what could I do?
Except take a lot
Of drugs.
And so hope to hide
From those slimy
Old slugs
Over there by the side.
And what of the fungus?
Growing out of the wall,
So alien and humungous,
I hope it won't fall,
Right onto my face.
In fact, is this all
That is wrong
With this place?
What else could I do?
With the dole so low.
Where else could I go?
Unless I live with you?

Liverpool, 30 November 1993

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Brain Food

I sit here alone,
And stare at the screen.
I'm pondering some words,
For something to write.
Inspiration is here,
Hiding beyond sight.
Frustrated I sigh,
And reach for another pint.
I want some words,
A tapestry of thought.
Something to do,
That stops my nerves,
Becoming so fraught.
There is no respite,
The Word Monster
Hungers.
And I am its food,
It eats me alive.
Brain first.

Bradford, 19 April 2001

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Flirt with the Qwerty

The muse has Qwerty nipples.
No, not dirty, Qwerty.
As in the keyboard.
She has 26, not including shift.
We fondle them joyously,
When she whispers in our ear.
Faithfully we commit her every sin,
To the written page we stain.
But what of those who use a pen?
The same metaphor cannot hold?
Or can it?
Is it not strange,
That the first three letters,
In our penis form a pen?
But what is this?
A metaphor too far?
Surely this is silliness,
For what of women and of men.
Some use keyboards,
While some use ink.
There's surely no distinction.
But I don't care,
For here's my muse,
Her Qwerty nipples on display.
Once more I must caress them,
Now goodness here's my pen!

Bradford, 2 February 2001
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Twilight's Shadow Twin

Dwarfed by my shadow.
What does it see?
This vacuum of me?
Does it look down,
And where a little frown.
At the puny little man,
That stands in its light.
Yet without me,
What can it be?
I give it shape,
If not form and being.
Only in darkness,
Or light absolute,
Does it dissolve.
My twilight birthed twin,
You are nothing,
Without me.

Bradford, 3 February 2001

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Tory Scum!

Hey you!
You nasty Tory vermin.
Who the Hell are you
To give me such a sermon?

You say I'm far too idle
To do some honest graft.
And then along you sidle,
Always on the prowl,
Looking for the poor
To sting
And make them howl.

You're just a nasty thief
With bully-boys on hire.
You steal my job
And call me yob.
You make me poor
And call the law,
Yet still it's not enough.

Damn the idle poor,
You say,
Their life is not so tough.
Then turn the screws
You make us lose,
All to feed the Rich!

But note this
You nasty Tory slime!

We're the ones
That feed you,
We're the ones
That clothe you.

We make you look so fine.
Your wealth is made by us,
The hated scum,
You'll always fear.

Liverpool, 30 November 1993
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Hidden Poem

I know I have a poem.
Somewhere deep inside.
There's only one slight problem.
It knows exactly where to hide.

Bradford, 19 January 2001
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Darkness Hates Our Light

Like oil it pours,
Through the streets,
Of our souls,
The darkness
Seeks to drown the light.
In it's wake,
Runs the rage,
The anger,
The hate,
The fear.
Like the dark,
They drown our souls,
In the darkness,
Of bestial thoughts.
We float,
In that sea,
Of rage and hate,
Awash with the
tidal ebb,
Of violence and
Petty aggression.
Unless we find,
An oasis of light,
That ocean of
hate,
Will wash us away.

Bradford, 24 April 2001

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Qwerty Nipples Has The Muse

Like a carefree lover,
I dance with my muse.
She is virtuous and free,
So long as she stays mine.
But faithless and callow,
She is when she strays.
Ever demanding,
I come when she calls.
Worked to a sweat,
And left drained of all strength.
For days she might leave me.
Lost and forlorn.
Wondering if ever,
I'll taste her fickle joys.
At the point of despair,
She comes calling at last.
Once more in her favour.
I reach out my arms,
And lovingly caress,
Her qwerty nipples.

Bradford, 2 February 2001

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Angel In A Cage

All she needs
Is a pair of wings
And then she'd be
An Angel true.
Bright blue eyes,
And golden hair,
Made to glisten
In the sun.
Pale skinned face,
So delicate and soft.
She almost glows
From within.
Made for sunlight,
This human orchid,
This living ode
To Feminine grace.
But here she is,
Lost to the sun.
Enclosed instead,
Within a glass cage.
Trapped in shade,
Cocooned from the world.
My Angel,
Just say yes
To my Devil's request.
So empower me,
To reach out and touch,
Give me the freedom,
To caress you fair skin.
In such an act,
Embolden me please,

And allow me to free you,
From the shade's cool cloak.
Come into the light,
Join me as one,
And there let us bask,
In the sunlight joys,
Of our mutual delight.

Bradford, 23 June 2001

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Gem Poem

Inspiration might find the gem,
Bit it's perspiration's polish,
That furnishes the jewel.

Bradford, 2 February 2001

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Orchid Girl

There she is,
My delicate orchid
Girl.
Her day spent
Trapped,
Within that
Glass cage.
All day long,
She fend for
waifs and strays,
From shopping's sins,
Handing out fags and choes,
To all who come.
Even me,
Who strays so close,
Like a moth to the
Brilliant flame.
Then a smile,
Those blue eyes light,
Like piercing lasers,
Gazing into my soul.
I look at her face,
Her features made for
Sun.
I long to take her out,
And let this dazzling
Orchid,
Look splendid in the
Light.

Bradford, 15 June 2001

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Therein Lies the Tale

The story is in the words,
Some say.
Built from the assemblage,
Of nouns, adjectives and verbs.
But there's more to a story,
Than its syllable frame.
There's the performance,
And the concepts,
Hidden among the words.
And still more,
There's the vault,
Of hidden thought,
A reader brings to mind.
Through that sheet of paper,
And its stain of ink or print,
Human minds converse,
Ours to theirs,
Writer to reader,
Down through each age.
Therein lies the magic,
Of literature,
Both poetry and prose.

Bradford, 28 March 2001

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Waiting for some Inspiration

What are you doing,
Sitting there alone?
I am waiting,
Comes the reply.
Waiting for what?
I ask.
For inspiration,
Of course,
It'll be along in a
Minute,
I am sure.
The hours tick by,
Still there's no sign.
Perhaps it's like
Waiting,
For a bus and
Three will come along at once.
Why are you waiting?
I ask again.
I told you, I'm waiting...
I know, I know,
Your waiting for
inspiration.
But isn't there something,
You can do while you
Wait?
Instead of staring into
Space?

Oh no, is the reply,
I have to wait,
Otherwise it might
Miss me.
But what is this inspiration,
You seek?
I don't seek, I only wait.
It's magic, it's arcane,
It's the heart of the soul,
That bubbles forth
Words and ideas.
Is that it?
Is it not more?
What of imagination,
And hard work?
Why wait, shouldn't you instead
Search?
Don't be daft,
It hides from those who seek.
It only rewards those who wait.
I am the conduit, the vessel,
Its clothes.
It moves me,
Controls me,
When its mood takes.
I can and will only wait.
I left him there,
Staring vacant into

Space.
I went on my way,
I turned round a corner,
And there it was;
My inspiration,
Waiting for me like
An old mate.
We went for a walk,
Had a good talk,
Sunk a few beers,
And exchanged some
More talk.
We went our ways,
And I went home.
And there was that bloke,
Still waiting.

Bradford, 15 June 2001

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Creativity Unbound

Creativity is my sanity,
My reason for being.
Or is it the other way round?
Is sanity my creativity?
Or is the muse my shrink?
Coaxing me back from the brink.
Still more,
Am I the reason for creativity?
Without me, could it exist?
If I were gone, would it remain sane?
I impose order on its chaos.
Stamp meaning on its irrelevance.
I am a gateway,
As well as a barrier.
Letting nothing come through,
Quite unfettered and free.
Who is the master,
And who is the slave?
Creativity: am I thine,
Or are thee mine?

Bradford, 2 February 2001

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Dark Hides Creation

Beyond the shadow of our horizons,
Lies a dazzling array of creation.
Universes yet unborn,
Jostle with the bones of
Those that were.
In the mindscape we find them,
Like gemstones in a cave.
If only we have the guts,
To venture through the shade.

Bradford, 12 February 2001

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Squatters Without Rights

In the midst of plenty,
We starve.
In the face of the cold,
We shiver.
Drenched in rain,
No shelter.
In need of air,
It's poisoned.
Our world is not our home.
Like cattle we are penned,
In prisons known as nations.
The Rich live as Gods.
We endure as serfs.
Capital moves free,
We are bound and gagged.
They took our home.
Enclosed the means to live.
Squatters on our own world,
Exiled from human life.
This is our home.
Our world.
We need it to live.
Wrapped in razor wire,
Defended by guns,
We are beggars at the gate,
Of our own natural palace.
We made this world.
We made the Rich.
Now it's time,
To end this serfdom.
Time to sever the wire,
And smash the guns.

Time to topple the Rich,
And win back our world.
The Rich are the squatters,
The parasites and vermin.
They stole our world,
They shackled our life.
It's time to take it back.

Bradford, 5 April 2001
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Free As The Words

In prose I am,
And in prose I've been.
It allows me to go,
To places
I've never seen.
Here in the words,
I'm free as the birds,
Taking flight in fancy.
Join me here,
And then you'll see
A place where you
Can truly be.

Bradford, 2 February 2001
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About the Author

MARK Cantrell has been writing since before time began, which is no mean achievement since he is only 40 years old.

Indeed, it's a paranoid fear that the universe is only a figment of his imagination that keeps him writing. Should he stop, then it might fizzle out, leaving him in a difficult position to get a decent coffee.

At the moment, he has no idea what happens in the next chapter of reality, but he is working on it. He briefly toyed with an asteroid heading on a collision course with earth, but then saw a spate of such disaster movies and thought better of it.

In the meantime, he has written four novels, is toying with his fifth and sixth, written and had published several short stories and has turned his hand to poetry.

Professionally, he is a journalist and works in Manchester to tide him over until he works out what to do with reality (it's an expensive business being master of creation).



POETRY. FREE



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