

Dot Cobely - Four Poems

Cogs

There's an intriguing illustration
on this leaflet that the neuro team gave us.
Looks like somebody had fun
playing around with those little plastic wheels,
presumably from disassembled toys –
kiddies' clocks and trains, construction sets, etc., etc.
The apparent interlocking of the cogs,
the balancing of sizes and colours –
it must have taken hours of work,
from the initial brainstorming sessions
through to design and layout,
printing, marketing and distribution,
so much money, time and effort spent
to put a new spin on the same, sad old story.
But wait – Exciting New Breakthrough, it says,
Could this be the Future?
No wiring to misfire, no living cells to die,
I'm tempted to think it might be an improvement.

A Trip to the Brain Bank

On the surface of it one brain
looks much like any other,
like the coral that bears its name,
a convoluted colony of polyps surviving
on their own little planet.

Or like a Celtic knot of serpents, limbs and heads
emerging, Escher fashion, in a struggle to escape,
or burrow deeper in. Or maybe like a walnut,
the pale naked kernel exposed
like a mollusc hunched in its shell...

Thank you so much for coming,
says a young researcher, smiling brightly.

It means a lot to us, meeting people like you.

People like me – as though I'd sprouted
an extra head or something.

But I smile back, desperate to clutch
whatever straws they might offer
to plug the gaps, those black holes
in my memory, and in my, you know –
oh, what's the word for it? – my comprehension.

Neurosurgery for Dummies

Having detached the head

part the hair at the back,

then take your knife

and slice through the scalp

from nape to crown.

Peel the skin off in one piece,

taking particular care

around the lips, eyes and ears.

The skull should be

hygienically disposed of.

Scrape and clean the skin,

setting it aside to rest

while you shape a form –

take your time with this,

use your imagination.

Once you are satisfied

fit your choice of eyes

then carefully apply the skin.

Now fit the new head in place

and stitch firmly in position.

If things don't seem quite right,

you can make adjustments

while checking in a mirror.

Be sure to take things easy

for the first day or two.

Baseline

What year is it?

Which day of the week?

Please put a tick in the box.

Yes, I can do this.

Remember the items in this list:

Velvet, Apple, Table, Church.

I will ask you about it later on.

Now I will read a list of letters,

tap your fingers on the table

every time you hear an 'a'.

Oh, for pity's sake!

I can feel my attention start to drift.

Velvet, Apple, Church –

but then, how will I fare

next year,

or the year after that?

Count down from one hundred

in 7's.

Oh my god!

How many words can you think of

that start with an 'f' ?

I think of one –

You have 60 seconds.

OK.

Fish, fork, foot, f...

Feather, feel, fun, ff...

Furbelow, fenestration.

Fart.

Yes, you can correct it,

but please add your initials and the date.

Copy these in reverse order after me.

What week of the day is it now?

You have 90 seconds.

Dot Cobley's poems appear in numerous anthologies and magazines, including The Rialto, Smiths Knoll and The SHOp. She underwent neurosurgery for trigeminal neuralgia, and has recently been diagnosed with Parkinson's