

## Submission

*Adrian Duncan*

I originally intended to submit an introduction I wrote to a book that doesn't exist. The book was a four-volume biography of Stewart Jessop (b.1894 d.1968) – histologist, philatelist, prominent/ controversial politician, father. Jessop, who did not exist, was loosely based on a mixture of Sigmund Freud, Ernest Jones (one of Freud's Committee members), medical practitioners around the late Victorian period, and some engineering lecturers whose lectures I would have attended in college during the mid- to late-1990s. Jessop, in this fictional introduction, is described as a man of extreme and earnest rigour, who, through his heroic scientific efforts, finds a cure for defective parathyroids. However, two incidents contributed to an about-turn, and I subsequently decided to write and submit this work, rather than the introduction to the fabricated book about the fabricated person, to this esteemed, or at least existent, literary journal.

The present submission comprises the above explanatory note about Jessop, a poem, a description of an incident with my father, and a video piece I made in 2010, entitled *Flies that Curve Fleeting Geometries into the Place*. The video work features footage of a forest to the rear of my grandmother's house as well as some recited text. In the text, I spliced autobiographical and fictional written material. The video piece was shown as part of an exhibition in 2010 in the Joinery, an art gallery in Dublin. The exhibition itself was a solo show called *How the Mighty Have Fallen*. I posted it on Vimeo, and you can find it there today.

Regarding the first of the two incidents mentioned above (the incidents that led to my about-turn): I received a letter yesterday morning in the post from a young Scottish poet called Sandy (Alexander) Brown, who, according to his letter, has had some small successes in the publishing world to date – having been published in quarterlies like *sHop*, *Scotia Review*, *Cencratus*, *Renaissance* and *Blind Serpent*. In the envelope, along with the handwritten letter, was a folded photocopy of one of Sandy's poems, which had featured in a recent edition of *Renaissance*. He had encircled the text with a lurid pink highlighter and told me that my video piece, which he had come across online, had inspired this particular poem, "Aberdeen" – and that he thought it would be nice for me to see it. (The photocopy has

been scanned and appears at the end of this text). Presumably, so as not to alarm me, he wrote that he had found my address on my website, and furthermore, that he had recently bumped into (what transpired over the course of their conversation to be) a mutual acquaintance – Elaine Henderson – and told her of this latest poem and its genesis\*. To which she apparently said, “That’s great,” and, “My regards to Adrian,” and, “I hope he is doing better.”

The second incident came later in the day when I was having a pint with my father (who visits me in Dublin every Tuesday on the pretense of helping me with engineering work) on the ground floor of the Lord Edward pub in Christchurch. I stepped outside the pub and returned a missed call from an unknown number that I had received earlier in the day. The person on the other end of the phone, after some longwinded misunderstandings, relayed to me that this was her partner’s phone and that he had tried to call me earlier in the day because he was looking for an Adrian Duncan, who, apparently, is his biological father. I enquired after his age, then I told her that I am a thirty-two-year-old man and highly unlikely to have sired her partner, as he was seven years older than me. My father, however, is also named Adrian Duncan, and it slowly occurred to me that as there probably aren’t too many Adrian Duncans in Ireland, that this thirty-nine year old man could well be my half-brother.

I returned to the pub and told my father of this curious phone call, whereupon he fell silent. His eyes started to water and he slumped and said... I can’t remember exactly what he said. In any case, he, this thirty-nine year old stranger, is his son.

To summarize, I began innocently inventing – through the retrospective writing of an introduction to a book about Stewart Jessop – a fictional character called Stewart Jessop. Then I received a poem in the post, from a stranger in Scotland, which was written in response to my video piece, which is itself half fiction, half autobiography. Then, later on that same day, it became apparent to me that the man whom I knew as my father for the last thirty-odd years is a fiction, and that I, as “his eldest son,” am also a fiction.

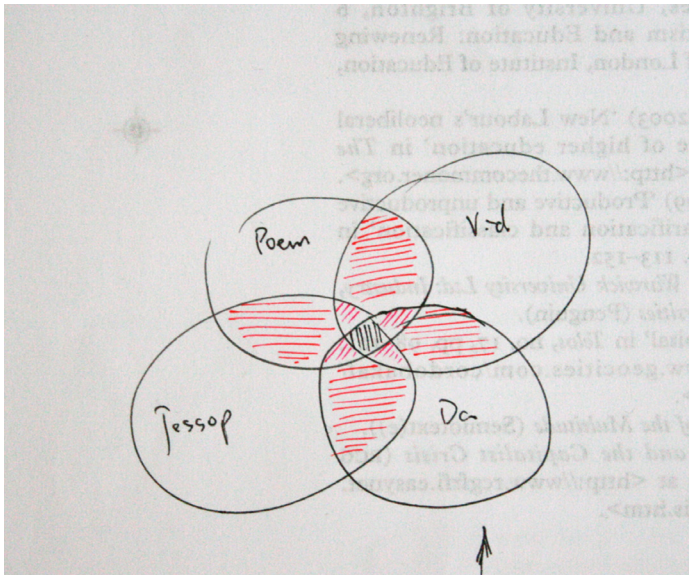
Who knows what seam of truth will rupture next? And what strange and confounding gunk, of unknown origin, will burst in upon me?

(\*\*) That *hysterical* imagery aside, what if we were to travel in reverse from the teleological endpoint described above, refragmenting the contributing elements of this submission back into their basic constituent parts and analyze them anew? This unfortunately cannot be done without accepting the contaminating pre-knowledge we have of the elements now. Nonetheless, I suggest we analyze the elements as separate sets and then analyze the relations between these

sets, of which there are four:

1. The video piece, *Flies that Curve Fleeting Geometries into the Place*.
2. The poem, "Aberdeen," by Sandy (Alexander) Brown.
3. The introduction written about the fictional Stewart Jessop.
4. My "father," as was known to me.

This morning, being unable to sleep, I quickly sketched this set relation:



I present four sets – Video, Poem, Jessop, Da, or, for brevity, V, P, J, D.

Using very basic set theory language we can discuss the relations and what makes the sets related.

Using the notation  $n$  as “intersection” or “common to both sets”, i.e.,  $V n P$  = what is common to both V and P.

And

$u$  as the “union” of sets, i.e.,  $V u P$  = indiscriminately and cumulatively *all of* V and *all of* P.

So, working anti-clockwise around the diagram:

$V n P$ : both are related to engineering and the North Sea.

$P n J$ : both are written in response to a text written by another unknown, and in many respects fictional, person. Also both were written by people with no direct knowledge of their respective muse.

$J n D$ : both are fictional father figures.

$D n V$ : both require me in their definition but also are themselves half real, half fiction, and both share engineering as a central topic.

Now, each of these can be expanded, e.g.,  $D n V$  can be expanded by a further intersection with set P: this is denoted by the small diagonally hatched section. This expansion yields:

D n V n P: all three share engineering as central topic.

V n P n J: all three share the feature of having been begot by fictional or unknown figures, (me included).

P n J n D: all three share the following feature: their defining tenets arrived to me almost concurrently.

J n D n V: all three share their fictions, these fictions having been begot by me.

And finally, relating to the central, black, horizontally hatched segment of the diagram, J n D n V n P: all share their having arrived to me almost concurrently, *and*, that they constitute this submission.

However, one could also say J u D u V u P also constitutes this submission.

So, is the crux of this exercise (or the analysis of this submission) merely saying something so terrifically banal and banally tenuous as: 1. that the contributing factors in making this submission merely occurred, or manifested themselves to me, concurrently, *and* 2. that they all appear in this submission? If so, then of course I can be fairly accused of dumbly responding (or responding dumbly) to a contemporary moment, which will/already has become as irrelevant as any tumbling, eddying moment, apprehended or not. Or worse still, be accused of creating text for text's sake.

However, one could also look behind this diagram and refragment each set into its own primary constituents and in turn refragment those fragments and in turn refragment those fragments, etcetera – thus revealing any number of chaotic particles, whose truths are knowable only to themselves, withdrawing as things rightly do from our will to access.

(\*\*\*) With this in mind, the reversal from this unstable teleological endpoint is itself the fuel for the propulsion forward into this text. The further I delve into the the refragmented past, the further I am removed from this past by writing about it. Also the analysis and rewording of a lived past presents a description of this past that steadily and irredeemably diverges from it. It is as if one were to find oneself recounting quietly one's surroundings, into a cracked full-length mirror, nose to nose, on an early Summer's evening, in the bedroom of a long-gone loved one, with the scent of lake and silage closing in upon you, until some calving beast from a far-off field roars, causing you to look away, and forget, almost completely, what it was your shattered jaw was mouthing.

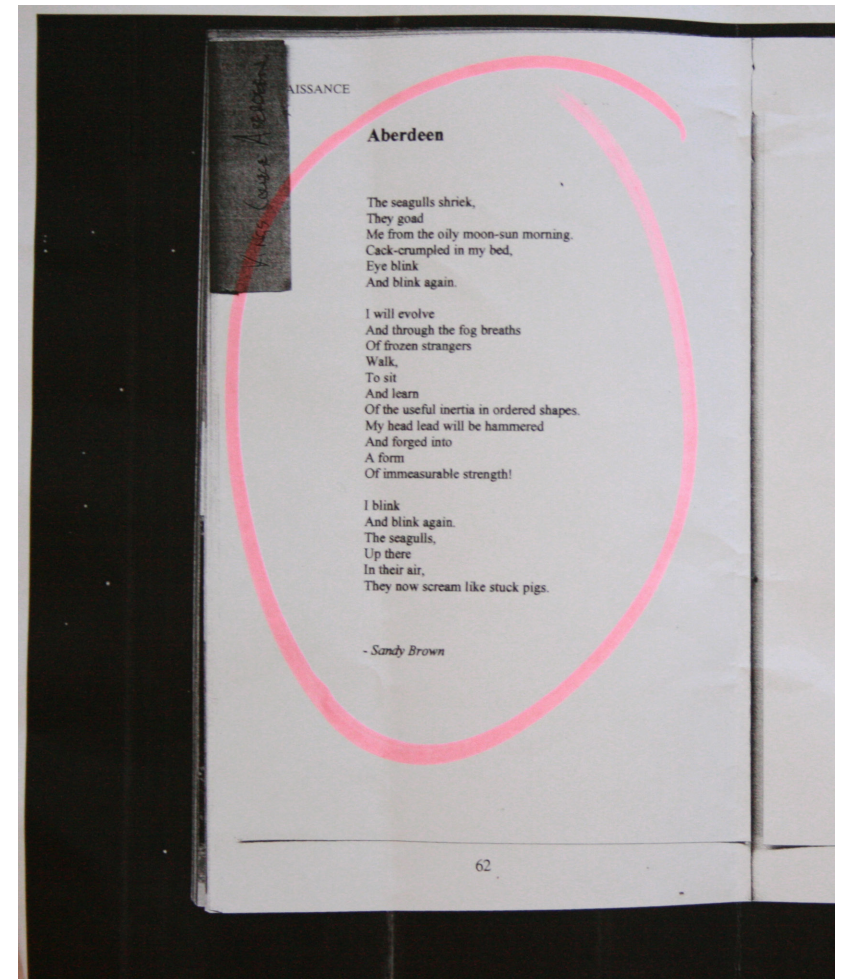
Completed 23 February 2011.

(\*\*) addition to text on the 26 February 2011.

(\*\*\*) addition to text on the 9 March 2011.

\* Note:

Elaine Henderson is the editor of the Saturday Magazine Supplement in the *Scotsman* newspaper, since 2003. It was from 2004 to early 2006, while I lived in Edinburgh, that I produced a small, weekly cartoon slot, called *Life Lines*, for this magazine. Elaine sacked me eighteen months and over seventy cartoons later, claiming that they, the cartoons, had become *depressed and depressing*, and that this was a *lifestyle magazine* and that I had *lost track of my brief*. I completely concurred and accepted my sacking with no noise and as such we retained a healthy and civil relationship toward each other. As it turns out, Sandy, the poet, has submitted some written work to her of late, which she has chosen not to publish, or at least that is what he related to me in his letter. You will also find a copy of one of the cartoons scanned below.

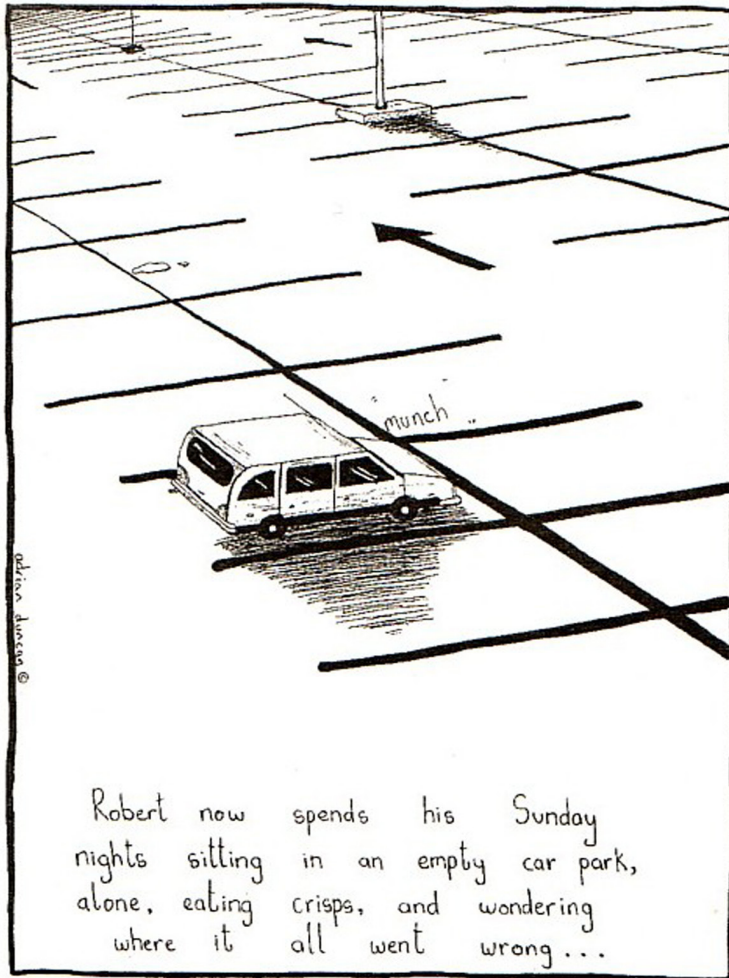


(Fig. 2: "Aberdeen," by Sandy Brown)

# LIFE LINES

By ADRIAN DUNCAN

*Adrian Duncan lives in Dublin*



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(Fig. 3: Cartoon)