

JEWELS & BONES by Rupert Loydell

David J. Gunkel suggests that 'creativity is a matter of drawing on, reconfiguring and repurposing remade materials that are already at hand in circulation' (Gunkel 2016: 137), a quote which can apply to both the subject and writing process of this triptych or trilogy of poems about relics and the notion of them somehow 'speaking' to or acting upon contemporary pilgrims or visitors.

A recent chapter of mine about bodies in relation to the music of Nurse With Wound and Cabaret Voltaire (Loydell 2022), along with my previous creative writing reversioning stories about Mary, the Annunciation and ideas of faith, doubt and sainthood (Loydell 2017a; Loydell & Cave 2020) piqued my interest about how relics and body parts can become religious currency, available for veneration, trading, selling, worship and healing. Amy Lyford (2000: 51) discusses a proposed 'grammar of the human body that parsed the human form into pieces that could be manipulated for aesthetic purposes just as words and parts of speech were mobilized in the process of poetic construction'.

I undertook some research, reading about relics and reliquaries, and also visiting some religious sites in the city of Bologna in Spring 2022. Although reliquaries are often beautiful objects, the faded tatters of clothing or shrivelled up human remains (if visible) and occasional supposedly 'incorruptible' bodies (that is bodies which do not decay or decompose), are not; in fact I often found them quite strange and revolting. Even *The Catholic Encyclopedia* notes that '[t]he veneration of relics, in fact, is to some extent a primitive instinct, and it is associated with many other religious systems besides that of Christianity' (unknown author, n.d.).

Using my own notes, textual excerpts and draft poems, accompanied by quotes from relevant texts which question, comment upon or inform the three poems (including a news item about the theft of a saint's remains, which prompted the third poem), I repurposed, reshaped, remixed and refined my poetic material to explore this primitive instinct and the concepts of heavenly bodies, veneration, and saints. As I have previously discussed (Loydell 2017b) my creative writing uses relevant found and original material to discuss its subject and itself, for as Vicki Bennett notes, '[c]ollage makes sense of things in a manner that our brain understands. Because of these fragmented parts and the way we assemble information, collage is like the working of the brain.' (Bennett 2021: 36)

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