

**I come from**

a pot-holed crescent  
where a faulty street lamp  
strobed the fur  
of moon-savvy cats;  
a post box sunk  
in a tarred-brick wall,  
its red mouth hard  
as a Russian winter.

I come from a house  
with a peeling milk-crate  
on a cracked doorstep,  
cobwebbed with memories  
and dried-up flies.

I come from a kitchen  
with fake-marble tops,  
a whitewashed larder  
stocked with greens.

I come from ribs and cabbage,  
Goblin meat puddings,  
Birds trifles and Vesta Chow Mein;  
Saturday nights at Ferranti's club -  
*Mamma Mia, Fernando,*  
*the Gay Gordons, the Virginia Reel,*  
a hiss of cymbals  
as the glitter ball whirled.

On the way home with a KFC,  
cats scrapping in a pitch-dark alley,  
teeth sinking through flesh  
into bone.

**A Horse Attends the “Reading and Writing through John Clare” Workshop at Manchester Central Library on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2019**

The new stable girl  
brought me as far  
as the door; I nudged  
the polished surface  
with my hairy nose:

the room was empty;  
I walked to the window,  
breathed in sunlight  
and rain-washed air  
until I felt settled    calm.

Minutes later a man  
walked in, threw me a scowl;  
a woman in a headscarf  
sat opposite, didn't notice me  
at all. More people drifted in.

My favourite by far  
was an olive-skinned man  
in a creased, white shirt  
who leaned forward,  
sent me a wink.

We went round the group,  
saying our names:

when it was my turn  
I tossed my head, scraped  
the floorboards three times  
with my hoof.

I enjoyed the poetry:  
*To see a crow fly in the thin blue sky -*  
I often watch skylarks, listen  
as their throaty trills sharpen  
into song.

During the lunch-break a young man  
brought me a bucket of water,  
placed it gently on the floor;  
I snorted gratefully,  
drank my fill.

As people ate, a hush descended;  
I walked to a bookcase,  
a feast for my eyes:  
gold-embossed print, historical novels,  
spine-cracked tomes.

I wished I could fold  
all that knowledge  
into my dark horse-head;  
a poem every evening  
in my blood-warm stall  
would be a thrill.

In the afternoon the others wrote  
about cherished landscapes, their sense of home;  
I composed in my head, trying  
to capture an earthy mix

of sweat, dung, barley and hay.

The workshop was over  
far too soon; I whinnied  
my goodbye, reached the door  
with the feeling I was leaving  
something precious behind.

My owner met me  
at the top of the stairs;  
we descended slowly,  
my mind wrestling with questions  
about my future, my place in the world.

As I stepped onto the street  
my thoughts scattered – *like vapours tossed*  
*Into the nothingness of scorn and noise, -*  
I kept a steady pace, returned to my stable,  
knowing everything had changed.