

BSS-S

Boarding School
Survivors Support

BOARDING SCHOOL SURVIVORS – SUPPORT NEWSLETTER
AUGUST 2022

Greetings to you all, and a warm welcome to supporters who have joined us since our last Newsletter.

Since we last wrote there has been the slow move out of Covid with some things seemingly having changed for ever. From the letters we have received we know that for many people those bleak Lockdown days and weeks were a very lonely and thoughtful time. For some it started them thinking for the first time of how boarding school had affected them. They related Lockdown was like being 'sent away'; living by imposed rules; removed from family ; no hugs again; feelings of isolation; coping alone, all echoing back to boarding. For some even when the restrictions were lifted many of those feelings have lingered on.

One wrote: "I miss everyone, those social events I love so much and keep me connected to others and the world. I miss family. I miss lots. And while I know in my heart I live in a beautiful place, surrounded by kindness this sadness is deep and I can sink low. So, please, if you see the snow piling up outside my house and the lights on and the door closed, come and find me in a week, because I could still be under the covers, nurturing my little girl who feels abandoned and alone and excluded from life."

Now, thankfully moving on, we want to say we are sorry it is a long time since that last Newsletter. We hoped to get one to you in June but were delayed by several things, the most important being making a decision about a Conference. We have had many inquiries about this as we missed two conferences because of Covid. It seems many other organisations are also playing catch-up, as we have been awaiting confirmation of our booking. With help and some adjustments made at the Centre, we heard yesterday that our rooms are now available, so all is well.

**Boarding School Survivors - Support Conference
12th November 2022
at
The Wesley Hotel and Conference Centre
81–103 Euston Street, London NW1 2EZ**

The conference fee is £85.00.

Please register and pay this, if possible, by October 1st to:

Bank transfer:

- **Account name** **Boarding School Survivors – Support**
- **Account number** **63019381**
- **Sort-code** **20-57-76**
- **Reference** **CONFERENCE 2022**

**Cheques: payable to Boarding School Survivors – Support
posted to 51 Oaks Drive, Colchester CO3 3PS.**

The fee includes the ever-popular Wesley lunch and tea and coffee. As with everything, the costs of the Centre have increased but we are keeping the fee as low as we can.

In the past we have had a very good idea of the number of people who will be attending. Covid has changed that, and this year we have no idea.

We have to confirm our numbers one month in advance; and, to help us with this, we ask you please to click on one of the following and send the e-mail that pops up:

- [Yes I will be attending](#)
- [I am thinking about attending](#)
- [No I will not be attending](#)

or write to us at: info@bss-support.org.uk.

For those who would find it financially impossible to attend, we are able to give some help with the cost of the Conference. To discuss this please

write to us at: info@bss-support.org.uk.

For health reasons, and to make everyone feel safe while Covid is still lurking around, we ask that everyone takes a lateral flow test the evening before the Conference.

Our thanks go to all the authors who have sent us contributions for this Newsletter.

The Nomadic Life of the boarding school child

We had an article from Thurstine in our last Newsletter on this topic and as it is such a major aspect of boarding we were very pleased to receive this one from Val which has a very different 'take' on the subject ...

Some thoughts on the Nomadic Life of a boarding school survivor

Val Harding

While I was still at boarding school, and certainly after I had left school, I always wanted to travel. Neither of my parents had been to boarding school, and throughout my life, from the time I was born, they never even left the country to travel abroad. So my desire to travel was not influenced by them, except that they had inadvertently initiated me into travel at the age of ten. My life became one long wish to travel.

I found that nothing felt meaningful if it did not involve travel.

I have travelled extensively as a tourist, a back-packer, as a volunteer for charitable organisations overseas, and as a researcher in ethnomusicology (for those not familiar, although a discipline in its own right, ethnomusicology is an off-shoot of anthropology, focusing on music). Much of this travel has been in South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka).

Boarding schools are clearly a preparation for long distance travel,

particularly to previously colonized countries. As has now been well documented, they are rooted in an ethos of preparing men to run an empire. I was at boarding school from the age of ten, from 1957-1964, and I can see how the boarding experience prepares you for anthropological fieldwork. This includes: long periods of time away from home, no close contact with family and loved ones, endurance of difficult physical conditions, resilience, operating in a different culture, experiencing the insider/outsider dichotomy (from my background this was a class issue at school), and living with a lack of personal space. One writer on the subject critiques fieldwork by saying "it is the archetypal heroic quest, a quest for knowledge and power". The danger for anyone from a white British public school/boarding school background becoming an anthropologist is that while they go off abroad to examine other people's cultures they remain detached and aloof from cultures and everyday life in this country. They depart on the 'heroic quest' to collect data and statistics and then return home with trophies and accolades, and then write books mainly for other academics to read.

However, I think my experience as a woman varies from this. I have found I do not fit into the heroic paradigm, although while actually researching in India I have often found myself indulging in a desire for dangerous journeys, living in isolated situations, and enduring difficult physical conditions. But I also feel that this work needs empathy and human understanding, the ability to sit with people and listen to their stories. I have often spent more time with women helping with household tasks and playing with children than I have recording music or collecting information on music. I have enjoyed much of my time with musicians, but not actually done nearly enough work to write a book. However, I have also at times felt dislocated and anxious.

Post-colonial relationships are complex. The task of any research includes an analysis of the part you play and your relationships in fieldwork. I studied for a Masters in Ethnomusicology in later life, and before that I worked in the field of mental health in the UK, so I was well familiar with psychological and relationship issues, and had had therapy myself. However, it was not until I went into therapy in order to specifically look at the relationship I had with travelling and with my work in ethnomusicology and the relationships I had built up in India, that I really

started looking at my boarding school experience. It was then that I realized how I repeated patterns, left myself open to trauma, and how the outer shell of resilience and self-confidence I had could crumble at any time. Above all, I did not want to inflict patterns of broken attachment on the people I had got to know and love during my fieldwork, and also people who I have got to know through other travel and charity work.

Many researchers in the field of anthropology and ethnomusicology now question the links with the legacy of colonialism in these disciplines. For me, that legacy exists in the whole ethos of white European researchers in developing countries. These disciplines are now being developed in universities in countries like India with researchers from local communities, and that is how it should be. Similarly there are those developing fieldwork 'at home' here in the UK. For me, it was important to realize that that was what I needed to do too. We live in a global situation of migration and the need for intercultural understanding and appreciation of each other's cultural backgrounds is very important. Disciplines such as anthropology/ethnomusicology can help to promote such understanding and can be used for positive social benefit and not just for an academic pursuit of knowledge.

My nomadic life no longer serves a useful purpose unless it is to build good relationships and care about people, honour friendships, and work towards equality and respect for human rights. Although my desire to travel never goes away, I think my addiction to travel is now losing its grip, and compulsion no longer drives me.

Not least amongst reasons to travel less are those of consideration for the environment.

Some more about those Nomads...

Margaret Laughton

In the last Newsletter Thurstine wrote about his Nomadic life as a child with no settled room of his own and how, as an adult, he had "trouble visualizing my childhood bedroom". This happened both as the family

moved around the world and then when he was sent away to school. He gave us details about the number of moves he had made.

It fascinated me as I have so many small details and numbers in my mind about those times which are totally non-existent in the years after I left school.

Do we all have that? *If so it would be **great** if you could send us your lists and we will see if we can make a chart from 0 to 100.*

I know one boarder who was sent away just before he was 6 and left at 18 which gave him 36 terms a boarder. If he went home for half-terms he had the trauma of being taken back to school 72 times. I feel this must be the maximum. Am I right?

I think compiling such a chart would read as a concise and enlightening document...

Thurstine

- By the age of 8:
 - 8 homes
 - 5 schools
- By age 18:
 - 11 home bedrooms
 - 10 school dormitories

Margaret

- 24 moves by the time I was 8
 - 4 of those moves to India and back
 - 0 schools before 8
- 9 years old when sent away
- 8 years a boarder
- In those years at school
 - 35 girls in boarding house
 - 2 baths maximum per week
 - 1 Hair wash per week
 - 5 years old – youngest girls
 - 48 exeats possible

- 0 exeats with parents
- 7 exeats with other parents
- 48 times taken, reluctantly and sadly, from home back to school
- 6 Housemistresses
- 5 matrons
- 2 kind teachers
- 7 dormitories
- 25 minutes' walk to school
- 1 hour letter writing on Sundays
- 40 minutes walk to church, rain or snow, every Sunday
- At age, 17 left school
 - 5 weeks later, unprepared, started nursing

Letters to the Editor

Recently articles by 'well-known' people writing about the trauma of their boarding experiences have been published in national newspapers. Some of our supporters, also wanting 'to spread the word', have had letters published in their local papers and have sent them to us so we can share them with you. This one was written for The Quaker Magazine *The Friend*. Maybe it will encourage you to put pen to paper!

Obedience

Carole Inman

Reading Elizabeth Coleman's article 'Out of Order' (29 April), in which she speaks of MPs acting 'because of obedience', I am reminded of the work of Nick Duffell and Joy Shaverian into the effects of boarding school on adults. Both show the psychological impact of being sent away from family, those broken attachments which stay with us forever, hidden until they may suddenly burst out later in life.

In Nick's book *Wounded Leaders: British elitism and the entitlement illusion – a psychohistory*, he writes that being educated away from families in institutions 'has a direct effect on their ability to love, to relate, to make good judgments and to develop the necessary leadership

qualities for today's world'.

Joy's book *Boarding School Syndrome: Broken attachments a hidden trauma* describes 'common symptoms suffered by those affected by early boarding and the enduring psychological effects of this trauma'.

Is this the 'obedience' that Elizabeth writes about, I wonder? The enduring and unconscious response to having to get it right for fear of punishment 'because they fear for their careers'?

I know that fear. In 2011 at the age of sixty-three I finally woke up to the effects of being sent away at five for those twelve school years when I had to do exactly what I was told, without any familial love, no real attachment. I wrote hundreds of lines in punishment for something minor, I wasn't encouraged to be strong, to think for myself, I couldn't cry aloud, I failed my Art O level. I still miss my dog. It stays with you. And at seventy-three I still search to find and hear my own voice, to break out of that black box of 'obedience'.

Elizabeth says that peers in the House of Lords can vote as they choose. I imagine many will have similar backgrounds and boarding school experiences. So what's different? Is this call to 'obedience' in the House of Commons the fear of punishment and shame, a fear of some inner failure?

Nick calls it our 'strategic survival personality'. Joy speaks of 'hidden trauma'. We had to survive in that wilderness and we will have carried those behavioural patterns into and throughout our adult lives. Government ministers too. Boarding school may not have been *all* bad, but the strategies we created in order to survive stay with us and they affect each and everyone we meet and, I imagine, the laws our ministers make and vote on. They remain deep in our unconscious until one day we wake up to mend and open our hearts once again.

Therapy

Almost all of the letters we receive are from people who ask for access to help with their boarding school issues.

Some have very recently come to realize the impact that attending boarding school as a child is having on their adult lives. *Others* have lived with that knowledge for a while but an event of some sort (very often within relationships) has made them take some action.

We send everyone who writes to us information that includes:

- a personal letter
- important contact details
- information about books
- therapy contact information

There are now many therapists who have trained with Nick and his team who specialize in boarding issues and provide an invaluable resource for those seeking help and some answers to their boarding pain and problems. Many people find therapy an enormous help as they look into their childhood memories of boarding school and are then enabled to move forwards with the support and tools to do so.

Contact details for therapists:

www.boardingrecovery.com

Referral service via Nick's website:

<https://www.boardingschoolsurvivors.co.uk/private-therapy-for-boarding-school-survivors/>

This article is written by two of these therapists:

Training for therapists working with women boarding school survivors

Sara Warner

Integrative counsellor

I have long been aware of the lack of material available specifically about the experience of women boarders. It was whilst looking for this, in connection with a women ex boarder I was working with, that I came across Nick Duffell's *The Unmaking of Them* Training and Joy Schaverien's

article Exiled: the girls' school boarders, in Therapy Today (November 2016). I completed Nick Duffell's training in January 2017, and more than half of my practice has been devoted to working with ex boarders since then.

Terms and Conditions – life in Girl's Boarding Schools 1939-1979 by Ysenda Maxtone Graham was published in 2017, and Finding our Way Home – Women's accounts of being Sent to Boarding school was published in June 2018. Both helpful and useful accounts about women's experience. Both Nick Duffell and Joy Schaverien have also written about women's experience, as have Pippa Foster and Nicola Miller, and yet I have always felt women's boarding experiences to have been an aside to the dominant experience of the male boarder. Whilst this is not surprising given that many more men have boarded than women, it has left a gap for women who have boarded and the therapists who work with them.

Cut to 2021 and a walk arranged to discuss the possibility of peer supervision Karen Macmillan and I started to talk about the lack of material around women's boarding experiences. We also started to recognise that between us we had a lot of experience of working with women ex boarders and helpful perspectives to offer as women and as an ex-boarder and a non-boarder team. The idea for developing a training for therapists working with women ex boarders was born.

From the beginning we were clear in our motivation for doing this. Primarily we wanted to share our knowledge and experience to help other therapists in this work. We also wanted to develop a training for therapists which was specifically geared towards working with women because there are many ways in which women's experience differs from men's.

There are several things we have recognised in the process of developing the training and working together. Women not only suffer from the trauma of boarding but from, for the most part, being in an environment designed for the education of boys in which the 'feminine' and all that might be associated with it is devalued. This is in the context of a patriarchal society so it is like a double dose with no home to go back to at the end of the school day in which there might be more balance. We have wondered and explored what it is to inhabit a female body in this context

and recognised the importance of addressing this with our female clients. For women of a certain age periods were known as the curse and schools, society, and parents were fearful of a girl's emerging sexuality. In our training we explore ways of working with these issues that are both sensitive and helpful.

We have recognised the impact of the lack of healthy male and female role models on the capacity of many of our clients to enjoy intimate relationships. The degree to which many women in order to survive develop an internalised misogyny which impacts their relationships with other women including their mothers. Girls and women bully in a different way to boys and men, which is much more relational.

We have been conscious of how much it has meant to both of us to be delivering this training together (rather than going it alone – which is for many a necessary boarding survival strategy) and have been enriched by our different perspectives. We have also made decisions around how we deliver our training so that it feels embodied, inclusive, and collaborative.

The impact of patriarchy and an education designed for boys is not confined to ex boarders. I went to a boys' school sixth form which let in girls, after being educated from 8 in an all girls day school. And I did get to go home at the end of a school day.

Karen Macmillan

Transactional analysis counsellor

It started with a meeting in the woods on the Downs for walk-and-talk peer supervision. Of course it really started long before that, but I'll come back to that. We soon found that we were talking more about the lack of material and focus on women's experience than supervision, and from that shard of frustration a workshop was born. The process of preparing took a lot of discussion, sharing and reading, informed too by the many women we had sat with in our counselling rooms. We spent time together, sharing experience, ideas, questions and challenges. I noticed how difficult it was sometimes for me to hold on to women's experience as I was so much more familiar with men's. Even in my own mind, men's voices could be louder.

It was, and is, a creative process, pulling on our individual strengths and interests and out of that generating something better than either of us could have made by ourselves. Working with Sara has really challenged my "I have to do everything on my own" ex boarder script. It requires trust, and of another woman, another potential challenge for my survivor self. There were many opportunities for our working together not to work, but we caught them and worked them through. We also had fun! It feels precious to have a sister in crime and one who shares my passion for getting the word out.

Recently I found a copy of my application to attend the women's weekends run by Boarding School Survivors some years ago. This was the first line of my answer as to why I wanted to attend: "I was first intrigued by articles on Boarding School Survivors & recognised some of what was being spoken about, although I was keen to hear more from a female perspective that might be more relevant to my experience."

My hope is that the training Sara and I are delivering to therapists forms part of redressing this imbalance. Our experience matters.

We delivered our first training in Lewes in February to a wonderful group of therapists.

On the back of this we have decided to offer this training online so the training is more accessible. It takes place on October 15th – more information and booking details [here](#).

This training is specifically for trainee and qualified counsellors/therapists who have an interest in this client material. It will not be suitable for boarding school survivors who are not therapists. Ex-boarder and non-boarder therapists are equally welcome.

For former boarder women we recommend the women's workshops run by www.boardingschoolsurvivors.co.uk.

We have also just done a podcast on Piers Cross's excellent Evolving Man Podcast about our work with women ex boarders

Facebook: <https://fb.watch/eh5j96fvNt/>

Youtube: <https://youtu.be/VXAHJucCGsY>

iTunes: <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/aem-40-girls-womens-boarding-school-survivors-the/id1586665873?i=1000570008457>

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/58dsUGxvBKIXMg34dIEBc>

Notices

Conference Programme

This is the first draft of the Conference Programme. We will send you the final and more detailed programme as soon as it is finalized.

Morning session

10.00 Asbury Room

Arrival and Registration; refreshments; meetings and greetings

10.30 All to Hilda Porter Room

Welcome – Allison Ujejski Chair and a Director of Boarding School Survivors – Support

10.35 The Boarding School Survivors – Support Directors

Sam Barber, Mike Dickins, Paul Fray Margaret Laughton and Allison Ujejski will introduce themselves and give short summaries of their work for BSS – Support

10.45 Guest speaker: Alex Renton

Title to be announced

11.45 Questions and answers

12.00 Guest speaker: Thurstine Bassett

Reflections on what I have learned over the last 18 years in the world of boarding school survival

12.45 Questions and answers to round-up morning session

13.00 Lunch

13.45 Coffee or Tea in Asbury Room

Afternoon Session

14.00 All in Hilda Porter Room

Sara Warner and Karen Macmillan:

14.00 Therapy for women

14.10 Therapy for Men

14.20 Divide into Hilda Porter, Asbury Room and break-out room

Discussions on a choice of topics facilitated by therapists:

1. Abused in school
2. Coping with family relationships broken by boarding
3. Finding help and moving forwards

15.15 Break: refreshments in the three rooms

15.30 Continue discussions

16.00 All return to Hilda Porter Room

16.00 Feedback from the three break-out rooms' discussions

16.15 Questions put to a panel

16.45 Summary of day

16.55 Close

Newspaper Article

A female journalist wrote: "regarding sexual abuse in boarding schools the

newspaper recently ran a feature with Alex Renton in the light of recent stories with people such as Nicky Campbell and Will Young talking about abuse at private schools, and they'd like me to investigate cases of female CSA in boarding schools".

For the feature to go ahead, they are looking for at least one woman who is willing to be identified and talk about her experience of abuse in a boarding school environment and have asked us if anyone might be willing to share their story.

They realise that this may be difficult and for many reasons women are more likely not to go on record. They may also be able to feature anonymous stories alongside.

If anyone is interested in doing this please get in touch with us at info@bss-support.org.uk.

A Film about Boarding School Syndrome and the personal stories of former boarders

We have been contacted by a former boarder who has been researching Boarding School Survivors for the last year.

He is also a filmmaker and in August will be recording several interviews that will make up the majority of a film about Boarding School Syndrome and the mental health of former-boarders.

The aim of the film is to alert former-boarders of the syndrome and to warn prospective parents of the issues that can arise from going to boarding school.

He has filmed Nick and Joy and some former boarders and he is now looking for a few more former boarders who would like to participate.

The number he can film is limited so if you would like to take part please write to us **as soon as possible**: info@bss-support.org.uk and we will then send you contact details so you can write to him.

Newsletter contributions and poetry

We would love to hear from you! Please send us articles for the next Newsletter and your ideas/topics for what you would like to see.

With the Conference coming we would welcome your contributions for the **Poetry Corner**.

Please send any poems you would like included to info@bss-support.org.uk.

A Workshop for Therapists

15 October 2022 – NEW DATE – Working with Women Boarding School Survivors: A Workshop for Therapists

This is day for therapists exploring the theory, themes, and issues which are specific to working with women who have boarded. Delivered by specialist Boarding School Survivor therapists Sara Warner and Karen Macmillan.

See our website [here](#) for details.

Poetry

Jonathan Burr

The tuck box

Is it time?
Anticipation.
Locked away,
Only to exist once a week.
Is it OK?
Not seen it for ages.
Entry through a Master
Treasures inside.

Some more than others
Wanted and discarded
Joy and envy.
What he's got I want!
Shame of my parents
Filling the inside with their choices
Not mine.
They would never belong here.
What's inside is
Never enough.
Sweet satisfaction
All too brief.
My own key to my own lock.
No combination
To get inside.
Time to go
Faded brass rivets with reinforced edges
On cheap ply
Locked it up again
Out you go
Save for the next time
Maybe I'll restock
Sweet cigarettes and acid drops
Can't think when.
Carry on till then.

The Bridge

'Mind the Gap!'
Ordered from a blank reverie
Pick up your bag and walk.
Stomach clenches
Is today the day?
Pacing drumbeat
Whispers from the past
Is today the day?
Muscles lazy from resting
Stretch and creak to carry

A load heavier than steel
The sense sharp
Pin prick awake
The enemy rises
Fear of being found out
Exposed, fraud and charlatan
Mind and body in perfect disunity
Walking towards fate
On spongy feet on hard concrete
My God Vagus knows
What he would do.
But 'Press on!'
Override that silly thought
Fresh air hits my face
Keep buttoned up
Down the 13 steps
Dodge and weave
Towards the bridge
'It's not too late to back out'
Is today the day?
Fading shout on the breeze
Mind made up and
Pile driving thuds echo
In pace with the trudge
Now pick up the pace
Last part to go
Achievements and armour
Breach the doors
Pray for no more battles
Is today the day?

Hélène Demetriades

The poems began in 2019. Six of them are now in my debut poetry collection '*The Plumb Line*', published by Hedgehog Press in June 2022.

'Weekends' began its life in a poetry workshop about *place*.

'The Arrival' began its life on a silent retreat at Woldingham Girls School during the summer holidays. Sitting in meditation in a darkened auditorium room with 400 participants, the felt-sense of my first days at boarding school came back to me: the lostness, bewilderment, the sense that something was all wrong. *That I was all wrong.*

'Letter From Home' is a composite letter from letters written by both my parents. I want to add that the poem 'Playing Dead' is about a genuine game. (Several reviewers have interpreted it as me being bullied by my peers). What interested me was how defiantly I refused to be provoked in the game. How we as boarding school interns held ourselves together, *chin up*. I hope you find some sense of companionship in reading these poems.

Warmly,
Hélène Demetriades
MBACP Snr Accred. Psychotherapist
www.helenedemetriades.co.uk
www.helenedemetriadespoetry.co.uk

Poems from 'The Plumb Line'

The Arrival

Ahead of me the trunk sways
like a coffin down the corridors.

My parents heave it up the stairs,
drop it onto the dormitory floor.

A crater opens between us.

Retracing our steps, I see them off
at the school entrance –

turn back to unpack my loss.

Stuff it into drawers under my allotted bed,

hang it limp in the dark of communal wardrobes.

That night I lie in a row of girls
with no walls on either side
to stop me from falling.

Weekends

On Saturdays we herd like calves
round the dark table, thirsting for post.

On Sundays we are walked two by two
up Chinthurst Hill, inmates in uniform.

The sounds of TV matinees spill
against common room walls,
air void of family
presses against rib-cages.

In chapel we score senior girls' outfits,
let loose we trail through a gut
of empty corridors.

The toilet cubicles smell of bleach,
the medicated loo paper is thin and shiny.
On it I discover the smear of my first bleed.

Letter From Home

You wrote that you felt lonely
on the drive home without me.
Whitegates was very quiet.

Kiwi was being cared for,
I needn't worry –
you were picking her milk-thistles.
Papillon had lost her balance,
was swimming upside down.

Andrew had written you a cheerful letter,
was settling in nicely,
Anna had phoned home –
you were sad to hear I wasn't happy.

You wrote I should make a real effort
– you knew how hard it was –
you'd been to boarding-school,
hadn't seen your parents in months.

I shouldn't be glum, it wasn't so distressing
– in front of my classmates and teachers
I'd want to put my brave face on.

Besides you'd always be here to advise
– once I was willing to accept my new life
I'd get a taste for it –

and not having Daddy around
would be a relief.

Playing Dead

Girls tickle my legs, waist, under my arms,
squeeze toothpaste into my nostrils,
try to prize open my teeth.

Rigor mortis makes me triumphant
in the game on the dormitory floor.

At home I fell out of bed
too afraid to cry out to my mother
who slept next to an ogre.

I lay on the floor
squeezing my anus
tight as a rosebud.

Weekly Hair Wash

They laughed at Goldballs in his blue overalls
pressing his body into their backs as they sat
in a chair craning their necks over the basin,
warm water trickling over their napes,
the caress of his hands on their heads,
this sixty-something-year-old man with pale eyes
fingering pre-teen scalps, wiping his snot in their hair.

Caged

An ogre has fashioned a cheese dome
out of his thoughts – brought it
down on a family.

Inside there's fancy furniture,
an airing cupboard and parquet floors.

The little people are clay in his smooth hands.
The mother cooks *osso bucco*, dreams
of tap dancing on the Pavilion stage.

There's a teenage girl sitting on her bed
munching through packets of Jaffa Cakes.

She'll shed the layers like baggy jumpers
back at boarding school.

The First Days

I'm born into service. My womb darns herself,
nipples crack open, weep.

I look at you asleep, lying open to the world
arms flung above your head in the middle of our bed
twitching as your body fires up, settles in.

My mouth gapes. I'm like a fish in the bedroom
gasping for words.