

*About the Cover Art: "Blackbird"*

Sylvia Plath's English nature poetry was the starting point for my depiction of the Blackbird. To quote Plath, there are her "wintriest moods" ("Soliloquy of the Solipsist, line 25) but also sense of her "flintlike, her feet struck/ such a racket of echoes from the steely street/...that she heard the quick air ignite/its tinder and shake a firework of echoes..." (Hardcastle Crag, lines 1-5). That is signified in the singing yellow beak in 'Blackbird'. There are also within the image the black/white contrasts in her English countryside - her carbon-paper black and bone-white, compiled through the Black Rook poems. However, her black can sing too: "its black feathers can so shine/ as to seize my senses.../ miracles occur/ If you care to call those spasmodic/tricks of radiance.../ miracles" with a horizon that can "sing/the air to orange" ("Black Rook in Rainy Weather, lines 29; 37-40).

Then there are the other dialogues in my Blackbird. Japanese Zen woodblock art -that simple black against white, all-encompassing snowfield; yet this golden yellow spark of Blackbird poetry stays beneath the surface even with early Spring surely just around the corner, if only the blackbird can stick it out and survive the cold. "Blackbird" as a painting was inspired and created in 2020, at the beginning of the Covid epidemic, so it too went through the dark night, only to surface on the spark shadow of Spring.

Where I come from in North East England, there is the origin of the tale: the philosophy of the bird, flying in from the cold winter through one door into warmth, then out the other, as into life.

"Blackbird" is also inspired from the Sir Paul McCartney songs "Blackbird" and "Jenny Wren". The colour synaesthesia where yellow "is the warming up sun of my inner child" (Franks). But the painting was sparked off by the English nature poetry (with its black/white) of Sylvia Plath. And in this cycle, for all to see, the blackbird is borne.

Garry franks