

**THE FUTURE
IS NOT
F*CKED**

*poems about relationships,
Aberdeen,
and oil*



The Future is not F*cked

poems about relationships, Aberdeen, and oil



The Future is not F*cked
poems about oil

edited by Scott Herrett

poetry by John Bolland, Mae Diansangu, Fin Hall, Orla Kelly, Sally Silvers

layout and design by Enxhi Mandija

stills from 'The Future is not F*cked,' by Sara Stroud (2021) courtesy of the artist

copyright © the authors

printed and bound at peacock & the worm, Aberdeen
edition of 100

a project by Friends of the Earth Scotland, 2023

INTRODUCTION

This book of poems is part of a body of work and series of events that evolved from an idea that sprang up in late 2021. At the time I was a few months into my new job as a Just Transition Organiser with Friends of the Earth Scotland. One evening I was listening to a discussion of the role that art takes in progressive political and social change, with contributors arguing that historically art that connects up to wider political change only happens if it carries some sense of hope.

I began thinking how to apply this insight to my work in Aberdeen, which is all about encouraging people to imagine and bring about a fair and just transition away from oil and gas. An especially difficult challenge as the oil industry is deeply embedded within city life. It provides jobs and livelihoods for thousands of people and I have also observed its dominance influencing the city's institutions like no other city in Scotland. From partnerships with Aberdeen City Council to longstanding links with academic institutions and funding for cultural institutions like Aberdeen Art Gallery, the oil industry is part of the social fabric of Aberdeen.

With these thoughts I reached out to a friend, Orla Kelly, who runs 'Speakin' Weird', a monthly spoken word night. We hatched a plan to run a poetry workshop asking people to respond to the question 'How do we let go of the world of oil and all it represents?'. A mix of people attended, including those from the surrounding community, students, oil workers and people whose family work for oil companies.

Aberdeen poet Mae Diansangu (featured in this book) hosted the session. People wrote new work that was performed at Speakin' Weird a few weeks later, at a night we called 'The Future is not F*cked'. I commissioned Aberdeen filmmaker Sara Stroud to record the event, with the initial plan was to create a record of the performances that we could share. As Sara began editing, she realised the poems resonated with her own experience of growing up and living in Aberdeen. So instead, she began piecing together fragments of the performances with additional short interviews to tell her own story of the oil industry and Aberdeen. In producing the film with Sara, we navigated through some challenging ethical terrain in terms of including fragments, rather than the entirety of the poets' work.

Thus, this book pays homage to all the performers featured in the final film, who placed their trust in Sara and the film process. I hope that trust has been validated given wherever the film is screened it stimulates important (and often neglected) discussions about the challenges oil has brought to people in Aberdeen, and most importantly for me, what people want for the future of their city.

And now with this book, we are happy to present the poems side by side in their entirety allowing for reflection, new meaning and hopefully inspiration.

Scott Herrett, August 2023.



Fin Hall

TOXICITY

Darkness descends, the streets foreboding
Hooded gangs prowl
Dim lights hide shapes in the shadows
The toxic city wakes
Masks abound
Around closed shops and stores
Few cars emit polluting gases
And strangers, eyes down
Pass each other.
Winter draws near
The fear still lingers
The year has been like no other
The bodies piled up.
The loneliness has eased
But memories,
Ah memories.
Remembering when things were fine
When we all lived together
Trusting
Rightly or wrongly
Not now,
It's changed,
The world is strange
The future remains bleak
As we seek answers
Answers which aren't there
Because leaders didn't care
Egos got in the way of sanity
And many suffered.
The toxic city prepares,
For a long, dark winter.

John Bolland

TO UNFUCKED FUTURES

"Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past."

T.S. Eliot, Burnt Norton

There is a relativity to fucking, an openness
to possibility – a hope, of sorts, they'll come/
you'll come/ it will/ it will-not end. Where 'fucked'
is binary-absolute-zero-sum-hopelessness.
"The future's fucked?" you say. But I will not survive
this fuckery... What future then? And is
the present also fucked? More fucked? Or are we
only fucking? Deluded stewards of other absent times.

This inter-sectional present, splinter-slim:
the problematic inbreath-outbreath of a moment,
hyper-ventilates each vacuous tomorrow
as we grind towards our final fucked-up finish. Feckless
orgasmatrons keeping score. Cling
to the sober chain-walk of future kindness. Don't fuck-up!

Mae Diansangu

SINK OR SWIM

the future is written in water.
torrential potentiality floods the
collective body, demanding we
make a choice.

parched eyes designed to drink sky,
learn to thirst after individualism:
that single use plastic liferaft,
setting us adrift from each other.

will our bodies remember
how we survived the first water?
how we became something new
to undo an ending?

birth is a kind of undrowning.
like the first stage of evolution –
another unwettingening – the reverse
baptism of a fish destined to
grow legs.

when we ask what will save us,
we forget the water made us.
that we were made to escape it.
time and time again.



Mae Diansangu

'GLORIA IN EXCELSISOLEUM'

i worship a crude god. coorse an rough.
slick wi that auld testament kinda love.
neen o this namby pamby, turn yer
cheek so abdy can gie ye a skelp.

his love is skimmerin blackness.
suffocatin, petropatriarchal darkness
hotterin wi holy hydrocarbons.
young loons tak swimmin lessons
in it. learn tae hud their breath,
an split unner the surface.

i worship a smeekeit god. dab his muckle want
on ma wrists, ma throat, ahind ma lugs.
i ging inside him,
douk masel
in his een.
afore i git the chunce tae droon,
his gleg-gabbit tongue
waps roon ma neck.
an i hiv nivver felt freedom
like it.
i ask fit wye im sae powerless,
his laugh is fire on water,

An fa telt ye, ye wis powerless?

I dinna hear his vyce, sae much as
feel it, smauldryn
ahind ma breest

*yiv aywiz bin free, ma quine. it's jist
humankind is a god factory.
yer aye churnin oot deities,
then da ken fit tae dee wi us,
fan wiv grown ower muckle
an can swalla yis*

i worship a finite god,
een fa's flock wis built
tae oot live him,
despite ettlin tae
die fur his sins

John Bolland

NRBD

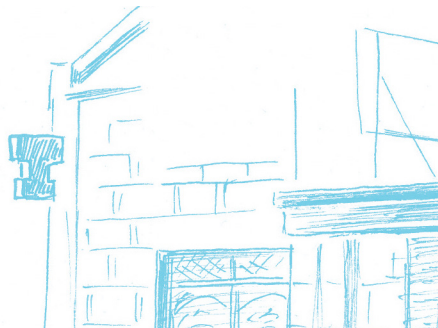
My father was a ruthless creature,
extracting his capacity to care
across the frontier of his manliness.

He came home squeaky clean:
covering his tracks in a binge
of hugs and holding. A guff of aftershave

with hints of booze from Spiders or the Crit:
Stakhanovite hero anointed with Old Spice.
Tuesday. It was always on a Tuesday.

His father was a fisher. Back each Sabbath,
reeking of dead fish, stale sweat and diesel.
Straight from the quayside with a fry.

But my father's world was secular: two on/two off.
The choppers left no wake upon the spindrift sea.
A whiff of unburnt fuel, perhaps. The rotor-thud





of his heart tamed by distance. Lost
across horizons. The unmentionable repeated
absence. Count the days. Pace yourself.

I never knew him till I filled his bunk. My hair
cropped tight into the wood. My wedding-ring
taped up or set aside. One more precarious

miner of the seething depths, rooted
by the well-stock to this license,
displaced on the hamster-wheel of time.

Crude weeps into the drip-tray of my nightmares,
sour gas pollutes my palate, guilt saturates
everything we knew because – of course, we knew.

Sally Silvers

THE SHINING

shining excitement out-spilling
black shiny slicks
petro pounds desolate homes
soulless nether regions

shining acoutrements
façades o'wellbeing
emptying hole heartless
drinking grey aiberdeen sea

shining aiberdeen stone age lang syne
becoming palace on the green
treed leafy shading
flourishing crafts markets afiles ago

shining now a cobbled oe'er
wi' nae trees
continuing remembering aiberdeen
surviving post petro

shining licking slicks sliding
drying deep wanton wells
o' oily hell de'il in disguise
beautifully emblazoned crude gold

shining siller bewitching souls
snow white's poisoned apple
bedazzling depleting destroying separating
divorcing heart-breaking despairing

shining aiberdeen rising tall
hopeful determined stubborn thrawn
aiberdonian artfully sparkin' post petro
solid siller sparklin' granite

shining eons reverberating
communing becoming itself footsteps
organically displacing stultifying slicks

as wis a'ways meant to be
d'ye nae notice in life a'thin' comes back



Aiberdeen artfully alive,
post petro, sparkling city.

Orla Kelly

UNTITLED

I take the dog out about 5pm every day.
After I finish working.
And turn off my computer.
We go to the rabbit chasing hill.
And at that time of day sometimes there's more or less light.
If it's cloudy or foggy the vapour seems to catch the light and trap it in an orangey
grey glow above the city.
Other days I need the crappy torch on my phone to light the ground.
And I don't quite know what creates the differences.
You can see the stars on the beach.
And the moon hovering above the water.
There's enough light from the esplanade and car headlights not to trip.
And the last few days the moon hasn't been there.
It's a sliver of a moon now.
But I can't see it even though it's a clear night.
I said that to another dog walker I met.



"I can't see the moon. I don't know where it's gone."
And it struck me then as a silly thing to say.
It feels oddly claustrophobic if it's not there.
I have some faith that everything is okay in some way.
That we may have trapped ourselves in some system we can't get out of.
Like a Chinese finger trap.
The harder you pull, the tighter it gets.
But I have some faith because I don't understand the world.
And there never was a garden of Eden.
And we haven't destroyed anything because nothing was ever innocent or perfect.
And we're part of it.
And it's just constant change change change.
And I'm here to watch.
And we, like the moon and stars and clouds and wind are just agents of change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all who have contributed to the project in one way or another. This includes (in no order) Orla Kelly, Mae Diansangu, Fin Hall, Sally Silvers, and John Bolland for writing and sharing your poetry. Sara Stroud for making the film. Claire Bruce for transforming my amateurish event poster into something half decent! Rachel Grant mutual oil mentor. Staff at Spin Aberdeen and the Torry Community Centre. Enxhi Mandija and Neil Corall at Peacock. Colleagues at Friends of the Earth Scotland, especially Connal Hughes and Kate Whitaker for your direct support and trust in this project.

