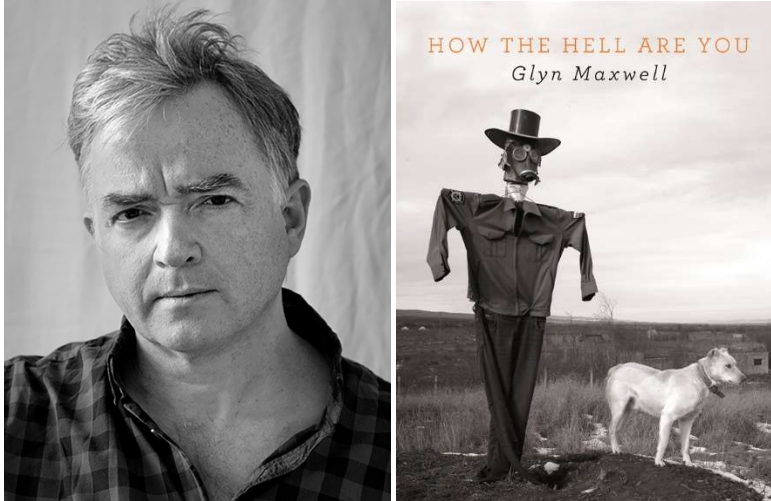


# *How the hell are you* by Glyn Maxwell



Glyn Maxwell is a poet, playwright, novelist, librettist and critic. His volumes of poetry include *The Breakage*, *Hide Now*, and *Pluto*, all of which were shortlisted for either the Forward or T. S. Eliot Prizes, and *The Nerve*, which won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. *On Poetry*, a guidebook for the general reader, was published by Oberon in 2012. *The Spectator* called it ‘a modern classic’ and *The Guardian*’s Adam Newey described it as ‘the best book about poetry I’ve ever read.’

## Reviews

‘A new collection from Glyn Maxwell – one of the great poetic stylists of the era, and one of its leading dramatic voices – is always a cause for celebration. Here, there are squibs and satires, lyrics and songs, poems written to family members and in memory of loved ones, a series of poems written by an artificial intelligence that will thrill and disturb in equal measure, and a chance for the blank page to finally speak for itself. But *How The Hell Are You* is, in its way, also a quietly political book: Maxwell regards poetry as truth-telling, and these poems – in their intimate, unsparing accounts and clear-eyed reckonings – recoil from the lies and fake news of the age to *actually* ‘tell it like it is’. *How The Hell Are You* shows a remarkable imagination and mind working at full tilt, and is the most powerful expression of Maxwell’s talent to date.’ (description via Poetry Book Society)

## Fox

Won’t do that thing we do and assume the fox  
is grinning. Watch him break from a light snack  
and saunter into limelight.

My thought's as flat as his, for any time  
he sets off for his needs in the night city  
I and people like me

stop and think the same: you didn't used to  
act so frigging brazen. Is it something  
we're doing wrong or nothing

touching us at all? You walk a kerb  
your kindred came to grief on, not a toss  
gets given, were you not

shit-scared of light one time? Did you not need  
a zigzag ingenuity to make  
the chickens walk your walk?

We've literature that says you once did shy,  
did plausible, sweet, biddable, polite,  
but look at you by floodlight –

nothing you have time for but a wish list,  
fat and soon, the churning stomach for it,  
X to mark the spot.

### **Page As Seating Plan At A Wedding**

Awoken by a quickening of soles,  
of polished shoes on polished tiles, I saw  
the looming of the crowd, elated girls,

a gent amused, two feather-hatted ladies,  
a lifted child and last the elderly,  
the careworn cheek, the lips maroon, I heard

the first of the great exhalations – *there!*  
*here we are! Where? There, together!* – saw  
the plump and jewelled finger circle, waver,

curl away, a voice cry out and turn –  
I heard recited names of the nine tables  
as if they meant the world, or meant a thing,

and I sniffed the eau de this or that, the rain,  
the mint and smoke, till the long hall was clear  
but for a booming sound, life all a dream,

far sprinkle of applause that seemed to greet  
a silence, many rooms away from here,  
some time ago, and not a soul to meet

hereafter but the one whose cotton hands  
come dancing through a door to take me down,  
her eyes unreading and her mouth all pins.

### **Thinks It's All There Is**

As far as I can see that's everyone.  
So thanks for that but where else would you be.  
Whatever came or went has come and gone  
without you why would you not turn to me.  
Look I too turned to me I'm just like you.  
Stuff came and went but nothing really took.  
So this became what else there was to do.  
This became where else there was to look.  
This became the language that is spoken  
here and here became the only spot.  
Here I sense I'm only silence broken.  
Here I sing because I see what's not  
is almost back. It's frightening, I had plans.  
You might have warned me. Hold my hand, both hands –

### **Discussion Ideas**

- 'We've literature to say you once did shy / did plausible' – what other fox poems and stories do you know? Ted Hughes' *Thought Fox*, Roald Dahl's *Fantastic Mr Fox*, Aesop's fox fables – what else? What do you need to include if you're adding another literary fox to the pile? Does this poem do that?
- 'I and people like me / stop and think the same'. Does everybody think like this about a fox? What about 'people *not* like me'? City people, country people, older people, younger people? Is this a poem written to make you think about inclusion or exclusion?
- Is 'Page As Seating Plan At A Wedding' in the voice of a guest, bride, groom or someone else? Is it specified? How might its tone change depending on the identity of its speaker?
- What poems have you heard read at weddings? Would you suggest this one to be included in the ceremony?
- '*This* became what else there was to do' – what is *this* in 'Thinks It's All There Is'? 'Here I sing' – is that the poet singing, or the poem?

## **Other books by Glyn Maxwell**

*Hide Now* (Picador, 2008)

*The Sugar Mile* (Picador, 2005)

## **If you liked Glyn Maxwell, try ...**

- Paul Farley
- Lavinia Greenlaw
- Ian Duhig

## **Glyn Maxwell online**

[glynmaxwell.com](http://glynmaxwell.com)