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**Chris Mann**

**Scapegoat**

*Nicodemus of Alexandria, a wool merchant in ancient Athens,  
to city officials at his door before the annual pharmakos (purification) ritual.*

I can take it when you badmouth me for doing something wrong,  
Can take it when you say you think some people don't belong,  
But ousting me won't bring more jobs or cure low self-esteem,  
The burning and the looting starts within that twisted dream.

I've watched so many blame artists switch targets down the years,  
It starts way back when we're still young, the teasing and the jeers.  
If you think othering gets things right, well – have another go,  
I've watched it make extortion, rape and bribery grow and grow.

It's not that I walk past the pain the poorest locals feel,  
It's just that dumping stuff on me won't help the city heal.  
Who's ever cleansed a market place of sleaze and avarice?  
You're mad to think I'll bear your sins into the wilderness.

This scapegoating's a coverup, a scam you know can't last,  
Next week your envy's bile will once again spew up the past.  
Why don't you try a little love, and treat me like a friend?  
A rabid dog knows more of peace than spite that doesn't end.

There're Syrians in the bankers' stalls, new money being made.  
Why scowl at foreigners in bars? You've always lived off trade.  
It's time you let Athena shush the doom-gods in your head,  
Don't sulk at work, don't booze and brood then vent on me instead.

I see it now – a shrinking Greece of migrant loves and hates,  
The longing for the road that leads towards Arcadia's gates.  
The world's a place of broken dreams, just as it was before,  
Well, I don't think I want to be a scapegoat anymore.

**Chris Mann** is Emeritus Professor of Poetry, Rhodes University. His main books are: *First Poems* (1979); *New Shades* (1982); *Kites* (1992); *Mann Alive!* (1992); *South Africans. A Set of Portrait-Poems* (1996); *The Horn of Plenty* (with Julia Skeen) (1997); *Heartlands* (2002); *Thuthula*.

*Heart of the Labyrinth* (2004); *Lifelines* (with Julia Skeen & Adrian Craig) (2006); *Home from Home: new and selected poems* (2010); *Seeing the Cosmos in a Grain of Sand* (2013); *Rudiments of Grace* (2014); *Epiphanies* (2017). Chris also performs song-poems with a guitar using the stage name Fafa Hopkins.

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