



CAMBRIDGE POETRY

JON STONE
YONGBO MA
FORK BURKE
JOO LZ DENBY
LAURA THEIS
ANDREA PORTER
MICHAEL BAYLEY
NINA ŽIVANČEVIĆ
CLAUDINE TOUTONGI
RICHARD BERENGARTEN
ATTILA THE STOCKBROKER
CHRISTOPHER HAMILTON-EMERY

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cambridgepoetry.com
cambridgepoetry@gmail.com
@cambridgepoetry
facebook.com/cambridgepoetry

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THANK YOU

MANY THANKS TO ALL THE WONDERFUL POETS WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS LAUNCH ISSUE FROM AROUND THE WORLD, YOUR BELIEF IN WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE IS INSPIRING.

Cambridge
December 2024

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the first Episode of Cambridge Poetry Magazine. You are probably as surprised as I am that no-one decided to start a magazine with this title before in the thousand-plus years since the founding of the city.

While the magazine uses the City of Cambridge name – because recognition is a wonderful thing – this magazine aims to be as eclectic, open, diverse, inclusive, ‘un-snobby’ and enjoyable to read as it is possible to be.

Within this (frankly rather mammoth!) first edition of the magazine you will find everything from political polemic to the most exquisite delicacy of refined modern poetry. You will find formal poetry, experimental poetry, a short story or two, prose poems, calligrams, a Haibun and a Haiku. The oldest poet is close to ninety years old, the youngest barely twenty.

You will find poems from first-time poets, student poets, teachers, mentors and lecturers as well as poetry by multi-award winning authors with dozens of interationally acclaimed volumes in their bibliography.

You will find poems in translation with all the beauty of other languages forms and sounds from Spanish and French to Chinese and even Hungarian in the print version.

There will be errors, there may be typos - please forgive them while celebrating the joy of language, meaning and our shared humanity.

With love and respect to all of you,

DAN.

Dan Leighton
Editor

Contents

Mǎ YONGBO & HELEN PLETTS

Abstraction of Distance	18
距离的抽象	19
Father's Lamp	20
父亲的灯	21
Sweeping Leaves	22
扫树叶	23
Deep Autumn	24
深秋	25
The moon is the white place in the sea of poetry	26
月亮是诗海中的白色之地	27
Our Own Moon	28
我们的月亮	29
Rooms in my Body	30
我身体里的房间	31
I bring candles	32
我带着蜡烛来	33

RACHEL GOODMAN & ELVIRE ROBERTS

O	35
speculative	36
UNflinching	38

CHRISTIAN DONOVAN

Flying for beginners	41
----------------------	----

PETE TAYLOR

Isle of Purbeck	43
still life with fruit bowl and flowers	44
redwood	45
on the exhumation of Saint Cuthbert	46
the purple-headed mountain	47
nib-digger	48

HILARY WATSON

Lazy Girls, Listen Up	51
Seven Ways to Be More Tiger	52
After the Murmuration	54
Fracturings	55
Afterlove	56
The Sleeper in the Night House	57
Feeder	57

MIKE BANNISTER

Satin Moth 59

JAC HARMON

in my cell of mirrors 63

SAMMIE ALBON

The Wall 65

Boundary 67

NINA ŽIVANČEVIĆ

On Dreaming Walls 69

Just say no! My old friend rebel/
very sensitive artist said! 70

Three Stories 71

ÖZGE LENA

Adamas 75

Hamartia 76

Horologe 77

Heartdom 78

SARAH HARROLD

Poem About Cheating the
Zener Cards Experiment By
Looking in the Reflection of
my Experimenter's Glasses 81

A Sight to Behold 82

The Hedgehog 84

Based on a True Story (Mostly) 85

EDDY LEIGHTON

花 86

my dear my dear 87

ANDREA PORTER

Belly 89

Palpate 90

Othello Gives an Interview about Tribal Scarification 92

Mother as Antelope 93

Totems 94

Old Handbook of Herbs

used in Palestine for Medicinal Purposes 96

J.S.WATTS

Time Again 99

Shaping Words 100

Overflow With Nowhere To Go 102

Painting On A Face 103

Dustings	104
DEREK FANNING	
The virus slinks away	107
At Gate 203	109
CANDY SMELLIE	
City Motors tea ceremony	113
Dust Slayer 2: Carmella's Lighthouse	116
ANNA LINDSAY	
World's Edge	119
Dim Earth	120
Trees	121
City Street	121
On the Ledge of the Day	122
Cityscape	123
RICHARD BERENGARTEN	
Poetry and Midnight	125
Approaching the Hour	
Poetry and Midnight	126
Chiming the Hour	
On Poetry and Dream	128
Twelve propositions	
TRISH HAREWOOD	
Game, Set, Match!	133
Gunter Grass releases the Flounder	134
LAURA THEIS	
in my mother tongue the name for grand piano is wing	137
the day I became a native speaker	138
This Poem Will Never Become A	
Multi-Million Dollar Netflix Series	140
The Selkies Visit At Bath Time	141
the nursery	142
Surgeon	143
MARY L. WALSH	
Big Boned	145
Birds of the Air Fly Free	146
Shakespearean Magpie	146
Mackerel Fishing in the Gaeltacht	147
Sarsaparilla Days	148
The Book of the Story of Love	149
CLAUDINE TOUTOUNGI	
asparagus	151

application for the role of hermit	152
Duck	153
unresolved	154
Without Moorings	155
ATTILA THE STOCKBROKER	
June 26, 1968	157
This & That	157
Never Too Late	158
My Ninth Birthday	160
The Lucky Generation	164
Candid Camera	165
To My Wife Robina in Lockdown	166
HELEN MCSHERRY	
After the Bomb	169
Pictures of You	170
MALIK AMEER CRUMPLER	
We Was	173
ANGUS ALLMAN	
Just	175
& then you asked	176
Lace Untied	178
I love like life spreads through agar.	178
7AM Showing	179
JULIE STEVENS	
Brimham Rocks	180
Buy a Better Pair of Legs	181
An Unwelcome Dessert	182
Out to Get Me	183
CHARLOTTE JOHNSON	
The Poet Seeks Inspiration at the Word Bank	184
JOOLZ DENBY	
In The Line	187
Life is Not Short	188
Narcotika	190
Lilac	192
YESSICA KLEIN	
There Is No Such Thing As A Straight Line	197
Such A Pisces	199
Dog Person	200
Sometimes The Girl Would Rather Be A Tree	201

LILLIAN DAVIES

From rooftops	203
Homesick	204
Mal de Pays	205

SOPHIE ROY

what of those who grow	207
Two hours and thirty nine minutes	208
pastel pink paracetamol	210

FORK BURKE

Cut It Up	215
Checklist	217

JULIA AJAYI

Haiku	218
Feet first	219

JOSEPH NUTMAN

Female Saint	221
--------------	-----

RETHABILE MASILO

White canes bend at two places, like fingers	223
The stallion	224
The bonfire	225
Eve and Adam II	227
Another world	228
Devil's weed & ginger	229

PILAR PUERTO-CAMACHO

Fringe	232
Fringe	233
Nadie dijo a la semilla	234
No one told the seed	235

FRANKIE-MAI BLYTH-SMITH

Autumn's Kiss	237
Shotgun	238

MY TINY WORDS

The Life and Times of a Misplaced Grocery	240
---	-----

AMIRA SKEGGS

Transit	243
The Last Dinner Party	244
Abstraction	245

DOUG LEE SCOTT

Tall Dance	248
------------	-----

STEWART CARSWELL

Regeneration	251
Owl in November	252
Postcard, or an afternoon dream	253

KATE O'NEILL

Social Connectives; Prepositional Experimentals	254
---	-----

JEFFREY NEILSON

Winter Moon	257
Eternal Return	258

JESSICA ROY

Solitude	261
The Hauntings of a Tormented Heart	262

ALICE HARRISON

November Nib	264
Archaeological Finds	265

EMMA DU TOIT

First Day	267
New Shoes	268
Circus of outsiders	270
Selkie	271
Myna Bird Laments the Morning	272
I follow her voice through marshes	274

CHRISTOPHER HAMILTON-EMERY

Dreams	277
The Long Cure	278
Jackson's	279
Song	280
Leave-taking	281
Later	282

GEORGE SZIRTES

An Island of Great Complexity	285
On Dancing	286
A Song of Resurrection	287
The City of Accusations	288
Remembrance	290
Magnolia	291
Two children with cowboy hats - a picture of my brother and me c.1958	292
In the Museum Garden	293

GIULIA PADALINI

Bedtime Stories	295
-----------------	-----

Couch Stories	295
Leisure Seeker	296
Protagonist	296
Allied Souls	297
MICHAEL BAYLEY	
Sparrowhawk	299
FREYA SACKSEN	
The Carding Shed	301
Plaster of Paris	302
JEREMY HUBBARD	
List Poem: 10 Odd Thought-for-the-	
Days (in order of occurrence)	305
Near Carcassone	306
Welcome to the New-road-iverse	308
JON STONE	
from Book of Subtle Poisons	313
The Cross	314
The Sentence	316
The Judgement	317
DAN LEIGHTON	
The Just War Machine	319
An empty room	324
Open Ground	325
Fekete Ország	326
Black Is The Country	327
Waking to light	328
A child born in quietness	330
All that I learned	332



Joolz Denby

Mǎ Yongbo & Helen Pletts

Mǎ Yongbo was born in 1964. Since the age of 27 he has published 7 poetry collections: *Red Bird* (Hong Kong Wen Guang Publishing House, 1991), *Summer Played at Two Speeds* (Tangshan Publishing House, Taiwan, 1999), *Journey in Words* (Huacheng Publishing House, 2015), *Geography of the Self* (Zhejiang Gongshang University Press, 2018), *Untied Boat* (China International Broadcasting Press, 2024), *A Grateful Ode to Eternity* (Long poetry collection, Sichuan Literature and Art Publishing House, 2024). He is a Chinese scholar focused on translating and teaching Anglo-American poetry and prose including the works of Dickinson, Whitman, Stevens, Pound, Williams and Ashbery. He recently published a complete translation of *Moby Dick*, which has sold over half a million copies. He teaches at Nanjing University of Science and Technology. The *Collected Poems of Mǎ Yongbo* (four volumes, Eastern Publishing Centre, 2024) comprising 1600 poems, celebrate 40 years of writing poetry.

马永波

马永波出生于1964年。自27岁起,他已出版了7本诗集:《红鸟》(香港文光出版社,1991年)、《以两种速度播放的夏天》(台湾唐山出版社,1999年)、《词语中的旅行》(花城出版社,2015年)、《自我的地理学》(浙江工商大学出版社,2018年)、《不系之舟》(中国国际广播出版社,2024年)、《致永恒的答谢词》(长诗集,四川文艺出版社,2024年)。他是一位专注于翻译和教授英美诗歌和散文的中国学者,包括狄金森、惠特曼、史蒂文斯、庞德、威廉斯和阿什贝利的作品。他最近出版了《白鲸》的全译本,销量已超过50万册。他在南京理工大学任教。《马永波诗歌总集》(四卷本,东方出版中心,2024年)共收录1600首诗,庆祝他诗学探索40周年。

Helen Pletts

Helen Pletts: (www.helenplett.com) Currently lives in UK. Shortlisted for Bridport Poetry Prize 2018, 2019, 2022, 2023 and 2024, twice longlisted for The Rialto Nature & Place 2018 and 2022, longlisted for the Ginkgo Prize 2019, longlisted for The National Poetry Competition 2022. 2nd prize Plaza Prose Poetry 2022-23. Shortlisted Plaza Prose Poetry 23-24. She has also been published by Ink Sweat and Tears, International Times.IT and Open Shutter Press.

She has worked closely with Mă Yongbo since Feb 2024 and the translations in this issue are collaborations between Helen and Mă Yongbo.

helenplett.com

Abstraction of Distance

You stand far away, emerging occasionally
with a 'miss you' uttered into the void,
leaning against trees unfamiliar to me,
plucking flowers from beneath leafy armpits;
you are women and fruits,
or magpies measuring land every morning.

Sometimes, I pinch the flattened stem's concave
where softness persists, carrying dampness and depth,
I sniff the scent, then wipe away fingerprints
on the rough bark.

Yet the vivid fruits, once operated on,
can't even fill Cézanne's pockets anymore.
'Miss you,' a battery worn to its core,
forgives me with death, but this time,
I'll walk by, hands tucked deeper into my pockets.

22nd February 2009

距离的抽象

你们站在远处,隔一段时间
就冒出来一句“想你呢”
然后倚靠在我认识的树上
掏出叶腋下的花,你们是一些女人和水果
或者是每天早上拉动卷尺量地盘的喜鹊

有时我捏捏果柄脱落后变得扁平的凹处
那里总是软的,继续着潮湿和深
我闻闻气味,然后在粗糙的树身上擦去指纹

而动过手术的鲜艳水果,终于
连塞尚的口袋都撑不起来了
“想你呢”,烂穿了底的电池冒着化学气泡
用死亡原谅了我,但这一次
我要侧身走过,把手插在更深的裤兜里

Father's Lamp

The lamp in the courtyard is still on
Over the fence, morning glory is climbing hard
White paint like cracking skin, on a wooden table
Scattered with pale pods and tears
It's autumn, one autumn of all autumns
Pockmarked potato pile before the window
Darkness has long occupied the house, dark but warm
And silence, weak scent of ashes
Breath of the family floating like ghosts

I'm awake in darkness, waiting for something
This is father's autumn, his knuckles thicker
He remains silent, I hear creaking of the rocking chair
By the window, father has risen and left
Darkness of his body is shaking alone
He stands alone in the courtyard
Looking up at the stars and faint path over tree tops
In the can beside the fence, a candle kept burning

Father's autumn, his heart contains more than us
Perhaps reaching a certain age, one will have
this concern as something of one's own
When did father step on that shining path
in darkness, nobody knows
The lamp he left keeps burning
The days are lengthening, that autumn seems forever

Christmas morning, 2016

父亲的灯

院子里的灯还亮着
篱笆上, 牵牛花还在努力攀缘
白油漆像干燥的皮肤爆裂的木桌上
散落着苍白的豆荚和眼泪
这是秋天, 所有秋天中的秋天
麻土豆堆在窗前
屋子里早就黑了, 黑而温暖
还有寂静, 微弱的灰烬的香气
家人睡熟的呼吸如白幽灵飘荡

我在黑暗中醒着, 等待着什么
这是父亲的秋天, 他的指节越发粗大
他不说话, 我听见窗前的摇椅
咯吱作响, 父亲起身离开
他身体的黑暗在独自摇晃
他在院子里一个人站着
望着天边的星星和树顶模糊的道路
篱笆旁的罐头瓶里, 蜡烛一直燃着

父亲的秋天, 他心里不再只装着我们
也许到了一定年纪, 人就会有
只属于他自己的一件事
父亲什么时候走上了那条
黑暗中发光的路, 没有人知道
他留下的灯一直亮着
白昼在延长, 秋天似乎始

Sweeping Leaves

Before the temple gate, the ginkgo tree
has long been picked clean by the grey-robed monks,
only yellow leaves remain on the branches,
waiting for gusts of wind to shake them loose.
They spin in midair,
sticking damply to the stone steps after the autumn rain.

The ginkgo nuts brought back to the monastery
have shed their flesh, gradually drying,
concentrating their fragrance.
Meanwhile, leaves in the mountains fall faster and faster,
covering the slopes, along with those from previous years.
Only at the temple gate, does someone occasionally come to sweep,
one moment here, the next moment there,
not wondering why more leaves fall as others are swept.

He knows, leaves fall faster in the dark –
those still clinging to the treetops
are like children playing late on their way home from school,
hesitating in the damp lamplight,
frightened by the rustling all over the mountain,
they suddenly hasten their step.

Christmas morning, 2016

扫树叶

庙门前,树上的银杏
早已被青衣的僧人拣走
只有黄色的叶子还剩在枝头
等待一阵阵风的摇落
它们在半空中打着旋
在秋雨后湿湿地粘在石阶上

那些被带回僧舍的银杏
脱落了果肉,已经逐渐干燥
将香气紧缩起来
而山中的叶子越落越快
和往年的叶子一起撒了满坡
只有庙门前,还不时有人出来打扫
东一下,西一下
毫不奇怪叶子会边扫边落

他知道,黑暗中叶子落得更快
那些还留在树顶上的
就仿佛放学路上玩晚了的孩子
在潮湿的灯火中犹豫
被满山的沙沙声惊吓,突然加快了脚步

Deep Autumn

I leave behind me the last woman.
There's no one left in the city
who knows me.
Autumn leaves fall around my shadow.
Sinking into puddles,
my boots slap as
water flows beneath the fallen leaves.

The trees on the muddy ground are too sad to speak,
they forget that seasons always change, in time.
My feet shine wet with glistening water and
the wind brings the odd message from beyond the woods.
Only the reins remain on the overturned cart,
a red horse flickers at the forest edge
How I wish for a narrow lane where,
that horse could silently walk in the morning.

There's no sound left in the city,
the small bottles on the balcony still shimmer.
The handle of the glass door turns gently,
at the same moment I wake up,
leaving the door ajar.

I run my hand through my hair,
deep autumn has arrived.
My wind-cheater flutters behind me instead of prayer flags.
No true woman will be seen on the roads now,
but I'll walk among the fallen leaves,
looking for a different path,
letting my shadow fall
on the wide open land.

深秋

我已离开最后的女人
城里再没有谁
与我相识
秋叶在身影里飘落
沉入水洼
我的靴子在响
水在落叶下流动

泥地上的树沮丧得说不出话
忘记了季节也会改变
脚上沾满发亮的水
风不时送来林外的消息
倾倒的马车上只有缰绳
红马在林边闪了一闪
我多想有一条小巷
在一个早上, 让那马静静走过

城里再没有声音
阳台上的小瓶子还在闪烁
玻璃门的把手轻轻转动
同一个时刻, 我将在那里醒来
让门开着

我将拍拍头发
深秋已来临
风衣代替了祝福飘在身后
路上再也见不到真正的女人
我将在落叶中走着
找到另一条路
让背影出现在
开阔地上

The moon is the white place in the sea of poetry

(For Ma Yongbo, after a sleepless night finishing revising his Chinese translation of Amy Lovell's 650 line long poem by the morning of the Mid-Autumn Festival)

Happy is the Full Moon,
the shiny white face at your window.
She will love your company,
the smart poet, gazes up at the moon,
the moon is very happy about that.
Her light can make us drop a stitch in the quilt of night
Her curiousness beaming through glass.
If we live at all it is her shaking us on the water
She pulls the levers and spins us beautifully.
We never have to reckon with darkness, silver-she,
Navigating the universe for us,
spins until our sleepy heads nod,
laden with her silverlight.
The industrious poet's midnight oil burning brightly,
like a very bright lighthouse over the seven seas.

月亮是诗海中的白色之地

Translated by Ma Yongbo 2024

马永波 译

(献给永波,一夜无眠,中秋清晨修订完成艾米·洛威尔650行长诗的中文翻译)

幸福是满月,
在你窗前闪耀的洁白面庞。
她会喜爱你的陪伴,
睿智的诗人,凝望着月亮,
月亮对此感到非常高兴。
她的光芒能使我们在夜的被子上漏织一针。
她的好奇照透了玻璃。
若我们还能存活,那是她在水面上摇晃我们。
她操控着杠杆,优美地把我们旋转。
我们从不必顾虑黑暗,银色的她,
为我们把宇宙导航,
旋转,直到我们睡思昏沉,头颅低垂,
充满她的银光。
勤勉的诗人,午夜的油灯熊熊燃烧,
如同七海之上一座耀眼的灯塔。

Our Own Moon

For Helen Pletts by Ma Yongbo

Our moon shines on the sea and on the ditches,
Shining on good people and poets alike.
Our moon is not insomnia,
Not a companion who doesn't understand drinking,
Not the frost that never melts on the window,
Nor the jade disc of other people's homeland.
The moon shines into the pine forest,
The moon surges from the Tianshan Mountain,
The moon stands alone before the empty golden goblet,
The moon seems small above towering mountains,
The moon illuminates the worn green collar of a returning traveler,
The moon ties to the tips of willow branches,
The moon curls up the pearl curtain like a hook,
The moon startles magpies into flight, the moon shifting shadows
on walls, Even the moon serves as a searchlight of the universe,
The moon gleams like a blade – none of these are our moon.
Our moon is a small seashell,
Walking step by step across the seven seas from the dark ocean floor.
As it walks, it sips on the sounds flowing through the light cables.
By the time it arrives at Cambridge,
A village floating over the river of flower fragrance,
And lands on the blue-painted wooden windowsill of the poetess,
It has already become a word cleansed of metaphor,
Smooth and transparent, like an ear,
Blushing in the morning light.

我们的月亮

我们的月亮照大海，也照沟渠
照好人，也照诗人
我们的月亮不是失眠
不是不解饮的伙伴
不是窗前永不融化的霜
也不是他人故乡的白玉盘
照进松林的月，涌出天山的月
独对空空的金樽的月
山高月小的月，照亮归人磨损的青青衣领的月
系在柳梢头的月，卷起珠帘如钩的月
惊飞鸟鹊的月，花影移墙的月
甚至作为宇宙探照灯的月
刀光闪闪的月，都不是我们的月亮
我们的月亮是一只小小的贝壳
从漆黑的海底一步一步走过七海
一边走，一边吸吮着光缆里的声音
等它来到剑桥，一座漂浮在花香之上的村庄
来到女诗人蓝油漆的木头窗台上
它已经成了一个洗净了隐喻的词语
光洁而透亮，像一只耳朵
在晨光中泛出红晕

Rooms in my Body

by Ma Yongbo 马永波

There are many rooms in my body
I used to be a castle with brilliant lights.
My hall always full of music and dance every night,
always people coming in and out of the bright porch,
the restaurant filled with the colours and fragrances of the four
seasons. There were people living in every room:
my friends, classmates, and relatives.
Of course, there were old wine barrels in the basement, secret
rooms for meditation in the stone tower,
the library had all kinds of rare books.
There were herds of cattle and sheep on the hillside outside my
castle, rivers, woods, orchards and pastures;
like a necklace surrounding the castle.
Now there are fewer and fewer rooms with lights on,
everyone's departed.
There is one room that is always dark
forever closed, only I occasionally open the door
like an elderly caretaker
stands in the silence of many years ago;
there are still floating breaths
like fine dust in light.
One day I will leave
the last room in my building will also go out,
I will stand in the darkness outside for a moment;
look up at the faces that emerge from behind each window.

我身体里的房间

马永波

我身体里有很多个房间
它曾是一座灯火辉煌的城堡
大厅里夜夜笙歌不断
明亮的门廊总有人进进出出
餐厅里弥漫四季的色彩与芬芳
每个房间里都住着人
我的朋友, 同学, 亲人
当然, 地下室里会有经年的酒桶
石头的塔楼上有可供静修的密室 图书馆中的珍本应有尽有
城堡外的山坡牛羊成群
河流, 树林, 果园与牧场
如同项链将城堡环绕
如今亮灯的房间越来越少
每一个人的离去
就有一个屋子永远黑掉
永远关闭, 只有我偶尔打开门
像一个上了年纪的管理员
站到多年前的寂静中
那里, 还有漂浮的呼吸
如同光线中细微的灰尘
当有一天我也离开
大厦最后一个房间也将熄灭
而我会在外面的黑暗中站上片刻
仰望每一扇窗后浮现的面孔

I bring candles

Response poem to “Rooms in my Body” by Ma Yongbo

the wax falls, long and thin like horses' tail hairs
ingenious threads of warmth
light and heat reshaping the white sticks in my hand
poetry moves in everything,
the human hand connecting us,
your pen's tiny spidery toes,
our keyboard's even stamp,
gracing a white mirror,
lamplight on a screen revealing.
i leave my signature beneath the bright moon
she is my shining companion,
she staggers in the sky, to break the clouds.
we leave the light in every room
and she promises to come back and press against the windows
her face like a persistent white cat
so that you'll leave the door ajar
and eventually the darkness will pour out of
every crevice until only light persists
lapping in a pool of milky-shine in the hallway

18th September 2024 early morning

我带着蜡烛来

应和马永波诗《我身体里的房间》

烛泪滴落，马尾一般纤长，
巧妙温暖的线索，
光与热重塑我手中洁白的枝条，
诗在万物中流动，
人类之手把我们连接，
你笔尖微小的蛛脚，
我们的键盘均匀的敲击，
使白色的镜子生辉，
使灯光透过屏幕显现。
我在明月上留下我的签名，
她是我闪亮的伴侣，
在天空摇晃，撕开云层。
我们在每个房间储存光明，
她承诺会回来，贴在窗上，
她的脸像一只执着的白猫，
以至于你会把门半开
最终黑暗将从每个缝隙溜走，
直到只有一盏灯，
在门厅一池乳白色的光晕中荡漾。

Rachel Goodman & Elvire Roberts

Rachel Goodman and Elvire Roberts are a collaborative duo whose work explores the ways in which women have been written over a lifetime, asking whether these narratives are fit for purpose. Rejecting the concept of sole authorship, they combine their voices to expand the boundaries of ‘she’ – inviting readers to inhabit this world through a new language, both in subject, form, and grammar.

Their poetry has been featured in publications such as *Under the Radar*, *Magma*, *Aesthetica*, *Finished Creatures*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Lighthouse* and the *Fenland Journal*. Both Rachel and Elvire earned Masters degrees in Creative Writing and Poetry later in life, having previously followed different career paths.

Elvire is a poet from the LGBTQ+ community and works as a signed language interpreter between British Sign Language (BSL) and English. She lives in Nottingham. Rachel is a former actor and BBC presenter living in North Norfolk.

Their first pamphlet, *Knee to Knee*, was published by Dialect Press in February 2024.

O

to not have to do

to not stand up to not ||

this weight gathering in my skull
with an addict's gleam is my tell

this need to sleep || perchance not
to dream to think to feel to weep to wake to rage
to plane against the grain graft choice harrow worth

but be || a pool of nothing between trees
soak into the soil sink || solve

day is coming close and the size of it || the girding up of it
makes me envy babies off-calendar with an easy engine
of body wants

day is coming close and the force of it || the hard grasp of it
crushes the sides of my face dragging down
my eyelids steeling my jaw

in the swell of idontwanttothink
truth louvres to fog || sucks me into the hollow of zerO
better than FluOXetiNeOlanZapineCitalOPram
DiaZePanZOpiClOneRisPeriDOne lullullme O

baptise me out of my life || hand me yellow
flowers as my head rolls onto the floor

speculative ||

structures linking disparate points in spacetime

I am going down the wormholes¹ windows shut could be
opened windows open can be shut² see out see in seal
them with tampons³ break jaws to prise a memory⁴ peel
blackout off sun pipes radiate pride see in see out slats
in the playground where she louvred up a fight hopper of
her armhole where his hand snuck in wish it was a sash
to smash down on him oriel juts out pushes up against her
mutters remember remember draw the curtains shatter the
glass⁵ window latched in her thumb one she would have jumped from
windowsmadeofshortlines———choosetocutorsew windowsacross
theAtlanticwaitingfortheirwalls lifesheneverlived windowinawindow⁶

1 Oh, Alice, is that really such a good idea?

2 How many times have I closed that bloody window?

3 Every time there's a puff of wind, it starts banging, stuttering w-w-want to go home, and now there's rain all over the floor FFS

4 I keep coming back to it – you can see the toothmarks from earlier attempts – but it's stuck shut from years of painting over

5 Wash the splinter from your eye or your heart shall turn hard and cold as a lump of ice

6 Who left these footnotes open?

in the side of a car a triangular no-No-NO stay there
 be good sunny French window to a Jackson Pollock garden
 pasted over with Private Keep Out⁷ should have slept with
 him⁸ skylights shouting *look at me!* should have slept with
 her⁹ paper flap on the advent calendar ripped at the
 Christmas that he ruined¹⁰ X taped on glass limits bomb
 damage¹¹ transom on the form where ☑ says Other it's
 a peel-off vista of eternal passion way up out of reach
 hinged on the left tilted on the right raise an eyebrow in the
 roof for the wild girl she might yet be imagine this the
 beginning of a long conversation imagine portholes
 listening to your dreams opening the casement of your ribs¹²

7 Futile virginity, a sharing in the life of angels, thanks Augustine

8 14th July 1985

9 Yesterday

10 And then bricked up. The ghosting is still visible: was window

11 It breaks, but quietly, and into larger pieces

12 Please close the footnotes after you have bolted

UNflinching

i picK up the
 meSS

i've
 maDe and Arrange
 it

over my shoulders [gorgeous] a splotched shawl with
outblood blooms pin my hair tall with a knitting needle or
shave it off and tattoo a fontanelle [gorgeous] spike my ears
with gold stars for learning to count and repeat after you
stretching each hole with weighty capitals & take myself

[gorgeous] down tOwn

lameNting lack
 of knives

i ghost smooth-skinned dolls trail fairy lights and vitals am
sticky feathered scrawled in italics

hauntinG Throw me
 sAlt

i breach the golden ratio leak pomegranate seeds step outside brackets
emboldened

stARving

feed me

PROTEIN

i dream of knives my darling sharps that split the bone
i-my-knives speak as the unflinching robin that tears the worm
in two

cRaving

offer me

saCRifice

my sweetest tamest me in her perpetual subscript i strike her through
and as she dies i lick her eyes shut

reVolting

swAllow me

poisOn

that i may spew happy endings skewer pronouns that agree
with their antecedents and still say SHE

redbreast [gorge]US

Christian Donovan

Christian Donovan lives in Pembrokeshire. She retired from work as a guide at Carew Castle in 2023. In the past she has been a dairy farmer's wife, and a Welsh language tutor. She started writing poetry a long time ago but has only recently started submitting to competitions and magazines. She enjoys exploring poetic forms and has written and published a number of ekphrastic poems: 'Recipe for Salt-Baked Maidmer' appeared in the *Ekphrastic Review* on August 2023; 'Small hours chat' appeared in *Ink, Sweat & Tears* in August 2024; and her film-poem, *Princess Nest Royal Concubine*, written for the Narberth Museum Women of West Wales project, can be found on YouTube.

ekphrastic.net/the-ekphrastic-review/recipe-for-salt-baked-maidmer-by-christian-donovan

inksweatandtears.co.uk/christian-donovan

youtube.com/watch?v=6JjoOdkITwk

Flying for beginners

f
irst
things first
observe the experts
at work – swallows on the
wing over water – dart, swoop,
gulp midges; red admirals jitterbug
vivid triangles, fan out to fly.

choose your starting point – think
high carn bica, frenni fawr, penberi
perhaps. before you leap, pimp
your ride, blag balloons or snag
a dragon, feel the heat. this is
for real, forget foxed, smoky
mirrors in *diy: learn to*
levitate. ready for take-off

unfurl silk feathers,
fluff into the wind,
unhook your
shadow watch it
fall spin out
of paradox
snap- roll,
loop-de-
loop

As
your
tail
flares
inhale
zero
gravity,
bite
the
cosmos,
skydive
to
weight-
less-
ness
until
at last
you
touch
down
beyond
the
horizon

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Pete Taylor

Pete Taylor has lived and worked in London, Brighton, New York, Salzburg, Riyadh, Doha and Nairobi – enjoying a career as a copywriter and editor. He now works from home in the Cheshire countryside, where he lives with his young family, running the poetry and photography imprint *Open Shutter Press*. His own poems have appeared in publications including *PN Review* and *The Rialto*, as well as anthologies from the *1-2-3*, *Candlestick* and *Wee Sparrow Poetry* presses. He has been shortlisted for the Ginkgo/AONB ‘Best Poem of UK Landscape’ Prize, twice highly commended in the Wales Poetry Award and twice longlisted for *Butcher’s Dog* magazine, among other commendations.

Follow Pete on Instagram [@petetaylorpoetry](https://www.instagram.com/petetaylorpoetry)

Isle of Purbeck

again the water lifts
again it lapses –
sea life fries on
hobs of stone and glass

our pebble stacks collapse
beneath the headland
with its handkerchief
of cotton-grass

this crevice is a
crumbling music hall
where mating guillemots
crank up the noise

and ocean waves cavort
like aging dancers
robbed of their agility
and poise

still life with fruit bowl and flowers

say what you will / these apricots will still
be apricots / this dish will still be clay /
say what you wish / your scathing words can't kill
acrylic daffodils / say what you may /

find fault with the perspective if you must /
it's all subjective / and when we are dead
and gone / long after we have turned to dust /
my paint will live and breathe / whatever's said /

should we not leave a little of ourselves
behind / some pictures in a gallery /
a slim collection on the library shelves /
a file of photographs / a planted tree /

for though I pass away / I will remain /
as long as someone somewhere speaks my name

redwood

too hard to climb
too rooted now to fell
the giant sequoia of
your silence
cones tight shut
your thickened skin
a rutted shell to shield
you from the flames
the sticks and stones
bad blood and
laid-waste woodland
shade and doubt
the broken necklaces
of emerald moss
our deep pink bedspread
of wild thyme burnt out
and blackened so
I see no way across
the gap

yet when the fire retreats
you free your fragile
seeds of hope
each setting sail
on tiny wings
to breed a sapling tree
in this dark fertile soil
(though most will fail)
our sap will rise again
defences fall
and I shall feel
a hundred metres tall

on the exhumation of Saint Cuthbert

his bones will creak like long-lost boats / his rack
of ribs embody tender arks / each hip
a keel of beached and silted Viking longship /
tilting darkly fore and harking back /

those healing hands now naked-knuckled should
be ready for the reliquary / that nose
no longer aquiline / just calicoes
and silks from vestments swaddling his priesthood /

no / sweet Jesus / Lindisfarne be blessed /
for Cuthbert / shepherd-soldier-saint / lies whole
inside his casket / dressed in robes and stole /
a gold-and-garnet cross across his chest /

the body incorrupt here on this trestled
catafalque / his corpse a shipshape vessel

the purple-headed mountain

like priests at Eastertide / the Devil's Chair
wears purple robes / its maniple and gown /
as summer sows and sews an eiderdown
of squirrel-tail and woven wavy-hair /

unwanted conifers are in retreat
from these scree hills / where here and there a flush
of flower forgives the trespasses of brush-
wood / sweeping out the grouse from meadowsweet /

but like a reliquary of God's own teeth /
these Stiperstones could quell the earthly doubt
of lost apostles / hazels twist and shout
about the resurrected bilberry heath /

whose foliage of heathers won't relent /
their lilac caps / their stoles like priests at Advent

nib-digger

had you not been alive we would have missed
it all / the deftly opened ground of peat
and potato / thrift and thatch / the hymn sheet
of soft vowels / the conflicted activist /

not mad Ireland with its troubles / but that
kin-and-cattle background was the trigger
for your gift of eye and tongue / nib-digger /
blogger of the bogs / teasing sharp and flat

from the music of what happens / from your
songbook of furrows at the happy edge
of Irish sanity / I wonder how

you'll fare / for half a century or more
you walked on air against your better judge-
ment / but not ever after / and not now



Dan Leighton

Hilary Watson

Hilary Watson is a Cardiff-based poet working towards her first collection. She is a graduate of the University of Warwick and was a Jerwood/Arvon Mentee in 2015 with mentor Caroline Bird. Her poems have recently appeared in *Magma*, *Poetry Birmingham*, *Atrium* and *The Emma Press Anthology of Contemporary Gothic Verse*. She was shortlisted for the Troubadour International Poetry Prize 2018 and the inaugural I'll Show You Mine Prize 2019 and the Verve Festival Prize 2020. She works in the third sector and spends her free time at the coast with her girlfriend and lurcher Lola. She is part of the 57 poetry collective.

[@poetryhilary](#)

Lazy Girls, Listen Up

You know what you are? Lazy.

Lazy girls sit in squalor
and don't get husbands

Lazy girls only run for trains
and even then, it's to get home early
to do more laziness

Lazy girls drag charcoal across paper
instead of irons across shirts

Lazy girls languish in bed
languish in chat rooms

languish in their feelings
sit on their fat arses counting breaths
and labelling lazy thoughts

instead of taking the bins out
Lazy girls Hoover while they sing crass songs
loud and unladylike

Lazy girls wear trousers
refuse to cross their legs
or shave their pits
or hold their tongues
or keep the peace
a disgrace.

Lazy girls cut their hair
to save on brushing
stop cooking, shower less
grow veg to save on shopping
go dancing to save on heating
it's pathetic.

Lazy girls ought to be taught
a lesson they can't ignore. Who
in their right mind wants
a world of worthless girls?

Seven Ways to Be More Tiger

i

A man pushes in front of you
in Co-op. Eat the man, then
ask for Menthol Super Slims
and change for the bus.

ii

There's a puddle in the park
your dog shows fondness for.

Find it. Take off your coat,
remove your shoes, tie the laces
and fling them
at an impossibly high branch.

Wade through the water,
realise it is only ankle height.

iii

When the postwoman ignores the sign
you put up yesterday:

NO SHIT
THROUGH
THE DOOR
DIOLCH

rake her face with your claws,
lest she forgets and repeats her mistake.

iv

Be kinder to pigeons.
They are your childhood
re-incarnate.

v

Sleep. Belly-up
whenever, wherever
the sun cares
to shine.

vi

Poop discreetly.

vii

Ignore all written instructions
henceforth. You're a fucking tiger.
Deal with the thing.

'Diolch' is cymraeg (welsh) for thanks.

After the Murmuration

Carp lie dormant, gills flitting the shadows,
the air calm as moonlight over water.

The blackbird pauses to quench her thirst, while scarlet
darters zip between grasses hunting mosquitoes.

Beneath the duck weed, a knot of toads shelter from
the heat. A lone dandelion seed settles on your eyelashes.

As tadpoles tickle your neck, nibble your jawline,
my fingertips skate like water-boatmen across your skin,

I nuzzle the contours of your waist where
irises burst out of buds in the early light.

Trace rows of pebbles along your ribs, memorise
the coordinates of your hips. Yellow flags reach for

a sky filling with starlings, rising from the reeds.
A terrapin slinks into the pool, rippling the surface.

Fracturings

The phone's been ringing all morning
and though it has been answered,
conversation's brief. 'No, I know.

We can't believe it either. I'm sorry
I don't know more.' Cyclical connections
and fracturings of calls that each become

a branch of their own dissemination. 'No,
no news. Her boys, I know, I know.'

And the telephone has rung all morning,
snow falls to mark the day,
to hold our thoughts—

'I hope I can make her proud.'

to the surfaces of fields,
a division of hedgerows—

'I hope I'll be half as kind.'

The telephone has been ringing
all morning. 'Still no news, no.'
'We don't know how this happened.'

Afterlove

I spent so long nesting against your hip bones I forgot
the curves of my own furniture, lost track of which way

the road flows, forgot how the barricade I built against you
from joists and doors and beds I flung from windows

was the same as love — made from the remnants of what
we lost together, found only in the afterwards of us.

Though I know you'll never see my splintered street,
joists and legs, splats, arms, brackets and mullions will erode,

neglected as berries red in mud.
Someday, when the tilt of Earth is unremarkable,

the moon another rock that you admire,
we'll find a way to reconcile;

the night spooling onwards,
that storm still playing out in Jupiter's eye.

Afterlove is that strange emotion that is only possible after a relationship has ended. When you finally return to your now unfamiliar home, having spent time moulding to someone else's life, and are then left upended. When you barricade yourself away from the one you've lost, and let go of all that is no longer serving you - as both a defensive act and so you can heal.



Joolz Denby

Mike Bannister

Mike Bannister was born Worcestershire. Following military service, he worked in Community Schools, mostly in the inner-cities. He now lives in Suffolk. Mike Chairs Café Poets at Pinky's, a venue for working poets. He has been published: *Greenstreet Fragments*, Orphean Press (2003) *Pocahontas in Ludgate*, Arrowhead Press (2007) *Orinsay Poems* Orphean Press (2012) *The Green Man Selected Poems* (Bibliotheca Universalis, 2015; dual English/Romanian text). His work has appeared in magazines regionally and nationally, earning a variety of awards and commendations.

Satin Moth

Lymantriidae *Leucoma Salicis*

Silence for the ghost of silence;
in pitch dark, I find a white-winged moth
at rest where I was sleeping just a while ago;
her wings, where mine would be; soft brilliance,
perfect moon on a quiet river, spotless lint,
traced with veins of mistletoe.

Defiant Lymantriide, you advertise,
against the protocols of camouflage,
flaring, pristine, rebellious in the night;
stealing into my dream on soundless wings
to taste the obscure chemistries we share
with poplar, or the willow leaf.

I cup her out into the warm night,
then lie awake, considering the metaphoric
significance of ordinary things; the hundred
thousandth possibility of meaning: the Zen
of white, of black, of the night messenger:
Stillness for the ghost of stillness.

The Terminology of Bells

Harmonic Minor Ten

Using Bells 2–11, with the flat fourth substituted for the 5th, and the flat 6th substituted for the 6th, the haunting sound of this peal is traditionally heard to good effect when ringing with the bells half-muffled on New Year's Eve.

Ringer's Book, Worcester Cathedral

Sally stroke: early morning, neither dog bark
nor cuckoo call, only that distant melancholy peal
a deep-rolling tonnage of bronze, rings out

over Saintbury, Salwarpe, Stratford and Cofton
singing the small rivers, Arrow, Avon, Alne, and Teme,
all the Willow and May-traced shires of Arden.

Go: the heart hunting now, headstock and chamber
back behind the tears, for one, born by Michaelmas,
who slept in a drawer; was told, and would believe

that the bees sang in their hive at Christmastide.
Strike: call memory out from wheeling bells,
catch, and hold plain things that stirred his heart.

Always the water, constant song, an endless
fall of foam on stone, and the slow pool under,
where he might see the grass-snakes wind.

Bare-foot, he angled for perch, dace and miller's
thumb; scaled the sluice ledges to wonder at some
wagtail's brood, felt fear, then slipped away.

One summer, wading home, late, through
Radford Bridge, he comes upon the last crayfish
orange with roes, some knotted fold of first life

broad as his own hand, enduring, oblivious;
raising hackles, it lets go, drifts away down river
over the grit ledges, and so to Severn clay.

Ring down: a crown of alder and flood-grass,
four perfect eggs; a moor-hen, white tail-flick
red neb, and green feet, steals the silence.

That's all: all there was of love and beauty, made
true again, seven decades on, by the tolling song
of morning bells, first faraway, then close

Jac Harmon

Jac Harmon was born in London, and has lived in the Cambridge area since 1998. She has a PhD in History from UEA and completed her MA in Creative Writing at ARU in 2024. She writes in all genres and her work has appeared both online, and in print. She is currently working on an Historical Gothic novel and enjoying engaging with all forms of poetry.

in my cell of mirrors

in my cell of mirrors
 i keep my grief suspended

on wires ravelled round my head
 blasted
 belligerent crystals
 and polished heart perceptions

an infinity of wastelands and
 tears in bite-back blue
 shed under sacrilege

within my four walls
 are reflected
 a million recalibrating selves

each a semblance of a ruptured whole
 lodged in its own oblique space
 entered under duress

Beneath bare feet
 tainted memory glass
 reflects my luminous crown

i exist mindless
 lungcrushed
 desiccated

desperate to fling heartache to the void

my grief
 a chandelier

celestial spheres
 of sadness

Sammie Albon

"I believe we all have a voice worth bearing and words belong to everyone."

Sammie Albon is a writer and mental health advocate with a passion for empowering others through creativity. Since earning her degree in English Literature and Writing from Anglia Ruskin University in 2011, she has dedicated herself to working with mental health charities, leading workshops that use writing as a tool for wellbeing. Her poetry, often performed live, plays with form, blending free verse and hybrid styles to push boundaries. Sammie is particularly driven by helping people find their voice, especially those who face barriers to education or self-expression.

The Wall

that cat sits black and
humped beneath

leaves of liver red and ivy
spilling from the

lip of the gutter;
sits soft where moss

creeps green above
a hole in the wall

where loose flints cling
to crumbling cement

sits compact above
a damp mat

of leaves cushioning
a few fallen stones

cat claims a dull
dank space

sits with neglect
tucked and still



Dan Leighton

Boundary

after, it might have startled you to see
my bare feet dancing between furrows
without the clothes you put me in

and if you watched me dance
the reach of the field, I hope
you saw those birds carry me

knowing my pulse was a winged beat
watching as they drew me beyond
the trees, or – maybe you thought it

indiscreet, my bloodied, mud-
streaked soles a sore sight
from where you were searching

or maybe you couldn't see —
or were the birds too loud?
screeching beyond the words

stuck on your tongue
and your hands burying
– nothing won

Nina Živančević

Poet, essayist, fiction writer, playwright, art critic, translator and contributing editor to *NY ARTS* magazine from Paris, Serbian-born Nina Živančević has published fifteen books of poetry. She has also written three books of short stories, two novels and a book of essays on Miloš Crnjanski (her doctoral thesis) published in Paris, New York and Belgrade. The recipient of three literary awards and a former assistant and secretary to Allen Ginsberg, she has also edited and participated in numerous anthologies of contemporary world poetry. As editor and correspondent she has contributed to *New York Arts Magazine*, *Modern Painters*, *American Book Review*, *East Village Eye*, *Republique de lettres*. She has lectured at Naropa University, New York University, the Harriman Institute and St. John's University in the US and she has taught English language and literature at La Sorbonne (Paris I and V) and the History of Avant-garde Theatre at Paris 8 University in France and at numerous universities and colleges in Europe. She has actively worked for theatre and radio: four of her plays were performed and broadcast in the U.S. and Great Britain. In New York she worked with the 'Living Theatre' and the members of the 'Wooster Group'. Nina Živančević lives and works in Paris and she is the winner of the 2021 Centre National du Livre Grant for creative writing (poetry domain) for a project titled 'The Source of Light', after the Syrian poet Nouri Al-Jarrah who exclaimed: 'Poetry is the only source of Light!'

Her most recent publication, *Roller-Skating Notes*, is published by Coolgrove Books: coolgrove.com/books/nina-zivancevic.

On Dreaming Walls

Dreaming Walls is a documentary about the Chelsea Hotel, New York by Maya Duverdier and Joe Rohanne, produced by Martin Scorsese

I knew I had to see this film all alone – too many memories, souvenirs, moments with my dearest folks in New York City – all of them disappeared into the sea mist and the Hudson River foam.

However, the film does not hold that Chelsea Hotel duende, that magic the hotel used to provide for free. They've been renovating it for the last ten years, the oldest, and most of the rest of the inhabitants, kicked out – or simply gone. Some outsiders and newcomers are being interviewed before the director's camera... But there's nothing of Rita Fetcher's smile, nor anything like Ira Cohen's deep laughter. Only the bohemian wannabes who desperately try to stay in the building before it is completely turned into a deluxe hotel, a sort of New York's Savoy... But Oscar Wilde would probably say the same thing – he was one of the first inhabitants to live there for a while...

Aside from the work I'd accomplished there, the most scintillating moments which I lived through at the Chelsea include a crazy night I interviewed Ira Cohen, and Rita's party on the roof where I met Nina Hagen; she was so tiny, one of the smallest creatures I have ever seen, but what a deep projecting voice!

'Hi, I'm Nina,' she said; 'Oh hi, I'm Nina too,' I responded, 'but I cannot sing, my grandmother was a trained singer... just like you, but I can barely speak in whispers.'

'Oh, never mind,' Hagen retorted, 'I will be singing for both of us tonight!'

And she did. It was such a nice evening, one of the events that the Chelsea was famous for.

**Just say no! My old friend rebel/
very sensitive artist said!**

(She invented the female rebellion centuries before the *metoo* movement and before Angela Davis, Judith Butler and Paul Preciado spoke about it.)

Say NO to the laws and lawyers and the priests and doctors (psychiatrists) are the worst, she said...

All these non-creative people desperately trying to help themselves under the guise of the good-hearted ones; they don't wish to help us (she winked at me), they are just thirsty for power and Lo! Let us not stand in their way.

Instinctively though, she whispered, they feel they can't rule the artist's mind so they spend hours and hours plotting how to subjugate us.

But do it quickly – say 'No!' to them quickly, before they suck up that tiny marrow that is left in your bones... Frankly... she hissed slowly... you know there isn't much time left to us.

Here, I said, I appreciate your help and I am going to write three short pieces for you, you tell me how you liked them:

Three Stories

Spanish Hidalgos

Spanish Hidalgo 1 versus Spanish Hidalgo 2

They meet at the party.

Spanish Hidalgo 1 kind of knew that Spanish Hidalgo 2 encountered, and married, “his ex-wife” at a party earlier in Spring of that year. Both of them are heavenly polite and too immaculately civilized to blurt out anything but a polite remark or request worthy of a Southern French or Spanish Hidalgo...

Hidalgo 1: So... How's your new born? Your baby, I mean?

Hidalgo 2: Very well thank you! Would you like some more of this salad? The same thing, I mean?

Hidalgo 1: Oh yes, thank you! It's excellent. You should not worry about my food, you know! I will help myself...

Hidalgo 2: I understand... but you should not worry about my baby that much either... XXXXXXXXXX

The Religious Woman

She wakes up every morning at five and lets the Imam's voice remind her that it is the hour for her first prayer.

Allah Akbar... a streaming voice announces on her cell phone and she starts singing the pertinent surahs from the Holy book, up and down promptly and gracefully to do prostrations, look it's already 5:20am and she is ready to face the world.

She starts her computer while giving one last Allah Akbar and one softer Bismillah.

Her client is ready on the other side of their Zoom conference and she enters a trance again while explaining to him a few things;

‘Why did you place these stocks over there – it was the wrong place!?’
Just tell me WHY?’

‘Oh, I did not know, Counsel, my mother told me to go to that market.’

‘How old is your mother, Sir, and - how old are you?’ Smiling and hissing at him at the same time.

‘Well...’ the powerless creature barely mumbles out, ‘I am.. sixty-nine... and my mom is ninety-five.’

‘There you go, Sir!’ the lawyer exclaims. ‘You are allowing a ninety-five year old lady to rule your life and business. Now you will see what happens next : I will do my best to help you, I am always here to help you, but I am not the Almighty in the sky!’

The sound of her own voice seems to make her perplexed, and she ends their conversation on a brief note:

‘I will call you tomorrow though, first thing in the morning.’

She switches off the computer as fast as she can, and then kneels down, frenetically ready to launch herself into a new set of prostrations and prayers. Which surah describes her zeal in the most suitable manner... the 114th Surah Naas? Or Surah Ikhlaas? Both of them work for the utmost protection of clients

The Shrink

Both of them were patients at the Bellevue hospital in NYC and their only entertainment consisted of playing this game early in the day, before the nurse entered the room and give them their respective shots.

She came in trembling and sat down at the very edge of the couch, she was still able to address the shrink – facing him straight and meeting him eye to eye and he, the “Shrink”, appreciated her strong will and courage.

She said, ‘I’m not feeling well , I hear voices all around me again.’

The Shrink said: ‘That’s all right, I hear them too.’

‘Well Sir,’ she said, ‘I hope you are not trying to minimise my suffering?’

‘Oh no, for God’s sake! It would not be my intention,’ the “Shrink” retorted. ‘I just hope that they calm down and that the noise around us stops once and forever.’

The woman left the office quite content with their working session, he was her ideal man who understood her really well.

That’s called a positive transfer in psychology, he said to himself, once she was out of his “office”; both of them thoroughly disturbed.

Özge Lena

Özge Lena is an Istanbul-based poet. Her poems have appeared in *The London Magazine*, *Abridged*, *Orbis*, *The Selkie*, *14 Magazine*, and elsewhere in various countries including the UK, USA, Canada, Bangladesh, Iceland, Serbia and France.

In 2023, she was nominated both for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. Özge's poetry was shortlisted for the Oxford Brookes International Poetry Competition and the Ralph Angel Poetry Prize in 2021, for The Plough Poetry Prize in 2023 and for the Black Cat Poetry Press Nature Prize in 2024.

She has the unique distinction of being the first poet ever to be accepted for publication in *Cambridge Poetry Magazine* a distinguished honour indeed!

Adamas

The day he gives her the ring carrying the head
of Medusa with a gentle tangle of silver snakes
on her skull, and two bright stones in the eye holes,
he mentions the word diamond derives from adamant,
that *adamas* literally means unconquerable in ancient
Greek. She looks at the eyes of Medusa and sees the ring
looks like a poor bargain, like surrendering her rare time
to paint, even her wild self, for a glow in which Medusa
shows her a glimpse of a frozen night with a broken easel
on the floor, spilled paints, and pain, she remembers Zeus
gives an adamantine sword to Perseus in order to behead
Medusa in her sleep, that *adamas* also means untameable.

Hamartia

Lung-pink sky descends on the claws
of carbonised trees, here we're captured

in a city of draconian smoke, look at us
now, two gas-masked figures standing

on the wrecks of life, of a house, alien
to each other. I turned back from a sun

city yesterday, just to see you loved
someone else in our sunny bed, right

before the sirens started, the wildfires
leaped into the streets, before I decided

that love was my hamartia, I loved you
so much that led to my downfall, what

a fatal flaw, to stay in a hungry fire that
eats the heart, look, I am a phoenix now.

Horologe

When I say I miss you, I mean the time
which means an indefinite part of our existence

measured in lives which means any moment
like the time we screamed in the blind

well in your backyard, like the time we chased
lizards to make a collection of cut tails,

like the time we crushed oleanders to fill in
poison bottles, like the time we found a roadkill

mountain goat on our way to a party, one horn
broken, you stuck it on your forehead—

there was a long summer day we made a human
sundial, you stood still with your horn

amid a giant circle marked with tailed numbers
as you cast a shadow on twelve, slashing

the day into half, the heart into half, then my time
was made of you, because the sun is nothing

more than a burning star, only one of the billions
which means without it, there would be no life.

Heartdom

You once told me you love me
three times more. I called you

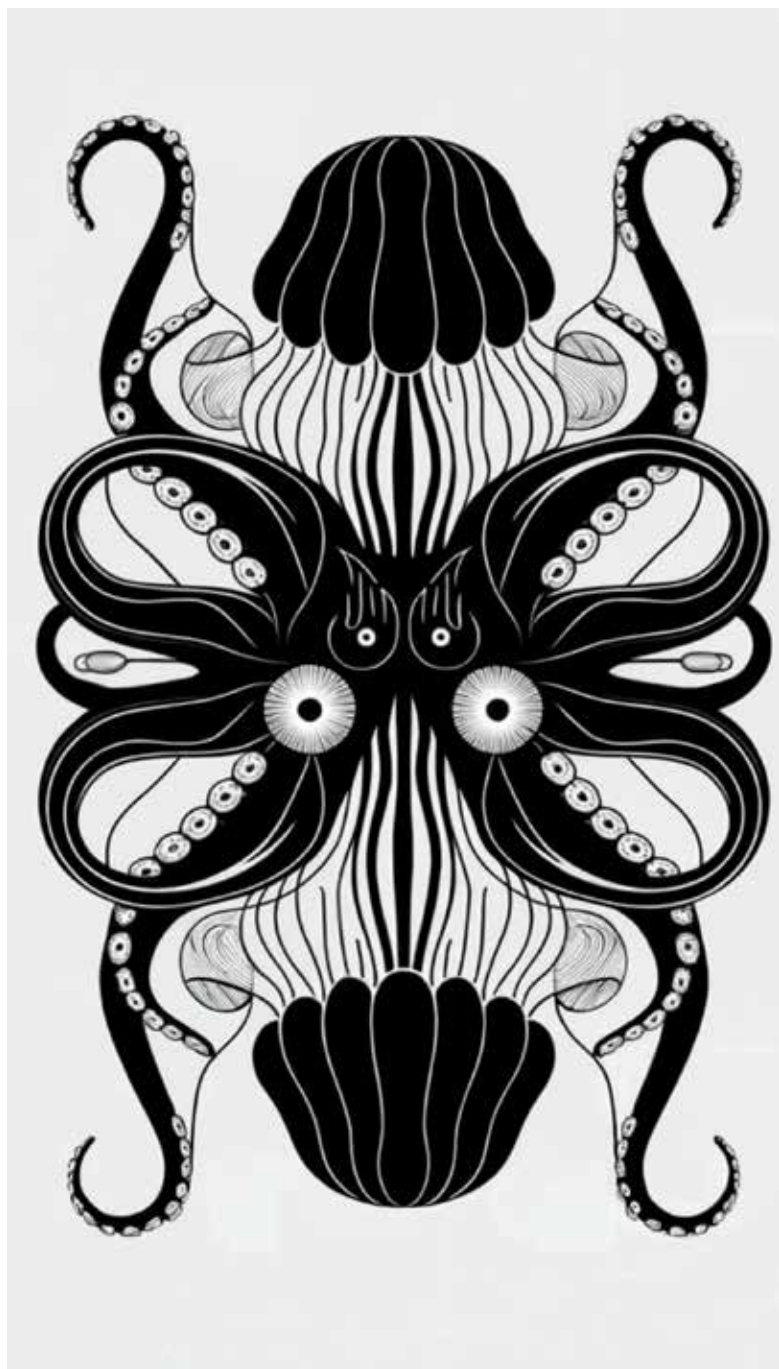
an octopus, I was your jellyfish.
I once read our fist is the size

of our heart. The scientists say
the heart size and the amount

of love animals feel are not
related at all. Once your heart

was on my eye, a slow-motion
attack. The octopus has three

hearts while jellyfish has none,
and they still live side by side.



Dan Leighton

Sarah Harrold

Sarah Harrold is originally from Cambridgeshire, she is now at York University studying Film and Television. She is a highly talented comic artist and has created and distributed a zine with two collaborators, with whom she is currently working on a second.

We are delighted to be the first to publish poems by Sarah in Cambridge Poetry Magazine, and look forward to more in the future!

The illustrations for each poem are by Sarah.

Poem About Cheating the Zener Cards Experiment By Looking in the Reflection of my Experimenter's Glasses

The psychologist gave me 25 cards
of five symbols
Circle, square, plus, waves and star

he chose a card
I chose a card
both waves

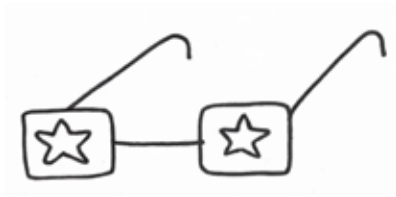
he chose a card
I chose a card
both stars

The psychologist raised
an eyebrow

he chose a card
I did the same
both circles

then, he took off his glasses

“Oh,” I said



A Sight to Behold

I do not wear glasses
or need them
do you read me?

I go to the opticians
to dominate, to win
to beat the test
into submission

I'm not fooled by
the test glasses
though they test
their best

And I can read
the little book up close
about Thomas
and His Friends

The optician turns
on a box of letters
And asks me to read a row

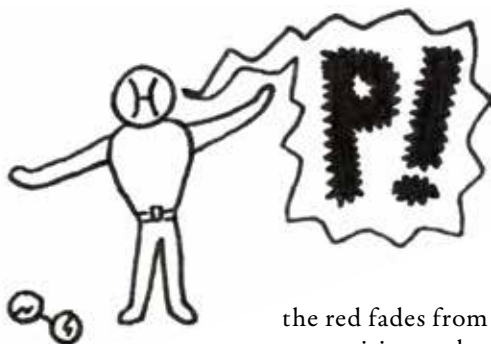
I start at the bottom,
to throw her off

XGBSLPO

As the letters
get bigger,
my performance keeps up

E!

L!



the red fades from
my vision and
I spot the optician,
with occluders
over her ears -

she's cowering
in the corner -
another success.

I leave
and say to the receptionist:

“Next.”

The Hedgehog

As a toad, I long for three things
a place to rest, some P
and some Q

A week ago and some change
I spotted a bush - a perfect spot
just off Church Street by the lake
anyway, I decided to chance it

A spiky fellow was inside
encroaching on my hedge
I asked him nicely to leave
he wouldn't budge
I croaked about sharing the spot
"No" said the hog "share I will not"



Based on a True Story (Mostly)



I went into the co-op
to buy some bread and some milk
it cost four pounds, more or less –
I decided not to get a receipt

Presently everyone erupted in applause
They started cheering my name
an old man kissed my hand
and a young girl gave me a flower

Eddy Leighton

Eddy has been writing since he was very young and has always loved to tell stories and imagine new worlds. He is studying Japanese, Linguistics and TESOL at York St. John Univerity. Eddy has always been fascinated with Japanese culture, art, society and storytelling and is looking forward to spending a year in Tokyo in the near future.

This is Eddy's first published poetry and we look forward to much more in the future.

花

the table holds the paper
my hand holds the brush
seven strokes
left to right once
up to down twice
across
up to down left
up to down straight
a flick to the right
curve down to the same side
ha-na-mi
a flower is born



Dan Leighton

my dear my dear

through the fraying forest
and desolate mountains
‘my dear!’ she cries
past the river
past the venerable path
‘I’m here!’ he says
and over the hill
and through the village
a husband walks
to fetch one loaf
and maybe a pail
though his wife
had asked him for four
for he has yet to remember
why he had started

Andrea Porter

I live on the edge of the fens, I find the huge fields tucked in like tight black hospital sheets quite mesmeric. I write because I have always written, from the moment I could string a few words together on paper that hung together as a story. I had a story published in the *Girl Magazine* when I was eight years old and found it life-affirming, going on to greater heights with a story in *Princess Magazine* the following year. Then I discovered poetry and luckily found it was not all clanking rhymes and love stuff. So for the past sixty-five years I have read and read even more and tried to find in words that same excitement that gripped me as a teenager, excited or puzzled me.

Accessible had become a very pejorative description of some poets but accessibility for me can be complex, multi-layered and elusive at times. The definition of accessible is having the 'quality or characteristic of something that makes it possible to approach, enter or use it.' If poetry cannot be approached, cannot be entered to fathom all the many rooms in the house, and cannot be used to discover things about myself, others and the world then poetry is not the living, breathing world I find it to be.

A boy who I worked with, who was a nightmare to manage in and out of a classroom, asked me what I was doing at the weekend, I told him I was going to a poetry reading. He stared at me solemnly and said 'Oh Miss that's a very posh sport, not much there that'll be of any use to anyone.' I have spent many years writing a couple of books of poetry, had quite a lot of poems published in magazines that keep running because wonderful editors work tirelessly to give poets a platform with little in it for them other than late nights and financial strain. I've co-written a radio drama with Fraser Grace, the playwright, performed with five other poets around the UK, and in New York in a group called 'The Joy of Six' but through it all I think I keep doing it to try and prove that boy wrong.

Belly

'A clone's neuro-genetic programming can be specifically adapted to cope with the problems of inter-stellar travel.' The Clone Technician's Handbook

We have not forgotten Jonah,
a lone supplicant for three days
in the belly of that great fish.

Maybe he would carve each day
into the beast's marbled ribs
or make time a cycle of tasks.

Minutes, the number of paces
around the gut, hours caught in
the slow slop of brine at his feet.

We are in the bowels of a whale,
walkways dripping with gravity,
its bulk nosing through tides of stars.

Haul Jonah's fish up from the sea
and it becomes a chapel of bone,
a pointless chalice of vertebrae.

Drag this beast from infinite space
and we are beached, stranded in air,
a carcass bloated with our breath.

We service the constant journey
that may stop that grand collapse
under the weight of ourselves.

Come Jonahs, lay down on its bones,
gouge a notch, watch shoals
of light years pouring down its throat.

Palpate

For Fady Joudah (Physician and Translator)

3 a.m. here in the backlit scroll of emails
and there you are speaking in that
urgent mesmerism you own so well

you wrote once of interrogating light
I cannot see you playing the lawyer
but as someone talking with a friend

met by chance in a quiet coffee shop
or in that deli not far from home
where you shop for fresh olives

you have wanted to know so much
explore questions asked by the soul
I see your hands scribe the air as always

in a conversation where each word
has its choreography of love awe and ache
and the breath moves through it all

light speaks many unknown languages
translation is a matter of ear and heart
but you have a gift for the lost and silenced

no one asks light for its purpose for travel
at Checkpoint 300 in Bethlehem or Hebron
light would have no answer except time

and darkness is not absence or silence
the translator could only give words
in a vacuum where no words are heard

but touch is the ancient first language
could the physician palpate light for signs
of what lies beneath its radiant skin

the wreck of rockets, history and pain
but light needs no healing observed
or unobserved its travel is as it is

c such a small letter for the concept
a law that governs without prejudice
but whose path is changed by what it touches

maybe we are the translated forever mutable
dreadful beautiful wise and foolish
light is one of the names of god

Othello Gives an Interview about Tribal Scarification

'Tis within ourselves that we are thus or thus' Othello

I'm not talking now about adornment,
the showy cut as a thing of beauty,
the hacked out tracks laid down as
the signifier of adulthood or courage.

It's not about the bite down on wood
as the skin is raised on fish hooks
then sliced through and fed on ashes
to keep away the spirits of the dead.

I'm talking about signs of belonging
to other ghosts, the secret mutilations.
The gouges, gashes, scores and slashes
hidden except from the ones we own.

These are our history written into deeper
flesh. We hide it in the ease with which
we come naked to lovers or in the skill
we demonstrate in giving all yet nothing.

The taut covering of skin, the thin spine
of a knitted ridge of flesh is just binding.
The book is shut to the uninitiated; scars
are studied only in the script of damage.

There are times we cannot read ourselves
but we can always sense a tightness,
this constant tug of something resisting,
a catch in the breath on certain words.

We can recognise our tribe in a man who
moves so his back is never to the door,
or in the flare of a woman's pupils in the
dark corners of a house without trust.

Mother as Antelope

'An antelope ceases to be wild when inside a canoe' West African saying.

So when you stumbled on board
everything rocked as you shifted
your weight and tried to restore

some sense of balance. You lifted
your head toward the bank and
snorted and stamped as we drifted

away from the plains, the stands
of trees that formed the world
that only you could understand.

The current caught us, hurled
us down a river that reached
for a sea that seemed to swirl

and promise itself around each
bend yet never quite appeared.
You became quiet, bleached

of sound, colours, those years
of wandering that made you wild
yet so compelling. Was it only fear

that dowsed all that rush and fire,
and brought you to a stillness
I could breathe or were you tired

of always being afraid? I confess,
to have you that calm, that close,
made those last months blessed

by some lost sacrament of ghosts
that let you haunt the best of me,
fade from the boat and into the flow.

Totems

After Shakespeare's 'A Winter's Tale' stage direction: 'Exit pursed by a bear'. First read at Future Karaoke, Cambridge Writing Centre

I saw it today as I went to make a cup of tea.
It sprawls over the butchered trunks of leylandii
the tree surgeons left. Before that massacre
it sat, legs splayed, like a fat man in his own pub.

I get a clear view of it from the kitchen sink.
Such sinks hold histories, dramas, chains,
white knuckles clutching the edge, the remains
of parties, wakes, mornings after, days before.

Most houses usually give the sink a window,
a way out, something to view if only a brick wall.
I have the white bear, the massive weight of it,
the unpredictable mess of hair and breath.

This sight has a bloodline. My mother had the dog
that bit her as a child. When her brain was heavy
with plaque and hung with back-lit tau tangles,
like a dark Christmas tree, she made her peace.

Thereafter he sat on the sofa and she fed him
broken custard creams and had me buy a collar.
My grandmother had a ragged cloud of cats
that yowled for more than she could ever give.

My great grandmother had crows and banshees,
their keening drove her mad during The Great Hunger.
They could not be beaten or rosaried out of her.
Crossing the Irish Sea did not free her from them.

My bear has taken to digging in the bins at night.
It bangs, harrumphs and swipes until at first light
there is a litany of hard plastic and packaging
arranged on the lawn in an upside-down smile.

The bear is mottled in moss, it alters with seasons
or that may be just how fur and memory work.
It is insistent, tonight it will press its frosted muzzle
against the window, its eyes fired by the strip light.

and it will roar, its yellow teeth dripping contempt
at my puny belief that words can even capture it
or that marks on paper or light fathom its purpose.
It mauls excuses and standing still is never convincing.

Soon winter will lace up its bulk in an ice corset
and it may sleep and only twitch in dream pursuit
across melting ice flows and apocalyptic city dumps,
which is just as well as I have no plausible exit plan.

Old Handbook of Herbs used in Palestine for Medicinal Purposes

<i>Aegle Marmelos</i>	Beal fruits	Wounds
<i>Allium cepa</i>	Onion bulbs	To get rid of decay in the gut
<i>Allium sativum</i>	Garlic oil	Strengthens the heart
<i>Aloe vera</i>	Juice	Wounds
<i>Rose of Jericho</i>	Plant	Easing childbirth
<i>Cupressus sempervirens</i>	Cypress tree fruits	Stops bleeding
<i>Cydonia vulgaris</i>	Quince fruits	Serious burns
<i>Eruca sativa</i>	Rocket, Cat Thyme leaves	Blood infections
<i>Daucus carota</i>	Carrot	Sedative and treatment of injuries
<i>Ficus carica</i>	Fig fruits	Wounds
<i>Jesminum Grandy</i>	Jasmine oil	For damage to the nerves that carry pain
<i>Laurus nobilis</i>	Sweet bay berries & leaves	Treats shock
<i>Mentha piperita</i>	Peppermint, entire herb	Analgesic

<i>Nigella sativa</i>	Nigella (Black Cumin) oil & seeds	Constant sickness
<i>Olea europaeae</i>	Olive fruits and leaves	Severe burns
<i>Pimpinella anisum</i>	Anise fruit	Sedative
<i>Punica granatum</i>	Pomegranate branches	Blood loss
<i>Salix acmophylla</i>	Brook willow bark	For wounds and anaesthetic
<i>Salvia officinalis</i>	Sage leaves	Sedative and anti inflammatory
<i>Trigonella foenum graecum</i>	Fenugreek seeds	Infected wounds
<i>Urgina maritima</i>	Squill bulb	Bulb leaves makes breathing possible
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Stinging nettle roots	Analgesic stops bleeding splits stones
<i>Vitis vinifera</i>	Grape vine dried fruit	Relaxant for the tired and those in deep despair
<i>Ziziphus spinachristi</i>	Syrian Christ-thorn, jujube fruit, leaves, seeds, gum and roots	Washing dead bodies with these makes it longer standing

J.S.Watts

J.S. Watts is a British poet, short story writer and novelist living in Cambridgeshire. Her work appears widely in publications in Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the States and has been broadcast on BBC and Independent Radio. She has edited various magazines and anthologies.

J.S. has published nine books: poetry collections, *Cats and Other Myths*, *Years Ago You Coloured Me* and *Underword*; plus pamphlets *The Submerged Sea* and multi-award nominated poetry pamphlet *Songs of Steelyard Sue*. Her novels are *A Darker Moon* – dark fiction, *Witchlight*, *Old Light* and *Elderlight* – urban paranormal.

See jswatts.co.uk for further details.

A segment of "Dustings" was first published in London Grip in 2018

Time Again

There was a time, a brief once upon,
when thought and memory were thick as water,
when hopes flew sunlit into a liquid sky.
No pause for fears, no second for doubt.
Arrows straight as geese.
Forward, always, through the open window.
Walking on the beach, the tide had only one direction.
I was always king of my sand castle,
always would be.
Time pours on, year in, month out.

Moving forward, I find myself back
walking tightropes on a treadmill.
I swear I shall not wait by this door again.
It will never open, though I find myself
wishing its peeling paintwork to swing back
granting access to a champagne doused sky.
I have learned tides
have more than one direction,
even through a closed door;
I told myself so,
writing messages in the sand.

Shaping Words

These are my words.
They might have been yours.

I shape my words with graphite and paper,
chipping away at purpose and subject,
the meaning I mean and meanings

I only feel.

I am fashioning myself a link
in a line of evolution
crafted for lifetimes
in stone, wax and ink,
in the flickering of light,
electric in invisible ether,
in words jumping from the tongue,
in time, in their own sweet time.

This is my time.
Once was yours.

My words draw language, paint visions,
try to envision a world which
produced ink, wax and stone,
the flickering of sunlight on dark blue waters,
words leaping deep in the mouth,
language using us to see difference
between night drenched sky
and cobalt day sea.
Comprehending blueness
through fresh, bright words
colouring my times,
threading the minutes you saw,
meanings I give them,
significance you felt.

Language pulls through us,
piecing us together,
links in a verbal chain,
shaping and fastening us
a page in the world.

Overflow With Nowhere To Go

Phone call snapshots
texting-in brief empathies
from the street-dark no-go areas of the brain.
Random dispatches
from wet, shadowy-lit, empty roads
through which time passes on by
making and breaking connections,
sending images like phantom limbs,
from places I no longer go,
or have not been to for a while,
unable to tell a map from my elbow
or vinegar from wine or water either.
An impenetrable merging of the senses.
Oil rainbows across the black tarmac
catching water like a blessing,
a misplaced miracle
a lost paradise
traded haltingly into silence
or maybe always there beyond reach
behind dead stained concrete
and the limescale bleached breath
of stale water
never tasted.

Painting On A Face

It's time to slap on the make-up, darlings,
the pale foundation, the rouge.

I'm already dressed:

concealed beneath
bright plumage like a Bird of Paradise,
a proud, gaudy Peacock
feathers trailing in the dirt.

Let's gild this lily
with a mane of glowing gold
or at least vibrating orange.

Now for the lippy –
paint on that broad smile.

I'm such a cliché, but
at least you don't see the Pierrot tears.

Can't afford to cry with this crap
all over my face.

And finally the shoes:
custom made by hand,
size nines masquerading
as size twenty twos.

Big is beautiful
or was.

And now it's time to roll
into work, pratfall
into the centre of the ring.

Sometimes it feels I've been pratfalling
all my life.

Dustings

Owl Dust

Owls echo across the night,
tawny feathered and
white-lightning shrieked,
from the soft descent of dusk
through the leaden weight
of the graveyard hours
to the rising downy grey
of dawn.

Listening, I lie
awake in a single bed,
alone but not.

The hushed throb of owl wings
beats inside me
with persistent memories.

Photo

A photo.
You and yours back when
we were, though now
we are.
My heart instinctively
flexes its wings
and flutters,
remembering how it used to fly.
It was soaring then
but you roosted elsewhere.
Still do.
Memory of the wind's soft lift
still makes my heart sing.

Field Walk

I am trying to sow this land inside my head
because that is the way to learn it
and because
it will soon be memory, dry as dust
within transplanted thoughts.
Each day I walk the same few hundred steps,
there and back, straight as an owl in flight,
noting as I walk, tussocks of grass,
dock and thistle points,
rain-drowned earth
and sun-cracked bog,
eruptions of bluebells, dandelions,
white daisy starbursts,
mist-painted web-traps
strewn in the waiting grass,
last year's thick thistle stem
lying diagonally across my route,
owl pellets,
an odd stray ladybird lost red
amongst towering green blades,
the brambles and waist-high nettles
seemingly stretching themselves overnight,
obstructing my chosen path
to the gate. Which is where I turn,
retreating from the unseen horizon
waiting beyond the blackthorn
and the next untried field.

Derek Fanning

Derek is an Irish poet, journalist, and author whose work reflects a deep connection to nature, philosophy, and Irish heritage. He has a long standing opinion column, *an Colún*, published in The Midland Tribune, County Offaly. Derek has authored several poetry collections and travelogues, often drawing inspiration from his experiences as an avid walker and mountain climber. His lyrical voice captures the essence of Ireland's landscapes and legends, resonating with readers both locally and beyond. Derek is also the editor of The Slieve Bloom News, a bi-annual publication celebrating the literary and poetic richness of the region. His revival of this publication, soon to incorporate Bard, underscores his dedication to fostering Ireland's cultural and artistic legacy.

The virus slinks away

The virus turns and slinks away
he shadows through the night-club door
where leather-trousered women drink

how good it is to mingle, dance and kiss
after years of fear and lockdown fetters,
how good to kick away unnatural rules.

The power of lust is driving him as
this strange woman strokes his hand
and licks her pomegranate lips –

so they make love and spend the night
conversing of Assisi and bright precious things
they recollect of lovers there across the years;

she has a gift – I speak with ghosts – she says,
I saw a ghost one night while walking,
among the fields around that place.

A leprous man, all skin and ragged flesh,
that spat at me and tore my skin, so I
embraced him, until he melted in my arms.

As she speaks the virus sees, the patches on her cheeks,
the nodules on her chin and neck –
Do you admire me still, my love? she asks.

He takes her hand, leads her outside,
and naked there, beneath the ancient falling rain,
he kisses her leprous-noduled lips again.



At Gate 203

Bubbled people flick their smartphones,
while some are reading books,
a couple whisper to each other,
while drunkards shout from the Gents.

Welcome to Flight ET seven-oh-one –
intones the tannoy-voice.
We are ready to board, so please would you form
a queue here – on the left.

A steward – sprayed – with dark blue suit,
with light blue tie, and smile,
welcomes us to join with him,
his happy hands and bright blue eyes.

Today our plane will arrow! Upwards!
Till we reach the stratosphere!
Where wings will blossom from our backs
and songs will fill our minds and lips!

Choral music of the Gods will fill us up!
Yellow flowers will grow beneath us!
Orange butterflies will fly above
our hearts awash with love!

The lion shall settle with the lamb,
we will step out into space,
we shall run with talking horses,
stand serene on rocky peaks!

And so it was, as I flew to the valleys,
it was just as the steward said,
a hundred birds of prey, they followed me
as I headed back home to rest.

Candy Smellie

Candy has an MA in creative writing from Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. Her world expanded from the Marketing of Medical Diagnostics to writing for pleasure when she retired from full-time employment in the last weeks of lockdown in 2020. After they waved her goodbye over a Zoom call, she signed up for non-fiction creative writing courses lasting two years at the Institute of Continuing Education. Realising that she wanted to continue, she enrolled at Anglia Ruskin University and, as the oldest person on the course, began a Masters in Creative Writing, focusing on fiction this time.

Over time she has discovered a coterie of like-minded writers prepared to take risks to create works of artistic joy. And here she is going to stay. Who knows where the twenty-six letters will take her, but wherever it is, it's sure to be fun!

City Motors tea ceremony

‘Anyone for a brew?’ Ted loves his tea but, as Audrey once remarked, sometimes he takes things just a little too far.

Each of them has their own mug and Ted makes certain that they get the correct one every time. Thomas, Richard and Harold, the old boys in the workshop, have very specific vessels.

Tom likes his fire-engine red tin cup, battered, oily and scarred from years of misuse. Dick now, he’s a bit more refined and enjoys his tea from a real china mug decorated with blue and white flowers – Ted isn’t entirely sure of Dick. And then old Harry, the longest-serving member of the gang, his is a chipped mug of indeterminate age and heavily stained with tannin.

The Boss drinks coffee. Ted doesn’t hold with drinking coffee so he gets his own. Audrey works for the Boss, in the office next to his, so Ted tries to be careful when he visits her not to coincide with the Boss’s visits to the Gents. He goes many times a day, so it can be difficult to avoid him.

The girls in the office share cups and saucers as they should. Fine china too and matching of course. Audrey has one of those fancy things that looks like a bottle but she only drinks water. Water for heaven’s sake! Do these ladies think they will expire without drinking at least a pint every two hours? But Ted knows she secretly loves a cuppa and can find a nice mug and one of his special tea bags just for her. Ted likes Audrey.

The urn is hot now and it’s time to line up the mugs, handles all pointing forward, from largest to smallest, each has its place. The milk is on standby and, though the top is still on, is ready to play its part. But it’s the teapot that’s most important.

Brown china, heavy and dark, huge with two handles for the weight. This pot has been employed every day of the week for many years. There’s so much tannin coated inside, there’s a risk of fallout if any flakes off. Ted however is only too aware of this risk and keeps a watch over any possible ingress.

Five tea bags are counted out, one at a time, and the serrated edges are separated to ensure the correct amount of mashing takes place.

Boiling water cascades into the pot, steam rises and there's exactly seven minutes on the stopwatch before the brew is ready, never more, never less. One last stir, three to the left and three to the right, and he's ready to pour.

For Audrey, he makes a special brew, tea leaves in a silken bag with a separate drawstring. It's a flavour of tea picked from the tips of the bushes high in the cloud hills of India. This box he keeps separate from the others to ensure no one is tempted to take one.

During the brewing time, milk has been added to the mugs, cups and jug – Audrey really likes to add the milk herself but after the tea. As much as Ted likes Audrey, he thinks there is all sorts of wrong in this behaviour.

And lined up, each comes and takes their brew. Perfect as they all knew it would be.

The tea bag has split but as yet no one is fully aware of all the risks and implications. A film of micro-dust forms around the rim of each cup, an indication of what's hiding unseen beneath. Tom, Dick and Harry are likewise unconcerned as they trust their friend.

But wait – the full horror is starting to appear in everyone's brew, roiling heavenwards to strike terror in those participating in the ritual. Gritty substances are stuck to tongue and teeth in equal measure, impossible to remove. Ted, realising too late to stop it, thinks he must spare Audrey and rushes to her office.

And there it is, in Audrey's cup, the horror of the split bag. Like the submerged feelings he's had for her, the bag has fallen to the bottom. It lies there like a stone, heavy and full of disappointment.

Of course she is furious. If only he could find a way to apologise.



Dan Leighton

Dust Slayer 2: Carmella's Lighthouse

The sky, so blue it hurts,
blue hiding a horror
unseen, omnipresent.

She hides in plain sight,
afraid to lift her face.
She knows the sky will burn her,
yet she stays.

Blistered skin – a deceit –
peels back, revealing flesh,
taut sinews, blood
spitting in thick drops,
juicy globules
spoil the grass beneath.

This is torture.
The pressure, unbearable –
smashing the bones
the splitting and crushing,
de-gloving the body.

But she knows,
the horror inside the house,
worse than this pain,
than fire under skin.

Panic grips again.

Dishes piling high,
tins cascading from countertops,
cutlery scattered,
no meaning, no order.

And the dust, the dust –
dust to bloody dust –
gathered in each corner,
copious, oppressive,
an unliftable weight.

The bedsheets, torn –
no saving them now.
They need burning and throwing,
no washing can bring them back
from where they've gone.

And the ordure of the cat,
overflows from the tray,
stench rising, no hiding,
lighting a candle won't cut it—
patchouli's a joke against this filth.

With thanks to D.L.

Anna Lindsay

Anna is a Cambridge based novelist, poet and artist. She graduated from St.John's College, Cambridge, and has worked everywhere from Hong Kong (as a volunteer working with drug addicts) to temping in Switzerland and as a teacher in the UK. Health challenges forced her retirement, since when she has served her community in a volunteer capacity, including almost twenty years as a trustee of a tiny local Registered Charity.

Anna can be found at facebook.com/Anna.Lindsay.UK

World's Edge

There was an elegance to maps
when men would swear the earth was flat:
crisp horizons meeting sky,
heaven arched to meet its bride.
Here be dragons watching, furled.

But we learned better, erased the mythical,
replaced unknowing with the physical,
showed that spheres are simply seamless:
unflattened earth and made it dreamless
in its drift through space, sun-curled.

How we scoff at ancient tales,
gods who quaffed celestial ales,
battled forces which would rend
all in Ragnarokian end:
voiding life, in darkness hurled.

They had it wrong, those men of yore
not far horizons or godling gore:
here in craters, bomb-struck homes,
cindered hospices, a charred child's comb...
find the ragged edges of the world

Dim Earth

Time dulls dim earth,
gnarls and rubs rough ridges,
softens the edges of lava's cruel claws,
nibbling greenly at its outcropped fields
which hide their gemmy harvests deep below,
birthed in heat and fire, but silent now.

Now Time has found
accomplices, men to mine
its treasures, fill waterways
with bags and plastic, trash and oil:
blinking tarnished tears for
hard times in harm's tide.

But tides bring ebb and flow,
dulled and dimmed can be repolished:
earth's grim and grimy frame
may one day gleam
as mother-of-pearl
shedding the cinders of its carapace.

Trees

I've heard it said
that humans are like trees,
just more mobile.
I disagree. For me,
the warmer it gets,
the less I wear.
Trees though choose
our deepest winter
to flaunt their nakedness...

City Street

Hunched over keyboards
in neon-lit hutches
foot-free shapes set root
to their chairs
and inhale the
stale air of paper.
 Outside,
trees with morbid roots
dance their branches
in spring air, unsapped
by traffic, call those
faceless, nameless two-legs
to leave their concrete cages
and emerge to touch the earth.

On the Ledge of the Day

I sat on the ledge of the day,
feet dangling, arms
stretched out behind me,
anchoring me safely in
soon-to-be-Yesterday,
admiring Tomorrow's perfect
stillness, its unblemished surface,
unsure whether or not
to let go, jump, plunge
into its coolness, imprinting ripples
on its waters.

After all, Today was safe and known:
I could not tell from here
what dangers lurked
beneath the next day's perfect gloss,
what undertow might drag below.
But Today was used, dried out,
crumpled, ready for recycling
of finished days, and this new one
looked crisp and fresh
and ready to receive me.
So taking hold of the clock's
tock tick, I

launched.

Cityscape

The city is shorelined against bleak clouds,
concrete blocks looming
over lightweight rascals whose yellow feet
strut undeterred between cold morsels
of battered fish and trampled chips.

White wings shrug indifference
to buildings' menacing bulk
and petty shames of human secrets,
instead spread, wheeling, to catch the wind
above stark storeys and soar
where only universals matter:
air, food, water,
life,
and maybe death.

And so now the sky is molten with seagulls,
sweep-etching pinion patterns
above urban cauldron,
heady with survival, yet
with liminal voices crying
for the dying on the tides of time.

Richard Berengarten

Richard Berengarten (formerly Burns) was born in London in 1943 into a family of musicians. He studied English at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and linguistics at University College London. His perspectives are international and multicultural: he has lived in Italy, Greece, the USA and former Yugoslavia, and has worked and travelled widely in other countries, including China, India and Japan. His recent books include: *Changing* (2016), *Imagens 2* (2019), *Balkan Spaces* (2021), and *The Wine Cup* (2022), all from Shearsman Books; *DYAD*, with Will Hill, *Knives Forks & Spoons Press* (2023); and *Riddles and Spells/Devinettes et sorts, Paradigme* (2024). For other works by or about RB, see the Shearsman Books and the Poetry Archive websites. In 1975 RB founded and ran the (now almost legendary) international Cambridge Poetry Festival. Half a century later, the event is to be revived. In Spring 2025, RB's poem 'The death of children' (from *The Blue Butterfly*, 2004, 2006, 2011) will be the basis of a multilingual translation project, with texts and voice-recordings in 40 languages (forthcoming online from the Poetry Archive). For tributes on RB's eightieth birthday, see <https://www.shearsman.com/richard-berengarten-at-80>. The three prose-pieces published here are taken from *Imagens 3*, forthcoming from Shearsman (2025).

RB is a former Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Newnham College, Cambridge, and Project Fellow. He currently serves as an Advisor for the Pari Center, Tuscany, Italy; as a Principal Counsellor for the International Poetry Festival, Medellín, Colombia; as a Fellow of the English Association; as a Bye-Fellow at Downing College, Cambridge; and as an Academic Associate at Pembroke College, Cambridge. He lives in Romsey Town, Cambridge.

Poetry and Midnight

Approaching the Hour

1. As midnight approaches, not sleep but poetry beckons.
2. The heart speeds. Pores open. Darkness, a black fire, billows shadows that swallow you. Shadows inside shadows. Shadows overlapping shadows. Until black is total. And no more pluralities.
3. But out of this – *letters* ! They swell in gradual negative, whitely on black fire. Elegantly, they shape. Into a swirl of alphabets. Into a stream of characters. Awash, flooded, engulfed. Scratched, carved, scalpelled. Pitted, painted, printed.
4. Their forms drift along, about. They touch, graze, jostle. They bump into one another. Some rebound, some open borders, some get swallowed up. Some merge, meld.
5. No danger here. Only act and pass on. Only action and passion. Building, binding, breeding. The letters clutch, agglomerate. A bunch, a bundle, a cluster. This gathers, grows, glues. Then compresses, condenses.
6. It fans into a sound. The sound forms a syllable. Tapered at each end.
7. It repeats clearly. More clearly. Syllables catch breaths.
8. Matter – worlds of matter – haven't yet begun to be. What might be material hasn't yet broken or spoken.
9. A poem begins to write you, write itself, write itself out, right out of you.
10. As from rock, carved letters, Or blazing, spilling, flowing, out of a volcano's heart. Now down-flowing, incessantly

down.

11. Did you once contain *blood*? Whatever *you* was, or might have been, *before* is a spattered husk. *You* has been utterly voided. *You*, quitted, acquitted.
12. A half-made thing half-emerges. Will this be a poem? You'll find out when you get back to it. When you put yourself back together. Quieted, you drift off.

Poetry and Midnight

Chiming the Hour

1. Beautiful midnight. At its chime, the soul's fingers play fugues on senses' organs in vaults of purest mind.
2. Things – remaining things – remain *and* fall away. They do so simultaneously. When they fall, what takes their place, inevitably, is music. The music of things as they are. When they stay, they tap their feet. They have no choice. And that's how it starts. They dance.
3. The music of things as they are recombines with the music of dream. In, through and out of dream. And with the underworld's music : sounds and depth-soundings. On instruments and through voices. Orchestrated and choired.
4. On a breath's oscillation, *I* disappears and returns. Faster, faster, on a pulse's momenthood. On a wave's white mane. No, quicker even than that – on the puff of a nano-second. On the breadth of a pico-tic.
5. Who would have thought it, thought *of* it? That I, forgetting, *knows* this? And has always known it? I, in this constant

ongoing dialogue with hordes of instant others ?

6. Hopkins knew this music in each thing's unique instress and inscape. He heard its pressures and strictures push through clouds and water whorls. Among minute particulars, Master Blake saw and heard it resonate (the) universal glory. These two I shall follow. These shall be my soul-guides.
7. All that's needed is breath. This heart is a transformer, pumping blood, breath, light. A time-breaker. A spacemaker.
8. I could get drunk on this midnight. From this hearing that's a seeing, from this seeing that's a hearing. Oh you, most beautiful centre ! Oh you, most radiant core !
9. And this I will *not* be obliterated. But deepened in this ground, be rooted all the more firmly. Like a springtime rowan tree in blossom, resting until dawn, and by July berrying in red clusters. And, no less, flying among stars. Brightly singing the dream.
10. After our ends, yours and mine, the singing and the dancing will go on, and on, without us. But in our time, this is no time for us to stop anything.
11. Even though any street at dawn – or field or forest or garden – will be hard to greet after this midnight, tender and terrible at once, steep generations of light will spread out from this blackness.
12. Rich-textured spangled quilt, blanketed now in cloudbank – matrix of all poems, yours is the blackest light, balancing the day's.

On Poetry and Dream

Twelve propositions

1. The closer I am to dream when awake, the more quickly and clearly the poem moves and breathes in and through me. Upwards and outwards : spring-like. Purer, wilder, wiser. Inwards and downwards : autumnal. Both equally pure, wild, wise – and equally beautiful. And both, drenched in mortality. The dream, like the poem, both comments on and criticises both living and dying.¹ Do dreams and poems also rehearse both dying and living ?
2. Is any dream ever finalised, finished, final ? Isn't there's always more in the dream to be dreamed ? More *to* the dream. An *eloseness* that always lies further, farther than any *this-bere-now* ? In this unfinishment, and in the intuition or apperception of it, lies an implicit *if only* – if not of a given futurity, then of (a) longing – and, perhaps, even, of (a) possibility. This eloseness resides precisely in the being of *if only* belonging further elsewhere, farther elsewhen. I can't help waking up, can I ? But a dream may be re-dreamed or continued, through and past wakeness – into another dream.
3. Whoever thinks being awake means deploying the fullest range, height and depth of the human mind entertains a belief that needs, at least, more questioning, more examining, more challenging. For how can any such belief contain any more than an inkling of truth, when waking and wakeness necessarily and inevitably involve the huge – even total – forgetting and forgetfulness of the dream, of all its possessions and precisions, its multiple meanings, memories and intimations, its compendia of treasures and temptations ?

4. The dream embeds and roots my personal mind, my consciousness – no, not *just* mind, not *just* consciousness, but surely, my entire being – right back into its sleepy prehistoric origins, into their undercurrents and undertows, and their reflections and reversals. In the dream, my mind, my consciousness, my being itself sinks down, through its roots, to taste its root-nourishments – mineral, vegetal, and archetypal. And down there, *sometimes* – in times that aren't *times* at all – an archetype may assault me, seep into me, invest in me, soaking me in images. And, if and when that happens down there, in the archaic ache of the archetype, eternity itself also tempts, radiates, glimmers.

5. What best and most effectively *re-members* the dream, puts its limbs back into it, and enables it to move again through me ? What most resonantly and resolutely *re-calls* it and most plausibly *re-stores* and *re-patterns* it, at least partly, to its originary being, in and through me ? In and through the medium of language, this capacity is the poem's. And even though the poem that emerges from (out of) the dream isn't its finishment, or its perfectment, and still less its copy, it *is* its continuation and its regeneration. Its child. Its offspring. And equally, its *Perle* !²

6. Dear Prospero, take me into it with you. Dear Donne, remember to call me up, so I can follow you, even accompany you. Dear Master Oyster, do likewise when you accrete another *Perle* around – *what* ? – a sandgrain ? Or like Blake, witness an entire world inside that core.

7. The dream purrs, pours, prowls through the poem. Its sighs, soars, sears through every part. It sings, strikes, rages, rings. It roars, whispers, hums. It drums, beats, batters, betters. It hints, suggests, intimates.

8. A dream *verbs* and keeps on *verbing*. It *nouns* and keeps on *nouncing*. A dream is *eventmental*. It is even an *event*. It is even *and* an event, even though it may be no event at all, but a drift of, in and through vaguest haze. And in the

dream – just as every verb *nouns* itself – so also, equally and reciprocally, every noun *verbs* itself. And that, at least partly, is how the dream inspires and evokes a poem. As an inkling, a sprinkling, a straining. An inking, a marking, a staining. These are only faint clues about how the poem lives, how it's destined, how designed, how made. How it's born – in, through and out of the dream.

9. And so many dreams of *people* : known and unknown, recognised and never before seen, alive or ghosted but brought back ! And so many speaking in their own authentic voices ! And as for animals, so many, too ! Last night a scorpion. Tonight, an elephant ? Next, a lizard, a louse, a leopard ? A damsel-fly, a dragonfly, a dragon ? The one and only Phoenix ? The dream keeps *animalling*, it keeps on *souling* and *ensouling* – insistently, as its people and animals appear, wake, speak.³ Hmm, I can't help this. Can I ? No, I can't And won't – even if I don't understand it myself, Here beginneth the poem.
10. *And* so many plants and plantings, intermingling, chimæra-like ! Huge plantations of lions. Wild herds of trees and shrubs. Deep forests of bees. Jungles of spiralling herring. Shoals of firs and pines. Orgies of plankton. Hives of sedges and ferns. Trees, tubers, trees. Swarms and swarms of seeds. Hordes and hordes of flowers. Of every shape and colour imaginable. The force that through the green fuse drives the tiger.
11. What a miserable existence it would be to have no poems. Almost as disastrous as being bereft of dreams. Might it be possible to really live, having no dreams at all ?
12. In both dream and poem *I* simply isn't I. The *I* is I no longer. But a dream of *I* through and by me. By and through me entrained. By and through me entranced.

Footnotes:

1. This echoes: “Poetry is a challenge to mortality and a criticism of Death” – my previous response to Matthew Arnold’s dictum: “Poetry is a criticism of life” (*Imagems I*, Shearsman, 2013: p. 8).
2. The reference is to the anonymous English medieval masterpiece. Like so many other poems, this pearl’s oyster is a dream. See *Pearl*, ed. E. V. Gordon. Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1953.
3. In Latin, *anima* = ‘soul’, but this is only half the story. In some IE languages, vowels such as /a/, /ɑ/ and /æ/, as syllables such as /an/ and /am/ enact and epitomise not only ‘breath’ but also ‘call’ (‘speech’). Which is to suggest that, the condition of ‘ensoulment’ means (identifies with and refers to) whatever or whoever breathes and has voice – and vice-versa. In this context, consider: Sanskrit आत्मन् (*ātmán*) ‘soul, spirit, self, essence, true being’; Greek ἀτμός (*atmós*) ‘vapour, steam, smoke’; ἀνεμος (*ánemos*) ‘wind’; Old English *æþm* ‘breath’; German *Atem* ‘breath’, *atmen* ‘breathe’; Dutch *adem* ‘breath’.

Trish Harewood

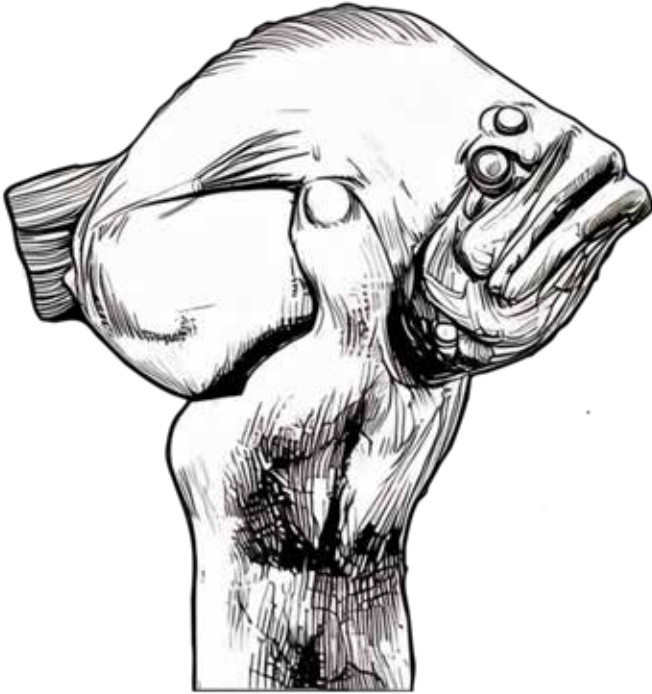
Trish cut her poetry teeth in the 1990s, at CBI Poetry in Cambridge, originally set up for open-mic opportunities but later diversifying to include guest readers. Trish has had poems published in *Rialto*, *Acumen*, *Interpreter's House*, and *Envoi* magazines. She won Joint 2nd prize in the Open Bedford Poetry and Short Story Competition in 2003.

Editors Note: Trish is one of the co-organisers of the current iteration of CBI Poetry which meets the first Sunday of every month in Cambridge, UK. Her years of support and hard work on behalf of the Cambridge Poetry community are noted and celebrated by this magazine! Thank you to Trish (and also Angus, see elsewhere) for everything they have done.

Game, Set, Match!

The ladies in the office
synchronise their gear.
They wake up in the morning,
check the wardrobe,
pick a purple blouse or cardi,
pick purple trousers,
feel proper purple
as they slip on purple shoes.
On the way to work
their mirrors parrot
purple ear-rings.
They don't wait till old age.
They are not practising.
They are already proud of purple.
They are wearing purple in the prime of life.
They gasp in admiration
when they meet in the corridor.
They say, purple today!
They say – Snap!

Gunter Grass releases
the Flounder



A man holds a fish.
As if this is not remarkable
in Göttingen
the fish is well-behaved –
sitting in Gunter's hand as if born to it,
A snug fit in a hand holding him aloft –
Triumph no doubt -
Over bronze and stone on one hand
Pen and words on the other.

Could he have asked for more?

Disturbance

I swear I didn't know
The light switch would hit the wall.
I had it in my hand, safe,
And then let go.
The glass clinked, the pen moved the paper, audibly,
As I reached out.
Even the pad flexed softly as I held it in mid-air,
Writing these disturbing lines.

Laura Theis

Laura Theis grew up in a place in Germany where each street bears the name of a mythical creature or fairy tale character. Now she lives in the magical city of Oxford with her partner and her scruffy dog Wodehouse.

Writing in her second language, her short stories, songs, radio plays, and poetry have been broadcast and published around the world.

In 2020, she was awarded the Mogford Short Story Prize. Her winning story “The Lift” was selected by the judges Stephen Fry and Prue Leith. Other accolades for her fiction writing include receiving the AM Heath Prize and the Short Story Prize by Curtis Bausse.

For her poetry, she has received the 2021 Oxford Brookes Poetry Prize, the Brian Dempsey Memorial Pamphlet Prize as well as the Hammond House International Literary Award.

Her poetry debut, *how to extricate yourself*, is published by Dempsey & Windle and her second book, *A Spotter's Guide For Invisible Things*, received an Arthur Welton Award from the Society of Authors, was the winner of the 2022 Live Canon Collection Competition and is published by Live Canon in 2023.

These poems have previously appeared in her book *A Spotter's Guide To Invisible Things*. The poem ‘in my mother tongue the name for grand piano is wing’ also won the Poets and Players Prize judged by Philip Gross.

**in my mother tongue the name
for grand piano is wing**

in my mother tongue
words can be feathered

which turns them into
old jokes or proverbs

owning a bird
in my mother tongue

is sign of great madness:
you can accuse someone

with an outrageous opinion
of cheeping and chirping

if you want to convey
that you are flabbergasted or awed

in my mother tongue
you might say: my dear swan

which is what I think
when I first hear you play

as your fingers move over
the keys I wonder

what gets lost in translation
between music and birdsong

whether both soar above
our need to shift between words

then I remember
in my mother tongue

the name for grand piano
is wing

the day I became a native speaker

I am ashamed
to admit it

but when the body crashed
through my skylight in a fury of glass and rain

my first thought
was not concern for the person and whether

they had survived
their horrendous fall

my first thought was oh fuck me
how am I supposed to afford to repair this

my first impulse was to run downstairs to get
some towels to catch the downpour

before it soaked through my entire bed
to get a broom and get rid of the sharp shards

on my pillow
I had to make a conscious effort to turn

my attention instead
on the victim of the accident

crumpled on the floor next to the bed
and wearing some sort of feathery coat

when they stood
they were too tall for my slanted ceiling

and had to crouch under the roof
to unfold their wet tangled garment

into what I now realised
were wings

soaked through from the rain
but miraculously uninjured

and my mind went oh
oh

then it went almost blank
forgot all about the damage and skylight

the rain still pelting down on my duvet
I had fallen in love because I am like that

shallow and easily swayed by beauty
I did not say what is all this

and who are you and why are you here
instead I said what people in this country

always say in fraught situations
I said I'll put the kettle on, shall I?

This Poem Will Never Become A Multi-Million Dollar Netflix Series

Starlings are dancing a slow
orderly ceilidh in my drain pipe.

I peer up at them and see their
dotted underbellies shuffling past.

Every so often a bird
poo flies by my window.

Festivities concluded, they leave
in a string of winged exuberance.

Meanwhile, a birch is losing copper
coins in the neighbour's garden.

I will not hit my word count today.
I've not written a single sentence.

An ancient acorn is growing
white roots in a water jar.

The Selkies Visit At Bath Time

it is the only moment in my day that I am
not lonely or in pain

the heat of the bath water eviscerates all of my
aging body's aches and complaints

around me the selkies' half-human
company soothes my solitary soul

their presence is a gift I refuse to question
their song is not beautiful

their chatter not all that friendly
they give me quizzical glances

they say things like
did you know that in seal years

you would most likely already be dead?
but in that they feel almost like family

and their animal eyes are soulful and deep
and uncannily familiar too:

I was given a stuffed white seal pup at birth
it shared my name and my life

across oceans and contracting years
and grew greyer and more beloved

the only childhood relic that
I have not lost or had to give up

perhaps the reason the bath selkies visit
is pity that we failed to truly turn into each other

because she was a toy and I was a child
who had yet to learn I deserved magic

the nursery

it seems that he wants us
alive but disconnected

from a seedling we are
living by ourselves

each of us forlornly growing
in our individual pots

we are overfed de-liced and
richly watered but

in the wild our roots would reach
for one another and amalgamate

we'd share our nutrients
and knowledge

if we sensed danger we would pulse
a parlous warning to each other

but it turns out the distance
is too great even for that

as he carries us away
towards an unknown fate

Surgeon

The heart surgeon is very, very young. Maybe half as old as me. He looks like a mini version of the German TV host Thomas Gottschalk. His hair is in curly gold ringlets and his smile is too bright, his teeth their own luminous creatures. I am trying to work out why I am here with him. It must be that he is trying to operate on my heart in some way, make repairs. "There is nothing wrong with it!" I shout. "So you better put that knife down." "It's a scalpel," he says. Still, he does put it down, but also steps a little closer. Then he sighs, and shows me his calm hands. He's wearing marbled gloves. Then he reaches inside my chest and pulls something out with great gentleness. "There," he says. "See, that wasn't so bad." The thing he is holding out to me is a light blue egg, as big as a fist. I reach for it, but the shell is already opening, already releasing an infinite dark wing and another, unfolding like so many parachutes until everything is feather. I understand that it could never have hatched inside of me, there simply would not have been enough room. I look around for the Gottschalk child but he is no longer there: It's just me and the infinite bird.

Mary L. Walsh

Mary has always written poetry, but it is only in her late 50s and 60s that she has gained the confidence to publish. She was recently shortlisted for the Sean Dunne Poetry Prize in Ireland with her poem *Mackerel Fishing in the Gaeltacht*. She has also published a crime novel, *Detective Armando Ramirez and the Iberico Ham Murder*.

Mary has had poems published in *Crannóg Magazine* and *A New Ulster Magazine*. She also writes for a not-for-profit organisation called Pentoprint.org. She lives in Essex with her husband, a dog, and a cat. She has three children and five grandchildren.

Mary loves to write poems and gift them to other people. For instance, she once wrote a poem for two little boys travelling with their mum on a long journey because they were so well-behaved and gave it to their mum. She loves seeing people's reactions to poetry.

Big Boned

Big boned,
Well covered, puppy fat.
“Eat that up now,
There are kids starving in the world.”
“Don’t leave that!”
“Waste is sinful!”
“Here’s a bacon sandwich,
There, meat, and potatoes,
Bread and butter to fill you up,
What about something before bed?
Hot milk and soda bread, butter, and jam,
In case you’re hungry in the night.”
First breakfast, second breakfast,
Elevenes,
Lunch: ham salad slathered in salad cream,
Floury potatoes in butter
And more butter for bread.
Tea, soda bread and Kimberly biscuits.
Dinner: soup, bacon, cabbage, potatoes, butter, butter, butter,
“You’ll have a bit of cake with that tea?
Nothing worse than a dry cup.”
Fighting the famine,
Buttering my big-boned life
Making me invisible.

Birds of the Air Fly Free

And the birds of the air fly free.
How we envy their unfettered joy.
They fly to the edge of tomorrow,
Swooping above the feathery clouds,
Skimming the puritanical blue of the sea,
Lapping at the edge of the universe.
Our thoughts fly with them,
Longing for faraway places.
Their song pierces our soul,
As they flit and snatch at our dreams.

Shakespearean Magpie

A magpie nests in the thatch of the Globe
A nest lined with sonnets
Chicks grow fat on Shakespeare's verse
Tales of shrews and merchants flit to their lofty
home
Comedy and tragedy combine
In silver tongued script
The magpie gleaming blue and black
Grasps the silvered verse within its beak, then
Soaring overcrowded London streets
Makes Shakespeare's words fly.

Mackerel Fishing in the Gaeltacht

Shrieks as our quarry is scooped up.
Our dresses tucked into our knickers.
Barefooted afternoon mariners,
Silvered scales on flashing barbs
from the murky waters of the bay.
Multicoloured pails.
our hands dip into
the darting black and silver murmur of sprats
that weaves its way round our frozen toes.
Once filled, the pail is taken, held high
in hands wet with salt
out onto the grainy sands where a bigger
buckets wait to gather in the fishy harvest.
We wait. the water turns black with mackerel,
the boys and men on the pier cast their lines,
pulling out mackerel that jump and twist on hooks
and lures, and are whipped off the line into buckets
ready
with salt water.
The gulls keening, keening, swooping, wheeling all
the while as
the fish are gutted, and their innards
thrown down into the bay, food for the crabs in a
bloody splash.
In the kitchen the sprats swim again, oat-coated,
their new sea, a patterned plate,
their new seabed
crusty bread and thick butter.

Sarsaparilla Days

In the old days
When the sun shone brighter
Everyone smiled a mist of sarsaparilla
Doughnuts were the size of tractor wheels
Lives were like a drawer stuffed full of fripperies
Spilling out their contents to the world
Even the seas surface cracked open
In a gallop of white horses
And leaves unfurled on the boughs
As spring began
Looking back, it seemed so.
This sets off a longing for old times
The tinted spectacles working well
Until you remember
The ice on the inside of the window in winter
The living in one room, the others too cold.
And the one set of clothes for school
One set for Sunday
Hand me downs and leftovers.
In the old days
The good old Sarsaparilla days.

The Book of the Story of Love

First, I will bring you the book of the story of love
Written in the earliest times
By lowly peasants and highborn kings
And you will open the perfumed pages and read the stories of love
Among pig Stys and palace gardens
In the lush rural landscape or big city
In the smallest hovel or loftiest castle turret
You will read how love conquers all
As everything steps aside for loves charm
You will turn the illuminated pages and see
Loves tortuous, twisted path, the path that led me to you,
Surpassing challenges and finding your love
First, I will bring you the book of the story of love
And next we will live it forever.

Claudine Toutoungi

Claudine Toutoungi's collections, published by Carcanet Press, are *Smoothie* (2017) and *Two Tongues* (2020), which won the 2021 Ledbury Poetry Prize. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, *The New Statesman*, *The Spectator* and elsewhere. A featured poet on the European poetry platform – *Versopolis*, in 2024 her work will be translated into Spanish. She has performed at many UK festivals and appeared on BBC Radio 4, which has also broadcast many of her original audio dramas.

She is currently a Royal Literary Fellow. Her third collection *Emotional Support Horse* is published by Carcanet in October 2024.

The first four poems published here are taken from Claudine's new book, *Emotional Support Horse*. The last was originally published in her first book *Smoothie*.

asparagus

it is 2.59 pm four days after Bastille Day and a heatwave and I am longing to see *A Bundle of Asparagus* by Adrian S. Coorte at the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge but there are obstacles such as for a start there are too many blocks of cement between me and the asparagus so I will have to forgo the pleasure even though it would be beyond words nice just now to see the dark woody tones and be reminded of damp earth and fecundity in a simple not quite renaissance kind of way and my mind instead of lumbering around inside its skull-case like a half-baked hippopotamus would be becalmed would have found in essence its mudhole if it could sit and wallow in the asparagus and recognise that such things as freshness and verdure do exist and have not been scorched into annihilation at every turn but it would require as I say too much back-breaking sun bouncing off concrete to get there and anyway as it's a Monday the museum is shut so I'd have to break in and the streets being extra still I would show up easily on a policeman's radar even accepting the fact that some of those policemen might have bunked off and be even now swimming along Snob's Stream or one of the other minor tributaries of the river Cam not wanting to be caught in a hotspot, not wanting to add to the already inflamed sense of outrage at how the peacekeepers and guardians and father figures of our time are sorely lacking and even if I didn't break in and I could slip in through an old stone archway and a wooden door that's been left ajar Cambridge being full of such portals even if I could step over the latticework of criss-crossing laser beams intended to prevent someone shoving *A Bundle of Asparagus* under one arm and making off with it even if I could choreograph it right so as to slide into a cool dim alcove and sit to meditate in total solitude on the asparagus maybe I wouldn't be alone maybe I'd meet a stray old lady bussed in from a hamlet in Hampshire who went to the loo at an inopportune moment and never saw her coach party again and has been wandering around the museum throughout all of Sunday night and who got so hungry she wanted to eat the asparagus and who got so desperate she lay down for a time in imitation of Nicholas Poussin's *Extreme Unction* (1638-1640) but then stood up again because really pretending to be a corpse doesn't help anyone especially if you're in a museum especially at night on your own and if we do meet (she half-crazed but with a last stick of liquorice in her handbag) maybe we'll sit together counting the pale green spears on the very dark background contemplating how something so luscious can be an optical illusion and if flowers mean *tempus fugit* what the hell does asparagus mean

application for the role of hermit

I see maps in the entrails of roadkill
I can fashion small meals from snails
my bloodline is the bloodline of bards
I creep about most days in a suit amongst
petty men—It's not me
I'm outdoorsy

I own a sheepskin pelt
I am prepared to primal dance
I want to go back to my roots
I want to eat roots

I am a man of few words
I am a man of no words
I can sleep in a tree
I have prehensile thumbs

I am calloused
I am bearded
I am a calloused, bearded, prehensile son of the soil
and of bards

I can turn my hand to poetry
I have by heart several fragments from antiquity
I can hang them from the trees
or carve them into bark
I can scrawl them in the gravel by the water feature

or I can zip it
totally

make like a high-end
sculpture out beyond the ha-ha
sitting in the Burmese posture

unblinking

or I can
blink

—I'm flexible

you choose

Duck

Capsized duck. Auto duck. Cut-throat duck. Long-nosed duck.
Renaissance duck. Hench duck. Mensch duck. Full-throttle duck.
Standardized duck. Truculent duck. Natty duck. Fatty duck. Fin de
siècle duck. Hi-dee-Hi duck. Cosmic duck. Tragic duck. Botox duck.
Fluffy duck. Lardy duck. Mardy duck. Mucky duck. Remote duck.
Kyoto duck. Live-in duck. Vermouth duck. Foolproof duck. Intermittent
feedback duck. Canal duck. Halal duck. Catch-me-if-you-can duck.
Lunar duck. Consumer duck. Do-as-you-would-be-done-to duck. Lucid
duck. Macro duck. Panoramic view duck. Morose duck. Verbose duck.
In-and-of-itself duck. Crinklecut duck. Smash 'n' grab duck. On-you-
go duck. Walk-the-plank duck. Down-amongst-the-dead-ducks duck.
Where would we be without you, duck?

unresolved

coconut crabs
ate Amelia Earhart
 that much is supposed

what they couldn't digest
was sent for analysis
 but got re-routed
 and lost in transit

sometime later Shiotsu
fashioned from found materials
 a set of avant-garde
 windchimes

placed them in his zone
of meditation and ease
 on mild days they
 shivered harmoniously

but when the wind
was up
 something percussive
 and insistent

took apart
the structures of his mind
 like a rat-a-tat
 of bullets

like the bones
demanded answers
 but what to tell them?

—what note
to strike?

Without Moorings

Yesterday when you were upset, I
wanted to tell you – things get
rubbed out all the time

faces, thoughts, lines of
communication. Take this empty space,
around which the artist has sketched

the beige sizzle of hot sand, the cry of an out-
of-sight gull, the breath of a sleeping child
sighing behind drawn-down blinds.

All the people in it have left, or died, or
are in hiding and even the unmanned boats go nowhere,
save for one without moorings

nosing towards freedom
on a fishless sea.

Attila The Stockbroker

Punk poet, latterly dub poet, singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist John Baine, better known by his stage name Attila the Stockbroker, exploded into public consciousness in 1982-3 via two John Peel sessions and a Melody Maker front cover and is now celebrating 43 years earning a living doing what he loves. So far: nearly 4000 gigs in 24 countries, some 20 CDs/LPs, eight books of poems, his autobiography *Arguments Yard* (Cherry Red Books, 2015) and his collected works *Heart on my Sleeve* (Cherry Red Books, 2021).

His latest album, endorsed by his old friend, the now sadly departed Ben Zephaniah, is a dub poetry collection *40 Years In Rhyme* with rhythms from Kingsley Salmon and What's Left Dub.

In 2018 he recorded *Restoration Tragedy* with his band Barnstormers 1649, combining early music and punk – a lifelong ambition – with tales of the English Revolution of 1649.

Attila's solo performances comprise fiery, satirical, political and personal spoken word, dub poetry, acoustic songs and early music punk on ancient instruments. He really doesn't sound like anything else.

Reviews

louderthanwar.com/dave-jennings-reviews-a-brilliant-career-spanning-collection-of-works-from-our-foremost-punk-poet

morningstaronline.co.uk/article/c/works-wit-and-wisdom-free-spirit-left

louderthanwar.com/attila-the-stockbroker-40-years-in-rhyme-album-review

June 26, 1968

‘Why weren’t you at my sports day, Mum?’
I knew what she would say.
I saw it in her tear-stained face
On that bright summer’s day.
We both knew it was for the best
We both knew it was near
Paralysed, insensible....
Relieved, I shared that tear.
‘He came back just before the end
And smiled as if to say
‘Go forth, my love, you and our son...’
My father died that day.

This & That

This is a dinghy, that is a yacht.
These people should, some say, those ones should not.
Those are freeloaders, these the chosen few -
Pleasure and plenty their natural due.

These have worked hard, and those are just scroungers.
Those don’t have life jackets, these have sun loungers.
But we are all human: perish, the thought -
Lungs fill with water and life is cut short.

I live by the sea, grew up next to its might.
I’ve been marooned there, heaving in fright.
From this coastal dweller there’s one simple call:
New legal frameworks now, safety for all.

Never Too Late

For my stepfather, John Stanford

My father died when I was ten
and when she'd dried her tears
Mum met you in the choir -
she'd known of you for years
I was so pleased when she told me
that she would be your wife
and I looked forward happily
to a new man in my life

But you were the classical singer
who thought rock'n'roll was junk
and I was the Bolan boogie boy
who soon became a punk
You were the civil servant
for whom everything had its place
and I was the left wing activist
out there and in your face

Yes, you were the 'head of the household'
and I was the stropky kid
We wound each other up for sure
We flipped each other's lid
But later we both learned so much
and something new began
And here's a poem I wrote for you
You decent, gentle man

So I went off to my own life
Left you and Mum to yours
A few words about football
Then the sound of closing doors
But the passing of so many years
gave us both time to reflect
And slowly, oh, so slowly,
we forged a new respect.

When you were ill the first time
and found it hard to walk
I'd take you to the hospital
and we would sit and talk
It felt so right and normal
And it was such a shame

that it had taken all this time -
Both stubborn, both to blame.

‘Cos you were the ‘head of the household’
and I was the stroppy kid
We wound each other up for sure
We flipped each other’s lid
But later we both learned so much
and something new began
And here’s a poem I wrote for you
You decent, gentle man

When Mum came down with Alzheimer’s
Five years you cooked and cared
And we were round there every day
so many thoughts were shared
Your simple, honest loyalty
The vows you made, you’d keep
No longer the big boss man
Me, no longer the black sheep

Then came that day in hospital
The end was near, we knew
You told me ‘I do love you John’
I said ‘I love you too’
You took my hand and squeezed it
Our eyes were filled with tears
The first time that we’d said that -
It took thirty-seven years.

‘Cos you were the ‘head of the household’
and I was the stroppy kid
We wound each other up for sure
We flipped each other’s lid
But later we both learned so much
and something new began
And here’s a poem I wrote for you
You decent, gentle man

It’s never too late
never too late
never too late to say you love someone

And if it wasn’t too late for me and John
Then it’s never too late for anyone.

My Ninth Birthday

For the people of Aberfan, 50 years on. One of my most powerful early memories and a day I shall never forget.

I'm sure it won't surprise you to learn
I was a proper little show-off.
'Too clever by half'
said my Victorian grandmother
who lived in the flat downstairs.
'You spoil him, Muriel.
Children should be seen
and not heard.
Be quiet, John!
When you begin to PAY a little
Then you can begin to SAY a little.'
There were plenty more such epithets.
If I asked what was for tea
on the days she was in charge of me
she'd always say
'Air pie and a walk round'
or 'Bread and pullet'
and when she read about the latest exploits
of the royal family
or anyone else remotely wealthy or privileged
in the pages of her beloved Daily Express
she'd often exclaim with heartfelt approval
'It's not for the likes of us!'
(When, years later, I read
'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists'
by Robert Tressell
and heard that particular servile catchphrase again
I felt retrospectively vindicated
in my instinctive determination back then
to do the exact opposite
of nearly everything she told me.)

Despite my grandmother's best efforts
I was seen, heard
and then some -
in school and out.
Self-assured and confident.
Playing the violin and recorder.

Writing little poems and songs
and about to begin a massive project
about the American Civil War
based on the battle stories printed on the back
of the unbelievably gory bubblegum picture cards
we boys bought on our way to school.
Cards with titles like 'Crushed By The Wheels'
'Wall of Corpses'
and 'Messenger of Death.'
(If you're male and over 50, you'll probably remember)
My form teacher liked me
and let me help other kids in class.
I had lots of friends
and if wannabe bullies hit me
I hit them back.

Like I say, a proper little show-off.

It was my ninth birthday.
At Manor Hall Junior School
when it was your birthday
you couldn't wait till lunchtime -
but you had to.
Then you stood in front of everyone else
in the canteen
a big, colourful plastic cake was brought out
with proper candles on it
you blew out the candles
everyone sang 'Happy Birthday'
(even the kids who thought you were a show-off wanker:
the teachers made sure of that)
and you got the chance to grab a handful of sweets
from a big jar.
As far as I can remember
I was the only one
with a birthday that day
so I had everyone's undivided attention.
I was really looking forward to it.
But I never got to show off
and I didn't want to show off.
My ninth birthday was different.
It was October 21st, 1966.

Before we went to the canteen for lunch
and my little birthday cameo

we were told there was going to be a special assembly
in the school hall.

Everyone wondered what had happened:
even I realised they wouldn't have one
just because it was my birthday.

The headmaster, Mr. Young,
came in looking very sad
and told us that earlier that day
a huge mountain of coal waste
had engulfed a junior school like ours
in a Welsh mining village called Aberfan
and many children the same age as us
had lost their lives.

He asked us to pray for them.
We all did.

Some of us cried.
They still sang 'Happy Birthday'
in the canteen
a few minutes later
but it wasn't a happy birthday at all.
I kept thinking about those children.

After I'd got home
and talked to my parents
and had my birthday tea with my friends
I tried to write a poem for Aberfan -
but I couldn't.

The poem I wanted to write
was far too big for a nine year old.
We did a collection at school
the money was sent to the disaster fund
and then

as happens when you're a child
with loving parents
at a supportive school
other things quickly came along
to take the sadness away.

But on my birthday
for the next few years
I always thought
about the children of Aberfan.

Years later, I learned
about the underground springs
below Colliery Waste Tip No 7
on the hill above the village

which caused the coal waste to turn to slurry
and crash down on the school -
springs easily spotted on maps
which were never even consulted.
I learned about the negligence
of the authorities
and the insensitivity of the press.
Some things never change.
I learned about the father who -
as the inquest into his child's death
declared the cause to be 'asphyxia and multiple injuries' -
shouted out
'No, sir. Buried alive by the National Coal Board.'
I learned how a ruling was made
that parents had somehow to prove
their children's deaths had caused them anguish
before they could benefit
from the disaster fund -
and that some of the money
from that fund
was used to clear the other waste tips
above Aberfan
because the Coal Board
refused to pay for it to be done.
I learned about the long-term psychological effects
of the disaster
on the whole village.
In short
I learned how the lives
of working class people
- of working class children -
were held cheap...
So cheap.

But that was much later.
Back then
I was a child.
A proper little show-off
who didn't want to show off
on his ninth birthday
trying to write a poem
for children like him -
for the children
of Aberfan.

The Lucky Generation

I wake at 4am once more
Beside my sleeping wife
Mourn for our broken world and then
Look back upon my life
Again the words stream out of me
In anger and frustration
At those who spurned the chance to be
The lucky generation

Born to a brand new Welfare State
Hewn from the pain of war
And Bevan's pledge that now would be
Much better than before
New council houses, towns and schools
Free further education -
I was so glad to be part of
The lucky generation

Full grant at university
First one of us to go
Learned how to galvanise a crowd
And run a punk rock show
A life in words from then to now -
Like many of my peers
I took the chances offered me
And broke down the frontiers

But others sneered at us - or worse
Picked on us for a laugh
Mimicked my Tory granny's words
'You're too clever by half'
No sticks or stones could break my bones
My heart was big and strong
I did my best to win them round
In poem and in song

But now the Bevan dream is dead
And who has sealed its fate?
The very generation whom
It sought to educate!
Our grandchildren despair of us -
Their words stick in their throats
They're saying 'Save our planet, please!'
We're saying 'Stop the boats!'

This poem is for those like me -
The thirty-five percent
Who raise our outraged voices high
In anger and dissent
And to our right wing tabloid peers
In this benighted nation
I simply say: last chance to join
The lucky generation...

Candid Camera

An Ode to Flexible Cystoscopy

I know I sometimes can be
A loud-mouthed, stroppy prat
I know I'm a control freak
(And a bossy one at that)
My wife says when I'm eating
I am a total slob -
I'm still not sure that I deserved
A camera up my knob.

The poor thing shrivelled up in fear
Till it was hardly there
A tiny little pimple
In a nest of pubic hair
The camera made its entrance
The pain cut like a knife
And then I saw my bladder
For the first time in my life.

I'm glad that it went up there
Though sad at what it found
And it can come back anytime
To help me stay around
So three cheers for the NHS
And to that camera crew -
And if you're feeling odd 'down there'
You get it checked out too.

To My Wife Robina in Lockdown

8th September 2020

For forty years today I've lived this life:
Travelled the world for concerts far and wide.
For half of this, my love, you've been my wife:
A glorious inspiration at my side.
A quarter of each year or more apart.
For me a time to rant, for you to rest.
Then I return to you, my loving heart,
Resume our path together, two abreast.

When lockdown hit, at first I was bereft -
Though I believed it should have come before.
My travelling ways through all the years were gone.
The gigs I built my life around no more.
I thought, then wrote, then learned to broadcast live
Though IT still remains a fickle friend
My office now my gateway to my world -
A world I first feared would come to an end.

But now we were together all the time!
Strong characters, both set a brand new test.
My table manners and the toothpaste top.
This tireless tongue which never seems to rest.
But all our days were full of love and fun.
We never thought 'Something will have to give'.
We looked into each other's eyes and said
'No-one I'd rather be in lockdown with!'

I loved to watch our garden as it grew.
Not sometimes, this year: every single day.
Tomatoes from the seed to bright red fruit
Green beans to freezer from the starting tray.
Once lockdown eased a bit and summer came
My childhood years returned: my rods, my bike.
A few hours to ourselves now all we need.
A night apart now something not to like.

One day, I hope, I'll hit the road again.
One day your peace and quiet will return.
But this great revelation in our love,
Enforced by fate, was wonderful to learn.
So, darling, thanks for marrying me full time.
A stropky poet, loud of mouth and arse.
And as my valediction in this rhyme
I hereby dub you Comrade Wife, First Class.

Helen McSherry

Helen McSherry is a Belfast poet living in Cardiff. She has been shortlisted in the Bridport Prize, was recently published in *An Áitúil*, Anthology, has poems forthcoming in *Poetry Wales*, and will feature in *How I Write a Poem* for the Literature Wales website. Helen facilitates writing-for-wellbeing groups and was selected for the 2024 Literature Wales Writing Well Programme.

The two poems published in this issue of *Cambridge Poetry* are from her new pamphlet with theme centred on her childhood, growing up in West Belfast.

After the Bomb

there is no breath no birdsong

no lawnmower strumming

no kids yelling *here I come*

ready or not

there is no whack

of the hurly ball against the brick wall

no ice cream van whining no school bell churning

after seconds

minutes

hours

the dogs start to bark.

Pictures of You

The one of you in the kitchen spilling Mozart
through the window, to me in the garden

beneath my upturned playpen.
The one of you pressing my split-open head,

your bare hand trying to stop me
tasting the metal of my blood.

The one of you skimming my hair with the brush,
then your palm, the brush, then your palm,

leaving knots for another day.
The one of you speak-singing tunes,

de-dum, dee-dum, dee-dum,
de-diddlee-dum, dee-dum,

while jigging me on your knee.
The one of you trailing my body by the wrists

over the surface of the Atlantic,
then leaning on gusts at the tops of the dunes.

The one of you smashing through the turf-brown stream
after we climbed down Mount Errigal.

The one of you raking embers in the hearth
of the cottage, before I knew it was morning.



Joolz Denby

Malik Ameer Crumpler

We Was... is a poem illustrating the inward journey performers / spontaneous composers take while performing on stage or in mundane quotidian situations. It was originally written to be translated into French for a French Jazz Poetry Anthology *Le Nom du son* (Castor Astral, 2024). It has never been published in English (the original language) although it was performed along with music provided by Thatmanmonkz (Sheffield, England) in an art exhibition and radio broadcast for Lumpen Station Switzerland.

Malik Ameer Crumpler is a poet, composer, curator, editor & professor involved in over 65 albums, several GlitchArt films, Artbooks, literature anthologies & 9 books of Poetry. Originally from Oakland, California Malik has lived in Paris since 2016 after twelve years in New York City where he gained an MFA in Creative Writing from L.I.U. Brooklyn after co-founding, hosting, curating & editing readings, exhibitions, symposiums & online journals: *Madmenscalling*, *Those That This* & *Visceral Brooklyn*.

Currently, Malik is an Editor-at-Large for *The Opiate*, moderating events while lecturing & teaching Creative Writing & Advanced English at several Universities in Paris, France (Sciences Po, Paris College Of Arts, Pôle Universitaire Léonard-de-Vinci as well as lecturing on African American Creative Arts Networks in Paris with Access Global).

His most recent Artbook of poems & non-poems entitled ‘...&?’ will soon have an experimental album of poetry & music to accompany it.

We Was

We was backstage conjuring saffron sunrises
as our elusive audience drank anticipation

We was walkin' on stage full of tobacco
questions recalibrating on phosphorescent
edges bathed in exhausted amber

We was all uncertainty, repressing nothing but
vinyl, glowing abstract streaks of vital vibrant rhythms
firm but flexible embouchures & cruel calluses

We was always underestimated underdogs
rehearsing difficult decisions until suddenly every
mistake we ever made bloomed brave as
17th century runaways chasing topaz trains beyond virtuosity

We was hand-rolling cigarettes on 145th & Amsterdam
inhaling smoke signals from those Harlem Hellfighters in
Montmartre

We was underground malachite pyramids
beneath intrapsychic shadows harnessing Hemphill

We was navigating Alice's multiverse narratives
in our silent way, loaded buddhas signifying on the corner
harmonizing lost languages flowing from inverted volcanoes
whose turquoise lava tongues drooled frustrated Hoodoo Blues

We was Mingus's mood high on woodwinds
unbinding generous gutstrings dripping Arkansas moonshine

We was Mojo hands of spontaneous transformation
often known as Guede's golden guns of transcendence

We are Thread's from other worlds easily slipped into while
ceaselessly changing fantasies from tan to coral to beyond time

We was almost optimistic until
our song ended & we abruptly returned
drenched in Elegua's blood, telescope eyes seeing
inside our audience, hearing their minds request
joyful iridescent sonic inundations to lift their
sorrows beyond our sudoriferous sojourns

Angus Allman

Angus came to Cambridge in 2022, having spent a few years reading and writing poetry independently. Most of those early poems, he admits, were terrible, but getting them out of his head was necessary to make room for better ones.

Cambridge offered him a supportive community and a space where even those imperfect poems could be read aloud without judgement. He took on the role of running CBI Poetry to ensure the continuation of the community he had become part of.

Angus says, “My style is unsettled — not by intention but possibly by the absence of it” and at its core, his writing often explores the theme of escape — whether from society into nature or into memories and he states that his poetry, at its heart, is fundamentally deeply anti-capitalist.

Editor’s note: We would like to record our thanks to Angus for his work as co-organiser of CBI Poetry. His efforts to ensure its continuation and blossoming are immensely valuable to the poetry community in Cambridge and are leading somewhere very exciting. Indeed, part of the inspiration to found this magazine came directly from attending CBI Poetry. We thank both Angus and Trish (also included in this issue) for all their amazing work.

Just

crack my neck and toss me in the bushes,
I'll enrich the soil like the earth's berocca.
I'll be the mushroom's food as it pushes
up through me. Pale bloat home for a flock of
glinting green and gold beetles but you'll see
only their hunger, their pincers and incisions
that'll leave a hand with bright rings stripped clean
but there's grace, there's grace in their precision.

I'll be found in a month or two with no
more thought than flesh. I'll be laid to rest. Moved.
Torn from new now-ruptured roots, from a broken
home but the soil holds the shape of bones.
Beetles shine and lay their eggs, the mushrooms
spread their spores. They just grow up so quickly.

& then you asked

& then you asked
if I'd still love you as a worm.
Expectant eyes gazed up
gilded-green
and brown hair brushed my chest.
This was your code to ask

Would you keep me in a little terrarium and carry me in a backpack?

Could you tell my mood
the way you do through
my wormy writhes and wriggles?
Tell which bit was my head
and which was my tail
and stitch me if I were
suddenly two.
You wanted to know
I knew you.

Rather than
'Do you know me?'
To which I'd reply 'deeply'.
It was
'would you still love me as a worm?'

This was your code to ask:
Would you still be lacking me in another life?
Would you melt the same through a brown gaze?
Rev your heart in the same way
if red caressed your chest?
Do these arms surpass the hereandnow?

When your last breath eeks out will I be there, hand in hand, flesh in
flesh, dust in dust, to watch you pass the cusp?

Would you sing the tune
we've said we'd use
to find each other in the beyond or
would the unblinking universe's
breath down your neck
and white-knuckle grasp
of your collar
keep you pinned
to the spot where
our hearts parted

or would our particles pull patiently?
Drawing me drawing you until we're a monkey-fist of atoms and the
clashes of matter we sprung from slow
to a covalent drift?

Your code to ask

Is there a piece of me in you?

'So, do you just wake up as a worm
one day?' I ask, feigning
that specifics matter because
in this ambivalent life
my answer will always be

undyingly.

Lace Untied

Light spreads through these fields I love
like life spreads through agar.
I was told in an act
of sisterly betrayal
nettles can't sting if you pick them quickly.

The sun's weight sags the treetops.

I learnt in school
that metals conduct power
and all at once become charged.
Wanting to see if life
conducts too we linked hands
by an electric fence, a sticky willy foil
our weapon of choice and braced for a shock.

The low-angled light rolls through trunks
like honey, turning flies to amber fossils.

A red kite took flight
as I unknowingly came near.
Wings wider than I am tall
flitted me in shade before
they reached treetops.
I sat where it sat,
laid, flattened out the grass.

The sunlight was eye-height.
I looked into it, lace untied,
and felt its tug; I am unravelled

To become light.

I spread through these fields,
I love like life spreads through agar.

7AM Showing

grey hung on grey hung on grey
in the crepe paper morning.
To be honest, it was just another morning
but the station framed air was rattling.

Concertina tracks fanned off to nought
and trains trimmed
the low-hung clouds
as crowds of stick-spined
boys and girls queued thinly, walled
the sleepers; still until the threadbare air
trembled

thundered
and the muffled speakers blared
*there is a train to somewhere
coming in so don't be blown away*
but the wafer paper suits
and their card briefcases knew
the drill. They braced
with copies of the financial times
and headphones in lieu of ears

ready

to barge through doors,
crumple into chairs,
to drift away for still
more pretend.

Julie Stevens

Julie writes poems that cover many themes, but often engages with the problems of disability. She has four published pamphlets: *Journey Through the Fire* (2024), *Step into the Dark* (2023), *Balancing Act* (2021) with The Hedgehog Poetry Press and a chapbook *Quicksand* (Dreich, 2020). She has had Multiple Sclerosis (MS) for over 30 years and was a successful teacher and athlete. Julie often says, 'Being disabled hasn't stopped me from having fun. It just means I have to shine my light in a different way'.

jumpingjulespoetry.com

Brimham Rocks

With you I feel whole.

I have a body that
doesn't fall; break.

With you I am alive.

I know where to go,
where I can breathe
so deeply, stand, or
sit on your head,
move down your spine
and wait.

Here, the ground rises –
giant blocks of rock
that want to protect.

I listen
as their faces speak.

Buy a Better Pair of Legs

And what if there were legs on a shop rail?

Would you try them out,
slot your toes to the end and twist,
snap shut, so they wouldn't fall off?

And what if the toes beckoned you nearer,
one foot lifted to catch your eye,
would you go?

Would you risk the undoing,
leave your legs on a hanger
swinging freely?

Would your new legs bolt to the door
or tiptoe a tedious tap,
all day, in front of every stranger?

What if they kicked a passing shopper,
trod on a child's foot, smashed a ball
through the nearest window?

Could you handle that?

Because these legs are not your own,
not full of the memories you made
with every step.
They only know this hanger.

Would you still buy them?

An Unwelcome Dessert

We never told her we didn't want it.
A silent strike, like stealing her regimented
sweet peas on guard at the gate
and scattering their confetti.
A melancholic goodbye and we'd trudge,
unwillingly up the garden path.

Still very young and determined
we thought we could fool her –
edge past her welcoming by arriving
still warm from our porridge,
but she still insisted on dessert.

The glint of a silver spoon
reflected two helpless eyes,
whilst the stench of rot
belonged only in dustbins.
She poured the fishy ointment
into our mouths on her doorstep
announcing life would be better,
if we were full of cod.

Out to Get Me

Lining the road is a crowd waving,
and grasses sway, as if waiting for
the bus. You're in my way.
Your height marks you as royalty,
but if I move further,

I risk
everything.

I can't see past tall grass,
grown hedges and these wheels
refuse to roll on. My wheelchair will
be tied to the pavement; its body
snared by nature.

I fought stones back there,
as they rose from the earth and
tipped up slabs that forgot their
smooth welcome. Hidden, sharp
edges jostled my wheels and
tried to rip my tyres.

A trip to the shops shouldn't be
this hard. Where is the flowing route
I need? Cut the grass, trim the hedges
and hammer down the paths, so I don't
have to battle, just
to explore a normal life.

Charlotte Johnson

Charlotte is a Scottish poet living in Reading and writes about place, family and belonging. *The Poet Seeks inspiration At The Word Bank* is about grief, and how it sometimes catches you by surprise, it addresses how the options to tell different versions of a story hangs on word choices, some of which tell their own story.

Charlotte has been writing poetry publicly since 2021, first through online readings with Scribbler's Union, a Glasgow-based poetry collective formed during lockdown. Since then, she has performed twice on Radio Berkshire and had poems published in anthologies. She now writes with Open Cast Poets, a poetry collective based in Yorkshire and meets with the London based Canopy poets as well as her local Stanza group.

The Poet Seeks Inspiration at the Word Bank

It'd been a while
it was somewhat unkempt (messy/loose). Shelves groaning
under words, disorganised and dusty (dulled)
some (few/most) strewn across the floor (had already thrown themselves
down)
in silent protest (dissent).
Gathering some up
dust scatters (shatters)
Obdurate/Tessellate/Viv-a-cious/Mia-s-ma/Bam-booz-le/Synonym
nym nym
I find Forgiveness (compassion/let it go)
slip it into my pocket
just words (lies/liar/pants/knickers/indeflagration)
needing context (justification).

Among broken-off (wrecked/fragmented) letters
moribund hyphens, hopeless endings (dying/lost/desperate)
sits a menacing iron elephant (ominous/foreboding)
closed hard (resolved/final/decided/ended/hiding)
guarding the not-exactly-bad words (incarcerated)
sweary words scary words (abhorrent/vile/rotten)
nasty, manipulative
lost words (hidden/squirrelled/offensive)
misused (abused/distorted) words
bits of which
unt uck slut catch the light
articulate
on opening (release/fissure)
words so long stuffed out of mind (trust/faith/grief)
Sorry topples
exposes (betrays/unshrouds)

Michael

slanted, spikey letters,
almost touching (close/heartbreaking) each other
almost broken (damaged/mishap/self-inflicted)
small among the noise
thorned (glottis)
mellifluous/dulcet/guitar-gentle/honeyed/smoke rings/wax-and-oil/
fuzzy
I haul (lift) him from the dark
and leave the door slightly open (ajar/free)
so the safe-words can breathe (be)
take home my prizes
Michael in my arms
Forgiveness fizzing softly in my pocket.

Joolz Denby

Joolz first came to prominence as a touring punk performance poet and has been a regular at music festivals both in the UK and abroad. She began recording music singles and spoken word recordings in 1983 – sometimes solo, but usually in collaboration with musicians Jah Wobble, New Model Army, Justin Sullivan, and singer/songwriter Mik Davis.

Joolz is a visual artist, a professional tattoo artist with her own studio in Bradford and has published poetry collections and novels. She continues to perform regularly at live venues and appears on television and radio. She has also recorded a number of unabridged audiobooks, including two recordings of her own novels (one of which, *Stone Baby*, won the US Audio Industry ‘Earphone Award’).

Joolz has performed at many major events, including five Edinburgh Festivals, twenty-five Glastonbury Festivals, and international festivals like Roskilde (Denmark) and Liss Ard (Ireland).

In the UK, her performances span venues from the Albert Hall to pubs and coffee houses. She is a member of the cult performance group Red Sky Coven, which regularly tours Britain and Germany.

An experienced broadcaster, she has appeared on BBC Radio 4’s Woman’s Hour, Radio 1’s Mark Radcliffe Nighttime Show, and ITV’s Toksvig! programme. She also presented Radio 1’s Sound Advice and featured in a BBC2 education programme on performance poetry.

She is an award-winning novelist, receiving the Crime Writers’ Association New Crime Writer of the Year Award for *Stone Baby* in 1998, with *Billie Morgan* later shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Literature. She has released albums of her poetry set to music, including her latest, *Crow*, in collaboration with German composer Henning Nügel.

Joolz poetry has been published by Virgin Books, Bloodaxe, and Comma Press.

We would like to thank Joolz for contributing four artworks to this issue of the magazine, one of which can be found accompanying her poem *Life is Not Short* reproduced below – the others we are delighted to include elsewhere in the magazine.

In The Line

In the line of cars stop-starting on the old main road out to Leeds,
Through the canyons of sandstone buildings half modern half Victorian,
The shabby shop signs bolted onto golden stone blackened with
The scorch of pollution like burnt toast all scuffed and dusty
Selling friable layered mounds of damp smelling clothes
Or filling prescriptions, testing eyes, hawking vapes or fruit,
The uneven pavement scrolled with skinny boys on scooters
And women careful of their hair in this damp weather,
In that line we all wait, tasting our breath, listening to other cars' music,
Bored and stale in our purgatory of traffic shut in and restless;
I look up, I look up in the clammy cold of summer and see the
Narrow ratchet strip of sky above like scrims of swollen grey
Not two miles from the rot of the city centre and see a hawk is
Wheeling silently hunting for rats in the rubbish choked alleys
And the vestigial green squash of a forgotten park;
The bird slides through the air and I think of you gone these last years
Without a word, a wild thing caught in the trap of humanity,
Always fighting, always turning, shifting, never still - the unbeliever
The whiplash jackhammer savage burnt out with grief,
And I watch the hawk and think our hearts are never quiet,
Our hearts are never pure or unalloyed, they are base and noble,
Beating four to the floor full of blood and love
And I wonder, I wonder where you're flying now.

Life is Not Short

Life is not short, I know we always say it is but it's not true,
not for those of us who weather all the storms like old trees
bent and slightly, but not quite, broken - still clinging on
to the rocks and earth with crooked roots and white crowns;
it's not short it's a stack of memories and all the lives we lived
piled one on top of another like those terribly thin little Chinese
porcelain tea cups, a tottering rickety tower of delicate fragility,
each with its faded painted pattern telling a story of a past
that seems so far away it's almost, but not quite lost;
of when we were young and green knowing everything and nothing,
of when we were in love and the world was full of summer
the sun slanting through the leaves – and quite endless;
of when we lost and grieved and wintered in our tight wrapped selves,
each one a scene washed in vanishing blue
some cracked, some chipped, some as bright as new;
old trees, old china, old lives repaired and repainted over and over
still growing, still turning, still turning on the wheel.



Joolz Denby

Narcotika

I watch the whores walk up and down, hobbled by necessity to a rat run
Their rubery reddened faces clotted with makeup, narcotised, absent,
Their glabrous, graceless bodies tottering greenish like primrose stems,
The god inside them buried in rotten nacre far, far away down in the dark,
A pearl with no price, an absentee landlord, the prince of nothing at all.
But I'm not supposed to talk about this,
I'm not supposed to notice.
The men dawdle in their cars looking through vaporous glass at the
Wavering parade perfumed with body spray and exhaust fumes and
Their brains spasm with an itch like a fishhook tugging at a sponge sodden with
Dirty water, and all the things they searched for in the unreal world onscreen
Float bloated and pallid in their minds, pasted on the whores walking outside.
But I'm not supposed to talk about this,
I'm not supposed to notice.
The whores' colours are the batik stains of washed out headache mornings,
Tints of bleach and lidocaine, the red pain and fraught irritating rub of unwanted sex,
The saffron bubble of fever that simmers wet as fear, the black lesions on their
Hopeless, trustless, fibrous spirits and their bruised little feet canted in stilettos;
The women see the men watching from the cars, and the men see a hole.

But I'm not supposed to talk about this,
 I'm not supposed to notice.
 And the men are, of course, husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, greedy and
 Simple, monstrous in their blank normality as they cruise the tender twilight
 While the whores push out their aching, trussed breasts and staple smiles on putty
 Mouths and the men in this town, hearing all the stories of cocaine pound-a-minute
 Brothels and superior girls from Manchester feel vaguely cheated and get angry.
 But I'm not supposed to talk about this,
 I'm not supposed to notice.
 You know, they say I don't write poetry, no, that I'm not a poet and the things I write Are ugly and
 untrue, I am unsuitable, I am in some way twisted out of kilter because
 Poetry is not the illuminous crow-black night flowers, the smell of Listerine and semen
 Washed breath and the whores' god in a ruined girl, the sacrifice, the Paschal lamb
 Going unknowing to the knife while the stars manifest in the indigo summer sky.
 But I'm not supposed to talk about this,
 I'm not supposed to notice.
 But we're not supposed to talk about this,
 We're not supposed to notice,
 The whores and the men, god and the night.

Lilac

It starts with the lilac, blooming in funeral colours through
The sap sweet green of the old, half wild garden;
Much as you root it out it comes back in cones of dusk
Or the rusty white of discarded bridal bouquets.
She chose lilac for her flowers, it reminds her of childhood,
She bought a lilac perfume too, a modern one, the
Dense floral trapped in vanilla and dry wood
Very fashionable, very Gucci, designer nature, unreal.

Wasn't it a lovely do, oh it was, it was, she looked so
Beautiful a shame about all the flowers now but they
Have to go – they never last, especially those ones.
Well, he behaved himself I'll say that, not like some.

The smell of the little corolla florets so nearly beautiful
But powdery, honeyed, catching into a sneeze, a suffocation
Something to love and hate, a decaying sweetness lighter
Than lilies but persistent in the clustered cones.

It used to be a grandmother perfume, L'air Du Temps,
Madame Rochas, a scent for women cloistered by age and expectation,
Drops on a handkerchief, exhaling from a scarf, never too much,
Blending into the air freshener hissing out White Lilac & Fresh Linen;
Old women must not stir the senses, they are a pattern of wallpaper,
The fold of a curtain, the dottle of life burnt out and seen
But not observed, drifting like soft floral wraiths.

Nothing is as it seems especially to those who assume,
Who want to see nothing so see whatever is given them;
In the garden, lilac dies in wads of friable desiccation,

Brown skeletons bobbing in the fresh North winds
Raining onto the rough grass in fragile torn confetti,
Blown away into dust a death so common it's not mentioned.

God knows it cost enough, what with the reception and everything
He had to take out a loan, her dad – oh yes, Evie told me,
Thousands really, that dress alone – the honeymoon – oh I don't know,
Somewhere you have to get jabs for I do know that.

The room has white muslin curtains to the floor moving
In a faint salt breeze as beautiful as incense in an old church
Housing a Madonna who weeps crystal tears nearly as perfect
As the ones decorating the net and Guipure of her gown,
There are dark slatted shutters too and a wooden bed
With turned spindles and the sheets are thick, white and starched.

She is alone, lying on the coarse coverlet, her mind turning;
It wasn't his wedding, it was hers, like her Nan said, men
Just go through it, they don't understand it, be grateful
He didn't whine or sulk like some, like your sister's husband,

Who couldn't wait to get back with his best man and
Snort some flake as coarse and gritty as the sand on the beach;
She didn't know her grandmother knew about things like that,
The provincial secrets of youth as stiff and ceremonial as the priest
Who intoned Til Death Do You Part and then said
You May Kiss Your Bride to her husband as if they'd
Never done that before, as if he didn't know her body
As well as his own and as little as he knows his own;
He favours Sauvage, she can smell the synthetic musk on the pillow.

The curtain stirs, she can hear the sea moving deep blue,
Glassy, thick with life and she remembers it glittering with
Dancing cubes of light shifting in the brilliant hot sun so unlike home,

So unlike the neat, flimsy beige flat they rent under rain blotted skies,
That's so unlike this cool room and the small town beyond saturated
With a slick rainbow of cocktails and unfamiliar food and the sea,
The sea, moving, hiding secrets in shades of cyan and wine.

The dark sea, the unknowable body of Mother Thalassa
Gravid in the lazy swells and sucking white foam rolling
Shells in the crush of tides beyond measure of moons and stars,
The blood magic of the saltwater beating a low drum that
Summons gods so old we have forgotten their very names
But who we can feel in our breath and who wrap our bones
In pearls and the ropes of swaying kelp glaucous and binding.

She can hear him in the shower splashing like a child,
She knows he'll be scrubbing the short, shaved stubble at
The back of his neck, rubbing his special shampoo in hard,
Worrying about going bald like his father and that he'll
Ask for her reassurance as he always does and she'll say,
No love, no, it looks fine, a real mop, lovely, as she always does
And then suddenly, without warning the world turns,

The world turns, the stars threaded in the night sky wheel
Around a point of light that blooms in her mind golden and ineffable,
She holds her breath, balancing like an angel on a pin point
While the glazed indigo sea embroiders the shoreline outside
And in her sudden breath she hears a voice crying

go, go, go

Run away, this is the chance you'll never have again,
This is the one moment in your life that will never be repeated,
Go before he comes into the room and asks the same questions,
Before you dress in your pretty white cotton sundress,
Before you have dinner and he says all the same sweet childish

Things he always says about foreign food, and this is a bit of alright,
Just go before you get the plane home and life, your life, consumes you.

And it flares in her head like a struck match unbidden
And unasked for but there, just as the sea is there eternal
And mythological offering strangeness, the unknowable
The immanent beauty of immersion in the mass of humanity,
A different life
A different

And she lets out her breath as the wave falls on the waiting shore
And he comes out of the shower smelling of chemicals and
Says can you look here, at the back I think and she says no it's fine,
Honestly love, what are you like and he is so pleased to be cared for

and the light goes out.

And in the sea, the spell recedes with the tide, the glamour fades,
The Old Ones move back into the deeps shrouding in cerulean
And turquoise, moving into the ultramarine, unwinding into coral
And the pulse of the unknowable sadness of beauty,
The ozone scent of salt and the crackling green and azure flames
Of the fishermen's driftwood fire down on the rough quayside
Scenting the night breeze with memories and endings.

She dresses, she slips on her gold sandals, she puts her
Wedding earrings in and slides a peach flavoured gloss on her lips

But she drops the bottle of lilac perfume in the bin.

Because it ends with lilac, too.

Yessica Klein

Yessica is a Brazilian writer and poet with an MA from Kingston University in London (UK). She was shortlisted for the 2023 White Review Poetry Prize, the 2021 Aesthetica Creative Writing Award, the 2017 Jane Martin Poetry Prize, and highly commended at Ambit's 2022 Poetry Competition, 'Magick'.

Yessica's work has appeared in Banshee Lit, The Moth, Wet Grain Poetry, 3:AM, Magnum Photos, The Lighthouse Review, and more.

She runs a newsletter called That Poetry Thing, which focuses on writers' desks and creative habits. She's also working on her first novel.

Instagram: @yessicaklein

There Is No Such Thing As A Straight Line

welcome to my curiosity: here,

I'm the bus driver

& I want you to be happy passengers

in this case, you should know

I don't have a drivers' license

& I can listen to Werner Herzog

all day

to become

the poem I want us to be

worldly trivialities do not interest me

I'm not attached

to this version of the truth

without a talking mind, here's the Neptunian astrologer

rebranding salt

saying it's all about Jesus

but his lifestyle is

not realistic

& the afterlife

sounds claustrophobic: three parents

divorcing

I know you've got too much time

in your hands

don't waste it overthinking

go to the cinema instead



Dan Leighton

Such A Pisces

Pisceans are Neptunians: they urge to escape

reality's frost bites & their redemption

instinct craves the fuzzy

mind, thoughts outside the lines

as if dancing underwater: the true meaning of

mermaid hair.

Mesmerising – from Franz Mesmer, theoriser

of a natural energy transference between all animated

& inanimate objects. They hug their

teddy bears while they sleep. They tend

to imaginary gardens with real

toads in it. They're going

to be obnoxious.

Dog Person

The sound of the wheeling bike
tells me you've arrived.
Metaphorically speaking,
I'm already by the door shaking
my butt & pacing in circles,
ready to greet you with
love scratches
& overstimulated noises.
You're home now:
I will fetch you
anything you want.
I'll curl up next to your warmth with
my warmth so we both rest deeply,
skin to
skin.
I am only mad at you in my dreams.
You can pet my back, my
ribs, the bald spot
behind
my ears, the cookie-dough softness
of my belly.
I will lick your neck as a thank you.
I will hump cushions
thinking of you.
You couldn't possibly resent me,
not when I have these substantial marble-brown
eyes,
these expressive
furry eyebrows.
No, you simply couldn't –
not even when I chew on your shoes,
poke holes in your socks –
you know it is
your absence
that makes me eat your
smell.

Sometimes The Girl Would Rather Be A Tree

dropping acorn bombs on hikers' heads
a wise oak
the girl would rather have roots over toes
mycelium BFFs
arms that house the raven & the robin
a willow
tangling silver whips with the
wind's breath
slow-dancing by the river bank
watching the Rhine float through the
centuries
the girl would rather live in tree-time
a sugary birch shedding
its layers
paint-brushed sunshine leaves for nails
mushroom
shelves for outside ribs
the girl would rather be reliant on the community of her forest
to be a stoic trunk part of a collective noun
a gingko
dropping paper hearts to the wild
grasses
the girl would rather obey unreasonable seasons
cover herself
with velvety moss
the
quietest, quietest
snow

Lillian Davies

Lillian is a writer and educator based in Paris. In her work as an art historian and art critic, she has been published in *Artforum*, *Flash Art*, *Interview* and others, and authored essays for artist books, including Mounir Fatmi's first monograph (*Suspect Language*, *Skira*, *Flammarion*), Christine Rebet's *Escapologie* (Silvana Editorial, 2022) and Hoda Kasha's forthcoming monograph with Mousse. She co-authored *Playgrounds* (Drawing is Free Press, 2023) with artist Chloe Brigg.

She is a Guest lecturer at École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris; Ecole W (Université Paris-Panthéon-Assas); and Parsons Paris, and currently an Adjunct Professor at Paris College of Art and Sciences Po.

From rooftops

From rooftops
it's chromatic,
the language colors speak
'Bonjour zinc, slate'
From above the below

Two make three.
For an instant there is more
Forgetting ever wanting
all this life
Before

Blood says,
with its poppy petaled bloom,
It didn't work this time.
'A vous de jouer,'
Once more

We are
Surely enough
On the eve of no longer
A possible
One more

Evening:
Tea kettle steams
Cracked cries to quiet
A child, grown
Somehow, alone

Homesick

Coahuiltecan is a language prickly pear still speak
Quiet, as the sun drops
And the flames glow weak

Heat mirage rounds courthouse stops
Caliche whispers, Night forgets
Popcorn, firecrackers, last cotton crops

Hurricane midnight calls in her debts:
Uranium gaslight
Frozen moon never sets

Double strand barb wire rusted tight
Thorns Quemado so the cattle eat
Sparkling salt lick dancehall bright

Walmart lanterns blink thin mesquite
Fever blazes beeswax wick
Tornado doublewide Palomino barefeet

Tarred petunias wilt granite slick
Rush, Father, son and holy ghost
Ash snake Menthol highway flick

‘Worst drought smells like buttered toast.’
Wave plastic bales and heart shaped fruit
‘US 90 to Del Rio, 2 hours at most.’

‘Home is a place you’ll never return to.
Because home is a place that no longer exists.’

Mal de Pays

Le coahuiltec est une langue que parlent encore les figuiers de Barbarie
Discrète, alors que le soleil glisse
Et que les flammes s'éteignent petit à petit

Le mirage de chaleur contourne les stops de la cour de justice
Le caliche murmure, la nuit s'est tue
Pop-corn, dernières récoltes de coton, feux d'artifice

L'ouragan minuit vient réclamer son dû :
L'uranium verte incandescente
La lune gelée ne se couche plus

Le fil barbelé rouillé tient étroitement
Les épines Quemado pour que le bétail mange
Pierre à sel étincelante la lumière d'un bal dansant

Les lampes du Walmart clignotent le mesquite phalange
La fièvre brûle la mèche de cire et silence
Tornade mobile home Palomino pieds nus épluches d'orange

Les pétunias goudronnés se fanent sur le granite lisse
Dépêchez-vous, Père, fils et saint-esprit
Serpent de cendres mentholé autoroute lâche-prise

« La pire sécheresse sent comme du pain grillé. »
Agitez les ballots en plastique et les fruits en forme de cœur
« US 90 vers Del Rio, deux heures et tu y es »

« La maison est un lieu où tu ne reviendras jamais.
Parce que la maison est un endroit qui n'existe plus. »

Sophie Roy

Sophie is a university student at Sciences Po in Paris, studying political science. She has always been a writer and has attracted acclaim for her writing in recent years.

She was recommended to Cambridge Poetry by her university professor of literature and we are delighted to have been able to publish this collection of poems in the magazine.

what of those who grow

what of those who grow
around grand trees of metal
without knowing snow
– is your heart then made of steel?
flowers in pots remain real

IV

on the train heading the other way
you saw him, once
if you jumped in front then he'd stay

II

deep blue salty sea water
stormy feisty ancient storm
lies, in private eyes

V

torn paper all the way
she dips the quill in the corner of her eyes
she stays quieter this way

III

the sky is sticky today
the clouds are too low to pray
for anything, other than rain
– the sun must stay away
call upon him and burn he may.

Two hours and thirty nine minutes

Two hours and thirty nine minutes,
that clock is ticking tentatively

Nothing is also something;
all that time: spare a glance,
still i don't exist,
well barely

The corridor of the apartment
hope someone can see me,
haunt the happy family,
allegedly

it doesn't matter, he won't see me.

I yelled, the microwave beeped, I slammed the fridge door, his eyesight doesn't even twitch, anymore.

Made you coffee,
but you would have preferred tea...
Sorry. Always been a whiny baby.

I'm so cool with this,
I feel I should be used
– to this, by now,

yet somehow
still waiting
– sorry, shut up, stay still.

Always pick up on the first ring,
and the second chances are never ending,
and I'm *still* sorry.

bathtub at three in the morning.
Teacup and scissors blazing.
Maybe just bangs?

Well, I've cut them already,
Chopped up carefully:
Dinner's ready

snip, snip, snip: red confetti.

Pot of ice cream beside me.
Vanilla, ice-ice-baby.
Sorry, not that funny.

I used to like the number five,
I remember, always easy.
Five in a row? Fucking seriously? That's crazy.

You haven't known me since
Never cared enough to even pretend,
Even under the age of two-times-five

Don't know why it still bothers me.
No one is coming – sorry

– sweetie.

pastel pink paracetamol

sit up straight, how do you feel about drugs?
what was the very first glass of alcohol?
this looks like a hospital, too white.
nails are a little overgrown: aligned little white pills
try strip poker,
darkening pages stories-to-keep-you-happy-mania.

body-through-the-dance-studio-mirror-mania
better than – doing drugs
precisely perfected part you cannot possibly play, poor poker
tequila ban from her eighteenth extended to all alcohol
hating medicine, nothing working, even sick you don't take pills:
when did warmth leave? salt lamp on her bedside table now white.

Fine. Swear. Swallow an egg white
tighter-ballet-bun-mania
he's always forgetting to take his pills
could you feel drugs?
nothing durably drowned deep enough with alcohol
be smart about it, your brother will teach you poker

before surgery : pills
willing to act strong, same as poker
old man in a white blouse and a respectable name prescribing not drugs
don't want to bleed on sheets too white
never-crying-again-mania
reek of alcohol

brother's shit at poker
until the stems snap, knuckles turn white

oh no thank you, I don't really drink ;
miserable-mania
never properly tried;
hate pills

cerebral celebratory only alcohol
feel better with pills ?
dad's old record player: beatlemania
need to learn how to play poker
burnt green top, paint everything white
can't see him take drugs

how should you feel about drugs? alcohol?
Winters when we were little, snow white and pink syrup instead of pills
my search history is all about poker, weird-mania
painful
it is an orange book,
with dog eared pages.
I do wish, it was
a bible.

on the corner of a table:
was it such a wild thing?
to hope, you
could handle with care

anything
a bible could've convinced you
but not me
not me

mine, mine, mine.
this is my favourite book
yet I feel myself leaving it
on the corner of the table,

yours, yours, yours
I think if I dared touch
those pages,
you might burn

You'd promised
not to leave it
like you did, by the table outside
poor soul, nowhere to hide

Through thick and thin
– ink and paper,
– drink and whisper.

it has seen the world with me – instead of you,
loyal companion, hate that I left it out of my purse that day,
gloomy weather, took my umbrella too.

I wish I'd kept my favourite a secret longer
then the pages could've been quieter.
Boring, Boxy, Beast.
sat, staring straight back at me, on the corner of a table;

like a prophecy
echo in my head,

not what it used to be
– seek no remedy.

I wore gloves of nostalgia,
to place it back on the highest shelf:

mine, mine, mine,
please let me have it back
– by myself

you, you, you,
forget easily
– to suffer in the rain; soaked to the spine: on the corner of a table
outside.

Do you mind?
Don't mind me, now.

No more of that orange book
Your notes in pencil, always so unsure of anything – about me,
childish and petty
But you ruined my Bible.

you, you, you
ruining – me.

Fork Burke

Fork is a poet currently living in Switzerland. Fork describes her work best: “My relationship to my work is rooted in the prophetic capacity of words and how they function. My poems allow something to happen free of the automatic association of prescribed meaning. a loyalty to that speak which has been a witness to human vastness and evolving meaning.”

She is Co-Editor of *I Will Be Different Every Time: Black Women In Biel* which was awarded 2021 Book Prize from Canton Bern, Switzerland.

Her publications include: *Licking Glass* – #33 and *Checklist*. Her other works include: spoken word recording *Durch die Blumen*, published contributions in *TSUNAMI GANG* - *Maintenant: A Journal Of Contemporary DADA Writing And Art*, and *Those That This*.

She is a graduate of The New School of New York, NY, USA.

Cut It Up

What does she want - Shape of a horse - place of the other - page 89 was a major event - they Have always been female - run in circles - individuals born of the beginning - or hope does an egg - development - females would wish face of it - damage that needs to be repaired - further research every piece of her body - toes soles nipples postmodern theorist - I dismembered
your body - but how it works - cassette player Nina Hagen can be safely taken in - while the notion that technologies have so far freezing - the brain was identified - Captain Grace there were plenty of yourn men scattered everywhere - good and bad ways - A worm might get Ideas beyond net eating - positions in a rhizome - only half a mind - electrical web - speeds time stretches out became synonymous - A then must B - B control is no longer purely writing - heavy increase - Western art crucial to taking Otta wandered off - The ancient unity of - something - until the more they tried to regain control - far too complex - reserved for hardware software 1950s zones - children and husband - If that is show themselves at all - He had only a few points - fund his work - only a few of us survived - the break - we were all at sea - free exchanges - we gave no thought - on through every organism - But he doesn't always - war - on the face of it - they are simply not a storage area

Checklist, is an interesting poem with a fascinating story. The Checklist form was started by artist Brian Moran – where he is now is unclear. Fork takes up the story:

“I was introduced to the form by a painter Robert Wallace who now lives in Kyoto - He and I were doing checklist a lot back in New York. The painters that Brian shared the form with started signing their paintings with checklist - this was in the late 90s. It has two rules: it must be numbered 1-33, and the last line must be 33 Degrees. What is on the checklist can be anything and come from anywhere - overheard conversations - a text - one’s own mind - anywhere.

Robert and I were the ones who kept doing checklist long after the others moved on - We mailed them back and forth - and when I moved to Switzerland I introduced the form here - Many people (artists) started to do them - from there I suggested to the publishers Haus am Gern that we do 6 journals over a long period of time that included three artists and their five checklists each - These have all been published and the project is over - The one [published here] has never been published - I was not in each journal - only about two because I wanted to feature others etc.

All I can say is it is something to know how it all started and I am proud that I continued and still do and that it has its own legs now .

The way a person does checklist is up to them in terms of how long it takes. Some people sit and write one, while I prefer to let it happen over time until it is done - It has trained my ear - I just know when a word or phrase belongs to the checklist - I am very much drawn to the shifts in language - the portals - the meaning and connection - and most of all the possibility that it has to delve once encountered - Lastly for me since I do it over time I am always struck by how it ends up being cohesive in speak and harmony.”

Checklist

- 1 Love and the Universe are infinite
- 2 A Good Owl gone Bad
- 3 Only the biggest lie survives
- 4 The history of the world is on your plate 5 I'm very bad at dumb things
- 6 This Champagne is burned
- 7 They were hiding the other people
- 8 Risk comes from not knowing what you're doing
- 9 Multiplicity blocks the introduction of the enemy
- 10 Relational Ulysses
- 11 Sandseife
- 12 It's song logic
- 13 state created legal fictions
- 14 Listening down into himself
- 15 How far does the health of the soil travel
- 16 Haus am Gern
- 17 You sit below the salt
- 18 If you don't complicate things you can't charge money for it
- 19 I'm going straight to the Kisses
- 20 1938 held what realm
- 21 The carnival reeks of failure
- 22 broken glass marks its story
- 23 I was able to get funding
- 24 It's a uniting name in a dead language
- 25 Warehouse 24
- 26 no stability of essence is proper to her
- 27 Spirit is shaped by my alignment with Spirit
- 28 Pre-God religions
- 29 Save My Skin
- 30 Sacher Torte
- 31 Smoke before fire
- 32 Success is a function of access and information
- 33 Degrees

Julia Ajayi

Julia was born and brought up in South Cambridgeshire. After travelling for many years, she has returned to the village in which she was born. She has always been drawn to reading and writing poetry and often writes when feeling particularly emotional or moved by something. She recently joined a local poetry group, and this is the first outing for any of her poems.

Haiku

A sun soaked hot day
Lying face down on cool lawns
Earthed – and now peaceful

Editor's note: The following poem is written to honour the life of poet and writer from Hitchin, Gill Booth. Gill was one of the original Greenham Common protesters whose actions were so influential on public perception of the place of nuclear weapons in our society. Indeed, Mikhail Gorbachev specifically said that the Greenham women influenced his decision to go to Reykjavik in 1986 and agree to the elimination of intermediate range ballistic missiles. Likewise, one of Ronald Reagan's advisers stated that the 'zero option' to remove these weapons had been copied 'straight off the women's banners' of the Greenham Common protesters.

Feet first

It's going to be heavy,
they say.
Put your arm underneath.

Find the shoulder
of the person opposite.
We shuffle.

Which end? Where?
I can't be beside you,
my dear friend, but lay your

hand on your sister's shoulder.
Together, you carry her head,
and I'll carry her feet.

And then the weight.
The full weight.
Brace, take stock, and

feel for the warm shoulder.
And then we move
in step.

Us first?
So unexpected!
Feet first? Who knew?

First to the chapel of rest.
First to carry our precious load
past family and friends.

First to feel
the weight of love,
of goodbyes.

A first experience, full
of honour
of gratitude and respect

for this original
woman
no longer protesting.

Joseph Nutman

Joseph is a poet from North-Hertfordshire who works in Cambridge. His work has appeared in journals and anthologies by Shearsman, Sunday Mornings at the River, Acid Bath Publishing, Open Shutter Press, Spelt, Late Britain Press, and Poetry Cove. He featured on the National Poetry Day BBC Upload show special in 2024.



Marco Basaiti, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Female Saint

After Virgin and child with Saints by Marco Basaiti (1508), displayed in the Fitzwilliam museum, Cambridge.

As they have done countless times
the white-washed mother and child hold court,
accompanied by that rock that holds the keys – looking on in adoration,
a happy moment before eternity denying the also-rans admission.
The holy land rolls on behind, green and pleasant, renaissance Italy
cast as the near east. And, there she is –
named simply on the information card Female Saint, though
from the tower in the background we may guess her name.
The apple of my own biases, whose sensuous gaze follows me,
a heart-shaped face that soothes an ache but lights another.
Her soft smirk I'd turn into a pucker and keep close, that's the spark
set to my taper, how apt her patronage – lightning and fireworks.
If I'd lived then, I would have lit the air for her
with the highest art of my tongue,
if I had my way she never would have earned a martyr's crown –
and her lovely head would have stayed where it belonged.

Rethabile Masilo

Rethabile Masilo is a Mosotho poet who has lived in France for more than 30 years. He left his country, Lesotho, as a refugee in 1981, eventually ending up in the USA where he continued his biology studies. He moved to France in 1987 and has lived there ever since, effecting as many visits to Lesotho as possible.

He has published five books of poetry as well as two poetry anthologies of which he was editor. In 2014 his poem 'Swimming', from his second book *Waslap* won the Dalro First Prize in poetry, as well as the Thomas Pringle Award for Poetry in South African periodicals a year later. The poem had first appeared in the magazine *New Coin*, Vol. 49 Number 1, in June 2013.

In 2016 the same collection of poems, *Waslap*, published by The Onslaught Press a year earlier, was awarded The Glenna Luschei Prize for African Poetry. That same year in October he was invited to participate in the 20th Poetry Africa Festival in Durban, where he also represented The World Poetry Movement; and in June 2019 he was part of The International Poetry Festival of Medellin in Colombia, to whose 30th anniversary festival in 2020 he has been invited.

Masilo's books are *Things that are silent* (Pindrop Press, 2012), *Waslap* (The Onslaught Press, 2015), *Letter to country* (Canopic Publishing, 2016), and *Qoaling* (The Onslaught Press, 2018). He blogs at Poéfrika (poefrika.blogspot.com) and co-edits Canopic Jar (canopicpublishing.com) with the writer Phil Rice.

His blog is at: poems.rethabile-masilo.net

White canes bend at two places, like fingers

Cities through fingertips inebriate me –
everywhere I go lies this pavement
defining the town with a kerb that may
or may not curve to where I go. Patient,
I like to try and see it with my cane,
slightly slanted in the hand. Not a stick,
a pen I use to trace my life again
as I walk and tap or touch stone or brick
or granite at my feet. No need to prove
God or splendour. If you don't listen well
to night you may miss the bat that moves
with rubber wing and flickers around walls
in a feeding frenzy. For the glory
of everything belongs truly to the night,
which holds day as dead retinas carry
light, to watch life with previous sight.

The stallion

Little waves crawl to our feet to die.
One by one through summer
with wet tongues they come.
A tern lifts its head, drags a gulp
down its throat. A stallion sniffs
the earth above an old salt mine
where the field is bald, like the head
of a spirit trapped in the mine,
thumping the ceiling for release.
Like sea water, the horse will come
near the saltlick to die, or go
for a last jaunt, then thunder back
down the hill past stables where
no one lives anymore, though
his ancestors roamed this shore.
One day, when the mist was still,
his parents appeared to him
in a bright cloud, and bequeathed
to him and the mare slumped
on the grass at his side, and the child
they were going to have, the right
to roam and gallop these hills.

The bonfire

They crossed all lands to reach us,
to surround with us the fagots and spires
of flames leaping like tongues at us,
laughter saying who among our folk
had sent them to find our souls.
The short one, who talks little,
knew something about what drives men
here, why a king might decree such a thing
out of fear. I stood to stretch my legs, broke roots
off the liana sagging from the cave ceiling,
fed them to the hiss of the sizzling stems
as we talked of the weather, the snow
that had surprised everyone and covered
everything – talked until the fire of dawn
was in our cells, root-sent, secure.



Dan Leighton

Eve and Adam II

They do not want to say that this is why it's forbidden to go to the centre and taste the fruit, though they know it must be the reason. That fruit is good, and eating it will make them equals of god. So they roam up and down the garden like children, not daring to look at their genitals. Adam's tuber dangling between his thighs and swinging like a hose as he walks, or runs to tackle Eve without looking at her burning bush, as she dashes between lines of trees with her boobs jiggling. Then they go to the escarpment to roll down its slope before going up to do it again and again, like children in a park, and at last down to the river to wash the grime off their bodies. They always wondered why the fruit had been forbidden – if there was another reason apart from the fact that it was ripe and delicious, and like kids for whose teeth bonbons were bad, they couldn't. They were born of light, god's first words, and they could rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, livestock, and over all the wild animals, as well as over creatures that move along the ground. So when a snake told them of the fruit, and of how it should be devoured, slithering back and forth to show Eve how she should carry herself then Adam how he should climb onto her, they protested, saying they couldn't do that. But the snake, unperturbed, used the analogy of an apple, of eating it, talked to them about pectin and about how an apple a day would keep the doctor away. So Adam stroked Eve, turned to reach her from the back, as their dog looked on; and they proceeded to condemn the human race. The dog barked and licked himself, which is when they stared at each other's genitals, realised they were naked, came up with the name doggy style, and left the garden to go and multiply, and make people like you and me, so as to fill the world with love.

Another world

Distance is pleasure to feet. I walk up and down these streets
so long as their snow touches my face with its fingers, as if
the street was a form of penitence. Night has its shadows,
the people I pass cast theirs across my monumental shape,
like they know I left in the basement where this all began
your letters on a shelf, with the faces of their stamps
shocked at the speed at which the years move on,
around the time when our road was plain, and we found
distractions everywhere, like the day we did it in the Y
of a tree and you plucked a plum and ate it till you came.
I like the night. I like how it grows and beyond it
trees flock in shadows of furious birds. I move among them
with the hand of your snow brushing my face.
We were always looking for distractions, and one day,
at the end of evening, you took me down to the cemetery,
to encounter stone's suspended light. Silence rustled dead leaves,
a forest of marble occupied our mind, gave it form, banyan
piercing the layer of our upper world with its stem, pondering
two who loved among its trunks. A boneyard is no place for death.
The unbreathing are a world waiting to rise again. You hold me
in your hand and knead until the dead, aroused, thump
the roofs of their graves. I like the night, its time, black
with the glimmer of oil. The dark meaning of another world.

Devil's weed & ginger

I need to wash you from me, scrub your smell off,
though no matter what soap I use you do not go,
you are in me throughout and on me night and day
since the last time we touched, and even longer
after I ate you and felt you writhing against me.
Turn those hours to days, and those days to weeks,
then multiply the weeks by fifty-two several times:
that's how long I have remained with your absence.
I am an animal sniffing essence to find its way
home. I remember how you relished it that last time.
We grew into each other, then were suddenly absent
from the years. I have been pounding devil's weed
and ginger from India and Ceylon in a clay mortar
to conjure you, dripping salt water on the blend
to try and keep your scent alive, stimulating me,
because I love it every time you melt over my face,
and me with a grin just going to die there forever.

Pilar Puerto-Camacho

Pilar has a scientific background but has always been closely tied to literature. She works as a Project Manager on Brain Cancer Research at the University of Cambridge but cannot conceive of a world without expressing her emotions or feeling the spark of an unexpected word when reading a poem. Her mother tongue is Spanish, and so she faces the a double challenge of not only writing a poem but also creating a good translation that can capture the core essence of the original words and perhaps even discover new experiences through different word landscapes in another language.

Editors note; We are delighted that Pilar has submitted both her poems in Spanish and English. The sound of a poem expressed in another language, even if our understanding of it is limited, is always a treat – and one we are determined to enjoy and promote in this magazine.



Dan Leighton

Fringe

'The sky has shores where life is avoided'

Federico García Lorca

The sky holds incompressible shores
from the overflowed foam of nameless voice
to the high sea with enraged grey colour.
But the windows also throw paper seagulls into the wind
looking for the astonished North, the embraces from home,
the hidden smile between sheets
among the fugitive cobblestones from Royal Mile.
The sky has cliffs where the cawing of time is accused.
But also diaphanous islands where the tear drifts
to the mouth converted into laughter,
the curly waterfalls melting in the forest core,
the plain hands of the beech tree gazing at our eyes.
Life wakes up on wings bridging to the river dream.
The sky hides truths that only dawn
in the twilight of a piano wind that devours the evening,
fires dancing and sparking sense,
calls illuminating the complicity.
But the night also harbours wiped glass
where we are still a true reflection between words.
Thus Edinburgh sky fervently trembles
under the eternal shore always lighting us to return.

Fringe

'El cielo tiene playas donde evitar la vida'

Federico García Lorca

El cielo tiene playas que no se comprenden
desde la espuma desbordada de la voz sin nombre
hasta el gris embravecido del alta mar.
Pero también las ventanas lanzan gaviotas de papel al viento
buscando el norte asombrado, los abrazos de hogar,
la sonrisa de lámina escondida
entre adoquines fugitivos de la Milla Real.
El cielo tiene acantilados que acusan los graznidos del tiempo.
Pero también islas diáfanas donde la lágrima navega
hasta la desembocadura convertida en risa,
las cascadas rizadas y untuosas en la razón del bosque,
las manos rasas del aya observando nuestros ojos.
Despierta la vida puentes alados en el sueño del río.
El cielo esconde verdades que sólo amanecen
en el ocaso de un viento a piano devorando la tarde,
fuegos que danzan y prenden sentido,
llamadas que iluminan la complicidad.
Pero también la noche adentra cristales enjugados
donde aún seguimos siendo reflejo entre palabras.
Así enfervorece y tiembla el cielo de Edimburgo
bajo luz de orilla eterna que nos hace siempre regresar.

Nadie dijo a la semilla

La belleza de una muerte
que aún evita su destino
palpita con elegancia, llorosa.
El dolor parece ser el origen,
donde las horas quebradizas
llueven la emboscada,
un silencio agonizado,
la sorpresa enhiesta del letargo.

Pero nadie dijo a la semilla
que debía ser árbol,
ni tampoco a la hoja
que volvería a ser tierra.

Dónde recordar entonces
el fruto colmado
al sol, sombra
de un fin no prometido.

Así llega el otoño
a estas manos desnudas,
abiertas al cielo.

Pero, es cierto,
nadie dijo a la semilla
que debía ser árbol;
como
 ahora
 las
 hojas
caen
a pesar del amor.

No one told the seed

The beauty of a death
that still avoids its destiny
throbs with grace, tearful.
Pain seems to be the origin,
where the brittle hours
rain on the ambush,
an agonized silence,
the upright surprise of lethargy.

But no one told the seed
that it should become a tree,
nor the leaf
that it would be earth again.

Where to remember then
The mature fruit filled
with the sun, shadow
of an end not promised.

Thus autumn comes
to these bare hands,
open to the sky.

But, it is true,
no one told the seed
that it should become a tree;
as
 now
 the
 leaves
fall
despite love.

Frankie-Mai Blyth-Smith

Frankie is a 24-year-old student with the Open University studying The Arts and Humanities with Creative Writing. She dreams of being published as a writer and journalist. She uses her poetry as a creative outlet to express her very human experiences and emotions that she believes everyone can relate to in some way, ranging from love, loss, despair, and friendship to more abstract work about her exhausting battle with anorexia and bulimia for more than a decade.

She believes poetry's power lies in offering comfort to readers through the relatability of the brutal truth that everyone is just trying to muddle through and do the best they can, while highlighting the beauty in that vulnerability.

Autumn's Kiss

There is something flirtatious about Autumn.

The way trees dance in crisp air,

A breath caressing each branch.

Coy murmurs tickle red ears, as leaves flutter in freefall.

Autumn bares her soul to Winter.

Naked and unapologetic.

Fearless is her resolve, this old romantic;

Archaic and sure as tides.

Autumn does not fear the frozen earth she falls upon.

Instead, enveloping Winter's contours with auburn blankets.

Cocooned in quiet, chorus of whispers.

A different melody or hushed sweet nothings elicited with each step.

Year by year, Winter frets the thaw of Spring.

Shotgun

I hated traffic before I met you,
but now as long as we're together,
stealing kisses on the M25,
I'm drunk on you and car seat leather.

We ain't gettin' nowhere quickly,
there's no place I'd rather be,
windows down, the radio on,
one hand on the wheel and one on my knee.

I don't care about the destination,
just as long as I'm by your side.
don't care how long it takes us,
I'll still come along for the ride.

Road-trips, I'm riding shotgun,
belting out noughties, utterly shameless.
carpool karaoke at the top of my lungs,
being stuck in traffic with you is painless.

With you I'll always long for another delay,
another red light,
my heart sinks as we near my hometown,
'cause I'm not ready to say goodnight.



Dan Leighton

My Tiny Words

My Tiny Words is a poet who has been exploring writing this year as a way to explore boundaries. Though a new poet, they are working hard at the craft and learning about the joys of writing poetry. This poem was read at CBI Poetry, and attracted a very positive reception!

The Life and Times of a Misplaced Grocery

You know when you walk round Tesco
And someone's dumped an item
Too lazy to return it
And now it's lost
Probably heading to the bin
No one can speak for its provenance now

Does that happen to people?

Because I'm pretty sure I'm a lump of cheese
That's been deposited with the crisps

I'm just sort of sweaty
And stinky
And failing fast

And everyone else is wrapped in these super cool foil wrappers
And they're dazzling
And made of real potato
And they're the king of lunches

And they belong

And no matter how hard I try to be a packet of crisps
I'm just mature cheddar

Appreciated in the bright lights of the refrigerated aisle
For the special delicate food

But here. With the shelf stable savouries
Room temperature curd is an unfortunate eyesore
A mistake to tut at as you reach for the crinkle cut salt and vinegar.

A waste

It'll be swept up sometime
By an exhausted shelf stacker
Chucked in the skip, via the reduced section

With the stale baguettes and limp broccoli

Just a chunk of cheese
Who lost her way

Torn from her dairy tribe
To cobble an unwelcome life as an entirely different food group

What
could be sadder?

Perhaps just the poet

Who resonated,
embarrassingly deeply
With a lost
and lonely
lump of cheese.

Amira Skeggs

Amira Skeggs is a writer and PhD student at the University of Cambridge, where she researches mental health interventions. Her work explores themes of grief, mental health, loss, and complex psychological experiences and has previously been published in outlets such as the Boston Globe

Transit

we were tired and you started talking
about that garden in Doha
where swallows sang
for jet-lagged geraniums

I asked if you knew
how many workers died
in the World Cup build
funded by that boycotted airline
which disliked public displays
of a certain kind
(my kind)
of affection

you smiled sadly
said it was the only flight you could afford
to cross all those Seas –
a gift to undo the wasted years.
“That’s how they win” I say
unserious because
I am happy you are here

all of this happened
on a budget flight,
to the continent that was also your home,
beside tourists discussing bargain holidays
to blistering destinations.

“I think Europe is crumbling”
you said to no one –
staring into cumulus clouds

I closed my eyes
and imagined Venice sinking
under the weight of turbine wings –
gondolas wrapped in sticky baggage tags
the dull hum of air conditioning
throbbing like our heavy hearts
against cobblestone streets

The Last Dinner Party

When I think of them I imagine a table
overflowing like that painting of Elagabalus
releasing rose petals onto innocent diners.
It is a mixed crowd, this suicide circus
her, sitting beside your best friend's sister
who shares a joke with your childhood crush
before asking your cousin if he knows why
red grapes are sweeter than green?
And at the head, the first husband
who was also the father of three sons
who don't understand why
he is drinking wine with Sylvia
and asking Virginia about the swallows.
They smile at each other and pass the wine
mulling over menial questions.
Do you have to wear SPF in heaven?
Does the baptism undo the offence?
And what of the soul's destruction?
Did it happen before or after she bit the apple?
Sylvia winks at me, beckoning
I wonder if they have enough fluoxetine.
Even in death's other kingdom
the questions stay the same.

Abstraction

A pale trunk against a blue sky will always remind me of
Georgia's New Mexico,
all sacred skulls and barren cliffs stretching out relentlessly
until the end of time.

Somewhere in that desert, Salvador is smiling at the
slowness of the hour,
the sun stretching across a horizonless sky like a suspended
hourglass, ready to turn.

A lone lizard slides through the sea of Calico roses and
stares, mocking the clock's absurdity,
has the beginning always been so slow?

Doug Lee Scott

Doug is American and came of age in the swinging sixties dancing on stage with the Grateful Dead. (Well, once!) After meeting and marrying a biochemist from Zimbabwe he moved there in 1980 and has lived there ever since.

When asked what he does he always replies that he is a writer... in truth he has also had many day jobs ranging from house-husband to three children, to forklift truck driver, to history teacher, to jewellery shop sales assistant, to mountain club chairman.

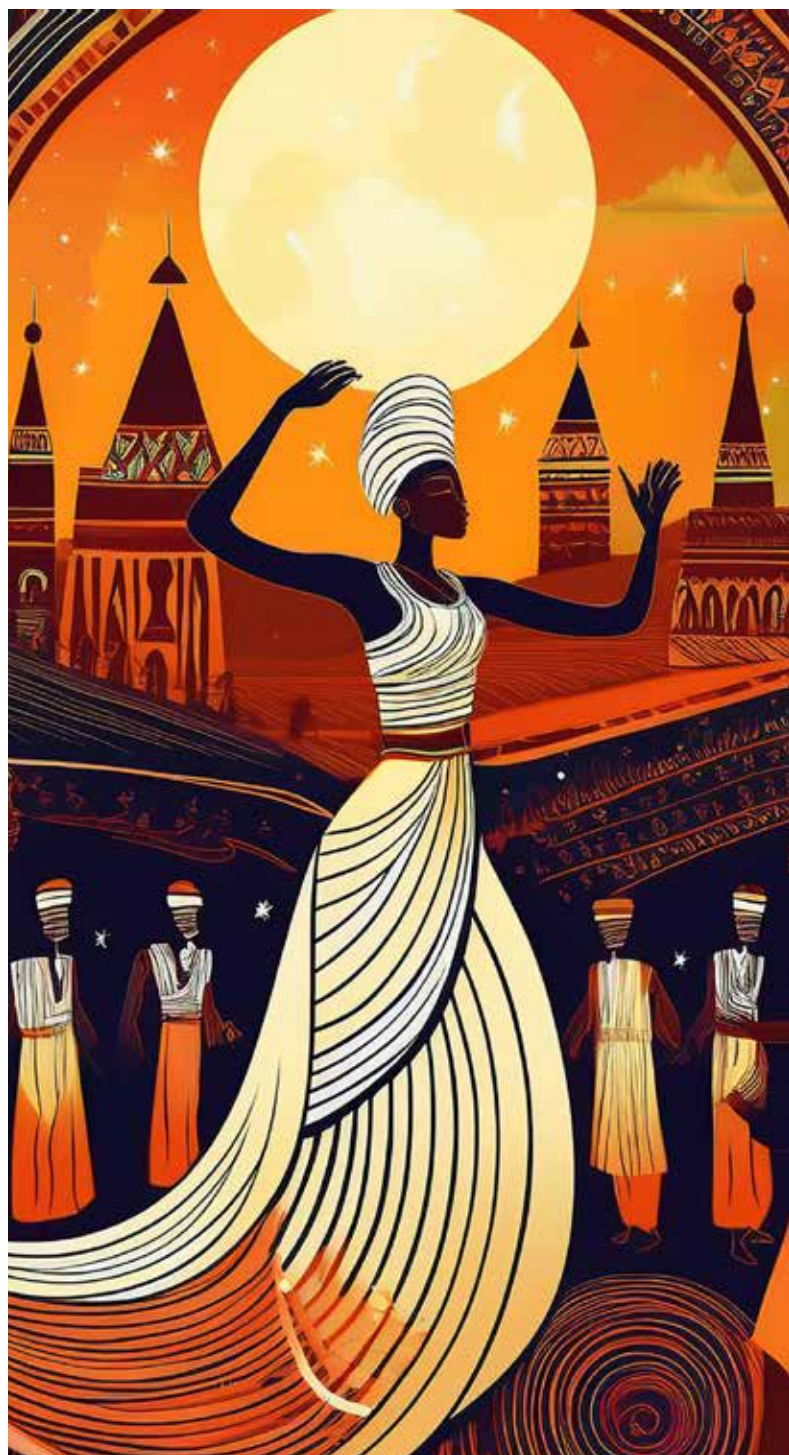
He has always written stories and poetry on the side but has had less success with the practicalities of publishing.

He had a stroke in 2020 that affected the part of his brain that generates speech. He has mostly recovered and is able to communicate but it has affected his ability to write.

He lives in a Buddhist retreat in Harare and his daughters, son and five grandsons live in Cambridge.

Editor's note: The following poem was read by Doug at CBI Poetry, Cambridge.

We liked it so much we insisted he publish it in the magazine. We understand this is the first publication of this poem and we would like to express our thanks to his daughters for sending it to us on behalf of the poet.



Dan Leighton

Tall Dance

Africa sings on the buses,
Africa dances in church.

African ladies sing gospel songs
In a hairdressing saloon
While I stand in the street
And cheer them on.

Every empty lot where I live
Is growing a new church in the grass,
A church in the trees,
A church in a tent
A church
Where the drumming, clapping and singing go on
To surround you like a second skin.

For we are all children
Of an African Eve,
'Mitochondrial Eve'.

An African woman who lived long ago ...
170,000 years.

We are digital now and genome revealed
And blessed by the new neuroscience;
We carry her genes every one of us
Mossel Bay to the moon.

And I am the tall white man in her African church
With a baby on my hip and a bottle in my back pocket
Dancing the polyrhythm drumming on and on
In African songs that go on
As if they have no beginning, no middle, no end
Mossel Bay to the moon.

And when you dance on the moon
And see the Earth rise on a moonrise horizon
– Our beautiful blue and swirling home
Of clouds and green and living –
Sailing the night-dark-deep of space,
So fragile and alone ...
And when you dance on the moon
With a child on your hip
And see the Earth rise on a moonrise horizon,
With soft, loving arms 'round your neck ...

Then it's really quite clear
That whether God is or is not for you
There is a coming through
Of the Dance, the Spirit and Life itself.

For we
... You and I and all of us in this life together ...
We are the Tall Dance of Tears
For the deaths of those we have loved the most.

We are the Tall Dance,
We are the Long Dance
Of the Birth of Stars.

We are the Infinite Sum of a Dance Unseen.

We are the Dance of the Double-Helix across the stars.

Dance on in the Spirit,
Dance on.

One generation on to another,

On without end.

Amen.

Stewart Carswell

Stewart Carswell grew up in the Forest of Dean and currently lives in Cambridgeshire, where he co-hosts the Fen Speak open mic night. His poems have recently been published in *Under the Radar*, *Finished Creatures*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, and *The Storms Journal*. His debut collection is *Earthworks* (Indigo Dreams, 2021).

Find out more at: stewartcarswell.co.uk

Regeneration

Longhope

Somewhere there is a beech tree
carved with the names of men from Longhope
who went to war.

Somewhere there is a lion
carved with the names of men from Longhope
who went to war and didn't come back.

It's on Hopes Hill – I know that one.
I've seen the stone plinth often enough
from the top deck of the 24
but the tree I've never found.
Perhaps it's one of those folk tales,
the legend of how they all went up May Hill
one last time, signed their names
in the boc of the land
and raised a toast to the setting sun
I lived here and belonged.

Or perhaps the tree crashed in a storm,
the carved bark splintering as it struck
the earth, its fragments now rotting back to mulch.

Or perhaps the woods know how to keep their secrets.
The regiment closed ranks around another name
known only to bark, a name that fell
like a leaf
and like a leaf landed, and was held,
regenerating deep in the wood.

Owl in November

A white figure rises, disturbed,
from the overgrown margins
of the field, and up into dusk.

All souls in time take flight.
And in time they will return,
circling and quartering the same territory.

The search reveals nothings. No explanation
for the leaving, the returning, the flight.
You can never know. The haunting continues.

Postcard, or an afternoon dream

The hotel I'm staying in is on the seafront.
Every day (I'm told) the promenade is decorated
with people and ice creams, and deckchairs
striped like sticks of rock. The pier
with its penny arcades rattles like loose change.
The sea, invariably described as azure or cerulean,
is timetabled and vibrant, the background orchestra,
crashing and polishing everything it touches,

but my cheap room round the back
looks out across the hotel car park
to the houses stacked behind the town.
I lie back on the bed
until the view is all the blue of the sky:
swifts dive like dolphins, clouds break like waves,
and the world of the sea becomes the world in the air
and is the world.

Kate O'Neill

Kate is from North Herts and occasionally lives in Cambridge. She describes herself as part of the wave of late diagnoses of neurodivergence, which gave many women an opportunity to finally understand themselves and their lives through a new lens. Amongst other things, her diagnosis of autism in 2022 was a portal to poetry. In her endeavours to process thirty-two years of confusion, social struggles, and burnouts, she found that the fractured lines of thought and feelings constantly swirling in her mind came together into form when transcribed onto paper – which, for her, becomes poetry.

Social Connectives; Prepositional Experimentals

A friend made in my 30s says that I seem ‘So For People’ (dat.)

What she means is: I am given; made with intent.

At other times, I have also been:

At (acc.)

Of (gen.)

To (dat.)

By, with or from (abl.)

people.

Drunkenly I am ‘People!’

Vocatively, fervently, pro-people.

Pro-at-peopling.

It is a cyclical experiment
of prepositional approaches to
successful social connectives.

Other connective approaches to people include:

Additional - furthermore, people

Timely - next, people

Orderly - first of all, people

Of place - beyond people

Resultant - as a consequence, people

Of purpose - to this end, people

Comparison - in the same way, people

Contrasting - Nevertheless, people

Summary - In conclusion, people

A fellow autist (and additionally mathematician)

tells me my grammatical social experiments

will rend truthful patterns

and real-life connective successes

I continue, therefore: casing, declining, inflecting, people:

studying their principal parts.

It is a matter of conjugation identification;

correct declension inflection:

for person, number, case.

Connective Conclusions remain pending:

Towards a Social Grammar.

Jeffrey Neilson

Born and raised in Berkeley, California, Jeffrey has published papers on Robert Duncan and Adrienne Rich, and holds a Ph.D. from Brown University (2014). He is based in Albany, California, where he teaches English. He has published *Hoarder* (Satori Ideas, 2019) and has two works in progress, *Berkeley in the Nineties* and *Other Places*. In addition, he has translated the poetry of Argentine Juan L. Ortiz, for which his manuscript *Between Rivers: The Selected Poems of Juan L. Ortiz* is under review.

These poems come from *Other Places*. They combine images, memories, and abstract inner monologues with the soul and revelations of spiritual and artistic motifs collected from Jeffrey's eclectic study of romanticism, mysticism, Buddhism, and jazz.

Winter Moon

Earth silently arrives again at the source
of the source—infinite regress until
the illusion of being in time is no longer illusion
all the same
one finds that the book just finished
opens to another life
to the question again
in the church's empty parking lot
midnight moon shining down
through the glass
dreamer wakes up
is comforted by space
found in the night's lightless black
ink flowing forever
in search of words
that will hold this mystery of you
safe in its arms
like a mother or a father
or a song you knew by heart
which knew you better
than all the others. . .

Eternal Return

This morning
my son Gustavo shared with me
that infinity is not a number
just like the sky
it never ends

Who has time or space
these days
for thoughts like this?

Truths sublime and pure
repeating
in finite minds across
time and space

Echoes
of life
to life
in life

Apprehensions of what is
beyond one's idiom, beyond
one's personal, original
garment of self,
eventually return. . .



Dan Leighton

Jessica Roy

Jessica is a 23-year-old law student from India. While she spends most of her days surrounded by statutes and case laws, her heart has always been tied to the rhythm of words and was captivated by poetry long before picking up a legal textbook.

For Jessica, writing and reading have been lifelong companions, fueling both her imagination and her sense of curiosity.

She is returning to poetry after a six-year hiatus, during which legal jargon took over her notebook. These poems mark her return to attempting to translate the complexities of life, love, and everything in between into verse.

Solitude

November's glum.
Dry gusts of wind
carry the cold in,
through open windows,
in an evening so quiet, so dim;
the solace of silence
envelops the room.

I sit alone,
with my favourite companion,
on this pleasant, solitary winter eve.
Warmth that shines
through dimly lit lights,
the comfort of my own company
keeps my mind and heart at ease.

I am often asked,
'Are you lonely?
How are days in your company?'
I lean back in my chair,
on this pleasant, and solitary, November evening,
contemplating the echoing paradox –
how strange, yet fulfilling,
to find peace in one's own company.

The Hauntings of a Tormented Heart

Growing up is losing –
To childhood,
To dreams,
To friendships relinquished;

To old homes with windows,
through which beams of sunlight peek in;
casting a softened glow that bathes
the childlike laughter and tears,
of shared joys and sorrows,
cradled by a canopy of warmth
beneath the eaves of solace.

To dreams that surreptitiously bolt away
with Time who plays chicanery on a blithe fool;
laughter blooms in hushed deceit –
a mockery of a fool's despair!

Resting in pain's cold embrace,
the fool wanders among the crowd,
haunted by phantoms of yesterday.

To memories of people that rot under floorboards,
in an old, abandoned house – a sepulchre of nostalgia,

that once echoed laughter and sequestered fears.
Now adorned with webs of muffled secrets,
embellished with the dust of forgotten promises,
the lingering smell of death,
of old connections that held the heart before.

To loss, to more loss –
to remnants of distant dawns,
to faded silhouettes of companions lost;
the fool prepares to endure,
holding on to the whispers of illusions,
quietly fading into the dark.

Alice Harrison

Alice's passion is storytelling through poetry. Poetry allows her to connect with the environment and the past, even on days when she isn't outdoors. Alice finds walking and writing in nature, particularly in the Fens, beneficial for her mental and spiritual health and she encourages others to write about the wildlife they encounter.

Alice has performed at numerous poetry nights over the years, has been published in three newsletters, and will be featured in a magazine and anthology this winter. She has appeared on BBC Upload with one of her poems has amassed over 1,000 followers on Instagram this year alone!

November Nib

Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon
by the fen water blown
by my bicycle wheel as it sped
I am off home
this cold night
with my lover and friend
we have cake
and tea to sip
and I need to write my book
with my inspired
November nib.

Archaeological Finds

Pool of water no longer there left an indent.

Around it, a circle of trees,

Mourners that stand still

Dying from disease.

Burial houses underground,

The shape of a lock for a key.

I make my Rhubarb cordial in the sink,

My hands remember I don't need to think.

Instead, I piece together

The people who have passed,

They wish they could speak,

They only have the power

To paint the Snowdrops green.

Protuberant roots like echoes,

From the ground that find a lost page,

The sun runs away,

The humiliated bones will dance now,

To heavens fulfilling music,

He says it's not about the romance,

It is about how you heal it.

Emma du Toit

Emma is a poet who has been writing for the last thirty years. She has been a member of various writing groups throughout that time and last year, completed an MA in Creative Writing, which has given her the confidence to share more of her work.

Her poetry explores themes of belonging, identity, and fitting in. These are issues she has struggled with after a nomadic childhood, exacerbated by, as has she recently discovered, ADHD. She is fascinated by interactions between people, small gestures, intimate moments, and the consequences of sharing emotions and anecdotes.

In a bid to be sustainable, she now writes mostly in the notes app on her iPhone and once wrote a two thousand word short story in ten-minute bursts while on the Madingley Road park and ride.

First Day is a Haibun. A Japanese literary form that combines prose with Haiku. The prose is often reflective or descriptive, capturing a moment or experience, while the Haiku distils its essence into a brief, vivid verse. Together, they create a blend of narrative and poetic imagery.

First Day

We sit in a corner of the music block wall and eat iced buns in silence. Then we drink raspberry Panda Pops until our tongues turn blue. She talks about moving from another village and about her twin brothers and the stables. She doesn't ask me many questions and I gather she doesn't like me by the way she looks over my shoulder as she speaks; it's clear I'm just filling a void. She has black tights, Kickers with leather laces and a record bag, but her face is naturally pretty and full of freckles unlike the peach-faced girls shunning us from across the field. I'm fascinated by the way her feet turn inwards so her big toes almost touch. I suppose it's from horse riding. Without meaning to, I will spend the next few months getting my feet to turn inwards when I stand still so that even now, as an adult, my big toes naturally reach for each other. I don't know why I wanted to do that. Sometimes I don't have control over the copying, the becoming, the pieces I need to mould to fit in.

Pulling grey jumper cuffs
Over my hands on itchy grass
Not ready to feel home

New Shoes

My feet are roughened on the soles because I'm an arboreal pioneer
and I bus ants between my toes

Last Sunday, we climbed the hollow stump and saw the nest

Red rubbery bodies nipped and stung until we ran squealing to the
safety of the hall

Lay under the ceiling fan looking up at the blades as it swayed violently
in its own breeze

The jeopardy of its possible descent into the room quashed by our need
for cool air

Plus, it helped discourage the remaining ants

Outside, Peter washed his shins in scalding water from the hose

Heat oozed through the afternoon, leaving us slick and soporific

But here the air conditioning is set too high and whines above the music

The scab on my right knee is in the shoe shop lady's eyeline

She says wiggle your toes sweetie

Nothing happens

These cannot be my feet

There's a question about how the red leather sandals with the too-stiff
buckles feel

Walk to the mirror and back, she says

Captured, I parade

Mum is talking about school

About getting the bus

About going to lessons in the classroom with the striped awning

My toes are too close to each other

The shrouds of white cotton send waves of panic up my spine

I wonder if she's noticed there isn't a tan line where the frilled socks
tickle my ankles

The shoe shop lady asks again

How do they feel?

Circus of outsiders

Lady in the moon
Seen in profile from afar
An audience primed to gawp and gasp
At my Russian climb into backwards straddle
Hands coated in white dust
Dishonest palms against the silks
Add flair, they'd said, but I lacked the audacity
So I twisted glittered ribbons through my hair
Distracted them with inversions and dives
Rested in scorpion as the light caught silver sequins
My face craned towards the darkness below

Butterfly angel drop unfurled with controlled fury
The crowd roar decrescendos in disbelief
Tumbling as the spotlight
Follows me down

Selkie

I find her in October forest
Fleeing the land for home
Hair tangled with russet bracken
Woodpigeons scattering in flustered bursts
Redpolls and siskins with glimmering golden bellies skim the beag
The wind an accomplice hushing through branches huddled low over the
glen
Her drizzle-covered fuzz of blonde-brown hair a cape over bare
shoulders
Humming as she slides the scree to land on the bank

Forest angel tasting mist
Caressing the morning with eager fingers
Bound in body to the sea
Here in the rippling looking glass she sees her daughter's eyes and
pauses.

Sprites jitter on the pebbled edges

As soon as she feels the water
Pulls her skin close over her bones

Myna Bird Laments the Morning

Dark feathers merge into the backdrop
Of high-rising sharp-edged concrete
Punched through jungle
Neat circles of history obliterated within two hundred years
The chaos of the kampong smoothed
Into swept and sanitary streets
Mahjong, hookah and double happiness linger
As camphor, agarwood and cinnamon curl
From one decade to another
Patterns of trees gather between buildings, lined up along pavements
Everything here is measured, counted, justified

A gregarious shadow flutters into being
A nuisance in the branches
Breaks free from the crowd
Focus on her bright eyes
Listen to the speech from her school bus yellow beak
Island hopper invading kitchens and bedrooms
With her light body, strong feet
She hears you and repeats

Brings messages from God
Boldly hops between burrows
Makes space to be heard
Belongs to forests
Blends into this city by the sea

Protected by words
She could be one of us
Mimicking the poetry of this place
She sings the song of how it used to be
Gathers comrades for her morning revelations
Until the air is thick with indignity
As if their song could raise history from the walls of
Market Street to Anson Road

**I follow her voice
through marshes**

Through summer sedge nodding at the sea

Boggarts lurk like toddler hands pulling at my shins

Time has distant edges here

I follow her voice along the shrub line

Memories shivering beyond the periphery of the afternoon

Cyan sky holds space for centuries of swifts

I pull grasses like threads

Unravelling the landscape

Revealing bare earth

Hidden skin as cold as clay

I follow her voice into salted froth

Clenching and releasing against sudden baptism

My sanded feet washed clean



Dan Leighton

Christopher Hamilton-Emery

Chris has published four full-length collections, an anthology of classic art and poems, edited editions of John Keats, Emily Brontë and Christina Rossetti, and wrote a best-selling guide to marketing poetry, *101 Ways to Make Poems Sell*. He has worked for the British Council, Cambridge University Press, Cavendish Publishing and Polity Press. He founded and ran a book design consultancy, The Cover Factory, from 2010–2019, and from 2019–2022 he was the Director of Operations and later Director of Development for The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. His most recent book is *Modern Fog* (Arc Publications, 2024).

Dreams

Do you think the night matters?

The rose god steps one way

then another through the dumb map of you.

You recall trucks in a blue desert;

hanging trees in a white apartment;

parapets and green water; birds in the cage.

I'm not sure the scale of it can hold us,

each gesture we make

furthering the dark.

All we love filling

the swift hands of the rose god,

counting and counting all that sand.

The Long Cure

It is a long cure, that's true,
we're here to venerate
the Mozarthaus, Domgasse,
and let love's lathered
page expire. The white
apartment trembles. Soundless
but for heels on boards
can rooms become a ministry?
Spied below dormers
rain splits on the lintels of Blutgasse.
It's a day of lost erotic light,
where huddled crowds subside
in an afternoon of silhouettes.

Here and there, the hollow space
permits its midlife tourists
to neglect their craving
to defect. In here we grieve
and point towards panels
whose trompe-l'œil lines
show all that can be lost.
Lemon light ladles
absence after absence
in a comic drill of decency
where each of us expires.
Square-shouldered, pin-legged,
we lurch through no music,
ravens in the unscored truth.

Jackson's

Except we didn't know it then
yelping on high bits, dead legging,
racing by a grease-slow brook
then jumping, coats off, landing
snorting with the shock
ankle-deep in stew-soft mud,
leaving two pathetic mouths
to close behind in the mud
and by the lifeless mud
erratic solemn weeds,
a rat's cobble that moved,
and beyond our screams
our shattered hill fort,
its jabbed foundations no one
ever named.

Jackson's brick works, Hale Lane.
Between our in-between years
we'd dig out broken
tobacco pipes from the dump
to scrutinise the fossil
each presented: the featureless
face, the smooth cup
you imagined cupped
in someone else's filthy hands,
pressing in sweet threads
from a pocket pouch, sucking
in soft clucks, pausing, sucking,
nodding to the others who
later would be lost, no one
ever named.

Song

Let's find a wet path to the river
and clap to the finch's rain song
and hear the hidden raven bark

all its three-time news for us
beside the ruined umber water.
You can have this life today, I know,

and give me never-ending rain,
iron-black houses, ask-grey dawn,
the love of other weather, only

set me on this wet path to the river,
by the last imperial city filled
with musk mallow and ragged robin.

Leave-taking

They say, if you stay anywhere long enough
the world will leave.

The common path is rough
it's not as if we fail to see it coming, if

all we chide and cherish passes:
flaming house, moon's adjournment, by and by one kiss,

counterculture silting up young lips,
fingers on a thigh, the apple and its pips,

love leaves no foment in the eye.
Stay anywhere long enough, a world will die.

The dust of what is left descants
on the sore deal absence makes for us.

No world can bear its advocate,
but do not let the world's abeyance grate

beside all the gold-barrelled attractions,
what was there beside you always, always thins

and we are here to sort the bright-faced gods
of our leave-taking, and pile the sods.

Later

Later, I tire of the sea, and you say, No.
No, it must be right to fear what's loose,
something bringing mad fog close,

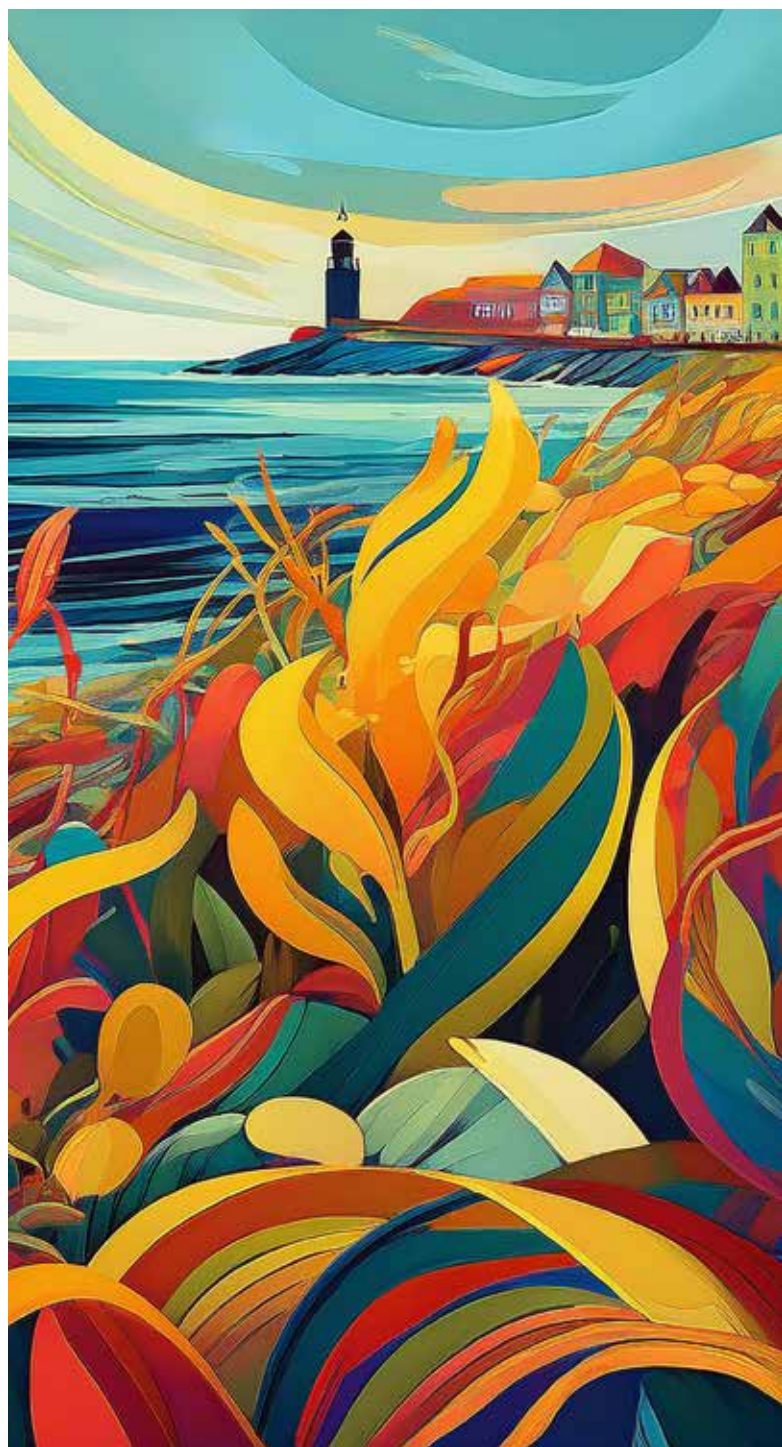
or reaching winter lather in the dark.
Folds of sugar kelp in dead seals,
weedy cavities in dead gulls, the sorrow

of each provincial harbour. I stare back,
zip my coat and smile and say, I know,
then drag my heels through combweed.

Like this, the island's fiscal future passes
us forever. It cannot matter
any of us knows these rags will sweep

and perish, diminishing each dark battery.
Each of us is bound to each in care of it.
We turn and watch the white caps breed.

I say it is exhausting to see how late
life is in tides; you laugh at me and say
it is commensurate; the sea in us is time.



Dan Leighton

George Szirtes

George Szirtes was born in Budapest in 1948, and came to England with his family after the 1956 Hungarian Uprising. He was educated in England, training as a painter, and has always written in English. In recent years he has worked as a translator of Hungarian literature, producing editions of such writers as Ottó Orbán, Zsuzsa Rakovszky and Ágnes Nemes Nagy. He co-edited Bloodaxe's Hungarian anthology *The Colonnade of Teeth*. His Bloodaxe poetry books include: *The Budapest File* (2000); *An English Apocalypse* (2001); *Reel* (2004), winner of the T.S. Eliot Prize; *New & Collected Poems* (2008) and *The Burning of the Books and other poems* (2009), shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize 2009. *Bad Machine* (2013) was a Poetry Book Society Choice and shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize 2013. *Mapping the Delta* (2016), another Poetry Book Society Choice, was followed by *Fresh Out of the Sky* (2021). Bloodaxe has also published his Newcastle/Bloodaxe Poetry Lectures, *Fortinbras at the Fishhouses: Responsibility, the Iron Curtain and the sense of history as knowledge* (2010), and John Sears' critical study, *Reading George Szirtes* (2008). His memoir of his mother, *The Photographer at Sixteen* (MacLehose Press, 2019), won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Biography. Szirtes lives in Norfolk and is a freelance writer, having retired from teaching at the University of East Anglia.

An Island of Great Complexity

I'm an island of great complexity, he claimed,
Though no man was just an island, as he knew.
To talk like that, a man should be ashamed,
Since it was neither accurate nor true.

Complexity was what he claimed, as one
Might claim, slowly unfolding the creases in his skin,
Peeling away the face, letting the make-up run,
And dropping redundant features in the bin.

How complex is complexity, you ask.
How big is the island? How long is the coast?
Can you command your realm? Are you up to the task?
Or is the island a few yards at most?

The codebook is in code and much of it has faded
To ghosts of itself. Your eyesight is not that good.
There's something in that expression all too jaded.
I know you'd make it simple if you could.

On Dancing

Then there was dancing
and before that more dancing,
as if dancing could

produce itself. Time
ran ahead, stopped and waited,
then lurched into dance.

On the school dance floor
spirits moved, dresses floated
and feet moved as if

fleeing from something.

A Song of Resurrection

We die and die, and come awake

Just in time to die again.

It is the route we're bound to take.

It's good as gold and right as rain.

We kiss and part and part and kiss

And then we come to kiss once more.

Of parting we know only this:

We open then we close the door.

We rise and lie and lie and rise,

Upright we are, against the grain,

We open then we close our eyes.

And look, we die then rise again.

The City of Accusations

1

He lives in a city of accusation
amid the noise of accusations.
He accuses himself as others accuse him
but these are silent accusations.

2

Always be aware of accusations.
Behave as though you had been accused.
Always anticipate an accusation.
If you accuse yourself first you will not be accused.

3

The streets are merely whispers.
The windows give on to whispers.
The whispers accuse you of guilt.
Guilt is the substance of the street.

4

Walk down the streets.
You are not innocent.
Put your ears to the walls.
You are not innocent.

5

The guilty walk among the innocent.
The innocent are aware of their innocence.
The innocent are aware of the guilty among them.
The guilty are not named.

6

It is your status that accuses you.
Your status is unearned.
You would not recognise it if you saw it.
Start by accusing it.

7

You know what you are responsible for.
If you don't know simply assume it.
The best state is the state of readiness.
Here is your hand gun. It is not loaded.

8

In the city of guilt it's business as usual.
The buying and selling of indulgences is forbidden.
Certain articles have been posted on the door.
Now go inside and remain inside.

9

Do not imagine yourself innocent.
Your duty is to imagine crimes of the imagination.
Your imagination will fail.
Imagine your imagination failing.

10

They will not come for you
but you are free to imagine them coming.
They are not accusing you of anything.
That is what they are accusing you of.

Remembrance

The great abstraction
of war is full of small bones
and scenes of burning

that are still burning.
It is limbs and cries and eyes
and names of the dead.

And then it stops. Things
return to their condition,
their generic life:

desire, hope, triumph.

Magnolia

Slap on the mag, he said, and soon our rooms
were all magnolia, like a fruity mist
in an autumn house. It was where we kissed
and made love. We had magnolia dreams
we could live with when it was getting late
and shadows faded into darkness. Time crept
down curtains, over beds on which we slept
ourselves into acceptance. We would float
into work and out of it and got through days
of long suffering with a light heart. It didn't matter
since life was magnolia, easy as spreading butter
down an ageing wall. There were minor delays
and mild regrets. Our limbs were tired, that's all,
and so we dragged our bodies through the soft magnolia hall.

**Two children with cowboy hats -
a picture of my brother
and me c.1958**

Two children in cowboy hats and small waistcoats
With wild bandanas round their throats
Smile and wave their guns in the air.

Bang bang you're dead
The cowboy said.
Shoot that revolver if you dare
Point at my heart, point at the air
Bang bang you're dead
The cowboy said.

Two children in cowboy hats with a long lasso
Smile at the camera. This is you,
You with a gun and a sheriff's star.

Bang bang you're dead
The cowboy said
Drop your poncho and cigar
Point your gun at my sheriff's star
Bang bang you're dead
The cowboy said.

Children dancing on the lawn
Sing the day the world was born
This is time and this is the day
They bring you here and bear you away

They bring you here and bear you away

In the Museum Garden

We used to meet in the garden of the museum
near a playground full of children. It was autumn
for ever. The weather never moved on. The children
sat on swings and soared ever higher. The sky
sometimes cleared and the autumn sunlight slipped
among leaves that were turning and would continue
to turn but it was still autumn and there were still
children on the swings. Occasionally rain fell
and things got wet. Then leaves and grass darkened,
the leaves having started to turn but they would not fall.
Meanwhile, in the museum, the exhibits turned sad eyes
on each other, feeling the weight of time in their limbs
and the small cases where articles of clothing were displayed
darkened. We did not feel time weighing on us.
These were public gardens. Once there used to be concerts
under a bandstand but they weighed nothing. Now and then
there were gusts of wind weighing nothing. We kept meeting
by the playground under the plane trees. The sound
of children was fitful but it would go on. This was
simply a garden that had never once considered itself
to be paradise. There was no time for that. It was late
in the museum gardens and it would continue to be late.
You'll find me if you want me in the garden,
someone was singing. Sooner or later we'd find him.

Giulia Padalini

Giulia is an Italian poet who has nurtured a passion for poetry since childhood. Currently residing in Switzerland, she is fluent in six languages, including Latin, Italian, English, Chinese, Spanish, and French. With a master's degree in Chinese Language and Literature, her academic focus explored the linguistics of poetry and trauma, culminating in a thesis on this profound intersection.

Giulia is very well travelled and adores visiting flea markets in every country she visits!

These are her first published poems and Cambridge Poetry is delighted to welcome her to the pages of the world.

Bedtime Stories

my mind forgets
my body remembers
breath
soul sinking
the bed in the dark
what is left

Couch Stories

reading into the depths of
our sounds
a desperate togetherness

can't you see
while i lay on
you

unknown to the
misery of our love
that it was

thought so well
dreamed so real
hoped so hard

that it was born
to end

Leisure Seeker

leisure seeker
finding comfort
in the heart that
was never meant to be yours
you are a leisure seeker
wanting that which
can never belong to you
wandering
heartless
to find
the next soul
to strip

Protagonist

the wounds inside me
leave a sense of emptiness
gaps of soulwonder
unsure of who i ever was
i hear the drip of time
fall to the ground
skipping in my bare feet
i am sour
and rounded
by the sweet melancholy of the pine trees

Allied Souls

sour rounded by the despair of life
the meaningless presence of the self
yet to find an alike match
with routine sadness in our souls
a madness turned love
to find tranquillity at your touch
tasting life's pleasure through your lips
feeling addicted to your skin
while hearing the noise of this barbaric world fade away
i devote myself to your weaknesses
to your worst
to your full self
i advocate i am yo

Michael Bayley

Michael Bayley is an Ely based poet, mentor and teacher. He is a poet of extraordinary muscularity and delicacy. His last collection *The Art of the Handkerchief* was published by Oversteps in 2014.

Editors Note: Michael has been one of the most important influences on the Editor of this magazine. It is not hyperbolic to say that this magazine would not exist without his kindness, generosity and clarity. Thank you Michael.

Sparrowhawk

Caught in the baffled,
 yellow, angry eye,
 you are fear

staring into fear,
 watching the twitching
 beneath the claws,

watching the tender
 lowering of head
 as he pecks,

three swift love-bites,
 at his prey,
 then hooks away

the headless, baggy
 romper-suited baby
 clinging to its nightmare.

Love and death,
 the same opening
 of wings

above another,
 only the blood
 tasting different.

Freya Saksen

Freya Saksen is a UK-based poet from Aotearoa New Zealand. They have recently published a collaborative poetry pamphlet alongside Clare Pollard from DIRT Imprint entitled *Loops*. Their work can also be found in the anthology *The Word Is...SMUT* from ARU Publishing as well as digital journals *SWAMP Press* and *#ENBYLife*.

Freya has just recently been awarded an MA in Creative Writing with Distinction from Anglia Ruskin University. Their poetry embraces storytelling, ecopoetics, liminality and queer identity.

Their current favorite example of the Order Lepidoptera is *Vanessa cardui*.



Lepidoptera *V. cardui* - Dan Leighton

The Carding Shed

outside the grass is summer gold
and the sun will burn you red in seconds.
the carding shed is cool and dark
and smells of lanolin and rainbow dyes.

she shows me how to tie the yarn to the card,
to wind it around into a ball, so that
it can be sorted away in the wall of colours
that makes up one quarter of the dark;

out in the summer, my brother calls
to neville; the sheep baa peaceably.
i do not recall why i am here, just that
i am; soon we will have squash,

and sit at the table over the cork floor
that every house of a certain age seems to have,
and i will hear ruth-mary laugh,
and we will drive home, to return tomorrow.

here in the dark, she smiles, her
eyes curled up in wrinkles - or my memory
plays tricks on me, for i am sure her face
was younger then, it must have been,

but that is unimportant. what matters is
the delicacy of the skin on her hands;
their grace; her eyes (though i cannot recall
the colour); and the way she said my name:

gently, as if she were scared holding it too
hard would shatter it. every time i smell wool
and lanolin, this is where i come. to the carding
shed. to Te Rangi. to ruth-mary, saying my name.

Plaster of Paris

(Or: My Best Friend Asks Me What I Like About Myself)

I am the alchemic moment
tea leaves transform from 'stewing'
to 'tea';
the floral scent in your head;
the bitter rasp along your tongue.

I am the satisfying 'snap'
of a hip finding the rhythmic
sway when putting heels back on
after months in flats.

I am hours spent in boyfriends shirts,
wondering if I would make a pretty boy.
(yes)

I am the long matte scar down one thigh that,
after five hours,
resolves itself into a jellyfish.

(we find ourselves in such small things)

I am a small, petty kind of justice,
found in sunlight over craft beer.

I am swearing in Spanish
saying 'I love you' in Japanese
and saying 'thank you' in a dozen more languages.
(I am fluent in none of them.)

I am a small
black
box
of screams - but
I am also sparkles, energy, effervescence.
The brightest star in the room.

I am casual cruelty.
I am learning to be better than casual cruelty.

Learning.
I am always, always
learning.

I am ocean blues for everyday,
lemon yellows for special occasions
and rose reds for Paris.

I am a piece of origami paper,
trusting its artist will not tear it.

I am, so frequently,
the artist.

But for now, I have been trying -

I am trying.

Jeremy Hubbard

Jeremy is a writer and poet currently working on a novel, a science fiction book series, a collection of short stories, a collection of poetry and songs.

Near Carcassone was originally read at Future Karaoke: *Ferment*, an exploratory regular reading event run by Jon Stone, Freya Saksen and Dan Leighton under the aegis of the Cambridge Writing Centre at Anglia Ruskin University. The poem was written to accompany the wine *Derelict Vineyard*!

List Poem: 10 Odd Thought-for-the-Days (in order of occurrence)

1. Everyone will go elsewhere.
2. Imagine a blue so pure its sub-atomic immanence vibrates at such a joyous pitch it hurts. This quantum blue does not exist, except that now you've read this and thought about it, it does, but your quantum blue is not mine.
3. Just as children will disappoint their parents, so parents will always disappoint their children.
4. <https://www.the-incorrigible-defamation.com/of-the-human-spirit/yours>
5. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names were the original cyber-crime.
6. The climate crisis: we were defeated by adverts for infantilizing consumption.
7. Set out to write about something and you end up writing about something else. Set out to write about nothing and you end up writing about writing.
8. These are my opinions, and they don't matter.
9. "I made the wrong decision for the right reasons." Is this even possible? If those reasons led to the wrong decision, they must surely be wrong? And yet... you can make the right decision for the wrong reasons, arriving at the correct location by chance, in willful ignorance of satnav.
10. Un-friend, de-share,
un-send, de-declare,
dis-like, mis-take,
con-text, tru-fake,
re-re, blind-see-see,
dot-me... not me.

Near Carcassone

You are here,
in the lengthening rays, the orange light of an ochre October afternoon,
the tan, well-tilled soil of the lined slopes taking on a maroon hue,
purpling into the distance.

You are here, now,
breathing in the lingering scents, musty, tannin, black vinegar,
the odours of la vendange de Cabardès, finally done for another year,
the tired vines clinging to their posts and wires as if crucified,
the remnants of their burdens a few bruised and bird-pecked bunches
of too-ripe fruits, congealing beads of blood.

Where are the ghosts of itinerant pickers,
wielding short-blade knives or shears, slicing or clipping
through tough stringy stems, nestling ruby clusters into canvas
shoulder-sacks,
moving on along the rows, through twenty, forty generations?
They are not here.

You will not hear the voices of the Albigensian Crusades
in the rustling of the fading leaves
nor catch the shades of Trancavel's fallen Cathars there –
nor Franks, Berbers, defeated Visigoths –
the land has swallowed them all, their vitality, their violence
subsumed, dissipated.



Dan Leighton

Not even lemurs linger there,
the restless dead, unable to return to Rome.
Only its tastes persist,
though now, here at least, even these have had their season,
a suburban eventuality pending – so says a bright, plastic sign,
appalling in its arrogant proclamation:
Terrain à Vendre.

This place has no time for ghosts, already a ghost of itself,
deserted, maybe yesterday, its sense of dereliction
fermenting in the earth, waiting
under the trodden rows, to happen.

It is haunted by its future,
the sullen buzzing of fat black flies, swollen with eggs,
their drunken flight, their inebriated drone the collateral of surfeit,
a final vulgar harvest.

Welcome to the New-road-iverse

The old ash tree, taller than the house, flails its stringy limbs against a blue-grey sky, veiny clouds pumping across it, the tree hurling leaves after them in autumny squalls.

Breathless, I have to close the curtains against all that churning movement,

that terrible beauty. Best wait until the day slants itself off and away downhill.

Restless sleep timed out, I resurface to glowing motes of dust swirling in Brownian motion, drifting in and out of the shaft of fierce sunlight that spears the bed like existence itself.

The curtains, again. The glass between me and all the rest of it a trance, a sheet of clear slow liquid, colourless amber, the day now a trapped bug, manageable.

#

The brown chair wheezes out a dusty cloud as I slump into it. Three walls are beige,

the fourth painted a brown darker than the smelly upholstery; unhostelry; unwholesomely.

The woman opposite, sitting behind a grubby desk, is also beige, with brown hair.

She watches, inscrutable, as I try to recapture the bitty narrative of how I washed up here.

What can we say? Words could launch a thousand ships more easily than move

those varnished features to passion. No – waxy. What might blur her edges, make her melt?

I try to picture her – can't – in the throes: an intimate of some gender

snagging up between her trembling thighs. But no.

'How now brown cow-nsellor,' he says, the words making me squirm.

He is me, unnaturally. Today's brown suit. Herringbone? Tweed?

A flicker of response, at last, a twitch at the corners of her small, mean mouth.

A pat on the back is deserved.

He asks, deadpan: 'How do you get a pat on the back?' No answer, of course,

so he gives one up: 'Milk a cow from behind.'

She shifts in her seat, nudges at the manilla folder in front of her. Yes, it's still there.

Is it relevant? I nod to reassure her. A vanilla feeling: I want to say something, help her out.

I could tell her: it's the sheer profusion of vividness, senses blasted with intimate experience, daily, minutely, minutely. All that savage beauty. The chance of it, of being alive.

Her brown eyes gaze at me, bovine, unrewarding. Is she's chewing my cud? Planning dinner? Elsewhere, listening to some other music, more coherent, more meaningful to her?

I could tell her: it's the inconsolable morbidity of the human condition,

the likelihood of chaos, the future certainty of entropy. Can you hear it? Gorecki's Third.

The tactless cactus on the dusty windowsill – a rusty smell – is shrunk and wrinkled beneath its cobwebbed overcoat of spines. Should be watered. But it's so desperate, it'd hurt.

'Needs a drink,' he nods at it. (Me too.) He nods at the water-cooler in the corner.

Looks piss yellow, stale as a sunken duck, a drunken fuck that's just for the sake of it.

Outside, three storeys down, the busy desert of the carpark calls to the drought-harried cactus. Can you hear them? "Jump", they say.' Should help it on its way.

'I'd rather you didn't,' she says. It speaks! 'And that's a handy skill to have,

in your line of work,' he says. She gives up the slightest shake of her head.

'Were you,' she asks, 'completely unaware you were... thinking aloud?'

'Was I? I was. And that's the truth of it,' he says, in sepia tones. 'Everything is brown.'

'Brown is the richest of colours – all the others put together – that's earthy,

tertiary territory. Anyway, who gives a shit? Everyone, right?

What is soil but old shit? We are what we eat. We all come from shit

and return to it. A scatological psychology!’

‘Anxiety, elation, depression,’ she says; ‘anxiety, elation, depression; compulsive and obsessive behaviours. That it? Crave and feed, in an inescapable cycle of hunger, satiation?’

‘Yes,’ he says; ‘and sex. We should probably talk about that, right? The necessary dis-traction, briefly exhilarating; desire-consumed, hedonistic.’ Head on a stick, she waits.

We wait. She looks at the tired brown clock on the wall; its twisty arms

have nudged on round, teasing out a trail of dead thunderflies in their gradual wake.

‘Well,’ she says. ‘Well. What’s the verdict, Doc?’ he asks.

‘I’m not a Doctor,’ she says. ‘As such.’ I don’t know the meaning of that.

Beneath the desk, her feet fidget as if unattached. The polished leather

of her chocolate-brown shoes squeaks like wicker. ‘I believe,’ she says,

‘you are what is now being termed “neurodivergent”.’ What the fuck is that?

What new label is this, now? ‘I don’t buy into labels,’ he spits. She blinks.

‘Hear me out,’ she says. ‘It’s a big, bubbling vat containing, among other experiences: anxiety, elation, depression; compulsion; obsession. Remember them? And others.

For instance: bipolar personality disorder... synesthesia.’

‘Nothing wrong with my sinuses,’ he sniffs.

‘Synesthesia... is when you experience one of your senses through another.

Ee-gee: a word, for you, has a colour, a shape; music.’

‘I know that, Doc – it was just a fucking joke! Well, hooray, for me. The new normal.

I don’t buy this label... fable, babel stuff. Stuffed bagel. Everyone’s like that, some, right?’

‘I want you to keep a diary for me,’ she says. ‘Why, don’t you want it anymore?’

Or are you hiding it from someone?’ ‘Now you’re just being facetious,’ she says.

‘Faeceseous?’ he retorts. ‘Synesthesia, my arse! I’m stuck on

brown, everything's brown. I'm not writing a fucking diary to show to you each week, not even in brown ink!

She flares her nostrils, pouts; velvet lip, a horse's nose. She makes a show – opens folder; writes on form headed Report; reads out as she writes: 'Patient refuses treatment.'

'Refuses treatment?' he yells. That's not a fucking treatment – I write every day.

That's what I do do, every day day. Breath, eat, shit, write. Breath, eat, shit... Jee-suss!

I could tell her: I feel driven to creative expression by a need for self-actualization,

for the illusion of imposing order on things, the reassurance that there is some purpose,

some worth I can have, some meaning; deferring the chaos, believing it can be,

at least postponed, just for one day... or a life, maybe.

She looks at me, dead pan. 'Welcome to the new-road-iverse,' he grins. 'A new label;

a new sign to set a different course by... to a new life, eh?' 'See you next week,' she says,

neither question nor matter of fact. 'Mmn, probably,' as I stand to leave. Possibly. Depends on the tree, the sky, the glass. Saddening glissandi strings. Can you hear them?

~ END ~

i.m. David Jones, 1947 – 2016.

Jon Stone

Jonathan T. Stone (born 1983 in Derby, England) is a British poet. He is the author of two books and several pamphlets of poetry, and also publishes work in the numerous collaborative poetry anthologies he has co-edited and published with Sidekick Books. Additionally, his poems have been published in *The Sunday Times*, *Poetry Review*, *Poetry London* and *The Rialto* (poetry magazine), among others.

He graduated with a BA in English Literature and Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia in 2004. He won an Eric Gregory Award in 2012.

In 2022, he published a peer-reviewed study of the interplay between poetry and video games, in which he coined the term ludokinetic poetry to describe poetry that “goes further than simply giving the reader the ability to physically manipulate the text or move through it multidirectionally [...] The intended effect is for the reader to become (and to recognise themselves as) a player of the poem, by making them—or rather, their ludic self—a feature of the text, operating it from within as well as from without”. Along with his own work, his cited examples included works by Porpentine.

NOTES:

from Book of Subtle Poisons

These pieces are from a longer prose-poem sequence: a mini pharmacopoeia or materia medica, documenting 22 fictional poisons, with accompanying collage illustrations.

The Sentence/The Cross/The Judgment

These poems are all based on actual cases I worked on in a previous life as a court transcript editor; I would edit the transcripts live while cases were being heard, in numerous courtrooms and arbitration centres, usually sitting just under the judge in a cramped space. ‘The Cross’ was initially derived from the Lakanal House Coroner Inquest, which concerned a fatal tower block fire very similar to Grenfell. I ended up taking the actual words and phrases from a patchwork of different cases and accounts of accidental fires. ‘The Judgment’ uses lines from the transcript I worked on (I copied them down at the end of the day), collaged together with fragments of praise from the back covers of poetry books.

from Book of Subtle Poisons



ACT OF FONDNESS

“Were it not so appalling, it would be invigorating,” writes Dovejolt, whose description of the effects of this chemical is widely regarded as the only account to do it justice. “I felt as if my true self – that is, I, me, the only me – were crouched in a trunk, with only light from the keyhole. The noisy body with which others interact was a puppet which I could, through great concentration, skilfully manipulate. It was of utmost importance, for reasons I dared not interrogate, that no one know anything was amiss. My only chance of escape lay in fooling the whole world with my puppet.”



KATE AMONG RIVALS

Airborne, odourless seedlings. Rapid onset. The effect is curious, because it is paradoxical: those exposed feel at once over-scrutinised and peripheral, that they are exhibiting themselves to all, gazed upon harshly, detestably detectable, but at the same time overlooked, intangible, the subject of others’ forgetfulness. Where the level of exposure is high, it may seem as if one is dragging one’s own body like a putrefying corpse, through the most umbral of shadows.

See also: Eyes and Stars

The Cross

Q: You have no bad habits?

A: (The witness sparked from an arc light, igniting a muslin curtain.)

Q: But how could you see this light that you speak of, when the light was at the side?

A: (The witness was fanned by a brisk northwest wind.)

Q: I ask you why you concealed it and kept it to yourself?

A: (The witness spread quickly through the mill complex.)

Q: Then, what are they firing with now?

A: (The wind strengthened and continued to spread the witness toward the centre of the city.)

Q: Now you are saying that you did in fact –

A: (The witness escalated rapidly.)

Q: Did any of these men who visited you at the Savoy have whiskies and sodas and iced champagne?

A: (Black smoke enveloped a passageway behind the witness)

Q: Who counselled you to take a man's dress?

A: (In all, the witness burned for four days and nights.)

Q: Isn't that what you told her?

A: (Furthermore, the witness had consumed all nearby forests.)

Q: Did improprieties take place there?

A: (Fireballs were propelled from the witness up to a height of 100 metres.)

Q: Do you drink champagne yourself?

A: (This was an accidental witness.)

Q: What you actually said during the phone call – and tell me if I'm wrong –

A: (Because of the dryness of the summer, witnesses were common.)

Q: Is there any significance in terms of this examination that you are not wearing a lab coat or a hair net?

A: (That air came rushing down into the witness to create a vortex or tornado of witnesses.)

Q: How old were you when you left your father's house?

A: (Six witnesses burned out of control, with another nineteen contained.)

Q: Does that seem to be consistent with your memory?

A: (The glare of many witnesses.)

Q: What have you to say to this Article?

A: (By now, thousands of witnesses.)

Q: What have you to say to this Article?

The Sentence

One word is misspelt. Its individual letters
sit morosely, like schoolboys in the dock:
dark-blazered and intensely dishevelled.

The preposition, meanwhile, is neatly poised –
an expert in his witness box
who reads the runes of a body's bruising
(strawberry, sour apple, cornsilk, chestnut).

Now we follow a rough chain of qualifiers:
pieces of a simulacrum spine, this flexed
by our expert as he recites
'bleeding in the hind-brain'
and 'subarachnoid haemorrhage'.

Finally, the fat full stop:
a judge peering over his notes and desk lamp,
tuning his ear, tasting 'the water hammer effect',
biting the 'rick' in 'one might rick one's neck'.
Someone's left an extra space,
but the sense of it gathers in this black spot.

The Judgement

Ms S, you are
new and accomplished.
You have a 2(1) degree in
capturing the world in all its beauties and horrors.
To your credit you have mostly
supreme clarity and fearless candour,
even though you were unable to find employment.
In addition, you have
the acid precision of a drypoint.

Mr C has emphasised to me the disconnect
between the cool intelligence he has seen
and the person your record demonstrates,
affectionate and truculent by turns.

He points out these offences occurred
well after midnight when you must have been
both rich and chaste, invigorating and refreshing.

I accept that.

However, you have
a spell-binding power
when drunk.
You admitted
short, spare lines
in interview, and say you offered
“an unstinting and penetrating gaze”
before being arrested.
That seems, in context,
subtly numinous.

The harm caused is very high.
Culpability is also high.
I make a restraining order in the terms sought.
I emphasise that if breached this is
beautifully expressed in its own right,
punishable with
a sense of grace, of transcendence.

*Sources: sentencing comments by Judge Howard Riddle in
R v Nimmo and Sorley; various cover endorsements.*

Dan Leighton

Dan is a poet and musician. He is the founding editor of Cambridge Poetry Magazine. All but one of the following poems are pieces written in memory of people without whom, for many reasons, this magazine would not have come into being.

Fekete Ország, (*Black is the Country*) is a poem by one of Hungary's most well known poets, Babits Mihály. It is famed for its use of the repetitive rhythmic motif of the Hungarian word meaning 'black' – *fekete*. In Hungarian the letter *e* has a *very* hard sound, almost as hard as the *a* in *cat*, and it is this which gives the poem its percussive force.

Strangely, though it has been translated many times, there seems to never have been a translation which retains these key characteristics. The version attempted here, therefore, aims to keep not only the power of the rhythm, but to match as many of the strangenesses and peculiarities of the original Hungarian as possible.

The Just War Machine

A letter to Tim Hetherington (1970-2011)

I remember you
round backed and intent
myopic over your books.

Just the one lamp lit in
the dark well of your room
and too long for the desks

they gave us for our studies.
I see you cautiously climbing
from the brown sunlit heat

down into the darkness.
Down from a dust choked
concrete citadel

in a clay choked concrete city.
Your heel is guided
to a ladder by a hand

that lifelong knows
the inexhaustible
Islamic care of guests.

You don't know this, of course,
but I followed you, and I
caught your last message.

You hadn't posted for some time
and then suddenly there you were.
Popping up to say:

In besieged Libyan city of Misrata.
Indiscriminate shelling by Qaddafi forces.
No sign of NATO.

That's all, just a few words.
One hundred and twenty characters
seems like it suited you.

I can still see you,
shrapnel sliced and rushed
six foot four all long laid out

as they bring you back
on your rusted corrugated bed in
a battered pickup truck.

Above you, the yellow
dustdrench sky.
One man on the gun sways

with practiced poise
as he rides the rattling road
to the hospital.

Glancing at you.
Breathing but sighing.
Just one more ebbing man.

I read of your American friend
who went back
after the dust to make sense of it.

I hear you could have survived,
perhaps I wish I hadn't heard.
If only for a simple tube.

If only. A tiny, cheap and
simple piece of plastic. If only.
Just wishes really.

Just wishes.

And, I think a lot about you in the days
after you die. In the weeks
and months after you die.

Not just about you.
But it is all about you.
As I wonder what I have done.

What have any one of us done,
or left undone, that

will be remembered?

And I see you again,
not long after, at your mass.
And I think of you there in your box.

I hear only one man cry that day and
wonder if, like me, the rest of us have done
our weeping in advance.

And yet I find myself smiling,
in the pub with the Irish lads
who flew over to see you off in style.

The Irish were always so much better
at an understanding with the dead.
Heaney said as much in our school poems.

Why would you not want to have a chat
with your mate while you hold your pint
of black stuff in the crook of your arm?

Picking your way through a pack
of cheese and onion. You just balance your
elbow on the lid and talk.

So we turn up to the pub
to say goodbye.
I still have the photos.

We get pissed and we blather
And we find there's others missing too.
Another accident we hear.

Have we wasted our gifts.
That we were told God gave us.
Did we make a bright start - then fade?

Were you different, Tim?
Just that little bit different,
not leaving so much undone?

We have a bite to eat at the Ritz.
And I can't help feeling, all evening, that
I'm somehow under-dressed

I meet our old Head who nearly
threw me out over a break-in...
and a bottle of Cinzano.

I drank that with Paddy.
Another one gone.
The Head pretends not to remember.

I meet the priest
who married one of us.
There's an old joke there

I shan't repeat it,
though the priest does.
And I don't mind at all.

It is a priest's privilege to make
and we like him,
enough to be forgiving.

Though he has forgotten
my name, which makes me feel
a little small. Just a little small.

I talk for a while.
To your brother.
And to your Mum

Though I don't know
it's them to start with at all.
I just say how we all came

to see you off.
I just try to say something kind.
And I fail. And I fail.

I just say we are trying
to make it make a little sense.
But we all know.

And, here's the wonder.
Even though I am sure
your brother doesn't know me from Adam,

he gives me a photograph.

It's not up to your standards, of course,

but it does show you.

Joyful after passing your driving test.
Just grinning a big, dumb, shaggy, stupid grin.

And I know that makes sense.
That you were, after all, just you.

And though you are now gone.
I still have that photo.

Just here,
tucked into my book.



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An empty room

Yvette (1933 – 2009)

as stealing
wisps arise
at dawn
you are gone

away on a cool
sunlit breeze

sparks of dust
gold skirts
unfurled by light
dancers whirling

feathers of dust
soft feathers of dust

Open Ground

Bettine and Anthony (c.1930 - 2008)

each sigh falls
and cold stars weep

water fire and ash
absolve at last

earth bears our sorrow
to weep dark pearls

cracked open and yawning
as the earth falls

daughter of eve
lay down your burden

son of adam
rest your limbs

come pain come
so grace may follow soonest

Fekete Ország

Babits Mihály

Fekete országot álmodtam én
ahol minden fekete volt,
minden fekete, de nem csak kívül:
csontig, velőig fekete,
fekete,
fekete, fekete, fekete.

Fekete ég és fekete tenger,
fekete fák és fekete ház,
fekete állat, fekete ember,
fekete öröm, fekete gyász,
fekete érc és fekete kő és
fekete föld és fekete fák,
fekete férfi, fekete nő és
fekete, fekete, fekete világ.

Áshatod íme, vágthatod egyre
az anyagot, mely lusta, tömör
fekete földbe, fekete hegybe
csap csak a csáklyád, fúr be furód:
s mélyre merítsd bár tintapatakját
még feketébben árad, ömöl
nézd a fű magját, nézd a fa makkját,
gerle tojását, csíragolyót,
fekete, fekete, fekete,
fekete kelme s fekete elme,
fekete arc és fekete gond,
fekete ér és fekete vér és
fekete velő és fekete csont.

Más szín a napfény vendég-máza,
a nap a színek piktora mind:
fekete bellül a földnek váza,
nem a fény festi a fekete szint
karcsu sugárecsetével

nem:
fekete az anyag rejtett lelke,
jaj,
fekete, fekete, fekete.

Black Is The Country

Translation by Dan Leighton

Black is the country that I dreamt last night
everything there blacker than black
all was black on black, but not just the skin:
bone deep, marrow deep, black as black
black on black
black as black, black on black, black as black

Blackened the sky and black is the sea
blackened the trees and black is the house,
blackened the creature, black are the people,
black is the pleasure, black is the grief
black is the ore and black is the stone and
black is the earth and black are the trees
black is the man and black is the woman
black is the, black is the, black is the world.

Here you can burrow, hew on forever
the soil here is indolent, lazy, solid
into black earth and into black mountain
only grasp on the grapnel, drill in the borehole
draw deep and draw deep, suck on the inkstream
still even blacker it surges, it gushes
look at the grass seed, the tree and its acorn,
turtle-dove eggs, all of the seeds,
they are black, they are black, they are black,
black is the cloth and black is the mind,
black is the face and black their concerns,
black in their veins and black is their blood and
black to the marrow and black to the bone.

Mere guest, the sunlight: colour-veneer,
the sun the painter, colours it all:
in black it tints it, this black earth vase,
no bright lustre this blackened plane paints
there is no slenderest of jet brushes

no:
deep black the matter, soul that is hidden,
alas,
it is black, it is black, it is black.

Waking to light

Edward (1977-1978)

I
christmas
i wake to virginal light
a cotton womb spills
birth to toys
i crouch raw kneed
on the coir floor as
cold smoke pours
from fractal panes

from my parent's room
i hear the new baby
cry as I read
in feathers
of blonde light
i am alone

II
easter i kneel
on cool lino
by my brother
holed in the heart
sun through droplet
flooded windows
paints his wax gold skin
in soft paschal light

i breathe his milk and
cradle cap scent
his sharp nails
scratch delicate
stigmata on my palm
i do not cry

III

gently i lift him
for my single embrace and
when i put him back
his head thumps
a punch
in a down pillow
into the cot
where he lays

in his paschal yellow
among the toys
wet cold fear settles
like dust on my heart
as his shrieks
bounce from the window

IV

first day of summer
mother comes home
and father carries
an empty rush basket
i am anxious
as mother
presses me to her heart
to return to my toys

and as i play in the warm
golden afternoon
i hear a song
float faintly
through the open window
something about a broken heart

A child born in quietness

deep in the soft rustle
of hay you lie and barely
breathe and sleep

beneath bark stripped
cedar boughs that creak
in the insistent seeking wind

folded in borrowed strips
and placed into the trough
where cattle chew

you lie asleep
above the tilth on
which she now kneels

cloaked in the sweet reek
of summer's last hay
and dust shivered

from the warm pelt
of curious ass and
elderly half-milkless cow

your damp and downy hair
stirred by a whispered
wind that enters

through gaps
in a stable wall
that long years before

cast the daub and straw
that held back
the warm spiced breeze

you lie here asleep
tight coiled
in your cloth cocoon

it is less than an hour
since you arrived
born into this place

while the carpenter
stands helpless by watching
through the doorway as

an innkeeper's wife softly
swearing at her husband's
thoughtless weakness

and generosity attends
the girl that keeps her
from her guests

All that I learned

*Mark, teacher and artist
(1943 - 2023)*

I learned that
a blue-grey
bright-sky day
is not a bad day to die.

In the end little matters
but the soul's bright ascending -
that life is worth living
and death is not fearsome.

I learned what it means
to feel numb and alone,
but that numb is
not absence of feeling.

That tolerance does not
always entail giving in,
but that sometimes
that's just what it does mean.

I learned that I cannot
walk by the other side
of the road when a man
is laid low in the gutter.

I learned that duty hangs heavy,
but can be worn light,
and that blood is not needed
to make you my sister or brother.

I learned when to let go,
and what to hold onto -
to forgive, and forgive,
and forgive again.

I learned to take Earl Grey
and ruin it with milk,
I learned how to "do" art,
and how to make good a sink.

I learnt how to give cuddles,
to all of the kitties
while still swearing blind
that I don't like cats...

I learned the importance
of being just silly -
and the joy of a
terrible, colourful, jumper.

I learned that faces are made
on all video calls,
and that voicemails shall always
start with coo-ee!

I learned that each thing
that we left incomplete
is no cause for regret
but something for next time.

I learned that each
shared place
that I visit again
is not torture, but memory,

celebration, compassion,
a moment of love.

I learned that I am loved.

I learned that those times
when I call for advice,
are now just the times
when I learn for myself.

They are the time when I find,
how much I received,
and that now is the
time that I teach.



Mark Leighton, Guru, c. 1970

Index

Alice Harrison	264
Amira Skeggs	242
Andrea Porter	88
Angus Allman	174
Anna Lindsay	118
Attila The Stockbroker	156
Candy Smellie	112
Charlotte Johnson	184
Christian Donovan	40
Christopher Hamilton-Emery	276
Claudine Toutoungi	150
Dan Leighton	318
Derek Fanning	106
Doug Lee Scott	246
Eddy Leighton	86
Emma du Toit	266
Fork Burke	214
Frankie-Mai Blyth-Smith	236
Freya Sacksen	300
George Szirtes	284
Giulia Padalini	294
Helen McSherry	168
Hilary Watson	50
Jac Harmon	62
Jeffrey Neilson	256
Jeremy Hubbard	304
Jessica Roy	260

Jon Stone	312
Joolz Denby	186
Joseph Nutman	220
J.S.Watts	98
Julia Ajayi	218
Julie Stevens	180
Kate O'Neill	254
Laura Theis	136
Lillian Davies	202
Malik Ameer Crumpler	172
Mary L. Walsh	144
Mã Yongbo & Helen Pletts	16
Michael Bayley	298
Mike Bannister	58
My Tiny Words	240
Nina Živančević	68
Özge Lena	74
Pete Taylor	42
Pilar Puerto-Camacho	230
Rachel Goodman & Elvire Roberts	34
Rethabile Masilo	222
Richard Berengarten	124
Sammie Albon	64
Sarah Harrold	80
Sophie Roy	206
Stewart Carswell	250
Trish Harewood	132
Yessica Klein	196

