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Editorial

Poetry, My Arse

The other morning, half-listening to the wireless in my breakfast break, I slid into ‘Something Understood’ on BBC Radio 4. It being the first Sunday in Lent, the subject was as expected. Suddenly, someone was reading a poem that meant a great deal to me. I remembered discovering it in the first poetry book I ever owned. It was Robert Graves’s ‘In The Wilderness’ and I began to whisper it alongside the broadcaster.

And ever with Him went
Of all His wanderings
Comrade, with ragged coat,
Gaunt ribs—poor innocent—
Bleeding foot, burning throat,
The guileless old scape-goat …

But the voice alongside mine said ‘young’. The guileless young scapegoat. I was horrified. Had I remembered it incorrectly all these years? I went to the shelf for the one book I can always find, The Methuen Anthology of Modern Poetry that my father bought for me in Willy Preston’s bookshop in Clapham Park Road, still priced in pencil on the flyleaf at half a crown. And I was right. The goat is old.

How could the Beeb have made such a radical error? I thought I must have heard it wrong. Off to the website to listen again. Yes, ‘young’, but I also noted a change in the first line. My version begins ‘Christ, of His gentleness …’ The Broadcast version replaced ‘Christ’ with ‘He’. The acknowledgements told me that they had taken it from ‘The Complete Poems’. I checked. I have Collecteds and Selecteds on my shelves, but the Complete only appeared in 1995, ten years after the poet’s death.

Off to Abe for a second-hand Complete, and there it is. Old is young and the scapegoat has lost his archaic hyphen. This is a poem that first appeared in 1916. Graves was a great one for tinkering and changing—improving with a view to perfecting. Which version of this simple idea is better? I can’t decide.

Nor will I try. If I were an academic I would chase the truth of it through revisions and publications, but that is one thing I have never been, because I came late to the language of it and have no expertise. Instead I shall sit on the fence and debate the honesty of it, knowing that at some point Graves altered his view of Christ’s companion from an old, unquestioning mentor to a young, unsophisticated disciple. I shall look to my left and see a poem I loved and believed I knew, and to the right, where sits a beloved poet who chose to change it. After all, ‘love is not love which alters when it alteration finds …’ (Oh, sod off, Bill …)

I like to think I have undergone a similar transformation in my own poetic appreciation, moving from the recognition of a poem by its uncompromising adherence to the old rules to the pleasing discovery that, with age, my perception has changed and grown. I see ideas and hear music in ways that would have surprised me in my pig-headed youth.
But I don’t think about it much. Somewhere between Negative Capability and Cognitive Dissonance lives my relatively new-found Flexibility, which brings me joy in my declining years. Here at Angle, I fold my editor-face into inscrutable as the poets file past and doff their hats. Now and then one of them will reach in and pull out a rabbit—Bravo!—but before I give houseroom to that rabbit, I need to see it dance.

Imagine me now, my Editor’s hand shading my furrowed brow as I perch here, peering into the middle distance, watching out for dancing rabbits.

And one day, when they come to prepare my lifeless corpse for decent disposal, they will notice that my rear end, cleft north-south to declare my human provenance, is also deeply grooved east-west, the imprint of the top rail of my familiar fence. They may find this interesting, but not significant. It will remind them briefly of a hot cross bun.

Ann Drysdale
Editorial

Per Ardua ad Nauseam

‘Narrative is hard’, as the estimable Richard Epstein reminds us below. Yes, indeed it is. However, we here at Angle do try in our editorial endeavours to create some sort of narrative with the poems at our disposal. Where that is not possible, we make some attempt to ensure that poems placed in close proximity play nicely together, or at the very least do not do unspeakable violence to each other.

For this issue, we asked for (not insisted on, for we are gentle creatures here) poems on the theme of ‘contradictions’, and we got a fair number in response, with a wide variety of interpretations. Gratifyingly, we did not receive one poem which referred in any way to Whitman’s now too-famous lines. Having thunk, however, we felt that the need for narrative (or, at least, peaceful coexistence) rather trumped the idea of a separate section, and in any case the intentional contradictions were quite often as subtle as those found elsewhere which were not explicitly offered as such. So, as a consequence, contradiction is woven into the issue and waiting to be discovered, rather than trumpeting its presence. And this is as it should be: after all, contradiction is woven into the fabric of life, is it not?

While we were engaged in the mighty work of reading, selecting, corresponding, cutting, pasting, formatting, squeezing, stretching, arranging and rearranging this issue (I cannot resist the pun, ‘beating it out of submissions’!) we experienced record rainfall in the UK (biblical, one might say). That being the case, it seemed natural to turn our thoughts towards building a narrative arc. Hopefully we have been successful. Hopefully this issue will ‘float your boat’, as it were. If there are leaps here and there, have faith. If there are surprises, we trust they are pleasant ones. Now, as I finish this editorial, we are basking in one of the earliest, warmest, bluest, goldenest, and most floriferous springs we’ve had in decades, and that’s the kind of pleasant surprise I can live with.

A big ‘thank you’ is due once again to all of our contributors, readers, and supporters, and we particularly welcome newcomers to these pages.

Are you sitting comfortably? Then we’ll begin …

Philip Quinlan
Wet Day in the Reading Room

The dribbly twins, the woman with a tic
Who drones about the blacks, the bubbling chest,
The vacant-eyed, the squashed, the dull, the sick,
Are here for shelter and a heated nest.
Hunched up below a line of local views
And one large print, The Fighting Temeraire,
They simulate attention to the news.
The smell of uncleaned raincoats fills the air.
Stone letters are still proud, high over all
The condensation and its crooked ways
Down scribbles that vermiculate the wall,
The spreads from which the glossy models gaze,
   And notices forbidding smoke or spit—
   Magna Est Veritas … Praeclarebit.

Local Collection

Glazed stares in lunar-dry terrains
From mutely-snarling fox remains.

Dust dims the orioles and terns
And blooms the broken ritual urns
Where Time’s collapsed inside a case
The harder facts of date and place.

Somewhere below the jaws’ fixed grins
The archived world is print, ink, skins.

An Echo, just come down, appears
Brittle and yellow-brown with years
Much like the other sheets laid by
Till this week’s masthead stabs the eye.

In Northampton Museum

Among the hide-and-canvas lace-ups made
For some poor elephant’s giant tender feet
And leathery minutiae of trade
   In boots, dissected or complete,

Mint Army-issue, every shade of bruise,
With Tudor scraps from trenches workmen dig,
You find a case containing John Clare’s shoes,
   Asylum-worn, and very big.

Jerome Betts
Make Happy Use of This

Amongst the treasures of the Paris Bibliotheque Nationale is a bronze plate, attributed to the last days of Roman military presence in Britain. It portrays soldiers of two legions, identifiable by badges and standards, and is embellished with a hunting scene. It was apparently presented to one Aurelius Cervianus and is inscribed VTERE FELIX, (Make happy use of this).

This is the plate. ‘Evacuation-ware’ we used to call it. Most of the Legion had something similar. One of a pair. Constans had its twin. He fled this region years ago. Debt-encumbered, I dare say, plus an element of woman trouble, although I never listen to hearsay. ‘His village is rubble, his fields stubble,’ as the Gauls put it. This ornament, identical except for our two names, we got at the biggest booze-up in Kent the evening before we sailed. Fun and games? That farewell shindig attracted every whore from Luguvallium to the Saxon Shore.

Anyway, this bronze thing. Not what you’d call great artwork. To be fair, the engraver was on a tight schedule. The emblems are all right. Knew his army stuff. Some young shaver from the ranks, no doubt. He’s let himself go a bit on the wildlife. Lions, peacocks on the Island, I ask you! If you show that to a Brit, he’ll say, ‘Load a’bollocks.’ They were a coarse lot, by and large, even after three centuries of inter-marriage with our cultured troops! Didn’t mind leaving, to be frank, which is not to disparage the garrison as it was at its best, but we all knew it’d go like the rest of those end-of-the-known-world backwaters.

Soon as Rome upped anchor and sailed away they came paddling in from all quarters. Angles and Jutes! In Suetonius’ day they’d never have dared. He knew how to treat ’em. Sorted the Iceni and their Queen. Barbarians respect a sound defeat by an efficient, disciplined machine. It’s a strange country. There are cliffs that wink like sleepy eyelids all along the shore. Now I’m retired, it’s comforting to think I’ll never see the Island any more. Fog-bound, rain-sodden, military station. One thing’s for sure. They’ll never make a nation.
Arriving

‘In the year of our Lord 565 … there came into Britain a famous priest and abbot, a monk by habit and life, whose name was Columba, to preach the word of God. …’
— Bede, Ecclesiastical History of England, Book III, Chapter IV

Arriving is the hardest part, the work spread out barren as this shingle, this rough skirt surrounding nothing but a bit of green turf, a gull-swept sky, and the angel-empty air.

In this clamoring silence of breakers, birds, and surf, I kneel and wet the hem of my robe. Now is the time for invocations, for prayers to fill this empty place with words made flesh.

Yet to be are the mortared stones, the joists of English oak, the quarried marble green as the hills of Donegal. But soon, God willing, foundations will be laid, the faithful will come, and hymns will rise, solid as vaults and spires, limpid as the clerestory of heaven.

Saint Columba and the Serpent

‘Once, the blessed man had to cross the River Ness … But the beast was lying low on the riverbed, its appetite not so much sated as whetted for prey. … The blessed man looking on raised his holy hand and made the sign of the cross in the air, and invoking the name of God, he commanded the fierce beast, saying: “Go no further. Go back at once.” At the sound of the saint’s voice, the beast fled in terror so fast one might have thought it was pulled back with ropes.’
— Adomnan of Iona, Life of Saint Columba

Gray as slate, the loch is still again, the serpent’s glistening bulk sunk fathoms deep by quiet words and gestures of the cross, the roiling waters calmed by God’s gravid name. In the hush, waves lap the stony beach, and a charm of greenfinches carol in the pines.

But soon this tableau breaks, as awe gives way to joy. These heathens start to dance and shout, forgetting fear; forgetting the fisherman, their friend, who lies beside his boat, a mound of bloody meat and chaff; forgetting, too, the beast that prowls their shared and purblind dark.

Despite the summer heat, Columba shudders. How long before the serpent turns for shore, before it comes again with tooth and claw to rake the bones of men? And who will stand? Nearby, a boy sits in the dark and stares. He sees the failing light, the midge-fuzzed sky, the ashen nimbus round the saint’s bowed head.

Robert Griffith
Barbarian

‘Omnes vero se Britanni vitro inficiunt, quod caeruleum efficit colorem.’
—Julius Caesar, The Gallic Wars

She fingers the blue on slowly, feralled in its wake;
she counts the steps from inside out the fenced-in fields of grace.

A vitrurnned likeness wavers, a cats-lick from the rim,
in the tea cup in the circle of the saucer’s closing ring.

Let the tongue tip shape the watchword in the shallows of its bow;
let sentry sleep and serpent sing beneath the shuddered vow.

Here is where their end is born; there is nothing at the gate
but ink and skin, the sylph herself: the cunt-directed state.

Caesar may misread you as infected by the glass
or more likely overlook you, a needle in the grass

but as you plunge into his heel he will see the face
of what gives womb its dark and what gives blood its taste.

Virgula Divina

Hands set light
on willow withes
turned stone,
your lissome soul
set fast
in collared bone.

A dowsing form,
two come to one
at throat and heart
where words are spun
of blood and air,
a fork undone

by a line that trembles as it runs
through chambers mad with salt-sweet wine
where bellows sing and cage bars tine;

a line that beckons
as it sinks
to all the waters
thirst would drink.

Peleg Held
The Sea at My Ear

The ocean took its place  
inside my ear.  
I owned my usual face,  
but could not hear,

could not pick up the tact  
that tilts in speech,  
must smile when the exact  
swam out of reach,

could hear my teeth crunch down  
on yielding matter,  
could hear the râle of town,  
but not your patter.

I’ve swum into  
an underwater pressure  
where talk’s askew,  
no fairway of my leisure.

I stare too hard  
toward the source of chat  
where disregard  
was once my democrat.

Now self pretends  
to suss what’s going on,  
pursues shrewd ends  
to seize its whereupon

in reaches of well-being  
now teasing reach,  
as vowels go dismayng  
the quick of speech.

The ocean finds its note,  
locates me there.  
The world becomes remote,  
to my elsewhere.

Alan Gould
String Quartet

Big dancing partner, double-bass, 
we like the fathoms of your voice. 
So broad-hipped mama, ply your bow 
to stir our sensual quid pro quo.

Why does a cello’s tanned physique 
and tenor make detachment weak, 
compel the spread of modest knees 
for strings to moan and finely please?

Exquisite pair of violins, 
outlandish how two rakish chins 
can firm the schemes of tweedle-dee 
that rouse the bliss in you and me,

first fiddle climbing up the scale 
for second’s counterpointing style, 
to rapture tease and its reply, 
and lead our comedown to its sigh.

Alan Gould

Les Amoureux aux Poireaux

after Robert Doisneau, 1950

A spray of jonquils signal his intention, 
Almost romantic, though hardly innocent; 
they say ‘I love you’—failing quite to mention 
‘I want you now’ was what he really meant.

Ostensibly an image of seduction, 
his bag of leeks turns passion into pathos; 
his ardour undermined in deconstruction, 
you sense desire collapsing into bathos.

And those of us beyond love’s futile flush, 
perceive a simple truth; Cupid’s alluring 
violence may deify a teenage crush, 
but nameless household gods sustain enduring 
love; so let this casual Parisian kiss 
be dedicated to domestic bliss.

Alan Wickes
Ancestral Ground

The victim of an infantile dark age
you sift through shards for clues. Prehistory
reveals an undecipherable page,
its archetypal script—a mystery.

Adrift in strangely convoluted dreams,
abandoned in some dear, familiar place
you sense that nothing now is what it seems,
your precious things all lost without a trace.

Impaled upon a broken blade of stone
the summer solstice sun, bloodied, crimson,
invokes the hopelessness of what is known.
More potent than our mythic risen son
a shaman gibbers in a tongue of fire:
how love was lost, eclipsed by raw desire.

Beneath the Dark

Beneath the dark, glittering sky
I watch a meteor flare, then die.
If one chaotic squib of light
perturbs our firmament tonight
do cosmic sums go all awry?
Star-gazing poets don’t ask why
or deal in fact; they beautify
raw truth in dialects of delight.
Beneath the dark

glittering sky I know I’ll die
someday. So metaphors must lie,
give consolation in our plight:
above, the conundrum of God’s light,
the paradise that I decry;
beneath—the dark.

Alan Wickes
Artless

Ground me for the sky.
Roots uphold or reach.
A purpose is in each.
Knowing is not why.

The line of stars. The name.
The weight of words, the tell.
Further down the well
and fire are the same.

Peak and basin both,
human and divine.
Now isn’t in time,
it’s not even close.

The blood. The bone. The hair.
The key. The fall. The grail.
The fool cannot prevail,
he does and does not care.

Close

We do not rhyme at the close.
No sonnet, or only the turn,
the turning away

the coming to terms like
50/50, and who is fit for more
of a child’s time—

the door softly clicks shut.
Between us this emptied room
filling with sun.

And I do not know
where to begin when going
is all that’s left.

And moment to moment
a far away train
colors the wind.

Jesse Anger
Euclid Strips the Axioms

A point is that which has no part

you slip from the last skin you can pinch
thread your scabbed needle
through a world too fluent in your radial cage
tremble

A line is a breadthless length

with things that cannot be held, cannot be parsed
into crumbs sprawled solemn in your mouth

A unit is that by virtue of which

each flinch winding you outbound
from a geometer’s embrace
coiling you beneath the glass rush

each thing that exists is

of your dying bulb shivering
slant and sharp, an erasure
sprained in the filaments
called

darkness pierced with darkness, new
constitution of Rorschach tests nested
in their fluorescent ghosts, the closest
you will ever come to undressing

one

the way night opens its mouth
in its accident of sense
to shout in its sleep

A number is a multitude—

to gasp infinity’s gooseflesh

Shakti Shrima
Point, Line, Plane, Space

Charting geometries
Post-Lobachevskian
Helps keep us yogically
Limber of mind.

Sketching these surfaces
Extra-Euclidian
Stretches perception past
Lines of one kind.

The Warhol Look

Though in Playboy, Marilyn
Dresses only in her skin,
She’s a new commodity
Silkscreened at your Factory,
Clad in garish shades of ink—
Blonde-babe yellow, nipple pink.
You can fiddle with her hues,
Have her any way you choose.
Mass production is your game,
Fifteen minutes worth of fame.
All your icons look the same;
Call them by a single name.
Jackie, Jackie, Mao, Mao, Mao,
Andy, Andy. Wow, wow, wow!

The Rakes Smile When Gin Is Free

I will arise and go now to where the gin is free,
And a good old time have there, with hope of getting laid:
Wild parties will I throw there, a honey on each knee,
And not atone for mistakes I’ve made.

I’ll find a piece of ass there, and wildest oats I’ll sow,
Stopping now and then to devour a plate of onion rings;
And later on at dinner, amid the afterglow,
I’ll have my fill of chicken wings.

I will arise and go now, the same as yesterday,
To hear glad hands a-clapping from barrooms I adore;
I can’t stand quitting halfway, and when we rakehells play,
There’s always time for a few more.

Chris O’Carroll

C. B. Anderson
Fifth Position

In ballet: With both feet touching, the toes of each foot reach the heel of the other.

One might, but for the bitter winter air,
Have stood all night inside the single pair
Of bootprints in the mud
Below the doorstep leading
Both to and from the light profusely bleeding
From curtained window panes at either end
Of someone else’s household. Linked by blood,
Close relatives are plighted to defend

Each other’s borders, bearing common pain
So long as any two of them remain
   Alive. As for the dead,
A shroud of woolen tartan
Is all that they require. The code is Spartan,
The daily grind extremely rigorous—
A way of life where hearts inform the head
And nothing but a wholly vigorous

Response to challenges is possible.
Today we curb our use of fossil fuel;
   We fertilize the dirt
That serves the kitchen garden,
Much as our forebears did at Tullibardine.
We’ve never loved each other all that much—
The comings and the goings often hurt—
Yet through both thick and thin we keep in touch.

Apocrypha

Two orbs in hand—one large, one small—
He climbed the tower to the top.
He let them go and watched them fall,
And those below who saw them drop

Were dumbstruck when they hit the ground
With a loud thud at the same time.
The clerics in the piazza frowned,
For it was deemed a heinous crime

To contradict the Church’s teaching.
Before an anxious Pisan throng
One Galileo, overreaching,
Had proven Aristotle wrong.
Anima

The periodic table
sufficiently explains
how elements are able
to manufacture brains
or fabricate a heart.
That’s the easy part.

The soul’s another matter.
Here science comes up mute
and speculations shatter.
There’s nothing to compute,
no tools to measure with.
For this, we turn to myth.

Indian Summer

The sun is burning borrowed wood,
the sky’s an azure fraud—
a late October sleight-of-hand
that awes an easy crowd.

Fault Line

You lying on your side, and I on mine,
both turned away in darkness, spine to spine—
each back a knotted ridge, the space between
a rift, a trench, a mute dividing line.

Ancient History

She made a Carthage of my heart
then salted it and plowed
and left no word upon a word
of all that she had vowed.

Her chronicles expunge the name,
her maps blot out the place.
A truth, a past, a slaughtered love
are easy to erase.

Richard Meyer
Requiem Spatumque

Rumor said you were leaving.
I dreamed you would and searched and searched—

and now you look away.
But I know the place
where the ships are kept, I see them

rebuilt, tempting the air and the sea to them,
and I want a pause there

when the sea has gone out to her lowest,
where the masts are dark, bare, seemingly taller:

there is almost a pause.
I’ll take almost. I don’t want

the sunset’s grisly pink to arrive
and nudge time forward, set it going faster.
We’re far enough along, I crave to tell you how.

Pilgrim

I went up the mountain but forgot the offering,
so I came back, swept the beetle shells
from the floorboards, cut a dead mouse
from the blueberry nets, left alone
the ghosts of the place.
You were silent in my dream last night,
standing at the top of the stairs,
looking out on what was not ocean but sound.

Northward

Come warmth we’ll walk the shores of March,
a bale hook Spring of flotsam feeding.
From the growing green beneath the Larch
come, Warmth, walk. The shores will march
behind us, through the nearing arch
to the ochered cave, our furrowed seeding,
a coming warmth that walks the shores of March
this bale hook Spring of flotsam feeding.
Owl

when you asked, and it stirred
such silence as has not been heard,

there was no word
for what the conifers conferred

Self Portrait in an Olive Grove

The clouds from the morning
have gone completely.
I sit in the driveway while
a man and a woman walk
toward the path next to the house.
Earlier, I watched you
walk through the olive trees.
It was cloudy, then, and cold.
I know I am not very good
at waiting. The trees here,
they know all about waiting.

What Comes Out

Valdottavo, Italy

The sun is playing tricks
On the valley, but the stream
Doesn’t mind, only I do
As I walk to the studio
To visit him, and he says,
What? You don’t want
To write today?
And it made me feel
That same way
As when I run my bow
Over three strings,
Thinking that music
Will come out.
Scales

The sequined dress that hangs in my wardrobe sings chromatics like Holiday as I gut cod, my movement causing light to strobe over kaleidoscopic scales. My hands throb from quartz cold water that reminds me of the sequined dress that hangs in my wardrobe.

Some women wear sparkly dresses, have locks of hair carved like the waves in my fish-filled tub, their movement causing light to strobe off glossy magazine pages and in discos. This morning I took out the hanger just to hold the sequined dress that hangs in my wardrobe, but my hardened hands decided I would wear it with my rubber-apron and welly-boots. My movement causes light to strobe off tiny suns as I sit astride my fish-filled tub, I feel glamorous as I wipe guts and blood on the sequined dress that hung in my wardrobe, my movement causing light to strobe.

Trending Beheading

She will never leave you now.

She will lie on the bottom steps of your basement.

You can take the bulb out, leave the empty socket swinging in blackness;

cover the stump of her neck with a towel, put her head in a red fire-bucket of fine sand.

She will always be with you, blood, oil-slick glinting in the dark, burnt into the concrete floor.

At the birth of your baby girl, at the funeral of your mother you will click and she will load.
Make It Come Calling

There are trees, and they are on fire
There are crows, and they gather the flames

There’s a boy and a girl
And they scatter their pebbles

They are silvery white
And the moon stakes its claim

There’s a cat and a dove
And they tell their own story

There’s a way to get home
There’s a way to remain

If you try it with breadcrumbs
You damn your own glory

Tick tock say the crows
Tick tock say the flames

There’s a witch, and she’s sweet on desire
She’ll candy your ginger and bury your blame

She’ll fatten you up
She’ll feast on your secrets

When the heat gets too close
Pretend there’s no pain

One witch in the oven
One girl who’s a hero

Who’s nesting on bones?
Who’s freed from the cage?

Don’t ask for forgiveness
Make it come calling

Remember the crows
Remember the flames

Marybeth Rua-Larsen
On Another Body

He finds it, on another body, strange,
so pulls me close to simulate himself
receiving taps on sternum, slaps at waist,
palms’ flicked staccato where my ribs meet flesh.
It sounds about the same, he says, on me,
despite my deeper clavicle, my curves;
the difference is in what he cannot feel
vibrating there, in his own nooks and nerves.
Over the years, lone practice dulls the cleft
of what he knows within and what without,
and as he drums, he wonders how the deaf
might hear the rhythms that their flesh resounds.
On me, he could drum up both pulse and flush,
yet not quite feel the beat of it, himself.

Infestation

From nowhere but within, the brown moths seem
to stake their writhing home in mine, their teem
through inner faults as near-known as the nodes
of this old frame, each cringing orifice
no jaundiced newsprint quite will stop beneath
the drawers, the plaster cracklings in the eaves.

Complicity, dark wish—is this their in
to walnut tins, the divet for the spoon,
the sealed container where their larvae gorged
on sweet lost summer’s one last sugar whorl
of ice cream cone? October, chilling earth.
The worms have left so fine and gossamer
a ghost of it, you’d swear they hadn’t rent
the coil, but spun its very filament.

Megan Grumbling
The Moth Metamorphosis

She sits still as stone in a lichen dress
faces the wall of her future,
solid in its blankness.
She cleans her thoughts,
sweeps words to dark corners,
lets the dust of her life
settle.

A shadow shifts,
she turns her head
to see moth wings unfold
from fissures
in her shoulder blades
and when she blinks
she looks away,
afraid that the draught
from her lashes
will disturb them.

The Reader

*after ‘The Reader’ by Maggie Taylor*

He tries,
mesmerised
to hear the sounds
of her voice
through the sheets.

Letters distort like notes
played underwater,
muffled
as they sing to
his heart.

A metronome
modulates her lilt,
regulates the rhythms
of her breath.

He finds himself deaf.

Lesley Ingram
Bee Bouts-rimés

Today I wore my face called undepressed.
Tomorrow I’ll put on my face of rain.
This switch of faces is a constant strain
but such is life, a queen bee’s busy nest.
Some days I feel that God has knelt and blest
my bees, and other days God wraps a chain
around my wings that reaches to my brain.
When can I sleep, God, when can I rest?
Day after day I smell the stinky blast
of gardens wearing faces in a wilt.
God’s coming back to save us any day.
Today I wander through the beehive built
of all the dregs I saved from my bee past,
my God face hidden in the eggs I lay.

Birdhouse

Why do my bluebirds choose the spring to leave?
The greening grass insults my nest of loss.
The pecks of pain they left behind do grieve
My very grove. Some memories of moss
I’ll keep, for eggs. I know the old routine,
The way the bluebirds come and go. The wing,
Bright blue, the breast, a shade of tangerine,
Belie, alas, the cheep-cheep song they sing.

Sonett

after Fradel Shtok

Perhaps it’s time for me to hide away
And cry without a sound, my head sunk low,
Then dry my weary eyes again that oh
Have never, never had a restful day—

And let my glances wander fitfully
Off in the gray, the distant atmosphere,
Pursuing phantom fortune, here and here,
Sick from the constant scramble hurting me—

Or is it time to fling myself straight down
In desperation, let my wildness show
In flaming eyes, the gutter of the town

My turf to growl and pant and puff and frown—
Or is it time for me to simply drown
And cry without a sound, my head sunk low.

Mary Meriam
Suicide Girl

Across your tits you have blue stars tattooed.
You dye your short hair purple, turquoise, red,
or jet black, show off rings, get piercings through
your nose, labia, and willingly shed
clothing, post photos on the internet,
your pussy shaved, a slut-smile on your face,
goth-goddess, online icon there to whet
the lust of cyber-surfers lost in space.

It’s difficult to pierce the outward show,
the razzle-dazzle pornographic flair;
to work past all that armor and to know
what lies beneath—to see what’s really there
under your covering veil of nudity:
the soul you don’t want anyone to see.

The Last of the Tangled-Haired Speustons

They were a family, my mother said,
of girls she knew who never combed their hair,
and, like their name, it spewed. It gushed, it roped
in helixes, in curves, geysers, frayed twine,
thick, ivy-wild, unkempt as tumbleweeds,
long as the vines that festoon rainforests.

When they arrived, disheveled, off the bus
in rural Arkansas, did they divine
they would become a proverb, like the ones
in the Old Testament? (‘So it was said,
Is Saul also among the prophets?’) They
became a by-word, one my mother used;
their names an evocation so that we,
her children, would be cleanly, neat and groomed.

You look like the last of the tangled-haired
Speustons, she would admonish on the days
my hair would not lay down or part just right.

I see them, like Medusa, writhing snakes
above their eyes and ears, slithering oil;
or like Rapunzel, though no one would want
to climb the snarled rope they might let down.
So they remain imprisoned in that tower
raised by a sorcery of words, founded
with imprecations to their memory,
their storm of hair arising still today.

David W. Landrum
The Dead

will rise out of their graves tonight,
spindly and calm. We will see them in their flawless
but old-fashioned suits, tramping up the drive.
A bone in the keyhole will unlock the door.
They will bring the evening paper. They will check
the mail. They will move into our lives
as if we never led them:
him with his cracked skull,
painting a bookcase; her with her wide leer,
dusting the hall. They will spurn
our food. They will spurn our air.
At dawn, they will lie down in our beds,
bones clanking. Turn down the thermostat.
Run.

Rick Rohdenburg

Winkle’s Prayer

Lord of Snails, the tide is here,
the sea is calm, it’s time to go.
Yet these months the tide’s been low—
beak and claw have been nearer
than you to me.

But Lord of Snails, I am not all
You’re Lord of—you who guard the ways
of ravening dog-whelk, who preys
as you ordain, and of the gull
who smashes me.

Still, Lord of Whelk and Gull, aren’t you
provider, too, of luscious kelp?
Something in my life brings help.
Is ’Lord of Snails’ that side of you
that sides with me?

Lord of Snails, Thy kingdom come.
Gracious, savage as Thou art,
pardon the mollusk of my heart
should it keep operculum
between me and Thee.

Charles Doersch
Beneath My Bed

I saw a Drock beneath my bed—
a thing you don’t encounter daily—
though thinking all was in my head.
It nested in a ukulele.

Forsaking snuff and whiskey dregs,
it dined on prunes and lemon sole,
then in the base it laid three eggs
and sailed off in a pudding bowl.

The Drocklings hatched and when they cried
I nourished them on roots of stars
and frosted flakes of asteroid,
then took them on a trip to Mars.

We ranged the seas in alpenstocks,
the rigging made from pirate vests,
with compasses from cuckoo clocks
we searched for buried treasure chests.

We panned the shores of jigsaw rivers
and crossed the Alps in caravans
to shapes and sights that gave us shivers
in lands where sidhe and scarecrow dance.

Ah, sweet as milk in moonjugs creaming,
we smell a rose in Adam’s garden,
still wide awake, alive in dreaming,
we see a gentle visage harden.

It’s time to seek another realm,
where night can not switch out the day,
with Drocks and Drizzards at the helm
we set our course and drift away.

Jim Hayes

The Tortoise

The tortoise is the swiftest beast.
He proves the last is not the least.
His view is long. His legs have shutters.
He loiters in his house, and putters,

dislikes the dash, prefers to snooze,
would be a stone if he could choose;
an armor-plated, languid mole, he
embraces fleeting moments slowly.

Ed Shacklee
The Otter

Otters are epitomes of cheer, except the otters living around here. Unlike the dogged beaver building dams, the average otter’s happier than clams and outmaneuvers trout as if clairvoyant: he’s unafraid of depth because he’s buoyant.

The otters around here, instead, are dour. The fire in their eyes is damped; they glower at those who pass them by the corner brook, act like they’ve read or written every book, avoid the sun, disdain the water’s drench while smoking cigarettes both thin and French, and only swim around in dry vermouth. What happened to the otters of my youth?

The Imaginary Friend

He had a little dog who’d eat your schoolwork done at home. As furtive and subversive as a mole who swims the loam, dishonest as the day was long and honeyed as the comb, he’d outlaugh your hyenas and was crafty as a gnome.

He wore the cat’s pajamas, and he wore them inside out. He yawned at ancient llamas while he rented room for doubt. His smile was your umbrella. When you went on walkabout and the way was straight and narrow, he would find another route.

An antic, antsy prankster heard to sing among the mimes, he’d swing with Quasimodo wreaking havoc with the chimes. When he punished Dostoyevsky for some novel writing crimes you took the blame, and had to write your name a hundred times.

The first to break from prison when Pandora took a peek inside a box of chocolates that would last a child a week, he helped drown all your sorrows until everything went Greek; but don’t believe your shadow died—he’s playing hide and seek.

Ed Shacklee
Amelioration

1

It hurts. It always hurts. It never stops. Amelioration is a myth, like cool Tortoises who will break the yellow tape Ahead of hares. You can wait if you wish For this bald lie. The world is made of lies: The moon is gouda, better, dear, than you.

2

Our parson is a person. I am sure His parsonage should house a personage. Fair dinkum, since he consters God for man In little ways, like jumble sales. The alms Accumulated in our poor box pay For polishing the poor box. When the hunt Rides by, the white-bread horsemen raise their hats. The parson can read Hebrew. Like a fox, He leads the philistines a fiery chase. What does he have to offer this dumb street Of cars and bars, red rovers headed home?

3

What would he read in Hebrew? He would read I AM, the 2 words everybody knows. Everybody says he is. YOU ARE Is what I want. The parson doesn’t know: He tills his fields from right to left and never Remarks what can be made from mud, the lithe Life, the quirky brown fox, the dogma gone.

4

I don’t know why I love you, but a dew Soaks these old shoes, and still I haven’t slept. This morning isn’t what it used to be: It gilds the hemlocks, growing, growing, green-o. If wildlife lives here, in this neighborhood, It hangs over the windows, spider silk Dotted with dew, with bits of last week’s flies, A codex for the future. Let’s go in.

Richard Epstein
Fiction

Narrative is never easy. A man says to a woman, Well? She says, I’m married—I’d like to, but I won’t. That’s one. Another is something about the boy becomes a man, the novel as bar mitzvah. Who knows where and who and when (the why cares for itself: it grows out of an action like a road from chickens), he knows it all. There is no more.

Dragged around his hometown, holes in his heels, Hector foresees no sympathy. He saw Paris in springtime, Helen in his hands, and held no hope for heroism. Lies he strangling on dust and perfectly preserved and wishing he had lived in Tel Aviv, where God is only dietary laws. That is a story. Narrative is hard.

Anna and Vronsky sitting in a tree, waiting for Tolstoy to put down that serf and wind them up. Between his history and fun, he hasn’t time to make the trains. If they must run on time and over her, she’ll have to ask her husband, Mr Civil Servant, him with the ears. Of course he is an arbitrary construct. He’s a text, like you and you and us. And you are too demanding. Plot your courses. Take an urn and fill it full of axes, fish, and foul conniption. Whisk your facts into a froth. Maybe it rises like a plot. Or not. There are so few. And sex beneath the bleachers, the hand beneath the tablecloth, the swift kick in the heart are easier. And short.

And yet between awaking as a bug and rutting, over public roads, though mined, a reader passes, spectacled, debugged, and disenfranchised. Murder on his mind, his hands are soft and empty. He’s confessed, hoping to be some more. More. More fuel. More complication and machination. The lowdown reader, dusty to death with common soil,

Continued
is crossing, wholly ground. If Bill believed
in Christmas, if he’s right in telling lies,
one drop of black blood turns you black, which makes
the heart of every one of us a coal
live in the pulpy embers. See them run,
rabbits and airmen and, oh Lord, even Jim:
one of them meant to know where he is running,
they cannot stop. Oh, narrative is hard.

Running for Godot

These glossy covers promise anything
For thirty dollars: rock hard abs or pecs,
Healing astral selves or beaten wrecks
Who tend to think they’re ill with everything.

Older volumes stress the sadness here:
The absent fathers who despised all noise,
With codependent wives who smothered boys
And spawned a helpless brood who drown in beer.

The newer titles try to offer hope
To younger people who might still escape
A life reliving brutal taunts, or rape:
Proud to be Gay, or Bullies: How to Cope.

Will these self-help tomes reach an audience
That’s young enough to not have reached the place
Where minds grow paralyzed and cannot face
Themselves, and rather race along the fence

Of self-help volumes, running for Godot?
Or will the teenagers in therapy
Also learn to gnash obsessively
On their own wounds, and chase their own shadows?

Richard Epstein

Jeff Holt
Ballast

Sailor boy, lover of the sea—
I harbor my own notion
of the way you see me:

vast-eyed and open,
still, broken as a sunken ship,
unstable as your waves—
sun-bleached victims
of the wind.

Of you, I see a tide;
a clear-eyed student
of the ocean’s teaching:
rising
and falling
to the occasion.

Rachel Nix
Review

R. Nemo Hill
‘When Men Bow Down’

Dos Madres Press, 2012

One of the film quotes I have carried around in my head for many years is a line by the John Malkovich character, Port Moresby, in The Sheltering Sky:

‘A tourist thinks about going home the moment they arrive … Whereas a traveler might not come back at all.’

R. Nemo Hill (hereinafter referred to as simply, Nemo) is most certainly not guilty of such a fault. As the postscripts to many of the poems in this collection attest, he has surely travelled, if mostly in Southeast Asia, but he is by no means a mere tourist. To expand on the distinction somewhat: the tourist tends to be constantly in motion—camera at the ready to collect the evidence that he has ‘been there’, however briefly—whereas for the traveller it is the ‘being there’ which matters most. And in order to truly ‘be’ somewhere it is necessary to be still from time to time.

Of course, the traveller generally carries a camera too, and Nemo is no exception. In his poems, though, there is much less sense of the stasis of a still-life, evidential snapshot than of the movie vignette. Hence my cheap trick of opening with the above quote. More often than not one is presented with life in motion, but with the slight detachment (sometimes redolent of W. S. Merwin) which is implicit in the mediation of the lens there is equally a sense of stillness in the poet/observer. Detachment, however, should not be taken to imply emotional uninvolvevement; these are poems which evince, as Rose Kelleher notes in the front matter, a ‘respectful sympathy’ for their subjects.

To digress a little before the main event, another peculiarity of Nemo’s poetry is his trademark punctuation: ‘—.’ It usually occurs midline, at a caesura, and I have come to think of it as ‘Nemo’s emphatic pause’. Whether it is significant I do not know, but one quite often finds the reverse punctuational device, ‘.—’, in the work of C. P. Cavafy, apparently performing a similar task. There are three ideas to hang onto then, in considering these poems: motion, stillness, and pause.

Let us be perverse and begin near the end, with the poem, ‘No Man’ (from the last section of the book, itself entitled ‘No Man’). It is a sequence of seven ghazals, each of seven couplets (or shers). The ghazal has somewhat mystical associations with Sufism, so I suspect the choice of the classically mystical number seven is entirely intentional. It is also a fairly strict form, allowing here for the fact that in Western hands some latitude is often taken; one of its defining and fixed features, though, is the radif or repeated word at the end of each couplet. Another more numinous quality of the ghazal is what I would call its anti-narrative: each couplet, though connected in theme and tone with the others, also stands still and alone, entire of itself. My excuse for beginning here, then, is simply that this poem exemplifies very well in its own way the three ideas introduced above: motion, stillness and pause. This, from the first in the sequence,
All upright things are bent and bowed by wind.  
Who taught your hair to argue with the wind?

Be still now, let this rose collapse.  
Why whisper in an overwhelming wind?

…

Here is no man. He slips right through your arms.  
He can’t control the volume of the wind.

is enough to convey the idea, but I could not resist quoting a couple of lines from the final ghazal, about which there is something rather Buddhist (a sort of benign nihilism, if such a thing be possible), and in which beauty and originality are allowed to trump literal meaning:

…

A pocket with a hole may give you nothing:  
a feminine hashish, an airy nothing.

By traveling circus moon tonight, come quickly—
bring wheel of light, bring lash—and spare me nothing!

…

If Nemo exercises latitude regarding the form it is in sometimes refraining (pun intended) from the use of the quaafiyaa (a rhyming series of words immediately preceding the radif); but he does follow classical tradition in quietly inserting his own name (takhallus) into each final sher (maqt); since Nemo himself is, of course, No Man—a fact which rather emphasises for me the idea of the poet as somewhat detached observer.

I began by focusing on the visual aspects of these poems, but there is a great deal of sonic satisfaction to be had also. In the eponymous poem, ‘When Men Bow Down’, the very title signals that, and one is not to be disappointed in what follows. There are four stanzas, each of seven lines (do I see a pattern forming?), with each, except the last, comprising a single sentence:

…

When men bow down to sip their drinks  
in dimmed down day or midnight’s glare,  
in common rows or solitaire,  
in a silence startled by the clink  
of ice on glass—as if in prayer,  
their eyes close and their focus shrinks  
when men bow down to sip their drinks.

…
... — Of passing moments stripped,
the present stares, the future blinks,
when men bow down to sip their drinks.

And there, announcing the terminal argument, is that ‘emphatic pause’ I mentioned earlier.

It is worth saying that this poem, though very different in structure, also has a ghazal-like quality: each stanza could stand alone, and there is hardly a narrative, despite the thematic connection. There is both motion and stillness, but these are not just four stills: the poem is like a moment drawn out into a short establishing shot for a movie.

Of course, in that poem (from the second section of the book, enticingly entitled ‘The Sons of Hecuba Present Their Wounds’) Nemo is on his home ground, New York. But it is in the first section, ‘Lovely Downcast Eye’, that we find the greatest concentration of poems grounded in his travels (to Bali, Singapore, Bangkok, Java and other places hitherto unknown to me). Incidentally, those readers who are themselves of a wandering disposition may take a short detour at this point and read two poems from this section in full—‘Lovely Downcast Eye’ and ‘A Lantern There’—in Angle issue 1. So let us look at two other, contrasting, poems here. First, a relatively short one in iambic pentameter, with a straightforward AABB rhyme scheme: ‘Bangkok Before Dawn’. Here the observer’s detachment is palpable and actual:

Through my double pane of hotel glass
there’s only one sound dull enough to pass:
the traffic river’s roar ten stories down,
in which the first few songs of birds will drown.

... There is no earth to grasp. No star for wishing.
And this ochre moon? It’s full of all that’s missing—
a round and empty television screen
on which (all broadcast ended) nothing’s seen.

I am reminded of that line of Isherwood’s: ‘I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.’ But if Nemo is a (movie) camera he is clearly one unequipped with a rose-tinted filter; despite the exotic setting, the scene is not romanticised. Perhaps ‘not thinking’ is going a little far, though, since there is clearly a thought, or rumination, in that last stanza. However, the thought is not imposed on the scene, it arises from it. What we have is a moment of stillness, pause and reflection on a world tirelessly, messily and noisily in motion.

By contrast, in ‘Eggs and Strawberries’, it is the scene (or scenes) which arise from the thought:

It’s first a question of the weight of things,
for all things fall through space as well as time.

... The famous bed of nails on which there rests
the sideshow swami is the paradigm
of all those bodies which, though manifest,
are somehow by their own concreteness undistressed.
Here, the thought is of motion, but the sideshow swami (later, also, the lotus bloom and the Buddha) remains impassively at rest. In the remainder of the poem (a long one, of twelve nine-line stanzas) a scene is depicted in which there is a great deal of motion (trucks of fruit and eggs descending a treacherous mountain path) from which the poet picks out ‘points of stillness’—not least, a young boy who sits ‘with paranormal harmlessness’ (that is to say, I assume, swami-like) on a cargo of eggs.

There is something curiously satisfying about this poem, from a metrical point of view: each stanza having eight pentameter lines with a concluding hexameter line. In addition to strawberries and eggs, I am rather partial to a little metrical variation. I confess freely that, had the author not enlightened me, I would not have recognised the form as the Spenserian stanza. One lives and learns.

I must say at this point that I am unable to give more than a flavour of what is on offer in this collection of forty-nine poems in the space available, and in doing so I am necessarily focusing on a few poems which demonstrate its range. By compete contrast to the foregoing, therefore, I move next to the alliterative, hemistichal ‘Men and Darkness’. [Thanks to the miracle of the Internet, you can read the full poem as well as one other from the collection, ‘Rain Can’t Forget To Fall’, at the Soundzine archives here, where you will also be treated to readings by the author.] This poem is another stretched-out moment of stillness, curiously grounded in a dramatic scene. As a tropical storm moves away, the narrator is reading a book:

Hemingway’s hoisted
his gun to his head,

he’s fired, and fallen.

The finished book

lies in my lap …

…

But I’m barely able

to see myself now,

by this low watt bulb

much less some other.

There are opposing schools of thought as to the essential nature of poetry on the page: on the one hand, some would contend that the written word is merely a script for an oral performance; on the other, that it is recorded thought, destined to be read aloud, as it were, only in the head. Both views have merit, but I must confess that I rather prefer the second idea. There is a sort of quiet intimacy about many of Nemo’s poems, such as this one; it is as if they were thoughts barely spoken out loud which only I, as the individual reader, am privy to. And I think it is that, rather than familiarity with the scenes and images presented, which draws me into the poems and makes me feel like a fellow traveller.

No doubt Nemo is a formalist at heart, and yet he is more than willing and able to negotiate with that to his own ends: he uses rhyme unselfconsciously, but is not always hogtied by rigid or predictable schemes; he will happily mix masculine and feminine endings as well as varying metre, or even switch to freer lines mid-flow. A good example of this is in the poem, ‘This Is the Hour’ [also available at the Soundzine archives, here]. But a poem like ‘Sonnet for Bill’ does exactly what it says on the can, despite the use of somewhat slant rhymes:
Forgive me now if face to face with death
I turn to paint a portrait more discreet:
a single glass of warm milk that’s been left
to cool beside a window. In the street
outside, long shadows of late afternoon
are gathering and entering your room.

Well, the movie metaphor is good as far as it goes, but this (as it suggests itself) is the painterly eye at work. If there is motion here it is of the almost imperceptible kind (the gathering of shadows), and the point of focus is that glass of milk, which would be a metaphor for stillness but for its equally almost imperceptible cooling. This is subtle yet surprising imagery which underscores the subject’s own slow-motion last journey; we are, you might say, all fellow travellers in at least one way.

These days, there is a good deal of poetry out there which does rather badly what prose would do better. When Men Bow Down is a collection which amply demonstrates what it is that poetry can do and prose cannot (see ‘Pastel’ below for a paradigm case). This is highly recommended reading.

Philip Quinlan
Pastel

I long to fade from action
into stupefaction,
slipping through the cracks
that restless fullness lacks.

I can no longer choose
between primary hues.
I crave complete collapse
into pastel gaps.

In torn mint and mallows,
by terracotta shallows,
where the gnat’s lavender eye
kindles heat in a sigh;

on a vanishing palette, where black
is blind, and white is mute—
lay me on my back,
in brown mud and gray suit.

R. Nemo Hill
Review

Rick Mullin
‘Coelacanth’

Dos Madres Press, 2013

The Resurrection Man

Coelacanths are living fossils. The whole group was thought to be extinct until a specimen was caught in 1938. (BBC Nature)

Just as the Coelacanth of the title has returned from extinction, so many of the poems in Rick Mullin’s new collection are concerned with resurrecting those who have gone. John Paul I, Van Gogh, Lassie, and a storm-marooned catfish are amongst those brought to life; not forgetting the coelacanth itself which can be found ‘burping under glass’ (‘Under Glass’). The poems are not simple portraits however; Rick Mullin takes the reader beyond the frame of what is known about the subject and uses language, rhythm, allusions, and metaphor to pose questions and trigger explorations. Rick Mullin is also a visual artist and knows much more about painters than I do, so his poem ‘Ungemalte Bilder’ about the ‘unpainted pictures’ of the impressionist painter Emil Nolde sent me off to Google to find out about this painter who Hitler banned from painting and the small (concealable) water colours he painted in secret. Once I had found the story, the poem delighted me with its allusions to hiddenness and secrecy, and the questions it poses about paintings that can’t be seen—and by extension about poems that can’t be read:

Magi, circus girls, apostles,
curl together in the dark
as dogs in birchwood shadows bark
outside the master’s door.

In looking for lines from poems I wanted to quote, I became aware of how extensively he uses enjambment; not least because it was difficult to find lines which could stand alone. The use of enjambment, together with subtle interweaving of sounds, creates a cohesive, sinuous voice in which Mullin’s frequent use of full rhyme feels natural. For instance, in the four lines above, ‘circus’ chimes off ‘girls’, ‘curl’, and ‘birchwood’ and other threads are drawn between magi/dogs/together, shadows/outside, and apostles/dogs amongst others so that the simple rhyme of dark/bark has a sense of inevitability, to this reader, in grounding the lines and tying off the tapestry of woven sounds.

A number of the other poems in Coelacanth are poems of place and travel poems, often noted by a place and date on the page. I have to confess to having a prejudice against such poetry; it can too often feel as if a slight acquaintance is insisting on showing me an album of holiday snaps and expecting the show of interest considered polite on such occasions. I had no need for polite shows of interest in these poems though; Rick Mullin brings his painter’s and poet’s eye to bear in finding the detail which brings a place alive and opens possibilities of pleasing layers and ambiguities. In ‘Spanish Mustangs’, the wild horses of North Carolina
rummaged through our garbage cans like rats—
enormous, pregnant rats with dreadlocks, each
a sunspot on the intercoastal flats

The keen observation of the horses leads, through their hoofing of the waterline, back
to the human observers to leave the poem open for the reader to consider the questions
implied in the ending:

To hoof the waterline of the lagoon
where sunset casts the due envelopment
of twilight on imaginary streams
that cut across the white sand of our dreams.

Mullin’s eye is caught by ‘Determined blondes on bicycles’ in ‘Zuiderkerk’ who
become ‘A daisy chain of fleeting bells’ who herald the sights and sounds of an
Amsterdam evening, leaving the speaker ‘in blissful vertigo’ as a heron

tilts its wings on landing in the green
and crystal-laden stream of everything

the final lines somehow making me think of McNiece’s great poem ‘Snow’ and ‘The
drunkenness of things being various’ and demonstrates Mullin’s sense of wonder he
shares with the reader in many of the poems.

Rick Mullin uses received form extensively in this collection; his use of form is
unpretentious and the poems mostly have the easy, natural feel enhanced by his
already noted use of enjambment. Formalist poetry that feels so natural usually
indicates, to this reader, congruence of form and content where the content or theme
has found the form, rather than being shoe-horned into it. The poems include sonnets,
sestina, sapphics, villanelle, and notably a canzone—‘Rise’. The canzone is a form
which is hard to write well and can be hard to read as the relentlessly repeating end-
words can become an irritation. In ‘Rise’, however, the repeated words, especially
‘light’ and ‘rise’, become incantatory with each repeat adding depth and meaning:

[...] You are enraptured in the light
and cast forever downward. Better rise.
The only prayer for darkness is to rise

and paint it white, to hear the blackbird rise
and shake its broken wing against the light
of darkness. A throaty prerecorded ‘Rise’
inscribed in silicon or vinyl: ‘Rise!’

If I have a quibble with Mullin’s use of form it is with the villanelles. I am aware this is
partly personal prejudice; it is rare for me to read a villanelle which I feel really works
in the way I want poetry to work—that is to unfold layers and depths with re-reading.
Of the villanelles in the collection, ‘Under Glass’ works best for me, its comedic tone
playing off the puzzle of the living fossil of the collection’s title:

Mythology has reached a sorry pass
when ‘-ologists’ start bringing out their dead.
The Coelacanth is burping under glass
expressing common bottom-feeder gas,
and look at this—a Chupacabra head.
Mythology has reached a sorry pass.

Other villanelles, ‘If What You Want is Fire’ and ‘The Strand’, don’t work as well, for me; the restriction of the repeating lines seeming to prevent Mullin from taking the poems beyond their frame, as he does with most of the collection.

Villanelle quibbles aside, this collection is rich with interest, crafted with skill, a poet’s attention to sound and a painter’s attention to detail. Mullin has a gentle, dry, wit which brings charm to the poems and an endearing self-deprecation which denies any pretentiousness; early in the collection, in the poem ‘Sticking Point’, he tells us

At 50 I am likely to arrive
with roses from the gas station, in need
of better shoes, a less frenetic haircut.
With a smile just barely managing
to hold the road.

An image that stayed with me, and charmed me, throughout the rest of the collection.

Angela France
Review

Sean Elliott
‘The Status of the Cat’

Playdead Press, 2014

This is Sean Elliott’s second collection, the first being the chapbook, Waterhouse and the Tempest (Acumen, 2009), from which some of the current poems are taken. On first inspection, it apparently contains twenty-two poems, although many of these consist of multiple parts so that the volume runs to a respectable eighty-four pages.

The title of the collection is taken from that of one of the three sub-poems of ‘Cats’—the others being ‘Edgar and Sam’ and ‘Domestic Behaviour’—which begins:

Schrödinger’s mouse is nervous: having heard
the cat is neither dead nor quite alive …

and runs to ten lines of fully-rhymed, neatly and naturally-enjambed iambic pentameter; and that strict formality, alongside a simplicity and clarity of language, characterises the collection as a whole.

The opening poem, ‘Dawlish’, is itself in nine parts. These, the opening lines of the collection,

I name the stragglers stranded at low-tide:
anemone, dog-whelk and hermit crab
shrink from my hand at large in their stone crib,
resilient and frail they flinch or hide.

... are again in iambic pentameter, and also employ what seems to be Sean Elliott’s favourite scheme: envelope rhyme. Beyond the technical, though, my first observation, derived from this opening sequence, is that this poet is particularly good on the poetry of place and atmosphere, gratifying effects being achieved by the accrual of spare but precisely-drawn detail.

The forms and tones of the sub-poems in ‘Dawlish’ vary somewhat, but there is a strand of melancholy or regret running through them, ending in ‘The Farm’ with:

No comfort but in words; I hear the tread
of those I love and hide from; let me hold
this sorrow back. They’ll say he never said
a word; they’ll say he was a little cold.

... Something Frostian lurks in these lines, and that impression is strengthened for me (although I’m not sure why) by the thrice-repeated ‘No comfort but in words’ motif.
Not all of the poems are sequences, though, and among those that stand alone is the brief gem which is the eight lines of ‘The Woods’:

A whirl of trees, the urgent second goes,
a crack of branches in the cool half-dark,
remote the dazzle of the sun on bark,
nutshells and mud on loosened clothes.

... 

Not startling imagery, perhaps, but lines of spare elegance, nonetheless. I would confess to a marked preference for shorter poems: the shorter a poem is, it seems to me, the more chance it has of being perfect, and this one is nearly that.

Of the seven ‘Love Poems’ it is ‘Haytor’ which takes my fancy the most:

... 

I asked if I might marry you.
For you I was a summer fling,
a frolic with a younger man,
an almost boy of twenty-two.
(Somewhere I heard a lapwing sing,
dazed by my words, I had no plan.)

... 

Never easy to ring the changes on such an old theme, but here, I think, the parenthetical rescues us from sentimentality.

Another difficult subject is, of course, sex. In ‘Threesome’, from ‘Social Notes’, we find:

Two men, one woman and a plot
as basic as their acting skills;
the grappling combinations knot
body to body without rest
and promise non-stop adult thrills
as each man cups a generous breast.

... 

This nicely takes a line between coyness and vulgarity, avoiding both pitfalls, and has a quietness about it which is again characteristic of the volume as a whole. But despite that quietness and formality, the simplicity and spareness of the language, these are poems of surprising emotional depth, which becomes evident as one re-reads.

In ‘Indira’s Laundry’, a longer poem in unrhymed pentameter tercets, there is an underlying sadness, conveyed through quotidian detail rather than explicitly stated:

... 

Each night your parents phone to check you’re safe,
exiled from Bangladesh, their home burned down,
their voices waver with a fear of rape;
Having established the subject as correspondent to the narrator, the poem concludes:

... I walk the beach,

uncertain whether I've deserted you,
the sea subdued, the moonlight's fleck of tissue
stinging my eyes, and wonder how to answer.

The sub-text here is self-reproach or self-admonishment, which strikes a chord with me, since I have used the same device myself on more than a few occasions. In the work of others, I find it disarming and pleasingly unegotistical.

Back to the poetry of place, here is ‘Dead Crabs’ (one of the sub-poems in ‘East Coast’), which I quote in full:

The winter cold had killed
the crabs and dragged them back,
their plates and claws no shield
against that slow attack;
what numbness had they let
invade them stealthily,  
what cause here for regret—
why waste my sympathy?
Seagulls surveyed that wealth:
hinged shells and emptied eyes
and I, despite myself,
wished death were otherwise.

Again, this is a testament to the possibility of perfection in the shorter poem (so much so that I felt unable to abbreviate it), and a piece (I, not espousing the modern fetish for line- and foot-counting, would call it a sonnet, for it is certainly that in intent) which ably demonstrates how effective form, rhyme, and metre can be when the craft is polished almost to invisibility. A great deal of modern formal poetry trumpets its crafty credentials rather too loudly, in my view.


There is, about this collection, a certain Englishness which I find engaging, and which is not wholly attributable to the poems of place contained within it: a surface reserve which belies deeper currents of thought or concern, perhaps? In any event, this is not poetry which forces its attentions on the reader, nor does it have those dread ‘palpable designs’ on one; rather, it understatedly invites appreciation and rewards revisits. So, if this review is shorter and less prolix than my usual, I think that is in keeping. Would that I could have quoted more in full, but nil desperandum, since we have two poems by Sean Elliott in this very issue.

A pleasing new discovery and a recommended read.

Philip Quinlan
Review

Catherine Chandler
‘Glad and Sorry Seasons’

Biblioasis, 2014

I am delighted to review the poems of a favourite poet. I don’t have a hard copy of the book, so I am unable to comment on that, but I have found the actual poems extremely rewarding.

I have been reading Catherine Chandler’s poems for some years now and I have always recognised in her the voice of a natural poet. Metrical poetry comes as easily to her as plain speech does to others. It is her native tongue. She simultaneously inhabits three different languages—English, Spanish, and French—and these have subtly enriched her perception.

The book is divided into six parts:

Part i: Give Sorrow Words
Part ii: Driving Back Shadows
Part iii: The Oldest Sins
Part iv: With Mirth and Laughter
Part v: A Smack of All Neighbouring Languages
Part vi: Glad and Sorry Seasons

The opening sonnet, ‘Coming to Terms’, is in the voice of a woman who has experienced a miscarriage. It is stunning and heartrending and it sets the tone for the powerful writing that follows.

‘Two Poems of the Sea’ (published in full in Angle issue 1), both beautiful, use formal meter onomatopoeically, almost as a musical accompaniment to songs about life’s disillusionment. The first, ‘The Dawning’, ends:

And then the crash. The undertow. The ache.

The second poem uses Sapphic stanzas. The meter surges with the sea:

Wave on wave all heaving and arch and spillage;
blue and green and grey overlaid with silver.
Christmas Day—my saviour the South Atlantic.
Triumph. Surrender.

Catherine Chandler’s use of formal structure frees her to concentrate on tone and sense. If I had ever believed that invented form enabled expressiveness I would doubt that as I read her best poems. Like good wine in good wine glasses the flavour is what matters.

A general theme is the arc of time. From then to now.
It isn’t possible to examine every poem here but I want to mention some snatches. The almost nursery-rhyme-like tetrameter couplets of ‘The Flying Moment’ (published in full in Angle issue 3) look back at the poet’s youth untill she pulls us back to the present with crisp rhymes:

But now the world’s a shadow box
of butterflies. And there are clocks:

‘Vinegar Tree’ seems to me to be a perfectly made little poem (I have learned that the form, previously unknown to me is the Leona Rima):

Late Fall. The staghorn sumac’s crown
is now ablaze. Though geese have flown,
the tree’s red conic drupes will feed
the phoebes, thrush and grouse in need
of food through months of ice and snow.
But brew the bitter tufts just so,
and they can etch a pearl. I know.
For I have gathered up its seed,
fair-weather love, and drunk it down.

The sound and meter are so integrated with the images that nothing is lacking. It makes me think of a painting by Mantegna.

‘The Measure of Their Days’ plays upon the repeated swash and clunk of an old-fashioned washing machine as a left-right metaphor for two sisters who chose different paths.

The last poem in Part One, ‘Intervals’, tells of the erased spaces in the memory of an Alzheimer’s sufferer who could remember his childhood toys but not his wife.

In Part Two, ‘Driving Back Shadows’, she again hits us with a strong sonnet, ‘After a Line By Millay’ (‘Grow not too high, grow not too far from home’). The poet seems to be examining her own peripatetic life.

A lovely triolet, ‘A Fieldstone Fence’, makes me think of Frost or Hardy: ‘A fieldstone fence still stands today’.

I was moved by ‘November’, particularly the last stanza in which Chandler’s special feeling for sound excels itself:

November’s neither there nor there, but here
in dazzling dawns that dissipate to grey;
here in the tilting asymmetric branch
and sharp note of a towering white pine where
the pik and churlee of a purple finch
can either break a heart or make a day.

The final poem of that section is ‘Winterbourne’ in which a stream ‘sings’ to the poet who is ‘flanked by behemoths of snow.’
Part Three, ‘The Oldest Sins’, is composed of ‘Seven Deadly Sonnets’.

The first, ‘Superbia’, tells of tightrope walker, Blondin, who asks for a volunteer that he can piggyback across the Niagara Falls.

‘Acedia’ tells of a flashy, superficial exhibitionist who kills himself from boredom.

‘Luxuria’ tells of a ‘bad girl’ who didn’t fit in the neighbourhood.

‘Invidia’ causes me to take issue with the poet, who has accepted the popular misrepresentation of the honest and gifted musician Salieri. The sonnet is well written nevertheless.

‘Gula’ is a sly examination of two women-shoppers in a supermarket.

‘Ira’ examines our breaking points, those dangerous moments when we might become someone else.

‘Avarita’ is a clever sonnet about Imelda Marcos’s greed for shoes.

Part Four, ‘With Mirth and Laughter’, starts with a delightful sonnet about sonnets.

‘The Bard’ is a clever cento/sestina taken from Shakespeare. I can’t love the cento as an idea, but if they must exist this is about as good as they get.

‘All these Words’ is a homage which plays lovingly with Richard Wilbur’s ‘All These Birds’.

‘A Mother’s Kyrielle’ uses the ancient troubadour form with energy and wit. A real accomplishment.

‘Rush Hour Sonondilla’ did make me laugh with delight as I followed the meditation on various culinary and aquatic aspects of the sardine until the final couplet which suddenly turned into the lament of a commuter in a tightly packed railway carriage:

For now take heart in that you’re free
not packed inside this train like me.

‘In Retrospect’ is another arc of time poem ending with the enduring rewards of matrimony.

Part Five, ‘A Smack of All Neighbouring Languages’, is made up of Chandler’s translations of other poets. I won’t say much about these as I don’t know the originals. Since it is easy to praise a poem for its beauty alone rather than for its fidelity, I prefer to refrain from comment.

Of the five French Canadian poems, all of which are interesting in different ways, the poem that touched me was ‘The Passerby’ written in 1903 by Émile Nelligan. A melancholy woman passed the poet in the darkening park. The younger poet felt that his life was like that of the grieving stranger:
My youth is like this woeful passerby—
many shall cross my path before I die;

Of the five Spanish-American women poets, ‘The Wonderful Boat’ (La barca milagrosa), written in 1910 by Delmira Augustini, captured my attention with its intense beauty.

I was equally caught up by ‘The Sonnets of Death (1) (Los sonetos de la muerte), written in 1914 by Gabriela Mistral, in which a woman almost triumphantly buries her lover (husband?) in the knowledge that she will lie with him and that no other woman can have him.

‘Rebel’ (Rebelde), written in 1919 by Juana de Ibarbourou, is a spritely defiance of death.

Part Six opens with a strong free verse pantoum lamenting the historical inundation of established Canadian villages and farms for a hydroelectric project.

Our lives will never be the same—

‘Upheavals’ is an intense and powerful poem about the Chilean earthquake of 2010. All Catherine Chandler’s gifts of sound, meter and emotion coalesce:

those galaxies of grief, of x’d-off days—
outnumber each spectacular KABOOM!
that shocks and awes and tends to paraphrase
the terms of our unmentionable doom.

She writes sensitively in ‘Heartwood’ of an old woman whose mind is dwindling but who is sustained by a lifelong intimacy with trees.

Now in a frail voice, tremolo,
she whispers ‘pear’ as if it were
ineffable as petrichor,
as time tilts back to long ago
when she was young.

‘Beach Dogs’, In memory of Alfonso Storni, is an amazing poem about an imagined encounter on a beach between a stray dog and a poet on the verge of suicide. The poet, Alfonso Storni, actually did exist and she did drown herself.

‘Edward Hopper’s Automat’ is as starkly lit and clear as the paintings of Hopper himself. The human drama which Hopper’s work implies is examined sympathetically.

I want to tell her that I know. I know
she can survive whatever’s brought her here;
that glad and sorry seasons come and go;
that there is nothing and no one to fear—
I’ve owned the loss, I’ve worn the coat and hat.
I am the woman in the automat.

There are more fine poems than I am able to mention here. I can only encourage those who love good poetry to add this book to their collection. Many of the poems ask for repeated reading. It was a great pleasure to review this collection. I feel enriched by the experience. If I have one reservation it is that it might have been helpful to the reader to include a note identifying some of the less-familiar forms.

Janet Kenny
Review

David Mason
‘Sea Salt’

Red Hen Press, 2014

What do love, death, and the night have in common? A lot, said the romantics Novalis and John Keats. But both those poets died young, their loves unfulfilled. And love is different when you’re older and have had various lovers and marriages, isn’t it? This new collection of poems by David Mason uses the L word more than any contemporary poetry I’ve come across, although its author is middle-aged and recently married for the third time. A poem in Sea Salt called ‘One Another’ admits that mature lovers bring a past:

What current between us
  touches abandoned days
  to the present of yes?

That word present is the key, since love always lives in the present:

  … what we are, we may
  be without asking why,
  given without a way.

  As you are. That’s how I
  would have you be
  if I had any say.

Sea Salt is Mason’s fifth book of poetry, the first collection of shorter poems since Arrivals in 2004. A verse novel, Ludlow, and a memoir on Mason’s time in and connection to Greece, News from the Village, as well as a collection of poetry criticism were published in the meantime. Mason has also been writing libretti for the composer Lori Laitman—an operatic version of The Scarlet Letter and a libretto for an oratorio, Vedin, based on the experiences of children at the concentration camp of Terezin—and a libretto for a one-act opera about the lives of Picasso and Gertrude Stein in Paris under the Nazis, to music by Tom Cipullo. A libretto for Ludlow has been written and that opera (also by Laitman) will debut in 2015. Another book of narrative poems, called Davey McGravy: Tales for Children and Adult Children, is coming out soon from Paul Dry books. Add this to being the poet laureate of Colorado, teaching at Colorado College, and traveling back and forth between Colorado and Oregon to be with his new wife Chrissy Mason, aka Cally Conan-Davies, and it’s easy to see that Dave Mason has been living the full life.

This new collection, as I was saying, is permeated by the themes and imagery of love, death, and the night, as well as the sea. Arrivals, too, as Gregory Dowling notes in his recent monograph on Mason, was full of marine imagery, and I don’t think it is too much of a stretch to think of Sea Salt as a fulfillment of various auguries in the earlier collection, in particular the wish for shedding identity, for release from the endlessly turning wheel of the little self:
That’s how a lifetime passes,
closing, re-closing the wound,
a million stiches [sic] tied in time
denyinng and re-denying

until you learn to let
it lie and let
it weep,
and open. (‘Lieutenant Mason’)

The title of the new collection fits the contents well: we human beings are sea salt,
much more porous, solvent, and multi-valent than the shrink-wrapped ego
consciousness of much of contemporary life would have us know. A poem that lists
various kinds of striving, socially approved behavior, applauded achievement, and so
on, concludes that all those things are nothing compared

to the auricles and sheaths,
spikelets and seedheads of an ordinary
end-of-summer clump of roadside grass. (‘Incantation’)

This resembles the conclusion that Antonio Machado reached when he said that all
philosophies are gibberish compared to the eloquence of wind.

A beautiful thing about Mason’s decidedly romantic streak is that he is antiromantic as
well—since romanticism, as the modernists pointed out and compensated for, can
degenerate into bellybutton gazing and narcissistic epiphany-thrill-seeking. So
Mason’s poetry has always offered strong doses of a universal corrective to that:
toattention to our neighbors’ needs and realities. An example in this collection is ‘In the
Barber Shop’, which depicts a female barber cutting the hair of an old Polish woman
who apparently has had a stroke, and the old woman’s husband is tenderly soothing
her tremors. The barber tears up at the sight. The speaker of the poem, waiting for his
haircut, feels challenged by this scene of selfless love:

And even if you’ve seen such love before
there’s shame in having left it at the door,
in having thought too often of oneself
and present happiness.

When he sits down for his haircut after the old couple has left, the barber’s eyes pierce
his conscience: ‘And when you pay and leave and feel the cold, / the dicing blades of
light [glare from the ‘windshields in the supermarket lot’] will scatter you’.

From his first book on, Mason in his poems has explored introspective intimacy with
self and the world, while at the same time holding to an ethical and social awareness—
what Dowling calls the communal aspect of his poetry. This is a function of much of
Mason’s narrative work, where unsentimental human situations are represented in
blank verse with a conversational lilt that Mason learned from Frost and Hecht and
made entirely his own. Mason’s narrative poems express alter egos, personas, voices.
Sea Salt is literally Mason’s most lyrical volume to date: it has the lowest proportion of
narrative poetry of any previous collection. No narrative piece is longer than three
pages. In the dramatic monologue ‘Mrs. Mason and the Poets’, two sides of Mason’s poetry, romantic and realist, are at play in the story it tells. A reader might assume, as I did, given Mason’s often confessional content, that the Mrs. Mason of the poem is a relation. This is not the case, though surely there’s a hint of self-reflection in the choice of title. Mrs. Mason was the pseudonym for one Countess Mount Cashel, a woman in Shelley’s social circle in Pisa, who changed her name along with the man she was living with, George William Tighe, because common law marriage was socially unacceptable at that time. I found out with a quick Google search that the Countess was an Irish republican and freethinking disciple of her one-time governess and friend Mary Wollstonecraft—hence the connection to Shelley, who of course married Wollstonecraft’s daughter, Mary. Mrs. Mason is non-judgmentally non-plussed by Shelley, Byron, and their romantic antics; the young poets are counters to the everyday, low-octane life of the married couple. Mrs. Mason observes of Mr. Mason:

And I shall notice how a slight peach flush
illuminates his whiskers as the sun
rounds the palms and enters at our windows.

As Dowling writes, in this poem there is a ‘curious contrast between the placid, civilized tones of the speaker and the extravagant behavior of the poetic world with which she has come into contact’—the romantic-realist tandem which alternate and at times combine in Mason’s own writing. It seems, then, that ‘Mrs. Mason and the Poets’ is a bit of a poetic autobiography, and an engaging one at that.

Death, as I have mentioned a couple of times, is a major presence in Sea Salt. It first appears in the book with a narrative, ‘The Fawn’, about a cousin who came to stay with Mason’s family when he was a boy, and an incident when a neighborhood dog mortally injured a fawn, which the cousin tried to save in the family garage. Major changes—starting with the nation in 1963 and extending to the poet’s parents’ breakup—are linked to the fawn’s life-and-death moment:

The years are a great winnowing of lives,
but we had knelt together by the fawn
and felt the silence intervene.

And there are poems about the infirmity and death of Mason’s parents, as in the poem ‘Fathers and Sons’, which opens with the realist of real-life experiences: assisting an old parent to go to the toilet. Mason marvelously transforms the event, in this free verse poem, with just the right dose of humor:

How he had wiped my bottom
half a century ago, and how
I would repay the favor
if he would only sit.

It is the most delicate and tender bathroom humor imaginable. But the father doesn’t understand the son’s laughter at that moment, and is hampered by Alzheimer’s from saying so. The poem concludes:
Somewhere
a man of dignity would not be laughed at.
He could not see
it was the crazy dance
that made me laugh
trying to make him sit
when he wanted to stand.

If there is a more touching middle-age-son-with-his-frail-father poem than this, I haven’t read it yet.

Animals suffer the loss of their dead, but man, the being that questions being, thinks and wonders about them as well. As Mason writes in ‘Our Dead’,

The calmest night we ever watched at sea—
make that the night they wonder in.
No one expects them home.
The moon will not forbid their wandering.

Nor are they really ours, of course.
We only navigate that way,
by something named, some story told
to last until the day.

And the ordinariness of death can be one of its most shocking characteristics. Death often happens when it is far from our thoughts or we are far from the one who has died. In a poem about the day Mason’s mother died, her death, her suddenly being ‘not here’, takes place while Mason is on vacation in Wales: ‘I’d missed the whole final drama / while in my life’. It was a day as calm and ordinary ‘as a blur of hedgerow, / a sunlit quarter of portioned field’.

Death, like love and the night, wakes us from the dream of what we come to call daily life. It reminds us we’re salt in the sea. ‘The Future’, an early poem in section 2 of this three-section book (and one of several free verse poems in it) says:

We know we are nothing,
forgetting our names
or the names of the cities,
the nothing we know as we know
the light on a window.

Mason’s lyrical poems, such as this one, often play at the edges of a kind of agnostic negative theology, circumambulating the unsayable:

Others grew up with chrism, incense, law,
but I was exiled from the start to stare
at lightning hurled from the sky
into a lake that revealed only itself. (‘A Thorn in the Paw’)
As the title poem, which is the last poem in the collection, concludes:

The days are made of hours,
hours of instances,
and none of them are ours.
The sand blows through the fences.
Light darkens on the grass.
This too shall come to pass.

That last line, which is repeated twice in the poem, means ‘This will happen as well’, but it also recalls the saying ‘This too shall pass’, meaning ‘This will be over eventually’, which we say or are told when we’re miserable in one way or another. The sense of acquiescence and imminence, of anticipated and at-moments-realized release, runs through much of Mason’s poetry, but seems particularly concentrated in Sea Salt.

Section 2 opens with several poems in the mode of loss, falling apart, starting again from scratch, only to make a leap into new love with the playful ‘Sarong Song’, in quatrains of alternating tetrameter and trimeter. There follows, here and there in the collection, a string of love poems that seem to embody the release that various poems in Arrivals hankered for. ‘The Soul Fox’, for instance, is one of those short, perfect lyrics that gives the appearance of having come out whole; the epiphany of the outer experience which triggered it and that of the poem itself are indivisibly joined:

Write.
Let the white page bear the mark,
then melt with joy upon the dark.

The poem, dedicated to Chrissy Mason, marvelously condenses the fundamental insight that love lives always in the present, and gives the lovers night-vision. After seeing a fox in the yard, knowing that the footprints left behind will melt, the speaker says:

we who saw
his way of finding out, his night
of seeking, know what we have seen
and are the better for it.

In ‘Night and My Love’, as in Novalis, the unknowing knowledge of love is synonymous with night, where, as with death, our daytime identity is left behind:

Night, I beg you, night,
anoint me with anonymity,
annul my neediness, my expectations,
and let my love sleep on and wake
annealed, anew …

This poem also contains the Keatsian phrase ‘come sweet oblivion’, wording which might shock the convinced postmodernist, freeze-dried in Derrida. Modernism and postmodernism have laid a number of superego guilt trips on experiences and feelings nearly everyone can identify with, and Mason blissfully ignores those strictures, without, of course, reverting to faux or retro poeticisms. The sonnet ‘Another Thing’ confirms the sense that new love has helped the poet to let go of what Hölderlin, for
reasons very different to those of poststructuralism, called the curse of the ‘human, too human, ... mania / Which insists there is only the One, one country, one truth, and one way’ (trans. Michael Hamburger):

The others are one thing. They know they are.  
One compass needle. They have found their way  
and navigate by perfect cynosure.  
Go wreck yourself once more against the day  
and wash up like a bottle on the shore,  
lucidity and salt in all you say.

There’s the salt again, and the marine imagery: which for Mason links back to his youthful discoveries during a year in Greece, living on the bay of Kalamitsi. In an essay I wrote on Mason a few years back, I said that ‘Greece represents a different kind of rootedness [from that of Mason’s family roots in Colorado and the Northwest]. Greece in Mason’s poems is both Epicurean and Homeric; it is an image of intense sensual presence and unreflective vitality—part of his drive to “feel more alive in [his] own skin”, as he puts it in Ludlow’. After reading this collection, including the various references in it to Greece, I’d add that Greece is where Mason discovered sea salt, which has instructed him on viable ways to approach the trinity of love, night, and death. As Dowling comments about the poem ‘Kalamitsi’ in Arrivals, the place name Kalamitsi accounts for the title of that book; it is ‘the symbol of all ... longed-for arrivals’. A poem in the present collection, ‘Andritsena Revisited’, consists of two blank-verse sonnets about revisiting a mountain village in Greece:

Losing the path, you find Andritsena  
[ ... ]  
... so one world  
turns its gaze away and leaves another  
privately fruitful, moving at turtle speed  
toward what cannot be a destination.

In the ancient culture of Greece, down-to-earth existence and transpersonal participation in the whole of existence go together rather than clashing. The title of ‘Kéfi’, the poem that opens this book, refers to a Greek word for exuberance, passion, joy-in-being-alive; Mason opens it with the lines: ‘Every meal a communion. / The uninvited dead are here’.

I believe that every poetry review should quote one poem in its entirety. Sometimes I think this is all a review should do. However, I’m writing a review and for the whole poem I choose ‘Fog Horns’, which is a gem set in syllabics, varying two and three beats per line. Mason has mastered a fluid approach to form and rhyme, going with the flow of the poem’s own movement. The form is the objective correlative of its content:

The loneliest days,  
damp and indistinct,  
sea and land a haze.

And purple fog horns  
blossomed over tides—  
bruises being born
in silence, so slow,
so out there, around,
above and below.

In such hurts of sound
the known world became
neither flat nor round.

The steaming teapot
was all we fathomed
of is and is not.

The hours were hallways
with doors at the ends
opened into days

fading into night
and the scattering
particles of light.

Nothing was done then.
Nothing was ever
done. Then it was done.

I have not performed any dutiful ‘close readings’ of Mason’s poems in this review,
instead quoting from them copiously. I assume that readers can read for themselves. If
the review does any good, it will be to persuade others to acquire a copy of this book. 
Sea Salt is the real thing: one of our most authentic and accomplished poets at the top
of his lyric form.

Andrew Frisardi
Leaving Holland

It is evening, and the train is rushing into neatly felled shadows of poplars. I think of Mr V telling jokes in a bar, Kathelijne describing her house-mates as bitches of course! And all that sky; lying back by the water with Sventje, wanting a baby girl with pigtails. Then the endless questions, quarrels, accusations, withdrawals; long walks alone, canals clogged with algae—this place where I longed to belong, that brilliant person I so wanted to be.

Rosedale

It doesn’t take long to reach the ridge where the old ironstone railway skirts the moor and the heather shivers, even in summer.

I first came here when Evie was three, her dark tail a metronome above the bracken, snout bolted to the floor on discovering a dead sheep or hare.

Another day, I might have stopped her drinking some dirty water or spotted that startled look at some grouse cluttering off.

As it is, I stand looking back at the footbridge she was scared to cross, that ladder stile I’d carry her over, a sudden haze making it rather difficult to see.

Will Kemp
Aysgarth

I find that photo of Sventje hugging me in a kagoul, leg see-sawed up after jumping back onto my lap, the camera set up on another rock, both of us flushed, about to burst out laughing beside the gushing river.

Where on earth did we go wrong?

I touch the shining face then slip it back in the box by the old bear she gave me, at once hearing her mother’s deadened voice, So you think you can buy her, do you? followed by those footsteps as I headed out the kitchen door.

Letter to Sventje

Tonight the sky is a mass of stars, gunsmoke clouds drifting about the full-blown trees,

like that time we watched fireworks flower above the river, walked over every bridge in Delft.

The next day your mother said it had to end; your father scoffed that I couldn’t speak French.

I’m sorry, S; I didn’t understand the way things were. But hope you have your own place now,

found someone too—felt he should be good enough for them if he was for you.

Will Kemp
Taking a Likeness

The Old Pilot, 1884, watercolour, William Wainwright.

I wonder if those folds of clothing ever peel apart? I’m sure he sleeps in knitted rib—adrift in bacy, brine and herring …

Don’t feel right just sat here, lazy, stuck inside to face his easel. Went down to the slip and waited, ready to be picked for sixpence. Dirty weather. Easy money.

… must be sixty, knows the Newlyn harbour like his trouser pocket. Draw his outline, right eye large from years of telescope …

It’s hot in all this clobber. Florence says a man should never wear his hat indoors. I tell him tales of peril, true they are and tragic, likely worth an extra tuppence.

… the wash behind must swirl like rippled sand, translucent, brown as flooding tides in winter. Let the paper show through fraying serge …

Circling seagulls up already, always first to know, those birds. I wait to hear our fishwives calling, fear the sound of crashing waves, a wailing from the harbour wall.

… add detail, finest brush, dark blue and ochre. Think I’ll call it ‘In the Face of Danger’. Memories and loss sell well.

Kathy Gee
Salting, Spurn

Snow embossed on tide-litter and time is thirst.
There in the sun-halo the halcyon starves.
Even the liquid of its eye’s freeze-dried;
Even all sound

While light roosts. The salting’s motionless.
Daybreak, smeared out of starlight, animates
Two swans, enduring parched and life-long passion
On their parched ground.

State Your Denomination

If, at the perimeter of wellness,
I were asked to state my denomination,
I will only set down
That the gods I’ve known
Are usually found leaning over bridges.

No footsteps lead up to them; on the further slope
Their journeys vanish merely into air.
Yet the bridge parapets,
Worn smooth by their jackets,
Tell time and its children they were there.

Trout minnow through June, becks
Fumble at boulder; bustard and sedge
Dance in the kingdom
Of the Miller’s Thumb.
That their world grows older, none could care less.

The Pack Horse bridge, Cottingley: at its green edge
I was in place, watching water become a view,
Becoming my own pause.
This parenthesis
Is where I fished and watched, wanting little else

As night collapsed over the journeying villages
And all the lovers’ silences turned intricate.
The gods asked no more
Than leaning over bridges, whose only law
Is occasionally understanding what you saw.

Chris McCully
Pond Skaters

You see them in the frozen times
in frozen climes
drift, the gliding icons, a linear
movement of the whole
their limbs in stasis.

But I think of insects—
dead when the frost comes
or moved to some other
station in the eternal round
of metamorphoses.

Reality is a form
and a shuttle between forms.

What they skate on
looks like skin.
It isn’t.
Molecules at the frontier of air and water
line up their ions where no one
is receiving and insects
ride on the message.

Ions in the ether.
No one receiving.
Station to station.
The eternal round
of icons gliding
in and out of memory.

Transport by Backseat

The bus was omni and the underground
ran round and round arcane as Arthur’s cave
or mount or hill of pleasure or the sound
of Mountjoy at the donkey Derby rave.

The Greeks will have a fire sale, we are told,
but who would buy a fire? And who would trust
its transport to a wooden horse? A bold
one you might say: one who returns to dust.

The mood of after-football-fighting quiet;
the spirits of the stairways’ poignant call
to places that the boat is leaving now
or meditations on the pussy riot
that never really happened here at all.
If I’m not driving, anything’s allowed.

Peter Richards
My Life as a Vestal Virgin

It smells of earth inside this tiny room beneath the ground. The guards have sealed it up. A tallow candle gutters in the gloom, illuminates the single bowl, the cup. I couldn’t know, when as a girl of eight I was delivered to the sacred fire, what torture lay before me in this fate, a woman, bound by rules, ruled by desire. I fought the way my blood sang with the need, but when he kissed me, something wild and sly uncurled within me, desperate to be freed. Yes, I still want him, even as I die. I broke my vow and yet the hearth stayed lit. Whatever insults Rome, men bury it.

My Life as a Camp Follower

The fight keeps dragging on. My soldier lover was badly wounded by a Yorkist axe. I came here in the hope that he’d recover, and stayed on after, in the army’s tracks. It’s easy living—all the men are lonely and most are gentle. I say I’m a nurse although I tend to them in one way only and then I slip their pennies in my purse. I use a pessary of wool and wine and drink mint tea in secret. If they saw they’d call it witchcraft. Well, the risk is mine, all part of women’s lot. The men make war and corpses pile crotch deep in England’s mud. So many things in life come down to blood.

Anna M. Evans
Coins and Buttons

Will you have coins and buttons?
Or will you have shoes and old hats?

A fine blue coat for the young man
And golden rings for his lady.

Here is an old coin, head of the king,
Here is a button that fastened the queen.

Here are the shoes, worn from the journey,
Here are the hats from the hands of the mourners.

Here is the coat worn by the young man,
Here are the rings of his lady.

Or will you have coins and buttons?
Or will you have shoes and old hats?

Empathy for the Cows

They died this morning, electrocuted.

A wire dropped on the pole barn side
and they couldn’t help touching it.

She cried for the bovines
with names like Belle and Posey,
knobby kneed creatures with big nipples
and bags full of nutrients.

When her husband came with the tractor
and sled to drag them away,
she thought about milking them one more time
to save their essence.
Watering Your Tomato Plants

They knew at once I wasn’t the real thing.
I was the drippy teacher—uncharismatic, shy—
who couldn’t keep control. Tight-lipped, hard-skinned,
their shiny faces stubborn-green, they’d eye

my clumsy path from water-butt to greenhouse,
sneer as water slopped from heavy cans,
say nothing as I dutifully doused
their roots, as detailed in your lesson plans.

The atmosphere was tense. I sensed a hardening
of their hearts. I read their marble minds:
Give up! Throw in the trowel! You’ve failed at gardening!
And by the way, we’re not ‘tomatoes’—you will find

we are Solanum Lycopersicum, to those who know what’s what!
To be honest you were lucky not to find them dead
on your return—all strangled in their pots;
green corpses rotting in a peaty bed.

Now the Master’s back, of course they’re blushing
fifty shades of red.

Annie Fisher

Autumn Shrugs

Autumn shrugs—the salad greens are embittered
choose not to bolt to seed—shade to malachite
and verdigris instead of verdancy.

Wither instead of luscious rot in the compost heap
the collapse of the Cucurbita family—autumn
has broken them.

The Cabbage White has gone to ground—the worms
I dig seem somehow urgent as if they cannot bear
the air on their skin.

There is a new order to everything—long shadows
lay over us—prefiguring early spring, I embed
broad beans, one at a time.

They will overwinter stoically—among the parsnips
and kohl rabi—yes, they will taste of rusty nails
and set my teeth on edge. Come spring.

Jennifer Compton
Misperception in November Fog

I’m driving home from the mall;  
my shopping bags are stuffed, replete.  
When I inch along my foggy street,  
I spot a distant walker—small,  
with a pair of enormous black wings.  
A bat! That costume is so clever,  
but kid (I think), you’re late. You’ll never  
get candy in November. Things  
take on a stranger, starker light  
as I approach. It’s an old woman,  
Asian, clad in black, a wooden  
stick across her shoulders. Slight  
and stooped beneath a massive yoke  
of bulging plastic sacks, she bends  
to glean from each recycling bin.  
She plucks a crimson can of Coke.  
How utterly I misperceived.  
I stop and offer her a dollar;  
she shakes her head, adjusts her collar,  
and turns away, like me, aggrieved.

Wood and Fire

When it became a long-drawn thing  
The wood was a shed  
Where we hid the strife  
For a small breed of truce.  
When it met the lance of a long-cutting thing  
The wood was like us  
Hewn and broken on many sides  
Severing into logs  
And herding off to blaze.  
When it licked the shadow of a long-sparking thing  
The wood was full of crackle and smoke  
Torched by a yellow heat  
Whose mark of memory  
Was to burn, burn, burn.
Daybreak on the Peninsula at Punta del Este, Uruguay

daybreak on the silver sea
the bay still in shadows
daybreak of white jasmine and blue hortensia
scent of eucalyptus

there are no sea lions in the bay
only fishing boats slipping away through shadows
past the tip of the peninsula
out to the silver sea

the bay is ringed with boulders
the sand is still cool
sea lions lift their heads
on their island in the silver sea

a giant hand rises from Playa Brava
it warns and beckons
the wind and shadows catch warnings
the giant hand has let slip away

there are no bathers
in the silver sea at daybreak
only cormorants perched on the boulders
their black wings shimmering in the sun

daybreak of wind and water
a statue amid rocks and mussel shells
a blue and white statue of Stella Maris
her back to the shimmering silver sea

Catherine Chandler

The Arrow

for R.M.

The world you prized, the culture you detested:
you left your secrets here, plus some of mine.
Your thoughts, unspoken at the moment, rested
on looseleaf. Now they creep across each line,
occasionally dance on pencil tip,
complaint and wonderment evenly spaced.
Ashen pronouncements, molten insights slip
out of the graphite point. Flaws are erased.

A half century should suffice to cool
the sentiments that launched this arrow’s arc
first heaven-, then horizon-bound, to duel
with gravity until the sky grew dark
and then to sink below, but not too deep.
Ambivalence is where you loved to sleep.

Claudia Gary
On the Other Hand

‘Your right hand shows your present state,’ she said, 'your life as you have made it. And the left tells what you could be. So much can be read: but I must speak the truth, be true to my gift.’ I nodded and she took my ‘could be’ hand, the left, and scrutinised it well. ‘Oh yes, such great potential’s written there!’ She scanned me dubiously for signs of earned success. And then she took my right hand up, and staring (What did she mutter? ‘Carnal gratification’?) revisited the left. She peered, comparing; her finger traced a heart-line hesitation. ‘Such promise!’ And her lip curled as she thrust my errant right hand downward in disgust.

Aussiemandias

This old blackfella, eyes like empty space — when he lob in from back ‘o Bourke he tell he seen two massive legs and a busted face out in the desert, way past Woop-Woop Hill, a lost stone relic in that empty place, a giant statue once — great chief, pre-White. Musta been up himself, the sculptor knew — even the busted face spell that out right. And on the statue base you find this boast: ‘Envy my work, which none but I could do!’ Nothing more there. No salt-bush scrub, no ghost. Only a proud man’s likeness, brought to rubble against the red horizon, keeps his post. The desert still stretch on, for all his trouble.

Henry Quince

Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias’ is generally believed to have been inspired by the fallen colossus of Ramesses II, and indeed is sometimes mistitled ‘Ozymandias of Egypt’ because of the assumption that the ‘antique land’ in the sonnet was Egypt. But modern evidence suggests a possible Australian prototype.

‘Ozymandias’, first published in January 1818 in Leigh Hunt’s Examiner magazine, was probably written late in 1817—the very year in which, with colonization already well under way, the new southern continent was formally named ‘Australia’. Much of the vast land mass was being explored for the first time by European settlers. Shelley had no direct Australian connection that we know of, but his friend Thomas Love Peacock had been a mariner and worked for the East India Company. Peacock was acquainted with Charles Throsby (1777–1828), a surgeon, settler and explorer in the time of NSW Governor Macquarie. A letter from Throsby to Peacock, dated August 1817, has recently come to light. It includes a rough sonnet (untitled) by Throsby, which he had written in the voice of the aboriginal tracker who told him the story. Both the theme and the rhyme scheme are close to those of Shelley’s sonnet. Coincidence?

I have modernized and edited Throsby’s rough sonnet, and added the title, to produce the version above.
Palinode

Love is no footstep-fated confluence of dreams, as I once thought; neither is love a song for voices tuned in harmony. Love is a meld of habit, hope, and risk. Lives are not paths whose various twists and turns will lead to the selfsame stations on a beach at sunset, at last, when eyes are narrowed with age. A life is less a path than a persistence. Put them behind with all the other illusions—that nature’s well-disposed, that head rules heart, that we must always will before we act, that Sirius has an eye that’s infinite. Comfort enough in the familiar, now, and company in the snorer by your side.

Henry Quince

Knockout

You temper doubt with faith and faith with doubt. I count my wealth by reckoning my debt. Your love lifts me and knocks me down and out.

This is our ruthless and most tender bout. By wearing blunt this edge, we keenly whet. Doubt is the crux of faith, and faith of doubt.

Thus we abide by all the laws we flout: The heartbeat’s freedom is the tourniquet, And your love knocks me down to lift me out.

A thunderous whisper and a silent shout Coordinate our perfect mismatched set Of doubting faith allied with faithful doubt.

We pray to be irreverent and devout, Delve deep to reach the highest parapet, Where love’s uplift can knock us down and out.

This paradox is what it’s all about: When all lost wagers are our winning bet, Without a doubt, love tempers faith and doubt To lift us as it knocks us down and out.

Chris O’Carroll
Astray

They forecast snow and it came late,
a light dusting only, but enough to make me stay.
I walked the path to the kissing gate

where we met that time we went astray;
the snow lay heavy then, a smothering,
the hedges weighed-upon, the ley

disguised. You were disguised, other,
someone new to me, so sure
that I would concede, become your lover.

Now I am here alone, but moved by that detour,
drawn to the snow on the hill,
the way the fields touch the moor,

the solitary sheep, the rise and lilt
of the wind, with whisperings of guilt.

On the Day I Didn’t Know

The street was quiet on the day I didn’t know.
Pigeons went about their business along the windowsills,
the high street just as steep, the river on its way below,
the sun hidden, then re-emerging to soften the early chill.

On the day I didn’t know, I dawdled on the hill—
I couldn’t up the pace, lift myself; the usual shops
held no interest. Too much time to kill.
A busker sang a baleful tune; I didn’t stop

to hear his reason for the day. I reached the top
of town and found a place to buy a drink,
a compromise to help me home and swap
my dullness for reward, anything so as not to think.

On the day I didn’t know, at home I locked the door.
I emptied ashtrays, fed the cat, and mopped the floor.

Julie-ann Rowell
Greenham Common, 1985

Everything is monochrome, but for the fire which she feeds and coaxes like a child; they can’t help but see it, the men behind the wire who keep guard all year, as if she were a thing gone wild, which she supposes she is to certain minds who don’t take trouble with, but interrogate this mild and gentle figure. She is only fending off the cold, inclined to nothing stronger than a rebel song, a mug of tea, yet her daughter has forsaken her, to which she is resigned— principle was never a wedding guest with suitable repartee. Now anything so formal has no meaning, there is only this camp, the stolen heath, the wind in the trees, and the men behind the wire watching this woman beside a fire dreaming.

Julie-ann Rowell

Adam’s Dream

First there was this strange sensation. It felt like a finger running along my ribs. It was quick, firm, with neither pleasure nor pain. Then I was lying on my back. A great tree took root between my legs. In a moment it grew to its full height, swaying in the wind. Then it exploded into a glorious crown of fruit. An angel of the Lord came with a flaming sword. The angel of the Lord burned the tree to ashes. I scooped the ashes up into the cup of my hands. I rubbed the ashes into the skin of my chest and shoulders. I rubbed the ashes into the skin of my arms and legs. I found myself in a new place. There was not a tree nor a bush nor any green thing. The earth was red and hard beneath my feet. But I was not alone in that new place. Behind me I heard laughter and weeping. I heard laughter and weeping behind me.

J. R. Solonche
Eviction

i  Adam’s Call

Big adjustment. Nothing like retirement.
One minute, I’m your average day to day man:
up at first light, a couple of grapes, then
it’s straight on with the job: Emu, Elephant,

Duck Billed Platypus, Lesser Spotted Toad …
biodiversity makes a demand
on imagination. When I got tired,
I thought of her in the lean-to: first bride,

always smiling; beautiful. Worth a rib.
Worth a leg, come to that. Worth Paradise?
Well, debateable; but I’ll tell you this—
I passed it down to all the human tribe:

if the woman you love says sink your teeth
into sweet flesh, what price eternal life?

ii  Archangel

It wasn’t easy, but it could be worse;
I mean look at my mate, Angel of Death:
hardly any notice, whim of a breath,
he’d to flash through the world with that curse
of extinction on the first born: toddlers,
babies, the whole shebang. How grim is that?
He never slept another peaceful night,
the screams of all those mother in his ears,
so I suppose I shouldn’t be grumbling.
And the rules were fair: all the pets you like,
but don’t touch The Tree; it’s just the one strike
and out. But, no, they had to go nibbling:
own worst enemies; caused their own trouble.
They were Naturists. Such a sweet couple.

Terry Jones
Some Houses Do Not Need Curtains

Premises where the windows
have grown lashes of cobwebs,
and look out on the street
with the frankness of the abandoned
who have nothing left to hide:
some houses do not need curtains.

Homes of the freshly evicted,
the vases left on a windowsill,
where panes stare in disbelief, as if
amongst strangers and old friends
they were suddenly naked:
some houses do not need curtains.

Those ready for demolition,
stand frozen like illegal immigrants,
who have given up on any hope
of fellowship or warmth; all distinction
between inside and outside is over:
some houses do not need curtains.

Rendezvous

Newly dead, I’ll meet you at the steeple
two hundred foot above the wet pavement;
look for me, if looking is what we mean:
I’ll be staring into those remote nests,
ones lodged on plinths near the gargoyles,
where souls of swallows move like shadows
and house martins without a house build hearts.
I believe I’ll recognise you, pale, thin,
wearing the dark we laid you in.
We’ll hover apart at first, amused, frightened,
before we drift together and embrace,
all our intricacies odd as snowflakes.

Terry Jones
My Shorts, My Undershirts

If I stare at them long enough, then close my eyes and turn them against the red wall of the house,

my shorts, my undershirts drying on the line become blanks in my sight, negatives of vibrancy.

If I stare at them too long, I know they will leave me as blind as I would be if I stared too long into the sun,

for that is how bright, how dazzling, how luminous they are in the air, a wall of fantastical mother-of-pearl, a fence of flattened full moons. And I know of no king of France or emperor of Byzantium who ever wore the likes of such freshness, the likes of such whiteness on his back and around his loins, and you fold them with such consummate cunning, such skill and care, with the vee necks and round necks meticulous, symmetrical, the edges straight as chalk lines, the corners square as a book, it is a shame to unfold them again, treachery to wear them, but when I do, as I will tonight after a long shower, I feel your hands on my body, warm as the sun is, and I think how blind I could have been this afternoon and all these years, and if I am not careful of the things you are for me (how bright, dazzling, luminous) how blind, how blind I still can be.

J. R. Solonche
Stock Trader’s Balm

Seclusion in the deepest tanglery
and bramble of the Luther Olive Woods,
where leaves so thick turn sky a lightswept green
and even paths are branch-caressed, so lean
a swallow barely flits past:

there Paul broods
on market theories, trigonometry
of chart and oscillation. There he soothes
himself with intellect instead of wrath,
against predictive failures of his math.

July sun seethes, but here mild breezes soothe
(despite declines, there’s been no margin call).
His assets stay aloft like a blackbird
that coasts on gusts of summer-shimmer while
her mate, crownperched, waits patiently.

No word
on his iPhone of new calamities. His expert eye
is fixed on how slow green tints sizzling sky.

Lee Slonimsky

Vesper

We are interested
in the echoes
sung one half-note behind
by the fossilized
mouths in the limestone.

In our minds,
the auditorium
is an elephant’s belly, where
we wait for Unanana
and her pot of beans.

We don’t need coaxing,
despite the box
of waxy chocolate,
it’s the blue that lures
us in from snow.

Sometimes we drift into
the warmth of a stranger,
breathing humid
as an iris, Alleluia,

Allelu.

Kerry Carnahan
Alternate Routes

I

The 94 express: It lofts them east
like pilgrims, toward the blazing window-rose
of sun-up, emptied minds in matins pose
in the strait pews of forward-facing seats.
This is their meditation on the book,
the screen, the earbud. This is their retreat
inside the freeway soundwalls’ pearled concrete.
Those are the neighborhoods they need not look to
for earthly comfort. Soon they shall be raised
to where the skyline, jewel-faceted,
glitters, its twelve gates foursquare in the bright
billboard-blaze. And they are not amazed
but take their brief bags up and walk. Ahead,
the day shivers with riches. They alight.

II

The local 16A: It kneels down, humble,
at every corner equally to admit,
halting with ramp and lift, the halt, who sit
in the seats reserved, or the quiet drunks who stumble
gently toward the rear to join a grumbling
minyan of loose and louche and hard-to-fit
souls, the sweet-breathed comforting the bitter.
This is the woman whose tidy life has tumbled
to trash-bag jumbles on a grocery cart,
lifted and ramped with groggy patience. This
marks off the ends of nightlife and night shift,
hauling homeward the dreadlocked who have starred
in scrappy bands, beside the scrub-clad nurses.
These wilder riches lurch onto the lift.

Listening

Who’s listening at the window or there, behind the door?
Whose footprints dent the nearly frozen mud?
I wonder what she hears in the wind of our speech, in mutterings
we make when sky disappears and the television snaps to life?

It might be the croaking of an old frog settling on a lily pad in a
pond by weeping willows, or whisper of fish through rustling reeds.
Maybe it’s an old song she longs for, lover’s octaves braiding
in the air or a motet for forty voices singing for the disappearing crows.
My Heart Is an Extremity

Who crowned the heads of conquerors with leaves?
You slam the door. I’m rolling up my sleeves.

We read each other’s eyes and almost drown
like gypsies rendered speechless by the leaves.

Then winter strips us down to skeletons:
static, silence, sparks are all it leaves.

What is this archaeology of love,
brushing fragile shards, preserving leaves?

Waking to a gentle blush, we whisper
truth in half-words, all the heart believes.

We slowly die, let loose from the tree,
then whirl in restless, weightless crowds of leaves.

Your hands dry out like parchment on their bones,
but longing for their firm grip never leaves.

The spine holds words together, names the whole
but we extract their meaning from the leaves.

Don’t measure time, Siham, by things that fall,
but by the upward thrust of newborn leaves.

Sunset Canyon

What if my heart, in its slow twilight, lost
all fear, and let me watch its waning bloom
seduce the hour? The clinking glass, a toast
as fine chromatics gild my mountain tomb.
We’d take our time, this final hour and I,
like lovers drinking in their last slow dance.
Our drumbeat, earth; our canopy, the sky;
All else would fade in pure irrelevance.
My passing colors line the canyon’s wall,
rock ochres fired in blazing red. Our kiss
uplifts, a timeless draught as memories fall.
It doesn’t even feel like an abyss.
So bury these last pulses, death, for me
beneath the sky’s resplendent banyan tree.

Siham Karami
Cézanne

Chrysoprase,
majolica,
ash and aubergine

celadon,
carnelian,
roofs of tangerine

L’Estaque, Auvers,
Mont Saint Victoire,
Chantilly, Montgeroult

Route tournante
at La Roche-Guyon,
pomegranate blue

bleached-out grasses,
burnt pavane,
Gardonne, Orangerie,

myrtle, sage,
the pyramid
of skulls at Annecy.

Close Enough to Nothing

It’s close enough to nothing as it is,
and nothingness is vague and impolite.
The man who means to hunker down to his
routine enigmas finds the quondam night
has entered with its reckless re-creation,
compelling his attention like a ghost.
And in a solemn, studied peroration
somewhere between his grapefruit and his toast
he comes to see that everything he’s not
is fiction, and the rest is filibuster.
So much for all the legions he can muster.
Nothing comes from nothing. (Caveat:
quite a lot that is, is nonexistent.)
The nothingness is slight, but it’s consistent.

Terese Coe
Hijacking the Poetry Class

I tell my class that poets hold two views:
‘Most claim all’s for the best and we become
stronger by error but a few refuse
this comfort; being stubborn, or just dumb,

they argue for a primal sin, a choice
we made which closed the gates of paradise,
we’ll never hear again the lost one’s voice,
our souls forever caged in cells of ice …’

Some students realise that para-rhymes
no longer form our topic; Grumpy stirs,
the Sweet Girl smiles. I talk and watch the floor,

‘… but is that “never” really true? Sometimes,
the utterly impossible occurs:
that woman waited for / walks through the door.’

Promotion

Your rise has been remarkable and, yes,
you’ve worn your power with a lack of fuss,
taking the weight of others’ deference
as if you barely noticed. Now we sense
a final shift to ‘hard won eminence’.

The term is grandiose but suitable;
there’s something in you of a cardinal
eschewing pride and happy still to nod
among the younger priests, a fussy squad
who know your favour counts, your word is God.

What do I think of you? Some jealousy
but admiration too; I did not see
your quiet ambition—was it always there
or did our masters choose to give you air,
coaxing you onwards stair by giddy stair?

Well, this is you at forty-five: a Name,
the subtle player of a bruising game;
I miss the younger you. Why choose to prove
yourself like this, some itch for praise or love?
I hear your speech of thanks, then watch your workforce move.

Sean Elliott
Following Orders

My father
Before he was my father.
On a bus in Biloxi, 1945.
A long, far way from the Bronx.
He liked to sit by the exit.
It was cooler there, the doors opening
Every stop.

‘Come up front, soldier,’ the bus driver said.
He hated the South, the dead slowness.
He hated being in the Air Force.
‘Come up front here, soldier.’
He would do anything to get off the base.
The five mile hikes on BIVWAK and
Sleeping in a tent were not for him.

This time he purposely broke his glasses.
Which got him to the optometrist in town.
Which got him in this seat.
While the rest of his flight marched.

‘This bus don’t move until you come up front, soldier.’
That was fine with him.
He could stay there until they shipped him home.
Next stop the bowling alley on Boston Road.
In his mom’s kitchen, eating her meatballs.
On the stoop, bouncing a Spalding.
Selling bags of peanuts at Yankee Stadium.

‘Please, Mister,’ she said, ‘move up front.’
Her eyes were as black as her face.
‘Please, Mister, I gotta get to work.’

Michael Mark
Mr. History

Perhaps it’s strange that when I think of you you’re dressed in outdoor gear, as though for war: a heavy khaki parka; army boots that give a spring-skip to your step; a pair of combats, camouflage. They’re not in green and brown for forest floor and undergrowth, nor light and sand to blend with desert heat. The grubby swirls are black and white and grey. I always liked the cut and fit of them, but only now I understand quite how just right they are: your battleground would be a landscape full of paper mountains, fields of print, and shades of odd significance, through which you stride, lost, with a dodgy map.

Ailsa Holland

Rhadamanthus Rides the Bus

I walk among them every day.
I ride the bus with them and they
Presume that I am one of them.

They do not hear the requiem—
The cantus firmus of the spheres
Forever sounding in my ears.

A butcher enters, pays his fare,
And joins his fellows, unaware.
They do not know that they are dead.

But I can see within each head
The skull, the fungal brain inside.
I see their bodies vitrified.

Through me the patient skeleton.
Through me the gory gelatin.
Through me the cruel array of nerves.

Hell hides the torments that it serves.
The epidermal gates enmesh
A dead world burning in the flesh.

I, Rhadamanthus, mark it all—
The teeming sphere on which they crawl
And weave their polyphonic moan.

I only am escaped alone
To tell thee. I alone: the cry
Of one who would curse God and die.

Seth Braver
A Second Hand Watch

I’d hoped to glance, but three hands beckoned me to watch. ‘Very well, if you insist,’ I sighed, ‘but I don’t have much time.’ Two too slowly rolled upon my wrist to hold me; not so the third, the second. The thin hand gripped me with its hard sublime perfection: circular and uniform, its moving tip a Ptolemaic finger flowing past. And though Chaldaic sixties try to press their cuneiform illusions of discreteness deep into the clay of continuity, suspicions of the perpetuity of each apparent moment creep into my soul and whisper that I’m blind.

For what is time? A trick with static images projected on a mind so that they seem to be in motion? A river’s hopeless, Eleatic, infinite approach towards an ocean out of reach?

An hourglassy ocean with a quicksand beach.

A memory: I watched a hen at ease—silent, still, between the dust and sun. No past or future desecrates the One for Pertelote or for Parmenides.

Biddy Doran shook in ash, Rose, and called it balderdash. Ashes, ashes, falling down! Ring around St. Helens town! Dust to dust baths, motes to moats—Hector! Tortoise! Asymptotes! Achilles smolders, Phoenix tells us. Ashes! Roses! Paracelsus!

Illuminous behind perception’s veils, untouched by Time—unfinished, unbegun—unbroken, unconfined in Space’s jails, the numinous and undivided Pun that underlies the world will only show itself to sages deeply steeped in bosh—who know how metaphysically to squash the universe into a portmanteau.
Full five fathoms of absurdity
roll my rattled, helpless bones beneath
the murky waves of history. The teeth
of unseen sea beasts grip and pinion me, and gnaw.
Two tetrahedra, tip to tip, transfix
my brain, yet still the stubborn clockwork ticks!
Why should all history converge on me?
Oh time, thy pyramids I beg withdraw.

The moving finger writes, and having writ
moves on. Into time’s kaleidoscopic churning
Ptolemy is gone. Parmenides has quit
his song. Troy has long ceased burning.
I cannot see the circles for the three hands turning.

My eyelids close. I open them again.
Gone are the tortoise, pyramids, and hen.

Thus the second hand swept out a minute—
swept like so much dust. What passed within it?
Another forty millionth of my life
was sliced away. Unless, of course, the knife
of time is not so sharp as it appears—
but, dull and pointless, merely smears
experience around the mind.

But when did I last wind
this thing? But then—how could I know?
I think it’s slow.

Or fast?
Memories from all my past
seem from a minute ago.
My God, but how I prate!
Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!

Seth Braver
Contributor Biographies and Previous Publications

Ovo Adagha’s work has previously appeared in several online and print journals, including: One World, Caine Anthology, African Writing, CMD Journal of Arts, EveryWriter and Eclectica magazine.

Walter Ancarrow lives in New York City.

C.B. Anderson was the longtime gardener for the PBS television series, The Victory Garden. His book of poems, Mortal Soup and the Blue Yonder, was published in 2013 by White Violet Press.


John Aylesworth lives and teaches children how to read in the Hocking River Valley in Southeastern Ohio where he earned a Masters Degree in Creative Writing and a Ph.D. in Comparative Arts at Ohio University. After school, he stayed to raise a family, teach kids, and write.

Jerome Betts comes from Herefordshire, but has lived in Gloucester and Northampton and now Devon. His work has appeared in a variety of print magazines and anthologies as well as UK, European and US web venues such as Amsterdam Quarterly, Light, Lightenup OnLine (which he recently guest-edited) The New Verse News, Per Contra, Snakeskin and Tilt-A-Whirl.

‘In Northampton Museum’ was previously published in Country Life.

Seth Braver lives in Olympia, Washington. He no longer writes poetry. His first (and presumably last) collection, Ill Enough Alone, will be published by White Violet Press late in 2014.

Kerry Carnahan’s poems have appeared in publications including Poetry Ireland Review, The Missouri Review, The Brooklyner, North Dakota Quarterly, Mid-American Review and Barrow Street. A graduate of Cooper Union, a historically free college, in 2011 she co-founded Friends of Cooper Union in order to advocate for Cooper’s continued tuition-free existence. She is a Fulbright Scholar, a current PhD candidate in English at the University of Connecticut, and last winter she was a fellow at The MacDowell Colony.

Catherine Chandler is an American poet, translator, editor, and teacher currently living in Canada. She won the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award in 2010 and was a finalist in 2008, 2009, 2012 and 2013. Her first full-length collection of poems, Lines of Flight (Able Muse Press, 2011) has recently been nominated for the Griffin Poetry Prize. A collection of her sonnets, This Sweet Order, has recently been published by White Violet Press. Her second full-length collection, Glad and Sorry Seasons, will be published by Biblioasis Press in 2013.


Jennifer Compton lives in Melbourne and is a poet and playwright who also writes prose.

‘Autumn Shrugs’ was previously published in Nimrod International Journal.

Maryann Corbett lives in Saint Paul and works for the Minnesota Legislature. Her newest book is Credo for the Checkout Line in Winter (Able Muse Press). Her poems, essays, and translations have been published widely in print and online. New work appears in Southwest Review and Barrow Street.


Charles Doersch’s poems have, in the past few years, appeared in several journals: The Hudson Review, The New Criterion, Edinburgh Review, Measure, Shit Creek Review, Think Journal, Academic Questions, among others. A critical review was published in Contemporary Poetry Review. For many years he taught rhetoric and composition for the University of Colorado at Boulder, but now lives in the Virgin Islands with the two lovely men of his life.

Sean Elliott lives in Margate and teaches Creative Writing for the Open University. He wrote his PhD on Robert Lowell. His first poetry collection, Waterhouse and the Tempest, was published in 2009 and his second collection, The Status of the Cat, has just been published by Playdead Press. He is also the author of Restoration Drama (Greenwich Exchange, 2013) and is currently writing a book on Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

Richard Epstein had a contributor’s note in Angle Issue 1. Not much has changed.

Anna M. Evans’ poems have appeared in the Harvard Review, Atlanta Review, Rattle, American Arts Quarterly, and 32 Poems. She gained her MFA from Bennington College, and is the Editor of the Raintown Review. Recipient of Fellowships from the MacDowell Artists’ Colony and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and winner of the 2012 Rattle Poetry Prize Readers’ Choice Award, she currently teaches at West Windsor Art Center and Richard Stockton College of NJ. Visit her online at www.annamevans.com.

‘My Life as a Vestal Virgin’ and ‘My Life as a Camp Follower’ are from her new sonnet collection, Sisters & Courtesans, forthcoming from White Violet Press.
Annie Fisher is a storyteller based in Somerset. She enjoys writing light and 'lightly serious' verse and has had poems published in a number of on-line and print magazines including *Snakeskin, Lighten Up Online, Ink Sweat and Tears, South and Other Poetry*.

Angela France writes poems, reads poems, studies poems, edits poetry journals and runs a poetry reading series, but the day job sometimes gets in the way. Her publications include *Occupation* (Ragged Raven Press, 2009), *Lessons in Mallemaroking* (Nine Arches Press, 2011) and her latest collection, *Hide* (Nine Arches Press, 2013).

Andrew Frisardi is originally from Boston, but has been living in the area of Orvieto, Italy, since 1999, where he works as a translator and editor. His most recent books are a chapbook of poetry, *Death of a Dissembler* (White Violet Press), and *The Young Dante and the One Love*, essays on Dante’s *Vita Nova*, published by Temenos Academy in London. Frisardi’s edition of the *Vita Nova*, with translation, introduction, and notes, was published by Northwestern University Press in 2012. He is currently at work on an edition of Dante’s *Convivio*, for which he received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2013.

Claudia Gary writes, edits, sings, and composes (tonally) near Washington DC. She is author of *Humor Me* (David Robert Books 2006) and several chapbooks. Her poems are included in anthologies such as *Forgetting Home* (Barefoot Muse Press 2013) and *Villanelles* (Everyman Press 2012). She was a 2013 semifinalist for the Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize, as well as a 2014 finalist for the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award. She also writes articles on health for *The VVA Veteran* and other magazines.


Robert Griffith is the author of four collections of poetry: *A Matinee in Plato’s Cave*, winner of the 2009 Best Book of Indiana Award; *Poisoning Caesar*; and *Necessary Alchemy*, winner of Middle Tennessee University’s Chapbook Prize. His most recent book is *The Moon from Every Window* (David Robert Books, 2011), which was nominated for the 2013 Poets’ Prize, and his work has also appeared in magazines and journals such as *Poetry, First Things, River Styx, The North American Review, The Sewanee Theological Review, Prairie Schooner,* and *The Oxford American*, among many others. He is the Associate Director of the University of Evansville Press, the Director of the Harlaxton Summer Writing Program, and the editor of *Measure: A Review of Formal Poetry*.

Megan Grumbling’s work has appeared in *Poetry, Crazyhorse, the Southern Review, the Iowa Review,* and elsewhere, and has been awarded a Ruth Lilly Fellowship and a Robert Frost Award for Poetry. She lives in Portland, Maine, where she teaches writing, reviews theater for the Portland Phoenix, and helps edit the literary journal *The Café Review*. 
Sarah Handley is an MFA student at Boston University, and a West Virginia native. Her work has previously appeared in Barnard College’s journal, Echoes.

Jim Hayes lives in Kilkenny, Ireland, and has been published in First Things, Light (featured poet), lambs & Trochees, The Shit Creek Review, and The British Chess Magazine. He won The Willard Espy award and $1000 for Light Verse and has a collection, The Bad Habits of Little Boys.

Peleg Held was a former member of Voices in the Wilderness as well as several other failed campaigns for basic human decency. He is a carpenter in Portland, Maine where he lives with his partner and children (primate and other).

R. Nemo Hill is the author, in collaboration with painter Jeanne Hedstrom, of an illustrated novel, Pilgrim’s Feather (Quantuck Lane Press, 2002), a narrative poem based upon a short story by H.P. Lovecraft, The Strange Music of Erich Zann (Hippocampus Press, 2004), and a chapbook, Prolegomena To An Essay On Satire (Modern Metrics, 2006). His full-length poetry collection, When Men Bow Down, was published in 2012 by Dos Madres Press. His work has appeared such print and online journals as Poetry, American Arts Quarterly, Anon, Soundzine, and Shit Creek Review. He is also the editor of EXOT BOOKS, www.exot.typepad.com/exotbooks; and his travel blog can be accessed at www.rnemohill.typepad.com.

‘Pastel’ is from the collection, ‘When Men Bow Down’ (Dos Madres Press, 2012).

Ailsa Holland has been longlisted for the Café Writers Poetry Pamphlet Commission 2014. Her poems have been published in And Other Poems and Ink Sweat & Tears. She is 2014 Poet in Residence at Tegg’s Nose Country Park, Cheshire and the founder of Moormaid Press.


Lesley Ingram was born in Yorkshire, and rediscovered her love of writing poetry when she abandoned her career in IT to move to France to teach EFL and run a gîte. She now splits her time between France and England. She has recently completed a Masters in Creative Writing at the University of Gloucestershire where she will begin a PHD in Autumn 2013. She has been anthologised/published in various places including Bli the Spirit, ink sweat & tears, Mslexia, Dead Ink, iota, Under the Radar, and The Flea, and her first collection will be published by Cinnamon Press in 2015. She won the 2013 Ludlow Fringe Poetry competition.

Terry Jones’ debut short collection, Furious Resistance, was published by Poetry Salzburg in 2011. That same year he was the winner of the Bridport Prize. His work has also appeared in magazines including Poetry Review, The New Statesman, Agenda, Ambit, The London Magazine, Poetry Salzburg Review, Magma, iota, The North, New Welsh Review and others. His website is: TerryJonespoetry.weebly.com.)

**Will Kemp** won the *Debut Collection Award* and *Envoi International Poetry Competition* in 2010. Cinnamon Press published his first collection, *Nocturnes* (2011), his second, *Lowland* (2013), and will also publish his third, *The Painters Who Studied Clouds* (2015). His poems have been published in national journals and well placed in national competitions (e.g. 2nd in both the Poetry Society’s Stanza Competition 2011 and the Keats-Shelley Prize 2013).

**Janet Kenny** is an old poet who used to be young. She sang professionally and wrote poetry after singing stopped. Born in New Zealand, she lived in places called overseas and settled in Queensland. She has published widely. Her last book, ‘This Way to the Exit’ (White Violet Press, 2012), is premature.

**Steve Klepetar** teaches literature and writing at Saint Cloud State University in Minnesota. His work has received several nominations for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. His latest collections include *Speaking to the Field Mice* (Sweatshoppe Publications), *Blue Season* (with Joseph Lisowski, mgv2>publishing), and *My Son Writes a Report on the Warsaw Ghetto* (Flutter Press). An e-chapbook, *Return of the Bride of Frankenstein*, is forthcoming from Kind of a Hurricane Press.

**David W. Landrum**’s poetry has appeared widely—in *Angle* and, most recently, in *Mojave Review, The Literary Bohemian, Atavic Poetry, Skylight 24, Red Fez*, and *Windhover*.

**Woody Long** is a retired computer specialist living in Arlington, Virginia. He has published poems in the online journal *14 by 14*.


**Chris McCully** was born in Bradford (Yorkshire) in 1958. He published his first poem (in *The Scarborough Mercury*, a free newspaper) in 1975. In 1982 he completed a BA at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and finished his doctorate at the University of Manchester in 1988. He worked in full-time academic life (University of Manchester) from 1985-2003. Since 2003 he has held a variety of part-time academic positions, combining these with an increasingly busy life as a writer, and recently completed work as the Managing Director of the Graduate School of Humanities, University of Groningen (The Netherlands). In autumn 2013 he moves with his wife and two Labradors to Essex. He has authored, co-authored or edited over twenty books including six collections of verse for Carcanet Press. *Selected Poems* appeared from Carcanet in 2011. Further details on www.chrismccully.co.uk

Richard Meyer, a former English and humanities teacher, lives in the home his father built in Mankato, a city at the bend of the Minnesota River. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in various publications, including: Able Muse, 14 Magazine, The Raintown Review, Measure, Alabama Literary Review, Light, and The Evansville Review. His poem ‘Fieldstone’ was selected as the winner of the 2012 Robert Frost Farm Prize, and his poem ‘La Gioconda’ was chosen as a top sonnet in the 2013 Great River Shakespeare Festival.

Rachel Nix is from Northwest Alabama. Despite an irrational fear of frogs, she’s declared herself content with living in the boonies. She has been most recently published at Spillway, The Summerset Reivew, and Bop Dead City; Rachel’s personal website can be found at: chasingthegrey.com.

Chris O’Carroll is a writer and an actor. In addition to his previous appearances in Angle, he has published poems in First Things, Folly, The New Verse News, The Rotary Dial, Snakeskin, and other print and online journals.

‘Knockout’ was previously published at Tilt-a-Whirl.

Henry Quince has a big, anachronistic moustache and a restless nature. His poems have popped up now and then in assorted venues. He maintains an address in Australia, but a business interest often takes him to Himalayan regions.

Peter Richards has been published, almost exclusively on line and it doesn’t get much less exclusive than that. There is a tendency to avoid ‘the right places’ although it may be sour grapes or just something that looks like sour grapes or simple confusion with regard to the directional causality behind this avoidance. He snuck into New Formalist and Snakeskin anyway, and The Shit Creek Review will take some beating both in name and nature.

Rosanna Riches is currently in her final year at the University of Gloucestershire where she has been studying Creative Writing. She lives in the Forest of Dean and competes internationally with the women’s GB Kendo team.

Rick Rohdenburg attended the Writers’ Workshop at Brown University. He lives in Atlanta, Georgia, where he works as a systems analyst.

Julie-ann Rowell’s pamphlet collection, Convergence, won a PBS Award in 2003. Her first full collection, Letters North, was nominated for the Michael Murphy Memorial Award for best first collection in Britain and Ireland, 2011. She teaches poetry in Bristol and serves on the ExCite committee for the advancement of poetry in Devon. She won first prize in the Frogmore Poetry Competition and was a runner-up in the Bridport Prize, 2005. She has been published in many magazines and journals including Agenda, The Reader, The Welsh Review, The Stand, The Moth and The SHOp.
Marybeth Rua-Larsen lives on the south coast of Massachusetts and teaches part-time at Bristol Community College. Her poems, essays, flash fiction and reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Raintown Review*, *Angle*, *Cleaver*, *The Poetry Bus* and *Free Inquiry*. She won in the Poetry category for the 2011 Over the Edge New Writer of the Year Competition in Galway, Ireland and her chapbook, *Nothing In-Between*, will be published by Barefoot Muse Press in 2014.

Ed Shacklee is a public defender who represents young people in the District of Columbia. His poems have appeared in *14 by 14*, *The Flea*, *Kin Poetry Journal*, *Light Quarterly*, *Per Contra* and *The Raintown Review*, among other places. He is working on a bestiary.

Shakthi Shrima has been restless with words ever since she could read. When she isn’t doing math, rereading Nabokov, or writing, she can be found behind her camera, drinking coffee, or humming at obnoxious volumes. Her favorite poets are Mark Doty and Dean Young. She will probably cry if she doesn’t get to be an algebraic number theorist, and currently resides in Austin, Texas with her Dracaena braunii, Aristotle.


J. R. Solonche has been publishing in magazines, journals, and anthologies since the early 70s. These include *The Progressive*, *The American Scholar*, *The New Criterion*, *The North American Review*, *Yankee Magazine*, *Salmagundi*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Poet Lore*, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and the *Anthology of Magazine Verse & Yearbook of American Poetry*. He is a four-time Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee. He is co-author of *Peach Girl: Poems for a Chinese Daughter* (Grayson Books) and author of *Beautiful Day*, forthcoming from Deerbrook Editions. Professor Emeritus of English at SUNY Orange, he lives in the Hudson Valley with his wife, the poet Joan I. Siegel, and ten cats, at least two of whom are reincarnated poets.

Alan Wickes grew up in Northumberland. He studied History of Art and English Literature at Manchester and Open University. His work has been published in the USA and Australia as well as in UK, including appearances in *Aesthetica*, *Znine*, *Worm*, *Loch Raven Review*, *The Chimera*, *Envoi*, *Raintown Review*, *Shit Creek Review*, *Soundzine* and *The Hypertexts*. His sonnets have won Ware Poets national competition twice, in 2004 and 2009. Cannon Poets awarded first prize to his poem, ‘Parting Shots’, in November 2006. His chapbook, *Prospero at Breakfast*, was published by Modern Metrics in November 2007.

Peter Wyton is just more than a little chuffed to learn that Jon Stallworthy, editor of OUP’s anthology *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*, has included his poem ‘Unmentioned in Dispatches’ in the revised edition which is scheduled for publication in June, 2014 in hardback and e-book formats, with the paperback to follow in September 2014.

‘Make Happy Use of This’ won the Ware Poetry Competition in 2003.
Acute, possibly oblique, but never obtuse