

Antiphon



Welcome to the first issue of Antiphon!

We'd like to thank all those who've supported us in creating this new on-line poetry magazine - those who've submitted, those who've encouraged us and those who've helped out.

We're excited to offer excellent new work from, amongst others, Jane Røken, Catherine Edmunds, Jan Fortune, Martyn Crucefix and Mario Petrucci, and reviews of works by Christy Ducker, Michael Mackmin and Helena Nelson.

We hope you enjoy reading the magazine and that you'll let us know what you think.

Antiphon number 2 will appear early in the New Year. There'll be a call for submissions nearer the time. If you'd like to submit publications for review, contact us by email.

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Applause

Editorial Note

I don't know a huge amount about classical music, but I've always rather liked Mozart. I hadn't realised why until I started playing his work myself. Despite being simplified and mangled by my grade 4 clarinet abilities, his pieces have a sense of joy, even at their most solemn. There's a love of the surprise turn, the unexpected phrase, the ripple and flow of sound. There's an understanding of how pitch and rhythm can work on the emotions.

And so with poetry. The best poetry has that same delight but in language, in the sound and feel of words in the mouth, in the way vowels can be long and sonorous or light and dancing. There's a precision in the use of pattern and syntax, carefully worked like a sculptor chips and smooths the curving angles of each toe, a knowledge of the way consonants rub against each other or lead the reader forward, an awareness of the etymology of words so that each resounds with the deeper tones of its wider meaning. Every word is scrutinised for sound and fit. But poets can do more than play with sound. They can use metaphor and simile and a dozen other devices to show us a new way of reading the world, distilling emotion down to one pure sentence and pouring that thought across the mundane.

Don Paterson talks of the poem having “to surprise, delight, scare you or blow you away” - and that's just its effect on the poet, writing the thing, never mind the reader. The best poetry works its way into your mind and memory and persists, altering the way you perceive the world, takes ideas and mixes them together in ways that illuminate both in a strange light.

The poems we're privileged to publish in this issue cover a range of styles but all have this sensitivity to language, have images and sounds that resonate in the silence at the end of the verse. I could talk about what we love in all these poems. Jane Røken yokes a series of startling images together to serve her dream-like elegy, each vivid and resonant. Mario Petrucci's “when a gaze”, has tenderness, suppressed emotional language, controlled expression, and limits itself to one dramatic moment (the split of “stup/endously”, which mimics the caught breath of its feeling). Jan Fortune gives us lyricism of folkloric simplicity, enriched by the placing of words on the page to modulate her words into echoes we might believe are “the language of slate”. Catherine Edmunds weaves a mystery for us out of images and half-narrative, a mystery we've yet to decode, but one which draws us in each time we read. Thomas Zimmerman offers a sonnet, but not one slavish to the form, happily switching the rhyme scheme, mixing full and half rhyme, using both end-stops and enjambment to give the poem a natural conversational flow. But we'd rather let you discover their delights for yourself.



It's been a strange experience, creating a magazine out of nothing but ether and words, and we hope you enjoy it.

Rosemary Badcoe

Act One



topple and fall

this is the tree that shadows the priory, this the lily
the winding way and the man on the path;
these the branches that bend to the wet and the stone
with the flower in its eye, its iris

buy a panama hat, says the man,
he has stacks, he turns, he dares you

you say you can't: the train is late, the way out
is blocked by the girl on the bench
and the little dog scampers,
pursued by a duck like a dodo, a headless torso,
and sphinxes that look out with children's faces

they miss the puppy –
they're too involved with out-staring each other,
hair carved in cabbage leaves, flapping and stone,
one hides his face, the other one tries to stand on his foot
while behind them venetian blinds topple and fall

the lady is legless, the dam is dry
and the man stands benign on the cusp of the wall
beneath the tree that shades lily, his wife
in her panama hat while the little dog tugs on the lead,
dreams of chasing the children who scamper and fall

you trip over chocolate and topple in fields
of coquelicot, cornflower, cabbage and rue
you slip on wet stone, in the priory ruins
singing lili marleen, and all the while, the beam in your eye
prevents you from seeing the tree, the shadow, the winding way
and the girl on the bench, departed

Catherine Edmunds

On foot

I still remember them
those books about angling
as summer dusks fell
in search of sport

how to tread carefully
the use of camouflage
the quality of terrain
and they were reinforced

by that northern voice
smoke wreath and tweeds
of an English patriot
who insisted I leave

no devastated trail
from gap-stone to cairn
and I knew the appeal
was to natural cunning

bound up with the image
of full-grown men
ghosting the undergrowth
gliding like phantoms

no green vein crushed —
but barely distinguished
from my lack of confidence
as I moved hesitant

from one girl to the next
my foot dab-dabbing
at interior brakes
hoping not to create

a more turbulent wake —
till metaphors now
reinvigorate themselves
I'm told to curtail

these blackening trails
I smudge on earth
though at times I feel
too much constraint

till I barely discern
my presence at all
and a wilful right foot
slams to the floor

Martyn Crucefix

The view from here

I know your toes aren't playing in the grass,
for all the rain that hasn't fallen yet
has settled in your hair. You say we owe
the view from here to no-one but ourselves.
I must have plumb forgotten every dream
in which the hills were empty but for us.
I'll turn away, though I don't want my back
to make a better target for your knives.
Who's going to wear your blindfold when I'm gone?
You'll have to eat the candy by yourself
and tell your evil twin about how you
can't dry your hair because I stole your towels.
You'd like that, wouldn't you? My phone is on.
I cannot wait to turn down all your calls.

Andrew Shields

A Way

He was looking to find his way
between whales and Treasure Island.
Mars would do in a pinch.
Through the culls of his search
there were spears and scars,
an emergence of heroes.

He was looking to catch light
from Aldebaran, apply it;
watch for the wish it summoned there.
Where night gathered at the ends,
a glow caught his eye, proof
he could lead the way.

In Mexico I saw... was how
he made believers; using Damascus
Seychelles, Tierra del Fuego.
He gathered in the corners,
made his knapsack from it;
dallied there with history,
adages for a compass.

Larry Jordan

Breech

The phone burrs in the bedroom
barely there above the clatter of bins

the throaty caw of pied whites
nursing their squab in our chimney.

I press the handset to my ear.
An eggshell frost on the skylight

mutes the morning's rash of blue
and seeps inside the sill.

I bury my head in your chest.
You ask and I tell in ruptured words

reluctant to give the news breath.
In the kitchen our son eats Frosties

pulls on muddied school shoes
his new coat, and calls out, *I'm ready.*

Angelina Ayers

Act Two



It's not the leaving of Liverpool that grieves me

Let old faiths sleep in their boxes. There'll be time,
time enough for them.

Hear the wind machine rising, low at first --
a jungle wind headed for Kilimanjaro, humming
across tar swamps and wide frozen rivers.

Open the shutters and look westward.
There, the lighthouse. There, the clipper ship.

Forget the cairn of ancient bones on the high ground.
Invent new typographies of divination;
read a succession of railway stations, landing stages.

Strangers will come to your door.
Don't buy indulgence, no matter how good the bargain.

Learn the language of true believers:
rowanberries dropped from heaven, blood-red
crab apples spreading over the ocean.

Let anyone on Walrus Street tell your fortune,
and know it's but a last-ditch cure for forgetfulness.

Some dreams are larger than the slow night.
Wind well your lantern clock. Take nothing with you,
take no encounter at face value.

When the winds howl, play a coronach.
Every day at sundown I lay the cards for you.

Jane Røken

Cochlea

I didn't dare use words,
their lanterns dimmed in vodka,
laced with olive grease.
You sent me surreptitious signals:
pour the wine and smile!
Each time I spoke our secret
boomed within my inner ear,
the boiling oil of noisy blood.

The four of us, friends;
it didn't bear being thought about.
And so we mainly did not.
Though even so, Ursula
picked us out – like fish bones.
Placed four in an empty snail shell.
Crushed them with a click of heel
as we walked home. She said,
No doubt you'll write about that.
Her grimace: hammer, stirrup, bone.

Richard Moorhead

Conversations with Guru ii

He holds the kidney stone aloft above
his head as though he is a market seller
and the last nub of some sacred ginger

is up for grabs. Handled by the waiting
disciple, it is placed inside a cupboard
of pure, pitch black. The spread limbs

on the lengthy table jump up, conform
into the shape of a man, who throws
a hug around guru and weeps with thanks.

Your tears are payment enough, says guru.
He turns towards our circle: you don't have
to feel unwell, you don't have to feel unwell,

says guru. (– We have all filled in surveys
stating our ailments. I have turned green
with all the talk of health and python curry.)

Now guru is doing handstands and making
teas and coffees with his feet. They throw
the sugar pot and the milk like juggling balls,

and we find ourselves applauding. Have
you seen this one, says guru, as he vaults
through the window's clear panel of sky –

a shockwave smashes a glass in the sink.
The large bird crushing my chest has a claw
on my heart. You feel this, says guru. I do.

James Howard

“Why do you live on your own, without any children?”

Bare feet slip into pink Crocs
then the task of balling her socks
which I suggest she bring with her
in case of change in the weather

to the park. The hallway is dark
crammed with half-seen things: Daddy’s art,
Mummy’s shoes, the baby’s pram.
And this new miracle: small hands

rolling socks as perfectly
as morning delicately
opens into deepening noon
or the sun segues to the moon,

the learning of it forgotten.
Stuffing her spotty cotton
socks in my pocket as we go
she takes my hand, and I know

love, like water, will find its
level; that it all somehow fits
together; that it’s not so far
to the park or the morning star.

Michaela Ridgway

Nil by Mouth, week 3

Still no swallow, so we'd brought things to smell:
lavender was in bloom and I'd plucked rosemary
trudging the dual carriageway from Silver Street.

Tessa brought various kinds of mint
from her Berkshire garden. You grunted
what we took to be approval. Encouraged,

I'd brought essential oils today. You had me repeat
their names: chamomile, geranium, frankincense,
rose. Your nostrils quivered at each sniff.

Then from the twilit depths of your confusion,
as if the oils had cleared some mental passageways
like menthol for the mind, with just a whiff

of a smile, you announced your plan.
'You can leave the bottles in the drawer,
and we can have some more tomorrow,

instead of listening to music. One is familiar
with the music, you know. But one isn't
familiar with this. It's very ... interesting.'

Along the dual carriageway I walk on air,
become familiar with this ballooning
happiness, held on a rope of grief.

Cora Greenhill

Interval

Helena Nelson, *Plot and Counter-Plot*, 54pp, £9.00

Shoestring Press, 19 Devonshire Avenue, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 1BS

Plot and Counter-Plot is the fifth of Helena Nelson's publications, a full collection of forty-eight poems. In some ways they are unfashionable poems. Nelson enjoys traditional form and rhyme, is not reluctant to use unpopular techniques such as deliberate stress on unstressed syllables (e.g. "soiled sheets" in "The Good Wife", albeit as part of a deliberately adopted idiom) or build poems that rely on traditional full rhymes and simple vocabulary:

Love is like riding a bicycle of light
spinning on two great wheels of moon and sun,
clean rain in your hair, and the air
kissing your face and tugging your clothes,
balance as sharp as a rush of stars.

(*Imagery*)

There's also quite a fondness for the rhythms of ballad and song:

and the river was bright and cold
and we paddled and splashed in fun
and were good – as good as gold –
and we shared the gold we spun

(*The Beautiful Day*)

So we might think that's all that needs saying about this collection. Not so. As with Alison Brackenbury, Nelson not only connects herself to a long tradition of sonorous, strongly rhythmic lyric writing, she works subtly against that tradition to create unique, and perhaps uniquely contemporary, slants upon it.

So, "Imagery" is entirely conscious of what it is doing with "light", "moon and sun", "air", "kissing", "stars". It is bringing traditions into play in order to work against them in its second stanza: "but it is only a simile.....Love is not a bicycle...Love will unseat you." This unseats us. Sure of our ground in the first stanza, reading the grand imagery and vocabulary of romantic love as if it were obvious sentiment, we're not prepared for it to be undercut by explication in the second stanza. This has the effect of at once affirming the traditional images and undermining them, an entirely modern device. (Well, on reflection, as modern as Donne and Shakespeare at least).

"The Beautiful Day" on the other hand seems only to suggest it should be read at face value. It sustains the simple language of childish pleasure throughout, and affirms the pure truth of simple feeling in the last line: "it was beautiful, and it was true." So we read as a child might, a poem of simple pleasure. As such it's not a world away from Lou Reed's "Perfect Day", straightforward expression of sensual pleasure. Except, as "Perfect Day" turns to challenge the possibility of such days – "You're going to reap what you sow" – Nelson's echo of Keats may just cause us to step back, too. Perhaps to consider how such days are the construction of memory, the construction of poets, truth in the way they are articulated, not just in themselves.

Again and again in *Plot and Counter-Plot* I find myself thinking: "this poet wants to express

pure lyric ideas in a form any ordinary reader might appreciate". She's probably not striving for a populist voice, but she achieves it in some of these poems, providing (again like Brackenbury) approachable poetry readable and attractive, and yet also uses a subtle and sensitive intelligence which understands exactly the choices being made.

Nelson can allow a Blakean straightforwardness to stand in place of detailed observation:

Never a time more sweet
only to sit like this,
only to sit and eat.
(Just This)

Such verse might have come straight out of *Songs of Innocence*, being immediately familiar, with its folkloric, nursery rhyme echoes. There's a purity and light in many of these poems reminiscent of Blake without myth.

But Nelson is presenting these apparently simple verses within a volume of some sophistication, too. Her truth can be as complex as the next poet's. "Fairy Tale", for example, uses ballad form to examine a fairy tale personal relationship and its consequent "confusion of form and fact", which in the end "dispensed with illusion" to kill innocence: "the Babes in the Wood are dead". Nelson weaves songs of innocence and experience together.

There are risks in producing such poems. Your audience may mistake simplicity of expression for simplicity of idea, and not search more deeply. The poems themselves may settle for "mere" sentimentality. "Felis Infelix", for example, records the death of a cat. Perhaps the poem is a tribute, but despite being written a little wryly ("a little bed, a litter tray (clean)") all it really does is say that it's sad and pointless when a cat dies.

But I can forgive such gentle sins, for the sake of the superb lyrics that nestle nearby. There is something perfect about a little poem like "Secret", the poem I'll quote in full to end this review:

Summer rain at midnight
sweetens the wakeful air.
You won't forget, you can't forget
nowhere is everywhere.

Still the rain is singing:
love watches over despair.
I've put this into words for you
so you can keep it there.
(Secret)

michael mackmin, *from there to here*, 32pp, £4
HappenStance, 21 Hatton Green, Glenrothes, Fife KY7 4SD

I only discovered HappenStance a few months ago, although the press has been producing quality pamphlets and the occasional full collection since 2005. Michael Mackmin is well known as editor of *The Rialto*. This is his second pamphlet with HappenStance.

There's a certain breathlessness about most of these poems, giving them a conversational, sometimes almost colloquial rhythm. Stylistically he achieves this through many devices: frequent use of direct speech, quotation or dialogue (or what the poet presents as such), interjections, perhaps as qualifications on a thought begun, perhaps as asides; a scatter of punctuation to work against the rhythm of the lines (Mackmin is fond of the bracketed comment); a vocabulary often informal, contracted; and a love, perhaps actually a passion for or even an obsession with, unexpected line breaks. Here's an example:

A troubled
lake, much rain, a river brimming
foretell (backtell) ignored
stuff. Recognise, 'they' say, what's
left out (of your life) oh, *get*
in touch. It's that ah so sad
you don't know you're born therapy
horn.

(Flood)

The consequence is poetry that races, full of liveliness and a stream of voices, the poet as medium for a cocktail party of overheard voices.

The downsides of all this can be a too-frenetic moment, or sometimes concision which momentarily puzzles (though usually clarifies on re-reading). Some lines seem broken for effect, rhythm without particular purpose. Sometimes the poet presents a wry, intrusive self-consciousness:

His heart hiccupped in his chest
like the lump of a pulse in a lizard's
neck. What of it? You about to write
a dead, a dying father poem?

(Him)

Perhaps we can read this as postmodern – the poet reminding us of his presence and the artifice he's engaged in, though that simply pushes interpretation back a stage – why raise awareness of the already pretty obvious? Or we can be a little sardonic ourselves, and see it merely as the poet having fun with us? Or, maybe the poet is aiming for a complex viewpoint, making the reader at one and the same time engage with the poem and step back from it?

Whatever tricks he's playing, Mackmin loves energy. The excitement in many of the poems is infectious, their personal voices entirely convincing. Which makes the more poignant pieces seem more striking in contrast. I think the poet is fighting against sentiment some of the time, which perhaps is one reason for the occasional distancing device, and also why animating *dramatis personae* works well for him: inhabiting others' complexities, he can avoid the straight lyricism he's drawn to but seems not quite to want. "December, for Lucy" is a good example. It opens:

Watching where a robin stood
and dipped to pick at little
bits of food

This would be entirely sentimental without the line break at “little”, so we get both the feeling and its undercutting. Similarly:

the goldfinch
that I took and cut
to see the heart, awed
how large it was in such a small –

Again we have a bird, we see its heart, but in a brutal way that belies the suggestion of tenderness even as it also reinforces it. And we have a thought deliberately incomplete (no noun is supplied to attach to “small”) so the reader fills the gap. The poem ends with questions:

singing is it? Is it singing
makes the heart get strong?

No answer is given. Most poets would shy from the unanswered ending. The result is a poem that, being “for Lucy” opens up sentimental possibilities, critiques or ducks or complicates them through its devices, and thereby both gives us the sentiment and queries it, as in the final question. The dilemma of the poem is experienced by the reader: should we trust the way we feel, or is it mere biology? Is it poetry that strengthens the heart, or is that merely a lie told by poets, to themselves and those they’re fooled to believe they might love?

In fact, many of these apparently quite simple poems contain subtleties to push, test or intrigue the reader. “Interlude”, for example, begins:

We walked along a sunken lane, not
much travelled, grass in the centre

Such allusion is almost cheeky. Or the poem which opens “This poem explains the meaning of life” is almost metaphysical, but intended merely as irony, for the poem itself is in the voice of a hopeful, but naive poet submitting (perhaps to *The Rialto*), her poem intense and deep, but delivered through cliché. And, of course, Mackmin has to present that poem within his, so we get another distancing, ironic and allusive construct. In itself this is amusing, reminiscent of Billy Collins’ self-referential “Workshop” in the way it both makes fun of and embraces the novice poet. But also in this poem, Mackmin has buried an anti-war poem, so effectively that no-one could accuse him of doing so. “I explain the pity and the terror” is the naive statement of the young poet, but as clear a statement from our poet, too.

We might dismiss much of this volume as wry meta-poetry and perhaps the cleverness, artifice and allusion will act as a barrier for some readers. Mackmin will write “Notes towards a September sonnet”, but not the sonnet itself. His “Things Fall Apart” is a filmic post-disaster world focused on Walthamstow: the mundanity of apocalypse. However, the straightforwardness and the sophistication enable each other in these poems. We can admire the way the poems are framed as much as the feelings they disguise. Sometimes, perhaps, it’s the cleverness we’re applauding, but just as often it’s the revival of real feeling that his devices offer a different slant upon.

Christy Ducker, *Armour*, 32pp, £5

Smith/Doorstop Books, The Poetry Business, Bank Street Arts, 32-40 Bank Street, Sheffield S1 2DS

Smith/Doorstop has a fine reputation for pamphlet publishing. I own twenty of them, and every one is well worth the £5 price tag. As a collection they offer a wide view of contemporary poetry: exciting first pamphlets from their competition such as Alan Payne's personal journey, Allison McVety's subtle social histories, River Wolton's affecting accounts of the Israel-Palestine border to the Michael Marks shortlisted mainstream quirkiness of Simon Armitage's *The Motorway Service Station as a Destination in its Own Right*.

Christy Ducker's addition to the list fits right in. Ducker mixes wisdom with weirdness, tenderness with thorns. Her love of the words for their own sake doesn't stop them having bite. Her imaginative inhabitation of strange ideas does not stop them being perceptive or heartfelt. A poet who can start a poem:

I'd rather be a lobster,
in pre-op, not knowing
whether I'll fail
on the surgeon's table.

(*Armour*)

Ducker knows exactly what she's doing, "knowing" both intellectually and intuitively. Having grabbed you with that opening line and that abrupt situation, she can sustain the comparison between her own vulnerability and the crustacean's self-assured selfish protection throughout the whole poem, she can place you in the mind of the lobster, she can make sly jokes about the evolutionary position of ape

with her brain a fruit
in the treetops seeding
chatter and quips
whilst her fingers crack lice.

And yet she can use all this to get us to identify absolutely with the persona of the poem and thereby feel the core experience of being human, this human in particular:

I wake up later

stitched into myself,
embracing the nurses
embracing you
making light

All this is done with economy and deftness. Look how that simplest of lines "I wake up later" becomes so powerful, simply because of all it implies. It needs no embellishment, so the core ideas that people are multiply vulnerable in order to love, that our vulnerability is the social, evolutionary success that enables us both to "crack lice" and "make light" is carried forward with elegance and subtlety.

This is perhaps the most striking poem in the collection, although others essay unusual subjects too. "The Talking Island" is the complaint of an island who has lost her lover (I take it to be Lindisfarne and Bede, but may be reading in my own associations). "The Working Woman's Right Breast is Not Amused" is a poem that presents exactly what it says on the tin.

“Grace Darling Learns to Count” runs through a number-scale representing Darling’s biography, doing so with wit, a concrete imagination and precisely chosen language:

5 will hook on fast to memory,
8 will moor with a rope twist
round and around the docking horns
(*Grace Darling Learns to Count*)

Much is going on in these few words: exactly apt visualisation, a child’s perceptions, fragments of (supposed) biography, a sense of a persona developing, firmly grounding the experience in rocks, sea, boat, the very gentle sonics (memory/moor, round/around/docking/horn), the natural use of specialist vocabulary (“docking horns” could be made up for all I know, but I absolutely believe it’s the right term) and subtle rhythmic touches, too (for example, hearing “round and around” as exactly the right rhythm, both for the poem’s success and the childlike intent).

Ducker’s sense of rhythm also leads her to offer a slightly unusual trio of poems, which I personally found the weakest in the volume: “Three Dances”. They use lateral spacing and indentation to carry the rhythm of dance, and the dancers’ relationships. They’re perfectly capable pieces, and rhythmically compelling, but they do not seem to me to carry the many subtleties of the rest of the poems. Perhaps this is unfair, as they’re entirely successful in what they seem to aim for, and arguably a pamphlet whose 21 poems all work in similar ways might feel a little flat, might need a little lighter approach in places.

There are a couple of other poems that I wonder about, too, such as the three-line poem “Asylum Seeker” which puzzles me as no more than the start of an idea, its “before and after” story being far too abbreviated to seem more than a political statement. “Footing”, also, in the voice of stones become wall, though a strong descriptive poem in essentially list form, seems to me not to offer the scope of the other poems, despite its very assured writing. Perhaps it is to be read metaphorically or symbolically, but if so, that has passed me by. Even so, these few poems certainly do not weaken the strong virtues of the poems at their elbows. The best poems in this volume, and there’s a long list of them, each give several delights, the surface simplicity of most belying the many layers of subtlety within. A full collection surely is not far away.

NW

Debating point: “Truth is beautiful, without doubt; but so are lies.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

In a recent workshop, as a change from deciding whether semi-colons should be commas, we found ourselves discussing the nature of poetic truth. Truth, I said, doesn’t matter in poetry. Others disagreed.

It turns out we think there’s a difference between “factual truth” and “poetic truth”. Sometimes, perhaps frequently, rather than fact, we get a better poem from a version of the truth, that is a fiction, that is that is, I suppose, a lie. Perhaps Plato was right.

It’s pretty obvious, isn’t it, that what works in any artistic construct, isn’t necessarily what happens in the real world? If they were the same thing, novelists would be out of business. But novelists do not have the same commitment to truth that poets are supposed to. “What is truth?” is a different question for poets than for Pilate. We are trying to find an answer, not

ignore the question.

So how can it be that the searchers for truth have a preference for fiction? I think we believe that, if we do it properly, we can create something which is more truthful, more revealing, more insightful, more worthwhile than simply reporting the facts as they happened. Which is a kind of arrogance, but also a kind of responsibility.

And also a source of conflict. Poets are observers. Poets are recorders. Poets are selectors of concrete images from the world around them. From these images and moments we expect a reader to construct or recognise an experience, a truth, beyond the fragments of reality we've selected. The image, then, is not really taken from reality, but constructed by the poet: it's selected because it stands for something, or it's a starting point for the reader to extrapolate from, or it's an example that illustrates some greater feeling or universalised experience. As we choose something in our small worlds to write about, we are also choosing it to resonate more widely, not really reporting the our world at all, but reconstructing it to create some sort of larger meaning.

The best poetry, then, perhaps reconciles two opposite pulls. It wants the reader to believe it is exact and closely observed from particular experience, but also that it is emblematic or symbolic, or in some sense "interpretable" as being more than merely an account of one poet's day-in-the-life.

The issue for the working poet, then, is how to make this happen. How do we find not only "interesting observations" – a skill in itself – but at the same time ensure that those observations do more than merely report? Whilst poetry does document the found world, it should not be documentary. Contemporary poetry also tends to shun the neater correlations of thing and idea past poetics have been built around, such as allegory and symbolism. We don't believe in ideals, for example, so can we select a particular image of beauty as a symbol of "universal beauty" if there is no such thing? Our world is entirely relativist and uncertain, so do the relations we can set up between world and meaning have to be uncertain, too?

One way to handle this is simply to avoid the problem. Be descriptive. Offer the image alone to stand for itself. Readers may then interpret it in any way they desire, with little responsibility in the poet's hands other than to make the image interesting in the first place. But is mere description enough?

Another is to rely on the words alone, not worrying too much about what they actually represent. Avant garde poets (of which I think the L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E school was one) often pursue this line. The problem with this approach is that it forgets language never exists in isolation. It is always doing something. And readers typically assume there's meaning to be found, even if it hasn't been hidden.

But for most of us the task is much more complex than these solutions. We want to describe, we want to plumb the intricacies of language, but we also want the resonance of truth through fiction.

How do we get that?

NW

Act Three



for a newborn son

when a gaze

is
not yet
thunder but

merely rolled open
steeped in
sleep

still
finding
range &

target that look
before a look
occupies

as if skies
found a way to
blink till then stup-

endously unwatched &
overseen you
lift blue

at last to
me – a glance
through wonder that

once thrown seemingly
fixes all that has
passed

below

Mario Petrucci

Triptych

In a house of corners and stairs
and my grandmother's cooking is a room
of permanence and wood, with a too-small
window and a bed that's a boat built
from soft history and wheat, where I wait
with my sister beside me to be orphan,
adventurer, queen; where I wait
with her to be old.

In a house of morning and birdsong
and my children grown away, grown from home,
I am smoothing the night from the sheets,
soothing the watchful, the wakeful; his touch
on my hip, his younger self's face as he sleeps.
Outside it is Tuesday; the hour of click
and stretch, and if I listen hard with my head
on one side I can hear a distant child cry.

In a house of salt wash and light
and my bed carried singing to the sea,
I cover the counterpane with petals
and pictures, sleep with my skin
to the sun and the whisper of trees,
feel the velvet speak of his breath
in my hair; wait to be orphan,
adventurer, queen.

Claire Dyer

White

I wake with the dawn and the fall
of frost-heavy beech leaves,
the secrecy of the night before
profaned by a pale sun.
The hawthorn wall, now gauze,
admits rime-hardened fields,
white and unwelcome.
Last night's embers lie
dead beside you,
the thieving air steals
your sleeping breath.

Soon the morning tourists will arrive
to cast their suspicious glances
and us as villains in their small worlds.
I know that I should wake you
but the town waits with stone hands.

John C Nash

Life and other terms

I split autumn perennials,
layer rhododendrons for spring,
lashed by winds,
lacking even good bones
against the virtues of age.

With full hands
I pull at heels of rosemary,
lad's love sweet and sad,
bitter rue and yarrow.
Geraniums on the patio
turned out like children to get the sun;
the faint green of old bottles
waiting for something to be done with them.

I see living's a job like any other,
that there are no true and perfect implements
to trim the edges, only working usages, like knives.

Janet Fisher

Mind in Flight

*Lufthansa Airlines
Athens to Frankfurt to Detroit*

The altitude is 40,000 feet,
we're west of Ireland, south of Iceland. Wine,
liqueur, and German beer have mixed to heat
my mind to phoenix-flight—No, not that fine:

more like a priest-drugged sibyl's, slavish-free.
A Donald Duck cartoon is playing on
the monitor: a sylvan scene, at dawn;
it could be Delphi, Epidaurus; see

the trees and stream and rocks, the absent gods.
“Shoot nature with a camera, and not
a gun,” the cartoon caption reads. At odds,
the two eternal: art and death. I've got

my third merlot—but when I'm sober, home,
I'll find the grounds to fix, or burn, this poem.

Thomas Zimmerman

Act Four



from I. Tŷ Schrödinger

i. Cwm

We come over the lip, drop to the bowl where lake seeps from itself, heather underfoot, a monkey-puzzle tree beside the house, lichen enamels walls that close round memories, dust, the word for ‘us’. No one speaks. The water can’t recall the smell of sweat, the taste of blood, the language of slate—the path to the chapel is long.

ii: Slate I

Water sucks colour from the sky, staccatos against the shore, greys granite ruins, grinds the scree-scraped rock; falls—slate needles on the lake—the last remaining roof-tiles stutter—
It’s late,

‘s late

slate

II. Cwmorthin for two voices

And the snow falls and falls
on the greying face of slate
and the ruined village calls

through crumbling granite walls
through the river’s crashing spate
and as snow falls and falls

the wind keens and crawls
into crevices to wait,
still the ruined village calls

as a hush of ice-web palls
bury broken barn and gate
while the snow falls and falls

on the mill’s shattered halls
slipping to a silent fate,
and the ruined village calls

out its grief as it falls
and knows it’s too late
and the snow falls and falls
and the ruined village calls

And the snow falls

and falls

and the ruined village calls

as the snow falls

and falls

and the ruined village calls

as the snow falls

and falls

and the ruined village calls

as the snow falls

and falls

Jan Fortune

Eating for Two

1.

When push and shove come, at last,
to stirrups and forceps,
protocol is waived and sans-mask
I take my place blindside of the mess.

First sight of his crown has them aflutter,
like pigeons round a bit of crust:
finally, right way-up, our little miner
tunneling his way into the hubbub.

If I remember right it was Trafalgar
Square, over a tuna-mayo sandwich
and a bag of salt and vinegar,
where you talked me into talking you into marriage,

a lunch-date neither of us would believe
would lead to me reminding you to breathe.

2.

Twenty-two laborious hours,
twice as long as her brother,
on an empty stomach too, unless
you count that brief encounter

with a tuna-mayo sandwich,
before the hollers wrenched me headlong
back to theatre, where my stand-in
was doing it *all wrong*.

At last, our little girl,
made of love, moulded by will —
I clean forgot
why my hands were cramped or what
it was they had been trying to shape
from your back, your shoulders, your nape.

Brian Edwards

Archie's Paris

(in memory: E.A. Markham)

I intend, of course, to live forever
you once chuckled, so I have three days
to search the city trying to conjure
some icy dimension where you can shine
alive for a moment; right here would do
by the Arc De Triomphe on a freezing night
as one year cannons into another.

Poems are gifts, you continued, tell me
why do you make your gifts so badly?
We collapsed in tearful laughter,
stumbling along the Crescent,
this morning the air in the Tuileries
is cutting and cold, it blurs my eyes
will we meet by the iron tree?

Was it you who offered to draw my likeness
up at Montmartre, did I see you crammed
onto the steps of Sacre Coeur?
For two nights now I have been woken
by a terrible voice, one of the damned
was it you screaming or some homeless soul
drunk in the echoes of Saint Lazare?

You didn't show at the market this morning
on the Boulevard Des Batignoles
I bought bread and cheese for the crossing
made you a gift, however clumsy
of course I found you at my elbow
rapid eyes quick with mischief,
Tell me, you said, do I look like your mother?

David Harmer

The Cartographer's Morning-After Shirt

Early, before you rise, I slip away
and in the pearly morning
hold this show-through up against the light,

blunder through latitudes
of meadows and upland farms,
pleated railways that fan out
to cities, aerial mosaic of darts and notches
end-on-end: I scent espresso, coinage
and tarmac until tears sting,

stumble where the grain line swoops
to hummock of each breast
and its neat trig summit,
trace meander of buttons and sewn lips,
parted, that ache for their kiss:

dream longitudes of greens, golds,
loose and limber, the almost indivisible waves
that lift and fall,
huge wheatfield
tensile in a summer breeze –

here somewhere, hiding,
you have erased the scale
and I may never get home.

How little we are,
seen from the air.

If I could meet you here
where everything is possible

I put you to my face
your sun-warmed yesterday smell.

Pippa Little

In Babel

In Babel we are rising all the time.
We have turned our eyes from unassuming earth,
a mortifying accident of birth,
toward a starry future as we climb

into the hitherto forbidden sky.
Our discourses and deeds will grow more rare-
fied as we attune to finer air.
The eagles will look upward when they fly.

And what can disconcert us at this height?
Unless a sort of overweening pride
that fills our head with stars and makes us mad...
we really ought to have a word for that.

David Callin

Applause

Our contributors in Issue One:

Angelina Ayers has had poems in *The North* and the *Frogmore Pages*. She edited *Matter 10* and is writer in residence at Bank Street Arts, Sheffield.

*

David Callin lives, if not quite at the back of beyond, certainly within hailing distance of it, on one of Britain's offshore islands. Dabbles in poetry when he can. Seems to spend most of his spare time in the garden, whether he likes it not, where he is trusted with a few menial tasks, but occasionally slips away to the pub. He has had poems in *erbacce*, *The Journal*, *Iota*, *Other Poetry* and *Orbis*, and also online in *Snakeskin* and *Lucid Rhythms*.

*

Martyn Crucefix has won numerous prizes including a major Eric Gregory award and a Hawthornden Fellowship. He has published five collections, including *An English Nazareth* (Enitharmon, 2004) and *Hurt* (Enitharmon, 2010). His translation of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* was published by Enitharmon in 2006, shortlisted for the Popescu Prize for European Poetry Translation and hailed as "unlikely to be bettered for very many years" (*Magma*).

Information on his writing can be found at

<http://www.poetrypf.co.uk/martyncrucefixpage.html> Also see

http://www.enitharmon.co.uk/pages/store/products/ec_view.asp?PID=386

*

Claire Dyer has had poetry published in magazines and anthologies and placed in various national competitions. She also recently attended the Poetry Masterclass at Tŷ Newydd with Carol Ann Duffy and Gillian Clarke and, as a member of the Brickwork Poets, performs her poems as part of themed conversations in poetry at venues around the country.

*

Catherine Edmunds is a prolific writer and artist, with more than 250 published works to her name. Her latest novel is *Small Poisons* (Circaidy Gregory Press), a gripping work of magical realism described as "the Contemporary Novel for Midsummer Night's Dreamers".

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*

Brian Edwards lives in Japan. Recent work has appeared in *Other Poetry*, *The Journal* and *Orbis*, and he is currently working on his first collection. He is an editor at After Literature.

*

Janet Fisher until she retired in 2008 was co-director of The Poetry Business. Her third collection, *Brittle Bones*, was published by Salt in 2008.

*

Jan Fortune is founder and editor of Cinnamon Press. She has published four novels and two previous poetry collections and is currently working on a sequence about a ruined slate mining village near her home in North Wales.

*

Cora Greenhill lives in Derbyshire and sometimes Crete, both of which inform her writing. She has taught 5 Rhythms creative dance and writing for many years. Her poetry is currently appearing in *The New Writer*, *The North*, *Artemis* and *Other Poetry*; and recently in *Staple*, *Tears in the Fence* and *The Interpreter's House*. She also has two self-published collections available on Amazon, or go to www.thirteenthmoon.co.uk

*

David Harmer is best known as a children's writer with poems and stories appearing in many books mainly published by Macmillan Children's Books. He also has a number of collections for adults. David was a founder member of the poetry performance group *Circus*

of *Poets* and when he isn't working solo in schools all over the country, is part of the highly rated poetry duo *Spill The Beans*. He also works at Sheffield Hallam University where he teaches both MA and BA Creative Writing and is part of a pilot project involving the Poetry Society and BGT College, University of Lincoln, working with PGCE students.

*

James Howard is a London-based musician/student, and is also an editor at the website afterliterature.org.

*

Larry Jordan's work has appeared in *Pirene's Foundation*, *Miller's Pond* and other on-line journals as well as the print journal *Comstock Review*. He hails from South Carolina.

*

Pippa Little lives in Northumberland. *The Snow Globe* (Red Squirrel Press) comes out in October 2011 and *Overwintering* (Oxford Poets) in October 2012.

*

Richard Moorhead lives in Cardiff. His poems have appeared in the *Horizon Review*, *Financial Times*, *Mimesis* and *Anon*. His first pamphlet, *The Reluctant Vegetarian* (Oystercatcher Press) was shortlisted for the Michael Marks Award.

*

John C. Nash has been, at various times, electrician, actor, toilet cleaner, traveller, gardener, walking stick maker, trolley jockey, private detective, middle-manager, wildlife ranger. He has most recently found himself feeling quite comfortable as a self-employed bookbinder and poet.

*

Mario Petrucci Ecologist, PhD physicist and Royal Literary Fund Fellow Mario Petrucci is a multi-award-winning poet and residency frontiersman (Imperial War Museum, BBC Radio 3). "Reminiscent of e.e. cummings at his best", his work is "vivid, generous and life-affirming" (*Envoi*). *Heavy Water: a poem for Chernobyl* (Enitharmon, 2004) secured the Daily Telegraph/ Arvon Prize and is the basis of a celebrated film by Seventh Art Productions; it "inflicts... the finest sort of shock, not just to the senses, but to the conscience, to the soul" (*Poetry London*). *i tulips* (Enitharmon, 2010) takes its name from Petrucci's vast Anglo-American sequence, of which *the waltz in my blood* (Waterloo, 2011) is also a part. Now on target to reach 1111 poems, these "modernist marvels" (Poetry Book Society) embrace contemporary issues of searing social, linguistic and personal relevance. The poem published here is from his forthcoming collection *crib*. www.mariopetrucci.com

*

Michaela Ridgway lives in Brighton. Her magazine credits include *Magma*, *Orbis*, *Other Poetry*, *The Frogmore Papers*, *Obsessed with Pipework*, *Purple Patch*, *The Ghazal Page* and *Moodswing*.

*

Jane Røken is Norwegian, lives in Denmark, and likes to think of herself as an internationalist. By daylight she can be seen pottering about in her garden; by night she's inventing strange things and writing poems and stories about them.

*

Andrew Shields was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1964 and grew up in Michigan, California, Ohio, and England. He studied English at Stanford University and received a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Pennsylvania. He has lived in Europe since 1991; since 1995, he has been teaching at the English Department of the University of Basel in Switzerland, where he lives with his wife and three children. His poetry has been published in many journals in print and online as well as in the chapbook *Cabinet d'Amateur* (Cologne: Darling Publications, 2005). His translations from the German include poetry by numerous contemporary poets. Most recently, he contributed to the translation of *The Bars of Atlantis*, selected essays of Durs Grünbein (along with John Crutchfield and Michael Hofmann). He is also a songwriter for his band Human Shields. His blog is at andrewjshields.blogspot.com

*

Thomas Zimmerman teaches English and directs the Writing Center at Washtenaw Community College, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. Poems of his have appeared recently in *The Flea*, *Electric Windmill Press*, and *The Road Not Taken*.