

Antiphon

Welcome to Issue Two of Antiphon!

Winter 2012

Issue One had a tremendous reception, and we've responded by making Issue Two slightly larger to allow us to publish more excellent work. Once again we have great poems from established poets including Ann Sansom, Alison Brackenbury, Debjani Chatterjee and River Wolton and from those just starting to be published. We have reviews of recent work by Andrew Greig, Pippa Little, Mark Leech and Gerry Cambridge and two new debating points giving differing views on reading poetry.

Issue Three will include our special **Turing Centenary section** - so please continue to submit poems on the theme of technology and its effects, as well as well-crafted work on any subject. Issue Three will be published in June 2012.



Issue 2, Winter 2012

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Applause - Our Contributors

Issue Two: Editorial Note

Helena Nelson, in her blog post about the creation of the poetry pamphlets *HappenStance* is publishing, talks of 'the checking and checking and checking that everything has been done, and finding it hasn't, and checking again' that goes with publishing anything, and almost gets to say it's a slog. She doesn't come to that conclusion because in the middle of the process she is seduced, once again, by the actual poems.

It's a different type of effort to produce an on-line magazine; less about postage stamps and more about trying to remember how the website works, but when the fiddling with HTML and layout was finished and I read the poems again, just for the joy of it, I was delighted to see how their words and images and music and sounds shone through the technicalities. We've discovered, over the last two issues, that a great poem can hold its own through many reads and all the editorial processes and still delight.

We hope you share our enthusiasm for the work featured here. The magazine is larger than the first issue – not just a greater number of poems but with guest contributors in our 'Interval' section of reviews and debating points. We have a similar mix of great poetry, all with an emphasis on careful word choice and lyrical cadence, but some sonnets, some free verse, and even a sestina, a form so difficult to use effectively.

We were encouraged by the positive comments we received about issue one, by the hundreds of readers and by the even greater number of submissions for this issue. We're relieved and excited to be able to say that this time it all feels just as wonderful.

Rosemary Badcoe

Act one



Swallows

'Swallows certainly sleep all the winter. A number of them conglobulate together, by flying round and round, and then all in a heap throw themselves under water, and lye in the bed of a river' Dr Johnson

It's August, and we gather by the water;
thread ourselves on telegraph wires,

clack like beads on strings.
We await two underwater seasons

and swoop again and again,
take sips to prepare for cold months

with feet sunk deep in river clay,
slack as eels

beneath a ceiling of ice
where children soar on skates,

arms thrown back, curved paths
etched into a surface of sky.

Our eyes are shut. We dream of Spring,
green corn, mouths full of mayflies.

Suzannah Evans

Love, Not Art

The men in China slurping what they're told
is tiger-penis soup; the sunset's hod
of broken bricks; the millipede a god
Lovecraftian, an eldritch spawn of mold

behind the gleaming white commode... These tropes
from broken poems of youth, this flotsam hauled
from gray backwaters of the brain, the balled
and hang-nailed fist of writer's block. Dashed hopes.

Relax. That's Schubert's *Trout Quintet* you hear,
Death and the Maiden's next. Just breathe. Don't take
yourself so seriously. The lobster bisque

is bubbling, Ann is waiting with a beer.
Hit *Pause*. Tonight, it's love, not art, you'll make.
Embrace? Annihilation? Life's a risk.

Thomas Zimmerman

We Swear We Never Touched Her

—for Zahra Al-Kaabi

We, rhizome and calla lily
spanning the room horizontal –
and she, nettled and rising
into the smoke of the light.

We squint at her toothed leaves and soft hairs
that stencil the air.

Iraq, she says, once and more.
We think about going somewhere
though we've never been anywhere else
but here, white and waiting.

Iraq, she says again. We want to say *enough*.

She shows pictures of then and now, she says
children, she says wounded, uprooted,
living in Jordan.

Her stinging hairs meet their mark.
We scratch.

Paresthesia may be transient or chronic.

She says, *Iraq, Iraq* and again, *Iraq*
with whir and crack and fire.
We swear we never touched her.
We swear we never even blinked.

Sarah Zale

The Dogs

They come at midnight,
sniffing traces of reaction.
They turn, pant, jump up,
ask after you.

No, I say, staring at the moon.
They have begun to look senile,
their muzzles turning grey, eyes
milky with lack of sight. *Get down.*

They are aimless now, skittering
at pavements, jaws full of yawning.
I want to caress, say heal. Walkies.
It's no use. I know they're lost

to the night, a longing for life,
the absence of gravitation a good training
might have brought. They won't sit up,
roll over, play dead for anyone.

From the balcony I watch them,
hear their snarls and yelps
recede in the night, until all that's left
is their barking inside my eye.

Miles Cain

The Conservator Dreams

Stained-glass: a spider's web of came and colour
brittle mosaics of the holy family;

suspended on my silks, I scuttled, penduled,
a hanged man dancing in a throat of song,

scraping the cancered frass from rotten mullions,
the clerestory, triforium and choir

light, dark and mystery surrounding me,
spinning slowly within my swirling sheets,

my dream-chaff clipped about my sleepless head,
as tears split the light – a thousand leaves

of bright grisaille rush past, their colour stripped,
kaleidoscopic, monochrome, exhaling

a turbulence of postage stamps awhirl
in frantic quest for tattered, unsent letters:

the dummy rings the chisel's striking tooth,
cutting back to stone that chimes the shank.

David Alcock

Breaking the Wishbone

I like the almost stagy scene – the hero
cupping her cheek, or the one where she walks
the coast road, skirts whipping around her legs.

Lamp-bright and fade to black where I am wrong
and wrong again, a little slit into a purer space.
Her husband is a spy who poisons her, don't

trust your heart to a man with broad shoulders. Here
there is a happy ending; in life it would not
necessarily happen in time – or would not stay

that way. Who is calling *cut* here? Who breaks
the little bone and hands you a piece? I love that
part of the movie where she's drunk and mooning

out the car window at the trees that whip so startlingly
one imagines almost they might pull themselves
out by the roots, which is, of course, just what

we do – and who can say why? I loved that he
had to rescue her. I love that she almost died, and I
hate what I have chosen to care for, like you

here across the table from me, the carcass of the
bird we roasted, boiled, someone we never saw
plucking it clean for us, this tiny hair-pin bone.

Sheila Black

Act Two



The Incision

With the children hungry at my heels
I plunge my hands into soapy water

towards a full metal moon. The pain
is instant, the cut so clean my skin

opens like a book, staining layers of muslin
I hurriedly bind. The children hunch

like goblins, refuse to look me in the eye,
as if I had torn a hole in the membranes

keeping the yolks of their lives intact
then asked to hold them, to blend red with gold.

Tess Jolly

Maundy Thursday

Snow melt unveils wind-snapped
sticks, scraps of cloth, something

sharp and metallic, a length of rope.
I am trying to understand

renewal. The fawn rabbits
on the slowly greening lawn see

their openings. The fox
waits at the wooded edge

in a morning-purpled vigil.
I once knew all the words of liturgy,

all the silenced hymns. Who never
needs a vinegared sponge?

There was a time I'd say I would ignore
the way a stilted heron plants herself

in the reeded shadows. An offering
will swim below the dripping beak,

unquestioning, and die sooner
than it deserves. And who

else but one who has bled to death
from lancing, water and blood

poured out into the quickened stream,
could tell us we were wrong to doubt?

Who else would open itself to us?
Soon, I want to say, we will rise

like birds. Soon we will know.
Only the wounds slow the hours.

Ruth Foley

Let there always be

the bright juice of oranges,
sun on the kitchen tiles,
a small nonessential bird
unraveling morning,

silvery snail trails, blue iris,
the gopher, the palm tree, the goat
that found its way into the house,

pigeons stitched onto telephone wires,
the clear sound of the sea,
a time when everyone is away,
a plate of milk, a tin of strawberry jam.

But never again the open gate
to the empty house down the street,
the algae drowning
the abandoned pool,

the man who stood by the edge
beginning the dirge.
The still water. The small
blue shoe.

Ruth Bavetta

Congregation

We rise after dark, after endless rain,
inflate our found silver pots, and labour
at the broken cursive of our documents:
path, patio, grow bag, Evangelists,
tireless at porch, doorstep, window.
O hear us.

We are the rightful heirs of the glass door
made pearly with our devotion. We are sincere
in our stamina, revered for our fortitude, our grace.
Gravel is our agony, salt our dissolution, beer our downfall.
In our slow passion, spare us the hedgehog.
Respect us,

the missionaries who cruise the mean streets
of allotments, who trawl the unhinged cloche,
the rotting shed, healing weakness
with our snot. We patrol the kennel of the Alsatian,
fearless in our eloquence. Our liturgy is timeless.
Witness

the intricate green lace of our altar cloths.
Witness. Sunday morning gardeners idle in their beds.
We mount the pulpit of the barrel, the bucket,
and in darkness we preach and rejoice in our art.
We sing, *the greenhouse is our Nirvana*.
Believe in us. O do have faith in us.

Ann Sansom

Courtship

*I need you – she is blushing, closer now;
this is in the limo, en route to the hotel –
to take me in a hostile way. Tell me how
you'll own me. Talk dirty. Say you'll sell
subsidiaries and drive your staff
to penetrate my org chart, stripping
assets and rationalising the hell from the chaff
in the top brass. Her breath is hot. She nips
his ear. Expose me in the press
where my practices aren't up to scratch
then tie me with injunctions. I confess
that being in legal knots makes my breath catch.
Slap me in jail... He's eager for the deal. It's hard
to think. She's already cloned his credit cards.*

Ian Badcoe

Close reading

From now on, I'll only look at detail –
scrub grass nurtured by rocks,
wind-skipping scurf of weed
daring the sands to catch it,
fragment of plastic film flown
like a flag from a spindly twig
or this, at water's brim: a pebble menhir
abandoned by some tot and swallowing brine –
what's small enough to bend to.

Working from scraps, I'll decipher
lost symbols, let no gravel
seep from my pan: I am not seeking treasure,
just a handle on the land's demotic script;
which, I admit, will need close study,
written, as it is, in a tight, cursive hand
and with its own punctuation – like those two
kitesurfer commas there, or the parenthesis of Africa
plodding past, crying *bandanas, good prices*.

Marjorie Sweetko

Interval

Pippa Little *The Snow Globe* 54 pp, £4.00

Red Squirrel Press, Holy Jesus Hospital, City Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 2AS,
www.redsquirrelpress.com

Stylistically Little's poetry is sharp, precise, exact, both in expression and observation. Some of the poems are only one or two focused sentences. Yet her sentence may span a dozen lines, making the poem a single thought but not a simple one. That sentence may sketch a place, then tease out a relationship, move on to evoke a memory, glance smoothly over some striking natural object, pin all this down with a startling image and do all this in language that sparkles and shines, in a few well-honed words:

Then, remember that city tree, grown
Through the metal frame of its sapling home
So wire curls grew from the bark in shark-tooth glinting:
What began as cradle turned to cage.
It's attachment shapes us most, he says.
(Holdfast)

Although this is a nicely produced pamphlet, I think there's a flaw in production. A largish font is used, with generous margins, making the poems visually very readable, but requiring the physical wrapping around of longer lines. This creates a visual imbalance in some poems, and a sense of false endings in some lines which, given the very careful punctuation Little uses (she's very clear on the difference in her work between dash and colon, for example) and her subtle rhythms, is somewhat counter productive – it creates ambiguity in reading and may even damage the flow of the poem. I think about half the poems have lines wrapped like this. I would have much preferred a presentation in a smaller font which preserves the integrity of the poet's intent.

Even so, this is a minor irritation in work one wants to read and re-read, whether it's the imagined historical projections of 'Whaligoe Steps' or 'From Brechin to Auchenblae, 1897'; or the personal recollections and yearnings in 'Trick of my Eye' and 'RNLI Box' or simply to revel in the inventive, gritty, language. Many of these poems bury rich linguistic ore in every line:

Sea haar sucks colour from crow-step roofs,
taints the air with bone-ash as we pass
shapes from this life or the last, marled
as particulate,
Scurdie Ness to Ferryden
a booming blows over the water
(RNLI Box)

I guess I occasionally struggled with an image or an expression in one or two of these poems. Perhaps the image is too allusive or the language too tight. But that might be my problem as a reader, rather than a problem in any poem itself. These are glittering pieces, some with their own luminosity, and even where I might fail quite to get it, I still revelled in the language, the craft and the perception that makes them work.

NW

Mark Leech *Chang'an Poems*, 28pp, £3

Original Plus, 17 High Street, Maryport, Cumbria CA15 6BQ

Mark Leech's *Chang'an Poems* is a sequence of 41 poems and fragments.

The note on the title page disclaims any relation between Leech's "imagined" Chang'an, and the ancient Chinese capital of the same name. The ironic effect is that this draws attention to the sequence's relationship with the real world. An ecopoetic heritage threads through the sequence, from Arnold's *Dover Beach*, to Bunting's "Tongue stumbles, ears err" (Briggflatts), audible in Leech's "phones dead doors locked / screens dark trees still" (iv). Edward Thomas's "Home" poems are as much about alienation as belonging; they explore concepts of home central to Leech's work.

The sequence begins with "i. Landscape with Nightmare":

The husband in the jade room
the wife on the turning road
the bridge long across the river
down towards Chang'an

This cinematic opening continues in the next lines: "Over the scene, the harried geese / the echoing of guns ...". The guns, the soldiers, who "fill the village lanes, drag / the weakest down into the vans", are only in focus briefly. This disinterest in the wider world creates the illusion of privilege, for the husband, his regrets while "gathering his clothes", for the wife, stamping down "her hopes of going home", but it also isolates them in their narrow lives.

Although this couple's moods dominate the poem, there are no names, and the distance created by the long-shot view adds to this sense of ambivalence. As a result, the lack of intimacy between the husband and wife, between them and their environment, is mimicked in the relationship between the reader and the poem. This is clever, I think, but frustrating.

However, the jade room returns later in the sequence, as does the turning road. There is a circular narrative at work. The repetition of such motifs is key to how the sequence draws the reader in. The theme of return comes up again and again, until we share the wife's longing for home:

Engulf yourself in patterns, comfort of chairs, of drinks;
allow home to be in you, look out at the road, and be still.

and all that has
changed and all that
has changed and all
that has changed and
all that has changed (xxxix).

The space between the strange and the familiar, an awareness of, and anxiety about change, is key to the sequence and its concept of home: "Coming back the way you came you are in a world subtly / rearranged. The beggar is two shops down", and a man's moustache has disappeared (xiv). But it's not just the world that can't be trusted; the reliability of "you" is

also questioned: “Sure? ... Is it true ...?” This is a fragile existence, one where our most comforting ideas of self and home are destabilised.

This instability is, in part, achieved by an intricate play of language and form. Intangible things, thoughts, for example, “arrive” and are unfolded softly (ix. *He Dreams of Coming Home*); shapes can be settled in “a drawer, / a quiet.” (v); “your neck carries sound / that ... floats on the sweat of the crush” (xxxix). Leech’s playfulness unpicks his close observations, his concern for the world, and renders them mimetically to create a fractured, shifting picture. Is this how we experience our world? This is a carefully woven sequence that is astute and uncomfortable.

Angelina Ayers

Andrew Greig *As Though We Were Flying*, 64pp, £8.95
Bloodaxe Books, Highgreen, Tarsset, Northumberland, NE48 1RP

Andrew Greig has been described as one of the leading writers of his generation, a Scottish poet acclaimed for his writing on climbing and ‘high-risk situations’. His latest book from Bloodaxe is split into three sections: *Home for Now*, *The Light of Day* and *A Moment’s Liberty*. The style is generally free verse, sometimes in couplets or triplets, but often following the natural breaks of thought. Greig’s language is straightforward, concentrating on phrasing and lyricism. Running through all the work is a strong sense of Scots cadence and vocabulary.

There’s no comment on the book’s divisions, but *Home for Now* captures a sense of growing up and living in a particular place, whether the tight-knit coastal community of Fife or less permanent stays in Ontario or Sheffield. Characters such as Alex Watson, the fisherman who never liked the sea, recur in life and finally death and populate the narrow streets and coastal fringes. These poems relate the rituals, both human and natural, of place and then pull back into wider reflection. The section ends with the longer two-part poem *Wynd*, a portrait of a teenager’s search for ‘the life to come’ amongst the cramped streets and boredom of his home town – ‘we grew up provincial, in the heart of the world’ – and his astonished discovery of wider horizons via the encouragement of a girl named Holly:

In those days you knew little more
than differential calculus and irregular verbs,
but you knew what came next would be
definitive as Sunday in the shrouded town.
Salt in the rain on her full mouth.

(*Wynd*)

The Light of Day and *A Moment’s Liberty* move into more personal territory and continue his earlier explorations of life and mortality. There is the feel of time moving on, of the poet bearing witness to his own life while seeing it in the wider context

Glance at the world you’re passing through,
small fry with Time pressing on your neck

(*Nine Steps to the Shed*)

yet always with a sense of joy that he is here at all, that there is still love to wake to in the morning, and knowing that it is almost enough.

Wanting nothing more but more of this,

the place that they must leave,
they would lie a while, drifting,
her world-defining hand uncurled on his.

(Married Lovemaking)

These are poems of appreciation of life and of connection to others from a man who has realised how fleeting it all is. *A Resurrection of a Kind* suggests that we imagine we and our loved ones are already dead; then realise how good it is that we still live:

Now greet your beloved.
She's dead too
and her brief return
is the biggest lottery win ever.

...

Her eyes, her smile,
her skin meeting yours -
how beautiful the dead are
while we live.

(*A Resurrection of a Kind*)

These are almost all personal poems, populated by I and we, written with gentle tenderness and wit. The overall impression is of uplifting and thoughtful work from a poet thankful for how fortunate he is.

RB

Gerry Cambridge, *Notes for Lighting a Fire*, 64pp, £10
HappenStance, 21 Hatton Green, Glenrothes, Fife KY7 4SD

HappenStance is primarily a pamphlet press so this hardback collection is something of a rarity in their lists. Helena Nelson's press has a reputation for quality products, creating some very attractive pamphlets and this volume keeps that reputation high. It's a stylish and elegant book, feels lovely in the hand, has a subdued design and a quietly conservative, elegant font, calling up traditional poetic values in its look and feel. The only design feature I thought worked against this is a slightly narrow left margin, making some poems seem just a little cramped on the page, but this is perhaps a design decision intended to accommodate some unusually long lines.

What about the poems themselves? I found them a little mixed. On the one hand, there are many poems of close natural observation which capture exactly the description of the creature or environment of their subject. In fact, several such poems avoid naming the subject, so the poem becomes something of a riddle. Puzzle, however, is not the driving force behind these poems: it's the complexity of capturing physical description of natural objects

which seems to excite this poet. And he'll veer between the lyrical and the sardonic in that description. Here, for example, are flamingoes about to take off:

They are bibulous retired colonels
with boxers' broken noses,
who happen to be cross-dressers, discoursing
one imagines, in a tone
of languorous hauteur. Each neck
is an Indian rope,
(Take-off)

This is sharply witty and accurately amusing. However, the poem as a whole does not travel beyond this mode, heaping pointed but unconnected observations on top of each other, to create something between a characterisation and a caricature of the birds at the moment of flight. So, whilst descriptively inventive, somehow such poems themselves do not seem to take-off.

More satisfying are those poems where the poet seems to have a stronger emotional investment than that of mere observer. Intriguingly, this happens in the several poems which concern what I've just learned is called "oology", the study, and especially the collection, of birds' eggs. As a child Cambridge seems to have been an avid collector, as all the poems "Blowing Out an Egg", "Sacrifice", "A Sparrowhawk's Nest", "The Herriers" and "At Twelve" deal with different emotional aspects of the experience of egging. But similar imagery recurs in those poems which do not have birds as their main topic:

Leaves I like,
at least as much
for themselves,
as they
shelter the simmering eggs in May
from such
thieves as I once was, who preferred,
God knows why, the blown husks light as mind
to their chirruping ends.
(Light Leaves 2)

Whilst this preoccupation is clearly a regret now for the poet, it was also clearly a passion for the boy, and that passion can be felt not only in the bird poems: "A sparrowhawk's egg, / a bartered death that said I live! I live!" but energises much of the nature imagery, too, for Cambridge's eye for visual detail releases some of this energy. His excitement overflows into hyperbole, exclamation and apostrophe. I've not read any collection that is so free with the exclamation mark:

The whole vast west was a pink astonishment –
everything in the room was pink!
(That Dusk)

I believe I can understand the motivations behind such dramatic exclamation, but I'm not sure it yields compelling verse. I guess there will be some readers who enjoy such phrasing, but others may find it a little histrionic.

In contrast, there are sustained groups of poems which are powerfully moving, the most satisfying of which are probably those in 'Light Leaves (1)'. These are grounded in the mundane, but their rich yet restrained imagery conveys all the subtleties of a son coping with his father's illness. Perhaps the subject is one that every poet is obliged to engage with, but only a few poets find that deep, solid insight which resonates with any son. Cambridge is one:

This is me,
brother now as much as son in this shorn-bare
exposure to the judging sight and air –
fussless as mowing a lawn, the heft of a skull
plain and solid as an iron hull.
(Light Leaves 1)

NW

Debating point: Read Less: Read Better

I need to slow down.

I need to buy, borrow, download, hear and over-hear fewer poems.

I can read a sonnet in 20 seconds (out loud in 25, 35 with feeling, 40 with real tears). And often that is it; so often I simply turn the page, telling myself that I have 'read' the poem. I haven't read the poem! I've let the lines float before me but that's not 'reading', or rather it is reading but it is not experiencing the poem, which is what poets write for and what they anticipate we, the poor, untutored readers, read for.

Is there a rule for how long we should 'read' a poem before we can claim to have experienced it? How much time and effort should we invest in order to 'get' the poem, to reach the promised land, to have it in a half-Nelson, to lie exhausted by its side? I want that hit, but I will walk for it, I will wrestle for it and give up sleep for it, so long as I'm going to get it sometime soon. I need that promise. Well, bad news: there's no rule, so what's to be done?

Read Less: read better.

I'm going to read a poem and then I'm going to read it again. And then I'm going to read it out-loud (quietly if I'm on the train). And if it feels like we're getting on, I'm going to write out the poem in one of my cheap notebooks, in my best hand. And if, we are both slightly breathless after such intimacy (I mean me and the poem, who did you think I meant?) I'm going to ask someone else to read it to me, to allow me to hear the poem from someone else's mouth, to see the poem in someone else's arms.

And then, oh only then, if I have the strength, if I want it enough, I'm going to learn the poem by heart. I'm going to take that poem right into my memory, every stress and syllable, every pause and start, every implication and resonance. The sounds and the dark silences. No footnotes. No glossary. No paraphrases. Give me poems I want to learn! Poems that rattle in the head or linger on the tongue; poems that might be of some use to me, slumped in despair at my workday desk.

Dear poets-whose-poems-I-want-to-fall-in-love-with, forgive me please for my sloth and tardiness. Your very best poems I shall read soon, if I am spared just a few more days, weeks, months, years, decades. Your very best poems I am looking forward to experiencing. Your very best poems I am going to commit to memory. I'll read less. I'll read better.

Jonathan Davidson

(Jonathan has recently published his collection *Early Train* with Smith/Doorstop)

Debating point: How should I read poetry?

I'm not sure how to read a poem. That is, I seek different pleasures in different poems, I read poems in different ways and I'm not sure I always get it right.

I don't think there's one way to read, or one kind of approach to poetry. That's not to say that there aren't poems that require re-reading, repay revisits, yield more the more they're interrogated. But there are also poems you can drink everything from on first encounter. Some poems are sonorous, but little more than sound. Or they're bright and brittle so at first you're distracted by their twinkle but there's no desire to find any deep pattern within or behind those beguiling lights. Then there's the poem which rolls along quite pleasantly to deliver its core idea or image, drops the last line on you, and lets you lie there under its weight, heavy with appreciation but lacking any real desire to lift it up and try again.

There are the long poems we may dip into or aim to read in one sitting beginning to end. Yet our attention flits, falters, drifts in and out of the poem. Takes a breath. Wanders off elsewhere. Perhaps never comes back. Conversely, sometimes we're bored midway but plod on in any case so at least we can believe we've finished it. We haven't, of course, we've merely reached the last line.

In some we see the cleverness, the technical brilliance, the dexterity of tongue and biro, but settle for mere admiration, do not delve more deeply. Whilst others seem transparent, telling us exactly what they mean to say so aptly there's no need to tread that path again. And others simply leave us cold, are badly done, play tricks, trade on reputation, so why give them any real attention?

For me, the best poems meld multiple virtues, and so can be read with different intensities and purposes. Each time I go back to them, I return to different poems – they're changed because of the relish or puzzle of the previous read. Yet in order to savour such poems there are many others I discard on first reading. There's not enough time in the world. I want to find the rich and supple poems, so I'll throw away the too dense, the too narrow, the poem that's not interested in language, the poem that only aims to label the world.

In doing so I guess I miss a lot. Perhaps half the poems I give little attention to might have something to offer me if I had patience to find the right trajectory of approach. And sometimes in a poem I struggle with, there'll be a line or an image, or the clear sense of the intelligence or sensibility at play, which intrigues me despite myself, and I'll find time for that difficult or problematic piece, struggle to get what I can from it, because of some first-touch promise.

Poems are like people, perhaps. You could stop anyone in the High Street and, given time, over coffee, if you paid them the attention they deserved and really listened to what they

wanted to say, they'd become interesting, complex, intriguing people. But most of them, most of the time, are casual acquaintances, chance encounters, a marginal brush of elbows, they make a brief impression then fade as the next arrives.

And yet, if I find the time to make a friend of a poem, I can learn so much about that friend, their world, our mutual world, and perhaps myself. I can't be friends with everyone. The same goes for poems. The rare ones get a proper hearing and settle in my heart. Most are brief joys soon displaced, fragments only remembered. And some I want to sit down with again and again, just to reminisce with them, to go over the old familiar ground, remind myself of what can be done, what has been said between us and what I myself hope one day to do.

NW

Act Three



After the Gardener
for Derek Jarman

Prospect Cottage

After the gardener,
eventide findings:

nothing is black on black;

inks are uncertainties—
the purple, wordless,
blue, unspoken over;
sticks and stones;

moonglow resolving into bones.

Here are lost oddities:
the windlasses and chains,
stilled life rust-rose among
the silver and the gold

in drifts the anchors cannot hold;

discontinuities;
thoughts, immaterial;
those lesions of the leaf
which don't eventually mend;

a name on slate, engraved;
a bowl of fruit by Caravaggio;
a sandcastle by Gaudí.

The summer's drug is done;
all colours now descend.

Hereafter, winter,
where the wind knows no defence.

In the beginning was the flower
who set a flame to catch afire
the last of England
in the ever-present tense.

Philip Quinlan

Poor old horse

*'He's forced to eat the coarsest grass
That grows along the wall.'* (Old song)

Yes, you begin with loving mush,
spinach, stewed fruit, spoonfuls too much.
Then more is piled on handed plates,
the gravy's lake, the shut-in meat.
So, in your prime, mushrooms and nuts
sustain. You bound from foot to foot.

When did it happen that you found
your careful children, calling round,
were ladling dinners rich in oil
leaving French sweets in glittered foil?
But eat, while you may dodge the past,
the workhouse gate, the bitter grass.

Alison Brackenbury

The Messenger

*'I send you this by a small boy with a pointed head.
Don't trust him. He is a Campbell.'* Iain Crichton Smith, from *Chinese Poem*

So here you are, the town recipient
of his good news, no news, and questions;
his last draft, hundred grams of little said

but that the buzzards rest on the black wire;
withholding whether this bird stands for loss
or death or the outsider outside himself.

And I was there, and it was summer, so
the cold wind mentioned at Ben Cruchan
means something else, like troubled, older love.

Know that the questions asked are not the ones
he'll want answered – damn the schools and frontier.
He sits in his dark room; waits a deepest reading
to draw him from the island, like a thorn.

Niall Campbell

Gone

How quickly this high street forgets. Two short
decades of billowing buses, and a figure

like you – my father, one who rarely spoke
to anyone – is shaken out of a town's consciousness.

Not mine. For me, you rush always down the gutter
between shuddering traffic and wide brick

pavement where people pause, exchange
Saturday morning pleasantries. You

hurry always, eyes averted, string bag
clutched in claw-like hand. Towards your weekly

run-in with the Safeway manager,
urgent phone call to my mother, pay-phone

jammed with two-pence pieces. *For God's sake,
Dagmar, the man's an imbecile.*

I leave you always, half an hour later, sunk deep
into the warm red bar of the White Hart.

Charlotte Gann

Herring Girls

She was a coiler, numb-thumbed, clumsy
still, fish skittling from her bandaged hands
no grip on the stubby knife
to slit their bellies cleanly,
yank out the reeking guts
and chuck swilled fillets in the creels.

She'd learn. A rare face only gains favour
for a time. Once the Neuk wind's scrubbed
and scaled her, the men won't pay her any heed.
Then, oilskins slick with blood,
she'll turn by slow degrees
to ice and salt.

The quickness in her fingers tallied with silver lines
a sharp map of each cold boned slip
punished in the stinging brine.
Waiting, dead-eyed, on the rising tide
for some harbour lad to chip her free:
frozen feet wedded fast to frozen quay.

A season in she'll dream of herring,
of gills and gulls and girls
their keening drowned in roiling waves of sleep,
grey shoals spilling like coins
beyond her grasp,
the curved arc of their soft undersides
slashed into a wide and leery smile.

Emma Simon

white horses

on white horses, a cable snaps, quick repair, don't let
valves cool too long or they'll never
be warm again, and there,
a fading beast, is it a cow or a man lying prone?
I can't see, I think he's going to be okay
but he's struggling, he's calling his dog, can you fix the cable? why not?

I don't know why we're the last generation
to clasp, to dig fingers into iron clothing, to wish
for white horses, to know the strength of a button,
a belt tied too tight, and such sorrow in his face,
his eyes, and look

I am too young and the mother
reads the newspaper and doesn't even know I'm here,
she has a brooch,
she doesn't know about the white horses, I won't tell her, not now,
not ever

she reads the paper,
she doesn't know

on the table, piles of Meccano, a bowl of oranges, a camel shed,
cogs, wheel-back chairs and spindle tops,
a rounded light switch, door handle, block-panelled, a rolling pin,

plasticine on the lino

Catherine Edmunds

Act Four



Airborne

Atoms of Buddha, say
or with your luck, Hitler
bonded with CO₂
dandruff and sweat
dry until they lift
into the jetstream
then gain gravity
(precipitation
or the alimentary system
of an arctic tern)
and plummet, finding
the sticky earlobe
of your friend, as she tears
across the prom
to greet you with a bear-hug
at the chippie
where you queue
and ponder pros and cons of fishcakes
unaware Gotama or the Führer
lodge in your left nostril, thrilled
to have landed in a world
that has begotten Voldemort
and cryogenics.

River Wolton

The death of poets

It's a shadow puppet game,
I explain. We'll take turns acting
out the death of poets while waiting
to fall asleep at night,
but the other players drag
their feet, so, to get things started, I offer the example of a broken

Sylvia Plath inserting her head in an oven, though the broken-
lined shadow hand that swallows the fingers of the other looks more like a game
of fetch than death, dog-hand dragging
bone-hand away to bury in a supremely mammalian act
of selfishness. Maybe that's why dogs and men keep company at night,
pretend friendship while we watch and wait

for each other to fall asleep, bowed by the weight
of self-knowledge breaking
over our just-above-water heads like waves. Nights
when you don't sleep at all, when the dog doesn't sleep but makes a game
of walking back and forth between the back door and your room, acting
as if she needs to pee again, you drag

yourself out of bed, dragging
your feet, hoping to make a statement, and keep the dog waiting
for keeping you awake, while her actions
might be likewise motivated – unbroken
barking meant to punish you for your insistence on a game
that keeps her up all night.

Between the ups and downs tonight
you rehearse charades, drag
one hand over the bridge of another, game
away your family then try to win it back, waiting
a little too long to play that hand: the party breaks
up before you have a chance to act,

to leap from the boat, to walk into traffic,
to swallow your pills, to drown in bed. Some nights
it's clear that you know too much about poets' broken
lives, their deaths a drug
that should've put you down some time ago, except that you waited
too long between doses, built up immunity, ruined the game

by acting on knowledge that the bedraggled
dog – benighted, beside herself – couldn't possibly have, waiting
for the breakdown that you know is not a game.

Wendy Vardaman

From a Car Window

Once, racing through flat Midlands fields
elbow to elbow in a crowded train,
a woman reached across,
touched my knee and
gestured to the window at a line
of dark geese cleaving sky.

They arched between us like a
small connecting bridge.
The silence of their moving wings
cancelled out the ching and burr
of i-pods, laptops, mobile phones.

Now, against the blower fanning heat,
the engine's purr, the airbrakes
of a lorry slowing down,
no-one hears my cry of *Look!* –

in a glittering field of frost
a flock of lapwing wheel and swoop,
the wide kites of their wings
black against the February blue.

Gill McEvoy

Levelling

I observe
the hollows
in hot sand –
sea of sorrows.

Salt sherbet,
breezy swell...
The deep rocks
me in its spell.

I cup hands,
splash and play
in water –
life's DNA.

I levelled
all the sand
glinting wet.
I understand

the primal
urge to hit
pavement cracks,
to smooth life's grit.

Debjani Chatterjee

Solitary Retreat

The rain steadies, wordless again.
This cottage shelters delicate
long-legged spiders, pins for a body,
making this house into their home.

I call them Bella and Luigi.
I try out each name on my tongue
voicelessly, and sing to them
or engage in conversation when I forget.
Sometimes I call them beautiful silently.

The sun a stain on papery cloud
I walk out to the compost
past the knots of slime mould
moving imperceptibly,
past the cats conversing in Cymraeg,
the mewing of a buzzard
in its slot above the sycamores.

To a fresh unfeathering,
– a ring of black around
a neat pile of intestines
where a greenbottle settles,
a jigsaw piece of bone, a claw.
I pause and watch the intestines
glisten under sun-reflected cloud.
I want to put a name to this
that looks like mess.
I want to call these pieces *John*.

John Barron

Fossils Cradle the Tenderness

I sort them out, I set them out:
the fritillaries, irides, crocuses
primed for their dark action.
An abominable mystery, said Darwin.

The ground is good for digging
after last night's pickpurse rain.
Hardly a leaf left on the birches.

Noisy lanes of whooper swans
cross white limestone sky.
My feathered heart flies with them.

Autumn. Penultimate cooling.
Fretwork in friable earth.
I have nearly come to terms with it.
Dusk opens night like a black egg.

Janice D Soderling

Contributors to Issue 2

David Alcock divides his life between Sheffield and Gloucestershire. He has been writing since he was a boy. He has been lucky enough to have had a broad and amusing career: among many other things that are better not named, he has been at times a mountaineer, factory-worker, tramp, luthier, musician, painter, labourer, photographer, abseiling medieval sculpture conservator, businessman, and father of three sons. He is an editor at www.AfterLiterature.org

Ian Badcoe walks in the Peak District and occasionally returns to the city for important supplies, such as money.

John Barron lives in Deepcar, Sheffield, and works as a teacher of the deaf in Barnsley. He is interested in the natural world, spirituality and consciousness. In 2010 he received a commendation in the Elmet poetry competition. He has been a runner up in a couple of competitions in Barnsley, including one to describe a pudding from paradise! He is older than he looks.

Ruth Bavetta's poetry has been published in *Rattle*, *Nimrod*, *Tar River Review*, *North American Review*, *Rhino*, *Poetry East*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Poetry New Zealand*, among others. She is included in the anthologies *Twelve Los Angeles Poets* and *Wait a Minute I Have to Take Off My Bra*. She is a graduate of the University of Southern California, California State College San Bernardino, and Claremont Graduate School.

Alison Brackenbury's latest collection is *Singing in the Dark*, Carcanet, 2008. New poems can be read at her website: www.alisonbrackenbury.co.uk

Sheila Black is the author of *House of Bone* and *Love/Iraq* (both CW Press), as well as *Continental Drift* with painter Michele Marcoux. She lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico, where this year, for the first time in recent memory, there has been a lot of snow. Recently she edited with Jennifer Bartlett and Mike Northen, *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* (Cinco Puntos Press, 2011).

Miles Cain is a writer, musician and storyteller based in York. His poems have been *Dreamcatcher*, *Orbis*, *South Bank Poetry*, *Frogmore Papers*, *Obsessed With Pipework*, *Cake*, and more. His first collection of poetry, *The Border*, was published by Valley Press in October 2011. He is currently working on a second volume, due in 2013. Miles has also helped to run York Literature Festival since 2008. Find out more at www.milescain.co.uk

Niall Campbell in 2011 received an Eric Gregory Award and a Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship. He has had poems published in: *Magma*, *Cyphers* and *The Red Wheelbarrow*.

Debjani Chatterjee has been called an Indian-born 'poet full of wit and charm' (Andrew Motion), and 'a national treasure' (Barry Tebb). Editor, translator and children's writer, she has written and edited well over 50 books, including *Namaskar: New & Selected Poems*, *Words Spit and Splinter* and *I Was That Woman*. She has edited prize-winning anthologies such as *The Redbeck Anthology of British South Asian Poetry* and *Barbed Lines*. She has been a Royal Literary Fund Fellow and chaired the National Association of Writers in Education and the Arts Council of England's Translations Panel. She is a patron of Survivors' Poetry. Some of her residencies have been at Sheffield Children's Hospital, Ilkley

Literature Festival and York St John University. Her poems have won major prizes. Sheffield Hallam University awarded her an honorary doctorate 'for outstanding contribution to Literature, the Arts and community service'. In 2008 she received an MBE.

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'. www.freewebs.com/catherineedmunds/

Suzannah Evans at the age of nine once wrote sponsored poetry for 50p a go. Since then she has had work published in magazines including *The Rialto*, *Magma* and *Horizon Review*. She is Poetry Editor of *The Cadaverine*, an online magazine for writers under 30.

Ruth Foley lives in Massachusetts, USA, where she teaches English for Wheaton College. Her recent work is appearing or forthcoming in *Adanna*, *qarrtsiluni*, *Redheaded Stepchild*, and *Umbrella*, among others. Her poetry has been nominated for the Best New Poets, Best of the Net, and Pushcart anthologies. She also serves as Associate Poetry Editor for *Cider Press Review*.

Charlotte Gann's poems have appeared in a range of magazines (*The Rialto*, *The North*, *Magma*, *Iota* and *The Frogmore Papers*, among others), online (for instance, in *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears* and *Snakeskin*), as well as in various anthologies, including *Stripe* (Templar 2009) and *Poetry South East 2010* (The Frogmore Press). Pighog Press published her pamphlet, *The Long Woman*, in summer 2011 www.pighog.co.uk. She has an English degree from UCL, and an MA in Creative Writing and Personal Development from the University of Sussex. She has worked for many years as an editor and writer.

Tess Jolly lives in West Sussex with her partner and two young children. She has work forthcoming in *Magma*, *Iota* and *The North* and was highly commended in last year's *Msllexia* Women's Poetry Competition.

Gill McEvoy has published two pamphlets, *Uncertain Days* and *A Sampler* (HappenStance Press 2006, 2008). Her full collection is entitled *The Plucking Shed* (Cinnamon Press, 2010). A further collection is due from Cinnamon in 2013. Gill was recently awarded a Hawthornden Fellowship for 2012.

Philip Quinlan has two print publications, *True North* and *Leaves and Linnings*, and a chapbook, *Head Lands* (forthcoming spring 2012, from White Violet Press). His work has appeared in: *The Flea*, *The Chimaera*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *Lilt*, *Soundzine*, *Numinous*, *The Avatar Review*, *The Centrifugal Eye*, *Sea Stories*, *Shit Creek Review*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Victorian Violet Press*, *Whale Sound*, *Studio 360*, *In Stereo Press*, *The Hypertexts*, and *Lighten Up Online*. www.theverbfori.net

Ann Sansom has published six collections of poetry, most recently *In Praise of Men and Other People* which *Poetry Review* called a "compelling volume of conflicting advice, conflicting loyalties, and skilful ventriloquy". She has also written and directed plays for stage and radio. She is a regular tutor for the WEA, Poetry Society and Arvon Foundation, as well as working in schools and running writing residencies. She is a director of The Poetry Business, which publishes *The North* magazine and Smith/Doorstop books.

Emma Simon lives in London where she juggles journalism with family life and poetry. She

has previously been published by *Prole*.

Janice D. Soderling has published poetry, fiction, essays and translations in a plethora of literary magazines, most recently at *MsLexia* (UK) and *New Verse News* (Singapore). Her poem was nominated by Now Culture (USA) to Sundress Best of the Net 2011. Her work was recently finalist for the second time at Glimmer Train Stories (USA) where she previously garnered a first prize. Soderling's short stories manuscript was semifinalist at Leapfrog Press 2011 and her poetry manuscript got finalist ranking at Kore Press 2011.

Marjorie Sweetko edits English language texts in Marseilles and publishes her poetry regularly in British journals such as *The North*, *Orbis*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Obsessed with Pipework*, *South*, *South Bank Poetry*.

Wendy Vardaman, wendyvardaman.com, has a Ph.D. from University of Pennsylvania. Co-editor/web master of Verse Wisconsin, versewisconsin.org, as well as Cowfeather Press, cowfeatherpress.org, and the author of *Obstructed View* (Fireweed Press, 2009), she works for a children's theater, The Young Shakespeare Players, in Madison, WI. In addition to poetry, she writes reviews, essays and interviews which have appeared in *Poetry Daily*, *The Women's Review of Books* and *Poets.org*.

River Wolton grew up in London but has lived in the north for twenty-five years. She was Derbyshire Poet Laureate 2007-9. *The Purpose of Your Visit* and *Leap* are published by Smith/Doorstop. www.riverwolton.co.uk

Sarah Zale is a writing and poetry instructor in the Seattle community college system. Her recent collection of poems, *The Art of Folding*, was inspired by her travels to Israel and Palestine. "The Refugee at Al-Arroub Fails To Explain" won the 2009 Anita McAndrews Award/Poets for Human Rights. "An Old Story of Food" was a finalist in the 2010 Split This Rock Poetry Contest, which called for poems that split open the injustices in society. Her work also appears in the anthology *Come Together, Imagine Peace*, a finalist for the 2009 Eric Hoffer Award.

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*.