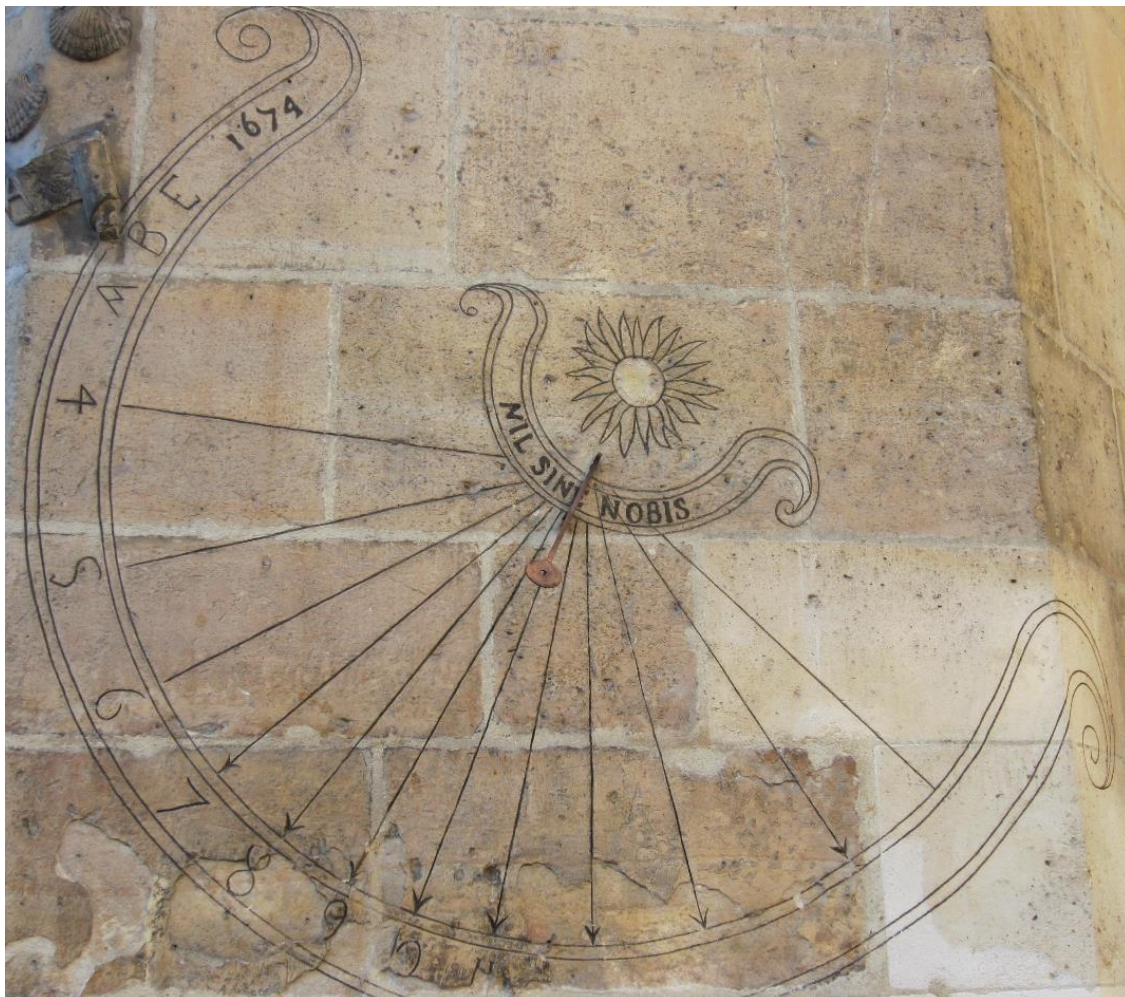


Welcome to Issue 5 of Antiphon

Autumn 2012

The theme of time is integrated into many of this issue's poems, everything from the creeping of a deadline to the end of the universe. We have new poems from Ned Balbo, Emma Bolden, Susan Rich and many others; and reviews of new publications from Geoff Hattersley, Rosie Shepperd and Paul Lee. As we enter our second year of Antiphon we've had more submissions than ever before; we hope all our readers enjoy this new issue.



Issue 5, Autumn 2012

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Issue Five Editorial

Our theme of 'time' occupied the minds of our contributors for this issue. In particular, many were keen to capture those times that consist mostly of waiting; the period before the birth of a child, the time spent with a parent during their last days, the time trying to carry on after the loss of a loved one. These are occasions when the consolation of poetry can work well in reminding us that these are universal themes faced by most of us at some point in our lives. They can also be quite challenging to write about - how to find new language to describe these age-old feelings, how to avoid falling into sentimentality. The poems we liked best were those that approached these ideas rather obliquely; we hope you like them too. And since time is pressing, I shall give up trying to find something witty to say about it all, and let the poems say it instead.

We've also included a mix of work that doesn't take time as its theme; though, as that wise playwright Tom Stoppard says (whose quotes we pick for our home page), "for all the compasses in the world, there's only one direction, and time is its only measure."

Rosemary Badcoe

Act One



Storyteller's Shanty

This morning you came in from Lizard Bay
and found me scribbling songlines on my door.
I don't care what the scholars have to say;
the things I saw will thrill you to the core.

By day we try to keep a track on time.
Long hours crash and roll upon the shore;
they hail from beds of gravel, silt and lime,
where all those minutes harden into ore.

And in the evening we may hear a sound
behind the boatshed. Then we will explore
to find a starscript scattered on the ground,
all coils and springs — yes, we've been here before.

Tonight the ship comes in, and we will share
such tales and yarns as we have kept in store.
We'll slip into the wondrousness that's there
and walk on stilts to cross the ocean floor.

Jane Røken

At Santa Barbara

Their shadows lie behind them on the beach,
elongated, as though El Greco
had taken to silhouettes, and with deft scissors
sketched this dumb show, stretched it out along
the sand that dries in the departing tide.
They smile into the lens — at least, she's smiling;
he's frozen by self-consciousness
into a tangle of elbows, neck and knees.
In this picture, as their taller
thinner selves reach out toward the mountains
that we did not attempt, their mother's
caught herself, her shadow — here, down in the corner:
an accidental fecit; a maker's mark.

David Callin

Schedule

8:00 porridge and tea.
9:30 we sit in straightback cane
chairs and roll the ball back and forth
calling out encouragements.
10:30 we tune our voices together
bending errant notes to the
strident march of the hymn.
Once all the sheaves are brung in,
we write short letters. Vinegar
scrubs the floor and shrieks
are quickly quarantined, shut off.
But not before you hear someone
calling for her mother, always,
regardless of their past relationship,
her mother. Community work.
Polishing spigots as apron knots sour.
The French lady always spoke so beautifully
we would beg her to speak again: *demiglasse*.
Her patrician hands, tender towards
sobbing shoulders, arranged about them
just so, like a shawl and you really forgot
they strangled her husband one night.
Noon: tapioca and overcooked
potatoes and corn. One: rest. Two:
letters home. Carefully scripted.
Three: a short stroll, weather allowing.
Inexplicably flourishing at low altitude
alder brush. Rent possum, one of its poor
kidneys out on the pavement,
awkward portraiture of indiscretion.
A twig with lichen thrown into
the creek. Four: talking or talking
about not talking and then talking.
Five, unease and board games,
a sob knotting up in the throat.
Lacunae, Lacunae the mockingbird
perched on the loblolly pine
outside the brown papered study
intermittently cries. Six, dinner.
Seven, a program perhaps.
Some Episcopalians who want to
remember God's poor for an hour.
8:00 strict preparations for the dark.

Jenn Blair

ANZAC Day Service, 1938

*They shall not grow old as we who are left
grow old, they say. I stop and think: perhaps
they do. What else would they do in the gaps
between back then and now? Within that cleft
of years? Of course they have grown old — and I
am glad for it, for so have I. Old frames
surround old photographs, signed by old names
so long ago — all things grow old. You died
too soon, perhaps, to age and wither gray
in people's memories, not like you'd been
here with us through all these years... But, again,
you must grow old with me because today
I am grown old and you and I were one.
You can't stay young now all my youth is done.*

Juleigh Howard-Hobson

Astrocytoma

for FG

The moon's in hiding,
pared to the rim of a fine
porcelain bowl,

the far edge
cloaked by a swirling
skim of steam.

The girl, pale
as dregs of day, her face
round as the clock

on the wall that inches
time, grasps the deep
flat-based spoon

in the hand that obeys
thought, scoops, leans in, sips
the comfort of mushrooms.

Her throat, in training,
swallows, warmth trickles
through her bones.

She is enfolded
in the quiet of stars,
has returned again

from the onslaught
that seeks to oust the dark
clutch of overgrowth

lodged within her head
that undoes her walking, puts
her days on hold.

Helen Overell

The Bridge

Sanding an old door, in the scent of fresh wood, the real task
is to ignore my children
paddling and playing Pooh sticks in the stream.

Great grandparents stalk like herons from the shade
as if they might fly in secret,
as if theirs were and always will be the gladder hotter days.

Light boned and angled they cross in a hesitant single file
and the children retreat step by step
to let them go carefully, balancing their weight.

Megan Watkins

Act Two



Sea View

When her youngest takes everything
he can't pack to Oxfam and heads
at first light for Inverness, she weeps
into the wrinkled shine of late summer sand,
listens to shingle hiss the receding tide,
and buries her heart in a cheek shaped hollow
cold in the Sussex flint.

When her kindest lover yet hears enough
he shoves his full plate like a snooker shot:
Christmas crockery smashed in her lap
and the rest of what may've sustained them
splatters her flat.

Caught on the icy back stair
tight lipped in slippers, she bites her tongue
clean off, sees it sizzle down to the shore
where it steams itself in the shallows.

When her last friends drift, they wave.
She turns away, slips into scuffed kitten heels
to sling back gins at a windswept bar

till all she's left is a rust-licked wall to climb.
Sea swallows stars and iron steps bleed,
serve her again up to another night's blur.
She stands by the breadth of her bed
stares out the thickening pane, on the swell
dark, still fresh.

Fay Musselwhite

By the Midland Station I sit down

I swear by the curses of the cabbie
and the smoky stigmata tattooed on his neck
the recalcitrant Citroen with spite in its lights
will soon shift itself from under his wheels
and by midnight this chaos will calm.

Scattered by the wild winds of Sheffield
comes such a multitude, so many undone
by random collisions and broken down engines
The accursed, the unbidden, angry, forlorn
heads all riddled with unlikely timetables
lost connections and missed destinations
abandoned on moorland, stuck in old stations.

I swear by the song of the shaven-headed
bloke on his mobile crouched on the kerb-stone
that all of this madness will fall and tumble
into the secret vault of dark waters
where Porter meets Sheaf under the platforms
where floodtides ebb and brickwork reflects
the throats of dead angels, the breath of old demons.

David Harmer

Substrata

Keep your eyes down, don't look
at the soil, but what lies below:
sticky clay, fist shaped boulders,
black shale that sounds like coins

when you bore through. Dig
into layers of fireclay, galliard,
the brittle strata of sandstone.
When grit sets your teeth on edge,

don't give up, even if you hit a layer
of bastard stone or strong blue bind.
Don't look back at the pinhole
of daylight shining above you

but take a deep breath, swallow
ironstone, fossilized shells,
eat your way through ganister,
toothsome silica, until you reach

the soft coal bed, then lie down,
let the weight of the world settle.

Julie Mellor

Ancestors

To old chestnut trees I have traced them:
their gravestones weathered runes
in the churchyard at Morval.

Unexpected to know they loved water:
the high stretch of a sail, catching fish,
growing grain, tending the shrines on the road.
That always and after they married
daughters of innkeepers, merchants and sailors:
salt so deeply ingrained they knew its grit,
through the pull of the city to Stockwell,
Shoreditch.

Inked in their writing, they handed down names:
Caroline, Thomas, each child a new future.
A compass and plumb line through departures,
the turn of tides on the wild Cornish coast.
Perhaps they explain my love of the sea,
the promise of harbours where the shore
is strung with fishnets and crabs.

Crossed on the land bridge from France
millennia ago: to beachcomb the marshes
where sea roads meet sand. Small and dark,
threaded into their genes, an indelible code.
My name the same as a sea captain's daughter,
the long season's ribbon, navigating their days.

Clare Crossman

An Angel's Fury

A variation on Baudelaire's 'Le Rebelle'

From what high place he leapt, or fell, or flew
I don't know, and I didn't want to hear
why he stood now before me. Yet I knew
exactly who he was. He struck my ear —

correct no one would stop him in this city
where, each day, I speed-walk past the poor
wrecked souls who ask for handouts, work, or pity,
so many I don't see them anymore —

and pulled me back, the traffic teeming by,
*What's wrong with you? You're lost. I won't ask why
you rush past in disgust: but don't you feel*

*that dead place at the center of your chest
where mercy used to swell? He squeezed my wrist —*
But I won't bend to anybody's will.

Ned Balbo

The Nail Forge, Hoylandswaine, December 2011

Men, the Chapels and Dysons,
flitted in and out
of this fire-lit space —
a flight of sparrows in a winter storm.

Nailed to the world they bore stigmata.
Their work both chimed and wept,
fashioned iron that couldn't hold
the ship they sailed for darkness in.

They re-emerge today as these bright faces
who write outside the nail forge:
embers from ashes, reddenings
banked against the coming cold.

John Barron

Prescription 1:

In the light of the moon we identify
coordinates, only to see them wash
away in the orange sunrise. To find
the lost requires more than GPS
or map, compass and sextant.
In the shimmer of our peripheral
vision they are the same, reading
an old book, or chopping vegetables.
In a better world, we could take
the compass and a straight edge
draw daisies, or circles around time
to hold everyone in a circle singing,
hands around each other's waists.

Carol Dorf

Interval

As Vernon Watkins said, "I'm a participant in the doctrine of constructive ambiguity". Sometimes I write poems and do not know what I mean by them. Is that good writing, or a cop out?

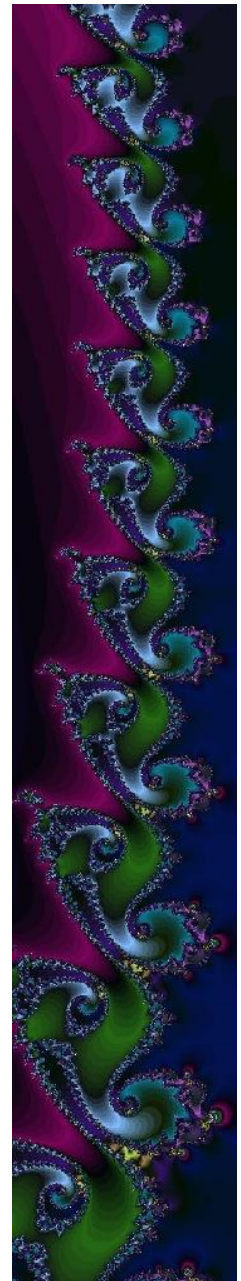
Obviously, I can't answer that. Only someone else, a reader, reviewer, editor, workshopper can tell me whether the poem "works" – and by "work" they may mean something quite different from what any other reader, reviewer, editor or workshopper might mean. The poem is ambiguous. Readers respond differently.

I think there's a difference between creating ambiguous work and creating unclear work. A poem may be unsuccessful, it may not work, if readers simply cannot get a handle on it because it is too obscure, too personal, too difficult in its construction, too open, too imprecise, too complex. Obscurity, meanings which are totally open, massive complexity and repeated imprecision are typically bad things in poetry. I know one can't be dogmatic in such cases, but I think this is generally true. They do create ambiguity, ambiguity creates difficulty and difficulty causes a reader to struggle with meaning and that struggle probably proves frustrating or unrewarding. This sort of ambiguity, where the reader is puzzled, but gets no gratification out of attempting to unravel that puzzle, is probably not good work.

Notice that I don't say that a good poem means the reader *must* find a solution, nor that the puzzle of the poem must even be soluble. I think it has to be *addressable*. That is, I think the reader has to feel that she or he has some ways of approaching the mystery, a way of attempting the poem which might yield feeling or meaning or intent or explanation. There are probably an infinite number of ways to read poems, but what we typically do as readers (I guess) is look for clues in the text on which we can hang little "theories" of what is going on. We might see the title as a context or a subject tag. We might identify words of time, place and person which set up narrative links. Descriptions give us images, which we may relate to familiar images of our own, such as memories.

And, as a reader, we aim to link these various clues into some sort of overall pattern. We look for such things as "development" (e.g. a continual narrative), "consistency" (e.g. of tone, mood, image), "emotional state", "idea" (e.g. a position or argument) and so on. These can be simple gratifications, as in a lyric poem which merely touches a specific moment or feeling, or they can be quite complex, where the associations, implications, resonances reach across culture or history or deep into language, or where a poem sets off in one simple direction and then moves into something very different.

For me, then, thinking in this particular way, one creative tactic is to build a poem which is consistently ambiguous. That is to say, it is not open about its actual meaning or intent, but it is consistent in presentation of that thing, that x-factor, whatever it is. Some list poems are like this, telling us "it is like a tambourine left in the rain, it's a lighthouse without power, it is mist on a June river" but never naming the "it". Such poems can be written easily, yet sometimes work, in the sense I mean above: they give something to readers, even though they may give different things to different readers. Whether this is



poetic sleight of pen, or something more sophisticated, I'm not equipped to say. What I can say, though, is that sometimes such poems work, and sometimes they don't.

There are rather more sophisticated approaches though, which yield deeper, or perhaps richer, ambiguities yet still remain consistent in their poetic intent. I remember Maurice Riordan during a class saying "take an emotion, and put it beside your poem. But don't put it in the poem." At the time, I didn't understand what he meant. How could a feeling be "outside" the poem, and yet still be useful in creating a decent piece? Now, I think I do. The idea is that you have a thing to convey, something that is underneath, beside, colouring the work, but never explicit on the page.

You may, for example, want to write about the destructiveness of love. One way to do this would be to write a poem in which two lovers destroy each other. That would be literal, descriptive and, quite possibly, dull. Or you might have that intent "beside" your poem, and instead write about what you see outside your window. Each object you record, the magpie picking over leaves in the gutter, the chain biting into the sycamore as it grows, the window-cleaner assiduously washing the outside of windows that are dusty and stained within, will be tainted by that purpose, and, as you refine the poem, keeping that intent at hand, you will select the images, trim the language, move towards a form which reflects that intent, though it is nowhere stated. I've just been reading Jane Kenyon, and she seems to do this all the time: she writes a poem about a country inn and hay-bales, but tells you how grief harms those who grieve.

The poem that results is ambiguous, therefore. It nowhere tells you what it is about. It could be about anything. But it brings to the puzzle a whole series of words and images which fit together, which work in consonance: it is consistently ambiguous, and out of it readers can build their own version of something that it may be about. It might be how love destroys itself, or how lovers are self-deceiving, or the inevitable decay of all relationships, or entropy, or the way the world forces us to be other than we want to be – anything, really, that the reader can bring into play from her or his own experience and fit to the template of the poem.

For me, that kind of ambiguity makes great poetry.

NW

Geoff Hattersley, *Outside the Blue Hebiium*, 32pp, £5.00

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

Geoff Hattersley is a popular, prolific and well-known poet both in his native South Yorkshire and nationally. This collection of twenty-six poems ably sustains the reasons for that popularity. They combine humour with man-of-the-people directness, straightforward vocabulary with surreal imaginings, life on the working-class street with sardonic social critique. The poems are engaging and amenable. Some have the tone of a jolly uncle, others of a mate in the pub. This makes them instantly approachable, a pleasure reinforced by humour and tenderness:

she does watercolours, landscapes.
He can only sketch a matchstick man

kneeling in front of a matchstick woman,
and he places this on her easel,

making her laugh, turn and kiss him
all in one swift movement.

(In the Room and Out the Door)

and compassion

I held her in my arms
till the ambulance came.
It took more than an hour.

There are these times
when all I can do
is sit in the dark
listening to music.

(Poem for Kylie)

Sometimes the pleasant tone seems little more than chatty narrative, even occasionally reading like fragmented prose, as in 'Nineteen Eight-Four':

He was a good man.
He liked Captain Beefheart
and the Bonzo Dog Band.
He had a load of hash
buried in his garden
and he dug up three ounce.

Whilst this is accessible material and easily appreciated, there's not much in the way of musicality or deep significance. It reads like poetry which will perform well, and so go down like a storm in the open mikes and slams, but on the page, it's actually only its political content which carries the poem, and this is quite simply stated, too:

There were policemen and
police vans and
police dogs and
police horses
all over
South Yorkshire.

(Nineteen Eight-Four)

The subject might be 1984, but the poem seems to belong to 1968.

Perhaps that's its appeal, as there are quite strong threads of nostalgia running through many of these poems. Hattersley is not yearning for a fictitious golden past, but there seems little in the current age that he has a good word for, with poems taking sideswipes at dole scroungers, the police, the army, the government, footballers, dog owners, poets – some of these with

affection, most, especially where authority is implicated, with aggressive simplification. Conversely, those who get sympathy in these poems are the downtrodden, the disenfranchised, the victims – or people who can be constructed as such, the most prominent being, logically enough for a South Yorkshire man, the miners.

However, this is only one kind of Hattersleian poem: the tell-it-like-it-is assertion all liberal poets should believe in. Though perhaps Hattersley's cynicism goes deeper than hostility to authority, as he seems to feel life itself is a mess, even hateful:

The object of the game
is to punish yourself,
those who love you,
and everybody else.

(The Game)

The dimension I enjoyed most in this pamphlet is Hattersley's surrealism, best illustrated by the poem 'Ten Hebiums'. 'Hebium' is a Hattersleian neologism. The ten poems each take that unidentified notion and riff on it, working from some slant on the made up word to imagine possible meanings:

He thought of how other people had hebium.
People had a limitless capacity for hebium,

everywhere he looked people were having hebium.
So why wasn't he having any hebium?

(Ten Hebiums: 2)

'Infection of the hebium,' he said.
I'd rather have heard anything but this.

(Ten Hebiums: 9)

He'd penned, he said, so far this year
approximately two thousand hebiums.

(Ten Hebiums: 3)

So we have chemical, medical, poetic and physiological meanings, amongst others, each inflected by its connection with the others. This is fun and clever and it permits some interesting reflections, as, beneath the word-play, each section can be seen as a question of the 'true meaning' of the kind of concept it substitutes for, as in the complete eighth poem:

'Happy Hebium, Honey!'

This surrealism can easily make us delve into the nature of meaning, how it is constructed by context and expectation and, indeed, the very form of related words (helium, cranium, hepatitis). Hattersley is fond of such wordplay. One poem is built around a misprint:

While still only fifteen, he embarked upon

a steamy love affair with a manure woman

(Infamous)

Another takes the ambiguity of the word ‘snapped’ to satirise the contemporary fetish for the digital capture of every moment:

I snapped my feet
as I got out of bed.
Then I thought I’d better
snap them again, individually.

(Snapped)

So, whilst many of the poems are sardonic complaints about the state of play in ‘The Game’, they are softened by the intimacy of others and, overall, the humanity of a gentle poet perplexed by the world he finds himself writing about.

NW

Rosie Shepperd, *That so-easy thing*, 30pp, £5.00

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

I was immediately struck by the unusual form of Rosie Shepperd's poems. Their shape on the page sets them apart from the typical lyric, most of the pieces in this prize-winning pamphlet using long, flowing lines, some tabbed or indented to the right, to give the look of a waterfall or drifts of lines or sprawls of language over the page or rapid mixes of long and short lines in unexpected combination.

On first reading this seemed an affectation, an arrangement designed to look different merely to capture attention or intrigue the reader, without real purpose. But after reading only a couple of poems to realise that this was simply the visual outcome of a flowing, liquid poetry and a sensuous intelligence which is ready to explore all sorts of different approaches to enliven her poems.

And they work. These poems are vibrant, full of flourishes and fluid movement, whether driven by narrative:

A man in a loose blue shirt

moves across the sand, leans on a rake, lifts his face to The Narrows.

He walks towards the pontoon, bumping in a breeze;

stays still for barely a moment,

then disappears.

(What is the name of the thing I call Love?)

or realistic dialogue:

"Are you hungry or shall we explore?"

"Look at the boats. They're so, just so."

"I know. It's beautiful, isn't it?"

(Thoughts inside a rented silver Opel)

or unanswered questions (Shepperd is very fond of questions, rhetorical or otherwise, to push her poems forward):

Was it the peach towels?

The sweet circular soap? A delicacy in the afternoon

light from the fly-over? Did she lift the single mint-

chocolate from her pillow, break it in two and save

each half for some tender moment, later?

Much later.

(A seedy narrative or moments of lyrical stillness?)

Her work is always restlessly flowing into the next line, the next stanza, the next image or idea. The shape generally reflects an excitement in rhythm or pace which is quite rare in poetry, an energy lifting work off the page.

Titles, too, are unusual, quirky, engaging and, typically, long, often having the air of aphorism, such as 'Perfect and private things have imperfect and public endings' and 'Somewhere I read that a thought can be exaggerated, while an emotion cannot'.

Such strong, almost sententious, statements are common in the poems themselves, but they never seem superfluous or forced, perhaps because of the way they are attached to narrative or image. I particularly liked the ending to 'How d'ya like them apples?', for example:

I stayed out on the blue boat, stayed out all afternoon;

came back to the quay with empty hands and salt in my hair.

Some things cannot be explained: some creatures

swim and breathe and cannot be caught.

While it is a generalised statement of the kind contemporary poets are often persuaded to avoid, in this case it acts as a summary of the narrative which illustrates it, though not in any Aesopian moralistic way, and that final image is a kind of "proof" of it,

The poems deal with both personal and more remote subjects although, as often is the case, there's no obvious distinction between the poems of personal experience and those which may simply be well-imagined fictions. What Shepperd's conversational style often does, however, is make even quite abstract or distant accounts seem personal and immediate. Even as she is engaging in some clever language tactic, she can bring us into the intimacy of a situation, as in 'A seedy narrative or moments of lyrical stillness?' Its first sentence is a declarative description, but the remainder of the poem is couched in speculations, negatives and questions, so that the casual relationship between salesman and 'girl on a summer job' that is described doesn't *actually* happen – but its not happening has a humanity and tenderness that draws you in, so the reader feels at once engaged by the rather banal romance, and wistful that it may not have occurred. Or perhaps it did.

There are recurrent themes and images. One set of imagery enriching many poems is that of food, with taste being an unusually prominent sense in Shepperd's work. I don't know if this is a deliberate device on her part but the food imagery in the collection is striking and rich. There's the metaphorical 'dolphin-friendly-tuna' the protagonist has been compelled to eat vs. the less PC but more self-indulgent Indian Summer Grill she'd much prefer, in 'I tend to tug when I shouldn't even push'. The observational detail of sushi chefs in 'Somewhere I read that a thought can be exaggerated, while an emotion cannot' provides an intrusive distraction in another relationship-during-a-meal, where observing the particular minutiae of the meal enables two people to maintain their relationship without having to communicate with each other.

It's gone again, that so-easy-thing we had for each other.

.....

we incline our heads,

together and at each other, bound by this thing,

this art form we're watching.

The meal becomes a metaphor for the way they run their lives together.

But it's the sensuality of the food imagery that I noticed most, with its many shifts and subtleties as well as Shepperd's clear love of the language of food in itself:

A heavy lamb shank seemed a fine idea,

basted with last week's Multipulciano,

perched on a goo of onions, sugared with rosemary needles.

(It's no good)

This collection is sharp, exciting, tender, and sensual all in the same mouthful. I was tentative at first, but after a couple of tastes, I loved it.

NW

**Paul Lee, *Us: who made History*, 106pp, £8.00
original plus, 17 High Street, Maryport, Cumbria, CA15 6BQ**

This is a posthumous collection, the final publication of Paul Lee, offering sixty nine poems and so offering clear economic value. But it offers values of other kinds, too: of variety, craft, dexterity and of emotional range.

I'd never read Lee before, so the first poems came as something of a surprise – their deftness, their craft, his desire to experiment with form on one page or build a solidly conventional sonnet on the next. I was surprised I'd not come across him before. You would think a poet of this ability would be widely published. However, the Acknowledgements only list *Orbis*, *Smiths Knoll* and *Terror Tales* as previous publishers of his work, so he appears to be one of those capable poets who has hidden his light under a bushel.

Lee's work is varied in many different dimensions. Some of the poems are solidly descriptive, others witty narrative, others work by sustaining an unexplained metaphor. Some are cynical satire, such as the sequence 'The Inquiry: Child Protection' which lambasts almost everyone involved in the failures to protect a child. (We're told in the afterword in which Lee's wife, Emma, eulogises him that Paul was a Senior HR Consultant at Leicester City Council).

Some of the poems are witty imaginings, such as 'Coming of Age', dedicated to the poet's daughter, Miranda (perhaps her name also tells you something about the poet), which advises her on how to live in an imagined future where:

everything south of the Cairngorms
maybe Sahel, Iceland, and Greenland swarm

with settlers, the Baltic be the new Mediterranean
and successive waves of Arctic immigration

be throwing up far right demagogues

Here, he threads a very personal message for Miranda in a witty, slightly dismayed dystopia, creating amusement interleaved with tenderness, and a sci-fi critique of contemporary trends as a result.

Probably the strongest pieces are those where Lee allows the constraints of formal considerations to squeeze his intellect into producing sophisticated solutions. His wit emerges in crafty half-rhymes, their subtlety almost unnoticeable in some cases, and in many experiments in using the vocabulary of particular registers, showing both a sensitive ear and a sophisticated linguistic capacity.

Here's an interesting example:

This guy was hot
as Alnitak, and soon smoked out Lambda.

No weak sister, Lambda though, but a tough nut.
Boy, those first two nanos were one helluva
rough-house. Fritzed light and space for keeps,
spooked the primal chunk into herds of galaxies
and lamed young Ticks double-clutchin' with deep
space. Hell, little G was too hunky-tricksy.

(The Big Crunch)

This poem combines the language of physics with that of 30s gangsters, and in doing so debates the relationship between theories of creation. There's so much going on here, it would take 1000 words to unpick it all, but I'll content myself with noting the rhymes (Lambda/helluva, galaxies/tricksy), the echoes created across the two vocabularies (Lambda/lammed) and the sustained way the style carries the story. This is a whole world away from, say:

We made love once, I recall, without desire,
on the first, wettest, day, then circled
round our own reducing axis.

A log fire,
well made, invites reverie, the rapt eye led
to the dervish flames, slowly subsiding to embers,
to white ash. And then, it is the chill one remembers.

(A Weathered Affair)

This poem could be written by a complete different poet, with its restrained romanticism echoing the fading of the affair. And this, again, is radically different from the witty examination of adolescent fascination with Emma Peel in 'Bowler Hat and Leather Boots' or the moral commentary on media exploitation of serial killer victims in 'Five Green Bottles' (the discarded bottle in the ditch being the discarded victim).

When the formal considerations are relaxed, and Lee writes from strong feeling or with a message of some kind, the poems can become looser, almost histrionic outbursts at times, allowing the poetry to suffer as a result:

FIRE! FIRE!

Stupendous, appalling, climactic, the havoc,
the steady concussion of dynamite and shell,
democratic dynamite and shell,
for hours louder than the roar of flame

(How the Great Fire was halted at Van Ness Avenue)

This, I think, is less successful. There is no doubting the seriousness of the intent, to convey the drama and scale of the event, but the poetry stretches to melodrama and is not as convincing as the more carefully worked poems in this collection.

So the offering overall is perhaps a little uneven. Nevertheless, it offers a remarkable range and a textbook of techniques. It's a collection well worth reading.

NW

Act Three



Amblyopsidae

I cannot say that the dark was the dark.
Was an eye in itself that couldn't stop
seeing. Was the pupil of an eye itself wide
and terrible. I can say that it was nothing

like light. I can say it was nothing like
nothing. And then a thin beam of it
from his hands. How I couldn't even
recognize light. How it seemed like nothing

I should ever know. Or like wrong. Or like
trembling. The beam led itself over the pool
and then they were there, the muscles in their pale
bodies visible. Their bodies weren't even

bodies. They were light itself, or seeing
light. He said they had adapted. He said all
creatures do. There in the dark that wasn't
even dark they pulsed and shimmered, they

pushed their bodies against the water
that pushed against their bodies. They didn't open
their eyes because they had no eyes. There
was the darkness and their bodies, and

looking was not looking. There was my body
and it was standing and looking. And not
looking. And then there was my mind and it
was thinking. How lucky, it told me. How lucky.

Emma Bolden

Deadline

The deadline is a red
line. Don't mistake it
for a headline. It's not
one of those lines
on your face.

The deadline leaves
no trace you can
find, tells you no lies,
leaves you no time
to freak out from
fear or surprise.

It's a sneak.

It comes from behind,
goes under your chin,
from ear to ear
and all the way
in.

Jane Røken

On a history of houses

First, you must listen
as they waken, the creak
and groan of old pipes,
the slow stretch of joists.
Listen to pigeons squabbling
on the roof as a cat
pads softly from room to room.

These rituals repeat in houses
that are home to the living,
each day rhyming to the order
of hours. The universe
slowly turning, the sky opening
to light from imperceptible stars.

But, in those houses that have fallen
to the stewardship of ghosts,
what essence is left in settled dust,
in the silence. What element
of heart and voice and touch
remains in the bare walls
of rooms that will change shape

as dusk comes on, and no one is there
to witness the pull of tides,
how the moon throws a pale light
over the garden so the shadows
of the tall trees become absences,
the intimate pauses between words.

James Caruth

Condemned

Unfinished, he sees only a Carroll
conundrum coupled with an Emily
Dickinson poem taking shape. Once he
has had his head drawn in, that is. Until

then he's on tiptoe at pencil tip,
watching his gallows go up: horizontal,
vertical, horizontal, diagonal
and that absurd stubby sliver of rope.

Up to that point his life's simply filler.
He plays a waiting game whilst the letter
of the law is applied. His sentence broken
only when light dawns and the h_ngm_n's beaten.

John Lindley

Early May on the Baltic Sea

Downy birch stand on both sides
of the road, a hundred white soldiers
at ease with everything
that travels along the dusty asphalt.

Their leaves are not early this year
but neither are they late
and if all things
maintain this mediocrity,
this year, we will be thankful.

My mother said a person lives
many lives in their lifetime. Clips
of routines that seem permanent
can change from sunrise to sunrise.
And a morning storm, here or there,
cannot hinder the noonday sun
from making its scheduled appointment.

And so the leaves will arrive in time
to wave the nightingale and warbler
into hiding, and they'll sing
the wisdom of holding small moments
for the listeners, drifting.

Suzanne Jean Johanson

Surprise Ultrasound

I forget
what a heartbeat
sounds like
when
the doctor can't detect one.
No beat, just
white noise, infinite
space in my abdomen.
I beat back
my own banging pulse, beat back
empty thoughts
of an empty body. I race
my husband down the hall to the ultrasound room.
A pause. A beat.
A pale form appears on the screen.
Its heart sounds less
like a beat and more
like an avalanche or a waterfall,
but it will do.

Katie Manning

Act Four



Desertion

This is a day of little perfection,
the season shredded on the boughs
and the trees themselves sighing,
packed like rubies in a treasure chest.
If and when I ever die,
there will not be another season like this.

Clearly, the universe is about to end,
tucked in a pocket, little
pilfered treasures, and the birds:
theirs is music in its purest form.

A crow dances among the leaves, scattered
forgotten thoughts;
the pea-green grass is awaiting death
in the hollows of my footsoles.
Small gulls spiral and try to snatch
a free meal;
it's a desertion of sorts
that mollifies the hunger of bees
before they converge in their winter habitations,
fickle as a god.
Like them, I cannot see
where there is left to go.

Caroline Misner

A foreshadowing

We need no foundation myth
but I have one anyway:

your appearance in my classroom
on some message or other

from the year below.
I looked up from the toils

of my long division —
it may have been something else —

to see you colouring shyly
under Poppa's brusque heartiness,

a picture of uncertain
fragile grace

like a Dresden angel
or one of our tottering calves;

one of those divinations
in which the lover's face

is made to appear
in an ordinary mirror.

And then you were gone,
taken back into

the undifferentiated pack
of annoying girls,

but I must have filed you away
to look up later.

You may not remember this,
but I do.

David Callin

Comma

When I look at the sky and say shiver
I mean the piece that broke off,
the little brittle thing against
the slope of you, your face and
a good measure of light.

When I see you there, I feel like an incendiary,
or a housewife, the missing match,
that sudden gladiola on the same walk home,

Or more maybe, a comma, that half curl
of breath between two places, a pause
in flat white air, the separation,
the substitution —

When you said you barely knew me,
I blamed the gin, the cut glass reflecting
the gin, the reflection of the cut glass
in the gin.

Cindy Carlson

Spring, Resumed

The redbuds stand now in full-blown glory.
The crabapple's covered half in leaf, half in bloom.
Dogwoods open their white cups in the understory
glowing bright in the falling gloom.

And all those trees that skip straight to leaf
now seem caught up in some kind of race.
By the hour the woods show ever more green
and draw a curtain between the hill and lake.

Through the gaps the light breaks and reminds
that too much brightness, in darkness, blinds.

Wendy Babiak

Abstract

after a painting by Julie Aldridge

Perhaps the painter's angry
with her art — the ocean — the gallery —
a comprehension that arrives too easily;

or is this simply Irish weather, stormscape
well-lived in unsettled blues, strong
undercoat of grey? What could it mean

that I look and can't see? Perhaps
there's no such thing as clarity.
In the middle ground, for instance,

an oblong labyrinth of mustard seed
or hay rolled tight, promise of
light unfurling, light you work to see.

Susan Rich

Before the Flood

The boys would bring in wood
planks Saturday nights to cover
up the damp earth as girls mended
muslin skirts and stained their
mouths a brighter hue and despite
the fiddle's irresponsible lilt
they were not a godless people
nor shiftless, for their mountains did
not move themselves but had to be
blasted coal crumb by coal crumb,
and every ear of corn coaxed.
Once the goat woman stood tall
in her garden and there amidst her
flourishing string bean announced
there is no god and they stoned her
but not before weaving a crown
of blue morning glory for her
brow as she was being carried
past her confusion for they
were thoughtful like that.

No one gossiped much there,
no gloating breast puffed out
like the toads' throats stretched
to the painful verge of translucence
there at the creek, for everyone was
evil, but walking around redeemed.
Lamb's blood in the odds and ends
store's bins of nails and thread, lamb's
blood on the handles of Lynette's
beauty parlor golden scissors sign,
lamb's blood sealing glass jars of
cool white milk left every Monday
in a wire basket by the stoop.

So everything flourished, children's
cheeks the most darling hue of apple
til the first drop of rain.
An old barn door's dilapidated latch
and hinge one last hymn for the
nettle and water. Sting and roar.

Jenn Blair

Contributors

Wendy Babiak is author of *Conspiracy of Leaves* (Plain View Press, 2010). Her poems have appeared in journals in America (*Barrelhouse*, *Tampa Review*, *Free Inquiry*), a newspaper in Tehran, and online at such diverse places as *Big Bridge*, *No Tell Motel*, *-esque magazine*, and *Poets for Living Waters*. She lives in Ithaca, NY, with her family.

Ned Balbo's latest book, *The Trials of Edgar Poe and Other Poems* (Story Line Press), was awarded the 2010 Donald Justice Prize by judge A. E. Stallings, and the 2012 Poets' Prize. His second book, *Lives of the Sleepers* (U. of Notre Dame Press), received the Ernest Sandeen Prize and a *ForeWord* Book of the Year Gold Medal; his first, *Galileo's Banquet*, was awarded the Towson University Prize. A chapbook, *Something Must Happen*, appeared from Finishing Line Press. He was featured poet in the Fall 2011/Winter 2012 *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, and his reviews of contemporary poetry may be found in most issues of *Antioch Review* from 1999-2009.

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.

Jenn Blair is from Yakima, WA. She has published in *Copper Nickel*, *New South*, *Tulane Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, and *Superstition Review* among others. Her chapbook *All Things are Ordered* is out from Finishing Line Press.

Emma Bolden is the author of three chapbooks of poetry: *How to Recognize a Lady* (part of Edge by Edge, the third in Toadlily Press' Quartet Series); *The Mariner's Wife* (Finishing Line Press); and *The Sad Epistles* (Dancing Girl Press). Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in such journals as the *Indiana Review*, *The Journal*, *The Greensboro Review*, *Feminist Studies*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Redivider*, and *Verse*. Her manuscripts have been semi-finalist for the Crab Orchard Review Poetry Series' First Book Prize, the Perugia Press Book Prize, the Brittingham and Felix Pollak Prizes in Poetry, and the Blue Lynx Prize for Poetry, as well as a finalist for the Cleveland State University Poetry Center's First Book Prize. She has been nominated for four Pushcart Prizes. She is an assistant professor at Georgia Southern University and blogs at A Century of Nerve (emmabolden.com).

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*.

Cindy Carlson is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. She currently lives in Madison, WI where she teaches writing and sings in her band *Linda*.

James Caruth was born in Belfast but has lived in Sheffield for the last 25 years. His first collection *A Stones Throw* was published in 2007 by Staple. A long sequence *Dark Peak* was published by Longbarrow in 2008 and his latest pamphlet *Marking the Lambs* has just been published by Smith Doorstop. His poem *The Deposition* won the Sheffield Poetry Prize in 2011.

Clare Crossman In 1996 her collection *Landscapes* won the Redbeck Prize. Since then she has published *Going Back* (Firewater Press Cambridge), *The Shape of Us* (Shoestring Press 2010). A new collection is forthcoming from Shoestring in 2013. Poems have been included in many anthologies, including *A Room to Live in: Poems for Kettles Yard* (Salt Publishing).

Carol Dorf's poems have appeared in *Antiphon*, *Qarrtsiluni*, *Sin Fronteras*, *Spillway*, *OVS*, *Unlikely 2.0*, *Theodate*, *The Mom Egg*, *In Posse Review*, *Moira*, *Feminist Studies*, *Heresies*, *Fringe*, *The Midway*, *Poemeleon*, *Runes*, and *13th Moon*. They have been anthologized in *Not a Muse*, *Boomer Girls*, and elsewhere. She is poetry editor of *Talking Writing*, and teaches mathematics at Berkeley High School.

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.

Juleigh Howard-Hobson has simultaneously written literary fiction, formalist poetry and genre work, along with non-fiction essays and articles, purposely blunting the modern 'brandable' concept of artistic obligation to any single form or movement. Her work has appeared in such venues as *The Lyric*, *Mobius*, *Trinacria*, *qarrtsiluni*, *The Raintown Review*, *The Best of the Barefoot Muse* (Barefoot Pub), and *Caduceus* (Yale University).

Suzanne Jean Johanson is an American living in Finland. She recently began writing poetry and found it suits her. She hopes to publish more poems and record them in this bio. Suzanne is an enthusiastic storyteller and a lover of words. She enjoys being in the forest, entertaining friends, and a good glass of wine.

John Lindley is a freelance poet and creative writing tutor. An experienced performer, he has read at Ledbury Poetry Festival and at the Buxton and Edinburgh Fringe Festivals. He runs poetry workshops for writers' groups, festivals and in prisons, schools, universities, youth clubs and day care centres, as well as for those with learning difficulties. Widely published and a prizewinner in a number of national competitions, his poetry has also been broadcast on radio. His eighth and latest collection, *Screen Fever*, is published by Pinewood Press.

Katie Manning lives with her husband and son in California, where she teaches writing and literature at Azusa Pacific University. Her creative work has been published in *New Letters*, *PANK*, *Poet Lore*, and *REAL*, among other journals and anthologies. She's a rotating editor for *Fickle Muses*: an online journal of myth and legend.

Julie Mellor lives in Penistone, near Sheffield, and teaches English at a local secondary school. After doing various jobs, including working in a shoe shop on London's Oxford Street, and as an au pair in Sicily, she gained a degree in English at the University of Huddersfield. She went on to do an MA in Writing at Sheffield Hallam, followed by a PhD, which she completed in 2003. Her pamphlet, *Breathing Through Our Bones*, was published earlier this year by Smith Doorstop and her poems have appeared in magazines and anthologies, including *Brittle Star*, *Mslexia*, *The Rialto* and *Smiths Knoll*.

Caroline Misner was born in a country that at the time was known as Czechoslovakia. She

immigrated to Canada in the summer of 1969. Her work has appeared in numerous consumer and literary journals in Canada, the USA and the UK. Her short story "Strange Fruit" was nominated for the Writers' Trust/McClelland-Steward Journey Anthology Prize in 2008. In the autumn of 2010, her poem "Piano Lesson" was nominated for The Pushcart Prize and her short story "A Necessary Sadness" was nominated for a Pushcart in 2011. Her new website is finally on-line: carolinemisner.com

Fay Musselwhite is working toward her final submission for the Writing MA at Sheffield Hallam University. She collaborates locally with artists in film, sound and other media, also regularly attends workshops in the city. Her poetry, which maps humans' negotiation with the elements, is published in magazines and frequently performed.

Helen Overell belongs to the Mole Valley Poets and has work published in magazines including *Scintilla*, *Staple*, *Acumen*, *The Interpreter's House*, *The Frogmore Papers* and *Other Poetry* as well as in *Poetry News* and online in *Qarrtsiluni* and *The Glasgow Review*. Her work appears in anthologies including *The Languages of Colour*. Her collection *Inscapes & Horizons* was published by St Albert's Press.

Susan Rich is the author of three collections of poetry, *The Alchemist's Kitchen* (2010) named a finalist for the Foreword Prize and the Washington State Book Award, *Cures Include Travel* (2006), and *The Cartographer's Tongue / Poems of the World* (2000) winner of the PEN Award for Poetry. She has received awards from *The Times Literary Supplement* of London, Peace Corps Writers and the Fulbright Foundation. Recent poems appear in *New England Review*, *Poetry Ireland*, and *The Southern Review*.

Jane Røken lives in Denmark, on the interface between hedgerows and barley fields. She is fond of old tractors, garden sheds, scarecrows and other stuff that, in the due course of time, will ripen into something else. Her writings have appeared in *Snakeskin*, *Mobius*, *Word Gumbo*, *Shit Creek Review*, *Astropoetica*, and several other online magazines.

Megan Watkins grew up in Wales and lives in London. She has collaborated with the writer and artist Audrey Reynolds on a pamphlet to be produced by Ancient and Modern Gallery, London in 2013. They are currently working on a project about Charlotte Brontë in Brussels. Her poetry is in *Magma*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Smiths Knoll*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*.

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Fractals for Applause and Interval sections from Peter Alefounder. Cover photo from Carrol Williams.

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