

Antiphon

Welcome to Issue 6 of Antiphon

Winter 2013

We're delighted to present you with another selection of great poetry, with new work from LouAnn Shepard Muhm, Wendy Vardaman and Gill McEvoy amongst many others. These are all poems worth lingering over; poems that may not be what they appear to be. We hope you enjoy reading them.



This is a spiral fountain in the Winter Garden, Sheffield.?

Issue 6, Winter 2013

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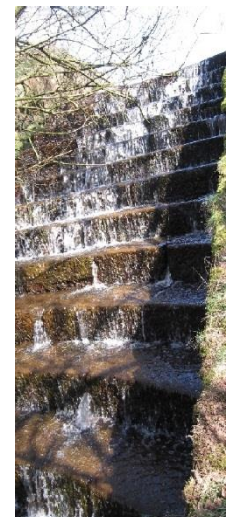
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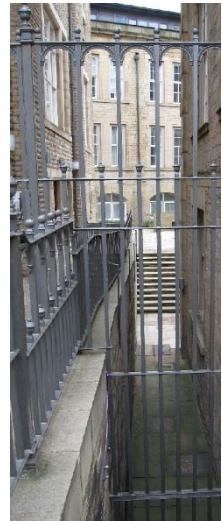
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Editorial Note

Once again, we're delighted to present a new issue of *Antiphon*. One of the best things is having no real agenda about what poems or poets we pick – it's very much our personal choice, though anything written really well, in whatever style, is considered seriously. We have quite a contrast of technique and subject-matter this time, and are particularly pleased to publish poets we hadn't come across as well as some we've published before.

A problem with an on-line magazine rather than a subscriber-based print publication is that it's hard to tell if we're gathering a core of readers who enjoy sticking with us and await each copy with bated breath. The occasional email makes me think it might be more than we realise, and we'd like to thank the increasing number of submitters who comment on the magazine.

We've decided it would be fun if you'd let us know the poems that you've enjoyed the most in each issue. We'll then offer one of those poets a special feature in our Exhibition Space and complement it with some interesting artwork. It would show the readers more of someone's work and let the poet know their poems are being read and enjoyed, which is always rewarding. So do write and let us know.

There are several ways you can contact us with your opinions – send an email to editors@antiphon.org.uk, use the form on the [Contact Us](#) page, or if you don't mind your thoughts being public, add a comment on [Antiphon's blog](#) - we'll add a post about issue 6.

Rosemary Badcoe

Act One



New Year's Day

The first winter was composed of sleeping,
flower-like, but this second is like prowling
the gap between feeling and thinking;
limbering up the dawn, unscarfed, uncoated,
with my head like a getaway bag, hastily packed,
a floppy trammel of tossed lists: lists of lies
told and believed that have since
turned into calcitrate in unsunned cloisters,
and I should know the dawn because I've seen it,
and I should know the gap because I populated it
with crows and left-behind items of clothing.
It was like dismantling a spiral staircase
step by step, leaving a sequence of hollows
stripped of the season's riverly cadence.
So I have myself to blame for this desolate winter,
because I thought I could be solved by the same process
by which we build bridges to unnamed places:
one slimy brick before the other, incomprehensibly;
forever imposing axiom upon axiom onto that plane
until the equinoctial day it answers back.

Megan Towey

Invisible Ink

I've walked here daily,
dog scouting ahead,
through the moldy dank of spring
into autumn's auguring litter.

The dog's nose is always down,
implacably drawn
to the black-footed mouse
or the secretest of weasels.

Today an inch of powder
canvassed the ground blank
and the deer clearly mapped
their cuneiform passage.

This bush just off the path
where the dog digs in his heels
is now neatly ringed with
raccoons' star-fingered walks.

The white sheet of the world,
held above a bulb
where the heat reveals
its lemon-juice message:

LouAnn Shepard Muhm

Paper Crane

"for every ailing body, one thousand paper cranes must be folded" Mariko Nogai

I hold out your arms like flightless wings,
supporting you to the bath's rim,
settle you gently in.

One hand on the saw-teeth of your spine
I sponge your body down,
my touch as light as bird in snow.

You displace so little water now,
your body light as autumn leaf
or paper crane.

Before the summer's done, I know,
you'll vanish like a faint white bird,
float up in the clouds.

Gill McEvoy

Liminal

A morning walk in the quiet
street; I rounded a curve,
and the rabbit sat, in a space of its own,
on a sloping lawn gone wild at the edges,
its ears translucent red in the early sun;
each umbel of Queen Anne's Lace
pointed in brilliance,
the grasses whiskered with light.
The rabbit held quite still: staring, unafraid,
as if we were together in the place
where every grass-blade always shines like that.

Christine Whitemore

Crease Pattern, Another Last Note from God

I lurk in possibility, folded into space too small, too narrow, too thin, too brief:
mountain-valley-squash-pleat. Arms bent one way, legs another. Fingers fanned.

You

can turn me any direction to begin, but eventually, you must choose an orientation:
up/down, left/right, hot/cold, spirit/matter. I am not reversible. Maybe you'll get
caught up in layers of complicated directions, follow every step to the letter, find I
look nothing like the picture. Perhaps you'll backtrack – undo – try again. But each
attempt creates another wrinkle, and every wrinkle is a blemish, an unsightly line.
You will curse my creases and wad, shred, toss me out the window. Start over, sure
that you'll succeed this time. Make me a flower, a little singing bird, a captive at the
top of a tall, stone, stairless tower, the dragon that holds her there, his hoard, a
doorless chamber of precious jewels, an out of the way table in a corner of that room,
the plain box on the table, a box that holds my origami heart.

Wendy Vardaman

A Stream and a Robin and Stars

Stream that winds from upland to lowland,
how in a dream do you know when to bend?

*I follow a fell foot or bramble dell,
brimful my water with bream shoal, otter.
At each rocky stumble my torrent runs whiter.
I swell to a river or curl to an end.*

Robin that wings from spindle to laurel,
how can grubbing find mud that's full?

*My whim is the wind's; I bustle and hop,
bob in the hawthorn, swoop for an earthworm,
rattle a beetle's skittering rhythm.
Sense won't fathom the rule for a haul.*

Stars, pooled in a spell of black night,
where do you go as the dark turns white?

*Down from the rim of your sky-wide world.
Down from dawn to sail with the moon.
Beginnings there go tumbling on:
spin; collision; outbreak; light.*

Beverley Nadin

Act Two



Sea Anemone

All mouth and waving arms,
deadly venom hidden
in blowsy floral beauty.

Unable to move,
stuck to the same rock forever,
or stowed away on a crab,
protection in exchange
for scraps.

Another floats,
untethered.

Broken against the coral,
each piece grows into a new animal,
all mouth and waving arms.

You will think this is a metaphor.

LouAnn Shepard Muhm

A note from summer

I've heard it said I look my best in late September,
the bloom of my skin, the freckles fading from my arms.
Wasps are fussing in the quince trees. Pomegranates wait
to fall. The year turns slowly in the slow air.

I should've called a cab and left here long ago.
But like the fool I am, I've overstayed. So let
me lean a little longer on the kitchen windowsill,
dropping these last petals in the bowl.

Equinox. And there's the chapel bell. Sunday
is a day for separation. The young drive back
to the city. The old stay on. And still no rain.
Michaelmas is late to hope for grace.

I can hear the stubbled hill, black above the village,
calling for a cloud to rub its back. A woman
lifts a stick and shakes it at the sky.
I won't stay to argue with the storm.

Let me slip away unnoticed in the bonfire smoke, before
the first moths settle or the apples bruise. I leave
a little warmth in pears in cardboard boxes,
a thread of perfume folded in the linen.

Peter Wise

Ovillejo for the Librarian

Four weeks, she says, as she hands back
a stack
of books checked out to me — bound herds
of words
I'll milk all month. It's life she lends,
and friends
to share it with. Though she pretends
they're only pages, I can sense
she knows she gives me sustenance:
a stack of words and friends.

Jean L. Kreiling

On Assembling and Disassembling a Greenhouse

We bought it second-hand, in pieces –
spent hours twirling aluminium struts and spars
perplexed, like useless majorettes.

Then each span fell into place, an arc of ribs
rose up. Hung in mail of misty panes,
its lungs inflated with muggy air.

The membrane glanced the afternoon sun.
It was, we saw, the last of its kind –
desultory creature, adrift among vines,

its hide tattooed by cobweb, guano, snail-spit.
Yet how content it seemed to lose its sight
by degrees to knot-weed, dust, allowing other,

lesser lives to penetrate its own.
Flies bobbed in its vacant head,
brambles pressed shoots between its scales.

Now we, who are not so inclined
to settle in this greening place,
have filleted flesh of heat and glass

from these bones, left the carcass standing,
skinless, clean and awful as a museum exhibit.
It shivers, whistles, on a patch of cleared ground.

David Clarke

Codex

It took five-thousand ass-hides to make that manuscript,
my instructor said as we learned about
hapax, haplography, and palimpsest.
I imagined, during lectures
on the evolution of miniscule script,
donkeys that toiled in mines or turned mill-wheels,
and wondered if, when the tanner's knife
was at their throats, some thoughtful angel
whispered to them that from now on
they would not carry burdens that would bend
their legs and hurt their backs;
instead, they would carry the Word of God –
the Scriptures written on the skin
that held their guts in, stretched over their ribs,
the covering that encased their tiny lives.

The Law excluded them: along with pigs
and camels, asses could not be offered
as sacrifices to the Lord. Through centuries
their backs and sides, transfigured, showed gospels,
epistles, the apocalypse, the psalms,
as in the past they bore baskets of grain,
firewood and figs, wineskins, ingots, iron ore.

David Landrum

Archangel

Quis ut Deus?

O Michael rope the souls and score
according to the rules,
those which you wear as fierce as rain
against the stone. It's cruel
to count the devil out, it's cruel
to keep our God in pain;
so willingly he'd rest if we'd
agree to stop. Go lay
with him beneath our whirring rain.

They find it bold among the ruins, raised
above the fields of granite. There's no law
to say to bow or kill or study it.
They wonder what it's reaching for, they place
their ears on cracking chest, imagine breath;
O Lord we trespass in the orchard! Take
us out to rivers cold and still and we'll
return the fire that we stole. The ash
we'll sow between the stones so doubts don't grow.

Like so the spindle's thread
is spun again: say God once more.

Our fears do not stay dead.

Bob Towey

Interval

The full stop (that's 'period', on the far side of the Atlantic) is quite easy. Even poets tend to start sentences with capital letters and end them with full stops. In a sense, one of these signs is totally redundant, because, with the exception of the very first and very last sentences in a piece, the end of one sentence will always be followed by a start of another. Every rose has its thorn, and every full stop has its following capital. Remove all the full stops and we'd still know when sentences ended, because there'd be a capital letter to tell us so.

However, redundancy is useful in communication. It cuts down noise, limits miscommunication. This is useful for everyday communication, and complex areas like technical writing. Poets, however, are less keen on having redundant meaning in their work. As a full stop also acts as a pause, a poet may be perfectly happy with using pauses alone, omitting full stops. The pause might itself be shown by a line break or a stanza break. So it's not unusual for a poet to agonise about whether they "need" a full stop at the end of a line or stanza, as the full stop seems to add weight to the pause, making it longer or heavier than otherwise it would be.

This suggests that poets operate with a sensitivity to the relative lengths of pauses (or space on the page) and punctuation, perhaps with a sort of working hierarchy of relative length. Obviously, the smallest pause on a page is the space between words (unless we want to consider the space between letters, which seems a step too far for most). In normal speech, there's often no pause between words: the phrase "pause on a page" in speech is closer to the one word "porzonerpaj". However, in poetry readings, the space between words is often articulated, sometimes so noticeably that one gets the "poetry reading tone" which artificially emphasises particular words and phrases.

If we read like this mentally, then we may find we don't need, or want, punctuation. If we can "hear" the page's visual space, then no other punctuation may be necessary. The poet can simply lengthen spaces to signal longer and longer pauses. We reviewed Kate Ruse's *Corridors* in Issue 3 of *Antiphon*. She creates rhythmic effects and dislocation by variable spacing within her lines. Harriet Tarlo is another poet who creates timing effects through page space.

The problem with this is that readers don't generally know how to read such gaps. Most of us have a sense that a full stop is "longer" than a colon, which is longer than a semi-colon, which is longer than a comma, in a way that's something like musical rests. But in speech, how long should this pause be " " compared with this " "? Of course, there's no standard for this, and there probably shouldn't be, but it does mean that readers may take particular lines quite differently. Whereas punctuation, being a little more regular and more familiar, is closer to an agreed approach.

But punctuation itself is a problem, I think. Oscar Wilde is reputed to have said: "I was working on the proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon I put it back again." This will be familiar to many poets. The comma is used to organise information (in lists, for example) but does so by offering a suggestion of a pause, longer than the implied space between words.

The common poetry problem with all punctuation is to measure the impact of placing one pause on top of another. Given that we're not certain of the weight (or wait) of any of them, how can we safely add them together? Should a comma be placed at the end of the line or not?

Worse than the comma is the semi-colon. Colons, in general, seem comfortable, well understood punctuation. They find homes readily, carefully nurturing their lists and long pauses, something like three quarters of the pause of a full stop, and signalling the beginning of a sub-structure in the syntax, such as a list about to come. But semi-colons are less clear about their behaviour. Often they end up pretending to be long commas, or even mistakenly standing at the head of a list as if it was its big brother. What is the purpose of the semi-colon, and how is it best used in poetry?

I know one editor whose view, essentially, is "don't use semi-colons". Because their use is not well understood by readers, and some writers, they tend to be offered effectively as a form of comma. In which case, use the comma. But what if you want a pause longer than the comma seems to suggest? A more emphatic pause, within a sentence, within a list: not the end of sentence, but contrasting with the pauses of word break, comma, line break?

Should we simply ignore the semi-colon, and use commas instead, with dashes in those instances where a longer pause is needed? But the dash itself can be a hateful device, suggesting that the poet might have missed something, or given us a shorthand, or simply used dashes as a trendy brackets.

I like the semi-colon. The comma may be more delicate and the colon more syntactically secure, but the semi-colon can help compress a list, give us pacing that is a little more sedate than the comma, and can offer syntactic complexity which, though hated by those whose watchwords are accessibility and readability, enables more thoughtful expression than might otherwise be possible. Okay, it needs care and consideration, it needs to be handled deftly, and not overused, but it has a purpose beyond merely winking from smileys in text messages.

Noel Williams

Dana Littlepage Smith *The Skin of Mercy*, 64pp, £7.99

Cinnamon Press, Meirion House, Glan yr afon, Tanygrisiau, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd, LL41 3SU

The opening poem sets the scene for the first of three parts in *The Skin of Mercy*. 'To a Tiger Moth Turned to Face Me', places Smith within a tradition spanning from Gerard Manley Hopkins to Mary Oliver, in its focus on the natural world and the speaker's awe in the face of it: "For the first time I see how a wing can be furred, / how the tapestry end of threads, orange like a lily / can be combed by a wind ... I can barely take it in".

The reader is made to look hard, and if the clarity of image occasionally tips into fussiness, it's no more than the poet's macro lens demands. For example, in 'What is So Special About Two-thirds of 5,294, 117, 647, 058, 823?' thoughts are "like the heartbeat / of an insect smaller

than a moth but larger than a mosquito”, which at first, seems to linger a beat too long; doesn’t “smaller than a moth” make the point? But this works well with the punctiliousness of the title’s question, and the dedication to precision and order expressed elsewhere in the poem, such as “the note on Martin Landy who lovingly catalogued / all he owned before he destroyed it”.

Smith is mapping human experience onto the natural world, so the speaker is not apart from her environment, but interconnected with it: in 'Faith', where the speaker finds it “oceaned in a grotto”, fathoms beg “not a toe dip but my total wit- / less abandon, utter wetness given unto wetness, / that leap without which life is lifeless.”

These poems are rich with image and sound, layering similes, and working hard to control what could become excessive. Yet here and there, they lose their nerve with an explicit line of narrative. In 'The Drowned', lines such as, “his heart banged / like a bell tolling in the unquiet dark”, and “He hung / in an amber tunnel”, are flattened by prosy explanation: “Most days, I seem able enough / to forget him, he who might have been a little brother”.

The second section of the book shifts emphasis, presenting a grittier vision of the world. In 'A Dream of Damson', a WWII soldier’s buried body feeds the plum tree that shades his grave. These plums then become the speaker’s gin, an explicit rendering of that interconnectedness between man and the environment. This recycling of nature’s resources is a familiar concept, and although the poem is nicely handled for the most part, it doesn’t bring much new to the theme. In addition, towards the end of the poem, the reference to Basra feels awkward. It’s an overstretched and unsustainable note, undermining the power of the poem.

Conflict in all its forms – war, prejudice, poverty – are represented in this section, and at their best, the poems retain the close observation of nature found in the opening section, but use it to expose incongruity, building and complicating the poet’s world. There’s also a dialogue about religion. The first section seemed to put its faith entirely in the material world, in poems such as 'Faith' and 'The Birds at my Birth', where “there were no angels at my birth / just one slight bird ...”. The second section’s more problematic relationships are reflected in its attitude to God: “Ask Christ’s disciples / who shunned the greasy / woman ...” ('They Call This Friday Good'), and “So how can I / correct him when he corrects me. Jesus likes good / and evil ...” ('Street Child Theology').

The final section is a synthesis of earlier themes, where the ambivalence towards religion resolves into a sort of equipoise in 'Thoughts Without Order Concerning the Love of God', where a kitchen can be a “kingdom” to the snail, who “measures a universe”, with its meanderings, and “Of Christ and necessity ... says / nothing”. At the end of this collection, the reader has been on an investigation of the world, wondered at the peculiarities of the everyday across societies and landscapes, led by a voice that is both curious and compelling.

Angelina Ayers

Marion Tracy, *Giant in the Doorway*, 32pp, £4.00

HappenStance, 21 Hatton Green, Glenrothes, Fife KY7 4SD, www.happenstancepress.com

Marion Tracy's volume contains the twelve poem title sequence and eleven other poems. The sequence presents the child eye's view and it captures well both the literalism and the magical, metaphorical wonder of ten year old perception: "her hair smells and is made into golden sausages" ('Giant in the Doorway: 2').

In general, Tracy's approach in these poems is to create an everyday sense of normality early in the poem:

every day of winter, I sit at table
with the cups and plates and forks.
(‘At tea-time’)

and then gradually darken and fracture that normality, in image, language and form, sometimes with a stream of consciousness interference between child's perception and other images, creating uncertainty in the reader. For example, we are told (of the mother), "her eyes aren't right" and "something is happening again".

so her falling apart
faces will come crashing down
right through the glass
to break the dishes
(‘At tea-time’)

Struggling to understand and deal with her mother's illness and problem behaviour. There's enough strangeness in the child's account for us to wonder with her "will I be like my mother when I grow up" though in facing the giant in the doorway, she is growing, 'taking the first step'.

Sometimes lines are a little prosaic, but this seems necessary to set up restrained language as background to the tensions of the subject. Sometimes a poem attempts a full histrionic account of the mother's mental dissolution, trying to express the experience of it directly, as in 'Constriction' and 'Banshee', which have powerful elements, though perhaps riskily expressed. Whilst we empathise with the child's position, as this is poetry, and the situation is "constructed", I don't think we're always drawn into them. Although the poems are finely convincing as expressions, they do not quite disturb, though there are moving moments. Perhaps one of the tenderest poems is the last poem in the book, which avoids all explicit drama, 'Ghost':

and I see suddenly lightning
is quite beautiful
when she takes my hand and says
like someone who's never afraid of the dark

and has known my name for always

Hush now,
hush you mouth now baby,
bush.
(‘Ghost’)

Noel Williams

Frank Wood, *Racing the Stable Clock*, 32pp, £4.00
HappenStance, 21 Hatton Green, Glenrothes, Fife KY7 4SD, www.happenstancepress.com

Despite being from the same press, Frank Wood’s *Racing the Stable Clock* contrasts strongly with Marion Tracy (also reviewed in this issue of *Antiphon*). Whereas Tracy’s volume has a strong unifying intent, there’s little that unifies these poems, neither thematically nor stylistically. As a collection it veers from the lightest of subjects:

This is confection to die for,
and you probably will.
(‘Bakehouse Bakewell: an inspector’s report’)

to dark hints of something rather deeper and more strongly felt:

a lullaby that sent me dozing
through to when the singing stopped
and the sobbing began.
(‘Bells at midnight’)

What these poems do have in common is surety of voice. They may vary in what they are doing, but they always do it well. Whether this is a strength or perhaps a bit of problem in a short collection, I find it hard to decide. Having been challenged by the severity of one poem I’m a little put off to find a piece of tongue in cheek humour nestling against it. But perhaps the contrast of moods works for some.

At their best, the poems can provoke a smile whilst also having something to say, as in the description of the Pennines as:

very far away
and awesome: places
where wild men
roamed by night
dumping old mattresses.
(‘Up from the provinces’)

There are two unexpected shifts in this (final) stanza, movements which seem to me typical of the way Wood works. Firstly we have “awesome”. The immediate response of the “educated reader” is to object to such a loose, fashionable and abused word. But, immediately it has been read, the poem suggests that it’s us, the readers, at fault for not realising that the word is intended with its *proper* meaning, full of awe, as we would be if

witnessing wild men roaming the Pennines in the dark midnight. So, we now correct ourselves. And just as we've done that, we discover these romantic, primitive figures are actually fly-tippers: so perhaps the contemporary meaning of "awesome" is to apply after all – a false awe, a diminishing of the true majesty of the Pennines and their inhabitants into a popular, careless dumping ground. A smile. A serious point.

Where the poems are a little weaker is when they become more obvious, despite the evidently heartfelt sentiment. The Great War, for example, wants to make us feel something of war's horror, and the inability of people to learn from history, both of which are important purposes. But it does so by trotting out clichés of wartime ("My father would never talk about it") and morals that seem rather pat.

There are also quite a few poems that depend on an audience of poets. 'We all have our problems', 'The poet travels', 'A day in the life of an objective correlative', 'The rain' and 'Reflections' all really require a writerly audience to work effectively. They're clever, but they seem a little obvious, somehow – the sort of things most poets might write out of their experience of being a poet.

the poet swallows
a pint of turbid water. He wonders
where the sewage goes in Aldeburgh.
(‘The poet travels’)

Even so, I enjoyed the variety in this pamphlet. There's a quirky set of subjects (poems about sardines, Bakewell tart, happiness, a child shot dead in Ulster, sermon writing, a child's perceptions of sound) and a correspondingly interesting range of tones to go with them. Whether this is all too much for a single pamphlet may simply be a matter of taste.

Noel Williams

Act Three



The Bud-Shell

Under the rain, a newly unfurled poppy
stoops, already drenched.

Down in the tangle of weeds below
lie two curved sepals,
fallen segments of the empty bud-shell,
each one satin-lined, pale silver-green.

They couched the petals when the bud was closed,
tight-knitted at the seams; a calyx
locked around the brightness of the folded silk.

Now beneath the pummeling of rain
the red-sailed parachute is bruised,
its shell discarded in two broken scoops;
two small coracles,
filling with rainwater, derelict
on the river of grasses.

I lift up one lost boat,
and carry it – listing on my palm – inside the house,
lay it on my desk among the paper-drifts.
I touch the softening bristles,
slip my fingertip
inside the thinning spoon.
I cannot stop its diminishing,
can only honour how well-made it is,
how it held on tight
until the bud burst open.

Christine Whitemore

Grievances

Friends close, enemies closer,
and your gifts close right in
round my throat, bite my ear-lobes
that bit too hard, which is fine,
lest we forget – at least I'll know
I'm wearing them; no risk
that they'll slide off, unnoticed,
as they brush against my hood
on a frosty night. Like you,
they're always there. And pretty, too.

Annette Volging

The black stag – Lascaux

Cave-blind, captured mid-bellow.
Shadowed antlers reach
for a memory of night,
piercing stars, tearing constellations.

They drew him from the earth,
made him dance with fire.
The light was long ago, yet
a warmth of yellow recalls
a back bright with sun.

Was he ever bestowed a body?
A vagueness suggests it; in dreams he runs
with the wild hunt, but on waking it fades,
he becomes a vessel, an upturned cup
rattling out the bone dice of men and deer alike.

John Nash

Ornament

My father has few things to protect.
In our house where laughter flirts
effortlessly with a history
of loneliness, sometimes
edifying each other, as two people
stranded on an island may behave,
the magnificent koi pond is
his honour and glory. Cut in black marble,
water unloosed over imposing
shoulders of an obsidian wall, it seems,
as I grow older, to be more perfect
for my father's affections
than I can ever be, how virtuous
its talent for turning the commonplace
beautiful. On nights when
my father is somewhere else, I would
stoop over its edge, cautious as
deer approaching the open, water
so still it could be land, my body
ready to navigate a world he has
carved out of absence and longing,
where we are together again.

Jerrold Yam

Orange

Come dusk, bearings you had switch to mountain lights,
tracks through the orange groves are one and the same.
If you could finger-nail a newall or navel,
ask hand and eye to peel your windfall until
zest showers to a single strip and earth that,
the luminous thread might lead you home.
Such are the desperate remedies of the lost.
Your mouth is stopped with pulp, teeth stab and clatter
against seeds; those who know the way, would undo
the paper-like skin, ease the fruit into polite
segments, leave pips for the path. Juice rushes headlong.
You meet its odd sweetness, a zinging orange with caution
as a back taste, and another sense directs you,
to blindly unpeel a world that is not your own.

Bruce Barnes

Secret Identities

I carry a piece of mirror I stole
from the hospital where I was born,
for the times I see the shadow of the hawk
but not the hawk itself.
Therefore, my daily walks include
the fetch staring back from the pond
who is more clank than chain,
and the old woman who stares
from the bench: "Can you say my name?" Yes.
Yes. You are *Butter-Stained-Pockets-
As-Translucent-As-Onion-Skin*,
and the boy with the electronic boat,
well, him I don't know, although
I do know the man watching.
He is *Threadbare-Hat-
With-A-Thin-Knowledge-Of-Stars*,
but he used to be *Dime-Store-Turtle-
Scrubbed-With-An-Old-Toothbrush*,
which probably explains his watching the boy.
That busy one with the leather striking,
that is *Flame-Lick-Footfall*, and the one
with the face done up like candy
is *Wrecking-Ball-Of-Joy*. My daily walks include
Red-Fingers-With-Loose-Wedding-Band,
a.k.a. *Naked-Chicken-Rinsed-In-A-Sink*,
whose husband might be
Hammer-Hitting-An-Anvil-Chipping-Off-White-Hot-Sparks,
but who is more likely to be
simply *Juan*. My daily walks include
Occasionally-Repaid-By-Slot-Machines
who is also *Hanging-On-By-An-Eyelash*,
and *Smiling-With-Tumescent-Secret-At-Stop-Light*,
who is also *Someone's-Love-Zombie*.
"Logic is the process of pairing and distinguishing,"
I was told in college by *Once Hair-Of-The-Dog-
But-Now-Seriously-Sober*, who also told me,
"It's the little things you do that will keep you alive,"
which is why my daily walks include
*Vortex-Of-Light-Temporarily-Human-
Suffering-From-Amnesia*,
as much as they exclude
the vibrating apologies on my cell phone

which are like the stories told by children,
never-ending, circuitous,
with more of a theme than a point.

Luisa Villani

Act Four



Arachne

Best keep a low profile, and don't for a moment rely
on friendly, female support. The last thing she wants
is competition. I used to be good, as you know,
but ever since that show-down, I feel –
well, somehow reduced in myself. I still weave,
though not like before: colour and texture have gone.
I see great holes in the fabric, ladders and rips –
as though the only way possible now is to loop
round empty spaces, over and over again.
Nothing's solid: these days, the wind blows

straight through my work. But just sometimes,
after an all-night tantrum of a storm,
I wake to find my threadbare pieces taut
like diadems and hung with heavy pearls.

Annette Volting

Perhaps to someone this is home

They move away from the structured chaos,
the conversations tangled in chart music,
those small collisions of lives.
She smokes in the beer garden and the night
is a long progression of clouds,
hunched and tight as fists,
without a breeze to break them.
She tells him she used to carry a compass
so she'd know the exact direction home,
but poles shift and all worlds change
and the compass wouldn't settle,
pivoting in slow circuits beneath the glass
like something caged. He imagines home
being the far north, the top of the world,
oil rigs buoyed on the vast light-scarred sea,
the streets smeared with skin on skin
of black ice, cold, impassable, giving nothing back.
The night tears open. Above them, a constellation
they can't name, spattered grains
that don't suggest a shape.
He watches the cigarette shiver
like a needle in her hand;
the compass moves,
resumes its frenzied ticking.

Jacob Silkstone

Lighthouse, 1904

Cross-dressing in the lighthouse
passes time.

The great, big tower, sticking out,
reminds us of the other way:

of femininity, the frilly,
the well scented.

Lighthouse Board supplies
don't run to frocks;

so we must mend, make do
and be contented

rotating just the two old dresses
once washed up

from the wreck
of the Santa Cruz.

One day we'll feel the need
for newer fashions,
better looks,

drop the switch
and dim the beam.

Pretty dresses:
find them floating in the morning.

Seth Crook

Skinned

His skin blazed with stories of survival
after loss. He was young, gallantly bold, bright
as late-summer showers spreading their final
joy through woods and dying fields. He offered light
affection, butterflies stroking my scars;
I laughed, uncurled, sought in his fabled arms
freedom from an agony so bizarre
that every memory coiled and hissed with harm.

After, as I passed your clouded door, I tried
replotting this twisted tale within my brain –
he, as new-told hero, slaughters snakes, while I
dance in a frenzy of sunspots.

Hard rain
drummed my skin, narrating a kinked tattoo:
He isn't you, he isn't you, he isn't you.

Tracey S. Rosenberg

Wishful

The truck in the poem is blue.
The girl in the poem is young.
The truck's door opens an invitation
to get in the truck.
The girl is 16 and thinks
she knows what she's doing.
When I go to set the poem right
the girl in the truck starts
beating on the door.
When I go to set the poem right
the truck speeds past
what the girl can handle.
Once I might have been
the girl in the truck.
Or the truck might not
have been in the poem.
The girl might have
kept walking and I might not hear today
on the radio that a 16 year old girl is missing.
The girl in the truck is blue.
The girl in the truck
is missing. In the truck
another human is holding her down.
He's trying to stay in the poem
but if I speed this poem away,
if I use it to save the girl,
if I could use it this way I
could say the girl in the poem is young.
She walks quickly past the truck.
She's mad at her mom but she still doesn't
get into the truck. She's forgotten her phone
so she keeps walking fast.
The girl is not in the truck.
The truck careens out of this poem.
The girl on the street is alive.

Julia Lisella

Saturday Afternoons

Mum would put Mario Lanza
on the record player,
teach me to waltz on the parquet floor;
Dad always absent working,
she'd play the man, sweep me
along in her arms,

telling stories of the dances
she loved, before he came along
with his dance-shy feet.
On the mantelpiece
a photo of her, lovely
in her cream wedding-dress.

As we whirled about,
I'd have a vision of it clinging,
then fanning from my hips
a hundred covered buttons
down my crepe-de-chine back,
dance card and pencil at my wrist.

Val Binney

Moon and Stars

At night the brick townhouses of DC
lamplit by both the street and window
like roses bloom behind the snowy trees
rooted in heating vents above the metro.

Cocooned in companionship and books and art
I walk round Dupont with friends and speak of these
before the inevitable intimacies
that draw all speech like dying stars' debris:

a love gone bad and months without a touch,
the loneliness of childhood. Before midnight's struck
we've orbited magnetic galaxies we've survived.
And then I drive alone for thirty miles

away from the tongue's careen and slide
across light years of mud and slush.
Outside, the Catoctin hills lie plump and hushed
as pillows on which the moonlight sleeps

and sheds against the bolted door the dream
that guides my key to the ordinary gleam
of emptiness, the lock that clicks, the door that opens wide.
My house inhales the moon and stars. I step inside.

Katherine Smith

Contributors to Issue Six

Bruce Barnes is a part time MA student on the Writing MA at Sheffield Hallam University, living in Bradford, and has the usual form of poems published in anthologies, magazines, and the occasional poetry competition win or place. He is an active member of the Bradford based poetry reading and workshop group, Beehive Poets.

Val Binney is a South African who has lived in the UK for a long time. She has always written poetry but her output increased after she started the OU 205 Course in Creative Writing in 2006 and then the Sheffield Hallam University MA in Writing in 2007. She is a member of the Broomspring Writers Group and the Tuesday Poets in Sheffield. She has published poetry in *Matter*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Decanto* and *Red Shoes and Wedding Trouble*, an anthology of the Broomspring Writers and prose fiction in various magazines. She is currently editing a completed novel submitted for her MA in Writing.

David Clarke is a teacher and researcher living in Gloucestershire. He has had poems published in various magazines, including *Under the Radar*, *Iota* and *Anon*. His pamphlet, *Gaud*, was published by Flarestack Poets in 2012. He blogs at <http://athingforpoetry.blogspot.co.uk/>

Seth Crook taught philosophy at various universities before moving to the Hebrides. He does not like cod philosophy in poetry, though he does like cod, poetry and philosophy. His poems have appeared during the past year in *Snakeskin*, *Other Poetry*, *Poetry Scotland (Open Mouse)*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *The Journal*, *Gutter*, *Northwords Now*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Message in a Bottle*, *The Passionate Transitory*, *The Centrifugal Eye* and *Antiphon*.

Jean L. Kreiling's poetry has appeared widely in print and online journals and anthologies, most recently *American Arts Quarterly*, *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Measure*, and *Mezzo Cammin*. She was the winner of the 2011 Able Muse Write Prize for Poetry, and has been a finalist for the Dogwood Poetry Prize, the Frost Farm Prize, and the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award.

David W. Landrum teaches Literature at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan, USA. His poetry has appeared in *The Dark Horse*, *Orbis*, *Straw Dogs*, *Umbrella*, *First Things*, *Raintown Review*, and many other journals in the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and Europe. His chapbook, *The Impossibility of Epithalamia*, is available through Amazon.

Julia Lisella is the author of a chapbook, *Love Song Hiroshima*, and a full length collection, *Terrain*. She is working on her next collection, entitled *Always*. She is an Assoc. Prof. of American lit and poetry at Regis College in Massachusetts and has had poems published in *Salamander*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Beloit Poetry Journal* and many other journals.

Gill McEvoy is a Hawthornden Fellow. Full collection "The Plucking Shed", (Cinnamon Press 2010). Second collection "Rise" due from Cinnamon Press in May 2013. She runs regular poetry events in Chester, which include a workshop group, a poetry reading group, and Zest! open floor poetry nights. Website: www.poemcatchers.com

LouAnn Shepard Muhm is a poet and teacher from northern Minnesota. Her poems have appeared in *Dust & Fire*, *The Talking Stick*, *North Coast Review*, *Alba*, *Red River Review*,

Eclectica, *qarrtsiluni*, and *CALYX*, among other journals and anthologies, and she was a finalist for the Creekwalker Poetry Prize and the Late Blooms Postcard Series. Muhm is a recipient of Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grant in Poetry in 2006 and 2012, and has been featured twice in the "What Light" poetry sponsored by the McKnight Foundation and the Walker Art Museum. Her full-length poetry collection *Breaking the Glass* (Loonfeather Press, 2008) was a finalist for the Midwest Book Award in Poetry.

Beverley Nadin lives in Sheffield and is working towards a PhD in creative writing at Newcastle University.

John C. Nash finally settled down as a self-employed bookbinder and writer in Northampton, England. His poetry has been published in various magazines including *Cake*, *Streetcake*, *The Delinquent*, *Triggerfish* and *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears*. He co-edited the anthology 'Making Contact' for Ravenshead Press and is currently working on a collaborative project with the photographer Sam Webster.

Tracey S. Rosenberg's debut poetry collection, *Lipstick is Always a Plus*, was published in 2012 by Stewed Rhubarb Press. She has individual poems in journals including *The Frogmore Papers*, *Poetry Scotland*, *Gutter*, and *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. She won a New Writers Award from the Scottish Book Trust, and is currently working on a full-length collection thanks to a Creative Scotland Professional Development Grant. She lives in Edinburgh and is a literary festival junkie.

Jacob Silkstone lives in Bergen and has previously worked as a primary school teacher in Dhaka, Bangladesh. He is a poetry editor for *The Missing Slate* and an assistant editor for *Asymptote*, and his work appears in *Sculpted: Poetry of the North West*.

Katherine Smith has had work recently published or forthcoming in *Southern Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Poetry*, *Louisville Review*, *Appalachian Heritage* (where her poem "Shipment" won the Denny Plattner Award for Outstanding poem in 2008) *Poems and Plays*, *Measure*, and *Appalachian Journal*. She has previously published one book of poetry, *Argument by Design* (2003) with Washington Writers' Publishing House.

Bob Towey is a philosophy graduate and musician who works in a busy office in Cambridgeshire, England. If you wanted to read more from Bob, you can find other poems at *Bad Robot Poetry*, *Vector* and in two inch high letters on a wall in Addenbrooke's Hospital next to work by Quentin Blake and Fiona Sampson. The website is www.bobtowey.com and he tweets from @bobtowey.

Megan Towey is an undergraduate at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, where she is a double major in Written Arts and Classical Studies.

Wendy Vardaman (wendyvardaman.com) is the author of *Obstructed View* (Fireweed Press), co-editor/webmaster of *Verse Wisconsin* (versewisconsin.org), and co-founder/co-editor of *Cowfeather Press* (cowfeatherpress.org). She is one of Madison, Wisconsin's two Poets Laureate (2012-2015).

Luisa Villani is a former Wallis Annenberg Fellow at The University of Southern California,

a Bucknell Younger Poet, an Academy of American Poets Prize awardee, and a winner of an Associated Writing Programs Intro Journals Award. Her work has appeared in *The New England Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Literary Review*, *Kaleidoscope Magazine*, *The Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Third Coast*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Hotel Americana* and many other journals. She has taught English in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, and currently resides in Princeton, New Jersey.

Annette Volfing is an academic teaching medieval German literature. Her poems have appeared in various magazines, including *Other Poetry*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Magma*, *Smiths Knoll*, *Snakeskin* and the *Oxford Magazine*.

Christine Whitemore was born in England where she was brought up and educated; she has also lived in Italy, in New York City, in Pennsylvania, and now in Lyon, France. Her poems have appeared in various American and British journals including *The American Scholar*, *Plains Poetry Journal*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Piedmont Literary Review*, *The Lyric*, *Orbis*, *Outposts*, and *The Christian Century*, as well as in anthologies. Among other awards she has received a Fellowship in Literature (Poetry) from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (1998). Her essays have been published in *Parabola*, *Islands*, *Weekly Telegraph*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *New York Newsday*, and elsewhere. Her novel, *Inscription*, (about the writings of two women separated by almost 2,000 years) has been taken on by an agent.

Peter Wise was born and brought up near London, and now lives in Portugal where he works as a journalist, contributing articles to the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*. He also translates from Portuguese. He is currently completing an online MA in Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University. A keen birdwatcher, he likes to spend his free time watching waders along the River Tagus estuary.

Jerrold Yam is a first-year law undergraduate at University College London and the author of two poetry collections, *Scattered Vertebrae* (2013) and *Chasing Curtained Suns* (2012). Recent poems have appeared in *friction : review*, *Mascara Literary Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Third Coast*, *Washington Square Review* and elsewhere. He is the winner of the National University of Singapore's Creative Writing Competition 2011, and has been nominated for a 2013 Pushcart Prize. (<http://jerroldyam.wordpress.com>)

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