

The Interpreter's House

49

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Cover image by Fi Smart: detail from an etching, "The Curiosity of Cabinets".
The artist says of it: "It arose from musings about why we keep certain
objects and how we arrange them and our need for a narrative."

Editorial

Apologies to Beth Levinsky for having described her cover etching in the last number as an engraving. This issue's cover is an extract from an etching by Fi Smart, "The Curiosity of Cabinets." "It arose from musings about why we keep certain objects and how we arrange them and our need for a narrative".

Interpreter's House 49 has the results of the 2011-12 Bedford Open, by now a well-established competition on the poetry 'scene'. We are very grateful to the poet Paul Groves for judging this year's prize, and for his report. It is good to have a fresh perspective, and a different pair of eyes from the editor's, selecting work for the magazine. We are grateful, too, to Ruth Muttlebury for her hard work organising the competition, a complicated and exacting process, and the first one we have been involved in. She has worked tirelessly behind the scenes and has been a great support, not least on the computer side of things. Thank you, as well, to Molly Mitchell for managing the subscriptions list and finance, and to James Bridgwater on the web-site, our 'webmaster'. Carole Evans, too, has lent computer support.

With the competition's November deadline fast approaching, we only had about 90 entries in all (we needed 300 at least to cover costs!) I was put in mind of Mr Micawber, "Annual income twenty pounds, and expenditure nineteen pounds six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, and expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery". Whereupon a cascade of entries burst through in the closing three weeks, bringing the total to nearly 350. We're grateful to all participants. We hope there will be even more of you next year!

Finally, thank you again to Tony Frazer for printing IH.

Simon Curtis

JULIET AYKROYD

The Angels of Muchelney

They visited the abbey late in the day.
Crosswinds
bully the dykewater,
rough up small trees. Queasily

the car heaves three old persons out.
They peer through gloom
at ruined walls,
foundations laid down *in principio*.

They see the beavered mason far ago
unroll the plans:
the abbot's hand:
hic capellam aedificio.

Wind goes for three old woolly hats,
flies whitefire hair.
Leaves run snickering.
Three vessels crab uneasily

together up the churchyard path,
sticks tremolo
at buttresses and pinnacles,
a gargyle, yews. One lifts the latch.

Inside, a hitch: too dark to see.
Another says: Let's sit
in these tall pews
and wait. The third one finds the switch.

Light spins the stone to gold,
the glass to indigo.
Saints gleam in oils.
Ecce puer in praesepio.

High above, the angels flash
their tawny breasts.
In ice-cold air
white lilies float erratically.

The verger bustles in: Just thought she'd check.
You'll note the missing chancel tile (glares she.)
Vandals hacked it out, would you believe.
A rare and ancient thing it was, coloured
ochre and vermilion, marked with a beast:
thirteenth century without a doubt.
How do these people dare, on Christmas Eve?
We must go, they said, and shuffled out.

The day is over now.
Prongs shape the sky.
Look, one murmurs, there in those small trees
the wicked wind shaking the mistletoe.
So ancient. So rare.

BYRON BEYNON

At Carew

Here the adjectives of place
gather like troubled rain,
the hard prayer achieved
when eyes smart
with memory
under a sky's smudged window;
the worn hour
pressed upon the trellised mind,
a charm of fields
holding the past and future,
scenting the resurrected air
the subconscious forages
for a rare meaning
beyond the moonwashed stars.

SHARON BLACK

Brocken Spectre

He said he saw one once on Crib Goch ridge:
a shadow rising from the corrie,
an oracle on a stage of clouds.
A chill uncoiled around his neck as he rooted

his feet in the heather, reaching
for the thread stitched
across Snowdon's peak to steady himself.
And each time he turned

it turned with him, its halo catching in the sun:
one hand raised in greeting,
two raised in surrender—
like a photo negative, like

a Rorschach blot anchored in the wind,
like that day the surgeon
pinned his scan before him
giving him twelve months, eighteen tops.

Note: A Brocken spectre is a large shadowy figure that appears when looking down into mist from a ridge or peak with a low sun behind the climber. The head is often surrounded by glowing rings of coloured light caused by the refraction of water droplets.

CLAIRE BOOKER

Dog

Eyes cut iceberg blue,
fur, double tipped, lies in thick drifts
down flanks that burn wolf power.
Something has ringed its neck.
For now he lets it; slip slaps
dead tarmac, trotting to heel, weathers
the daily downpour of small hands,
girls in red capes asking: *does he bite?*
At night, when the wolf's sun shines,
he hears ancestral howls
in the chimney breast, twists
at his collar, dreams he tastes hide.

PHIL BOWEN

Thoroughly

(after MacNeice)

If we could go over things thoroughly
 They may get back in reach—
What we're left with's the thud of memory landing
 On crumpled scraps of speech,
And when we pore over more and more thin
 Excuses it's hardly
Any surprise that we can examine
 Anything thoroughly.

If we could find satisfaction thoroughly
 In someone else's ways,
We wouldn't have a sky so full of snow
 Or long hours of blank days
That drift and stray like passing clouds, palely seen
 In our eyes, and mostly
Beyond all the usual signs that blind all green
 Light of thought thoroughly.

And if each plan was cast in iron thoroughly
 And not one part wrong,
Instead of a chaotic collapse of cards,
 A broken box of song,
We could take a sure step on every journey
 Or no—maybe simply
Stare at the moon when there aren't any
 Things to do thoroughly.

LES BROOKES

Klepto

First off, the pot. Cute little specimen
in bone china with a necklace of pink
roses and a dainty spout and handle.
Just took my fancy. The following week,
the sugar bowl. Easy as breathing, that.
But the milk jug, some days later, almost
scuppered me when the floor manager passed
at just the wrong moment. Oh yeah, close thing.

Got the full set now. Snag is, I can't stop.
Crockery is everywhere. Stacked so high
I've had to move some of it from the loft
to the cellar. Don't tell, please. I'm mental,
I know, though far from short of a shilling.
Oh, and I hate tea. Never touch the stuff.

VICTOR BUEHRING

Sound

The most ecstatic sound I heard
Was not in song or spoken word
But rather in the poignant, silent gap
Between the lightning flash and thunderclap.

PETER BUTLER

Journey Man

He plans his routes overnight when the small hours aren't for sleeping,
passing unhurriedly through unmarked lanes, map references in his head,
reaches the inn for a glass of cider, some conversation about thatching
techniques and the threat to traditional landscapes of new-fangled
machinery,
recounting to those that listen how once he instructed his pupils,

In the earth's sequences of change, cause and effect, the shapes of oceans,
creation of coastlines, progress of rivers, anatomy of earthquakes, position
of mountains (by survey, not guesswork), all this modern fuss about climate
change, while noting in his careful, precise script the development of a new
woodland, before heading to hills where kids defy gravity to fly kites,

Until late afternoon, when he swaps countryside for town and a black cab,
viewing—with delight—a choice of churches, a cathedral and Palladian villa,
garden suburbs (though fast disappearing), ruler-straight lawns reaching
out to
hedgerows and—with alarm—the sight of hoodies and urban sprawl,
before taking
tea at the Geographical Society, until a sudden chill locks his well-worn bones,

At which point the nurse alerts him to a new day, a visit from relatives
(possibly) and, after providing for his intimate requirements, tucks a blanket
round him, wheels him to the balcony, where planes on the flight path break
his thread as he stares at people emerging from high rises going nowhere,
or just about anywhere on the map, all rather anxious and in a hurry.

DERRICK BUTTRESS

Dante Alighieri Sees Beatrice

The first letter of each word spells out the name

Devil's advocates, nubile tarts entice,
affecting love,
Italy's godless hookers
imbibing every ratsbane imaginable:
double applejacks, nog,
tequila, even absinthe.

Later, immaculate girls
(haughtily indifferent)
emerge, reigniting instantly
Dante's ardour.

Now the exquisite angel,
looking ineffably graceful,
heaven's innocent,
enters regally.
Idyllic days are nigh.

Temptation ensnares all lovers;
inamoratas gladden hearts inordinately.
Especially raunchy Italians.

CHRIS CONSIDINE

The Voyage Back

Did I see them or only want to?
Looking towards the sun was difficult
over an indigo sea with running sparkles.
The ship's engines quietened

passengers moved to the starboard side
and someone pointed. I think there was
broken water among the confusion of lights,
perhaps a sliding smoothness

as dark and shining as the sea
inside the oblong of disturbance,
as of something suspended at the surface.
Did I imagine an exhalation of spray?

Word went round: two of them,
humpback mother and calf, swimming so tight
together they might have been touching.
But was this experience or hearsay?

It must have been like that with miracles.
The short-sighted, the ones further back
saying *What can you see?* like
the blind man in the art gallery.

SARAH DAVIES

Ancient Professions of the Highlands – p78, Cloud Movers

Call the cloud movers to come—
this is the age when clouds are herded, slow.
They shift malingerers with harpoons, hooks, tarpaulin

drag them to the cliff edge, topple over
where they chill and seep into the language
and fuck up the sky's blue.

Slow, speared mares leak out their wraithy guts
incorporeal over moss and rock,
their wishy bones torn up nesh and ghosty.

Our lost are found, deheavened—
there is magic and a hokey resurrection,
a stagger high to low.

Some white mass, sung
like breath newborn in winter
seeps cold down the mountain.

And tell the shouter, yelling in the wind,
his voice snatched, his jaws gape, muted;
tell the shouter to stop.

And on the sea,
tell the sleeping captain, wake—
lift the children above the rail and show them to the waves.

Tell the peat miners to put their backs into this poem,
come dig the level of the world a little lower,
adjust the squint and terror of their horizon so, just so.

At last, as by decree, tradition in heavy weather,
the cloud movers come – to bring an end to muteness,
release the song of rain through mouth of sun.

CLIVE DONOVAN

The Cards

The cards long dealt and held in my hand
Here on the table lie fanned;
The Queen of Spades I nearly wed.
For that I received a Red.
A Yellow, I see, for breaking some rule.
The Magician, Hanged Man, The Fool.

The Knight of Swords who cuts his words,
The Queen of Wands who won't.
The One of Cups which lies in sherds,
The Pentacles which don't.

The King that Clubs my beaten Heart,
The Ace of which I hold.
The Knaves from which I've had to part,
The Diamonds I sold.

I keep a card still up my sleeve,
A special one for me.
You'll see it if you see me leave—
My Get Out Of Gaol For Free!

ANN DRYSDALE

Upon First Looking into Kowalski's Market

*For an American friend who sent me a parcel of books
wrapped in interesting plastic bags*

Of have I travelled through the sullen aisles
Of Wal-Mart, Kmart and the A & P.
But this, the mead-hall of the gastrophiles,
Had hitherto been firmly closed to me.
The throaty rustle of a crumpled tote
Whispered a summons and I answered "Yes",
Stepping into a golden antidote
To years of culinary fecklessness.
Signature dips, balsamic vinaigrette,
Moistened my palate as I wandered through,
Tasting the peaches, olives, breads, and yet
The busy Minnesotans never knew
That, like the sparrow Bede reflected on,
I entered, fluttered, whistled and was gone.

NOEL DUFFY

Songlines

The cave of meanings, its weathered horde
its haunted echoes and brimming core.
The soil, the clay, the basin, the ground of being,
the foundation-works and river of need.

Land hunger, mound, earth-dwelling, home,
the blood in the veins and first sound.
The serpent's kiss, the coupling chromosomes,
the foetal appetites and clinging forms.

The dust of longing and force of change,
the hands, the skin, the tongue, the heart and brain.
The bottom, the belly, the base and bones,
the body of the world and all we've known.

The Presence, the prayer, the pit of desire;
heart's return and unquenchable fires.
Yggdrasil, well-spring, starlight and stones.
The long journey out and our stolen songs.

CLIVE EASTWOOD

La Femme Asphyxiée

Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille

Like

two Tom Thumbs inside a pair of egg-cups

two clowns are having a pee, the top halves
of their costumes laid carefully to one side.
Each tilts his extravagant waistband
for access so the false backsides—one red,
one white pompom—rear up in turn.
Between the striped, half-globe trousers
and the motley are stained shirts, four
thin arms, a dragon's head tattoo. Through
their exaggerated mouths—one glad,
one glum—they are talking about a painting.

What could have led her to decide on
suicide? Why would she (too late)
have changed her mind, fingers stretched
for the window catch? A rider
rushing towards her through the dark
or the fire's noxious yellow reflected
in a lead light? At the two end urinals
they shake their tousled heads
then their other parts
and, with a short bow, turn to wash.

SEAN ELLIOTT

Double Act

Only the phone cord tethered me,
I joked, and stopped me floating off,
airborne with simple happiness;

because the world was serious enough
our love became a levity,
a double act called More and Less.

Ironic that our rapid patter
becomes more weighty and more true
than vows I've sworn in some distress.

One time I trod the air with you
and improvised our subject matter;
wasn't there laughter? More and less.

MARIAN FIELDING

The Pea

Dear Mum,
I don't know how it happened—
I made the bed
the way you taught me,
meticulous to the point of perfect symmetry,
smoothed the silk sheets
calmed the wrinkles with my palm
honed hospital corners straight as glass—
a treat for the tenderest arse.

No one's ever complained before.
So how did it happen?
I say that so-called princess, lady la de da
must have invented it, lock, stock and leguminous barrel.
Marriage was on her agenda
and that's what I told my employer,
but he took offence
and now I'll never get a decent reference.
Love Brenda.

Dear B,
Am so sorry, but don't worry,
I've got you a job!
The seven dwarves next door,
tell me they're desperately short of a cleaner
since their last one ran off
with some toff.
Love
Mum

JULIAN FLANAGAN

Moving Away

Our first roll of honeymoon snaps
is haunted by double exposures
and the wedding guests gatecrash Venice:
a flotilla of aunts hang in mid-canal,
friends stand knee-deep in a palazzo,
cousins party in relic-heavy churches.

Then Verona, Florence, a new roll.
Caroline sits at an open book,
bella figura in black polo neck,
the old convent balcony behind her
empty of new ghosts.

SIMON FLETCHER

Hawthorn

In spring it was our bread and cheese of play
with water in tin cups we'd take our tea,
a fading memory now.

It's matrimonial in May and like
some over-anxious wedding guest the scent
is rather overdone.

All reds and purples in late summer days
it fires the hedges with its warming glow,
beloved of winter thrushes.

This hawthorn rarely gets to be a tree,
it's trimmed and pleached, a five year job, to keep
the beastly neighbours out.

DUNCAN FORBES

Graffiti

A would-be graffiti artist
who dislikes vandalism,
I read on a white Thames Water van
the words Together let's beat the drought
Ask driver for details
and I want to Tippex out
the d of driver.

Likewise at Reading Station
I should like to add some letters
to the lit-up signs
so they announce the town's arrival
as DREADING READING SPREADING
all the way down the platform
DREADING READING SPREADING
from London to Penzance.

MARC FORSTER

The Garden

These green shapes fit together: children's games
To the faint giggle of water. Vegetable love
Ignores brute beasts yet gives their young ones names,
Evolving light as small beasts shout and shove

Till its one source is far too high for sin.
The white fur of young leaf, its untapped veins,
Ape Eden's blossom. This new world we're in
Seems full of good intentions till it rains

Near mortal tears. They wander hand in hand,
Still solitary, pressed by fruit, red leaves.
The freezing earth is still at their command:
A shocking myth that no-one now believes.

GEOFFREY GODBERT

A Good Poem

is one which is
polished and weightless
like shining drops
of starlight falling
straight on an empty page.

It used to fill up
with glittering words
of consecrated verse;
but that was, of course,
centuries ago.

Now it would be quite
insignificant,
unmemorable
and no longer;
as though it never
had existed before
nor ever will again

even if we know
there is living proof
of what once happened
happening once more

even though
all our friends
are in love
or gone away.

YANNIS GOUMAS

To Be Hellenic or To Be Greek?

This nation uses us that it might exist,
and we use this nation that we may exist.

We are as clothes pegs on a clotheshorse without clothes.
We are fearless as lightning,
undisciplined as the wind,
inconsiderable as birds
leaving droppings everywhere...

We are committed to an Orthodoxy,
which keeps us locked out of reality
and locked up in fantasy.

Mercenary brains advocate our rights,
our dues, our prerogatives.
Politicians do the living. We do nothing.

Our Health System makes sure
that Greece is safe for the dead.

Whilst our Educational system
whittles you down to a pinhead,
not knowing an iamb from a trochee
(not to say your face from your ass!)

This country is a kitchen sink drama.
All of us are walk-ons doing an encore,
only to receive derision's standing ovation.

What's even sadder: each person is alone,
there is no room for two.

KEVIN HANSON

Ernesto

In the photograph by Paul Schatzberger
is a framed print of Alberto Korda's
iconic Che. It hangs on the wall above

three citizens seated in a 'day centre
for older people' in Havana. Forget
the bedsit posters, the million T-shirts,

the accusations of cold-heartedness,
the smugness of privileged liberals,
guerrilleros of a thousand bar stools,

cock-a-doodle dandies of the modish
obliterati for whom any violence
is permissible so long as it serves

the self-anointed fleecers of the world.
Take a look at these elderly people,
lean and alert in Spartan cleanliness.

Ernesto Che Guevara lay in mud
and shit for a gentle end to their lives.
He died like a dog for this civility.

CAROLINE HAWKRIDGE

Earth Lion

Cha-me-leon. A lizard that's all tongue and rumour.
With this throat click, press and purse of my lips,

I can taste the Middle English, still give breath
to the Greek, itself re-mouthed from Akkadian; cuneiform

for the legged snake that stole eternal life from Gilgamesh.
Edin, wedged in the same clay, also riddles with the Garden.

Four thousand years murmur as I name this creature
which science says cannot hear. It sits alive behind glass,

where my syllables leave a brief mist.

MICHAEL HENRY

His Silver Airway

I was at the beck of magic
when he hung up his hat and stick
and walked into the room
like a conjuror at a children's party
with his Gladstone bag of tricks

from which, poker-faced, he pulled
out a silver airway he could turn
with a subtlety of hand.
'Silver has to work for a living,' he said.
'This airway's been all over Liverpool.'

To a woman with epilepsy in Woolton,
to a stevedore in Bootle
and to a child in Allerton
who'd inhaled the arsenic
from green flock wallpaper.

I didn't just want to hear medical
happy endings. I wanted him
to conjure immortality.
Which is why I sometimes blow
through his silver airway onto a mirror

waiting for the surface to blur into being.

EMMA HILLIER

The Graduates

We spent four warm months travelling together,
squashed against each other's thighs on lunging buses,
boat rides, planes. And a year squeezed into single beds

in halls at university, learning to breathe,
to twist and turn together in our sleep. For two years
we shared double beds in our own rented houses,

basking in the space where we could lie out flat,
not touching, but slept clinging in the middle
anyway, curved round like two big Cs—my feet

laid flat against your shins, your knees behind
my knees. Now, we have graduated, and have moved
back with our parents. Moved back to sleeping

over once a week, setting up beds with sofa
cushions and spare blankets. To walking to
and from the bathroom quietly, fully dressed.

ROBIN HOUGHTON

Invasion

It took three rows of barbed wire coiled round stakes, hammered at angles into sand and shingle. The beach packed and leaking like keddle nets of cockles in green buckets, for six summers.

Wading off in gumboots, bait-diggers beyond the rocks held occasional wakes, observed by boys belly-down in the dunes with binoculars, swapping quiet jokes and stale crackers.

Over on the mud flats lugworms blew their coiled casts as shellfish slept peacefully, and tides took time to warp the weed-wrapped posts, as crippled as the knees of sentries denied their leave.

After the war, low-slung homes stood watch; black-eyed, slammed cold up against marram grass and buckthorn, demanding their sea defences. Then came Pontins and the caravans.

ASHLEIGH JOHN

Beside the Seaside

It's taken wind and water a long time
to mould these cliffs and make this strip of sandy shore.
But only gulls and oyster-catchers seem to find
them interesting. The beach is nothing but a bore

for the day trippers—somewhere to come
on Sundays. Children foul pools and grub in the sand;
parents watch the time, and wish they were at home ...
All at sea beside the seaside, they prefer dry land.

Patrolling shallow water, a black-backed gull checks
its flight to stoop at litter floating on the tide.
Past the lighthouse brooding over centuries of wrecks,
the waves roll in, heads raised like snakes about to strike.

MARTIN JONES

Overseas Posting

Who were we, mere recruits,
to doubt the word of a Corporal,
a veteran of the Korean War?
Yet, despite vehicles still painted
yellow from the Suez campaign,
we didn't expect hostilities,
and, when our postings arrived,
they were to peaceful destinations,
mine to the George Cross Island,
where, in lofty barrack-rooms,
fans flapped like giant birds,
mosquito-nets shrouded beds;
where, in fierce sunshine, stones
glinting on the parade-ground,
work was discarded by noon
and, temporary holiday-makers,
we left for the rocks, dropped
in the cool of the Mediterranean.

JOEL LANE

Dreams Burn Down

Some time after midnight
on the restless Warwick Road,
a paper recycling bank
was pushed over, split in half
and the contents set on fire—

front pages stripped of faces,
cardboard boxes no longer able
to hold anything together—
a few hours before the last
News of the World hit the streets.

Whose ritual was it? A few
youths lit up by alcohol,
or a private act of revenge
for a life stolen or given away
on the night's black page?

JENNY LEWIS

Notes from Exile

for Ramez Ghazoul

i. Cucumbers

in this Garden of Eden where Genghis
and Alexander left their marks and Cain
murdered Abel: in this garden, this same
garden, I tended my little patch of soil
growing melons with their showy yellow
trumpets, and cucumbers, water-holders,
tubes of coolness shining in the desert
before the Flood, before the King List:
known to Kurds, Arabs and Turkumans,
Muslims, Christians, Jews and Chaldeans,
Armenians, Yezidis, atheists: children
of Mesopotamia who might have run
at first light to cut the best one, saying,
as I did—*father, I've grown this for you*

ii. Umm—Ulrabiain

in Mosul, when the hottest hours
made work and studying unbearable,
we slept on thin blankets in the large
hall, its porous marble surface sprayed
with water, as outside, in our copious
garden, birds fled to the veined shade
of pistachio trees to escape the sun
that scorched the lawns we played on,
made too hot to touch the taps that

hung with icicles in winter; it mellowed
only in the spring and autumn seasons
when my family picnicked in the fields
outside our city which is often called
Umm-Ul-rabiain, or *Mother of Two Springs*.

iii. Occupation

a gap in the stones, a bowl of air and sky
stippled like trout skin, barred by cloud
like a pheasant's wing: that airiness
flew inside us, that safety and freedom,
roamed the archaeological ruins of cities
with us—Khorsabad, Hatra and Nimrod—
while bees on the purple thistle were like
jewels on a pincushion, and butterflies
darting, stitching green fretworks, sipped
moisture from the muddy track we trod
until, at the end of the day, we trekked
home to bed, leaving behind the ravaged
past and the buzzard above us, sky-hunter,
wind-driven ahead of the carnage to come.

ANDREW MAYNE

Nothing

My brand-new desk-lamp draws them up three flights;
they're foiled against ebony window panes.

Now four show off their bellies' egg whites—
these night maggots pulled in by light's taut chains.

Triangular brown-paper wings make capes
behind the eyes that, in full beam, glow red.

They crawl the glass, autumnal leaf-like shapes,
then plunge and flutter; till they re-embed

belaying-pins—tight on their pitch again ...
What pleasures them must quite as much torment.

Beyond, head-lit and twinkle tailed, a plane
slow curves its auto-piloted descent:

to passengers the town's decked-out extent
invites their wonder at the starred mundane.

GORDON MEADE

The Whiskey Drinker

Does the first sip always promise
what the final swallow is sent to deliver?

To start with, the illusion of incisiveness but,
in the end, disaster. Oblivion is all he is really after.

He can lecture you for hours on the different shades
of peat, the subtle influences of seaweed and the smokiness
this particular malt inhaled inside the darkness of its barrel;

but the end result is always the same—himself
lying wrecked on his favourite sofa with his arm
wrapped around another empty bottle.

SUE MILLARD

Pink

white horses still their clattering feet
and wait for you
in shadow street their pink-plumed heads
stand straight for you
the lady at the bus-stop signs
a cross for you
the walker with the terrier dog
sighs loss for you
the traffic at the roundabout
must queue for you
the metronome of trotting hooves
beats true for you
the wagons on the carriageway
change gears for you
the rider on the cycle-path
wipes tears for you
pink rose-bay and foxgloves paint
July for you
the sunlight on the fell pours down
goodbye for you
the smiles of all who met you weave
the pall for you
that pink box in a white hearse is
too small for you
a sailing group of pink balloons
learn flight with you
and high the wings of wheeling birds
delight with you

FIONA MOORE

Domestic

The duvet cover's swollen—an indigestion dream—
and has assumed the characteristics of the clothes
it swallowed, so that fingers trying to tug it out

grate against the blue shadow of jeans, and once
the wet, distended lump is pulled free the duvet clings
to everything as a deep sea stomach might, a stomach

with just enough brain (no whale, this) to feed
according to the science of the lobster pot—
easy to get in, hard to get out—and large enough

to ingest a human, and when the washing's all
shaken into the basket and onto the floor
the duvet starts eating itself, eats its own slack

pouch of inside-outness so it has to be held
over the steep steps by the back door, shaken
until its bamboo pattern turns to storm and then

doubled over the line, in the shadow of the house
among the casual birdsong of mid-morning, where
it reverts to two dimensions, emptied of desire.

ANDREW PIDOUX

Ian Starsmore

Director of Cultural Studies at Norwich School of Art, c. 1993

Wearing only rainbow clothes
Which the Norfolk weather loathes,
Starsmore makes his way to school,
Weighed down like an artful mule,

Past the ancient autumn fair
Where the gypsies curse the air
And the unwon goldfish eye
The floating man as he floats by,

Over the enchanting bridge
Whose under-darkness is a fridge,
Over, too, the old reflections
Sunk inside their recollections,

Through the watchful art-school doors
Scarred by fierce artistic wars,
Up white-water marble stairs,
Past a wee girl drowned in flares,

Under the unfocused looks
Of the statues perched like rooks,
And on into his cubist room,
Where his work waits like a womb.

Casting off his casual cloak,
He laughs at some half-private joke,
And with an arc of rainbow rind
Feeds the monster of his mind.

ANGELA PLATT

Rough Justice

What do I know about golf?
Just that once at Wenvoe
my left-handed ladies' club
catapulted the hard white
pitted sphere high into the air
a mile or more, or so it seemed.

It landed in the rough
where placid sheep cocked eyes
but went on chewing evening mist
observing my stupidity.

Perhaps they knew the pristine ring
that caught the setting sun
in its reflection
like diamonds in wet grass
in early morning dew

would mark my finger out

for harder things

than playing games.

DAVID RAIN

V.Victoria

A rainy day: Port Phillip Bay.
I'd lived too long to find my way.
From Flinders Street I travelled back
To towns where clocks were left to crack.
Like Richard Mahony's, all these years
My fortunes ran too deep for tears.

Shall Shepparton, shall Castlemaine
Be places where the barons reign?
I found the Land That Time Forgot.
It laughed, and said 'Forget me not'.
Then Warrnambool must crumble too,
Each Friday when the tithes are due.

The Twelve Apostles face the clouds
With certitude of blackened shrouds.
The Balcony casts down its load
On Buffalo and Ocean Road.
The Great Dividing Range has stalled.
We stand divided, thunder-walled.

What chance is there for New South Wales,
When even Wangaratta fails?
The places where the barons live
Are places I cannot forgive.
They keep the castles in the hills.
Victoria has air that kills.

In Ballarat and Bendigo,
I learned how much I'd never know.
In bright Mildura, in the heat,
I faced at last my last defeat.
I reached into the river's frown.
The waters whirled by, muddy-brown.

STEWART SANDERSON

Ballade of the Leaving Land

Leaving land, I come into my power
on a rivet deck on a hull, on a rivet sea
with metal at the foot of it. And down
the rock and steel of that cold hull are weighed
mastering by a redded core of fire
on an anchor chain of earth the wedding sea
cauls out and over. Comforting, that cord
of touch and standing locks me there as Wyre

and Stronsay, Graemsay, Shapinsay and Hoy
offer all their meanings, all the words
whose saying gathered last before it died
and comforted by the kirks, by the weighing loan
which judges us. And the ettle of the steel
that locking Flotta to the blasting sky
establishes new meanings, newer fires
the old wire broadens, judging; no less real.

It is more real, perhaps, when conscious thought
comes into it and speaks it in a line
like scansion—limited by that
which rivets it to words—like Rousay there
with a routh of tombs, old bones and older stones
extending backwards once we dug it up
to show the dead the sunshine and the smoke.
Discomfited, they thought it new and fine.

But leaving land, I come into my power
when the lifeboatman judges me with his Hoy voice
and Sanday beckons, all the old words beckon
and the line goes down, and the cord, and the rising glaur.

EDWIN STOCKDALE

Thorp Green. Little Ouseburn

The hall has pink and yellow brick,
a stone and plaster portico:
high sash windows complete the scene.

I think of Agnes in the schoolroom
listening to tales of Rosalie's attachments.
Matilda more interested in horses and dogs.

I can see Mrs Robinson sashaying
about the house, fan in hand,
before reclining on a *chaise-longue*.

In the grounds stands the fourteenth-century Monks' House:
timbered frame, brick and wattle walls,
diamond-paned windows—Branwell's lodgings.

Anne writes in her diary paper:
"During my stay I have had some very unpleasant
and undreamt-of experience of human nature."

ANGELA TOPPING

A Garden for Emily Dickinson

There's a bird on the walk.
The flowers are all white:
white roses, white lilies,
white blossom on the trees.

The small lawn is trimmed
precisely within an inch
of its roots. The path shines,
a parting finely dividing hair.

A frog is croaking 'nobody'.
A line of white dresses wafts
decorously, showing no sign
that last night was a wild one.

HUGH UNDERHILL

Theory and Practice

Creation happens, says the theory of complexity,
at the edge of chaos. Systems form not neatly
or by direction, but bit by bit, quite abruptly.

She writes of her home. Trouble with the place
is subsidence, cracks in ceiling and wall,
but it won't collapse, she's told—in any case
not in her lifetime. (When it does at last fall
something will doubtless form in its space.)
With transport near and five minutes to Tesco,
though it's odd without *him*, why up and go?

As I walk there a week or so later,
the BT man hangs from a pole
in shearing wind and rain. He's clipped alone,
in cold contempt of weather, at the edge
of a sort of chaos, someone's dodgy phone
claiming his power to order, his knowledge
of complex wire and sequenced terminal. Slung
at his waist his loaded gear like a wild west gun-
toter, or some freedom-fighter.
Such appearance belies his more civic role.

'Go left after sixth pole down.' To say
First left would be custom, but not her droll way.
I find the house. Nothing looks amiss. I can't see
the cracks. 'Coffee,' she asks, 'tea?'
Something stronger? You're wet and chill.'
Steers me to a room with stacks and spill
of boxes, papers, files. *Now* I remark the flaws

scraggled in ceiling plaster. "There and there,
all his half-done work. I don't know where
to begin."

We sit side by side, she pours
hot tea, then whisky, and bit by bit we negotiate
the sequence and the system of his will to create.

WYNN WHELDON

The Glove

for Pom

Ten of us perhaps had already passed
and it was you, my friend, with whom I walked,
who noticed first the baby rabbit
bang in the middle of the lane, on its side,
an eye open, lightly breathing, barely living.

We must put it out of its misery—
I remembered killing a broken-winged pigeon
with a shovel, how it took two whacks at least,
how something inside it refused to die
or something inside me lacked courage to kill.

But you looked about, saw a single old glove,
mangy, filthy, forgotten at the wayside,
and declared *that's what it's there for*,
took it from its yellowed plot, curled it in your palm,
and tenderly scooped up the baby rabbit,

and set it upright off the beaten track.
For half a minute we waited: no motion.
You were sanguine: better closer to the earth,
come life or death, than exposed on the path.
I was waiting for you, so you moved first.

Because whatever sentimental
anthropomorphism I had just witnessed
seemed not that at all, but a lesson in love,
and you do not leave before your teacher.
And you may wish one day for such a glove.

Bedford Open Poetry Competition 2011-2012

Judge's Report

This was an enjoyable competition to adjudicate as only 345 entries materialised and around 75% promptly disqualified themselves. Common faults included slightness, lack of ambition, and a vague delivery which was supposed to sound deep and meaningful but was simply unfocused. Gavin Ewart once wrote in *The Guardian*: 'It is often preferable to take your subjects from life or even from newspapers... than to construct mysterious fantasies at one remove from reality'. Romanticism sometimes drifted across my path like smoke across a motorway. Too often tangibility was sacrificed for a feel-good dreaminess which ultimately failed to satisfy. And I was faintly annoyed by the number of poems addressed to, or concerned with, an unidentified 'you'.

I was introduced to, or reacquainted with, 'cordage', 'integritas', 'bodhi', 'trilithons', 'cartouche', 'nenuphars', 'omnitheocracy', 'troublewit', 'wanderfalke', 'muggles', 'sallows', 'metathesised', 'mele', 'werriting', 'helicoidal', 'vogueing', 'kokshnik', 'off-worlders', 'yaffler', 'murrelet', 'piacevole', 'slam-dunked', and 'hermaziels'. I'd like to know how many of these are regularly encountered and in what context. Philip Larkin, held by many to be the leading 20th-century English poet, would hardly have used any of them. I met 'Scotch Whiskey' [sic]; someone who had 'END. © Author' at the foot of each contribution; 'it's' as a possessive; a poem whose stanzas started 'Dear womb'; and somebody whose first line was 'House sparrows quit London yonks ago' (according to *The Independent* in 2009, 'The sparrow population in the capital has plummeted by 68% in the past 15 years': hardly the total desertion claimed). Poem 301 was entirely in upper-case letters. Number 304 began: 'This is the most personal poem I have ever written'. In Number 321 the writer presumed the past tense of 'lend' is 'leant'.

I would advise would-be bards to cut back on enumeration. A list does not a poem make: e.g. 'lizard, olive, apple, / moss, pocked with fuchsia, / poppy, plum, hyacinth, / malachite, marigold, / bay'. I'd also counsel against positioning close to the left-hand side of the page, and embracing too readily the short line. If some of these columnar efforts had been rearranged into more conventional shapes they might have fared better.

There was a plenitude of not-particularly-interesting poems where eight or nine sentences about the English countryside were cobbled together in the hope that they might refresh the reader with their sub-Edward Thomas cadences. Others were almost wilfully flat and banal, chronicling, for example, buying fish fingers and a daily newspaper, glancing into the spare room to see whether the family pooch had yet woken, trying to find strawberry jam in the fridge. Most of these were unenlivened by wit or irony and demonstrated an unwillingness to be in the slightest bit enterprising.

Once the long list had been compiled I was on the *qui vive* for the clever construction masquerading as a poem, penned by canny individuals who knew what the real thing was and how a nifty approximation could be fashioned. These paste jewels were, on occasion, difficult to distinguish from true authenticity. After numerous re-readings I could bask in the satisfaction of knowing I had succeeded in identifying them. The final twenty cared about spelling, used punctuation correctly where appropriate, and possessed self-confidence and an element of unusualness. Space does not permit the naming of those beyond the top ten: they had in their various ways so much attractiveness that it was painful to discard them.

10th is 'The Wild West', whose 21 lines manage to contain 20 'in's, yet whose nostalgic nature does not stoop to sentimentality.

9th is the understated and mysterious 'Love You To Pieces'. Its low emotional charge suggests not so much restraint as repression or suppression, keeping a lid on experiences (personal, or vicariously registered) which might unsettle if fully released.

8th is 'The Glass Bottom', a prose poem which uses the full complement of 50 lines. One wonders whether trimming might have enhanced its appeal.

7th is 'Flat-leaf parsley in a blue jug': more undemonstrative writing which echoes Christopher Isherwood's assertion from *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939)—'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking'. The poet here is clearing 'thinking' but not letting Self obstruct the view. Paul Durcan has said: 'The great enemy of art is the ego. It keeps getting in the way. One needs the ego to disappear so that I become you; I become the people walking up and down the street.'

6th is 'Artefact', a fascinating exercise in syllabic verse, reminiscent of Oliver Reynolds' style. It is pared down to a magnificent starkness, and has no value judgements to parade. Those who hanker after excitation might find it anaemically deadpan, but I like it.

5th is 'Dealing with Bees', a teasingly difficult piece to sum up as its sense of mystery and equivocalness are all-pervasive. The last couplet is the oddest of clinchers. I had doubts about how something could simultaneously be 'unknown but now instantly vivid', especially with an article of clothing which comes up to the neck yet reveals the 'wrinkled pale skin of her breasts'.

4th is 'In the Low Countries'. I wanted this to be rewarded with prize money but finally felt it should miss out. This is regrettable as sure-footedness and intelligence are on display. It reminds me of the style of Michael Henry, the accomplished Gloucestershire poet. The piece is multifaceted, several considerations vying for attention (the locale, hunger, a mother and daughter, a couple of living statues, a Latin maxim, and an intriguingly absent woman). Its unresolved urgency has exemplary energy. I could have done with a couple of commas either side of line 23; and, wearing my pedant's hat, I took issue with the tautologous 'one last and final time'. Otherwise it comes close to being a *tour de force*.

Few entries rhymed or scanned. Too many were loosely constructed to the point of ramshackleness. Whilst not everyone would endorse James Fenton's view, as expressed in *The New Yorker*, that 'Poetry will wither on the vine if you don't regularly come back to the simplest fundamentals of the poem: rhythm, rhyme', there is much to be said for both—hence my delight when coming face to face with a well-turned sonnet.

3rd is just that. Its slightly stiff title—'A Position'—matches Gainsborough's 1749 portrait of landed gentry in East Anglia to a tee. The discipline of the lines, the adept use of semicolons, the half-rhyme until the concluding couplet: all are indicative of a poet of sensitivity, restraint, and perceptivity. Any temptation to head the piece with the name of the painting was wisely avoided; though this does leave a little in the lurch anyone unacquainted with the work. There has always been a place in English literature for craftsmanship of this kind: its modern displacement by the sometimes unruly thrust of free verse makes its appearance the more welcome.

In 2nd place is 'The clue lies in the lady's toe', a measured and strange creation which doesn't remind me of anything I've read before. Its subject matter is underwhelming, but this does not render it inconsequential as we are kept in suspense until the last as to the point of it all. When the denouement comes it is as low-key as the rest of the narrative, yet this is deliberate, as to depict sheep on a Scottish hillside as anything racier would be to tamper with reality to an uncomfortable extent. The matter-of-factness is maintained in the conversational pace of the enjambment. This indicates a poet who is not flustered by the challenge his or her material presents, someone cool- and clear-headed and at home within their chosen medium.

The poem that rose to the top—'Violence in Old Sainte Geneviève'—has uncommon brio. Its boldness and energy incorporate real life-and-death drama. It is too urgent in tone to incorporate standard punctuation (though such grammatical convention is something I generally applaud). It is direct and spare and not set in Surbiton; and it spans the centuries with élan. It does not trip one up with fancy words or well-worn poetic conceits. I do not detect any known practitioner at work, though I feel strongly that he or she (and it appears almost certainly to be the former) is confident and ballsy in just the right proportions.

The entry form states that the £500 prize money is to be divided up thus: £300, £150, £50. Faced with the top three poems, I do not think the first is six times better than the third, or twice as accomplished as the second. Ideally, by my estimation, £238 should go to the first, £167 to the second, and £95 to the third. This would better reflect my preference, though I acknowledge that the terms and conditions set out on the form are probably unalterable.

Paul Groves

FIRST PRIZE: DAVID R CRAVENS

Violence in Old Sainte Geneviève

when Kickapoo mercenaries captured an Osage
and burned him at the stake
the Osage would often sing to his captors
telling them as he died
that the fire was not hot enough for his liking

in seventeen seventy-three these same Osage
rode on Ste Gen
(in their black and orange bluff-paint)
and as they cut one villager from the running crowd
a warrior of the Bear gens unsheathed his knife
and pretended to scalp the man

but when the man screamed in terror
the warrior slit his throat
and he was left to lie where he fell—
for no honorable warrior wished such a man's scalp
to adorn his spear

the following century
Auguste De Mun insulted William McCarthur
(both candidates for the House of Representatives)
they met at the Ste Gen courthouse
one going up the steps, the other coming down
both fired their pistols

no police reports filed, no charges pressed

the century after that and just down Merchant Street
I fought two men in front of The Orris

but that was still the old days
before pent-up anger burst forth
in mass school-shootings
like the mighty river that ruptured the levee
(that very same year)
and nearly destroyed the entire village

I stumbled to my truck with a broken bloody nose
cracked ribs and mild concussion
but I made it home and slept it off

I like to think the Osage would have taken my scalp

David R Cravens has a BA from the University of Missouri Columbia and MA from Southeast Missouri State University. His work has appeared in the Saint Petersburg Review, EarthSpeak Magazine and Albatross Poetry Journal, among others. He's an adjunct professor of English Studies for Central Methodist University, as well as an instructor at Mineral Area College.

He writes that this poem stemmed from a conversation at The Old Brick House restaurant in Ste Geneviève. 'A friend and I were discussing research I'd been doing on local Indian tribes for my master's thesis, and at some point I also brought up the fact that De Mun had been slain by McCarthur in the very building we were sitting in. That got us talking about some of our own past escapades. My friend teaches for a living, as do I, and we talked about how much had changed in the twenty years since we'd been in school ourselves, and how kids are now being arrested for the same fistfights we'd received a slap on the wrist for. It occurred to me that school shootings were all but nonexistent at the time, and although correlation doesn't prove causation, I think the association warrants consideration. Throughout history digression has all too often disguised itself as advancement.'

SECOND PRIZE: ALWYN MARRIAGE

The Clue Lies in the Lady's Toe

On visiting Henry Moore's sculpture in Dumfries and Galloway

On a Scottish hillside the bronze statue
of an archetypal king and queen
braves the elements,

observing, perhaps, a thread
of slit-eyed sheep winding up the hill,
with careful, delicate tread,

yellow marks like lichen
on their rumps, their gaze
full of vague unanswered questions.

My mind, also, struggles to explain
the different texture of the metal on
the king's right knee. While all the rest

is stippled, rippled, riven
in a pattern to catch the varying
shades of light, his knee is smooth.

What point was the sculptor making
as he carefully fashioned this
one unblemished surface?

Only as I descend the hill
does a clear-cut memory emerge
from long ago, as I recall

a constant stream of pilgrims
filing past a marble statue of
the queen of heaven,

the slight roughness of the stone
contrasting sharply with the smooth
and shining toe

which generations of the pious
have knelt to fondle and to kiss,
wearing away the awkward corners

and bringing out a deeper shine. The line
of sheep has reached the sculpture now,
and as I watch

each sidles up to the impassive king
and meditatively rubs her rump
against his knee.

THIRD PRIZE: LESLEY BURT

A Position

Decorous, she follows her husband's gaze;
he stands to one side; shows posterity
his property: wife, meadows, sheaves and trees.

She sits upright, clenched tight by corsetry.
He leans on her seat, nonchalant; one elbow
holds his gun with barrel pointing down.
Still, we must appreciate he has the power
to fire it at the game birds that he owns.

Her lap is a cascade of ice-blue silk;
crossed ankles close those thin thighs in together.

Over his verdant landscape, dark clouds skulk:
Mr Andrews does not dictate the weather;
but the dog watches his master's face, his stance;
he will run, retrieve, at once, given the chance.

COMMENDED: CLIVE EASTWOOD

In the Low Countries

In Amsterdam they've written it on a building:
a wise man doesn't piss into the wind.
But it's so high up you only see it
looking out over the urinal's iron wall
with a gale spinning the droplets round your legs.
And by the time you've worked the Latin
into something colloquial
your shoes and hands are soaked
and you must find somewhere to wash
before you try to ring her again.

The girl in front discusses secretly with her mother
what she might safely say
then tells you she is eight and bilingual.
You stammer your dozen words and begin to understand
that in a few minutes the train will divide
and you've chosen the wrong half.
Tot ziens to them both, you get back on
further down the platform,
miss the chance to see Dordrecht
though you know there'll be no answer.

Hispanic, local, Lebanese—a hundred restaurants,
each menu subtitled. You read them all until
hungry enough to eat a horse
you settle on the Five Flies which by now
has no room. You find a phone
where a top-hatted man, a girl in a short skirt
are both smiling, both painted
all over in silver and blowing bubbles.

After fourteen rings, you buy a beer
and put the change in their tin.

On the way back a croupier
with her hour-long nails and make-up
is dealing a hand of patience as she waits
for someone to be tonight's first.
...*NON URINAT IN VENTUM* is floodlit
above the evening's neon
and you know it makes no sense
but, still hungry, you have to try
one last and final time, to take the extra card
that, even as you ask, will be too many.

COMMENDED: MATTHEW BARTON

Dealing with Bees

Old acquaintances, we had guarded
a considerate boundary. At the most

a farewell kiss on the cheek
(and she my mother's age but childless,

somehow perfectly good):
suddenly we were intimate—a bee

then another (or one
multiplying itself like a god)

in my hair, climbing
over the lip of her rollneck shirt

and about to crawl down into
the unknown but now instantly vivid

wrinkled pale skin of her breasts...
she was ruffling through my hair to find it, I

picked it or flicked it free of her shirt.
We went in quickly, shut the glass doors

against which its several selves
tocked and ticked for a bit.

But one was still there in my hair,
my scalp crawling strangely

like a physical thought. She said
as one with much experience:

You must whack it, you have to...
So I hit my own head

hard with the flat of my hand
and it dropped dead.

But after that, though too polite
to say it, I could see

she wanted me to get
out of there fast and not come back.

(Or more or less the same:
to stay and never leave again.)

COMMENDED: HELEN OVERELL

Artefact

An ancient flat stone
 chiselled into life—

two men plough a field,
 using two yoked cows—

one man walks behind,
 he wields a long stick,

the other, in front,
 holds a branch with leaves.

Scholars muse for hours—
 The stick strikes the cows,

drives the beasts that drag
 the plough that makes drills

in the fields; the branch
 with leaves? who can say?

Then in Spain one day
 a learned scholar

sees two old men plough
 using two yoked cows,

one long stick, one branch
 with leaves—the first man

waves the branch to keep
flies away, to swish

leaf cool air around
the working beasts' eyes,

the other pauses
at each furrow's end

scrapes the plough blade clean
with his long stout stick.

COMMENDED: HELEN OVERELL

Flat-leaf Parsley in a Blue Jug

Green vigour of leaf—notched flags at half-mast
on stems that nod in gracious acknowledgement;

the sturdy jug, a flecked and mottled blue,
a bold turned shape entirely purposeful—

firm shoulders narrowing to a wide neck that flares,
curves to a rounded almost-spout,

the handle well-balanced, comfortable,
giving a sure grip, ease of tilt—

the cradled water quenching thirst, the zinged
alacrity of herb, the still of clay

fired to stone—that chip in the glaze reveals
pebble-dark, earthbound strength—for days,

the brave conjunction sings from the windowsill,
fills the kitchen with clarity.

COMMENDED: CHARLES EVANS

The Glass Bottom

Wait, he said, reaching for the frayed rope, *you wait plees!*
and he pulled till the prow bumped below us at the quayside.
Me Amman, you come plees, as we stood watching him. And he
moved down the boat, smiling crookedly with his two black teeth.
I didn't move or speak, but I felt my wife edge away, as again
he said, *you come plees, very good boat, very safe, come plees.*
I turned to my wife, uncertain. *Why not*, she said suddenly, and
moved forward past me. I saw her hand rest momentarily on his
thin brown arm as she stepped cautiously into the boat. Then
he turned his toothy smile to me, and I followed her.

We sat on either side of the little boat, he pushed out into the water.
See plees, and he pointed down, *see plees, plenty fish, gles for see.*
At his bare feet we saw the glass panel, the golden sand moving past.
You married peoples plees, come for marry? He was still smiling.
Oh yes, I said, reaching for her hand and laughing, *for marry plees!*
He could see we were in love, watching us watch each other. Now
the swimmers fell behind and he moved to the bench at the stern.
I looked across at her, I was content just to watch her smile. Then
the *chug-chug* of the outboard motor and the bird-calls were the
only sounds as we headed out towards the reef.

Then she pointed suddenly, leaning forward so that her fair hair
brushed my face. *Look*, she said, her face radiant, *look at the fish!*
and as I followed her gaze to the glass, saw the bright pattern, the
fanning tails, the bunched rainbow shapes turning and twisting as
one thing. Amman was speaking again. *See plees*, he was saying,
reef many fish! And he revved the motor, steering us towards a
small gap in the reef line. As we neared, I turned to him to speak.
For a second he shifted his gaze from the reef and looked at me, and

in that second there was a long juddering screech under the boat. We stopped with a jolt and I looked across to her.

She was sitting bolt upright on the bench, her hands gripping the sides. I looked down to the bottom. There was a circle, a bright white scar at the centre of the glass, and through it, a thick stake of white coral jutted into the boat. As we watched, water bubbled round it, circling our feet. Amman was silent now, moving quickly between our legs, crouching down to where the water gushed. She began babbling at him, in a rush, but I motioned her to be silent as Amman moved planks and boards. Amman looked up at me. *Very not good*, he said. *Amman not fix*. I took his arm. *What can we do, Amman?* I said, then, More loudly, *WHAT WE DO?* Suddenly Amman climbed on the gunwale.

Sorry plees, he said, *Amman bring boat*, and he dived into the water. For a second I watched his black head bobbing as he swam slowly away. Then I moved next to her, put my arm round her shoulders, felt her shiver. The little boat settled slowly, perched on the coral towers under her keel. We felt the tiny nibbles of the rainbow fish at our legs. We sat in silence, and she began to cry. Later, there was the siren of the police launch as it came alongside. Amman sat at the back, an officer's hand on his shoulder. They took us back to the shore. Now years later, after the divorce, I wonder if she still remembers the blue sea, rainbow fish, sharp coral spikes, and the little wooden boat with the glass bottom.

COMMENDED: ANDY POLLARD

Love You to Pieces

Her mother's hands were hard and white,
came swingeing downwards from her voice:
they packed her arms into her coat
and pushed her out like a parcel.

The crossing lady passed her across
the cars and trucks, the teacher
steered her by the shoulders into line,
then after school her uncle picked her up.

He never touched her once, he said.
A woman wrapped her in a sheet
and tucked her softly in the van:
Don't worry, she said, you're in good hands.

Sometimes she felt like a spider
she'd poked with a stick in the playground;
sometimes she felt like a piece of china
the teacher had brought and let them stroke.

They allowed her mother in the room.
They fell into each others' arms.
Then someone pulled them, quite gently, apart
and carried them off in separate cars.

COMMENDED: GREG FREEMAN

The Wild West

Gentle unravelling of a dishevelled dream
that started in the right direction:
long hair bleached by strawberry-picking;
no car, little money, hitching
down the western peninsula, tent on back,
to meet a farm girl shunning
college, following her environmental vision.

Curious hard bleakness of rural north Cornwall;
derelict railway stations, thin bed
of straw in disused barn miles inland.
Swallows rushing in and out, restless to leave.
Leaden with stagefright, Lawrentian
boy and girl in each other's arms
unable to follow the script, to seize the moment.

In the long run of happy marriages
and children none of this counts;
barely a footnote, nigh forgotten.
Wind, or the sea's distant murmuring?
Appointments of autumn waiting.
Forty years on: in my mind the barn's empty.
Only the swallows still go and come.

AFTERWORD

Among books received, we're grateful to our contributor David R Morgan for sending us *Beneath the Dreaming Tree* (Poetry Space, £7.95), and to Flambard Press for *Strange Horses* by Olivia Byard (£8.00). HappenStance have published Gerry Cambridge's *Notes for Lighting a Fire* (£10.00), and Graham High's *The Range-Finder's Field Glasses* has come out with Oversteps Books (£8.00). We have welcome notice of Lotte Kramer's *New and Collected Poems*, out with Rockingham at £9.99. Merryn Williams was sent *The Aye-Aye's Pillow* by Jonathan Attrill (Five Leaf Press, £5.00) and *After the Storm* by Robert Leach (Dionysia Press, £9.50).

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Going to teach at Manchester University in 1968-9 meant that my first fortunate experience of the world and working of poetry magazines was with Harry Chambers's *Phoenix*, which he ran from the Manchester suburb of Didsbury, where he taught at the training college, after a spell teaching in Northern Ireland. I recall his Phoenix Pamphlet series (Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, Harold Massingham and others). This led on to Peterloo Poets, a publishing venture that was to continue for about forty years, bringing out dozens of poets. Soon after Peterloo began, he moved to east Cornwall, which became its base. It was a happy coincidence that when I retired to Plymouth, decades later, I found Peterloo still going strong in nearby Calstock, with a home in the marvellously renovated Old Chapel there. It was good to be in contact again; Harry is a fine publisher and an enthusiastic and generous reader of poetry. Alas, Peterloo came to an end two years ago, a notable and long-lived imprint, committed to skilful, intelligent poetry (U A Fanthorpe, John Mole, Ann Drysdale, Peter Scupham, John Whitworth, Gerda Mayer, John Levett, Kenneth Steven and many others). The imprint and its founder richly deserve a salute from Interpreter's House. Best wishes to Harry in his retirement in York.

S.C.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Byron Beynon's recent collections include *Cuffs* (Rack Press) and *Nocturne in Blue* (Lapwing Publications), launched at the Dylan Thomas Centre.

Peter Butler runs The Peppercorn Poets in London.

Derrick Buttress is associated with Nottingham's Shoestring Press.

Chris Considine has published with Peterloo Poets and with Cinnamon Press in 2011 with *Behind the Lines*.

Noel Duffy's *In the Library of Lost Objects* appeared with Ward Wood Publishing, shortlisted for the 2010 Patrick Kavanagh Award.

Julian Flanagan has appeared in various magazines, including *Ambit* and *The Spectator*.

Simon Fletcher has had three collections published by Pennine Pens.

Yannis Goumas was born in Athens, and is a translator, novelist, TV actor, composer and singer.

Jenny Lewis's poems are from a collection she is working on, *Taking Mesopotamia*, about her father's war service in World War One.

Alwyn Marriage directs Oversteps Books in south Devon.

Andrew Mayne's first book of poetry was *Always Our Likely Finale* (2006); he has published textbooks and editions of plays.

Gordon Meade lives in Anstruther, Fife.

Fiona Moore has appeared in *Poetry London* and *The Rialto*; she has a chapbook forthcoming with HappenStance.

Andrew Pidoux's first collection *Year of the Lion* came out with Salt; he had an Eric Gregory Award.

David Rain is an Australian novelist living in London; poems in *PN Review* and *Agenda* online Supplement.

Stewart Sanderson is completing an MPhil in Scottish literature; he has appeared in *Lallans* 78 and 79 and other magazines.

Angela Topping has written a number of collections and chapbooks.

Among **Hugh Underhill's** collections are *The World We Make* (Shoestring 1996) and *Found Wanting* (Smokestack 2008).

Wynn Wheldon has published quite widely in magazines, including *The Spectator*.

