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 Beginnings and Endings
 Editorial by Andrew Oldham

The Incwriters Society (UK) is passing into a new phase, with plans to open a chapter in the States in 2005 and bring grass roots promotion and poetry to wider audience, our reach now extends across several continents; projects include the sponsoring of the poet, Dave Wood, in his recent Ireland trip (see the new regular column in this edition) and bringing the Suffolk County (NY) Poet Laureate, George Wallace to the UK this November, part of his wider USA and European tour (see George's latest article). This is a far cry from what we hoped for when on the 23rd October 2003 we launched inc. A year later and our rise and growth is still going, more and more join us everyday, more people promote via our pages and most importantly we are a pro-active Society creating "*Literature networks which are sustainable*" and providing "*members with a one-stop shop of literary resources*" but none of this would have been possible without one person.

In August 2003, feckless and footloose I had to go to London on business, whilst there I decided to watch a few plays and see what the capital had to offer with poetry readings. I was delighted to find a well known, and respected, poet on at a small venue. Now, I have always had problems with readings, I have a short attention span, and I can't sit still for long without yawning, I think it's my upbringing, as a child I was always having to do something or be somewhere - so the idea of sitting still and listening for a long period has never really caught my imagination. However, this was a very well known poet and I wanted to see them for a long time, I arrived at the venue on a wet night, the chairs were laid out, there was bad red wine, there was food, a few stale biscuits and buns; it was all rather *lovely*, in the English sense of the word. The reading was scheduled to start at seven thirty; in the audience so far was a rather disheveled man, eating a bun, drinking a glass of wine and feeding his dog,

which was stuffed into a holdall (it was a small dog). This was still the situation when the clock struck the half hour and remained so as the poet came on to silence, looked out into the 'audience' and delivered the most succinct appraisal of the situation: "Bollocks". At that point Samantha Morton, her husband and two small children (four and six respectively) walked through the open doors.

Now, I had met Sam Morton some years back at University, we both loved this poet but loathed readings, we had both sat giggling through a reading by a poet year's earlier at an Irish Festival, merely because of the way he stood.

Suffice to say the reading was a wash out and the reasons the Literature Officer gave ranged from "It's the weather" and worst of all, "He's not as well known as he used to be" referring to the poet who was stood a few yards away wrestling a biscuit. When I asked this same man what marketing he'd done, he looked at me blankly and replied, "That's not my job".

Now this pisses me off, we seem to live in a culture of passing the buck and then bemoan the situation when we lose our rights.

In moments like this there is only one solution and that is to get very drunk, very fast. Several pints of beer and glasses of wine later - don't ever mix these two, the old wives tale is true - I was ranting, yet again (this is something I have been doing for ten years with little or no result, normally because no one ever listens) about why poets and writers in the UK seem to put their trust in people who couldn't promote Tena pads at an incontinence jamboree (excuse the awful but vivid joke). That there are great poets amongst us largely ignored, badly promoted and who have spent years giving readings in empty venues, that deserved something better, that networking and drawing resources together was frowned at because it was too much like 'sharing'. Sometime around my rant on Waterstones' pulling the plug on selling independent magazines and new poetry titles I passed out. Samantha has always had the capacity to drink me under the table and age had not diminished this.

Next morning I had a screaming hangover and I was on a strange couch. Now, I have slept on plenty of strange couches in my time in the name of poetry, from the Wirral to Southend, from the Hebrides to Guernsey but normally I could remember getting to them. The pounding in my skull was one of the worst rhythms I had ever been subjected to. It took me thirty minutes to acclimatise, and another twenty with my head down the toilet before Samantha filled me in on how I got there and how she was delighted I didn't have long hair anymore, and she wouldn't be needed to hold it back.

Over the children's breakfast, something I barely survived; I still can't look at coco-pops. Samantha recounted for kids all the fun that Uncle Andrew got up to the night before, it was Jane and John meets the Godfather. It seemed sometime during the night I had announced to the world and Covent Garden that I would do something about the 'lamentable and piss awful way we treat each other in Literature' - I was very, very drunk.

On the 23rd October 2003, inc. was launched, at first it was a co-operative (writers were nominated and selected via an independent board). Samantha and Bixby came on board with the idea of Incorporating Writing, I did the admin and website, and all was peaceful, the site grew, we took on listings, we sold books, we promoted, nothing big, nothing monumental, we were not rocking the boat.

Then in December 2003 I fell seriously ill, something I am now only recovering from, I have had to learn to walk again, I have fought constant

pain, but at all times I have wondered how inc. would continue if I, Samantha or Bixby were not there to push it along. It was Samantha's idea, that inc. should become a Society and in April of this year it did, and I was appointed as its first Administrator - I'd like to think it was because of that drunken rant but I know I was nominated for the post because there's bugger all to do in a hospital, and if for awhile it would keep me sane it would be better for all concerned.

Now, that original core group of Samantha Morton, Bixby Monk, William Park, Ian Parks, Carole Baldock and myself are being joined by new people and organisations everyday. Incorporating Writing has a readership of twenty-five thousand people a year, we work with many festivals, promoters, venues, publishers, poets and writers to unify and keep them in contact with most important element of Literature, the audience.

So I am a little saddened that Sam is leaving us, that after years of her own personal rant, she has bit the bullet, sold up in London and brought a studio in Cornwall. Come Christmas she will be the proud mother of her third child and a new art gallery.

Change isn't bad, as a voluntary organisation we thrive on it but whoever you are, where ever you are, we are growing thanks to you and Samantha Morton.

 Making Snow Angels With Michael: An Interview with Eva Salzman
 Interview by Andrew Oldham

Eva Salzman grew up in Brooklyn and on Long Island where she was a dancer/choreographer. At Stuyvesant H.S., her teacher was Frank McCourt; she received degrees from Bennington College (BA) and Columbia University (MFA), where she studied with Derek Walcott, Joseph Brodsky, C.K. Williams, Edmund White, Elizabeth Hardwick, Stanley Kunitz, Carolyn Kizer, Josef Skvorecky, Stephen Sandy, Patricia Goedicke, Ben Belitt, Thoms Lux, Stephen Dunn and Jorie Graham. Her books include *Double Crossing: New and Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe), *One Two II* (Wrecking Ball Press), illus. Van Howell, *Bargain with the Watchman* (Oxford), and *The English Earthquake* (Bloodaxe), all Poetry Book Society Recommendations/Special Commendations.

Her grandmother was a child vaudeville actress, and her mother is an environmentalist. This background, and a diverse range of jobs - as Exercise Director of a Brooklyn orthodox Jewish diet centre, out-of-print book searcher and cleaner of rich ladies' houses - all inform her writing, especially her cross-arts projects with performers and visual artists. She has collaborated with the director Rufus Norris and with composers Gary Carpenter, Rachel Leach, Philip Cashian and A.L. Nicolson. *Shawna and Ron's Half Moon: An Americana Satire* and *One Two*, commissioned by the English National Opera Studio, were performed there, at Hoxton Hall and at Greenwich Theatre. *Cassandra*, a mini-opera written with her composer father, Eric Salzman, has been performed in Dusseldorf, Vienna and Oslo. She won 2nd Prize in the National Poetry Competition and major prizes in the Arvon and Cardiff Poetry Competitions. Grants and awards include those from the Arts Council, Royal Literary Fund, London Arts Board and the Society of Authors

Her poetry and fiction has been frequently broadcast on the BBC; she's read at the Royal Festival Hall, Barbican, Poetry Society, Troubadour and at festivals all over the UK, as well as in Ireland, Spain and France. In the US, she has read at the Nuyorican Café, the Walt Whitman Association and at Wesleyan Writers' Conference, where she taught as a Fellow two years running. Her varied teaching work has included Adjunct Professor at Friends World Programme (Long Island University, London), regular teaching for

Arvon courses, for community projects in London's East End and a residency at Springhill Prison, as well as continuing input to the Poetry Society's educational programmes and co-devising the Open University's first Start Writing Poetry course.

Her poetry, fiction and features have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Kenyon Review*, *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Poetry Review*, *TLS*, *London Magazine*, and in the anthologies: *The Firebox* ed. Sean O'Brien; *Hand in Hand* ed. Carol Ann Duffy; *Sixty Women Poets* ed. Linda France; *Last Words* eds. Don Paterson & Jo Shapcott; and two *New Writing* anthologies (British Council/Picador/Vintage) eds. John Fowles, A.L. Kennedy, Penelope Lively & George Szirtes.

How do you feel the two Literary Cultures of the USA and the UK differ? "Despite my years living in a Home Counties cliché (Tunbridge Wells) even now I cleave to an idealised view of the European intellectual, with England virtually part of Europe - not how the English see it. Who wouldn't want to be part of Europe I thought?! Though transplanted to the UK ages ago, I've never felt anything but an outsider in England, where American literature is permitted its place in the hierarchy...eventually. The English aren't keen on us actually living among them. Once poets are safely dead, they're drafted into the canon. The anti-American bias was in evidence since before this Bush era - maybe a hangover from WWII's "Overpaid, Oversexed and Over Here". This poet's not overpaid. Pass on the other two. The English frequently mistake me for a representative of the US government. You're supposed to be able to tell from the shoes.

It's a contrived division between the two literary cultures which, historically, a certain kind of writer feels determined to bridge or ignore. (I'm in a train trundling across a bridge at the very moment I write this, leaving New London, Connecticut.) I recall attending an event protesting the closing down of Oxford's poetry list, at which a starry array of poets read, including on behalf of absent or dead American Oxford poets. Michael Donaghy and I, the only two Oxford published Americans in the audience, were the only two poets not asked to read at this event. This odd omission is not uncommon. Recently, the publication of Faber's "Selected Poems" by Robert Lowell was celebrated at the London Review of Books bookshop by a panel of three English male poets. The fourth panel member - the co-editor - was a visiting US academic, whose first words to me were: Why weren't any American voices taking part? Don't ask me I said - I only live here. I often wonder whether most current English editors, faced with Mr. Lowell's typescript themselves, might have simply returned it to the poet, with a cool note about his voice sounding "too American"! Hush my mouth.

I've just finished a month of giving workshops and readings at universities such as Brandeis, Connecticut College and Columbia University, I'm reminded of the assembly line poetry culture of US academia, which turns 'em out, like it turned me out too. My Columbia MFA fellow student's parting shot to me, when she heard I was boarding a plane to England, was a warning to "Watch out for those formal elements", as if the Formalist mafia were lying in wait on the other side, pens drawn like pistols. I watched the growth of the so-called New Formalism with some bemusement, since I thought all poets secretly beavered away at form, even if from the privacy of their own homes. I wouldn't be surprised if the slightly illicit nature of the activity was precisely what appealed to me.

This whole movement's lines were more sharply drawn in the US where the prevailing aesthetic seemed almost dependent on an ideological stand against rhyme or metre. Even now, there exists in the US this "us" and "them" mentality, perhaps because poets, and people generally, seem to need

to belong to some church. Frequently, I've exchanged rants about language poets with the poet Michael Donaghy. Such schools define themselves in exclusionary terms, with reference more to what they are *not*, than what they are. It's a slightly less elevated kind of playground fight. The fun is to smash a few icons, while crafting some new ones of course. Actually, a lot of what Language Poetry did originally has been subverted along the way - as this kind of experimentation often is - by ideologues only glancingly interested in the poems themselves. God forbid. Why bother with such trifles, when there's all that theory to get your teeth into? When I first heard about Language Poetry, I thought: "Language! In Poetry. Now there's an idea!"

The news of Michael Donaghy's death came to me during my US tour and I've been utterly heart-broken by it. I was talked out of cancelling my tour by the Maddy, his wife, who insisted I stay in what was, after all, Michael's hometown. My husband attended the funeral for both us, and I used my radio interviews and readings to talk about Michael and read some poems. We met within a year of both moving to the UK, where I live right round the corner from his house. We've frequently read and taught together, on Arvon courses for example. I recall both of us finishing our Poetry Society reading, which I'd gotten through with the help of some wine and he with the help of glass of water which turned out to be the proverbial vodka. Passing through the Poetry Society lobby, having accomplished our mission, Michael's impromptu hop-scotch over a carpet of interlocking leaflets on the floor (somebody counting them, I thought, somewhat bemused by the activity) went down well with me, but was not so happily viewed by what turned out to be the artist installing his art installation. Michael's inadvertent critique seemed apt to me, but I mean what could a person say in apology? I thought. Sorry, I didn't realise this was *art*?!

This must have been not long after I'd introduced Michael and Don Paterson, my boyfriend who I lived with for a number of years. Frequently, I'd told Don how I couldn't wait for them to meet; I'm sure Don must remember this well, and how we all went to France together with Maddy, before the birth of Ruairi, to stay in the house of my friend. Our car broke down en route, which prompted lots of tears and then mitigating alcohol. Actually, when we finally arrived, Maddy and I swam, rode horses and enjoyed ourselves lots, while the two male poets sat glumly in the shade, complaining about the heat, unable to swim and therefore proving my contention that most male poets can't swim...nor drive very well. (I also remember Michael's frantic call for us to evacuate the ever so slightly smoking car, and we all fled frantically from the mildly dysfunctional car, and stood there in a field for a while, observing it, until we realised it was not going to explode and we were the only ones who could do something about it. As with so many things in life, we waxed lyrical about the trip after it was over, just as the Irish love Ireland from a distance - and the way I love America from even further away - but I'd like to think that some of us waxed lyrical about Michael - about the guy and the poet - while he was still alive.

He was also a wonderful Irish musician, as many know. Okay, so he rehearsed his jokes to perfection, but the showman really was a genuine poet. The first time I met him at Colin Falck's poetry group (where I met Don too) the group weighed in about his poem "Pornography" as if it were no better than the usual, which was quite clearly not the case, as I insisted, amazed by the generally cool reaction. For god's sake, I said, couldn't we tell when something was really *good*? Colin, our fearless leader, must have. Michael and I departed that session together, and our friendship lasted from then, even though not all friendships forged in cups ever last more than plane-ride. This one was forged through poems too of course, and those by him will last. There weren't enough, but it's a good thing there were

that many - more than the handful of good ones per book, which someone once said is the best one can hope for.

Michael knew some London zoo orangutans personally, and did a very good chimp imitation. He was from the Bronx and I'm from Brooklyn, which may or not explain my also-close relationships with various beasts from the animal kingdom. (I don't mean poets.) We both also held a series of unlikely jobs, knew a little of the underworld, even if he was Irish Catholic. (Like Sarah Bernhardt, I'm a lapsed Catholic Jew.) I was just in Santa Cruz, California, hanging out with some sea lions, blubbery lumbering beasts which spend their days squirming and squelching around gracelessly, shoving each other off their dry perches, constantly vying for room and bickering in distinctly inelegant honking tones. Not that Michael was the bickering type - he avoided all confrontation to a fault - but he would have appreciated the raucous spectacle. He had a hard time saying 'no' and that positive, friendly mask he presented to the world was often at odds with what he really felt inside, to the point where sometimes I'd want to shake that smile off his face. But then lots of people really liked him for this warmth, and women were incessantly falling in love with him. I'm taking up a lot of this interview talking about Michael Donaghy, but naturally this is the moment and opportunity to do so. Perhaps someone will want to hear more sometime; it's an urgent need to talk people you love when they die. I was delighted that he chose to visit my dream the night before he died (when he had so little time and so much to do!). Side-by-side, we fell back into the soft snow, made snow angels and had a brief conversation about the cosmos and the starry sky overhead. He said he could stay there looking at the heavens forever. It was a lovely dream.

To return to the question, I think the British literary scene is more male-dominated and sexist - perhaps like the culture. British publishers often seem unwilling to take risks, but instead tend to congregate in aesthetic coffee clutches, all backing the same horses, rather than wanting the pleasure and excitement of putting their own stamp on things. Maybe this is the stock US individualist speaking, or how Americans like to think of themselves. My host just described to me a poet colleague who is a literary entrepreneur - in the best possible way - with her energetic Mickey Rooney-ish approach to new projects. Maybe you've seen the films? "Hey, guys! I got an idea! Let's put on a poetry show in the barn!" I should say that my host was describing this with admiration, even if this approach may seem culturally shallow, tasteless, tacky or exhibitionist to some - this kind of "hey, let's make do and put together a show just for the heck of it" thing which, these days, I find refreshing for its energy, spontaneity and innocence (god forbid I use such a word about anything American!) which I really miss sometimes. Many English people find this impulse excruciatingly embarrassing, and I did too...once".

As a New Yorker, now living in the UK, how did 9/11 affect your identity and the feeling of 'home' and 'belonging'?

"At the precise moment US friends were insisting I was damn lucky to be out of this damned country, these events have made me long for home more than ever - rather perverse I know. Of course I don't think of myself as American, but as a New Yorker, Actually, I was back in the States for 9/11. Fortunately, we weren't in the city at home, which is just across the water from the twin towers. We were terrified where we were though, just outside the city. I felt like my past really had tumbled down, virtually in front of my eyes. Before that, from a distance, I could almost pretend it was still all the same. Was that some loss of America's innocence? That innocence was long gone from me - maybe part of the reason I left the place like I did, holding a cynical view of Americans, as does everyone these days. I see things differently now. Maybe it's the so-called ignorance of

many Americans which keep them innocent too, not always in a pleasant way. But many really do believe in the corny precepts America is based on.

Meanwhile, the English seem to prefer the idea of the American as an ignorant dolt, but that is ignorant thinking too. Also, it is precisely the diabolically bad media which prevents anyone from getting a clear picture of the American opposition to the clichéd, imperialist, war-mongering, red-neck mentality which I sometimes think some English would prefer to believe is an accurate picture of the American character, when of course the truth is infinitely more complicated...and interesting, if I may say so. By the way, on this trip, I've been hanging around with a lot of Republicans, all of whom said they're planning to vote Democrat. Fingers crossed. Kerry recently said: "Bush has united our enemies, divided our friends." It does seem to me this nation is deeply divided right now, which aptly represents an internal division I've felt culturally for many years living in the UK, but felt even when I was living in NYC, partly for political reasons and partly as a twin".

You were a dancer up to the age of twenty-two, what drew you from this Artform into writing Poetry?

"I can't remember *not* writing - both fiction and poetry - so I never turned towards poetry from anywhere else. It may seem odd that I practised both verbal and non-verbal art-forms, but I've never felt any contradiction. However, reading and writing are and have always been utterly essential to me; they are part of my identity. I've written for as long as I can remember writing".

Artists/Poets are often perceived as making things happen, politically, socially and/or emotionally, how do you see your work in this?

"I've written the odd polemic, but much of my work is implicitly political. I've been told I'm the sort of person who makes things happen - both good and bad. Watches don't exactly stop dead when I put them on, but machines do malfunction when I go near them. I have a far better relationship with animals, and men. I don't know if I'm going off-piste here to mention how the kind of people who put themselves forward in some way are also the ones who end up taking the flak. The stereotype of the American makes them the crass but also outspoken one which means I say what others often tell me they'd like to say, but don't, and this foot-in-mouth tendency I try to put to good use if I possibly can.

However, the "messages" are less in my writing, and more in the uses I put the writing to, or in the kinds of teaching I end up doing, often in the service of good causes - the kind of work most writers I know wouldn't and don't touch with a barge-pole. It sort of started with the English seeming to not know what to do this NYC Jew, so I'd get placed among ethnic communities, for fellowships and teaching. That worked for me fine, even if I roll my eyes at the pigeon-holing and incomprehension about my work. Even if I don't write politically, I want to be able to do a little for some greater good. Part of this comes from Jewish (Catholic?) guilt. I'm obsessed by the injustices of the world, and often see in the smaller cowardices and lies of people the far larger crimes they seem to represent. I see the tyrant and large-scale hypocrite in the petty playground bully, for example, or even in my fellow poets. This may sometimes be a fault in me, or a curse".

Your new collection, Double Crossing was Poetry Book Society Recommended, but what poems or Poets would you recommend and why?

"I'm assuming you mean poems by others, but I'd say to read both American and British voices. It's important to read in different genres. I'm reading a book about Mormons at the moment. However, I don't recommend Mormonism as a life-style choice, and neither does this book, about a largely forgotten

massacred perpetuated by these breakaway Christians (another advertisement for atheism!). When I came to England, I was simply carrying on with a literary love affair I'd had with England as long as I could read my grandmother's classic, old-fashioned collection of some books; she ran a book business from her home, but this was just an excuse for accumulating something like 20,000 books in her home. My first reading was intensely old-fashioned: Fielding, Dickens, Fielding, Richardson, George Eliot, Austen, Melville, Hawthorne, Hardy...and then later Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Edith Wharton. I worked my way up to modern times; I was trying to approach things chronologically but now I mix and match eclectically, which perfectly suits my temperament. Early poets I read included Keats, Dickinson and the Romantics, and then Frost, Auden, Bishop, MacNeice, Kavanagh, E.B. Browning. I go back to most of these poets, and also admire Molly Peacock, Derek Mahon, Carol Ann Duffy, Kate Clanchy, Colette Bryce, Simon Armitage, C.K. Williams, Sharon Olds, Marilyn Hacker, Kathleen Jamie, Ciaran Carson, Sean O'Brien and Michael Donaghy. I like individual poems, rather than poets, if you know what I mean".

Double Crossing deals with various issues of gender, love, sexuality, politics of sex, drawing from a myriad of the everyday and from the realms of mythology. What draws you to mythological figures and what do they have to say about modern situations and events?

"Of course we're all just re-writing the same stories, over and over. When I wander towards some mythological topic, I might do some research, but usually long after a first draft. Then, I'm often struck by the uncanny way I've made connections unconsciously, as if we're all dipping into some collective unconsciousness when we tread this territory. I found this when writing "Poor Relations", when I was reading about some early creation myths and their connection to certain elements such as gold and silver, and when I was writing "Helen's Sister", which gives a voice to Helen of Troy's not-quite-so-beautiful twin sister, living in the next town, her life lived in the shadow of fame and beauty. Also, my muse poems, with their conceit of the muses as men (or women dressed as men, and other such subversive things) allowed a broader palette from which to draw, while writing about the things I was going to write about anyway. With these last, I ran out of muses, and so began to make up new ones, allowing myself to add to myth a little, in my own small, and irreverent way".

What do you think makes a Poet?

"If we only knew, eh? I do know a little what *doesn't* make a poet. Self-expression is inadequate, as is dull competence with form. One can improve one's work, but I often think poets are born, which is not to say that one can't blossom late, or come to the genre through the back door. Poets must have an instinctive, musical understanding of how language works. Some well-known poets let me down in this respect, having a feel for anecdote or narrative line, but being painfully unmusical with no feel for the music in the words and lines. I recall one saying she couldn't in a million years write a traditional sonnet! Eh?!"

How much does personal culture, background, religious upbringing affect your writing? And, how do you see your role as a Poet within the wider realms of this?

"I've talked about guilt as a motivation in the political realm. I think sometimes of the wandering Jew; I loathe nationalism, even as I feel its pull. I've managed to belong nowhere, or everywhere. Nothing seems to fit perfectly, or it all does. The club I belong to is the large one consisting of writers who never settled, or moved around incessantly: Joyce, Lawrence. All New Yorkers are foreigners to begin with anyway. What is a New Yorker, but somebody from somewhere else?

I never thought about being Jewish at all (why would I, living in a Jewish city?!) until I moved to England. Now, I think of identity as imposed on me by others. I realise that my cultural roots (and this is my primary attachment to religion, coming from a staunchly secular, liberal, intellectual family...who were all rabbis two generations back) are inescapable. I'm not painting NYC as some kind of racial utopia but I honestly never noticed people's colour or religion particularly - unless they're highlighting it in some way - in the same way I notice it in England. The English seem particularly deft at pigeon-holing and putting people in their place, as I've said. I never experienced anti-semitism...until I came to England, and that makes me happier to be part of my minority - again, maybe out of sheer perversity. Where I live now I feel I'm part of a number of minorities: as an American, as a Jew and as a woman, that great majority minority.

I'm most at home in exile, among exiles. I feel more affinity with a Palestinian (which isn't really so odd, when you think about it) than I might with an Englishperson. I've managed my outsider situation by working in prisons or in a place like Ruskin College - the 'working man's college', as it is known - or among the disenfranchised. Of course I'm now a foreigner in my own country now, America being strange to me in precisely the way England used to be. There's a certain poignant sadness in this situation. Some of my poems (perhaps more so the earlier ones) have a kind of peculiar nationalism of - the learned nationalism of the outsider or displaced person, which its own language, subsequently employed more broadly, for all transactions, including romantic ones.

My family came through Ellis Island in NYC, like a huge percentage of the US population. It was the usual emigrant story of Jews seeking a better life in the US, and running from Cossacks and Pogroms. One grandparent was Polish/Russian, another Latvian and the third from Hungary. I've never been to any of these places but hope to go sometime and see if I can track down a few Salzmans or Jacksons (a changed name of course). One side is Pasternak, and I grew very excited when I heard this. My Great-Aunt reassured me that yes, it was indeed the same family as the Hollywood Producer, when naturally I was thinking of Boris. We're still not clear on this connection. I live in hope. I am related to Edward G. Robinson, an actor from the 30's who played mainly gangsters - a criminal-ish connection I can't help but relish. My grandfather was an extraordinary polymath but he and his six siblings all worked to put money into the pot to send the youngest to medical school - that's how it was done - from where he emerged to become a pretty famous shrink, specialising in human sexuality. Two other brothers were union men; one Great-Uncle subscribed to Soviet Life his whole life. My grandfather tutored me through High School - where Frank McCourt was my English teacher - as he did my grandmother, which was how he met and courted her.

This polymath grandfather was a Levi or Cohen, I forget which; the fact is passed down in families through word-of-mouth, but is relevant only to those with the appropriate genitals - as with so much in life. His wife, my favourite grandmother, was a child vaudeville actress. My father is a composer, and my mother is an environmentalist. Well, all this is raw material, and I don't expect I've gotten through a quarter of it. Who knows what I'll do with it all, but I doubt this mix of artistic and political will go to waste.

Of course I lost relatives in the Holocaust so I have only a short ancestry behind me whereas my artist husband's family came to the US as pilgrims. Before around 1900. there's a big blank. I have some early c.1900 photos of various relatives, some of whom look intriguingly dark-skinned and Gypsy...) Although Americans are mocked for their search for roots, in another way

the Jews especially re-invented themselves by obliterating whatever of their past was available to erase. One set of my grandparents seemed to air-brush out their Jewishness completely, and even my father's generation are strangely uninterested in their own history. Maybe this is partly why Americans, more generally, are cavalier about their heritage - because their identity is conjured up, invented, newly-minted, even though they appreciate the notion of heritage in England, where everything is supposed to be old. In the US everything's supposed to be new. I wonder if this accounts for the US poet's willingness to take more risks (which may mean more bad poems too, but, hey, at least they try!). This is another affinity I feel with Michael Donaghy; I often thought that both of us had re-invented ourselves in another place from scratch, away from family and a familiar place. Right now, I'm interested in returning to an American vernacular overlaid on all this Britishness instilled in me. Of course, I'm not convinced that this American voice has ever been absent - as I'm sure various English editors who have seen my work would agree".

You also write essays, in particular I'm thinking of *Babel* (printed in *Mslexia* and reprinted in *Incorporating Writing Issue 1 Vol 3*), this medium is often seen as a direct opposite to poetry. What drew you, to what is traditionally perceived as academic, to writing essays?

"I've never thought of myself as a writer of any particular genre, but simply a writer. Reticent is not a word people who know me would apply to me, but that's exactly what I've been up-to-date as regards my fiction, which I've always written, along with various kinds of non-fiction: essays, journalism and criticism (about which I've not been reticent enough!) The poetry world is a small one, and the criticism culture in Britain emphasises a biting wit, often at expense of the writer. This is not to say I think criticism shouldn't include opinions, but it's easier to be witty while being cruel.

I'm very interested in writing which I term cultural journalism, which includes under its heading a multitude of literary sins (memoir, travel writing, anecdotal essays which verge on the academic), and I'm fond of sin. I've even written a screenplay with Anne Rouse, another American poet who has been transplanted in Britain long enough to also have a shared identity. I'm working on fiction and have been writing libretti and lyrics, a natural progression from my musical training. I don't feel the desire to write much criticism anymore, but would love to have a year off teaching to do what I know I can do with a longer work of fiction. May I be granted that blessing. I've learned how few writers - and poets in particular - are genuinely self-supporting freelance writers, with no second income, trust fund or the luck (or pedigree) to have a succession of grants, minus the hard teaching slog which many of us depend on. I've never been anything but completely self-supporting, and it's tough. Very few poets I know are, of if they are they have a domestic and/or secretarial support system".

Do you feel there is a 'glass ceiling' for female poets in UK Literature? "This is my hobby-horse (god forgive - many others don't) but I love the way the (mainly guy) poets, in their charmed circles, dismiss as nonsense whatever one says about the realities of being a woman poet/writer. Let them try to live my life for a week, or the lives of many others struggling year in and year out. Oh well, mustn't complain. To hell with that; I'll complain. A well-known female poet friend once said to me that it takes two or three books for women poets to achieve what male poets achieve in a single book. Repeatedly, I see nice bright young lads showing up and sweeping away the awards, and scratching each other's backs for the next ten years, in pubs. It's impossible not to be just a little cynical.

Of course, some women achieve quick success too, but often more through facility with career game-playing than with words - forging the right

alliances, and having amazingly helpful love affairs. I knew who my real friends were after I broke up with Don, which event affected my 'career' (if you can call it that) profoundly. I have to remind people that I 'discovered' and pushed Don, and supported him financially, domestically and as secretary for years, although of course we were mutually beneficial as each other's editors. It's never a good thing to have to tug on people's coat sleeves and remind them of such things. Naturally, I never had this kind of support myself. I've have to do my own taxes and my own laundry - that great enemy of the writer, as I believe Martin Amis once put it. The joke is that women poets need wives too. Early on, I had a fairy grandmother who helped support my career - if it could be called that. I spent the rest of my life irritated to discover I had to eventually figure it all myself, and do it all myself. Having figured it all out, I realise too late one important secret: be incompetent and very bad at things so that someone else steps in to do it for you.

Many women poet colleague describe in private their own similar experiences, which they know better than admit to many men, since such statements endanger one's position. I'm acutely aware of the kind of backlash I invite by saying these same old tired things here again, but then the same old, tired things rule our lives. When I broke up with Don Paterson, some friends (only a few) suddenly dropped from my orbit, and I was once reduced to complaining that I got more attention for my alliance with a male poet, than for the work itself - thus reiterating exactly this fact, by pointing it out. Don himself, who'd certainly championed my work previously, suddenly failed to mention me when it counted. When Oxford dropped its list, I was out in the cold for a while. This is personal experience but it there are analogies in others' stories, often told in private. (Here's the impolite Yank speaking out again on a few unpleasant home-truths, which certainly are not just relevant to me...). I do think women are much more at the mercy of things nothing to do with the work itself. Some poets have been known to sleep their way to the top. My joke is that I'm the sort of person to sleep my way to the bottom - sheer perversity again".

The editing process is often where Poets are made or destroyed, how does your personal editing compare to working with an editor?

"I've done virtually all my own editing, except for isolated experiences with newspaper editors - usually good ones, although occasionally editors have abused this position to introduce their own agendas via some new, young writer, who puts herself forward for the job, without suspecting the Machiavellian strategies at play in the small, back-stabbing poetry world. I do believe that editing is a large part of the writing process, but I equally treasure the other more instinctive and mysterious part of the process. I've had to become a good editor, never having had the luxury one at my disposal as often as I'd like. I enjoy all the editing work I've done - for Bloomsbury, The Printer's Devil magazine and for other book projects - perhaps more than I enjoy teaching in fact. When they start hiring American editors in the English poetry scene, somebody let me know".

What are you working on at present?

"I'm working on a novel, and short stories. Or rather I'm *not* working on the novel I should be writing, since I to pay the bills. Teaching is hard work, if you do it well, which I try to, and I teach all ages and levels, and in all situations, as I've taught myself to do - out of necessity. I need to find some impossible sum of money for medical things. I think patronage is a terrific idea. Should there be any rich people who are also keen on this system, I'm available for work".

Finally, if you could invite anyone to supper (living or dead) who would they be and why?

"There are too many choices. I've been reading a biography on Benjamin Franklin a fascinatingly eclectic, true Renaissance man who was also down-to-earth. Surely good dinner party company. I'd be old enough to be safe from his roving, groping hands, although I understand he was pretty indiscriminate in his amorous inclinations and he liked older women too - though I don't yet think of myself as older yet, I must say! I was recently reminded about D.H. Lawrence's hatchet job on Franklin, in his *Studies of American Literature*. (I loathed *Women in Love* but *The Rainbow* and *Sons and Lovers* had an enormous influence on me; I don't care so much for the poems, but I can appreciate their intent...sort of.) So, maybe I could be a not-quite-silent third party at an event which involved sparring between these two men, punctuated by my occasional pithy and perhaps surprising contribution or rejoinder. Afterwards, these two gentlemen would no doubt withdraw during the Ball, since I can't imagine that they'd be real keen on dancing, unlike Queen Elizabeth 1st, whom I could join, dancing a jig or hornpipe. She wrote poetry too and I wonder what she'd make of mine. In advance, she'd have to know that I had no designs whatsoever on the monarchy; some contemporary English literati might need to be reminded of the same. What I want mostly is the time to write what I need to write. Wouldn't that be nice".

 Interview with Ian Rankin
 Interview by Felix Cheong

Ian Rankin was born in Fife, Scotland, in 1960. He was educated at Edinburgh University. On graduating he worked for the civil service, later working as a researcher and journalist.

His first published book was *The Flood* (1986). *Knots and Crosses* (1987) was the first in a series of novels featuring Inspector John Rebus and set in contemporary Scotland. Other novels in the series include *Hide and Seek* (1991), *Strip Jack* (1992), *Wolfman* (1992), *The Black Book* (1993), *Mortal Causes* (1994), *Black and Blue* (1997) (winner of the Crime Writers' Association Macallan Gold Dagger for Fiction), *The Hanging Garden* (1997), *Dead Souls* (1999), *The Falls* (2001), *Resurrection Men* (2002) and *A Question of Blood* (2003). His latest Rebus novel is *Fleshmarket Close* (2004). Several of these novels have been adapted for television, starring John Hannah as Rebus. Three of Rankin's novels were written under the pseudonym Jack Harvey: *Witch Hunt* (1993), *Bleeding Hearts* (1994) and *Blood Hunt* (1995).

Ian Rankin is married with two sons, and lives in Edinburgh, Scotland. He was awarded an OBE in 2002.

Like a suspect under the harsh light of interrogation, Ian Rankin strikes you sometimes as a tad too rehearsed, his answers studied and unfazed. He may disarm you with a witty comment, the lilting lull of the Scottish accent, but there's no denying that this top-selling crime author, acclaimed by *The Times* as "arguably Scotland's finest living writer", is one cool customer.

After all, having published titles that account for 10% market share of all crime book sales in Britain, he has probably done numerous interviews. And as a former journalist (with the now-defunct *Hi-Fi Review*), he also knows the media circus inside out - its drills and tricks, its hunger for sound bites.

Which is why throughout the one-hour interview - he's in Singapore on a promotional tour for his latest Inspector John Rebus novel, *A Question of Blood* - Rankin is generous with quotable lines.

For instance, on his approach to writing, he wryly comments: "Writing is therapeutic for me. It's a way of controlling the world, playing God in a way that you can't do in real life."

Elaborating, the father of two boys continues: "I give a lot of the crap that's happened in my life to Rebus [so that] I can be a more balanced personality. Most crime writers would be very unhinged if they didn't write it all down on paper... People you've got to watch out for are those who write romantic novels. Because they have no outlet for the darker side of their imagination, they tend to, in real life, be frustrated and angry."

For a moment, you're not sure if he's being serious. But a flicker of a smile gives him away and you suddenly feel like you're sitting opposite that Kevin Spacey character in the movie *The Usual Suspects*. All charm and calm, having a ball of a time at your expense, his wit between the lines.

On a more serious note, though, Rankin, who was born in Fife but now calls Edinburgh home, admits that writing-as-catharsis does come with its drawbacks. "When I'm writing a book, I have to be in character. [Rebus] is inside my head, for six months to a year. And when I finish the book and it's time to exorcise him, it's very difficult."

The upshot: "I'm grumpy and grouchy and my wife hates it! Because Rebus has a dark world view, much darker than mine. So I can't say anything good about the world. It's terrible!"

Sounds like the occupational hazard plaguing actors too. But Rankin, who received the OBE award in 2002 for "services to literature", seems more than ready to grin and bear it. Since he intuitively understands where Rebus is coming from, he can afford to cut his creation some slack.

"For Rebus, the job he does is a curse because it means he can't see how beautiful Edinburgh is. All he sees is a crime scene. A huge crime scene waiting to happen."

The more Rankin fills you in on his relationship with Rebus, the more you notice the love-hate dynamic at work. Rarely has an author identified so intimately with his protagonist that his own learning curve turns in tandem with his alter ego's.

"In the first book [*Knots and Crosses*], I didn't really know Rebus. He was just a means of telling a story. I was 24 and a student [at the University of Edinburgh]. What did I know about life? Not much. And he was 40 and he's been through it all.

"Now I'm married with kids and I know more about what it's like to be a parent, which I didn't know enough of in that first book. Now Rebus *is* the plot. He *is* the story. I've grown more like him in some ways."

Rankin is aware that at some point, he and Rebus must part ways. Despite pleas from die-hard fans not to kill off the character, Rankin feels the day of reckoning may not be that far away.

"The problem is: How do you keep it fresh? Have you got anything new to say about this character? Have you got anything to say about the world through the character's eyes?

"That's the problem with a series: You get into a wheel, a treadmill. Everybody expects another Rebus novel so I've got to write another Rebus novel. But if I ever start thinking that way, that's the end of the series, right there."

Ever the shrewd media man, Rankin is keeping his cards close to his chest and not committing himself one way or another. For he knows only too well that what he says now can and will be used against him.

 Taking the Leap: An interview with Lucy English
 Interview by Bixby Monk

Lucy English lives in Bristol. She was born in Sri Lanka and grew up in Ruislip. After leaving the University of East Anglia with a BA in English and American Literature she lived in the countryside in tied cottages, growing her own vegetables, keeping a goat and having babies. In 1985 she moved to Bristol and worked on the Windmill Hill City Farm until 2000. Since being bored out of her box in Devon with three small children she started writing and in 1994-5 took an MA in creative writing. In December 1996 Fourth Estate signed her up for a three book deal. Her first novel Selfish People was published in February 1998. Lucy is a lecturer in Creative Writing at Bath Spa University College. She is presently working on a fourth novel and appears in the collection Velocity: The Best of Apples & Snakes. She took time out of her busy schedule to talk to inc. about her work.

Writers are often hyped, giving the general public an image of the sexy but intelligent individual, the diligent drunk and the writer who snorts his advance. The media love to demonize writers but grow weary of them fast. So when the media goes home, how do they explain their job to their peers and their family without the conversation falling in echoing tumble weed after the answer?

"A writer puts into words what most of us would call daydreaming. Sitting on a bus, or a train and making up stories about the other people is, for me, the first step to writing. Writing is about asking 'What if?'"

Lucy English is a writer, who juggles poetry alongside the more successful aspect of her writing, novels. 'This Poem' recently appeared in Velocity: The Best of Apples & Snakes. Poetry and Prose are cousins, kissing cousins at best, poetry affords time and prose devours it but both have their merits to a writer tackling ideas that pass between them.

"I wanted to show how writing changes depending on what age we are. When we are young it is much more about how we feel rather than the sort of word choices we have made, the danger as we get older is that our writing can become too cosy, too unchallenging. That is why we need the new idea, the just born baby, to get us inspired again".

English has taken this on board, making the jump from poetry to prose, and back again, introducing readers to different aspects of her writing.

"A poem can be about an experience and doesn't need plot or characterisation. It can be about a mood. And, of course, poetry is shorter. It takes me over a year to write a novel and it might take me an afternoon to write a poem".

But the novel is a long process, with an extensive and time consuming editorial process, how did you embark on your first novel?

"Writing develops from being passionate, clumsy outbursts into something more polished. My first novel took around three years to write but I wasn't working on it continually. I worked in short intense bursts followed by interludes of nothing. Not the best way to work".

Most wannabe writers fall at the first hurdle, believing, in many cases, that they can emulate the hyped writers seen in the press and become rich but for most writers, it is the long-haul process, in which they develop through a series of terrible supporting jobs.

"Before my first novel was published I did a variety of jobs including child minder, house cleaner, telephone canvasser, and workshop leader. I was a single mother with three children so a full time job was a difficult task. I now work as a teacher of creative writing at Bath Spa University".

The media still persist on making writers trendy and swinging the double edged book deal that is the cult of celebrity. Lulling many dreamers into the idea that writing is easy and that the money should be to.

"The way a mediocre writer can be hyped up by publicity, novels written by celebrities, I hate that. I also hate the next big something that disappears by next week. I want to see more quality fiction written by young writers. I know it exists. Commercialism, the constant focus of the publishing industry on sales figure".

But the opportunities?

"There are a lot of good writers and more opportunities for people to write. That's the good side".

And for those who have chattered about writing for the last ten years and done nothing?

"Do it. Don't talk about it. Join a writers group. Go on a course. Learn as much as you can. Read as much as you can. Find out how other writers do it. Set aside time every week to do your writing. Books don't write themselves. Write as much as you can".

English is an example of this mantra, signed to Fourth Estate soon after graduation and now with three books under her belt and another on the way.

"I am writing a novel set in Bristol. It is about a woman who finds she doesn't get pregnant and her partner leaves her for somebody who does. It's not a totally bleak story but it does have its bleak moments".

Her influences?

"In poetry I am a great fan of Selima Hill though my poetry is not like hers at all. I also like Helen Dunmore, Sylvia Plath, Jackie Kay and Toni Morrison. I spent my teenage years reading the Romantic Poets and my early twenties reading the Beats".

Many writers find it hard to relight the enthusiasm that sparked off their first novel, they often descend into writers block but English is now in the midst of her fourth novel.

"I love writing. I love the space I get into mentally when I write. I love being absorbed in a creative task. I love creating characters and sorting out their lives. I love surprising myself when I write something good. I love it when somebody says they have enjoyed one of my poems or novels. I love that way that writing can communicate to many people far more than a conversation can".

 Moving Up The Bench
 Column by George Wallace

When the definitive history of the Beat literary phenomenon is ultimately written, Janine Pomy Vega's name and her art will figure significantly in it.

This is true for several reasons, aside from the fact that she's a survivor. 'We move up the bench,' said Vega a couple of years ago, at a memorial for Marty Matz, one of the last of the 'vagabond subterraneans' with whom she has been associated from the 1950s alternative literary scene.

As dozens of fellow Bohemian artists have fallen by the wayside, Vega has

moved up the bench to take a prominent position as a voice from the Beat literary era.

Visitors to the Poetry Barn, a particularly lively 10-year running venue for poetry in Huntington, Long Island, recently experienced this for themselves. The barn was host to a rare regional encounter with the legendary Vega - as well as the very talented poet Andy Clausen. And in the legendary and challenging conditions which prevail at the old barn in the heat of summer, the duo - who make a home upstate near Woodstock - tweaked a full house with poetry that combined political passion, intense rhetoric, humor and considerable rhythmic and poetic magic.

For Clausen, years of mentorship and comradely interaction with Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso inform his work. Even moreso in the case of Janine Pomy-Vega, who in performance draws on nearly fifty years of participation in and experience of the alternative literary scene.

Contemporary accounts of women associated with the so-called Beat era tend to focus on the pre-women's lib relegation to the sidelines which many endured during the male-dominated era. But to read Vega's aesthetic accomplishment that way would be to sell it short. One need only turn to the writings of Herbert Huncke - whose soul of Baltimore gentility and extra-societal grace belied the mere underworld grifter role that some would ascribe to him - in seminal works like "The Evening Sun Turned Crimson," to see that original Beat figures were struck by the fuller light of her first entry onto the scene. Janine, writes Huncke, "preferred her own means of obtaining her answers. She possessed curiosity concerning living and wanted to search on her own - I was honored she trusted me."

Janine Pomy-Vega grew up in Union City, New Jersey, where she emerged from "a happy childhood and teenage years" to an young adulthood in which she felt a constant need to travel and experience life. While still in high school, she was magnetized to the Beat scene in Manhattan, became lovers with Peter Orlovsky, and developed deep friendships with Herbert Huncke and Elise Cowen.

Vega's name began to figure prominently in the Beat scene through her associations with them, as well as Ginsburg, Orlovsky and the subterranean alternative arts scene of Manhattan in the 1950s and 60s.

A well-spring for inspiration that would inform the personae of the East Coast beats, it was a meeting place for art, jazz and literature with a quasi-underworld melange of drugs, homosexuality and petty crime. This admixture went a long way to producing the fundamental character of the transcontinental Beat/Bohemian scene, which attempted to carve out a free alternative lifestyle in the iceberg of Eisenhower America in the 1950s, and Pomy Vega was in the midst of it.

The startlingly direct "Fernando," published by City Lights in 1968, provides a raw and ready glimpse into that scene. But for what is perhaps the best reading of her work, the best bet is to obtain a copy of the 2000 "Mad Dogs of Trieste: New and Selected Poems," from Black Sparrow Press, a book that is frequently to be found in shops stocking contemporary poetry.

*If you don't know what
your name is, how
can I introduce myself?
-fr Polish Cantina*

Over the years, Vega has carved out numerous interest areas for aesthetic and polemic exploration. In particular, her connections to South America

are profound. From 71-75 she lived variously in Peru, Columbia and Bolivia, including a stay on the Island of the Sun in Lake Titicaca, during which time she completed two books of poetry (*Journal of a Hermit, Morning Passage*). Other poems reflecting on South America have followed since, including the particularly beautiful *A Gift of Flowers*, written in Peru in 1990:

*You ask if I remember the flower
you gave me last year
on the puna, called Rima Rima*

*more than the flowers
I remember
on this or that mountain*

*but the flower you put in my hat just now
from the cactus Hudcuru Huayta
with a stick through the center
to keep it open*

*drones like a bumblebee
in the wind
as I run down the hill.*

Not that Vega is immune from social and political criticism - in her performance at the Poetry Barn, her allusion to issues of gender and contemporary political events was pointed. Yet this was no mere grandstanding - rather a distinct sense that here is a full human voice at work - neither preaching to the choir nor shouting at the imagined barricades.

Pomy Vega eschews the easy in favor of engaging her listeners in an impassioned discourse. Still, her political statements can be quite incisive, as in *Luricgancho*, which concludes:

*Ciao, South American continent
the murders in your face
are less disguised than where I live -
one sees who to hate
To the north the civilized killers
corporate fists, the ones with power
have no human faces at all.
They have no face.*

Vega also has considerable power to her 'social' voice, which draws from years working with prisoners upstate. This topic combines her impassioned political consciousness with an inherent emotional calm, borne of wide philosophical vision: '*one is inside/and one is outside/the same plane passing through/the same sky over both,*' she writes in one poem. It is an aphorism she brings to riveting life and gestural immediacy, with a surge of intimacy in the final lines: '*inside, walking out/through stone corridors/I rub a little lipstick on the wall.*'

Artist and musician Bill Heine, who survived the era to remain a performing artist into the present time, recalled her beauty, her early efforts at writing, her relationship with her first husband Fernando Vega and her overarching survivor instinct, which brought her through sometimes harrowing lifestyles on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Haight Ashbury, and Paris. "She's an incredible survivor," said Heine in an interview with Carson Arnold recently, "very strong."

Some of that resilience is suggested by the inspiration she finds in nature, and a kind of East Coast zen attentiveness – aptly encapsulated in the 1997 poem "Morning," which Vega wrote on the New York Thruway in the month of February:

*A mountain chain of clouds
substantial, thick
suddenly broken through by the sun*

*in just the way
the ego is broken through
by climbing*

*real mountains in a real somewhere
and you have done that
you have given me back my joy.*

While other women who have emerged as noted writers of the Beat era have frequently maintained an aggressiveness of style or theme – Ann Waldman with her stage histrionics, Diane DiPrima with her frequently sharp political rhetoric – Vega's presence and poetry reveal a complexity of vision and subtlety of intellect which approaches that kind of joy, and affords those fortunate enough to encounter her work a precious glimpse of it.

Alien: Life in Asia
Column by Andrew O'Donnell

The first time I touched down in Asia would be January 15th 1999. I'd just finished a degree the previous year and had spent the last six months doing not very much.. working sporadically. The two jobs I remember most specifically were a glass-collecting job at The Old Three Crowns in Bolton centre and a nightshift at a post office depot in Westhoughton, Bolton. I slowly got bored of the bar job and concentrated on the nightshift for maybe a month or two. All of this time I had the luxury of accommodation, since I was still living at home with my Dad.

The reason I remember the date so well is because, for whatever reason, I've found myself leaving/arriving in foreign places on the same date quite a few times since.. it's become some kind of personal-national holiday. These two words.. personal and national also have some kind of meaning for me now.. why, I don't specifically know.

And the money? It always disappoints me when I read travelogues and am never given any specific information as to how the person raised the funds to travel. Not that I'm obsessed by it.. but I often wonder why, especially when this person is talking about the liberty and education that travelling or living in a foreign country is ..I can't help thinking, in my practical way, '..so how did you stump up the cash?'.. call me cynical.

For me there are two truths when talking about funding for trips and that kind of thing.. the first is an age old cliché– You do not need much money to travel.. to experience new places and new people. Fairly true. But that depends on how much of your own cultural baggage you like to carry with you. The less money you take, the cheaper you have to make things.. the cheaper you have to make things.. the more chance you will get for chatting with local people along the way. But these are problems of what you deem to be necessary for a rewarding trip. If you're up for living in luxury at a nice hotel and still open to spending much of your time with local people then whatever works, I guess. But this notion also hints at the idea of the Englishman abroad.. the stereotype of a man in a white

suit, drinking exported scotch and holding court on exactly what this new culture is all about. I have to be wary of that.

For me.. it also goes without saying that you have to go alone.

Travel in Asia, more than anything, is about how you treat the idea of observation. In countries where you cannot speak the language (or can only just about survive with a few words etc) you are forced into becoming more of an observer. You can partake in all kinds of events.. but, language-wise, you contribute less and, because of that, you are not IN the scene as much as you were in your home country. You are mostly an observer.

This can be what frustrates a lot of people.. what they seem to do is either get sick of it pretty quick, stay longer, observe.. but with a kind of smooth contempt for the conversations that go on around them.. not valuing these conversations in the same way as they would at home.. and thus justifying their not wanting/having to be a part of them. Or there are the very few who actually learn the language.. and an even smaller amount of people who have somehow faced this unknown aspect about everything that is going on around them and are perfectly happy for that aspect of mystery to go on for as long as they want. This last type is the true observer.. one who is totally happy to know even the most concrete things rendered in the local language as things that will always be an absolute mystery to them. And, even then, I'm guessing that knowing the language does not somehow explain everything about a culture. Culture is not explicit in what people say or do.. it is present in what people expect.. in how and why people are disappointed.. in what they hope for.

I mean, most people I know have lived as ex-pats for a period of their lives.. even if it's just been a few months. What I realise so far.. is that most places have been explored.. there are not that many places left to visit in relative safety.. without bumping into a few other travellers along the way. There is no totally uninhabited place that does not take some drastic altering of a cultural viewpoint to change. By that I mean.. a person truly travelling into a truly unknown place has to somehow recognise and dismantle all those cultural textures that exist in themselves.. everything that could be 'from a place' must be discarded without a second thought, without any kind of mourning process. This could be anything from expecting to be able to get a cup of tea when you go outside.. to knowing where you can read/see something in your own language. Again.. expectations have to change. The most perfect viewpoint for travel is to expect nothing.. and expect everything. It's this kind of zone that I stepped into when I got off the plane in Mumbai on January 15th 1999.

The reason I often give for spending most of my time since University in Asia is 'divorce'. When I was at Uni I was still lucky enough to receive a grant. My parents divorced some time before the nineties (to the best of my knowledge!).. so the maintenance my Dad gave my Mum for my upkeep was saved while I was living on government funds. By the time I left University I had a couple of grand to do what I liked with. I always find this excuse a little bit grandiose.

I've never had much money and people have had to bail me out along the way. BUT that money was enough to give me the bug for travel. I'm still paying back what I owe.

So.. the summer and autumn of 98 found me working a number of shitty jobs and planning my first big travelling spree. I've yet to top that first experience in many ways.

I chose India. I don't really know why. A friend had spent some time in India at the time and the place had somehow piqued my interest. When people ask me why I chose India I usually reply that I don't know. It's still true for me. I'm not quite sure why. My friend hadn't particularly enjoyed India ..but somehow I was fascinated. He wrote me a letter on pink toilet roll from some non-descript place.. and the little contact we had throughout his travels (he'd opted for a round-the-world ticket) always seemed mysterious and intense in equal measure. He had travelled to Japan on his way back and was now basing himself there, teaching English. So I planned to spend four months in India and another month or so in Japan.

Throughout the winter I did the usual round of Xmas activities. Nights in pubs.. nights in pubs. I also remember an evening around the New Year when I got thoroughly wasted and, in my heightened state of non-awareness, proceeded to lay into my Mum and a number of friends.. but especially my Mum.. I called her all the names under the sun that night.. I'm still amazed by the fact that she still has anything to do with me.

The truth was that I was scared.. even I didn't know it at the time.. and perhaps I knew that I wouldn't be coming home in anything resembling the same role (I've been back to England lots of times since.. even spending over a year living in London) ...that I might not be back at all ..this was a plunge that I had to take and yet I may have known that the consequences would be enormous.. in terms of the course of my life. There is something extremely terrifying in altering your way of life.. choosing the totally unfamiliar over security. There always seem to be degrees of loss though.. a lot of sacrifices have to come in the way of grand plans.. a lot of subsequent idiotic posturing too.

My first night in Mumbai is vividly carved in my memory. I can remember it totally as if it were a whole, concrete thing.. like it were an object.. a personal talisman that I always unconsciously keep in whatever room I find myself in. I don't remember very much from my early childhood.. or at least don't remember that childhood in the same way as with this first night in Asia. I'll start out in the present tense just to give you the sense of immediacy it always has.. so that it's as close to me as when I find myself thinking of it.

I'm in the airport. The cab. No. The airport. Changing money. The colour brown. The colour yellow. I'm in the cab. Everyone was hollering for fairs. I'm exiting the airport. I'm at the bureau de change. Changing. Money. Then dual carriageways. A hot wet half-petrol-half-sweat smell. Like the air is full of sand. Or mosquitoes. Thick with something. Saying the name of my hotel. I'm leaving the airport. The heaviness of my rucksack. In the cab. Palm trees? But maybe something else. Night time. The heat, more than anything. The humidity. The thought of a half-flicked-through Hindi phrasebook. Stretching for some kind of reassurance. Roads. Car horns. Car horns. Car horns. The colour yellow. Cabs, probably. Headlights. You can smoke in cabs? Everyone was hollering for fairs at the airport. I smoke. I sweat. The dark. 10am. I smoke. Almost as if everything is in third person. Like he doesn't have to be in this scene.. just now.

The taxi-ride into central Mumbai takes around an hour. It is also a totally new experience to the foreigner since much of the outskirts of Mumbai are taken up by many of the poorest in the city. Shanty towns spring up by the side of the road. Half-built shacks. I have the thought of mattresses in my head.. I don't know why. Maybe lines and lines of mattresses by the road.. people trying to the sleep in the fumes that so obviously spill from the road. You can smell that burning when you travel in Mumbai. It's just there. It kind of mingles with the heat.

Funny how memory plays tricks on you.. because I think now about the mattresses.. it may have been that there was just one... but that it struck me so hard that I multiplied it in my head. Perhaps I still don't want to think of hundreds or thousands of people sleeping on mattresses beside the road. Or maybe one mattress was enough for me to see how the poor in Mumbai live. One mattress is somehow enough. Because it could be mine. How the mind clings to symbols just as much as poetry. The reality of travel situations must be even more incomprehensible.

But thinking of a side of a road that is Lived On.. no doubt.. that is the impression I got.. not a road that is used specifically for travel. people Stay here.. that may have been what I was thinking at the time. And not even a road.. we're talking motorway, if anything. A constant bustle.. the mass of a people, the weight of them.

The glow of lights thinning in the black-brown night. I heaved that rucksack into the cab. The airport. Only a cloud of English tobacco smoke for my head as I lean back and away from the window. Jetlagged. Then the girl and her hand. Mostly her hand. And her voice. Dollar. Dollar. Dollar. Ten rupees? Rupees? I give her the money. Did my driver turn around? Does he know? But he knows too well, maybe? What does this money mean to me? What does it mean to you? Thinning roads. Road stalls. Food. The colour yellow. Airport. I get out onto a cracked pavement. The colour red. The colour brown. Up some steps. Tiled steps.

When I reach the top of the stairs I find myself in the strangest reception area ever. The place is being tiled and there are still workers milling around at this hour of the night (10 or 11pm) Half of the room is tiled but there is obviously still a lot of work to be done. Wires dangle from ceiling fittings. I approach the makeshift desk and book myself in. The guy asks me for my passport saying he'll return it in the morning (this was standard practice wherever I travelled) ..but I'm not having it. I say that he can look at it now but that I won't be giving it him. He eventually gives in and shows me a room just off the reception area.

Brown room. Brown carpet. T.V. Bed. Brown curtains. Bathroom. No toilet roll. When in Rome. Anything else I need is cigarettes, water. I hand him a hundred. Repeat the scan of the room. Brown carpet etc. Brown world. Brown bed covers. Turn the T.V on. Sit down. Edge of bed.

I got up just now and had a look around for the notebooks I kept from the time. Luckily I carried a notebook around with me everywhere. These notes became what would be something I called 'The India Variations' (a book-length poem that thankfully I never attempted to get published).

I look around my brown world. Open the curtains. India is outside. I stroll up and down the length of the room.. a room like so many hotel rooms anywhere.. but it is irrevocably infused with India. A man comes back with cigarettes and mineral water. I sit back down on the edge of the bed. Sound of the television. I find an ashtray and turn the packet of Marlboro Lights over and over in my hands.. peel off the plastic. Open the packet. Take out a cig. Light it.

It took me a long time to get to sleep that night. I remembered a letter this same friend of mine had written to me about India. It seemed to help me come to terms with my situation. I can't remember exactly what he wrote. I guess it was something like- you won't know where the fuck you are, why you are there.. what brought you there.. but it doesn't matter. Things get better. In a skewed way I must have been glad for that first step to be over.

I also realised that setting up a mosquito net was a pretty useless idea. It didn't seem to work the way I'd planned. There was nothing to hang it from. I don't think I even attempted trying to use it after that.

The Screaming Rock - A poetry project for Ireland (and me)

by Dave Wood

Co-operative Business Consultants are part sponsors of the project.
www.sluggerotoole.com has also been invaluable as have Word and Action (Dorset) Ltd.

I want to thank (without mentioning names) friends, family and contacts for their absolute support for me before, during and now after the event. It didn't matter whether they could give anything or not, the fact they joined in the excitement, gave encouragement etc was all the support I craved. I've enjoyed the challenge of the project and it feels suitable that I found support in the grass roots.

I am happy to break new ground

Introduction

*and here the screaming rock
its eyes against the sea and all she hides
shouts obscenities
where heather clinging to its sides
gives whispers to our feet...*

At the beginning of decade 1988 - 98, I joined and started to tour internationally with community theatre co-operative, Word And Action (Dorset) Ltd. My main position in the work quickly fell to organising tours in Britain as well as to undergo the practical hands-on work of helping groups build stories and act them through to completion in a central space. It was exhilarating work that kept you on your toes (and behind the wheel of a car for long periods of time) and gave a richness of experience that, for me still lies unsurpassed in any other job.

One learnt to expect the unexpected, groups hotch-potching together highly original plays by responding collectively, vocally and abstractedly to a random question and answer process. Parts in the play were acted by the audience supported by ourselves. Everything was represented by people - tables, chairs, the moon (!) etc. Because of the speed of the story gathering process these often quirky statements revealed (through symbol) great insights into the groups concerned. But that (sorry) is another story...

It was through Word And Action, I made my first visit to Ireland. I'd previously been across the water to other countries that spoke English as their non-native tongue. Sweden was my first sojourn abroad (Italy came later) The Swedes' English was perfect.

Ireland felt different; 'it is foreign, because it's across the water, but it's not...' I pondered, and I remember having the conversation with my colleague at the time, Michael Fealty.

I had a lot of questions to ask and was ready to make some bold statements about a subject I came to realise I knew little about in terms of the grass roots. I was soon shushed down in the public arena. The song 'whatever you say, say nothing' has always been a reminder of those times. Sensitivity was not my strong point but it was to be an absolute essential.

We got on with the job in hand; working in schools, colleges, hospitals and

universities. In the first year of being an apprentice to the work, utmost concentration had to be in learning a process which felt (and was at the time) completely alien to me. Along with learning came periods of stress, frustration and anger, usually projected on to my colleagues who were experienced in handling most battle periods in the growing pains of a newly initiated community arts worker. The processes of Instant theatre was digging its talons into me, asking me to respond quickly and fluidly to situations way beyond my ken. Somehow I pulled through and stayed to enjoy and grow a further ten years. Christ knows how.

The journey through Ireland was about four weeks with a lot of time spent in the north. Mick (or Michael to his mum) had instigated the tour. Now the brains and spirit behind www.sluggerotoole.com, he continues a similar role that he held in Word And Action; facilitator of a myriad voices. His (now award winning) blog site, dedicated to the Irish situation is dipped into by everyone from the passing surfer through to political representatives wanting a genuine cutting edge update on the peace process.

So Mick became my knowledge base - both for the work and for his home background. He was from Holywood near Belfast where his mother still lives (I wish I knew what tea she bought, because she seems to thrive on it!).

The company's dedication to the freeing up of language led me into poetry. I'd never really studied it except at school. As a child I went through a period of composing what I went on to call tum te tum verse, the kind of stanzas that would trip merrily along like your were bouncing on the back of a camel. My vision of poetry changed when I joined Word And Action. Regular gatherings run by the collective invited the reading out of poems previously written to the evening. There was no critical analysis just gentle probings to clarify and open out points in the lines. My own poetry by this time was run by the intellect and the heart hadn't quite brokered free as yet; I was writing it as 'part of the job' . I could hear my muse laughing her stockings off in the back of beyond. Nevertheless I persisted.

I returned to Ireland, not always with Mick, and each time my experiences of the country were recorded into notebooks. Some were scratchings at verse or short lines that seemed prose, others were far tighter poems and honed over several days. Some were a few words long but I felt were poignant. The poem based at a day centre near the Sinn Fein headquarters in Belfast;

ballyronan day centre

she said
i'll say a prayer for you tonight
 she called me *sir*
 and constantly asked me
 what to do
 amidst all the bombs
 and the threat of more
 i try to make sense of old age

Nowadays, you can still hear the gasp when you tell people you'll be going to Belfast or that you've already worked there. But it's a lively and lovely city. Yet, looking back, I can understand their fear. On an early visit there, I was put off walking into a department store by being confronted by a heavily armed guard. He didn't say anything (he didn't need to) but somehow it gave me the jitters. Later, encounters which should have put the wind up me dropped away like nothing, the cancellation of a scripted play because of a bomb scare at a school being just one example. Perhaps they just didn't like the play.

When I left the co-operative in 1998, I had notebooks bulging full of poetry covering the day to day, the peace process, the breaking up of reconciliation (consequently the furious anger) and the massive demonstrations demanding real radical change from within and without.

So came now. I'd tried applying to the Arts Council for other ideas before but without success. I'll admit I'm not a form-filler. If you asked me to create an arts project for a group of three toed sloths with incontinence, I'd have no problem, but filling in the form to open up the purse strings of the powers that be - no chance. This time I failed again, picked up the energy that could have slithered away and said 'Bugger it, I'm still going'. I collected the feedback from the Arts Council and said I'd sent them a postcard. I still haven't - sorry! I hope the pleasure of this travelogue makes amends.

I knew exactly what I wanted to do and nothing would stop me. My primary focus for Ireland was to tighten my existing poetry as well as create a new block of poetic work based on the country. My task was not to change the vision of the land but to find an understanding, both for myself and for readers and listeners of my poetry.

I'd sent out an information release as soon as I learnt that I didn't get the grant. The letters offered free creative writing sessions if they would give me accommodation. The appeal went to hostels, small presses, writing groups and old contacts previously visited. It took me a long period working like mad to raise the money to get the project financially stable. I also wanted to make sure I could cover the marketing and the publishing when I return.

It had been a mad rush trying to get things organised. There were times when I was still waiting at the last minute for people to get back to me about whether they can get enough people for a workshop and if so would they still put me up. Magically, most that originally said yes, but found it was too late notice to organise a group gave me a bed for a night or even more! Those that couldn't do either, still got excited about the vision of the scheme - and again, that's just as useful. I realise now that I should have given myself more time but there's a stubbornness in me that won't subside. The feeling of waiting didn't let go during the visit, manifesting itself in coach stations, traffic queues, pubs and the Guinness of Northern Ireland.

 Making Connections - thoughts of a literary magazine editor
 By Jane Hardy

Connections magazine, which I have edited since summer 2002, has an impressive growth record. Begun as a mere photocopied sheet or two by poet Narissa Knights, it started as the newsletter for the East Kent writers' guild seven years ago. Since then, it has metamorphosed into a 36-page A3, relatively glossy (for a literary title) quarterly, supported by the Arts council and read by some 1500 people each issue, although bought by rather fewer.

So what is the magazine's philosophy or ethos? Never a fan of mission statements, nevertheless there is an ideal lurking behind our much-discussed cover image. As poet Brian Jones (incidentally, undervalued and worth more study than the other Brian, Patten, with whom he shared a grainy BBC documentary back in the 60s) said to me a year ago, What's the politics? In terms of literary politics, we are probably on the side of Bloodaxe Books rather than Poetry Review, more pro-narrative and subjectivity and the numinous even than pro-the postmodernist tendency.

At the moment, there seems to be an interesting-ish debate about what poetry should be about, if anything, and how it should read and whether it should be easy, ie accessible. Neil Astley of Bloodaxe Books, the Faber de nos jours, has nailed his colours to the mast with his inspiring anthologies. I'm not just a fan because as a big publisher they have been helpful to a small magazine, although that is the case, but because attracting new audiences to good poetry seems important and because the lyric, comprehensible yet still deep strand of English literature seems to be being ignored. Yet open your green-covered Oxford Book of English Verse, ed Helen Gardner, and poem after poem from 'Somerset is icomen in' onwards rains into your imagination in the most pleasurable, painless way possible, via comprehensible words and images and music.

One poet I know actually said to me he daren't risk overdosing on Poetry Review, now edited by a University of Kent academic and literary journalist, for fear of, and I use his words 'being corrupted' by the dry, po-mo (postmodern), self-conscious let-the-lines-run-where-they-may style.

Of course, I am mainly dependent on the work I receive through the post, which is supplemented with published poems. In the spring 2004 issue, with its themed section on music and words, I used work by semi-known poets, newcomers and two poems by the excellent George Szirtes, Glass and Rain, which have been set to music by composer Roderick Watkins, an experience he also wrote about in a fascinating feature.

On the fiction front, we have expanded the coverage and discovered some notable talent. One name to watch, whose stories arrived out of the blue from Edinburgh (Connections is stocked in selected Borders Bookshops, long may they flourish, including the Glasgow branch), is that of Nick Holdstock. His story FAT which I ran in a recent issue satirised the obsession with thinness in Swiftian manner, by clinical reversal so that the fatties ruled the world, and had a startling denouement. It also opened well 'All his friends were fat. His neighbours were fat. His wife and children were fat. They were the fat people of a fat country. But he was thin. Not just lean, not even slim, he was truly skinny. And he had always been this way...When people looked at him, they did not see Leonard Bream, architect and father. They saw a thin, disgusting man.' Nick Holdstock is now working on a novel, has discovered an agent partly through exposure in Connections and is also planning to do postgraduate work in creative writing.

Nick is one of the new writing talents featured in an event in this October's Whitstable WORDfest, a brand new literary festival in the seaside town where I live, and supported by the magazine. We've got involved with planning this festival - lots of late nights and lengthy meetings - and it should introduce new people to the magazine. Running from October 14-17, the WORDfest features among other treats Michael Horovitz and his new band, the William Blake Klezmatrix. Should be uniquely entertaining, Also Phil Bowen's play on when Dylan (Bob) met Dylan (Thomas) - ie in the playwright's imagination and at the Chelsea Hotel, New York, in the 60s. Also a writers' brunch, writers' walk, open mike session, and stop press, Selima Hill is launching her latest title, Lou-Lou, during WORDfest. Can't wait.

It seems to me this is what Connections, or any arts magazine, should be doing. Encouraging new talent as a kind of contemporary patron, enabling people to enjoy (not furrow the brow necessarily but laugh, cry, engage with and think about) new writing and images while covering some of the debates in the writing world. In terms of artwork, Connections now uses new and established artists and photographers to enliven the text. When a magazine journalist, I used to fight the art department for word-space,

resisting the old maxim about an image being worth however many words it was. Now in the editor's chair, I see the visual point. Cover images we have used range from startling photographs by American photographer Ron Forth, discovered via the web, whose shot of a person whose head was a schoolroom globe (very Magritte) was perfect for the issue with a travel theme to an illustration of the Bull Hotel, Rochester, from Dickens' Pickwick Papers for the current issue, which has a section on writers' sense of place.

Our review section isn't bad either, with Fleur Adcock on Freda Downie, Carol Rumens on Frieda Hughes (a canny choice, I thought, since Rumens had written poetry inspired by Hughes' mother) and new, excellent reviewers such as Steve Elves carving their way through the current crop of books, also poetry tapes and radio programmes. I think one should cast the net as widely as possible.

With a website nearly there, the next issue tackling the short story form and translation and a guest poetry editor's slot established to run every three issues or so, things are looking positive. John Whitworth, poet and critic and a helpful editorial extra view whenever I need one, most recently guest poetry-edited to rousing effect.

One arts worker recently questioned our title. Why Connections, wasn't it linguistically vague to useless? Well, no, I don't agree; there is Forster's famous 'Only connect' and I think making connections is the way we approach most art. Connecting it to our own experience, to other art we've known, to the invisible space behind the eyes. It's a decent title and I hope we can continue to live up to it.

Connections magazine is a literary quarterly, supported by the Arts Council and Canterbury Arts Council. Subscriptions cost £12 (p & p free), £10 concessions. Write to: Walter Newby, Treasurer, Hillside, 41 Augustine Road, Minster, Sheppey, Kent ME12 2NE or Jane Hardy, 4 Shipwrights Lee, Island Wall, Whitstable, Kent CT5 1EW. Cheques made payable to Connections. Back copies cost £2.50 and can be bought from Jane Hardy, Connections at the above address.

 Be Judged or Be Damned
 Interview by Samantha Morton

When Ted Hughes suggested a poetry competition in 1980, and invited Charles Causley, Seamus Heaney and Philip Larkin to judge it with him, neither he, nor the other judges, nor the Arvon Foundation - which was to be organiser and beneficiary - had anticipated such a mighty response. Just before Christmas that year, the judges gathered to select the winning poems from a total entry of 35,000.

Philip Larkin, shrewdly it now seemed, had agreed to be a judge on condition that he read only the short-listed poems. Not so the other judges who read all 35,000. London Weekend Television's South Bank Show made a programme showing how the judges worked and how they selected the winner: Andrew Motion. It was the sheer size of the public response, and the manner in which the judges took it on, which established the Arvon Poetry Competition as a literary event of real significance.

The competition has continued to flourish and the 2004 competition will be the twelfth. Since the beginning, distinguished poets have willingly agreed to judge, and they have been joined by journalists, reviewers and publishers. Sometimes the panel has been as many as eight, sometimes only three. Sometimes the judges have been exclusively men, sometimes women;

more often a mixture of the two. Sometimes, after the short-list has been agreed, the business of selecting the winners has taken days, once it was completed in a single morning.

The conditions of entry have remained unchanged. Entries must be written in the English language and must not have been previously published. There are no restrictions on subject matter, form, or length. Long poems, excluded from many other competitions, have figured prominently and achieved first prize several times. Jo Shapcott, one of the 2002 judges, wrote "The Arvon poetry competition is unusual in that there is no restriction on length for poems entered. This gives the competition a seriousness and quality others don't have simply because it recognises that the short lyric poem, however luminous and marvellous, isn't the end of the story".

Jean Sprackland lives in Merseyside and her book Tattoos for Mothers' Day was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection in 1999. Hard Water is her second collection and has been shortlisted for the Whitbread, she is one of three judges for this year's Arvon Poetry Competition.

How do you approach the task of judging the entries?

"My approach has been to read all the poems and sort them into two piles: those which are not in the running, and those (a much smaller number) which I want to read again. Then I went back through my 'read again' pile and began to whittle it down into a 'longlist'".

What to you differentiates a good poem from an award winning poem?

"There are plenty of well-made poems among the entries; this was an important criterion but not enough on its own. I wanted to be surprised by the freshness and originality of a poem. I wanted it to have depth and complexity, to puzzle me and to reveal itself gradually with each re-reading. The hairs on the back of my neck are unusually sensitive, and a good indicator of something special! "

Why do you think the International Arvon Poetry Competition is such an important poetry competition for all poets?

"The Arvon competition is open to everyone, it's judged anonymously and provides a level playing field for established and unknown poets alike. It's a prestigious competition, and can give a real boost to the winners. And I think it raises the profile of poetry in general, reminding people that it's there and available to be read, written, participated in".

What advice would you give to poets entering the 2005 competition?

"It's important to read widely, but not with the one intention of emulating other poets and thereby winning prizes! Read for pleasure. And I would always recommend going on an Arvon course... again, go for the sheer joy of it".

Day in the life of a guidebook writer

by Rosalba O'Brien

The handheld that holds my life in its palm beeps. I wake up and stare at a nondescript ceiling fan. Where am I? The beige bedside table and vaguely Aztec picture on the hotel wall give little away. Rubbing my eyes, I look a little closer at the handheld screen. It is Wednesday, it informs me. Ah, then! If it's Wednesday, it must be the pampa!

To be more precise, it's the Argentine town of Tandil and I have a dozen places to visit before lunch so I shower (mental note: plentiful hot water!) and dress; unlike most travellers - and writers, for that matter - I have to look presentable to minor officials and managers so it's slightly creased smart casual. After breakfast (mental note: a choice of jams does not qualify as a buffet!) I head out.

I've already seen a little of this town; I arrived last night and once I'd checked in to the hotel, I had a wander. The first evening I have no real set agenda, I just walk around the place to get an initial impression and my bearings. That first impression is crucial, as it will tint everything from now on and is likely to be shared by many of the readers.

The tourist office is always the first port of call; I like to get there early when the staff are fresh and the tourists still in bed. There's always a map and a few pointers but otherwise it's a bit of a lottery how much information I'm going to get out of them. Even big resorts sometimes produce nothing more than glossy leaflets with lots of photos and the sort of vague writing that can only come from local government ("Our wonderful city will delight you with its attractions and its ambience. Be careful! You may just experience the holiday of a lifetime!"). On the other hand, some staff in tiny off-the-beaten-track places are so pleased to actually see a visitor that they will give me a personal guided tour and will rouse half the town from their siestas in order to secure an up-to-date bus timetable.

In this case, the girl is extremely helpful and can answer all my questions - and, crucially, gives me some interesting sounding suggestions. It takes a while because we keep getting interrupted by pesky visitors, despite the hour. I watch the girl reciting the same information for the umpteenth time with a smile on her face; she is bright and dynamic and seems rather wasted in this backwater tourist office.

Finally I leave, heading to a café she recommended to try their espresso and work out a schedule for the rest of the day, my arms overflowing with bumph. I transfer all the chatter in my head to a notebook - in a fortnight's time, when I'm writing this up, Tandil will be all tangled up in Tomas Jofre and the other towns of the pampa in my mind and I'll need the hardcopy to straighten it all out again.

The town's two museums follow. I spend some time at museums as not only must I come up with both a general description and highlights, but also they usually provide interesting snippets of information on the local area and culture that contribute to the well of understanding and experience I tap into when I'm writing the place up. Besides, they're a damn sight more interesting than the five hotels I'll have to traipse round after lunch.

Lunch is a task in itself - will it be authentic Italian or the best squid rings in town? I go for the (faster) squid rings and then, downing a couple of Rennies for dessert, it's off to the hotels. This is the least interesting and most time-consuming part of guidebook writing. Visiting them all is impossible, but even the shortlist that I've drawn up of places that sound interesting is a rather long shortlist. Lots of walking - and getting lost - is inevitable at this point.

The procedure is identical at each one. I walk up to reception and ask to see a room. Sometimes I say what I'm doing, but this can lead to getting bogged down in the hard sell if the owners are around - and only being shown the recently refurbished airy front rooms with balcony. If I do a Michelin and go undercover then I will get the same treatment as future readers and they'll try and fob me off with the poky back rooms that smell of moss. What I'm looking for, in every category from cheap hostel to five star hotel, is character - rambling gardens, themed rooms, lounges with real fires, peacocks and rabbits wandering around, rustic furniture, friendly staff who organise excursions to local football games. Anything that gives me something to write other than 'pleasant, clean rooms with TV

and private bath'! And will also give the travellers coming in my footsteps something for their postcards, their journals, and ultimately their memories.

As evening approaches I head back to my own accommodation for another note-writing session. Once this is done it's time for dinner; I'm still on duty, but it's not such a bad one, and it's made all the more pleasant accompanied by a glass or two of wine. There are times when I must go on to sample the nightlife - a local friend is invaluable in this one, although it's surprising how much you can learn about a town armed with little more than Dutch courage and a nose for a good Marguerita. But tonight I'll be heading straight back to work out tomorrow's itinerary - walking in the immediate area - and get a good night's sleep (if I can locate the bed under the snow of pamphlets). Tomorrow - the hills!

She is

This autumn sees the release of the second collection of poetry form Michelle Scally Clarke, *She Is*. This new book follows the same format of her first book *I Am* in that it is a mix of poetry, autobiographical commentary and a performance CD of her work set to music, but it represents a considerable step forward in the work of this Leeds based performance poet. '*I Am* was about me laying down my truth, opening up my issues and dealing with the labels put upon me, whether that be black artist, single mother, adopted child,' says Scally Clarke, 'But now that is done there is no need for me to stay there. This book is about me stepping out of those boxes.'

What does remain however is the immediacy and freshness to the work that characterizes Scally Clarke's poetry and performance, these are words committed to paper it seems before the wounds of the events that inspired them have had chance to heal. As a result, leafing through these pages is akin to stepping into the middle of a life being lived, the strength and weakness therein, capturing mistakes as they happen, pain as it is felt and the joy of enlightenment the moment it strikes. This approach to her work was illustrated in her first book in which she writes of a meeting with James Berry that left her completely underwhelmed, whereas she sacrificed a trip to Africa in order to appear on the same bill as Benjamin Zephaniah. Berry had recommended that she needed to go to university in order to learn her craft. 'Underneath the madness of the spin in this world, there is a sea of beautiful emotion' adds Scally Clarke, 'This is universal, we are born of emotions and all live on them.' *She Is* therefore is not a collection of considered reflection and definite summations, but life as the poet lives it.

The book defines itself as '*...a walking she woman ride, for she is an emotion, a passion, a warmth or loss in every woman. She is - not of me but of we*' and a large part of the book deals with the poet maturing and learning to understand the nature of the woman inside her, of being a mother and of often turbulent relationships with men. And as the blurb suggests, these discoveries are not just a product of internal introspection, but of watching and caring for a host of female friends and family members.

In addition to the printed work, Scally Clarke's strength as a performer is showcased on a CD that comes free with the book. The CD is a mix of a cappella performance and poetry set to music by long time collaborator and music producer Aerron Perry. 'We wanted the musical tracks to search for the emotion behind the poetry,' says Perry, 'and we've achieved this by a use of a variety of styles including guitar riffs and urban beats, bringing dub poetry into the digital age.' The resulting ten-track album

demonstrates further the range of influences Scally Clarke draws upon, her raw talent as a performer, the flexibility in her approach to take her work to an audience and it is as vibrant and fresh as anything you will hear on the radio.

She Is

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The work of Michelle Scally Clarke encompasses a range of emotions and is often written on the run, in the moment, and captures on the page and in performance the freshness and immediacy of a sentiment and feeling of life as it is lived. This is not a collection of considered reflection and definite summations, this is life as Michelle lives it; it is a record of a life unfolding. This freshness in her approach and the brutal honesty in her poems brings a unique quality to the work of Michelle Scally Clarke and takes her intimately close to her audience, either as witnesses to her performance or readers of her books.

South 29 (ISSN 0959-1133, Yearly subscription rates for 2 issues: UK: £10 [2 years £18]; International: details on request, PO Box 5369, Poole BH14 0XN, email: south@martinblyth.co.uk)

One could be a tad confused at first to find poems from Glasgow, York and Newcastle-upon-Tyne in a "poetry magazine from the southern counties" but it appears that although the magazine is based in the south (Poole, in fact) submissions are accepted from the whole of the UK and, indeed, abroad.

South's submissions policy is fairly unique: the magazine employs a different panel of "selectors" for each issue and the poems are chosen anonymously. This ensures an eclectic mix, regardless of name or reputation, with each issue containing a healthy breadth and scope which can be somewhat lacking in magazines with a single, constant poetry editor.

The presentation is fairly smart - 64 stapled pages in a glossy, monochrome cover. My one small criticism, though, which is the same with many similar publications, is that the poems are squashed too tightly together. This is one of my pet hates, so do forgive me if it is something you have heard me harp on about before, but the impression of poems having been shoe-horned onto the page is a real turn-off.

This issue begins with a "poet profile" of Pauline Hawksworth containing a three-page introduction to her life and work, followed by thirteen of her poems which span her 30-year career. I enjoyed this section and it was refreshing to be able to read samples of a poet's work whilst gaining insight into the context from which they were produced.

The poet profile is followed by the main poetry section then a small selection of reviews (generally of poetry collections) at the back. The poems are all of a decent quality and there is nothing desperately bad. It was interesting, however, to get perspective of the selectors who, in the *Selectors' Statement*, say that though many poems were of a good standard, it was "difficult to find the poems that really stood out." I feel the same way, and this is what made *South* a good read but not outstanding. After all, a poetry magazine can only ever be as good as the work it publishes. JM

Eva Salzman, Double Crossing: New & Selected Poems (Bloodaxe Books £8.95, 160pp, ISBN1 85224 661 8)

There is something so tantalising about Eva Salzman's poetry, a mixture of pure sensuality and raw identity. In this collection, Bloodaxe and Salzman draw together a vast body of her work in five sections that uniquely capture the poet's voice and body within the crisp white sheets. It pulls poems from the ashes of Oxford University Press, Bargain with the Watchman, and shows you that OUP's decision to curtail its living poets section to have been a monumental mistake, something that Salzman points out in 'The Oxford University Press, in Hospital': "Haven't you heard it's the fashion/to decline the hale and hearty,/ snub the living and only invite/the dead to the scholarly party". The collection also allows a second chance and a second reading for poems from The English Earthquake (Bloodaxe 1992), One Two (Jones Press 2002) and One Two II (Wrecking Ball Press 2003) and presents them in a perfect volume along with new poems that reflect on religion, personal conflict, faith of love and sexuality: "Each time I went to Seville, I slept on the Street of Slaughter,/Street of the Scythe, with kind friends, less kind friends, who led me/down baroque naves, where I knelt at countless altars/I shouldn't have - Madrid, Salamanca - letting strangers wed me". In these new poems, Salzman draws on her Jewish upbringing, the conflict between the ingrained and the fresh, the fear and the desire, the damnation and the salvation, this is reflected in such works as 'Practices' where the poet own fears are shown in a nutshell by the lines: "will never reach the far-off you: you,/the one I'm burning all these pages for./When you come, how will I explain myself?".

Throughout this volume Salzman reveals a craft of drawing on the past, both historical, mythological and personal to reveal an open picture of identity, both private and public. She shows how history remembered and history written are two different things and that words cannot always convey the moment: "Words travel badly./ Unwieldy and hard to fold/into small bundles,/they take up far more space/than the grain of truth would occupy" as seen in 'Air Mail'.

This is a collection that conveys more than could be written here, this is a volume of beautiful, gritty, powerful, bone shaking poems that do not just reach into the reader's heart, but yanks out other vital organs and lays it before them, as if to say, this is all you are, you are no different from me. Deal with it.

And a way of dealing with it is to buy this collection and realise that OUP's mistake was Bloodaxe's gain, and that Salzman should be taken to our hearts and souls and celebrated. AO

Paul Hyland, Art of Impossible: New and Selected Poems 1974-2004 (Bloodaxe Books, £9.95, 192pp, ISBN 1 85224 643 X)

This collection from Paul Hyland presents a selection of his work as a poet over the last thirty years. Hyland is a professional magician as well as a poet and the back cover photograph shows him suspending a gold ring in mid-air with a suitably concentrated expression on his face. The image is an apt one, drawing attention at it does to the connections that exist between poetry and magic. Hyland's best poetry possesses these magical qualities in abundance: the poet, after all, is someone engaged in the activity of creating something out of nothing and sustaining the illusion. That Hyland sustains the illusion through words is significant. When Lachlan Mackinnon, in the TLS observed that in Hyland's poetry 'language constitutes a world' he was drawing attention to the way in which the imaginative world of the

poet is both created and explored by means of the poem itself. Hyland's range is wide and impressive; his perceptiveness deep and genuine.

To offset the many beautiful lyrical pieces (such as 'Dig' and 'Evidence') Hyland has included his long sequence, 'Poems of Z' which is in fact a sustained piece of persona writing which allows the poet to write in a voice completely unlike his own. The poems in this sequence purport to be written by a spy who codename is Z and who 'seems to have been engaged in intelligence activities in the UK for a number of years'. The text as we receive it is supposed to have been passed on from poet to the publisher in the form of Z's notebook. A facsimile of the pages of this notebooks adds to the 'authenticity'. Like Geoffrey Hill before him, Hyland is inventing a poet in order to extend he imaginative franchise and to liberate him from his own voice. The sequence is compelling and very effective. Unlike many selected poems this collection presents us with a truly representative introduction to the poets work. Hyland's range is covered admirably and all the major poems are included. The last poems seem to demonstrate how Hyland has developed as a poet, learning from himself and his past achievements. When engaged in the business of articulating a precise series of intense emotions Hyland is difficult to surpass. Take, for instance 'A Proper Vanity' (one of two moving poems in memory of his grandmother) where the delicacy of the language corresponds to the almost painful fineness of the perception: "Her hair glistened in sunlight/and her hands, knotted and frail at rest,/unpinned it fluently, unloosed/the braided white, combed and caressed/the skein unfurling to her waist."

This is a poetry both powerful and vulnerable, outspoken yet reticent. Art of the Impossible demonstrates Paul Hyland's uncanny ability to create poetry out of nothing and - like the magician he is - to sustain the illusion with his reader's imagination. IP

Jigs & Reels (Doubleday, £15.00, ISBN 0 385 60642 7, 274pp)

Joanne Harris to some extent has been mired in a genre by her previous work. See such books as Blackberry Wine, Five Quarters of the Orange and her best known work to date, the beautifully crafted Chocolat. She is often perceived by her readers as producing books that are either (a) set in France; (b) about food, and; (c) set in France with food, these are misconceptions borne by the dreadful film version of Chocolat, which has overshadowed some of her greater works, Coastliners and Holy Fools. To say that Harris was a rare writer who combines a delicacy of touch with a unique understanding of people, would be to under estimate her. In Jigs & Reels she tries to undermine what we perceive Joanne Harris to be, certainly in the short story 'Gastronomicon' we see her return faithfully to the idea of food and comfort, already a well tread path for this author, only to have her twist the genre that made her famous and reveal that food can sometimes be an evil necessity.

Harris displays an amazing range in this collection and smashes out of a genre that she has written in for so long, she shows that in short stories there should be no confines, no condescending nods towards the reader that flag up the tired preoccupation that any short story produced in the UK should have a beginning, middle and end. There are gems here, perfectly crafted and set upon the page.

Harris to some extent does rely a little too much on the twist in the tale, but still she manages to surprise, in 'Hello, Goodbye' and 'Waiting for Gandalf', she exhibits her ability to do this and to keep the reader on the hook. There are moments in the collection that feel a little too formulaic, and we see Harris's struggle in other stories not to fall into this trap. Harris's skill has always been in her ability to create vivid characters

such as the enigmatic Mr. Tamaoki ('Tea With the Birds'), and this sets Jigs & Reels apart from its contemporaries.

However, Harris's continued attempts at the beginning of each chapter to explain her reasons for the story became somewhat tiresome after awhile and it felt almost as if she was afraid of the stories standing on their own. This was no more apparent than in 'Any Girl Can Be a CandyKiss Girl!' and 'A Place in the Sun' which seem to drift away from the plot and into the realms of scathing commentary on society's preoccupation with beauty and youth. This side of Harris would be better preoccupied in journalistic pieces that would make more sense and have more direction than either of these two stories had.

There is no doubt that this collection reveals Harris to be more than what she even perceives herself but whether it achieves what it sets out to do is something only posterity will answer. AO

MISCHIEF NIGHTS: New and Selected Poems: Roddy Lumsden
 (Bloodaxe Books £8.95)

There is a lot of poems in this book, for a poet whose first book came out less than ten years ago. This can mean one of two things. Philip Larkin's whole career adds up to a couple of hundred pages; and every one of them is precision-tooled, crystalline. Then there's Ted Hughes: a solid breeze-block of a book, full of restless energy, brilliance - and, frankly, damp squibs and plenty of empty posturing too. Well, which you would rather have depends, I suppose, on where you're coming from.

Roddy Lumsden - despite a tendency to the morose that seems to come from his own brushes with depressive illness - is more Ted Hughes than Larkin. Like Hughes, his poems can be brilliant:

As some malingerer, a long time sick,
 strives to force his raw-boned bed sore body
 up, one sunburst morning, then so it with Roddy
 who wrestles with the memory of love
 and who, despite his rumoured bag of brains,
 can't pin the bastard, since no brawn remains
 after the barb-strung malady of love.

(My Spring, from *Roddy Lumsden Is Dead*)

This short poem is an object lesson in metaphysical conceit in contemporary poetry, elevated diction mixed with streetwise diction, and it pulls no punches with the emotions.

Other poems seem more like make-weights, like *Evidence of Owls*:

Unthinkable jewels,
 these pellets laced with a trinkum of mouse-spines
 and the black jeel eyes of creeping things...

which is fine writing, as far as it goes, but doesn't really reveal much more about owls, or life, or anything else than we already know.

Although there are a lot of love poems in this selection, and he has been identified with lad-lit, Lumsden's real subject is himself, his feelings, his relationships good or (often) bad. He can see himself from multiple viewpoints, as in the early *August (and Nothing After)*, where he has people talking about him behind his back ("I hear that Roddy Lumsden doesn't believe/ in the soul' she says, and shakes her head."), and sometimes he

speaks of himself in the third person, often in the first, but there's not a single dramatic monologue, and the few poems that are about something else don't often work.

So he's an egotist then? Well, partly, but no more than most poets whose main subject is themselves (Frank O'Hara and Robert Lowell both spring to mind); and he can be incredibly funny with it at times, and the laddishness is tempered with a tenderness that can be very charming. His poetry is mostly plain-spoken, demotic and sometimes includes local Edinburgh dialect words and obscure words; and mostly everything's in complete sentences which make sense. So he's accessible, and apart from the odd prose poem, formally unadventurous. The later poems don't seem to have changed much from the earlier ones; perhaps he's doing what he did then more consistently, and sometimes now the focus shifts from himself to the universal:

It could not save my friend from seeing what a window
showed him one night, it was Christmas, can't slow
the wave that swallowed Noel, Nelly beneath the wheel,
the bad seed in Ruth's little breast, *girls when they fall...*

(*What Love Cannot Do*)

but it's still the same Roddy who's speaking. Personally, I wouldn't have it any other way. Roddy Lumsden's poems seem to divide critics: some seem to find them boastful, histrionic, over-emotional. And not all his poems work: some go nowhere, some seem insubstantial if read on their own. If I were he, I might want to chuck out a third of these poems; but Roddy Lumsden's not daft. He knows that some poets work best in bulk, and he's one of them. He doesn't so much write sequences as singular poems that like to be in a crowd. Sure, that poem doesn't work, but here's another one, and it drops you dead with its passion and the aptness of its phrases.

So it's best not to take each poem in this collection one at a time: read them several at a time, and what builds up is the self-portrait of a man trying to puzzle out his life as it goes along, the mystery of relationships, and the strangeness of the world he's found himself landed with. SW

Contributors:

Felix Cheong

Felix Cheong was the recipient of the National Arts Council's Young Artist of the Year for Literature Award in 2000. His three books of poetry are *Temptation and Other Poems* (1998), *I Watch the Stars Go Out* (1999) and *Broken by the Rain* (2003).

His work has been published in newspapers, poetry websites, foreign journals and 6 anthologies of Singaporean poetry. Felix has been invited to perform his poetry in Edinburgh, Brisbane, Hong Kong and Singapore. He has also read in London, Sydney, Melbourne, San Francisco and Manila.

As a literary activist, he has been involved in promoting Singaporean literature abroad. He was instrumental in organising and leading a Singapore contingent on 4 successful reading tours - The Philippines (January 2001), Australia (July 2001), the US (April 2002) and the UK (August 2003).

Felix completed his Master of Philosophy in Creative Writing at the University of Queensland in 2002. He is currently a freelance writer for *The Edge* and *Today* newspapers.

Bixby Monk

Bixby Monk his half Scottish and Half Czech, he was born in 1968. Named by his father after the jazz musician, Bix Beiderbecke, he spent a disappointing childhood in the Edinburgh school system before leaving for the army. He splits his time between Edinburgh and Prague. His claims to fame are being the last war correspondent to cover the Gulf War and being the first war correspondent to leave Kuwait. He writes for several press agencies and writes under various pseudonyms in the UK and European Presses. He is the editor of Incorporating Writing (ISSN 1743-0380).

Samantha Morton

Samantha Morton before fleeing the capital worked happily in publishing, the hours were long, the pay was rotten. So in a bid to do what most Londoners do, she left London and set up a gallery and workshop in Cornwall, near St Ives, called Whey Pottery. She has three children and an understanding husband. Next year she hopes to go organic.

Rosalba O'Brien

Rosalba O'Brien is a freelance writer based in Buenos Aires, from where she writes on Latin American society and travel. She has recently contributed to the upcoming second edition of the Rough Guide to Argentina. Contact rooroo@ekit.com.

Andrew Oldham

Andrew Oldham writes for Stage, Television and Film. His credits include BBC1's Doctors, BBC R4 Go 4 it, Piccadilly Key103 BTCC Christmas Campaign, the short film Divine Blonde and The Charlie Manson Room (showcased by Theatre and Beyond at Brighton Pavilion, part of The International Brighton Festival 2002). He is prior recipient of a Writers Award from the ACE NW (UK), a Peggy Ramsay Award (UK) and a nominee of the Jerwood-Arvon award (UK) and has been nominated for the London International Award. Publications include the crime story, Spanking The Monkey, in: Next Stop Hope (Route ISBN 1 901927 19 9). Poetry in The Interpreter's House (UK), Gargoyle (USA), Poetry Greece and Poetry Salzburg (Europe), Grain (Canada) and Dream Catcher (UK) to name a few. He is an academic and journalist.

William Park

William Park was born in Hillingdon, West London, in 1962, and grew up in High Wycombe. He now lives in Preston, where his interests include Buddhist philosophy, World Cinema and Jazz. In 1990 he was awarded a major Eric Gregory Award, and in 2003 he gained an MA in Poetry from Liverpool Hope University College. His poems have appeared in Critical Quarterly, Observer, Poetry Review, Stand, and many more. His latest collection Surfacing (Spike ISBN 0 9518978 7 X) is available now.

Ian Parks

Ian Parks is a Hawthornden Fellow 1991, he has travelled through the United States of America on a Fellowship in 1994. His poetry has received accolades and awards, including the Royal Literary Fund 2003, the Oppenheim Award 2001 and 2002 and the John Masefield Award 2001. Ian was a National Poetry Society New Poet in 1996 and was a prior Poetry Editor for Dream Catcher (issues 7 -11). His collections include, Gargoyles in Winter (Littlewood, 1985), A Climb Through Altered Landscapes (Blackwater 1998), The Angel of the North (Tarantula CD 2000). Departures and Rendezvous: Love Poems 1983-2003 is due for publication in 2005. His next collection, Shell Island, will be available from Way Wiser (USA) in 2005. He teaches at Leeds University.

George Wallace

George Wallace, author of eight chapbooks of poetry, is editor of Poetrybay www.poetrybay.com, co-host of his own weekly poetry radio show

www.wusb.org, and the first poet laureate of Suffolk County, New York. A regular performer in New York City, he frequently tours America with his poetry. Internationally, his work has been read in Paris, Copenhagen, Vienna, and particularly in Italy and the UK - including Italian appearances in Rome, Parma, Verona and Trento; and in the UK, London, Cardiff, Belfast, Bury St Edmunds, Norwich and the Lake District. His work has been translated into French, Spanish, Italian, German, Korean, Bengali, Russian and Macedonian. Forthcoming collections are Burn My Heart in Wet Sand (Troubador, UK) and Fifty Love Poems (La Finestra Editrice, IT).