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Incorporating Writing Issue 3 Volume 1

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1. Editorial

"We were born of great ideals but we hide in their shadows, we have chained ourselves because we have made poetry holy"

British Poets: The Return to God
Editorial by Andrew Oldham

"Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they. How did this change come about? I do not know. What can make it legitimate? That question I think I can answer" (Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, Social Contract, Vol. IV, p. 131, 1762)

"I know that you have come here today to hear explanations. Well, don't expect to hear any explanations about Dada. You explain to me why you exist. You haven't the faintest idea. You will say: I exist to make my children happy. But in your hearts you know that isn't so. You will say: I exist to guard my country, against barbarian invasions. That's a fine reason. You will say: I exist because God wills. That's a fairy tale for children. You will never be able to tell me why you exist but you will always be ready to maintain a serious attitude about life. You will never understand that life is a pun, for you will never be alone enough to reject hatred, judgments, all these things that require such an effort, in favour of a calm level state of mind that makes everything equal and without importance. Dada is not at all modern. It is more in the nature of a return to an almost Buddhist religion of indifference. Dada covers things with an artificial gentleness, a snow of butterflies released from the head of a prestidigitator. Dada is immobility and does not comprehend the passions. You will call this a paradox, since Dada is manifested only in violent acts. Yes, the reactions of individuals contaminated by destruction are rather violent, but when these reactions are exhausted, annihilated by the Satanic insistence of a continuous and progressive "What for?" what remains, what dominates is indifference. But with the same note of conviction I might maintain the contrary". (From "Dada Manifesto" [1918] and "Lecture on Dada" [1922], translated from the French by Robert Motherwell, Dada Painters and Poets, by Robert Motherwell, New York, pp. 78- 9, 81, 246-51)

It has been 244 years since Rousseau pointed out in Social Contract the plight of humanity. Nothing has changed. But Rousseau is still relevant and along with his contemporaries, gave rise to the Romantic Movement, the backlash against this ideal was eventually called the Avant-Garde. Ironically, the crux of Avant-Garde is that 'God is dead' but in Social Contract Rousseau argues that civil religion is a necessity. That there should be tolerance of religious opinions and beliefs, that Providence would reward the good and punish the bad. Such an approach to civil religion would only come about with the commitment of the entire of society. Avant-Garde faced with the industrialisation of the modern world, the destruction of the rural classes, the rural people and the move towards urbanisation, war and materialism, saw no room for God and foresaw only disaster for humanity. For if God is dead and all our beliefs are based on religion, our morals, then our morals and ethics are built upon a house of cards.

These two contrary viewpoints have delivered the very society we live in today, nothing has changed since either Rousseau and Tzara set out their manifestos. One in the name of philosophy and the latter in the name of anti-art. Both movements gave rise to a change in literature, in 1792; hope of a new world order would spread across Europe, with the impact of the second French Revolution (a failed attempt had occurred in 1789). The new ideas of liberty, fraternity and freedom would have its greatest impact on The Romantics, Wordsworth and Coleridge, who met in August 1795. By then both men were disillusioned with the turn of events in France, the revolution had become a blood bath and common men who had supported the cause had fallen under the machine ('the guillotine'). However, both poets had a desire to stick to the ethos of the revolution, to explore freedom in a common language that could be read by all. The outcome of this collaboration was the Lyrical Ballads. Only by embracing our nature, would we realise that poetry is the language of the common man:

"To this knowledge which all men carry about with them, and to these sympathies in which without any other discipline than that of our daily life we are fitted to take delight, the poet principally directs his attention".

(p149, From Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*." The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Ed. M. H. Abrams. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company)

This collection, printed anonymously, it separated the art from the artist and showed that the fore could have more impact. it was a turning point in the history of British Poetry and would influence a generation of poets, Shelley, Keats, Southey and Byron. Though Coleridge and Wordsworth were trying to speak of the plight of the common man it was inevitable that both poets would quickly lose contact with the very ideas, the very people who influenced this early work.

The change from an agricultural society to an industrial society splintered the country in two, giving rise to the industrial north and the commerce south. The creation of UK modern economics, capitalism and materialism find their roots in this era. The splitting of a nation echoed the growing gulf between the self and man, between creation and imagination, between deliverance and reality:

"I know that even all this wrong and misery are brought about by a warped sense of duty, each of you striving to do his best; but unfortunately not knowing for whom the best should be done. All our hearts have been betrayed by the plausible impiety of the modern economist, telling us that, 'To do the best for ourselves is finally to do the best for others.' Friends, our great Master said not so; and most absolutely we shall find that this world is not made so. Indeed, to do the best for others is finally to do the best for ourselves"

- John Ruskin speaking to civic leaders in Bradford Town Hall, April 1864

It was the gulf between God and man. It was the death of God. The Avant-Garde responded to this but it is only fully realised with the impact of The Great War. In Zurich, Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings, create Cabaret Voltaire and found the anti-art movement, Dada:

"And so Dada was born of a need for independence, of a distrust toward unity. Those who are with us preserve their freedom. We recognise no theory. We have enough of Cubist and Futurist academies: laboratories of formal ideas. Is the aim of art to make money and cajole the nice nice

bourgeoisie? (Cardullo, B & Knopf, R eds. Theater of the Avant-Garde: 1890-1950 Yale University Press 2001 p285)

It is a backlash against the slaughter and the destruction of the common man, against industrialisation, religion, morality and ethics. There is no God to Dadaist. With the death of God, the common man is lost and we will destroy ourselves because we have chosen ignorance, self pity and cruelty. Morals and ethics are based on a lie. Yet in all this chaos, anti-art, anti-theatre, anti-language; Dada delivers the first performance poet, Hugo Ball. It is Ball's phonetic poem, Karawane, that Ball discovers a ritual to poetry, a primitive use that taps into the very essence of language. It is an epiphany.

The deconstruction of language is quickly taken up by other poets, such as Schwitters, Huelsenbeck and Tzara, and is called cut and paste, this is also used for the first time in the world of art:

jolifanto bambla a falli bambla
grossiga m'pha habla horem
 egiga goramen
 higo bloiko russula huju
 holloka hollolo
 anlogo bung
blago bung
 bosso fataka
 ü üü ü
schampa wulla wussa olobo
 hej tatta gorem
 eschige zunbada
 wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu
 tumba ba -umf
kusagauma
 ba-umf

(Ball, Hugo Karawane 1917)

In 1918, Dada spreads to Berlin, Cologne and New York. The cut and paste technique and the ethos of Dada carries on. It will be another thirty years before the ideas of Dada will be taken on by a new van guard of writers and musicians, Burroughs, O'Hara, Cage and Kerouac.

This is a simplistic overview of two movements but both are present in Britain today, these two schools of Romantic and Dada are how we perceive poetry and art. There is the continued argument between the classical or contemporary, spoken or written, poetry of academia and poetry of the open mic. Snobbery abounds on all sides. We have become narrow in our point of view, afraid to tackle the big idea. We were born of great ideals but we hide in their shadows, we have chained ourselves because we have made poetry holy.

2. Interviews

"I don't really think that accusations of British poetry being elitist and academic can be backed up. However, it is rather safe. I think it's because of this that young talent gets neglected"

Roar, Clare, Roar!: Clare Pollard
 Interview by Andrew Oldham

Clare Pollard was born in 1978. She survived a Bolton comprehensive and three years at Cambridge to end up in London, where she is now working on a novel. She published her first collection, [The Heavy Petting Zoo](#) with Bloodaxe in 1998; won an Eric Gregory Award in 2000; and took to the road in the First Lines young poets tour in 2001. Her first collection was followed up by [Bedtime](#) (Bloodaxe 2002). She has presented two TV documentaries, one for Channel Four with a verse commentary on the break-ups and piss-ups of Bolton's 16-year-olds. Her present collection is [Look, Clare, Look!](#) (Bloodaxe 2005) and deals with the story of a year, in which she set off on a six-month world trip, to write a long poem which engaged with what she saw and felt during her travels. On her return, she discovered that her father was seriously ill, he died shortly after. The collection reflects on her travels and her loss and is a thought provoking book which ushers in a new voice in her writing. We sent fellow Bolton survivor and writer, Andrew Oldham, to probe into Clare Pollard the woman, the poet, playwright, editor and television presenter.

Last year you were appointed the new editor of the [Reactions](#) anthologies, taking over from the poet, Esther Morgan. What has it been like to be an editor judging other poets? How has editing [Reactions](#) changed your views on poetry?

"It has been an absolute pleasure. I thoroughly enjoy both the thrill of finding a genuine new voice in the slush pile, and the adventure of seeking out exciting new writers through events, rumours and tip-offs. I've always had very strong opinions about the kinds of poetry that are undervalued or neglected, and to have free reign to exercise those opinions over an anthology is incredible fun. I was excited to include lots of poets under thirty in [Reactions 5](#), as well as some like Cheryl B and Tim Turnbull who have been dismissed as 'performance' poets for too long when their language works incredibly well on the page. I did my BA in English lit, and have just completed an MRes on Anne Sexton, so have always felt comfortable as a critic, and feel able to get to grips with texts easily and see where they need redrafting. It was really satisfying to work with new writers and feel I was pushing some in the right direction. I wouldn't say that editing [Reactions](#) has changed my views on poetry particularly though, other than increasing my love for it".

Editors often come in for criticism rather than praise when selecting work for anthologies. How difficult was the process and how did you select the final poems for [Reactions](#)?

"Not actually that difficult. I decided from the start to set the bar very high, as we want [Reactions](#) to become a kind of textual equivalent of the Eric Gregory Awards - something that provides a genuine boost to the career of any new poet, and opens up both opportunities and a support network. We also want it to be the first place for readers to look to find out who's 'up-and-coming'. I cut the number of poets we published, and only accepted those who had a substantial quantity of good poems to showcase. And once you're asking for more than four book quality poems, that really narrows down the contenders. In the end I actually sought quite a few of the poets out and commissioned them - Daljit Nagra, for instance, who had a huge buzz around him at the time, and who I hear has just had his first collection accepted. Or Meryl Pugh, who was recommended to me by a publisher, and was just shortlisted for the New Writing Ventures Prize. I imagine it's much harder for editors who have to pick out individual poems, as almost any writer can have a moment of brilliance, but I had to look for poets who were ready to take the next step in their writing career, and on the 'cusp' of something big. With Rebecca O'Connor and Tim Turnbull publishing first collections this month as well, I think our hit rate has already been quite good".

In the past few years we have seen a rise in new presses and new voices. How do you feel Reactions fits into this new movement and tackles critics calls that British poetry is elitist, academic or lost?

"I don't really think that accusations of British poetry being elitist and academic can be backed up. However, it is rather *safe*. I think it's because of this that young talent gets neglected - there's a sense that you should spend years and years chipping away at the magazines and letting your voice mature before you get published. The youngest writer in the recent so-called 'Next Generation' promotion was 29. I think that's just absurd. Throughout literary history youth has produced some of the greatest poetry - from Keats and Rimbaud through to Kathleen Jamie or Zoom! - and I get a bit bored of the current insistence on careful, elegiac and mature voices. What about young writers being allowed to speak for and to their generation? I think that if the scene was more generous and celebratory about its young voices - as the worlds of drama and fiction are - it would make British poetry braver, cooler, less predictable and ultimately more popular. So I suppose I hope with Reactions we're helping to clear that space".

Look! Clare! Look! (Bloodaxe) compared to your prior work has a different resonance that tackles both the journey of the word and the heart. Can you take us through the physical and emotional journey you undertook during the writing of the collection?

"The book is chronological, and was literally written over one year. I received an Society of Authors travel grant, so when I set off with my round-the-world plane ticket in the new year in 2003, I decided to keep a kind of poetic diary of my travels called 'The Journey'. I was particularly interested in looking at a lot of the big issues that trouble my generation, but which are not really being explored by many poets - ideas of globalisation, western consumption, the damage we are doing to our environment - and as our journey developed and both SARS and the Iraq War began to dominate the news, the poem really came together. I suppose it has a real debt to the confessional movement, because I like the brutality of their honesty. They don't just tell anecdotes, they worm their way to a truth, however ugly. I think I'm very hard on myself in that poem. It's not a comfortable read. There I am in my big long-haul plane, flying from ethnic trek to beach party whilst the world burns... When I got back, I had no particular plan for the next part of the collection, but then very quickly I discovered my father had terminal cancer. I began to write incessantly - I think it really confirmed for me that I am, in my bones, a poet, as it was the only way I could deal with the horror of those months. Somehow by putting things into poetry I could gain some measure of control over them, or transform them into something I was able to look at straight. As I had started to study Anne Sexton for my MRes, the confessional spirit really continued through the poems, which I hope are a very honest depiction of what it's like to lose someone you love, and how fucked up and messy it is. There are other poems in there too though - about the chain pub I worked in around then, and getting engaged (I'm now married). My father died just before Christmas and was buried on New Year's Eve. Even the day after my father died we stopped on the motorway for coffee and a poem - 'Cordelia at the Service Stop' - appeared fully formed in my head. Monstrous, really. I haven't really written any poetry since then. I'm exhausted by it".

What were the highlights and low points of your six-month trip that influenced this collection?

"The high point was China. It's absolutely terrifying but so genuinely *other* that overturned all my assumptions, and felt like a real adventure in the way so much travelling fails to do now. The low point was losing my handbag with all our money in it in Bangkok, due to a Thai-whisky binge. I

was puking on the steps of the police station when we went in to report it. A complete disgrace".

You grew up in Bolton and made the move to London a few years back. How much did your upbringing and environment affect your way of writing? And, how did the move away from this to London change your writing?

"I was never really a regional writer. Except I swear quite a lot, and I'm not afraid to tell the truth - both possibly Boltonian characteristics! I like the anonymity of London - the huge diversity of places and people, and how you can move around like a ghost, unobserved, taking it all in. I feel very alert to the voices of adverts, the cry "buy! buy!" on every inch of the city, so I suppose that has affected my work. I feel obliged to wrestle with that language".

Poetry is often marginalised in British education, with teachers concentrating on dead poets rather than bringing contemporary poets into the classroom. What was your own experience of poetry at school and how did your classmates treat you when they discovered you wrote poetry?

"Poetry was definitely a marginal part of the curriculum, but I had a couple of very good teachers who introduced me to writers that still influence me. One of our set texts at A-level was Plath's Selected Poems, and this had a profound impact on my desire to be a poet - when I wrote my first book, The Heavy-Petting Zoo, my main aim was to capture something of her intensity of emotion - her ability to write rage, or move you to tears in the space of a few lines, which seemed to me close to miraculous. Having seen my work, one teacher suggested I write an essay on Gerald Manly Hopkins, and I think his density and musicality has marked my poetry. And then of course, Shakespeare, who I constantly go back to - I recall having to perform Lady Macbeth's 'I have given suck' speech in one class, and being completely overawed by it. Given that I was a bit of a loner and 'swot' at school, I don't think anyone was particularly surprised to discover I went home and furiously scribbled verse. In fact, the response was good - there was a kind of novelty in seeing their own experiences of clubs and fumbled kisses put into poetic language".

You appeared in a series of TV programmes dissecting poems for secondary school children. How important do you feel Lit Criticism is and how do you feel that it helps readers understand poems?

"I think lit criticism teaches us a closer, more intense way of reading, and a fuller engagement with the text. So many people let words float past without really thinking about them. I know there's the argument that criticism takes fun away from reading - and a little does go a long way - but sometimes complex texts give us the richest pleasure, and just a few simple pointers in the right direction can unlock them for us. There are millions of people out there who say: 'I don't understand poetry', and I think the TV series Arrows of Desire is a really important because it says *yes you do*, and leads you through famous poems in a really clear way. People get really intimidated by metaphors, for example, and I think that metaphorical thinking is something you can learn really easily".

If you could change British poetry in anyway what would you do?

"I would like it to open its doors more to young writers, but I've probably banged on about that enough. I'd like people to start buying more. That would be nice".

You were named as one The Independent's top writers under 30. How much do you think this has helped your career and what was it like to see yourself in a national newspaper?

"It might have sold a few books, but if anything, my appearances in national newspapers have probably harmed my poetic career. Poetry's a small world, and when it's felt that the 'wrong' people are getting press

attention, there's usually a mixture of jealousy and annoyance. My mum likes it when I'm in the papers though".

There is often the argument that what the poet means isn't always found by the reader, and that the reader interprets the poem the way they want. How important do you feel this is? And has anyone ever got the core message of your poems wrong and how did that feel?

"I think my work's quite explicit. I've never really been greatly misinterpreted, apart from the fact that occasionally people don't pick up on my very black sense of humour. I did all that 'death of the author' thing at university, but ultimately, I think literature is about communication. I don't read to see my own self reflected back - I want to know about other people, other lives, other opinions than my own".

If you could talk with any living or dead poets, who would they be and what would you like to talk to them about?

"I actually have a poem 'Fantasy Dinner Party' that features Sylvia Plath. But I think I'd rather have a few cocktails with Anne Sexton, just to hear her wonderful husky voice and find out if Diane-Brook Middleton's scandalous biography is all true. I think Frank O'Hara would be interesting on the subject of globalisation - there's this queasiness about consumption in his poems. And Shakespeare, of course, to see if he's actually Shakespeare".

You presented The Sixteenth Summer for Channel 4, how did you find the process of writing for television and going back to Bolton to chronicle the break-ups and piss-ups of 16-year-olds? What did you learn from the process?

"Documentary is a very funny medium. I felt pretty guilty most of the time, because these kids were sixteen and didn't really know how they were going to appear on camera. It felt intrusive, even though I think it was a very sensitive film in the end. There was one amazing sequence, where these sixteen year-olds were having an Anne Summers party, and all sucking chocolate cocks until they oozed out between their teeth, which was horrifying but an amazing image of girls on that edge between womanhood and innocence. We decided it was too exploitative in the final cut though. I'm quite good at writing quickly, to order, and it was interesting writing around the edit, and then dubbing my poetry over the top of footage straight away. And it was a very weird experience when it got screened at the Manchester Cornerhouse - my face 10ft high was an alarming spectacle!"

What do you think makes a poet?

"A love of language, a love of reading, the urgent sense that you have something to say.

Attention to the detail - whether that's the placing of a comma or remembering the precise scent of your ex-lover's clothes".

You have held a series of jobs to support your work, managing editor of The Idler and assistant director of the Clerkenwell Literary Festival but what has been your worst and best job and why? What did you learn from these jobs?

"The worst was in a chain-pub opposite Liverpool Street Station. My poem 'The Chain' is a kind of torrent of bitterness against all the patronising bastards who abuse and insult barmaids. Plus the place was so expensive I felt the urge to apologise before I served a drink, and the staff so badly paid that all apart from me were squatters. The only good thing about it was that it inspired a poem. The best has been working at The Idler. They're really inspirational people, throw great parties, and are flexible to the point of ridiculousness (e.g.: "I'm not coming in today, I feel like sunbathing" is a completely valid excuse.) I've also learnt a lot about editing from them that I've applied to Reactions."

Your play [The Weather](#) (Faber, 2004) was performed at The Royal Court last year, can you take us through the process of how the play came about? And, what have you learnt that you are taking forward to your next play?

"I did a course with the Young Writer's Programme at the Royal Court a few years back, which I think is the best writing course in the country, bar none. I was taught by the completely inspirational playwright Simon Stephens one night a week, saw lots of plays for free, and spent hours in the bar debating the state of modern drama. That was when I first started writing seriously for the theatre. [The Weather](#) was written very quickly, in about a fortnight, when my dad was ill. It was fuelled by a lot of rage. It's set in the near future, with the weather getting dramatically worse, terrorists blowing up shopping centres, and the end of the world in sight. I wanted to explore the visual side of theatre, so decided to put a poltergeist in the house, which becomes a metaphor for the outside world finally catching up with this privileged family and wreaking its revenge on them - although it's also linked to the daughter's anger. It was a real thrill having a play on. It can be quite lonely being a writer, and it was fun to work with lots of other people, although a wrench giving up total control of my work. I think in future I need to let go more. My new play under commission for the Royal Court is called [The Zoo-Keeper's Wife](#), after the Plath poem. She has a breakdown and the monkeys start talking to her. I don't think I can go wrong with talking monkeys..."

Returning to [Look! Clare! Look!](#) can you take us through how you edited the collection and how that differed from your work with [Reactions](#)?

"As I've got older my editing has become very much gut instinct. If something feels wrong or dull, even if I can't quite explain why, I'll just cut it. I'm ruthless. There wasn't really much more editing to do on [Look, Clare! Look!](#) once I'd cut out the weak links, as the chronology was dictated by the subject matter".

What does this collection mean to Clare Pollard the poet and Clare Pollard the person?

"I think it's my best book by quite a long way. I love the whole package, from the photo on the front - a snapshot of my eye taken on the night I got engaged - to the map my husband drew of our journey that prefaces the poetry. I also think that I'm dealing with really important things in it, not just looking round for a suitable poetic topic - these are poems I felt *impelled* to write, which is something I can't quite say about my previous work. So as a poet, I'm proud of it. And as a person, I suppose I think of it in a way as a tribute to my father, and a kind of love letter to him. It was very important to me that I commemorated him somehow, and words are how I do it best".

If you could give any advice to people who are thinking of trying to make a career as a poet, what would it be?

"I know everyone always says read a lot, but it's true. If you don't read contemporary poetry books, why would you expect anyone to read yours? Apart from that, the only real way to break into poetry is to build up a reputation in the magazines - Poetry Review, The Rialto, Magma and Poetry London are all very good places to be spotted. Be true to your own vision, rather than writing what you think is 'publishable.' And the sign Sexton had pinned above her desk is a good rule of thumb: 'WHATEVER YOU DO DON'T BE BORING'".

Finally, What are you working on at the moment? And what have been the successes and the problems?

"I'm working on [The Zoo-Keeper's Wife](#) for the Royal Court, and a movie script for the production company Celador. It's a rom-com. I've never

really written comedy before, but I keep chuckling to myself at my desk, so things must be going okay".

"When I'm engaged on a poem and it's going well I feel like I did as a child making a den at the bottom of the garden, a place where I could think and dream away from the adult world"

The Truth With A Line: Esther Morgan
Interview by Andrew Oldham

Esther Morgan was born in 1970 in Kidderminster, After reading English at Newnham College, Cambridge, she worked as a volunteer at the Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere, Cumbria. She took an MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia and has since taught on its under-graduate creative writing programme, editing the UEA new poetry anthology, Reactions. In 1998, she won an Eric Gregory Award, and taught at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Australia. [Beyond Calling Distance](#) was her first book of poems from Bloodaxe, followed up by her recent collection [The Silence Living in Houses](#).

In your new collection [The Silence Living in Houses](#) you deal with unsettling themes of ghosts, sisters who come to a macabre end and servant girls that vanish. Why did you want to tackle such themes and what drew you to the characters, their tales and the language or their poetry?

"I've always been interested in themes of absence, silence and erasure. My first collection contained a lot of poems that touched on silences between people who are failing to communicate in some way. But the feel of the second collection was prompted in particular by a move to an old house in Oxfordshire about three years ago. The circumstances are unusual: my partner and I don't own this house, but are in effect care-taking it for the owner. The house isn't that old - only Edwardian - but it hasn't been renovated for half a century. There is, consequently, a powerful sense of history in the place - a lot of the furniture is of the period and details like the servants' bells remain, along with antiquated plumbing and no central heating (there's a lot of wintry imagery in the book). It's got a magical atmosphere - surrounded by trees with an overgrown garden that backs on to fields and woods. It's the house that time forgot and living there has been a powerful imaginative experience - the past is so palpable it's as if the former inhabitants are sometimes more real than ourselves, as if we are the transient presences. But whilst the rooms are redolent of former lives, these remain in the realm of hint and suggestion so it's natural for the mind to start inventing stories from the fragments that remain, like the broken china we occasionally unearth in the garden which surfaced in the story of the disappearing maid in 'Bone China'. In a way the house has provided a setting and a different slant on subjects I've always been interested in: the hidden lives of women, the secrets within families, what happens behind closed doors".

This collection is infused with a rich tapestry of language and intrigue. What do you enjoy about this medium of poetry? What is about poetic language that drives you to write?

"Because the poems were written in a shorter period of time than those in the first collection, the book has a stronger sense of cohesion, something that is often the case, I think, with a second collection. But I've always been drawn to poetry that modulates language through the course of a book. I'm also more interested in poems that proceed through suggestion, that are ambiguous in some way. In writing a poem I'm struggling to express something which may be ultimately incommunicable and that tends to lead to a strategy of implication. I don't set out to be deliberately mysterious

but I am fascinated by how little we know about other human beings, even those we profess to be close to, sometimes them most of all. We all wander through life like icebergs with nine tenths of us hidden beneath the surface - that's the bit most writers are interested in exploring. As far as what drives me to write, I think it's a sense of territory. When I'm engaged on a poem and it's going well I feel like I did as a child making a den at the bottom of the garden, a place where I could think and dream away from the adult world. Writing a poem is like making a den out of words. I also feel I'm deeply inarticulate much of the time - I'm not someone who is good at arguing or particularly confident in my own opinions - I often only know what I think or feel about a given situation after it's passed and I can talk to myself through writing. I feel very cut adrift when I'm not writing, because I'm reduced to reacting to the world rather than thinking about it".

Poetry is often seen as a personal medium, that themes tackled on the page are often drawn from the poet's background. At the heart of your new collection there is dark menace of violence, and the question arises of whether the poet has first hand knowledge of this or if not how did they perpetuate 'the truth' of the collection?

"I agree there can be a problem with the 'I' in poetry and the assumption that this equates with the person of the poet in a very direct way. I'm interested in the implications of using the first person and the construction of identities that are tangential to the poet. This was an issue for me in writing the poems in the second section of 'The Silence Living in Houses' (the book's split into three sections altogether, each of which is linked through the idea of interiors). The second section was problematic because it deals with domestic violence, albeit in an oblique way. I haven't, thank God, ever experienced physical violence myself, though I think I have an understanding of emotional intimidation which often goes hand in hand with violence. The immediate context of these poems though, stemmed from my work as a Case Conference Administrator for Oxford Social Services, taking the minutes of Child Protection conferences where domestic violence was often a factor within families where the children were having problems. Some of the stories really got under my skin: I was already writing poems about what happens inside houses and this subject started to creep in, particularly the sense of secrecy and isolation these women were suffering. I was struck by a remark one Social Worker made, that in the right context domestic violence can be a raised eyebrow, because of the threat the gesture implies. I found I was writing poems where it was this threat of violence that's more frightening and controlling than the violence itself. But to get back to the issue of using 'I', this was a real problem in these particular poems - though I was careful not to use any real details from the cases I heard I still felt that adopting the first person was an appropriation of others' experiences. The last thing I wanted to do was suggest that I was a victim of this kind of situation. I therefore switched early on to using the second person, 'You', in these poems which is more inclusive, though readers may still may make assumptions about autobiographical elements even so. Of course, I believe writers are entitled to write about any subject but with the proviso that if it's not your own direct experience you have a bigger responsibility to get it right, to try and inhabit the material as fully as possible. I didn't have this issue with the other two sections of the book - the first being largely free invention, and the third drawing on personal childhood memories".

The poetry in the collection is haunting and disturbing, how hard was it to delve into such areas?

"Some of the poems about home life were tricky as well - you may feel you own your personal memories but they are also the stuff of the memories of others who are close to you. This presents a different challenge from the

one discussed above. I don't want to imply there are any terrible family skeletons which I reveal in the book - there aren't - but nevertheless the public narrative a family tells about itself can be rather different from the secret one which rumbles on beneath the surface of everyday life. In my case it was the relationship between my grandmother, her daughter (my mother) and myself. There were plenty of hidden tensions - nothing out of the ordinary but powerful nevertheless, particularly as I spent a great deal of time with both of them growing up. Children are very sensitive to emotional atmosphere and this is the territory that these poems explore - but investigating this can be unnerving and I did worry about the reaction they'd get. In the end I gave them to my mother to read before publishing them - my grandmother died a couple of years ago - as I wanted her to absorb them before they appeared in public. I felt I owed her that as a courtesy - after all it's her past as well - and fortunately she thought they were good and didn't have a problem with them".

Poets are illusionists that the poet can create as well as draw from reality. But how much do real events on a personal and global level affect you? And how, if you do, do you tie these into fictional event that re-enforce what you are trying to say?

"'The Silence Living in Houses' is a pretty internalised collection, claustrophobic even. There's plenty of autobiographical material in it, especially in the third section which re-examines the interiors of houses from my childhood. However, I don't feel I'm a nakedly personal writer in the way someone like Sharon Olds is, whose work I very much admire for its combination of honesty and technical skill. However, whilst I draw on personal memory a great deal it's often transformed into material which feels more like folk or fairy tale. For instance, my grandmother is a key figure in my life and writing - she was both deeply ordinary and quite remarkable - but in the poems in the third section she becomes more like a figure from a childhood story, part nurturing, part frightening. So her old-fashioned way of laying a fire becomes a kind of ancestral haunting in the poem 'Firelighter'. She played cards a lot to pass the time, different kinds of patience in particular, and this found its way into a poem called 'La Patience, 1943' which is based on a painting by the French artist, Balthus, but is transformed into a gothic tableau. Elsewhere there are poems which come from sources external to memory and family life. For instance 'Half Sister' was triggered by watching the film *The Others* starring Nicole Kidman (not a great film to watch alone in an old house where there are rooms which aren't used!) One of the most haunting details in the film was the child who can't be exposed to daylight otherwise they'll burn. This image of someone trapped in a twilight world was very powerful to me and became a kind of doppelganger in the poem, an image of an alternative life which is ghosting the present. Another poem, 'Fast' is from a shocking true event in which three sisters and their aunt deliberately starved themselves to death in an act of religious fervour in the midst of an ordinary housing estate in Dublin. So external events are an important inspiration but the distance between poems based on these and more personal memories is often not that big, in that I use a similar approach in both cases. If by global events you mean more overtly political or environmental concerns, these inform my view of the world but they don't often enter directly into the poems - I can't just choose to write about something, be it the Iraq war or the Asian tsunami, unless it connects to some inner poetic impulse. Perhaps this sounds selfish or remote from real life, but I don't feel this is so - I can't write a successful poem from the head, it has to be more than an intellectual articulation and to do otherwise would result in false writing. However, some of the ideas that obsess me, particularly silence and the voice connect to repression in a wider sense - it's so hard to speak freely even if your culture, at least on the surface, allows this. I'm interested in the power mechanisms, personal and political and sometimes a combination of the two, that prevent

people from speaking. And in my first book there are poems about isolation which touch on environmental degradation - *Beyond Calling Distance* begins and ends with fables of landscapes which have ceased to be fertile and the psychological impact of this on a community. So yes, what is happening out there finds its way into the work, but usually in quite a roundabout way that takes time to mesh with my poetic voice".

How did you edit your latest collection? And how important do you think the skill of editing is to a writer and poet?

"This collection actually fell into place quite quickly. It became apparent that I was writing about three main subjects: the old house, domestic violence and childhood memories and once the idea of interiors had taken hold as a unifying theme, the different sections were clear-cut. I do think editing skills in terms of a whole collection are important - thinking about the shape of a book and also considering on a smaller scale how the juxtaposition of different poems affects the way a reader interprets them seems to me an extra resource at the poet's disposal. I know readers won't always begin with poem one and read straight through, but I often read several poems in a row, or once I've dipped into a collection several times, may then read the book in a linear way. Arranging poems in a book is a bit like arranging stanzas in a poem: I enjoy the process and the way surprising connections can reveal themselves along the way. For example, the second section of the book moves from stifling confinement and oppression towards some possibility of release; this wasn't pre-planned but as I wrote more poems I began to see a subsumed narrative was possible and that it would be good to progress towards the idea of escape".

Until recently, you were the editor of *Reactions*, what did you learn from this time and how had it improved/detracted from your view of poetry and your own work?

"Editing *Reactions* was a very positive experience and a continual reminder of how many different kinds of poetry there are. I dislike anthologies that try to spin a party line or are only interested in promoting one kind of poetics. No single book can be comprehensive and taste will always be subjective, but I was determined to adopt as broad-minded approach as possible to the editing task. Any submission that seemed to offer anything at all was always read more than once and I'd bring in other colleagues as readers in trying to make the final selection. In terms of my own work it showed me different possibilities exist: there's always a danger as a writer that you start reading only material which confirms your own taste, that a kind of narrowing will occur over time. As an editor it's impossible to remain insular - every now and then I'd read a poet whose work really jolted me awake, that I was surprised I liked. On the other hand I gave up editing as I moved more deeply into writing the second collection. I needed the solitude, to focus the energy inwards and that's hard to do if you've got fifty other voices competing for attention inside your head. I find this tends to be my writing rhythm - that I need alternating periods of busy engagement in the wider world, followed by bouts of introspection".

Do you feel that in the UK poetry scene that there is a glass ceiling for female poets and what do you feel perpetuates this?

"I feel personally I've been very fortunate in the opportunities that have come my way, not least of which was editing *Reactions*. Also my instinct as a writer is to be very private - I'm not comfortable in pursuing a particularly public role in the poetry world, competing for editorships or review space. For me this is detrimental to the writing process as I find myself worrying about what other people think of my poetry and my judgement - feeling self-conscious just makes me and my writing awkward! Having said that I think it's absolutely vital that a wider range of the poetry community has access to the most powerful jobs in poetry, not just women but poets from different ethnic backgrounds as well. I'm glad that *Poetry*

Review now has a woman editor in Fiona Sampson, and there are plenty of examples of women making headway in this respect, such as Pascale Petit and now Martha Kapos' editing role for the wonderful *Poetry London*. But still the major poetry publishers are male-dominated and I think that does need to change - that's not to imply that the existing male editors aren't doing a good job but there should just be greater representation across the board. It's far too easy for a situation to become self-perpetuating in a small world like that of poetry publishing where a relatively small group of people becomes comfortable with each other and the status quo - that's true of any field and needs a good shaking up from time to time".

What kind of problems have you had as a poet in the UK and abroad?

"The enduring problems are with myself, the endless battle to give myself permission to write. Laziness and lack of confidence are formidable foes and need watching carefully. I thought the writing process would get easier with experience but I'm not finding that - perhaps this is a bad time to ask as I'm searching for a new direction and haven't yet picked up the thread! A friend just sent me the following poem by Elaine Feinstein which I'm finding very inspiring - so I thought I'd pass it on:

MUSE

for E.T.

"Write something every day, she said",
"even if it's only a line,
it will protect you".

How should this be?
Poetry opens no cell,
heals no hurt body,

brings back no lover,
altogether, poetry is
powerless as grass.

How then should it defend us?
Only by strengthening
our fierce and obstinate centres.

I love that last line - I often feel I lose my 'fierce and obstinate centre' amongst the demands of everyday life and that's precisely why I write, to fight against a tendency to acquiesce or just drift along without questioning things. I think reading as well as writing poetry can help strengthen this too; that's why it remains important".

What do you think of the UK Poetry Scene today? If you could change it anyway what would you do?

"This connects to some of the thoughts I express in answer to question above - since I became interested in contemporary poetry in the late 80s I think it has become a more vibrant and open-minded place but there's a way to go. Healthy debate is good, bitchy faction-fighting isn't and I sometimes think there's a fine line between the two as far as the poetry world is concerned. For example the concerted campaign against Bloodaxe's *Being Alive* and *Staying Alive* anthologies in some quarters of the specialist poetry press enraged me and flew in the face of the books' reception in the general review pages of newspapers and magazines, and the overwhelmingly positive reception the books got from the public, perfectly intelligent and sophisticated reading public I might add. That struck me as intellectual snobbery, the squeals of an elite faced by an external threat beyond their control. It reminded me of certain tutors and fellow students

I came across at Cambridge who were intent on using knowledge to bully and undermine the intellectual confidence of others - it's something I've no time for. On the other hand, I know from personal experience how very generous poets can be to one another - my own creative journey wouldn't have been possible without the unselfish support and encouragement that I've come across. There's often a lot of coverage of spats and feuds in the poetry press but not much attention paid to the quiet, ongoing sharing of work and resources amongst practitioners. If there's one thing I could change it would be to somehow get poetry reviewed more extensively and substantially in the broadsheet press; my sense from speaking to literate friends of mine who are avid fiction readers is that poetry remains too much of a mystery, that they don't know where to start when it comes to contemporary poetry. The prizes and gongs of recent decades have done something to publicise poetry beyond it's ghetto, but so much more needs to be done. I know from my experience as a teacher that students who are initially suspicious of contemporary poetry are converted very quickly when good examples are placed before them week after week. That's all it takes - here's a poem, and another one and here's another - what do you think of them? And then they're away. But that only happens in small pockets, not across the culture as a whole".

How important do you feel it is that writers and poets should be readers?
 "Absolutely 100% vital. Any breakthroughs in my own work have come from reading others and absorbing approaches, ideas, techniques and then trying them out for myself".

What are you reading now? And what is your favourite piece of work?
 "A great deal of my reading recently has been bound up with my involvement in a project called The Poetry Archive. It's an online resource of poets reading their own work, both contemporary and historic. I've been working on both elements, researching recordings, writing introductions and amalgamating all the bibliographical info etc. So my reading has really been listening and that's been a powerful experience, to get back to the voices of poets and their different intonations and accents. It's made me re-assess the relationship between the spoken and the written voice and how the two might influence each other. Particular favourites include Margaret Atwood's laconic tones which suit her dry-eyed, sometimes acerbic poems, Christopher Logue's impassioned reading of a section from *All Day Permanent Red* and Roy Fisher's quietly ruminative and witty meditations on art and our industrial heritage. It's a different experience from going to a reading where poets tend to stick to their tried and tested favourites and the performance element can dominate. These are largely studio recordings and have a personal, more reflective quality as if the poet is speaking quietly to you alone - and that can be a very charged experience. The Archive's an ongoing, inclusive project (everyone from Betjeman through Heaney to Denise Riley) with many more poets due to be added over the coming months - www.poetryarchive.org"

What are you working on at the moment?
 "As I mentioned above, I'm casting around for the next book, the next idea. Work commitments meant an enforced break last year so I'm experiencing an uncomfortable rustiness at the moment. But I know I want a more open collection this time - whether in style or subject matter or both".

Many poets and writers are drawn to academia, why do you think writers and poets end up in a HE environment?
 "By accident! I think with the proliferation of creative writing courses there are more teaching opportunities than ever, however these are mainly part-time and insecure posts, so it's not a bed of roses. However, it does provide some flexibility I guess and the lure of the holidays to get some

writing done, though in my experience these are often taken up with planning for the next academic year".

3. Articles

"In 2005, The Incwriters Society put out the call to publishers across the United Kingdom to submit magazines for 'The Incwriters Society Award for an Outstanding Contribution to Literature 2006'. The award takes the format of twelve months of on-line support by The Society to promote the winning magazine. It is a pleasure to announce the final ten, and the winner today. As always there a few surprises that will create opportunities for the two winners"*

- Andrew Oldham, Administrator of The Incwriters Society

10. Orbis 133 (Orbis, 84 pages, ISSN 0300-4425, £15.00 per annum). Contact Address: 17 Greenhow Avenue, West Kirby, Wirral, Cheshire CH48 5EL. carolebaldock@hotmail.com

If it's not broken, don't fix it. When Mike Shields called a day on Orbis a few years back, I and many others assumed that was the end of a great publication. Then Carole Baldock took over as editor and with a seamless change of staff (it seemed seamless at the time) we had a new editor and new Orbis. Orbis though hasn't really changed since Shields left, and there is something comforting about that, but what has been differed is the new editor's choice of poetry, 'Lines on Lines' which brings you extremely useful information on the industry, competitions and publishing news (this was always something that Baldock was renown for, her ability to filter information out into the wider reading community) and the 'Poetry Index' actively helping to promote other magazines.

That was the beauty of Orbis it never set itself up in competition with other magazines and what criticism was published on their pages was never tinged by jealousy or competition. That is the beauty still.

Poetry still comes from all across the world, which is a credit to the magazine's reputation and history. Highlights are Claudette Bass with *Beyond Breakwater*: "until death/Polly puts the kettle on/leaves it boiling furiously/goes to find a golden bird/which sings and spits" with her intriguing verse buried up to its neck in Plath and Greek legend. Emma Curran (*Sugar Pill*), Alexandra Benedict (*Play Dead*) and Donna Pucciani (*Magnolia*) all tackle dark areas and do so in way that brings in the reader, stuns them into bitter silence with images that haunt the mind.

The only downside to the magazine is the monochrome interior, though part of you wishes that Orbis would come into the twenty-first century when it comes to design, a larger part screams out for them to never change because quality always outweighs style.

Bixby Monk

9. The Rialto Number 57, Spring 2005 (£5, subscription £15 pa) <http://www.therialto.co.uk/>

This is one of the most revered publications amongst poets; from its inception in 1984 the magazine has roared quality to the Literary world. It is has also put Norwich back on the map, beyond the usual jokes or references to Alan Partridge. The reason that the magazine has lasted so long is simple, The Rialto believes in quality in all quarters, in content, in style and tone. The magazine has changed over the years, there's now a letter page and more prose. Under Michael Mackmin the magazine has grown in

strength and popularity, it has become a national institution, more so than the Poetry Review and with a wider ranging taste in poetry.

Of course, the magazine isn't afraid to publish letters from their detractors and there will be a few out there, who never having been on their pages (I'm one of them) feel the necessary bile to spit out at the editor. It is Mackmin's continued belief in being open with Rialto readers, that allow us to view such letters as genuinely eccentric ("Many of what you publish is quite boring, tasteless"). Which says more about the letter writer than it does about the publication.

The editorial bemoans Arts Council funding, our beloved ACE have away of taking away money and shrugging their shoulders in disbelief when you go bankrupt (they must believe we are a nation of poetry lovers or are just philistines who have yet to get beyond banging rocks together in a London cave).

This A4 magazine gives us plenty to think about with an interesting interview with the poet Lotte Kramer, verse from the likes of Esther Morgan and Simon Armitage and a taster of Sean O'Brien's translation of Dante's Inferno (another translation?). Poetry touches on different themes from the 1950s (Peter Lewin and Joan Johnston) to haunting poetry by Hans Magnus Enzensberger.

The Rialto isn't so much a roar but an approaching stampede.

Samantha Morton

 8. The Third Alternative #41 (TTA Press, 66 pages, ISSN: 1352-3783, £4.00)
<http://www.ttapress.com/>

This issue of TTA (Spring 2005) contains seven short stories alongside the features of book reviews, comment, Stephen Volk's film column and an interview with writer Phil Rickman. Things are prefaced by Joel Lane's guest editorial - an interesting and thoughtful piece on the inheritance of slipstream writing and recent trends in genre fiction. Lane writes convincingly about the 'restless innovation' that characterises the pulp tradition and the necessity of "tidy plots" being "overgrown with mutant strands of narrative". Elsewhere, the level of reportage isn't as high, The Dodo's 'tongue-in-beak' column reduced to a discussion of pensions, possibly not what springs to mind as a topic for the dark, edgy material celebrated in the editorial.

Andrew Hedgecock's interview with Phil Rickman offers some insight into what led to Rickman's series of 'spiritual procedurals' featuring Reverend Merrily Watkins. Rickman is an articulate commentator on his own work and the process of writing and explains how he managed to go from being Wales' Current Affairs reporter of the Year to a celebrated author.

The fiction in this issue begins with 'SS' by Nathan Ballingrud, a story about a boy's involvement with white supremacists that is skewed by some extraneous and gratuitous horror concerning his crippled mother's eating habits. Next there is Cody Goodfellow's 'A Drop of Ruby' that is a little gem of clear prose with a central concept of sentient blood that could sustain a novel. Scott Nicholson's story 'In the Family' concerns a son who is forced to take drastic steps when his mother plans to sell the family funeral business, forcing the son out of what has become his vocation. It's sharply written and reads like a tale from the 'Pan Books of Horror' crossed with 'Six Feet Under.' Chaz Brenchley's 'Going to Jerusalem' is about a couple who walk the Jerusalem Mile maze in a bid to start a family and the consequences of putting a foot wrong. This issue's standout story is 'The Return' by Conrad Williams. This is a fine example

of Williams' work, a compelling short story full of subtle narrative effects and striking details. "She'd fallen into the canal and was face down in a broth of oil, her arm twisted behind her back. I could see the resin flower on her finger. A great bloom of red had blossomed at the small of her back. I waded in and fished her out, knowing she was already dead. I touched the blood. It wrinkled, much like the sugar test my mum used to perform on a saucer when making strawberry jam." Martin Simpson's story 'The Sixteenth Man I Killed' is a crisp tale of a contract killer haunted by his most recent victim and Patrick Samphire's 'The Western Front' is composed of the diary and letters of a World War One captain waiting for the order to begin the push who discovers something strange and impossible growing in no man's land.

As is usually the case with *The Third Alternative*, the standard of artwork accompanying the stories is high. In particular, Mike Bohatch, Vincent Chong and Robert Dunn produce impressive illustrations while the cover is a debut piece by David Gentry - hopefully he'll be back.

Jake Elliot

7. Banipal, PO Box 22300, London W13 8ZQ. Editor Margaret Obank.

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Banipal is instantly attractive - elegant in design, it is, nevertheless, a daunting journey of discovery for someone like myself largely ignorant of Arab contemporary literature. Only poet Saadi Youssef was a name recognisable to me, and that simply because there had been the first-ever tour of Arab authors in this country which had occurred in-between these 2 issues of *Banipal* - no.21, Autumn 2004, and no.22, Spring 2005.

The magazine, launched in February 1998, features interviews, news, photographs, and a colour cover featuring a prominent Arab artist. The translations embrace Arab writers who write in French, English, German, as well as Arabic. The name 'Banipal' comes from the last great king of Assyria, Ashurbanipal, patron of the arts. Salih J. Altoma, Professor Emeritus of Arabic and Comparative Literature at Indiana University, says: 'No other Western journal dealing with the Arab world has contributed as much as *Banipal* toward a wider appreciation of modern Arabic literature'.

Issue 21 features a bewildering but rich and varied array of Lebanese, Iraqi, Moroccan writers, novel extracts, short stories, poems, as well as a special section on Contemporary Egyptian Literature. I enjoyed particularly the short story *The Sweetest Tea with the most Beautiful Woman* by Tarek Eltayeb, born in Cairo, and the two very short stories from Mahmood Abdel Wahab (born in Basra, Southern Iraq) because of their precision and deft evocation of human situations. At the end of each issue is an interview with an Arab author on their early and childhood literary influences - here, more recognisable (Western) names helped me to find some familiar literary territory!

Occasionally, I found the poetry (in both issues) rather effusive, lengthy, and declamatory in style, but referring to a couple of reviews in issue 21 - of brief, intense lyrics by Syrian poet Maram al-Massri (*A Red Cherry on a White-tiled Floor*) published by Bloodaxe in the UK, for instance - I'd have to conclude this is an impression only. There was also a review of

short poems by Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti, published by the Aldeburgh Poetry Trust, UK. It is interesting, though, that in an interview with him, Lebanese writer Abbas Beydhoun talks of the 'loose or liquid or free' characteristic of French surrealism as well as that of Arabic poetry, due to its 'extreme verbal resonance' as opposed to the precision of image and idea in the poetry of T.S.Eliot.

The stories in Issue 22, Spring 2005, were, I found, strong on urban and environmental detail, but that is simply a general, overall impression. Again, there are novel extracts, poems, interviews, reviews. To be honest, the only reason why I wouldn't subscribe to *Banipal* is that the unfamiliar cultural backdrops, references, and names, would take some getting used to, and an interest in this literary territory would need to grow on me, gradually, over time.

William Park

6. Avocado - Prose Special, Summer 2005, edited by Jonathan Morley, £2.00
24 pages.

www.heaventreepress.co.uk/avocado.htm

This issue of Avocado magazine is certainly something to get your teeth into, with its densely-packed anthology of prose writing, accompanied by some poetry and incisive, accessible arts reviews. By turns surreal, poignant and witty, Heaventree Press's lively and varied arts showcase blends literature and social commentary, privileging a ripe vein of humour as it does so.

There is a sharp community and international focus to many of the pieces of work within this issue, with exclusives from Guyana Prize winner David Dabydeen, Malawian writer Jack Mapanje, and Algerian poet Amari Hamadene. Dabydeen's prose extract 'The Truth of the Dead' is particularly strong, focusing on a woman's experience of mental illness and disability as she builds a relationship of dependency on her animate stick, which condescends to give her scathing advice when it is not pontificating on the nobility of its ancestry ('One branch of the family tree beheld crusaders engaging with Saladin at the Battle of Jerusalem'). The writing is assured and entertaining, making you want to read the rest.

Chan Ziquian's 'The Bodies' depicts a sinister, but strangely familiar, post-apocalyptic world, where human existence is characterised by decay, fragility, and fear. The writer's use of imagery and pace is powerful and effective in conveying an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty which could apply to any number of modern contexts: 'Elsewhere a woman was turning on and off taps, trying to silence the ringing noise which she would hear again years later for the rest of her life, a note bright and hard and impossible for the human vocal chords to sound (and if anyone should try, he will find lodged in his throat a small lump of gold so that all future words will emerge empty like an underwater stream) and like a bird, like a plane, the sound travels.'

The humour of 'The Silent Tooth', by Vanessa Cross, lies in the ridiculous humanity of its characters: a man murders his wife by jumping out at her naked, and she is struck down by his sheer ugliness. This brand of sardonic wit continues in the hilarious rant by George Ttoouli on the 'Lifestyle and Habits of the Audi Driver': on its home territory of the M40, '[t]he Audi Driver will feed regularly, up to fifty or more times per journey. Their favourite prey is the smaller car, a common Fiesta [...]. Prey are targeted according to their proximity to the fast lane; should the pack sight suitable prey actually travelling in the fast lane they are considered a personal insult and are marked for instant execution.' Being the proud owner of a clapped out N-reg Fiesta I was of course beset by howls of

delighted recognition. I decided I thoroughly approved of Avocado's brand of 'community writing'.

Kate Parrinder

5. Tadeeb Vol. No3. Issue 2

This is a quarterly magazine produced both in the UK and Pakistan, and is therefore a bilingual magazine with the strangest advertising ever. Yet, this magazine fills a necessary cultural hole in the UK, the promotion of poetry on a multi-lingual and multi-cultural stage. The beauty of this publication is that it brings together poets, thinkers, essayists and writers from all over the world, and every page has something to convey, be it in an essay, a letter, an article or a poem. In the latter we see the deft touch of Debjani Chatterjee 'In 1498':

Tsunami waves swept
Kamakura's temple walls
Buddha stayed serene

Echoing the tragedy of Boxing Day 2004, which Chatterjee reiterates in a series of poems entitled 'Remember the People, Remember the Places'. These poems set a central theme to this edition of loss, natural tragedy and man made destruction. The editors do not shrink from taking a firm stance and pointing a finger at us all. Helen Goodway edits some of the most exciting voices writing in English, Tariq Latif, Saqi Farooqi and Emma Lindley with 'Cherries at 4am':

The flesh cold on my tongue as I bite
As they split I think of your bottom lip
And unspoken love.

And introduces Ifti Nasim:

He liked the flowers.
He liked them so much he called them the messengers of God.
A child's smile or a blossoming of a flower.
Was the same thing to him.

This is an editor who has carefully put together an issue that reflects big ideas in an environment of distrust. Through these poems we learn about our own culture, not foreign cultures but *our* culture.

In 91 pages of English we are introduced to new writing from England and Pakistan, the love poetry of the nineties and the ideas and ideals behind writers from different continents but with the same thoughts and feelings. This is truly an international publication that inspires and breaks down pre-conceptions and prejudice.

Samantha Morton

4. Harlequin IX (ISSN1474-9076, 31pp, £3.00)

<http://www.harlequinmagazine.com/>

'You are invited to send works of intense beauty, mysticism and wisdom to the poetry magazine of the new century. We dare you to re-create your world and open new horizons in art and literature. Harlequin reserve the right to reject uninspired material'

Any poetry magazine with such a bold criteria for submissions engages my attention immediately. Not having had much previous experience in the metaphysical realm, I cleared my mind and prepared to let Harlequin in. Boy! What amazing places it took me to, from the Narnia-esque landscape of

'Winter in Openheart' by Peter Geoffrey Paul Thompson, complete with ice queens, milk-white unicorn, snowbird and an invitation as tempting as any land beyond the wardrobe;

'O snowbound heretic of Earth,
With laws and creeds opaque,
Enter through the visioned door,
The offered chances take.'

To the sheer liberating energy and pace of 'Yes' by Julian Daizan Skinner.

You see, I have to admit to expecting a collection that would leave me feeling suicidal, given the subject matter suggested by some of the titles neatly laid out on the contents page. This, reinforced by a poignant tribute to the late R. L. Cook, followed by his poem 'Reunion under the Shadow,' a dark and truly moving piece, but wholly accessible with his words on friendship resonating from the grave:

'Dear friends, across a darkness and a time
Of waiting, I repeat: This is enough;
This crumb of light is ours and the bright niche
Lies in our hearts.'

But Harlequin is far from graveyards and gloom, although much of the subject matter explores the darker side of life - and death - and re-birth, such as 'Reincarnation' by John N. Brown, a particular favourite of mine, with its matter of fact ponderance on life, rich with images of possible past lives:

'Perhaps in some forgotten age long since
I trod the streets of ancient Rome
Or rowed in galleys with the ancient Greeks'

Harlequin offers a mischievous celebration of the human spirit, skilfully juggling themes of time, faith, love, life and beyond. Theatrical in its presentation, the eponymous full colour harlequin on the front cover of this edition, immediately catches the eye, inviting readers to venture inside, if they dare; offering a Brechtian experience, challenging our perceptions and ushering us into an arena of alternative realities.

The collection is beautifully illustrated with the striking black and white drawings and images of Katy Jones and Christopher Bilton. These add a further dramatic and surreal dimension to the collection and are to be admired in their own right, complementing the poetry, rather than depicting it.

Much of the poetry instils the reader with a lingering wish to discover more. 'Amorosa/Desiderata' by Marysa Lombard is a touching tale of despair and isolation that conjures up many questions on why the character had reached such a sorry, forsaken state. Similarly, the intriguing intimation of a relationship in turmoil suggested by the minimalist style and unresolved issued in A. C. Evan's 'Not the Cloudy Sky,' is a wonderful example of poetry at its best - a picture, a mood and the desire to want more.

'There will be poetry' by Helen Jeffery has a powerfully uplifting strength, set as it is against a backdrop of universal annihilation, it calms with the certainty that, when all else is gone, poetry will remain.

'Even when the sun
Explodes and we are
One with the universe again,

There will be Poetry.'

And let's face it, in a world where poverty, violence and destruction are increasingly the constants, it's comforting to imagine that once we've all been vaporised by the sun, '..poetry will linger, in the nothingness, in the expanse of infinity..'

Also triumphing over adversity is 'Climax' by Pamela Constantine. It has a beautiful timeless quality in which hope is present for the downtrodden or outcast, be it in today's society or an era long gone:

'We, paupered and alone,
Dreamt of a day like this:
To be lifted on rainbow wings
And returned from the deep abyss,
Lifted from old rememberings
To the lost estate of bliss.'

Another that creates a sense of history yet keeps one foot in the present is 'Alterego' by Evelyn King. The language used conjures a time long past:

'boots black as night click upon stony cobbles
Organza and lace sweeping in their wake'
Yet its title and ending suggest a present day dreamer:

I whisper softly, "Sebastian...Sebastian..."

Your eyes move to open
Then I awake

Harlequin is a gift; igniting the imagination to boldly transcend the threshold of the known. It does indeed 'open new horizons in art and literature'.

Carolyn Thomas

Winner of The Incwriters Society Magazine Award 2006*

3. Mslexia , PO Box 656, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE99 1PZ.
postbag@mslexia.demon.co.uk
<http://www.mslexia.co.uk/>

My first thoughts about Mslexia, when I learnt that I would be reviewing a magazine for women who write, were not entirely complimentary. The idea of a magazine for women writing seemed potentially creepy, or somehow therapeutic, with a bit too much New Agey self-help for my liking.

But Mslexia does not remotely resemble such a nightmarish publication. It's intelligent, opinionated and motivating. It's also supportive: somehow it feels as though everyone published within its covers, whether in a full-length feature or just on the letters page, is part of a community in which people know and encourage each other.

Feminism is definitely on the agenda. For people who still reach for the blinkers whenever they see the f-word, here's a little explanation. Feminists do not hate men. Most of them like men. Some of them are men. What they don't like is living in a world where certain characteristics are assigned to masculinity and others to femininity. They especially don't like people who claim that these characteristics might be different but

they can still be equal, and then rage at what they see as the increasing feminisation of the world.

But the fact that society still says that men should be tough and proud and never admit to failure is one of the reasons why Mslexia is always going to find a readership from both sexes: it provides a forum in which people are allowed to admit to their fears and insecurities about writing. In the men's world, this isn't possible unless you already are some kind of superstar, and even then you have to be half-joking.

Mslexia's manifesto is tucked away on the back page. The magazine's editorial team defines 'mslexia' as: "the complex set of conditions and expectations that prevents women, who as girls so outshine boys in verbal skills, from becoming successful authors. The magazine Mslexia aims to define, explore and help overcome the condition of mslexia and provide a platform and playground for women writers."

This 'complex set of conditions and expectations' operates in many fields. It's the reason men dominate even in professions that are generally considered feminine or for women: cooking, hairdressing and clothes design to name a few. And for writing, Mslexia has the statistics to back it up. According to a survey the magazine conducted in 1999, twice as many women as men write, but women are 50 per cent less likely than men to send off their manuscripts. This issue is largely a product of the way girls and boys are socialised, and could be overcome - if enough people recognise the problem and want to do something about it, that is.

The second set of Mslexia's statistics, however, shows an industry-wide bias towards male writers. In 2000 the magazine surveyed newspaper book reviews and found that 70 per cent of books reviewed were written by men and 72 per cent of the reviews were written by men. In 2005 the figures were exactly the same, the only change being that 72 per cent of books reviewed had male authors and 70 per cent of reviewers were men.

I can hear the hackles rising already on some of your necks: yes, you complacent middle-aged men, as well as some of you young men and women who think that reactionary is the new radical (like the women who say they will change their name when they get married "because it's so uncommon nowadays"). You suggest, delicately, that perhaps if the women were as good as the men things would be more equally balanced. I've got two words for you: context, and contacts. If it really did come down to quality of writing, Nick Hornby would not be considered a better writer than chicklit authors. But this is not the place for an in-depth analysis: perhaps Mslexia will decide to run a detailed feature on it in an upcoming issue.

But most of the articles in Mslexia are not specifically about, or exclusively relevant to, women. There are helpful tips on how to get known as a beginner writer, and a lengthy consideration of the short story and its market. The one thing the magazine lacked - in this issue at least - was a short story, although there were two calls for themed submissions.

Newsagents' shelves now overflow with ill-conceived magazines for women (or, more precisely, female consumers) - and, increasingly, for men - containing nothing but thinly disguised adverts for beauty products and expensive shortcuts to material happiness. In contrast, Mslexia covers an impressive range of important writing-related issues: the intellectual, the political, the grubby business and the inevitable domestic. Mslexia is more than just a condition: it's a good read for both sexes.

JC Sutcliffe

Winner of The Incwriters Society Magazine Award 2006*

2. Transmission Issue 2: the cause and effect issue (Transmission, 36 pages, £5.00)

<http://www.transmissionhq.org/>

Themes worry me, they can work either of two ways, they can free an editor or have them scrambling around for anything that may loosely fit in to them. Graham Foster and Dan McTiernan do not resemble mountain goats, and therefore have had no need to scramble over rock and heather to create what is a striking second issue. Within what is a humble cover, the editors have brought together Doris Lessing and Douglas Coupland, these insightful articles, allow for these two writers to explore and in turn be explored by readers and practising writers. Don't worry if you're completely new to writing as Dan McTiernan addresses this is a regular writers workshop, which on the whole creates an image of a magazine that is as interested in their reader as you are in them. This is refreshingly simple but it is often the death knell of many a magazine who fail to connect with their audience. After all, Literature does have an audience, even though we are afraid talk to them.

This magazine is fiercely Mancunian and most of the writing in this issue deals with writers from this city. Short stories by Kim Wiltshire, Andy Moses, Adam Bowman, Neil Campbell and Dan McTiernan (always nice to see that an editor can put his money where his mouth is) show the diverse range of writing that can be found in one city. It is hope that with other issues, the magazines will tackle other cities in the UK and represent a wide and diverse voice in writing.

David Gafney explores the world of micro fiction Felix Beam explores male sexual fear.

Though this is relatively new and thin magazine, weighing in at thirty-six pages, it is surprising that it is a publication that is irresistible to read and re-read. It is unpretentious in its approach and accessible to readers, writers and publishers.

Transmission may still be a quiet voice in the city but it is striking a mighty drum.

Bixby Monk

Winner of The Incwriters Society Magazine Award 2006*

* since the award was finalised, Zembla and Simon Finch Publications have gone into receivership. The Society acknowledges the magazine's contribution to excellence in the field of UK Magazine publishing. However, after discussion with Zembla, both parties are unable to enter into the Award's conditions and therefore The Society Council have decided to award the 12 month on-line support to Transmission and Mslexia.

1. Zembla Issue 8 (Simon Finch, 128 pages, ISSN 1741 6310, £4.95)

<http://www.zemblamagazine.com/>

Welcome to the future of Literary Magazines, this sharp, slick, cosmopolitan magazine is value for money and a feast for the mind. Literary articles, extracts from new books, writers on writing, writers on shoes, writers on shark hunts, letters to the editor, beside extracts from critically acclaimed authors and new writers who move out through history

to interview the dead. This magazine cannot be accused of being all style and no content, as it actively promotes new writing, established magazines and pushes the boundaries on ideas, theories and taste.

In this edition we get an insight into the late Hunter S. Thompson's gonzo writing ("as I was finally shaking off the last of the acid horrors"), specifically his ability to keep missing deadlines and not giving a damn, Will Self points out the candid truth that not everyone has a novel inside them:

"those hapless punters who, having laid their cash down, now want the novel-inside-them delivered as painlessly as possible".

Marie Darrieussecq traces the confusing and amusing metamorphosis that is book jacket covers in translation. Mark Richards looks at the sinister side of google, Arete is the hot pick of the edition, they dissect David Bowie and discover why German Literature just isn't funny.

The stories in this edition range from Hanif Kureishi's 'The Dogs' to John Haskell's 'Toast', chronicling the breakdown of a relationship set against the backdrop of Britain's favourite breakfast food, earthquakes and nuclear power:

"they didn't yell or scream and throw up their hats. They didn't hug each other. They stood in the middle of the squash courts and smiled".

The magazine actively involves its readers through competitions and letters page, publishing the strait-laced beside the quirky and irreverent. It should also be commended for introducing Little Z, a smaller magazine of fiction for children, making this one of the few magazines that is family orientated.

Highlights of the magazine are Charles Dicken's notebook, an interview with Asia Argento, Ekow Eshun and a portrait of John Fante (who he? The magazine reveals all and shows that even some of the greatest voices are lost in time).

Sure, the only poems are by the playwright, Harold Pinter ('All Gone'), a worthwhile buy just for that and the novelist A.L. Kennedy's first children's poem ('The Wolverine of Monteval'). UK Literary magazines could learn a lot from Zembla. You don't have to sacrifice quality for image or vice versa.

There's so much to and in this magazine that it would take a series of magazine to criticise, dissect and appreciate what Zembla is doing for readers and writers in the UK and abroad.

Andrew Oldham

*no monies ever change hand and this is a reciprocal agreement, in the event that the winner is unable to take up the award, the award and all agreements therein pass to the runner-up.

"The new Aesthetica is exciting, and involves more a huge plethora of emerging artists in one issue. Aesthetica is now the culture magazine for the UK's emerging arts"

Aesthetica
 Contemporary Writing Art Music Film

Article by Cherie Federico

The changing face of *Aesthetica*. You may have heard of *Aesthetica* over the past few years. I'm here to set the record straight.

Aesthetica was started in November 2002. I was a postgraduate student at the time and after working as an intern in New York for a literature magazine, I had this enthusiasm to start my own. When I moved from New York to York, I was looking to volunteer my time with a literary and arts magazine. I searched for a few months and could not find one locally. I discussed my ideas with Dale Donley and he eventually became the co-founder of *Aesthetica*. He was keen to get the project going. It was something that was going to help new and emerging writers and artists to get their work into print.

So, on a Sunday in November three years ago, *Aesthetica* was born. Dale and I made a series of posters that said 'Do you write?' and 'Do you draw?' *Aesthetica* magazine did not even have the name yet. We hadn't thought about that, but set up an email account and then hit the streets, universities, and public notice boards to put up the posters and get submissions. With anticipation, after arriving back at the flat I checked the email account and in the span of three hours someone had sent our very first submission. We needed a name, it could have been *Poetica*, or something like *Poetry Yorkshire*, but *Aesthetica* just came out. I particularly liked Greek aesthetics and I thought about the true meaning of the word, and realised that I wanted my literary magazine to represent all that is creative and diverse.

In the early days we did not know about funding, business plans, or anything like that. We looked at *Aesthetica* as a great hobby, something that was uniting different communities. All of our work was done because we believed that we were making a difference (and still do).

Issue one was released five months after the first day of putting up posters everywhere. It was an 80-page journal with poetry, fiction, reviews, and artwork. We had a big launch for it, and amazingly around 150 people turned up. Someone said to me "so when is issue two out?" The truth is I hadn't thought that far ahead but I replied by saying "two months". As time progressed we started getting more and more submissions from across the country, and we started selling in 12 Borders stores. This helped to get *Aesthetica* around the UK.

Dale and I both finished university, and started working at York College. We were researching educational issues in FE. It was great; it was my first proper job and eventually, both Dale and I moved into teaching. Throughout this time (Issues 2-10), Dale and I were compiling *Aesthetica* in the evenings, running events and workshops (free of charge), and dealing with distribution, accounts, and all that is involved with running a business. Around about issue 4, we applied for Arts Council funding, but were unsuccessful. In hindsight, I feel that it was not the right time for us. We needed to learn much more about publishing. Starting a business is a process; it takes time and a few learning curves too.

In June 2005 we released Issue 10, which featured the cover artwork of pop legend, John Squire. *Aesthetica* was already starting to change; we were including more music and more reviews. It was a great honour to feature the never-before-seen artwork of one of my favourite musicians, but somehow when the issue was finished, I was disappointed with the results. The reason for this is because the artwork was phenomenal, but the A5 size did not give us the ability to showcase it in the way it deserved. I thought, this is John Squire, there should be more fanfare for this. The layout was

too simple and constricted. I felt at that moment it was time to develop the magazine in some way.

After a meeting with Dale, we decided that something had to change. We discussed the idea of changing the entire layout of the magazine to make it easier to read and more inspirational. Dale and I decided that we would spread out the pages, add pictures, make things more visually interesting, and standardize the font. This decision all happened in the space of one week.

Meanwhile, there were funding issues with the research work at the college, and our hours were dramatically reduced. This was the moment when we decided to make a break for it, and give *Aesthetica* magazine the attention that it deserved.

Rachel Hazelwood, who is our Features Editor, also enhanced the ideas for the changes. We expanded the team to include a poetry editor, art editor, and a fiction editor. We also compiled a team of people to review CDs, DVDs, and books. This team was instrumental. Having the support of other creative individuals made a really big difference. The next stage of the redevelopment was to actually layout the magazine in A4 format using proper design software programmes. Dale had minimal experience doing this and I didn't have any. This is where the redevelopment underwent some very difficult times. Initially, we hired a graphic designer to put the magazine together, but when the magazine was returned to us, it wasn't right and we had to re-do the entire thing. This was a serious learning curve but a necessary one. It gave us the confidence to realise that we could learn the programmes and produce an A4 glossy arts magazine.

We looked for inspiration from many sources such as newspapers and magazines. We looked at *The Art Review*, *Zembla*, and *Mslexia* and considered what *Aesthetica* could learn from these publications. *The Art Review* is excellent because it has great features, *Zembla* pushes the boundaries of design, and *Mslexia* is a great resource for literature. *Aesthetica* has expanded on these aspects and added new sections and learned to play with design and to use our imaginations. *Aesthetica* offers more than just art or literature; it's inspirational because of all the diverse art forms that we cover. At the moment it is the only current arts magazine that covers so many genres and was described as doing so with "panache" (The Bradford Telegraph & Argus)

As the new pages took shape, I began to see exactly what we created, a magazine that is innovative and inspirational. The new *Aesthetica* offers features, and engages with the readers. It provides readers with information on new writing, books, films, music, comedy, SciArt, websites, but still retains the initial idea to promote new writers and artists.

The new *Aesthetica* is exciting, and involves more a huge plethora of emerging artists in one issue. *Aesthetica* is now the culture magazine for the UK's emerging arts. *Aesthetica* has a confirmed identity, and has been identified as "the fastest growing literary and arts magazine in the UK." (The Robards Report) We want readers to see *Aesthetica* as their magazine, a place to share innovation in the arts.

After reapplying for Arts Council England funding, we were successful. We intend on marketing the magazine, redesigning the website, and learning how to use all the software! This has been a milestone for *Aesthetica*. We feel honoured to have the support of the ACE, and it helped us to realise how important the work that we are doing is on a national scale for the arts, and the great potential that we development allows. With change you are able to gain a new perspective and things become exciting, and fresh.

Keeping in line with our ethos, we invite you to get involved tell us your news, write reviews, and keep *Aesthetica* up to date with what is happening in your area. After all...it's your magazine too.

We've started a new series of creative writing workshops and a new monthly event called "Speakers' Corner". Speakers' Corner hopes to attract poets of all ages and backgrounds and will welcome anyone who has something prepared to read. This could be poetry or even comedy. We are keen to attract people who have never read before; the support of a creative community encourages interaction and helps to foster innovation. This venue will be an opportunity for anyone to perform.

As part of the on-going celebrations we're offering a 10% discount on UK subscriptions. See our website www.Aestheticamagazine.com for more information.

"We feel that it is not fair to grab stuff and just throw it on a page for the sake of having it displayed"

Interlude Magazine

Article by Becky Philp, Francesca Ricci and Helen Nodding

<http://www.interludemagazine.co.uk/>

Manifesto

"The genesis of Interlude lies in the need to "shelter" ideas and samples of one's artistic and personal research: work still in progress, or too fragile to let stand on its own, roaming ideas, or formed projects which stand lonesome, finding it difficult to fit within their fellows. These scraps of work need a home and a magazine could be the suitable place for them to be welcomed and take physical shape.

A magazine could also act as a melting pot where ideas could be stirred up, exhaling new inspiration.

Interlude is not a strictly political, social, literary or artistic magazine - any intelligent and interesting contributions are welcomed. However, the magazine is not intended to be a mere showcase for artists' work - pieces should match the spirit of the magazine.

We feel that it is not fair to grab stuff and just throw it on a page for the sake of having it displayed - ideas need a "cosy" environment. We think that the page and the work on it should live together in a sort of symbiosis: the page emphasising the work rather than distracting from it. We value the principle of simplicity when creating a page, where the design is motivated by the content."

The concept of **Interlude** was created in response to frustration on the part of the Editors, all having come from artistic backgrounds, to the fact that full-time jobs were making it difficult for us to realise full-scale projects such as exhibitions or books. A lot of ideas remained as embryos in our sketchbooks or notepads, whilst other projects were taking a form that did not lend themselves to display in an exhibition or as a book; we envisaged **Interlude** as a place to fulfil the need for this 'in-between space', hence its title. We were sure that our own working situations were not unique and felt that **Interlude** could provide an opportunity for others to display small projects, ideas and works in progress that best suited the environment of a magazine page.

Though described as a magazine, being a periodical publication, the intention was to create a product that felt precious to own, something to keep on a bookshelf rather than discard after reading.

The research that we carried out gave us the opinion that many contemporary magazines had a 'throwaway' feel and invited the reader to flick through, rather than encouraging to 'linger' on individual pages; we felt that both an abundance of advertising and the dominance of a house-style characterised many magazines, creating a sense of 'over-design' and diverting the focus away from actual work on the page.

For this reason we made two decisions. Firstly, not to include any advertising in **Interlude**, sacrificing revenue for aesthetic (and in part ethical) reasons. And secondly, allowing contributors to entirely design their own pages, submitting them exactly as they wish them to appear.

Our main inspiration, in terms of aesthetics and content was **The Yellow Book**, the brainchild of illustrator Aubrey Beardsley and writer Henry Harland who conceived the idea whilst celebrating New Year together in 1894. **The Yellow Book** aimed to '*promote those who found little outlet for their talents in more august periodicals... it would contain the best literature and the best art of its time, but at Beardsley's insistence 'Art' would remain independent of 'Literature': there would be no 'illustrations' as such.*'^[1]

In **The Yellow Book** each page is beautifully designed and design and content work together, whilst remaining as separate works. We also favour the idea that individual pages should stand on their own both in style and content, allowing the eclectic nature of the magazine to speak for itself and reflect the ideas of contemporary artists, the multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary means used to explore and express ideas.

Interlude is not a theme-based magazine and we welcome unusual and heterogeneous contributions. The only criterion we initially set out for selection was artistic quality. We had no other stipulations and have allowed the selection process to be organic in nature, based on the content that we receive. The experience of compiling the first three issues, however, has allowed us to observe the manner in which we naturally make decisions.

Firstly, we try to remain as objective as possible and make selections based on quality, rather than opinion over the subject matter. Submissions do not necessarily reflect our personal viewpoints; rather if we deem a piece to be interesting and well thought-out it will be included.

As we also ask contributors to consider the design of their piece on the 186mm x 226mm page-format and artists who respond to this, and in general, the spirit of the magazine as an exploratory space, are judged favourably.

Many poetry and literary submissions however are given as plain text. These are all read through and if we find a piece of outstanding quality we will ask the author to consider the format, assisting if necessary.

On the other hand, some excellent work has been received, but it has felt not to be appropriate to the manifesto - for example, work that has already been published elsewhere, excerpts from a longer piece of work, or a photograph of a painting do not fit with our intentions. We are not interested in merely acting as a showcase or catalogue for people's work.

^[1] *Aubrey Beardsley, A Slave to beauty* by David Colvin, published by Welcome Rain, New York, 1998.

The final selections are made by considering the magazine as a whole, creating a balance of written and visual work and, as editors, we see ourselves more as 'compilers' or 'curators' of the work intending each issue to be interesting and different, appealing both to people in the Arts and the general public.

The selection process has very much relied on the submissions that we have received and though the initial contributors to Issue 1 were largely friends and associates, the volume of material submitted expands all the time. Issue 2 broadened the scope to include over 20 people, many of who approached us to participate. Our forthcoming Issue 3 will see 15 new contributors, further diversifying and including artists from different parts of the world as far afield as China. This progress reflects our aim to make **Interlude** a place for creative practitioners from all over to meet through ideas, in the pages of a stimulating publication. It will be interesting for us to see what how the magazine continues to shape itself through this organic process.

The experience of establishing **Interlude** has been a steep learning curve, none of us having any prior knowledge of publishing. But we pooled our strengths, worked hard, and by facing each challenge, have managed to successfully produce three issues and the magazine is still going strong. Of course, we could not have achieved any of this without the many creative, talented and supportive individuals that have assisted in all aspects of the project and made it a very positive experience.

We will further build on our success and would like to encompass new media in the future, with plans to distribute CDs and DVDs with the publication featuring music, performance or film/video projects as well as continuing to expand our readership, channels of distribution and circle of contributors.

To find new potential contributors and raise our profile we often participate in Book Fairs and Arts Events as well as Open Studios. We have already had a number of successes in this area. Through the London Artists' Book Fair (LAB) at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in 2005 we were invited to participate in **Kiosk** 'a travelling archive of independent publishing projects within the field of contemporary art' and give a short gallery talk about the magazine in relation to this exhibition. **Interlude** is also part of **PrintRoom** 'a growing collection of artists' publications from all over the globe' and we have recently filmed an interview with **IConscious**, an organisation 'who seek to create projects that challenge, excite, provoke and promote interest in music and art'. This webcast will be broadcast at a date TBC.

As Editors, despite our great belief in the magazine, have been surprised at how well **Interlude** has been received. We look forward to receiving your contributions!

*Interlude is available to purchase online via our website and from a number of outlets in the UK (please see our website for a full list of stockists). The magazine can be viewed in the Poetry Library and as part of artist's publications collections such as **Kiosk** and **PrintRoom**.*

"His greatest gift, however, resides in his ability to create totally convincing, self-contained worlds"

John Fowles: An Appreciation
Article by Ian Parks

When I think of John Fowles I think of two great novels: The Magus (1966) and The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969) - both of which were successfully adapted for the screen. Fowles - who died last year - had a marked narrative gift, which made his work perfect for the cinema.

All the director had to do was to recreate in visual terms the striking (sometimes disconcerting) images that appear in the novels. No one having seen it can forget the moment in The French Lieutenant's Woman when the character played by Jeremy Irons first sees the solitary figure standing on the cob in the middle of a storm, scanning the horizon for a sail. That Fowles' work translates so well into a visual medium is testimony to his eye for detail and to his powerful imagination. His greatest gift, however, resides in his ability to create totally convincing, self-contained worlds. In these two novels he reaches a peak of emotional intensity, which he rarely (if ever) recaptured afterwards.

The Magus, as the title suggests is about magic and mysticism. Set mainly in Greece it makes a profound link between the powers of the magician and illusionist and the corresponding powers of the novelist in that both can create versions of the world and inhabit them with characters. The atmosphere is unrelentingly pagan. Against this backdrop Fowles weaves a complex plot that centres on issues of secrecy and disclosure. It is a sprawling, meticulous, absorbing and obsessive novel. By contrast, The French Lieutenant's Woman is tighter and bases its narrative structure on the great nineteenth century novelists (particularly Hardy) who Fowles admired and learned from. He manages to write a novel dealing with the injustices of Victorian society while, at the same time, involving the reader in a love story, which is as haunting as it is compelling.

As a poet, I don't pretend to understand the workings of a novelist's mind - but I do recognise a poetic sensibility when I encounter it in a writer of fiction. And this sensibility pervaded everything he wrote. He has an acute awareness of atmosphere and its relation to landscape and character. In many ways, Fowles became a victim of his own early success. The Collector, which appeared in 1963, established an international reputation and Fowles was recognised as a formidable talent from then on. He was particularly admired for his imaginative sweep, the depth of his characters and the unsettling atmospheres he was able to create. When Anthony Burgess described The Magus as 'an astonishing achievement' he was drawing attention to all these elements. However, the 1970's saw something of a falling off. There was still much to admire in The Ebony Tower (1974) and Daniel Martin (1977) but the intensity of the earlier novels was lacking. While the plots remained intriguing the quality of the writing never seemed to match the potential of the material.

However, it would be asking too much of any writer to sustain the quality of their best work - and it is for his best work that Fowles will be remembered. First and foremost a novelist, but a novelist looking at the world through the eyes of a poet.

"everyone has to do something with their life, he personally preferred a bicycle"

Hovis Has Risen and Left The Building
Article by Andrew Oldham

The first time I met Hovis Presley I was signing on and being forced to go through a soul destroying programme of back to work sessions, learn how to type, learn how to do your accounts, learn how to do just what we say. They were the kind of sessions run by middle-aged men who wore Burton suits, drove away in a saloon car as you stood at the bus stop in the rain and who had no problem in informing you that 'they knew your pain, your lack of confidence', and how they thought about this every time they took to the beach or the ski slopes. I remember telling Hovis this in a Bolton pub (it was raining outside and I could see his bicycle tethered outside to a railing), he replied that everyone has to do something with their life, he personally preferred a bicycle. He then asked me what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a writer and he was happy to give me some advice - 'just write and don't buy into believing your better than everyone else'. I'm paraphrasing, but it was a truth about Hovis, no matter how big he got, no matter how many times he appeared on stage, radio and television (he had a few plans for documentaries involving his Irish heritage, he mentioned a boat once and the coast of Ireland in one of our later interviews), he never gave up that bloody push bike or forgot who he was and what he wanted. To me he wasn't just a comedian, or a performance poet, he was a giant of a man full of warmth and understated charm, the master of the pun, the flat delivery and the drole.

I kept bumping into Hovis over the following decade, both in my role as a journalist and as a writer. He was always laconic about why he took to the stage and why he wrote; "If I weren't doing this I'd be looking for chewing gum under shop window ledges". He cited his interests back then as postal ker-plunk and choosing eight sandwiches to take to a desert island (seven cheese and one egg). I interview Hovis for many people, The Big Issue in the North, Flux, BBC GMR, Manchester Evening News, Bolton Evening News and always enjoyed meeting up with him and talking with him about his work (he would always bring a friend that he felt I should interview as well, via Hovis I met many comedians, Pete Kay, Justin Moorhouse and Smug Roberts). Years later, Peter Kay would offer Hovis a role in Phoenix Nights but he turned it down (he feared that this role would typecast him). He never bought into his celebrity, he influenced comedians across the country but he would only ever take gigs where he could get back to Bolton before the trains stopped. "The only place in the country where broken biscuits are still legal tender," he once quipped. However, he was man of integrity and would often do charity gigs wherever and whenever he could, regardless of distance.

That first time I interviewed him was my favourite meeting, he gave me a hand made copy of Poetic Off-License, made in his kitchen. A friend had done the art, someone else had typed it up and Hovis had stapled them together (I still have it now on my shelf along with other copies that surfaced over the next three years, the re-editions and the holiday annual - before I moved from Bolton, he would phone me up and ask me to gigs or would say that he had a new book for me). He was generous and I will miss his presence in this world.

Hovis died on the 9th June 2005.

4. Columns

"British poetry needs a good shaking up or shakedown, to wrench it from the hands of the trustees and university posts"

Changing Horizons: Report from Liverpool
 Column by George Wallace

"You say you want a revolution..."
 - John Lennon

April 20 2005, Liverpool England -- There's a stiff wind blowing on the Mersey River and a young dad with his little son is attempting to launch a crazy kite contraption, more complicated than any device I've ever seen, a device whose purpose is simple and clear to me, a simple act of inspired irrelevant play, but he's got it all balled up, there's a pair of strings pegged into the earth and something is wrapped around the man's waist and he looks like a back-strap weaver in the South American Andes, he's doing some mad calculations and he's shouting at the strings, and the kite and the sky are spinning, the kite is an ordinary looking thing but with the play of the whole man's body and the wind over the Mersey that kite is doing a sad kind of loop-di-loop, nearly launching then crashing earthward, in the nick of time spinning away from earthly doom and flailing skyward again, and the disbelieving grin of the bystanders and the awed look of the boy and a little dog barking at the edge of the grass - it seems impossible that the poor kite will ever take off.

I'm in-country, as we Americans sometimes like to call paying a visit to England, to read at the Everyman on Hope Street with the Liverpool Poetry Festival, heralded nationally in the UK not only because of the connections to the swinging sixties of the Beatles and the Mersey Sound poets who shook up British poetry in that era, with their populist common-man verse, but because Liverpool's been named Europe's 'cultural capital' for 2008 and the aesthetic landscape of that fact is just now emerging and everyone wants to know what it is going to look like and beside the world of British poetry needs a good shaking up or shakedown, to wrench it from the hands of the trustees and university posts, some new voice to keep it fresh and alive and of the people, to rekindle and resurrect its eternal natural flame as the language of the streets of "Old Blightey," the farms and mosses and becks and glades from which it originates - and who knows, just maybe Liverpool is the place to do that in the emerging 21st century.

So as I say I'm in-country to be part of all that - but also to pay a visit around the region as well.

Including a stopover at Joan Poulson's place outside Manchester, Joan who is still glowing over a recently completed book of poems called onetree singing, the book being one of the results of a project in which a 150 year old oak tree has been cut down and carved up by 75 artists and made to fill an exhibition hall with furniture, sculpture, swill baskets, not to mention to make tanning bark, compost, twig miniatures, and a book of poetry, to boot - and not incidentally the tree produced 18 acorns the year they felled it, school kids planted them, it is an 'everything from oink to plate' project (as my friends in North Carolina used to describe how to use the parts of a slaughtered hog) to show the value and potential of a single natural resource, and the resourcefulness and inventiveness of the British artisan.

Including a stopover at Bluebell Books in Penrith to read with the northern Cumbrian poets, organized by Geraldine Green, a woman in touch with the stone circles and waterfalls and precipitous high mountain vistas of her district, the mystic poetics of it all, a woman knowledgeable enough to be able to identify the great Cumbrian secrets - Cumbria, a region where five hundred thousand trees, mainly larch, were blown down across the ghylls and valleys in a winter wrenched from its Wordsworthian complacency and soft congeniality by riverflooding and the blowdown grief of fallen trees - as

I say a reading in Penrith which transcended all that with poetry to celebrate the enduring raw mystery and saintly gentleness of the English countryside, from Greenodd village with its yew tree farms and spinning galleries to the yellow broom along Coniston Water, the bluebells growing on Loughrigg mountain, the wood sorrel tasting of wild cherry and snow on the high peaks of April - not just lakes and waters like Windemere Grasmere and Rydal, which attract hordes of sensibly clad ambling English tourists, but the fell walks and endless footpaths of every by-way, the tussocked towpaths and narrow country lanes, sheepfields and low mosses lined with slate wall or bread and cheese hawthorne in spring, the woven in and wrapped out and meandered around places in every country town beyond the pale of automobile traffic and engine noise.

I'm in town to be part of the Liverpool scene but also I'm headed up to Ulverston on Morcambe Bay to conduct a full day's workshop for the poets of southern Cumbria, a happy sprawling fishing town watched over by a lighthouse on hoad hill designed by Sir John Barrow - a workshop peopled with spry sprightly and inventive writers with language dancing in their eyes, brought together by Linda Graham and a group called Wordmarket, a fulsome day of wordplay on the upper floor of a pub in town overlooking the market square - where mummings and schoolkids are re-enacting the tale of St George slaying the dragon (St George is undergoing a resurgence in Britain these days I'm told), only these days the dragon is a flamboyant and flowing red-ribboned Chinese New Year type fellow, the baddies don't just put damsels in distress but they also string up a Tory MP lookalike in tweeds and wellies, and St George is portrayed by a woman.

Along the way there will be an evening of music hall fun and foolishness at Glaxo Sports Club overlooking Morcambe Bay for a group called Poem and a Pint, peppered with one liners from MC Ann Wilson and moaning baritone sax solos over candle-guttering guitar lines. Afternoons to sit in rowhouse gardens so pretty they rise up to greet you. Moments in passing to see the little half-forgotten details - latches on gates, sheep in their mottled pastures, or the four small faces I saw carved in Ulverston stone, the ages of women, from youthful primness to the meltdown of a crone.

Time to drink real ale in country pubs - the Kings Arms in Keswick, the Red Lion Pub at Lowick, The Bay Horse at Canal Foot outside Ulverston - and eat beef pie and chips and Cumberland sausage daubed with mustard so hot and so delicate it stings and sweetens the tongue like painful flowers.

And along the way there will be a walk along Solway Bay with Geraldine and with Charles Johnson - outside Allonby, a town with a history no doubt of smugglers and pirates and border raids, peering narrowly across the water at Scotland, Solway Bay where fisherfolk haufnet salmon in the manner of the ancient Icelandic traditions, Solway Bay, where oystercatchers script the ocean and twin peaks Criffel & Screeel loom the horizon and Wigtown, 'the Book Capital of Scotland' with its great literature festival in September, nestles. Nowadays the Allonby strand is all children on swings and shell collectors and plumbers lounging in the afternoon sun and dogs let loose from their leads, and we've come to do some driftwood collecting, an activity one might think of as a matter of picking out a small bit of wood or two that resembles something clever - a mandrake root or the body of a woman or a talisman or a chicken or a fish or a dream - instead, the pair of them are quite soon staggering with huge armloads of bleached wood cured for the fire by the action of wind, rock, river and surf, so much wood after last winter's storm that Geraldine says "it gets to be too much to carry, so heavy, I have to change my horizon, stop looking at the ground at the driftwood, too much wood, I have to look up at the sky, I have to change my horizon."

The progress of the imaginative mind is a marvel of convention, imitation, innovation and convergence, and it's always been what you do with a thing that makes it an opportunity instead of an impediment, and I'm reminded of all this at the Ye Cracke Pub off Hope Street by a plaque on the wall explaining that this is the location to which John Lennon and a couple of his buddies retired after hearing Ginsberg-influenced Royston Ellis read his poetry at the local university in 1960. Ellis, who had the fortune or misfortune depending on your point of view to have said to John and Paul that he was going to try his hand at a more commercial literary venture, "I want to be a paperback writer," Royston allegedly said, instantly achieving a far different and more dubious kind of immortality than he might have ever anticipated.

Here, the story goes, John and his pals - later known as "The Dissenters" - decided that it wasn't good enough to just imitate the American Beats, it would be much better to exercise the engine of ingenuity which has been a Liverpool trait from the days of the industrial revolution and make themselves a pop revolution - hence the Beatles, with their Mersey friends, built on the R&B music and Beat poetry of America, but with a healthy dose of Scouse lunacy and British music hall kitsch thrown in for good measure.

It was 1960, there was a youth revolution going on, it had to spark somewhere, John hears Royston and has a better idea and the sixties were off.

Things aren't always black and white, of course. Other accounts have it that Ellis was a big deal at the time, that the Beatles were only too willing, as unknowns, to put him up in a flat with them for a week, back him up at a gig in Liverpool, and take him up on an offer to come to London, where various goings on included experimental sex and Benzedrine inhalers. Be that as it may, Lennon's 'Paperback Writer' went on to become an obscure travelwriter in Sri Lanka while I've personally seen John's oeuvre on the top floor of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and thinking outside the box remains a good way to conceive a revolution.

A revolution like the one in the sixties, that found its kindling in and around Liverpool but especially along Hope Street, stretching from the sandstone walls (from St Bees and Lazonby) of the Anglican Cathedral to the verdigris doors of the new Catholic Cathedral, inscribed with a face and a liver bird, emblem of Liverpool.

Of course Liverpool's more than Hope Street with its music and pubs and poetry and students. Visitors typically go to Albert dock, the Beatles Museum, Tate Gallery, the usual Merseyside attractions. But to get to the heart of it all, where the Beatles emerged, where Liverpool poets like Adrian Henri lived, where the Pope walked, in fact - John Paul walked from the cathedral with its great old stone to the odd lunar Catholic church, with its massive doors and pennants simulating stained glass flapping in the wind - is to go to Hope Street

As might be expected in a world where the 'heavy-hitters' are called out to give weight and substance to an event, the festival in Liverpool kicked off with stars, sixties legends Brian Patten and Roger McGough, two of the three poets who - along with Adrian Henri - sold tens of thousands of books of poetry 'back in the day' and whose names continue to inspire those who would believe that poetry can spring from the people - particularly the people of Liverpool.

Henri is a couple of years deceased, however, though his spirit might be found to linger just off Hope Street on Mount, where he lived for a number of years. McGough's a Londoner these days, his status in the poetry world

too big to be hanging about in Liverpool. And Patten seems to be an irregular.

Naturally enough then, it seems to me the future of Liverpool poetry, while it might harken to the sixties threesome, or get a paid visit from one of the current fellows in the poetry limelight, will necessarily involve many newcomers. And in fact there is a distinct future orientation to the scene, with 2008 coming up as the year when Liverpool will serve as the official 'Cultural Capital of Europe.' Those newcomers will likely be drawn from a healthy diversity of new sources, immigrants to the British Isles, and the unsuppressable reservoir of women's voices.

My night at the Everyman was suggestion enough of all that - it included everything from a karate-kicking poet to a standup comic wearing a political mask, and a South Asian female writer whose multi-lingual intensity and deep pool of sensual aesthetics was tweaked with moody jazz and contemporary political sensibility - and all in the context of that British flare for combining reserved dignity and linguistic elegance with a healthy dose of comic relief.

Hope Street - all in all, a fine place for the next change in the horizon.

I thought about this on the beach of Allonby, along the Solway, Geraldine and Charles hauling driftwood, a persistent ladybug crawling on Charles' neck and the haze of Scottish peaks beyond our reckoning. 500 thousand trees blown down, two lonesome poets gathering armsful for the fire, me holding up an amulet, a walking stick, a human figure plucked from seaweed, hugging a log which resembled a struggling sailor mangled by the sea.

Endless driftwood for the fire ('I love the smell of it,' exclaims Geraldine). And, elsewhere in Britain, 75 ingenious British artists filling an exhibition hall with endless fine products carved from a single oak.

Before I left the states to visit, a graduate student asked me if I could let her know what's happening in the world of Liverpool poetry these days. The truth is, I'm not sure. Certainly it is an urban thing with elements of New York and London and Chicago and LA in it, like a lot of places. It is hidden like the faces of buried coastal saints. It is carved from coppiced oak and laced with the smell of driftwood smoke. It is something riffing off cathedral ceilings and belted out in basement cafes, echoed from the ghylls and becks of Cumbria and immersed in black pools. It is something crafted in universities. It is pacing the music hall boards and dug up in performance poetry venues and stand-up comedy shows. It is all that.

But like John Lennon and the Liverpool Dissenters a generation back, there is a palpable sense that the scene ought to be something more than that. Something Scouse.

The roots of imagination are in changing horizons, people looking up from the landscapes carved out of river and wind, deluged in floods and loss and redundancy and retirement and birth and death and position and career - the ordinary ferment of life.

The roots of the imagination are in the vision of people with crazy kite contraptions which just might fly.

So it is that like anywhere else, when Liverpool holds a high-profile poetry festival, the old ones will come along to grab the headlines - the Armitages and the Pattens and the McGoughs. But chances are, if an amalgamation can happen that leads to something which just might actually

be new and interesting in the poetry world, it is more likely to come from the newest denizens of Hope Street.

"We stop for lunch. On a tight bend of a road straddled by long stretches of green, dilapidated farm houses and dumping grounds for litter"

Welcome to Planet Sicily
 Column by Dave Wood

Wednesday 2nd March 2005

It's a fairly dry morning (i.e. at least it's not raining). We pack, we sort ourselves out, drag our luggage downstairs and walk through the door saying, 'Bonjourno' as we go along. The table is laid out with yogurts, milk, cake, bowls, cups...

The table is close to the window looking out on the garden. Their home is simple and warm. Again, there are some original pieces of work running alongside prints and the usual ephemera of ornaments. Yesterday, in the car, as a three, we talked about what we'd like that evening - just dreaming really. I mentioned a bath; which I got and then possibly internet access. I could have probably had the latter too. The couple were all wired up for the net.

The garden was strung with grapevines and olive trees stood against the sparkle of lemon trees and oranges. St Clements eat your heart out. It was picture time for the English tourists.

The smiles were genuine off both sides - us and our hosts. Sarah is amazed at what the garden offers. The man mentions the magic word 'Limoncello'.

Leemonnceeeello. Magic word - delightful word, lemony word. A word that bites at the back of the throat, tickles the tongue and makes the eyes sparkle. If taken in enough quantity, would make you fall over, looking like a lemon of course.

<http://beverage.allrecipes.com/AZ/Limncell.asp>

Limoncello - uses the zest of lemon in alcohol. You can make it in Britain but remember to do your research (and I think) use organic, non waxed lemons. They insist on us having a snifter. Oh go on then, but only a snifter. What's 'snifter' in Italian?

There is a ridiculous amount of paperwork to be done in Sicily (and the rest of Italy, come to that matter) when someone stays at a hotel or B and B. Each one gives in their passports the night before. The day of leaving each has to sign a docket with details of birth, place of birth, inside leg measurement...

So, just as we thought we were ready to be whisked away to the school for the performance, we had to hand over our life stories to the nice man.

Leaflets picked up, hopes to come back and lots of ciao's.

The school, on Via Motta, looms up and massive. White stone with lots of avenues to swing around and get lost in. Not too difficult for me at least. The school, Liceo Scientifico Majorana is a veritable coverage of half the earth's circumference. Our contact, Gloria, walks ahead with Sarah, who'd been in the car with her. I notice something on the floor and was just about to pick it up and say, 'I think you dropped this...'. Could have been interesting; it was a pair of tights. Ahem.

If Sicily as an island is famous for its food, wine and Cosa Nostra, then (in our minds) its schools must be famous for its awkward chairs. We always

give ourselves about half an hour to set up the seating for the performances. There are standard plans we try and keep to, always in the round (not circular but rectangular with the action taking place in the middle) and with various combinations depending on the size of the audience. If there are forty, a front row of twenty using four on the short sides and six on the long and the same again on the back row. The next leap up in numbers would be five by eight and then six by nine. All fairly standard practice. Not in Italy though. The chairs (in this instance) are wide and have pre-attached desks making it awkward to have any width across the short side of the room.

Myself and Sue are swallowing cough sweets but nothing tends to work on a longer term basis. My voice during performances already begins to sound like a cross between Johnny Vegas and Frances de la Tour

http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/guide/articles/r/risingdamp_7775500.shtml

During the three performances, some of the students struggle with the complexities of the language but most lap the sessions up along with the drama, the excitement and complete Italian-ness we're used to. Again, the standard of spoken English has much improved and, noting from walks into the school principal's office, there has been a huge input of (electronic) resources that came hand in hand with the European Union.

Siracusa - we're off, we're coming and we've got to find the road out of here first.

Not too bad. Signs (though miniscule) are quick to appear. Sue is in the back sleeping, Sarah (in Italy, say Sara - get confused with buona serra) drives. My job is to irritate the driver so she's fully entertained, kept awake and felt needed. Which of course - she is.

We stop for lunch. On a tight bend of a road straddled by long stretches of green, dilapidated farm houses and dumping grounds for litter (sorry - forgot to mention there are spots which are rife with the latter) we find a bar which looked a bit more welcoming than the other dodgy eateries we passed. Time was chewing away at our stomach linings and if we didn't stop soon, all hope of a snack would be gone.

So, Sue is lurgified and stays in the car to sleep as much as possible. Myself and Sarah enter into what is really a glorified butchers; a short walk forward and you could end up in a bacon slicer, a dance to the right and there's a bar to grab a coffee or a juice and to the left? that's where the essential chocolate and the pay station is. Choice of sandwich...ham or cheese, cheese or ham, cheese and ham, ham and cheese, oh and tuna. I won't go into those combinations again.

So here goes. In our best Italian walk, we ask for a coffee and how to order a sandwich. the man behind the bar, thin and Indian-Asian looking speaks good English (this is getting embarrassing) and guides us through. Actually, he does it all for us. All we have to do is pay and eat. Another Italian couple also offer to help us, in English. The fillings come lovingly slapped in the middle of a huge wad of crusty bread with minute tads of chilli inside. You can taste the olive oil, almost as if it was escaping and running softly down the throat. The white, fleshy mozzarella rubs against the tongue and mixed up with the interior the huge rustic doorstep we're salivating over, round and through.

Within forty five minutes, we're pulling out the gravel yard, saying goodbye to the cute little dog wandering the roof and making our way to the next port of call. The day is warmer and the road is twisty. It'll be a break from the drawn out motorways we've been slurring along with the only given built in breaks of paying the motorway tolls and asking for a

'ricevute per favore'. Though we did stop a few times for drinks along these autoroutes.

We stop once for directions just before we come to Siracusa itself. The mountains stand like sentries, looming over us in verdant green. There are patches of prickly pear and a quaint charm around here - even if it is a service station. The girl behind the counter is pleased to help but does not offer to have my children. Never mind - next year?

The main road into Siracusa is a long stretch of apartments, 'useful' shops and house numbers which you'd need a magnifying glass to see. What is it about signage in Italy? Why don't they consider the squinting English tourist coming to visit?

We find 'Royal Residence', the apartment we're sharing on the Vialle Greca. There is always doubts about my navigating and there is always doubts about the standard of accommodation; the latter being an unknown quantity unless you've been there before.

We pull into the car park and the cute little 'Smart' (the place is snided with them) lets us out like a balloon expelling sweet air!

The keys we have to pick up from reception - a mother and son double act who are incredibly helpful, highly chirpy and have a healthy collection of religious ephemera on the fulsome desk.

It's quickly done and we're up the stairs to see a clean, practical apartment, complete with double bedroom, sitting room/kitchen with single bed and table and television. We stand ashamed at our previous predictive thoughts of a hideous nightmare of a place with bars across the windows etc. I've actually stayed in places like that; I can't remember the name of the town, possibly Messina or Catania. It was a hotel recommended by the Rough Guide so we thought it would at least be habitable. Instead, we got what looked like cells for rooms with a dribble of cold water in the morning coming from an ancient sink in a bathroom with no lock and no light.

But now, this was entirely different. This was luxury in comparison. Sarah and Sue took turns to go downstairs to the public phone and use the cards they'd bought at the tabacchi (a kind of stamp sellers, newsagents, tobacconists and vendor of bits and bobs). I stayed upstairs and did one of the most important functions I could muster as a man - made the tea. They both call me lovely, a habit which I quite enjoy, but am somewhat in denial of. If anybody else thinks I'm lovely, please send flowers to...

The humble kettle still hasn't been completely adopted by all the European countries, so it's a saucepan on the hob job. The teapot, lord bless us, has though. In fact that reminds me, I forgot to mention that Rosa (Palermo) had a delightful crocheted tea-cosy which made me almost yearn for the WI market of yesteryear I used to frequent.

Sue does an excellent job of sorting out the finances - filing receipts, handing out any loans and keeping things in check. In the days of the Lire, it was a struggle to get all the zeros in the columns. A lot of Italians are complaining that since the introduction of the new currency, prices have gone up. We shall see.

Eventually, though desperate to see the old part of Siracusa, Sue retires to bed with the lurgy. Myself and Sarah will enter in the bowels of the area on public transport. That means she can drink, I'll be let off navigating and Sarah keeps sane from coping with my saying left when I mean right and take the next when it should be the second turning...you get the picture. If you don't, then I'll take you driving one day.

We get the tickets from the tabacchi - a real multi-function of a shop. You buy them for periods of time so we purchase two hours (strange - being able to buy time). It's not long before the right number turns up and we hop on board. There are lots of single seats on board and plenty of floor space to move around. Some of the chairs run parallel to the wall of the bus, whilst others are at right angles.

It's about fifteen minutes into the old part of Siracusa. It's strange seeing the mixture of shops with ancient buildings, temples and ruins. The bus station was not really recognisable as anything if it wasn't for the vehicles themselves.

We're standing by the waterside and head forwards with this and the temple of Apollo on our right. With the realisation that Apollo wasn't in, we gawped into his abode and meandered further. Whatever reason Apollo had for leaving, the place was left a complete mess - stones everywhere and, may I add a broken down moped just by the gate.

Natural daylight was waning and we find a nice safe alley to wander along. The further we traipse, the more narrow it becomes. This doesn't slow the traffic though. Cars, mopeds et al zip along as if the encroaching pavement would somehow slip back and say, 'Perdonnay'.

The houses look like something created by Charles Dickens. Tall, dark, looming and unkempt, many of the buildings overflowed with ivy and flora directly from the brickwork. Tucked around one corner I spotted a three wheeler 'Ape' van. I was just pondering on sneaking another photograph, when I have overheard Sarah strike up a conversation with a woman (max height 5ft 3inch), of about seventy years old. The young man with her had already sped off on his moped. The old woman probed us as to what we were doing here and if Sarah was married, had children (one of the first things Italian people tend to ask, probably even if you were a newt). Sarah gave an affirmative and explained they were all at home in England. The old woman found this immensely amusing for some reason but agreed to pose for a picture. Just be aware Sarah, my photography is on a par with my navigation.

At the end of this long drawn out and close knit alleyway, the place opens out to a wider walkway of shops and restaurants. Sarah's good at chatting with complete strangers. In what must have been a minute flat, a man in his early forties who works at a school (administration I think he said) was showing us around and directing us towards the fourth century cathedral on the square. And yes, his English was good.

The Duomo is a patchwork of styles and civilisations and has the usual Italian niches for visitors bring in photographs and mementos of deceased relatives. We light a candle each, point a while at the statue of St Lucy (a grim death) and move on.

There are shops and there are shops which make the mouth water, the tongue hang out and the mind go quirky. I refer to any place in Italy selling wine, food and in the last case, chocolate spanners. This particular chocolatier could have probably supplied a whole household with utensils made from the cocoa bean. As much use as a chocolate spanner, I like that phrase and will probably use it in my next crap joke collection. We vow to come back tomorrow and get some basic breakfast provisions.

Time had run out on the bus ticket so we had to do a quick top up at the rather grey booth back at the station (see yard). The lights along the waterfront were quite beautiful and we felt privileged to be here. If I'm

crap at navigating and photography, I'm much better at reading bus timetables. I check it out and Sarah double checks it with the rather nonchalant men behind the glass.

We have twenty minutes to wait. Time for another coffee for me and a phone call for Sarah.

The bus has about seven travelers on board - including us. The vehicle, unfortunately takes the round the world route and we're stuck. It was not an unpleasant journey - highly entertaining in fact.

Sarah shivering gave the first opportunity for the Sicilians to get talking. You're cold? one asked in Italian. It was definitely cold but he continued to compare the last few weeks as far worse. There was the usual English chat about the weather as the bus left the depot for the beginning of what must have been a half hour journey back to the apartment.

Far more important conversation points had to be raised - the Charles and Camilla engagement of course. None of the passengers were in favour of the royal union and looked back fondly on Diana. Either all of them knew each other previous or they were incredibly quick social networkers. I reckon on the latter. The man behind me, quiet and unassuming spoke in staggered English of his two year journey (avoiding trouble spots) from Ethiopia to Sicily. His brother was also here and I was told that in the first year of landing, you're not allowed to work. He did, thankfully have a job at this point. I wish him well.

We pick up Sue from our temporary home and head for the nearest restaurant. She orders my favourite - spaghetti al aglio, olio et peroncino. A basic sauce of olive oil, garlic, chilli and chopped parsley. I'm on the pizza and when Sue realises her appetite has died a death I quickly grab the plateful before the waiter clears it away. All is explained to the staff so we don't offend anyone. I wonder about taking the waitress home but think she might object.

We went back and slept and it was good. Sarah awakes with a dry throat.

Thursday 3rd March 2005

Thursday - oh yes - Sarah wakes with a dry throat: the beginning of this foul flu that seems to have us all by the you know whats.

I'm awake first. I enjoy getting up before everybody else and having that space to think, fart and put the kettle on. Though I know I'll be called nice at some point. I suppose it's just false modesty or disbelief in myself.

It's cereal for breakfast. Not just cereal for me but also cough sweets which have to be fetched from the tabacchi round the corner on the main road. I return with what is probably the most useless collection of lozenges imaginable. They're lemony - that's fine. They chewy and full of nutrasweet and have no potency - that's not so good. I'm shoveling them in by the palmful and they work for about half a minute. Unfortunately, they were the only ones there.

We don't know if the tutor/organiser of the performance we are about to give is going to pick us up or not. We wait outside and eventually give up and phone him. He is there at the school and we have to get going pronto.

The school is hidden away in the corners of nowhere. We stop and ask and stop...and ask and again. This is becoming like a Status Quo song. Eventually, after stopping a traffic warden in the middle of his directing, we find our destination. The gate to the building is swarming with

teenagers all with smiles that shouldn't belong to this age group at this time of the morning. There are the typical low slung jeans with high slung pants, the duffel coats, the crop tops and the slick backed hair. What sets them apart is the cut of the clothes and the innate cheerfulness.

We are introduced to the English teacher and shown the room where we are to give two sessions of instant theatre to his students.

There is a problem. We are to work in a gym with a sparkling new floor which has an allergic reaction to chairs being scraped across it. Apparently it makes it really scratchy. The other room is being used for a meeting and there is no negotiation out of this. For the first time in my life, I will have to work with teenagers sitting on squashy gym mats and benches. It's the predictive stuff of nightmares.

Both sessions go ok. The first one, wherein the story is gathered by myself is told quickly, efficiently and humorously by the group. There was a little reluctance to do the acting at first, but the volunteers soon emerged from the sides. By the end of the session, my voice could match Johnny Vegas rasp for rasp. Another week here and I could probably match his stomach girth too.

Between performances we can go to the school tuck shop for a top up. School tuck shops, admittedly is a very old fashioned phrase. It's also completely inappropriate in this scenario. The tight corner of a galley kitchen sells a mouth-watering display of brioche (croissant), pizzette, chocolate, juice and the standard coffee and cappuccino. Coffee to gibber for.

The caretaker speaks a little English (though he denies it) but the front of house administrator is almost fluent and very funny with it. He introduces us to the man inside the gate sellign farm fresh vegetables and herbs from his car boot. He comes here once a week apparently. There are deep purples and pale greens of broccoli and fennel and cauliflower. Interestingly enough, Fennel in Italian is also slang for a gay man as it is both a masculine and feminine noun.

Some years ago, after a performance, a student in Catania and a favourite of the tutor's asked me if I'd ever seen this hand movement and upheld his fingers as if swiveling a large mango in his palm. It means 'wander like a broccoli or to act the fool. Remember that always.

I wander back into the room while Sarah and Sue go to sort out the payment. They return with bad news. The banks are on strike and so we have to return tomorrow. That's fine - the man at front of house will be there to help.

The second performance goes easily and I can take some minor roles in the play, like the alien gorillas and a space craft - that kind of thing.

We return home - I don't remember or know how (it was me navigating) but we do.

This time, after much talking of the beauty of the old part of the town, Sue comes with us. Tonight we'll take the car.

It wasn't too bad parking by the waterfront. We find the Corso Cavour and immediately see the ceramics shop we passed by last night. Only it's not just a shop - it's also a studio for the artist who's produced all the pieces here. Every piece is a stunner - from the great unglazed to the small artful trinket. My eyes get drawn to the words on the incense burners.

We leave happy. Another woman I'd love to share the rest of my life with.

It's already late and we tuck ourselves into a taverna-like restaurant to have the last meal on our own on tour. Perfect - even down to the Ella Fitzgerald on the speaker system. Now - do I tell the Ella Fitzgerald party story? No - I'll do that another time and on another blog.

We drive back and spend a lovely twenty minutes (no, honestly) with the people who own the apartment. The payment needs to be sorted and a little extra needs to be added for doing the girls' washing.

They send us off with lots of free posters and thank yous.

We sleep well again of course.

Friday 4th March 2005

Same breakfast routine, only this time we're leaving and this time we're getting paid.

And we are - and it doesn't take long. Before and after, Sarah has to look around the baby and children's shop - toys and clothes. Sue and myself are big kids so we join her wandering the aisles and trying to help her make the decisions as to what her son and daughter would like.

Utmost care is taken by the shop assistant wrapping the gifts - finished with a beautifully placed red bow and as a free gift, a small car. There's something about being treated well that makes you want to come back. So Sarah did.

We're off on the road to Palermo...I sang inside.

We head across country towards <http://www.enna-sicilia.it/english/>>Enna. It's a little (well, for me anyway) confusing as to which is the main road and which is motorway.

We decide to stop at Enna, 948 metres above sea level, the highest provincial capital in Italy.

Driving up the snaky roads that slowly we build up an expectation of snow and by the time we reach the Mediaeval town there are clumps of grotty grey snow still left over. We squirm our little smart car round the last tight corner to the top of the hill. This is how I remember Sicily. Thankfully (unless they bulldoze the whole island) this will always just 'be'.

We don't have masses of time but we want to relax and take in the food. Sarah tells the man who owns the pizzeria she works in an organic bakery which uses a wood burning stove. She wonders if she can watch. There doesn't seem to be any objection - there's no encouragement either. The chef (or maybe the runner for the chef) is chided for not having doing his job properly - holding the pizza shovel incorrectly. I'm sure there's a proper word for this implement. The poor man had just been sent out for oranges too.

The two pizzas (oh pesto - what would we do without it?) and the pasta al funghi are getting a tad late and the man, making me think of the night club owner from La Cages aux Folles is getting a bit uppity. It gets here and we scoff. Sue lets me do a vulture job on her leftovers. Of course, I'm doing her a favour - her being so ill and all.

Sarah has to make a phone call and myself and Sue look for ideal photo-opportunities. What about posing as the same shape as the drainpipe? No? By the phone box? Ok then. The digital camera has picked up not only me but the ghost of Sarah behind the glass.

A piece of information for your delectation and delight; on the shore of Lake Pergusa, not far from Enna, Demeter's daughter (<http://www.loggia.com/myth/persephone.html>), Persephone was abducted by Hades, the god of the Underworld. You see how much danger I put myself through to bring such quality travel writing?

We find our way back down the scary slope and onto the main road into Palermo. Rosa is there to greet us and makes umpteen apologies about me having to sleep on the settee tonight. I've slept on worse - stone cold floors, in kitchens, sheds, half size sofas - you name it. We go for our last meal tonight at the same restaurant we began with. This time there are more of us. This time, Rosa orders starters. Sorry, but maybe it was because it was the last night here, that the food (Gnocchi all <http://www.pestogenovese.com/> Pesto Genovese is disappointing. The Limoncello helped. Ahem.

Saturday 5th March 2005

No problem sleeping. Rosa and myself agree that our team should leave about 7am because of the traffic build up at 8am. I let the others know. Sorry chaps.

It's the approaches to roundabouts that really shake up the traffic (lack of) system. Absolute chaos and we wonder how we've done the whole week without a blemish on the bonnet or anywhere else really.

The bringing in of the car is easy enough - no hassles whatsoever and completely pleasant. We have our last cappuccini, spremute and get on the plane.

5. Reviews

RECOMMENDED POETRY COLLECTION FEBRUARY 2006

[Look, Clare! Look!](#) by Clare Pollard (Bloodaxe, ISBN 1 85224 709 6, 62pp, £7.95)

Clare Pollard's third collection follows the ups and down of her journey through China, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand and America. This is the modern version of the grand tour, and is a tour de force, as it brings the reader face to face with the cultures that the poet is passing through. The first part of the collection, 'The Journey', contains poems which are a cool and observational look at western culture, in the shape of Pollard, passing through societies, that at the time the collection was being written were coming to terms with the SARS outbreak and the start of the Iraq War. It is somewhat of a sad tour, revealing the horrifying influence that western business/materialism is having on the heritage, psyche and culture of the east: "And those two fathers - Colonel Sanders, Chairman Mao- / gazed out on every scene with twin bland smiles / watched over each end of Tiananmen Square / that vacancy, vast, like memory lost" (taken from 'The Journey').

It would be easy for Pollard to slip into a reverie of accusations, subtopia city landscapes, and bland lists of starbucks being on every corner and every prostitute in Bangkok being stereotypes borrowed from war films but Clare Pollard's poetry is not tinged with anger, hatred or accusation. The anger in these sequences are directed at herself: "Puking outside the police station next morning, / I wept with anger because some stranger / did not think that I deserved to keep things" (taken from 'The Journey'). This is a controlled anger, a western anger, though Pollard

points out the many intrusions of the west on the east from coke to CNN, she is a victim of the very materialism that she so abhors in the cultures that she is literally passing through.

Pollard doesn't have time to immerse herself in these cultures, she is the poet tourist and this gives her a unique opportunity to see the materialistic against the echoes of the cultural past and her own history. This collection would not have worked if she had spent months in one place, getting to know the locals and learning their ways, this is a collection that flags up our own indifference and ignorance of a wider global stage. No more so, than in the sequence from the poem, entitled 'Vietnam': "The guy on the coach said: *we didn't hate the GIs / They were just kids, how could we hate them?*". And the poet's own epiphany at the knowledge: "We met a man who earned \$17 a week, / and asked us what we earned, / and we felt obscene, / were obscene: / the casual flamboyance with which we bought a Coke, say, or Pringles/ We are the same age as those GIs". This subtle turn of phrase, linked to the prior stanza sums up western culture in both a damning and forgiving way, we are children, we are kids, we get away with too much and are forgiven too easy.

Pollard's journey takes her from eastern cultures and deposits her back in to western materialism that comforts her but creates and unease in her writing: "To go into a supermarket, for example, with rows of fridges / bright as movie-star's teeth, eight types of dip...But then the safeness falters" (taken from 'Australia - South Coast and the centre').

'The Journey' is a diary of Pollard's travels, and is a rewarding glimpse in global fears, culture, hope and faith. It is the journey of a child to adulthood, from innocence to experience. The latter, reflected no more starkly than in the third part of the collection, 'Home'. This part of the collection deals with the loss of a father, the concerns of depression, love, self-pity, growth and change: "so the girl who is spat upon hugs her knees, / and tucks in the head, and is stone" (taken from 'Metamorphoses').

With this collection, Pollard has awoken to find herself changed in to a true poet for the ages.

Andrew Oldham

RECOMMENDED POETRY COLLECTION FEBRUARY 2006

[Swim](#) by Pat Borthwick (Mudfog, ISBN 1 899503 63 3, 76pp, £7.00)

Borthwick has been quietly chipping away at the British Poetry scene for years, producing work that is both humourous, thought provoking and dazzling. Her last full collection, Between Clouds and Caves (Little Arc), appeared seventeen years ago, it is not because the poet is a slow writer but is indicative of poetry publishing in Britain today, as the reading lists get longer, and slush piles are swept in waste paper baskets. Borthwick has slipped through the nation's fingers and could have been easily of lost if hadn't been for Mudfog. The sad thing is, is that Borthwick has been the stalwart of many poetry magazines for over two decades, and regularly wins or is the runner up in numerous poetry competitions across the UK. Yet it has still taken seventeen years, numerous pamphlet collections, to see her returned to the place she deserves to be the most, in a full collection that spans her style, breadth, taste and love of the word.

The title poem of the collection is series of beautifully crafted vignettes that deal with the sea, the smells and the memories of water. They are poems that deal with loss, the fantastical, the mundane, the fishing fleets and nets, the disgorging, Amsterdam, fire and ice, mud and tourism. It is a credit to Borthwick that she can bring all these ideas and themes together, in spurts of magic realism:

"Tonight, she'll watch a comet across the sky
then swim from the snowy breakers of her bed"

(VII Lakeside Lodge)

Borthwick harnesses her love of the English language and the word to float out her poems of fantasy and surrealism. She floats the elderly and the young out across the sea, the sky and the stars. The reader will find Borthwick an ease to read, the work is haunting, creeping beneath the skin and with each reading brings out new ideas and shadows. Borthwick is a product of her environment, North Yorkshire, but she easily draws on any environment she works in, she breathes through the very soil she touches and draws on it:

"The sea has set it stalls
halfway along the beach.
We rummage through its bric-a-brac,
collect smoothed glass, driftwood,
unusual rusty shapes"

(Kleptomaniac)

She merges ideas and juxtaposes polar opposites to create beautifully crafts. It is no surprise that this collection deals with both the beauty of her landscape and the decay beneath. The only surprise that it has taken seventeen years to arrive again on our bookshelves, let's hope it doesn't take another seventeen years. British publishers pay heed.

Bixby Monk

RECOMMENDED NOVEL FEBRUARY 2006

[A Map of Glass](#), by Jane Urquhart (Published November 7, 2005 by Bloomsbury, 371 pages, ISBN 0-7475-8149-5 £10.99)

A Map of Glass is Canadian writer, Jane Urquhart's sixth novel. If you haven't encountered Urquhart's work before, you should know that she is a writer of substance. *Away*, was short-listed for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, *The Stone Carvers* was long-listed for the Booker. Her other novels show enormous literary ability, as does this current book, four years in the writing.

The novel opens with young conceptual artist, Jerome, who arrives on an island between Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River to work on an idea for a new installation. There he uncovers the body of Andrew, encased in ice. Sylvia is a middle aged woman suffering from an unnamed 'condition' that appears to be akin to autism, who has had a long love affair with Andrew, whilst in a non-physical marriage with the doctor who has been trying to cure her. A year on from Andrew's death, Sylvia tracks Jerome down, to share the story of her love affair, and to pass on the story of Andrew's forefathers. This parallel historical story is where the writing really comes alive, and the characters fill out their shapes. It is a familiar aspect in Urquhart's writing; her ability to make the past come to life and entwine it with the present day, makes her stand out from other writers.

It is through the telling of Sylvia's tale that young Jerome is released from his own demons of his past, though why the telling did have such impact on the young Jerome and proved to be such a dramatic catalyst in helping him come to terms with his own past, is not completely apparent. It is a bit of a leap of faith on the part of the reader to accept his turnabout. However, all can be forgiven when you allow yourself to be swept away by the eloquent, lyrical writing of which Urquhart particularly excels. As a writer, she deals in big concepts - bigger than the stories of individual people, and sweeping settings - the vastness of the Canadian landscape. At times the structure of the novel seems to take a backseat to her almost sermon-like narrative, as in: "It wasn't until years later that he realized that the ignition of these constructions, made so that air might move more freely and carry fire farther, faster, was like the burning of the history of the country in miniature, a sort of exercise in forgetting first the Native peoples and then the settlers, whose arrival had been the demise of these peoples, settlers in whose blood was carried the potential for his own existence." Toward the end of the book, and the description of the end of the love affair, Sylvia says, "...we spoke about history, about the past, about the generations of his family, and about mine, about lost landscapes and vanished architectures, there was ...I still believe this...quite a lot of joy" and such writing takes on a kind of literary-consciousness, almost pretentiousness. But the romance and the landscape bring the reader back on side: "'...the sense that while we held each other we were, in turn, being held by the rocks and trees we could see from the windows and the creeks and springs we could sometimes hear running through the valley.'" It is in such language, where we can see Urquhart's origins as a poet. What stays with you long after you have finished the book is the sense of landscape, and a haunting lyricism that eclipses both the plot structures and characters.

Katherine Blair

RECOMMENDED ANTHOLOGY FEBRUARY 2006

[Passionfood - 100 Love Poems for those in Love](#), edited by Neil Astley
(Bloodaxe Books 128 pages, ISBN 1-85224-727-4, £7.99)

Sometimes in a short life reviewing can seem a burden. Not because the reading or the writing is a chore, but because it can be hard to find the time to enjoy fully exploring the work in question. I was feeling like this about *Passionfood*, just after Christmas, and then I was struck down by one of those ghastly winter afflictions. Inconvenient for the day job, yes. Ideal, however, for reviewing, and where better to focus on an anthology of love than in bed? Far too ill to focus on either passion or food, but just strong enough to be able to turn a few pages, and indulge in the comfort offered by a book of life affirming poems. 'There are no broken hearts here' writes editor Neil Astley. In my current state, I'm very glad of that.

The link between love and food has often been made by writers, and exploited by publishers, a notable example of the latter in recent memory being the 1981 glossy and up front cookbook, *Rude Food*. In *Passionfood's* case, food is not literally central, although the collection is grouped according to course: Desire being the Appetisers, full enjoyment of the pleasures of love the Dessert. There are also direct references to food within some of the poems: the anthology opens with Pablo Neruda's sonnet in which 'bread does not nourish' him but wants to eat his lover's 'skin like a whole almond'; in *For Desire*, Kim Addonizio calls out for the 'Strongest cheese, the one that stinks best', and later in *Like That*, she commands

'Love me.../...when you're alone in a glaring diner/.....when your eggs are greasy/ and your hash brown underdone.' Helen Dunmore's contribution is a poem called *Wild Strawberries*. In other pieces, food is incidental or does not appear at all. This collection provides poems for lovers to feed on. Remember Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, 'If music be the food of love, play on'? And that was five hundred years ago. However, *Passionfood* escapes cliché because its chief delight is in the juxtaposition of works from different periods and ages, from Sappho and Catullus to Rumi of Persia, from Shakespeare to Byron to Julia Copus, the youngest of the contributors. There are works surviving from the seventh century BC and those that are hot off the press in the twenty-first century AD, all celebrating a wide variety of experiences of love. Forms, registers and imagery may differ, but the emotions are comfortably similar.

One of the real strengths of the way this book is organised, is that it encourages the reading of familiar pieces in a fresh light. Elizabeth Barratt Browning's *How do I love thee?* Or Andrew Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress* have been frequently anthologised, and I have certainly glossed over them because I feel I know them well. Here, however, UA Fanthorpe's 'kind of love called maintenance/which stores the WD40 and knows how to use it', or Selima Hill's desire 'like rampant vaginal flora', and a range of contemporary settings and voices enticed me to look again at images like John Donne's 'She is all states, and all princes I', or Shakespeare's reasoning in his sonnet 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds/admit impediments.' Millennial frankness, as in Rita Ann Higgins *It's Platonic*, is to be expected, but Herrick reminds us in *Upon Julia's Clothes* that celebrating the erotic is nothing new

'When as in silks my Julia goes,
Then, then (methinks) how sweetly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes'

Throughout its four courses, *Passionfood* explores love with healthy dashes of humour, lines or whole poems raising at least a smile. Musing on love, WH Auden makes unlikely connections, 'Does it look like a pair of pyjamas,/or the ham in a temperance hotel' while James Fenton plays with words and expectations, 'Do you mind if we do not go to the Louvre,/if we say sod off to sodding Notre Dame'. John Donne's outrageously assured seduction technique in *The Flea* is well matched by Grace Nichols' sassy celebration of her ample body in *Invitation*,

'below the blues
 of my black sea belly
there's a mole that gets a ride
each time I shift the heritage
of my behind

Come up and see me sometime.'

In the end, there was so much to savour that I stopped dipping and just read, only daunted by the *Dessert* section, where the richness of each poem is hard to appreciate without some time to pause and digest.

Although there are no 'broken hearts' in the volume, and even the poem *In Defence of Adultery* carefully avoids the consequences of transgression, pleasure is thrown into relief by hints of darker moments. Carol Ann Duffy reminds us of the sinister power of desire in *Warming Her Pearls*, and, in *Valentine*, she describes the lover's disturbingly 'truthful' gift of an onion as

'Lethal.
Its scent will cling to your fingers,

Cling to your knife'

In *You Don't Know What Love Is*, Kim Addonizio writes of the man who has the power to stir love but not to reciprocate.

Nevertheless, the emphasis in *Passionfruit* is unashamedly upon positive experience. This is not a book to give to jilted lovers; it is perfect for someone you love. Or buy it for yourself, and give yourself a taste of something good.

Caroline Drennan

Spiked <http://www.spiked-magazine.co.uk/>

Issue 16 is a tour de force. Really? With this tiny demographic? How does this small East Anglian, non-profit, volunteer outfit manage to put together such a compelling collection of commentary, poetry, and fiction? Very rarely does a small magazine find itself so perfectly placed as to snare such a variety of healthy game. The metaphor is not gratuitous; how many literary and arts magazines are born of journalistic, even entrepreneurial vision and enthusiasm in a vacuum of actual writing talent and incisive thought? If you're going to lure the *rara avis*, better set your trap in the right place and on the basis of past successes it seems like East Anglia is fertile hunting ground.

A rapid inventory is in order: this issue features an interview with painter and printmaker Colin Bygrave, vignettes of India from Vikram Kapur; essays on the expectations of 21st Century art by Raylia Chadwick, the gift of the gab *a la francais* by Augustus Young, and the demise of garbage photography by Duane Locke; Carolyn Watson's acid "Advertisement" for a suitable male; a stunning photo-essay on 70's Liverpool by Steve Wolfenden; poetry from Helen Ivory, Peter De Ville, Merryn Williams, Carolyn Oulton, and Tessa West; fiction from Eddie Wilson and Andrea Porter, and last but not least Christopher Dawes on the cowboy novels of George G Gilman.

The reader will be excused for not recognizing the names. There aren't any fireworks here, nor even luminaries. The writing, photographs, and prints are less spectacular than hypnotic. Meaning accrues, piece by piece. One can't help but think of fellow East Anglian WG Sebald when examining Colin Bygrave's unassuming, brooding landscape prints and reading his responses to Frances Noble's pointed questions: "Do you think of your landscapes as timeless?" she asks. To which he responds, in part: "I am just concerned with making a well-constructed image. Once I have done that, in a sense the image is out there in the world, it isn't my property anymore." As much could be said of Steve Wolfenden's photographs of urban regeneration in 70's Liverpool. They are local and personal - what possible motivation can this photographer/interloper/voyeur have, doing here shooting broken street signs and piles of bricks in this suburban wasteland? Yet the images are universal: this could be Stalingrad fifty years ago, this could be Lagos today.

The short stories featured in this issue, "Back from the Sea" and "Table Six", are dark and poignant, respectively. Eddie Willson's effort is a raw and tasty slice of (low) life and Andrea Porter's a meditation on the genesis of poetry and, metaphorically, Burns' louse.

Pinpointing a weakness in this magazine is an easy way to round up. One wouldn't want to be held accountable for too glowing praise. The poetry,

the essays - surely there has to be something there... Alas, all competent, all original, all meditative. Perhaps the next issue.

Barrie Sherwood

[Modern Women Poets, an anthology of British, Irish and American writing](#)
 (Bloodaxe Books ISBN 1-85224-678-2, £9.95)

"A woman's problem in writing poetry is different to man's," wrote Edith Sitwell, complaining that she had no one to follow and had to learn everything for herself, including how not to be timid.

Within *Modern Women Poets*, an anthology of British, Irish and American writing published by Bloodaxe Books ISBN 1-85224-678-2 at £9.95, there is a community of female role models to draw strength from and drive timidity away. Edited by Deryn Rees-Jones, the 416 page collection stretches from Charlotte Mew writing in the early decades of the 20th century to the Irish poet Caitriona O'Reilly born almost a hundred years later.

Allowing access to this wealth of writing is the fundamental justification for the anthology's existence. You wouldn't expect to find a similar volume titled *Modern Men Poets* on the shelves of your local bookshop.

It couldn't happen.

It wouldn't happen because poets are men, just as authors are men; they are never put into a sub-category. Some writers have argued that women-only collections perpetuate their position on the margins. Rees-Jones maintains, however, that her book celebrates their work, giving woman writers the exposure they deserve, while recognising that they work within a masculine tradition of literature.

For poets the anthology may act as a support group, for me - a general reader - it is a generous cache. I am grateful for the introduction to Anna Wickham and, in particular, *Nervous Prostration*, a lament to the emotional poverty of the "Croydon class". Written in 1915, it is a phrase that is still deliciously resonant today. And all women writers (strike that, *all* women) should have Sylvia Townsend Warner's words prominently displayed throughout their home: "it is well known that a woman can be in two places at once, at her desk and her washing machine..."

The notes introducing each poet are particularly valuable, as they give an understanding of the influences that informed their work. For Ruth Padel, the first woman fellow of Wadham College, Oxford and a direct descendant of Charles Darwin, it has been rock musicians such as Sinead O'Connor and Carole King. The poems of Jamaica born Una Marson have also been influenced by music. In *Kinky Hair Blues* written in 1937 she addresses a perennial problem for women everywhere - how they look and how they are supposed to look.

Now I's gwine press me hair
 And bleach me skin.
 I's gwine press me hair
 And bleach my skin.
 What won't a gal do
 Some kind of man to win.

In *Alice Uglier* the Scottish poet Elma Mitchell explores the position of the unmarried older woman, once occupying the most awkward position in society .

Lonely, never alone,
She nursed
Her nearest through senility and worse.
Placid in gratitude, dumb to abuse,
She kept
The business out of debt, the books in order,
But now, it seems, the monkey's loose,
And something's tearing papers in the cellar
Far down.

Other so-called women's subjects are explored here: relationships, family, children, but so too are politics, science, sex, identity and the natural world. If there is any unifying theme in poems that span almost a century Rees-Jones sees it in the form they take, rather than their content. The dramatic monologue is a favourite, perhaps because it gives women the freedom to speak in voices other than their own.

I have a quibble, the same quibble that readers have with any selection of writers: where is my favourite? Limited to 100 poets, Rees-Jones explains in the introduction that had space allowed she would have included at least 50 more. I presume that among that 50 is Martina Evans, the Irish writer living and teaching in London, whose inclusion would have formed a happy companionship with Rita Ann Higgins, the Galway poet who creates penetrating bitter sweet portraits of Irish family life.

However, the most notable absence is the American writer Elizabeth Bishop who refused to allow her work to be included in any women-only anthology. Instead of ignoring the gap created, Rees-Jones acknowledges it, listing her publications, recommending reading for those unfamiliar with her work, and charting her influence on contemporary poets such as Lavinia Greenlaw and Jo Shapcott

Of course, Deryn Rees-Jones herself should have been included. Recently voted one of the 20 best poets of the next generation by the Poetry Book Society, she has published three collections of poetry, the last a murder mystery set in her native Liverpool.

"The least important factor of a poem is the person who wrote it," said Greta Stoddart last year. "As we enter the 21st century women poets can hopefully, finally, become poets."

I can't imagine that Rees-Jones would be dismayed if *Modern Women Poets* turned out to be the last of its kind.

Bridget Whelan

[The Book of Faces](#) by Joseph Campana (119pgs, ISBN1-55597-433-3, Price US\$14.00, Published by Graywolf Press, Saint Paul, Minnesota)

Now, I like Audrey Hepburn as much as the next person. Or so I thought. I have a video collection of her films, I watch *Breakfast At Tiffany's* when I'm feeling down, I think she is the most beautiful and stylish woman I have ever seen. But I am not even at the starting blocks in comparison with Joseph Campana. Almost every poem in *The Book of Faces* is about, or written to, Audrey Hepburn. There are songs to her, a dance to her, a

couple of scripts which are peripherally about her, poems about her films, a poem in the shape of AH - when I got to the poem entitled *Yes This Is Another Damned Audrey Hepburn Poem* I nearly wept.

Yes, it's funny. There is certainly a great deal of humour in this volume. I liked the lists *How to Make a Million* and *How to be a Star* that introduce new sections of the book. So No 1: 'Move to Switzerland for tax purposes'. No 5: 'Invest, invest, invest'. No 3: 'Try diamonds.' The poem *Dance Steps for Two Left Feet*, eleven stanzas of four lines, each verse ending 'cha cha cha' is amusing, and hides a poignancy within the rhythm as he writes 'I am not happy/you are not childless/we are not dying:/ha ha ha'. But with some poems, such as *Pattern of Beauty* which is arranged in the shape of AH, amusing is all that it is. The shape of the poem adds nothing to the meaning, indeed it distracts from it. It is as though he simply cut up a piece of prose into the shape of the letters, without focussing on the impact they could make. So the words that float alone, such as the ones on the legs of the A, carry no specific meaning of their own ('smooth in' 'lodge a' 'feeling as' 'comes like', are the words on the left leg). The resulting poem is frou frou rather than profound.

Which is a shame, because I do believe that Joseph Campana wants to be profound. He wants to talk about war, and starvation and the nature of beauty and fame and adulation. But somehow he gets distracted by style and topic. In an effort to find yet more extreme shapes for his poems he writes *Stations*, a stations of the cross to Hepburn. This is high camp triviality. It is quite funny: 'no 3. You stumble - is that a stone in your glass slipper?', but when he tries for depth ('is [your father] the one you might catch in the cellar with a dying bird?') what he achieves is mawkish.

These are undoubtedly clever poems - often too clever for me. I found myself floundering when I tried to penetrate the meanings of some. For instance, in *Declaration*, there is a verse 'You screen your thoughts like a poem through/a veil. Light is the pain you can't reduce.' As I read this I nodded solemnly, until I thought I have no idea what he means by 'Light is the pain you can't reduce.' Campana has a library of references and allusions, to Chaucer, Barthes, Chekhov and, always, Hepburn. Sometimes this is effective, as with his homage to *War and Peace*, written with the rhythms of a waltz. But sometimes, when he has written of his muse Hepburn in the style of Catullus, followed by Petrarch and then by Spenser I am reminded more of parlour games than passionate love.

There are poems in this volume which are well-written and thought provoking, almost despite being written to Hepburn. The poem *Lights* ends with 'I, without you, will not abide the burning of any desert and I will/ reduce it to glass with my love.' The image of a desert of glass burnt by the heat of his love is a wonderful one. In *Queen of the Night* there is a verse 'Beauty devastates,/Make me thin,/make me hungry/make my longing/thrust like bone/through skin.' Again, here, Campana reaches beyond his muse to make a valid point effectively. *Final Cut* is a low key poem, conjuring up an empty cinema, the film over, dark. It is melancholic, atmospheric and rather moving.

Mainly however, Campana will not allow himself simplicity. The poems are a wild and sometimes exciting mixture of styles and shapes, picking magpie-like from the classics, ranging over the centuries. The focus on Hepburn as his muse feels too thin for a volume of this length. I wanted a narrative of some kind, a probing of the nature of obsession, a chart of his love, but he delivers pure adulation. I longed to ask, as he does in *Fan*, 'What would you do with her anyway?' He sums up my view of Hepburn best in *How to Make a Million: No 7*: 'Start as a cigarette girl, end as an

angel: be a queen in between'. This is witty and sharp and pertinent. It is all I need to know about Audrey Hepburn. I am now going to go and put my video collection in the bin.

Clare Reddaway

[Tales from Deadwood](#) by Mike Jameson (Berkley, 248pp, ISBN 0-425-20675-0, £4.99)

If you're looking for a shot of testosterone, this is your novel. And if you thought the Western was dead, think again. As part of Berkley's Western Novel imprint, Mike Jameson uses this genre to evoke a harsh, raunchy world, full of gritty detail - a sort of 'John Wayne meets *Trainspotting*'.

Set during a gold rush to the Black Hills in 1876, many interesting characters are conjured up for the reader - most having amusingly evocative names like White-eyed Kid and Colorado Charley. The protagonist, Dan Ryan, is a sardonic ex-soldier turned prospector, with an eye for the main chance. Legendary figures, such as Calamity Jane and Wild Bill Hickok are presented as idiosyncratic and intriguing. However, it is Deadwood itself - lawless, anarchic and dangerous - which becomes the dominant personality in this novel. It is a place which shouldn't be, which exists where it shouldn't be. Outside all moral codes, it encroaches on Sioux territory and doesn't so much as ask for trouble, as sits up and begs for it. Needless to say, the tales that come out of it are all scandalous, violent and action-packed.

The plot is well-crafted with several twists, to keep the reader page-turning. You won't find the meaning of life here, but plenty of entertainment, as good (or at least what approaches it in this society) battle against some very nasty and often literally poisonous evil, particularly in the form of Al Swearengen - the Wild West's answer to Lucretia Borgia. The novel gives an interestingly modern and realistic slant on the Western. Randolph Scott wouldn't last two minutes in the survival of the fittest world created here.

The main weakness of the book is the lack of credibility of the women characters. Take Calamity Jane, for example. Doris Day she is not - but rather born of male fantasy and so full of libido, that she might as well wear a badge saying, 'Come and get it,' rather than any gunbelt. Mike Jameson is more successful in depicting the motivation of his male characters, particularly that of Hickok coping with physical decline. The technical detail of prospecting and the historical background are well-researched. This is interwoven into the story with much skill, giving the novel depth without any information overload. Many characters and events are based on fact, and this gives an authenticity to the text. Life in the Dakotas in the late nineteenth century is depicted as raw but fascinating. Deadwood itself becomes something of a microcosm for emerging - albeit feeble - civilisation.

Helen Shay

[-273.15](#) by Peter Reading (Bloodaxe ISBN 1852246790, 36 pages) £7.95

Peter Reading's -273.15 [absolute zero] is a slim volume of poetry with a density beyond its apparent brevity that explores the links between

contemporary industrial society and the precarious natural world that has to contend with the resultant effects. From the outset Noyes Fludd washes through the work, leaving a tangled and allusive narrative as the flotsam and jetsam forming the tidemark between nature and society. Reading is cast as the meticulous and diligent beachcomber, holding up individual images and water-worn abstractions for our attention. As there are so many apparent allusions and references cast among the shifting discourses and differing speech registers it is tempting to see -273.15 as a work that bears comparison with Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The focus of Reading's poetry however is not so much the sentiments of modernism, or even the fragmentary experience composing the social order, but rather a shared sense of the interaction between the timeless and the transitory.

"Who'd've ever thought / that the bozo who came to lunch / would've stayed?! / [Well, we won't live long, we know that; / but. While we do, let's love, thus.]"

Recalling earlier works, Reading treats time as something both of the personal moment - captured as memory - and a "vast ineluctable" presence considered from afar or merely visible through the span of millennia. This telescopic effect is replicated in the way minute gradings of taxonomy are juxtaposed with the stream of photographs from the Hubble, or the rapidity of light received from Mars.

Beyond this modern *Waste Land*, a topography uncovered at random by the tidal shifts of desalinated seas, is a natural order thrown into disorder and struggled to maintain a semblance of equilibrium. Reading is meticulous in matching technical data concerning "extirpated" species, coastal decline and the degradations inflicted upon biodiversity against pig iron production and the "composite set" of exposures beamed from the satellite in space.

The animals and insects still existing in the delicate interstice in between are offered up for refuge to a passing Noye, whose ark charts a steady progress through the pages, redeeming those that make it on board and providing a wake for those for whom the promise of sanctuary is too late.

Reading is an elegant stylist and even when one is seemingly adrift in a confused squall of discourses and registers it is tempting to feel there is still a sea chart guiding this navigation. The clash of demotic, old English and a sort of txt-register is at times distracting in its wilful obfuscation but the tension that's created is nevertheless compelling. - 273.15 is an impressive piece of work and admirably demonstrates that the Lannan-endorsed poet can never be accused of simply treading water.

"No space, matey, / For the deceased; / Get over the gunwale yerself, / Or else stay there and drown / (Only the Great Algonquian Mugwump / Could tell us how many cubits up / The waters will prevail this time)."

Jake Elliot

Modern Muses, How Artists Become Inspired, introduced and edited by Mankh (Walter E. Harris III). Allbook books, Hauppauge, NY, 2005. ISBN 0-9743603-2-5. 148 pages. USA \$13.

Mankh' book, "Modern Muses, How Artists Become Inspired" will be vital for artists of all kind who are interested in the nature and origins of inspiration and in comparing their own with that of others. It will also

be useful for those who are blocked, and help them channel their energies back to the source of their creativity.

Gary Steven Corseri gives an example of Shodo, the Japanese "way of writing" which uses imagery to introduce and order narrative. This is a fascinating description of a way of writing that Corseri calls "the art of the particular moment." He begins his piece: "I'm surprised by the cold of my father in law's hand." Corseri, a Caucasian, goes on to talk about his Japanese father in law, in the meantime mentioning his own wife and his own father, reflecting in passing that the a generation ago the two men would have wanted to kill each other on a battlefield. Reflections arise from the image of the cold hand, from the present, from tactile sensations; a story is told.

Other essays which are memorable include Maxwell Wheat's "Birds of Prey, Macbeth and a Poem." Wheat describes bird watching and observing raptors taking their prey. He quotes Emily Dickinson, who describes a robin swallowing a worm then uses language as a "comforter" a "compensation" for what would otherwise be "raw" and "turbulent."

J.E. Franklin, who writes 10 minute plays, was first a painter at a very young age, then something almost inexplicably changed the nature of her inspiration. In her essay, "Following The Spirit" she explains her change, what led her to leave art behind and become a playwright.

Some of the artists simply give examples of inspiration, preferring to attribute it to some symbolic figure like the muse. Others analyze it.

"Maybe for me, inspiration comes from a celebration of what is strange in this world, or at least estranged. That which is made to be shut out, disenfranchised, or silenced, but refuses to oblige; inspires me. Inspiration is the voice that won't quit in the middle of the night because it has to continue; there's no other choice. I celebrate and am inspired by those voices," writes Alan Semerdjian.

For Vivian Ciolli, a poet, facing a blank page is difficult. She describes her process of inspiration, and thinks that the inspiration helps her contact a world where poems may be like "prayers". "Something mysterious happens each time I write. It's as if my writing is created in two places: in my mind, and in a place which cannot be located. This second place is the home of my muse, a space I enter without being aware of the moment it happens, like trying to catch the exact point of falling asleep. Nothing is more difficult for me than to face a blank page. I need to drag myself to it. But each time I do, the writing seed splits and germinates. Then it rises into that wild place, and I follow. It's as if by my letting go, the poem, which already exists where I cannot see it, is able to reveal itself."

The commonality of this experience of inspiration as something inexplicable, which comes from somewhere else, has led the editor to explain it symbolically as the work of the muses, as did the Greeks. The book is nicely organized with the muses of comedy, tragedy and other art forms grouped together.

Linda Benninghoff

Contributors:

Linda Benninghoff

Linda has always loved reading and her love of reading inspired her to write. She has spent most of her life in Long Island, New York. She lived in Baltimore for five years where she went to college. An English major at Johns Hopkins University and graduated with honors. While there, she particularly liked the poetry and novels of Thomas Hardy. She has a MA in English with an emphasis on creative writing from SUNY at Stony Brook.

Linda Benninghoff has had poetry published in about 40 magazines and anthologies, including The Journal, listening to the birth of crystals, Current Accounts, Poems for Madrid, The Peoples Poet, Poetry Graphics Monthly. She recently translated The Seafarer from the Old English. The translation is available at www.electrato.com. She has published two chapbooks, The Street Where I Was A Child, with Finishing Line Press, and Departures, with March Street Press.

Katherine Blair

Katherine Blair was born in Toronto, Canada, Katherine studied journalism and political science at Carleton University, in Ottawa, then took up positions as a television reporter and presenter first in Timmins, then Ottawa, Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Happy Valley/Goose Bay, Labrador. It was while flying to Labrador, that she sat beside the man who five months later would become her husband. She returned with him to his native England, eventually settling in Yorkshire where she took up a position at Yorkshire Television working in news and then as a producer of regional programmes and documentaries. During that time, she gained two Master of Arts degrees - one in International Studies, the other in Creative Writing. An avid reader, especially keen on Canadian writers, she is currently working on her first fictional novel, and lives in Yorkshire with her husband, daughter and son.

Caroline Drennan

Caroline Drennan was born in Malaysia and brought up by Irish parents on the South Coast of England. She has always been passionate about literature, studied English at Oxford, and has taught English, and some Drama for about twenty years. Mostly, she has worked in London but spent five years as Head of English at Bruton School for Girls in Somerset. At present, she is Head of Sixth Form at the Godolphin and Latymer School in Hammersmith.

An avid reader, Caroline is also committed to writing. In the past, she has produced both poetry and plays, and her play, Green Silk is thicker than Water, was performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1995. Currently, she is concentrating on prose, having just completed a sabbatical year on the MA course in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. Ongoing projects include a novel set in London, and an anthology of short stories for schools, to be compiled with an ex-colleague. She was short-listed for the Harpers and Queen/Orange Short Story Competition 2005. Caroline's other main interests are Art, Art History, and Travel. Peru, Cuba and the Sinai desert are her most memorable destinations.

Jake Elliot

Jake Elliot is a graduate of the Creative Writing MA at the University of East Anglia (UK). He is a regular contributor to the magazine Flux and has also written on film for trade publications. He has had stories published in the the magazines Spiked, Cafe Irreal and the journal of Cornish writing Scryfa, the anthologies Paper Scissors Stone and Wildthyme on Top, and broadcast on BBC Radio 4. He is currently based in Norwich where he is teaching and studying for a PhD.

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.

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.

Kate Parrinder

Kate Parrinder has recently completed the MA in Literary Translation at the University of East Anglia, and hopes to continue translating twentieth century novels from the French, as well as launching a career within publishing. She graduated from the University of Warwick in 2003 with a degree in English and French. She is passionate about literature and its potential to make the mind travel to different places and inside other people's heads. This stems not only from an unhealthy curiosity about other people's private lives, but also from a keen interest in other cultures, places and mindsets. Research into ways of expressing interiority has formed the main focus of her academic work.

She enjoys travelling outside her native Britain, especially to France, where she has spent time living and working in Paris. Apart from an appreciation of literature, she also spends her free time sampling different wines from around the world, eating out and benefiting from the cooking skills of her friends and family.

Clare Reddaway

Clare Reddaway writes scripts for theatre and radio, and stories for children. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University College. Her play A FAMILY TALE was recently staged at her daughter's school in Bath. An extract from her story for children WILL appears in

WATERMARK, an anthology of students' work, published in February 2005. She has had a children's animation series idea optioned by Lion Television, and two of her radio plays have been developed for Radio 4. Before taking up writing, Clare worked as a script editor for the BBC and Granada Television. She has worked in radio in Hong Kong, and as a documentary researcher and producer for a number of independent production companies. She now lives in Bath with her daughter.

Helen Shay

Helen Shay is a solicitor-turned-writer. She has reviewed for magazines, Reading Lights and Print Radio. She writes fiction (drama and performance poetry) and non-fiction (mainly on legal subjects, with the third edition of her Writers Guide to Copyright & Law now out, ISBN 1-85703-991-2). She is currently completing a novel as part of an MA in Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Barrie Sherwood

Barrie Sherwood was born in Hong Kong and read English and Philosophy in Vancouver and Montreal. His first novel "The Pillow Book of Lady Kasa" was published in 2000. His next novel, "Free-Girl", comes out in April, 2006. He currently lives in the UK.

JC Sutcliffe

JC Sutcliffe has lived in England, France and Canada in the past ten years, and now works as a writer, translator and editor in London. She is a recent graduate of the MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia and is working on Propaganda, a serious comic literary novel starring a man on an indefatigable quest for a perfect life.

Carolyn Thomas

Carolyn Thomas is a keen writer and reader, enjoying texts from a wide range of genres. She writes short stories, sitcom scripts, plays for both radio and theatre and is currently working on her first novel.

In 2004, she was runner up in the BBC's nationwide 'End of Story' competition after completing the ending for one of best selling author Marian Keyes' short stories. She gained a diploma in dramatic writing at the University of Sussex in 2003 and is a member of the National Association of Writers in Education. Carolyn reviews scripts for an online scriptwriting group of which she was a founder member in 2001.

She is a part-time special needs teacher and in early 2005 combined her skills for the post of 'writer in residence' at two secondary schools.

She describes herself as more writer than teacher and her short term aim is to write herself out of teaching.

Bridget Whelan

A freelance journalist, Bridget has been an agony aunt, a researcher for investigative journalist Paul Foot and contributor to Miriam Stoppard's Daily Mirror health and personal advice column.

Born within walking distance of Fleet Street, she left school at 16 to join the staff of a small weekly newspaper and later studied for a degree in Irish history in evening class while her family were growing up. Winning \$4,000 in an international short story competition gave her the confidence to study for a Masters degree in Creative and Life Writing at Goldsmiths College. She is now working on a novel about the London Irish community of the 1960s and lives on the south coast with an encouraging husband, two handsome sons and a fat cat.