Welcome to another LUNCH time.
Suitable for vegetarians and vegans.
Welcome to the fifth edition of Lunch. Our magazine is full of the poetry created by poets who are friends of Poetry Kit Courses.

This edition edited by Jim Bennett

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Cover picture is Afternoon Tea by Percy Shakespeare
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I The Optimist

This is not a poem about the taxi being late
nor the flood that turned us back half-way
It isn’t about the check-in queues that zig-zagged
right to the door of the departure gate.
Nor about my passport being out of date
or the flight cancelled.

It is not a poem about arriving in scorching heat
to queue at passport control
staffed by a newbie afraid to miss an illegal immigrant.
It isn’t about losing my suitcase
nor even about it being last on the carrousel
so that all the taxis were gone
and I missed my boat to the Island.

It is about arriving at a hotel in a Venetian building
on the hottest day on record
to an air-conditioned room
and a waiter who found me a table for dinner
even though I had forgotten to book.
II Heatwave

The year when it was too hot
to walk barefoot on the terrace
to sleep even with windows wide open and a fan
to stroll to Mongonisi through the olive trees

the year when the pool was like a warm bath
when there was no evening breeze on the terrace
when the supermarket ran out of water

the year when we dared not barbeque outside
for fear of a spark
when the mountains above Igoumenitsa
hid all week behind the heat haze

the year I sat on my terrace at night
after the cicadas finished their chorus
a glass of wine on the table beside me
putting off trying to sleep
III Departure

The alarm woke me before the cicadas
from the blessed sleep of dawn
after a sleepless night.
Just light, but hot, as it had been all night.
I put on my travelling dress,
black and white linen,
too dull to wear on the island
but suitable for a wet English summer day.

Corfu had forest fires overnight.
White smoke drifting from the forest beyond the town
a layer of brown haze above the island.
My taxi driver is optimistic, tells me it is contained,
or is that just for a tourist’s ears?

The airport now has a Duty Free
a new Street Food Café outside
and can scan my electronic boarding pass
but queues long as ever, information sparse.
The plane leaves late.
A Case of Preposterous Optimism
from ‘Light and Shade’ a linocut By Cuillin Bantockt

How to dare alone at night
to float towards two arches
one roughly rounded
one gently squared
in a craft so flimsy
nothing but a frame of balsam
light as matchsticks
nothing but a skin of vellum
thin as cobwebs.

The artist selects
twenty centimeters of linoleum,
chooses a v-shaped tool to cut.
Struggling for space
within this most unforgiving media.
My struggle is for words
against the narrative agenda.

From these docks the Bounty
set sail, full of flowerpots.
A familiar reek, a rich brew
of hair, bodies and sweat
emerged from each household.
Pepys walked the streets
Busy with naval affairs
and the diary working
in his head.

Every step counts.
Out of the realisation
of huge limitations
the heart must make its choices.
Vertical lines waver
descend by reflection
into deep waters.
My vessel surfaces slowly.
Everything finally shows.
Deptford Creek is lit with gaiety,
Cherry Blossom

On our doormat
my two shoes
made from lasts
and lasting thirty years
lie plastered with clay
one cast on its side
Fraying laces loop
through eyelets.
Tongues without speech.

Through double glazing
and spattered rainbow droplets
I dream I see my father’s shoes
neatly placed side by side
as if he wants to remind me
how his slender left hand
was inside one shoe
like a glove
while the right hand
brushed on cherry blossom
polish till they shone.

Perhaps his pleasure came
from memories of years
dug into muddy trenches.

Now, I scrape the earth from
my sturdy shoes, wipe them clean
and nourish them with beeswax.
Clockwise

Outside, cows maunder
by the hawthorn hedge
up Lower Willow field
to munch on nettles
at our edge. The kitchen clock
always running fast
requires subtraction.
Green numerals on the cooker
flash fourteen fifty two; ten to
three, after translation.
It’s hard to judge exactly
when to leave for the station.

On platform one, information
rolls in circles. An earlier train
now late, is just arriving.

Ensconced in a padded seat
time unwinds, unfetters
hours and hands, stretches out
in all directions; patchwork fields
some green, some tilled, prepare
by work for growth, in imagination.
I ask you to take my poem,
hold it like an opal to the bright eye of the sun,
see the colours.

Or clasp it to your ear like a seashell.

I suggest you drop an adder into my poem,
watch it slide around the curdle of words.

Or you could walk into the poem’s dungeon,
try to unpick the locks.

I want you to swim in the river of my poem,
see if you can get to shore.

But all you want to do
is place my poem in a birdcage,
force it to sing its song.

You start by starving it
to find out what it really means.
The Rejected Maiden

Yr Eneth Ga’dd Ei Gwrthod

The wind’s pulse and stubborn rain
corrugate the Dee’s deep water –
sky-tinted – into tarnished tin,
but I will find shelter in smooth stones,
a welcoming bed at the bottom.

The swollen river rushes like a steam train
as the crisp scent of water forget-me-not
and wild mint sweetens the air.
The sun’s relentless blade –
like the mouths of my father

and all of Cynwyd –
whittles waves in the milk-pale sky.
My skirt balloons – I become
a lotus flower until the weight of water
and subtle currents pull me down.

I will no longer fear
winter’s anvil or spring’s whetstone
as the effervescence of the summer morning,
the comfort and hum of deep water,
bring me a healing and home.

Bury me in a lonely grave,
give me no gravestone or memorial
showing the place where
the whitening bones
of the rejected maiden lie.

“The Rejected Maiden” (“Yr Eneth Ga’dd Ei Gwrthod”) is a traditional Welsh song about the drowning of Jane Williams in the River Dee, near Cynwyd, in July 1868. The cause of death is thought to be suicide, after she was rejected by her lover and then her father and the whole community, for being a ‘fallen woman’.
Home

To be Welsh is to never know who you are: abroad, you are English; in the Home Counties you are Welsh; in Welsh Wales you are Seisnigaidd, your language that of a dysgwr.

You try to explain to a tourist angry at hearing Welsh spoken for the first time that it’s not a choice, an awkwardness or resistance to progress. You try to explain to one of your neighbours that despite your English accent, you are proper Welsh.

This language you spoke before any other – survivor of the Welsh Not – brittle on your tongue, slow as lichen, tactile as clay. The language you dream in, yet cannot write. Intimate as the pridd you played with as a child, untidy and ragged as a rook’s nest.

This imperfect mother, this home.
Seasonal Quartet

thin forsythia stems
laden with yellow tinged buds
sway in gentle rain

wrens splash at pond's rim
toad rests in shade of peony
respite from hot sun

fat pumpkins dot fields
scarlet maple leaves tumble
beneath snow filled clouds

crimson cardinal
perches on evergreen branch
brightens white landscape
Conversations

in the exhibit hall at the McMichael Gallery
between en plein air paintings by the Group of Seven
jewels of the collection we have come to see

lay three metal horns larger than dinosaur bones
waist high openings at one end point over the treetops
of the Humber Valley while the opposite taper
to grapefruit-sized apertures  craggy surfaces
resemble rocks  other places are smooth
like something unearthed at an archeological dig

neither of us fond of modern art we talk about what
these have to tell us  Anne is reminded of alpenhorn
I think of ogres blowing calls to battle

Anne doesn’t see the sign that says do not touch
raps on one  leans forward  asks is anyone home?
echoes loudly like a steel rimmed culvert
the smiling docent comes over  I think she is going
to give us heck for touching the exhibit
two old ladies should pay more attention

she explains that the artist wants us to understand
the need to listen to nature  points to the smaller ends
each covered by the raised figure of an ear

then I see that these look like ear trumpets
eyearl hearing aids held to catch sound waves
the title of the exhibit “Wave Sounds” makes sense

Anne engages in easy dialogue with the docent
my friend can talk to anyone  she’s a great listener
I hover in the distance  catch dribs and drabs

contemplate what escapes me in a day
keen to move on to the next exhibit
Biting Off More Than You Can Chew

She said to me – ‘Jeff’s got a bloody cheek.’
Didn’t agree, we’ve never seen eye to eye.
Jeff’s that sort of guy, lands on his feet
smelling of roses, strutting like a ram, nose
in the air, all horny with wandering hands.
Spitting blood, Jen whacked his ostrich ear.

Guess I owe her. She rabbit-rabbits in my ear,
I listen and wipe her tear-stained cheek
and gently hold her manicured hands,
my sheepskin smile soothes her beetroot eyes.
A sniff, a snuffle, a red snotty nose,
weakly she rises on drink-wobble feet.

Those trainers So last-season on her feet
and Grandma-dangles hanging from each ear,
and black-head pimples on her shiny nose,
no surely not puff-powder on her cheek?
No wonder Jeff dumped her. His roaming eye
has trapped a new belle, a proper hand–

ful. She’s no putty in his fumbling hands.
This damsel, un-distressed, swept-off her feet
had long-time drooled, giving him the eye,
yeaming to whisper sweet nothings to his ear.
Vixen thief, she stole him — of all the cheek.
Dressed in sexy best, I watch Jen fume, nose

out of joint, she hasn’t a clue, not a nose
whiff that it was I, her Bezzie, whose hands
did the dirty. Now Jeff and I are cheek
by jowl like peas in pods, rotten at her feet.
Banshee yells — she catches our kiss; my ear-
drums burst, dragon-flames pierce my eyes.

(Cont...)
(Cont...)  

But I am smitten, red roses light my eye.  
His after-shave — Merlin magic to my nose,  
his every word— singing treacle to my ear  
as we walk life’s Champagne, hand in hand  
floating the sky, no land to touch our feet,  
lips of spring-flower nectar smooch my cheek…  

until  

No husky whisper greets my ear, no meld of eyes.  
*Her* lipstick on his cheek. Long office-hours, nose  
to grindstone? No. Cold hands and walking feet.
Distant voices

(after ‘Memories of Christmas’ Dylan Thomas)

We tobogganed down the hill,  
towards the Welsh-speaking sea,  
like a moon bundling down the sky.

At the ice-edge, fish-freezing waves,  
it was snowing, white as Lapland,  
though no reindeer. We snowballed cats  
and padded streets leaving spoon-footprints.  
‘What would you do if I saw a hippo?’  
‘I’d raise my arm, go bang and eat snow-pie.’

‘Can fish see through sea and see it’s snowing?’  
‘They think the sky’s falling down.’  
Trudging desolate streets homeward,  
we stumbled on ancient oak-roots  
in mine-soot black to the cries of ghosts  
carrying their heads under arm.

Kranken and Yeti lurked in shadows  
of fear, ‘Hark the Herald?’  
‘No– ‘Good King Wenceslas.’

‘I’ll count to three.’  
We sang fortissimo in boy-soprano,  
earth-dry voices added bass harmony.
Dent de Lion

To taste forbidden love,
yellow flowers, summer sun-kissed
blush of youth  he loves me…
he loves me not…

Fizzy Corona pop on a school trip,
purple-brown nectar, sugar rich
to fuel the group sing-song,
he loves me.

Tears, ice-crystals trapped
in a bell-jar, silk-worm wisps
with browning-dead stalks,
he loves me not.

Dandelion leaves eaten for thirty days,
Theseus draws strength to defeat
the half-man, half-bull, Minotaur,
he loves me.

Weeds on a neighbour’s nurtured lawn,
a dawn attack with glyphosate,
shrivelled debris, stollen stature,
he loves me not.

Ground roots, caffeine-free
winter warmth in a mug
as winter sun dips below the horizon,
he loves me.
JON KILI

amor odit inertes

calm air playful mood the hoverfly
threads its dance
advances settles on my red nose

mouthful of air – small twirl –
danced on tongue
twisted its way
ran off with my wit

fifteen years -
yet her cheek on mine -
wind caresses

body recollects –
something true that cannot be
forgotten

ooune two ooune two
sea r ching terns
dance
body of knowledge

a set of body memories I own –
gums play the nipple – discover we are two -

a set of body-anchored memories I own

grew from seeds, from acts of war right deeply sown

the boats of Lofot lads drew searoads to our northern sphere
well before the Germans came to Vågan -
they used slaves to build their fortress here -

behind fences dogs and guards skeletons
watched us kids spoke no word

operation Claymore set in motion was in fact
post Dunkerque the allies first offensive act

midnight sun turned on light on beach and sand
winter darkness sits five years heavy on the land
red balls grow nearer closer really? true?
red balls grow fill the window view
mother’s chest is warm

hornmines
powderkegs

dynamite

one lad lost a hand

all lights off five years of moon and sun
cogwheels roll crush splash gnash
cogwheels turn soundless run
cogwheels roll crunch crush splash
bed is warm

villagers but shades all bowed and bent
we know us best by voice and scent
storytelling evenings are max
listened lost on stockfish stacks
voice is warm

an uncle climbed aboard a British ship

joined Norwegian forces on that trip
(fortyfive brought his stories and his wardog home
stuck on Walcheren they’d fought)

(Cont…)
an uncle lacking judos wanted easy kudos
so betrayed an uncle on the other side
tortured into death darkness in a bubble
fills up a five-year old
chain links framed eyes
grasp the links still the flight of time
us kids we heard them call now we were told
yesterday the Germans killed them all
peace arrived on our shores dressed in rags
we told each other never more never more
today we quote another set whispered words
subterranean archives rows of tags
Hiroshima Nagasaki
Viet Nam Kosovo
and the next the next the next epicentre
Africa Asia Americas
so many we forget a lot of text of faded photographs
forget to count Kristallnacht cenotaphs
EssA EssS GoebbEls Zauberlehrlings
vomit in a torture lab
these names they do not rhyme
krupp friedmann
hitler pickova
rosenberg niemoller
heydrich levi
mengele wiesel
defensive force projected fragments in Nurnberg escrow
excuses explanations I did not know as relevant did not accept
followed orders never more innocence

(Cont...)
JON KILI

(Cont…)

blind goddess
lad of no return
I kill I maim
I burn

u c
again?
ok
Butchery

I wept so much
when the tree surgeon came
to prune the silver birches
in our back garden.

It seemed to me
like amputating a dancer’s arms,
brutally reducing each unrestrained arabesque
to a crude sculpture.

In Winter, without leaves,
the branches are Lavinia’s butchered
stumps or like shelled trees
along the Western Front.

In Spring random growth
gives the leaves the look
of a bad haircut — shorn
Samsons after Delilah’s betrayal.
The Prayer Flag

I am making a prayer flag:
it will hang wind-blown
in the sky above my mind's
mountain ranges, its frayed ends
mutable, impermanent poetry.

Bursting from imagination's core –
the heart's bolt hole, the ends,
humming zephyrs, will sing
their way via pen and ink
to paper's star lit spaces.
White Death: Moscow 1812
( After Adolphe Yvon's 1856 painting of Marshal Ney Supporting The Rearguard During Napoleon's Retreat From Moscow 1812)

Whatever comes – the Russians
or the white death, we’ll face it together.
Ammunition’s running out … bravado
is all we have left.

Sky, grey with night and snow, closes in.
We upturn the carts, flank together
to conserve what heat we can.
Next to me, Marshall Ney steadies his musket
with one hand, bolsters wounded Brossard
with the other – a show of courage and defiance.
Taking his cue from the Marshall,
Gaspard holds the flag high.

Most of the men are out of their minds.
Old Lavalle has dropped his gun.
He’s cradling a dead baby in one arm:
Petit Jacques clings to the other.

Almost fifteen, Petit Jacques,
but he’s whimpering like a five-year-old.

We're stuck in the middle ... all around us,
the Russians, brutal experts in guerrilla tactics,
pick us off, one by one. Behind us, Moscow burns —
its spiteful fires useless against the white death.
White death, the Russians, they take no prisoners.

There's a naked corpse at my feet: stripped
while hope still drove us forward.

I look at him and see myself ... Dupont's the name –
Lieutenant Dupont —

not that it matters now...
Tough Roots

Searching online for a gardening gift, I settle on a fork, its prongs pointing with satisfying logic towards the earth. Americans call them 'spading' forks to distinguish them from pitchforks.

'American Gothic' has a farmer with a pitchfork standing with his daughter in front of their white clapboard home. Church-like, the pointed-arch window reinforces their terrifyingly pious deportment.

The farmer grips his fork as he would a weapon, ready to defend his land in troubled times, or warning off an undesirable suitor pitching a claim for his compliant, solemn-eyed daughter, whose child-bearing years are slipping away.
CORINNE LAWRENCE

**2019: Timeless in Lyonesse***
*(La Vieux Benauge: Bordeaux)*

Not Cornwall but Aquitaine: ancient woodland and vines, home to deer and wild boar, surround chateau and villa—the only buildings in sight. Though grateful for modern amenities, buttressed walls and arrow slits seem more meaningful. We might have slipped through a portal of rising mist and found a mystical land.

I half expect Sir Lancelot to ride out from under the chateau’s archway, harness bells a-jingle, hoofbeats vying with crickets to override the infrequent drone of car or tractor. Most of the time, it is so quiet you can hear the grapes grow, a swelling promise of wine.

At night, plunged into medieval darkness, we dine simply on cheese and crusty bread—their time-honoured taste part of Aquitaine’s past.

*First published in Reach Poetry 2019*
Cerberus

It’s difficult to believe advanced forecasts. Some call them mere speculations for when the country is caught in early autumn cool though it’s mid-July. who can believe high summer will visit this Isle? A heatwave may hound Continental lands, drought-stricken as climate crisis tightens, scarcity’s lean fist dominant as spring’s rains fell short in Iberia and Northern Europe. In Southern Europe wildfires rage Greece, La Palma, even the Swiss Alps smoulder and blaze whilst people, young and old, suffer its sultry intensity, no gentle lover’s kiss in scorching all it touches. Will Cerberus turn a head to us?
A Parent’s Life

They never warn you
that being a parent
isn’t easy,
that babies don’t let you sleep
the night through,
that toddlers may not comply
with your planning,
that children may borrow without asking
and not return those ‘loans’ to you,
that teens may be embarrassed
by your sense of dress
and a million other things too.
But what some do assure
is here you’ll find purest love
that’ll remain
with you beyond the day you die
and when that love leaves home
for the first time
you’ll find it hard not to cry.
theatrum

he stood behind the first curtain
the woman behind the second
behind the third, a cloud

after the fourth, we see the sky
with droplets condensed
with latent greenery
with translucent wetlands
the heralds of the day
with roots
the signs of the night
of silence

yesterday's mists
breathe clouds
where they rush?

blackberry orchard of sorrows
of body

the legs alone carry the wanderer
he lost the track
in that autumn
of hollow leaf
wet
with shining lanterns
in a distant kingdom
on loess hills
Dream

ey sleep in the forest
on a pine bed
smells
next to a glass wall
night goddess Nyx
protects against noise
tomorrow
you can enter them
creaks
rusty gate
the cat brings them food

in the murmur of the night
naked
still in love with the sun

sunken
once upon a time in the fields

now
melt
in the London fog

sealed
a cobweb possessed

overgrown with grass
thicket bent

accustomed to breakups

are you still in love with the sun?
Keats at the Casement

He turns on his heel as he always does
when he enters a room, neglecting his host

for the gift of a sky and a dazzle of words in the air.
Below the ledge, a sparrow, shabby in brown

picks about the gravel, an entrepreneur
of bugs and grit. A blink and it becomes

the Muse of a spring-time nightingale
in an orchard of blossom and buds.

He exists in this moment of sparrow and sky.
Not yet that birdless vista.
One Thing

I met her again, suddenly, in a dream. She looked unwell, skinny and lined, hair like straw. Unfriendly, unhappy to see me. I thought you were dead, I said. I’m glad you’re not.

She said nothing.

Later I found her waiting by a window and the light was not bright but not too dull either. And I said I’m sad we lost touch. Every time I use the pencil case you gave me the one with a pattern of paper clips I think of you.

A moment. An unfreezing. Something I had forgotten was unfinished is finished.
Sir Walter in the Park

My grandparents lived in Beddington near two gasometers which terrified me. In my mind they were Gog and Magog. Beyond, lay the park where my grandfather picked up litter and autumn leaves with a spike. Invisible, but close, walked Walter Raleigh in a scarlet cloak, tending an orangery with Bess, his wife.

Raleigh in Beddington? An orangery in the park? Surely, a child’s fantasy. But I’ve checked online. A vast manorial estate belonging to Bess’s family stretched for miles and yes, there was an orangery, one of the first in England.

And there were ghosts. Raleigh’s decapitated head buried under a haunted tree. His spectre, searching.

But listen, happier times, overheard on a hot summer day:

‘Come, Bess. You have, methinks, been too much alone. Let us wander together with our sons and enjoy the fragrance of this bright fruit for it is golden as sunlight at noon
POETS BIOGRAPHIES

CLAIR CHILVERS
Clair Chilvers was a cancer scientist and lives in Gloucestershire, UK. She has had poems published in numerous online and print magazines. She won second prize in the Poetry Kit Ekphrastic Competition 2020 and her poems have been commended in the Cinnamon Press Pamphlet Prize 2020, the Poetry Kit Competition 2020 and the Gloucestershire Writers’ Network Competition 2023. She is a CITN poet and joins PK courses regularly. She has two published collections: Out of the Darkness (Frosted Fire, 2021) and Island (Impspired Press, 2022). www.clairchilverspoetry.co.uk twitter@cedc13 https://www.facebook.com/clair.chilvers

GERALDINE COUSINS
Geraldine Cousins lives in Hampshire. Attended courses and workshops at the Poetry School in Lambeth and has had a lot of poems published in the Kent & Sussex Folios and one in Bangladesh.

ANNEST GWILYM
Author of two books of poetry: Surfacing (2018) and What the Owl Taught Me (2020), both published by Lapwing Poetry. What the Owl Taught Me was Poetry Kit’s Book of the Month in June 2020 and one of North of Oxford’s summer reading recommendations in 2020. Annest has been widely published in literary journals and anthologies, both online and in print, and placed in several writing competitions, winning one. She was the editor of the webzine Nine Muses Poetry from 2018-2020. She was a nominee for Best of the Net 2021. Her third book of poetry – Seasons in the Sun – is forthcoming from Gwasg Carreg Gwalch in early September 2023.

CATHERINE HEIGHWAY
Catherine Heighway lives in London, Ontario, Canada. She has taken a number of Jim's courses through Poetry Kit over the past several years. In addition to writing, she enjoys gardening, swimming and travelling.

FRANCESCA HUNT
Francesca Hunt is an enthusiastic writer of poetry and fiction living near Welshpool in Mid-Wales. As a retired Chemistry teacher, she came to Poetry later in life. She has won poetry competitions, been short listed in several and had poems published in anthologies and magazines.

JON KILI
80+ male alien on British soil

CORINNE LAWRENCE
Corinne lives in the South Manchester area of the UK. A specialist teacher of Speech and Drama for over thirty years, Corinne started writing seriously in 2010. Corinne has had poems published by Indigo Dreams Publishing in Reach Poetry, and also in 'For The Silent' and 'Voices For the Silent' anthologies published in conjunction with The League Against Cruel Sports. Corinne is also a 'Poetry Kit' poet as from 2020. Several of Corinne's poems have been reviewed Writers’ Forum and Writing Magazine, and she has won, and been placed or short listed in a number of competitions in both of these publications. Corinne enjoys writing both formal and free verse and is especially fond of ekphrastic poetry.
SIMCHA LEOF

ANNA MARIA MICKIEWICZ
Anna Maria Mickiewicz (http://faleliterackie.com) is a Polish-born poet, writer, editor, publisher, and foreign correspondent who writes both in Polish and in English. Founder of the Literary Waves publishing house. Anna moved to California, and then to London, where she has lived for many years. She edits the annual literary magazine Pamiętnik Literacki (The Literary Memoir), London, and Contemporary Writers of Poland (USA), and is a member of the English Pen.

MANDY PANNETT
Mandy Pannett is a creative writing tutor and the author of several poetry collections. She is currently working on a poetry/music/art/collaboration about the South Downs.