ON COURSE

POEMS FROM THE PK SUMMER SCHOOL POETS 2021

Edited by Jim Bennett
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**POEMS**
The Other Mrs Lot
Posting
Body Brace
Flowing
Travelling Light
The Other Mrs Lot

It isn’t hard to walk away
from rooms where anger buffets
empty air and grief is pasted
into every wall, where memories
are layered in a jar with salt,
like beans from summer glut.

She ignores the voice at her shoulder
coaxing her with promises of sun-veiled
cherry blossom, evening shade of vines.
She chooses not to turn, let her crusted
eyes glance at faceless windows
staring out from a slowly melting void.

She welcomes exile, the relief
of rooms where nothing happened,
where she can kill last year’s
invasive weeds with boiling saline,
throw salt in the Devil’s eye.

Posting

Jane is at a hen night at Woongarra Winery – posts up
pictures of a stretched white limo, while from Toronto
Malcolm shares a poem written for his grandchild.

Chased by magpies in the garden, someone’s cat
looks warily at camera. There are daily updates
of campaigners fighting to save a much-loved tree.

Around the world, videos of oceans choked
with plastic are viewed by millions; we all
plant lavender and nasturtiums to save the bees.

People are invited to philharmonic concerts,
poetry readings, exhibitions, and to submit
photos of the town for next year’s calendar.

On Prince Edward Island heavy winter snow
has melted, while in Hiroshima the cherry
blossom season is coming to an end.

And a wife, watching, waiting, posts up pictures
of the Hospice garden – water trickling over rocks.
I share my photo of a thousand origami cranes.
Body Brace

At first she’s grateful, 
enjoys the daily ritual 
of putting it in place, 
how it holds her head firm 
fixes her body inside its rigid frame.

She welcomes the security 
the comfort of tight straps 
keeping her safe. 
It is a positive in her life 
through dark days.

With the approach of Spring 
she thinks of leaving it aside, 
try to bear her own weight, 
but fears the consequences. 
She still needs its support.

Then in the heat of Summer 
the padding under her chin 
begins to itch and irritate, 
she feels constricted, stifled 
by unbending steel and plastic.

Stronger now, more confident, 
she releases the straps, 
loosens the grip 
restricting her head and body – 
lets the redundant contraption fall.
Flowing

If this were silica sand heaped on your driveway
you could melt it into glass, add manganese,
iron oxide, create vibrant decorative objects,
but you will add cement to this river sand
to mortar concrete steps, where a voiceless
blackbird pecks at breakfast seeds while church
bells break the silence of this summer morning,
and reflected colours from its cobalt windows whisper
along gravel paths that lead down to the river,
where barges once ferried cargoes of hops
and grain along the Medway, and gunpowder
was transported to feed cannon at Waterloo,
meander past print works, warehouses, converted
into luxury flats, and by the lock a conference centre,
new age church and high-rise blocks – temples of steel
and glass. Swans glide by in their shadow.

Travelling Light

We climb the pyramid of the sun,
touch the stone where dawn light broke
only when a human heart was sacrificed
to placate the angry god.

I feel the heat of Mexico on my skin,
your hand on my arm as we seek
shade beneath the bougainvillaea
framed against white stucco.

The air is heady with gardenias
lining the market square, stalls
tempt me with rich-coloured rebozos,
clay pots in dazzling designs.

I choose instead this tiny spoon,
the Sun God glaring from crafted silver.
Wrapped inside my single suitcase,
it leaves with me in the morning.
LESLEY BURT

Lesley has been writing poetry for about twenty years. Following retirement from social work education, she completed an MA in Creative Writing from Lancaster University. She lives in Christchurch, Dorset. Her poems have had success in competitions over the years and have been published widely in magazines including: *Tears in the Fence, The Interpreter’s House, Prole, Sentinel Literary Quarterly, Reach, Sarasvati* and *The Butchers Dog*; also online, including in *Poetry Kit, The Poetry Shed, Algebra of Owls* and *Ink, Sweat and Tears*.

POEMS

Black Canons step through the priory museum
gardens open to the public
Black Canons step through the priory museum

Black-cassocked-and-cloaked, linen rochet
and – beware the vanity of a head in vair –
a woollen almuce.

Tonsured, otherwise unlike
a toad-squat Tuck, a naked-toed Friar –
shoes conceal feet, heels-to-ankles.

Shoes to speed-walk cloisters
in accordance with the calls of bells
at lauds, vespers, compline –

process to plainchant on stone floors
beneath vaulted roof and pillars where
pipistrelles cling until evensong,

stride beyond the monastery mill,
the plough, reap, winnow and grind,
beside rivers of salmon, estuaries of flounder,

glad to replace pagan footsteps yet innocent
of Saxon warriors’ bones beneath their feet
dissolving in graves of acid soil –

leather fragments unearthed
from the priory dump – displayed under
photographs of Saxon stains.

(first published in Prole 32, 2021)
garden open to the public

sky's bright  splashed with cloud
shape-shifted by breeze

outside the dome of an iron pergola
overhead becomes

a watercolour
turquoise fading to washed white

and seen through this almost-cage
trees are patches of pointillism

still striving  even in late summer
to flaunt the forty shades

on the far side of imitation foliage
wrought in iron curlicues

standing season after season
between the world and so many colours
CLAIR CHILVERS

Clair Chilvers lives in Gloucestershire and divides her time between writing and running the charity Mental Health Research UK that she founded in 2008. She was a cancer scientist and latterly worked for the English National Health Service.

She started writing poetry after retirement. Her work has been described as ‘powerful and moving’ by Anna Saunders, CEO of Cheltenham Poetry Festival, and has been published in online and print journals including Agenda, Allegro, Amaryllis, Apex, Artemis, Atrium, the Ekphrastic Review, Impspired, Ink Sweat and Tears, Sarasvati, and The Journal. Her first collection *Out the Darkness* was published in 2021 (Frosted Fire). She is a Poetry Kit CITN poet.

https://www.poetrykit.org/CITN/citn%20192.htm

She was inspired by the work of UA Fanthorpe. She studied with Dr Edward Clarke at the Oxford Poets’ Workshop and Dr Angela France at Gloucestershire University. She has attended an Arvon course and several PK courses.

She won second prize in the Poetry Kit Ekphrastic Competition 2020 and her poems have been longlisted or commended in the Cinnamon Press Pamphlet Prize 2020, and Poetry Kit Competition 2020.

http://clairchilverspoetry.co.uk/

POEMS
Black Truffles
The Exile
Easter Images
The Mother
The Strike Breaker
Black Truffles

Sunday, a shady courtyard
a hill-top village in Umbria
a grandmother orders lunch
pasta with Parmesan and black truffles
waits for her family and remembers

the foghorn faint at first
as the yacht approaches the shore
then suddenly louder
as it goes about too late

the recurrent dream
she walks down the stairs
into the bright sunlight
passes the tables decorated
for the wedding breakfast

dives from the caique at anchor
into the clear blue sea
feels the caress of the warm water
as she turns onto her back
and contemplates a future alone
The Exile

Matron said she could take one piece of furniture, and her television of course, two pictures, clothes to fit the narrow wardrobe. So she gave the pot plants to her neighbour; her children didn’t want the furniture nor her collection of china birds – most had chips after so many postings. But she kept her photographs in their silver frames children neatly posed in sunhats on the beach, grandchildren who didn’t visit any more but sent bouquets of funereal lilies on her birthday.

Today she wakes at dawn in her narrow bed light streaming through skimpy curtains. She knows she will never walk barefoot on the grass through the dew of a summer morning, nor hear the sea crash on the beach on winter nights. She will not potter round her garden picking a rose or two for her dressing table nor walk to her neighbour’s for tea one afternoon nor choose what she will make for dinner from her old Elizabeth David cookery book.
Easter Images

That first Greek Easter I meet the Holy Father, tall black hat jammed on his head rusty black skirts tucked up beneath him on his motorbike grey beard flying in the wind.

We pack into the church behind Babis’s restaurant in the square to hear the Easter liturgy the smell of incense, candles bright in the cramped dark space bells ringing afterwards.

We follow the crowd to the harbour to boats that take us to Panagia follow the procession round the island stop at Agios Nikolaos to break the fast with bread and offal soup.

I have a photograph of lunch next day Patrick and his friends at a long table shaded by olive trees eating kid cooked on a spit drinking Antipaxos wine. All dead now, but for my daughter and me.
The Mother

Inspired by an Inuit carving of a mother and child

New snow had fallen overnight in Toronto. A car collected me at 6 took me to the hospital to present my paper at the breakfast-time Grand Round.

Afterwards still high on adrenaline I find my way downtown to an area of artisan shops just opening new snow still on the sidewalks windows almost impenetrable with steam. An old Inuit man sweeps the doorstep beckons to me to enter. The heat hits me, clouds my spectacles

and there, among the polished soapstone seals sad-faced with downturned eyes and whiskers, I spot a mother and child carved roughly from a heavy cube of dull grey stone. The child carried on the mother’s back, his arms around her neck, looks sideways, alert. The mother’s face intent, but kindly.
The Strike Breaker

Patrick meets us at the airport
his new mistress wearing
vertiginously high-heeled scarlet shoes
drives us to the grand hotel
orders champagne cocktails
before he breaks the news –

banners everywhere around the port
more pay, less time
the eternal politics of Greece
the ferry will not run for days

he makes sure we are unheard
whispers that he has a plan –
tonight a boat will wait for us
in a remote cove
to take us to The Island

the sea is calm, no moon
we wait in the dark
then the creak of rowlocks
as the tender reaches the beach
to take us in silence
to the fishing boat that stands offshore

the passage uneventful, slow
without lights
then the ribbon of surf ahead
and the sudden flare of a match
as a dark-haired man
waiting on the coast road
lights a cigarette
ANNEST GWILYM

Author of two books of poetry: *Surfacing* (2018) and *What the Owl Taught Me* (2020), both published by Lapwing Poetry. Annest has been published in numerous literary journals and anthologies, both online and in print, and placed in several writing competitions, winning one. She lives on the coast of north west Wales with a rescue dog. She is a nominee for Best of the Net 2021. Twitter: @AnnestGwilym

POEMS
Sometimes at Twilight . . .
Wasp’s nest
One Day in August
Sometimes at Twilight . . .

I open my back door
to the high clean ozone of the tide,
when the chill small evening
clinks with sounds of crockery
from the beach-side bistro
and wine-hazed banter.

And I’m glad of cormorants
that dry their wings
on the jetty’s end,
sloe-dark eyes of a surfacing seal,
plants that grow
despite the wind’s salt charge.

Glad that in spite of poverty
there are watery days
of soft rain and poetry,
the past that is always present
beneath the surface of earth and our skin,
the lost graves of my peasant ancestors.

Glad of the balm this place brings
to a frightened rescue dog
who now calls it home,
for being able to stand on my step at night,
sniff the air like a fox,
for what the wind brings.

Inspired by Helen Dunmore’s *Glad of these times.*
Published in *The Dawntreader* and *Fevers of the Mind.* Nominated for *Best of the Net* 2021.
ANNEST GWILYM

Wasps’ Nest

In the dark interior of the shed
where only night’s voice speaks
the hours here are alive, urgent,
with a furious, red-hot buzz.

The paper globe, a palace
made of wood and saliva
contains an invisible seethe –
pollinators, drunk on nectar.

By spring the empire falls –
a mass of tissue in my hand.

Published in *Reach Poetry*, October 2021.

One Day in August

Soft summer rain shakes
the buddleia tree growing on
the corner of a run-down house, releasing
the sweet smell of lilacs, and dust.

A shrill breeze makes the cables
on the boat masts ring like bells –
an urgent, amorphous symphony
in the salt-sharp air.

Pink clouds at sunset –
*Breathe, breathe in the air* playing –
punters from the pub zig-zag up the hill,
waltz with wheelie bins.

Oncoming night blurs, erases
the sharp angles of buildings.
Like a television set just switched off,
the air crackles with static.
Jan Harris lives in Nottinghamshire in the UK. Her poems have appeared in various journals including Acumen, Atrium, and Poetry Wales, and in anthologies including *For the Silent*, (Indigo Dreams Publishing, 2019) and e-books published by The Poetry Kit. Jan was awarded third place in the Wales Poetry Award, 2019. Her first collection, *Mute Swans on the Cam*, was published by Oversteps Books in July 2020.

**POEMS**
Urban Sheepdog
Friday, six thirty
Opening the bell jar
Scandinavian visitors
Urban sheepdog

He’s your uber-cool streetwise sidekick, hyper-connected through the wavelength of his lead,

but unleash him and he flows like a brook through the park, gathers you in the oxbows of his meanders. No city nine-to-five for him - he keeps a farmer’s time. Wet nose in your face at dawn and instant-coffee eyes that perk you up for work - no time to play. The sticks you throw are sheep to stalk in stealth mode, belly low to dew-damp grass, his gaze unflinching before the fetch. He’s partial to the urban life. A taste of pilau rice from late night takeaways goes down a doggy-treat. He works out weekly at the canine gym, and though he’ll sleep on a rug, he always prefers to snore amid the snowdrift of your crisp and clean Egyptian cotton sheets.

But see, his muzzle’s flecked with moorland brown. He dreams and his paws shake like a new-born lamb.

Friday, six thirty

windblown leaves scuttle down the pedestrian precinct tip-tapping like tiny claws taking flight like autumn moths the barber closes metal shutters on the scent of hairspray hurries to the Posh Meze grill and bar the smell of burgers frying magpies chatter from shop rooftops like clacking castanets behind them the sky turns red as a flamenco dress a man in a wheelchair hums along the quiet road a driver brakes needlessly blares his horn swerves past him laughing
Opening the bell jar
after Ennui, Walter Sickert, c. 1913

Sometimes, in a Sunday afternoon’s silence, 
happiness enters Henry and Marie’s parlour, 
whooper swans flying over Windermere, 
their cries so wild the sky could not contain them.

Henry lifts a decanter from the mantelpiece, 
unstoppers memories of wood smoke 
through the open window of a modest room, 
their moonlit bodies tentative as April snow.

On a chest of drawers, hummingbirds in a bell jar. 
A memento of their honeymoon. Exotic wisps 
of unspent lives. Marie places them in the sun, 
watches rainbows appear in their wings.

Scandinavian visitors

flock to our garden 
starry-winged iridescent 
in advent sunlight

they convene in cliques 
chit-chat on aerials 
bicker from twiggy branches 
descend 
with stabbing beaks

until at a secret cue 
or coincidence of thought 
they scatter 
leave us with a lawn 
pecked clean
Catherine Heighway lives in London, Ontario, Canada. She has been writing poetry for a number of years and has had her work published in local anthologies. She also has had essays published in newspapers, journals, and newsletters. In 2019, she self-published a book – Yoga for the Seasons – which she co-authored with a colleague. She enjoys helping people write their memoirs. Catherine has taken several poetry writing courses with Jim Bennett through Poetry Kit.

POEMS
auntie’s marmalade
where wisdom begins
needlecraft
like the first morning
empty as a pocket
auntie’s marmalade

came in a squat glass jar
dark orange threaded with
bitter shredded peel
stored sunshine of Seville
still warm from the pot
offered from grey gloves
while snow blew in
around her feet
at the open door
as my father lay dying
in the next room

where wisdom begins

we stagger under the stone archway
Welcome to Ghandruk - elevation 6,600 feet
almost every one of those feet
stepped up unforgiving stone staircases
interspersed with swaying suspension bridges
sheer drop offs  no railings in sight
my husband’s face white under a sky
the colour of Himalayan poppies

light-headed  trembling  we choose to stay behind
wait two days for a jeep to take us back down
while our companions complete the journey
I weep at the dismal end of my bucket list trek

at sunrise as the others shoulder their packs
the snowy slopes of Annapurna tinged golden pink
we are left in the care of a porter named Krishna
whose t-shirt says “Wonder is the Beginning of Wisdom”
needlecraft

“The woman with the long feet ends up alone in a room”
Chinese proverb

she squints at the eye
of the steel needle

snakes the thin strand
of embroidery thread

pulls it through ties a single knot
follows the rice paper pattern

at ten years old her skills
like her mothers are strong

intricate stitches
in colours of precious gems

chrysanthemums
animals of the zodiac

twining branches that coil
across the top down the sides

for special orders
onto the sole of each shoe

her long feet occupy
cloth soled slippers

she keeps tucked under
cotton trouser hems

never bound the way
the girl who will wear these

lotus shoes had done
she sees them

carried in servant’s arms
hurried by in litters

sometimes in the bridal chair
red lacquered curtained

decorated with details as fine
as her embroidery stitches
like the first morning

the trumpet of the Morning Glory unfurls
Heavenly Blue after all summer growing
profuse vines faithfully trained on a trellis
colour like the sky of the Sistine Chapel
Michelangelo on his back all those years
with paint dripping in his face
Charlton Heston forever painted in my mind
that biblical voice and chiseled jaw line

carved like the Pieta weeping Mother Mary
damaged by a mentally disturbed soul
who took a hammer to Her broke off Her arm
a chunk of nose chipped an eyelid
as he shouted *I am Jesus Christ risen from the dead*
Mary restored now under a bulletproof acrylic panel
preserved for all eternity or at least as long as
St. Peter’s stands but the Mother Church is in trouble

with the discovery of mass graves
of hundreds of residential school children
buried under the desperate blue vault of heaven
their mothers and grandmothers weep under the same sky
did the nuns or priests weep I wonder
in their black habits and cassocks
who broke those children beat the culture
language and soul out of each one
surely heaven weeps for them

and for my mother who adored Morning Glories
whose love was a trellis to twine and climb
life tried to break her as a child but she flourished
in the end it was a stroke a nursing home
immobility so unlike these plants
she grew up the side of the garden shed
waited all summer for them while they reached
for the first rays of sun just over the roof
her favourite hymn *Morning has Broken*
empty as a pocket

turned out before being sent to Goodwill
golf tees  a few coins  scent of Old Spice
closet door shuts  the mirror rattles

she stares in the mirror  turns sideways
clutches her waistband in one hand
she’s almost at her pre-wedding weight

the weight of empty dishes on the floor
basket cleaned out  toys  blanket
carrier donated to the rescue society

she can no longer see her mirror image
only shadows  she tilts the paint brush
rescued by points of light

in a box at the back of closet
pointe shoes never worn again
still cries at ballet performances

he cries  promises he’ll never go again
straight flush beats four of a kind
kids wait in the car as windows fog up

like the refugee’s apartment windows
we give them all of her kitchen things
footsteps echo on the linoleum

in the mirror her tongue traces the rough gap
where for a week it wiggled and dangled
she places it under her pillow for the tooth fairy
FRANCESCA HUNT

Francesca Hunt is an enthusiastic writer of poetry and fiction living near Welshpool in Mid-Wales. She has won three poetry competitions, been short listed in four and had several poems published in anthologies and Reach magazine.

POEMS
Still Birth
Freedom
sounds of sixties
New Messages
Foot Fish and Fancy Free
Orange
Title  Plop
Still Birth

December’s frost hangs from picture rails
with faded paintings of summer daisies.
Teeth scrubbed once, and once again,
removing sweet remnants of dinner’s tiramisu.

Clothed in thick winceyette,
buttoned to the neck, light off, she inches
to her edge. Football finished, six-pack
downed, burping, he staggers out.

The nightly ritual, both relieved to escape
the black cloud hanging on five amp cable
where once there was laughter and light.
A stone monument, bent, desiccated,
cowering in empty prayer, she mourns
her vacated womb, barren to future seed.
No child cries from the dusty crib,
no wide-eyed gurgles framed by golden
curls. Neon, flashing red against black sky,
burns his loins– cheap at twice the price
until his stoned statue of guilt, crawls
home to bed with icicles wrapped in winceyette.

(after Dali’s Archaeological Reminisces of Millet’s Angelicus)
FRANCESCA HUNT

Freedom

they sail out dark to sea the slow tide turns
no bat nor bird nor tree
spirit awakes sprite can see
float in freedom fire lifts me

sounds of sixties

raging fire broke those nights rags from bodies
hit the sky high as kites
bags packed bogus pace of frights
he died of hidden delights

New Messages

anger drums my head I grab his mobile
lust-fed cheat lost sheet-cred
burps and belches bound for bed
untethered no text unread

Foot Fish and Fancy Free

I follow him out to the pond
there is no one there
no human just fish
unperturbed knees bent back arched
I plunge myself forward

diving to darkness
deeper than its depth of one-foot-six
my arms thrash through a swarm of koi
orange white against black
I follow an oven-glove fish

into the nowhere of infinity
into before and after time
beyond the pond
to no one now here

(Inspired by Grandma’s vintage oven-glove fish)
Orange

no sugar  black and strong
orange goes with his autumnal
years  the days of log burners
and closed curtains  order logs
delivery’s tight as you get closer
to Christmas  no cream but orange
marmalade  the window seat
I do love to people-watch
something about the fact
they don’t know I’m visiting
their world  thank you  lovely
just a knife  look at her orange coat
far too tight  boobs bursting the buttons
keep the change

B&Q  orange logo  a vinyl-silk
for the ceiling  white gloss for wood
the wallpaper is orange to go with the burner
his choice not mine  never could take advice
order the logs  he feels the cold
soon be Christmas  will he come
it will be orange by then
he loves holly berries

He did come
and it was orange
with thick snow outside

now it’s magnolia again
wreaths are cheap  cancel the logs
it will soon be Spring
Title  Plop

my hand runs rough with bark
through red valleys searching for tea
where little acorns shed tears
as they land plop  without amalgam filling

some are tube squeezers  random graspers
aim for the middle where green leaves
start to orange as the kettle whistles
I write my name with pride

choking back steam  toothpaste
is an excellent medium but choose your
brush with care  sable is preferable
unless the horse has bolted  then

I’d opt for hog  milk first
or milk after  or lemon
from the bathroom  squeezed
methodically from the end

a scientific approach  the careful
winder should use a ladder to prune
the oak before winter ice cracks
the tea cup  wetting great aunt Agatha

as she cleans her teeth  the whirl
of the motor  the twang of Darjeeling
as acorns plop plop  Ah  fresh baked
croissant  vive La France  plop
DORRIE JOHNSON

Dorrie has been writing poetry for many years. She has won competitions and many of her poems have been published in small press journals or anthologies, including *Orbis* and *Acumen* and others accepted for on-line publication. Her collection *Following the Monarch's Way* was published by *The Battle of Worcester Society*. A second collection is with a publisher at present.

POEMS

Come walking
Among the sundries
4/3πr³
Come walking

I wake to bright curtains.  
You are up, smiling,  
opening the curtains to the sun.  
I'm not ready yet.  
Yesterday is still with me.  
'Come walking', you said,  
'you choose where'.  
Or did I dream that?  
did I wake to cloud?  
Were you up, frowning,  
curtains still closed?

Was it yesterday the old man died?  
'I'm sinking into the dark abyss', he said.  
His dread was real.  
I remember his words  
taking him to a death  
that had no hope of anything more.  
And she was there,  
grey with despair.  
They used to walk.

And today I woke to dim light.  
We walk. The forest floor  
still carries the storm's kill.  
Trunks shattered, branches, half branches,  
leaves, cones, lie, gathered  
testimony to a brutal end.

You are looking for mushrooms -  
those undamaged. Your camera ready  
to record life among death.  
At the edge of the forest  
the remains of an old castle.  
with a dungeon still there.  
They say it's haunted.

We go over to look.  
I trip, I'm falling, I can't scream.  
It's cold. It's dark.  
I'm shaking, Someone is shaking me  
'Wake up. You're here with me.  
I'm held. The curtains are bright.  
The sun must be shining.  
'Come walking ', you said.
Among the sundries

Just an object.
Nothing special.
A small Viking figure,
owing more to romance
than to fact.
In a drawer it would be among the 'sundries'.
'Neither use nor ornament',
my art mistress might have said.
She'd be wrong.
It does seem unimportant,
non-impressive,
non-conventional,
but by association
dearly loved.
Just a dearly loved object.

\[ \frac{4}{3} \pi r^3 \]

Effervescent light
All maths and physics.
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. Her first placing was as a runner-up in a Writers’ Forum monthly competition and subsequently her work appeared on the Visual Verse website. She enjoys poetry writing courses. She is also a long term member of a local writing group. Corinne has had poems published by Indigo Dreams Publishing in Reach Poetry, in 'For The Silent' - an anthology published in 2019 in conjunction with The League Against Cruel Sports and also as a 'Poetry Kit' poet 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:

POEMS
Not Like Adlestrop
Deep Pockets
Centuries Apart
Teehey
Life Story – Seven Ages of Fire
Not Like Adlestrop

To start with, it wasn't late June,
but a January 2nd slump of a day,
as far from one afternoon of heat
as it was possible to be and for me,
an uncomfortably early start to term
in a new school of a thousand new faces.
Would I even recognise hers –
the young HOD I'd met only once
at my October interview?

I'd been told to meet her outside
the station at the far end of the village –
both deserted, comatose, the community
still nursing its collective New Year hangover.

A ghost train, the eleven forty-
five
from Chester, arrived on time. No one left
and no one came on the bare platform.
What I saw was railings and railway track,
straight as a Roman road, disappearing
with the empty locomotive into impenetrable
grey rain – mistier, farther and farther –
until absorbed by a vanishing point
somewhere in an uncertain future.

No save-the-day mobiles back then: why
hadn't she been on the train, as she'd said –
the HOD whose only time to brief me
on my new job was twenty-four hours
before I had to face my first class?

And for that moment, apprehension and sleet
trickled icily down my neck.

The lines in italics are direct quotes from Edward Thomas's poem, which is one of her favourites.
Deep Pockets

I too possess a coat of many colours
for warmth in the wakeful small hours
woven from thoughts dyed with experience with emotion
it has pockets deep enough for Caravaggio’s Supper At Emmaus
the second one and Schubert’s Litany For All Souls’ Day
for word-hoards of enthusiasms and enthusiasm for word-hoards
their history heritage and significance their sounds

and rhythms remembering the lilt and dance of nursery rhymes
chanted with an infant lisp Ladybird reading books
Uncle Arthur’s Bible Stories the way from Genesis to Jesus
early existential exploration then Shakespeare’s beloved word hoard
now entertain conjecture of a time of ancient footsteps
finding a four hundred-million-year-old mudstone hurled up
from its primeval past on to a Devon beach waves crashing

the thunder of a revving Vulcan mistaken for a storm rumbling
around in the air for hours before breaking overhead
as I run without stopping down the chestnut lined dirt track
multi-coloured coat over bottle-green uniform to a maths lesson prison
can’t find Shakespeare’s comfort too soon throw
the quality of mercy is not strained at bullies and audience
a plea for kindness compassion Hitler isn’t alone
creating grounds for Orwell envisioned goosestep strides a boot
crashing down on a face from the Western Front to Auschwitz
Montgomery Rwanda Kosovo or Kabul

Centuries Apart
Teehey

I am from the well-proportioned rooms of a 1930s 'semi'.
I am from brown-stained skirting boards, 
gritty *Vim* and the smell of *Mansion Polish*.
I am from shiny nuggets of coal – calling cards
of the earth that left comfort and warmth
behind them in a Teehey grate. *Music While You Work*
teeheyed out of its windows to lupins
and michaelmas daisies in our long, narrow garden.

I am from Enid Blyton’s *Famous Five*
devoured from the comfort of a Teehey hammock:
I slept on summer nights in a Teehey tent.
I'm from *Cowboys and Indians* played out
in the field behind the Teehey Farm.

I am from any one of the numerous packs
of cards spread around my Teehey home –
ever ready answers for idle moments.
I'm from *Patience* and *Whist, Gin Rummy* and *Snap, Newmarket, Old Maid, and Strip Jack Naked*
giggled around the dining room table
in the Teehey Christmas season.

I’m from roast lamb and apple pie with cream
for Sunday lunch; I’m from the Teehey 'Taylors'
and 'Pringles', (they're not the socks or crisps 'Pringles',
so I'll never be an heiress.) I’m from my father’s buck teeth
to my mother’s expression of purse-lipped disapproval.
We called it her Teehey face.

I’m from ‘*Just wait till your father comes home ...’*
and *All Things Bright and Beautiful* at church
on Sundays to tell out my Teehey take on life.

On top of my wardrobe, with the cards –
three ancient albums, full of Teehey faces:
I hear their voices still, read their catch phrases
written in faint, fountain-penned Teehey copperplate.

I am from the emoticon free albums
of my forbears, clicked and scrolled
into the non-Teehey now. I’m from
*Bebington on the Wirral – Teehey Lane –
the only one in Britain. I’d forgotten
how whacky it sounds.
A single embryo,
I am kindling: flame conceived
in a womb of straw.

Splitting

in the draught
from a slammed door,
my twin is formed.

We quicken side by side,
are delivered as puckish sparks, our voices cracklings
of wicked laughter, infectious
as childish hysteric.

Adolescence explodes
in ungovernable flares of heat
and passion. Fire begets fire, breeds more of our kind.
They call us Farriner's fiends.

Swirling in our own wind,
we convert timber, pitch, and smoke
to our cause, then blaze and conquer. Führers, our empire is Inferno,
and there will be no end to our sway. Four epochs of flame scoff
at the city's feeble firebreaks.

The sixth age,
therefore, takes us by surprise.
Roars reduce to whispers, wheeze
with...laboured...breaths. No longer
giants but dwarves, we lick
where once we devoured:
our wasted fingers fail
to meet.

At the last,
shrinking
to smoulder,
sans tinder,
flashpoint,
ox...y...gen
or ember,
we...
are...
ash...

* This poem was awarded 2nd prize in Writing Magazine's 'Great Fire Of London' competition in 2016 and was subsequently published in Writing Magazine in the May 2017 issue.
KATHRYN DE LEON

Kathryn de Leon is from Los Angeles, California but has been living in England for eleven years. She is a teacher and lived in Japan for six years teaching English to Japanese university students. Her poems have appeared in several magazines in the US including Calliope, Aaduna, Trouvaille Review, Avatar Review, and Black Fox, The Ofi Press (Mexico), and in the UK, London Grip, The Blue Nib, Runcible Spoon, Neologism, Amethyst Review, New Critique, The High Window where she was the Featured American Poet, and others.

POEMS
High Fiving Angels
Prediction
A Little Boy by the Sea
Stumblebee
Shoes
High Fiving Angels

It’s hard to see their hands,
they are so bright.
They are soundless locomotives coming at you
through the darkened tunnel
that is your life.

Their light is so tall
you have to raise your hand high,
even jump a bit
to reach them.

They wait like closed curtains
that hide a brightly lit stage.
Just a hint of the upcoming show
shines through.

You’ll wonder why they chose you.
You’ll feel unworthy
of their attention.

Remember:
You’re not dead yet.
You’ve not seen their halos
nor their rich abundance of wings.

Just accept the moment and enjoy:

Your life is going right.
Your life is good.

(published in Calliope, Fall 2017)
The world was supposed to end last Sunday
but I completely forgot.
I had planned to check if the sky looked strange
or if the sun dimmed at midday
as it sometimes does
in my dreams.

My mother remembered many such predictions
in her lifetime.
I myself have lost count of those in my life.

Some of us try to push and bend the world
to fit neatly into these prophecies.
Or we push and bend the prophecies
to fit the world.
Especially those of Nostradamus.

Nostradamus.

His huge name thuds
like a black door slammed shut.
How can we not believe?

I hold a bit of my breath
with each prediction,
wonder if this could be a correct one.
In 1969 California was to sink into the sea
so I should know better.

But none of this matters
since we will all have our own unique,
personal end of the world.
We are each a sealed envelope
with an indelibly written date,
a life-sized secret, somewhere within us:

the anniversary of our death
that we pass every year without knowing.

On that day, we wake, we eat, we live.
The sky watches us,
patient and filled with God.
Waiting.

(cont)
Then the day is finished, forgotten like a turned page. It rides the earth’s sad blue away from us but returns again and again never giving up.

Until finally it stands before us, its God-sized hands raised blocking our way and the world ends without a prediction.

Published in London Grip, winter 2020

A LITTLE BOY BY THE SEA

He won’t remember this warm May afternoon. He’ll forget his hand is tiny encased in the ancient God-hand of his father as they walk by the sea, a full-blue sky with sun and soft winds.

Too many days will crowd in between today and the future. Then the years will come like endless bullies pushing and wrestling so many of his days from his crowded memory.

Today will fall like a thin book from a packed shelf, forgotten.

He won’t remember this warm May afternoon, how he walked with his father, ghostly as the soundless sailboats gliding white over the sea’s distant blue, changing nothing, leaving nothing behind, on this forgotten day.

But for now at least he’s smiling.

Published in The High Window, September 2020
STUMBLEBEE

This is the first time I’ve ever seen
a stumbling bumblebee (a stumblebee?).
He’s a shrunken airplane
rushing awkwardly down a runway
of bumpy concrete at my feet by the sea,
pitching left and right,
unable to get off the ground.

He’s not giving up.
not slowing down,
his wings understand nothing but flight.
He’s like a baby trying to walk,
not accepting the ground,
wanting only up.

I took my eyes off of him.
Now I can’t find him.
He might have staggered into a nearby bush
and not come out.

But I like to think he made it,
that his black and yellow body’s tiny engine
coughed into life
and up he went, smacked back into play
like an out-of-bounds tennis ball,
a five-eyed pollen god
headed back to work with flowers,
getting in as many nectar-hours as possible
in his few weeks of bee-life,

enjoying the summer buzz of afternoon,
talking to himself in a deep voice
among green leaves,

flying off into the blue freedom of wild July
thinking like the rest of us
that these warm spicy days
of sun and flowers will never
ever end.

Published in Neuro Logical, December 2020
SHOES  Titanic

They say people were wearing them
as they went down,
shoes full of skin and bone
gently escorting the body,
slowly,
ever letting go,
faithful to the bottom.

The bodies dissolved,
left a haunting of black leather
on the sea floor,
pairs of shoes with perfect soles and heels
lying sideways or upside down
as if kicked off by tired legs at bedtime.

Many disagree,
say the shoes were not worn
but packed in suitcases or bags
that also dissolved,
leaving the shoes stranded
in awkward positions unnatural
to feet and legs.

Whether worn or packed,
a sadness of unworn shoes
is in that sea,
shoes that have failed,
that have lost the feet they were meant
to protect, keep warm.

How many floors had the shoes
moved along before they floated down
to rest on their final floor,
seawater filling them
like the mouths of the drowned,
but leaving them

like headstones that forever mark the spots
where the dead lay down
in the sad magic of the dark
that would make them disappear.

Published in Avatar Review, Summer 2021
SHEILA LOCKHART

Sheila Lockhart is a retired social worker living in the Scottish Highlands. She started writing five years ago and has done several Creative Writing courses, including with the Open University and with Poetry Kit. She’s been published online and in print in anthologies and magazines, including Northwords Now, Nine Muses Poetry, Twelve Rivers, StAnza Poetry Map of Scotland, Writers’ Cafe, Words for the Wild, The Ekphrastic Review, Re-Side and The Alchemy Spoon.

POEMS
You Are Here
Peter’s Little Joke
Little Buddha
You Are Here

watching a bumblebee
squeeze its furry abdomen
into foxglove fingers
you’re trying to work out
how long it takes for a pollen molecule
to travel from the soil up to its calyx
you’re getting close but now you see
another galaxy has formed
a splotch of swirling grey
in a pink universe how many is that now?
you count them one two three
five hundred and sixty seven
and the letters too
directing pollinators to the hidden source
of happiness and why not you?
a message for bees
can’t be that hard to decode
it’s alphabetical after all a matter of
triggering the right responses

now the rain splashes silver curtains
smearing pink and cream
blurring outlines
its drops tap-tapping on cups
their pipes vibrate with fugal harmonies
truths which must be recorded
with mathematical precision
using special symbols on graph paper
no easy task but the beauty of it
oh the beauty of it makes you weep
if only you could grasp its exactitude
its magnificent systems everything
would be clear

(cont.)
(cont.)
there was a time you could enjoy
simple pleasures of line   patterns of colour
as you would looking at an abstract painting
no need to search for meaning everywhere
until one day you started counting
the number of flowers on each stem
the number of bees   ones twos threes
stacking up behind your eyes
and you began to see
how every flower contains a universe
that demands investigation
how you could read their messages
how they insisted on it

you’ll have the answer worked out
very soon   you just need one more
tiny calculation

After *You Are Here*, a painting by Lorette C. Luzajic 2021

**Peter’s Little Joke**

Peter Blake brings home another treasure
to add to his cabinet of curiosities

the studio holds its breath
crumpled newspaper flutters to the floor

he hears them whisper as they shift about
to get a better view

and out she comes - a tiny doll
all dressed up in silks and feathers

Maisie shrieks - it’s shocking pink!
I wanted sepia - you promised me

more Edwardian porn with lady bits!
(she’s jealous of anything with limbs)

Peter sets his acquisition down
right in front of Ivan the balding cossack

he wants to see if Ivan will dare to
put his hand up the new girl’s skirt

Maisie’s open-mouthed - she’ll never get her head
around the crassness of Peter’s little jokes
SHEILA LOCKHART

Little Buddha

these days
I hardly see him
hidden in the shade
between the Christmas cactus
and the jade plant
his scalloped lotus seems
insignificant
beside their lush growth

his butter lamp is crusted
with dead flies
his topknot flame of wisdom
dull with dust
his begging bowl
balanced precariously in his palm
holds out an offering
of spider webs

If I could write
just one true thing about him
I too might sit utterly still
with a half-smile
not needing
to look about me all the time
eyes open just enough
to let some light in
Amanda McLachlan lives in Somerset in the UK and is new to poetry.

POEMS
An Instrument for Measuring Blueness
Climacteric
This is how he will come back to you
An Instrument for Measuring Blueness

She says, I like this pale blue for the wall.
He says, It reminds me of my mother.
She collected aquamarines
because they matched her eyes
(she didn’t count the tiger iron splinter in one iris)

She says, I like this greenish-blue for the door.
He says, It reminds me of an eggshell
I trod on, barefoot
I will never forget the cuts in my sole
the smear of yolk, of blood

She says, I like this richer blue for the skirting.
He says, It reminds me of a broken teapot.
Willow Pattern. It lost its lid
and the porcelain was crazed

She takes him by hand to the garden.
She says, Choose your blue from the sky.
He says, I’d prefer something reliable
like this – and picks a sprig of borage
rubs the prickly leaves between his palms
breathes cucumber scent
to the top of his lungs
Climacteric

That day, blowing across the grass
a wasp nest flew into my hand
like a tossed bouquet

I tried not to see it as a sign
but it seemed to me the deadest
thing I’d ever seen

It’s no good being wide-eyed
seeing luck everywhere

I saw only a ghost bride
alone with her wedding cake
and a clock stopped forever

I saw only empty cells
where eggs should have hatched

Nobody else was there to catch it
Nobody even seems to see me
I put my hand to my throat
to feel for lumps and

cough up a froth of ectoplasm
so thin and silvery and clean
it lights a sting in the tail of my spine

Look at me now, with my barb of fire
and paper foaming on my tongue

Watch me sculpt a shining city
with this mouth of mine
This is how he will come back to you

Waiting in the car outside the shop on the main road. Bank Holiday traffic thunders past. A trailer rattles. Pallid teasels droop their heads by the church porch, next to a poster saying Thieves Beware.

Dad was dead set against priests. At the funeral parlour, the undertaker smiled when we told him that. One of mine, he said. He produced a black padded bag from under his desk and passed it over. This is how he will come back to you.

A single black feather puffs up from the hedge, rises through the air into the ash trees, defying the laws of gravity.

Dad went to the fire with a coffin full of grave goods – Spanish postcards, handwritten notes from his friends, an off-colour joke we couldn’t believe that we tucked deep into the shroud, hid from Mum, who sat rigid in the front row.

The shopkeeper has nailed a sign to the wall Did you know… One in four hazelnuts end up in Nutella?! Lime-green blackberry thorns thrust into the footpath; a rough cross of two pruned Christmas tree trunks leans in the grass.

I read a poem about white roses being left to grow wild around my dead father. Mum fished in her bag for secateurs, produced a dry white handkerchief. Didn’t I know his cross-quartered claret and blue heart, his yellow liver?! She stared at the poem like I’d offered her a cup of Earl Grey tea.
NINA VIGON MANSO

Nina Vigon Manso lives in Vila do Conde in Portugal. Mostly, they writes prose and chronicles. Recently, they decided to engage into poetry because of their work (poetry analysis) and passion for poetry. Like Audre Lorde said, “poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital space for our existence. (...) Poetry is the way to give name to the nameless so it can be thought.” They wants to find freedom, and sharing it with others, being poetry the language and space for it.

POEMS
Poem
spaces or chaos
In the pocket
I tell you a mystery
Remains of a Singer - part I
Poem

yellow sparrow chirps
convince flowers to come out
scented gardenias
randomness spreading the air
whispers to leaves when to fall

spaces or chaos

the room is narrow and the floor creaks
near a crackling fireplace of trophies and family albums
room body odour remains in the stains
life as we know continues rotating

entangled in smooth bedroom sheets
a mix of blue silk threads
a small table covered with oriental spices
the mouldy living room is also a pantry

people wore boots
hummings alternated with lullabies
of your days as an actress
right next to the dressroom

while stargazer lilies garden turns to the sun
three bodies aligned from dark to light for life
sometimes Earth places itself in the middle
as sun and the moon stay in shadows

In the pocket

if time flies when we're having fun
consider this as a master of none
a device of precision, meant to measure
where pleasure has nothing to do but fear
taken by the wind-up regular mechanism
where is always time to organize
synchronize no heart beat but pulse
internalize a clear sense of tempo
stricted with no memento or ode to joy
it's not about who makes the click
it sticks, so strict, fixed
hipnotic but no magical
repressive in fractions of seconds
stripped of tricks in the pocket
it aimed straight barely with no hands
in the pocket in the pocket
I tell you a mystery

ambulance passes while a woman gives birth in a basement
old ladies scorn smothering child's first cry
the trumpet shall sound when help arrives with glances of shame
penniless young mother drips blood attached to a knife

seats at the back swing like a rocker
stacked with dust carrying dreams enchained
it's always rush hour in these pavements
the bigger the dream the slower the lane

first the dead shall be raised incorruptible
it is time for the last ball with the company
band enters aligned looking shiny
bodies so close one to another in the dark hole

later archeologists gave pairs a last chance
straight yet entangled all those brothers in arms
and these mortals must put them on immortality
but not all we shall or want to be changed

(partially inspired by the Aria "The Trumpet Shall Sound" - Messiah, Handel)

Remains of a Singer - part I

made to complete and fit
it is used to reveal the unique
protocol mimic repeat

a machine running on wheels
to flatten all edges of wedges
tuned with oil needles and speed

it can sow patch seduction
cheek bones left hips turn right
insinuating there is more to come back

it hides bobbins of threads gone wrong
wanted all flat match with large hat
embroidery jewelries wearing bodies

egos passing the eye of the needle
made to fit and making the cut
dressed to impress not to interest

world of hard working noisy hours
still nobody figures out what's to come
this innovation was made for aspiration
EMMALINE O’DOWD

Emmaline O’Dowd lives in Derby in the U.K. She has had poems in several magazines, including Poetry Nottingham, Staple, Assent and most recently Acumen, and two of her poems were included in the anthology A speaking silence, (eds. R.V. Bailey and Stevie Krayer). Recently she gained a ‘highly commended’ in Amnesty Internationals 'Poetry for Social Justice' competition and will be included in their forthcoming anthology.

POEMS
Falling to the Ground
Nothing, probably
Cliff-top
Falling to the ground

Peggy reminds Tully that we bought his print, asks him again about the making of it. But It’s all a bit scrambled now. So she tells how there were bird-designs in fragments everywhere, some of them quite beautiful, later, people would buy them. When he asks, Are you enjoying it? so good to say, We love it! and mean it, to be able to thank him, for him to understand. I used to go armed to meet him, ready for his pepper. Now his meekness makes me gentle. The thoughts that hop in his mind Often fall to the ground. Some of the fragments are quite beautiful.
Nothing, probably

Not like you to say
mid-afternoon
let's go for a walk, just you and me.

Of course it's probably nothing serious…

This was the canal. We walk on water,
or the ghost of it, ankle deep only in grass.
There are wild roses. There's birdsong.

Of course it's probably nothing...

We don't hold hands.
Occasionally glass to glass,
our watches kiss.

Of course it's probably…

Here's the stranded bridge, a solid shallow arch,
jointed copings carefully preserved,
now strongly linking just two fields lying fallow.

Of course it's…

A runner floats past, his body's springy machinery
keeping him a foot above the ground, as though
he just opts to touch down lightly at each pace.

of course…

We plod in his wake through the heat.
Tomorrow, will we need a miracle?
No of course not. It's nothing.

Probably…
Cliff-top

The wind feeds the boy’s hat to the white horses
at work a hundred feet below,
pulling the sea to the foot of the cliff.
The mother has been reading a rather bizarre novel.

Unquestioning obedience seldom tends
to complete satisfaction with circumstances.

Keep a rebellion or two in your back pocket.

His green and yellow kite isn’t seriously trying to lift him,
it’s easily tamed, like the little leashed dog
walking demurely beside the push-chair
where a toddler strains against her safety straps,
wailing to be let loose.

There’s no equitable way to govern horses.
And the women are just as bad.

The boy keeps to the rule, run anywhere you like,
so long as it’s inland of the path.

Obtusely she allowed the diamonds
to slither down between the platform and the train.

There’s a rider coming towards them, reins well in hand.
Polite, he holds back to let them pass.

The mother wonders where she can buy a replacement hat.
The champion angler in the next carriage
gallantly hooks them for her
and is amply recompensed with a gold doubloon.

The horse is laying back its ears,
not liking the little girl’s crying. It’s a white one.
Mandy Pannett lives in West Sussex. She taught children with special needs for many years but now works freelance as a creative writing tutor for adults.

Her poetry pamphlet ‘The Daedalus Files’ was published in May 2021 by SPM Publications and was recently selected as The Poetry Kit’s Book of the Month. Five poetry collections have been previously published: ‘Bee Purple’ and ‘Frost Hollow’ (Oversteps Books), ‘Allotments in the Orbital’ (Searle Publishing), ‘All the Invisibles’ (SPM Publications), ‘Jongleur in the Courtyard’ (Indigo Dreams Publishing). A selection of her poems was issued by Integral Contemporary Literature Press with English and Romanian parallel texts. Two novellas have also been published: ‘The Onion Stone’ (Pewter Rose Press) and ‘The Wulf Enigma’ (Circaidy Gregory Press).

Mandy was also poetry editor for five years for Sentinel Literary Quarterly and has edited anthologies and poetry collections for them and for Earlyworks Press. She has acted as an adjudicator for national competitions and won prizes and been placed herself in several others.

POEMS

Enjoying Sunlight with John Donne in Derek Jarman’s Garden
Instruments from a Silver Band, flattened, hanging
From ‘Thing of Weld’
Enjoying Sunlight with John Donne in Derek Jarman’s Garden

it began
with a dog rose
stalwart against the easterlies
by the back door of a fisherman’s cottage

salty winds
incessant in winter
an expanse of shingle

everything is on the edge
a garden both
Gethsemane and Eden

driftwood rust cuttlefish stone
sea kale green and purple scent of honey across the marsh

lavender lovage samphire fennel
the dark red of valerian
golden orange of California poppy

an unruly sun and a north-sea wind
comes in with the tide
bringing
hours days months

the rags of time

(lines quoted are John Donne’s ‘The Sun Rising’ which were inscribed on the wall of Derek Jarman’s cottage at Dungeness)
**Instruments from a Silver Band, flattened, hanging**

They would reach for the sky  
these filigrees of earlier shapes  
silvered, skeletal, compressed.

Once earth, now air, one form of art  
transforms to a new. There’s a shift  
in the meanings of things and they are  

feathers on the scales of destruction  
and creation  

suspended as if still  
at the moment of crush  

or the moment after.

As they move from sound into sight  
silver tongues are silent and lost.  
Thin shadows sway in a half-lit room.

**From ‘Thing of Weld’**

You deserve the best portrayal.  
Cubism was invented for the likes of you.  
Nothing *avant garde* shall be ignored  
for I shall be your Picasso, pin you down  
and release an inner being.

But – a sticking point. You are no  
Dora Maar, long fingernailed and supreme  
in elegance. Your eyes are blobs, blind  
blobs, iron-coloured, not red as you gaze  
one way, not green the other.

Frontal view or mixed with profile  
your long screw neck will always stick out  
in rigid defiance. Already a combination  
of bits you are who you are.  
I shall leave you whole; complete.
Graça had several lives, as an academic, diplomat, founder of a Centre for Economic Social and Cultural rights. She started writing poetry in March 2020 on her return from a yoga retreat in Sri Lanka, when lockdown started. She now lives in Portugal. She went to university and worked in England.

**POEMS**
The Measure of things
The Thread
THE MEASURE OF THINGS

My uncle Raoul worked
At a Singer Co. outpost
At lunchtime on the train he rushed,
Time was tight, like a rope.

Measured were also the pills
Kept safe in that amber box
Like secrets that give thrills
Kept away under lock.

The pot is like a vessel,
A container of all things
Water fire metals
Gives measure to our wings.

A thermometer is on hand
To control the temperature
For the heat is to be tamed
To prevent a sudden rupture.

The head is also a vessel
That provides containment
This doesn’t always happen
And leads to derailment.

Comforting was the candle
Raoul lit in his house
The wax smelt of sandal
The warmth of his spouse.

One morning the body of Carmela
Was found by the tracks,
“It’s where the train passes”, said the fella,
"This is where the mettle cracks.”
THE THREAD

It comes in cotton linen wool metal silk
Talks of slaves weavers merchant prayers
All sorts of people of that ilk
Going about their daily fares.

It witnessed life at the plantations
The flax fields, the Silk Road
Peoples from all nations
While along deserts and crossings they flowed.

Memories of those picking cotton
Flash in our absent minds
Maybe a better life they could have gotten
Had we taken off our narrow blinds.

I love my cool linen sheets
I dive in them every night
To meet the gods for their treats
And get rid of all my plights.

Father’s business was wool dealing
We grew up honouring sheep
While knitting for mother was healing
We children knit woollens for Mozambique.

Ariadne’s thread was red gold
She wove it with great love
Nothing less could be unrolled
To meet the demands of her beloved.

For Theseus she abandoned silk atires
Woven in China no less
She also left her sapphires,
For in the end, who could have guessed?
Carolann Samuels lives in Kent and has been writing prose for about ten years. She has had short stories published in: Ways of Falling, The Folkestone Anthology 2010, and One Hand Clapping (online). In the past couple of years she has started to write poetry. She belongs to two writing groups and has attended several writing courses, both online and in person.

**POEMS**
how you peel an apple
Hanging Flattened Brass Instruments
Sea Sculpture from the Ca Mau Wreck
how you peel an apple

You stand at the kitchen counter
notice how the coating
has peeled off the dividing strip,
how crumbs catch in the join
to be cleared, time and again.

Bramley apples
on the chopping board,
newspaper to collect peel,
a bowl for the slices.

A magpie wipes his beak
on the fence;
a jackdaw dips his face
into the birdbath,
tips his head back,
you watch him swallow.

You spiral the apple
in your left hand,
the right guides the peeler.
The crunch as the blade enters the skin;
a remembered taste of the apple tart.

You dig out bruises, the apples’
memories of bumps and jumbling
on their way from the tree to here,
the imperfections that will sour the pie.

You guide the peeler, adjusting,
to make the skin as thin as possible.

You take your time,
resting now and then, your arm aches,
the one that hauled the vacuum cleaner
up the stairs and cleaned the windows
and beat eggs for breakfast.
Hanging Flattened Brass Instruments
(from a sculpture by Cornelia Parker)

They look like people
hanging around distorted
reactions to what happened
the brutality of it
alike and different
made voiceless
then remade
to shine.

Sea Sculpture from the Ca Mau Wreck

A black mark, like the eye of a crow
on a clam as big as a blacksmith’s hand,
whose broken shell looks like stubby fingers,
engulfing damaged cups and bowls.

Cobalt blue flowers on white porcelain
still bright three hundred years on
after all those men’s lives were lost
to flames and the waves.

76,000 pieces, bound for Europe,
and the new fashion of tea parties,
unexpectedly condemned to settle for ever
in a briny mausoleum with clams and crabs.

Now we admire how accident and nature
produce an item worthy
of a glass cabinet in a museum
and a brand new name.

POEMS
Time please
I want to go to heaven in a blaze of brass
On the way to somewhere else
About a pebble 2
A kind of magic
Time please

During the siege of Leningrad
the only thing broadcast on the radio
was the ticking of the clock
day and night for many months.

My grandfather’s timepiece
under its dome of glass
was hidden away in the front room
and wound up every Sunday.

The clock on my wall
synchronises with the British Standard
Frequency Time Signal
accurate to one second in a million years
but ultimately dependent
on one AA battery ( not included )

I consult my watch incessantly
all the time in the world
but never enough
time is a healer
time is a thief.

I want to go to heaven in a blaze of brass

I have seen them in the moonlight
suspended from slender threads
instruments silver-lucent floating in the soft air
moving together a flashing canopy under the sky
a flugelhorn flies with a refulgent tuba
a trumpet outshines a euphonium
as a trombone long and luminous
slides alongside a saxophone.

No sound reaches me
but when my time comes
I shall hear them in their full glory
too terrifying for ears on earth
I shall cede my body to receive them
as their sonority swells within me
and harmonics become limitless
in music unimagined.

After seeing a photo of hanging, flattened brass instruments.
On the way to somewhere else

I saw nothing behind his black sunglasses. 
Lock the door please he said -
the start of my hitching experiences
scary sometimes on my own
but mostly an excitement and delight
and when there were two of us
sometimes we’d just switch
to where the car was going.

Verona our best diversion of all.
We were delivered there late evening
and sat outside in the heat-shimmering air
surrounded by the sound of Aida
drifting from the amphitheatre.

As it drew to a close in the early hours
we made our way unnoticed up stone steps
till we could see far down below
Radomes and Aida in each other’s arms
as they sang their dying duet of love.
Fifteen thousand people clutched candles
that fluttered in the darkness
hardly daring to breathe
as they fought back the tears.

About a pebble 2

A pebble found and saved
by my mother
sits on my mantle piece
valued but no longer noticed.

Today I take it in my hand.
It lacks the shiny smoothness
of my other polished ones
feels rough and unappealing.

It is very pockmarked
with deep connected holes.
Now I see a skull with eye sockets.
I see a scream.
A kind of magic

I remember the little things
an air-raid in the middle of supper
two sausages that danced on dad’s plate
as we ran to the shelter.

An air-raid in the middle of supper
that spoilt our special treat
as we ran to the shelter
bombers in the sky

that spoilt our special treat
searchlights criss-crossed lighting up
bombers in the sky
streaks of metallic strips

searchlights criss-crossed lighting up
snow falling to the ground
streaks of metallic strips
moonlight and leaping shadows.

Snow falling to the ground
two sausages that danced on dad’s plate
moonlight and leaping shadows
I remember the little things.
JONATHAN SHAW

Jonathan Shaw lies in Marrickville an inner suburb of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. He has been writing poetry on and off, mostly off, for 50 years. In the last 10 years he has had poetry accepted for publication in several Australian journals, and in 'The Last Page', a feature of the European Journal of International Law. He blogs, mostly about literature, at https://shawjonathan.com

POEMS

Ritual Vessels
Letter to my mother
Overlooked
Pot
Ritual Vessels

1. Saucer
   His special saucer,
   wider, deeper, than the rest,
   ideal for holding tea,
   suscipe domine,
   for blowing on, and slurping.

2. Glass
   Cut glass beside the samovar
   in its silver filigree
   shows the cherry jam
   swirled by Raïssa’s spoon.

3. Enamel mug
   It
   burns your lips,
   the cuppadee Nangala pours
   from the black billy
   on Warlpiri land.

4. Chinese tea cup
   Fill, drink, fill,
   drink, fill, drink.
   The yum cha trolleys
   come and go.

5. Moroccan glass
   Waiting for the virtuoso high pour.

6. Bone china cup
   On its base there’s plaster
   where she wrote the name
   of which child should inherit it.
   The ink has faded by the time she dies.

7. Keep cup
   Locked in the cupboard,
   useless in lockdown.

8. Ceramic mug
   The curtains open.
   Day dawns.
   I bring it to you.
**Letter to my mother**

Dear Mum, I won’t write you a novel. 
Barely fourteen rhyming lines
I’ll manage. No space to unravel
the half a century that twined
our lives. Perhaps I know you better
now than when your weekly letters
filled me in on family news.
I wish that you could know me too,
that you could look down from some heaven,
hear the words I wish I’d said,
see the tears I should have shed
back then, take thanks for all you’ve given.
The grave is deaf and blind and still.
What we didn’t say, we never will.

**Overlooked**

The blueberry bush on our balcony
is white with blossom.
No one looks at its green pot,
as Norman Mailer
prisoner of sex
lamented that for novels to be written
someone had to do the dishes.

**Pot**

Shelf on shelf in the kiln
pots whose clay still smells
of earth, showing no fingerprints
waiting for the fire

Before Mao,
before Chiang Kai-shek,
brush and stencil, slip and glaze,
repeat

Always a key in our front door
this pot the only sentry
silent and accommodating

No one expects fruit
from its painted blossoms.
A child touches them with a question.
MARGARET SIMPSON

Margaret Simpson lives in Bolton UK, has had poems published in anthologies produced by ‘Write on the Farm’ workshops, ‘Bolton WorkTown’ and ‘Creative Minds’. She has also had writing performed at ‘Best of Bolton’ at the town’s Octagon Theatre and herself performs at open mic nights. She is a member of the Bolton based writing group, Bank St Writers.

POEMS
Dear Wasp
Regret is
Wind of Change
Fork in the River
Missing
Dear Wasp

I could huff and I could puff
and I could blow your house down

but instead I will take my sleekest pen
the one with the finest nib and
fill it with the smoothest (least viscous) ink.

I will remove my shoes and my sullied outer layers
and if permitted enter your home

I will step lightly across your threshold
pass through the portals pause
at the fragile deckle edges

before entering the inner chambers
of onion skin lining and listen

your hum may bristle
my innocent skin
or it may psalm my senses

and on the translucence
of the hot pressed surface (that one might call a wall)

I will trace your image
so that ten thousand years hence
worshipful eyes will know the Builder.

Regret is

the stone she wears round her neck
honey warm embedded in heart wood

a seaside post card edges furred
but the blue inked address clear penned still
square nibbed in a slant hand

and the monogrammed badge
wreathed and crowned in its box still
a hint of Duraglit when opened

that shows who she once was.
Wind of Change

If I were the sea
I could pound your cliff face
until you cracked and crumbled and left streaming pillars
for tourists with cameras
not knowing they were witness
to a crime scene.

If I were the wind
I could lift your roof tiles
rearrange your furniture
in ways you never thought possible
or
I could fell trees
and block your path
so for once
you had to find a new way
home. Remember home?

But I am neither
so once more we’ll dig out the photos
laugh at our eighties’ hair
count the missing persons.
Then we’ll put the album away
on another wedding or christening or bar mitzvah
draw the curtains.

But Dylan was right,
the waters around you have grown
and you never did learn to swim.
Since you last looked in the mirror
leaves have fallen.

One day I want to walk past you
on the street and have you tap me
on the shoulder and say.
“Hey remember me?”
Fork in the River

Metal in gravel glinting like a lucky strike, an old fashioned fork with long thin tines, heft in the hand, substantial.

I posed for a photo, the legs are whiter than I remember above the peaty water, rucksack latched on my back like a monstrous red growth. Contents weighed, calculated, heavy as the day we started though the food was mostly eaten. And a hall marked fork with long thin tines, cold steel on the teeth. Me hands free as if about to be daring, afterwards we used to wonder from which kitchen table and who noticed its absence.

Missing

I take out the canteen, lift the sateen lined lid, release each piece, hold it up, turn, turn again, (wrist and handle, one efficient tool) looking for evidence, each facet reflecting a fragment. I polish, polish, polish, place the spoon and knife, just so by cut glass. Since last time

the constellations have changed. Guests arrive, flushed with their own stories. Air tastes brittle in winter.

For the first course you won’t be missed, songs will be sung, the wassail cup emptied, we will eat our fill, be merry. I will still be hungry.
SUE WATLING

Sue Watling is a writer and poet, living near the River Humber in the UK where she has an allotment and keeps honeybees. Sue has had poems published in The Adriatic, Seaborne Magazine, The Tide Rises, Amethyst Review, DawnTreader, Saravasti, Green Ink Poetry, ASP Literary Journal, Poetry Shed and Dream Catcher. Sue can be followed on Twitter @suewatling and her blog about poetry and bees can be found at suewatling.com

POEMS
For Anne Bonny and Mary Read, 18th century pirates
Unreachable blue
Walk in the park at the dying of the year.
Home for a song thrush
Safe for a Samhain Spell.
Research into the nesting habits of birds
For Anne Bonny and Mary Read, 18th century pirates

We will birth girls,
astride the waves,
in the swing of a hull,
to the keen of gull,
and rattle of black-fingered reef.

I’ll teach them to bind their breasts,
while you sew pouches for blood,
they’ll straddle rigging,
tilt with the tide,
while all through the night,

boat beds rock them with salt star
dreams of tarnished moons and flying fish.
When we dock in a harbour,
houses will scare them
for how can the world be made of stone,

when breathing is motion,
life is curves,
and living means
finding your feet
on uncertain ground.

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Unreachable blue

Birds are indifferent to misery,
they chatter, chatter,
like black-feathered demons.

If I had wings,
I’d fly, like souls might do,
dancing their sorrow,
as if they were equivocal,
tethered by our grief,
yet sensing joy.

Who knows
what the dead become
in that final dream,
or if space exists
where souls might strut,
before taking flight
like birds or kites
against an unreachable blue.

Walk in the park at the dying of the year.

The language of winter trees
is stark from an absence of colour,

trunks black in the rain, branches spindle
against grey skies, think Times New Roman

with skinny legs, serifs like punctuation,
I want so much to read what they say.

Searching for clues, I scuff through leaves,
heavy with wetness, their life over,

they’ve nothing to do, just rot dank breath,
hunch on cold grass like crouching toads,

or dirty confetti, fallen on snow,
white as the wings of angels.

If the park were a book of poems, would they
include a language for prayer before sleep?
SUE WATLING

**Home for a song thrush**

Perched in a hedge,  
on the edge of a field of barley,  
this is home for a song thrush.

Round as a cup, bowl, scoop of hands,  
woven from sticks, roots and grass,  
no doors or windows, ceiling of sky.

I had a home like this where I laid my eggs,  
their mystery hidden in shell so thin  
it looked like transparent membrane.

Inside, a heartbeat,  
curve of spine, arms,  
legs, like spindly balloons,

mushrooming longer, stronger,  
the curls on their heads  
soft as feathers lining the nest.

It’s empty now and smells like absence,  
while the song thrush sings a lament  
for those who are lost, or fallen.

**Safe for a Samhain Spell.**

If I’d been there,  
my hand on your chest,  
counting down your final breaths,  
running my tongue around their shapes,  
like tasting clouds, I’d swallow them whole,  
each one with a lick of the louche, dripped through  
iced water, listen, there’s more, can you bear it? I’d steal  
the prints from your fingers to make me a dress, and where your feet  
pressed into the bed I’d make me a collar, then snip a curl from your head  
soft as a sleeping comma, slipping it into my pocket, safe for a Samhain spell.
Research into the nesting habits of birds

Many species of birds dress up their nests
Anna said, as we set up the cameras,
disguising them the best we could,
with bales of straw and branches.

Some use bright coloured objects,
others gather feathers,
magpies like silver,
while storks, crows, swans,
all collect wool, hair, shells,
nails, pieces of glass or stone.
No one knows why they do this,
we’re going to try to find out.

I was seventeen and in love.
Anna was funny, clever,
amazing legs, knew all about birds,
I was her errand boy, DIY call upon,
she worked for my father,
who led a big charity,
something to do with water,
and his turn to have me for summer.

Maybe they do it to attract a mate
Anna said, with a smile, It’s what most people
think. I flush, cheeks red, seems
everything’s down to sex these days.

What we leave makes a difference,
Bower Birds fill their nests with blue;
plastic bottle tops, ribbons, straws,
pebbles, thread, our research

will go in a paper, would you like that?
I nod, thinking of nests and how we might
fit within their curled walls, like brackets, comma’s
or a seahorse tail, curled in a permanent question.