

AUTUMN 2015

Editor's Note

Autumn 2015 is the second in a series that begin with the University of Liverpool's triumphant *Spring 2014*, a collection of student writing.

For *Autumn 2015*, I began nursing a wider ambition; to create a space where the work of poets at the beginning of their career, and that of more established artists could stand together.

Whilst inviting submissions from students, I approached poets whose work I admired. The response I received was generous and overwhelming with writers of international standing offering new work.

Each author has a separate section of the magazine; a mini collection, so that readers can get to grips with their style and themes.

There is no brief for *Autumn*, no theme, no prize. It is a blank canvas where authors and poets can articulate freely; where readers can witness the spontaneous interplay between authors, and pieces.

Enjoy, Seamus May

Acknowledgements

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And of course, thanks to the people of Liverpool and beyond who most generously sent their work to be published.

SEÁN STREET

About the Author. Seán Street is a Hampshire-born writer, now living in Liverpool. He is something of a polymath, having contributed considerably to theatre, broadcasting, poetry and academia for several decades. His most recent prose work is *The Historical Dictionary of British Radio (2nd Edition)* (Rowman & Littlefield) and most recent poetry collection is *Jazz Time* (Lapwing Press), published in 2015 and 2014 respectively. He has written very successfully for stage, and has had several works adapted for BBC Radio. Seán's greatest interest is in the interaction between audio experience and memory. Seán Street is Emeritus Professor at Bournemouth University and life fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

The View From Here

Léo Valentin, Liverpool, 21 May, 1956

It's changing all the time. Everything's
about observing -
the closer I come the less I see.

Desiring it as trees strive towards
dancing, our flying
shapes these descending variations,

confusing more detail all the time
in a picture frame
that gets faster as it gets bigger.

It's a presumption, to be bird,
to be angel, sky
offering a lost dream of the mythic.

In the end as I reach out for it,
it's a nothingness
blurring to black and then exploding.

No such thing as a fixed horizon
after all it seems,
just vanity's plummeting impact.

Matins

(April, Aldeburgh)

Familiar light, known music.
This is what we should be working
towards, this broken silence.

We begin as a bell does, struck
at another's will into sound.
We begin as light begins.

Because of where we are, a frame
of time pictures it, but a bell
knows better, its place in things.

As a bell moves away towards
betterment from its literal
blow, so should we, so we might

Mise-en-scène, Margate

From a photograph by Tony Ray-Jones

Exterior, night. Street lights,
suburban curtains undrawn.
In the distance a man moves,
searching through a vague bedsit.
In the foreground, to the right,
a woman, back to the dark,
sits in her own room alone.
Street light illuminates her
but we only see white hair.
Room light bleeds into the road.

Poem for Wilko Johnson

I dreamed I was Wilko Johnson,
had wings and a telecaster
and Rock 'n' Roll made the pain go
so then I could write about it
without hurting too much, fed by
the blood of guitars. So it was
that music saved my life. Saved me.

A tough one to wake up from, that,
but then there was Wilko up from
Oil City singing dreams come true,
and Rock 'n' Roll made the pain go
with wings and a telecaster.

Post Industrial Archeology

For now, we have no real answers
beyond surmised guesswork of what
happened next. River is cryptic,
the evidence is against it.

Watch them, ruins on the far side
choosing not to respond. Listen,
incoming, it's still tidal here
over shallows' burial ground.

Back then in their utility
these metal estuary cities
could have given reasons when lit
with their gantry stars, why they hummed,

how it was they defined their stretch
along the bank, a workscape formed
of what their place and day convinced
itself to be necessity,

pipes, tanks and funnels igniting
(it's said) paranoiac alarms.

But without context beyond tides
arriving, leaving, tremolo

water reflections under rust
towers, we, bleached out by new light
can only guess. Strange church builders,
these technicians of their sacred.

The conundrum is that spirits
leave objects then vanish. We have
sent out enquiries into why.
Currently awaiting response.

We could exhume them and then ask -
unstrapping jaws, unpicking lips,
rewinding beyond their last gasps -
what it was on earth told them things?

Nothing to gain there, and river
is cryptic, so savour mysteries
just as they did, ahead of what
they became, post industrial.

CLARE O'CONNOR

I have tried. Truly I have. I regret that I was not able to give the wife and the life that might have made this partnership everlasting.

I regret that my husband was not able to be the man that God made him, and instead was reduced to the man I thought the world and I had made him, but who I later learned was the half-man he made himself.

I fear for my children. Their little minds are budding open with each passing day. They are the flowers of my Earth, and of God's. I hope that my passing does not halt their blossoming into the world.

I know that their father will not endanger them. I was not of his flesh, except when we lay as one, and so to harm me was not an affront to him. But our children are of his flesh, and of his blood, so he will protect them. For that I give thanks.

To God and to my husband, I am sorry that I tried to find myself through another man, and that I let him find himself inside of me. Perhaps the blood which flowed forth from my veins and decoloured in the bruises of my skin was punishment enough for me. A holy sacrifice. A different colour, a different sin, Harold used to tell me, stroking my bruises meditatively. He used to joke, when my bruises mixed into a colour neither of us recognized, that it was the sign of a sin I had committed that he hadn't found out about yet. He squeezed and jabbed them, hoping for enlightenment, but he laughed and said he would find out in

due course. He loved his wife in spite of her brokenness, he said, even though she Fell like a common harlot.

It was by Harold that I was broken, and not by knowledge of another man.

It is my conviction, now that it is not I who is broken, but he. I have realized, but I am too late.

My wife and I are one, he announced in his speeches. My family, we are a unit. And so by shattering me, he weakened and crumbled himself. He opened cracks in the lives of our children.

The family is the single repeating unit of the healthy world. Like the bricks that hold up our walls and houses, he told the poor men, and they had to be vigilant that no mould or ivy threatened their bricks. To the men with parted hair and crisp collars he said, Gentlemen, make sure the cells are functional, or the organs will falter, and the organism of society will be destroyed. Though the men were different, and though they were many, they applauded his words as one.

It was my job, twice a year, to address the women. Equally, they applauded me in their drones.

I hear their dulcet appreciation, now, when it is too late – and I regret that I served out his poison to these women, who might have otherwise questioned his natural order.

I have seen the light when it is too late. I might soon see another light – or be plunged into eternal darkness.

MICHELE ROBERTS

About the Author: Michèle Roberts is a highly acclaimed half-French author, who splits her time between the Mayenne in France and London. Her 1992 novel, *Daughters of the House* won the WH Smith Literary Award and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Michèle has published eleven other novels, alongside poetry collections, memoirs and short stories. She has said she writes about “Food, sex, saints, death, love, memory, desire, power relationships, perversity; whatever obsesses me at a given time.” She is active in socialist and feminist politics. Michèle Roberts is Emeritus Professor of Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia.

Men Talk To Me

(stories found between the City of London and the East End)

I’m a bit up the arse: I’ve lost my fiancée and I’ve lost my dog. The fiancée left me and the dog died. To tell you the truth I’m far more cut up about the dog. My world’s been turned upside down. I’ve got a photo of him here, look. I bought him a bed costing £200, a sort of mattress with a buckskin trim. And then I’m a bit up the arse as well because I don’t make enough money. This morning I read my stars in the Sun. They suggested my financial affairs would be looking up quite soon, so I put £50 on a horse to win. I’ve just called my mate and the horse lost. That’s a bit much. £50 is a lot of money. I can’t really afford it.
(Man in overalls, in café, Roman Road)

My great-grandmother was called Black Bess because she had the gift of second sight. She passed on tips to my grandmother and she passed them on to me. A robin in the house spells death. It’s bad luck to have a hole in the fire. Never put a pair of new shoes on the table. My mother still lives in the old lodge on the edge of the woods, opposite the house in which my great-grandmother lived. Recently she gave me two porcelain swans, which belonged to Black Bess. *(Taxi-driver in blue parka, in Liverpool Street)*

Some of my family, they grew up without me noticing. I was always working. They liked it all right, the money for holidays. One of my daughters didn’t want to know me. Ten years on I met this girl and said to

her: there's something familiar about you. She said: well, I'm your daughter. To tell you the truth I've been married three times and with a bit of practice in between you've got that helping hand to recognise true love when it comes along. (*Man in tweed suit, in café, Mile End Road*)

I dream of studying astronomy. Perhaps one day in the Open University. My school teacher put me down when I asked a question about atoms, and put me off science. I worked as a guitar teacher for ten years before Maggie Thatcher put an end to all that. I reckon I don't believe in myself enough, having left school at fourteen with no qualifications. (*Man in grey tracksuit, in café, Bethnal Green Road*)

Lap-dancing girls. Essex girls. Tarts I'd have to call them. Prostitutes. Two of them got in the cab one night, Liverpool Street, wanting to get home, saying: how much? Fifty quid I told them. Turned out they only had a tenner each. They said to me: come in and we'll lap-dance for you, make up the difference. (*Taxi-driver in grey fleece, in pub on the Roman Road*)

I used to be a butcher. But I got hit by the recession so I became a cabbie instead. My

father abandoned us children when my mother died and got married again, left us boys to fend for ourselves. So I grew up selfish, not wanting to be, but knowing nothing else. I left my own three boys when my butcher business failed and I took to gambling and my marriage broke up. I did the gambling mainly for company because I was lonely. Now I've got a new girlfriend and a new little cub, and I ring my boys every day, and try to see them regularly. I tried to talk to my father but my father won't talk. He's very hard. (*Man in jeans, in newsagent's shop, near Cheapside*)

I grew up in Bethnal Green, in Finnis Street, near the old fire station. We were on the third floor, with no bathroom and a lav out on the balcony. So when the Council rehoused us in a tower block we were pleased. Oh if only we'd stayed. That house must be worth a million by now. Should have sold it, made my fortune. Bethnal Green was a bombsite. We played on the half-sunk ships in St Katherine's Dock. (*Man in dark puffa jacket, in betting-shop, Roman Road*)

Those Amish girls he killed, he did it out of revenge. For something that happened to him when he was young. He did it for revenge. They say he had a huge bucket of

KY jelly with him, he was going to abuse them before he killed them. Oh yes. They say he only shot them so soon because the police arrived. Apparently the Amish have forgiven him. They've asked his family to the funerals. So there must be something in that God stuff mustn't there. But perhaps not. Me, I'm so cynical. They're just doing it for publicity for the Amish cause. *(Man in olive denim jacket and blue jeans, antique shop, Spitalfields)*

That recent rape case. Ninety-nine per cent of men wouldn't dream of having sex with a drunken woman. You want her to respond, see? You must be anti-men if you think otherwise. *(Man in pinstriped suit in bar, Cheapside)*

If you say hello to people on the towpath they return the hello, much more than

people do on a path in the park. Oh, look at her taking the skipper his lunch. Oh, that looks nice that plate of food does. Oh, the skipper's not impressed. He's still mending his prop. He has a load of weed entangled I suspect. Last week I saw some men towing a boat away from where it was moored by the gasworks, just below Sturt's Lock, a seagoing boat, quite rounded, uninsured, hadn't had its safety test, hadn't paid mooring fees, I said oh what a shame to tow it away and the man said: no, it's as rotten as a pear. *(Man in black beret and red windcheater, on canalside towpath)*

EDWARD McCANN

About the Author: Edward McCann is an aspiring writer from Merseyside. He is undertaking a masters degree at the University of Liverpool, examining the relationship between Romantic and Modernist poetry, and is pursuing a career in literary academia. He is compiling his first volume of short poems: a series of stylistic experiments that pay homage to traditional form, with a post-modern bent. His first novel, *A Mechanical Planet* is also in the works, an apocalyptic tale that explores the role of humanity in climate change. In his spare time he volunteers as an editor, providing book transcripts for the access of disabled children. His favourite writers include George Orwell, Iain Banks, and Kurt Vonnegut, and his main inspirations are TS Eliot and William Blake. Stylistically, the following poem is an imitative exercise. An inversion of Genesis, it examines the need to create, and the relationship between creators and their creations.

The Garden of Man

The glimmering, trivial, hesitant seeds
Quiver as viscous greenery bleeds,
Lurching the stunted form to stir –
Old Adam breaks the new born air.
The Earth it groans beneath his weight,
He stands bereft and contemplates.
With eager strides through natural wealth
He hunches down to view himself.
In shimmering waters materialise
The old Apocalypse in his eyes.
The bubbling lake recoils in dread,
The sky it shrieks in awful red,
The sapling moans in bones and dust,
And Gaia's sword decays to rust.
Yet Adam lost in thoughts serene,
Creates creation blue and green,
And starts in landscape to envisage
A God to fashion in his image.
So in dumb ground he lays his hand,
Crafting blackness from the land,
Until the deadly form did rise
And trembling lifts its infant eyes.
Then Adam stands apart to ask:
'What purpose stirs my earthly task?
The cosmic painting seems askew
Unless replete with human hue.
Mud and sea don't understand
The picture painted by your hand;
I feel my mighty mind traverse
The centre of the universe.

Oh God, created by my Art,
Reveal that which sets me apart!
The apparition howls in terror
In comprehension of the error.
Abyss it yawns apart the skies
And seems reflected in its eyes.
For Adam's ambiguity
Is gilding of vacuity.
It shrieks in vacant horrors hoarse
The question back with threefold force.
The creature raving disappears
To haunt, to sooth all mankind's fears.
To stalk the mind's eternal night
And masquerade as blades of light
Which, piercing through the blist'ring rot,
Conjure truth where there is not.
While Adam, solemn, turns away
To think what next to breathe in clay.
But now the glade that shone with joy
Does tense his senses and annoy:
The prickly, sickly, thickly mixed
Paint of an artist late eclipsed
Does boring bleed from hectic wounds,
And choking on the broken fumes
Old Adam seeks a place to hide
From which to loose his perfect pride.
In darkness dwells the mortal soul,
Pond'ring how to stop the hole
That gapes beneath us ev'ryday
Till ignis fatuus phantoms play.
With sapphire, gold and ruby crowned,
The man adorns the trees and ground.
In madness hangs his chandeliers
To shine in spite of heav'n'ly spheres.
And from his flesh he fashions new
A woman, and adorns her too.
How pretty she in vale of tears,
Wherein he caged her all her years.
She toiled beneath a silken cloak
That stopped her conscience ere she spoke –
Confined in chains that gript her heart
Where she should suffer for his Art.
He hangs her on a golden wall
And worships her beneath a shawl,
In her erects his artifice

To spring from sacred orifice
 The flesh fest'ring family tree,
 Burdened by fruit of society,
 Which he locks in diamond case
 To stunt its growing to disgrace.
 And Eve in silence tends the leaves
 That wither as she inward grieves,
 While Adam carves the laws of nation
 In diamond for its decoration.
 And in that jewel encrusted dale
 The sallow trees in private wail,
 The grass it gnaws and gasps for breath
 In futile, ornamental death.
 Eve perceives the subtle rot,
 And nursed defiance in its cot.
 The hidden bark begins to peel,
 Beneath the woodworms make their meal.
 She sheds her veil in spite of duty,
 Beholds in diamond unknown beauty.
 The naked fragments hypnotize
 As flaccid fancy wayward flies
 And, grasping out beneath the smother,
 The tree encased perceives its mother,
 Till fractures knit the glassy casque
 To manifest a pallid mask.
 'What phantom haunts my garden hence?'
 The man demands with pride immense,
 'What base revolting thing be this
 That dares to pair the precipice
 Of crude and artless desecration
 In union with my great creation?'
 In canvas skin and thund'ring eyes
 The woman new in fire replies:
 'The question that you justly ask
 Is answered not by simple task.
 Here stands attired in naked woe
 A creature that I do not know.
 A creature woken from a spell
 That makes in nature specious Hell
 And binds all beauty at the root
 In madd'ning malcontent pursuit
 Of some elusive warped supreme,
 Marching forth like Stygian stream
 From the mouth of demon man
 Who, beating out with spirit wan

Against the iron casket sealed
To break upon Elysian field,
But when he sees the lock is tight
And Chaos and Eternal Night
Begin to fester in the cracks,
Elysian dreams begin to wax,
In tribute to his confined heart
He forges chains and calls them 'Art',
And in the face of vacancy
He paints a painful agency
To better suit the lost ideal
In hoping that he might conceal
The throbbing idle insight near,
Unspoken bound in subtle fear,
He grafts his shackles 'cross the Earth
To order the incessant dearth.
I know this now since I have torn
The world I have from childhood borne
And blinking at the blinding light
Into a chasm infinite
I fumble in the fleeting air,
And meet the void without despair.
Like Ulysses I cross the border,
Rejoice the boundless death of Order!
While Adam braced in jewelled dress
Against the curling words' caress,
That on his waning spirit grind,
But find no haven in the mind
That, moved to mark the now grotesque,
A tree that laboured picturesque,
Now vexed convulsing 'neath the skin,
A cracked and lapsing mannequin,
That failed beneath the natal charge
Of harbouring the pure visage
Of maidenhood untouched by law,
He leashes thoughts of fatal flaw
And, striding wide across the split
Between the real and counterfeit,
He moans to see his masterpiece
Polluted by unchecked caprice.
And turning to the naked form,
Mutated in his eyes forlorn
To seem a beast contrived in flame,
Of contour crude and inhumane,
He cries before the ghastly shape

And answers thus with eyes agape:
'Back! Back, thou ugly fiend!
Lament the state that you demeaned!
The world I shaped with godly hand
Will not this wickedness withstand.
Retreat into thy blackened heart,
Rent thy world and mine apart,
Do not presume thou ever may
Return to taint the Gates of Day!'
Our mutual mother softly sighs
And lifts her face up to the skies.
She steps into the Great Beyond –
A space no greater than a pond
That specks the vapid heavens vast,
She sheds the fetters of the past
To search for that elusive proof
Of universal, unseen truth.
And Adam slithers by the nights
To hoard the delicate delights
In fresh ambition to design
A monument to man sublime.
He makes from the forsaken dress,
That did the woman once oppress,
The perfect piece of artistry,
A womanhood in harmony.
And calls the sunken form ideal
To marry with in golden seal.
He thus surrounds himself with shades
Of mortals wrought from palisades.
A palace found to house the shrouds
Of emerald spires that pierce the clouds
And ivory walls adorned with gold
He builds in self-importance bold.
He dines with disembodied thread
In darkness specked with glittered dread
And saw no more the open green,
The stars that glide indifferent gleam
To answer moon in ancient song,
Aloof from the relentless throng
Of faces turned to offer praise
Retreated now to spend their days
Entombed in timeless elegance,
Impeccable in decadence.
And as the spheres revolve the skies
The tree forgotten gently dies,

To rot in the eternal womb:
A sobbing, silent, hollow tomb
That twinkles in the mindless air,
Steeped in shadows unaware.
And in the great cathedral grim
Encircled with the ghostly dim
Of disincarnate shrouded shape,
Embroidered dress and silken cape,
Old Adam lies in crippled death
And rumbles with his final breath:
'I feel the firmament to shake,
The beast of Eden starts to wake!
My mind that gave the cosmos sense
Does crumble with creation hence:
My passing must indeed portend
The world will surely come to end!'
'Apocalypse! Apocalypse!'
From hollow horror's howling lips,
'Apocalypse! Apocalypse!'
And rising in a mass eclipse
They slither up the pouring walls,
The shrieking, gleeful, ghostly shawls,
To hang themselves upon a frame
And there forevermore remain.
The mausoleum stands today
Looming in the human way,
Preserved to be the perfect price
In sacrifice for mortal vice.
And still in darkness dwells the soul,
Pond'ring how to stop the hole
That gapes within us every day
And outwards in the airy way.
We are the consciousness between
The seeming emptiness obscene
And all the hope that we create
To guide us on the idle strait.

CATH BORE

Friday Roses

The red roses Brian sends on Fridays are delivered to the house, bound in a tight bundle. The taut rubber band pinks my fingers and thorny stems long and tentacular splice my skin as I unpick the stubborn brown rubber. My fingers cut and bleed but push the flowers into a vase.

‘Have they arrived, the flowers?’ Brian rings up and asks, as always.

‘Yes, they’ve arrived. Thank you.’

‘And do you like them?’ He says this each time too.

‘I love them.’

He makes me say it every week, forces me to lie. Sometimes I think I hate the roses more than I despise Brian. They offer up no scent, shiny plastic petals scratch the end of my nose as he forces me to sniff them and inhale plain air that smells of tap water.

Flowers every week, how romantic, everyone says. You’re so lucky.

‘Yes,’ I smile. ‘I’m lucky.’

My cracked ribs creak as I force uncomfortable words out from lips stiff and awkward with lies.

In the end, all it takes is a little push. I watch Brian fall down the stairs, arms in frantic circles, hands grabbing air, gob flapping silently. He breaks. I taste copper in my mouth and smell its perfume, realise I’ve bitten my tongue and hold it between my teeth as I watched him windmill downwards. Relief washes through me like a flood but the police believe my tears.

The following Friday roses arrive as usual, red like blood.

JOSEPH ROCHE

A Rime of Rejection

Cast aside and ripped away, lov'd not
By impatient and fickle hearts, who try
In vain, through pain, to drag me, sick with rot
To and fro, torn and fraught, I tire of the old lie.

I walk 'mongst titan's pillars slick with lime
Through a verdant glade's pregnant silence, where
I stop and kneel in this temple of time
And pray for the day I no longer care.

But the wind disagrees with my only request
It's talons and claws make me falter
To your feet, it says, you shall have no rest
You must walk to your death at the altar.

Battered and broken I shoulder my loss
She hangs round my neck, cruel albatross.

The Tragedy

From dark places with dark thoughts, I return
Aware now of malignant agendas
Dream-woken and passion-weary, I yearn
For simpler days spent in love's soft splendour.

I have seen verdant vistas turn to ash
Cerulean seas dry Vermillion
Bastion walls, weak pretenses, can't last
Fragmented victims, numb'ring millions .

The rigours of Love are manipulations,
Poesy and art, a form of Vengeance,
Our lives, an illusion of salvation,
The tragedy, our struggle with sentience.

Love; thy necessary mechanism
Thou art but a primal despotism.

The Moth

I am trapped in this painful state of mine,
Where time's soft healing absolves of my blame
Nothing, solace is sought with the next line,
Yet it only serves to deepen my shame.

Absolute error in its purest form,
Apologies are anthems we don't sing
Lightly, desolate, I bequeath forlorn
Denials of unoriginal sin.

Man or Animal, fall prey to desire,
Torn asunder by guilt, or each other,
Icarian lust draws into the fire,
The Moth, whom flickered, and failed his lover.

Delicate, underserving of this pain,
I will let nothing extinguish the flame.

The Priest King

Across the dark wastes, under frigid skies
Through cold air 'neath apocalyptic clouds
Where haunting albatross, wing weary fly
Above ships, heading ashore as drums pound.

A lone figure stands, waiting to recieve,
Hooded, Priest-King of these complex heavens
He surveys the masses gathered, relieved
Arms raised, the start of the end he beckons.

Fires die as his vengeful tempest rages,
Eyes widen at terrors not of this earth,
Wind bites and tears at distorted faces,
As bone white legions wade through breaking surf

He lowers his hood, and with practiced ease,
Summons arcane Mephistopheles.

Untitled

When will I be free of this painful state
Of mind, body and soul longing for you
When will I avoid fits of rage and hate,
Searing jealousy, to me nothing new.

O' if the crashing waves of time doth heal
And your face, seen upon sands, away will fade
Then never again in thrall shall I kneel
to your monstrous, intoxicating shade.

Until, borne upon Saharan zephyrs
She, another, arrives, to torment me
and make me ashamed of all my nevers
leaves me adrift on a desolate sea.

Still do I yearn for that which caused me pain.
Love is a cure that leaves it's patient lame.

DANA GIOIA

About the Author: One of the most prominent American poets and writers of our time, Dana Gioia has been an imperious literary figure since his seminal 1991 essay ‘Can Poetry Matter?’ Dana was originally a highly successful businessman, serving as Vice President for Marketing at General Foods, before stepping down to focus on writing full time. He has since published several volumes of poetry, including *Interrogations at Noon* (2001) which won the American Book Award, and his most recent collection *Pity the Beautiful* (2012). Dana held the post of Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts between 2003-2008, serving two terms and credited for the agency’s revival. He has been described as a New Formalist, whose work pronounces strict rhyme and meter forms as the new avant-garde. Alongside poetry and criticism, Dana has a strong interest in music: writing two opera libretti and criticising classical music for *San Francisco* magazine. Dana Gioia is the Judge Widney Professor of Poetry and Public Culture at the University of Southern California, and 2010 he received the Laetare Medal, marking him as someone “whose genius has ennobled the arts”.

At The Crossroads

Here are the crossroads where old women come
Under the rising moon to cast their spells,
And where young lovers meet to argue out
The secret terms of their surrender.

It is a place that everyone sees differently—
The salesman scouting, soldiers tramping home,
The scholar napping by the riverbank
While someone else’s fortune drifts downstream,

But if you stand at crossroads long enough,
You’ll see most of the world come stumbling by--
Businessmen, preachers, cats--all going somewhere,
Even the Devil striking up a deal.

I used to wonder if they ever got there.

Be careful here in choosing where to turn.

You learn a lot by staying in one place

But never how the story truly ends.

JULIAN MAY

About the Author: Julian May grew up in Cornwall. He has published one collection 'The Earliest Memory' (Peterloo). He is a radio producer, making documentaries, features and arts programmes for the BBC. Julian has worked with Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and Dana Gioia in the past. He is interested in how radio can be a medium for poetry, rather than merely a vessel for it. Julian recently finished a programme on Yeats, and is producing a programme about the 600th Anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt this autumn.

A Gale of Wind in Winter

That night the wind
stripped the last leaves
from our mulberry tree,
deft as a chef with sprigs of rosemary.

The house rattled and, uneasy -
our ancient chimney pots just feet,
a sliver of slate, from where the boys
kept on, strangely, sleeping -
I peered west through the flak
of rain, and whispered, "Incoming."

Was it perhaps like this?
Not silent, starlit and profound:
the streaming houseless shivering,
fearful, grateful, as the restive beasts,
snorting, pawed the ground

which a kind, impatient stranger
strew with fresh straw, an armful of hay
sweetly pillowing the manger.
Then left them, cursing,
struggling to secure
the slamming stable door.

First Light

Such stillness: the only movement
the brightening of light as the sun
rises; the heaving of my breathing;
my heart hopping, still.

But, no, a faint flicker in the sycamore,
the black tips of the ash tree waver.
Then, like gravel flung by a child,
starlings hurl themselves across the sky.
Grey cloud steams in from the sea.
A rook tunnels deep, deeper, until it disappears

into the morning. A single leaf falls, twisting,
though a drop of water clings on to the eave
and I look for the resurrection of the wren.

Trees, Speaking

The trees lick this October sky with flames.

They dazzle. As I shut my eyes
fear flares: one day I will go blind
never see again the burning leaves

shimmering in the wind. So I resolve
to listen, and learn trees by their voices.
That easy sussuration is the poplars;
a lime tree, flicking briskly through its pages.

The gingko flutters silken fans
while, like a happy man, the chestnut rubs its hands.
An old ash runs its fingers through its hair;
pines share children's secrets in a whisper, and fall silent.

Could I ever know the oak by its low moan?
Will the sighing of the maple light a vision I'll remember
as, all ears, I lean sightless beneath them,
when winter has blown out their dying embers?

Physical Geography

Long, shallow, narrow lakes

- formed by the slow solution of limestone.

Terminal moraine

- piled by the bulldozing blade of a glacier.

Ria

- flooded river valley ushering the sea inland.

Beautiful, heartless landscapes, engineered
before human imagining.

I scan them all like site plans, name parts and processes:

the hanging valley, machair, the armchair
hollow of the cwm, the drumlin's upturned spoon.

Thirty thousand feet above America, at last
seeing for the first time an ox bow lake,

I can't but point, excitedly explain
the accumulation of silt, erosion, separation, then the river moving on.

As night falls on this crescent of water, that meander;
they echo the cold moon, the distant earth,

this father and his daughter

KAYO CHINGONYI

About the Author: Kayo Chingonyi was born in Zambia in 1987, moving to the UK in 1993. He works as a writer, events producer, and creative writing tutor. His poems have been published in a range of magazines and anthologies including *Poetry Review*, *Magma*, *Wasafiri*, *The Best British Poetry 2011 and 2013*, *The Salt Book of Younger Poets*, *Out Of Bounds*, *The World Record*, and in a debut pamphlet entitled *Some Bright Elegance*. Kayo teaches in the Writing School at Kingston University and in the Drama, Dance, and Speech Department at City Lit. Kayo's work displays an astute understanding of the spoken word, no doubt influenced by his experience as an MC.

The colour of James Brown's Scream

I have known you by many names
but today, you are Larry Levan,
your hand on the platter, in the smoky
room of a Garage regular's memory.
You are keeping When Dove's Cry
in time, as you swing your hips,
and sweat drips from your hair
the colour of James Brown's scream.
King of King Street, we are still moving
to the same sound, though some
of us don't know it is your grave
we dance on, cutting shapes,
machismo lost to the beat
—every road man is a sweetboy
if the DJ plays Heartbroken
at just the right time for these jaded feet.

Teach us to shape-shift, O Legba,
you must know I'd know your customary
shuffle, that phantom limp, anywhere;
that I see your hand in the motion
of a couple, middle of the floor,
sliding quick and slick as a skin- fade
by the hand of a Puerto Rican clipper-man
who wields a cutthroat like a paintbrush.
Let us become like them, a moving ode
to sweat, ordering beer in a corporeal
language from a barman who replies
by sweeping his arms in an arc,
Willy Ninja style, to fix a drink our lips
will yearn for, a taste we've been
trying to recreate ever since.

For those who wait till the moment has passed

You come into your own at train stations,
after the fact, in the safe distance
afforded those who remain behind
stalled beside the point of action;
brave enough to speak once
the chances of failure, and success, recede:

I was the man in bound's-tooth

shoes you sat next to on the over-

ground to Richmond at 2:05 on June

22nd, you wore a sundress and Ray Bans,

rimmed the shade of your lipstick. Drink?

So many pages given over to this yen
we have for laying ourselves open,
so long as it won't end in brokenness.

What you have to say of hope, hinges
within the particular details: Flight 551
from Mexico, Seat 18 C, the tallest
of the Polish contingent, a palpable
frisson in the queue at baggage claim.
You know an unbidden compliment
for what it is. You can be distinguished
from your opportunist counterparts

by your tendency to qualify. Where
brasher paramours, drunk naturally,
might blurt, you opt for poise:

Since what works in a film

tends to fall flat in print, I don't

usually do this, but I was afraid

you'd live your life not knowing

what I'd give to know your name.

JANE DRAYCOTT

About the Author: Jane Draycott is a UK-based poet with a particular interest in sound art and collaborative work. Her latest collection **Over** was shortlisted for the 2009 TS Eliot Prize. Nominated three times for the Forward Prize for Poetry, her first two full collections **Prince Rupert's Drop** and **The Night Tree** were both Poetry Book Society Recommendations. Her translation of the 14th century dream-vision **Pearl** (2011), is a Poetry Book Society Recommended Translation and was a Stephen Spender Prize-winner. Jane's audio work with Elizabeth James has won several awards. With the British Film Institute she was a contributor to the *Essentially British* project (2007) and Simon Barraclough's *Psycho Poetica* (2010) and *Poets on Pasolini: A New Decameron* (2013). Other collaborative work includes **Christina the Astonishing** (with Peter Hay and Lesley Saunders) and **Tideway**, a sequence of poems about London's river (with paintings by Peter Hay) written while in-residence at the **River & Rowing Museum**, as well as a collection **No Theatre**. Nominated as one of the Poetry Book Society's **Next Generation** poets in 2004, Jane is Senior Course Tutor on Oxford University's MSt in Creative Writing and tutor in the Dept of English and Creative Writing at the University of Lancaster. She was winner of the 2014 Hippocrates International Prize for Poetry and Medicine.

Le Lac

for Caroline

Right now I'm at my lake and you
are at yours. Everyone knows
about lakes with villages in them
including the church - if I dived
like Beowulf into the mere, down
through the cellars and ice-houses,
beneath stalactites called the cathedral,
the crypt, the green chapel, could I
surface in your lake, see you there
reading, sipping your beer in the sun

on the underside of the world?
People have whole lake-worlds
in their head. Like the boy who lay
with his small face bent to the edge
of the lake near the palace trying
to glimpse the children at the bottom.
I could have told him, just keep
swimming with your eyes, past
the mouth of the dreadful cave,
don't take them off the water.

Beast

Lying among leaf-fall he lifts the logs or carcasses,
presses them towards the sky where happiness
is. What's on his mind is metamorphosis,
himself transfigured, smaller creatures fearless
crawling between his paws, his muscle mass
a fortress, Castle Tenderness, as his roar is.

Weakness is in the polished stream he sees
like something forgotten, trying to be remembered is.
Meanwhile seasons. Night itself approaches:
something foreign, something from the forest,
snow-fall melting on his pelt, such is
the sight that Beauty lifting the door-latch catches.

The Hill above Harlech: William Nicholson 1917

*No person shall...make any photograph, sketch, plan, model
or other representation within any area...*

Defence of the Realm Act, Jan 1916

The landscape was on the radio. It was early days
transmitting like that, but some things came through -
the fields, the shine of the slate rooves after the rain.
The artist added his voice: a map was the last thing
he'd wanted to make from the smoke near the cottages
crouched by the wood, the light the colour of tin.
But it was all just words. He'd wanted to show how the sky
was everything - the long roads, the pandemonium
and the lulls in the pandemonium, a complete guide.

Atlas

All day he waited in the corner of the top field
where the signal was strongest. Beetles
and ladybirds led their lives round his feet.
Celandines, poppies, Michaelmas, snow.
Gone for a season, they'd said. He looked
through binoculars west across the dry-stone
boundaries of central America, the reefs,
the volcanoes and fruit trees, straining to see
the island where everyone went barefoot.

He wanted to ask, are there snakes
in the orchard? Do strangers come by on the path,
are you frightened at night? At the end of the day
he saw them, the sky's door half-open, lit up
over Marriot's Wood like fire on a beach.
He'd taught them to turn the big map
underworld up and it still be the Earth.
Looking back at the house he could see that even
the roof he'd raised for them all was a boat.

Where is Your Banksman?

So often you wait in the cab of the excavator
and he's nowhere to be seen, head down
in his copy of 'Aerial News'. *The sky's the future*
he says and that's where he is now, missing again

gone hang-gliding, abseiling from skyscrapers,
soaring from the cliff at the top of the world,
Captain Marvellous. *Up there you feel more alive*, he says,
more human - take it on trust - *closer to God*.

It's always sunny in the stratosphere, but what use
is high-wire walking when help is needed here on the ground?
You miss him though you never really saw his face
under the helmet, watched only for his magician's hands.

The earth lies opened up in front of you, clay and stone.
Tomorrow he'll return like Marco Polo to give
the world detailed account of all the lands he's seen
invisible to you. How much of it can you believe?

ANDREW J. NEWELL

About the Author: Andrew J. Newell is a poet and writer. While currently immersed in writing his first full collection of poetry, he is also working in partnership with both the English Department and Institute of Irish Studies at the University of Liverpool to create the 'Ulysses Project': an online project aimed at presenting readers with new and innovative ways of approaching James Joyce's novel, *Ulysses*. Andrew was born in rural Nottinghamshire, where he would spend the first eighteen years of his life before moving to Liverpool, to read English Literature at the University of Liverpool. Andrew is twenty-two: he is fond of church interiors, the month of September, and the first hoarfrost.

Notes on 4th October 2014

No. 49,566

The weekend starts here with your complete Saturday package

Beverley Turner,

Graham Norton,

Hannah Betts

And Victoria Moore'

'Home is where the heels are'

Now Rachael's tears of Rama ran at halting

paces, down

to water-scarred cedar sills

and through veined glass these

streets of rain,

brief stylites, rising, falling

splashes to splashes

drawn back by spinning teabags on

lengths of white string, and earthy

stains creeping up through the twine,

The mildewed rim,

The rings on the table,
The paper lying in state;
Orange pictures strangely from the blackened folds

Notes on a tree.

The tree begins there
to populate, to occupy white spaces

the creases where soil knew bark
moist and dry and mingling

a solemn congress of skins
to climb in rivulets and scars

and the damp-dry smell of moments
borne outward by flesh on flesh on

flesh and hands
raised in silent supplication

you draw your veil, murmuring
against the moving firmament

the sky passes between
your living bones. And you are a tree.

KENNETH STEVEN

About the Author: Born in Glasgow in 1968, Kenneth Steven moved to Highland Perthshire during his schooldays. He also spent a spell in Norway, teaching and writing, and translating from both Norwegian and Sami. Kenneth is widely published, with his poetry novels and children's writing all seeing print runs. his collections of poems include *A Song Among the Stones* (2012), *Evensong* (2011), *Island: Collected Poems* (2009), *Making the Known World New* (2009), and *Iona* (2000). His translation of Lars Saabye Christensen's *Half Brother* was a finalist for the 2004 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize.

Kingfisher

My father's game:

to see a hundred different birds each May

(mostly little brown things

disguised by bushes, hidden

somewhere deep in trees.)

It meant uncurling from my bed at six

and staggering down into the cold

to pad through woods, by old canals

for cloth-soft flights of owls

and sudden splutterings of wrens.

That morning I thumped the path along

a stream that trickled liquid treacle,

glinted by a smear of sun.

I wanted nothing more than going home,

the warmth of burrowed sleep.

And then, an electric bolt of blue
flickering a single inch above that sump –
the wings spread out, a living jewel's glide,
until solidified, it turned into a frozen bit of sky
atop a broken post.

I stood, still looking,
unable to believe what I had seen;
my father turned to watch,
to see all that I had become –
marvelling, rejoicing, at something new.

Mistletoe

We hushed across the field, carrying tall sticks,
Huddled in our coats and scarves and gloves.

December and the only colour grey;
Somewhere the river silent in the trees.

We crossed a crackling of winter,
A film that broke beneath our feet.

A little muffled snowball of a moon
Small and useless in the padded sky.

We reached up into the ghosts of trees
For sprigs of mistletoe, and clipped them one by one –

(These wheels of leaves and berries,
Weird where they should not be).

They fluttered down to the ground
The berries beads of ice, a milky glimmering.

We gathered them and did not speak,
As though our work was strange and secret

Like ancients in a pagan land
Who brought a magic back.

After Culloden

The wounded wandered home in Gaelic
by rivers and back roads;
all they had fought for
unsure and broken.

How long before they saw
their language and their land
like a limb that's tied too tight,
still there but dying all the time.

Or like a wildcat caught at last
not killed, but tamed;
de-clawed, castrated –
then stroked and told to purr.

After Winter

Sometimes we cannot see the stars;
The dark is down and holds us bleak and lost.
Sometimes all that we can do is wait,
For believing's just too big and too alone.

Until a snowdrop pushes up the sky
And suddenly the snow is only slush;
The winter no more than a waiting for the sound
Of geese in thousands overhead.

Let It Be A Garden

unopened into light
the rose gathering her warmth
to sun the silence and to still
this step we bring inside –
our loudness and our doubt;
to down the noise of all our talk
and be inside a quiet for a time,
to learn what quiet means and heals –
to take it back at last outside
and break small pieces for the ones
who have not heard or held
what gift was ours

For Wendy

Not everything can be a happy ending,
Life is just too long for that –
The truth is that fiction often lies.
The hero slays the dragon certainly,
But other dragons lurk beyond the page:
The princess has a mother. The castle leaks.
No money in the world can buy a life
That's out of reach of dark.
We would not notice sunlight were it not
For all the cloud that comes before.
Perhaps our happy endings are these things:
Fresh bread, a smile instead of wrath,
The bringing in of logs to make a fire
The coming of the morning after storm.

TOM PICKARD

About the Author: One of the leading figures of the British poetry revival, Tom Pickard grew up in Cowgate, Newcastle, leaving school at 14. He then managed Morden Tower, a poetry centre on a piece of medieval wall. His talent was fostered by the English poet Basil Bunting, who helped him develop his writing during periods of unemployment. Tom edited several magazines and came into contact with American poets and the beat movement. Allen Ginsburg was a notable fan. In the 70s, Tom had television plays produced, and moved to London where he produced films and documentaries. He later moved to Poland with his wife during Solidarność movement. Tom's writing has always been informed by the songs and speech of Britain, perhaps resulting in his musical work, writing the libretto *Ballad of Jamie Allen* (a finalist for the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award) and working with several musicians, including Paul McCartney.

syncopation

so, she said,
stripped
and slipping into bed,
do you have a copy
of Machiavelli's
The Prince,
then?

but what she craved
was rock hard,
ready to roll

he flopped across a soft lob

she pounced

a cat

at a carpet scratch

and blew him to insomnia

by faithless

how would she be

with the Goldberg Variations?

the Late quartets?

Bartok's but-offs?

bebop?

Stravinsky?

Scriabin's whole

exploding atonal hole? John

Cage?

late start

late start
and the day
behind blinds
begun

shadows
on a distant hill
a passing car

the phone rings
am I in?

Wonga Wonga land

Doctor Gobbles with his jowly wobbles
wants to stop the lowly jobless quaffing
from his golden goblets

once they bled themselves for a cure
now they only bleed the poor.

the day Neil Armstrong died

I dreamt I wrote a poem
about a day with you in August
so easy and unaccomplished
I forgot it when I woke

and made no effort to recall
until the kettle boiled,
and I remembered
how complex easy is

New Year's Day 2010

the blizzards blown out
snow blowers go below
sun white Watch Hill

a growking raven groaks
whatcheer?
my first-foot flying past.

Homage

a stripper strokes the
slope of her hip; Hokusai
painting mount Fuji.

For Bob

The whole sweep
of the day.

If I were Creeley
I'd know what I meant
and make it a poem
but I'm not
and I don't
and I have

From an old song.

*Do not ask, I cannot tell
What between us fell
When she said she would not dwell
In the heather on the fell
Beneath the down upon my bed
And all the words she said.*

*I'd rather be an old stairwell
And feel the weary tread
Than be an unsprung mattress
On your old cold bed.*

*I saw the midnight waters rise
The colour of her eyes.*

JOEL PEARCE

About the Author: Joel is a young, south Oxfordshire writer living in Liverpool. He has been writing prolifically for many years, and has finished many collections of poetry, short stories, plays, and, even, a novel ('Fruitless Endeavours & Beautiful Teenage Girls'). One his plays 'Why Are You So Fit?' has appeared in in another magazine. He is now working on a slew of spoken word pieces.

Life in the Home Counties

By Joel Pearce

I have sought nonsense merely for unreality's sake;
believed in nothing just to dance all the more free;
the silhouette of an eternal tree splayed across Oxfordshirian fields and all and everything
speaks sinisterly to me; comfortless, craven;
my trainers are tattered and my hands stained with tobacco smoke;
I love you Mother, Father, and Sister.

A distance started to form: at first an obviously visual phenomenon
separating me from Pan incrementally;
the Autumn leaves seemed beautiful the day he told me his Granddad died;
the rolling hillsides of quintessential England;
after three years we're still sitting on a picnic blanket and wailing witlessly
my cheery companion and forever friend.

And limbs grew out of my head to chums gormless, unbelieving eyes,
snooker balls morphing into golf balls as you rest the cue on the table,
cheeks chewed through and tongues gnawed off;
I guess this is the end;
kaleidoscopic eyes growling from the gutter;
half-Italian girls making dubious emotional pleas.

Peace, peace: two feet tinder box rub 'em and get warmth
so spiritual and satisfying even if she does have the soul of a wart;
oh, I'm not such a brute, she's just a bloody baleful bitch;
I may be the most intelligent boy to walk this Earth;
the weeping and weeping and weeping digested as I stand caked in cow shit
smoking another cigarette.

'They're selling England by the pound and I'm repressing my libido
'else I'll be doing it with the major's daughter;

let me march through you again, plunder what I can, ageless Pan;
two hours sleep on a mate's sofa and I've got bloody tachycardia;
the rain rippling Old Father Thames excuse the trite metaphor
all I know is: I don't love her.

England, England, England: I'm not a patriot anymore;
the shrouded shrubs and bramble leaves pricking me in the dark on a walk home;
the impossibility of catching consecutive buses;
the angst felt on a November's night lost in England's suburbia
with a jester whose lost his touch.

The unheard reverberations of the home counties;
cavaliers of pungent lager and slapstick erudition;
he sniffed his way through Schopenhauer's aphorisms with heady glee;
Raynaud's Disease and his hands immovable and the pudding pud pud of the bloody rain;
the rolling paper soaked, the lighter's flame blown out;
the sickly sallies of nostalgia.

Happiness nevertheless: never worth much unless there's a girl or two about;
unseeing and unmoving and I've donned my Harrington jacket for the third time this week
hoping to communicate the ineffable after sinking enough of this stuff;
wakened at nine on a Sunday morning for a jaunt down to the local newsagent's
to laugh at the iridescent redness of an old man's shoes;
muddying my Primark socks just to tell you I love you.

.

JORDAN DOBBINS

About the Author: Jordan Dobbins has recently graduated from the University of Liverpool, where he read English Literature. His interests are broad, ranging from early Twentieth Century Works to contemporary popular art. At the time of publication he is forming the foundation for a first collection of poetry. He plans to complete a Masters in Twentieth Century Literature in the upcoming academic year.

Touching Moon

Come to meet me without words.

A communion. Raw flesh rhythmred red.
Salt water and anchored deep.
Heavy deep lynched in time.
Writhing in a rhythmred bulge.
Mooning to a kind of death.
Eye the swells. Eye horizon.
Eye the tight line. Eye the noose.
Remain in communion.
Submerge against violent whiteness.
Death as a kind of rhythm.
Deep saltiness anchored in water.
Suspended in communion.
Submerge.
And rebaptise. And rebirth countless times. And resurface recoiling.
Not to know time.
To know rhythm. Without horizon.
Rhythm manifest in raw red flesh.
Rhythm tightening and tightening and.

What is after violence?
To look backward behind.
Calmness and it's finish
lurking forbidden
backward behind.

there is an echo of myself
behind myself
moving backward
transformed unknown symbol
caught in a pure violence

nailed to the strong movement
flogged on the shallows
echo upon echo
crawling up the beach

like a burden
carried by a silence

Ian Cai Mercer

About the Author: Ian writes whilst working for an afterschool club in Chester. He has produced many poems, hiking tales and stories and scripts, which can be found at his blog: <http://iancaimercer.wordpress.com>. Ian also writes Mr. Tiglet's Travels, a children's story about using a Tiger puppet. His Storysite has tales ranging from Pirateez, the Woozies to the Tiglet Show and Infinite Whoniverses. His interests include science fiction, fantasy and thrillers. Ian is currently endeavouring have one of his projects commissioned and to contribute to existing programmes.

A RIOT IN THE LIBRARY

Chanelle loved kids. But twenty of them running riot around the Library was too much, even for her. It was noisy, chaotic and there was an accident just waiting to happen.

Any second now, she thought as she looked round.

She had lost control; it was as simple as that. She had chosen an easy exercise but it had gotten out of hand. She regretted trying it now.

She sighed as she ran a nervous hand through her hair. All they had to do was march once round the Children's area, then

sit back down where she was sitting on a chair near the computers. Just part of the story, which was all it was supposed to be.

She had noticed several of them getting restless, which was why she had timed the march for them to get up and get rid of some excess energy, which had been a fatal mistake.

"Kids". She shouted timidly, like a frightened mouse stuck in a biscuit tin with a herd of terrified elephants all shrieking and stomping all around it.

None of them paid her the slightest bit of notice, of course. Little Ethan was the

ringleader. He was getting the others to chase him. If she could somehow catch his attention, then maybe the others would follow his lead.

Channelle sighed again. If only Eleanor or Tarina were here. But there was no one else available to help this week. All the parents were having their meeting upstairs, so it was only a matter of time before someone came to see what the noise was. She had to regain control of the situation, fast.

“Ethan, Ethan.” She called to him. He stopped and looked over, but one of the girls whooped with joy as she caught him. The others gathered round and they all laughed with glee. Channelle had to stop herself from grinning at the sight of all these children just enjoying themselves. She smiled and beckoned to Ethan, who dutifully came back over and sat down. The others followed his lead and they all sat down and waited for her to finish the story.

Channelle was astounded at this sudden transformation. What had moments ago been a full scale riot of manic children

running and chasing had become, in a heartbeat, a quiet group of little Angels all waiting for her to tell them what to do next.

She was overwhelmed and grinned at the lot of them, relieved there had not been any accidents after all.

She picked up the storybook off the floor and quickly found the place she had gotten to before she had dropped it.

“Now when the Elephants had stopped marching.” She said to them in her storytelling voice. “The King of the Jungle thanked them for finding his lost crown. And they had a wonderful party, with lots and lots of food.”

“Like Jelly?” Ethan suddenly blurted.

“And cake?” A little girl called Stacy asked.

“And Ice Cream!” another girl cried out.

The entire group waited in anticipation as Channelle nodded. “Yes Ethan, there was lots of Jelly, and ice cream and cake and chocolate and fruit and everything!” she finished as they all oo-ed and aah-ed like a

wide-eyed chorus. This was incredible; they were back to the normal, well-behaved group of children that came every week to the storytelling sessions.

“Did you enjoy that?” She asked. They all nodded eagerly and said yes. “Well then, what would you like to sing?”

Ethan’s hand shot up like a rocket. “Jelly on a plate!” He called out. The others clapped and nodded their heads in agreement.

So they sang their favourite nursery rhymes and did the actions. Jelly on a plate/Row your boat/Heads shoulders knees and toes, then finished with a game of Sleeping Lions, which Stacy won.

Channelle checked her watch. The parents meeting should have finished five minutes ago, but there was no sign of any of them. She had to think of something quickly to stop another riot breaking out. Ethan was getting restless and the others were beginning to follow his lead again.

She had a flash of inspiration. She got up off her chair and knelt down next to the storytelling box. She felt the children’s curious gaze’s on her back and smiled. They would love this. Why she had never thought of this before when they were running round, she would never know. Whoever had included these things in the box was a genius.

She stood slowly back up, still with her back to the children. “Oh Hello, Sammy.” She said as she raised her hand with the glove puppet on over her shoulder to wave at the children. They squealed with delight and waved at the cute little Red Squirrel waving at them. Channelle turned round and sat back down, stroking Sammy’s head with her other hand.

“You remember Sammy the Squirrel?” She asked them. Clearly they did as they all took turns getting up and stroking Sammy and shaking his tiny paw before sitting back down again.

Somehow this piece of material over her hand had mesmerised every single child with

wide-eyed wonder. She used Sammy to tell a couple of stories and explained how rare red squirrels were while greys were much more common.

A hand shot up, so Channelle let the girl, Erin, one of the triplets, stand up and ask a question.

“Yes Erin?” She said.

Little Erin was the quiet one of the three. Her two brothers, Aron and Callum were usually boisterous and had actually been the loudest when they were running round in the mini-riot before. So whenever she said anything, she fidgeted with her hair or sucked her thumb, which she was not doing at the moment, thankfully.

“My Mummy says that Grey Squirrels eat everything and are nasty to the red ones.” She whispered in such a quiet voice that Channelle had to strain her ears to catch all of it.

“Yes, that’s right Erin, thank you.” Channelle told her, not completely sure if that was correct. Erin was well chuffed with

herself and sat down between her brothers who were also pleased.

Channelle had the group say good bye to Sammy and thought about winding the session down as she put the puppet back in the box. ‘Putting Sammy to bed’ was the way she had explained it to the children.

She glanced over to the back of the room to see that her boss, Gwen had sneaked in and was watching the group. Channelle felt a pang of guilt as she realised she must have seen her lose control earlier on one of the security cameras dotted around the Library. Hoping she was not going to get into trouble, she waved briefly. Gwen waved back, then pointed to the clock on the wall and held up three fingers. Channelle nodded in understanding. She had to keep the children occupied for at least another three minutes then.

There was something else in the box that would have the same effect on the children as Sammy the Squirrel. She reached in and brought out a gleaming white Polar Bear

teddy and held it up on her lap for all of them to see.

“Look boys and girls, it’s Pat the Polar Bear. He’s come down all the way from the North Pole. Who’s going to say hello?”

A clamour arose as the children shot up their hands to say hello. Channelle handed the bear round so each of them could stroke it, though Ethan pulled its nose and ears. They all loved it, so Channelle thought it would be good to have Pat back for another session.

Then all the parents wandered in from upstairs and the children hugged and greeted them as if they had not seen them all day. The triplets Mother came up to Channelle and asked if they had behaved themselves.

“They’ve been fine.” Channelle reassured her. Erin proudly told her about telling everyone about Squirrels as they left.

Ethan wanted to take Pat the Polar Bear home with him, but became upset when his mum said no. Channelle knelt down next to him and told him he could hold the bear

next week if he wanted to. He brightened up and nodded, then told his mum he had led the others marching around the room.

“Oh, marching was it? Good, I thought it sounded like a riot!”

Channelle laughed. “It was just a bit of fun, wasn’t it Ethan? I just sent the Elephants off to find the crown for the King that’s all.” Ethan’s Mum laughed as she left. Gwen came over and helped tidy up.

“Well, that was an interesting session Channelle.” She commented. “Though I think the marching could’ve been toned down a bit. But, you handled it very well, I thought.”

“Cheers Gwen.” Channelle replied, relieved her ordeal was over.

Gwen smiled. “I’ll make sure there’ll be at least three people from now on, which is what it should be for that number of children. Oh, by the way. How would you feel about taking the youth readers group with Steph on Monday night?”

Channelle thought about it for a few moments. “Should be fun.” She replied, eager for the next challenge. It got her away from stacking books onto shelves for a couple of hours anyway.

She smiled as she figured that if she could cope with a group of children running riot, then perhaps she could handle just about anything!

Daisy March April May

About the Author: Daisy is a veterinary medicine student with a penchant for charity shop jumpers and Ted Baker handbags. When she isn't studying, she's usually writing, baking, attempting to run, or selflessly playing her part in keeping Liverpool's many coffee houses in business. She learned to ride a unicycle before she learned to ride a bike, speaks both Welsh and Italian sufficiently poorly to embarrass both nations, and once lived for a year without electricity. In the future she hopes to specialise in exotic species medicine, publish at least one passable novel, work towards a private pilot's license, and successfully go a full year without being mistaken for a calendar.

Poem: Those Days

Those days, we didn't care about the rain,
Mud splattered by murky puddles shattered
In passing. We'd lift our small feet higher
Welly clad, and full of welly we were
My fierce brigade of bright feathered bandits:
Leaf clad like lace, and eyes bright with marvel
Three boys and a girl – in coats, hats, gloves, scarves
Four nestlings blood bound, and me the youngest.

All months meld with years, eventually
And with our feet – less small now – distance bred
Like rabbits it was. Slow at first and then
Uncatchable -you turned away from me
To paths less bright, minds less sharp, lives less lived -

To dark and dangerous desires; And oh,
Those leaves left unturned, those words left unsaid
And I would wait at home. Me, the youngest.

Time reared resentments, jealousies, blood bound
Blood bound?! How dare you throw that in my face
Like duty! I've had enough of duty
Blood bound or no. It's time you stood upon
Your own two feet. Drunkard! Halfwit! User!
Leave me be! To live a life less tangled,
Seeking solace from how we all grew up
And forgot our fairy tales.

ALISON BRACKERBURY

About the Author: Born in Lincolnshire in 1953, and attended St Hugh's College, Oxford. Until her retirement in 2012 Alison worked in her family's metal finish business. She is an incredibly proficient and talented poet with 11 published collections of poetry, the most recent of which was *Then*, published in 2013 by Carcanet. Alison has an upcoming collection due to be published by Carcanet in March 2016, inspired by the beauty of William Smith's maps. In 1987 she was given the Eric Gregory Award, to be followed ten years later by the Cholmondeley Award.

The gamekeeper's wife

The village noted clean washing.

Where did the keeper go?

Under the hawthorns hung his gibbet,

strands of wire to show

shot crows, dulled magpies, squirrels' plumes.

Torn weasels danced below.

When we took the gamekeeper's house,

I learned he had a wife.

I knew women named for flowers.

Rose, Daisy, no man's wife,

kept house for brothers, grim with pills

trudged past me, shut from life.

Her house lay half a mile from lights,

I never saw her face.

The cobwebs held a reeking soot.

They heated the whole place

with paraffin. We tried it once,

each flame a fierce blue taste.

Did the house draughts consume us?

Books cracked me, then instead

I found a boy. Father, retired,

took briefly to his bed.

My mother read there, undisturbed.

Wisely, my sister said

they bought a bungalow. No well

in grass breathed apples' rot.

No rose from an old garden turned

white petals apricot,

spared by the keeper's childless wife

one warm hour, while he shot.

February 26th

Though I read 'Notes on Stars',

yet I always forget

the planet, or comet,

until my blank noon.

But our milkman saved me.

I saw on the dawn's step

the milk, then high Venus,

by her crescent moon.

They were a white iris,
as crisp as an eyelash,
a slim curve, a great blaze,
taut blue that too soon
is cars, is dulled daylight.
Look quick, you may catch them,
old Venus, though faded,
her smudged crescent moon.

The Irish busker

(for Michael Donaghy, who played by ear)

The silver tube sings at her lips.
There is no note more pure, more strange.
But darkness slips
down my warm clothes, my carriers' loot,

for this is death, for now, no spring,
no pulse of star, wind's blustering,
will echo back your battered flute.

The day of the fair

But then, at noon, the rain did clear.

So by a hut, a garden shed,
a café in a London square

opened, like mushrooms, to the light.

Its owner pointed to the cakes.

Banana bread slid on our plates.

It was a Saturday, and most

had travelled far to reach the hall,

its book fair. But now truant, blessed,

they perched upon hard wood and smiled

in flocks of sun. Upon dried grass

pigeons, plump grey leaves, flopped in piles.

It was September, just the time

students enrol, fresh protests march.

Then I remembered the square's name.

A boy, named Kevin, ran, then tried

to dodge the surge of mounted police.

Only the birds know how he died.

For patience, blood, raw shouting won
this lull, where we bask, pigeons sleep,
in Red Lion Square's September sun.

Wool-gathering

My skin cannot bear it. Nettles
would whip as red and sore.
Yet I purloined your College scarf,
curled in its coils for warmth.

I took the last blue jumper
which my bored mother made.
In its thin ribs, worn by soap's rubs,
I galloped into gales.

I watched my tall uncle shear fleece
(his father guided, stooped).
It flowed like scoops of heavy cream
no needle clicked or looped.

Let old wool's wisps, where wire wears thin,
snag in my soul- But not my skin.

He appeals for lost manuscripts

You hoped that you would find them.
But long ago, unknown,
they whispered up a chimney.
Now we must write our own.

Torquay by train

At seven-twelve, first gulls hung out their line.
At eight-fourteen, the starling cloud blew on.
Eight-fifty. I leaned to see a heron.
You hit the carriage glass at half-past nine.

You echoed the high station with your cold.
Past the Promenade's last dip you came,
till pavement's seaweed slithered with your name.
You killed the bladderwrack in gouts of gold.

From hotel chairs, far deeper than at home,
I watched dogs nose you, children shuffle pools.
But though your edge ran clear, troughs, oily blue,

I sensed that you were sulking, would not come.

Never explained, blind noise broke over us.

Hotel's P.A.? A rescue throbbing through,
great blades of sound? Someone tugged open doors,
we burst past the wet glass. We came to you.

On the train from Stroud

It is late summer. It is done.

But so much work! Did it go well?

Now I am almost there.

Here are great hedges, which hunters will leap.

Here are the fields, hacked bare.

Donna Summer

The woman with the airy voice is dead.

How could she hold those notes so high, so long?

I do not know if I should mourn her death,
or float, a loose pearl, strung along her song.

