

THE
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VERITY SPOTT, ULYSES RAZO, LUCY CARLESS, ROBIN PURVES,
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Harriet Rose and Kate Frances, eds. *The New Cambridge Chapbook Review*
(Issue 1, Winter 2024–25)

We are not feeling the same thing and
We are not feeling it at the same time.
— Brecht

The New Cambridge Chapbook Review is a welcome new publication, promising green shoots of improvised, critical, and cursory reflection on small press poetry. The editorial tone is intimate and dedicated. The journal is cared for and carefully assembled, its objecthood an homage to, and example of, the labour of necessity that marks the most lasting publications of its kind. Its appearance is both auspicious and risky. It appears at a moment when no real review culture in the small press poetry scene exists, because for many years no-one has really wanted one. Such a culture would amount to the frank exchange and circulation of readings of each other's work in the at-least partial cognisance of an underlying order of communal trust as the condition of that exchange, a trust more powerful for being unspoken, and thus shorn of the anxiety over unconscious or implied bad faith that tends to plague our critical inquiry. Gone is the shit sandwich: what we have now are two slices of warmed-over sourdough.

We are all familiar with the usual fare. The time-worn timbres of effusive gratitude and the funded language of refusal are funnelled into a few lines of blurb-like solidarity. The blurb form, meanwhile, has attained a kind of review-like hue by retrospective sleight of hand, because its delivery of paraphrased vacuity now feels utterly of a piece with the most popular mechanisms of circulation on social media. Without a critical imperative realised upon a tacit appreciation of the review as a comedy of contestation — rather than an appreciative exposition — the review that challenges the poetry's choice of objects and its basic assumptions risks succumbing to the blob of mutual celebration, the *like for like* that is inimical to the working through of poems received, read, and lived with.

The stakes for the Review are thus high. These thoughts are offered in companionship with its stated aim of providing 'a space for critical discussion of, and enthusiasm for,' new small press poetry. They are offered in the hope of many issues to come. If this response seems hasty, let its prematurity be read in the spirit of urgency, a spirit I think is shared by the Review and its contributors, most of whose enthusiasm positively breathes through the journal's enticingly cut pages with a shared demand for the life increased by poetry. In Issue 1, enthusiasm is certainly in the ascendent.

The affirmative turn in small press reviews of the last fifteen years (or so) is partly a function of the scale of the endeavour. Everyone knows each other, or feels like they

do, or wants to be known (who wouldn't), and this makes it difficult to say negative things about each other's work. There is an obvious upshot to this situation. Older poets worth reading are revered for their basically life-preserving powers and younger contemporaries are given a step-up into the authenticity of the elder by a dependable glossing. Where basic political attitudes are shared, it seems fundamental that the public reception of poetry should reflect shared struggles, even where private misgivings creep in.

But the contestation of expression need not entail the abandonment of solidarity with the source of expression. In the most hopeful of cases, it should encourage and embolden that source. It should be possible to commit to paper what I've called a comedy of contestation because the disproportion between the stakes within the small press scene, which are high, and the relative value of those stakes vis-à-vis the culture at large, which couldn't be higher, lends itself to endless opportunities to turn private misgivings into public gifts. Because most of life is made up of unadulterated dogshit, poetry written by our friends tends to seem unaccountably beautiful. When poetry is wonderful, it is incumbent upon poets to adulterate their wonder. This is not a plea for harm, to begrudge anyone a good time, or for some sadistic exfoliation of misery, but for reflexive attention to the contemporary to include in its measurement of style something like a scepticism of the purity of endeavour.

John Wilkinson's claim that 'books [by Andrea Brady and Andrew Spragg] confirm the present need to construct a holding space for love and for hospitality' is indicative of the Review's maturational environment. Different versions and intensities of this claim populate Issue 1, and they are never more compelling than in their penultimate digressions before the final, aching swerve. Owen Brakspear's erotetic worrying of his song of community and Redmond Kerr's frustration with J. H. Prynne's hideousness are exemplary in this regard. Most reviews, whether brief notices or extended treatments, revel in the details of close textual attention. The love and hospitality that Wilkinson finds in Brady and Spragg are evoked across the issue, in various communal, cooperative, and optative adumbrations of poetical possibility. Some reviews are more pragmatic: Anthony Barnett just contributes an advertisement.

Wilkinson's review goes further than most in his defence of the loveable. His recuperative switcheroo that the 'expectation that ambitious poetry should be disruptive has become routine [and] conservative' strikes me as a thought worth experimenting with but not believing in. The 'expectation' remains that the 'holding space' of love's hospitality must act disruptively in a field of generalised hurt.

This rather makes it all the more imperative to hold on to disruption in form and tone and angular momentum. To abandon its dissociative matrix to 'the authoritarian right' makes a kind of anti-accelerationist sense, but it's not as if there are any ambitious Proud Boy poems out there competing for readers against Brady and Spragg.

Do we want to be held by poems, or welcomed by their hospitality? In the psychoanalytic object relating that Wilkinson alludes to, this would mean feeling cared for and healthily contained, free to regress, to be in touch with our past-child, and so also to be cognisant of the extent to which our childhood experiences of being cared for and contained inform our present experience of adulthood. It would mean experiencing poetry as a moment in time of that ideal developmental continuum in which the child is capable of using objects— of experiencing a shared reality — because they (the objects) have survived the child's destruction of them. It would mean this whether or not the developmental continuum just described was yours, which is where its attractiveness as an aesthetic experience lies. When we hold on to poems, is this what we need?

If so, might we also wish to be capable of trusting in a shared reality in which our discordant and even destructive feelings are not the progenitors of the psychological doom they can often feel like in private (and in therapy) but part of the patient outflow and influx of an environment of poetical objects, objects that will survive our attacks because they have become more real for having sustained our negativity and not just our sighs of gratitude? If 'love's fruition' (Brakspear) is what we aim for, it must be possible for such plenitude to include the destructive without ceding it to that other environment, the one in which Trump gets re-elected and our friends die and there is nothing between it and us but new chapbooks to be grateful for. Gratitude is surely by now a well-worn trick of the light, a gestural salve for a wound it should be possible to bear, and which poetry should be capable of peering into, like 'love's encounter with the unsolvable problem of death.' Joseph Minden leaves this thought there in his review of Joseph Persad. Insolvability is where we start from.

An account such as this one begs the question whether the author will put his money where his mouth is — or at least have a pop at some of the latest Faber atrocities. This is because an atmosphere of genuine care and excitement makes the prospect of demurral immediately sound salacious and snarky. There is room for that, too. What is boring and useless about the bigshot poetry publishers' lists might also be useful to hear about. I want The New Cambridge Chapbook Review to thrive, and I am grateful for its existence. I also think it wouldn't be a bad idea to print a few reviews that leave gratitude at the front door, and which run around with their shoes on.

Joe Luna

***Publishing on Brazil's Margins: Cordel Literature, 1970s-'80s*, ed. Daylon Orr, trans. Emily de Silva Prado, design by Maya Fell. (New York, Fugitive Materials, 2024)**

This lovely 32 pp chapbook contains a succinct introduction, in both English and Portuguese, to cordel literature alongside reproductions of the striking woodcut cover art from 21 folhetos published during the period (1964-1988) that Brazil was ruled by a military dictatorship. (The text on the covers is not translated so I have relied, with mixed feelings of gratitude and trepidation, on Google Translate.) The term cordel refers to the way these chapbooks were displayed for sale, suspended from a string in the market place, by vendors who would often recite or sing their stories to attract potential customers. It really took off as a popular medium at the end of the nineteenth century and though debate about what exactly these chapbooks represent within Brazilian culture has been happening for at least the last forty years, the genre continues to develop with a new generation of cordelistas publishing online today.

I was initially curious as to why Fugitive Materials chose to publish this pamphlet, since their publications tend to showcase material from marginal radical movements, and, on first glance, the covers presented here, without any further information about the stories inside, are not obviously calls to resistance. Yet, published at a time of suffocating press censorship by a brutal regime determined to crush all opposition, how can resistance be embodied? One strategy some of Brazil's leading newspapers adopted was to fill the blank spaces left by articles they were forced to pull with random cake recipes to signal the act of silencing. In addition to quashing every scrap of political opposition and cultural critique, the military government, supported by the Catholic church, set out to suppress everything that went against their take on 'moral e bons costumes' ('morality and good manners'). Perhaps, thinking of the toxic mixture of reverence and contempt with which fascists seek to exploit 'folk' culture, that cordel literature was regarded as a genuinely homegrown Brazilian product meant that its lapses of taste were regarded as too 'folkish' to be any kind of threat. Or perhaps they were seen as actively useful to the regime. The cover art of *EU QUERO É SER MADAMO E CASAR COM FEMINISTA* / I want to be a madam? and marry a feminist (n.d.) lampoons both the eager young tie-wearing woman clutching her book and the stunted, balding, bespectacled academic? she harangues as he lounges in his trunks by his private pool. Could it have been assumed that people with their noses stuck in *O Vampiro-Lobisomem de Jacaraípe* / The Vampire-Werewolf of Jacaraípe (1983) were not going to be reading Marx?

Things are rarely that straightforward. Even if crudely presented, that the feminista appears at all could be seen as a tiny jab at the regime's cultural control. The introduction to *Publishing on Brazil's Margins* draws attention to 'an early treatment of AIDS,

blaming tourists, loose women, and homosexuals for its spread in Brazil'. The cover of AIDS - A DOENÇA DO SÉCULO / AIDS - the disease of the century (1987) is dominated by a coffin with a crucifix on its lid, but there are also weeping mourners, so the deceased is not a pariah, and even if this folheto is 'blaming', it is also publicising a topic the regime would have preferred to ignore. Is it too fanciful to think that those seeing the image of a bird behind bars under the title Não é Justo Se Prender Um Passarinho / It's not fair to arrest a bird (1978) might have been reminded of the arrests, imprisonment and forced exiles of a large number of Brazilian musicians, among them Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso? O barulho de Lampião no Inferno /The noise of Lampiao in Hell (5th ed., 1977) invokes the most famous cangaço, (Robin Hood figure) of the 1920s and 30s, stock folheto fare but also capable of turning people's thoughts to contemporary guerilla warfare carried out by a number of leftist groups in both rural and urban settings. However the most surprising cover in this collection, since it doesn't rely on people making mental leaps to foster thoughts of resistance, is ESPERANTO - A LINGUA INTERNACIONAL QUE AJUDA OS POVOS, NUM LAÇO DE CULTURA E FRATERNISMO / Esperanto is the international language that helps people in a bond of culture and fraternity (1984). The title appears above an image of Esperanto's five-pointed star, *verda stelo*, originally green as a symbol of hope. Hopeful indeed, since this folheto offers its readers a potential means of accessing a world beyond the airless environment of Brazil under the military regime.

Bridget Penney

Verity Spott, *Went to Get the Sink Unblocker* (Forthcoming : Eternal Selections, 2025)

Went to Get the Sink Unblocker is an ADHD aubade depicting a manic spiral of executive dysfunction and demand avoidance. Leaving their lover behind, the speaker leaves the house, “into the morning light” to embark on a surreal quest to buy unblocker for the sink, reaching obstacles at every turn and musing on their own struggles with these mundane tasks. The poem feels like a battle between spouts of streams of consciousness, characteristic of Spott’s work, reading as multiple conflicting voices fighting their way to the surface. Hearing the poem read aloud (which is available on Spott’s podcast, Spidered News) is a frantic and dissonant experience as Spott plays with tempo and rhythm, hurrying and interrupting herself, tripping up through this psychedelic world that shrinks and expands, becoming sporadically reminded of the task at hand. These interruptions of thought occur mid sentence lacking punctuation breaks:

“And so I left into tremors to get the sink the mould killing spray you’ve to leave on for something I don’t know perhaps fifteen or thirty minutes the last time I gassed myself it was deep inside the throat the eyes bulged out I mean if it kills the mould so definitely, all trace of it gone from a white wall dysfunctional mind scrambling for focus robbed of detail, stimming words away”

To “scramble” suggests at once a hurried, difficult reach towards mental focus but also the mind self-sabotaging and muddling itself before it can get there, a dissonance reflective of neurodivergent functioning. “Stimming words away” is reflected in word choices throughout, stimming referring to self-soothing acts where vocal stims are entirely about the sound and feel of a word rather than its meaning. Is poetry always engaged in “stimming words away” in how words are chosen often not based on their function but their sound, rhythm and feel? These “stims” appear throughout the poem in short passages of frantic repetition:

“Trade in dreams speck little pleasure speck line up, wake speck to move the body speck to speck dots in specks dust to dot to weak was speck spoiled speck there a speck I see her specks I speck we move past two specks in harsh light dot to speck to weak speck, no words, no prophetic speck wheel on day takes to the drain speck supreme motions above like the sunlit speck”

The repeating “ck” sound is the stim here with the repetition of “speck” and the near rhymes of wake, weak, prophetic, take. Sharing this consonance, the sink unblocker haunts this passage, not quite at the surface but present in the distraction of paranoia over these specks.

The poem shifts into more structured stanzas where the lover is addressed: “I would believe in the moon, for you, and I would believe in the stars. If only your face would out from the dark, forgive me.” These stanzas have more breathing room and read slower. In a poem that is itself under pressure, Spott is avoiding the demands put upon it by breaking form with these structured interludes of romantic sentiments. The poem returns to this form in the final stanzas, addressing the lover again and lamenting that they have had to leave them, “And there, up there, may be the sun. My air. Hating that I have to go, leaving your eyes”. These gentle stanzas mark the poem confidently as an aubade, pulling it back from the chaos and anxiety into reliable sets of three short lines falling down the page.

Synonyms are deployed throughout to represent leaving, escaping, shifting, unblocking; moving from one state to another. Leaving the lover at dawn, a disc slipping out of place, a pub or memory to fall into, the unblocking of pipes to allow movement again. The poem itself feels like a great act of unblocking, throwing out every anxiety, every spiral into romanticism, into space to free up the mind and move past the task of sink unblocking which has left the speaker stuck, “burned up, anxious, forever”. The poem is a cathartic expression of the often hidden sides of neurodivergence that present as messy, unpleasant and shameful for those experiencing them. Spott still manages to find moments of beauty here, in the deep and overwhelming feelings of love that can coexist with these isolating anxieties.

Went to Get the Sink Unblocker is coming out as a pamphlet with *Eternal Sections* in 2025 and is forthcoming in the next *Chicago Review*.

Anna Jepson

Deborah Templeton, *Water's Edge* (Confingo Publishing 2023)

Deborah Templeton is an Irish writer of short fiction and performance texts, with performances widely in the UK, US and elsewhere. *Water's Edge* was collaboratively conceived by Templeton and composer Monty Adkins in a process in which musical fragments inspired the texts and textual fragments the music. Story and sound thus emerged together. The finished project comprises three artworks: a story sequence, a musical composition and a radiophonic work in which a reading of the texts by the author is set within the musical soundscape. A Czech version of that radiophonic version was broadcast by Czech Radio Vltava in 2018.

In something of a coup, and a very innovative example of small-press publishing, Confingo has made available the whole project. Materially, *Water's Edge* consists of a 48pp. stapled booklet containing the texts, details of artists, and some stunning monochrome photography by Zoe McLean, an audio-visual installation artist; immaterially, the full radiophonic work (around 50 minutes) accessible either by QR code in the booklet or downloaded on purchase from the Confingo website. The whole project is stunning.

The printed texts alone are worth the purchase, dealing with loss and memory, loss and retrieval of memories brought back by news of death of a childhood friend, a belated grieving and stirred memories of youth, friendship, a widening world of possibilities and paths not taken. These are the work of a poet in their precision of language, lightly salted with dialect, and careful, unobtrusive patterning - a 'curing stone', moorland 'standing stones', the mountains looming over the fjords of adulthood. There is also a beautifully handled motif of a stranded mountaineer, rescue attempts announced on radio and unremarked, but culminating in a Postlude describing his death.

The poignancy of that whole sequence is considerably heightened in the radiophonic work: ambient electronica interwoven by solo lines from the cello, fidufiddle and wordless vocalise. This is not background music - quite the reverse: the (beautifully spoken) narratives cut into the music like the fjords, haunting the music like the standing stones haunting the moors, each part - spoken and musical - reflecting absence, loss and bleak loneliness.

That Postlude of the lost mountaineer, abandoned by the search party, ends with his dying breath merging into the narrative landscape of rock, cloud and sky, then drifting beyond, into the cosmic keening of the soundscape.

Utterly overwhelming.

There is also a substantial radiophonic bonus.

David Rose

***Shapeshifting* by Timothy Thornton (Run Amok Press, 2024)**

“What grand irregular thunder, thought I, standing on my hearthstone among the Acroceraunian hills, as the scattered bolts boomed overhead and crashed down among the valleys, every bolt followed by zigzag irradiations, and swift slants of sharp rain, which audibly rang, like a charge of spear-points, on my low shingled roof”, begins “The Lightning-Rod Man”, an 1854 story by Herman Melville in which the narrator opens the door to a salesman selling polished copper rods that, he claims, if fitted to a premises, will protect its owner from being lightning-struck and reduced to “a heap of charred offal, like a haltered horse burnt in his stall; and all in one flesh!” and from which *Shapeshifting*, the latest poetry collection by Robyn Skyrme (published under the name Timothy Thornton), albeit without reference, takes its epigraph, lineated and centred in the middle of an otherwise blank page: “*lonely ... ploughing / smit in the unfinished furrow*”. Taken in the context of Melville’s story, these words describe those “six-footer” Kentuckians of the Acroceraunian hills, southwestern Albania (we all know at least one, I’m sure), *smitten* by a lightning bolt while recklessly pushing on with their labour in spite of the electric clouds overhead. “Tall men in a thunder-storm I avoid,” says the lightning-rod man. But the narrator is a lover of the storm and of “that illustrious God, Jupiter Tonans”, with whom he first flirtatiously mistakes the salesman (standing there grasping his “very fine rod” as “the Thunderer himself” grasped his bolt), so he refuses the purchase, much to the chagrin of the rod-peddler, who threatens: “Impious wretch! ... I will publish your infidel notions”.

If the lightning-rod man did publish these defaming “infidel notions”, we are not told. (We are told, though—and I think this could be right—that the salesman “still dwells in the land; still travels in storm-time, and drives a brave trade with the fears of man.”) But if the narrator took it upon *himself* to publish these notions instead, it might read something like *Shapeshifting*. Taking the lightning-rod man’s words of warning that he will end up “*lonely ... ploughing / smit in the unfinished furrow*”, these poems affirm them in all their unintended ambivalence and ambiguity. *Smit*, after all, may refer to being violently struck down by lightning, but it may equally refer to being desirously *smitten*, in love. *Ploughing*, likewise, may refer to the labour of turning up the earth, of creating a *furrow*, readying it for sowing, but it may also (and why not? this is Melville after all) refer to fucking. (Indeed, as *Shapeshifting* demonstrates, the two are not mutually exclusive.) And yes, these poems are at times desperately *lonely*, yearning for an as-yet-absent radical intimacy, but there is also solace to be found in the loneliness of its far-flung environments (woodlands, cliff-edges, pools, caves) to which its characters are incessantly drawn.

Each of these in their multivalence—being lonely, smitten, ploughing—is suggested by the opening couple of poems, though in starkly different ways, the first a rhapsody on the pyrrhic victory of the dawn (“the hostile sacred early / morning”), the second,

set moments before, a pared back lyric of fraught sexual encounter. The former, entitled “The Serpent’s Eyes”, declares “in the early morning the enemy gone”, a respite which gives way to a series of trumpet calls: “a first trumpet in the air as the sycamore notes / the early morning its language is a great gate of leafy tongues / worth the richness of the scales in the sky”—a series of lines which, in their lush polysemy, evoke something like an English pastoral Hart Crane. What are “the scales in the sky”? They are the musical scales of the “mighty” trumpet, the scaly leaves of the sycamore which “note” the morning, the scales which weigh up the night just gone, and the scales of the titular serpent. They are also the scales of size and extent from the small “hairline fracture / writ through every dawn” to the cavernous: both encapsulated by the image of “this filamentous globe / of weather and rooves”.

The latter poem, “Bolting”, meanwhile, closes in on the smaller (or singular) scale—“By the canal I saw a sycamore leaf”, not the multitudinous “scales in the sky”—and the “bolting” of the title develops the ambivalence of Melville’s “smiting”. Having sex with “a boxer under the bridge, a welterweight”, the speaker is bolted, fixed (“Icarus / Pinned me”), the “bolt” taking on clearly (and perhaps diminutively) phallic tones (the bolt which penetrates is described as “A small piece of metal.”). But as this word reappears throughout the other poems it modulates to take on alternative and additional significance: yes, a bolt fixes and pins, but with “the sugary bolt of the sea” it glistens and dances with light. Then, with the book’s final lines, the lovers “alone in dusk / And seaweed and hiding”, they are described as each “a high Icarus bolting in time”—a “bolting” which seems to cover all bases: the *lightning* of “the electrical roaring sky / And sea”; the sexually ambiguous *fixing*, “holding them / Naked here forever again” (as with all bliss, eternity (“forever”) is fleeting, but repeatable (“again”)); and a moment of speedy upwards *flight*, transcendence, escape—albeit with the knowledge that, like Icarus, we will come crashing back down. (Icarus is a recurrent character in *Shapeshifting*, though more frequently grounded than airborne. At times it is ambiguous if the ‘I’ of the poems is the first person or short for ‘Icarus’; an ambiguity heightened by and also present in the name(s) of the other main character(s), Jackdaw and/or J—).

Not only are the terminology and prosody musical in *Shapeshifting*, then, there is something even methodologically musical, the way in which the poems develop and manipulate short motifs, sometimes even a single word like “bolting”, which acquire surprising new meanings through inversions, retrogrades, augmentations, diminutions. (Skyrme, not incidentally, is also a pianist and a composer.)

“A cloud chamber, against further / Against further”, for instance (against further *what?*), is resolved in a later poem into “against / Well against hurt / Against *further hurt*”. When, poems later, a stanza ends, “I do not even form into droplets in the dark / Against”... that final word hovering, constituting the entire line—we can, or can choose not to, fill in the gap with what we have read before.

Likewise, we come across “mechanical / *diggers*” which quickly become “replenished vicious / *daggers*”... and then in the next poem, “After the *pulse* your bones hold out like lamps / Jackdaw’s *digging* his nails in my chest”, the “digging” retains these connotations of machinery and violence, as well as sensual passion. This “pulse” too, at first physiological, a throbbing heartbeat or sexual climax, itself begins to pulse as it rhythmically returns throughout: “Leave not a wreck behind they / land as a dome and pulse, click”; “pebbles clang still falling from anxious // Crag peak pulses”; “Icarus the pulse of // Your fire eyes fragments of a dreamt coalescing”. This repetitive return has the effect of both intensifying and defamiliarising the word. On rereading, then, when we come across “A naked *lentil* of pure / Sun”, we are given a different kind of pulse: a singular spot of throbbing light, but also a leguminous *seed*—one to be planted, perhaps, in the unfinished furrow.

By methodically-musically shapeshifting such words across these 29 poems of hurt, hope, and desire, Skyrme realises the potential of poetic language to *bolt*: to fix, attach, and penetrate; to smite; to dash off skyward like Icarus towards the sun; and, in spite of the lightning-rod man, to electrify. In reading them, it feels as though something is beginning—as though there is “silently a vengeful / process underway a vital / centrifugal haunting alive / and out and across.”

Robert Lucas Scott

Jennifer Soong, *Hand Hiding Hand* (Cambridge: Face Press, 2023)

Pivoting from pages of blue text to red text, Soong's polychromatic approach unlocks an additional layer of semiosis that enhances how we read *Hand Hiding Hand*. Blue and red become less divisive, and more like ventricles exchanging blood in its red/blue oxygenated/deoxygenated appearance, with poems that change colour as we move through its corpus.

Echoed fragments of Soong's text also appear within the illustrations by Thom Donovan, with vignettes of openings and dualisms from a new founded anatomy. Elsewhere in the poems, the colour switches buoy a synaptic repatterning, or 'colloquial consequence', with the blue and red text creating a visual stimulus with which we might recodify things. In red, 'night is superfluous negation and in my sleep / I see men', and in blue, the sequence closes: 'it will be a woman this time / who enters into consciousness'. This opportunity for overwriting is seized by the speaker, deviating by association and with an assertion over one's own sleeping state ('it will be a woman'); in other words, dreams are deconstructed to suit the dreamer.

In the opening blue lines, Soong writes, 'I am let down by the world', and in later red lines, we get the arboreal perspective—'trees totter / upon this swab of land'—suggesting that trees also seem to have been let down by the world. With 'swab' being closely associated with bacterial or salvia sampling, the wasted state of the soil being offered up for roots and hyphae is perhaps incorporated into Soong's gesture of phyto-kinetics, which imply a depressive lack of direction and stability in the tree's movements. The tottering creates an image of trees willing to uproot themselves, but failing in their attempt to find somewhere better. This discomfort is furthered by the 'twisted arms / adjoined under / wet soil', in red text, with human arms and plant roots becoming an indistinguishable analogue. Later down the same red page, the motif of limbs recurs: 'when I touch your arm - what does / it matter?' If these lines are in reference to the buried arms a few lines above, this might pose the question that if no-one can perceive the affection being displayed, does it lessen the connection between those two bodies? Or can it exist as an internal ember inside the aorta; does it matter if an arm touch is storied underground with the roots and biota where the hands are hiding.

Laurel Moore

Against Glass: Alan Hay's *The Turn Out* (Veer2, 2024)

One path towards comprehension, and clearer judgment, of Alan Hay's *The Turn Out* is helped along by the cover. On the front there is an indistinct painting of a figure sat by a window; on the back the blurb describes the poems as "impressionistic" and also, curiously, "desperate for love". Before we start reading Hay's collection, we're presented with a lonely looking figure by a window, and poems that are somehow also lonely. The poems are marked with an imperative to respond lovingly, we look back sympathetically at the gloomy and indistinct figure, sitting by the window, by glass. And as if behind frosted glass, we cannot make out the figure fully. It is rather an impressionistic cover, and we're told the poems are impressionistic too.

We're up against a cover of impressions and it is almost as though we, like the cover figure, are held behind glass. This holding, like incarceration, is a motif that is curiously resonant of *The Turn Out*'s impressionism. For Walter Pater, writing in and for the fin de siècle of the nineteenth century, impressions are akin to feelings of incarcerated dreams: "Every... [impression] is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world". The poetic figure at the window, daydreaming about the love it is desperate for, is trapped in its own world, but is also dreaming up a world, is dreaming a self-contained escape. For Pater, and other aesthetes (as well as Freud), the attacking flow of sensory impressions, and the accompanying narco-masochistic imprisonment, is the de facto nature of lived experience—it is universal. For others, such as Baudelaire via Benjamin, the nature of life as a flurry of sensory moments is historically determined, a post-industrial fall from innocence; an era that leads Adorno to remark that modernity is turning everyday life into an "open air prison". (In a Jamesonian sense, our postmodern prison encases us more behind glass than behind bars—though bars do also feature strongly in Hay's collection: "Let's... quit this fucking bar").

Whether impressionism is a return to universal nature or a symptom of modernity (or both), by marking the cover in such a way, the publishing editors have chosen to draw attention to aspects of Hay's aesthetics that help us think about this book as a decisively modern collection of poems, whose style and subject matter is intrinsic to the beauty, humour, and pains of our era's hopes and failures. Fragmented, ethereal, impressionistic verse became a form of expression at the latter half of the nineteenth century. To mark Hay's 2024 collection in such a way is to help us comprehend this work as reacting to and symptomatic of the same crises that affected people back then.

But situated as such, these poems are also incredibly self-conscious of their effective powerlessness against the pains of modernity, as against glass. They are themselves incarcerated, and dreaming a way out of incarceration. That is, dreaming within their quiet despair (their desperation) for others who also, within glass, can read from outside, or from in and out of windows of various manifestation.

The motif of figures interacting with windows and other forms of glass, such as lenses, glazings, or glass doors, occurs repeatedly throughout the collection: “look at sunshine fizzing up the glass”. “a new pastime sweeps the land: / etching names on door glass of / great thieves and racing drivers” (an image that recalls “Jack” Donne’s “Valediction of my Name, in the Window”). One of the collections sestinas is entitled “The Glass House”, which neatly distills a spiralling journey between skylights, glazed eyes, and windows.

Not just via content, though, but formally too. Hay opts for containing forms such as the sestina and the fourteen-line sonnet frequently. The latter has been described as having window-like qualities by scholars such as Rayna Kahn, who even goes further to argue that the shakespearean sonnet historically resonates with the materiality of glass, which was a burgeoning phenomenon during the elizabethan era. As such the poems in both content and form offer reflections of a life through and against glass, a kind of material barrier that flaunts impressions of transparency, but more so frames distance between one another’s bodies and dreams.

It is a way that Hay’s poetry captures a sense of being held against its will, while heroically upping this resistance by being very real about the necessary containment within form. Hay’s poetry proves again and again that it is possible to think creatively, ruminatively, playfully, perhaps sometimes violently, as a response to this holding:

holding back
a curtain is a good feeling it bunches
by your wrist and kinked it falls
very elegantly one is inclined to look
down and across the world like so
is how you look looking out a window
how you really are the room a shadow
it’s been a bad year with my brow to the
cold glass what with losing and all
my dreams of swinging downstairs
in panic and sheets of blood of course

Windows sometimes make us aware that you can only hold on to what you can hold onto, and meditate only on what can be meditated upon. Later on, in “the opposite of scotland” a spider is begrudgingly meditated upon (“meditate on a diligent uh spidersome shit like this”). Yet these restraints are of themselves cause for moments of heightened subjectivity. In the above citation the speaker can only appreciate focally the cover of the curtain, but we can also appreciate the casual and colloquial language (an anti-formal linguistic “cover”) that Hay beautifully disperses across the lines and that disappears, gets covered up, via rolling enjambments: “like so / is how you look” “losing and all / my dreams”.

Another casual phrase comes at the end of this citation in “blood of course”, which poignantly captures our delimiting internalisations. Namely: that to attempt escape is to come up against violence; “of course”, we all know, that to attempt a “swinging” escape from this window is to destroy our comforting covers—our “sheets”—with blood. Blood is both symbol and matter of overflowing, unconfined subjectivity. But for all this subjective tension within isolation, Hay also brilliantly celebrates and cherishes love between people that he often memorialises as a necessarily creative gesture to the trappings of modernity. The collection’s title monumentalises the social by switching from the ordinarily used singular “A Turn Out” (e.g., “what a nice turn out”) to the definitive “The Turn Out”—the unique and singular gathering. A heightened emphasis towards the social, Hay’s own definitive sociality, is one way that the poems break out of their formal trappings as windows, as pieces of fragmentary glass, a breakout that the conclusion to “five sonnets” (five windows) performs so powerfully, with an act of self-commentary:

I use the last part of this poem now to
say I know that all of us so bravely wake
and smile, even in this slow dream coup
our friends are still, look, falling in love
big blinking eye of the year don’t cry
we’re fine, just got the wrong / jackets on.

Not just a mirror, then, but also a “mirar!”; a “look” beyond the looking glass. Such a naive and elegantly simple word, “look”, knitted parenthetically in the middle of the line, points outside the frame towards “our friends”. It is such a small and powerful gesture, and filled with hope that is more revolutionary than it is sentimental. The “slow dream coup” is gripping tightly, within this love. And the horizon, though imagined and slow, is still edging on in its quiet phantasy for liberty. This ebbing towards freedom appears faintly elsewhere in the collection, especially at moments where the heroic journey, often at sea, is alluded to. The heroic signals itself in “knuckle” where radical feminism is also signalled with a nod to “shalumith” (firestone):

we are the last people before the water
she says the horizon is our hope
spits and pulls her cap down

It is out there outside the frame, on the horizon somewhere, and the holders of ideas, of dreams, are brutish and rugged in their heroic integrity. These heroic images are wryly inspiring, they look courageously out from the frames and the glass windows that hem them in, and towards a freer world on the distant horizon.

And Hay evokes not only the heroic but also, more strongly, the anti-heroic, through repeated references to crime. This is apparent in poems such as “heist”, which ends with a statement that marks the mixed emotions we have of being contained while dreaming up anti-heroics: “it seem’s we’re off on a / crime spree if we ever get out of this kitchen.” Though the poem is set in *media res* of what feels like a social gathering replete with amnesiacs “what have we been talking about all this time... planning a robbery maybe”, the reference to the domestic scene, the kitchen, as a place of entrapment does rather wryly and tragically cut those dreams short, as it brings the poem, formally, to a close.

Hay’s poetry can thus never quite get up and fire a gun down the street (thankfully!). It dreams of being criminal, and is held back by its own formal and material constraints. But it is when these constraints are dwelt upon at their outermost extremities that Hay’s poetry becomes its most radical, technically brilliant, and deliciously amusing. At one of the the collection’s most experimental points, a poem called “Four Roses for Alfred Starr Hamilton”, the delightful image of a writer typing away at the keyboard is figuratively jumping out of the page:

all it takes finally is to strike the keys
 all it takes is to strike the keys
 three or four hundred times
 in the precise order required

P E A C H
 P A P E R
 P E T A L

peach
 paper
 petal

The formal difficulty of citing this passage is a testament to its own self-referential reflection. It is both about writing within constraints, as well as being the material evidence of writing within constraints—indeed evidence of the very real glass, windows, and tiles that make up a desktop computer. It is a dancerly interaction (another form of turn-out) with writers’ glass. The passage begins with a deep breath, a moment of self gathering, before delivering the three delicate word-objects, twice. First manically: in loud and staggered steps the letters are capitalised; the space bar is juddered on methodically. Second softly: the aesthetic word-objects are delivered again but in their defined and resting simplicity. It is a defining moment in Hay’s collection that leaves both the poem and its readers gazing speechlessly on at the extreme limits of of ideals and formal restraints—of words and glass.

But the last word is best left to Hay, who writes in the collection's finale a somewhat ironic resistance to this review. It is the way that great poetry always naturally smashes out of any critic's encapsulating frame, and flickers like a star enticing, submerged in a space beyond reach:

I really do not like
this glass comparison
the wind drives me crazy;
I'm a flower, I'm in the air,
I'm a star of the sea

C.D. Dobson

Sylee Gore, *Maximum Summer* (Nion Editions, 2025)

The poems of Sylee Gore's *Maximum Summer* forget the records they want to keep: 'On the day you are born, I take no photographs' (7). Split into six sections ('Late June', 'Early July', 'Late July', 'Early August', 'Late August', and 'Early September'), the collection charts postpartum life over a summer, and yet the poems often act on forgetting rather than remembering: 'I've forgotten a pen', 'I've forgotten a book', or 'I hum the words I don't remember' (17; 19; 42). Sometimes, record-keeping is spontaneous: 'I photograph your hands. Now you're here' (11). That is, planning, foresight, or retrospection give way to the 'here' of a continuous present. Gore returns to a triangulated rooting of place, lyric voice, and addressee amongst the blurry apparitions of the collection: 'here, 'I', 'you'.

The poems are formatted in neat squares surrounded by generous page-space. Gore works with the compartmentalisation of the sentence, using it as a frame for a perceptual instant: 'Wind moves our courtyard sycamore as I wheel you to the road' (13). The intransitive blur of 'Daybreak flowers. Milk becomes flesh. Days swelter' is occasionally punctured by a split-second: 'You wake as I mount the stairs' (18). Short sentences stretch and snap – 'flowers', 'becomes', and 'swelter' have an unfinishedness that spills over their concise framing. Despite the neat borders of the sentence, then, the long duration of 'Night fugue becomes day fugue, then dream fugue' backdrops individually 'framed' moments (42). Early on, Gore makes a commitment: 'I pledge unrippled days. Wind shakes our sycamore' (18). Ripples, rather than jolts or collisions, form a good metaphor for the progression of time, as well as the relationship between sentences, in this collection. We encounter the sycamore tree again and again – in 'Early September', for instance, 'A man scales our sycamore easily. You become. In its upper boughs, his chainsaw flints the sun' (37). *Maximum Summer* unspools from the intransitive duration of 'becoming'.

Gore's chapbook is published by Nion Editions, co-founded by Jane Gregory, Claire Marie Stancek, and the late Lyn Hejinian. Thinking back to Hejinian's *My Life*, there are some affinities to be drawn here, like time as a structural conceit (the arrangement of one section for every year of her life, updated as she aged) as well as the sentence as the basic unit of the collection. *My Life* lifts from 'A moment yellow, just as four years later, when my father returned home from the war, the moment of greeting him, as he stood at the bottom of the stairs, younger, thinner than when he had left, was purple – though moments are no longer so coloured' (3). The initiating 'moment' retains its stark yellowness. Memories here are not discrete 'images' so much as quick sparks of connective texture: 'just as', 'as he', 'no longer'. Connective logic, though, buckles as soon as it is introduced – 'later' follows not from a demarcated time, but from 'yellowness'.

To remember something is to immediately pull in other associations, to scramble your timelines – ‘four years later’ is overlaid with another ‘moment of greeting him’. Strangely, a ‘younger’ father returns; perhaps an earlier memory is transplanted into ‘the moment of greeting’. ‘Greeting’ is a site of contact, or interaction, between father and child, as well as overlaid memory.

In *Maximum Summer*, sentences similarly greet the evolving ‘You’. There is a mineral graininess to Gore’s poems that attempt to replicate analogue photography, particularly the chemical processes of light exposure. The sustained analogy between poetry and photography in *Maximum Summer* is interested less in hard-edged precision than in the gradual, light-sensitive processes of the cyanotype, tintype, and daguerreotype. Gore includes a handmade cyanotype in a *carte-de-visite* format in each copy of the book. The cards are made in six shades of blue recalling a sentiment from Henry Fox Talbot: ‘Talbot said a photograph is but a succession of stronger lights’ (30). A circling figure 8 threads through words from the collection, such as ‘water’, ‘light’, ‘lullaby’, ‘lacquer’, ‘negative’. The title, *Maximum Summer*, also recalls photographic exposure, or over-exposure: ‘She floods you with song, I flood you in language’ (21). Later, light fills the spaces of the collection, dissolving the outline of things: ‘Unfiltered sun blinds our small rooms’ (38). The cyanotype is similarly an image made from UV light, from summer. Gore’s poems stay in the moment of over-exposure: ‘At the brimming cusp, I photograph’ (37). Light-flooded, poems ‘are less record than breath’ (36).

Works cited

Gore, Sylee. *Maximum Summer*. Oakland, California: Nion Editions, 2025. Print.
Hejinian, Lyn. *My Life*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2013. Print.

Serafina Lee

On an Unpublished Poem by Julia Zampronio Gurden

I left my place of work and was delighted to find this poem in my inbox, circulated to the Hollingdean Poetry Group:

“In the Meadow of High Altitude”

Etiolate in the oven light we lean over
comes last. You're
Issued in verdancy
and here I am, believing
maudlin whorls
carrying this stint of a sun
- over
titular
 inundated
valleys
I am
happy to be here
mounting crepuscular suns.

It's portable.
You return, down the scree in the evening
to the village
and further, and less, and convex lapses
in the elsewhere while you spill it
my god.
you've spilt all of it

Light is the subject line that runs through. Every “I” and “t” holding it, turning us towards it, letting the light from the poem fall onto us. I am put in mind of the poem *Land Flown So Few* by J.H. Prynne, which is a poem like none other I can think of which holds a the sound of a single word and concept as its full fanfare: The word “end”. Light, here, which begins in the sickly stretching to paleness of ‘etiolate’ and ends ‘spilt’, entirely. The ‘we’, the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ are undisclosed, and this gives me the freedom to allow them to be entirely themselves. Good. I don’t want to be listening to poets, but listening to poetry and the figures composed inside of it. A precious enclave. This is a poem full of puns. My favourite is ‘maudlin whorls’, which I hear as ‘words’ or ‘worlds’.

It is neither of those things, but the mind wishes to naturalise things like this to a recognisable point. How does one believe in whorls? The whorls are sentimental, and the speaker in the poem believes in them, and because of the sentiment this poem gives to me as a whole I would say that the belief is not without reason. It is not the kind of belief which the thing itself depends on for existence. It is belief grounded in the reality of the light that is glimmering through the canopy of this poem onto the spiraling clear water which gives me glimpses of a reflection, reflecting light above and perhaps the hints of people, as in 'convex lapses'. There's a secret too, and it is with some shock and a little quiet humour that its spillage appears in the final line. The title is apparently from the instagram page of the excellent poet Kyle Lovell. Have you ever been to a high altitude meadow? I have. In the Swiss alps you find these occasional plateaus. Flower meadows, often near to waterfalls where, due to the altitude, the water and the carpets of wild flowers the light is quite unlike anything you've felt before. And in these meadows if you are lucky you will see Parnassius apollo. Possibly one of the most singularly beautiful butterflies I can think of. Light catches its wings and a rare red spot glimmers and reflects it. This is what this little poem did to me.

Verity Spott



A Permafrost of Nudity: On Eleanor Tennyson's *The Submissive* (Drunk Muse, 2025)

Beginning with an epigraph that ignites a narrative of interpersonal failure (an “I” fucks up without intending to), *The Submissive* would seem to have something in common with human catastrophe, insofar as disaster, once it begins, cannot be helped, and therefore demands our submission.

In the book's first poem, aptly titled “The First Season,” we read: “That winter, on the road,/I let go of the balloons.” In the context of mortality (winter), an image of childhood is relinquished, but not without feeling. The poem closes with the following lines:

in the ice of my appetite, I felt
beneath the Highland thistles
a happiness had been put into place
settled down and laid to rest.

The funereal tone of the text falls on the reader both slowly and insistently, and is double-sided. While at first glance one might understand the book as beginning with the image of happiness being buried, that burial might in fact be a planting, the memory of childhood creating its own acquired taste.

Eloquently playful, Tennyson's language includes lines like “The cows had/aches for eyes” and, in the next breath, “ugh.” The speaker becomes “ridiculously/evangelical on the likeness/between me and the cows” (“Tarn”).

Tennyson also has fun with the title of *The Submissive*. This is both a book about being a bottom and about being at rock bottom:

I stayed a while here with my anguish,
my dependent, my whistling tune,

my cousin, favourite hotel, my falconer
in the moonlit sandbags of the hierarchy (“Tarn”)

In the poem titled “Sally Bowles,” self-mythology comes into play, Bowles being a fictional character from a Christopher Isherwood novella whom readers assumed was based on Jean Ross, though Ross rejected the association. As such, there's tension between identity and perception, as well as the importance that literary narrative can play in one's legacy (Ross felt that her identification with the fictional character obscured her activist efforts).

Heart, beware,
for I am

at a busy dinner,
with well-to-do strangers.

In what is perhaps my favorite poem in the collection, Tennyson innovates formally in a way that is neither flashy nor simple, but perfect in its appositeness. The poem is titled “Hometown Diary,” and it begins with the striking line, “Hello to my life,” only to deepen the interrogative sense that the poem opens with, when, in what is a literal aside, the language shifts to the right of the page and reads, “I look for you in every mirror.” Tennyson seamlessly slips away from the world in the very act of addressing it, creating a private space within the public; an opportunity for the reader to be alone and together simultaneously.

To this end, Tennyson gives us the great privilege of eavesdropping on a lover’s intimacy, the kind which is only possible after heartbreak, when two are bound by a wound which “only you see.”

This is a book of pure poetry. Everything exists inside the language, its graceful and honest imagery. Crystal balls glow “clergy red,” and you understand that the voice you’re hearing knows your life because it knows its own so well.

Ulyses Razo

Happy Birthday?, Issue 2., Ed. Nell Osborne.

Features Vicky Sparrow, Hilary White, Kate Paul, Fatema Abdoolcarim, Peter Manson, Edmund Hardy, Nell Osborne, Jessa Mockridge, Tom Jenks.

It arrived with a gentle thud one day. The envelope read ‘HI LUCY CARLESS’, simultaneously warm and disconcerting. I couldn’t remember ordering anything—certainly not something that might interpolate me in such a way. I slipped the pink pack of papers from the envelope, expecting a slip of explanation to fall out with it. Nothing. Just a small book, stapled together. The front read:

no money no phones
 retired
no address no business

I learnt from the inside that the cover is a reproduction of the business cards found in the pocket of author William Lindsay Gresham at the time of his death in 1962. ‘Cover image by Nell Osborne’ jogged my memory. During an Instagram tunnelling session, I’d stumbled upon Nell’s page and clicked a link to a form. I signed up to receive a low-fidelity, DIY poetry zine, entered my address, and forgot all about it. My apparent memory loss wrapped its arrival in an extra layer of magic. I felt like a child receiving their first letter with their name on it—suddenly aware of being part of some larger system.

This feeling of gleeful mystery spills out onto the first page where each writer or artist has drawn a picture of themselves for the contents page, featuring among other sketches, a gnome, some hands, and one simply a black hole. The question mark of the title, a lingering presence throughout. Is the birthday happy? Or is it an invitation to celebrate regardless of whether it’s your birthday or not? Either way, a birthday has been declared and I rarely need an excuse to celebrate.

And celebrate I will: the experiments of form, the silliness of content, and beneath it a quiet political and affective charge. Its very existence is a political act: distributing work for a small cost outside institutional frameworks and publishing work that might otherwise be overlooked. It’s a resistance by way of generosity. By way of play.

I smile at a small spider squashed between the last pages, the marks of labour, knowing I am holding something put together by a human for the love of creating. At times opaque and absurd, irreverent and moving, specifically alive. It skips from works on ducks, lists, gnome sanctuaries, to stained pyjamas, to kaleidoscopic vorticist visual art experiments. There isn’t the space to give all the artists their due credit but there is magic in the fact each piece seems to be singing from the same copy of *Das Kapital* so to speak, albeit with a playful, youthful tone—perhaps a comic book version.

A collection of found objects, putting faith in the idea that putting together something might spark.

Osborne defines the project as a space for ‘ugly and unlikeable writings and visual art’—and while I revel in the more abject elements of some of the work, there is nothing unlikeable about it. Unruly and inviting, it’s the kind of project that feels like being handed a secret or being invited to a party by the person you’ve always thought was very, *very* cool. *And* the invitation to play comes in the post. That’s a birthday(?) I would like to go to.

Lucy Carless

Keston Sutherland, *Meditations* (Amsterdam: The Last Books, 2024)

All thoughts are intrusive but some are more intrusive than others.

In the first of the fifty four poems levelled into prose which make up *Meditations*, a book written in response to the traumatic death of his mother, Sutherland writes, because he is compelled to, about his unavoidable compulsion to say in writing things and unthings he doesn't want to write:

Yet I must say something next that will not be easy to hear. I will say something in a moment that it will not be a simple thing to hear, something in a moment that it will not be a simple thing to hear, something that will threaten to stop all the doing well and stopping and make it harder than ever to resist cracking out the old, forbidden syntheses of brainsick, indigestible unthings, like a water-bed caked in the sun-dried shit of porcupines.

True to his words, nothing he says in the rest of the book will be easy to hear, and the unthings proliferate irresistibly.

I take unthings to mean the atrocious fantasmatic objects which have been precipitated inside the poet's works for as long as I've been reading them and which, against the express wishes of the poet himself, drop and swell and accrete across the pages of *Meditations* too. My most excruciatingly unbearable and favourite example is encountered in the fourteenth meditation which begins "True love keeps its promise to accommodate the other's good objects." This vaguely Kleinian pabulum is then subjected to a meditation - that is, in a spirit of withering scepticism, the phrase "good objects" is taken literally and speculated upon: "The objects could be so massive that it's impossible to get them through the front door..." or "they could be so unattractive that, once they're inside, they don't go anywhere..." or "they could be the wrong colour..." until a single detail in an obsessively contrived and extended simile is taken up and itself somehow extrapolated into a scenario where "the defence system of the eye" is destroyed by "ultraviolet radiation"

creating a gigantic cataract, larger than the eye itself, that bulges out obscenely from the cornea like an unspeakable mushroom cloud of squandered sight, oblivious light and blind devotion, that anyone in their right mind would hasten to saw off, with a breadknife, the blade of which is decorated on one side with a swirl of tiny eyeholes through which anyone at all can look and see the trees, or the frame of the window, provided they're prepared to muck in and squint, and move their head in tandem with the blade, and feed deep and on the other side of which is an illegible motto...

And so it runs on, the unthing, enjoying its disgusting protean function of ruining any healthy or significant formations in development and imposing others which operate on a spectrum between inventive but mild amusement (“like a water-bed caked in the sun-dried shit of porcupines”) and the cataract’s repulsive polymaniacal distractions whose main point, it seems, is to have no equivalent existent in real life or in anyone else’s writing. They seem to be pushed out to fill up space and take up time, held up to provoke a reaction, as proof of something, or as sleight of mind, or outcry, or dirty protest. As such, the unthings seem to suggest themselves as figures for the poems they infect and inflict themselves upon in vertiginous fractal recursions and gristly recrudescences, despite the fact that neither the poet nor anyone else is going to be satisfied by their ghastly “old, forbidden syntheses.” In between the unthings, we are offered the opportunity to follow the alternately convulsive or benumbed movements of a mind suffering crises whose suppression via crude or sophisticated means most often proves impossible even inside the perimeter of a single sentence. The sentences which are most clear and conventional and uninterrupted tend to be essayistic, embedded commentaries on other texts or polemics against injustices in the organisation of a world which made the poet’s dead mother’s life a miserable one; also, occasional memories from his childhood surface, which seem to be gasped out, disgorged and ended fast before Poetry can kick in the door and save/ruin the day. The sentences which do none of these things, or which start off trying to, are very often self-sabotaging, in reaction to the language of what he has just written or the parts he didn’t write in the sentences he’s just written, sabotaging themselves in order to distract from or prolong and intensify the way they hurt. All the powers of language working at full tilt in what feels like a relentlessly drawn-out present moment to veer away and out of and back into certain ruts left by the recent past and the pressure of an unbearably present absence, as if it might reach an instant where the writing could feel free of every tie to its author and his subject and his readers.

The main reason that the prose in this review is so congested is the difficulty I have in moving freely through the book to make an assertion I don’t immediately have to retract or qualify: the book contains everything and does everything and explains what it is doing in the most limpid, exquisite and undemanding ways, to articulate the painful details of his mother’s last moments: “And watched you as you never breathed again. How soon it is ever to stop like that. How stupidly too soon it is to die.” How to represent a moment like this so that a dead person might understand:

...and the held hand need no longer hold back, but can press on and hold nothing, unhold everything, yet still be held, until you are not even gone, and it is not your hand, and then for some additional minutes.

If you have a mother, you are always her child; when your mother is dead, more than ever. I've just called passages like this "undemanding" because it takes only a small effort of attention to be deeply affected by them. But if the poet and the poems don't demand much of anything from the reader in terms of interpretive labour and intensive research, they make endless demands on the universe in the apparently fruitless hope of producing a life-changing consequence in reality. The final six words of the section quoted above, from the twenty first meditation, read like the conclusion of a report but they are dipped in a quality evident in more blatant situations elsewhere in the book; a sudden flattening and extrusion of rhetorical potential just as it appears on the verge of carrying itself away, towards the possibility of something impossible happening in the next second, a decision being made, a terrible event revealed to have been merely a dream, or the radical transformation of every life on earth.

Instead, there's a waking up from literature into a life of daily horror and bland torment, from which all residual narrative elements have been deleted: no time and no place, no characters, action or situation, just one unthing after another. The risks involved in writing like this must surely be outweighed by the risk involved in not writing *Meditations*, but the poems appear to me repeatedly to call into question the entire premise or purpose of Sutherland's poetic vocation, and how could it not, given its subject? What good does this do? What did it do for her? What might it do for me? And was she the reason I do it?

In his poetry, his criticism and his correspondence, original ideas and forms and methods are introduced and explored with a power that is renewed in every text as it arrives in the inbox or mail. Alongside J.H. Prynne and Peter Manson, no other poet has taught me anything like as much; unlike those first two poets, he's ten years younger than me. Reading him and knowing him is one of the privileges of my life and I've never found a book more difficult to describe, never mind estimate or analyse. As I began thinking about writing a review of *Meditations*, I was sent a link to Julian Murphet's extremely insightful and informative review-essay of the volume in the *Sydney Review of Books*.¹ I would urge anyone interested to read Murphet's review, which is especially good at elucidating a host of historical and literary references and the buried formal features in many of the poems, including the manic composition of blank verse inside them.²

1 <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/reviews/mother-goose-in-purgatory>

2 The seventeenth meditation offers a good example of this feature:

...for shit's no recompense for emptiness. Some emptiness is never recompensed.

Some

feet are meant to crush life out of wasps. Some soles are bred in time's captivity as meat for death that eats them into dust. But sick that's full of pips is not a thing. And death will simply have to go without. [etc.]

Where I part company with his analysis are the occasional moments where his entirely appropriate admiration for the book's astonishing erudition, polemical force and technical mastery ushers him towards and into perorations which, for me, misidentify deliberately bathetic and unendurable end-points as climaxes of uplift and transcendence.

The thirty-fifth meditation concerns the murder "by an unnamed Israeli police officer" of a disabled Palestinian man, shot dead "as he was crouching in terror behind a trashcan." Twice Sutherland offers a translation of parts of poems by a Dutch poet, Elisabeth Koolaart-Hoofman, written in memory of her younger sibling and a friend, and the last lines of her poem for Susanna van de Ryp read 'Ascend on wings uplifted to the sky, and shine forever!' In response, Murphet writes that

The meditation concludes, briefly and movingly 'Goodbye Eyad Rawhi Al-Halaq. You never made it to school that morning. But you live on in our hearts.' This turn to epitaph gathers up the tender sentiments of Koolaart-Hoofman's elegy and smites statistico-forensic anonymity with the power of a contagious affective intimacy.

I can't read the address to the dead Al-Halaq as anything but a sort of despairing arterial spray of the most hackneyed platitude coaxed into being by the frictionless take-off which Elisabeth's poem orders for Susanna, and I see the same process taking place in Murphet's discussion of the flattened 'sextuple sestina' he discovers in the final meditation:

As a climax to these meditations, this formal crescendo forges an excruciatingly moving synthesis out of the elements of the greater work, its single rhythmic pattern (whose tensions and resolutions, specific to the sestina form, are taken to the very limits of the tolerable) made all the more striking by its having been 'crushed' into prose.

These last unlineated verses are the triumphant wings fashioned by our poet for his fallen mother that she, too, might 'Ascend on wings uplifted to the sky, and shine forever.'

I, on the other hand, find the return of the same words throughout this sestina section to be as sickening as the absolute and wilful inadequacy of the passage waving adieu to Al-Halaq, and the monosyllables 'stairs' and 'door' come back again and again in an especially appalling manner, as if found in quotations searched for and hawked up randomly from a database of poems in the English language, to chime in, clumsily, at the worst possible moment: "What I did see, after we'd got in, there, before my eyes, Than to thy person they would do their door. And walked out, after you, back down the stairs into the ambulance."

There is no exit to be found in this book or from it; as you hold it in your hands, it holds you too, in its desperate but gentle grip and it will not let you go. As happens in its pages, all attempts to think about anything else are found to track back to the nameable thing or unnameable unthing that you've been trying to avoid.

Robin Purves

Rushika Wick, *Infections of Loss* (Broken Sleep Books, 2025).

Rushika Wick's latest collection contains a poem titled 'I Am Walking Out of My Mother's House'. Its path seems straightforward. We are led towards a picnic, a 'lace-edged' tableau of jellies and pastries. Yet, 'peppered with ants' and finely coated in a veil of 'white mycelium dust', we quickly find that this is not a picnic but an elegy. The speaker's mother appears in the final lines, 'behind' her, urging her to eat. We now know whom we mourn.

Wick's poetry is gradual in its diagnosis of loss – whether of names, mediated encounters, memories or indeed what we lose at the whims of global capital. Loss is a lag, or, in the words of Brent Hayes Edwards, a 'décalage' (jet lag).¹ A disarticulation of time and space which, in Wick's work, forms the uneven ground of the South Asian diaspora. Another poem, 'Show me how to wear a sari you ask', frames this as a simple question and answer. In its implicit suggestion that we ('you') expose her vulnerabilities, the speaker replies with 'goth shop eyes' and a 'Marlboro light after-haze' that she has only worn one once.

Loss lends itself to clinical detachment or self-fashioned apathy. It drags. It is also a deeply dull experience characteristic of capitalist modernity. The speaker recounts a visit to globalised Jaipur, a city renowned for its beauty, where:

Another man told me to give him money
For bread & cake
I tried to send love instead.
Five battles were occurring
& I tucked them up neatly in bed.
It was, after all, the Anthropocene.

Here the city is rendered indistinct, aside from 'the Red Fort of Jaipur!' called out from the car. Instead, impersonality plagues this poem. By bartering 'money' with 'love', these lines lay bare their non-equivalence: love cannot compete with the money form in this scene of urban precarity. As the alternate 'instead' and 'bed' mould into a flippant nursery-rhyme, we are affronted by an engulfing universal, a lack of alternatives (so to speak). It ends with apathy. A feeling framed as inheritance which is at once demoralising and dangerous – both with the climate crisis ('the Anthropocene') and genocide. 'Five battles', and all their variations, are compressed into one as her late father's words 'sculpt' air into its 'resolute future'.

A numbing, non-presence inflects this collection which can make it difficult and at times unnerving. There is a ghazal, however, that offers the possibility of existence

1. Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2003), pp.13-15.

beyond this confessed self-estrangement. An Arabic form which spread across parts of South Asia, traditional ghazals are formally contained: metrically regular and structured around the *radif* (the word that ends the first couplet) and *qafiya* (found toward the end of each subsequent couplet), they centre devotion, love or desire. The beloved in Wick's ghazal is 'that girl on the Walworth Road'. Held onto 'like an icon in a wooden church', the speaker wishes to be unburdened and free as she perceives her to be. The rhyme ('grown', 'glowing', 'growing', 'groaning') is patterned around an imperfect homophone of 'groaning' / 'grown' established in the opening couplet. Far from any imposed regularity, this poem labours under its own weight as it grows and groans, returning to and breaking away from its formal constraints. Looking back and moving forward, it's a necessary tension. All 'so I could leave my groaning, walk into my body.'

Anna De Vivo

Yasmine Seale, *House Style* (Run Amok Press, 2024)

I've been thinking about wormholes, recently.

Early January, and in the narrow corridor of days between the New Year and the passing of the first full week, I found myself back in London. At home, in the West Midlands, it had snowed: it would snow again on my return, but in the Big Smoke not even the veins of frost had grown their way into the empty windows of stationary cars. I had no reason for going, I couldn't remember why I went, but in those few days I ended up face-to-face with a series of sixteenth-century paintings, lifted from a manuscript book from the Mughal Empire.

They were beautiful. Gilt-edged, sequential, strangely geometric in their flattened, omniscient perspective. Strangely small for their broadened omniscient perspective. I saw one of the most beautiful trees I have ever seen, barely the size of a fingernail. My eye lingered on that soft patch of olive-green until I cried, a little. I knew I would probably never see that tree again. But there was something I couldn't understand. These paintings were mounted on a special glass wall that illuminated the paper from behind. Amongst the golds and greens and blues and reds were pinpricks of pure light. They were wormholes, literally: holes in the paper where the agents of decay had tunnelled through.

Looking at those pages side-by-side, I could see networks of passages sliced into two-dimensional cross-sections, shifting and disappearing and reappearing as they mapped across pages, superimposed and imposing, a little real and a little imagined.

Wormholes—a thing that lets light through, that allows truncated travel across some small slices of dimensional space. Transitional, a little weird. Contingent, moving. A tracing across boundaries. A technology that trespasses boundaries.

~

Yasmine Seale's *House Style* (2024) is a small collection of verse wormholes.

House Style developed out of a bigger translation project. In the 'Note on the Text' Seale explains that she had been approached 'by a publisher' (Norton) to produce a translation of 'a collection of Arabian folk tales' (the 1001 Nights). The editorial commentary produced by that task began to appear to Seale as a 'counter-text vibrating in the margins', a long poem written in the mediated spaces between drafts and languages. This is editorial-ese at large: querying, sometimes brutal, sometimes nonsensical.

Framed words. Every verse, a handful of words, is centred in the margins of its own page, but how it is arranged vertically changes. Flicking through *House Style* is a little like flicking through a flipbook: the possibility of animation, of movement, from a collected stasis. How these words came to be is, itself, an open question. How edited are they? Are some of them made up? The more I think about these questions, the more I feel I'm missing the point. Sat anxiously on the threshold, unable to step through.

Though that feeling of being unsettled is perhaps also the point. Reading *House Style*, I'm reminded of Anne Carson's translations of Sappho's poems, *If Not, Winter*. In the paratexts of that book, she gestures to moments of 'overtranslation' that come from the joy, the inductive pleasure of meaning, appearing like an erotics of the half-touched, half-held, unliteral. Strangely wordless for wordiness.

House Style encourages a kind of overreading. In selecting the editorial commentary from her translation of 1001 Arabian Nights and arranging them as poems—an editing of an editing—the minute slightness of those handfuls of verse vibrate with potential meaning. Is this serious? Is it playful? Is it both—or neither?

The cover, designed by Kit Schluter, is based on discarded material of JMW Turner's: stained manuscript page scrawled with crossed-out pencil drafts. Provisionality at its rawest, especially for those that see the manuscript as the autograph of genius, or the living home of creativity. But printed on card, neat and snug and measured, it is also crafted, minutely designed. There are so many antinomies that begin to populate my mind with little, festering queries that I can't answer. Not quite in the sunlight of American days, but closer than the dreams of Arabian nights. Making a nonsense of my geometries of knowing.

Some selections are beautiful. 'Above, she moans. || A cry is a different sound.' Taken out of annotative relativity, the deixis 'Above' could be an anywhere, holding the moaning and crying in a spatial relationship. Is the cry a different sound because it is held Below, resonating in a different kind of echo?

But so much of what shimmers in these poems is the simmer of violence that characterises the movement from 'Arabian nights' to 'American days'. The brightness is harsh, excoriating. Every page, barely a handful of words, present editorial commentary as the edifice defining one boundary of understanding (silently) against another. Demystifying. Literal. Being literal, quietly, as a grammar of policing.

House Style ends with three words just below the centre of the page: 'Something | To consider.' In my voice, this final poem has a resounding sense of finality, a trochee followed by a rising anapaest and an extra, unvoiced syllable: stodgy emphasis on the 'some', the verb lingering into a quiet imperative. It could, just as easily, be light, inconsequential, phatic.

You never quite know where you'll end up.

Jack Heath

A Various Art Revisited

A Various Art (Carcanet, 1987) is an anthology of seventeen poets edited by Andrew Crozier (publisher of Ferry Press) and Tim Longville (co-editor with John Riley of Grosseteste Review). It appeared as a Paladin paperback in 1990. The anthology had a precursor in Crozier's editing of "Ten English Poets" within the USA anthology *New Directions* 32 (1976). The contentious, in some quarters, introduction to *A Various Art* needs to be viewed in the light of earlier, widely-distributed, anthologies, in particular, *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, edited by Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion in 1982. It was therefore a mischief, a contempt, that *The London Review of Books* commissioned Morrison to write a feature-length review of *A Various Art*, in which he succeeded in not mentioning by name a single contributor, apart from the editors.

Well, I am one of those contributors, so I have a soft spot for *A Various Art*. I shall, nevertheless, try to be as objective as possible. Every now and then I make the mistake of checking the posts at the JISC British–Irish–Poets list. More often than not, it is a dire, insipid, experience. In January, Drew Milne posted a criticism of the introduction to *A Various Art*, in support of a review, at another site, of a book by Robert Sheppard, which in turn is a criticism of poets who, in Sheppard–Milne's view, do not, overtly shall we say, concern themselves with poetic theory (oh, alright, "poetics" as both would have it). It reminded me of things in the past and, try as I may, I find myself unable to resist this revisiting.

David Marriott has put things most eloquently, whether referring to foe or presumed friend, whether of things stated or by omission: "The pious denunciations of *A Various Art* do not come from a purer place, but from a tendentious ideological one. That said, I do wish Andrew had been more forthright in both his defense of the book and his critique of the UK poetry scene. After all, why anthologize these particular poets if not to say here we are, read this (and not this)?"¹

When *A Various Art* was published, *The Daily Telegraph* commissioned Donald Davie to review it. The newspaper expected a negative review. It received a positive one, so they refused to publish it. (They also refused to review the true first edition of J. H. Prynne's collected Poems. Things have remarkably somewhat changed with the *Telegraph* now printing features on Prynne.) Some while later Davie's rejected review found a home in Carcanet's *PN Review*. While Peter Ackroyd wrote a glowing feature review, complete with caricature illustration, in *The Times* (especially generous since he was, as Crozier told, disappointed not to have been included), Michael Horovitz, another anthology editor (Penguin's manic 1969 *Children of Albion: Poetry of the Underground in Britain*, to which Crozier contributed), was this time a foolish, rather than mischievous, reviewer choice, castigating it in *The Independent*, again managing not to mention a single contributor.

1. email exchange 14 February 2025, by permission.

How sweet it would have been for him to say, for example, that it would not be his choice, but at least it has seventeen poets who have rarely or hardly received exposure.²

Did the TLS review it? If they did, I have forgotten.

Probably the most extensive, seriously argued, review was that by Allen Fisher in *Reality Studios*, vol. 10, 1988. Also, a well-worthwhile lecture given in USA by David Herd, *Declining National Culture: The Dislocated Poetics of A Various Art*, found a home, some years later, in *PN Review*, no. 228 in 2016. There is also a curiously ambivalent, it seems to me, essay by Andrew Duncan, “A Various Art and the Cambridge Leisure Centre”, in his *Origins of the Underground* (Salt, 2008), although my understanding is that he is by no means one of the anthology’s detractors. Yet I think the “underground” tag, wherever it is found, is frivolous and unhelpful. (Caddel and Quartermain sought to escape it with the word *Other: British and Irish Poetry Since 1970* for their like it or not hit-and-miss 1999 Wesleyan anthology. And what are we to make of Picador’s 1996 *Conductors of Chaos*, whose editor, a contributor to *A Various Art*, I can hardly bring myself to mention—his name is in the endnotes—or Tuma’s monstrous 2001 *Oxford USA Anthology of Twentieth-Century British & Irish Poetry*? I wouldn’t know. Or if I do, I’m not saying.) James Keery fully covered things in the review *Bête Noire*, including “Nature, Flowers and the Night Sky: A Review of *A Various Art*” plus essays on some individual contributors. Keery’s title references a disparaging review by Peter Porter in *The Observer*: “how often these poets laud nature, flowers and the night sky”.

My own position is that there are valid points of criticism to make both about the anthology’s selection and its introduction (though I do not think it would be right were I myself to go into that). Such is rather heavy-handedly born out in *The Letters of Douglas Oliver and J. H. Prynne, 1967–2000*, ed. Joe Luna (The Last Books, 2022). Look, as I have tried to show, anthologies are not always or at all that much fun, a thankless task, but whatever the shortcomings may be of *A Various Art* I do not think they outweigh the positives and I could wish that Prynne and Oliver had had a slightly softer spot for it.

Postscript: Many years ago, it would have been 1988 or 1989, I was plucked out of the audience to join a poetry discussion panel at the Brighton Festival, replacing Faber’s poetry editor Paul Keegan, one in a long line of undistinguished post-Eliot toffee-nosed Faber wooden-heads, who had failed to show. In fact, he arrived late, so we were both on the panel. At mention of *A Various Art*, published a year or so before, Keegan dismissed it as marginal. I wish I had had the forethought to say not only:

2. The seventeen poets are Anthony Barnett, David Chaloner, Andrew Crozier, Roy Fisher, Veronica Forrest-Thomson, John Hall, Ralph Hawkins, John James, Tim Longville, Douglas Oliver, Peter Philpott, J. H. Prynne, John Riley, Peter Riley, John Seed, Iain Sinclair, Nick Totton. Crozier’s ten poets in *New Directions* 32 (1976) were Barnett, Chaloner, James, Longville, Oliver, Prynne, Riley (both), Sinclair, Chris Torrance.

Not true, which I did say, but also: If true, better the margin than the bin. There's a wonderful expression for such afterwit: *l'esprit d'escalier*. You don't think of it until you're on your way out.

Anthony Barnett

Dedications to Elspeth Walker's *Inconveniences* (If A Leaf Falls Press, 2024)

Flip to the end of a book and you will find a list of dedications; a way for the author to express gratitude to family, friends or muses. What happens when this list of dedications isn't at the end of the book but rather at the beginning? How does the reader engage in gratitude then? If it's taken even further, what shape could gratitude take if dedications comprised the only text inside an entire book? These are questions Elspeth Walker entertains in her new pamphlet, *Dedications*, published by If A Leaf Falls Press in late 2024.

Taking the experimental form of dedications, Walker's poems subvert the formula for gratitude with a playful, sarcastic wit. Thanking howling foxes, stinging jellyfish and HRMC, among others, for their inconveniences or misplaced judgements. Through these brief but poignant poems, the reader encounters an honest depiction of a writer; of a woman drifting between friends who come and go, lovers that disappoint as quickly as they dissipate and the trials and tribulations of her fluctuating practice.

Walker's personal reflections and objections are punctuated with a concern for our planet, rattling from uncontrolled change. These pieces are carried by her conversational tone that transform them into emblems of the reader's own relationship with their daily circumstances.

"Gin; let's be honest, you're the only reason these words exist."

Printed in an edition of eighty and designed by O. Tong, *Dedications* is a quick read but one that reverberates with familiarity. Walker leaves the reader to interrogate their own intentions behind their approach to gratitude, just as she reveals her own.

Elida Silvey

*Seen from the point of view of death, the product of the corpse is life.*¹

Chaudhry's collection has a setting, or at least a kind of thematic background: the 'Necrobiome'. The poem of this name in *Rimming the Event Horizon* is still, characteristically, dislocated (or 'dyslocated'), both spatially and temporally. Starting in the face-to-face encounter of an 'I' with the universe which 'eats | all the feelings I won't have', 'Necrobiome' connects microhistories of defiance with biochemical affinities, almost in counterpoint. The scale of events is not so much de-limited as deranged, reaching through to pre-imperial Surat, to a revolt against the British Raj by forty teenage girls in the village Odisha, and to a contemporary '[d]rop-ship pretence' which now extends and diffuses the secret violence of any supply-demand economy – all a 'bacterial freaking out in brown | digesting ourselves to pollute space with flowers'. Chaudhry's lyric voices can be this comprehensive because of their commitment to playing out the full ecological consequences of 'post-mortem sociality'. If this sounds similar to the grim realisation of irrevocable contradictions in a petro-capital world, that, in Roy Scranton's words, 'this civilization is already dead', then it is because in both Chaudhry and Scranton there is an attempt to reorientate thinking around the perspective of death.²

Death itself is beyond the remit of medicine, its end and failure, but even after death there is a whole lot of life, whole microbial 'communities are present in the host antemortem or colonize on the body after a human or animal surrogate dies'.³ Necrobiotics is the study of this 'culture', and Chaudhry's poetry works through the suggestive critical potential in this term.

Lyric has, at times in the past, derived some idea of its own power from the rejection of any 'murder to dissect' mindset, favouring the appreciation of whole and living presence. The argument was that the living could not be analysed from the perspective of its death. Side-stepping the nature-worshipping problems that later developed in this kind of Wordsworthian lyric holism, or even cutting them off at the root, the necrobiome trades life-through-death for life-in-death. If the world is already dead, why is there still so much going on? Rational analysis was only one method of decomposition. The necrobiome certainly stinks as it decomposes but that's still something; the smell tells us so.

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, pp. 218.

2. Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (City Lights Books, 2015), p. 23.

3. Gulnaz T. Javan, Sheree J. Finley, Zain Abidin and Jennifer G. Mulle, 'The Thanatomicrobiome: A Missing Piece of the Microbial Puzzle of Death', *Frontiers in Microbiology* 7:225, pp. 1-7 (2)

Rather than sifting society's remains to see, ragpicker-like, the lost potential of what might have worked at some other time, under Chaudry's microscope there are already new communities eating away at the surface:

I am quietly confident, seeped
and scattered, tacitly histrionic
as starshine launders my dreams to deify
the unsafety of scavenger nicetimes
nematodic decadence defying outside
/ inside as thanatOMICROBIAL baroque
begging to bloat the post-mortem sociality
of our revolving 'invasions', trying
to stratopause racialisation's staring
loop-the-loops between heavens and dirt
displaced soil on the soles
and souls of our names

Within the space of one line, the quiet confidence of the 'I' is 'seeped' and then, after the line break, 'scattered', revealing within this disposition a tacit histrionics that resists natural beatitude. Nematodes are not beautiful in the way 'starshine' might be, or wants to be, but the latter is aligned with the deification and interdiction of categories which determine what 'nicetimes' are safe or unsafe, what you should dream of. The poem comes up against a cultural imaginary which has already conscripted microbial life in the policing of its own boundaries. Hence writing a 'thanatOMICROBIAL baroque' becomes a way of bloating or overinvesting in a set of rhetorical tropes that are normally mapped onto 'Nature', an ideology which finds justifications for its 'invasions' (and note Chaudhry's deliberate scare quotes) in observations of organic behaviour. Our dead society is still capable of waging wars, of reproducing its own racial categories and of insisting that heaven and earth are in fact connected, pretending naivety in doing so, no matter how absurd or childlike its 'loop-the-loops' may seem.

(And here, possibly, is an oddly prescient critique of the return to theological blood and soil represented by a figure like J.D. Vance.) 'Stratopausing' these relations might be to push them to the stratosphere, to thoroughly denaturalise them, or even just to pause that incessant movement, but importantly to find a way of recognising a point at which it no longer makes sense to think of biology as grounding human events by repeating them at some other scale. Organicist metaphor has an afterlife, in which all soil is displaced, all names historicised in a material politics of shared vulnerability.

Certainly discourses are collided here, biology with politics, economics, poetics, but Chaudhry's target seems to be a logic of figuration which runs through all of these. (Why are biology and politics thought separately anyway in the first place?) Somehow microbial life seems ripe for projection within poetry, as though already replete with its own dramas and themes. Simple explanations of microbial phenomena often fall back on anthropomorphic figurations, or rather these figurations seem appropriate or 'natural' to what is being described, as in this passage from a book review from Peter Brindley:

Even if microbes are not our friends, they are as unavoidable as colleagues. We take turns providing labour, and often they take charge. When humans eat, it may be as much to keep our microbes happy, and they may even direct us when and what to eat. In return, we die, and they clean up the mess. Our immune system may be less a means to kill invaders and more a way to manage a tenancy agreement between host and microbe.⁴

What's interesting about Brindley's language is the way it rehearses and repeats an entire spectrum of potential affective investments through figuration, from amicability to colonial enterprise and economic relations. Biology does not only provide vehicles for meaning in Chaudhry's poems, the decomposition of the (social) body not only a moment of analogical recognition. It's not that microbes don't have feelings, that they can't be 'happy' (as above, metaphor can make it so), but rather that happiness itself, human or microbial, is the aftereffect of some mutual configuration of the two, as a healthy gut biome might say, if it could speak. To say that our bodies are *like* landlords or that microbes are *like* colonial invaders presupposes that these really are different things. A truly materialist science eventually requires the representation of parts of the world too small to see, at which point the tensions between matter and meaning resurface – the historical overdeterminations implicit in thinking of microbes as 'colonizing' anything.

Chaudhry's endnotes refer to Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, where similar arguments are developed – matter and meaning are indissociable, especially at

4. Peter Brindley, 'I Contain Multitudes: The Microbes Within Us and a Grander View of Life', *Anesthesia & Analgesia* 127:4 (2018) October 2018, Volume 127 (4), pp. e63

the smallest scale of observation – but I’m also reminded of books like Bruno Latour’s *The Pasteurisation of France* or Donna Haraway’s *Crystals, Fields and Fabrics*, where organicism consists in so many shifting paradigms and scales of figuration.⁵

Containing multitudes is no longer enough. Any such projects, any appeals to a metaphysical unity, end for Chaudhry in the fealty of a ‘[t]ycoon universe’ that ‘sells my soul back to me’. Multitudes are already given, which is why the old Whitman declaration is now better suited to thinking the unseemliness of bodies within bodies and rethinking the senses of ‘belonging’ that this entails. *Rimming the Event Horizon* instead wants to think in terms of singularities (and this plural is by no means a contradiction), the whorls, spirals and asymptotes that become something like a formal logic. Elsewhere, Chaudhry adopts Barad’s ‘tell-tale photon’, the contingent trace which describes the existence of such singularities as black holes, as a way of realigning the materials that lyric uses. The necrobiome does stink, but it is this smell that can be read and conceptualised, a kind of trans-historical mineral sympathy whose matters and meanings tick-tock in counterpoint:

I sniff-out future clandestine graves, truly
you can’t slip one past me in this
elegant epinecrotics of dislocated we
astral project into a coffee cup or tea leaves
and I will show you where to find the body
the bodies swishing my thoughts to tick
the microbial tock and the maggots
are hundreds of years old, rolling
the timeline back to Surat, metabolising
iron ore, saffron and jewels--

5. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke UP, 2007); Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Harvard UP, 1993); Donna Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields: Metaphors of Organicism in Twentieth-Century Developmental Biology* (Yale UP, 1976).

Lyric is, as in the closing lines, a ‘degraded thing’, but nonetheless one that can see singularities in the mutual configurations of biology and politics, histories personal and collective. In universal fiefdom is also a radical political commitment and an expressive pedagogy:

Tycoon universe sells my soul back to me

but I won’t let the gripe flee, refuse to let it go—

only degraded things teach me to dance

like the sun setting for the first time.

Jack Martell

A Note on Bald (Soon) Anders (Another)

“Welcher wolte den nicht preisen der die buchstaben zu erst erfunden? ja were welte nicht vielmehr den uber alle kunstler erheben welche die edle und der gantzen welt hochst nutzbare kunst der buchdruckery erfunden?” Hans Sachs, Baldanderst (1534)]

[*Who wouldn't praise the one who first invented letters? Indeed, wouldn't the world rather exalt above all artists the one who invented the noble and most useful art of printing?*]

Grimmelshausen, Simplicius Simplicissimus (1669)

“Simplicius does not undergo a single conversion, but a multiplicity of conversions, each one of which is revealed in retrospect to have been in bad faith” (Heckman)

“Baldanders (whose name we may translate as Soon-Another or At-any-moment-something-else) was suggested to the master shoemaker Hans Sachs (1494-1576) of Nuremberg by that passage in the *Odyssey* in which Menelaus pursues the Egyptian god Proteus, who changes himself into a lion, a serpent, a panther, a huge wild boar, a tree, and flowing water. Some ninety years after Sach's death, Baldanders makes a new appearance in the last book of the picaresque-fantastic novel by Grimmelshausen, *The Adventuresome Simplicissimus* (1669). In the midst of a wood, the hero comes upon a stone statue which seems to him an idol from some old Germanic temple. He touches it and the statue tells him he is Baldanders and thereupon takes the forms of a man, of an oak tree, of a sow, of a fat sausage, of a field of clover, of dung, of a flower, of a blossoming branch, of a mulberry bush, of a silk tapestry, of many other things and beings, and then, once more, of a man. He pretends to teach Simplicissimus the art “of conversing with things which by their nature are dumb, such as chairs and benches, pots and pans”; he also makes himself into a secretary and writes these words from the Revelation of St. John: “I am the first and the last,” which are the key to the coded document in which he leaves the hero his instructions. [...]

Baldanders is a successive monster, a monster in time. The title page of the first edition of Grimmelshausen's novel takes up the joke. It bears an engraving of a creature having a satyr's head, a human torso, the unfolded wings of a bird, and the tail of a fish, and which with a goat's leg and vulture's claws, tramples on a heap of masks that stand for the succession of shapes he has taken. In his belt he carries a sword and in his hands an open book showing pictures of a crown, a sailing boat, a goblet, a tower, a child, a pair of dice, a foolscap with bells, and a piece of ordnance.”

[Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, (New York: Avon, 1970), pp.39-40)]

Hollingdean Minutes

29th January 2025

Edith Sitwell and Sean Bonney

'Aubade' by Edith Sitwell from *Eleven Bucolic Comedies* some time in the 1920s. We read the poem. [unreadable] with kitchen couplet. Taken by first and last chorus stanzas. Light is an enemy. Creaking and emanating. Hardening into light and sight. The poem renders us wrong footed. A sense of silence. Overtones. Silence. You need silence to hear. Silence creates sound on its own terms. Light. Rain. Silence. Sight. Material. 'Stalactite of room'. Stalactites 'creak down' through repetitive motions of water. Is the refrain affective or mocking? Which crane does the poem refer to? Materials are poised to fly off. [Jane's faulty labour?] A [unreadable] eternity in a kitchen garden. Imagining a reality where Jane is at leisure, as in the impossible dream of the aubade. Upstairs and downstairs. Light becomes the enemy and the damned conclusion. Language, pleasure...

Edith Sitwell interview: A tiny cinema moment. She was six foot tall! You can watch us watching. Eccentric and rather dangerous. I would be followed for miles. Barefoot from Leeds - magnificent! Very proud. Silence. I don't trouble myself with the frivolity of hobbies. I just hate them because they smell so awful!

Sean Bonney poem: Keep a pill in your mouth. All this burning earth. Don't cry. A cloak of courage. In the tooth. A constellation of defence. In order not to swallow one that ameliorates. Caesura. Sorry, say that again? There's a whole story there. Cut. This piece of paper is apocryphal. After he died, these appeared everywhere. Greek anarchist poets. Not allowing himself to write beautiful things. Tight, a wringing out. Pound. Poetry as necromancy. Time will come. Is it comforting?

Don't let yourself down, and all the other things people say that they don't mean. Don't cry. (Don't drag chairs across the new flooring!)

Attendees: Kat, Verity, Jamie Reanna, Karen, Joanne and Julia.

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