

Also in this issue:

Jorge Carrera Andrade, Ron De Maris, Red Hawk,  
Richard Jackson, Antonio Ramos Rosa, and many more.  
"Before Adam and Eve," by William Farr  
"The First Book of Mailer, called Genesis," by Louis Phillips

ATLANTA



**ATLANTA  
REVIEW**

REVIEW

# GREAT BRITAIN

Simon Armitage • David Constantine • Wendy Cope  
U. A. Fanthorpe • John Fuller • Lavinia Greenlaw  
Tony Harrison • Linton Kwesi Johnson • Glyn Maxwell  
Jamie McKendrick • Andrew Motion • Bernard O'Donoghue  
Don Paterson • Jo Shapcott • Benjamin Zephaniah, & more.

*Edited by N. S. Thompson*

Spring/Summer 1998

V, IV, No. 2

U.S.  
U.K.  
IRE.  
CAN.  
AUS.



**ATLANTA  
REVIEW**

Volume IV, Issue Number 2

# ATLANTA REVIEW

## Welcome

*Editor & Publisher:* Daniel Veach  
*Great Britain Editor:* N. S. Thompson  
*Literary Editors:* Lee Passarella, Alicia Stallings  
Maudelle Driskell, Delisa Mulkey  
Memye Curtis Tucker, Malone Tumlin  
*Art & Design Editor:* Malone Tumlin  
*Production:* Daniel Veach, Malone Tumlin  
*Distribution:* Lee Passarella

In this issue, N. S. Thompson sheds light on a British poetry scene as multifaceted as the Crown Jewels. As we travel from the lightest whimsy to the deepest human drama, it may help to keep in mind a line from Monty Python: "And now for something *completely* different." Oxford University and the national Poetry Society in London are both graciously hosting readings in honor of this issue. If you happen to be in England in the merrie month of May, by all means drop in.

Music from around the world drifts through the rest of the issue, from the warm beaches of Cuba to the chill reliquaries of Rome. I think you'll be especially delighted to discover Antonio Ramos Rosa of Portugal and Jorge Carrera Andrade of Ecuador, two major poetic talents who are rarely translated in the U.S.

By a lucky chance, we also get two *completely* different takes on the Book of Genesis. Louis Phillips gives us the Norman Mailer rewrite, while William Farr spins a true-to-life, down home story of South Georgia. The issue ends with poems that, like Wordsworth's skylark, are "true to the kindred points of heaven and home."

Something is in the air at *Atlanta Review* these days. Three of our editors, myself included, are getting married within a month after this issue comes out. Memye Curtis Tucker (already married) just won *both* the State Street Press and the Palanquin chapbook competitions; and Delisa Mulkey (still available at press time) won the \$15,000 Ruth Lily Fellowship. Perhaps if you open this issue and inhale deeply....

*Dan Veach*  
*Editor & Publisher*

---

*Atlanta Review* appears in April and October. Subscriptions are \$10 a year.  
*Free surface mail anywhere in the world.*

*Atlanta Review* is distributed by Ingram, Anderson News, Ubiquity, Bernhard DeBoer, The News Group, Blackwell, Ebsco, Dawson, Readmore, and Turner.

**Submission guidelines:** Up to five poems, with your name and address on each. Prose double spaced. Black and white artwork with title, artist, and media. Submissions & inquiries must include a stamped, self-addressed return envelope. Issue deadlines are June 1st (Fall issue) and December 1st (Spring issue).

*Please send submissions and subscriptions to:*

**ATLANTA REVIEW**  
**P.O. Box 8248**  
**Atlanta GA 31106**

© Copyright 1998 by Poetry Atlanta, Inc.

ISSN 1073-9696

*Atlanta Review* is funded in part by the Fulton County Commission, under the guidance of the Fulton County Arts Council; the Georgia Council for the Arts, through appropriations from the Georgia General Assembly and the National Endowment for the Arts; and the City of Atlanta, Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Office of the Mayor. Poetry Atlanta, Inc. is a nonprofit corporation in the state of Georgia. Contributions are tax-deductible.

*Atlanta Review* is set in Times New Roman and printed on acid-free, recycled paper by the Rose Printing Company, Inc.

Prayer for the Small Engine Repairman	1	<i>Charles W. Pratt</i>
The Hummingbird	2	<i>Peter Newton</i>
Trees	3	<i>Antonio Ramos Rosa</i> <i>tr. Alexis Levitin</i>
Night walk, Richmond to St. Kilda	4	<i>Peter Bakowski</i>
Evening Edition	5	<i>Jorge Carrera Andrade</i> <i>tr. Steven Ford Brown</i>
The Terrestrials	6	<i>Jorge Carrera Andrade</i> <i>tr. Steven Ford Brown</i>
The Sentimental Poem		
I Almost Didn't Write	8	<i>Richard Jackson</i>
Nothing the City Does	10	<i>Ron De Maris</i>
Tigers in the Zoo	11	<i>Shulamith Wechter Caine</i>
Nose to Nose with a Tiger	13	
The First Book of Mailer (Fiction)	14	<i>Louis Phillips</i>
Sanibel	16	<i>Anne Giles Rimbey</i>
Holly	17	
The Poetry Game	18	<i>Red Hawk</i>
Sitting Bull's Revenge	20	
Church of Bones	21	<i>Stuart Coleman</i>
Cuban Family Reunion	22	<i>Margarita Engle</i>
Tango	23	<i>Robin Jacobson</i>
Guayaba	24	<i>Michael Schneider</i>
For a Brother in Cyberspace	26	<i>Maria Terrone</i>
<b>GREAT BRITAIN</b>	29	<i>International Feature</i>
Small Country, Big Heart	30	<i>N.S. Thompson</i>
The poet in search of a voice	32	<i>Pauline Stainer</i>
Gyr Falcon	33	
Greek Island Triolets	34	<i>Wendy Cope</i>
Being Boring	35	
From a Line of Snorri Sturluson	36	<i>Ian Duhig</i>
The Commodore...	37	<i>Graham Nelson</i>
The Umbrella	38	<i>Stuart Henson</i>
War and Peace	40	<i>Jo Shapcott</i>
Flyover Elegies	41	<i>Gwyneth Lewis</i>
To Pain	44	<i>Janet Fisher</i>
Mother Scrubbing the Floor	45	<i>U. A. Fanthorpe</i>

Underground	47	<i>U. A. Fanthorpe</i>
Mystic	48	<i>Tim Kendall</i>
And Indians	49	<i>Glyn Maxwell</i>
Chopsticks	50	<i>W. N. Herbert</i>
White Comedy	51	<i>Benjamin Zephaniah</i>
First I Fall Over Then You Stumble	52	<i>Andrew Motion</i>
The Daughter of Jairus	54	<i>Bernard O'Donoghue</i>
Burying Fairies (Fiction)	55	<i>Sarah Evans</i>
Light	62	<i>Lavinia Greenlaw</i>
Reconnected	63	<i>Tony Harrison</i>
The Gift Horse	64	<i>Jamie McKendrick</i>
The Night-Watchman	65	<i>Simon Armitage</i>
To the Sculptor Emiliano Barral	66	<i>Don Paterson</i>
Reggae Fi Bernard	67	<i>Linton Kwesi Johnson</i>
Mechanism	70	<i>John Fuller</i>
Bead	72	<i>John Redmond</i>
The blood-bruise	76	<i>Peter McDonald</i>
Instructor	77	<i>Ann Sansom</i>
Sestets with Fruit Coda	78	<i>Peter Sansom</i>
Man and Wife	80	<i>David Constantine</i>
Envoi	82	<i>Elizabeth Garrett</i>
British Contributors	83	
Concerto for Mariachi Band	87	<i>Rob Carney</i>
Freedom Revisited	88	<i>Mark Terrill</i>
Current Events	89	<i>David Schuster</i>
Guffaw U.	90	<i>Michael Fessler</i>
Hard Out of Eden	92	<i>Mark McKain</i>
Before Adam and Eve (Fiction)	93	<i>William Farr</i>
Fishhouse Road	100	<i>John Bargowski</i>
Oasis	101	<i>Geraldine Mills</i>
To the Man Holding the Plans...	102	<i>Robert Arthur Lewis</i>
A Baker and a Blitzkrieg	104	<i>Leigh Jackson Pressler</i>
Like The Sky Tonight	106	<i>Barbara Van Noord</i>
Before Divorce	107	<i>Kristina Van Sant</i>
For Sale	108	<i>Jane A. Wampler</i>
On the Accomplishments of Prayer	110	<i>Ed Ruzicka</i>
Contributors	112	

## Prayer for the Small Engine Repairman

Our Sundays are given voice  
By the small engine repairman  
Whose fingers, stubby and black,  
Know our mowers and tractors,  
Chainsaws, rototillers,  
Each plug, gasket and valve  
And all the vital fluids.  
Thanks to him our lawns  
Are even, our gardens vibrant,  
Our maples pruned for swingers,  
The underbrush whacked away.  
"What's broke can always be fixed,  
That is, if you have the green  
And I can find the parts,"  
He says as he loosens a nut,  
Exposes the carburetor,  
Tinkers and tunes until  
To the slightest pull on the cord  
The engine at once concurs.  
Let him come into our homes,  
Let him discipline our children,  
Console and counsel our mates,  
Adjust the gap of our passions,  
The mix of our humors: lay hands  
On the small engine of our days  
And make it again as new.

*Charles W. Pratt*

## The Hummingbird

At once, a rage of wings

and emerald stillness

hanging from the fuchsia,

here to repair the flowers,

tinkering

until each bloom

is a bell again.

*Peter Newton*

## Trees

What trees try to say

in their slow silence, their vague murmuring,

the sense they have, there where they are,

the reverence, the resonance, the transparency

and the bright and shadowy accents of an airy phrase.

And the shade and the leaves are the innocence of an idea  
that between water and space turned itself to lithe integrity.

Beneath the magic breath of the light they are transparent boats.

I don't know if it's air or blood budding from their boughs.

I hear the finest foam of their green throats.

I am not, never will be, far from that pure water

and those ancient lamps of hidden isles.

What pure serenity of memory, what horizons

surrounding the silent well! It is a song in sleep

and the wind and light are the breath of a child

who upon a bough of a tree embraces the world.

*Antonio Ramos Rosa*

*translated by Alexis Levitin*

## Night walk, Richmond to St. Kilda

The moon waits at the bus stop,  
traffic-lights wink at cats.  
Factories are crying on the shoulders of rivers,  
but babies are sleeping,  
wildflowers of identity  
growing in the forests of their heads.

Old houses wear their bandages of amber lights,  
possums scurry across the roof-tops, waiters of starlight.  
Cleaning ladies are emptying ashtrays, thinking  
of butterflies.

In the crumpled sleeves of cafes  
the coffee-brimmed are plotting  
and the jails and mothers toss in their sleep,  
worried about their sons and daughters:  
their fervent ownership of thrill and risk.  
And the priests are dreaming of sermons like the ocean,  
that will fracture us from sin.

Stars fall from the purse of heaven,  
the prostitutes pitch in their beds,  
enduring another night of shark meat love.  
The bloated moon shines down  
on cop cars, tulips and fire-stations  
and dogs bark loudly,  
caught between  
leash and star.

*Peter Bakowski*

## Evening Edition

Evening casts forth its first edition of swallows  
announcing new politics of the time,  
the scarcity of light's wheat,  
ships that emerge to float in the sky's shipyard,  
a warehouse of shadows from the west,  
mutinies and disorders of the wind,  
birds changing addresses,  
the hour of the opening of brilliant stars.

The sudden death of things  
drowning in the tide of night,  
weak cries for help from stars  
trapped in their prison of infinity and distance,  
the incessant march of dream armies  
against an insurrection of ghosts,  
and, at the point of light's bayonets,  
a new order imposed on the world by dawn.

*Jorge Carrera Andrade*  
*translated by Steven Ford Brown*

## The Terrestrials

I tell you: ours is a fabulous century,  
Twilight of Man,  
besieged by thousands of terrestrials  
too blind to see clouds or flowers,  
nourished only on gold,  
incapable of hearing the world's music,  
apprentices or larvae to the coming Age of the Automaton.

Terrestrials who bury statues  
and lock away books,  
throwing keys of the planet into the sea;  
having never heard of lilies,  
they will sell anything, even moonlight;  
they proclaim a worldwide cutting of swan's throats  
to provide the basic material for a new industry.

Terrestrials, all dressing and acting the same  
and yet hollow,  
these deniers of sunlight, living in shadows;  
phalanxes of yawns and forgetfulness  
lead an immense uprising  
against Man and his world of love and marvels  
to restore the Kingdom of Empty Words.

A kingdom of skies filled with flying machines,  
a kingdom of mechanical music  
and Identical Houses  
—innumerable tombs with floors and windows—  
the Kingdom of the Deaf and Dumb,  
obedient to signs and luminous numbers,  
wasps palpitating in the walls.

There are no springs  
in the Terrestrial City.  
Eternal thirst  
lives in glass dwellings.  
Thirst flees in torrents of automobiles  
toward neon constellations, and returns  
in its mortal night patrol of colored insects.

Oh fabulous century!  
The planet contemplates the agony  
of the last men  
endlessly pursued by those  
identical and dynamic Terrestrials,  
moving forward burying paintings and books,  
the last fortresses of human dreams.

*Jorge Carrera Andrade*  
*translated by Steven Ford Brown*

## The Sentimental Poem I Almost Didn't Write

I fell out of my dream at 3:00 AM like that medieval monk  
who would land in trees and have  
to be rescued with ladders. That's why I found myself  
talking to the birds that have made a nest behind  
the broken screen of my bathroom window. Yesterday I watched  
the mother feed a cricket to one of the fledglings  
and I thought for a moment that we could both fly out  
among the restless stars over the enormous gully of 3:01 AM.  
When you left, two hawks crossed the road in front of me  
as if they were making love in mid air  
and then melted into the Slovene woods. Sometimes I think  
birds fly from your fingers when you touch me  
and make their way towards places I can't see.  
Now the wind is lifting the eyelid of the lake.  
Now I remember my soul breaks open like a seed beneath  
the ground just to think of you. Now it is 3:02 AM,  
a time when my dreams often migrate to the desert where  
they pitch their tents like Bedouins and the desert blooms.  
I remember how carefully you point the camera towards  
the least flower as if somehow you held the universe in its lens.  
I am sorry my words sometimes frighten  
the fireflies from your dreams. I am sorry that battalions of doubt  
have pitched camp in your heart. It would be crazy to love you  
as much as I do. It is 3:03 and by now the whole universe is  
attracted to you so that I feel gobbled up like the ice in a comet.  
I am sorry the time is passing so slowly.  
I am sorry, birds, for not mentioning you again until the end.  
My fifth grade teacher said comets are angels.  
You can determine the exact makeup of a comet  
by spectrographic analysis. An X-ray of this poem would reveal  
dark spots on its heart. It would reveal the smallest memories—  
my hand resting so gently on your hip that it requires  
great effort just to stay on this earth,  
how your legs seem to become  
part of your bicycle and you seem to fly into a world

that lies beside this one. I am sorry that now, at 3:04 AM,  
I have already become too sentimental. I am sorry I lost a draft  
of this poem in the Campo Dei Fiori where we had supper  
last week in the shadow of the statue of Giordano Bruno.  
He was burned there a few hundred years ago for writing  
that there might be life on other worlds.  
There is no end to what we humans can do to each other.  
In Vienna, someone has finally decided to bury  
the brains of the 400 children the Nazi doctors killed  
in some experiment to find their young dreams.  
When Berkevic gave me the copies of poems from Bosnian  
orphans he was working with, I completely broke.  
That was just a few hours ago before the storm rolled down  
out of the mountains. Even the stars were confused.  
It is 3:06, but I am six hours ahead of your time.  
In a storm the birds will fly backwards and suddenly  
it is 10 minutes ago, and I am still dreaming of you.  
Sometimes it is fifty years and we think we can change history.  
Each breath we take is a magnet, each word a point on the compass.  
Sometimes we are 5 minutes too late.  
I am starting to wake again.... Don't give up on me. I realize  
if I were any kind of saint I would not be the kind that lands in trees—  
and I wouldn't be St. Francis of Assisi  
with his sackcloth tunic and stigmata the way I was  
in the fifth grade pageant, nor one of the birds he talked to,  
resting at your window, not meaning a thing, crazy for love,  
for this night, even when I didn't know you, only the possibility of you.

*Richard Jackson*

## Nothing the City Does

Nothing the city does is as good as the rain  
twisting its strands like a wrung mop,  
rinsing in silver the grime of our labor.  
Who can wash us clean again? Rain,  
pouring through drains, sounds the organ  
pipe of our forgiveness, drums the line  
of stalled cars like a patient mother,  
drowns our little routines. Here at the hushed  
center, under rooves, whether making love  
in the gray afternoon or idling with Cuban jazz,  
the ghost of another life rises out of the  
drizzle. This is the day for great departures;  
two by two we climb to the ark, already  
the gangplanks are down, the chief bosun swings  
his oil lamp slowly, slowly, to light our way.

*Ron De Maris*

## Tigers in the Zoo

Even in old age, their bodies are beautiful  
and fit together like puzzle pieces.  
They flick their tails flirtatiously;  
they snap at a persistent fly.  
The tigress dozes, crosses her paws  
like my grandmother folded her hands on her lap  
or laid a brush on the dustpan after  
a job well done. The tiger sprawls  
beside her, relaxed and spilled as a man  
after sex. Two spots above his eyes  
are spectacles pushed up and resting  
on his forehead. His beard is white,  
wispy as a Chinese philosopher's.

I am like a voyeur spying  
on neighbors who never close their blinds.  
I wonder what they remember of blue  
stars pulsating in the immense  
jungle night, what longing holds them  
in its bloody jaws.

*Shulamith Wechter Caine*

## Nose to Nose with a Tiger

After a woodblock print, *Woman Painting a Dragon  
That Comes to Life*, Totoya Hokkei (1780-1850)

I am writing about a tiger  
when suddenly we are nose to nose.

He rises quietly as smoke,  
unexpectedly as winter

blooming of *ume* in Japan.  
We stare at each other, unafraid.

I greet him, cool as Stanley greeting  
Dr. Livingstone in Africa,

"A tiger, I presume," I hear  
me say. Then, nimble as thought,

the tiger disappears, trailing  
pawprints and the musky scent

of well-watered grasslands.  
This reminds me of a Japanese

woodblock print—an artist paints  
a dragon on a fan. It is

as if she coats the paper with oil  
for the dragon loses his footing,

slips from the pleated surface. He glows  
above her head, a fiery halo.

The artist kneels at her task. Perhaps  
she prays. As for me, I do not

know what god to worship, but  
I have sweated scrubbing floors,

weeding an unruly garden.  
When I write, I, too, am on my knees.

*Shulamith Wechter Caine*

# The First Book of Mailer, called Genesis

Louis Phillips

Since Norman Mailer has published a first person account of the life of Christ, some readers have breathed a sigh of relief: Thank God, the Old Testament is safe. Well, the Old Testament is also coming under intense scrutiny from the author of *The Deer Park*, *The Naked and the Dead*, and numerous other novels. In fact, we are pleased to publish a brief glimpse of *The First Book of Mailer, called Genesis*, for our discerning readers:

## CHAPTER I

In the beginning, God punched out the friggin' heaven and the friggin' earth.

And the Earth at that time was without Mailer. And the Spirit of God moved upon the chickenshit void. Norman Mailer was silent. This was not characteristic of Mailer.

Then God fumbled sloppily for light. And there was light. But there was still no Mailer.

And God called the friggin' light Day, and the friggin' darkness he called the friggin' Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day without Mailer.

And God said, Let there be an Army of Night to carry my banner forward and let there be critics to divide readers from writers.

And God made the critics, and divided the readers which were under the firmament from the writers which were far above the firmament. In fact, some writers were far too good for this firmament, John Simon being one. And God called the firmament Book Reviewing, and it was good. Sometimes.

And God created huge advances, and every living literary agent that moveth, and multi-structured contracts which overpaid legal departments brought forth. And God saw that this was complex.

So God created Mailer in his own image, in the image of God created He him, Norman.

And the Lord God said, It is not good that Norman should be alone; I will create an help meet for him. And from the ribbing which God had taken from Mailer more than once made He a woman, and brought her unto Mailer. Mailer then took up a kitchen knife at Eve and, in a fit of ungodly anger, stabbed he the woman. God saw that this was not good and shook His head sadly.

And the Lord said unto the Norman, Why art thou wroth?

And the Norman saith, Why am I not Roth?

And God said, I can see from the sweat of thy brow that thee and Roth are going to suffer much trouble with women. Perhaps after five marriages you might embrace a Church.

And God said, Let the writers bring forth books. And the writers brought forth many books. And the Lord said, This they begin to do. Now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. But I shall confound them by creating Hollywood, a holy place where their names will be mud and they shall be treated like dirt. And that was the morning and the evening of the fifth day.

And God said, Let the writers have whiskey, marijuana, seconal, and benzedrine. And God blessed them, saying, Sell to the movies and fill the accounts in your banks. And God read *The Naked and the Dead* and said that it was good. Very good. But the movie version was not so good.

And Norman tore the ear off the sun and called it the moon. And was there fire on the moon?

And God saw everything that Mailer had made and behold it was very good, except of course certain home movies. And the ancient evenings and the ancient mornings were the sixth day.

And God helped Mailer create characters for his novels. And they were all naked, the men and the women, and were not ashamed.

And on the seventh day God ended His work, but Mailer continued typing; and God rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made, but Mailer, he rested not from all that he had made.

And Mailer gave names to all his critics, and Mailer went forth from Harvard and the Great War to cross the borders into the Kingdom of Brooklyn, where he would next write *The Second Book of Norman, called Exodus*.

## Sanibel

Some days are almost wordless, our hearts  
swaying like waves on Sanibel:  
we swim and sigh and *You are my beloved*  
washes over us. On a sandy blanket, we look  
to each other, butter bread, slice tomatoes

from our garden, raise cups of red wine. *L' amour*,  
we say, and swallow bravely: presence and absence,  
every last drop, seed, crumb. It takes strength  
to cry and not look away, to storm or revel  
face to face. Yet, this is marriage's meal

for the courageous, for those who kiss open-eyed:  
a shared hunger, a quickening even as decades  
pile like dunes. We put shells to our ears  
because we are sure of their whispers: *I wish*  
*for early wakings. I want the longest days with you.*

*Anne Giles Rimbey*

## Holly

*She's lowing*, the farmer says.  
*Time to A.I. Holly*. He calls the A.I. guy  
who rolls up in a peacock blue pick-up

and folds back his sleeve. He pushes  
in a fistful of semen armpit-deep. Holly  
delivers waste and hope from so near

the same place, like a politician or a teacher  
or anyone of us trying to make the world better.  
The results appeal like a timid calf

or unnerve us like a slick arm speckled  
green with digested grass. We trust  
soap and water, but we don't really

want the A.I. guy stirring the cake batter.  
Still, he is gutsy plunging into unknown guts  
as is Holly, who trembles at the easing

of her yearning, although it's not  
as her mother said it would be.  
We open our darkness as best we can.

*Anne Giles Rimbey*

## The Poetry Game

I have not had much luck at the game,  
an occasional grant or fellowship,  
a brief score at a big magazine  
now and then

but mostly rejections, no tenure  
at the first dump I taught in,  
nice notes from the big time editors  
urging me to send more poems

and the piles of poems keep on growing  
while the stack of money dwindles  
and then disappears.  
Now I am a clerk at a bookstore,

50 years old and recommending nice  
romance novels to no longer young women  
who like myself have not had the luck.  
But today this young woman comes in and

she is beautiful. Aren't you the poet,  
she asks and when I admit it she smiles  
and wants to buy my books. Then  
she asks me who are the good poets

in the poetry section so I show her  
the others and she buys both of them too.  
She asks me to sign her copy  
of my book and when I do she leans close

so her breasts are heavy against my arm  
and her breath is sweet and warm  
on my cheek. Maybe we'll see each other  
at the readings downtown, she says to me

as she leaves and her smile makes the years  
fall away like the promises of lovers.  
Ah, the poetry game, I think to myself  
as I watch her tight jeans move off,

it has been good to me.

*Red Hawk*

## Sitting Bull's Revenge

By 1887, even Sitting Bull had given up his rifle and his horse and was held prisoner of war at Standing Rock, the last of the Sioux to go down.

Few still believed in Sitting Bull's powers. Many of the captives quickly forgot the old ways and adopted the customs of their captors. Shell King was one of them.

Once an able warrior, he took to farming and sided with the agent against his Chief. Sitting Bull called him on it publicly one day. Enraged, Shell King attacked him with a knife.

Sitting Bull pulled his battle axe but before either could strike, the tribal police disarmed them and took the weapons. Ten days later Shell King was walking the road

near the agency when a big storm hit without warning. A great black cloud appeared from nowhere and let loose a brilliant burst of lightning which struck Shell King,

killed him where he stood.  
Not many men can fight like that:  
smoke the pipe, call the rain cloud,  
let the son of a bitch have it.

*Red Hawk*

## Church of Bones

Two summers ago in Rome we wandered into the Church of Bones and saw walls adorned with the skeletal remains of countless monks. There in that underground chapel you held my hand as we slowly walked down the dirt aisle, staring at the morbid artwork, masterpieces of bone made from every part of the body: skull arches, above us a delicate chandelier of tibia and fibula, star shapes made from jaw bones and femurs, there a lei of vertebrae around a smiling skull, a winged hour-glass made with shoulder blades to show how time flew even in the Dark Ages, and an ornate pattern of pelvises, hollow hips where desire once flared and faded like a flower in mummified monks lying in dark crypts— all these remains laid out by some graveyard artist who wanted to glorify god with his brothers' bones. With each step, you squeezed my hand and I held my breath wondering if love could endure such death. Then we saw the dark sign at the end of the aisle and stood there staring at the haunting message as if the muted choir of monks were whispering their ancient chant into the depths of our being: WHAT YOU ARE NOW, WE ONCE WERE— WHAT WE ARE NOW, YOU WILL ONE DAY BE.

Alone now on my return to the Church of Bones I recall how their words left us silent and numb— that was their message and these are their bones but I have something of my own: REMEMBER— WHAT WE ONCE WERE WE MAY ALWAYS BE. We walked down this dirt aisle together once, alive and in love, our souls married in that dark sanctuary. But now the lights are dimmed in the Church of Bones, a gesture from the Brothers, it is time to move on.

*Stuart Coleman*

## Cuban Family Reunion

returning to the shoreline of childhood's escape  
we find the same hidden reefs of black coral  
soft white beaches, vultures, iguanas, fruit of royal palm

a ghost crab runs backwards twirling long-stemmed eyes  
dark spiders lurk in the abandoned *cabaña*  
we pluck seashells from the ruins of a broken family altar

Beach of the Artists, quiet *susurru* of waves, tropical heat  
we wander beneath stone watchtowers and branching pathways  
where ants build highways of sap along the curving limbs of sea grape

we climb past starving horses to the Cave of the Virgin  
only her pedestal survives, the marble hidden by bat dung  
and the secret symbols of *santeros*: arrows, circles, shields

we inhale the soaring of flying fish, taste of *piña*, fragrance of *lirio*  
the initials of our ancestors are carved in rock on this tide-washed shore  
pale sand, crystal sunlight, transparent blue

we stand between two stone promontories, *el fraile y la monja*,  
hooded with fern and palm, the monk and the nun  
separated only by space, by time, by sea

*Margarita Engle*

## Tango

*for Kenn*

Because, once upon a time, an unfathomably long time ago,  
we came from a single cell

and because, even in water, where everything touches everything,  
that cell itself was the expression of a need  
for gathering

Because way back then—soon after  
that singular and miraculous gathering—we  
divided

and because, ever since, we've been  
dividing and dividing, having to move  
apart but wanting  
to cling to one another

Because, in all this time, we've never taken a lesson  
but just kept learning as we danced, stepping  
on one another's toes,  
on our own,  
now and then  
coming together perfectly at breast and loin

Because the tango glides us down the dance floor as if  
we were that single cell in a place where there was no gravity or friction,  
then flings us  
one from the other, to the very edges  
of our joining

Because our fingertips simultaneously lose  
contact and reach back for one another  
into the gap we've just made

*Robin Jacobson*

## Guayaba

*Esteli, Nicaragua*

Tropical afternoons like a long boat  
with black sails and a sharp prow  
splitting the air, thick with emptiness  
and anguish, drizzle of foreign tongues  
words and meanings like stray stones  
in the street, skipping away—  
I've always been here  
    trying to understand.

I remember the orange flowers  
like early stars bristling at twilight  
the distant tree of fire  
*arbol de fuego*, and there  
in the flickering light of memory—

slender ankle  
undisturbed through the dust  
she came, a young girl like a small deer  
bringing this strange hard fruit  
*guayaba*. I took it, biting hard  
as she showed me, the fruit  
yielding *dulce* she said  
soft and pink *rosita* she said  
the color of dying light.

Quietly as sunset  
wholly as indifferent to me  
or anything she turned toward the mountain  
and I felt the certainty and grace of evening  
approaching shadow by shadow  
as she walked away  
the print of her cotton skirt

sinking into a remnant of memory  
a woodcut or an engraving.  
Once I saw a jaguar flitting across a road  
slipping into a field of corn  
so quickly I wasn't sure I'd seen at all.  
Soon there was a white moon.

It was October and cool.

There were her brown eyes  
and a smile, hardly a smile  
gesture without gesture—  
there has never been another way  
for an arm to lower and reveal  
thin wrist, fingers opening, palm  
full of sweet green *guayaba*.

*Michael Schneider*

## For a Brother in Cyberspace

In your land-locked state  
your valley sealed by snow,  
I think of you bound in place like the crook  
of a broken arm, the hard crust  
of Vermont winter a permanent cast,  
you shriveling inside, puckering to nothing  
like the peaches of last summer that lay unnoticed  
on your land. If you were really broken—  
if you skidded off Loop Road, say, spun into a ditch,  
or began to fracture  
in ways I couldn't see,  
you know I would leave New York  
to scrawl graffiti up and down your limbs:  
"I was here," and being there,  
talk you back to yourself.

We should write letters, you said  
one summer stopover here, sipping wine  
with me in the garden dark. I nodded, knowing  
the mountains would soon enclose you,  
unable to foresee the day your thoughts  
would vault across the space  
between us and drop on my desktop  
with a toy trumpet's fanfare.

Twice, three times a day I open  
the picture of an envelope, viewing  
from my twelve-inch window  
a life lived on the back roads.  
You send reports of snow depth, wind chill,  
a collapsed bridge that left you stranded—  
your words not the danger but icons  
of danger that make me shiver  
until they're banished with a stroke

to another, safer place. The trumpet calls  
once more and I see you as you were just seconds ago,  
hunched in flannel at your basement desk,  
two hooked index fingers tapping  
out each letter—my brother adrift on a floe,  
slowly chiselling SOS on ice.

*Maria Terrone*

# GREAT BRITAIN

*Feature Section*

Edited by

*N. S. Thompson*

## Small Country, Big Heart

Had I been writing the introduction to a special British issue thirty years ago, the job would have been a good deal easier. The emerging generations of poets had all been neatly labelled geographically: they were the "Liverpool" poets, the "Newcastle" poets, with poets in Scotland (where the rediscovery of Scots was an important catalyst) and Wales also finding a distinct voice. Of course, it was the poets of Northern Ireland who were to go on to achieve the greatest international recognition. London, naturally, still had a "scene" of sorts—as it still does—but that is because of its hold on cultural life generally.

What is most apparent now, of course, as in the USA, is the cultural diversity of the writing, from a variety of centres. Happily, there has been a good deal of sustainable devolution in the provinces representing this change, with major poetry publishing houses in Manchester and Newcastle, among other centres. And although poetry readings have still to find the popularity they once achieved thirty years ago, there is a blossoming market in festivals and prizes with, again, cultural diversity in mind.

What is presented here, then, is very much what is currently being published. This selection does not attempt to be partisan or predictive, but as eclectic as possible. My guiding principle has been to present as great a representation as possible of the different *individual* kinds of poetry being published at present. (For a more geographic view, you may consult the excellent British issue of the *New Orleans Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1996). I am pleased to include a handful of newcomers, but in the main the poets here have all had at least one book published; I have also been fortunate in receiving work from some very eminent names. Naturally, there are omissions, but the whole makes for varied and — I hope—enjoyable reading.

Although there are no schools as such, you will find a number of poets writing from their particular backgrounds and—notably—a few poets (re-)turning to the notion of the well-crafted poem. Some, of course, never left it. As yet there is no great debate about "New Formalism" here, but the challenge is apparent.

Wherever it comes from, you will notice the sense of humour, irony, self-deprecation and understatement which seems to be a uniting influence. I do not proclaim these to be essential virtues, but they are characteristics to be aware of as a general cultural difference. If used

without sense and sensitivity these characteristics can (and, rightly, do) lead to the charge of "little England-ism" (or whatever). But what I hope is apparent from the writing here is that this particular charge will be unproven and that, albeit small geographically, these islands and their culturally diverse cargoes can produce poetry with a big heart.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Dan Veach and *Atlanta Review* for suggesting and hosting this issue. I hope it will help breed a new awareness of British writing in the States, as I know similar efforts are being made this year to present American poetry in Britain. The contact can only prove valuable and fruitful.

N. S. Thompson

## The poet in search of a voice

Listen!  
the moon rustles the pasture,  
a deer's foot splays the moss

and in that moment  
of magical inattention  
the words come

unpurposed, importunate,  
acrobats, improvising  
within a fall.

*Pauline Stainer*

## Gyrfalcon

She came through sea-mist,  
a captive bird,  
jesses trailing,  
her whiteness flecked  
with ermine.

After sightings  
I waste nothing:  
how she braced herself  
against the space  
between words

the light as linguist,  
that syllable in the blood  
when she turned  
on a lazy axle  
in the eye of the wind.

*Pauline Stainer*

## Greek Island Triolets

### 1. Entomological

This fly believes I'm dead.  
I cannot lift a finger.  
He buzzes round my head.  
This fly believes I'm dead—  
A body on a bed,  
Safe place for him to linger.  
This fly believes I'm dead.  
I cannot lift a finger.

### 2. Sartorial

Why did I buy this Marks and Spencer's t-shirt  
And, having done so, fail to take it back?  
An average-English-frump-beside-the-sea shirt—  
Why did I buy this Marks and Spencer's t-shirt?  
I needed something ace. This is a B-shirt,  
Fit only to be worn beneath a mac.  
Why did I buy this Marks and Spencer's t-shirt?  
Shall I wash it once and take it back?

### 3. Arboreal

We hugged a tree last night,  
And all of us enjoyed it.  
Ecstatic, by moonlight,  
We hugged a tree last night.  
Trees can't put up a fight—  
That oak could not avoid it.  
We hugged it good and tight.  
I hope the tree enjoyed it.

*Wendy Cope*

## Being Boring

*"May you live in interesting times."* Chinese curse.

If you ask me "What's new?", I have nothing to say  
Except that the garden is growing.  
I had a slight cold but it's better today.  
I'm content with the way things are going.  
Yes, he is the same as he usually is,  
Still eating and sleeping and snoring.  
I get on with my work. He gets on with his.  
I know this is all very boring.

There was drama enough in my turbulent past:  
Tears and passion—I've used up a tankful.  
No news is good news, and long may it last,  
If nothing much happens, I'm thankful.  
A happier cabbage you never did see,  
My vegetable spirits are soaring.  
If you're after excitement, steer well clear of me.  
I want to go on being boring.

I don't go to parties. Well, what are they for,  
If you don't need to find a new lover?  
You drink and you listen and drink a bit more  
And you take the next day to recover.  
Someone to stay home with was all my desire  
And, now that I've found a safe mooring,  
I've just one ambition in life: I aspire  
To go on and on being boring.

*Wendy Cope*

## From a Line of Snorri Sturluson

"I would say the names of the Sea"  
for I'm a poet and that is my job,  
but watch me exercise a possessed dog  
knowing more of depths than Thor's lip,  
for this is Fenris, wolf to Loki.  
Behold the cairn of his tributes!  
Behold the strawberry condom  
ribbed for extra sensitivity!  
Behold the slobbery cornet  
of this hysterical child!  
Behold the expensive snorkel  
of that approaching psychopath!  
Behold also this month-dead tern,  
jelly-boned, its white throat  
bibbed with its own black blood,  
my wrack-mailed champion's  
trophy-hoard for his god, his  
sorry god who calls him fetch—  
even writing that word makes him twitch,  
eyes shining like a martyr's,  
relishing tonight's drive back  
in our limping minuscule Fiat  
with windows which always stick  
when his guts trouble him,  
for this hound is Hel's\*  
and neither am I out of it  
O Sea, Sweet Suffering Sea,  
Insulted and Unlistening Sea.

*Ian Duhig*

\*Hel: Scandinavian goddess of the Underworld

## The Commodore Personal Electronic Terminal™

*2048 bytes free / That was your catchphrase*

The sun is over the yard-arm, the Commodore  
Spills his mint julep, asleep. His squadron—  
The old salts who harried the old Texas/4  
Into crossed-cutlasses off Liverpool,  
His coding-monkeys (now grizzled), his salesmen—  
All have forgotten their flagship, the PET,  
The squat, green-eyed Buddha of every rich school,  
Forgotten the *clunk!* of its built-in cassette,

Its memory-mansion (enough to contain  
This page nearly twice), its Achilles heel  
(With one POKE command, a PET could be slain,  
Reduced to smoky ruin). How meek  
They are now, or else dead, all sunken, all  
Buried under skateboards, Rubik cubes, kipper-ties,  
sideburns, World Cup '78 footballs,  
eight-track cartridges of Abba—  
Where are the divers, to raise this antique  
To an ever more ironclad harbour?

*Graham Nelson*

## The Umbrella

The rain was the steady, soft, fine rain  
of a summer day, and as she ran

from the métro, the pavements shone  
and the cars hissed on the black sheen

of the street. Her heels clicked, and the wet  
faubourg was dripping echoes—from the wilted

awnings and the plane leaves on the boulevard.  
Windows were steamy with breathed words

condensing there and in the puddles on the floors.  
This was the weather for affaires

de coeur. The clatter of her shoes  
was oddly loud. The coat she chose

Au Bon Marché swished its own noise.  
Each stride she felt it touch her knees.

Her breathing, too, was tight, as if the slight  
anxiety he might be gone constricted it.

So when she tripped the steps and pressed the bell  
and saw his dark shape cross the hall,

she set her red umbrella down  
on the stone flags and opened all her drowning

self to his embrace. The kiss was fierce.  
He brushed the silk of wet hair from her face:

'Je t'attendais'—the smothered words. Then hand  
in hand they turned, the door swung closed behind

them, ghostly, as they climbed the stair  
like angels rising to their sphere.

As they made love, she thought of café chairs  
stacked soixante-neuf, and he took care

to let her come and come once more  
and then again, as if the mere

fact of gravity were not a law  
to stop their endless spinning on love's lure.

At last their hearts' subsiding beats  
grew separate; while outside, like a stray boat

drifting, unthought of, by the basement rails,  
the red umbrella, upside down, sailed

on and gathered pattered droplets in.  
As if that were its purpose—catching rain.

*Stuart Henson*

## War and Peace

The woods of Normandy are hot with stars  
underfoot, resistance and memory.

It's the Queen's birthday and we know  
the stars are flowers in reality because  
today flowers are everywhere for her.  
Yellow smoke hangs over the bridge  
at Mostar and someone has taken  
huge bites out of the town, chewed up  
apartment blocks. Yes, it's peacetime.  
Grab your shopping trolley at Tesco's  
and read the sign: *DO NOT HESITATE*

*WHEN PASSING THROUGH THIS GATE*  
and you don't, you don't hesitate  
knowing you're about to buy a world  
in the supermarket someone else  
lost recently. Peacetime. Here is Mostar  
still dressed in yellow smoke. The Queen  
marks her anniversary by doing a bungee jump  
at Crystal Palace, a two hundred feet plunge,  
in full regalia. She yo-yos up and down  
as her tiara crashes to the ground.  
A mess of yellow clouds passes

behind the roof of the chateau,  
windows and their frames are blown out  
and works of art are moved elsewhere.  
The problem is not living together, pulling together,  
the problem is dying. A little boat  
leaves the bridge at Mostar and shudders  
towards the white mists of Niagara,  
whose plunge and roar is thrilling all the tourists.  
Peace. The engines grind against the undertow  
as the captain takes us as far into the mist  
and thunder as he thinks we dare to go.

*Jo Shapcott*

## Flyover Elegies

*for Jane*

### I

The traffic's been worse than ever this year,  
straining bumper to choking tail,  
inching towards the roundabout. We feel  
that there's less oxygen to breathe in air,

less room for manoeuvre. The flyover's arch  
holds cars in a rainbow whose pot of gold's  
somewhere in town. Meantime, below,  
mothers with pushchairs use the underpass,

struggle with shopping. These are the circles  
of Dante's hell. There's the view  
from the parapet, of course. But you,  
like the traffic, wanted somewhere else.

### II

Pain made you a cow,  
though certain men  
liked that suffering in you,

at least for a while. That ache  
drove you to lying and then on  
with hope to the next regrettable mistake

involving kissing. Your heart  
went missing. You searched  
in all the wrong places, carried a note

by yet another bloke  
who said that he loved you,  
till that burning lack

inside you drove even him away.  
Love's never enough. As for his words,  
you never believed them anyway.

### III

I remember the flyover being built.  
The *word* was for freedom, for rising high  
and swiftly over the heavy wait  
of junction. It was for cruising, it was for view,  
it was for ease of passing through.

It *sounded* like death. All day the pile-  
drivers thudded into the earth  
with a horrible heartbeat. Flying takes depth  
and violence. You knew as you leapt.  
Now the overpass stands, your monument.

### IV

At two in the morning the strongest hug  
never touches the hurt. A mug

looks promising, but delivers less  
than a bottle. Now the breath's

a faithless friend who's disappeared,  
comes back in the nick of time. Tears

are diamond earrings. You crave  
some rightness, but you don't believe

anything less than pain: the tug  
of concrete with its credible hug.

### V

I think of you as I'm changing gear,  
approaching the junction. Sign:  
*All Through Traffic. Industrial Estate.*  
*Cardiff City Centre.* In their cars,

wrapped in their music, the commuters glide,  
profiles pharaonic on the sunset's tomb.  
*A 470. M4 West.* Illness had made  
you less than yourself. When you died

you became much larger. Now you wear  
the roundabout like a sparkling belt,  
rush-hour traffic like chiffon scarves.  
I see your foot in the welcoming air,

hold it there, precious. Forget the shame  
of failing, we all know your fall  
as we plunge ourselves, daily, clutching the wheel,  
grateful today that we're driving home.

*Gwyneth Lewis*

## To Pain

You're fond of games, you play hide and seek,  
hang about in the wardrobe, under the bath,  
peekaboo through your fingers, just for a laugh.  
I count to a hundred, don't move, hold my breath.

Catch as catch can, you tease me, your shadow  
nipping down alleyways, peeping through windows,  
at my back or beside me; sometimes it's cast  
right up in front of me, won't let me past.

You grip hand, leg, the nape of my neck,  
no holds barred, you tighten the armlock,  
living my life for me, pinning me down,  
my common law lover, my toy boy, my clown.

I'd dull you with drugs, pack you off home,  
you'd sulk by the telephone, sucking your thumb.  
I'd give you the finger, tell the tale on you,  
stick my stamp on you, sack you and mail you,

but when it comes down to it, how do I see you—  
a face in my mirror, a head on my pillow;  
so, fix your odds, notch up your winnings,  
you're mine. I can hack it. No more beginnings.

*Janet Fisher*

## Mother Scrubbing the Floor

She had a dancer's feet, elegant, witty.  
We had our father's, maverick spreaders of dirt.

Dirt from London, dirt from Kent  
Mud, dust, grass, droppings, wetness, *things*,  
Dirt barefaced, dirt stinking, dirt invisible.

Whatever it was, she was ready:  
The rubber kneeler, clanking galvanised bucket,  
The Lifebuoy, the hard hot water.

*Let me! we'd say, meaning Hate to see you do this.  
Too old. Too resentful. Besides, you'll blame us  
That you had to do it.*

She never yielded. We couldn't do it right,  
Lacking her hatred of filth, her fine strong hands.

*Don't want you to do this, she said. Don't want you to have to.  
Just remember this: love isn't sex  
But the dreary things you do for the people you love.  
And 'Home is the girl's prison,  
The woman's workhouse.' Not me; Shaw.*

I do remember. I stand where she knelt.

*U. A. Fanthorpe*

## Underground

Henry Moore's *A Shelter Sketchbook*

They have come as far as there is,  
Under the tree-roots, the sewers,  
Under drains, cables, flood-plains.

They sprawl, wrapped in blankets,  
Waiting like tubers for spring, the all-clear.  
At Belsize Park, Cricklewood,

The Liverpool Street Extension,  
Londoners lie under London, incubating  
A difficult energy, a different life.

Round the corner the artist watches,  
Jotting notes on an envelope.  
*To have drawn from life would be like*

*Sketching in the hold of a slave ship.*  
Not the Cockney wags of legend, but huge  
Muffled forms, trussed and bandaged

Like Lazarus. Wood and stone,  
As well as bones and veins, wait inside  
These vast vulnerabilities.

From their coding, we can construe  
Houses falling, bridges falling, London falling,  
Civilisations falling down. The artist

Must show this without saying. Just  
His sketchbook's sotto-voce: *Abstractish figures shelter background,*  
And *Try white again then scramble dryish grey over.*

Also he shows the women knitting,  
People holding hands, sleeping,  
And thinking. Particularly thinking.

From these rhizomes the future will rise,  
Equivocal, chancy. Crowned stones  
On a northern moor, too big for houses,

And paper-shrouded Cardboard Citizens,  
Sleeping in Strand doorways, neighbours to rubbish,  
And all stations between. As Cabot

Aimed for Japan, got Newfoundland instead,  
These monstrous eggs may hatch surprisingly.

Above them, paving stones and tarmac sag,  
Windows taped into resistance, the hunched  
Apprehensive roofs of Cricklewood

And Belsize Park, the Liverpool Street Extension,  
Guns, smoke, cloud, fighters, bombers, fire, air,

Under the City, in the sky, pitched  
Between heaven and humanity, as we are,  
The tube trains shuttling between,

And the artist taking notes round the corner.

*U. A. Fanthorpe*

## Mystic

I glimpsed God once,  
or something very like.

A starry starry night  
back in '88 or '9

found me—as usual  
tipsy but not drunk—

staring out to sea  
and wondering which waves

would break and which would lap.  
I'd spend hours doing that.

Suddenly the sky  
exploded—or so it seemed—

like a city with power restored.  
I only understood

a contour, never fixed,  
an after-image on the eye,

indelible. Indelible  
like the exquisite

sense of loss at homecoming,  
like the exile's rage

I'd very soon appreciate.  
Since when, nothing, nothing

but silence, infinite  
and subtle in its shades.

*Tim Kendall*

## And Indians

They made a word for light when it went out,  
Then many words for dark, if not such dark.  
As fell and spread among them like a doubt.

It's not a date we celebrate, but then  
There's no one day to ring or week to mark.  
It happened and keeps happening to them.

Nothing to make a song or dance about.  
Nothing to be the theme of a third act.  
They had no argument and show no sign

Of coming back to make one. They were *them*,  
And death is in that word like its own wine  
Gone acid and eroding them to *then*.

Then to the fled allotment of a time.  
Then to the listed ruin of a fact.

*Glyn Maxwell*

## Chopsticks

You arrive like two legs slid  
into a single paper stocking:  
kneeless, *à pointe*, joined at your bamboo hip,  
half a person awaiting  
the awareness of fingers,  
the mirrorball of an open mouth before  
you can dance on the rice-strewn floor  
of an emptying bowl.

You are drug-stuck lovers  
joined at the heads,  
you are goalposts with a foreshortened bar,  
you are a gate through which  
a bone-thin password must be whispered  
before we can enter the garden of good appetite.

Your snap as I part you  
is sharp as a shot,  
is the opposite of a gnash,  
is the wishbone of a geometric chicken.  
It is the sound of one stomach clapping:  
it announces the breaking of all fasts,  
the beginning of all feasts.

*W. N. Herbert*

## White Comedy

I waz whitemailed  
By a white witch,  
Wid white magic  
An white lies,  
Branded a white sheep  
I slaved as a whitesmith  
Near a white spot  
Where I suffered whitewater fever.  
Whitelisted as a white leg  
I waz in de white book  
As a master of de white art,  
It waz like white death.

People called me white jack  
Some hailed me as white wog,  
So I joined de white watch  
Trained as a white guard  
Lived off de white economy.  
Caught an beaten by de whiteshirts  
I waz condemned to a white mass.

Don't worry,  
I shall be writing to de Black House.

*Benjamin Zephaniah*

## First I Fall Over Then You Stumble

### I.

That fool my neighbour who went abroad  
all week long of the deep hard freeze

left the stupid pipe from his over-flow  
drip-drip-dripping, and then came home

to find this satire-toothed icicle glued  
the whole unscaleable drop of his house:

something from nothing but lasting how long?  
Not long at all if he had his way.

With my nose in a book I heard bits strike  
my window like gravel as there he worked

hammer and tongs—like handfuls of gravel  
so I thought Careful! and went to say so,

forgetting what made his icicle grow  
meant walking out into the world at all

was asking for it, as then I proved  
taking the flight of my own front steps

bright-red-face-first, smacking the path—  
the stone-flagged path—like a sack of meal

and bellowing up to his ladder-perch  
*Watch what you're doing! Mind my glass!*

(feeling the earth lose shape and blow  
in fragments round me, flakes of snow).

### II.

It just so happened that because we'd hired  
those men to fix our lawn, because they'd come  
the wrong end of a rainless spring, because

you were unhappy in your self, and tired,  
and ripe for falling, and because some  
clods the men had pick-axed-up then rose

(or seemed to rise) against the instep of your shoe—  
because of these and other passing things  
it just so happened on the day I mean,

the sunlit morning I stepped out with you  
for nothing more than what was happening,  
you stumbled. Lurched. Went over, almost. Then

flung out one hand like someone sowing grain,  
no, not like that, like someone when the seed  
has just been sown, who sees their hand a scoop

filled up with useless air again,  
and thinks: *this looks like something given but feels sad—  
like something taken; more like hope denied than hope.*

*And look at him. Does he think otherwise? Is that why  
he's all smiles? The 'he' this time was me, of course, and I  
—I had to say: you're wrong. I'd smiled to see you fall,*

or nearly fall, because that self-same day  
you'd washed your hair, then blow-dried, brushed it dry,  
which meant that when you tripped it swung like half a bell

and framed your face. Your lovely face. Your face  
which in the struggle to keep balance found no place  
for anything but self-belief, and energy, and grace.

*Andrew Motion*

## The Daughter of Jairus

*for Pat-Joe Morley*

There is an art to it that can't be learnt  
By reading which roses to prune back  
In their dormant season: you only know  
From long experience which varieties  
Flower on the old wood.

Our glass-cupboards you crafted perfectly  
From wood saved when you dismantled  
The organ-loft in the local church;  
Our ceiling-boards were once the sprung floor  
In the village dance-hall.

There's something else which tongues and grooves  
Between the roses and the builder's pine:  
The wood at the base of the gorse-bush  
Is dead, grey, dry—fit for nothing  
But burning; yet on it grows

The vividest dark green and a gold  
To put the newly risen sun to shame.  
Everything fits: your apprentice-trade  
Was coffin-making—six on a good day,  
Flat out, with no meal-break.

The sawed pine first, shaped for the shoulders,  
Narrowing by set proportion to the feet  
(Set, according to some traditions,  
One on the other). Then all lacquered,  
Adorned with brazen handles

To merit everlasting heaven's riches:  
By this art to book your place, in the eyes  
Of those who look up to the ceiling,  
Among the ranks of the immortal dead.

*Bernard O'Donoghue*

## Burying Fairies

*Sarah Evans*

We stood out in the rain, Marianne and I. We stood out in the rain before the mound of fresh earth with the ground turning to mud around our feet. She sniffed a few times, but refused my arm about her, and stood far away from me, shivering, smelling dusty like the flowers from her shop. I said a few words of sorrow, or maybe I didn't, maybe I only mouthed them or whispered them, as if no-one, not even my wife, should know my secret grief.

She stared at the grave and the tiny puddles of cold water that collected on the tops of her shoes, and then towards the sky beyond where darkness squatted over by the hills. She seemed lost for words. Her mouth simply opened and closed, her hands sputtered delicately over her rose-coloured coat buttons. I watched her as I scraped my boot on the shovel, as I brushed sad soil from my trouser leg—but she wouldn't look at me. Instead, she gazed vaguely towards the bright kitchen light, towards sanctuary, towards the biscuit tin.

"I'll go and put the kettle on," she said. And that was it. I watched her as she went back to the house. I thought she might be sad or grateful or something, anything but angry. Her anger was like one too many steps down into darkness. I didn't know what to do.

There were times I could look outside and be happy, but now, it's just fields with trees and hedges and places where the fairies go at night. Sheep too, full of guilt and suspicion, looking like naughty ankle-socked school girls, as they amble along the hedge away from the damp scuff of my boots.

"What have you done?" she said. Well, I couldn't tell her exactly, could I? Where would I have started? Her chin trembled, I knew tears would come. Part of me wanted to tell her how much I needed her. But I merely looked at the tea as it swirled around in the dainty white cup and at the peculiar pattern of the icing on the biscuits.

There are still parts of her here, of course. I found a bangle the other day. It bears her sweat and maybe an imprint of her pale skin's patterned surface. She was halfway through a paperback, her bookmark a piece of the local paper torn free of its parent with incomplete sentences and

half-hearted secrets in its jagged edges. Sometimes I read it, just the last few lines she was reading, just to the end of the chapter. Someone in there left the lid off the herbs in the kitchen and the warm room smells of dead leaves and dead flowers and bread left out overnight.

"What have you done?"

The accusation lay in the fire's cold ashes gathered around the grate, patterned with the burnt corners of logs and fragments of heated coal. And the layer of it on the tiles, like she'd shaken her head to get all thought of me out. I warmed my feet there after she'd gone, not really feeling anything, or rather just feeling as if she'd gone to the shops and would soon be back. The fire turned grey, collapsing into the pattern that remains there still. She didn't come back. I wonder how cold it will become before I break the spell that fireplace has over me.

"Have you seen the lambs, Marianne?"

"Yes," she said, bitterly mimicking the frosty earth. "Of course." Her voice was venom, a spider's fang, quickly injecting her serum and backing off while it did the work for her.

She had paused only briefly in her job, a rose stem angled across her face, its head already wilting, waiting to be stuffed into an already-crammed vase. Their faces seemed to plead me to let them go, but of course, I never did. I merely brushed their dying petals with my fingertips and searched for their non-existent, over-cultivated scent with my nose.

"More leftovers?"

"Well, it's not really the time for roses," she said.

She was lost then, in her display, leaving vagrant leaves, bits of stem, and unsuccessful blooms in her wake. Sometimes I just wanted to shake her. Sometimes, it was myself I was angry with.

These moments fade in and out, woven with rubbish like the little bits of flower she would discard. But they linger, like the scent is supposed to linger on her pillow, like the patch of sunlight creeping deftly across the wall, or the call of the growing lambs in the fields. I have stood in the kitchen for hours, played experimental tunes on the empty pans. I've even taken the tops from the tiny bottles of herbs. They were pungent for a few days, but now they just smell of dust.

My breath comes and goes, blowing around with the leaves and the wood smoke and sheep's sneezes. Some heavy weight clings to my shoulders. In more romantic moments, I rather think it's my sanity, its tapered fingers gripping tighter day by day. Then, I rather think that it's as if, when she went, Marianne left my lid off and gradually I'm evaporating, becoming the stuff that her flowers breathe in.

"What have you done?"

The first one was Penny. She had auburn hair that curled at the temple and long, brown lashes that bracketed those deep brown eyes. There were hours when she was all I could think about. I talked out loud to her presence in my head. I felt completely foolish when the sheep turned to look at me before they ran away. It was difficult to remember that they have no clue as to the peculiarities of men, and no idea that the person I walked alongside holding hands with did not, in fact, exist. Painfully, she clung to my insides, made me weak. Even now, I can imagine her lips: I want to pluck them, I want to nibble them like cherries.

Then it was a girl on the train. She sat opposite me, limbs like fingers. Long, long fingers beneath the rapture of my paper's edge. How I wanted to nuzzle the thighs I glimpsed. I scratched a hole in a picture of some balding politician so I could watch her read without being observed myself. With the paper close to my face, I was able to watch her blonde hair, her graceful hands. At one point, she lifted her head and her eyes locked with my one eye. Did she know? And did she know that, as I stared at her, the eye I had to keep shut made tears run down my trembling face?

Karen, I like to call her, and she sometimes folded up her long, long limbs and soothed my own as I bathed, or she caressed my cheek after I'd shaved.

"You're putting on weight," Marianne said. Her hand was on my furry belly, cupping its flaccid tautness as if there was a womb inside—a grand and excited womb. She went into the bathroom where water was running, like all her little inconsequential thoughts were gushing out to become a single, vast paper mache idea. Sometimes I thought her mind was a wasps' nest—chewed up bits of paper, wriggling blind larvae with a sting.

"Are you joining me?" she shouted. I shivered, thinking of the potent peach-smelling stuff she would make me use, and then of the things she might want to do to me.

Marianne was naked when she walked back in. There was a red mark around her waist where her skirt had been too tight, another under her jelly-like breasts.

"And you've developed mother's hips."

She simply stared at me, the towel in her hand soaking up all the hate I glimpsed behind her eyes.

"I'm going for a walk," I said, so embarrassed that my tongue was dry and as I buttoned up my shirt, my fingers trembled as a pocket of mirth opened up in my belly.

"Catch me a fairy," she said and I watched her bottom walk angrily away. It was only then I allowed myself a smile.

We were in bed, Marianne and I, her hand across my chest as if she wanted to know the moment I died, or moved or thought of someone else. I'd lain awake for ages listening as the frost moved in tight circles around the garden. I'd stood at the window and watched in the moon's light as the blades of winter grass crackled and bent under its clutch. Marianne murmured, her hand twitched on my cotton-clad nipple. Something bayed outside, a fox probably, hungry and cold as it roamed favourite paths out of the woodland.

Marianne's hand slipped gently from my chest, went to her mouth, or her own breast—which she would sometimes cup and cling to in her sleep. I slid over to the window and peeked quietly through the curtains into the frosty night. There were strange sounds out there, strange shuffling scuffles. My heart raced, my breath fogged at the window, trying to escape my face.

Minutes later, I was outside, so excited I thought I was going to cry. From the window I had seen some strange lights, tiny flickering fragments of some larger object. I wanted them on me, touching me, kissing my skin. I stood there, my bare feet in uneasy communion with the pale crispy grass, waiting, longing for the bright shards of light to come back and swirl about me. But there was nothing. Even the fox had stopped barking, even the grass had stopped crinkling. There was just nothing. Nothing at all. I went back to my wife's bed and lay awake, watching her sleep. I thought of Penny; wished it was her beside me, or Karen with her long, long legs of molten gold.

"More leftovers?" I asked. Huge bundles of unsold flowers now adorned shelves and dark hollows of our house.

"It's not the time for roses."

"But it's just been Valentine's Day," I said, laughing. "How can you not sell roses?"

"Look," she said, "I am not arguing about fucking roses, all right?" Lips and eyes were the colour of heartburn. Thin and nauseous they turned on me, full of flame and spite and sorrow.

"I'm going for a walk," I said, not knowing what else to do.

"Again? Going to see your fairies?" she said. There was an edge to her voice; it had angles.

"It's pointless, isn't it?"

"What? Exactly?" She plucked leaves from the stem of a yellow rose.

"You just don't believe, do you? For you, there's just no fantasy?"

"Fantasy? I stupidly believed in this marriage didn't I?" she said, and quickly removed another vase of unwanted roses.

I found the dead fairy a few weeks after that. Poor thing. It's just something you never see. Where do they normally go to when they die? Do their kind carry them off to a fairy cemetery? Are their bodies eaten by the fox or the badger? Or do they simply disappear, dissolving into celestial air, tainting what we breathe in?

But, anyway, there she was, in the field with all the sheep grazing beside her, her eyes glazed and sightless, her limbs stiff, unyielding. I picked her up in my arms, her head lolling across my shoulder. I think it might have been then that I started to cry, but when I reached the house and set her down on the grass, I started to sob.

"Marianne?" I called. "Marianne?" But there was no answer, just the silent ring in the dim corridors of the house. So, I decided to bury her. It would be too dark soon, too dark and too sad. The earth was hard work and came up in huge, soggy clods. Earthworms sucked themselves back into tiny holes, retreating or rampaging forward—curling up with regret. I laid her down with great care. I tried to close her eyes under my freezing palm, but they wouldn't close fully. I stroked her head, her white hair, her smooth cheeks. Tears still ran from my eyes. The ends of my fingers were numb from the cold despite the gloves, despite the frequent gulps of whiskey, despite the racing of my heart. I laid the fairy in the cold earth and covered her over with dark, heavy soil. I fetched one of Marianne's roses and laid it on the mound of earth. Cold March raindrops collected in its folds.

Dark skies loomed to the west. I stayed to watch the grave just in case undead fingers poked up through the soil like the stems of spring flowers. Whether I imagined it or not, there was a scream. It ripped open my layers and exposed my pale flesh to the biting wind. I opened the grave. But she was still. I covered her over and calmly blew on my hands.

When Marianne came to find me, I was stiff from the cold.

"Vincent?" she said, "Vincent? What ever's wrong?"

"She was dead when I found her."

"Who's dead, Vincent? What's happened?"

"A fairy."

"A fairy?" she said. Ice formed on her jowls; you could hear it, crackling through space.

"A fairy." I nodded, but I don't think she saw.

She stepped away from me. I plunged the shovel into bare earth, lowered my head, reached for my wife and started to speak, or whisper or whatever it was I did.

"I'll go and put the kettle on." I watched her walk away. She did something with her hands, some movement I missed, and then she had gone, turned away from me and back towards the cold house.

Perhaps she blamed me for the death; I wasn't to know. But she refused my arm; she refused my consolation. Instead she drank her tea and went upstairs.

I awoke later in the darkness of our bedroom. The bathroom light was on and she was in there talking to her own reflection. She's finally gone mad, I thought. She's finally gone mad.

She was drenched and filthy dirty, her dark hair plastered to her head, her shirt flat upon her breasts. I saw her shudder. I stayed where I was. I didn't know what else to do.

"What have you done?" she asked me. "What have you become?"

I could see myself. I looked down from her eyes and I almost laughed. My eyes were wide, my grin foolish, my hands tight upon the quilt.

"What have you done?" She was crying, but made no attempt to hide it.

Suddenly she grabbed the corner of the duvet and ripped it back from my paisleyed body.

"Get up! Get up Vincent! Come and look."

Marianne hauled me over to the window and grabbed the curtains open in front of my face. But all I could see was darkness and the pattern the rain made on the glass. She ran downstairs. I heard her footsteps go through the hall and the kitchen and finally out through the back door.

Swimming in the sudden lake of light, Marianne's face loomed, looking up at me, her arms outstretched as if she were about to receive Jesus and all his followers. Her mouth was moving. I opened the window to the scent of freshness and the cold. Marianne shouted something. I waited.

"It's a fucking sheep," she repeated at last. "It's a sheep."

At her feet, its fleece heavily soiled, the sheep's grotesque body lay stiffly on the grass. I backed slowly away from the window and climbed back into bed. What was she trying to do to me?

Sometime later, Marianne climbed in beside me. She smelled of soap, even her breath did.

"It wasn't a fairy, Vincent. It was a sheep. You saw it was a sheep."

I simply looked at her, the draft from the open window fluffing a section of hair on the back of my head.

"Vincent," she sighed, "are you going mad?"

I'm having an affair, I wanted to say, I'm not mad, but I am having an affair. But I didn't say it, of course. I didn't say anything; I just turned away from her and looked at the shape of the hills through the open curtains. I brought my hand up and held it in front of me. For a while, I studied its shape, marvelled at its simplicity, trying to see through the flesh to the shape of the bones. The thud of it falling back onto my body was startling. For a while, I thought it belonged to someone else. All feeling and warmth had gone from it. It had no movement, no humanity. It could have belonged to a cadaver.

The summer is finished. The sheep has rotted quietly on my lawn. I watched it regain life as a season of insects used it as a restaurant. But there have been no more fairies. It's as if, having buried one of their number, they have now gone. They took off their hats to their sister, and now they have moved. Equally, I could have buried the last of their kind. Whichever is true, I miss them, I miss them all.

## Light

*The Giraffe House, London Zoo (1836)*

A cool exaggeration, five-metre doors  
made reasonable with Roman arches.  
An arrangement of parts, the giraffe  
carries himself off, all height, no weight.

His ancestor arrived at the dawn  
of Transcendentalism and acetylene.  
Walking from the dock to Regent's Park,  
he freaked at the sight of a cow in Commercial Road.

Fellow ungulates, they met in the year  
of the Arc de Triomphe, *The Pickwick Papers*  
and the birth of the state of Arkansas,  
more feats of design.

*Lavinia Greenlaw*

## Reconnected

Years later, with a frantic need, I phone  
and almost pull the flex out of the wall  
when the younger voice that answers me's my own:  
"Sorry we're not here to take your call."

*Tony Harrison*

## The Gift Horse

into whose mouth we're not supposed to look  
stands firm on four legs, as many hands high  
as a civic statue, almost a house  
with a back-boiler and new pump and all its lights  
on—as shiny and horsechestnutlike  
as if painted by Stubbs. Though it's shod in lucky iron  
and its teeth are flecked with a green foam of clover  
it's precisely the gift horse whose mouth invites  
something more than a brief once-over.  
Think of the Trojans. In what remained of their  
language that proverb was ditched  
and replaced by the one about being beware  
of the Greeks, especially those who bear gifts.

*Jamie McKendrick*

## The Night-Watchman

Waking in cold sweat, he thinks of the miller,  
dunking his head in his day's work  
to guard against theft from his precious flour;  
sealing every grain and ground in place  
with the look in his eye, and his mouth—like a scar,  
to make sure.

Even a finger, licked and dabbed for a taste  
would leave a print, a trace.

Going back to bed  
from a week away in the far south, finding  
another soul impressed in the cotton sheet,  
airwaves bent around a human shape,  
a different death-mask  
buried in the pillow-case,

he stands a minute on the ocean floor of outer-space,  
lead-limbed, and ashen-faced.

*Simon Armitage*

## To the Sculptor Emiliano Barral

*after Machado*

Plane by plane,  
corner by corner,  
your chisel struck upon me  
holding my breath  
in the frozen dawn  
of this porphyry block,  
or at least the man I now  
want for my mirror:  
a Spanish Buddha, in all  
his pure and idle grandeur!  
The dumb, slaked mouth,  
the ears put to the wall  
of silence, and, under  
the great slope of the brow,  
eyes scooped from the rock—  
from rock, that I might not see.

*Don Paterson*

## Reggae Fi Bernard

wi nevah come fram di same blood-line  
but wi pawt kriss-krass an jaine  
an alldow wid wananadah  
wi wozn dat familiah  
all di same  
wi woz family

dats why mi a beg pawdn an tek dis libahty  
an pudung a couple rime to yu mehmahry

it come een like a jus di addah day  
yu lef school an jaine di railway  
wid nuff ambishan an a fewcha plan  
yu wozn drawin big pay  
but yu woz well an yu way  
an jus wen yu ready fi staat  
fi goh choo-choo choo-boogie  
train cut yu journey  
shaat

di day yu get yu laas send-awf  
fram yu bawn-groun  
before dem fly yu bady  
doun to jamdoun  
di sun stay away fram work dat day  
an di slate grey january day  
a sing a silent dirge  
az daak clouds daat  
inna diffrant direckshan  
callide an canverge

merge an re-emerge  
inna blustah a emoeshan  
inna di church grey sky