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N66 PROSE

FEATURES

Poets I Go Back To 56

Daljit Nagra and **Penelope Shuttle**

In Conversation 62

Yvonne Green talks to **Ruth Padel**

Blind Criticism 71

Suzanne Conway and **Pam Thompson**

Close Reading 80

Susannah Hart

Featured Title 82

Geraldine Clarkson, *Crucifox*
published by Verve Poetry Press

PUBLICATIONS

Chrissy Banks

Frank 74

David Tait

By Degrees 76

Ben Bransfield

Judder Men 78

James Caruth

Speechless at Inch 84

Meg Cox

A Square of Sunlight 88

David Harmer illus. Ted Schofield

All Kinds of Poems for All Kinds of Kids 94

Michael McCarthy

Like a Tree Cut Back 100

REVIEWS

Paul Stephenson 105

on Manuel Vilas, Matthew Sweeney, David Morley

Jane Routh 109

on New Poetries VIII

Edmund Prestwich 111

on Fleur Adcock, Michael Vince, Annie Freud, Tishani Doshi

Belinda Cooke 114

on Frank Ormsby, Nessa O'Mahony

Josephine Corcoran 117

on Maria Taylor, Jackie Wills, Katherine Stansfield

Philip Rush 121

on Bad Betty Shots Series 3: Anita Pati, Jacqueline Saphra,
Daisy Thurston-Gent, Victoria Adukwei Bulley

Elisabeth Sennitt Clough 123

on Heidi Williamson, Carrie Etter, Phoebe Stuckes

N66 POETRY

116 POEMS BY 58 POETS

Sally Goldsmith
Jane Kite
Mike Di Placido
Hilary Menos
Michael Greavy
Nichola Deane
Penelope Shuttle
Martin Hayden
River Wolton
Mike Barlow
M R Peacocke
Subhadramati
Josephine Corcoran
Neil Martin
Amanda Dalton
Carola Luther
David Hale
Charlotte Baldwin
Hubert Moore
Judi Sutherland
Candyce Lange
Chanje Kunda
Alexandra Corrin-Tachibana
Duncan Chambers
Yvonne Green
Paul Stephenson
Emily Wills
D A Prince
Jon Miller
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Lydia Harris
Matt Howard
Jane Routh
Peter Raynard
Maurice Franceschi
Becky Cullen
Rich Robinson
Emily Cotterill
Robert Hamberger
Niamh Prior
John Lancaster
Jo Bratten
Dominic Weston
Jenny Hockey
Roy Marshall
Gerry Stewart
Lauren Garland
Ruth Padel
Chrissy Banks
David Tait
Ben Bransfield
Luke Samuel Yates
Geraldine Clarkson
James Caruth
Meg Cox
David Harmer
Michael McCarthy

For A Full List Of Poems
Please See Back Pages

EDITORIAL

It's a sunny Monday in July after a spectacular thunderstorm yesterday in Sheffield. Wimbledon is underway and at the Euros England won their quarter final four-nil. Which is great though I always say I don't really follow football, being a Mansfield Town fan (whereas Ann is Doncaster Rovers). If Brexit had meant leaving the football, it surely wouldn't have happened, despite so many deliberately misled voters, even or especially those who flourish their Little England on twenty-foot flagpoles in the front garden. There's one up the hill from us, on the edge of the most deprived estate in Europe. Ann worked in a school there once, a particularly happy writing project, one that made a difference for a while, the way poetry sometimes can, funded by the EU.

In any case, all this sport means the world seems to be opening up again. The first poems in our first issue during the pandemic were from China, by David Tait, and now those bulletins have been gathered together in a pamphlet, some of whose other poems are included here. Similarly, but from an altogether different place, the current issue features days from River Wolton's *Year of Kindness*, running from January through to August 2020. We hope to complete this remarkable calendar in the Winter issue.

Other material is waiting too, not least poems by the just-announced winners of the International Book and Pamphlet Competition. Every year the quality is high and really this time (thank you if you were in among) there were more collections than ever that might have won, and which must sooner or later be in print. So, thank you to the judges, Daljit

Nagra and Pascale Petit, who have done a fantastic job. Ann and I have begun editing with their winners, and it is such a pleasure – you will see what we mean next issue. In that issue too will be poems from the New Poets Prize, judged this year by Kim Moore. We're equally if not even more excited to be publishing this quartet of young writers (again from a very strong field). Kim will run workshops and our own Suzannah Evans will mentor the poets, so as to have their collections ready for next year.

Now the 21st Century Books poll. It was great so many of you responded and heartening to read the comments on your favourite poetry collections. We couldn't get the results in focus for this issue, but they're available at www.poetrybusiness.co.uk and will appear as a feature in *The North 67*. We can say meanwhile that the most popular titles (four or more votes) were by Raymond Antrabus, Fiona Benson, Liz Berry, Eavan Boland, Imtiaz Dharker, Rebecca Elson, Seamus Heaney, Mimi Khalvati, Andrew McMillan, Kei Miller, Sinead Morrissey, Helen Mort, Sharon Olds, Alice Oswald and Claudia Rankin.

Some of your comments about titles we happen to publish: Jane Routh's *Listening to the Night* ('Wordsworthian in the best sense'); David Constantine's, *For the Love of It*, ('the most re-read of all my books and pamphlets'); and *When I Think of My Body as a Horse* by Wendy Pratt ('wow wow wow'). If this looks like a blatant advert, check out the other Poetry Business publications showcased in this issue. We'll just mention one, the memoir by the late Michael McCarthy. We are proud to have published Fr Michael and we miss

him, and this book shows something of why. I remember him ringing to say he'd just fallen off his chair reading the *Guardian*, where Hilary Mantel had chosen his new poetry collection as a Book of the Year.

One of the reasons this latest *North* is the Apart Together Issue is that nearly a third of the poems were started on Zoom, as part of a larger Arts Council funded digital project. See if you can guess which poems, though even we don't know now. We're glad to say these workshops will continue, many led by more (and the same!) brilliant guest-tutors. We are looking forward to beginning 'real life' Writing Days, but it is wonderful to work with people so far apart and altogether and as it were up-close on-screen. As well as Zoom workshops and masterclasses, 'Apart Together' includes fantastic input – such as conversations, blogs, writing tasks and reading recommendations – from our monthly Digital Poets-in-Residence. Check them out, you know where.

And finally, many thanks to the contributors for another stand-out issue – the feature writers and reviewers not least (we know we are blessed), and of course thank you to the poets. And thank you gentle reader, where would we be without you. If you're also a poet (are you, you never said), send us poems please – not by post though but online these hip and virtual days. Meanwhile, from Ann and me and the rest of the team, we hope you are keeping well.

SALLY GOLDSMITH

Charcoal Burner

In memory of George Yardley, Wood Collier. He was burnt to death in his Cabbin on this place Octr. 11th 1786. William Brookes, Salesman; David Glossop, Gamekeeper; Thos. Smith, Besom maker; Sampn. Brookshaw, Innkeeper.
– Inscription on grave, Ecclesall Woods, Sheffield

His stack built of cordwood is rounded
like a neat hive or plum pudding.

He's covered it with earth and sleek, prepared
for changing winds with fleaks and sacking,

dropped fire into its maw, stopped it with turf
for a slow burn. Soon, he'll watch for the turn

of smoke from white to blue,
three days or so, he'll rake and pack.

Tonight he'll slake his thirst at the Rising Sun,
then totter home to sleep while he can.

With half an eye on the smoulder, he'll miss
the breeze, the stray spark, the glow of it.

The Whitecoal Makers

They lived like gypsies in shifty shelters
of propped hazel and turf, working
for loppings, rammel and broom brash
but never wrote it down –
their precise alchemy of oak, owler, flame.

No record of their names, forgotten men,
unlike their masters, flash yeomen turned
lead smelters – the Eyres, Strelleys, Mowers –
still whiffing of the farm but newly fat in their halls,
or the sixth Earl with his *most commodious milne*.

Their *kylnses* pock the wood,
brambled hollows over which we stumble,
our tools a tape, a camera, GPS, two metre pole,
their tools just axe and froe, tinder for *coalinge*
the coppicings in Smeekley and Brindwood.

We guess at humble lives, the way they stacked
oak wavers, warm draughts to dry them,
made the fuel to fire the bellowed mills
that smoked and blighted families and fields,
their woodland poverty where now we walk our dogs.

We map each kiln, each Q-shaped spout sketched
and questioned as to how it funnelled air.
Or not. The Qs are questions too, this trade unwritten,
these men, their skills rubbed out by unimportance,
their lack of letters, the plenteousness of coke.

Whitecoal kilns – small pits – have been discovered all over woods in parts of South West Sheffield and North Derbyshire. Until the 1980s, no one knew what they were.

JANE KITE

Visitor

I thought it must be Tony
when I heard tap-tapping at my kitchen door.
Tony bringing a poem
or a little note
with some sideways observation
on the known world
or a bottle of beer.

I was pleased
to leave my fireside.

On the step wasn't Tony
but a fine cock pheasant
dark and shiny
standing proud
an old un,
so must have been more wily
than are most of his breed.

I held my indignation
that he wasn't Tony
and addressing him directly,
thanked him for his visit.

Convolvulus

There are no weeds in my garden, only plants
and I like the clover, dandelions, fox and cubs,

Welsh poppies, thistles and nettles
and all the little trees that germinate and have a go
for a bit until I cull them so as not to live in a forest.

The plants remind me of my friends.
She's like a rambling rose, he's a buttercup, pretty,
but a bit all over the place;
there are sweet violets, speedwells and teasels.

I enjoyed dragging the matted bindweed off the trellis
this morning, appalled at its growth rate, the overwhelm
and choke, the twist of its deadly embrace,

and as I spread the tangled mess in the sun
for dehydration before composting, I think of you.

MIKE DI PLACIDO

Hedge Laying

Frank's pulling on his gauntlets
and stretching like a dancer
while Billy's sizing up
where the main pleaches are.

Without more ado
they dock their roll-ups
then set to like poetry
with loppers and billhooks.

With those pleaches stripped clean
and half-hacked at the base
they bend them horizontal
and nick along the bark at random.

Those weeping welts
will draw the sap in spring
and turn long bare limbs
into a brazier of life.

Laughable at the moment –
you could easily step over –
but come back in a season or three
and try to do it then.

Drying Out

Australia, of course; but as I remember,
the weather was always warm, equable,
like Bruce and his family – the farm itself, even.

A few hours from Melbourne in his Toyota Celica
we'd head off after those Sunday games:
a teammate in the true sense of the word.

In the distance a tractor grumbling along,
the black collie rounding us up, walks
to nowhere and back – the endless mugs

of sweet tea. My first drying out weekends –
although I didn't know that then. Just a hazy
line of blue hills, the unbroken sounds of

ordinariness going on. Fences, paddocks –
there, where I first found a peace and a distance
from a then unremitting and savage state.

HILARY MENOS

The Great Pool Shoot-Out

On Valentine's day in 1978 Willie Mosconi, then fifteen times World Straight Pool Champion, played Rudolph "Minnesota Fats" Wanderone, hustler and pool shark, at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel.

Fats interrupts the emcee, and once he start he don't stop.

*I am the smartest man I know. I know everything anyone knows,
and nobody knows what I know.* The emcee runs the toss; Mosconi wins.
Fats shrugs. *I lost it because I wanted to lose* he says, and hitches up his pants
and wanders away to grandstand the crowd. He looks like an unmade bed.
In an accent as thick as pastrami-and-Swiss he drawls *I beat the whole world.
Detroit Slim? I beat him a thousand nights in a row. Beat him so bad
he had to go back to share croppin'. I played Happy the Chinaman down in Hong Kong,
he ain't been happy since. An' I played the Terrible Turk, he ain't been terrible since*
and everyone laughs but Mosconi.

Mosconi's rule: Fats has got to be quiet while Mosconi shoots.

*Never kept score. Keeping score is for suckers. Only thing I ever kept
was the cash and the broads. I beat everyone on Earth. St Peter, rack 'em up!*
With a face like thunder, Mosconi takes the lead, the game, the first set,
while Fats circles the table with his cue in one hand and the audience in the other.
*I've played everywhere from Zanzibar to Timbuktu, everywhere but the moon.
I own land in outer space. Played the North Pole, a hundred twenty below.
I beat every sonofabitch in New York a hundred times.
All I ever knew about was winning, I ain't never been a loser in my life.*
The emcee ushers Fats back to his seat.

Third set. Mosconi has the balls and Fats is facing extinction
but what should have been a hanger was a flub and Fats clears the table.
Was there doubt? he shouts. *You ain't never seen one like me!*
I never lost a game when I was playin' for the cheese! Next game he
misses a bank on the five ball, and it's game, set and match to Mosconi.
The emcee shoves the mic in his face. Unflappable, Fats deadpans.
*This man's a champion, okay, fifteen times he's been champion,
but I been champion of the Earth ever since the turn of the century,*
says New York Fats, Broadway Fats, Minnesota Fats.
Besides, he says, if I want a trophy, I'll buy one.

W.O.M.A.N.

"A girl can't sing rock'n'roll. It's basically too savage for a girl singer to handle." – Connie Francis

What was the first rock and roll record ever made? Most people say 'Rock Around the Clock' by Bill Haley but you're not most people so you might say 'Rocket 88', and not even the Bill Hayley version but the earlier recording by Jackie Brenston and his Delta Cats who, you might mention, were actually Ike Turner and his Kings of Rhythm and who only got the credit because of a cock up at Chess Records. You might even tell me the (probably apocryphal) story of how they dropped the guitar amp on the drive up to Memphis and packed the broken cone with wads of paper to keep it in place, and Sam Phillips liked the sound it made, and the rest, as they say, is history. Ike got twenty dollars for the gig and no writing credit, though you'll say he deserved what he got, and on this I have to agree.

Or maybe that's not esoteric enough, so you say 'Rock Awhile' by Goree Carter, its Johnny B Goode-style riff and overdriven guitar the authentic sound of Chuck Berry before Chuck himself had even met a girl called Maybelline. Or Fats Domino, or Wynonie Harris, or Howlin' Wolf. Or Elvis. And you say Elvis in that emphatic end-of-discussion way. Fair play, but where are the women in your Rock and Roll Hall of Fame? Where's Big Mama Thornton, first to record 'Hound Dog', first to record 'Ball 'n' Chain', where's Sister Rosetta Tharpe, out there rockin' that train station platform in the rain wearing her cream A-line coat with the diamanté collar and belting out 'Strange Things Happening Every Day', bringing it home her way on a white SG custom Gibson. And where is Etta James, who was

rock and roll from the jump, born to a 14-year-old black girl from LA and a slick white boy pool shark who seduced her and ran, Etta James, defiant in her honey skin, platinum wig and black tail fin eyeliner, skipping school and singing bebop on the corners, catching a break by writing a song too rude to play on the radio, forging a letter from her mum to say she could go on tour with Johnny Otis. Etta James, loud and lusty and lewd, belting out *I just wanna make love to you*, ballsy with attitude and rebellion and pain, in and out of rehab time and again, smouldering with sex and transgression. When Etta James says she's gonna take down Davy Crockett and make Jesse James eat out of the palm of her hand you know that she can even though she's just *one little rib taken from the side of man*.

MICHAEL GREAVY

Lifting the Joanna

Damp we lug her walnut bones, scuff
the beerhouse floor. Smoke teeth tinkle –
plinks of Disney raindrops, old milk bottles.
A darker shade of plum and rust.

Round her arse: the van, snow, Matterhorns
of kerb. Two blokes half-cut hopped up
can't hoik a pub piano. Fucked. No luck,
landlord Simon lends a sounder arm

to ush her in, a stubborn cow you lash
fast to the runner, slat and beam;
kneel in bolted dark to keep her calm,
composed. I stall, turn right, rush

the amber light; a glim of Borodin,
Bauhaus at a pothole. Speed bumps:
Les Dawson, 'Chopsticks', Keystone Cops;
bat on to Ludwig, wipers keeping time.

Ice. A Steinway dismounts Bempton Cliff.
Lon Chaney, death jazz, *Jaws*; your groan
in 3/4 time as we bounce hairpins,
moon-holes, humps and dips, risk

the big hill home. I feel like clapping, twice:
that pause before applause when air
retunes a silence richer than before.
Encore. Last chord. 'A Day in the Life'

The Map of Me

Comb Skull Wood for paths and tracks,
this greying field, its campfire patch.
Lower Shoulder

take the slope, dip
of a shirt, its scratch of snow. Crag Rib
bashed in a soccer match.

Edge the bend beyond Old Thumb
bent back in a water fight. Swum,
the pocket to Knee Top

that scar –
I vaulted two walls for a dare –
crooked this foot on a winter run.

The nab of my wrist, mole I can't see,
burn in my side turning my sleep.
Picture my skin:

potholes and dents.
Hip End. Chin Hill. Over the hedge
to Shingle Street.

Boxes, bags, clutter and rust:
a room in the thatch junked with stuff.

It's still here, under the air –
my blue compass worse for wear,
gathering dust, fishing for us.