

## ‘Retrospectives’ issue of *Agenda*: Web Supplement

Along with the sonorous chosen poems, we are focusing here on the art work of **John Hacker**. John has his own studio in East Sussex. He studied painting at the Royal College of Art, London, and art at Kingston School of Art. He has lectured and taught for many years and in 1964-65 worked for Chicago University on Archaeological Drawings of Ramases III Temple in Luxor.

He says of his work, ‘Although my work appears abstract, I paint what I see. I Ching and the Book of Changes has been a starting point for me – the movement of light coming through dark, and dark through light which is especially apparent on the mono gallery and to a certain extent on the colour gallery pages shown on this website.



Furthermore, what also is of great interest to me is the balance and imbalance of these light patterns and different energies which change throughout the seasons, and how this affects colour – from the winter months when the light is at its lowest to mid-summer when intensity reaches its peak.

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## **Roy Marshall**

### **Arm Wrestling with Nonno**

My mother told me how he altered  
the river's course, how those muscles  
were forged in the icy torrent where  
he shifted boulders.

An alpine soldier of the first war,  
later self-announced target  
of Fascist batons and castor oil;  
Fireman, climber, hell-raiser.

I knew him in a wheelchair,  
his demijohns of red turning  
to vinegar under the stairs  
as he sipped Orangina,

half-frozen and turtle-slow,  
weighted by a stroke  
that had cramped  
and furred him.

It was my face that brought light  
to his pale eyes, and it was me who,  
before he died, was the one  
he allowed to win.

### **Triumph**

When his army mates leave we hug  
and she hands me the keys.

The door swings open to oil scent,  
gleaming rims, exhausts blued by heat.

I wheel into autumn sunlight, the engine  
thumping steadily. His helmet fits

but this leather isn't me; *Triumph*  
across the back, forever him-creased.

## Inheritance

I'll take it now, that look you gave me,  
the one I saw yesterday,

as you passed an old man's hand  
over an oak-framed table,

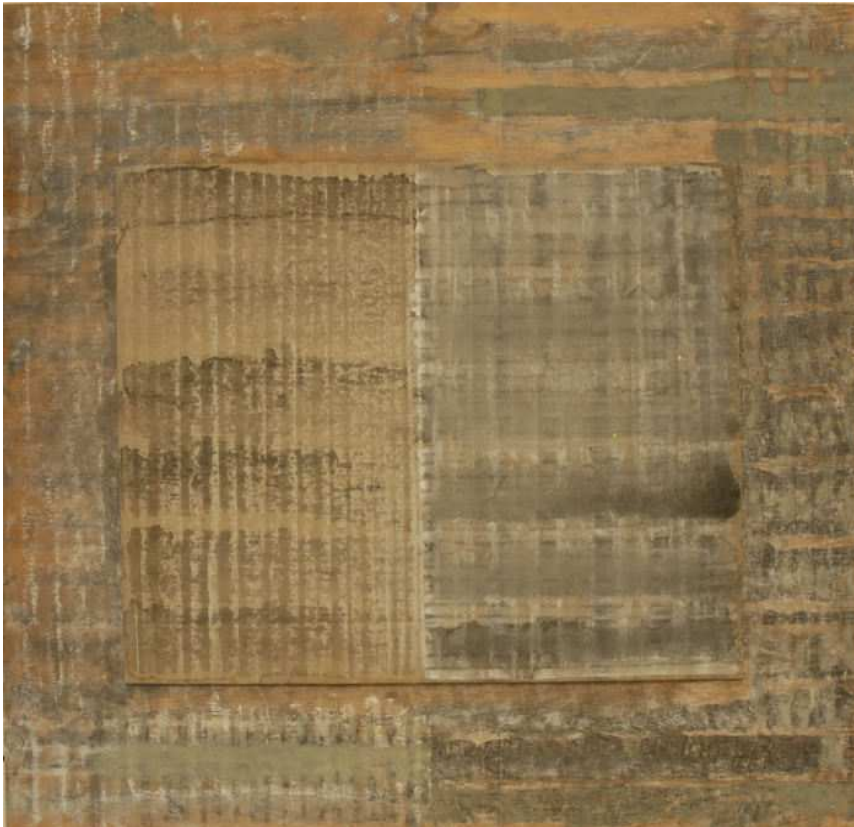
remembering how we lifted it from  
a roof-rack and into family history

when I was twelve and you  
were only forty-seven.

I'll keep that look with me,  
like the knowledge that geese will return

to land beyond a screen of reeds.  
All you felt and didn't say was in your steady gleam.

I turn to my son; his time now not to respond,  
to move beyond, out of reach.



**Michael Henry**

**Go As A Pilgrim**

X marks the spot in a Kentish lane  
where the wind winnowing in from France is frisked  
and told to blow on the left-hand side of the road,  
shivering the tops of trees, rustling through the hedgerows.  
Where the silence is broken  
by the ack ack of a startled pheasant,  
the brogue of a tractor-driver's brakes,  
a motorcycle clearing the ignition in its throat.

There's a pillbox in a farmer's field,  
topped-out with clover, nettles and oxeye daisies  
where rust distresses the lost blooms of elderflower,  
where shadows of soldiers at a loose end play games  
and where the virtual silence is broken  
by their singing heads mouthing Flecker's *'Go as a pilgrim'*.

A cross marks the spot  
where a Kentish lane crosses swords  
with the ley lines of an inner fear.  
I walk on with all the other pilgrims along the pilgrim way.



**Mandy Pannett**

**‘Stopping a Bunghole’**

A man may sing of love but never  
know it for himself, plot a murder yet  
not lift a knife.

Who would claim experience is wisdom’s only key?  
A one who’d write of suicide and think  
to try it first?

Too many niches are precise, uniform  
in nook and alcove, sprites and threads of air  
will drift away ...

Why talk of dreams as fancies lost?  
This imagination game is no more arduous  
than a doodle, only needs a cloud

with humps and we see camels or like Fools  
recruiting elves we blink and find our sudden selves  
aboard a stormy sea. Enticed to forms

of things unknown we trace the dust of Alexander  
to its final stopping point – the bunghole  
on a barrelful of beer.

**Peter Rawlings**

**The School Kiss**

On a great stone like nature's bench  
or a Druid's chair in the making  
they sat during their vacant minutes  
cut-off from the swirl, cut-off from the hurly-burly  
of being moment to moment  
while each in a pristine uniform as if lifted out of history  
spoke what they could from the scant  
collection of their combined years  
while her hand rested on his back, shoulder, white sleeve  
so gently he could not have imagined it,  
and his hands inert on her shirt wondering if  
this was correct or bold or pleasurable  
and they kissed so quietly and long  
their thoughts mainly about their thoughts  
in the imperative present of the now  
their mouths sipping through seared lips.  
She knew her touch pierced his shirt, how warm  
it was to him, all nerve ends. He knew only  
the stripping of his lips and a current  
unwilled as breath engrossed his groin.  
He tilted away from not knowing,  
his brain confined humming to the kiss  
violated his singleness.  
Their great stone fixes them to the earth.  
His current runs through him from her down  
down into cold stone to earth like a bolt  
fixing her to him to immemorial dimension  
as the kiss purges the passing minutes like the dead.



## **Robin Houghton**

### **When my sister is old**

I will wait at the door with flowers  
if she greets me at all it will be brief  
and cold as the Guildford house  
where the stairs stayed uncarpeted  
and the kitchen unmodernised,  
names and numbers taped on walls,  
coats and boots crammed under stairs.

Her back will be bent like our mother's,  
she will start in the middle of a sentence  
half scolding, half pleased, tired of TV  
and itching to get out walking with sticks  
she will bring up that time on the Isle of Wight  
when my legs gave way and she carried on,  
fitter than me and needing to travel.

We will have tea and talk about church  
or someone's baby, there will never be  
enough hours for all she must do or has done.  
I will tease out family secrets and remind her  
of twenty years she thought she'd never have,  
if she comments at all it will be brief,  
like the moment before sleep.

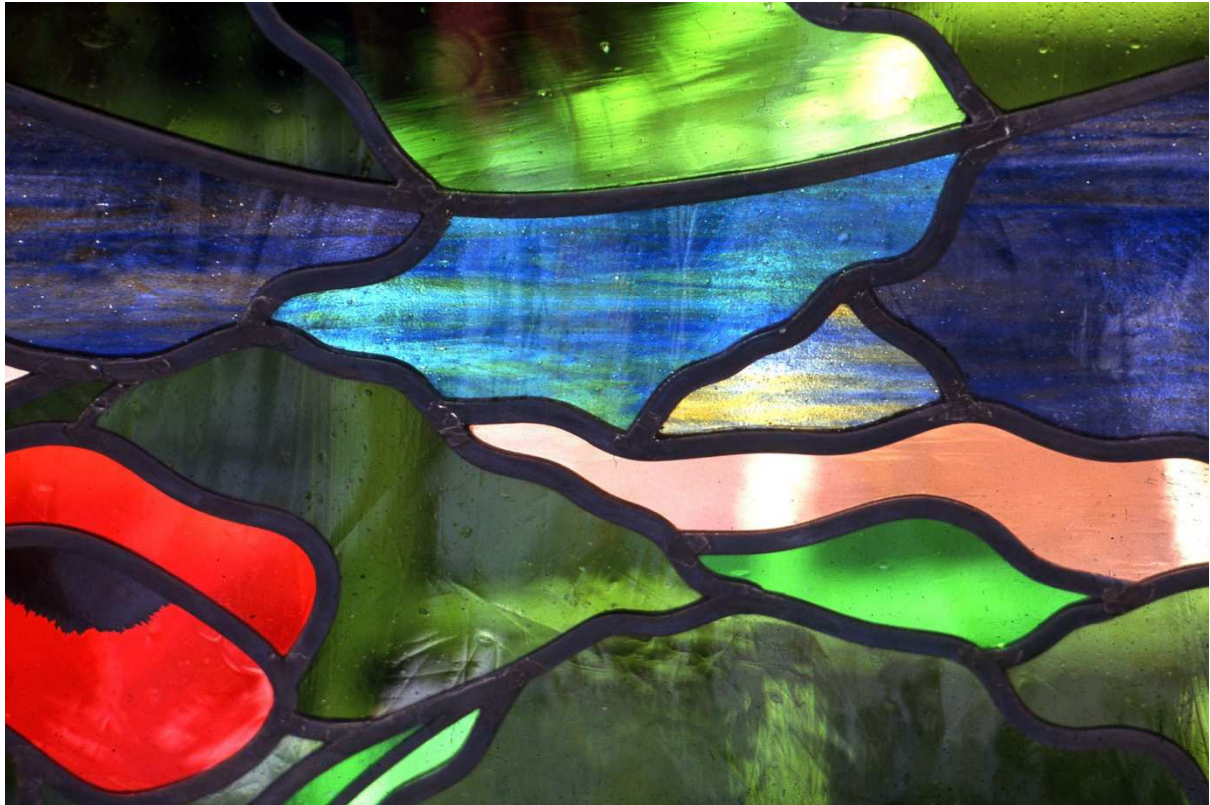


**Robin Renwick**

**Prism**

Take this piece of glass. Place it between  
your words and mine, and those you hear me say.  
See how reflection and refraction change  
their meaning.

I did not begin the day  
with the intention it should end this way.



**Stoney Parsons** is an architectural glass artist with a strong sense of design and aesthetics. She believes that glass is an exciting and contemporary art form and she exploits its colour and light to powerful and inspirational effect.

She makes dynamic windows and panels that enhance their architectural settings and complement the interior design. She is particularly interested in creating work that enhances healing environments.

[www.stoneyparsons.co.uk](http://www.stoneyparsons.co.uk)



**John Gladwell**

**Recall To Witness**

Recall to witness to isolation and to song  
Where the cage of our past still waits

In absence  
In this place of uncertain praise

Where to think without thinking  
Takes all the energy I have left

Marooned in silence  
With too many seasons and too much time

I have become your skin now  
I want to become your breath



**Clare Best**

**How they are in the wind**

*For weeks it toils around the house, slamming windows,  
dimming lights, dangerous with the scent of rain.*

Overnight, a wild night, her mind  
bursts its cage in a Force 8 gust.  
By morning she's all eye and beak, a falcon  
winging the room.

He waits, knowing the postman always comes  
at eight. On the mat: four brown envelopes,  
three padded white. For him.

When he lets her out  
she drops on a mouse by the shed,  
rips through fur and flesh, steals its heart  
before it dies. Sated by blood,  
the taste of blood, she perches on a garden chair.  
No motion but the cocking of her head.

He sits beside her, fills out forms.  
Two ticks here, three crosses there.

Her shadow rises, dark. A sudden squall—  
knot of claw and feather as she soars.

Number of curtain rails, sockets, taps;  
is the boiler working as it should?  
Details he can't recall.

**Will Stone**

**FIR FOREST**

Rising up too darkly for men,  
they sow confusion in their coldness,  
haul their gradient into the ravine.  
Always enough space for a hanging  
over the off-cuts of scattered huts,  
swallowing dust, thickly painting  
over the impertinent sound of saws.  
Canopies are dense but seem poor,  
monotonous sap and needle speech  
that draws foreboding in towards you.  
Bombed cathedral, gutted house,  
abyss of whispers, forbidden barn  
of casually blackened wounds.  
Stolen bird calls sifted, counted.  
A grey procession of faith  
that moves on without you,  
hoarder of the stream's silver  
the cowbell's gold, but forbids  
passage through the un-trod cloister,  
where only the lonely one passes,  
sees sky through rents of branches,  
recognises the full moon as the face  
that appeared at the window,  
unconsciously drawn, like the rest  
to the screams of a new birth.

## Robert Smith

### Shutters

Closed after twelve  
on a strong voltage of cicadas,  
arc of the bay, and roofs piled up  
like dishes careering the slopes  
of their own dazzle;

sealing in the lines  
of hills, a stunned mule,  
descending through the orange groves  
switch of a road cracking its whip  
across the retina;

the walls thickened  
as if to offset with whitewash  
the rutted patterns of the afternoon,  
a scoring behind the eyelids  
the breath of junipers.



## Shanta Acharya

### Hunger

The gecko's progress across the ceiling,  
scaly limbs defying gravity,  
eyes fixed on its prize hypnotised

Is matched by the speckled moth's nervous  
fluttering against the fluorescent bar light.

I watch mesmerised waiting for a taxi  
to take me to the Siddhi Vinayak Temple.

Dark, sunken, hungry eyes peer at me  
behind the closed, tinted window screens  
each time the car stops at traffic lights;

Long enough for mother and child to gesture  
for alms, palms rising in unending salaams.

When I hand out ten rupees, my car is  
mobbed with myriad hungry eyes.

Across the road a life sized poster sells dreams  
an actor gazes enchanted into the eyes  
of his beloved, lips barely touching.

Near the temple an emaciated devotee  
crawls across the tarmac penitent for his sins –  
a caterpillar crossing from leaf to leaf  
declaring eternal hunger for His love and mercy.

I join the evening queue for *darshan*,  
my hands laden with flowers, earthen lamps, offerings.  
*It is Divine hunger, this Creation...*

I overhear a conversation about Darwin and evolution,  
origin of the universe, Hadron Collider and the Magician,  
the meaning of life, religion, Higgs boson,  
in answer to the question: *What is maya, illusion?*



## **Just for Today**

Just for today I will not squander  
my time on things of importance or of no importance.

Such decisions carry the illusion of grandeur,  
of being the chosen one, placed in a position of power

To alter destinies just because it seems plausible.

One thing leads to another, a sigh turns into a hurricane.  
years later you look back at lives not lived, times gone.

Just for this morning I will let everything be  
just as it is – knowing nothing in this world is just  
or true. I'll ignore the past, the future –

Stop worrying about all I don't have or what I do.  
I will not hanker after eternity or God's eye view.

Just for this hour I'll fly free, see things for the first time,  
sketch new horizons with colours of my imagination  
stretch the limits of my perception.

Just for this moment, I will be everything, nothing –  
light of the universe, its energy, its darkness  
the silence, the words, opening my eyes.



**Tobi Cogswell**

**Two Gentlemen Discussing Beauty by Mail**

Farm-girl beauty is  
like an old coastal  
church, stark to the eye,  
but strong as wheat grass,  
and hidden in a  
field between yellow  
daisies and the eyes  
of those who don't see.

A prairie woman  
has skin older than  
the plains, a peaceful  
countenance, a child  
by the hand and one  
on her hip. A smile  
plays about her sense  
of hard work. She is  
a woman you want  
to know, to learn from  
and love completely.

Broken beauty can  
go either way. You  
can see what she once  
was, cannot be now.  
The palm of her hand  
on your cheek will tell  
stories worth dreaming,  
a bit crinkled and  
worn like bedsheet marks  
across the stomach  
of a lover, but  
not forgotten when  
you write your list of  
who captures your wants...

Shadows of each glow  
like rekindled flame.  
Careful, they will burn.

**D.V. Cooke**

**Under the Glass Dome**

Among the tea-cups and scent of oranges,  
Sunday lunch or afternoon early  
Papers strewn open at the literary page,  
The day takes its sound and ease.  
Mozart or a Haydn Mass on the C.D.  
Player – a music heard but then heard  
As by one on a farther shore,  
Who turns back and gazes on all  
That he had lost and gained  
And lost again. Or as one  
Who sends out a thought which  
Travels and returns but changed,  
Transfigured, which reveals itself  
But slowly, gaining in depth and fixity  
Until it becomes as air. Between  
These idle consequences the radio  
Heaves its torpid news into  
A slight communal prayer.

What now shall we do? Open a book, close  
An eye? Settle into our individual pain?  
A flourish of trumpets as the Mass departs.  
Into these ironies of departing spring  
The unfussy symmetries of hell coil down.  
Afternoon moves to lethargy  
And tediums. Outside small doves  
Swoop and feather the stained-glass pane.  
Our lives fill and empty out.  
The years fall and in between  
Sleep slips in at the window  
And enters through an eye.  
We are here, alive, below  
The surface ease, suffering  
An action and its consequence,  
While the afternoon brings to mood  
Female voices, slanted,  
Coiled into some part-kept room.

*And here, she said, here is Endymion  
Sleeping under a glass dome – a small dog  
Curled at his feet. Time roosts in such  
Perplexities yet brings us here*

*For talk of you and me.  
What now after all this time, after  
All this time should I call you?  
That antique leviathan? A hummingbird  
Kept in a cigar-tube? Yet that voice  
Is it really you, after all this time  
Really you, returned from exile  
As some Polynices? Here, she said,  
Here I put on a performance  
All for you, and here you made  
A renunciation of slight regard.  
Here we undid the Florentines  
And you played Peter Abelard  
And I your Heloise.*

And here we ate oranges, here by  
The colonnade and flowering urns, then  
Settled to watch the stippled dark descend.  
Or among the sunken garden at noon  
Where the engraved heads whispered  
And returned a hollow sound.  
And here, here is the door where  
She who would have played Portia  
Walked into the inviolate room.  
- *Not the individual expression.*  
- *Nor even the collective imprint.*  
Through the iron gates in the distance  
Of lawns, late into the evening,  
Chestnut trees swell and bud. And here  
Among the aroma of oranges  
Talk undid her distance –  
Yet as between Masaccio  
And Giotto a hundred year absence.

And here she who was Portia was favoured  
By some small cruelty. Here by a wall about,  
Where plainsong quietened doubt –  
Among these flowering urns and tombless  
Gardens, the colonnade where light descends,  
I have remembered everything  
And nothing, yet among  
The rigidities of afternoon,  
Caught in some curve of memory,  
Have attained such suppleness of mind.  
My mind was unstill, trapped  
In its monologue, silenced  
Yet alive inside the room  
Where a solemn music moved.  
Only at noon without shadow  
Among the rose garden I found quiet.

*- Yet who was it who accompanied you?  
- In those days there were always two of you.*

As one peels the orange of the self.  
As one with quite empty hands  
Peels the layers of the self –  
In some portion of the mind  
As yet unravelled, a music room  
Where wooden panelling holds  
The dry aroma of cedar wood.  
Among the memories the room unfolds,  
A malachite table where  
An engraved lute consumed a consequence.  
All this I remember. That solemn music  
Stolen from our lips that it took  
Four or five virtuosi to unravel  
Some lost impulse refracted  
On our sensorium. At three p.m.  
I step again into the room.  
At six I rise and take tea.  
You should at that hour visit me.

Who is it whispers and visits room  
To room – that constrained voice which being  
Constrained urges restraint, which searches  
Alongside, in the sunken garden's  
Undergrowth or veering off – the mind  
Confirms these hollowed victories  
And swirls among laurelled trees  
And takes the path where the small stream  
Fills with shade and subtleties,  
Where an unassuming English voice,  
(Too unassuming for me, of course,)  
Questions the names which endorse  
The things that were, and wears them  
Till they blend quite new. Carved in those  
Elms and oaks, those undiscovered lives,  
(Too anonymous - too certain  
Of all the strengths of living  
Quietly, for me, of course).

Here something unassuming seeps.  
The past rises and keeps those undiscovered  
Lives. Now, grown older with less need  
To categorise the past, the achievements done,  
Accomplished, finished, sealed-off, almost.  
Among such gardens and forbidden rooms  
They become a voice, an elegy –  
A music heard but then not heard,  
Which moves as from a farther shore.



The feelings now become refined,  
Yet that language did it equal  
Your desire, or did it fall into  
The exactitude of prose? Only at night  
The moon floods and rings the hollow dome  
With speechful light, and from the garden  
Brings a voice to a room. *There is  
No way back, it seems to breathe, begin again.  
Meanwhile, rehearse your life, wait, refrain.*



**Stoney Parsons:** stained glass

**Stephen Yeo**

**Bus Pass London**

i

*Et alors je vis bien des choses  
Au dedans de ma memoire...*

No overalls.

On every corner  
more choice, more chains.

More couples out of wedlock:  
too many rings to tell.

More thin young men:  
hands  
which seldom work outdoors.

More signs of diaspora.  
More smells of deodorant.

More smart women  
with jobs senior  
to the thin young men.

More plastic,  
less bakelite.

No smoking upstairs.

More big people,  
too fat for one seat.

More people not quite there,  
talking to people not there at all:

to know where their eyes are looking  
really would be telling,  
more than a poem.

Arthritic fingers?  
Seems like the same number

on strong women  
carrying child-carriers, children  
and awkward bags.

A rococo age, not in rouge  
but in brands and in nails.

No conductors.

...  
*Remuer*  
*S'evailer*

Suitcases on wheels.

*Un risorgimento:*  
everywhere's natives.

State-seekers and guerrillas,  
without a Mazzini, as yet.

From Wood Green  
along Green Lanes,  
change for London Fields.

Where Huguenot weavers camped,  
Somalis are selling umbrellas.

Stop. A church, apostolic  
for endists and saints,  
'of the Fourth Watch'.

*Oysters, passes and seasons,*  
bikes and tabloids fold.

Wheelchair access.

*Uno, First Capital, Arriva*  
(North) *Arriva* (South).

Private? For boarding  
not booking or hailing.

Move down inside:  
Blake's city of Golgonooza  
is more than a poem.

Digit (silent)digit  
digit digit digit....

Unvocalised God:  
YHWH,  
text become verb.

Numbers play:  
Nought is not One.

Drivers wanted.

*Note:* the header quotes are from Ezra Pound, 'Dans Un Omnibus de Londres', in *Poems from Lustra* (1915).



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