



OCTOBER EDITION 2023



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KITCHEN STAFF:

Lucy Reis, as zine chef

Tristram Fane Saunders as poesie maître d'

Lucia Morello as promotion patissier

WELCOME

What do we want from poetry? “Fancy’s maze and clue, / Wit’s forge and fire-blast, / meaning’s press and screw”. When Coleridge wrote that, he was using the word *clue* in its old sense, meaning a ball of thread, yarn or rope – like the one Ariadne gave Theseus to guide him through the Labyrinth.

Crystal Palace Park has a labyrinth of its own. Near this Concert Bowl that once hosted Bob Marley, the Beach Boys, and now – just as impressively – hosts GRAVY, you’ll find London’s largest living maze, ring after ring of dead ends. In a puzzling poem, Tristram Fane Saunders tries to find meaning among its overgrown hedges, a prisoner of the labyrinth.

Where’s Ariadne when you need her? She’s here, too, but busy with her own problems in a 2,000-year-old poem by wicked old Catullus. The Roman poet finds fresh life – with a fire-blast of wit, and no shortage of pressing and screwing – in Isobel Williams’s translations. Her versions (and gorgeous artworks) turn Ancient Rome into a *shibari* rope-play fetish club. And why not? Love and lust have a way of leaving us tied up in knots.

“Everything worth having, doing, making / is a knot”, as a tongue-tied Abigail Parry tells us, spinning yarns, playing games with control, and tugging at loose threads. “I find it hard / not to think of myself as a rope-bag full of blood” says Parry. Bodies can be slippery things. “There’s too much water inside these bones,” sings Jade Cuttle, trying “to tame the water’s chaotic curl” in her.

There’s chaos in the Concert Bowl’s lake, too. Strange things lurk beneath its surface. In 1974, a Godzilla-like creature rose up from this very lake – an inflatable prop for the prog band Yes, which upstaged them completely (nobody could see the band past the monster). Three years earlier, at a Pink Floyd gig, their fans tried to swim across the lake to reach them – only to get tangled up in a giant inflatable octopus.



Keep an eye out for octopi, dinosaurs, and other unlikely local fauna. Still, we can comfortably outrun John Clegg's giant tortoise with its "fat tyre tongue", even if there's no escaping Clegg's albatross, hell-bent on following him all the way to Lima.

London lad John Keats is no ancient mariner, but he, too, takes a watery journey in Ruth Wiggins's poem *K is for Keats*: "estuary/ mud that holds you [...] yearning to be held by reeds / steals / back into the creek".

Keats – to our knowledge – never wrote about gravy, that liquid manna murkier than even estuary mud. The word appears not once in the Oxford Book of English Verse. Many have asked "what is poetry?" Few ask "what is gravy?"

John Ashbery's poem *Gravy for the Prisoners* begins: "I wouldn't try to capture it / on the page, or in a blog". But we have tried. Here – captured on the page, and in a blog (GRAVYPOETRY.COM) – is a brimming Concert Bowl of GRAVY.

And there's another helping on its way. At the Bridge House Theatre (THEBRIDGEHOUSETHEATRE.CO.UK), at 7.30pm on Sunday December 10, we'll be serving up a special Christmas portion, with poetry from Amy Acre, Luke Kennard, Billie Manning & Declan Ryan. It should be a cracker.

THREE VERSIONS OF CATULLUS

By Isobel Williams

This book belongs to _____

misappropriated

Words glistening raw, vellum exfoliated –
Yours if you want to navigate its folds,
Diving for cargo in the drowned holds.

Tell the teachers dead and alive I'm sorry.
While they were splitting Gaul in three they knew
I'd waste a lifetime waiting for the ferry.
Drop in. Whatever. Take a generous view.
This house dust/book dust will grow damp with tears
If I outlive him, cursed with my hundred years.





CATULLUS 7

By Isobel Williams

Stress-testing are we, Mistress?
How many of your tropes in rope
Can be endured before the poet chokes?

Ply me hemp silk jute and tie me
Ichinawa, takate kote,
Futomomo, hishi karada,
Tasuki, kannuki,
Hashira, daruma shibari.
All of it. Semenawa for the burn.

Count the stars that spy on sly
Lovers when the night is ball-gagged –

That's how many of your tight knots and rope marks
Will deliver me beyond madness –
More than a voyeur's torch could spot
Or a jealous sensei take to pieces.



CATULLUS 64, LINES 249-265

By Isobel Williams

Ariadne has just been abandoned by Theseus

...poor Ariadne...half-dressed, miserable
...watched his ship diminish and battered her wings
Against the dead ends of her labyrinth

That you loved me still the same
That you loved me
You loved me still the same
That you loved me
You loved me still the same

Then

what?

with a zip-wire trip-wire bomb-bounce big-band

Bang Bacchus fronting the Electrowercz crew
Scouts and shouts for you Ariadne it's love this
Time with a true all-over blue tattoo
And you

<loss>

ecstatic erratic

Torture Garden's hardened exhibits
Pour on the dance floors stimulant-silly
Bite the apple and couple and triple
And quadruple
The hand on the bottom the have you had sex yet
Brandish the fertility spike
Cover up the business end
With a pine cone, it works for some,

Juggle joints of botch-butchered bullock
Bodies bound with seething snakes
Cluster round the glass inspection
Case with the naked human inside
Thrust bold tentacles through the holes
(Tourists try to glimpse the rituals)
Spunked spanked scarlet tooth-vibrating
Tinnitus-techno here's a floorshow
The Infamous Boom Boom and Skinny Redhead
Shinbone shindig flutes with savage
Harmonics

Wait

Everything is very small
You wake up face down on the counterpane

Each tiny prick each satin stitch
Flame stitch stem stitch isolated knot
A deafening echo of embroidery thread
Dragged by a needle through a hole it made





INTENTIONAL COMPLICATIONS

By Abigail Parry

Like this one here: the column tie.

Three wraps about the wrist,
then looped around,
and slipped inside, the bight
passed underneath and all the rope

pulled tight. The standing end

is fastened to the bed. A simple hitch
will do the trick:

a knot should only ever be
as complex as the work it does

– very like a spell, in that respect.

Like any act of will. You know,

I know a thing or two about control,
its loops and convolutions,
stops and holds,
that little pact

where all I know of want involves itself
with all I know about restraint –

and yes, I wanted this.



I must have wanted this – I hid
twelve knotted bits of thread inside your house.
And every knot spelled *yes*.
And every knot – doubled over, wound around –
spelled *now*.

(A little wince –
now, but spelled like *consequence*.)

Doubled over, wound around,
Let each one pull its little cinch *Revolving this*
will teach you how

I must have wanted this.

Doubled over, wound around,
I said, as I moved through your house.
Let each one turn its little winch,
let each pull tight and fasten to
the wrought dark work

of consequence. The brattish riddle in the gut
that knots itself and begs to come
undone *what's done cannot* tell how

I ever wanted this.

I did. I wanted this.

But yes, I'm frightened now
of every fluent thing my tongue could tell
if I untied it.

And where to start – And how to spell it right –
And how to move one inch



or catch your breath, when all the subtle rigging
of the plot constricts the heart –

I did

and didn't want this. The simplest proposition
doubles over in the knot:

its turnabout, intricate
dark world of spellbound consequence.

I might have said –

I might.

I might have said
that everything worth having, doing, making
is a knot.

There again, I might have said

that life was quite straightforward until you
snarled up the line;

and what a thing, to take on someone new
with all that mess of ribbons,
all ravelled round the pole

you know
I know a thing or two about control –

the stopstart jig of how and when to want,
when to resist,
when to let go,

you know
I know a thing or two about control
and how to lose it –

a little weed, a lot of wine,
untied my tongue enough to tell it straight –

that yes, I wanted this.

I did, I wanted this, the bond

where all I know of want is stopped and held
by one taut lesson in restraint –

That you might understand. That you might not.

Hush now – tie your tongue. We mustn't tell.
We mustn't spell the name
or name the spell, or else

the whole lot comes unravelled in our hands.





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ARTERIAL

By Abigail Parry

I'm only half-surprised to find the heart
stranded half-way down the M4. This is not,
as you might think, a metaphor. The cats' eyes
all join up and there it is, red-raw and chugging.

The stereo's on the blink. So it's the racy roar
of eighty miles an hour in the dark, and that hot,
nagging tattoo – a doom-drum, counting down.
Three years ago I split the thing in two,

left one half of it in town, lobbed the other
out beyond the London Orbital. Now here it is,
jammed crudely back together, flashing red.
Just like my mother always said – *leave one man
for another, and you leave the better part of you.*
She knew a thing or two about the heart, its plush
interiors, dim-lit. The heart has four red rooms,
through which the blood is pushed in roughly rhythmic

stops and starts. Think of the poor dull traffic,
nudged from heart, to brain, to gut, and back again.
Once I read that the heart can only travel
at walking pace, so it can't keep up this shuttle,

shuttle, shuttle. *These are not helpful thoughts,*
said the therapist, behind her wedded fingers.
Also – *We cannot treat you for a broken heart.*
I went away with sertraline instead – a little oil



for a scrapped Tin Man. I'm counting down the junctions.
All the while, that little tyrant's in his palanquin,
drunk on his drumroll. You draw a broken heart
with a cartoon fracture line, like the house

built on a fault, walls gone, all rooms exposed.
You can die of a broken heart, something to do
with the vagus nerve, and enough rancid adrenalin.
At eighty miles an hour, I find it hard

not to think of myself as a rope-bag full of blood
thrown forward faster than it was meant to go –
the ventricles, the veins and valves, the arteries,
whose A is a rude mnemonic, and also means

away. Away we go, my tin can and my palanquin,
my unhelpful thoughts, my little scrawl of blood.
Anyway, I pulled off at Membury to write you this
while the wipers beat their soft, half-hearted thud.



FOUR CRYSTAL PALACE PARK POEMS

By Tristram Fane Saunders

THE SPHINX

It's lunch, and I've one leg on either side
of the brick-red haunch. Astraddle, or astride.
A flask on his flank, a sandwich where the spine
would lie, if either of us liars had one,

hindlegs before me and the fore behind.
Although it's true we don't see eye-to-eye
(uneager for the future, I'll keep mine
fixed on what for him's already gone)

we've this in common: neither will admit
we're going nowhere. Someone taught him 'sit'
in 1854. He mastered it.
The hand that framed this fearful symmetry

made something less the bane of Thebes than kith
to Clifford, Big Red Dog. The hieroglyphs
say nothing: lorem ipsum dolor sit
in Middle Kingdom script. The riddle's why

the hell we're here, red-faced. Him? Blame the eye
of Mr Jones, first pharaoh of primary
colours when London's walls and tastes and skies
were grey. Me? I've been struggling to cope.

The thermos spirals open with a sigh.
Pandora's dog-red lunchbox will be empty,
the lone and level sandwich gone. Still, why
not give the box a shake. It sounds like hope.

THE HEAD

In the middle of a lockdown, I am lost
in the living maze. The hornbeam hedge, unminded
now for months, remembering its lopped

limbs, grew headstrong. Wildering, it blinded
its own eye, sewed shut the famous rings,
turning against the maker that designed it.

Turning again, each path re-roots to bring
me, though I hardly mind, to the same dead
end. I have forgotten everything

but these three things: the root of *Penge*, the head
-less sculpture loitering outside the maze,
and one more piece of what I'd always said

was useless trivia, which means three ways,
a forking road, the point where lost begins.
Lost in the mid-Eighties, it was Dante's,

the head. I'd like to think it wore a grin.
Penceat: from the Welsh for 'head' and 'wood'.
Whichever way I turn leads further in.

The statue's standing where Penge Place once stood,
demolished for that looking-glass, the Palace, |
whose weightless walls shine like they never could

when it existed. Living backwards, Alice,
has one advantage in it, said the Queen.
I don't remember it. Pre-emptive malice?

Or knowing that we're where we've always been,
that turning back does not mean losing ground?
I like it here. I'm lost but hell it's green.

Green as a thought, and no-one else around,
which re-minds me. Trivia can mean
common place; something easily found.



THE BOWL

The pond beside the Bowl we call the 'rusty laptop'
has grown to be less pool than baize pool-table top.

A moorhen foots it, Christlike, but for the red dot
that's more a mark of Cain. A football floats to a stop.

It's reached the stage now where to reach the stage is a hop
from the always greener side where grass is smoked and cropped

to plant both feet on concrete, almost falling in
love with what was. What is a shelter from the wind,

for watching birds – a hawk, a stonechat, crows, the thin
strut of a heron – watching out for needles and tins,

once hosted Gil Scott-Heron, Stone the Crows, and Hawkwind
opening (I swear to God) for Vera Lynn

at a gala fundraiser for – I mean, against – heroin
where the band were reunited with their top

-less Irish go-go dancer, Stacia. These days, Stacia
– an artist, trained in '89 at Hamburg Frei Kunsthochschule –

makes sense of life by *mingling inner landscapes* and nature.
She grinds up *people, movement, animals* etc.,

into the mix. My laptop's on her Wikipedia.
Like bowerbirds, we gather things that mean together.

Some things go on. The moorhen is a thing that goes
on, not in. Some things just pose and juxtapose

and never break the surface. Some things seem to choose
inertia, having flown, not fallen, out of use.

The Bowl is empty and the Bowl is full. Suppose
I put you in this scene? Suppose that you refuse?

I'd like to think there's time for unbilled cameos,
late entrances, green shoots against rust-red, a future

arrives – as parakeets – to say the stage is yours,
Lucia. Green feathers burst into applause.



THE DINOSAUR

The iguanodon,
 like everyone,
 is guesswork.

Apologetic plaques
 correct the too-
 long neck,

imagined horns, and all-
 round lack of feathers.
 Whatever,

we like them wrong. Henry,
 these were made
 for you

to hide from. *We must walk,*
 you tell me, *very*
 quietly.

We are protected by
 a moat, and a fence
 waist-high

to me, head-high to you,
 and ankle-height
 to them.

Across the water, *he*
 is hiding too.
 Bashful,

tail toward us, snout
 nuzzling the ground
 for bones.

The time-pressed sculptor, knowing
how little was known –
they'd what,

a kneecap, teeth, one shin
to go on? – sighed
and turned

the doubtful face from view,
a little abstract
in the concrete.

Dickens stood here, saw
the megalosaur,
went home

and wrote *Bleak House*. You draw
a book for me:
T-Rex,

in his blue cape, breathes fire.
Dicynodon
looks on.

I know that I should draw
a lesson here,
something

about *their need to cobble what they could into a whole,
brushing away the dust and counting feet. Tapping, tapping.
Our common work of making something old from something new.*

I'd draw a lesson here,
but it's summer.
Lessons

are centuries away.
Look over there,
no, higher,



where the giant sloth
 (my favourite)
 is hunting

imagined concrete ants
 inside a concrete
 tree.

When you're old enough
 to read these words,
 you won't.

Explorer, you will find
 better things
 to dig through.

GIANT TORTOISE

By John Clegg

In the new Galápagos enclosure, Polly
lops a nopal cactus at its lower stem.
She can rotate her beak and that's
a treat to watch, the nopal's caltrop spines
go smutch against her fat tyre tongue.
And untriumphal when it topples,
she climbs up and sprawls across it
head down, scissoring the paddle open, slow
only the way that any action
done without too much intent looks
slow: a dough hook tearing dough,
a mezzaluna penduluming over herbs.
A glass of wine. The radio.
Her mind could be on something else entirely.



OLD GOREHAMBURY

By John Clegg

'A spoiled house' my daughter calls a ruin.
She wriggles through the lower kitchen window
belly flat onto a ledge then flops upright
and runs down the foundation kicking gravel.

When Francis Bacon took the queen's left arm
to steer her up the ceremonial stair -
still extant, just - she had to pause on this
antepenultimate stone step, while inside

heralds or whoever had the door unbarred.
My daughter hoiks a shiny bit of gravel
at the unbarred door, the nonexistent door,
the frame she calls a firm part of the spoiled house.

THE ANCIENT MARINER

By John Clegg

The albatross had followed out of interest,
not because we fed her, I forbade that.
We had an authentic destination.
She wanted to follow us to Lima.

Lima! I forbade that. But she followed:
out of interest, not because we fed her,
piggybacking on our destination -
on the breeze enticing us to Lima.

I forbade the crossbow on the focsle.
Hatley said he shot her out of boredom,
not because she warped across the tidal
wobble, as the sea spilt into Lima,

but because she was a point of interest
and the point of point of interests is
you either shoot them or pre-emptively
forbid them. By this point we'd docked in Lima.



THE RIVER

By Jade Cuttle

Throw me on the fire: I will not burn.
There's too much water inside these bones,
like bare and broken branches that beg to be held,
left in the rain too long.

Throw me in the river and I will learn
to tame the water's chaotic curl,
not cower from the chill blow
that's edging its elbow slow, too close to my heart.

But who knew that the slightest ripple would do such harm?
Even the river shakes and shivers beneath its calm.

A ghostly gasp of cold water climbs inside my bones,
creaks me open but at least I'm not alone.
And if I splinter at least I'll know
how far to bend before I break.

I wipe the silt out from my eyes
and pray I'll get through the night,
that this restless heart won't dwell too hard
and wither away in the light.
But who knew that the slightest ripple would do such harm?
Even the river shakes and shivers beneath its calm.
If time's bending slow
as the spill of the sun,
it's because they both know
that the dawn must come.

LEAVES & LOVERS (NEVER LOST)

By Jade Cuttle

Branches stripped back to bare bone,
this tree's never felt so alone, as now.
Even though it's lost its leaves,
it's haunted by the memories, of warmth:
who let who go?

Holding onto hands too tight,
the trace of touches left behind
is where it all goes wrong.
But if I dwell upon the cracks
inside my bones then I'll collapse
and I don't want that, again.

But maybe I'm not made of leaves
and holding hands is what I need to grow.
Lovers never leave our side
their shadow haunts our memory and mind.

The ache of time, this anchor in my mind,
it holds my heart in place.
The ghost of your grasp, its warmth will last
until the day I turn cold.



BORROWED DAUGHTER, CHERRY SEASON

By Ruth Wiggins

She reaches into the brown paper bag, tells me – *Last night! I dreamt about your grandparents! We were all together!*

This crowd she never actually met.

And your mum, she looked so beautiful.

She was, I interject.

SO beautiful, she says, as if I have forgotten the degree to which.

Your mum she said to me I'll never forget she said –

'When it is one we are calling it berry. When it is two we call cherry.'

My mother's English seems to have slipped, but it's probably her. She laces a wishbone behind my ear

a soft thud against my neck.

TROUT

By Ruth Wiggins

You had me wade out into the middle of the river, coaching me through watercress and brooklime to where the water flowed right. This is how to catch fish, you said, as though it was something you'd done a hundred times. I watched long and hard for the trout to pass, shipping their gold towards the ocean. More like clots of light than anything I might hold onto. And then one pulled alongside and slowly I slipped my hand under. You said they could be easily charmed, with little more than a compassionate touch. Who knew that fish were fools for kindness? I gently moved a finger back and along. And then I lifted. Made an apron and eased him in, water seeping through my shirt, looked up grinning. But you'd wandered on, as though you'd had a change of heart, and just not bothered to tell anyone. The gold muscle against my belly sighed, and I slipped him back into the river, caught up with you breathless on the path. Silly buggers, you said, to give up so easily.



K IS FOR KEATS

By Ruth Wiggins

In bright white sparks I try to pick your whole name

from the night

sparkler in my hand the whip

of the upright

the K that is gone the K that is velar plosive tongue

against soft palate

pulmonic consonant after which

all airflow ceases gone before the flourish of

t into s really takes in the air

And so instead I slip you

finger deep into estuary

mud that holds you

holds until tide yearning to be held by reeds steals

back into the creek

lifts you out to sea

how cease holds the sea which does not cease

how cease holds the sea holds the sea

which does not cease

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EPILOGUE

By Ruth Wiggins

As when a great oak is taken down, its limbs divided and sent to diverse places. Some go to the dockyard to become a great ship, and some to become rough tableware. Some go to become the boards about a book. Some wheels, some caskets. And some go to be consumed by fire. Yet still each holds within it the leaf, the acorn, the yellow rosary of the catkin. And the limbs are gone as relics about the land, and one goes here, another there. And others, where the wasp has been, are gone to ink.



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ISOBEL WILLIAMS blogs about live-drawing, has held solo exhibitions in London and Oslo, and has written for publications ranging from *The Amorist* to *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*. She is the author of *Switch: The Complete Catullus*. Isobelwilliams.org.uk

ABIGAIL PARRY spent several years as a toymaker before completing a PhD on wordplay. Her first collection, *Jinx*, dealt in trickery, gameplay, masks and costume, and was described as ‘a party in a bag’ (*The Poetry Review*) and ‘vaudevillian sleaze’ (*Review31*). The book was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection and the Seamus Heaney Prize for Best First Collection. Her second collection, *I Think We’re Alone Now*, is out in November 2023.

JOHN CLEGG’s most recent poetry collection is *Aliquot*. He works as a bookseller in London.



TRISTRAM FANE SAUNDERS lives in Penge, SE20. He is the author of five pamphlets, including *The Rake* (2022), and one full-length collection, *Before We Go Any Further* (2023). His poems have appeared in the TLS, Poetry London and The White Review. He is the editor of Edna St Vincent Millay: Poems & Satires.

JADE CUTTLE is a poet, singer-songwriter and AHRC researcher at the University of Cambridge. She is a Northern Writers Award winner and speaker on BBC radio, television and Times Radio. Her EP *Algal Bloom* was released via Warren Records with funding and support from PRS Foundation and BBC Introducing. jadecuttle.com

RUTH WIGGINS is based in East London but is happiest in the great outdoors, something which continues to inform her work. *The Lost Book of Barkynge*, her first full poetry collection, is a 900-year lyric history of Barking Abbey, told through the eyes of the women that lived there. Ruth also has three pamphlets: *Myrtle*; *a handful of string*; and *Menalhyl*.

