



The Circles Issue



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The HCE editorial team



Adam Steiner



Jodie Carpenter



Ben Hayes



Christine Fears



Alyson Hall

Editorial

Gary Sykes-Blythe

When you sit down and say 'let's have an open mic night' you're inherently stepping out into the unknown; after all, you can't exactly book the acts in advance. Fortunately, HCE and SP are supported by a great community of individuals and organisations, so the chances of a catastrophe of non-attendance were small.

Nevertheless, you never know quite what's going to happen, and that's a big part of the fun. We knew we'd have at least one person to read, our headliner and friend of HCE Stephen Morrison-Burke, but the rest was a cruel unknown. Typically, there was nothing to be concerned about and the performance space in The Tin was already close to full by the time we were finished setting up.

A friendly, but nervous, tension filled the room... there were plenty of people on the 'to read' list, but after a shower of nervous 'can I go last?'s nobody really knew who would go first. Fortunately, SP director and HCE deputy editor Adam Steiner had no such qualms and was happy to open the bidding. Poets followed in brisk succession: some bawdy and obtuse, some delicate and poised, but all performing with great energy and passion. There were no nerves in sight, even amongst the people reading for their first time, and at each break in proceedings, more and more people confidently signed up to read in the next segment.

At last, an exhausted audience of readers and listeners sat and listened to the vigorous and expansive delivery of Stephen. Choosing poems on a wide range of subjects, a virtuoso performance was the perfect way to round the evening off.



HCE Editor Gary SB: never even heard of 'pretentiousness'

Meanwhile, in the Circles Issue, we've got a lot of fun stuff for you to read. For some reason, there's a lot more poetry than usual, but such is the way of magazine. We've got some great stuff from the Circles competition, please have a look at that, plus a pair of reviews for the Off the Fence theatre company's recent WW1 plays. Also, especially have a look at the interesting shapes and styles that people have adopted for their circles poetry: it's quite fun.

And finally, we'll see you all at Wenlock on the 27th of April!

G

P.S. The cover image is, in fact, 'Here Comes Everyone: the Circles Issue' in Gallifreyan. Really...



HCE 10: The Circles Competition

with Adam Steiner

Judging the HCE 10 Competition was challenging (in a good way) for several reasons. My first decision was to collect all of the entries together, regardless of their medium (fiction/poetry/non-fiction essay), because after some reflection, it became clear to me that HCE is very much a magazine without borders. We welcome EVERYONE to submit, and if not featured, to try again, and while each issue has a strictly defined theme, we encourage a degree of vagueness in submissions.

So what about the entries themselves? We would've liked more, [*always! -Ed.*] but the quality of Circles-themed work was high and the winning pieces attest to this.

3rd place Victoria Redgrave presented us with that most clear and distinct of poems, seeming simple at first it reveals layers of meaning with repeated readings and I thought the overarching message of unity delivered on the theme. OK, Victoria only won a (green) HCE badge, but what could better represent the entrance to a writing community than a circular artefact, to be worn with decadent pride.

2nd place A regular contributor to HCE, Chelsea Schuyler has consistently produced brilliant and informative (see The Dinosaurs Issue) and once again she excelled herself. Her non-fiction piece, The World Comes Around, questions our conception of roundness and circles, digging out the faults in human perception that help to make us the fantastically flawed beasts we are. She highlights the fact that though it may be difficult for humans to create or truly perceive the perfect circle, we have still come a long way in our attempts to understand them more fully.

1st place I am not a fan of concrete poetry, it smacks of 80s try-hard attempts at free verse shoe-horned into a case of form over sensation, **but** in the case of Sharon Larkin-Jones' poem, Rain Circle, I was glad to make a distinct exception. The body of the poem steers the eye from simple beginnings of science, the announcement of colour, and on to the completion of circular narrative of vision, before trailing off into the vagueness of shadow. It's fun to be challenged by words alone and Sharon's poem gravitates around the sheer rationality of mathematic measurements and the impact of light upon our everyday lives.

So enjoy these venerable works, and thank you for reading!

AS

Deputy Editor, Here Comes Everyone



- 1 Sharon Larkin-Jones - Rain Circle (poem)
- 2 Chelsea Schuyler - The World Comes Around (non-fiction)
- 3 Victoria Redgrave - Welcome My Friend (poem)



Rain Circle

Sharon Larkin-Jones, 1st Place

Rain circle

No it's not a bow Noah
you only saw part of the picture
and we're no more discerning
but learning to see beyond the surface
to Isaac. No, not the prophet, Noah
although as it turns out
Newton was also a seer.
Our doubting Thomas nature
could incline us to believe
that raindrops might well be
liquid prisms in a large array
splitting no-colour into seven
grouped hues between
earth and heathen.
Something possessed
to set a wedge
slicing through
in a darkened
white became
and dwelt
as waves
in seven lengths
bent at forty two degrees
among us
Worsthorne's magus
in a shaft of light
a gap in curtains
room so
spectrum
in seven lengths
among us
and bent again at fifty one
for another non-bow Noah
fainter mirroring.

The World Comes Around

Chelsea Schuyler, 2nd Place

Humans' first journey into space was supposed to be about the Moon. What the astronauts didn't expect was the impact of looking back and seeing Earth. Those who've had this opportunity speak of a profound change in their perspective, a reaction so common it's termed "the overview effect." Alexei Leonov, the first man to make a "space walk" in 1965, had a similar experience, but added that he now knew what the word "round" meant. Huh. What does "round" mean in this context?

Of course, the world is not technically round. But no one's going to fault Leonov for that, we should be grateful he expected it to be round at all. Society has had to be dragged kicking and screaming to accept the shape of our planet, its orbit, and its unspecialness in the universe for centuries. In our ongoing struggle, can a new sense of "roundness" affect our fundamental understanding of existence? Let's review what we've learned so far.

It began, as usual, with the ancient Greeks. Around 500 BCE a few people like Pythagoras and Plato were throwing around the idea of a spherical Earth, but a hundred years later Aristotle really laid out the evidence. He noticed that southern constellations rise the farther you go south, and that during an eclipse the shadow of the Earth on the Moon is curved. Therefore, Earth must be round.

Then in 200 BCE, Eratosthenes found further proof when it was brought to his attention that in Syene, the sun casts no shadow at noon on June 21st. Yet at the same time, in his own Alexandria, the sun did cast some shadow. He could then use simple geometry to calculate the entire circumference of the Earth to be about 50,000 Egyptian stadiums, or 25,000 miles. We now know the Earth

to be 24,901 miles around. Not bad. (Columbus, often mistakenly attributed to proving the world was round, would have done well to go by this estimate. His math was so bad that if the Bahamas hadn't been there to stop him, he and his crew would have starved to death before reaching the real India).

Unfortunately, the Greeks did have a nagging habit of assuming the universe was perfect. The Catholic Church would later adopt this philosophy and proclaim it as evidence of a perfect God. Fear of heresy charges stifled science, including an epic discovery by Nicolaus Copernicus that the Earth actually circled the sun. He withheld publication until so near his death in 1543 that the general public would not fully freak out about it until Galileo Galilei corroborated the idea using telescopes in 1615.

Alright, so Earth is not the center of the universe, but at least our sun is. If you look around, there is an equal distribution of stars out there. They would be gathered more densely in some area if our solar system wasn't at the center, right? Nope. The Milky Way's clouds of gas and dust absorb the light of 99% of stars we might see otherwise. Harlow Shapley instead studied globular clusters in the early 20th century, and showed we're actually way off to the side, and Heber Curtis argued in 1920 that there are actually many, many galaxies, none of which revolve around us.

Well, can we at least pride ourselves in being perfectly spherical with a perfectly circular orbit? Everyone loves a satisfying, ordered, perfect circle. A YouTube video of a man drawing one freehand has 8.8 million views. Enthusiasts agonize over the patternless digits of Pi (the ratio of an exact circle's circumference to its diameter), which has been calculated out to a trillion figures, and has its own day on March 14th. Surely our Earth will abide?

Alas, Isaac Newton worked out in 1680 that Earth is an oblate spheroid, bulging at the equator because of its rotation, and Johannes Kepler knew that the planets actually revolve in elliptical orbits.

Sigh. This wonky, clay diorama version of Earth falls short of our perfectionist hopes, and we feel remorse when mathematician John Adams says there is indeed no perfect circle to be found in nature. Some come close—the pupil, the ripple





The Eastern Mediterranean at night. commons.wikimedia.org

in a pool—but not quite. Neither does a true sphere exist (though, the electron is close enough, and the 860 million mile long sun is only 6 miles longer at its equatorial diameter than from pole to pole). And so, beaten down for centuries by our shattered, anthropocentric ideals, we now laugh at our past arrogance but wallow at how small and insignificant we are.

Yet, perhaps we have gone too far on such a depressive note. Let's give credit where credit is due. Are humans not of nature? If our conception of a perfect circle is the only place we will find one, then it is we that make up the unique set of conditions in which one can exist; we that are the example of a perfect circle in nature. Maybe our planet's shape and place is nothing unique, but there is something special about it, us. We are a conscious, dynamic, culturally rich, brilliant species able to contemplate the very universe we have been so ridiculously disappointed by. We investigate beyond our imagination, and build tools that can see farther than our naked, imperfect pupils ever could.

In perhaps our greatest triumph, we have managed to defy gravity and atmosphere to enter space and take a look back. Free from bad theories and assumptions, what do we see?

"The first day or so we all pointed to our countries. The third or fourth day we were pointing to our continents. By the fifth day, we were aware of only one Earth."

— Sultan bin Salman Al-Saud, *STS-51-G Space Shuttle*

"Oddly enough the overriding sensation I got looking at the Earth was, my god that little thing

is so fragile out there."

— Mike Collins, *Apollo 11 astronaut*

"Clearly, the highest loyalty we should have is not to our own country or our own religion or our hometown or even to ourselves. It should be to, number two, the family of man, and number one, the planet at large."

— Scott Carpenter, *Mercury 7*

The sight instills an appreciation for the beauty, fragility, and singularity of our planet; the absurdity of our petty politics and boundary lines; and the oneness of all human beings. This is what "round" can mean to us now. Not a mathematical exactness, but a coexistence, both with the environment and ourselves. By viewing this imperfect sphere, this blue marble, this pale blue dot, from the outside, perhaps we can gain a scope of humanity that will give us the understanding to bring our peoples together. As poet Archibald MacLeish put it, "an equal Earth...will be truly round: a globe in practice, not in theory."



Welcome My Friend

Victoria Redgrave, 3rd Place

Welcome my friend
I am the guest house for which you knock at the door.
Fear cloaking my mortality.
The thorn in the side of freedom.
Come
in, Come in!
I wish to see you.
Your face, your colour
Your meaning &
intentions.
Take a seat
Warm yourself by the fire
And let me hear your story.
I
welcome you at my hearth,
In my heart and turn towards you in a mindful way.

Who are you? Where do you come from?
You interest me.
I am curious of your
state.
Maybe when I see you I shall be able to remove your cloak.
Repair and
embellish it to change it's blackness
And enhance it's new beauty.
Maybe my
conscious mortality
And the acceptance of will shine through And reveal my new
freedom.
My heart open from letting go
We shall walk life and death and life
again together
Hand in hand, heart in heart, side by side Entwined as one in
freedom As lovers forever.





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attach to stuff?

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Botanic Garden

Sally Jack

May day;
Sainsbury's chips away at my patience.
PIN OK: GO

I rub chicken skin with thyme, roast

then sit outside, drink them in,
analgesics to circling biplanes'
persistent throb.

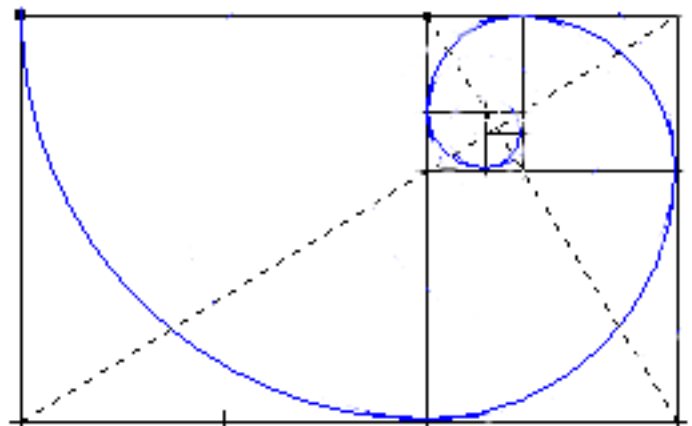
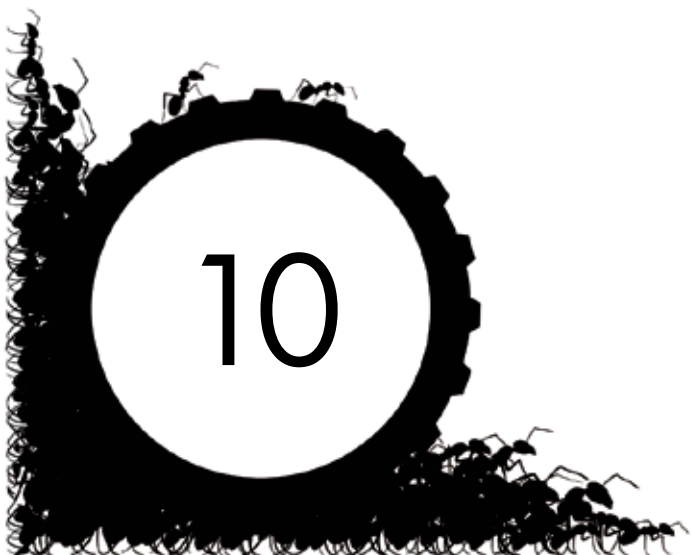
I grasp rosemary, anoint palms.

Those of a scientific leaning
see geometry, appreciate
the properties of Pisa-based herbs.

I smooth silvered ears of rabbit's foot.

Here, in clumps of comfrey,
sage, rhubarb,
is nature's Golden Ratio

"common in art, architecture and credit cards".



An example of the golden ratio commons.wikimedia.org

Glorification of the Rule of Urban VIII

Maggie Williams

Pietro da Cortona

Painted on the ceiling of one of Rome's most sumptuous palaces, this ambitious fresco is a celebration of the powerful and noble Barberini family. It also represents an allegory of Divine Providence. The daunting grandeur of this composition is based around an illusionistic architectural structure, which is seen from below, with the sky appearing to open out above. This type of perspective, known as *spetto in là* (Italian for 'up from under') is typical of Baroque ceiling decoration. The spectator's attention is

Glorification of the Rule of Urban VIII

quickly channelled by the swirling fluidity of the design to its focal point, where angels carry the papal tiara and St Peter's keys – representing the Papacy of Urban VIII, himself a member of the Barberini family. All sense of mass and gravity is dissolved in the sparkling colours and brilliant light, making this one of the great masterpieces of Baroque art.

• Bernini, Domenichino, Giordano, Guercino



Pietro da Cortona (Pietro Berrettini). b Cortona, 1596. d Rome, 1669
Glorification of the Rule of Urban VIII. 1633–9. Fresco, Palazzo Barberini, Rome

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Maggie Williams' most recent work involves the delicate transformation of familiar images from art history. At first glance, the viewer is presented with another seemingly exhaustive reproduction from The Art Book, however upon closer inspection nuances of alterations can be identified, enticing the viewer to reconsider the image's context. The original image is redescribed with a poignant and playful twist; this selective reconstructive process bears as much importance as the final piece itself as each image is premeditated before creation.

Stuck in a Sphere

Kathy Hughes

Existence,
An introduction to Euclidean geometry.
Creeping,
Towards an understanding of cosmology.
Searching,
For the answers in astrology.
You crawl
You stand
You walk
You run
You learn
You love
You lose.

You love
You forget
You love
You falter.

You love.
You pause -

Stubbornly stuck in sphere
You trace the passing of each year
With the fall of every tear.

Spin the wheel of being
And learn nothing of your mistakes.
Measure the radius of happening
And consequently raise the stakes.

You smile.

You love the one who drives you wild,
Once, twice, three times.
You love the one who gets you riled,

Far
Too
Many
Times.
You vow to learn
To change
To hide.
You love again on the blind side.

You smile.

You moan
You fake
You break.
You stand on pointed toes,
Chin up,
To repress the contents of your woes.

You tire.

Stubbornly stuck in sphere
You wake
You work
You win
You wonder.

Stubbornly stuck in sphere
You navigate the simple curve of life.
Stubbornly stuck in sphere
To contemplate the extent of all your strife.

You fade.

You regret nothing.
You fade.
You are remembered.

Out There

Diane Sherlock

Something is wrong. I sense it. But here's the thing.
What is this 'I'? A distant drum roll sounds.

A clue?

The roll describes circles. They are silver. In some way
they are connected to the body - body? - of whatever 'I'
am. They arc out of the blackness, transcribe a perfect
ring and disappear.

They are huge like the rolling drums. I struggle to apprehend, comprehend. The desolation is unbearable.

The drums are getting louder. I am conscious of a
rhythm and a purpose. There is a knowing.
This is a countdown. I must count the circles. It is the
only way.

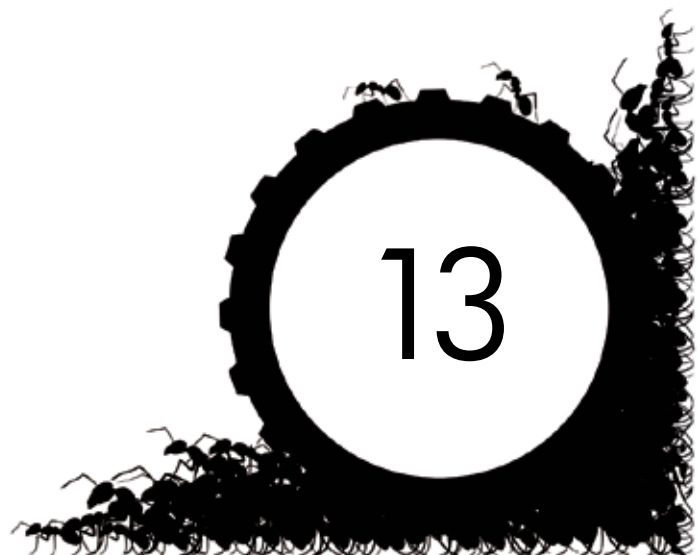
And on the count of three...

Ah! Human. So that's it. I am human! The drumming
was the blood pounding in my skull.

I must have fallen and knocked myself unconscious. Or
perhaps I lost consciousness and have knocked myself
sensible? And the circles? An umbilical chord to planet
earth?

I open my eyes. I'm lying on the kitchen floor. I get up.
Phone. The voice insists. Anything

involving a blow to the head no question. About fifteen
minutes. I put some clothes on over my damp pyjamas.
Something is wrong.



The Psychedelic Portal

Stuart Snelson

From his desk, he had overlooked the doorway for as long as he had been with the company.

The doorway was a perfect circle or as perfect as these things get. It had been the entrance to a church. Twelve enormous stones arranged in a circle: a monumental clock. The hours of five through to eight had suffered footfall's erosion. It had obviously drawn the devout.

It existed now bereft of the building to which it provided ingress. It retreated, a minor tunnel, towards a set of wooden doors. They had been daubed with countless names and remained fastened tight. Its sides dwindling to nothing, it was not much of a draw: destination erotica only for those in thrall to architectural partialism.

In his time in the office, he had remained almost oblivious to its presence. It existed peripherally masonic white noise. Now though it proved harder to ignore.

It had featured in a cult film, had doubled as a portal to another world.

Before film crews had transformed its fortunes, he never saw anyone pay it the slightest attention. Pedestrians rushed past without a second glance. On occasion he would see someone hunkered down within it seeking shelter. A doorway was often all the homeless could rely on.

Since the film's release, visitors seemed to arrive hourly. For friends, they would pose, before the camera changed hands and roles were reversed.

Nothing had changed in the intervening year since the film crew had descended. It was a mere façade, scenery in an imagined world. Yet still they arrived. What were they acknowledging other

than the keen eye of a location scout?

Admittedly, the scout had done well to find it. Before the film, their office suffered very little traffic, tucked away as they were, at the conjunction of unused cobbled alleyways.

Visitors often seemed surprised to discover that it was just a doorway. What did they hope for? That another dimension lurked beyond it? An exit from their humdrum lives? That this fading masonry would prove to be a portal after all, whisk them away into intergalactic adventures? In this he was being ignorantly dismissive. What he knew of the film he had picked up from colleagues: from gossip. He had not read the novel upon which it was based, had no intention of seeing the film.

It was not made with him in mind; he didn't care for wondrous speculation.

Beholding it now he was forced into other realms as he contemplated the lives of those who went out of their way to find it. He imagined tourists



returning home, adding this image to an archive of similar visitations: beaming smiles as they stood in front of cinematic scenery.

Each day he watched them gather; huddled skulkers stood before the portal.

Of the church to which it had been the entrance, he knew little. It had ceased to be a place of worship many years ago: last candles had been snuffed; final prayers offered by the genuflecting; choirs muted.

It now welcomed worshippers of a very different order.

There were rumours that the church was haunted. But could something that wasn't there be possessed by spirits? Uncontained how would ghosts know not to wander off. Once again, he was applying logic to nonsense.

How empty did people's lives have to be that they filled them with spirits?

Other rumours, his office was rife with them, suggested darker forces. There were intimations of paganism, of satanic cults, of other mysteries that a division of accountants mustered from nowhere to pass the time.

It was said that the church had been used in acts of black magic, had in fact been destroyed by vigilant Christians avenging sacrilege. In just over the time it took to type its name into his computer he discovered that in fact it had been a casualty of war. Online he looked at photographs of the wreckage, of how it had looked prior to attack. It had been an awe-inspiring building. Beyond it, now, a partial wasteland.

The filming itself had been covert. Scaffolding had been erected. They blocked the sun, replaced it with artificial light, high watt lamps bouncing off tin-foil. Or so it seemed. From an upstairs window, staff had gathered to peer into this other world, hoping for a crack, a fissure in its enshrouding. For the first time since his appointment, people gathered around his desk. They angled for better views. He wished to get on with his work, but didn't wish to dismiss their interests with his diligence. Pretending to give a fuck, he would stand and crane his neck.

It was described as a cult film of a cult book. How were we defining cult film now? he wondered. From the faithful's daily traiipse it seemed an inordinately large congregation.

The rigid circle was open to interpretation. More than once, he had witnessed the cinematically confused forge a gun from their fingers and re-enact the opening sequence to Bond.

Having endured his colleagues' incessant wittering he had avoided the film first time round. In town, it was showing at a repertory cinema. For his sins, he went along. Never before had he bought a ticket for a film in order to see the scenery.

Expecting nothing, he had watched in utter astonishment. This doorway, over which he looked daily, was completely transformed. Those entering had their wildest dreams fulfilled. As they stepped tentatively through, it mesmerised, a swirl that seemed to contain all possibilities. Squinting into this cinematic vortex time seemed to unfold. The world turned in on itself, fractured, kaleidoscopic.

Whilst trying to do other things with his time, he found himself drawn to the cinema once more, losing himself in this Technicolor fantasy.

Soon he saw it every night.

He refused to download it, was aware that scale was an important part of the magic. Whenever it appeared on screen, it did so in a hallucinogenic whirl: the hypnosis wheels beloved of B-movies brought up to speed with modern technology. It was how he imagined the world would look on drugs. Reduced to the size of his television, it would seem

like following the spin cycle of a psychedelic washing machine. On the big screen, he was sucked into the illusion.

Each night he saw something new in these sequences.

By day, he overlooked this doorway; by night, he watched it transformed into an entrance to a world of dreams.

He had worked backwards, watched the film first and then retreated to the novel. The adaptation coloured his views. He had to work against the screen in order to conjure characters of his own.

At his desk, looking out over this crumbling façade, he lost focus. The spreadsheets that filled his screen sapped the life from him. He entered reveries, imagined what he would want to experience beyond this world. He knew with some certainty the wish he would have fulfilled.

Visitors' infringements of his view angered him. As he heard tourists clomping upon cobbles, he would sigh. The presence of others served to shatter the illusion. Inconsiderate, they converged nonetheless, grinning idiots insistent upon their snapshots.

He struggled to effect a work/fantasy balance, to focus on two things at once.

Work mounted up.

That his performance was suffering did not go unnoticed. Management offered curt words. He

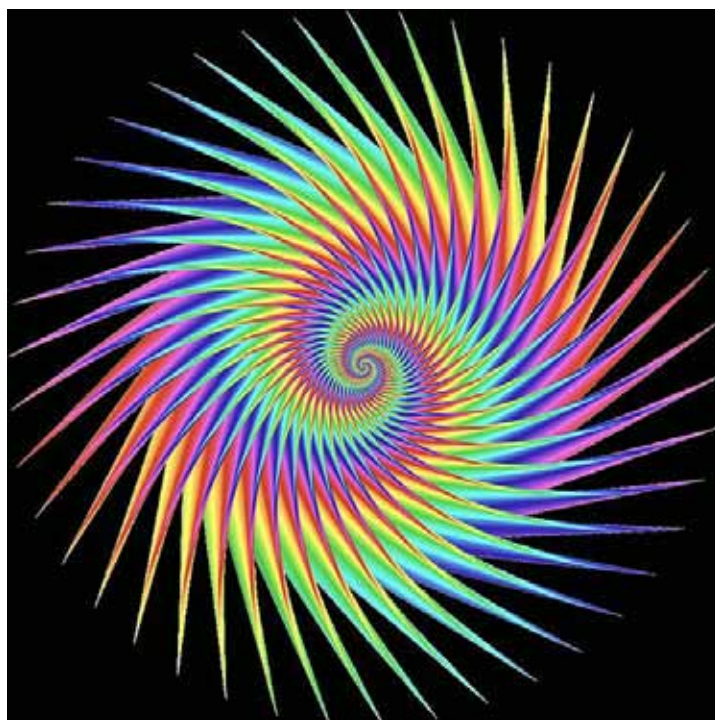
failed to improve. He progressed through the gamut of warnings: oral, written, official. Still he fumbled, days passed in a redundant funk.

They had no choice but to let him go.

His replacement, fresh-faced, was brought quickly up to speed. He asked about the tourists who emerged intermittently to snap themselves in front of the relic of a doorway he looked down upon. It was in a film, they said. He had seen it, realised now why it had looked so familiar. It had given him a sense of déjà-vu.

Every so often, it would steal his attention as another gaggle arrived to mug in front of it.

By its side, slumped, a man stared deep into the void.



Ancient Memories

Peter Tinkler



17

Like Circles

Sean Chard

Primordial straight lines drive
Like shards of sheet rain through the
Belief that what we see is
Real like rolling, rolling down
Hill with the resonance of
Chiming bells in vaulted air
A revolving door which is
No more valid than our faith in
A beginning and an end –

Drawn straight from carbon lines that
Overlap like concepts arising from
Empty space in orbs of thought
Shared and merged, rolling, rolling
Clay with water in the palms
Resisting like magnets, making
Life and making reality like
Night turning to day and back
Standing back-to-back with what

Exists

and

does

not

exist

Like straight lines, like circles and
Planets turning on their axis.



Thirty three and a third RPM
that was High Fidelity in
the golden age of LPs.
I recall the time I bought
The Ace of Spades
in gold vinyl.
The needle in the groove.

Spinning in
ever decreasing circles,
like Kylie; in
her gold hot pants.
Did vinyl die in 1991
as CDs ascended?
No!

Here in the age of
the digital download,
Thanks to the warmth
of your crackle and hiss,
you've found a niche
in the hearts of
70s teenagers everywhere.



This is apparently a gramophone, which is apparently some sort of 'iPhone'
wikimedia.commons.org

Hula-Hooping

Holly Magill

His tongue sharp in her ear.
Sharp like tongues
shouldn't be.

The loop of untruths
twirled to giddy him near:
it wearies her now.
So fragile.
A long way to fall.

Hands clip unseen nips
to capture her waist.
She gyrates sickly spasms
to keep them at bay.

Shudders her hips faster,
must fulfil, give him cause.
Don't let it ever drop.
Don't break.

So fragile.
A long way to fall.

And still he's licking, invisible
in her ear, demanding
ever more of her
nausea-spun promise.

Now, she can never stop.

Rocket tip of glue-slicked paper;
rolled over circle pinched to point.
The baby-est fingers shaped her.

Edges paper-cut hungry to bleed
solvents to eager tongues.
Sealed with boiled sweet spit.

She is poisonous and flammable.
A danger in the playground.

A disc crease-turned
in sugar-pink paper;
not even enough
for a hasted plane.

Still enough to light up and run from.
Puncture wound the slab-grey sky
and anything else that gets in her way.





Antony Owen: looking as much like a poet as he can

Antony Owen

Antony Owen is from Coventry and is credited with two poetry collections since 2009, *My Father's Eyes Were Blue* (Heaventree Press) and *The Dreaded Boy* (Pighog). Owen was awarded a poetry completion finalist by The Wilfred Owen Story and in 2013 had an exhibition feature at The Hiroshima Peace Museum.

<http://www.pighog.co.uk/authors/Antony-Owen.html>

Dwane Reads

Dwane Reads is a Derby-based poet performing 160 gigs in two years. His collection, *The Annoying megaphone pigeon*, is published via Piggyback Press in 2013. Performed at Rebellion festival. Blackpool. Tramlines festival. Sheffield. Rotherham show. Derby festival. Nottingham literacy festival. Wirral festival of first. Recently listed in *The Times* as must see event as part of furthest from the sea events held in Derby.

<http://dwanereadspoeetry.weebly.com/>



Dwane and his trousers perform at HCE Live

Neil Laurenson

Whilst studying English Literature at university (2000-2004), I became hooked on the poetry of Philip Larkin and began to write my own. In 2006, my poem, I'm a Soggy Tennis Ball, was selected for the Belmont Poetry Prize short-list of five poems to be judged by children in primary schools. My poem, Mole, was highly commended in that year's Norwich Writers' Circle Open Poetry Competition, which was judged by George Szirtes. I have had poems published in magazines such as Brittle Star and Krax, and last September, my poem, Greedy Spider, was a runner-up in the Mardibooks-IdeasTap Poetry Competition.

<http://www.ideastap.com/People/nlaurenson>



Neil Laurenson: Larkin fan and brick wall aficionado

Silhouette Press @ Wenlock Sunday
27th April, 4:30
Wenlock Pottery

They say:

Hello and welcome to the fifth Wenlock Poetry Festival.

Once again we congregate in our beautiful corner of Shropshire for what promises to be a great weekend of poetry, literature, music and film, joined by some of the greatest writers at work today.

Wenlock's beautiful rural setting informs this year's Festival, with many poets drawing on the natural world and sense of place in their work. In particular, modern day troubadour Simon Armitage reads extracts from his latest book, recounting his travels along the Pennines.

The anniversary of the breakout of World War I is another theme, with a celebration of the Shropshire war poets A. E. Housman, Wilfred Owen and Mary Webb, plus a number of film screenings.



23

Flood Crisis: Rings 'not fully circular'

Neil Laursen

The government has been heavily criticised for its allegedly inconsistent response to the latest flood crisis.

Fire crews in Surrey have rescued 500 people over the last 24 hours as police warn that residents in around 6,000 homes are at risk. In the rest of England and Wales, only 200 people have been rescued.

Surrey county council highways have provided 21,000 additional sandbags to local borough councils for distribution in affected areas and additional rescue craft has been provided by the police and military. 1,000 troops have been recalled from Afghanistan and drafted in to help the response to the floods in Surrey. Private Symon Roberts, 21, said, 'I thought I'd seen it all in Kabul, but nothing prepared me for what I saw in Guildford High Street.'

Responding to criticism that the government was not doing enough in other affected areas, a government spokesperson said the floods were "difficult" and rejected the view that the government is out of its depth.

In Devon and Cornwall, local authorities and residents have expressed frustration at government cuts, which they believe are hindering rescue operations. A 12 year old girl was rescued from the Tamar River with the aid of a singular armband and a big stick. In Northumberland, a group of drowning scouts had to make do with semi-circular life rings.

Another government spokesperson said, 'We accept that more help could have been given in some places and that some of the life rings issued have not been fully circular. It is simply not true to say that this is an uncaring government. The Prime Minister and the whole of his cabinet care very deeply about Surrey.'



24

Prayer

Neil Fulwood

In the third circle of hell
where gluttons are digested,
I will pay for my love
of the full English breakfast.

Wild boars will gore me,
demented beyond reason,
while egg-deprived chickens
peck my nether regions.

Lord, hear my prayer;
do not forsake me.
For thine is the black pudding,
the fried bread, the HP.



Un petit-déjeuner anglais complet commons.wikimedia.org

Running in Circles

Jonas Schnyder





A Night in the Pantheon

Augustus Stephens

Nestled down behind the screen behind the altar, I heard the door slam as it was pulled to and the giant key turn in the giant lock. I peeked through the screen to look. It really was shut, I really was alone. 'The security in this place is useless', I thought.

I smiled, stood up and shook my aching legs, then climbed over the screen. On a whim, I ran round the perimeter of the building. Weehee. How exciting. Alone in my favourite building in all the world. What fun!

I settled down with my back to the wall and took out my thermos and had a sip of coffee. Not much, I didn't want to have to despoil the place later on.

I looked up at the oculus, with the sun shining slantwise, lighting up one of the alcoves high in the wall.

I must have dozed, for the next moment I noticed that the sunlight from the oculus had gone, and the sky through the hole was a deep purple. It must be about sunset, and inside the church it was very dim. I took out my torch and turned it on – a strong beam of light. Good. I turned it off.

I changed my position to lie directly under the oculus. I gazed up through it, waiting for the first star to appear.

But out of the corner of my eye I thought I caught a movement. I turned to look, but couldn't see anything. Then to the left I heard a noise, as of wind rushing. Then with a pop, and out of thin air, a figure appeared. A handsome, curly haired youth wearing an ancient Greek chiton and carrying a bow and arrow. It looked for all the world like Apollo himself! As the moments ticked by, more and

more figures appeared: Minerva, Vesta, Hercules, even Jupiter himself.

While I had been looking to my left, I had missed what was happening on my right. I was startled to see the occupants of the pictures around the walls leaping out of their frames and becoming solid beings. The greatest Saints and Martyrs Christendom could muster arrayed themselves opposite the Roman Gods.

What on Earth or in Heaven was going on?

Then it all kicked off. The opposing forces went at each other hammer and tongs.

Minerva was having a real ding dong with Saint Agnes, Minerva prodding with her spear and Agnes swinging a bloody haunch of lamb, Minerva's shield ringing with each blow it suffered. Mighty Jupiter assumed a position floating below the oculus, right at the centre of the structure. He sent out bolts in all directions. One hit Saint Mark and turned his arm as black as ash, but Saint Mark was nonchalant, he'd suffered worse, and he carried on swinging his club as he rode his winged lion about the place. One of Jupiter's bolts came my way, I jumped back, but I smelt singed hair nevertheless. Saint Sebastian was shooting arrows at Hercules, but Hercules hardly noticed them as they bounced off his thick hide. He just laughed.

I scuttled to the altar and hid behind it, keeping one eye on proceedings.

And so it went, hour after hour, as the stars slowly swivelled above the oculus, the battle raging between the gods and the saints. Who would triumph and claim the venerable building for themselves? Meanwhile, I trembled and shook from fear that one of them would see me and send me to my maker (or possibly to Dis).

As dawn tinged the sky with blue the battle was over. The gods and martyrs stopped their mayhem. Jupiter called out 'Till tomorrow', and they all faded out, like will o' the wisps.

A few hours later, when the great doors were unlocked and opened, I fled into the sunlit streets, never to return.



Circles

Dwane Reads

Today I am on the side of circles you can call em noughts if you like
I try to outwit my opponent with zig zagging skills
unlike the dog I watched
chasing its tail until dizzy on a well troden path of deja vu

I am in bubbles floating up above the allotments
over people's gardens...please don't evaporate yet
you have just pushed out the plastic stick
I want to admire your beauty

Whilst driving around ring roads more than twice
to observe the sculptures
I notice them more now wheels tyres cut out holes
from cardboard or plastic like ship portholes
Woph Woph

I am the sunset watch the ship crusing into the distance
we can see for miles without any fear
as we know we are not going to fall off the edge
the earth is not flat after all ask the dustbin astronaut
who journeyed to the shapes in the sky
we call them moon we call them planets

Is that why they could not recruit?
fear of falling off the edge
its all different now due to aquired knowledge
it is safe even in the imagination
so who is coming with me?
lets set sail let us be free in circles.



30



Next Time in HCE: **Disgust**

Why do people feel disgusted?
Should we trust our instincts?
What is it about certain sexual
activities that provoke so much
disgust?

Submissions close 15th May

All submissions **must** be made to
submit@herecomeseveryone.me

The Poet in the Boxroom:

John Kitchen considers writing for Leicester's 14/48



14/48 Festival,
7th and 8th March, The Y Theatre,
Leicester
14 Plays in 48 hours: The World's
Quickest Theatre Festival

"What did you get, John?"

"Play 7, three female actors."

"Good luck!"

The theme, drawn out of a hat, The Seven Deadly Sins. I know there's lust and envy, what are the rest? Do I pick one, all, or some of them?

10 pm and seven writers depart, looking for inspiration. By 8 am a script must be submitted. 9am

seven directors will each pick an envelope containing a script. It's a play, not a sketch or performance art. It needs a beginning, middle and end, something for all of your actors to do. It's acted not read so not too text heavy.

It's the staring at a blank screen. Where do ideas come from? Can you force them to fit a deadline?

I'd had an idea driving home. Fortunately it worked. 2.30 am: a script has been written. Leave it. Up at 7 am, check and tweak. Click and send.

Friday morning, sitting, while this girl I've never met before examines the script. You're thinking, "Does she like it?" And she may be thinking, "Oh shit! What am I going to do with this?" 10 am, my director picks three actors from the box containing the names of female actors. They go off to create the play for showing at 8pm and 10.30 pm that evening. Stage managers look after props etc. There is a band put together to provide music and twenty minutes are set aside for lighting each play.

Show time: programmes have been produced, the actors are ready, well, near enough. Six plays are performed, in order, on time, without major disaster, the actors do not noticeably fluff their lines, and we're treated to clever ideas, wit, spectacle played out in front of an enthusiastic audience.

Play 7, the last one; my lines have been lost,

The Circle

John Kitchen

the over-arching idea subsumed to some idea the director wanted to play with. The last half seemed to be from a different play entirely. I sit bemused. But not for long. This is 14/48 – 14 plays in 48 hours. Between shows on Friday night another theme is picked out of the hat and off you go again. The theme, Vengeance. I pick an envelope, Play 1, two male actors, one female.

Home by 11 pm. It's difficult to put the first play from my mind. I'm tired, a bit stressed and I have to write again. 10 minutes may not be long but that brings its own pressures. Clear my head, think creatively, come up with an idea – Vengeance – it's been done to death. An idea comes, no can't see how to end it; another idea, too clichéd; another, too complicated. Midnight, nothing down. 12.30 am, another, might work, focus. Think it through. Maybe! Write it.

The other problem, when you've completed a script, caffeine and/or alcohol is coursing through your system; you've been concentrating on the story for a few hours; your critical faculties are shot and the sleep you so desperately need will not come. Send the script for 8 am and the process begins again; another director, another group of actors.

Saturday night, my script, 'BOOM!', is first. The director has done a great job, the actors are wonderful. I'm happy.

The key to 14/48 is the enthusiasm, co-operation and commitment of all involved. But more than that it is the willingness of the audience to enter into the spirit of the thing and enjoy the variety, the vitality and the sheer madness of it all. Next 14/48 festival in Leicester is in November at the Y Theatre. Will I put my name down again? Actually I can't wait.

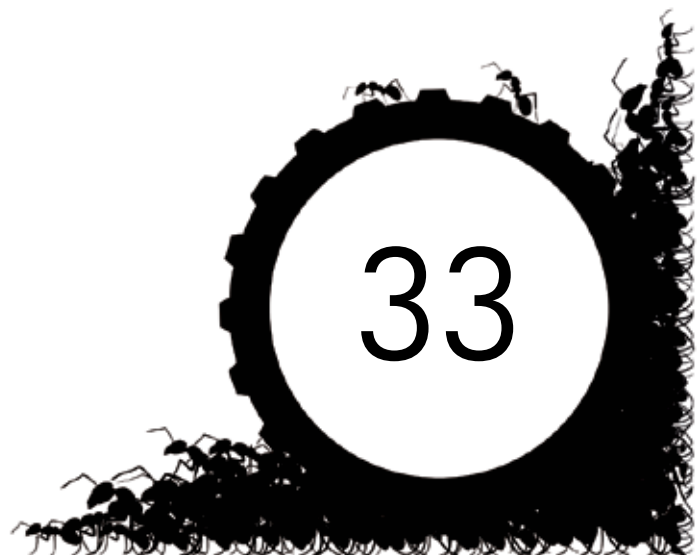
I don't feel at ease. I can't sit in the window today. The café's been taken over. All-terrain buggies, sprawling denim and big boots. So loud? The adults worse than the kids, shouting instructions, sudden bursts of, oh aren't we witty, laughter. The beeps and rings of mobile phones, "Oh I must take this." And, "Oh my God, it's Sandy. Hi, Sandy." Bet they only saw each other earlier today.

A circle aren't they? Close knit, known each other since Uni. I'm no part of a circle, never have been. Lose touch too easily. What's it like to have all these friends and their gossip, their opportunities, their bitching, the let's meet up for coffee?

I don't meet up. There's no one I can call to see if they're free for a film or a chat.

"Oh, Simon, that's great, well done. It's fantastic," she says. I don't do things that are fantastic. They're all so close, so supportive, their worlds revolving around each other's.

Ignore them, sip my tea, read The Metro. An unexpected touch on my arm. I look into an attractive face. Has one of them noticed me? She nods towards a child pushing an empty buggy. "Can you ...?" she gestures for me to move my legs.



13th of the month,

John Kitchen

the old wooden door disturbs the dust. Footsteps. Weight descends on the old, leather Chesterfield. The shutters stay closed. Click and flick. From an attaché case, a half bottle of claret, a glass in a linen napkin. Wine fills the glass. By the side of the settee the rings of previous bottles, glasses.

Black and white, 8 x 10, glossy prints from the case, one after the other. The claret goes down, the photographs go back. A bundle of envelopes, letters, all in the same hand, scented, unfold, refold, light shapes in the gloom. The glass raises, raises again. A long pause, the dust, the air settling. Bottle dry, glass empty, the case clicks shut.

The settee returns to its usual shape, the old door closes, sticky circles on the floorboards dry.

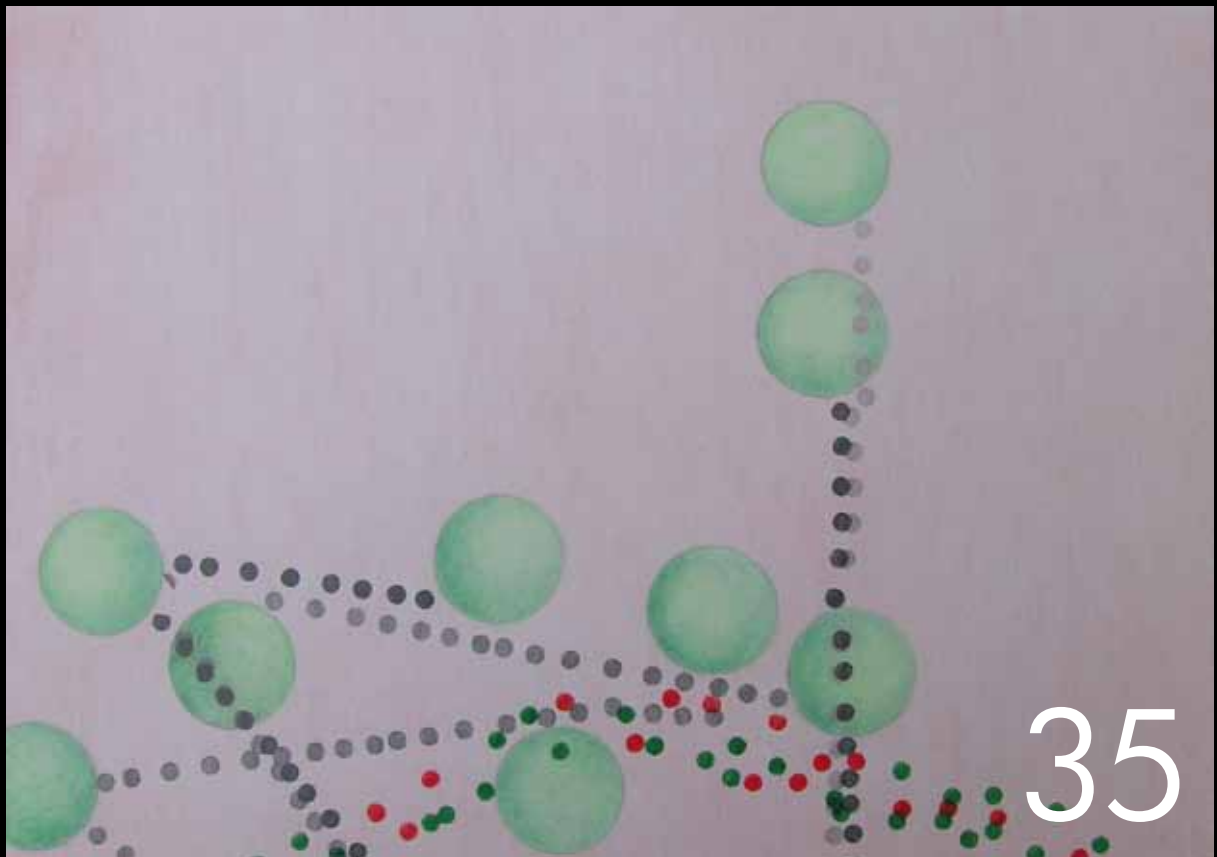
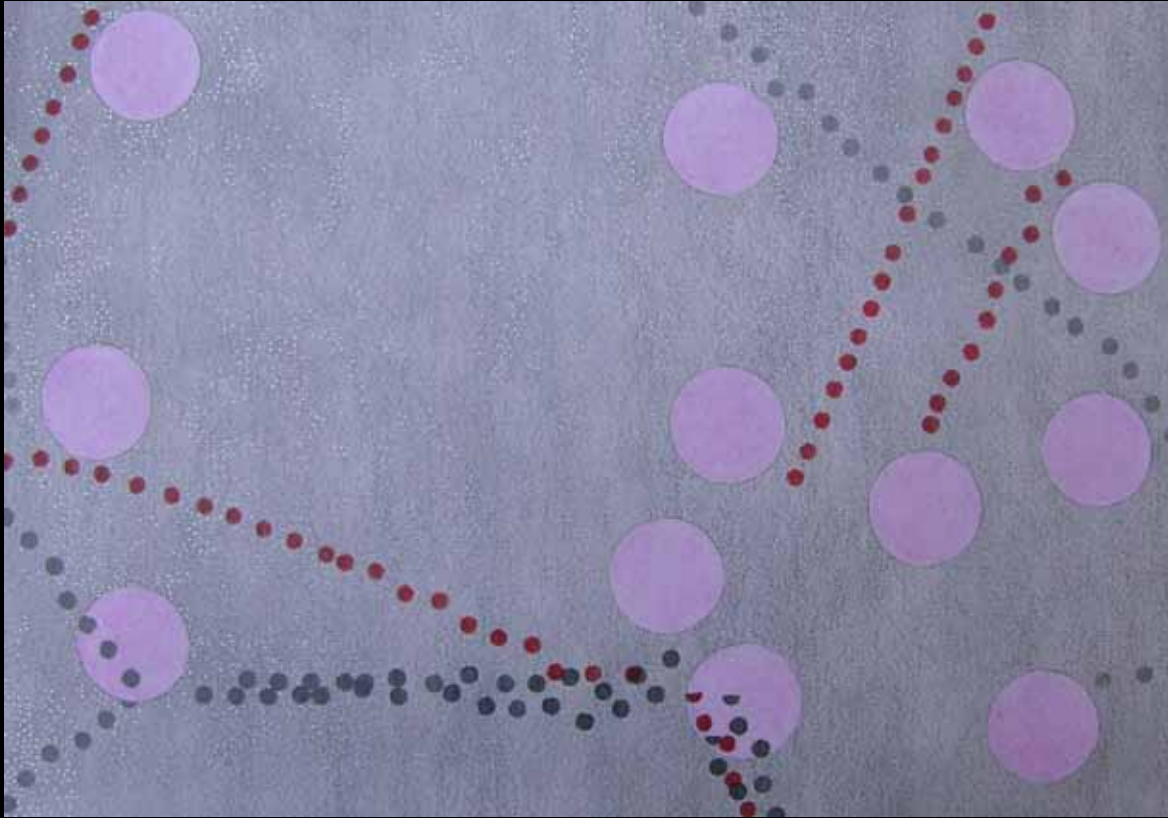
Punishment

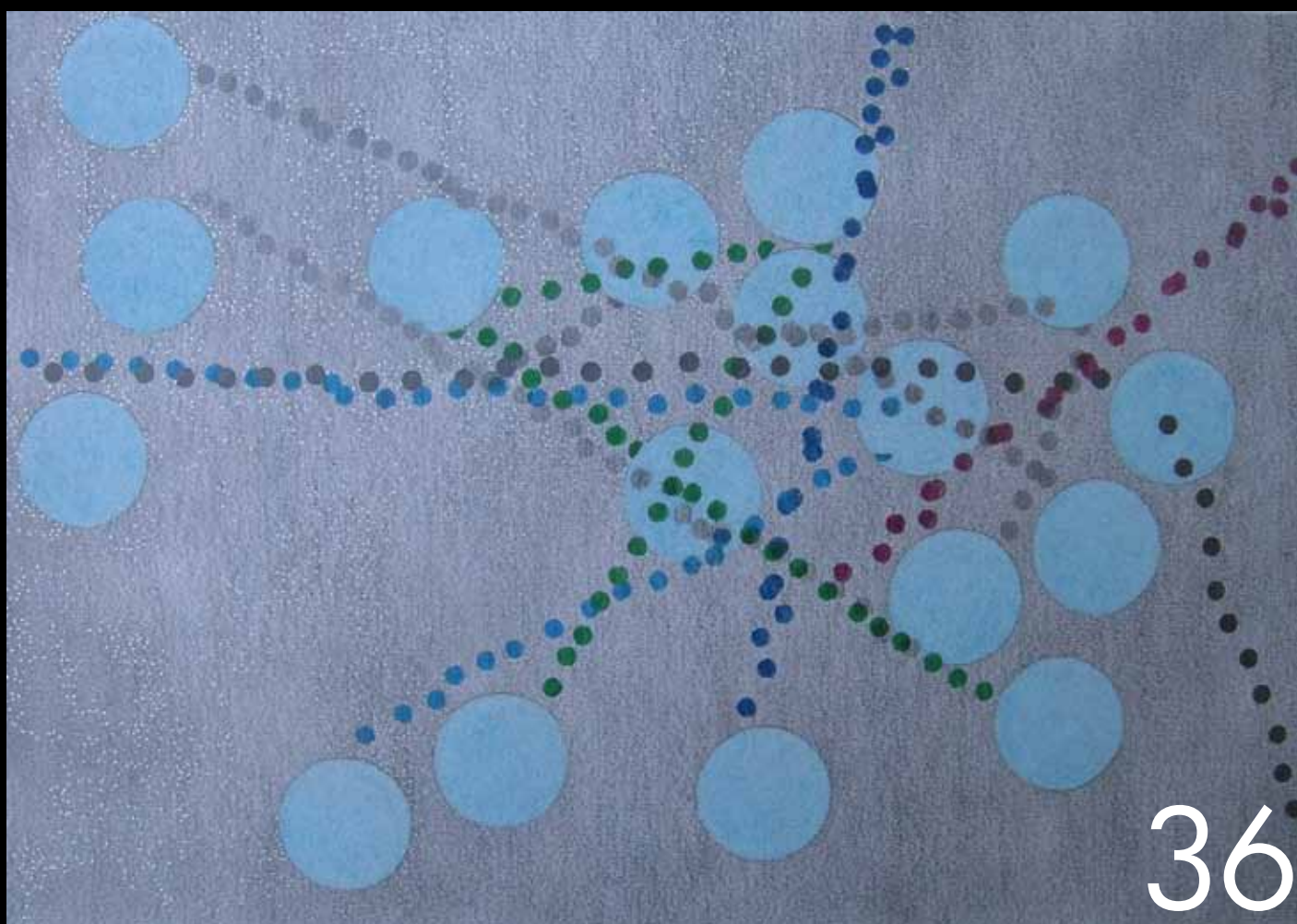
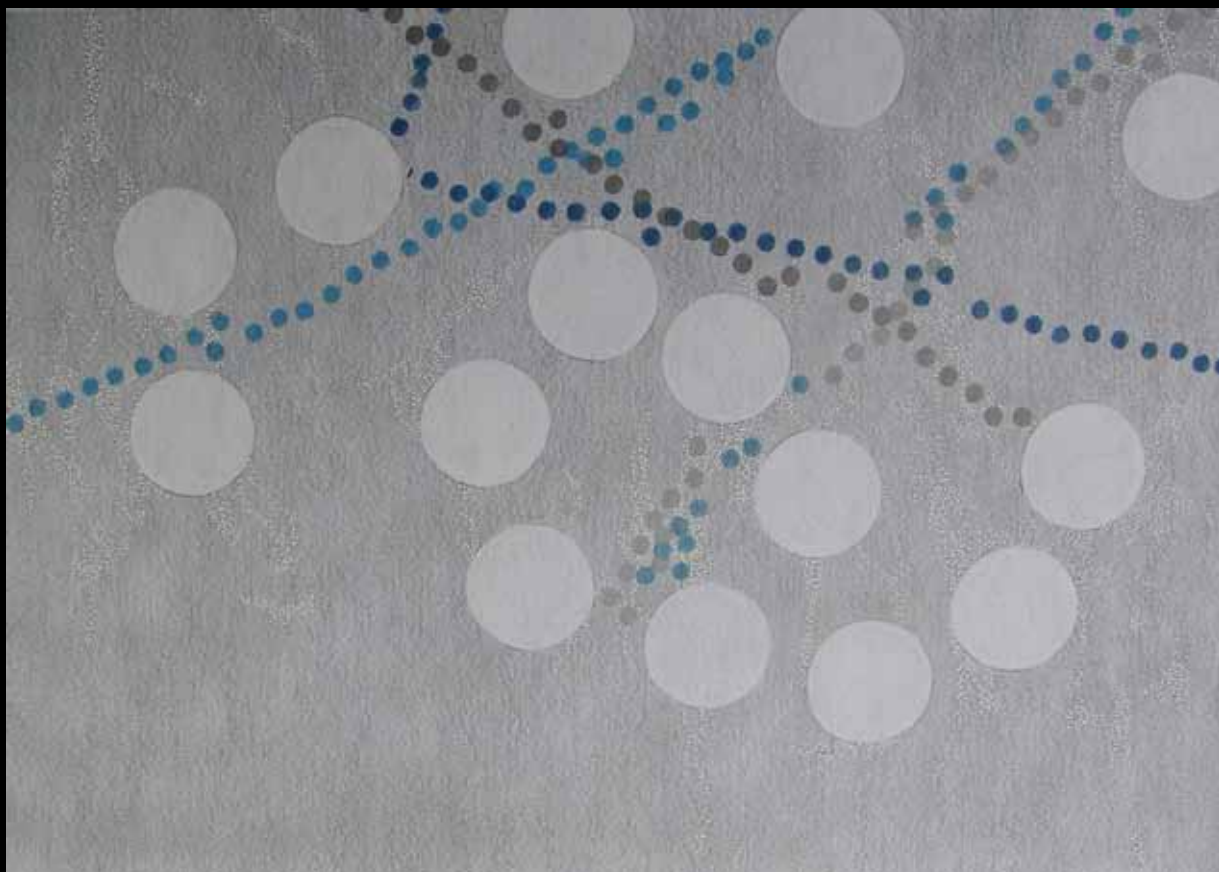
John Kitchen

I look through its shape
that elongated circle
death tied to a beam

Atoms

Pamela Schilderman





The Corpus Clock

Geoffrey Heptonstall

Artful shadows pattern
The incremental moments.

This is Cambridge.

This is somewhere knowing itself
To be timeless
This is a place with a taste
for gothic enclosures.
At another ceremonial hour.

There is a clock on the corner.

A crowd gathers.
We delight in watching
what shall not come again.
The mechanical chimera devours

Every precious second.
Send not to know for whom.
There will be time for that soon...



Croix de Guerre

Gary Sykes-Blythe reviews *Clamber up the Crucifix*

Director: Gary Philpott

Starring: Jonny McClean

Written by: John Kitchen

Watching *Clamber up the Crucifix* at Upstairs at the Western is one of the most intense, and satisfying, theatrical experiences I've had in some time. Watching the sweat pour from the actor, (and there is only one) Jonny McClean's brow, emphasises not just how physically draining the performance is, but also the energy and passion with which the whole play is infused. As McClean dashes left and right, back and forth, expertly conveying the different and distinct characters across the small stage, slowly and inexorably you forget that you're watching a play. At the end, you feel some sympathy for the actor's exertion: 'surely that wasn't just an hour? It felt like much more'.

The play opens with a brutal and mysterious moment of agony, but the explanation is deferred into the depth in the plot. Through retrospective vignettes the personal story of 'Sparks', the principle protagonist, is told. Although the story is essentially one in which most would be familiar (young man goes to war: doesn't like it), the restrained way in which the stage is set and the artful use of mannerism and humour round off the sharp edges of what could have been just another oh-so sentimental *Journey's End*.

Kitchen's dialogue is knowing, witty, urbane, but authentic. In the hectic group conversations, in which McClean cunningly slips between distinct characters and ranks with confident ease, each man has a clear and concise voice: you can actually see who he is playing at the time. The character of the doctor, interviewing Sparks at the end of the war,



couldn't possibly be confused for the Sergeant, for instance.

As with all stories of the Great War, the boredom, danger and mundanity of the trenches is somewhat exaggerated. Similarly, the relationship between 'Chalkie' and 'Sparks' has to stand for the relationships of all soldiers in all trenches, all of the time. In some respects, it's a pity that the two characters never really get a chance to step aside from the Tommy clichés, but equally, it would be difficult to imply any kind of alternate relationship in the space of just an hour.

The conversations between Sparks and his doctor, and they are conversations of a sort, gradually explore the growth and changes that caused Sparks to break down altogether. A crucified stance is a (perhaps slightly too) consistent visual metaphor, but it isn't revealed as to what this means until far deep in the play. Sparks, as a telegraph operator, is a shattered individual in conversation with the doctor, which is simply and neatly conveyed through a pidgin of Morse-code and gesture.

Clamber up the Crucifix is a play that fits very neatly into the canon of retrospective World War One plays, with the positive and negatives that that implies, but above all it is a genuine tale of humour and individual trauma. As a technical achievement, one cannot help but be impressed.

Off the Fence should be commended for their ambition!

Not so Quiet on the Western Front

Alyson Hall reviews *England Expects*

Director: Gary Phillpott
Starring: Becca Cooper
Written by: Tom Glover

I took a theatre novice with me to see *England Expects*, whose last experience of live drama took place circa 2006. "You didn't tell me it has songs!" he cried upon seeing the poster. "What have you brought me to?!" he exclaimed upon seeing that a single actor, Becca Cooper, would be playing all of the parts. What I had brought him to was a play produced on a modest budget by the relatively young Off the Fence Theatre Company for Upstairs at The Western, a pub theatre with roughly 50 seats.

Yet, from the script, written by Tom Glover, to Cooper's stellar performance, to the technical aspects, the play defied expectations. As music hall star Vesta Tilley - and the host of characters who surrounded her throughout her career - Cooper was hugely likeable, despite Vesta's complicity in recruiting men to be sent to their deaths. Vesta's increasing conflict between her duty to her husband and her guilt at encouraging young men to enlist was subtly conveyed. Though she began nervously, stumbling over a line here and there, Cooper soon settled into the role, moving deftly between each of the characters. Carrying the play for 70 minutes, her energy didn't appear to waver and, though she didn't seek it, she received an ovation after every song (and another when she entered the bar in her civvies after the show.)

An assortment of costume pieces were on hand to assist Cooper, but the audience immediately knew who she was at any given moment through her use of posture, facial expression and dialect; her depiction of Marie Lloyd - cockney, wide-legged, hands on hips - provided Vesta's comic foil. Most of the secondary characters were familiar, two-dimensional wartime figures: the politicians, suffragettes and Tommies we've seen before on stage and screen. Walter de Frece, Vesta's husband-cum-manager, was perhaps the star of the show. His desire to use Vesta's career on the stage to further his own in politics, before realising that Vaudeville was not considered respectable by the ruling elite, delivered many of the bigger laughs.

Glover's witty and artful script provided no

history lesson, nor did it preach - we already know about the losses and casualties of World War One - but rather it presented a satirical portrait of the war and those involved in it. The gaiety of the music hall and the jingoism of the recruitment drive were drenched in irony, while Vesta's initial enthusiasm for the war effort was undermined by the self-interest of de Frece and his cohorts.

In its tone, *England Expects* can be compared to its forebears *Oh! What a Lovely War* and *Blackadder*. Both were recently condemned by education secretary Michael Gove for perpetuating an image of the Great War as "a misbegotten shambles - a series of catastrophic mistakes perpetrated by an out-of-touch elite" and denigrating "patriotism, honour and courage", but *England Expects* addressed both sides of the coin. Honour and courage were evident themes, shown by the presentation of men with white feathers, and a young soldier returning from war blinded yet proud of his time serving, proving that criticism of war and the portrayal of human resilience are not mutually exclusive.

England Expects will certainly not be the last play written to mark the centenary of WWI, but it kicked off the commemorations in style. Off the Fence succeeded in delivering a quality piece of theatre; by the time the applause faded and the lights went up, my companion was nodding earnestly: "That was very impressive."



Next time in HCE:

DISGUST

submissions close 15th May
publication 15th June

