

A  
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A SAMPLER VOLUME  
EXTRACTED FROM THE POEMS OF

LYN MOIR  
JANE MARY WILDE  
MARY JOHNSTON  
IRENE BROWN  
LILLIAS SCOTT FORBES  
MERCEDES CLARASÓ  
ANNA DICKIE  
JAYNE WILDING  
CATRIONA MALAN  
ANNE CONNOLLY  
DAVID C PURDIE  
JO GIBSON  
KEVIN CADWALLENDER  
GERALD URWIN

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Selected by Anna Dickie

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Please note that *Downside Up*, by Anne Connolly, and *A Blessing of Unicorns*, by Mercedes Clarasó, are out of print.

## Full Cycle

Chasing the final cygnet from the harbour mouth  
ten days after the other five,  
the cob raises his iceberg wings  
in feathered architrave,  
sharpening the whitecaps' edge  
with loud, discordant hisses.

The cygnet tries  
to foil its parents, spreading wings, takes off,  
returns, continually rebuffed.  
The pen looks on.

Back in harbour, cygnet gone,  
the cob and pen relax, their annual duty done.  
They swim awhile, in parallel,  
then, bowing, twining, circling, dance  
until the cob, like some bright avenging angel,  
wings outstretched, covers the pen.

By Lyn Moir, from *Easterly, Force 10*, published 2009

## **Monkeys on a hot tin roof**

The monsoon is late again.  
Our paws burn and blister;  
we dance the cancan, bark and yowl  
to ease the pain.

Is anyone at home? Silence.  
Look a chink of open window!  
Send a baby down,  
he'll open it and let us in.

The house is empty.  
Here's a fruit bowl,  
apples, mangoes, lychees, nuts,  
and bits of breakfast on the table,  
sugar, butter to soothe hot paws, cool milk.

Now to the bedroom  
Pillows to be ripped apart,  
showers of feathers,  
bright jewels, not so good to eat  
but well-worth hiding,  
children's toys to smash.

Stop!  
A door opens; the cook's mate yells at us,  
drops his bag of yet more food,  
carrots, okra, onions roll out.  
Grab some, bare your teeth and chatter,  
then back to the roof and away with the swag.

By Jane Mary Wilde, from *Words, words, words*, published  
2009

### **First grandchild**

(born 29<sup>th</sup> November 1997)

It wis seein the kypie yer heid  
hid made in the middle o the pilla  
on the spare room bed that feenisht me:  
I sat doon an grat.

Three months syne ye cam inti ma life,  
I never thocht I'd ken sic seil,  
yestreen ye left for a fremmit land.  
It's nae jist ma hert minds on that day,  
I've a photie o the kypie

By Mary Johnston, from *Fa dis she think she is?*, published  
2009

## **Snowdrops**

Each February you appear  
your sheltering petals white and fresh  
like teardrops shedding modestly  
your slim new stalks all fresh and green  
so full of promise; full of hope  
a sign that winter's nearly done.

Your coming minds me of a girl  
I never really got to know  
who once strolled past you, young and fresh  
a chill wind blowing in her hair  
to step the hills, crunch diamond snow  
and breathe in freedom's cold, bright air.

She knew the joy of starry skies  
of tented shelters, warming stoves,  
two sets of footprints stepping out  
all full of promise, full of hope,  
another's hand around her waist  
playful, carefree, intimate.

One February she went away  
to breath in freedom's air again.  
One set of footprints tottered on,  
my teardrops fell immodestly  
minding the quiet, slender girl  
whose winter was already done.

By Irene Brown, from *Glass Slippers*,  
published 2009

### **Brown's Piece Barn**

Oh, such a dancing the hours away by the moonlight then  
Blinded by stars on our perilous way through the night  
Was it Katie I kissed or brown-eyed, low-browed Bess?  
I know not now through the mist  
Through the mist -  
But to Brown's Piece Barn we would flee, the two of us  
In by its one dark eye-of-a-door, safe as a- church.

Then the night-long, dreaming away the day-time labours  
Nought so cradle-soft as the pallet of straw  
Our hearts with the heart of mare and foal conjoining  
We two lay mute as lovers, face to face  
Housed in our chosen place  
And the breath of beasts ever spiralling sweetly aloft.

Till the day 'twas ordained by flick of the master's finger  
That the door be barred: the horses put out to new pasture  
And our longed-for laughter would rise to the rafters no more  
Oh, bring back the dancing, the stumbling, the tumbling,  
The fearful fumbling  
At back of old Brown's Piece Barn as it was before.

By Lillias Scott Forbes, from *A Hesitant Opening of Parasols*,  
published 2009

## **Gold Standard**

My value is forever fixed. Like rock,  
secure and unassailable, I stand  
upon imagination's marble block  
resting serene upon time's shifting sand.

Not subject to the tyranny of fact  
my truth is mystery. I tell no lies.  
My mere existence constitutes a pact  
between the unbeliever and the wise.

My standard is of gold. You can depend  
on my reality; I will not fail.  
Men shall dream of me to the very end  
and gladly follow my elusive trail.

By Mercedes Clarasó, from *A Blessing of Unicorns*,  
published 2007

## **Ordering Chaos, Playing God**

Dead-heading roses in a garden  
of a thousand thousand blooms.  
The intense scent evoking perfect  
summer lawns, spread with jam,  
clotted cream and the strewn  
pot pourri of stiff suburban teas.

Cutting away countless buds  
steamed shut, mummified, by weeks  
and weeks of wet. Plucking out the blown,  
before they can develop big fat hips.  
Ordering chaos, playing God comes  
naturally here, but take the gloves  
off and I'm lost.

By Anna Dickie, from *Heart Notes*, published  
2008

it begins in the mist  
not knowing  
stumbling along  
a new path

belief takes us  
beyond logic  
but a map  
and compass help

finding  
the right pace  
is letting go  
of arriving

By Jayne Wilding, from *sky blue notebook*  
*from the Pyrenees*, published 2008

## **Death of a Climber**

It was no green hill far away  
but here, where some great slumbering block  
awoke, resentful of the peck  
of axe upon its dreaming rock,

wincing at the tread of boot on ledge  
and quite forgot the breathless thrill  
its cliffs had cast, his reverent touch  
his love of stone, and let him fall.

No clamorous death, no heavens gone wild,  
yet, like that green time on that hill,  
the sun that set will rise again  
and I will see him climbing still

where summer crags hoard winter snow,  
where rowans burn high gullies, where  
black ridges flaunt against pale skies.  
My memory will set him there:

his fingers' grip, his misting breath,  
on steepest face, on sheerest wall,  
peak after peak - for he will climb  
on my heart's hills and never fall.

By Catriona Malan, from *Love Affair With Mussels*,  
published 2008

## **The Daith-Tree**

*(For Pam Aitken)*

*Jesus wis a jyner – lang lang syne,  
In Joseph's shap, in Nazareth,  
The laddie ser'd his time.*

He wrocht the bonny cedarwuid, the gopherwuid, the beech,  
Wis skeily wi the cheisels, wis hantie wi the eetch,  
Coud fettle plous or cairt wheels, coud kirn, coud scrunt, coud snig  
Cuid scutch wi the Rob Sorby, snod an squerr an trig

His faither learnt the laddie tae kerve a bonnie yock,  
Tae big braw rambust raughters an no lea onie brock.  
Tae ken the weys o timmer, its navis-bores its awte:  
Tae kep it happ't an caller tae stey oot daise an rot.

He learnt tae dunt the stobs hame, intil aik or esh or yew;  
Tae mak a stuffie fixin, strecht an strang an true.  
His wrists wis slee an soupil, his airms wis sture an teuch,  
His shooters braid an canty, his hauns wis gleg bit reuch,

Wi Simon an wi Andra He fushed on Galilee,  
He kent whit wey the skiff wis colfed tae cowlde on the sea.  
An whan He timmed the tables owre, tae skail the nipscarts' gelt,  
He kent whit wey the jints wis duin an hou the buirds wis stell't.

Sae whan He humphed His daith-tree, He kent its wecht an lenth,  
Coud cairry it fell aisy gin He'd ainly hid his strenth.  
An whan they drave the stobs in, He kent hoo mony dings,  
Wad dunch them throu the shackle-banes, hou mony hemmer swings.

They liftit up the daith-tree, He kent its awte, its spails,  
Its rouchness doun His back-bane, the bluidie skaithin nails.  
The lee lang day He hung there, stechin for His braith;  
His bluid weezed oot the stob stangs: fell slaw an sair cam daith.

*Jesus wis sair rackit on the ruid lang syne,  
The bluid weezed doon the daith-tree,  
Like roset dreeps doon pine.*

By David C Purdie, from *The Biggers*, published 2008

## Ear

I wanted her voice  
honey and treacle  
in equal measure  
like the way she looked,  
a bit exotic for The Glens.  
The shelter was a concrete lump  
where you might sit on either side  
depending on the boys.  
There in the summer mizzle  
we could sing our hearts out  
over the rocks and all the way  
to Kintyre till their noise arrived  
and, despite ourselves, the giggles.  
Always the nuns made me sing  
contralto to her sometimes uncertain air.  
"Sure you can hold the tune  
and Mary has the voice," they said.  
Harmony I loved but also height  
for my small volume struggled  
with the deep while she took flight  
till one afternoon of sodden feet  
and plastered hair I ran ahead  
and warbled a solo to the Irish sea.  
An old man, taking his refuge  
unbeknownst to me called out  
"Yer a bit of a song thrush ye girl ye."  
That's when the tide turned and the rain  
stopped.

By Anne Connolly, from *Downside Up*, published 2008

## **Marmalade**

Hypnotic it was  
observing your kitchen rituals.  
Lemons first,  
turned in your hand,  
a nod or a shake deciding.  
Next  
a crate of Sevilles,  
the sunniest ones chosen,  
a knife, a worn board,  
a copper pot reflects your concentration,  
a hesitation.  
A cupboard opens,  
Silver Spoon sugar completes.  
You brush aside your fringe  
and I watch  
your mother's mother's mother's  
dance begin.

By Jo Gibson, from *The Heart Is Always Full*,  
published 2007

**Debajo de tu piel vive la Luna**

*(Pablo Neruda)*

Your skin is mostly made up of moon,  
that is, the colours that moon is capable of.  
Unearthly colours, pale as the cold that  
comes from playing too long in snow.  
You fade in daylight, not ever as tangible  
as say a cloud.

I cannot understand all of your mythology,  
your tide shuffling and the bruises you acquire  
so easily from making giant leaps.

By Kevin Cadwallender, from *Dog Latin*, published  
2009

## **Feline Epitaph**

What's more pleasurable than a verse,  
Brought to mind by a passing hearse,  
Written for a cat's interring,  
Bringing to an end his purring  
And his frightful chase of birds,  
Encapsulated in a few words.  
Here, in earth both dark and soggy,  
Lies the last of this poor moggy.  
Sad to say but this late cat's  
Made his final entrechat.  
No more his quite relentless mousing.  
Now he lies in cardboard housing,  
Placed quite reverently headfirst,  
(Making sure that pussy's dead first)  
In some cat heaven now to lie,  
Maybe Macfisheries in the sky.  
The world remains for you and me.  
Goodbye Pussykins. R.I.P.

By Gerald Urwin, from *A Muse To Amuse*, 2009