

*The Apple and the Mountain*

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Body, Time and Locale

(CO-EDITOR)

The New Poetry (with Michael Hulse)

David Kennedy

*The Apple  
and the  
Mountain*

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2015 by  
Shearsman Books  
50 Westons Hill Drive  
Emersons Green  
BRISTOL  
BS16 7DF

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office  
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB  
(this address not for correspondence)

[www.shearsman.com](http://www.shearsman.com)

ISBN 978-1-84861-426-0

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements are due to the editors of the publications  
where some of these poems first appeared:  
*And Other Poems*, *Hinterland*, *Magma*, *Poetry Ireland*, *Poetry Wales*,  
*Shearsman*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Under the Radar* and *The Warwick Review*.

‘The Rage’ was first published in *Mistral* (Rack Press, 2010).

‘Hortense Breastfeeding Paul’ was first published in  
*The Emma Press Anthology of Motherhood*.

Anyone working on Cézanne owes a debt to more than a hundred  
years of scholarship. I have found the following bloggers and writers  
particularly useful:

Nina Athanassoglou-Kallymer, Roger Fry, Susan Sidlauskas,  
Tomoki Akimaru, Kurt Badt, Henri Lallemand, Griselda Pollock,  
Elisabeth Reissner, Erle Loran, Theodore Reff, Richard Shiff,  
Nataša Dolenc, Joni Spigler, John House, Brian Kame,  
Phan Lâm Tùng, John Shannon Hendrix,  
Christopher W. Tyler and Amy Ione.

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*To Christine, with love*





# The Apple

— I will astonish Paris  
with a single apple!

I will recompose the city  
parish by parish, arrondissements

one by one becoming effects of  
Calville Blanc d'Hiver,

Reine des Reinettes,  
of Provence's crisp green odours.

The fruit's bright red, opaque  
yellow thoughts will turn

the sour smack of soot and zest of iron  
to dew at day break.

Eiffel's rivets will bleed  
with memories of geologic saps.

Paris, you are empty  
but for a single apple,

painted as if God had painted it,  
from all angles, all apple colours at once,

and long queues of citizens  
turning slowly round and round it

in astonishment, moving  
on the thoughts of its perfume.

## Jas de Bouffan

'Where the winds live'  
in Provençal,  
two or three times  
painted tilted,

taken aback,  
just background for  
the chestnut trees  
accumulating

in him deeply  
year after year  
and he in them.  
Trees happening

and happening  
as stubborn poles,  
supple structures,  
light breaking through

or broken up.  
Systems for knowing,  
feeling, breaking  
through or not, not,

in him deeply.  
Veins in the eye  
and in the leaf  
'where the winds live'.

## *Still Life with Bread and Eggs* (1865)

Deep in black space  
objects floating,  
primary objects,  
things of our first world

and the first world of painting:  
two onions, two eggs,  
the wine glass still found  
in cafés today, a hearty loaf,

pain de campagne  
or rough-cast baguette  
on a bunched white cloth,  
set foam, sculpted tripes,

domestic fleece, and  
a black knife  
at an angle,  
a simple tool with which

we make the world  
and a jug.  
Animal, vegetable,  
mineral. The same objects,

the world distinguished  
into groups, appear  
and appear in paintings  
two, ten, thirty years later,

an emotional vocabulary,  
a continuing conversation,  
dialogue of forms  
and planes, things

of our first world, floating free,  
being reconfigured  
deep in black space  
or sunlit space.

*Portrait of Louis-Auguste Cézanne,  
Reading L'Évènement (1866)*

Papa in his armchair throne  
  in his cap  
                                  palette knife patois  
  living room  
at the Jas de Bouffan  
                  rough impasto evidence  
of work, of a person at work  
                                  reading republican news  
                  in France profonde  
far from Paris polish  
                  Salon finish  
                  manière couillarde  
                  from the balls from the guts  
like the thickly buttered  
                  smears and daubs  
of Paul's Sugar Pot,  
                  *Pears and Blue Cup*  
                  behind Papa's head  
as he reads L'Évènement  
                  itself a blank  
as if the future's not set  
the knife's dirty lesson  
                  not done

## *Scipio the Negro* (1867)

The brush keeps asking

'how is a body?'

The arm loosely braced

against the stool

runs with so much light

it might be bronze.

The back hums differently,

idling motor; light strokes,

dark strokes, are a rhythm

ticking over; quick shifts

in intonation. The head,

asleep, the claw-like arm

it rests on, both in shadow,

are true to light withheld,

an answer the brush

may not want but has to take.

## *The Bridge at Maincy (1869)*

The paint runs cold.

The bridge straddles  
stiff waters. Everything joins  
forces with brown or green,

the brush strokes not accents  
or inflections,  
diacritics of light,  
but stacked or propped

like broken tiles  
on collapsed shelves,  
weight become structure.  
The bridge straddling

stiff water, the frozen trees,  
are geometry filled in,  
clotted with colour  
somehow weathered

as if a moment  
built of light, of built light,  
had suffered time.  
The paint runs cold.

The two trunks, entwined  
front left, are the struggle  
to find form, picked up  
in girders of branch

and trunk, the rickety,  
warped wood straddling  
stiff water, the dissimilar arches  
of speckled stone.

The paint runs cold.  
The strokes press in.  
A drama of planes  
and angles and curves.

An old bridge, doing its work.  
No-one would linger here  
even if the strokes left room.  
The paint runs cold.



## *Black Marble Clock (c.1870)*

The traditional lemon's  
a joke: this isn't still life

but a big, ballsy, 'so what'  
collection of wrongness.

Black marble clock with no hands,  
the stiff white cloth that rises

under its own starch, scored,  
grooved, in repeating panels,

cunty conch, jug that's either  
glass or metal (who cares?),

man-size cup and saucer –  
bloke's salon, man cave comforts

of the mineral, opposite  
of a flower arrangement.

Now imagine who would have  
this picture in his wallet.

## *Hortense Breastfeeding Paul (1872)*

Hortense dozing,  
dreaming, the contents  
of her content  
    hidden from us,  
dreaming, dozing  
in a long tradition,  
Isis nursing Horus,  
    Memling's nursing Mary,  
Corot's breastfeeding mother,  
but the painting,

like Hortense,  
    is turned away from  
this knowledge,  
    neither sacred nor sexy.  
Hortense's closed eyes  
do not return a gaze,  
so do not confirm  
    anything we think we know  
about mothers, breasts or babies.  
    Soft curves

of pillow and bedding  
    are breast-like, body-like,  
echoing Hortense.  
    And the paint is quiet,  
a sleepy 'nothing to see here' hum  
    done quickly.  
The viewer is not required.  
Everyone knows what they know  
and need to know: Hortense  
    is breastfeeding Paul.