

# Sea Pie



# Sea Pie

A Shearsman Anthology  
of Oystercatcher Poetry

edited by

Peter Hughes

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2012 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 978-1-84861-231-0

Introduction and selection copyright © Peter Hughes, 2012.

Copyright in the individual poems presented here remains  
with their authors, who have asserted their rights to be identified  
as the authors of these works, in accordance with the  
Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.  
All rights reserved.

To the memory of Cliff Hughes  
1924–2012

# Contents

Introduction	7
John Hall	9
Kelvin Corcoran	11
Emily Critchley	15
Peter Riley	18
Ian Davidson	21
David Rushmer	24
John Welch	27
Maurice Scully	29
Carol Watts	31
Rufo Quintavalle	33
Alistair Noon	35
Lisa Samuels	38
Gerry Loose	40
Allen Fisher	43
Ken Edwards	45
Randolph Healy	46
David Kennedy	48
Alec Finlay	50
Michael Haslam	52
Richard Moorhead	54
Carrie Etter	57
Simon Perril	61
Iain Britton	63
Peter Hughes	66
Anna Mendelssohn	69
Catherine Hales	72
Nathan Thompson	74
Michael Ayres	77
Giles Goodland	80
Sophie Robinson	83
Matina Stamatakis	85

Ralph Hawkins	88
Nigel Wheale	91
Ivano Fermini	94
Rachel Lehrmann	97
Pete Smith	99
Tim Atkins	102
Philip Terry	104
S.J. Fowler	107
Alasdair Paterson	109
Tim Allen	112
Amy Evans	114
Sophie Mayer	116
John James	119
Simon Marsh	121
Further Reading	124

# Introduction

In the spirit of the best English poetry of the past, these poets have opted to move on. They make it new without resorting to gimmicks, make it aesthetically potent rather than merely decorative, and make it contemporary rather than modish.

When you are dealing with the very new, as we are here, the merit of individual works of art is bound to be disputed. Some will be ignored, some dismissed, especially by those still relishing the styles of 1956. But, to paraphrase John James, it wasn't like 1956 in 1956 either.

This is a period of political regression, and of the erosion of opportunities for independent thought in education, and of the remoulding of 'consumer tastes' by multinational corporations. In such circumstances it is easy to underestimate the importance of modern art, which begs to differ.

This book displays a series of choices and procedures which are not determined by 'what the market thinks'. These are individual writers investigating and imagining what is true now. They are thinking for themselves, and writing for anyone tired of official versions.

Readers will notice that these writers are different from each other and do not constitute a 'school'. Cultures thrive by means of such diversity, and 'schools' are best reserved for children, fundamentalists and whales.

\* \* \*

Oystercatcher Press got off to a good start. The first batch of pamphlets was entered for the inaugural Michael Marks Award and won the publisher's prize. Ian McMillan, Chair of the judges at that time, praised Oystercatcher for 'taking risks with older and newer writers from outside the perceived centre of British poetry'. We must admit that this took place.

Since then many individual pamphlets have been singled out for praise in various quarters. At the same time, attempts to define a

'house style' have generally been thwarted by a new Oystercatcher pamphlet which seemed to be stylistically located on the other side of someone else's fence.

I think it dangerous for poems or presses to have too clear an idea of where they are going. Just around the corner is a place which is different from where you have been. And it's more fun checking out the locals and locale than grumbling about how this is not the same as yesterday and why are there no chips.

I hope all the people enjoy some of these poems most of the time, whilst keeping on the watch for what's coming up next.

*Peter Hughes*

*The Old Hunstanton Vortex*

*April 2012*



JOHN HALL

*from* The Week's Bad Groan

pale flames of an unruly sun  
rise gingerly over the pillow's horizon  
from an indented arc

corporately they move me, the shape  
they have, to a colourful  
love

hollow for a concealed eye, is there  
beauty in our lives? does it enter  
golden through the hideous (grubby) curtains  
to bounce off familiar surfaces, which we angle  
do we, in obeisance for the visit

in our dreams we rolled  
steadily through the darkened memories  
of recent distress, & colourfully rolled  
also what we woke to, a world "new" again  
in an antique daily wonder

lights driving a clear way through  
high banks of grubbily impending  
snow

the changeful sleep dropping brightly  
in our lives, moving the opening eye  
to some remedy

\* \* \*

rise gingerly to the edge  
of the week  
pale ginger hair caught  
in the comb, left by the mirror

the Miró painting of the beautiful  
lovers left out of this with the same  
regret any fine thing we have found

the admired painting not quite hanging  
in my imagination against the rather  
grubby lime-green wall  
the beautiful lovers left in the mire  
of recent distress without their  
favourite painter, teaching the young  
who offer some corporate resistance & what  
is famous about the beautiful lovers is  
a certain fragility

KELVIN CORCORAN

*from* What Hit Them

**From the hen-roost**

‘War, one war after another, men start ’em who couldn’t put up a good hen-roost.’

1

Black ships drawn up for ten years  
to get an exquisite woman, to get at all the women.

To master trade routes, grain supplies, pipelines of wealth  
burning lights of acquisition scored on the map.

Make a poem of it; a bayful of weapons in the sun  
a poem; the fertile plain a killing ground unrolled

Runs in every direction—delight in slaughter found  
the great host fell upon Asia’s meadowland and marshes.

2

Karl Twitcher out in the field geologises  
no water or gold found but thought  
there might be oil out here, let’s talk.

Philby bows to the father of his new nation  
lips wet from Zamzam, sets about God’s work  
the American concession secured.

Osama sits on the banks of the River Gash,  
wives safely stowed in Khartoum,  
sings—ain't gonna study war no more.

At the crossroads of Nejd the Word rose up  
from the Buner Mountains, the King of the West,  
farming abandoned to wire the faith.

Osama dreams of smart women, burning towers  
of Qutb by the waters of Manhattan  
of an old bitch gone in the teeth.

Every grain of sand becomes a gem,  
and Lord—Israel's tents do shine so bright,  
Aramco on the tribal mat, afloat in the Gulf.

3

We had thought them easy meat  
for jackals, leopards, wolves  
but now . . . across the moat on high ground  
Trojans reaping.

It came down hard on us  
what if we pull out, wait off shore?  
the rampart breached, Europe stranded  
by the ships, politicians at the old business.

They go licking up the paid, fat words  
in a greased circuit of ignorance;  
gods in bliss in Houston and Riyadh  
granted the power of massacre.

My brothers dropped in to the sleep  
of bronze, their accents mapping  
the poor cities of an indifferent country,  
as they leaked into the ground.

4

Breathing long alcohol afternoons he might tell me about the war,  
thick layers of it. The stories thick as beer and rum breath and I still  
don't know the truth, the final version. He volunteered himself out of  
the Free State and poverty to cross the Irish Sea, the gulf of sad song  
misery, for the spit-shine British Army. Out of what? I don't know.

He was shipped out to India and off to fight in Burma with the  
forgotten 14<sup>th</sup>. He went on about the filth, the child prostitutes, just  
girls waiting in alleyways with men shouting the prices. Bored, they  
would set traps for kites, tie bread with string and allow the birds to  
swoop down, swallow the bread and fly off, then yank them out of  
the sky and kill them.

They were half buried in jungle tracks, tunnels of festering vegetation  
without names, and the stacked humidity just makes you rot—and  
then, Jesus, the bloody insects at you, at you, all the time—and on  
top of that the Jap bastards trying to fucking shoot you for free.

And if men like him had not gone to it?

I don't know what they made of their fear; dark bird hovering there  
for years, just out of vision, ready to slide off the air, dive and tear  
and shred; one of Chadwick's beasts would do, sharp eyed, clawed.  
Armitage could identify the model; outline its shape, as it ghosts in  
and out of the mind for decades.

5

And Thatcher's nasty little war  
and Blair's nasty rented wars,  
at some point they believe  
then retire to revelation on the Red Sea.

We hear their voices like ghosts on the air,  
the false tone burning, smeared on a nation.

May their houses be drowned in black dust.  
May their words be as waves of dead locusts.  
May their fake empire be struck dumb.  
And may the names of the dead be made real to them.

6

The bay empties itself, the deep-sea ships sail away  
Homer doesn't cover this, if he did I would rewrite it.

The boy looked out to sea, it was empty, he was astonished  
—nothing on the radar, just static, just radiation ghosts.

Peace like a white vision, bees murmur in the marram,  
and light paints the surface of the whole world.

Somewhere, ships low on the water, take cover,  
their discrete weaponry a design feature.

Somewhere, rewritten—speedboats take a punt at the Cole,  
Odysseus already dreams of Ithaka pitching under his feet.

And the elemental gods flatten the rampart  
as if nothing ever happened here.

## EMILY CRITCHLEY

*from* Who handles one over the backlash

### **Waiting**

to force these intensities to a shape, to burst  
or dilate. Body without cause, so detailed, so collate  
and threaded, you find yourself together making verbal patterns,

visual attachments, which you can't unless willing  
an escape. If you compere, all concepts can be made concrete,  
released suddenly, a movement in commonplace, maybe over

your head. Like I've been searching suddenly all over  
for justification. Dicing through bends in the time.  
It's suddenly a wall of laughter—warping occasion

on a determined fault line. Or, we are all attached  
anyway. Not the same as attack. Bent on understanding,  
see? It will curve us as we lean it out. The response

which was so automated, so confused, is more like  
keeping up chance, smirched now in the  
temperature of the room. High order, it was heady

lately. You had to be there to experience. And even though  
one left early, odd throbbing away, ready to hatch.  
And though you lay your ear very close to the side of it,

which side have you taken? Responsive or servile?  
Others' needs don't curb in the place used to blast  
others' intentions for. Can it be generous while qualifying

embrace? The area is warm where thought pounds on it,  
day after day, bending pale green shade afterwards.  
That's unclear. Or maybe the eye which makes light of or sense anyway

↓  
↓  
↓

## Road Accident

Who handles one over  
thegap & thecrash?

When it's all over,  
cut from it & grab wilting over  
some warm desire: metal: the wish of it.  
Trailed salt cuticle draped  
from an edging. Nobody's inched perfectly along.

Behind thepowerfulwreck,  
just your soft outline bruised  
hedged-in  
dripped formatting.  
Not least before.

But that was a shame  
not to will it goodbye.

important wait on  
at the ploughed skyline. Eyes up  
—reddened on both sides for the ride.



Could've told one as good as new.  
Could've stuck to the sideline.  
Like reliefs—  
marbled in signia: little swan's nests on 1000 or so mini oceans.

Out there where  
a drunk's  
faltering & spitting,  
1 time out of 10  
will there actually *do* something.

Others, smell it, the fear.  
Warm engines pump out  
their love of the ether.

What cry,  
what does it matter gathering hurt to itself?  
Waste drips all over  
every one is

ruined fields

, of no fault  
but their own.

## PETER RILEY

### *from* Best at Night Alone

*(after Deguy)*

Singing old songs together in the evening  
like nomads round the camp fire. The rare  
moment when we agree to die  
It is Orpheus, it is the soft thing stronger  
than stone, stronger than tree or  
scattered creatures, the song in its clearing  
as one by one we stand and leave  
in good order by the law of random numbers.

They have all gone to bed and left me here.  
Singing old songs together in the evening.

\* \* \*

Questions in my hair like midges, buzzing and  
getting lost among trees and fading to distance.  
Mars, Venus, dusk on earthen spring,  
the great fruiting vastness beyond these walls  
all the people living their lives and I cannot address  
less than that, some favour or dream. Only you listen  
are my opening eye, piercing the lights.  
Venerable honeyed lips, bitter wine.  
Earth's glories pass away.

\* \* \*

Darkness is not a human condition  
but a condition of the earth, that renders us  
isolated and uniquely empowered at

a turning point and if we are quick and careful  
before the light returns in the silence when  
people sleep because they think there is nothing to see  
there we can reverse the world's drift by  
a spasm of thought carried across several mountains  
like fire in a fennel stalk. And a bluish paleness  
from the night horizons.

\* \* \*

*Ekelöf in 1932*

I shan't sleep tonight.  
Forgive me if I write badly.  
Forgive me if I write stupidly.  
Death was ignored, and sat there  
like some hapless employee.

The bands of night enwrap the house  
the wind hisses on the gables  
the circular graveyard  
turns slowly in the night.  
If I am wrong, forgive me.

Memory of a plume of thought  
brushing down the hillside like snow  
announcing the human victory  
and purpose bursts out of enclave.  
He got up and opened the window.

\* \* \*

All I ever wanted, a hand touches a wooden table.  
And there is nothing to pay, looking at the hills  
Through the window and hearing a faint cry from  
The cradle, remembering a carved stone at Southwell

Of intricately entwined leafage: somebody was capable  
Of setting aside the world's catalogue of ills  
And I wanted a lot more than that, a cat's dream  
In a quiet basket, of the great fix, the claw in harm.

The claw passes through air and retracts  
At the delicate stone edge, the world stands,  
It stands alone, not knowing what it wants,

An élite or egalitarian structure. Call it home,  
Let it settle round us and hope the wild fires don't  
Reach it. There's nothing else either to want or own.

\* \* \*

These hearts always at war,  
Twenty years day and night.

O Earth you don't listen, you don't understand,  
You don't speak when you see me dying.  
O Earth you don't protect your children,  
You don't lead them home from the killing fields  
You just cry and cry.

Damn these years always at war.  
Damn the liars who speak of community.