

S P A R K S

INK DRINKERS POETRY

ISSUE #1
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Mary Mulholland

READING THE SILENCE

It's the sound of the sea
behind your breathing
we sit without talking
the fire crackling
a rustle as your finger slips
down the paper to turn a page
you let out a sigh

rain trickling down
windows rattled by wind
muffled by curtains
the shrill cry of an owl
far-off a dog howls
while in here a fly as if drunk
buzzes and bumps round the lamp

You flick the fly with your book
toss it into the fire
add a log that sends an explosion
of sparks onto the carpet
you stamp each one out
fill a large glass with whisky
then back to your reading

once in Africa with the rain
like steel drums on the roof
and rivulets racing over

the red earth you said I was safer
drinking whisky than water
and the grey parrot – bought from
a bronchial old woman – coughed

I pick up my knitting
replay our chat from earlier
plain purl clacketting needles
surely it's time to cast off
you glance over raising an eyebrow
I half-smile back
notice the clock needs winding

Mary Mulholland

Mary Mulholland's poems have recently or are about to be published in *Under the Radar*, *Finished Creatures*, *Arc Journal*, *Amethyst Review*. She's a recent winner in the Stanza Members' Competition, was recently commended in Artlyst and Winchester, and shortlisted in Aryamati, Buzzwords.

Colin James

THE PRURIENT

This can be quite painful.
Speak to me fast, faster.
It's all blurring, that's better.
I see where it ends,
on some narrative tangent.
Very clever not
avoiding the soft tissue.
Scratch and you will be rewarded
an itch not unlike sex.
It can occur occasionally,
so whom am I leaving with,
the good-looking one
or the smart one?
They both intimidate me,
neither aggravatingly too far.

Colin James

Colin James has a couple of chapbooks of poetry published. *Dreams Of The Really Annoying* from Writing Knights Press and *A Thoroughness Not Deprived of Absurdity* from Piski's Porch Press and a book of poems, *Resisting Probability*, from Sagging Meniscus Press.

SO IT BEGINS

11.34am

We perform our ritual before bed, I wipe the mascara and concealer from my face while he putters around his room inspecting his record player. I pull at the newly sagging parts of my skin as I rub in a serum that may or may not work. We brush our teeth. I gargle until it burns my throat. I slink beneath the duvet and watch him out of the corner of my eye as he takes off his shirt and trousers.

12.03am

Breathing breaks against the place where my neck meets my back, and the sound he makes when he sleeps reminds me of the rumble of a boat engine. I press in closer to the vibrations. Kisses on my cheek and I am saving this for the nights where I sleep alone, a selfish star fish. A density sets against my eyes and I match my breathing and fall asleep.

2.46am

I have been awake for half an hour and my brain communicates exclusively in fractured quotes

from *The Emperor's New Groove* and *Brooklyn 99* and lyrics from the playlist I made on Spotify last October.

3.33am

Noting the time on the clock I wonder if certain times are more auspicious than others, I make a mental note to try to fall asleep during one of these times tomorrow night in order to see if maybe doing that will banish my insomnia to the far corner of the bedroom.

4.06am

I have given up on sleep.

5.32am

My early morning daemon is back. We chat over a cup of black coffee and stale toast in my kitchen.

EC Lewis

EC Lewis (she/her/they) having grown up in a small coastal town in New England, is now a Glasgow based poet and writer. They earned an MLitt in Creative Writing, and are pursuing a DFA in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow. They are a founding member of the literary journal [*Hwearf Journal*](#), and has served as a poetry editor for the literary journal [*From Glasgow to Saturn*](#).

Twitter: @banlocan

Sara L. Uckelman

LIGHT LIKE SILK

Light like silk
Sliding over peaks
Slipping through cracks
Catching on crags
Rippling to the ground.

It takes time, to scale the mountains, reach this valley
Desire moves faster than feet
We pray at night and in the morning the sun comes

Washing down over the dark peaks
The guardians
The stone walls that surround us
And keep us penned inside

Sara L. Uckelman

I am an assistant professor of logic and philosophy of language at Durham University. My short stories and poems are published or forthcoming in Manawaker Studio Flash Fiction Podcast, the Martian Wave, Pandemic.ie, Pilcrow & Dagger, Story Seed Vault, and With Painted Words, and anthologies published by BCubed Press, Black Hare Press, Exterus, Flame Tree Publishing, Hic Dragoness, Jayhenge Publications, QueerSciFi, and WolfSinger Publications. I am also the co-founder of the reviews site SFFReviews.com, and founder of the small press Ellipsis Imprints.

MAD

A part of me is mad for something
Love can't give.
Halfway through term, and rain,
And credit checks
That always seem to clog the end of March,
It's waking like a cat,
Draped on the radiator in the hall.
It makes me pause in mirrors,
Preen myself,
Take hold of flesh and squash it – up and in.
I swear off coffee, sugar, alcohol,
Braid hair and go to yoga.
All for a vague, uncertain sense of... what?
A sea-change in the wind,
A gasp of warmth – Persephone emerging from her lair.
Then... nothing.
April comes and goes,
May bursts with violent colour, through the glass
Both look oblique and distant.
The feeling is still there – a letter sealed
Awaiting its first reader.
It starts to grate. I take the antidotes:
Songs by Adele and Taylor Swift,
Chocolate ice-cream,
Nothing seems to help.
My hands still weak, I write and write again,
Spilling into a book of litanies.

My mother cautions, "Don't be rash with this.
Stay still. It will blow over.
We both know handsome people can't be friends."
It's getting late,
The house is out of milk.
As I step out, I glance down at my phone
Addicted:
Yours is the face that launched a thousand ships
And like the towers of Ilium, I burn.

Anna Milon

Anna is a PhD student at the University of Exeter, researching environmental narratives in modern fantasy fiction and Live Action Role Play. Having been writing both poetry and prose for as long as she can remember, she is now attempting to combine her research and her literary creativity to better express the joys and difficulties of a doctoral thesis and of being an emotionally invested LARPer. When not holding the pen, Anna favours the sword and practices historical European martial arts.

About the Poem

Written between February and May of 2020, 'Mad' documents the oversaturated emotions during lockdown. It was prompted by an unlikely shared liking for Christopher Marlowe's poetry.

THE UNUSUAL SPARK

*There are people you always love,
no matter what they have done to you,
no matter what you have done to them.
- Amy Bloom*

It's been a lazy day, but I am not alone.

I am listening to two women
one very famous
another not so famous.

I was nowhere, still could inhale
the fragrance of French rose and water lily.

I sat next to them in train
and saw the colours of the fading sun,
the darkness of the night.

I sipped martini, spilled vodka
and awakened my sleepy thoughts.

The book White Houses will be over soon
and the story will rest, for now I am sitting with them.
And trying to understand the spark in their life
and the story which they tried to rhyme.

Priyanka Srivastava

Priyanka is a writer based in Singapore. In her free times she likes to find stories in simple moments. Apart from writing she loves to paint and read.

Instagram and Twitter: @notyet100

GALLOWS HUMOUR

Across furrowed field, we broke traditions
Playing cowboys and native Americans
Me, Cheyenne nation - eyes like tadpole
Flaunting wool aroc, flaring eagle bonnet, bow and
arrow
You, Vacqueros - skinny like beanpole
Parading brogan, bowler hat, baronet and musket

Gallows humour, I'd be darned to forget
The day you went tumbling on the foliage
Before taking to your heels,
Running from a snake in 's' shape
Whilst I went haywire, gun-slinging like a misfit
We were impossible
Hyperventilating as though our lungs had been gas
sprayed

Respite amid hysterical sobs,
We sipped fermented mesquite beans
From a jug using bamboo straws
Until we become cross-eyed drunk sketching our future
on fissured rocks
Hieroglyphics - this is our treasure map to treasure
hunters, we boasted
Our fits of laughter fanned pyrolysed biomass
Whilst orange embers pirouetted

'til they kissed the night sky with fireflies starring in
amazement

No doubt, the war stole our childhood
Those wonder years,
Now archived within the ruins of this landscape
My folks traipsed north,
 "For safety," father said
But it seemed he traded our language in return

You hid in the woods
Not wanting to leave the ways of the ancient
We calqued ancient words,
Chewed them into metaphors
And spat out what ought not to be left of it
Good grace, we could speak in tongue too
 "Gene autry," I said to spark old rivalry
You kowtowed, smiling like the half-crescent moon
I could hear dawn breathing asthmatically
I would need a Joseph to interpret this, were it a
dream.

Dissipated years, word had it that you're a child soldier
Truce reached, back in the great plains
But hard to fathom who suffered the most -
The great plain, its people or our language crossway?
Not one tired of launching the smoke signals
Again, I did but this time,
You never turned up only a shooting star

Short-lived, wished I could hold onto its trail of
luminescence
Burning out into that expanse of infinite, inky darkness
No hue, no goodbye - it's all clear now
There will be no sequel to our sweeping epic
Now, in my second childhood
Staring at the stable door where your horse bolted.

Ibrahim Salihu

Ibrahim Salihu is an author, a poet and structural engineer. He's a wordsmith with a penchant for humour and satire. A Reflex Press Longlistee. His poems have appeared online, most recently at Words for the Wild and in the printed edition of Brag (Issue 1), Dreich Shorts (Issue 1), Dreich Magazine (Issue 2) and forthcoming in Reflex Press Anthology.

THE TOY

I had a toy fire-truck sent to me for Christmas,
the usual shiny red with a ladder on top.
I dressed a doll as a fireman
with a helmet made out of paper,
made him rescue the baby
stranded in the attic of my doll's house.

I saw the heat reach out towards the paper hat,
curling the edges without touching,
and flames, snaking the bars of the baby's cot.
Quickly the doll's house became alive, spitting
and hissing, lighting up the room
better than any nightlight.

Best of all was the way the carpet colour changed
wherever a spark hit. The way flames would come
running towards me, greeting me, encircling me,
compelling the horrid pink carpet to flower into orange.

ZS Howarth-Lowe

Zoë is a Poet and Mum from Dukinfield. She has an MA in Poetry from Bath Spa University.

Her first pamphlet 'Love is the way bark grows' came out with Half Moon Books in June 2019 and her second 'I have grown two hearts' with Hedgehog Press in Autumn 2020. Her First Collection is forthcoming with Indigo Dreams in 2021.

Her work has appeared in Anthologies and Journals including For the Silent, Atrium, Ink, Sweat and Tears, Picaroon, Algebra of Owls, Bonnie's Crew and Here Comes Everyone.

Twitter: @ZSHowarthLowe

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SPACEMAN

You can travel through the galaxy with only the use of your brain and your bed. It's as simple as laying down after a long day of class and exhausting social interactions where she told you, "You look good today!" because you're wearing something that makes you look like a g*rl and where someone else called you s*e again. You pull your hands through your hair and you don't scream into the pillow because someone will hear it. You have always been quiet in your distress. Don't get told off. Don't get checked in on. No, my dear, it's much easier to pull your hands through your hair and hold your head in one piece and feel the unbursting swell in your chest that used to be the prelude to tears but now simply sits there like a stone, heavy and immovable. It's easier to rub your face until it tingles and then scrunch your eyes closed and suddenly you're seeing stars.

You can travel through the galaxy with only the use of your brain and your bed. It's as simple as waking up in a daze at three in the morning and realising you fell asleep with your spacesuit still on. So you force yourself to sit up and peel off layer after layer until you pull off your skin and you are bare muscle and cracked sternum against the cold air of the day and you're glancing at yourself in the mirror across the room and seeing someone that isn't you. You've always related to aliens, with their awkward limbs and their inhuman systems of communication and their longing to go home. People are scared of aliens, too, of what their existence implies. Being up this early (late?) is dizzying, and this head is spinning, in an orbit of its own. It falls back to the pillows, a stone, and you wonder when it got so hard to carry this strange alien body you've fallen into. You scrunch tight its eyes and suddenly you're seeing stars.

You can travel through the galaxy with only the use of your brain and your bed. It's as simple as making a stand, literally. You take off your shoes and your socks and you massage out the aches in your feet. You open up your computer, turn on a track that makes you think of happiness; from when you had a lot less to worry about, or maybe when you worried about a lot less. You're not sure on the difference, and what does it matter, really? Save for writing a more concise poem. The music plays and you're too heavy, too much of a rock, to float to it but you can imagine a world where you're not, so you do. You make a stand, literally. You stand up on the bed that's not really yours and you hope it doesn't break when you start to jump on it. You're flying, falling--what does the difference matter, really? You laugh and it makes your eyes close and suddenly you're seeing stars.

Abs Dion

Abs Dion is a queer, nonbinary, mixed-race writer. Their primary interest is in experimental poetry, playing with form and theme to further the work of the written word. They also write fiction and drink far too much tea.

Currently, they're studying BA English and Creative Writing at Royal Holloway, England. In June and July 2020, they organised the creation of three digital collections in order to fundraise for Black Lives.

Twitter and Instagram: @absdion

John Grey

THE OLD DESERT COUPLE

Our hair sparks, rises up
like sailboats on a sea of wrinkled brows.
Insects move in, follow the imaginary maps
that populate our every surface.
We brush them away,
breathe bug-free air
like panning for gold.
Old rocks consolidate lime.
Dinosaur footprints mock its every move.
Adobe mud molds itself
to the shape of centuries.
Only people can reflect
the chaos, the violence, of moments.
Only you and I can squash insects flat
so their death is not part of some cycle.
There's a coppery dust to the taste,
a foreclosed reverie to solemn eyes
mourning a lost sunset.
The past digs itself into the landscape.
The future turns Arizona into
a distant planet, dares us to scour
the heavens for it.
The what-might-have-been forms
an incendiary mirage.
What can we aging mortals do
but sustain it.

John Grey

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in Soundings East, Dalhousie Review and Qwerty with work upcoming in West Trade Review, Willard and Maple and Connecticut River Review.

Anisha Kaul

THE SPARK REMAINS

Twined in an unsettled fold
Lifted by a sudden gale, dropped gently
Pair of grey feathers once flocked together
Now undone

At dusk, unseen under the canopy
They merge to yield a dazzling spark
A fleeting respite, Whisper sweet
Promises of reconciliation
Then adrift directly

Afar, a lonesome sailor remembers
Some bygone days and persons
Under the full moon light
Beholds the tiny feather afloat
Both ferry the immortal spark within

Anisha Kaul

Anisha Kaul is a poet and a Postgraduate student of Masters in English Literature at Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi, India. Her work is forthcoming or has appeared in the *Beir Bua Journal*, *Analogies & Allegories Literary Magazine*, *Visual Verse* and *Afflatus*, among others. She is also a budding researcher and is currently working to pursue the same. You can reach out to her on twitter @anishakaul9.
Pronouns: she/her

Mark Grainger

STATIC ELECTRICITY

There's still a spark between us
though we spend our nights

at home. A charge that jolts
a thousand volts when our E.T.

fingers touch. The shock of it
is almost pain—a throbbing pulse

of light—and my heart rate rises

every time

I'm struck by you.

It could be it's just one of those
natural phenomena—an exchange

of electrons between our bodies
and the sofa, a build-up of potential

that's unleashed by your affection—
but there's no link to earth

in our

electrical connection.

Mark Grainger

Mark Grainger (he/him) is a Brit who lives in Germany with his fiancée and their dog. He writes and translates poems for fun. When his output ballooned under the coronavirus lockdown, he started sharing 'lockdown poetry' on Twitter (@marktgrainger). He recently won the Austrian Cultural Forum London's translation prize, and his poems have appeared in *Daily Drunk Mag* and *Dream Journal*.

CORONATION

I am framed; hollowed out and
Filamented. Glowing like hot stones.

Lightforms flicker and congregate like
Fireflies, their friction throwing off
Sparking heat and infant wildfires.

Friction against itself; wearing
down on the world like the velvet antlers
of the shedding deer; bloodstained velvet
in hanging strands, gnarled and tender;
the bone beneath sharp and anointed –
the new crowned King of flesh.

I am a stippled form; textured, dense
Extruded in many manners, condensed
and then expanded, spiked and rough
like sandpaper drawn across the skin.
The gentle rasp of broken glass on
Concrete, shattered glinting left
behind and then allowed to spark the
light.

Falling apart, unfolding and flattening,
expansive and covering far more space
than I have any right to hold, I reign

supreme. Ignited and consuming.
All is mine, as it is within
My tumultuous being.

Jay Fraser

Jay Fraser is a poet and general nuisance from Lincolnshire in the UK. He graduated from the University of Lincoln with a degree in English in 2019, and has since been working on all kinds of disparate writing: currently his main focus is the political philosophy of industrial music. You can find him on Twitter @JayFraser1, or getting bitten while trying to pet a cat.

GAZE-GLOW

When I see crimson evening ripening
To the core of the sun, I remember how truth like
sunrays
Canned in the west, shelves into
Glossy objects like those in supermarket,
The sky stacked with purple berries, red raisins,
Yummy yolks on the plate of white clouds,
Marshmallowed in cool blues,
I hold the sky as a smoothie in my eyes.
Keep your eyes wide open
To taste it: gaze its glow, pair it with lemon lies,
Check creamy facts.
To me, the moments used to peel off
Fact from fiction are light years,
Which carry a torch into the blackholes
Of saddening times.
To you, light is just another spark that nerves through
Our stardust moulded body frames,
Spangled with hopes to touch cosmos beyond our reach
Everytime we rise in the east in anger
You fall in revenge with the west, our mood in various
shades.
Thought it doesn't matter anymore to frame
Who is right to say what exactly is our light
Or if it carries any colours other than being just dark or
bright.

Sumera Saleem

Sumera Saleem is a lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature, the University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Gold medalist in English literature from the University of the Punjab, and former sub-editor in the department of English, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. She has published poems in National and International literary magazines.

IN A SUPERNOVA GARDEN

I sought you everywhere
traveled the world imagining us
face to face breath mixing breath
I left the Earth without having found you
cruised past the moon Saturn Pluto
the long and winding Milky Way
I imagined your warm voice in the soundless
universe I searched through gardens
of blossoming magenta cherry and saffron
supernovas until I began to recognize your face
the stars that freckle
your unfathomable countenance
and from within
a dream I heard you call me beyond
the universe and I looked
to your voice and beheld the edges
of a multiverse reaching outward
at the same time as the universe
reaches inward

Carrie Sword

Carrie Sword is a writer and Jungian psychotherapist in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. She earned a B.A. in English in 1986, and worked as a journalist before pursuing a master's in counseling psychology, and later, a doctorate in clinical psychology. She specializes in experiential dreamwork through her private practice. She resumed writing three years ago and started a blog last March. The beauty and spirit of nature have been continual companions since childhood. Her essay, *Reverence for the Queen Underfoot*, will be published by Sky Island Journal this fall.

She/her

<http://dancingonmoonlight.com>

@DrCarrieSword

Kate Clarke

NATURE BOY

I hate to write of flowers
It's not very rock and roll
But those tulips you bought and I planted
Couldn't be more you if they tried
Their shade would have caught your eye
You'd talk of a boxer's bruise
a seeping blueberry pie
a garnet from James Brown's finger
Ava's nails, a Lansky shirt
You would photograph them
one knee in the dirt
before squid ink turned to ash
Colour was your thing
Beauty your passion

Kate Clarke

Kate is a journalist by trade who also works as a copywriter and a PR account manager.

As a lyricist she worked with her husband, the writer and performer Terry Clarke. Terry recorded and performed throughout the UK, Europe and the US throughout his career. He passed away in April 2020. Kate lives in West Wales with their two sighthounds, Sunny and Vera.

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