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# Marginalia

Ten Years of Poems & Texts  
from Penned in the Margins

Penned in the Margins

LONDON

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## FOREWORD

ON 20<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2004, in a dank basement underneath the railway in Herne Hill, South London, I introduced a group of ten poets to an audience of friends and locals. Fresh out of university, I figured myself a dabbler in the dark arts of language: producing a small magazine (*Keystone*), helping out with another (*Tears in the Fence*), and of course writing poems of my own. The night was called 'Penned in the Margins': a phrase lifted, self-indulgently, from one of those poems: 'I Guthlac / steadfast on my island / in my insularity / stamping at boundaries / lost contours of march / penned in the margins.'

Ten years on and, like the Anglo-Saxon hermit-saint, I'm still stamping at boundaries; no longer in a dank basement but working from a small office in East London on publications and performances for people who are not afraid to take risks.

In a phrase repeated so often it almost seems apocryphal, Iain Sinclair described the British poetry scene as 'a knife fight in a phone booth'. Penned in the Margins was conceived as a publisher that looked beyond small-minded factionalism to promote the full diversity of poetries in Britain. We have built a publishing stable that comprises performance poets (Luke Wright, Ross Sutherland), experimental poets (SJ Fowler, Emily Critchley), lyric poets (Sarah Hesketh, Melissa Lee-Houghton, Roddy Lumsden) and some who resist categorisation altogether (Hannah Silva, Siddhartha Bose).

Penned in the Margins has sometimes been called 'alternative'; and that's fine by me. Our relationship to mainstream literary culture has always been provisional, on the edge of things. Writing in *Poetry London*, Philip Gross described *City State: New London Poetry* as 'a

central space that is also the meeting place of many edges'; in *Poetry Review* Katy Evans-Bush declared *Adventures in Form* to be 'the start of a new, healthier and more joyous way of looking at the poetic endeavour.' The last couple of years has brought wider recognition in the form of Poetry Book Society selections for *Adventures in Form*, *Beautiful Girls* by Melissa Lee-Houghton and Meghan Purvis's translation of *Beowulf*, and the longlisting of Claire Trévien's collection *The Shipwrecked House* for the Guardian First Book Award. With over forty titles now under my belt, *Penned in the Margins* is based in Toynbee Studios where I am ably supported by Production and Research Assistant Nick Murray. Our publications reach a wide audience thanks to our distributor Central Books and our sales agent Inpress Books, and we have been fortunate in working with talented book designers: Ian Simmonds, Will Daw and, most recently, Ben Anslow.

Authors are the life-blood of any publishing company, and over the past decade I am proud to have built up an eclectic group of writers from all over the country, writing from many different contexts. Many of them I would rank as friends as well as collaborators. Editing is an unfashionable concept in an industry increasingly driven by the demands of marketing, but it is integral to my approach as a publisher. It signals a commitment to the author, and to the reading experience, that I hope shines through the text.

Central to my vision is literature as language-in-performance, existing not as an isolated species but in a fluid dynamic with theatre, music, comedy, live arts, and with new digital media. *Penned in the Margins* has always created events and productions alongside, and often in collaboration with, our publishing programme. In *Marginalia* there many poets whose work can be found off as well as

on the page: Luke Wright, Siddhartha Bose, SJ Fowler, Hannah Silva and Ross Sutherland. Our very first perfect-bound book, *Generation Txt*, was the basis for a nationwide live poetry tour. Most recently we have collaborated with Claire Trévien to transform *The Shipwrecked House* into a multi-sensory theatre piece complete with ropes, pulleys and two specially commissioned perfumes.

This anthology is a celebration. Less of a 'Best of' and more of a 'Now That's What I Call...' A poetry mix-tape, lovingly recorded, with your name scrawled on the front in biro. My choices were, as ever, subjective and capricious; I did not consult with the authors but just followed my instincts. There is no single theme, though you might identify some recurrent motifs - the body, the city, our shifting relationship with language and modernity. Some texts here have 'done the rounds'. I think of Ross Sutherland's 'Two Moons for Mongs', for instance - possibly the best, and funniest, example of a contemporary univocalism. Others selections will, I hope, surprise both readers and authors.

The poems that follow range in location from Dark Age Denmark to twenty-first century Mumbai; from rural Dorset to contemporary London (filtered, variously, through Google Streetview, a glass of water and a Saturday night on the town). In form they morph and twist, some adopting and adapting traditional forms, others coalescing into prose blocks or fracturing across the page in unconstrained textual sculptures. Some are expansive, discursive or conversational; others (such as Roddy Lumsden's short lyrics) arrive as compressed, honed nuggets of language. And alongside the poetry that makes up the bulk of our back catalogue, you will find excerpts from prose works by Luke Kennard, Alan Cunningham, Gemma Seltzer and Heather Phillipson.

Penned in the Margins stands for the power of words to challenge how we think, test new ideas and explore alternative stories. There is, within these pages, political observation, compelling social satire, history, humour and poem-as-play - but always, I hope, there is language brought to bear on the world and on the self.

Tom Chivers

Editor

London, August 2014

# Marginalia



# Hwaet

*Meghan Purvis*

Stop me  
if you've heard this one before: the lands up north,  
hoar-bent, frost-locked, need deeper plows  
to dig them. Here is one.

## Austerity rules, okay!

*Steve Spence*

I have been here too long but I have yet to find a suitable guide who can guess where I am going. Cash remains the most important method of payment for small transactions yet their manifesto promises to maintain current levels of defence spending. Successful applicants will be required to provide an enhanced disclosure. It is low tide and directly below the doorway the shore lies exposed. Fifteen miles off the coast a sea turtle is seen struggling through the slick. Coral reefs in many parts of the world now face devastation yet she is as trendily crisp and flawlessly groomed as you might expect. To qualify, simply switch to our high interest account using our hassle-free switching service.

# When Paperboys Roamed the Earth

Ross Sutherland

Your scrappy Reeboks are the first to break the frost;  
a bicycle track surgically stitching our hollow streets together.  
And nobody knows these bungalows better.  
Each detail of our back gardens: the debris of playthings;  
hoarded bricks that refused to be barbecues;  
ripped cans and wet ashtrays.  
Picking past croquet hoops and dog shit,  
you navigate our traps  
to pass daily judgement on our novelty doormats.

From the daily exchange at our letterbox,  
it seems you have become a connoisseur of us.  
You know when our children have brought home a fuck,  
how the widowers smell different from the divorcees,  
the death of a goldfish instantly broadcast  
by the condensation on our toilet windows.

Your satchel maps our pavement politics,  
exposing a secret vein of *Times* readers,  
shifting into salmon as the fences rise.  
Blotches of red-tops fester in cul-de-sacs;  
both a *Guardian* and a *Sun* for the Fitzpatricks at 12,  
their conversation like tectonic plates across the breakfast bar.

Next door, J. Bruce stuffs yesterday's *Mail* into sodden brogues,

property pages retained for the post-Evensong massacre of spiders.

Smoke rises from the scrub. The telegraph poles  
end here — this is as far as word can travel.

Back in bed, you compile your report in dreams.

Dogs bark instructions at the moon.

Polished umber cars are unlocked at a distance.

Men with windy faces watch ducks raping ducks  
on recently reshingled driveways

as Tuesday arrives. A thousand bald patches begin to itch.

An egg boils. Here is the news.

## The Machine

*Roddy Lumsden*

An egg when  
cooked is all tails. Wink into its one yellow eye and see

its spectre chick, a gibbet spirit, uniquely broken,

unable to sift the topfreeze for specks of summer.

# Wild Boar of New York

*Sarah Hesketh*

Remembering how Aristotle felt  
metal-bound and hard to the throat,

the swart boar flirts the stoop.  
Snaffling for trash, his ridgeback wig

stands stiff as a disguise.  
He bides his time.

Haunted by the cuff of his feet  
in sweet grass,

the burst flute of Aphrodite's calls  
as he put her young god to the gore.