

SUNSPOTS

Simon Barraclough is originally from Yorkshire and has lived in London since 1997. His debut collection, *Los Alamos Mon Amour*, was a Forward Prize finalist in 2008. In 2010 he published a pamphlet of commissioned poems, *Bonjour Tetris* (Penned in the Margins), and his second full collection, *Neptune Blue* (Salt Publishing), followed in 2011. He has contributed regularly to BBC Radio's The Verb and The Film Programme, as well as to The Long View. In 2014, Simon was writer in residence at UCL's Mullard Space Science Laboratory in Surrey. He is very excited about our neighbourhood star.

ALSO BY SIMON BARRACLOUGH

POETRY

Los Alamos Mon Amour (Salt Publishing, 2008)

Bonjour Tetris (Penned in the Margins, 2010)

Neptune Blue (Salt Publishing, 2011)

The Debris Field with Chris McCabe and Isobel Dixon (Sidekick Books, 2013)

AS EDITOR

Psycho Poetica (Sidekick Books, 2012)

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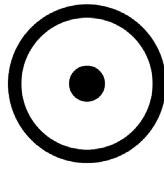
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Sunspots

Sunspots are generated and decay in longer and shorter periods; some condense and others greatly expand from day to day; they change their shapes, and some of these are most irregular; there their obscurity is greater and there less.

Galileo Galilei, letter to Mark Welser, 4th May 1612



*I am ashamed
To look upon the holy sun, to have
The benefit of his blest beams, remaining
So long a poor unknown.*

William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*



The Sun woke me this morning
with a swift kick to the door,
its rays full with a breakfast tray
rattling with silverware,
orange juice and sunny-sides-up,
and crisped toast slathered
with butter fattened on all that grass,
saying, "Hey! Budge up,
let me slide in alongside,
it's a whiteout outside,
the schools are closed,
the roads are glazed in bottle-ice,
no-one's going anywhere today."



My mistress' eyes are nothing like the Sun;
they *are* the Sun, and make a sundial of my gait.
Too late each pace and all my mornings gone,
I'm hanging on, rattling the abacus, totting up
the setting Suns I have to come.



Could it have known —
as the disc accrued,
as gravity drew all things to itself,
as proto-planets formed
in its skirts,
came spinning like googlies
from the back of the maker's hand —
that it would have to oversee all this,
the billion years of agony
and bliss
the Sun-kissed flyblown wounds of everything that exists?



Photon, get a move on.
A million years or more
pushing through the crowds,
from the core;
not sure I can wait eight minutes more
for you to speed through space
and hit my eye.
Penetrate me, little one,
see right through me,
screen your favourite movies
in my skull,
light my way from east to west.
My usherette.



For I will consider my Star Sol.

For I am the servant of this Living God and daily serve her.

For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East I worship in
my way.

For this is done by fixing espresso and watching the pinkening light
on The Shard.

For then she waves her warmth across the scene and lifts the hearts
of those who took a Night Bus at 4 a.m. to clean HQs.

For she tickles the orbitals of foxes in their stride and hies them
home.

For having risen and settled into her groove she begins to consider
herself.

For this she performs in eleven degrees.

For first she does the Planck to strengthen core stability.

For secondly she runs a malware scan for comets closing in.

For thirdly she completes the paperwork for eclipses total, annular
and partial.

For fourthly: flares.

For fifthly she sorts her sunspots into pairs.

For sixthly she gives neutrinos Priority Boarding.

For seventhly she referees the arm-wrestling match between the
upstart fusion and gravity.

For eighthly she weaves flux ropes and thinks up skipping games.

For ninthly she degausses her plasma screens.

For tenthly she is profligate with her photons.

For eleventhly: star jumps.

For having considered herself she will consider her neighbours.

For she runs a cloth around the ecliptic to make it gleam.

For she oils the wheels of any planets gliding there.

For she sends invites out to wallflowers in the Oort cloud.

For she issues shadows for children to dodge as they make their
way to school.

For she shakes out her blankets for devotees of helioseismology.

For when she takes her prey she plays with it to give it a chance.

For one planet in nine escapes by her dallying.

For in her morning orisons she loves the Earth and the Earth loves
her.

For she is of the tribe of Tyger! Tyger!

For she hands out colouring books to chameleons in the morning.

For when it is time to rise she blushes to be seen at so intimate an
hour.

For when it is time to set she is crimson ashamed to run out on us.

For though she neither rises nor sets she thinks it best that we believe
so, so that we can take our rest and fuel our waking with
anticipation.

For she lifts oceans over mountains without thinking.
For she tries to solve the puzzle of the weather, placing *this* here
and *that* there and attempts to even out the air.
For she is a mixture of gravity and waggery.
For she's a stickler for solstices.
For she booms like a woofer for those that can hear.
For she cares not what lives as long as all live.
For she takes her time.
For she lenses the light from distant stars to swerve it into our
sockets.
For sometimes in the winter haze she's as pale as a lemon drop and
lets us watch her bathe unpunished.
For she never calls in sick.
For her colours are open-source.
For every raindrop's an excuse for Mardi Gras,
For she will work on her drafts for a million years and release them
typo-free.
For she will lash out and then regret the hurt.
For she promises radio hams jam tomorrow.
For your power grid is a cobweb she walks into when she steps off
her porch.
For she kept mum through the Maunder Minimum.
For her behaviour is definitely 'on the spectrum'.

For she keeps dark about dark matter but she definitely knows
something.

For she plays Miss Prism in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

For she offers board and lodging to Turner's 'Angel in the Sun'.

For she made a great figure in Egypt for her signal services.

For she can fuse the wounded parts of a broken heart and release
the lost mass as hope.

For she spins plates to create auroras.

For she leaves clues all over the place: some cryptic, some quick,
some general knowledge-based.

For she is hands-off.

For she tends to micro-manage.

For she lays down squares of light for your pets to sleep in.

For she turns a blind eye to all the creeping, swooping killers of the
night but leaves a Moon-faced night-light on.

For her sunquakes flatten no buildings, gridlock no cities, disgorge
no refugees.

For she is not too proud to dry your smalls.

For she gives us heliopause and time to rethink disastrous
decisions.

For Ray-Bans.

For she polarises opinion.

For her secrets are waiting to free us.

For she appreciates Stonehenge and visits every day.

For she sets herself by the grid of Manhattan.

For she will kill you with the loving of you.

For she can shine.