

East Coker Poetry Group

Quarterly newsletter – Issue 2 – May 2005

Annual poetry writing competition

We're seeking the new "East Coker"

Thursday 6th October 2005 is National Poetry Day, organised by the Poetry Society.

To celebrate, East Coker Poetry Group is running a competition to find a new "East Coker". The village found fame as one of Eliot's Four Quartets and since then it has proved the inspiration for other amateur and professional writers. Now it's the turn of residents, neighbours, visitors and friends of the village to put pen to paper.

The competition is open to everyone, with a first prize for over 18s of a meal for two at the Helyar Arms, and books and book tokens for younger entrants. The winning poems will feature on the poetry group website and a selection of the entries will be published as a booklist.

The closing date is Friday September 23rd and the winners will be announced on Thursday 6th October to coincide with the national event. For more information visit www.eastcokerpoetry.org.uk or call Sue McKerracher on 01935 863633.

Forthcoming events

All at 7.30pm, The Helyar Arms, East Coker

Tuesday 10th May: Sally Jackson hosts an evening devoted to poems relating to "Journeys".

Sunday 12th June:
Shaftesbury poets
Sebastian Hayes and Keith Walton take centre stage

Monday 18th July: "Poetry, parodies and puzzles" with Anne Bingley, retired publisher and lifelong poetry lover.

Next issue

The next issue of the poetry group newsletter will come out in August. Please forward poems for publication to the East Coker Poetry Group, Tellis Farm, East Coker, Yeovil, Somerset BA22 9JP, to arrive by Friday 5th August – all will be included.

Birdsong

Iona Lamb

May 2004

We live in a world of birdsong.
The warbling songs wrap softly round us,
Their gently tumbling notes and trills
Spill down the dewed and mossy hill
And eddy round the greening trees.

The slip and slide, the stir of music,
Seeps into the very blood. The heart,
Lifted in the morning's warming air,
Revels in that world of birdsong, there
Above the topmost dizzying leaves.

The Poet

Jean Caunter

*After the visit of Gillian Clarke, East Coker's
poet-in-residence for National Poetry Day
2004*

Into our quiet lives she came
Invited, but unknown to us.
She brought, floating in the air, ethereal but
Dagger-like, her vivid verse.
Compassion for all living things
And love for our fair earth.
We listened, rapt, then she was gone –
- But no! Not true
She left behind a distillation of her world
For us to share.

Falstaff

Joyce Best

*In memory of a much-loved little rooster who
died last year*

The lady smiled, a pullet beneath each arm.
The rain-soaked fields alive with hens
Not minding the drenching cutting wind.
Behind her standing still and small
A slim young cockerel quiet and wet.
I said, "He's lovely, let me buy him."
She said, "Ah well, I'll give him, no future
here

For Falstaff."

He spent the summer happy with his girls
Running, scratching, crowing.
In at the kitchen window
Calling loudly, "Crumbs and oatmeal here."
Chasing his ladies, seeking the garden
shade.
Enjoying with them the warm dry summer
dust.

Falstaff!

With autumn came the falling leaves
The heavy ripening fruit
And again, the rain.
His comb grew pale,
No longer crowing, the neighbours wondered
why.

Standing sad beneath a tree
Hunched beside the winters wood
Crumbs and peanuts lay untested.
At last a firm and gentle hand
Held him close and warm
And said "Enough"
Falstaff.

Recycling lines

David Cloke

David describes this as a bit of fun but perhaps topical with the new council recycling system!

The discarded detritus of our modern age
just thrown away and out of sight and mind,
in smooth white clinical plastic liners.
Wrappings, cans, leftovers and tea bags
all consigned to a bluebottle heaven of waste.
Letters torn, junk-mail junked, and till receipts read once.
Our thoughts are troubled by our profligate ways
over fields torn up for land-fill with skips, riffled through
by yellow jacketed foot soldiers of the council dump.
We feel a need to stop and recycle
the waste from our fire and forget society.
Re-use, salve our conscience and let the phoenix fly.

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Heart break

Haley Peckham

Every day I cry,
I have moments of strength
I read the listings closely,
text friends
and with brittle upbeat tone
arrange coffee.
I pull the covers up, shed tears
anaesthetize myself with video,
for hours, the day.
I look at my phone, the message tone
makes me wish and dread it's you.
I pull a pad, write you a letter
that seeks to understand you,
the inadvertent hurt you do.
It seeks to understand;
it doesn't beg,
just to let you know I understand enough
that next time, next time,
please please don't need to do this to me
again.

I look red from crying,
my nose peels when it's dry.
Tomorrow, again I will start the day
looking old and puffy.
I read the singles, read them
and put them down.
I have a moment of needing, wrenching pain,
flush with tears,
pick up my phone,
I would apologise,
Create a temporary reprieve
For a moment of what I have lost
Write messages, I put it down
I can't see for love blind tears,
but know I am too desperate,
too sad; I have to stop.
I have thrown the letter away.
I may change my number but then
I would never know if you tried.

An evening stroll

Jean Caunter

Beneath the dark and lowering clouds
Above the line of trees,
A shimmering band of brilliant light
Glow as the sun sinks down.
- Sunset

An owl floats down to hoot and hunt,
The weary land must rest.
Nocturnal creatures snuffling out
Seek food as darkness falls.
- Twilight

The wondrous moon shines kindly down
Night now enfolds our world
Bright friendly stars that guide us all
Will point us back to home.
- Midnight

The Painting

David Cloke

*After seeing a painting by the popular
New Zealand artist Tony Ogle called
"Coach House Balcony"*

On a balcony, pine boarded
blue, faded and fenced
white, a wooden balustrade.
Beyond, right of a tin roof
red of the beachside house next door,
the sea. Centre of our vignette.
Turquoise; emerald green;
deep deep blue stretching
far, far across the bay
to a low volcanic silhouette
black brooding. Waiting
to hurl its fierce rage
against the too blue,
Pacific blue, tropical sky.
It is Christmas and the trees,
the dark pohutukawa trees flower
red, red against the too blue sky.
Do you see it?
Can you hear the waves
white foaming in the sun-lit heat?
and can you feel the earth
tremble gently beneath our feet?

Playtime

Dorothy Mules

Dusk has fallen.
Birdies out to play around the willow tree.
Circling, bowing, turning, cavorting about the willow tree;
Now a hush, a portent,
No more play today – that is for another day.

A visit to the Saatchi Gallery

Sue McKerracher

*The exhibition includes a room filled with used
sump oil, creating a perfect mirrored surface*

Blood spattered canvases
A madman's brain
A fat artist with a balloon for a face
Giant gluey sperm

I asked: "Where are the oils?"
We found a roomful
I thought of saying "how slick"
But it took my breath away

Road-kill

Joan Johnson

Moving machines – invent of man
To carry one who knows where.
No journey's made without you see
The road-kill lying there.

The hedgehog with no time to curl,
It's spines can't bear the load.
How many flat – like cartoon shapes
You'll see along the road.

The badger still snuffles earth in death
Small eyes no longer peering.
The fox was hit, transfixed full run
Its brush outstretched and streaming.

The tiny mouse, ferret and rat
Can flee the thresher's sound
But stray from verge to glean the way
No more twitching whiskers found.

Young rabbits' lives cut short in play
One ear up – still alert.
The squirrel, it crossed to one more tree
Bushed tail a'twitch with hurt.

Beware, say signs – Beware of Deer,
But who will slow the pace
When startled, blinded, leaping run
In death defying race?

In death birds fly, one wing a'flap,
No soaring – stilled the song.
Too bad the chicks will miss the grubs
In nest to fade ere long.

The cat so soiled with gore and dirt
Mouth wide with mute meow.
The dog unleashed was unaware,
No walking needed now.

The silken moths to lights are drawn
In flitting fairy dance
And one by one they meet their doom
In blinded, fitful trance.

We call them creatures of the wild
And sing of great and small,
Inhuman – Creature – words of scorn,
Yet innocent one and all.

Nature's chain seems cruel but fair
Each knows its place in line.
To flee or chase to claim the meal
On road-kill too can dine.

Then we go to start anew
And clean off blood and grime,
The twirling brush and misty spray
Will polish off the crime.

When gleaming clean, get underway
Hov'ring hawk accomplice still.
Have thought for all so unaware
Of machines of men, that kill.

Joan of Arc

Sebastian Hayes

This poem relates to a play called "The Chosen One", written by Sebastian and performed in Shaftesbury by the local theatre group. Sebastian and Keith Walton are hosting the June poetry evening, on Sunday 12th.

*"Lead an ordinary life, do
Ordinary things." "Like what?" "Try eating,
Sleeping, doing some kind of work – especially
Manual." "Why manual?" "Because
It leaves the mind intact." "Well, yes, but is
All that enough?" "Why shouldn't it be? Feel it
To be enough, it is." "But if one does not,
Will not, cannot, feel that it's enough" "In that
Case go for something extraordinary." "Like what?"
"Like raising the siege of Orleans, deciding who
Is to be crowned the king of France, ridding your country
Of invaders – anything you like." "Can such exploits
Be done alone?" "Without some supernatural aid – impossible." "So
Who or what will aid me in these tasks?" "In principle
You hear a voice, it tells you what to do." "That's
In the Age of Faith, not now." "It's possible
You'll have to improvise a bit, if all else fails talk
To yourself – you'll end up hearing something." "Sounds a
Dangerous course." "You chose it." "Did I?" "Yes." "But how
Do you know for sure the voice you finally hear, the voice
That speaks with absolute authority, the voice on which
Success and every single moment of your life
Depends is not a trick?" "Essentially, you can't."*