



Even in the Shadow

poems for the planet

**Mole Valley Poets
Anthology
2020**

www.molevalleypoets.co.uk

Dedicated to the memory of

Sylvia Herbert

one of the founder members of Mole Valley Poets, whose death in late April saddened us all.

A faithful member of the group, always engaged and always encouraging, her contribution to the group was in the last few years marked by the honorific of Life President. She will be much missed.

*Silver sea laps over quiet sand
And darkness never seems to fall,
But sleep comes gently
On a prayer of light.*

From 'Evening in Iona' by Sylvia Herbert

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Mole Valley Poets Anthology 2020

This anthology takes its inspiration from the Poet Laureate Simon Armitage who described the climate crisis as a “background hum that won’t go away” .

“Now nature has very much come back into the centre of what poetry can, and should, be dealing with. And you can’t write poems about the natural world now unless it’s in an environmental context. Every word you write on that subject sort of quakes with the background predicament.”

With the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic highlighting how much the world can change, this collection of poems looks at the despair and hope of how we can affect the natural world.

Mole Valley Poets meet monthly to celebrate, discuss and share poetry in all its many forms and expressions. If you would like more information visit our website www.molevalleypoets.co.uk

We are also a Poetry Society Stanza group www.poetrysociety.org.uk

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The Earth

That the Earth is round — iridescent pearl
 in a hidden field lit by a star

that life is manifold — rainforest, gut flora,
 butterflies, vertebrates
 there is no doubt.

That this finite world, this gift of plenitude,
 sustains breath
 cannot be denied.

That oceans cleanse — spew up squandered
 plastic detritus

that ice protects — mere depth of frost
 melts to a pooled stare
 this we can see.

That fade of song — trees felled, land soured,
 coral bleached to bone

that lack of kilter — wildfire, drought, flood,
 barbed rasp of lungs
 makes manifest

that healing — the ghosting of epitaph scars,
 the great greening — needs us
 hands, minds, wills.

Ovation

“...the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.”
Isaiah 55:12 – The Bible

With the dawn light they came,
 rising up from the shadows alone or in rows
 or clustered in coppices, thickets and groves

Strong and silent they came,
 as if now unearthed and yet rooted in time,
 their rings harbouring secrets of growth and decline

From the hillside they came,
 from forest and avenue, heathland and park,
 horse chestnut and sycamore, cedar and oak

Like pilgrims they came,
 steadfast in purpose, as one in their search
 for the simple and sacred, the healing of Earth

All together they came,
 and as we gasped for breath offered up their pure air
 in a song of thanksgiving for what had been spared

For the slowing of life to the rhythms of grace
 a pause from the ravaging, a lull in the race.
 Then from deep in their branches the sound of applause
 surging up through the canopy, Nature's "Encore".

Heather Shakespeare

Creation

In the beginning the earth was the song of a virgin
 empty for an age:
 her womb was of bamboo & water
 & her hair was the wind in the trees:
 her eyes were as day & night
 the left & the right
 & her breasts were as mountains
 of bright fertile rock:
 she sang & she sang & she sang
 of fishes and turtles
 whales & sea-horses bearing shells of desire:

And the melody of the earth grew substantial:
 time took shape with her song
 & energised her deepest breath
 to bring more light to her ravenous womb:

And at the hour of the wolf
 (the gap between night & dawn)
 her children emerged of music —
 airborne
 & pregnant with time again
 she sang to them of love:
 & her children grew through the stars that were their eyes
 & bamboo & water
 permeated the land
 & the hair of her head
 spread across the mountains
 & she sang song after song
 that turned dust into diamonds
 & ashes into birds:

And the rocks are alight with the tongues of living fire
 that speak of light to the holograph of darkness:
 sing out of the light!
 sing out of the dark!

And the tongues of the rocks call the wild horses
 to carry men into the mountains of the light
 & to bring the tongues of living fire
 into the minds of the free:

And in every tongue there is an avalanche
 of wild white words suffused with heat
 & as a token of the visions to come with eyes
 the heart of the rock will simply start to beat:
 the great holograph of darkness is lit up by gems that speak

A A Marcoff

Bluebell and Leaf

I breathe in nothing
 but clear air till I sense
 a drift of bluebell,
 heady and redolent
 of past and peace.

A fly passes, absorbed
 in its tunnel of sound
 and in the canopy
 robin and great tit call,
 like singing stars.

Sweeps of bluebell
 smudge the margin
 of mauve and ultramarine,
 the flowers stand, tang sharp,
 against their fresh leaves.

Yet wonder is not caught
 in these alone, the floor's
 a weave of pallid leaves
 made fine by autumn's death
 in trceries and swirls.

I sit on a tumbled branch,
 try not to fill my mind
 but seek in all this beauty
 the stillness beyond my sight,
 the Abba voice of God.

Richard Lister

Stop all the cars

Stop all the cars, ground all the aeroplanes,
hop on a bus, a bike, or take the trains.
Dig out your pampered feet and learn to run
or walk in the lavish rains, the wind, the sun.

Let Greta's schoolkids conquer every stage
with clear and poignant words, empowered with rage:
'Don't leave our beautiful planet to wither and die,
our futures are at stake, and we ask why?'

This pandemic points a way: let's plant the earth
to grow the flowering trees of its rebirth,
not leave behind a legacy of greed, polluted
air, rainforests lost, a trail of creatures dead.

Look up from our lockdown tonight, look up at the stars,
think of the plastic in seas, the waste of wars:
Let's choose life now, not a desert of moon-dust.
Hear our children speak: have faith, have trust.

Rosemary Wagner

with apologies to W.H.Auden (1907-73)

Cherry Blossom

Along the cobbled path
under the cherry trees,
clouded pink against skies,
bluer than a robin's egg.

T shirt Spring day,
bare arms under sun,
old ladies, still huddled,
trundle their shopping.

Midges are out and about,
early barbecues tantalize,
potatoes baking, sausages,
laughter, music, voices.

Then the weather is shattered,
new camellias are battered,
wild witch, riding her broom,
cobbled paving, blossom strewn.

Pauline Watson

The Lepidopterist's Tragedy

From Wynyards Gap the livelong day
 We beat afoot the Northward way
 We'd travelled times before.
 The sunblaze burning on our backs
 Our shoulders sticking to our packs
 By Fosseway fields and turnpike tracks,
 We skirted sad Sedgemoor.

Full twenty miles we hunted on
 Yet never glut our eye upon
 The rarest butterfly.
 But as the sun drew down to west
 We climbed the toilsome Polden crest
 and saw of landskip sights the best,
 The inn that gleamed nearby.

We ducked the porch, pushed hard the door
 T'ween low ceiling and rough flagged floor
 An old man sat alone.
 He slow snuffed out the candle flame
 The sun's rays caught a silken skein
 Beckoning smoke through a cracked pane.
 He coughed with dusty tone.

"Oh look those green remembered hills
 Are dying and my pulse faint stills
 They just don't look the same.
 As when this lost boy's feet did tread
 Full flowery slopes to clouds that lead
 Towards a soft sun ripening red,
 Like when young Tom first came.

Down there did the Ash copse bright blow,
 Now slimy stumps a grave shadow
 Black as this inglenook.
 These hills were never fit for plough
 Pumped with poison full to the brow
 It's only me lives up here now.
 And I just sit and look.

The Bee Orchid, I was beguiled,
 And fields of geese from Northlands wild
 Where icy air ascends.
 I'd show you where the Sorrels swayed
 Goldcrests gathered in pines and played
 Threading needles of light in shade.
 Yes, they were all my friends."

He stood and pointed straight away.
 From the window framed dying day
 A dust devil arose.
 "Autumn's rains had washed out the earth
 Flooding floods with the after birth
 The history of lost lives worth
 And then all-time froze

Two months gripped in the jaws of a vice
 Then the sun appeared, paradise
 Bad times were forgotten.
 The heat grew taller every day
 Dry baked the soil by mid of May
 And there you saw it sucked away,
 Leaving roots a rotten!

The goodness gone no thistle grows
 To flower, feed, seed where wind blows,
 No Goldfinches no Bees.

The fluid rainsong's never heard
 Full fluted from the wood's Blackbird
 And even dusk's Rooks, not one word
 Echoes through the bare trees".

"We seek out the rare Butterfly,
 But just a Meadow Brown blew by
 On no bloom alighted.
 A male Large Blue was last here seen
 This very same week in Twenty Nineteen,
 Nectaring the sweetest scene!" I beam.
 His worn eyes ignited.

"Flying sparks of electric blue
 Clouds of them up and flew
 From the cushioned Thyme.
 What tragedy has happened here
 That made such beauty disappear
 A pall be-drapes, decay hangs drear
 Whose guilty of this crime?"

He looked at me accusingly.
 "You're from the Twentieth century
 And have blood on your hand.
 Grab the ground plant our green flag furled,
 Lies and greed spin this planet pearled
 But the real world's the natural world
 The truth's told by the land!

Add you voice to earth's rising chant
 Do what the politicians can't
 Yes, you the outsider."
 Opening the cupboard dull with mould
 He fetched us gleaming liquid gold
 We shared the harvest of cold,
 Sweet Somerset cider.

Richard Jones

Hope

Ice
 melts
 and
 oceans rise.

Storms rage,
 forests blaze,
 heads of government
 turn blind eyes.
 Action is lacking,

so why hope?

Because
 of the promise of technology,
 the energy of youth,
 the increase in awareness,
 the facing up to truth
 (in some quarters only
 and it's little and late)
 but the trickle of action
 is becoming a stream
 and streams become rivers
 and the river's in spate.

Because we are human
 and foolish
 we hope.
 Because hope is life
 And we're frightened of death
 we cling to the life line
 with every last breath.
 Because to give up
 would be a betrayal
 and we cannot betray.
 Because of the youth
 who must have their day.

We hope.

Tony Earnshaw

The Code

They made it very simple so
 the smallest child could understand,
 drilled into us the words that kept us safe
 instilled in us the rhythm and the pace
 – *Think – stop – wait – look – listen –*

They told us we must bide our time,
 stand still and steady at the edge,
 linger long enough to notice what
 approached, take it slow and only
 go when all was clear.

Or was it just the fear that held us
 there, stopped us running out to court
 disaster for a plastic ball that slipped
 our grasp, stopped us cutting short
 our little lives for a plaything?

And now, constrained to stop again
 against our will, we stand and watch
 what happens if we do not care,
 if caught up in the game, the thrill, the win
 we look away and fail to see what lies
 ahead, as whoops and shouts drown out
 the green and quiet earth's refrain:
 – *Think – stop – wait – look – listen –*

Heather Shakespeare

When all this is over

Could we please,
 when all this is over,
 when we crawl from under our stones
 out of the dark and depressions,

wearing the corona of thorns
 we have woven to defeat
 this virus
 at its Easter peak,

having closed down schools,
 cafés, churches,
 shops, life
 as we knew it,

could we please,
 in Helen's lovely phrase,
 unpick some threads of grace?
 We could make space

for the balm of silence,
 which we have found to be good.
 We could let go of having
 more than we need.

We could let go of greed,
 say goodbye to growth,
 allow the planet to breathe
 again, and savour air

that is clean and fresh as childhood.
 And while we care for each other's hands,
 raw from the washing,
 we could dare

once more
 to embrace one another,
 learn to share together
 our earth's renewal:

in love and peace,
 with all our animals, trees, plants,
 birds, insects, fish safe
 on their land, in their seas,

in our keeping.

Rosemary Wagner

with ref. to Helen Dunmore's poem 'Threads of Grace' in her book Bestiary

Hedgerow

Celandine and bluebell,
 stitchwort and dandelion.
 God has trailed his fingers
 through the hedgerows
 and left eddies
 of his glory and his joy.

Richard Lister

where the kingfisher goes
 none can follow
 only shadows
 & blue silence
 & dreams

there is
 a clearing
 in the woods
 where water stands still
 & collects the silence

a robin
 appears like dawn
 on the wing
 singing
 the song of songs

A A Marcoff

first light a crow cry hails the day

so much to fear so much to celebrate I vacillate between the
 poles where the ice is melting far too fast so much to fear so
 much to celebrate

last light a tiny star appears

broken in two
 a classroom globe
 chucked on the tip

Diana Webb

Reason to hope

I sit here determined to write on the warning of how the scum of plastic is drowning the ocean, the cloud of pesticides choking the pollinators, the increase in population overwhelming the land, seas rising, forests felled, floods and bushfires — every word confirming that we are dead set on a path to obliteration.

The magnolia outside my window insists otherwise — all is well, all will be well — ready to flower again as it has for millennia since before even bees evolved.

waxed buds on bare branches
throwing their elegant silhouette
against deep blue sky

Sue Beckwith

Storm song

Storm Dennis chucks rain
to crack like popcorn on our window,
a blackbird, leftover shard of night,
sits on a cherry branch and sings.

Richard Lister

The thing is

The thing is
it's getting hotter - not only that but there's a lot
of storms and floods and forest fires.

The thing is
we need to understand,
stop burying our heads in desert sand
where once were trees.
The thing is,
please,
pay some attention.

The 'thing'
too frightening for a word or phrase –
call it extinction, call it disaster.
We've gone too far for sticking plaster
and we need some positive thinking,
so while the polar ice is shrinking
and islands beneath the sea are sinking
solutions must be found;
not only that
applied
to save the planet before we're fried,
to save the guillemot, and the frog,
the creatures of the marsh and bog,
the file fish, the dolphin, the polar bear,
the giraffe, the monarch butterfly,
their habitats, their food supply.

The thing. Is.
 Is the crux on which our future rests
 Is the time to show us at our best
 Is the throw of the dice we cannot lose
 Is the road less travelled we need to choose
 Is the narrow bridge across the abyss
 Is the choice to make now
 for this
 is the moment that determines our fate
 when we have to act
 before it's too late.

The thing is
 This
 Matters.

Tony Earnshaw

Sea levels rising

Even so, land glimmers green-gold,
 sand banks in the shallows gleam silver,

our footprints fade — ebb and flow of years
 dislodges mica, silica, specks of shell,

sea-seep infills the spaces that hold us,
 our words float on the wind, gather

snatches of gulls' cries, whistle-thin
 peewit calls, bittern boom.

No-one knows how much this accretion
 matters, whether sky filled with tumbled

clusters of consonants, eked out,
 embellished with singing of birds,

constitutes crisis — hindering sight,
 breath, life — or a new beginning.

Helen Overall

Halcyon

Downside Bridge, Cobham

And when the dark clouds lifted,
I hurried through the town
past shattered tree trunks,
fences flung from their moorings

and pausing on the bridge,
as I let the river's roar,
swirling debris, fields
shimmering with floodwater

wash over me, you pierced
the mist, like the first
kingfisher Noah released
from the ark, which caught

the sunrise on its belly
and heaven on its back.

Elizabeth Barton

published in The Dawntreader, Summer 2019

Afterwards

The view from the hill was of water,
lapping gently, drowning much.
Crowded by the water's edge,
shivering survivors,
minds as numb as fingers and toes,
on surfaces slippery and wet to the touch,
regretting decisions and mourning those
who had slipped beneath the surface
and were gone.

Receding, settling, the waters left
a new shoreline,
a new isolation,
a new reality.
The few houses stood proud,
householders barricaded against invasion.

Boats were in short supply,
never needed this far inland.
Weekend sailors
found themselves in much demand
to seek and find provisions,
building materials, food,
where once the proud home counties stood.
Steering uncharted waters, past first floor windows,
trees, the floating corpses of pigs and sheep,
the threat of disease

they held their breath
and prayed for peace.

Tony Earnshaw

Elegy for Green

Green budburst
in a secret grove of oaks,
where hallowings
break loose from the throats
of wren and thrush and blackcap.

Green beckoning
of woods, a winding path
through song-laced leaves
where you can lose yourself in sweet
incantations of bluebells.

Green rapture
of a shaded stream,
its banks clustered with marigolds,
red campion, air charmed
with scents of nettles and wild garlic.

Green vanishing
of open fields and trees,
our streets a grey forgetting –
Elm Grove Road, Nightingale Close –

the little gods of woods and streams
that we've made homeless
and can't bring back.

Elizabeth Barton

published in The Curlew, March 2019

Sower *

A boy treads the path
that Millet drew, bends below
the angled tree.

Glowing lemon sphere
haloes him above a field
of purpled earth.

Beyond, the green wheat.
Branches sweep towards lime skies
and morning clouds.

Sower and the trunk
are shadowed in Prussian blue
lightened by white.

Movement is in an arm's swing
and a certain step.

Denise Bundred

**The Sower, Vincent van Gogh painting - oil on canvas. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0029V1962*

In praise of no street lights

Walking back into the winter dark:
a silver sliver of unshadowed moon
low in the north-west sky
casting its sickle sharpness into my eye

I am delighted

Above: the pure light
of the evening star pulsing
its diamond brightness

Ah Venus

My head spinning from chasing
a thousand scurrying quavers
across Bach's contrapuntal score
my soprano vocal chords are

very sore

How small we are
looking up out of our muddied world
how incomprehensible
these distances

how far

How unimaginable
this infinitude of galaxies
looking down on us
also perhaps

in awe

of our one sunlit beautiful earth:
on which we tread so clumsily
sans love sans care

so unaware

Rosemary Wagner

Autumn river

how
autumn falls
just as
geese once again return
from the sky

seeing nothing more
than
what is here —
this green irrevocable
river

I am
part of the life
of this river —
I stand like stone
on the grass

above
the cool calm waters
a heron
makes the moment
grey

beyond
the heron
the river splits into islands —
our slow valley
just as it is

this is it —
river of my soul
with its scattering of wagtails
&
the quick kingfisher core

a pine cone
falls
to the forest floor —
it is time to bring you
the pale green gift of tea

higher & higher
gulls
soar into the autumn rainbow
of
the world

A A Marcoff

Metamorphosis

A million miles away
A butterfly trembles on a twig
Wings iridescent, vibrant
Invisible to me.

The butterfly shivers and quivers
Syncopating her wing to a beat
Vibrating in time to a pheromone
Unheard by me.

Butterfly wings flutter their beauty
Flamboyant on top, pale underneath
Flash their radiance, silent assonance
Unseen by me.

She hears a fluttering, a suitor
Displaying his exotic colours
Scenting her urgent need to mate
Unfelt by me.

Their mating a whirling shimmy
Kaleidoscopic colours
A whirligig of insemination
Unrevealed to me.

Carefully she lays her eggs
Clusters of pale green pinheads
Tucked safely under her chosen leaf
Hidden from me

Then, her life's work done
Falling into the littered leaves
Falling onto the forest floor
Unknown to me.

Pauline Watson

Our New World

I have noticed said the owl
there are no planes in the day
to keep me awake

I have noticed said the rabbit
there are no cars on the road
so I can cross safely at dusk

I have noticed said the bird
my song can be heard
all across the gardens

I have noticed said the bluebell
that I seem even more beautiful
than last year!

I have noticed said the tree
that I cannot hear a chainsaw

I have noticed said the sky
that I am admired more

I have noticed said the star
that you can see my light sparkle

I have noticed said the ant
that I am important

I have noticed said the bee
that my buzz is the buzz

I have noticed said the rainbow
my colours have dripped
onto the earth
and brightened everything.

Susan Thomas

Listen

Birdsong reaches out
across valleys and fields
nothing to drown it out,
no cars, planes or trains
it fills the clear and bright
sky with its message
of new beginnings

Now that we have heard
and seen what was lost
amongst the noise and fug
of pollution, are we still
going to ignore the remedy
not take the cure?

A bit like a rainy day
after weeks of sunshine
it's as if they never were
so resolve now and listen
remember the clear bright
message of lockdown
and make the difference

Sue Beckwith

Going, going

Hawaiian honeycreeper
giant mountain lobelia
spreading bellflower
Sierra Nevada blue
staghorn coral
ringed seal
sea turtle

Hawaiian honeycreeper
giant mountain lobelia
spreading bellflower
Sierra Nevada blue
staghorn coral
ringed seal

Hawaiian honeycreeper
giant mountain lobelia
spreading bellflower
Sierra Nevada blue
staghorn coral

Hawaiian honeycreeper
giant mountain lobelia
spreading bellflower
Sierra Nevada blue

Hawaiian honeycreeper
giant mountain lobelia
spreading bellflower

Hawaiian honeycreeper
giant mountain lobelia

Hawaiian honeycreeper

Heather Shakespeare

Contributors

A A Marcoff - Tony is an Anglo-Russian poet who lives near the River Mole, which is his inspiration and meditation. He is a long-standing member of the international haiku and tanka community and has also had longer poems published in many journals, including Poetry Review, Ambit, Agenda and Fire.

Denise Bundred trained as a paediatric cardiologist and completed an MA in Writing. She has recently had her pamphlet *Litany of a Cardiologist* published by Against the Grain publishing.

Diana Webb is editor of the haiku journal Time Haiku. She runs a local haiku group called Leaves to a Tree and has won both the British Haiku Society Award and the Genjuan Contest Award.

Elizabeth Barton lives in Cobham with her husband, Jon, and two daughters. She loves walking in Surrey's woodlands and heaths and along the River Mole. She has had poems published in magazines including Agenda, Acumen, Orbis, South, The Curlew and the Frogmore Papers.

Heather Shakespeare worked for many years teaching English and Creative Writing in colleges and prisons. She now facilitates workshops, which focus on the writing process and its potential to enhance wellbeing and encourage self-development, both personally and professionally. Her own poems have been published in Antiphon and The Interpreter's House.

Helen Overell lives in the Mole Valley and has published widely in magazines and anthologies. Her first collection is *Inscapes & Horizons* (St Albert's Press, 2008) and her second is *Thumbprints* (Oversteps Books, 2015). Her website is www.overell.co.uk.

Pauline Watson has always loved poetry, both reading and writing poems. Taught English at Wallington Grammar School for Girls before opening her first Antique Jewellery shop in Dorking. Enjoys living and walking in Surrey.

Richard Lister works as a coach and catalyst. His poetry often draws on his encounters in Africa and Asia. He enjoys time with his family and painting semi-abstract acrylics.

Richard Jones celebrates the beauty that the other creatures of chance we share this planet with can bring us.

Rosemary Wagner studied modern languages and worked in education, administration and translation. Her poetry has been published in a number of magazines.

Sue Beckwith loves walking and cycling in the Surrey countryside. She has had haiku and haibun published in *Time Haiku* and *Blithe Spirit*, the British Haiku Society journal, and is the editor of the Mole Valley Poets anthologies.

Susan Thomas is a Senior Staff Nurse in a Hospice and lives in Westhumble. She enjoys walking her dog every day and won The Elmbridge prize for poetry.

Tony Earnshaw is a Dorking based poet, playwright and author, having published his novel *Blessed Assurance* last year. His plays have been performed in London, Edinburgh and New York, as well as locally, and he is a director of theatre company Damn Cheek Productions.

£1 from every anthology sold will go to CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young), a charity which works at preventing young sudden cardiac deaths through awareness, screening and research, and supporting affected families in memory of Stevie Jivani the daughter of one of the Mole Valley Poets former members

CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young) www.c-r-y.org.uk
Registered charity Number: 1050845



Produced by Mole Valley Poets

Mole Valley Poets logo designed by Gillian Dear
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price on application