

LATELY

Stephen Yeo

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The cover photograph, *Henry Moore's hands* by Gemma Levine shows the sculptor holding found objects in the Bourne Maquette Studio in 1978. Reproduced by kind permission of Tate Images www.tate-images.com, © Gemma Levine Archive at the Tate.

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Alongside his poems, Stephen Yeo has published widely in the fields of co-operative, religious, voluntary, labour and socialist association. After teaching social history at the University of Sussex, he became Principal of Ruskin College, Oxford and Chair of the Manchester-based Cooperative College and of the Trust which looks after the Pioneers' Museum in Rochdale and the National Co-operative Archive. As a founder of QueenSpark Books in Brighton, he helped to bring into being the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP).

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So many people have shown me how a poem cannot grow,
shrink or wither until sounded in more than an empty room.

First and foremost: Ursula Howard. Many of the poems collected here would never have seen daylight, let alone be kept, without her uncommon sense, eye for detail and belief during times when I lost it.

Familial poets risk a lot from generation to generation, while their immediate families live with endless writerly preoccupations. Eileen Janes Yeo, our sons Jake and Ben – and now their families – helped me more than they will ever know, as did my late brother, Peter Yeo.

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*Rummaging into his living, the poet fetches
The images out that hurt and connect*

W.H.Auden, December 1938

*Our hurts unclenching
As we become more akin*

*To kin, as we return
To who we were*

Amanda Gorman, *Back to the Past*, 2021.

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BECAUSE

A void exists
chameleon,
until we limn it.

The truth lies
harlequin,
until we
člěe' mōsŷnarŷ
hymn it.

1.

GODSENDS AND SILENCES

LOVER

for Ursula

Yours a honeysuckle, once *woodbine*.

Mine: Lorna Doone, Citrus White, Fur Leaved, wild and hybrid thyme.

Yours the whiteness of chalked green, lilies of the valley.

Mine Salmon Dream, a peony.

Yours – white mock-orange – sugared our summer.

Mine, a quickening scent – broad beans – not quite vanilla.

Yours a bearded-iris bed. Would that

I, solitary bee, could fly, feed, come clumsily out.

Ours is... a love (in-a-mist), seedpods, elf-like nigella,

clematis, aquilegia, self-sown

primroses, heartsease ...that goldfinch nest seen through a field-gate.

Do you remember, how she never came home?

WINTER WALK

sing winter solstice in
while starlings shriek
on leafless trees

December days
in middle age
and bitter times

such moments fall
and then they fall
on sheep as maggots

high on grazing land
red thorn-bush berries
make scars on Hadrian's Wall

so pick them out with song
which will go wrong
in three days' time

as Christians sing too timidly
in liturgies
which hide the blood

PERSEVERA - PER SEVERA - PERSE || VERA

Peals

Grandsire Triples
Grandsire Caters
Stedman Triples
Stedman Caters
Stedman Cinques
Union Triples
College Single Triples
Bob Major
Bob Royal
Double Oxford Major
Double Norwich Major
Duffield Major
Oxford Treble Bob Major
Kent Treble Bob Major
Kent Treble Bob Royal
Kent Treble Bob Maximus
Duffield Royal
Superlative Surprise Major

There's plenty to be said about stressed and unstressed syllables and the stressed and unstressed writers who count them up, but the important question (for me) is whether you hear ...a hurrying, incremental kind of music or whether you hear something more to and fro and rewinding like birdsong *Alice Oswald, introducing Thomas Wyatt's poems.*

and Changes

upon the campanological side
carelessness leaves bells high up
some windy inaccessible tower un-
visited save by owls and jackdaws
precarious ladders, dangerous steps

after two hours the long draught at Totnes
made the 7th and tenor unpealable
at Exeter Stedman Caters came to
grief the seven front bells inaudible
to strangers unaccustomed to the belfry

many failures follow due in each case to
bells not ringers at Saint Finbar's Fowey
the bad go of the bells entangled ropes
made even call-changes impossible
at Kenwyn Superlative Surprise failed.