

good evening

And welcome to **Sour Grapes**, a bi-monthly pamphlet of new writing by members of the **Monday Night Group** at **Commonword**.

The **Monday Night Group** exists to bring writers together in a supportive environment, irrespective of gender, age, ethnic origin, social background, sexual orientation or disability and to give them the opportunity to read their work and receive constructive feedback.

The group also provides publishing and performance opportunities, and is currently registered with MANCAT with the aim of providing members with the option of pursuing an NVQ in Creative Writing. Members of the group regularly perform at **Frog & Bucket** poetry evenings.

A wide variety of writing is encompassed, including poetry, short stories, drama and novels. The group meets every Monday evening at the **Commonword** offices and would like to thank **Commonword** for providing accommodation and a kettle.

If you would like more details of the **Monday Night Group**, or further copies of **Sour Grapes**, please contact Phil Hatfield at **Commonword**, on 0161 236 2773.

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Enjoy.



Steven Waling

a history of british art

Pictures of horses. Pictures of men on horseback. Pictures of ladies, side-saddle, staring into the middle distance in vacant and in pensive mood. How from their mounts they look down on England as their stable lad, to be fed when the nag's had his oats.

In this etching by Anon, the Prince Regent's face resembles a horse's behind. Note glowing fetlocks and cropped tails. Equestrian statues in town squares mark famous victories at sea. Note how lovingly the artist paints his client's favourite hunting dog. A gentleman only talks of sex, religion and the National Debt alone in the stalls with the old grey mare. Now this,

this is finest Arabian stud. Note how the brush-strokes seem to melt into flesh. Note extensive parklands admitting no straight lines and planted with oak and horse-chestnut. Down at Headquarters, Newmarket: *English Reticence* neck and neck with *Heroic Failure* and only a furlong to go. Note the absence of men in bad suits, tearing tickets and sucking their dentures.

Contour-map faces and noses like follies built with more money than sense here place a pony on *Dungannon* or *Hambletonian*, odds on; pipped at the post by *A Real Work of Art*.

There are roomfuls of hunting prints where the sun never sets on red coats chasing fox but we're too modest to mention it. A booklet explains the rules of Polo and the Sport of Kings.

Pictures full of horse-sense, horsey girls braying at bezique as would-be husbands mount chambermaids and charge off to war, bits between teeth in the Valley of Death.

Whilst down the final strait comes *Mustard Gas* from *Flower of Youth* by a head and a hand.



Matthew Curry

the blue frisbee

The man with the walking stick walks into the sea. He swims so that only his white hair and brown shoulders are visible. His wife paddles up to her ankles, Holds the stick, and throws a blue frisbee for their dog.



Paul J King

one man and his pen

I want to write something
I really want to write something
Pacing up and down
Thinking.
I want to write something

I want to drink something
Well, no, I don't actually want to drink something
I want to eat something
Or possibly, I don't want to eat something
But I do want to write something

I want inspiration
I want inspiration to write something
I want to write something that uses inspiration

I want to look through some books but not actually read them
And then I might be able to write something
I want to go for a walk
Go for a walk in the countryside
Reading some books
And while reading some books, looking at the countryside
I might be able to write something

I want to write something
Sat on a bus
At the back of a bus
With a couple of books
And photographs of the countryside
And a dog
And I look at the people on the bus
I want to write something
I want to write something deep and meaningful
Something that uses inspiration ...
I can't think what to write

Paul J King

hotel lobby

Red and yellow and green and brown
Orange and purple and blue
I can see dried flowers
Dried flowers
Stuck together with glue



Kevin Doyle

rocks at the edge of the sea

They've risen from the grass. While she smoothes down her dress he puts a light to two French cigarettes. Midsummer's day will mark the first and only anniversary of my accepting the job of observing them. I've collected copious notes and taken countless photographs. I've shadowed them along miles of motorway, up and down twisting lanes and out into astounding countryside, like this, many times.

The sights I've seen. The places I've been. The case of a lifetime, in many respects, and a lifetime's as long as it seems to have lasted: but no mind, it's June 18th today.

They've been much more than a meal-ticket to me. I've come to know them. I've come to admire them. I rather envy him. I can see what he sees in her. I see it myself. Something priceless.

I hate the husband: his manner, his hypocrisy, the way he eyes his secretary. A successful self-made businessman (car imports) but a born bastard all the same.

"Keep your eye on them for twelve months," he told me. "If you can prove they're screwing, tomorrow," he went on, "fine, but don't show me the evidence. Keep it safe until a year has gone by." Some legal trickery designed to disinherit her.

She was sad in mid Autumn, like every cloud in christendom hovered over her. He was away at a week-long conference in Paris. I could have taken the time off myself, but I was glad I didn't.

She'd linger late over tepid coffee in their favourite Bistro. I spoke to her twice, even made her smile once. Sadness didn't suit her. She had no clue what I was up to, still hasn't, I'm good at what I do.

As it happened, I was summoned to the pub by "mister injured party": he wondered what was wrong with her. Over a pint and a plate of vile shepherd's pie I told him.

"So, she's suffering, poor love. Isn't that a crying shame," he sneered.

"Shit!" I said, sharply. He should have guessed that I'd bitten on a piece of gristle.

"If the cap fits. . ." I ventured benignly.

For Christmas I was given a flashy watch with a card that read: "They're halfway to hell!" I binned them both: the card in pieces, the watch in bits.

June 20th. I'm expecting an excitable phone call within the hour. Confirming tomorrow's meeting with his lawyer who doesn't yet know of the wife's. . . what shall we call it? Life-affirming pleasure should do it.

Only four of us are aware. That's the way he wanted it. I did mention the iron, striking while it's hot and all that.

"The longer it's left, the hotter it'll get," he'd smarmed.

"Hesitation is fatal," I'd muttered. And so it's to prove.

All morning I've been busy at the shredder. Tangles of tape to burn later. So much paper. So many photos. If I

could I'd keep one of the latter. I took it at Heathrow when the lover returned from France. Her face over his shoulder. A picture of that rarest commodity: untainted human happiness. It was there and then I decided what had to be done to preserve it.

I heard somebody on the radio, recently, likening illicit lovers to rocks at the edge of the sea. It's a phrase that haunts me. If I can stretch the idea further: in this case I have it in my power to keep the waves and the corrosive spray at bay.

The opportunity has been gifted to me. From the outset he had copies of his housekeys cut and sent over. I can make it look like a bungled burglary, before I leave.

No guns or knives. Nothing so messy. A simple length of sturdy cord. His wealth has made him flabby. His heart will probably give quite early. More's the pity.

Ironic, really. It'll be like the games he's been indulging in with his Visa card prostitutes. Only this time, nobody's playing.

Philip Dunn

mozart

Is it Haydn? Is it Mozart?
Sounds like Wolfgang's playing acrobat
Romping through old Jo's Magnificat.

Philip Dunn

i didn't know achilles wept

There are no accidents, only nature throwing her weight around.

Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 1992.

I didn't know Achilles wept.
(His temper was his weakest point).
No doubt Achilles loved the girl
And saw her more than prize.

Thersites too burst into tears
Like little boy with knuckles rapped.
All mouth and trousers some of those
Achaean men of godlike wrath.

Against Helen of the gleaming limbs
What magic might some hero find
To half annihilation? None.
We're daemons' slaves. The gods are fire.

Steve Rouse

angels have zits

Angels have zits, heads like
lead shot, tumescent with
custard. Eruptions pompeii
their pot-holed faces when

they sleep, baby-curled in
Elysian fields, termites
nibble their toe-nail cheese.
God has B.O. Armpits like

rain forests - things swing
through the hairs, get
dislodged when he scratches,
fall a hundred miles or more,

bounce off clouds and populate
worlds. His breath formed the
Magellanic cloud, he belches
galaxies and hasn't washed

his hair since he created
oceans. Next door, while
cherubs shit in the woods,
daemons polish their tiaras

and lick their icicle wings.
Their dainty horns tipped with
silver and their tails tipped
with glue. They pat their

piglet-pink faces with cream,
manicure their claws and wash
their hair in rosewater.
Beelzebub's Italian tie is

the colour of his eyes, the
colour of the ocean, the colour
of the sky which frames the
dove that flies back to my arm.

It is heavy, it caws, pecks my
hand, draws a focus of blood.
The paint upon its feathers is wet,
the olive branch drips vinegarete.

Sophie Clarke

very nearly an armful

Everyone and their dog should give blood. Forget
altruism, it's this lazy weightless high,
the cheapest going.
I'd drift away, if only I
wasn't tethered by this needle.

In the room the nurses come and go,
talking haemoglobin high and low ...

Course they don't. Blood's their business,
not worth mentioning. Instead, discussions
fall to whispers, on the theme of Lent
and sacrifices made,
break up in screams of laughter, while
three good citizens smile tightly,
clench/unclench their fists
and wonder what this signifies.
Will there be chocolate biscuits
afterwards,
or not?

I parrot the party line. No
won't have a fag for an hour.
Promise.
Bullshit, and they know it.
Walk out into the rain, light up. Giggle,
'cause it's like the first time again ...

Later, raising a glass to you, I say:
Tony, twenty donations and you *do* get a badge.
Enamel, rather tasteful;
after fifty, one's name goes
on the Roll of Honour.

One day, I'll sneak in,
write yours at the very top,
for all the people who came after,
inspired by bitter comedy
and surly self-importance.

Matthew Curry

innocence

The two girls running with their towels flapping out
Are barefoot, and hold their bars taut.

In an agony of glee they breast what is ahead -
The ribbed sand, the frilling sea, the doing bad.

SOUR
grapes
in this issue,
new writing by:
sophie clarke
matthew curry
kevin doyle
philip dunn
paul j king
steve rouse
steven waling
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