

## ... and welcome

To the second edition of **Sour Grapes**, the bi-monthly pamphlet of new writing by members of the **Monday Night Group** at **Commonword**.

We'd like to extend a heartfelt "thank you" to all those who bought the first edition. Without your interest, commitment and (above all) money, this second edition just wouldn't be here.

Oh, and just to remind you...

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** and **Tommy Ducks** 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, a kettle, and nice things to put in cups.

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.



## Philip Dunn

## egyptian mummy portraits\*

In Manchester Museum go and see  
Two Egyptian mummy portraits, 1st century AD:  
She's a ringer for Sophia Loren.  
He's like Tyrone Power; his hair's primped, still wet.  
They were genteel in Hawara, and foreign.  
I wonder if they ever met?

\* *Painted panel portraits originally placed over the faces of the mummified dead.*



## Ken Wilkinson

## first line death

The bus stopped, but the road kept moving; then the road stopped and the bus fell over. This was definitely his worst journey since that pig leapt from the third floor balcony and landed on his father. Bacon had never tasted the same again. He walked on past the dead bus, its wheels spinning aimlessly, and heard an old lady ask if this was the end of the line.

He turned a corner, but the view was the same. The road arched away towards the right, but he followed the path towards he knew not where. He started to wonder if the dodo knew if it was extinct. There was no tradition left in Christmas, he decided. We used to eat dodo for Christmas, he remembered wistfully. Those were the days when the future used to visit you, but you were always out. He felt a movement in his trouser leg and checked his pocket, but it wasn't there. If a leopard could truly change its spots, he might never find it in the field of sprouts.

What is the plural of dodo?, he asked himself. Dodos. Dodi. Sheep. Lucky the bastards are extinct, at least they don't have to worry about sex any more. A tree grew in front of his eyes and he had trouble combing his hair after that. On the left, the field fell away sharply, but fortunately not the part he was standing on. He realised with startling clarity that the past is only the future backdated, and made a mental note to pre-date his cheques. He rejoined the road, but never left the field, and liked the green pavement, but thought it could do with a cut.

The road merged with another, going to nowhere. He had never been to nowhere before, and it sounded less forbidding than somewhere. He supposed nowhere, like somewhere, has to begin sometime, unless you're a fucking

dodo, of course. This time it was for keeps, he told himself.; why should he return library books anyway? The book slipped from his hand and landed open on a blank page, one of only two in the whole book, but certainly his favourite one. Was it a sign, or merely a comment from above about the present state of his life? He put the book in his pocket and hoped that what happened to the leopard wasn't about to repeat itself. He hated spotty books.

He sat on the bench beside the dead tramp who smelt of lavender. Strange how the smell of lavender always, even after all these years, still reminded him of lavender. Fearing for his sanity, he searched frantically for an explanation. The tramp was next to useless, and where can you find an intellectual dodo nowadays? He realised, with a rising sense of panic, that he was suffering from ambiguous first line syndrome. A fatal condition, unless a decent second line can be found.

He stepped into the road, his sight obscured by the tree in front of his eyes, and was hit by an unambiguous 30-ton artic.



## Pam Leeson

## climbing

my child climbs the impossible  
she bangs her head  
I rub it better.  
I'd rather be climbing.

my daughter  
Swims in the sand  
stuck to her skin  
temporary wings  
disappearing every summer.

She holds my hand  
and leads me round the supermarket.  
Tears slide down  
from behind my sunglasses  
as she holds my hand  
and carries the basket.



## Matthew Curry

## excerpts from 'blood'

The fear on the girl's face  
As her human mask  
Started to unlace,

Leaving a whimpering  
Wounded animal  
Waiting for the final tusk.

\*

She lay back in to her neck  
Then sat up and soaped her body.  
She didn't want to wet  
Her head or hair at all,  
But for the blood to come off  
She must lie right back into the bath,  
Get it in her ears, her nose, her eyes.  
She got a taste in her mouth, spat it out.  
But it wasn't so bad  
It was just like hers.

\*

We'll have none of that wet talk in here love  
She's got what was coming to her.  
It's balanced the blood.  
If you had kids you'd know.  
She tortured that little girl to death.  
No-one in here's forgot what it was like  
I bet it was a lot quicker for her  
I bet they left her knickers on.  
Lily-livered liberals  
Embroidery then parole  
It's not enough for that kind of evil.  
She sucked the heart from this city.  
It's been dead ever since.



*Steve Anderson***manor cottage**

Press your hands to my face,  
my skin has endured so many earth turns.  
I am creaky and arthritic now  
with many wrinkles but no tears.

I nestle at the foot of winding cobbles,  
where donkeys once hauled water bags,  
where ghost-women still beg  
ha'pennies to lug brimming pails.

People peer through my boiled-sweet front door,  
desperate to touch the past in my heart.  
I'm a tourist's photographic dream, unique  
in these parts for my witch hat thatch.

My womb has comforted generations  
of fretting parents and babbling babies.  
My entrails have been ripped apart many times  
to install the latest in bright wires or pipes.

Beneath the restless bead-strung ivy  
interlopers steal garden cuttings.  
They trample my stretching conifers,  
while stuffing centranthus heads into bags.

The Annual Bed Race tips weird contraptions  
down the cobbles. They clatter past, rumbling  
my foundations. So much excitement and  
feverish cheering bring on my blackest migraines.

And when the commotion cools, we crumbles  
like to talk ailments. My arthritis flares again,  
while across the cobbles, the outcrop lion roars  
from frostbite, un-noticed by the winter visitor.

*Louise Glasscoe***paradise fragile**

The city glistens at night  
Like some dark crystal  
And all its facets are windows;  
The city is the most delicate jewel  
And its people live  
In the chinks of its surface  
In a place called "Paradise Fragile".

*Paul J King***superman's big sister**

Superman cowered in the corner of the ice-cave home,  
pulling his underpants over his head. "Cyril, where have  
you been, tosspot?!" screamed Superman's big sister.  
Superman grimaced. "You've been flying and showing off  
again, if only they knew you like I knew you, nothing but a  
big girl's blouse." Superman hid behind a rock. "You think  
you're so tough, you have all the style of Quentin Crisp  
and all the personality of Debbie McGee, you raving piece  
of perforated piss!" Superman summoned up all his  
superpowers and cried. He never did get on with his sister.

*Ian Meldrum***the argument**

What? What? What did I say?  
You know what you said;  
one more word like that from you,  
one more word you're dead.  
Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.  
Yeah yeah come on.  
Yeah yeah.  
Yeah yeah.  
Yeah.  
Yeah come on.  
Leave it.  
What a twat.  
Come on.  
Fuck off.  
Come on come on.

*Steve Rouse***black hats and bright medals**

Had memories of the Somme  
lived on for some eighty  
years or more, we might still  
be facing each other across

the wire; pacing through the  
mud of trenches, treading on  
torn photographs of loved  
ones, keeping our heads down.

Back home, those whose images  
we drowned would be marching  
and taunting, bathing in  
propaganda and collecting for

the boys at the front, for they  
are always boys, those ordinary  
grunts who wear the medals and  
grow the petals; while in Geneva

the talk would be stalled by  
walk-out after walk-out, and  
pride would fly like shrapnel  
as impartial commentators in

martial ranks officially  
doubted either side's resolve  
to reach a compromise. Soldiers  
would lean against wet and

crumbling walls and say, "This is  
*my* hole, even though it's full of  
shit. No way am I going to let  
filthy Krauts walk around in it."

*Steve Rouse***the immobile tuxedo**

Hanging in mid-air  
above a red carpet;  
quietly contemplating  
the absence of  
a handkerchief in its pocket,  
a carnation in its bottonhole,  
confetti on its shoulders,  
champagne on its lapels.



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new writing by:

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