

good evening

and welcome to the second year (yippee!) of Sour Grapes, the bi-monthly pamphlet of new writing by members of the Monday Night Group, who are based at the offices of Commonword, 21 Newton Street, Manchester.

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 receive constructive feedback on their work.

A wide variety of writing is encompassed, including poetry, short stories, drama and novels. The group meets every Monday night (except Bank Holidays) from 7.30pm until 9.30pm - just turn up and ring the buzzer.

The group also organises the 'Poetry Party' event on the third Wednesday of each month at the Nag's Head, Lloyd Street, Manchester (just off Albert Square), with a special guest act each month and readers from the floor.

If you would like any further information about the Monday Night Group, Sour Grapes or the Poetry Party, please call Commonword on 0161-236 2773, Steve/Sophie on 0161-881 2943, or e-mail us at mondaynight@mcmail.com.

If you've enjoyed this issue of Sour Grapes, tell your friends!

This month's tired and emotional editors are ...

John Calvert

Known to bend the needle on the shirt scale. The man with the amazing organ. Answers to ubiquitous when he can spell it.

Kevin Doyle

Has no 'truck' with the cult of celebrity - at least, not 'til he is one.

Jillian Flanagan-McAvoy

The Canuck who wishes she didn't give a ... care in the world about being unpublished.

Phil Hatfield

call my bluff goes for a song

A schedule transported in time
A concept weak at best
The wrestle with words and egos;
Nobody ever called my bluff
Besides, 'The Sweeney' was on at nine.

Was it Frank Muir's witty repartee
or Patrick Campbell's dry, sardonic
stuttering foil that endeared us
every tuesday night for an age?
Its typical englishness, theatre-hardened
luppies, appearing on the advice of their agents?

Was it everybody's favourite uncle,
Robert Robinson, who put us at ease
the game reminding us of sleepy orchards
and church bazaars, when everything
was delightfully pompous, squeaky spotless
and meadows obscenely green?

Not dragged from the archives
but perpetuated in ten-minute slots
Captain Holness at the helm, that phlegmatic
Englishman, Alan Coren, versus the cryptic
Sandi Toksvig, a Dane at that
put back-to-back with Michael Parkinson's

'Going For A Song'. Prime Time. Barnsley's
favourite son browsing in the antique shops
of Bath, Harrogate and Chichester
amongst Georgian decanters and Victorian clocks
tea-rooms on the High Street, women's guilds
and the class struggles of Little England?

The same BBC that gave us 'The Singing Detective'
and 'Colditz'. Potter turning in his grave.
Wasn't Little England last summoned with Betjeman's bells
and toasted crumpets, the taking of after-dinner mints,
T S Eliot mopping his banker's brow
at a public house in Camberwell?

Remnants are artefacts, a populist's abstraction.
A planner's whim, who said: Bless Joe Public.
Here's more of what he wants.



Steven Waling

we start with the sea

but on second thoughts watch clouds
drag themselves rainfully off the horizon.
If we're careful we'll avoid them. We're not
so it pours down. Those are the hills of - where?

and a coastline of beaches and ports. Look:
those little houses painted white, beyond
the ferry from where we're going. Numerous
landmarks ahoy: the Wicklow hills, Phil says

who's been here before, knows everything. A buoy
gently bobbing. Sue looks sceptical at another
sudden squall. No time to read the waves, deep
as uncut books. We're baited, hooked, reined

in and landed. Is my mouth gulping? Are my eyes
two round black holes either side of my mouth?
We're swimming in perceptions as the sea rises
and falls toward port. Then a lighthouse passes

the window: pinned to the pier like a brooch.
I bet it rains before land. It does: I win. Then
the twin white chimneys ringed with red; wharves
gleaming like pictures of harbours in books

full of gantries, cranes, dockers oily with sweat
hauling bales with one hand. But not these days;
and sailors don't dance singing off the decks
like they do in films. A pilot boat zips past,

makes its small announcement to the shore.



Steve O'Connor

pink windmill love poem

Life without you
is like Rod Hull
without Emu.
A good idea,
but still
a bloke without
his bird.



Sophie Clarke

no user-serviceable parts inside

I was brought up to think quick
And pass greasy spanners,
Not to dress like a girl
And improve my good manners.

But I've seen the future, and it worries me.
I hear that, soon, all cars will be
Computer-controlled, fixed instantly.
No more squeaking through the MOT.

I know what this means. It means

no more

Auction rooms, exhaust fumes,
Look underneath it, check the head gasket.
Allegros, Avengers, Dyanes, Hillman Minxes.
Friday afternoon specials with their own personal jinxes.

Bangers picked up for a few hundred quid
Made of rust, Snoopy decals, bald tyres that skid.
Humorous stickers that'd drive you to drink,
So you respray it orange, magenta or pink.

Holes in the floor when you lift back the carpet,
Saying your prayers each time you start it.
Cleaning the filters, changing the plugs,
Drinking strong sweet tea from oil-stained mugs.

I want cars you can talk to,
Not cars that can talk.
Cars that take you halfway there -
Then you walk.

I want to use mechanical intuition,
That childhood Grand Prix, stock car racing ambition.
I don't want these valuable skills to be lost -
Want a car with some character, whatever the cost.

So, when cars are all perfect and maintenance-free,
I'll be searching quite determinedly
For a battered old Citroen - I know I won't rest
'Til I've got me a big, black and shiny DS!



Kevin Doyle

front

The Radical Science Lobby:
at once bright, spacious and airy,
framed in beech and poplar,

is feted as the final word
in design for tomorrow
and yet, paradoxically,

potted plants and shrubs
are consigned to corners
and tagged in Latin.

Security staff strut their tough:
overseeing the comings and goings
of leather-clad couriers

they clack their heels, for effect,
on the glittery marble.
Workers are never seen by callers.

Every hour, on the hour,
a clock chimes in the top
of their red-brick tower.

And when home-time comes
they file into lifts, fifteen to each;
never one more, never one less.

Evening can be as fine as it likes
but before leaving the lobby
they button their raincoats tight.



Paul J King

a triolet?

I wanted to write a triolet
A form of eight lines
But I'm not good at forms yet
I wanted to write a triolet
But only to try and win a bet
And I struggled to keep its times
I wanted to write a triolet
A form of eight lines



Tim Collins

detention

Steven, I'm not happy. I'm not happy about your behaviour.
The headmaster isn't happy. Your parents aren't happy. Are
you happy? I don't think you are. I don't think you'd be a
bully if you were.

No, come on, listen. I'm sure you can think of excuses for
what happened today, but I want to know why you're a bully. I
don't attach labels to people often. I don't like doing it. But
sometimes I have to.

So what's wrong, then? Why aren't you happy?

Well, it doesn't seem that way to me. Come on. Talk.
Sometimes talking about these problems can make us
aware that we have them. We've both got plenty of time.
Neither of us are going anywhere in the near future. So talk.
I'll listen.

Look at this piano. It's you. These high notes are the
Steven I can hear. The Steven I want to hear lives all the way
down here. Listen to these low notes. Tell me about them
as I'm playing. I don't want the Steven who patrols around
the playground looking for some weak little first-year to
steal lunch money from. I want the Steven that can't get to
sleep at night. The Steven who hears his parents argue. The
Steven who sees pictures of starving children on the news.
The Steven who cries.

I'm listening.

I can't hear anything.

Is this all there is when the high notes aren't playing?
Silence?

I'm waiting.



John Calvert

the woman of shutlingslowe

(for Mary Baker)

Under the forest's nave
Sunken light falls short
Murmuring leaves draw close
Over the covering of branches

There she lies sleeping

Muffled fall in abandoned barn
Sudden presence by trees
Arm, then hand, breaking water's cover
She is there

Where the summit's cone
Smooths from broken stone
She dances on the wind's edge

Breathing
She draws Cheshire back
Bosley Cloud and White Nancy
Pillowing horizons.



Steve Rouse

scuttle

This is Peter the Crab,
said John the Mad.
Will you make it to the NEC,
or will I eat you,
with a nice Chianti?

The press pressed,
and he put the jar to his
Yorkshire Tea-stained lips
and drank the wild water
and its little red, but with more
than a hint of blue, crab.

And when John walks
sideways into the House,
they'll all know
and realise they'd have done the same
many side-stepping years ago.



SOUR

in this issue,
new writing by:

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Sophie Clarke
Tim Collins
Kevin Doyle
Phil Hatfield
Paul J King
Steve O'Connor
Steve Rouse
Steven Waling

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