

Poetry Series

**Paul Hansford**  
**- poems -**

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## Paul Hansford()

I am an ex-teacher (of all ages from 3 to 18) , and a member of a Poetry Workshop group - so I have to write at least once a month! You will find all kinds of poetry here, extracted from many years of writing. There are set forms and free, humorous, serious, romantic... so if you keep looking you should find something you like! I have self-published 2 books which sell locally (at least covering my expenses) , and am working towards a third. Some individual pieces have been printed in magazines and newspapers (including the Daily Mail) , I have been invited to read my work at the Cheltenham Festival of Literature, and have won a couple of prizes for my poetry.

## \*how To Critique A Poem

If you read somebody's poem and it makes you want to say,  
"I think this piece is wonderful; it really made my day, "  
just go ahead and say it – feedback like this is good,  
but saying WHY you like it will please them (well, it should) .

If somebody you don't know says, "Please comment on my writing, "  
and you look at it, and find it ... let's say, rather unexciting,  
then don't forget – be tactful, find something good to say  
before you start on finding fault – don't ruin someone's day.

And if you think it's terrible, be careful how you speak.  
Some people write as therapy; their life may be quite bleak.  
Don't be too harshly critical and leave them feeling worse,  
but simply go to look elsewhere, and just ignore their verse.

Some poems, though, may leave you with a puzzle or a question,  
or even make you want to give some tentative suggestion.  
There's nothing wrong with doing this – just get it off your chest,  
but don't think your ideas are necessarily the best.

With members, though, who claim they are God's gift to Poesy,  
(if there's nothing to commend them as far as you can see)  
you can state your own opinion – of course you have the right –  
but don't forget the golden rule: be HONEST but POLITE.

AND ...

If you're wanting other members to read something that you wrote,  
it isn't so unusual if you send them a note  
saying, "Honoured Sir or Madam, I hope that you'll agree  
to open up my pages and read my poetry."

Now, if to ask me to read yours you still might feel inclined,  
please comment something that I wrote (that's if you wouldn't mind) .  
For I will tell you kindly that, before I read a line,  
I'd be much more interested if YOU'd first read some of MINE.

Paul Hansford

# A B C Of Poetry

Here are some subjects of which I have written  
in blank verse, or free, or in rhyme.  
I've tabulated twenty-six or so,  
but might think of more, given time.

Arts and music show our humanity,  
but Birds and Beasts also have passions.  
Celebrations of joy, or Death and grief,  
Events of all kinds inspire Emotions.

F tells of Friends and Family;  
G and H, Garden and Home;  
and I is Inspiration,  
sometimes slow to come.

Jokes and humour entertain us,  
or may have the power to move;  
and K could be the Key to all secrets  
of Language, Life and Love.

Metamorphosis and Magic can change our lives,  
and the Natural world can surprise.  
Objects of all kinds may inspire,  
and Places we visit can open our eyes.

Quirky poems may be Quaint,  
though Religion is generally serious.  
Scenery and landscape surround us,  
but Time is deeply mysterious.

Unfortunately my index doesn't include  
any subjects beginning with U;  
but I do have Verse-forms of various kinds,  
Villanelle, sonnet, decima, haiku....

Weather and seasons influence us,  
and pastiches (by X) may be fun.  
Youth and age come to us all in time,  
and Z shows a poem's a fantasy one.

As you see, I've forced into an alphabet  
some subjects I've treated in verse,  
and if this is not one of my best poems,  
at least I can console myself by thinking that if I had written it differently it could  
have been a lot worse.

Paul Hansford

## A Few Limericks (Serious/Satirical)

They were going to start a new life;  
childhood sweethearts become man and wife.  
But a drunken stag-night  
ended up in a fight,  
and someone had taken a knife.

[This is the only serious one so far]

-----

A tiny space traveller one day  
flew to Earth from a world far away.  
His superior intelligence,  
however, was no defence  
when they zapped him with a can of fly spray.

[This is only serious if you're the alien]

-----

The people who run Camelot  
added up all the money they'd got.  
They very soon found  
a small part of each pound  
amounts to a heck of a lot.

[Camelot is the company that runs the National Lottery, at no risk to the shareholders/directors, and takes a good profit for doing it.]

-----

An MP who flew to Hong Kong  
for a week of wine, women and song  
charged it up to expenses.  
Is he out of his senses?  
He still says he did nothing wrong!

[This is an imaginary example, but it could just as well be true]

-----

An MP thought he was in luck  
when he charged for a house for his duck.  
He thought it was OK

for the voters to pay,  
but did we agree? Did we... blazes!

[last line approved by the PH censor]

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Another MP rocked the boat  
when he charged us for cleaning his moat.  
When they forced him to tell us,  
he said we were just jealous!  
Now we'd all like to set him afloat.

Paul Hansford

# A Poem About Laterality

Why does the right hand get all the good jobs,  
like greeting visiting dignitaries  
(such a pleasure) ,  
or blowing farewell kisses to the one you love  
(such sweet sorrow) ,  
or playing the melody while the left  
has to oompah along in the bass?  
Right-handers get the best adjectives too.  
I mean, we'd all like to be  
adroit (as the French have it) .  
So why do we poor southpaws have to be  
gauche or, while we're about it, gawky?  
Tactless, without grace, ungainly, awkward,  
physically and socially inept, that's us.  
And Latin's no better.  
We'd like to be dextrous too.  
What makes us  
sinister? Was Dracula  
left-handed, or something?

Even when we can hammer  
or saw or paint or drive a screw  
with either hand equally,  
or cut the nails on both sets of fingers,  
they only say we are ambi-  
dextrous, which is a bit of a left-handed  
compliment, treating the left  
as if it were an honorary right,  
as if it had no right  
to be skilful  
in its own right.

I suppose my left hand ought to be grateful  
(in this respect) that I was not born  
into a tradition where it is laid down  
what each hand can do. It could have been  
condemned to a lifetime  
of bottom-wiping and not much else,  
and becoming cack-



handed in more ways than one.

Paul Hansford

# A Poem About Recycling

My ultimate ambition in life  
is to be recycled. When I die  
I shall not be put  
with the newspapers, plastic bottles,  
glass (separated into green, brown and white) ,  
cans and aluminium foil  
into the box to be collected  
on alternate Mondays  
- that is not dignified  
for a human,  
and besides it is unhygienic.  
But recycled I will be  
into soil and air,  
beetle, centipede and blackbird,  
and the blossom  
that every year comes  
and fades.  
Yes,  
I'll be back.

Paul Hansford

# Absence

Just as when looking into the sun  
I am dazzled by pure light,  
which is invisible,  
and I only see what is lit  
by the paler reflections of its rays;  
or when my mind,  
refusing to hear a perfect silence,  
creates its own thundering echo of that silence,  
so that I may more nearly understand  
the incomprehensible;  
your absence also is absolute, and leaves  
a void in me I cannot come to terms with  
until it is filled by a memory.

Paul Hansford

# After The Stroke

This is my husband, my mother said  
to the nurse with pride,  
only she meant me.  
Everyone in the day-room knew  
who it was she had been expecting all day  
waiting like a birthday child.  
We all laughed and put her right,  
and she laughed and continued  
... and this is her husband  
(only she should have said, This is his wife) .  
So we all laughed again,  
and my mother laughed as much as anybody.

Later, walking round the garden, she showed us the flowers  
– roses, geraniums, poppies –  
only she called them all lilies.  
You can go home, the doctor had told her,  
when you remember your name.  
Who are you?  
– Lily, she said, Lily.  
Lilies out there (pointing at the roses) .  
Well, at least she knows lilies are flowers.

It isn't as if her mind has gone,  
I keep telling myself,  
it's only the words won't come.  
A week ago she knew her way  
through the dictionary blindfold,  
amazing at anagrams  
scholarly at Scrabble,  
and quicker than anyone she knew  
to finish the daily crossword.  
But now the thoughts that chase round  
and round her puzzled brain  
find no expression.  
How can you say it's 'only' the words?

Having survived the first critical week  
she is in no immediate danger.

She might last any time;  
she might go any time.  
All this, somehow, she realises,  
and hasn't even the words to tell us  
she knows and is not afraid.  
Then after awkward silences  
and awkwardly cheerful conversations  
it's time to leave.  
Will you help me on to the bus? she says  
– meaning the bed –  
and she laughs again.  
After all, it's better than crying.

Paul Hansford

# All Chinese To Me

I could say "Ni hao"  
for "Good morning, "  
and it was only polite to say "Xie xie"  
for "Thank you."

That was my limit  
until, in a babble of unfamiliar sounds,  
I heard the word, "Ho-murr, "  
and then again, "Ho-murr."  
Ho-murr? I thought.  
Do they have The Simpsons in China?  
But it was only "back door."

Later, struggling to board a bus by the middle door,  
I heard the conductor say, "Ho-murr"  
– and I could hear the exclamation mark –  
"Ho-murr! ",  
I knew this time he wasn't talking about The Simpsons,  
and I had a pretty good idea  
he wasn't a fan of classical Greek poetry either.

But I didn't want to be left on the pavement  
when he closed all the doors and drove off.  
So I just squeezed in by the middle door,  
as if it was all Chinese to me.

Paul Hansford

# All Round My Hat

All round my hat I wear a lot of badges,  
all round my hat, for many and many a day.

A disc of abalone shell from New Zealand;  
a jester's mask decorated with four glittering glass jewels (Venice,  
though we weren't there for the carnival) :  
the Stars and Stripes, given to me in New York,  
in the weeks after 9/11:  
three lions, for England;  
a bull, for Spain, even though I hate bull-fighting;  
a liner (Alaska Cruise,2000) :  
and a gold-coloured jet plane, for all the journeys I have made;  
a small badge of a very large statue, Christ the Redeemer (Rio) :  
the seashell of St James, with his special cross on it  
(Santiago de Compostela, though we didn't walk the Camino) :  
a very tiny badge of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico;  
and a shiny gold-coloured outline of a dove  
(Carcassonne cathedral) representing the Holy Spirit;  
King Kong, my biggest badge, appropriately:  
a smaller-scale hero, Winnie-the-Pooh, a gift from my daughter:  
a koala decorated in crushed opal (Australia) :  
a stripy cat on a tartan ribbon (Edinburgh) :  
a dolphin from the Azores, though we didn't see any there,  
(but we have seen dolphins, so it counts twice) :  
a miniature cookie-cutter in the shape of a moose (Canadian rockies) ,  
– but it would make impossibly small cookies;  
a toucan (Costa Rica) and a puffin (Iceland)  
admiring each other's beaks;  
heroes of the Revolution: Chairman Mao, bought in Beijing:  
the H&#7891; Chí Minh League of Youth badge (Vietnam) :  
the face of Che Guevara, looking handsome and intense (Cuba) :  
and not forgetting the daddy of them all,  
Lenin, on a red and flaming star;  
the Hand of Fatima (Tunisia) for luck;  
and the Eye of Horus (Egypt) ,  
because you can't have too much luck.

And if anybody asks me the reason why I wear them,  
they remind me of places – and people – that are far, far away.

Paul Hansford



# An Accident Of Birth

1840: Claude Monet, whiskered creator of canvases of water-lilies so vast you have to stand across the room to see what they are – “all paint, ” as my artist friend remarked, revelling in the sensuousness of surfaces – and of countless prints, diaries, tea-towels and table-mats; father of Impressionism.

1889: Jawaharlal Nehru, pandit (learned master) : father of modern India. In his homeland his birthday is Children’s Day, because he loved children – though even he couldn’t eat a whole one.

1900: Aaron Copland, American composer (Appalachian Spring, el Salón México, Rodeo, etc., etc.) .

1919 (but some say 1922) : Veronica Lake, iconic movie star of the 1940s.

1948: Prince Charles Windsor, king-in-waiting (a long time) , famous for talking (A) to plants (since he admitted it in an interview) and (B) indiscreetly on the telephone to his mistress (since the security services leaked the call) .  
When I was a boy they played the National Anthem on my birthday, only it was for him, not for me.

1954: Condoleezza Rice (two ‘E’s and two ‘Zee’s) , famous for being black, and a woman, and arguably one of the most powerful people in the world.

and 1967: Letitia Dean, one-time soap-opera actress, landlady of a fictional pub in a fictional East End, now a “personality”.

Celebrity makes strange bedfellows.

Paul Hansford

# An English Calendar

January's frost and snow  
makes your central heating blow.  
February? That's no better;  
almost as cold, and a good deal wetter.

March is windy, so they say -  
I'd add gloomy, grim and grey.  
Then April's showers join together  
to give a month of drenching weather.

In May you may see skies of blue  
but flying pigs are possible too.  
In 'flaming' June the days are longer,  
But sky's as black, and rain falls stronger.

July brings thunder, lightning, storm.  
Ah well, at least the rain is warm.  
August - at last the sun comes out;  
Turn the hose off, it's a drought.

September - stifling, hot and dry -  
Makes you long for wet July.  
October then brings early chill  
- and pouring rain. Oh what a thrill!

November - dull, drab, dank, and dismal;  
of all the months the most abysmal.  
Oh no, that's wrong; now I remember  
It's more abysmal in December.

Snow, hail or thunder, storm or flood  
don't bother those of English blood.  
Let any kind of weather come!  
Stiff upper lip, chaps, don't be glum.

Rejoicing in our heritage  
we'll stick it out through every age,  
and shout abroad both near and far,  
'Our weather makes us what we are'

- blooming miserable.

Paul Hansford

# Another Sun

Perhaps in another world  
another sun comes  
up,  
lighting a different  
here  
and now,  
where another I  
could meet a second you.  
Would she smile to know him there?  
Would he look into her grey eyes and see  
what I have seen, know  
what I have known?  
Perhaps in another world,  
but here  
spring always ends, petals  
fall, and rivers  
only run  
downhill.

Paul Hansford

## Artist's Model

Stand there, he told me.  
Look up, try not to move.  
So I stood there  
while he painted me in half-profile,  
and looked at the sky  
and tried not to move.  
I tried to think of nothing,  
but (you know how it is)  
the thoughts come into your head.  
So I looked at the sky and remembered.  
Tears in my eyes?  
No, it was just that the sky  
was very bright that day, I remember.  
I remember a lot of things.  
Some of them I'd prefer not to.

Paul Hansford

# Death Of A Queen

She was industrious  
for one of her elevated station,  
not above scavenging  
for her own building materials.  
'Well, you have to, ' she might have said,  
'at least at the outset,  
'before the real workers get started.'  
I, however, no respecter of rank,  
would have none of her,  
and hit her with my latest work.  
Ah well, one less wasp nest this summer.  
Her epitaph – "Here lies a Queen,  
killed by Poetry."

Paul Hansford

# Dos Besos (A Brief Love Story)

1

The morning sun warmed the dew  
from the opening rosebud;  
a bee visited the fragrant heart of the rose;  
the breeze tumbled a petal to the water,  
drifted the pale petal across the surface of the water.  
You surprised me gently.

2

I thought – hoped – the emotional baggage  
was safely in the locker,  
just for once,  
just overnight,  
but like a Houdini homing pigeon  
it came back,  
like a smart missile locked in on thought patterns  
it found the target,  
penetrated the armour,  
and suddenly  
just after midnight  
I knew how Cinderella felt,  
her new world sucked back  
through the vortex,  
as the life we call real  
returned.

Paul Hansford

# Driving On Auto-Pilot

Called out of a staff meeting, I was told  
my mother was on the point of death.  
Searching in the regulations,  
the secretary told me  
how many days I was allowed  
for the death, and  
(separately) for the funeral,  
each allowance dependent  
on the degree of relationship – mothers  
are in the first category.

Arriving home, without realising  
how I had driven there,  
feeling the need to be clean for her,  
I showered, dressed appropriately,  
and drove on.

A hundred and fifty miles of motorway,  
somewhere a stop for tea.  
Why did I look in the service station bookshop?  
There was a life of Eliot.  
I should read it one day.

She died before I arrived.  
It was not unexpected. She had lived a year  
after the stroke, longer  
than we, or she, had thought possible.  
How cold her cheek was.  
Death was not new to me –  
I had known pets in plenty go  
from age, accident, or lethal injection,  
been with some as they died – but mothers  
are in a different category.

Paul Hansford



# Ending

Once we were friendly.  
Then we were more than friends.  
Now there is nothing.  
Must this be how it ends?

Paul Hansford

## For Mel (Villanelle)

The one who should have lived has gone so fast.  
The old ones, in their dotage, linger on –  
they, with no future, live only in the past.

And we who can but sit, dumb and aghast,  
scarcely believe that while the sun still shone  
the one who should have lived has gone so fast.

Six decades older, surviving to their last  
few days or years, together but alone,  
they, with no future, live only in the past.

At least she kept on living to the last,  
but should have had a future. She has none.  
The one who should have lived has gone so fast,

and they, for whom so many years have passed,  
are unaware that one they loved is gone.  
They, with no future, live only in the past,

mark time until the final trumpet blast,  
and never know the respite they have won.  
The one who should have lived has gone so fast.  
They, with no future, live only in the past.

Paul Hansford

## Four Haiku

1.

Into a dull day  
you came all unexpected.  
My afternoon shone.

2.

Look into my eyes,  
see my whole world reflected,  
you at the centre.

3.

In your eyes are tears  
but your smile overcomes them.  
Where is the rainbow?

4.

There was so much more  
that we could have said and done,  
but we said goodbye.

Paul Hansford

## Fragment Of A Novel (More Of A Prose Poem Really)

He saw one evening a young woman in a red dress, and he remembered being in Luxor, sitting on a hotel balcony, looking out over the Nile, watching all day as the shadows shifted on the cliffs above the opposite bank, as the colours changed from ochre to gold, from pink to violet, and how he had felt so completely at peace. And seeing the girl in her red dress, with her hair up showing the curve of her neck and throat, with her easy, natural smile and her confident air of self-possession, he knew the same feeling; he could have sat and looked at her for hours and asked for nothing more to make the evening perfect.

Paul Hansford

# Gifts

I gave you violets;  
you gave me your smile.

I gave you elderflower wine;  
you gave me wild strawberries.

I gave you a small brown bird  
that hid in the shadows;  
you gave me the nightingale  
singing to the summer midnight.

I gave you my need;  
you gave me your warmth  
and almost-tears  
and rainbows.

I gave you poems;  
you gave me inspiration.

Paul Hansford

## Growing Up (Sonnet)

'Write fourteen lines on Growing Up, a sonnet, '  
the teacher told us, 'Don't forget the rhymes  
must make a pattern; I've told you several times.  
The subject's easy; you've all got ideas on it.'

Who does he think I am? Some second Milton?  
Another Shakespeare? an Eliot? a Tennyson?  
Compared to them, my mind's as dead as venison,  
slightly less fresh than over-ripened Stilton.

'A poem's the equivalent in words  
of something I once felt, ' the poet said.  
Clues to another's feelings, like the sherds

of ancient pots, like jig-saws in the head.  
A few curt words my feelings clearly tell,  
one simple sentence - Growing up is hell.

Paul Hansford

# Guard Of Honour (Rondeau Redoublé)

(An RAF officer helps to carry the coffin of Diana, Princess of Wales, to the plane for return to England.)

The burden I bear is more heavy than lead.  
The physical weight is a thing that I share,  
but the loss that I feel will not leave my head.  
Why did you have to die? Why is death so unfair?

I am close to you now. Yes, touching my hair  
the flag with its lions of gold and of red  
that wraps round your coffin. I know you are there.  
The burden I bear is more heavy than lead.

My comrades move with me in slow, solemn tread.  
Our eyes are all fixed in an unseeing stare.  
Our shoulders support you in your oaken bed.  
The physical weight is a thing that I share.

As I feel the world watching I try not to care.  
My deepest emotions are best left unsaid.  
Let others show grief like a garment they wear,  
but the loss that I feel will not leave my head.

The flowers they leave like a carpet are spread,  
In the books of remembrance they have written, 'Somewhere  
a star is extinguished because you are dead.  
Why did you have to die? Why is death so unfair? '

The tears that we weep will soon grow more rare,  
the rawness of grief turn to memory instead.  
But deep in our hearts you will always be there,  
and I ask, will I ever be able to shed  
the burden I bear?

Paul Hansford

# I Have Looked At....

I have looked at sunsets as long as they lasted  
the reds and the golds and the pinks of them  
the play of light on the edges of clouds  
the changing shadows over the land.

I have watched the sea steadily rolling in wave after wave  
breaking against the rocks with the energy of distant storms  
or gently lapping at softer shores.

I have gazed up at the brilliance  
of a black night of stars million upon million  
no moon to dim their richness.

I have seen the hidden blues and greens  
in a slow river of ice.

I have known forests and mountains.

I have known you also and you no less  
are part of the universe. I can admire  
the changing sky in the colour of your eyes  
the moving sea in the curve of your neck  
the wonder of an opening rosebud  
in the crook of your elbow.

Paul Hansford



# Inconsequential Syllables

The first cold letters, alone on the page.  
A quick pencil found them,  
and the lively and beautiful syllables blossomed.  
The pale book felt the pencil  
as the terrifying, hot words entered.  
The lines grew, living and sensitive,  
gleaming as never before,  
and I knew the unheard lines!

First, a tiny and unselfconscious sound.  
A noun struggled to appear among overpowering words.  
A strong, golden adjective ran out,  
a short, fragrant adjective, beautiful in the early spring.  
A young verb grew among tiny blue conjunctions,  
and a fortuitous adverb understood, instinctively.

The first sentence dreamed of trees, and a sad cloud.  
It dreamed a grey rain,  
and the tall trees felt the rain.  
There was a first and unknown river,  
imagined, inconsequential, like snow in summer.  
A red bird glided beyond reach,  
as if it had never happened.  
The soft sounds fitted the lines,  
and the quick bird cried,  
Remember the short rain!  
Remember the sad poem!

Paul Hansford

# In-Convenience

Very early in the morning we were woken from our sleep,  
We were going on safari, being driven in a jeep,  
We went out before our breakfast, we went out before sunrise,  
We went out before the sleep had fully vanished from our eyes.  
We had to dress quite quickly, and we went out in a rush,  
And after we'd been driving through miles and miles of bush  
For an hour or two (I have to say forgive the way I speak) ,  
But - the roads were very bumpy - I was dying for a leak.  
The driver stopped the jeep and kindly offered us a drink,  
But it might have been more kind if he had only paused to think;  
We had seen a herd of elephants, some vultures in the sky,  
Several wildebeest and zebra, a hyena passing by,  
Giraffes, a pair of ostriches, a buffalo or two,  
And we'd taken lots of photographs (well, that's what tourists do) :  
We had even seen some lions lazing underneath a tree,  
But... we hadn't seen a toilet... and I really had to pee.  
Beside a water-hole at last we found a pair of loos,  
And I hurried to the gents', 'cause that's the one I have to use.  
Yes, I went up to the gentlemen's, and pushed the door ajar,  
But I didn't push it hard, and it didn't open far.  
There was something in the way, you see. I did a double-take,  
For it looked just like a tail, the last six inches of a snake.  
I decided not to panic - I'm not that sort of bloke,  
And it could have been a rubber one, left there for a joke -  
So I pushed the door wide open, to be sure of no mistake,  
And what should I clap eyes on but two yards of living snake!  
... I closed the door, quite firmly, and went to tell the guide,  
'I was going to the loo, but then I found a snake inside.'  
He didn't quite believe me, but he went across to check.  
- Not just a snake, a cobra! - 'Gosh, ' I thought, and 'Flipping Heck.'  
For the snake looked very supple, and the snake looked very strong,  
And if it would uncurl itself, the snake looked very long,  
And a cobra's bite is savage, and a cobra's bite is quick,  
And if that snake had bitten me, I'd be feeling rather sick.  
'It might even be a spitter, judging by the size,  
'So don't you go too close, and please be careful of your eyes.'  
But I had to take a photograph, for that's what tourists do,  
And, warily, I took a snap of the cobra in the loo.  
The driver wrote a notice 'Danger, Big Big Snake Inside',

And the lady with the first-aid box took out of it with pride  
A strip of sticking plaster to stick it to the door,  
To tell anyone who came, there was a cobra on the floor.  
By now the snake was moving, it was climbing up the wall;  
It hid behind the cistern, and could not be seen at all;  
It came down again, and wrapped itself around the waste-pipe neatly,  
Then slithered right into the pan and disappeared completely.  
Now I was on a mission to tell others what I'd seen,  
But I was very conscious of the fact I'd Still Not Been!  
So in that situation, though most times I wouldn't dare,  
When I found the ladies' empty, I quickly popped in there.

So if you see a man who's coming from the ladies' loos,  
Please don't jump to conclusions, he might have a good excuse,  
- 'I went to spend a penny, for my need was quite intense,  
'And I had to use the ladies' - there's a cobra in the gents!' '

Paul Hansford

# Insides

(or 'Things aren't always what they seem,  
and the same goes for people.')

-

It's a commonly held belief.  
a theory by many supposed,  
that inside every fat person  
there's a thin person enclosed.

And it's often been said before  
(though that doesn't make it less truth)  
that inside many a middle-aged man  
beats the heart of a passionate youth.

A girl with the plainest exterior  
may be blessed with a soul of great beauty,  
while one who appears just a butterfly  
may deep down be a slave to her duty.

But here is another hypothesis  
I'd respectfully like to suggest,  
(if no-one has any objection)  
that might take up its place with the rest.

If I'd courage to match my conviction  
I might stand on the table and shout,  
but it's this - Inside every introvert  
there's an extrovert trying to get out.

Paul Hansford

## January (An Acrostic)

J ust as the old year ends the new begins,  
A nd once again the countdown is in motion.  
N ow we can say goodbye to last year's sins,  
U plifted hearts set out on this new ocean.  
A las, our resolution may soon fail  
(R elentless life is so full of commotion)  
Y et full of hope we willingly set sail.

Paul Hansford

# Just A Minute!

(This piece is a 'minute' - 60 syllables,844484448444, and rhymed AABB, etc..)

October turned the leaves to gold  
but now the cold  
November wind  
rustles their thinned  
and meagre remnants on the trees.  
No kindly breeze,  
this bitter blast  
will tear the last  
few faded leaves from oak tree's crown,  
and cast them down  
onto the earth  
for spring's rebirth.

Paul Hansford

## Life (Sonnet)

Living your life the way you want to go  
is not that easy. Things don't turn out right,  
never go just the way you wish they might.  
Plan as you will, you never really know.

Some people seem to have that lucky streak,  
enjoying what they really don't deserve.  
Or is it luck? Perhaps they have more nerve,  
enabling them to achieve what we still seek.

Don't you just wish sometimes you had the key  
that let you do what you would like to do,  
and find some luck intended just for you?  
really to be where you would like to be?

Don't waste your time writing some master plan.  
Spit in fate's eye, and grab life while you can.

Paul Hansford

## Life Cycle (A Tritina)

Gloriously green in spring and summer, these leaves  
turned to bright shades of flame, lit up the fall,  
and autumn's winds tumbled them to earth.

Decaying, their remnants now enrich the earth,  
and winter buds fatten with next year's leaves,  
which in their turn, we know, will wither and fall,

an endless cycle of growth, decline and fall.  
We too decline, return at last to earth,  
and memory is all our existence leaves

until we rise in new leaves, and fall again to earth.

Paul Hansford



# Like Going Into A Dark Room

When you left this room,  
or a room somewhat like it,  
stepping into the light  
you were dazzled by the sudden brilliance,  
only gradually coming to terms with it.  
Now, overwhelmed by the darkness,  
by the stillness, dazzled still  
by the light you learned to take for granted,  
(impossible in this quiet room to see  
what faces you) you grope for a chair.  
The thought of turning back passes briefly  
through your mind, you refrain  
from opening the curtains, knowing,  
telling yourself, the moment will pass,  
the after-image fade, the echoes  
of outside be absorbed in the silence.  
Be still in the dark,  
listen to the silence,  
understand  
this room was waiting for you.

Paul Hansford

# Little Mr Hansford's Car

A thousand children. How could I remember  
all of them? I was the teacher; they were there  
to learn. Those were our roles; that was the contract.  
They would move up and I move on, for all of us  
always a new beginning.

But now and then  
one will return to haunt me, like the girl  
whose secret friend drove a red plastic car.  
I have it still. He was a tiny version  
of myself.

The boy, his skin flaking  
and cracked with eczema, trying to resist  
the urge to scratch. How could he bear to wake  
each day to face that life? Yet I was proud  
he claimed me for his brother.

Another girl,  
seventeen, crossing the Alps, moved beyond tears  
by her first sight of mountains.

Do they remember?  
Maybe they do. A young man in the street  
I met by chance surprised me by recalling  
how I read Winnie-the-Pooh when he was small  
and did the animals in different voices.

So many children, so many years have gone,  
but memories, like hope, can linger on.

Paul Hansford

# Magenta

January. A dry cold. Snow had been lying  
for days, and fresh falls on top of it,  
packed hard on the pavements and verges,  
ideal for sliding, and we did,  
all the way home from school,  
heedless of warnings.

Out in the evening too. A clear night. My breath  
clouded in the air.

The icy surface, reflecting street lamps' glare,  
multiplied sodium-yellow to orange day  
on some strange, icebound planet.

I slid all the way, and my shadow  
alongside me, magenta  
on the snow, lengthening  
and shortening as I passed;  
my plum-coloured shadow  
going ahead, my amethyst shadow  
falling behind, until  
familiar house lights turned it black.

Older, I learned the physics of it,  
but there was no magic in that.

Paul Hansford

# Manifesto

We're the Opposition Party, not Socialist, not Tory,  
not Green, not Liberal Democrat, that's quite another story.  
They all come out with policies as fast as they can blink.  
We just say No to everything, so we don't have to think.

They want to build a by-pass 'cause the traffic's getting thicker,  
and congestion brings pollution that makes everybody sicker.  
But extra roads mean extra cars, I'm sure it must be true.  
So we'll go on protesting, no matter what they do.

They're building more McDonalds, only we don't think they should.  
Their Meals make us Unhappy – they don't do you any good,  
and burgers cause obesity and that Mad Cow Disease.  
So let's boycott McDonalds. That should bring them to their knees.

We need more electricity, but how should it be made?  
It mustn't be atomic! No, we're all far too afraid.  
And fossil fuels make acid rain and lots of CO<sub>2</sub>.  
But we'll still oppose the wind-farm, no matter what they do.

They want to put CCTV in the High Street in our town.  
Broken windows and graffiti get 'most everybody down.  
But while they're filming vandals they'll be filming you and me.  
So we'll oppose the cameras; they infringe our liberty.

You're walking in the evening – up comes a panda car.  
The coppers stop and look at you and ask you who you are.  
If you haven't got your documents it makes their job quite hard.  
So at least we'll get the criminals to oppose the ID card.

I bought my kids a mobile phone, the very latest kind,  
I warned them of the health risk, but they said they didn't mind.  
Still, we blocked the new transmitter. The ambulance can't get through,  
but masts cause radiation. I'm sure it must be true.

They want to dose with fluoride the water in my tap.  
The nation's teeth are falling out from eating piles of ... junk-food.  
But fluoride is poison and pollutes you through and through.  
I read it – on the Internet! I'm sure it must be true.

They say that smoking's bad for you, and try to put us off,  
but I know it's nothing serious. It's just a little cough.  
A hundred thousand deaths a year? I'm sure that can't be true.  
So I'll just go on smoking, no matter what they do.

We don't like politicians – they're all somebody's cronies.  
We think the House of Commons is a talking shop for phoneys.  
They think they've got the answer, try to stuff it down your throat.  
The difference is we know we're right. That's why we never vote.

We're the Opposition Party, not UKIP, not BNP.  
We're opposed to everything. It's simple as can be.  
So let's take all their policies and flush them down the sink.  
We just say No to everything, and we don't need to think.

Paul Hansford

# Meeting In Jerusalem

“Mea-She’arim is blessed with many synagogues and schools for the learning of the Torah and its commentaries. Its inhabitants have retained the mode of life practised and the garments worn in the ghettos of Europe.” (Guide to Israel - Zev Vilnay)

-

We didn't go to Mea-She'arim on Saturday  
because they throw stones at cars there on the Sabbath.  
We wanted to see the locals, certainly,  
but only to look in a respectful way. We had not expected  
to make contact. But crossing the road  
you dropped your book – Torah or commentary,  
how was I to know? You didn't notice the loss of it.  
I picked up the book, ran after you.  
Not knowing how to address you, I touched your sleeve.  
You turned to me, took the proffered book  
without a word, and looked at me. Your eyes,  
beneath your strange hat, between your side-curls,  
showed hatred, or perhaps  
no expression. You turned away.  
Was your garment unclean now? Did the volume  
need to be purified? I was only  
returning your book. We had not expected  
to make contact.

Paul Hansford

# Metamorphosis - 3 Variations On A Theme

## 1. The Second law of Thermodynamics

Out of winter, spring,  
out of spring, summer,  
then autumn, winter,  
and out of winter, spring,  
always the same.  
Out of the bud, growth,  
out of the flower, seed,  
out of death, life.  
Entropy always increases.

## 2.

Once you were within my reach.  
Suddenly you became a  
g l i t  
t e r  
i n g  
damselfly.

Just wait, I thought, I can change too.  
Why did I have to turn into a frog?

## 3.

Consider the Paradoxical Frog,  
so named because it is several times smaller  
than its p h e n o m e n a l l y huge tadpole.  
(But then, look at people,  
whose achievements often fail to match  
the promise they once showed.)

Paul Hansford

## My Poems (Décima)

(The décima is a Spanish form of 10 lines - rhymed ABBAACDDC - in principle of 8 syllables, though the rather relaxed method of counting syllables in Spanish verse means that lines can actually be anything from 6 to 10 syllables. I've just kept to the standard English Iambic pentameter.)

My poems are my children, more or less.  
I care about them, want them to go far, □  
would like the world to love them as they are.□  
Or would it help if I could maybe dress□  
them in fancy words, improve their accent? Yes, □  
though a judicious measure of sobriety□  
might give my work commendable variety.□  
Alas, they're disadvantaged from the start, □  
these single-parent children of my art, □  
and I can't blame their failings on Society.□

Paul Hansford



# My Shopping List

I write my shopping-list in rhyme.  
It doesn't take me too much time,  
and always helps me to remember.  
(I've been doing it since last September.)

Wholemeal bread  
low-fat spread  
strawberry jam  
dry-cured ham  
Cheddar cheese  
frozen peas  
free-range eggs  
chicken legs  
grape jelly  
pork belly  
lamb chops  
lemon drops  
fillet steak  
chocolate cake  
cookie mix  
seafood sticks  
tortilla chips  
salsa dips  
instant coffee  
treacle toffee  
dried sultanas  
ripe bananas  
runner beans  
a bunch of greens  
new potatoes  
vine tomatoes  
and (really urgent)  
liquid detergent.

That's my shopping-list in verse.  
Not very good? Could have been worse!

Paul Hansford

# Not Ozymandias

Walking along the line 'twixt sea and land  
I saw a bottle, half hidden by a stone  
and buried to the neck in the wet sand.  
I picked it up, then, with a puzzled frown,  
unstoppered it and, as by mute command  
deciphering the note inside, I read:  
"The one who finds this will receive all things  
his heart desires, his appetites be fed."

But is this promise what it may appear?  
I asked myself. For commoners and kings  
alike may find all hope turn to despair;  
they all will die; their bodies will decay.  
The promise, then, was meaningless and bare.  
Grasping the bottle, I hurled it far away.

-

Note: the last words of each line are the last words of the lines of Shelley's Ozymandias, with which I would not venture to compare it.

For other versions of this exercise by other members, see -

If anyone else would like to try, please feel free, but I'd be glad if you'd let me know.

Paul Hansford

# Pantoum Written After A Visit To Tate Modern

All of these were at the Tate;  
I know they were, for I took notes.  
The plaster cast of an empty space;  
View of the Thames, with Pleasure Boats.□

I know they were (for I took notes)  
on open view, but Art? Well, maybe.  
View of the Thames, with Pleasure Boats;  
Mother Feeding Crying Baby

on open view, but Art? Well, maybe,  
- unless they take me for a fool.  
Mother Feeding Crying Baby;  
Man in Orange Shirt, on Stool.

- Unless they take me for a fool,  
Damien Hirst and Jackson Pollock.  
Man in Orange Shirt, on Stool,  
saying, "What a load of bollocks! "

Damien Hirst and Jackson Pollock;  
Couple Drinking at a Bar,  
saying, "What a load of bollocks,  
"A plywood model of a car! "

Couple Drinking at a Bar;  
Monet's Waterlilies, and  
a plywood model of a car;  
fruit decaying on a stand.

Monet's Waterlilies, and  
People on an Escalator;  
fruit decaying on a stand.  
No, skip that one, we'll come back later.

People on an Escalator;  
a film of two men standing still.  
No, skip that one; we'll come back later.  
I'm certain that they'll be there still.

A film of two men standing still;  
the plaster cast of an empty space;  
I'm certain that they'll be there still.  
All of these were at the Tate.

Paul Hansford

# Photographs I Never Took

I didn't take a photograph of the statue of Robert Burns.  
His sightless eyes were looking out over Dunedin,  
the most Scottish town in the southern hemisphere,  
and there was a seagull, not a pigeon, standing on his head.  
I would have called it 'Robbie Burns and Friend.'

And I didn't take a picture of the bus shelter  
painted all over with jungle foliage and a tiger  
peeping out over the simulated signature of Henri Rousseau.  
The title would have been 'This Bus Shelter is a Forgery.'

Neither did I photograph another painted wall,  
one round a cemetery full of ornate and sombre tombs,  
with a large and skilfully executed advertisement -  
Renta Sanitarios Mobiles (Hire Mobile Toilets) .  
It would have been called 'Is there no Respect for the Dead? '

I didn't take the photo of a Fijian policeman.  
A pity, for he had such a practical uniform,  
very smart and cool,  
in a tasteful shade of policeman-blue,  
based on the traditional sulu  
with a striking zigzag hem.  
The title would have been 'A Policeman in a Skirt? ! '

I couldn't take a photograph of sunset over Popocatépetl  
- although the sun was setting in a red and golden haze,  
and the most romantically named mountain is just  
what you imagine a perfect volcano should be,  
even to the wisp of steam at the peak  
- because the sun was actually setting over Ixtaccíhuatl  
and 'Sunset over Ixtaccíhuatl' doesn't have quite the right ring  
The shape of the mountain is not very picturesque either.  
Yes, I would have called that one 'Sunset over Popocatépetl'  
- if I could have taken it.

My camera wouldn't focus on the crescent moon  
hanging over the Egyptian skyline,  
horns pointing up, so close to the Equator,

and the evening star (Venus or some more ancient goddess)  
just above and almost between the points.  
If that one had worked it would have been called 'Islamic Moon.'

I couldn't possibly have taken a photograph  
that would do any justice to the young piano student  
in a Hungarian castle  
hammering out Liszt as if the hounds of hell were after her,  
but if I could, I would have had to call it 'Apassionata.'

And I didn't even have time to get my camera out  
to take a picture of the wild humming bird  
darting green and unconcerned  
among dilapidated tenements in the heart of Mexico City.  
But that living jewel shines bright in my memory,  
even without a photo.  
I don't know what I would have called that one,  
and I'm sure it doesn't matter.

Paul Hansford

# Playing In The Park

Near the banks of the Nile  
I walked in the park  
and came across a group  
of schoolgirls, teenagers.  
Friendly, not flirtatious, they smiled.  
– Welcome to Luxor.  
– Ahlan bikum, I replied,  
and they smiled again.  
– Will you join in our game? said the teacher.  
So I stood in the circle  
and we played like nine-year-olds.

Happy for me to take their photograph  
in their all-enveloping dresses,  
their white headscarves,  
they smiled or, wary of the camera,  
cast their eyes down.  
They don't meet many foreigners.  
In Qena, their town, tourism  
is not encouraged.

Luxor in the headlines.  
Tourists massacred by extremists.  
Were they from Qena too?  
Will these gentle girls remember  
our small gesture of friendship?  
or is it lost,  
drowned in infidel blood?  
I should have written to the teacher,  
but I lost the address.  
You know how it is.

Paul Hansford

# Questions

Why does a cow say moo, Daddy?  
How many leaves has a tree?  
Why am I smaller than you, Daddy?  
How does food turn into me?

Why is an elephant big, Daddy?  
And why is an ant so small?  
Why can't a cat be a pig, Daddy?  
Can't you answer my questions at all?

How do puddles see their reflection, Daddy?  
Have unicorns ever been?  
And, not that there's any connection, Daddy,  
Why is a tangerine?

I've puzzled as hard as I can, Daddy,  
But why can't I go to the moon?  
Will I know it all when I'm a man, Daddy?  
Will I be grown up soon?

I know that the sky can be red, Daddy,  
So why can't the sun be green?  
And the thoughts that go round in my head, Daddy,  
How do I know what they mean?

Where does yesterday go, Daddy?  
I don't mean to ask out of turn,  
But with so many things I don't know, Daddy,  
How else can a little boy learn?

Paul Hansford



# Rainbow

'The vocabulary in Sanskrit is so rich that some words (such as rainbow) have □ over two hundred synonyms.' Raja Rao.

Two  
hundred  
ways of saying  
r a i n b o w  
and among that richness one  
that would perfectly describe  
the magical light that fleetingly  
shone from your face as,  
tears welling in your eyes,  
you turned to me  
and smiled.

Paul Hansford

## Reflection (A Palindromic Poem)

Still waters, deep,  
surface like glass reflecting green above;  
and below are trees, sky,  
shadows, leaves, sunlight,  
moving and motionless.  
Here silent images shimmer now,  
and - air breathing suddenly - break.  
Unbidden feelings confuse  
reality and fantasy.  
Which is which?  
Fantasy and reality confuse;  
feelings unbidden break, suddenly breathing air;  
and now shimmer images,  
silent here, motionless  
and moving....  
(sunlight leaves shadows) .  
Sky, trees are  
below - and above -  
green, reflecting, glass-like surface.  
Deep waters, still.

Paul Hansford

## Remnants: Auschwitz

Even from behind the glass,  
you can smell the insecticide  
that keeps the moths away.  
A vast mound of matted sheep's wool  
you would say, except (they assure you)  
it is original, all two tons of it,  
the human hair that was left  
unused at the end.  
The rest went for socks  
to keep workers' feet warm.  
All grey now, sixty years on, it has aged  
as those that owned it never did.  
They went naked to the shower room,  
clutching the soap  
they would never use,  
and then to the ovens.  
A lorry's engine drowned the screams,  
and the Governor's wife tended her flowers,  
making a garden "like paradise."

-

This is at least the fourth major rewrite of this poem  
- 'a poem is never finished, only abandoned.'

Paul Hansford

# Revision Of Tenses

As far as actions in the past are concerned,  
if you give the matter your attention,  
you will recall various tenses -  
the Past Continuous, the Past Definite,  
the Imperfect, the Perfect, and the Pluperfect,  
which we might call the more-than-Perfect;  
we need not concern ourselves at the moment  
with the Past Anterior.

I, at the moment, am not concerned with the past at all,  
for you are very much Present, and your action  
of brushing the hair from your cheek  
requires all my attention.

Take, for example, this sentence

- 'I was looking for a word, and found it  
in a dictionary which I had.' You will notice  
the action of looking for the word  
extends over a period of time, and is Continuous.

What I notice is the luminosity of your skin  
where the sunlight strikes your shoulder, for in my case  
the action of looking at you is Continuous.

The action of finding the word is complete  
and fixed in time,  
and requires the Past Definite.

And I observe how beautifully complete you are,  
and I am fixed in this moment  
which is now and forever.

While the action of possessing a dictionary,  
in this sense, has no beginning and no end,  
leading us to the Past Imperfect.

Your eyes, at which I continue to gaze,  
are more than Perfect, having depths in them  
which seem to lead towards an Indefinite Future.

And the Past Anterior and the rest of them  
do not concern me at all,

for you see me looking at you,  
and the corners of your eyes crinkle  
as you smile at me, and in my case  
the action of being in love with you  
has no beginning and no end.

Paul Hansford

# San Juan Night

That night  
the beach was full of fires,  
and the waves rolled in mysterious,  
foam-laden,  
from the ancient lands.  
And on the beach  
full of fires and magic  
we burned our paper wishes,  
for that night they might even come true.  
Then, because we were unwilling to wait  
the last few minutes, we ran  
a little before midnight  
into the mysterious, ancient, pagan sea  
and submerged ourselves in the foam.  
You rose up,  
shouting amid the waves  
with the joy of that night.  
When fireworks shot into the sky,  
and some, falling to the sea,  
exploded there again  
to shoot from the very waves,  
you also leapt up, shouting  
with the energy of that magic night.  
And later, when we were almost  
the last remaining in the sea,  
we went up onto the beach  
full of fires and love.

Paul Hansford

## San Juan Night (2)

You took yourself away from the crowd  
to the dark sea's edge. Alone and silent  
you stood watching the waves.  
I could not know how big your thoughts were.  
I only remember how you looked then,  
your eyes, and the night, and the sea.

Paul Hansford

## Seventeen Words

No more the picturebook Eskimo,  
the modern Inuit have central heating,  
snowmobiles, welfare; they do not need  
to fashion harpoons from bone, wait all day  
for seal to come to ice hole, drag the body  
to a home they have built from snow.

Once they lived with cold  
and the creatures of the cold,  
fish, seal, and white bear, familiar  
if not friends, the snow itself  
almost alive in its moods and movements,  
falling as flakes, powder, clumps,  
floating, flying, dazzling, stinging,  
covering, drifting, compacting to ice.  
Snow informed their lives;  
one word was not enough.

Our life from infancy to grave  
is shaped by love, comforting, calming,  
thrilling, unsettling, dazzling, stinging,  
covering, drifting, compacting to....

Seventeen words for snow,  
How many ways to say I love you?

Paul Hansford



## Six Poets (Clerihews)

Alfred Lord Tennyson  
was very fond of venison,  
but he never had it when dining with the queen –  
she was far too mean.

Oscar Wilde  
in his lifetime was frequently reviled.  
If he had lived today  
he'd have had no problem being gay.

Ogden Nash,  
wrote more verses whenever he ran short of cash.  
Some critics declared his style was rank,  
but he just cried all the way to the bank.

Gertrude Stein  
used to like a dropp of wine,  
but I think she must have had more than one glass  
when she wrote "Pigeons on the grass alas."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning,  
who suffered not only from Aquaphobia (a morbid fear of drowning) ,  
but also from Tyriophobia (an irrational fear of cheese) ,  
nevertheless had no trouble writing Sonnets from the Portuguese.

Ezra Pound  
seems to have been the best poet Eliot had found.  
He called him "il miglior fabbro, " so  
must have thought him pretty fabuloso.

Paul Hansford

## Sleepless Night - Sonnet

I cannot sleep tonight, and you know why.  
You know how many weary hours I've lain  
upon my bed and listened to the rain  
lashing the window, and the mournful sigh  
the wind makes. You have heard mine in reply.  
I know you know the reason for my pain.  
I know you know why, over and again,  
I've wept out loud. I know you saw me cry  
as I remembered carving on that tree  
your name and mine. You were the only one  
I needed then. You know, just as before,  
how much I need you yet, but you have gone.  
Only your spirit now still lives in me,  
and I can never hope for any more.

-----

### NOTE

The lines of his poem end with the same words as  
Edna St Vincent Millay's sonnet  
'What Lips My Lips Have Kissed, And Where, And Why'

Paul Hansford

# Spring (Sonnet / Acrostic)

(written for my wife)

S pring always comes, however slow it seems,  
A nd on the trees at last from sleeping wood  
N ew growth sprouts green where black twigs starkly stood.  
D istant the winter now; like far-off dreams  
R ecalling snow, white blossom-petals fall  
A nd throw confetti down on warming earth.

H ere after months of sleep the signs of birth  
A s daffodils thrust up and songbirds call.  
N ow the breeze blows more gently on fresh grass,  
S un gives its blessing, sky's a softer blue.  
F rom greener woods then pipes the bold cuckoo.  
O ur thoughts move on to summer. Spring will pass,  
R ipe summer turn to fall, and winter, then,  
D epend upon it, spring will come again.

Paul Hansford

# Spring Song

The trees are coming into leaf;  
the sap is pressing through the wood.  
Violets, suspending disbelief  
in spring, reveal now one by one  
flowers of self-defining hue;  
while butterflies with purple sheen  
on flimsy wings try out the sun;  
the sky's a half-forgotten blue.  
Brash celandine invades the beds,  
covers brown earth with green and gold;  
bold daisies dare to show their heads.  
The grass puts on a different green  
and grows apace - I knew it would  
(when was it mowed last? I forget)  
and tangled branches really should  
be pruned, but I've not got the heart  
to execute or amputate;  
in this profusion, who'd be so cold?  
Though some day soon I'll have to start  
(my neighbours think I've left it late)  
I won't rush in and then regret -  
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

Paul Hansford

# Sunsets And Flowers (Pantoum)

('I hate sunsets and flowers. I loathe the sea; the sea is formless.' - WH Auden.

I hate sunsets and flowers;  
I loathe the rolling sea.  
What matter sunshine or showers?  
None of it matters to me.

I loathe the rolling sea,  
Where once we used to roam.  
None of it matters to me.  
No colours, no waves, no foam.

Where once we used to roam  
It's formless now and bare.  
No colours, no waves, no foam,  
Because you are not there.

It's formless now and bare  
Everywhere I go.  
Because you are not there  
Your garden's full of snow.

Everywhere I go,  
What matter sunshine or showers?  
Your garden's full of snow.  
I hate sunsets and flowers.

Paul Hansford

# Swifts In The Wind

Such a wind today! The air  
seems almost solid. Impossible  
to go out in it.

Swifts invoking anti-gravity  
lean on the air with sickle wings,  
slice upward through it;  
hang weightless at the peak,  
then accepting the pull of earth,  
hurtle downhill on kamikaze ski-run,  
a mutual slalom, each avoiding  
a hundred twisting obstacles;  
alter their angle to the air, and rise again  
up invisible gradients,  
a swooping, soaring ballet with the wind,  
its complex choreography  
conceived in the tiny brains  
of a hundred separate birds.

One pair, suddenly detached,  
wings fluttering, wheel and plunge,  
circle each other in an aerial  
ice-dance pas de deux  
(stunt kites without strings) ,  
return to the flock, and are replaced  
by another, and another, virtuoso couple.  
The whole ethereal stage is full  
of improvisational star turns.

Such a wind! Impossible  
for this earthbound human  
to go out in it.  
I'll stay and watch the show.

Paul Hansford

# Testing A Theory

Take a group of chimpanzees  
used to swinging through the trees,  
and sit them down at keyboards in a row;  
lots of paper, lots of ink,  
lots and lots of time, I think,  
and what the theory says I'm sure you know.

Yes, along with all the junk,  
all the gibberish and bunk,  
somewhere there'd be the full works of the Bard:  
AS YOU LIKE IT, CYMBELINE,  
RICHARDS 2 and 3, the DREAM,  
though HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK, might be hard.

But I'm sure the little blighters  
would get on fine with TITUS  
ANDRONICUS, The TAMING OF THE SHREW,  
The MOOR OF VENICE (that's OTHELLO) ,  
the other MERCHANT fellow,  
and ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA too.

The WINTER'S TALE would hold no terrors,  
nor The COMEDY OF ERRORS,  
and VERONA's GENTLEMEN would turn out right;  
LOVE'S LABOUR might be LOST,  
or it could be TEMPEST-tossed,  
but ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, even on TWELFTH NIGHT.

LEAR, KING JOHN, and MUCH ADO,  
HENRY 4, parts 1 and 2,  
HENRY 5, and 6 (in three parts) , HENRY 8,  
TROILUS, TIMON, MEASURE FOR MEASURE,  
PERICLES (a neglected treasure)  
and how ROMEO AND JULIET met their fate;

all the SONNETS, and the RAPE  
OF LUCRECE (typed by an ape!)  
and if they worked for ever and a day  
they could fit in JULIUS CAESAR,

that CORIOLANUS geezer,  
the WIVES OF WINDSOR, and the 'Scottish play'.

I grew more and more excited –  
even thought I might be knighted  
if I could be the one to make it work.  
But to realise my dream  
I had to try a pilot scheme,  
to prove I wasn't just a reckless berk.

I bought one chimp from the zoo -  
didn't have the cash for two -  
and gave him a typewriter, just to try  
for a short while. Well, a fortnight  
was the time-scale that I thought right.  
You see, I'm quite an optimistic guy.

Now everyone who heard  
of my project said, "Absurd! "  
when I told them of my striking new departure.  
"Teach a chimpanzee to type?  
"Why, I never heard such tripe! "  
Still ... he did produce the works of Jeffrey Archer.

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(NOTE: This poem was printed in the Daily Mail with the illustration used in my  
biography.)

Paul Hansford



# The First Time

I was only seventeen, and you were about the same,  
and I knew nothing about you – I barely knew your name.  
But I looked at you, and you looked at me, and we looked at each other, and  
then...

I knew, the first time you smiled at me, I wanted to see you again.

So I went where I knew I could find you, and asked you to go on a date,  
and you looked quite shy, but you said you would, and I knew it must be fate.  
And I looked at you, and you looked at me, and we looked at each other, and  
then...

I knew, the first time I held your hand, I wanted to hold you again.

We were crossing the river. The sky was grey, but the sun came bursting  
through,  
and lit up your hair like a coppery flame, and I couldn't stop looking at you.  
Yes, I looked at you, and you looked at me, and we looked at each other, and  
then...

I knew, the first time I stroked your hair, I wanted to touch you again.

Then we walked in the park and we sat on a bench, and (I still see it all so clear)

my arm was round your shoulder, and your face was oh, so near.  
And I looked at you, and you looked at me, and we looked at each other, and  
then...

I knew, the first time I kissed you, I wanted to kiss you again.

You were everything I wanted – well, that's the way it seemed –  
everything I wanted and all that I'd ever dreamed.

For we met again, and I held you again, and we kissed again and again,  
and I'd never known a feeling like the happiness I felt then.

But life doesn't stay that perfect, and dreams don't always come true,  
and there came the day that you told me you had found somebody new.  
And I looked at you, and you looked at me, and we looked at each other, and  
then...

I knew, the one time you broke my heart, I could never be happy again.

But, though young hearts are easily broken, it's surprising how soon they can  
mend.

So after you there were other girls, and now I have more than a friend.  
But I still think of you with affection (even if it is just now and then)  
for the one you remember as first love is never forgotten again.

Paul Hansford

# The Flight Of Birds

See the buzzard soar, the swallow skim a lake, the kestrel hover;  
observe the skylark pouring his little heart out in the sky;  
admire the flapwing, lapwing flight of a flock of plover;  
what birds do is fly.

At least they oughter,  
because once birds get onto the water  
they can't help looking absurd  
- except the swan, for which nobody I know has an unkind word,  
or, mostly, seagulls,  
who fly with almost the grace of eagulls,  
and in their silvery uniforms are impeccably neat,  
even if my admiration for their manners is incomplete -  
but, shucks,  
look at ducks.

And for something really silly,  
shaggy-winged, fluffy-headed, and disproportionately neck-and-bill-y,  
consider the pelican, for heaven's sake.  
Surely Nature made a mistake,  
or left the designing of it to a particularly inept committee,  
it's so unpretty.  
But once in the air he can soar like a buzzard, though maybe lower,  
and skim over the waves with more perfect control than a swallow, and slower,  
and dive for a fish like a living javelin, that clumsy pelican.  
By helican!

No, for a shapeless, hapless caricature, created to be comical,  
the epitome of what a bird shouldn't be, the penguin must be the most  
epitomical.  
As he does his impression of a Charlie Chaplin waiter,  
you know he'll fall off the ice sooner or later.  
But before a warning can escape your lips  
he trips  
(and slips) .  
Then, as he slides beneath the waves, ah! see the happy penguin fly,  
a graceful bird in his bluegreen underwater sky.

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(The last section owes most of its images to a class of 8-year-olds I once taught.)

Paul Hansford

# The Science Of Parting

On a line from Mandelstam - 'I have learned the science of parting'

There was so much we never did together,  
places to go and visit hand in hand,  
so much we could have learned about each other,  
so many things to say before goodbye.

Nobody ever knew how much I suffered;  
but by applying all the skills I'd learned  
I always coped. My strategies were successful;  
the ache of separation always eased.

So many times the same has happened to me,  
but every time the pain returns anew.  
Just as intense, although it's so familiar,  
regret comes like a band around my heart.

Falling in love, each time's a new experience;  
the same thing goes for learning how to part.

Paul Hansford

# There Is No Comment Submitted By Members.

(a rondel)

"There is no comment submitted by members."

Nobody bothers; nobody cares;

nobody gives a hoot how my work fares

– or they mean to say something, but no-one remembers.

The fire of my passion is reduced to grey embers;

the most piercing of glances just meet with dull stares.

There is no comment submitted by members.

Nobody bothers; nobody cares.

Like summers of hope fading into Septembers,

or flowers I've grown being smothered with tares,

I search and I search but, despite all my prayers,

I read once again, with a chill like December's,

"There is no comment submitted by members."

Paul Hansford

# These Children....

These children,  
round-eyed, absorbing  
what the world offers them,  
or silently wandering in their own  
imagination,  
must lose their innocence and grow  
older but not necessarily wiser.

Paul Hansford

# This Is Not A Poem

If I wanted to write a poem for you, what would I write about?

(Better not go too far)

Other eyes than yours may sparkle

(Better be very careful)

Other lips may smile

(Better not say too much)

Other cheeks may blush

(Better not seem to have said too much)

Other names may have music in them

(Better say nothing at all) .

But my poem would not be for others; it would be for you

(Better not even consider it) .

So this is just to say, this is not a poem

(Only, it could have been)

Paul Hansford



# Three Non-Conversations

(1)

I called your number and  
your voice answered –  
“Sorry I’m not available.  
Please leave a message.”  
I put down the phone  
without speaking,  
and hoped you might pick up  
my thoughts.

(2)

I called your number and  
your voice answered,  
sounding tired and lost.  
I wished I could hug you better,  
but the voice said,  
“Who did you want to speak to? ”  
– It wasn’t you  
(do voices run in families?)  
but I still wanted to hug you.

(3)

I called your number and  
your voice answered,  
and this time it was you.  
I said hello,  
and you said hello,  
but what could I say  
(that I wanted to say)  
that you didn’t already know?  
So we talked about trivialities  
until we said goodbye.

Paul Hansford

# To A Young Woman

I never knew your name. I only saw you once.  
We exchanged glances and platitudes  
about the heat. At your neck  
the letter S - I never asked you  
what it stood for.  
We shall not meet again,  
but dreaming, or in some future life,  
I will know you, and when you tell me then  
what you are called,  
I will remember, and tell you,  
Last time we met your name began with S.

Paul Hansford

# Triolets

## Christmas dinner

After the turkey and brandy-battered pud,  
A glass of punch, a mince pie, and the cake,  
With tangerines and nuts, just as one should.  
After the turkey and brandy-battered pud,  
Biscuits and cheese with port would seem quite good.  
But would you credit? I've got the belly-ache  
After the turkey and brandy-battered pud,  
A glass of punch, a mince pie, and the cake!

\*\*\*\*\*

## The insomniac spouse's complaint

I've been awake since half past two;  
If only I could sleep  
Instead of brooding, as I do,  
'I've been awake since half past two.'  
If only I could be like you  
And snore in slumber deep.  
I've been awake since half past two!  
If only I could sleep!

\*\*\*\*\*

## The power of a word

Unthinkingly just now you said 'my love';  
I made no sign, as if I hadn't heard,  
But now my heart is soaring high above.  
Unthinkingly just now you said 'my love';  
I'm all a-flutter like a turtle-dove  
To think perhaps you didn't use that word  
Unthinkingly. Just now you said 'my love';  
I made no sign. As if I hadn't heard!

Paul Hansford

# Varanasi

Ganges, dawn, a luminous haze  
over the water. The bathing ghats  
are busy with the faithful. (But India  
is inconceivable without faith.)  
The robed bathers, raising river water  
to the sun, pouring it back  
to mother Ganges, are they worshipping  
the sun or the river?  
For them God is everywhere  
and everything. Water, sun,  
the river and the twinkling lamps floating on it  
are part of one consciousness.

The burning ghats too (such quantities of wood  
stacked ready) are beginning their day.  
The funeral party approaching in respectful haste  
have a job to do. They build their pile,  
move the body to the wood,  
start the fire. I watch, but not for long.  
This moment, so intimate, so public, reminds me  
I am an intruder here. The ashes  
will return to Ganga unwitnessed by me.

Away from the river, the vendors of tea  
do their trade among the stalls. Monkeys,  
cheerfully pilfering, are chased away  
half-heartedly, for they are Hanuman's representatives,  
and they, with the sacred, garbage-clearing cows,  
are part of the one consciousness. In this land  
all are "the faithful", everything is God's creation.  
In this poverty is richness.

Paul Hansford

# Victims

'Trains into and out of Waterloo are subject to delay because of...  
a body on the line at Basingstoke' (railway notice)

-----

A body on the line at Basingstoke -  
the train to Waterloo has been delayed.  
You'll have to wait; the plastic bag brigade  
are clearing up and trying not to choke.

Commuter suicide's no news to us.  
We don't suspect foul play; it's by the book.  
But one more driver, terror in his look,  
takes the day off, wishing he drove a bus.

Neighbours or strangers, those who saw him leap  
could never know what so possessed his mind.  
His unwished legacy - they long may find  
the image of his death disturb their sleep.

The quiet desperation of a life  
brought by that final step over the rim  
to its conclusion - weep no tears for him,  
his torment's over. Who will tell his wife?

Paul Hansford

## Victims (Mk.2) - A Triolet

A body on the line at Basingstoke

Has caused an inconvenient delay.

- Unless it's just a rather tasteless joke

(A body on the line at Basingstoke!)

What pain could make an ordinary bloke

Do himself in? It's just another day.

A body on the line at Basingstoke

Has caused an inconvenient delay.

Paul Hansford

# Whose Apples?

(a poem in three voices)

-

(The gardener)

This is my garden; my apple tree  
has over-reached itself. The branches,  
weighed down with fruit, threaten to break.  
If I had read the signs, thinned out when it was time,  
the crop would be less heavy, the fruit less small.  
And what there is, is damaged. If it's not birds  
it's caterpillar, wasp, or earwig.  
It will all be rotten soon. I don't know why I bother.

(The blackbird)

This is my garden; this tree I sat in and proclaimed my own  
when it was full of blossom, with war-cry love-call song.  
Then mating, nesting, bringing up the brood.  
The days were scarcely long enough, but that  
was long ago. My children gone,  
there's time now for myself, time for a treat.  
My yellow chisel bill invades the flesh  
of these fine apples. Delicious. This is the life.

(The wasps)

This is our garden - insects do not have time  
for individuality. We built the colony, us lads,  
chewed wood to make our paper nest, and now  
we work to feed the grubs.  
'Lads', that is, using the word loosely - for us  
gender is not important; that's for the queen,  
and, as it may be, the ones who service her,  
none of our business.  
But we need food too, and when we find a fruit  
where blackbird has broken in, we eat our way inside,  
till only skin and core encase our private eating/drinking den.  
So what if it's fermenting? If we get tiddly,  
and roll about, and buzz a drunken hum, then who's to care?  
And if they do, we'll sting 'em.





## Will Granny Be Coming?

Will Granny be coming for Christmas,  
The same as she does every year?  
- No, we won't be seeing her this time.  
She's too ill to travel, my dear.

She'll stay in the hospice for Christmas.  
They have crackers and things, just like us.  
But, my darling, your Granny is dying,  
And she'd hate us to make any fuss.

We'll still have the presents to open,  
With paper all over the place,  
And, even though everyone hates it,  
I expect we'll play Chasing the Ace.

And we'll still have the turkey and pudding,  
And the tree standing out in the hall.  
- But if Granny's not coming for Christmas,  
It won't seem like Christmas at all.

Paul Hansford

# Words

The love of a mother for her child  
is not the same as a child's love for his mother.  
The love of a man for a woman changes  
after they are married  
from what it was before,  
and her love does not correspond in all points with his.  
Love between man and woman  
is different from the love of boy and girl.

Love can be permanent as the tides, regular, unquestioned,  
with no end and no recognisable beginning.  
It can come suddenly,  
violently,  
as a thunderstorm in summer breaks  
upon the thirsty earth,  
short-lived  
except in the memory.

But under any one of these emotions,  
what is there for us to say?  
Only, I love you.

Thoughts can be subdivided, classified, clothed with words.  
Words fit feelings only approximately,  
and our deepest feelings must often go unclothed.  
So when I say I love you  
I cannot analyse what I mean.  
I only know that I do love you  
and hope you understand.

Paul Hansford

# Words And Music (Sestina)

If I could go beyond time,  
And life be transformed into music;  
If all that is subject to change  
Could be fixed into an intricate pattern;  
And what is expressed in words  
Distilled into pure sense,

Perhaps what we experience in the physical sense  
Could be extended to infinite time.  
Then what we now perceive as words,  
And what we think of as music,  
Would all be part of the same pattern,  
And things would not always have to change.

But if nothing were ever to change  
Can we be sure it would all make sense?  
Our life is part of a pattern,  
But a pattern that is lived in time.  
The emotions inspired by music  
Have to be forced to fit into words,

And when I communicate my feelings to you, my words,  
And your understanding of them, are liable to change.  
When I hear what is deep in the heart of the music  
It speaks directly to my sense.  
Though I may interpret it differently each time,  
The rhythm, the melody, the harmony form a pattern.

Then, as I struggle to set down that pattern  
In what I know must be inadequate words,  
Sometimes I feel the echo of a time  
Before I was aware of life's continual change.  
Yes, I can be transported, in a sense,  
To a time or a place recreated in the music.

Trumpet, organ, or seven-stringed lute recreate the music  
That existed first only as a pattern  
In the mind of one who could give it sense.  
Thus in my own way I search for the words

To express myself in a way that will not change,  
So that this much of what I have felt may go on through time.

And if I can make the music ring in the words,  
If I can weave my thoughts into a pattern that may resist change,  
Then, but only in that sense, maybe then I can go beyond time.

Paul Hansford

## You, Young Girls...

You, young girls, whose faces,  
if I try hard, alone, of a night,  
I can recall, though your names  
are more difficult,  
exist, so to speak,  
in the parallel universe of my mind,  
and I,  
as I once was,  
or as you would have liked me to be,  
live on in yours.  
But as we are now  
there is no crossing those frontiers,  
and even if the possibility should arise,  
in that other world  
the people we have become  
would be strangers.

Paul Hansford