Poetry Series

sheena blackhall

- poems -

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sheena blackhall (18/8/1947)

Sheena Blackhall is a writer, illustrator, traditional ballad singer and storyteller in North East Scotland. From 1998-2003 she was Creative Writing Fellow in Scots at Aberdeen University's Elphinstone Institute.She has published four Scots novellas, ten short story collections and sixtyfive poetry collections, which are listed here (most recent first) . Two of her plays have been televised. She has won several national awards for Scots poetry and short-story writing. In 2009 she became the poet laureate for Aberdeen & the North East of Scotland.

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1984: The Cyard's Kist (Poems) Rainbow Publishing
1986: The Spik o the Lan (Poems) Rainbow Publishing
1987: Hamedrauchtit (Poems) Rainbow Publishing
1989: Nor East Neuk (Poems) Charles Murray Trust
1989: Fite Doo/ Black Crow (Poems) Keith Murray Publications ISBN 1 870978 20X
1989: Nippick o Nor East Tales (Short stories) Keith Murray Publications ISBN 1 870978 099
1991: A Toosht o Whigmaleeries (Poems) Hammerfield Publishing
1991: Reets (Short stories) Keith Murray Publications ISBN 870978 331
1992: A Hint o Granite (Short stories) Hammerfield Publishing
1993: Back o Bennachie (Poems) Hammerfield Publishing
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2000: Skin Balaclavas (Poems - jintly wi John Easton) Finavon Print and Design ISBN 0 9528813 7 3
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2002: A Boorich o Breets (Poems) Severin Books
2003: A Boorich o Fowk (Poems) Severin Books
2003: Loon (Scots novella) Itchy Coo ISBN 1 902927 72 9
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2004: Diminishing Lines (Poems) Ltd Ed. Thistle Repro
2004: Preparing to meet the Minotaur (Poems) Ltd. Ed. Thistle Repro
2004: The Wizard o the North (Poems for Halflins) Ltd. Ed. Thistle Repro
2004: Katy the Crocodile (Poems for Littlins) Ltd. Ed. Thistle Repro
2004: Indian Peter (Bairn Tales) Ltd. Ed. Thistle Repro
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2004: Pie in the Sky (Short Stories) Ltd. Ed. Thistle Repro
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2006: Dragon Rikk (Poems & Tales for Halflins an Littlins) malfranteaux concepts
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2009: Danse Macabre: Writings Round a Festival (Poems & Songs) Lochlands
2009: Peacock (Poems) Lochlands

A Dip In The Pool

There is no luxury like water,
Blue as the Hope Diamond.

Land rules cease to apply,
Are firmly marooned on shore.

The peace dove's dropped its feathers Just for me.
The pool receives me kindly Asks no questions
Makes no assumptions Demands no entry fee.

It washes away the heat, the dust, the noise
Of the crowded day.
Succour, solitude, silence.
Oh the silence, the silence
Sweeter than larks' tongues
Or honey from amber bees!

I kick my heels like a fish,
Chasing the wobbling coracles of light.
Creature of fluid boundaries, I watch day drown, knowing,
Like Noah, new lands will rise like growling whales.

sheena blackhall

Bannockburn 1314

Stirlin Castle lay in Inglis hauns
Beseiged bi Scots, a biggin strang an stoot
Edward, the Bruce's brither, ringed it roon
Ettled tae sterve the furreign sodjers oot.

The Englishman, King Edward traivelled North.
Wi wechty cavalry, Welsh bowmen, infantry
Weapons, siege engines, buglers, meat an wines,
Wi Knichts an Barons, prood clanjamphrey

Aa marched tae Stirlin, takkin the Roman road.
The Bruce placed men wi widlan at their back
He chuse his grun fu weel. A nerra gap
Atween the trees, should ony challenge, brakk

He set his pikemen heich on Gillies Hill,
Close whaur the the road fords ower the Bannock Burn.
Inbye the wids he blockit paths wi boughs,
Leavin the Inglis little room tae turn

Tae cowp the Inglis shelties should they charge
He howked pits, an happit them wi sticks,
An syne, he wyted, wi his waa o spears.
As stinch a waa as ony vrocht wi bricks

Fechtin brukk oot, the Scottish pikemen held
The beast o War, sherpened its teeth an cleuks
Like ninepins Inglis cavalry wis felled
Men crawled tae dee wi fiers, in bluidy neuks

The Inglis forces crossed the Bannock Burn
Henry De Bohun, a young Inglis knicht
Spied a lane horseman on the Scottish front
Weirin a croon, the Scots King in plain sicht

Forrit De Bohun rade wi deidly lance
As Robert raised his battle-aixe alaft
Stude in his stirrups, jinked the comin cloor
An split the foe-man's skull-bane fore an aft

Thon nicht the English camped, Bruce planned aheid.
Ower fu o deep consarns tae brakk breid
The hinmaist fecht wad be upon the morn
The verra day the Baptist, John, wis born.

Bi day-brakk, aa the Scots war in position.
King Edward, saw the Scotmen kneel in prayer

An leuch, nae kennin they socht Heiven's blessin
Thinkin they prigged for mercy, ooto fear

Straicht ooto Revelations, aa in reid

Horseman o War breenged oot on fiery steed

The Bruce’s pikemen, stinch as porcupine
Cowped Inglis shelts at ilkie gory meetin
The Scotsmen focht wi steel doon ilkie spine
Welsh bowmen skewered their Inglis fiers retreatin.

The bonnie Bannock burn wis smored wi deid
An ran for mony days wi sodjers’ bluid
Edward tuik ship fur hame, a beaten cur
Fechtin for freedom gies the weakest, virr
An smeddum, tae rise up an takk a staun
Strivin fur liberty an native lan.

sheena blackhall

Bannockburn Crow

We crows saw the deadly shower of arrows
The soup of brains and sweat
The gralloched spearmen
Turning the moss sour.

Terrified horses churned the buttercups
Into a golden pulp amongst the lardy flesh of the dead
Rich pickings for us crows
There was a clamour of rooks
On the back of a Welsh archer
A screech of gulls on the spilled
Bellies of pack horses

At night a stare of owls
Watched moonlit women
Stripping the field of trophies

Later, in our parliament of crows
We talked of this, how men
Tear open men, providing
A feast for the winged ones and the worms.

sheena blackhall

Barley

As a child, I loved the sacks of seed
That slumbered in the barn like slack-mouthed toads.

I'd plunge small wrists for pleasure in the amber pellets,
Squander fistfuls from a ten-foot drop
Onto a dirt-caked yard, for hens to peck.

At ploughing time, I'd watch the broken sod
Topple before the blade, wide to the frosty skies;
Eye-slits of soil, overshot by screaming gulls.

At sowing time, the land closed in, grew secret,
Corn suckled sustenance within that great, black, pod.

On lark-swung days,
When webs were bead-strung dew,
My eyes would glisten at the sight
Of mists of just-new green,
The field, a beetle splitting wings in flight.

Daily the ranks crept up, banners unfurling —
Delicate tips of grains, with nails of polished pearl,
Thin beards, uncurling
Under a bronze sun; braided crowns, tossed haughty,
Top-heavy tribal knots, stood mustering,
Clustering, whispering reedy tales to one another.

Most musical, they sang all sweetly-humming summer...
At night, each was a lamplighter, pale as murmuring ghost.

Then came the harvest, turning wheel of the cart.
The field, alive with farmhands, whistling, cursing,
Grey rats scuttling; combine clacking, cutting,
Chewing the barley up and into store, a golden pour
Of grain, raining through shafts of sun.
Children capering, women bringing tea in flasks
With baskets of buttered scones.
A trampling, gleaning, getting... the final transaction
Of the farming year.
And I a part of it,
Shouting, hurrahing, leaping from dyke to dyke
With snapping, racing, dogs
The world gone drunk with the joy of it,
That was the way of it.

Then the others left. The hush was haunting.
Alone on the dusty stage, the players packed and stacked,
Oh, it was daunting
That empty silence, there, on the plundered hill,
The harvest won, and lost.

The still field seemed forsaken,

Lamenting its children, taken.
I wanted to kneel and thank it -
The land from which we fed -
But lacked the knowledge; touched it
With a reverent hand instead;
The torn stubble scratched me
And I bled.

sheena blackhall

Beetle

A small green beetle sat on my open page,
Antennae probing the wind like weather vanes.

His shell was a wet umbrella,
His ticklesome shadow, barely half an eyelash.
The sun lit a spot of fire on his domed back.

He moved like a war canoe propelled by six swift rowers;
Halfway over a comma, he paused to clean his two back legs,
A small fat ballet dancer tugging off his tights,
His voice so small it did not reach my ears.

sheena blackhall

Birthday

Today, I am nearly six.
I am ten steps up the stair, looking in
Through the parlour door at a party.

I am bad as bad can be.
I have not been the perfect hostess,
Sweet as a chocolate smarty.

I am a black shark's fin on a chintzy china sea.
A Shirley Temple of girls is worshipping my cake.

I have dreaded this day all week.
Mother is raging. 'The things I do for your sake,
No nice pink frock when I was wee.
You could pretend to be grateful.
The hours I've spent on invites, icing, games,
Sulk then. Go sit on the stair.
We'll have a party without you.
Don't blame me if the others call you names.'

Today, I am newly six.
A circus of giggling girls
Is ritually passing the parcel,
Is whooping and laughing and yelling.

I am ten steps up the stair.
I am bad as bad can be.
From my two bad eyes, two hot wet tears are spilling.
I am wrapping my arms round my sides to hug me better.
I want to rub myself out, like a squiggly letter.

In my two bad eyes, the sadness drops keep filling..
I am dressed like a lamb on a sacrificial plate.
The jellies are spiked with spite, are laced with hate.

I am newly six. I am bad as bad can be,
Sitting way out on a limb, at six, sixteen or sixty,
Feet of clay, and a heart of rusty tin,
Ten steps up the stair,
On the outside, looking in.

sheena blackhall

Conference of the Snails

Brothers, we are slithered here together
In full flood, to ooze,
Our manifesto a convoluted trail,
A trellis of slime set out in the best Celtic manner
With a flourish.

This row-boat venue is most apt.
We shall be launched in moonlight,
Secretive as the magnificent Masons

Our ceremonies shall include
Horn weavings, ritual munchings of air and mulch.

All mention of shellings will be punishable by exposure to a thrush
With long beak and no table manners.

We shall inaugurate a brotherhood of slugs;
Worms to inhabit the lower orders,
Split-backed bugs to be our emissaries.

The founder of our Faith was a visionary, Monsieur Pierre Lune
Who slipped from a rainy taxi in Paris under a whore's umbrella
To be eaten as a martyr.

We are a closed order.
We colonise the dark.
Such stereotypes those humans! So alike!
Pifft! Such nonentities!

Whereas we, beloveds, are most beautiful, mysterious,
Infinite in variety, the Chosen;
Our hymns and humours are divinely damp
As Lucretia Borgia's vulva.

Anoint your antennae with Nivea!
Each shell is a sculpture in motion,
Sliding through the parting air inhabited moistly by mushrooms.
We are a glide of turbans.
Our tiny horns are minarets of joy!

sheena blackhall

Diving for Poems Dhanakosa, Balquidder

Diving for poems,
I entered the moon's reflection.

The water swallowed me like a womb,
Like a shark, like a dark friend.

Shadows swam round me;
I dipped into the depths, over and over.

Moon poems are beautiful, plucked from inky fathoms.
I would wish for all poem fishers,
Little lights set out along the shore
To guide them back.

sheena blackhall

Earth

Come close; come closer.
You must.
My lust is slow, but consuming.

Come blindly into my darkness,
My wet, black rose.

I'll lay you down,
I'll loosen your loins
In my rich, sweet niche of rot.
In the sift of ages,
Pharoah and slave come hot
To my tight embrace;
My tawny sepulchral charms
Are irresistible.

Don't quibble. We are well met.
Not a single hair of your precious head
Will I share.
Your nacreous skull,
The pearled gleam of your eyes,
The curved rib of your hull
Will launch me a forest yet.

I breed the power of the oak,
The sloth of the snail.
I swallow shadow and shape,
I am the curving knife behind the eleventh veil.
Returned to my midnight nursery,
The prideful nettle, the timid Columbine,
Eagle and ant and king in me combine.

I am the breast that feeds the suckling corn,
I am the rag-doll bride of the plough.
You who would reap my harvest,
Now do you know who colours the morning green?

I am Queen of the May,
I am the blood of the bull,
I am the seed of decay,
I am the pounce of the owl,
I am the door of dismay,
I am the wolf's howl.
I am end, and beginning of all,
The roll of my heavy thigh, is rhythmic, seminal...

Hear me, each white, umbilical root
(Desdemona abed with her Moor) ,
I am a cruel Madonna
Sharing the throne of the mole,
I settle all dispute.

sheena blackhall

Fridge

In the black kitchen
Midnight is two red dots In a square clock.

I hum quietly
Little fridgy tunes;
Cuddle my marg in frost, Crystal by crystal
Converting milk to ice.

sheena blackhall

Goat

A Pan-horned goat
Lifts up the weird
Triangle of his face.

His neat packed teeth
An octave of tiny notes beneath
The elegant curving slits of his wet nose.

His beard's a puff
Of thinly curling smoke;
His arcane eyes are eloquent as Satan,
Mournful as King Lear.

It seems he's been rooted to this place
A thousand years;
His neck fur is a Spanish grandee's ruff.

sheena blackhall

Growing Down

I loved to hear him gasp with scared delight
Safe in my grasp, as we slid down the peat
Between the fir tree branches, low with cones
Close to the thundering Falls on angled feet

His tumbled toddler knees were brown with bark
Behind my skirts, he’d bounce and wave for fun
A wingless fledgling, golden in the light
Greeting the waters haloed by the sun

Now he’s the human crutch I lean against
As, roles reversed, we slide towards the Falls
Watching them plunge into their own demise
Far and away, a wheeling buzzard calls.

sheena blackhall

Gull

Gull's yellow smile splits open;
He is standing in a little pool of sunshine,
Wrinkly stockings of skin droop round his ankles
Like a harbour whore at the end of a busy shift.

His shriek presses the pay-off button:
Three oranges and three lemons
Line up below a gratuitous peal of bells.

sheena blackhall

Homage To The Ancestors

Many wombs opened before my coming;
In Catholic Normandy, flat Flanders,
The past turns in its coils,
Blood of my tribe, spent rubies in its eyes.
Dutch, French and Spanish,
Pounded into the gritty bread of Scots.

I was an old man's child,
Singer of songs, as all his village knew,
Who made the short walk to the grass
In a warm winter,
Grief and joy like sword-cuts on his brow.

One brother sleeps by the maple,
Another fills the bellies of Inca worms.

My mother, a withered gourd
Came late to the birth-bed;
Her christening present to me was a thorn.

Many wombs opened before my coming,
Quiet doors in the spirit house on the moor.
Grandmother's ghost is weaving a wooden cradle
So she may nurse my bones.

sheena blackhall

Horse

It is easy to love a horse.
Affectionate exchanges
Are straightforward.

He is not jealous,
He does not demand more
Than his due;
When you walk away,
He does not taunt,
Whine or grovel.

If you step aside
To clap a passing dog,
He does not complain
Pettily or bitterly.
It is easy to love a horse.

His eyes are perfect almonds
Filled with pools of moonlight,
Fringed by lashes, bulrush-black
And exquisitely formed.

When you stroke his flank
His eyes slip shut in ecstasy.
Run your cool palm
Down the warm chute of his face
And he will tilt his head
Into your side like a tired lover
Nudging you to stay.

Flaring delicate nostrils,
He draws up
The skin curtain of his lips,
Nichering softly.

His mane smells of the wind -
I breath him in.
Like a struck tuning fork,
I resonate with
Echoes of barns,
Sun-hot meadows of hay -
He has me harnessed.
Almost, I neigh with happiness.

sheena blackhall

Hugo

Piebald boar.
Two jug-sized, bristly ears,
Jet pupils set in amber eyes
Like two black flies in resin,
A shovel of a snout,
A Glasgow docker's throat
Gruff-grunting his amours.
Brisk tick-tocking tail,
Two mud-caked buttocks
Smeared by the clay-kiln yard.
This glorious tub of lard,
This randy wallower,
Sires split-new squirming piglets,
Small hot ovens
That I raise and hold
And momentarily cradle
Like two rough coconuts;
Round, sun-warmed seeds of pig.

sheena blackhall

Interlopers

Two tables along
From two Dutch lovers whispering
And a housemaid pushing a broom,
Three sparrows hoop round a menu.

A flea-bitten dog climbs onto a seat,
Not ordering,
Lolling abundantly.

This is not reciprocal.
I do not perch on sparrow's branch,
Or slouch in the brown dog's kennel.

Moreover,
Not content with
Patronising the eatery,
Even now
Three sparrows are hopping about this page,
The flea-bitten dog is lolling across this poem.

sheena blackhall

Jacob's Ladder

Debating in a Small Aeroplane Garden
Jacob's ladder soars from bins and shop-fronts.
Masonic angels wearing bovver boots
Working the day shift, clip the beanstalk trellis
That hugs the sides of misty steps,
Dusted by night squad angels' dusky wings.

Such a ladder
(a spiritual Forth Road Bridge
In constant need of repair)
Symbolically ferries
Storybook Giants,
Jacks, Knaves, Aces, Kings,
Discarded heroes,
Mourned (and unmourned) lovers,
And penguins who ascend its heights with hoists.

This tower of fable
This Babel of to-ings and fro-ings
Doesn't teeter like Pisa,
No Rapunzel's hair hangs from it.

What's there?
What's up at the ladder top?
Iron-shuttered bookies?
Urban terrorists masking pots of tea?
A tiger picking its teeth with a pheasant's feather?

What's the climate like?
Is the weather fair or stormy?
Is there a Fast Food Palace serving loaves and fishes?
Are there security angels to oust intruders,
Illegal imps and demon asylum seekers?
The ladder is ancient.
At its rickety feet Dragons and skinheads sleep,
Palaces tumble, myths abandoned weep.

sheena blackhall

Jacob's Ladder, Sidmouth, Noon

It's hot as a blacksmith's forge.
A Union Jack droops at the end of its tether,
A sloughed skin.

Scallop-shell indents
Of fingers toying with architecture
Belong to the Lord of the sandcastle.

Ancient slots in the rocks
Fill with today's Channel.
The sea is wide and blue.
Everyone faces the water
As if expecting Neptune
To step ashore, bringing a lobster grill on a silver tray,
With lemon sorbet for afters.

A little girl, her bum two scoops of flour,
Looks down surprised
At two new sea-spray anklets;
Curtains of flaxen hair dropp round her cheeks

Half boy, half fish,
Up to his belly button in delight,
A splashing toddler tries to quell the ocean.

It is on its best behaviour,
It is showing its Sunday face

When bells and drums fall silent in their cases,
When pipes and fiddles return to reeds and staves,
When night shuts evening's eye, down Jacob's ladder
Will Moon send pearls and silver into the waves
To hire the piper who plays a lullaby,
Soft and gentle as wings that hush and hover,
Cool as milk that slips down a girl's white thigh
An hour after the act of passion's over?

sheena blackhall

Journey To The Amitobha Buddha, Forres

A fox lay on the tarmac,
Back curled like a hen's feather,
Foraging paws stopped in their urgent tracks.
Dead on a full belly -
Snapped like a twig by a quick car,
A punch bag thudded onto the cat's eyes.

His delicate pointed face was bright with dew.
Round a narrow bend the road stretched wide;
Autumn burned in flames,
Where an eagle guzzled the wine of a stilled hare,
His raptor's feathers flounced like a grandee's ruff,
His great beak skinning the fur.

Under dripping shrubs,
Through webs of trees, leaves fluttered down like snow.

Journey's end.
A house of stairs and hush
Where Amitobha sat, the sunset Buddha
Above two peacock plumes, framed by a window
Holding day's dead fires.
Flowers in his hand, warm candles at his feet,
The shrine-cloth coiled beneath in folds of blood.

And then, the muffled drum-beat of a tabor,
The mantra like a pulse, lub-lub, lub-lub.
An owl rose from silent woods,
Opened his wings and scattered stars like jewels.

sheena blackhall

Lazarus

Only a god could pull a stunt like that,
Like plucking a plumb from a pie past its sell-by date.
There are lines which should not be crossed,
Lairs should be left unopened.

Death made living flesh is miraculous
But also barbarous.
It doesn't seem right... like trawling the night
And catching the moon in a bucket, just for the hell of it.

Quite a show, as spiritual parlour tricks go.
But what of the gape in the ground?
What becomes of the status quo
When the dead start shillyshallying to and fro?

What if, to your surprise the dead did rise,
Long after time had chosen to erase them?
Would you look them in the eyes?
Would you turn and face them?

(`All things arise and bloom in their time, and then they return to their root. Their returning is peace.'
The Tao Te Ching XVI)

sheena blackhall

Learning Curve

Don't phone.
I won't be in.
I am learning to be a corpse.

Just now, I'm foetal
A beaker body, with knees drawn up to chin.
I am practising the ultimate in post-natal.

But when you're dead what happens to your head?
Where thoughts roll round inside the skull like marbles?
Do they leak out, like veins that have been bled?

I am learning to be a corpse.
I want to know.
When I am dead, where will my daydreams go?

sheena blackhall

Leftovers

A litterbin of the past, one dented tartan tin
Holds a key to a something no-one quite remembers:
Buttons of Sunday jacket,
Saturday's dance dress -
There is also a red pencil, Braemar in golden letters,
Stamped on its side.

Buttons, key, pencil,
Have never grown fatter or thinner.

The buttons have lost their owners, but do not mourn them;
In the manner of buttons they are quite hard, quite brazen.

One button shone from my brother's blazer pocket.
Over the thunderous organ, his long, white fingers
Pressing keys, releasing hymns from silence,
The button reflecting the brass from altar and aisle.
The other is incognito.

The key may have opened amazement's door
To a china can-can dancer's jerky steps.

The pencil stamped Braemar in golden letters
Ran a red light one night in father's conscience;
Scribbled a passionate letter to a lover.

Leftovers, when we're dead, outlive us all.

sheena blackhall

Moon

Moon slumps like a hammock,
All mooned out
With lovers loving him,
Lunatics blaming him,
Owls hoot-hooting at him,
Mars and Jupiter calling him little squirt

Tomorrow, Moon
Will grow four legs,
Two horns, a tail,
And jump across a cow.

sheena blackhall

Moustaches

Dali's moustaches
Were tuned in to the stars.

Hitler's was merely a typewriter ribbon
Over the clacking steel of his words
Europe in mourning underneath his nose.

The laughing Chevalier's
Was choc-a-block with beer
Whilst Kitchener's was kitsch.

How like hedges grow the world's moustaches!
They hibernate in winter Icicle bound and brittle.
Soup creeps up their stems
Pea green, tomato,
Even Chinese lentil
Abseils along their strands

Hercule Poirot's was stiff
As a Welsh Life Guard
But a mandarin's dangled like liquorice
Sly and Oriental
Eminently knottable, suckable,
Machiavellian.

Doused in drams
Moustaches curl and bristle
Like porcupines
Or walruses on parade

Moustaches of the world,
We salute you
Razors are sharpening a little to the left
The sinister side...
Droop, droop,
You may evolve into a beard.

sheena blackhall

New Cottage Industry: The Egg-Head

In the writers' farm I am free-range;
I don't want my eggs in one basket,
I want to be broody in lark's houses,
In hare's forms.

I want to produce triangular eggs that bounce,
Or square ones with sky-blue yolks.

I want to bark instead of cluck,
And maybe have metal feathers.
And at the end, please,
A lion stamped on my poems
To prove they are up to scratch.

sheena blackhall

New Deer Sheep

To my surprise, a sheep's eye
Is not round. The pupil is quite triangular,
Almost angular.

So when it looks at me
What does a ewe see?

I must look like a pyramid
Or a wandering wedge.

My cousin, its master, the farmer,
Must look like a chisel edge
Coming to chip it out of its Cubist flock.

A New Deer ewe's a woolly, walking block
With triangular eyes...
A fleece of crumbly chalk

Amongst acres of permed sheep,
A field of woolly leapers,
A grizzled matriarch stamps,
Stands her ground like a tug at anchor.
Her flanks, butted by lambs,
Her back, mounted by rams.

Her eyes click off and on
Like two car side lights;
Her woolly heart is fluttering like a fan
At this new smell on legs so near her young.

Her lamb leaps two feet happy.
New Deer, a melting moment in March,
Spring on four legs has sprung.

sheena blackhall

Old Woman

My udders are dry.
I will never chew the grass of the lush future.

I am a washer of pots,
A stroker of cats.

I am a Maypole stripped of all its ribbons.
The red stigmata has withered between my thighs.
My womb is a walnut,
Age has dried it out like a dead coal.

Before the mercury drops in the empty hall,
I may grow lavender to hide old woman smells.
The grandfather clock that stands on the stairs to
Heaven Chimes eleven.

Almost, it is the hour of the mole,
The velvet tunneller who'll greet my soul.
Perhaps they'll keep my memory in a bowl.

sheena blackhall

Orange

Orange is
Slogans, fists and drums,
Frightened women closing windows and doors,
Children snatched from the street.

Orange is
Xmas morning.
A window of frosted stars,
A tangerine like a huge carbuncle
Down at the toe of a woolly sock,
Its coat tugged quickly off
Like a fat lady's on a hot day.

Orange is a
A magnificent mincing cat
Walking across the room,
Its tail erect and waving.

Orange is marmalade toast,
Slowly melting into bread
While roasted coffee pours.

Orange is rioting petticoats
In a hot Brazilian fiesta.

Orange is
Pips afloat in the moat of a squeezer,
Launched in a squirt to soothe a streaming cold.

Orange is
A tease.
Not as easily won
As a Cox's Pippin,
It requires foreplay to get its juices flowing.

Orange is
Cheap and plastic, a Woolworth's picnic cup,
Or Buddhist cool in meditation robes.

sheena blackhall

Pebbles, Waves, Gulls

Blisters of pebbles rise through sun-tanned sand,
Waves topple like dynasties.
Tonnage of salt, slippage of tide,
The wreck of an April day
Melting into the strand in gritty shards.
Scabby with barnacles, ghost-posts rise from the spray
Where gulls like crosses flex angelic wings.

sheena blackhall

Persley Walled Garden

a walled garden surrounded by:
one deer of an excitable disposition
three vandals in top of the range trainers.
a castleful of OAPs
a constipation of traffic
flown over by:

arthritic pigeons with iron hinges
a plethora of planes
a sparrow which unaccountably dropped its nest
smelling of:

four star petrol
assorted herbs

slithered upon by:
a spaghetti of worms
an ooze of snails
with:

rising damp in the lawn
which is shaved to a number one
one coy tesco bag tucked under a hedge's wing
a concrete pre-cast fountain with nozzle implants
a thrush enjoying a cold collation of Red Thai chicken salad
a rose's foreskin pulled back red and crinkly,
releasing a single drop
of wobbly
dew

and all marked out like a freemason's apron,
measured and made precisely,
like the Sun King's parterres.
live workers tribute to dead workers
resting in peace after the final whistle.

A solitary
ant
crawls over a bag of crisps.

sheena blackhall

Scraps From A Wedding Album

Blue square from a bridsmaid's underskirt;
Two bricks from the left wall of a granite church,
Predominantly grey, shot through with silver;
A third of a cloud with one bird stalled in it;
One guest's hat of multi-coloured feathers;
Half a bride's bouquet in quick-film petals;
The tip of a minister's scrubbed pink earlobe.
A cousin's sliced off laughter;
Two nostrils white as icing on the cake;
The half moon of a torn sun;
Two sunbeams knitting ladders by a font;
Aunt Janet's suede gloves drumming on a pew,
Costing more than an arm and a leg.

sheena blackhall

Sea-Washed

If oceans of shark and fin,
Torn rigging and splintered prow,
Should suddenly widen, sea pour everywhere -

If the hairbreadth crack in the side of all that's real
Should swamp the cosy world of the here and now,
Watcher, high and dry on the gallery floor,
Would you simply stare?

What if the canvas tears?
The breakneck tide
Come tumbling out from the frame,
And fathoms of gales,
Would you hear the screech of whales
As your eyes roll back and your dry mouth fills with brine?

sheena blackhall

Shopping Trolley

I am a shopping trolley.
I am hooked on pushers
They strip the shelves like locusts.

Bikers zoom me round with granite fists
Pensioners slump over me like caterpillars
Babies are dumped in me like pupae
I whizz through plastic jungles of bananas
To the surprisingly friendly cackle of plastic hens

I am a shopping trolley I am heavily into Zen.
I am a metal meditator
One day I may levitate
Over the drinks aisle
Frightening the alkies.

I am a water carrier,
This bottle on my spars
Contains the following:
(Please read before swallowing)
Calcium quinine magnesium
Chloride sodium potassium
Sulphate nitrate
If you've a dicky prostate
Avoid this mineral water at all costs.
It harbours aluminium and iron
The ideal drink for
Thirsty horse shoes
Parched park railings
Dehydrated nests of non-stick pans

sheena blackhall

Show Me Your Shining Teeth

Splatter-red droplets
Crimson my snow-white thoughts.
So empty a cold mind, you wouldn't believe.

Wolf, I even wish
You'd jump between my ears,
Squat in my inner landscape,
Show me your shining teeth

sheena blackhall

Sleep Fast, We Need the Pillows (Traditional Polish Saying)

I am sleeping as fast as I can,
So as not to wear out the pillow.

Pillows are precious;
This pink one was mail-order,
Bought by my mother, now deceased.
Deliberately nylon, so it never creased.

Half of a matching set,
Except they never matched
Was this one his or hers?

It'll outlive us all.
Immune to disease, to moth,
The ultimate mort-cloth.

If I unpicked it, what secrets would it tell?
Pillows are fickle, shameless.
Promiscuous,
Pillows lie down with anyone.

When I, too, am dead,
Oh pillow, who then will hold you close?
Whose dreams will run like rivers
Round your frills?

sheena blackhall

Spider

She has drawn up the portcullis of her legs,
Like a hunting sea anemone.

The flimsy artefact that is her web
Is slung like a pirate's hammock,
Like a net that waits
For the delicious shudder
When the high wire artist falls.

Debris of a daddy-longlegs
Lies on the stone ledge
Under her live-in larder,
Expelled from Miss Arachne's Mincing mouth,
Surplus to current requirements -
Like unhinged meccano,
Nuts and bolts tastefully removed.
The legs are the wheels
Of a stalled car
In the breaker's yard,
Disjointed.
Going nowhere.

sheena blackhall

The Artist's Store

Faces turned to the wall,
Cold-shouldering the world,
Squares of canvas
Lean against the dark,
Stretched to the limit
Blank, blind, anonymous
As stones. Cut adrift from easels,
Stacked in racks;
Like an orchestra's brass section
When it's silent, All taps and pipes,
U-bends and gaping mouths
Ugly as plumbing.

Each canvas-back is bare as a scraped pig,
But turn the pictures round,
You're hooked! They dazzle you; with their
Quicksands of delight,
They swallow you up and spit you out like pips.

In the artists' store
Wonder hides behind frames like the sun that sleeps
In an angels' folded wings.
Magic sleeps, like the fire
That flames from an actor
His hero-greasepaint on.

Something miraculous happens when paint meets canvas,
Old as caves, deep as dawn.

sheena blackhall

The Dying Room

On the first day she was borderline.
It was white and sunny, the Dying Room
They gave me a rich tea biscuit the colour of clay
With weak tea, served in a hospital mug.

I sat in silence by her silent bed.

On the second day
They asked my permission
To withdraw life support
'You wouldn't want your mother
To be a vegetable, ' a young nurse said

With cheeks like fiery apples,
I gave my agreement
To quicken my mother's going.

I sat in silence by her silent bed.

The drips were drawn away
I remember the wheels of the trolley
They gave me strong tea
And a piece of cherry cake.

Her head rolled on the pillow
An old turnip, yellow, with threads of grey.
I poured banalities into her shrivelled ears
Late rain on stony ground.

On the third day her lips moved.
She left the Dying Room
Came back to a sort of life.

I sat in silence by her silent bed.

sheena blackhall

The Heron

Cement is lashed to a frenzy by showers of rain,
Envelopes sigh like fans at the postman's knock,
Piglets scream like kettles
As the mash bin announces its coming;
Beads grow incandescent beneath a chandelier,
And have you noticed how cash-cards
Twitch when tills start to ring?

Gatherings, meetings, events,
Have their effects
In crowded rooms.
There are definite modes of behaviour.
Definite ways of being in the world.

I learned mine
From the heron I saw
By the long pool last midsummer.

Shifting from one leg to the other,
I watch the silver river of trays flow by.
I dip and sip,
Dip and sip
On the edge, on the cool periphery.
Conversations rise like mayflies,
Drift in snatches over the busy rooms.

The door is near
The yellow evening
Waits outside like a taxi;
Waits outside with the trees
All rustling green

sheena blackhall

The Hiccupping Directory

Anderson, A Anderson, B
And- And- And- And
Anderson, C.
Cruickshank, B
Cruickshank, D
Cruick-Cruick-Cruick-Cruick Cruickshank, V

Macafferty, F
Macafferty, G
Mac-aff-aff-afferty Macafferty, T.

Jones, F
Jones, I
Jo-o-o-ones Jo-ones, Y.

Williams, A Williams, P Will-ill-illiams Williams, V

sheena blackhall

The Lambing

Like grey fur boulders rabbits huddle down,
Ears pressed back like sleeves,
Raiding the grassy larder of the fields.

The car goes cobbling over
Ruts and pots of pasture,
Stops and fixes the ewe
In its twinned spotlight.

Under the cold stars,
Stuck between push and pant,
She's hard by the dyke,
Womb filled with lamb
Jammed in the breech position.

This is not an occasion
For caution, for gentle introduction,
For 'How do you dos';
A flying tackle topples her off
Her four black matronly pegs,
A capsized table, wearing a face of fleece.

Her master thrusts his hand into the bloody darkness
Closing around his arm like a mouth.
His sinews tauten.
One pull jerks out a slimey, slithery flop,
All dangly legs and head
Swung like a pendulum over the racing ground.

He cleans its mouth of muck,
Lays it down,
Kneads its sides like bellows.

The baa when it comes is beautiful;
Thin and reedy, ancient and new.

Here is craft at work,
Satisfactory as sliding glass into wooden grooves
Properly fitted, every corner plumb;
Like setting a ship in motion down a slipway.

sheena blackhall

The Light-House Keeper's Sighting

From my glass-house on the cliff It's a sheer drop
Into the icy seaweeds of the fjord.

This morning I clearly saw five sheep,
Against all recommended procedures,
Against recognised animal practices,
Against the clock,
SwimmIng boldly and strongly out towards the horizon.

Each fleece was sodden with brine,
Each tough black face was nosing forcefully forward.

The lead sheep floundered first;
Spun by the ocean,
Round it turned as if on a roasting spit.
One by one the others sank and drowned,
Five pieces of flotsam bobbing like buoys.
One slim black leg was pawing a wave
As if it hoped to climb it, having a whale of a time.

I was a fly on the wall,
Watching from the porthole
High on the fissured cliff, half dead - or half alive -
But safe, safe, from the tentacles of the ocean,
Its seaweed swaying coldly to and fro.

sheena blackhall

The Marriage Of Blue And Yellow

It was a primal love-match:
The Navy-blue officer
Walking out of the ultramarine of the sea
Holding a white balloon marked 'Cloud'
Gave a blue sigh that escaped like a small blue bubble.

He spotted her right away
On the yellow sand,
The girl in the yellow bikini,
Golden hair cascading down her back.

They went to the fair together.
All the golden goldfish
Circled their bowls
As they looped the loop,
As they shared their first wet kiss.

Everyone came to the wedding
Poppy holding a posy of blushing rose,
Reverend Black, his bible edged in red.
There was no going back.

Now little green children
Dance down watery fields.

sheena blackhall

The Prosthesis Speaks

I'm reliable,
Not pliable.
I never tan,
Rain is water
Off my back.

I enjoy, however,
The laying on of oils.

I never lose an ounce
Or gain a pound.

I am very supportive,
Programmed to serve.

I have no secret agenda,
No axe to grind;
Metal fatigue's
My only niggling angst.

My cousin Henrietta
Spends her life in a hammock
Lazy hussy!
She's Mrs Alfonso-Parker's Silicon implant.

She has been fondled
By a peer of the realm
And a short-sighted postman.

Fortunately,
She's quite a tactile creature.

sheena blackhall

The Stag, Cernunnos

His coming was so quiet,
Lightly, lightly,
Stepping between two firs.
I thought he had grown from the air
A cloud-beast,
Sailing between two regions,
Child of the toad-brown bog,
The cauldron, mist,
Whose vipers' tails
Curled slithery down the hill.

He stood, a living quest,
In the dying sun.
He was brideless, brideless,
I could have kissed
The ground that held him;
The riven veins of his antlers
Ran with fire. Like amethyst
His eyes. No Nature's plaything -
That much compelled my reverence.

His crown, an out-stretched tree
Bark-branching, horned in gold,
Embraced the sky.

He was a king, certainly.
After his silent going, I
Was leaderless, leaderless.
The space where he had been
Was empty. A lake of loss
No footprint marked his passing,
He took his shadow with him
Like a cross.

It was as if a sage
Carried his knowledge,
Peerless, peerless,
Into another age.

sheena blackhall

Tree

TREE as a name
Doesn't grow as a tree does.
It does not sprout letters in Spring
Nor lose them in Winter

Birds do not sing In the branches of TREE
Nor do they nest
In the white spaces of a page.

Clouds do not rest
On the tops of
The printed word.

The stars do not shine
Through the print

Nor does the snow
Steal up the stems of ink
Soft, like a dove breathing.

sheena blackhall

Washing

Eek! I am a sheet of the line,
Yawning.

Wumf! I am a pillow
Fawning into the billows of the wind.

I am a linen shirt
Like an American flag

Flump!
I am a quilt-slip,
Playing fast and loose with air.

Whump!
I am a tablecloth In full sail,
Suddenly caught by the tail.

Slump!
We are the washing.
Tossing.

sheena blackhall

Waterbabes

Jean Sim, a clippie, dressed in navy-blue,
Shouldered her punch as if it was a gun,
Her netted hair caught tightly in a bun.

She'd lift her pocket flap, tap out a fag,
Take a long drag, quick-sip a mug of tea,
Never missed the ashtray.
Snibbed her smoke, was thrifty,
Always looked the other side of fifty.

One year she took her leave of Christmas cheer
Trussed in a belted coat, with red beret
And matching scarf and gloves from Aunty Joan,
Zipped up her fur lined boats (the frost cut to the bone) ,
Left by the back door, cutting across the fields.

Finding the note too late, her father sought her,
A railway worker, shouting his daughter's
Name across the snow.

Sharp frost that held the furrows in a vice
Warned that minds too, can chill and turn to ice.
Storm brewing darkly over the woods,
The narrow burn was raging,
Thinking itself a torrent, thinking itself a Tiber -
Pretentious, piddling puddle, three feet deep,
Where Jean stepped in and laid her down to sleep.

For weeks she stalked my dreams, hands on lap,
Her clippie's uniform immaculate,
The raging burn roaring across her face,
Unreachable by censure or disgrace.
Her father's knuckles wrung his tweed cap raw.

One summer the smiling river pulled me down,
And played with me as if I'd been a toy.
No kindly tree stretched down its boughs to save,
Forget-me-nots watched blankly from the waves;
I could have been a stone thrown in by boys.
Till, struggling, I broke free.

I love to watch the river, find it haunting
Its moods and sudden eddies so enchanting;
I dabble with it, toe-dip, do not enter
I am no Jean, could never go dead centre.

sheena blackhall

Wedding Party

The bride is a young dragon,
Exquisite, with eyes of deepest jade;
George the dragon-slayer is her groom.

His lips are working up to a bon mot,
See how his armour glitters above the bridal cake!

He will slay her affection slowly,
He will turn her fire to ash,
He will feed her to the Lady of the Lake.

sheena blackhall

Wolf Prints

I write in a cold climate.
There may be a moon,
There may not. There may be snow,
There may not.
I write from need, from no-need.
I write from joy from no-joy.
My words are stones,
Skimming ancient water.
Finned poems,
Five fat salmon leap
Up the ladder from wave, to sky, to page.
The Wolf-King pads through mist, through no-mist,
Weaving in and out
Of the mind's dark chamber.
I sit by the bank unmoving,
Watching for wolf prints,
Waiting to catch the drips
From the salmon's slap-dash tail.

sheena blackhall