

The background of the cover is a photograph of a rocky coastline. The upper portion shows a steep cliff face with distinct horizontal layers of rock, some appearing light grey or white, others darker. The lower portion shows a beach covered in smooth, rounded pebbles of various sizes and colors, including grey, brown, and blue. The overall scene is natural and rugged.

Openings 24

The Poetry Society of the Open University

An anthology of poems by
Open University Poets

2007

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The Poetry Society of the Open University

Annual Anthology of

OU Poets

2007

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Introduction

OU Poets is the Poetry Society of the Open University, it is open to any student or staff member, past or present. At the time of going to press there are about 120 members from all over the UK, with some in Ireland and in mainland Europe.

Members of the society submit poems to a magazine, which is produced 5 times a year, each one having a different voluntary editor. The magazine is not a publication per se and is strictly produced by the members for the members. There is a section for comment and criticism of members' work.

At the end of the year, members are asked to vote for the 20 poems they most appreciated from the 5 magazines produced that year. Those with the most votes, allowing for no more than one poem per poet, appear in the following year's issue of *Openings*. The anthology is as broad-based as the society itself and reflects the varied backgrounds, interests and tastes of the members.

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Jenny Hamlett

To My Dear Cells

I did not mean this to happen.
Just a few of you like children

at a birthday party became over excited,
started to show off - it ended in tears.

My dear cells I am so sorry,
such small mistakes - you made

and now it's all destruction,
the innocent dying with the terrorists

but this is war, I'm afraid.
Your host must bear some of the blame.

I worried too long and too hard, forgot
to look for sunlight on the grass

rippling beneath a green cathedral of leaves.
Dear cells please forgive me. I am trying to change.

Adrian Green

Afraid of the Silence

The night
the chops aren't there

the embouchure's gone
or arthritic fingers
snatch discords
from the keys

marking time
and counting out the bars
while music flows
from someone else's horn

or sitting-in
with someone else's band
until there's no-one
willing to risk
the cracked top C
and broken counterpoint.

Afraid of the night
the spotlight moves

and rests go on
and on.

Published in "Read The Music" Issue 6.

Beryl Myers

Fountain

is
love
like the
sand that fountains
from dunes on
a windy day
to grit and
dumb the
tongue
blind
eyes,
hide
the
T
r
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t
h
?

Sally James

Everlasting Love

I am glad I knew all of you
like the curve of your spine
the way your little toe curled
and your thighs had that strength
that only comes from exercise.
I am not sorry I noticed
the bald patch you tried to hide
underneath the sprouting grey
or the way your lashes curled
and flickered when I touched a nerve.
I am glad I looked into your eyes
saw the intermingling of brown and blue,
the twinkle I provoked when I made you happy
and the tears that flowed when you were sad.
I am relieved I heard your voice, gentle in laughter
and strong in passion. I am happy
because I noticed your mouth,
the curve of your smile and the way
your lips felt soft to the touch of mine.
I am glad I knew all of you
like a woman should know a man.
So that now, long after you have gone
I can sense the perfume of you
feel your spirit locked into mine
your shadow by my side, and the rhythm
of you ebbing and flowing.
Because of this you will always be with me
your ashes never become ashes
your dust never back to dust.

Dave Etchell

Culloden

Only heather, bare
and the strict drum,
and the raw pipes leaping.
Long lived memories,
unforgotten wrongs,
and the proud ones, sleeping.

Ringed by savage clouds
squat the sullen stones
In their vigil, unspeaking;
With love's posys laid
on the clan graves
under wild skies
ever weeping.

David Blaber

LOG

060409

Compare and contrast,
she might have said, showing me
both radiographs.

It's stabilised. The tumour
floats high in the lung, dead white

in the silvery
rib cage, like a man-of-war
becalmed, but waiting.

060410

Of course, it's a joke,
but my doctor, aspiring
to philosophy,

says my problem, really, is
I don't know when I will die.

I admire his style,
so much I forget to ask
What's new? Where's the help?

060813

Meanings slip away,
liquid, ungraspable, like
fish through my fingers,

as day spills after day from
my net of allotted time,

leaving behind them
small vortices of regret
I cannot define.

Eileen Ward

Snail Paradise

After the storm,
earthy smell clings to air,
all is still.
Rain drops on summer blooms
glisten
like sequins on ball gowns.
Snail trails adorn damp pathways
snaking away from remains
of juicy young plants
on which those greedy snails have feasted,
gorging themselves,
so they hardly fit their shells -
take-away meals
for hungry blackbirds.

J. A. Bosworth

Separation

It is the little things that hurt the most.
The memories by unexpected clues
Unbidden roused; the cherished books; the sad,
Abandoned toys; the furniture and clothes
For which there's no more use; these cause the pangs.

We can endure the absence - if we must -
Of one from whom, once, parting was such pain;
For early love may fade, or it may change
To something altogether new. (At least,
For now, there is no bickering reproach,
No double-meaning talk, no bitter rows).

But how to reconcile yourself to lose
Your child, the hope of all those future years?
It is the little things that hurt the most.

Bronwen Vizard

Christmas List

What can I buy for Ina?
I gave her soap bubbles last year.
Would Jennifer like some sparklies?
She often looks far too austere.

What about John and his brother?
They always say thank you to port.
My present list is quite endless
Just reading it leaves me distraught.

A catalogue came this morning,
Brimful of intriguing ideas,
Gifts for each one of the family,
So expensive they drive one to tears.

I've remembered a box in the attic
Full of fancy gifts gained in past years.
With curios and C.Ds unwanted,
And a toy cat who sings songs and purrs.

Would Elizabeth like the blue mittens?
A shawl for Ann would be great
And John and Suzette will be glad of a set
Of two cups, two saucers and plates.

I've a fine horsey mascot for Richard
But did he give it me last time round?
Recycling suggests many pitfalls.
One needs care on this tough battleground.

David Gildner

Fireworks

He never got involved
Never brought the
Rockets and wizzbangs
Never helped with the guy,
Letting her supervise the
Night, checking mittens and scarves
Making sure sparklers were held
Well away from faces.
He never lit fuses,
Before standing well back
Or went back to check damp duds,
Sitting quietly by the backdoor
As if waiting for something,
Of course that was before we knew
Anything about D-Day Dodgers,
Incoming 88s and the fireworks
That was Monte Casino.

Helen Harvey

Tongue-tied

We arrange to meet:
coffee in the metropolis. You're late
and as I sit and wait, I wonder
when we'll kiss.

Will it be here in the chilly street,
toe to toe, fingertips on elbows,
a chaste exchange of cheeks?

Will we stand?

Will you take my hand,
or slip your arm around my waist,
soft brush of lips;

how will you taste?

Or maybe it will be
in the cafe as we sit

knees touching, arm by arm?

Will you let me rest my palm
against your face

or trace the softness of your mouth,
the line of your chin,
the warm skin

at the base of your neck?

Will our first kiss be there,
or in some quiet place,
later still?

Will you draw me to you,
hip to hip,

tongue tip slow on tongue tip,
with fingers tangled in my hair,
slipping gently into love

as heat casts off the frozen air?

Will it be there?

- You're here.

You startle me from wondering;
You smile and ask what we should do.

My heart burns. I stand and turn
away, too shy now
to kiss you.

Jim Lindop

YPRES

*"My soul fainteth for thy salvation... ..
for I am become like a bottle in the .smoke."
(Psalm 119: 81-3)*

I became a bottle in the smoke;
a creature of the smoke,
indistinguishable from the smoke.

I was the rag on the twisting wire;
you smell the rust of me
in zig-zag furrows cut for sprouts.

I am the scrap of mildewed leather
spied among the loosestrife,
where madcap thrushes delve for worms.

I am the mud-blackened baccy tin
of messages of hope
and picturing the Queen and King.

I am the shard of white, white bone
that picks the teeth of harrows
and makes the man work-slow and sad.

My soul fainted for salvation
from the smoke, the wire, the din,
the yellow-death, the mud, the blood,

the blood, the bloody, bloody, blood.

Alice Harrison

Holiday Romance

She clutched him in the yielding dunes
and in her room under the eaves
where he slept while she made beds,
cleared tables, emptied bins,
where she brought him fruit and rolls
and wrapped pats of butter.

She traced his shoulder blades and rib cage
and gazed into his fringed eyes.
She ignored her reading list
and the girls she'd come with.
He rarely went home to his mother
and his old dog.

This was real life, she thought;
when her friends left she stayed
but her parents arrived the next day
with faces of thunder and contempt.
There were negotiations and compromises
and promises and farewells.

Back at university she found
his letters were infrequent and petulant
and - frankly - illiterate.

Peter Godfrey

Borough Market

The homeless man
Who stares at us
From the closeness
Of our vasty distance
Observes our meal.
He is without;
We, insiders.
Haves and Have Nots.
It is always so.
It was when this market began
It shall be whenever it ends.
Between us the window
The Great Divide
Is impassable
Like some natural waste.
We ate and talked
Until his stare and silence
Spreads about our table.
He has nothing.
We have everything.
Embarrassment joins us
We smile stiffly.
The homeless man
Dressed in old clothes
Stares at us
Pressing guilt
Upon this gathering.
Do tears run from the eyes
Of the stone angels
Who live nearby?
On the walls
Of Southwark Cathedral?
They have borne witness
To so many like him.
But crying is not enough.
And our feast turns sour.

John Starbuck

Birthday September 2006

I shall compare you to a summer's day,
For summer's when you truly come alive.
All that is dark now burns away
As surely as lavender driftings thrive
To feed late bees, as honeysuckle, may
And quince propelled their sisters to the hive
In early spring. The air hangs heavy, sweet,
And wrapped around us, all claggy lionsmanes.
We'd be in fogs of candyfloss, too great a treat,
If bees left contrails like cloudbirthing planes,
Their undercarriage sugar-frosted feet,
Their luggagestraps of nectar welcome chains.
The days of summer shorten, but remain as warm
As my love, renewable as next year's swarm.

Hilary Mellon

Fools Gold

We are not fools and this is not true gold
Ignore its name for it is but a token
of how I feel each time that you take hold
of me and leave my shiny surface broken
and all the glittering lights of me laid bare
Your voice, your words, the way you laugh, your rhyme
all cause my spark, my glow, my blaze, my flare
when we ignite on wires through space and time

And now that we are close enough to touch
I place this metal in your open hand
It glistens like my tears and says too much
yet not enough. But you will understand
that this is my bright soul and I am it
which melds with yours till all the edges fit

Rosa Thomas

Nothing is fixed

the lightest breeze
ruffles the outline of full-grown trees.
On rooftops resting birds form a living frieze;
disturbed, they tumble into limitless sky,
patched, cross-hatched as clouds sail by.

Nothing is fixed, over age-old walls
the ivy creeps; on smooth grass a petal falls.
Over stony beaches the ocean crawls
and the pebble mosaic alters twice a day
as sea- birds and sailing craft speckle the bay.

Nothing is fixed, each well-known smile
may change to a frown in a little while
as shadows obliterate time from a sundial.
Every second a soul leaves or enters the earth,
in some far galaxy a new star comes to birth.

Ian Campbell

Suddenly aware of the melding shadows

Such dreams we had,
Such innocence,
all boulevards and avenues,
not one-way streets and cul-de-sacs,
not then at any rate.

Now we are blind-folded,
hostages to fate,
stuck fast in the dark of time
shrouded in our retrospect,
and circumstantial hindsight,
deliberating on a past
too far away to touch,
to smell, to hear,
too far away to see, except in memory
or dreams, and by the way...

...such dreams we have,
such innocence.

Cate Cody

Hidden Orchards

These trees are old and crooked
They are hunched like withered bones,
Callused, brittle and haggard.
Yet their decor is ornate;
Damsons akin to amethysts,
And heavy, laden with gold
Are the armfuls of apples.
Only the mild grazing sheep
And the humming buzzing flies
Know of these jewelled treasures;
Their charms are set in a wealth
Of tall grasses, woods and hills.

GJ Pledger

Deafness

It's hard to listen in silence
To the noiseless thrush's voice.
To watch the mouthing children's play
With shouting joke and song.

It's hard to hear the non-rounds
Of tumbling church-tower chimes.
To image the laughter in pitches
Of revellers passing along.

It's hard to imagine the souging wind
The roaring tides and wind-swept shingle.
To describe the sound that is no sound
Of voices, seen not heard.

It's hard to live in a silent world
Not to enter the lives of others.
But to live on the edge of soundless sound
To gaze from afar at things for ever.

Andrew W. Pye.

Mister Eliot

I live alone, I live alone.
I sit at dusk by silent phones.
Should I presume, should I presume
to have some lilacs in my room?
I am afraid, I am afraid,
of butler, cook and second maid.
To eat the peach? To eat the peach?
The fruit-bowl's there, but out of reach.
I've thinning hair, I've thinning hair.
Short back and sides will leave me bare.

I do not know, I do not know
this man called Michelangelo.

Should I begin, should I begin
to leave the shell and start to sin?
Will there be time, will there be time
to kiss a girl, or take to crime?
Oh, do I dare? Oh, do I dare?
To run through streets in underwear?
I'll take the air! I'll take the air!
No, fog is thick and I am scared!

I do not know, I do not know
these men called Mike and Angelo.

I come and go, I come and go.
Both here and there. Then to and fro.
I'm counting spoons, I'm counting spoons.
I'll have the final total soon.
I'm growing old, I'm growing old.
I'll wear my uncut foreskin~~rolled~~.

Michael Mitchell

Wings of the Blue Butterfly

That morning it had rained,
And so it watered the day.
And in the afternoon,
He heard the sound of the train.
And he travelled with the train,
Because his mind could fly.
Flying far above his pain,
And above the highest sky.
And he had become his dream,
On the wings of the blue butterfly.

Geoff Hattersley

The Only Son At The Fish 'n' Chip Shop

He lived with his mother till he was forty-five
and no one was allowed to touch his head.

He worked on a novel for twenty years
without writing a word. He didn't like people

who wrote novels. He often drank. One glass of beer
was too many, two glasses weren't enough.

Travel brochures were as far as he went.
A football match, one time. He often said

'Why would anyone want to think about a potato?'
He painted his door with nobody's help.

Al Campbell

The Only Son At The Pub

His Dad was Polish and had escaped
in 39 when the Nazis took over his country.
He had seen a lot of war and wanted nothing
but a quiet life. He kept an allotment and
grew champion potatoes. When he felt good
he would ruffle the boy's hair saying, "keep
shmile-ink, boy." The son thought the old man
a fool with his thick accent & painful accordion
music, who never took him to football games,
or out on family holidays, but spent all his
spare time at his garden. One day he would do
it all so differently, write a book or something.
When the old man died, he missed the funeral
but stayed on at the pub till closing time.

(With thanks to Geoff Hattersley for his original)

The character in Geoff's poem reminded me very much of an odd ball, quirky friend of mine who has a number of similar traits. He is a clever man who never really accomplished much in life. He never married, though I know that he has two children, a boy and a girl, by two different women. His father left Poland, and joined the Army in Britain. He was wounded in some scrape with a Panzer and lost two fingers on his right hand; he was the closest thing to a full fledged hero of World War II, that I ever met. True he kept an allotment and raised grand crops of sweet corn, cabbages, carrots and other vegetables. Also true that the son was an only child who lived with his parents till after his father died. He, the son, is very opinionated and tends toward OTT statements and an excess of drinking and smoking. His favourite restaurant is the Fish-n-Chip shop, where he likes chatting up the girl behind the counter.

As to formal elements in the poem, I haven't gone for anything overly clever; rather I have used much the same informal, prose poem style as in Geoff's original though mine is a sonnet of sorts. I like Geoff's line breaks and use of enjambment that leave ones imagination hanging, as in the line, "He often drank. One glass of beer" and continues on the next line, "was too many, two glasses weren't enough." He uses a number of these almost as separate paragraphs each containing a topic and full statement, but running from one into another; the meaning in the "travel brochures" line running into the following on "football matches". It makes one wonder about the place of the paragraph in poetry, which I've never heard any comment on. And too, the line about, "thinking about a potato," what a knock out? My friend once rang at two in the morning, kind of drunk and asked, "Can you break a pencil with one finger?" another good, quirky line. I used that potato idea in my poem, though I don't know if he did grow potatoes, but it's true that he had an allotment and spent much time there.

My writing process is one of pen and paper and putting down what comes, letting the mind grip the matter, after a while; I stop and leave it to distil. This is when I put what I have on the word processor, making many alterations, cuts and additions. The long hand phase is vital but is always unfinished. AJC

Ann Alexander

Half Life

The half-grown girl with the small bag packed
and the five pound note and the half-baked plan
plots her escape - *at half-past ten,*
when they're all asleep - I'll do it then -

And is discovered, stopped.

Seventeen, and the bag still packed,
and the fitful sleep on the false friend's floor
and the slow slip slide to the faithless man.
And the running away to the rented flat,
then the running away from even that,
And the running back from city to town
and town to village and back again
where the clueless girl with the half-packed bag
and the ten pound note and the half-baked plan
and the new wrong man, plots her escape.

And is discovered. Stopped.

Roy Rowe

Spitting Into the Wind

No. Don't go away. This isn't one
of those poems that tries to squeeze
a scrotum of expletives into fourteen lines.

We slump in the wardroom, like
washed up wrecks. Nothing to declare,
except stove-in ribs and a conked out pump.
An organ recital with wheezing pipes.
Cracking seasick jokes till salt lips
wear thin.

Trying not to think mine's
the next numbered pin.
Dreading what the final cause might be.
Whether it's a Larkin slow fade,
or a quick pavement trip.

(written in the recovery room after heart surgery)

Phil Craddock

Gone With The Wind

For at least forty years I saw it there
in the same place, on the same shelf
in the same glass-fronted bookcase
which was always to be found in the dining-room
in four successive houses.

It attracted my gaze from a very young age
Its broad spine had yellow and white horizontal stripes
the bold title went across instead of down
and there was a small grey illustration, which I thought looked like a mouse
but was in fact a wind-ruffled Confederate flag.

On picking it out, as I did when older
I noticed the thin, worn, sellotaped cellophane covering
the browned paper edges, mark of numerous thumbings
newspaper clippings tucked into the inside cover
and, on leafing through, a warm, musty smell.

It probably wasn't a first edition
I don't believe Mother acquired it - bought it or was given it
until after she had seen the film
and I don't believe she saw the film until she was twenty
which was more than fifteen years after the book was first published.

She went to the pictures once a week in those days
if not with a boyfriend then on her own
Her diary says she saw the film - on her own; she was between boyfriends
on Tuesday 16th December 1952
She wrote underneath: "Very Good Indeed!"

I had known that it was special to her long before it came on TV
I had heard of Rhett Butler, Scarlett O'Hara
the burning of Atlanta, "Fiddle-dee-dee"
Mammy and Ashley, "Tomorrow's another day"
and "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn!"

I was just twenty-one myself that Christmas it was first shown
Afterwards she told me I could borrow the book and read it
I picked it from the shelf, thumbed it through and felt its weight
I wanted to read it, but it seemed such a huge task
so I carefully put it back.

Nina Mattar

Summer Moon

Night, the moon white faced
heaped a smile upon a dark
earth, we children of the hour
gather as summer warmth
and the present moment
alighting, revive our spirits.
We then edge one by one
into our assembled patch,
giggle, nudge, awaiting
our evening feast, sprinkled
with father's usual magic
tales and mother's usual
magic cake.

Chris Bushill

The Only Son at QPR

(Apologies to Geoff Hattersley)

He sat by me in his crocheted hat.
Not watching the game but writing,
chewing his pen, screwing
his eyes in concentration.
It looked like a novel
but the words didn't flow that day.

Not all game, now I remember.
At half-time he bought a beer,
searching for coins in his leather purse.
Drinking only half, "too much" he muttered,
then rejoined the queue to buy another.
That time he bought chips as well,
said, "what a way to treat a potato",
sat on the terrace and cried.

After the full-time whistle,
out in the darkened street,
"Did you enjoy the game?" I asked.
Shuffling away, looking down, "I'm an artist",
I only seek to inspire my painting", he replied.
"Well, QPR won", I said.

Matthew Macer-Wright

The Chorister's Christmas

They are ringed golden, flames of another world,
the carols I loved when I was a child.
How we sang 'O Come Emmanuel' while
pulling on cassocks and straightening curls,
as, through the vestry door, our voices swirled
around archways of candles and up aisles
laden with winter berries. Our moves streamlined
in pairs to 'Once in Royal'. My eyes blur
over and it is December again,
stealing myself for a month of piped sounds
along shop floors, as commerce prepares the big spend
on seasonal parties and ripped cracker crowns.
If only I could unlock that door, go back
to those songs of pearl, I would pause, breathe in, thank.

Miriam Patrick

Spoons

Being Welsh,
perhaps my ancestors
traded lovespoons to mark
their promises,
betrothals or marriages.
Carved them intricately,
painstakingly and lovingly
by guttering candlelight
in flag-stoned kitchens.

We had nothing of that sort.
Only the glass -stoned ring
you bought me
from a little shop in New Cross.
A hurried wedding on a wet day,
in a ruined suburb.
But after thirty years we sleep
contentedly, curved together,
like spoons.

Anthony Stainer

Heron

Grey heron.

Stepping.

Stepping delicately
like a bankrupt Duchess,
rail thin, a twisted wrangle
of bones, finely feathered
but tattered at the edges.

Elegant though, with that
dagger sharp beak betraying
pterodactyl origins -
(breeding is all in the
Aristocrat world).
Pickings are poor this time
of year in spite of weak
winter sunshine.

And there is danger at
this roadside - give a
sudden flap of your
wings and it could be a
windscreen splat in a
split second - jewels
permanently pawned -

in this place traffic is
no respecter of life,
wild or otherwise.

Tree tops are a better,
safer domain. Or, in this
time of famine, better to
patrol the field, explore
the ditch, but not even

there will the pickings
be rich.

Stewart Earl Emmott

You Who Are My Mother, Ageing Still

In memory of

Olivia Linda Emmott

Born 21 September 1920.

Died 13 January, 2005. Guildford.

You who are my mother, ageing still,
Who suffers much in silence, patiently,
You who are the reason and the will
I own I should have loved you tenderly!

You who in your illness, sigh so much,
You who softly stir your greying looks, ~
And look to me for tenderness of touch,
I own my heart is heavy with reproach, ~

For all the moods and all the angry flashes,
All the years of anguish and requite,
All the heartaches that time passes,
And all the sorrows of this plaintive night.

For how I wish to cauterize your pain,
You who are my mother, ageing still,
How I wish to love you once again;
To ease your illness with my will.

Lem Ibbotson

Why can't you be like me?

I'm a writer, you're a scribbler;
I can argue, you're a quibbler.
I use assonance, your rhymes are horrible;
I write poetry, you write doggerel.

I eat well while you're quite greedy,
If I got slim you'd just get weedy:
But I'm well-built, amen to that
While, truth to tell, you're simply fat.

My face has character, you are plain.
I guard my looks but you are vain.
I'm confident, you're brassy bold
And I'm mature, but you're just old.

Barbara Cumbers

The shape of us

You are sitting in your corner drawing, or puzzling
at a bug in a program listing, pencil poised.
The pictures have printed their shapes on the wallpaper
as your feet furrow their places in the rug. Your head
fills the dent it has made in the back of your chair.

I have come in quietly, for a book maybe,
or to collect your teacup. I have essays to mark.
We are active and still and silent. Outside,
the garden slowly casts off its colours.
The shadows disperse, dissolving into themselves.

Stacey Lane

SILENCE

Talk to me in Silence
Of the morning's tawny hill,
Of a ghostly shifting outline
Against a clouded sky,
As lowering dark of rain clouds'
Indigo puffs stand stark
From the wisps and mists below;
Of spikey pines, whose jagged fingers
Scratch the white above.

Talk to me in Silence,
From where my words begin to come.
I shape and turn the phrases
Round the scene you left behind.
I capture all I can
Of the memory in my heart.

Talk to me in Silence
The silence of my soul.
Your Silence speaks to mine
In which we're both a part.
I feel your gentle radiation
Of a love that waits;
A waiting that creates
The quietude that shapes me
On the cobbled road to home.

Evelyn Leite

The Distant Shore

Come with me where thought waves touch
the distant shore, chasing silver whispers
in the hollow shells and lingering
in our footprints on the sand;
clamber over rocks at turn of tide
and view the backdrop as Valkyries ride
the skies, the sea-field churns
a thunderous applause and spirits
from the deep release their breath
once choked by blades of steel;
come leave the valiant echoes of the past
and walk the pier into the city heights
where traffic growls and grinds
as shoppers shelter in their cloistered
minds, zig-zag through shops and streets;
behind the block the lazy river winds
with touring boats that cruise along
the never-stopping flow from pier to pier
then empty in the sea, come, come
with me again, where thought-waves
touch.... another distant shore.

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