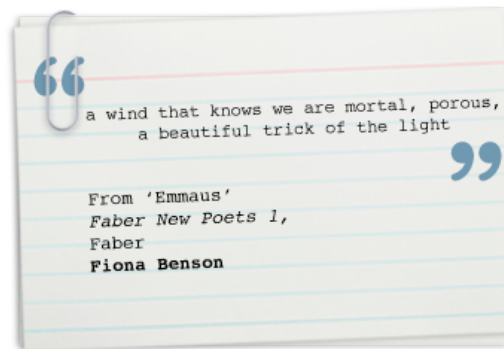




Good Morning! It's Tuesday on January 03, 2012.

Literature for everyone in the South West

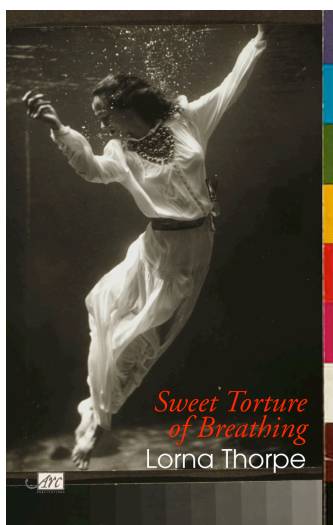


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## book of the month

*Sweet Torture of Breathing*  
by Lorna Thorpe



Lorna Thorpe moved to Cornwall from Brighton in January 2011. Her debut publication *Dancing to Motown* (Pighog Press) was a Poetry Book Society pamphlet choice and her first collection *A Ghost in my House* was published by Arc in 2008. *Sweet Torture of Breathing* is her second collection, and is also published by Arc. A freelance business writer, feature writer and poet, she also writes short stories, which have appeared in anthologies and magazines.

Lorna is launching her book at The Crown Inn, Lanlivery (off the A390 between Lostwithiel and St Austell) on Wednesday, 7th December at 7.30pm – free.

Cyprus Well caught up with Lorna to ask her about her life as a poet.

Tell us a bit about your new collection *Sweet Torture of Breathing*, it's your second isn't it?

It's my second collection, but my third book of poetry – my first was a pamphlet, called *Dancing to Motown*. The background to the book is the near death experience I had several years ago – I wrote some poems about the event itself in my first collection, *A Ghost in my House*, but the poems in the new collection are more about what it means to be fully alive – or only half alive, come to that.

It's arranged in three sections. The poems in the first section are about a period I refer to as psychic death – crudely, a combination of a mid-life crisis, nervous breakdown and way too much self-analysis resulted in a loss of vitality. The central section is a series of poems about people who died before their time, including Michael Jackson, Maria Callas, Virginia Woolf, Janis Joplin and photographer Francesca Woodman. The final section contains the coming back to life poems. Linda France puts it rather well in her endorsement, when she says the collection “toys with death and disappointment but ultimately is on the side of life,

### Calendar

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What's On



### Book of the Month Clips

The Redeemed by M.R. Hall

*Dissolution* by C.J. Sansom  
[Pan Macmillan](#)

*Innocent* by Scott Turow  
[Hachette Book Group](#)

*Dark Matter* by Michelle Paver  
[Pan Macmillan](#)

*The Death of King Arthur* by Peter Ackroyd  
Penguin

love and the perfect Martini.”

**How does your poetry happen, how do ideas for your poems come to you?**

Writing prose, which I also do, is about discipline. It's about sitting at your desk and writing. Poems, it seems to me, need different conditions, a less structured frame of mind. Now and then I'll make a decision to write a poem about a particular topic, but that top-down approach rarely works for me – the poems end up sounding forced. The poems that make it often emerge in a liminal space, that threshold place between sleeping and waking, or the feeling you get when you're unwell, of being slightly untethered from the world and more connected to something beyond the daily round of work, bill-paying and cooking supper.

A lot of my poems are sparked by an image, phrase or sensation. To give you an example, there's a poem about Ethel Rosenberg in the new book. This came about when I was online researching lightening for another poem – one of those topics I'd made a conscious decision to write about, actually – and got sidetracked by the phrase 'riding the lightening', which is slang for being executed by electric chair. I started reading about Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, and came across an extraordinary picture of them kissing so passionately they each looked as if they could eat the other alive. Ethel's mouth fascinated me – the poem grew out of that.

**When you are working on refining poems into a collection, how do you go about that, and do you have a working routine at that stage? What do you look for in a selection of poems to link them together?**

It follows from the last question that I don't write start out writing poems with a theme in mind. But a time comes when I get the feeling that the poems might be grouping themselves into a collection. This is a fairly tense time – I've written a lot of poems but will they cohere in any way?

What I'm looking for is an overarching theme or motif. It's an incredible moment, actually, when you see that a pattern has been forming all along, quite without you knowing it. Once I've found the theme I can start ordering poems and working on a more purposeful kind of editing. As this uses a different part of the brain to writing a poem, I find it useful to have a routine at this stage, setting aside periods of time to read and re-read the poems individually and as a whole. Beyond that, I'm not much of a planner so I don't have a foolproof process – like the writing of the poems themselves it's very much try it and see.

**Do you have any 'top tips' for poets who are just starting out?**

Read. Write. Read some more. Write some more. Find poets you admire and study them. When it comes to crafting, the crucial thing is the integrity of the poem itself, not the experience that might have sparked it. The reader doesn't care whether it actually happened like that; they just want to read a good poem.

**How do you feel about poetry readings? Are there things organisers could do to make them a better experience for poets?**

I love reading my poems to an audience and I've been to some stand-out readings. Equally, I've attended and read at some dire poetry events. For me, the question is how to make them a better experience for poets and audiences – and that means thinking about generating excitement through every element of the event.

Rather than taking the hair shirt approach (drear, worthy, reverential, warm white wine) why not think entertaining, fun, decadent even? I want the poetry to challenge me, not the lighting, heating or chairs. I'd love to go back to the days of smoky basement clubs jammed with intense looking people in polo neck sweaters but I'll settle for a good café or bar (one of the best launches I went to was in a snooker hall), tea lights on the tables, a decent glass of wine and maybe some live music. An enthusiastic MC who's interested enough to find out something about the poets they're introducing is essential. Oh, and create a buzz beforehand – tell people about it, and get the poets to tell people about it, too. Because however great the venue, however invitingly the candles are flickering, you can't hope to create any kind of atmosphere with an audience of three, one of whom is your mum.

**Do you feel that poetry in the UK is thriving, or do you find that it doesn't have enough coverage?**

Let's face it, poetry is a minority art. Poets and publishers themselves are partly to blame for that – erecting barriers to protect what can seem, to those on the outside, like a closed shop where the members of the inner circle publish and encourage writers that are just like them. From someone who's definitely not part of the inner circle that might sound like sour grapes but I've always been more interested in reaching non-traditional audiences, people who might not ordinarily pick up a poetry book. That said, there is a lot happening on the outside – plenty of poetry journals, lots of poetry groups, workshops and readings at a local level,



interesting collaborations between poets, artists and musicians, and an increasingly vibrant spoken word scene that's making poetry accessible to new audiences.

As for coverage outside of the poetry scene itself, I don't think mainstream newspapers and magazines know what to do with it.

**Is there a particular poet whose work has inspired you?**

I think more in terms of being infused by certain writers, not just poets but novelists and songwriters, too. On the whole they're more likely to be American, which is reflected in the rather direct, open style of my poems. In particular I'm thinking of Frank O'Hara, James Salter and a wonderful but relatively unknown poet called Lynda Hull. And in this day and age it's impossible to not be influenced in some fundamental way by visual media— for me, film is the magical art form.

**At Cyprus Well we're always watching the developments in digital publishing – and asking all our interviewees about it. How do you view these developments?**

I'm a terrible Luddite. I don't have a Kindle – I've downloaded a couple of books onto my computer but I haven't read them yet because I don't like reading on screen. The most cited benefits of e-books seem to be ease and convenience, neither of which excites as much as the feel and smell of a secondhand book or picking out a book from my bookshelves to find a favourite sentence, which might be marked with a sticker or which I know is roughly this far in on the lower half of the left hand page. I've no doubt that writers and publishers will need to embrace new forms of publication but I'm more interested in seeing people explore ways to make imaginative use of what digital forms can offer.

**Thank you Lorna!**

**Book of the Month Archive**

June 2010 Derek Landy: *Skulduggery Pleasant Dark Days*  
 July 2010 Scott Turow: *Innocent*  
 August 2010: Julia Green: *Drawing With Light*  
 September 2010: C J Sansom: *Heartstone*  
 October 2010: Of Love and Hope  
 November 2010: Michelle Paver *Dark Matter*  
 December 2010 Peter Ackroyd *The Death of King Arthur*  
 January 2011 Andrew Taylor *The Anatomy Of Ghosts*  
 February 2011 Jill Mansell *To The Moon And Back*  
 March 2011 Aminatta Forna *The Memory of Love*  
 April 2011 M.R. Hall *The Redeemed*  
 May 2011 Jussi Adler-Olsen *Mercy*  
 June 2011 Philip Marsden *The Levelling Sea*  
 July 2011: Imogen Robertson *Island of Bones*  
 August 2011: Simon Scarrow *The Legion*  
 September 2011: Rachael Boast *Sidereal*  
 October 2011: Jorn Lier Horst *Dregs*  
 November 2011: Stephen King *11.22.63*