



Glass is Elastic by Jon Glover

Publisher: Carcanet Press, 128 pages

Reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) July 2012

I first came across **Jon Glover's** work a few years ago with the collection ***Magnetic Resonance Imaging*** . It was a

collection that joined a trend of poetry publications at the time, which included Maurice Riordan and Jocelyn Bell Burnell's

Dark Matter: Poems of Space

Of course using Science as a theme for poetry is nothing new, John Donne's poetry is testimony to that, and one can even go back as far as Lucretius'

On The Nature Of The Universe

The drawback to creating thematic genres of poetry is that the theme becomes the primary concern rather than the poetry itself, which can be a drawback if you create a narrowed audience. For someone who has done so much for the poetry in this country, and is one of the few real artisans (who I would rate along with Geoffrey Hill, for the real workmanship that goes into their poetry), being seen for autobiographical or propagandist dabblers that populate much of the poetry scene in Britain, would be a grave mistake.

Whilst there is nothing wrong with using political or personal themes in poetry, for many it seems as if it is an end in itself, with little concern given to the craft. The narrative (subject) of the poem is an essential component but it should not be separated from the overall work otherwise a major distinction between poetry and other writing becomes lost.

What is immediately obvious about the poetry of Glover is its lyricism:

*Sleep yourself out of the ceremonies still
to come – and a good try at speeding up the
next generation’s evolutionary deaths and
survivals. Such consent’s worthy of much
longer-term research . . .*
[Glass Squares]

The strict metre suggests the science of the theme, whilst alliteration provides it melody. Even ending lines on ‘the’ or ‘and’ do not appear awkward as they might well do otherwise. The flow of each poem is perfectly balanced.

As with his previous work Glover is concerned with 'seeing' and the title of this volume suggests that we do not see things in the same manner when using different forms of glass. Sight is generally the first sense we use in comprehending something ("I see" being a common phrase as an affirmation of understanding), however we do not always see the same thing whether we are using magnification, radiology or just unaided sight. But we may also 'see' a work of art differently, whether that be a painting or even a poem.

Also our 'seeing' depends on other factors, such as time. For example

*I see across the avenue. Something so quiet
and dull. Leaves half-gone. No green. And
with no intention, it's becoming (become
already?) unrealisable . . .*

[**With Verbs**]

A central group of poems, **Narcolepsy**, inspired by a collection of microscope slides of nerve and brain samples, from research after World War One provide us with an example of Glover at his best. Usually the World War One themes can be seen as a comment on

[modernism](#)

but Glover looks beyond, what has become a cliché, and you never know whether it is the actual war or the medical war that the narrative engages. There is a slow but determined progression to these poems, as

Glass Squares

suggests

Glass is Elastic is one of the best collections I've read in a while. Glover challenges his audience and yet his work has an immediacy to it that few poets can succeed in capturing.

Glass is Elastic

is available for purchase online by clicking on this

[Carcenet](#)

link.