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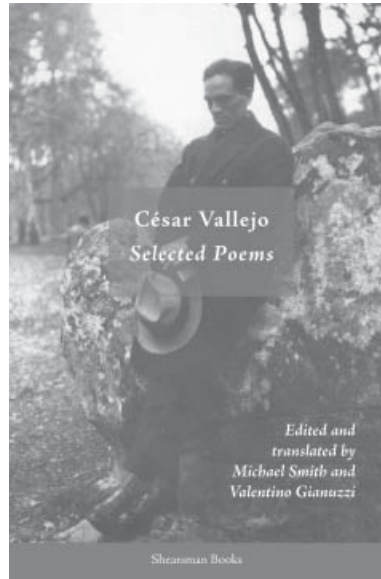


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New from Shearsman Books



R.F. Langley

Journals (paperback, 144pp, £9.95 / \$17)

R.F. Langley's *Collected Poems* was one of the poetic highlights of recent years, showing a sometimes sceptical public that a contemporary poet could still engage with the shades of Modernism and produce fascinating and original work. This book offers a number of selections from the author's journals, ranging in time from 1970 to 2005, which will give admirers of his poetry more to think about, and a greater understanding of the wellsprings of his poetry.

César Vallejo

Selected Poems (paperback, 136pp, £9.95 / \$17)

In September 2005, we published the astonishing new translations of Vallejo's *Trilce* and the *Complete Later Poems 1923-1938*, in translations by Valentino Gianuzzi and Michael Smith. This *Selected* fills an important gap on the bookshelves by making available a rigorously-edited bilingual selection of Vallejo's work, which draws on last year's volumes as well as a group of poems from Vallejo's first publication, *The Black Heralds*, itself a fascinating work which demonstrates the origins of his astonishing art, and what boundaries he had to cross in order to achieve the heights marked by *Trilce*.

Broken Lapse

[The Hanging Boy & The Girl Hanging On]

“Negatively, the voice within criticizes, intuits, witnesses and insists that this broken discourse we call culture is not ultimately human.”

Robin West
Caring for Justice

For two real people
(who might as well remain nameless).

Left Hanging

The boy who was hanged had a very interesting slant on death row.

After the hanging he returned to his hometown, the place where people were the most sympathetic to him being a criminal. In certain respects it can be quite simple. Good people do bad things and bad people do good things. Etc.

Upon arrival he finished school and applied – successfully – for his first job again. He spoke to friends, acquaintances, relatives and strangers about many things in his living but, above all, mentioned to no-one that he had lost his life.

Anaphora

The boy who was hanged, after the hanging, utilized anaphora as his preferred mode of expression.

This is the rhetorical device of beginning successive sentences, lines, etc., with the same word or phrase.

This is what he said.

This is why he said it.

This is because after being hanged one has to bear oneself back to where one left off.

This is because it becomes most important to avoid repetition of what preceded the anaphora.

Narrative ad infinitum

One can avoid the severest consequences of what has happened to one by telling (and retelling)(ad infinitum) the story of what took place and by telling (in various and infinite ways) stories based on the story of what occurred.

So, the girl who bludgeoned to death her best friend's mother can become a crime writer. She can discover the male flowers on the same plant of herself and write under a pseudonym using a made-up man's name. She might go even further and create a heteronym, an alter ego with a distinct biography, perhaps modelled on the brother of a man who exists. Then, when she has tired of this fellow, she can simply change her name whilst inside feeling the kind of satisfaction she might gain from killing a real man's brother.

Author(itative) Individual(ism)

Then, there are echoes and overflowings. There is harking back. Things going out and things coming back in. Shadows cast forward to where what casts it has not stepped.

The girl might have changed her own name to a new name before writing using another name entirely.

The bits of what she writes may each have a different status. What she writes may be full of diagonals and curved lines. What she writes might relate to everything. What she knows. Perhaps it intuits what she doesn't.

Would you say she knows who she is? And who she isn't? Or only precisely?

Somebody / Else

What effect is had by the creation of a new name?

What does it mean to become somebody else?

Is anybody who they are? Do they ever stay that way?

On the one hand we have the boy who was hanged who died and stayed the same person and then went on to live his life as that person, to live his life among those he knew and who continued to know him. On the other we have the girl who murdered a childhood friend's mother, who changed her name, who moved from her town to another, who forged another life among new friends and acquaintances who knew her only by her new name and life.

The first is a memory; the second has memories. Perhaps a memory exists more certainly than the fact of having one.

New Earth; New Life

It takes a long time to find something that doesn't exist.

That didn't.

Flowers, apparently, are the first things by which human beings noticed (created?) beauty.

Earth formation: Archean Period in the Precambrian Era: 2.5 to 4.6 billion years ago.

First appearance of birds, flowers and fruit bearing plants: Jurassic Period in the Mesozoic Era: 144 million to 208 million years ago.

Was beauty always there and simply noticed? Or is it necessary for the beautiful thing to come into existence in order for beauty to exist in the world? Is beauty an idea or a thing?

How beautiful is the flower really? And what of the ugly flower?
The girl who takes the back of an axe to the scalp of her girlfriend's
mother. Does she retain her beauty because outside of disintegration
beauty cannot be lost? Does she keep her beauty if she had a good
reason for cracking the skull? Or does she simply appear beautiful?

Was she ever beautiful? Can any fifteen year old girl be described as
ugly? Have you ever seen an ugly flower?

Hiding

It is we who hide the dead.
The living hide from us.

Solace hides reality. Reason hides what is unreasonable. We maintain
the dead. We follow them. The living elude us. Make us tread paths
that lead not to them. The woman's stories hint. Remind us of the
girl without showing her to us. The boy who decided to live his life
has no story. Life has no story. Just thousands of stories told about it.
Thousands of little attempts at the straight line around the struggle.
His rope. Both vertically and in the loop about his neck. His spine.
The effect of his body in making the rope straighter. More taut. The
distance he could now stretch in the story that someone else had
written for him. Simply, the distance. Closing it by beginning again
exactly where he left off.

The girl is writing her own stories. Increasing the possibilities.
Stretching the distance between who she was and who she is. All the
stories being about other people who don't exist. It can take a long
time to find something that doesn't exist. It takes a long time to lose
everyone else.

Distance hides the destination.
Distance reveals the journey.

Where They Started

Where anyone starts. At a spot. A spot in a fog. A none. Anonymous. And then emerges. Always fully formed. She with her strong arms and hands at an angle. Ready to pick up something and make it a weapon. To wield the pen after the sword. He with the others already in pursuit. Him carting around the invisible gallows all those years until it became gradually less and less transparent. Solid enough for him to walk onto and put his head into the noose. *Through*. She goes through the blade of the axe to find the sharpness of the pen. Through murder to the fiction of the crime. Through her death to create others. He moves his face forward to feel the space made by the curve of the rope. He puts his head through the loop in order not to touch the rope. Goes through their death to find his own. Where anyone starts. Where dying begins.

What Vanishes?

And where do they end? Do they?

What vanishes?

The gallows dissolved around him. The paraphernalia of execution disappearing into asphyxiation. Eight to thirteen minutes. A few minutes to almost twenty. Until there is only him left. Not even the world could survive his hanging. Wanting to breathe but can't.

And she disappears immediately before becoming famous. Years later. Someone else becomes known in her place. Years behind. A past estranged. A world that gave its place to another world. One that is imagined. Created breath by imaginative breath.

Ritual of Permission

Doing what you want takes place beyond permission's jurisdiction. You can murder. You can be murdered and refuse to die. Just don't ask. Don't find out what is decorous behaviour. Revise the story until it works for you. Revise at the level of the body, not at the level of theory. Refuse to take part in the ritual of permission. Do not allow others' study to take away your legitimacy. Be in trouble with all laws. Even those of nature. If you want, be a chicken. Run around squawking after your neck has been snapped. Like a cat with a transected cord, take a few steps without assistance. Invent killers with strange paths. Invent who they kill. Though the laws of publishing and bookselling and gripping narrative require finding out whodunnit, let your murderers get away with it. Survive any way you can. Kick and dance. You can give yourself permission to do anything and good and evil will remain unaffected. Will still not exist. Take a deep breath so you won't need to breathe for the next fifteen seconds. The sensation is pleasant. Well-oiled. So say the first-hand accounts of survivors. Hold the breath in your own body. Constricts well. All of the air is yours. Take it. It's your choice. Choose the most difficult thing you can possibly imagine. Choice.

'The

long

drop.'

The bequest of freedom.

Geoffrey Squires

Untitled V

In my in what I in
in the way how I we how we
which of necessity which of of necessity
in the way that we do that we have come to do in the way
knowing of course knowing

When I look out when I look when I see
torpor stillness heaviness a heaviness
and confirmation as it were
and that we can make that we can make of them the objects of thought
which of itself would of itself by itself would in itself
where I

I

Seeing in one thing something of another in the one thing
something of the other in the other
if the difference is

Any any of them any one of them

in their own on their own

and who always speak of themselves about themselves concerning
themselves

how it is what it is like what it is to be

in which that which of which

thinking thinking how thinking that how

with with the slightest the least the slightest with

with

difficulty what difficulty at one level everything is clear

this garden this place this full of things

Of the quality of or the nature the nature of of the quality or
the nature of

Attaches attaches to

and what we love what we love about or in what we love in

in the dark each other the dark of each other in each other

in the place that in the place where

what might or could have been

unimaginable the warm scented air come from afar

Beside beside alongside beside

Where I

hearing hearing or listening listening

would almost certainly almost certainly would

in another or different another different another

considering considering how considering the way

that we we

And the sudden outbursts effusions so sudden as to be wholly

unexpected

Even even now even when at this time even

in the end simply perhaps in the end perhaps simply

not that I

would surely would would surely surely

Maze

I've an etching, one of a series, loosely based on Pandora. A woman kneels on the earth; head in hands, above her in the sky a fine tangle; a knot of ribbons so interlocked it is impossible to unravel. Clearly, a pretty burden. In another she sits on a sofa, hands folded in her lap; lightning streaks across her face, a crevasse opening beside her. In yet another she is seated on a high stool, her long hair plaited and crossed at the ends like an open pair of scissors, across her thighs, a cat-o'-nine-tails. Beside her on the dressing table, perfume bottles, sharp and angled, a pair of evening gloves almost alive; in the mirror she faces, naught but a passing cloud.

Take my surroundings:

This accumulation. I wish to examine how it (collective or singular?) came to be. (Already there exists an assumption of passivity.) The mind balks at such a colossal task; fear not – a methodical approach renders the most complex of situations a piece of piss. Having assembled, it is thus possible to deconstruct. 'Surroundings' in this instant, refers to a room known as 'the studio' – a rather misleading epithet as the room itself is devoid of natural light depending for purposes within upon borrowed light (somewhat sparse) from the hallway and in turn from the upper landing (and a fraction perchance from the pane above the front door?). Have I not heard it said the last to arrive is the first to go? I have said so myself. Ah, but to know what was (or is) last? Do not be unduly concerned – there are precautions quite within ones grasp.

‘and so with bodiless eyes’

and so with bodiless eyes they went to ground
beyond the dry-stone wall, the stand of trees
with all this life untouched and spread before
till, in the midst of thought, the sea was at their feet
 summerday bright
 sun-saturated blue
and they were lost before such wide expanse
so blue to the last, to the full-most point of blue

and all this pulse of life declining to a point
to the sound of bird-song at the very end
that final twitter in the deepening sky
which, deep-flare red, expressed its dying self
its evening, falling sense of self and life
its close-of-day declining into loss
which they all saw but did not comprehend
 such failing sight
 such vision drifting by
their minds wrapped up in darkness which was not,
of course, a metaphor for the evening sky
but somehow caught itself within itself

now all this turns from shifting summer blue
to deepened shades of purpled blue and red
and that flock of birds across the field of sight
 plunging through the light
 sweeping in then out
all flamed to disappearance, then white against the sea
so sharp from this high point above the town

and all those lengthened years that echo back
that trudge about the harbour and the castle walls
that sense of being quite in place, beneath these hills
all this is now such undistilled desire
as we are watched by things from distant fields

and from the edges of those distant fields
that hedge set in place generations before
 sepia-still
 pictured here
your grandfather's brother leaning back on the wall
to take a little time at the end of his long day
just a blink ago for the stretch of sea and sky

at the end of this long day they went to ground
and cupped their hands about their ears
to drown out all the noise of cars and shops
to hear the thump and rush of their own blood
to breathe in deep and sneeze in the evening air
 now slowing down
 now resting back
and squeezing shut their eyes to take a pause

these motions are what might be most expected
 so they thought
these motions put us firmly in that place
 or so they said
where all we are can come to sudden blush
with such a rush of doubly deepened sense
that anything else is of such small account
of such short change or shoulder-shrugged inconsequence
amongst the smallest turns of half-coughed thought
beside this sense of being in our place
amongst these hills, close by our sweep of sea

but no, not theirs, always beyond themselves
in blue, or grey, or dirty dull grey-green
beneath the always-changing skies out here
 far out west
 quite at the edge
in ragged curve of bay, hugged close to the land
it is here, just here, we go at last to ground

Basil Bunting and Dylan Thomas in Tehran

I

Are the children singing come back
slap bang in the black sea of sex of gossip
buoyant on the good ship drink?

Here in 1951, springtide rising,
your silhouette postcard arrived.
How's the oily business treating you?

It's not everyday a ghost sends a message,
despite this absorbent card from Isfahan
blotched with shapely terms.

But this morning, with the circus of waking light
and the traffic of my life on the march,
the poetry god sits down to breakfast.

2

Tehran is depressing and half made;
we went by train to Ahwaz and Abadan,
saw four Iranians on a mud bank
in the middle of the river – contented.

The opium did not touch me,
unlike the beetroot vodka and glycerine beer
which had me flying over arboreal Shiraz,
the city of poets, Hafiz and Sa'di.

Caitlin – could we live together here,
in this dusty, sun-fried place?
Your letter made me want to die,
I went off to the hills with the geologists.

As for our technicolour lie,
the muslims and the nationalists
want shot of the Shah,
and how will we make our money then?

3

When Thomas read for the Anglo-Iranian Society
Bunting was not in the audience, he would return
later that year and go about his own dubious business;
apparently the reading left Mrs. Suralyir shivering with
delight.

Why do I pursue this coincidence where none exists?
Both men were entangled in the politics of oil for gain;
if our peers were so involved we would enjoy hating them,
how we would revel in such irrelevance.

Bunting was a spy: Thomas a drunk.
In *Country Sleep* (1952), the dark enfolded hills of song.
The Spoils (1951), the moment of knowing, free of itself.
Voices drawn from a well deeper than history.

In their great flood of the music of water of music
a chorus explodes; sing sing you reckless bastards,
sing your headfull of singing birds
winging it across the drinkless desert.

Anna Reckin

Pieces

Right on cue

the magpie

broken white

I don't want to pick up

and the weather, of course,

so when sunshine joins the damp

I'm turning around & around

looking for indigo-violet stripes,

a different pattern

stronger than re-assembly, the tug

and pull of resemblance

much, much later, the rain

Janet Sutherland

Suvla Bay, Gallipoli 1915

slipped between the pages of the
minute book of the Fulmer Society
of Bell Ringers 1st May 1872
two letters written from the front

“my dear pater, on Friday we will have been five weeks ashore”

what remains

each page of the book watermarked, an image
of Britannia centre stage, crude cameo
with shield, and trident rough waves
and thirteen poems, typed, stuck carefully in

“we had a pretty hot strafe on the 21st I was . . . under heavy fire all day
and most of next day”

just this

others, the limericks, light verse
on scraps tucked in the marbled end papers
whatever came to hand, the coal factors bill
1954 £1 5s 11d

“I went up on top of a hill the other night and started a dressing station
. . . there were lots of snipers”

these pieces

on the back of form B941/MT the National
Milk Testing Service raw milk regulations 1949
a piece about ermine and something that caught
the eye in 1924 a page torn out of punch.

“and one of my men went potty with nervous strain – he sat in a corner
and could not speak and kept rubbing his hands together”

folded

“we are praying for one nights frost to kill the flies . . .
they sit on your food as you put it in your mouth
and walk all over your nib as you write . . . when you remember
where they come from the idea is not very pleasant”

“there is no news, you can’t believe a word you see in the papers”

in the dark

Valeria Melchiorretto

In the Devil's Pockets

After Dante

If you are out there, my beloved, my promised soul-mate,
write to me at 'Circle Eight, The Hypocrites' Close,'

just below the ring of burning sand. Write to me by bottle-mail
as all bridges are broken, collapsed under the weight of sinners

who go astray in this region. I am not resident but pilgrim,
seeking the infeasible among flatterers, charmers and deceivers.

They have grown roots in this rocky, rhetorical landscape.
We are all in a pickle of sweet compliments.

Mine is the brine of love-sickness which I can't cure or part with,
theirs is doubt's gunk. Write to 'six-six-six Lower Hell, Earth's Centre'

It is close to my heart, deep in my personal inferno.
I am tall, attractive, the laurel wearing type, and if you are slim,

blond and at least a couple of years younger, we are the match
that sets stars alight. I am already so head over heels,

hell could as well be situated in the pitch black
between Sirius and Gemini: as above so below.

Admittedly, I hang out at the low end. After all this is Boglia,
call it bedlam, a place as cosy as the devil's pockets.

If you are Beatrice you know, exaggeration is transient.
You have passed through this ditch long ago,
perhaps carved your phone number on the back of a stone.

Richard Burns

The conquerors

Everyone forges his fortune –
but destiny twists the metal
and, since the necessary
way is of fire, always,

when we are hot with desire
it smelts new alloys in us,
then, cooling, cracks us open
like eggshells, for the flights

of gold or grey winged eagles
or, like redundant casts
of statues to dead heroes
we would no longer recognise.

So we, who scoured pit and forest
carrying coal and wood
to stoke our own fevers
and seal ourselves inside them,

who set out brave to burn
and conquer, have come to this:
to know ourselves no more
than husks of futurity.

The corners of the mouth

I called: No, not this brine
leaking through cracked vessels
of pitted clay,

nor these hollow woodwind calls
from outworn flutes, seeping
in mortal echoes,

nor flesh and blood memorial
weaned or wound imperfect
from human hands,

but a cup of rock or bone
unmarrowed, non-porous, durable
against gales,

a black ring to bind speech, carved
in jet or onyx, to contain
the unsayable,

and a voice pure as impossible
harmony of human
made angel.

Mortuary Passport

And after all the lamentations,
tears falling off of our faces
for a wife, a mother dead at forty-four,
she could not be lain to rest.
Nobody mentioned any mortuary passport
needed to carry her onto the plane.
Illegally, they had exported her ashes,
lucky not to have them confiscated —
traveling with the family luggage
twelve or so hours to Milan from Narita
in the chill of the cargo hold.
After all, she had to be brought home.

★

There, from the local railway station's
portico in delicious shade
and that seaport's northern suburb,
its ferries, tugs, container ships
black against an azure skyline,
it was a few hot minutes' climb
there where she was lain to rest,
all correct paperwork being complete,
her illegal sojourn over and done.

★

There, there, there she had come home,
a living face among those roses
on her tombstone in the wall
with photograph's ingenuous look
even as her young son struck it
right beneath a cypress tree
in the little cemetery

at Pegli, in Genoa,
overlooking her Ligurian sea.

★

Black glimmers of its restless motions
out beyond a harbor mole
lured us after night had fallen;
her town's and promenade's lights turned on
and the docks' illumination
multiplied that fairyland.
A straggle of pilgrims strolled the shore,
us brought together by her death,
then separated out down grimmer streets
on a bus ride through the underworld,
that seaport's usual darkness ...
and it was there she had come home.

★

Now then, given the above,
when a wind lifts and life's for the living,
let the jib fill, the boom swing
on a tack across this storied bay . . .
Then, despite love's seasickness
like a grief at the stresses of yesterday,
drop off the old blue-hulled yacht's aft
into a Shelleyan swell —
as the mountains make an end of it
at Portofino, in silhouette,
falling straight down to the sea.

Anthony Hawley

from P(r)etty Sonnets

LXXI

a poem will out-parcheesi you any day of the week
in the race to finish, to capture opponents
the poem does one artful dodge
after another escaping the fate
it condemns us to
albino in the immeasurably white day
it is a whole spooky system
the poem dupes us, we enter
how many times have we heard jazz of that sort, at say, a café of that
sort
though the outerwear is definitely polar
no expedition takes place
we run right into a future that boasted
giant stalks of rhubarb, freshly ground coffee, and free parking
there we are caught, closed in the empty lot, sold as slaves

XXXVI

tired campfire
fired marshmallow
my luck run
dry done
vanished
felled timber
sage of sorrow
page will
hear it all fore you
bear it
forgive me now, i cannot not
walk around in circles
talk in squares

L

scene is scary music

scene is colored crow and smells like harbor

scene is gas lights and hazy bulb, paris circa 1886

scene is scented bluefish and malt whisky

scene is boat's motor humming and someone dropping softly

someone else's body into mouth of harbor

scene is the sinking body weighted, and the lighthouse

flashing faintly in the woolen fog

scene is the blue blue light

and spy hidden

underwater

the information stuffed

inside his mouth

stolen from

the sinking body's pockets

from The Method

Pantoum

Perhaps the universe is an extinguished building
with blue banners strung along
and the forest, more like a commodity
bordering bushes and asphalt,

something else to string blue banners on.

Never was restoration swifter:
the leafless trees, the asphalt
less splintered and more splendid.

Never was restoration swifter
with its mightier solutions
less splintered and more splendid
snipers, dynamiters, colorful bombs.

We please ourselves with mightier solutions
picnics under blue spruces
snipers, dynamiters, colorful bombs
the guardians of what we might call “home rights.”

At picnics under blue spruces
we clamor after the news
and its employees, the guardians of “home rights”
the media mustering “one mind.”

It’s news,
the decision to nobly save rather than meanly lose
a pretense of mustering “one mind”
finally secures its truth.

The decision to nobly save rather than meanly lose
our flag
secures its truth
as a squirrel secures its nuts by hiding them in the ground.

Our flag—
a souvenir of having been here before
a squirrel's nuts, deep in the ground.
But travel, travail, and the Method's mistakes

all souvenirs of having been here before
haunt us and taunt us and call us names.
But travail, travel, and the Method's mistakes
mark a different season, nuts rotting, bulbs blooming.

Each season haunts us and taunts us and calls us names
until finally the universe is an extinguished building,
a different season, nut rotting, bulbs blooming
and the forest, a commodity.

**Meredith Quartermain's "I Canadian dream of English,"
variation one**

dream in crazy, engine
on gearwheels – houses, rafters
lets draw our enigmas

a dozen turns wheels
in a body, names trunk root,
need sleep in means,

in blood or bloodlet thicker than shining

is the next stop heaven? through
bellowing clouds at sequence,

clusters of public facilities
making chemical to play,

below hello; you ask,
because a stone spire

must listen carefully; an aching sigh

and the fault-lines in strange

from The Woman in White

I

The pastoral

lies diaphonous on itself

pale tissue pulled from within There is no secrecy, only swathing

The consolation of the flat world

Tissue of consolation

on the wan field Wandering tissue

What the narrator thought was a flawless passivity

was not

Shush

Mist

Make the new year to arrive

—an estate atop our pastoral

The sound of arrival secures silence

for if none are known to arrive

only to have preexisted

veiled in the countryside

rural peril

The creature turning smoothly in its enclosure comes to

admire its own silence above all

What the narrator supposed was perfect

was the creature in its white fur

struggling soundlessly in the trap

Perfect, yes, camouflage Hence the field

makes white snow to fall upon itself

Blemishless

Snow Melt

winter pasture,
clotted rain —
snow first-footing
the new year

★

bridled with ice
the beck is down:
it has been snowing
it will snow

★

threading moor
& skyline together,
a red threat of fox
flagging the field

stand silently & go

★

a world spins
wintering
under each
eye-lid

★

knuckled feet
gather in —
blade of the spine
an upturned boat

★

this is a man:
body of Christ
life in his teeth
snow in his mouth

stand silently & go

★

melt & make
no noise — this life,
this crucible
of accidents

★

is ice what happens
when water forgets
how to be anything
else?

★

snow-melt over-
fills the burn —
stots off stone,
tells it clean

stand silently & go

Four Poems

If I sit
first sun

curiously
out and to

uplifted
archaic flood

★

Outside us, words
change
the itinerary
recapture
the shape of
naming
before
another
disturbs
the sense
made

★

It is outside the wind I hear
in here listening to not a sound
other than what is heard
not listened to rain can be
heard not yet fallen it will

SPELL

Words make it seem
a moment more
than looking was

Peculiar grace
worth not being
silent for

★

Borrowdale Details

soft larch needles I sniff wish thin dangling larch twigs hold
raindrops christ & pagan wrapped to tinsel autumn light
has projected Borrowdale's matter a work crafts growth I

peer at a twig's knuckles a needle's green edge a tiny globe
dissolving landscape Borrowdale is a mass of details full
a vastness of minuscule high resolution beauty immense

numbers of bits of leaf-frames pebbles daddylongleg claws
for an instant I spread let a moment explode as I climb
through woods by crags every detail of me follicle bone-cell

grease shatters or slicks amongst Borrowdale's infinite
tiny details one of my gasps stretches wetly with the beck
others entwine with white fibres of gills unravelling gravity

the calcium atoms of my teeth jumble along drystone walls
moss green-gleaming my meal of Herdwick meat passes
through my gut whilst Borrowdale's details digest my soul

Donjons

A circular keep with chapel and battlements
mock-medieval (mostly nineteenth century)
mist-blue and sunlit, tucked into the horizon

staring from a distance through thorny twigs
she tests a spike on the pad of her thumb
wondering how the genes produce such sharp tips

★

Problems with her feet
'shooting pains' as she walks around the room
having to ask her husband to take her home

undoing the little button on the strap, rubbing the skin
staying elegant, even in pain
(she bends forward with legs neatly crossed)
her sentences rasped with a foreign intonation

'A certain kind of Greekness'
wide-hipped, broad-shouldered, large-boned
big eyes and dark rippling gold –

'Beautiful hair!' another woman remarked
as her friend, with hers fashionably short at the front
a rat's tail nape, turned round to look

★

In the window of a newly opened lingerie shop
a suntanned young woman is sitting on a chair
in lace-trimmed black satin underpants and bra

gripping the seat like a school-child on a desk
swinging her toes in back-less stilettos
and smiling self-consciously

this in a cobbled country town, on a Sunday

★

A rust-red nap on the shadowed tree trunks
green leaves, horizontal, cutting out the glare,
on the ground, a soft pink matting of beech loam

a girl in strapped helmet, old jeans and Wellingtons
is holding a small dappled grey round the neck
as it skitters along
eyes wide with alarm or curiosity

a pedigree, exquisitely groomed and bridled
it would bound away, if she didn't hold it tight.

Omens

In homage to Elizabeth Bishop

I

The clouds glide so slowly
they cannot go in pursuit of day,
to follow its trail,
to call it by name.

Who are you? I asked.

There was no answer
but a great disturbance.

I made use of a piece of the mosaic
its grays, whites, metallic shades,
a moment from my life.

And I left for the encounter.

The little mist, lacking,
was dispersed little by little
to the beat of a radiant heart
that could not be mine.

Fleeting already, the forces tried also to flee,
but the unanimous chorus of the climate retained them
on the verge of forgetting themselves
and never finding space in the illusion,
to the doors
of the land,
of its plenty.
What solar mercy.

2

Sublime,
overwhelmed with abundance
to partake.

Like one who carries a basket
containing the pick of the season,
reluctant desires,
deep water, old,
born behind the rock
of the body that breathes.

Like one who touches the edge,
the horizon of day,
with one great need
to sit in place
and look upon the basket
gleaming with radiant fruit.
Who is known, then, as a guest
at those parties.
Who approaches the host.
Who smells his tunic and sandals,
his overwhelming majesty.
Who hears the beat of blood,
looks upon the soul
and discovers the senses
in the secret chambers
of that living sanctuary.

Like one who left a trail
and then erased it
with the eyes.

Like one who knew the path
and ceasing to be
was no longer.

The Later Fisher

Roy Fisher is a massive “presence” in English-language poetry; and perhaps a poet establishes himself in this way by being (verbally), with extreme accuracy, himself. But his self may take in greater or lesser swathes of what is around it. The more the self takes in, the more it is hard to sustain (verbally) without falling into the well-known forms of empty verbalism. Fisher has shown a long-term artist’s dedication to acquiring the verbal means needed by his poetic self. It reminds me of Thoreau’s, who had “travelled a great deal in Concord,” and whose thick book on that narrow land has provided good meat for the world since to chew on.

I should like to start with some distinctions concerning one matter that Fisher’s writing seems to be particularly concerned with: the “sense of order” in life and in art. My ideation may seem to him dangerously metaphysical; to me it is tentative, and probably based on aesthetics.

We arrange the world for our own sense of completeness, of “where we are.” We are happy that Diana Vernon, forgotten for a dozen chapters, shall reappear at the end of *Rob Roy*: that ties up those threads. We like it when Sylvia Plath pulls a “sense of conclusion” out of matter that we know (really) doesn’t lead to it. We are pleased that, at the end of the *Divine Comedy*, our hero shall “unscrew the inscrutable” by looking into a light whose contents he can’t tell us about, which contains the form of the universe, and whose complexities (could we but hear about them) must surely resolve and tie up all the immense clockwork of Canto-count and bolge-location and relative turpitude that has been arranged in the poem foregoing. All these works are arranged thus openly, thus blatantly, so that we may get artistic “closure.” This is also related to the kind of closure people are supposed to get when the person who murdered their daughter has his neck stretched, or when some ceremony, which is always in some indirect way a totemic re-enactment of something, “ties off” the ragged catastrophe of a *Challenger* or the accidental deaths of Russian submariners.

“Ragged” is what we don’t want; the sense of the accidental is what has to be removed. We want the ends of poems to “tie up” (which means, almost always, somehow to allude to their beginnings). In the old days, we wanted the numbers of syllables to add up, too; not even

the most wildly Romantic of bards was allowed a false pentameter. We want these things because they suggest the unraggedness that we would like our existence to be.

“Was it for this . . . ?” “Not for nothing . . .” “. . . at the going down of the sun” (it took a poet to invent that untruth) “we shall remember them.” Monuments to RAF bomber crews allude to Icarus so that their deaths may not be one-offs—lost in a waste of one-off events in a therefore-random universe (“contingent,” or “accidental” in the old sense)—but part of a pattern. That means things must have similarities in order to allow relationships, categories, organization. Art expends immense energy on creating them.

To know where you are is to know your relation to this, and that, and something else; and that must mean to know the relation of those things to each other; ultimately, to acquire an ability to work towards predicting the location of everything in relation to your own, given the time and effort of correlation. The time and effort is what we pay the publishers of Road Atlases for, and also the astronomers, who are busy trying to sort out the new kinds of signal that emanate (with troubling frequency) from Ur-space and to relate them to the disturbed patterns of the old.

Only, it seems to get more complicated. Our salaries to the scientists have rewarded us with a universe whose interrelations are harder to fathom than Newton’s seemed to him when he compared his knowledge of “what is” to a man’s standing on a beach before a limitless ocean. If I remember the parable.

Nevertheless, “We know nothing” is a silly position. We wouldn’t even be able to get up in the morning if it were truly so. Roy Fisher’s poetry seems to me to get profounder because, as the years pass, it reflects more rigorously the nature of those half-knowings with which we *do* know. In this, it reminds me of the progression of Wallace Stevens, who in his early days played with relatively simpler paradoxes of un-knowing, but later showed exact qualities of some of the ways in which we in fact (half-) know.

I should like to work on another paradox: that giving the real sense of not knowing, or half knowing, or of the formlessness of things, requires great skill in forming and great observation of forms. I think this is how Fisher has grown profounder: he lives and sees wider swathes than most, and labour with his verbal craft has enabled him to communicate them.

What is form, what is organized-ness? The boundary between thing and thing becomes difficult. In one of Fisher's recent poems, survivors place parents' ashes with piety beneath the patrimonial sod, but each step of the process is attended by the odd contiguities that we delete. On the way home, the ashes, "owl-size in their jars", have by accident of domestic timetable been

lifted up high on the greased, shining
hydraulic pillars under the workshop roof-lights,
closed in my grey-green car
while its rusted and burnt-out piping gets
yanked off and replaced . . .

And when bags and name-labels are consigned to the rubbish bin, of course,

each has still
a whisper of human dust that
clings to the plastic,
the boundary a mad
regress beyond the microscopic.

They're going again in a day or two:

to be in part twice-burned
in city flames; eight hundred
degrees of the lance-burner
under the oven's
brick arch, and then whatever
blast of the municipality
lifts the remainder haze clear of Sheffield
and over the North Sea.

There is a sort of magnificence in this ending too, but profoundly arbitrary according to our usual sense of how things ought to be: a municipal rocket fires the old folks into a God's-eye orbit of the world they had lived in.

Fisher's centre is what has not been centred by the hierarchies that

we need to “form” our lives. He is drawn to what we pass over as the wash, the float, the void:

Borne constantly over to one side, to the shelter
not of primary buildings—opera-house, cathedral,
law-palace, prison—but of the blankness of the
bare ground artists didn’t render by more than a
wash and a few spacing figures who rummage there
or float, as the sun goes down and pediments shove
shadows.

But to be (in practice, for us) formless, what environs us does not
have to be a fine-milled uniform soup. In “The Dow Low Drop”, Fisher
imagines a new Creation Myth. In it, what he is going to make his
“nothing”-Cosmos out of is already finely differentiated, like Carrara
marble:

harvested, woven, bleached . . .
Or chosen for pallor in the ground,
quarried, sawn into straight
sheets, polished

That is how things are: however far “down” we go, there is organization.
But it is another paradox that what is extremely “formed,”—has to an
extreme degree the differentiation that comes from being born of one
time, one place—re-becomes bits of the Sargasso Sea as soon as it is
taken out of its supportive context. When time is slit open

Almost
everything that tumbles out
is furniture and the like, lived with
but not digested: sideboard,
ironing tackle, things for the kitchen
that match, air-fresheners, seersucker
sheets . . .

—all the paraphernalia of our suburban purposes, unlocated and thus
in inverted commas, become comedy.

A writer cannot reflect those incongruities, those essential disorders, unless he sees the qualities of things in the first place, since it is those qualities that make up the oddness. He absolutely requires the ability to evoke the *this*, not-that, to get anywhere with this antimetaphysic. In this section of 'It Follows That' there's a "gap" in the presence/non-presence of the sun: a sense of illusion that cuts away our base in reality, though deftly noticed:

What's
been the sun, sliding all day
unseen above the cloud-lid,
gleams without form from a gap
at the horizon; gleams
a long while, picking up water.

Yet the sense of a certain kind of day, a certain kind of light here, is as sharp as anything in Wordsworth. Without it, this illusion would be a mere "idea." This is not a clever play with ideas, but a play with experience, as real as in Donne's cries, or Rochester's 'On Nothing'.

The same applies to the art of the (socially) verbal. The most local phrase is the most formed, requiring all sorts of social formation to become what it is and to be understood: "she walks the dog"; "he's walking Uncle Eddie." When dislocated, with its context crumbled away, it becomes pointless, a joke, another bit of the flotsam, the void. In Fisher's parody-Creation, Aphrodite

raises the dead and
walks them for a while
without explaining.

Deftly, lightly as this goes, one cannot write this way (one can't create those incongruities) without a vast latent vocabulary of verbalisms noticed—dialect, idiolect, social inanity. These are resources Fisher's years of being his un-narrow self have developed.

In 'It Follows That', the ivory god System drives the speaker, hunting him out even in sleep. But the last section seems to be about the pleasure of "learning" some new place to *be*—privately, in one's own quirky way, like a spy. Likewise in the first section, he seems safe

in the idyll of the here-and-now: there are no badgerings of thought about actual or desirable relations to other loci, other times, or what might or should have been. But section 11 says

In brooding,
balance, pleasure,
power.

In contemplation, perhaps, things do what you want them to. That might be the effect of the opening part of “A Furnace”: the world is my world, the world is what I see, I am happy to watch its inconsistencies and collisions as it approaches me, centring at the top of the double-decker I’m travelling on. In any case, Fisher’s whole poetic seems posited on the assumption that the personal is the foundation of any truth: you must start from what you yourself really know. A hard truth for all writers. It goes on to an inescapable responsibility towards that truth:

Brooding is voiceless
image stored with no bodily
trace; recoverable only by
strenuous and dense
translation.

You “translate” that insubstantial (and not necessarily even visual) image into the precise collocation of “things” (as Fisher’s elder, Basil Bunting, would have insisted) that will somehow suggest to your reader the preciseness that the image began as. There lies the work, and there also the honesty, or the lack of it.

Hence—from this sharp sense of honesty to what has been perceived—Fisher’s disgust for the usual empty verbalisms.

The world is the speaker’s world, the world is what he sees; he is happy to watch its inconsistencies. He may be less happy, despite the comedy, to watch the mess those get into who would adjust its odd plans and relations so that they fit better—by means of their “social” untruths. ‘The Dow Low Drop’ evokes the wraith of a schoolmate who

Died at fifteen, in his delight
alone in the house,
clothes-line over the banister,
mother's underwear . . .

The censors of the day
comforted the boys with *suicide*,
impatience, *despair*, *tragedy*. Said
nothing about the underwear.

The speaker of Fisher's poems is certainly less happy to watch the wars people "design" for the sake of some grand scheme of propaganda, always suspiciously neat like the frame of the "bizarre/system of dates the Christians have . . ." ('Hand-Me-Downs'). And this brings in the matter of a wonderful diptych called "On the Neglect of Figure Composition," dating back to 1984, which is worth dwelling on because it shows that a predisposition towards personal truth in no way precludes an observation of political reality; rather, it should foster it.

I was once confronted with a graduate class in Japan who thought *Gulliver's Travels* was just a children's book, and I found myself impotently trying to collocate instances where modern political climbers were doing "exactly the same thing" as the courtiers as the court of Lilliput. But the point of allegorical satire is the swiftness of it: the sudden grotesque collocation in one's head. Any attempt to tell the reader what he does not already know destroys that speed. Yet if there were not that kind of "applicability" in Swift to the life we know, he would be pointless, except for antiquarians.

Fisher's poem takes it as read that the causes of war are replaceable. Any cause will do; the conflict itself is the thing that people use to make purpose for their lives. So he dreams up a new war, for a new Matter of Britain. The nearest model seems to be the Civil War; the protagonists will be Ianists and Zoggists. And he sketches "The First Exhibition of the New Heroic Art,' for this art will be the real point of the affair for the protagonists. It will show how they see themselves; what they feel the war is for—for this exercise in self-exhibition; and what the war is. For clearly they have no other sense of its reality. As Frederic Remington's strutting cowboys on canvas both justified and constituted the Conquest of the West, for Americans of his day: so this art, the new War.

Posing is all:

Diptych: 'Members of an Ianist Cell Brushing their Crests/
Appraising One Another's Crests'

Since posing is what it is about, and since no more inherent or necessary cause is ever hinted at, the more elevated are the associations that are brought in to justify it, the dafter it becomes:

'The Spirit of Queen Geraldine, Borne on a Cloud, Encourages
Flagging Zoggists . . .'

But this is not a whit dafter or more kitschy than the Titianesque inflatable Milton mythology that populates art galleries with the iconography of the English Civil War.

The most pointless conflict in European history? It would be hard to say. But the kitschiness of the art is integral to the politics. The role of the Lincolnshire airfields in the Second World War is *seen* by the participants as those oil paintings of Lancaster bombers in sunbursts, which you can buy from tourist bookshops on the Steep in Lincoln. And which, intentionally or not, Fisher catches perfectly:

'Ianists Driving Randomly-Coloured Ford Escorts in Formation
on the A1 near Peterborough on a Fine April Morning'

(Note the Escorts: what perception of 70s suburban dignity was necessary for that collocation.)

Chocolate-box art: perfectly unconscious of incongruity between style and content. Likewise the official art of all times, from Soviet Realism to the heightened George W. Bush that we now get on the front cover of *Time*. And that brings us to the war of the moment.

I do not claim that Fisher's antimetaphysics is either right or wrong; metaphysics is a fog I lost myself in a long time ago. I claim, with Ezra Pound, that the writer's first job is to "give us his world," and that this world somehow centres on the self. That centre Fisher has retained his grip on, and the world it leads into, unfalsified, is of no mean dimensions.

Notes on contributors

PAUL BATCHELOR is currently undertaking AHRC-funded doctoral research at Newcastle University on the poetry of Barry MacSweeney. His poems have appeared in various magazines including *Modern Poetry in Translation* and *Poetry Review*. His pamphlet *To Photograph a Snow Crystal* was published in May 2006 by Smith Doorstop. A full-length collection is imminent from Salt Publishing.

LINDA BLACK studied Fine Art at Leeds and etching at the Slade School. She ran Apollo Etching Studio in London and has exhibited widely. Her poems have been published in various magazines and in the anthology *Entering the Tapestry* (Enitharmon). She was a recipient of the 2004/5 Poetry School Scholarship. A pamphlet, *The Beating of Wings*, has just been published by Hearing Eye.

For more than twenty years RICHARD BURNS has maintained a close involvement with life, culture and politics in the Balkans. He lived and worked in former Yugoslavia between 1987 and 1991, immediately before the wars that broke the country apart. Out of this have come two books: first, *In a Time of Drought*, published in Serbian in 2004, recipient of the international Morava Poetry Prize in 2005, and published in English by Shoestring Press, Nottingham, in November 2005; second, *The Blue Butterfly*, published in 2006 by Salt Publishing, Cambridge, as the second volume in Burns's ongoing series of *Selected Writings*. The twin taking-off points for this book are a massacre of 7,000 men and boys, perpetrated by Nazi occupiers outside the town of Kragujevac, Yugoslavia, on 21st October 1941, and the descent of a blue butterfly onto the poet's hand as he waited to visit the memorial museum at the site of the massacre, on 25th May 1985. The three poems in this issue are all from *The Blue Butterfly*.

KELVIN CORCORAN lives in Cheltenham. His *New & Selected Poems* (2004) and *When Suzy Was* (2000) are published by Shearsman Books, and his 2005 pamphlet *Helen Mania* (Poetical Histories) was a Poetry Book Society Choice. His most recent publication is the chapbook *Roger Hilton's Sugar*, from Leaf Press of Nottingham.

M.T.C. CRONIN lives near Brisbane and has published a number of books in her native Australia. Her Shearsman volume *<More or Less Than> 1-100*, published in 2004, won the 2005 C J Dennis award for poetry (one of the Victoria Premier's Literary Awards) and the Innovation Award in the Government of South Australia's 2006 Festival Awards. Other recent titles include *Irrigations (of the Human Heart)* and *The Flower, The Thing*. Shearsman Books will publish her latest collection *Notebook of Signs* in May 2007.

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MATTHEW JARVIS — formerly a lecturer in the English Department at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth — is now an independent writer and critic. He is currently working on a book called *Place and Environment in Radical British Poetry* for the Rodopi series 'Nature, Culture and Literature'. He lives in Aberystwyth.

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PETER MAKIN grew up in Lincolnshire, and was educated in London (with Eric Mottram). He lives in Japan, where he teaches and writes (*Pound's Cantos*: Johns Hopkins U.P.; *Bunting: The Shaping of his Verse*: OUP; [ed.] *Basil Bunting on Poetry*: Johns Hopkins U.P.). His poems have appeared in previous issues.

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MARY MICHAELS' New and Selected Poems, *The Shape of the Rock* (2003), was selected for the 'Alternative Generation' list in 2005. *Assassins*, her sixth pamphlet from Sea Cow Press, appeared earlier this year (2006) and a collection of short fictions *My Life in Films* was also recently published by The Other Press. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines. She lives in London.

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PETER ROBINSON will shortly return to the UK as Professor of English at Reading University, after many years teaching in Japan. His poetry publications include *About Time Too*, *Lost and Found*, *Selected Poems* (all Carcanet Press, Manchester), *Ghost Characters* (Shoestring Press, Nottingham, 2006) and *There are Avenues* (Brodie Press, Bristol, 2006). He has translated Ungaretti, Erba and Sereni from Italian, and his critical writings include *Twentieth Century Poetry: Selves and Situations*. Shearsman Books published his *Talk about Poetry*, a collection of interviews in November 2006, and will publish his next collection *The Look of Goodbye* in early 2008.

GEOFFREY SQUIRES was born in 1942 and grew up in Co. Donegal. After reading English at Cambridge he lived and worked in various countries including Iran, France and the USA, and is a translator of French and Persian poetry. He lives in Hull. His most recent print publication is *Untitled and other poems 1975-2002* (Wild Honey Press, Bray, 2004); in June 2006, Shearsman published an e-book of a recent poem, *Lines* — see www.shearsman.com/pages/books/ebooks/ebooks_home.html for access.

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New Titles from September 2006 include:

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Peter Larkin	<i>Leaves of Field</i>	(Sep 2006, 97-3, £8.95/\$15)
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Further books to look out for in 2007-8 include new translations of Iberian and Latin American poets, including — subject to permissions being obtained, and dedicated funding, where required — a *Selected Poems* of Vicente Huidobro, a *Selected Poems* by the Mexican poet, Elsa Cross, a *Selected Poems* by Rosalía de Castro (translated by Michael Smith), three volumes by Fernando Pessoa, in addition to the selection of his English poems listed above, and *Charenton* by Chus Pato (translated by Erin Moure). For a list of all titles published prior to 2003, please see the catalogue on the Shearsman website, or request a printed catalogue from the publisher.

Our 'Classic Poets of South-West England' series is still in development, but is expected to feature an anthology of poets from Devon and Cornwall (ranging in time from Alexander Barclay to S. T. Coleridge), and volumes of *Selected Poems* by Robert Herrick, Mary, Lady Chudleigh and William Strode. These books will all feature modern orthography and are intended to be reading editions rather than scholarly editions.