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featuring poetry by

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ANDREW DUNCAN

On the Beach at Aberystwyth

I woke up eyes opening
On the whole curved sweep of the bay
The grumbling old men
hadn't written the books I wanted, leaving me
Loose on a beach lapping out of sight
In a spin too slow to be at a loss, to
Fetch from underfoot what lost footing,
A stock lump called *babalwbi*,
Silurian drift of air wafer like the surf
Turning lateral sibilants into chain alliteration,
fossilised coral,
fallen from the sea bulging with the likes of us,
the boats the sheep, the
words you soften at the start and slenderize at the end.

Space built up of passages that interconnect
but never go far, could we use that
for a littoral chain-stitch
not rich in roads and towns
where what stops in Skye
might start in Marrakesh? to abstract the maths
of an endless surface and no outside
that could reckon
Not the ocean
Checkless moving around one fluid northwest axis
But the concept of the ocean
The very wash of our geosophy
emergent glass with 360 panes and no centre.
Making headway through the Celtic archipelago
A boundless littoral
Unrolled like linen
where you are never any further away.
The mirror washing in shears twin planes of social laws
Of phoneme arrays
Spanish town names matched to Irish ones
Shimmering plane of beached wave drafting curves.

A cassocked figure leans from the pier
And shouts down
Distinctly, but in Welsh,

*Where are you from?
What is social structure?
How is experience organised?
What are the rules which permit you to identify?
Beth ydy adeiladwaith cymdeithasol?*

In the middle of this sea province
How we think of it is our choice
As a set of excellences recorded in strict verse
A line of hops between soft coves for coastal vessels
The movement of formal groups conducted by sound
Or the running of beef and hides down to arid Spain
A set of symbolic objects tied to real ones
for the purpose of exchange;
the way we go is what we find
a non-scalar map of references
pointing out of either side of my head
where my senses lie collecting:
suspend now the eastern investment and the French routes,
hang on to Tartessus
the monopole of the whole pastoral recession:
bales stamped with words in Punic business hand:
at St Malo
heathland grains, buckwheat made up into pancakes
the prevalence of cats by the fishermen's dock:
out on the Western Approaches
waiting for the clouds to part
and show the conduct of the stars:
standing off from a Cornish promontory
the Cyclopean villages visible inland
stone jambs where timber is an import
the sheltered gully, green, down
to a porth with the fishing smacks drawn up:
at the mouth of the Ystwyth
wading through the surf shouting about a hot drink
falling along the predrawn lines of least distance.
Or, how was Spain before the Spaniards
Whether Pokorny was right about those Berber cattle breeds
Or come to that the Iberian verb system,
An eager sort of Bronze Age dog,
Or a kind of sheep used to travelling by boat.

a 3-dimensional meander
salt flake glistening
in curved inlet

drawn lax vacuity
bringing forth wealth
inmost healing loss

detritus whose environment is itself
wafer fluent
a skeletal tendril [the CORAL
pitted with permeations
backwash drifts
cellular vortex
recessively lapped

How much of the Atlantic
in each pore of coral? how much
of the oceanic culture strain
secured in me?
A scale pattern
Of a living sense dissolving at a glance
I jitter intent to hold the jitter thing holding me
my eye failing for want of cleats
on a skittering fish-scale surface
In the topos of borderless egoless states
Seized in a net and unseized.
The vacancies
but not clarified as posts, tied to individuals,
Social *that same old riddle*
Always starts in the middle structure
Where language flows through foramina
And runs in suspended circles
gently expanding
to amount to a family

But what I think *is* where I live
by the estuary calmly funnelling craft
from the outcomes of the Parisian Basin
And its weatherproof hangars of goods and ideas
For an hour each side of high tide.

Out here, populations don't aggregate
They carry poems in their head
Packed in rules of assonance
A kind of enforced surplus of symmetry
(This crossed the water sometime)
Memorising the faces of hundreds of sheep

Consulting the neighbours and people like that for
Linguistic waves, slowing towards the western edge.
A ripple deflecting on with holes
(what's this? ethnicity as *mispronunciations*?
the border as
an awkward lump in the sound cone?)
Poetry in the absence of cities
Fused with kindreds
As the superindividual might.

From facts into grammar
A board
Within which space has callable rules
Of transit & contingency & address
The shingle addresses the whole question of proximity
Turning over and over
Too small-cut to possess memory
the smoothness of outward records contact time
its structure is all washed up.

The ocean uses fish to weigh down its catch of water,
Uses pebbles to count its pebbles.
I seize on the brilliant stones
and to break the surface of loss
throw them away again
she threw me back into the ocean
at St Ives or nearby,
innovating,
and I swam with the fishes
cruising the domain of the soluble
and like a little bit of Avonian driftwood
I bob into shore here in Aberbabalwbi,
Like a gull skittering over a slate roof the
loss skittering over the sea, and The Matters keeping
in the National Library up on the hill
head back to the values of icecream and sunshine
A little light rain
To bring the ocean to a scale we can handle
As a wash of loving forgiveness.
I *am* what I think,
The culture *is* what it says
The ocean starts where it *ends*

GEOFFREY SQUIRES

*From Untitled II
(sections 14-27 from 57)*

Coast laced with islands the sea a deep deep blue
broken only by the small puckers of waves

as if from sleep or some other absence
as if it from sleep or some other absence

the mind is full of assertion and denial
which neither thing

and to get the right balance get the balance right

uninflected in any of the ways that it might
inclined turned neither towards one thing nor the other
one thing or another

there is not one moment but that something happens
body place light what else experience

Glitter then

or that it might that it might even a little
how they appear to us how they are remembered
each look small glance each little excursion

as between several only one of which

and ready ready as it were
where in truth the mind cannot follow
when all is brought to bear

Steady it is steady
and all the time this other thing going on

in the front room
the flowers are arranged by the sea-window the bay
body place light what else

world comes in sound sounds after a little delay

tiny waves the occasional ripple
reaching the water's edge
only to collapse dissipate itself

last small effect

That it might that it might even a little

distraught logic
to get the right balance get the balance right
as between several only one of which

what problem is it we are talking about then
finds things to work on

as if from sleep

into the one small aperture which still exists
in the knowledge that with the knowledge that
what it does it does lightly and without noise

and by the same token

Slope of sound down where it comes from
last small effect

has no need of is not part of unaffected by
the mind is full of assertion and denial

and no impediment or obstacle nothing it seems in the way
but to listen for hear the right thing
that we so that we

quick it is quick rapid extraordinarily so

and overlapping not separate or distinct
laid down one upon another one after another
how they appear to us how they are remembered

And peopled as it were

remoter things quiescence of distance
pausing only to take in what is different what is new

to each side as far as the eye can see
what kind of memory is it that the body has

this landscape spread out before me like a word

never at rest never quite at rest
so that something should come out of it
so that it should not altogether be wasted

Winter sun low and blinding
all that is surface surfaces

unthinkable that it would ever
yes but then

maintains maintains itself
has no need of is not part of
and overlapping not separate or distinct

unthinkable that it would ever
and laid down one upon another one after another

How in what way
almost or about to or just after
and overlapping not separate or distinct

magnificent interminable arbitrary inconsolable

memory of them of what of them
that we so that we
almost or about to or just after
unthinkable that it would ever

maintains maintains itself
yes but then

Of which we know nothing are only dimly aware
and by the same token

low hum of insects nearby further away

light movement or play
recognition is not knowledge is it
how in what way

repetition of accumulation of
there is not one moment but that something happens

Small things that lie in wait
that hover in the air as it were
almost or about to or just after

to get the right balance get the balance right

how in what way
so that each each

that hover in the air as it were
many and at the same time
how they appear to us how they are remembered

Behind that and behind that again
hidden sounds unattributable movements
this place which has become a place of the mind

small things that lie in wait
that stand upon the air as it were
minuteness of world each particular

distraught logic
steady it is steady

and that moment just before
it has gathered itself collected itself

At the level of the senses
there is not one moment but that something happens

haze sunlight diffused not concentrated

behind that or behind that again
entering or disappearing
or like something that we might imagine

where does it lead nowhere certainly

entering or disappearing
hidden sounds unattributable movements
this place that has become a place of the mind

And closed behind us again as if we had never been
entering or disappearing
recognition is not knowledge is it

at the level of the senses
light movement
this present we parted

way or way through

where does it lead nowhere certainly
beyond that or beyond that again

And the words themselves reaching towards some conclusion

what softness is this what light that waits
which takes to itself absorbs into itself
receives

memory reciprocity
recognition is not knowledge is it
what softness is this light that waits

while or until
capacity or loss
the consequences of which

GARY HOTHAM

Four Haiku

under glass—
something old
Napoleon owned

the end
of the rainbow vanishes—
the whole sky to deal with

Goethe lived
much of his life near here—
the Buchenwald Memorial

busy morning—
the bottle with the last drop
in the trash

DAVID MILLER

from *Spiritual Letters*

Sitting at a small table on the balcony, drinking wine and writing draft after draft by lamplight. More and more incapacitated, his head snapping backwards in spite of himself, the boy was stranded in the waiting room. Having dropped the heap of leaves, the little girl beseeched her sister and parents to help her pick them up again. –You should try writing a novel, he told me. *Dear is the honie that is lickt out of thornes*. Desire's thrown into confusion; overwhelmed. Full moon above trees in the long window. Stepping down – plunging into water. The stranger he'd been gazing at earlier suddenly came over to speak to him and then fetched a nurse, insisting he should be looked after immediately; her compassion caught him, so unexpected.

*

To be sung: *...that the lost might life inherit...* A sheet draped over the chair. We sat at a table between two banana plants, a pool of water gathering underneath. A banner of flame in the night sky, above the treetops and streetlights. In a shop on the way to her home, she chose a circular mirror for me to purchase; in another shop, fuchsias for herself. I dreamt that the artist – most famously narcissistic of her generation – had died; yet later in the dream I encountered her at a private view. The old woman turns a radio on at the back of the lecture hall, loud static interrupting the discussion. He arrived at my door, his suitcase full of fish bones. On the far wall of the living room, a sheet was draped around the mirror. Between the twin rocks, a reddish light – as if scumbled over the pond's surface. –*A good amulet*, he said, invoking, gathering protection. The small silver hand was engraved with letters, signs. –The motherfuckers won't let me sing, the woman said at her friend's funeral. Around the frame, a pattern of stars, or the names of angels.

MARTIN ANDERSON

The Hoplite Journals (1)

In our own country everything takes place without us. Diverse rivers mount the plateau of our days only to overcome them, and whole villages and counties, with a dark mud in which we find the evidence of fossils. The glistening arabesques of dried up seas, glazed shards of cobalt, petrified teeth and post holes. We look in vain for the treatise preserved in its jar of posthumous air, for the exordium we have been waiting a whole lifetime to read. The disquisition by *Flebenius* on the plant of immortal longing. The tireless aperture of the sky opens, instead, upon these roads upon which we are caught each day, impelled to repeat the same journey, through the suffocating heat of drawing rooms in summer, across the carpeted floors of which something has left damp spores as if it was leaving.

*

The tattered Royal Doulton blue of a scalloped awning draping dry red rivulets vertically down itself from the rusted iron frame on which it was stretched. In damp shadows at the end of a tunnel of flapping tarpaulin walls, in something like a vestibule, two armed security guards slouching, waiting to frisk anyone from the street who should wander in, drawn by the allure of the name *Adonis*. To come so far to seek what was so much, evidently, nearer home. Or, simply, that the signs are reinterpreted here, in this different place in this different time. And what lies, then, behind the facade of *Penhurst* two doors down, what mansion amid bucolic acres, festering in the fat of a wild boar, transposed to these endless sizzling margins of lechon. And what is it, anyway, that we are after?

*

We are only, all of us, an adjunct of, an interdict to the immense and inglorious history of longing. *You must be tired after your long and difficult journey across the seas. Let me take you to your rooms so that you may bathe and rest. Afterwards, you may eat and we will arrange entertainments for you in this, your city, which we have merely been looking after for you, while you were gone.* It comes round, again and again, in a full circle. Without a memory, let the stones guide you into a dark corner, and listen. You should regret nothing, apologise for nothing. It is not your own heartbeat that you hear echoing, but the jostling of all the continents through time, the voices of

the oceans and the forests, and, in the air above them, the small droplet of blood that pre-dates and post-dates you, that is divided up into a million sacrifices, unnecessary, and all at once.

*

The fusillade toward the barricades at the entrance to the campus enveloped them in a slow and densely moving cloud of gas that drifted among the desks and chairs and upturned vehicles. Eyes blinked back the liquid of lacrimations. Nearby, in the botanical gardens, light, as sumptuous and fine as the beaten gold leaf on the pages of an old book, burnished the embankments. The libraries were ransacked. The ministries sandbagged. In the streets only abandoned dogs where we tread, now, lost in our illusions in shadows at noon as if we were among noctambular ghosts in stairwells, by quays where fetid holds disgorged their cargoes to the padding of bare feet on springy planks. Warehouses of reveries. Fragrant, but impotent, lubrications circumnavigating the brain. On the thigh of a young girl, like a mouth gaping for air, a wound you could put a whole walnut into, exuded a staunchless, red tear.

*

They have ploughed up a cemetery for a plot of land to build on. Who issued the order? Who did not issue the one to countermand it? Bones dust in the hot entelechy of air. To the gates of the white walls of certain affluent subdivisions no tax demands are ever issued, and no beggars ever intrude in that cordon sanitaire that is purchased by them. The votes are all counted the wrong way. The committee on overseeing elections is easily distracted. The telephones ring all day but the circuits are always busy. Talk. Talk. Talk. And in the government offices it is merienda at every hour of the day. And newspapers brandished above desk tops. And the files, in multiple copies, of official forms, waiting to be processed or 'expedited', impede the corridors and every square inch of space, curling and softening in the humid air that only a few dispirited fans make tremble once in a while. And everyone smiles.

*

Having arrived at the precise point of the present, where does that leave us to go? We lack nothing, scorning sequence, scorning duration, even the 'person' and its percipient whole. Good deeds come easily to us, and we are not immune to misanthropy too. They have removed the great lidless eye behind the creepers on the wall of the hotel where

we used to stay. The advertisement for an opticians. Box-ads for enticing lotions to improve a man's amorous performance by enlarging what he is already endowed with fill the *For Sale* columns of the local newspapers. *The Good Ship Venus* glides, now, over the rooftops filling the terminals with a dissolute and unshaven crowd. We talk to one another in a language that lacks any form of protocol. In the equality of our desires, enshrined in the sign of the *Duty Free* store, everything is possible. At the exit, by the money changers, the official foliage bends in the air conditioned draught, extending a greeting that carries not even the faintest trace of remorse.

*

The abysmal flotsam of our days persists. Vocalic husks. The strimmed modalities of airwaves that have nothing to offer but the aromatics of love. The sonorous perorations of our rulers, back home, elude us. Hoarse croakings – a seminary of herons. Here, in a charmed half-circle of mushrooms someone lays his head, and asks to be anointed. On a roadside, banged out on old typewriters, on paper so thin you can hold it up and see whatever is behind it, a decree with an official stamp with the name of whomsoever you want – dignitary, Minister of State – on it. Behind the Bureau of Immigration a corpse floated in the river for five days, snagged in the chains of an anchor, before it was apprehended and, for 'landing without a permit', detained.

*

It is someone, and somewhere, else. It always was – *another*. So let us say goodbye to all those despedidas in dingy basements and in rooms of institutions where the drinks carbonate endlessly in orderly array under the predictability of the conversations. It is all a lie, it always has been. Only the naïf tourist believes that he will return to this same place and people at some time in the future, to these exact rudiments of smile and house front, of physical comportment and gesture. And yet what else does he have but memory on which to rely to establish again where he has been and would wish to come back to. Under the deep blue shade of the jacaranda tree, in the courtyard, the air wanders from one appearance to another. And in the hallways and corridors of each official building the duplicity of affirmations and ardours, and of rebuttals, reverberates in the fabric of the walls and floors. Perhaps someone should write a guide not to the places we see and that we leave but to the indefinable and contiguous images that they press up from within themselves those brilliant and elusive refractions of what it is we are (at morning, midday and at evening) in the sunlit plaza or in our room staring up at the alabaster cornice, as we wait (in autumn, winter, spring or summer) to enrol ourselves in the catalogue of our deceptions, and the mystery of how we lose what was in the first place not our own, and never will be, deepens.

*

The idolatry of meaning. Through the streets of the living, apparitions and portents of happiness and despair pursue us. A hand raised in anguish, pointing to some irreversible act. A face like a neophyte's – imploring and rapt. And the fear of nothing – waiting, around the corner. The sky a bleached and endless indictment of what we cannot have. What is it? That point at which all that has gone before it is redefined. Up until that point, then, nothing is determined and can just as easily turn out to be the opposite of what it appeared to be. So, in this city that we have come to, it is always the *Day of Lamentation and Remembrance* at which the inhabitants are reminded of how we are caught in the cruel and remorseless cycles of time. Shards of the infinite are drenched in the sweet scent of the dying. Sails break upon reefs. Always more than we are, and less than that to which we aspire to belong. The earthly community so richly divided – priests, writers, whores, entertainers, vendors and artisans – on the same sidewalk. And for all of them the price of deliverance from doubt, is what? Fragrant utopias proliferate on each street corner. Democratic and undemocratic. Near and far off. The leper rings his bell and everyone runs into the arms of another,

*

In the bamboo palace that sits alongside the river – no architecture of permanent forms would be appropriate in this land of instability of reference – the dirty square umbers on walls where the artworks were looted, the life support equipment in the basement, a virtual miniature hospital, and the shadows that have eaten everything that was not fastened down, and some of those that were. Origin of edicts and imperial encyclicals. Now the cockroach and the termite digest it. The liveried orchestra. The prestidigitators – gone. And in their place the fake title deed to a property someone had spent their life's savings on acquiring. The bogus film production crew, full of blandishments and cameras, entering a house to relieve it of its possessions. A carnival of whores and politicians singing the national anthem. While, in the plantations, pubescents cut sugar cane faster than adults, from dawn to evening, for a few cents a day. And, in the capital, a 'city' of slums visible to visiting foreign dignitaries on the road from the airport, is encircled by a white wall, air brushed out of existence. *Quelle triste vie!*

*

Our little angst, in a polis of sad peregrinations towards bed and night, our ablutions almost over. Pay the leaves to entertain us, they are almost as bored as we are; open a new leisure centre; invent a new drug that will save us from tomorrow – and from all the days that will come after. The guilt at having left when we were away and the guilt, when we return, at having not stayed, are different. Where do we belong? Not to ourselves that is sure, for we don't know where that particular item can be located. And the Other stands at a distance from us, waiting for us to approach. Only, as we walk through the mirrors into ourselves can we find it. And it is then that we realize that distance and time are so many false trajectories out of the mind of the inattentive. And that all objective categories are superfluous. Without landfall, without a horizon, we lack nothing, but the confidence to explore this land, and its cities, drenched with the scent of unripe fruits – including the endeavour of all its darkness and horrors. Priests, flinging the heart into the fire, should not dissuade us. Even its government's declaration of *A State of Rebellion* should be interpreted not as a disincentive, but as an incentive for us to begin the journey.

*

The Hoplite Journals (2)

On that faint exiguous line (contract, horizon, point of rest) of the future someone has signed their name more deeply than the rest, as if they had been there before. The pattern of our lives is circular. The same route that takes us forward also takes us back. We wave to ourselves in passing, knowing that no one else waves back. Out of the shadows our own ghosts move amongst us. Until, finally, they sit down with us and listen to us as we talk amongst ourselves, while the afternoon monsoon rain falls raising a bright spume, a fine mist, on the roads and rooftops that surround us.

*

We remember the piles of dromedary dung freezing at night on the outskirts of town under cold stars. At the railway station it was so cold all the thermometer casings cracked. But in the morning the smell of coal dust in the streets, the gleam of fish ponds and canals, the sound of dried grass crackling under brick ovens, woke us. We had dreamed we had left for another land and woke, instead, to find ourselves twisting under mosquito nets again, perspiring in rooms sheathed in a fine mesh that shone. That normally invisible skein of our senses, sifting and mediating the world, seemed, suddenly, to have appeared before us. Behind it, time sobbed in the branches of the acacia trees outside the window.

*

To be in a place, without memory, in absolute time. To know that one has, finally, come *home*. In this city of eternal longing, this body in which we feel we are in exile, the penumbras and pandemonium of appearances unfold before us the true nature of our being. We move backwards and forwards through time in a motion that is continually intersecting itself, until we are lost amid the calated, the sublated and the circumfused. On the long grey kerb that we stepped off many years ago to get here, the same space, opening onto that moment, remains. The breath of a distance that no one has measured, or counted, runs through it. Undescribed, unmapped, it burns inside us, like a virus – a tenderly nursed prospect that has become, we know, the sad fulcrum of our fate.

*

The many voices, of the living and the dead that we are assailed by, on going to sleep and on waking. Stitched into that silence that underlies every discourse. A fragment of a phrase, rhythm, tilt of the head, characteristic pause. Listening, and looking, for them we get drawn into the maze of the body's backstreets, and alleyways. Disorientated – without a street map or compass. The midday sun obliterates the names in the window of a bookstore where we stop. Across the road a wave drags into the harbour another fragment of that silence that seems, minute by minute, to be breathing inside us. And somewhere else, too, on a small shelving parabola of beach, it is setting down – on a light washed horizon. In that liquid, far off, ripple, we hear our bones speak in the amalgamate of an anonymous discourse, above the traffic.

*

Behind the dark tree of winter – a glimmer. From the dark roots – a sigh. That distance could be disentangled from what is present. Everything bends with the weight of what it is not. A silvery thin air glides over the water beneath iron bridges. The mind has carried off what it cannot live among and cannot leave. A caravanseraï of objects. Calendars and ledgers, encyclopedias and atlases, ride on the backs of angels. We tap the glass fronts of barometers and constellations rot above airless plains where signs we cannot decipher are carved into the rocks. And then, soon, it will be summer again, and we will discover the white cadaver, left under the sheet from another year. And the red fruit bending the branches, dropping, unpicked; because we have not excised these apparitions from our lives.

*

From around the edges of door frames, the serrated perimeters of palm fronds, light; from across anonymous distances, consuming the wainscots and eaves, issuing through the windows of the library where we sit, reading, looking up at the slow luminous diffusion from the burned out xerox machine invading bodies and walls, listening to its paper feed crunch then halt. Light, omniscient, emanating out of all those porous and immense spaces, out of old forsaken imperial domains, demarcations of land and interconnecting seas, flickering, here, upon spines with such gilded titles as *Administrative Districts Of British India 1800-1900; A Flora And Fauna Of The Province Of Medina* ... Alas, all our limited lexicons and taxonomies, all our frail genera and classes. They thrash, unilluminating, within it. Leaving only the dust of a silence, a white dying gasp, like a sea drying up, that robs us of our voice.

*

We walk each day through the cluttered bazaars that run all the way along the foreshore and back up the narrow precipitous streets that ascend into hills of jungle where light filters slowly down in dappled pools and bright dust wreathed columns. Textiles and tapestries laid out on the ground and hung from bamboo frames throb with an energy derived from the same profligacy of line and colour exhibited by the flora of these hills. Beside the roads, counterfeiters and copyists, scribes and illustrators, in this land of continuous reproduction in which we have spent so many years of our lives trying, unsuccessfully, to find what it is we left for. An antidote, perhaps, in the confident and fecund way its objects assert themselves before us, to an overwhelming sense of absence. And, in the long, hot, uninterrupted stream of this illusion another illusion emerges - a forlorn wailing of tugs on a grey river moving through the treacherous sediments at Shoreditch, Purfleet and Gravesend, seeping into an emptiness difficult to bear ... A loss. An acquisition ... Both part of the same ineluctable dream that does not attenuate the older we get; to represent what is and has always been irritably adumbrating, at the back of our consciousness, a self that can't be spanned - ghost ship gliding silently in and out of a harbour, whose hawsers turn hauling us slowly, again, in: to a dark hold crammed with lapping water, with invisible shores, unidentifiable and rich scents...

*

The huge swell of the sea running up the almost vertical embankment. Perspiring brokers scurrying, this way and that, scouring the pier heads for business. In the customs sheds the interminable wrangling with officials. Bargains struck, and then unravelled. Our passports cursorily inspected. For who would suspect that as we cross this border we are anything other than we appear to be or describe ourselves as being – vague spirits, traders in the ineffable wares of an interior where, frequently, we lose ourselves amidst an array of false turnings and washed out tracks and end up at night at an inn in a dark room with the lamp extinguished, the only sound the sound of our own voices – and, in some other part of the building, a child crying. We leave before dawn our trunks lashed to our backs muttering our own names in a ritual of emancipation, going over and over the same road littered with torn up inventories and bills of lading, and do not return. Inaudible cantors, the dust on our tongues of an endlessly perishing moment, we are to be found at midday crouched at some food vendor's street stall, impervious to the din of people and traffic around us, thinking.

Notes on Contributors

Martin Anderson now lives in London after many years in Hong Kong and Manila. His most recent poetry collection was *Black Confetti* (University of the Philippines Press, Manila, 1999). Irish poet **Geoffrey Squires** teaches at Hull University; his most recent collection is *Landscape and Silences* (New Writers' Press, Dublin, 1996). **Andrew Duncan** is a frequent contributor to *Shearsman*; his books include *Switching & Main Exchange* and *Pauper Estate* (both Shearsman Books, 2000), *Skeleton Looking at Chinese Pictures* (Waterloo Press, Brighton, 2000) and the selected poems, *Anxiety Before Entering a Room* (Salt Publishing, Cambridge, 2001). An earlier version of the poem published here first appeared in the webzine *Chidesplay*. **David Miller** is the author of a number of collections of both prose and poetry; his *Collected Poems* was published by University of Salzburg Press, Salzburg & Oxford, in 1997. A large prose collection *The Waters of Marah* will be published by Singing Horse Press in Philadelphia this year. **Gary Hotham** is an American poet, now based in Maryland after some years in the UK. His haiku collection *Breath Marks* was published by Canon Press, Moscow, Idaho in 1999. **John Muckle**'s publications include *The Cresta Run* (short stories, Galloping Dog Press, 1987) and *Cyclomotors* (a novella, Festival Books, 1997). He has also published a study of Allen Ginsberg, a number of children's books, and was founding editor of the late lamented Paladin poetry list.

CHARLES HADFIELD

OFF THE EDGE

The difference *is* here
a cloud sun
on water snow

all skies moving
rolling
evening (smile:

everyone's own superstitions
come together this
one special moment!)

stick to detail:
sandwort,
gentian, glacier
edelweiss, dunes

and it's often like this
I find snow on a pass blocking
the way down

out with the ropes
on with the gloves
on with the helmet

over the side
down the ice wall

or again, anchors cut loose
sails torn no lifejackets

and even then the horizon *is* within reach...

HERE NOW THEN

Suppose, for example, that the city of Sparta were to become deserted and that only the temples and foundations of buildings remained, I think that future generations would, as time passed, find it very difficult to believe that the place had really been as powerful as it was represented to be.

(Thucydides)

Olive grove.
Trackless dry grass.
Dogs.
I pick up a stone.
Snarl, bark, whistle
of shepherds.

The outline of theatre walls.

All that's left, stones and grass
as Thucydides predicted.

Dogs bark across these centuries.
A man picks up a stone.
Olives ripen in the light.
Shepherds whistle:

perfect timing.

each error and way alight on a plain slick as milk,
There, going home, it's the night staff
in their prudence – who carry water.

Sleep. float. pity.
Cruel restive groanings and calls
undo the beds
& gall-heaped duvets, spillages
on the shoreline of their murmurs.
Empty laughter's their blessing, blind fear of time
the manifold worry that is care
& dull memories of bold crimes.
Strike up boldly on a walking frame
the last say wept out its piece
to slack-jawed barrier faces
learning talk to drown in ink –
to please nay and nay and nobody:
a matchbox, an elastic band,
clothes peg triggers in the palms of my hands
cover up the land with farthings.

The blind were dying to be led,
the play ageing as a play ages.
Answerphones – a throttle rain,
the last of ravaged cornflakes, a spoon.
Night trouble and daily fights:
a sky black writh screened icons
folded underclothes, ironing –
lying in wait for a last madrigal.

It drops towards you on a glider
over the spit-splashed washing,
before the fog ends
after the next flag –
Territory, I believe in you
retching, spitting in fright,
a shallow grave's winter solstice
rising up from the leaky earth.

Slowly they'll march to reach us
who are talking and biting air.
Can a pill hide the gibbous state?
Will a choice feed us?
I slake my thirst, spurning thought

for the swift rotation of a florin.
I parade lies as the ploughing of furrows.
I parade murder as the spring-cleaning of a house.

Let it go. No further reasons
ruthless or broken.
Time's a trouble-healer with a burning coal,
Time's the friend of might, the cessation of play.
Lessons are free to all who flinch –
the prudent will carry water
or listen to me, who suckled
your teats by the fountains of whispering pond

by the coliseum of snore
thoughtfully arranged for the edification of morons.
To look within and stare –
a prayer of halfwits, a prayer of disquiet.
I wanted to trust my mind
a line stolen from a song,
some lost word or proverb
my pocketed spanner, riding out to the fair.

Books Received, Read, Enjoyed & Otherwise Noteworthy

Kenneth Cox: *Collected Studies in the Use of English* (Agenda Editions, London, 2001, pb, 269pp, isbn 0 902400 69 X). I used to read *Agenda* only to catch Cox's thoughtful, well-written essays, so it's a pleasure to be able to have a compilation of them here. Recommended.

Drew Milne: *The Damage. New and Selected Poems* (Salt, Cambridge, 2001. Pb, 117pp, £7.95, \$12.95, C\$16.95, A\$19.95). A valuable survey of Milne's work to date. At their best, these poems, teetering on the edge of the communicable, offer a delightful playful surface, as if unexpected words had some slipped into someone else's structures.

J H Prynne: *They that Haue Powre To Hurt* (privately printed, Cambridge, 2001, pb, 86pp, £9.95). Subtitled *A Specimen of a Commentary on Shakespeare's Sonnets 94*, this is a dense, learned, and invigorating exposition of a wonderful poem.

J H Prynne: *Unanswering Rational Shore* (Object Permanence, Glasgow, 2001, chapbook, 20pp). This is one of those books that goes back on the shelf in "too dumb to understand it" section.

John Wilkinson: *Signs of an Intruder* (Parataxis Editions, Cambridge, 2001; chapbook, 22pp). I continue to have a problem with Wilkinson's poetry and have failed to get my head around this one. File with the Prynne volume above.

Nathaniel Tarn: *Three Letters from the City / Tri Pis'ma iz Goroda* (Weaselsleeves Press, Santa Fe / Borey Art Centre, St Petersburg, pb, \$9.75. Available from SPD).

An odd book this, in that (not only is it in English and Russian) it is composed of three texts written at a considerable remove from one another. *The First Letter* dates from 1968 and was published in Tarn's excellent 1974 Black Sparrow collection *The House of Leaves*. The *Second* is from the mid-90s and appeared in a US journal. The *Third* is from 1998 and was first published in *Shearsman* two years ago. It's always a pleasure to see a new Tarn collection, especially as we don't see them as often as I'd like these days.

They rarely learned the language to perfection.
But each one as he came
brought from his far-off city some illusion.
To the land of duck
they brought the image of the land of swans,
turned the duck into swans.
Illusion shorelined to reality.

from *The Image of the Land of Swans* (from *The Second Letter*)

John Ashbery: *As Umbrellas Follow Rain* (Qua Books, Lenox, Mass., 2001; h/c, 48pp. \$20. ISBN 0-9708763-0-0) A new press, edited by Michael Gizzi and Craig Watson, and it starts with something of a bang in the form of a new Ashbery collection. Some of Ashbery's more recent work has not been as interesting as one has to come expect, but this is an excellent volume. This poet has an extraordinary imagination, a delight in words, and that odd avuncular style which is deliberately at odds with the strangeness of the 'content'. Consider the elegiac ending to the poem *Chinese Whispers*:-

The trees, the barren trees, have been described more than once.
Always they are taller, it seems, and the river passes them
without noticing. We, too, are taller,
our ceilings higher, our walls more tintured
with telling frescoes, our dooryards both airier and vague,
according as time passes and weaves its minute deceptions in and out,
a secret thread.
Peace is a full stop.
And though we had some chance of slipping past the blockade,
now only time will consent to have anything to do with us,
for what purposes we do not know.

No-one else can do that. In short, a delightful volume, which Ashbery fans will need no prompting to acquire. I doubt it will convert the unconvinced, but most open-minded readers will enjoy the book, and I think a small-press venture of this nature deserves to be supported.

Francisco García Lorca: *The Tamarit Poems* (translated by Michael Smith; Dedalus Press, Dublin. €8.80, £6.95, pb, isbn 1 901233 86 3.) A fine new translation of Lorca's posthumous volume *Diván del Tamarit* by Michael Smith, who appeared in the last issue of *Shearsman* as a translator from the Anglo-Saxon. This book is available in both the UK and the US and should definitely be sought out by Lorca fans who don't have access to the entire text – the Spanish originals are included. Recommended.

Geraldine Monk: *Noctivagations* (West House Books, Sheffield, pb 118pp, £10.95, isbn 0 9531509 9 2. Distributed in the USA by SPD.) This is the first full-length collection I've seen of Geraldine Monk's work and very welcome it is. I'll confess that my interest in performance writing is limited at best which reduces, for me, the impact of some of this book, but I enjoyed the more traditional (?) pieces such as *Trilogy*. As with all West House Books, this is a very fine production, so far above most small-press standards as to be unrecognisable as such. Recommended.

Chris Emery: *Dr Mephisto* (Arc, Todmorden, pb, £8.95, 87pp. Isbn 1 900072 67 X) A good first collection, although – as with most first collections – there is no unified style to it. On balance, a stimulating volume. It will be interesting to follow Emery's development.

Keith & Rosmarie Waldrop: *Ceci n'est pas Keith. Ceci n'est pas Rosmarie*. (Burning Deck, Providence, RI, 2001. www.burningdeck.com. Pb, 93pp, \$10. Distrib. by SPD in the USA and by Spectacular Diseases in the UK.) Autobiographical texts by two leading figures in the US avant-garde. Well worth acquiring.

Oskar Pastior: *Many Other Compartments. Selected Poems*. Translated by Harry Mathews, Christopher Middleton & Rosmarie Waldrop. (Burning Deck, Providence, RI, 2001. Pb, 120pp, \$10. isbn 1-886224-44-7) Pastior – of Transylvanian Saxon origin – is the only German member of Oulipo, just as Harry Mathews is the only anglophone member, and the delight in games that one would expect from this is at the forefront of the selection here. I'll admit some bias here: I adore Pastior's work and have done since first discovering it in Middleton's translations back in 1982 (when I published them in the first series of this magazine). I've since tracked down most of his German collections and – knowing the originals, and the apparent impossibility of translating them, I am amazed at the wonderful outcome here. Obviously it helps when your translators are writers as good as these three, but it also helps when it appears they've had fun doing it. There's no point in quoting any of this, as no one text is especially representative of the volume as a whole, but if you like the playful end of the avant-garde (think Jandl, early Raworth, among others) you'll love this. Sometimes spectacular re-creations rather than translations per se, but Pastior has been wonderfully well-served here. At \$10 it's a snip, quite frankly, and I think you should all go out and buy it.

Martin Gray: *Blues for Bird* (Santa Monica Press, pb, 286pp, \$16.95, C\$25.95, isbn 1-891661-20-5. www.santamonicaexpress.com). A biography of Charlie Parker in rhythmic unrhymed verse by a Canadian poet who specialises in biographical verse. (He's also 'done' Modigliani, Pollock and Gilles Villeneuve.) Alas I'm not a jazz aficionado and have only a passing acquaintance with Parker's work – which seems to have done for jazz what modernism did for literature – and thus a good deal of this

book goes straight past me. It's telling that the appreciative quotes on the rear cover all come from jazz musicians, and I have a suspicion that they may well be the best audience for the book. Try it out if you're into jazz, then.

Peter Dent: *Unrestricted Moment* (Stride, Exeter, 2002. 97pp, pb, £7.95, \$14, isbn 1 900152 76 2. www.stridebooks.co.uk / www.stridebooks.com) Distributed in the USA by SPD.) A fine collection of Dent's airy lyrics, his first full-length volume for a while. A excellent summing-up of his work at the close of the 20th century. Buy this book. Consider this poem, *Cancellation*:

Will we not entirely know it

To unlovely ends but hope for
More which prime account
Is opened often a voice

And just an ordinary mist
Through trees will disappear
Long waiting for it slowly

At first the wind is not
Is she not indescribable the
Nothings of every look

Here's love lean into it

Rochelle Owens: *Luca: Discourse on Life and Death* (Junction Press, San Diego, 2001. Pb, 220pp, \$20. isbn 1-881523-12-8). With an introduction by Marjorie Perloff. This is a big one in more ways than one. Perloff's claim that Owens is a proto-Language-Poet sits somewhat oddly alongside the fact of the poet's outright assertive communication here. So what is it, and what is she? Well, mainstream verse it isn't, either American or British. Avant-garde? Maybe; there are recognisable gestures here from the front lines. Feminist? Yes. Angry feminist? Yes again, although not in the way one might expect. Basically the theme of this book is Mona Lisa / la Gioconda, subject of the Leonardo painting. A series of interlinked narrative layers and personae play out a confrontation – the male creative genius, the female sitter & mysterious icon, Freud, even pre-Columbian America and the horror of its meeting with European invaders. The author's level of distrust and dislike of the violent realities of our past is – certainly from a narrative standpoint – somewhat disingenuous, and I find the simplistic associations of rape/invasion/masculinity/male creative genius etc etc a little wearing. On the other hand, there's an undeniable power to the writing and it positively leaps off the page in places. I suppose I don't like the entirety of *Luca*, but I do like it in parts, because there's a masterly writer at work in there. On balance I'd recommend the book.

By Way of Editorial

So we made it to 50 this time around. There's no special issue to commemorate the event, though it was considered at one point – just the usual continuing stream of issues. There is going to be a change however. With effect from this issue, Shearsman is migrating to the internet and will henceforward be available in both electronic and printed formats. The intention is that the current issue will always be available on a new, much larger, *Shearsman* website (which I expect to have up and running before no. 51 is due for publication – probably by early June) and that at least some back issues will be added to the site in PDF format and will be available for free download. I imagine that the electronic version of the magazine will at some point begin to differ from the printed version, but for the first few issues the two versions will be identical. When the site is ready for testing I will inform all subscribers, contributors and friends where it can be found.

New from Shearsman Books:

David Jaffin: *Into the Timeless Deep*. Pb, 160pp, £7.50, \$12. isbn 0-907562-33-7.

Jaffin's latest collection, consisting of poems written at the start of the new century. The design complements that of the previous two collections, *The Telling of Time* and *That Sense for Meaning* (Shearsman, 2000, and 2001, respectively). The three books may be ordered direct from Shearsman Books as a set for £20, post-free (in the UK only).

