

shearsman 51

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*featuring **poetry** by*

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*& **prose** by*

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RALPH HAWKINS

FOUR POEMS

Poem

I have in mind here one of Brancusi's birds
(set the number of lines to sixteen
include some performance indicators,
some topical adjunct
have a focus or a subject, some latin)

(Mrs Pink hanging out the washing
sexual and economic matters
hose and pants)

floating orthogonal lines creating
tension within and between words

the constant of what the written misses, evades,
between the straight and the curved

(Betti's flat stomach
as Fumihiko below Fuji)

the sensual abandon of shaped space, of passages
(the footnote to line 10)
and points of juncture give the poem a sense
of fluidity and movement

these curves one senses
have left the realm of rational constructs.
Unusual spaces (between letters, words, lines, stanzas
And unexpected scenes

which lead us to

and **BLACK CYPRESSES**

with his hat on in her hat putting on her
gloves to go out in the red of Jephtha's dress
in front of a donkey do a third girl
at the feet of a girl who holds it

reduce me to tears wears a short dress
the thighs interlocking chalky
the hills covered with the undulations of armies
(Dec 2001) the readiness of a quiet town
spared by war spared from war
the immediate sound of guns
from Colchester firing range

Some Signs

I cannot be accused of being an innovator

I shall prepare a great poem
and my readers will gather in crowds

what words there are in the rain
Bididi and Betti doing the lottery,
a swimming pool, a caravan

Mrs Pink a holiday in the White House,
re-do the garden

but I'm letting the poem slip

the forest echoed with voices
the night lit up with bright lights (almost deranged)
the saint stood before the crib and his heat overflowed

how old I am now
my wife and children

poems written in riddles
the efficacy of which is discussed in
closed circles

what is integrity

and the hay from the crib
was kept by the people
afterwards cured
sick animals
and drove off pestilence.

Poesia

Giorgione came from Castelfranco, northwest of Venice
I have written to her two or three times
She ignores me
The third is artifice
The fourth *poesia*

my theory is that only the words
in composition move both in
literal and figurative combinations
the overall movement is lateral

Giorgione pushed three figures to the side, *La Tempesta*
I scour the pages
scroll the screen
what offence have I committed
softly spoken from the desert

I read somewhere Renoir's paintbrush was a penis
which puts a lie to the words
a certain horizontality
"with this small painting visual poetry has been born"

and it may well be possible to read Venice as Venus
thereby setting up a depth of movement on a sonic level

her red lips, her creamy body lies
her left hand holding her genitals

here
alone
you may think who your friends are
and what do they mean

contrapposto there is an *S* curve to the body
of sensuous skin
the stallion on the lid
the rabbits in the field

one reading of visual artifice is static
although the eye and mind wander

some people you like
others you disregard

I will write again, maybe, one day
to the trees and sky at night

Poem

Before I begin this poem
I would like to discuss the question of poetry itself

I can recall that in the ancient world
children learned poetry at school
it was ranked among the foremost of the liberal arts
it was forbidden to teach it to slaves

it was also held in renown by the Romans
Catullus always seemed to have his cock out
writing on the walls of temples
overlooking the sea

It's a fact that many useful skills
can be derived from poetry

a helpful tool for memory
for categorisation, patterning and decoration

the intricate knowledge it can provide
can be found in the fine details
of citadels, walk and subways,
rivers, canals, citadels and bridges (see over)
(air traffic control would seem to be in need
of some refinement)

Indeed a reader
who does not esteem this kind of poetry
is obviously, politely, quite
wrong-headed

DENNIS BARONE

Let Us Suppose

A penny is cheaper than a thought, something animal: a body with four legs, perhaps. A scraped knee, cut and bruised by the architecture, swelled even. And fifty yards backwards and under the heel, a cigarette. Its downward spiral and stars so snug in their heavenly design instead. The spit arched over the edge and away. Like that: dwarf zinnias on the other side of the rail and a habitual movement of the foot and under the heel, a cigarette smoldering. So distant from the door, from the animal in its cage, from the outer edge of understanding an image that suggests rather than replicates a car parked surreptitiously in the driveway. Hands in pockets; eyes on the porch and the heel, a cigarette smashed to smithereens, kept at it, gone up in smoke, gone. Twisted and turned, enclosed. Starting out, something less, like the expression: we heard the clock in his voice for the first time today, his hands whistling. Like the expression: line up in front, smoldering – somewhat less than a shock, but more than a surprise. The stairs remain but the guests disappear. Dewy air brightens as a rosy sun rises over stern shoulders and beneath the heel, a cigarette that had glistened. What would soldiers have said if invited to square dance? Too hungry for speaking they stuff their mouths full of macaroni and cheese. Love was like that, too. The manufactories keep producing more hats and more ties and more stickpins and more cigarettes. Professional ones. Ones we've romanticized. Blue ones. Plaster of paris ones. They are wet; they are dried in an endless repetition of stone and air. Storm drain and stop sign: more words only repeat a cage of quotation marks: the animal, the night, the burning match, the temple of grammar, and the inability to move or to think or to spend a dime. Whatever is convenient, lit, cheap, or will rhyme with it. The expression of concern so perfect that prayer enters to glance at a watch, to return an allusion without the utterance. The perfect river: its title lit in matchless color.

Denial

The play of “art” and “architect” in one line clears the rest of the page for a better disguise. I’d clap but I have to keep my four paws to the ground. I am afraid of tipping, of tripping, of breaking through to the underworld. There are too many toy soldiers here trying to play this game. They heave their duffle bags on to the flatbed of trucks setting out for every distant corner. Very few of them have read Emerson’s *Essays*. It is not required reading when you’re stuck on the surface of things.

If I had enough time to complete my education, then the Australian crawl would become the mode of locomotion to rescue me from the blood on my hands, the blood in my spit; from a shooting star or spinning leaf. There are too many books in your collection and that man outside has a white belt across his shoulder. There is too much contrast. He signals for a car to stop, but it soon becomes a shouting match out there and this too is a distraction.

How will I ever learn anything? The surface of things needs a little bit of polish. The surface has become brown and silent. You tell me that it is just a game. Then one of the trucks pulls up here and I’m not sure about how I’ll feel when asked to move. I’m not sure if I can carry all that weight, all those books bound in black vellum that you require for your next settlement somewhere out there beyond the flat topped ridges with their golden trees, somewhere out there in all that wind and heavy breathing.

It’s the knowledge that matters, not the ceremony, not the panting or the pawing. A month later, two months later all the places in the line have been taken. The red paint has chipped on their uniforms. There is no space left for any of our regrets. I had thought that I could keep everything on a single line, but their hands are in my pockets. They have turned me inside out, and I no longer have that penny to offer you for your thoughts.

NEW SHEARSMAN WEBSITE

www.shearsman.com is now up and running. The entire text of issue 50 is available on the site, along with PDF downloads of issues 47 through 49; the current issue will join them during August. Details of all books published by the press are also available, plus a number of selected texts from those books, and there is a substantial amount of background material, which will grow as the site develops. If you should happen to experience problems with the site, please email details to the editor at shearsman@macunlimited.net.

PETER ROBINSON

TWO POEMS

Numbers Game

1

Approaching the ancestral tombs
in their stands of pine,
I'm wondering how many mildewed stone stairs
there are here, how many years
it is since last I climbed them,
and hear myself learning to count, once again,
on flights of worn-down steps
as we make our way back to the grandparents' house
at 22 Sea View Terrace
however many years ago.

2

Now groves are stillness itself on the climb.
By black iron railings and a children's graveyard
I've misjudged the time.

It's past 4:30 and that gentler slope
towards the ancestral tomb museum,
my short cut's just been closed.

3

Damp shadows, red pine bark, the hollowed-out stone,
flowerless peonies, silence and moss
pass by as I practise the rule of adding one...

When they asked me how many to home, back then,
I could hardly guess.

4

Approaching the ancestral tombs
in their stands of pine,
I've had to take a long way round

5

and keeping on over the cared-for ground
wonder just why it should be
that though numbers came, still, you can't know
how many years, more or less, there are,
how many stairs to climb
before you arrive near the top, the top
step, step up and go.

Babel Tower

Languishing languages, the dying dialects
bereft of mouths and ears,
with barely anyone left who can sound them,
let alone a poet to make them sing...

It seems you've already forgotten
the sunset reflected on a thousand windows,
forgotten each monosyllabic cry
from construction workers ensconced in the sky
and scaffolding grids across heaped cloud
overwrought with the colourful meaning.

It seems you've already forgotten
love-scribbles in steamed-up panes or the dust,
your senses, the feeling made known
then lost with whatever named thing.

Or perhaps you barely knew
any more than a garbled bird-call
as pidgin-idiom warbles interrupt
empty blue silence, then nothing at all.

Now even the Tower of Babel's to be kept up.

WILLIAM GILSON

from *JUNKYARD*

1

June – Cambridge, Mass

8:15 a.m.

specific, to the time
air-drift thru open door

Sliver of wood under the palm skin

Last of coffee,
in the black cup

Memory? or wishd

Her face close
at eyes' closest focus limits

Closer
Length of

Never before so, O

Ocean, Now the size of it Ice

2

Police Officer Kills His Lover and Himself

Three Men Die on Mt. McKinley

of a Sunday

Morning hammering, and jet
aeroplanes
(my father spelt it)

Fiber optic light pulse under ocean
where snouts of the creatures,
sometimes sharks bite the cable
leaving shark tooth dents

While love,

in voices

As love,

on pages

this waiting & remembering bodies'

touches/Vision up close

3

maple trunk grey curve, slow curve,
leaves' soundless shakings

Dirt Megan gave me, in 2 buckets
on the flat pebbled roof outside my fire escape door,
one with pea seeds an inch deep, other
with pole beans; black flat wet dirt,
now

How'll you like it?
You there in
 morning presence,
 5 hrs lost

Build something
Shelf, box, bookcase.
For the feel it gives

Officer Key followed Ms Singleton
into a supermarket, dragged
her out

onto the

 pulled the trigger Why?

4

breeze, and pulls
at leafage mass As if under water

Pulls at us all
Inside we move, in the sway of water

Root
to us

Stem

“She’s down in New Haven having chemo”
(*kee-mo*, now our word)
my mother said on the phone, about her friend
“It’s not just in her brain”
Mouth stomach throat

With age, acceptance
of ghastliness
The Scythe

On a lovely day, like this one, sliding
the whetstone
along the blade, a day’s
work

In it. I’m

5

Daylight
uses itself up. The rough-cut boards
as if waiting, there
where I've set them, leaned them
Sandpaper (3 6-D) to take
the roughness off

Pulling myself,
my body,
and kicking, thru
water
Chlorinated blue-green
Little tiles, numbers
set in

For you, my love

In the bathwater naked
I sat on the floor
we shared the can of Guinness

Walt Whitman: "The press of my foot to the earth
springs a hundred affections"

Unseen, in some woods, the purple trillium
blossoming/missed

7

Millions of Maple keys like a green pond on the flat
tar and grey pebbled roof, the neighbors' supper meat
stinks in the smoke
off the little charcoal grill

in the jackhammer'd
summer
hot air

The small square
envelope

Envelope,
from England

Her hand touched
pen, pen-tip to move to make
the directions,
to here, & my name

her hands. A week it takes

O come
come on
over

Tiny pulse at the wrist's underside.
To watch each other sleep

Help each other, against

Noise/noise out there, &

Dreams
 just before waking
“Possibly prophetic”
 a lean man, city man
 with combed-back brown hair
moved my car, my red Rabbit diesel
without asking. When I
 looked inside, something
 was different

This I got while climbing
the dream-rocks, where the hand
can pass through the rock
and suddenly the black crow,
against bright green

 The wind
 bent the limbs back, so bent
Why didn't they break?

 How did the small crows stay in the nest?

9

China bullet
faster than its sound
Human tissue torn
Blake's wheels of blood,
men inside iron

Killed his lover,
then himself
with his .38 caliber off-duty gun; fired
four shots into her chest

Hareton, he put the knife
in Nelly Dean's mouth
(she said she wasn't scared)

Who's scared?
3 men dead on Mt. McKinley
Accidental/bones

Will it rain today? Drop water
onto roof pots
Will body's all part's
function
so nicely

May she be well this minute in sun in England
May she be all right

Her body
Narrow the way, thru chance

CARRIE ETTER

Divining for Starters (5)

Circumnavigate boxes of forgotten letters
preserved with a reverence for the past and
pretend fire, pretend catastrophe, you must dispose
let the present to its work—comparable handwriting,
that cologne, a particular kind of anything
but all the pluck and ample of reinvention
all my hands redone

Divining for Starters (6)

Begin photogenic. Implicitly or explicitly posed.

Consider lighting: reckon degree and exposure; the differing sensibilities for sun,
fluorescence, candle, all provocative, all other-wise.

Surely you have one or two props: a book, a stalk of blue delphinium, the severed
mouse-head a cat left on the step.

And relentlessly, inescapably: the face. As this is not a photo, *per se*, the tilt of your
head, the fall of your hair cannot conceal the mounting expression.

You are, after all, the beholder as well as the beheld.

You control this frame, and that may suffice. (Would that it does.)

Divining for Starters (8)

Admitting the ultimate arbitrariness of origins
Or at least their illimitable multiplicity
The potential for a new argument to designate a new beginning
I reach into the past (I am pretending,

as you pretend, that it is not a bowl of sand)
I've got a thin thread and choice of beads
Glass beads, despite what confessional poems urge
I'm more suspicious of myself with each
passing moment I deliberate over which one
I stray from event into landscape, the small field

we played in as children, where I felt and felt
without revelation, with want more than need

or so I now would have it

Divining for Starters (9)

lingering in bed to recover the dream's trace
the winding bike path along Venice Beach
the smell of marijuana on an ocean breeze and patchouli
a leg slips out of the blanket and the chill
hot sand and a red sail on the ocean striving for realization
the flash of a batik scarf the color of nutmeg
and it's London, winter, weekday, rain

Divining for Starters (10)

Bend to crack to rise
Who is in writhing
Emptied out by the brief night
Merely an elision
Radio heard but unlistened
Retirees' energetic chatter repelling
Stimulants or succumb
Into the molten day from which
Nothing's divined but

Divining for Starters (13)

scrupulous or not so unwitting you plied me
an outdoor table three blocks from the ocean
a health store on Montana Avenue where you bought
a reading at a Hollywood gallery those were the
an act of interpretation requires interpreter and text
(momentarily shunning the potential for contradiction)
which is not to say that alone the text unravels to wield
circumscription rather forging these trajectories
made palpable if always more pleasant than
(forkfuls of wit don't call arbitrary)
maybe once a year I never touched your
congenial if ultimately foreign, if claimed in reverie
even now your eyes darken and flash to call this
cull this among bygones and we're even

Biographical Notes

Dennis Barone is Professor of English at St. Joseph College, West Hartford, CT. His most recent collection of short fiction, *Echoes* (Potes & Poets, 1997), won the 1997 America Award for the most outstanding book of fiction by a living American writer. Other publications include *Separate Objects: Selected Poems* (Left Hand Books, 1998) and, as editor, *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster* (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1995). The texts published here are drawn from a new collection of short fiction called *The Disguise of Events*. **Claire Crowther** has been writing poetry for three years and has been published in a variety of British and American magazines. She is half way through an MPhil in Writing (Poetry) at the University of Glamorgan and is researching Selima Hill's use of metaphor. **Carrie Etter** moved to London from southern California last year and is completing a PhD in English for the University of California, Irvine. Her chapbook *Subterfuge for the Unrequitable* (Potes and Poets Press) appeared in 1998. Scottish poet **Robin Fulton** lives in Stavanger, Norway. His last collections were *Fields of Focus* (Anvil) and *Coming Down to Earth and Spring is Soon* (Oasis / Shearsman). **William Gilson** is an American living permanently in Kendal, Cumbria. *Junkyard* is a long poem in progress. **Ralph Hawkins** has published a number of volumes, including *Tell Me No More and Tell Me* (1981), *At Last Away* (1988), *Pelt* (1999) and *The Coiling Dragon / The Scarlet Bird / The White Tiger / A Blue & Misted Shroud* (2000). Over the past two years he has published a series of collaborative books with Bob Cobbing, most recently *The Next Morning* and *Everyday Pursuits* (both Writers Forum). **Mike Parker** lives in Brighton with his wife and three children. His poems have appeared in a number of UK magazines. Carcanet published **Peter Robinson's** *About Time Too* in 2001 and will publish his *Selected Poems* in 2003. He has also recently published *The Great Friend and Other Translated Poems* (Worple Press) and *Poetry, Poets, Readers: Making Things Happen* (OUP).

ROBIN FULTON

On the Death of Werner Aspenström

The life-stories: insistent
and many-tongued as the routes
invented by highland rain
through heather. There's no silence.
The one-tongued river agrees.

One of the stories has just
stopped. His poems don't notice.
I think of them as standing-
stones whose dead weight is weightless.
They are outside language now.

By day they shed a darkness.
By night they illuminate
those who have lost sight of day.
Even the fluent river
can't interrupt their silence.

Birch in July

When I'm feeling least up to it
– rejuvenation and suchlike –
there it is, a sky more cobalt
than I could have hoped for now there
above me and birch buds that once
in a week of cold rain and death
decided to become black stones
have changed their minds and are open
after all each leaf reputed
to be unique enough of them
with whispery variations
on the evening breeze to sound like
unargumentative rivers
at peace with their courses, that breeze
no doubt cousin to the high wind
shredding occasional cloud wisps
that follow timetables fearless
of depths below and heights above.

Watercolour

Four verticals, unsupported slabs
balanced on air, misty openings
in a non-wall, or sky samples each
with all the shades of a grey rainbow.

Cloudscapes seen from crumbling arrow-slots.
Papyrus scraps pasted where they fit.
Skyscrapers at a rainy distance.
Old Men of Hoy. Organ-pipes. Birch-boles.

In the gaps between the grey oblongs
three thin blue strokes, also vertical.
The blueness of the blue will ward off
pessimistic interpretations.

C. P. CROWTHER

Uphill and Tired

*All in our apartments
The world untended, unwatched
George Oppen (Myself I Sing)*

A plasticised fabric cover on a motorbike,
petrol blue and green of peeling eucalyptus trunk,
the still water in a granite bowl in a calmly
horizontal driveway: all hang with shine.

Imagine
its subtlety, even inside my muscle where streams
of glycogen gleam as climbing dams them for sugar.

The words metallic, pearly give the sun some mirrors
back.

You like my solar coping – we play shine – we swap
glazed posters of Culture Clash and Rawson Democrat,
wheelie bins for calla lilies.

Now our shine,
like lesser stars has darkened, we can identify

better, things that shine, vitreous, resinous, splendid,
anything adamantine – cars like water droplets
splashed on the hot bypass, boats like tiny stones skimming
the marina, spots of tarmac lustre.

Think of us
next to these images, all retinues of the sun,
as salts of silver, bromide or chloride, blackening
in light. Rose Steps steepens. We pause, absorbed by garden
rooms, their retinas.

Fennel

Zesting all over my front garden, how her fennel clings
to the removal men. As if it is interested
in boxes. In my leaving today. I haven't trimmed it.
It fixes on my shoulder. Neither have I named the house,
this semi, as my daughter begged me, Fennel Cottage.
Pretentious. The new owners may scrape the taste of my house
off its surface. But her fennel seeds cranny in fissures
and plan a dynasty of yellow tang. Root is a fruit.

MIKE PARKER

Elizabethan Gentlemen on The Thames 1599.

A wallet of night, a thin skiff,
both, wait on the water; your lyre
lays in the gunwhale and the cliff
of darkness in this past
holds its hung, wave-shape fast
against your hurried rower's hire...

(The day's drunk details kept the sky
away, and meats in many reds
were either vital or denied:
the dead eaten, the caught
bear and mastiff fought
until the living and dying, bled.)

...When lightning sears a caesar scar
along the river's live tissue,
twelve thousand lanterns die, their stars
lost in the greater flash.
They are water and ash,
the gentlemen, glowing wishes.

The river knows they're dead people
as they live, so they feast and song
as they tipple under steeples;
yet Awe is their moral,
and the chopped water calls
to come, to be gone, to float along.

Brine and Fresh, mix their salt and clear
tingle, at the tide's pushing point;
the sky's hands on your shoulders steer
you to bank, land and Inn,
to beer and table; shin
beef's juices, red-wet in the joint,

painted in whorls like a cosmos,
printed by a god's finger, ringed
with weep loops, a cut trunk across,
next to pickles and conserves.
Every song preserves
them in the rhythm of a hymn.
Sing today's meaning, gentlemen,
on water cheat oblivion.

Coracle

Come from a roundhouse, sat in the belly boat,
an ancient Briton angles between worlds;
the coracle turns slow – the iris of a circled lake
with the long view of a planet’s eye;
it doesn’t cut or cleave like a kayak

– It’s where it wants to be –

Why does the water suggest an endless
smouldering fire and the fish, helix like offspring,
in unpredictable twists of rhythm?

Into this, conquest came straight as a Roman road.

Tramped with a route, parallelogram shields,
cloaks tucked tight by battle brooches.

Empires sew evil into strict insignia.

Power fears a curve
martial hate and potency draw lines
of communication
of combat

conquest demands angles and
the mathematics of the march;
file, rank and shoulders squared
with a retinue of intellects,
graphing a geometry of oppression:

Emperors don’t employ anglers.

The coracle floats without displacement;
a sign on liquid parchment, the water
soft as the lop of his hunting dog’s jaw,
rolls wet palms over the cheek of the boat.

He’ll strike his spear into the pool’s tenderness,
even for him, success is a disturbance
but he’ll become part of the healing quietness after.

Past him stride the ruthless,
in transit to every regime’s dissolution.

Books Received, Noted, Recommended

Due to the volume of books arriving, more reviews will appear in the online version.

David Annwn: *Arcs Through. The Poetry of Randolph Healy, Billy Mills & Maurice Scully* (Coelacanth Press, Dublin, 36pp chapbook, hand-stitched. £5; £10 (l.s.e.). Available from Wild Honey Press.) Valuable essay on three Irish poets from the vibrant alternative tradition. The first in a series of essays from Coelacanth, and very welcome.

John Ash: *Two Books: The Anatolikon / To the City* (Carcenet, Manchester, 2002. 140pp, pb, £9.95. Isbn 1-85754-560-5). *The Anatolikon* was published by Talisman House in the States last year in a large format edition. This volume adds a second collection and makes quite a lengthy book. I imagine that Talisman's format was driven partly by the length of Ash's lines, which carry over all the time in the title poem here. Carcenet's font-size is too large for the page, which I find irritating. So much for the design. The poetry is as good as ever, and the new part of this book kicks off with the jibe quoted on the back cover:

Because they didn't get it, and wanted to be polite,
critics used to call my poetry 'experimental'.
This always puzzled me. Was I some kind of scientist?
Was I planning to clone Mallarmé or an ox?
What did they mean? Uh. I always thought
it was just my heart talking about things
I loved and hated, hated and loved, like Scriabin,

who was a very strange person,
or Gesualdo, who killed someone on a swing
and got away with it. In truth, I care little
about either of these composers. Ah, sadness and freedom!
(‘My Poetry’)

It's been six years since Ash's last UK book (the *Selected Poems*), and that entire period has been spent in Turkey, a country whose sounds, sights and smells permeate this book, along with the author's mordant wit, which remains delightfully intact:

For some an element of risk
greatly enhances the experience of sex,
so, for example, they might choose to make love
in the path of a hurricane, on the slope of
an erupting volcano, on the roof of a house during
a flood or in a badly run game-reserve,
where, at any moment, they might be trampled
to death by a herd of wildebeest. It might be argued
that they would hear the herd coming
from a long way off, but in the throes of passion they
might not. Sliding off the roof could also be a problem,

assuming it was pitched.

(from 'Remembering Sex')

And the City of the title? Istanbul I imagine, city of multiple cultures on the edge of Europe and of Asia:

O plumbers of Asia,
it is your lyrical and improvisatory
compositions that most delight me,
filled with the sadness of flooded basements.

As with all of Ash's work, I find this hugely entertaining, and quite unlike most other British poetry, save maybe Peter Didsbury's. We need the book, after some ten years without a new collection by Ash. I laugh out loud reading this poetry more often than I do with any other, and it's good to be able to do that.

Fred Beake: *The Cyclops* (Menard Press, London, 2002. 96pp, pb, £6.99. Isbn 1 874320 38 1). Subtitled *poems, translations and an essay*, this book comes with illustrations by Fran Burden and is rather beautifully done. Fred Beake's poetry is more conservative than most of the things that I follow but I value it for its honesty and seriousness. I particularly liked the versions of Homer and Theocritus in this volume.

Tilla Brading: *Notes in a Manor: of speaking* (Leafe Press, 1 Leafe Close, Chilwell, Nottingham NG9 6NR, 2002. 21pp, chapbook, centre-stapled, £2.50 + 50p p&p within the UK). A welcome new sequence by Tilla Brading who continues to develop her strenuous language games. Part of this previously appeared in *Shearsman*.

Richard Caddel / Anthony Flowers: *Quiet Music of Words. Conversations* (West House Books, Sheffield, 2002. 40pp, chapbook, centre-stapled, £4.50. Isbn 1-904052-06-1). Revised edition of the interview that appeared in a very short run last year. Worthy companion to the new *Selected Poems* from the same press (see below): buy them as a pair.

Richard Caddel: *Magpie Words. Selected Poems 1970-2000* (West House Books, Sheffield, 2002. 182pp, pb, £12.95. Isbn 1-904052-03-7. Distributed in the USA by SPD). This summing-up of Caddel's poetic career to date is a valuable one and, in keeping with the West House track record, is superbly designed and produced. To confuse matters, the book is organised alphabetically by title, rather than chronologically, thus suggesting that the life's work is all of a piece, as well it might be. You need to know, though, what's here and what's not, so here's a quick rundown: 22 pages from *Sweet Cicely*, 27 from *Uncertain Time* (but all of the *Fantasia in the English Choral Tradition*), 25 from *Larksong Signal*, all of *For the Unfallen*, which was a Wild Honey Press chapbook, all of *Underwriter*, which was Maquette Press pamphlet, plus a few other poems that I think have only appeared in magazines and pamphlets, such as *Counter* which I published in *Shearsman* a while back. So the three individual collections are still worth collecting, in so far as a majority of each one is NOT here, and this *Selected* is worth having even if you have those individual books, because they constitute only half of the whole. So much for the economics. On the poetic side of things, this book is a constant delight, a living book and not just a monument. It draws a line neatly under the poet's career so far and serves equally as an introduction to the next phase. Music has always been behind Caddel's work, as it was behind his mentor Bunting's,

and it's fascinating to see the application of musical forms to words throughout this book, and the keen eye for the natural world. A book for re-reading; I'm pleased that the author has been so well-served.

Alison Croggon: *Attempts at Being* (Salt, Cambridge, 2002. 174pp, pb, £9.95, \$13.95, A\$21.95, C\$22.95. isbn 1-876857-42-0). 37 pages of this book are devoted to an opera libretto based on Büchner's *Lenz*. Another 15pp are devoted to a theatre piece called *The Famine*, 10 more to a performance piece called *Arthur*, and a further 7 to an improvisatory stage piece. These performance texts are interspersed amongst a large group of poems, some of which I like very much indeed and others which left me a little puzzled. First time through, I found myself responding to some very beautiful short lyrics; next time around the big ones were coming into focus with their extraordinary levels of energy and propulsion. *Amplitudes* was a particular favourite:

Never enough but always that desire which returns
And it always does return, although the stars are not propitious
They say for example today that I will be offered more
opportunities than I can accept
And I take that to mean the kisses which will not fit on my skin
Which has grown private overnight and wishes to hide its shames...

If I have a negative here, it's that the performance texts got in my way, partly because I'm a resolutely non-theatre-person (which is of course my problem, and not anyone else's). For me, they obscured the flow and interactions of the rest of the book.

George Evans: *The New World* (Curbstone Press, Willimantic, CT, 2002. 95pp, pb, \$13.95. isbn 1-880684-81-0). Several times in recent years people have asked what happened to George Evans. The questions came up again after I published a fine prose text of his in a recent issue (now to be reprinted in the 2003 *Pushcart Prize Anthology*). As if to answer those questions, here he is, back again with an excellent collection of work, his first in 10 years. The poetry has changed, developed, found a new stylistic direction. There are very few short poems here, and some are in prose; they deal with the world, with autobiography, with politics and with social realities. They engage. All too much contemporary poetry flops badly when the personal and the political collide but Evans brings it off – the poetry does not get overwhelmed by the political position; instead the strength of the observations and the power of their delivery merge to get the point across. Now that's something to be celebrated. Another book for the re-reading pile.

Kate Fagan: *The Long Moment* (Salt, Cambridge, 2002. 107pp, pb, £8.95, \$12.95, A\$19.95, C\$19.95. isbn 1-876857-39-0). Kate Fagan is a 29-year-old Sydney-based poet who is also managing editor of *HOW2*, which latter fact neatly establishes her innovative credentials. The poems here range from abstract word-driven texts to tender lyrics. There is little engagement with the physical world but her sometimes startling imagery shows signs that a rather more interesting poetry could well develop from here.

Bill Griffiths: *Durham & other sequences* (West House Books, Sheffield, 2002. 64pp, pb, £7.95. isbn 1-904052-04-5. Distributed in the USA by SPD). Good new collection by Griffiths, produced with the usual panache by West House. It bears all the hallmarks of Griffiths' work – a fascination with words and sound (*grt selvedges of rigs / of*

bussicles of notes of knowledges...) and an investigative delight in obscure detail. I particularly liked the vegetable poems (...*the peak of evolution / when every parsnip aspired (if darwin) to be sapient*).

Jill Jones: *Screen Jets Heaven. New and Selected Poems* (Salt, Cambridge, 2002. 139pp, pb, £98.95, \$13.95, A\$21.95, C\$22.95. Isbn 1-876857-22-6). Confession time. I've never heard of Jill Jones, an Australian poet. This is a selection from three previous collections plus some 40 pages of uncollected work. She's obviously a talented writer but there wasn't much there to excite *my* interest, I'm afraid.

Sophie Levy & Leo Mellor: *Marsh Fear / Fen Tiger* (Salt, Cambridge, 2002. 101pp, pb, £8.95, \$12.95, A\$19.95, C\$19.95. Isbn 1-876857-07-2). A two-handed first collection for two poets in their 20s and not long out of Cambridge. Inevitably perhaps, this is a little soon for a first collection in both cases, but Levy and Mellor both write with skill and verve. Levy seems more interested in experimental approaches and a rougher-edged kind of poetry, and Mellor has more cool control of his material: it'll be interesting to see where they go from here.

Kate Lilley: *Versary* (Salt, Cambridge, 2002. 98pp, pb, £8.95, \$12.95, A\$19.95, C\$19.95. Isbn 1-876857-15-3). Now this is a fun book – the first I've seen by Sydney-based Kate Lilley: there is a lovely wry humour at work. (Subject for a thesis, somebody: why is modern poetry usually so po-faced?) The varying registers here clash to great effect, academe meets street, country-music lyrics meet television, and all put together with a most knowing eye. Worth exploring.

Nathaniel Tarn: *Selected Poems 1950-2000* (Wesleyan UP, Middletown, CT., 2002. www.weseyan.edu/wespress 335pp, pb, \$19.95, Isbn 0-8195-6542-3). Now, this is a welcome event. Since the mid-70s, Tarn's books have been scattered across a slew of publishers on both sides of the Atlantic (though mainly in the USA), and many of them were hard to find in pre-internet days. The one big Selected/Collected, the Brillig Works edition of *Atilan / Alashka* back in 1979, vanished from the marketplace not long after publication, though copies do turn up in the second-hand trade, I've noticed. It has therefore been almost impossible for an interested reader to get a sense of Tarn's work as a whole without buying a large number of the separate volumes – an expensive process. Now Wesleyan has done us the favour of a solid selection covering all of the author's career, neatly summarising a half-century's work (though I doubt that any of the earlier poems here dates from before 1960 in fact....). As with the Caddel book listed above it may be useful to explain what's in here:-

Old Savage/Young City (1964 (UK)/1965 (USA) – 6pp; *Where Babylon Ends* (1967/8) – 8pp; *October* (1969 – also published in *Vallejo*, see below) 9pp; *The Beautiful Contradictions* (1969/70) – 10pp; *A Nowhere for Vallejo* (1971/2) – 24pp; **The Persephones* (1974) – 4pp; *Lyrics for the Bride of God* (1975/6) – 30pp; *The House of Leaves* (1976) – 32pp; **The Microcosm* (1977) – 8pp; **Birdscapes with Seaside* (1976) – 6pp; *Alashka* (1979) – 18pp; **The Desert Mothers* (1984) – 10pp; *At the Western Gates* (1985) – 28pp; *Seeing America First* (1989) – 18pp; **The Mothers of Matagalpa* (1989) – 6pp; **Flying the Body* (1993) – 8pp; *The Architectures* (2000) – 10pp; *Three Letters from the City* (2001) – 20pp; Uncollected poems – 40pp. (An asterisk indicates a chapbook or pamphlet rather than a full-length collection.) After *Lyrics for the Bride of God*, none of these publications – save *The Mothers of Matagalpa*, published by

Oasis Books – appeared in Britain.

As with any selection from what is a very large corpus, there are things I would change here and there but, on balance, I think this is a very objective assessment of a fine poetic career. If this were to be the only Tarn volume in your collection, you would have a very good idea of what he was about. (I happen to think at least 4 or 5 of the individual collections should be added, but that's another story.) In the case of the *Lyrics for the Bride of God*, a difficult and ambitious book-length work (148pp in the New Directions edition) it is hard to make excerpts but at least the selections here are complete within themselves and not simply bleeding chunks. I have a slight problem with the selections from *At the Western Gates*, largely because it's my favourite single volume of Tarn's poetry. Inevitably the poems get squeezed up together here – that's unavoidable – but I regret the excision of parts of these poems. Although all five of them are represented, only the wonderful *Palenque*, the shortest of them, survives whole. The first two collections get relatively short shrift but, from the distance of almost four decades, I presume they look a little callow. I've always liked those books actually, as they typify a certain kind of spirit that bubbled to the surface in the 1960s, and which culminated in Tarn's ambitious later long works but which was lost to British poetry during the meltdown of the 1970s.

From the perspective of the year 2002, it's amazing how un-British Tarn's poetry looks, even in its early days. Thematically ambitious and raiding his academic disciplines (anthropology, ethnography, native religions) for source material, this was a poetry that could only have erupted in the 1960s, but would not have been intelligible in the 50s and wasn't very welcome in Britain after about 1975. By 1990 they would have laughed at much of it in mainstream UK journals, which just goes to show what we lost along the way. Tarn has been living in the US since the early 70s, became an American citizen, and now regards himself as an American poet. Even in the States much of this kind of work, this kind of ambition, has gone out of fashion since those heady days, though. Fortunately US publishing does retain enough depth and range to accommodate him and books continue to appear, albeit with less regularity. It's intriguing to see 40 pages of uncollected work here: it surprises me that these poems weren't collected before, as they are very good indeed. In summary, then, this *Selected* is a most welcome event, a generous and even essential overview of an oeuvre that too many readers on this side of the Atlantic have lost sight of, and that too many US readers may have missed these past 15-20 years. This is a necessary book and Wesleyan deserves plaudits for having put it together. I hope it establishes his reputation once and for all – then we can have a Collected perhaps?

Mark Weiss: *Figures. 32 poems* (Chax Press, Tucson, AZ, 2001. 32pp, chapbook, npl.) As with a previous Chax edition I've seen, this is very well-produced. The poetry too is most attractive and ranges from the light to the weighty. Good to have.

C. D. Wright: *Steal Away. Selected and New Poems* (Copper Canyon Press, Port Townsend, WA, 2002. 233pp, h/c, \$25, www.coppercanyonpress.org, ISBN 1-55659-172-1) A big and very beautifully produced hardback which does a fine job of summarising the poetic career to date of C. D. Wright, a southern US poet resident in New England for many years, but who writes like no-one else I can think of, north, south, east or west. The first of her books that I read was *Tremble* (Ecco Press, NY, 1996), a quite

remarkable collection of short lyric poems to which I often return. Most of her previous books were already out of print at that time and it was hard to track any down. Two years later however *Deepstep Come Shining* appeared (also from Copper Canyon), a difficult and wide-ranging book-length work that uses poetry, prose narrative and hybrid forms to mash together memory, observation, history, myth, allegory, recorded voices, snippets of Lord knows what, so that the poem becomes a displaced reflection of life itself. If anything, that book is cinematic, not Hollywood-cinematic but Tarkovskycinematic: the Tarkovsky of *The Mirror*. The earlier poems here, such as those drawn from *Translations of the Gospel Back Into Tongues* (1982), are far more predictable in formal terms but there's a tensile strength to the verse, a tight control coupled with a merciless eye and accurate ear, which sets her apart. In *Further Adventures With You* (1986 – 16 pages here), the style loosens up quite a lot, and dream landscapes – shot through with memory as they always are – leave weird echoes in the reader's head that start to re-echo when you get to *Deepstep*. By the time we get to 1991's *String Light*, we're sometimes in radical territory, explorative, pushing out the boundaries to see how far they'll go, to see just what will go into a poem, or how it can come out. We still have those poems of memory though, the author's native Arkansas writ large.

Maybe you have to be from there to hear it sing:
Give me your waterweeds, your nipples,
your shoehorn and your four-year letter jacket,
the molded leftovers from the singed pot.
Now let me see your underside, white as fishes.
I lower my gaze against your clitoral light.
(‘Lake Return’, from *The Ozark Odes*).

1993's *Just Whistle (A Valentine)* is a long sequence that is intensely concerned with the body, with sexual imagery, with life and with death. I imagine this is not the whole book reprinted here so I'm just going to have to hunt down a second-hand copy somewhere:

Let the record show the body
has never made such plaintive claims before
except in the wake, the wake of.
(from ‘On the Morn Of’)

Something about straight gold hair on a pillow
Something about writing by the kingly light
in the quick minutes left before lips
suction a nipple from wrinkled linen
(from ‘Voice of the Ridge’)

If books can make you happy, this is surely one of them. It will remind you of the possibilities that contemporary poetry has, and all too often does not deliver.

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