

Shearsman 52

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featuring poetry by
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MICHAEL AYRES

Bridge of Sighs

It was the summer of the adjectives.
They flowered everywhere, and scattered in scented migrations.
We couldn't find the noun we wanted – home –
but made do with 'glitter' and 'warm' and 'bare'.

These came away from the stars and the breeze and the walls.
A beetle on your tanned leg was a Fabergé mountaineer,
intense and hard and sapphire – the colour of extinction.
It was harsh and rattled and spoke in dry clicks.
It wept light on your skin like a metallic tear
until I chopped my gaze in two
and it vanished through the hole in vision.
I fell on both sides of a blink as if halved with an axe
and saw the darkness coming.

It was smoke in my lungs, another toxic investment with Goldman Sachs.
Smoke, lips.
Our kiss seemed to core the sexy, laid-back afternoon.
We relaxed: 4 storeys of glory, shades –
we became quiet, because this was Summer's story.
I held a small chrome house in my hands, my Leica.
She cut out her own face with scissors – try to imagine.
This is a most unlikely story.

We couldn't find the hour we wanted.
It came away from the birds and the soul and the leaves
like a song, trickling down through green laboratories
to the rocks below. It was noon. It was hot.
It was a motion vetoed.

We patched it up with Greek and species and logic.
We tore it down with want and rabble and magic.
It was a few barefoot miles of the Children's Crusade.
It was long layman's hours of nursery flu, and a Lucozade shaman
becoming skipping Peter Rabbits on the undulant wall,
or Dan Dare's silver phallus floating just off Saturn,
the waltz music of the spheres, the stately rotations,
the feverish 100s and a talking horse.

Like flimsy knights, we armoured ourselves in lotion,
and rode the breakers to do battle with the flamboyant sun.

The full moon was so bright, I thought it might burn us.
Our kiss was a liquid axis we revolved on.
It was spacewalking, a kind of treason
and a last sight of land.
You turned me off, and you turned me on
like electricity, water or gas.

Fluid and fractured, it dripped through cracks in the lattice.
Limber and juiced, it flipped another page of Thomas Kuhn.
King of the king of kings, it somehow mattered:
it was a solid rip in things – the radiance of darkness.
It was a lacquered atom, a molecule of lapis
lazuli: it rippled in cells like a tear in my thoughts,
a flaw in the azure, a scratch on the film:
it roved through my dreams to a zone that was no-go.

It was August's, an ember, flamethrown by a volcano:
it was destined for Bond Street, a chemical jewel
elicited from a crucible – it rose out of nothing from the dust,
and crawled, strange to Nature,
through the cool science of our eyes.
It was a weird tale.
And all the photos had holes.

In details, it was bowled along in a shimmering wind of glances.
When the looking fell still, things dropped like petals
onto a dry patio, and the insect slipped away
across the stones: all need for us thrown off,
it headed back to Genesis, or to Khlebnikov.

It was a fire of unknown origin.
When the looking fell still, and the neighbours rustled
with their small, Cretaceous jaws,
sleep was a Red List, and dreams unsigned,
and light sounds filtered through the thin partitions
into the violin silence of Franz Kafka's apartment
and the violin alertness of a wakeful mind.

The sun has dried the concrete slabs of the patio.
The heat prepares the autumn stillness,
and everything's tense, like Zen paper
awaiting the first ink of a last haiku.

It was nothing given, but freedom taken away – ours.
Like evolution going into reverse,

it was a man growing whiskers, suckers, claws.
A saurian battle on the ocean floor,
it was predicates and predators,
and the subject was oozing scales and tails,
a warlike lemon and black, and liquid silver –
it oared through my sleep in a state that was slo-mo,
a vegetable person, as if by Archimboldo,
a blur of light, a wear of maws,
part theorem, part lobster, part wasp.

It was little Jean-Jacques Rousseau playing with his hoop or yo-yo.
It was the Tower, the sonnet and the moated grange.
It was tomorrow – an idea of the skull.
It was a play made by rude mechanicals,
a rustic entertainment. It was cold, the canals
froze: it was difficult to live.
It was the winter of the adjectives.

The average cloud weighs thousands of tons.
11lb exact, 1 gram, 1 mile. In the fairy tale,
the sorcerer used a telescope made of human hearts
to probe the mysteries of skies and seas,
to peer at the birth of waves and winds, of stars and planets and galaxies:
one day, he turned his gloomy mystic lens to spy
upon the ash-blond princess, singing at her spinning wheel –
content with neither simple sight nor secret glimpses,
from his darkened, occult chamber,
the brooding sorcerer magnified, and magnified yet more
his magic instrument
to snoop beneath the hair and skin
of the ash-blond princess, oblivious in her tower,
to delve deeper into her thoughts, and dreams, then deeper still,
until, at last, he pierced her to her innermost core –
and hated what he saw.

The sorcerer was an anatomist.
The city floats upon reflections.
Palazzi, San Marco, churches, campanile,
all upside-down in a watery red,
all ripples to the black bisection of a gondola,
in a dawn of plotting, and unease,
a mirage of guilt and peeling plaster.

The city sinks into reflections.
The grey Doge of the brain lies sequestered in his chamber

veiled from our eyes by drapes of tissue pink –
he is reclined upon his bed,
and dreams of us –
of how we moved, of how we spoke,
and what we said.

The poem is what happens – but here, there is no poem.
Words wept by themselves. The lexicon was institutional:
they'd been deloused, and their heads were shaved.
We left ourselves on one side of a bridge –
rage, goodbye – and scooped ourselves in little, fragile pieces:
many rooms, many lights, many walls, many pages.
Time passed by, an orphanage.

My life was dust, then milk.
My neighbours' child lifts the cup of his voice
to my dry lips, and I drink
something sweet and remote – the future.
It flames and holds, with effect immediately:
1 mile, 1 gram, 1lb exact –
it was a binding contract.

It was a butterfly with a hurricane
balanced on the tips of its resting wings.
It was an idle tongue, with evil in the silence.
It was a paedophobe and a paedophile.
It was an egg, with something growing in it,
something vile, sluiced in rennet.
It was an hour of sliding and of shedding scales:
it was the woodsman with his axe and horn,
a play made by brutal mechanicals.
It was a human gaze with a human child
balanced on the tips of its resting eyes.

And then the tenderness came.
All of Time's babies lay in their cots.
My eyes are Shakespeares, writing scenes – furiously.
It was pastoral, tragical, history, pastoral-comical,
tragical-comical-historical-pastoral.
They were the chosen words, and the words unchosen
crowded the windows like beggars or ghosts
keening to be heard, and to be let in.
And my eyes were organs – jellies, not oceans.
A pair of thumbs could put their writing out.
Still, as I watched you, I wrote

The Tempest, of blindness and pearls.
I wrote a script our mute gaze could hear and speak.
The tenderness came.

Starlight cracks insects between its dead jaws.
The insects tug down the stars.
A barren planet rotates on its brittle axis.
It's phosphorescent, lunar. It's without title.
It is final.

Café days glide by in hearses of smoke and sugar.
Cloudy sounds whorl and brood
like mist on the canals.
All of Time's babies are curled in their cradles.
It was a dirty word, and it caused them to curdle.
And still, all of Time's babies are being cooked in their ovens –
they're baked, they blacken, they rise, and they swell.

The wind veers and the ashes dispel.
The poem is a little girl, falling and grazing her knees;
it happens in the evening, when the sun's about to set,
and in the coming night, something is swarming wildly
in her shaking bees' nest of tears.

Sunset on the water was pink, ruffled, and blown
on a wind of verbs like a flight of flamingos –
rotten peach, fanned in a hothouse, was a porn movie, softcore.
As night fell, the lights in the skyscraper went out
one by one, and briefly the building played chess with the darkness;
in the end, there was no king,
and a moon rose over the deserted CBD,
and the heartless centre of the city
waited for the heart of a new glance to begin beating.

It was the summer of the adjective.
It was a dead letter box. And it was honey.
The wall was a pastel yellow, and the mirror
a Venetian. Thinking of a poem (*Narcissus*),
I held up the little word 'end'
as if with a pair of delicate tweezers.
She called to him to come to bed, put off the tv.
Images floated like lillies. He kissed her goodnight.
It's going to rain, she said, but it stayed dry
and our world seemed to stop breathing.
There wasn't much between our lips.

Somewhere, the storm held us, suspended, but in the way
mirrors hold faces they will never touch.

Gemini

I'm looking for a word that resists –
the bright twin of darkness, who lies in her arms,
and laughs and takes tiny steps
not sure where each of them will lead.
I know the word, even before the poem begins,
my bright double who takes the darkness in her arms
and teases her and makes her cry
with each intimation of leaving.
But, still, I'm looking for this word that resists,
and will go the whole length of the poem's darkness to find her.

The day's smashed open in flakes like beaten metal
and grows harder with the beating.
I won't survive this day,
or his brilliant twin the night
who runs away frightened at being different
and hides in herself herself and her sibling's eyes
and his impassive samurai face
which stares and won't look away –
which simply stares, and won't look away.

There isn't a word in the world harder than the light
of a poem making its way back home.
That light is so utterly ruthless,
it makes children of lovers –
even the most ruthless of lovers –
the ones who won't survive the end of love.
There isn't a word in the world that can endure
the hardness of a poem that knows
all thoughts of home are over,
all thoughts of love, all thoughts of you.

But the poem occurs, so there must be one thing harder
even than the diamond length of the coldest poem.
And there, every word bends and breaks –
even tenderness itself – even hardness itself.
The morning and the night are like children –
literally, like children –
and you know that I won't survive them,

or being their father
who always looks away, and lets them die,
and who can do nothing else.

I'm looking for a word that bends, then breaks –
a word that's too true for its own good –
and then I'll discard it
like a woman discards her footprints in the snow.
Those words, the ones that resist too much,
they're easy to find, and easier to lose –
they're everywhere, all over the ground,
you can pick them up off the street
or walk right through them
like a man walking through fresh snow.

The diamond words of the whole poem's length of light
are harder than anything,
even than a walk through the snow at noon
knowing you can never go back to her.
The light's hard, and the snow
that gives under your feet is hard,
noon's hard, but knowing you can never go back to her
seems harder than anything
except for the diamond words of the whole poem's darkness
and its glittering, sinuous corridor
that doubles back its cold length into the waiting light.

Blizzard

Tonight, what isn't spoken will never be spoken.
And what isn't known will never be known.
So let the silence have it –
silence, the stake – at the ferocious point of this poem.

I'm writing through my death, simply.
I'm making my way through my death as if through a blizzard.
Tonight, what isn't spoken will never be spoken,
and what isn't lived will never be lived.

My death, which has the colour of the unknown sky I've described,
stretches around me, and its thirst
continuously needs a horizon to slake it.
Give it your horizon – I'll ask that of you.

Tonight, I'm coming all the way through my death to you.
It seems a long way, but it's just a smile –
just the diffident way I caress
the hair from out of your eyes.
And I'm not a game anymore, tonight – not the gambler,
or the gambler's hand; I'm not even the dice.
I'm alive. I'm alive all the way through to my death.

You didn't understand before; you thought it was just snow.
You thought it was Thursday; you thought it was December.
But it was my death, the colour of a clear sky
no one will ever see.

You didn't understand before, but now, when I look in your eyes,
you'll look all the way through me –
all the way through, and leave nothing behind.
It's quiet tonight; and maybe there will be snow.
But it won't be snow – it will be my life.
Tonight, I'll write my way through it –
and the silence, I'll throw to the poem.

Walberswick

for Jon, Andrew and Anna

You keep, under your eyes, two gulls.
And they keep you under their wings –
their eyelids, Holland, their wings.

The horizon is never satisfied. I understand.
If it had a voice – today –
it would be your voice;
if it fell quiet – yesterday – still, today,
I would hear you calling.

There is a great distance inside me, and a line
where the dunes meet the sky.
There is a great silence inside me,
and through it, perhaps beside it, clouds are slowly moving.
The gulls keep you under their wings,
and pierce you, suddenly, with flight.

We should feed the present – like this –
with pieces of soft bread it snatches from our hands.
It will bolt us, both of us, together.

And if it has a voice – sad, raucous and insatiable –
we have a quietness it can never take.
Holland. I understand so little now.
My mouth is two pale green crabs
holding on to the air with slender pincers
because the air is like meat
and, today, I am hungry.

Fisherman clouds, lowering fine steel lines,
bacon, hooks, all the rain of Noah:
April's turning into May, and May – here –
into September. You keep two gulls under your eyes –
two gulls, two rains, two Septembers.

We should feed tomorrow like this – gently.
And let yesterday drink softly from our hands.
There is a great stillness inside you, and a line
where the sea leaves the dunes.
There is a slight distance between us,
and through it, perhaps beside it, we are slowly being moved
under a massive sky.

April. I am not satisfied.
Fused haze and calm, steel to steel,
Holland lies, cast somewhere beyond the molten lines
where our eyes let us go.
We keep, under our flight, two rains –
two seas, two Hollands, two rains.

There is a great quietness inside me, and a cry
of white gulls scorching the sea.
There is an horizon inside me,
and if it had a voice – now –
it would be your voice;
if it fell silent – then –
I would throw it soft pieces of my breath,
calling your name.

Tomorrow – today – yesterday –
hold on to me with slender pincers.
They are almost pure hunger – and they pierce us –
but we have a hunger they can never take.

On stilts, the wooden house – stove, harmonium and everything –
is walking away. And what was once leaf, resin and air

no pitch or tar could preserve,
it was made for flooding – everything, music and fire.
Lie down, and you will see, there's light beneath it;
and, beneath the light, ourselves, walking back.

Tomorrow – today – yesterday –
I hold them in four slender pincers
of hard, pale green.
Tomorrow – yesterday – today –
we have a hunger they can never take,
and – with this – we pierce them.

September – try to take it now.

Galicia

I must learn to fall in love with the word 'goodbye'.
I've tried to use it too coolly for too long;
and I've also hated it, as if it didn't care for me.
I must learn to fall in love with 'goodbye'.

It has a cold light, uninvolved, of massive gravity.
You can't look into its heart, it's too bright,
but at its edge the radiance grows softer
– and that, that you can bear.

I must learn to fall in love with the word 'goodbye'.
If it is a sun, I must learn to look away.
It has its own hot light, profoundly involved, of strange gravity.
You can't look into your own heart for long, it's too bright;
and at the core, there's the seething, rustling sound of burning;
and only one other element can quench that fire –
the cool, dispassionate element of 'goodbye'.

I can't tell you how beautiful it is –
this is the very word 'goodbye'.
I can't tell you how odd it is, wavering, uncertain:
it holds out the possibility of ends,
and yet pretends to be a kind of link
that chains us to greeting.

And I think, in time, I will become the word 'goodbye'.
It will no longer rest outside me
but remain, unsaid, inside every word that I say to you.

I will speak about things, but they will be half-moons,
each of them, and even the visible half will be clouded;
and the dark half of each word will be 'goodbye'.
It has no children. It can never have children –
is that terrible? It has great spaces –
inches, grams, miles – and in the white corner of an eye,
moonlit fields of wheat, Kansas, and a calm, interstellar beauty
in which the sublime unkindness of life falls quiet,
and gazes at us, and even, for a moment, seems kind –
but it is not kind: it is just another word for 'goodbye'.

This is the last poem you will ever read – the ultimate one.
And you think: what a relief,
never to have to deal with stupid poems again.
This is the last one:
it is simply the word, 'goodbye'.

It will have no children – is that beautiful?
Once understood, you need never read a poem again –
it will use all words up, dry them up,
hollow them, harrow them, make them useless –
and, most useless of all, the words, 'I love'.

Perhaps this is why it is wonderful – this simple word, 'goodbye'.
It's strange, impartial, a metal that could be bronze or gold,
but whichever metal it is, forms an axe,
sometimes with two heads – yours and mine –
sometimes with a caress – instinctive and homely –
sometimes just with a cawing of rooks in the evening,
a deboned, incinerated sound
which is, impossibly, no one's.

It is mine. And it will be mine forever.
Everyone is adult who really walks in the light of 'goodbye'.
Gold, beaten, its metal enters the kiss, halving it perfectly.
The moon, too, it halves – constant, inconstant –
and one half it gives to you.

I want to be very gentle with that word, 'goodbye'.
Autumn moon, it cuts the world in two, even with a smile,
and one half you must always keep.
I'll learn to respect that word, and its decision;
I will always say goodbye forever.

And when I've said goodbye to you
that will be like one stone falling on another stone.

There will be a dull clicking sound that doesn't echo at all
even though the air is clear;
perhaps there will be a little dirt, moonlight, fences, roads;
but everything else will be luminous, and barren, and sterile;
and inside me then, for the very first time,
I'll hear my heart beating, and each beat will sound
like one stone falling on another stone –
and one stone, I must always keep.

It isn't mine. It will never be mine.
I want to be brusque with this word – goodbye –
bully it, sneer at it, rough it up a little –
naturally, it's hard to bear its composure,
and the fact that it will never be home.
I want to be negligent with this word, casual,
I don't want the air to be clear, but fuzzy, facetious and noisy,
full of fat life that goes on and can't
be cut into neat halves, neither of them love.
I want to insult the word, 'goodbye'.

Sometimes, though, it's too late: the air is clear,
the night quiet, and even a kiss
sounds like two stones, one falling against another;
and there's not even dirt, or the crying of gulls –
just a clicking sound – casual, almost facetious –
and in the luminous, unbearable calm stretching around you –
Galicia – as if under bare moonlight,
you see there are so many stones,
and they're skittering and clicking against each other with each step
as if in a field you're walking across
though it isn't halved, and there is no other side.

This is the mercy of a field of stones: it becomes the adult human heart,
and you know that you must walk across it forever.
It becomes the ground, and possesses no horizon.
And then the word 'goodbye' has a dull, echoless sound,
and every greeting grows harsher and harsher.

I can't tell you how beautiful it is.
I can only keep walking.
I must learn to fall in love with that sound, the sound
of the word 'goodbye' –
even if that love is secretly hate.

This is the longest word I will ever say.

PETER LARKIN

3 Poems from "Sprout Near Severing Close"

31

The outshelter we are long shorn
above: it is important to raise
countless subtrees at every
gauge of growth, wedding
no universe of replacement.

This loss of risen wealth
beaches on the severed height:
underneath and without bareness
of reproach, spared more than
lowest (ungapped) re-approach.

A cistern of buried roots
gives spill-size a light
to the consolation of un-
leaked (parodied) shoot.

Repair is flabbier than re-invasion
but the compassion is clothable
ground, warded by *this* generation
to within a stem of the stamp-out.

Sproutage as a surge-ignorance
by open stasis in the clearing
cut green unclean to foot:
staying go-shaven
without the furtherance of closure.

Secondary piety
in a poverty of concision
healing what is sagged to site:
one low dowering
cores revision
on the rod.

32

Spears out (out of) dorsal
spate, thin burnish
crabs it steeply,
might graft but not crest
regeneration, or what a
community in dumpy stick
won't traverse as hoard,
though abroad enough
beyond seedling fir.

Not hinged on survival horizon
save at liddable shoot.

Unengrossed cap of beech
exports from canopy to sprout.
These scraps between the fender's polar weave
re-attach a glow in the throat,
a morsal of swallowed flame
from callus to tip.

Damage to forest
at the tipped brokerage.
A fineal mosaic of change
assured preliminary
stanchion no lower than
any upright's unsowing.

33

Spars lofted to a bar
at naked instances.
Revival by other green screens
than ground off ground.

Faint second-growth shadow
of the original interminable
negotiation a middle aisle
closer, a conjugate ex-aggregate.

Forests not resown to cover
but blunt parody of anoriginal
aslants of cut,
slighted to asymmetric
radicals to resume
the reel of cycles forth,
the tallness straits
over subvacuous crowns.

STEVEN TAYLOR

Utilitarianism

I retain the tendency
to confuse value pluralism
with anthropological attitudes
and this makes
even my newest fiancée
grimace her orgasm

sceptical about objective morality
as it might apply

when we are together and talk
with our teeth

lengthways nude in bed with light
slatted between American blinds
from moody films where words

and spent passion provide a context
for when inevitably we double cross
while our cigarette smoke entwines

as a series of cancerous afterthoughts
about fate, romantic love, and desire

and how your commitment
might be measured out
from a Victorian water jug

that is already
more ornament than use

Requiem

Becoming ill in summer

My father would inevitably
Need his nasal cream:

Naseptin. Later

Allopurinol 300mg
Morphine sulphate (liquid) 5ml
Diclovol 75mg
Voltarol 75mg
Morphine Sulphate 30mg
Catopric 25mg
Prepulsid 10mg
Bumentanide 1mg
Cyclizine 50mg
Praxilene 100mg
Oramorph Solution 5mg

When I counted them

7 suits altogether
Striped, fine check and plain
A dark blue blazer with an RAF badge
A beautiful wool coat
Miscellaneous trousers
That might make you think he golfed
Which he didn't. Shirts
Made from unnatural fabrics

Terylene
Polyester. Bri-nylon.
A jersey knit.
Even courtelles.

Odd for a cotton worker
A cutter, which he was.

Steven Taylor was born and brought up in Hyde, near Manchester, and now lives in Kilburn, North London, as the English aspect of an Irish household. He is currently assembling his first collection.

IAN DAVIDSON

Five Poems from 'Jetski'

1.

in hot darkness a pool
spreading drawn across by
politics to be polite

here's a way forward
things drifted between
the banks through the

dropped arches fascist
memorabilia a spreading pool
of fact the tall monuments

casting shadows brain
damage from a bulky pinnacle
I can see my house from here a

sphere of influence from holes in the
ground many spikes rise commemorative
and that which has past the industrial

daring the future a series of
rectangles each one over and
under or to one side the fit not

perfect not meant to be people
written over and through the
arch to arch from lighthouse

to lighthouse no more than a heap of
rock where the birds come to roost beyond
the fold around the tides meet

2.

The longitude and the latitude

Within the grid reference the contour lines
leak
between a mountain life is different
higher still no vegetation grows

It sits as if to squat below a certain level
small squares of fields between
dry stone walls we're no goats nor mountain
agiles to climb or needing peace at last

Most sudden movements can cause bruising the
Marxist party or clearing land of its
people for other purposes and that's why the
big house is big and the monument something

to begin at the beginning there is a stretch of
water wider than even my outstretched arms
and spreading further across the wooden floor
a voice can go further than that it can take up time

3.

Water has less friction I glide on pictures of
water oh choppy sea the superstructure
of pier mighty columns across a
stretch and its failed significance station

Hotel pink flowers against dark stone some potential
difference draws the road through from point to
point whatever pollution they come up with in
layers and slices I heal and clone new bands

And when she smiles, smile, towards sunset June 18
1815 I am badly drawn between difference
and unsure of coordination what England expects
whether a memory of itself or the real thing

Shadow induced panic the switch thrown across
the face of the earth across the lung the dig
x rayed long held skeletons back by the tide a sea
wall or a tidal wave between the two undertow

4.

the tale of the battered monk
turned out a light well less
an inner courtyard my
architecture is faulty the flexible
spine of the fish and its feathers
washed out to sea on a wave of

optimism back to the wall and
what is it this sand is it blasted
bone or the wall of the cistern
for the wet sacred bones the

sea exhuming out of disinterest for
what angle are they laid at
how does the sun bounce
off the sea the first day all the
grass was bent by a westerly and
when the background is not
granite which splits
evenly down the grain what
material do they use for a cist?

sometimes a one word answer
yes or no an augmented maybe
or the stutter of sources juddering
down the time lines before
lighting up the dark wires
of a brain that's lost its history

a child plays between the cracks
poking a drain with a stick a
hole into somewhere without light
where liquid runs and what is the
shoreline but a barrier why does
digging stop at the high
tide mark the fear of sea
slugs thick kelp a medium

5.

thick with absorbed oxygen the
expertise swims in the brain the
clipboard floats away we classify
the objects in a piece of mind
standing in the air and moving

once dug the ground is never the
same again it's a performance
archaeology of discovering what
really went on or at least as far
as they can tell the real thing

he saw himself pretending to
doubt and that was enough
the queue outside the town hall
spread down the street the projector
was useless with that size of crowd

poetry can be put into words the
purple amongst the marran grass
rain whipped across
a windscreen how a sea shanty feels
from the inside where the mouth of the bay spits in
waves and the jetskis in the jaw
or the curve against the horizon where
the island becomes a wasp waist

on the second day the wind still blew
and the air was full of water, the site
protected from invasion from
young and inexperienced fingers
picking it over disturbing the bones
with the seal of approval others just
worry away at it like the sea washing
through the stone wall or the chapel that
Pennant mapped all the facilities

Biographical Notes

Michael Ayres was born in Nottingham in 1958, and lives in Cambridge. His publications are *Poems 1987-1992* (Odyssey Poets, 1994), and two pamphlets from Poetical Histories, *1976 Streets* and *The Sky That Was Your Guide*, all of which are obtainable from Peter Riley's small-press mail-order service at 27 Sturton Street, Cambridge CB1 2QG. Salt will publish his second full-length collection, *a.m.* in 2003. **Ian Davidson** lives on Ynys Mon in North Wales, where he has been for most of his life. He is currently completing a PhD in the relationship between ideas of space and poetic form. Previous publications have included *Human to Begin With* (Poetical Histories) and *The Patrick Poems* (Amra). *Harsh* is forthcoming from Spectacular Diseases. Recent critical writing includes essays, interviews and reviews in *Additional Apparitions* (*The Paper* 3 & 4), *Six Poets* (*The Gig*) and *Excommunicated* (*Ecorché* 3). **Peter Larkin** is Philosophy & Literature Librarian at Warwick University, with research interests in ecocriticism and in postmodern theology. His latest collection is *Terrain Seed Scarcity* (Salt, Cambridge, 2001). **John Muckle** has just relocated to London after some months in Devon. He is the author of two prose books, and has recently completed a first novel and a collection of poems. **Craig Watson** is based in Rhode Island, USA, where he runs a theatre company. The poems printed here will appear in September 2002 in a new collection *True News* from Instance Press of Santa Cruz, CA. (ISBN 0-9679854-2-0, \$10.00, available through SPD).

CRAIG WATSON

Five Poems from 'Spectacle Studies'

Missing and Presumed

Everyone in this picture is gone;
That's what it takes to invoke the world.
Truth could be the law of the father
Or a rock in a rock storm.

A map's red lines display shortest distances.
The blue ones tell us what to think.
Why "parent" rhymes with "parrot" and
How long the dead remain dead.

There are always three choices:
The feast, the ordeal, the cul-de-sac.
Meanwhile, every lyric impulse
Caresses the dirt in our mouths.

If this is where light comes from
Then music must be an echo of the big bang
And a new prime number can only exist as
Infinity regained, a place to hide in broad daylight.

Path of Least Resistance

Thought engraved a devoted world
For each blind and celebrated image.
So we consigned our trust to ambition and
Applied for citizenship in the wax museum.

Just as a picture becomes unanchored from
The idea of a picture, the more we learn
The greater becomes our ignorance, until
Each resemblance creates another, unconditionally.

In a perfect world, witnesses are
Nothing more than indestructible puppets:
They receive thought, crack heads, then walk
Into the past precisely where the past is.

Eventually, we will substitute the figure
Of many with the word for empty.
Anonymity will be our just reward:
That blessed purple match head.

Profit Margin

Every choice is a round trip
From wilderness to climax
Among a knowledge that exerts no gravity
Between seeing and the thing seen.

Like a perfect virus
Or a bride in the dark, we want
What anyone wants as if
The reciprocal was always true.

Only the author can escape
That chorus of particulars and
Rain from below, a continuous
Failure which keeps us immortal.

Nevertheless, we dig and fill
Burn and pour, haunted by
The act of acting and the inequity
Of eternal solace.

Plus One Plus

To locate a unified single subject
Fold and tear moon from earth
Or imagine us endowed with aboriginal fertility
Scratching with pointed sticks in the dirt.

We like to think that fantasy battles reality
Because pictures easily adapt themselves
To any available space and every
Silence imitates a freeze-frame consensus.

But the dead hate that metaphor of sleep
As if each absence implies enclosure
Or a class of images craving projection
Back-lit by the verso of chance.

Eventually we will return to the senseless
That home-away-from-home prose
And prescient fear of falling between
Unequal half-hours and every flawless deceit.

2/15 of a Second

A newborn "O's" her mouth
To the hums of passersby.
The natives are restless:
All praise hopeful monsters.

Express yourself.
Subscribe yourself.
Today, like yesterday
An insolvency unendured.

In the desire machine,
Hunger forms flesh.
One window conceals another
Gathering a familiar light.

According to reason
God has no mouth but
In the river of stain
Everyone's name is each other.

JOHN MUCKLE

Isabelle, sa soeur

I remember you coming to me in Charleville
on a furlough from your first husband,
the architect, the high flier, when I was still
a student studying Arthur Rimbaud.

I remember the tallest of wire fences
surrounding your father's large self-built house
as a sort of enclosure around your girlhood
to keep the Ardennes' wild boars out.

I remember you dousing your breasts with wine
to make them grow for me, so that I'd want you
and the list of rules your father sent me
with the timetable of his daughters' bedtimes.

I remember your tallness, a curved spine,
your sloping gait, your feet, bigger than mine
so when I greeted you and we made love
on our feet, it was like facing another man.

You joked that you were no longer a child
while I still was, the roles were reversed
and you made me another chocolate cake
in your mother's kitchen, pretending it was for yourself.

I remember your unimaginable life
your incomprehensible letters, I still have them
in a cardboard suitcase, the one I carried
with a bleached photo of you I developed at school.

I remember meeting you in a supermarket
on Belle Ile, still scruffy, a sort of nervous arrogance
while your boisterous, ill-dressed daughter
demolished a stack in the adjoining aisle.

I remember hearing of your death in a car
on your way to work in the mountains of Grenoble
where you were a psycho-motrice for children
carried away by a snowdrift, a small avalanche.

Paradoodle

The best writers take people and things as they are
not having any particularly
harumphing idea of culture
to sit back upon
and following as they do
their exploratory lines
across an unmapped but always
undefined experience: undefined, that is
until the moment it's done
and then mainly for others
they never really seem to connect
with the conceptions that dominate their times
except they do: they're commenting on them
as you say, but only tangentially
and whilst there's a politics
they're following, perhaps of the acceptable,
of what they are allowed to say
it's not what you and I might prefer
to call politics
and the best of them, although they must possess
as much Machiavellian intelligence as anyone
(even a chimp)
seem only to be observers, recorders of their impressions
which they're not being too precious
about either
just getting it all down
dead centre, the way it's meant to be
the way nobody had quite seen
or managed to tell it before –
too hedged
in the sense both of
running between dense screens
and of a caution that wouldn't
allow us to invest
so heavily in apparent, unimportant meanings.

Anti-Heroes

Imagine that Pope had dedicated himself
to obtaining fair play for hunchbacks;
that, as the most intelligent of their kind
he had tried to 'represent' his tribe
and find a literary analogue for their condition.

Perhaps he could make his verses mis-shapen,
listing, asymmetrical, a bit like himself.
He could make them limp a little, too
and play for sympathy. He didn't though.
He didn't. That's why we've heard of him.

Each crack is at the end of the whip.
And even then they said his satiric bite
was only the bitterness of a cripple.
I expect they were probably right.
They are usually, these fountains of opinions.

He certainly asked for their advice on women.
He acted the lad in letters. How sitting
between the glowing misses Blount
he had trouble 'to keep myself in my skin',
and they jumped out of theirs in a kind of delicious fright.

How he could place everything in order –
grasshoppers, swine, elephants, and men
arraigned, arranged; yet their order's
mocked, turned upside-down, a provisional:
a day, a play on which the curtain falls.

Mrs Pope died at Twickenham, still unaware
they say, of the reasons for her son's fame.
A caterpillar repeats thy mother's grief,
her gardening undone by its infernal chewing
in an aphorism Blake flung down anywhere.

Editorial

This issue of *Shearsman* will go online at www.shearsman.com in mid-October 2002. Readers will also be able to find a new venture on the website before the end of October: the first in a series of electronic chapbooks, tentatively titled the *Gallery* series. Each 'publication' will feature the work of an individual writer, and will continue to be archived on-site where copyright allows. The 'chapbooks' will feature poetry, prose, critical work, illustrations, photos, anything in fact that can add to the reader's appreciation of the featured writer's work. The series will begin with work by John Hall, who has been working with a combination of words and visual materials in recent years and whose work is therefore especially well-suited to website delivery. There are plans to feature Michael Ayres and John Muckle, both of whom appear in this issue, in subsequent 'exhibits'.

Books Received, Read, Noted, Recommended

Franz Josef Czernin: *elemente, sonette* (Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich, 2002. Isbn 3-446-20227-7. 159pp, h/c €17.90). I'm a fan of Czernin's exceedingly difficult poetry, and had been looking forward to this volume since seeing parts of it in magazines. It contains nothing but sonnets, all rhymed, and he has to be the only avant-gardist anywhere writing rhyming sonnets, let alone sonnets of this complexity. If you can't read German this is irrelevant, as these poems are unlikely ever to be translated; if you can deal with the language (and do read them aloud to yourself, if your tongue doesn't get stuck in the process) get this book: it's quite amazing. I confess to liking the previous book (*natur-gedichte*) more, but anything this man writes is worth your attention.

Federico García Lorca: *Collected Poems. Revised Bilingual Edition* (ed. Christopher Maurer, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 2002. 990pp, h/c, \$50). I think there's a softcover edition of this too, and it should be available in the UK. I'm still in my early days with the book, but it's pretty formidable and includes just about everything you need, unless you're obsessive and really do want the juvenilia (which you'll have to get from the Spanish edition of the *Obras Completas*). The revised edition also includes *Poet in New York* in its correct form (which can now be established following the reappearance of the final manuscript in 1999 – the story of this long-lost document appeared in a recent *TLS*). Whether or not García Lorca is untranslatable, as many have suggested, he is the kind of writer who has to be attempted. For what it's worth I think he *is* translatable, but not all the time and not (to be honest) by all of these translators. Some of the more baroque surrealist-inflected pieces sound very odd in English, but then we don't have much in the way of Surrealism in English and nor do we have a Góngora or a Quevedo to echo. By and large, the book is a success, however, and ought to be sought out by anyone interested in this writer – it would best suit those with at least some level of literary Spanish, given the uncertainties, but for all the rest of you – grab it anyway because it's as near as you're likely to get to the work of one of the great 20th Century writers.

Charles Hadfield: *The Nothing We Sink Or Swim In* (Oversteps Books, Salcombe, Devon. Isbn 0-9541-376-0-4. Pb, 47pp, no price listed). The third full-length collection by *Shearsman* regular Charles Hadfield, and published by Anne Born's Devon-based press. There are a couple of minor design problems here, such as the glossy paper, insufficient allowance for guttering, typeface for titles not being the most appropriate, etc. I think I've committed each of these sins at one time or another myself, to be honest. The book's appearance is rescued, however, by the clean & unfussy cover with its Chinese character and neat typography. Hadfield's poems are not noisy – this is a quiet and undemonstrative art, often elegiac in tone, and concerned with other lands, the poet being much-travelled. It's a pleasure to have a new collection by him.

Two more from Oversteps Books:-

James Cole: *From the Blue* (40pp, pb, £5.95); **Mandy Pannett:** *Bee Purple* (44pp, pb, npl). Two more south-coast poets for this Devon press, and first-time print collections in both cases. I have to say I'm not too excited by what's going on here. The poetry is attractive and accomplished enough but it doesn't get into my soul and doesn't push at the frontiers of perception in any way. Both books are safe and unassuming, well-written of their kind, and as such will no doubt find a more accommodating audience than myself.

David Jones: *Wedding Poems* (ed. Thomas Dilworth, Enitharmon Press, London, 2002. 83pp, h/c, £12). Yes, it's **that** David Jones. These are the last two poems by Jones that remained unpublished, having been left out of the *Roman Quarry* 'opus posthumous' for reasons personal to the editor of that volume (which strikes me as absurd, and an abdication of academic principles, but what do I know...). If you like Jones, you have to have this book, which is exquisitely produced. The *Prothalamion* is 36 lines long, and the *Epi-thalamion* 236 lines. Essays and scholarly apparatus make up the rest of the book. Further welcome news lies in the fact that the editor of this book is engaged on a biography of Jones for Jonathan Cape, due in 2006.

Alice Oswald: *Dart* (Faber, London, 2002. Pb, 48pp, £8.99).

Memo to Faber's designers: green on turquoise looks foul. Other than that the new typographic house-style looks good and clean.

This book has created quite a stir in the British broadsheet press, in a way that poetry usually does not. And then for a book that is only the author's second collection. Some of the press commentary was a wonder to behold, the book being proclaimed in *The Independent* as 'poetry for those who don't read poetry' (the mind boggles: almost no-one reads poetry... so where does that leave us?). This was of course sophistry: it simply meant that the article's author didn't read poetry and was surprised that the book was both 'readable' and enjoyable. We won't go into what some of the real poetry reviewers said in any detail, but I was amused by the attempt in *The Guardian* to argue that Alice Oswald had managed to straddle the divide between Hughes and Larkin. Eh? Larkin would have hated this.

The book is the result of a few years spent in, on and around the River Dart, a process for which the author received some Lottery funding in the 'Poetry Places' scheme. For once the results of such lubrication are positive. The book is a fine one, and is the first attempt I've seen from a British mainstream perspective to dig into a poetry of place of the kind that Williams was trying in *Paterson*, for instance. Now that's not to say that *Dart* is of the order of *Paterson* – far from it. Its aims are less ambitious, but this is nonetheless a fine evocation of place, and is formally adventurous, being composed in prose and various kinds of verse, with a sprinkling of marginalia that add to the unfolding of the poem. The diction is compelling, and takes every opportunity to swerve into a watery onomatopoeia:

when the lithe water turns
and its tongue flatters the ferns
do you speak this kind of sounds
whirlpool whisking round?

If it clunks now and again:

I would sing the wedded kiss
continuous of Salmacis

Ms Oswald is also capable of delightful local usages that show a poet's genuine pleasure in sound and language:

o I wish I was slammicking home
in wet clothes, shrammed with cold and bivvering but

this is my voice
under the spickety leaves

I don't know if those are really local words, but they sound as if they ought to be and, as with many dialect words, they convey meaning even when their lexical definition is opaque.

I like the ambition of this book, and not just because of a predisposition to like the local landscape in the poem (most of the poem's locales are within 20 miles or so of the house where I write this) and some of them are familiar. It's the kind of ambition I don't expect to find in the current British mainstream, and it's good to have one's preconceptions confounded like this. I acquired the book expecting the worst after those press reviews, only to find some very fine writing and a poet who is not simply wearing the locale as a convenient crutch for her writing. A book that you should read.

Frances Presley: *Somerset Letters* (Oasis Books, London, 2002. Chapbook, Isbn 1-900996-20-0, 36pp, £5. With illustrations by Ian Robinson). Another place book, and another one worth your time. In this volume the difference between the prose sections and the verse is more forcibly marked, divided as it is into numbered pieces, with no mixing of the two. This seems to have started as a book of letters & prose observations, with the poems gradually entering as the work developed. I'd say this has been to its advantage, as Ms Presley is a more compelling poet than she is a prose-writer. Notwithstanding this, the book as a whole works well and I look forward to further developments of this kind in the author's work.

Gustaf Sobin: *In the Name of the Neither* (Talisman House, Jersey City, NJ, 2002. Isbn 1-58498-030-3. Pb, 57pp, \$14.95. Available via SPD.) Anyone who reads this magazine regularly or has seen the comments on the *Shearsman* website about Sobin's work, will know that I yield to none in my admiration for his work. His latest collection, a most welcome one after his recent fiction sabbatical, is all that one would hope for. There is little new here, but Sobin's art is already so singular that it seems churlish to mention it. The style has long since settled down and his faithful readers can expect continuing refinement rather than new barricades being broken down. All that I love about his work is here in abundance: the ethereal atmosphere, the delight in language, the oddly fractured almost-prose line in some of the poems, the ability to use abstraction in a way that most English-language poets simply cannot:-

the beauty of mimosa, of
all flowers, finally, resides in the
commotion they provoke, that barbed, be-
wildering disorder that sends you, each
time, to the far, the facing side for the
spectacle of some all-
too-fleeting placation.

(*From a Mimosa Sketchbook*)

Grammar, parts of speech, syllables and breath all occur and re-occur throughout these poems almost as if the author is struggling to reclaim some primeval sense of expression that has long since been lost to us. The world is defined according to grammatical principles, has its own grammar if you will, the poet's breath and expression giving it air, sense, definition. And a book like this is a breath of fresh air, always.

ANTHOLOGIES

Christoph Buchwald & Lutz Seiler: *Jahrbuch der Lyrik 2003* (C.H. Beck Verlag, Munich, 2002. Pb, 135pp, €12.90). The latest in this useful series of annual anthologies. The thematic divisions are always somewhat spurious, but the poems are interesting at least, and often very good indeed. This is a good place to find what's going on in contemporary German poetry, though you won't find too many representatives from the avant-garde. I guess they'd frighten the annual buying public.

First Eleven Poets (Dept of English Literary and Linguistic Studies, University of Newcastle, 2002. Isbn 0 7017 0140 4. 63pp, pb, £3.50). A showcase for the members of the MA course in Writing Poetry at Newcastle University, this includes work by 11 ladies (it was, I assume, an all-female course): a nice thing to do on the part of the University. The range and style of the work included will not surprise anyone who follows the Bloodaxe list, and the intro is by Jo Shapcott, who teaches part of the course. Would-be students can contact Professor Desmond Graham (d.f.graham@ncl.ac.uk) or Mrs Rowena Bryson (rowena.bryson@ncl.ac.uk).

MAGAZINES

Das Gedicht No. 10 (ed Anton G. Leitner, Wessling bei München, 2002. <http://www.aglv.de> 190pp. €11.50). Special issue, *Politik und Poesie: Gedichte gegen Gewalt*. Latest of several special issues of this annual magazine, which is no longer as informative as it once was. It's still a good place to find out what's been published, however, and the ads are useful. The poems printed in it range from the interesting to the mediocre. It is by no means improved on this occasion by having poems from Sean O'Brien and an interview with Peter Forbes, late of *Poetry Review*. Not one of the better issues of *Das Gedicht*.

Near East Review Vol. 1, Nos. 1 & 2, 2002. ISSN 1303-3174 (ed. George Messo, Faculty of Humanities & Letters, Bilkent University, 06533 Ankara, Turkey. 171pp, \$10, TL 13 million. Website <http://www.bilkent.edu.tr/~leech/nerjournal/>

Subscriptions (2 issues) \$18; add \$3 for overseas orders. I confess I picked this up in an Istanbul bookstore while on vacation, and then largely because of John Ash's inclusion, although I had seen an announcement some months previously concerning the impending appearance of the magazine. It is going to take some time to bed down, and it's dangerous to make assumptions based upon an inaugural issue, but there are good things here: poems by Christopher Middleton, Peter Riley, Peter Didsbury & John Ash, an interview with the latter, some translations of Ernst Meister, letters by Nazim Hikmet, the only Turkish poet I can name, and sundry versions of other Turkish & Kurdish poets, the quality of which I am unable to judge. There's even a review of an anthology of Hebrew Feminist Poets, which may indicate a desire on the part of the editor to situate his journal firmly in the centre of the old Levantine world. If so, good luck to him: this is a pretty good start.

Poetry Review Vol. 92/2 Summer 2002 (120pp, £6.95). This is the first issue of *PR* under

the stewardship of David Herd and Robert Potts, after the long fallow years under Peter Forbes. First impressions are very good indeed, particularly as some good books from outside the standard mainstream are reviewed (Prynne, Tranter, Milne, Haslam), and Lee Harwood is a contributor for what must be the first time in 25 years or more. Poems by Ashbery, Hill (who crops up everywhere at the moment), Tranter, Brackenbury, Wilmer and some that aren't even names to me, plus an essay on Edwin Morgan, and a comic-strip (!) by John Tranter. A good start, guys: let's have more. It should also be noted that the cover-price is the same as that for *Stand*, which is half PR's length. PR, however, is the only magazine I know that charges more for subscriptions than it does for single issues. You can buy a single copy for £6.95 plus 50p postage, but you can subscribe within the UK for £30 for 4 issues. I suppose you still come out slightly ahead having not paid for a stamp to make the order, but all the same... Overseas (airmail) subs are £40; \$56 for the US.

Stand Vol. 3 Nos. 2 & 3 (62pp, £6.50, \$12, A\$17.95, double issue) & Vol. 3/4 & Vol. 4/1 (64pp, £6.50, \$12, A\$17.95 double issue). I imagine that most readers will be aware of the long-running British magazine *Stand*, founded decades ago by the late Jon Silkin and printed in an odd horizontal format. After Silkin's death the magazine began again, so to speak, under the editorship of John Kinsella and Michael Hulse, and made a promising start. That promise – for whatever reason – was not maintained and the last issue under the Kinsella/Hulse editorship was a dire double-issue joint-venture with *Kenyon Review*. Since the new *Stand* promised to offer a home for writers of all aesthetic stripes, its swift decline and disappearance was a great disappointment. Now *Stand* is reborn once again under the editorship of Jon Glover of Leeds University. The first of the two double issues listed here smacks of the contractual obligation album and is positively awful. There are some half-interesting translations from the Montenegrin poet Milika Pavlovic and a couple of prose pieces by that up and coming young Russian prose stylist, Anton Chekhov, but otherwise the content is best filed in the round filing cabinet. The second issue is, by contrast, something of a treasure-chest – a Geoffrey Hill special issue, and I can't help wondering whether Hill's status as an ex-member of the Leeds faculty might not have something to do with his appearance. This is well-timed given that Hill's new volume *The Orchards of Syon* has only just been published in the UK. The issue contains a 20-poem sequence from a new poem-sequence titled *Scenes from Comus*, so-called in homage to the composer Hugh Wood – Hill's exact contemporary – who wrote the vocal-and-orchestral piece of that name which inspired the poems, given in turn to the composer for his 70th birthday this year. The 20 poems here make up Part 1, titled *The Argument of the Masque*. First acquaintance suggests that this *Comus* does not have the cumulative power of *Syon* or the latter's tautness of composition, but anything from Hill's pen is worth attention. In addition there is a good review by Rodney Pybus of *Syon* and a few other texts about the poet. The supporting cast includes a sequence of poems by Michael Hamburger in his easy-flowing late style. But you get this for the Hill poems and the attached paraphernalia, not for the supporting cast.

Where does *Stand* go from here? I suspect it has no discernible role, since most of what it used to do is better done by magazines such as *PN Review* or *Agenda*, and, if it is going to do more of what's in its first revival issue, we could do without it. What the market needs quite frankly is a magazine that provides an outlet for serious poetry and prose by younger writers, rather than another quasi-academic quarterly with no *raison d'être*.