

shearsman 53

winter 2002 / 2003 issue

*featuring **poetry** by*
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Shearsman Books
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Single issue : £2.50

Subscriptions : £7 (4 issues)

Cheques payable to Shearsman Books

Europe ex-UK : add 65p / £2.50

Rest of the world : add £1.25 / £5

GUSTAF SOBIN

Quinces

1.

...just as the poem
runs rippling through the poem and
coincides, so

doing, with its
inherent momentum, so the
quince, catching on
its

pinched syllable, rounds to its
mass, decks itself in
a

burst girdle of
gold
foliage.

2.

nothing, you'd
noted, that
doesn't happen twice, but only at the

bow's
according.

3.

beating, as they do, abrasive, one
against another in an
un-
remitting mistral, these
plump, pendulous mammillaires know
no

quarter if not the
notes themselves, their
deep

refluent receptacles.

4.

where else, though, would the
quinces go, would you
your-

self, if not into
those

vibratory under-
worlds: there where the breath, at last,
might find
umbrage.

5.

...offered unto no
known
deity, these battered
rococo vessels, come September, swell
putrescent. find, then, the
key, the

chord mute enough to record such
numena before
the

ground thuds redundant under so much
broken
token.

RICHARD BURNS

Poems from 'Following'

Stagnation

Skies slept, or looked
The other way.
Exonerate nobody.

The eye of
Heaven detached.
Justice cataracted.

On earth, men
Slaughtered, fell
And rotted

And the dead
And living dead
Sank deeper in decay.

Darkness flowered
In cruelty. Gracelessness
Numbed hope.

Heaven there, world
Here, and their only
Meeting place, death.

Grace

Under the hills, quiet
Fire. From their graves
The dead awaken.

Blessing on you
Who live, they call
Through our own voices,

As in their places

We too shall call
Our own unborn.

Under hills, this
Grace flows
Through everything.

Chestnut and oak
Bud, green
Earth's carpet.

Red tulip petals
Scatter. A blue
Butterfly hovers.

Winter Solstice

It is the year's
Sabbath. Rest,
Take in quietness

From the dammed
Valleys, walled
Canyons, like a bare

Tree's taproots
In darkness. Let
It swell through you

As water gathered
On underground granite
Pools resources

To well upwards
Its meniscus clawing
Slowly at light.

Currents are rising
Beneath earth. Drink
Deep that good water.

In Light / In Fire

1. Night, curtains open

On the window's
Dark outside, rain
Pearls and runnels

And on its inside
The light in here
Accurately reflects itself.

We cannot see
Outside, at least
Not yet. But these

Identities
Soon will fray
And what they hold

Spill out
Into whatever dark or light
Surrounds them. Which

Is as it should be
And no cause
For grief or dancing.

2. Dawn

Dawn lay
Mother of pearl
Below the rooftops.

Trees
In purple robes
Lined their avenues.

Mists pillowed
The hills like
Quiet sheep.

Without lifting
A finger, light
Unlocked the gardens.

Window panes
Glistened in dew
When day breathed on them.

Something like glory
Hung all over
The air.

3. Morning, open windows

Sunlight is flickering
On the far wall
From the window

In our sitting room
And the leaves
Of houseplants

On the windowsill
Scatter their magnified
Shadows there

Daubing and splashing
The whole wall,
Bathing and swathing

The entire interior
In singular
Unrepeatable

Patterned waves
Where nothing can
Or will keep still.

4. Green and Red

Green, the open flimsy
Curtains, and red, the frame
Of the sash window

At the foot of our bed where
This afternoon
I lie, lazy, reading

And green, your tall potted
Houseplant growing in
Front of the window

And green, the rowan
Framed outside it
Against the sky

And brilliant
Red, the rowan's
Berry clusters

A pair of thrushes
Nonchalantly
Peck and scatter.

5. Glory

No fire flames once.
That which is bright
Rises twice.

Sunset and dawn
Repeat their burning
Searing skies.

Downy boundaries
Of Maytime trees
Flare and will –

White as snows
Or whiter against
Pale leaves. When flame

Clings to the palpable
It connects the world
With invisible

Glory. Everything
Harbours this. Nothing
Ever happens alone.

6. *Encased in unhappened time*

Light encased
In unhappened time,
Unopened in eyes

Of creatures unborn,
Unformed yet in water
Drops on panes

Of sloping windows
In unbuilt roofs,
Ungathered as yet

In cistern or well,
And uncupped
On parched tongue

On this or that
Space-and-time-
Crafted world –

Here you all are
Sudden in
This now, total.

Richard Burns was born in London. Over the years he has lived in Greece, Italy, the USA and former Yugoslavia. In 1975, he founded and organised the first international Cambridge Poetry Festival. His most recent publications are: *Croft Woods* (Los Poetry Press, Cambridge, 1999), *Aganst Perfection* (King of Hearts, Norwich, 1999) and the long poem sequence *The Manager* (Elliott & Thompson, London & Bath, 2001). A further volume of his poems, *Book with no Back Cover*, which will include the work appearing in this issue, will be published in 2003 by David Paul Press, London.

Burns

RICHARD BURNS

Nine Codas

(En-voys, En-vois, En-voies, En-voix)

Bailie oweth me 200^{li} and Adrian Gilbert 600^{li}. In Jersey, I have also much monye oweing mee. Besides the arrerages of the Wynes will pay my debts. And howsoever you doe, for my soules sake, pay all poore men.

Sir Walter Raleigh, Letter to his wife from the Tower of London

1

Here descends an angel fallen from his perch. Feet cracking my skull.
Greetings. Friend and comrade. With your gat-toothed grin.

Your eyes flaming hoops for dogs to jump through. Your fists full of
basil maggots and anemones.

I look up. I look inwards, I go to meet my God. I am the mountain he
climbs down in search of flowers.

2

Sonnenuntergangstraurigkeit on the waterfront at Milina. Wolfgang
(from Hamburg) is writing. In English. A poem.

The sea bends hovers and dips its silver wings. Around your stone smile,
Pelion, as you prepare for sleep

Your hair smells of chestnut olive and pine. It whispers around the bay.
The light, so sharp it creaks,

Has twisted the roots of tears and cut them out of my eyes. I've no more
weeping in me.

And now the sun, as the Greeks say, is kinging into sea haze. It slides
down very quickly now

Like a coin into a mouth. A golden lozenge for Charon. Now helplessly
the cicadas

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Tune their leggy instruments in permanent rehearsal. Petros and Theo
have gone off to find a taverna. Bruni und Elfi

Are yet playing volleyball. Yoko chats with Louisa. Sven listens pensively.
Finger on his chin.

Brigitte takes photos. *Nevère si az cine eni cinque seau fantastique*. Liz lies in
the minibus. Cross sunburnt and with cramp.

Will you meet me Heathrow Thursday 29th. Flight 259 Olympic 09.35.
Forgive these scrappy notes instead of a proper letter.

Will tell you all about it when I see you in London. Wolfgang's poem is
finished. He's simply dying

To show it me. Must go now. See you soon. XXX. Love

* * *

3

Hey you there Rolf. I shout to one I thought I recognised. On the far side
of the steps. Shouldering his slab of stone.

His mouth forms the shape of a single word. Panic. He repeats it over and
over. *Panic Panic Panic*. Hey Rolf, I shout, louder

I can't hear you properly. Don't you remember me. We met I think in
Kanalía at the Festival of the Almonds.

But no sounds vibrate between his first and final plosives. He looks neither
right nor left.

Behind him a girl stumbles. I know her at once. I had met her in the
piazza. Hey Veronica, I call. What are you doing here.

She coughs blood as if trapped in diesel fumes. She spits and picks up her
stone again. Froth drips from her lips.

In slow motion she passes me. As if I wasn't there. The guards light
cigarettes and swap lottery tickets.

Burns

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Hey Dad, I cry. Mum. Hey Bertha Bessie Manny. Hey Percy Anya Tom. Hey
my seven Williams. Osip and Marina. Hey Dylan of the Wave.

I call and I recall. But not hard or near enough. I whimper, Won't you speak
to me. I'm trying to listen, honest.

They march on and on. Nobody turns round. Nobody bats an eyelid in even
a wink of greeting. The guards slouch, grinning like statues.

The pile of stones grows bigger. I know – they are building a temple. I can't
hear you, I whisper. I don't understand the code.

Only walls steps tunnels stones speak to me. Through their deaf dumb
sightless faces.

* * *

4

And these were wearers of the winged sandals. And these bearers of
thyrsus and drum. Minstrels who lorded and led the dance

With flutes timbrels and banners flying. And these, unacknowledged
legislators

Who knew the languages of trees and birds. Some were proud and some
humble. And some famous in their time.

Look there's one with his tongue torn out. And who is that with broken
fingers and on his back a stringless guitar

Under the Arc de Triomphe at the far end of the line. You here too.
Orphée . . .

* * *

5

I will speak. Yes I will. I will not, cannot be silenced. I am responsible for
this seed landed here called Human

Burns

shearsman 53

To root it through and through me till every pore breathes. That it break
this sheen on the stuff of things.

That it scratch this varnished light a little. To trace what lies beneath it.
That what be called gross or foul

Be charged with clearer breath. For blood, sweat, salt are particles of
radiance. And shall be known by their true names

And for what they really are. But how perfection leaks from cracks in the
bowl of now. And how time

Drips constant through the porous jar of presence. And how you and may
waste, trying to fit shards together.

Yet I will speak. I must. And of these things too. This plant that grows
from our speech in joy here I name: Community.

* * *

6

We walked around the hill brow, and stumbled upon a temple. Tucked
into a rock-fold and perched on its own outcrop on the far side of the
valley. Down we stumbled, then climbed narrow steps, and paused,

Muscles aching, panting before its portals. It seemed half-built or a part-
abandoned ruin. The sky tumbled in, etching clean-edged shadows.
Dwarfed by lion-topped pillars in the broad, half-roofed arena,

Squatted an old man, white-bearded, barefoot, wearing no more than a
loincloth. Poised on the patterned floor like a lizard under the sun,
statuesque in the late afternoon silence, self-absorbed as a child,

With mallet and chisel he played, and pegs and a line of hemp. And
surrounded by piles of stone-chips, painstakingly he sorted – the blue
and the green and the red, the opaque and semi-transparent,

The rainbow and spotted and speckled, the glossy and the polished, the
rough edged and the pitted, the sparkling and iridescent, and the dull,
that glowed, concave, as if swallowing light,

Burns

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And those that held echoes or promises, gleaming or resplendent. And those that held depths, like eyes. Or mirrored skies, like wells. And those textured like parchment. Or tree-bark. Or flesh. Or leaves.

And my companion approached. And I followed and stood behind her, a little off to her right. And she asked the old master, *When will this mosaic be finished?* And he took, from a pouch at his waist,

An alabaster egg. And gestured to her to kneel, next to him, on his right. And closed her two hands over it, and closed his own over hers. And answered a single word, *Never*.

* * *

7

Once hearing music, I thought: A man or woman made this. And once there was a time before its pattern was. Before its form or harmonies had ever been conceived

Out of flesh and its travails. Out of the labour of hands. And before that, a time when not one single quaver of it had been the slenderest shadow. Less even than a shadow

Lying dark in its maker. Until it was shaped, crafted and nourished into light. And he or she no angel but human to the core. Who made it for you, for me, that we

Might see clear through it, build our own work upon it, and by our willing love, also transform our world. That through us, matter be known, transparent and resplendent

As music. And with these thoughts, I rejoiced to be in its history, to be alive in its time: my time now his and hers. And yours too, as you hear this. Which is not the time its maker

Lay less than a pip in an apple, unformed, unborn, unnamed. Yet to you and me in our times that maker of music reached out. And me here humanly touched. And moved to make this.

* * *

Burns

8

Hello Hello again. My voice is now approximately eighteen inches from yours. Give or take a bit. To account for your poor sight and hearing. Although I am ash in an urn

In Hoop Lane Crematorium. And you not knowing or caring even where Hoop Lane is. Or was. Not that this matters a dot a zero a windpuff or dustspeck. But I call that somehow nothing

Short of sheer miracle. And you saying all along you didn't believe in angels. Or talking to the dead. Or ghosts. Are you still really there. Haven't you rung off. Hello. Hello.

* * *

9

If you're still there, Angel. If you have not rung off. Brother. Sister. It's you I'm talking to.

And you too, Beachcomber on the shore of the world against time. The label on the package

'To Whom It May Concern' means you. It was meant specially for you, being the one who found it.

This voice, no longer mine, is yours now. Take it. Use it. Give it your own, far finer sound.

In hearing these words, rewrite yourself. Having no back cover, now the book is yours to complete

For who or what might an angel be, other than you. As for me, nil desperandum. I've a fair way to go

And am still growing strong. Cheerio for now. Sierra Romeo Bravo Uniform November. Over and out.

* * *

CHRISTOPHER GUTKIND

Too

heart

 lifting enough

being called

 its best sensation

needs ticking

 the *unseen* exchanging

always having

 a special look

even the splits facing

 drawing warm lips up
releasing

 relieving a question

the wonder never tired of

 all the whiles as well

accepted past enough

 and starting

cut from variousness

 fear of sustaining
coursing

 feeding itself

carelessly and carefully

hearts of mind coming
after ever

corners nearly torn

it is shimmering

through the stretch

in calls called to
everything almost

around

Wintering

The offerings of the conversations
around us, the wind in the life of friends
who skate off inside you, the winter
traffic easing further into its convulsion
of beginning speech, this might be a
night I have if I need it, this might make
my next waking day a birthday of the
possible, of the whispers and oil of daylight
dreams, for everything still hangs from
the words we make to settle us, weather us,
explore against in contagions of delight,
of despair, of the beauty of a face between
want and reply, you there drifting in the
air that breathes me, you in a slow race with
yourself I'll never see.

Christopher Gutkind grew up mostly in Montreal and then lived in London for many years. Currently he lives in Berkeley, California, where he works as a librarian. He has the odd poem published in a magazine and hopes to have a collection out before too long.

Gutkind

MATTHEW GEDEN

Two Poems

The Deciding Battle

Madness has a white and haggard face
when I stoop
among the reeds
the ice-sharp wind lances me through
I am a fallen image
an insane king
frostbitten, clinging to memories
words that stick
in the crow
I hear the hammer of the distant surf
black are the sorrows
I am abandoned
and crack frost from my beard
winter steals the life from the slow
and old, I sleep with my eyes
open, ice on my lashes
I have no weapons
Only the rain throbs on the grass
as I search for watercress
My pale paunch juts
the screams of battle echo
crack the boughs
the pain in my head
my blistered feet
mine is a complete poverty
too weak for wars

(Italicised lines are taken from Trevor Joyce's *The Poems of Sweeny, Peregrine*)

Obstacle

Cúchulainn an obstacle
ripple of fame muscle
skin-deep heroic cycle
wheels into the action
warrior words splinters
bloodied no odds too
much too high
the first exchange

**the peace is shattered
by another explosion
limbs severed ball-bearings
nails shards of glass
rip into flesh delicate
balance crashes down
over-burdened more fragile
than your soft hands**

met in the middle wrong
to challenge bitterness
a great boar about
to bring down havoc
groaning over corpses
doom will slash softly
a common courage will suffer
the sweetness of assault
promised falsely set forth
fended off until sunset

**it is suddenly dark
dead people lie at your feet
screams perforate
this new world where hope
is something far-off
to be discussed around
a table between meals**

he lamented everyone
must die cross swords
soul tearing from body
begin again war-like
a thousand feats high

miraculous fighting
in water until
high noon so closely
heads touched but
it was too late

**in the scramble to stay
alive tread upon
the dying squeeze out
their lifeblood panic
becomes a way of life
a survival instinct
sudden lack of air
lack of life lack
of options lack of touch**

it is enough ribs crushed
clasped arms set down
mourning memories of together
your blue clear eye speech
crimson deeds split open
stark battle-madness
only a shade countless
multitudes fallen everywhere

**distant yet not so far
the flick of a switch
rustle of newspaper
look up and into space**

Matthew Geden lives in Kinsale, Co. Cork, Ireland, where he runs a bookstore. This is his first appearance in *Shearsman*.

Michael Ayres is based in Cambridge. His second full-length collection, in which *Black Light* will appear, is called *a.m.* and will be published in 2003 by Salt Publishing of Cambridge. He will also be featured in 2003 in Shearsman's online *Gallery* series. **Gustaf Sobin** is one of America's finest poets, and has lived in the south of France for the best part of 40 years. His most recent books are a collection of poems, *In the Name of the Neither* (Talisman House, Jersey City, NJ) and a novel *In Pursuit of a Vanishing Star* (Norton, New York and Bloomsbury, London).

Geden

RUPERT M. LOYDELL

The Architecture of Memory

‘There are exactly the same things in a room at night
as there are in the day time; it’s just that you can’t see them’
– Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *The Flanders Panel*

What is a man supposed to do?
I think that faith is strong in me
but it is not especially useful
for getting from one place to another.

I favour conjecture and counterpoint,
am opposed to clearly defined structures.
There are no answers to most questions,
no such thing as being sure.

If I am ever in a state of total conviction,
attempting to embrace conclusions,
please remind me only gestures exist.
How fragile and short-lived the truth is.

•

I imagine I can spot doubt a mile off:
curved surfaces with undue distortions.
I really do hate writing poems,
swing between words like a confused needle.

Why do some of us love nothing
so much as complex nothingness?
Poetry is a simple instrument
that breaks the continuous flow,

part of a carefully constructed system
of abstract symbols. Doubt and distrust
seem just as true; interpretative biases
are inevitable. What lies we tell.

•

Loydell

Writing itself is a process of discovery.
It can be read as marks printed on paper
or heard as long and short notes.
There are ways of using repetition.

The syntax and grammar of a spoken tongue
propels the reader through the landscape
by seductive whispering in the ear.
There are ways of using repetition.

I posit a world beyond measurement.
We are a wonderful paradox
whose meaning escapes interpretation.
There are ways of using repetition.

•

Experience and quotation intersect.
Whatever attentive reader
might loose the lightning,
I acknowledge my debts right now.

We are discussing the individual words,
cannot crack the code; the pictograph
is the substance of communication,
phantom pain after the loss of a limb.

We can be moved by the memory:
birds and women conjoined in stone,
swollen symbols of fertility,
paired beneath blessing hands.

•

Mystical vocabulary brings
propensity for astonishment.
Time seems to run out
with nagging persistence.

Voyages into abstraction
must be documented:
plot the position of
these nameless countries;

make the mute articulate;
sort out music from the sound.
I want to insist on experience,
call this state of being 'wonder'.

•

I sometimes never know
which part of my poem is yours.
The whole mix of self & search
arrives over forgotten airwaves.

I could make these four-line stanzas
quirky, irregular and sensuously inert,
send jargon to landfill and recontextualise.
The urinal might become a fountain.

Signs have a history of changing meaning:
in old maps the compass points
were often referred to as winds.
I may be charged but I ain't moved.

•

I am not part of the circle
although every game I ever played
stressed the loop, the elaborate
meandering of imagination.

I sense you aren't entirely sure:
the shadow as well as the silhouette
must be dealt with, there should be
at least a faint tremor of sense.

Observe, interpret and experience.
Notice the faded disturbance of darkness,
the unforeseen movement of light.
Language is the only thing in the world.

Rupert Loydell runs the Exeter small press, Stride and its associated webzine (at www.stridemagazine.co.uk). His latest collection appears shortly from Arc. He is also a painter, specialising in abstracts.

Loydell

MICHAEL AYRES

Black Light

I'm dying more quickly now. It's you.
Even the hurt is unharmed.
Even the way you try to hold me,
and the place we made with so few ragged caresses,
the most delicate place of all –
even this is unharmed.
I want to hurt it, but I can't: it's you.
It's you; and I'm dying more quickly now.

Yesterday, I died slowly. I lived and I died.
I felt the blood back up in my veins
as if it had taken a thousand years
to circle between heartbeat and heartbeat.
I was thinking of you,
and of a few ragged caresses,
each one more futile than the last.
Yesterday, I died so slowly. But I died.

And in the most delicate, most hurtful place of all
I tried to hide, and to take shelter.
But there was no shelter, and I couldn't hide:
it was you. It was my own voice, calling,
exposing with each word
our skin and the darkness, nude and vulnerable as flowers,
raying our gaze
which asks for pity but which has no pity
but is simple, and sheer, and cold.
And the darkness, we lit with what we had,
a little Venus and a little Bethlehem;
a little Bethlehem, a long time and a road.

White light of a white star – and maybe a little Damascus –
last night, we burned so slowly.
I felt the poem back up in my throat
as if I would take a thousand years to speak it,
as if my flesh had turned to sugar
and would melt and crumble on a warm tongue
as if we would kiss again
and one of us, at least, might mean it.
It was me, lightly: it was you:
it was between us – and it was pitiless.

Ayres

And in the most secure, most inviolable place,
scented with carbon and the wind,
we could find no peace at all
under a sky that could not love us,
by a sea only we could love:
last night, we burned so slowly. But we burned.

Last night – a thousand silences ago –
we really spoke: we broke down, and we spoke.
We kissed, and the world flowed to it.
And I remembered all the beauty that had died away.
I remembered what I came to say.
We don't want to lead small lives.
We don't want to be mean-hearted.
We're not consumers, and we won't be consumed.
We are not things. We are not slaves.
We wanted to light the night with what we had,
maybe a few ragged words and a few plum blossoms,
to be generous, to be kind, to die.
We didn't want to live so watchfully,
or to stare through bitter, subservient eyes
which have seen too much and seen nothing.
We didn't want to lead small, mean-hearted lives.
We wanted to be great, like our poems.
We wanted to give, not to take, our time.

I've carried the summer a long way.
It's hot, I'm tired and I'm in love.
And today, I'll write so slowly – I'll write: I'll burn.
I'll burn away all the impure things,
white light of a white star,
and that bug at the heart of a lotus, metal cocoa,
will crawl out of the dew –
I'll burn away all the impure things,
the dirty smuts of my memories, chars, the little one,
I'll burn down the hatred and the sticky lies,
burn away the foolishness,
erase it with heat the way
a wind smooths the surface of a frowning lake –
black light of a white star,
today I'll burn so slowly. I'll burn, and I'll write.

I remembered what I came to say.
And if I fill you with loathing, still
you fill me with tenderness.

I'm going to write the beautiful, I'm going to write you,
the things we are
in the black light of this white, harsh summer.
I'm going to contradict this world,
and then it will break me down
until, at last, I agree with it again.
A black star shines over us,
you're a thousand silences deep, I want to burn away
every mountain silence between us, love.
And you know that, sometimes, I just want to let the silence burn.
And that, sometimes, I never want to be unkind again.

I've carried this summer a long way,
dust on the bonnet, the skylark above the Norfolk dunes,
and wrestling with you in my mind, making every endeavour
not to hurt, when breathing is hurting.
Now autumn will carry us a little way,
a little Sol, a little Venus in the morning,
I can do nothing but wrong,
I can't right you.
You throw me down with our struggling, pitiful flesh
down on the bed with knuckles and elbows and knees
bone to bone, with a reeling universe between us,
blow upon blow, tenderness
upon tenderness: we carried the summer the whole way,
and I remembered, for a moment, what I came to say,
the one worthy thing to say –
the final, the essential.

Today, fire is not enough for me, violence is not enough,
though I must go through them, and be them,
where hurting is breathing.
Sometimes, I want to burn the flames themselves,
burn the purities down,
to speak again, to be filthy, intact, emerging –
I want to open like a few ragged words,
a few sparse, China plum blossoms,
I want to break and to break open
above the snowline,
to be so tired I can't stop the summer pouring in,
to step aside, to be swept aside, be forced aside,
to be tender, dispensible, unneeded:
today, I want to be given and to give –
I want to write so slowly, to burn down and to burn away,
to erase and to be erased.

And when nothing is left, when all the small life
has been given away,
you will be left.
And when you are left, these poems will be left.
Because these are the poems I couldn't bear to leave behind.
These are the poems I wrote for you.
These are the only poems I will ever love.

I love them because they're true,
and because nothing can ever take them away from me.
I love them because you are in them,
because they're stupid,
and because they are so quiet.
Even the way I try to hold you,
the caress we built with so few ragged places,
the sound of your voice stirring me when you say
Carry me down the stairs –
even this is unharmed, and perfect.
And I want to break it, but I can't: it's you.
It's you, it's beautiful, and it's full of lies.

Last night, the white heart of a dead star, scarface, face of the moon,
the furious, pumping heat of a white flower, last night
we were out on the water
and I seemed to have left my blood behind.
I was a thousand words away from you,
a green, deer silence, white breath in the mist,
the glamour and silver gelatine of Apollo shots.
Last night, I was alone like the people of the world,
I was so alone, and my brother said
'these waters are some of the deepest on Earth' –
and when I looked in your eyes
I believed him. Last night,
the raw, opened lotus of a coming kiss,
I seemed to have left every sound behind –
every wave, every kiss, every dawn.

Last night, we laughed and we kissed. We kissed, and we hurt.
And dawn wasn't a revelation at all.
Last night, the last night before all other nights –
and it was a King tide –
in the green, Asian quiet
I formed English words like 'lunar' and 'phosphor' and 'chilled',
and I could hear the sea rolling as if it had existed

for a million years, or for a moment –
last night, we said little. We lived little.
Last night, we hurt so slowly. We hurt and we burned.

Honesty, those small dun seeds, white, deer mist,
my own shadow is stronger than me,
armed against me in the brilliant light,
I'll shoe Achilles, failsafe,
I'll shield Hector, failsafe, sure – sure.
It was a thousand summers, a thousand mouths ago.
Dead heart of a white star, last night
the train had liquidised my journey,
the door opened straight onto the beach,
and I was a hemisphere and a darkness away,
the smell of turds floating on the sea
mixed with the scent of pineapples and sandalwood,
and rats nibbled the offerings
of white rice grains from a small dish of green leaf.

And we were what beauty began. We weren't ashamed.
We were so human, it was work, but we weren't slaves, only
the work didn't belong to us –
and your mouth was a river, that summer,
we wrote like a river.
The room was empty, and motionless, but for the tv
left on, flickering with the cool, affectless face
of Le Samourai, Alain Delon,
and the space of the room was smooth, constant, clear,
like the steady gaze of a child.
But there was no child, and I had no daughter.
And in the most futile, most brutal place of all
she was harmed. Last night,
we opened so slowly. And we died.

It wasn't the rain or the years –
they weren't the danger.
They meant no harm.
It wasn't the lead or the steel,
the frail swords of marram grass,
the invisible thoughts of the wind:
it wasn't the moon or the snow –
they couldn't hurt us, and they meant no harm.
It wasn't Polaris, or any of the ravaged stars of heaven –
it wasn't the night. It wasn't the storm.
It was just love.

It wasn't fate or chance.
It wasn't the stillness of Mirror Lake at evening, so suspended
I felt a sound might stir the water into life
or the mist disturb the perfect surface, bruise it.
It wasn't the whirl of the fire, or the coldness of the evening.
These things meant no harm.
But the words – yes. They were dangerous.
And we – we were the source of danger.
And love.

And still, I go towards it.
It's night on the road, a little Sirius and a little Damascus,
and the headlights, naked and amoral as flowers.
I run from you, return, I'm meteoric and lazy,
itinerant, I'm no Saul, no Paul, I'm Western, a son of a gun.
And you – you're constant, like salt, like a star.
You're the truth that watches over me –
you won't believe me, but I'm showing you –
the way you look at me,
and I stare back at you, coolly, utterly uncompromised,
in the black light of poems and a few, ragged plum blossoms,
where you give a home –
for one moment alone – for my glance.
It's you: it's absence. It's my word.

Break it for me – I can't do it myself.
Break my word with your presence, with your magic,
with your star which is white
and brilliant, and intolerable, and with your glance
which is still dangerous, and which gives a direction to light.
Break my word for me,
I'll keep you safe from harm,
I'll show you the tenderness of ephemeral things,
rapid like cedars, giant like mayflies,
and in this least, most tenable place of all,
my eyes will gently push you away, back a little,
into a space where the truth is not watching,
into this truth which is not true.

Today, I learned so much. I learned, and I forgot.
I was thinking of our house – the maritime prow of the ironing board,
laundry done, the neatly folded handkerchiefs
and their sailboat nautical white.
I learned of the stillness of objects – kettle, iron, plate –

and of the creamlike afternoon sunlight
which seemed to back up in the room
as if it had almost stopped flowing
and curdled on the lemon walls
like a filmy Vermeer.
I forgot so much today. I learned, and I forgot.

I remembered, a long time ago,
we took 36mm shelter,
and my eye was as big as the shore.
I looked through the shutter, held you in my fingers
like a stunned Kong,
so much was the past.
Last night – a long time ago –
I touched you, and I couldn't touch you,
and last night, in the most fragile, ruthless place of all –
in those fluid, Inca caresses –
I learned that the way of the samurai is death,
and that after the first love
there will be no other.

Today, I lived so slowly.
I lived at the speed of willow trees –
they were so admirable –
I lived where nothing was sheltered or hidden
and where even death was unharmed.
Today, I lived so slowly,
and, in between the willow trees,
time knocked off work early,
grew aimless and stupid,
unable to cut even one tiger from the backs
of the golden, black-striped dragonflies,
or to shave one flake of diamond from their flight:
today, I lived so slowly. And I died.

Black light of a black star – today, we loved so slowly.
We loved and we died.
Light must flow outwards from a star –
shining is like this.
Diamond must flow out from diamond,
tiger roar out from tiger –
diamonds and tigers are like this –
what else could they be?
Today, we lived so slowly, so calmly,
as if we were sheltered,

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and I opened my dying eyes
our life shone out from, unsheltered, alone,
and dazzling with harm.

Black light, black star – today, we loved so slowly.
Blinding with harm, sight leaves the sky,
and in the most ruthless, gentle place of all
falls on faces that were once our own.
Unseen, underfoot, carbon trickles to diamond.
Quietly, through the forest, the tiger moves,
its life is its own,
and nothing moves through the forest more quietly
except – and with his eyes only – the samurai.
Today, I lived so slowly. And I died.

Shining is like this.
I must flow out from you – it's in my nature –
green and lethal – and very quiet.
A star can't give its own light shelter.
Stars are like this.
And they move very quietly.
Tonight, you will move so quietly.
And I will leave you.

New Books

John Ashbery: *Chinese Whispers* (Farrar, NY; Carcanet, Manchester, 100pp, pb, £9.95)
Another good one from Ashbery, although quite a bit of it overlaps with the lovely Qu
Books publication from late last year *As Umbrellas Follow Rain*. The title comes from my
favourite poem in *Umbrellas*, which is a book I still think you should all buy.

Alan Baker: *Not Bondi Beach* (Leaf Press, 1 Leaf Close, Chilwell, Nottingham NG9
6NR. ISBN 0-9537634-7-1, 24pp, chapbook, £2.50). Available from the publisher for
an additional 50p to cover p&p. This must be the third or fourth Leaf Press chapbook
to turn up here and, design-wise, this is the pick of the bunch – a lesson to anyone who
wants to do this entirely in-house, with a PC, inkjet printer and DTP software. I've seen
much worse from professional printers. And it's not Bondi because it's Roker Beach at
Monkwearmouth, near Sunderland. The poems are quiet, well-crafted and demonstrate a
good eye and a well-tuned ear. All in all, a very welcome publication.

Dennis Barone: *The Disguise of Events* (edition Key Satch(ell), Quale Press, Florence, MA.
16pp, pamphlet, \$5. ISBN 0-9700663-3-3). Slim publication of fine short prose pieces,
two of which appeared in *Shearsman* earlier this year. Recommended.

Alan Halsey & Martin Corless-Smith: *Lives of the Poets: A Preliminary Count*. (Ispress,
Wakefield, 2002. unpaginated, chapbook, price? ISBN 0-9533897-1-5. I began by mistyping the
title as *Lies of the Poets*, which is perhaps prophetic, given the same authors' traversal of

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the works of the imaginary Thomas Swan last year. We start here with Chaucer and Lydgate and end with Hopkins and Thomas Gray, but there is apparently more to come, this being but a taster for the eventual full compilation. Some of this sounds as if it might be genuine, but so did the Swan volume. I wonder. Entertaining, though.

Randolph Healy: *Green 532. Selected Poems 1983-2000.* (Salt Publishing, Cambridge, 2002. 128pp, pb, £8.95, \$12.95. Isbn 1-876857-44-7). Healy's first UK publication, this book brings together the full texts of a number of Wild Honey Press pamphlets such as *Rana Rana*, *Scales*, *Arbor Vitae* and *Daylight Saving Sex*, most of which have already been welcomed in these pages. Healy works as a math & science teacher and his familiarity with normally unpoetic forms of discourse informs his work. The surface of the work is not dissimilar to some other late-modernist work coming out of Ireland, but the work as a whole is really *sui generis*. Healy is a very interesting poet indeed and fully deserves this generous selection, which I hope will generate some attention in the UK.

John Light: *Light's List 2002.* 70pp, centre-stapled, £2.50. Isbn 1 897968 15 9, ISSN 0950-6217. Photon Press, The Light House, 37 The Meadows, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland YD15 1NY.) The 17th edition of a useful list of worldwide literary outlets – mags, small presses etc. I can't help thinking this would be better off on the web, where it could be kept current rather more easily. It is nonetheless very cheap and well done for what must be an almost thankless task.

Drew Milne: *Mars Disarmed* (The Figures, Great Barrington, MA, 2002. 68pp, pb, \$10. Isbn 1-930589-09-3. Distributed by SPD). Milne's first US collection. About half of the book has already appeared in chapbooks in the UK, in *Pianola* (Rempres) and *The Gates of Gaza* (Equipage). His disconcerting lyrics that teeter on the edge of sense, expressed in colliding registers and a mix of "poetic" and demotic, are amongst the more interesting in this style. Not one for British collectors, really, given the overlaps, but a good introductory volume for US readers.

Ethan Paquin: *The Makeshift* (Stride, Exeter, 2002. 82pp, pb, £7.95, \$15. Isbn 1-900152-80-0, distributed by SPD in the USA). Paquin is the editor of the online journal *Slope*, and this is the first time I've come across his poetry. It's a most welcome occurrence. American, and one would guess it from the style and verve of the poems – even without the various clues in the text that point across the Atlantic – Paquin has learned early to excise the excess baggage of his poems, to pare them down to the right size. The celebratory intro from Brian Henry was probably unnecessary: these poems are good enough to make their own way in the world without help from bigger names. Recommended.

John Phillips: *Path* (Longhouse, Guilford, VT, 2002. Isbn 1-9290418-04-1, unnp. Chapbook. \$8.). Spare epigrammatic poetry in the quasi-oriental mould. Unusual to find a British poet using this rather American style, but welcome all the same.

Gordon Read: *Gifts in Store* (The Woodward Press, Exeter, Isbn 0-9539889-2-9. folded broadsheet, illustrated by Robert Joyce). A wedding poem. Interesting design, with tracing-paper cover and string tie.

Editorial Note

Lack of space in this issue means that some three pages of reviews have had to be dropped, including a whole section on current magazines. The uncut version of this issue's reviews will be made available on the Shearsman website in early January 2003.