

# *Shearsman 54*

*spring 2003 issue*

*featuring **poetry** by*  
*Tilla Brading*  
*Susan Briante*  
*Pēteris Cedriņš*  
*M T C Cronin*  
*Carrie Etter*  
*Christopher Gutkind*  
*Gary Hotham*  
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**M T C CRONIN**

from *More or Less Than <1-100>*

1

not simply the stream but they who thought of following

2

and not just running water – how concerned, sometimes,  
a group of people with the movements of the clouds

3

'follow me' means three, the speaker  
a page of water and they, addressed, wavering,  
as the third beckons as well as it can, hidden

4

not just, along the way, vines finding light and its myth,  
as myth, invisible, unplants one life for another,  
but the unrecognizable fruit they will test with their teeth  
for the answer to the tongue's question

5

the tongue, the tongue, steps backwards into a web  
respun daily by an appetite that thinks never of holiness  
the tongue makes them miniature and blind  
the tongue caresses and ruins their splendour  
in its own land it speaks the language of stones

6

helped by the small swallow the stone is lifted  
from what is crushed and lifted to emptiness, its futurity,  
lifted with its earthquake to the place where it is learning  
to speak, to the roof of the mouth, that cave of fullness  
which can feel the emptiness with which it is filled  
covered with breath covered with breath

7

this was their magnifying glass, and not just glass,  
but the metaphors, what they see what they see through,  
what they see through what they see, one  
of the Amaryllis, the face, and the petal is like  
a tear dropping down, when fences come down  
it is no longer possible to pass from one side to another  
incarnate labouring longing the reason won't suffice

8

it isn't simply the difference between action and rest –  
there is solace in the sky's reflection and words  
will serve any purpose their meaning can divine –  
but following to the place where things and words  
leave disappearance lonely and smooth as a brow  
that is finished for the night with dreams and the place  
where they rest is nothing like daybreak –  
all is invisible in this morning that has forgotten the night

9

they clamber forward thinking about the concept of forgiveness,  
the heart forgives, and not only that but the highest fruit in the tree  
hanging like a spindle-shaped shell in an ocean of sky, the heart leaps,  
and high excitement about what you can see through a magnifying  
glass if only it was not covered with breath, the heart sees though love  
is blind, and then the storm of hair over the pillow and the ship  
as it approaches the rocks, the heart breaks, think, pure, refusing,  
burning, and ache in love, the longest eclipse of the self, and the heart  
described in writing always makes the heart look gaunt,

10

literally  
the real heart  
how surprised they are if is said  
something that is not written down  
and not simply the kiss but the lips  
not simply the tapping but the door  
not simply the wind but whispering perpetually through the trees  
not simply the stone but the stone  
a face, a wall, smooth, rough, always broken  
these gentle cleaving feet of the spider

11

not just the spider with its web – one like this  
but different, one unlike this but the same –  
but the ant rumbling a smaller ground – one small  
bit of waiting over, a lifetime – before or after  
the event, neither what has been or what is  
to come evident in that small word, event,  
but a new world spun there, not mistaken,  
but still, think, simply of another, and not just  
the ant but the cosmos – the enormous miniature  
of the universe shaking bones in its palm – not just  
bowel, brain and chest but, think, planets and heroes

12

auxesis  
was it just that?  
glows in hyperbole  
impalpable, refusing, loud  
meting out life to the body  
was it the mud of the mind  
creeping with starfish  
the tracks they left like galaxies  
spinning into sleep?  
was it linoleum battering itself  
to a small pattern against their legs?  
word for word, agape

13

they heard the door close  
and went to find a place that was away  
from them, not only the only place  
but somewhere the books  
would not stack and the ceiling corners  
would not hold and the drip of the tap  
would not greet the fly trapped on  
the window's sill overlooking the land  
where they'd planted the corn, ungainly  
tall and destined to dry like chalk  
on their lips because of some secret the soil  
had not told them, nor the correct  
season that would keep their tribe intact

**AIDAN SEMMENS**

*In Passing*

*(Thou shalt not oppress a stranger)*

weird August, end of the dry monsoon  
in a pot-bellied tramp steamer we speculate on Kandinsky  
the cultural attaché & I, deliberate in mufti

culture is always a convenient prostitute  
goddess of darkness, mutability & death  
unsunned, corpse-white body alluring, not for sale

conical green mountains rise from a coastal plain  
full of shadowplay, grotesqueries & lurid colour  
smell of foetid bodies in Capricorn heat

Durga with a torn bodice, appellat  
delicate flakes of dandruff on a clerical pate  
colonial as pipesmoke

\*\*

darkness of the ward at night  
the urgent declivity of dreams  
amber & jade

a cathedral stillness  
tropical torpor  
stone haloes & conical hats

fragrant scrub reclaiming the site of a wayside shrine  
a cricket chafing song by a patch of oil on gravel  
the rhythmic ching of the coppersmith bird

Durga, Uma, Kali; Time & Sleep –  
don't jump to any conclusions about this  
a candle in an airless empty room

\*\*

her firm white body by him on the bed  
remembered shock of the first touch  
that alabaster flesh

lights of the valley strung from here to there  
a liner lit up on the evening tide  
suspicion of music, laughter on the breeze

the boy is abstract  
in reflection in the lake  
broken up with houses, trees, sky & a votive god

in this political climate  
we make our bed & lie –  
a difficult berth

\*\*

passion awakes passion  
the urgency of sleep in liquid heat  
distant noise of engines

rapid eye movements take in the covered market  
snow in surprising places  
the earnest colloquy of bright brass & leather

wayang voices chatter things you'll never understand  
things that should be recalled from dreams  
shadows thrown by a kerosene lamp on a screen

to widows leaning on balconies  
the endgame is unendurable closure  
with a sweep of the hand the dying man

\*\*

in junks & sampans on an inland sea  
in strident tones on unseen televisions  
idols on the verge of death lay down law

where passing showers of envy snick the skin  
puppets of gods are traded at a snack-stop  
to leap electrically into possibility

waking with monsters, adult in a child's room  
muscular formations of weather beyond the window  
reverberate with Thou Shalt Not

the travelling salesman sweeps the cellar steps  
blood in newsprint, observation & invention mingled  
lub-dub, lub-dub, lub-dub, lub-dub, lub-dub

*What Then We Must Do*

Carthage from the air  
smoking ruins  
walls robbed out  
trowel scrapes on tesserae  
vertiginous descent  
through desert sands

Prussian *moderne*  
broad steps leading down  
empty as ransacked tombs  
– Carthage, then Steglitz

won't look like Chicago  
now: jokes with an edge  
& the smell of spilled beer  
the map redrawn by debris  
cataloguing the missing  
the early days, before the guilt

a city full of rumours  
we protest, they protest  
a measured pavane  
invite to canapés, fingerfood

a small man with ghastly  
teeth, cigar & sketchpad  
peeks through doors  
on inelegance, decadence, laughter of whores

tanks roll in newsreel  
the end of history

he watches the dancers  
step: the band & the beer  
fill the hall & the head  
drown a drone that could be overhead  
percussive firefight in what passed  
for a street, reduced to flat  
cabaret scenery

an underground rocket factory  
vast fingers poked into the earth  
telling stories out of school  
*nacht und nebel*

fingers in that pie  
who'll have  
the biggest slice  
which segment is coloured  
red on the chart – & who  
gets red in the division  
of the legend?

poets & old pros  
stagger under this mulch  
from the multinational propa-  
gator: which side  
of the story  
do we give credit?

black  
market, grubby  
tunnellings below  
all this weight  
of what was domestic  
architecture, severed  
fingers

*How Doth the City Sit Solitary*

How did the place first  
become holy? Home to  
Shalem, shrine of Baal,  
a threshing-floor  
on the mountain.

The sound of the stone,  
the blood of usurpers,  
odes to lost children.  
Physical splendour alternating  
carnage & exultation.

A stretch of that road is visible,  
huge blocks of stone. During Passover,  
Succoth & Shavuoth,  
ox teams hauling  
huge slabs of limestone

the sluices of blood, the stench.  
In the sanctuary  
of churches, mosques & synagogues,  
sacred rites of faith  
never beyond surveillance.

Signs of messianic redemption,  
bleats & bellows of sacrificial animals,  
tricky pirouettes. The outline  
of the mountain  
gradually disappeared.

A lamb for Passover, a bull  
for Yom Kippur. This  
would have been his path.  
Pilgrims spend the night  
on the outlying hills,

lights shine from the arches  
down its western slope.  
The view here is stunning,  
five or six coloured hens,  
a herd of sheep among scarlet anemones.

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Aidan Semmens succeeded Peter Robinson as chairman of the Cambridge Poetry Society, co-edited three issues of *Perfect Bound* with him in 1977-78, and won the 1978 'Chancellor's Medal for an English Poem' (which can be found on the *Jacket* website as part of its feature on *Perfect Bound*). He was published in a number of magazines in the 70s and 80s, had small books out from Lobby in 1978 and Pig Press in 1987, both now long out of print, and has only just returned to poetry after a 15-year silence. There are some poems currently on the *Stride Magazine* and *Great Works* websites. He has been a journalist since 1978 and has a website on medieval churches ([www.syllysuffolk.co.uk](http://www.syllysuffolk.co.uk)).

Semmens

**M T C Cronin**

*Brothers*

There are some  
whose only meaning is their absence,  
death.

You pretend my injuries.  
You are so extravagantly me!

They are different different  
like great wings living in a world of wind.

You live my life  
without ambiguity, reminiscence.

They turn over the little secret animals  
of a surface  
trying to touch what is brotherly in between.

*The Three-Week Goat*

For twenty-one days  
the rocks made a mountain  
Rue grew in clumps  
under quivering noses  
Three eagles – one who didn't belong  
eyed the circular lives  
of a horde of bees  
A white flower  
Yes, a white flower...  
At the beginning of the fourth week  
entered the stomach  
of a thing with hooves  
which immediately entered the sky  
as if that other existence  
had depended on some sureness of foot  
on a certain view that had purely to do  
with reality's angle  
with its where-you-stand take

*Cronin*

on survival  
So a breeze continued  
its sightless journey down the slope  
A sheep in its second year, suddenly  
saw the ilex forest

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MTC Cronin has had six books and two booklets of poetry published, the most recent being *Bestseller* (Vagabond Press, 2001), *Talking to Neruda's Questions* (Vagabond Press, 2001) and *My Lover's Back - 79 Love Poems*, (University of Queensland Press, 2002). Her next book, *beautiful, unfinished - PARABLE/SONG/CANTO/POEM*, is forthcoming in April 2003 from Salt Publishing of Cambridge. She is currently working on her doctorate, *Poetry and Law: Discourses of the Social Heart* and lives with her partner, a musician, and their three young daughters.

*Editor's note:*

The *More or Less Than <1-100>* sequence, from which excerpts are drawn in this issue, runs for 100 sections in a mirror format, 1 reflecting 100, 2 reflecting 99 and so on; hence the unusual organisation of the piece in this issue. The two poems on the previous page are not part of the sequence.

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**Some other contributors to this issue:-**

Tilla Brading is Assistant Editor of *Poetry Quarterly Review*, one of the few journals in the UK that consistently gives space to reviews of small-press output. She was raised in Wales and now lives in Somerset. Her recent publications include *Possibility of Inferno* (Odyssey Poets, 1997), *AUTUMnal Jour* (Maquette Press, 1998) and *Notes In A Manor: Of Speaking* (Leafe Press, 2002).

Pēteris Cedriņš is a Latvian-American writer living in Daugavpils, Latvia, where he earns a living by teaching and translating. His poems and parts of a long autobiographical prose work called *The Penetralium* have been published in previous issues of *Shearsman*.

Carrie Etter moved to London from southern California in 2001 and is completing a PhD in English for the University of California, Irvine. Her chapbook *Subterfuge for the Unrequitable* (Potes and Poets Press) appeared in 1998. Her work has appeared in a number of other UK magazines.

Gary Hotham is an American poet, now based in Maryland after some years in the UK. His haiku collection *Breath Marks* was published by Canon Press, Moscow, Idaho in 1999.

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## TILLA BRADING

### *Track One Track*

Keep in the insistent mode the cord the  
cord and where you are cry cry the place  
of a sad ecstasy and draw out that insistent  
strain vocal cords and binds and bids the  
singer to his song will not let go accepts his  
place insistent urge I want to leave before  
its vortex sucks away response imposes its  
belief yet call a scenery of caves when open  
fields are calling indulging overgrown the  
trail the trailing off

that is an illusion device and so used to  
track the track

### *The Question Is*

Wha abou' the chipmaking is meaning he  
fuckin' one is how it came into question  
are you fining them the works babe units  
of unmeaningness incorporated anew have  
you ever been in love versus a community of  
sloganeers acting lik yobs (isn't it) brackets of  
knowledge should he have a a look now or  
leave it until he woke how the scale might  
change how she had known these models  
copied from films she had never seen what  
spirit broke through her informing her impa-  
tient flesh asks should cinema follow the forms  
of theatre and painting what does that prove  
the methodology of language should I not  
go and he stay in the boat as language is con-  
structed of sounds do you think men shouldn't  
cry redefining the frame shot and scene

that it is an illusion device and so used to raise  
the question

PĒTERIS CEDRIŅŠ

*Juodkrantē*

I

I sealed a manila envelope with nothing in it, glancing at my nifty geochron – a map of where it is night in the world – (we were walking towards \_\_\_ in heavy snow) – I drew the sigil you drew *back then* and took it to the dead letter office, where I wrote *Robert Podgurski, Esq.* in the hand called “Jackal’s Scissors” and asked a postal employee to throw it at a passing train, but she passed it to a woman who is sure to give it to you

(less a woman than a hand, one of those torchères from Cocteau’s Beast’s house). The ink was gray, the silvery gray used to print the warning on mirrors (OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR) in a stencil script, I heard you saying “hands are very important,” you meant all eight of them, you meant the delta Dee used to draw phlogiston – I tried to concentrate but couldn’t, too many places in time, they flew like kites from their graven names –

(you were with me within the massive sundial smashed by the storm, late August near Nida – a week ago – I needed to recite “The Wives of the Nehrung-Fishers” – *needed* – when did I last feel such need – but I couldn’t remember a word, only the sounds the madwoman made when the fishermen returned empty-handed. Instead I remembered “Always to be named:”

“And who will teach me  
what I forgot: the stones’  
sleep, the sleep  
of the birds in flight...”

(you were with me on the face of the sundial, its obelisk smashed in the storm, looking towards the frontier of what is now Kaliningrad. Nehrung – Neringa – it has no fishermen now, it’s swarmed by tourists, the dunes below Nida right out of Lawrence of Arabia, sandwiched by a picture postcard sea).

And then we drove north, to Pape, to the marshes where the wild horses have moved into an abandoned house. “They inhabit it as if it is their home, moving from room to room.” The drought was everywhere evident. This places you in time. Dust covers the stunted pines on both sides of the narrow road to Papes *koņu ciems*. The grass in Ausma Brenča’s garden is a golden brown. Every night in dream the moon is sinking, but checking my handy geochron in the morning, the moon was always exactly where it should have been, unmoved by sleep, its phase as clear as the amount of milk in the glass you lift to your lips. Ausma Brenča, barefoot, takes us to see an oaken dugout the sea washed up. A thousand

years old, it drifts into your sleep. The hottest summer in history, a red moon rising, a few drops of rain.

## II

“No tenses. The words tumbled from all the mouths of the god at once.

He rubs himself with his utterance. He shines.”

– Gerrit Lansing

A circle shaped like a teardrop, widdershins, out of the interior. Age is making less sense. “Call the color age, or of the work’t, silver...” The age of your sensibility, the terrible natural inclination to return unchanged from terror, to fill your father’s outline with the ineffable, to hold the fort, to squeeze received ideas out of your pores, to hold still in the light of them.

We were walking towards the Capitol in heavy snow, after absinthe. Long live the academy d’absomphe! The trouble is with the pronouns – who were the “we” and all that jazz, I lost my Leitmotiv on Blueberry Hill, I live in a country where time is confused, the dead boat is not seaworthy, fuck the cyclical, make *japa* upon causality-wine.

In the next dream it was paint-by-number, mixed with the stick-on parts of the human anatomy, which were very confusing to me as a child (I lost the testicles, they were tiny). The adhesive social systems and the shame of one’s position! Paint-by-number on the cheesy velvet of Novalis’ night, the solar system, Velveeta orange for the angry planet, rotten milk for the stars.

Spirograph and Tinker Toys. Old poems about an ideal body politic. Indoctrination.

Age is making less sense, is trusting to the madness of dream once the meaning of each face has been evacuated, chasing the corner of her lips ever downward, hunting her down, “in the lamplight... with light brown hair,” bearded, bartered, in love with a final anonymity.

We were walking towards the Capitol in heavy snow. Gerrit had said to focus upon the personal. I had the green curry. A little girl drew us in green – after absinthe, as if moved by our aesthetic experience. The landscape speaks in an extinct language and Ausma Brenča collects stones. The things she sees in them are there. They are as real as

## III

Where’s the transcendence? If you stare at a spot in the dream long enough, will it (deepen it, will you get through, is every place blotter for the Doctrine of Signatures, to know what the mark is – to act upon the mark, is this not a sad string of subtitles for the Life of the Soul? Do you still labor beneath that?) – shall it rescue you from the inanity of

Self? Woo-ha! I always wanted to be an old man, a still life. *Nature morte*, the wild horses were imported. A bad biography is better than a slick one, the archetypes slipped beneath oilcloth. In the very last dream we had to find out how to live. How to make a life or love, how to trick ourselves out of our fabled destination.

IV

You want to say something awfully clear. I have come to distrust clarity, I prefer – like the next guy – I prefer to prefer, I let my fingers do the walking in the Yellow Pages, I am on vacation, I have vacated my position – only to return to it like a swallow through a hurricane, to find my way home. My prince is a palm tree sprouting between her legs in orgasm, my prince is something she came up with, I am her prince. Old, sad stories told until you no longer believe in anything, and then revived, o' ugly rustlings of a simple desire to be carried away. Shut your trap et cetera. To be tired for real long time and without analyst, to play you were my lover I am sorry you went mask-like, I am sorry I am sorry, *mea culpa* all the way.

To want to get somewhere where it is clear  
I will never get there, start to build a house in hopelessness, scratch a barrio, do make something out of it, it stands for something, you do grok the vile, ephemeral nature of my architecture, don't you? I have been lifted from this; I have been lifted from this before. This old look-at-me, this torturous structure. To strip off

V

I sent off a manila envelope with nothing in it, only the swish of wheat and in the end the door, or the odor of wherever my fingers had been that day.

Fuck your soul, o fuck your soul, fuck soul itself.

Stick to the personal.

VI

What is the difference between the story and

do nothing to wake her – I hate complexity, stick it, *solve*  
*et coagula*, draw your own awfulness  
out, replete with pleonasms –

we live in different worlds, *gimme*  
*gimme*, I hope (Gimmler, Gitler, German Gesse) –

*SALVE* – when them civilizations clash, it's good to be at home.

I had nothing to tell you and mailed you a letter –

I hope you are at home.

9:41, 2002. 31. VIII., upon returning from Courland

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**CARRIE ETTER**

*Another Obituary for Poetry*

Relic of the present, this  
Fronde-green and still a-bristle  
Suspicious, indeed,  
A post-mortem before the death

Who will inherit? I'd ask  
Were we in a Victorian novel  
The detective's gaze askance  
The clues under our fingernails

What's not on a billboard  
Misses the census  
(Find the day's vanishing point  
And tell me again)

*Divining for Starters (16)*

Out of the vernacular as the sky drains of light  
The body heavy with a day's work that gravity  
What would it mean to aspire to transcendence?

The garden more lush with encroaching darkness  
The slight tremble of branches, call it a knowledge  
Not the self—think of consciousness as steam

Dispersal and absorption; possessive adjectives aside  
There's no knowing if willing it makes it so  
Pooling again, with the drain and tremble

Something of appetite, of sensory reach  
Cleave to, cleave from, believe what you will  
Gravity grows lush, reassumed, pooling

*Ginger*

ginger remembered on the tongue and fingers run the smooth wood plane  
always beforehand the lying-in-wait, the dissipation of possessed activity  
where I devolve into the flux of emotion and instinct welling  
concatenation by fragments of memory and possibility  
ruptures with the elusive, the encroaching foreignness of illegible gazes  
salvaged by those blunt instruments words I do like the knotty handles  
to see you is to yield to you the blaze of moonlight on the dirty river  
enthralled with and without discernment gingerly my fingers

**GARY HOTHAM**

*Four Haiku*

well lit vacancy signs  
on the ocean front street—  
an evening rain heavier

in the distance  
out of our hearing—  
deer the hunters look for

my address on the envelope—  
a long ago hero  
on the postage stamp

end of season rates—  
old paint over old paint  
chips off

**SUSAN BRIANTE**

*While The Bride, Miami Beach, 1999*

1.  
undressing  
she is an impossibly white shoulder  
in a rind of sun

2.  
L says: 'Nothing really looks like that.'

She fingers the border between Florida and Georgia.

3.  
Where she cannot be bent:  
scapula, sternum, ribs: so stiff  
they hardly seem part of anything  
you could possess: a man with a rosebud  
mouth, lips worn smooth: the temple  
grooved for thumb, a body carries blades.

4.  
Her mapping of the island is instinctual.

5.  
It is hopeless for a woman to write about love  
to get it right she must slip  
into the front of a taxi, palm the steering wheel,  
and watch herself stride across the street,  
traffic working at her skirt hem,  
threads trailing from her sleeve.

6.  
little ear filled with storm  
little eyes scratched by dawn  
little mouth against the morning train

7.

Where the shoreline blots each wave; repeats herself; hems; rages;  
unravels; calls her lover back; rejects architecture, garments, pathways.

Nothing swallowed suits the thirst.

The conch holds its color.

8.

Water boundaries unchallenged, it has more to do with hierarchy, a north imposed on  
a south, a spatial privileging of “up,” a globe positioned against infinity so that you will  
never be sure of where you are going unless heaven sits heavy as glass

9.

on insect wings.

10.

“I wanted you to be true to scale.  
I wanted you to be glossy.”

*Prints*

34 grackles rise from the grass, recorded effortlessly,  
an exercise in blossom;  
your lungs fill with music, cedar

You decide not to notice, wipe the pane, tell the story  
for what the story is – scent, kindling –  
    as the sky goes from blue  
to porcelain, spooontaste before you swallow  
rain in italics, power  
surges, puddles

Meanwhile, touch turns to crows, a watermark left by strangers  
of comfort and dialogue

The oak dies late this year, perspective works its spell, negotiates hard  
truths: a stump

becomes a saucer of ash and mud falling  
to someone other than me; the vespiary frays

Same feet through our backyard.

### *The Groom Stripped Bare*

*The hero flies through the air*

on a steed; on a raptor; in the form of a falcon; on an '88 Harley-Davidson; on the board  
of a flying schooner; on her flying carpet; on the shoulders of a giant; in the wheel  
casing of a 747

*He travels on the ground or over water*

on the back of a horse or wolf; on the over pass; through the underbridge; in a green  
Volkswagen taxi with the meter whirling; in a stifling boxcar over the Rio Grande;  
a handless soldier carries a legless one

*He is led*

a coyote ushers the hero through a desert; red cotton thread unwinds like a clock from  
his lady's hem

*He makes use of stationary means of communication*

he climbs a stairway; he finds a subway passage; he walks across the back of an enormous  
pike as a across a suspension bridge

*He follows bloody tracks*

to the cougar's lair; to a rusty tin; to the pulpit; to the villain; to one cardinal flame  
burning above the charred door of her hermitage

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**Susan Briante** is a poet and translator who is currently living in Austin, Texas. Recent poems appear in *Triquarterly*, *New American Writing*, *Indiana Review*, *QuarterlyWest*, *Kenning* and *Notre Dame Review*, among others. Her translations have been published in *Mandorla*, *Review: Latin American Literature and Art* and a new anthology of Mexican poetry, *Reversible Monuments*, published by Copper Canyon Press. She lived in Mexico from 1992-1997, working at the journal *Artes de México* and on the bilingual literary magazine *Mandorla*.

## CHRISTOPHER GUTKIND

### *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.

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**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. This poem was printed in the last issue of *Shearsman*, shorn of its last two lines, an error which the editor greatly regrets. The online version of issue 53 was however correct, and the online version of 54 will therefore not include this poem.

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## New Books

**Michael Begnal:** *The Lakes of Coma* (Six Gallery Press, Geneva, OH, 68pp, pb, \$9, €9.) First collection, I think, for this Irish-American poet and editor of the Galway magazine, *The Burning Bush*. It has many virtues, and a few of the inevitable sins of a first collection. The author, in his foreword, says that this is an American collection and implies that it is somewhat distant from his current concerns. It certainly feels American; there's a cool post-beat kind of feel to a lot of the work here, but without the lazy mannerisms that such a style often implies. The cool presentation can sometimes mean however that not enough exploration or penetration has occurred in the poems. Some would feel more resonant if worked through a little more thoroughly, if they were more than artifacts. *Westmeath*, a poem I rather like, is a case in point:

*I'm back / Westmeathman // fields and fields / and brambles and bushes / and thickets, and  
the road / has no shoulder // they had a nice new farmhouse, / but way out past the pastures / was*

*Gutkind*

*the house / of my ancestor's birth, // or the ruins, / or the foundation, / I'm not quite clear.*

A little more work in the middle and that would have been really interesting. Michael Bernal is a talented young poet and worth tracking.

**Billy Collins:** *Nine Horses* (Picador, London, 2003. 120pp, pb, £7.99) I joined the UK's Poetry Book Society last year and, after receiving the execrable Muldoon volume three months ago, I now get this tosh. I know, I know, I shouldn't have joined. Collins is better than many I can think of, especially on these shores, but this is really poetry intended not to frighten the horses, however many there are. Some of it is rather mechanical, image chasing image down the page, and some is couched in that rolling, avuncular tone, beloved of certain poets who want you to empathise with their private vision of things. Nothing to get too upset about then, but life's too short to waste on this kind of book.

**Monica de la Torre & Michael Wieggers** (eds): *Reversible Monuments. Contemporary Mexican Poetry*. (Copper Canyon Press, Port Townsend, WA, 2002. 675pp, pb, \$20). ISBN 1-55659-159-4) What a wonderful book. The crazy thing about it is that this selection of poets born after 1950 does not even have an equivalent in Mexico itself, where anthologies still tend to be dominated by grandees from an earlier generation (which is not to imply that those grandees should be overlooked; it's just that their absence clears the way for the sheer range of contemporary writing in Mexico to be seen here). And not only does it include Hispanic poets, there are also indigenous poets (in the Zapotec, Tzeltal and Mazatec languages – just three of the ninety-plus languages of Mexico and far from the most widely-spoken: that accolade goes to Nahuatl, the Aztec language, and then to varieties of Maya). The book will take some time to be read and this is by way of an initial introduction. It's ridiculous to cherry-pick poets from this cornucopia, but I'm going to say now that an enormous impression has been made on me by Gloria Gevirtz, Claudia Hernández, Alfonso d'Aquino and Veronica Volkow. I've no doubt that much of the rest will be having an impact too, as this book slowly permeates my consciousness. It's like having maps rewritten, or indeed written for the first time. Essential reading. The translations are high-voltage affairs, by and large.

**Laurie Duggan:** *Mangroves* (University of Queensland Press, Brisbane. 186pp, pb, A\$20 (A\$22 incl. GST)). This is a very welcome volume indeed. Those who have paid any attention to my Recommendations pages on the Shearsman website will be aware that I'm a fan of Laurie Duggan's poetry. *Mangroves* comes after a hiatus of some six years (94-00) in which the author wrote no poetry. This fact was a little obscured for the reading public by two significant publications in that period, however: a *New & Selected Poems*, also from UQP, and a long poem in 6 sections, *Memorials*, published by the Adelaide press, Little Esther Books. The new book starts with 85 pages of new work (post-millennium, subsequent to Duggan's re-engagement with poetry); the rest of the book contains some translations and some uncollected and/or revised work that originates before 1994, as well as a 23-page prose piece, *The minutes*, best classified as 'poetic prose'. Snaking their way through the whole volume are poems in a continuing loose sequence called *Blue Hills*, the first of which – not included here – date back to the author's collection *The Great Divide* (Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1978). All in all, a very fine collection indeed.

**John James:** *Collected Poems* (Salt Publishing, Cambridge, 2002. 365pp, pb, £15.95). This is a long overdue collection and, as with the Raworth volume noted below, it finally brings together between one set of covers the entire oeuvre of a very fine poet. I had most

of the contents already, but I'm still delighted to have been able to fill in the small gaps in this section of my poetry library. James is usually lumped in with the so-called 'Cambridge School', which isn't a school, and mostly isn't in Cambridge (but it's a long story). James is in fact a Cambridge resident, but he wasn't a Cambridge student. He's Welsh by birth and, as far as I am aware, has been left out of every anthology of Welsh poetry, perhaps because there's nothing discernibly Welsh about his work, at least not as far as the subject matter goes (other than *The Welsh Poems* from 1967). Maybe Welsh literary politics has something to do with it? There's an American tinge here, which is not unusual for non-mainstream poets of his generation, and it has always seemed that the first New York School (that of the 50s & 60s: Ashbery, Koch, O'Hara, Schuyler) has been an influence: it comes through in the tone, the way the reader (or the poem) is addressed, the artfully artless stance, the throwaway line, the rallentando of the poem's unfolding. There are nods in the direction of (leftist) politics, of music (Hendrix as well as The Human League, anyone?), of German literature. The work becomes less boisterous with the years, but it's one of those poetry collections you can actually read from cover to cover rather than have to work at with a smug self-congratulatory air, thinking "it tastes bitter, but it's good for me". This one tastes good right down to the bagel at the end.

**R F Langley:** *More or Less* (The Many Press, 15 Norcott Road, London N16 7BJ, 2002. Chapbook, centre-stapled. 24pp, £3.50, ISBN 0 907326-36-6). R F Langley's *Collected Poems*, published by Carcanet 2 or 3 years ago, was one of the books of the year, revealing a small but wonderful oeuvre to a largely unsuspecting public. Given the small scale of that oeuvre, it's good news that John Welch's Many Press has come back to life to offer us this slim gem of a collection and further our acquaintance with this poet's work. There are seven poems here, most of which have seen the light of day elsewhere but which will have quite likely escaped the notice of all but the most attentive enthusiast. Copies can be had from Peter Riley's mail-order service or be ordered direct from the press. Add 50p for postage, I should think, if it's to be sent within the UK.

**Peter Larkin:** *Slights Agreeing Trees* (Prest Roots 2, 2002. 42pp, A4 format, centre-stapled. £4.50). I've a taste for Peter Larkin's truly original work, fusing ecology with experimental poetics. In the wrong hands this could be utterly indigestible, but here the results vary from the fascinating to the luminous. An excellent postscript to the recent Salt volume *Terrain Seed Scarcity*.

**John Matthias:** *Working Progress, Working Title* (Salt, Cambridge, 2002. 94pp, pb, £8.95, \$12.95, \$A24.95, C\$19.95) This is Matthias's first British publication for many years, and I wish I could welcome it more wholeheartedly. Two-thirds of the book has already appeared in the author's last US collection, *Pages* (Swallow Press / Ohio UP), and the rest of *that* book is much superior to the remainder of this one, a self-consciously experimental work called *Automystifistical Plaice* [sic], which concerns itself with the early-20<sup>th</sup> century Parisian avant-garde and the "strange fact that film siren Hedy Lamarr and avant-garde composer George Antheil collaborated on a patent for a radio-directed torpedo in the early days of World War Two". Actually, by that time Antheil was very much a *former* avant-garde composer, but he had indeed been the darling of the *avant* set in Paris in the 20s. I found this work overwhelmed by its material. *Pages* by contrast is consistently interesting in its interrogation of memory but, as I say, you'd be better off with the Ohio volume, which gives you a better idea of the range of this consistently interesting poet, who is not as well

known as he should be in the UK. A chance missed, I feel.

**Steve McCaffrey:** *Bouma Shapes. Shorter Poems 1974-2002* (Zasterle Press, La Laguna, Tenerife, Canary Islands. 66pp, pb, no price listed. Distributed by SPD, Berkeley.) McCaffrey is the best-known Canadian avant-garde poet, a north-of-the-border offshoot of L=language practices, I think, though I confess to some ignorance as to his exact categorisation. This book is beautifully produced, as usual with Zasterle, but I found it rather uninteresting reading material. I guess, if you know and like McCaffrey's other work, you'd be interested in this one.

**Tom Raworth:** *Collected Poems* (Carcenet Press, Manchester, 2003. 576pp, pb, £16.95). This, as they say, is the big one. And in more ways than one: it weighs 850 grams, or the best part of two pounds. It's an essential book, in that it gives us the chance for the first time to get our heads around the scale and breadth of Raworth's achievement. Few people will have the complete publications of this poet – in fact not even the author does, which explains why one obscure chapbook from the 70s has been left out of this otherwise exhaustive compendium. The layouts are generous enough, though *Ace* is double-columned, as are a couple of other skinny long poems (not ideal, but I can live with it); it's a clean smart production and the texts are eminently readable. I'd recommend some support for the book, though, because it does get heavy after a while. It's a book you need to buy, because you need to have the works of one of the most singular and interesting contemporary British poets, who proves you can be innovative, challenging and still have a sense of humour. I would be surprised if this has competition for "book of the year", come December.

**Jaime Saenz:** *Immanent Visitor. Selected Poems*. Translated by Kent Johnson & Forrest Gander (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, 2002. 145pp, pb, ISBN 0-520-23048-5. \$19.95, £13.95. H/c edition ISBN 0-520-23047-7 \$49.95, £35. www.ucpress.edu). Translation seems to have died a death in the UK recently, other than for the umpteenth version of Rilke, and we never see anything at all from Latin America apart from the usual Nobel-prize-winning suspects. In the USA by contrast – aided by good university presses and by comparative proximity (partly illusory: La Paz to Los Angeles by air takes about 6 hours) – there are large numbers of modern Latin American poets receiving respectful attention and getting good translators. Here is a case in point. Saenz's name will probably register with very few people in Britain, but I *have* come across him in a couple of anthologies, such as the Mexican *Antología de la poesía hispanoamericana actual* (1987; he gets 3 pages). Nevertheless, I don't recall ever seeing a collection of his work in Spanish. The last big US anthology of *poetas iberoamericanas*, Stephen Tapscott's *Twentieth-Century Latin American Poetry* (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1996) fails to include Saenz (1921-1986) but, happily, a forthcoming OUP anthology edited by Cecilia Vicuña includes some of the versions in this new book. (That book is of course from the American side of OUP; too much to hope that it would be commissioned by the burrowing creatures on this side of the Atlantic.) *Immanent Visitor* is one of the most beautifully designed paperbacks I've seen, which makes up for the rather high cover price. As with Forrest Gander's recent versions of Pura López-Colomé, reviewed in the last issue, the policy here is to place the originals in the second half of the book, thus giving the reader of book of translations followed by a book in Spanish, an arrangement I rather like. So, who was Saenz? A bisexual, alcoholic, bohemian, baroque symbolist somewhat out of synch with the rest of the literary world, who was also the author of two of (apparently excellent) novels

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that seem to be virtually unknown outside of Bolivia. His work is mystical and baroque & given to the overladen rhetoric typical of a lot of Hispanic poetry, but it barrels along, sweeping the reader with it, leaving meaning in its wake as a secondary issue:

Alive at the edge of language, the head floating in a body not there  
a finger in the fog  
the running water in the world of those who embroider their presence with a border of flax  
and another finger in wind that swings the suns of a miracle named by summer and rain  
and the ancientness of light still unrobed, unseen  
then one night another finger twitching to a vague melody on the bridge  
and the heaviness of sobbing in the bouquet, bequeathed from offspring to offspring  
when the swollen fury of the gleaming torrent roars past  
but the bond calls you and calls you and another finger sheathed in flame prods and prods at your  
[heart  
—you bat your eyes at the magical sign that orbits your body and licks at stubborn life  
—you're on the way to a city, and someone straining and straining to be born snaps the lighter off  
and you eat his desire and the cauldron of a drum disenchant itself before your eyes.  
(from *Immanent Visitor* VII)

Vive a la vera del lenguaje, la cabeza flotante en un cuerpo que no hay  
un dedo en la neblina  
el agua corriente en el mundo de los que agracian su estar un borde de lino  
y otro dedo en el viento que mece los soles del milagro nombrado por el verano y la lluvia  
y ancianidad de la luz que todavía no viste  
una noche otro dedo paralelo a una ambigua melodía en el Puente  
y el peso del llanto en el ramillete guardado generación tras generación  
cuando las modulaciones y la furia del agua fija y reluciente pasan de largo  
mas el vínculo te llama y te llama y toca y toca tu corazón otro dedo con el apoyo del fuego  
—parpadeas a poco la fórmula mágica que ronda tu cuerpo y lame la áspera vida  
—a una ciudad vas, y tiene apagado el mechero alguien que está y está por nacer  
y le comes su intención y un fondo de tambor se descencanta ante ti.  
(de *Visitante profundo*, VII. 1964)

I believe this to be an important book, one which, like a lot of the better 20C Latin American poetry, offers a radically different experience from that to which we are used in the Anglo-American tradition. It's the heritage of the Spanish baroque, religious mystical poetry, French surrealism, and the early Latin-American *vanguardia* — poets such as the Peruvian Vallejo, or the Chileans, Huidobro and de Rokha. It's a heritage we don't share and it's all the more fascinating for that. Other paths, other ways, other modes of expression. Yes, it's OTT, it's excessive in places to an English ear, but the hell with English reserve: it's had its day; we don't need it any more.

If you have internet access and Spanish, you'll find more of Saenz's poetry at the wonderful online Latin American poetry anthology *palabravirtual.com* .

*Space considerations have prevented any reviews of magazines or journals from appearing in this issue. As is now the house norm, these will instead be carried on the Shearsman website [ <http://www.shearsman.com/pages/magazine/home.html> ] when this issue is uploaded at the end of April 2003.*

**M T C CRONIN**

from *More or Less Than <1-100>*

88

when the season comes, the door opens  
shall we find this without the help  
of our own hands?  
the books fall like a waterfall over the mind  
and our ceilings apologize to the stars  
for their blindness  
this is a quiet house  
the sounds within it are like the movement  
of a foetus when night has settled  
the dripping tap, the buzzing sill,  
the screeching cobs of corn against  
the sky's dark board, we all crawl inside  
the tribe's womb and wait

89

a gape  
was it what you tore with your own hands?  
your literary voice?  
what you spoke made palpable despite softness,  
loudness  
was it what you refused?  
they, from the other side, who we reflect,  
say that the god refuses, that god's descendants refuse,  
that the ocean refuses, that sleep  
refuses the mind unless it creeps  
was it the galaxy  
spinning like a fired starfish to make us edgy and doubtful?

90

cut the world in half with the knife  
inserted right between my feet; open my hand  
and find the frozen earth; plant the apple  
seeds of my fingertips inside the inner walls  
of my chest and, delicate, thin, watch  
the new world grow from there, pulsing like  
the folded-back lips of a pap-hawk  
suckling at the breast of the spider, ant,  
bones of the shaking chest of the cosmos;  
tell only the truth and grieve only for such  
cause as that, think, burning, swearing

91

you kiss and you blow through the trees  
far-off from these lips and whistling perpetually,  
lightly, in a wind occupying a world absent because infinitely  
detectable, rising and falling, above and below your ear  
like a stream flowing, purely of light but sounding  
like water through tall reeds and sounding like many breezes  
dripping through leaves and washing against the curtains  
before falling again through a window and leaving you here  
with only your mouth, its small breath and locked door  
did you notice me standing there in my boots and coat

92

knocking, tapping? think back, you always saw the lover moving  
and the thumping heart propelling that and more, if you look  
at what you've done I'm sure you'll admit it hasn't transferred  
to the page – to be happy you must be faithful to happiness  
but you kept changing your shape, any beast would do,  
and throwing fruit, shell, rock, did you think I lived for you,  
what is your love but this war with reality, borne down upon  
by a featureless stone horse, mountainous, blood the slave  
of its veins and high-black scream?

93

you sit under a tree with your blood too old  
to make anything work, you sit under a tree one day,  
one day unusually, and in your chest there's an electrical  
fire that's as tight as pain, breath being heaved with the effort  
it takes to sink the same bit of earth you've always  
lived on, cliff passes by, petals lift up like hips  
in desire, only once the sun lifts the clouds onto  
a painter's canvas, gold, like a new corpse

94

incarnate labouring longing  
I can already hear you telling them,  
it's your imagination  
one of the writers separates each sentence  
and in those spaces  
where the darkness is kept dark  
I can hear your breath

95

we breathe not for oxygen but to expel the air we have husked  
to dirty ghost; we are under the black river where we breathe  
despite being land animals; this is how they put things in packets  
force them in; when I try to speak it feels like having my face  
ripped off; the words float up to the surface; language blossoms  
opening; but I can't hear what I'm saying; I'm under the black river

96

what is sour? the body after it has been in the mouth  
for the space of a night, the sweet lemon rolled  
in your tongue and unfurling like a daffodil?  
flicking over and over the fine skin of a coffee bean, sweetness  
growing spontaneously in the sacred dwelling of the mouth

97

along the way, not just the dark quotes,  
the chipped off light of utterance unmeant and skint,  
but all the regions of the tongue drawn by surfaces  
the tongue slides: can I let what I have go – into us?

98

call me, when you need to barely touch; every  
visitor, the taste of a whispered world; every  
path is a furrow; find us, the uncomfortable stars

99

and not simply time but the kind of second that passes  
only because of words – how concerned with effects...

100

ice follows water follows

Shearsman Books announces the publication of  
*Departures: Selected Poems*  
by David Wevill on 30 April, 2003.



ISBN 0 907562 34 5  
144pp, paperback. 203 x 127.  
£9.95 UK; \$15 USA.

*From the rear cover:*

David Wevill was born a Canadian in Japan in 1935, and was educated in Canada and England. He has lived in Burma and in Spain and has made his home in Austin, Texas for the past thirty years. While resident in England in the 1960s and 1970s he established a substantial reputation as a poet, publishing four volumes between 1964 and 1974. He won prizes, was represented in all the major anthologies of the period and was included in the famous Penguin Modern Poets series before his first full collection appeared. With his move across the Atlantic, he fell from view in Britain, although his work continued to be published in his native Canada. This collection is designed to redress the balance and to bring his work before the British public once again, reprinting work from the four books published in London and adding to them work from his subsequent Canadian collections.

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**Also newly available from Shearsman Books:**

**David Jaffin: *A Birth in Seeing*** (168pp, paperback, 205 x 134mm. £7.50, \$12. ISBN 0 907562 35 3. Published February 2003, in association with St-Johannis-Druckerei, Lahr, Germany. Available in the USA from Small Press Distribution, Berkeley ([www.spdbooks.org](http://www.spdbooks.org)).

Jaffin's fourth collection since his return to writing poetry at the end of the 1990s, this book contains poems on places, on music, on art, on religion and belief, all in the author's trademark minimalist style. David Jaffin, a native New Yorker, is today a Pastor in the Lutheran Church [*Evangelische Kirche*] in Germany, where he is well-known for his lectures and sermons, many collections of which have been published.