

# *Shearsman*

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*Edited by  
Tony Frazer*

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#### **Submissions**

*Shearsman* operates a submissions-window system, whereby submissions are only considered during the months of March and September, selections being then made for the following October and April issues. Submissions may be sent by mail or email, but email attachments—other than PDFs—are not accepted.

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## Christopher Middleton

---

### Some Birds

I swallowed that third benedictine probably  
too soon, but as to birds,  
    the barn owl on his beam,  
kestrel swivelling on a shaft of air  
    and the seagull with a squawk:  
and no perceptible effort gliding—  
there is beauty in birds and all about them,  
the ways their plumage  
    fits the planes  
    or tunnels in the air,  
a wholeness to their colours—

how about that? And their varieties  
from any sparrow scuffling in his dust  
to cobalt blue legs, the white silken breast  
and metallic green spot above the eye  
    of the kingbird described by Wallace,  
from the friendly redbreast poised  
on the handle of a spade that somebody  
    left dug into the soil of a drab garden,  
to the condor in the Andes with a wingspan  
    four times as far as anyone can reach.

No Roman prelates here to aim at them  
    their shotguns, no Calabrians  
to cut down all the trees . . .

Birds appear also in plays such as that  
    of Aristophanes.

*Tio tio tinx* the Greek actor calls replicating  
sounds I heard while performing in English  
the play out of doors  
on a ranch in Texas: spluttering Greek  
we strode on a slope and an actual bird  
mocked from a bush by the creek

*tio tio tinx* (though a time-warp  
crept in here somehow). The thousand songs  
that rush from the birds when Spring  
is what they feel—what life  
what future might there be on earth without birdsong  
to brace, to console, to welcome us?

The swan solicitous beside her cygnet,  
survivor of five, the others  
gobbled by raccoons—or snapping turtles—  
Could I ever, believing birds, have even  
gone halfway only with Paul Celan? Since when  
did a new coherence between  
ourselves and undivided nature  
cease to be thinkable?

Hummingbird, how should we greet your  
individual occurrence, let alone the scores  
of astonishingly robust varieties? Thrush,  
missel thrush plucking his worm  
from a lawn in Rutland,  
Aztec parrot flitting from a palm  
among creekside huts in Michoacán,  
that erratic wren who flew  
round my desk one day and out again—  
what sort of world flashed into its perception?

No self-denial there, turning bitter  
into life-denial, monkish wheel and rack . . .  
What position, however, do their tribes  
and habits occupy in the global food-chain?  
A large one now as it must always have been,  
depending on  
vagaries of space-time. Come to think of it,

earthbound I glimpse through vertigo  
gradual and huge mutations. Alas,  
lonesome the loon calls back birds of Ur,  
birds of Babylon,

for brilliant breeds have perished probably,  
what spectacular doves, what secret songs,  
what willingness to be, to be . . .

And unforgotten, nested once in fathomless night,  
a million golden birds,  
an enormous whisper of lifted wings  
now you flock, vigour to be  
in time to come,  
in the exile of daylight

Tiberius must have seen the swifts off Isca  
skim the calm and turquoise water  
and heard their quick shrill cries  
while tumultuous round rocky nests they flutter;  
and horses in whose fat were carried  
spores of the very first fragrant flowers  
heard as anyone today can do  
various birds, calling perfectly.



## The Ailing Wife

*'There was a new softness in the air . . .'* wrote Malaspina, approaching Doubtful Sound, at the south-western end of New Zealand's South Island in 1793. He and Don Felipe Bauza, who explored Doubtful Sound in a rowing boat from the corvette *Descubierta*, were responsible for 12 Spanish place-names in the area. While the first European music heard in New Zealand is said to have been that played by English sailors on fife, drum and pipes in 1773, the first conceivable instance of a guitar being heard in the country was when the two Spanish vessels visited two decades later.

### Punta de 25 De Febrero

It was stained as the sea was  
stained

tannin-brown. A wintry forest  
of six strings.

Sweetness, she stood on the pier  
and passed me

the guitar. And with that  
I was pushed

out to sea. I sailed latitudes  
of frets, longitudes

of strings. I worked on my hands.  
My nails

grew, fingertips hardened  
and, this way,

I was restrung.

## **Isla de Bauza**

So had it the talkative hands  
with which I accompanied

myself. Slowly as we went  
the instrument and I

out towards the horizon of  
her ailment

that we might make  
dry land again

on this ship I called  
The Ailing Wife

sailing calmly for  
the storm.

## **Islotes de Nee**

The fair sea, she said,  
the unfair sea . . . My wife had left instructions

for the playing of the instrument  
in the worst of weather

come rain, typhoon or  
waterspout.

But she had not prepared me for  
the calmness, these most

unmoving of waters. Slowly,  
as we went.

## Canal de Malaspina

I clung to her. A lesson learnt from crayfish,  
the left hand's shuffle

neck-wards. A lesson learnt  
from sails:

that we are gathered  
inwards. A thinness

she taught me. Slackness  
I taught myself, and then

unlearnt it. J. S. Bach  
you were

a bridge over the river  
of such things.

Together we pressed onwards to  
the upper reaches

of her sickness.  
A lesson learnt

from gut strings:  
a necessary tension.

## Crossing from Guangdong

Something sets us looking for a place.  
For many minutes every day we lose  
ourselves to somewhere else. Even without  
knowing, we are between the enveloping sheets  
of a childhood bed, or crossing  
that bright, willow-bounded weir at dusk.  
Tell me, why have I come? I caught  
the first coach of the morning outside  
the grand hotel in town. Wheeled my case  
through the silent, still-dark streets of the English  
quarter, the grey, funereal stonework facades  
with the air of Whitehall, or the Cenotaph,  
but planted on earth's other side. Here  
no sign of life, but street hawkers, solicitous,  
arranging their slatted crates, stacks of bamboo  
steamers, battered woks, to some familiar  
inward plan. I watch the sun come up  
through tinted plexiglas. I try to sleep—  
but my eyes snag on every flitting, tubular tree,  
their sword-like leaves—blue metal placards  
at the roadside, their intricate brooch-like  
signs in white, that no one disobeys.  
I am looking for a familiar face. There is  
some symbol I am striving for. Yesterday  
I sat in a cafe while it poured, drops  
like warm clots colliding with the perspex  
gunnel roof. To the humid strains of Frank  
Sinatra, unexpectedly strange, I  
fingered the single, glossy orchid—couldn't  
decide if it was real. I slowly picked at  
anaemic bamboo shoots, lotus root like  
the plastic nozzle of a watering can,  
over-sauced—not like you would make at home.  
I counted out the change in Cantonese.  
Yut, ye, sam, sei. Like a baby. The numbers

are the scraps that stay with me. I hear  
again your voice, firm at first, then almost  
querulous, asking me not to go.  
I try to imagine you as a girl—  
a street of four-storey plaster buildings,  
carved wooden doors, weathered, almost shrines  
(like in those postcards of old Hong Kong you loved)  
you, a child in bed, the neighbours always in  
and out, a terrier dog, half-finished bowls  
of rice, the ivory Mah Jong tablets  
clacking, like joints, swift and mechanical,  
shrill cries—ay-yah! fah!—late into the night.  
My heart is bounded in a scallop shell—  
this strange pilgrimage to home.

\*

The bus stops  
with a hydraulic sigh. So, we have crossed  
the imaginary line. The checkpoint  
is a concrete pool of grey. The moss-green  
uniformed official, with his stiff-brimmed,  
black gloss hat, his elegant white-gloved hands, his  
holstered gun, slowly mounts the rubber steps,  
sways with careful elbows down the aisle. I lift  
this wine-magenta passport, the rubbed gold  
of the lion crest—this mute offering.  
Two fingers brace the pliant spine, the thumb  
at the edge—an angle exact as a violinist's  
wrist—fanning through watermarks, stamps,  
flicked verso and recto, halting at the last  
laminated side. He lifts his eyes to read  
my face. In them I see—uncertainty.  
The detection of eyes, the bridge of a nose.  
Half-recognition. These bare moments—  
something like finding family.  
The mild waitress in Beijing. Your mother . . .  
China...worker? she asked, at last, after  
many whispers spilling from the kitchen.

Or the old woman on the Datong bus,  
who might have been my unknown grandmother.  
She took a look at me, and weakly grasped  
my shoulders from below, loosing a string  
of frantic, happy syllables, in what  
dialect I don't even know. She held  
my awkward hands, cupped in her rough, meagre  
palms, until the general restlessness showed  
we neared the stop. As the doors lurched open,  
she smiled, pressed a folded piece of paper,  
blue biro, spidery signs, between my fingers—  
she and all the others shuffled off. Some,  
I realised then, were in hard hats, as they  
dwindled across the empty plain, shadowed  
by the blackened, soaring, towers of the mine.

\*

Something sets us looking for a place.  
Old stories tell that if we could only  
get there, all distances would be erased.  
The wheels brace themselves against the ground  
and we are on our way. Soon we will reach  
the fragrant city. The island rising  
into mist, where silver towers forest  
the invisible mountain, across that small  
span of cerulean sea. I have made  
the crossing. The journey you, a screaming  
baby, made, a piercing note among grey,  
huddled shapes, some time in nineteen-forty-  
nine, (or year one, of the fledgling people's  
state). And what has changed? The near-empty  
bus says enough. And so, as we approach,  
sluggishly, by land, that glittering scene,  
the warm, pthalo-green, South China tide—  
far off, I make out rising, mercury  
pin-tips, distinct against the blue  
as the outspread primaries at the edge  
of a bird's extending wing. So much

taller now than when I left  
fifteen years ago. Suddenly, I know—  
from the mid-levels flat where I grew up,  
set in the bamboo grove—from the kumquat-  
lined half-octagon of windows, tinted  
to bear the sultry, drip-refracted glare—  
you can no longer see the insect cars  
circling down those jungle-bordered boulevards.  
The low-slung ferry, white above green,  
piloting the harbour's carpet of stars,  
turned always home, you can no longer see.

### **The bowl of milk**

This eve-  
ning light  
is good  
enough  
to eat.  
In the  
windowed  
kitchen  
everything  
is white  
no longer.  
Sweetness  
over-  
flows, my  
honey-  
suckle of  
the flame-  
like tubes,  
my blushed  
tin sink  
is swall-  
owing  
diamonds.

## Passing Through Sea-Thorn

sheets of salt -light slice frontal  
greys land to our backs sea to our faces

a little vill age of Rinsey & its pure  
wet name behind our minds clings to a slip

pery tilt of world as angered January tugs  
at it & us with bur sting sky Rinse

y at a back of land our feet fed across vague  
at a back of a coast's dumb mouth

as ocean shouts deep backlogs of vast rain  
trick ling a long thorns a taut

fraying rope of coast -path passes through  
a purple-black blackthorn cloud thorn-

clitt-clatt wind shreds through sharp wood  
a wren's fragment wrapped in brown

glimpse Rinsey Head's sing le howled-at  
house tightening distances round its granite

selfness teetering fast on a cliff-lip facing  
sea's visible sizzling voices & spray's

seen scraping phrases & wind's ever  
uttered touches contains deep indoors a floor

-corner with warm still fluff no one has  
touched blackthorn's long inter laced pricks

a mesh of weapon ry ranks of skeletal  
fretting either side of footworn hawser-width

clickt-drip clackt-drop thorn phantoms  
shudder under wind -strings I am spine on

femurs & shins myself strung to jolts wind  
grinds my brow each boot -clunk disconnects

me to path-pebbles and thence to sol  
id but erodable depth a bag of air bursts a burden

of spatters a wet hammering holly leaves  
glisten-rattle gorse in bloom with boun cing

golden scraps is a hill side of dancing ram  
blers clad in gaudy yellow Gore

-Tex jackets heat & moisture leak from joints  
in my high -tech shell sweat wicks up through

a finely woven mesh of syn the tic fibres Praa  
Sands rushed by ringing froth & curling

shrouds of ocean skimming scum-foam like  
weightless bread sliding sideways a figure

& his/her Spring er on sand faint & miniature  
at a weather's far end be yond behind

this human's & dog's minds houses flat  
white wet paper squares balanced on an

old eroding rim bet ween a thick depth of sea  
& heavy height of sky all impossibly not

b lown a way su ggests

*Note: Praa is pronounced as 'pray' (or perhaps 'prair'),  
it should not be pronounced as 'Prare'.*

**McLean County Highway 39**

tar shrugs goes to dirt  
gravel's slow crunch over  
winter with no hill for  
frost to the horizon

★

green hectares rising into our  
Illinois' no blond endeavour  
but for the tassels dangling  
covert threads of silk

★

cycle up dirt-dust's brown haze  
flattening thought a prairie  
the only height for miles  
a grove its doe

★

sweat and cornstalks taller than  
pushed through the close  
click into speed sticking hairs  
peel the nape free

★

all exhale the green expanse  
cicadas' two notes sunset  
the red eye pink strata  
push an unwavering line

★

without thought three miles out  
an idle porch swing  
shrug or flattening not silence  
but nothing heard in

★

soybeans crouch along even as  
horizon at my back  
cools toward streetlamps and cement  
glide in the last

## *Keri Finlayson*

---

### **Gulls**

We know them don't we

Gulls.

Solid bodied, white. The beak a split scream.

Yelping us up a storm or a turned tip.

Seeding our sky like weeds.

They are not souls or prayers

But whole cathedrals of rage.

Feathered vaults, gathering all known sound and pitching it as noise

Against the false horizon.

Our bodies are inadequately boned for such wrath.

Richly dense they lack the cavities for height.

We open our mouths and bleed long strands of gravity.

Our speech being the opposite of flight.

*from Internal Rhyme*

a conservative impulse  
lodges bakes a thin  
rough escarpment traps  
taste a trellis stapled on

tracks down former  
run into me down  
to sullen swerve of  
the deep

tacky postcard view  
fortunes ruined chambers  
kinds of infinity  
lay waste to wilds

laid waste to submerged  
shredded nullity what  
stalks into cells  
within me

at this rate of change  
snatching options as they  
back from the overall  
favours of esteem or

I buffet forth and back  
occur rather than working  
plan it does me no  
charity is a commitment

to real time composition  
instead of wrapping back  
live it out first then  
by then actually start

a kind of blunt lie  
a shape onto myself  
write it not too late  
whilst on the way

I thee obdurate implacable  
this spectacle sunk into  
bring it up on the plinth  
a triumph of sudden

your broken spear demands  
a stage managed sulk  
shattered attention tries  
unfeeling grace of servitude

your longing detractors  
exile anonymous indulgence  
beneath sky lights lots  
distend or do they

gift you the feelings of  
lying in a sad heap  
of clouded ranges distract  
uplift, mend, suspend?

## Neck of the Woods

### I.

The twig knuckle being caught  
lifts up a curl of clear water;  
ancient of days.

A small pulse, irregular,  
down this groove  
arising from the play of water-flow  
round the leaves and the brown cedar-spray  
as they sway  
caught under water.

After each pulse a strange slow dimple  
across the pool.  
Difference of temperature?

And then at last a movement up in the cleft  
where the water also moves:  
not the stream, but a living waterlouse.

### II.

Mandibles, proboscis  
the ant and the loplop bug

a small stand of mushrooms  
along the groin of a meadow  
under bamboo.

Ferns about to burst out of the ground;  
mayfly dancing above the waterflow;  
every event in this stream is an irregular wave.

### III.

A huge wasted-out tree-stump  
almost alevel with the ground  
with the firm young upstanding fern-shoots  
higher than it,  
some bowed,  
some curled up,  
ready to rise. And now I've trud on one;  
no longer ready to rise.

That wrinkle in the water  
that stays,  
that fold in the glassy substance  
where the fold meets another fold  
and is itself ribbed:

1. Silver drop  
at about-one-second intervals  
down a dark frond
2. Every third pulse, or so  
the wave over the rock dwindles  
and the ribs start to dry
3. The bird overhead, per-  
petually  
an unsatisfied scale of five notes.

Waves and wrinkles,  
back-wrinkling across the pond,  
meet and disperse.

#### IV.

In the vast cavernous hole  
millions of work-hands  
on ladders, with buckets,  
rising and falling  
in a centipede-like movement,  
like the wind passing over fronds  
or the flow of a centipede's legs  
rising unendingly.

#### V.

St John's pulpit  
now gone, now rotted:  
an old sock, dimpled with orange  
and bent over like a limp finger  
beckoning.

In the stream, under a tomb of living lead  
the little bug has implanted itself  
very firmly in the side of the living rock.  
The twig has stopped rocking,  
somehow locked;  
only the thickening water over it, in waves,  
makes it seem to move.

A dollop of snow lands on the rock,  
diverting the pulse;  
the pulse melts it;  
but for a while it was changed,  
changing some other rhythm  
downstream.

## VI.

Wail, and cry from the unknown creature on my left  
to the unknown creature on my right.

The open maw full of fungus.

Little gleam of sun on the lower part of a tree-trunk;  
this was a meadow.

Tree rockets off to the left  
to start a new life.

Here a deer lay.

Little fists of fern-ends,  
grass growing out of a crack in an old stump.

And the bubble with the rhythm of a heartbeat  
and the dangling hairs as if from a twat  
with the beads of water on them  
evermore thrown up by the stream.

## VII.

The leaf-edge lifts  
and lifts  
on the water,  
but not regularly;  
the whole mass of them, leaves and cedar-fronds, shakes like a belly,  
irregularly,  
and on the upturned leaves  
the globes of water wobble, but don't move.

## Underfoot

all the birds have come to this bancal  
on the high path between Sóller and Deia  
built stone on stone by Moors a thousand  
years ago for olives, oranges and carob

in February they are feeding the fires  
and flames catch the leaves and blaze  
almost to the arms of the man who  
settles the twigs it could be my father

who still makes fire run through things  
but here they are re-making the old  
cutting and burning the ripe wood  
leaving young shoots on gnarled trunks

the voice of the chainsaw echoes in  
valleys smoke hangs high and drifts  
the terraces are held against the mountain  
by the dead and the living their hands

their muscles the salt of their skin  
at dusk the mountains shift to grey  
layers of rock are smoke and mist  
and the sound of the chainsaw stops

just this spade and this pick scraping  
making the little difference and underfoot  
the cloudy cyclamen and by the side  
the dark leaved aromatic myrtle

## Ash

All that remains is dry  
fragmented bone,  
the rest is vaporised  
and gone. We've held to this  
and set our teeth to give you  
the first day of autumn.

Pulling grass and groundsel  
free, we make the bed.  
Is there a good way to do it?  
Just face away from the wind.

Grit and substance falls  
to earth, a finer grade suspends  
in air. This is the place  
for calcium phosphates;  
Out of a garden you can  
grow what you want.

I think of her all the time.  
Grey ash settles on the back  
of a black frog. In fits and starts  
we go on.

## The saddest tree at Kew

There are words that twist the fingers raw  
like *only once*, and yet again *once more*.

King Kong, when asked, is a film about immigration  
and if you have ever examined an MRI scan you will  
know that the spine does not resemble the great ape's  
but has everything to do with long telephone calls.

Paranoids are the only ones to make sense of anything,  
connecting everything, and although that may not be  
flowers, it will be something, just like a sigh is another  
way of holding one's breath.

There are burnt words in a battled silence  
and if you have ever listened to goodbyes  
you will know that they shout and gape  
a mouth that slides down a mountain like snow.

The saddest tree at Kew cannot speak or hang up  
and rain on its leaves longs for the spring.  
The female species of the tree has apparently  
not been preserved and in context *hmmmmm* is

a string of DNA for putting on hold and all things  
broken and struggling to *mansize* and *beingthere*.

## Memorandum

(i)

slush fun/d. i'm in love with my illness. can i tell  
you about it? please let me  
tell you about it. wait! why  
are u covering your ears? i want  
ear covers too! please over me. i  
want to be your cover girl. i covet her. i am  
a covering for distant planets.

(ii)

i writed. i waited for u. u weren't there why  
RU busy? UR always busy  
when i have a problem. i want to know! will you  
be still. will you be still busy if my  
problems vanish? will you be you. who is  
"you"? will u appear? what will u appear  
as? am i part of yr appearance? is your appearance  
important. i'm apparent now. more than  
mine? what is mine? be careful  
of mine(s).

lets do lunch. lets do debbie. debbie did dallas.

(iii)

the scene has discolored. i awaken. naked  
talent. the dead are often rescued. tired  
obituary. killing jamboree. ghost  
apprentice. goodnight stuff.

i want to suck the giant  
tit that is mount fuji. and a  
mint julep.

giant pail of  
regret. moist  
men. secret black list.

i see sky everywhere.

kitty occult.

Never infect sound.  
But artificial fork.  
It's erasing already.

(iv)

just restless people roaming  
the earth. we aren't just. we are the earth. we aren't  
just people. littered with people. people with litter. so so  
very. the very one people so. little people.

(v) You think to yourself:  
And next you:

(vi) How could we  
be attracted to other people? I did  
feel a little left out. He's really  
feeling stuck in his  
job. They have a long  
history of competitiveness. I've  
been attracted to other  
women. What  
an embarrassment.  
Okay, but.

(vii)

What a creep of a brother. I  
didn't pay attention to anything.  
That day. It was disgraceful.  
average: 3.0

(viii)

in the goals of Americans. Movement  
has teeth. tryout a shot. less  
than the future

## **fishing for beginners**

it is usual to have a line  
    either actual or one that  
        is carried in the head—  
success does depend on this

it is better to be as close  
    to water as you can—preferably  
        with a little depth—though  
fish are not known for their intellect

it is good practise not to sing  
    or chatter for this is serious  
        business and depends on  
concentration from both the fish and you

it is customary to throw the fish  
    the line—include bait at one end—  
        hold the other—if nothing happens  
be assured the fish has not drowned

it will take lots of time as all serious  
    fishing does—may never finish  
        the scale of the task is so huge—  
remember you are preparing to invade another world

it is said that if you catch a fish  
    and let it go the fish will soon forget—  
        only you will remember—  
good to know if continuing to fish

## *Linda Black*

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### **E J Arnold & Co, Stock no 201194**

One page blank, one lined; lined (right), blank (left); lined front, blank back, reversed from the centerfold (blank, blank), the final page being lined (as is the first), each blue line—neither too dark or too pale—a pleasing distance (8mm) from the ones above and below. She hovers, inhabits the spaces between. Each blank page remains and will so remain. Each, by requirement, should have upon it a drawing in pencil or crayon in a child's hand: some aspect of desire, of a world seen not as wanting. Who knows the demeanour of those who wouldst populate such unruly realms?

### **The Onlooker dictates**

Neither pen nor paper (to hand) nor any notion of such, this she ignores (as does he). Something in common? Patience/desperation: action/stupefaction—I think not. He may very well reach the end before she ever begins. Take that page in a notebook (Stock No 201194) some way in: 'I never thought you'd get *this far*' her tutor had written, and she hasn't. Lines run through her head (the beautiful bounty of silence never hers) deeply wrought: chatter, mutter, matter, utter tripe—like that stuff from the inside of a cow, white, visceral, on a tray in the butcher's window. Repeat after me. How could anyone stomach it?

### **She feels sick**

And as she leans forwards, wretched, retching, an image – this would be an etching – begins to form: the symbolic contents of her (add a few belongings) spewing from her own wide mouth, caught in mid-stream; such precious artefacts, a lifetime's worth, so fine and neatly drawn. How pretty a picture would that be?

## Young Woman With Scythe

As if soil was noise, the legal notice  
shivered on the barrow. Louise tore off  
her scything gloves. High on a pine, wild  
parakeets, harbingers of change  
in our climate, stared from their margin, chattered  
about apocalypse. Carefully, eking  
out a holiday, I watered plants.  
That's my dialect of territory  
against the elocution of possession.  
I looked for so long at Louise's face  
that, in the bedroom mirror, it smoothed mine.

## Woman in the Canon

Heads are floating at every level of the staircase,  
marble, bronze, sometimes with a shaven shoulder.

Carry on up your long bud-sprout stalk  
of a kail runt torch: a cabbage head lit

by a candle on top, its thick packed leaves  
hard-veined as winter. Your arms are out

at the elbows in this stairwell crowded with murals  
of mythic actions—but what does it matter who

landed the boat or fought off the invaders?  
Hold up your cabbage head uncooked, uneaten,

a simple candelabra to the canon.  
This multi-storey atom of the arts

hosts men on every floor but inbetween  
and going down I give off light.

## **Song from a bamboo flute in the dark**

We hear the breath,  
the movement of fingers

before the notes  
linger like steam curling from the earth.

Half the moon has fallen  
and wrapped itself in a bed of lichen.

There is a hole in the night,  
soft and black as liquorice

through which we hope to glimpse  
the Aurora Borealis.

The colours of the song  
move through red to green and yellow

as if we are summoning  
the sky to come alive

and dance for us.

Tonight, temperature is stretched like elastic.  
Snap. Zero degrees.

Ice crystals glint like raven's eyes.  
The flute makes no promises.

from *criticism* (brief lives of poets)

U. J.

hobbyist in his summer dacha  
biting on crackers, spitting snow  
untrained in implausibility  
offhand carpenter back from the city  
tables stormed  
by postage and handling  
the ink garden's minor superstitions  
metric neatness, terracotta replicas  
disinfected mouseholes, a set of slides  
(his father's dog still barking)  
a little listener on his trail:  
picking of stones, test moves  
shadowy transitions  
additional embarrassment thinly sketched  
a rewrite man  
in the guise of a Tibetan golf instructor  
leaving no traces on the beach  
(period detail)  
early on someone discarded  
the wrong ghost  
while hunting snails

## A Road in Berlin

On my daily route to or from Oranienstrasse via the Penny Supermarkt for a bottle of cheap dry white to drive *The force that through the green fuse*. A road equidistant from the Kurfürstendamm of my once-a-week treat at the Ice Cream Parlour and the Kurfürstendamm of the glamorous prostitutes. The road with the *Ringbahn* train screeching along the elevated tracks, sparks flying; with the Turkish *gastarbeiter*, with all the little ateliers and artisan shops: the cobblers and picture-framers, the sewing-machines and joinery. Everywhere movement. Old men struggling with ladders and planks of wood; young men balancing massive panes of glass; little trucks bouncing over cobblestones; bicycles, tricycles and mopeds; the heady smells of paint, rubber tyres and sawdust; the pervasive whir and whine of sewing-machines, of lathes shaping and scraping and moulding in a symphony of industry. That was the road with the mad women where at any time of day you'd see them hanging out of third-floor windows, screaming and gesticulating. The artisans ignored them. If they glanced up, they looked down again. I never saw them laugh or make a 'knowing' gesture. Yes, that was the road where lost women popped out of windows like cuckoos from the clocks of ancient minutes.

## Song

It hardly felt adequate downloading soundbites;  
it tastes so sweet to save targets under pseudonyms.  
In a sense that is part of the same slipstream,  
flip side of the half empty, says the sceptic,  
or so They will announce again & again,  
as a pap-fed lexi-minimum. The ampersand  
is becoming more and more pleasing  
as if its promise of the syncretic ennobles and accesses  
Great Things: “is this the way that thoughts are tending”.  
Public opinion crescendos in this make-shift footstep  
and I settle into the sushi box you’ve long neglected.  
In that I detect the sigh of the self you’ve tried to conceal, for,  
“it’s been such a long time,” you find yourself saying  
to cover the interstices left by the scuttle  
in the other direction that may well have been noted.  
Unctuous excess may seem to you perfectly natural  
but people aren’t so easily manipulated.  
You’ve left a notch open there for  
people to snag themselves on;  
an “invite hook” I call it in my better moments.  
“Oh, is that what they’re calling arrogance nowadays.”  
Whatever suits the par for the hole-in-one dialogue  
(the T-Shirt announces his intentions,  
strut-swaying along the street).  
Excuse me. Yes? Ex-cu-oose me. Yes?  
“There’s something tactically surreal about your swagger,”  
she mentions, evoking the long dead but peristaltic memory  
of Antonin Artaut. To which the only response can be the cold-  
shoulder and a mention of the weather forecast for  
this time last year. It seems such a heady waste  
clawing to this always “redolent” rhythm  
when so many tintinnabulations beckon.  
And I am left gazing at the bath water and the mights  
with very little (but little enough) sense of the (relative)  
agony of being linear.

Sub-section on the 'relative'.  
We all know we've invested a lot  
Of time in offsetting the guilt  
When we talk of anything or moan  
About our 'position'.  
Mountains of Sisyphus clauses "of course"  
Burthen our talk until it's a wonder  
Anything ever gets done  
(By which, of course, I mean said).  
Caveat—warning—forewarn.

Dawning into shape before our very  
comes the clinching metaphor  
with quite enough anchor to head our lines  
isomorphically. Like the Galloping Gertie resonating.  
"I GET THAT THRILL WHEN YOUR WORDS CARESS."  
The duress this internal rhyme puts me under  
to make the connection between all things.  
(Caveats roar in my ears positioning away  
from the inevitable interpretation).  
And, when I say 'working', what I am really saying  
is that this is a performative designed to translate  
all this indolence into something worthy.

"There you are, there's another."

#### Four Codas in search of an End

You were already there even before I knew I wasn't  
even close and it's only now (1 year on) I come to the  
same conclusion that you had already come to (I now  
realise).

Reading all this high-fallutin' stuff but really snuggling  
up with a glass of shiraz and Christine Aguilera whose  
lyrics challenge in other ways.

Your titles are confined, like vox pops, to the temporal  
bulletin from which they were born.

And I still prostrate myself before it despite myself  
and others.

## Ulixes Comicus

Then sat we  
in ergonomically engineered office chairs  
*homo sacer*—soccer mom hauling son  
by minivan to muddy field for soccer match.  
Washington Bullets & Paris Match

langue & parole she stands between two stones  
the gall—& for the love of God safety ratings

several stars not the Pleiades given Honda Odyssey:

Rollover Resistance Rating  
Static Stability Factor  
Driver's Side Impact  
Passenger Side Impact  
Thoracic Trauma Index

thus by minivan to muddy field fallen leaves  
jamming the wipers.

These—software & systems applications  
cartographically reconfigured—rhizomatic colloquy.  
& for the love of God don't be fooled. Testify  
to the reification of abject rage inflected.  
Index down. Ulixes Comicus is clearly  
not the man we thot him be. This is all something  
of a terrible travesty—something of a convention.

Ulixes at the office ensnared in detachable  
drop lift cubicle panels complaining  
carpel tunnel & lower lumbar—the pain  
of supplication  
of examining data feeds more valuable than  
the data they contain.

Penelope neither Creeley nor Cruz  
supportive subaltern in the margins of the fold;  
by minivan to muddy field for soccer match  
between Ithaca & Ilium, watching her son receive  
a yellow card—the boy Telemakus a legacy  
tired of bearing witness to soccer dads swooning  
his mother in the margins & tossing bones  
from buckets of KFC to form a beggars banquet.

He a legacy  
plods across muddy field in muddy clothes  
cleats worn down to ineffectual nubs.

Ulixes at the Manhattan Office  
mired in Microsoft Office laboring through  
overtime now unpaid under  
recently amended federal guidelines  
shamefully & sheepishly received.

*Parodia sacra nelle letterature  
moderne . . .*

that is Novati but not Novati, rather  
“the grammarians of Toulouse arguing  
over the vocative of *ego* amid  
the crash of empires.”

Their passing songs like stones  
rivalled a thousand furiously written theses

these the epic song of  
the Cantastorie bellowing in Tuscany  
& their minds then as now  
on the conflict  
between Christians & Moors

wandering troubadours  
wearing Depression era sandwich boards

telling tale of Ulixes &c

(this according to the mighty working  
whereby he is able to subdue  
nothing other than himself)

But don't they talk tough  
around the coffee pot  
or in the parking lot

where every vehicle is leased. So that:

## *Carolyn Hart*

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### **Aurora — An excerpt**

for a thousand years, we had lived like this—cut us a cake.  
wish.  
i held my head in my hands.  
what i had left behind—  
the days inside my heart—  
before i was born, i could see my father, through the trees.  
why had he left the land that he was from—  
the children's voices, in the room—  
the hands around the clock face turned.  
in damienne i could trust my words; my children's names.  
why i had left—  
in the place where i was from, a river flowed. men had fought;  
bloodshed, leaves falling.  
i kept the words in my heart; i kept the ring in a chest;  
from her hair, for me, she had cut a strand.  
i am reminded of the white lace dress and the ring —  
the clock ticked—  
my daughters' names  
eva, asha and kara—  
i wished to tell the story—  
the pictures in his mind, no words could tell.  
this story is for you.  
damienne wished to turn the time back—  
the rivers of blood to my heart flowed.

i never knew that to damienne my world would turn—  
the globe spun small in my hand.  
the story was here.  
at last something began to grow, our daughters, this verse—  
as a child, i never knew.  
the depth of my skin, penetrated— stopped.  
the spreading of the disease.  
beside a river shiloh told me stories of the land he was from,  
and how i could heal—  
some kind of light i saw—  
filling the room.  
beside the river, i read; the book closed in my hand—  
my hand covered his, without the white lace of the dress,  
without the cake cutting into my dreams.  
i had left behind the land that was my home—  
beside the river shiloh read, turning the pages. tears fell—  
the children he had left—  
not knowing when he would see them again.  
the story ends—  
ours begins:  
beside the river as shiloh read, he had wished for damienne—  
when he was young, the place shiloh knew best was his home.  
i wanted her to live—  
make a wish—  
blow.

## Winter of Murder

I

*Any moment lived only once  
bears within itself  
its own irreversible error.*

They made me give up my wings.  
They taught me treachery.

No other news.

II

I lived like a whole split in two  
One side an enemy to the other  
On my right red-hot sands I walked  
An old memory chills my left.

III

Candle: touchy. A mollusc  
consuming itself with its own flame.  
You exist to melt, you believe in your fate.  
Unnoticed when dying, you're the time of fading light.

No love trembles for all eternity  
A candle dies of lost entirety  
and some day man dies of pain.

#### IV

The well I carry on my face  
the cold climate,  
the heavy leaf on my skin  
the weight  
I stop and turn and touch.

I tear the curtain that rain draws between us  
I pass beyond sleep's vine in my chest  
soon the world will forget me, I don't understand it.

Cold climate,  
that I stopped and touched  
I too will forget you.

#### V

If man dies he dies one day of pain  
of being unable to meet with himself again,  
of life never staying where he left it,  
of the mistake being irreversible.

No love trembles for all eternity,  
a candle dies of lost entirety  
and man parts  
from his wings one day.

## There Have Been Trees I Have Made Friends With

“I filled silence with names.” Codified things. I have known the sky’s and the trees’ infancy. There have been trees I have made friends with. There still are. I didn’t understand the Milky Way. Nor numbers. (They behaved as if they had yet to be discovered.) Except for eight (5+3) with whom I became intimate friends. (Who hasn’t?) A little with zero too. (It’s not been so easy to find zero.) I’ve heard terrible things about three. Why? I don’t know. To know is a number. And I’ve also met one. You can’t think with one. Some numbers are born guilty. One of them is one. I loved stones without asking why. The relation between the pebble’s name and its shape has not been proved. I couldn’t find a thing on the history of black amber. Fine. Mystery is everything. There are some consonants I couldn’t read. (The letter’s spirit abounds in consonants. American Indians knew this well.) I accompanied birds. Except for the turtledove, birds know nothing of numbers. Horses, I understood, don’t dream in the East. (In Homer horses weep.) I have seen mountains while walking. And thinking as they walked. Recognition impedes reason. *The World is ours!* Said the snails, talking among themselves. I can’t say I understand that. Nor that I don’t understand it. One should read snails.

As you talk about rivers the rivers themselves are talking, grasses are in their eyes. Time is an illusion. Write this down somewhere. It's not true that spirit has no outward facing view. Jesus' ghost still roams the earth. (I only ask. It's only to question that one writes.) Those who forget their youth stagger in the morning. The rose exists because it is named. Stone got its name when its face was found. (Which is why masons turn stones around and around in their hands.)

I want to return to your eyes. And then . . . There's no such thing as "then." "Then" is outside history.

## The Conversation

/

when they ask what your body was like  
you will understand sacred dimensions  
only temples know in their cracks

what do you call soliloquy?

what do you call prayer?

: desecrations or lost works,  
the weary hours  
pain's sour grass, this city of the arrogant  
where little is left of its history

soft collapses of matter  
psychological schools exude ornaments, all faked for dementia  
liquor of agony;  
you'll agree  
it is difficult to love or die without language

[This world is language that is from this world]

//

Hope will be an amulet  
cumulus,  
tumulus,

[ashes inside the urn  
forming a tiny pyramid  
that generates the illusion  
of all that elevates]

**Chestnut joe**

a cheerful evening

1. swaying  
ashen backs  
of elephants  
like grass in their passing  
shake the bushes  
rip off a few branches  
to chew on slow and pensive

2. the cook  
for the food

3. for a westerner  
what westerner  
does not have

a cheerful evening  
his cheerful evenings

1. chestnut joe

2. at the piano  
a whole day

3. rolls back  
it is the cold  
of the night before  
the cold has a hold  
on us

1. rolls back  
it is the cold

of the night before  
the cold has a hold  
on us

2. at the piano  
a whole day

3. chestnut joe

1. I cheerfully begin  
once more  
what do we see  
when our eye  
is not constantly  
eclipsed  
by recoiling eyelid

2. the cook  
for the food  
shines likewise

3. has lost  
meaning  
now that in the distance  
a permanent river crossing  
is being built

1. at the end  
of the day  
when everybody wants to go home  
at once

2. during the building  
of that new bridge  
during gale-force winds  
a serious accident

a blockade  
of that bridge  
3. to the others  
who with grand gestures  
draw through the air  
how the bridge should be  
1. this time I walk into  
the park  
from the back  
even as the crowns  
touch each other everywhere  
1. I look at  
the other strollers  
only earth nameplates  
on stems  
of bare plants

it gives me pleasure  
to look as if  
there are nuts  
3. not only do  
the surroundings disappear  
the object too  
on which initially  
the attention is focused  
1. she is absolutely right  
what you have too often  
seen no longer works  
this is how monkeys play  
2. a double role  
3. until we have had enough  
1. by evening helicopter  
they are shattered

when at last  
together

1. the newspaper lies about

2. in the room  
the rest is quiet

3. it is good  
that seldom  
leaves  
the living room  
of the owner

1. it is good  
that seldom

## **The city of white stairs**

Lisbon, city of white stairs, numberless poets  
have descended your stairs, your loin-like stairs,  
describing that descent towards  
the glimmering blue Tagus with its  
hints of yellow. Or they've  
sat in the furthest corners  
of dark bars wondering why their  
lives are so miserable, why their destinies  
are too long for something that can't be put into words,  
drunk these little cups dry and asked for more, asked why  
life hadn't given them a different role to play. And they have  
described descending the stairs, described longing for something  
unsaid that they would never achieve and, as if to prove these words, they  
drink more booze so that they might feel something, even for a moment,  
even the  
oblivion of drunkenness and they write about getting drunk and at the  
same  
time get even drunker. And they drain their cups dry, write verses  
on the stairs that lead them down to the Tagus, on other cups that are  
still to be emptied so that  
this rolling downhill might be forgotten and life might take an  
upward curve, like  
the idea of flying or the act of flying itself, they rise from their chairs  
as if they were just getting up and heading out through the bar door while  
the last customers call out their names.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**ASTRID ALBEN** grew up in England and now lives and works in Amsterdam. Her work has been published in several poetry magazines; she was recently longlisted for the Bridport Poetry Prize and is also the founder and editor of *Pars*, a science and arts publication ([www.parsfoundation.com](http://www.parsfoundation.com)).

**JAMES BELL** lives in North Devon, and co-hosts Exeter's Uncut Poets reading series. Tall Lighthouse published his collection *the just vanished place* in May 2008.

**İLHAN BERK** died on 28 August, 2008, at the age of 90. He was one of Turkey's most influential poets, and also an acclaimed visual artist. His publications in English include *Madrigals* (Shearsman Books, 2008), and *A Leaf About to Fall: Selected Poems* (Salt, 2006). Further volumes are forthcoming from the same publishers.

**LINDA BLACK**'s first collection, *Inventory*, appeared from Shearsman in 2008. She lives in London.

**SUSAN CONNOLLY**'s first collection of poetry, *For the Stranger*, was published in Ireland by Dedalus Press in 1993. Her second, *Forest Music*, is due from Shearsman Books in 2009. In 2001 she won the Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry. Susan Connolly lives in Drogheda, Ireland.

**CLAIRE CROWTHER**'s first collection, *Stretch of Closures* (Shearsman Books, 2007) was shortlisted for the Jerwood Aldeburgh First Collection Prize. Her second, *The Clockwork Gift*, will be published by Shearsman in 2009.

**RITA DAHL** is a Finnish poet whose work has appeared in anthologies and journals in Portugal, Australia, Great Britain, the United States, Nigeria and Canada. Her first collection of poems *Kun luulet olevasi yksin* was published in 2004 by Loki-Kirjat press. She is Vice President of the Finnish PEN Centre and is working on a book about her travels through Portugal.

**F. VAN DIXHOORN** has published five collections with the Amsterdam publishers, De Bezige Bij. He is the recipient of the C. Buddingh Prize for best first collection (1994) and Woordlijst 2007 (best collection) and was nominated for the Ida Gerhard Prize (best collection, 2008). Readers are encouraged to view his website at [www.wonderlijkevlek.nl](http://www.wonderlijkevlek.nl), where the web versions give a further idea of how the poet wishes his work to appear to the reader.

**CARRIE ETTER** teaches creative writing at BathSpa University. Her first collection, *Tethers*, will appear from Seren in 2009, and a second, *Divining for Starters*, will be published by Shearsman Books in 2010. Her chapbook *Yet* was published by Leaf Press in 2008.

**GARETH FARMER** lives in Brighton and teaches at the University of Sussex.

**KERI FINLAYSON** was born and raised in Cornwall, but now lives in Swansea, where she was the recipient of an Academi Writers' Bursary. Her poetry has previously appeared in *Poetry Wales* and *Poetry Cornwall*, and a first collection, *Rooms*, will appear from Shearsman Books in 2009.

**JANICE FIXTER** lives in south-east London. Her second collection, *a kind of slow motion*, was published by Tall Lighthouse in 2007.

**ROMINA FRESCHI** is a poet, teacher and literary critic. She has an MA in Literature from the University of Buenos Aires, and has published, among others, the books *redondel*, *Estremezcales* and *El- pe- Yo*. She publishes the review *Plebella* ([www.plebella.com.ar](http://www.plebella.com.ar)).

**MARK GOODWIN** lives in Leicestershire. His first collection, *Else*, appeared in 2008 from Shearsman Books.

**LUCY HAMILTON** lives in Kent, where she teaches international students at Ashford School. Selections from her translation/sonnet version of the prose work *The Legend of Lalla Maghnia following the Arab Tradition* are published in *Modern Poetry in Translation* (3/8, 2007) and *I am twenty people!* (Enitharmon, 2007).

**CAROLYN HART** teaches at London Metropolitan University. The work here is drawn from an experimental novel in prose and verse.

**SARAH HOWE** was born in Hong Kong in 1983 to an English father and Chinese mother, and is now working on a PhD on the visual imagination in poetry at the University of Cambridge.

**JANE JORITZ-NAKAGAWA** lives in Japan. Her books are *Skin Museum* (2006), *Aquiline* (2007), and *EXHIBIT C* (2008). Poems have also appeared in *New American Writing*, *Otoliths*, *Tinfish*, and many other journals.

**BIRHAN KESKIN** was born in Kırklareli, Turkey, in 1963. Her first poems began to appear in 1984. She was joint editor of the magazine *Göçebe* from 1995 to 1998, and has since been an editor at a number of Istanbul publishing houses. Her books include *Kim Bağışlayacak Beni* (*Who Will Forgive Me*, 2005—a Collected Poems), *Ba* (2005) and *Y'ol* (2006). Birhan Keskin was the 2005 winner of Turkey's prestigious Golden Orange Award for *Ba*.

**PETER LARKIN** is a librarian at Warwick University. His most recent book, *Leaves of Field*, was published by Shearsman in 2006. The whole of 'Stone Forest' will appear in his next collection *Lessways Least Scarce Among* (The Gig, Toronto).

**PETER MAKIN** lives in Japan. Best known as a critic, and the author of some fine books on Pound and Bunting, his poetry has appeared several times in *Shearsman*.

**DEBORAH MEADOWS** has a new volume, *Goodbye Tissues*, due from Shearsman Books in early 2009. Her collection *involutia* appeared from Shearsman in 2007,

and there are also two collections from Green Integer. She lives in California, where she teaches in the Liberal Studies department at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

**GEORGE MESSO** is a poet, translator, and teacher. His books include *From the Pine Observatory* (2000), *Entrances* (2006) and two collections in Turkish. His translation of İlhan Berk's *A Leaf About to Fall* was published by Salt in 2006. Shearsman will publish his third collection of poems, *hearing still*, in 2009, as well as his ground-breaking anthology *İkinci Yeni: The Turkish Avant-Garde*. He is the editor of *Near East Review*.

**CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON** is one of our finest poets. Born 1926 in Truro, Cornwall, he lives in Texas, after retiring from his professorship at UT, Austin. His magnificent 700-page *Collected Poems* appeared in June 2008 from Carcanet Press, Manchester. His *Palavers, and a Nocturnal Journal*—an interview and excerpts from his journals—is still available from Shearsman.

**DANIEL MUXICA** is a poet, novelist and publisher. His published works include a number of poetry collections—most recently *La conversación* (2004)—and the novel *El vientre convexo* (2005). He has also compiled a number of anthologies such as *La erótica argentina 1600 / 2000* and *El arcano / el arca no* (contemporary Argentine poetry). He created and directed the literary magazine *Los rollos del Mal Muerto*, an uncomfortable magazine consisting of eight rolled sheets of paper, 90cms x 30cms.

**GREGORY O'BRIEN** lives in Wellington, New Zealand, where he is Senior Curator at the Wellington City Gallery. Born in Matamata in 1961, he is both a widely-published poet and a widely-exhibited painter. His most recent poetry collection is *Afternoon of an Evening Train* (Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2005), and his most recent prose book is *News of the Swimmer Reaches Shore* (Carcanet Press, Manchester, 2007).

**RICHARD OWENS** is studying for a PhD at the University at Buffalo / The State University of New York, and edits the magazine *Damn the Caesars*.

**MATÍAS SERRA BRADFORD** is a poet and translator from Buenos Aires. He has edited an anthology of English poetry for the Spanish publisher, Lumen, and his own work has recently appeared in *PN Review*, as well as several Spanish and Argentine journals. The poems in this issue were written in English.

**ZOË SKOULDING** is editor of *Poetry Wales*, and the author of two collections from Seren, *The Mirror Trade* (2004) and *Remains of a Future City* (2008). She teaches at Bangor University.

**JANET SUTHERLAND** lives in Lewes. Shearsman Books published her first collection *Burning the Heartwood* in 2006.

**SCOTT THURSTON** is a lecturer in English at the University of Salford. Shearsman publishes his two collections, *Hold* (2006) and *Momentum* (2008).