

# Shearsman

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*This online version includes slightly more  
than half of the original publication*

Edited by  
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#### **Submissions**

*Shearsman* operates a submissions-window system, whereby submissions are only considered during the months of March and September, when selections are made for the October and April issues respectively. Submissions may be sent by mail or email, but email attachments—other than PDFs—are not accepted. We aim to respond within 2 months of the window's closure.

## CONTENTS

Alan Wall	4
Anna Reckin	6
Robert Saxton	8
Kelvin Corcoran	9
Helen Lopez	12
Stefan Tobler	14
K.C. Clapham	15
Alasdair Paterson	17
Sarah-Anne Cox	19
Nick Potamitis	21
Catherine Hales	24
Nathan Thompson	25
Jen Crawford	27
Peter Robinson	29
Tony Williams	31
Lynne Hjelmgard	35
Steve Spence	37
Michael Ayres	39
Norman Jope	43
Óscar Curieses	45
<i>translated from Spanish by Valentino Gianuzzi</i>	
Melih Cevdet Anday	46
Özdemir Asaf	47
<i>both translated from Turkish by George Messo</i>	
Edoardo Sanguineti	49
<i>translated from Italian by Ian Seed</i>	
Antônio Moura	50
<i>translated from Portuguese by Stefan Tobler</i>	
Biographical Notes	51

# *Alan Wall*

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## *from Ruskin and Sesame*

‘ . . . acting not as wealth, but (for we ought to have a correspondent term) as ‘illth,’ causing various devastation and trouble around them . . . ’

John Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, 1860.

### I

Like the man who, given radium  
(A curio, a little gift, a tiny elemental)  
Wore it on a silver string around his neck  
And pointed out with pride this rarity  
To all and sundry  
Until it killed him,  
Ruskin wore the rancour that he felt  
For the grand machinery of fate  
Turning its wheels inexorably in England;  
For children working fifteen hours a day;  
For ugliness emblazoned everywhere in iron;  
Effie’s faithlessness and Millais’ malice.

Illth, he said. Written first then uttered  
Before attendant crowds in lecture halls.  
Illth. A moth clings to the syllable’s end  
Chewing holes in a gorgeous brocade  
Riddled through with silk and golden thread  
The length of a palace wall:  
‘NO WEALTH BUT LIFE.’  
Illth. Furred fog of a word  
Swallowing its mess of shadows  
A soft-shoe-shuffle, a blur.  
Bright wings mimic the rainbow  
Only to sizzle in candle flame,  
Such a tiny sun to die in.

There's illth.  
When insect heads explode in adoration  
Of the incandescent gas  
One exiguous wick provides.

## II

The age was steaming up.  
Outside his window, industry  
Re-fashioned nature in its image,  
But to whose advantage exactly?  
Commodities are zeroes multiplying in a ledger-book.  
In lecture after lecture, he demanded  
'What is wealth? What illth?  
'By our art and architecture, books, music  
'We'll be known, should this our name survive at all  
'The great entropic principle our age is formulating . . .'

Railways vein the land, and snorting engines  
Heave their loads up gradients. Pig iron,  
Rubble for roading, tin trinkets, coal.  
Out of the earth's resources, its riches  
We fashion our world.

**St Peter's, Castle Hill, Cambridge**

Well in a grove

of thunder, in

a round yard

A line of limes up to the door, but what I remember are the cloudy  
shapes of the branches of the hawthorn tree

X-tied now, lest

sprung apart

And the square stone stillness inside

## **Fabric**

dusk

shoulders

ivies

bride's

name-tag

hips

girdle

blossom

*folding*

*figured*

*forced*

*repeats*

[ ]

satin

tartan

poppets

[ partition ]

## **Manifestation**

white makes the pattern

via quiet lanes

etched, or as decals

different kinds of rays and arrangements of circles

or dark steps in a wet field

## ***Robert Saxton***

---

### **On Wicklow Fells**

*Argan Spraint, a shepherd's son, knew the constellations  
before he knew the alphabet. One sheep, valiant against  
predators, he named O'Ryan.*

The fells of Wicklow teem with knitted sheep.  
Our cottage mumbles in its cap of slate.  
A stranger dances, gravely, on the grate.

The werewolf digs its den in human sleep.  
A bear, with a grin, pours honey on the dawn,  
your dewpond. A soot-speck fills your yawn.

The hills of Wicklow broil with ravelled sheep.  
Some golf we played before our furze was burned.  
Some gains we got before our lack was learned.

**Reading *The Cantos***

1

Fell asleep in the courtyard reading *The Cantos*  
after swimming rolled on white waves and ankle stones,  
Malatesta and the Magnificent, the bloody mechanics.

After the dazzling verse and magnetic names  
I remembered two hours sat before the girl Aphrodite,  
the intermittent light and the crowd parting occasionally.

Her hair lifts, she dreams the name of a new world,  
the sea surrounds us on all sides and the light  
comes and goes over her meadows and pathways.

What does Pound find to admire in Sigismundo and the Medici?  
Hands grasping the rods of power, banking and patronage,  
polishing the azure air for the faces of Tuscan gods?

I woke up in cherry season, ate the cherries ripe and wet,  
the sea breathing in the olive groves, clouds rising from the hills,  
to see ants hoist crumbs to a depthless sky.

2

The wind cases the house all night  
rolls away to reveal the harbour washed  
the sea lanes rise and fall.

How grand to propound the big idea;  
interest rates as rented money  
made all art go rotten after 1527.

A species of modernist ambition  
to synthesise the culture's cache,  
a gesture, anti-Semitic and parochial.

The wind cases the house at night  
to reveal the coastline hung out to dry,  
Europe and the Faithful heard on the air.

Chanting of dumb beasts sanctioned  
their reasoning is shallow  
they speak to popular prejudice.

Small birds drill the sky in an agony  
of Spring it is it is it is the force of them,  
they sing song a theology of awake.

The merchants of the Morea carried  
the sprouting branch and sharp mind  
where she sets her foot to the sea.

What nerve they had to outstare  
Mehthoni and Corroni, eyes of  
the serene empire's trade routes.

Platsa, above us on the mountain, traded  
directly with Venice on donkeys, down  
the calderimi to the harbour of the world.

3

And then in Canto XLIX his genius  
breaks your heart, imperial power is  
what is it?—the rushing particles ignite.



## **Mechanism**

Monarchs use the sun as a compass to guide them on their 2000 mile round trip booking a holiday is a great way of beating the post-Christmas blues the key gene CRY2 identified in the monarch butterfly that acts as a biological clock for estimating the 24-hour cycle of the circadian rhythm because Britons (even in a credit squeeze) are far more likely to cut down on the big ticket items and luxury consumer goods than on their beloved holidays cryptochrome—a light sensitive protein which counts the passing hours of each day and also communicates the information to the monarch's inbuilt solar compass for the insect to calculate its correct direction of flight the appallingly wet summer last year will encourage more of us to head abroad and swap the UK's unpredictable climate for guaranteed sunshine we have still to understand how the tiny brain of the Monarch butterfly which is no bigger than the head of a ball point pen can arrange information about time and space that leads it to carry out the appropriate flight behaviour.

## *from A Time to Shine*

### **1. Rise Above**

Start up by nurturing success, aim high steal ideas, net work. This is real time research by the experts roaming the room in a culture of enterprise and a living system with flexible funding solutions. This is a time to shine the net effects on the stock of geographic indicators, dynamic and innovative processes in place with a clear mandate for leadership. This snapshot will inform policy and decide the churn rate of team breakdown. This paints a vision for the future on an economic development canvas, stretched and ready to boomerang straight back the trends in the right direction. It is service to say that with our foot on the gas our geography is an asset. 3 hubs in

our engine room manage and lead space, skills and strands. Fleet of foot and with a single slide we operate in a vacuum of heavy manufacturing.

## **2. Uncommon Results**

The gross added value sustaining the community in physical spaces has processes in place for project failure that shape the retail and leisure hub. A footfall comes in as a positive lever in the public sector, and in the right time frame we could have a symbiotic relationship. The trick there and here, in a winter wonderland is to maximise the benefits of eco prioritisation in a global Christmas market. Clever knowledge industries manage and lead the spirit of partnership with the right solutions going forward. Light composite materials spend alone and give up sovereignty for the greater good. Clever stuff - creative industries, a prize winning local supplier, distinctive and unique along the costal strip we have the sea. The time is right for small and medium sized leisure opportunities, businesses that will endure and shine.

## **3. What's In It for Me?**

When you set out goals and activities for the year break into your creativity. Brainstorm your thought shower. "You are always only 12ft from an opportunity" Look back on your life with 20/20 vision, manage your memories and then lay them to rest. Mainstream the diversity contractor with key icons, opportunities come hidden, camouflaged and sometimes on a plate. Seize and be aware of the abundance theory in hindsight develop your sagacity, try more little and often and discover the habit of flipping the negative. Only visit with pit stop pessimisms. Bounce back fuelled by meaning. Go the extra yard and mexican wave your future by living and breathing the bigger picture. Define your elephant thick skin with your yes/no quota and connect with others. Multiplicity in action and disruptive thinking make good quality conversation when you need to get going.

## *Stefan Tobler*

---

### **Canción**

1.

Each body with its desires  
and the air carries sea-salt

two bodies share a bed  
and the sea between them

the old song on the radio  
the one they would fall asleep to

is the rhythm of a body  
and each body asks after its rhythm

each body stopped and listening  
and the song breaking each

lying next to the other  
each facing the sea

2.

In plastic buckets  
each carries with care  
to bring for the other  
what they can of the sea.

*Note: the 'Canción' heard here uses a couple of lines from the Venezuelan poet Eugenio Montejo's poem of the same name.*

## The List

1. and I'm sitting down to write the list  
of things to write poetry about  
and it seems there are too many things  
to write in a list but not in a poem  
where one word can mean so much  
more than it does in prose and why  
not prose if it is no more; but the list,  
so, it should matter to me if it is in the list  
though to not matter is also a thing so  
that could be on the list and like anything  
because what doesn't matter: the list doesn't  
know, it is not a poem it does not matter  
but it could, to escape the list and become  
the poem is to matter, no matter the thing  
but it turns out the list has poetry written  
all over it and inside it, wrapped in poetry and  
it is listed, bookended, by that thing inside  
and out, if it seemed wrong to waste ink,  
to waste time to the arrival of the princess, towing  
a cloak of heavy words that now were  
right to be listed because here they are;  
though the list became questions that answered me  
back up the list and it shifted and turned against me,  
attacking me with its listless questions and I had no  
answers—why wasn't it on the list, why were notes  
connected and why had the gun pointed the bullet  
back into the list

2.

I swear there were no shadows in China Town,  
to hide me between trees and the notebook.  
And 'China Town' is a junk, boating rubbish recycled

from the vast stream of chatter that I like to remember with a pen, in a note in the book. Note. Add to list. Note to note, start escape plan.

## **Wolf**

and the woodcutter began to cut open the wolf. He began with the W, it was coarse and familiar like his own hands. My My Wolf, what a furry distraction you have.

The O peeled away like a rubber glove inside out. All the better to see your insides with, it was a library of tiny texts, tiled fast. The discarded was a beast itself.

Red Riding Hood and Grandma crawled out of all that was still there and walked off. L was inside the wolf cave, a fibre woven into a wall the woodcutter halved.

F was still inside the wolf when they filled him with rocks. A whole shape with new weight; the woodcutter's wolf-shape would hide between different trees and move in new forestry.

## *Alasdair Paterson*

---

### *from On the Governing of Empires*

#### **On fire**

lightning shimmy lucifer scratch liberated spark libertine smoulder

leaf spasm licked spruce lemontree squeeze lilac spurt

lacewing shrivel lizard stencil leveret skirl lark suttee

luminous stable lantern stairwell library smokehouse lighthouse  
steeple

lake sanctuary larch survivor lung sfumato lurking sequel

#### **On heresy**

stars come solitaries first  
then a host like  
pilgrims no crusaders

this rock that bleached  
all day in the sun  
still isn't white enough

do you prefer  
the desert places or  
the cities of the plain  
I like best the view  
of lights from up here

a breath of rosemary  
perfection in the air  
but the bridge is the devil's

## On tragedy

out in the drenched unseen  
was where the worst  
usually came to the best  
colonnades are what you think  
but colonnades were just  
the metrics and a long  
echo till the building failed

by then the gods had shut up shop  
slipped the search parties  
bought gash papers laid low  
reopened in the workshop zone  
and there they took their long breaks  
in the courtyard of chestnut flambeaux  
or under a naked storeroom bulb  
pointing the workclothes at  
a chorus of death masks  
and torsos pockmarked with the years  
banging on about an upturn as if

nemesis meantime was no  
longer the death of the past  
no scarcely to be recognised in her  
new uptown solo business set-up  
focussed and going for volume  
and hell if some customers  
missed the personal touch  
there was no denying  
the groaning indexed shelves  
those great marketplace stats

*from* **Truancy**

search and research finally  
under the library heading “problem children”  
the frame of what is offered, expected  
*problemkinder*, cross culturally rotted  
Jon was a boy who had magic

Jon was a boy who had magic  
was the beginning of his story  
the one he was writing  
the one constructed of hope  
a fine line drawing  
the first line  
of course life will be what you make it  
of course, meritocracy  
and the good clarity of addition and subtraction  
a correct answer filling in for wonder  
a battery of psychological inquiries  
I have seen the smoking man before  
in a green tattered copy of Othello  
on folded up Latin homework

For some people  
that we do the same thing  
is important  
we string the wooden primary beads  
go not straight to walking, but crawl first  
go to school  
sleep alone

For some people  
implication runs backwards and sideways  
for instance, a binder titled  
“Daily Behavior Rating”  
In the front office desk  
some children biting or  
weeping go into this book

For some people the number  
3 can point right or left  
for some, the r is a w in sound

I has never been the same as you

## *Nick Potamitis*

---

### *from nine coffins : a masque for nectanebo*

1.

a poem, abstract'd from the royal bedroom

is more, perhaps, than blowsy tsifteteli, or  
razor'd statements filling green refuse-sacks

by the road . with these computers can make

an assemblage . behold, a pale dust-cart  
bent on waking the dead & neither must you  
write down your mother's maidenhood,

the din / such delicate matter . those clamorous

bin-jockeys up at dawn to claim our midden-  
heaps—a blight'd wreath—that rowdy  
parataxis . by hand, re-program'd refuseniks  
will need a bit under six-hundred years

doing the job ( for chri'sakes ) it's damn  
too early for that racket, pantokratoras .

2

careening past brassy roma at the platform,

your man & his massive sunglasses disappear  
beneath the train . the marble king is asleep .

the man with sunglasses might be an actor

in the part of man falling under a train,  
a necessary geometry of position . no one  
ever dies, everyone is always already dead,

the tally—on war footing ready to mobilise

—is zero, zero, one & still the marble king  
sleeps . that same man, haul'd so many yards,  
now a human accordion, his moody pass-  
port reads bricoleur balkan nektanebos (

an outstretch'd hand / the sleeping stones  
) give them a turn on your squeezebox .

3

nightmare outbreak of violent chicken's disease

with pictures . nightmare cowld gangs  
in the forecourt are a real nightmare, a not

very dada suicide on the metro . consider

how she loves muscley arms, stakes out—  
for future reference—her cleo from five till  
seven bed-chamber, wounding & immaculate

as the wings of swans . indifferent, the swan

is a presence in the poem even if poland makes  
more ready for nightmare war ( one shorn  
clean at the shoulder joint / parts of shoulder  
bone scatter'd recalling tube mice ) & always

on a promise, she would let him only when  
he wore that nightmarish ram's head mask .

4

bandwidth & roving 'gyptians are stain'd by grief

the same as linen garments—damn'd / the damages  
—his meat thought at no loss, with neat hand only

. things fit together . a basement gallery-space

if she can get away, mojitos, talk of graffiti-  
inflect'd art well-hung . two inconsequential  
things will fit together, become a consequence

( cropping his beard, his head shaven ) mis-

taking her & by her mistaken . as ever, with all  
eastern warfare, when the king retreats the buffer  
overflows collapsing memory stacks . like small  
wax ships on a bronze basin of rain-water,

a poem says jack, is never by itself alone . time  
is a concrete continuum quotes jill, in repose .

**two sonnets**

who writes that sort of thing by hand any more  
it's a short step from that to putting it all aside  
for a pocketful of buy two get one free & who  
can say whether this is just incompetence  
or the result of a well-thought-out strategy  
the subtext being as it's always been an improvement  
on last year's menu & improvisation as a means  
of placing hand on heart & aching for authentic  
melodrama complete with mandolins  
& all the trimmings the offer stands please  
read carefully it's wholly inappropriate  
a crispy base just like in the restaurant  
I'm not sure where all this is leading but I like  
the punctuation you may tick more than one box

we'd expected a few hold-ups but nothing like  
this choke of traffic backed up to the border  
it's not all doom & gloom you know & breaking  
news & palimpsests & clearing misconceptions  
the air-conditioning on the blink & then  
the lack of running water we didn't deserve  
where can we put our trust if not in the power  
of broken stones plaintive spaces & public  
declarations we apologise for any in  
convenience due to disruptions to services moving  
forward we set our goals high we're setting standards  
in quality & price judge us by our results  
for account information please press one for your  
security this conversation is being recorded

**a haunting**

before you enter    consider everything  
    the difficulties inherent in 'belief'  
she comes in    him too    we sit together  
while the wheel goes round    put in your pennies  
this one's on me  
                                if you knew how to  
would you lift the lid    expose the trick    know  
goodness in removing the vestige of  
    these thoughts    will you be returning    'dove-like'  
if so/not sit here with me    you seem restless  
keen to get on    is this right    well    it's  
    soon this will I think concern me    how to  
become more definite    outside your welcome  
I prefer things like this    we discuss why  
your thumb flickers nervously over the door

**The Floating World**

Here,  
stroking the swing and fall of words,  
the fishermen are patient,

for in the red chamber  
the emperor's fat wife  
limps in the shade,  
her hand a sphere of light.

The emperor weeps for his ornate geographies  
to the end of everything,  
as if the lettering  
'a corridor of locked doors'  
paints watercolours in the afternoon.

*Out among*  
is for gathering flowers—  
new reds and blues, say:

*Master of the embroidered foliage,  
the windows of the libraries  
fish in ancient pools*

but patiently.  
The laws of supply and demand  
leave behind words that climb,  
leave tawdry quays:  
*how the room fills with dried flowers  
of the stars.*

The emperor claims:  
“In here I keep all,  
trying valiantly not to move.”

Outside, beyond the drizzle  
clouds break on cliff faces.  
They hover by the lolling bells,  
deep and steady  
in the quietness of thresholds.

A knock comes to the door,  
  
and ahead,  
surprised by swords and bones,  
feathers and skin are cold to the touch.

“Her goodbye is the distance you colour yourself,”  
he says, while the sun still for years  
moves unmistakable for a moment.

*Source: one line from each poem in Alasdair Paterson's 'The Floating World'*

## *Jen Crawford*

---

### **cup vertigo**

leads me in to the precipice on a blue rope night. an incline, dogs for  
anticipants, hand in mane.

inside the well up my gills open the stairs dent the walls where they  
brush their weight. quilly fingers gather the way in small wet beads.

dilate the harelip hall. the horse lays on its side for the ECG. enlarged  
one side, atrophied the other, all around the photographs, muscles  
fire in sequence, drawings of the patterns of the hooves' scar the  
floorboards then score.

at this edge I call the meeting. the shadow minister in his cube  
extends his leg above his head, touches his toe to the glass, we touch,  
toe print to toe print. fog wax and wane. x-ray waves fray through  
water's privacy the patterns on its face and his, what I've come to  
ask about. the horizontal upright a 90 degree dissipation sniffing my  
scalp, cupping my face. exposed beams swell.

which were a split valve, a quiet consultation. learning to waltz a  
three-legged stool. in the 2/4 garden the rhinoceros. wore his horn.

### **viaduct**

a reward, a hand on the back on the small of the back.  
walking out to a car. a night, a tiredness, a whisper.  
your tiredness and that you did well.  
building a wall around it. like a harbour with boats clinking.  
like a sky, placed light and orange clouds.  
the clubs and their liquid shout clinking.  
your tiredness, your reward at the small of your back.

your reward the hand at the back of the thigh,  
the edge of the skirt, & firm.  
a rest. firm as the body of a car, a body of  
decisions made by others for you to rest on.  
door cell stamped from steel coil. wet  
window against the back of your back  
or. the hard turn. resting in pressure.

let him watch, let him walk out to you  
and watch. one close  
as a hand as another watching  
for your voice in  
the symmetry of boats

## Owning the Problem

‘and it is but grief to have come home  
if one cannot return to oneself.’

F. H. Bradley

Lath-ceilings down, through cracks  
in the landing floorboards  
and hall’s revealed rafters,  
there come light-chinks from below;  
it’s like that filmic nightmare  
in which I tread, precarious,  
on a tenement stair.

The broken light-chinks underline  
a powder of blown plaster dust—  
we’re covered in it, see  
how even soiled laundry  
migrates from room to room  
in this unfixed home  
or stays put, as it must.

★

They put me in mind of emergency floor  
lighting, or lights at the end  
of a tunnel with stripped bedroom door  
forming an exit before me.

Down the fracture lines, light-chinks lead  
back where we’ll begin again;  
and I feel my way over joists through pitch darkness  
as if above the Siberian plain . . .

★

So much that had to be postponed  
returns with the light-chinks in your eye  
it's like, despite a severe headwind,  
past promises were renewed as we try,  
heaven knows, to strike the note  
of home (or get tradesmen to quote).

## Enigmas of Departure

*for John Matthias*

It was while I walked out to the plane  
readied on an apron at Giuseppe Verdi airport,  
hair raised by the breeze  
and a few spots of rain  
spattering the tarmac,  
across its spaces came a sense  
of release in roaring silence  
before being cabined, cribbed, confined . . .  
And while I walked out from the gate  
it caught me once again  
as at South Bend, Michiana,  
since we also had to wait  
while our O'Hare plane arrived,  
and the Michiana field  
hazes off equally in a great plain . . .  
Not that much wanting to go or to stay  
but exposed in their flatness,  
what I would fleetingly feel  
from another winter's journey in the vastness  
was an isolate air around frame houses  
in yards out beyond wide sidewalks and a green  
expanse, right, then a grey one  
as we were cleared for take-off and were gone  
to put yet more distance between.

from **Broken Tiles**

Hans Prinzhorn was a German psychiatrist and art historian whose *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1922) explored the relationship between mental illness and artistic expression and is considered a landmark in the history of outsider art.

Prinzhorn died in 1933 in Munich, having retired there with an elderly relative after the failure of his marriages. The building he had lived in was stripped for renovation as a chiropractic clinic in 1986; in the cellar a number of his patients' works were discovered, including a large crate of hand-painted ceramic tiles. Most were smashed, but a significant remnant were able to be pieced together with some hope of accuracy; a selection of these reconfigured tiles is presented below.

F O L K

WHO OR HOW OR WHAT MAKES ME A BROTHER TO VIOLENCE • GOLD &

*The sun  
observing  
the planets*

SCRAP OF LAWN outside the kindergarten.  
I returned.

The foul weather abated. A crocus,  
A plait of bread rising in a dingy wood.

*The crow  
observing  
the deer*

I knelt among the birches and lay down and vomited  
And slept.

Calm, serious voices. The little leaves  
Dark and restless against a blue and airy sky—

*Theory of  
modern  
medicine*

KEEP ME HERE under the trees, my homeland!  
My brown heart's seismic stone—peripheries—  
The webs of leaves shaking benedictions.  
A wet conclave of earth and stone.

*Alternative  
theory*

Prone to the laws of season, when I was very close  
I flew far distant, and awoke—forgetful—  
Raving—a sunflower, blinded by finches,  
Torn from its merry scrap of ground.

FLAT ROOF of the TEMPLE • TO PULL DOWN THEIR FOLKLORE HEARTS

S O N G

# M A R S H

ARE NOT SUCH AS WILL PERSIST FOR ALL TIME' • GELSEMIUM

*Physiology  
of the genus*

{ BLACK-FIGURED. Chitinous of thought,  
Love-fearing. So I am. And from each wound  
I bear, exude a hæmolympinous spit,  
Simple and inhuman. But my *friend*

*Indignity  
& iniquity*

{ Soothes me, his staff bathe my wings.  
Five times have their sticks mishandled me,  
Ugly and earthbound, firing the smoky BANGS  
Loudly that brought me down from the refectory.

*A sacred  
promise*

{ NO, MY ORDER, I shall not abandon you.  
Evening's the time I shall alter and fly from this land.  
So shall the keeper accede and be altered to know  
Secrets of ours, who now is the rope on my neck, and

*Reiteration of  
current folly*

{ Explicates at length the madness of a face  
Some god has painted on my carapace.

REDUCTION of the SPECIES • AZAZELLO SPAT IN MY SOUP . UNTRUTH

# M O O D



**Who brought you to this place?**

Disappear into the park  
early, after a sleepless night

in the toilet the smiling Signora, Gracia

is black, white and red tiramisu  
is cypress trees at the top of the stairs

a man sings his a's, e's and o's  
everyone needs Borghese

the poets the ballerina the man reading his paper  
the actors the parakeets the painter  
who paints the scene of this poem

as magnolia  
as conversation  
as a grieving angel writes  
on Lord Byron's face

'there is that within me which shall'

as young as old  
as already gone

after forty nine days the soul  
leaves the first place of light

cicadas take the lead  
followed by swallows tweet-ing  
geese cackling

the baby bird turns to dust  
David fights the lion

Hadrian builds Antinopolis  
for the boy who fell into the Nile

the first year it throbs  
then numbs out  
to less, moves  
up through the throat  
shortens the breath

to move in waves the way  
the world does  
when someone says your name

*Title: from Brenda Hillman's untitled fragments, Bright Existence.*

**A number of interpretations of this dream are available**

After wandering around for some hours I returned to the landing place but before reaching it was overtaken by a tropical storm. Why should this story have become fixed in my mind until it became an agonising obsession? To effect an entrance was not so easy but would any self-respecting pirate give up an opportunity to talk about her youth. Something in the form of the girl irresistibly recalled his dream of the figure in the bath yet the afternoon was hot & an intolerable oppression reigned. The boards creaked a good deal as I moved around & the signs of occupation were so recent that I could hardly believe I was alone. There, among the correspondence, was a letter from the pirate.

Last night Alice had a curious dream, yet it's good to know that knobbly fruit & vegetables are back on the menu. Meanwhile, outside the smokehouse, something fishy is going on. Flamboyant millionaires & retired buccaneers have bought up much of the land, displacing small-time dealers with coffee shops & boutiques. In civilian hands the tattoo is used to assert individuality although not everyone is joining the queue for the summer of love. At last, the pirates conspired together & hit upon a plan that promised a dazzling victory. They were off the leash & on the lash. In the long run, lending across frontiers can only be serviced by trading surpluses, yet we now recycle a third of all our rubbish.

Some sailors suffer loneliness in a crowd while others become lonely when there is not a soul in sight. A death wish or something like it may be present in all of us yet the rise & fall of hemlines is reckoned to correspond with the ups & downs of the economy. As he hurried from the library, I was conscious of the circle of bewilderment he had left behind. A terrible desire came upon me to rid the world of such a monster. Refreshments will include a free wine-tasting & a hog roast in the stable courtyard yet we have little to do but meet & greet. Most dandies have a Peter Pan complex yet a great advantage of working with dead people is that their objections go unheard.

**Love poems like autopsies**

In bright light your bodies sway and lie  
in love poems like autopsies.  
There are the capuccinos and the old cord jacket  
of washed-out lime  
and biscuit chinos, white T.  
*This is too true to be good* you say  
as Alfie steers his pale blue car into traffic,  
puts on some music and laughs.

She gets off the bed and pads away across the room.  
Through the Venetian blinds the moon is rising.  
You pour out the city from the secret place  
in which you keep the things  
which are not immediate,  
shake out the streets,  
the innumerable little wells of loneliness,  
dustbins, service ducts, steel shutters,  
but it is somebody else's loneliness today,  
so you let your gaze rise with the moon  
in unearthly sympathy.  
From the rooves of skyscrapers, steam from the air-con units  
drifts in plumes  
like the ghosts of bombs.  
She comes back and slips off her robe,  
and you stop rolling the dice of your thoughts  
and kiss her.  
Somewhere, the dice still tumble  
into valleys of carbon and moss  
and your kisses have become  
small beads of fresh rainwater  
falling on stones.  
A silence opens inside you  
and she fills you with her breathing.

She has touched the sea and now she touches you.  
The sea moves with her fingers.  
When she leaves she takes the sea with her  
and you will never hear the sound of waves again.  
But you hear them now . . .

You will be with her soon. From the window seat  
as the plane banks sharply  
the city slides and glides  
in a casual astronomy  
of fluid stars.  
The trickling corpuscles of traffic,  
synapses sparkling on cocaine,  
melt into the odour of her skin  
as she steps from the ocean.  
You have loaded her with such absurd expectations,  
yet the strange thing is that, for a while,  
she carries them.  
She has become hope, your diary teems with her,  
she is every direction you move in.  
The engines rev and then go quiet  
and the jet seems to float upwards towards the moon again,  
away from earth.  
You lie back and rest your head in her long black hair,  
it pours and coils down on your face  
and far from the bodhi tree  
just this small cluster of delicate sensations  
makes you happy.

There are days when she brushes against you  
with her hip or the edge of her hand  
it sends a shock of peace through you.  
The tiniest contacts  
make you dizzy  
as if you were high on some precipice

and you can't quite tell whether falling  
will mean rapture, or calamity,  
or both.

Then you fall,  
then she no longer touches you.  
In between there is knowledge,  
but it is just the air moving  
between the wings of a flying bird.

It was not in the snow, or it was only in the snow  
to an infinitesimal degree, as the corpse  
is in the shadow.

Or perhaps it swept through the snow  
entirely, permeated the fairy lattice of each flake  
as substantially

as a memory permeates a mind.

Swept through the white forest like a fire.

Like hands through hair.

Caribou crop at the low branches.

In the hinterland of other people's lives,  
the immense systemic calm of a world without focus,  
destiny flattens out and the stars are too many  
to count or to care for.

In serialised homes, the hum of unseen commuter trains  
threads an anonymous life of things,

and to the wallow and whine of washing machines,

lost in local daydreams

individual figures take on

the thoughtless peace of appliances.

In the soft wheels run and run,

penned softly within conducive routines.

Subaudible, humdrum robots beep and click, like insects meeting.

Underfoot, the arena of skyscrapers and daytime TV  
crushed among the giant ants.

And glaciers weep no tears.

With the mute compliance of barometers,  
these devices perform their tasks again and again;  
as the lovers bliss up to the music and sigh,  
the production line of DNA  
runs off another model like Chinese toys.  
Like Aztec ruins, on suburban lawns,  
white plastic furniture lies tipped over  
abandoned to the sudden rain.

## **Dead Men's Shoes**

On the Pest bank of the Danube, near Parliament House, there are iron shoes in pairs . . . their owners, who never wore them in their lives, were shot from the bank in the autumn and winter of 1944–45 for the capital crime of being Jewish. The patriots of the Arrow Cross committed this deed, under the Árpád flag now rehabilitated at political demonstrations—then, and now in some hands, it was a symbol of a Turanian wonderland unsullied by Semites, Roma, and interlopers from the mongrel Atlantic. They did so as, on the Buda bank, the turul-bird of Magyar legend perched proudly on the Castle Hill walls . . . and either exalted in their ruthlessness or, with a certain degree of resignation, performed a solemn yet, in their minds, unavoidable act of national hygiene.

Sixty years later, they are despised by all apart from the most intransigent of fascists, and Budapest—no less a Jewish city than a Hungarian one—is, above all else, a city that belongs to the world. But these iron shoes, scattered on the bank in a quiet place without traffic, where cheap leather shoes were taken off before the shots rang out from behind, speak of utter homelessness. They are worn by ghost-people with invisible yellow stars who act, as witnesses, to suffering and ignominious death. They express the vulnerability of human beings in the face of armed barbarity, but also the possibility—the possibility only—of eventual vindication and memorial.

They are not shoes of a kind I am ever likely to wear, although this has often been said. They are not shoes of a kind my friends are ever likely to wear, although this has been said, as often, and with less conviction.

Chastened by seeing them, unexpectedly, on an iron-blue day beside the Danube I continue north—tempted, despite my exhaustion, to cross the next bridge. It's as if I were expecting to see wet footprints on the opposite bank.

## What I Wanted To Say About György Ligeti

The dematerialisation's as immense as ever—geographies of sound diffuse into cirrus patterns seen from an aircraft at midday. Solaris illusions fool me into seeing what I loved and has passed forever, cities and clock-towers and trees that wave in parks and cyclists moving under them as pigeons and starlings scatter.

All of this is melting, steaming, forming and un-forming and the colours that reflect this mingling are unearthly, eerie, as delicate as those in a nebula, firework colours out of Stravinsky made still more ethereal and extreme . . . so tenuous in their evasion of mind and tongue, in a world of ceaseless and hyperactive change where clocks become clouds and clouds are sugar watches melting in sun, everything resisting the solidity that is death.

You wove all this, candyfloss flavoured with the dark blood of your sombre heritage, the pain of a clown's there if we look for it and you laid it down lightly, your lost Erdély, slow carts trundling between bare hills, ramshackle villages with long main streets, manic dances and yellow stars in the air.

In protean transformations from the grave to the sky, your music lent itself so perfectly to the acid overdrive of the spaceman's escape and its chromo-delirium. You spent your life in take-off, winging from difficult roots as, that autumn week in 1956, you escaped the institute, the imprisoned country and crossed a continent to sleep, for days, on arrival as if in pupation. You evaded the trap of what you would have been, a caterpillar in a tomb of thick glass, a professor growing old in a mellowing city, to deal firsthand and on equal terms with the Tao.

Your brain has become anonymous dust but we can listen and dream with your thoughts and, each birthday, sharing yours I can't help but try to resurrect you. Looking at clouds in a late spring sky, I can hear the infinite droplets of your music. And all notes remain possible—even the classical remains as everything warms, expands, grows strange and mobile in the quickening world.

**Fruit**

The mother lies dead before her mother and the hybrid riverbed  
awaits for new rain in the mould of wasted soil.

And the tree drives shrapnel on children, the hosts slide through  
white wine.

And on the bloodied rick night lingers, the grass ruminates a sun  
on the prairie.

The children graze the empty well that almost floods the meadow,  
searching for their father in circles and horns.

The bull child pours forth a scream and is born!

Before the eternal path of twilight, the earliest fruit of a virginal race  
seasons the entire tree facing the river.

**Third Letter to the Father**

Sewing your name on the empty tree is sewing your sweet absence on  
your nonbeing. Now it is all light and sugary pool, easy conscience  
of the wettest tar. No one swept the brow in my memory; sticks  
sprouted: forthcoming fruit.

The sun fashions a father in me and you will be the father no more.  
I'll be the fruit taken from your tree with my own hands: blood of  
your blood.

May the bull cry horns from his eyes; may he rush into the olive  
woman's sex,—so the children may matter no longer; so the children  
may remain children!

## **Barefoot**

The writing's upper part can't be read,  
Nor is it clear who wrote it.  
Anyway, it's the words, not the sound, that counts.

“. . . Then I ate whatever I found in the house:  
bread, almonds, cress.  
I jumped barefoot onto the horse,  
So wild was the morning's wine,  
And off I went through the people  
At full gallop.”

## **Forgive Us All**

They were sitting, drinking in the rain  
with their hair ruffled like soil  
a crate of lager, vodka too . . .  
The women looked pale, thin, unhappy.  
But October wasn't yet over.

I recognized her the second I saw her.  
“Hello” I said, “don't you recognize me?  
We pulled your corpse from the sea  
fully clothed.  
And yes, you swaggered as you walked . . .”

“I'd forgotten”, she said, “forgive me.”

**The Story of the Cat Playing with the Candle Flame**

I

A candle was burning in the room of a house.  
There was a cat in the house too.  
As nights went by of their own accord  
The candle burned and the cat played.

On one such night when the candle burned  
The cat became lost in its game.  
In eyes hungry for play  
The candle flame burned,  
The cat stared,  
And in the flickering flame of the candle  
A toying pleasure called out.

The cat, growing in its games, grew too  
In its own child-like way,  
Went round and round, walked slowly  
Towards the toy-like flame.  
A glance, once more, and again it looked  
And stretched a paw  
To the flickering candle flame.  
He appeared confused  
Until his whiskers burned . . .  
Didn't seem to believe  
That the flame he'd seen for the very first time  
Could burn him.

The cat grew as it played,  
The candle grew cold as it burned.  
Time stepped between them,  
Quickened its pace.  
And something seemed strange  
Between the burning of one  
And the games of the other.

But the cat grew as it played,  
Slowly losing the game.  
And the candle grew small as it burned,  
Slowly losing its flame.

The cat, as it plays, will burn,  
The candle, lighting, growing small, will burn.  
The one getting small will brighten as it burns,  
The one growing big will learn as it's burnt.

After the candle's burning  
And the cat's playing  
There remained  
In a room of a house  
In the middle of the night  
Two people  
Silently staring.

II  
The candle burned to its end,  
The cat grew and went.  
Games dissolved into nights  
Into a silent insomnia.

In the memories and thoughts  
Of two people  
A cat and a candle  
Came and went.

Wherever a candle burns now,  
Wherever a cat plays,  
The shadows of each are entwined and reflect . . .  
Today is like yesterday,  
Yesterday like today.  
The candle scratches my hands  
And the cat's paws light up my past.

*from Reisebilder (1971)*

29

I wouldn't know how to write it anymore, for you, an infinite letter,  
on school paper  
with regular lines, with decorations in red and blue pencil, with chains  
of hearts and flowers, full of capital D (for Du, for Dein), of  
*für uns* underlined forcefully:

(a letter like the one we spied  
the other day, in the hands of two boyish civilians, on the top deck  
of a 94 Bus):

not even if you were that tiny pseudo-  
hawaiian berliner girl without a breast, without a bra, who exhibited  
herself recklessly  
for us: (for us, sitting to suck a banana ice cream, under  
a small flag with the writing 'EIS', from a gallant ice-cream man who  
looks like  
a butcher):

not even if I was that obscene faun of middle  
age which really I am, by this time:

look me in the face, at least  
when you cut my hair on the balcony, because I'm there with naked  
torso, in the living  
sun of midday, in the wind:

I dream of myself being similar to Hoffmann  
in delirium: and I'm almost the double of a mediocre english comic:

## Father

*This is because the species,  
in which lies the germ of our being,  
has a nearer and prior claim upon us than the individual.*

Arthur Schopenhauer

Your hand foam undone in the sand  
Your ear conch at the bottom of the sea  
Drums of your temples and your hips  
beating on the day when you centaur  
galloped, galloped, galloped  
over the fire-tattooed rose of my mother's womb,  
de-petalling her  
When I called you from the depths of a shadow  
and you naively, unknowingly, looked for me  
with howls and eyes possessed by the secret daemon  
that smashes into everything in its intent  
to bring, through a gust, a wind,  
a being to drift blindly among the blind  
in a maze of echoes and secret signs  
where at any moment—by a gust,  
a wind—it can be undone  
Dad, nothing for it but for both  
to hold out a hand in forgiveness, faced  
with nature's indecipherable purposes:  
You, for, unwittingly, making me  
enter time, without support or hold,  
I for making you, without choice, my instrument

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**MELIH CEVDET ANDAY** (1915–2002) was born and lived in Istanbul, where he worked as a journalist and teacher. A novelist, playwright and essayist, as well as a poet, he was a leading member of the *Garip* movement.

**ÖZDEMİR ASAF** (1923–1981) was born in Ankara, but spent most of his life in Istanbul. During his lifetime Asaf won substantial critical acclaim and earned a large readership; since his death his reputation and his readership have continued to grow.

**MICHAEL AYRES** is the author of three collections, the most recent of which is *Kinetic* (Shearsman Books, 2007).

**K.C. CLAPHAM** is from Lytham St Annes, Lancashire. She now lives in London where she is a part-time student on the Poetic Practice MA at Royal Holloway University of London, and the full-time production editor at *The Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*. Her work has also appeared in *How2*.

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**SARAH ANNE COX** is the author of *Arrival* (Krupskaya 2002) and *Parcel* (O Books 2006). She lives in San Francisco where she teaches, windsurfs and cares for her two children.

**JEN CRAWFORD**'s collection *Bad Appendix* was published by Titus Books in 2008. She teaches creative writing at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and has a PhD in Creative Arts from the University of Wollongong, Australia.

**ÓSCAR CURISES** was born in Madrid in 1972. The poems here come from his recent collection *Sonetos del útero* (*Sonnets from the Womb*, Bartleby Eds, 2007).

**VALENTINO GIANUZZI** lives in Lima. A scholar, translator and editor, he co-translated the complete poems of Vallejo with Michael Smith for Shearsman.

**CATHERINE HALES** lives in Berlin, where she works as a freelance translator.

**LYNNE HJELMGAARD** was born in New York, but now lives in Copenhagen. Redbeck Press of Bristol published her *Manhattan Sonnets* in 2003.

**NORMAN JOPE** lives in Plymouth. His publications include *For the Wedding Guest* (Stride, 1997), *The Book of Bells and Candles* (Waterloo Press, 2009) and, as editor, the anthology *In the Presence of Sharks* (Phlebas Press, 2007).

**HELEN LOPEZ** lives in Anglesey, and is widely-exhibited painter. Her first collection will be published by Shearsman Books in late 2009.

**GEORGE MESSO**'s new collection *Hearing Still* is due from Shearsman in June.

**ANTÔNIO MOURA** was born in Belém, at the mouth of the Amazon. His publications include: *Dez* (1996), *Hong Kong & outros poemas* (1999), *Rio Silêncio* (2004) and also translations of Rabearivelo and Vallejo.

**ALASDAIR PATERSON** lives in Exeter. Collections of his work were published by Pig Press in the 1980s, including *Floating World, Selected Poems 1973–1982*.

**NICK POTAMITIS** has taught Film Studies at various institutions and writes on the history of Greek cinema. His publications include *N*. (Perdika Press, 2006).

**ANNA RECKIN**'s poetry and essays have been published in the UK and the USA. She now lives in Norwich, and is working on a book about landscape and contemporary experimental Anglophone poetry.

**PETER ROBINSON** is the author of *The Look of Goodbye* and *Talk About Poetry* (both from Shearsman Books) as well as a number of collections from Carcanet, including a *Selected Poems*. He is a Professor at the University of Reading.

**ROBERT SAXTON** is editorial director of an illustrated book publishing company. His three collections are *The Promise Clinic, Manganese* and *Local Honey*.

**IAN SEED** edits the online journal *Shadowtrain*; his first collection, *Anonymous Intruder*, was published by Shearsman Books in January 2009.

**EDOARDO SANGUINETI** was born in Genoa in 1930. His first collection, *Laborintus*, was published in 1956. In the early 1960s, he played a major role in the *Novissimi* group and in the 'neo-avantgarde' *Gruppo 63*. His poetry is collected in *Segnalibro (1951–1981)* and in *Il gatto lupesco (1982–2001)*.

**STEVE SPENCE** lives in Plymouth. His poetry and reviews have appeared in *Tears in the Fence, Magma, Stand, Fire, Great Works* and many other UK journals.

**NATHAN THOMPSON**'s first collection, *the arboretum towards the beginning*, was published by Shearsman Books in 2008. He lives at present in Jersey.

**STEFAN TOBLER** is a freelance translator from Portuguese and German. His translation of Roger Willemsen's *Afghan Journey* was a 2007 Recommended Translation from English PEN. His translations of Antônio Moura were recently awarded a commendation in the 2008 BCLA Dryden Translation Prize.

**ALAN WALL** published two collections with Shearsman in 2008: *Alexander Pope at Twickenham* and *Gilgamesh*. Also in 2008 he published his sixth novel, *Sylvie's Riddle* (Quartet Books, London). He is Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Chester.

**TONY WILLIAMS** has a collection forthcoming from Salt Publishing.