

**SHEARSMAN**

**30**  
30TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

**87 & 88**

SPRING / SUMMER 2011

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*Shearsman* magazine is published in the United Kingdom by  
Shearsman Books Ltd  
58 Velwell Road  
Exeter EX4 4LD

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-154-2  
ISSN 0260-8049

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### **Acknowledgements**

The poems by Élise Turcotte translated here are from *Sombre ménagerie* (Eds. du  
Noroît, Montreal, 2002), and appear by kind permission of the author and publisher.  
‘Recycling Starlight’ by Penny Harter has appeared in an eponymous chapbook  
(Mountains and Rivers Press, Eugene, OR), copyright Penny Harter, 2010.  
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are drawn from *Triste Tristan* (Éditions Apogée, Rennes, 2004), and appear here  
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Current subscriptions—covering two double-issues, each around 108 pages, cost £13  
in the UK, £16 for the rest of Europe (including the Republic of Ireland), and £18  
for the rest of the world. Longer subscriptions may be had for a proportionately  
higher payment, which insulates purchasers from further price-rises during the term  
of the subscription.

Back issues from n° 63 onwards (uniform with this issue)—cost £8.50/\$13.50  
through trade channels. Single copies can be ordered for £8.50, post-free, direct  
from the press, through the Shearsman online store, or from bookstores in the UK  
and the USA. Earlier issues, from 1 to 62, may be had for £3 each direct from the  
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### **Submissions**

*Shearsman* operates a submissions-window system, whereby submissions are only  
considered during the months of March and September, at which point 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 2–3 months of the window’s closure.

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# CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

---

## From the Grotto

Much blood spills in the kill and sharing out.  
None smears our cave walls, as yet.

\*

To make good I have spat, hoping for a bird  
to take shape, a mouthful of manganese.

\*

Here and now it will be forever home;  
piqued by no phantoms we share and share alike.

\*

A sight better than us, the beasts know  
what is what. What if we made do with that?

\*

We had luck and chose this shell of rock;  
river glitters below, with fish we'll harpoon.

\*

How temperate now these people are, they think  
no gods could come and dare play dice with us.

\*

I'll tell a story of how we came to be here.  
Pleasure in the design will drive them to believe it.

## **A True Tale of the Anecdotes Improvised by Villiers de L'Isle-Adam**

Ropes in their coils now the men have cast off  
And the Mariner eyes the deep—  
So in a bar that is gaslit  
And homely to him, though it reeks of piss,  
Villiers would begin, impromptu, an anecdote.

Marvels he spoke, and the air burned them up.  
Marvels, we say, for they were not bookish.  
To this day the bright legend travels by voice.

But when invited to collect between covers  
Some of his stories, Villiers  
Could barely account for those he had published.

As the Mariner puts in at a hospitable island  
For supplies of water and meat,  
So Villiers knocked on the door of the Master.

Welcomed in, Villiers watches the silent  
Master withdraw into a room apart.

Soon the Master is stepping forth with an Album:  
Saved from the daily papers and reviews,  
All the stories Villiers could not account for.  
The Master had harvested every tale in print.

Of the impromptus not a scrap  
Came down to us. All went up in smoke—  
Gone with the old Parisian reek of piss.

True, their *fraîcheur* had to fascinate as much  
As anything Villiers wrote on paper:  
And now even more so—

As long as the anecdotes,  
Richly flowing, leaped toward horizons of hasard,  
Make-do phrasing likely  
Tempered the thrust of recital; but  
As the legend about them prospered, those anecdotes,  
Not in the least bookish, lit all the faces up.

Even in ink, unbookish tales  
Such as were spoken in gaslight once  
Might be no mirage: Eldorados for feeling,  
Not even the ghost of a statement in them;  
life-giving their book of mysterious vagaries,  
like space the Mariner houses in his compass,  
Evolves to measure and in perspective.

# ROSMARIE WALDROP

---

## War, You Write

*for Esther Tellermann*

And: in the beginning was death, black black behind the eyes, the light from below, the waters ungathered.

Whether in war or peace, we carry our bones wherever we go. Counting how foot follows foot on the ground; and idea, idea in the mind. Or not. The air does not resist. Thus it refutes us.

How plant the roots we come from, you write, artifice, effort, fatigue, the image subsumed, sifting to settle, approach the river, the troops at the ready.

Trapped in the skull, a roar we cannot recognize. In terms of “the nature of war.” Or repair in parallel sentences, with punctuation in the right places. Rain, storms, fire from all sides. But the best way to measure time, says St. Augustine, is by reading a poem.

Our war was mental, you write, a net toward the insides of skirmish, raid, raw pronoun, preposition in ambush, patrol, pitched battle.

Even if the clock stops, each cell pulses. Deep in the body we feel silently flowing water. Consciousness plays its searchlight on this image and on the surface of this image. The flesh turns transparent, and the organs sit next to one another. We refine our ability to kill.

Thirst was the inherent cause, you write, shared language of destruction, mutilation, waxy days, the tribe of warriors rode down the abstractions.

Not far below the skin, the habit of pillage, rape, murder, flash of fire along our arms. Compatible with gestures in vain from a clean, well-lighted street. The physicist sees the passage of time as loss of organization. But the rhythm of a sentence, like the water we drink from the faucet, has the form of our inner sense. And one minute devours the next.

The poem is ashes, you write, set free on the inner surface of the world. Thus it remembers.

## RAY DIPALMA

---

### The Persistence of Memory

Very evil people cannot really be imagined dying.  
—Adorno

The wall against which they  
flattened their backs and raised their arms  
without quite knowing themselves—  
some former pedestrians some former individuals

sacrificed to a perpetuation  
of the modes of indifference  
approval and dissolution

talking through broken doors  
fatal witnesses to apocryphal knowledge  
that harbored the means of the ancient wound

propaganda and admonition  
ensured a turning point—merely  
a transference of loss to reflex-dominated pathos  
abandoned to the calamitously relative

### Site

Buried today  
No, buried yesterday

The light rain had stopped  
The late May evenings still cool

Lapsus in ms. but not in substance  
The light rain diswritten discomposed

Thought to sit through—the floor turning  
You are found composed of last lines

The floor turning thought  
You are found

A fragile alignment will get this back

Nostalgia remembers how to seem

The vertical bars placed closer together  
The horizontal arranged further apart

The Sun Artist

at the Cross of Muiredach, Monasterboice, c. 850–2009AD

d e e p s h a d o w e d  
s d e e p s h a d o w e s  
s d e e p s h a d o w s  
s u d e e p s h a d o s u  
s u n d e e p s h a d s u  
s u n d e e p s h a s u n  
s u n d e e p s h s u n  
s u n s d e e p s s u n s  
s u n s d e e p s u n s  
s u n s e d e e s u n s e  
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s u n s e t d s u n s e t  
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f r e n e w s r e n e w s f  
f r e n e w s r e n e w f a  
f a r e n e w s r e n f a  
f a d r e n e w s r e f a d  
f a d r e n e w s r f a d  
f a d i r e n e w s f a d i  
f a d i r e n e w f a d i  
f a d i n r e n e f a d i n  
f a d i n r e n f a d i n  
f a d i n g r e f a d i n g  
f a d i n g r f a d i n g  
f a d i n g f a d i n g  
f a d i n p f a d i n  
f a d i n p a f a d i n  
f a d i p a t t f a d i  
f a d p a t t e r f a d  
f a d p a t t e r f a d  
f a p a t t e r n f a  
f a p a t t e r n s f a  
f p a t t e r n s p f  
f p a t t e r n s p a f  
p a t t e r n s p a t

*deepshadowed sunset renews fading patterns*

i l l u m i n a t i o n  
 s i l l u m i n a t i o s  
 s i l l u m i n a t i s  
 s u i l l u m i n a t s u  
 s u i l l u m i n a s u  
 s u d i l l u m i n s u d  
 s u d i l l u m i s u d  
 s u d d i l l u m s u d d  
 s u d d i l l u s u d d  
 s u d d e i l l s u d d e  
 s u d d e i l s u d d e  
 s u d d e n i s u d d e n  
 s u d d e n s u d d e n  
 s u d d e n s s u d d e n  
 s u d d e n s h s u d d e n  
 s u d d e s h a s u d d e  
 s u d d e s h a d s u d d e  
 s u d d s h a d o s u d d  
 s u d s h a d o w s u d d  
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 w o r l s h a d o w w o r l  
 w o r l s h a d o w o r l  
 w o r l d s h a d o w o r l d  
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 w o r l d s s w o r l d s  
 w o r l d s w o r l d s  
 w o r l d f w o r l d  
 w o r l d f l w o r l d  
 w o r l f l u w o r l  
 w o r l f l u t w o r l  
 w o r f l u t t e w o r  
 w o r f l u t t e w o r  
 w o f l u t t e r i w o  
 w o f l u t t e r i w o  
 w f l u t t e r i n w  
 w f l u t t e r i n g w

*sudden illumination shadow-worlds fluttering*

# ANNE GORRICK

---

## Laundry and Wonder

*for GG*

Drugs in garland  
edge her gangways

Gala lewd, dyed and lunged

An aged waggery null, wrung

A ragged ally with (equally) ragged lungs

She yawns and dangles, raw  
She glares like an August lawn  
Gulls and gully danger her gardens

Rage and gnawed, grayed

The walled gulag laden in alder  
in lawyer glad

An unwary runaway: she is gluey  
wary  
wan

Her grand drag unwell  
aged like drywall  
like (mathematics)

Eggs in error put in with the laundry: gangs of angels in  
their larded waggle

The Lady yawns legalisms  
her gear argyle: a dawn in rags

Laundry Ugly  
An allergy regally, waggery, grange

Really!

Rude duels, naggery

The wall or war: a gray lawn  
The lawn gulled with yarn, drawn in her warn(ings)

## JOHN MATEER

---

### Ekphrasis

These Mozambican figures  
in the billionaire's African Collection,  
phantasmagoric. One of a spirit  
standing on a man's bent back  
and hacking into his spine, though the grimace  
such he could have been eating flesh,  
drinking from a skull-cup. Like the protean  
in Mia Couto's tales: war's phenomenology,  
how photos 'capture' what we either struggle  
to remember or can't forget, our regressing  
to the scene of the crime  
as to a lost country, edenic.

### Coimbra

Slitting open the pages of an edition  
of *The Tragedy of Inês de Castro*,  
reflecting on the experimental  
poets of Coimbra, their insistence  
on the dissolution of the FIRST PERSON,  
you remember, earlier in the day,  
picking oranges for the first time  
in your life, floating, a cosmonaut,  
between the suns in an Australian's  
poem, and then, somehow anticipating Inês,  
THE FIGURE, you must have read elsewhere,  
as effigy, as corpse, you are wondering  
whether your own dissolution has begun,  
whether, between these memories,  
you were SELF, or could be 'mere'  
allusion, a cloud, drifting;

## Stalking Gerald Manley Hopkins

I've been reading your diary and sniffing its flowerbeds  
*The white violets are broader and smell* of April 15, 1871  
treading in my bare reader's feet *the sharper wheeling and*  
*a more winged recoil in the leaves.* I've left some of the days  
to themselves, unfinished like Spring, 1871, April 21  
*We have had other such afternoons, one today—the sky a*

I've whisked past that specific (it was *beautiful grained*) blue  
and backwards to peruse you, in letters to your father,  
to read you caught believing, between him 16 October 1866  
*You are so kind as not to forbid me your house, to which I have no claim,*  
*on condition, if I understand, that I promise not to try to convert*  
*my brothers and sisters*

and your superiors *Before I can promise this I must get permission,*  
*wh. I have no doubt will be given. Of course this promise*  
*will not apply after they come of age.* Closeness to a God penning  
the distance—grown child's to parent's soul—that's as much  
like doubt as faith *Whether after my reception you will still speak*  
*as you do now I cannot tell*

I can spell no comfort in my witness's wince, though I spy onwards  
irreverent with chronology and plundering half-sprung *authorship, poet*  
*to his pal* 15 Feb 1879 *When I say that I do not mean to publish*  
*I speak the truth.* I can wedge myself in between you, your mum and  
Marvel *most rich and nervous* of verse, not knowing who I was  
looking for in your bud-filled universe until via post-Herbert Vaughan  
27 Feb 1879 . . . *and even his muse underwent a conversion*  
*(for he had written before).*

## The Writer's Portrait

Sun beats that bashful brain  
protectionless and exposing  
itself as if to pervert, to off-  
er alteration from an original  
course, meaning or state to  
a distortion. Corruption of  
what was, first intended,  
natural? The abnormality  
and sex ever-present, thump  
as solar power. Pulse.

# NATHAN THOMPSON

---

## by a haunting

what I mean is the of course of [rain]  
listening to slow harm  
as (is this the town or the country  
you decide)  
chimneys fresh outmoded  
gas-lit perhaps a miracle's atmosphere  
filmed sheen as paths cross

I could have remembered you into this  
but it's already too complicated  
contemplation eased over  
diluted songs undermining a certain flavour  
concentrated repression behind closed eyes

you become the moment before a calm starts  
widowing widening out grief movements

to believe is to have come a long way  
[mist] circling a kept thing losing time  
to stop when it all becomes too beautiful

## GARETH DURASOW

---

### Regina Lisso

*The little box, instrument of metaphysical shrinkage, wasn't intended to witness the intrusion of ultimate realities.*

—Eugenia Parry

Lee Miller at Leipzig  
the statue that came to life in the Blood of a Poet  
photographs the selbstmord in the Rathaus

Mors certa, hora incerta  
the parents just bodies but the daughter Regina  
chiaroscuro courtesy of the hour

Regina you have such Fabergé teeth  
the very pietà the Third Reich deserves  
coiffure dishevelled by furtive caresses  
gaunt young men compelled to touch your will-o-the-wisp hair

Permission to sit with her awhile  
to defibrillate her with my eyes  
a kiss so voltaic  
her needlepoint hands unfurl &  
Vogue all over my roughshod face

Nurse's fingers gone to waste  
expending their vestiges of dexterity  
unpicking a button from the upholstery  
like a girl chastised in the fairy wing repair shop  
plucks out an offensive eye

To sleep more soundly in the sun's black spot  
a Rammstein espresso shot straight down her throat  
derailing all the enzymes till the air is no use.

## NATHANIEL TARN

---

### Romancero

Incredibly—from vertical to horizontal in one moment (moment as long as some sang passages in bygone eras from a named purgatory to their named heaven) the day, turning from tempest to just fine; all lowering clouds drowning the earth to smiling azures; brown landscape turned to green; the silent birds now perpetrating riots of conjugated melody. Romantic time has, true, evolved from patience to consumption. Below the birthplace of the earth is seen, wreathed in black, blond and burnished auras – its mines await the miner while from blood and lymph he turns mud into gold and diamonds. Higher than centrifugal valley all senses radiating, the birthplace puckered symbol smiling in its heartland, twin mountains holding up the planet high above the centripetal turtle understanding. Higher yet, those two-way windows giving/receiving, opening wide onto the widest azure sky, closing as breath comes faster, as flights of fancy multiply and mastery of life flowers and spreads its seeds with wind-like laughter. Is it not passing brave to be a king and ride in triumph through Persepolis? But now, however, the novel's on its downward path—it must decline into misunderstanding or ghastly tragedy and winds dissolve to tears. To lamentations. Readers, dreading the end, yet racing to the end – as if another death were to be added to a list, a litany of deaths, begin to try to think, prod memory for last reviewer's commendations; the choices of the famous for the year's best produce (*famosi* ah!), to court desire, to count and to make notes of which-

soever other plots, why, just might satisfy: but, what, by *other* authors than this present one? No, god forbid, this tittle-tattler by far a favorite, one cannot exit from his list, plots, famous / infamous, his grand finales so vastly credible no other maker to whom one can subscribe lives now on earth, publishes daily, reads to a vast, adoring public on 365 out of 365: despite book-perishing, publishes on, endures forever. This is no fair description of the greatest writer. Now rage devours his reader's mind; great dragons of desire break, overwhelm his will. Black clouds are back, depressing him into the garden. Oh for Persepolis!

## TOBY OLSON

---

### The Houses

The houses on the cliff can block the bay,  
thought it is still there  
    between them and in memory.

Ocean like  
in flatness and dark amoebic shadows  
    of weed on this calm day,  
our anger's only periodic,  
just when the four-master's passing,  
seen only in blinks  
    in the interstices,  
but the houses have no volition.

Anger at objects, as if people's  
    mistakes and miscreant behaviors,  
fighting off the passage of time's  
perpetuality, the body's noted accelerants,  
as we grow older...  
    the frozen bolt rusted,  
a chain-saw that won't start.

“Come to me now in your sure fading,  
put your foot on my neck,  
before twisting me.  
Sentimental,  
    I too was born from the dead  
conventionally,  
but that was years ago.”

This, then, is the dream that rises  
like a whale in that calm water  
glimpsed only in the interstices,  
    those fucking houses  
blocking our view.

## JOHN LEVY

---

### Four Untitled Poems

“You are the hottest one for years of night . . .”

John Berryman wrote, in #4 of *The Dream Songs*, about a keenly desired woman eating chicken nearby for whom he

(if I make the error of calling the poem’s narrator the poet himself) hungers. But when he reads it aloud he says,

“You are the hottest one for days of night . . .”

I prefer years. Listening to the recording it’s obvious he often reads different words from what’s

in print. Wishing he’d written something else? Or careless with his own writing, disdaining the bridges

of words he’d built, not wishing to cross silence the same way again? Or wanting to sing and dream

a little differently each time? Needing to be free of all that’s boring, especially himself?

## PETER ROBINSON

---

### Epigrams of Summer

‘as a haunted man—a man haunted  
with a memory—he was harmless’  
Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*

Two coots have built their nest  
on a tipped-over shopping trolley;  
a mattress of wet plastic litter  
supports the twigs they meshed together.

Now mother coot is sitting pretty  
in shallows and her found-art splendour,  
while, me, I find a theme from whatever  
happens to be happening . . .

\*

Bedraggled summer, overblown,  
comes at us from under trees,  
their thick-surgings leafage  
near summer’s full opacity.

So you see this opaque world  
(its piled clouds once more making  
a three-dimensional sky)  
carries us on its broad shoulders.

\*

Walking back into that world once known,  
there are glints of copper pipe-work,  
fuss and palaver in pointed brick,  
privet hedges, you alone . . .

Then a piffling kerfuffle of weather  
might blear the window pane  
with your memories of judgment,  
of being judged again.

\*

Sensitive to initial conditions,  
here I am back in a Britain  
like memories of things written,  
the white roots under turned stones;

and find I'm living a broken series  
of acronyms, every new-to-me term,  
rain scents, words or idiom—  
things to get done beyond these.

\*

It's like we've got to do to others  
what had been done to me  
and there's no help in it, you say,  
for that misery—

as if I could be both quick and dead  
by lapping river water, a  
world once known, bankrupted,  
etcetera, etcetera . . .

\*

Cow-parsley, buttercups, seed-heads  
in extents of moving waves

are traipsed past by late revellers,  
the house-backs like a stain.

Late revellers in their dribs-and-drabs  
come murmuring out of the dawn.  
Overcast, a morning greets them,  
and what remains of their lives.

\*

It's a Sunday, long before car noise,  
and youth's in this June daylight:  
one carries a girlfriend on his back;  
others stalk with naked feet

from summers gone, at other dawns,  
cloudless skies, bird choruses,  
a yard's tree shadow thrown against  
its house-back like a stain.

\*

Momentary, come bungalows,  
anemone-filled gardens, and enemy  
infiltrations—  
as if these were the front line . . .  
Far fields are flecked with poppies.  
It's like a mute complaint  
about the further sacrifices,  
this compliant scene!

\*

Invisible beyond a taxi's windscreen,  
pasts blank me, on the High Street,  
like none of it had ever been  
over grounds where we can't meet.

Just so, the pasts won't speak,  
except in sly objection—  
money, lust or interest,  
most other values gone.

\*

My projections of irrational fears  
on cornered, desperate men  
are summoned in the summer losses,  
a village's mourning routine

or like an attack on the everyday  
at Hungerford and Dunblane  
or Whitehaven, us, implicated  
in lives not being enough again.

\*

Yet still things come and steady you  
at a pumping house arched window,  
its biscuit-brickwork textures  
a survivor down the years.

My hand remembers what it would do  
to get through tricky transitions,  
pinching between forefinger and thumb  
that scrap of shirtiness too.

\*

From traffic by Christ's Pieces  
those pasts can still be caught  
in my heart-rate, chest,  
lawns where we tried goodbyes . . .

Reflected in the river's flow  
now other pairs are drifting past  
under a guestroom window,  
towards this Bridge of Sighs—

\*

as elsewhere, they've renewed  
a path across the grounds;  
dusty, bereft of lampposts,  
the old paths trouble knows.

Even water birds foul this new one.  
Beyond a weariness and fret,  
another life's to be retrieved  
under the leaves of summer.

\*

But here, I walk back under leaves  
past black wrought-iron gates,  
over flagstones sunk in grass  
and more checkered shades.

Through the event-filled ordinary  
postponements of that life,  
these ghosts, you might suppose,  
had our pasts in sole possession.

\*

Like attacks on the everyday  
or kind of self-betrayal,  
how could they not spoil  
this summery array?

Then come the extra mile  
to exorcise those years,  
a dazzle of sunshine appears  
and words, words to say.

\*

In ill-lit rooms across town  
lives had altered course;  
their ghosts on a horizon  
(it's understood between us)

are dazzled by the mote-stream  
as currents of talk along backs  
come clearer in fresh air  
and lift them away.

## MARTIN ANDERSON

---

### The Banana Archive

“My children too have learned a barbarous tongue”.

Tu Fu.

#### I

*Alone in this dead city by the salt marsh. City I long to leave. City I long to return to. Each morning workers coughing on their way to the factory. Each evening mist over the quiet quays. After the export trade declined. Importers now of oil and wood, of electronics and food. After the sea withdrew its bounty from us. Exporters of spent uranium and industrial waste. Poisonous rains at twilight. The river with its dead dogs. Two blocks away the Mint, the Ministry of Financial Services. Close by, the Numismatic Museum. Behind dressed granite generation after generation of the country's Kings and Queens, Emperors and Empresses, pseudo Sultans and Satraps: their heads embossed in gold. From far flung corners of the globe. A collective effulgence. Now, in the gloom of yet another polluted evening they shine, if at all, with a less than vigorous light. I stand on the balcony, smoking. All traces of the day's deliria having subsided from the roads beneath me. Like a painted mime faces linger in doorways and in shop windows, each one having pursued his or her "separate interest and pleasure." Each one reluctant to go home. The faces of a city that has died, that has been reborn and has died again. In its canals the waters, still, forgetful and habitual. Dark as the ink of any actuary or obituary. The great warehouses gone. Docks and schools turned into luxury apartments—still vacant. The wind rattles through deserted goods yards at dawn. The bodies of dead soldiers returning. Rumours of another war. Of borders sealed and of people fleeing. No love amongst the populace of a common good at home. Even less of it for those abroad; exploited, murdered or pauperised by those we elected. In cemeteries of de-consecrated churches, in parks, on wayside verges, autumn encamps. Blood red coppices emblazon air. Days shorten. Mist wraps viaducts and bridges. I lean on the balcony, dreaming. Sound of an oratorio through an apartment's broken window. A solitary drunk walks down the side of the road, unseeing. No one pays him any attention. In*

*the canals the waters have begun to harden. Harden around this present. Present which perpetually returns. With a yesterday and a tomorrow; in an unbroken circuit. Taking its place amidst all time's other inventions and appearances. Here, on these roads which no longer vibrate to the triumphal return of armies, it waits, like a foul shadow between the houses, trying to extinguish itself. Enveloping us, too, in its disguises. Seeking, like the stale Ithaka in our bones, a home. Which we, through the grace of our fictions of memory and experience, always provide for it. An exhausted destination. Standing at the door, beckoning us to follow. And we comply. Turning back again to the contaminated moment; of an evening plundered by love or hate. The grey gestation of the day to come, much like the one before. So it was, though they did not know it, when they set out. Dead men singing on the current. Cadavers, not angels, for burying. Men whose narratives would never be completed. Completion requiring surrender. Surrender to what was beyond them. Not suffering—for surfeit of profit or passion. As they left they heard a song above the osier-beds. Fiercely compressed as if it desired never to be repeated. 'Acrocephalus palustris', marsh warbler, singing in a voice reconstituted from all its migrations; each syllable, each phrase, a locus. Singing a song reinscribing in itself the songs of many others. Stumbling through ruined villages at dusk, half full of vermin, they imagined they still heard it. Through fields of unharvested wheat. Presiding at baptisms in remote mountain gorges. Whilst climbing paths treading wild garlic and jasmine into the dust, the sea behind them, before them a fragile carapace of snow and ice—cerement of crystal. No looking back. Whilst scrambling over dry river courses, then down amid arid plains welcomed by horse traders and hunters—for a lame piebald with a downcast look which moved them they bartered a silver fork—through landscapes without cities, without boundaries. Into those immensities of unnavigated, and unrecorded, space and light.*

“[June 21st 1571] A long strand broke upon us, suddenly, out of the sea mist and it was as if in that perfect parabola of sand and foam, that gently sluiced—O sempiternal referent!—light, the accumulated rime of all those years sea-wandering was lifted from our eyes. Here, we thought, amidst sweet solaceful scents wafted offshore from some ripe and verdant interior, is the beginning of that world of limitless possibility we had imagined. Day after day, year after year, watching the horizon for sign of some such land, our very selves poured on ahead into the distance, our minds nurtured on the prospect of the destruction of all boundaries. The Absolute, in a form, we veritably believed, of some demiurge or afflatus, beckoned. Only our ever sanguine and sceptical Doctor, Garcia de Aguiar, cautioned us that we might well be pursuing nothing more than residual effects of repeated calentures, or of insufflation of the nerves brought on by too much confinement. ‘That unconstrained condition which you seek, too, is not natural. And’, he added as an aside, I suspect, upon all our ‘continual exploring . . . the whole person is never completely anywhere’”

.....

“[December 12th 1571] On the night air were the odours of burnt meats and the sounds of far off dancing and music. In life, according to our good Doctor, whose discourse inherits the complexion of the Philosopher, one is either moving away from something or someone, there is either a leave taking, or one is moving towards them in impending arrival. Attraction or repulsion, terror or joy, we move, within ourselves, always between opposed or different states and emotions—our being never exclusively engaged within either. Arriving, we are also departing, departing, we are also arriving, and in this slow sad music in which all our lives are conducted there are only impure journeys, imperfect divagations, towards a union which always eludes us. So, as the horse traders settled down with us outside the walls of the city of the ancient kingdom, their mallets pounding tent pegs into hard earth, as dark lanterns swayed in the breeze and braziers of spluttering coals glowed red in the dusk, we were informed that though we had arrived at our destination there was, the good Doctor reiterated (by which some of us were much disquieted), no cause for celebration.”

[Translated from Fernão Eannes Azurara's *Jornais*]

*Beneath me, on the street, a faint burnishing light. Late November. Cold gleam upon the window. Words from a meeting, past remembering. From another landscape, perhaps, another life. Voice lost in the endless excursus of its re-working. Impersonated persona of another November. Gulls, blown from the headland by the sea wind. White underparts gleaming, incandescent against sky. I listen to their cries above dull accents from the street below. Axles grind the air. In the outer precincts of this paradiso all postal deliveries have been suspended. All postal codes, it is rumoured—rumours, wildly abound—will be abolished. Will they then, I wonder, revert to the Creatrix, to the O of an absence greater than their sum? Our dull sublunary language be superseded, perhaps, all the seas rising around us, by the ethereal music of birds? A gust of wind, thick with the smell of saw-mills and crude oil from refineries, fills the balcony. Under the passing darkness of a squall newspapers and litter are lifted and threshed down emptying streets. Close by a dog howls from a vacant lot. A broken latch bangs on the security gate of a boarded-up beauty parlour. Above the increasing tumult I imagine I catch, for a brief moment, a shard of frenetic song; *Acrocephalus palustris*, wringing its repertoire of motifs above the osier-beds. Beds where pill-boxes still stand, crumbling on jetties. Where once, damp days among the fens, they waited: time, monotonous and cruel. A continent on fire, a people burning. "Minds bent on a debauchery of destruction . . . a boisterous joy." Windows blacked out. Beyond the saltings dark breakers overwhelmed.*

**liminal**

*(for dancer Tim Rubidge)*

always  
this rocks cumulative rotations

wind drag across bones  
tongue becomes fight

the mirror azure  
to depths undreamt

unarmed by sun  
fist of light tightens

time brittles  
with each slow breath

amplify light  
bird without roots

a flightless tree  
fight and upside

and concrete pages  
encourage tears

bloody page spill  
lives unread

whose out of step?  
turn the book around  
feather necessity, flesh  
being flesh is torn or worn

at dusk and dust recall  
lips skipped in stutter-rhyme  
this sweet day, between yourself  
and child-song pures

\*

outreaching to the broken last, trying to? not so much bridge as  
milky-span, toe the line, keep within channels, don't jerky-dance  
some magenta-bleed, eyes glide from hand, try some slammer, for  
crying out. winged, but then who is? and who is lidless sweat, ever  
kneeling, supplication in deep-sunk inhibiting machine

\*

light swelters  
swells in gesture  
jester you  
apply match  
urging shelter  
in airs rare shell  
oxygen unfurling  
kindling tricks  
and again  
trip/ripped  
ripe flailings  
back slam  
coinciding  
the spilt up  
rouged flight  
necessary  
as splitting light  
pained air lines

reverb bleeding  
extraordinaire  
this arabesques  
inked in stutter  
mining somewhere  
around dawn

spark eyes fruit lung  
from tree of body  
no sudden gusts  
giddy toward  
unusual shoulderings  
destroy hard data  
write vast surfaces  
stare unlocked  
saffron wide  
border is  
borders are  
wingfold chained  
edges of chaos  
fist years, flux us  
lung ecstatic  
grasp at skybreath  
your winged tang  
on differing tracks

## PENNY HARTER

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### Black Leaves

At dusk, rain begins.  
A black bird flies into black leaves.  
Rain enters the dry dirt.

I step on an ant.

Last night I could not sleep,  
Something buzzed just under my skin.

Today a dragonfly lit on my arm.  
Its wings were humming.

Startled, I brushed it off.  
The wind blew it back into my face.

Last night I could not sleep.  
Something buzzed just under my skin.

The black leaves of the tree are raining.  
The black bird has disappeared into rain.

The ant is gone.

Buzzing is the same as humming.  
I have no wings.

Green at morning, black at night—  
Where are those leaves now?

The ant is in the dirt.  
The dirt grows black with rain.  
I cannot sleep in this tree.

## SIMON PERCHIK

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### Eight Poems

\*

Every love note starts out warm  
sent by one hand over another  
is pressing down on this snow

making a fire on her grave, covers it  
with those songs from the 40s  
still trailing smoke, longing for rain

that's not one night alongside another  
each falling off as the name  
at the end, a pet name, a secret

you would write on a wall  
to whiten it, begin again  
already winter and bleeding to death.

\*

You always wanted to be near ashes  
close to shore, kept warm  
between two fires and the afternoons

easing around the rocks  
you dead go here with  
adrift just below the surface

that has no owner  
though nothing falls to the bottom  
the way even now the rain

smells from smoke and your coffin  
looks for another body  
—you wanted to be water, run clear

take your bones with you  
and after a long loosening  
empty them as a go-between

this hole to lean down  
and filling it from shells  
not yet your mouth and shoulders.

\*

From far off though this wall  
still grieves, stone over stone  
closing from inside as mist

—still sags into each corner  
the way mourners come by in twos  
binding their dead to the dim light

that covers the Earth with your forehead  
—you're lost, sinking in  
till you stop as you did before

and again your back breaks open  
for air and wings and in your knees  
the bones that will go no further

are filled with an immense arch  
pressing down on the thin shadow  
waiting at home and loosening.

nicods criterion & the paradox of ravens

the black mirror  
which is also the obsidian mirror  
through which the oracle returns

the black mirror  
which is also  
the beautiful black stone  
by means of which dr john dee  
conjured up the spirits

from the *grim-gribbers*  
to the black body bags  
masking  
unfathomable darkness  
eructing from the death  
that illumines  
the secret ferments of the mind

like  
*the glassy essence* of lies  
engraved in  
memory  
marking  
ship s caverns  
merging sand out of samphire

at first  
men were counterfeited in the elements  
then confounded  
by the singing of the infinite abundance  
even before it was hewn  
from the cubic stone

but then men stood / outside the regolith of time  
with the smell of carrion carried on the wind  
&  
turning east ward to watch  
over the rising sun would demand to know  
what songs the sirens sang

now the ancient mariners have set their sails drifting  
over / blake s blackmilkwhite ocean  
the black milk  
drained from their mother s womb

or yet mother love  
still stretches across globe & hemisphere  
as perfect as the song bird named  
or as bright as the marrow of the intellectual soul  
defiled

t was the stench cast  
by mazarine raven & miniscule dove  
like the vortex in the plenum

oh exorbitant night  
once  
you desired that our love should extend over thresholds  
but  
chance encounters endangered *our* son  
& so you  
banished the remembrance of him

*twas*  
rugged fate shipwrecked  
the one thousand and seventeen lives  
as if / each soul had become that song bird named  
as her passions violated virgil s slick-sorrowed seas /  
or drowned in the white flecked sounds

that drift over  
the ruby wine-merled waters  
or wash over  
stones / that flail & flutter  
whenever waves crush    exegetical heroes  
or  
fling them hard against  
sacramental creeds

## AIDAN SEMMENS

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### *from* The Book of Isaac

there is the cool consolation where as for me  
already putting out voice in distrustful morning,  
everyone who fears awakening the minimum doubt  
which you read the following shock which it should expect  
threatened when being hardships, forfeit bad ribbon  
capital punishment of the typewriter where in any case  
because of those of camp illegally adjusts the radio  
the good deed of the time of tribulation is this  
but & which reads post together with us;  
it is that it reaches the point where you are conscious for the  
second time;  
as for writing by pencil, possibility of camouflage  
which is permitted in this way, with the Minsk reconstruction  
depending upon me who am removed just under the refuge  
of at least interesting darkness where the fresh air breathes



louder than desire. A new chorus  
sounds, rising over the land.

Thinking outside of thought.  
Water's edge darkens in elegy.  
The world to us:  
I will dream you.

**[Dusk as a pink & vermillion gashed sky]**

*(Stroszek)*

Dusk as a pink-&-vermillion-gashed sky—  
the large-scale beauty of it says, learn to die  
    & afterwards cars with their headlights on race  
        into darkness until  
            the flatness of the land swallows them  
                never touching what it is they came for . . .

## ALAN WALL

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### *from* Endtimes

#### Part One: Those Tombs in Ephesus

*Dionysius insisted there were the tombs of two Johns in Ephesus, and that is true: I am in both of them. I spent some time on Patmos, then came back here finally. Though written in various cellars of persecution, on an insignificant island, my words commanded attention.*

If my Greek is wayward and odd  
my Aramaic was a wonder to them all, believe me.  
That's how I wrote the gospel  
which some redactor cast into the other tongue.  
The original lost by Clio's copyists.  
Now through the window in the rain  
the moon is weeping.  
Stars are quicksilver spheres on a black silk windingsheet.

Don't believe the Turin shroud—his was black  
woven by the Magdalena from the fleece of a panther  
through countless Gethsemane nights.  
She knew her beloved Lord would lie inside it  
shortly.

If it's evidence of chronology you need  
read these gospels  
each authentically carbon-dated  
by our grief. Taste  
the acrid stink of desolation's cellar.  
Penned in that catacomb each hides inside himself.

My words have resurrected him  
as he dictated. My work now's  
writing his life, tending his mother.

Never a tear from her  
since that day on Golgotha.  
Should they fall they'd not be  
salt water, but atoms, weapons-grade  
plutonium, angry enough to eat the whole of Ephesus  
leaving it void and smoking.  
She keeps a drawer full of resurrection name-tags.

Revise.

Dead man rising in his rags  
to stare incredulous into a saviour's face.  
And now they say that in the colosseums  
lions feed upon his testament.  
(Should *Hegemon* be used, I wonder,  
in the passages concerning Pilate?)  
Beloved disciple  
a man hunted and haunted from Palestine to Patmos  
half-insane with emblems, symbols,  
eschatological venom.

The world will end one day  
he said: never attempt to compute it.  
She says almost nothing now.  
With the boy at last outside her womb  
the end of the world began.  
Such a calm here finally  
sharing our endings in Ephesus.

This afternoon as I wrote  
she spent two hours staring  
at a dead sparrow on the windowsill.  
An invisible hand will surely  
come to revive it.  
I place a cup of red wine in her palms

and she looks down  
as if at blood.  
Who needs reminding of its colour?  
She thinks she might have left some trinkets  
on the dark side of the moon—  
old CDs; an album of photographs—  
a young boy learning the rudiments of carpentry  
from his earthly father. Her son, she says,  
will collect them for her  
once he gets back home and picks up his messages.  
The journey turned out longer than we'd thought.

*(There is a tradition that, after the crucifixion, the disciple John went to Ephesus accompanied by Mary. There they both lived to a great age. An early account held that the author of The Gospel According to John was one and the same as the author of Revelation. This has been disputed for centuries. The texts are so different. But written in different languages, different genres, different times, might they still claim a single author? No one actually knows. In any case, you can't always choose your redactor. History assigns them. One thing we do know: after the original document was written, it has never ceased to be re-written, in accordance with each new generation's millenarian expectations. Apocalyptic visions born at the heart of the Empire.)*

Question with an Answer That Doesn't Matter

*for Christian Law Palacín*

A medieval theologian asks  
if two angels  
can  
speak—converse—  
without the other angels hearing them.  
The answer doesn't matter  
but the almost  
physical sensation  
that beneath these symbolic codes  
one can draw an exact  
definition of how  
poetry can be  
transmitted  
in book form, and this strange  
pleasure  
that spiritual things allow  
provided  
that they are written in lower case.

## The Reign of Hadrian

*It's about, above all, a theory of knowledge, of the manner in which a man steals himself little by little from the ideas of his time which he rejects.*

*Marguerite Yourcenar [on Zeno],  
Letter to Alain Bosquet, January 1, 1964*

The reign of Hadrian  
is like the October the Japanese  
celebrate. But the nostalgia  
I feel from those years isn't a result  
of the absence of gods. Nor is it due to  
the joyful government of this monarch.  
Nor to the Hellenic culture, his trips  
or the stability of the borders  
of his empire. I recognize  
that as my homeland,  
as my own time,  
because I sense that then I wouldn't have  
this feeling of deepening  
exile that wakes  
in me the age that I have been given,  
the anguishing culture  
dictated by some who don't love,  
the intellectuals  
of the middle class, those  
who are neither poets nor philosophers,  
the cloudy future,  
the uncertain situation of my country.

*from* **Triste Tristan**

They're still in our heads the good old fellows  
let's talk hormones  
a monologue of the deaf—  
we allow a ration of free sex  
down at the ford—  
would have to be dumb not to sing  
now  
that the story's all over the world.

Bérroul and Thomas,  
of course we've read them,  
bring up fornication  
in every line—  
a chance to embroider:  
a tale of love won't always  
lead  
to sexual reproduction—  
terror isn't the last word from heaven  
we need the natives  
for the lowdown.

Gains prestige  
being on top of the queen—  
she snaps, hurls insults  
can't take it no more—  
he, aggressive, comes—

two dogs stuck together  
their talk  
a slew of droppings—  
I'll add a fool a dwarf a messenger—  
as best I can.

Is nonetheless a cuckold,  
par for a horse—  
jeers at the one he adored.  
his face drenched with rain—  
a spectacle with plenty of spies,  
enemies of abstract art  
forced to pipe down.

International debacle—this job of  
the enraged husband—  
beware the mangy cur, disgustingly  
happy—good for nothing  
howling at the merciful sky—  
I get lost here, all these memories  
and the piles of critical editions.

Stick it to me, your dick,  
says Iseut (would you believe it)—  
everybody believes it  
to the point, precisely, where  
God is hard pressed preaching love—  
God, would you believe it,

rustling in flowing robes  
and complicit—  
otherwise how explain it—  
they never stop,  
he's going to kill her right there under him.

Iseut, black sky between her tits—  
makes me hungry— me  
who never thought I'd need  
to throw myself on the bread—  
this piece of Iseut:  
thorax night,  
tear at it with my teeth—likewise  
smashed dishes  
around them—something  
makes them lose it.

**Five Poems**

Dream where fear  
is queen  
as in a painting  
where birds strike  
the window  
before devouring each other

My yard is covered  
with a layer  
of unknown material

I make the rounds  
of the boutique  
of evil spells  
finding  
neither prayer  
nor magic formula

\*

Children also  
are destroyed  
there's a fire  
behind the barricades  
I can imagine  
the chapel full  
of hands, of sighs  
piles of shoes lie unclaimed

abandoned  
on the marble floor  
war took a picture  
of its people  
but despair here  
has no bond  
it's fluid  
perfect  
like the song  
of a shell

\*

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**MARTIN ANDERSON** has been publishing with *Shearsman* since the very first issue. Recent books from Shearsman: *The Hoplite Journals* (2006), *Belonging* (2009), and *The Hoplite Journals XXX–LVIX* (2010).

**ISOBEL ARMSTRONG** is Emeritus Professor of English at Birkbeck, University of London, and a Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of English Studies at the University of London. She was featured in the anthology *Infinite Difference* (Shearsman Books, 2010), and in a chapbook, *Desert Collages* (Equipage, 2007). Critical work includes *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830–1880* (OUP, 2008).

**CURTIS BAUER** won the John Ciardi Poetry Prize for his first poetry collection, *Fence Line* (BkMk, 2004), and has been a finalist for the *New Letters* Poetry Prize, The Willis Barnstone Translation Prize, and The *Glimmer Train* Poetry Open. He is the publisher and editor of Q\_Ave Press Chapbooks and teaches creative writing and translation at Texas Tech.

**SEAN BURN** has 3 full-length collections, most recently *wings are giving out* (Cardigan: Skrev Press, 2009).

**SUSAN CONOLLY**'s first collection of poetry, *For the Stranger*, was published by the Dedalus Press in 1993. Her second collection, *Forest Music*, was published by Shearsman Books in 2009. She lives in Drogheda, Ireland.

**RAY DiPALMA** lives in New York City; he is the author of a number of books, most recently *The Ancient Use of Stone: Journals and Daybooks 1998–2008*. (Otis Books, Los Angeles, 2009). His visual works (including artist's books, collages, and prints) have been exhibited in numerous shows in the United States, Europe, Japan and South America, and in a one-person show at the Stempelplatt's Gallery in Amsterdam.

**GARETH DURASOW** has work in *Onedit*, *Great Works*, *Spine*, *Grist* and *Freak Lung* and *Sunfish*, and a chapbook, *Obelus* (Knives, Forks & Spoons, 2010).

**AMY EVANS'** poetry, art-work and critical writing have been published in *Openned*, *Jacket* and *The Wolf* respectively. She is completing a PhD on Robert Duncan at King's College London; she was co-editor, with Shamoan Zamir, of *The Unruly Garden: Robert Duncan and Eric Mottram, Letters & Essays* (Peter Lang: 2007).

**JUAN ANTONIO GONZÁLEZ-IGLESIAS** is Professor of Latin Philology at the University of Salamanca, Spain. He has translated Ovid, Horace, Catullus, Stendhal and Sebastiano Grasso. In addition to *Eros es más* (selected by *El Cultural*, *El Mundo* as Spain's best collection of poetry in 2007), his other collections of poetry include *La hermosura del héroe* (Premio Vicente Núñez, 1993), *Esto es mi cuerpo* (Visor, 1997), *Más hermosura* (CELYA, 2002), *Un ángulo me basta* (Visor, 2002) and *Olimpicas* (El Gaviero Ediciones, 2005).

**ANNE GORRICK** lives in New York's Hudson Valley. She has two volumes from Shearsman: *Kyotologic* (2008) and *I-Formation, Book 1* (2010).

**PENNY HARTER** lives in New Jersey, and is the author of a number of books, most recently *The Night Marsh* (WordTech Editions, 2008). Penny and her late husband, Bill Higginson, both featured in early editions of *Shearsman*.

**PAOL KEINEG** is a Breton poet and dramatist who writes in both Breton and French. He teaches at Duke University in North Carolina and has published almost 20 books, including *Lieux communs* (Gallimard, 1980), *Triste Tristan* (éditions Apogée, 2004), *Les trucs sont démolis* (Le temps qu'il fait/Obsidiane, 2008). In English: *Boudica* (tr. Rosmarie Waldrop. Burning Deck, 1994)

**PHILIP KUHN's** *at maimonides table* was published by Shearsman in 2009. His co-translations of German poet, Gertrud Kolmar, will also appear from Shearsman. The text here is scission 4 from *how to make radical leaflets*, just published by itinerant press.

**JOHN LEVY** lives in Tucson, Arizona, where he works as an attorney. He was one of the contributing editors in the first series of Shearsman. He has recently published a prose volume, *A Mind's Cargo Shifting* (First Intensity Press); his last poetry collection was *Oblivion, Tyrants, Crumbs* (2008) from the same publisher.

**JOHN MATEER** lives in Western Australia, but was born in South Africa. Books include *The West* (Fremantle Press, 2010), *The Ancient Capital of Images* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2005), and the bilingual volume *Ex-white/Einmal-Weiss: South African Poems* (Klagenfurt: Sisyphus, 2009). Forthcoming is *Southern Barbarians* (Giramondo).

**CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON** is one of the UK's finest poets. Carcanet published his *Collected Poems* in 2008, and Shearsman recently published his *Poems 2006–2009*, comprising all the work composed since the *Collected* was assembled. Christopher Middleton's work was featured in the first series of *Shearsman* in 1981–1982.

**ANDREA MOORHEAD** is editor of *Osiris* and a translator of contemporary Francophone poetry. She publishes in both French and in English. Poems and translations have appeared in journals such as *Abraxas*, *Great River Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Autre Sud*, *Estuaire*, *La Traductière*, and *Metamorphoses*. Collections include *From a Grove of Aspen* (University of Salzburg Press), *le vert est fragile*, and *Présence de la terre* (Écrits des Forges). Translations include books by Hélène Dorion, Abderrahmane Djelfaoui and Madeleine Gagnon.

**TOBY OLSON** divides his time between Philadelphia and North Truro, on Cape Cod. His most recent novel is *Tampico* (University of Texas Press, 2008); his most recent poetry collection is *Darklight* (Shearsman, 2007). Toby Olson's work was featured in the first series of *Shearsman*.

**SIMON PERCHIK** has been a regular in *Shearsman* since its first days. His first six books were all published by the Elizabeth Press in the 1960s and 1970s, and his collected poems, *Hands Collected 1949–1999*, appeared in 2000 (Pavement Saw Press, 2000; 2nd ed., 2003). Subsequent books include *Touching the Headstone* (Stride, 2000), *Rafts* (Parsifal Press, 2007), *Greatest Hits: 1964–2008* (Pudding House Publications).

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**ÉLISE TURCOTTE** was born in Sorel, Québec, and has published ten collections of poetry, for which she has received numerous prizes. Her most recent books are *Ce qu'elle voit* (Noroît, 2010), *Piano mélancolique* (Noroît, 2005) and *Sombre ménagerie* (Noroît, 2002). She has also published several books for children, short stories, and three novels.

**ROSMARIE WALDROP** appeared as both poet and translator in the first series of *Shearsman*. She is the author of a number of books, six of them from New Directions (most recently *Driven to Abstraction*, 2010), and the translator of many more, from both German and French, with her many renderings of Edmond Jabès justly celebrated. With husband Keith, she runs Burning Deck Press, a beacon of light in the darkness for several decades.

**ALAN WALL** is a professor at the University of Chester. Author of a number of novels, most recently *Sylvie's Riddle* (London: Quartet Books, 2008), his poetry is published by Shearsman: *Gilgamesh* (2008), *Alexander Pope at Twickenham* (2008) and *Doctor Placebo* (2010).