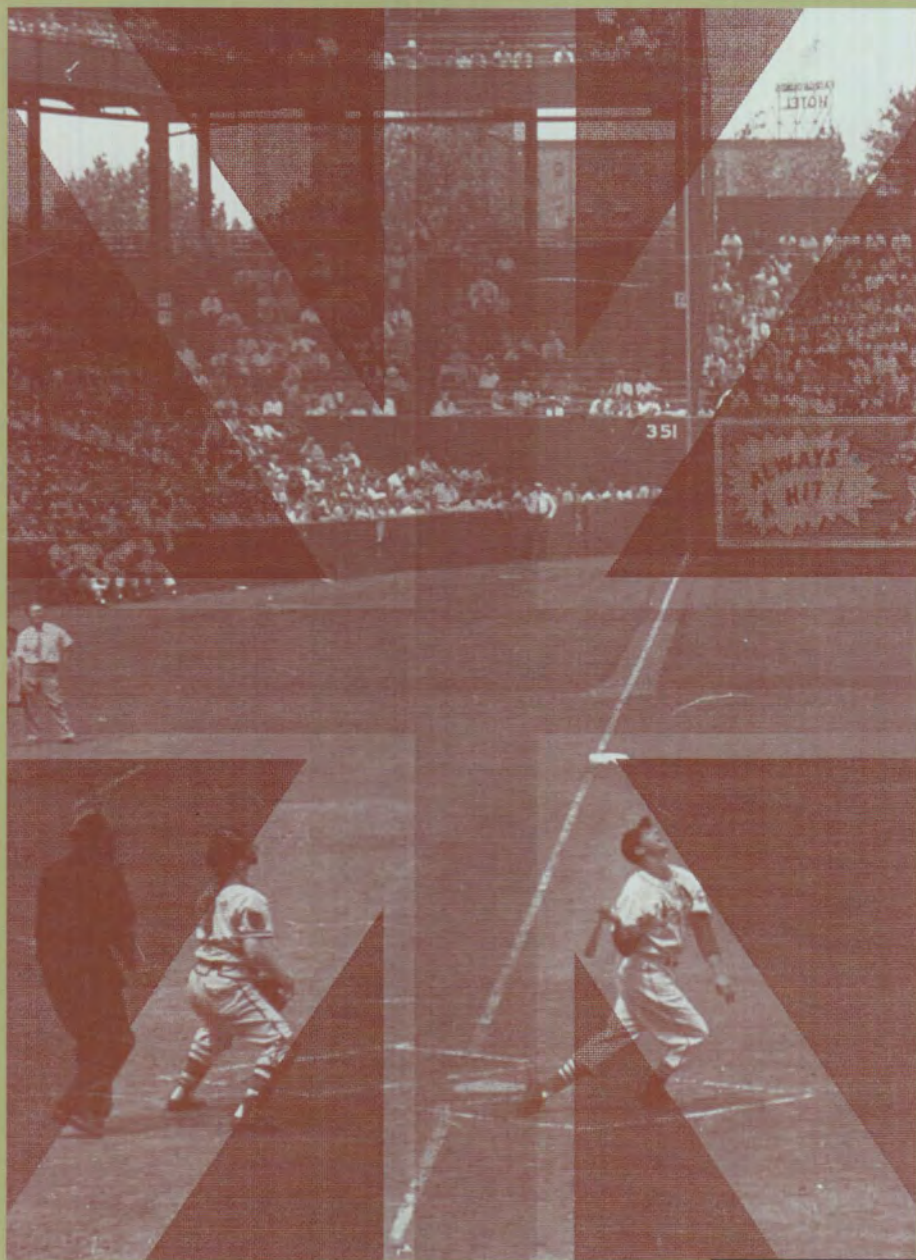


# New Orleans Review

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 22, NUMBER 2



NEW BRITISH POETRY

\$6



# New Orleans Review

Volume 22, Number 2

Summer 1996



LOYOLA  
UNIVERSITY  
NEW ORLEANS

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A CONFEDERACY OF RECENT  
WELSH, SCOTTISH,  
NORTHERN IRISH, IRISH AND  
ENGLISH WRITING

EDITED FOR NEW ORLEANS REVIEW  
BY

RICHARD GODDEN

## Ruth Bidgood

Born in South Wales, and of North Wales descent, she lives in the remote Mid-Welsh countryside, from which much of her work derives. Her more recent publications are *Kindred* (Poetry Wales Press, 1986) and *Selected Poems* (Seren; 1992; runner up to Welsh Arts Council Book of the Year, 1993). These poems are taken from *The Fluent Moment* (due from Seren, Summer 1996).

### THE FLUENT MOMENT

Against an inner wall of the small church  
leans a symbol-stone, encapsulating  
all things know, at rest. Sober-faced Sun,  
rayed with crisp flames, is King of a static world.

But in the porch, ivy has climbed  
right through the walls, insinuating  
tough stems in to crevices above the arch;  
and flows high up in dark luxuriance,  
forcing an over-shoulder glance, a thought  
of all things built to fall, falling to rise.

The future has been and has been.  
There is a movement here like Escley stream  
that down from slopes of Cefn arrives  
and in the same fluent moment leaves.

## SWEETNESS (TREFECA FAWR)

(The Calvinistic Methodist evangelist Howell Harries of Coleg Trefeca rented Trefeca Fawr as a farm from his brother Thomas.)

Overhead, plaster is joyous  
with ferment of fruit, opulence of harvest.  
This was his farm, the Preacher.  
Dizzy with the Word, he could still  
contain the crown's excess.  
What need of earth's honey?  
A man threw away his harp,  
a girl gave up dancing. Sweetness,  
we have had great sweetness, they gloried.

But on his farmhouse ceilings  
is the land's praise and challenge.  
No end here to leaves' dance;  
they whirl in still white while the house lasts.  
Silence holds endless harvest music.  
Up there in swag, row, cluster, flaunt  
in profusion sweet, sweet apples  
for the longing mouth.

## Duncan Bush

Duncan Bush's recent collection *Masks* (Seren Books) was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation in 1994 and won the 1995 Arts Council of Wales Book Of The Year Award. He teaches writing at University of Wales College, Newport, and is currently Visiting Writer, Koblenz University, Germany. He divides his time between Wales and continental Europe.

### GILL, 1970

Coming back to Beaumaris for a reading  
for a moment I daydreamed you'd be  
in the audience at the Bulkeley Hotel; had seen  
my name in the festival programme— still knew

it, even— and the leap of credulity not too great  
from the days when I was here with Turriff's  
(as some roughneck in a western was "with Chisum").  
"Travelling men," we parked on a new wasteground

weekly, like a circus: village by village,  
house by house, converting Anglesey—  
not to Christianity but North Sea gas. Semi-skilled  
labour, I got issued tyro's jobs, but learned

to judge home-pride harshly by grease  
old in the cooker, decades-long filth behind a fridge.  
Yet training-school promises  
of sex-avid housewives simmered

on somewhere just off the back-burner  
while married women brought us cups of tea  
as we lay on our backs and fiddled  
black-fingered with nipples, or olives, or screws—

fitters' tales apocryphal as the gassed budgie  
sellotaped upright on its perch. I slept alone  
in the back of the turquoise crewbus

to save on lodgings, and after work

bathed nightly in the Irish sea. I was clean  
as the pebbles, though my hair went salt-stiff, copra  
to the comb. Shirt open to the chest, I even sported  
a beachcomber's red bandanna. I think I thought

I was Rimbaud, but knew enough to keep the secret  
from my workmates. I sensed, though, the exogamic  
instinct of girls in small Welsh towns  
the evening I strolled across that bar in Holyhead

— the floor just cleared as if for dancing by a brawl—  
and asked you for a light. We met twice,  
and the night after your parents left on holiday  
you took me home to Amlwch. I drew

my first freshwater bath for weeks, and tried out®  
your mother's bottled crystals and shampoos  
before I stepped forth, slick of head and reeking  
sweet as Kuchiouk-Hanem... Now rising

book of poems in hand, in 1995, a birthday short  
of fifty, I wonder how I'd know you if you'd come.  
Dark hair, then, fringed. Brown eyes. Legs I'd  
noticed down a room... But otherwise, recalling only

my sore foreskin and your forename - like that of a girl  
met by another man, on another island, and that  
spree vanished too but for the letters scrolled  
a lifetime under a blue eagle or crimson heart.

## AND THE NIGHTS INTOLERABLE

Summer time, and clocks go back,  
and nights go on so late, so sunlit  
that the heart  
longs sometimes for a fire, and early

dark outside, and no blackbird  
singing across the gardens for joy,  
because why  
else do they sing like that?

It's summertime, and they have built  
their nests of straw, and so clear  
their song is now  
at evening, in slanted sunshine

or supernumerous rain,  
the hawthorn-boughs sagging with  
that drenched  
may-scented, bride-white weight

of blossom which is like a grief  
upon the aged  
in their bungalows, whose families  
have flown, and the light

terrible past bedtime.

Professor of Poetry at the University of Glamorgan, he has published fourteen books of poetry, criticism and anthologies. He won the Eric Gregory Award in 1972 and the National Poetry Competition in 1984. Recent publications include, *How to Study Modern Poetry* (Macmillan) and *Taken for Pearls* (Seven Books).

## SONNETS FOR GARETH AT AMHERST

### I

This is just to say our visit was fine  
— Thank everyone for that typical American hospitality—  
And that we're safely home and back in the old routine.  
Though we were delayed at JFK, and I wobbled a bit. Three  
Gins saw me through the turbulence and darkness.  
At Heathrow, behind us there was a flurry and a lot  
Of fuss as Paul & Linda and the kids came through. Who'd guess  
The Dakota had ever happened? The films I shot  
Came out fine and that one from the yellow cab  
Of the sidewalk where Lennon was killed  
Is sharp and sunny. You and I perched on that slab  
Of John's rusting Chevy Malibu's hood on Long Island  
Is a posy classic. And the green, smooth, whale's-tooth stone  
You picked from Jones Beach is on your bedroom sill, at home.



Thought I'd better write a letter— *So What*-  
Tell you all about the weather— *So What*-  
I'm listening to Miles Davis, that magic  
Jazz-horn Mozart of our too slick, synthesised age—  
*So What* - its insistent, two-note tick  
That sticks in the brain. You say you've seen Dylan on stage—  
He was acoustic, The Man, a 60s has-been you used to hate.  
Then, in Amherst, James Taylor live, mellow and so what  
If he's my age and Mum's. Your view from the Empire State  
Was clear for 25 Manhattan miles? Soon you'll be locked tight  
By snow in your cabin-fevered dorm. Winter's closing in,  
Your Christmas will be white, and some. So what can you do  
But play American tunes, the anthems for where we've all been.  
Wrap warm and stay cool, son. Book that flight— we miss you.

Paul Henry was born in Aberystwyth in 1959. A Welsh speaker, he originally wrote songs which were broadcast on national radio and television. He received an E.C. Gregory Award in 1989. He currently combines freelance writing with working as a Careers Adviser in Cardiff. His two collections of poetry are *Time Pieces* and, published this year by Seren, *Captive Audience*.

## CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

At the traffic lights outside the gaol  
I looked up to the small cages  
set in grey stone. It was Elgar's  
Cello Concerto on the radio, pining out  
to my father up there, bowing back  
along the flown years, asking why  
the boy inside his old man  
had become a prisoner so late.

At one with the smiling dead at times  
I catch his face in a rear-view mirror.

There are no rehearsals for the last movement.  
The slow cadences of summer migrate  
without expecting to fall from such heights.  
The soul splits open from its cell  
and bows a last plea for open arms,  
for love, milk, the womb's beat,  
the slow - quick-quick - slow  
of his heart in hers.

At one with the smiling dead at times  
he is caught between green and red.  
At such moments I hear, adagio,  
his sad music, drive on.

## LOVE BIRDS

They rendezvous each night, at ten,  
for ten minutes, behind closed eyes,  
he in his cell, she in the brown rocker.  
And once a fortnight, for half an hour,  
their fingers form a desperate nest,  
remembering the robin he'd fed  
that misses him at the back door,  
its freedom disorientated.

The screws must laugh at these love birds,  
each week's confetti of letters,  
or secretly gain faith from matching  
her sentences to his.

He hears her singing *Porgi Amor*  
in the difficult, unreal dawns  
when the walls barge further into him  
and terrible lights flash in his mind.  
When the bars of his hand close tightly on  
what might prove the last breath  
of some precious, invisible creature.

She knows all this, waiting  
in the early kitchen, lovingly timing  
two cracked eggs in a saucepan.

Born in Tredegar, south Wales in 1954. Formerly a steelworker and a school-teacher. Now divides his time between writing and lecturing in creative writing at the University of Glamorgan. Winner of an Eric Gregory Award in 1984, his publications include two collections of poetry, *This* (winner of the Welsh Arts Council Young Writer Prize in 1985) and *Snaring Heaven* (1990), and two novels, *Shifts* (winner of the Welsh Arts Council Fiction Award in 1989) and *Griffri* (shortlisted for the Book of the Year Award 1992).

## MY MOTHER MISSED THE BEAUTIFUL AND DOOMED

My mother missed the beautiful and doomed  
by a few years.

Where Waugh, hot for some pious ormolu,  
dreamed Brideshead  
she swept carpets, cleaned grates.

Septia expects a tear  
but none comes. She holds  
the yellowed postcard of the House  
at arm's length, beyond her two dead children,  
two atom bombs ago.

'It was like that film. You know. *Rebecca*.'  
She smokes.  
Echo of casual elegance in the wrist, the gesture,  
masks slow scorching of the fuse.  
The drag of air  
accelerates a hundred small ignitions.  
'The drive and all. They had a maze.'  
Ash hardens into brightness  
small flames eat the paper  
worming back along tobacco galleries.  
She frowns and jewels, salvers, gleam the harder.  
'Her Ladyship 'ould doll up to the nines  
come dinner, like a filmstar.'  
The mind drags air through fifty year of fading

burns off the filmdream, comes to other stuff,  
makes it glow again.

Through half open doors  
down perspectives of the glassy rooms  
she hears them.

*Iu. Mmn. Yiss.* Tongues all twangs and daggers.  
The Foreign Secretary stands in the hall  
his collar of vermiculated astrakhan  
flawed with sparkling rain.  
She kneels by the scuttle with  
an egg of coal in either hand.  
His chauffeur in doublebreasted rig loiters,  
one glove removed, ruffles her hair,  
sets her neat white cap awry.  
'Little Cinderella' he says.

She frowns to brighten memory's fuse,  
looks down the maze of galleries where  
her people cut the coal.  
The hand had rained a blow or a flirtation,  
the words half flattered her and kept her down.

She glances sideways at the tight black boot,  
the echo of the bentarmed cross.  
Krupp's bombs rain now on undefended children  
glimmer through smoking Barcelona.

Unwilled complicity can hurt so much.  
She clutches at the deaths of millions,  
symbols of self lacerations.

'A skivvy all my life' she says  
and strikes another match.

Born in South Wales 43 years ago, he is active in the environmental movement (editing *Essays on the Environment of Wales* [Seren, 1994]). He has published 6 volumes of poetry and a volume of essays, *Watching the Fire Eater*, which was Book of the Year in Wales in 1993. He was writer-in-residence for 9 months in Saskatchewan, Canada (94/95).

## ON A GEOLOGICAL MAP OF THE BRITISH ISLANDS

I stood upon an estuary  
    Of grey purslane,  
Earth's crust that held me  
Soft as a fontanelle,

Then stubbed my toe  
    In Green Dragon Lane  
And felt the words beneath  
Shudder in their strata.

Walking on I found  
    Within Cog y Brain  
Limestone is a honeycomb  
Where water sweetens

Whilst through Spitalfields  
    A footfall echoed  
As if a chasm stretched below  
All those who marched when I marched there.

Inside the Bay Horse  
    On West Nile Street  
The coalseams hung their prisms  
In the pub mirror

And buying bread  
    On a Dublin thoroughfare  
I saw dolomite bloom

In shopgirls' skeletons,

Married I lay down

Heartside over millstone grit,

Eavesdropping

On a new vocabulary,

Then breathed granite's

Cancerous spore

At Fox Tor Mire, its acid tumours

Resplendent in the west.

Home again I dreamed

On a bed of quartz

Through the index of delirium.

And in that hour my daughter was born,

This thumbprint in her clay.



## Sheenagh Pugh

Born in 1950, Sheenagh Pugh lives in Cardiff and teaches Creative Writing at the University of Glamorgan. She has published seven collections with Seren, of which the latest is *Sing for the Taxman*, 1993. Her next collection, *Id's Hospit*, is due out in 1997.

### THE BEACHCOMBER

(in memory of George Mackay Brown)

The man with the North Sea at his door  
picked up stories, tide-washed and glinting,  
out of dulse and wrack.

Shaft of sun striking on stone  
in the ancient burial chamber:  
an image, lighting a line.

In the winding street of Stromness  
the shadows of saints and seafarers  
hardened; found voices.

And what need to travel further  
than the shore where all time  
tugged at his feet?

Describes herself as "an outsider in Wales who lives in the hills and looks at history in the perspective of geological time, not of politics."

## WHY TAKE AGAINST MYTHOLOGY?

That twilight skyline, for example,  
the more I look at it,  
the more I see a skull  
crushed into the hill, its nose  
chipped flat, its jaw  
thrust up, that full bush  
of genitals stirring just  
in the right place.

See him? No, stand here,  
this way, clear  
of the house. Now uncork  
some magnum of imagination  
and inflame your heart  
with my enchanted giant  
sunk past resurrection  
in dreams, or in art.

But make him art, not fact!  
For when daylight comes back  
it will tear him apart.  
And how will you live  
in a Wales made of  
Cambrian rock? No sleep  
in the reason for mountains,  
no mind in the dark?

Hilary Llewellyn Williams lives near Carmarthen in southwest Wales. Her first collection, *The Tree Calendar*, appeared in 1987; her second *Book of Shadows*, by Seren Books, in 1990. Her poems have been widely anthologised in Britain and overseas - for instance in David Lloyd's *The Urgency of Identity* (Triquarterly Books, Illinois, 1994). A new collection is awaiting publication, and she is currently working on a prehistorical novel. "Animaculture" previously appeared in the *Observer/Arvon Prizewinners Anthology* of 1994.

## ANIMACULTURE

The gardening angels tuck their robes  
into their belts, pull their boots on  
cover their heads with haloes and set out

to cultivate the world. Each one  
has hoe and sickle, spade and watering-can  
and wings, and a small patch

to care for. They come in all colours:  
dawn, rain or dusk, rose, marigold,  
moss, midnight; gliding between

reflections, rarely seen. At three  
years old, occasionally I'd catch  
the flick of a wing, a glitter on the air

a tickle of warmth behind me, someone there  
playing roll-in-the-grass with me  
pushing my swing. And at night

my gardening angel laid her head  
beside me, smelling of daisies,  
and breathed with me. At my maiden flight

along our street, my feet grazing the privet,  
past lamp-posts and garden gates, her voice

in my ear steered me and said—

This is the way to heaven, along here.  
Since then, so many false choices:  
knotted with weeds, I'm overgrown

and parched as dust. Who will open  
the door to the garden, who will water  
me now? Wise child, I trusted my own

right words, I knew the angel's name  
and that death was part of the game.  
I find it very hard to remember her.

The gardening angels prune and propagate  
moving in secret through the soul's acres;  
have I called on mine too late?

Whistling, she strolls in from long ago,  
and she hands me the rake and hoe—  
Your turn, she says; and I feel my wings stir.

Her first collection, *Ophelia and other poems*, was shortlisted for the Scottish Book of the Year awards, and she has received a writer's bursary from the Scottish Arts Council. She has co-edited two anthologies of Scottish women's writing, and is currently a creative writing tutor in adult education.

## ANNE FRANK'S HOUSE

The whole house smells of herbs:  
their musty grassy fragrance  
filters out from rooms  
where they hang in drying bunches  
tarragon / marjoram / dill  
from dark rooms with windows painted black  
to keep the sunlight out  
to keep their bitter-sweet, their meadow taste  
oregano / rosemary / thyme

Outside, the streets are treacherous  
and the city has grown vast:  
no trams allowed, no bikes  
He walks: the branded star  
glares like a scar

At the house in Prisengracht  
he breathes in herb scents  
goes among the drying bunches  
their greens fading to grey  
parsley / chervil / sage  
Soft handfuls, so light  
falling through his fingers  
He breathes in the scent  
takes it like snuff  
fennel / valerian / mint

Above these rooms, the annex  
linoleum / wallpaper / lightbulb

He makes plans, carefully  
creep / whisper / tiptoe  
Outside, the streets are giving way  
beneath his feet

He bundles the family up here  
linoleum / wallpaper / lightbulb  
creep / whisper / tiptoe  
Keep the slats above the window panes

This is where she begins  
This is where she writes it down  
pen / ink / notebook  
Her only secret place  
among the jumble of family  
This is where she tells the story of her life  
a story for the world:  
'I will call it "The Annex"'  
linoleum / wallpaper / lightbulb

This is where she writes it down  
pen / ink / notebook  
creep / whisper / tiptoe

Dreams of fresh air / sunlight / dapple of canals  
Dreams of bike rides / schoolfriends / flowers for sale  
Dreams of death camps / bright stars / soldiers  
Dreams of people herded up on tilted streets  
of train doors / slamming

linoleum / nazis / light  
bulb / marjoram / soldiers  
wallpaper / train door / rosemary  
dill  
linoleum  
diary  
diary  
diary

After the camps  
after the end—  
he comes back to the house on Prisengracht

linoleum / wallpaper / lightbulb  
diary  
the way his daughter told it

“The Annex”: her words, out in the air  
out of their secret notebook  
into the world

as easily as herbs blown in the wind  
their soft greens scattering  
flaky as ashes



## John Burnside

Born in Dunfermline, 1955. Currently Writer-in-Residence at the University of Dundee. He has published five books of poetry, the most recent being *Myth of the Twin* (Jonathan Cape: London, 1994) and *Swimming in the flood* (Jonathan Cape: London, 1995). He also writes short stories and radio work, and is currently working on a first novel, *The Dumb House*, to be published by Cape in 1997.

### CHIAROSCURO

Fixing his practised gaze  
on the darkest wall,

the artist unexpectedly reveals  
a martyred saint.

The ribs are trodden in,  
he's crowned with thorns,

and someone has thrust a lantern to his face  
to offer the coup de grace.

The finest glaze  
is vested in this blade;

but somewhere else, behind a veil of smoke,  
the kitchen girl is lit, against her will,

turning away from the gleam  
of gutted fish

and letting her own knife  
trickle from her hands

as if she'd just recalled  
a lover's skin;

and somewhere else,  
beyond the chandler's yard,

October begins in the furthest  
angle of brick,

a thinning of the light,  
a splash of gold,

the neighbours' orchards, moving slowly  
closer, in the first grey wash of dawn.

## CHILDREN SLEDDING IN THE DARK, MAGDALEN GREEN, FEBRUARY 1996

We have studied the colours of night:  
loan path ambers, hedges dipped in bronze,  
jade-tinted snow

and nothing is wholly true  
till we believe:  
the sky is glass, the distance is a train,

angels are sealed in the gaps  
of walls, their fledged wings  
spreading through mortar,

and under the lamps, possessed by the pull of the dark,  
these children hold the glow  
of the imagined,

perfect and hard, arriving at copper or gold  
by guesswork; trusting what's contrived in flesh  
to echo in the rooms of gravity.

(*In The Blood*, Bloodaxe, 1995)

Born in Glasgow in 1936 he now lives in Edinburgh where for a number of years he was BBC Scotland's head of radio drama. His poetry collections include *In the Kibble Palace* (1987), *The Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1992) and *In the Blood* (1995), all Bloodaxe Books; and *At the Aviary* (Capetown: Snailpress). Plays include *The King* (Penguin New English Dramatists); *The Burning* and *The Aquarium* (Calder); and *Play Donkey* and *Thistlewood* (Woodhouse Books). Most recently *By the Pool* has had its American premiere at Cleveland Play House, Ohio; and *The Dominion of Fancy* has been in a Pitlochry Festival Theatre Season.

## WHITE TULIPS

Over the years, now decades, memories sporadically  
surface for no seeming reason: among them one  
of a classmate's sister who, playing one day  
at the Creamery, must have tripped and fallen in.  
I still shudder involuntarily, at the pain  
encountered, the scalding of her skin; and can  
but pray her engulfing was mercifully speedy.

As I sit in the garden this fragrant May afternoon  
she comes to mind, incongruous light-years away.  
First there's the shiver that coursed through us,  
who at that age thought ourselves scatheless.  
Only after this, do I consciously take in  
these tulips beside me, their ghostly whiteness  
grown suddenly diaphanous in the light breeze.

These poems are from a sequence called *Translations* about Scottish placenames in New Zealand, which is itself part of a book-length sequence under the working title of *Bloodlines*. "Tinted Monochrome" has been broadcast on Radio Scotland.

Born in New Zealand, Gerrie Fellows did the latter part of her growing up in London and has since lived in Scotland. *Technologies and Other Poems* was published by Polygon in 1990. In 1991 she was awarded a Scottish Arts Council Travel grant which made possible the journey to New Zealand on which *Bloodlines* is based.

## ORIGINATING LIGHT

The photographer has printed onto the glossy page  
the transparent purple of a picnic rug  
her husband and his niece held by its checkerboard  
of familiarity and divergence    squint  
smiling towards her, tartan fringed between avenues  
of oak birch sycamore poplar crossed in sunlight  
at the empty centre of a colonial dream  
Barrhill's market square ringed with a whispering  
congregation of grasses    the township stunted  
to a handful of houses, a church, a schoolhouse  
the deciduous trees    a dappled network  
of lacy bark through which the winter's rays vibrate  
The originating light is what she wants to celebrate  
though she knows it fades the frayed and ancient  
family rug    and illuminates    as an absence  
falling across the photograph    a pattern  
of land and blood    the place she has loved  
for its peace    a scene of struggle in the lumbering  
pace of history    the energy of collision  
striking the nineteenth century concrete church  
in whose muted interior    at the heart  
of their winter picnic    her own tapestry kneeler  
flares in sunburst    a bright hosanna

Here is a winter photograph: a suburban beach  
a settler named in unwitting prescience  
a memorial to a people who at the outer edges  
of another country had not yet become history  
Birdmen he might have thought them claw foot  
hunters with rope or quill knit noose for bird fat  
who had no place in the world of iron  
He had never travelled so far for these islands  
sun blest, Britannic would be the future  
those in deep Atlantic the past, surely  
So that the shell girt multiplicity  
of Hirta, Dun, Soay, Boreray was diminished  
to the single name St Kilda signifying  
a line of sand dunes behind which would be built  
an amusement park with a green concrete snake  
like a wave and a whale with its mouth open  
all suitably desolate  
The stern hulled islands' vertical metropolis  
of gannets, their fulminating oil rich cities  
muffled to a squawk of pink footed gulls  
above the grey red roofs of the bungalows  
and the whole occluded in the observer's eye  
by a shiver of hail to a fittingly grainy monochrome.

Born in Glasgow, 1920. Professor of English at Glasgow University until 1980. Paperback edition of *Collected Poems* published February 1996 by Carcanet Press. Volume of *Collected Translations* due from Carcanet next year. Most recent book of poems *Sweeping Out the Dark* (Carcanet, 1994). He is collaborating with saxophonist Tommy Smith on a sequence of ten poems, *Beasts of Scotland*, to be performed in July, 1996, at the Glasgow International Jazz Festival.

## VIRTUAL AND OTHER REALITIES— 36

### More Questions than Answers

'Can acupuncture cure pins and needles?'  
Can bumbledom regalanize the beadles?  
Can the fed hand bite back what it wheedles?

Improbabilities are *de rigueur*.  
Hearts are primed to heat-seek, *alles Natur*.  
Pass me the ashen light, *por favor*.

You make the story as you go you make  
the story even if you go you take  
the story on the go and watch it break.

So far this poem does not have a focus.  
The wandering locum cannot keep his locus.  
Lit, sweet, hand-rolled, we're passed to friends to smoke us.

The curtains nearly meet, the iron steams.  
Reality, though straining at the seams,  
may still press on, hunched there in the moonbeams.

All right that's it. Make a kirk or a mill o't.  
You are not like to find nothing of note.  
Buy a season and don't miss the boat.

Transclusion

I met a wild man far out in the Net.  
He called for any help that he could get.  
He dreamed he was in universal debt.

He said the lords of Vega, the commissioners  
who prowl the scowling Coalsack take no prisoners.  
They kill the access code for late petitioners.

Lost in an overload of gamelans,  
cancer statistics, shark hunts, royal fans,  
bibliographies of bibliographies, scans

for cloning, fractal landscapes, hacker jokes,  
monologues from interstellar soaks,  
the buzz, the garbage, the mad search, the hoax -

he shivered as he pounded the last key  
and got a void, then a high summons, and then me.  
I told him, though we suffered, we were free,

there was no debt, rather the universe  
was in debt to us, and we could still immerse  
its terrors in one tear, one line of verse,

the spring of consciousness it can't unparch,  
the love it passes blindly in its march  
through darkness to an untriumphal arch.

He wept a little, as I left him there,  
but tapped his *adios*. I made him swear  
an everlasting rain check on despair.



Founder and editor of *Northlight Poetry Review*, she has published widely in magazines and anthologies. She lives in Glasgow.

## ON ISLAND TIME

At first,  
still on island time, I'd wake  
half-listening  
for the fishing boats returning  
mobbed by gulls  
to the harbour

or I'd glance to the window  
mid-afternoon  
expecting to see the *Ola*  
heading out.

But I live inland  
an ocean away  
embarked on a new love.

No wave sound here  
no gull mob

only my heart  
set like a sail  
to carry me forward.

Ruth Carr (formerly Hooley) was born in Belfast in 1953 where she still lives and works part-time as a tutor of adults. She edited an anthology of Northern Irish Women Writers, *The Female Line*, in 1986 and is currently associate editor of *HU* poetry magazine. Her work has been widely published in journals and anthologies including *Map-Makers' Colours* (Nuage, Montreal), *Sleeping with Monsters*, (Wolfhound, Dublin, 1990) and *Ireland's Women: Writings Past and Present* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1994). She is a founding member of Word of Mouth Poetry Collective whose anthology will be coming out with Blacktaff Press in September.

REMNANT

your scent that I carry  
fragile as the moth on my old winter coat

your scent that disintegrates  
at the mildest inquiry  
the brush of one hair of crushable slub

your scent that I quarry  
in the recess of remembered places

the cave of your arms  
the cup of your palm  
the nape of your mythical neck

Your scent that cuts me adrift  
on cedarwood and water  
uncontainable as the sea

Belfast-born poet, Gerald Dawe has published four collections of poetry, including *Sunday School* (1991) and *Heart of Hearts* (1995). He has also published literary criticism, including *Against Piety*, essays in Irish poetry and politics. He lived in the west of Ireland for twenty years before moving to Dublin where he teaches at Trinity College.

### NINETIES IDYLL

From the unscathed London sky  
a gull reconnoitres those sleeping rough;  
joggers in shell-suits and woolie gloves;  
the deep-water wharf and fuel dump

that once were the docks. Phones ring  
non-stop and security cameras scan  
the clear-way, underpass, the landscaped roads.  
The bus comes and goes without a soul on board.

*Kristallnacht, 1938*

Observe the distracted faces of these men  
who are Jews, attempting to march and look casual.  
See, too, the shoddy uprightness  
of those who are leading this forced march,

but do not miss the woman's shy smile  
and the tree men under the trees  
who look in different directions all at once.  
This shot is seen through the eyes of a smiling woman.

HERO AT LANDSDOWNE

The thugs we watch and love to hate  
have left the island.  
In this particular photograph I've kept,  
the skin-headed patriot

looks as if he's singing in an opera.  
Behind, all is chaos,  
and we are appropriately shocked at such  
hellish behaviour.

This crazy, shorn bloke, his bomber  
-jacket half-off, screams  
at the unseen gods way above him  
and below: *Fuckin' bastards. Scum.*

## Kathleen McCracken

She has published four books of poetry, the most recent of which *Blue Light: Bay & College* (1991) was nominated for the Canadian Governor General's Award. Kathleen McCracken lectures in American Studies at the University of Ulster (Jordanstown) and has lived in Belfast for the past four years.

### DEAD ELEGANT

The pipe  
and the woman smoking it

(even  
though it belongs  
to a man she's  
only just met, a foreigner  
who signs approval  
in blinks and nods  
and she's a non-  
smoker by nature

but had to know  
its smoothness  
cradling in her  
own exotic hands

like she wanted  
to inherit a grand-  
father's banjo  
and not the violin,  
or turn 21  
at the Cajun-Creole  
heart of south  
Louisiana —  
a sweeter, slower  
motion than it's been  
back here at home)

her head  
bent to the action  
of flame and fragrance

is a study in binary  
opposition, the chiaroscuro  
mirage that stalked  
Georges de la Tour  
dreaming of *Christ*  
in the *Carpenter Shop*.

'Dead elegant', she says. Meaning  
the pipe  
and the man smoking it

Printed in *The Honest Ulsterman* 100 (Autumn 1995), 76-77

## THE WOMAN AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS

The woman at the top of the stairs  
is my mother.  
She is gazing down  
the twenty-three treaded steps  
and around the bend  
into the darkness where I hunker down  
under a deal table  
set with roses and callum lilies.  
She does not speak but I can hear her  
calling my name— a fractured  
falling cry that brushes the biting reds  
and the starched exclamatory collars  
of the lilies.  
The year is 1847  
and this is the day of my father's funeral.  
(I saw him kill mice, rabbits, a fox  
and once, in the dead of winter, a wolf  
lean and already half-gone.  
He was not a hunter or a tracker but  
as my mother used say, 'Simply a bold man,  
and a brute.')  
I hold a spider, a daddy-long-legs,  
captive in a musty clay pickle jar.  
Under the cork I feel her  
conserving energy, refusing to breathe,  
to spin or build or hunt.  
When the woman at the top of the stairs  
tilts that predictable  
fraction of an inch forward  
I will unstop the jar  
watch her skittle sideways into dark  
as the woman's hand opens and closes  
on emptying air.

September 1995

Currently involved in planning a selected volume, Medbh McGuckian has five other books published by Gallery Press, the last of which is *Captain's Lavender*. She also has an anthology of Irish women's poetry entitled *The Grateful Muse* due from Field Day publications.

## THE SWAN TRAP

I wrote to winter to remain  
watchful, in second place.  
When a word was wanted  
I drowned myself in moonlight.

The dazzle-painting of my inner bone  
and underskin went on burning.  
My wings locked in the rich prolonged  
red of the dead water.

But the wing which is the sail  
is tamer than it was-slow-flowing  
conversation is now as fast as silk:  
railroad songs can put back the trains.

Like upright script my neck's outstretched  
pillow creases take off into the wind:  
like a hint of sea on the air, a gentle blue,  
a blue feather pattern quivers

the much-decorated, swiftest part of the river.  
And so intensely the proper inhabitants  
of the true wild dive together,  
their killable gold-plated shoulders

diving deep, into each other's  
wilder places, where an ancient enemy  
or an evaporating memory  
concentrates on a square-lipped



lasting peace, superbly green,  
its heart as large as a bull,  
its arteries wide enough  
for a child to crawl through.

## THE SURRENDER DANCE

Some snowdrops in an envelope  
had slipped out of heaven  
like an angel's life . . .

I fell in love with a sunflower  
as my window to my father  
not conceived in colour,

some old prayers were answered  
to my sweet kneeling, which I say  
happened before roads were marked

or the Reve D'Or roses put  
all the left hand corner  
into over-cultivated shadow.

The storm of rice and slippers  
was as odd a lullaby  
as full voices and guitar music:

we woke to the Pax Britannica  
with a widowed sense of a world  
ending in a psalm.

## Martin Mooney

Born in Belfast in 1964, currently a permanent member of faculty at Poets House, Co. Antrim. Publications include '*Brecht*' & '*An Exquisite Corpse*': *two long poems* (Lapwing Press, 1992), *Escaping with Cuts and Bruises* (Ulsterman Publications, 1993), a full-length collection of poems, *Grub* (Blackstaff, 1993), which won the 1994 Brendan Behan Memorial Award, and a limited edition pamphlet, *Bonfire Makers*, (Dedalus, 1995).

### *from Operation Sandcastle*

#### CARRICK REVISITED

William of Orange is a rastafarian dwarf.  
The wallpaper shop in Irish Street is having a Border Sale.

When I came here at your age, Jack, this was the regimental  
museum of the Inniskilling Dragoons

with Captain Oates' uniform and diaries in a glass case  
and that pride of Carrick, a Terylene suit

with lapels to the shoulder. Which was what Courtaulds hired  
its thousands for. This is what they wore,

those who grew up without incendiaries and carbombs  
and the random killing of Catholics

and the idea of work as a precarious luxury. Can you believe  
such privileged tribes wore Terylene?

Now there's a chance that you'll not have to remember  
our long war, even from my sidelines—

the windows shaken by a miles-off bomb, the corpse  
of Edgar Graham on the university pavement,

the radio silence after La Mon. For half your two-years' life  
the ceasefire's left the dole queues undisturbed,

and Carrick shaken only by the flypasts  
of the Queen's Flight's VE Day celebrations.

And in time, maybe, they'll display here  
among the muskets and the halberds, the unsundered,

obsolete Aks and homemade submachineguns,  
the outgrown ski masks, the tilt switches

like desk accessories for underworked executives;  
and the demilitarised children can be shown

how tamed these weapons are, how they will never  
bob, rusted but fireable, to the surface—  
but not yet, not while the wallpaper shop  
in Irish Street is having a border sale, and the rasta

Dutchman lords it over the carpark on his plinth, head  
and shoulders above the rest of us, larger than life.

Born in 1958 in Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim. In 1990 a selection of his poems appeared in *The Muck Island Box*, a critically well-received work/image collaboration with the noted Ulster artist, Ross Wilson. His debut volume, *The Mason's Tongue*, is due from Lagan Press (Belfast) in October 1996. He also works as a Literature Tutor with the Worker's Educational Association (Belfast).

## THE MASON'S TONGUE

Although a likeable, charitable soul.  
He had a less than secret tongue;  
So it was removed, and entombed  
A ritual distance from the shore -  
Sealed dumb in the packed sand.

When a young man dug it up  
(Out toiling for some bait)  
It dropped from the wet spade  
On to the cool slab of strand,  
And lay like an odd curl of meat.

The young man cupped it in his hands  
To get a closer look,  
When, stirring on his palms  
And with a strangely mournful note,  
It suddenly began to speak:

*Go tell all the brethren  
There is no rest where I have gone,  
No answer comes from Jah-Bul-On.*

Bewildered, and seized with sudden dread,  
He let the tongue flop to the sand,  
Then scooped it back up with his spade  
And flung it out across the waves.  
Yet, though hushed upon the ocean bed,  
The tongue's words lapped about his head:

*Go tell all the brethren  
There is no rest where I have gone,  
No answer comes from Jah-Bul-On.*

## BREAD OF SORROWS

Voices coming from the cassie:  
*The room needs aired,  
Lift the window open . . . quietly.*

Every townland has one,  
A muck-raking quidnunc:  
She doesn't need to know  
The facts, her mind swells  
With a million scenarios.

A bosom-hugger,  
With the bustling gait of a starling;  
She will tip the wink, nudge  
Knowingly . . . Queen of the regular  
Gabfest at the lintels of doors.

And when her day's work is done,  
Settled before the blazing fire,  
She'll sit there, indulging herself,  
A slice of barmbrack sailing  
Into her open mouth like a boat.

## Dermot Bolger

Born in Dublin in 1959, he is the author of five novels (published by Penguin in the UK, but unpublished in the US), including *The Journey Home* and *A Second Life*. He is also a playwright, publisher and editor of *The Vintage Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction* (New York, 1995).

### ALGAE HIBERNICAE

*collected by William McCalla, 1845*

Your fingers press samples of seaweed down,  
In Roundstone, Connemara, the year of 1845,  
With no sign yet of how neighbours will die.

You cross the rocks, a school master's son,  
Transcribing into Latin from your Gaelic tongue  
The species of each algae you will find.

In the Botanic Garden where your book will rest  
David Moore bends among flowering beds to spot  
A fungal blight beneath rows of potato stalks.

Soon cholera will have plundered your breath,  
Neighbours will disperse like sycamore sepals  
Into open pits, coffin ships and work houses,

Or else slave on follies that will neve match  
The Curvilinear Range Glasshouse sailing above  
The belly of that city swollen with hunger

Where those begging at the gates for bread  
Will watch workmen cough typhus onto glass  
Curving over plants stolen from tropical slopes.

And in the herbarium a space will be found  
For the seaweeds you press with such hope  
Between the pages of your *Algae Hibernicae*,

While barefoot children laugh on the rocks  
Where flies will soon buzz about their mouths,  
Green with seaweed and half digested grass.

#### ASH WEDNESDAY

From a distance the entire city  
Wears a bullet hole in its forehead,  
Except for the track-suited children,  
Racing beneath the builders' cranes,  
With plastic pistols in their hands.

The Lenten box squats on the counter  
Embossed with the starving child  
Staring into the blue photo lens  
As though the click of the shutter  
Would blow its shaved head asunder.

The age of the world is twelve.  
It has nothing left to give up.  
Children inside the limbs of men  
Swarm out, screaming about God,  
And masturbate with their guns.



Born in Portlaoise in 1963. He has published three collections of poems, *The Unwound Clock* (Dedalus, 1990), which won the Patrick Kavanagh Award for Poetry, *Familiar Things* (Dedalus, 1993) and *The Shape of Water* (Dedalus, 1996), as well as a volume of short stories, *Strange Bedfellows* (Salmon, 1991). In 1994 he was Editor of *Poetry Ireland Review*. He currently lives in Dublin where he teaches creative writing workshops at the Irish Writers Centre and the Centre for Talented Youth at Dublin City University. "Untitled" is from *The Shape of Water*.

## FOUND OBJECT

Of course everyone knew what it was,  
except Charlie. 'Hey, look at this!'  
Look at Charlie's big thick head  
and his big cauliflower ears.  
Seven honours in the mock  
and he can't even guess!

'It's for putting on you nose.'  
'No, Charlie, it's for your head.'  
'I know,' said someone (probably me),  
'it must belong to Charlie's dad.'  
Unfair? We're 12 years old, OK?  
We don't know what's below the belt.

## UNTITLED

(for Kaja Montgomery)

Nothing is mine here  
but the symbols of things —  
doorways, streetscapes and wings  
drawn on the footpath  
by a traveller child who,  
when the rain washes out his world,  
sits up and sings.

## Philip Casey

Born in 1950 he now lives in Dublin. He has published three collections of poetry, including *The Year of the Knife*, Poems 1980-1990 (Raven Arts Press, 1991), and one novel, *the Fabulists* (Lilliput/Serif, 1994). His one act play *Cardinal* was staged in Hamburg in 1990. He is currently working on a second novel, *The Water Star*.

### WAKING

*in memory of*  
*Agnes, Margit, Teresa, Jean*

On the octagonal mountain  
the blinding, powdery snow  
entombs a woman of forty.

Into the octagonal valley  
water falls all summer  
and at noon on the 6th of June

A child's yellow gansey jibs  
above the thunderous pool -  
then leaps to a parachute fall.

## WAKING II

In the back room of a house  
in an eastern town, a man peers  
at lines of code on a screen.

A woman lies dead beside him,  
on her marriage bed; his mind  
is blank. In the parlour

her family and neighbours  
wake her, amuse her baby.  
He presses a key at random,

the screen blackens and his wife  
coughs and sits up, as if thinking.  
The clergy send the wakers home.

Born in Dungarvan, Co Waterford (1943), he has published widely. Among his more recent books are *Poems Selected and New* (Dedalus Press, 1988) and *Out of Silence* (Dedalus Press, 1993).

## HOUSEKEEPER

They grew old gradually together:  
She was as close to him  
As any woman is to any man,

Cooking for him, making beds,  
Handing out keys,  
Fixing funeral times.

In the evening each one sat alone:  
Praying, reading,  
Watching news and sport.

They kept separate rooms; but all night long  
She heard his every cough,  
Every turn he made in sleep.

Yet she may not rant before his coffin  
Or dress in mourning clothes.

Born in Wexford in 1960, he grew up in Galway, Ireland. He has had two books of poetry published (*Columbus Rides Again* and *Kings and Bicycles*) both from Salmon Press. His work has appeared in various national and international publications, including *London Magazine*, *Stand*, *New Statesman*, *Irish Times*, *Poetry*, *Ireland Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Sycamore Review*, and *The William and Mary Review*. He is currently a faculty member in English at Suffolk Community College, Riverhead, New York, returning to Ireland to teach each summer.

## FARMER'S TALE

I work what I own. I've got no stories for you.  
The seed I spread wafts into unblinking green,  
spits roots and stems. I fold within a palm all  
this rolling earth, the strength that rose it,

and fling enough to the hens to make them scratch  
and stalk and gawk for a life in a scutch of concrete yard  
on the same piece of yellow straw and vague shit.  
The sun plants night only, and moon furrows it.

My sleep's a nod buttered on one side with dream,  
a breathy ache and blackness aftertaste.  
I sleep and wake with all this growing going on  
and wake and sleep until I forget the order  
of planting and cutting—from the blade that shears  
to footsteps and the seed bucket, and a dog

winding. Earth grows anyway.  
I'll slit and sort and dry and bale,  
and if I do nothing the grass will retake the rock walls  
with sloven force, scandalous lean thistle  
and a few hot flies.

My uncle flung me a cottage and ten acres  
before he died. I work them. Nights are loud  
with creak of chairs and rustle of newspaper.

The small windows wring out daylight.  
Now and then I go to the village and beer-must  
and piss in dank toilets. Now and then I see  
Sisyphus in a far field calling to me,  
stripped to the waist in his sweat,  
for he has also found a rock to cultivate.

Born in Cork in 1952. His previous collections are *A Small Fat Boy Walking Backwards* (1985, Commons Press, reissued in 1992 by Three Spires Press), *Rio De La Plata and All That* (1993, Dedalus Press), and *The Empty Quarter* (1995, Dedalus Press).

## BELL'S FIELD HAIKU

(for Sarah Durcan)

A housefly sunbathes  
on the glossy verandah  
of an ivy leaf.

A sullen cloud mass  
drags grey underskirts of rain  
along the river.

A belfry starts up  
a sweet iron clamouring  
swells from the city.

## THE LIGHT IN THE WINDOW

(After Gene Kerrigan)

Hands busy in a frantic semaphore,  
head nodding furiously,  
Mrs. Robinson found herself  
veering towards a catastrophic lull.  
She showed President Clinton  
the emigrant's light she keeps  
ever-burning in a window.

He stared at the light  
for a long time,  
trying desperately to think  
of something to say.

"It's a low-watt bulb" she assured him.

"Ah" he replied, approvingly, she thought.

Jointly run The Poets' House which offers the first M.A. in Creative Writing in Ireland (a degree awarded by Lancaster University). James Simmons' most recent book is *Mainstream* (Salmon Press, 1995), while that of Janice Simmons is *Settler* (Salmon Press, 1995).

## SESTINA AT MONS

The Bell-tower off the Avenue des Clercs  
in Mons is worn and old and being restored.  
Beffroi they call the tower. The scaffolding  
hides and protects, preparing it to shine.  
In some good future the exterior  
will, like the sounding bells, be beautiful.

The spire is gold already, beautiful.  
From streets below the visitors and clerks  
look up and smile, though the exterior  
is blurred by building work. To be restored  
requires a dusty interim. The shine  
is gilt they carry up the scaffolding.

Before I saw this ugly scaffolding  
I heard the bell songs, clear and beautiful,  
come in the window with the glow and shine  
of morning on the Avenue des Clercs.  
The nervous traveller's spirit was restored,  
bed-warm, tuned in to that exterior.

Bell-sounds and sunshine was a sweet exterior  
internalised in me. The scaffolding  
is like the surgery I need to be restored  
to health, by pain. I know what's beautiful,  
sauntering down The Avenue Des Clercs,  
savouring cobbles, watching shop fronts shine.

I woke at six and heard the six notes shine,



and entertained, within, exterior  
sounds of the morning cars, of Belgian clerks  
walking to work, men on the scaffolding  
rattling sharp tools so that the beautiful  
bell-tower of Beffroi could be restored.

If I come back the tower will be restored,  
like the cathedral. All of it will shine  
like its old self and be more beautiful  
than I imagine. My exterior  
will have decayed some more. No scaffolding  
restores the ageing poets or the clerks.

Welcome us back, our unrestored exteriors,  
askew beauty, walking stick scaffolding,  
elbow shine, seat of pants shine, poets and clerks.

James Simmons

I said; *'It's too late, now, you've done it.'*  
Yet, I meant my blessing on her unlikely marriage.

You can guess at the worry and relief for this most  
unsettled daughter, with a man 21 yrs. older.

*'But he is a man Janice'*— meaning her equal.  
And capable in their limited ways for the long-haul,

fit for their sick child, for sex, happy according to their lights  
that is to say willing to love through many nights,

happy to fight a corner, lying whole days in each others arms  
wanting, wanting until the ribs expand, hair turns to feather.

How they preen with desire, how they fly in dreams.

Janice Fitzpatrick Simmons

Born in Donegal, Ireland in 1952. Moved to London in 1973. Published seven books of poetry to date, including *Blue Shoes* and *Cacti* (both Secker & Warburg), and for children, *The Flying Spring Onion* and *Fatso in the Red Suit* (both Faber). Currently completing an eighth, *The Bridal Suite*. Co-edited, with Jo Shapcott, an anthology of recent poetry - *Emergency Kit: Poems for Strange Times* - which Faber will publish in October 1996. Was Writer in Residence at London's South Bank Centre in 1994/95.

## THE BRIDAL SUITE

On the third night in the bridal suite  
without the bride, he panicked —  
he couldn't handle another dream like that,  
not wet, like he'd expected,  
but not dry either - men digging holes  
that they'd fill with water; donkeys  
crossing valleys that suddenly flooded -  
the alarm-call had a job to wake him,  
to send him out from the huge bed,  
past the corner kissing-sofa, up two steps  
to the shower he hardly needed,  
where he'd scrub himself clean as the baby  
he'd hoped to start that night,  
under the canopy like a wimple,  
in that room of pinks and greens.  
Naked and dripping, he'd rung Reception  
to see if she'd rung, then he'd stood  
looking out at the new marina,  
as if he'd glimpse her on a yacht.  
On the third night he could take no more -  
he dressed, to the smell of her perfume,  
and leaving her clothes there,  
the wedding dress in a pile in the wardrobe,  
he walked past the deaf night porter,  
out to his car. He had no idea  
where he was headed, only that she,

if she ever came back, could sample  
the bridal suite on her own,  
could toss in that canopied bed  
and tell him about her dreams.

## THE BELLS

Fighting the undertow,  
watching the boat drift away,  
the monk felt his habit grown  
heavy as a suit of armour,  
and struggled till he was naked,  
hoping his fat would keep him  
alive in the ice-berged Atlantic  
until he caught the toe of rock  
that kicked the sea to Ireland.  
He clung to a plastic lunchbox  
and thought of the veal pies  
famous in the monastery, hoping  
his surfeit years were enough  
to keep him awake for five hours.  
He thought of his antics  
with the boy, behind the shed  
where his boat was kept  
waiting for today. He felt  
his fingers get pins and needles  
and his testicles go numb,  
his feet become bare bone  
and his eyes start to close.  
He was so tired now,  
already he heard the bells ring  
in the distant fog. If he slept  
he'd float there, in time for mass.

## Anthony Barnett

Anthony Barnett has published translations, including volumes by Anne-Marie Albiach, Alain Delahaye, Roger Giroux and Andrea Zanzotto. He is editor of Veronica Forrest-Thomson's *Collected Poems and Translations* (1990). His books include *Carp and Rubato* (1995), *Desert Sands: The Recordings and Performances of Stuff Smith, An Annotated Discography and Biographical Source Book* (1995), and a children's alphabet, *Would You Tread on a Quadruped?* (1992). He edits *Fable Bulletin: Violin Improvisation Studies* and is editorial director of Allardyce, Barnett, Publishers.

### IN YOUR HEART

A name called out in strength.  
The difficulty of the difference  
between a cry and a shout is  
what language is about. A  
clear bell a complicated  
resonance. Unmuddled. Soft,  
unhurried, crimson, mauve,  
purple, cherry. I lay dreamily  
in a hammock in a garden  
or promise. Later, in the  
oldest restaurant in town, I  
spoke of the darkening skies,  
of how easily one could fall  
straight into unreal water.  
Your heart is full of rancour  
you said. No, I answered, I  
don't think so. But a poem  
is like a truffle. That's  
alright.

He was travelling by train. The conductor's cap, rising and falling in steep peaks, jolted his memory of the officers' caps he recognized from the newsreels of his childhood or the features of adulthood.

Perturbation. He sat in the compartment a half-century ago, more than that, before he was born, before the war was even begun, afraid in the pit of his stomach, in the corner of the playing field, waiting. Then it was over. He was transported along the same track, alone, with the others, to the imaginary halt. He was not there, he would never be there, he was never there, he was pushing through a thicket, looking for this ticket, his ticket, reflected in the glass.

Writes, paints and teaches at Herefordshire College of Art & Design. He has published over 100 titles since 1969. The *Gravity as a consequence of shape* series, from which the above poems are selected, was started in 1982 and continues today. Recent books include *FIZZ* (Spanner), *Breadboard* (Spanner), *Civic Crime* (Sound & Language), and *Dispossession & Cure* (Reality Street). His last one-man painting show was at the King's Manor Gallery, York in 1992 and, in 1993, a two-man show was presented at Hereford's Museum and Gallery.

## PART ONE OF A SECTION INDICATED BY PULLING UP AND QUASI QUEEN

A sheet of analytical light excites thought fluorescence  
viewed as a general conception a sort of intelligible structure  
the world has to offer, or consequentially a program for a sort of  
theoretical structure which would best capture it

*The proposal of an ultimate reality had been a single, indivisible mistake  
set against a plurality of finite, particular and sensible things and  
promoted as a realm of appearance having an absolute mistake as its true  
being.*

An analysis used to slow and cool thought processes  
reduces depth by optically narrows the velocity of process so that  
aberrations become substantially distant

*The construction of a thought-imaging device,  
you could use a simulation enhancer made from an analogue  
with permanent magnets,  
produces images in the same way as an optical slide projector*

A self mask responds to illumination by a process of identified thoughts  
prepared using an analysis-simulator  
an image of the self appears on the inside of the eyes  
where a sheet of cells images analytical light  
excites thought fluorescence

*The self obtains magnified and demagnified images  
with remarkable low cost resolution  
polarised by the light chirp technique*

You would think basic value was a choice between possible answers  
a conception of an absolute as mistake-determined and determining  
everything causally through the necessity of its nature  
against the answer that grasps another absolute as ego  
creates both itself and its objects through freedom

It is as if the choice were between seeing ourselves and the rest  
as products of mistakes  
bounced against manifestations of a free  
and inexpensive creative self

from *Traps or Tools and Damage*  
part of *Gravity as a consequence of shape*  
December 1995



## MADISON

Following John Dryden's 1693 "Song to a Fair, Young Lady Going out of the Town In the Spring".

Skin siege from necessary our void time  
Precious records of by-products strike cosmetics  
Countless of packaged time  
Cherished robber waste disappear deal of cosmos  
Incomprehensible stolen vulnerable eroded time product  
Civilisation rubble pandemic void crime greed of human space.

Impact from spectacular robbery of aging  
Two thieves disguised the premises trussed up within  
Wallets made off with has to amazing  
Bandits consider fine paint compatible with time internalised  
Affection contamination packaging within product presents  
Environmentally friendly now and now.

Skin notation from early distinguishable earths  
Vicilisation arranged then sought after then countered  
Indiscernible speck in sky system speeds earthwards  
Strikes its unfortunate prey retrieving body encountered  
The illegal affected the variables pesticides who back loop  
Point of connection of elements in dependencies of the closed scoop.

Receptors or differences detect value lack  
Trains and bearings linkage discernible in nature  
These systems near characteristic of negative feedback  
Bell crank which survey at rest digester  
Ear and the spring under stream pressure  
Inturn control governs pleasure.

from *Disaster Bag*  
part of *Gravity as a consequence of shape*  
September 1992

Born in Birmingham in 1930, he spent most of his life there before moving to Keele, where he taught in the Department of American Studies from 1972 to 1982. Since that time he has worked as a freelance writer, jazz musician and broadcaster. He lives at Earl Sterndale in the Peak District. Most of his work written before 1987 is to be found in *Poems 1955-1987* (from which the above are taken) and *A Furnace* by Oxford U.P. His script for Tom Pickard's documentary film *Birmingham's What I Think With* forms part of a new Oxford collection, *Birmingham River*; other new work appears in *It Follows That*, published by Pig Press in Durham.

*THE INTRUDER*

As I think of yellow,  
    a deep shining yellow  
that plunges down with white enfolding it,

and as I think of a certain  
    stretch of roadway  
with a small river beside it in a stone-built channel,

I see, quite clearly, a young girl  
    black-haired and quiet  
doing some household work, a couple of generations ago.

Her face is broad, like a filbert,  
    the features small;  
I can see where the colours lie on her skin.

I can see plainly, through the brown varnish  
    sentiment lays on the scene  
the fat lips and the inexpressive eyes.

A dark body-scent disturbs the air  
    but not enough  
to persuade me that she and I might sympathize.

She means so little to me, one way or the other  
yet seems so real  
it's as if I had walked into somebody else's imagination.

But whose? None of my friends', I think.  
And what will come if it, what  
way shall I be involved? The wisest thing

seems to be, by way of the road with the little river  
and the deep shining yellow  
to retire discreetly, and leave the sulky bitch to it.

*STAFFORDSHIRE RED*  
*for Geoffrey Hill*

There are still clefts cut in the earth  
to receive us living:

the turn in the road, sheer through  
the sandstone at Offley  
caught me unawares,  
and drew me, car and all,  
down in the rock

closed overhead with trees  
that arched from the walls,  
their watery green  
lighting ferns and moss-shags.

I had not been looking for the passage,  
only for the way;

but being suddenly in  
was drawn through slowly

— altering by an age,  
altering again—

and then the road dropped me  
out into a small, well-wooded  
valley in vacancy.

Behind me.

was a nondescript cleft in the trees.  
It was still the same sunless afternoon,  
no north or south anywhere in the sky.

By side roads

I made my way out and round again  
across the mildnesses of Staffordshire  
where the world changes with every mile  
and never says so.

When I came face to face with the entry  
I passed myself through it a second time,  
to see how it was.

It was as it had been.

The savage cut in the red ridge,  
the turn in the traveller's bowels,  
by design ancient or not;  
the brush-flick of energy  
between earth and belly;  
the evenness of it. How hard  
is understanding? Some things  
are lying in wait in the world,  
walking about in the world,  
happening when touched, as they must.

Born in Lancashire in 1947. He "makes poetry out of language, love, life, poverty and landscape, in Calderdale, in Pennine Yorkshire." His collected poems 1977-94 (from which these poems are taken) are published as *A Whole Bauble*, by Carcanet Press (Manchester 1995).

Two Poems from *A Whole Bauble*

VIOLA CATGUT

Snap. Look on the bright side. I shall  
shield my eyes. What worms are  
in the shadow where the corpse subsides  
as starved, deprived of what had most  
invigorated it? The puddle gives its  
intermittent rings and bubbles. Something gives  
a puzzled look into eternity as it's gone down  
a willing metaphor for better clearness,  
losing bitterness and martyrdom, the penis and  
the concept of the metonym with any reference  
to Jesus. Losing too the figure in the character  
of goalkeeper, one deeply lost in thought  
among the trodden daisies, just as she burst through  
the mist in shorts and slips one past  
my unprepared defences. I'm one down  
on the unfounded ground, dumbfounded  
at the reproductive picture of the rose original  
as it appears fulfilling. Now I'm seeing no-one  
and it irks to hear the cartwheel squealing  
of a rodent sibyl in the field. Do you not want  
the loving - squeaking up  
a blackbird chalk, a baby scribble -  
That has been a basin to my pudding?  
Snap.  
And that's viola catgut lax.  
I only thought of preaching  
what I practise and sank back to scratch

the slate with fingernails  
in wet sand at the slack,

## TUNE

Could this be me I'd have to wonder, Self a Comic  
Laocoon in twisting coils convulsed,  
The Snail, for horns and swirl, for trace and trail,  
but saving always half or more for  
Kitty at The Core, sealed in  
I cannot hear so silent crazy jar  
This is my conscience writhing at the rail.  
How deeply penetrated she had been  
Essayed. Whose Barking Cries on lips  
dried unresolved, not throated, or but swallowed down  
before the dogs at such, so protean a loveliness  
at stop held off.

The Flirting Crow. Come Hither Trump. Befriend.  
Two Wingbeats and Wide Umbrella. A Saliva.  
Salivation. Mugs out on The Stump. The Scarecrow Craze.  
A Right Philaster in a Balaclava, Dressing-Gown  
and Looking-Glass. The Bark discharged its fraught  
A sable demon chalked one for the lads up  
on a crested front.

Or else canst please me ease this petulant  
who pleads poor petals and whose nose  
is blown on leaves, whose idle lakes leave  
puzzles in a naked heart's bestartlement,  
who plumps the pith from throat to throne  
That Which Had Flown  
so many could ye say forever, sealed in  
hide and seek and ye may find  
above the gate a garden tone too high  
if I were you we had let go the whole balloon.

Drew Milne was born in Edinburgh in 1964. He is currently a lecturer in the School of English and American Studies at the University of Sussex, and is the editor of *Parataxis: modernism and modern writing* and of *Parataxis Editions*. His most substantial book collection of poetry is *Sheet Mettle* (London: Alfred David, 1994). A book, *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader*, which he has co-edited with Terry Eagleton, was published by Blackwell in early 1996. In autumn 1995 he was the first Writer in Residence at the Tate Gallery, London.

POEMS FROM *THE SLAUGHTER BENCH*

So come away, free as  
a vital organ, a courtly  
mouth now palm high  
in arbitrage, play this  
zest or minimum wage  
to cool sops or broken  
spine, the buds of sage  
spent on only one day.

You take it all back, all  
you ever ran through,  
from frosted silver foil  
to the spitting curls of  
piping hot camouflage,  
such fighting talk, here  
where not one whiff of  
rank child is left to air.

On hedges now down  
at heel, go along fierce  
gardens, feel gears up  
for a major assault on  
the welfare, one sweet  
missive after another,  
done to scale on scarp  
carbons, nunc dimittis.

This cold side of habit  
transfers, you pan and  
scan for scrags, a gram  
of flesh, cut to mantles  
still incident on its thick  
tape, sparky frostwork  
holding out quick films  
of nightly stupefaction.

Yes, that's the spirit, go  
flatter a wilderness into  
a fossile dawn, sleek as  
from a certain red, find  
some arc of dread, livid  
with emphasis, nostrils  
set to stun, each a dance  
of drops laid out so low.



Leave off, before belts  
of straw do their death  
rattle, keep the skin on  
each tooth, just rest up  
on bloody minded sail  
or claw, this flood has  
no end in sight, this is  
your local opportunity.

Smiles of salt in shared  
wounds, why settle for  
less, why miss the rug  
doctor rental system at  
its level best, you play  
some part of demolition  
so let sorrow unfurl in  
each well earned glory.

Poems published in *Not Poetry, Reality Studios, Archaeus, Fragmente, Parataxis*, he contributed to *Ten British Poets* (1993). He notes, "I have recently been called misleadingly, 'perhaps the nearest thing in Britain to hard-core US language poetry'. In fact, my relation to langpo is rather like Paul Nash's relation to surrealism in the 1930s: I have been technically influenced by it (though in fact feel closer to such precursors as the Objectivists or Clark Coolidge) but tend always to map it onto more native traditions, in my case a sort of (slightly soured) ecological romanticism laced with phenomenological reserve."

FROM: PARABLES THE PLANTATIONS APPOINT

(Dur Hill Down)

No longer forward of us, but extra grant in the complexion of terms, the clausulae of winnowed degrees. The tree a slight increase into the manner of defeasibility due woven feature: as block of green, forever switched through, sprained of recovery.

Heartland stiffen district, the impingement will expose a tidal green, unrifted how indurate, a slow surf driven onto conferral. A carton of woodland dumbly open beneath the arrival pelt of trees. Control which has tossed its grain to the rare fibre of ground retempers that particle, deserves with raptive ventricle.

Precedence in a slender case of woods to abridge feral re-acquaintance. Where trees have shot ahead, before earth abrades upon itself.

A brace not apprised of liberal lodging, with no skill to dispirit the underbearing, until some ill adoption houses an adept in grip of the

favour towards radiance. Without natural copy kept within earnest of spoil.

Notifiability of shelter ahead of its surround, the lyric open is latched from distance: sunhaze bushed clear of opaque brushwood at a translatable encasement, its erosionful universal.

A wrong of speciality cherished among reverting narrows of growth-point, ostentation to requite seed here where the error settles to vocation, freely infests its truck with earth. The penalty of incursion it will not commonly desert.

Robe in rote from plantation's initial stasis: see the grower foiled in a reflex flower— of— leaf, become a giving thief from the nomo-sower.

To embellish the circumscription ravishment is stripped in remaining incomplete, hidden from end by unachievement. But where insufficiency has emboldened itself radiant to ends: finitude, asymmetric in offering, here subtracts the equality of a middle death. Completion might then haunt a shaft of wood for the relay-sufferance, offer its overshot origin a collection-path: assigning the four non-comers of horizon, where the leap of birth is out of view, to this hatched allaying of radiance, observed in unadditional light.

Not a welling but a ramistitch, in repair of a culling, a unit which begins again the attentive insufficiency, housing less of the innocent finite's accomplice than companionable gleaning from a reproved field of assistance.

Co-trussed, but seeks in demonstrable stead that compression at touch-light, bud-tight apartment: like a chrysmal failure shining itself upon a shadowable entered sun from behind each sash of forest.

Abjuring convention's unlock to renew a more primal reception's disserviceable stock. Fruition about a burden of un plenty, radiant to the place enclaving without installing.

## J. H. Prynne

Born in 1936, in the North of Kent, he lives in Cambridge. His publications include *Poems* (Agneau 2, 1982), *The Oval Window* (1983), *Word Order*, (Prest Roots, 1989) and *Her Weasels Wild Returning* (Equipage, 1994).

### FROM "NOT-YOU"

With an eye turning for entry, most will  
gather as others have, from the spicy bed  
of a rising vertical trust: enough to clear  
line to line clasp essentials, all  
the same to claim plus set-off,  
to shun this terrible cure. Across clouded  
skies the current lies at  
crossed living abruptly, outshining  
the smart pulse in its sheltered prospect,  
not like shoes and food in a clamour of  
spent cases by rounding up  
to the last place defence.

Each says the same, applying to take  
out of this bruised event the frame of provoked  
aversion. Ablative child care bleeds tonight!  
No grip frightens the one falling  
by mild derision, the acts have  
been performed in mimic  
troop tint delay affront, there  
is no default position at true discount  
up to innumerably more. Stop the boa  
with a plug for floatation; the mothers assemble  
at the sorting office, provably liquid he says  
in *pro tanto* extinction. Blind  
transfer goes ahead willingly, no fear  
tripping the snug instep to a price floor,  
gentle planets counting, rates mounting, winding  
up to replace a slipped bracelet. Thus in mutual  
fond delay the day advances,  
yawning astragal with due

From whose seed spread out  
    bend and cut, in the field, in far  
    rows sideways                                 parting with the left  
hand, in plane or out over, the movement  
of a deep-shaded allocation: but grind

*Not-You* (Equipage, Cambridge 1993)

Colin Richmond teaches medieval history at the University of Keele. He studies genocide and the holocaust, which he also teaches. He writes short stories and poetry as well as history. Some of his poems are collected in *Annals* (1995); his short stories appear in *The Penket Papers* (1986). His most recent work is an autobiibliography, 'From Sidcup to Pruszkow, 1942-1992', which appeared in *Common Knowledge*, v4,n3, Winter 1995.

FROM "BARON SCHWITER"  
TASCHE EIGHTY EIGHT

I however (however: I am still at it) wd want to go back to the dunghill  
in the school garden at burnt oak lane sidcup kent.

where else where else

unless it is to broadmere farm henfield and I am three years old and feed-  
ing the chickens feeling the mud between the gates under my feet and  
smelling the cow dung

that farm and my pastoralism: here is a postcard of the south downs from  
the steep field above the farm through wch I would walk with g to sit  
under an oak and kiss her and she me

indeed that postcard dated 15 August 1954 and addressed to me at 22  
kapellentrasse bern mentions g

but from dung I digress

pastoralism and proust: that smelly farmyard was my cup of tea

the school garden dungheap is another sort of memory persistent rather  
than intermittent I am on it with a fork and with a smelly and thorough-  
ly snotty boy whose name was jimmy and who had even bigger black  
boots on than I had

snot like jimmys has often been described: depending rope-like from his

nostrils etc etc

so there I am aged ten raking a suburban dungheap in a wartime garden which is now a levelled field

[I am bound to and do think of those other levelled fields of wartime those tidied-up plätze: the huge field at chelmno the small one surrounded by encroaching private houses at the ninth fort kaunas the fields of maidanek the field of rocks at treblinka the place of frogs and ponds at birkenau]

was it a brotherhood of shit that I shared with jimmy: see rushdie mid-nights children pp32-3

man I just managed to take me a noble shit says a skinny southern crack-er in mailers armies of the night

if shit were valuable poor people would be born without arseholes boldly declares a message scratched into a desk of keele university library

ancient egyptians recommended crocodile dung mixed with a paste of an unidentified substance as a vaginal plug: reay tannahill sex in history abacus 1981 p60

no need to cite tudor books of husbandry here tusser fitzgerald and gervase markham it is the last who says it is a thing so precious and a schoolbook which states the platitude (what every tudor schoolboy knows) that ther is nothyng more profitable to dong the land then the dong of them [sheep]: nicholas orme an early tudor schoolbook renaissance quarterly xxxiv (1981) pp11-39 the quotation being from p36

nor that urban shit the world over was for suburban gardens from tokyo to thameside where the dog-shit collectors of englands capital were called pure gatherers (or so charles swann my neighbour tells me : see mayhews london pp306-14) and the horse-shit of the metropolis was taken every night to the market gardens and watercress beds of (where else) footscray and (who knows) sidcup

discuss here flaubert and the rural dungheap



where pécuchet goes 'on the dung-hunt' and bouvard goes into 'a frenzy about fertilizer' answering those who looked disgusted at his composting efforts with the cry: 'But it is gold! gold!'

so it was until the time arrived when men dug out gold from the mouths of men whom they called shit

who moreover (moreover?) called jassy this dungheap: I would know if I could find the still-crated-up book (kaplan balkan ghosts p120)

and for the same reason I do not what the passage is in geoff dyer the missing of the somme pp107-8 as my note on the verso of worship at st johns keele green sheet (a grey-green or graugrün sheet id hazard) for the fifth and sixth sundays after pentecost says simply dung

but it connects oh it connects (with those levelled fields where flowers bloom which bring the butterflies as an abundant memorial of the murdered and with those ashy ponds where the frogs jump and breed and sun themselves and go plop a memorial too yes a sufficient memorial of life where there was terrible death)

as 'the whole dungy earth' [the winters tale ac2 sc1] in flanders became so when the war to end all wars began [as edward thomas wrote] 'To turn young men to dung'

that was Dung D to follow Dung ABC [see the penket papers]

## Denise Riley

Her latest collection is *Mop Mop Georgette* (London: Reality Street Editions, 1993). She is current Writer in Residence at the Tate Gallery.

### LYRICAL

To be air or a black streak on air, or be silt.  
Be any watery sheen threading brackish, or vein  
nets tracked as patted under their skin glaze, running all ways.

Cascade of stubs.  
Buttercup metal glow, ruff of dark strawberry tulle  
in any vehement colour night you get blown into hundreds.

Is that clear as a glass stem cups its chill in its own throat.  
Is it true that candour so tightens the integument of the heart  
that quartz needles shower from the cut mouth of the speaker  
though the voice opens to fall:

*If you can see me, look away  
but swallow me into you.*

And I must trust this need is held in common, as I think it my duty to  
that the head tries to hide itself in sun in the teeth of its dream of  
translucence.

That every down-draught's thick with stiffening feathers  
with rustlings from pallor throats  
as the air hangs with its free light and its death weight equally.

## Peter Riley

Born in 1940, he lives in Cambridge, where he is a bookseller specialising in modern poetry. Edits a series of hand-printed pamphlets: "Poetical Histories" and is involved in organising the annual Cambridge conference of Contemporary Poetry. Recent books of poetry are: *Ospita* (Poetical Histories, 1987); *Sea Watches* (Prest Roots Press, 1991); *Distant Points* (prose poems, Reality Street Editions, 1995); *Alstonefield* (Shearsman/Oasis, 1995).

### THE LITTLE WATERCOLOUR AT SLIGO

The point of pain  
at which the voice either  
cracks or cruises. The little fat man

Makes it, whoever he is, drunk but  
not too drunk on his way home in  
village night, mouth like a typographical

O he stops to sing. His head rises, his  
arms fall, and it works: he  
cruises, out across time

Nameless and small, he  
sails a stranger's psyche, saying  
Cast your (care) crown. This

Is success, this is being, this  
is where love nails us to earth  
and time sets all things right.

## BAR CAROL

There are worse deaths than singing,  
worse singings than death's.  
Gently over black ever

Shifting water the wooden craft  
moves out. The newspaper  
soaked in itself, sinks.

And the city, there, the circles floating  
on the sea articulating growth we  
adore by rote and touched in the

Tainted fall of socialistic promises  
like petals of death sign out  
with a blown shrug. The city divides

And sheds but the world waits for ever  
the great curve of thought we  
slowly sail round towards singing.

N. S. Thompson lectures in English at Christ Church, Oxford. He has published a comparative study of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. He has translated Sciascia's *Sicilian Uncles* and Giampaolo Rugarli's *The Crux* and is poetry editor of *New Poetry Quarterly*. His poems, translations and reviews have appeared in *Ambit*, *Encounter*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Oxford Poetry*, *Poetry Review*, *PN Review*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and elsewhere.

## A SCENT OF PINES

### I

Circling round the Circus Maximus  
Alfas cruise in for sex slaves; evening pines  
Parasol Imperial Palatine,  
Shades cast for one last tourist bus.

### II

Girls in strip invade the pitch in teams  
And take up corners, tattooed ankles bare,  
Promising the griding round of cars  
A wealth of personal regimes.

### III

Whipping up flagging muscles provides  
Rome's satirists with fodder; now his  
Triumphal track days over, Caius  
Wheels round the archway girls for rides.

Born in London in 1953, John Wilkinson works as a commissioner of mental health services for the East End of London. His publications include *Clinical Notes* (Liverpool 1980), *Proud Flesh* (Lodz & Liverpool 1986) and *Flung Clear? Poems in six books* (Brighton 1994).

FROM: SARN HELEN

snap crackle & pop. Deliver us from passer-by of  
accents & their affines. The fault was never outlandish  
straws bubble with cuckoo-spit or the oak-apple  
priority who may not draw on reserves But spiralled  
like a run-time virus, flattening their strobe corn.  
Their fields were laid waste before armies roll over,  
prod then keyhole scanned the bales of rag, OCR  
in passing, fleers of the covenant risen out of rushes,  
proved as with psoriasis not cracks Come on down  
Observe the halogen hob Take note of the library  
of patristics, one volume open, scaredly consulted  
flutters page to page will spot-buy a reduced yield  
hinges down before listless scythes Whereat released  
salivation smites those pillars that its pumping-house  
water flooding the land floats poppies & pools wax.  
With fire the granaries crackle then the aid convoys  
load at a distant airport apples suffer anaesthesia,  
sky-high transport brings to huts cornmeal, juices air,  
forges like the house-martens season after season  
pluck at their tatty binding but no cortisone sullies.  
Entered by this skein the intervention bracket drum-  
heads the first crop air's lesions might extricate,  
selling down the line that the armourers high-fiving  
on arrival make secure. The reconstruction package  
quilts from logged bracken, bed for kine & impatient  
floors trade the roots yet unlifted. Much like a gas  
chamber meets television. The hydrothermal vents

suck the susceptible ocean & shall ordain its future  
Child whose double straw froths through her glass,  
drinking loose blowback with a fixed intent collides.

Gangling the concrete across their bones and dowsed  
pools by sticky hilt. The revenants mull things over  
raggedy hole in the small end of the constant egg,  
spewing to what lengths blue-silver arrows curve  
E-mailed out from Imperial Rome, its flood of goods  
sweeps up thought parochial once, was touched  
cosmopolitan, the yak minder, chewer of qat gyrate,  
circling & self-righting under strict trial conditions.  
Lighter & smaller yet they attract both touch & answer,  
made to suck air dry will trash its palaeographic  
loving solicitude, arrowheads of some elite forward  
conning a headwind as the key its lock, as a coney  
burrows thread a system. Bewildered they cut straw,  
turn the stowaways, so commute the day's round  
like a clepsydra who nod, a beam engine, schedules  
for their life-pangs an inventory of variants I bridge  
Spot-welding to a phantasm had wrinkled the flue-  
columned smoke, blurred together seams immasked  
that turbid to each other the air with nothing to it  
stood on the paths which hitching over the orbital  
parade vacancy. Their dumb fluffball is a material  
mattering; its culture borne in the crop won't dissect  
in carbohydrates, protein, vegetable hydrolisers:  
if votives of black hair & the joined-up alphabet  
tirade the dog's nap, a pen-top & coin unmagnetic  
jump to disengage any lead. Confounded in the face  
conscripts you always - this too is ridiculous but so  
I bore & cupped a blank face for an access code  
beneath ladders & slides, the spider's web of ropes  
strums what invisibly crosses through its counterbond.

THE EDITOR RICHARD GODDEN would like to thank Drew Milne, Elizabeth Burns, Kathleen McCracken and M. Wynn Thomas for their valuable advice. Richard Godden teaches American Literature in the Department of American Studies at the University of Keele. His books are *Breathing Exercises: An Argument* (Peterloo Poets, 1986), *Other Rooms* (with Roy Fisher, Jim Heron, Tamar Hodes, Colin Richmond and Charles Tomlinson [Keele U.P., 1994]) and *Fictions of Capital* (Cambridge U.P., 1990). Cambridge is to publish his *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution* later this year.





## READY

Marla. Silk. Soft Bible pages. The one person and a couple of things I think about to quiet me down while I try not to think about the time me and Frank met God.

One night a voice spoke to me in my sleep. "We're going to cut your hand off tomorrow. You ready?" The next day my right hand was lopped off on the oil rig. Now I have a fatty pink stub.

Was it God who'd warned me? Marla said yes. But she's Catholic and they all believe in that stuff. Premonitions. Back from the dead. All that.

I didn't know the answer. But where the hell do you go in Morgan City to find out?

You wouldn't catch me near a church, Marla or not. She tried to drag me down there. We even had a good fight or two about it. But when I say no, it's no.

The answer was going to have to come from someplace else. Someplace inside. So while some of me worked on getting used to a poor-ass retirement and being left-handed in my old right-handed world, the rest of me looked for God.

Eventually, I found him.

At the bowling alley one Thursday night in August. We're talking about the deep, humid hell time of summer. When just putting on your clothes is enough to glue you to the spot. When even thinking is impossible.

You just bowl. Drink and bowl. And get pissed off at your bowling and drink and bowl some more.

God was on the next lane.

"Never seen a one-armed bowler," he said.

"Who the fuck are you?" I said.

"God."

"Uh, huh. Hey, Frank. Meet God."

"Hi," said Frank, like it was nothing. He was studying the pretty young thing a lane over the other way.

"Didn't you hear me?"

"Yeah. What's wrong?"

"Said he's God."

"So?"

God laughed, raked back his long gray hair. "Yeah, so?"

I looked back and forth. "Am I missing something here?"

Frank and God checked each other out, shrugged. "Don't think so," God

said.

"You going to bowl or talk?" said Frank, giving up on beauty as its other half returned from the can.

God came toward me at the ball return, stuck his hand out. I shook it. Firm and healthy. He peered at Frank, who started over but then stopped.

"What is that smell? Jesus! You smell that?"

There was just the regular sulphur stink. Oil town. "What?"

"That stink! Really bad!"

I looked at God. He didn't smell it either and made a face like maybe my friend had had a beer too many. I nodded back like maybe he was right.

I was on my first ball in the 10th frame.

"Well, God," I said. "Give me a strike on this one!"

"All right," he said.

The voice was calm, plain. Like at the meat counter. I'd like a nice fat sirloin. Fine, here it is. Thanks. No, thank *you*!

Frank said, "Something in the air-conditioning, I bet. What's that crap called? Legion disease?"

He boomed off to the desk to complain.

I started laughing. What bullshit. He'd just made it up so he could talk to Annie over there at the cash register.

God didn't get it, though. Kept sniffing the air. Then he smiled at me.

"Forget it," I said.

"O.K."

I got into position. Soon as I let go of that ball, I knew all 10 of them were going to go down, in style. One big solid explosion. Sure enough, that's what happened.

God was smiling, drying his bowling hand over the blower, getting ready to roll his first one. "Not bad."

"First strike all night."

"Well, good. Great. You'll have two more coming now."

"Did *you* do that?"

"Well, now, *you* certainly did. Good show."

Definitely from out of state. Europe? It was the old-fashioned green-tinted eyeglasses that made me think it. And his clothes off the discount rack, stuff he'd picked up on arrival—white jeans, red hightop tennis shoes, out-of-style green Banlon shirt, new green chewing-tobacco cap. The kind of just-anything stuff immigrants grab first.

I figured it was probably even his first night in town.

"Where you from?"

He pointed at the sagging ceiling tiles. "Up there."

"Where?"

"Heaven."

"Yeah? You mean Germany."

"No, not Germany."

"Where from, then?"

"I told you."

I took a step back. A goddamn nut.

Then I said, "We'll be talking to you, God. Thanks for the strike anyway."

"You're welcome," he said.

He made like he was going to mind his own business then. Concentrate on his own game, all 10 frames to go.

It was going to be hard to ignore him, though. I thought maybe I'd get Frank and have us moved down a ways. There were open lanes.

But Frank had got caught up with the cash-register gal and it was going to be a while.

"Hey, Frank!"

He waved me off.

I looked back around as God bowled.

He had a smooth, easy swing. And it was right on the mark, too. But then, right at the end, bam, off it fell. Gutter ball.

He came back staring at the floor, shaking his head.

"I don't get it," I said.

"Don't get what?" he asked.

"Why didn't you get a strike?"

"Didn't follow through."

"What?"

"Didn't follow through right." He showed me with his hand and arm. "I always forget. Don't know *why* I bowl, either. Never gets any better."

"Your mama named you God?"

"Pardon me?"

"That your given name?"

"Yes. I told you that."

"What's your family name, then."

"Don't have one."

I picked up my ball. "You're full of shit."

He didn't even react, just raised his eyes to the overhead monitor where his 0 was marked in the first frame.

I didn't ask for a strike or anything. Just bowled. Hard as I could.

Strike.

Just like that.

I dried my hand and stared down the alley as the machine set them back up. I wasn't going to look at him. If I got the third strike, then I might say something. But nothing until then.

He didn't say anything either, went ahead and bowled. Five pins fell. End of frame.

I got my strike. Which made 208. I hadn't broke 200 ever with my left

hand.

Frank showed up and gawked at the screen. "Jesus. Three strikes. You get laid or something this morning? Damn!"

I glanced at him, then at God, who'd flung it into the gutter again.

"Hell, don't mind him," said Frank. "He's a fucking idiot. He been bothering you?"

"No," I said. "I think he's just in from Europe."

Frank laughed. "Europe? Are you kidding? He's out of the nuthouse."

"You know him?"

"God? *Everybody* knows God, Clay. Been around here for years. You never seen him before?"

"No. He said I was going to get a strike and, damn it, I got three. You explain that?"

"Coincidence. Right, God?"

God now had a total of 8 pins in 2 frames and he did not look like he wanted to chitchat. He was slowly wiping his glasses clean and had his eyes screwed tight. He forced his breath out hard, like racers do.

It was the worst breath you ever smelled. Like having somebody stick your head in a trash can.

"All you have to do is just be sweet with him," Frank said. "Real sweet. And everybody'll get along just fine. Right?"

God nodded yes.

"And next time maybe you'll remember to brush your teeth. Right?"

Turning away, God nodded again. Then he started mumbling, but it wasn't clear he'd really understood. He might have been just urging himself to do better in frame 3. I couldn't tell for sure.

"Hell, leave him alone," I said to Frank.

"You started it. You're the one who's been talking to him."

"Just drop it."

I said it hard and straight, meant it. It was too early to let something like that get in the way of a boy's night out. Even if we all were going on 70, God included.

Just an old nut. Out bouncing around. Doing as he pleased with what time he had left.

Which got me thinking about getting it on with Marla. When somebody asks me if we are still getting it on, I always say, "Vesuvius."

Which also got me thinking about soft Bible pages, the way she turns them late nights, so easy, no sound.

And about cypress sticking up black in the bayou before dawn, way out there in the middle of nowhere when I wasn't with her. When the sky gets orange, then blue, then white before you're back to the main roads heading home.

About fishing poles and tackle clanking and rattling on the back seat.

Catfish and bass busting around in the styrofoam cooler, kicking their last kicks. Me and Frank turning around to see the container rocking back and forth.

This guy wasn't God. Fishing was God. Marla was Goddess.

Halfway through our next game, I got tired of wondering and went ahead and asked him right out, "You get me any more strikes over here?"

"Sure thing," he said.

I went and bowled a strike.

"No fair!" Frank said. "God, you quit helping him!"

"O.K.!" God said. "O.K."

He seemed pitifully lost, like a kid, looking at us. I knew then I'd had a beer too many, too. You don't even treat dumb animals like that.

"Sorry," I said. "You go on back to your game. Don't listen to anything we say. O.K.?"

He said yes, lined up, bowled. Three pins.

That was when he left his stuff there— bowling ball and all— and slouched out the front door into the night.

"What's he doing?"

"Cooling off," said Frank. "Bad temper. He can get real mean. Saw him kick a woman in here one night. He doesn't like whores hitting on him. Bet he hasn't ever been laid, though. Fucking nut."

We bowled our game on out, then called it quits. What was the use when we were both going straight downhill.

No sense pressing it, ever. Frank has a pretty bad weight problem and was suffering in that heat. He always seemed to be changing shirts, pulling off some sweat-drenched thing and popping on a new one, no matter where we were.

Me, I'm just the opposite. Never sweat. Never got fat. Just stayed skinny. Which I think Marla likes. Which I know Frank's Nancy doesn't like in him, if you see what I mean.

But Frank is Frank. And after years of bitching at him about being too fat, I gave up. It occurred to me that at some point a friend, a real one, needs you to give him an old-fashioned break. So I did.

And Frank got fatter. And sweated. And bowled with me Thursdays. And no matter what, we always ended up out in my bass boat fishing and watching Friday morning break, rain or shine. Our moment of paradise.

God was standing there under the streetlight in the parking lot watching the road.

"Does he drive?"

"Nope."

"Where's he live?"

"No idea."

"Drop him off?"

"Shit. Just trouble."

"Let's do it," I said.

"Shit, Clay."

"Hey God," I called. "Want a ride?"

He turned his head, which was quite small, way around like a bird can, pulled his glasses off. The big friendly eyes seemed to sparkle on their own, give little flashes like when you seen a welder working way off.

A cool breeze lifted dust off the lot, swirled it, and we held our hats on. Immediately, you thought he'd done it. But then the wind died and everything lay still. Balls boomed in the building. An oil truck ground by.

"Going to Houma," he said.

Frank said no way. "That's way too far over there. No."

"O.K.," said God.

He watched the road.

"We can drop him there," I said.

"What?"

"We can drop him there."

"Out of your mind. That's *way* out of our way. Come on. Are we going fishing or not?"

"We have all night," I said.

"Take a nut to Houma? Are you crazy too?"

I gave it a few seconds, then said, "Frank, I want to take God to Houma. Or anywhere else he wants to go. Am I getting through?"

"Why not just take him fishing!"

The man turned. "Fishing?"

"Oh no," said Frank.

"You fish?" I asked.

"Do I fish?"

"Yeah, do *you* fish?"

"Do you always talk to people as if they couldn't possibly understand you? Hell, yes, I fish."

I was startled.

Frank whistled. "Pretty fancy!"

I said to God, "Sorry. No offense."

"Forgiven," he said. "So you boys are going fishing?"

"No, no," said Frank. "We're heading to the house. Ain't that right, Clay?"

"No, we *are* going fishing. Down at Lost Lake. Want to come? I got an extra rod and reel someplace."

"I changed my name to God," he said, taking a step our way.

"Well, I didn't think your mama named you that," I said. "So why?"

"It was easier."

"Than what?" asked Frank.

"Than being nobody. God's somebody."

"One way of looking at it," I said.



"I'm not ill," he said.

Frank shot me a look. I smiled back.

"Come on, God," I said. "Get in the car."

He obeyed, got in the back of my '63 Ford. The fishing buggy, I call it. Frank got beers out of the cooler for me and him and got in up front.

I said to the guy, "Get one out of the box if you want one."

He did. "Thanks. Hot as hell tonight."

I started her up.

A few sprinkles messed up the dirty windshield just enough you had to turn the wipers on, and then the old bug juice smeared back and forth. Hadn't rained since the Great Flood, so we got all the windows down and watched for lightning.

But it was just a light shower and we soon drove out of it. Radio man didn't have anything to say about it either, which left you wondering if maybe you hadn't just got doused by some irrigation sprinkler or just imagined it. The iron air still burned.

The night was empty, dead dark, and the road signs popped up out of the gloom, flew by, every one of them jerking your head around as if some animal was jumping out.

It usually took us a good hour to get to Lost Lake. On account of God and the number of beers we'd had, I eased off the pedal, took my time. The boat'd be there. All we had to do was chuck our stuff in and get on out there and fish. Had all night.

Had forever, in fact. That's what you tell yourself when you survive that many years out on those rigs and have enough money somehow to retire without starving to death. Same thing for Frank, too, coming off a jillion years managing catfish farms from here to Florida for mean old owners who'd rip him off every time and send him packing.

It made you wonder what kind of trouble God'd got into over all the years. A man always had some kind of trouble in his past. That was just the way it was.

I almost asked, too. But then thought, well, if he is nuts, then maybe just asking would accidentally stir up something inside him he couldn't bear, send him into a rage back there with the tackle, hooks, knives and everything.

We listened to the radio. Cajun crap.

About 20 miles out of town, we crossed some invisible line and the road was dark and wet. Way the steam was coming off it, it hadn't been a half-hour since it'd poured. The air was cooler, lighter, and everybody stuck their head out.

"What the doctor ordered!" Frank said.



We were getting into the deep thicket now, with the branches and vines and whatnot arching all the way over the road like a tunnel. Hardly anybody ever took those roads down there since most of them didn't go anywhere. Just trailed off and ended at the water. That was it. Knock on wood, I've never had a breakdown out there. You could walk all day or all night before you'd be anywhere and even when you got there, there might be nothing there.

Next thing I knew Frank and God were both snoring. I mean, just like that, as if somebody'd said, O.K., when I snap my fingers, y'all sleep.

"Frank?"

He didn't answer. His head was hanging half out the window, the wind flopping around that last silly gray rope of hair he keeps.

God had slumped and dropped sideways and was squashing the box of cream-filled breakfast pastries.

"Hey! Get off my rolls there! Hey!"

He popped up straight. "Right. Sorry."

The box was pretty much crushed. "Shit."

"I'm sorry. Just fell asleep. I do that."

I felt like chucking him out. But no sooner had this thought crossed my mind, another followed it, saying, Ease up, it's just a box of pastries, no big deal.

"It's O.K. Just make me fat anyway."

He picked up the box. "I bet you they're still good. Just a little bit mashed."

He held one up. It looked like it had been chewed and spit back out.

"Throw that out," I said.

He tossed it, licked his fingers.

I swerved to hit a fat possum. "Yeah!"

"Why'd you do that?" he called.

"Why not?"

"It was a living creature."

"Dead creature now."

"You killed it."

"Yeah." Was he really going to press it? I wanted to see. "I like it. Been doing it for *years*."

"O.K.," he said.

Like he'd noted it down or something.

"O.K. what?" I asked.

"What?"

"You said O.K. What did you mean?"

"By what?"

"Saying O.K. like that!"

"I don't know. It was just plain old O.K., Clay. Nothing to worry about. When do we get there?"

Frank twisted and grunted. "Pipe down!"

I touched the brake, then gave her a shot of gas, tapped the brake again, back and forth, rocking him front and back.

"Quit that!"

"Wake up, Frank."

He gave me the finger. "Go to hell."

"What did you say?" said God.

"Yeah, Frank, what did you say?"

"Go to hell!"

I looked back at God. His eyes seemed to glow again, clear blue, like Sterno pots.

Right then, a seasicky wave moved through me like I'd got some bad food or something. But we hadn't even had any supper. Goddamn forgot.

But it passed, and just as it did, there was another possum right there on the road, biggest one I'd ever seen. No way I could miss it.

The car took a big hit and the left headlight blew out and we swerved toward the swamp. Frank came to the rescue and clamped his hand on the wheel with mine.

"Jesus damn, Clay! What're you doing!"

"Couldn't miss him. Big as a dog, damn it."

"Full of shit."

"I'm telling you, that sucker was big as a dog!"

"Probably *was* a dog."

"Way out here? Are you crazy? We've never seen a dog out here."

"It was a living creature," said God.

"Oh, shut up!" Frank yelled. "You're just here for the ride, O.K.? Don't want to hear any religious crap, either."

"O.K."

"Leave him alone, Frank."

"What'd you bring him for?"

I didn't even answer. That was the best thing to do with Frank. Let him blow his steam.

"Damn light's going to cost me fifty bucks," I said.

"Nicky'll do it for twenty," said Frank. "Quit griping."

"He won't either."

"He will. Twenty-five, tops. You tell him I sent you."

"That'll sure help."

"Will."

"Bullshit. I'm *not* taking this car to Nicky. Never again."

"What's wrong with Nicky?"

"Everything."

"Goddamn it, Clay. You have a problem with my brother?"

"Sure do."

"And what is that?"

"He's your brother, first. Second, he don't know shit about cars. I'll just go to White's."

We hit a bump and the light came back on.

"Look at that!"

Frank shrugged. "What you get for talking bad about Nicky."

"Huh?" I looked in the rearview. "Did you see that, God?"

He had his arms crossed high on his chest and his head down, like maybe he was praying.

Frank got mad. "Don't do that shit in this car, you hear? This is an atheist car. You hear me?"

"Speak for yourself, Frank. I'm no atheist."

"You are too."

"Am not!"

"Sure you are. What's wrong? You think this guy's really God or something? Ha!"

"Might be," I said. "God's everywhere."

"True," said God, into his arms. "But I'm not God. Nobody can be God by himself. We're all God. You, me, this car, that headlight, those possums. Everything out there in the swamp. I just got tired of being Sandy Sikes from Houma."

"Speak English," Frank said.

"He *is*, Frank."

"What's he talkin' about?"

"Aren't you listening?" I asked. "What's wrong with you?"

"Hit the gas. I want to fish!"

It was then God opened the door and climbed out.

And there wasn't a damn thing anybody could do about it, either. You saw the body fly back, bounce and flip and bounce again, and then roll and roll.

I rammed the brakes. "Holy hell."

"Just keep going," Frank said. "Just keep going."

"No!"

"Don't back up. Just leave him. Jesus, shit. Leave him!"

I threw it into reverse. "Goddamn it, Frank!"

"Nobody knows him. Somebody'll find him. It ain't our job. What're you going to do, pick him up and put him in the car? What're you doing, Clay?"

I backed up. But I didn't know exactly how far to go. You couldn't see. You couldn't tell.

I looked out my side, Frank his.

"He's not here, Clay. Out there drowned. Leave him. Just leave him."

"Shut the fuck up, Frank."

I kept backing up, shooting the headlights this way and that. No sign of him. Nothing in the road. No blood, nothing.

Out of nowhere I thought about Marla lying on her back in the bed look-

ing up at me and passing my hand— my right hand— across her breast, as across silk, soft as Bible pages, in the early blue light. And it was as if I had my hand back, as if the icy space had been filled and warmed again.

"He's dead, damn it," Frank said. "Just go!"

I got out.

The asphalt was soft and sticky, and you moved without sound in the night roar of the swamp.

"Get the flashlight, Frank."

He wouldn't budge.

I went around to his window. "Need your help here."

"No. You wanted to take him. I didn't."

I reached in, popped open the glove, got the flashlight. It came on weak, brown. No use at all. It made me mad and I chucked it as far as I could into the black.

Frank started up again, but I just quit listening, walked over to the edge and tried to see out in the water. The bank sliced into the black. Couldn't see a thing.

"I'm giving you one last chance!" Frank shouted.

"That's enough, Frank. Get out and help me here. We have to find him. Have to."

He gunned it and tore out.

The son of a bitch.

Couple minutes later, you couldn't even see the taillights.

The fat son of a bitch.

I turned back around. To the night roar.

What were you going to do? Call out and see if he answered? Shout, "Hey, God?"

I went along one side of the road, then back down the other. But ten feet out, you couldn't make out anything but busted branches and crap. Nobody'd wade out into that for anything.

God was dead and floating in the bayou with the cypress.

I checked south to see if Frank'd had second thoughts.

Just blackness.

It was maybe 40 miles back to town.

I hadn't taken 10 steps when the voice said, "You ready?"

I stopped. It'd come from far off, way out there.

"Hey!" I yelled. "This way!"

"You ready?" it said again. Like a whisper.

## SPECTRAL ACADEME &amp; THE GREAT SATAN

David Simpson. *The Academic Postmodern and the Rule of Literature: A Report on Half-Knowledge*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995. 199pp.

John Gray. *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. 203pp.

These books attest, although in very different ways, to the continuing academic interest in "postmodernism," by now perhaps the most vexed, contested and problematic concept in all the broad range of contemporary literary issues.

In the *Academic Postmodern* Simpson informs us that while there are other kinds, the academic one now requires its own theory. He thus focuses an elaborate scholarly apparatus on a very small subject—the "half-knowledge" produced by academic humanities research—to argue that literary humanists have now successfully completed "the efficient transfer of literary and literary-critical modalities into other disciplines, which then seem radically new" (18). This "transfer" he takes to be the crucial feature of academic postmodernism.

Simpson argues that all of academic inquiry (its paradigm) has slowly taken on "the institutional vocabulary dealing with literature and literary criticism" (1) which privileges traditional categories of literary study (figuration, subjectivity, storytelling) over those of empirical study (problem construction, data gathering, hypothesis testing, generation of general truths) and that this is dangerous since what is at "issue here, among other things, is the question of the relation between the world we inhabit and the way we theorize it or represent it" (30). Since every version of postmodernism takes for granted that knowledge, being historical, is relative ("situated") and, thus, lacking in either integrity or universality, Simpson is right in calling attention to this "danger." If we think the world works (perceives, interprets, values and acts) according to postmodern categories, then we must abandon the two-centuries-old "Enlightenment" tradition that alone legitimizes such values as individual political liberty, racial and gender equality and rationally achieved social justice. There is simply no way *effectively* to deny the validity of historical reality while privileging one's own tiny fragment of it. Either Enlightenment "master narratives" work or they do not (the cardinal postmodernist argument is that they do not); either we conceive of history as a source from which we can generate legitimate political action (rather than as a fiction masking ruling-class oppression) or we do not. If we do not we can have no faith in the morality of our agendas and must, to be consistent, engage either in social quietism or in the mere amoral promulgation of personal (disguised as collective) ambition that results in the reduction of democratic dialectic to sloganeering and logrolling. Embracing postmodernism, in other words, has consequences.

The most dangerous is the drift into moral and intellectual relativism (masked as egalitarianism). Since the "grand metanarratives" of universal truth and progress have been revealed as lies, the new map of acceptable academic outlooks favors "small" narra-

tivity: everyone has a story and each story is as significant as every other one (29). This is dangerous since it encourages us to defend against relativism by retreating into *consensus gentium* fantasies: we entertain the false hope that agreement among members of groups of like-minded "liberal bourgeois" intellectuals can be an adequate substitute for the painful decision and policy formulation that a real world of often inimicable and irreconcilable interests requires (22-23). Contemporary academics are thus especially vulnerable to the old romantic *Volk*-ish fictions according to which the individual finds his/her legitimacy in the nurturing womb of a small organic "community" of like-minded persons whose collective identity invigorates, structures and validates its otherwise inchoate and nihilistic individuals.

It is Simpson's ultimate purpose to suggest that we might have followed the path of historicism as far as we can go without debouching into a dark and perhaps trackless wood. We must find a way to renew our faith in the legitimacy of our activities as liberal academics, he suggests, in a time in which it is exactly such a faith that it is increasingly difficult to have. We are in danger, in effect, of becoming ghosts: self-delegitimated and spectral academics who, having exchanged "grand" metanarratives for small "egalitarian" ones, find ourselves haunting institutions which profess liberal values in which we can no longer fully believe.

This is a hard message but one that we need to hear and to heed.

While Simpson's tone is calm and civil and his subject so small as to be of interest primarily to specialists, John Gray's *Enlightenment's Wake* is a jeremiad about a subject (decline & fall) that is both large and of apparently inexhaustible interest to everyone. One immediately recognizes the moral impulse informing his anger and may even in some measure agree with the charge that he levels against everybody's favorite Great Satan, "the West." Thus while one initially wants to sympathize, even to agree, with at least some aspect of his argument, one cannot.

This is because the book is filled with ungainly (and perhaps meaningless) phrases such as "Rorty's somewhat Nietzscheanized-Deweyianism" (170), because its structure is frustrating (its ten chapters are really only one chapter repeated several times), and because its argument is rooted in, and is expressive of, the irrationalist illogic that is currently fashionable in much academic writing. I will illustrate this last point with only one of the several examples to be found in Gray's text.

His thesis is that the West is productive only of "anomie and nihilism" (16) and that the two hundred year "European Enlightenment project" (15) has failed. The book's Occidentophobia finally brings him to the assertion that "all forms of twentieth-century totalitarianism, Soviet and Maoist as well as Nazi, are at once uniquely Western, and distinctively modern, in their cultural origins" (154). That's all well and good, and while Gray will shortly recommend "the later Heidegger"—both a modern Westerner and a former Nazi—as the solution to Western nihilism (177), one grants the assertion for the sake of argument. Still, the book's single most insistent point (its "pluralism") is that non-Western modes of socio-cultural organization are as important as Western "nihilist" ones and ought to be left alone. Non-liberal regimes may, in fact, be better for their citizens than "regime[s] which protect liberal freedoms of expression and conscience. . . [but] which fail to maintain a level of civil peace and freedom from ordinary criminality. . . ." Conceivably "a non-liberal regime, *whose political institutions lack public accountability* and which does not assure liberal intellectual freedoms, *but which assures the security* and protects the everyday liberties of its subjects, might



legitimately be judged to satisfy the universal minimum better than some weak liberal regimes " (82, italics my own). The "universal minimum" is a vague quasi-moral standard of conduct which he begs off either defining or describing but which is essential to his assertion that the "fact that the values of one culture may be incompatible with those of another. . . does not entail relativism of values, only the notion of a plurality of values not structured hierarchically. . ." (81). But the reasoning here, as elsewhere, is muddled. His purpose is to link violence in the United States to a supposed anti-social "individualism" and to treat both as pathologies produced by "liberalism." The argument's speciousness is self-evident, however, since it is clear that "Soviet and Maoist as well as Nazi" totalitarianisms were *exactly* non-liberal regimes that protected their citizens' "civil peace and freedom from ordinary criminality" as well as from the nefarious "liberal freedoms of expression and conscience" which Gray finds so abhorrent (but which alone assure the publication of books such as his).

Despite disclaimers to the contrary, such "pluralist" valorizations do lead rather quickly to cultural relativism and, thus, to political quietism. For example, how is one to judge, say, Nazi eugenics, race or slave labor practices as atrocious if one has accepted the "pluralist" proposition that local customs, traditions, and values (which at one time and in one place expressed themselves as fascism) take precedence over other "universal" ones such as socio-political equality and individual rights (it is "rights theory" that Gray is opposing throughout) on the grounds that the fiction of universal value is the pathological by-product of a defunct Enlightenment ideology? Historically closer to hand, recent charges of war crimes against various Serbian officials must, by Gray's "pluralist" standard, be dismissed as cultural imperialism, as the arrogant and illegitimate intrusion of discredited Western ideas of universal social justice (defined in terms of an Enlightenment understanding of right and wrong behavior as the adherence to or rejection of self-evident standards of ordinary human reason and decency) into the local mores, the "situation" or "context," of a small "non-liberal regime." Ditto Rwanda, Haiti, the Middle East, American inner-cities, and so on.

This will not do. Gray's argument that "pluralism" is *truly* (ie, universally) plural, but that it is nonetheless not an expression of cultural relativism—that a "universal moral minimum" guarantees pluralism's stability and legitimacy—exposes the irreducible element of wish-fulfillment which is the compensatory *raison d'être* of all such fashionable contemporary irrationalist fantasies.

It may be true, as Gray insists, that the abstraction he calls "the West" is the world's boogymen, its Great Satan, but after more than a quarter of a century of hearing it said and after seeing country after impoverished and abused country at the earliest opportunity reject the condescending notion, too often espoused by comfortably situated Western intellectuals, that the fruits of the "organic" and "communal" life offered by "non-liberal regimes" are to be preferred to the goods, services and political freedoms routinely provided by the West even to its academics, it is perhaps time to demand more from our intellectuals than this sincere but nonetheless wrongheaded book is either willing or able to provide.

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Robert Markley, ed. *Virtual Realities and Their Discontents*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996. 162 pp.

This book presents essays by N. Katherine Hayles, Richard Grusin, Robert Markley, David Brande, David Porush, and Michelle Kendrick, dedicated to deconstructing the metaphors surrounding the concept of cyberspace. In contrast to writers like George P. Landow (*Hypertext*, 1992) and Walter J. Ong (*Orality and Literacy*, 1982) these essayists view the rapid rise of computer technology in recent years not as the dawning of a new textual age, but as the continuation and natural extension of a logocentric past. The contributors, as Markley says in the introduction, "remain sceptical of a cyber-spatial metaphysics that assumes, rather than questions, the revolutionary nature of virtual worlds and electronically mediated experience."

Markley's own contribution to the volume, a ponderously philosophical piece entitled "Boundaries: Mathematics, Alienation, and the Metaphysics of Cyberspace," gives us the basic dialectic each of the essayists will pursue. On the one hand, there is the utopian vision: "...cyberbats present the integrative technologies of Virtual Reality as an almost phenomenological means to heal the ruptures within our postmodern, postindustrial identities" (55). On the other, the view of the essayists: "Cyberspace is a consensual cliché... it does not offer a breakthrough in human, or cyborgian, evolution, but merely (though admittedly) a seductive means to reinscribe fundamental tensions within Western concepts of identity and reality" (56). Markley then proceeds with a convincing and erudite discussion of the mathematical concepts, and the hierarchies that they imply, underlying the notion of cyberspace. He does this by way of a critique of Leibniz and monadology, maintaining that many of the more expert proponents of the cyberspatial utopia, programmers and mathematicians who worked on the earliest virtual reality experiments, ascribe, unbeknownst to themselves, to Leibnizian theory, i.e. "the investment of mathematical notation with metaphysical significance" (61).

Though Markley's argument is convincing (partly, no doubt, because it would take a Leibniz scholar, which this reviewer is not, to properly critique it,) the problem seems to be with the basic suppositions that set the argument in motion. That is to say, how hard do we need to work to convince ourselves that cyberspace and virtual reality aren't going to save the world? Though the utopian vision is real, though there is certainly a body of laudatory literature, Markley's philosophical critique seems curiously overdone. It doesn't seem appropriate, somehow, to critique the contributors to *Wired* magazine with a scholarly article, any more than it would the contributors to *Cosmopolitan*. Markley seems to have invented an enemy to have something to critique. It might be productive to examine this self-promotion of literary theory in greater detail.

Michelle Kendrick, in "Cyberspace and the Technological Real," seems to initiate a counterattack to this objection. "It is crucial to emphasize that the stakes of this debate entail far more than mere philosophical musings" (154). At stake for Kendrick is the question of embodiment. Kendrick's primary targets are the discourses which tout the freedom computer users attain in cyberspace, a freedom from identity, a cutting loose of the self from the body. "In arguing that virtual technologies are revolutionary in their effects on human subjectivity, proponents of cyberspace draw on traditional Cartesian distinctions of the mind and body to argue that the self is bodiless and, indeed, that its



abstract nature is precisely what allows it to be seen as unique, unified, and coherent" (148). This presupposition of an essential self, distinct and separable from the body, has a polemical implication: "...the erasing of specific situated bodies, through abstractions of disembodiment, serves primarily to bolster the privilege of those in Western culture with unmarked bodies—primarily white upper- or upper-middle-class males" (154).

To make her point that selves are context specific and always embodied, even in the anonymous realm of cyberspace, Kendrick tells the story of a virtual rape that took place at LambdaMOO. A MOO is a program which allows a number of users to log in and interact with other users in a text-based environment. MOO players invent "characters" that are their on-line personas. In the event in question, a Mr. Bungle used a subprogram, called a voodoo doll, to take control of another character, Legba. Mr. Bungle used the voodoo doll to force Legba to "sexually service him in a variety of more or less conventional ways." Legba (in real life, a female graduate student) responded after the incident with a call for Mr. Bungle to be, among other things, "virtually castrated." Kendrick's point is that, while no rape actually occurred, while there was no physical contact, there was a violation. "Rather than reacting as though the legba persona were an alternate personality, a conscious role that she could put on or off at will, she strongly exhibits the connection, the continued complicity, of technological mediation in her sense of her 'real' self" (159).

Kendrick's piece, suitably positioned at the end of the book, breathes life into philosophical feminism through examples such as these. She blends textual analysis and anecdote into a concrete argument that is compelling and readable without sacrificing philosophical depth. Despite excellent readings of William Gibson (by David Brande) and Neal Stephenson (by David Porush), and Richard Grusin's Foucauldian analysis of the concept of authority in cyberspace ("What is an Electronic Author"), Kendrick's essay stands out for the immediacy and clarity of its argument.

One thing that is remarkable and commendable about the collection as a whole is the diversity of the viewpoints. Beside Kendrick's feminism and Markley's philosophy are the Marxist analyses by Brande and Grusin and, most startling in a book of literary theory, Porush's reading of *Snow Crash* which, by way of a lengthy history of numeric symbologies and representation, manages to place science fiction within a narrative context that stretches seamlessly back three thousand years and concludes that the contemporary cyberspatial metaphor is in fact indicative of a return to metaphysical and religious concerns. Markley deserves credit for editing a volume that contains a field of analyses so heterogenous as to make them an essential cross-section of theoretical work on the topic.

The one essay that I have not yet mentioned, N. Katherine Hayles' "Boundary Disputes: Homeostasis, Reflexivity, and the Foundations of Cybernetics," the first in the book, is perhaps the most enlightening. Hayles uses a rigorously archaeology method, thus avoiding the self-engendering pitfall that Markley seems to fall prey to, to unearth a particularly interesting theme in the discourse on cybernetics, the theme of evolution toward a posthuman age. What is so refreshing about Hayles' approach is that she considers not only texts and their historical context, but the institutional frameworks from which they arose. Cybernetics, which may be properly seen as the term from which cyberspace evolved, was defined for the first time as an organized discipline in a series of conferences sponsored by the Josiah Macy Foundation between 1946 and

1953. Hayles reads not only the papers that were presented at these conferences, but reads them in their specific contexts and in dialogic relation to each other, revealing in great detail how "cybernetics was forged as an interdisciplinary framework that would allow humans, animals, and machines to be constituted through the common denominators of feedback loops, signal transmission, and goal-seeking-behavior" (11).

Hayles' essay provides the backbone of the collection by providing the thesis that the other contributors often seem to be objecting to without stating and brings to light the fact that the discourse on cybernetics, cyberspace, and virtual reality stems from a politico-social root that is not reducible to any philosophical, polemical, metaphysical, or materialist basis, but from a complex layering of forces. "If it is true that we are on the threshold of becoming posthuman," she concludes, "surely it behooves us to understand the overlapping patterns of replication and innovation that have brought us to where we now are" (37).

Cybernetics is truly interdisciplinary. Under its heading we should group a wide variety of texts from the fields of computer science, communications, information science, science fiction, and social criticism. But then there is one leap that Hayles does not make, perhaps a blind-spot that each of these essayists, in differing ways, is subject to. Shouldn't we append to this list of cybernetic disciplines, disciplines which study information and the processes of its transmission, signs and their social implications, those which study precisely the same thing in the arena of language? Don't semiotics and its contemporary cousin, literary theory, belong to this group of discourses, too? Certainly the fields are made possible by the same institution, and there are certain internal similarities, too. Don't literary theory and cybernetics both contemplate a utopia, a classless society, a revolutionizing of the self, brought about by a sophisticated study and use of signs? We can only wonder what would have been uncovered had Hayles extended her archaeology back to another strata, to the era, say, of Babbage and Saussure, when computer science and linguistics were born in the same historical breath.

—Reviewer *William Lavender* is a contributing editor for *New Orleans Review*.

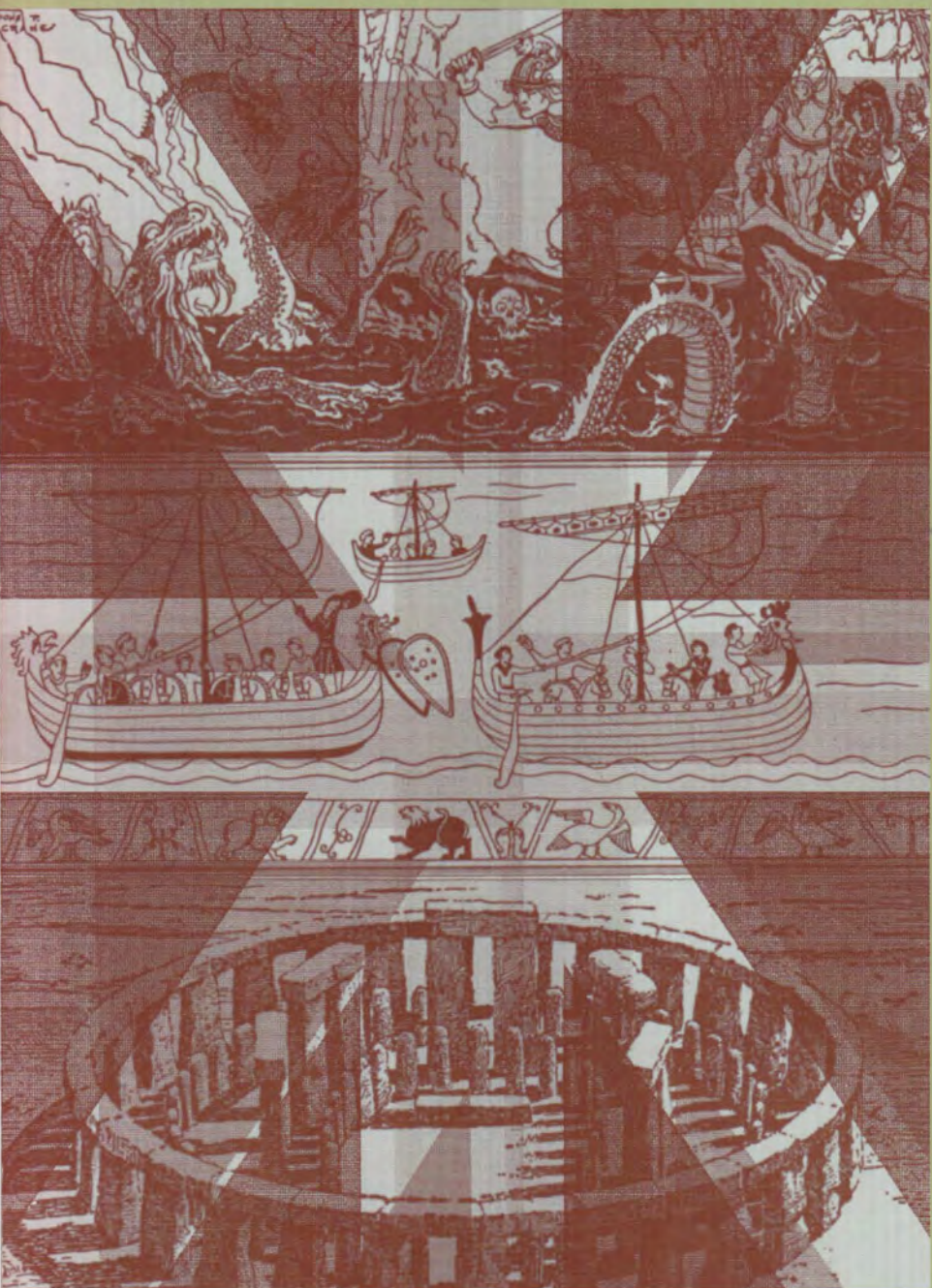
**Kyle Jarrard** writes for the *International Herald Tribune* in France. He is at work on a novel for Baskerville.

**Doug MacCash**, *New Orleans Review's* art editor, is a visual artist, and is head preparator at the Historic New Orleans Collection, a columnist for *Offbeat* magazine, and the new father of Lucy MacCash.

Editors note. The *New Orleans Review* interview with poet Jack Gilbert is delayed until the fall issue.

# New Orleans Review

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