

IN BRIEF



Another instalment of Maurice Scully's long sequence, *Livelihood* (1986-1997) has just been published by Reality Street Editions (4 Howard Ct, Peckham Rye, London SE15 3PH). Comprising sixty-nine pages of individual poems, *Steps*, the blurb says, "is not a 'collection' of discrete items but itself part of a large structure", and this means that it is often difficult to negotiate one's way through some passages. The jury's out until complete publication, but in the meantime there's much to savour here, not least the freshness of Scully's preoccupations in the Irish context and his willingness to go beyond the formal conservatism of much Irish poetry.

One of the finest critics of poetry in America, James Longenbach, has published a book of essays entitled *Modern Poetry After Modernism* (OUP). It came out of his frustration with the "breakthrough" narrative which characterizes all American poetry as New Critical up to 1959, at which time Robert Lowell published *Life Studies* thereby releasing torrents of experimentation and innovation. The critical fable fails to accommodate the work of so many fine poets that Longenbach considers it high time it was discarded. Among those are Elizabeth Bishop, Richard Wilbur, Amy Clampitt, Jorie Graham and Robert Pinsky. He writes with clarity and style, and whets the appetite to re-read these poets rather than reducing them to a set of ideological equations. Such critics are thin on the ground these days.

In what feels like no time since *The First Four Books of Poems* and *The Wild Iris* (reviewed in *Metre* 4), Carcanet have now published Louise Glück's *Meadowlands* and *Proofs and Theories: Essays on Poetry*. *Meadowlands* possesses the classical poise and grace one has come to expect from Glück but at the same time snarls, claws and bitches its way through the break up of a marriage. It reads with the verve of a good novel (excellent dialogues, firmly marshalled plot), yet also contains some of Glück's best lyrics. Carcanet though are having a hard time keeping up with her as her latest collection, *Vita Nova*, has just been published in America. Let's hope we get that too.

Another American poet recently introduced to audiences this side of the Atlantic is Charles Simic. In 1995 Faber published a selection, *Frightening Toys*, and this spring Harcourt Brace brought out his *Jackstraws*. But what was once enjoyable and original goofing around with

the big themes has now turned tedious, as this Professor of English at the University of New Hampshire is proving incapable of re-inventing himself from one book to the next. Wacky surrealism on draught, Rowan & Martin Laugh-ins on a loop. No thanks.

It's been over thirty years since the last biography of Hart Crane, all the more reason to welcome Paul Mariani's finely written *The Broken Tower: A Life of Hart Crane* (W.W. Norton). Perhaps it's because the English and Irish poetic traditions have never really known what to do with the Romantic sublime that those American poets such as Stevens and Crane who picked up the baton dropped by Shelley and Wordsworth have always been so neglected over here. Looking for a way into Crane's slim but complex life-work, you could do a lot worse than turn to Mariani's book which tells a fascinating and colourful story so well and reads the poetry so excellently. Warmly recommended.

A handsome and rewarding batch of pamphlets from Shoestring Press: Michael Murphy's *After Attila*, a bouquet of translations from the great but still under-translated Attila József; *The Lobster Can Wait* by Christopher Pilling, with much Gallic adroitness and wit; from Leros to Liverpool with Matt Simpson's *Somewhere Down the Line*; *Clair de Lune* by Stuart Henson and Mark Bennett—serious moonlight and spectral intrigue; and *The Cheerfulness of Sparrows* by Peter Walton, English birdlife, to be read to the accompaniment of Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. Further details from: Shoestring Press, 19 Devonshire Avenue, Beeston, Nottingham NG9 1BS.

Another poet who has published with Shoestring Press is Dimitris Tsaloumas, whose new collection from the University of Queensland Press is *The Harbour*. Tsaloumas is a meditative classicist, whether he writes about Greece, Melbourne suburbia or, through a symbolist filter, conflict and bloodshed. Pretend you didn't see the title page and imagine you're reading some late Aegean survivor from *The Greek Anthology*. Then read a poem like "Autumn Days 1995" and realize how contemporary he can be too.

American poet William Bronk died in Spring 1999. *His Life Supports: New and Collected Poems* are published by Talisman. He is a laureate of epistemological anxiety: "Gnomon of the Pro-Nouns" reads in its entirety: "Loving you is love but is not you. / Knowledge of you is knowing but not you. / He is not, nor it; you are. / I am not I. My despair is your despair." Bronk evidently knew his Stevens, late Stevens rather than the more floribund chanticleer of *Harmonium*. Dryness and abstraction are persistent problems. A highly selective *Selected* will be the Bronk book to read.

The Belfast- and London-based *Brangle* has made its third appearance, with new work by Michael Longley, Bernard O'Donoghue, Jean Bleakney, Aidan Rooney-Céspedes and Cathal McCabe. Here is Peter Reading's "At the Reading", which must go down a treat at his own readings: "The sham-coy simper, / the complacency, / the *frisson* titters, / the sycophancy." *Brangle* laudably sets its face against literary in-breeding and sleaze, but we trust the presence of a number of *Metre* contributors doesn't prevent us endorsing this lively and resourceful magazine (£3 stg, available from 100a Tunis Road, London W12 7EY and 42 Sicily Park, Belfast BT10 0AL).

You won't find a biographical note, let alone a photograph, on the back of J.H. Prynne's *Poems* (Bloodaxe) but his belated availability in a commercial edition may finally help Prynne lose the tag of the invisible man of English poetry. Which would be a good thing, but as for his being "probably the most significant English poet of the late twentieth century" (John Kinsella), we'll have to wait for the review in *Metre* 7 to discover. Another book scheduled for review in *Metre* 7 is Conor O'Callaghan's exceptional second collection *Seatown* (Gallery).

Prynne wouldn't feel too out of place in the pages of the eponymously titled *The Journal*, which cultivates a pugnacious obliquity to the mainstream. As Maurice Scully complains in "zulu dynamite": "So complete, so / concerted has been the walling round. To call repetitive / clones 'innovators' & get away with it. To inculcate / a pathologically low tolerance threshold for complexity / & be thought intelligent." Tom Raworth, Geoffrey Squires, Catherine Walsh and Brian Coffey complete the list of contributors, with the last of these eyebrow-archingly described as "possibly the most significant Irish poet since Yeats". A contents page might have helped. *The Journal* is available from hardPressed Poetry (PO Box 6733, Dublin 6W, £9 for two issues).

In "The Day Lady Died" Frank O'Hara picks up a copy of *New World Writing* "to see what the poets / in Ghana are doing these days". These days the internationally curious reach for *Verse*, which has recently devoted special issues to Scotland and Australia (Vol. 15.1-2, Vol. 15.3-16.1), packed with many more good things than can be easily listed here. Subscriptions come at \$15 from: English Department, Plymouth State College, Plymouth, NH 03264, US.

Dedalus Press have published two new instalments of Thomas Kinsella's Peppercanister sequence, *The Familiar* (Peppercanister 20, £6.95) and *Godhead* (Peppercanister 21, £6.95). The first of these returns to familiar Baggot Street haunts, the second contains a meditation on the trinity of father, son and spirit. The four lines of "Spirit" could hardly be more valedictory: "A wind that passes and does not return. / Disturbing a

few particles / loose on the desert. // Dust of our lastborn.” But then Kinsella has been writing poetry in a valedictory tone for almost a half-century now. May his long goodbye have several performances to run yet.

Two fine translations: Michael Hartnett’s *O Rathaille* (Gallery) and Patrick C. Power’s *The Midnight Court* (Mercier Press), after Brian Merriman’s eighteenth-century masterpiece *Cúirt an Mheán-Oíche*. *O Rathaille* completes a remarkable trilogy of translations that began with *O Bruadair* and continued with *Haicéad*. It is with Hartnett that anyone interested in the Gaelic seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should begin. Extra plaudits to Patrick C. Power’s Merriman translation for including the text of the original.

Don’t let the cover put you off: David Kennedy’s *Men’s Talk* (Sheffield University Printing Resources) is one of those fugitive publications that shouldn’t be allowed to go by unnoticed. Kennedy’s poetry is full of quirky argumentation and aleatory charm: “A Walking Lunch”, “What Pefkos Said” and “Horse Chestnut” are all fine and more than fine poems.

Missed opportunities corner: John Calder has reprinted Samuel Beckett’s *Collected Poems 1930-1978*, despite this edition now being fifteen years old and badly out of date. In his defence he points to differences with the Beckett Estate. The authorship of a number of French poems from the 1940s is known to be disputed, but this does not explain the absence from the book of a late great poem like “what is the word”, to give only one example. Beckett wrote many poems and translations he was unwilling to publish or reprint, such as “Antipepsis” (published in *Metre* 3) and his version of Montale’s “Delta” (published in this issue), but whether they go in an appendix or in a separate book from the rest of his poetry they should now be in print in some form. Someone should do what it takes as soon as possible and give us the *Complete Poems and Translations* we need.

COMING ATTRACTIONS INCLUDE

Chris Agee on American Poetry

Stephen Burt on Randall Jarrell

Elizabeth Lowry on South African Poetry

John Kerrigan on Jeffrey Wainwright

Montale Revisited