

B R I E F L Y N O T E D

Greta Stoddart's *At Home in the Dark* (Anvil) is a first collection of considerably more than routine interest. Stoddart is acutely sensitive to demarcations of light and dark, and beneath the poetry's cool poise there is a disturbing undertow in poems like "Premonition" and "A Hundred Sheep in a Green Field". Carol Rumens has written about "stealing the genre", but Stoddart does some more literal pilfering in "The Night We Stole a Full-Length Mirror", a *tour de force* of sly eroticism. Another of the book's strengths lies in its lucidly detached perspective, which Stoddart maintains without compromising the emotional complexity of her subjects, and her range is impressive, from affectionate addresses to her husband and mother, to bizarre fantasies like "Switzerland", to an enjoyable Swiftian humour in "Waving Goodbye to the Elegists". The maturity and sophistication of this as a first collection makes for a most enjoyable and illuminating read.

Gillian Allnutt's collection *Lintel* (Bloodaxe) was a PBS choice in 2001, and deservedly so. With its religious preoccupations and trance-like tone, it is different from the present demotic dispensation in British poetry. Allnutt is very much involved in poetry workshops and is the author of *Berthing: A Poetry Workbook* (1991); in her acknowledgements she remarks that many of the poems in the collection began during sessions at Newcastle University's Centre for Lifelong Learning. All those people who complain that such institutional structures yield conveyor-belt Confessionalism are advised to study *Lintel* well: its pleasures and atmospheres are the product of an original talent.

Carcenet have re-issued Charles Tomlinson's *Some Americans* (1981), and added several of his essays on American poetry (for the most part about Modernism and Objectivism); it appears under the title, *American Essays: Making It New*. Other re-issues from Carcanet have included Donald Davie's criticism, most importantly perhaps *With the Grain*, which includes one of the outstanding critical works on the British and American traditions, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (1972).

Tomlinson, the better poet of the two, is much less on the critical *qui vive* than Davie: he is more anecdotal and recounts stories of his friendships with several American poets. While doing little to change ideas of American poetry, it does provide valuable background on the influence that poetry has had on Tomlinson's own work as a poet.

Reginald Shepherd was the recipient of a "Discovery"/*The Nation* Award in 1993, and his third collection, *Wrong* (University of Pittsburgh Press), comes strongly endorsed by Mark Doty and Marilyn Hacker. As noted by Doty, the collection's main theme is the erasure and founding of identity based on being "not white, not straight, not apologetic, not believing in the easy way of making sense". The collection contains an oration, "At the Grave of Hart Crane", and it is easy to detect Crane's influence in the tidal zones chosen as the setting for meditations about Narcissus, and in the formal mode of address that reflects the classical temper of each. Shepherd is strongest when he resists the draw of an abstract landscape and turns to the physicality of the figures in it; "Icarus on Fire Island" puts Stephen Dedalus's meditation in *Portrait of the Artist* to good use, replacing the tumbling son of the original myth with a kite, while his erotic imagery recalls Mapplethorpe: "Wolfsbane, monkshood/ demon lover's black corsage". Weaker are the poems in which puns and homonyms lead into the maze of language poetry, all too sententious in their conclusions; better is "Geology of Water"—a translucent exploration of self using an extended conceit, reminiscent of Clampitt or Moore.

Ian Hamilton, poet, editor and critic is dead. As editor of *The Review* and *The New Review* he perfected the art not just of paying contributors nothing, but of making them seem grateful for it too (see *Another Round at the Pillars*, the *Festschrift* for his sixtieth birthday, *passim*). He ran a tight shop: "praise was unknown", Blake Morrison noted, "the best hope was to avoid a withering put down". He biographised Lowell, Salinger and Arnold and wrote the best-titled sports book ever, *Gazza Agonistes*. Is it true that he once finished a round-up review by describing the last book as having "a nice title"—end of review? Maybe we'll find out if someone puts together a miscellany of Hamilton's fugitive pieces. It'd make an enjoyable book. Oh, and he wrote poems too. *Sixty Poems* at the last count in 1998, and small ones too, most of the lower halves of its few enough

pages blank. Putting it like that makes them sound like afterthoughts to Hamilton's bulkier output in prose. Not so: they form the centre of his work, and have a look of small but undeniable permanency about them.

Perhaps the most important poetry publication in the U.S. in 2001 was James Merrill's *Collected Poems* (Knopf), edited by J.D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser. It will be reviewed by Robert Potts in the next issue of *Metre*. And back on home ground, *Touching the Bones* and *Grace* are two first collections by *Metre* graduates Tom French and Bill Tinley (Gallery Press and New Writers Press respectively), while another recent *Metre* first-timer, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin has published her first book in seven years, *The Girl Who Married the Reindeer* (Gallery Press). Reviews also to follow.

Corrections and clarifications corner. In the interview with Richard Murphy in *Metre* 10, the quotation from his "Wellington Testimonial" inadvertently omitted the word "point", blunting its "point" in more ways than one. And the two Philip Larkin poems, also in *Metre* 10, come from notebook number six, not number two. Not quite as bad as a poke in the eye with a sharp stick, as the man himself used to say, but getting there.