

Never is the title of Jorie Graham's new collection from (\$22.95, Ecco, which now sadly is no longer an independent publisher but an imprint of Harper Collins, who gobbled it a while back). It is 112 large pages in length, and it returns to description in earnest, after the more metaphysical dislocations of *Swarm* (reviewed by Peggy O'Brien in *Metre* 11). That last book dismantled syntax—*Never* reconstructs it:

Over a dock railing, I watch the minnows, thousands, swirl
themselves, each a minuscule muscle, but also, without the
way to create current, making of their unison (turning, re-
infecting,
entering and exiting their own unison in unison) making of
themselves a
visual current, one that cannot freight or sway by
minutest fractions the water's downdrafts and upswirls, the
dockside cycles of finally-arriving boat-wakes...

This is the beginning of "Prayer", and the book is suffused with supplications for the fate of the earth. Graham is most openly ecological here with the descriptive urgencies driven on by this concern. Like most of her books, it is demanding and resists brusque evaluation. Time will be needed to assess it on its own, and within the body of her oeuvre.

In Kafka's "The Giant Mole", the narrator publishes a pamphlet on the sudden appearance in the village of a monstrous nocturnal mammal, then in a moment of agonised conscientiousness decides to recall all the copies. If Samuel Beckett's unpublished and uncollected poems have led a legendary mole-like existence over the years, turning up on rare and unpredictable occasions, the publisher of his *Poems 1930-1989* (John Calder, £25) would do well to follow the example of Kafka's narrator. Trawling for new material in a notebook from the 1970s Calder has come across an epitaphic stanza beginning "One who never turned her back", and publishes it here as an untitled late poem. It is in fact an imperfectly transcribed stanza from Robert Browning's

"Epilogue to Asolando". Beckett liked his Browning, and in *Happy Days* Winnie attempts to remember a line from *Paracelsus* that captures all too well Calder's approach to editing: "I say confusedly what comes uppermost." Owners of *Metre* 3 can permit themselves a Belacqua "quarter-smile" at the description of the early squib "Antipepsis" as previously "unpublished", reserving the other three quarters for the publication of an adequate successor to this shockingly slapdash and error-laden book.

Geoffrey Hill has published a new book-length poem, entitled *The Orchards of Syon* (Counterpoint, \$24; English publication to follow). The book is handsomely set in an unusual typeface called Fell, and indeed type-design falls under the book's purview:

Deep-rucked topsoil where brick lorries turn; Jim
Brindley's iron and stone; Boulton's coin press;
Baskerville cutting, setting, his plain
and ornamental types; artificers'
resounding mastery of things hard laboured.

Mellower in tone than the two preceding collections, *The Triumph of Love* (1998) and *Speech! Speech!* (2000), *The Orchards of Syon* will nevertheless, like those books, take time to be comprehended in their full complexity and—the word seems only accurate—greatness. (An essay by Peter McDonald on *The Triumph of Love* appeared in *Metre* 10.) We will not be reviewing it, but instead invite essays on this phase of Hill's career.

Warmly recommended for rides on steamboats, viaducts, and railways, or just the bus, is John Hollander's selection of *Sonnets: From Dante to the Present* (Everyman, \$12.50). Beautifully produced like all of the Pocket Library series, the book has a marvelous range, from the delicacy of Elizabeth Bishop's dimeter "Sonnet" to the *sprezzatura* of Giuseppe Giaocchino Belli's "The Bosses of Rome", in Miller Williams's translation:

These are the bosses of Rome; take a good look.
They know how to deal with scum like us. They learn
To cook us on both sides as no other cook
Could cook us, turned out perfectly, done to a turn.

Handsel Books, an imprint of Other Press in New York, is a new outlet for poetry and poetry criticism. Among the items we found in the parcel were two collections, Lee Gerlach's *Highwater* and Daniel Bosch's *Crucible*, along with a book of interviews edit-

ed by Harry Thomas (who is also the list's editor), *Talking with Poets*. The interviews arose out of classes which Thomas gave and for the most part it is the students who interrogate Robert Pinsky, Seamus Heaney, Philip Levine, Michael Hofmann and David Ferry. One or two of these are obviously all-interviewed-out (some anecdotes recycled almost verbatim here), but the interviews with Hofmann and Heaney are well worth a look. One student asks Heaney what makes him "distinctly an Irish poet and not a British poet?" This is the reply:

Well, the issue probably wouldn't arise at all were there not the political situation in the North. All of those remarks about Irish versus British are actually intended as irritants rather than definitions. The adjectives have nothing essential to do with the noun. They have to do with the aggravation of the political and current situation. They're a form of game-playing.

Now, there's a tune to whistle.

Like Thomas Russell in the '98 ballad, James Henry (1798-1876) is a "man from God knows where". No obscurity could have been more sepulchral, no neglect more replete than those he has enjoyed until now. And yet here is at last, a startling rediscovery. Scourge of God and Christianity, celebrant of pigeons and sofas, missing link in the succession from Swift to Beckett, Henry features in no anthology of Irish verse we've seen. Time to make amends, after hearty thanks to his editor, Christopher Ricks (*Selected Poems of James Henry*, Handsel, \$22; Irish edition forthcoming from Lilliput Press).

Dermot Healy has recently been prolific as a novelist, playwright and memoirist, and his success in these genres tends to overshadow his poetry. His new collection, *The Reed Bed* (Gallery, IR£12.95, IR£6.95), combines minute glosses of the natural world (there are the imitative notes of "The Blackbird"—"At sadness heard him pluck, scold, stop, teeter, sway, call in the animals at sunset/ whistle for the fun of it/ and the forgetfulness") with melancholy and sometimes comically self-scrutinising exile's letters ("Better to be abrasive in Hull/ than go shouting 'Go fuck yourself'// to no-one in particular/ on a windy peninsula").

On 9 May, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill launched *Irish Pages* as part of the Cathedral Arts Quarter Festival in Belfast. Edited by Chris

Agee, with Cathal Ó Searcaigh as the Irish language editor, this journal of Irish writing, published twice-yearly, aims to fill the gap left by *The Bell*. Its inaugural issue reflects the scope of Agee's international perspective on literature and politics, and includes writings by the Palestinian poet, Zakaria Mohammed, a previously unpublished essay by Hubert Butler on his trip as a delegate of the National Peace Council to the Balkans, and an extract from an unpublished poem by W.G. Sebald, accompanied by a tribute from Michael Hamburger. Dean Andrew Furlong, who has just resigned in the face of prosecution for heresy by the Church of Ireland (the first such case for centuries), has an essay on the historical Christ. There is also new writing from Seamus Heaney, Medbh McGuckian, Deirdre Madden, John Montague, Tom Paulin and Cathal Ó Searcaigh, as well as Helen Lewis and Ivo Zanic. A subscription costs €26 per annum. More details available from *Irish Pages*, The Linen Hall Library, 17 Donegall Square North, Belfast BT1 5GB.

A list of contents for *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vols. IV and V is now available on the Cork University Press website. The section on contemporary Irish women's poetry, edited by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, reflects the project's long genesis through the late 1990s, and usefully builds on projects like Joan McBreen's *The White Page / An Bhileóg Bhán*.

The English poetry magazine, *Thumbscrew*, edited by Tim Kendall, is bowing out with a double issue. It was the best poetry magazine in the UK during the 1990s, and provided a good deal of the inspiration for *Metre's* own founding in 1996. In the early years of the decade, when the London poetry world was beginning to look like a continuous PR cocktail party, *Thumbscrew* published sharp, independent notices which cared nothing for reputation, and everything for poetry itself. Sorely missed isn't in it. But no sooner does it leave by the door than it comes back through the window, with three pamphlets: Peter McDonald's *As If*, Andrew McNeillie's *One for the Road*, and Anne Stevenson's *Hearing with my Fingers* (all £4, Thumbscrew Press, P.O. Box 657, Oxford OX2 6PH).

English and French constitute a single language, said Wallace Stevens. Whatever the truth of that, no one remembered to tell English and French poetry: Anglophone anthologies of contemporary French poetry are disappointingly thin on the ground, with Marilyn Hacker's recent special of *Poetry* a welcome excep-

tion. Hacker turns up again in Stephen Romer's equally welcome *Twentieth-Century French Poems* (Faber & Faber, £10.99), two hundred or so poems from Valéry, Jarry, Roussel and Apollinaire to Paul de Roux, Gilles Ortlieb, Paul le Jéloux and Valérie Rouzeau, all of them new names to *Metre*. The lack of *en regard* originals is a pity, but this is still one of the best of Faber's recent crop of paperback anthologies.

Michael Longley's *Twentieth-Century Irish Poems*, also from Faber & Faber, arrives in hardback, and one pound cheaper too. If Yeats is the Everest of Irish verse, as another Irish anthology began by declaring, Longley has assembled an enjoyable landscape of molehills to accompany him, even if it's hard to think of Yeats or anyone else towering over Mahon's "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford". Longley's choice of poems by Kathleen Tynan, Helen Waddell and Patrick MacDonogh has already attracted praise, to which we add praise of our own for his choice of Hartnett's "An Dobharchú Gonta", Ní Chuilleanáin's "Fireman's Lift", and Dennis O'Driscoll's "Water".

Anyone who has ever wondered what became of English poet John Ash will be interested in the new *Near East Review*, in which he turns up giving an interview from his new home in Istanbul. Also in attendance are Christopher Middleton, Peter Didsbury and Sean O'Brien, mixing it with a selection of Middle Eastern writers, including Sunay Akin, whose terse poems include "The Statue": "Only I know/ the world's/ birds/ migrate/ just to/ shit/ on statues/ of dictators" (*Near East Review*, Faculty of Humanities & Letters, Bilkent University, 06533 Ankara, Turkey, \$18 for a two-issue subscription). Mark Ford will provide the low-down on John Ash's latest collection in the next issue of *Metre*.

Does Ruth Padel do much cooking with chillies? If so, the experiment tried in "Home Cooking" (*Voodoo Shop*, Chatto & Windus, £8.99) might have been painful for all concerned. *Metre* recommends Johnson's baby powder for any lingering irritation, or failing that a sturdy pair of long johns in future.

Two Carcanet *Collecteds* that arrived too late for more than casual dip, this time round at least: by Elizabeth Jennings (a *New Collected*, in fact; £9.95) and Donald Davie (£14.95). And is that the sound of a cane connecting with schoolgirls' flesh we hear in the background? It can only be Philip Larkin and *Trouble at Willow Gables, and Other Fictions*, expertly edited for Faber by James Booth (£20).

Just in the postbox before we went to press: the first issue of *Fulcrum: An Annual of Poetry and Aesthetics*, out of Cambridge, Mass. It runs poetry and essays, and there is an impressive international range of contributors. Ireland is represented by Randolph Healy and Paul Muldoon, and there are writers from as wide afield as Belize, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore, England, India and Guyana, as well as a strong American contingent. Politics and regionalism are clearly concerns, and the editorial states, "The true fulcrum is everywhere" (\$12 per issue, *Fulcrum*, 334 Harvard St, Suite D-2, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA).

Despite international efforts at mediation stopping just short of calls for UN intervention, fighting rages on in the war-torn province of Tom Paulin (*The Invasion Handbook*, Faber & Faber, £12.99). Early indications suggest hostilities are likely to continue for at least another five years. Sandbags at the ready!

Metre garbled the Polish diacritics in Cathal McCabe's poems and translations on pages 35 and 36 of the last issue. The title of his first poem should have read "Jastrzębia Góra" and the second poem, "From the River Limpopo: A Letter" was translated from the Polish of Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, and not the mathematical formula we turned him into. Our apologies to McCabe and the memory of Gałczyński. With the switch in this issue to Jannon Text Moderne as our standard font, we hope to avoid all such errors in future.

Mention in these columns does not preclude lengthier review in a later issue.