

SAMPLER

*Of Heads & Hearts*

ALSO BY LUCY HAMILTON

Sonnets for my Mother (Hearing Eye, 2009)

Stalker (Shearsman Books, 2012)

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Lucy Hamilton

SAMPLE  
Of Heads  
&  
Hearts

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2018 by  
Shearsman Books  
50 Westons Hill Drive  
Emersons Green  
BRISTOL  
BS16 7DF

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office  
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB  
(this address not for correspondence)

[www.shearsman.com](http://www.shearsman.com)

ISBN 978-1-84861-571-7

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the editors of the following magazines in which many of these poems, or earlier versions of them, first appeared: *Shearsman*, *PN Review*, *Molly Bloom*, *Litmus*, *Her Wings of Glass Anthology*, *Tears in the Fence*, *The Wolf* and *The Rialto*. A group of poems from ‘The Diarists’ appeared in *PN Review* 220 and in an exhibition at The Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, for which I am grateful to Michael Schmidt, Heather Lane, Naomi Boneham, Rosie Amos and Joseph Minden.

My thanks to Mimi Khalvati, Kaddy Benyon, Lucy Sheerman, Joanne Limburg, Peter Collier, Clare Crossman, Jeri Onitskansky, Fiona Moore, Hannah Lowe, Ali Thurm, Joanne Clarke, Linda Black and Jude Rosen. Thanks also to Tony Frazer.

I wish to thank James and Mary Yardley, mutual friends of the ‘Engineer’, for their extended friendship and kindness.

Special thanks to the real-life protagonists of these poems for their generosity and permissions.

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*For my family and friends  
who inspired these poems*

*With love & admiration*

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## Geometries & Numbers

The Polymath is sitting at the white round table drawing tangents with his protractor, set-square, ruler and compass. The Art Dealer hovers by hoping against hope that the proportional measurements between the 'dots' on his bronze insignia, a stylised representation of a symmetric 8-petal flower, match those of the Rosette in Milan Cathedral. The wall is covered in the Polymath's chalk equations, diagrams and formulae. I'm planning to paper another with his beautiful pen & ink diagrams. He frequently achieves an almost complete model but there's always one essential component that refuses to fit and I tell him it's like doing the Rubik's Cube. On a dresser next to the old Dutch wood-burner there's a wooden ship he bought me from a tea plantation in Java. We seldom drink *tea* in Spyglass Inn and when we dance on the boards and hear a thud everyone cries *There goes the ship!* Yes, a frieze of bright-inked diamonds, cubes, rectangles and triangles and from the ceiling octahedra and tetrahedra flying around like Chinese kites.

## Wigs & Dyes

Every day the Entrepreneur flits from place to place wearing *Mary May*, like a humming bird flaunting its blond & crimson feathers. Her office is crowded with *Babu / Nikki / Alex / Abdul / Oska / Aziza / Britney / Molly / Minka* – for nowadays as in ancient Egypt both genders wear wigs. Back then heads were shaved and embellished with wigs threaded from sheep's wool or vegetable fibres dyed in inks from plants, oak-bark & shellfish – to protect against sunstroke or lice-infestation. Ever since people could create they've been adding pigment to the world around them. The Entrepreneur is no exception. While Egyptian queens adorn their wigs with ornaments of gold & ivory, she loops ribbons in *Mary May*, and on her bike festooned with plastic flowers brightens the city where ever she goes.

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## Codes & Folios

The Art Dealer is collecting citations from the most ancient texts – the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and the *Codex Sinaiticus*: the solar and lunar week, lunations and weekday dates, monthly and yearly cycles from Babylonia and Egypt which the ancients used as mnemo-technique to teach computation of reliable religious festivals. The folios are stretched skin of donkey or antelope and it's thought 360 animals were slaughtered for the *Codex*. He's trawling for Jewish and Christian references before turning to the Arabic sources. He has produced eighteen Word pages – about six thousand words itching in his fingertips. Outside of this writing process he's forever 'losing marbles', as though his brain-box had shifted to another zone throwing an entirely new and stretched perspective on the world.

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## Orthogonals & Transversals

The Architect is working on a painting overlooking the Tarn, which he started during his annual painting trip to France. He's enraptured by the pink brick of Albi Cathedral blazing like a rose in the Midi sun. He sighs, twiddles his chubby fingers and sips his pint of Adnams. Today has not gone well. Years enslaved by perspective and a prodigious memory! He's Theseus in a labyrinth of orthogonals & transversals whose Ariadne has snapped the thread of the ball she is spinning. The Polymath suggests a trip to the Blue Ball at Grantchester.

Shifting his pint, the Architect spreads the photos of his paintings. It's a tour of aqueducts & amphitheatres, rock-faces, gorges, castles & cathedrals. I search for his faithless Ariadne, willing her to emerge from a glint of river, a spiral cloud, a flash of red hibiscus. I ask about the recent commission. Finished, he says cheerfully. The Royal Scot steaming on Platform 2, the commissioner's father - tam o'shanter & hackle cocked at a jaunty angle: Royal Scots Fusiliers, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. And I know that everything is to scale - meticulous and flawless.

## Wild Sage & Camomile

The Engineer is applying to be Director of Corsican Railways, as advertised in *Corse Matin*. A dream come true for a structural & material engineer with a good track record. The perfect post for a foreigner with a fresh perspective. She's attempting transmigration, speaking the *lingua corsa*, flitting between Cambridge & Calvi according to season & pocket. The washing-machine's been fixed and she's planted two vines & three trees: apricot, grapefruit & olive, along with the desert scrub *lantana* – the name of her parents' house in Liverpool. The little garden is a repository for wild sage & camomile and her cooking-pot is varied & generous. She brings her once-eminent father here to nurture him through dementia. But he refuses to eat, wanders the streets, and before the year's through he's transported back to Liverpool.

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## Rice & Wine

On the pine worktop clean cooking implements lie in parallels. Garlicky knives, forks & spoons are cross-layered in neat little stacks. At each extreme of the work-surface a white teacup brims with rice. A bottle of red glints at the ready. As he stirs & tastes the sticky *Oriza sativa*, the Polymath recalls water-buffalo working straight lines across the paddy fields. The men plough while the women plant seedlings, half-hidden under wide-brimmed hats – just like the carvings in the Prambanan temples! There's jasmine tea and red or white Brema distilled from black & white rice. When he brings the *nasi goreng* to the table, I'm dancing with the Architect. The Javanese ship wobbles on the shelf above the fire.

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## Mules & Men

The Diarist has inadvertently deleted her latest draft. The story's imagined but she knows it well, easily retrieving Tangiers: the noise & mules & men excitingly shocking to the 1930s English! Oranges, grapefruit & lemons spilling from the trees and how she'd insisted on the trip, travelling alone to join her man at work and now these two small boys enter the script. Her daughter helps research dockers, ratchets & abduction ... *In a raid against Lisbon in 1189, the Almohad caliph Yaqub al-Mansur took 3,000 female and child captives to the Atlas Mountains.* And here are Mohammed & Hassan stowed in a Moroccan container, turning up on a Felixstowe truck, searching for their blood mother.

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## Tati the Parrot

The Polymath is creating a model to demonstrate analogies of space and time across physical and biological structures. He nurtures it in his head and in the diagrams he draws with coloured pens – calculations a cosmologist transfers into Euclidian graphics. Meanwhile the Art Dealer is asking him questions about Pythagoras and the pattern of 3 in the rosette windows of Milan Cathedral, adding that 52 is the number he found in a book about the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem where a medieval Arab traveller witnessed a liturgy being performed. Today and every day at the appointed hour 52 *lascars* anoint the tip of the Rock with sweet-smelling ointments. And because his hotel window looks down on a second-hand bookshop in Zurich he slips out and buys *Tales of Tati the Parrot* who whispers, in attentive ears only, 52 moral/behavioural injunctions. I say it must be the same parrot that flew into John Ashbery's *L'Heure Exquise*. Then he tells us that a medieval numerologist may for a fee like 3 hens eggs or a bushel of barley inform you that the number 5, compounded with a Pythagorean triangle, mutates into the Octagon which supports the Dome of the Heavens.

## Nostalgia & Goose-bumps

The Diarist has had another fall. A black bruise is spreading from wrist to elbow which she says looks worse than it is. She tends her garden from the scooter, plucking weeds with long tweezers. Men are repairing the little stream's bank and mallards waddle up to the door. *Nostalgia might find a place ...* and as she talks my skin prickles with goose-bumps. She was five years old, brother four, sister two. And to think it was an undergraduate at King's College Cambridge! She lends me her late brother's book and night after night I glimpse the murdered father they barely knew: explorer, doctor, botanist, entomologist collecting nepenthes & aromatic balsams, treating malaria & beri-beri, discovering a tribe of *very small, very jolly* Dyaks.

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