

Aidan Semmens, former co-editor of *Perfect Bound* magazine and winner of the 1978 Chancellor's Medal for an English Poem at Cambridge, read of himself in *Jacket* in 2002 that he had "long given up writing poetry". His work has since been in *Shearsman*, *Stride*, *Shadowtrain*, *Jack*, *Jacket*, *Great Works*, *Blackbox Manifold*, *Free Verse*, *Otoliths* and *Likestarlings*. He lives in Suffolk, where some of his photographs have been exhibited at the Snape Maltings gallery.

A Stone Dog

Aidan Semmens

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Blackbox Manifold (Damaged Mirror, Relics); *Free Verse* (Four
Distressed Sonnets); *Great Works* (In Tombland, Depicting The Artist
As, From Afar, Where Is He That Counted The Towers, And Brake
Them Beneath The Mount, Torch Song); *Jack* (On the Curlew River,
Wave); *Jacket* (Lamentation, Upon the Death of John Barleycorn);
Shadowtrain (In The Process, Phenomenology, The Uncertainty
Principle); *Shearsman* (In Passing, What Then Must We Do,
The Penitents, How Doth the City Sit Solitary I); and
Stride (As Far As I Can See, The Pleasure Beach).

‘The Good News’ is a reworking of material that appeared in 1985
in the Pig Press Staple Diet pamphlet *Confidential Report*.

CONTENTS

From Afar	11
The Pleasure Beach	12
On the Curlew River	16
Sins of the Fathers	17
The Good News	21
For I Have Seen That I Knew Not	25
Depicting the Artist As	26
As Far As I Can See	27
Wave	32
In the Process	36
Phenomenology	37
In Shanghai	43
Only If	44
The Uncertainty Principle	45
Lamentation	53
Upon the Death of John Barleycorn	54
Damaged Mirror	55
The Penitents	57
In Passing	61
How Doth the City Sit Solitary	64
Where is He that Counted the Towers	66
And Brake Them Beneath the Mount	67
And the Revolters are Profound in Slaughter	68
What Then Must We Do	70
Four Distressed Sonnets	72
Relics	74
Torch Song	75
In Tombland	76

In memory of Ric Caddel

A Stone Dog

From Afar

byline on the author photo
provides a place to start:
he pretty, monochrome
she a mystery merely a name
maybe Malay

slight hint of a distant
land of water, stilted homes

then there is a handwritten
inscription on the flyleaf
but that tells us nothing

the depths to which I
 depths or heights
it was ever

these are extraordinary times we
—always they are, times, extraordinary
extratemporal

the sun setting quicker
tideline shifting
contours mobile on the map

call of curlew nocturnal

mildew & must
a suspicion
moisture of empire
has entered the pages

The Pleasure Beach

gummed wrapping, fresh
—twenty-four exciting
new flavours,
cultural references
to collect

timeless representations
of human truths,
opera, shadow or mirror images,
a dialogue of Dionysian
abandon

 distant rewards of Time,
immediate delights of Pleasure
the only constant ambiguity

Pleasure salutes to Pain

when one's childish fingers stumbled
through the works of Zemlinsky
that bridge atonal
& serial works
influences & cultural milestones
two forms

 of cryptic
message communication: enigmatic
utterings of Delphi,
spy number transmissions
on the shortwave radio

an abandoned
 military building
where blocks of colour meet
I was reminded of painting

Master William turns the handle
& notes come. It is a Player
Piano—that is, a piano
without a player

at noon, on every Sunday
something happens
a bizarre piece of art
Breaking the Code—something
weird

 & wonderful: false
colour satellite image of Suffolk: colours—
dark, very dark red/black,
coniferous trees; black/blue
water; blue urban areas,
bare earth. In various
order ranged as Time
sets all things right

at noon, on every Sunday
& then
let's be fashionable
& say art died
flawed & driven genius haunts me,
symbolist poetry & a rich
palette of sounds,
short grim apocalyptic
portent of war

Ophelia's journey into madness,
symbolic voyage through love,
rarely heard
 mythology & sounds
in an essay of exoticism,
elegant phrasing, glistening

fingerwork
only faith that is necessary,
lushly welcoming Death

an age of tension & anxiety
—not Bolshevik illiterates but men
with a musically educated ear
—Balzac, Proust—all that
is sociology,
 predominantly
quiet sonorities

Having an avid interest in all varieties
of arcane weaving
of the Middle East,
chevaux-de-frise, portable barriers
of spikes designed
to check cavalry charges—
Samuel Beckett's favourite
piece of music was Schubert's Death
& the Maiden

taken from a ballet & full
of lurching waltz rhythms,
every utterance a distillation,
prime heather-covered heathland
sea views from the cliffs,
mythological depictions
of women
moving through this world
with unearthly ease
waterproof footwear is essential

I suspect never again
will I carry a marimba across a beach,

cut swathes
through the intellectual fabric of Britain
born in the year
of the October Revolution, he talks
about culture & politics,
distorted dance music
& warped waltzes

embodies a degree of spiritual
searching, earthbound & obvious

an eccentric collection of acts
trapped in a war-torn homeland,
recent responses
to war & peace

at noon, on every Sunday
two forms of cryptic
influences & cultural
milestones, painting
where blocks of colour meet

I know where there's some turnips

On the Curlew River

dawn comes slowly through
phosphorescent mist
creeping across the reedbeds

a red-throated diver sits calm
glacial erratic with a dash of colour
where wavelets edge
at the mudbank shore
of an islet built by silt & reed
river's trickle & tidal seep
meet in a swirl, missing a beat

the round stone tower at the river's bend
is a thumbprint of brown, clumsy
upright in the landscape's horizontal

longship & liner
grey smudge
on grey horizon

grey waves crash on flint, grinding
axehead, keep & cloister
to shingle; bodies washed
up & away, liquor mortis
infinitely dilute