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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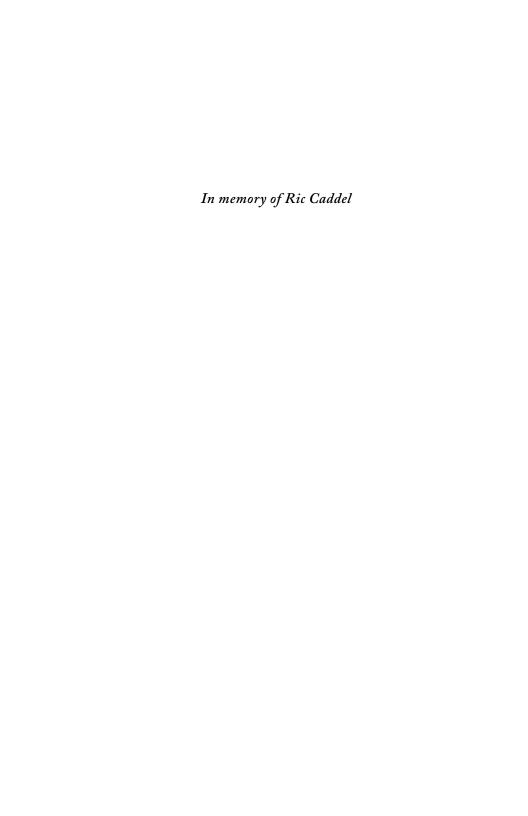
#### Acknowledgements

Poems in this collection have appeared in the following magazines: 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*.

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## 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