Elsewhere or Thereabouts
Also by Alasdair Paterson

Poems for Douanier Rousseau
Hieronymous Bosch’s picture history
Terra Nova
Alps
Topiary
Brief Lives
On the Governing of Empires
Brumaire
in arcadia
Alasdair Paterson

Elsewhere or Thereabouts

Shearsman Books
in arcadia was published as a pamphlet by Oystercatcher Press in 2011.
Contents

HOMERICS
   Age of gold 9
   Age of migrations 10
   Age of glossaries 11
   Age of bards I 13
   Age of oracles 14
   Age of bronze 15
   Age of bards II 16
   Age of stone 17
   Age of fire 18
   Age of similes 19
   Age of bards III 21
   Age of wisdom 23

ELSEWHERE OR THEREABOUTS
   Noctivagation to an air by John Martyn 27
   Walk beginning and ending with lines by Harry Guest 28
   Dander round the loch with Henry Raeburn
       and James Hutton 30
   Near-stasis in the style of Ingmar Bergman 31
   Coastal path around some lines by Lee Harwood 32
   Nostalgia trip, words and music by Leonard Cohen 33

THE LIVERPUDLIAD
   pier head 37
   the grapes 38
   shaw street 39
   sefton park 40
   penny lane 42
   william brown street 43
   hope street 43
   abbey road 45
   red square 46
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAMOUS RUSSIAN POET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigation by statue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The odd splash of colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another fairy tale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenin Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic abroad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN ARCADIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>metamorphoses (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metamorphoses (ii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exequies (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shepherds (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>princesses (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exequies (ii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>princesses (ii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metamorphoses (ii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shepherds (ii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exequies (iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shepherds (iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>princesses (iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metamorphoses (iv)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shepherds (iv)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>princesses (iv)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metamorphoses (v)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exequies (iv)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metamorphoses (vi)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For of great Homer, men say that he came from this country or that island, from such times as he sings of or less ancient days, that he was one man or many, and all of which may be to say, that he was no-one and all men, and so you, and so me.

Jonathan Hobday: *Mirabile visu: discoveries of roads and ruins*
Age of gold

Burnish the armour.
Drench the altar.
Flourish the treasure.

Or walk out
into a flare of sunlight
that’s all that matters
here, this moment.

Those gods you named
and brought to life
seem to like you.
Days like this, you might
expect to hear from one.

Pellucid, bright
as a rock-pool at sunrise
is how oracles speak
the day before
the age of second thoughts
Age of migrations

Through the swirl
and settle of black beer
surge the night-crossings,
depth and sharp.
Out of the shore-mist
into jolts of dark
and you’re cleared
all at once to begin
the long losing game,
remembering.

Remembering arteries
of fuchsia and rust,
stone penned by stone,
all roads the road away;
the music in your head
a smoky flute
hard at the songbook
of empty rooms.

Leaving:
that taste nothing drowns.
That drained glass.
Age of glossaries

*wine-dark*: contentious epithet for the sea, conjuring up an unlikely overlap of colour ranges, though a glorious sunset or volcanic ash in the atmosphere (see *Atlantis*) may indeed tint the marine landscape with red or purple. This locution seems to have nothing at all to do with battle-stains (see also *rosy-fingered*).

*long-shadowed spear*: sun, plain, the advance of the phalanx, shadows pushing in front to create an avant-garde. The travelling shadow of a spear thrown into the air. The degree of visibility of death’s approach. The strike. Familiar discussions of the destined and the random.

*blinded*: here, not by blood or sweat but by an intervention of the gods, perhaps in the form of mist or that moment’s fatigued distraction fatal in a battle with edged weapons. In these moments, a wounded enemy can be spirited away or your death-blow come at you unseen.

*timeless bronze*: now at the bottom end of war-gaming accoutrements, in its day the bronze breastplate was often glorious with sophisticated decoration and adequately resistant to bronze age weapons. Nothing at the sharp end of the arms race is however destined to be timeless. Nor its wearer.

*clattered*: a noisy impact, both transitive and intransitive: here, the soundtrack of falling metal carapaces encasing compromised flesh, the audible transition from animate to inanimate, the fall of puppets with their strings cut.

*Olympians*: soon enough, though, gods lose interest in competitive puppeteering, in the butcher’s bill and the hecatombs of offerings, and head off for feasts and adventures elsewhere.
Probably they think their own time of reckoning will never come. It will come.

*feasting*: a definitive epic activity, enmeshed in societal expectations of largesse and obligation, a counterpoint to battlefield heroics and terrors. Uncomfortably, with the reference to dogs and birds, we are reminded that the battlefield is, for the rest of the natural world, the banquet.

*darkness*: see *surge of death*.

*darkness*: see *soul flits weeping*.

*darkness*: see *night enfolded him*. 
Age of bards I

Years and years of it,
blind scrabbling on the heartstrings,
years choked with the suppressed,
undischarged, abandoned
but never gone, never gone,
till there was no room in me,
till in the end
what alternative had I,
nothing for it
but the old measures.

Every day now
I’m back in bard school.
I’m trying hard.
I must try harder.
I’m trying harder.

Familiar, the blacked-out room.
Familiar, the stone on the chest.
Familiar, descent. Ascent.
Then.
Age of oracles

To begin with, the question.

No, surely, first of all, the problem. Then the question. Like: The pre-emptive strike, yes or no? Peace through marriage: what are the chances? How much flex should there be in consanguinity taboos? Why has a certain goddess got it in for us and what/who should be sacrificed?

The problem, the question, the stifling multiplicity of solutions, the labyrinth of futures, the weary decision to consult the oracle.

The decision, the journey. The toll exacted by mountains, forests, seas. The bedraggled arrival at the sanctuary.

The arrival, the wash and brush-up, the priestly interview. The outline of the problem. The sacrifice, the payment. The audience with the oracle.

The audience with the oracle. The tripod above the smoking fissure in the rock. The rolling, drugged eyes, the babble. The priest primed from the interview to tidy up the utterance. The official response, cadenced and impenetrable.

The arduous return home with the response. The understanding or misunderstanding. The action. The success or the catastrophe. Whichever, full credit to the oracle.

Somewhere in there, the god is hiding. Can you see him?
Age of bronze

You gave the wounds.
You took the wounds.
Not all the wounds
were at the front.
Nevertheless.

You shared a sorceress' bed.
You wore out your welcome
with another sorceress.
The sorceresses were chalk and cheese.
Nevertheless.

You swore an oath.
You broke an oath.
Your words blew away
like spindrift.
Nevertheless.

Nevertheless
the wound you survive
is the scar you can live with;
sea-winds cancel spells,
salt spoils honeycomb;
and when it comes to
undertakings and offences
your memory is only
as short as anyone's.

Agreed.
Now and at last,
you're ready to go home.
Age of bards II

The continuing tradition of wandering blind bards is to be considered a provocation for the following reasons:
1) Their endless wanderings spread the bacilli of gossip, dissent and other poisons.
2) Their stock-in-trade stories, full of superstition and the deeds of heroes in a feudal setting, seduce the minds of the credulous and challenge correct Party narratives.
3) Consciously or inadvertently, they draw demeaning parallels between past conflicts and beliefs and those of the post-revolutionary present.
4) They have proved resistant to the normal programmes of re-education.
5) They are, in the final analysis, incapable of any existence but that of the wandering blind bard.

Action recommended:
1) Conference on the oral poetry of wandering blind bards.
2) Maximum attendance of wandering blind bards.
3) Transcription of bardic materials by approved folklorists for future study in a hygienic and ideologically orthodox environment.
4) Post-conference social programme including escorted tour of typical regional forest.
5) Disappearance of wandering blind bards.
Age of stone

The night wood
of broken columns.

Heroes the colourway
Death-Mask Moon
gone astray and crumbling.

The air already filched
their bright colours and
rubbed away their eyes.
The weight of small birds
is too much for them.

Loser’s arithmetic
they always struggled with
but still that applies:
subtraction tending to the point
beyond, the less than nothing,
footprints sunk in a plinth
like a myth of escape,
a myth of punishment.

How much they saw once.
How sad they are
now the stars have lost
their singing voices.
How they wish the gods
would get well again.

How little they seem
to have learned, after all.
Age of fire

Don’t let it bring you down.
It’s not the smoke
from funeral pyres,
not crematorium deposit
on childhood games,
not another city burning,
not here, not tonight
though someone whispers
all fires are the fire.

It’s not oil flares
at the refinery,
not a red dwarf
tracked from the observatory,
not the sfumato
of Last Judgements;
just another humdrum done
day rolled to the furnace
in best sunset pinks and blues,
just another deathbed conversion
to the quattrocento.

Then there’s black space
and mouthfuls from our flask,
each one a five minutes’ heartbeat;
all fires the stolen fire
I think, as we walk
under the lamps
towards our own blaze.
Age of similes

Like an old rocker who’s wasted
all his line-ups and his comebacks
but can’t let go, no way, and takes
some rackety journeymen and kids
back on the road to the Wild Wild East,
the Road To Ruin Tour, far from jibes
about The Elderly Brothers or Simply
Remaindered or The Dewdrop Explodes;
and weeks down the road, is found dead
in a hotel room in downtown Vladivostok,
czarina-sized bed stacked with empty
vodka bottles and the kind of young Russian
who knocks at your door in the small hours
wearing nothing but a bad fur coat,
when your only comment should be *I can’t
talk to you now, I’m in my pyjamas*…

So wily Odysseus, tired of palaces
and tapestry and unopened horizons,
planned a last one-way adventure
and sent out the Ithacan press-gang…

So blind Homer rattled to his feet,
pushing dementia away like a man
who fends off a wild boar with a harp,
to launch *Odyssey II*, the final sequel…

So the ageing flâneur, surveying
life on his provincial boulevards
and finding in his coffee cup
a great ship and cliffs of landfall
or shipwreck, wondered again if ruin was the journey out from Ithaca, safe harbour and quietude, or the voyage that took you back there…

So…