

Casket

SAMPLER

Also by Andy Brown

POETRY

Bloodlines (Worple Press, 2018)

Exurbia (Worple Press, 2014)

The Fool and the Physician (Salt, 2012)

Fall of the Rebel Angels: Poems 1996-2006 (Salt, 2006)

Hunting the Kinnayas (Stride, 2004)

From a Cliff (Arc, 2002)

The Wanderer's Prayer (Arc, 1999)

West of Yesterday (Stride, 1998)

COLLABORATIONS

Goose Music (Salt, 2008, with John Burnside)

of Science (Worple Press, 2001, with David Morley)

CHAPBOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

Watersong (Shearsman Books, 2015)

Woody Alliance Laundered (Argotist Ebooks, 2011)

The Storm Berm (tall-lighthouse, 2008)

The Trust Territory (Heaventree, 2005)

The Sleep Switch (Odyssey, 1996)

AS EDITOR

A Body of Work: Poetry and Medical Writing

[with Corinna Wagner] (Bloomsbury, 2016)

The Writing Occurs As Song: a Kelvin Corcoran Reader

(Shearsman Books, 2014)

The Allotment: new lyric poets (Stride, 2006)

Binary Myths 1 & 2: correspondences with poets and poet-editors

(Stride, 2004)

NOVEL

Apples & Prayers (Dean Street, 2015)

Andy Brown

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*With many thanks to James Simpson, Marc Woodward,
Kelvin Corcoran and Rob Magnuson Smith, who listened
generously to drafts of these poems*

*The poem titles in this volume are in the Northumbria font, which was
modelled on original 7th and 8th century monastic gospel books from
Northern England.*

The runes are in Babelstone Runic Beowulf.

CASKET

The Franks Casket (or Auzon Casket) is an 8th century Anglo-Saxon treasure chest, donated to the British Museum by a private owner from Auzon, France. Made from whalebone, the front, back, sides and lid of this small chest are decorated with runic inscriptions, some Latin text and images from various religious and mythical traditions.

Runes comprised the earliest Germanic script, derived from earlier alphabets and modified into angular forms so that they could be carved. Each rune has an equivalent letter in the Latin alphabet, allowing for Anglo-Saxon and modern English translations. Each rune also has a pictorial value: for example, in the runic \mathfrak{FIMH} ('fisc'), f signifies 'wealth', i 'ice', s 'sun' and c 'torch', yielding a sequence of four images. To write the following poems, I determined the sequence of images yielded by each runic word and then used these images, or variants of them, to write the poems.

A table of all the runes in the Anglo-Saxon Futhork alphabet follows, showing their equivalent English letters and their pictorial values. In their esoteric sense, runes came to symbolize something mysterious and difficult to interpret – the word 'rune' translates as 'mystery', as well as 'letter', 'row' and 'series'. It may also derive from the Germanic word 'runo', meaning 'a song'.

Using this multilevel technique of 'translation', the following poems are an attempt to capture something of the layered histories, from ancient times to present, of the place where I now live: the river Teign and its surrounding area.

'open the box, a knucklebone of tin'

Kelvin Corcoran, 'Pytheas'

SAMPLER

The Anglo-Saxon Futhark Alphabet

ƿ	ᚠ	þ	𐚩	ᚱ	ᚲ	X
feoh - f	ur - u	þorn - þ	os - o	rad - r	cen - c	ziefu - z
“wealth”	“cattle”	“thorn”	“mouth”	“ride”	“torch”	“gift”

ƿ	ᚱ	ᚲ		ᚷ	ᚸ	ᚹ
pynn - p	haezl - h	nyd - n	is - i	year - j	eeoh - eo	peorð - p
“joy”	“hail”	“need”	“ice”	“year”	“yew”	“game”

Υ	ᚻ	↑	ᚾ	ᚿ	ᛀ
eolxec3 - x	si3el - s	tyr - t	beorc - b	eoh - e	man - m
“elk-sedge”	“sun”	“Tyr”	“birch”	“horse”	“man”

ᚺ	X	ᚾ	ᚿ	ᚾ	ᚾ	ᚾ
lagu - l	ing - n	œd - œ	dæz - d	ac - a	æsc - æ	yr - y
“lake”	“Ing”	“estate”	“day”	“oak”	“ash”	“bow”

Υ	*	A	✱	✱	ᚷ	ᚸ
ear - ea	iar - ia	kalc - k	kalc - kk	gar - g	cpeorð - cp	stan - st
“earth”	“serpent”	“chalice”	“spear”	“fire”	“stone”	

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I. WhaLeBOne

(front panel)

FIMLFPMNFHFF+FMRX | M+BMRIX | PFRÞXF:

VRHXRRR+FRHMF+XRMTXIMPFA | HRF+FM

*Fisc flodu ahof on fergen-berig
Warp gas-ric grorn þær he on greut giswom.
Hronæs ban.*

*The fish stirred up the flood on to the mountainous cliff;
The king of terror saddened when he swam onto the shingle.
Whalebone.*

From the river's curved calligraphy
We haul up a trawl-net of treasures
And tip the shells out on the sorting rack...
Dark mussels fall in clattering cascades.

This unforgiving trade, when the ice
Of February frets the core and fingers
And the sun's declining disk smoulders,
Barely bright enough to light the creek,

Although it shimmers on the shellfish
And brings the silted backwater to life
As it trickles out at Netherton Bridge
Towards the estuary's open mouth.

Daylight sketches the flanks of piebald stock
Grazing placidly where aurochs once roamed,
Protected from the squalls beneath banked oaks
That shelter them from hail and cutting sleet

As they slowly turn their ruminative mouths
To the business of turning pasture into gold.

*God gives us seven hungry mouths to feed,
But winter's only shrunken guts and worry.*

*

Along the seafront, the wealthy promenade
Watching the hale take their horses for a ride.
The ailing fill their lungs with healing air,
Stopping to read the illustrated text
Where the old harpoon lies stored
Under glass in its heritage box –

*From here the township's whalers set to sea
In eighteen hundred and twenty nine, never to return...*

In the amusement arcade along the pier
Children shovel coins into the horse races,
Betting pocket money on mechanics
Tuppence at a time, their faces turning hope
To profit and loss beneath the neon lights.

Under slender birches on the esplanade
A sideshow donkey champs in its nosebag
Outside the pound shops and boarded-up hotel –

Someone here's been taken for a ride –
While in the shallow rock pools of the bay
An Anglo-Saxon breaks the frazil ice,
Draws up a flounder with a well-aimed spear.
With mouths to feed, the fish brings untold joy.

Upstream, the cattle underneath the oaks
Disinterestedly watch a water skier ride

The estuary, carving her hieratic V
As though some blade had slashed the water's skin.

In the boatyard the oak planks mature,
Furnishing the whaling fleet with boats
To comb Imperial waters heading north,
Bearing the national torch in pursuit
Of the great ocean gods; coursing waves
To feed the lamps back home...

*The leviathan feels the thorn lodged in her side,
Buried in her blubber – like towing a tree.
She takes that oaken vessel for a ride.*

Here at sea

*The hail falls fast on seahorse and sailor alike
From the mouth of god. Each soul and sailor
Hungry in their need.*

Beneath the lamps on the sea wall, a tourist
Spears the contents of a carton of whelks
With the languid strokes of a weekend away.
Behind her, the kids spin scooters and boards
Over the humps of the concrete skate park,
Ditching their rides to glut themselves
On teetering ice creams beneath the placard
Of the plastic cow who sings the praise of dairy.

On the beach they haul the speared whale
Through the ice-cold surf. Their faces are lit
With the light of god. Their mouths proclaim
The light of man... *Hail the great whale!*

Above the beach, the car park empties out
As visitors drive home, their own mouths open

To the spectacle of sunset.

What more could you need?

On their long slow climb from the valley,
They watch the ash trees slowly turn to flame
In the sun's reaching rays.

Back downstream

The mussel men throw their bushel baskets
Of woven willow and birch across their backs,
As strong as the oaks that line the banks...

The river yields enough for all our needs.

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