Barry Hill’s most recent book of poems, *Naked Clay: Drawing from Lucian Freud* (Shearsman 2012) was shortlisted for the 2013 Forward Prize. The poems in *Grass Hut Work*, his tenth collection, were written in Japan in the years he was living in Kyoto researching *Peacemongers* (UQP 2014), his most recent prose work. He is the former Poetry Editor of *The Australian*, a Post-Doctoral Fellow from the University of Melbourne, who has been writing full-time since 1975. He has won major national awards for poetry, history and the essay. *Broken Song: TGH Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession* (Knopf 2002) his magnum opus on Australian poetics, won the National Biography Award and the Tasman Pacific Bi-Centennial Prize for History, has been described as ‘one of the great Australian books.’ He lives by the sea near the Southern Ocean.

Praise for his previous collections includes:

“*A masterpiece… the finest realization of painting in poetry as well as poetry in painting I’ve ever read.*”

— John Kinsella, on *Naked Clay*, 2012

“When I say that Barry Hill has drawn on all that he has studied to achieve these poems, I’m thinking of the sort of discipline of the spirit that makes possible the lines of the poem, their precise visualization, their music, their handing of space as breath… It takes a lifetime of discipline to produce poems like this.”

— David Malouf, on *As We Draw Ourselves*, 2008

“The two ‘authors’ so connected, so inbricated into each other, the reader is faced with a multi-voiced project entirely wrapped around by the incoming and outgoing songs of birds. An inordinately beautiful hymn to the bird and a union between writer and artist rarely as intimate as this. A miraculous gift of a book.”

— Nathaniel Tarn, on *Lines for Birds*, 2011
Also by Barry Hill

The Schools (1977)
A Rim of Blue: Stories (1978)
Near the Refinery: a novella (1980)
Headlocks and Other Stories (1983)
The Best Picture: a novel (1988)
Sitting In (1991)
The Rock: Travelling to Uluru (1997)
The Inland Sea: Poems (2001)
Broken Song: T G H Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession (2002)
The War Sonnets (2007)
Four Lines East (2007)
As We Draw Ourselves (2008)
Lines for Birds (2011)
Naked Clay: Drawing from Lucian Freud (2012)
Peacemongers (2014)
Barry Hill

Grass Hut Work

Shearsman Books
First published in the United Kingdom in 2016 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

ISBN 978-1-84861-475-8

Copyright © Barry Hill, 2016.
The right of Barry Hill to be identified as the author
of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the
All rights reserved.

Acknowledgements
Earlier versions of some poems have appeared in As We Draw Ourselves
(Five Islands Press 2008), Four Lines East (Whitmore Press 2009),
Arena Magazine, August 2015, London Review of International Law, Vol 3
issue 2, 2015. My thanks to the enthusiasm of editors Alison Caddick
at Arena and Catriona Drew at LRIL. And gratitude also
for various acts of friendship and love with regard to the
manuscript-in-progress:
Rod Moss, Mike Ladd, Justin Clemens, Ian Johnston,
as well as my son and my wife, Joe Hill and Rose Bygrave.
Contents

1 TURNIPS IN KYOTO
  Bow to the Weatherman 11
  At Shugakuin House 13
  Sex in Japan 23
  Dojo 25
  At the National Gallery 26
  On Getting to Grips with the Heart Sutra 28

2 CRAB MEAT NORTH
  *Ratty Ryōkan Country* 35
  Dumb Further North 39
  A Cold Night in Kisakata 40
  Party Train 41
  Leaving Sapporo 42
  Strange Joy 43
  Good News Near Shibetsu 44
  Can't Remember Where I'm Staying Tonight 45
  Wakkanai 46
  On Catching the Ferry to the Snow-capped
  Volcano on the Island of Rishiri 48
  A Morning Walk in a Spasm of Sunshine 49
  Lucid 51
  After Sapporo, Travelling South
    Heading into Kenji Country 52
  That Photograph 53
  Cherry Trees by the Kitakami River 54
  Insomnia in Sendai 55
  Leaving Ise 57

3 CICADAS
  All Over the Body, Hands and Eyes 61
  Unholy 63
  Pillow 64
  Bashō’s Sin 67
  Rough Notes 69
  Almost Forgetting 72
Untitled 73
Poor Reason 74
Boy O Boy 75
Like Grass 77
Crazy Iris 78
City of Angels 79
Eyes All the Way Down 81
The White Horse 83
To Speak of Tragedy 85
Lines Found in My Father’s Hiroshima Folder 86
Hibakusha 88
The Loveliest Things 90

4 Dōgen’s Ashes
Solitary Heron 95
Kite 96
Egret 97
Ritual Sharing 98
Rakushisha 100
Curling into Each Other’s Smoke 102
Sodden Thrush 104
Listening Out 105
Debris 107
Lyric Yellow 110
Rain in Kyoto 112
A Son Arrives and Departs 118
Going and Coming 119
Big Root Feast 120
Nothing Gained 121

Notes 124
For

Richard Tanter and Nakao Hajime

Burton Watson and Ko Un
You should not, by clinging to views of humanity or views of heaven, fail to learn about in the fire.

Zen Master Dogen, *Flowers in the Sky*
1

Turnips in Kyoto

SAMPLER
Bow to the Weatherman

Above the last terrace
before the forest
where the track ends
down from Hiei-san —
there’s a sunken garden
behind a high wall.

A stream trickles
through to a small
moss stone bridge.

You enter
from the narrow road
near old pines
giving off youth.
You have to stoop
through a rickety gate
to come in under
wide eaves.
One slide of the door

and there’s plenty of room
for the abandonment
of shoes.

Your toes. How many toes
can you feel
padding across the mats?

Straw. As if
you’ve been born
to this refinement
of stable, a native-creature palace.
Relax.
Make your breath papery.

Tune the body
to its whispered
arrival.

Put the radio on.
Fill the kitchen
with storm-news from Sapporo.

Bow to the weatherman.
At Shugakuin House

_Darkness in the eight-mat room_

As the sun set in the hills over Arashiyama you could hear chanting, probably from the grounds of the Imperial Villa. It comes from another world into this one, yet seems familiar.

That broken field of turnips white and bluish after slaughter —
tops here, half-bodies there.

You walk up towards the tall bamboo
the sun setting cabbages
alight with silver.

What a mess —
the old ground of your thought
wounds and memories

straw brooms of good intentions
the all-too-familiar earth
the same, same self.
Cold Ears

Moon shadows tonight.
Wild boar in the woods
the deer with them.
No wonder the gardens are fenced.

Did the pigs do the turnips in?
Last night, when it felt like snow
was that a stag
watching over my sleep?

Downtown, the teens in tartan shorts
are watching 007.
It’s Saturday night.
Up here not a dog barks.

My ears were cold
after the poetry reading.
Too much listening
to myself.

Over dinner
we talked of other poets.
The first dish steamed of the earth.
That made us feel heaps better.
Under the Carpet

The moon is on its back
or maybe its smooth belly.
It hangs both ways
as fully itself as a sword.
From Shugakuin the city lights
are fat, palatial slugs
aglow in slow time
a gentle carpet —
those civil wars swept under.
No sound. Only a cat
on heat in the tin shed
its natural siren carrying on
as I slope up the hill
past those hacked turnips.
Han Shan on the Bus

On the way back from Daitoku-ji
irked by instructional gardens
I read Han-shan on the bus
agreeing and aging with each word.

Each morning I see a lizard neck.
Each night bones commune with dust.
But still I hope for a pure heart.
The days here give a lucid dusk.

At Shugakuin the hills are a cradle
the moon a half lamp. I came
up by the clinic and school
a short cut through the shrine
in under its bracing gate.
A pine roped behind a red fence.
A bell hanging in the dark.
I was quick around it, then out

up between the frostbitten cabbages
unnameables under black plastic
that dug-field of turnips —
wounded torsos, loose white flesh.

Like the housewife ahead of me
groceries loaded each arm.
Soon I had the climb to myself.
All the craggy hermit said was true.
I reached my gate in the low wall.
Further up, perfectly pruned peach trees
stood spiky under the stars.
For the crystal night I had

a wild piss beside the house
then went inside to forget sutras
drink wine. The rice steams. Truly
I don’t know how old I am.
*Shallow*

The helpful neighbour
who gardens across the way
standing inside the wire
showed you where the boar
dug under the enclosure
and stretched his length
down into his creative work.

Be careful out here
at night, he laughed
pointing to the shallow grave.
Without You

At Daisen-in
behind the raked garden
near the headstones
my face brushed a camellia bush.

Winter buds.
They were younger than you, or me.
The tree might have been
more our age.

Shamelessly, I picked
a bud for the Buddha
in this empty eight-mat room.
There it lolls — stemless.

and without water,
as I am without you.
Tightly pink, bursting —
my favourite flower.
Returning to Mat

It’s twice a day. 
At least give 
yourself credit for that.

You can’t fail 
looking into a garden 
with a teahouse 
and a thrush in leaf-litter.

And even if you 
loose the bird 
and the dilapidated teahouse 
is locked to strangers

you just have to consume 
more time. Simple. 
You don’t have to 
say simple, or think simple.

Just accept the monkey 
on your back. Ok — 
roof, monkeys. 
You’ll know when

you fail, or fail better. 
Day by day is good 
with the oil boiling 
over the blazing fire.