

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

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Barry Hill

Grassroots Work

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For

Richard Tanter and Nakao Hajime

Burton Watson and Ko Un

SAMPLER

*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

SAMPLER

1

Turnips in Kyoto

SAMPLER

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.

SAMPLER

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.

SAMPLER

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.

SAMPLER

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.

SAMPLER

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.

SAMPLER

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.

SAMPLER