Selected Publications by Christopher Middleton

Poetry
Torse 3: Poems 1948–61
Nonsequences/Selfpoems
Our Flowers & Nice Bones
The Lonely Suppers of W.V. Balloon
Carminalenia
111 Poems
Two Horse Wagon Going By
Selected Writings
The Balcony Tree
Intimate Chronicles
The Word Pavilion and Selected Poems
Of the Mortal Fire
The Anti-Basilisk
The Tenor on Horseback
Collected Poems
Poems 2006–2009 *
A Company of Hosts
Just Look at the Dancers
Forty Days in the Calypso Saloon & Frescos with Graffiti
Collected Later Poems
Nobody’s Ezekiel

Prose
‘Bolshevism in Art’ and other Expository Writings
Pataxanadu and Other Prose
The Pursuit of the Kingfisher
Jackdaw Jiving: Selected Essays on Poetry and Translation
In the Mirror of the Eighth King
Crypto-Topographia
Palavers and a Nocturnal Journal *
If from the Distance: Two Essays
Depictions of Blaff
Loose Cannons: Selected Prose

Translations
Andalusian Poems
Faint Harps and Silver Voices. Selected Verse Translations

* Shearsman publications
Christopher Middleton

Serpentine

Shearsman Library
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Serpentine
Something may come to mind as an ammonite in a bathtub. Look at it before you ask why it is there or what it means.

This ammonite has been set on end and sawed in half. The inside is therefore outside. The outside inside has been given a high polish. The bathtub is otherwise empty.

Before saying how inconvenient this menace what a nuisance look. The highly polished outside inside is a dense maze of crystal forms crisscrossed by flecks and sprays the imprints of ferns fizzing through the dark porphyry gloss a soda of unclassifiable colours. You could spend hours deciphering the surface inch by inch with a microscope and even then not be shaken by its age only baffled by its laws.

Count as many as seven spirals on the outside outside these are seen as ridged or furrowed swellings. On the outside inside they are thin flat parabolas flush with the polished surface.

The bathtub is an ordinary one even though it is hosting this ammonite which might have seemed small when you first heard of it but is now assuredly of exceptional size.

A fully grown person might fit two arms around it but would hardly be able to lift it without hurting his spine.
The awkward thing now is that you cannot share the bathtub with this ammonite so you will have to go about feeling defiled. A loss. Who knows what spring winds wrought the seven spirals bringing to them a fragrance unless it was a sulphurous choking gas.

Not everyone would feel defiled but some would positively curse the inconvenience even while they openly admired the beauty of the ferns and crystals protesting against a monstrous trick.

For such people the disparity between the bathtub and the ammonite would smack of

Smack of but where else where could such an ammonite be not out of place As if a fault had occurred a fault of which the feeling of defilement was no more than a tiny offshoot Local echo of the smack.

A fault signalling a break in a covenant which had hitherto prohibited ammonites from settling down or standing on end in ordinary bathtubs. The oracle had misspoken itself or else had been misheard and the next thing will be milk spurting out of a tree.

A word becoming

Even then no cause for panic Imagine all the generations filing past in tatters and fluttering robes across mountains and deserts as they construct for
their flesh lawful cities out of the dust  utter their cries heave into time out of their delight the flute the ploughshare  also small glowing objects

Somehow they contrived to accommodate their lives to the ammonite  The ammonite crept squelching along its dusty millimetres in the black hills never turning a hair or was it bowled along by a baby diplodocus  What noise did it make when it stopped the moment it began slowly to become this

Yet the weight of it and its density this great stone pudding  makes you want to stretch up and touch the sky

A snailshaped meridional town suddenly has contracted into a solid mass with its people squashed and bell tower cracking decomposed into suet glittering now with fern leaf filaments or oblong crystals all that was left of the café yelp of dogs  the players of pétanque

Something may come to mind

Something may but short of crying out look god look at the flesh strewn across the street an objective dense electric cloud of darkness would you not say evil will just as well fit into an ordinary bathtub when you feel your skeleton melt in the blaze of recognition that a covenant had once been made
Something he said about a poem before getting into the 60 bus at Wittenbergplatz with five minutes to spare noticed the iron frame with place names across it like rungs of a ladder and could not see very well go closer they were the names of places like Auschwitz Bergen-Belsen Buchenwald Theresienstadt in alphabetical order and off the square on a corner he could see looking beyond the frame Sexpool a window and in the window a wax dummy woman wearing a black leather corselet chains and a steel studded collar and on her head jauntily a military cap with several squat fir trees planted to commemorate the great undulant plains and forests where

Wax dummies were being pushed about in wooden carts like this one coming up the street now it is perfectly true white and thin and upright stiff

Without hair being pushed into a tailorshop I suppose a whole bunch of them being liquidated cremated no he said they were being pushed in a wooden evilaesthetic cart diagonally across from the Sexpool Wittenbergplatz named after Luther of course who was fanatical authoritarian and got everyone spiritually standing to arms waiting for orders to be washed down with big draughts of beer conformity was the thing after Luther saw what Münzer with his hungry peasants might do so he called in the Gestapo actually most of them uptight little barons wearing leather corselets and eyeglasses mad with greed and shouting frightened mirrors of Luther himself with his anal obsession like Wagner often painfully

Constipated needing purges in front of the Sexpool are two trees quite large let’s say lindens with shocks of foliage shaped like breasts pointing upward in which case the Sexpool is the head the squat firs pubic hair and the iron frame saying ORTE DES
SCHRECKENS would be the cyclopic twat that watches over the system. If the poem got written I’d be surprised you can’t do much with too many loaded variables and it would be inexact too he knew this when he thought it up or over sitting in the borrowed wicker chair by the open window not waiting for the Emperor’s Message at all but listening to sparrows in the courtyard and looking up at the green young chestnuts the three soaring boles of acacia which are also berlinisch.

Thinking too how many people in these rooms around the courtyard I hardly know the archaeologist the doctor the beauty parlour lady the apothecary the electropod plumber the little Japanese wife and her baby and the lady of eighty giving private lessons in literature who does not mind when Jürgen Theobaldy upstairs switches on the rock music and Frau Mortan too what a talker with her quadroon granddaughter growing up to be a thoughtful active happy person.
Moon climbing over the rose trellis
And now by day ventilating dusty blue silk
Wild geese build their staircase

The wrens chattering from chairback to periwinkle
Circle the house all day pecking for insects
All night moon you are brought in
To keep the empty space away

A present image
A present image washed clean by distance
To keep the empty space away

To blot from thought if only for a little time
And from memory to wipe or in memory to veil
Its gathering empty spaces
In fear of what might occupy them

In fear of what might heavily settle in them
The symbols of power that make brutes of men
Moon climbing over the rose trellis

This O is here for homeless homeliness
Wild geese floating over dusty blue silk
Will shut out the horrible height of falling
Wren persist in making your circle
It is tough it is tenuous look about and listen
Nightmares enough nudge their way in
Otherwise breaking soon this feathery thin ring

Peck and look about and listen and flit on forever
Nine times circling the house I shelter in
But saying I am seized by what I shelter from

Wild geese do not be long gone