

So Here We Are

Also by David Caddy

Poetry

The Balance (1981)

Anger (1982)

The Beating on the Door (1987)

Honesty (1990)

Continuity (1995)

Desire (1997)

The Willy Poems (2004)

Man in Black (2007)

The Bunny Poems (2011)

Literature

London: City of Words (with Westrow Cooper, 2006)

So Here We Are

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Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom 2012 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
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)

ISBN 978-1-84861-091-0
First Edition

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Didi Menendez, without whom these essays would not have
been written, Luc Simoncic, for introducing me to Didi, and Pris Campbell,
for her technical support.

I must thank Ian Brinton, Brian Hinton, Ketaki Kushari Dyson,
Edward Field, Sarah Hopkins, John Kinsella and Nathaniel Tarn
for their enthusiastic support of these essays.
Finally, I must thank Tony Frazer for his efforts
in the smooth publication of this book.

The essay on Jeremy Prynne was subsequently revised and published as
‘Notes Towards a Preliminary Reading of J.H. Prynne’s *Poems*’ in *A Manner of
Utterance: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne*, edited by Ian Brinton (Shearsman 2009).

Cover:

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2007, when Didi Menendez, publishing director of MiPO publications and miPORadio, invited me to present a monthly series of literary talks, my remit was to be personal, direct and contemporary, in the manner of Alistair Cooke's *Letters from America*. *So Here We Are: Poetic Letters from England* began somewhat gingerly on 7 May 2007, with an essay on aspects of my poetic background, and picked up pace from there. I attempted to give some background to the contemporary poetry scene in England as well as responding to the deaths of poets, such as Bill Griffiths and Andrew Crozier. The talks were written quickly and intended as intelligent introductions rather than definitive statements. Their aim was to stimulate the reader/listener and prompt further reading and discussion.

So Here We Are soon found a loyal and expanding internet audience. Some of the audio podcasts were downloaded by several thousand people; others by eight hundred or so. It was the vision and diligence of Didi Menendez that made this programme such a success. She found a considerable number of internet outlets for the audio podcasts beyond miPORadio and my blog at davidcaddy.blogspot.com. Many friends not only listened to the podcasts but added links to their websites or blogs and in this way *So Here We Are* found its place on the internet. Such generosity of spirit is enlivening.

LETTER 1: RALEGH

I should say that I love both English and American poetry and that I read both in equal measure and delight. I suppose that that already marks my card as a figure concerned with what might be usefully called the melting pot of Anglo-American poetry and poetics. In England there is great hostility from the poetry establishment and the mainstream towards Anglo-American poetry, not to mention modernist and post-modernist developments.

In this sense, by my very interest, I am an English outsider. Indeed I have been called the outsider's insider and I do like to challenge accepted versions of literary history. Given this position, I may be able to shed light on aspects of English poetry, Anglo-American poetry and the state of the art. Having said that, we all have our prejudices and I shall be trying to curb mine. I rather like the idea of being a reporter from the frontline, an Alistair Cooke producing a poetic letter from England. *So Here We Are*.

To start with, in this first letter or two, I want to talk about my poetic heritage, the one that impacted during my childhood and beyond, and hopefully through this approach reveal some things that are peculiarly English.

I have lived most of my life in tiny villages and towns in rural North Dorset, which is situated in central southern England, and some twenty-five miles inland from the Jurassic coast, as it now called by those eager to drum up tourist trade, and some thirty miles south-west of Stonehenge, the Neolithic and Bronze age megalithic monument.

I live in an ancient landscape where the past looks at you from every angle. I look out of my study window at wild deer grazing and at the Neolithic hill fort, Hod Hill, with its visible Roman settlement from the first century AD. In England you feel you are part of the long march of everyman.

When I went to Sturminster Newton primary school, the first poetry that I can recall hearing and reading after nursery rhymes, hymns and folk ballads were the poems and songs of William Shakespeare.

When icicles hang by the wall
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail
And Tom bears logs into the hall
And milk comes frozen home in pail.¹

Letter 1: Raleigh

This comes from the end of the play *Love's Labour's Lost* and I suspect my teacher thought that this was suitable for us country boys and girls.

Coming from a family where there were no books and no one had ever gone to University, I resisted such things. I recall complaining about the irrelevance of such old writing and saying that I would never become a poet. However, I was crestfallen at not being selected ever to appear in any school production or sports team. I felt excluded and was. I was surely as good as the others. I loved that magical school play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which I could only watch but not be part of. Access to the heritage is closely guarded and if you can find a way in to this, it may not be easy.

I think we may have read some of the *Sonnets* but cannot remember for certain. I was a dreamer, looking out of the window. I was also a playground fighter, hitting back hard at the bullies, trying to be left alone. I am more certain that we read *The Passionate Pilgrim* poems VII and VIII:

Fair is my love, but not so fair as fickle
Mild as a dove, but neither true nor trusty
Brighter than glass, and yet, as glass is, brittle
Softer than wax, and yet, as iron, rusty:²

Shakespeare was standard fare for eleven-year-olds at the time. I did know creative writing and, when it came to the age 11-plus examinations, I recall writing a story (a *composition*) where the characters were subordinate to the detail and structure and the end was the same as the beginning. I certainly had no idea of the *Nouveau Roman* at that time and I rather suspect that neither did my examiner, for I failed my 11-plus exam and was confined not to the local Grammar School but to the Secondary Modern, a school designed to produce farm workers and, more secretly, I suspect, poets.

The school was divided into Houses named after local poets: Raleigh, Barnes, Young and Hardy. Walter Raleigh (1552–1618), William Barnes (1801–1886), the dialect poet, Robert Young (1811–1908) and Thomas Hardy (1840–1926) were the forces for which we applied ourselves. Old people in Stur had known both Young and Hardy.

The Hardy Players had brought his plays to the town for years. My friend, Jean Guy, lived in the farmhouse at nearby Bagber where Barnes had been born. The old School House where he had gone to school was now being used by the primary school as a dining room. Hardy had written poems, such as 'Overlooking The River Stour' and 'On Sturminster Footbridge' and the novel, *The Return of the Native*, when he lived at Sturminster Newton in 1877.³ Poets permeated the town.

Although I will mostly be talking about Raleigh, I am going to take a brief detour.

In December 2005, Thomas Hardy's poem 'On Sturminster Bridge'⁴ was widely used as part of a local protest against the development of a large house that altered the historic Sturminster Mill view. It was published in national newspapers along with photos of the Mill and proposed building plans that had been passed by bare quorum of local councillors on quiet night. The house is currently on the market at a cost of one million pounds (ca. \$1.6 million). The local artists, musicians, writers and councillors who protested felt that it was an eyesore development, planned by people who had no regard for the historic Mill view. The water mill is mentioned in the *Domesday Book* of 1086, that great survey of England made by order of William the Conqueror, and could well have been painted by John Constable when he travelled through Sturminster Newton from Salisbury on the way to Lyme Regis, on the Dorset coast, in 1821.

Such poetic protests are not uncommon. The Northern Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, is currently involved in trying to prevent a dual carriageway being built through the wetlands of South Derry, where he grew up, and about which he has written so eloquently. William Barnes prevented a railway cutting through both the heart of Dorchester and Maiden Castle by leading a poetic protest in 1845–6.

Raleigh was a dashing gentleman poet, soldier and explorer, born in Devon, and a Dorset man by choice. His relationship with Queen Elizabeth is the subject of the film, *The Golden Age*, due out this autumn.⁵ Cate Blanchett plays Elizabeth, Clive Owen, Raleigh, Geoffrey Rush, Walsingham and Samantha Morton, Mary Queen of Scots. Doubtless you will see Raleigh etch with a diamond "Fain would I climb, yet fear

I to fall” on a Court windowpane and Elizabeth reply, “If thy heart fails thee, climb not at all”.

Raleigh was a poetic role-player. His friend, Edmund Spenser, said that he was “the sommers Nightingale”, writing poetry of “melting sweetness”. Raleigh was imprisoned for secretly marrying the Queen’s Lady-in-Waiting, Bess Throckmorton, and was forced to write his way out of prison. He was banned from Court. He was imprisoned and close to death many times, yet managed to write his way to freedom with a vigour bordering on fury. During his years of disgrace at Sherborne Castle, Dorset, he wrote a striking condemnation of his world, ‘The Lie’, with such lines as “Say to the court, it glows / And shines like rotten wood, / Say to the church it shows / What’s good, and doth no good: / If church and court reply, / Then give them both the lie.”⁶

‘The Lie’ can be read as a defence of “outside thinking” against rigid dogmatism. Raleigh had been accused by Jesuits and pro-Catholics of being an atheist and leader of the ‘School of Night’, a group that included Dr John Dee, Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman and so on. Although this is a modern name derived from Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, in which the King of Navarre says “Black is the badge of hell / The hue of dungeons and the school of night”.

Raleigh made his fortune as a man of action centrally involved in the expansion of Elizabethan Protestant England. He established the first English colony in the New World, in present-day North Carolina. He had failures of exploration and lost his fortune. He employed his own magus, Thomas Harriot, as well as having two other mathematician / alchemists / explorers in his household. Harriot was a mathematician imbued in Neoplatonist mysticism. Raleigh had studied with Dr John Dee, royal astrologer, (the inspiration, in part, of Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus* and of Prospero in *The Tempest*), and the intellectual leader of Elizabethan expansion and the group of poets surrounding the Earl of Leicester in the 1580s. These included Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Fulke Greville, Edward Dyer among others. They were concerned with rationalising a role for the poet and sovereign within a divine Protestant universe. They saw the poet’s role as essentially moral and religious, and sought to renew English as a poetic tongue. English rather than Latin poetry should be used to move English

people to virtue and knowledge. Raleigh knew these aristocratic and self-made men well. He was a leading member of what became known as the Sidney-Spenser circle. Raleigh, though, also knew another club of poets, much lower down the social scale: those writers who lived exclusively by the pen. Whereas Leicester's coterie, including Raleigh, lived in mansions along the Strand by the River Thames, these poets and dramatists frequented the margins of London, the theatres to the south of the river at Southwark and to the east in the City of London at Blackfriars and Bishopsgate. Raleigh is credited with being the founder of the Mermaid Tavern's club of poets in 1603. The club included John Donne, Ben Jonson, Christopher Brooke, George Chapman, Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, Michael Drayton, John Marston, Thomas Dekker and (possibly) William Shakespeare in a floating population of writers, law students and politicians. The Mermaid was a safe house where they could exchange manuscripts and discuss potential patrons and news of court intrigue.⁷

Raleigh is, to me, almost a contemporary. His oeuvre is as fluid as any post-modern critic would want. His name has variant spellings and his words are changed at will. His legendary stories could be claimed as most probable or even fact by a New Historicist critic any day now. In my local weekly paper, the *Blackmore Vale Magazine*, houses are sold with dubious connections to the man. Perhaps his most famous poem, 'The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage' with its "scallop-shell of quiet", "staff of faith" "scrip of joy" and "bottle of salvation" still resonates and is used at commemorative functions.⁸

Raleigh wrote at a time when poets could rapidly run out of favour at court and writing was a dangerous and precarious living. Playwrights and poets that upset courtiers, diplomats, religious leaders and, above all, the monarch, were imprisoned and sentenced to death. You could even be arrested for not writing to order, as happened to Dekker in 1599. Raleigh was tried for treason and atheism several times and won the legal arguments. He wrote much of his poetry in the Bloody Tower where he lived with his family between 1603 and 1616. He only published five poems in his lifetime. His theological, philosophical and poetic work circulated in manuscript form. If the poems got into the wrong hands, it could be well be the end. His accounts of the consequences of tyranny in *The History of the World*, written in the Tower, inspired both John Milton and Oliver Cromwell.

His last poem, ‘Even Such Is Time’, written the night before he was beheaded, is a pointed survival and partial epitaph, with time paying the narrator nothing but “earth and dust” and its belief that “My God shall raise me up”.⁹

Raleigh’s head was embalmed and given to his wife. She returned to Dorset, famously carrying his head in a basket, to display that head so that his friends and enemies could say goodbye to him. Bess worked tirelessly to restore his reputation and ensure that his work survived. She kept his head for the next 29 years until her death. Their son, Carew, then took care of his head until his death in 1666 and it was buried with him.

Before I close with my poem inspired, in part, by Raleigh and the transmigration of the soul, I must say that I have come to realise that reading *The Passionate Pilgrim* at age 11, which contained the work of Marlowe, Shakespeare and Raleigh, was an unconscious inspiration for my founding of a theatre company when I was aged eighteen. That company was called The Pilgrimage for Pleasure Theatre and I wrote my first love poems and comedy sketches for that group.

NIGHT HORIZONS

Looking west to the sounding sea shore
the eternally present in eyes and ears.

Discrete hatching the wood, weed and wag
outside tainted coercion clasped in conjunction.

Light shining in silent stillness before the door
this non person out of action and fear.

Mapping out and mapping subsong of home
racked with flight, darker plumes, pelt in blur.

This prisoner alive with jays and kingfishers
manic to God the sufferer in us all.

Black the night, badge of heat and dungeons
abuses 'stript 'n' spit' into the cauldron.

In this Night School there is no hell eternal,
no damnation, only the soul's ground.

Not born to inherit land or heaven's graces
the substance of things hoped for anchors

This wayward vessel, unearthed to drink
and drink to abandon, disseminate.

Blood drips, coheres into tears and operative
phraseology of sins, transfigured matter

internecine with all forms of lack
and judgment of warring bodies

around the wound from body to text
this scallop shell of quiet unleashed.

Inside the skin creasing compass borne
talisman of shepherds and new worlds

brief ripple of leaves and lineage
earth's shadows fly, black on white.

Beyond those that have power to hurt
this jack, black emissary of dirt, deposits,

stabs and weaves. Twist of hair and moss.
Inside the song. Trail of blood and bit.

Fine hair wisps. Beauty in purpose. Back of throat
longing. Ale and more ale. Head opens to thrill.

Trailed withered root. Multilingual litter brack,
scored with pitch scrapings fed to cattle over-feed

dumped carcass bleeds pink to purple gut
womb intestinal matter left by all but yes

but no but yes but no but butts head feed
pulled water spots wheeling tracks past sings

oh movement continuous untamed and well-
tempted to steal the voice of men.¹⁰

Notes

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*. Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press / Blackwell 1934 p. 244.

² Ibid p. 1248.

³ Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840–1928*. Basingstoke: Macmillan 1962 pp.110–119. Norman Page (ed.), *Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy* Oxford: OUP 2000, p. 403.

⁴ Thomas Hardy, *The Collected Poems*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions 1994, p. 445

⁵ The film subsequently appeared as *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*.

⁶ Walter Raleigh, *The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh*, ed. Agnes Latham, London: Routledge Kegan Paul 1962, pp. 45–47. I have followed the modern English rendering as used by Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes in *The Rattle Bag*, London: Faber & Faber 1982 pp.241–243.

⁷ See David Norbrook, *Poetry And Politics in the English Renaissance*. Oxford: OUP 2002, for more details about the Sidney–Spenser group of poets.

⁸ Walter Raleigh, *op. cit.* pp.49–51

⁹ Ibid p.72

¹⁰ David Caddy, *Man in Black*. London: Penned in the Margins 2007, pp.39–41

LETTER 2

BARNES AND THE ENGLISH POETRY CANON

I first encountered the poetry of William Barnes when I was sixteen. I had been in Barnes House at Sturminster Newton School and had no real idea of what he wrote until I bought some books at the Dorset Bookshop in Blandford Forum. It was a charming, overflowing bookshop run by two elderly ladies who had published a book about Barnes. What was striking about Barnes was that he wrote almost exclusively in the Dorset dialect. Here was the language that my parents, grandparents, the local farmers, farm workers and villagers, more or less used.

When skies wer peåle wi' twinklen stars,
An' whislen air a-risén keen;
An' birds did leave the icy bars
To vind, in woods, their mossy screen;¹

The habitual 'v' for 'f' and 'z' for 's', as in "zunzet" was still in common use. I grew up, as did my daughters, saying, "Oh-arh" and "Look at that girt bull". I come from the same peasant stock as Barnes and at seventeen I was writing a strange poetry inspired by Wordsworth, Barnes and the puns of radio comedy.

I want to talk about Barnes, his context and the English poetry canon. This general overview may cast some light on the narrowness of the canon and the relative instability of late-twentieth-century English poetry.

William Barnes has three aspects that are noteworthy. He wrote for a specific and local audience, the rural poor and dispossessed, and put that focus above anything else. By choosing not to conform to national English he reduced his potential audience considerably. However, his dialect poetry did sell in quantities and has never been out of print. It is still widely available in different editions. Indeed, in the past forty years his position in relation to the canon has improved. There has been a *Selected Poems* in the Penguin Classics series, edited by the then Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion.

Secondly, his work as a linguist and as a theorist of English language is significant and similar to the seventeenth-century Levellers, who also wanted the removal of the Norman-French system of government.

Thirdly, he was also a political economist seeking a way out of worst effects of industrialisation. In other words, there is more to Barnes than might be thought.

The poet, John Ashbery, in a handy book entitled *Other Traditions*,² based on his Norton lectures, delineates the value of six poets outside the canon. These include the Northamptonshire peasant poet, John Clare, who is listed in the *Cambridge History of English Poets* among the “Lesser Romantic Poets”. He is there with some fascinating figures, such as Barnes, Thomas Love Beddoes and George Darley. Clare is the poet who famously wrote

I am—yet what I am, no one knows or cares;
My friends forsake me like a memory lost:
I am the self-consumer of my woes—
They rise and vanish in oblivion's host
Like shadow's in love-frenzied stifled throes—
And yet I am, and live—like vapours tossed³

Now I don't wish to suggest that Barnes is better than Clare. Rather I think that both have been sorely neglected because they deal with the rural poor and dispossessed. Clare lost his mind as a result of his problems and has only recently—thanks to Ashbery, Jonathan Bate⁴ and the Clare Society—found his way closer to the canon. A similar resurgence is happening for Barnes. They are, both, though, still outside the canon.

There is a view of the origins of English literary language that late-fourteenth-century and early-fifteenth-century poets took the wrong course within vernacular English as it slowly emerged as a distinct language. At that time the bulk of the population spoke Middle English dialects influenced by successive invaders, the Normans, Vikings, Angles, Saxons and Jutes. The official languages of government were French and Latin and they dominated the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman dialects. The dialect of London, of the City of London that is, became the first English literary language through borrowings from other languages, the power of print and the position of its users during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The London poets, Chaucer, Gower, Hoccleve and so on, had to make difficult choices about which

dialect to write in. It is this borrowing from other languages that so upset Barnes.

One impact of the London poets' choice of literary language is that a cultured English person should know the parts of language that are reliant upon knowledge of Latin, Greek or French and can use them for purposes of power. Similarly the ability to quote from other languages in conversation is seen as the mark of a powerful person. Obviously the less well-educated and poorer people would not ordinarily be able to fully understand such a person.

This affectation towards the quoting of other languages is not confined to the English. Here's Hugh Fox, the American poet, writing about when he first met Charles Bukowski in 1966 and saying

“You're the first writer I've ever read that used English the way I used it in Chicago when I was growing up. You know, you get a Ph.D., fall in love with T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, think that if you write a page without Greek, Sanskrit and Italian in it that you're a fucking fool . . .”⁵

Here is perhaps a key to why Barnes and Bukowski are not acceptable to the English canon, despite tremendous popularity and much academic interest. They use localised versions of English. They write, as it were, in another language. Barnes narrative poem, 'John Bloom in London',⁶ for example, when read aloud, comes alive and was a popular part of Barnes' performances. Barnes read his work in and around Dorset and was in regular demand as a popular oral entertainer. He developed a large following and enjoyed a longer performing career than Charles Dickens.

Barnes was a self-educated polymath. Described by Rev. Francis Kilvert in his *Diary* as “half-hermit, half-enchanter”, he was far from being an orthodox Victorian churchman. He was more in the visionary tradition of Milton and Blake through his conception of Paradise and out of touch with the direction of Victorian England. He saw Dorset village life as an Other England, an Eden more or less outside of industrialisation. He believed in the holiness of everything and saw God in everything, in all religions. He believed in an everlasting God, without any reliance

upon a totalising theosophy. He was anti-imperialist, spoke out against the Crimean and Opium wars and studied sacred texts in their original language. I went to school with direct descendants of Barnes and Hardy; however, the boy that I most remember is Terry Loveless, a rebellious relative of the leader of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, those farm workers who were arrested for forming a Friendly Society of Agricultural Workers and deported to Australia in 1834. Indeed Hardy can be read as the successful echo of Barnes celebrating a people that live in rhythm with nature and it is the most obvious place to start in seeing the traces of Barnes mark. However, that tradition lived on beyond Hardy.

From the late 1970s until the mid '90s I met various members of the extended Powys family in Mappowder, mid-Dorset. This was the family that produced several writers, poets and artists. John Cowper, of *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Weymouth Sands* fame, Theodore, Llewellyn, Philippa, Lucy and Lucy's son-in-law, Gerard Casey.⁷ All were thoroughly intellectual and otherworldly. All were deeply imbued in profound spiritual and literary study. They were not fans of Mrs. Thatcher or President Reagan. They were part of the ongoing inheritance of non-denominational visionary poetry.

Visiting the Powys family was an education. Lucy Powys, youngest sister of John Cowper, and the dedicatee of *A Glastonbury Romance*, had been born in the nineteenth century. Although bedridden, she gave me the second strongest handshake I ever received. A formidable intellect, she chopped at my simple assertions with the discreet charm of an executioner. Taking tea in her summer garden, she was surrounded by butterflies and birds that would congregate around her wheelchair. She was certainly of the same ilk as Blake and Barnes in terms of seeing the living sacrament in all creatures and moment. Barnes, though, was less of a neo-Platonist than she was.

Like Barnes, the Powys family had lived in Dorchester, (Casterbridge in Hardy's novels), a town that in the seventeenth century had been the most godly of Puritan towns.⁸ This was a town where power had been exercised according to religious commitment rather than wealth or rank, and there was a tradition of unorthodoxy that Barnes and others fed into. Barnes did not smoke or drink alcohol. Instead he studied philology and the religions of the world. He was a founder and first Secretary of

the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club. This society still exists at the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester. His dialect poetry was written for, and concerns the lives of, Dorset agricultural people. Out of the impact of enclosure, the agricultural depression and poverty that so impacted upon John Clare, Barnes developed a middle way between capital and labour in his *Views of Labour and Gold* (1859). His vision of an economy where no one was ever over-worked or idle is a late echo of the seventeenth-century dissenters, the Levellers and Ranters, as well as a precursor to the Arts & Crafts socialism of William Morris. He was a believer in smallholdings, as opposed to the division of labour and the ethos of time-work discipline. The popular image of Barnes in a smock only gives part of the man. Yes, he was anachronistic, an oddball, but he was also a man thinking for the future within a divine universe.

Barnes believed in the local as the starting point of the self and his really big vision, even more than the “small is beautiful” idea, was in the need to restore the English language to its Anglo-Saxon roots. Anglo-Saxon politics were libertarian. You find the Barnes influence in Hardy and the Powys family here. Like Blake, Barnes drew inspiration from ancient Britain with the addition of knowledge of ancient Egypt and Hindu mythology. Barnes was something of an anthropologist and it is no wonder that he was sought out by Tennyson, Browning and other literary figures as a sage. He represented a tradition far removed from the authoritarian Anglo-Norman politics that dominated Victorian England.

Barnes recognised Saxon English as the local language of speech and poetry, carrying with it an alternative culture and civilisation. This is the context of his dialect poetry and the main reason for his exclusion from the canon. He produced glossaries and wrote books on grammar and philology in Saxon English. He had an international reputation as a linguist, having become familiar with some seventy languages. He created a simplified Anglo-Saxon English replacing Latin and French words with new ones. Thus ornithology became “birdlore”, pathology, “painlore”, optics, “lightlore”, and so on. Essentially he used English prefixes and suffixes for foreign ones, thus *many* for “multi”, with “multiple” being replaced by *manifold* and “ism” being replaced by “hood”, so that equality becomes *evenhood*. He also translated Latin

roots into English so that “-flect” became *bend*, “pose” became *put*, with “preposition” becoming *foreputting* and so on. He also added to Saxon English by creating new words. *Suchness* for “resemblance”, *allsome* for “universal”, and so on. Some of the words he created and used have been adopted and are now part of the language. *Earthlore* for geology is used by New Age shops and is part of the back-to-nature movement, although, interestingly, it is not in the *Oxford Concise Dictionary*. Also *gawk* from the Dorset dialect, meaning to stand and stare about idly, is well used, albeit recognised as a colloquialism by the *Oxford Concise*. There are many other examples. He made good use of the dialect and there are many words that have been incorporated into the language. It would be interesting to know the full extent of Barnes’ success in this. Thanks to Barnes, we can say that the differences between Saxon and Latinate English and the power of each are relatively well known and that for poets word selection, based on knowledge, power and effectiveness, has become an issue that the canon is struggling to recognise and deal with. Barnes’ new words have survived but are resolutely kept outside Standard English.

The English poetry canon can be defined as the works and authors represented in the histories and anthologies published by Oxford and Cambridge University Presses. The nature and status of the canon has been challenged since the 1970s on a number of areas, such as the relative absence of women, black, working class and other minorities, and these have been to some extent addressed. However, the position of dialect English, of poets like Barnes, Clare and Samuel Laycock⁹, and of the counter-Movement poets of the Sixties, is untenable. Whole traditions are excluded. Essentially, those Sixties poets who absorbed the rich heritage of American poetics from Pound, the Imagists, William Carlos Williams, the Objectivists, the New York School, Black Mountain, San Francisco and the Beats have been ignored and marginalised, despite international success and the publication of a *Collected Poems*. The impact of those diverse poetries was enormous, in stark contrast to the neo-Edwardian Movement poets in terms of developing a counter-culture of poets, poetry magazines and presses in both high and low modernism.

Mainstream English poetry remains conservative, insular and nationalistic. Consider the continued mainstream gloss of Basil

Bunting, with his use and celebration of the Northumbrian dialect, or Sorley MacLean, the Scottish Highlander who wrote in Gaelic, both barely recognised in their own lifetimes. Indeed Oxford University Press (OUP) in New York, but not in Oxford, published by far the most representative anthology of *Twentieth Century British & Irish Poetry*, edited by Keith Tuma in 2001. It was as if Oxford had washed its hands of such brazen openness to The Other. Indeed, J.H. Prynne, one of the most important Sixties poets, refused to allow his work to appear in the volume as an ongoing protest against OUP. Similarly, I have received hate-mail for publishing many American poets and essays on Anglo-American poets and attempting to restore historical accuracy. The OUP and Oxford English faculty have been slow to recognise that the continual refusal to address wider readings of post-1950 English poetry has been a public disgrace and disservice. It goes back to the mid-1970s backlash against the Sixties poets and the rewriting of recent poetic history by such post-Movement poets, and their successors, to suit their own ends. Andrew Motion and Blake Morrison's *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982) notoriously summarised the Sixties, but excluded the dominant influences on English poetry. Their aim was to establish an alternative to those Sixties poets, with their various art, centred on a few good poets from Belfast. Unbelievable, you might think, but sadly true, and also successful. Their anthology also excluded women and ethnic-minority poets. Motion is now Poet Laureate,¹⁰ and subsequent histories and anthologies have largely excluded what Professor Eric Mottram termed the "British Poetry Revival" until the mid-90s. Such deliberate misreading is slowly being undone.¹¹

William Barnes alerts us to the need to study the roots of words and of the need to cultivate local distinctiveness within a wider, international perspective. Like Barnes, I take solace in the knowledge that the English were not always so insular.

Notes

- ¹ 'The Lydlinch Bells' from William Barnes, *Poems of Rural Life in the Dorset Dialect*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1887, p.260.
- ² John Ashbery, *Other Traditions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- ³ Harold Bloom & Lionel Trilling, *Romantic Poetry and Prose*. Oxford: OUP 1973, p.578
- ⁴ Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*. Basingstoke: Picador 2003.
- ⁵ Hugh Fox, *Way, Way Off the Road*. Somerville: Ibbetson Street Press, 2006, p.10.
- ⁶ William Barnes, op cit. pp.453–456
- ⁷ Gerard Casey (1918–2000) was an impressive figure; a poet, translator and thinker. His books include (as Gerardus Cambrensis) *South Wales Echo* (London: Enitharmon Press 1973), *Between the Symplegades* (Enitharmon 1980), *Echoes* (Rigby and Lewis 1990) and *Night Horizons* (Phudd Bottom Press USA 1997).
- ⁸ David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*. London: Harper Collins 1992.
- ⁹ See Samuel Laycock, *Selected Poems*, edited and introduced by Glyn Hughes. Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press 1981, for an example of a Yorkshire dialect poet ignored by the dominant culture.
- ¹⁰ Carol Ann Duffy succeeded Andrew Motion as Poet Laureate in May 2009.
- ¹¹ See e.g. Andrew Duncan, *Origins of the Underground: British Poetry Between Apocryphon And Incident 1933–1979*. Cambridge: Salt Publishing 2008; Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and Its Discontents 1950–2000*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2005, and Randall Stephenson, *The Last of England? The Oxford English Literary History Volume 12: 1960–2000*. Oxford: OUP 2004.