

The Man Who Spoke To Owls

Also by David H W Grubb

Prose:

Beneath the Visiting Moon
The Almost Child
Sorry Days Are Over
Sanctuary

Poetry:

The Green Dancers
The Burial Tree
And Suddenly This
From the White Room
Somewhere There Are Trains
Falconer
Last Days of the Eagle
Mornings of Snow
Figures and Masks
The Mind and Dying of Mr Punch
Stone Moon Poems
Return to the Abode of Love
Replies For My Quaker Ancestors
Three Meeting Houses
Village Poems
A Banquet for Rousseau
Romanian Round
The All Night Orchestra
The Rain Children
Turtle Mythologies
Bosnia
Dancing with Bruno
A Country Alphabet
An Alphabet of Light
Conversations Before the End of Time
The Man Who Thought He Was
The Memory of Rooms
The Elephant in the Room
Out of the Marvellous
It Comes With a Bit of Song

As Editor:

The Gifted Child at School
An Idea of Bosnia
Sounding Heaven and Earth

The Man Who Spoke To Owls

DAVID H W GRUBB

Shearsman Books
Exeter

Published in the United Kingdom in 2009 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
58 Velwell Road
Exeter EX4 4LD

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-047-7
First Edition

Copyright © David H W Grubb, 2009.

The right of David H W Grubb to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988. All rights reserved.

Acknowledgements

Some of these poems previously appeared in the following:

Ambit, Poetry Salzburg Review, The Journal, Poetry Review, Shadowtrain, Stride, With, Iota, Strokestown Competition, English Association, Biscuit, Ragged Raven, Kent and Sussex Competition, Neon Highway, Geometer, Oversteps, Troubadour, Sign, The Matthew's House Project.

CONTENTS

Part 1

Intro	10
A House With No Windows	11
Waiting for the Angels	13
The Colour of Angels	16
Angels	18
Fire Sermons for James Agee and Walker Evans	19
Christopher Smart's Flowers and Hardships	20
Emily Dickinson and the Snow Days	24
Emily Dickinson and the Words Again	25
Emily Dickinson's Joke Book	26
Emily Dickinson and the Meaning of Snow	27
The Man Who Spoke To Owls	28
Every Silence	29
Her Light	30
In the American Night	31
In the City That Does Not Exist	32
Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of Necessity	33
Inventions at the Asylum	34
Mr and Mrs B Entering Heaven	35
Peace Musick	36
People From Porlock	38
Remembering To Forget	40
The Horse With One Eye	41
Passing Wonderful	42
The Sound of a Short Story	43
The World At Last a Meadow	44
Things That Can Happen	45

Part 2

The Beginning and the Muddle and the End	48
The Rain Sends Children	49
Poem for Daughters	50
My Father's Bells	51

My Father Will Not Let Go	55
Lux	58
Flying the Face of Logic	62
Mousehole	63
Three Priests on Their Way	64
Tumble	65
What Was Wild	66
Wind Song	67
When The Farm Was Breaking	68
Where Will We Put the Words?	69
Questions About Heaven	70
We Are All Going to Paint God	71
The Closing	72
The Beautiful Intuitions	73
When She Gave Up the Music	75
And Whilst We Were Doing	77

Part 3

Poem Beginning with Last Lines by Veronica Forrest-Thomson	82
The Blue Piano at Midnight	83
Blue on Blue	84
Blue Wolf	85
A Short History of Blue Dogs	86
The Blue Dogs of Albania	87
In a Blue World	88
The Mind of Blue	89
The Blue Dogs	90
Blue Dogs Again	91
Horse Prayers	92
Slow Music	93
The Woman Who Washed Her Hair in the Orchard	94
Heart Music	95
Vanishing	96
Astonishings	97
The Hail Mary Pass	98
A Whistling Woman	99

The Red Piano	100
Hand Taps of a Brief Encounter With This Time	101
Five Hundred People Are Writing the Same Poem	103
Migrations	104
When Charlotte Mew Visits the Zoo	105
The End of the World Taxi	106
Red Moon, Red Sun	107
Places in the World Where There Has Never Been a Miracle	108
Men in the Forest	109
This Is the Poem That Will Never Be Finished	110

for Beverly

PART 1

INTRO

Before you read this book you need to be aware that everything that has been said before by Helen Joyce Bellbarker is cancelled.

When we read the manuscript it had been with an agent for three years and when he died his wife used chapter one as wallpaper she told us.

The opening scenes about parrots and the meaning of rain are better set aside or perhaps used as opera but it is a fact that windscreen wipers, laser printers and bullet-proof vests were all invented by women.

11 of the 12 men who have walked on the moon were in the Boy Scouts so they were used to rules and rituals and nonsense and places where others did not want to go.

Meanwhile Helen is training to become a monk and all of her dresses are to be sold and the book is about to be published by Invisible Press who once published comics.

Isaac Newton invented the cat flap and there are two chapters in the book about zoos in modern wars where the animals moved out and the homeless moved in converting cages etc.

There is also a chapter about etc and things that be in dreams and the socks of Wallace Stevens and why writing wrecks routine.

A HOUSE WITH NO WINDOWS

1.

They will all be talking at once and the words will tumble so much that the grandfather will stand up on his chair screaming for them to stop.

2.

There will be a very long silence and perhaps some conversation about nuns blowing up balloons or the child who underwent an operation and came out of it well but with a foreign accent.
(Laughter)

3.

There will be no conversation about the war.

4.

Who is it that has come to live at 55 and will they throw a party?
The last people who lived there; details and rumours and too many dogs.

5.

There is talk of a dead child found in a shed.
(Silence)

6.

Spunk. How can that be spoken without giving offence? Now that the bishop has shaved off his beard are we to expect other things?

7.

Throughout these chapters everything speeds up and most of the speakers actually sing.
(Is this to become an opera?)

8.

Some talk of poetry and Dunster at dawn and the idea of a house with no windows. What to do with a gardener who is going mad and making tea for the tulip tree.

9.

The carol singers have gone on strike. All the main speakers who have been singing now take to their violins so this cannot be an opera really. Each chapter will end with a birth and a house with no windows.

10.

They do not know what to do about the war? They do not like drums. They are very different people in winter. He is also writing about lichen.

WAITING FOR THE ANGELS

Annie

I do not like the silent rooms. I do not like the way
the air is filled with hair and angels.
I do not like the silent rooms. I do not like the sideways
of their words and what the doctors mumble to each other
and the ramblings of their obsessions and the way it is never
dark enough to dream and look what the man in white brought in!
What is the point of a baby here? Dear God; the baby has been broken
and all I have is a doll who does its thing on my lap and I give it hymns.
Today is God Day again. I do not like the God Day because I like the God
who does not snore, who does not smile, who sits in his alone and never
winks
and never asks for me to do that thing and sometimes his face is more
like rain.
Monday is taps. All day the baths are filled and we swim like swine and
the stuff
gets in our gobs and the drying takes us into freezing and all I can do is
running so
fast I sometimes drop my face on the floor and hope that mother will come
and pick
it up and stick it on again and I wonder a bit what she sees when there is
no face.

Bill

Don't do it when they ask me anymore. Don't play music. Forget all tunes.
Forget
her singing and the skipping songs and what the teacher said about a tune
for every
truth. Sit at the piano now, in the small room now, in the old part of the
house now,
and sometimes speak to the keyboard which is a beautiful thing. The
waiting notes.
The expectations. The beautiful thing.

Mary

The Blue Angel comes on Mondays. Her eyes are rain.
The Green Angel arrives on Tuesdays. Only sometimes she does not come.
The Red Angel enters on Wednesdays, always at twelve o'clock. She holds a bag full of nails.
The Yellow Angel crash lands on Thursdays. Then he runs on the spot.
The Brown Angel never turns up.
The White Angel is blind. Coming or going or what?
The Black Angel plays a kazoo. I think he can do tricks.
There are no angels on Saturdays and on Sundays we do not need them.
On Sundays we sometimes dress in wings and scare the pants off the others or we get inside some words and don't come out.

William

I keep getting back to the farm. Every day I smell it.
I can see right through the hills to the back door and the pram.
I can hear her and the kids and sometimes the pigs.
It takes a long time for me to get out from under all these dreams
and I suppose I need proper clothes and proper words
but I can't do that because of the earth.

Margaret

Quiet as quilt
Silent as egg
Naughty as nettle
Crisp as cabbage
Secret as silence
Seldom as sorry
Hard as pardon
Waiting as water
Eager as earth
Mother as bell
Doctor as bum

Nurse as worse
Baby as midnight
God as glass

Tim

I write these letters you see. I write them every.
I catch the sound and ground it down and sentence it.
I have a way with that and what you need to understand
is that there is no need for more than rhyme
for you all remember rhyme and rhyme will not
and what goes up stays up; whatever is said stays said.

Melba

Please tell me something nothing
will also do so long as you tell me
using words not dead birds and even
carrots would be nice to hear them
snap and crack like fingers in case
nothing ever comes here again; again.

Archie

Where do they put the dead angels, after
they have crash landed in some field?
Or do they send them here, one or two,
dressed in light and kindness and sometimes
unseen in the snow; sometimes hiding in the
empty flower vase above the broken television?
I expect that's it.

THE COLOUR OF ANGELS

1.

It depends on the time of day, wind tides,
what we have not been saying, in which case
it is the brown angel, bark dark with slats of green
and eyes like an early autumn morning, head down
as if looking for something on the ground, a thing
that might be missed, something that will be crushed
beneath and remain there all winter, as if a lost message.

2.

Whereas the blue angel can be heard rushing about
as if it should be busy at a miracle or ready to carry
off a dead baby or at the place of a conversation when
the bully takes pity or the lunatic says something that
is so beautiful it shines and everyone falls silent; more,
more, you only need to say more and we will adore you
and forgive you all the years of silence and upsidedown.

3.

The white angel is always there. Of course you cannot
see him as he opens a door or a window or tips a book
onto the floor. The white angel scribbles messages on
the lake and sometimes he claps his hands at midnight
and you wake up and check the house for burglars or
in the midst of the radio announcement there is a long
buzzing and when it is over you feel like a stranger.

4.

Wait. The red angel always arrives about now. He has
a box of lies for you to choose from. He has a sack of

excuses and get out clauses and revels in denials. If you ask him what truth is he laughs so much he begins to fart and the veins in his head wriggle like worms and his hands get the jitters. So do not do this. Let him come and go and never pick up what he leaves on the table. Let it bleed dry.

5.

The pink angel of course you enjoy. The pink angel looks a bundle of fun, ready for a dance, a polka, a prance and all that jazz. The pink angel has a box of chocolates for each one of us and wants to meet the children and wake up the dead and throw a party for the nuns and what about a swim at dawn? Only it is too late. The war has only just begun. The pink angel will have to wait, take up yoga, get a real job.

6.

When it is time for the green angel to arrive there will be a slight drop in the temperature of the field, the tennis court, the lane, the hedgerow. The horses will know it and the birds will all rise and fall again in seconds as a sign. There will be no words. The angel will be there to remind us of the way all things are changing, how the visible hides things, how a silence has its story, how sunshine and moonglow may not return. Ever.

7.

That summer, when the drought bit the land raw, we all knew that the chapel would rise from the lake again, crusted white and gold, and that some would want to pray there and recall the names; and there would be the dead to look after and even ghosts; and we sensed that there were angels there, entwined, holding hands; and some said they had seen them with their children of light and that they wore robes of every shade, shafts of colour, as if they were dressed in music.