Music’s Duel
Also by Gavin Selerie:

*Playground for the Working Line* (Ziesing Brothers, 1981)
*Azimuth* (Binnacle Press, 1984)
*Puzzle Canon* (Spectacular Diseases, 1986)
*Strip Signals* (Galloping Dog Press, 1986)
*Elizabethan Overhang* (Spectacular Diseases, 1989)
*Southam Street* (New River Project, 1991)
*Tilting Square* (Binnacle Press, 1992)
*Roxy* (West House Books, 1996)
*Danse Macabre*, with Alan Halsey et al (Ispress & West House Books, 1997)
*Days of ’49*, with Alan Halsey (West House Books, 1999)
*Vitagraph* (Binnacle Press, 2001)
*Le Fanu’s Ghost* (Five Seasons Press, 2006)
*The Canting Academy*, with David Annwn et al (Ispress, 2008)
Gavin Selerie

Music’s Duel
New and Selected Poems
1972–2008

Shearsman Books
Exeter
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For my niece and nephew
Gemma and Peter

and in memory of my parents
Peter Alexander Shaw Selerie 1916–1989
E. Muriel Helen (Lee) Selerie 1916–2007
One said go
never hesitate

The other said
you will have to stand
by each line
for the rest
of your life
from *Azimuth (I-IV)* and *Puzzle Canon*

1972–1978
Star Carr

You stand up a stag,
the skull pressed to your own
with horn-spring
height and hardness,
reaching into the other
dark domain

I was the red deer
I hunted,
I was the year
next given,
I moved above
the marshy lake

Dancing in the campfire flames,
dressed for story-telling,
driven by the load of memory

So the stars shake
the wind cries
the riggs beckon

(Vale of Pickering, 8000 BC)
No Trespassers

Who’s here who should not
dwell, them as needs
a scape afar

skin to skin
over ground divide
in secret coppice heart

urgent commune
by orbit turns
to quiet clutch
and let go

rustle, twitch, grunt—
what stirs
under oak and ash
beside strange creature pulse

from the trods
of an ancient ridge
they shift,
dark grey, white heads
streaked with black

bedding to the surface
drag, and nuzzle this soil
for grubs and roots

two feet away
some Doomsday trust
says adult and cubs
will not begrudge
our stay since February
wind by snatches

as the sign, absurd
back there
bears witness
Fyllr

leaning into the hill
she drew him
through green skirt, red knickers

a passage guarded
in modest bud

fear the rays of fire
sixty times a raging child

knitted the several parts
bone blood and limb

Fyllr: or Fulla (filler, lifegiver), handmaiden and confidante of Frigg. A Norse fertility goddess.
Scope

Reeds, meadows, and sand
reaching flat to the horizon,
scattered farmsteads on low mounds
red above the fields

sky spreading into sea
fixed with ink
murmuring in stillness
across the marshes and dunes

a force agitating from below—
someone walking on the causeway
a faraway giant
the clouds alive with orange
the dykes purple

colour and light
is form itself

Seebüll, 1972
The Ring

We sat silent beneath the moon
in a crown of slender trees
and the legend precipitated
a riot of cordage
from which there could be
no divergence.

Before the chaffinches
a stone curlew
in wild, human voice.
Before the beech-trunks
an oval earthwork,
a later temple
within.

800 feet, a ridge
between the Adur and the Arun,
Celtic banks and hollows.

We looked through silver-grey pillars
towards Cissbury and Lancing,
other crests with a separate music,
towards the tide-pull
at Shoreham.

Leaf and wing forms without I or it
murmur as we drop
steeply from the scarp.
Our feet plot the nervous system
of planets wheeling.
Rabbits scamper in chalk,
flint-flakes shift and scatter,
the field narrows to a tunnel
breathing through foliage.

Sliding more than walking,
we follow a spear point
marked but strange—
a world new, potent, inimical
and besieging: he was talking
of a serpent engendered by the Sun
and killed by him
to protect the human race
who dreaded its fire and suppleness.
Of that same god’s pursuit
of a virgin who refused his flame
and was captured in a freeze
of writhing sinews.
He said only: Let her be always
green and shining.

As each tree became that face
and dissolved, moving in and out
of the forest. The years
an elastic turf under foot.

She raises her arms to the stars,
she is fresh as gathered herbs,
she offers new blood for the forgotten,
she is the night prowler’s triple dream.

A panel of perforated black,
silver profile of a leering mask.
There was something closed
that began again. He looked ahead
at others ganging. Stopped
as between decades, dim laughter
about. Maybe a trumpet, a trumpet
bottling feeling, a harmon mute
speaking gruffly sweet. Drums
paring each bar with a rimshot.
Tremor on seam of contact.
To each his language—do they know,
can they, is this a non-repeat frame
or a blinker jump?
Flecked forward by a thread
groundlong they go
passing no should or ought
where roots coil like pythons,
branches quiver.

The tall chemist led them back
to the cottage. After him, in line,
the psychologist. Last, as a retina
over crystal, the poet, bringing her power
with him. Down the lane, by hedges
and haystacks, they share thoughts
roughly inherited, take colour
from iron stalks. Quickly the secret
is overlaid: a slippery, thorny track
running south-east between the charted routes.
To the High Street with its curves and dips
and no satyric cries.

Icon of that place, his friend’s
woman, she queens it casually
on the doorstep. The cats are roused.

Brushing fat daisies, they walk
as intruders in known space:
the salad on the dresser not for eating,
the disc on the turntable not for hearing,
the books, as a concertina, not for reading.

She turns suddenly and laughs,
her cheeks boned with summer lightning,
and he sees one thought pass over another,
all that was anger being pain.

The head swims with spreading legs
as beams bend in a white room.
Thinking back, he is thinking of a figure
but she reverses
to show a need not voiced
a morning or a season ahead.
She is wearing a red cotton dress with embroidered mirrors. She has bangles on her wrist. She drums her fingers on the couch. Her eyes pierce a male domain, check-shirted.

Soldiers march across the wall in green uniforms with red tabs. A kettle boils after the gas is turned off. He stubs out a cigarette, eradicating schooldays. Mud in the crevices of a boot sole. Daffodils in a Persian carpet, or lilies expiring. Veins in an alabaster cup.

What shivers as a tart reply is not—you stalk the glint of your own weakness. A chain unfastens, is there by the hearth.

One parts the curtains to find a star cluster. Another feels that rich aggregate, if ever we were alive, without stirring. Our silver mistress, constant in change, sparkles in woodland as the village sleeps.