

No. 25

Geraldine Clarkson

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2018 by
Shearsman Books
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*)

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-615-8

Copyright © Geraldine Clarkson, 2018

The right of Geraldine Clarkson to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988. All rights reserved.

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to the editors of *Shearsman*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Iota*, *Magma*, *Live Canon Competition Anthology 2017*, *Smiths Knoll*, *Under the Radar*, *Envoi*, *Primers Volume 1 (Poetry School / Nine Arches Press)*, and *nthposition* in which some of these poems have previously appeared.

Special thanks to Arts Council England for their generous support in enabling me to prepare this chapbook, also to all who have commented on these poems, and particularly to David Caddy and Ahren Warner for their thoughtful editorial advice.



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Contents

RIVARIATIONS	5
The House Dreams	8
Sons and Fraughters	9
A Thursday	11
Lament, My Natural Home	12
Spinster Soup	14
On the Street	15
Filth	16
Hopeless on Hope Street	17
Eyes in a Whirl	18
Mother's Meals	19
Vault	20
Whole Salmon	21
Unlawful Daughter	22
Of Uncreation	23
Lorm	24
When my enemy came home with my love,	25
Creeper	26
Melody's Meadow	27
When tooraloos were taboo,	28
Unlearning the Cloister	29
Lustre	30
Nutmeg, America	31
golden opportunity wet streets	33
Muzzy McIntyre	34

*Lovely the Leam and her sisters
milling through Midlands
watermeadows. Broadbacked
and elegant, halving the Spa town.*

*There was a story in childhood
of three daughters of one family,
adrift in a boat, lost. Leam lowered
her gaze and mourned. Hypocrite river.*

RIVARIATIONS

I *The Ouse Is My (Unexpected) Home*

I slip into the day as into swish silk.
Up before anyone, digging out morning's
moist newness like truffles. Green prickling
my nose, sharp as thorn. I head down the slope.
Hop. Down by the apple trees, down by
the apple trees. Skip.

The water is plated, a table set for tea.
One little white teacup for you, my dear.
A trembling, almost transparent, slice
of angel cake.

Icy green slink—*oh why did you*—
fugitive flurry, rattlesnake breath.
How roomy here, in this black heart.

II *Louis Limpopo Laments*

like an oiled clarinet, a bouncy bassoon,
with caulked cork on his back. A sulky slider
of green treacle, slow, with a sloe-gin kick,
all from one lung. Through desert and forest,
he's hippopotamussy. Has one ancient urgent
push to carry me home. Fever trees
make a low chariot. *Ain't going to
study war no mo'.*

III *Shelagh Shannon Shoulders the Cross*

She batters rocks like crockery, brims.
From overhead (the familiar home-tug
gets you from all angles), you see she trails a mane
of porter-black, with its froth, and gullies of
ginger, jellied air. What did they all
want, my sorrows drowned. It's goodbye,
Muirsheen Durkin. *Going to lay down my
burden, down by, down by.* Pulling up
through bog and moor, potato land. Gliding by
strange new settlements, shiny acre gardens. Old
hurt. Work away now, work away. These rocks
seep secrets. Rough words into the night.
Someone who oughtn't to be there. Lies.
Something wrapped in a cloth entrusted
to the emerald stream.

IV *Mr Derwent*

How d'you do, my rushing gent, tawny-capped,
whiskers bristling, up at Howden, busy about
a northern agenda, along steep corridors,
ten thousand items to see to, circling the scree
and sparing a word to court the lady scar. Debrief
at Hathersage, healing rush down through
Matlock. Thick oak valleys. You try to hold it back
but you break out with such a brown surge.
Whip, slap. Mutate, flower into cotton and silk.
I follow in my head, on, on through rock
and lime and moor, always forward
with canny grit; brief circuits, blunt as a tongue.
The wind confounds you at Ambergate.
I spent two years trailing you
then wonder where you went.

V Gave de Pau, Lourdes

One leap down from the snows, and she pauses the tune
to pass the shrine—rheumy, watery place. Milk-green
with the sun on it, rising, full of lace.
October firebombing the trees.

So cold. The shock of contact—mother's blue
obliterates thought. Baby's legs working, treading air
in a jig of anticipation, little life held close, nut-heart
refixing itself to the tree, held hard, one flow.
Now nothing new will ever be the same again.

The House Dreams

began when the house was sold. I returned nightly without fail. Once, there were new owners and we spoke different languages. I stopped at the front garden. Another time I sneaked in, and had to be abject when the lady owner came back and seemed affronted. One weekend I went and slept in my old bed, luxuriant, fearful of Monday. The worst, I was trapped in the bathroom, her voice rising the stairs, getting nearer, her hand on the ivory plastic knob, and I woke to protect myself. There was a life-size crib in the back garden, containing my father. Scenarios unrolled with my mother and people I'd just met, in the kitchen, and a partitioned quarter of the living room. I met someone injured in the street and told the ambulance driver to take them back to the old house (the new lady not impressed). Real life, I was told that everything went wrong for them, gas, water, garden, electrics. The most haunting, I am searching under the floorboards, there is damp black earth, and treasures, blue-and-white fragments, I am excited, knowing these will be valuable, too, to my sister. She refuses to look.