SAMPLER

Uncommon Place
Also by Gerrie Fellows

*Technologies and Other Poems* (Polygon, 1990)
*The Powerlines* (Polygon, 2000)
*The Duntroon Toponymy* (Mariscat, 2001)
*Window for a Small Blue Child* (Carcanet, 2007)
*The Body in Space* (Shearsman Books, 2014)
Gerrie Fellows

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Shearsman Books
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SAMPLER
Transitional
*(Loch Ossian to the Water of Nevis)*

Under the wind turbine
birch wood  tattered bunting
pegs & stacked coal
spots of colour
vanish into thick air

Elevations levelled by cloud
islands in mist  a revelation
divulged by the flight of birds
  white-bellied    over water
  huzzas of shooting parties
towed from the pierhead
this place once was

where I begin from

  under the stilled places
  a multitude of voices
  raised at departure
  the harp    played by the wind

Into a nowhere
bound by tracks  old tracings
yet hard underfoot

the iron route of the railway
held by brushwood and earth
(new trunks for old in buried peat)
follows the herding and herded ghosts
Over springy selvedge
mind floats wisps of bog cotton

Above the loch
the train secret but for sound
in its belt of leaves

What is a place:
a titled lodge
under a leek-green crag
on a loch whose name meant to cease
while houses yet stood at its head

a halt on the drove roads
a market at Kinlochtreig
for drovers and thieves vanished

before the shores were inundated
waters raised
to power the Alcan smelter

or drained to a trace landscape
of meanders contours
of fine gravel water-rippled
as the ripple marks in the rock
the continuous transformation
of sand to rock of rock to sand
of water to power through distant pipes
Ahead low cloud in the gap
mountains named and renamed
   a speculation

the river
a link around which perspective swings
summits clouds and blueing air
all in our binocular vision

Names succeed one another
from east to west yet place is flowing
as the river is
as a path is
through bell heather and cross-leaved heath
as walking seems to be
the successive steps
of our gait beside the Abhainn Rath
past alder and bog myrtle moving
upwards against its rushing down

voices in a solitude
in the strings of the wind the river’s music
peregrine’s solitary mew dragonflies
a coupled zither
tumble rings of gold through air

water
tumbling over schist and porphyry
a sculpture of folded upheavals turbulent
as weather across the quartzite summits flows
over the jumbled successions of geology

makes a truth of our not knowing
Evening at Meanach
billies, rock-balanced
my windblown flame
makes slow tea

is a place a gable end
a fire in the hearth

Peooled once a habitation
at the bothy, at skeletal Luibeilt

Before the shepherds
the transitory smoke of thieves
making meals of bannock
and cattle blood
herding stolen beasts

after them transient
we unfold our rolled alloys, best titanium
make a high summer habitat
under flysheets and netted inners
populous again

Over transitory kitchens
at dusk a smoke of midges

Each step a questioning
of balance over water verve of crossing
from stone to stone
over the shoaling river
our good fortune in a dry summer yet deep in air
waist deep the echo of a torrent
To the watershed
   a narrative of crossings
   the wanderings of a river  feint
   of our faint path
   but who needs it now
   when we can dance over dried-out peat
   with only clegs to prickle us

       deep in rain or snow melt
   the meadows     impassable bog
   the river       unfordable
   the watershed   unreachable
                   an impasse

   this point in space
   from which on a summer’s day
   to frame a viewpoint
       in deep
   among folds of tilted earth
   where air was rock

   the summits
   tethered at last to their names  never stop shifting
   play us for fools and strangers

   Is place passed through  or does it pass through us

   quartz grain, bedrock, microbial soil

       place  changing its nature
Span (1)

In the birch leaves
lightness moves
fire quick

inhabits waste spaces
makes new
the burnt ground

brittle whips
the wind snaps

lives like humans
Seeded

*(Dawyck Botanic Gardens, mid-September)*

A chill
among uncut grasses

of an almost wild place
quick birds in the undergrowth          Betula ermanii
papery barked   flares gold

almost wild
as if in an orchard gone to seed
  small dark berries of Prunus grayana
feathery grasses  creeping buttercup    Miyama Cherry
seedheads of sorrel

almost wild
(as is said of a garden
run wild in a season’s brief generation)
yet tended:

  a garden of the found collected, transported
            as seed or cutting:

  cinnamon-barked Rhododendron calophytum
  carried from Sichuan
  (by ‘Chinese’ Wilson)

  felted leaves of Rhododendron bureavii
  borne from Yunnan

  to this damp island
  where folded lichens grow
  on patchy barked Nippon Maple
  (native to the mountains of southern Japan)
Under my hand: peeling Flaky Bark fir
(a slow motion in thin air)
corky bark of Sequoiadendron giganteum
(resistant to the fires of its native place
seeds falling from scorched cones
regenerate on ash)

In labels rubbed for knowledge
place is elsewhere
(an echo
a suggestion of the exotic)

Korean whitebeam
Spirea japonica

grow in this shady glen
in starred and creeping mosses
native to this place

the Nikko fir’s purple cones
flared and empty flung outward
seeding in this new ground:

this place
to which after 8,000 years
Pinus sylvestris
has become native

earth enmeshed by roots of birch oak
Fagus sylvatica

invisible entanglements Cep, False Chanterelle
fleetingly revealed beechmast
lifting on a swirl of wind
Air and water enter it: leaves turn light to sap

(vision to substance)

molecules of water

restlessly travelling

transformative of tree, soil, rock of place

flow through this particular habitat

this particular climate of temperate cold

transformed

through tree, soil, rock becoming place
Span (2)

Radiant cells  thin-walled
to carry sap through spring wood

porous, diffusing nets
fixed in circumferences of dark and light

our blood’s quick molecules
a restless encompassing

the trees’ slow circulation
of time and weather