

Janet Sutherland

Home Farm

SAMPLE

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2019 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 978-1-84861-643-1

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements are due to the editors of the following publications
in which some of these poems or earlier versions have appeared:
Envoi, *Kent and Sussex Poetry Society Folio*, *Litter* (online), *London Magazine*
(online), *Mary Evans Picture Library* (online), *Molly Bloom* (online),
New Humanist, *New Statesman*, *Poetry & all that jazz* (Chichester Festival),
Poetry Ireland Review, *Shearsman*, *The Spectator*.

‘Stridor’ appeared in an online anthology, *A Festschrift for Tony Frazer*; ‘Tracks
and Pathways’ and ‘Upstream’ first appeared as commissioned pieces in *Mary
Evans Picture Library* (online); ‘The Ship at Anchor’ appeared in *True Tales from
the Old Hill* (The Frogmore Press, 2015); ‘Foxed’ appeared in the *Telltale Press
Anthology on Truth* (2018); an earlier version of ‘Braided Wire’ won first prize
in the Kent and Sussex Poetry Society Open Poetry Competition 2017.

I am very grateful for a Hawthornden Fellowship in 2018
where some of these poems were written.

Grateful and warm thanks to Maria Jastrzębska, Robert Hamberger,
Jackie Wills, John McCullough, Fiona Sampson, Mimi Khalvati,
Bernadette Cremin, Kay Syrad and the Lewes NZ poets
for friendship, generosity and close reading.

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To Lesley and Joe – thank you for everything

For my mother, father and sister

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Water Meadows

River as wind
as light
as final form

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At Cuckmere

Down in the ditches reeds eat mud and, on the hills,
cows turn to sniff at their calves as if they
were strangers. This river's a snake that opens its mouth
and sings, looping and undulating, leaving
a sloughed skin oxbow by its side,
but neither ditch nor oxbow will take us back home.
The real snake in the old river does that,
swimming head up and jaunty across a ford,
through muscled water, cold and treacherous,
where we paddle, our luminous shins
skinny-white as the peeled sticks we use
as switches. "*Christ!*" he says, "*look at that
snake swimming*". Heifers stand in the shallows,
snorting and shaking off flies before they drink.

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The Drowner

Greate profit may redound to the owners of this land upon a free ymprovement, by drowninge, wateringe or drayninge. To the Floating of our Meades and the drawing water off againe, as he shall think most fit, we shall appoint a Drowner.

— *John Snow 1676*

I make the land a moving pelt, I stretch it thin.
I float the meadow in cold sun, keep ice from meddling
with the roots of spring. I let the heavy rope of river
fray its course, drop silt against marsh marigold
and lady's smock, on meadow fescue and on timothy.
I open veins. I cut them with a knife. I draw the water in
and drive it off. I am the equal of the shepherds of the hills
who wrap the orphan lambs in skin to give them life.

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Standlynch Mill, the gardener's girl

Inquest of Dora Beesley, December 13th 1903

Dora was six years old and lying
on the long bridge by the waterfall
collecting icicles when she fell in.

The Miller got a grappler and shut down
two boards to stop the flow. He found
her in still water where the flood

losing its downward force had let
her rise. Her father came and took
her in his arms but blood was trickling

from her nose and mouth. Nothing
he did could make her breathe again.
Nothing he did could make her breathe

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The Eel House

Put your eye to the knot hole in the feather edge board of the small house adjacent to the bridge.

Pinhole-slits and gaps let in, between the boarding and the brick, a suffocated grey. The floor's a sloping grid for eels to fall on when the weir's in flood. At night white water grinds over and over through this sieve, and in that loneliness the eels come quietly, one by one, driven by longing for a spawning place at sea. Slither an eye across the peep show floor. The risen dark pools where eels still hide trapped in a storage well, somersaulting, tumbling and unbalancing. Their tender fins caress each other, water, air; slip off a little luminosity.

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View of a Water Mill and its Eel House

Mill on *River Avon*, **now disused**. English bond brick, stepped **plinth** vitrified headers, **half**-hipped tiled roof, brick stacks. L-plan with single-storey C18 wing and C19 extension. **Stable Door** in chamfered *case* with initials MB 1698 on lintel, **planked** door to right. **2-light** casements and louvred *windows* to left. Five hipped dormers to roof, one with 2-light **latticed** leaded *casements*. Left **return** has several louvred windows. Right return, *2-light* casements. Rear has **semi-circular arch** to mill **race**. Interior has chamfered **beams** with **runout stops**, cupboard with **butterfly hinges** in west room, **6-bay** roof with C17 trusses, tie-beam with raking struts to **collar** and two tiers of butt purlins, the upper tier with straight wind bracing. The initials MB, **and for Maurice** Bockland, of the Original **Stand-lynch** House **nearby**, demolished **ished** circa 1733.

This mill survives, complete with an 'eel house'. Thus, large **numbers** of **eels** were caught **each** year during their migration, providing a **second** **come** for the miller. Brick, tile with feather-board.

Gifts for Lethe

the water bailiff thought I was a boy
the water bailiff who was
bitten by a grass snake

beside the Avon, by the water meadows

my mother slipped us past wild daffodils
to a gate marked 'private' where I said to her
this means we should stop but we went on

*the deer pond in the field we called Horatio
was so overgrown with weeds, a child could run across it*

my skin was a nasturtium leaf
my stomach hollow under water
the bathroom bitter cold and lido blue

above the Avon, in the farmhouse bath

a film about Helen Keller
her first word dropped on the back of her hand
water gushing from a cast iron pump

*in Salisbury (Avon, Nadder, Ebble, Wylde, Bourne)
the sweating weir gates holding back a flood*

and the standing pool he used in Mesopotamia
(he was Captain RAMC to General Marshall's Headquarters)
seemed good to drink till the dead Turk resurfaced!

between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates

after milking I scraped then hosed the parlour
the usual order entrances stands corridors yard
high pressure drove the shit in pretty deviations

*a coiled pressure hose, kept where? – I have forgotten –
somewhere above the Avon, above the water meadows*

her granny said to me *Thalassa* meaning
go to the sea and swim
I walked to the monastery I was alone

here the Vohinas river ran, at Poros, a natural crossing

I lay detached that first night in the bedsit
on an old iron bedstead
oiled cloud in spate outstripped the window

at Springfield where they found a Saxon boat

those nights we lay together
foreheads tightly pressed all night awake
and then all day awake our bodies languid

*of South Millfields lammas lands
and Hackney Marshes*

his first word was “ada!” “ada!” “ada!”
the gist of it “My God! That train is beautiful!”
we watched it with him pulled the buggy backwards

the railway arch, the timber yards, the lost meanders

when you arrived at your mother’s house
a mad apple-woman had barred the door
of the house which was long since demolished

the River Lliedi which flows underneath the town

we skirted the reservoir
having been dropped off by a Mallorcan taxi driver
a slight climb to the ridge then zigzag paths through olive groves

the Cúber Reservoir and then the torrent of Biniaraix

it was morning so we washed her
flannel soap warm water skirting that dimple in her lower back
her last breath as we turned her

Alderbury, which has no river running by it

“You’ll be the death of me” he cried out to the doctor
when he was dying and his shit was black and foul
to us he hissed “Don’t be so bloody silly”

Alderbury, and the goldfish pond we dug together

at the empty crossroads
a very small grass snake lifted its head
poured itself across tarmac towards water

making for Pellbrook Cut and river Ouse

a three-line stave hung between telephone poles
on either side of the river
late august swallows a gathered song

hard by the Ouse, the water meadows

I ordered my horse for a short ride—indescribably
filthy, slippery and cold. I was glad to have seen Alexnitza
in its winter garb. Perhaps for the last time.²

below a broad plain thro’ which the Morava serpentine

a grass snake writhed
and thrashed around the beak
of a heron who was hunting by the river

*the river Lethe and the goddess Lethe
water both nameless and invisible*

Daubenton's bats were skimming the river
the Serotine at tree height aping birds bat conservers
aimed their lights all of us listened to their calls

*the blue enamelled throat, the water snake
at Wiley's footbridge where we stopped to stare*

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