

Sarments

SAMPLER

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New & Selected Poems

SAMPLER
John James

Shearsman Books

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(this address not for correspondence)

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Author's Note

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'On Reading J.H. Prynne's *Sub Songs*' first appeared as the livre d'artiste with lino cuts by Bruce Mclean, designed & produced by Bridget Heal with the support of Ivor Heal at Queen of The Dart Press, Ashburton, 2016; my thanks to Bruce, Bridget & Ivor.

I am grateful to Andrew Taylor for discovering the fugitive poem 'Nightmare'.

From 'Poem Beginning with a Line of Andrew Crozier' to 'Recollection Ode: Les Sarments' inclusive are works selected from *Cloud Breaking Sun* (Old Hunstanton: Oystercatcher Press 2012); my thanks to Peter Hughes. Of these, 'A Visitation' first appeared in *Tears in the Fence*; my thanks again to David Caddy.

From 'En Sevrage' to 'Last Days of The Vulcan' inclusive are works selected from *In Romsey Town* (Cambridge: Equipage 2011); my thanks to Rod Mengham.

From '6:00 p.m.' to 'Colonial Medley' inclusive are works selected from *Collected Poems* (Applecross, WA, & Cambridge: Salt Publishing 2002); my thanks to Chris Hamilton-Emery & John Kinsella.

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Affection

*one does not work out of a reaction against but rather
out of affection for something*

—Barry Flanagan

I

guide my soul to the light from this unwholesome pit
where all is sold for an arm & a leg the stirrup pump
to no avail against the incendiary hail as countless children
hunger for tallow calling from faraway cities while radios
drone on masking the salacious trembling hand to fist
a sardine can almost fast food who wants it now
got no other option the drudgery of minimum wage
or listed in the Sunday supplement bought in the family visit
to the super store with mum & dad & baby buggy large as life
what do they want they do not know until they find the box
American breakfast with green top milk & loads of sugar
shake so nose to the ground the lengthy strap that pulls the dog
so careless like its human chancers show every piercing
& tattoo as yomping down the aisle they go no bended knee
or supplicant incense low aroma of aftershave will do no
blessing now required as nothing told but enter pin code now
the 4x4 awaits as shriven by the carwash men as cheap as that
a quickie without the smokeless public bar the little town
not quite a capital spot to try for pollination
a double bed can wait

Fruiting bodies vintage
garment by the carpet pile grandpa full of what he's led to believe
some stinking rubbish from the daily junk adorning flaccid
regular the mat falling on us all as the queen lacks semen
popping drones following the soak of neonicotinoid
what good are they well there's munitions
pull up his joggers crossing the road against the red
two fingers to the horn the camera can only lie in shaky grey
by what stretch can this be called an art house cinema
our visions of grown up fillum lacking schedule
would you credit it best to buy your olive oil from Aldi
at least in winter bare flesh concealed from blatant view
dot & carry at the ankle loss of pace in sorry state
wrapt in a shiny body warmer Soviet black felt scarf & woolly bonnet
seeking something good to eat to take home to your kitchen
forlorn sell out of the local to the multiple estate

Bite off the
top of the morning on the high road to the bank no froth
or gain to see the pitiful junky lost to the world beside the path
would you believe it yes it is there tension of neck muscle
can't wait to get back home make fast the door rewind
the dread & disarray of the street to climb the stair
to application love of the creatures seen from the window
at the secrétaire you will continue till you ache the line
will turn & turn again in ascending barometric pressure
before you rest to reconsider what is done a draft
a pattern showing how it's made

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Call-sign freedom

of the kitchen taking the bird in hand & spatchcock for the grill
 a little pile of carrot slices layered in the pot for Vichy
 mortared pepper bursting aroma of the juniper under your nose
 man on a roll a glutton for more throw in a soupçon of garlic
 pursued as Norah showed you by the glowing range so long ago
 toiling in the back of the house away from traffic noise at the front
 she's standing on the stair again calling your name faithful as ever
 in spite of everything hot on the hob a quick sip of red
 a drop to ease the perspiration dripping from your brow
 another splash of southern red brought in from Carignan
 Napoleonic Guards are marching on back Rod Steiger at their head
 a marvellous recreation but the deadly Prussian cavalry in black
 infest the possibility stifle the scenario of the struggle
 all was lost but now we have to stay alive to get things done
 to wish for calm & certitude resist the pelting rain
 that drives us to the lee of the house flicker of
 painful surrender denied

land of the free

TV direction what cost dominant intrusion severed our conversation
 broken linkage in the aftermath of 1953 soon to be washing whiter
 without blue or so she thought American all over as the hotter prospect
 spinning like a running dog & working for the Yankee dollar
 removal of hedgerow not recorded in the broken archive
 never had it so Macmillan said but why should we always tag along behind
 as in a chaingang with mist shrouding the forgotten garden shelter
 corrugated pile encased in turf like a charcoal burner bonfire
 arms slung over the swaying washing line you play in your bonnet
 sheets of glass breaking your volunteer fall in the blink of an eye
 take off your socks to feel the pain of shard extraction from your leg
 feathered deep in gore a flowing dream of torture worse to come
 in Castlereagh heart beating for the evening constable any old tale will do
 then back to your cell would you believe it take it or leave it in your
 own time
 one finger one thumb keep talking swear by Almighty God the whole
 shebang
 still breathing with a bloody mark on anglo conscience
 no further questions asked each man & woman spoken for as beast

In the curving
 surface of the screen the news today a baleful pornographic dance
 defies your sofa plump up the cushions skip the ads
 the Devil now assails your weary visage
 but you say Hail Mary to send him away that's what we do
 say no to all his works & pomps deny send back his penetrating gaze
 flick the switch tear up the card & cross your legs before the fire
 of celebrity eating their way through muck before your faltering hearth
 listen to what I say or speak your own sequential prayer
 zap each shadowy intrusion & abide the possibility of better times
 break off & rearrange your own interior without external guide
 that deed of stolen thought it's beaten out of you to cut you down to size
 it's take you over time in substitute Weetabix a catch phrase or two
 rises in your throat you'd better believe it they want you to swallow it
 proceed to eat your Horlicks in the darkened room a spark of light
 in the fallen log ash before the power supply gets too expensive
 cut down the cost entailed inside the home renew your Senior Railcard
 drink deep from history ancient story modern pain unheimlich duration
 but for a moment recall all that was not lost in the guarded outlook
 of our cherished circle our careful ambience in these four walls
 en garde my love a hoard of peace & happiness in time abundant
 though worn out by work & visits to the doctor never cost a penny
 even when strapped for cash we never lost for thought