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*Also by John Matthias*

**Poetry**

*Bucyrus* (1970)

*Turns* (1975)

*Crossing* (1979)

*Bathory & Lermontov* (1980)

*Northern Summer* (1984)

*A Gathering of Ways* (1991)

*Swimming at Midnight* (1995)

*Beltane at Aphelion* (1995)

*Pages: New Poems & Cuttings* (2000)

*Working Progress, Working Title* (2002)

*Swell & Variations on the Song of Songs* (2003)

*New Selected Poems* (2004)

*Kedging* (2007)

*Trigons* (2010)

**Translations**

*Contemporary Swedish Poetry* (1980)

(with Göran Printz-Påhlson)

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*Notre Dame Review: The First Ten Years* (2009)

(with William O'Rourke)

**Essays**

*Reading Old Friends* (1992)

*Who Was Cousin Alice? and Other Questions* (2011)

# Collected Shorter Poems

Volume 2

(1995–2011)

John Matthias

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## Part Two

*from* Kedging

### I

Post-Anecdotal

... cannot you stay until I eat my porridge?  
—Will Kempe



## Post-Anecdotal

### I

And then what? Then I thought of  
What I first remembered:  
Underneath some porch with Gide.  
Oh, not with Gide. But after years & years  
I read that he remembered what he first  
Remembered, and it was that.

### II

Not this: Someone calling me,  
Johnny, Johnny. I was angry, hid.  
It was humid, summer, evening.  
I hid there sweating in the bushes  
As the dark came down. I could  
Smell the DDT they'd sprayed  
That afternoon—it hung there in  
The air. But so did the mosquitoes  
That it hadn't killed. Johnny!  
Oh, I'd not go back at all. I'd  
Slammed the door on everyone.

# Kedging

's all you're good for  
someone said. Is what? Your good

and for it. Not to fear: O all your  
goods so far. Your good 4.

Your goods 5 and 6. With a little tug  
at warp. So by a hawser winde

your head about. Thirty nine  
among the sands your steps or

riddle there. Who may have  
sailed the Alde is old now, olde

and addled, angling still for some  
good luck. So labor, lad: *when other*

*moiety of men, tugging hard at kedge  
and hawser, drew us from*

*the sand?* Brisk and lively in the  
dialect East Anglian. *Ain't so well*

*as I was yesterday, for I was then  
quite kedge. Even though I pull and*

*pole and persevere I'm blown to  
windward. Winding still. Warping so*

*as not to weep, cadging as I can.*

# Hoosier Horologe

## I

### ON THE EARLY MANNER OF T.E. HULME

who had no later manner. But also  
Hadn't pork chops in his poems!  
Pink pigs for Impressionists, but  
No ardoise / framboise for Mr. Whom.  
Hulme, sir. And no E.P. in that T.E.  
Matter, manner. Natter natter.  
Only a Brit at the lip  
Of a trench, smoking a Bosphorus gasper.  
Only a moon torching a cloud.

## II

### ON THE LATER MANNER OF GEOFFREY HILL

You wonder where | that line I wrote has gone?  
Famous in its time was "Where the tight ocean  
Heaves its load." Some drunken sailor stumbling  
From a pub and barfing in the street, I thought.  
But cut for good as some kind of penance.  
Spondee, that. Berryman is somewhere in this mix.  
And not just Manley Hópkins. Not just Milton either.  
The sailor's name was Ocean, Legion, Seaman,  
I forget. What load did he heave then, M & M?  
The bloody weight of the whole | world!

## Corvo, Pessoa, di Camillo, etc.

Kevin Thomas Patrick Medina y Carrizo di Camillo,  
That's your name. Your names. We all need  
Three or four; we all should be Pessoa, Baron Corvo,  
If we could be. But they, like you, were Catholic & I fear  
This naming's pagan. Polytheists worship  
Different gods in different names. Álvaro de Campos  
Wouldn't write Ricardo Reis' poems. Just ask  
Fernando. I'd never call you Tom or Pat. Nor would  
One address the Baron—Frederick William Serafino  
Austin Lewis Mary Rolfe—as Lew or Bill. Those names  
Just seem dormant, somehow yet to come. I'm sorry  
That we have to talk so much about the meds we take, the  
Drugs intended by the medics to dispatch a name or two.  
Rolfe was clearly paranoid, Pessoa was perhaps a  
Schizophrenic. A critic of my own stuff wrote the other  
Day that “although every poet must love names, JM  
Loves them to excess.” Kevin, I would name you  
Pope if I were able, Hadrian the Eighth. I'd puff white  
Smoke out of my ears and nose. Who else sends me,  
Lapsed Presbyterian that I am, Happy Feast Day messages  
(St. Matthias, 14 May), or, for years, prays for my lost  
And disaffected daughter who could be in Indianapolis  
Or, for all I know, in Venice like the Baron as a gondolier:  
Her name the most beautiful of all. Anyway, I hope  
That all the gods protect the powers and persuasions of  
The names of the house of di Camillo. And that they feast  
As one and several in the name of what they love.

## Polystylistics

Simeon had style, but only did  
One thing—admittedly impressive, if unvaried.  
Juggler, too, had just a single act,  
And tossed his balls *before the Lord*.

Serial and several, boys! When  
Menelaus asks for Proteus, he  
Knows the servant of Poseidon turns  
More tricks than Helen, and is

Hard to hold. Plainsong stylized the  
Prayers: Singing at the monkish  
Hours of Prime, Sext, Nones, no one's  
Goods are godly. Seals only barked

One note to lost Achaeans. Steel as in  
Stalin piercé Shostakovich  
But not Schnittke: *Viz*, his lecture at  
The Moscow Music Congress, 1971.

Even *In Memoriam* can waltz on broken  
Legs back from Leningrad to  
Old Vienna, even a quartet can play its  
Ending first and leap from Renaissance

Orlando Lassus to the *Grosse Fuge*. Hail,  
Prince! If you hold Simeon, he only fears  
A fall; Proteus may sing a pillar made of  
Fire or water, but he sings. Stand to harms!

Poseidon at Apocalypse opens seven styles.

# Not Will Kempe

*Only . . . that's no jest.*

RALEGH

A fool brings the queen an asp;  
Another leaves the king  
When he's most needed—right  
In the middle of the play.

I think a fool is in the doorway  
Of my life, neither bringing  
Anything just yet nor going off;  
He's there, though, and watching.

It's so quiet I can hear him breathe.  
We're not on stage, but I know  
That I'm upstaged—and  
It's so quiet I can hear him breathe.



## Christopher Isherwood Stands on His Head

Half way to a double dactyl with that title.  
I think he stood like that for ten or fifteen minutes,  
Which is almost worthy of hexameters.  
Why was he standing on his head?  
(I was standing on my feet, and mightily  
Perplexed—a student down from Stanford  
In L.A., looking at another kind of life.)  
He said he'd finished his new novel  
Just that day and thought he ought to celebrate.  
And then stood on his head. He told me  
That he'd picnicked recently with  
Aldous Huxley—meant to be there at  
The party—and the aging Chaplin, when they  
Found themselves on someone's private property  
Accosted by police. They were told they'd have  
To leave. Huxley said: Do just let us finish lunch;  
This is Charlie Chaplin, back for a visit to America.  
The cop damn well knew Chaplin when he saw him—  
Little guy with a derby, cane & funny walk—  
These three trespassers could  
Pack it up and move it out, he said—and that  
Included Charlie Chan . . .

And I thought

I knew Aldous Huxley when I saw him—  
Approached a tall man in a corner sipping wine  
Who said—*But I'm Jeff Chandler, actually!*  
Astonished, I stared at Chief Cochise, noble Indian  
Hero of my childhood, Jimmy Stewart's friend,  
Star of *Broken Arrow* which I'd seen a dozen times.  
I could feel myself perspiring, and I  
Couldn't think of anything to say. *Aldous Huxley is quite  
Old*, he sniffed. *So is Charlie Chaplin, who is over there.*  
*He's talking with Marlene Dietrich*, Chandler said—  
Isherwood still standing on his head.

## Smultronstället

. . . and someone saying, *Yes*  
*but Göran doesn't really speak good Swedish.*  
I looked up, perplexed.  
*Skanian*, he declared. *He's from the south*,  
as all of us—Doctor Isak Borg and Marianne,  
Sarah, Anders, and Viktor;  
Susan, John and G. Printz-Påhlson—  
headed down to Malmö and to Lund.  
*Smultron's not the same as jordgubbe* said  
a man in dark glasses sitting right behind us in  
the Lane Arts Cinema, Columbus, 1959:  
a handleless clock, a coffin falling from the hearse,  
and top-hatted ancients walking to their  
*jubeldoktor* honors, Borg having dreamed  
his way from Stockholm, Sarah both his lost love  
and late Fifties girl, just like my Susan, flirting  
with the guys in the back seat, chewing on her pipe.  
What did I know then of time, of memory, of age?  
And who would watch a movie wearing heavy shades?  
We looked behind us and he nodded in a formal way.  
Göran, ten years my senior, was writing poems  
in Malmö that von Sydow liked to read—*Max*,  
as he called him, who spoke his Swedish very well  
whether as a knight in *The Seventh Seal*  
or there before us pumping gas in *Smultronstället*  
or when reading Göran's poems to a  
little group of connoisseurs. But Max doesn't  
get it when the doctor says, mostly to himself,  
*Perhaps I should have stayed.*  
We didn't get it either, though we stayed—right  
through the film, and trying very hard.  
In twenty years I'd introduce my friend from Skania  
to my Midwest as Dr. Printz-Påhlson, poet.  
A colleague thought that Göran was a royal and  
called him Prince. Oh, and Göran hated  
Bergman films, all that religious angst, which

everybody asked about, even though his lecture was on Strindberg. So much for the 80s.  
In 1959 Bibi Andersson was twenty-two, only three years older than my girl friend.  
I thought how much I'd like to sleep with her.  
The man in sun glasses put his head between us and said, *Place of wild strawberries*; the English doesn't get it. The car drove on.  
Years after Göran got his own degree at Lund, his head literally belaudered, little girls in white throwing flower petals in his path, he fell all humpty-dumpty down a flight of stairs and broke his crown on the concrete, and lost his sight, and pushed aside his work, and rests in silence in a Malmö nursing home. With whom share a joke, a plate of herrings, bog myrtle schnapps? The nightmare examiner had said:  
*You are guilty of guilt*  
when Isak Borg mis-diagnosed his patient, saying *She is dead. You are incompetent*, concluded the examiner, and all of us got back into the car and headed south: Borg & Marianne; Sarah, Anders, Victor; Susan, John, & Göran; and the man in heavy shades. The summer sun is blinding, even in the night. *Smultronstället*. Wherever we were from, we couldn't stay.

# Oscar

Not the movies, poems—  
And before the days of Dons Allen and Hall.  
Oscar Williams: pocket paper books  
Of modern verse. (Also Little Treasuries.  
Also Mentors and—revised—the Palgrave.)  
Held now in contempt or just forgotten, Pocket  
Modern was the Bible of my teenage faith.  
“More than 500 Great Modern Poems”  
Bulged in my pocket like a wallet stuffed with cash.  
There was the Genesis:  
Emily, Walt; there was the Exodus: poets still  
In their prime.

Those summers I worked  
For minimum wage  
At the State Auditor’s office, Columbus,  
I loved best what I least understood.  
My blood pulsed pizzicati  
When I smuggled lines of Wallace Stevens  
In reports I typed. Entirely by the numbers,  
Ohio’s new electric Royal  
Hopped to dollars & sense in the tables  
I prepared—tabs  
Jolting me over the page: tens and  
Twenties and thirties of things; hundreds  
And thousands and millions. If money was a kind  
Of poetry, was poetry a kind of money too?  
\$2, 384, 958. 00—*A violent order is disorder; plus*  
\$3, 179, 265. 00—*A great disorder is an order.*  
*These two things are one.*  
No superior collecting my reports  
Seemed to notice a thing, so I kept it up  
All summer long. Stevens’ Oscars  
Bled into the numbers, then took over like  
A sense of slight-of-hand,  
Like *tootings at the weddings of the soul.*

Pool-side and lake-side, myself  
 I sang for Susan where in slim adolescence  
 She did all but strip as Yeats's music fell from  
 Pan's disco's Delphic oracle and we saw goat-head,  
 Breast, bikinied bottom in the pages of a book  
 Dedicated, 1954, to  
*The Memory of Dylan Thomas—*  
*Major Poet, Great man, Immortal Soul.*  
 Thirty pages of the Great Man.  
 Fifteen pages of George Barker; ten of Oscar  
 Himself; one of the other Williams, W. C.;  
 None of T.S.E. (who offered none,  
 Thinking, I discovered later, that my  
 Much revered anthologist was self-serving, vain).  
 In what vein was Auden's *Pray for me*  
*And for all poets living and dead (?)*  
*For there is no end to the vanity of our calling (?)*  
 I skipped that at the time and flew with hawk  
 And helmeted airman: *Beckon your chosen out (!)*

The chosen still included: Masters and Bridges,  
 Masefield, Lindsay, Wylie, Waley  
 Houseman, Muir, Millay, &  
 Frederick Mortimer Clapp. By the time I'd  
 Sanded fifty pages like a deep valley  
 Cut through mountains when my Harvard book bag  
 tied onto the luggage rack of the motor bike  
 I rode those days fell and  
 Was dragged half the distance from Mountain View  
 To Stanford, many an Oscar was maimed.  
*Find also in the sou      ought*  
*Hearing it by      sea*  
*The sea*  
*Was                      earth's shore*  
 Even Matthew Arnold still was Modern—  
*Dover Beach* an Oscar there between the Civil War

Of Melville and *Mikado's Song*.

The last poems, unsanded, were intact; the last line  
with a confident finality declares:

*The page is printed.*

## Don's Drugs

I read that teenage girls  
Routinely send out naked pictures  
Of themselves to boy friends  
And even strangers on the Internet.  
And then I think about my own  
Generation of kids, staring only  
At the movie magazines  
In shops like Don's. We'd get  
Our cherry cokes there too, and  
Sometimes even have prescriptions  
Filled. There was Marilyn, even Betty,  
Though a little old; there was young  
Liz Taylor—all in rather proper  
One-piece bathing suits. We'd pretend  
To be reading *Road and Track*, even  
*Classic Comics* where I had  
My first encounter with Shakespeare.  
Ballooning out of Caesar's mouth—  
*Et Tu, Brute?* What ballooned from  
Half opened mouths of movie  
Stars? (We never thought to wonder  
What might enter them.)  
Don would lurk about, watching  
From behind the soda counter  
With its five round stools you could  
Spin when you got up to leave. Although  
Eventually I owned the whole series  
Of *Classic Comic Books*,  
I remember best the movie mags I never  
Bought. Marilyn! Betty! Liz!  
*And you, Brutus?* Even he was headed  
Through the aether toward those girls born  
As we approached a *fin de siècle*.  
Out there somewhere all of them,  
Blooming & ballooned, are  
Tangled in some lonely virgin's  
Pixellated dream.

## Ned's Sister, Pete's Dad

My neighborhood was pretty much divided  
Between streets that crossed a hundred yards  
Or so beyond the entrance to my drive:  
Ned's street, out and to the right, or—  
Out and to the left—Pete's. Although these  
friends were neither Swanns nor, certainly,  
Guermantes, they split my world in two.  
And though I didn't know it then, part of  
That division had to do with class. Ned's father  
Didn't seem to be around, and his mother  
Worked all day at the local five and dime.  
His sister was in charge of him. Pete's father  
Was Professor of pathology, School of Dentistry,  
Ohio State University, Columbus. He'd line up  
Slides for lectures on the family dinner table.  
Knowing I got queasy when I saw them,  
He'd laugh and hold one up and say, *Now*  
*That's pathological! Watch out whom you kiss.*  
I was twelve and hadn't kissed a soul.  
But Ned's sister was fifteen and clearly had.  
Pete claimed he'd kissed a girl once, down the  
Road that led to Old Glen Echo Park.  
His father held his slides up to the light.  
Even now when I hear someone jesting—*Now*  
*That's pathological*—I see diseased mouths,  
Lesions on the lips, inflammation of the epiglottis,  
Sets of toothless gums, bleeding and infected,  
Or, most frightening of all, tongues already  
Half cut away, maimed organs of speech.  
He'd go to his class and flash these on the screen  
With the keen enthusiasm of an art historian  
Dissecting a Giotto. Ned's sister, I imagine, had  
Already been debauched. I was once allowed  
To take her picture in a bathing suit. She'd put  
Things in her mouth, suck a mixing spoon  
All full of icing for a cake. Ned would shout



Out *gross*, a word ruined by its use in situations  
Just like this, as later *awesome* would be ruined  
And recently, borrowed from the English, *brilliant*.  
Was the slide I took of Ned's sister in her  
Bathing suit and sucking on a spoon *brilliant*,  
*Awesome*, or *gross*? Maybe it was all of these.  
My parents didn't like me spending time  
With Ned and his sister. They'd talk up Pete  
Enthusiastically: *A boy that's bright and has  
A future. Ned's not the kind of friend for you  
To have*. When I'd mention anyone at all I'd met,  
One or the other of them asked: Who's he?  
They meant: Who is his father? I think Ned's father  
Was a wino out of work, but then I only saw him  
Once or twice and he never spoke to me at all.  
Pete's dad would say: *Don't start drinking alcohol;  
It causes eight different kinds of oral lesions  
And can scar the esophagus and give you  
Duodenal ulcers*. I have no idea what became of Ned.  
He disappeared one week at summer's end along  
With his mother and his sister. Dog days.  
The house was up for sale. Pete became a periodontist  
And the head of his department at Northwestern.  
When my colleague Conrad Schaum came back  
to Notre Dame after having been to Pete for surgery,  
he looked as if he'd had his upper gums sewn up  
by a Singer, stitches beautiful and regular and tight.  
*That friend of yours*, he mumbled as I poured him  
Out a drink, *is pretty good*. I said: *You should  
Have known his dad, who used to scare me half  
To death*. I saw Ned's sister last a week or so before  
The family left our neighborhood. She rolled back  
Her head and said: *I bet you don't have guts enough  
To kiss me*. Ned said *Gross!* And I thought *Awesome!*  
*Brilliant!* (though I didn't know those words).  
My tongue felt sick. But she had opened wide.

## Red Root's Spleen

is always there among  
“The pickled fetuses and bottled bones”  
Which come to mind—those words attached  
Like labels to a thought—whenever I

Smell alcohol, preservative, or just  
Walk in for blood work at a lab.  
Root was stabbed by a classmate and  
Staggered down our high school

Hall, a switchblade in his abdomen.  
It was an argument about a girl.  
That afternoon, he nearly died in surgery.  
Somehow the extracted organ ended up,

Like other curiosities, in alcohol, and  
Labeled *Human Spleen*. He was  
Last scion of the Blackboard Jungle days:  
*Disfecemi Maremma*, or Ohio.

The dark back room of 321 Biology  
Where all these things were kept  
Was also where the sexually precocious  
Locked themselves away at noon.

It was an underworld populated by the  
Amputations, parasites, and parts that our  
Magister collected. There they did  
What daring would permit. Though squeamish,

I was asked to feed the snake its mice  
And once to saw a monkey's head in two,  
Spoon its brain into a little dish. *Blood, girls*,  
The Magister declared: *liquor of initiation*

*In whatever rite or wrong.* His lab coat was  
Spotted with red drops. I thought the spleenwort  
Was a good idea for a Gnome who needed  
Passage through a dismal place, or, sick of Paris,

For a syphilitic down with ennui to brandish  
As he entered branching catacombs. Whose lock,  
Rolled into a deed, concealed more of magic than  
Our Caseous Mass in mason jar: *Trades*—

*though a foole be hurl'd spleen, shittle, cocke?*  
We of course called Root himself “The Mandrake.”  
We called his spleen lymphatic, sinusoid.  
We called each other, in exasperation, spores.