John Matthias was born in 1941 in Columbus, Ohio. For many years he taught at the University of Notre Dame, but also spent long periods of time in the UK, both at Cambridge and at his wife’s childhood home in Hacheston, Suffolk. He has been a Visiting Fellow in poetry at Clare Hall, Cambridge, and is now a Life Member. He continues to co-edit *Notre Dame Review*. Matthias has published some twenty-five books of poetry, translation, scholarship, and collaboration. His most recent books are *New Selected Poems*, (2004), *Kedging* (2007), *Trigons* (2010) (all verse) and *Who Was Cousin Alice? And Other Questions* (2011) (mostly prose). In 1998 Robert Archambeau edited *Word Play Place: Essays on the poetry of John Matthias*, and in 2011 Joe Francis Doerr published a second volume of essays on his work, *The Salt Companion to the Poetry of John Matthias*. *Collected Shorter Poems*, vol. 2 is the first of a projected three-volume edition from Shearsman of Matthias’ complete poems.
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)
Working Progress, Working Title (2002)
Swell & Variations on the Song of Songs (2003)
Kedging (2007)
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(with Göran Printz-Påhlson)
Jan Östergren: Rainmaker (1983)
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David Jones: Man and Poet (1989)
Selected Works of David Jones (1992)
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

Shearsman Books
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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 Hopkins. 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!
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 piercéd Shostakovich
But not Schnittke: Viz, his lecture at

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.
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-Pålson—
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 handless 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-Pålson, 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 belaurelled, 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.
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.*
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 or 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 foetuses 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.