Tessitura
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Shearsman Books
Acknowledgments

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the editors of these publications in which the following poems have appeared; also to Chrissy Banks, Genista Lewes Mary Maher and the Fire River Poets, for their encouragement and constructive skills. Also, to Bob Mann who introduced me to M.P. Willcocks and her writing; and to staff at Mount Edgcumbe for their assistance with finding Edgcumbe (formerly Edgecumbe) family-trees.


‘Fran Skating on the Manor–Pond’ was runner-up in the Exeter Poetry Prize 1999 and appeared in *Making Worlds; One Hundred Contemporary Women Poets* (Headland, 2003).
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Doppler-Effects
her eyes will green

Arachne

comes from a place
(beyond) where there is
space here
black (drab) fields spindle trees
spiders in her mind
shoes clogged in earth
Her crops are few yet
she bulges unbeaten desire for the whip
of history retracing steps out of mud
releasing Ariadne’s thread
when she will bloom her eyes will green
to a throbbing sky
she will spin
on her axis
her cobweb dress tied with a golden sash—
over the horizon an ocean swells
My wheel
  turns

moorland vistas up by
  Hannaford

behind its frames
  fibres
    twist

flyer of time
  rotates

I, spinner,
left holding the yarn

(Susannah Gidley Abbott,
Dean Prior, 1741-1823)
Somewhere

in the lining
of her head
a sepia photo, unframed,
of what her poem could be about.

In the study cobwebs
trespass over Virago books
high shelves where baby spider
plants suspend in air
her mind is sifting spaces
sewing gossamer thread
through nooks and crannies
amongst rows of women’s books.

Now intent on fetching scissors
snipping ties and spinning
this imaginary yarn
of enchanted craft
she will lift her head
brush back a strand of hair
and follow spiders with that pencil,
trailing desolate landscapes
over fifty sheets of unlined paper.

Somewhere
in Devon
a run-down cottage, framed
in an old oak doorway
Father stands, his cheeks amazed
by frost,
proudly bearing in armfuls—
the last of his spring cabbage.
Contextual

I don't want annotations
for
this poem
will be
the key
simplicity

white hyacinths
sigils across grass

so
no notes
in margins—
only flowers
This is to let you know

that when I
moving with
this poetic line

saw your eyes
open upon mine
I shut the book
and ran with the page onto the open moor
Salix-fragilis

As usual
I drive through the night
my mind on you

moon is gold, full blown
hair flecks invisible
across my face.

Ghosts flicker over these marsh levels
and through the window
soundings of the armoury
of a long-ago war.

Our finale was as civil
you’d think of me
I of you.

Why should our meetings
be such as this
through liminal September evenings—

when sun and moon hover in twilight,
selves of other selves dissolve in vapours
and the lone hound
howls behind the skeletal crack-willow.
Swell Wood

Framed from the cut-out hide
little egrets gently rock their young
sky-high in heron nested ancient trees—

wind moves us
  away
from the mainstream
down the winding path
to this Other—
a dimension rustling under feet
with secret dormice in
their hidden hazel thicket

we should turn back—
the hectic road’s waiting
to scoop us in its flow

but something draws us
on
  and
further down the track—

Enchanter’s Nightshade
lines the path—a galaxy of daystars
  white stones
from fairytale that led the children
to the cottage—

we must find the heart
the tick of the place
and talk of how a Circe
might lie in wait for us
  round
that next corner
where are tree-giants
ash oak and lime—
may we
be changed—
our beat chime in time with the wood.

—Watch us squirrel to the top
through the canopy out
of the scene
to the sun.
Viroconium

‘The past is only the present, become invisible’
(Mary Webb)

I’m sure you saw her
—braided hair—golden lights
rim her face and the ring
you found at the edge of the field
after a mere hour-glass
of a mosaiced two thousand years
is spinning her longest finger.
She smiles at you as someone
(her husband) calls
across the tessellated pavement
of the palaestra:

Placida!

The name rings on
as she, slowly, turns,
her sandal-strap glistening bronze
and walks hand in hand
away with him,
across the marbled floor.
Over it a dolphin leaps,
on a fountain, into air.
They cross underworld the sea of Hades.

(Grass grows thick and crisp
through chunks of once chiselled
stone. Archaeologists come again
to explore foundations, chart on computer
the palaestra area—those colonnaded
city walls).

Fragments only left.

You noted the waft
of fragrance
as she wrapped a cloak
close round her bodice,
a jet necklace encircled her throat—
the fastening brooch is jade—

She had no voice.

At Viroconium
sheep are grazing turf
on earth covered bones—
stone haunts the museum,
inscribed:

To the gods and shades,
Placida, aged 55,
Set up by order of her husband,
In the thirtieth year of her marriage.

Space on stone
for details
of next to die.

You are born
from your more recent grave,
as you ride to her
through crested waves
on the back
of the surfacing dolphin.