

# Selected Poems 1975–2010

*Also by Ken Bolton*

*Poetry*

Four Poems  
Blonde and French  
Christ's Entry into Brussels or Ode to the Three Stooges  
Two Sestinas  
Talking To You  
Blazing Shoes  
Notes For Poems  
Two Poems—A Drawing of the Sky  
Sestina to the Centre of the Brain  
Selected Poems  
'Untimely Meditations' & other poems  
Happy Accidents  
August 6th  
Three Poems for John Forbes  
Europe  
At The Flash & At The Baci  
Three Poems  
The Circus  
A Whistled Bit of Bop  
Sly Mongoose

*as editor:*

Homage to John Forbes

*collaborations* (all with John Jenkins)

Airborne Dogs  
The Ferrara Poems, a verse novel  
The Gutman Variations  
The Wallah Group  
Nutters Without Fetters  
Poems of Relative Unlikelihood  
Lucky for Some

*Visual Arts*

Michelle Nikou monograph  
Art Writing—Selected Art Criticism

Ken Bolton

*Selected Poems*  
1975–2010

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# Italian Drink

The phrase “Italian Drink”, nearly abstract, nearly real like  
my best ideas

comes thru the window

which is where I stand

& sometimes laugh, sometimes (almost) cry,

& where abrasively

& beautifully

ideas for poems float past

Tonight I’m high

But actually I must design some words for a poster,  
as the summer begins, the nervous summer, whose flowers are  
strength & lust & nobility

& where there is a sense of forever

& where I write at night & think of you

where I aim my best

ideas

## o terrific cigarette

Relaxing lying back  
after reading the inspirational texts  
of the poets I love  
—briefly— & watching  
you back & side  
as you write, naked, in  
bed  
calm & pale as a cigarette that is smoked,  
lying here **am**  
I smoking one, aren't I?  
responsibilities  
“start in bed” you hardly seem like  
a responsibility & I take you  
the responsibility  
of taking you, & later finishing  
your writing  
up  
you take me  
o terrific cigarette

## II

next morning  
we get up. you bath,  
briefly,  
in my bath then I get in &  
wash my hair & you go to work my hair still wet  
I take the washing to the laundromat, & bring  
it back — there's  
**no / hot / water** — & think about  
my poem terrific cigarette

which is  
what I compared you to,  
though  
I 'don't smoke'  
& only fantasize how relaxed & calm smoking must be like  
from films  
though you're better by far than most films,  
terrific film.  
& now I think  
you are far more  
'natural' than a film,  
& like a cigarette in existing  
in 'real time', & of course better than both, because you're  
a person.  
but not one comparable with any other

## nerve


at the reading Nigel read  
“a poem with a quote from  
Auden”; & Rae Jones read “Moirá”  
& a few others; & a few  
others read a few things they’d read  
other times too; & so did I — I read  
one or two I’d read other times; Carol read  
one she’d read a lot at a lot of readings  
a lot of times : **‘The Eye, The Moon, & The Tree’** (you’ve  
heard it before); & who else was there,  
& what did they read? Kerry was there & he  
was very defensive about this poem he’d read a lot  
& he said he’d read it a lot & he read it. (though  
he read it very well.) Anna read a story that was  
very good but that she’d never read before—  
because she didn’t read at our readings then,  
because she *hadn’t written anything*; & obviously this was one  
we were gong to hear again, from time to time. John  
Jenkins said he was going to read one that he didn’t  
usually read, but when he did I’d heard it before.  
& the one I read that I’d read other times was one  
that involves a lot of repetition : it’s called **“mysteries”** & says  
the word “mystery” a lot like Nigel’s poem which repeats “a quote from  
Auden” a lot of times; & that’s why I liked it,—because  
of its similarity to mine, though I think his  
is not as **good** as mine because “the quote from  
Auden” is a much more recognisable phrase & is used  
like a refrain & if he keeps on using it, at every reading,  
it will become boring.

## Four Poems

intricate days, / portrait of certain people as/  
Spanish assassins;

& a portrait of Rose Selavy's uncle,  
the assassin ; & of

Rose Selavy's assassinating  
desires

intricate days. the Citroens.   
irritable rose & black Coltrane Jazz & blues over-  
eating days the thought of you a blue cool mile  
from the ways I can feel on these days, now, —days  
like the longest afternoon in history through which  
the longest most huge blue black cloud is building & our  
anger  
is leaden in our veins.

a black citroen pulls up.—  
pulling out  
from the curb, a black citroën

a relentless formalist sensitivity  
projects sixties Miles Davis passionate irrepressible repressed structuring  
everywhere.

desire . an angry languor,  
ancient person of my heart, old lover, makes  
spiritual miles distant the thought of you

intricate

days / in the wrist. (the blood ticking there, a thin  
highway of black citroens.) —no sad in  
finites : everywhere distinctly possible  
distances

(&) impenetrable, the mystery of the black citroen.

buffeted some way as if  
asleep. jazz & our sensibilities like a  
mantra swathed around us, every  
nerve that can take it exposed to the wind & the  
mood of aesthetics

finally & inevitably & like the  
panic scene in a dream  
where the anticipated &  
dreaded thing happens  
,but it begins as though  
disguising that it is  
happening, you dream  
the man takes  
a black violin case  
from the boot

o beautiful impenetrability

o beautiful sky blue impenetrability  
of the blue

o blue sky impenetrability  
of the beautiful sky. inimical, impenetrable, intricate, & blue.

o beautiful impenetrability of the distances behind  
John Ashbery as he stands  
pictured on the cover of the book you are holding in your hands, called  
*Three Poems* & he moves forward, becoming vague  
& behind him, where you are looking, the distances  
recede as you search them, though the book is flat & has  
no distances & is a surface & impenetrable  
— literally, as well as ,in some way, metaphorically  
impenetrable.) now,

you are looking at it ordinarily again, (& John Ashbery is there visible on  
the right.)

o

beautiful impenetrability of the ground on which you  
stand, when you imagine yourself standing  
looking at the blue, impenetrable & distant, you  
impenetrable, your mood unguessable,  
not looking romantic or stoical or classical or cool

looking at the distance.

impenetrable. in  
a totally intelligent unremitting & purposeful daze unerring &  
impersonal &

with  
a taste / far more  
impersonal than mine. The lines  
George Oppen quoted are true “They fed their hearts on  
fantasies / & their hearts have turned savage.” — the last  
poem I wrote was called *Poison* & began “intricate  
days” & it wasn’t this & “intricate” has been in & begun  
so many poems the last 6 months where no other could  
that clearly it is appropriate : like the fastest Miles  
Davis of the late 60s moves mesmerically &  
obsessively.

o beautiful impenetrability.  
impenetrable.

more impenetrably than the most rigorous foreign poem,  
a beautifully impenetrable one;  
more beautifully than clear syntax, more impenetrably  
than “hard faceted” can conjure in review  
( — more than it can conjure in review of the volume of  
foreign poems where it quotes & describes the particular one  
you like, & when you turn to it knowing that you like it,  
it is not there, — it is differently impenetrable & the beauty  
/ doesn’t come through —the words are ungiving &  
impenetrable)

Here the destruction of the rhythmic organisation,  
the weakening of melodic motion, & the arrival at  
a harmonic impasse create a musical situation bor-  
dering on chaos. And the tremendous impact of the  
new theme, when it arrives, is clearly a product  
of the uncertainty of the antecedent situation.

Music, The Arts, & Ideas    Leonard B Meyer  
(conjure in

review.)            beautiful & impenetrable.

like the sea.

like “you”,  
when one imagines addressing an imaginary ‘second  
person’ in an hermetic & didactic kind of poem,—a long one in which one  
suggests, for his instruction,  
a comparison between something & the sea  
: blue, cool, beautiful, & impenetrable as the one you are addressing finds  
the sea  
when you compare it to something impenetrable.

the mind falls & lies gasping, as, now, the scenes roll by, registering but  
uncomprehended how many does it ‘see’, battered by ideas of connection?  
Who’s

that actress in the  
photograph, & how many times has she been married before?”

you don’t know do you? it’s impenetrable

or like this: “the white-jacketted attendant  
going back to his coach to fill cups  
of pale blue, the colour of an uncertain spring sky over a northern town,  
with coffee that is neither cheap nor  
good.”

impenetrable  
in their different ways

more —



—“Outside the window the rain is falling with increased violence, lashing the pane with great drops that run slowly down in slanting streams.”

“The Englishman folds up his newspaper & pushes it back into his pocket.”

“Beyond the corridor, underneath the quivering confusion of the telegraph wires, you can still make out the blurred shape of an occasional house or tree on the slopes covered with leafless vines.”

—•—•—•—•—

like a betrayal that makes one’s heart, & one’s mouth, gape  
that instant 3 citroëns pull up blocking the street  
& men get out.

•

swift as the thought of you  
you become aware of a black citroën,  
below, in the square.

•

Feeling like a cross between  
Frank O’Hara, Laurence Harvey being desperate,  
& Danny Kaye or some *fool* you hop into  
your light blue Skoda. can you escape?  
— citroëns are suspended silently in the rear view mirror.

•

in the mirror the citroëns, like sharks, & around the  
Trevi Fountain, suddenly, like sharks, citroëns

•  
•  
Colin in a citroën, Kerry Leves in a citroën. John Jenkins  
/in a citroën; Michael Wilding in a citroën. Carol,  
& Vicki, / in a citroën, & in a gunmetal grey citroën some-  
one unknown (John Ashbery?), *in a citroën*. Gary  
Oliver in a Mercedes. Rae Jones, in a citroën. GASP !—  
Bob Adamson, Max Williams, Clive Evatt, Denise Hare & Shelton  
Lea in a citroën! Walter Billeter & Kris Hemensley in one of those *old*  
citraëns; Martin Duwell & Graham Rowlands  
in an Alfa; Tranter in a Porsche Sebring, & in  
a citroën, Mark Booth! All of these—real people, & all of them  
(most of them) in citraëns

Anna Couani / in a Volkswagen, but **evil** !

—Graham Rowlands,  
naked!

thinking seriously,  
about sex. on a pogostick. (—silly.

(but evil!)). & on the roof of a  
citraëñ !

in a gorilla suit !! Pie **O**! (evil) .

does reality consist  
of a list of things  
so that everything stands as flat as the beer-can does? — real, &  
singular enough but, at  
any moment, & in fact before you realize it  
—because it hardly

sticks in your consciousness—  
liable to fade;

a list of things liable to fade into a mere  
backdrop with a foreground /  
that is empty, unless some dream  
or day-dream chases something  
across its 'fields' or begins fishing

like a repoussoir figure,  
 deflectively, on the right or left  
 (this is to compare it to a landscape),  
 or unless we select something immediately  
 & give it pre-eminence —the beer-can, say,  
 exemplar of ‘reality’? There it is again  
 where it stood while we stared at it, where it stood  
 while we forgot it  
 staring at it, &  
 where / it stands now an object ironically  
 found, lost, & ‘found’ again & shiny &  
 untransformed (it is a can of Reschs pilsener),  
 deep blue & gold & indifferent.

**& better than everything !—**

More beautiful & loveable (& ‘better’ in that sense) because  
 the real is the new, or is it that just ‘newly accommodated’ & ‘able-  
 to-be-loved’—where the novelty of loving *it*, rather than  
 the small book of reproductions, is the remembrance of discovery,  
 of accommodating something new, some  
 expansion of ourselves?

or is the really new that which  
 we are still struggling to accommodate? (& our gaze  
 now focuses behind or beyond the beer-can;  
 & out of focus; & it is one with the other objects  
 littering the desk in a not too littering way; & objects, time  
 & motive & consequence

**in abstract**

descend upon the group of things investing them  
 with a cool cubist philosophicality; —reality  
 becomes (again) a French & not American word.

As in, for example,—

*(the) Sardine-Can Experience*

which goes :-

I invite you into poetry,  
 sardine can,

—which are  
nothing else than experience, the roller  
of big cigars, as  
                absolutely ‘real’  
an experience —as image, or sound— as you could want  
for a poem of hard facts, written down  
to be indigestible like irreducible ore, sending the mind  
on tacks to try to find a way in  
but never penetrating the factual thing, the sardine can, the man  
    with his cigar,  
—hard as a Gris painting, a sharp  
light-hearted one whose attraction is that of one whose attraction  
wears off only to leave the lover *there* un-  
enamoured; there was nothing killing you that wasn’t happening  
any day. the mystery of those sad romances.  
these lines into which we would inject  
a little glamour, or little charisma into these lines. will keep you  
out of the pool shots & out of prostitution “Now I’ll  
never have to see a whale. I enjoyed it. were you  
lighting me a match? No? Good. he will be back  
& then we will have to leave

( FINIS )

... *Three*

*Poems* & he

moves forward becoming vague & behind him, where you are looking,  
 the distances recede as you search them though the book  
 is flat & has no distances & is a surface & impenetrable  
 —literally, as well as in some way metaphorically im-  
 penetrable. now,  
 you are looking at it ordinarily again, & John Ashbery /  
 is there visible on the right o  
 beautiful impenetrability of the ground

& of the smell  
of fruit

just as if in the context of your thinking about  
Mexico & someone says 'whore' or says 'Whores',  
& not pejoratively, but giving the word all the false glamour that it can  
have  
of nights & of the softness & beauty of the women  
of the largeness of their eyes

(this scene: we are on the deck of the Zaca, Errol Flynn's old yacht. it is  
the sparkling waters of the côte d'azur; the wind  
is slight, but also slightly bracing

It is like

an Alpine ad

or something by Matisse.

above the rise & fall of the deck lies the vast field of deep blue & further  
the colorful, solid line of the land beyond : the terraces of oranges,  
& of carnations & roses that can be seen, even at a distance, growing all  
along the coast /  
up to the bay,  
& further up the coast,  
& which will go to the perfume factories ...)

. . . we shall be told about it, & as with our  
being told of a shell, the  
*feeling* of the concept 'whisper' begins to hang about it, gently  
as the 'edges' of this sculpted shape;  
—like the lip of the tiny ridges in the sand or like that  
minutely & invisibly downed space above your upper lip, & the beautiful  
edge

of that lip

(you drive up in a citroën. you are an old man. you get out, you  
& he, & look out over the water pounding below at the foot of the cliffs.  
the wind is tousling your sparse hair.  
not looking to him you say "It is like the sea."

• • • • •

below, in the distance, coming across the sand, black suited figures of  
gangsters  
can be seen, combing the narrow beach for you.)