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
First published in the United Kingdom in 2012 by Shearsman Books
50 Westons Hill Drive
Emersons Green
Bristol BS16 7DF

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB
(this address not for correspondence)

www.shearsman.com


The right of Ken Bolton to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.
All rights reserved.


These poems originally appeared in the following books:
‘Untimely Meditations’ & other poems (Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 1997);
At The Flash & At The Baci (Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 2006);
A Whistled Bit of Bop (Sydney: Vagabond Press, 2010),
Sly Mongoose (Sydney: Puncher & Wattmann, 2011)
## Contents

### Poems from the 1970s

- Italian Drink 9
- terrific cigarette 10
- Nerve 12
- Four Poems 13
- Nonplussed 23
- Water 24
- terrific days of summer 31
- Beginning the new day 44
- Talking to You 46
- Bunny Melody 51
- Triptych 54
- Walking Standing Up 58

### from the 1980s

- Blazing Shoes 61
- A Perfect Life 73
- Little Cup Sestina 74
- Greta’s Quote 76
- Poem (Live at Birdland) 77
- excerpts from Untimely Meditations 82

### from the 1990s

- Paris to Pam Brown 93
- Florence to Lorraine Lee 97
- August 6th 102
- Poem (Up Late) 119
- Home Town 124
- A Picture 130
- Hindley Street Today 133
Coffee & John Forbes Poem 137
Hi, John 139
Horizon 144

New or Rediscovered

News of the Day 148
Double Trouble 157
Some Photos for Gabe 165
Suburban Garden 175
Outdoor Pig Keeping, Methods of 182
Kirkman Guide to the Bars of Europe 185
Mary’s Blues 197
Hindley Street Morning 201
Various Movie Directors 205

Notes on the poems 208
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 “Moira”
& 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 Rrose Selavy’s uncle,
the assassin; & of

Rrose 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 irrepresible 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
finities : 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 bordering 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-jacketed 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 someone 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 citroëns; 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 citroëns

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 citroën!
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 repousoir 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.)