

RED ARCADIA

Also by Mark Scroggins

Poetry

Anarchy

Torture Garden: Naked City Pastorelles

Prose

Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge

The Poem of a Life: A Biography of Louis Zukofsky

Edited

Upper Limit Music: The Writing of Louis Zukofsky

Red Arcadia

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Shearsman Books

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

<http://www.shearsman.com/>

ISBN 978-1-84861-192-4

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some of these poems have appeared in *The Cultural Society*, *Elixir*,
Fascicle, *FlashPoint*, *Intercapillary Space*, *Marsh Hawk Review*,
and *The Rumpus*. My thanks to the editors.

Contents

I

Dawn, New & Improved	9
Captain Modernism	11
Flâneur	13
Burano Lacework, Murano Glass	14
Connection Static	15
Papillon	17
Boo-boo	18
Dumbfoundry	19
World Culture	20
Vasa Leviathan	23

II

Goldfinches	27
Goldfinches	28
Chicago	30
Mystic Seaport	32
Contrafactual	33
Untitled	37
Untitled	38
Untitled	40
Of Systems Subject, Political, and Private	45

III

Lazarus	51
Richard Kern	54
Oliver Cromwell	58
John Milton Blues	59
John Milton Blues	68
The Book of Meat / Samuel Johnson	74
Damage Poem	80

I.

Dawn, New & Improved

Turn the sun rising into
a new genre, dubbed for want
of better words *solar apotheosis*.
Slug down the coin slot,
night down for blurred metal
racket, cat calling for her
husbands. Reach across her back
for the door lock, gear box
frozen and matted. As authoritative
as he may appear, suddenly
the sky cracks with motion—
women and men running, backpacks
purses briefcases scattered heedless before
the sun of a new
trademark. *Logos* as logo, descending
dove whose feathered breast touches
your lips for one aching
moment before the darkness falls
and endless credits scroll. I
am in a box somewhere,
beyond the rumblings and gurglings
of the tongueless dialectic, flicking
a lighter to make out
the cramped curves of my
own limbs, sapless. Someone planned
it all, brought us to
this sorry pass. Waves pink
far as the eye sees
under the tumid, bristling
orb—and a blanket crusted
with sand, rimed with salt.
You are in a box

somewhere, as Spirit unfolds itself
in the patter of dirt
and the thud of clods
drizzling down over your head.

Captain Modernism

The pictures no longer tell tales,
nor do the symphonies give us
Broadway themes. I took pleasure
in the woven plaits
of your sunshine locks, subservient
firms once again took them around
a back alley
for a thrashing.
I am beautiful, you
are sublime, the prettiest thing
ever seen since Mont Blanc,
where blue-eyed skiers slide
down diamonded inclines.
We want to know intimately
how it punches each of us
in sequence out
of the self-same metal
flimsy substance, or how the boys
with their tattoo'd backs
and shining mandibles
can seize so effectually
the days. Blue eyes, shining
teeth and fingernails,
frozen on the windowsill
that separates the revolving mind
and its noumenal,
untouchable object. Play it
again, watch the play count
rise and roll over.
Fido is faithful, and
a dog. His rites consist
of fleaing, fetching, scratching, donning

an ossuary chasuble—flicks drops
of water from the wafer, and drops it
onto waiting beaded tongues.
Confronted by the polished black
of the maze's wall, Captain Modernism
uses never before suspected super-powers, turns
back time
to where her rescuees find themselves
snuggled around the fire in bespoke
upholstery, brandies warm, cigar alight.
Like a picture, which no longer tells tales.

Flâneur

The commodity strolls through the shopping mall,
peers into each store, turns over
price tags, casts a cold eye
over advertised specials. In the movie

a four-thousand-years-dead Egyptian boy
finds his way to his parents—among
the stars—with the aid of a giant
yellow bird (species undetermined)

and a long-haired, tuskless dwarf
mastadon. There is a proper way
to turn these things inside out, unravelling
which no optical contrivance

can blacken or occlude. Sunset
lavenders spin their ways down
through a tall cool one, a hand-held
tracking shot that lingers on palms

and corrugated fences to beat back
the constant drumming traffic. Culling
over price tags and casting advertised
eyes on exposed breasts—the polished

leather, laced and tightened around
white-and-peach-fuzzed thighs, the pins
of heels and woven rattan mats, home.

Burano Lacework, Murano Glass

Eyes livid veined and water-streaked
stare at a tracework of threads and pins.
Observe, sir, this leaping world,
the slow leak in the convertible's
left rear tire, and consider
the strangeness of your circumstance.
The fires burned down
all evening, blackening walls
and ceilings, the dawn seeped through
in unexpected colors. The angle of incidence
and the angle of refraction, the recording
angel that walked with God, and was not,
are numerals fixed in the mind
then forgotten. With what system
did you produce these words, sir?
Or did the pencils move themselves
at your fingertips, limn the lines
and curves and limbs of your
greedy secret desire? That pink thing
(and here I point—*you*, sir)
struggling to raise itself from the carpet,
is that alone the sum of your fears
and hopes? He upheld it as though
it were hot, his hands weak, their blotches
spreading like a spilled beverage. It is easy,
she said, to lay a graceful period beside
another, string sentences on a wire
like stars of millefiori glass—Ruskin hated
those Venetian beads, drawn to a monotonous pitch
and clipped from careful fragile rods.

Connection Static

His steel-toed shoes setting
 off the airport's metal
detector, they took him aside
 to search him. The grass
was vivid across the pavements,
 the sky was lowering, dark.
Place, taken place, and token
 assignation. Slanted raindrops
cutting the plexiglass scratched.

Moist light like an evening's
digital shift numerals careening
 through their base-ten cycles
and stars the Chrysler's windshield.

His wife, the infant
in her arms, pregnancy fat
 still pillowed around her
ankles, would kiss his cheek
 as he threw his briefcase
onto the sofa. Birdsong,
 cricket-song, the restless
sounds of deep, unsubstantiated
 night, fell on the ears
of the child, bright-eyed
 at five months and some
days. An air-conditioned storage
 space full of furniture. Black-
eyed peas and green beans in

Mason jars sweet corn blanched
and frozen. Some Theseus, Mycenaean
 super-hero, could do it, untangle
the twines of the varicolored
 paper kites the old man used

to fly in his vacant lot, behind
the closed convenience store—dust
in the aisles, knotty plywood mending
one spider-webbed plate-glass pane.
Searching him they found nothing.

In the concourse, he could imagine
like a raptor's beak the airliner's
shadow, cutting across
ponds and streams, breast
of the Bovary husband reaching
up for the posthumous scalpel.

Papillon

Tattoos, pricked and chased, cunning
lines and multifoliate detail, scale
her arms, winding ladders or dancing
Maghrebi brides, black eyes gleaming
beneath the hennaed embroidery of scent-
thick hair. Daylight fallen face-down, stirring
only at the scratch of the intercom,
he pulls the sheets over an unwashed
head; and a weaving, noiseless buzz
rings between his ears. She switches on
the radio first thing, and it “plays”—
emits sound—the livelong day, even
when she says she’s “thinking.” Mr. Evan
Moonley, brushing his teeth, catches
the flash of silver from his tongue, the tang
of quicksilver from his fillings—alchemical
mortality. Tattoos—fading numerals braided
among the sparse hairs of slack, translucent
forearms—are rarer these days in the Diamond
District. A supper at the Hotel: heavy cloth
napkins, dimmed lights, lobster under
a silver dome, and the ambassador—making
his apologies—departed. Revealed in the tabloids,
after his shocking death, was the butterfly
tattoo his khakis always concealed, leaping
the Gap between celebrity and sailor.

Boo-boo

A porous membrane, swelling around
to welcome the intrusive object
and sketch in chalk basics
of the mechanisms of healing;
 pursues a love affair with the dressing,
 grasps and clings, osmotic
freeway swell salving dirt
into the weeping wound's lens;
 the species fumbles midway through
 a bad luck run no longer
 to be denied, but what possessed us
to make this stake on chance, unmarked
unexpected offramp where clouds scud
and swag, scab and dangle, grasping
and changing; the flag in the windshield
 is fidelity and petty love, a magnetic
 ribbon supporting overseas manufactories
 and the export of blood death thunder
 shock and awe; I am haunted
by images of dismemberment, evisceration,
wretchedness and deformity. Postmortem Edgar
Poe lies like an angel, skin clear and bright;
at that point the sky no longer browns
eagerly, creamy, but blotches in embarrassed
roseate patches, blobs of fractured melanin.