

*Obsequy  
for Lost Things*

*Also by Martin Anderson*

POETRY

The Kneeling Room \*

The Ash Circle \*

Heard Lanes

Dried Flowers

Swamp Fever

The Stillness of Gardens

Black Confetti

Belonging \*

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Interlocutors of Paradise

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PROSE

The Hoplite Journals (complete in one volume) \*

The Hoplite Journals I-XXIX \*

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*An asterisk denotes a Shearsman title.*

Martin Anderson

*Obsequy*  
*for Lost Things*

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2014 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  
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[www.shearsman.com](http://www.shearsman.com)

ISBN 978-1-84861-350-8

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The Lower Reaches* first appeared, in different form,  
as a chapbook from Shearsman Books in 2013.  
*In the Year of Expeditions* first appeared in  
*Shearsman* magazine, n° 99/100 (2014).

Cover illustration by Donald Maxwell,  
from his book *Unknown Essex* (1925).

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“It is only delusion, and not knowledge,  
that bestows happiness.”

Stefan Zweig

# THE LOWER REACHES

“This is England, and I’m in a nice, clean English  
room with all the dirt swept under the bed.”

Jean Rhys





## ONE

### I

After the high pitched whine of bellicosity: “We’ll bomb you back to the stone age” the remote is pressed. Crackle of distressed air. Warm, incendiary smell. All colour implodes to a white mote. Silence. The crevasse opens.

## II

Boiling white spume. Caught on steps of the public baths before noon, the shadow of a vapour. Ash, in the dissolved hand. Shard, or ember. All melted into air. In the stone, heart's cold memento.

### III

What keel breaks this ice? What *dignitas* is affirmed in these particulars of a profound winter? Our Lady of the Salterns bless this rotting wharf, this ramshackle back-end deserted by the tides. It is snowing over all the reed clogged wet-lands of the earth.

## IV

Scent of sea asters edged the creek. “Die Tankanlagen” under the aimer’s sight. “Marschland.” Identified/located from a great height. Locked in a grid: “Zu den Sachen selbst!” Held for a moment in his gaze, they bled. Blackened viscera. The air received them.

## V

Outside the window purple reeded hollows of the former channel. Sea lavender, grey with river light. At the inlet's mouth. There, where a "leaking, unwholesome ship" once harvested wind, tide lapped silt bars catching the sun's last rays ignite. As, too, the scarp's high ledge of flowering thorn – a "Sea-mark", Hawkesbury-bush > Hamechesburga > burh: *hill*. The Hill of the Hawks. To navigate a way back, from the farthest corners of the earth.

## VI

Togodumnus. Dead or lost amidst the reed beds. Harried from fen to fen. His horses slain. Pursued into the claggy wastes east of the Island of Thorns. Aiming beyond the sand capped wooded heights for Camulodunum, he disappeared. Sound of the bittern booming amid bull rushes. Slither of sword hilt and shield, as each man sought to hold his footing through the miry labyrinth. Water welded to sky. On the salt driven wind the sound of men closing. Panick, then stumbling. A foreign tongue. There is gold in Dalcouthi. There is silver.

## VII

Over the mudflats the smell of oil. Dream of an ideal order. Beyond any particular geography, any particular time or place at all. Driving men mad. Blacking the shore. Leveraging the sea-lanes open. "A perpetuall warre without peace or truce." Crude. Pungent in summer, over the fields and hedgerows. And in the houses of the villages. Ancient distillate. Of a mind which "(save upward to the heavens) could have little solace or content in respecte of any outward objects." Or any inward excursus.

## TWO

### I

Out of the forlorn city at last, its fogs and its counting houses. The white noise in the rigging after dark. Droning. Insincere. Incessant. Past Thorn Island where one summer the effluvium became too much even for those inside debating. Each voice overlapping and merging with the other. And with those outside, reporting. Downstream. Past Hole Haven. Scent of sea lavender on the breeze. White noise in the rigging. Smell of the open sea roads. Stars look down on another journey about to be undertaken.



## II

Struggling through deep drifts with a copy of *Der Angriff* under his arm, a latter-day Robert Conway. Ice fragments from the Pontic steppes lodged deep in the tread of his boots, his shadow survives in abattoirs and in the stockyards of railway terminuses. In the frozen breath of *die Kristallnacht*. But who has not followed and extolled, through a bloodied swathe of foreign villages and towns, that small red rowan on his cheek, “that nobly arched head, containing such a quantity of brain ... those coral lips?”

### III

Driftway, sluice. Beyond, breakwater, river scour, margin. Where foreland of saltern is over-lapped. "All overflowen". And eyot, and terp: "quite drowned". No tithe map. No tiltboat to stairs or wharf. Undrained. Unforded. What soggy track, inter-coursed with copse/willow, to follow? All wet-land words, and ways, converge; seem foreign. To find a way, amid shifting brine sump, piling, hollow.

#### IV

Togodumnus. Feet in mud. Following the channel's curve.  
Seeking the higher ground. Above the sedge lapped verge his  
shadow flits. Gulls cry out over the sunken tideway. Revenge.  
But there are no tracks to guide him back. Each imprint erased  
in the flood's quiet launder.

## V

For “a pug nosed rodent with lustrous fur”, for a pile of moth-eaten pelts, the “beaver fields exhausted”, the great Eastern deciduous forest depleted, a civilisation, with no concept of wealth accumulation, “debauched”.