

The Waving Gallery

Also by Mervyn Taylor

An Island of His Own (1992)

The Goat (1999)

Gone Away (2006)

(all published by Junction Press, New York)

No Back Door (Shearsman Books, 2010)

Mervyn Taylor

*The
Waving
Gallery*

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
(this address not for correspondence)

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-330-0

Copyright © Mervyn Taylor, 2014.

The right of Mervyn Taylor 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some of these poems have previously appeared in:
Black Renaissance Noire, *2 Bridges Review*, *The St. Ann's Review*, *Taos Journal of
Poetry and Art*, *Big City Lit.*, and *ZocaloPoets.com*.

I would like to thank Indran Amirthanayagam, for long-distance
discussions over time, about poems and poetry, Susana Case, for her
diligence, sharp eye and attuned ear, Ira Joel Haber, for teaching art
with a freeing mind, and Kathryn Weinstein, for letting me see
what the book would look like before it was finished.

Contents

Section 1. Leaving

Mt. Hololo	11
The Waving Gallery	13
First Time Seeing Snow	14
Country of Origin	15
Poet in Peru	16
Edwidge's Voyage	17
And Now This	18
Marie, and Juan	21
The Old Ways	22
In the Act	23
Single File	24
What Poets Wish For	25

Section 2. Overstayed

Student Days, D.C.	29
West Indian at the Front Desk	30
Busboy	31
Language Major	32
The Familiar	33
Race	34
Concern	35
Benefit of the Doubt	36
The Last Round	37
Mammogram	38
Dry Eyes	39
Another Country	40
Shorty	42
Settings	43
Sedona	44
Storyteller	46
Speech	47

Section 3. In Transit

Life in the Islands	51
Countryside	52
Ecology	53
Half an Island	54
The Mentor	56
Returning	60
Somewhere Safe	61
The Devil's Chariot	62
The Body Politic	63
Carnival Takeover	64
In Crazy Port of Spain	65
Layover Trinidad	66
Post Mistress	67
John Creig, Esq. of Woodford Square	68
Diplomat from Peru	70
Steelband Clash	71
Stella	72
Widow's Peak	73
Facing Montrose	74
The Party	75
Ticks	76
Both Blind	77
No Owner	78
What Will Happen	79
Mother Moon	80
Folding Chairs	81
Embassy	82
Home from America	83
Breath	84
How I Can Tell	85
Enchanted Evening	86

For Lena

Section 1.

Leaving

Mt. Hololo

Let's talk, my friend,
when the wind comes
across the mountain
to touch our faces, and

flowers in your yard
rise on their stems
to salute, and the cock
puffs the feathers

round his neck, the
hens walking away
as if to say not again,
not today. Let's

talk about winters
in far-off lands, irate
husbands and windows
we jumped from,

let's brew the pack
and play a game of
rummy, though
neither of us is any

good. Show me
a painting you've
been working on
that may or may not

be going well. Let's
argue about a line,
a verse in a poem, the
cause of a fire that

has suddenly bloomed
on the hill. Let's leave
some issues for another
day, otherwise what

would we do tomorrow,
when your rooster's
tail grows too heavy for
his body, and the ladies

must remind him
when it's time to crow.
Let's discuss, until then,
important matters,

like the estimated
age of your eldest
turtle, like the day
that is dying outside.

The Waving Gallery

Up there, I could make out my mother, in
her favorite dress, the one she wore in pictures
taken thirty years apart, and Doris, her friend

who'd warned her not to cry, a white kerchief
dabbing at her eyes. Behind them stood Uncle,
waving, the keys to the house and the Hillman

on the same ring. Across the tarmac the line
of travelers moved slowly, and the hills seemed
closer. I think I made out people in houses,

children in yards who could see me from that
distance, going away to study English, as if
it were not the language spoken here.

First Time Seeing Snow

There's that scene in the movie when Sinatra
shuts off the wipers and floors the accelerator.

You're a passenger. You can't see a thing.
You hear the tick of ice, the whine of the motor,

and you think of the song he was singing
back in the bar, One for My Baby. You want

to say, *Don't do it, man. Doris loves you, the way
you turned when she answered the door, that hat.*

The car's an old Ford and in the theater your foot's
on the brake long after you've struck something,

and you sit there, Frankie slumped over the
steering, snow under the tires, churning.

Country of Origin

Before going off to Argentina
on diplomatic duty,
the poet from Sri Lanka read to us
nervously. He told us how thieves

had broken into his car
and stolen his manuscripts.
Except for shoes, he had to
buy all new clothes, including
a silk shirt, which made him perspire.

That was before the twang of Spanish
spoken in Buenos Aires
took delight in its new trainee,
and his old habit of
pacing round the podium
entangled the streets like wires.

The mahout's in his office now,
patiently restoring his words.
Between appointments, and there
are many, he answers letters from
a new love, whose Tamil is just
as halting as his.

Poet in Peru

It must be summer where you are,
your hands out of your pockets,
your scarf a neckerchief, more
for style than anything.

It must be steaming, sitting
outside that small café where
poets plead their cases for
Europe to be old again, and
America to fuck away with
those no-smoking laws. You're
pretending your coffee has
vodka in it, and that cursing is
the most natural thing. In that
village near the Equator,
your wife's temper assumes a
tragic air, one of screeches
and dives, like when parrots
pretend they can't find
home in the evening, and
grow so loud the poets point
in all directions, anything, just
to get them out of there.

Edwidge's Voyage

I hear her singing, the policeman's boots
crunching near her hiding place. She is
quiet, then starts again, reading the
names of the missing, and the dead.

They don't recognize her in the cities,
grown woman whose smile is forever
young. She startles when she breathes,
the sharks that followed her scatter

in the wake of her song about hairless
women, and men who plunge
to their death convincing their children.
You may mark your place in her book

when you are done reading, you may
write your own. So says this woman
with the clearest of eyes. Buildings fall.
She ignores them.

And Now This *for Edwidge Danticat*

Sometimes it must feel like
your fight for independence
will never end, that liberty
will keep eluding you like
a goat that runs into the sea.

The preacher says it is your
voodoo that is killing you,
that keeps you scraping and
digging and having to subdue
the enemy in your own house.

But who can deny you your
home, where even in hunger
your mouths sing and drums
beat the sweetest ra-ra, eh?
Where your soldiers once

marched over the cliffs to
their death in the sea. And now
this, your roof falling in while
you were combing the children's
hair, sending them off to school,

while you were opening your stall
to sell the few grains that still
manage to grow, here comes
this rain of rocks upon your head,
this shaking of the ground, as if

God does not know his own
strength, as if He were dancing

carelessly in his house above
the mountains where your cries
would not reach.

Now from across the river
help comes. Who could
pretend not to hear such a
breaking up of earth, such
a split

run all the way from
Petionville to Jacmel, through
the belly of Port au Prince,
that where it ended it seemed
it could never be joined again.

A whole new island I tell you
is what you need, new roof,
new flooring, new everything,
new hills, new flowers new yard
with no fence to say

this is yours that is theirs,
someone forever claiming
what you work so hard for.
A place you can bring all those
Boat People back to, where

you can make a huge bonfire of
all the bad memories, of Papa
This and Baby That, the furry
slippers of their madams. But
never mind my wishes,

this is where you are now. This
is your sweet and sour, your
grief on top of grief, your little girl
dancing to show the amputation
was a success. Amazing how

you sing through your sorrow,
how you still fling your behind
in the Carnival when it comes,
and say your prayers however
you remember them, whatever

sacrifice you must make:
chicken, goat, your own blood,
saying, *Not me, not my Haiti*,
blood coming out of her pores.
Her mountains march naked

up and down beside the river
that divides the island as you
put it back together, the plate
that shifted the day the world
broke into a million pieces.

Marie, and Juan

If he had remained in his country
and you in yours, you'd never
have danced like this.

He would never have crossed
the border between the cane,
nor known your name.

Your memory of Trujillo
would have focused your eyes
on the sharp edge of a machete

and your cries in patois
would have brought your father
running, the old Boukman record

skipping on the gramophone. But
here you are, dancing a bachata
in Brooklyn.

The step is fast,
the zombie from the past
trying to keep up.