The Messier Objects
Also by Michael Zand

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Michael Zand

The Messier Objects

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David Miller for their interest and support.

Many thanks also to my family for their encouragement and patience:
it’s not easy living with a stargazing poet.
for Carrie
Foreword

A few words on the title and theme of the collection. The Messier Objects are a catalogue of astronomical bodies discovered and published by Charles Messier in 1771. Messier was a comet hunter and was frustrated by seeing objects in the sky that he thought were comets, but turned out to be random and uninteresting clouds of dust. He drew up the list to avoid comet hunters wasting time on what he regarded as the “worthless detritus of the skies”. Ironically it was later discovered that these objects were in fact galaxies, nebulae and other deep sky phenomena, and in fact Messier is now better known for his hated “detritus” than for his comet hunting.

The Messier Objects uses these astronomical entities as a starting point, or more precisely, a point of extrapolation. At one level they are a fairly disparate and occasionally playful set of musings. At a deeper level they are my meditations on the colour and complexity of the universe, and a rejection of the drift that we are seeing all around the world to cultural polarisation, simplification and standardisation. Hence it is also a play on the Messier being “messier” objects, and there is a political subtext to all this too of course. There are within the collection the ghosts of a number of figures who have fought for their vision of a pluralistic and tolerant world. I will not name the figures here – frankly I don’t think it matters if you do not recognise them. The key thing is that they are in there, giving resonance and purpose to The Messier Objects through their own words and actions.

Those of you familiar with my work will know that it is rarely easy to decipher in terms of meaning or narrative, and The Messier Objects is no exception. I would urge you, as I always do, to worry less about the meanings and more about the impact of the sounds, forms and rhythms of the poems. Sometimes this
approach will take you into random, unexpected and seemingly irrelevant places, but as with Messier’s objects themselves, these places can be extraordinary and deeply powerful.

Michael Zand
Istanbul, 19th June, 2015
M1

is vaguely in the shape of an apple tree

how much time do you have
these star clouds are all that’s left

anything you say
anything with a word in it
has been exhausted

you see they think up games
yarns that hang over us
like a false regression or
a chance to regress or
books with too many book marks

yet between their stitches and their hard drives
is a thin plectrum that plays a hollow mono sound

these star clouds are all that’s left
they are our horses
it’s the sky or the wine and the sky that makes us –
like all geeks
he had a one-track mind

sounds harsh
and it is
it’s meant to be

at times he studied the cracks
the cracks within the cracks
he developed his own hinterlands of despair

he knew the value of new words too
the fact that pencils breed pens
that pencils are in way just like pens
but a bit less hard

and in the close-up
just off kilter from the main bands of spectral light
he would avert his vision

and see a poet’s heart or a –
M3

a panoramic view
a motion less in the torrid
not an ocean of angry points

or at least not now

the face of—
he’s all surfaces

he may terrify us with his wondrous crown of lies
but he’s not and never will be
merely beautiful

worry beads in effect tell us that he’s –
i want you
to agree to
do something

i know of
two priests
who will set
off in the same
direction as you
soon or very
soon or now

i want you
to consider
joining them
but if you do
stay with them
close to them
until they –
The Butterfly Cluster
	his is where our first names came from
carried to us through the universe
embedded in rock and ice so that we could –
he was a good-looking young man, probably about
the same age as her
tall
and slim and fair

he wasn’t married and they got on just fine
but they didn’t exchange addresses because they felt it a
little false a little tempting of fate

he gave her a talisman which she treasured

she gripped it tight when they –
The Lagoon Nebula

does this is the temple
does this is where she was killed as if in a garden
der her imagination and ours run through it
does we were built of this

sounds and chants
does from the red and infra-red ends of the spectrum
does and all the sweeter for it brother

and she remains here in the –
M9


Noor-un-Nisa Inayat, Noora, Noor, Madeleine, Marie, Maria, Maria-Nisa, Jeanne-Marie.

She was and is our –
For ten months, she was kept there shackled, at her hands and feet. Scratching on coffee cups, the names of her favourite herbs and herbal teas.

There are no excuses for the actions of men against the stars.

At least we have these few bright specks and smudges, my sister.

Stars shift above us. A little at a time. Year after year. Their patterns change, until they are forgotten, or –
The Wild Duck Cluster

spring and summer
autumn

succeeds with a pulse or beat

like an immense religious love it makes us –