

# *The Messier Objects*

ALSO BY MICHAEL ZAND

Kval

lion: the iran poems \*

The Wire, and other poems \*

Little Rubies

*\* available from Shearsman Books*

Michael Zand

*The  
Messier  
Objects*

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2015 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](http://www.shearsman.com)

ISBN 978-1-84861-456-7

Copyright © Michael Zand, 2015.

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

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Alex Davies, Stephen Emmerson, Steven Fowler,  
Alan Hay, Jeff Hilson, Peter Jaeger, Keith Jebb, SL Mendoza, and  
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 –

## M2

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 –

## M4

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 –

## M5

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

this is where our first names came from  
carried to us through the universe  
embedded in rock and ice so that we could –

## M7

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

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

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

and she remains here in the –



## M9

Dangerfield, Daniel, Danzig, Daphne, Dardenelle,  
Dar-es-Salaam, Dariush, Darayavoosh, Dasht-e-Lut,  
Darwin, Dante, David, Davood, Dearborn, Decopolis,  
Deneb, Denebs, Dachau, Death.

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

She was and is our –

## M10

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 –