Raw Skies
Also by Nigel Wheale

*Answerable Love* (Great Works Editions, 1977)
*Simples* (The Many Press, 1979)
*Strong Lines Recessional Numbers* (infernal methods, 1980)
*Phrasing the Light* (The Many Press, 1994)

with Walid Abdul-Hamid

*He Said to His Prince and Patron Sayf Al-Dawla* (Poetical Histories, 2002)

*The Postmodern Arts: An Introductory Reader* (Routledge, 1995)
*Writing and Society: Literacy, Print and Politics in Britain 1590–1660* (Routledge, 1999)

As editor

*Shakespeare in the Changing Curriculum* (with Lesley Aers) (Routledge, 1991)
Raw Skies
New & Selected Poems

Nigel Wheale

Shearsman Books
Exeter
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Nothing happened . . .
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Colour Notes
There is a well-defined progress . . .
Her later portraits . . .
Ways of Working and Notes to Self
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Strong Lines Recessional Numbers (1980)
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Deeply Programmed in the Main of Light
In the Sharp Mode of Failure
All-Niter
The Windshield Glarestrip Legends (1979)

The bi-metal strip cuts in and out
As the year declines into the black box
The ice maidens dance worried
Scrupulously indifferent
tendered
The sun and the moon pour down
It is clear you call down
black-dyed herds of punks
furtive predations
And the Moon’s franchise contracts
Feast yourself he said
Venetian words
Moonlight Becomes You But I Prefer the Sun
More than ourselves
Walking through the world

Three Qasidas (translated with Walid Abdul-Hamid)

He Said to His Prince and Patron Sayf al-Dawla
‘And he spoke . . .’

Zuhair, an Arabic Poet of Peace
The Mu’allaqa of Zuhair ibn Abi Salma

Two Sonnets

Desmayarse, atreverse . . . Lope de Vega
Nada es mayor que tú . . . Arturo Camacho Ramírez

Acknowledgements
J : tibi seruiat ultima Thule

I sent a tightly folded poem, expecting no reply.
Your answer came, woven in the tide’s race,
   The wordless speech of branches.
Flows and Traces

2003
Curlew Glide

Rises stuttering, a seeded trail of cries
flung between the green and the grey,
he marks his ground in song spraint.

At full curve from tail to beak tip,
wing blades flexed,
the arc of song
tense with an urgency we seem to know
thrills to a joyful alarm.

In the clearing of night
they are homeless star cries
stitched upon soft felt.
Riddle

Rapid breaths across the wan dome.
Sheddings of light from an ice-pleated sky.
Wave upon pulse, a shiver among stars.
White satin sheet, furrowed and stained.
Breathing of sand across dark dunes.
Fumes of light, snagging on Algol.
A weaving drape of light-fall
thrown down to this earthline.
Goose Field

A gentle inbreath as two hundred wings unfold to beat them upwards. Once there, they fade to strandlines, crying creatures strung out against the northern light.

Gull-motes surf above the latten-grey Flow, buoyantly underlit. Fierce masses of water trade gradients below. Soon Draco will fracture their sky with his bright graph line.

O sleep, thou fleshly birth, may you never be free of your heart, here in a world that the world might make.
A night endless like the sea’s waves . . .

A night endless like the sea’s waves, a dark curtain flooding,

   bringing the sky-host of anxieties.
   
I said, as it arched its huge back above me,

   its chest unmoving, the hips so far beyond,

   ‘Monstrous night, make way for dawn,

   though morning will bring no relief.

   Such a night you are, as if your stars

were tied to the Ward Mountain by thick chords,

   the Pleiades bound with simmans to rock.’

From the *Mu’allaga* of Imru’al-Quays (lived 497–545 AD; a pre-Islamic poet from Najd, Yemen. Translated with Wālid Abdul-Hamid.
Flow Stone

Trending layers swept south
across the intermontane basin,
‘a sea gradually shallowing’
gently deposed blank pages of rock
Over millennia, pressing rare life.
Now stone-frozen fish swim the strata
within lamina of grey mudshale.

Glazed by light in a moment’s breath,
a wave’s feathering
Is caught across warm silt skin.
Now it is rock-woven,
Eve’s falling tresses at Autun
drift on the palaeocurrent.

Then flexures, folding and faulting
contort the passive sediment.
Firths and straits are overdeepened
under glacial stress,
Mountains levelled and gouged
and all is overlain
By thin tills of glacial drift.

At Outertown the basal complex
is laid bare, granite flesh
Shot with white banding,
dykes become shattered rubble.
Thermal aureoles burn within the granite
to survive this savage downthrow,
Cold rock under the sparagma of stars.
Wind Huis

There are breeze ghosts in the wind slabs
when near-gales burnish stone and flesh alike.
Window songs and chimney voices
pluck at the soul of the small hours,
peedie ones dancing maniacally beyond the wall’s depth
under the glancing loom of the lighthouse.

This house begins to sing once more,
tuning for long winter,
but by morning light-quiet has been won
between the passage of storms,
a front losing its identity beyond the Fair Isle,
morning a solvent of warming light,
and silence wide as the bay curves to the hills.

Small birds make nests
in branches high against the sky.
Their song hangs open to the light
as all of time begins to brim
towards the corners of our day.
Such a scale of light
soothed the islands last evening
under a bird-calling stardome.

Morning’s glarestrip is laid upon the waters,
turquoise of inshore plunging to dark
over the hundred fathom deeps.

Quick flecks move on the bay below
as a whitemaa cloud rises from the back rig,
sown by spring’s harrow.

Swiftless these skies, light spaces aching
for wing notes, heart cries of young May,
gracing the bitter sharp savours of hoar thorn.

Yet two buds upon each sprig
have made the mountain blush
across the bay.
Sea Notes

There are no tricks in sea painting,
no short cuts to success as a sea painter.
I intend to analyse waveform through my responsive medium,
sweeping in the main lines with a flowing brush of thin Ivory Black.
Too much detail would suggest the sea stood still to be portrayed.

First lay in the semi-dark waveforms.
In this way the immensity of the sea
rolls through the carrying power of the colour.
The rocks will show their resistance to the sea.
The water, though enormous in mass, is pliant.

You must work at top speed, placing
everything on canvas in its proper value,
leaving accidentals in the mixed tone.
These will reflect a greater sense of light.
The canvas begins to have colour all over
and your highlights should flash like amber drops,
more brilliant than foam.

Rose Madder purples shadow colour,
detracting from the sunlit detail.
It is not lack that blooms in the shadow,
only reflected light.
In this case, a pink note runs throughout.

You could not paint a landscape sky
into a seascape work. There is more halation
by the sea. The clouds are more radiant
in tone and colour. The peep of the sea below
provides a platform of complementary colour.

A certain amount of wildness
is apparent in this rough note.

Formulas lightly adapted from Borlaise Smart, The Technique of Sea Painting (1946).
Five Remarks about Waves

Waves leave no mark upon each other but have certainly impressed these redstone cliffs.

The luminous inner palm of which wave was it has left these Spanish detergent bottles ecstatically high at the driftline?

All of those frail waves have carried all of those great ships.

The wave passes through its medium like a persuasive idea, vertically agitating all the stationary monads, itself unmoved.

Nature’s way of bringing the sea to an end, waves are not symbols of permanence or change, nor of passion or equanimity. The Department of Wave Mechanics knows this, but will never be able to convince the oceans, forever fretting at the land.
Surface Tension

A meniscus skins water
with transparent rigour.
Creatures walk upon it
or fail to pierce it
from beneath,
condemned to water.

This interface curves
from shore to shore,
a sac dividing anti worlds.

Waters meeting across a temperature gradient
struggle to level their surface differences,
the meniscus line a complex polymer
ferociously dancing as it arbitrates.

At middle dusk the water face
petulantly throws off light of the sky
and its depths withdraw
under implacable grey.
Small insects touching on this silvered flesh
fall through, but do not sink.
The face of the water eats them via its creatures.
Fight or Flight

Racing tidal headwaters
etch an eroding shore.
Each stone and wrack stands clear
in a raking daedal dawn.

Light’s seven-braided blade
hangs above the brae,
fierce covenant of times to come.

How you walk the wastes of this heart,
the sharp tang of our flowering
still upon me.