

For the Living

Selected Writings 1: Longer Poems 1965–2000

Richard Berengarten was born in London in 1943, into a family of musicians. He has lived in Italy, Greece, the USA and former Yugoslavia. His perspectives as a poet combine English, French, Mediterranean, Jewish, Slavic, American and Oriental influences.

Under the name Richard Burns, he has published more than 25 books. In the 1970s, he founded and ran the international Cambridge Poetry Festival. He has received the Eric Gregory Award, the Wingate-Jewish Quarterly Award for Poetry, the Keats Poetry Prize, the Yeats Club Prize, the international Morava Charter Poetry Prize and the Great Lesson Award (Serbia). He has been Writer-in-Residence at the international Eliot-Dante Colloquium in Florence, Arts Council Writer-in-Residence at the Victoria Centre in Gravesend, Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Newnham College, Cambridge, and a Royal Literary Fund Project Fellow. He has been Visiting Associate Professor at the University of Notre Dame and British Council Lecturer in Belgrade, first at the Centre for Foreign Languages and then at the Philological Faculty. He is currently a Bye-Fellow at Downing College, Cambridge and Preceptor at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. His poems have been translated into 22 languages.

By Richard Berengarten

The Selected Writings of Richard Berengarten

Vol. 1 *For the Living: Selected Longer Poems, 1965–2000*

Vol. 2 *The Manager*

Vol. 3 *The Blue Butterfly* (Part 1, *The Balkan Trilogy*)

Vol. 4 *In a Time of Drought* (Part 2, *The Balkan Trilogy*)

Vol. 5 *Under Balkan Light* (Part 3, *The Balkan Trilogy*)

Poetry (written as Richard Burns)

The Easter Rising 1967

The Return of Lazarus

Double Flute

Avebury

Inhabitable Space

Angels

Some Poems, Illuminated by Frances Richards

Learning to Talk

Tree

Roots/Routes

Black Light

Half of Nowhere

Croft Woods

Against Perfection

Book With No Back Cover

Manual: the first 20

Holding the Darkness (Manual: the second 20)

As Editor

An Octave for Octavio Paz

Ceri Richards: Drawings to Poems by Dylan Thomas

Rivers of Life

In Visible Ink: Selected Poems, Roberto Sanest 1955–1979

Homage to Mandelstam

Out of Yugoslavia

For Angus

For the Living

Selected Writings

Volume 1

Longer Poems 1965–2000

Richard Berengarten

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To Melanie

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Avebury

for Octavio Paz

To rise up and become wakeful guardians of the living and of the dead.

Herakleitus of Ephesus

And the Lord shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall the Lord be One and his Name One.

Sabbath Morning Service

For the first time in our history we are contemporaries of all mankind.

Octavio Paz

I

huge slabs
wrenched
from under grass, dug
out of hills

time's
teeth

worn

yawning the sky in

porte of light

earthed

tongued

broken
altars

answerless

covered the cave's
cracked jaw



II

back and forth
round and round
under the cloudy dome speechless

sniffing among these petrified hopes
these ossified dreams these
dead memorials pacing
back and forth

ancestorless

under the compact slogans of the sky

walking
as dead

cursing
their answers
their meaning

looking for what

the riddle?
the question?



III

and can the stone know
me I wonder
 does the stone
 wonder

even here among absences
and wreckage

if any place



IV

if any place
most of all

here, most
of any

in the dance
in the ring
of stones dancing
metaphor on metaphor
silence
anagrammatised
measured spaced out
in this syntax of land
this plot of time

where the green causeway ends
where the avenue ends
where thought ends

begins
the burial
the dance
of stone
begins



V

the sky's throat
says

Ascend Sun

from this syntax of hills
this plot of space

mean

light

ripples
expanding
across the downs
waves returning
from where? the centre
to where? circumference

*now any
place is now*

say the stones

I do not tell I say



VI

little mother
of Willendorf
 ‘vegetable’ Venus
of the hunters
 neckless head
featureless
 under the beehive hair
thin arms asleep on breasts
 like hills belly
 enormous the buttocks
steatopygous the whole blind body
 bowed over the womb
as if above
 an unseen child



VII

in the gallery
contorted struggling
The Prisoners
one in limbs and torso
 nigh perfect, yet
with genitals
 trapped
under unhewn rock
 the arms
 unable to heave
backbreaking
 stone off his head
undiscovered
 dreaming in



VIII

and at Samothraki
striding out came dancing
 Nike
 the daughter

 headless
in the wind and taking wings
 her robe a river of hair
over the jutting curve of her
 incredible arrogant breasts

 and the breakers
 confluent
under the belly
forming like an unseen hand
protecting her cave the mouth of her



IX

on snake island
two *phalloi*
unsheathed from stone like flowers
and the air parched
so high above the sea
that time of year, August
with *Meltemi* blowing
and an hour by boat back to Mykonos

poised erect
twin offerings
twin motives

one of the shafts
broken
above the marble scrotum



X

now see where in marble play
the musicians: a sturdy
flautist with double pipes
stuck in his chinless face
his companion seated at a cracked harp

nameless the song from a cave by the sea

silence

still growing
out of, louder

heads uptilted blinded by sunlight

the tune climbing, still
going strong in

great dusky sea, so many pebbles round your neck
so many glinting jewels in your hair



XI

I am awake
sleeping, I wake

in
the cave, tomb
and temple

under
turrets that wind
and climb

deep in your chambers

where I lost my memory
of concerns and imports
and the way
up is way
down

of all but boyhood

those dead children

ghosts

I said
I never believed in

you
here, all present?



XII

down the corridor wound like a horn
and not a glimmer
 to the first signs
half a mile in from the surface
you touch but don't believe,
nor shadow of a glimmer down beyond them
 your eyelids
 jumping like fish
veil nothing here: you are the very
 shadow you discarded

all is eyes

 your path
 a spiral groped along, past
cataracts of stalactite
 stalagmite screens, chasm
 waterfalls, chimneys, columns
 and with a twist
upwards through a manhole
 sides worn smooth

into the gigantic halls
 the
 know not where

Light,

and your hands
a sudden shield a torch
shaking out shadows

against a blaze of inner noon
your blindness

you

there, my
sister? my brother?

pounding
of blood across temples

breath
an instant held

the drip
drip of distant water

that unfathomable roaring



XIII

where sleeps the man
who shaggy haired
roamed the steppes
with wolf and bison
ate grass, and played
with the herds

in that time

before she came
with her ear-rings
of amber her breasts bared
her armpits scented
let down her braided hair
and struck you with that gaze of stone
taught you the art of her stone smile
woke you with language
of cattle
byre and cave

I am awake
sleeping, I wake

in that time

before Delilah



XIV

and where now

brother of boyhood
male half of my otherness
strong as the beasts you hunted with
before we hunted

how have I lost you
in this cave blackness dancing
blinded by a mask of hands
in *that time*
by my own cunning

changed my face
like one gone
under sunlight
on a long journey

aye we must treasure the dream whatever the sorrow

brother, you
were the axe at my side
my hand's strength
the sword in my belt

in *that time*

standing in this cave of light
this mouth of stone
that eats me



XV

words you rush in on me like a surf
into my core like semen to the uterus
like torchlight on these stones
moving and melting the frost's shadow behind them
trebling their din with intervening silences

and who is this come riding
in on the foam this long haired
green creature who brings me
back again among the scattered seasons

once I was young enough to think
you like these stones were immortal

in the wave that gathers you up in it like a sandgrain
and drops you down somehow else,
has it changed you, the sea?

has it turned you into a fish? a note? a pearlseed?
in the silt did you taste like thi?
whose was it that kiss,
who was it embraced you?

jetsam of dream,
eroded

down in the pit I have seen your face mother
your skull in the rockface

and who is that other
face in shadow
the cloud that lurks just behind you?



XVI

stone
you too

a monad

atom
as I am

what is the sum
of these quanta?

I am not just
my body

are you
stone
my body?

the total?



XVII

under my eyes these stones
are

dancing

stars

birds

figures of speech

growing into each other
out of each other

and have become
the spaces between them

points
in the dance

including me
enclosing me

me, embraced
in this dance of stone



XVIII

stone in me
stone that I am
centre or periphery
nomad and society of atoms

eyed by stone
eaten by stone
loved by stone

danced in the dance
by the dance
of stone

by stone
uttered
by stone
dreamed



XIX

bloody stone
 blood I am
grained
 with breath
death of ancestors
 of my blood
 stone I am

wizened

enduring

the sun's hammer
the frost's nails
the wind's arsenal



XX

adamant

defying discourse
messages
eyes tongues

telling nothing
giving nothing
being of absence
core the dream

threshold
ledge of energy
meniscus of darkness
grain of light

bringing to life
in me what does not exist
me in what does not exist

subversive stone

uprooting
word from language

winding down
time to rubble

this continuum

in you
all is the saying



XXI

in my throat
the man rises
from the cave he was immured in

break
speech
in a tide on these stones
wash
clean break
word
into stone
out of stone

sleeping, I wake
I am awake

and the ghost gone at end
of childhood

comes back
eroding, endures

among these ancestors

sharing



in the neat but functional lines
of Block H
in the beige walled waiting room
of The Labour Exchange
in the public bar of The Tiger
or The Square and Compasses
in the new auditorium
of The College of Arts and Technology
in the Maplan Supermarket
that sells everything

from what is between these hands
from what is under these eyes

ancestors' fathers
locked in stone
we struggle out of
measuring
immeasurables



XXIII

this was no whore
not abandoned
not 'wild'
and cruel only

when an absence
and no gap
between speech and her mouth

matter of words
word of matter

always touch
lips touch
tongues speech
 the world
born

 wherever
light of eyes
eye of light

child of elements

 wherever
 touch and find
anywhere centre

say these stones
of Avebury



XXIV

*find any
where centre*

echoes from peripheries
out of galactic range

creatures awake on distant shores
across those seas and skies

beyond sidereal thoughtspan back
to breathing

waves
expanding, re-echoing

*including
us here*

*enclosing
us here*

say the stones

*now every
where centre*

I do not tell *I say*