

Selected Poems

JEFF NUTTALL was born in Clitheroe, Lancashire, in 1933 and grew up in Herefordshire. He trained as a painter in the years following the Second World War and began writing poetry in 1962. He has published widely with Writers' Forum, Turret Press, Unicorn Press, Fulcrum, Trigram, Pirate Press, Rivelin and Penguin (*Modern Poets No. 12*). He taught fine art in schools and polytechnics, and has acted in film and television. He lives in Crickhowell, Wales.

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JEFF NUTTALL

Introduced by Roy Fisher



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*This book is dedicated to Rose Staples,
Amanda Porter,
Minnie Chorley,
Laura Gilbert,
Jill Richards,
and in memory of Jane Nuttall*

Contents

<i>Introduction by Roy Fisher</i>	xvii
WAITING FOR THE HOLOCAUST	1
Windows	3
I shall invite my little friends to tea	4
A phrase cracks through	5
They come like a wall, stalk forward gravely	8
It wouldn't reach in the summer night	9
Little Miss Muffet	10
Summer drops dollars	11
An ancient thing	12
Dangerous to drink day	13
Insomnia	15
Notes Towards a Suicide Note	16
Ruth & Rover	17
Suffer Little Children to Come Unto Me	19
To Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, Lord of Time and Father of the Universe	20
Schoolmistress	21
Autobiography	22
GUTTER GRACE	25
Dogs came to us	27
Locked buckled couple	28
Your sleepy musk is a season's tang	29
To My Wife	30
Could see her a milky thing	31
Spread thighs bowstrung with your stretch pants	32
Them There Eyes	33

It's a long way out on the swell of gristle	34
Skeins of groundmist	36
Girl forked on horizon sticks	37
The Voyeur	38
Mother & Daughter	40
Summer	41
The Twin	42
In the Park	44
When it had all been told	45
BARKING	47
Jumpin' at the Maudesley	49
A pale old woman sits in a thicket	52
Sun Sequence	53
Lightning Sequence	56
Driving the jumper	59
Blood let / melt light	61
As a breast	62
Day breaks brittle blades around my heart	63
Medieval : England	64
Open my bones when the rain spills	65
Pig proud pain for the pit of her	66
Murder Song	67
There's going to be	68
Small room big bed	69
DADA	71
Kwela for a Situation	73
There was a cabbage	75
Acres of wreckage strewn round a rhino	76
Pig on a prong	77
Scissor. Trunk. Elephants.	78

Still Life I	79
Still Life V	80
Still Life VII	81
Still Life IX	82
Still Life X	83
I wandered lonely as a seal	84
The red turkey	85
Green rippers split curtains	86
George the corner crocodile	87
PENNINE	89
Three Takes of the Same Chorus	91
I embrace an apple twice	94
I shelled a boiled egg badly	95
A little shrieker	96
Sheets aghast at an air's intake	97
He goes out on an always Sunday frequently	98
bird with fall-coals	99
Handful shaved out of moorland	101
I am a hill	102
The Split	103
Premonitions of Divorce	104
Europe - Medieval	106
Newhaven Ferry	107
Dogwind	108
Debts	109
Four-Way	110
Pogrom	111
To Feminists	112
Summer Holiday	117
Jeff Nuttall's Psychedelic Poem	118

Domestic Interior – Late Night	122
Margaret Thatcher And The Fox	123
Suburban Garden	124
Goodbye to Leeds (Regret)	125
Two Takes of the Same Chorus	127
Puritans	129
Welsh Bay	130
Cloudscape	131
“The levels of gold are constant. . . .”	132
SUMMER	133
I yawn for a fishboy shy among bilberries	135
An essence so delicate	136
Love is a goad, a goatfoot god	137
The surly postman	138
Sea food salt pond	139
And the bee on wheels has laments on a stick	140
Autumnal	141
Tremble vigil	144
Every night is a curtain over deeper dark	145
Oysterflesh nurtures pearl	146
Shot Theft	147
Wet Kestrel	148
Sentinel	149
Shrike Shriek	151
When it comes	152
Stands at the stairs’ turn	153
The Familiar Ghosts	154
The Coast	155
Sculptures	156
Maintenance	160

Ejaculation	161
Siege	162
Radnor Sunset	163
Mediterranean	165
Return Trip	167
Mischief	170
Hillside Pregnancy	172
Channel-Crossing	173
Woman Approaching	174
Sore as a sandrock	175
16 th August 1981. Bedroom, Scarcroft.	176
Banks of vapour, flower-strewn	177
Humped cherrywool and a cockatoo whisp	178
SCENES AND DUBS	179
Three Scenes: West Yorkshire	181
Dub One	182
Three Scenes: North of England	183
Dub Two	184
Two Scenes: England	185
Dub Three	186
Three Scenes: Todmorden	187
Dub Four	188
Two Scenes: North of England	189
Dub Five	190
Three Scenes: England	191
Dub Six	192
Two Scenes: North of England	193
Dub Seven	195
Three Scenes: London	196
Dub Eight	197

Three Scenes: Lancashire	198
Dub Nine	199
Three Scenes: Algarve	200
Dub Ten	201
Three Scenes: Todmorden	202
Dub Eleven	204
Three Scenes: Manchester	205
Dub Twelve	206
HOUSES	207
Prologue: Dream Houses	209
I. Alcohol	210
II. The Relationship	211
III. Religion	212
IV. Travel	214
V. Nationality	216
VI. Art	217
VII. Language	218
VIII. Anxiety	220
IX. Body	221
X. Sleep	222
Epilogue: Dream House	224
ABERGAVENTNY	225
Breakfast at Guernsey Grove	227
Hotel Bar, Harrogate. August 1992	228
Putney Antique Fair	229
Spaghetti	230
Bed Crash	231
For Basil	232
Sleep	233
Lower Usk	234

A social chrysalis looks like a tin bug	235
Some mumble so dim	236
Sketch for Autumnal	237
Autumnal	238
When the wind whisks at first-light leakage	239
The rain sends children	240
He's lain by us all night	241
We set him high on a windowsill	242

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Introduction

“Breakfast at Guernsey Grove” catches, on more levels than one, a moment of Eric Mottram’s hospitality. Anybody who stayed, as I often did in the Sixties, at Eric’s previous place, the basement flat on Kensington Church Street, will have had the experience of being allowed, around three a.m., to give up and doss down on the couch in the living room. The last thing I’d see as I reached for the light-switch across the great bedside pile of books my host had assembled against the impossible event of my getting insomnia, was an object by Jeff Nuttall that watched from the top corner of a tall bookcase. It was an overfilled-to-bursting doctor’s bag, a dusty Gladstone from which viscera, rubber things and respirator hoses bulged, apparently caught, though possibly only temporarily, in the act of escaping. Satirical? Not really. Observant. Extravagant. Wary. It was my first meeting with Jeff Nuttall’s work and it was an accurate guide to most of the multifarious ranging of his activities. Besides “art” there was of course theatre – the Quack Doctor from hundreds of years of mummers’ plays and the hint of a future Friar Tuck to rival Eugene Palette’s.

And there was already the abiding theme, to be found everywhere in this collection, of the politics of boundary and containment, and the aesthetics of that zone, something like the sea-bed fissures out of which magma continuously steams and smokes to create the world. In human terms there’s always the assumption of the precariousness and the permeability of the self’s temporary packaging: the brain-box, the bone-locker, the bag of guts, all miraculous, all vulnerable, all capable of breaking bounds and messing up the moquette.

Like any life-forms that aren’t pickled in jars these poems draw on their manifest energy for their form. Particularly interesting are the poems that have empirical reference: locations, for example, that another consciousness could check against experience or assumption. And in doing so probably apprehend with unusual emphasis what a variety of different worlds our familiar individual aesthetics look out on.

ROY FISHER

Waiting For The Holocaust

