

Press When Illuminated:
New and Selected Poems 1968–2003

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NEW AND SELECTED POEMS 1968–2003

NICK TOTTON



CAMBRIDGE

PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge PDO CB1 5JX United Kingdom
PO Box 202, Applecross, Western Australia 6153

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First published 2004

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Lightning Source

Typeset in Swift 9.5 / 13

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ISBN 1 84471 039 4 paperback

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*For my original peer group of fifteen year old poets—Andrew Spooner,
Paul Selby, Clive Saunders et al; and in memory of Rosemary Delbridge.*

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Acknowledgments

Thanks to the editors who published some of these poems in *The Curiously Strong*, *The Literary Supplement*, *Skylight*, *Grosseteste Review*, *Perfect Bound*, *Vanessa*, *One*, *Ochre*, *Musics*, *Fool's House*, *The Oxford Literary Review*, *Equofinality*, *A vision very like reality* and *A Various Art*; and, especially, to the publishers who produced collections of my work under the imprints of *The Curiously Strong* (Ian Patterson), *Many Press* (John Welch), and *Grosseteste* (Tim Longville). *You Can't Get There From Here* has also been published in *Poets on Writing: Britain, 1970–91*, edited by Denise Riley.

Many of these poems consciously use texts and words from a wide range of sources, including Hans Christian Anderson, Anthony Barnett, André Breton, Daniel Cohen, Michèle Cohen, Zoe Edmondson, Sigmund Freud, Herman Hesse, John James, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, J.H. Prynne, Petra Meier, Eugenio Montale, Ian Patterson, Denise Riley, Jack Spicer (keep it coming, Jack), Martin Thom, César Vallejo, John Welch, and Paul Wheeler. Thanks to all of these, and to everyone else I have plundered.

More particularly: *Food Trouble* consists entirely of re-ordered statements made by someone imprisoned in a mental hospital, and subjected to the further indignity of being consistently misunderstood by Geza Roheim in *Magic and Schizophrenia*. His name is not given.

Seeing It Through makes extensive use of Sigmund Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, and Bates's *Better Eyesight Without Glasses*. 'Co' has been proposed as a gender-neutral third person pronoun.

Green Heart partly concerns the Dog Star, Sirius, whose heliacal (with the sun) rising at the ancient Egyptian New Year — traditionally, July 23rd — symbolised rebirth and announced the flooding of the

Nile and the fertile season. This annual reappearance of Sirius—having spent forty days and nights blotted out by the Sun’s light—moves slowly through the calendar, like most stellar events. On July 16th 750 CE, it coincided with a solar eclipse while the Sun was conjunct the planet Venus. This event the Aztecs wove into the myth of Quetzalcoatl, his death and rebirth, and his dog-headed twin Xolotl.

Fully Into the Light: Each of these three poems derives all its words from a different short text. *Memphis* from *Hamlet’s Mill: An Essay Investigating the Origins of Human Knowledge and its Transmission Through Myth*, by Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend (Boston 1977), pp 118–20 (including: ‘Athenaeus says that there was a much-applauded mime, Memphis by name, who in a brief dance was said to convey faultlessly the whole essence of the Pythagorean doctrine’). Internal quotation, ‘During the whole . . . interpretation’ from S Schut, in *Dekane und Dekansternbilder* by W Gundel (1936), p 5. *Elusive Ideas* from an interview with Pierre Boulez by Martin Kettle, *The Guardian*, Thursday February 6th 1992, p 27, and other articles on the same page. *Enemy Action* from *The Holy Place: The Mystery of Rennes-le-Chateau—Discovering the Eighth Wonder of the Ancient World*, by Henry Lincoln (London 1991), pp 42–5, 86, and 137–8.

Get it where you can.

From This Moment a Change (1968)

This is the strongest anxiety of all; the 'terror', as Descartes calls it; the terror of failure in time against which there is no recourse except by a veritable leap to God. In this manner the idea of God reappears to Descartes. Long neglected by the primary consciousness absorbed in the 'science admirable', it reappears in this spontaneous act of the secondary consciousness given to him by his dream. From this moment, so to speak, a change of atmosphere will occur in those dreamlike regions which seem to lead to some inevitable reality of despair. But in order for Descartes to arrive finally at the true 'shelter' and to find the genuine 'remedy', he must endure other trials. The spontaneous act by which he turns toward God does not possess at this moment the necessary efficacy: it is not pure spontaneity: it is not addressed directly to a God of the present, but to a God of the past.

GEORGES POULET, *Studies in Human Time*

*But the snow stopped after I opened Norah's suit, and the beasts departed.
And I saw movement in that planet's metal, at the last. I don't think it was a
trick of the light, or of the evaporating snow.*

ALGIS BUDRYS, *The Unexpected Dimension*

but the
snow
and the beasts
movement in the
light the
evaporating
light
departed
that
I opened
that planet's
light
at the last

failure in time
a change
in those
of despair
in time
the stronger
given
from this moment a change
failure in
in those dreamlike
but in order
of the present
of the past

failure in time
snow
in those
movement in the
in time
evaporating
given
departed
failure in
I opened
but in order
light
of the past

but the
a change
and the beasts
of despair
light the
the stronger
light
from this moment a change
that
in those dreamlike
that planet's
of the present
at the last

from this moment a change:
from present and
past, in the
dreamlike (snow and
light) movement
of despair

from the beasts
from this failure
in time
I opened

from this moment a change

