

New Selected Poems

JOHN MATTHIAS was born in 1941 in Columbus, Ohio. He has been a Visiting Fellow in poetry at Clare Hall, Cambridge, and lived for much of the 70s and 80s in East Anglia. He teaches at the University of Notre Dame. Matthias's recent books include *A Gathering of Ways* (1991), *Swimming at Midnight: Selected Shorter Poems* (1995), *Beltane at Aphelion: Longer Poems* (1995), and *Pages: New Poems and Cuttings* (2000). In 1998 Robert Archaibeau edited *Word Play Place: Essays on the Poetry of John Matthias*.

Also by John Matthias

Poetry

Bucyrus (1970)

Turns (1975)

Crossing (1979)

Bathory & Lermontov (1980)

Northern Summer (1984)

A Gathering of Ways (1991)

Swimming at Midnight (1995)

Beltane at Aphelion (1995)

Pages: New Poems & Cuttings (2000)

Working Progress, Working Title (2002)

Swell & Variations on the Song of Songs (2003)

Translations

Contemporary Swedish Poetry (1980)

(with Göran Printz-Påhlson)

Jan Östergren: Rainmaker (1983)

(with Göran Printz-Påhlson)

The Battle of Kosovo (1987)

(with Vladeta Vuckovic)

Three-Toed Gull: Selected Poems of Jesper Svenbro (2003)

(with Lars-Håkan Svensson)

Editions

23 Modern British Poets (1971)

Introducing David Jones (1980)

David Jones: Man and Poet (1989)

Selected Works of David Jones (1992)

Criticism

Reading Old Friends (1992)

New Selected Poems

JOHN MATTHIAS



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 040 8 paperback

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To my students at the University of Notre Dame
1967–2004

“ . . . there in the interstices ”

Contents

PART I	1
Swimming at Midnight	3
Diptych	4
Arzeno Kirkpatrick	5
Renaissance	6
An Absence	7
Statement	9
Five Lyrics from “Poem in Three Parts”	11
Between	15
Facts from an Apocryphal Midwest	16
PART II	43
Survivors	45
Edward	47
U.S.I.S. Lecturer	49
If Not a Technical Song American:Statement, Harangue, and Narrative	51
For John, After His Visit: Suffolk, Fall	54
Once for English Music	59
Three Around a Revolution	62
Alexander Kerensky at Stanford	64
Double Sonnet on the Absence of Text:“ <i>Symphony</i> <i>Matis der Maler</i> ,” Berlin, 1934: — Metamorphoses	65
Turns: Toward a Provisional Aesthetic and a Discipline	67
Double Derivation, Association, and Cliché: from The Great Tournament Rollof Westminster	74
Clarifications for Robert Jacoby (“ <i>Double Derivation . . .</i> ”, <i>Part IV, ll. 1–10; Part VII, ll. 1–15, 22–28</i>)	81
Poem for Cynouai	86

PART III	97
Double Invocation as a Prologue to a Miscellany of Poems Mostly Written in East Anglia	99
The Fen Birds' Cry	102
Evening Song	104
Two Ladies	106
Dunwich: Winter Visit Alone	110
Verrucas	111
After the Death of Chekhov	113
You Measure John	115
My Youngest Daughter: Running Toward an English Village Church	116
Mark Twain in the Fens	117
Paul Verlaine in Lincolnshire	119
Words for Sir Thomas Browne	121
Lines for the Gentlemen	126
From a Visit to Dalmatia, 1978	128
Friendship	130
Agape	132
Brandon, Breckland: The Flint Knappers	133
59 Lines Assembled Quickly Sitting on a Wall Near the Reconstruction of the Lady Juliana's Cell	136
26 June 1381/1977	139
On the Death of Benjamin Britten	144
An East Anglian Diptych	145
PART IV	165
Rhododendron	167
Not having read a single fairy tale	169
Everything to be endured	170
Private Poem	172

Public Poem	173
E.P. in Crawfordsville	174
F.M.F. from Olivet	176
Mr. Rothenstein's Rudiments	178
Footnote on a Gift	183
Horace Augustus Mandelstam Stalin	184
Into Cyrillic	185
Bogomil in Languedoc	187
The Singer of Tales	188
The Silence of Stones	190
A Wind in Roussillon	192
Northern Summer	200
PART V	221
While You Are Singing	223
'Void which falls out of void . . . '	224
On Rereading a Friend's First Book	225
Two in New York	227
Easter 1912 and Christmas 1929: Blaise Cendrars and Garcia Lorca in New York (a second take)	229
Two in Harar	231
She Maps Iraq	235
Six Or So In Petersburg	240
Scherzo Trio: Three at the Villa Seurat	242
Francophiles, 1958	244
Some Letters	246
From Cuttings	249
PART VI	267
From A Compostela Diptych	269

PART VII	311
Epilogue to a Cycle of Poems on the Pilgrim	
Routes to Santiago de Compostela	313
After Years Away	315
The Key of C Does Not Know My Biography	318
That Music is the Spur to all Licentiousness	319
Received by Angels Singing Like the Birds	320
The Flagellant (<i>i.m. Percy Grainger</i>)	321
Master Class	326
Diminished Third	328
A Note on Barber's <i>Adagio</i>	331
Sadnesses: Black Seas	332
Persistent Elegy	334
My Mother's Webster	336
The Singing	338
Left Hands and Wittgensteins	340
Geneva Pension	342
Reception	344
Unfinished	345
The Lyric Suite: Aldeburgh Festival, Snape	348
Black Dog	352
Ohio Forebears	353
Variations on the Song of Songs	358
Letter to an Unborn Grandson	359
Swell	366
<i>Afterword</i>	377
<i>Notes</i>	381

Acknowledgments

Many of the poems in this selection first appeared in books published by Swallow Press in the US and Anvil Press in the UK. I am grateful to David Sanders, director of Swallow Press / Ohio University Press and to Peter Jay, publisher of Anvil Press, for permission to reprint poems that originally appeared in the following books: *Bucyrus* (1970), *Turns* (1975), *Crossing* (1979), *Northern Summer* (1984), *A Gathering of Ways* (1991), *Swimming at Midnight* (1995), *Beltane at Aphelion* (1995), and *Pages: New Poems & Cuttings* (2000). All of these books were published by Swallow; *Turns*, *Crossing* and *Northern Summer* were co-published by Anvil. New poems appearing in this book have been published in *PN Review*, *Samizdat*, *Ars-Interpres*, and the Momotombito chapbook series. I would also like to thank the editors of those magazines which have published my poems regularly in the past and in which most of the pieces in this book first appeared in journal form from 1970 to the present: *TriQuarterly*, *Poetry*, *Salmagundi*, *PN Review*, *Chicago Review*, *Parnassus*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, and *Boundary 2*.

I would particularly like to thank Michael Anania, Robert Archambeau, Joe Francis Doerr, Kevin Ducey, John Peck, Vincent Sherry, Mike Smith, and James Walton for their support and close reading during various periods when the poems in this book were being written and throughout the difficult year when the selections were made. My special thanks to Bridget Brown for preparing the manuscript, and to John Kinsella and Chris Hamilton-Emery for their enthusiasm for the entire project. It is always a pleasure to work with the team at Salt. Finally, my thanks to Douglas Kinsey, whose painting reproduced on the cover has hung in my living room for more than twenty-five years.

Part I

Swimming at Midnight

[Near my grandparents' home at the outskirts of town, a stone quarry was established, then abandoned, nearly a hundred and fifty years ago. The early blasting hit water, and after many soundings were taken, the management concluded that they had uncovered a bottomless lake, fed, they surmised, by a sizeable underground river.]

Under a pine and confusion:
ah! Tangles of clothes: (come
on, silly, nobody's here:) and
naked as fish, a boy and a girl.
(Nobody comes here: nobody looks:
nobody watches us watching us
watch.) Except the police.
Thighs slide into the moon.
Humbly, into the stars: Mirrored,
flashes a father's red eye, a
blue-bitten mother's red lip: No
Swimming Allowed In The Quarry
At Night. (Anyway, nevertheless
and moreover: feel how warm!) here,
among the reflections. (Feel the
water's mouth and its hands, feel
them imitate mine: can there truly
be any danger?) danger allowed in
the quarry at night? can people
really have drowned? (Now my body
is only water alive, and aeons
ago you were a fish growing
legs —) well, dust to dust, a
curious notion. But quarry water on
dust green with seed! Quarry water
forbidden on land after dark! What
young forms of vegetation emerge.
What new colors of light.

Diptych

I

Carpet flames.
Chain grip: incense
in a cup. Violins
and mandolins re-
corded. Oddly off.
Stumble dancer,
rafter slanting down.
(What is now beyond
you now my dear?)
Hold it (having
hardened) with a kiss.
He had lied
for years.

II

Zero on ice.
Tire spun: smoke
to three a.m. Hail
and also headlight
dimming. Oddly out.
Weep then weeper,
headlight out and hail.
(Who is now beside
me now and dear?)
Break it (having
buckled) with a fist.
She had cried
for years.

Arzeno Kirkpatrick

Should he, if the telephone rings,
pick it up? And if a knock should
come at the door? He ponders, Arzeno
Kirkpatrick, the questions. Another
occurs: what if a light should
suddenly flash in the yard?
It is late; Arzeno Kirkpatrick
is tired. He sips his tea and
smokes his cigarettes. He
ponders, Arzeno Kirkpatrick,
the questions.

There is a light in the yard.
The telephone rings.
There is an angry knocking at the door.

Renaissance

The knocked-up look is back!
(old accurate Van Eyck):
the turned-up pointed shoes,
the twin-peaked cap.
Gentlemen, there's no one
here but Gentlemen.

And Ladies.

And the Court.

Virgins of St. Denis
bare their privies for
the prince. And I am priest
and altar, consecrated host.
Bread and whiskey on
my loins, a wooden
phallus, nails:
I stiffen and endure.

Empty out the coffins, then.

Disinter the bones.

An Absence

I

Korok.

And of Korok, Kazi or Brelum
Tekka or Tecta.

Libushka. Libushka
of Korok, a sybil.

Weleska said: our lady
Libushka is dead.

But let us continue to rule.

II

The tithes were refused.
The clergymen were assaulted.
Henry IV deferred to
The Bishop of Bremen.

Excommunicate (about '97)
And damned, the men
Of that region deferred
To the women.

III

“Hordes of devils are making for France!”
 (“The French, you know, are
 a restless and turbulent people.”)
 Run the country in absence
 Of Husband and Son?
 Libushka of Korok, a sybil.

IV

A toad the size of a goose or a duck.
 The rhetoric of crusades.