

## Green 532

### Selected Poems 1983–2000

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SELECTED POEMS 1983-2000

RANDOLPH HEALY



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*To my wife, Louise, and our children, Margaret,  
Florence, Genevieve, Beatrice and Theodore.*



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Green, at 532 nanometres, is the wavelength of light to which the human eye is most sensitive.



## Mutability Checkers

The full deck gusts outside the playground  
briefly forming an aerial house of cards.

I see a woodlouse chasing a tiger,  
and square pegs in square holes.

*An atom is the part of your throat that sticks out.*

*Every Sunday I am a bicycle.*

*Famous Dialogues* lie on a table.

Enter Socrates, winged by the medium's  
dot to dot. Solvent without solution,

ignoramus champ of all history,

I think of you sending away a would-be  
empiricist with a flea in his ear,

then sweeping to the end of the argument –  
reality as a series of diagrams.

Secateured titan, I dreamed a random river

whose surface's inflexions shimmered

with every possible geometry

where all-envisaging blindness hatched

and crossed as chance, swollen with potential,

surged against the given, sculpting a world

where botched and sublime bloomed without design.

## Vision

The pure fire which is within  
and does not burn  
flows out through the eyes  
and the motions caused by contact  
between objects and the visual stream  
produce in the soul sight.  
Plato.

Light and water:  
the fluid within which presses out their shape  
changes every four hours  
and tears salt as the sea  
in which eyes first appeared  
stop them drying out.

Intelligent camera.  
A dimple in the nerve tissue  
which forms before the brain  
will become the retina.  
Skin above a bulge in the brain  
becomes a lens.

1352. A church fresco in Treviso  
shows two mounted lenses  
their handles riveted together  
fixed before the eyes of Cardinal Ugone.

By 1600 opticians can be found  
in most of the larger towns on the continent.

The pure fire.  
I remember  
having been sent home from the hospital  
dashing back minutes too late  
for Margaret's birth.  
There she sat in Louise's arms

irises glittering  
like the sea alight with the early morning sky  
and like both of these containing no pigment  
the colour due to scattering  
spectral blue  
the blue of pure hydrogen's flame  
living cobalt  
the blue light streaming  
from her eyes into mine.

## World War II

Fifty five million people were killed  
at a cost per corpse of over  
a quarter of a million dollars,  
a third their weight in gold.

Which took a total firepower of three megatons.  
Which is the energy  
of a seven minute hurricane  
or of one hour of the world's tides.

Who got a mention?  
The history book names 117  
or one in half a million.

The advantages  
a rise in technology  
massive development in agriculture.

Indeed, by the equivalence of matter and energy  
the firepower condenses to the mass  
of a small potato.

How much does this represent  
of all the energy used in human history?

Compare an electric fire to an earthquake  
or a full stop to a small dog.

The graveyard would cover an entire city.  
The gold would fill

## Russian Tabernacle

A gold box one cubit high.  
Three of the sides are engraved.  
and every available surface studded  
with pearls, rough-cut rubies, emeralds and sapphires.  
This God's house is cheerier  
than a birthday cake dotted with Smarties.

At the back John sucks his beard  
while on his desk an eagle clutches an ink pot.  
Matthew's well is held by an angel  
while Mark and Luke make do with tables.

On the side at the right Jesus stands  
jug in hand as six men approach him  
the foremost caught leaning his cheek against the jug.  
Above is a dumpy hourglass figure  
with not so much cut as chipped and sanded  
rubies and emeralds stuck on.

On the left a minaret contains the trinity  
under which the other six apostles continue their supper.

At the front six ceramic scraps  
and two figures, one Mary, close in on a crucifix  
with a lovely little skull and some bones at its foot.  
Jesus is by now dead, his face no more  
expressive than that of a child  
conked out after a very long story.  
The cross is gold, the wounds made up.  
The six discs are the stations.

Above this the paraclete  
a wild hook-beaked predator  
its vision darkened by a tilting halo  
freezes in mid-burst through the surface.  
Dissent is death

and death itself is being gutted.  
At the corners of the roof  
four ordinary cherubs surmount  
little cubes with pearls on.

Over it all, toilet roll pink, pierced by a rod of gold  
and topped by a cross on a little globe,  
burns a raw fist-sized lump.  
Irregular surfaces vibrate, reflect,  
feed on the vitals, flicker joyfully.  
Tourmaline.  
This is the shape of faith beyond belief.  
This is the gate of the grave thrown open.  
The unachieved craftsman is saved.

## Storms

The reason my sister was screaming  
was that the cloth I had grabbed  
and used to mop up spilt black tea  
was our mother's unshakeable favourite.  
There was no going back.  
I hid it in the shed.

That evening, in an unannounced first  
my mother went out herself to get the coal  
and returned to swat me around the front room  
with the carbonned tanninned tea-cloth  
of enormous sentimental value.

There was anger  
glittering and transient  
as the colours in a just caught fish.  
Her last wish was that her ashes  
be brought back to Ardrossan.  
The ground is full of famous men.

## Poem in Spring

M-A-N  
spells  
and remains separate from  
man.  
A boy is following him,  
trying to keep in step.  
Success, then he begins to lag.  
And the difference increases  
until he has to make a small  
jump to get back in phase.

A king crab with a lighted tallow on its back  
pushed into a burrow by fishermen  
to frighten the rabbits into nets –  
Bembridge, Isle of Wight.  
Ends. Recall the very complex  
nimble cavorting of tiny bubbles  
as water is poured into a glass  
in a dark room.  
Hard to catch. Again.  
Lost in a library:  
a print of a painting in a cave near the White Sea  
three men ski-ing down a hill, laughing their heads off,  
19000 B.C.  
Noted, this time on a strand,  
“At night the unstable surface  
becomes more reflective”  
reads *silver on the dark*

Who saw a book?  
Who wanted to start from luminous statements  
and finally catch the world?  
Jump.  
The magnet effect,  
the attraction which two rhythms have for one another.

## *Arbor Vitae*

### I

But there were some good ideas knocking around,  
then, before the first word was spoken.  
History.

Two Dominican Sisters, Srs. Mary Magdalen O'Farrell  
and Mary Vincent Martin returned from France  
with a sign dictionary and a number of teaching texts, 1846.  
Fr. John Burke, Vincentian priest,  
Englished these resources, in addition making signs  
"softer and more feminine" for the girls  
and "bolder and more masculine" for the boys.

Acosh, sachó, ohacs.

I get up early in the morning.  
I wash my face and my hands.  
I put my clothes on.

Casoh, hasoc.

St. Mary's School for Deaf Girls,  
St. Joseph's School for Deaf Boys,  
both residential, only hundreds of yards apart,  
yet the lack of opportunity for contact between them  
led to separate "men's signs" and "women's signs".  
The difference between these became so great  
that a belief arose among the girls  
that another system had been brought from America for the  
boys.

Hosca, casho, scoha.

Hosac.

Start with radial strands, then go  
alternately anticlockwise up and clockwise down  
for four circumspins  
then anticlockwise all the way to the centre  
and home, sixty thousand individual movements later.  
Ocsha, sacoh.

If moved before the end  
will continue the web where it left off  
however useless either result.  
Günz, Mindel, Riss, Würm.

1946. Signing was no longer permitted  
in the Girls' School (1956 in the Boys')  
as oral methods became policy.

*Why learn a sign when they might learn a word  
question mark.*

At the same time, the City of London was subsisting  
on time lapse movies of William's Bon Chretiens  
(seed to fruit in sixteen seconds)  
lying hour upon hour in a poky flat  
waiting for just the right time  
being horribly aged by the wrong.

Write down the six combinations which begin with "CH".  
Then swap the "H" with the third, fourth and fifth letter,  
in turn, completing those twenty four which begin with "C".

Central doctrines:  
That true language is lingual;  
that one form of expression excludes another;  
that failure is due to lack of effort.

Socha, hacos, ahsoc.  
Out of the corners of our eyes we could see

a group pulling a plug of ice  
hundreds of feet long out of the ground  
trying to find out if the weather would hold.

Releasers of behaviour.

Transpose the “C” with each of the other four letters in turn  
for the full list of one hundred and twenty.

Today ,  
fifty years later,  
those still without language at the age of ten  
are classified as being multiply handicapped  
and transferred to a signing unit.  
Ask *them* what it’s like to have no native language.

*Use your voice.*

I will get up early in the morning.  
I will wash my face and my hands.  
I will put my clothes on.

Yes is open, two handed,  
contact of horizontal and vertical.  
No is a small, solitary, upright bird, closing.

Sohac, hasco, shoca.

In the omniscient landscape  
every event was plotted as a point  
all the lines between them exposed  
every action every thought knitted into one cloth.

Back at the party, not even bothering to check the price,  
we aimed lower, attempting to construe  
what it was that underpinned each gesture,  
assuming expression was an imperative,

even its evasion a loop in the autograph.

Shaco, cohas, ohasc.

Remove seat cushion,  
embrace, grasping loops with hands, float.

Since love is a gift,  
you cannot always choose what you get.  
And, since no purchase is required,  
no responsibility is accepted for any disappointment.

At that height, as if time had slowed,  
I could feel my eardrum  
vibrating like a puddle in the rain,  
and a sickening feeling as I realised  
that my car was not insured  
for any loss or damage directly or indirectly  
due to

sahco, hsoca, oshac.

How much of us have they translated?  
One or two pages of fragments.  
Good. But what progress?  
They think much of it is nonsense and the rest a sealed book.  
Excellent.

Acsho, scaho.

Deep signing is never used in front of hearing people.

I washed my face and my hands.

Total Communication,  
the simultaneous use of speech and sign,  
although in practice one atrophies  
at the expense of the other.  
Home is an array of data arising out of