

Wan-Hu's Flying Chair

RICHARD MARGGRAF TURLEY was born in the Forest of Dean in 1970 and moved to Wales when he was seven. He teaches in the Department of English and Creative Writing, Aberystwyth University.

Also by Richard Marggraf Turley

The Fossil-Box (Cinnamon, 2007)

Whiteout' co-written with Damian Walford Davies
(Parthian, 2006)

Wan-Hu's Flying Chair

RICHARD MARGGRAF TURLEY



CAMBRIDGE

PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING
14a High Street, Fulbourn, Cambridge CB21 5DH United Kingdom

All rights reserved

© Richard Marggraf Turley 2009

The right of Richard Marggraf Turley to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Salt Publishing.

Salt Publishing 2009

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Biddles Ltd, King's Lynn, Norfolk

Typeset in Swift 9.5 / 13

This book is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

ISBN 978 1 84471 443 8 hardback

Salt Publishing Ltd gratefully acknowledges
the financial assistance of Arts Council England



1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Contents

Landing Party	1
The Jade Corridor	3
Suiting Up	5
Spindrift	7
Moon Songs	8
1. Wan-Hu's Flying Chair	8
2. Elixir	9
3. Seventh Moon	10
Elisions	11
Forensics	13
Billiard Ball	15
Court Ladies of the Former Shu	16
Winter Wheat	17
Life Classes	18
1. Women's Hour	18
2. Female Nude with a Mask	19
Afterlives	20
1. Blink	20
2. Queen of Scots	21
3. News from the Dead	22
4. The Apparently Dead	23
A History of Explosions	24
1. Tail of the Devil	24
2. Wan-Hu	25
3. Kuzka's Mother	26
4. RX J0822-4300 (Neutron Star)	27
Castles	28
1. St Briavels	28
2. Goodrich	30

Three Palettes	31
1. In the Campo di San Polo	31
2. Untitled	32
3. Old Master	33
Harbouring	34
Umbels	35
1. Hush-Hush	35
2. Siren	36
3. Pang	37
Islands	38
Amulet	39
Thitherwards	40
Old Man of Tang	41
Beach	42
Garden	43
The Couple	44
Brothel Scene	45
View at Le Gras	46
A Guide to the Stars	47
Steerage	48
Delft Tile	49
Toads	50
Porcelain Dish	51
Dissolution	52
Vaulting	53
Where c is the speed of	54

Acknowledgements

'Elisions' won the *Keats-Shelley Prize* for poetry in 2007. 'Afterlives' first appeared in *Agenda*, 'Billiard Ball' and 'Overheard' in *Planet*, 'A History of Explosions', 'Amulet', 'Umbels' and 'A Guide to the Stars' in *Poetry Wales*, and 'Thitherwards' and 'Toads' in *The Wolf*. 'Delft Tile' was first published in *Whiteout*, with Damian Walford Davies (Parthian, 2006). 'Steerage' is a joint composition with Kelly Grovier and first appeared in *New Welsh Review*. 'Slip' was commissioned for a radio programme broadcast in 2008 on Resonance FM.

Landing Party

Saturday the second
we sailed from Salem,
laden with articles,

spankers brailed, the sea
a sweat of horned pout,
flying fish finning

like swallows. We laid into
the squall, seabirds
wheeling above the freak,

changing the sound of the sea.
A bucket of light loses
its brightness hoist on deck.

On the twenty-third,
we hauled our cargo ashore
with well-planed oars,

plantains and pumpkins,
up to our necks in the parallel
cries of tropick birds.

Around the ship, women
diving for sea-eggs, laid
out on the slimy black sand

with tripe and trumpet-
weed. A boar's head proved
the existence of pigs.

The women wore bracelets
and blue beads: roughly
with red faces, we begged

with others. In the shrubs
and creeping grass, they cut
our buttons for cocoa-nuts

and ears of corn, the air
beyond thermometers,
broken coral reaching

to fathoms. In the morning
we saw fewer birds,
our shot spent short of us.

The usual winds and weather,
skaerls and skarls,
flying fish like swallows.

The Jade Corridor

You draw me to the planes
of a pendant older than pyr-
amids. I think its furious

stillness would rest on
your neck like silk. I imagine
you drinking from a jade

cup, sipping the wine's
pulse, hems weighed by plaques
of open-work and pierced

buckles. A burnished disc
brings the relief of flat
surfaces, its rice-pattern

opening the way to realms,
where to think is to occupy
space. The daggers lack

cruelty, edges too soft
to part flesh. Further along,
a high cabinet, a phoenix

and pyre carved in atoms.
Even you draw breath
at the conundrum of curves,

the feint of cursives scratched
in bone. A final glass brings
fluted forms, a polished

wheel of words, a lidless
vessel, a suit of stone
to keep the dead at bay. Locked

in, we leave past a gold
head-dress, a hat with winged
creatures quivering on springs.

Suiting Up

These are the flooded salt-marshes, navigated by terns, and this, the hangar where

we store the suits. We've come a long way since the lace-ups of Mercury. You're looking

at the hard torso, bellow-jointed with a zipper. The helmet's the last shout, drinking straw

ready for the pull of lips. At first we thought hooks for hands, until we overcame

the problem of fingers with kevlar, rubberized tips for the impression of feeling.

You've found an optional wrist mirror. And those are nozzles for the nit-

rogen sighs. I urge you all, consider the weight of bodies, the delicious pitch and yaw,

water scaling off the pores. Any suit worth its salt should tighten like a corset.

You're alarmed; since the bladder
layer isn't pressured,
it won't 'pop' like balloons,

even if torn. That's quite it,
line up the parts—neck
to collar, shell to hinge, pin

to flange. The future's scrim
and chiffon, spandex stays
that push the breasts high,

impossibly. And the veil that hides
nothing, spaced inwardly—not
far off—the undarkening sky.

Spindrift

They hint at things, these
hen tracks, scratched over
the waves' clenched

fingers. On the wharf,
a woman faces the sea's whips;
she sees me, she doesn't

let on, or raise the gist
of smoke towards the bay:
inland, I hang words

in the filigrees of an apple
tree, a sugared bird churring
and I ask is it one slow

song, or many? Keying in
to its steady 0000, I catch surf,
the drogue's tow, a vessel

broaching to, far out. She's there,
drawing the moon's curtains;
unmoved, tidying the dark.

Moon Songs

1. WAN-HU'S FLYING CHAIR

High above the mulberry
lake, washed with ink,
after the waving peach

blossom and the blast, above
the storked stars, what if
you'd cratered, broken

the well of gravity—
what if you'd arrived?
Wan-Hu, over the winter

birds, what would you
have made of the mag-
nificent desolation, the dry

mass? And, peering down
on the earth's bone
china-blue, marooned

in the deepest deep, what
strange songs clanged ears
before the torture of air?

2. ELIXIR

She observes the willow-
pattern world from her
cold kingdom, her jade

land. Gods, falling
as rocks in the ears.
Do not trust them,

Chang'e. Orioles sing
and elmkeys float through
the chrysanthemums;

saffron steams above
the firepot. Wrinkles
in the cherry lake

fooled you into flying,
left Hou Yi cut below
the bow-bent moon.

3. SEVENTH MOON

Suspended in the black
egg, Niu Lang longs
for his girl across

the celestial river. There,
she weaves clouds ; and
he dreams of limbs

breaking the silk of
stars. Zhi Nu, meet her
on the magpie bridge,

feel again the elastic
collision of lovers,
the sky red over China.

Elisions

*The firm of Boulton and Watt sent 132 engines
to the Caribbean between 1803 and 1830.*

Since you ask how
it begins, it begins
with elasticity

of steam, with sun
and planet gearing,
wax and resinous

bodies. It continues
with inequality
of pressure, with want

of wind and water.
It's put to work by the fly-
ball governors, Gale

and Long, and the am-
iable Pennant. I am
a man of sector and rack,

quadrant glass; I
calculate the economy
of heat. No, not

of planter class
myself. Look, these
latest drawings regulate

the speed of an engine,
describe the action
of vapour. Here, the descent

in the cylinder, and,
figure c, the condensate
and vacuum—and here,

here we find the endless
reservoirs. Each night,
this dream of dark

bodies. My valves move
by gears very similar
to Smeaton's.

Forensics

What deceived us at first
was the distance between
them. The other con-

undrum, time, we cracked
by calling to mind flesh
maggots and the screw-

worm. That gave us five
days. You ask me, it was
she pitched the hike—

drawn, I imagine, *by the celeb-
rated light over the stairs
and spires*. Later, there must

have been cedar sparks
from the firepit, exploding
pockets of sap. Just picture

it. One minute, going
hammer and tongs; the next,
inundation, limbs every-

where, swollen sands rush-
ing through that dry bed
like nobody's business. How

do you drown in the desert?
After draining, the heat cured
them. Then insects, arriving

with their eggs. It takes
months, otherwise, for green
bones to push through.

Found them out on the plains,
some way north of the canyon's
throat. Hundreds of feet apart.

Billiard Ball

Consider the round-
ness of the proposition:

think into the chafe
of planes, the bag-

atelle of balls, of angles
and the bounce of promis-

cuous cushions, each
collision a memory-

less kiss, love
spinning into balk space.