Collected Poems

KENNETH ALLOTT (1912–1973) was a leading poet of the Thirties generation, publishing two collections of poetry: *Poems* (1938) and *The Ventriloquist's Doll* (1943). He was also the editor of the highly influential *Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse* (1950, rev. 1962). His *Collected Poems* has been out of print for a number of years, and this updated and revised new edition includes a significant number of poems either previously unpublished or not reprinted.

MICHAEL MURPHY is the author of three collections of poetry, most recently *Allottments* (2008), and his poems are included in *The New Irish Poets*. He is the author of a number of critical studies, including *Writing Liverpool: Essays and Interviews* (edited with Deryn Rees-Jones, 2007) and *Proust and America* (2007). He teaches at Nottingham Trent University and lives in Liverpool.

Collected Poems

Kenneth Allott

Edited with an introduction and notes by Michael Murphy

Cambridge

PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge CB21 5JX United Kingdom

All rights reserved

© The Estate of Kenneth Allott, 2008
Introduction and notes © Michael Murphy, 2008

The right of Kenneth Allott to be identified as the
author of this work has been asserted by her 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.

First published 2008

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 488 9 hardback

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

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

For Miriam

Contents

Acknowledgements xi
Introduction xiii
Note on the Text xxvii

POEMS (1938)
Men Walk Upright 3
Lament for a Cricket Eleven 8
Any Point on the Circumference 10
Sunday Excursion 13
The Statue 14
The Museum 15
Gnomic Verses 16
Lovers We Need 17
Offering 18
Request 20
Historical Grimace 21
Quicksilver 22
Pins and Needles 24
To Die Clean 25
Privacy 26
End of a Year 27
Never and Ever 28
Summer 30
Lullaby 31
Barometer 32
Azrael 33
Parable 35
Heroes and Hero Worship 36
Municipal Myth 37

The Plutocrats 38
Fête Champêtre 39
Exodus 40
Memento Mori 41
Prize for Good Conduct 43
Patch 44
The Watchman 45
The Professor 46
The Infinite Regress 47
Calenture 48
Aunt Sally Speaks 50

The Ventriloquist's Doll (1943)

Against the Clock 55
The Children 57
Love in the Suburbs 59
Love and Herbert Spencer 60
Christmas After Munich 61
Ode in Wartime 63
The Ventriloquist's Doll 67
Wedding Anniversary 69
The Medium 70
Morning and Evening 72
Ragnarok 76
Two Ages 77
Feast of Saint Swithin 78
Steering Line 80
Speech from a Play 82
The Memory of Yeats 83
The Map 86
Blackout 87

People are Real 88
City Nocturne 91
Elegy 94
The Situation 97
Out of the Dream 101

Uncollected Poems
Barking 105
Lake of Darkness 106
Patches on an Old Coat 107
Legend of a Good Woman 110
Lost Time 111
Poseuse 114
Farewell in the Afternoon 116
Week-end Guest 117
Dialogue of One 118
Hallow'een 121
Statement of Fact 122
Poem 123
Invocation 124
Signs 125
Valediction 126
Quicksilver 127
Cheshire Cat 128
Departure Platform 129
'The Inconsequence of the Old Collecting Ferns . . .' 131
Moon in November 134
For Action: This Day 135
Late Augustan 136
Typed with Two Fingers 137
Fable 139

Song *(from the Swedish of Pär Lagerkvist)* 140
'To Be Old and Feel Nothing . . .' 141
Sunday 3 a.m. 142
Song 143
February 144
Before Breakfast 145
'One Pain Cries in All Ages . . .' 147
'Words Are Not Subtle Enough To Say How It Is . . .' 148
Lilies of the Colne Valley 149
'He Could Not Sleep . . .' 150

Notes 151

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank John Fuller, Esme Miskimmin, Judith Palmer, Deryn Rees-Jones, Stan Smith, and Mrs Elizabeth Thomas for their invaluable help in the preparation of this book.

Introduction

Kenneth Allott was born in August 1912 in Glamorganshire, South Wales. He was the eldest child of Somerset-born Hubert Cyril Willoughby Allott and Rose, the third daughter of an Irish family, the Finlays, who had emigrated to Tyneside. Allott's brother, Guy, to whom he dedicated his second collection of poems, *The Ventriloquist's Doll*, was born two years later in the small lead mining town of Nenthead in Cumberland where Allott *père* was filling a temporary post with the London Lead Company as a doctor to the miners, some of whom after the outbreak of war in 1914 were Belgium refugees. Hubert Allott was called up in 1916, becoming a Captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps. Injured in France, he was promoted to Major and saw out the war at a convalescent camp in Whitchurch where, Guy Allott later reminisced, 'Batches of men who had grown fit again marched past our house on the way to the railway station'.[1] There must have been great excitement for the young boys in witnessing the spectacle of soldiers being transported back to the front. Equally, however, the men in the camp and the medical staff aiding them must have been acutely aware of the horrors to which they were being returned.

In 1918 the boys' parents separated. Allott's paternal grandfather had been an evangelical Protestant Rector in the village of Croscombe, Somerset, while his mother's family were devout Catholics. To ease their marriage, Allott's father had converted to Catholicism—seemingly without any real conviction. Rose's religion, however, meant that she refused him a divorce. This left her and the two boys who stayed with her in a precarious financial position. Guy Allott writes how she was forced to 'take in' elderly army officers and their wives to give her some money to live on. 'As we

seemed to have a lot of curries,' he says, 'I presume that many of them came from India.'

When he was twelve, Allot, along with Guy, was sent away to the Jesuit maintained prep school Beaumont College at Windsor. Allott was not a poet obviously given to the autobiographical, yet 'Christmas After Munich' allows us a glimpse into this period of his life:

> When we were younger Christmases always meant travelling—
> Stockport, Stalybridge, finally change at Northallerton.
> Christmas meant port wine and fruitcake, and High Mass at
>   midnight,
> The ribbons in missals, the children asleep next the pulpit,
> Headmasters' reports, 'continues to make steady progress,'
> The mistletoe jokes, the riddles, the dressing-gown stories,
> The side of our lives which nobody tells to reporters,
> Like the back of the moon, which is only a matter of guess-
>   work[.]

Allott was unhappy at the school, loathing in equal measure the dominant forces of religion and the military. Having abandoned his Catholic faith (adopting Voltaire's description of Ignatius Loyola as 'mad' in 'Aunt Sally Speaks' may have been influenced by his experience at Beaumont) he faced a blank, indifferent universe: while his scepticism about the efficacy of programmatic politics meant he was something of a political agnostic at a time better remembered for the clash of extreme views and beliefs. His sense of isolation was further reflected in the rather severe, aloof manner he adopted. Even his taking up smoking suggests unresolved tensions. On his sporadic meetings with his two sons his father ostentatiously smoked 'fat Turkish cigarettes' at a time when straightened circumstances had meant that Rose Allott had had to give up the habit. Holidays were spent either on the north Wales coast or visiting their maternal aunts in Newcastle. The move north became permanent after the death of Rose following a stroke. The brothers were taken

in by their aunts, leaving Windsor for the 'tough' St Cuthbert's Catholic Boys School. The move also signalled the last time they were to see their father.

Allott went on to graduate with first class honours from the University of Durham and Oxford where he gained a B. Litt for his work on the poet William Babington. It was at Durham that Allott had his first poems published in a university-produced anthology (re-printed here for the first time), while Oxford saw him growing in confidence as co-editor of the little magazine *Programme*. Between 1936 and 1939 he worked as assistant editor to Geoffrey Grigson on the influential *New Verse*, to which he was by now a regular contributor as poet and reviewer.

The Rhubarb Tree, a comic novel written with Stephen Tait, appeared from The Cresset Press in 1937. The following year saw the publication of his first collection of poetry, *Poems* (The Hogarth Press) followed five years later by *The Ventriloquist's Doll* (The Cresset Press). He later wrote two plays: the first, *A Room with a View*, on which he again collaborated with Tait, was an adaptation of E.M. Forster's novel and was produced at the Cambridge Arts Theatre in February 1950: the second, *The Publican's Story*, was produced in 1953.

For most of his adult life Allot was a teacher, first in adult education in Gateshead for a year during the war and then from 1948 as a lecturer in English literature at Liverpool University where he quickly gained a reputation as a witty, funny, amusing man whose commitment to his students was absolute. He was appointed Andrew Cecil Bradley Professor of Modern English Literature, a post he held until his death from lung cancer in May 1973. He wrote a biography of Jules Verne (1940) but as a scholar is perhaps best known for his work on Matthew Arnold: *Five Uncollected Essays of Matthew Arnold* (1953) and *The Poems of Matthew Arnold* (1965). He also edited the hugely influential *Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse* (1950, rev. and enlarged 1962). He wrote with Miriam Farris *The Art of Graham Green* (1951) and the two were married soon afterwards. They later collaborated on the *Pelican Book of English Prose: Victorian*

Prose 1830–1880 (1969) and on a posthumously published essay, "Arnold the Poet: Narrative and Dramatic Poems".[2] Miriam succeeded her husband as Chair in Modern English, and in 1978 she established the Kenneth Allott Lecture in Poetry. In 2008, the year Liverpool was designated European Capital of Culture, the Lecture celebrated its thirtieth anniversary.

Giving the first of the Allott Lectures in February 1978, Seamus Heaney talked about Allott's 'amphibious intelligence'. While Heaney was reflecting on Allott's life as a poet-scholar 'moving between creativity and scholarship',[3] it's difficult to imagine that he did not also have somewhere in mind his own 'Death of a Naturalist' with its schoolchildren who 'wait and watch until / The fattening dots burst into nimble- / Swimming tadpoles.' Grown to maturity, however, the tadpoles soon outgrow the school teacher's reassuring narrative of a stable family and society:

> [. . .] Some hopped:
> The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat
> Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.
> I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings
> Were gathered there for vengeance [.][4]

Though Allott's sometimes baroque language– or what Julian Symon's calls 'the inconsequential gaiety or horror, the sensational but intuitively apt imagery, of good Surrealist verse'[5]—is starkly different from Heaney's 'blunt' demotic, there's enough in even the most cursory of summaries of Allott's life to see some comparisons between his own experience of sectarian divisions within the family and global violence without, and its metamorphosis into the 'amphibious' life of poetry. Certainly Allott equated the two in the 'Knotted and clotted darkness' of 'Morning and Evening' from *The Ventriloquist's Doll*:

> [. . .] The summer lightning
> Flickered showing the frogs in the lily pond,
> The broken panes in the greenhouse like vowels missing,
> And the siren's warning
> Rising and falling.

Exactly a year before Britain's declaration of war in September 1939, *New Verse* published a double-issue which asked leading poets to declare their 'Commitments'. Allott's response, published alongside contributions from W.H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Frederic Prokosch, Herbert Read, Stephen Spender and Geoffrey Grigson, reflects something of his literary personality at the time, summarised by Bernard Gutteridge as 'too modish, too bright: . . . cynical and over clever'.[6] Though Gutteridge goes on to say that such a reading misrepresents Allott, nevertheless his opening salvo declares itself as defiantly individualistic:

> I do not know what I mean by society: perhaps Communism, Liberalism, Transcendentalism, Capitalism, Fascism, Humanitarianism: perhaps all the facts and objects and sub-topics, crosswords, bus stops, totalisators, Dean Inge, A.R.P., Louis Armstrong's trumpet, mushrooms, Rhodes Scholars, somebody else's poems: perhaps my wife and her cat, our relatives and neighbours, the people I work with, and then with greater and greater indistinctiveness the newspaper faces and minds — the fraudulent escaping financier, the labourer sentenced to the cat for brutal assault, Countess Haugwitz-Reventlow, President Benesh, the International Brigade, Roosevelt, tunny-fishing. Will anyone whose brain is not a hive for abstractions offer to do better than this?[7]

There's something here of Guy Allott's anecdote about the schoolboy Kenneth's tactics in the boxing ring: 'as soon as his fight started, he dashed out from his corner, lashed his opponent in the eye. His opponent burst into tears, Ken was declared the winner, and he was out of the ring'. So, too, is there something of what Stan

Smith says about New Verse being ‘dominated by the personality, preferences (and strong aversions) and the take-no-prisoners polemic of its curmudgeonly editor, Geoffrey Grigson.’[8]

Elsewhere in Allott’s contribution to the ‘Commitments’ issue of *New Verse* he speaks more directly of what it is poetry should commit itself to:

> Better to do something for your street, your suburb, your town, your country than to tremble like Keats or a leaf over the woes of continents or worlds.

And it’s this statement that Gutteridge quotes in his review of *Poems*, declaring that what runs counter to Allott’s ‘over clever’-ness is his being

> honest enough to write poems that do present his street, his suburb as he sees it—and does it completely enough to make it exciting—rather than make his admittedly uninformed guess at a Europe as it should be and as it will be if and when . . .

While Allott may have been wrong-headed in his opinion of Keats, whose training to become an apothecary (the forerunner of a GP) made him familiar with the principles and practice of surgery—a bloody craft at the time—Allott’s manifesto nevertheless tells us much about his commitment to poetry and to education. And if what he says suggests a pragmatic approach to poetry, as Kenneth Rexroth noted from across the Atlantic about the poets who clustered around Grigson, the results need not be utilitarian:

> Constituting as it did a technique of discretion and suppression, the flat, tightly cemented armor plate of stuff accumulated quite a head of steam underneath. Kenneth Allott and Bernard Smith, for instance, really have a lot of banked fire in them.[9]

Certainly the 'inventories of seascapes and city streets' that Rexroth saw as defining Grigson are present in Allott's work. Not everyone, though, saw the technique as building to a head of steam. Francis Scarfe, for example, remembered the 'deliberate lack of spontaneity' of Allott's early poetry, and his 'saving up individual lines and trying to insert them into new poems, which as a result sometimes creaked'.[10]

Rexroth's insistence of the utilitarianism of poetry need not lead us to think he is arguing that poetry communicates information like a public service broadcast. Rather, the influence of surrealism and other European movements such as *l'art pour art*, cubism, even Marxism contribute to what Rexroth calls

> the gospel of artistic impersonality . . . [I]t was almost universally taught and believed that the work of art was not communicative, was not 'about anything'. Instead, it should be approached empirically . . . as an object existing in its own right, a sort of machine for precipitating an 'aesthetic experience'.[11]

Such impersonality defines much of what Allott included in Poems, while acknowledging that he was not Mallarmé nor was meant to be. Instead there is an intention to dedicate himself to *sang froid* as much as *l'art pour l'art*: 'I sacrifice the flowering centuries / . . . / With such impeccable gesture and sentiment / as the stiff gods of the upper lip allow' ('Historical Grimace').

A different kind of stiff upper lip leads us to Allott's second collection, *The Ventriloquist's Doll*. A note to the collection says that the first five poems were written before September 1939, that is before Britain's declaration of war on Germany. 'Against the Clock' ('Against the clock, like the end of a school cricket match') picks up on both the most anthologised of Allott's poems, 'Lament for a Cricket Eleven', and the final line ('Till the clocks fly away') of a first collection that showed an acute, pained sensitivity to the passing of time. The poems that follow, 'The Children' and 'Love in the Suburbs', tell of domestic life and the kind of innocence which in

'Love and Herbert Spencer' sees the world as a 'Cloud-Cuckoo-Land / . . . boundless as when he was seven. / He is the love-child of luck to whom lovely things happen'.

'Love and Herbert Spencer' concludes with Spencer (the English philosopher who, after reading Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, coined the phrase 'survival of the fittest') being ironically addressed as 'Orpheus'. Such irony has no place in the poem that immediately follows, 'Christmas after Munich', with its litany of betrayed promises. The next poem, 'Ode in Wartime', tells of the impossibility of speech in a Europe at war with itself:

> O antique vistas of stone sarcophagi,
> Silent except for the stammer of literature
> Through millennia,
> [. . . .]
> O agnus mundi, baa-lamb inhabiting
> The inhibiting volcanic ranges of today [.]

The 'rhythms and stresses' of poetry are out of joint, or as Allott puts it 'out of the metre of time's way' and capable only of warning (or, indeed, tempting) 'like sirens of impending judgement'.

While it is too simplistic and complacent to see lines such as these pointing to Allott's own artistic silence after the war, we might nevertheless be minded that silence has its own way of being articulate. We need only think of Adorno's now infamous conclusion to his essay 'Cultural Criticism and Society':

> Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.'[12]

And though Allott was always too much the man of culture to allow himself to speak with the authentic voice of the barbarian, 'The Ventriloquist's Doll' can be read as an attempt at speaking in just

such a language. For as Steven Connor says:

> There seems no limit to the extremity of the violence that can be conjured up by the invisible voice, once freed from appearance or embodiment. . . . The voice of suffering, the suffering voice, allows suffering to be drawn apart, to be put into another body, the body of the voice. . . . The ventriloquial dummy will act in precisely this way, both to focus the threat of violence associated with the voice, and to contain it.[13]

'The Ventriloquist's Doll' is a poem riddled with images of violence, and yet it seems a poem rendered incapable of speaking clearly or cogently. The strain of surrealism in Allott's poetry may have been able to articulate the anxieties of the thirties: it was less capable of depicting the realities of wartime and the war-torn. Allott seemed aware of this, and at the end of 'Ode in Wartime' appears to have at least an eye on the plainer, public register of Auden's 'September 1st, 1939' or Yeats's 'Among School Children':

> Yet we who walk among the distorting mirrors,
> Whose hearts refuse even the empirical years,
> Must undermine our eye-grasp of defeat
>   And prove facts liars.
> Hope must be evergreen, and will distill
> Tinctures of promise from a retort of tears.
> Let the birds teach us who sing on parole, and sing
> Among the unmapped clouds and the sun's splinters.
> Or the children buoyant as corks in a sea of cares,
>   Whose behaviour says:
> 'Phosphor shall rise above a moon of sorrow
> And we shall know such a day as never was.
> Tomorrow or a day after tomorrow
> Do what you will and when, love whom you please.'

The Ventriloquist's Doll was Allott's last collection and much critical ink has been spilt over why this was so. Roy Fuller suggested that the war was to blame, creating as it did a chasm between the world of the thirties and the late forties. Francis Scarfe, meanwhile, touches on more personal reasons, citing how Allott's loss of faith and the breakdown of his first marriage had affected him deeply.[14] In his Allott Lecture of 1980, however, Donald Davie suggests that Allott's silence was willed. 'Poems do not have to be written,' he says. 'Though it's quite true that they originate in something mysterious, a visitation, the poet is at liberty to shut the door against his visitor, and even has the duty to do so when he knows or suspects that the visitor is a demon, not an angel.'[15] The argument against this is that Allott did not entirely bolt the door, as shown by the poems he wrote and in some cases published in the fifties. Nevertheless Davie's comments on these later poems is astute. He sees in them 'a style in which to lay himself open, open to being hurt: whereas his earlier styles had functioned as suits of rhetorical armour, inside which the poet, the speaker, could remain impregnable and unseen.'[16] This would certainly chime with what Allott himself said in the *New Verse* 'Commitments' issue, even if his conclusions differ markedly from Davie:

> I think a poet should have the ability to be thickskinned now and then so that he may grow. He works between the two poles of a callous indifference which petrifies the moral sense and a prickly over-sensitive barometer act to any outrage suffered anywhere by anybody. Both states are bad, but as far as producing poetry goes the latter is worse.

As I said earlier, many of the poems in *Poems* and *The Ventriloquist's Doll* can be defined as 'list' or 'catalogue' poems, what Scarfe describes as 'consist[ing] of piling up objects and images and activities in a stupendous way'. Such a technique is inevitable 'as soon as the poet steps out of the hoop of the compact lyric and looks about him.'[17] If Allott's pre-war poetry is defined by precisely this

stepping out of the hoop in order to pay attention to the local rather than 'the woes of continents or worlds', looking about after the war he would hardly have been alone in seeing little that he recognised. With whole streets, suburbs and towns reduced to rubble by the blitz, the poet found his or herself in a very different landscape—artistic, linguistic and metaphysical as well as geographical. And if Allott's pre-war poetry presented a version of English society as a kind of bohemian Cockaigne, an England that in his own description of the nineteenth-century poet Winthrop Mackworth Praed came in for the kind of 'idealization and distortion to which his idiosyncrasy submitted whatever came under his notice' and 'celebrates the vanities that sweeten . . . "birth, copulation and death"',[18] then such 'vanities' were harder to deal with with Allott's studied irony after the full horrors of the War were exposed.

Though Allott anticipated such difficulties in his essay in *New Verse*—'What *does* the poet say as two-legged animal with five senses? Very little, I suspect'—he could hardly have imagined just how much the Europe he goes on to describe—'Melancholy, *weltschmerz*, sunt lacrimae rerum, the Tchekovian afternoon with the eternal meaningless gestures'—was going to change. What replaces this epitaph for a world that even in 1938 couldn't have felt entirely lost is the soberer account in a poem such as 'The Inconsequences of the Old Collecting Ferns . . .' published posthumously in 1975:

> Knowing the civitas dei will never be built
> Knowing that time has its way with triumphal arches
> I prefer the shabby-genteel to a Fata Morgana
>   Of principled leisure
>
> I have made my bed with the second-rate and the trivial
> Which will not betray me to the cruel heroic

And after such knowledge we can only imagine Allott's thoughts turning to the work of a 'minor' poet such as Praed, in whom he

discerned a renunciation of ‘the Romantic artist’s seriousness about his poetic vocation: the prophetic stance, the intimations of immortality, the itch to be an unacknowledged legislator’.[19]

In his Introduction to the influential *Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse,* Allott writes how the war brought about changes in the ‘cultural weather’ which ‘conspired to produce an atmosphere in which all political optimism and idealism seemed childish’. Significantly, he provides a catalogue of those things which contributed to this atmosphere, and which it is instructive to read alongside the ‘weltschmerz’ of New Verse: ‘Militarism, bureaucracy, Russian foreign policy, the melted eyeballs of the Japanese at Hiroshima, weariness of slogans and propaganda lies, with a hundred other matters great and small[.]’[20] The movement is from the ‘poetic’ nineteenth century to the numbing horrors of a genocidal twentieth. What Allott clearly felt was that simply knowing this did not make it any easier to turn the knowledge into successful poetry: ‘One pain cries in all ages / But to cry in this / As seeing how it is / Means splintered teeth and rages’ (‘One Pain Cries In All Ages’).

If, then, Allott’s engagement with writing poetry after *The Ventriloquist’s Doll* was sporadic and far from secure, he remained a critic of both great insight and generosity. He also remained sympathetic and responsive to a younger generation of writers who had to wrestle poetry out of the detritus of war, the retreat of various European Empires and colonialism, the threat of nuclear extinction, and the doublethink of the Cold War. The forties, he wrote, produced a poetry that was ‘either dark, prolix, and unnecessarily involved . . . or a lisping “silly sooth”’. The comparison between that decade and the next could be summarised by reading Dylan Thomas’s ‘Fern Hill—‘the naivetes and nostalgias of childhood’—alongside Larkin’s ‘I Remember, I Remember’—‘a highly self-conscious performance’ in which ‘How far the poem is personal in

any sense is left an open question'.[21] The poetics of the fifties he designated as 'poetry of the unenthusiastic imagination . . . something is said positively in well-turned phrases, the movement is sedately brisk, the air is hygienic'.[22] Such gentility was all to change, of course, with poets such as Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath (both of whom—in particular Plath—are championed by Allott) who were to exemplify the kind of poetry advocated by Al Alvarez in *The New Poetry*, which first appeared in the same year as the revised edition of Allott's anthology. Indeed, the praise Allott singled out Plath for—that her 'poetic gift was a civilised one without being at all weak or precious'—can be held up as an epitaph for the best of his own writing.

Notes

1 For this and much of the material concerning Allott's early life I am indebted to Mrs Elizabeth Thomas, Guy Allott's daughter, for sending my a typescript of her father's unfinished memoir.

2 See Kenneth Allott, ed., *Matthew Arnold* in the *Writers and Their Background* series (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976).

3 Seamus Heaney, *The Makings of a Music: Reflections on the Poetry of Wordsworth and Yeats* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1978), 1.

4 Seamus Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 16.

5 Julian Symons, *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved* (London: The Cresset Press, 1960), 95

6 Bernard Gutteridge, 'Kenneth Allott: Realism and Modishness', *New Verse* (January 1939), 23–24. I'm grateful to Stan Smith's essay 'New Verse / Twentieth Century Verse / Seed' for revealing the identity of 'B.H.G.'. Smith's essay is to be published in Peter Brooker's 3 volume *Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines* (O.U.P. forthcoming 2008–2010). Further details of the Modernist Magazines Project can be found at

http://www.cts.dmu.ac.uk/exist/mod_mag/index.htm.

7 Kenneth Allott, 'Several Things', *New Verse* (Autumn 1938), 4–7.

8 Stan Smith, '*New Verse / Twentieth Century Verse / Seed*'

9 Kenneth Rexroth, *The New British Poets: An Anthology* (A New Directions Book, n.d.), ix.