

David Wevill

*Collected Later Poems*

SAMPLER

BY DAVID WEVILL

*Penguin Modern Poets 4* (with David Holbrook & Christopher Middleton,  
Penguin Books, 1963)  
*Birth of a Shark* (Macmillan / St. Martin's Press, 1964)  
*A Christ of the Ice-Floes* (Macmillan / St. Martin's Press, 1966; Tavern Books, 2016)  
*Firebreak* (Macmillan / St. Martin's Press, 1971)  
*Where the Arrow Falls* (Macmillan, 1973; St. Martin's Press, 1974; Tavern Books, 2016)  
*Casual Ties* (Curbstone, 1983; Tavern Books, 2010; Shearsman Books, 2022)  
*Other Names for the Heart: New & Selected Poems 1964–1984* (Exile Editions, 1985)  
*Figure of Eight: New Poems and Selected Translations* (Exile Editions, 1987)  
*Figure of Eight* (chapbook; Shearsman Books, 1988)  
*Child Eating Snow* (Exile Editions, 1994)  
*Solo With Grazing Deer* (Exile Editions, 2001)  
*Departures: Selected Poems* (Shearsman Books, 2003; 2nd edition, 2013)  
*Asterisks* (Exile Editions, 2007)  
*To Build My Shadow a Fire: The Poetry and Translations of David Wevill*  
(edited by Michael McGriff, Truman State University Press, 2010)  
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*Selected Poems of Ferenc Juhász* (with *Selected Poems of Sándor Weöres*,  
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David Wevill

Collected  
Later Poems

1974–2021

Shearsman Books

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*Child Eating Snow*  
(Toronto: Exile Editions, 1994)

*Solo With Grazing Deer*  
(Toronto: Exile Editions, 2001)

*Asterisks*  
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VILLA BLANCA

RINCONES & OTHER POEMS

1974-1981

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## Con Ansias

*(For Alberto de Lacerda)*

Burning nights ... Juan de la Cruz  
escaping from the cell in Toledo  
down the wall, into the arms  
of the friendly sisters ... read his poems

aloud as the chain  
ate into his flesh. Praised even the fishes  
the harshness of summers at  
high altitudes. Desire to give back

to his maker the unwanted body, corpus, corpse  
mutilated later by the teeth and hands  
of worshipers. An arm and a leg

as relics, the rest enshrined elsewhere.  
For one moment of love in the garden with his beloved.  
Desire the rushing of water under stones.

## Spain

North wind at stalemate with the sun. Acorns  
dropping where the wind has touched the oak tree.

You spent too much time living others' lives  
Casually, as if detached from them. You've

earned the silence you wanted. Now  
listen to the replay ... broken glass

underfoot across the red tile floor  
of an abandoned police barracks high above the sea.

There is no entry point  
no exit wound. But to come here now and think

why such stress still flickers about us like thin rain  
the victims dead and gone. You held your sex

like a bouquet of lilies, close to your face.  
You gave yourself away at noon like a bride.



## Rincón of the heady abstractions

Densities: a summer in the country  
like other summers in towns  
measured by one light or another  
that comes or refuses  
reek of old earth. This

corner has no exit. If I remember  
it is satisfaction of remembering & not  
even a body or face to go  
under for, strings in my hand  
vibrating still with earth's winds.

Orpheus is too old to meet his question.  
Above & below there are greater  
certainties than love  
remembered, a person. Blood  
hardened like an old cat after many wars  
now stretched out asleep in the sun.

In the country we learn silence  
but among friends we are too talkative,  
our gossip is old, what  
news we must invent. We are painkillers.  
We kill for pain & kill the pain  
of those things we kill.

In towns this summer the country becomes  
whatever age it wants to feel:  
the spirit of independence, freed  
by choice to choose lies. Lakes  
edged by spruce & fir will always be backgrounds.

# OTHER NAMES FOR THE HEART

1981-1984

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## Child Sketch in Crayon

Two trees in full leaf, one  
with the mouth of an owl's nest  
halfway up the trunk. On a field of grass

seven flowers stand in a row  
red, yellow, blue. The sky is filled  
with simplifications of blackbirds or crows

and an eighth flower now  
tucked against the tree trunk hides itself.  
Someone has slashed the tree

deeply near its base, and she left  
the sky white so the birds could fly  
or because she did not want to fill

that whole space where blue is infinite  
and doesn't belong. Love  
is practical, of things, a color, a form

at the edge of what's possible  
crying not to be released or made  
perfect, but held, held there where it holds

itself in its own arms  
which is what sleep is  
when your dreams do not threaten the sun

– to learn caution with age, but what  
is the metaphor for  
terror? That you have outlived

the self you thought weak  
but precious  
and now the hard frost

where eloquence imagined a thousand colors  
plucking the wind

the eye is a wind

it rises, it dies  
the shadow she left in the grass  
refuses to move. You'd need a thousand years.

SAMPLER

FIGURE OF EIGHT

1987

SAMPLER

SAMPLER

## Making Plans

*I worry too much about the sound  
of wind*

*happen I sent those messages too late  
to attract what scars need  
reopening*

*a dog now, a dog  
but in winter the temper can turn  
dangerous*

*distance is precisely the will  
it takes to cover it*

*but without masks how can we meet  
and equal ourselves*

*in space above cloud cover  
two shadows slipping past missing  
each other's grip*

*tremblingly  
intentionally  
with such regret.*



*For A.G., Both S.W.'s and A.M. the figure of morning*

SAMPLER

## FIGURE OF EIGHT

“Mientras la sombra pasa de un santo amor”

ANTONIO MACHADO, *Del Camino*

“...this essential nothingness of the  
imagined object...”

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

“It’s one thing to love New York  
It’s another thing to live there  
Baby I know you’re lonely”

SAM HIGGINS, ‘Baby I Know You’re Lonely’

SAMPLER

## Premonition

She kicks off her jewelled sandals.  
The rain will wash her feet.  
The long hair of the rain  
will hide her eyes. Any moment  
the way is lost and must be looked for  
without footsteps, the gaze  
always the gaze, breaking  
through heavy cloud. Wild animals  
living the night through their eyes  
as we live by fire, whisper  
this is not the way. Turn east, turn west  
plod north or glide to the south  
it is all one where the spirit stands  
barefooted in the rain  
waiting. She gathers the young trees  
and eats them leaf by leaf  
drinking the rain. Blood collects  
in the footprints she leaves behind.  
On Broadway the lights flash out her name  
a hundred years from now, the  
wind that turns the rain-wheel  
rises and dies, circling her feet.  
She moves as a flute breathes  
through all the stops and ghosts of air.  
The lights flare in our bone-cells.  
It rains as it never rained.

SAMPLER

## FIGURE OF EIGHT

“En la bendita soledad, tu sombra”

ANTONIO MACHADO, *Del Camino*

“That girl standing there”

W.B. YEATS

SAMPLER

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# I

Frost a little like Yeats  
a great poet no one wants to be  
caught dead sounding like

and Pound might have got it wrong  
but Lowell's excursions into history  
were fruitless, mirrors just

to magnify the self  
and diminish the anguish of time

What Pound suffered at last with the Jews  
was incarceration and the threat of death  
the wages of love, to survive this

but eventually the stories get told  
yours, mine, in whispers or through  
that silence which is terrifying

because it is "its own nothingness"  
the gap in the journey that annihilates  
the entire road. So far one goes

has gone, must come again  
to where the pathway and the feet  
are identical, and you are not

the figure lost or I the shadow left.



## II

That afternoon  
the rain came  
riding the back of the wind  
we watched, naked behind the screen  
and couldn't make love, the wind and rain  
did it for us, and you sang  
a love song from your village  
it moved in the wet air and rush  
of water through leaves and grass  
the trees shook their ankle bells  
and flung their hands  
"an unbroken continuity  
of existence in itself"  
to borrow words from Jean-Paul  
who was as remote from that moment  
as you are gone now  
beyond the Manhattan skyline  
city, city, the great divide  
the "empty world of laughter" as you put it  
to walk out in the lamplight  
as the snow drifts down  
a hundred years ago  
an hour from now  
"for the most beautiful girl in the world  
can offer only what she has"  
that circle of light in the dust  
which Lakshman drew around Sita  
to protect her from her story  
the imperative of her own fate  
the passion of rain falling  
bent-headed into open hands

but she went back under the earth  
and Rama grew tired of life  
and crept to the river's edge  
and vanished as a fish slips through its ring.

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## A Perfect Stranger

SAMPLER

SAMPLER

## Interstice

Deep as it appears to have gone  
the way lies deeper

depth of rivers, depth of eyes  
depth of hidden intentions

the hazy wind, the *amargo*  
sea wind flutters in the tv aerals  
above the village

some things move slightly  
and others soar, it is all one body  
a scarab, a mountain swift

the goats are coming down the mountain  
leaping and jumping over the rocks  
the thorny bushes

somewhere not in sight  
a car is burning by the side of a road

nothing is there to watch it but these words

## Patterns Leaves Make

The adams and eves are in the gallery.  
In separate rooms the light changes  
differently, my  
remorse, a clock  
running down.

In sugar maple weather  
hands taste sweeter.  
I dream I believe. A dusky skin  
glows between buildings, moves  
just out of reach. Your breath

is the silence it takes to speak  
what is listened for  
but might change. As a painting  
turns from you and re-enters  
the landscape it came from

or that face  
already moving away  
to ask its question somewhere else.

Of the light in the park.  
Of one particular tree.  
A perfect stranger.

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## Full Moon Story

“¿Eres la sed o el agua en mi camino?  
Dime, virgen esquiva y compañera.”

ANTONIO MACHADO, *Del Camino*

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I

Mother, cradling the sky  
in your loose blue sleeves  
wind arrows the yellow wheat  
forever, it seems, in one direction  
and I walk behind you

You never turned  
to ask me who I am  
I am unidentified still  
a man without identity, a  
father without speech, words, for his daughters

And the water continues to flow  
Kitaro, under Fujiyama  
the owl, the tuk-too, flute-calls  
peace, love, the innocence that is evil  
the evil that is tolerable

because it is lovely.  
I am free to write  
my question-mark in your womb  
curled, the foetus, as my hand lies  
curled against your thigh

hoping for a second birth  
the touch that failed, the touch that  
flashed between us in late May  
two people alone, each wanting  
the lost half of the world in the other's body

Chords of electronic wind  
frenzy the bamboos by the mountain stream  
the water's nipples rising

like raindrops, like small fish  
nestlings cheeping for food

The music is over. The music is gone  
with your song in the far distance  
I think I can't reach. My clothes  
smell of yesterday's bed  
and today's carpets. The nerves

are steadier than they should be.  
I am strong, strong  
with the strength of the weak  
who must stay still to survive  
or of the very powerful

whose mere gestures can destroy.  
I am the monster you gave birth to  
so gladly. The one so full  
of hunger even the stones  
aren't safe. The music is over

and the wind returns  
formless, inhuman. Give me back my name  
to play with again. I  
gather you in my arms. I gather  
emptiness, as a dancer gathers eyes.

SAMPLER

# CHILD EATING SNOW

1994

SAMPLER

*for Guit, and the road to Campillos*

SAMPLER

## Baby Upside Down in a Light Snowfall

The ones we know and recognize  
through the flame, they smile and are gone  
before we can name them As memory is  
what otherwise we would forget  
what cries for forgiveness.  
The mouths the tiny mouths of snow that burn us.  
The white nails of our mothers playing us wildly angrily.

SAMPLER

## Blue Fur Hood

Here are my eyes. Almost all the mirrors  
are gone from the house, what I see  
wherever I look, is myself  
multiplied, in all possible forms.

So, in the light snow falling, I think of you  
and reach for the telephone, your voice  
furred with air of unbroken animal time  
inside the wind. My brother's death

meant winter all over again, the dark eyes there  
this time, like holes in the snow, cooing of Inca doves  
lost in white smoke. *Being dead is*

*hard work* I remember from one of the Luino  
Elegies. And also, *Every angel is terrifying*  
in your breath's voice, white across thin blue air.

## Christopher

I know what it cost him to be born  
In the likeness of a younger brother  
walking behind us, aware  
of the backs and backs of heads  
and running feet going past him  
and the dark humorous forgiving eyes  
waiting for someone to turn  
and wait for him to follow  
because he never chose to walk ahead  
though his legs were longer than ours  
his head inches taller, his brain  
at least as good. When our mother died  
young, of cancer, he was too green  
he was not prepared for her memory.  
In every shadow there is still  
a picture of her face:  
and the shadows he saw as he, young  
lay dying of cancer last March  
must have been too frightening  
for him to ask me to name them.  
Our love lay not with language  
but with silence. There is a speech  
the grass breathes for us. It is summer  
and the wind coming off the hills of the Gatineau  
is filled not with sorrow but with time.

# SOLO WITH GRAZING DEER

2001

SAMPLER



*Presence is just a special case  
in the category of absence.*

—Roberto Calasso, KA

*Deer graze here each morning  
for you harm nothing.*

—Du Fu

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## The River That Drowned

Years ago when I was a child in Japan  
there were no seasons I can remember.  
There were always soldiers in the streets  
and children wore black uniforms to school.

In our high garden above the valley  
of small houses, I was at home. There  
were Christmases, the birth of a sister  
parties with paper hats, lawn tennis, skiing

in the winter mountains. By then  
the armies were deep in China, towns were burning.  
I remember helping the gardener, my friend  
wind the khaki cloth puttees around his shins

before he went off to drill in a dusty field  
below the house. I was at war  
with no one, only the English neighbour boy  
who'd come to play and hogged my favourite toys.

There are films my father made recording  
some of this. I rescued what I could  
of the old 16mm reels, cracked, spliced  
and faded, and had them compressed to a brief

video memento. The wide-eyed child my self  
survives there in a world his parents remembered  
too fondly to ever feel quite whole again  
in the deeper snows of Canada we came to

before the armies moved south out of China  
before the murders in Asia, the bombs on  
Hawaii, the killings back westward across  
the islands, the last incredible fires.

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## Lamp

While I was dreaming inside my flame  
the wind bit at the edges of my teeth  
and I thought I could see in the dark –  
it was your word against mine.

Though they had broken shattered pieced together  
Dresden and Hiroshima  
Coventry London Guernica  
the shadows you left wouldn't move.

So in Robert Capa's photograph  
of a street in Bilbao in 1936  
eight women and men and a young girl  
look up at the sky at where German bombers

are coming. So it might have been  
a little before dawn when a boy not quite one  
woke up in a white crib in Yokohama  
and saw shadows cross the ceiling of his room

– the world had soft bones  
and old and brittle bones  
and from time to time the light falls  
exactly where the body runs to hide.

## *Sabi*

I feel my rust beginning.  
It is inside me and between my fingers  
a slow cold itching, like distant rain.  
Or brown eating at the edge of a leaf  
which is the light withdrawing  
the mirror withheld  
the air's child that hides.

The sun tests the future with a tentative hand.  
I know the gender of water, the cold  
beginning of memory under the long evening light  
that comes to no fulfilment but itself.  
The light that keeps returning has no language.  
I am content to remember how you breathed.

SAMPLER

## Memory and Season

Somewhere between here and Japan, the summer wind rises  
as delicate as a salad made by her hands.  
It was a loss of heart we were thinking about  
when pain killed the child too far away.  
How often, brother, lying under the stars  
you have returned to now, how often and  
in all fairness did her soft cry warn us  
too soon or too late?

SAMPLER

ASTERISKS

2007

SAMPLER

*For Guit, who is here*

SAMPLER



\*

1.

Shredded pulp, glue  
of history,  
page upon page  
pressed flat. In every word  
in and between each cry

a body, a some  
one, not  
clothed or naked or named

Let the sun  
attend to this  
fingers of concrete  
feet spared the grass

Cut us doors less tall  
so we may enter on our knees

Look down Look down.

\*

2.

They're digging the field  
that took them in  
from exile in the sand

The man bent double can see  
where a woman  
lay down with her child

Ant, she sings  
come home  
to where  
distress has no other smell

now, ever.

SAMPLER