

Shadow Box

SAMPLER

First published in the United Kingdom in 2023 by  
Shearsman Books  
P.O. Box 4239  
Swindon  
SN3 9FN

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office  
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB  
*(this address not for correspondence)*

[www.shearsman.com](http://www.shearsman.com)

ISBN 978-1-84861-848-0

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## THE CURIOSITIES OF DR HUNTER

Dr Hunter's cabinet of marvels  
polished to a high gloss  
frames the body parts of beauties  
a nymph

dry-pinned  
the sheen of a carapace  
the startling sash of brilliant wings  
fixed under mirroring glass

Neptune beetle made up of parts  
head and thorax of a true Scarab  
staked to paper  
a recipe for a fake

or an invention  
for the naturally curious to unravel

as Lady St Aubyn's gift  
of Cornish ores  
(the raw core of tin mines)  
was an invitation to know the ground

the mineral heart of his collection  
six hundred jaspers agates  
translucent as insect wings  
lucid amber traders' gems

quartz in a chert concretion  
one of Pocock's petrified melons  
delicious but inedible  
case of mistaken identity

and identification  
was the name of the game  
God's perfect arrangements  
thrown into doubt

by the fossil sequence  
unearthed  
from coal measures or limestone  
Cuvier's proof of extinction

Corals insects shells  
the wealth  
of Dr Fothergill's collection  
a purchase on nature's profusion

the *Endeavour's* prize flower  
and artifice of southern oceans  
the materia of a living culture  
or relics for an age of wonder?

for his antiquarium a case  
of the long-gone swaddled dead  
(grave good was to come of it  
and did)

all manner of curiosities  
even Linnaeus



original of the collecting mind  
preserved here a bronze medal

beside the image of fortune  
a mother with her sun king  
embraced in a silver roundel  
bulbed as a pregnant womb

The core of the matter  
in the doctor's mind  
(before the Rembrandts  
the Hogarth engravings)

manuscripts incunabula  
historical medical treatises  
books as hooks to hang his thinking on  
anatomical samples

wet specimens and dry bones  
diseased and intricate as coral  
the bony eminence  
of a skull deformed

*the anatomy of the human  
gravid uterus*

ravaged yet no grave goods  
for his cabinet of curiosities

(though the book's a cabinet too)

a woman    nine months pregnant  
newly dead    cut open in secret  
revealed in cross section  
on the page's two dimensions

a natural object    unidentified  
(habitat London    Camberwell Beauty?)  
her death    an instruction  
for science    and the safety of royals

Jars    drawers    trays of glass  
wood sheened to high gloss  
to polish off the stain of rumour  
a shimmer

as if the body of knowledge  
were exposed    flayed to muscle

the man of natural curiosities  
(up-and-coming anatomist  
obstetrician to royalty)  
makes his own entrance

in history    (reputation intact)  
a man of science    winging it  
among butterflies and body parts  
and his own death mask