

SAMPLER

Song of the Constant Sea

Also by Richard Owens

Poetry

Delaware Memoranda (Blazevox 2008)

Embankments / Outtakes / Uppercuts (Blazevox 2010)

Ballads, 1st Edition (Habenicht Press 2012)

No Class (Barque Press 2012)

Ballads, 2nd Edition (Eth Press 2015)

Poems (Blazevox 2019)

Criticism

Sauvage: Essays on Anglophone Poetry (Blazevox 2019)

SAMPLER

Song of the Constant Sea

SAMPLER
Richard Owens

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2021 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
PO 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

ISBN 978-1-84861-791-9

Copyright © Richard Owens 2021

The right of Richard Owens to be identified as the author of this work
has been asserted by him in accordance with the
Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.
All rights reserved.

SAMPLER

For our Little C

SAMPLER

Finding home where home is not—what
exile utterly shreds the chest—what remains
of the womb—these last vestiges of sound
and stone that smack of an old familiarity.

Ancient is a word. It tells us that we were
not the first—not by a long shot—not when
migration drags us like iron shavings
across the surface of a sphere too many
poets caught the movement of—and the sea
was never me—was never mine—but the
rivers that drain into it and the mountains
that flank them so flagrantly—these belonged
to mine—ours—the Delaware curling down
from Hancock—the nexus where Pennsylvania
—place my Father was born and New York
where he worked and New Jersey where my
Mother traces her people back to the farm land
along the banks—Bloomfield—landed
gentry and when the land went bad they took
their name to the factories just to feed themselves.

What could such place be to we. Old familiarity
—that of a stranger—estrangement—a woe
and discomfiture unsuited to such a fragile set
of bone and flesh—the mind as much a part
of all that as the foot or knee that listens as do
the ears—and under what stars do we see
our sign when influence was according to the
ancients an ethereal fluid that flowed forth
from the stars and each according to their lights.
The sea is not for we. Simply put. But I stand
as witness to it—the lobstermen here in Maine
—in Harpswell—that village when it takes
a village to raise an idiot like me when way back
we imagined the world in its worlding when
we said the whole of this Earth is a global village.

On the Devil's Back Trail in Harpswell
I watched with my family seals upon a rock at
the center of Long Cove—a stone between one
shore and another—the water salt not fresh like
my Mother said we were when we told lewd
jokes that made her blush—but that was in Jersey
—not far from the banks of the Delaware where
my Brothers and I swung off a rope and into
the river at a stretch of bank inhabited by Colonel
Hairtrim who lived in an old camper just off
the Old Mine Road where somewhat recently my
Father and I stood in total awe at the final
resting place of a veteran of the Indian Wars
—the remains of a cemetery stitched to what once
was the Minisink Church and no longer stands
which is how history and exile and home do work
or at least that is the labor they perform as when
in Amazing Grace they say the Earth shall dissolve
like snow—and tonight here in Scarborough
it snows on this day—23 March 2020—and the
plow trucks rumble up and down the road scraping
the asphalt and throwing sparks into the weather.

Mike Basinski used to tell me the only thing
Jonathan Williams ever cared to talk about was
the weather—and even when I spoke with him
back in 2007 all he talked about was the weather
and that was in June and he said everything was
lush—and he had the photographer Reuben Cox
out behind the house on Scaly Mountain
at Skywinding Farms—Highland—North Carolina
—he had Reuben Cox pulling weeds and there
was a tall weed I pulled from the ground that day
my Father and I drove wildly up the badly asphalted
Old Mine Road—a road built along an old Native
American foot trail that went back centuries if not
millennia—and that weed—which I just caught

out of the corner of my eye as we rumbled past it was Common Mullein which I capitalize here if only because it was and is a staple ingredient in North American Native American knik-knik—the miscellaneous herbs Native Americans blended with their tobacco—and we—US Americans—regard the plant as a weed but it has overwhelming healing properties—the respiratory system in particular—to offset the harm of smoking as such and I wondered then and I wonder now why after I pulled that weed and dried it and smoked it—I wondered why American physicians—all of whom took the Hippocratic Oath—I wondered why American physicians who swore to do no harm would send us to the horror of pharmacies rather than send us to supermarkets or into the woods. Steve Jobs—the creator of the touch screen—used to say: If food is not your medicine then medicine will be your food. But our doctors fed us heroin and we lost friends and we lost family members and the doctors still send us to pharmacies rather than supermarkets and forests—and they do terrible harm slicing us open and stuffing us with hyper-processed pills when many Native American communities were capable of healing cancer with song and dance and what the forests offer gladly as gifts. We are slow to learn—but the Old Mine Road teaches and it taught me that day just a year or so ago when I traveled it with my Father as Fathers often do. Jonathan Williams traveled through the forests of North Carolina with Reuben Cox photographing the remains of log cabins built by Joe Webb—a master of the art. My Father lives in a cabin he and my Brother and some friends built with their bare hands after a crew came up to Jersey from Tennessee and assembled the hand-hewn logs like Lincoln Logs.