

Collected Poems
& Sequences
(1981-91)

Bill Griffiths

Edited by Alan Halsey

REALITY STREET

Published by
REALITY STREET
63 All Saints Street, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 3BN
www.realitystreet.co.uk

First edition 2014
All rights remain with the estate of Bill Griffiths
Additional material copyright © Alan Halsey, 2014
Typesetting & book design by Ken Edwards
Cover image from a hand-coloured copy of *The Book of the Boat* in the collection of Allen Fisher

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-874400-65-3

Preface

This volume is the successor to Bill Griffiths' *Collected Earlier Poems (1966-80)*, extending the account through the following decade. During the 1970s Griffiths had lived mainly in London, publishing much of his work through his own Pirate Press while also closely involved with Writers Forum and the Consortium of London Presses. The 1980s saw him move to Cowley, Middlesex, where he lived on a houseboat until its destruction in a welding-shop accident. There followed an itinerant period, spent partly on a caravan site at Brightlingsea, preceding his final move in 1990 to Seaham, County Durham. In the previous year he had founded a new imprint, Amra, initially publishing a backlog of poetry and prose. A distinct juncture appears in his work in 1991: once he had settled in Seaham the history, dialect and ethos of the north-east became his main focus. Griffiths was above all a poet alert to, inquisitive about and absorbed in his surroundings; in the later 1980s those had principally been his boat, the London waterways and the Thames estuary.

The earlier phase of his poetry was remarkable for the sheer quantity of work mostly published in short-run pamphlets which permitted frequent revisions and re-sequencing. The period 1981-86 shows a stark contrast: just three collections of new poems and relatively few magazine appearances. Most of the poems collected here were first published, and probably written, in the prolific years 1987-91 and practically all published by Writers Forum and Amra in very small editions. Many have not previously been reprinted and since this includes all the longer sequences, at least in intact form, there has been no widely available overview of the extraordinary compass of Griffiths' work in this decade.

The largely chronological order of poems in the collection for 1966-80 offered the soundest editorial approach to the textual mutability, interrelations and cross-reference of the 1970s pamphlets. A similar order was also an option for 1981-91, founded on the 'collected poems' which Griffiths assembled on digital files in 1991 and expanded in 1996. But since this would have dispersed the careful, coherent and self-contained gatherings evident in the pamphlets of this period it has seemed a preferable chronology to present the work as it appeared in those successive publications. Exceptions have been made to avoid repetition – *Quire Book*, for example, is reprinted here in its later appearance as Part 1 of *A Book of Legends*. In comparison with the earlier poems this 1980s work is textually stable although migrations and variations of passages persist, most notably in *The Book of the Boat*, *Morning Lands* and *Quire Book/A Book of Legends*, sequences sufficiently interrelated to need considering en bloc. Sections and excerpts

from these and other longer poems were republished in revised versions, sometimes newly titled and without reference to their previous incarnations, in retrospective collections such as *Future Exiles* and *The Mud Fort*. Most appear here in their original form but readers will need to refer to the end-notes for significant variants and exceptions. The Amra miscellanies *North Scenes* and *Joanne's Book* (1992 and 1993) are included since they are entirely retrospective. A few poems dateable to 1991 but re-sequenced in later pamphlets have been held over for future collection.

Thanks again to Joanne Harman for her permission to publish this book. Thanks also to everybody whose enthusiasm for Bill Griffiths' poetry has been a constant encouragement and especially those who have given crucial advice and textual help: Fred Beake, Steve Clews, Marc Vaubert de Chantilly, Ken Edwards, Allen Fisher, Harry Gilonis, Michael Mann, Chris McCabe, Robert Sheppard and Richard Tabor.

Alan Halsey
Nether Edge, January 2013

Contents

Further Songs & Dances of Death	11
Materia Boethiana	17
Scenario / Alfred's Metre, 19	
Karl Schmidt's Boethius Version, 22	
Link One, 25	
Charm or Chant, 25	
Link Two, 30	
Guide to the Giants of England, 31	
Alfred's Prose, 41	
November, 42	
The Hawksmoor Mausoleum, 44	
Eight Barques for the Manifold Soul of G.L. Renfree, 49	
Link Three, 54	
The Peacock Variations, 55	
The Bournemouth	59
The Book of the Boat: Inland- and Blue-water Texts	73
The Waterfell, 75	
Ballad of Blissworth Tunnel Open, 76	
Spiller's Boat, 77	
Moving the Boat, 78	
Stanzas, 78	
The Rabbit Hunt, 79	
My Boat is Burned at Uxbridge Boat Centre, 84	
Archb. Wulfstan Reminds my Neighbours to Keep their Hands off my Moorings if They Can, 84	
Brightlingsea, 85	
The Cimmerian, 86	
The Land-Search, 87	
At The Victory, 89	
Coast Notes, 90	
Log of the Cimmerian (prose), 92	
Log of the Cimmerian (Sea-Shanties), 93	
The Cave, 98	
On Setting Out on the Night Sea, 98	
The Marriage at Ipswich Docks (Nocturnes and Diurnes), 99	
Unities, 101	
Closing Song, 102	

Morning Lands	103
1: In Essex, 105	
2: De Apio (Concerning Celery), 113	
3: With Pomona, 121	
4: Interiors, 127	
Poems after Plotinus	137
Peri tou Ekousiou kai Thelematos tou Enos (On Free-Will and the Will of the One), 139	
Peri Pyseos kai Theorias kai tou Enos (On Nature and Contemplation and the One), 142	
Peri Pronoias Proton (On Providence), 144	
Peri Eudaimonias (On Well-Being), 148	
Darwin's Dialogues	151
Opening, 153	
Josiah Wedgwood II & Robert Darwin, 155	
View, 155	
Josiah Wedgwood & Charles Darwin, 159	
Adventure (Found & New Text), 161	
Charles Darwin & The Sea-Captain, 165	
The Breed, 167	
Darwin & The Finch, 169	
Steve's Garden, 171	
Darwin & Wife, 182	
The Relief of Aachen, 184	
Darwin to Marx, 188	
Englynion, 189	
Alternative Ending, 190	
A Book of Legends (<i>incorporating</i> Quire Book)	193
<i>Part One:</i>	
The Treasure, 195	
The Brothers, 197	
Dance, 200	
At the Coast, 202	
Sherds, 204	
Ra, 206	
On the Nile, 209	
<i>Part Two:</i>	
The Argosy, 212	
Pattern-Peeps, 215	
Brunnhilde & Me, 216	
Metamorphoses, 219	

The Ship, 220	
Tracking the Bear, 221	
Siegfried and Me, 223	
Coal	227
Metrical Cookery: A Performance Text for Two Mouths or More	257
The Purple Shepherd: An examination of perfect government according to the best authorities	283
North Scenes	295
Little Scenes, 297	
Seaham, 304	
In The Coal Year, 305	
Moorsrider, 308	
Sixteen Riddles, 311	
Joanne's Book	315
Dedication, 317	
The Tempest, 318	
The Toys, 318	
Ely, 319	
St Albans, 319	
In Yorkshire: Mark's Slide, 320	
Joanne-Marie's Swimming Manual, 321	
Family Spell, 326	
Midnight Scene with Cousins, 328	
Handling Rodney, 328	
By the Wye, 329	
Riddle with Goatsbeard, 329	
At the Junction with the Slough Arm, 330	
Mark's Poster of Wales, 330	
In The Car, 331	
Charm, 331	
Proem, 332	
One Hundred Images of a Captured Friend, 333	
'Now ...', 342	
Other Poems	343
Prince Igor, 345	
Songs (after Schubert), 350	
Short Bestiary, 353	
Second Family Spell, Without Names, 355	

Weight-Training, 356
The Great Cheese Fair, 360
Grief that the Palestinians are Treated like a Tribe of Onions, 361
Two Summer Poems, 362
The GLC Abolished, 363
The Uxbridge Workers, 365
Untitled Poem for 4 Voices, 368
At Matlock, 370
Exposition, 371
The Long Barrow, 372
Mesostics: Two Boats, 373
The Wind-Cheer, 374
Five-Liners, 379
At Castleton, 382
Cards from Cologne, 383
Ecclesiasticus ch.14 etc, 387
The Battle, 388
Words, 389
Alf, 389
South Songs, 390
Robigalanus, 390
Sound Stanzas, 391
Riddles, 391
Speedway, 392
Postcard, 395
The Flood, 396
Moretum 2, 398
Elvis Sets Sail, 399
Aristeas' Journal, 403
From *A Pocket History of the Soul*, 409
Les Assis (after Rimbaud), 411

Notes 413