

The New Criterion

Verse Chronicle

June 2006

Victoria's secret

by [William Logan](#)

On *District and Circle* by Seamus Heaney; *Averno* by Louise Glück; *Landing Light* by Don Paterson; *Dear Ghosts*, by Tess Gallagher; *Decreation* by Anne Carson; and *Without Title* by Geoffrey Hill

Last year a Dublin literary magazine sponsored an open competition for the best Seamus Heaney imitation. The winning poem began,

Niall Fitzduff brought a jar
of crab apple jelly
made from crabs off the tree
that grew at Duff's Corner—
still grows at Duff's Corner—
a tree I never once saw
with crab apples on it.

This would be hilarious, if Heaney hadn't written it himself (I was kidding about the competition, though surely he would win). At sixty-seven, his Nobel dusty on the shelf, Heaney is old enough and honored enough not to have to impress anyone. He's so full of genial sanity and sly little tricks with syntax (no one since Shakespeare has been shiftier at manipulating the sequence of tenses), it's easy to be gulled by his calloused facility.

The poems in *District and Circle* (the name of a London Underground line) sometimes take up the subjects of poems from twenty or thirty years ago.^[1] You go through the book thinking, *Oh, there's the Tollund Man again, and there's Glanmore, and there's the Underground*—you'd be forgiven for thinking this a Seamus Heaney greatest hits collection. He's still a poet of wood smoke and heather, imbued with the Irish past, a sucker for every hand tool and stove lid that comes his way—he goes into a swoon over farm machinery the way Auden did over collieries. Heaney will make a poem, as Frost and Hardy could, from something seen out of the corner of his eye; he gives you an Ireland where the ancient flows beneath the leaf litter of the modern. When critics say he's the best Irish poet since Yeats, they mean there hasn't been an Irish poet as full of blarney and yet so honestly brilliant at being himself.

And yet. And yet! The verse in this new book is sloppy and casual, the poet running through his routines with great skill—but they *are* routines, without the routine magic he once brought (whatever's at stake in these poems, it's much less than two decades ago). It's a good day when he drags out the poetry engine and cranks it up, but I'm not sure the old Heaney would have settled for lines as fumbling as “Like a scorch of flame, his quid-spurt fulgent” or “But if kale meant

admonition, a harrow-pin/ Was correction's veriest unit." (*Veriest unit!*) Heaney continues to smuggle Irish dialect into the emollient diplomacies of British English, but the new poems sometimes sound as if he were still translating *Beowulf*.

And for me a chance to test the edge
of *seggans*, dialect blade
hoar and harder and more hand-to-hand
than what is common usage nowadays:
sedge—marshmallow, rubber-dagger stuff.

These lines have wrestled Grendel, and lost.

Nobody does a better Heaney imitation than Heaney, but you can get a little tired of the tweedy offhand wisdom and sentimental touches (of a gift of ferns: "So here they are, Toraiwa, frilled, infolded, tenderized, in a little steaming basket, just for you"). The language is over-earnest, over-egged, the poems collapsing on occasion into lathers of guff. Heaney is an old master, but mastery must be refreshed and deepened if it's not to congeal into mannerism:

If self is a location, so is love:
Bearings taken, markings, cardinal points,
Options, obstinacies, dug heels, and distance,
Here and there and now and then, a stance.

This plummy set of abstractions ought to make you laugh as hard as at hearing that *Seamus Heaney* is now rhyming slang for *bikini*. (I'm not kidding about that.)

When Heaney relaxes a little, when he simply observes nature and muscles it into poetry ("Panicked snipe offshooting into twilight,/ Then going awry, larks quietened in the sun"), he seems again the voice of the age on the history of the age:

"We were killing pigs when the Americans arrived.
A Tuesday morning, sunlight and gutter-blood
Outside the slaughter house. From the main road
They would have heard the squealing,
Then heard it stop and had a view of us
In our gloves and aprons coming down the hill."

The Americans are training for the Normandy invasion, and this small invasion of the killing fields, the slaughter house, is a quiet reminder of all the killing to come.

Readers are by now familiar with Heaney's fascination with bog bodies, his laments over the Industrial Revolution and the Troubles. He knows a lot about writing poems, knows it in a craftsman's split-nailed, horn-handed way. The things he does well he can still do brilliantly (he's the rare contemporary poet unabashed about being a man, and not creepy or depressing about it), but they were trademarked by a younger poet also named Seamus Heaney. His poems carry a whiff of the ould sod, but they've been dug from peat bogs and packaged for garden centers. If he's not careful, he'll become the equivalent of a faux Irish pub, plastic shamrocks on the bar, Styrofoam shillelaghs on the wall, and green ale on tap.

The tense, overwrought poems in *Averno*, nervous in their very syllables, are striking additions to one strain of the American psyche—if there were a Goddess of Anxiety, Louise Glück would be the temple priestess. [2] Her recent books have drawn their mysteries from the Greek gods to a degree

even Freud might not have anticipated. For a woman who bears the “horrible mantle/ of daughterliness,” there’s no more desirable origin myth than Persephone’s. Should the psychiatrists of the future need a Persephone complex, they’ll have to pay Glück royalties.

Glück revisits the scenes of childhood as if bad memories held some masochistic allure. Though Greek myths thrived on punishment repeated—the temptations of Tantalus, the labor of Sisyphus, the torture of Prometheus—they were never masochistic (to invent the sadistic torments of the *Inferno*, however, Dante must have studied Roman law and Greek myth). The troubled daughter looks over her shoulder at her parents, seeking a scapegoat or feeling like one.

“You girls,” my mother said, “should marry
someone like your father.”

That was one remark. Another was,
“There is no one like your father.”

Who wouldn’t trade a mother like that for a goddess, one who would rescue you from hell? (The Christian Passion, with its mother of sorrows, its barren cave, its descent into and resurrection from hell, seems a distant echo of the myth.)

Glück’s poems inch forward, phrase by weary phrase, line by doomed line, as if it killed her to write each word. These monologues of distress have no time for chitchat—her mortal longings find their subjects in death, or dying, or the soul.

What will the soul do for solace then?
I tell myself maybe it won’t need
these pleasures anymore;
maybe just not being is simply enough,
hard as that is to imagine.

A little of this goes a long way. Glück’s neurotic intensity lies plain on the page, bleached of descriptive pleasure because any image of the world is taboo (“when the sun sets in winter it is/ incomparably beautiful and the memory of it/ lasts a long time”— *Gee, thanks*, you want to say).

The claustrophobic form of Glück’s verse —the nervous, shivery lines; the agitated sentences—whispers what the poems sometimes shout, that we are lonely, atomized beings with little to offer each other, or nothing at all. She lives for extremes. Indeed, her nature is drawn *only* to extremes—every beautiful moment makes her think of death, as thought of her terrible return to the marriage bed no doubt tormented Persephone, the months she was allowed to walk the earth. The unnerving quality of these poems lies less in what the myth offers the poet than in what she offers the myth.

The purity of death may be glamorous, but as a subject it’s exhausting, and monotonous, too. (Emily Dickinson had visions of death some days, but she had other days.) Glück can’t provide the gratifications of a poet more willing to come to terms with the rhetorical possibilities of the art—every line is stripped bare, naked to the knife edge of hysteria, the poetry of denial sometimes laced with a quiet paranoia: “I know what they say when I’m out of the room./ Should I be seeing someone, should I be taking/ one of the new drugs for depression.”

Glück is so easily caught up in fortune-cookie wisdom, capable of hokum like “You exist as the stars exist,/ participating in their stillness, their immensity,” I appreciate her more the further away I

get. This doesn't mean her poetry works best when half forgotten, only that it disturbs me more deeply when I can ignore the straitened language; the tight-lipped grimaces; the brittle and petulant temper. In fading recollection, the brittleness becomes all too human fragility; the stifled speech a guarded honesty; the airy thinness a rueful taciturnity. Glück has made her own an abandoned back alley of the Plath estate, her poems like chamber music for bandsaw and razor blades. Had Plath survived, grinding on decade after decade, would she too have become a minimalist, enamored of the pregnant pause, the pious hush?

Not all Glück's previous encounters with myth have evaded blind comedy, but the success of *Averno* is that the reader isn't tempted to laugh too often. Limited in range and tone and figure, limited to a degree you're surprised they work at all, these eighteen poems repeat themselves until her repetitions have a mythic squalor. You're glad to shut this airless book and look at the dumb world outside, a blackbird taking up tufts from an old doormat, two roofers squatting on broken slates—all that life excluded from a book like this. But a book like this can unsettle a life like that. If you want to avert your eyes from the pain recorded, the fretful worrying, the bloodless anxiety, you must remember that the torment Glück suffers is to be stuck eternally writing Louise Glück poems.

The Scottish poet Don Paterson has a distinctive voice, at once confident and rhetorical (not an easy combination, though sometimes found in haggis), and his poems are fond of abstractions as unexpected as a view of the ocean after rounding a bend on a dingy lane.^[3] He can write largely of large things, but also largely of small ones—Seamus Heaney was like that at the start.

Here, beside the fordable Atlantic,
reborn into a secret candidacy,
the fontanelles reopen one by one
in the palms, then the breastbone and the brow,

aching at the shearwater's wail, the rowan
that falls beyond all seasons. One morning
you hover on the threshold, knowing for certain
the first touch of the light will finish you.

Landing Light is a convenient introduction to a poet with a deceptive touch. The poems seem written from necessity, not simply to satisfy the small itches many poets feel; yet Paterson is oddly ill at ease at the center of his poems. Indeed, the persona he creates, everywhere given the lie by the subtleties of his language, is slightly doltish and cowardly, rather surprised to be writing at all. (There's a long strain in British poetry of gawky hayseeds like Clare and Burns, and Paterson takes every advantage of it.)

English poetry has had a torrid love affair with Ireland but remains standoffish toward Scotland, as if Hadrian's Wall had never been dismantled. There were the Scottish Chaucerians, of course, and later Burns and Stevenson, but then almost no one until Hugh MacDiarmid. The Scotch are all too fond of their own poetry, which to the English is part of the comedy—and there is the further problem of verse in Scots or Lallans, once an honest dialect but now reduced almost entirely to a literary language. There have been loving translations into Scots of the New Testament and *Macbeth*, translations so good you think the gospel writers and Shakespeare must have worn kilts. In the late stages of a dialect, poets turn into stuffy antiquarians, guarding themselves against influence, or end up sounding like the dominant fashion in the dominating tongue—the dialect is no longer powerful enough to influence itself. Paterson includes two or three half-hearted poems in Scots, dragging their footnotes, but, like the best Irish poets, he writes in English because it happens to be his language.

Paterson often steers his poems toward small epiphanies, approached with wary patience.

They caught him by the thread of his one breath
and pulled him up. They don't know how it held.
And so today I thank what higher will
brought us to here, to you and me and Russ,
the great twin-engined swaying wingspan of us
roaring down the back of Kirrie Hill

and your two-year-old lungs somehow out-revving
every engine in the universe.

This is for his younger son, who almost died at birth. Other poems defeat me—I end up feeling that their mysteries lie just beneath the surface, lacking only one small fact to make them plain. Paterson loves turning the dailiness of life into something mock heroic; the rhetoric comes within a breath of being blowy, but his homely honesty keeps the lines genuine as lead pipe.

Paterson is willing to turn his hand to any sort of verse—there's even a concrete poem shaped like a guitar (he's a professional musician on the side). A master of the short lyric, he rarely suffers from Muldoonitis, that general affliction of British poetry these days (Paterson's earlier books did show a touch of the fever)—there's so much he does with ease and flair, it's interesting to note the little he can't do. His translation of Canto XIII of the *Inferno* is cast into quatrains, a daring choice, but the stanzas reach for their rhymes, padded out in a way his other poems are not. Whenever he tries to be entertaining, Paterson becomes gauche and uncertain (his gifts are entertainment enough), and his long-winded long poems tend to beetle off into a fabulistic realm from which there is no return.

Paterson is never afraid to ask the reader's attention, just unwilling to bow or scrape for it. There are a score of ambitious, intricately spoken, devious poems here, self-mocking in their mythologies, quietly waving the cross of St. Andrew, their local humilities somehow the more spacious for that. Paterson has been the best thing to happen to British poetry since Glyn Maxwell and Michael Hofmann. For a small book, *Landing Light* covers a large stony ground.

Tess Gallagher's wide-eyed, well-meaning poems were the embodiment of 1970s narcissism—conversational and intimate, chatty at times, they burnished old hurts into the sentimental routines of confession.^[4] *Dear Ghosts*, (that comma, part of the title, is one her many affectations) is recognizably the work of that younger poet, now more than sixty, long widowed, suffering the aftermath of operations for breast cancer—her new poems are haunted by a mortality that has brought not serenity but doubt.

Gallagher's virtues have gradually slipped into vices—the poems are now dusted with New Age spirituality (often Buddhism lite), the once easy phrases kinked, the imagery tortured or simply malformed:

Our inner plea: not to be absent
from pain through the tourniquet
of irony, denial's tepid bath water
that poisons the soul's aquifer.

Everywhere you turn you find the nest of self-regard fouled by the bandage of metaphor in the forest of piety: "I apologize falsely/ for my counterfeit amalgam," or

the rain-telegraph keeps getting through—its urgency
so like the midnight flag
of a chewing gum I bought in Tokyo.

Drama queens can be charming at thirty; at sixty, they're insufferable.

Gallagher's new poems don't think the unthinkable so much as unthink the thinkable: they turn honorable reservations about war into op-eds. During a week of R & R with her first husband, a Vietnam War pilot, the poet kisses a young sailor in a sugarcane field. It's a small moment of grace and absolution, but you're still reeling from her Billy Sunday sermon about the soldiers' wives, "their suitcases/ crammed with department-store negligees for conjugal trysts/ that seem pornographic now in their psycho-erotic/ rejuvenation of the killing." *Psycho-erotic rejuvenation!* And how snobbish that *department-store*. (Where else could you buy lingerie then? Victoria's Secret hadn't been invented yet.) Later, her head shaved after chemotherapy, the poet compares herself to the Jews whose heads were shaved at Auschwitz.

Gallagher assumes that the reader will find her life endlessly fascinating while she kneads her tidy domestic moments into parables (and ties them with the ribbon of homily in the boudoir of second thoughts on the avenue of regret). She's become so garrulous and windy, however, that what's intended sincerely often seems grotesquely funny. When she rescues a lamb from the slaughterhouse (you may not care how much she paid, but she'll tell you), it's a mawkish gesture, and she knows it. That ought to be enough, but she has to make the grand statement, too: "While/ my country makes war, one lamb/ is saved in the West of Ireland,/ a sign to what oppresses." Warmongers, take note.

The best poems here stay subdued in their moments: during World War II, her father rises before dawn to light the fires in his neighbors' stoves, a job he's taken to help his family get by. Such a poem might be modest and affecting, if the poet didn't feel it necessary to drag in the atomic bombs about to fall on Japan. (The connection? The "use of people, their homes, as incidental/ combustibles.") An uncle meets his dead brother in a field, and no one believes him; yet the poem can't stop there—the poet must have her say, and she always has her say. You feel helpless as a crowd worked by a snake-oil salesman.

A poet has to think pretty well of herself to begin her book with an epigraph from one of her own poems (and, better still, to misquote it). Poets often use the acknowledgments page to pay off their nearest and dearest, but it's remarkable how many nearest and dearest there now seem to be. I've been wondering where this self-congratulatory gesture would end; but Gallagher has set the record, unlikely ever to be broken—she thanks 101 people, including her hairdresser. (The credits of many Hollywood movies have been shorter.) She even apologizes for leaving anyone out ("maybe I can add you into the next edition!").

The language of gratitude needn't be so overwrought ("their gifts are contributions at a level where even thanks is a kind of ragged attempt to express the blessings of right companionship") or sloppy with self-regard (of her mother: "she has been a great and overweening cherishing"—does Gallagher know what *overweening* means?). No one would begrudge the poet her appreciations, but when flaunted they seem boastful—gratitude may be the eighth deadly sin. Like her prose, her poetry is now studied in artifice, oddly informal and tarted up at once, as if plastered with Kabuki makeup. Perhaps the reader won't notice, still in shock after learning that one of these poems "will appear on coffee mugs at Starbucks across the country." Gallagher's new poems are so manufactured you wouldn't be surprised to turn them over and find *MADE IN JAPAN* on the bottom.

There are no sins in literature except unsuccessful ones. Successful sins are called virtues. Anne Carson, who moonlights as a classics professor (unless she's a classics professor who moonlights as a poet), has for the past decade been the acceptable face of the avant-garde. In *Autobiography of Red*

(1998) and *The Beauty of the Husband* (2001), her poems promised that postmodernism might be a new dispensation, that if you stole, borrowed, and begged enough, something interesting might come. Her love of the classics gave a *gravitas* to poetic experiments that otherwise would have been trivial.

I was never sure how far Carson could take such experiments, which despite their deadpan charms used up all the oxygen in the room. The poems began to seem less original and more a slightly frenzied burlesque. Being an iconoclast is a good thing until you start trying to live up to your reputation; before you know it, you're swallowing a flaming sword while balancing a copy of Heraclitus on your nose. *Decreation* is a ragbag of strange ambition—there are four essays (on sleep, Longinus, eclipses, and “decreation”), three sequences of poems sometimes in brute or ironic relation to them, a choral response to a painting, the shot list for a documentary, a note on a pair of Beckett's television plays, a screenplay, an oratorio, and an opera. [\[5\]](#)

Carson delights in dizzy leaps of thought—the essay on Longinus also tangos with Antonioni, and soon she's writing poems with titles like “Longinus' Dream of Antonioni” and “Kant's Questions about Monica Vitti.” The poet can make the intellectual seem jolly while puncturing its pretensions; but the only good thing about these poems are their titles, the lines often rambling along in the opium dream of cafe philosophers: “blondes/ being/ always/ fatally/ reinscribed/ on an old cloth/ faintly,/ interminably/ undone, why/ does Plato/ call Necessity/ a ‘wandering cause’ isn't it because/ you can/ 't/ tell/ where/ she got in?” Plato seems thrown in only to anchor this mess of academic jargon and lapsed punctuation.

Carson is intent here on the relation between fact and documentary, on jealousy, on the feeling of wrongness, and on “decreation,” a notion (about effacing the self) borrowed from Simone Weil. The poet stalks her subjects from oblique angles, but her critical readings are often bullying and contrived. Elizabeth Bishop's *Man-Moth* becomes, courtesy the temple of Asklepios and Jacques Lacan, not an unworldly creature but “sleep itself.” There's not much in the poem to support this reading, but Carson's slippery use of symbol (she has the love of symbolic readings found in those with a taste for psychoanalysis) is like the philosopher's stone—with it you can turn every scrap of metal in the junkyard into gold.

Many of Carson's ideas are first pitched as essays; by the time they've been worked into poems, they seem pawed over and secondhand. She knows she has an odd view of things; when she trusts her inspiration too much, she seems to believe every idea brilliant *because* it is odd. Her oratorio “Lots of Guns,” a self-conscious tribute to Gertrude Stein, uses five performers each “equipped with a triangular white paper flag on a long stick, ... snapped smartly up and down” and has choruses even kindness can't help giggling over:

The mythic past.
The curious past.
Lots of guns expressing restlessness.
Lots of guns with cherry cobbler.
The man is tremendously.
The woman almost.

For pompous silliness this is hard to beat, but her opera manages to beat it. A single stage direction may give the flavor: “Sung by Simone and Madame Weil waltzing in an empty factory while the Chorus of the Void do calisthenics in slow motion.” The Chorus of the Void consists of ten transparent tap-dancers. What are the lyrics like? Here are Madame and Mademoiselle Weil:

Please translate the word *thankyou*.
Ontologically not new!
Theoretically blue!
Naked as the dew!
I'm lime green who are you!
No idea what to do!
Just be glad this song is through!

No comment.

I linger over Carson's striking insights into classical texts (a beautiful passage is devoted to sleep in the *Odyssey*) and the psychosocial dialogue in her poems, recording the fraught moments of couples at odds. Even her offhand remarks can be provoking—who else would have noticed the “poached-in-eternity look Beckett has in his last photos”? Yet far too much of this book has the burnt-toast reek of academic air—her poems have become parlor games of extraordinary tedium. When you're told that the opera requires “7 female robots built by Hephaistos,” you're not sure whether Carson has spent too long reading *R. U. R.* or watching *Star Wars*.

No sooner do I finish reviewing one book by Geoffrey Hill than another thumps onto my desk.^[6] In late age, Hill has found a devil-may-care giddiness, a taste for diatribe and invective that seems unstoppable, this side of the grave. This famously taciturn and thin-skinned poet, so constipated in his early years, can be forgiven for carousing now (it took him a quarter-century to publish his first five books, but in the last decade he's published half a dozen more). His new style may well be the result of antidepressants, as he confessed in an interview, but who will complain if the muse can be found in such odd places?

Hill's recent books have been at times unreadable, even by those who want to read them (taking pills against depression has done nothing for his cussedness). *Without Title* is clearer and less frustrated than his ranting monologues, but its short poems and one long sequence are no less stringent in their demands. Hill has often given the impression of wanting to communicate, if only he didn't find it humiliating (communication being an act of love)—he has dressed up this aversion in thunderous essays, but I don't believe that clarity inevitably soils meaning with the unctuous language of public consumption. Besides, there are moments when no living English poet has written more gorgeously:

the singing iron footbridges, tight weirs
pebble-dashed with bright water, a shivey blackthorn's
clouded white glass that's darker veined or seamed,

crack willow foliage, pale as a new fern,
silver-plated ivy in the sun's angle.

Hill's redolent landscapes have excited suspicion among critics, though it's possible to see them as indulging in the aesthetic, like a warm mineral bath, while calling such beauty to account—his snarled complications allow him to have things both ways. (“Shivey” is wool cloth full, like Hill's poems, of dark burrs or splinters.)

The new poems live gloomily under sentence of death—“Death fancies us but finally/ leaves us alone,” he says mordantly; and it takes a second to register what that leaving alone means. Hill believes in syntax's autocracy, and a reader must sound the sentences before the drama of meaning comes plain (the violent riddles beneath syntax are more darkly defended). When the mood takes him, he'll coat every phrase with tar and dare the reader to grasp it:

Vorónezh: Ovid thrusts abruptly wide
the ice-locked shutters, discommodes his lyre
to Caesar's harbingers. Interrogation,
whatever is most feared. Truth's fatal vogue,
sad carnifex, self-styled of blood and wax.

Even these brutish lines can be winched to the surface, given patience and a stout cable. Mandelstam was exiled to Vorónezh, cast like Ovid far from the warm society of the capital. The interrogation remembers 1984, where men were broken using their worst phobias (rats, in Winston Smith's case). A carnifex is an executioner.

There are poems here of the most defiant opacity, others that descend into an old man's muttering, especially the fraught meditations of a series of "pindarics" (a form Congreve called a "bundle of rambling incoherent thoughts"), each inspired by a scrap from Cesare Pavese's journals. It's easy to grouse about Hill—the phrases piled up like rear-end collisions, the "savage rudeness" (to use a phrase quoted from Emerson), the knee-jerk wordplay, the odd marks of punctuation, the Colonel Blimpish apophthegms ("Women are a contagious abstinence," "Small hotels are to die in"). "I tell myself," he boasts, "don't wreck a good phrase simply to boost sense." Don't murder your darlings—simply embalm them.

Hill desperately needs a group of acolytes to tease out his meanings. It's not that his verse is austere and forbidding, not that the price of admission is so high—Hill just doesn't like the reader all that much. Readers are a tax on his purity, but few can bear to be loathed by the books they read. (Reading, after all, is a *voluntary* labor.) Pound, however difficult, has a far more welcoming intelligence, but Pound longed to be a teacher (hence his lectures, and *The ABC of Reading*, and his plans for an Eziversity). If Hill wants to transform the reader, it's a prophet's task; the only reader worthy enough may be Hill himself, though poets are forever deprived of the salvations of their work.

One solstice has swung past, the immeasurably
varied, unvarying, profusion of hedge-burgeon
stays richly dulled, immoveable for a while.
Over by Studley the close air is dove-grey,
a hollow without sun
though heat had filled it; shadow-reservoir,

more than a mirage, however you chance to look.

More than any poet alive, Hill has the pulse of English inside him, knowing like a lawyer all its loopholes and vagrancies. The stopped energy of his landscapes has become a valediction, the epitaph of a poet who cannot give up his rages, even as age grinds him down. In a few months this book will be available in the United States. That this brilliant, maimed, and cantankerous poet was for a time published only in Britain did not flatter our publishers, much less our poetry.

Notes

[Go to the top of the document.](#)

1. *District and Circle*, by Seamus Heaney; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 78 pages, \$20. [Go back to the text.](#)
2. *Averno*, by Louise Glück; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 79 pages, \$22. [Go back to the text.](#)

3. *Landing Light*, by Don Paterson; Graywolf Press, 88 pages, \$20. [Go back to the text.](#)
4. *Dear Ghosts*, by Tess Gallagher; Graywolf Press, 144 pages, \$20. [Go back to the text.](#)
5. *Decreation*, by Anne Carson; Alfred A. Knopf, 251 pages, \$24.95. [Go back to the text.](#)
6. *Without Title*, by Geoffrey Hill; Penguin Books (UK), 82 pages, £9.99 (paper). [Go back to the text.](#)

William Logan's most recent book of poetry, *Strange Flesh* (Penguin), was published last year.

[more from this author](#)

This article originally appeared in *The New Criterion*, Volume 24 June 2006, on page 70

Copyright © 2009 The New Criterion | www.newcriterion.com

<http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Victoria-s-secret-2422>