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First published in the United Kingdom in 2022 by
Shearsman Books
50 Westons Hill Drive
Emersons Green
Bristol BS16 7DF

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

www.shearsman.com

Distributed for Shearsman Books in the U. S. A.
by Small Press Distribution, 1341 Seventh Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94710
E-Mail orders@spdbooks.org
www.spdbooks.org

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Production, composition, & cover design: Edition Wortschatz,
a service of Neufeld Verlag, Cuxhaven/Germany
E-Mail info@edition-wortschatz.de, www.edition-wortschatz.de

Title painting:
Oil on canvas, without title 2021
Alfons Röllinger
Atelier Ruschweiler – Germany

Printed in Germany
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If I had to classify my poetry, it could best be done through the classical known “saying the most by using the least”. The aim is thereby set: transparency, clarity, word-purity. Every word must carry its weight in the line and the ultimate aim is a unity of sound, sense, image and idea. Poetry, more than any other art, should seek for a unity of the senses, as the French Symbolists, the first poetic modernists, realized through the interchangeability of the senses: “I could hear the colors of her dress.” One doesn’t hear colors, but nevertheless there is a sensual truth in such an expression.

Essential is “saying the most by using the least”. Compression is of the essence. And here are some of my most personal means of doing so turning verbs into nouns and the reverse, even within a double-context “Why do the leaves her so ungenerously behind”. Breaking words into two or even three parts to enable both compression and the continuing flow of meaning. Those words must be placed back together again, thereby revealing their inner structure-atomising.

One of my critics rightly said: “Jaffin’s poetry is everywhere from one seemingly unrelated poem to the next.” Why? Firstly because of my education and interests trained at New York University as a cultural and intellectual historian. My doctoral dissertation on historiography emphasizes the necessary historical continuity. Today we often judge the past with the mind and mood of the present, totally contrary to their own historical context. I don’t deny the past-romanticism and classical but integrate them within a singular modern context of word-usage and sensibil-
ity. Musically that would place me within the “classical-romantic tradition” of Haydn, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Brahms and Nielsen but at the very modern end of that tradition.

My life historically is certainly exceptional. My father was a prominent New York Jewish lawyer. The law never interested me, but history always did. A career as a cultural-intellectual historian was mine-for-the-asking, but I rejected historical relativism. That led me to a marriage with a devout German lady – so I took to a calling of Jesus-the-Jew in post-Auschwitz Germany. For ca. two decades I wrote and lectured all over Germany on Jesus the Jew. Thereby my knowledge and understanding of both interlocked religions became an essential part of my being. History, faith and religion two sides of me but also art, classical music and literature were of essential meaning – so many poems on poetry, classical music and painting.

Then Rosemarie and I have been very happily married for 61 years now. Impossible that a German and Jew could be so happily married so shortly after the war? I’ve written love poems for her, hundreds and hundreds over those 61 years, not only the love poems, as most are, of the first and often unfulfilling passion, but “love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage”. Perhaps too prosaic for many poets?

When did I become a poet? My sister Lois wrote reasonably good poetry as an adolescent. I, only interested in sports until my Bar Mitzvah, a tournament tennis and table-tennis player, coached baseball and basketball teams, also soccer.

My sister asked whether I’d ever read Dostoyevsky. I’d only read John R. Tunis sports books and the sports section of the *New York Times* so I answered “in which sports was he active?” She said, rather condescendingly, “If you haven’t read Dostoyevsky, you haven’t lived.” So I went to the library for the very first time and asked for a book by this Dostoyevsky. I received *Poor People*, his first book, that made him world famous. My mother shocked to see me reading and most especially a book about poor people said, “David, don’t read that it will make you sad, unhappy – we, living in Scarsdale, weren’t after all, poor people. From there it went quickly to my Tolstoy, Hardy and so on. In music it started with the hit parade, then *Lost in the Stars*, then the popular classics and with 15 or 16 my Haydn, Mozart, Schütz, Victoria … And then at Ann Arbor and NYU to my artists, most especially Giovanni Bellini, Van der Weyden, Georges de la Tour, Corot and Gauguin …

But it was Wallace Stevens’ reading in the early 50s in the YMHA that set me off – he didn’t read very well, but his 13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird, Idea of Order at Key West, Two Letters (in *Poems Posthumous*), Peter Quince at the Clavier, The Snowman … and the excellent obituary in *Time* magazine plus the letter he answered some of my poems with compliments but “you must be your own harshest critic”. That pre-determined my extremely self-critical way with a poem. Please don’t believe that prolific means sloppy, for I’m extremely meticulous with each and every poem.
My poems were published in the order written and I’m way ahead of any counting … The poem is a dialogical process as everything in life. The words come to me not from me, and if they strike or possibly join-a-union then I become desparate, read long-winded poets like Paz to set me off – he’s very good at odd times. Those poems need my critical mood-mind as much as I need their very specially chosen words – not the “magic words” of the romantics, but the cleansed words of Jaffin – Racine used only 500 words. My words too are a specially limited society, often used, but in newly-felt contexts.

O something very special: I have a terrible poetic memory. If I had a good one as presumably most poets, I’d write say one poem about a butterfly, and every time I see/saw a butterfly it would be that one, that poem. But I forget my poems, so each butterfly, lizard, squirrel … is other-placed, other-mooded, other-worded, other-Jaffined. That’s the main reason why I am most certainly the most prolific of all poets.

Shakespeare is the greatest of us: his sonnets live most from the fluency and density of his language. I advise all future poets to keep away from his influence and the poetic greatness of The Bible.

Yours truly
David Jaffin

P. S.: As a preacher the truth (Christ) should become straight-lined, timelessly so, but as a poet it’s quite different. What interests me most are those contradictions which live deeply within all of us, not only in theory, but daily in the practice. And then the romantics have led me to those off-sided thoroughly poetic truths that mysteriously not knowing where that darkened path will lead us.
If only
darkness
is to be
seen is it
looking
through
the invis
ible depth
of your self-
reclaiming-
past.

Dream
as Word de
termines not
only its own
means of
expressing
an exclusively irredeem
able-past.
Time-telling (5)
a) pictures An art
ist’s time-tell
ing picture
s signifying

b) his most-per
sonal-raison-
d’être To his
right his role-
model Haydn
pen and paper

c) at hand and
a recognition
plague of Is
rael’s 40
year life-

A single
immovably-
visible-star
at this
early morn
ing light-
phase witness
ing the poet’
s word-deter
mine-re
solve.

d) span Closer at
hand Jesus’
penetrat
ing all-
assuming-pre
sence On the

e) window
sill my Rose
marie at
various
time and
place-expos
ure
s.
Our house (3)

a) and garden
vintage 1937–38 the same as Rosemarie and myself

b) One of the oldest in this modern post-war suburban town despite

c) all it re mained her private time-elusive most indwelling-re sort.

“You call the (3)

a) shots” confid ent words from the golfer to his

b) caddy to choose the best wood or iron But also more household You Rosemarie shall

c) decide the day’s course But that “shot” has something ominous about it.
**Exampled (3)**

a) No one
knows (not even the so-called expert

b) s) which way
Corona will mutate next
She’s become the best

c) example
for what we call personal-freed om.

**Good starter (5)**

a) s especially
with T. S. Eliot may remain memorable while

b) not even
“love at first sight” insures a future-happiness. A

c) bright
late winter day may even lift the usual sun
If one has (3)
a) acquired in
time “a
mind for win-
ter” will

b) only loosen
its half-per-
manent-hold
with those
seldom spring

c) thoughts as
with the ap-
pearance
of the first
innocent
snow-drop
s.

d) beyond its
lowly-expect
ant-path
but bright

e) hopes often
remain with
out a suffi-
ciently-secure
ground-base.
No-lady (3)

a) For her no
remains the
first ungen
uine respon

b) se only then
does she be
gin to real
ise the why
and where
fore of a
c) tentative
ly-assumed
if-rarely-
expressive-
agreement.

Hay pigs (3)

a) Their adver
tisement for
“hay pigs”
Just the
freedom you'

b) ve always
wanted for
rolling-free
But not to
be forgot
en what or
c) who has enjoy
ed such a
self-satisfy
ing life taste
s better as
well.
It’s diffi (3)

a) cult not to love a woman as attractive and fine

b) ly-sensitive as my Rose marie but it becomes less difficult when her mood

c) s fully embrace such indwelling loveliness.

Such a (2)

a) fully encompass passing Feb ruary after noon bright tens Rose

b) marie’s smile to mid-summer Italianate swim-time pleasures.