



Photo: Tatjana Zuboff

‘In the act of writing poetry we stand at a verge of consciousness. Past language momentarily comes to an end and then, as dew on the wheat, is given back to us. As frost on a knifeblade. Is given back to us.

And the act of reading a poem? It serves perception. One way of keeping shine on a stone is to leave it where you find it. Another is to hold it in the wash of poetry.

My Japanese friends told me another thing—that the larynx is shaped like the Buddha, and that *Buddha-Throat* is actually their name for it.

How happy and terrified I am to learn that my every utterance passes through Buddha’s place. There he sits—close as I am to myself—witness to what truth or beauty rings in the words I speak.

It was *Right Speech* he advocated in his Eightfold Path — a love-filled language and a language loved. Poetry is the practice of it.’

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# SLIPPERY CHARACTERS

Poems & Poetics

Paul Matthews

In this first gathering of his poetry since *The Ground that Love Seeks* (1996) Paul Matthews explores aspects of biography 'at the verge of the mythological'. Writing of his strong experiences in the mountains of California, at Ephesus, on the holy island of Lindisfarne, he is keenly aware that the words and alphabets under his pen come charged with the fibs and fables of millennia back, a more than personal will which must be wrestled with, surrendered to at times, as he shapes his present purposes.

The dynamic relationship between word and world is central to this book, the 'slippery characters' of its title being both the mythological, historical, human and animal beings that inhabit these pages and the written characters themselves whose images and gestures spring to life through the emblems and letterings created by Katharina Kubin.

*I find in your poems a stillness, which is a kind of witnessing, as if time had stopped . . . these poems open a centre. They have a gymnastic balance.*

Peter Redgrove

*When I told her that I knew Paul Matthews she said, 'He is the flower of England'. She could have meant 'flour', of course, but even so.*

Sasha Menezes

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A large, textured, greenish-brown fossilized footprint is the central focus of the image, set against a background of fine, multi-colored sand. The footprint has a distinct arch and a deep groove for the heel. In the upper right corner, a small, bright orange, circular object, possibly a piece of coral or a shell, is visible. The overall scene is a close-up of a beach with a prominent fossil.

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**Paul Matthews**



God be praised  
in the Lugworm  
whose scriptures  
in the sand imbue  
the illuminations  
of the holy scribes