

PREFACE

For the fourth International Festival we asked for poems that reflect aspects of this year's theme of Birds and Gardens. As features of everyday life and landscape, birds and gardens have a long tradition in British and Chinese poetry and art. We need look no further than Shakespeare and his great Chinese contemporary, Tang Xianzu: both chose gardens as stage sets for scenes in their famous dramas of love and loss, and birds as performers and messengers. This anthology includes a family garden with a swing-seat, an elegant Japanese-style front garden, a neglected Corsican scrub-land and a circle of trees in a city park. The poems' locations are in Britain, the United States, Canada, France, Greece and the Philippines, and within them there is an abundance of trees and flowers, providing a real or imagined backdrop for cocksparrow, pigeon, finch, blackbird, cross-bill, the endangered mindoro dove and other birds.

Forms range from a letter and a prose poem through free-verse, un-rhymed couplets, rhyming verse and sonnets. One poem corresponds to a hexagram in the *I Ching*; another employs an idiosyncratic use of split words and full-stops to create multiple layers of meaning. Whatever the form, it seems to me that all spring from an impulse of love. Concerns are far-ranging. They include beauty and gratitude, reflections on life in different periods of history, responses to crises, mixed feelings towards springtime gardens, anxiety about threatened species, celebration of the Earth and lamentation for the loss of Eden. While most poems are in their original English language, we also include a translation from a nineteenth century French poet, and another from a contemporary Greek poet.

For many of these poets, as for Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare, gardens and birds are symbols of beauty and absence, often expressed with great poignancy, sometimes to paradoxical effect: '... hearing birdsong each time the door closes despite the impossibility of birds'.

Lucy Hamilton