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BLUES

John Hartley Williams

CAPE POETRY

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blue lagoons, crazy fires, sheaves of wheat . . .

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FOX TO EARTH

i.m. Ken Smith 1938-2003

I have this vision of you, Ken,
sitting in a pew
with a growl ready in your throat
for the incoming congregation:
Leave the doors open.
Could do with some light in here.
You're holding up
a glass of pure spirit
to a ray of sunlight.
Back it goes.
You turn to inspect
the cross-eyed, the ruined,
the homicidal,
and the betrayed.
They're stopped in their tracks
by your regard -
vodka-quaffer,
smoker in church,
hummer
of a secular tune . . .
A line of them
bump-backs up
to the aura of the door.
You exhale and cough.
The sign reads:
NO SERMONISING
but you'd give them one,
preach them the time of the dog,
if they'd only stop

that stealthy shuffle forward.
What have they come for?
Where the hell are they going?

*

In Colombia they called you *Marinero* –
it was your casual metre,
the roll of a man
still following
his ploughman father's wake
feeling the ridges and pressures
the half-stumble
the soft and the hard
loping after the trudge
of his father's anger.
No sailor, then,
but you leaned forward into it
like an old romantic helmsman
who knows
there's a story in that port tavern:
Matelot Night & Disco
with the girls
from the quays
and not all the weapons
parked outside.
You could smell conspiracies
in the back seat of a taxi
read the minds of ghosts
jostling for a view
of the grave
life will tip them into.
And the dead floated down