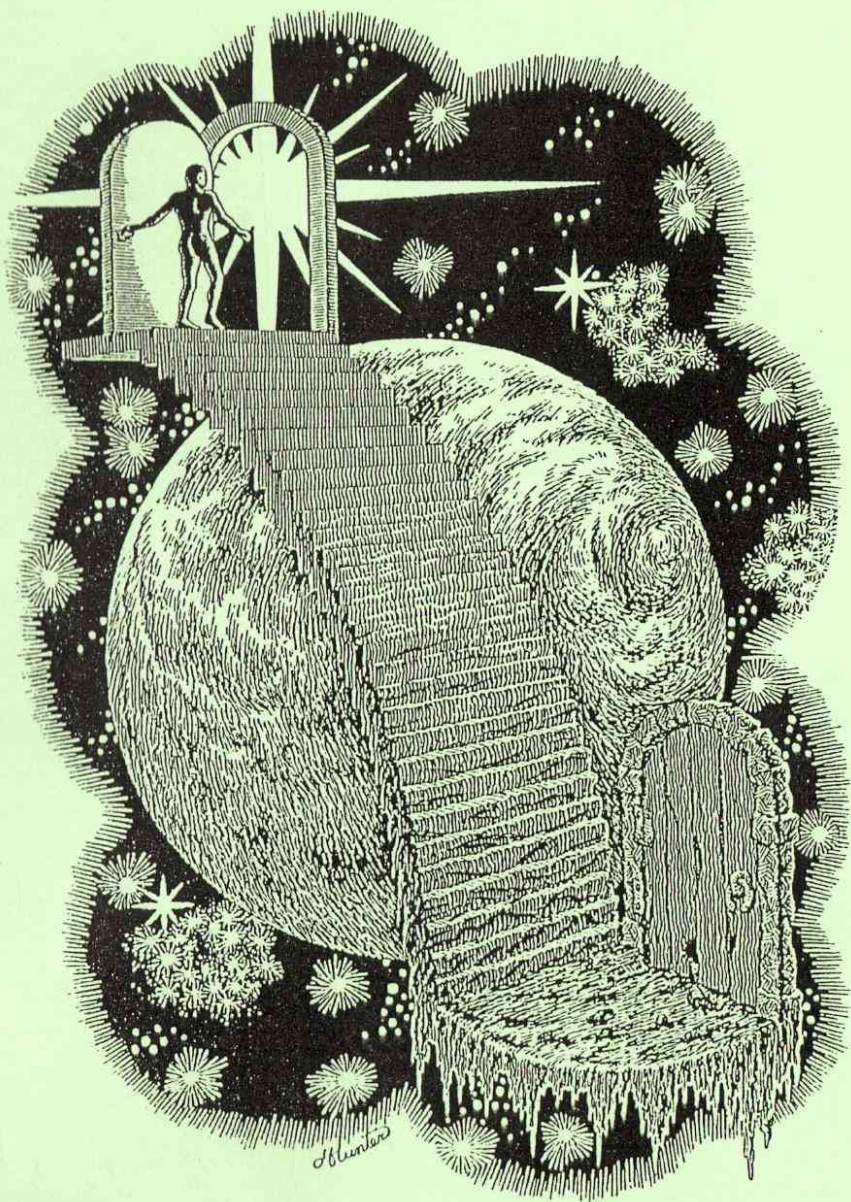


SPACE MAN



DAVE CALDER

S P A C E M A N

by

D A V E C A L D E R

with an introduction by
K. V. Bailey

1995

H I L L T O P P R E S S

S P A C E M A N

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first 5 poems in this sequence
appeared in the author's 1979 collection
Spaced (Toulouse Press, Liverpool)

and were subsequently reprinted in the
1980 Rhysling Anthology (SFPA, USA)
as a Rhysling Award nomination (Long poem category)

The remaining 3 poems, which complete the sequence,
were written in 1994, and are published here for the first time.

Spaceman poems © Dave Calder 1979, 1995

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Introduction © K.V. Bailey 1995

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INTRODUCTION

Spaceman. There could be no simpler title, yet none more complex in its implications. Spaceman : Space / Man. The single composite word, imaging an icon of our age, has acquired a familiarity obscuring a polarity which becomes evident when the component words are separated. That single word gives these poems their title (and narrator), but the poems themselves deconstruct its familiarity, demand the polarity of Space / Man before attempting a reunion. In them man is in confrontation with space where "weight is dangerous" (S2) and where he is an "exile, nomad" (S2). Space, however, also denotes that which, though alien and polar to the encapsulated man, is for him a total environment, which, like an ocean, like an amniotic fluid, contains "the stars which are perhaps / the summer pastures of my species' time" (S2) and constitutes "the deeps where shoals / of lifeseeds swim to new beginnings" (S3).

As the sequence progresses, the elementary confrontation of man and space is disturbed by willed action - "set the starship for the black hole, autopilot / i will search the place where we are dreamed" (S3). And the carrying out of intention invokes inevitably the dimension of time in which quest and return can occur. The search appears to be dual: an *anima* quest for the completion of identity, and a quest for the nature and source of being, there being a measure of coincidence in these two goals: "i seek the timeplace where we can meet and join" (S3). Such an ontological motif is first introduced in S1 where the paradoxes of spacetime and timelessness, of confinement and extension, fill the awareness of the spaceman in his metal cocoon - "my body is / as large as small as the rhythm that flows through it" (a very Blakean dynamic). The atemporal complement of that spatial-organic focus is the eternal moment: "whenever i arrive it will be the moment of departure" (S1). This Eliotian paradox creates a metaphysical milieu for the questing journey, one akin to that of the voyagers of 'The Dry Salvages' for whom "... the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back".

Three primary symbolic strands are apparent in the sequence's structure. There is the manifest science-fictional narrative of an alienating, barely-controllable journey, analogue of life's willed and/or determined course. At times the conveying starship, like the outward voyaging 'runaway' of Harry Martinson's *Aniara*, seems autonomous. S7 is the culminating poem expressive of this component. The ship's screen, however often the reset key is tapped, remains an uncommunicative communicator, its flashing merely replicating an asteroidal swarm "... like that the ship plunged through / as if in a tunnel, a circular tunnel it made itself on its unguided track", its only message (a message from the subconscious, or unconscious?) is "Please wait ..." for which the spaceman is grateful: "... it was, after all, all he could do." The inter-related second and third strands also explore metaphors not uncommon in science fiction and fantasy. These are the cosmic womb of regeneration (cf *2001, a Space Odyssey*), which is beautifully realised in the closing lines of the sequence (S8); and the 'out of time/ eternal moment' concept which in S4 and S8 proposes a reality transcending the regressive oneiric nihilism (cf Alice and the Red King) of S5. A feature of Dave Calder's sequence is the manner in which the continuing motifs are variously combined in individual poems. There is no absolutely straightforward story, but a mosaic of insights, intimations and imagery which together offer the reader entry to experiences that are at once psychologically interior and imaginatively interstellar. A remarkable poetic achievement.

K. V. BAILEY

S P A C E M A N

S P A C E M A N / 1

i do not count the time

in this cocoon the metal is my pulse
my mind a slow murmur that echoes the soft throb

i cannot feel my flesh, my body is
as large as small as the rhythm that flows through it

wherever i go, i cannot pass outside myself
whenever i arrive, it will be the moment of departure

i do not fear either space or time
but only my self's fear in the grip of something greater

yet if it fills me, i fill it too
i am stretched immeasurably thin to the ends of space

and i do not count the time

S P A C E M A N / 2

set free from the old migrations
where will you go, exile, nomad

i will wander the stars, which are perhaps
the summer pasture of my species' time

to fill myself with the fresh wonders
i feel my memory is hungry for.

if i return, it will be to our winter
& if i do not, it will be no matter

i have few possessions, for weight is dangerous
i carry my home & death, within me, always

S P A C E M A N / 5

how does it feel to be awake? he said
in words that were not quite of the language

i could not move my head, could not laugh,
yet it seemed so foolish, so unreal, and he
stays, serious, as if waiting for a sign,
some prophecy to affirm this resurrection,
keeps talking of cold sleep and centuries,
strange rituals.

if it should be true then i
have dreamed away lifetimes, have even
dreamed i dreamed, and never wondered
how it would be when i woke,
what face, what name, i'd bear.

this is perhaps that very dream, how can
i tell? i remember too many maybes, no
starts or conclusions, and though i recall
this corridor of clear containers from
somewhere, sometime, that is not uncommon.

i must stay calm, watchful, above all
unpreoccupied; do the best i can
to meet this dream's demands

S P A C E M A N / 6

he had floated through the light years: it was not
as restful or as effortless as he had first imagined.
but he amused himself by coping with curious difficulties -
the minor struggles to perform small tasks, to feed, to wash,
kept him from total aimlessness. What else was there to do?
the ship, the voyage, were out of his control, even to stop
would be a slow grind down to death. That time passed for others
he knew from reports heard long after the event, and his own messages
dropped behind him as if they belonged to someone else.
The sun was behind him, he moved into his fading shadow. Entranced,
he drifted in his small space while the ship
edged into and span out of the orbits of great planets
in a time too huge, too uncentered to concern him.

Only now as he returned, he sensed the slowing, was forced
to focus on coming down to earth, and realised how unprepared
he was for living with dragging heels, and felt
the weightless years accumulate into a burden,
so leaden he was almost crushed
beneath the gravity
of his situation.

SPACE MAN / 7

how many times had he tried for a fresh start, a sign of sense,
patiently, for he had all the time that was left to him

nor did it matter to him where he was. he was going nowhere fast,
and nothing seemed to work, no procedure explained the fault,

he tapped the reset key once more, once more the screen
flickered and crazed and held, once more he read the message

the same as ever, promising nothing: Please wait ...
and again he said to himself, it's just a statement. anything

i think it means is only what i think it means. And then as before,
the screen lurched and he sat motionless staring at it flashing

like a shower of asteroids, like that the ship no doubt plunged through;
as if in a tunnel, a circular tunnel it made itself on its unguided track,

until it held once more, once more requested patience. And he was grateful
for those two words. It was, after all, all he could do.

SPACE MAN / 8

After the new life had been launched, the booster fuel spent,
of all things her shape alone, if slightly damaged, was much as before
They sped through time, dazed, between auto-pilot and alarm,
driven by the sound of the child, steering erratically
through the surges and shut-downs of almost ungovernable energy;
and when at last they rested it was already the future
and when they lay on the couch and asked where are we now
the ship replied: here, inside me. It spoke in the child's voice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in 1946, Dave Calder began to be published in 1965 while he was studying law. After qualifying he had jobs as varied as teacher, roofer, baker and surveyor's pole holder and in the fields of housing cooperative and play development, while pursuing a continuous involvement in a variety of aspects of poetry..

He has been giving readings of his poetry round the country since 1968. For many years he toured with musicians and performance arts groups while at the same time creating and participating in events as an independent artist and running poetry readings, mainly in Liverpool.

His frequent work with the Great Georges Community Cultural Project from 1970 and later for the Merseyside Play Action Council involved him in arts, play and education in the community.

He was a co-founder of, and still works for, the Windows Project, which since 1976 has provided innovative poetry workshops, in particular with children at play, as well as a wide range of other facilities for those interested in writing. He is also active in the Poets in Schools and Writers in Schools programmes.

His work is published in eight collections and many pamphlets, has appeared in numerous anthologies, national and international magazines, on cards, posters and in exhibitions. He has scripted mixed-media events and schools poetry programmes for the BBC and his work has been used and recorded by theatre and performance companies and broadcast on BBC TV, Radios 3, 4, 5 and many local stations.

Poetry publications

Dealers and Dancers (1972), Cube (1972), KONG (1974), April (1974), Fingerbook of Thumb (1975), Leaf of Mouth (1976), Spaced (1979), The Batik Poems (1980), Continents (1981), Buchan (1982) Islands (1983), Theorems of Violence (1984), Umbrellas (1985), Bamboozled (1987), Passages (1987), Snake Songs (1988), A Garden for Dracula (1988)

His work appears in more than fifty anthologies, over forty of which are for younger readers. Those of most interest for SF poetry readers are Burning with a Vision (Owlswick, USA), The Umbral Anthology (Umbral, USA) and Snow Summits in the Sun (Cerulean, USA).

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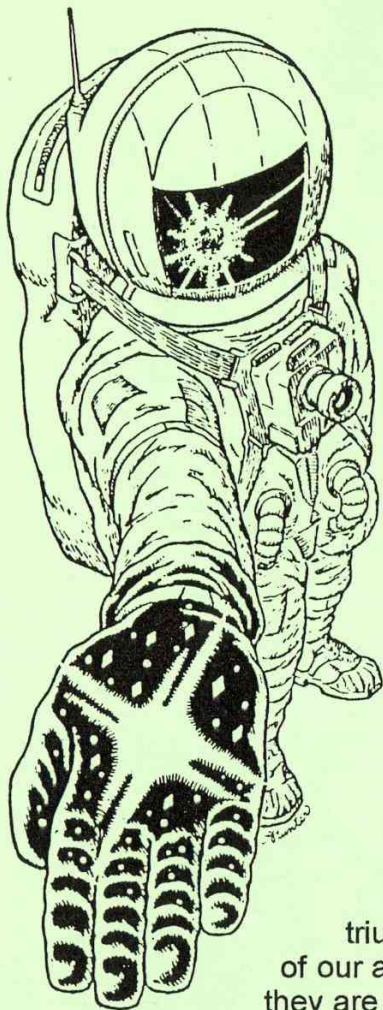
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S P A C E M A N

'A remarkable
poetic achievement.'

K. V. Bailey
Introduction

In this powerful sequence
Dave Calder explores the
outward quest for
knowledge, and the inward
search for meaning, of his
space voyager narrator.
Freeing this explorer of the
endlessnesss Out There from
the obscuring veils of media
simplicities, he succeeds
triumphantly in 'imaging' an icon
of our age' in ways as fully human as
they are fluidly, and beautifully, poetic.

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