

Gary Geddes, *The Terracotta Army* (Calstock, UK: Peterloo Poets, 2007 [1984]), 51 pp. (unpaginated); ISBN 97801904324607 (pbk); RRP: 7.95 pounds sterling.

This collection of poetry comes highly recommended; Gary Geddes (b. 1940), a former Professor at Concordia University, Montreal is deemed Canada's finest political poet. The back cover notes *The Terracotta Army* won the 1985 Best Book (Americas Region) in the Commonwealth Poetry Competition. The 1974 discovery of the vast army (around 8,000 soldiers) of terracotta warriors guarding the tomb of Qin Shi Huang ('First Sovereign Emperor'), founder of the Qin Dynasty, who reigned 221–210 BCE, is of great interest historically, and significant for archaeology, museology, and heritage studies. The First Emperor built the original, unified Chinese empire, and is an almost mythical figure. All the poems are named for figures in the army or associated with the making of war: "Archer," "Spearman," and "Minister of War," for example. Geddes plays with the terracotta army as pieces of pottery and as a real military force.

The inspiration for the poetry cycle was a visit to Xian in 1981, in which Geddes saw the army of the First Emperor. He adopts a ventriloquist technique, speaking in the persona of each role, and uses a standard structure, nine couplets, to create the impression of order and discipline appropriate to an army. Yet, the seemingly similar participants express very different sentiments about war and its processes: the Charioteer objects to most of the terracotta horses being "cast from a single mould" as he "found more distinctive characteristics in horses/ than in men" (p. 3); the wily Minister of War (the only speaker to be allocated two poems) "kept the Emperor occupied with toy soldiers/ and the arts, or fears of death and court intrigue/ while the real politics unfolded as I knew it would" (p. 9); and the Commando "prayed daily [his] strength would win/ sufficient honours" (p. 29).

Geddes is a vivid and compelling writer, and his taut, compressed character studies are varied and arresting. The interweaving of human characters' attitudes to war and the over-arching theme of the creation of the terracotta army in the potters' kilns are cleverly combined. The gruesome image at the end of "Guardman", where the Guardsman leaves the tomb of Qin Shi Huang after a disagreement with the master potter and is told while having a drink in the mess "the tomb was finished/ and the great door had been dropped into place,/ sealing in every artist and workman employed there" (p. 7) stayed in this reader's mind long after the book was finished. Peterloo Poets are to be congratulated for reprinting this award-winning volume of poetry by one of the more distinguished poets writing in English today. I heartily recommend *The Terracotta Army* to all readers of poetry, and hope that it will prove a gateway into Gary Geddes' other poetic writings which stretch over forty-five years, from 1971 to 2016. Reading such poetry is transformational.

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