

LA VOZ HISTÓRICA EN LA POESÍA INGLESA (1985-2005)

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Fuentes primarias

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IRON AGE

Peter Redgrove (1932-2003) - *Assembling a Ghost* (1996)

As they worked the meteorite with silex hammers,
'Your knives - where are they obtained?'
Asked Cortez of the Aztec chiefs,
Who simply pointed upwards, to the sky.

Meteoric iron was the valuta, superseding gold,
Aeroliths weighted with stellar sanctity skidding to earth,
Ore speeding from elsewhere, trophy of the beyond;

And the one who makes a sword,
Beating the iron fallen from heaven into stars,
Is naturally invulnerable as those stars; and this Smith
Strikes his anvil so that nature feels

Through all her pores the enormous revelry.

River History

Lavinia Greenlaw (1962) - *Night Photograph* (1993)

Even then the river carried cargo,
Saxon corn shipped to storehouses on the Rhine.
Taxes were paid in pepper and cloth by the Easterlings,
the German merchants trading from the Steelyard
demolished in the fire of 1666.
Wharves burned like touchpaper, packed
with resin, sulphur, pitch.
The daily catch between London and Deptford
was salmon, eel, smelt and plaice
but the Port Authority preferred to dine
at the Tavern on the best turtle soup in the City
as they argued the height of the wall to be built
against the Mudlarks, Plunderers and Peterboatmen,
intent on their nightly specialized percentage:
cloves from Zanzibar, mother-of-pearl,
tortoiseshell, South American iodine,
West Indian rum, the heavy iron bottles
of Spanish quicksilver, and, from Ivory House,
the occasional mammoth tusk unfrozen in Siberia.
The Empire expanded, cess-pits were banned,
water grew thick with steamships and sewage
and the docks pushed east out into the marshes,
breaking the horizon with a forest of cranes
that unloaded meat, cloth, tobacco and grain
from countries my school atlas still colours pink.
At the Crutched Friars Deposit Office records were kept
of ships in berth, noted daily
by a row of clerks crouched under gaslight
and seven-foot ceilings. Records were kept
of each member of the Union, the fight to be paid
a tanner an hour and not have to climb each day
on another's back and shout to be chosen.
There was always the army.
The Luftwaffe bombed Surrey Commercial Docks
for fifty-seven nights and the timber blazed
for more days than most people kept counting.

Even when every magnetic mine
had been located and cleared, there were dangers.
Centuries of waste had silted the river
till the water ran black over Teddington weir
and a bag of rubbish thrown from London Bridge
took six weeks to ride a dying current
out to the estuary. No swimming, no fish,
and those who fell in had to be sluiced out.
No ships, no work. The industry found itself
caught in the net of passing time,
watching mile after mile of dockland fill
with silence and absence. Land changed hands
in an estate agent's office, short-lease premises
with 'Upstream' and 'Downstream' carved above the doors.
Now the tidal traffic is a slow weekday flow of cars
channeled into streets built before cars were thought of.
They inch round corners, nudge against kerbs,
then settle tight packed against the pavement.
On Butler's Wharf, the only machinery
now in daily use is the tow-away truck:
cruising yellow lines, it pauses to hoist
the solid engineering of a badly parked BMW
into the air with illogical ease.
In Coriander Building, an agency
maintains the plants, the colour scheme is neutral
but the smell of new paint has yet to sink in,
like the spice that still seasons the air after rain.
A film crew arrives, on a costly location shoot
for *Jack the Ripper*. It's a crowded night.
Intent on atmosphere, they've cluttered the alleys
with urchins, trollops and guttersnipes
who drift to the waterfront when they're not working
and gaze across at the biggest, emptiest office block in Europe
and its undefendable, passing light.

The Other England

Tom Paulin (1949) - *Walking a Line* (1994)

- 1 Just as Charles Stuart
- 2 ---that virus in the body politic
- 3 hid his rebel presence
- 4 in an oak tree
- 5 while troopers scoured the woods
- 6 after the battle of Worcester
- 7 so the evil essence
- 8 of all things royal
- 9 when it came to oust
- 10 the new republic
- 11 perched upon a tree
- 12 *the middle tree and highest*

- 13 now the shade of John Milton
- 14 asks how long will the loyal
- 15 citizens of Britain
- 16 go on bending the knee
- 17 to a scraggy vulture
- 18 that feasts on a spent tampon
- 19 and a dead dick?

HISTORY

Roland John (1940) - *To Weigh Alternatives* (1994)

To start with air pure and the streams undammed
a landscape still to be parcelled and broken by walls,
not yet the time of high halls, old men
and warriors' calls in the fields of battle.

But the beginning of terror, of loneliness, the panic
before darkness, victims of rocks, the Great Tree
rustling, the terrible sounds from the sea, black spells,
can trips for victory in the caves of the hunters.

Later spears and the bleached, ground bones on the shore
Troy fallen and the beaked ships scattered
over ocean, landless men battered, proud captains lost,
it mattered little, innocence over, history's begun.,

The clan time, family feuds, dynasties rise,
kings laid low, politics and intrigue, the upward
curve to the electric future, where bored with satiety
men in high halls hoard the relics of Troy's last kings.

Now time of gombeen men, bankers, jobbers and freaks,
sure tricksters all and still brassy with power
but without a hero's pain, a dour crew of showmen
who would still cower before any god you care to name.

The Sculpture Museum in February

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *The Wound-dresser's Dream* (1996)

It was warm behind the glass,
the sun a swung lure

chandeliers filmed with muslin,
marble bodies flowing against the light

so many sexual positions
ghosted in the huge milky mirrors

and outside, the rococo garden,
a gardener opening the soil.

Millennium

Patricia Beer (1919-1999) - *Autumn* (1997)

- 1 A thousand times travelling over these fields,
- 2 Shorn as if shamed, the shortest day
- 3 Has yellowed and gone, yomping to new year.
- 4 From a Wessex window we have watched it.
- 5 We mull over the millennium. Not many days now.

- 6 This time ten centuries ago
- 7 (Romans retired, Normans not ready)
- 8 Saxons had come here to settle, not swallow or govern.
- 9 Vain in vigour they vowed this hill would suit them.
- 10 Wood served these warlords wonderfully for dwelling.
- 11 They lived off the land, lopping the trees
- 12 That soared again in the same spot, as mead-halls
- 13 Where warriors wilted, weapons erect beside them.
- 14 They snored, serging and slumping with the verse,
- 15 Pleased the poet. They performed his rhythm.
- 16 Bats burst in out of a burning night sky
- 17 Like stars scorched and scattered over Middle-earth.

- 18 At sunrise they would set out to seek more land,
- 19 Claiming Cornwall, calling its fields after themselves.
- 20 Half-foemen, half farmers, they frisked like centaurs
- 21 On the Roman road that rang through Exeter,
- 22 Till moors muffled them and mists sent wandering.

- 23 Paganism was patchy but powerful nonetheless
- 24 Giving new greatness to the goddess Easter.
- 25 Kings of Wessex were Christians, counting their years
- 26 From the birth. Backsliders, brought home by carols
- 27 Each winter, kept Woden but worshipped one God.

- 28 Fifty fathers-and-sons fill this place,
- 29 Heroes hidden in earth or hoarded offshore
- 30 Tombed with their treasures till tides parted them
- 31 They left us language and lymph, verse
- 32 Made of sibling sounds and strong heartbeats.
- 33 We have always talked of lasting till Two Thousand.
- 34 From January on we could join them, justly,

- 35 For now comes Nunc Dimittis, if needed.
- 36 It is dispiriting to dodge death for ever.

A Maybe Day in Kazakhstan (1994) - Tony Harrison

Flea-market

A city wall not quite sure where,
no May Day posters plastered there.
Although it's May Day no parade
disturbs the new free world of trade,
only the memory of a choir
and from it one voice rising higher
out of a red doll standing near a
man who bows a Black Sea *lyra*.

The *lyra* man

I seek directions from the man
who welcomes me to 'Kazakhstan!'

What sometimes haunts these traders' looks
are dark nights and days in cattle trucks.

Cold dark deportation trains
still jolt and judder through their brains.

From Black Sea coast to Kazakhstan
cooped up in a cattle van.

Confined to Kazakhstan and far
from Sukhumi and Krasnodar.

May Day comes and haunts a man
with memories of Kazakhstan.

Red flags he flogs for what he can
once flew high in 'Kazakhstan!'

Flag-seller

This flea market that's now free
from surveillance by the KGB,
though things to aid the human eye
take aim, surveyor even spy
are all part of this pavement trade
police no longer keep surveyed.
The free market, seller/buyer
of tablecloths and *Stolichnaya*,
hats made of Siberian furs,
and surplus Soviet secateurs
we see flea-market browsers feel
to test the sharpness of the steel.

	<p>Maybe they once cut the wire that put barbed confines round a choir, not for pruning plants but man collectivized in Kazakhstan.</p>	not in black boots and on parade .	Old woman knitting
Red dolls	<p>They seem to sell these everywhere as talismans against despair, these little dolls on every stall no force seems able to make fall. The doll, no matter what the drop, 'll come up trilling from her topple, cling to her song and go on clinging though Kazakhstan could crush her singing, collectivized and forced by rote to still the <i>lyra</i> in her throat.</p>		Gas masks
Tools and spare parts	<p>We see in these flea-market scenes all the system's stilled machines, the bit, the drill, the cog, the gear, the technology of yesteryear. The hammer once gripped in the fist of Stakhanovite and Stalinist or cast in gold as an award for greater output quotas scored. The Stakhanovites have all downed tools and live by new free-market rules. And no red flags to stitch or darn means surpluses of scarlet yarn. The people's flags of deepest red novel coverlets to drape a bed. And uniforms have been sloughed off, redundant after Gorbachev, mere novelties a trader peddles, not in Red Square impaled with medals bouncing on breasts as brass bands play marchers and missiles through May Day</p>		Radiation meters
Red Anny uniforms	<p>This march-past's only shoppers' feet browsing on flea-market street in various shoes, high heels or suede,</p>		Toy xylophone

She sees their
feet from
where she's
sitting on the
pavement,
peddling,
knitting.
And
maybe
all her
bright
bootees
will
walk
to
better
times
than
these,
not crash
their heels
to May
Day brass
as
medalled
smilers
watch
them
pass, not
keep in
step, or
form in
ranks
and march as
boots in front of
tanks.
And maybe
the head that
wears this
bonnet won't

ever need a gas mask on it...

The Kazakhstan these masks come
from was the test site for the Soviet
bomb. And choristers in gas masks gag
and can't perform the People's
Flag. The most you'll ever get
from them
's a fearful muffled requiem.
The metronome these masks
employ gets sold here as a
gruesome toy.
These meters dumped in great amounts
measure radiation counts.

Army issue anti-gas
and army surplus May Day brass
some Kazakh or Uzbek brigade
marched past with playing on
parade.

They need a new tune to
redeem the redness of the old
regime.

The tune we hear three browsers play
still haunts them though it's had its
day.

Pavement peddlers trading
trash from Communism's fatal
crash, salvaging the washed
up cargo
from their ill-fated, shattered *Argo*,
spewing from its kitsch-crammed
hold debris to be bought and sold,
and all that spewed-up spillage
sprawls on these pathetic pavement
stalls.

Lenin	<p>Doomed Argonauts condemned to peddle the bric-à-brac of badge and medal from that doomed voyage that maroons Lenin here with fork and spoons, cast in bronze now cast away to read <i>Das Kapital</i> all day.</p>	Acropolis	<p>but to Athens, Greece that they've all come. This market wasn't Kazakhstan but where democracy began two millennia and a half ago which makes its progress pretty slow.</p>
Trotsky	<p>Most stalls sell his statuette (though I haven't seen one bought here yet), this mannikin time's mummified in philosophical formaldehyde, and behind bronze Vladimir Ilyich (once you've pressed his little switch) there, in strange surgical disguise, Dr Trotsky rolls his eyes drinking his prescribed solution, only his eyes in revolution and that by no means permanent once Dr Trotsky's battery's spent. And Trotsky drinks and drinks and drinks because the new free market stinks. Though New World Order mongers crow that History's got nowhere to go and make the socialist despair it's ever going anywhere, the New World Order thinks we're wiser when every man's a merchandiser. But Trotsky goes on making toasts to <i>glasnost</i> and the gulag ghosts. The foundered <i>Argo's</i> former crew now peddling here on pavements new, marooned in free flea-market forces with no sights fixed on future courses, what new horizons do they scan, these castaways from Kazakhstan?</p>	Athinas Street, Athens	<p>This flea-market Athens street is where a dream and nightmare meet. These peddlers, Greeks, once deportees to Kazakhstan, call Kleisthenes, democracy's first dreamer, kin (a dream they want including in) so come to Greece to reconnect and salvage lives that Stalin wrecked and get to feel like Greeks again, though Greeks still call them Soviet men, forced out of Georgia and displaced from fertile farms to barren waste, at two hours' notice packed in trains to Central Asia's arid plains.</p>
	<p>They scan the market where they are, not Sukhumi or Krasnodar... and not Georgia, Georgia Tblis (Tbilisi, Georgia) but Greece - not the Black Sea coast Sukhum</p>	Archive. Song (tune: 'Red Flag')	<p><i>'Forced from our farm in Sukhumi though full of tears my eyes could see the cotton glow, a golden fleece cold in moonlight far from Greece.</i></p>
		Tubas	<p><i>Though long ago I've not forgotten the moonglow on the Kazakh cotton when we staggered from the cattle van collectivized in Kazakhstan.'</i></p> <p>Their nightmares in the old regime have not quite dimmed the ancient dream.</p> <p>Two Soviet tubas, silver, brass, struggle through the May Day mass, tubas in whose bulled-up gleam red flags blazoned the regime, tubas in which bazookas shone reflecting coats with medals on, tubas with missiles mirrored in, now, unregimented, can begin</p>

	<p>to learn a new tune for today and play a fanfare not for May but Maybe Day and that maybe 's the future of democracy.</p>		<p>the girl's first cautious tread onto the path of fallen red.</p>
Procession up Acropolis	<p>Two tubas join their band to blow as jaunty a new <i>Jubilo</i> as may be hazarded in days when only a muffled fanfare plays.</p>	GIRL (song)	<p><i>'From Kazakhstan now back in Greece I dream the maybe, piece by piece. I dream with open eyes and see the marble of maybe... maybe.'</i></p>
	<p>This band of Greeks who get called Russian with their strings, brass and percussion, whatever they could buy or borrow (and sell on their own stalls tomorrow) will play a cautious fanfare blown for democracy's foundation stone.</p>	Wide shot, Theatre of Dionysus. Fade	<p>The scarlet banners she trod on to find her red doll have all gone with all the instruments that played back into flea-market trade, the red flags back on pavement stalls, folded, as May Day evening falls</p>
Fanfare to Parthenon	<p>They'll wake what may be from the waste, this makeshift band of the displaced.</p> <p>Not marble but millennia weigh on cables that maybe'll fray. Depending how you calculate democracy's foundation date is 506 or 7 or 8 but once you've got it off the ground with gleeful or more grating sound and got it hoisted in the air, it goes into which structure? Where?</p> <p>With democracy the truth is this: no final fanfared edifice, only the crane however grating continually recreating...</p>		
Girl in Theatre of Dionysus. <i>Lyra</i> player	<p>The people's flags of deepest red spread for tender feet to tread. Those scarlet standards he saw fly above his and other heads, held high in Kazakhstan, when he was Russian, now he's Greek he watches cushion</p>		

The Shadow of Hiroshima (1995) - Tony Harrison (1937)

SHADOW SAN

I heard a sound I thought was birds
but then I swear I heard these words:

'This voice comes from the shadow cast
by Hiroshima's A-bomb blast.
The sound you hear inside this case
is of a man who fans the face
he used to have before the flash
turned face and body into ash.
I am the nameless fanning man
you may address as Shadow San.

The inferno flayed me as I fanned,
gold fan with cranes on in my hand.
In that fierce force but one degree
of quicker combustibility
separated fan and me,
but that one degree meant that the man
was stamped on stone but not the fan.

My shadow's fading and I fear
I may not make centenary year,
and so before I finally fade
give one last outing to this shade,
and you will be my eyes to see
this fiftieth anniversary.'

He bowed. I bowed, and then began
one day's parole for Shadow San.

..

Radio exercises

The Shadow said, 'I recognize
this pre-war tune for exercise.
Not only here but through Japan
this was how each day began
with music from the NHK
[our BBC] to start the day.
This Radio Tai-chi's been broadcast
before and since the A-bomb blast.
Radio Tai-chi's brought the nation,
ruined and wrecked, regeneration

of weary flesh and hopeless soul
and got the flag back up the pole.

A-Bomb Dome

My shadow's eighty, so is this
devastated edifice,
built 1915 by a Czech
now A-Bomb Dome, symbolic wreck
left standing for our meditation
on nuclear death and devastation.

Though the river by the name
of Motoyasu's just the same
and though the old sun emblem flies
there's nothing else I recognize
in all this city I called home
but this gaunt husk, this gutted Dome
opposite the Peace Park where
they'll loose the doves into the air
tomorrow at 8.2.3
too late, alas, for me to see.
At 8.15 the Peace Bell's chime
means my fiftieth burning time.

KOBAISHI, SAN

•
Kobaishi San,
Hiroshima's champion pigeon man,
does Radio Tai-chi exercises
beside his pigeon racing prizes
and cooing and flapping up above's
a loft full of symbolic doves
his pigeons are called on to be
tomorrow at 8.2.3.
August 6th, 8.2.3's
the time tomorrow that makes these
flapping pigeons VIPs.
Kobaishi San's cohort
of colombophiles, apart from sport,
every August 6th supply
doves of peace to fill the sky
at 8.2.3: eight minutes past

the time of Hiroshima's A-bomb blast.
And all the homing pigeons home
back to their lofts past A-Bomb Dome.
He'll be there to count them back and by
about 8.30 he can scan the sky
and at 8.40 can begin
to whistle his flock of pigeons in.

•
The Flame of Peace burns just behind
the ten green cages where, confined
until tomorrow's special day,
the pigeon fanciers' peace doves stay,
kept unfed, till they're set free
tomorrow at 8.2.3,
and, in about ten minutes, speed
back to their lofts to get their feed.

SAKAMOTO SAN

•
And this is Sakamoto San,
proud his birds can help Japan
make tomorrow's plea for Peace,
who crates a score for the Release.
And he'll be at his loft to count,
if twenty go, the same amount
come home. Though the flight back's short
peace doves can get lost, or caught.

Hara San paints
the A-Bomb
Dome

•
While pigeon fanciers prepare
others start the day with prayer.
Like Hiroshi Hara who each year
begins his own peace ritual here.
'Hiroshi Hara, did you say?'
said Shadow San, 'Alive today?
How come a man now sixty-three
survived the Bomb blast and not me?'

Because, by chance, he was away
at his grandmother's that fatal day,
Hara San has lived to see
this fiftieth anniversary.
Hara San, lucky to survive
and live to 1995,
is a painter and his way
of commemorating A-Bomb Day
and all his friends lost in the war
is on the 5th, today, to draw
and paint the A-Bomb Dome with water from
the river those flayed by the Bomb,
including all his friends from school,
jumped in, hoping it would cool
their burning and bomb-blackened skin,
here where he dips his bottle in.
His schoolmates' shrieks from blackened lips
haunt Hara San each time he dips
his brush in water from the stream
to give relief to those who scream,
all his dying schoolmates, those
whose skin slid off their flesh like clothes.
Like clothes, three sizes oversize
their flayed skin loosens from their thighs.
Burns and blisters, bloated blebs
burst as the Motoyasu ebbs,
the tidal Motoyasu trails
black flaps of flesh like chiffon veils.
Like kimonos with their belts untied
black sloughed-off skin floats on the tide.
This water mixed with children's cries
paints the Dome, green trees, blue skies
and in that way, he hopes, redeems
something from his schoolmates' screams.
'The force that blew the Dome apart,'
said the Shadow, 'makes short work of art.'

..

Baseball stadium

Close to the Dome on soil where heat
burnt the soles off people's feet,
on Saturdays, close to Ground Zero,
crowds cheer the current sporting hero.

Tomorrow they may pause in play
to watch the peace doves pass that way.

Shadow San stood, head on one side,
listening, and then he cried:
'You'd need a stadium five times higher
to seat all those who died by fire.
Where you see baseball I can hear
all those thousands who can't cheer.
Listen, can't you hear the choir
of those who perished in the fire?'

'I hear a baseball being hit
or thudding into catcher's mitt!'

Shadow San, exasperated
I heard no chorus of cremated,
deaf to all the humming dead,
turned to me again and said:

'Dead men's mouths make only M,
the M in *Dome*, the M in *Bomb*,
tuned to the hum that's coming from
the A-Bomb Dome that I hear hum
all round this baseball stadium,
still after all these fifty years
reverberating in my ears.
Can you *not* hear it? Or the choir?'

'No, only a baseball hitting wire!'

And you, in front of your TVs
which are, no doubt, all Japanese,
all you sitting there at home
can you hear the humming Dome,
the M, the M? As one of those
who always haunts where water flows

Shadow San, destroyed by heat,
drew me away to this retreat.

*

Shinto shrine

'This,' said Shadow San, 'this shrine,
though I'm not certain, seems like mine.
The fiery fountain dragon felt
the same fierce force that made me melt
and melted but can be remade
to spout cool water in the shade.
Burnt red banners and bamboo,
orange arches all made new.
That character carved on this trough
was blackened but not blasted off.
This lion though its jaw got cracked
has all the rest of it intact.

I came here to this Shinto shrine
most mornings between eight and nine,'
the Shadow told me, 'and the day
I was to die I came to pray,
to pull the bell rope, throw the yen,
bow twice, clap twice'... He broke off. Then
Shadow San, although he fanned
obsessively, grabbed at my hand
and with a more than shadow squeeze
made my blood and spirit freeze.
I see my Sonoko returning.
It was her who I was yearning
on the steps for, burning, burning.

SONOKO

Ah those tender, tender fingertips
the memory of those lips, those lips.'
At that moment no dead man
can have longed for life like Shadow San,
who, hoping love could break through time
thought he watched his loved-one climb
the blasted but now rebuilt shrine
to seek the help of powers divine.

But once he'd seen her throw the yen
hope left him when he spoke again.
'No! No!' he said, 'Not Sonoko,
we both died fifty years ago.
And if she *had* survived she'd be
a scarred and shrunken seventy-three.
But that girl, head bowed at the shrine
wings my heart, she's so like mine,
so like the girl I was to meet
that August 6th and go and eat
sushi and drink *sake* and...
the night of love we'd also planned.
And I sat longing, planning
on the bank steps, fanning, fanning
in a 100 Fahrenheit
longing for my girl and night...
when all my flesh was set alight.'

*

NHK and
A-Bomb Dome

Above this shrine where he had seen
the girl like his, the workers clean
windows at the NHK
(their BBC) for Peace-Dove Day
and clean the windows so they'll see
to film the peace-doves being set free
or point out to visitors the view
the Shadow keeps returning to:
'The A-Bomb Dome I never can
quite lose from view,' said Shadow San.
'It's as if,' he said, 'these views were by
my favourite painter Hokusai,
and if he re-did his hundred views
instead of Mount Fuji now he'd choose
as Hara San, his painter heir
still painting on his folding chair,
chose, the A-Bomb Dome, the eye
always gets recaptured by.
I take my city bearings from
that fellow relic of the Bomb.'

Elementary
school

The school where all the pupils died
stands rebuilt near this riverside.

•

When Shadow San set eyes on these
he began to sing in Japanese:

'Misu, misu kudasai,

water, water they'd all cry
burned and blackened, soon to die
if these pupils here had been
in this same room at 8.15
the 6th of August' 45.

None of them would be alive.

And none would see another star
if they'd been where now they are,
and me, this shadow Rip Van Winkle
for whom all stars have lost their twinkle,
came here to school before the War
and also learned to use a saw.

I hear my own voice in this choir
I hope the world will spare from fire.
I learned this song, it's one you sing
to calm little pigeons panicking.'

•

MITSUFUJI SAN

The A-Bomb Dome and all the rest
make Mitsufuji San depressed.
He wouldn't mind if it was made
into a vast pinball arcade,
a game that millions will play
even tomorrow, A-Bomb Day.
He's never been to see you yet,
I told the sullen silhouette.
He thinks it's better to forget.

He likes to sing, to play, to laugh,
never goes near the Cenotaph,
unless, like now, delivering doves.

He only does the things he loves,
what makes him happy, and doves do.
He sings to them to make them coo;
his girlfriend does, and he'd prefer
to sing this little song to her,
a pigeon song he'd sooner use to
calm her flutters into coos.
Shadow San who said he'd seen
birds in flames at 8.15
with a dead man's dosed mouth M
hummed the pigeon song with him,
then said quietly, 'Which burns quicker,
birds or basket, wings or wicker?'

Tram crosses the
Aioi Bridge

As the sun-drenched streetcar crossed
the centre of the Holocaust,
the Aioi Bridge the Enola Gay
took focus from that fatal day,
I heard the fanning Shadow say:
'The trams of Hiroshima ran
always on time,' said Shadow San,
'but at 8.15 were blasted black
along this then bomb-buckled track
and all the passengers, like me,
were fanned into eternity.'

Mitsufuji San
phones Sonoko

The Shadow melted into shade.
I thought the phone made him afraid,
I thought the booth put him in mind
of that place he'd been confined
until this morning in and must return
when the Peace Bell chimes to burn
and to resume at 8.15
his most uncarnal quarantine.
Though Mitsufuji hates to dwell
on why and how the A-bomb fell
the Dome's dark hellish silhouette
summons up his dove, his pet.
The fanning shade stood flabbergasted
that the Dome the Bomb had blasted

could now so magically summon,
from waste and wilderness, a woman.

I asked the Shadow to translate:
'The A-Bomb Dome makes him a date
but he's got some hours to wait.
He'll leave his peace-doves first and then
go to play pin-ball until ten.'

Hara San paints
the A-Bomb
Dome

Hara San hears scorched throats croak
where now new thirsts get quenched by Coke.
'And Coke,' sighed fanning Shadow San,
'has come to conquer new Japan.'

The forecast from the NHK
predicts another scorching day
tomorrow and the shops will sell
scores of ice-cold crimson cans
of Coke, and scores and scores of fans
to cool the watchers waiting for
the liberated doves to soar.

Tomorrow morning, 8.15,
he'll give the trees their August green
and the sky its final blue,
then what Hara San will do
at the very moment the Bomb fell
and he hears the tolling of the bell
is seal and sign it with the date...
'The date that also sealed my fate,'
added the watching Shadow San
who, as the day cooled, dosed his fan.

Sunset

The setting sun forecast as stronger
tomorrow made my shadow longer,
but Shadow San's stayed just the same
as when first cast by flash and flame.

The sun tomorrow that's forecast
as hot as when the A-bomb blast
exploded fifty years ago
will make the fans flap to and fro
and sell a fortune in iced drinks
but now, turns fiery red, and sinks.

Hiroshima by
night, neon
lights

Except when nightworld neon threw
his outline out in red or blue,
or he made another bitter joke
about the crimson conqueror, Coke,
he stayed unseen and silent in the night
until he stopped me at this sight:
'Parlor Atom, look this sign
must mean another A-bomb shrine.
with shadows in it just like mine.
Perhaps I'll find a fellow shade.'

Parlour Atom
pinball arcade

'It's a mere pinball machine arcade
I'm sorry to tell you, Shadow San,
there are thousands like it in Japan
there are 30 million Japanese
spend their nights in "shrines" like these.'

'I thought Mitsufuji came to pray!'
'No, Shadow San, to play, to play
A pinball addict I'm afraid.'

We watched him enter the arcade.
The sound unleashed made Shadow shrink.
He shouted out: 'It makes me think
of Hiroshima shattering, and me
a shadow showered with bomb debris.'

Mitsufuji San
meets Sonoko

Shadow San drew me ahead
half-excited, half in dread,
and when Mitsufuji came he said:

'Mitsufuji's little dove
's so like my own cremated love,
and maybe all my dead man's yearning, still
undiminished from the burning
has made Mitsufuji San,
the Hiroshima pigeon man,
and the *sake* girl he's met unite
to commemorate my final night.'

The thought consoled him for a while.
But Shadow San soon lost the smile
I'd imagined that he'd had
and stopped me in the night to add:

'Like men condemned to hang or fry
get favourite meals before they die,
the man who fanned his way to hell
wills them to the Love Hotel.'

..

Mitsufuji San
and Sonoko in
Love Hotel

'Seeing Sonoko asleep
could even make a shadow weep.
Girls as beautiful, as young, as sweet
were seared to cinders by the heat.

Sayonara, Sonoko,
I love you but I have to go
back to my museum case
with no body and no face,
back to a world where none embrace
nor do the things I did before
our hawks and jingos joined the war,
and you're so lucky to do after –
drinking *sake*, singing, laughter,
even Parlor Atom, but above
everything on earth, to love.

Sayonara, I must return
back to the bank steps where I'll bum.
tomorrow morning, 8.15,
only this flimsy paper screen,

flammable as a fan, 's between
your sleeping body and the man
who'll be cremated, Shadow San.
When you hear the Peace Bell chime
that's 8.15, my burning time.
First the conflagration of the fan
then after it the fanning man.

Before my eyes burst from the heat
a blazing dove falls at my feet.'

I saw the saddened shade retire
to face again the flash and fire.

Shadow San
departs

Radio exercises.
Mitsufuji San
wakes in Love
Hotel

Mitsufuji San's alarm
that his doves may come to harm
makes him run past A-Bomb Dome
to catch a tram to take him home
across the bridge they call Aioi,
the bomb-aimer of 'Little Boy'
high up in the Enola Gay
fifty years ago today
took focus from where now we see,
walking the upright of the T,
two survivors' shadows but
shadows still fixed foot to foot,
two survivors here to find
the special seats they've been assigned
to hear the speeches, pray, and see
precisely at 8.23
all the doves in the release
making their winged plea for peace.

Peace ceremony
begins

The cicadas' dry tattoo
gets quicker towards 8.22.
Fans, like a chorus of quick sighs,
will the doves into the skies.
A white glove poised against the blue

signals it's 8.2.2.,
only one minute now before
the liberated doves will soar
above the fans and the cicadas -
Sakamoto San's, Okada's,
and champion Kobaishi San's
and carefree Mitsufuji San's,
flying above the sighing fans.

Once the signaller's white glove
gives the signal, every dove
will rise and fly as cage-doors fall,
crash to the ground, and free them all.

And fanciers wait at home to greet
their hungry peace-doves home to eat.
Normally each fancier's flock
's back and fed by nine o'clock.

•

The peace-doves have been freed but why
won't this last shaking straggler fly?
Perhaps he's seen what's in the sky.

Where peace-doves are the birds of prey
are never very far away.
These hawks cruising the skies
don't care what peace-doves symbolize.
These emblems are mere morsels, meat,
their ripped-out innards good to eat.
Since yesterday the hawks have waited
to see their lunches liberated.
Hiroshima hawks are glad to glut
and gorge themselves on peace-dove gut.

It's not inappropriate birds of prey
are also present on Peace Day.
They could well stand for Japanese
who forced other Asians to their knees.
They stand for a spirit from the past
that moved Japan before the blast,

Release of doves,
8.23

Last dove

Hawks

Mitsufuji San
back at pigeon
loft

A-Bomb Dome
and pigeons

Fan

the old Japan that took Nanking
under its dark, blood-spattered wing,
Japan in her aggressive guise
taking Pearl Harbor by surprise,
the prison camps that made us pray
for any means to bring VJ.

Many doves freed on this day
fall victims to these birds of prey
and Mitsufuji fears his may.
A dove he sang to might this minute
have a hawk's beak thrusting in it.

Or, turned scavenger, join other strays
from all the former Peace Dove Days,
from '94, 3, 2, 1.

The Peace Park's almost overrun
and the symbol of man's peace-seeking soul
is a matter for city pest control.

And peace doves of the recent past
could end up sterilized, or gassed.

Those symbolic doves that flew
in '91 or '92
in '93 or 4 survive
by fighting these from '95...

Pigeon/Peace-doves brawl and fight.

Is the world at peace tonight?

Or are we all like Shadow San
facing inferno with a fan?

Don't Call Us

Adrian Mitchell (1932-2008) - *Blue Coffee: Poems 1985-1996* (1996)

- 1 Stalin phoned Pasternak's
- 2 Noisy flat.
- 3 'Hello, Boris.'
- 4 'Er---hello---can we chat?'

- 5 'What about?' asked Stalin.
- 6 The poet said:
- 7 'Life and death.'
- 8 The phone went dead.

THE HARP

Kenneth C. Steven (1968) - *The Missing Days* (1995)

Under the burning crumble of the peat
Last spring, they found the harp.
A thousand years and more it lay
Unsung, the chords taut in buried hands
Of Celtic bards. The music curled asleep,
Its strings still resin, left full of woods
And sea and birds, like paintings in the earth,
And only curlews mourning in a bleary sky above.

They lifted out the harp, a dozen heads
All bent and captured, listening for the sounds
That might lie mute inside - the bones of hands,
That once had strummed for kings. But all around
Were broken promises, the wreckage of the Viking lash
Across their history's face. The harp still played-
Remembered how to weep.

THE HARP

Andrew Crozier (1943-2008) - *All Where Each Is* (1985)

1 An open book: work. *This metre*
2 *which in England outlived the Anglo-*
3 *Saxon language several centuries.*
4 These are only years. The tree is growing
5 it renews its leaves, they fall.
6 A thought transcribed over a century
7 is ink still damp upon the paper.
8 Wind moves in the leaves, rain gleams
9 upon them. It makes them make a
10 sound like rain drops falling, they move
11 against each other. Wind and rain
12 in silence touching sounds out of the earth.

Art History

Dick Davis (1945) – *Touchwood* (1996)

Paintings and poems - what survives,
The residue of used-up lives
That want to live a little more.
Their gaze pursues you to the door.

Your life's an orphanage in which
The foundling poor stare at the rich
Who load their arms with children they
Hug briefly - but then walk away.

The War in the Congo

Douglas Dunn (1942) - *Northlight* (1988)

- 1 A man in a bar in Glasgow told me of how
- 2 He'd served with the Irish Army in the Congo
- 3 Under the flag of the United Nations.
- 4 'It was hot,' he told me, 'hot, and equatorial.'

- 5 They passed through a deserted and dog-ridden town.
- 6 They passed a house that had been blown up.
- 7 An arm, with a hand, rose between blasted breeze-blocks.
- 8 In the black hand was an envelope, between fingers and thumb.

- 9 The Irish soldier looked at the hand and its letter.
- 10 Cement dust scabbed the blood on the arm.
- 11 He tore a corner off the envelope, removing the stamp,
- 12 Which he sent to his nephew in Howth, in Ireland.

- 13 In reply to what my companion asked him,
- 14 The soldier said it wasn't right to read a stranger's mail.
- 15 There was no one about in the little town, other than
- 16 Dogs and birds, and the arm and its hand, like a cleft stick.

- 17 He didn't say if it was the hand of a man or a woman
- 18 In which the letter was held, between fingers and thumb.
- 19 It was the arm of black Anon, of Africa,
- 20 Holding a letter, just received or unsent.

- 21 What concerns me is the soldier's nephew in Howth
- 22 Holding the piece of envelope with tweezers
- 23 Over the spout of a steaming kettle, and the stamp,
- 24 Renewed and drying between sheets of blotting-paper.

- 25 Philately of foreign wars is a boy in Howth
- 26 Licking a transparent hinge, and mounting a stamp
- 27 In his album, hot, hot and equatorial,
- 28 That innocent know-nothing stamp, lonesome in history.

- 29 Did he or she read it, that letter? Who wrote it? Who sent it?

30 So many stamps, and stamps from many countries,
31 And boys saying to their uncles and elder brothers,
32 'Remember, when you get there, to send me their stamps.'

The Field Transmitter

Peter Scupham (1933) - *The Air Show* (1988)

1 The Field Transmitter, heavy in its box,
2 Uncurls its oily braids and hanks of wire,
3 Stuck by a green corrosion to brass terminals.
4 The knurled knob taps and stutters dit and dah,
5 Its V for Victory: 'For you, the war is over.
6 Come in, my children, from the echoing green,
7 The city street as yet unlicked by paint;
8 Climb from the bunkers in your sad back-gardens,
9 Yesterday's foxholes: iron, sacking, iron.
10 Hand in your outsize helmets, bits of perspex,
11 Your bomb-fins and that treasured German arm-band;
12 Dismiss those leaden armies to the dust
13 Which settles into what you will call memory.
14 Crouched for the last time on the garage floor,
15 Let my headset's hard constriction tighten
16 Till all your war becomes a new, strange tinnitus,
17 The bombers climbing through your cloudy brain-cells,
18 Gaining their altitude and levelling off
19 In as much sky as spreads from ear to ear.
20 This band of gunfire bouncing off your skull
21 Makes the thick sound of other children dying,
22 Out of your reach, beyond your messages,
23 Who played their war-games, heard the sirens glow
24 Hot silver filaments in miles of night,
25 Till gathering babel took them to its arms
26 And held them still, and held them very still.'

History of the Tin Tent

Tom Paulin (1949) - *Walking a Line* (1994)

- 1 During the first push on the Somme
- 2 a temporary captain
- 3 in the Royal Engineers
- 4 ---Peter Nissen a Canadian
- 5 designed an experimental
- 6 steel tent
- 7 that could be erected
- 8 from stacked materials
- 9 by an NCO and eight men
- 10 in 110 minutes

- 11 so the Nissen hut is the descendant
- 12 and enriched relation
- 13 of the Elephant and other
- 14 similar steel structures
- 15 that were adopted then adapted
- 16 for trench warfare

- 17 sheets of corrugated iron
- 18 beaverjoints purlins joists
- 19 wire nails and matchboard lining
- 20 were packed into kits
- 21 so complete societies
- 22 could be knocked and bent
- 23 into sudden being
- 24 by a squad of soldiers with a truck
- 25 a few tools
- 26 and a pair of ladders

- 27 barracks hospital
- 28 mess hall and hangar
- 29 ---chapel shooting-range petrol dump &c
- 30 they were all bowed into shape
- 31 from rippling thundery
- 32 hundredweight acres
- 33 of sheet metal

34 Europe became a desert
35 so these tents could happen
36 though they now seem banal
37 like the word *forever*

38 all over England
39 on farmland and airfields
40 these halfsubmerged sheds
41 have a throwaway permanence
42 a never newpainted
43 sense of duration
44 that exists anywhere
45 and belongs nowhere
46 ---ribbed basic
47 set fast in pocked concrete
48 they're almost like texts
49 no one wants to read
50 ---texts prefabs caves
51 a whole aesthetic in reverse

News Report, September 1991.
U.S. BURIED IRAQI SOLDIERS ALIVE IN GULF WAR

Denise Levertov (1923-1997) - *Evening Train* (1992)

1 " *What you saw was a*
2 *bunch of trenches with*
3 *arms sticking out.*"
4 "Plows mounted on
5 tanks. Combat
6 earthmovers."
7 "Defiant."
8 "Buried."
9 "Carefully planned and
10 rehearsed."
11 " *When we*
12 *went through there wasn't*
13 *anybody left.*"
14 "Awarded
15 Silver Star."
16 "Reporters
17 banned."
18 "Not a single
19 American killed."
20 "Bodycount
21 impossible."
22 " *For all I know ,*
23 *thousands , said*
24 *Colonel Moreno.*"
25 " *What you*
26 *saw was a bunch of*
27 *buried trenches*
28 *with people's*
29 *arms and things*
30 *sticking out.*"
31 "Secretary Cheney
32 made no mention."
33 "Every single American
34 was inside

35 the juggernaut
36 impervious
37 to small-arms
38 fire." " *I know*
39 *burying people*
40 *like that sounds*
41 *pretty nasty* , said
42 Colonel Maggart,
43 *But..."*
44 "His force buried
45 about six hundred
46 and fifty
47 in a thinner line
48 of trenches."
49 " *People's arm*
50 *sticking out.*"
51 "Every American
52 inside."
53 "The juggernaut."
54 " *I'm not*
55 *going to sacrifice*
56 *the lives*
57 *of my soldiers* ,
58 Moreno said, *it's not*
59 *cost-effective.*"
60 " *The tactic was designed*
61 *to terrorize* ,
62 Lieutenant Colonel Hawkins
63 said, who helped
64 devise it."
65 "Schwartzkopf's staff
66 privately
67 estimated fifty to seventy
68 thousand killed
69 in the trenches."
70 "Private Joe Queen was
71 awarded
72 a Bronze Star for burying
73 trenches with his
74 earthmover."

75 "Inside
76 the juggernaut."
77 "Impervious."
78 " *A lot of the guys*
79 *were scared* , he said,
80 *but I*
81 *enjoyed it ."*
82 " *A bunch of*
83 *trenches. People's*
84 *arms and things*
85 *sticking out ."*
86 " *Cost-effective ."*

War in the Gulf

Gillian Ferguson (1965) - *Air for Sleeping Fish* (1997)

Human sounds in trees'
bending spines;
fingered branches claw
night's black fabric
tented over earth,
to lay bare
a bone-coloured moon.

Widows dig
for memories –
compare the war
that spawned film,
to one swallowing it live.

There is no right
or wrong any more –
only people,
plumbed with blood, .
cocooned in whole skins,
fearing sleep
in treeless sands.

Falklands, 1982

P. J. Kavanagh (1931) - *An Enchantment* (1991)

There are houses today that men have walked away from
They will never walk towards again.

Chink! goes a widowed chaffinch on the terrace,
Like a hammer on concrete it hurts a nerve in the brain
Damaged so often we quit the sun and the room.

It stands on a twig to see better, calls on and on,
Its twinned to- and fro-ing cut short, is incredulous.
(Back with his kitbag, kids jumping up at the gate?
No. *Chink!*) With June half-achieved and eggs in place-
Chink! - is the sound itself of loss,
Not grief, but a clamour for all to go on as before,
Insistent faith, misplaced, and the cat
Asleep in blue shadow not even twitches an ear.

32 But was it well done?

33 Kipling's 'Recessional' told us to beware of Hubris,
34 and not give way to flag-waving
35 (they don't in the Lebanon, or Northern Ireland)---
36 if men's lives are worth giving, they're also worth
37 saving.
38 Who let them start the bloody thing?
39 That's the question, there's the sting.

Brut

*(after Sir Frederic Madden's Poetical Semi-saxon Paraphrase
of the Cottonion and related British Museum manuscripts)*

Ian Duhig (1954) - *The Mersey Goldfish* (1995)

For horned Menelaus
the Greeks took Old Troy,
salted its vineyards,
slaughtered its folk,
poor innocent bastards
reduced all to words,
a right bloody stroke
from his friends and relations,
their oars in for Helen -
o praise for her boat-race
surpasses my art,
but you'd fork out a fiver
just to hear the girl fart.
So when the old king
tired of twanging his string
he called in all favours,
suggested a raid
to make them all famous:
Siege of the Decade!
The price on the meter?
Think of a number,
say: all those you've met.
Think of them dead.
You've got the picture.
Troy got the point.
Some people blame her
who never raised sword,
others the dick-thing
Men get about war.
And that woody horse?
Boxed half a batalion?
Some sex-toy it was,
no I-talian stallion.
In Greek propaganda
Old Trojans believe
the slaver Cassandra
serves from tea leaves,
but she thought the beast
was breed of the breed of

Catherine the Great's
traction contraption,
who felt the best Ovid
translates best to action.

Just Where to Draw the Line

Roy Fisher (1930) - *Birmingham River* (1994)

1 A comment on Saul Bellow: 'It's marvellous---
2 I mean, just the little incidental descriptions
3 are better than most poetry. And they
4 just keep coming.'

5 ---those Quattrocento paintings
6 with a tiny peacable city
7 on every hilltop in the distance
8 bobbing on the skyline in a rich
9 luminous watery twilight. While
10 near at hand huge imaginary personages
11 slug out needless religious nastiness
12 and mess up the view.

Christmas 1989

Andrew Waterman - *In the Planetarium* (1990)

Last month's miracle was young people dancing
on top of the wall dividing a city, hands
from the West reaching for those from the East
until that day shot for such transgression.

"The Berlin Wall is History!" headlines proclaim-
meaning not just dead, but irrelevant. Likewise
my postwar German friends say: "Hitler? -
that Nazi stuff's just history..."

But history never dies, is the perilous tide
that wave upon wave breaking bubbles carries us onward,
floats once again like broken-up jigsaw
Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia.

In the baroque basilica of St Kasimir,
Vilnius, history laughs, is a headscarved
woman clearing out the Museum of Atheism:
"All junk now, the lot wouldn't fetch three kopecks!"

While if, in Romania, this day a tyrant is killed,
history weeps through the imperfect living who bury
his victims; melts down their myriad candles...
And also history stares betrayed

from sad eyes knowing Utopia too has died,
the lethal old charmer who led us on, alchemised
the selfless to murderers and their prey. Leaving
the future to crave merely more cars and shopping.

Filmclip: Leningrad, October 1935

Ken Smith (1938- 2003) - *Tender to the Queen of Spain* (1993)

Dark comes early, and wet snow.
The citizens hurry from work,
Scarfed, buttoned, thinking of supper,
the tram clanking and squealing
in whose glass an arm has wiped
a V of lit space wherein smoke,
old and young wrapped for winter,
eyes focussed somewhere ahead,
dreaming perhaps of a sausage,
of bread, coffee, a warm bed,
a bullet in the back of the brain.
Then they're gone. Next comes
the future. **It** looks like the past.

A CZECH EDUCATION (1948-)
Jamie McKendrick (1955) - *The Sirocco Room* (1991)

for Lucie

'All that remains of Clementis is the cap on Gottwald's head.'

---Milan Kundera

- 1 A frontispiece for one of the standard school texts
- 2 showed Gottwald donning a Russian cap Clementis,
- 3 the Jewish partisan, has handed him
- 4 in a sweeping gesture---reminiscent of Raleigh
- 5 or Garibaldi before Victor Emmanuel---
- 6 a history teacher's favourite anecdote.

- 7 When Clementis had been hung for treason
- 8 at the front of the new edition was Gottwald
- 9 in the same photograph and hat, but his righthand man
- 10 has done the bunk. Call it ingratitude
- 11 or history's trick photography
- 12 the hat he wore no longer had a story.

- 13 When not long after Stalin's funeral
- 14 Herr Gottwald died still dogging his master's heels
- 15 they built a gimcrack shrine up Zizkov Hill
- 16 near the heart of old Prague
- 17 to house his glorious memory and corpse.
- 18 In life a puppet, in death a waxwork doll.

- 19 He was embalmed after the fashion of Lenin, or almost;
- 20 only the State's unpractised taxidermists
- 21 lacked the Kremlin's expertise with death.
- 22 Either that, or there was a Joker in the pack.
- 23 As Gottwald began to rot, less and less
- 24 of the man seemed to be on display.

- 25 More and more people heard and a series

26 of regrettable jokes corrupted the young.
27 Filing past the much-revered carcass
28 these jokes, like luxuries smuggled across
29 a guarded border, simultaneously overwhelmed
30 two girls on a school outing in '58.

31 The pious hush in there had been too much for them.
32 Frogmarched out, shaking all too audibly
33 they were disciplined next day for their calculated
34 insult to the People, their act of vandalism.
35 Gottwald then fell out of favour.
36 After '68 his punctured image was reinflated

37 to its former eminence in all the history books.
38 (That bubbling noise again: *'Bobok! Bobok!'*)
39 His poor bruised rancid body wheeled
40 up and down and in and out of state
41 as if damned to perpetual motion---decay
42 always advancing on cosmetics.

43 And those beleaguered trimming textbook hacks
44 dodging, veering and double-backing
45 to readjust the nation's history syllabus
46 can best be seen as hapless coffin-bearers
47 stumbling up a downward escalator
48 as one more blemished limb breaks out of cover.

A History of Soviet Organ Music

John Ash (1948) - *The Burnt Pages* (1991)

The boy is in the field,
and the new tractor is there, gleaming.
Tears spring to his eyes. An organ sounds,
and this causes some uncertainty
in the audience, since the very existence
of Soviet organ music had been something
entirely unsuspected until this moment.
And the boy is a marionette,
and the tractor only a careful construction
of blue cornflowers and straw, even though
the corn continues golden for miles over the black earth,
as far as Kazan or vanished Itil of the Khazars!

The history of Soviet organ music
is easily told: from the time of its foundation
in the tenth century, the Russian church
has found no use for the organ whatsoever.
Thus the Soviet organ is a youthful organ
heard to best advantage in lively medleys
of traditional Uzbek melodies-
and, oh, how blue the cornflowers, how black
the earth, how red the kerchief of the female comrade!
The younger brother of the heroic youth, meanwhile,
is having a fit of hysterics on the Ferris wheel
which turns and turns to the accompaniment
of Soviet organ music.

Toni Harrison (1937) - *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992)

Exactly a hundred years ago in 1892 the marble statue of a dissident German Jewish poet, rejected by his fatherland, was taken by Elizabeth, Empress of Austria, to a retreat in Corfu. The film-poem follows its fortunes through the century from its eviction from the island by the German Kaiser, who bought the palace after the Empress was assassinated in 1899, to its present resting place at Toulon in France.

Once established in Corfu, the Kaiser claimed that while Europe was preparing for war he was excavating the fifth century B C pediment which featured a giant Gorgon. The film-poem takes this terrifying creature of legend who turns men to stone as a metaphor for what the Kaiser unearthed on to our century, and finds her long shadow still cast across its closing years.

Clutched in the left hand of the marble Heinrich Heine the Kaiser evicted from Corfu is the manuscript of '*Was will die einsame Träne*', a *lied* set to music by Schumann. The song in various transformations makes the same journey as its hounded author.

To the same degree, though in different fashion,
those who use force and those who endure it are
turned to stone.

Simone Weil: *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*

Art forces us to gaze into the horror of existence,
yet without being turned to stone by the vision.

Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy*

Ask General Schwarzkopf who Goethe and Schiller
and Heine were. He would be well advised to
answer if he wants to go on addressing Chambers of
Commerce at \$50,000 a pop. 'Were they the
outfield of the St Louis Cardinals in 1939?'

Kurt Vonnegut

Gulf: Tank
Gorgon / Golden
Sea

From long ago the Gorgon's gaze
stares through time into our days.
Under seas, as slow as oil
the Gorgon's snaky tresses coil.
The Gorgon under the golden tide
brings ghettos, gulags, genocide.

ECU-Land
(Frankfurt)

That's maybe the reason why so
many mirrors reach so high into
the modern Frankfurt sky.

ECU-land seems to prepare
to neutralize the Gorgon's stare.
But what polished shields can neutralize
those ancient petrifying eyes?

Goethe statue,
Frankfurt

Great German soul, most famed Frankfurter
on his plinth, the poet Goethe.
Born Frankfurt but deceased Weimar
where his mortal remnants are.
The old Cold War used to divide
where he was born from where he died
but now they're once more unified.

Schiller statue

And once more it doesn't seem so far
from Frankfurt-am-Main back to Weimar.
And but an amble down an avenue
to Friedrich Schiller on full view
and I suppose I ought to say
it's right they're put on proud display
(though often scorned although their scale
's, say fifty times this can of ale).
It's proper that the Fatherland
should give them monuments so grand
but there's another German who
is quite the equal of those two
(and greater in some people's eyes!),
whose monument's a fifth their size.

HEINRICH
HEINE memorial

There are, I think, three reasons why
my statue's not so bloody high:

1: I was subversive; 2:
(what's worse to some) I was a Jew
and 3: I'm back here almost hidden
because I was ten years bed-ridden
with syphilis; this keep-fit freak
scarcely suits my wrecked physique.
This monument that's far more humble
's to the voice you're hearing grumble
that he's less on public view,
Heinrich Heine, poet and Jew.

Two grander monuments were planned
but turned down by the Fatherland,
though to the horror of the Habsburg court,
both had the Empress's support,
Elizabeth of Austria, Sissy, who
felt inspired by the soulful Jew
(but to be frank I wouldn't quote
the poems she claimed my spirit wrote!).
In 1892.

Sissy took me to Corfu,
and statues Germany rejected
found safer spots to be erected
and with a more appealing view
of sea and cypress in Corfu
and, like many another hounded Jew,
the second statue found its way
to safe haven in the USA.

Your average Frankfurt-am-Mainer
doesn't give a shit for Heine
(nor, come to that, the young mainliner!).
So elbowed to one side back here,
surrounded by junked junkies' gear,
I, Heinrich Heine, have to gaze
on junkies winding tourniquets
made from the belt out of their jeans,
some scarcely older than their teens.
The Gorgon has them closely scanned
these new lost souls of ECU-land.

The Gorgon's glance gives them their high
then, trapped in her gaze, they petrify.

Schumann *lied*
(soprano)

*Ach, meine Liebe selber
Zerfloß wie eitel Hauch!
Du alte, einsame Träne,
Zerfließe jetzunder auch!*

Schumann set those words I wrote
that might bring lumps into your throat
(unless you grabbed for the remote!).
And even if you turned away
you could still hear the *lieder* play.
The marble Heine Deutschland banned
had this *lieder* in his hand,
a manuscript whose crumpled folds
a war-cracked index finger holds.
Where the statue goes the song goes too.
I took it with me to Corfu.
And wish to God I was still there
not here with bloodstains in my hair.
Europe's reluctant to shampoo
the gore-caked coiffure of the Jew,
the blood gushed from a botched injection,
in case it gives it some infection,
or maybe Europe doesn't care
there's junkies' blood in Heine's hair.

The gaze of modern Frankfurt's glued
to this glassy-eyed high altitude.
The Europe of the soaring cranes
has not seen fit to cleanse these stains
or give new hope to the stainer.

(soprano)

Was will die einsame Träne?

What is the music that redeems
desperate kids in such extremes?
Do those I hope you're watching need a
Schumann setting of my *lieder*?
'This lonely tear what doth it mean?'
we might well ask in such a scene.

Gaze and create. If art can't cope
it's just another form of dope,
and leaves the Gorgon in control
of all the freedoms of the soul.

[I can do nothing, even cry.
Tears are for the living eye.
So weep, you still alive to shed
the tears I can't shed, being dead.
And if I could I'd shed my tears
that in the century's dosing years
the nations' greatest souls preside
over such spirit-suicide,
and that in 1992-
Schiller, Goethe, Heine view
the new banks rising by the hour
above a park where chestnuts flower
whose canopies you'd think might cover
lunch-time lounge, reader, lover,
but for one who wrestles on his own
against the Gorgon who turns men to stone
the tree with white May blossom sways
like snakes that fringe the Gorgon's gaze,
the serpents that surround her stare.
Spring blossom hisses like her hair,
as this young junkie tries to choose
which vein today is best to use.]

Frankfurt police

The junkies' early evening high
is cut short by the *Polizei*,
who read the law they half-enforce,
and let some shoot-ups take their course.

The regular police routine
is shift the junkies in between
Schiller and Goethe every day
and pass by Heine on the way.

From Schiller's statue back to Goethe's
watching smartly dressed Frankfurters
enter the theatre, and dogs divide
the opiate from the Opera side.

The horns tune up, the dogs bark '*raus*'
the precincts of the opera house,
the maestro's rapturous ovations
kept safe by *Polizei* alsatians.
They glimpse a shoot-up then they go
for their own fix of *Figaro*,
see heroin addicts then go in
to hear heroes sing in *Lohengrin*,
and evening junkies grouped round Goethe
hear distorted *Zauberflöte*.

Music is so civilizing
for the place with new banks rising:
The main financial centre
of the EEC has to present a
fine *Turandot*, *Bohème*, *Così*,
for the European VIP.
Traviata, *Faust*, *Aida*,
even Schumann's setting of my *lieder*,
just to show, although it's mine,
I can put my own work on the line
and ask as the opera's about to start
what are we doing with our art?

Are we still strumming the right lyre
to play us through the century's fire?

['Bankfurt' they call it; by the way,
I was a banker in my day
and had a somewhat brief career
as Harry Heine banker here,
but the banks have grown and rather dwarf
the Jewish poet from Dusseldorf,
Not only me. Banks in the skies
cut even Goethe down to size.]

With clouds of coins, cash cumuli
floating in the foyer sky
gliding guilder, hard ECU
dream clouds of 1992,
you'd think this Opera House foyer's
a long way from the Gorgon's gaze.
Escape, they're thinking, but alas
that's the Gorgon in the glass.

The ECU bank-erecting crane
reflected in van windowpane,
where, afraid of Aids, the youngsters queue
to trade old needles in for new,
though higher and higher into the blue
new banks to house the hard ECU
rise into the Frankfurt skies,
piece by piece, like Gorgon's eyes
or polished shield of one who slays
the Gorgon, but can't kill her gaze.

Schumann *lied*
(soprano)

*Was will die einsame Träne?
Sie trübt mir ja den Blick.
Sie blieb aus alten Zeiten
In meinem Auge zurück.*

*Sie hatte viel leuchtende Schwestern,
Die alle zerfloßen sind.
Mit meinen Qualen und Freuden,
Zerfloßen in Nacht und Wind.*

*Wie Nebel sind auch zerflossen
Die blauen Sternelein,
Die mir jene Freuden und Qualen
Gelächelt ins Herz hinein.*

*Ach, meine Liebe selber
Zerfloß wie eitel Hauch!
Du alte, einsame Träne,
Zerfließe jetzunder auch!*

Corfu shrine of
HEINRICH
HEINE

Isn't this a somewhat finer
monument to Heinrich Heine?
Banished from the Fatherland
with pen and *lieder* in my hand.
The *lieder* Schumann makes so touching
is in this manuscript I'm clutching,
and though war breaks round the manuscript
my hand will always keep it gripped.
But I'll have ten years of peace
with my Empress here in Greece
from this year 1892,
when Sissy brought me to Corfu.
[It was fun to have the Empress fawn
on one so much more lowly born
and so notorious a despiser
of King and Emperor and Kaiser,
those Krauts in crowns who used to squat
on Europe's thrones but now do not
wherever history's been rewritten,
that's everywhere but backward Britain,
but then I always found the English mind
compared to Europe's lagged behind.]

My shrine was in the forest glade
and up above she had displayed
Apollo with the lyre that plays
the darkness out of our dark days
in old times when Apollo's lyre
could save men from the petrifier.

For Sissy these weren't mere antiques,
these Muses of the ancient Greeks.
All the human spirit uses
to keep life's colour were the Muses,
or at least to Philhellenes like her
and many of her age they were.

[She retired from the Imperial Court
into art and poetry, music, thought,
though I really wouldn't care to quote
the poems she claimed my spirit wrote,

most of her lines are deadly dull
but in all her soul is 'like a gull'
or 'swallow' like the ones that flew
around her Muses in Corfu
and though a palisade of peace
surrounded Sissy and myself in Greece
it was nonetheless a palisade
where Sissy thought and wrote and played.]

Music Room:
Schumann *lied*
(piano)

How would all these Muses fare
when dragged screaming by the hair
to gaze into the Gorgon's stare?

Dying Achilles
by Ernst Herter
(1884)

The fatal wound, the calf, the thigh
of Achilles who's about to die.
This hero of Homeric fame
gave Elizabeth's retreat its name.
This Achilles of 1884
foresees the future world of war
and shows the Empress half aware
of horrors brewing in the air.
Her presentiment and pity shows
in the Achilles that she chose,
helpless, unheroic, dying
watching clouds and seabirds flying
and not one so-called 'Eternal Being'
the Gorgon gulls us into seeing.
First the dead man's gaze goes rotten
then flies fast, then he's forgotten
after those who used to shed
their tears for him are also dead,
unless a bard like Homer brings
the dead redemption when he sings.
Along with me the Empress/versifier
revered blind Homer and his lyre
the ancient poet whose *Iliad*
was the steadiest gaze we'd ever had
at war and suffering Sissy thought
before the wars this century's fought.
Though melancholic, steeped in grief

Triumph of Achilles
by Franz Matsch

the Gorgon was a mere motif
for Sissy who was unafraid
to have the Gorgon's face portrayed
on ironwork or balustrade,
and this almost charming Gorgon stares
from wardrobe doors and boudoir chairs,
but unwittingly they laid the track
that brought the grimmer Gorgon back

Schumann *lied*
(piano only)

[The palace style based on Pompeii's
might warn us of the Gorgon's gaze
but as her century drew to its close
still found poems in the rose,
the lily of loss and grieving hearts
until this closing century starts.]
The Empress posed above those roses
vanishes as her century doses
and the Muses she believed in threw
their roses to... I don't know who.
All the century's fresh bouquets
decayed beneath the Gorgon's gaze,
the grimmer Gorgon simply waited
till Sissy was assassinated
in the century's closing year,
which brought the German Kaiser here.
And when the Kaiser's gaze met mine
contemplating in my shrine,
the Kaiser's eye began to harden:
I don't want his kind in my garden.
He said straightaway: *Get rid
of Sissy's syphilitic Yid!*
*Dammit! the man's a democrat
I've got no time for shits like that.*
So once more the poet-refugee
was crated up and put to sea.
The crating up I had to face
the Kaiser wished on all my race.

And as the Kaiser wasn't keen
on Sissy's sentimental scene

of Achilles dying he'd make him stand and
represent the Fatherland.

He didn't like this sculpture much.
He liked his heroes much more butch,
more in his own imperious style.
He'd build an Achilles men could *heil!*

'Build my Achilles armour clad'
the Kaiser said, 'and confident in steel,
not some mama's little lad
with an arrow in his heel.

Make the wounded warrior stand
regrip his spear and gaze
through Sarajevo to the Fatherland,
the Lord of all that he surveys.

And put a Gorgon on his shield
to terrify his foes
wherever on Europe's battlefield
the Kaiser's Gorgon goes?
And that is almost everywhere
as gazers freeze in stony sleep
seeing her eyes and coiling hair
hissing like chlorine gas at Ypres.

The Kaiser, though a Homer freak,
despised the victim and the weak
and looking at Sissy's picture saw
Achilles riding high in war.
For him the focus of the painting
was triumph not some woman fainting,
but Sissy always used to see
Hector's wife, Andromache,
who has to gaze as Achilles hauls
her dead husband round Troy's walls.
The soon-to-be-defeated rows
of Trojans watch exultant foes
who bring the city to the ground
then leave it just a sandblown mound,
but the Greeks who'll watch Troy blaze

*Triumphant
Achilles* (statue)
by Johannes
GÖtz (1909)

Doors opening.
*Triumph of
Achilles*
(painting)

Statue of
ACHILLES

are also in the Gorgon's gaze,
the victims and the victimizer,
conquered and the conquering Kaiser,
Greeks and Trojans, Germans, Jews,
those who endure and those who use
the violence, that in different ways
keeps both beneath the Gorgon's gaze.
A whole culture vanished in the fire
until redeemed by Homer's lyre.
A lyre like Homer's could redeem
Hector's skull's still-echoing scream

Not like Sissy's Achilles sculpted dying
this one's triumphant, time defying.
The crane has hauled into the skies
the Kaiser in Homeric guise
(though not that you would recognize!)
Not only does this monster dwarf
the dissident from Dusseldorf
now newly banished from Corfu
it dwarfs all Sissy's Muses too.
What can lyre play or bard recite
the same scale as such armoured might
to face his gaze and still create?
Boxed up again inside a crate,
and forcibly reshipped
but still with pen and manuscript,
the shore receding, my last view
of my brief haven in Corfu,
hearing as cypresses recede a
fading phrase of my faint *lieder*,
was Achilles' spear whose gilded tip's
the Kaiser's signpost to Apocalypse.
Which of us, the marble Jew
the Kaiser kicked out of Corfu,
or armoured giant, him or me
would make it through the century?

Kaiser
excavation stills

The founder of the 'master race'
put this inscription on its base.
Those cavities in secret braille
say: *All the Kaiser's work will fail!*
but, wrought in characters of weighty lead,
these pockmarks in the plinth once read:
'The greatest German to the greatest Greek.'
Though not quite equal in physique
the Kaiser's there in his creation,
emblem of his warlike nation,
this bellicose, Berlin-gazing totem
has hornets nesting in his scrotum.
Envenomed hordes have gone and built
their teeming nests in Prussia's kilt,
and perforate the scrotal sac
of the tutued 'Teutomaniac'.

But while all this trouble's brewing
what's the Prussian monarch doing?
We read in his own writing,
how, while all Europe geared for fighting,
England, Belgium, France and Russia
(but not of course his peaceful Prussia),
what was Kaiser Wilhelm II
up to? Excavating in Corfu,
the scholar Kaiser on the scent
of long lost temple pediment,
not filling trenches, excavating
the trenches where the Gorgon's waiting
there in the trench to supervise
the unearthing of the Gorgon's eyes.

This isn't how warmongers are,
this professor in a panama
stooping as the spades laid bare
the first glimpse of her snaky hair.

The excavator with his find,
a new art treasure for mankind.

Barbitos

The patient Kaiser, piece by piece,
prepares the Gorgon for release,
the Gorgon he let out to glower
above us all with baleful power.

The *barbitos*, the ancient lyre,
since the Kaiser's day,
is restrung with barbed wire.
Bards' hands bleed when they play
the score that fits an era's scream,
the blood, the suffering, the loss.
The twentieth-century theme
is played on barbed wire *barbitos*.

Terpsichore -
Achilleon

Terpsichore, the muse who sees
her dances done by amputees.
How can they hope to keep her beat
when war's destroyed their dancing feet?
Shelled at the Somme or gassed at Ypres,
they shuffle, hobble, limp and creep
and no matter what old air she plays
they can't escape the Gorgon's gaze.

Melpomene with
tragic mask

The tragic mask of ancient days
looked with eyes that never close
straight into the Gorgon's gaze
and sang Man's history through its throes.

But now where is she when we need her?
Tragedy's masks have changed their style.
Lips like these won't sing my *lieder*.
They've forgotten how to smile.

What poems will this mouth recite?
There'll be no Schumann sung from this.
Before these Germans went to fight
they'd been beautiful to kiss.

This is the Kaiser's Gorgon choir,
their petrification setting in,
grunting to the barbed-wire lyre,
gagging on snags of *Lohengrin*.

Gorgon
pediment

With glaring eyes and hound-like snarls
from the maze-bound Meanderthals,
the Kaiser's Gorgon will preside
over ghettos, gulags, genocide.
Mankind meanders through the maze
made rigid by the Gorgon's gaze.
Following a more flowing shape
might find us freedom and escape
from the Gorgon and her excavator
who gears his kind for horrors later.
The Kaiser couldn't stand one Jew
in marble near him in Corfu
but the Kaiser's not uncommon views
were just as vicious on all Jews:
'A poison fungus on the German oak'
(to quote the bastard makes me choke!)
This is how the Gorgon blinds
her henchmen's eyes and rigid minds.

Arrow motif on
pediment

The Gorgon worshippers unroll
the barbed wire gulags round the soul.
The Gorgon's henchmen try to force
History on a straighter course
with Gorgonisms that impose
fixities on all that flows,
with Führer fix and crucifix
and Freedom-freezing politics,
Each leader on his monstrous plinth
waves us back into the labyrinth
out of the meander and the maze
straight back into the Gorgon's gaze.

Gorgon motif
into swastika

The Kaiser in his notebook drew
where the Gorgon leads us to,
step by step and stage by stage
he steers the Gorgon through our age.
Her hand on his unlocks the door
that never will quite close on War.

Ocean-borne
bodies and Nazi
flag

The junkie and the nationalist
both get their fixes with clenched fist.
And even in the ECU-world
the Kaiser's flag's once more unfurled.

My statue, meanwhile, got away
with swastikas daubed on my face
out of Hamburg to Marseilles
to Toulon and a new safe base.

Statues of
Gorgon's
henchmen being
demolished

And apart from finger, nose and pen
my statue's pretty much intact
but those that let the Gorgon out on men
are totally broken and cracked.

HEINE'S statue
in Toulon

My statue, meanwhile, got away
with swastikas daubed on my face
out of Hamburg to Marseilles
to Toulon and a new safe base.

And apart from finger, nose and pen
my statue's pretty much intact,
but those that let the Gorgon out on men
are totally broken and cracked.

Banished from the Fatherland
still with my *lieder* in my hand
though the pen the poems flowed from
was shattered by an air-raid bomb,
so being without it I recite
as I do now what I can't write.

The *lieder* Schumann makes so touching
is in the manuscript I'm clutching.
This manuscript with faded writing
survived a century of fighting.
Though war broke round this manuscript
my broken hand has kept it gripped.

Toulon *lied*,
Schumann arr.
Kiszko

[No longer hunted or hounded
and safe and far from fear.
If all the dogs are silenced
why do my eyes shed this tear?

The tears I let fall on the journey
were falling for all I saw.
Today I gaze on the ocean
so far from the fear of war.

The gloom that surrounds those frozen
beneath the Gorgon's gaze
now falls as the century's shadow
to darken our hearts and days.

And though I gaze in sunlight
on springtime's brightest hues,
no longer hunted and hounded,
I weep for six million Jews.]

(End *lied*)

But when through dappled shades of green
I catch glimpses of a submarine,
and across the ocean have to face
through waving palms a naval base,
it's then I'm reassured to know
that just a hundred years ago
when this rejected marble Jew
escaped with Sissy to Corfu
my other monument made its way
to safe haven in the USA,
safe from Europe's old alarms
into the New World Order's arms.

The Bronx, New
York

The Gorgon who's been running riot
through the century now seems quiet,
but supposing one who's watched her ways
were to warn you that the Gorgon's gaze
unburied in your day
and I've glimpsed her even in the USA,
you'll all reply he's crying wolf,

Gulf War

but in the deserts of the Gulf
steel pediments have Gorgon's eyes
now grown as big as tank-wheel size
that gaze down from her temple frieze
on all her rigid devotees.

Skull-lied,
Schumann arr.
KISZKO (soprano)

The closing century's shadow
has darkened all our years
and still the Gorgon's filling
my empty sockets with tears.

The tears I let fall in the desert
the sand has all soaked away.
My eyes and all that they gazed on
are gone from the light of day.

They've gone with these palls of blackness
the smoking desert blaze.
Will all of our freedoms and glories
end up in the Gorgon's gaze?
O so much life has vanished
in smoking fiery skies.

The closing century's shadow
is cast across all our eyes.

(end *lied*)

*Triumph of
Achilles* (detail)

The empty helmet of one whose eyes
have gone to feast the desert flies,
the eyes of one whose fate was sealed
by Operation Desert Shield.

They gazed their last these dark dark sockets
on high-tech Coalition rockets.

Tourists

Soon, in 1994,
in this palace Greece starts to restore,
in this the Kaiser's old retreat
Europe's heads of state will meet,
as the continent disintegrates
once more into the separate states
that waved their little flags and warred
when the Kaiser's Gorgon was abroad.

So to commemorate that rendezvous
of ECU statesmen in Corfu
I propose that in that year
they bring the dissident back here,
and to keep new Europe open-eyed
they let the marble poet preside...

1 The year began with baleful auguries:
2 comets, eclipses, tremors, forest fires,
3 the waves lethargic under a coat of pitch
4 the length of the coastline. And a cow spoke,
5 which happened last year too, although last year
6 no one believed cows spoke. Worse was to come.
7 There was a bloody rain of lumps of meat
8 which flocks of gulls snatched in mid-air
9 while what they missed fell to the ground
10 where it lay for days without festering.
11 Then a wind tore up a forest of holm-oaks
12 and jackdaws pecked the eyes from sheep.
13 Officials construing the Sibylline books
14 told of helmeted aliens occupying
15 the crossroads, and high places of the city.
16 Blood might be shed. Avoid, they warned,
17 factions and in-fights. The tribunes claimed
18 this was the usual con-trick
19 trumped up to stonewall the new law
20 about to be passed. Violence was only curbed
21 by belief in a rumour that the tribes
22 to the east had joined forces and forged
23 weapons deadlier than the world has seen
24 and that even then the hooves of their scouts
25 had been heard in the southern hills.
26 The year ended fraught with the fear of war.
27 Next year began with baleful auguries.

History Lesson

Philip Gross (1952) - *The All-Nite Café* (1993)

1 First, one
2 in the crowd puts the eye on you---
3 a nod to number two

4 who gets the message
5 and flips back something side-
6 long, something snide

7 that everybody hears
8 but you. Soon three or four
9 are in it. They'll make sure

10 you catch the steel
11 glint of the snigger they wear
12 like a badge. And there

13 come five or six
14 together, casual, shouldering in
15 around you with a single grin

16 and nothing you say
17 seems to reach them at all.
18 The badmouthings they call

19 mean only this:
20 they want to scratch. You are the itch.
21 A thousand years stand by, hissing *Witch!*

22 *Nigger! Yid!*
23 All you hear is silence lumbered
24 shut around you. And the ten or hundred

25 looking on
26 look on. They are learning not to see.
27 The bell rings, too late. Already

28 this is history.

Contrasts

Stewart Conn (1936) – *In the Blood* (1995)

A reverberant monument to pomposity and pride,
Hamilton Mausoleum housed the sarcophagus
El Magnifico bought as his last resting-place:
despite chiselling Egyptian basalt out,
for his insertion, sledge-hammers needed.

On the skyline the pink pavilion-towers
of Chatelherault, the ducal *Dogg Kennells*;
Adam's charred interiors ornately restored,
the formal parterre and Cadzow cattle
heightening the impression of a film set.

After such lavishness, leave the main road
at a sign (easy to miss) pointing the way
to a small church, loft and spire unfussy,
a single row of weavers' cottages opposite;
and the Dalserf ferry long-since obsolete,

sit as though marooned, history's shadows
sifting and lengthening, looked down on
by an obelisk to '*the Rev. John McMillan,*
Covenanter of Covenanters'; an 11th century
hogback grave-stone adding its *memento mori*.

Sarajevo, June 28, 1914

Anne Stevenson (1933) - *Granny Scarecrow* (2000)

1 Cramped under plumes of slaughtered cock,
2 In uniform of High Command,
3 Steps, to the ticking of a clock,
4 Unfortunate Franz Ferdinand.

5 Bright upright teeth that prick the ground
6 Are troops set out like painted toys.
7 The drums beat loud, the sun beats down,
8 The game awaits its player boys.

9 And now contingency meets fact.
10 They drive in state along the quay.
11 The Duchess in a picture hat
12 Assumes imperial dignity.

13 The Duke, self-conscious, feeling stout,
14 Stows his accoutrements of war.
15 A nervous youth in black pulls out
16 A pin, but fails to bomb their car.

17 What, scenting death, can an Archduke do
18 But prove his blood, be madly brave,
19 Look to the wounded, make a show,
20 Snapping fat fingers at the grave?

21 Just such a rule directs this day.
22 The Mayor makes his mayor's speech.
23 Then Duke and Duchess drive away
24 To luncheon they will never reach.

Sonnets for August 1945

Tony Harrison (1937) - *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1993)

1. *The Morning After*

I.

- 1 The fire left to itself might smoulder weeks.
- 2 Phone cables melt. Paint peels from off back gates.
- 3 Kitchen windows crack; the whole street reeks
- 4 of horsehair blazing. Still it celebrates.

- 5 Though people weep, their tears dry from the heat.
- 6 Faces flush with flame, beer, sheer relief
- 7 and such a sense of celebration in our street
- 8 for me it still means joy though banked with grief.

- 9 And that, now clouded, sense of public joy
- 10 with war-worn adults wild in their loud fling
- 11 has never come again since as a boy
- 12 I saw Leeds people dance and heard them sing.

- 13 There's still that dark, scorched circle on the road.
- 14 The morning after kids like me helped spray
- 15 hissing upholstery spring wire that still glowed
- 16 and cobbles boiling with black gas tar for VJ.

II.

1 The Rising Sun was blackened on those flames.
2 The jabbering tongues of fire consumed its rays.
3 Hiroshima, Nagasaki were mere names
4 for us small boys who gloried in our blaze.

5 The blood-red ball, first burnt to blackout shreds,
6 took hovering batwing on the bonfire's heat
7 above the *Rule Britannias* and the bobbing heads
8 of the VJ hokey-cokey in our street.

9 The kitchen blackout cloth became a cloak
10 for me to play at fiend Count Dracula in.
11 I swirled it near the fire. It filled with smoke.
12 Heinz ketchup dribbled down my vampire's chin.

13 That circle of scorched cobbles scarred with tar's
14 a night-sky globe nerve-rackingly all black,
15 both hemispheres entire but with no stars,
16 an Archerless zilch, a Scaleless zodiac.

2. *Old Soldier*

1 Last years of Empire and the fifth of War
2 and *Camp* coffee extract on the kitchen table.
3 The Sikh that served the officer I saw
4 on the label in the label in the label
5 continuously cloned beyond my eyes,
6 beyond the range of any human staring,
7 down to amoeba, atom, neutron size,
8 but the turbaned bearer never lost his bearing
9 and nothing shook the bottle off his tray.
10 Through all infinity and down to almost zero
11 he holds out and can't die or fade away
12 loyal to the breakfasting Scots hero.

13 But since those two high summer days
14 the U. S. dropped the World's first A-bombs on,
15 from that child's forever what returns my gaze
16 is a last chuprassie with all essence gone.

3. *The Figure*

1 In each of our Blackpool photos from those years
2 and, I'll bet, in every family's South Pier snap,
3 behind the couples with their children on the pier, 's
4 the same figure standing in frayed suit and cap.

5 We'd come to plunge regardless in the sea,
6 ball-shrivellingly chill, but subs all gone,
7 gorge Mrs Moore's Full Board, now ration-free,
8 glad when *I - Speak - Your - Weight* showed pounds put on.

9 The first snap that I have 's from '45.
10 I've never seen a family group so glad
11 of its brief freedom, so glad to be alive,
12 no camera would have caught them looking sad.

13 He's there, in the same frayed suit, in '51,
14 that figure in each photo at the back
15 who sent us all sauntering towards the sun
16 and the tripod, and the biped draped in black.

4. *Black & White*

1 If we had the cameras then we've got today
2 since Oblivion, always deep, grew even deeper
3 the moment of the flash that made VJ
4 and the boom made almost pro ones so much cheaper,
5 I'd have snaps of me happy and pre-teen
6 in pale, affordable Fuji for the part
7 of innocence that never could have been
8 born just in time to see the World War start.

9 The ugly ducklings changed to sitting ducks!

10 Now everything gets clicked at the loud clock
11 the shots and shutters sound like 's Captain Hook's
12 ticking implacably inside the croc.

13 If he wants his shadow back the Peter Pan
14 who cowers since Hiroshima in us all
15 will have to keep returning to Japan
16 till the blast-cast shape walks with him off the wall.

5. *Snap*

1 Uncle Wilf in khaki but decapitated,
2 and he'd survived the jungle and the Japs,
3 so his grin 's gone when we all celebrated
4 Hirohito's empire in collapse.

5 My shorter father 's all in and looks glad
6 and full of euphoria he'd never found
7 before, or since, and I'm with the grocer's lad
8 two fingers turned the positive way round!

9 Innocence, that fraying Kirby wire
10 that briefly held the whole weight of the nation
11 over the common element of fire
12 that bonded the A-bomb blast to celebration,
13 our VJ bonfire to Jehovahspeak,
14 the hotline Jesus got instructions from,
15 and, at Pentecost, Apostles their technique
16 of saying in every language: *Ban the Bomb!*

6. *First Aid in English*

1 *First Aid in English* , my first grammar book
2 with a cross on the light blue cover of dark blue
3 drilled into a [?] of parrots that one rook
4 became a congregation when it's two.

5 We chanted gaggle, bevy, coven, herd
6 between the Nazi and the Japanese defeat.
7 Did even the dodo couple have its word
8 that became, in the last one's lifetime, obsolete?

9 Collective nouns but mostly bird or beast.
10 Ghetto and gulag weren't quite current then.
11 The fauna of our infancies decreased
12 as new nouns grew collectivising men.

13 Cats in their clowder, lions in their pride,
14 but there's no aid in English, first or last,
15 for a [Fill in the Blank] of genocide
16 or more than one [Please Tick] atomic blast.

7. *The Birds of Japan*

1 Campi Phlegraei, Lake Nyos of Wum,
2 their sulphur could asphyxiate whole flocks
3 but combustibility had not yet come
4 to the femto-seconds of the *Fiat Nox*:
5 men made magma, flesh made fumaroles,
6 first mottled by the flash to brief mofettes
7 and Hiroshima's fast pressurising souls
8 hissed through the fissures in mephitic jets.

9 Did the birds burst into song as they ignited
10 above billowing waves of cloud up in the sky,
11 hosannahs too short-lived to have alighted
12 on a Bomb-Age Basho, or a Hokusai?

13 Apostles of that pinioned Pentecost
14 of chirrupings cremated on the wing
15 will have to talk their ghosts down, or we're lost.
16 Until we know what they sang, who can sin

AT MAUTHAUSEN CAMP

Anna Adams (1926-2011): - *Green Resistance: New and Selected Poems* (1996)

If there is a god, he will have to beg me for forgiveness.

(Graffiti at Mauthausen Camp)

1 To use such sufferings
2 as raw material
3 for art, is not permitted;
4 and yet I wish to add
5 a token, like those flowers
6 on the Italians' wall.
7 I wish the dead could know
8 that we know how they died,
9 that we might touch their hands.
10 No monument can do it,
11 no bronze, no rusting iron,
12 nor formalised barbed wire,
13 nor Berthold Brecht quotations.
14 Perhaps this crown of thorns
15 with name-tags speared on each
16 pitiless spike, says something.
17 These photographs of faces
18 when they had flesh on them
19 express that they were loved
20 and individual
21 but cannot bring them back.
22 Perhaps they haunt the stairs---
23 these steep and broken stairs
24 that sweep down to the quarry
25 like a dry waterfall
26 that was a fall of men:
27 but they cannot return
28 to vulnerable sense
29 to be abused again,
30 and would not if they could.
31 It is our minds they haunt.

32 By climbing up those stairs
33 and resting only once
34 I made my offering.
35 What use was that? No use.
36 It proved that I am lucky
37 in living on past sixty.
38 I see the species-rich
39 meadow above mass graves
40 where Yugoslavs and Poles,
41 Hungarians and Jews,
42 Bulgarians and Danes,
43 Dutchmen and Frenchmen lie
44 by Germans and Italians.
45 I think: The Earth forgives.
46 Forgiveness is not just.
47 There can be no amends
48 except remembering
49 bloodfalls where starved men fell
50 beneath heartbreaking stones
51 and each was I---and I---
52 and I---

Verdun

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Our Lady of Europe* (1997)

In memory of Franz Marc

1 Thistles, poppies, blue cranesbill
2 by a dusty road.
3 In front, under the cloud stack
4 of an August sky,
5 the chalk ridge.

6 *Trees, flowers, the earth*
7 *all showed me every year*
8 *more and more of their deformity.*
9 *I dream of a new Europe.*

10 On a bluff a machine-gun post,
11 an iron mask with two eye-holes,
12 looks down on new growth.

13 Inside, the remains of a gun,
14 rusted and twisted.
15 The emptiness smells of fear.

16 The mask that blinded
17 has survived the face. It overlooks
18 slopes with harebells and young pines.

19 *In spiritual matters new ideas*
20 *kill better than steel.*

21 The blood throbs, pulses.
22 This is the rhythm
23 in all things.

24 Deer feel the world as deer,
25 but whose landscape is this?

53 where the village was,
54 but the chapel in a glade
55 is filled with sunlight.

56 A white butterfly wanders in
57 and flutters outside the porch
58 as though it, too, were in the picture.

59 New Year 1916. *The world*
60 *is richer by the bloodiest war*
61 *of its many-thousand-year history .*

62 *And all for nothing.*

V. E. Day

Peter Scupham (1933) - *The Air Show* (1988)

*Carpamus dulcia: nostrum est
Quod vivis: cinis, et manes, et fabula fiet.*

PERSIUS: Sat. V

- 1 Noticing oddly how flags had been rubbed thin,
- 2 Bleaching in shut drawers, now unrolled
- 3 In blues, reds, their creases of old skin
- 4 Tacked on brown lances, headed with soft gold.
- 5 Clotheslines of bunting,

- 6 And light fresh at the front door, May
- 7 Switching the sky with stray bits of green,
- 8 The road levelling off; the day much like a day
- 9 Others could be, and others might have been.
- 10 A woman laughing,

- 11 Sewing threadbare cotton to windy air,
- 12 The house open: hands, curtains leaning out
- 13 To the same gravel, the same anywhere, everywhere.
- 14 Birds remain birds, cats cats, messing about
- 15 In the back garden.

- 16 And a table-land of toys to be put away,
- 17 To wither and shrivel back to Homeric names.
- 18 Scraps gathering myth and rust, the special day
- 19 Moving to its special close: columnar flames
- 20 Down to a village bonfire

- 21 In which things seasoned and unseasoned burn

22 Through their black storeys, and the mild night
23 Fuels the same fires with the same unconcern:
24 Dresden, Ilium, London: the witch-light
25 Bright on a ring of children.

26 Night, and the huge bombers lying cold to touch,
27 The bomb-bays empty under the perspex skull.
28 The pyres chill, that ate so fiercely, and so much,
29 The flags out heavily: the stripes charcoal, dull.
30 Ashes, ghosts, fables.

BC-AD

John Heath-Stubbs (1918-2006) - *The Game of Love and Death* (1990)

- 1 The *Pax Romana* ---spurious:
- 2 A knock-out blow, delivered
- 3 By the most ruthless contender
- 4 Among a band of rival thugs.

- 5 The good roads are for the tax-gatherers;
- 6 The military discipline, the legions' tread,
- 7 For the extending boundaries.

- 8 Neck and foot the slaves are shackled.
- 9 In specious freedom, the barbarian,
- 10 Lousy, wrapped in a tattered hide,
- 11 Scuttles about the frontier,
- 12 Drinking kumiss from his grandfather's skull.

- 13 Famine and pestilence an ambient sea,
- 14 Too turbid for the halcyons' brooding.

- 15 In all this darkness, one small point of light---it shines
- 16 Out of a foul stable, between
- 17 A pair of commonplace quadrupeds.

- 18 It burns, now blue as the heavens of faith,
- 19 Now green as the hopeful shoots of spring,
- 20 Now fiery red like pain.

- 21 And from this seed expands
- 22 The lover's rose, the rose of revolution,
- 23 And shall continue to expand until
- 24 It touches the limits of eternity.

Tony Harrison (1937) – V. (1985)

Next millennium you'll have to search quite hard
to find my slab behind the family dead,
butcher, publican, and baker, now me, bard
adding poetry to their beef, beer and bread.

With Byron three graves on I'll not go short
of company, and Wordsworth's opposite.
That's two peers already, of a sort,
and we'll all be thrown together if the pit,

whose galleries once ran beneath this plot,
causes the distinguished dead to drop
into the rabblement of bone and rot,
shored slack, crushed shale, smashed prop.

Wordsworth built church organs, Byron tanned
luggage cowhide in the age of stearn,
and knew their place of rest before the land
caves in on the lowest worked-out seam.

This graveyard on the brink of Beeston Hill's
the place I may well rest if there's a spot
under the rose roots and the daffodils
by which dad dignified the family plot.

If buried ashes saw then I'd survey
the places I learned Latin, and learned Greek,
and left, the ground where Leeds United play
but disappoint their fans week after week,

which makes them lose their sense of self-esteem
and taking a short cut home through these graves here
they reassert the glory of their team
by spraying words on tombstones, pissed on beer.

This graveyard stands above a worked-out pit.
Subsidence makes the obelisks all list.
One leaning left's marked FUCK, one right's marked SHIT
sprayed by some peeved supporter who was pissed.

Far-sighted for his family's future dead,
but for his wife, this banker's still alone
on his long obelisk, and doomed to head
a blackened dynasty of unclaimed stone,

now graffitied with a crude four-letter word.
His children and grandchildren went away
and never came back home to be interred,
so left a lot of space for skins to spray.

The language of this graveyard ranges from
a bit of Latin for a former Mayor
or those who laid their lives down at the Somme,
the hymnal fragments and the gilded prayer,

how people 'fell asleep in the Good Lord',
brief chisellable bits from the good book
and rhymes whatever length' they could afford,
to CUNT, PISS, SHIT and (mostly) FUCK!

Or, more expansively, there's LEEDS v.
the opponent of last week, this week, or next,
and a repertoire of blunt four-letter curses
on the team or race that makes the sprayer vexed.

Then, pushed for time, or fleeing some observer,
dodging between tall family vaults and trees
like his team's best ever winger, dribbler, swerver,
fills every space he finds with versus Vs.

Vs sprayed on the run at such a lick,
the sprayer master of his flourished tool,
get short-armed on the left like that red tick
they never marked his work much with at school.

Half this skinhead's age but with approval
I helped whitewash a V on a brick wall.
No one clamoured in the press for its removal
or thought the sign, in wartime, rude at all.

These Vs are all the versuses of life
from LEEDS v. DERBY, Black/White
and (as I've known to my cost) man v. wife,
Communist v. Fascist, Left v. Right,

class v. class as bitter as before,
the unending violence of US and THEM,
personified in 1984
by Coal Board MacGregor and the NUM,

Hindu/Sikh, soul/body, heart v. mind,
East/West, male/female, and the ground
these fixtures are fought out on's Man, resigned
to hope from his future what his past never found.

The prospects for the present aren't too grand
when a swastika with NF (National Front)'s
sprayed on a grave, to which another hand
has added, in a reddish colour, CUNTS.

Which is, I grant, the word that springs to mind,
when going to clear the weeds and rubbish thrown
on the family plot by football fans, I find
UNITED graffitied on my parents' stone.

How many British graveyards now this May
are strewn with rubbish and choked up with weeds
since families and friends have gone away
for work or fuller lives, like me from Leeds?

When I first came here 40 years ago
with my dad to 'see my grandma' I was 7.
I helped dad with the flowers. He let me know
she'd gone to join my grandad up in Heaven.

My dad who came each week to bring fresh flowers
came home with clay stains on his trouser knees.
Since my parents' deaths I've spent 2 hours
made up of odd 10 minutes such as these.

Flying visits once or twice a year,

and though I'm horrified just who's to blame
that I find instead of flowers cans of beer
and more than one grave sprayed with some skin's name?

Where there were flower urns and troughs of water
and mesh receptacles for withered flowers
are the HARP tins of some skinhead Leeds supporter.
It isn't all his fault though. Much is ours.

5 kids, with one in goal, play 2-a-side.
When the ball bangs on the hawthorn that's one post
and petals fall they hum *Here Comes the Bride*
though not so loud they'd want to rouse a ghost.

They boot the ball on purpose at the trunk
and make the tree shed showers of shrivelled may.
I look at this word graffitied by some drunk
and I'm in half a mind to let it stay.

(Though honesty demands that I say *if*
I'd wanted to take the necessary pains
to scrub the skin's inscription off
I only had an hour between trains.

So the feelings that I had as I stood gazing
and the significance I saw could be a sham,
mere excuses for not patiently erasing
the word sprayed on the grave of dad and mam.)

This pen's all I have of magic wand.
I know this world's so torn but want no other
except for dad who'd hoped from 'the beyond'
a better life than this one, *with* my mother.

Though I don't believe in afterlife at all
and know it's cheating it's hard *not* to make
a sort of furtive prayer from this skin's scrawl,
his UNITED mean 'in Heaven' for their sake,

an accident of meaning to redeem
an act intended as mere desecration

and make the thoughtless spraying of his team
apply to higher things, and to the nation.

Some, where kids use aerosols, use giant signs
to let the people know who's forged their fetters
like PRICE O WALES above West Yorkshire mines
(no prizes for who nicked the missing letters!).

The big blue star for booze, tobacco ads,
the magnet's monogram, the royal crest,
insignia in neon dwarf the lads
who spray a few odd FUCKS when they're depressed.

Letters of transparent tubes and gas
in Dusseldorf are blue and flash out KRUPP.
Arms are hoisted for the British ruling class
and clandestine, genteel aggro keeps them up.

And there's HARRISON on some Leeds building sites
I've taken in fun as blazoning my name,
which I've also seen on books, in Broadway lights,
so why can't skins with spraycans do the same?

But why inscribe these *graves* with CUNT and SHIT?
Why choose neglected tombstones to disfigure?
This pitman's of last century daubed PAKIGIT,
this grocer Broadbent's aerosolled with NIGGER?

They're there to shock the living, not arouse
the dead from their deep peace to lend support
for the causes skinhead spraycans could espouse.
The dead would want their desecrators caught!

Jobless though they are how can these kids,
even though their team's lost one more game,
believe that the 'Pakis', 'Niggers', even 'Yids'
sprayed on the tombstones here should bear the blame?

What is it that these crude words are revealing?
What is it that this aggro act implies?
Giving the dead their xenophobic feeling

or just a *cri-de-coeur* because man dies?

*So what's a cri-de-coeur, cunt? Can't you speak
the language that yer mam spoke. Think of 'er!
Can yer only get yer tongue round fucking Greek?
Go and fuck yerself with cri-de-coeur!*

'She didn't talk like you do for a start!'
I shouted, turning where I thought the voice had been.
*She didn't understand yer fucking 'art'!
She thought yer fucking poetry obscene!*

I wish on this skin's word deep aspirations,
first the prayer for my parents I can't make,
then a call to Britain and to all the nations
made in the name of love for peace's sake.

*Aspirations, cunt! Folk on t'fucking dole
'ave got about as much scope to aspire
above the shit they're dumped in, cunt, as coal
aspires to be chucked on t'fucking fire.*

'OK, forget the aspirations. Look, I know
United's losing gets you fans incensed
and how far the HARP inside you makes you go
but *all* these Vs: against! against! against!'

*Ah'll tell yer then what really riles a bloke.
It's reading on their graves the jobs they did-
butcher, publican and baker. Me, I'll croak
doing t'same noun ah do now as a kid.*

*'ard birth ah war, mi mam says, almost killed 'er.
Death after life on t'dole won't seem as 'ard!
Look at this cunt, Wordsworth, organ builder,
this fucking' aberdasher Appleyard!*

*If mi mam's up there, don't want to meet 'er
listening to me list mi dirty deeds,
and 'ave to pipe up to St fucking Peter
ah've been on t'dole all mi life in fucking Leeds!*

*Then t'Alleluias stick in t'angels' gobs.
When dole-wallahs fuck off to the void
uihat'll t'mason carve up for their jobs?
The cunts who lieth 'ere war unemployed?*

*This lot worked at one job all life through.
Byron, 'Tanner', 'Lieth 'ere interred'.
They'll chisel fucking poet when they do you
and that, yer cunt, 's a crude four-letter word.*

*'Listen, cunt!' I said, 'before you start your jeering
the reason why I want this in a book
's to give ungrateful cunts like you a hearing!
A book, yer stupid cunt, 's not worth a fuck!*

*'The only reason why I write this poem at all
on yobs like you who 'do the dirt on death
's to give some higher meaning to your scrawl.'
Don't fucking bother, cunt! Don't waste your breath!*

*'You piss-artist skinhead cunt, you wouldn't know
and it doesn't fucking matter if you do,
the skin and poet united fucking Rimbaud
but the *autre* that *je est* is fucking you.'*

*Ah've told yer, no more Greek... That's yer last warning!
Ah'll boot yer fucking balls to Kingdom Come.
They'll find yer cold on t'grave tomorrer morning.
So don't speak Greek. Don't treat me like I'm dumb.*

*'I've done my bits of mindless aggro too
not half a mile from where we're standing now.'
Yeah, ah bet yer wrote a poem, yer wanker you!
'No, shut yer gob a while. Ah'll tell yer 'ow...'*

*'Herman Darewski's band played operetta
with a wobbly soprano warbling. Just why
I made my mind up that I'd got to get her
with the fire hose I can't say, but I'll try.*

*It wasn't just the singing angered me.
At the same time half a crowd was jeering
as the smooth Hugh Gaitskell, our MP,*

made promises the other half were cheering.

What I hated in those high soprano ranges
was uplift beyond all reason and control
and in a world where you say nothing changes
it seemed a sort of prick-tease of the soul.

I tell you when I heard high notes that rose
above Hugh Gaitskell's cool electioneering
straight from the warbling throat right up my nose
I had all your aggro in *my* jeering.

And I hit the fire extinguisher ON knob
and covered orchestra and audience with spray.
I could run as fast you then. A good job!
They yelled 'damned vandal' after me that day...'

*And then yer saw the light and gave up 'eavy!
And knew a man's not how much he can sup...
Yer reward for growing up's this super-bevvy,
a meths and champagne punch in t'FA Cup.*

*Ah've 'eard all that from old farts past their prime.
'ow now yer live wi' all yer once detested...
Old farts with not much left'll give me time.
Fuckers like that get folk like me arrested.*

*Covet not thy neighbour's wife, thy neighbour's riches.
Vicar and cop who say, to save our souls,
Get thee beHind me, Satan, drop their breeches
and get the Devil's dick right up their 'oles!*

It was more a *working* marriage that I'd meant,
a blend of masculine and feminine.
Ignoring me, he started looking, bent
on some more aerosolling, for his tin.

'It was more a *working* marriage that I mean!
Fuck, and save mi soul, eh? That suits me.
Then as if I'd egged him on to be obscene
he added a middle slit to one daubed V.

Don't talk to me of fucking representing

*the class yer were bam into any more.
Yer going to get 'urt and start resenting
it's not poetry we need in this class war.*

*Yer've given yerself toffee, cunt. Who needs
yer fucking poufy words. Ah write mi own.
Ah 've got mi work on show all ovver Leeds
like this UNITED 'ere on some sod's stone.*

'OK!' (thinking I had him trapped) 'OK!'
'If you're so proud of it, then sign your name
when next you're full of HARP and armed with spray,
next time you take this short cut from the game.'

He took the can, contemptuous, unhurried
and cleared the nozzle and prepared to sign
the UNITED sprayed where mam and dad were buried.
He aerosolled his name. And it was mine.

The boy footballers bawl *Here Comes the Bride*
and drifting blossoms fall onto my head.
One half of me's alive but one half died
when the skin half sprayed my name among the dead.

Half versus half, the enemies within
the heart that can't be whole till they unite.
As I stoop to grab the crushed HARP lager tin
the day's already dusk, half dark, half light.

That UNITED that I'd wished onto the nation
or as reunion for dead parents soon recedes.
The word's once more a mindless desecration
by some HARPoholic yob supporting Leeds.

Almost the time for ghosts I'd better scam.
Though not given much to fears of spooky scaring
I don't fancy an encounter with mi mam
playing Hamlet with me for this swearing.

Though I've a train to catch my step is slow.
I walk on the grass and graves with wary tread
over these subsidences, these shifts below

the life of Leeds supported by the dead.

Further underneath's that cavernous hollow
that makes the gravestones lean towards the town.
A matter of mere time and it will swallow
this place of rest and all the resters down.

I tell myself I've got, say, 30 years.
At 75 this place will suit me fine.
I've never feared the grave but what I fear's
that great worked-out black hollow under mine.

Not train departure time, and not Town Hall
with the great white clock face I can see,
coal, that began, with no man here at all,
as 300 million-year-old plant debris.

5 kids still play at making blossoms fall
and humming as they do *Here Comes the Bride*.
They never seem to tire of their ball
though I hear a woman's voice call one inside.

2 larking boys play bawdy bride and groom.
3 boys in Leeds strip la-la *Lohengrin*,
I hear them as I go through growing gloom
still years away from being skald or skin.

The ground's carpeted with petals as I throw
the aerosol, the HARP can, the cleared weeds
on top of dad's dead daffodils, then go,
with not one glance behind, away from Leeds.

The bus to the station's still the No. 1
but goes by routes that I don't recognise.
I look out for known landmarks as the sun
reddens the swabs of cloud in darkening skies.

Home, home, home, to my woman as the red
darkens from a fresh blood to a dried.
Home, home to my woman, home to bed
where opposites seem sometimes unified.

A pensioner in turban taps his stick
along the pavement past the corner shop,
that sells samosas now, not beer on tick,
to the Kashmir Muslim Club that was the Co-op.

House after house FOR SALE where we'd played cricket
with white roses cut from flour-sacks on our caps,
with stumps chalked on the coal-grate for our wicket,
and everyone bought now by 'coloured chaps',

dad's most liberal label as he felt squeezed
by the unfamiliar, and fear
of foreign food and faces, when he smelt
curry in the shop where he'd bought beer.

And growing frailer, 'wobbly on his pins',
the shops he felt familiar with withdrew
which meant much longer tiring treks for tins
that had a label on them that he knew.

And as the shops that stocked his favourites receded
whereas he'd fancied beans and popped next door,
he found that four long treks a week were needed
till he wondered what he bothered eating for.

The supermarket made him feel embarrassed.
Where people bought whole lambs for family freezers
he bought baked beans from check-out girls too harassed
to smile or swap a joke with sad old geezers.

But when he bought his cigs he'd have a chat,
his week's one conversation, truth to tell,
but time also came and put a stop to that
when old Watsy got bought out by M. Patel.

And there, 'Time like an ever rolling stream' 's
what I once trilled behind that boarded front.
A 1000 ages made coal-bearing seams
and even more the hand that sprayed this CUNT

on both Methodist and C of E billboards
once divided in their fight for local souls.
Whichever house more truly was the Lord's
both's pews are filled with cut-price toilettrolls.

Home, home to my woman, never to return
till sexton or survivor has to cram
the bits of clinker scooped out of my urn
down through the rose-roots to my dad and mam.

Home, home to my woman, where the fire's lit
these still chilly mid-May evenings, home to you,
and perished vegetation from the pit
escaping insubstantial up the flue.

Listening to *Lulu*, in our hearth we burn,
as we hear the high Cs rise in stereo,
what was lush swamp club-moss and tree-fern
at least 300 million years ago.

Shilbottle cobbles, Alban Berg high D
lifted from a source that bears your name,
the one we hear decay, the one we see,
the fern from the foetid forest, as brief flame.

This world, with far too many people in,
starts on the TV logo as a taw,
then ping-pong, tennis, football; then one spin
to show us all, then shots of the Gulf War.

As the coal with reddish dust cools in the grate
on the late-night national news we see
police v. pickets at a coke-plant gate,
old violence and old disunity.

The map that's colour-coded Ulster/Eire's
flashed on again as almost every night.
Behind a tiny coffin with two bearers
men in masks with arms show off their might.

The day's last images recede to first a glow

and then a ball that shrinks back to blank screen.
Turning to love, and sleep's oblivion, I know
what the UNITED that the skin sprayed *has* to mean.

Hanging my clothes up, from my parka hood
may and apple petals, browned and creased
fall onto the carpet and bring back the flood
of feelings their first falling had released.

I hear like ghosts from all Leeds matches humming
with one concerted voice the bride, the bride
I feel united to, *my* bride is coming
into the bedroom, naked, to my side.

The ones we choose to love become our anchor
when the hawser of the blood-tie's hacked, or frays.
But a voice that scorns chorales is yelling: *Wanker!*
It's the aerosolling skin I met today's.

My *alter ego* wouldn't want to know it
his aerosol vocab would balk at LOVE'
the skin's UNITED underwrites the poet'
the measures carved below the ones above.

I doubt if 30 years of bleak Leeds weather
and 30 falls of apple and of may
will erode the UNITED binding us together.
And now it's your decision: does it stay?

Next millennium you'll have to search quite hard
to find out where I'm buried but I'm near
the grave of haberdasher Appleyard,
the pile of HARPs, or some new neoned beer.

Find Byron, Wordsworth, or turn left between
one grave marked Broadbent, one marked Richardson.
Bring some solution with you that can clean
whatever new crude words have been sprayed on.

If love of art, or love, gives you affront
that the grave I'm in's graffitied then, maybe,

erase the more offensive FUCK and CUNT
but leave, with the worn UNITED, one small v.

Victory? For vast, slow, coal-creating forces
that hew the body's seams to get the soul.
Will Earth run out of her 'diurnal courses'
before repeating her creation of black coal?

But choose a day like I chose in mid-May
or earlier when apple and hawthorn tree,
no matter if boys boot their ball all day,
cling to their blossoms and won't shake them free.

If, having come this far, somebody reads
these verses, and he/she wants to understand,
face this grave on Beeston Hill, your back to Leeds,
and read the chiselled epitaph I've planned:

*Beneath your feet's a poet, then a pit.
Poetry supporter, if you're here to find
how poems can grow from (beat you to it!) SHIT
find the beef, the beer, the bread, then look behind.*

Fenlight

Gillian Allnutt (1949) – *Nantucket and the Angel* (1997)

Alan of Walsingham, Sacrist, practical man -
quo se verteret vel quid ageret,
not knowing which way to turn nor what to do -
know vertigo -
as if the Isle of Ely had gone down
into the fen -
as if his spine were broken - knows
he must invent the earth again and God
and therefore send to Stamford
for new stone.

His job is to imagine, to administrate
materials and men. His mind's
dismantled. First he's only able to invent the erstwhile -
transept, chancel, nave - not
penetrate the unimaginable
hole where-
quo se verteret vel quid ageret -
the ordinary fenlight enters and it feels
as if the sparrows flying in and out
are flying in his heart.

His job's to order men and boats to bring out more
of that once wholly to be trusted
Barnack stone
and build again -
but he is momentarily unsure.

During the night of 12 February 1322 the central tower of Ely Cathedral collapsed. It was subsequently replaced with the octagon and lantern. The Latin, quoted from a record of the time, is translated in the text of the poem.

A Café Waiter in Tel Aviv

Ian Duhig (1954) - *The Bradford Count* (1991)

'O to be a café waiter in Tel Aviv!' - KAFKA

'We did not come from Russia to mix with blacks
or listen to their nigger-music!' 'Kurdish,'
whispered the guitarist, 'Perhaps it should be kaddish.'
His knife flicked open - the bar doors slammed shut.
'Drinks, waiter, I have made your café
Judenrein. Perhaps Hitler could have used me.'
'For shame, guitarist, you are still a Jew.'
'I'm told. But let me tell some things to you;

round Krakow my grandfather dug white lime,
practised Pilpul till the Tartar pogrom.
He fled west for Mendelssohn's Haskalah,
wed an Ashkenazi and taught High German
for low pay. Old Zvi met Marx - you know
his *On the Jewish Question*? "Money
is the God of Israel. The exchange-token
is the Jealous God of the Jew."

In 1933 Papa also learned:

"Framing these codes I have kept before me
the laws of Ezra and Nehemiah."
Thus spoke the drafter of the Nuremberg
Race Purity Laws. You know the rest –
boots in the night; the family dispersed.
I worked Rothschild's vineyards in Algeria
with Yemenite Jews, Jews from Libya.

"It is not more land we need, but more Jews!"
Ben-Gurion cried. We were smuggled in
by night, like arms, stashed in the maabaras,
the transit camps. Russian Jews had barracks
with bunks and stoves and portraits of Stalin.
We slept in sacks and dug hollows for our hips.
They bussed us round to break up Arab strikes,
harass their wives at market, burn their crops.

Papa did not approve my new career.

I left "resettlement" for the guitar.
I'm told Bialik, our "Russian-Hebrew
Poet" hates Arabs because they're like black Jews.
Tell me, I don't understand literature,
is this wit or something we should believe?
'I'll tell you you'll be tried for such chatter.
I'm not a writer. This is Tel Aviv.'

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Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) - *Virtual and Other Realities* (1997)

1 Despite his manacles, the wiry murderer
2 in the death cell broke a bottle of porter,
3 slashed his throat, but death was out of order---

4 blood-red Matthew was patched up by his jailer,
5 made half decent for the hanging, all the better for
6 white cap, white gloves, tied feet and hands, miner

7 with no dirt on him, Matthew Clydesdale, actor
8 to a massed milling of hard starers, leaper
9 out of this world, carted in coffin of fir

10 with his death in order, under halberds as was proper,
11 up the Saltmarket in a dreary November,
12 into the College, to the anatomy hall where

13 Matthew must act again. The professor-dissector
14 gowns himself in white, bows to the theatre
15 of buzzing tiers, introduces an experimenter.

16 A Glasgow Frankenstein is Doctor Ure.
17 The hanged man sits unbound in an armchair.
18 His dreadful face faces the handsome professor,

19 the avantgarde chemist, the galvanic battery. Air
20 enters his lungs, his tongue wags, eyes flutter,
21 limbs convulse, he stands, amazed, aware---

22 his death is not in order! In the uproar
23 shouts, faintings, shrieks, applause conspire
24 to let Professor Jeffrey lance the jugular

25 with theatrical flourish. At his third death, the collier
26 leaving the electric arms of his resurrector
27 slumps in the blade-cold arms of his dissector.

28 Clear the hall. Pity the executioner,
29 pity the murderer, pity the professor,
30 pity the doctor with his battery and his ardour.

Acquisitions

Lavinia Greenlaw (1962) - *A World Where News Travelled Slowly* (1997)

Henry Ford boasted

there would be no Egyptian mummies in his museum.

Everything we have is strictly American.

Steam engines, cars and guns

in answer to the amateur anthropologist's

list of set questions:

Is bleeding, scarifying or cupping practised?

Is marriage by capture, exchange or purchase?

Lifting the Lid

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

Lifting the lid on our
uncertain longing
for a god -

these ropes and pulleys
are the liturgy
of modern belief,

but no explanation of
darkness can
be found in the light -

when you touch your
own hand in the mirror,
what you feel is glass.

Visit of the Egyptian Antiquities Department's Inventory Commission

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

Each item labelled and in its own place.
The work (they had to admit) of a true
Professional. Just one final check through
Those storage boxes at the back. No trace
Of anything improper: only a case
From Fortnums, marked 'Best Claret'... Allah! a new
Baby lifted into the room! A blue
Sacred lotus blossom - the Sun God's face!

'I do not condemn you. It was a crime
Of passion. You will be dealt no punishment
By me - but by the Future. When the time
To weigh your heart nears, should my head prevent
The scales balancing, you may have to climb
And be questioned by her correspondent.'

To Haydn and Mozart

Clive Wilmer (1945) - *Of Earthly Paradise* (1992)

- 1 You were both endowed with flair and with, no doubt,
- 2 What is called genius; but I think of you
- 3 Bent over your claviers, two men at work,
- 4 Fending off discord with your fingertips.
- 5 At work you could stay unmoved by what you knew
- 6 Of exploitation or of penury,
- 7 Uncomprehending ignorance and pride,
- 8 Loss, disappointment, pain. You turned from these
- 9 To forms your labour could not warp, because
- 10 You heard in them the possibility
- 11 Of grace, which echoes order in the mind.

Winchester Diver

Hilary Davies (1954) - *The Shanghai Owner of the Bonsai Shop* (1991)

- 1 Twenty-pound boots to keep him
- 2 Under the surface. Each morning
- 3 A dresser to weigh this leaf
- 4 Of bone down beneath the suspended
- 5 Cathedral; twelve men to pay out
- 6 The line and listen for the tug
- 7 And flow of his heart.

- 8 He works in utter dark, letting
- 9 The rivers in. They burst
- 10 From gravel beds and set
- 11 Logs that once were forests
- 12 Dappling the banks adrift into
- 13 His arms. Around him
- 14 Whisper the dreams of the
- 15 Casketed dead.

- 16 Pick, pick, pick with his hammer
- 17 And greased, bare hands.
- 18 His fingernails are black
- 19 With the ark's foundations;
- 20 She grinds and dances
- 21 On her shifting rock;
- 22 Wounds wide as hands
- 23 Open her flesh.

- 24 Down here the world's still
- 25 At its dead centre.
- 26 Stacking and slashing of cement
- 27 Turns the diver's ocean of
- 28 Salt to stone.
- 29 He'll beat out the fishes
- 30 Of his mind, stops up his ears
- 31 When tremors from the trench below

32 Burst their hearts. *Only*
33 *Make this house safe, think of*
34 *Nothing but the work in hand.*

35 And the queen and king are sailing
36 Home from the windless sea of Marmora;
37 Two owls that refuse escape are
38 Grouted in. Now the scaffolding
39 Rises into the free air away
40 From nightmares of whales,
41 Only children in violent reds
42 And whites, crowds shouting:
43 William Walker in his perfect
44 Dark shores up God's kingdom
45 On his back.

Unidentified Aliens, New Mexico, 1947

John Gohorry (1943) - *Talk into the Late Evening* (1992)

They found them a couple of miles off the disc-wreckage,
still in their time-harnesses, but unbelievably aged;
their fat, scaly tongues like the tongues of chameleons
petrified by the desert heat and turned macaw perches,

and their eyestrings drawn out by desperate hummingbirds
tangled around their white mouths like failed parachutes.
Cursing the heat in their respirators they cut them free,
and stowed them like war casualties in canvas body-bags

on the floor of the gunship. Heading for Walker Field
and the Lieutenant's report to his General, Base H.Q,
they were already naming them - Toadsucker, Silverskin,
Big Mouth, Horny White Eye, recognising them as their own,

and recalling too how, as they pulled Horny White Eye up
from the body heap, his hands were tight around Silverskin
as if they'd been sitting side by side in the bucketseats
at the movies, and he knew how the last reel would end.

Opening

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

A cache of,
aristocrats
unearthed by the
Antiquities Department
watches Carter lift
the crowbar
(‘We’re going to have
a concert!’
winks Carnarvon)
and break into
the sealed
burial chamber.

Two have already
been in here
unofficially once
but disguised their
entry and withdrawal
with a pile of reeds
and a Moses basket
(‘left by the tomb-
robbers in their
haste... ’)
and now
at all costs
they must pretend
that they are seeing
everything for
the first time.
(‘Carter’s going to to
sing a song!’)

The alabaster lamp
seems to writhe
and croon, its limbs
a triple lotus
growing from a sacred pond
like the legs and welcoming
arms of a cabaret star
that single you out

and usher you in
and show you the circle
which you must enter
before you may open the shrine.

The spectators
will the two
protagonists
to speak
to elaborate...

but they stand,
a momentary shudder
of guilt shadowing
the triumphant
backdrop of gold and blue

and suddenly -
not words, no words
from this dumbstruck
double-act

but a whisper
from the black wings
from a small lamp
with a wick
and a mud base:

*It is I
who hinder the sand
from choking
the secret chamber*

*I am for
the protection
of the deceased*

A Pocket Collection

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

I

Touch these bright bead
sandals and their pattern
rolls for ever out of reach.

II

Grasshopper that hopped
from tomb to top pocket
to New York Art Dealer.

III

The King's Wishing Cup, found
to be left in peace.
too late for him to wish

Entertaining Caesar

Fergus Chadwick – *A Shape in the Net* (1993)

(Puteoli: 19th December 45 B.C.)

Not liking to refuse his plan
that we should meet again
lest he read my absence as fear,
or 'resistance to the trend
of events', I let him come.

Scholars' respect apart, our friendship
- from times past - I'd never get back
into it, I thought,
any more than a tight robe, but,
his presence thawed the frost

Like the sun on the roofs that morning,
and despite the guards that Cassius
Barba lent me - making the grounds
look like the dictator's
camp - all was friendly.

Still, it was my feeling he came
to test me: about new
vacillations; old decisions;
prompted perhaps by henchmen
who feared my veto on them...

Or simply from curiosity:
sure in my own mind his private
opinion belittled my past
handling of power and
discounted my 'threat' now.

Threat? - We had three rooms
full of dining retainers and slaves.
Had it not been a slight
to friendship, you could say we leant
over backwards to make him God.

He seemed meaner than before:
one knew he could obligate

bullies like Antony.
His reserve -we discussed only
literary things-was awesome.

For he couldn't quite hide the fact
- despite his walk on the shore, his
bath, his emetic pills -
that he had billeted himself on
me, a friend of Rome,

As if to show his marked contempt
for the freedom he had
ended with gifts, of conquests
arming his greater Empire to crush
those who would kill him.

Arming against Rome,
he had need of guards: for it was
by the stink of power
that the Liberators found him
when the people had no champion.

I was relieved to see him go,
for I had dined with a dead man.

(Cicero himself was murdered one year and nine months later, under proscription by the party of Antony and Octavian.)

For the First Dog in Space

Lavinia Greenlaw (1962) - *Night Photograph* (1993)

You're being sent up in Sputnik 2,
a kind of octopus with rigor mortis.
Ground control have sworn allegiance
to gravity and the laws of motion;
they sleep without dreams,
safe in the knowledge
that a Russian mongrel bitch
can be blasted through the exosphere
at seven miles a second,
but can never stray far from home.
You will have no companion,
no buttons to press, just six days' air.
Laika, do not let yourself be fooled
by the absolute stillness
that comes only with not knowing
how fast you are going. As you fall
in orbit around the earth, remember
your language. Listen to star dust.
Trust your fear.

The Defenestration of Hillsborough

Tom Paulin – *Fivemiletown* (1987)

- 1 Here we are on a window ledge
- 2 with the idea of race.

- 3 All our victories
- 4 were defeats really

- 5 and the tea chests in that room
- 6 aren't packed with books.

- 7 The door's locked on us
- 8 so we begin again

- 9 with cack on the sill
- 10 and *The Book of Analogies*.

- 11 It falls open at a map
- 12 of the small nations of Europe,

- 13 it has a Lutheran engraving
- 14 of Woodrow Wilson's homestead

- 15 in a cloon above Strabane,
- 16 and it tells you Tomás??? Masaryk

- 17 was a locksmith's apprentice.
- 18 This means we have a choice:

- 19 either to jump or get pushed.

Articulating Hungary
(1956-1989)

Paul Hyland (1947) - *Kicking Sawdust* (1995)

Imre Nagy is excavated
watched by his daughter and granddaughter
bone by bone from the unmarked grave
where he was thrown face-down.

Bone by bone: pelvis, scapula, jaw,
skull like mahogany, tibia and fibula
like twigs still rooted in boots,
laced boots that trod the air.

Elsewhere a woman disinters
a shirt from her drawer;
says she's washed it, washed it
but stains stay where the bullet
tore from her husband's chest,
a family secret until now.

Two hundred thousand witness
Nagy's funeral, his skeleton assembled
face-up in a pristine casket,
a revolution resurrected.

The woman holds out the shirt:
a banner, a flag kept folded
for the day she would be free
to fly it, heavy words
tearing out of her mouth faster
and faster, lighter and lighter.

Imre Nagy: installed in government by USSR, premier 1953-55 and in 1956 uprising,
seized by Russian troops and hung in 1958, reburied 1989.

Canteen Song

Preston Station Buffet, 4 a.m., July 1916

Phoebe Hesketh (1909-2005) - *A Box of Silver Birch* (1997)

- 1 Green flag and whistle
- 2 Shrill through clouding steam
- 3 As the panting train,
- 4 Loaded with cheering tommys,
- 5 Jerks into life.

- 6 *Living and dead*
- 7 *Living and dead*
- 8 *The living are gone*
- 9 *To add to the dead.*

- 10 In the canteen
- 11 Plump ladies in blue overalls
- 12 Turn away, rolling up their sleeves
- 13 To empty the urns, clattering cups and spoons
- 14 Louder than thoughts.

- 15 Yet some are weeping,
- 16 Some are yawning,
- 17 None are greeting this midsummer morning
- 18 With more than flickering hope.

- 19 *Living and dead*
- 20 *The living are gone*
- 21 *To add to the dead.*

- 22 Again the signal falls
- 23 To greet the train blowing sparks and steam
- 24 As it screams to a stop.

- 25 *Two cheers for the living*
- 26 *Though all are crippled*
- 27 *And many already half dead.*

28 Here come the Red Cross,
29 The stretcher-bearers
30 And valiant V.A.D.s,
31 Give a thought to the widows
32 And children, losers
33 And bearers as much as these.

34 *So the living return*
35 *In halting hundreds*
36 *Leaving the thousands dead.*

Reforma Agraria

Ian Duhig (1954) - *The Bradford Count* (1991)

In 1936,
Falange or Carlist priests
showed wounded men,
republicans,
rojoseperatistas,
an extreme unction,
a cristazio limpio,
a blow with the crucifix
between the eyes,
a blessed paseo,
the light oil of the gun
like watchmaker's oil, or sunflower oil,
ran from the Lugers,
ran from Berettas down into the eyes
of wounded land-leaguers,
who closed them knowing
even then they'd won
two square metres,
room for the red rose tree.

At Swarkestone

U. A. Fanthorpe – *Safe as Houses* (1995)

It is often said that Bonnie Prince Charlie got as far as Derby in his invasion of 1745. In fact, he reached Swarkestone, some nine miles further south.

J.G. Collingwood, *The River Trent*

He turned back here. Anyone would. After
The long romantic journey from the North
To be faced with this. A *so what?* sort of place,
A place that, like a mirror, makes you see.

A scrubby ridge, impassive river, and beyond,
The flats of Middle England. History waited
To absorb him. Parliaments, dynasties, empires
Lay beyond these turnip fields. Not what he wanted.

He could have done it. The German Royals
Had packed their bags, there was a run
On the Bank of England, London stood open as jelly.
Nobody could have stopped him. This place did,

And the hurricane that blew his cause from Moidart
In a bluster of kilts and claymores and bright red hair
Faded at Swarkestone as they turned their backs,
Withdrawing into battle, slaughter, song.

Earthquake, Osaka 1995

Tobias Hill (1970) - *Midnight in the City of Clocks* (1996)

She leans the door against a wall.
Takes off her shoes. On the freezer is a bottle
of *Plum Orchard Fine Rice Wine*. In the freezer
is the smell of rice fused to clinker in a pot.
Next to the freezer is a hole.
Through it she can see the street:

a boy in shorts is selling cans of Coke.
A boy in jeans is drinking head-down to a puddle.
Between sirens, an old woman
is catching locusts with her hands
in an allotment of tea-green rice.

She wants to help them but the television
has been broken and her arm
hurts to the bone. She pours rice wine
into her mouth, up to the hard brim of her teeth.

It tastes of sour milk.
She fills a cup until meniscus
shivers like clockwork at the brink.

The Gas-Mask

John Levett (1950) - *Their Perfect Lives* (1994)

Its foetid tubes outlasted usefulness,
War issue circa 1939.
She let me put it on. No one would guess
The skull that filled the rubber snout was mine.
My voice, sucked down into the past decade
Through pipes and perished mouldings, sounded wrong,
Too hollow, other-worldly, too betrayed;
The noise I'd make if I had not been born.
The eyepieces were yellow, pickled cracks
Zigzagged into a musty nasal cave,
A shelter from the senseless dawn attacks
Of guilt and fear if I dared misbehave.
Anonymous I'd prowl the scullery,
Visit every room, patrol the stairs,
Sealed off from mustard-gas and Zyklon-B,
Dive-bombing beds, napalming rocking chairs.
The mirror in the hallway trapped my shape,
Half a face, a trunk, two rolling eyes,
The blind stare of some technocratic ape
At high-octane liana in the skies.
It grew too hot. My head stewed in my breath,
A sapping, unhygienic foetal bath;
I fought myself and died rehearsing death
Still strapped inside a face that couldn't laugh.
There comes a time when all pretending stops,
The door is opened, out you go to play,
You grab your mask, your bag of acid drops,
Then run and duck towards the grainy day.

The Wall (*Obligatory*)

Ken Smith (1938-2003) - *The Heart, the Border* (1990)

There is the one side and the other,
and between there is the wall. Each side
has its monuments, its flags, its currency,
its bulletholes, its notions of the other.

Over here we say *the beaten in the lobby
of the crestfallen*. Some days we pity them.
Over there they watch us through binoculars.
Over there they call us fascists.

There, here is *over there*, and their maps
of where we are are coloured white,
as ours are of them. No one
over there can fall in love over here.

Here the street ends and there's wall,
and on the other side the same street:
tramtracks, kerbstones, streetlights
coming on, pedestrians about their business.

They do not wave or look back. It is
as if we were each others' ghosts. Either side
history comes with a wall round it.
We are each other's terra incognita.

Somewhere there's a piano playing boogie,
and on this side a late night argument
strung out with booze and bamboozle
till the word gets lost in the many

qualifications of itself, and it all ends
in tears. Over there the long silence
broken by dogs at each change of shift,
some border guard on his two-stroke.

And everywhere it seems a night bird
fills the dark with long pulses of his song.
He doesn't care to be one side or the other.
His song is all of him.

I understand where this late night music
of a sad piano is coming from.
I understand where that long
leashed baying of manhounds is coming from.

But I don't understand where the nightingale
in these long pulls of music through himself
and the buildings and the trees
or from which side of anywhere he is singing.

1944

Sylvia Kantaris (1936) – *Dirty Washing* (1989)

When we heard that a fighter-plane had crashed
in Ash Wood we could hardly wait till school was out.
'Little jackals,' one of the spectators called us.
We guessed a jackal was a kind of werewolf
and bared our baby-teeth to try it out.
The area was cordoned off but we crept close
behind a wall and squinted through a crack,
and Peter said he saw a bloody finger.
John said he saw brains and I swore blind
I saw a blue eye staring through the wreckage.
Janet saw a leg in a flying-boot.

Each Saturday for weeks we grubbed
for any scraps of flesh the Home Guard
might have overlooked amongst the last
remains of rusting metal - and shrieked
each time we spied a clump of fungus
or clots and streaks of elderberry blood
until the thrill palled. We got bored with death.

After that, Saturday was pictures day,
as usual, at the village hut. We yawned
through censored newsreels, crunching Victory Vs,
and spurred our front bench through the tomahawks,
spitting bullets loudly with our fingers,
bravely plucking arrows from our guts.
But when they showed a horror film they wouldn't
let us in. We were too young to be exposed
to close-ups of the war or Frankenstein,
except in bits and pieces, one eye at a time
glued to rust-hole in the corrugated iron.

Royal Family Doulton

Kathleen Jamie (1962) - *The Queen of Sheba* (1995)

My ladies of the dark oak dresser
I reached for you above the pewter
teapots ribbed like cockles, snaps
taken with the first family Kodak
six months ago when we were wee.

Figurines in mufflers, *Top o' the hill*,
Katherine, ermine, *Demure's* eyes
lowered in a poke bonnet; I remember
your petticoats, flower baskets,
the delicacy of gloves.

Not my Nana scrubbing floors, her fine mantle
a gas-light's; the shared lavvy, my hand
in her rough fist past the blacked-out
stair-head window no one bothered
to scrape clean, to welcome a dull sun

twenty years since the bombs.
The Doultons' heart-shaped faces
gazed at summer Downs, sparkly ballrooms.
Seized in coy pirouettes, little victims
of enchantment, the tenement was condemned.

Handed down. On the mattresses
of my various floors I saw you trip
along lanes, hold tiny parasols against
the glare of naked bulbs, peek behind
fans in a house

where shaven-haired women
slept in the same bed,
and Jim greased guns for burial
in a revolutionary field.
One day I smothered them

in bubble-wrap, like a mother

I read of who smothered her kids
for fear of the Bomb,
took them back to the safety
of my parents' built-in wardrobe,

in case they got smashed,
little arms and bonnets, parasols
and scattered baskets. One day, I said
I'll have a calm house, a home
suitable for idols; but it hasn't happened yet.

Oboth

Gillian Allnutt (1949) – *Blackthorn* (1994)

Utha was my wife. She howled as I left her.
She flung herself to the floor of the hut.
Packed earth it was and ashes.
I saw two little ridges of earth where she'd
dug her wooden boots in. Writhed and howled, she did.
No one was there, though they are with her now.
They are combing her hair down her back.

I am sad I had to leave my boots behind.
They'd cut them from me months before I left
because I could no longer walk but lay on the shelf
of the bed cut into the white wall by the stove.
I would not let my split boots out of my sight.
They sat side by side on the stool
and Utha did not sit on it.

I did not know my feet. I think they were white
but I felt nothing. And they did not know themselves.
Utha wrapped them in brown cloth.
She said it was an old chemise.
What is chemise? Chemise came with her
from the small town where she'd been a girl.
Chemise was before I knew her.

Forest was what we knew together. What was ours.
Edge of forest. That at our backs and before us
taiga, scrub, the coarse yellow flowers.
Carts coming over the rutted plain.
Carts that stumbled, stayed one night
then left at dawn loaded with logs of pine.
That was in summer. The short light months.

In winter, snow. Moon light of snow my boots loved.
How they let themselves in for it and were glad.
They shaped themselves to snow and me,
the hard ground that they knew.

Irith had to split them from me
with his heart-axe. Little axe
he had, tucked in his belt.

We'd sawn together and our lives were long.
It is quite hard to explain how, with each pine,
we'd come to it and known.
The first and last and inner ring.
How Irith, axe in hand, had quickly cut the tree
and how, because he was a kind man,
Irith came to cut my boots from me that day.

The Sentries' Night-Watch
George Charlton (1950) – *City of Dogs* (1994)

(West Walls, Newcastle, 1644)

This evening, as we mount the walls,
The housewife, humming a lullaby,
Shakes bedbugs from an eiderdown
Beneath tawny Flemish pantiles:
A lock of loose hair describes her cheek
As thinner than it was in spring.

Atop the castle keep, the flag
That's flown there all along
Is luminous red in the lowering sun:
The captain gives his lass a kiss
Below the steps, his cuirass creaks
In the moistening air of evening coming on.

Our armpits reek: we watch across
The siege-scape's rubble suburbs,
Its wreckage of coalpits and glasshouses,
The vacant wharfs and merchant-adventurers'
Chambers that rubbery bats rebound off,
To the tree-line of the Scottish wood.

We watch as martins curtly snip through air
To nests like cannonballs beneath the eaves
Of villages we come from - villages
Lost to us, for all the ways are barred,
Though we know their scents of resin and flowers
And their names: Dissington, Dalton, Stamfordham.

Therefore, before we go, we'll leave
Such things we have no further use of –
Our clay-pipe bowls, their broken stems,
The cold scorch of the brazier's fire,
Our long-awaited back-pay in small change:
You can make of them what you like.

French Connection
Stewart Conn (1936) – *In the Blood* (1995)

(in celebration of the Auld Alliance, 1295-1995)

What amalgam of nationhood and sentimentality
induces in us Scots such lachrymosity?

When in the bluster and skite of Hogmanay,
smooth as an oyster in stout, the old year slips away;

or bagpipes skirling and glengarries doffed,
the haggis's reeking entrails are raised aloft.

Grown men are known to weep in caravanseraï
by yon Bonnie Banks, or crossing the sea to Skye;

while comics (Glesca and other) employ their wiles
to reduce us to crumpled Kleenex, in the aisles.

A more solemn lump comes to the throat at losses
on foreign fields, those rows of receding crosses;

or posthumously honouring men of girth
driven by inner demons to the ends of the earth

on feet of clay: remote anniversaries
an enticing diversion from today's injustices.

Given that accident of birth and blood decree
which flag has first call on our loyalty

have these seven centuries of Auld Alliance
borne fruit, or merely fuelled defiance

of the common enemy happed in imperial power,
its emblems the village green, the Bloody Tower;

alternate bombast and disparagement
occupying the vacuum of self-government?

Somehow we manage to survive such rancour

(English paradoxically, our *lingua franca*);

increasingly employing on sporting occasions
the vocabulary of war, to stoke our passions:

viz football's lunacy - or the true romance
of Big Gavin's glorious try at Pare des Princes,

manly metaphor for entente between Nations,
or separatist's excuse for more libations.

Words to a rousing tune can cause a riot,
albeit so spurious the head won't buy it.

Though often riven by ambivalence
the heart knows no dilemma in this instance:

O Flower of Scotland quickly mists my gaze,
but my pulse races to the *Marseillaise*.

SIENA IN SIXTY-EIGHT

Charles Tomlinson (1927) - *The Door in the Wall* (1992)

The town band, swaying dreamily on its feet,
Under the portraits of Gramsci and Ho
Play 'Selections from *Norma*', and the moon,
Casta diva, mounts up to show
How high the sky is over harvested Tuscany,
Over this communist conviviality within the wall
Of a fortress that defends nothing at all.

History turns to statues, to fancy dress
And the stylishness of Guevara in his bonnet. Here,
Red-bloused, forgetful sales girls
For the revolution, flirt with the males
At a bookstore under an awning of red:
Lenin, Che, Debray and Mao-
The unbought titles, pristinely serried.

'Realism and sobriety' one might write of the art show:
In *No to Repression*, a procession of women
With raised fists, shouts No, No, No.
And between *American Bombers* and *Black Boy Cleaning Shoes*
Somebody, unteachably out of step,
Has gouged intently into paint
The stigmata of St Francis in *Miracle of the Saint*.

Consciences drowse this summer night
Warmed by the after-glow. Fragrance of cooking
Weighs on the sense already fed by it,
The wild boar turning and turning on its spit;
And the air too greasily replete to lift the red flag,
The morning headlines grow fainter in the dusk:
'Where is Dubcek?' 'Tanks on the streets of Prague.'

THE CENTURY PLANT

Jamie McKendrick (1955) - *The Marble Fly* (1997)

1 A century after its introduction
2 to Oxford's Botanical Gardens greenhouse,
3 on the site of the medieval Jewish cemetery,
4 the agave has taken a leap of faith
5 it won't survive, and begun to blaze
6 with sulphurous buds. It's not clear whether
7 global or more local warming lit the fuse
8 in the patient rootstock and sent one limb
9 rocketing upward so its top
10 can look down even on the banana tree
11 besides the other transplants. The palm-line
12 is said to move a metre north each year
13 ---these days more like a kilometre---
14 but either way the agave's too far ahead
15 to be caught up with, despite the hundred years
16 of waiting---now two, at the most three weeks
17 of prodigal flowering and the whole thing ends.

18 In 1850 in Seville,
19 while his contemporaries photographed
20 rotting barges on the Guadalquivir
21 or farm labourers in sheepskin waistcoats
22 or Gypsy women in the tobacco factory,
23 Vicomte J. de Vigier,
24 turned his back on the folkloric and his lens
25 on the common-or-garden naturalized exotics
26 like palm trees and bamboo. His masterpiece,
27 *Etude d'aloès*, shows this tumid
28 dusty plant on a nondescript roadside.
29 It holds grimly on to its patch of nowhere
30 and drinks and drinks the silver nitrate light
31 as though there were no belonging anywhere
32 but there and then, and nothing sublime

33 except that stretch of dirt, that broken wall

34 and the rays of a faded nineteenth-century sun.

The Lists of Coventry

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

Then, it was just a means of arbitration,
Ordeal by mass entertainment: two knights,
Like glittering exhibition cases, armed,

Escutcheoned, and embroidered, their chased
Lances quivering at the opposite ends
Of a concourse, waiting for the first trumpet

To send painted Swan and Antelope charging
Down on painted Mulberry Tree and Lion;
Or a more urgent trumpet - like the voice

Of a ten-year-old trying to make himself
Heard above his advisers, above the mob
Writhing around Wat Tyler's corpse - to cry out

'Let me be your leader!', and in a
Kingfisher flash of crimson and green-blue
Velvet, prevent the bloodshed. A lover

Of spectacle, and the colourful arts
Of peace, King Richard stands up to flourish
Words in illuminated filigree

From a goat-hide scroll... and we recollect
That Pathe shot of Chamberlain after Munich;
Or a dark-suited, bespectacled John Nott

Stumbling through the lists of British losses.

George Müller

Jack Clemo (1916-1994) - *The Cured Arno* (1995)

He would have shocked Devon anyway,
That madcap turned pietist,
God-tracked from his native Saxony.
Before he yielded, reached the Teign
And Keats's shade, there was a kinship
Between wafted poet and plodding, prose-burdened student

Wand-waving, word-weaving, the pagan spell
Fierce under delicate fancies - these, for Keats,
Bred torment through the inspirer's caution or scorn;
And dry husks, abstract in divinity courses,
Could not guard virtue when thick Prussian blood
Relit carnality near inns and brothels.

Demure, perplexed, the church-folk around Teignmouth
Had stared at Keats a few years earlier,
But Muller prompted a friendlier awe.
This quirky penitent, refusing
Schedule and salary, had captured Shaldon
With a childlike love, a seer's prophetic eye
And a slow tongue groping for English.

He had once been jailed for petty crime
And dead drunk as often as Keats,
Arrogant at Halle and, flushed at cards,
drawn into brute-heat by a haggling kiss.

The London poet seemed a sick moth, fluttering
To his grave in Rome and casting on the Teign,
The Exe, the Shaldon cottages,
The venom of a starved, orphaned dream.

Young Muller soon dreamed of orphans,
Spurred by his Exeter wife, pregnant in Bristol,
And a century of humdrum philanthropy,
Haggling humanism, was struck by a seer's gamble,
Herding his multitudes of children
Outside the well-planned tracks of survival,
In a Bible-fenced corral of stubborn prayer.

The saints' way of emptiness, blind trust in God
Its vindication is historic:
It bred no melancholy art.

George Müller, a lecherous German student before his conversion, became the most remarkable Christian philanthropist in Victorian England. He built and maintained five orphanages at Ashley Down, near Bristol, relying entirely on faith and prayer, never advertising or appealing for funds.

A Ballad for Apothecaries

Anne Stevenson (1933) - *Granny Scarecrow* (2000)

Being a Poem to Honour the Memory of
Nicholas Culpeper, Gent.

Puritan, Apothecary, Herbalist, Astologer

Who in the year of our Lord 1649

Did publish *A PHYSICAL DIRECTORY*

A translation from the Latin of the London Dispensatory
made by the College of Physicians

'Being that Book by which all Apothecaries are strictly
commanded to make all their Physicke.'

- 1 In sixteen-hundred-and-sixteen
- 2 (The year Will Shakespeare died),
- 3 Earth made a pact with a curious star,
- 4 And a newborn baby cried.

- 5 Queen Bess's bright spring was over,
- 6 James Stuart frowned from the throne;
- 7 A more turbulent, seditious people
- 8 England had never known.

- 9 Now, Nick was a winsome baby,
- 10 And Nick was a lively lad,
- 11 So they gowned him and sent him to Cambridge
- 12 Where he went, said the priests, to the bad.

- 13 For though he excelled in Latin
- 14 And could rattle the Gospels in Greek,
- 15 He thought to himself, there's more to be said
- 16 Than the ancients knew how to speak.

- 17 He was led to alchemical studies
- 18 Through a deep Paracelsian text.

19 He took up the art of astrology first,
20 And the science of botany next.

21 To the theories of Galen he listened,
22 And to those of Hippocrates, too,
23 But he said to himself, there's more to be done
24 Than the ancients knew how to do.

25 For though Dr Tradition's a rich man,
26 He charges a rich man's fee.
27 Dr Reason and Dr Experience
28 Are my guides in philosophy.

29 The College of Learned Physicians
30 Prescribes for the ruling class:
31 Physick for the ill of the great, they sneer,
32 Won't do for the vulgar mass.

33 But I say the heart of a beggar
34 Is as true as the heart of a king,
35 And the English blood in our English veins
36 Is of equal valuing.

37 Poor Nick fell in love with an heiress,
38 But en route to their desperate tryst,
39 The lady was struck down by lightning
40 Before they'd embraced or kissed.

41 So our hero consulted the Heavens
42 Where he saw he was fated to be
43 A friend to the sick and the humble
44 But the Great World's enemy.

45 Nick packed up his books in Cambridge
46 And came down without a degree
47 To inspire Red Lion Street, Spitalfields,
48 With his fiery humanity.

49 As a reckless, unlicensed physician,
50 He was moved to disseminate

51 Cures for the ills of the body
52 With cures for the ills of the state.

53 Who knows what horrors would have happened
54 To Nicholas Culpeper, Gent.,
55 If the king hadn't driven his kingdom
56 Into war with Parliament.

57 In the ranks of the New Model Army
58 Nick fought with the medical men,
59 Till a Royalist bullet at Newbury
60 Shot him back to his thundering pen.

61 'Scholars are the people's jailors,
62 And Latin's their jail,' he roared,
63 'Our fates are in thrall to knowledge;
64 Vile men would have knowledge obscured!'

65 When they toppled King Charles's head off
66 Nick Culpeper cried, 'Amen!'
67 It's well that he died before the day
68 They stuck it on again.

69 Still, English tongues won their freedom
70 In those turbulent years set apart;
71 And the wise, they cherish Nick's courage
72 While they cheer his compassionate heart.

73 So whenever you stop in a chemist's
74 For an aspirin or salve for a sore,
75 Give a thought to Nicholas Culpeper
76 Who dispensed to the London poor.

77 For cures for the ills of the body
78 Are cures for the ills of the mind;
79 And a welfare state is a sick state
80 When the dumb are led by the blind.

CROYLAND

A Hermit's Journal

Stuart Henson – *Ember Music* (1994)

(for Kevin Crossley-Holland)

In the seventh century, Croyland (now Crowland, Lincolnshire) was an uninhabited island deep in the inhospitable and undrained fenlands to the north east of Peterborough. St Guthlac was a Mercian warrior before his conversion to Christianity. He entered the monastery at Repton, and after two years was given permission to depart and seek out a hermitage.

The sequence uses details from Felix's Latin *Life of St Guthlac* (edited & translated by Bertram Colgrave, Cambridge University Press, 1956). The versions from the Guthlac poems in the Exeter Book are based on S.A.J. Bradley's prose translations (*Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, Dent 1982).

1.

The boatman dips his oar
in the sticky waters;
the weed swirls in his wake
and the ripples close.
It begins now,
my apprenticeship to solitude
in this no man's land
of the soil and skies,
where the sun rises and sinks
in marches of fen on every hand.
The four horizons
gather their winds to hurl
the seasons across this place:
a wilderness,
an emptiness, a space
to meet God on his own terms.
I am bound now to search
my path into grace
between these alder groves
these ambiguous shades
with their water-mint
and their poisonous bittersweet.
I am bound
to make it my own,
this trackless island,
sunken in chaos.
My acre of savage Eden
voided of men.

2.

Today, an inventory, of beasts:

freshwater fishes, eels, the heron's feeding;
the small amphibians - frogs, toads, newts.

Among the rushes, coot, warblers, grebe
of both kinds; lithe worms; fenny snakes.

When the sun is out, butterflies,
beetles, bugs in abundance.

One common kestrel hangs on its cliff of air
where the grasses beach themselves in waves.

Larvae, thin nymphs with telescopic legs.
The mask of the gauzy dragonfly.

By dusk, moths, bats, glow-worms...

No demons. So far.

3.

Who dug my cell?

Thieves.

Where did they sweat?

Down in the ark of a grave.

What were they seeking?

Gold, crystal, garnets and ivory.

What did they find?

Bones in the black soil,
worms, a flask, ivory skulls.

How did they go?

Furtive, fearful, charged
with all ill.

Why did they so -
scraping my cell
with their iron crows,
their hands;
guilty, unknowing?

Working God's will.

4.

Easy enough to disregard the gloss of mirrors:
sickness and hollow age and death.

Too long with these coarse, sore hides on my bones,
today in the lake I caught my own face, shrunk, thinner.

A scrape of barley-bread when the sun's set;
the taste-sense dull, like silt in my bowl.

My head has become a shell of doubt. At night
the dread of the ravening dark, the last threshold.

Time past, too long in lighted rooms, in brazen cups,
drunken and draining desire's lees for the drug lust.

Too many beds with neither then; these lips
stained: blood; kisses; a woman's promises.

Enough! As if it were not enough to have strewn
men out of their homes, set torches at their thatch.

A third of all their pathetic wealth I gave them back,
proud, with that condescending charity.

Each time I look, the glass of my life shows ill.
This cell's not tight enough to squeeze me out of hell.

This suffering itself is another kind of vanity.

5.

How frail the flesh,
the body's bone thermometer,
the thin capillaries
of fingertips and toes
that still record
night's rigor mortis setting in
and the slow thaw by day.
And seasons too -the spirit
flaking out of its almost-death
with the greening earth,
with the fledgling leaves
close-budded in their shells.

April. My face pulls
to the southern sky
for hints of warmth
and the looked-for time
when the swallows come
like a promise reaffirmed.
I slept today
at my open door,
and I dreamt my arms, my knees
my breast aflame with wings.

To wake
and to lift the small birds up
to their place in the eaves!

To nest the storm-blown
pulse of their life
in my hands!

6.

A visitor. A thin young monk
who is much possessed by writing.

Truths, no doubt, of the deepest kind.

Each day between prayers
he sits for an hour
at his sloping desk
with furrowed brow.

No doubt he is sowing thought
in his fertile mind.

Alas, as we knelt today in the oratory
a pair of mad black jackdaws
in at the window
stole up his parchment, flapped it out,
and vanished it to the depths of the mere.

Dark moods! Despair! His text lost!

But the boat is there and I send him off
in the maze of mysterious creeks
to where he may find
the reeds bent with his paper's weight,
and not one word of his wisdom smudged.

An act of fortune, or High Design?
Who can tell?
By God's grace his manuscript
is retrieved from the waters' clutch.

It would seem, then, that he writes well.

7.

Last night, a fever, and then the demons came,
as I knew they would.

But to go to the lip of hell and back-
my soul sickens within me still.

It began with the cracks in the floor
and the wall where they slimed in,
their bodies yellow and soft as phlegm,
and the stench choking the air of the room;
each one with its own foul grin, its slobbered beard,
its skull like the bulbous head of a cretin.

Their knees and their elbows twisted out;
even their bowels were visible
through the slack transparent-ochre skin.
They came with the stink of sin on their breath,
with obscene screams, like the shrieking of calves
in an abattoir.

Then they began their tortures.
I sang: 'The Lord is at my right hand...'
They drove thorns in my finger-ends,
dragged brambles across the tender zones
of my limbs till I cried aloud.
They thrust my face down in the mere
till my breath burst and I knew I drowned;
they cried: 'Guthlac, leave this place!'
I replied once again:
'The Lord, The Lord is at my right hand.'
They scourged me with cords
knotted with iron butterflies;
they brought machines
from the forge of their sulphur-den
to try me until I swooned into death.

In that dream, the skies were alive
with the buzz of wings. I was borne aloft
on the back of a cloud of their grim kind,
and the black wind, like a locust-storm
transported me north and set me down
on the rim of a great volcano
surging with flame. And it rained there,

in the fire-sea, with bolts of frozen hail.

As I watched, the host of the devil-kind
began to wail: 'O Guthlac, we can cast you in
where the heat of your lusts and your manifold sins
will consume your flesh like wax on the wick
of your bones. Behold, the vents of Erebus,
the burning stones, the boiling Styx,
and the molten gulfs of Acheron!'

I cried in reply: 'Woe unto you, you seed of Cain.
You are no more than dust and ash of a fevered dream.
I am ready. So cast me in if you can!'

And with that the fever began to turn:
I felt in my veins a white calm,
like a drug that salves and dissolves pain,
and my mind was filled with radiance-
the invisible face of the saint whom I loved
and to whom I prayed each night of my fast,
Bartholomew, with his seraph-train, who spoke
one word that drove the crawling demons home.

From that moment on, I sank toward dawn
when the sun with its simple warmth
came touching the walls of my room.

8.

(from Guthlac A)

*At once when Bartholomew spoke the God-word,
then Guthlac's spirit swelled in bliss.
All the submissive horde of the Satan-kind
cringed to obey the behest of the saint.
Thus blessed with beneficence, Guthlac began his journey
back to the hallowed-spot thankfully trusting Grace.
Gently, in God-fear, they gathered him up,
anxious for his comfort, and careful to keep him safe.
Home to the holy-place they bore him in triumph,
where the host of birds chorused the wise-man's return
in loud song, as if their voices would burst.
For often the holy sage would hold out food for them
when, hungry, they fluttered about his hands,
fearless and greedy, glad of such aid.
In this way, the gentle soul had withdrawn from the world,
preferring the quiet-counsel and peace of the woods,
delighting instead in the wild-creatures' companionship.
The cell where he struggled was newly sanctified.
Around about, the landscape broke forth in blossom;
the cuckoo spoke with her two notes of spring.
Renewed in resolution, Guthlac could rest in his dwelling-place,
in the green, God-guarded ground of his cell,
where divine strength had driven the devils off.
What purer desire distilled from man's love than this?
Is there any remembered among our fathers,
or such we have known since then ourselves?*

9.

A great white owl
with quilted wings like an angel
has made its residence
in the trusses that span my roof.
The brush of its comings and goings
has shadowed my sleep.
When I pray in my cell I always keep
the south door ajar:
the blackbirds, a robin, a coot
will come in and potter
about my feet while I'm still.
The fish, too, will attend my call:
I speak when I go to cast them bread;
then I wait to watch the lake-top boil.

But a price is paid for such
gifts of God; such knowledge
cuts like a two-edged knife.
There are days, more frequently now,
when the strangers arrive
at the landing-place
and the signal rings,
and with slow heart I must go
to answer their visiting.

There are those who journey from monasteries
with their doubts, their curiosity,
who will sit at meat with me
and will judge in their secret hearts
what they see of this old eccentric
who lives out his life in a nest
of timbers lost in the fen.
Again, there are those who are sick
in body or limb who come brave
in the hope that my fasting, my prayers
and my remedies will do more
than all their physicians can.

Today, a young man whose madness
the doctors cannot mend.
There is nothing left to defend his soul
from eternal fires but my faith
and our actions of penitence.
We must go, once again,
to the oratory, to the font,
to the edge of a black abyss
more profound than despair;
and there I must fight three days
or more till the devil breaks.

Each time I am certain,
yet racked with doubt:
I must pull my miracle out
like a conjurer with a great
infallible trick: my devout hands
must take his head, and my words
must banish the beast in his brow
with a God-sweet breath.

His parents will pay the dues of faith.
They may build a church.
Most probably they will broadcast
my name with all favoured speech.
Alas! I have not gone seeking such fame;
but to follow in patient ways
the paths to those truths
that fall with the hush of an owl's wings,
those wisdoms that gather in solitude
like the birds at my feet.

10.

(from Guthlac B)

*Often on frost-bound days, forced in by hunger,
the shy bird-flocks flew to feed from his hand
and afterwards remained among the reed-beds,
repaying their sustenance sweetly with song.
And strangers too, the sick, the sorrowful in mind,
would call at his cell for counsel and God's help.
Not one of them whose need had driven him on
to seek out this saintly man on the scene of his temptation
departed despairing of his dark condition,
but each restored, raised by that special power
to health, healed in both body and soul
went forth in praise and prayer and gratitude
while God was pleased to grant him longer days.*

*But death's disseverance, dawn of attrition's end,
was near at hand for the holy man -
full fifteen years from his first rest in the wilderness.
The Holy Ghost, the Comforter, came down from above,
speaking his benediction to the blessed evangelist
whose breast grew hot and burned with flame,
his soul filled with the fervent need to find its home.
Then sudden sickness silted through his veins,
though Guthlac still maintained his mood of cheerfulness,
and as the illness took fierce hold,
it licked like fire at his bony frame.
This was the bitter cup first brewed for Adam
by Eve and the Devil when Eden fell.
From that time on, for that sin's memory,
no man on Earth could escape or refuse
the deep cup of death at the door of eternity.
Nobody born of flesh, bondman or lord
can fight off its fell advance.
Just so this death, cold and companion less,
drew near to Guthlac now through the dark of night.*

*Onefollower remained who daily would attend his cell.
This man was patient, pure in heart,
and sought him in the silence if the sacred hall
that he might hear discourse if heavenly things,
gladly to glean the teachings if the saint.
He found his teacher ill-at-ease and sick,
of a great grief that gnawed him at his heart.
And thus the servant, speaking to his guide:
'How can it be your spirit is so sorely tried?
My friend and master, father, refuge...
Can you not command words, converse,
comfort my mind?' Blinded by tears
he sought to know how the disease would go with him,
whether indeed the illness would abate.*

*The saint struggled to muster breath,
enough to answer the anxious man.
'My friend, these limbs grow fiery with pain:
the thief death has the keys of my life
and waits to unlock my body's treasure-house.
I must exchange it soon for a roof of loam,
the earthen walls and floor of the grave.
My soul may seek no more than seven nights' respite:
at the dawn if the eighth day it will ease away,
be freed to receive its benedictions, its rewards,
before God's seat, its journey's end.
My spirit yearns already for unceasing joys.
Now you have knowledge of my body's death.
Its wait was long and tortured in the World.'*

*A time then if weeping and bleak moods:
the young man's spirit clouded and grew dark,
knowing the saint's impatience to move on.
Although he struggled, sorrow spilt in tears
as he prayed to understand what fate ordained.*

*The seven days had duly passed
after pain's arrow-shower attacked his lord
and probed with its barbs his heart's fortress
when once again the patient youth
hurried his footsteps to the holy place.
He found the old man prostrate, overwhelmed,
much racked with suffering, his sure hope gone.
The servant's heart was hollow and afraid.
Knowing the end was near fearful he spoke
words that till now he had not dared to ask:
'Beloved lord, best-favoured of God,
often my mind has troubled me to tell
who it may be that I hear speak with you
each evening when the eager-resting sun
sinks down behind the westward rim
of the flat fen? Father and comforter,
reveal this voice, this visitor's identity,
who speaks with gentleness and great authority,
invisible, yet audible, alone with you.'*

*After a long pause the pious man
spoke slowly, struggling for breath:
'Listen, my friend, this is a secret
never before broached, betrayed to no-one,
because I was afraid that fools would prattle,
make of it a miracle, marvel and embellish it:
I have no wish to boast or broadcast such a thing,
or cause displeasure to my Lord and risk His wrath.
From the second year, my solitude was blessed
by my Victorious Lord, the Life-giver:
He saw fit to send a celestial angel
who came at dusk each dawn and eventide,
a servant of God, secure in His supremacy,
healing my every hurt, my heart's anxieties,
showing me His will through the gift of Wisdom.
Such wisdom has permitted me intuitively to know
the inmost thoughts and workings of men's minds
when they have come for conference to my cell.*

*My loyal confidant, for our love's sake,
for the sake of the trust sustained between us
now and always, be answered and be comforted:
I will not leave you languishing alone;
I shall be with you even beyond the grave.'*

*Then he sank back, head bowed against the wall,
not giving up but fighting still
against the agony of every breath.
It seemed then the sweetest fragrance,
like summer blossom scenting the fields,
spread from his lips and issued forth
the whole day long, continuing and pure.*

*Across the reeds, the flat wash of the mere,
the sun's path glittered as it sank.
The northern sky, swirling with cloud,
grew dark and overcast, hauling a heavy mist,
and night in its course bore down upon the earth.
Then suddenly a light of all-surpassing brilliance
broke from the heavens above the hermit's cell.
This holy radiance, a noble brightness,
shone all the night about the holy-man,
dissolving shadows in its clarity till dawn
broke in the east across the old sea-path.*

*Then Guthlac, warrior of God, arose,
ending his wait, pain's harrowing,
and spoke humbly, haloed in light.
'Companion, my friend, the time has come
when you must go and conscientiously discharge
the tasks that I have asked of you.
Carry this message quickly to my sister:
tell her I have begun my journey on
along the road to the gloriousness of God.
I have denied myself her presence in this life
that we might meet matched in perfection
and abiding love before God's throne.
Entrust to her the burial of my corpse
where soulless it may rest in its sandy hill.'*

*Refreshed by the sacrament he raised his hands
and seemed to see beyond this life,
turning his gaze in rapture up to Heaven.*

*Then his cold body fell away.
Released, his soul went rising like a lark.*

*At this the light blazed all about
a bright beacon binding earth and sky,
a holy incandescence like a fiery tower
wherein the angels sang anthems of victory
and saints rejoicing sanctified his path.
Thus was the island filled with ecstasies,
sweetness of air and angel-sound,
transformed, beyond the power of word to tell.
Even the sun, eclipsed, shone dim,
the earth shook and silent nature quaked.*

*Meanwhile the messenger grew much afraid,
with drained courage hastened to his boat
and launched again across the slate-grey lake.
His wave-steed briskly slipped the water-face,
his sorrow like the swirling depths beneath.*

At Crowland

Time tears them down, the abbeyes
and the choirs of stone:
slow-motion centuries dissolve
their sandy heads and their saints' bones.

Somewhere across the water-lighted fen
a barn sinks on its holy quoins;
behind this wall a pair of drunken bishops
shoulder-to-shoulder tilt and lean.

Roofless, their pillars rise to loft a firmament
vaulted with cumulus, pricked out in blue.
Where jackdaws rasp and pigeons smothering reply,
here Guthlac keeps his monument alive:
a vast arched window on the sky
that swifts skim screaming through

Klee/Clover

Tom Paulin (1949) - *Walking a Line* (1994)

1 Nightwatch after nightwatch
2 Paul Klee endured
3 'horribly boring guard duty'
4 at the gasoline cellar
5 and every morning
6 outside the Zeppelin hangar
7 there was drill then a speech
8 tacked with junk formulas
9 he varnished wings
10 and stencilled numbers
11 next to gothic insignia
12 a private first-class
13 with a lippy dislike
14 of their royal majesties
15 and *Flying School 5 (Bavaria)*

16 he wrote home to Lily
17 *it's nice this spring weather*
18 *and now we've laid out a garden*
19 *between the second and third runways*
20 *the airfield's becoming*
21 *more and more beautiful*

22 each time a plane crashed
23 ---and that happened quite often
24 he cut squares of canvas
25 from the wings and fuselage
26 he never said why
27 but every smashed biplane
28 looked daft or ridiculous
29 halfjoky and untrue
30 ---maybe the pilots annoyed him?
31 those unlovely aristos
32 who never knew they were flying
33 primed blank canvases
34 into his beautiful airfield

Baroque

James Lasdun (1958) - *Woman Police Officer in Elevator* (1997)

Francesco Borromini (1599-1667)

- 1 Spirit and form: to every soul its shell;
- 2 Sounds their instruments---flute, double bass,
- 3 Trumpet, each instrument its plush-lined case,
- 4 The flesh its cribs, Death its Heaven and Hell.
- 5 Bernini, your lightest-fingered rival,
- 6 Built only on the human scale, filled Rome
- 7 With wooing, delicious airs; *your* dome,
- 8 Dizzying, serial-spiralled, was a skull
- 9 Sucked to the coffered contours of a mind
- 10 Breached by infinity. The Infinite!
- 11 It made you less as well as more than human;
- 12 Implosive, visionary, one hand designed,
- 13 The other flogged a workman till he died,
- 14 Then drew the sword you fell on like a Roman.

Clare Leighton Packs a Bag, 1939

Maura Dooley (1957) - *Explaining Magnetism* (1991)

What I remember, she said, were her hands, her huge hands, moving in the light.

She dug up light with a knife,
whittled shade to the bone,
heaped up shadow in the comers
of an English summer's day,
but everything was too black and white:
print on a page, a flickering screen,
the image she cut and bled onto paper,
reasons to fight, reasons to leave,
the wastepaper basket spilling over.

Maybe there was love, maybe discovery
in another country, a southern harvest
in another country. In London only
the grey stone, white air, grey stone
of a country waiting, its cornfields
ripening to the blare of poppies,
fireweed flaring in the cities.

Looking out then at all that snow
she knew paper was never as white
as this, no ink as black as her mood,
no wood as heavy, as hard, as this.
She carved out shade like a cancer,
slicing towards the light.

Heine in Paris

Hilary Davies 1954 - *The Shanghai Owner of the Bonsai Shop* (1991)

- 1 How vast this room to the one eye tracing
- 2 Its lines of exploration to the door
- 3 Outside which onions slice, a woman admonishes
- 4 Before clicking four flights down beside the graveyard,
- 5 (O, All Souls' Day, the widows flowering
- 6 Amongst the sepulchres, green lovers
- 7 Lying under the cool yews!)
- 8 Till her return now there will be not silence
- 9 But these structures with which daily he fills his room
- 10 And masters all its changes: blue for summer
- 11 When the light should be bright as sand grains;
- 12 Red in winter to gash the snows outside
- 13 With pathways where his wife will walk protected
- 14 From overhanging things.
- 15 Today the world he inhabits is russet
- 16 And he heaps the multi-coloured leaves
- 17 In all the corners till his eyelids glow
- 18 With his own sunset. Now the waiting is easy:
- 19 In the afternoon he accompanies the gardeners,
- 20 Raking and watering with their arms,
- 21 Carried to exhaustion in their backs and thighs,
- 22 And drunk with light. When they go home,
- 23 He is lifted like a feather up the stairs.

- 24 She comes only when the curtains are drawn;
- 25 Sees in his hand the ever thinner trceries of blood:
- 26 'All afternoon I held you under the yew trees
- 27 And knew nothing but your scent, the grass,
- 28 Over my whole body the climax of the sun.'

Dominikus Zimmermann

Hilary Davies (1954) - The Shanghai Owner of the Bonsai Shop (1991)

- 1 Like a barn: he said, the externals do not matter
- 2 Though upon the exact date of this learning
- 3 There was no consensus. Certainly not from father,
- 4 Uncle or brother. At nine years in Josephus' workshop
- 5 Watched the men bevel till from silence
- 6 They drew a mad dog, a Virgin with Butterfly.
- 7 In the afternoon he saw the carpenters
- 8 Rounded against the open door like moons,
- 9 Their cloth backs flickering at dusk in the beer gardens.
- 10 At seventeen uncovered Emilie's thighs and found them white
- 11 As doves in storybooks
- 12 And when he worked the altar in the parish church
- 13 Gypsum and flesh performed the same undulations.
- 14 The fields of Wessobrunn were opal all that summer.

- 15 He took apprenticeship and saw a little of the wide river
- 16 And how magically its blue reflected heaven.
- 17 Noted for the first time the movement of a thing
- 18 From source to finish, though seeing neither,
- 19 Only the parable of what lay between.
- 20 That was enough. Then marriage. When they brought him
- 21 To the birthroom, sheets were streaked with blood
- 22 Like ancient lintels; downstairs,
- 23 A calf to celebrate the coming of a son.
- 24 When work resumed, he told the assistant builder
- 25 To place the cherubs upon draperies of pain,
- 26 The purgatory in red.

- 27 Easy at the end to accept the abbot's invitation,
- 28 Many things having reached their end, and little desire
- 29 For the stifled streets of Landsberg. The meadows reminded him
- 30 Of his mother fetching in the cows and mushrooms deliquescent after dawn.
- 31 It should be like a barn; the inner space provide
- 32 A case for nature, the white, blue, red
- 33 And upward thrust. His hand to cast

- 34 Petal and flagellation so finally to say
35 Between air, wood and interstices what he had learnt.
- 36 Then stay ten years to worship at his shrine
37 Walking each day from hut to organ loft
38 Under the cornice 'Dominikus Zimmermann',
39 Baumeister, carpenter, master builder.

On William Drummond of Hawthornden

Marion Lomax (1953) - *Raiding the Borders* (1996)

whose fiancée died on the eve of their wedding

Well-worn paths from his beloved retreat
lead me down a hillside, scarred by storms,
to a face of rock. I can see him
where the kestrel has made a nest now –
staring across the churning river,
tracing the chisel marks above him,
holding the caves cool and comforting –
or, striding along the Esk's wild bank,
he might have opened up his anger,
conscious that he had lost forever
this first bright love. Was his grief released,
dropped hundreds of feet over the high
edge of garden? Or did it increase -
a force strong enough to uproot trees?

John Nelson Preaching in Grimsby
Jack Debney (1941) - *Clowns and Puritans* (1999)

I
To bear witness
In one more stubborn town -
Stinking mudflats make Adam's dough,
The sea-bluster his breath.
Rage shakes me.
Redirecting an old sin,
I'd press-gang these souls for God!

II
But until I master rage,
Until my turmoil becomes the milk of calm,
Every word I preach
Is the Tomb left empty,
A coreless glossolalia.

III
Before me now
A man and his bold drum,
A man hired by the vicar -
Claret lickspittle of the gentry -
To drum, drum, drum though my sermon,
As though I were some kind of tamed bear
That would shuffle to his idiot's rhythm.

IV
My voice carrying the centuries,
Then and now, all one.
I bank on this, secured
In the Bible - rant it out!
I gamble with grace.

But when the Paraclete does descend,
Quickening the waves beyond these houses,
Each white horse the tip
Of a scroll unfurling,
I know there is no gamble.

Then I know

That God sends doubt like hidden harvest,
Tests the moment with its seeming death.

V

The hireling's fingers unclench the
Stick, the silenced drum
Now like a dropsied belly -
Sweet reneging!
His failed trickmaster
Skulks in the reaches
Of the church, takes
Gentry's refuge.

VI

I say that Christ lives
In this drum falling,
Lives too
In the convert's onion tears
And buffoonish praise,
Makes me - His preacher -
For long moments
A miracle-huckster
Peeved at a bad accomplice.
Yes, Christ lives here too,
In my fear and secret
Smiling.

VII

When all is finished,
I will leave these people,
The flat land, the sea:

A straight, dark man
Climbing a chalk hill
At sunset, its swart spine
Like a tensed bow,
But his shadow released round him -
Dancing, a burnished loop.

1829

Alison Brackenbury (1953) – *1829* (1995)

In the year 1829, when Mozart had been dead for over 30 years, his wife Constanza was still alive, alert - though a little frail - and living quietly in Salzburg. There she was visited by an English couple, the Novellos, with whom she talked at length.

In the poem, the first and final sections are spoken by Mozart, the second by Constanza. From death and life, they pursue their argument with a certain Viennese lady, Fräulein von Greiner, whose memoirs had been ecstatic about Mozart's music, but less than complimentary about Mozart himself. They remember others: their two surviving children, Carl and Franz, Puchberg, Mozart's most generous creditor, and Sussmaier, his last pupil.

Many of the poem's details are history. Thanks to the creditors' inventory, we know the exact contents of Mozart's apartment, down to the six 'ordinary glasses' left in his study.

I

In my new room, between Vienna and Virgo,
The air, like good coffee, tastes fragrant and black.
In shifting starlight I read a page
By Fraulein von Greiner. A half-life ago
She turned her fine nose and her classical gaze
On her father's stiff salon, for which I played.
She murmurs, 'He was the most ordinary soul,
Who preferred, to our learning, the silliest joke.
He jumped on a chair, then miaowed, like a cat!'

'Will she still pay you?' my young wife cried,
Although I had sung her the Fraulein's shock,
The lilting cry from the throat of a cat.
Disturbed, she woke, loud morning near;
Pupils hummed luminous and black
Moon's answers tugged warm seas to fold.
No work is ever finished here,
The rush of space whirls each hot globe.
Dear gallop's heart, can she be old?

II

I lean my stick against the bed
As straight and brittle as my bones.
The green quilt's watered pattern glows
Like the fine coat he last had made.

Today, the English couple came
Who worship him. The kind wife wept,
She hugged me; but her husband stepped
Back shrewdly; watched me seek his name.

He saw how small - and faint - it blew,
That light from forty years ago.
I also loved the next man who
Paid bills, made notes, slept quiet by me.
But they asked of that hard, first end.
I told my story, smoothly learned.

'The stranger wore the long still face
A doctor makes. He said, "Someone
Most dear has died. Her Requiem
Has been commissioned, at your price.
Your patron's name must not be known."
Strange terms! I almost laughed at them.

'As we climbed on the Prague post-coach'
(I had left Franz, turned four weeks old)
'A hand dragged on my heavy cloak.
"It is not ready." No reproach.
"It shall be done, when I return."
The grave man nodded, barely spoke.

They met again; I was away,
With the children, in the storm-tossed park.
Skies battered with rain. He sat alone.
I made him drive with me next day.
He said the work was not for her,
The strange, dead girl. It was his own.'

How could I know that she was young?
When that hand clutched, my body shook
In the child's last shudder. It is all true.
How desperate we were then, how young.
I hid beneath the sodden sheets
In his heat's ruin; would die too.

The last bill for his sea-green coat
Lay with the rest. I wept again
To see the wreck of our affairs.
The papers shone in glare of snow.

Once he was gone, our money grew.
The dead cannot insult gilt chairs.

When I had woken, weighed and wrung
By Puchberg's loans; four children gone;
He would turn, to speak the silly
Warming names which licked rough tongues.
He drowned; I breathe. High in this room's
Neat wastes, who laughs? who aches for me?

That clever Fräulein and her guests,
Even the kindly English, want
Something grander than the sun
Of ordinary happiness.
It only dazzles them when glanced
Down from its flying, frozen, done

Fräulein von Greiner, cats may sing.
I sing the last notes that he wrote.
I hear him walk to that fresh dark
Slow as my stick taps, note by note.

III

That my name is strange as a star:
that she forgets my voice, my hands
that she marries again,
this is death, as life makes it.

The water is streaming along the small road
the carthorse foal, his awkward head
spiked with spring's mud, rushes up to the coach.
Carl points to him, cries.

I could set that; any note. I caught
Constanza's raw cries as she struggled with Carl.

She could not sing high, as her sisters could,
the two mad birds at the top of the voice.
I would have had one. To have high notes for ever-

but no, we live on the middle road
the coach slowing and rocking, the carthorse foal
spinning away and Carl's thin voice singing.

She left me too, she went away
to those costly cures - what did Puchberg say?
'Is she a fish?' - and I laughed, and saw
Constanza at Baden, with half-closed eyes
in the murky expensive baths,
floating, the heavy child hung light
as the milk stars whirl, in her private dark
she swims, and her arms are slender and bare,
stronger than mine. There she floats, and smiles.

If stars asked questions, they would say
'Was it hard?' It burned the mind.
As you would know, Constanza, with
Your cracking voice, as they would know
Ringed with the iris of their fires.

Something comes to hold us back.
It drags and jars the carriage wheels.
I never loved those small dark rooms -
Black stove, dull glassware, shut from day -
In which we lived. To move's to live.
The roofs, the small fields fall away.

Your sister, Sophie, told the truth.
'The open score lay on the bed.
He twitched his mouth to show Sussmaier
The drum's pulse: the last sound he made.'

He set it wrong; I saw he would,
I could not teach him anything.
The Masons cleared the choking bills.
How smooth things ran, like Sussmaier's drums!
Listen, you fool: there is a start:
The jolt of heart, the sudden kiss,
As first sun beats to rake the skin.

Carl, whose kindly crooked face
Could never take one lesson in
Has somehow made a bookkeeper.
She taught Franz all my songs, then hoped
To coax him to a prodigy.

His swift career has veered, instead,
Into a Polish Countess's bed.

They are my children. They are brave,
Powerful as these icy lights.
She, straight-backed on her green bed
Is silence in its straightest flight.

What planet now wears my old coat
Washed by the rain, as fine as grass?
What lost suns from the shadows' height
Throb radiance through my cheap glass?

Works

Oliver Reynolds (1957) - *The Player Queen's Wife* (1987)

- 1 Staying at Sans Souci, Voltaire
- 2 went over Frederick's poetry for him---

- 3 he called this
- 4 'washing the king's dirty linen'.

- 5 The prose was more self-reliant,
- 6 as is shown by just one title

- 7 from the thirty-volume *Oeuvres*
- 8 (he wrote---and fought---in French):

- 9 *Instructions Militaires*
- 10 *du Roi de Prusse pour ses Généraux.*

- 11 In the Seven Years War
- 12 the Jung-Braunschweig regiment lost

- 13 1,650 men
- 14 through desertion.

- 15 So,
- 16 guard your troops.

- 17 Give them beer.
- 18 Put sentries in the cornfields.

- 19 Never camp near a forest.
- 20 Never march at night.

- 21 The portable field oven can bake
- 22 1,000 6lb. loaves daily.

- 23 Though biscuits take up less pack-space

24 than bread, they're not so sustaining
25 as the men mix them with water
26 and drink them as soup.

27 Firewood should always be made up of logs:
28 we forbid the practice
29 of setting alight
30 the houses of the peasantry.

31 The army is built
32 on discipline---
33 or, more exactly,
34 on fear.

35 The common soldier
36 should fear his officer
37 more than the enemy:
38 the horse prospers
39 under the eye
40 of its master.

41 Know the land. Talk to old inhabitants,
42 especially shepherds and gamekeepers.

43 Before battle, go to the nearest height,
44 map in hand, and study the view.

45 Cemeteries and sunken roads
46 make excellent defensive positions.

47 Know the land. What if that marsh
48 covering your flank
49 turns out to be a dry field?
50 What if that river freezes over?

Norman Collie at Sligachan Inn

Stewart Conn (1936) – *In the Blood* (1995)

Collie is still up in Skye like an eagle in his eyrie but I hope he will get tired of that lonely vigil and come back to London.

F.G. DONNAN, 1939

Ropes and ice-axes stashed, the climbers
troop into the dining-room, nodding towards
the fine-featured octogenarian who slowly
sips his wine. Puffing his pipe afterwards

in the corrugated-iron smoking-room, eyes
like quartz chips, he gives nothing away
at their expressions of amazement that
so many peaks thought previously unclimbed

should be capped by such similar cairns.
He smiles as they plan the next day's
routes and traverses; recalling his own
and Mackenzie's mastery of the Bhasteir Tooth,

solving the massive shadow of the Cioch...
They say goodnight, oblivious of his
unspoken benediction: 'Set your sights
on your aspirations' limit. The summit won,

let the eye gaze, the spirit brim. Then
the gods of the mountain not taking kindly
to abuse of hospitality, make your way down,
recharged and calm. Nearing the treeline

you will encounter colours intense as any
you recall, cow-bells resonant in the inner ear.
Gaze back at the crest where you've been,
its blueness nothing on its own - rather

the use you put it to.' Continents merge
as he drifts towards sleep, pursued by troupes
of Edwardian ladies, ropes round hourglass waists,
who slip from precipices, abseil into the abyss.

Later he turns in a cold sweat: Mummery
and Whymper, as on a glass plate, spin past
in a neon blaze; voices in whispers ask,
was the rope frayed or mysteriously cut?

Until eased by a chuckle, at his request
that Leverhulme sponsor an attempt on Everest:
in return, they'd plant a flag on the summit,
a bar of Sunlight Soap emblazoned on it.

Mirak

Dick Davis (1945) – *Touchwood* (1996)

Mirak, descendant of the Prophet, born
About the middle of the fifteenth century:
An Afghan brought up to the family trade
Of bow-maker, who as an adolescent
Turned to reciting the Qoran, was soon
A praised professional at it, tried his hand
As a calligrapher and thence became
The painter of all painters, the miniaturist
To end them all, the Wonder of the Age,
The unsurpassed whom kings sought out, who sketched
From life - while travelling, while a guest at banquets,
Untroubled whether courtiers crowded him
Or left him to his own absorbed devices;
And to the admiration of his time
Was never seen to use an easel. A man
Whose passion when not painting was for wrestling
(Each day he lifted weights to build his strength)
At which, of course, in due course, he excelled.

A talented young orphan came to him
To be apprenticed as his servant, page,
Paint-mixer, gofer, sweeper-up, a boy
To trace and prick the pounces; now and then
Allowed to colour inexpensive pieces.
This was Behzad, whose teacher Mirak was,
Whose fame eventually eclipsed Mirak's
And whose pure, sumptuous, gentle miniatures,
So bright with passion, whimsy and restraint,
Are now the art's unrivalled masterworks
While not one solitary sheet has been
Attributed with any certainty
To Behzad's quondam teacher - Qoran reciter,
Bow-maker, calligrapher and wrestler,
Mirak, surpassed (perhaps) at last, unheld
By any trade, adept at all he touched,
Patient for mastery but negligent
When once he had the mystery in hand:
Or so we picture him, at this blurred distance.

A Poor Useless Creature

Tom Paulin (1949) - *Walking a Line* (1994)

1 Jeremy Bentham
2 that sunny child
3 had a central heating system
4 installed in his London home
5 ---the age of steam
6 was coming to a head
7 and Dr Bentham
8 held modern views
9 ---they solved he said
10 the cold problem
11 ---it was the task
12 of a long-serving servant
13 to clear and stoke
14 the boiler at 5 a.m.
15 then he had to cook
16 a mutton or a bacon chop
17 to stoke the rational engine
18 that worked upstairs
19 ---this solved the food problem
20 but one day sadly
21 when strapped for ready
22 he stole two silver spoons
23 from the dining---the feeding
24 room as it was termed
25 those two bald spoons
26 they solved his cash problem
27 but the hapless fellow
28 he didn't know
29 that he had fried
30 his final chop
31 ---those spoons were numbered
32 tried and sentenced
33 ---this solved the crime problem
34 he rode the cart
35 all the way to Tyburn

36 so he might give pleasure
37 even happiness of a sort
38 to a greedy crowd
39 that gathered with his master
40 to solve the pain problem
41 as they watched him drop

THE EMPEROR'S HEAD

Michael Blackburn (1954) - *The Ascending Boy* (1996)

The Emperor Justinian

He walked on floors of blood,
slept little, wandered
from one room to another,
picked at his food.

The dead of his reign
outnumbered the living.

And more than one eyewitness claimed
he was really a demon -
they'd seen his head dissolving
like an orb of muddy snow
then vanish from his shoulders.

Sometimes his headless body
stood by a window as if watching
or stayed in the centre of the room
without moving; for minutes, for hours.

Do not laugh, my friend, but imagine
your own cool terror
at seeing his head reform
as if from gobbets of white clay
till his eyes lay clear upon you
and his voice demanded

what are you looking at?

What We Can See of the Sky Has Fallen

Lavinia Greenlaw (1962) - *A World Where News Travelled Slowly* (1997)

Luke Howard 1772-1864

Born into a lost fortune (the wrong royal attachment
in your *land of reasonable freedom*), a third-generation
Quaker, excluded from the military or church.

A childhood of freak weather - roused from your bed
to see the night lit by a meteor, dim days
of what was later found to have been volcanic smog.

Knowing your expertise and expertly knowing it to be
of the moment - chemistry was *business*, you insisted,
industrial secrets. (What was your role in the manufacture

of ether? The debate whispers on.) You slipped once,
crushing a bottle against your wrist which cut so deep,
the arsenic (*al-zarnik*, orpiment) gilded your veins.

Those weakened hours; the ellipses and questionmarks
of science - *ideas*, you called them, eager to admit
your amateurism, excess Latin baggage and poor maths.

Your ninety-two years held three kings, a queen,
two planets, Faraday and the first photograph.
Somewhere between Income Tax and the Battle of Trafalgar

came your essay on clouds: cool distillations
from your observations' heat. Not giving shape, you found it
and found yourself ever after skybound, abstracted,

frightening the grandchildren with your carnival of apparatus
and unfashionably forceful speech. *People say I am weatherwise,*
but I tell them I am very often otherwise.

Raising thousands for relief of the war-tattered continent,
you disembarked in that half-drowned country
where the language like the rye bread scoured your tongue.

Taking notes on a stork's dance, its nest's construction,
Dutch kindness to cattle, how they walk by their horses,
the Napoleonic roads. The itch of continental quilts,

your infant German, half-grown French, the patchwork
where you took each meal in a different principality,
amused by borders like pub signs stuck in a ditch.

Scrutinising evaporation at a salt works, able to see
banks of snow lift away from a mountain, how the water
of the Rheinfell is nothing if not boiling snow...

Goethe's *prodigious inclination to sing the Praises
of Thy Theory of Clouds*. He was avid for the *true observation
of a quiet mind (and such reasonable beliefs!)*.

Goethe's request, you first thought a hoax. Reassured
- *one of their very celebrated Poets of Weimar (I think)* -
you sent your life in ten pages. He wrote at least

twelve thousand letters and received eight thousand more.
His effusive note promised a full reply of which there is
no trace in the seven volumes of his life

(something known of every day). You carried a mirror
into the light, insisting you had less to tell than Franklin
less to pass over than Caesar.

Sense Data

John Burnside (1955) – *The Asylum Dance* (2000)

John Goodricke, (1764-1786)

We measured things for years: our schoolroom walls,
the growth of plants, lost energy, shed skins.

We counted petals, tadpoles, grains of sand,
observed migrations, rainfalls, frequencies.

I thought there was a chromatography
for happiness, or unrequited love,

and somewhere behind it all, in private realms
of gulls' eggs and stones and things I couldn't name,

another world of charge and borderline,
an earth-tide in the spine, the nightlong
guesswork of old voices in the mind.

Waking at night, I would sneak downstairs in the dark
and know my way by some unconscious craft,

some seventh sense that recognised
a deeper pulse, the tug of things at rest,

the tension in a table, or a vase
of goldenrod

- and when I stood outside,

head tilted to a night-sky packed with light
I waited for a music I could feel

like motion in the marrow of my bones,
as Goodricke must have done, night after night,

beyond all hearing, resonant as some
struck bell, harmonics
singing in his blood,

his fingertips and eyelids bruised with grace
and tuned into the plainsong of the stars.

TO LIONEL JOHNSON

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Master of the Leaping Figures* (1987)

1 Enchanted
2 and exhausted man,
3 you built a dream
4 in Winton stone:

5 a crystalline, white city
6 among hills;
7 a cloister for
8 heart burial.

9 Brother stranger
10 of 'Death's holy place',
11 the yellow leaves
12 whose sweet fruit
13 galled your tongue
14 have fallen long ago,
15 but still your spirit
16 murmuring through stone
17 repeats love's threnody.

The Marquis of Ripon Purchases the Convent of San Damiano
David Scott (1947) - *Playing for England* (1989)

Up a steep hill and out of town,
looked after by a shuffling, aproned verger
doubling as housekeeper to the priest
was Ripon's Roman Catholic Church,
St Wilfred's; where Lord Ripon lit the first
eager candles of his conversion.
Was it there the idea came to him
to buy back San Damiano's from the State,
at a time when places such as those
were realising very low prices?
He thought of all the place had meant to him
(cicadas, cypress, thyme,
the ancient conjunction of wood and stone,
the lack of any compulsion to respond)
when he had visited there with his friend
and water-colourist, W.B. Richmond.
The Count of Cavour would have knocked it down,
used the benches for levering gun-carriages
out of the mud in his fight against the Austrians,
and stolen the brittle, silver hair,
probably not St Clare's, and used it
for stuffing King Victor Emmanuel's footstool.
But there, Francis heard the crucifix speak,
and Clare wrote letters to the Blessed Agnes of Prague
signing herself 'useless handmaid'.
For these and other reasons, Lord Ripon paid
all those noughts of lires
arguing over the exchange of currency
and mistranslations, so that the nuns
could filter back under no pressure to be useful.
San Damiano's, the place where Francis wrote
Il Cantico di Frate Sole, under its Yorkshire landlord
was returned to an acre of grace.

GEORGE FOX CROSSES THE BAY

Neil Curry (1937) - *Ships in Bottles* (1988)

- 1 On the beach at Bardsea, the cocklewomen
- 2 Stood watching, waiting, dry-eyed for them to drown.
- 3 Around their horses' hooves a rip-tide was racing
- 4 And swirling away the brogs of gorse

- 5 That had marked safe-passage over the sands,
- 6 So now it was too late even for them to turn.
- 7 But that speck against the dark sky,
- 8 What was it? Was it a star rising?

- 9 Was it a sign? Later they would tell
- 10 How the great God Himself had parted
- 11 The waters; how that Quaker hat of his,
- 12 That stayed, God save us, undoffed

- 13 Even at Swarthmoor, had been a halo
- 14 Round his head; would bear witness
- 15 To the grit that lodged in the hard shells
- 16 Of their cockled hearts as he rode towering by.

Didius Julianus Imperator

John Heath-Stubbs (1918-2006) - *Sweetapple Earth* (1993)

'Daddy, you must buy it!'
How his daughters, his daughters and his wife
Egged him on, 'You must buy it, Daddy!'
They meant, of course, the Roman Empire.

The Praetorian guard, having disposed
Of the last unlucky incumbent, had decided
To put the whole caboodle up for auction -
Sale to the highest bidder. He could afford it too.
He'd made his pile, this acquisitive man,
Exporting savoury fish sauce
To all the further provinces;
And from the blood and bruised backs of the slaves,
Groans of the starving poor.

The gavel struck. He paid down cash
(It jingled with a kind of hollow laughter),
Assumed the purple, made a few
Tedious speeches to the somnolent
And ineffectual Senate. Before the year was out
He'd gone the way of all the others. The Praetorians
Notched up another tally.

'The world at sale' - no, not really the world,
Merely the fringe of a Mediterranean fish-pond.
In the high Andes, Guatemalan forests,
Beside the Yangtze or the Brahmaputra,
Other great states, each one claiming
That it was universal, tottered onwards,
Oblivious of Rome, towards
Their own inevitable disintegration.

As for his wife and daughters, I don't suppose
History has any news of them.
I like to think that they perhaps retired
To the Roman equivalent of a private hotel
In some salubrious resort - Baiae for instance -
And bored the other guests with detailed anecdotes
About the reign of mighty Didius.
We only know of it distilled,

A few brief sentences

Where we may savour Gibbon's irony,

While still great empires fall about our ears.

The Banquet

R. S. Thomas (1913-2000) – *Residues* (2002)

That will be the repast
(come, sit down and sup with me
in my kingdom) both men using
the long spoon, while time

waits on them with its glass
menu. No choice of dessert
there, other than to remember:
Hitler with his 'Sorry about

the six million Jews'; Stalin conscious
that behind his moustache
his smile has become the transparent
lid over as many coffins.

This is His Coat

Oliver Reynolds (1957) - *The Player Queen's Wife* (1987)

- 1 A plain officer's coat
- 2 of Prussian blue
- 3 with red collar and cuffs

- 4 (which allowed any subaltern
- 5 to claim he wore
- 6 *des Königs Rock*),

- 7 the whole of the front
- 8 is powdered and smeared
- 9 with Spanish snuff.

- 10 The pockets are lined
- 11 with chamois leather
- 12 so as not to scratch

- 13 any of his collection
- 14 of fifteen hundred
- 15 jewelled snuff-boxes.

- 16 Unusually,
- 17 he wore his sword-sash
- 18 outside the coat

- 19 hoping the sash and sword
- 20 would mask his odd shape---
- 21 the wide hips and hollow back.

- 22 He felt the cold
- 23 and buttoned the lapels
- 24 across his chest

- 25 which also helped to secure
- 26 the dog he often rode with
- 27 snug under his chin.

28 (Greyhounds were his favourite
29 and he built graves for them
30 on the terrace at Sans Souci.)

31 His love of dogs
32 was shared by a later leader:
33 Hitler, saying that only Eva Braun

34 and Blondi were faithful to him,
35 would quote Frederick's remark:
36 'Now I know men, I prefer dogs.'

Burke and Hare
Frieda Hughes (1960) – *Waxworks* (2002)

Burke, being penniless,
Tried to work out
Who would put up the least resistance
If he borrowed from them.

It occurred to him
With sudden clarity of vision,
That those who would not complain
Were those who could not talk.

And the dumbest of them all
Were the dead.
He could dig up each ended life
And render it with meaning.

He could write out its diaries
And dismember its intention
In his own words,
So to speak.

He could sell it then, as newly anointed
For vivisection. His work
Was all in the discovery,
In the presentation,

And his part done,
He would start looking for another one.
Funerals were thin on the ground
When he met Hare,

Who kept a household for trolls
And travellers, and an idea
For earning a penny or two
From their blood and history,

Each one different for the slab,

For the butcher's table,
As one by one
They died.

But in the end, not fast enough
For Burke and his new friend.
They couldn't wait for the cadaver
So now, the corpses were fresh

From a drunken cup
And the feathers of a pillow.
And someone was recognized
As too recently alive.

Then Burke himself, was sold on to die,
And Hare counted the most
He'd ever made for the trade,
In his days left.

Imprisoned in the room of his head
All he could see was the price
Per passer-by. He must have wept
To watch so much money walking.

Hitler and His Mother

Susan Wicks (1947) - *Open Diagnosis* (1994)

'A l'heure où je vous parle, Hitler s'est endormi en suçant son pouce ...'

Patrick Modiano, La Ronde de Nuit

1 Did even Hitler have a mother
2 to feed him and wrap him in towels,
3 lower him to the rusty water,
4 while above him the geyser
5 snorted its hot message? Did he lie there
6 and splash gently, bending his fat knees,
7 squealing as she sponged suds over him
8 like another skin, soaped him
9 in the folds of his chin like a baby?
10 Did he look up at the ceiling,
11 follow the old cracks running
12 from one corner, forking towards sounder
13 plaster? Did he see spiders? When she
14 lifted him and folded him to her
15 did she play counting-games with him---
16 church, steeple, clergyman,
17 little piggies---call him
18 the cleanest one in the family,
19 show him his white skin all wrinkled
20 as the water ran off him in rivers,
21 dance like a child with him,
22 tell him he had washerwoman's fingers?

Rasputin

Frieda Hughes (1960) – *Waxworks* (2002)

He's selling God, you can buy the book;
Six dollars a bible. He sells life insurance
On the side and can do a deal
On a car for the cash and a ride.

His wife is pregnant again - each child
By a stranger, he says to the girls
Who want to understand his vast kindness
In taking on another man's burden.

If they looked a little closer they'd see
His face on each of the three, bastards
By rumour only, his wife undone
And left when he found another one.

But his eyes like pointy spears, darting out
From their almond greens, are looking
For anyone who won't ask questions
And move him on. What he has seen

Are the voids that women carry; their wounds
Wanting to be stopped up and gagged.
'Come sin with me,' he tells them,
'And my forgiveness will set you free.'

'God is embedded bodily, as if I have
Been marked out by the gift
Of his most powerful blessing and made
Immortal. My hands are magic.'

And his hands performed. They took
Houses, cars and chequebooks.
The old and the infirm came to him,
Their powers of attorney flapping

Like winter cloaks, eager to be given

To a man who promised warmth
In return for their investment.
When, one by one, cast out as empty,

The men and women stood up in only
The emperor's new clothes, they discovered
He'd been poisoned once for fraud, and lived,
As if God acknowledged his apology.

So this time they shot him.

Houdini

Frieda Hughes (1960) – *Waxworks* (2002)

Houdini hangs like a swinging peach,
Ropes twisted and knotting,
Chains padlocked, and limbs caught up
In a foetal crouch.

He is convinced that his sister
Is the mistress of his misfortune
Because his ties were fastened
By his stepmother's fingers,

And he wants to find a goat
He can scape for the fault
He wishes to relieve his stepmother of,
So she won't cast him off like a stitch.

He watched his sister cut free
When she accepted the umbilical scissors
In her stepmother's voice
And thorny embrace,

Not pretending any more
That the blades of severance
Were not hidden in every welcome,
Because she wore her mother's face.

But Houdini, with a look like his father's,
Knew he'd been favoured. So the knots
That grind his flesh, and the padlocks
That staple his chains, madden him now.

He will hang for as long as it takes
To let his stepmother go, and know
She would always have done what she did
And hidden it, just the same.

Air and Water

Stewart Conn (1936) – *In the Blood* (1995)

(for James Rankin)

The Bible beaten into him (thrashed excessively but exclusively on week-days, to preserve the calm of the Sabbath) Muir one of three children (the others left with their mother in Dunbar) taken to settle in the Wisconsin prairie. First Fountain Lake;

then Hickory Hill where when he was twelve his father, desperate to hit water, lowered him in a bucket with hammer and chisel, to hack obdurate sandstone out. Eighty feet down, the air so carbonised he collapsed and could have died, if not hauled to the surface.

Subsequently University, and departure from home: thereafter his own man. But nightmares the remainder of his life, choking in an underground pit - the father stentorian as ever; his comeuppance that his son, Nature's disciple, would not credit its glories to God.

Years later on the Yosemite trail, the thrawn old Scotchman he'd become leaping naked from a snow-pool to challenge his President to a wrestling-bout: an immigrant, battling for his American dream, tackling Big Business head-on. The marvel, he won.

Roosevelt, needing the Californian vote, later to welch on him, turning Hetch-Hetchy into a dam. Muir still worshipping his open spaces, the supreme escape from that father who drove him below ground. What better than a Wilderness, to liberate the mind.

Stan Laurel

John Mole (1941) - Depending on the Light (1993)

Ollie gone, the heavyweight
Balletic chump, and now
His turn to bow out, courteous,
A perfect gentleman who
Tips his hat to the nurse

Or would, that is, if he were
Still in business. She
Adjusts his pillow, smooths
The sheets until their crisp-
And-even snow-white starchiness

Becomes his cue. It's time
For one last gag, the stand-up
Drip-feed: *Sister,*
Let me tell you this,
I wish I was skiing,

And she, immaculately cornered
For the punch-line: *Really,*
Mr Laurel, do you ski? A chuckle -
No, but I'd rather I was doing
That than this,

Than facing death, the one
Fine mess he's gotten into
That he can't get out of
Though a nurse's helpless laughter
Is the last he hears.

Dynastic

Annemarie Austin (1943) – *The Flaying of Marsyas* (1995)

Joanna of Castile, 1479-1555

Margaret of Austria, 1480-1530

Catherine of Aragon, 1485-1536

1

You are two years old.
This is your wedding day.
In a great cathedral in a distant country
your uncle acts as proxy to repeat your marriage vows
per verba de futuro; and another child,
transported in his long clothes in a noblewoman's arms,
is bound to you as husband
sight unseen.

Now you are princess, duchess, *Madame le Reine* of France;
yours is the highest rank here in the castle;
someone is making you a little crown
just like a plaything but of serious gold
with real gems in its insets. You are cold
from their deference; no one may handle you,
and metallised fabric stands you stiff upright
and back from everybody in the rooms.

You learn the rule is 'to defend right and rank'
by 'honourable bearing', 'cold and self-assured'...
But what does it mean and where does it apply
when suddenly the bird springs up from the garden bush
and you try to toddle after in your jewels?

You cannot see the change to your body's nature:
that nested inside the child is a tiny woman
who is really the ring to enclose a king's
gold member; ring passed across an ocean
from one country to another in a giant's marriage;
ring whence the mongrel two-tongued children
must burst into the world and turn it
flat for themselves to lie on, all one throne...

You are the means, a flesh circle with the empty centre
through which the business of the dynasty is conducted,
the needle's eye whereby your family

may troop with all its goods to earthly heaven...
But this is secret from you, generally unsaid;
it shows as manufacture of bright cold gold instead.

The voyage out

from the nest, from first base,
 into the eye of the wind;
 from the rest of the same bone,
 the known bodies, into empty space;
 from the garden of the bird bush
 into the sea's furrowed field...

You stand at the rail and pray mechanically -
 'now and at the hour of our death, amen'; and then
 blasphemously - 'if it be possible,
 let this cup pass from me'. But the great vessel
 of the sea is swilled by an unseen hand
 and its waves lip against the rim of the horizon;
 the cup is too big to pass away - you are in it
 like a sop of bread and washed about
 without any say in such a matter .

...from hand to hand into nothing;
 from the case of familiar rooms,
 the original view from the window,
 into a blur of sky like fainting;
 from rugs and paintings, chairs,
 into an endless blank...

Margaret, you believe you will die in this limbo
 still unbedded. What is the use of that trained denial,
 sacrifice to a distant father's will, unless
 some end is reached, a real crown put on?
 The deck lurches underneath you and the clouds
 whirl round. You are sick at the very core
 of your velvet metalled gown, your backbone
 turned to a vial of troubled liquid. There's no land
 in which to lay your virgin body down.

Each court is approximately the same
 as every other court. But behind
 a jewelled procession thin as cut-out paper:
 a new and savage country with a different light
 from yours, with house facades like steeples

and a people speaking with stuffed mouths -
the vowels spilling down their alien chins.

So he must be your home base
who was chosen husband almost at your birth:
Arthur or Henry, Charles or Juan, Philip or Philibert –
just names for the stable spot at the eye
of the whirling. You look at him again, again,
assessing his worth whom you must love
by prior arrangement...

And you fall, Joanna - as from a high tower
into a well - in another country where the population
splutter consonants towards you as they move
through soupy light that slops against
the stepped gable-ends of buildings.
He that is nicknamed 'Handsome' gives his hand
and you drop into the moistly echoing dark.

Lost utterly now, and blind to everything
except his touch, the glimmer of his face
at the end of the mole's tunnel, where he passes
with another lady in the circle of his arm.
Duty sits lightly on him, while your own
has merged into the marrow of your bones,
twisted within the heartstring strumming at your red centre.

4

Catherine, you are brought to bed again
of a dead child. This is not co-operating
with the dynastic plan whereby this man
spawns smaller replicas of himself
to fill the ever-diminishing-to-the-distance
thrones of an eternal kingdom.

Consider your sister. Her offspring will accept
a clutter of crowns in France, Portugal and Denmark,
in Hungary and the Empire. Ten years of effort
achieved this simple thing - live children
in the cradle and the crowds' acclaim
at trumpeters' loud announcements.

Instead you swim in the dim of a shrouded room
where waiting-women walk on tiptoe and restrain

their words. He visits you less each time,
the disappointed... all he has asked and you
have failed him, not doing what any washerwoman
can - springing red noisy babes again, again.

Though such a skivvy cannot bring
your blue-veined white skin to the task,
your jewels, your genealogy most of all.
It is a paradox: what makes you marriageable
must sap your strength for sweating labour –
those kissing cousins weighing down the tree.

5

Leftover life to be consumed in whatever way
it pleases you. You have shaken loose
from the dynastic process and swim on your own
at last in the cold indifferent sea. A widow
past your prime, a done-with person by and large,
locked in the pocket of your own obsession:
Joanna, in a place without windows, gazing at the beauty
of your Philip's embalmed face as he lies long dead;
Margaret, ordering the mausoleum where Philibert's
image and your own shall turn stone heads
to mix looks somewhere in the air between you;
and Catherine, grass widow, in those lonely manor houses,
refusing to surrender any name of queen or spouse...

It comes apart at a touch,
remaindering fragments
like a torn, illuminated
Book of Hours... a strip of knees
and spurs from a hunting expedition
...squares of so blue a distance
they draw the eyes to drown ...
a platter or two from the banquet
where the cock stood up in the dish
and crowed (an attested miracle,
marginal here)... crowns on a journey
...so many disembodied lifted hands...

You tarnish slowly, growing a little shabbier
with each year away from married glory
when they polished you for appearances, those minions.
The ring thins on your finger, the slipper underneath

your heel, the bone inside its velvet sleeve.
With age you grow invisible to kings and popes
and princes; no longer ripe enough for
wedding-bed or childbed, withered, you are given
some space out of time for your own after all...
Soon you will stand in the midst of a ring
of birds as they fly up from their bushes
to circle above your head in the whirling sky.

The Patagonian Nightingale
Lavinia Greenlaw (1962) - *Night Photograph* (1993)

The colonists have 3 flour mills, 8 threshing-machines, 70 reaping machines, 6 pianos, 3 harps, a brass band and more than 100 violins... Music is much cultivated and Miss Lloyd-Jones is called the Patagonian Nightingale.

The Standard, Buenos Aires, 1889

Her hands play with the map on her apron,
Carmarthen and Cardiff slip through her fingers
as exotic and dangerous as the red dragon
that used to hang above the mantelpiece.

Her son fills the room with Spanish gestures.
She sends him to sleep with stories of Wales,
a country drawn from her parents' memories,
where you did not have to fight the weather
but rain fell like a lace curtain
and sunlight passed, barely noticed.

She remembers her father learning to hunt
like the Indians with a three-ball sling,
and bartering rum for meat and skins.
His newspaper was always twelve weeks old
but he inched his way down the columns for hours
and swore this valley was like all valleys,
only, here, spring came in October.

The summer she married, there were dresses from Europe.
She sang at dances every Saturday night
and fell for a cousin who translated himself
into ApJuan, Welsh son of Spanish John,
looking backwards and forwards in two syllables.
He decided the voice of Mary Lloyd-Jones would be
his to cherish and keep safe at home.

Now she meets the train at the new Bethesda or Bryn Crwm
and sends cheese or butter to be sold in Buenos Aires.
After chapel she sifts flour, picks out weevils
and soaks scarce currants in strong cold tea
to make barabrith because her mother did.

Some days she tests that remote language
and tells anyone who'll listen what they already know:

how her pregnant mother crossed the Atlantic,
three months of hymns and seasickness,
and how Mary was the first Welsh child to be born
in Patagonia. And they named the hills for her.

The Horse-drawn Sun

Kathleen Jamie (1962) - *The Queen of Sheba* (1995)

We may lie forsaken in the earth's black gut,
but days are still lit, harvests annual,
skies occasionally blue.
So remember. Pay heed.

Our struggle to surface
after thousands of years is, forgive me,
to break up with a nightmare. Apposite
mate for a horse of the light?

Forget it. Were I not sacred
my work would be duller than
turning a threshing mill.
But it's nothing; an honour.

I draw strength from the burden I've hauled
like a Clydesdale through a hundred
closed generations. But what's an age?
a mere night. I sense light

near exhumation, the plough-share
tearing the earth overhead.
- Go on; blind me. Hear the whinny beneath
the tremor of sun underground. Let us out

to raise a new dawn this dull afternoon.
Let us canter high and look down.
This is the sacred horse drawing the sun.
Let's see what they've lost. What they've become.

TICHBORNE

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Master of the Leaping Figures* (1987)

(To Chidioc Tichborne (1558-86), executed for his part in the Babington Plot.)

1 There is no place deeper in earth---
2 where the young quick river grows
3 and cressy streams feed it
4 on beds of purest chalk stones;
5 and the rhythms of settlement
6 remember a life before his,
7 from Vernal Farm through meadow,
8 copse and ploughland, and St Andrews
9 standing against curve and swell,
10 where Catholic and Protestant
11 share a roof, and members
12 of his family who succeeded him
13 figure in stone.
14 His place is not with those
15 who gained the world.
16 Nor can there be an elegy
17 for one who wrote his own:
18 the perfect balance
19 of a man who would soon be
20 'bowelled alive and seeing'.
21 About to die, his claim
22 was a faithful occupation
23 older than the Normans;
24 a long life before him here,
25 which he planted again
26 on the scaffold, in Tichborne earth.

Galileo's Salad

John Heath-Stubbs (1918-2006) - *Galileo's Salad* (1996)

Democritus, laughing philosopher -
Atoms dancing in the void. A maverick donkey
Wandered through the market place, helping himself
From produce stalls, until at length he came
Upon a booth, in which a skilful goldsmith
Had displayed his wares - among the rest
A marvellous gold platter, and upon it,
To indicate its function, a dozen or so
Of green figs had been placed.
The donkey scoffed these too - Democritus,
Who by mere chance was there, convulsed
In a wild paroxysm of helpless laughter.
It was his death - still guffawing,
As it disintegrated, his thin soul
Plunged in the meaningless void.

Galileo was ready for his supper.
He'd slogged all day over his books and papers
Tackling those atomists. At night his optic tube
Would sweep the sky, observing
Jupiter's satellites and the phases
Of mutable Venus - all the planets,
Our Earth among them, dancing round the sun,
Like priests that dance around a central altar.
His wife set down a plate of salad before him.
He gave a wryish smile. 'It seems,' he said,
'If what they'd prove is true, had lettuce leaves,
Radishes and cress and cucumber,
Salt crystals, peppercorns, and a fine dew
Of olive oil and vinegar, been drifting round
In empty space, since the beginning of time,
They would at length have chanced to come together
To make a salad.' 'But not: answered his wife,
'One that's as fresh, well-seasoned and well-mixed
As this of mine is.' Later, he recommended
That remark of hers to his opponents.

Columbus

Robert Hull (1936) - *Encouraging Shakespeare* (1993)

'Generally it was my wish to pass no island without taking possession of it.'

The slaves were not profitable
'for almost half of them died'

but there were spears to be had
for broken crockery

and untouched rings of islets
like trinkets.

And though the Great Khan
finally went missing

and the gold pagodas
faded with the mists

there was the first flamingo
pink as dawn

there was the terminal innocence
of rivers.

When enough naked harbours
had been manacled

enough grief
requisitioned

a cargo of fables
set out for Spain, heavy

with lilting names-
Cathay Indies

conquistadores spices
syphilis.

JANET HORNE

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) – *Cathures* (2002)

In Dornoch there was a burning
With no sign of mourning
That January morning

This was the final solution
The last execution
Of an ancient persecution

For they called it witchcraft
An old woman's stitchcraft
Or a bit of leechcraft

Century of enlightenment
Still thirled to torment
Thumbscrews and judgement

Janet made a pony
Of her daughter, says the story
Rode her for Satan's glory

They tarred her and feathered her
Bound her and gathered her
Screaming and barrelled her

Burning in the peat-smoke
While the good Dornoch folk
Paused briefly for a look

Dear God were you sleeping
You were certainly not weeping
She was not in your keeping

Today there is a garden
Where a stone stands guard on
The spot she was charred on

O heart never harden!

MADELEINE SMITH

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) – *Cathures* (2002)

O Madeleine was a well-bred lass
Brought up in Glasgow and Rhu.
She fell in love with a warehouse clerk
And her dad said 'That won't do!
It won't do at all! So ditch him quick!
But she went and bought some arsenic.

Cocoa, cocoa, stir it well.

Drink it down and go to hell.

A merchant makes a suitable match,
Her father had it planned.
Emile grew jealous, uttered threats,
But it all got out of hand.
Was Madeleine tired of her Frenchie boy?
Or was she afraid of his power to destroy?

Cocoa, cocoa, stir it well.

Drink it down and go to hell.

O terrible were the stomach pains!
Emile lay down to die.
Madeleine played the piano, and
Was there a tear in her eye?
Madeleine was cool and knew her role.
A well-bred woman has self-control.

Cocoa, cocoa, stir it well.

Drink it down and go to hell.

Up through a trap-door in the dock
She rose in a brown silk gown.
'Colour of cocoa', muttered a juror,
Silenced by the judge's frown.
The trial ended with Madeleine's smile.
'Not proven', oh yes, that was her style.

Cocoa, cocoa, stir it well.

One of us must go to hell.

JOHN MUIR

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) – *Cathures* (2002)

Lakes and canyons, woods and streams,
Blue sierras to traverse -
What did he write in his daybook?
'John Muir, Earth-Planet, Universe'.
 Wilderness be wild and free
 Song-thrush in the live-oak tree

Ragged soldiers, runaway slaves,
Rattlesnakes and ravening bears –
Gunless John marched on regardless,
An innocent among the snares.
 Wilderness be wild and free
 Ice and snow and frozen sea

John Muir is standing on his head!
That way, the Grand Canyon's grander,
Its reds are redder, its limes are livider,
Its smoky greys are rich as lavender.
 Wilderness be wild and free
 The eagle and the wandering bee

'Nothing is really dead,' said John.
The water-meadow breathes its prayer.
Teach us what an orchid feels
Or a stone flung through the air.
 Wilderness be wild and free
 Unlock nature with a key

He broke a mustang, built a cabin,
Watched the glaciers creeping down,
While memories of grey Dunbar
Filtered through from his home town.
 Wilderness be wild and free
 North Sea to Yosemite

 Wilderness be free and wild
 For every man woman child

HELEN ADAM

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) – *Cathures* (2002)

She was the magic crow
Oh – ho -
Who flew from Glasgow
To San Francisco

In the morning of the Beats
See - see-
She threw back the sheets
Greeted the streets

If her words were surreal
Real- real-
She shone like an eel
Sang like a seal

Changing, ranging
Neigh - neigh -
A kelpie breenging
Bringing a ring

Cat-headed woman
Woo-woo-
Dog-headed man
Catch if you can

She had ballads for all
Caw-caw-
Scotch waterfall
Purple and pall

Her reels and her dances
Da-da-
Flickered like sconces
From long-dead manses

What a starry array
Fey-fey-
Waiting for day
In Americay

IN THE CELLS

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) – *Cathures* (2002)

i.m. Robert Fergusson, 1750-1774

'The night is young,' they said, 'it's only nine.
We've brought a carriage for you, see, it's there.
What your blue devils need is a when wine.
Put on your coat, there's a nip in the air.'
They took him to the madhouse, not the club.
As the gate clanged behind him, he set up
A howl the inmates echoed in hubbub.
One more in hell! One more to drain the cup
Of horror, pick the sleepless straw! He sang,
He did, but it came out like the scream
That wakened him a week before: a cat
Had caught a starling in its playful fang,
Squeezing and rending its joy and the poet's dream:
A throat fluttering to death: it was like that.

Edward I

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

He had been playing chess.
With whom?
Toom Tabard, perhaps-
King Nobody!

But he had got up
to pace the room,
when from that shadowy
and uncharted area
above him,
from that high vaulting,
a clan of ancestral granite
came tumbling down
on to his chair.

He had been about
to declare the game
a stalemate.

But instead, he
swept north
to Dunbar and
the Palace of Scone:

there claimed,
in case it should one
day fall
and crush the English throne,
the stone
that was a nation's destiny.

Edward II

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

It was to Berkeley Castle that they brought
Him after they had beaten him, hoping to
Starve him, and when he wouldn't be starved,

Inserted into his rectum a red-
Hot, specially procured, ox-roasting
Spit, that his body should not bear any mark.

Indeed it did not. But what remains of him,
His effigy, has been so scratched, scored with
Such viciousness, that all you can see is

I.H. pleading from the blank eyes, while his
Hair twists and snakes in supplication -
Smoke from an inextinguishable wrong.

The Black Prince

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

From Crecy, from Poitiers,
the bundles come, and
from each hops the Plague.

It bursts out in swellings
of pride, tongues that swing
deliriously in the church towers,

fountains that spew red wine,
and all the fascias
blotched with tapestry.

Gold cups from Gascony, rings,
coins, chains, old Norman battleswords,
robes, and rich French furs,

all are unwrapped and
gloated over, regarded as
tokens of God's love.

From Crecy, from Poitiers,
they return: the black rats
following their Black Prince.

Darwin in Patagonia

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *The Wound-dresser's Dream* (1996)

I brood on the process
of perfection and the less
perfectly gliding squirrels

in the parallel light of the afternoons
I study the creatures
constructed for twilight

I am never completely well;
the lakes hang like mica templates
in the brackish air

the winds pour from La Plata,
flies breed in the navels
of young mammals

I record the diving thrushes,
the woodpeckers
in the treeless wastes

the ice floes
which may formerly
have transported foxes;

across the straits
the barbarians multiply
The horse among the trumpets saith 'Aha!'

I take quinine and speculate
on the slashing claw
in the folded schists

but still dream
of Adam naming
the doubtful species

and wake shuddering
at the irreproachable design
of the eye.

Alexis St Martin

Jo Shapcott (1953) - *Electroplating the Baby* (1988)

1 The morsels, tied to string, are lowered again
2 into the marinade. Today it's beef;
3 it's gone on every day for nine years now.
4 He says he's trying to evolve a system---
5 set down on tiny charts---to show how long
6 digestion takes in lots of different cases:
7 with different temperatures, time limits, in
8 the stomach and outside in jars. He says---
9 straight out---it is my solemn, human duty
10 to let him bow like some old mandarin
11 over my belly wound so many times a day.
12 Although the wound was not the end for me
13 the hole---closed like a valve---is permanent:
14 The accidental bullet from the musket
15 sealed my future: adulation, he says,
16 or at least some fame in scientific journals!

17 I'd like to sit at a table without his jar
18 waiting to collect the seeping gastric juices.
19 I've run away. Renewed my family ties
20 and took myself a squaw with waist-length hair.
21 I was her hero: she loved to serve and feed me
22 and even bathe me in the summer streams.
23 It was a place where charts and words were absent
24 but he was clever---in four months tracked me down.
25 He called me worthless, nekkid, drunk; invoked
26 my duty and took his spoon to the sludge again.
27 He says I should be very proud of being
28 a partner in the holy race for knowledge.
29 But I yearn for an ordinary life
30 where the textures of my insides aren't on view.

The Life and Life of Henrietta Lacks

Carole Satyamurti (1939) - *Love and Variations* (2000)

1 That was me in the New Look
2 sassy as hell, in the days
3 when wicked was wicked;
4 not the fist on hip of a woman
5 who knows she's cooking
6 a time bomb tumour;

7 not a number's up smile
8 like a dame who figures
9 she'll not be getting the wear
10 from all those yards
11 of cloth she scrimed for,
12 who'll be dead at thirty.

13 Dead? For forty years
14 my cloned cervical cells
15 have had a ball in Petri dishes
16 gorging placenta soup,
17 multiplying like their crazy mother
18 ---the first ever cell line,

19 flung like spider's thread
20 across continents I never got to visit,
21 the stuff of profits, reputations
22 from Melbourne to Baltimore;
23 hot property, burning mindless
24 energy I'd have known how to use.

25 They never asked. Never said
26 *How's about you live for ever* ,
27 *like immortal yogurt* ? I'm bought,

28 sold like cooking fat. But I get even,
29 grow where I'm not supposed,
30 screw up experiments.

31 Soon, they'll have the know-how
32 to rebuild me from a single cell.
33 A rope of doubles could jitterbug
34 from here to Jupiter. Meantime,
35 I'm grabbing my piece of the action,
36 hungry to cry my first cry again.

The Frog

Ian Duhig (1954) - *The Bradford Count* (1991)

(for Leon McAuley)

The ollamh faltered in his staves,
a gilly spilled his wine-cask:
the Ossory court circled a wonder;
'It is the living budget of The Morrigan!'
'It is the handsomest child of a Connachtman!'
'It is the ghost of a drunkard's stomach!'
'Without doubt, it's a Fomorian cat.'
'Without doubt, it's from Paddington.'
'Without doubt, it's an ugly bugger isn't it?'

The frog gulped, swivelled its headlamp eyes
and burped like an earl. The hall stilled,
its eyes fixed on Duvenold,
king and seer. He knew he must pronounce –
Warfare, Pestilence, the Gael in Chains -
that sort of thing. It was expected. 'Friends,'
he cried, 'this hare-fish means Death to Ireland;
Warfare, Pestilence, the Gael in Chains!
It also shags that poem of Muldoon's.'

The Frog

Paul Muldoon (1951) - *Quoof* (1983)

1 Comes to mind as another small upheaval
2 amongst the rubble.
3 His eye matches exactly the bubble
4 in my spirit-level.
5 I set aside hammer and chisel
6 and take him on the trowel.

7 The entire population of Ireland
8 springs from a pair left to stand
9 overnight in a pond
10 in the gardens of Trinity College,
11 two bottles of wine left there to chill
12 after the Act of Union.

13 There is, surely, in this story
14 a moral. A moral for our times.
15 What if I put him to my head
16 and squeezed it out of him,
17 like the juice of freshly squeezed limes,
18 or a lemon sorbet?

A SHORTENED HISTORY IN PICTURES

Jamie McKendrick (1955) - *The Marble Fly* (1997)

- 1 The Child Maximilian in a White Frock.
- 2 The Imperial Family with their Chairs and Pet Cat.
- 3 Maximilian, a Thoughtful Young Man in Black.
- 4 Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico, at Court.
- 5 The Empress of Mexico, his Wife Charlotte.
- 6 The Emperor Maximilian on Horseback.
- 7 Maximilian and his Court Playing Cricket
- 8 (with the English Ambassador, Sir Charles Wyke).

- 9 The Broken Cacti and the Convent's Outer Wall.
- 10 The Execution Squad Standing to Attention.
- 11 A Mestizo Leading a Llama under Popocatepetl.
- 12 The Execution of Miramón, Mejía and Maximilian.
- 13 The Gold-Green Tail-Feathers of the Quetzal.
- 14 The Emperor's Shirt after his Execution.

Frans Masereel The Idea

Kelvin Corcoran (1956) – *Lyric Lyric* (1993)

1 The man sat at an empty table,
2 his mind enmeshed in a web.
3 She's already there, perfect,
4 naked, light emblazons her.

5 Her beauty is undimmed,
6 no man can handle it.
7 Fornication and commerce
8 continue unabated.

9 Lettered, sent abroad,
10 translated, manifold, athletic;
11 against perverts and capital
12 her beauty is undimmed.

13 Off the public corridor
14 a room of rotting paper
15 shaped into blocks, printed
16 in the Schiele typeface.

17 She read the sign
18 and hit the wall
19 with a flat palm,
20 three times evenly.

21 What do you want?
22 A photograph?
23 Rain, burning eyes, music
24 sports the clouds of May.

St Catherine and the Philosophers

Matthew Francis (1956) – *Dragons* (2001)

1 This is a painting with five books in it.
2 The young woman stands with her back to the philosophers
3 who have their backs to the window. They are reading,
4 ignoring the passers-by who are reading them.
5 Behind them all we can see the rest of the palace,
6 a harbour, a mountain, the landscape going blue.

7 The first book is a guide to Purgatory,
8 the spiral mountain. The only escape is up,
9 but you have to know the way. This book will tell you.
10 It takes three men to read it, and first of all
11 you need the guide to the book. It's in your hand,
12 uncrumple it. Or you could just turn round
13 and see if you can untwist the rocks themselves.

14 The second is the book of Good and Evil.
15 If you read two pages at once you get the world
16 exactly as it is. The red and black
17 figures twitch into life as you flicker through them.

18 The third book was originally a baby
19 but a sorceress appeared at his christening
20 and turned his skin to leather and his cries
21 to hieroglyphs. No one has told the priest,
22 or else he blesses it anyway, not knowing
23 what happens when it grows up, in Chapter 20.

24 The fourth book is so real that Catherine holds it
25 in an insulating cloth. It gives the low-down
26 on the philosophers, how without looking
27 they can tell everything about the world
28 except what she is doing there. She knows.

29 The fifth is the perfect book. It is written

30 in a language only it can understand,
31 but it's bored with reading itself. It lies around
32 yawning all day, leaving itself undone.

33 The king and the man he talks to have given up books.
34 There is so much else for them to do, hill walking,
35 crowd control, sailing, palace architecture.
36 The king explains that he has hired a sculptor
37 to describe the future in a marble frieze
38 above their heads. No one has read it yet,
39 and even Catherine doesn't know that the wheel
40 in that little panel up there has her name on it.

Ode to Antonio Gaudí

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Our Lady of Europe* (1997)

1 When I first saw
2 the façade of the Nativity
3 I laughed, and wanted to cry
4 and the imp in me itched to say
5 to the imp in him, 'So this
6 is what can happen
7 when parents let little boys
8 play with sand!'

9 But it was not like the work
10 of that other devout man,
11 Gerald of Wales,
12 who built cathedrals
13 in the sand at Tenby,
14 and grew up to be a bishop.

15 This was about play
16 more than power,
17 and more than both,
18 and as well as both,
19 it was about wonder,
20 Gaudí's, and the wonder
21 of the people (myself
22 among them) who stood
23 amused, intrigued,
24 amazed, and first and most
25 of all, wondering.

26 This was about being a man
27 who was a great artist
28 and a child, who made
29 a thing that stands, and flows,
30 and seems to melt and run
31 and drip, like water

32 or forms that grow in water
33 and embody its rhythms
34 and its shapes.

35 The work of a man
36 who knew the Adoration
37 of the Serpent and the Beast;
38 who had seen angels riding
39 the winds on wineskins;
40 St Michael with wings
41 made of peacock feathers,
42 slaying a monster that lies
43 on its back exposing
44 an orange belly, like a newt's.
45 This man's familiar was
46 John the Baptist, wide-eyed,
47 brown-bearded, standing
48 in a desert of cacti
49 that leap about him like green flames.

50 And their makers, the makers
51 of these images, were his people,
52 the people he belonged to,
53 with whom, at another time,
54 he had embroidered
55 the Tapestry of Creation
56 using the umbrella pines,
57 the Catalan soil and fields
58 for materials and tools.

59 Gaudí of Barcelona,
60 the city that gave him freedom
61 to embody such a vision
62 and most deserves his blessing.

63 He died, the great work
64 unfinished,
65 and because of that
66 more natural, more
67 a place to play in,

68 and laugh and cry
69 and wonder at the maker,
70 man-child, and his praise
71 in the body of Creation
72 that begins and has no end.

THE DIVER

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Master of the Leaping Figures* (1987)

(To William Walker, whose work on the foundations of Winchester Cathedral from
1906 to 1911 saved the building.)

1

- 1 This was a great cross, shaken,
- 2 an ancient decaying tree.
- 3 A foundering ship, breaking her back,
- 4 Titanic of the watermeadows---
- 5 except for him.

- 6 He descended each day
- 7 to the pitch of death.
- 8 Enshrined stillness, turbulence of prayer,
- 9 rested on him.

- 10 In darkness, with dockyard skill,
- 11 he made the foundations sound.

- 12 And rose through the graveyard each evening.

2

- 13 He rises here still.

- 14 He is The Diver:
- 15 fish bowl and goggle eyes.
- 16 More weird, friendlier, than a mason's monster.
- 17 Ropes and pre-war innocence
- 18 hang about him.
- 19 His globe swims through chaos.
- 20 He walks alive among the dead.

21 He stands here too,
22 with builders whose face he saved:
23 a workman offering his hands.

Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen
Ian Duhig (1954) - *The Bradford Count* (1991)

Dismissed from Tlaltizapa for changing sex
Manuel Palafox sulked in Arenista. At markets
he bought chimoyas, limes and ink from Oaxtepec.
Some days he wore his twenty-ounce sombrero,
deerskin pants and "charro" boots. On others
gold-embroidered blouses and red kerseymere skirts.

He wrote to Magonistas: 'Zapata is finished.
He takes orders from Obregon. Rally the Peones!
Death to Carranza! Tierra y Libertad!'
He wrote to Lenin: 'Trotsky is finished.
Seek concord with the Ukraine Makhnovshchina.
Brest-Litovsk's a cock-up. Regards to the Missus.'

He wrote to Freud: 'Were you coked when you dreamt up this?
No Mexican has even heard of the sexual revolution.
All Eros last year now it's Thanatos, bloody Thanatos.
Jung was right - grow a beard, you think you're Moses.
I hope your jaw drops off. Regards to the Missus.'
At last he wrote to Yeats: 'Dear Willie, how's the Vision?'

Mine's double, ha-ha, Shit. Willie, I'm finished
in Mexico - it's full of bigots. Ireland can't be worse.
I'll work. Your brother paints - I'll hold his ladders.
You can have my poems. The one about this year -
change it round - it'll do for Ireland. What happened
to my lift with Casement? Willie, GET ME OUT OF HERE!'

Shopping in Cashel for pulque, Michael Robartes -
'Research Assistant to a popular writer' -
itched in his Connemara Cloth. Himself well-known
for a Special Devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe,
he frowned on local talk of a drunken madwoman
in red skirts, publicly disputing with the bishop.

Marc Chagall, *Over the Town*

Tom Paulin (1949) - The Wind Dog (1999)

1 Marc and Bella
2 are flying happily over Vitebsk
3 ---they've shucked off the iron husk
4 of place
5 and like two salmon trout
6 've leapt high above the flood
7 above war revolutions pogroms
8 ---this is a real a shining good
9 but if you look closely there's a lout
10 squatting on the mud
11 near the fence
12 ---like a Brueghel peasant
13 he's laying a turd
14 at the edge of their wedding party
15 and it isn't hard
16 to know how serious his face
17 and his bare bum are
18 though many a reproduction
19 mars this famous painting
20 by omitting not just his arse
21 but the entire squatting lout
22 whose absence reminds me
23 how quite a few
24 critics of T. S. Eliot
25 choose
26 either to forgive or forget
27 those bits of verse
28 and one piece
29 of coldly sinister prose
30 that're about
31 his fear and hatred of all Jews

GRETTA BOWEN'S EMENDATIONS

Michael Longley - *The Ghost Orchid* (1990-94)

Eighty when she first created pictures, Gretta Bowen
Postponed the finishing touches, and then in her nineties
Emended her world by painting on the glass that covered
Children's games, fairgrounds, swans on a pond, interiors
Not brush-strokes to erase her studious reflection
But additional leaves and feathers falling on to ice.

Three Brueghel Paintings

Clive Wilmer (1945) - *Of Earthly Paradise* (1992)

I

1 This is the world (the painter says)
2 Reduced by ice and snow, bone-bare.
3 Then ride in mercenaries.
4 Armed to the teeth, they introduce
5 Fear, panic and despair.
6 They'd trace a king. How can they know
7 He is not here?

II

8 Where earth encounters heaven, cloud
9 Frays on the trees that spike the air.
10 Ranks crumble to a crowd
11 Of stragglers. Some, bemused and dazed
12 By light's intrusion, stare
13 At one the light has felled, who sees
14 What is not there.

III

15 No myth informs this wintry view
16 Enhanced by no nostalgic care
17 For skies of southern blue.
18 Skaters delight in circumstance
19 Three hunters come to share,
20 Who slant against winds charged with snow
21 From who knows where.

After Rembrandt: *Saul and David*

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Our Lady of Europe* (1997)

1 The beautiful young man plays,
2 absorbed in the music he is making.

3 And the king listens---
4 there is only a curtain between them,
5 he could reach out,
6 touch David on the shoulder,
7 speak his love.

8 Saul hears, and his face
9 is haggard, stricken.
10 The music is close---
11 he could reach out,
12 he could touch the strings---
13 but he hears it where he sits,
14 deep inside himself,
15 music he was once part of,
16 that sounds now
17 eternally distant,
18 beyond the ramparts of paradise.

After Rembrandt: *The Anatomical Lesson*

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Our Lady of Europe* (1997)

1 It is one life
2 that shines in the dark eyes
3 of the surgeons who are bending
4 over the cadaver---
5 one life, unique in each.

6 The eyes of the dead man
7 are closed, his mouth
8 slightly open---
9 the mystery
10 has left this dead flesh

11 but shows in the eyes of the living,
12 in those who look down
13 at the exposed tendon,
14 the dissected arm,
15 or thoughtfully aside,

16 and in the face of the man
17 who looks at us,
18 wondering about himself,
19 mystified.

20 It is not yet only
21 a scientific question
22 that dawns in his dark eyes.

23 What is man? What am I
24 who am wonderfully
25 and fearfully made,
26 like this dead thing?

Edvard Munch: *The Sick Child*

Jeremy Hooker (1941) - *Our Lady of Europe* (1997)

*Disease, insanity and death were the angels
which attended my cradle.*

1 North is a dark green sea
2 which the boy shaking on the bed
3 was born to.

4 He is wrack
5 opening and shutting in the tide;
6 a ribbed shell dragged down
7 which waves knock
8 and the brine swills;

9 a mariner who will not drown.

10 Angels
11 attend him into the cold:

12 a woman the sea has broken on
13 bowing her down;
14 a girl with red hair, face
15 fragile as a moon
16 that floats out on the dark.

Leonardo draws Bernardo Bandini
(hanged for the murder of Giuliano de Medici)

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *Sighting the Slave Ship* (1992)

You noted the costume
as if compiling an inventory:
tan-coloured cap,
doublet of black serge,
dark hose;
red-stippled velvet
at the swinging neck.

How cool a faculty,
when you bequeathed
no silver instruments of surgery,
but drew
soft against stopped heart,
a blue coat lined
with fur of foxes' breasts.

32 He holds the yellow note,
33 the black cypress is a vortex
34 and the heavens rain down fire.

35 Gauguin paints him painting sunflowers,
36 in which he sees himself 'gone mad'.

37 He paints irises in the asylum garden,
38 tongues wagging, the silence
39 loud with shouts and screams.

40 He has gone out of hearing,
41 he is somewhere deep in the fields,

42 a stranger in a foreign land.

The Blue Beret
(after Rembrandt)

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *Sighting the Slave Ship* (1992)

In the *Raising of the Cross*
you painted yourself
in a blue beret
assisting at the crucifixion.

Is death
so fixed a tincture
none at the atrocity
escape recognition?

Soft –
even now
in the *Descent by Torchlight*
you help him down,

wearing neither beret
nor doublet,
but bodies
interlaced

for flesh
is the outlandish dress
at the recurring
deposition.

Bathers, 1930

(from a photograph by George Hoyningen-Huene)

Maura Dooley (1957) – *Explaining Magnetism* (1991)

Staring so intently out to sea
they do not hear the stealthy camera
click like a key in a lock.

His hair is thick, sticky with salt.
Her hair is shingled. Their skins take a dip
in June sunlight. The air, the mood is blue.

The rest is out of focus; an ocean corrugates
and concertinas, the wind is a held breath,
the horizon too distant to believe in.

Their faces turned from us, they balance
on the edge of a narrow jetty. We look at them,
in black and white, from a long way off.

Language

Annemarie Austin (1943) – *Door upon Door* (1999)

In these photographs the dead soldiers
have all the vulnerability of children
asleep in postures of abandonment.
Arms thrown wide. Legs sprawled.

Until their time lays claim to them.
This is December 1942.
It is the Russian Front.
These are German corpses.

So the picture of this youth
whose head is forced to crook
against the sheer side of an open grave,
whose shirt is undone at his throat,
whose tunic is unbuttoned
under a powdering of light-coloured earth
or snow

is labelled
'*Lebensraum* for one more Nazi'.

This other spread-eagled face down,
dark shape in his winter padding,
bears a thin line of brilliant fire
along one arm and
working on his back.

His caption reads: 'The enemy:
one of the Fascist robbers is halted,
and on his tank the flame springs up
that will burn him and all his kind.'

ON A PHOTOGRAPH OF CHEKHOV

Christopher Middleton (1926) - *Intimate Chronicles* (1996)

---for Katharina Wagenbach

- 1 While the rain comes pouring down,
- 2 Chekhov, in his white peaked hunting cap,
- 3 And prone beside a rick of hay, surveys
- 4 The scene behind the camera, narrow-eyed.

- 5 While in Berlin the rain comes pouring down
- 6 And will refresh the yellowed centenarian
- 7 Blossomer in the courtyard, Chekhov has
- 8 Anchored his umbrella, gone to earth.

- 9 Ivory handle of the slim umbrella shaft atilt
- 10 To birch trunks in the background, has a curve;
- 11 Eyesight arching clean across the image
- 12 Divines, in the cap's white crown, a twin to it.

- 13 Chekhov's brother, meanwhile, props his head---
- 14 Summer rain, phenomenally somber---
- 15 On Chekhov's hip; from his blubber mouth
- 16 A howl escapes, the sockets of his eyes

- 17 Are black, as if he wore, beneath his bowler,
- 18 Smoked eyeglasses; as if he were, perhaps,
- 19 A horror Chekhov carried on his back, and still
- 20 The rain comes pouring down, and the umbrella,

- 21 Hulk become a dome to shelter Chekhovs, both,
- 22 Can float across a century, be put to use.
- 23 O perishable hayrick!---and its fringe,
- 24 Where Chekhov tucks his knees up, will be damp.

25 Yet Chekhov's massive cap, laundered a day ago---
26 Intent beneath its peak his eyes are watching
27 How people make their gestures through the rain,
28 Set dishes on a table, turn

29 Vacant faces to the window, wring their hands,
30 Cling, so predisposed, to their fatal fictions,
31 Or stroke the living air, to make it hum
32 With all they mean to talk about today.

The Burgomaster's Daughter
(Leipzig, 1945)

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *The Wound-dresser's Dream* (1996)

Why do they wait
the soldiers at the door,
she on the black-buttoned
sofa alone?

The light falls on her lapels
like drinkable gold,
the fillings in her teeth
red-gold as her hair.

Why don't they flinch
the allies at the door?
*O make my bed father
for I fain would lie down.*

Portrait of Henry V by an Unknown Artist
John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

Behind the bodkin nose
and shadowy curve
of occiput
is a draw-weight
of thirteen years,
of which the pursed lips
and brass basilisk
eye are sale evidence:
an eye which, seeing
the French emissary
beg consideration
for twelve thousand
women and children
refugees,
stays blind -
though open, as if
it were looking back-
wards and could sense
the grip of a fist
around the neck's
smug folds, or
a paternal tweak
to that monkish crop –
as if it had long known
the source of its pain,
but longed to glimpse,
further back,
the figure without a crown
drawing his
vengeful bowstring.

Charles I on Horseback
(*Van Dyck*)

John Greening (1954) - *The Tutankhamun Variations* (1992)

The King sits rigid, in chalky
bewilderment: his favourite grey
has just trotted calmly through a grove
and into a green morass, been swallowed,
and left him astride a nightmare
whose outline still glares at him, carved white
on that imaginary hillside opposite.

The dark equerry, the smiling equerry,
so quick to come to His Majesty's rescue,
has offered him now a fresh and hugely
muscular mount - more like a boulder
weathered to an approximate horse shape,
its miniature head protruding trimly
from a landscape of burial chambers.

The King tries to laugh - this monster
should be before a plough; or hauling some load
home from harvest; at any rate, securely anchored
against such poundings out of the earth
as have today snatched his best horse from under him -
till a sanguine half-smile rising near the oak
assures him that this is a very tranquil bay.

The dark equerry, the crimson equerry
on whom the King turns his back,
pretends that he must just once more polish
His Majesty's helmet before releasing him;
meanwhile, has concealed a flint or a frog's bone
in the crest, breathing into its restive
royal feathers the ancient Horseman's Word.

Piranesi's Fever

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *Sighting the Slave Ship* (1992)

It could have been malaria -
the ricochet of the pulse
along his outflung arm,
grappling-irons
at each cauterizing-point on the body.

She lay with him between bouts;
pressed to his temple
the lazy estuary of her wrist;
brought him myrrh
on a burning salver.

How lucid they made him,
the specifics against fever:
the magnified footfall of the physician,
the application of cupping-glasses
above the echoing stairwell,

windlass and shaft,
the apparatus of imaginary prisons;
a catwalk slung across the vault
for those who will never take
the drawbridge to the hanging-garden.

None of this he could tell her-
that those he glimpsed
rigging the scaffold
were not fresco-painters,
but inquisitors giddy from blood-letting;

that when he clung to her
it wasn't delirium
but a fleeting humour of the eye -
unspecified torture,
death as an exact science.

Only after each crisis, could he speak

of the sudden lit elision
as she threw back the shutters
and he felt the weight of sunlight
on her unseen breasts.

Watteau's Crucifixion

Pauline Stainer (1941) - *Sighting the Slave Ship* (1992)

Master of ambiguity –
what lovely conspiracy
did you make of crucifixion
in a southern landscape?

Was the cross snakewood,
angels rippling
against alluvial gold
like a new shift of sails?

Is that Gilles
sanguine under eclipse
who cannot lift the body
for weight of myrrh?

Do the mourning women
wear slipper-satin
of a yellow
that physics sparrowhawks?

Did you take
straight vermilion
for the electuary
of wounds?

Do you know whether
the pilgrimage is over
or why the Magdalen
embarks in fugitive red?

Did you sanction her
to crouch below
the male half-nude
and weeping

slip her hand
between his legs?

