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

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Fuentes primarias

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IRON AGE

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.
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


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


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


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

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.  
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  
onece flew high in 'Kazakhstan!'  

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.  

Flea-market  
The lyra man  
Flag-seller
Red dolls

Maybe they once cut the wire that put barbed confines round a choir, not for pruning plants but man collectivized in Kazakhstan.

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, clinging to her song and go on clinging though Kazakhstan could crush her singing, collectivized and forced by rote to still the lyra in her throat.

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.

This march-past's only shoppers' feet browsing on flea-market street in various shoes, high heels or suede,
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.
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 Das Kapital all day.
Most stalls sell his statuette
(though I haven't seen one bought here yet),
this manikin 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 merchantiser.
But Trotsky goes on making toasts
to glasnost and the gulag ghosts.
The foundered Argo's 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?
They scan the market where they are,
not Sukhumi or Krasnodar...
and not Georgia, Georgia Tblis
(Tblisi, Georgia) but Greece -
not the Black Sea coast Sukhum
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.

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 reconect
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.

'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.

Though long ago I've not forgotten
the moonglow on the Kazakh cotton
when we staggered from the cattle van
collectivized in Kazakhstan.'

Their nightmares in the old regime
have not quite dimmed the ancient dream.

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
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.

Two tubas join their band to blow
as jaunty a new Jubilo
as may be hazarded in days
when only a muffled fanfare plays.

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.

They'll wake what may be from the waste,
this makeshift band of the displaced.

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?

With democracy the truth is this:
no final fanfared edifice,
only the crane however grating
continually recreating...

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

the girl's first cautious tread
onto the path of fallen red.

'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.'

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

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.

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.

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,
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.

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.

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

T

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 wrings 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.'

SONOKO

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.'
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.'

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?'

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.'

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
Hara San paints the A-Bomb Dome

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.

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.

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.

Hiroshima by night, neon lights

Parlor Atom pinball arcade

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.'

'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.'

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.'

..

'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.

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.

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,
fly 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 inwards 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,
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


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

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

all over England
on farmland and airfields
these halfsubmerged sheds
have a throwaway permanence
a never newpainted
sense of duration
that exists anywhere
and belongs nowhere
---ribbed basic
set fast in pocked concrete
they're almost like texts
no one wants to read
---texts prefabs caves
a whole aesthetic in reverse
"What you saw was a bunch of trenches with arms sticking out."
"Plows mounted on tanks. Combat earthmovers."
"Defiant."
"Buried."
"Carefully planned and rehearsed."
"When we went through there wasn't anybody left."
"Awarded Silver Star."
"Reporters banned."
"Not a single American killed."
"Bodycount impossible."
"For all I know, thousands, said Colonel Moreno."
"What you saw was a bunch of buried trenches with people's arms and things sticking out."
"Secretary Cheney made no mention."
"Every single American was inside"
the juggernaut
impervious
to small-arms
fire." "I know
burying people
like that sounds
pretty nasty, said
Colonel Maggart,
But...."
"His force buried
about six hundred
and fifty
in a thinner line
of trenches."
"People's arm
sticking out."
"Every American
inside."
"The juggernaut."
"I'm not
going to sacrifice
the lives
of my soldiers,
Moreno said, it's not
cost-effective."
"The tactic was designed
to terrorize,
Lieutenant Colonel Hawkins
said, who helped
devise it."
"Schwartzkopf's staff
privately
estimated fifty to seventy
thousand killed
in the trenches."
"Private Joe Queen was
awarded
a Bronze Star for burying
trenches with his
earthmover."
"Inside the juggernaut."
"Impervious."
"A lot of the guys were scared, he said, but I enjoyed it."
"A bunch of trenches. People's arms and things sticking out."
"Cost-effective."
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.
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.
The Falklands, 1982


1. This must have been more like the Boer War
2. than anything seen in our lifetime,
3. with the troopships and the cheering,
4. the happy homecoming, the sweetheart-and-wifetime,
5. everything looking over and solved,
6. and no civilians involved---

7. except a few stewardesses, Chinese in the galleys
8. almost by accident taken
9. willy-nilly on The Great Adventure,
10. where the Argentine fusing of the shells was often
11. mistaken---
12. lucky for each floating sitting duck.
13. Oh yes, we had luck!

14. Luck that the slaughtered World War I soldiers
15. who died on the Somme and at Arras
16. would have welcomed, in their dismal trenches---
17. though that’s not to belittle the victory of the Paras,
18. who lost, all in all, very few dead,
19. good men, well led.

20. At home, indeed, it was terribly like the World Cup,
21. though far less bright, commented, stagey,
22. security making the war news nil, mostly,
23. but good value when they finally stopped being
24. cagey.
25. Was the *General Belgrano* really offside?
26. A few hundred died.

27. And the outstanding achievements of the great Press,
28. particularly that section called ‘yellow’,
29. that wrote ‘Up yours!’ on missiles, went berserk
30. and shouted ‘GOTCHA!’ in a giant coward's bellow---
31. and circulation rises, like *The Sun*. 
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.
Flight

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

*After the Arab defeat of the Persians in the seventh century AD some aristocrats of the defeated Sasanian dynasty fled to China. Gravestones indicate that they hung on there as a distinct community for at least two centuries.*

In time the temporary withdrawal
Became a way of life. How long
Before they could admit there'd be
No going back, before they ceased
To live off rumours of a prince,
A scion of the royal house
In hiding, living hand to mouth,
About to gather troops to hurl
The haughty enemy back from
The gates of Ctesiphon -
   which was
A pilfered ruin, a harmless tourists'
Curiosity somewhere beyond
The brave new city of Baghdad?

So they erect the stone inscribed
With words that speak to home though home
Has long since ceased to speak such words,
A witness to a way of life
Corroded by fidelity
That is a kind of willing madness;
A story told and then retold,
Whose referents are all elsewhere,
And now lives only in these minds
That still repeat the litany
Of what was lost, till they too die.
Brut
*(after Sir Frederic Madden’s Poetical Semi-saxon Paraphrase of the Cottonion and related British Museum manuscripts)*


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 battalion?
Some sex-toy it was,
no Italian 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


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.
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-)  

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

The pious hush in there had been too much for them.
Frogmarched out, shaking all too audibly
ey they were disciplined next day for their calculated
insult to the People, their act of vandalism.

Gottwald then fell out of favour.

After '68 his punctured image was reinflated
to its former eminence in all the history books.

(That bubbling noise again: 'Bobok! Bobok!'
His poor bruised rancid body wheeled
up and down and in and out of state
as if damned to perpetual motion---decay
always advancing on cosmetics.

And those beleaguered trimming textbook hacks
dodging, veering and double-backing
to readjust the nation's history syllabus
can best be seen as hapless coffin-bearers
stumbling up a downward escalator
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.
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

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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

Schumann lied
(soprano)

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

Ach, meine Liebe selber
Zerfüß wie eitel Hauch!
Du alte, einsame Träne,
Zerfließe jetzt zunder 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.

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 lounger, 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.]

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, Boheme, Cost, 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.

Was will die einsame Träne?
Sie träbt 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
Zerflossen wie eitel Hauch!
Du alte, einsame Träne,
Zerfließe jetztunder auch!

Isn't this a somewhat finer monument to Heinrich Heine?
Banished from the Fatherland with pen and lied in my hand.
The lied 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.]

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

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 feast, 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
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
[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

Music Room:
Schumann *lied*
(piano)

*Dying Achilles*
by Ernst Herter
(1884)

Schumann *lied*
(piano only)

Triumph of
*Achilles* by Franz
Matsch
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
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?
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.

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, 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.

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 bound-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. 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.

Gorgon motif into swastika

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.

Ocean-borne bodies and Nazi flag
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 lied 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 lied 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,
I weep for six million Jews.

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 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,
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.
KASSAK (soprano)

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


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


*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.
By climbing up those stairs
and resting only once
I made my offering.
What use was that? No use.
It proved that I am lucky
in living on past sixty.
I see the species-rich
meadow above mass graves
where Yugoslavs and Poles,
Hungarians and Jews,
Bulgarians and Danes,
Dutchmen and Frenchmen lie
by Germans and Italians.
I think: The Earth forgives.
Forgiveness is not just.
There can be no amends
except remembering
bloodfalls where starved men fell
beneath heartbreaking stones
and each was I---and I---
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?
In the woods the war rages
with fiery signs.

All things, all creatures
are on fire. All being
is flaming suffering.

Under pine needles, the earth
that bled for purity
is matter,
pulped and shattered.

In the immaculate cemetery
each white cross has a red rose
that smells sweet.

The Ossuary gleams
above trees and graves.

Whose temple is this?
Whose dream?

The tower is shaped
in the image of a shell
that blasted bodies to bits
but released the soul.

On the tower, the cross.

EN MEMOIRE DE FLEURY DEVANT DOUAMONT

She is Our Lady of Europe,
her chapel stands on rubble
under pines, on blasted,
cratered ground.

The woods are dark and still
where the village was,
but the chapel in a glade
is filled with sunlight.

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

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

And all for nothing.
Noticing oddly how flags had been rubbed thin,
Bleaching in shut drawers, now unrolled
In blues, reds, their creases of old skin
Tacked on brown lances, headed with soft gold.
Clotheslines of bunting,

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

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

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

In which things seasoned and unseasoned burn
Through their black storeys, and the mild night
Fuels the same fires with the same unconcern:
Dresden, Ilium, London: the witch-light
Bright on a ring of children.

Night, and the huge bombers lying cold to touch,
The bomb-bays empty under the perspex skull.
The pyres chill, that ate so fiercely, and so much,
The flags out heavily: the stripes charcoal, dull.
Ashes, ghosts, fables.
The Pax Romana --- spurious:
A knock-out blow, delivered
By the most ruthless contender
Among a band of rival thugs.

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

Neck and foot the slaves are shackled.
In spurious freedom, the barbarian,
Lousy, wrapped in a tattered hide,
Scuttles about the frontier,
Drinking kumiss from his grandfather's skull.

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

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

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

And from this seed expands
The lover's rose, the rose of revolution,
And shall continue to expand until
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-steem 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 PRI CE 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 PAK GIT, 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 'tAlleluias 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 over 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 scram.
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 Wattsy 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 toiletrolls.

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 baulk 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 neonned 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.
DRUID SONG


Who keeps the vert and the venison?
Who calls the creatures into a circle?

The stag-headed one,
bearded with green leaves,
lies down with the tree that was windthrown
in its prime,

the lightning-shattered,
all the litter of the seasons.

These come again---
new wood, timber.

But Thor's tree is down,
the groves of the oakmen are felled.

There is no leaf, no twig
that does not grow upon the tree of life.

Where is the tree that will rise
to lift up the image of its maker?
A Café Waiter in Tel Aviv


'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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I'll tell you you'll be tried for such chatter.
I'm not a writer. This is Tel Aviv.'
Despite his manacles, the wiry murderer
in the death cell broke a bottle of porter,
slash his throat, but death was out of order---
blood-red Matthew was patched up by his jailer,
made half decent for the hanging, all the better for
white cap, white gloves, tied feet and hands, miner
with no dirt on him, Matthew Clydesdale, actor
to a massed milling of hard starers, leaper
out of this world, carted in coffin of fir
with his death in order, under halberds as was proper,
up the Saltmarket in a dreary November,
into the College, to the anatomy hall where
Matthew must act again. The professor-dissector
gowns himself in white, bows to the theatre
of buzzing tiers, introduces an experimenter.
A Glasgow Frankenstein is Doctor Ure.
The hanged man sits unbound in an armchair.
His dreadful face faces the handsome professor,
the avantgarde chemist, the galvanic battery. Air
enters his lungs, his tongue wags, eyes flutter,
limbs convulse, he stands, amazed, aware---
his death is not in order! In the uproar
shouts, faintings, shrieks, applause conspire
to let Professor Jeffrey lance the jugular
with theatrical flourish. At his third death, the collier
leaving the electric arms of his resurrector
slumps in the blade-cold arms of his dissector.
Clear the hall. Pity the executioner,
pity the murderer, pity the professor,
pity the doctor with his battery and his ardour.
Acquisitions

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


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


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.'
A Ballad Re-Creation of a Fifties Incident at Barnes Bridge


1 'Tis the ghost o’ Colquhoun an' the ghost o’ McBride
2 That do balcony-lean by yon auld riverside,
3 An’ they baith are sae fou’ they can scarcely see---
4 For they're baith at a party (where booze is free)---

5 An' the Sassenachs there wi' their highbrowish speech
6 Mak’ a nebulous nectarine oot o’ a peach.
7 But Colquhoun an' McBride hauld theirsels weil aloof,
8 Aye drinkin' the drinks that are ower proof.

9 Nae word do they speak, but they lean an' glower
10 Wi’ the pissed perfection o’ painterly power---
11 An' as they lean there the sun gaes doun
12 Like a watercolour o'er London toun,

13 In a’ the sweet tints that the calendars love,
14 Wi’ a braw great pink flush i’ the skies above.
15 Och! they do notice this, tho' their eyes are glazed,
16 An' baith wi’ horror are sair amazed---

17 Colquhoun turns tae McBride wi’ a fine disgust
18 At the sight o’ that distant an' reddenin' dust.
19 'Mon, but it's horrible!’ 'Aye, but 'twill pass!’
20 An' they ply, baith, the gold, unremittin' wee glass!
To Haydn and Mozart


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


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


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


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


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.
Here we are on a window ledge
with the idea of race.
All our victories
were defeats really
and the tea chests in that room
aren't packed with books.
The door's locked on us
so we begin again
with cack on the sill
and *The Book of Analogies*.
It falls open at a map
of the small nations of Europe,
it has a Lutheran engraving
of Woodrow Wilson's homestead
in a cloon above Strabane,
and it tells you Tomás?? Masaryk
was a locksmith's apprentice.
This means we have a choice:
either to jump or get pushed.
Articulating Hungary
(1956-1989)


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.

Canteen Song

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


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

So the living return
In halting hundreds
Leaving the thousands dead.
Reforma Agraria

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

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 scruffy 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
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


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

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)*


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.
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


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

In 1850 in Seville,
while his contemporaries photographed
rotting barges on the Guadalquivir
or farm labourers in sheepskin waistcoats
or Gypsy women in the tobacco factory,
Vicomte J. de Vigier,
turned his back on the folkloric and his lens
on the common-or-garden naturalized exotics
like palm trees and bamboo. His masterpiece,
Etude d'aloès, shows this tumid
dusty plant on a nondescript roadside.
It holds grimly on to its patch of nowhere
and drinks and drinks the silver nitrate light
as though there were no belonging anywhere
but there and then, and nothing sublime
except that stretch of dirt, that broken wall

and the rays of a faded nineteenth-century sun.
The Lists of Coventry

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

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

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

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

The College of Learned Physicians
Prescribes for the ruling class:
Physick for the ills of the great, they sneer,
Won't do for the vulgar mass.

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

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

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

Nick packed up his books in Cambridge
And came down without a degree
To inspirit Red Lion Street, Spitalfields,
With his fiery humanity.

As a reckless, unlicensed physician,
He was moved to disseminate
Cures for the ills of the body
With cures for the ills of the state.

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

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

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

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

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

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

For cures for the ills of the body
Are cures for the ills of the mind;
And a welfare state is a sick state
When the dumb are led by the blind.
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 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.
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.
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.
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.
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, 
delight ing 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.
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 of find off its fell advance. Just so this death, cold and companion less, drew near to Guthlac now through the dark of night.
One follower 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 if 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 if 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 if 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 if 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 abbeys
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
Nightwatch after nightwatch
Paul Klee endured 'horribly boring guard duty' at the gasoline cellar and every morning outside the Zeppelin hangar there was drill then a speech tacked with junk formulas he varnished wings and stencilled numbers next to gothic insignia a private first-class with a lippy dislike of their royal majesties and Flying School 5 (Bavaria)

he wrote home to Lily it's nice this spring weather and now we've laid out a garden between the second and third runways the airfield's becoming more and more beautiful
each time a plane crashed ---and that happened quite often he cut squares of canvas from the wings and fuselage he never said why but every smashed biplane looked daft or ridiculous halfjoky and untrue ---maybe the pilots annoyed him? those unlovely aristos who never knew they were flying primed blank canvases into his beautiful airfield
Baroque


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


*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.

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 traceries 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
Petal and flagellation so finally to say
Between air, wood and interstices what he had learnt.

Then stay ten years to worship at his shrine
Walking each day from hut to organ loft
Under the cornice 'Dominikus Zimmermann',
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.
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 Fräulein 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 cart horse 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


1 Staying at Sans Souci, Voltaire went over Frederick's poetry for him---
2 he called this 'washing the king's dirty linen'.
3 The prose was more self-reliant, as is shown by just one title
4 from the thirty-volume *Oeuvres* (he wrote---and fought---in French):
5 *Instructions Militaires*
6 *du Roi de Prusse pour ses Généraux.*
7 In the Seven Years War
8 the Jung-Braunschweig regiment lost
9 1,650 men
10 through desertion.
11 So,
12 guard your troops.
13 Give them beer.
14 Put sentries in the cornfields.
15 Never camp near a forest.
16 Never march at night.
17 The portable field oven can bake
18 1,000 6lb. loaves daily.
19 Though biscuits take up less pack-space
than bread, they're not so sustaining

as the men mix them with water
and drink them as soup.

Firewood should always be made up of logs:
we forbid the practice

d of setting alight
the houses of the peasantry.

The army is built
on discipline---

or, more exactly,
on fear.

The common soldier
should fear his officer

more than the enemy:
the horse prospers

under the eye
of its master.

Know the land. Talk to old inhabitants,
especially shepherds and gamekeepers.

Before battle, go to the nearest height,
map in hand, and study the view.

Cemeteries and sunken roads
make excellent defensive positions.

Know the land. What if that marsh
covering your flank

turns out to be a dry field?
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 troupe
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, cleaner-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 longserving 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 readies
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
so he might give pleasure
even happiness of a sort
to a greedy crowd
that gathered with his master
to solve the pain problem
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?
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 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


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.
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-carrigages 
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 Emmanuels 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


'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


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


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.
Greyhounds were his favourite and he built graves for them on the terrace at Sans Souci.)

His love of dogs was shared by a later leader: Hitler, saying that only Eva Braun and Blondi were faithful to him, would quote Frederick's remark: 'Now I know men, I prefer dogs.'
Burke and Hare

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 plaster? Did he see spiders? When she
13 lifted him and folded him to her
14 did she play counting-games with him---
15 church, steeple, clergyman,
16 little piggies---call him
17 the cleanest one in the family,
18 show him his white skin all wrinkled
19 as the water ran off him in rivers,
20 dance like a child with him,
21 tell him he had washerwoman's fingers?
Rasputin

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

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

*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 metalled 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

_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


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 Chidiock 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.
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.
Sonnet: Pepys in 1660


1  Everybody is openly drinking the King's health!
2  The King is about to be back! There are bonfires
3  everywhere!
4  Stable government, King and Parliament, not
5  Cromwell's wobbly son!
6  Yet Pepys, at sixteen, saw with satisfaction the King's
7  beheading.
8  'There's a Divinity doth hedge a King,
9  rough-hew him how we will!--Samuel Butler's joke.
10  Charles II promises a free pardon,
11  proceedings only against those named by Parliament.
12  As you read, you can see what is coming.
13  Exhumation and gibbeting of regicides---
14  hanging, drawing and quartering for those still living.
15  We are still in the century when Shakespeare died,
16  where the racks and the fires were not thought
17  barbaric...
18  with Pepys, his music, his ideas of order, a civilized
19  man.
'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.
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

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

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

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

\[ \textit{i.m. Robert Fergusson, 1750-1774} \]

'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 wheen 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.
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.
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


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.
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.
The morsels, tied to string, are lowered again
into the marinade. Today it's beef;
it's gone on every day for nine years now.
He says he's trying to evolve a system---
set down on tiny charts---to show how long
digestion takes in lots of different cases:
with different temperatures, time limits, in
the stomach and outside in jars. He says---
straight out---it is my solemn, human duty
to let him bow like some old mandarin
over my belly wound so many times a day.
Although the wound was not the end for me
the hole---closed like a valve---is permanent:
The accidental bullet from the musket
sealed my future: adulation, he says,
or at least some fame in scientific journals!

I'd like to sit at a table without his jar
waiting to collect the seeping gastric juices.
I've run away. Renewed my family ties
and took myself a squaw with waist-length hair.
I was her hero: she loved to serve and feed me
and even bathe me in the summer streams.
It was a place where charts and words were absent
but he was clever---in four months tracked me down.
He called me worthless, nekkid, drunk; invoked
my duty and took his spoon to the sludge again.
He says I should be very proud of being
a partner in the holy race for knowledge.
But I yearn for an ordinary life
where the textures of my insides aren't on view.
The Life and Life of Henrietta Lacks


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,
sold like cooking fat. But I get even,
grow where I'm not supposed,
screw up experiments.

Soon, they'll have the know-how
to rebuild me from a single cell.
A rope of doubles could jitterbug
from here to Jupiter. Meantime,
I'm grabbing my piece of the action,
hungry to cry my first cry again.
The Frog


*(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 Morrígan!'  
'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


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
   (with the English Ambassador, Sir Charles Wyke).
8. The Broken Cacti and the Convent's Outer Wall.
9. The Execution Squad Standing to Attention.
10. A Mestizo Leading a Llama under Popocatépetl.
11. The Execution of Miramón, Mejía and Maximilian.
12. The Gold-Green Tail-Feathers of the Quetzal.
13. The Emperor's Shirt after his Execution.
The man sat at an empty table,
his mind enmeshed in a web.
She's already there, perfect,
naked, light emblazons her.
Her beauty is undimmed,
no man can handle it.
Fornication and commerce
continue unabated.
Lettered, sent abroad,
translated, manifold, athletic;
against perverts and capital
her beauty is undimmed.
Off the public corridor
a room of rotting paper
shaped into blocks, printed
in the Schiele typeface.
She read the sign
and hit the wall
with a flat palm,
three times evenly.
What do you want?
A photograph?
Rain, burning eyes, music
sports the clouds of May.
This is a painting with five books in it. The young woman stands with her back to the philosophers who have their backs to the window. They are reading, ignoring the passers-by who are reading them. Behind them all we can see the rest of the palace, a harbour, a mountain, the landscape going blue.

The first book is a guide to Purgatory, the spiral mountain. The only escape is up, but you have to know the way. This book will tell you. It takes three men to read it, and first of all you need the guide to the book. It's in your hand, uncrumple it. Or you could just turn round and see if you can untwist the rocks themselves.

The second is the book of Good and Evil. If you read two pages at once you get the world exactly as it is. The red and black figures twitch into life as you flicker through them.

The third book was originally a baby but a sorceress appeared at his christening and turned his skin to leather and his cries to hieroglyphs. No one has told the priest, or else he blesses it anyway, not knowing what happens when it grows up, in Chapter 20.

The fourth book is so real that Catherine holds it in an insulating cloth. It gives the low-down on the philosophers, how without looking they can tell everything about the world except what she is doing there. She knows.

The fifth is the perfect book. It is written
in a language only it can understand,
but it's bored with reading itself. It lies around
yawning all day, leaving itself undone.

The king and the man he talks to have given up books.
There is so much else for them to do, hill walking,
crowd control, sailing, palace architecture.
The king explains that he has hired a sculptor
to describe the future in a marble frieze
above their heads. No one has read it yet,
and even Catherine doesn't know that the wheel
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
or forms that grow in water
and embody its rhythms
and its shapes.

The work of a man
who knew the Adoration
of the Serpent and the Beast;
who had seen angels riding
the winds on wineskins;
St Michael with wings
made of peacock feathers,
slaying a monster that lies
on its back exposing
an orange belly, like a newt's.
This man's familiar was
John the Baptist, wide-eyed,
brown-bearded, standing
in a desert of cacti
that leap about him like green flames.

And their makers, the makers
of these images, were his people,
the people he belonged to,
with whom, at another time,
he had embroidered
the Tapestry of Creation
using the umbrella pines,
the Catalan soil and fields
for materials and tools.

Gaudí of Barcelona,
the city that gave him freedom
to embody such a vision
and most deserves his blessing.

He died, the great work
unfinished,
and because of that
more natural, more
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

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,
deer skin 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 Guadaloupe,
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


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?
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.*
Vincent

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

1. In the north
2. he goes among the people,
3. farmers, women who cut the peat.
4. He is a peasant-painter labouring
5. to paint peasants.

6. He is somewhere in the room
7. with them, struggling to paint
8. the hands they dig with,
9. and put in the dish, and share out their portion.

10. Darkness
11. comes out of the earth in the north.
12. It moulds the figures,
13. it shapes the farms.
14. This is the good soil of Holland,
15. the soil the poor live on.
16. It means hardship, not misery,
17. not the dry, dusty wind of the Borinage.
18. The cold wall of the church
19. chills him to the spine,
20. he is a servant
21. of the man-forsaken god,
22. a light-bringer
23. who loves the dark.

24. Earth is new in the south—bright yellow,
25. vermilion, burgundy, violet,
26. sky blue, bright green.
27. Earth melts, burns with a flame
28. that does not destroy but restores.
29. This is the force life lives by,
30. the force he seeks to enter.

31. The sun roars in the harvest field.
He holds the yellow note,
the black cypress is a vortex
and the heavens rain down fire.

Gauguin paints him painting sunflowers,
in which he sees himself 'gone mad'.

He paints irises in the asylum garden,
tongues wagging, the silence
loud with shouts and screams.

He has gone out of hearing,
he is somewhere deep in the fields,
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)


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.
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


---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.
Yet Chekhov's massive cap, laundered a day ago---
Intent beneath its peak his eyes are watching
How people make their gestures through the rain,
Set dishes on a table, turn
Vacant faces to the window, wring their hands,
Cling, so predisposed, to their fatal fictions,
Or stroke the living air, to make it hum
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.
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.
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 cautery-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?