

THE NEEDLE IN THE I

MICHAEL WOODS

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THE NEEDLE IN THE I

The gates crash open and they're off.
A galloping thumping sweaty crush
As sods of turf and grass
Hurtle like blown leaves in the autumn rain.

Crowds cry out
In their emptiness of expectation
And bets
As Pegasus,
Whipped by his little tormenting master
Clips another fence.

Snot and tears streaming,
He looks about this demented crowd
Of pointless strife
And sees another fall:

Cracking bones and splayed legs
And the roar and roar again
As the little rider
In fluorescent green
Runs for cover
While his mount is
Crushed and broken
In the rush.

Pegasus sees but does not know:
He has no I.

Thumping towards the finish
In the deafening surge
Another crack of the whip
Stinging, bleeding,
He is staring ahead
Like a madman on a bus.

But he doesn't know:
There is no I there,
Only what is
In a demented configuration
Of colour, form and fury.

The muck from the horse in front
Spills like acid into his eyes
And the whip
Crucifies but there is nothing he can think:

There is no thinking there.

And the multitudinous screaming in the rain
As his legs, spindly and pointless
For a nearman of his size,
In the blizzard and noise,
Empty and weak
In this blinding seizure of calamity,
Fail.

Those thin galloping legs,
Are just bits of a body,
Commanded by a small colourful master
With a whip,

Thump into a steaming filly
And clatter into the straight
Towards the finish.
Then there is a pain like a needle in the knee
Coursing through an I that was never there.

And there is something,
There is a sting, a shadow, of knowledge
Passing through something
That was never a someone.
A future of nothing
In the blinded eyes of a steaming animal.

This was an animal that could not see:
A slip a fall, a throw,
And the gunshot to the head
That Pegasus could never know.

BERBER CAVEWOMAN

Black eyes whitely
Peering out of the light of ages,
She crushes spices, crouched,
Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Nomad driven
To Atlas heights
In a cavegloom of silence.

Raucous tourists descend from a roaring bus,
Cameras, like guns, at the ready,
In a post-prandial
Bonhomie of cackle
Into the troglodytic silence of the cave
Suffused in the dust of the still centuries.
And the silent black-eyed child of a mountain grotto
Spinning at a wheel,
Plump baby in a cot,
With almond eyes of calm,

Regard in depthless wonder
The multitude of shrilly dressed people
Shooting the shots
For a future to be dumped in a bin of out-dated stills.

Flinchless in the flashes
Heedless in her now, here,
In a cool shadow of a recess,
Her art is to ravel at her thick coarse wool in
The living dusty mist of what is,
Rocking with her thin-boned foot the cot,
And waters the sand of simple acts
In the cave of her belonging.

Sun rises and world turns
In this silent prayer of life
Which begins with begetting
And ends in dust,
And persists in the wonder
Of the hereafter
In the shades of present solitude.

Just so.

And she neither sees, nor hears,
This clamour of empty curiosity,
This blank disruption of twitching figures
In shorts, shirts and shoes.

Just the simple shape of what is,
Shadowy forms of what has been,
Because displaced human frenzy
Craves things she has no knowledge of.

There are no images in her eyes,
No objects in her hands, just her wool,
Her shawl, her infant.
Her heart commands a captivation
Of a spindly flower, a chicken,
Saffron, sabra flower, a child's cry,
The sigh of a wind off a hill,
The sap of a cactus,
And she waits, as the sniggering undone disperse,
Only for what is already there: an unworlding world.

The child shifts in the silence
Of a fading Atlas sun,
Spilling milkily into the light, the dancing dust
In a mountain cave,
As the bus roars off
On a scraggy yellow road
En route to another awesome sight
Of chronic mountain a new dispossession.

GRAVEYARD

The gorse hills sick with the suppuration of
His bread and cheese and the bony waste of rock
Slope to the black seas moaning with weight,
The blood of the earth
Keening loss, loss.

There's the unhinged gate
At which celestial voyager
Trembles in his dead reckoning
At the book of final decision
When the river must be crossed.

Winds like sleep curl around those grey slabs
Worn markers of bones
In the wispy white grass
Lamentations of blown souls,
Snowflake scattered.

Cloud shadows flee this place
Where the hour is deathly still
And craggy reminders
Of fierce and fretful longing
Crumble in this vault of sea and sky.

These multitudinous unwritten ones
Whitely nestle in soft silence.
Nothing rings, heralds, in this void
Nothing strikes a time
They went the forked way.

What is unwept, unremembered?
Does this wind, sea,
Forget the rock it gnaws?
The legions silt the earth
With the prickly rumbling truth of death.

But I have come to look for you,
Not stones in the shadows of grass
Not that black windless bourn.
You a name a time
Sleeping under the thick blanket.

And there the sign of the deathwoman
In loving faded memory
By all her 1995
May

She rest

(On banks of rivers laden with golden day.)

Anne do you remember us,
Do you remember us Anne the dead
Our nails are bitten and blue
And bloodied with scratching
The hammered lid

We walk the earth with stiff hollow longing
And crave remembrance
But we stammer truth blown empty
And the worms that eat through us
Slither down the throat of dry days.

Anne I long to talk to you and
You are nothing but fissure of death
Unutterable wound
Unmoulding,
Dead, lost, blown on a wind

The graveyard is a place
Of refined disintegration
Where sick gorse blossoms
And heaving sea and sky make
Magic yellow spells

This grew in my hand:
A skull of white exactitude
Spilling stories of ancient days
When we spoke in luscious tones
But now in tongueless loss.

The place is the same Anne
There is no place
But crowded yellow hills
Tumbling into turbulent
Wordlessness

THE BUTTERFLY COLLECTOR

She comes at dusk,
blind as a bat, wings of an owl,
flushed from foraging forests
where she sips gluey nectar drunkenly
in groves of crimson hibiscus.
only freedom is full of sober eyes.

In the swimming light she is
and could be anyone's
for insect heart reveals itself as eyeless
and in drunkaway dreaming
she lusciously opens up
even as she sucks.

Nothing dwells in her
just the fullness of what is
and there is no death only extinction.
She has eyes for nothing
but the seminal blossom
of damp garish growth within
and larval imbecility.

So I am waiting with my net.

For there is no fate,
only obliteration, which befalls even us.
And so I sit and wait with
my instruments
for I will snuff out insect unfreedom
and pin it on my wall
to regard with enchanted loathing
and label with Latin exactitude:
Taenaris myops, drunken owl.

Only I can see what is
with clinical disgust
and take and spread and flatten
for aesthetic elevation.
The god of light blesses us
with domination of the dark.
Butterfly compulsion cannot reign
and shadows of insect sightlessness
cannot fall on shining form.

And so I wait for her.
In the dread uproar of impending night
She will stagger through the same door

Into the clearing of my place
of order and precision,
my clipped expanse of fretted control
and I will examine and kill her.

I clutch my net
and muscle and mind collaborate
in wet anticipation
of a cool catch,
a swift wristquick action
to entrap this galloping trollop
as shadows lengthen in flushed dusk.

Then I see her, staggering from whorled darkness
Into clean air
in a ragged trajectory
towards me, as if to smash into me
in drunk voluptuous insect rage
with instinctual knowledge of my intent,
a blind hatred of me,
the clear collector.

I whip my net.

But the metal rim connects
and there is just a little click,
a scattering
of light limbs on grass,
just a drifting of torn wings -

sightless bits –
on a broken breeze

across the logic of my
empty space
called mind.

The living catch,
when the fluttering futility of freedom
is frantic in the entrapment
of my unforgivingly enclosed net

will have to wait for the next time.

The bell tolls for all,
Even for scraps of insects.

THE SPIDER

Dry, your spaces, I penetrate,
Your icy breath on my neck,
You are my white corpse,
Unmoving but rhythmically moved,
You, hooded eyes closed,
Splayed motionless
In my stiff assault,
Say, teach, nothing,
Maw of frozen teeth,
Plume of breath,
Nothing happens,
Just your void of no
As I heave and push
In this cold night.
Nothing remains
But your name
Which I confuse
With others
But persist
In parched
Sucklessness.

In this carcass night
Of mangled limb
Breath on cold breath
In twisted form
Your form
Of shut-eyed
Eyeless legs
Pole stretched meat
Dry and bloodless
Inaudible scream
Of penetrative silence
In a rip
Of ejaculative exhaustion,
Empty mimicry
You are no further.

A spider hauls itself
Across the wall
In front of me
As I seize, I seize on
A fingered vision
Of a wet girl entranced
And stops
At the damp spot
Just beneath our picture

Where we smile our smiles
Above peeling paper
And your white face breathes
Clouds of cold breath
Into the sliver
Of an empty moon

And stops
As if to take this in:
A mesomorph at love
With a body
White as a vault
Twisted as a crab
In this night of cold light,
And regard with ease
This spectacle
Of sleet
On crimson sheets
And frostbitten eyes
Of lunar fixation.

I lose my grip at the stare,
Frank stare of this
Intruder of damp
Saying everything
And fall out of you
Fall on;
Away
Turn aside,
But regard my deliberative
Monster of wet
As he penetrates
Another fold
Of peeling paper.

ALICE IN THE LOOKING GLASS

You had the impression that the eye doesn't see,
That King Oedipus had one eye too many perhaps,
That the scabrous paternal slaughter on a road,
Rough sword intruded
And motherly penetration
Constituted a life of vision?

A nail clipped elegantly on a toilet seat,
Lips rouged and ready
Have missed the point of contact
When the look, the light, the piercing sun
Can with a quick twist
To a blazingly failing iris
Notice nothing?

And Alice digs in the garden
With a little truthful spade
Unearthing, a worm
A piece, a leg an arm an eye
Of a doll whose blue perfect
Eyes can never see?

The imprecision consists precisely in this:
Form always finds form in the formless.
When the clipped nail
Could have rent the eye
Once bluish now reddened
In a spurt of a nightclub mirror

As she blindingly twists to see the next girl
Approaching the same image of conceit
Or at least in the same place of fantastic light
And grotesque reflection of the complete truth of appearance.
Oedipus had no mirror like this.

Alice digging in the snow,
White flakes of exact inexactitude
Falling like the truth of fallen souls
Frozenly melting in the garden,
For the bits of the blind doll.

Alice digs. She looks and finds nothing.
Sees everything in a mirror where there is no image.
Just blood on bluish snow.

One eye too many, perhaps
In the vision of a wet anticipation,

The fraudulence of what is to be,
In the thumping beat of a music
That cannot be heard.

Her vomit is strangely coloured
And shaped in things she cannot have eaten.

THE EYE

All you need is an eye.

Not the I of Descartes
And other fools who never knew the difference,
Thought them the same.

No.

Just an eye that can see.

The cunt of a woman
Is an eye that can see into eternity.
Its tremulous perceptive progression
From the place of becoming
And the tortuous point of meaning

To what is.

That is the eye of seeing.

The rain falls on us all
And wets an inner sanctum
Or so men of vision tell us.

That is the secret undisclosed.

But what is hidden is the most clear:
A cunt from which we emerge.
That is the essential eye.

The legless imprecision in a fumbling night,
Focus of manic intention,
In the drench of indecision
Leads to events wanted or unwanted, unperceived.

Paul, galloping to Damascus on a horse,
To see a mistress, perhaps,
To sip the slow wine of delusion in the shadows
As her thin fingers unreason his thinking.

He never expected the fulguration on the road,
The lightning flash, the flaring truth
In his dark night of unwisdom that tells him:
That is not the way. He saw.
Or at least was made to see.

Beards grow from nowhere:
There is pointless hair in every place.
Yet another thinking master of the universe
Cries that eye is me.
The man from the fallen horse said: behold me
I now see.

But can't see that what is
Emerges from blind need.

Old men rattle change in their pockets
And think of a world beyond
In a Baghdad café of tea and clicking beads.

A woman passes, shrift, shrouded,
And hides the eye that causes all.

She looks on, but swiftly,
Her secret unhidden,
With the knowing
Of what must be.

She is the one with the eye,
That calm eye around which
The fury of corrugated debris and uprooted
Natural pointlessness
Collude in the blinding flash
Of a fallen horse.

That's all she needs,

And sees all.

GHOST

If one day I have to go
I will leave my painting
Behind.

The one that holds your vision.
You know the one,
The still-life spilling fruit,

Nestling in your thick-eyed silence
Invading your hollow spaces
Juices of your darkness,

Sliding across your wet slit of mouth
Chiarascuro of scarlet splitting hours.

It will accompany you down damp dark days
And it will haunt you

Like Vincent's posted ear.

ECHTERNACH DANCE

There the shape of times a leap, a jump, a twist,
Eyes shining in the rain that pours
For an advent of seed become flower

But dead past alive, clings, and
Winters round the thin ice of now.

Saint Vitus must have known of this,
The dance of the damned,
The choreographed leap
Of pointless progression
When there is no progression at all.

Just a leap, a bound, on cobbled streets,
A pilgrimage of fools,
As a band plays a tuneless tune
And the jumping crowd,
Solemn in their devotion,

Dance towards the grave
Of someone who never lived.
Like a thrush on a lawn,
Hopping about for a worm heard in the earth,
Beaked head to the ground, pecking about,
With a memory of muscular fever
That could never be remembrance.

To be is just to act.
The dancer is the dance
And the dance is the torment
Of a trapped soul
Clapping its hands.

WAGHI WIGMAN

(Papua New Guinea Highlands)

A prismatic fracture
As the light shafts through
The hole of his nose
In the drifting dust
Of a room.

In abstract discussion
His blood-black eyes
A stone age away
To yesterday,

His tie adjusted,
He talks of policy
And the necessity
For implementation,
The need for advance.

Yesterday his nose held a bone.

He agrees that recommendations
Should be adopted,
To ensure that budgetary limitations
Should be no constraint to
Efforts being made
For regional development.

Yesterday Yako
Held and used a bow and arrow.

He hopes that suggestions
Be noted in the minutes
So that there should be no delay
And no waning of commitment
In ensuring that the measures
Be carried out.

Yesterday he killed a man for a pig
A question of honour
Im ples blong carri leg turnim head.

Therefore any further recommendations
Should reach the committee
Before the 10th inst.
With the appropriate emendations

Yesterday Yako –

The mind of the tribe is like madness
From which arises strange things -
Caked in mud and the feather
Of the paradise bird.

And so after grumbling agreement
Meeting declared closed,

Rose up and seized,
In heat and sweat and dirt
Those instruments,
Stone axe and bow,
As plumed men bayed,
His sister bloodily betrayed,

Rose up -

And adjourned any further discussion
Until the next meeting -

When he applied red and ochre mud
And demanded compensation
That was appropriate
To the outrage,
A pig, which they refused.

To see off these men
In the pink dawn of smokewood,
These men in suits,
The howling and stamping
Of caked warriors
For a meeting
In the round
To make a decision,
To avenge

And Yako, in the falling silence,
Declares war on betrayers
And thinks of tomorrow's meeting,
And in the keening, screaming agreement
To his proposal in an eternity of minutes
Leads his muddy warriors,
Dancing and banging,
To revenge.

Strange mud and leathered land
Giving birth to names,
Chimbu, Tari, Huru, Sepik
Mad river idols
Of the cassowary bone,
Of killers in bark cloaks
With red spilling mouths
Staring and dancing in fire
And here, Waghi Valley blear,
Blood charged with the
Grievance of generations

Tearing up a mountain in mist
Sees men descending
With equal howl and outrage
To defend their scraps, women, pigs,
His heart throbbing with lust,
He sees one, takes aim,
Big bow straining,
Lets fly
And hears screams and flees.

A day's vengeance is done,
Tomorrow's stuff is yet to come.
A scrape, a wash,

A shirt, a tie,
The bus is there
And blood released

His grateful sister says farewell
Weeping tears of teeth,
Yako, bone-extracted,
Wig undone,
Pandanus leaves stripped,
Steps on the bus,
The splitting hour,
Endless hour,
Time without time,
Has arrived.

Minutes have to be entered.

MUST

I grip you in my pincer embrace
Crabtormented I mount you
And wearily, condemned to mount you,
I regard you with crustacean imbecility.

There is no wish only Must
And uncracked skull of libidinous compulsion
I move mysteriously sideways
Out of the vision of your heart.

ARAB SISTERS

The Arab sisters talk on the telephone,
Speech like cracked ice on a blown wind
And fabulous comprehension,
With the laughter of little waves
Spilling on a shore.

Family, smallness, talk about things
That matter, do not matter,
Big things, the price of Always, Drecht, condoms,
Where to buy them.

High-pitched voices in excitement
About a life of nothing in particular
Yet everything except
Wanting to be with what is.

I want a life like that.
I am stuck in a traffic-jam of nonsense
Leading, ridiculously, and slowly
To no particular conclusion,
To no special destination.
Because there is none.

This woman opens her legs to me,
I cannot say what the motivation is,
Except that she wants what I cannot understand
And I cannot understand what I am supposed to give.

Camels copulate, although how I don't know
And she will have seen them in their blind sexual madness
Except to be astonished yet not astonished
By copulative madness in the sand

Which is carried across to the bed of heat and dark
And sweat of effortless effort
When in a conclusion of tremulous rhythmic penetration
There is a feeling that it's fake. But it's not
I am.

That's when truth emerges:
A huge mass of her hair
Occludes my smallness.
My particular untruth is
When I did this thing with women
Of smaller minds
And I finally understand something:

There is a man who took my penis
Into my mouth,
Me understanding nothing,
And I loved and loathed it.

The Muslim woman does the same:
Except that there is a divinity attached,
A purpose for devotion.

Who can divine a soul unclasping itself,
A couple of Arab sisters talking,
Except that
There is something unsaid
Because it cannot be said?

I am close, unclose to Arabs,
Certainly my Arab woman.
She means nothing to me:

A dark recollection of approach,
A peach, a date, a luscious fruit in any case,
Presented to me for no reason,

Came to be with me
In the slight dark of a scimitar moon
When in sliding naked interest
Sand and camel copulation
Blinded my eyes.

When I hear the Arab sisters talk
I am in a world without a world.

POETRY ONLY LOVE

In the deepening shades,
In the lengthening shadows
Of the gloaming,
A footfall, a whisper,
A homing crow,

Poetry only.

In the beseeching hour,
In the blossoming silence
Of twilight,
A prayer, a sigh,
A sleeping child,

Love only

In the pall of the grave
In the twist of the moon,
Of tormented earth,
A worm turns,
A leaf curls, falls,

Poetry only

In the heart of a girl
On the breath of a child
In the shining rain
Lips of roses,
Lies of hope,

Love only.

In the refuge of life,
An oasis of fruit
Out of the blast,
The grape pushes
In canticles of word,
Drenched thought,

Poetry only

There's the path,
Through jungles where
Everything tears loose
Where we open
To dreams drenched

In yes, no

Poetry lonely,

Where chrystalline shapes
Of future grow
Up to gates
Of adamantine refusal
When flames melt reason

Love lonely,

Earth closes itself,
Its song's cadence,
World disposes itself,
Its word withdrawn,
In enveloping night

Poetry lonely,

Love lonely,

Poetry only love.

THE SWIMMER

Out from the shallows further
Slapping and slashing
Monstrous seaweed slewing toward,
Muck brown on green,
Sky crouched over,
Clouds slipping past a milky sun
Here am I, slow stroke,
I am,
Breathing the briny
Easy rhythm,
Whiteskinlicked on foam
Rock upon barnacled rock.
Scum gathering drifts on
Breakwater sludged,
Rat sewered crevice
Of appalling regard
But ease of distancing
My eyes saltburnt,
Stroke upon stroke
In measured control
Of calamitous thought
In breath then breath
Of beat of ease of calm

Now a tug,
A gulp and I gulp,
That's what?
I, what's that, I,
Gulp, mouthsfull
Go under legtwisted
Up again,
And gulp,
Bitter water,
See a fogshrouded ship
In the murk
And wave
And hear a sorrow
A distant horn
But look and feel

I seize
I breathe
A rat looks on
With eyes of
Limpid loathing
And I appeal to
Fellowcreature

As I am swept,
Fatbellied slithering,
Am swept
And down I look
And I come up
To seaweed

And the rat still looks
With the hatred
Of the damned
I am swept
Past rocks,
Out, out,
So that's it,
This occlusion,
This oblivious salt
I am swept
My mammy says,
In blazing love,
Swept
My mammy says never
There's the steaming ship
The whiskered rat
Never go swimming
Furling steam
Is it smoke?
Never
Scurries off in triumph
After eating
Past wall,
Red lighthouse
And look now
Is that it?

Wave on wave
And sink
Drift away and under
Past this, that,

I forget,
Past anyway,
Rat past
Seaweedgone
Mammypast,
I am suckled,
I sucked
There I was,
Where was I?
Where?
There anyway,

Away,

Away

THE ROCK

I placed a rock on a traintrack once
A hard thing, unbitten,
Yielded up from softness, in roaring heat
And cold rain
In this smithy of earth,
Forged from spuming elements
Unleashed on the first day
When the almighty blacksmith
Laughed at his steaming cataclysm

Hurled from which
This grey and intractable nut of earth
Landed harmlessly
Here, just here,
To occupy just this space
In its timelessness
On this blessed island,
And so true a rock,
On and from whose kind
Great things were built,
Churches, Cathedrals, Vaults,
A truly declamatory Pierre
Of luminous lineage,
Appeared,
And in its unanimity
Bringing the word
Like no other rock
On earth,
Not the sand nor mud
Of other claimant places,
But the unmovable foundation,
The intractable solidity
Of Veritatis Splendor.

So I placed it on the shiny track
And listened intently,
My ear to cold steel,
For a rush, a rhythm
Of clattering train,
And in no time,
No time at all,
I heard this crescendo

Of metallic growling
Then I saw this bloom
And heard the ghostly train
So I scrambled down,

Out of harm's reach
To watch
At the embankment wall
As this galloping monster,
Careering carriages in its wake,
Rushed, eyeless and heedless,
Towards my rock

I picked a scab
Then peered, astonished,
Up through the bracken, shards,
Over the buckled bicycle wheel
And tins and ort,
As the earth shook
Then trembled at the approach

Then again a screech of whistle
And clouds of steam
In the uproar
I stuffed my hands to my ears
Squeezed my eyes closed
And lived my brief life
In this cataclysmic clatter

I undid myself to watch
The billowing crusher
Snaking away
And I crept up, in a filling silence,
To check my rock

Wisps of trailing breeze
Lofted puff
Like gnats on a wind
And traces of powder remained,
Fake as makeup
I wet my finger.
Touched this warm dust.

So much undone,
Creation itself
Pulverized monasteries,
Blazing cathedrals,
In the mechanical clatter
Of advance

WOMAN ON FIRE

This gravel of memory,
Crunching in flashes of
Stony road images
Of a woman, hair on fire,
Her house engulfed,
Leaping from a window
To a pavement of onlookers,
Helpless with imbecility
At her featherlike landing,
A soft impression on concrete
A puzzling twist of limbs
In a crinoline formality
Of dressed disintegration
Legs, arms, concocted
Into a postmodernist spillage
On a footpath canvas

And just a lipsticked mouth
Of resigned O
An acceptance of
Neighbourly limitations,
Their forgetfulness,
Probably their astonishment
At a new event
Crashing through their lives
Onto a bleeding street
And they turn away
In mute wonder,
At themselves .

Or so I recall.

LA VIE CONJUGALE

(Roger de La Fresnaye 1885 – 1925)

By moonlight a ghost crossed my heart
And I bleed against your thorn
Knowing you are almost immortal
In your suit of abandoned thoughts
And disposition of mute exhaustion

Staring out past your dropped journal
In a whorl of smoky dereliction
Caged in a crushed velvet chair
Of polished oak
To a time of static dilemma

Your scattered books
Betray empty intelligence
And skinned ease of animal intensity
Your lips a succulent invitation
To a future of fog and dissolution

As though your stapled soul
Had come undone
And was already wreathing
From your mortal shanks
Like steam off a pot.

Uproar of pineal separation
You are not undone but fading
In this peeling of present
Which is just the irritation
Of what cannot be.

The river flows
And is never the same
And your faltering steps
Unfoot you as you are
Sweeping away to a sea
Of sorrowful bells.

I hold your arm in this rush
But your kiss poisons me
Your frozen love despoils me
Leaves me vacant like a cold pond
In winter's wind

But I want penetrating ghost of night,

Thick heat of summer,
When the damp heaviness of mortal moment
Rises and shoves within
To a groaning conclusion of now.

Desert of past,
Arctic of future,
Seas of waste,
Are best left to men.

Dying thinkers in dinner suits
Are blank to the unfelt of what is.

So where is that summer of lavender,
Where the ebb tide's miracles?
The giver ungives, unpromises,
And lies between my legs, vanquished,
Like a slowly burrowing
Slug.

GIRL IN ATHENS

Sad Acropolis wraiths
Sigh like priests over an immemorial sea of puzzles.

In the cracked light
Stands a girl,
Arched hips in skinny skirt eyeing a camera,

The disintegrating temple as a backdrop.

King Oedipus saw too much, perhaps,
But there is no look more Ancient and Greater than hers,
This smiling girl luscious with waiting

And the old siren eyes of a child
Laugh at the silly antics of the ancient Greeks.

SEA CHANGE

Casting off that morning
The farouche sea swollen
With sullen menace
But when the early sun cast its gilt,
Poured its radiance
Over world's thick lids,
Ocean oozed into emerald brilliance
And souging breeze
Sucked our little boat ahead

In sprays of glistening laughter
You curled yourself around me
Under a sky blooming with cloud
And kissed my depths with liquid longing
Surge swelled as my pink sails filled
In your ambrosial breath
And we swished softly forward
In the limpid blue

But you had your eyes on
A growing swell
When the sails flapped dead
And cracked in breathless air
Clouds of birds
Chattered on the slick waste
And dived and flew and dived
In a feast of forthcoming,
For every creature, except me,
Knew of the storm.

The sky cracked and sea rose
In fulminations of spite
As you uncoiled yourself,
Unroped yourself
From my twisted rigging
And slipped away,
In seas of mountainous foam,
For consolations of the drowned

MY WIFE SMOKING

My wife has a cigarette
Which she lunges at with succulent incuriosity
And sucks like the last breath
And squeezes
Smoke, breathes evaporative ash
Into coaled cavities,
Out of this fragile pencil

She looks at me with curious disdain
As she volcanically exudes
Her pleasure
In frail sticks of internal combustion,
Frank bleak look
Of avaricious clarity
Clouds of displeasure enshroud
Her gunshot eyes

As she waits,
Thin fingers clasping this fragile thing,
Erect on her chair,
Not waiting, howling,
Wreathed in smoke
For a movement, a motion
A twist to calm, unclasp

Her face pale with ease
As she eats this thing
With thick pink lips
And exudes a mist,
A want
Of legless imprecision
In her look

It burns near to a close
Of cinders and butt
In a thin hand, sharp fingers
Of longing
Flick, spill the ash
Lips pouting sucking
Ready for the next draw

IRISH WOMAN

She inhabits a space of dark declamation,
Of inhibited night shelter
Where there is a prevalent no.

Infested with refusal and grief
She weeps the sighs of white trees
Moaning in ceaseless gales

Dark compulsion reigns
In cusped planets
Of frozen obligation

Grown big with weeping
Her ice blossoms in baskets
Of blown weightlessness

She orbits in loveliness in vain,
Eternities of sombre clarity
In washing winds of imprecision

Time is a grave of feeling where
She is interred
And in the empty coldness

She digs through bloody density
To wrench my heart
From the misery of unbecoming light

There is no reason but unreason
In a human failure
Where inexactitude once gaily reigned
When imprecision was joyous
And knowledge was a poison.

Now she turns away from me half-clothed
With a cold sweaty back
And sighs the sigh of
The sadness
Of a want that doesn't want.

THE ROAD

That's the road I take
To go to the place I don't know
This one not the other
With the tree on the slope

And the verge of pebbles
With shoots of weed
A thistle or two
And the Devil's bread and cheese

That curls towards the moon
When mist falls
And rivulets of drought
Seep through the dust

And I with my dark spaces
Serry there
On the right
So there is no confusion

As to my intention
When I wind forth
On this path
That leads to places

That I can't imagine
Nor care about
Nor understand
For the road is all I know

No overtaking here
Just a slow pace
Raggedly conducted
Over cobbles and shards

This shrivelled strip
Of walkway where
Feet fall and fall
To shove forth

And ever forth
To places of
Unimaginable density
Which are not there

Because there is no
There

That is no beyond
Nothing I don't see

Nor seize,
Nor get sick about
For all is
This shingled road

That compels me,
Drives me
Towards always towards
Looking always forward

To what is not
To nothing in particular
To nothing at all
But that's all there is

Except the slivered moon
That lights the way
And blazons this path
Through heath

And gorse
Of tumbling confusion
Where insects beat tessellated tracks
Through pebbles and roots and merds

But I plod this stony road
With the dire precision of the blind
And this ribboned arrow
Points me to where I've been

LUNCH AT LA CAVE

(Le Déjeuner, Pierre-August Renoir)

His small brown eyes leap, old beguiler,
At his wife erect at table,
Calm apprehensive woman of two minds,
Mouths of one effulgent silence.

He divines her over rouge maison
Pate cheese and blessed bread
And she blushes in slow submission
To the gnarled creeping ivy of - love?

The yellow afternoon is filled
With mute clinking and whispers,
And shafts of dusty light
Dance on blue peeling walls.

The waiter wisps through,
Café? Dessert? smiling through
A frond of clenched moustache,
In a swift twist shuffling off.

They quaff eternity
And it spills into a glance
Of frightful evanescence,
Pichet of wine become evaporation.

Both cling without clinging
To the taste of this momentary lunch,
To the doomed bud,
In the drift of insistent passing

Knowing that all will be lost
In an instant between this
Entrée of birth
And digestif of death.

Eyes shine a sudden shower of rain
In the intense Spring of love
But soon shoots of green
Will be scythed down,

Soon all will be cleared away,
Addition called for,
Soon the waiter in
Whitewristed loathing

Will twist his cuff,
Smile the pale eyes,
The thin lips
Of the knowing,

And see
That the vanquished are broke
In the gourmet banquet
Of love's final reckoning.

PALE SUN

When scraps of ice
And snow remain,
Shreds of rotted lace
Scattered around
Still sleeping fields
Soporific as a sermon
In an empty church,

Your passion for me seeps away and
Ever so slowly
Melts,
Defiant, though, in its steady disintegration
As if it might harden afresh
In an unseasonal shower of snow,

Chrysalis grown again in a new pale
Winter sun.

But cold shadows grow warm and stretch
And take shape in new songs of earth.

In the harlequin of your Spring
Sprouts a silvery blade of grass,
An unseen flower.

A pigeon hoots in a stripped wood:
Slow awakening for a new furious assault
On what is not yet bloomed.

But I find myself losing form
In your yawning warmth
As you stretch and glow
In another loveless morning.

I resolve myself into odd, frigid pieces,
Bits of thawing slush.

I mouth exhalations through cracked blue lips,
Final instruments of muted moans
On a frozen wind
Heavy with Winter's silence.

Love has left and swept away
Like a breeze on a cold, cropped field
Of an unripened plant that once was.

MORNING ON A BUS

(Jerusalem)

A drifting silence rains down
Over screaming battalions
And frontline martyrs of Jehovah
Setting the Judgement day device
To tick a ripped future
Of tangled bloody conclusion
Into stockinged schoolgirls

Waist-strapped detonation
Of tomorrow sweet with longing,
Of laughter on a bus,
Swells in a carnation flame
Of furious loathing
For a girlsmile.

Sextime explosive of innocence
Hurling shards of debris
In the astonished silent sky
Of abandoned birdsong
Where nesting hopes
Are roasted in the fire of morning.

Charred bits spill down
On a market stall,
Drifting in the silence
Of ritual incomprehension,
A mist of blood
On the heads of vendors

Sick with wonder at this heavenly miracle,
This latest miraculous creation,
Disarticulation of the born,
Rendering mute the song
Of Earth's axis,
For a real purpose

Look: here's a hand that shows a way.
Still a little ring.
A Sistine finger of creation
Could not point like this one,
Touching the Almighty's,
Almost,
In the vaulted chapel of hell.

BREEZE

This breeze won't cease:
it whistles through every mortal thing,
shaking solid branches, shuffling leaves,
shoving clouds
Across an otherwise still sky.

Meadows yield to this brisk impertinence
as lush upright thickets of green
bow in grey defeated deference
to this swift intangible master

Sweeping its invisible fingered softness
through static cobwebs of rigidity,
shaking the life into fixtures
of indomitable inflexibility.

All cower beneath a breath of nothing,
Seizure of earth turning,
a wisp of space in motion:
all rooted things bend to unrooted presence.

A slight, uninvited, invisible song
shifts nature's things, opens them up,
seduces them in the tremulous melody
of a child's sweet breathing.

A new idea cascades
and whistles through the ruins of decision
on abandoned islands
And shocks these desiccated stones
Into the dust of a new life.

A yet unspuncobweb of conviction unravels
In the blast of a new thought,
unspinning, disintegrating,
scattering before a developing gale

But how evanescent the breeze,
Swiftly leaving what it touches
Coursing away to new adventures
In developing, ceaselessly,
leaving us windlessness,
In loss.

IDEAS

The moon invades
As moons do,
Spilling cool light
Into bat-infested thinking -

a yellow stare
Into craggy worlds.

No sparkling intuition this,
No fulguration of delight,
No leap of recognition:

Just slowcold illumination
Of caves
Slick with suppuration
Of verminous thoughts.

Placid revelation
Of sightless flapping.

Diseased ideas contending,
Hanging upside down.

The still moon
Reveals these
Sightless grotesques

That like Oedipus
In seeing nothing,
See too much

And, in her fecund clarity,
She multiplies them,
Tempting them into a half-light,
At the back of the cave

Where blindness is clarity.

INRI

I may not to go to church,
But my unmarbled altars are strung between masts
In lancing rain, groaning gales,
Roped around sticks as thin as the unrisen Christ
And She kneeling before Him.

I commune there in lightning and
My tongue reaches, stretches
Out at the rails to
Wafers of such transparent whiteness,
My lips to salt wine,
That I pray for a sign, a star, a floating tern on the gale,
To usher this smallest ship, Oh My Father
To tabernacular port
And I see her smile,
And steer,
In scorching sleet

My tar-black halyard hands,
Crusted red with torment and redemption,
Stretch out on the cross-tree
Towards certain salvation,
As she sweetens my feet
With innocent damnation.

But it's her billowing shrouds that astonish
Profane eyes fixed on just body and blood,
Strange elegant captain
Of my life without life,
Wake without wake,
Commanding in the softest, knowing whisper,
In her furious knowledge:

Greater than Yours.

In Nomine Matre, Ecce Homo,
On this white waste of world,
Guiding me gently,
With lighthouse eyes of deception
Towards the sleek crucifying rocks
Of salvation's tomb.

MEMORY OF KNITTING WOMEN

Memory is an act of will:
Unchanging of the swinging damned
From the shadow of a place
Where those knitting women ungather
Folding cold wool
In a communication of soft discretion,
Whispering breaths
In visages of wrinkled surprise.

They still sough in formlessness,
Though scent persists
To show the bloodblack
Eyes of wintering pleasure
And precise splitting
Of arterial pain
In the imprecise confluence
Of my recollection

The half-pain of regret
For these murmuring creatures
Is but a sting in the sinuous
Shadow of the
Twisting of necks
At the block.
Denser and denser
The fog of recall
But it is no purling of blindness.

Dangling sacks I know
Not needling pleasure:
I remember those who gave,
The bread they were given,
Not the garment fabricators
And their faint, fatal smiles.

AWAKENING

What a laugh the setting sun
Prescient in the notion that
It will flame, inexorably,
In a morning of damp eyes,
Squinting in a weeping light.

Coughing at the curse of awakening
Cacophonous birds in full cry,
Trees, leaves,
Geranium potplants
Twisting upwards in witless confusion.

Rise, rise - the infernal order
Get up and do, move,
Dead mother resurrected
Sprung from disintegration
To command afresh

But when I unrip myself from
Mummified shroud
And unzip my skin
I peel off generations
Of exigency.

Spill myself out of a bloodied bed
Of hot infestation.

Dayward I climb
Into lightshowering
Nightmare release.
And know that

She and day collide in a conspiratorial fulmination

While my smiling wife, in the kitchen,
Makes toast and tea.

HEART

"Keep your heart with all diligence
For out of it are all the issues of life." (Martin Heidegger., Rötesbuckweg, 47)

Seas and seas
And tedious circumnavigation
Of endless passage
Under white suns of dayless days
Through silence,
Fulminating seed
And stillness without rest.

Keep it through
Mythic days of painted skies,
Streaming golden hair,
Songs of lovegrass and leaf
And declamatory landscapes
Of stained imagination.

Keep it through
Nights of want and waste
When tremulous need seeps through
Sheets of diseased release
In spilled generations
Tossed in the maelstrom
Of mute exhaustion.

Keep your heart with what matters:
The eyes of a dog, a horse
We blossom the blind man's song.
There's a squashed face squeezing through
To a new sinuous beckoning
Of the mustcall
And weary heart
Springs again.

EXPUNGENCE

A smell peels through cracked ceiling,
Planked oak floors.
Rank effusion from sinks and troughs
And places of vile repudiation.
A presence without source
And me in fretful search.

Inevitable decomposition but of what?
Seeping through walls
Filling spaces meant for habitation.
Pestilential rot whorls
Intractably through the senseworld
In ratsbreath suppuration.

In dank sheets I drift
On waves of this suffusion
And ghost through poisoned marshes
In mists of putrefaction
Where crabbed branches
Claw the vomitous sky.

By morning this hellish vapour
Has waited,
Leaving a trace,
Faintest clue.

As the earth rose up
To bury wounds of memory
A sickly sweet past diffused
In a delusive now
That held the promise
Of perfumed pandemonium.

PULSE

There is a pulse of demand,
A throbbing of veins we call life,
Bits of us strained, pumping,
Bursting to exigency
Nervends of twisting confusion
Gnarled in the silence of lost intelligence.

Cleareyed athlete
Foot exactly on the line
Expulses the nerve of precision
Hurling towards a muscular time
Of deadends and
World records.

Is this where we reveal what we are?
I counted the moments of night in my hands
Leaping over hurdles of imprecision
Pounding round tormented bends,
Crashing through unclocked thoughts,
Smashing nerves of scythed seconds
In the petty pace
Of sweaty perpetuity.

FLASH OF LIFE

A flash a flame
Shrapnelled into twisted tin bits
Hurling through pitiless spotlight dark
Into soft yielding dancers
Hammered by hot unwitting nails
For a reason

There is more than one reason to be crucified:
Just to be,
To live the tangle of nervends
That men still call life,
To be kissed, simply, in a garden, a park,
Is to have a use:
Thirty pieces annealed
Into coppery extinction.

But there's the modern gift:
No long haul up Calvary hills
Past howling multitudes.
No thorns, whips,
Spitted loathing.

Just swift gutted extinction
In the delightful surprise of
A firecracker sound of explosive
Carnation of flame.

MASTERY

Yeats paced the stone floor of a Tuscany evening,
White suit immaculate, uncrumpled,
Flair brilliant, fingers clasped:
Cool reflective ghost in expensive rags,
An elegant stick.

Swallows, he said, or rather intoned,
Swallows again, a voice of urgent whispering
Then Swallows, Swallows, Swallows,
Though there were none to be seen
In the creamy cool light.

Master, I said, Master,
Wherefore your mysterious repetition?
He stopped dead
Looked at me like a goldfish
In a watery trance

From out his furious gyre
And I felt ashamed,
I felt small,
Beneath the foot of Olympian revelation,
That I should so interrupt.

Early in the evening a man, he said,
And again he paced,
And again I was entranced
For the mystery of his words,
Trailing like clouds of dreams

Filled me with wonder
And I crouched in the shadow of my corner,
I hid out of harm's way,
As the Master paced in the light
Of this blazing afternoon.

My heart leapt at every utterance,
Every breath,
The Annunciation,
Almost the Word,
No The Word.

Spirits, he said with sybilant softness
And I said Oh Master, here in the House of Being,
As if a transcendental fulguration from the gods
Were to rouse me from my ecstatic sloth
And split me in a Damascene flash.

He turned to me, shining and abrupt,
Wrathful lion of the speech desert,
And roared oracularly,
But desolate with failure,

Early in the evening a man swallows spirits.

ORNITHOPTERA

He stalks the garden with his net
Walking,
In the wet silence of a jungle clearing,
As if between landmines,
And the heavy hibiscus
Explodes from towering bushes
Sick with green effusion.

A giant birdwing flaps at a flower
And sips the sweet marrow,
A tropical albatross of green and gold
Hovering in the sick wet air,
Earth nauseous with profusion
In the shrill beetle clamour
Of a hot forest gloom.

Proboscis glued to pistil
He drains sweet stickysucculence
From the flower,
Wide open in
Effulgent pink submission
Dreamily yielding
To this glorious golden stranger.

He flaps back and forth
And in and out
Proboscis thickening and shifting
Reaching the darkest depths
Of the screaming hibiscus

Suffering the rapture
Of the heavy-winged invader

Shaking like an ecstatic Bernadette
Under the flapping enormity
Of the Archangel Michael
In the throes of golden gracegiving.
And the shadow of the stalking man grows
In the suspiration
Of a late tropical evening.

But the birdwing knows when night is night
And even in his lubricious frenzy
He withdraws his sticky member
And flees through the backlanes of the thick bush
As the net comes crashing down on
The panting flower

Smashing it to pieces on the grass.

LINEAR THOUGHTS

I don't understand your line of thought he said.
Well I replied with asthmatic hesitation
It's rather simple,
A more or less straight trajectory
Drawn between two, what shall I say? ideas.
Not exactly a Great Circle route
But one that takes in a few sparkling islands on the way,
As the crow,
Tossed through the thrill of cross currents, flies,
Her eye not quite on the nest
A syllogistic impulse
That finds the rush to conclusion
Rather vulgar.
Thought rhapsodically quickened by pulse.

I've stitched in more premises
So as not to arrive too unshocked at the idea that
Socrates is a man.

MINUET

Through an oak door, ajar, Mozart.
The minuet seeps around corners, sinuously,
Fainting, falling cadences
Drift, matured, through cracks of wood
A small solemn pianist labours inside,
Spilling sounds
Into the dark hallway.
A falter on a trill, maybe,
But still the silvery cascade
Rushes thrillingly through the dark,
Filling, through a smashed sluice,
The empty, hungry space.

CANTICLE

Your eyes that rage for silent stars
Still dark pools longing for light
Seek crystalline signs
In shadows of the eclipse

I saw you being led to the garden gates
Stillborn smile on your lips
You want and you want but no
Just invisible light of black ice.

Laughter has cracked
Gleaming has dulled
Now only grains of dust
In a recess of crumbling rock

Your dry estuary face
Tells of silvery rivers
Long flown and gone
Amid juices now encrusted

Winds blown from meteors
Frozen in shattering emptiness
Shape your face
Into an ecstasy of want

Flesh become dry stone
Shuddering parched womb
In deepening night
Shrivelling day
The star extinguishing shadow
Lengthens in the luscious garden
Where others squeeze heavy fruit
In sickening naked light

And slide in stiff nipples ease
Into drenched caverns
Of bleak glorious wonder
In constellations of fierce glances.

You want but you know:
Blood turns black and slow
And azure eyes once bright
Turn dully towards snuffed stars of night.

THE ISLAND

let us go the island.
lamenting gulls tear at the
unrelenting black sky
in soft-feathered ferocity
their screams spilling
over sinking buoys
in this heaving waste

there is no one there
just the encrusted
droppings of generations
blown smooth by winds
screaming out of mouths
in a songless music
of spray and spume

bobbing on crests
of mountainous menace
a wake is spun like thread
woven
from a past
of shattering memory
as we go there

that is our place
of white silence
shining from out mist
in tumultuous rain
sombre shape
glinting in a crescent moon
of sick desire

my bellying sails
drive me into furious valleys
of shark black seas
crowded with dead
damned generations
eyebright with fury
at our straight track

I chart a blind course
through gaping rock
and rasping foam
but in the sudden eye of
silence we are lost
and a shining shape
recedes in our wake

we have missed the island
and ploughing through starless night I
look back with open mouth of grief,
surge on black surf
towards edge
of solitary end

THE SWEATER

I knitted a mouth from your pubic hair,
A sensuous fluffy gash
That in silent wet opening
Would hold my stiff rage
And drink my inundation
Of ejaculative fury.

With penetrative needles of deceit
I purled and wove
A pattern of fabulous intensity,
Lips of luscious exactitude,
In precise replication
Of labial allure.

But in the dense ooze of night,
In the moaning delirium of the giver,
As I pulled back the hood of my creation,
You unravelled in front of me

And resolved yourself into
Cold coarse dry wool.

THE BADGER

I brushed against a badger at dawn,
Or so it seemed: a shuft across my leg

As I was casting in the cold clear lake
For the speckled trout, in bliss

A wispy suspiration on the shore
Against my skin, evanescent hush of busy friend

Shuffling solemnly but swiftly about me
In search of sure branch and stick.

Then dream and truth m lange:
Mystery of imaged world

Is poisoned by wretched fact of what is
And sensuous delusion is destroyed.

When my eyes shot open in the dark
My transportation was complete:

Broad blessed dawn turned into night
And rivulets of sweat trickled down my chest

A mouse? A rat? had scuttled across my leg
Me in my damp nakedness in this place

The upheaval of a tropical night
Where a trout is but a silent frozen image.

Night blackens all and I could neither
Hear nor see, bolt upright, peering about,

From the cover of my moist sheets,
This hellish furry thing

Invading already invaded night,
Slithering, snuffling about unseen

And gnawing into my dreams
Of trembling other places

Yet he was there, I know
For I felt his blood surge with fear and daring

Pumping through his stick-boned frame,
As he regarded me with fury

Through yellow eyes, pinheads of hate
For me - stertorous smooth-wet monster -

Trembling and dreamily moaning
In the malodorous dark of his place.

Maybe there was more than one, I thought,
An infestation of fat-bellied magnitude

Swarming in copulative zest
About the darkness of my house

Screeching and beseeching
In undulating contention

Mindless and driven,
A sinister exigency of pointlessness.

But as I waited for a sign
A sound, a scratch, to indicate

That he or they were there
I only heard the silent heaviness of night

Spilling like a fog into my room
And I reclined and waded back into my dream

Or so I thought
But all I found was a thick multitude

Of heaving badgers upon my shore
Ripping at my lips my tongue my mouth,

Scuttling away with bits,
To nests of putrifacious destruction

While my glasseyed trout skidded off
In cold empty wordlessness

Mouthing in the shallow dark,
As I wetly slept a sleep.

Badgers don't swim.

THE BOATMAN

I opened my eyes
And darkness,
Canny shroud of life,
Fell.

I looked about
And saw the sad impatient boatman
Waiting for me
At the oozing river,

A grey shape
In the black rain that poured
From the eyes of Time a
Beckoning at the bankless flood.

I walked on crumbling signstones
And he waited to take me across
To the curses of damned generations
Mouthed in hollow fury.

He gently helped me,
Even gave me a sack and some ashes,
And I closed my jaded eyes
In this night of dark discovery.

DIE HUTTE (The Hut): TODNAUBERG, BLACK FOREST

(Martin Heidegger 1889 - 1976)

Across the sward I see it,
Concealed, almost,
Through this black forest
Of battalions of pines,
Static divisions,
Being without time,
In marchless precision
Rooted in abject determination.

There it is, the sign,
Needled in floral insularity
Windowglinting
In the Death Now hills
Through shadows of crisp gloom,
Heathacre timberstatement
In high scented moors.

There the clearing,
Sweep of light
On precipitous slope,
In the eyebright vista:
There the hammered dwelling
In the fissure
Of illumination.

See the house of the Thinker,
The enclosure in the wild,
A planked human space
In the gaze of fleeing gods,
Holding out against
The ravages
Of forgetfulness and loss.

And there the well,
Drunk from, in homage
To the Ancients,
In thirst
Of longing
For the mouldering
Knowledge
Of extinction.

But the seer doesn't know,
The oracle cannot see
And in his hut, drunk with Nous,
He undeclains the word in silence

And tolls the bell in darkness

Nighfall softly snuffs a candle,
Shadows bloom like moths,
And eclipsed echoes in shapes of sleep
Dry the bones of unknowing
And glaze his levelling gaze.

LA MONTAGNE SAINTE-VICTOIRE

(Paul Cezanne 1839 - 1906)

No landscape this:
Nothing twisted into my image
Gnarled rock of repulsion
Imperturbably there
Incisor tooth on a sky of laggard blue

Solemn difference between this unsprung crab
With its creased loathing eye -
And washed alluring colours
Beckoning stippled abyss
Of what? Relaxed,
Beautiful view?

This is no pastoral, no idyll:
It is solemnity.

I can't see me there.

This scowl is a repudiation -
Or confirmation of darkness:
I cannot suffuse aqueduct, bush, field.
Where is the entrance, mirror, snapshot?
This is a rock or something,
Some stuff scattered about.

I can't see me there.

Just a canvas, daubs, thicknesses,
Shapes and colours of
Repulsions of myself.
Incommensurable Images.

Nothing at all. Not me.

SMOKE

Smoke creeps round the chimney-flutes
Like sleep, twisting, drifting in silence.
In the yellow curd of a jaundiced streetlamp
swamping the flagstones with a cowering dog bitten by fleas
Stands, under a hat, a man
Looking at a toenail moon
Casting its thin light on the slick slates
Of impossibly sliding roofs.

He is thinking nothing,
Nothing does he think
But the slow passage
Of the drifting smoke of him and her and them,
The multitude of what had been.

Behold this slow rushing flush of the same mindless river
And he knows in advance
That things remain the same
Just different in the
Flux of shapes of sleep and pointless dreams
Of him and her and them.

And forms of waking
When he stands under a hat and beholds
A slow rush of nothing in particular
Like moon and smoke and lamp,
And saunters in this nocturne
Of breath on the night
And thoughtless regard

As if in prayer for something
Missing, just missing,
Because a cloud scuds
Across the moon and then
Is gone and so the same moon again
And gulps the same air
Breathes the same breath

As the train in the night
In a decrescendo of disappearance
Sighs past in the dark
In shrouds of ochre,
And he lights up a Player's,
Scratches his nose
Sniffs the night as
Whorls of smoke,
Twisting in the milky light,
Lift like released souls
In the night
Of unforgiving final darkness

But thinks nothing,
Just lets the moon
Wash into his wintry eyes
Then shuffles on, past a heedless dog,
Hearing the train in the night
And hungers,
In the emptiness,
Under his hat,
In the yellow smoke,
For days of golden fields,
For nights of blessed dreams,
Evaporating in the morning

Like the steam off a shrill breakfast kettle.

HAMLET, THE STUDENT PRINCE

Skulls have the last laugh
In this perpetual disassemblage
Of twisted nervends,
Interminable preparation
For what has been.

I have a collection
In my bedroom
In cultivated morbidity,
Ranged and peering
In a hilarity of
Aesthetic dementia
Over my bed.

One particular one I love
Although it is the same
As all the others
I place on my desk
When I wish, like the Prince,
To think of my mother
And gaze in fatuous intensity
At the wall.

I twitch in transcendental
Pleasure when I lean
On my Critiques
And feel the ease of death
Curling like mist
About my eyes

Knowledge of death
Is a meditation
On what is.
This skull bloodily
Pressed through
A duggery mother
And dryly encompassed
Infinitude

In a sea of incestuous memory
Is my borne
Where bones dry and shine
And lift spiritless depression
To comprehension
Of broken waters.

Who is my father?

Where is the place?

This skull I love
Outrageous calm descends
In this noble presence,
Defiantly unpresent,
Clamping birth and death
Into a forceps joketime
Between delivery and execution.

THE PATH

The path that leads
Through strong-smelling wood
Sweet-sickened pines
Glowing in tenebrous battalions,
Is one he cannot choose.

He is not apprenticed in a yes
That will transport him
On highways of vertiginous delight
In drunken delirium
Where signs tell you
And thick arrows point
To crashing conclusions
Of a pointless end

Where hooded crows
Pick and flap in murmurous cloaks
Over white shattered bones
In the dark space
Of an overlooked metallic smash.

This is his place
Of rooted, screaming no and stop
Where the shadow of the wood
Grows and shrinks,
Home to eye-devouring birds.

But no dark unfolding
Like death
Embraces like a trembling lover
For a last battered bluecold kiss
In an ecstasy of decisive finality
As headlights flash heedlessly by,

Where there is no more choice
And the shaking earth
Offers its lying paths,
Its crooked beckoning fingers
Of bony false delight.

He is planted there in a
Rooted, rancid, racinated
Refusal
And all is gone
Except a once spinning wheel
In a deepening fog
Of mystifying end

RAPE

The effulgence of war brings song to their lips,
Incarnadine their pumping hearts
Swelling in the half-mast flags of drunken glory
And I tell you bloodied sister
That ripped limbs in a marketplace
Are testament to Right.

The breathless love of shattering brick,
Thumping shells and the beautiful screaming
Of enemy rats ripped apart is the delicate poetry
Of metallic chaos as God bids them drink
A black toast to a sure symphonic victory.

The drunk revenge as doors to hovels
Smashed to shards in darkness reveals,
Stenched in corners,
Huddling small hooded ones
Trembling in the thick-tongued sound
And ripped consequences for dying generations.

The assertion of right has the form of
A rancid smile through black cracked teeth
Tearing the sacred silence of a girl apart
Until daybreak she's asunder
And as the sated ones with mouths of wood
Prepare to leave

A shot, a crack, jellies walls with brain and bone
And there slumps a tiny hooded child already bloodied
In the miasma of seminanted splintered night.
Crunch of heavy boots my sister
Stamp the just deed as done.

No stars grow for this lost country where they dig and they dig
In a world-blind, wide-eyed frenzy
Of blood red plum brandy
Which cascades through righteous shivering night.

THE GIFT

I am handing back your mean gifts
Your stone-cold gifts your kisses of cracked lips
Your filmy stare as dry as a mounted moth
Shrivelled on a pin.

Take back these gifts, terrible gifts
Of broken stone and dust
Wrapped in gay ribbons of deceit
And tinsel of miserable delusion.

Here are these gifts these useless things
Your fingers of sand your mouth of wood
Your cold breasts and clenched fists
Your words: confetti of ice on a wind.

So here's my gift to you:
A dark horse carved from heart of oak
Laden with explosive surprise
Outside the locked gates of your fly-blown heart.

GHOST

If one day I have to go
I will leave my painting behind,
The one that holds your vision -
You know the still life spilling fruit,
Nestling in your thick-eyed silence
Invading your hollow spaces
Juices of your darkness,
Sliding across your wet slit of mouth
Chiaroscuro of scarlet splitting hours.

It will accompany you down damp chasms
And it will haunt you.

Like Vincent's posted ear.

FATHER

I watched Willy walking up the street,
Wet street
In mists of yellow lamp
Before me,
Bent, thin.

A twist of the head revealed
A smile,
A love of purpose,
Small eyes of need
Shining in the light rain
Twirling onto his hat
In the year of his demise,

And he crouching
Toward the muddy comfort of his end.

A pint? he asked
Through thin lips
Pursed on a cigarette,
And face
Wreathed in almost laughter
At life's comical unbecoming.

My arm through the arm
Of this small bird.
Silent in the night
We went to the place
Smelling of Winter and woodsmoke.

The main thing, he said.
Is not to worry.
I thought of ghostly things
Of nights, demented circles,
Twitching patterns for dreams,
And I was calmed.

I sipped and saw
The black cloak.
Buzzard face I love
You cannot go.

"You'll get used to it."
I sank. What?
"I'm gone" he said
"It's done."
I saw my darkness live

In his still-treacled eyes of ages.

Another pint.

I kissed him.

I've kissed women.
But I've never kissed -
Toothless, cracked fabulous face,
Splitting with death
Tongue in silence
And pearls of tears-

Someone like that.

INTRUSION

And just before the last fatal shot is in the net
And your wife sniffs a substance you have never known
Nor cared to ask about
While the silent multitudinous cheers
Roar into arenal spaces
Once incarnadine with the love of death,
The love of nothing

The bear walks past
Intervening in this vision of contemporary exactness,
Sniffs with his preposterous wet black snout
And procedes to the fridge
To sniff the smells of human emptiness
Where there is nothing to be found.

Your wife sounds out the steam of the iron
As she runs it over a dead blue sock
As a televisual man in a crisp black suit
Speaks in a plastic crushed bottled voice of his sporting vision.
And the inevitability of loss
In a field bloodied with wordlessness.

Here's a proposition: there is no now that is not
Its own unbecoming in the unfissuring of world.
Step into the river's own undoing
Even only once
And you're blind.

The bear, heedless of steam, socks
And the great cajolery of what hilariously counts for what is,
Lumbers, snorting, unsatisfied,
Shaking great shivering shambling coat through the back door
Into a garden and does a little dance
With Descartes' lethal Eye

Where the snow falls luscious and bleeding
From a sky black with riverrun tears
Meaning me.

WHAT WOULD I WANT A WIFE FOR?

To beat me, to begin with, that's certainly on the cards,
In the ancient arts of scrabble, cooking and the more ancient arts
Of looking her in the eye when there is something amiss.

That's when the fist comes flying at you, as from nowhere,
When something said or sighed or a sad expression
Catches a thought gone loose and in need of a collision.

A child gone wild at table and demanding impossibly complex things
Like chocolate flake at breakfast starts it all. I just want a cup of tea.
A nonchalance, thought as a dismissive, let's say, spit in the eye,

Cuts into an icy willing chilling mind,
Prepared to slice into disintegration
Some unknowing lazy look
That I feign.

Here's a story: a café, a bed, a whore
The night before.

How does she know?

She knows.

STRASBOURG CATHEDRAL SQUARE MARKET

Murmuring and heavy-coated
They squeeze pumpkins and small cheeses
And shuffle from stall to stall
And shell out coins
For little bags of beans or spices
Clutched with blue bony hands
On a cold arthritic morning.

An old girl tugs her scarf
And toothlessly complains
To a shrugging vendor.
He smiles her away to someone else.
A man in a cap
Who laughs in this frozen
Conspiracy of fat shilling thieves.

The fishmonger sifts through
His shards of cracked ice
For a little piece of cod.
He slaps it on his huge palm
And shows it to an old stick of a man
Who nods his 'yes, alright'
And stamps on the frozen flagstones.

The contaminated cathedral angels of death
Flutter noiselessly about the buttresses and spires.
They cast shadows like cold stains
When the light leaps off the icy hill.

Silent vultures from the wisdom of beyond
They are waiting in their ancient fortress
For a little slip, a fall,
In this commerce of nothing,
On icy flagstones of noisy derision,
Of a haggled, weary suspiration of fightlessness
When bones will break,
Thin blood will flow
And life will take flight.

BOY

I hold my plump blond boy in the snuffling sleek sea shallows,
My bellybutton tummy plump white boy,
Gleeful as a shower in May,
Squirmly rolling in my fierce arms.

Splashily lashing little toes like sixpences
Tossed silvery twirling in the cerulean heave
Slippery turning and flailing and squealing
And clapping fat small pudding hands

In an ecstasy where blue sky laden with cotton
Meets blue sea slowed with sighing souging surf
Makes him the emperor of what is
In an imaginative ice cream of the impossible.

When I hold my little boy
And roll in the slipslapping shoals
Sky and sand and sea
Melt into a delirious melange

Of lambent light
Where delusion holds no sway yet
And future is just what is now.
Girls cream their pointless wanting bodies on their towels and chairs
As sunglassed boyfriends pout and probe and finger.

Dark heavy clouds begin to occlude the sun.

My little boy tumbles heedlessly in the sand
Laughing at what he knows is to come,
At what he can't know:
His sandcastle is trampled on
By a sleek bikinigirl in mirror shades
Licking an icecream.

NO SPRING THERE

Spring cracks the ice of the sky
And spills birdsong
Over a blizzard of gnats
Drifting in the milky light over a pond.

Earth heaves off its overcoat and
Black maggoty clods steam slightly
In the streaming sun,
Pallid as a child's face at dawn.

Dull bones move and the marrow flows
As I stiffen and push and penetrate your icy ramparts.

But your breath blows blue and cold
Out of icy regions:
Spring cannot touch your heart.

THE MAESTRO

The dumb cacophony of wave on sand
Is the purest voice when we hear it.
We squeeze sickly green confusion
Into the stillest forest view.
We transform vomitous substance
Into the silk we touch.
In the putrid stench we smell
We tell rose from rot
And declame what it is not.

We are the Deciders.

The riotous conflagration is tamed
By our merest look.

We are the Masters.

But when I shave at dawn,
The shaking blade slits my chin
And the splashing turns crimson in the soapy sink
In this rush of uncontrollable flood of red.

I think of women.

And then in the mirror I look:
The smashed image of the bleeding Maestro
Is ready for dominance of the day.

DEATH INSURANCE

Life insurance is all very well, Mister,
But what about Death?
Any guarantees there?
The cut of your suit is as clean
As a razor-blade incision on my wrist,
Your cool confidence as convincing
As the cold charm of my gun in the drawer.

Look forward?
What if you can't see?
Insure me against exhausthose pillfilled ropedrop
Death,
Mister.