

**Poems**  
**by**  
**Timothy Chappell**

## The Exiles

*Still the blood is strong*

There every foot of field-end matters,  
each river-pool is itself;  
every stone is a sacred standing stone,  
every hill a *sith* of the old ones;  
here each street is the same  
for mile after mile.

It only feels like what they had cannot be lost.  
It only feels abiding unchanging home.  
The bulldozer and the eviction writ,  
north and south, work the same.

They walked into London's sameness  
with heather-stalks still in their socks,  
the plough-callus still on the insides of their thumbs,  
the mark of the sheep-tick still fading behind the knee.

*Kincardine O'Neil, Aberdeenshire, 7 July 2008*

## Another Spring

Without you to consult about it  
I have chosen a shade of blue  
to spring-repaint the salt-blistered window-frames  
around what, all these years, were your favourite views.

And now the full-grown rosemary-shrubs we planted,  
dancing in the rough April wind's renew,  
sun-reflection-rippled at high tide, bee-haunted,  
are also flowering blue.

Another spring is moving over these dead old leaves,  
but this time, for the first time,  
I see it without you.

*Pontac, St Clement, Jersey*  
5.4.2012

## Vaisey Verses

My rabbit won't retrieve thrown sticks  
or swear like ill-bred parrots  
but she does know some conjuring tricks  
involving vanishing carrots.

\*\*\*

Some think good conversation means  
an endless stream of piffle  
but the *best* conversationalists  
just look at you and wiffle.

\*\*\*

Woke up this morning  
All bleared and woozly  
Rabbit in kitchen  
Nose in the muesli

\*\*\*

Twitchy whiskers  
Wiffly nose  
Greedy rabbit  
Dribbling on my tose

\*\*\*

When depended-on friends go round the bend  
Or bog off to watch *Buffy*  
Then heaven sends a more dependable friend  
Who's small and grey and fluffy.

\*\*\*

When all the time is out of joint  
And everything's gone crazy  
Click on a calming manatee  
Or cuddle up to Vaisey.

\*\*\*

Skipping and dancing  
Merrily prancing  
Watching the morning unfold  
My little Coney  
My little Coney  
What does the future hold?

*(At this point my children threatened to move out, so I had to stop)*

3.9.13

## Disenchanted

When you are young enough  
all is light-haunted  
dazzling stars shoot each moment  
enchancing delight

Now you are old enough  
to see disenchanted  
but here's the illusion:  
it was *then* you saw right.

31.1.14

25.12.2013

Trapped between armies on the unwatered plain,  
days hid in dust-ditches under the thirst-sucking sun,  
bullets to barter with, but no food remains.  
Their skies are empty and their hopes undone.

Cowering in crowds that the CCTV surveys –  
blood-bright posters proclaim their rulers' benison –  
behind blank wary eyes, is it one in a thousand prays?  
Their skies are emptied and their hope long-gone.

Lost in our shopping, caught in our latest craze,  
cheated of what we can be by what we can own,  
neither famines nor tyrants press in on our half-awake days,  
yet still our skies remain empty, our hope unknown.

A young girl in tears, confused and lost and ashamed,  
not sure what happened, but sure that she's three months gone,  
knowing her innocence, knowing she'll catch the blame;  
imploring the empty skies, holding hope alone.

A sordid shed where unclean animals graze,  
a peasant-boy born – no silk sheets to lie him on;  
squalid and base to all reasonable onlookers' gaze.  
Aren't these skies too empty to build any hopes upon?

And yet we have seen these same skies explode with praise.  
Though the heartless years still roll by and find no home,  
this same shed has been filled by the Ancient of Days:  
if our skies are emptied, that's because Hope is come.

## Before an icon

How little changes. Delight is always there,  
waiting for us to fit it to our grasp  
as it awaited her. And suffering is unending;  
the contours of old pain etched in her face  
are new in ours.

Prayers of healing, implorings of release  
cannot go out of date  
so long as birth and death are still our boundary-marks;  
that long the Holy City,  
the beautiful, the forsaken,  
will still remain a ransacked ruin behind us,  
will still remain a perfect dream ahead.

And the frightened soul like a sparrow  
that flickers in mid-air suspense  
over an infinite drop  
under an infinite height

*Chapel of the Icon of Mary the Mother of God  
Great St Bartholomew's Church, West Smithfield, City of London  
December 2 2008*

## Two pets

The power of human sight. The hanging hawk  
Is only awaiting prey, but turns, observed,  
To picture, image, symbol; becomes *framed*.  
The power of human focus, of the rapt attent  
That constellates the sky and names the species,  
That populates the peaceful empty fields  
Quiet with cow-pats and the small life of birds.

Or how a blank-eyed pebble-turning fish,  
Bobbing in plastic weeds its simple scales,  
Or furtive exoskeletal invertebrate,  
Six legs and mouth-parts, stalking unawares  
Within a human ten-year-old's arc-light awareness,  
Is turned into a burning-point of love;  
Is seen and by this concentration made  
Something very good.

*For Róisín and Thalia, pet-owners*  
*February 28 2011*

## The Box

My love met me within a darkened wood  
where no light was: I knew her by her hand:  
but my grip slipped, her presence vanished, and  
till dripping dawn I waited where I stood.

I saw my love upon a city street,  
amid a thousand others gave her chase:  
I found her longed-for look in many a face,  
ten-score half-echoes, but not one complete.

I woke and washed and worried at my error,  
a looking-glass behind me and before me;  
ninety-nine times repeated there I saw me—  
and then *her* image in the hundredth mirror.

But my quest and her trail alike turned cold.  
I've put my memories of her in a box  
to hide inside a drawerful of socks  
and finger through when all grows stale and old,

and I have lost the living patterns of  
her stance, her grace, her glance so once adored;  
have settled for sure less not dubious more,  
have lived as if I was not made for love.

When I began so filled with venturous fire  
how comes my world to dust and grit and sweat?  
Is real-but-paltry really all we get?  
How can we live so wide of heart's desire?

9.12.07

## Sunday Evening, Dundee Law

In dusk-glow at the War Memorial  
dazed smokers lean on churning lurid cars,  
review the week.

Beyond the huddled smirr-grey tenements,  
amid the ancient chaos of the sea,  
the Bell Rock starts its blink.

The Chinese lantern of a rain-fat cumulus  
mirrored in still River  
flows on by.

Always comes the rainbow, always, after storms,  
the washed-clear and forgiven  
cloud-lit sky.

9.3.08

## Ash Wednesday

As humans do here what they've so long done  
the bitter spices burn in silver mists;  
around the grandmother's knees the toddler twists,  
warm hands playing candle-shadows on cold stone.

The two-thousand-year-old pain is here remembered  
that stands for our earliest and our latest wrongs:  
in the stillness remade generations-long,  
offered foreheads, lined or smooth, are crossed with embers.

And there is time while a tall taper burns  
to look along the pews to left and right,  
to ask how long yet each of us still might  
remember we are dust and to dust return.

Some of us present can remember when  
they wore this lent ash sixty years past or more.  
How many times have I done this before?  
How many times will I do this again?

*Exeter Cathedral, February 22 2012*

## How the light gets in

The light of all lights dazzles in our dark;  
we shut our eyes.

The truth of all truths reasons with our hearts  
blocked by our lies.

The joy of all joys asks us to dance, but we  
prefer to grieve.

The king of all kings waits on us, but we're  
too proud to receive.

Why then was he born in a cowshed?

That's where there was space.

And why was he born to Mary?

Because she said yes.

25.12.11

## PONTO

I say to my black dog Ponto – off we go!  
And I walk in the woods, in clothes to scare a crow;  
I walk in the great woods, reading in old books:  
In winter woods, all frosted haggard hooks,  
Or summer woods that laugh even in dawn-showers,  
With all the grass one widening riot of flowers;  
I read Froissard, Montluc, or Tacitus on their times,  
And as I walk I chill at glory's crimes.  
My God, the horrors everywhere, even among the best,  
The sleepers murdered by those who cannot rest,  
The best men's hands, my God, always blood-clad,  
Caesar lost in his orgies, Alexander drunk and mad,  
Charlemagne in his massacres – Didier, Vitikind –  
No better a man than the lowest sins he sinned,  
The fish fed men's flesh in Cato's aquarium,  
Titus impaling the whole of Jerusalem,  
Even our *chevalier sans reproche* Turenne  
A sordid murderer prowling Germany's fens,  
And Jarnac hamstrung Châtaigneraie "in a fair fight",  
And Carrouges ran Le Gris through "which proved him right";  
Tongues that slandered French kings tasted red-hot iron;  
Milton was Cromwell's fool, Calvin Servet's pyre.  
Glory, how many pale spectres must haunt your rest!  
Mankind, I turn away to where nature's pure,  
And as I think "All traps, all imposture,  
All lies, all injustice, evil in splendour dressed",  
Ponto waits at my heel.

A dog is goodness made  
Not close, but as close as can be, to human ways.  
Dog Ponto watches me with his honest gaze.

26.11.11

PONTO

Je dis à mon chien noir : — Viens, Ponto, viens-nous-en !  
Et je vais dans les bois, mis comme un paysan ;  
Je vais dans les grands bois, lisant dans les vieux livres.  
L'hiver, quand la ramée est un écrin de givres,  
Ou l'été, quand tout rit, même l'aurore en pleurs,  
Quand toute l'herbe n'est qu'un triomphe de fleurs,  
Je prends Froissard, Montluc, Tacite, quelque histoire,  
Et je marche, effaré des crimes de la gloire.  
Hélas ! l'horreur partout, même chez les meilleurs !  
Toujours l'homme en sa nuit trahi par ses veilleurs !  
Toutes les grandes mains, hélas ! de sang rougies !  
Alexandre ivre et fou, César perdu d'orgies,  
Et, le poing sur Didier, le pied sur Vitikind,  
Charlemagne souvent semblable à Charles-Quint ;  
Caton de chair humaine engraisant la murène ;  
Titus crucifiant Jérusalem ; Turenne,  
Héros, comme Bayard et comme Catinat,  
À Nordlingue, bandit dans le Palatinat ;  
Le duel de Jarnac, le duel de Carrouge ;  
Louis Neuf tenaillant les langues d'un fer rouge ;  
Cromwell trompant Milton, Calvin brûlant Servet.  
Que de spectres, ô gloire ! autour de ton chevet !  
O triste humanité, je fuis dans la nature !  
Et, pendant que je dis : — Tout est leurre, imposture,  
Mensonge, iniquité, mal de splendeur vêtu ! -  
Mon chien Ponto me suit. Le chien, c'est la vertu  
Qui, ne pouvant se faire homme, s'est faite bête.  
Et Ponto me regarde avec son œil honnête.

Victor Hugo

Marine-Terrace, mars 1855.

## **Buskers at Dusk, Buchanan Street, Glasgow**

To grey-suit minds set on trains  
in grey-suit business streets  
silky jazz unfolds from the sheets  
in shimmering scarlet skeins.

Jumping the bars of the notes  
transgressing performance space  
a wee girl hides her face  
as she donates.

14.12.07

## **Most Hills**

Most hills should be climbed quite alone.  
Could I do what cannot be done  
and climb them alone-with-someone  
then quite obviously you'd be the one.

23.4.11

## **At nought I was your hidden signature**

At nought I was your hidden signature,  
the knotting in your side,  
your clotting pulse.  
We needed no communication  
being a single thought.

At flailing four  
you answered all my questions.  
At self-consumed fourteen  
I stonewalled all of yours.

At twenty-four I left.  
We met to talk, but sometimes telephoned.  
Later we telephoned, but sometimes met.

And now at forty-four  
a knot is in my side,  
a catch is in my pulse  
that is not you.

What is you is a ten-year dust of ash  
in the roots in the straggling nettle-grass  
in a garden itself to be burned.

Yet my phone still promises you on the other end  
if I could just find the number.

27.5.10

## The Vision

Do not expect it in the green of May.  
No cleanness in that growth that parturition  
as pure as clean as death.

Nor in the bland and flyblown August sun,  
in hot banality upon a balding lawn,  
in non-event of sweltering desiccation.

Ignore October's blustering warm winds,  
rain-rotted fruit let clog the orchard paths;  
it brings no insight eaten.

But when the bloodline's thin as mercury  
when ice flowers white on wood and stars the stream  
then head up through the beeswarm of the snow  
then climb the Hill of Vision.

8.1.00

## **Father to Daughter**

I drive you to the station.  
I unpack your bags for you  
(you've packed too many)  
I see you onto the train  
you go away.

If there was more that I could do for you  
then I would do it  
but in so many ways you are on your own.

*13.3.10*

## Seawood

Close up the house. Strip coat- and key-rack clear.  
Enshroud in dust-sheets the cracked chandelier.  
Break stiff carpets from new-echoing floorboards, break  
the wandering webs old cellars and bookshelves make.

Close up the house and count in every key.  
Throw out the greyed and paled photography.  
Peel bleached stickers from kids' windows. Turn the lock  
the last time on the sun-porch and the silenced clock.

Close up the house and in an envelope seal  
the keys to fifty years of thought and feel.  
Now all we dreamed here, everything said and done,  
goes north of the north wind, west of the setting sun.

*Seawood House*  
*Kent's Bank, Lancashire*  
1959-2012

9.12.9

## Glen Living

A river can run a thousand years through rock  
not altering its course but only deepening it:  
not so on the aimless free-meandering plain.

A farmer can lose a decade on one slope,  
sink in one gorse-choked scarp a half-century's sweat,  
yet not grudge the son who left all his random gain.

Think then how deep this glen goes in those who home here,  
whose thought's this forest, this skyline their subconscious,  
whose dream is this buzzard's wheel on this heathered moraine.

*Tarfside, Glen Esk, 14.9.03*

*Meum est propositum*

When I die, I won't die dry  
In cold teetotal bunk;  
I'll sink round the pub, where I  
So many rounds have sunk.  
I'll expire inspired by choirs  
Of angels singing "Nunc  
Dimittis, Lord, thy pity for  
This reprobate old drunk."

Meum est propositum  
In taberna mori  
Ut sit vinum proximum  
Morientis ori.  
Tunc cantabunt laetius  
Angelorum chori:  
Sit Deus propitius  
Huic potatori.

30.4.09

## Not To Miss

Why *do* so many pretty girls  
dress as much like boys  
as it is possible to,

preferring drab grey serge  
to frilled silk's noise  
net petticoats' frou-frou?

If you *could* taste such clothes'  
transposing joys  
why *wouldn't* you?

19.8.06

## Boxing Day Morning

Yesterday the feast  
today the penance

yesterday the spree  
today the dearth

yesterday reunions — ex-wife, ex-child, ex-brother —  
today we lick new hurts,  
old lovers who know too well where to wound each other.

The hint-gift tracksuit waits, but it's too wet to bother.  
A sea of wrapping-paper stretches door to hearth.

But lift your wine-furred eyes above the earth,  
above our lost cold dawn, chill-drizzle-dim,  
see Christ enthroned among the golden seraphim.

26.12.07

## Wherever you walk

Wherever you walk  
I'd be the walker beside you;  
wherever you travel  
I'd be the guard on your train;

whenever you sleep  
I'd be the angel above you,  
guiding your dreams  
past the sheer cliffs of fall in the brain.

If I was God  
I'd not let you out of my eyesight;  
if I was God  
you'd never feel lost at cold midnight;

if I was God  
I would de-booby-trap every portal;

but I am not God,  
I am only another lost mortal.

Off, then, on your journey  
where I have no business to go;  
off on your way  
to make friends whom I'll never know;

your life will be different and yours  
and mostly not about me;  
my main part in it will be just  
to be a good memory.

8.8.8

## **Keep away from Buses**

Given the overlapping  
of our living that has happened,  
Given there's no reshaping  
the once-only we're still making,

Given all my bearings  
would swing lost without your northing,  
Here is what I'm asking  
you're not gambling or risking:

Save the lives of spiders  
Don't walk under ladders  
Don't change plugged-in fuses  
Keep away from buses.

22.7.06

**Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 1264-1278**

Attendants, take him up. And pity on me,  
Pity and compassion on my plight,  
All while the unpitying gods indifferently  
Watch these things unfold under their sight.  
They make us and they claim the name of fathers  
Then stand afar and watch our suffering.

No one knows what the future time will offer;  
The present time, for us, means suffering,  
And for the gods means shame;  
It means worse than any human suffering  
For him on whom this doom of anguish came.

Girl, come away, and leave this house behind.  
New shapes of enormous death now fill your mind,  
Novelties of agony, pain beyond all use—  
And nothing in all this that is not Zeus.

**26.6.08**

*The Children's Cemetery, Balgay*

Parents' sentences on marble;  
mildewed dolls beneath grown trees:  
O you who mark the sparrow's fall,  
did you not notice these?

25.8.06

## **The king is dead**

Another day, another execution,  
another round of routine suffering.  
What could a corpse solve by its dissolution?  
How could a tortured dying mean a king?

The priest-king who fought off, in Nemi wood,  
eternally recurrent suffering  
kept memory of his predecessor's blood  
just till another killed him and was king.

The Roman road once forested with crosses  
where rebel slaves hung parched and suffering.  
Did that world stop to register their losses,  
or when one died, cry out "Long live the king"?

Each day we take another paper's weight  
of crushing slow unspecial suffering,  
nor will our tired old sun discriminate  
an ordinary dying from a king's.

Yet still today we bless one who, accursed  
for hanging on a cross by hell enringed,  
by dying once all dying has reversed.  
The King of Kings is dead; long live the King.

*Easter Sunday 2007*

## Allt a' Mhuillin, April

For the first time, the birchwood *not* by night,  
path-bogs not sealed by corrugated ice;  
for the first time, pied wagtails in the corries.  
Pink sunshine slants through innocuous sleet-flurries.

Here on the Hut's rock-seats, snow-stripped, sun-warmed —  
was it here we half-froze in the January storm?  
Where the crampon drives through slush to brown-baked scree —  
was that our icefall-route in February?

Did we tread here a snow that none had trod?  
Did we glimpse here the hidden face of God?

8/4/06

## St George

Heraldic-taut white-shining-armour knight  
over a honey-stone font.

Mailed foot pressing down on the neck of the vanquished beast,  
a leaning twist on the righteous skewering spear:  
one shafting thrust ends the triumphing hero's hunt.

Thus is the slick gross leathery-wingèd dragon  
poison-green and stone-cold-eye malicious  
stamped out and erased  
extirpated and excised  
by our purified Christian Perseus  
freed from sin.

So what is it Andromeda's temporary saviour misses?  
How is it ice-chill heart and fire-lust rage  
live on within?

*St Michael at the Northgate, Oxford*  
(so not in fact St George, but never mind)  
*April 23 2014*

## Sidlaws Benediction

Blessed be God  
*Blessed be God for ever.*

Blessed be God on the burnsidés and on the braesides  
Blessed be God on the bramble-track, and at the ruined tower  
Blest be the God of old kirks and of older abbeys  
Blest be the God of hill-forts and stones of power  
*Blessed be God for ever.*

Blessed be God with the incense of resinous woodsmoke  
Blessed be God when the sun makes the wet gorse steam  
Blessed be God in the silence of fox and buzzard  
Blessed be God in the silly pheasant's scream  
*Blessed be God for ever.*

Blessed be God from heath-hills to barley-fields  
Blessed be God for wild strawberries in half-tame gardens  
Blessed be God in byres and dung-misted farmyards  
Blessed be God at the firesides glimpsed through curtains  
*Blessed be God for ever.*

Blessed be God for the airs that are over the Sidlaws  
Blessed be God for the waters that run through the Sidlaws  
Blessed be God for the rocks that lie under the Sidlaws  
Blessed be God for the land and for those who love it  
*Blessed be God for ever.*

Blessed be God in Eassie and in Nevay  
Blessed be God in Auchterhouse and Flocklones  
Blessed be God in Kincaldrum and Tullybaccart  
Blessed be God while the light lightens Black Hill's stones  
*Blessed be God for ever.*

Blessed be God for the sacrifice of creation  
Enormity of subtraction from Himself  
Rending away, as a rib, from His fullness of being—

Self-gift, self-abnegation foresigning Eucharist –  
By his own null-black absence making Space  
That grace and savagery, danger and delight  
Might co-engender World:

The gift of Him Who Is  
This something not Him  
He who is all in all  
And will re-call at last this Other Side  
Immortal Bride.

Now, in this one time and this one place,  
Break pace:  
Breathe in, and know yourself  
Immensely loved.

*Blessed be God for ever.*

15.1.2006

## **I am a mirror**

I am a mirror  
faced towards the wall  
I bounce no sight

I am a mirror  
angled into earth  
I give no light

I am a mirror  
stained and cracked and smeared  
my glance is dim

I am a mirror  
point me at my source  
and I blaze Him.

This is the famous glass  
that turneth all.

*16.1.06*

## Leaving Dundee

We build lives where we can: in factory towns  
or willow-hollows on the dusty Downs,  
in sandstone's gold or brick's suburban browns.  
Roots anywhere are preferable to none:  
your roots grew best beneath a late-night sun.

Mountains on one side and multies on the other,  
harsh in its welcoming yet brusquely kind –  
home of the friend sticks closer than a brother,  
town of the tunes stick longest in your mind –  
this is where you were kicked down, then recovered,  
hope-enticed on, then tripped up from behind.

You know the line's first bend will end the scene,  
your River and your wooded hills be gone,  
your living places turn to what has been.  
The diminutions of the South  
are coming on.

*19 December 2003*

## **Prayer at Baldowrie Symbol Stone**

The Holy being still with us though unknown,  
To keep your ever watching listening care  
Over indifferent lives and living air  
Set a strong good angel in this stone.

*Baldowrie, Strathmore, 27.12.03*

## **Parenting skills**

*Bad* parenting:  
you go out of the house  
so you can ignore your children.

*Good* parenting:  
you stay in the house  
so your children can ignore you.

11.11.03

## Highland Envoi

Before you sleep for good, remember this:

the moss-soft bridge within the dripping wood,  
the wild catch of sea air blown on high;

night-climbing up, through ice-storm, to the cornices,  
the starlit snow-peak shining in night sky;

the slopes you charged, when young, because you could;  
the summer's sunlight on your hills of bliss.

*2 April 2002*

## **The right train**

*For Claudia*

I've done some bad things and I've done some mad things.  
I've done some things that got me in the stew.  
Many of my options are not for sane adoption;  
but I did a good thing when I married you.

Some people's choices are based on hearing voices.  
Some read the stars, or the leaves in their Typhoo.  
I treat life's junctions with minimal compunction;  
but I took the right fork when I married you.

We have shared the sunlight, and the sudden-failed umbrella.  
We have sat out winters that stormed out of the blue.  
Warmth drives branches upwards; cold pushes roots deeper.  
What would I have done, if I hadn't married you?

Life is all alternatives, but hopeless information.  
Unmarked and unsignalled, and too many for clear view,  
trains line every platform through the vastness of life's station;  
but I caught the right train the day I married you.

*Sept 24 2001*

## **Breakfast in Bed**

*for Claudia, 27.8.99*

Is eleven years' length too long for a conversation?  
After so long, has every good line been said?  
Does our contract need undecennial renegotiation?  
Believing not, I bring you breakfast in bed.

Is every steady a frozen situation?  
Are stones of indifference hardened from gift-bread?  
Does love, in short, know time's devaluation?  
Believing not, I bring you breakfast in bed.

## **By this time of day**

By this time of day, perhaps, you are  
combing your hair.  
You are pouring your morning tea  
in another city.

And I stranded in this one  
watch for the post.

## Nostos

*Get thee out of thy country... unto a land that I will shew thee*

Leave your homes here for your truer home.  
Leave your hills (their mists around your heart)  
for those hills whence your mists of longing start  
though you have never come.

Mist-lifting day  
will turn your face toward the homeward way.

Leave your work unfinished.

There is time,  
where you are going, for the weaving mind  
to make and remake reasoning and rhyme  
a perfectness remaining undiminished.  
To find as diamond what is lost as clay  
turn your face and walk the homeward way.

And leave your friends.

One only you require,  
that lover whose fierce heat etched in you's fire  
that moulds your melting gold to bride-ring bends.  
From marriage known to Marriage none can say  
turn your face and take the homeward way.

Estranged by this sweet sudden discontent  
shake off all exile-lands. Your time is spent  
of wandering the mazes of life's Lent:  
Easter calls you straight from every stray.  
Rejoice and turn your face the homeward way.

4-5.3.98

## A Prayer for my Daughter

Pour upon my daughter's face  
all the rainstorm of your love:

while she shapes, blind oceans deep,  
the ink-black element of sleep,

though the whirling earth may move,  
cast a stillness on this place.

17.7.97

## Assumption

*Mother of all on high, pray for us yet*

Nothing is left. The world's a corridor,  
vacant, echoing the great ones' passage through.  
It is closed doors in rows: behind them, murmuring  
of a second generation's other businesses.  
Nothing is left me here.

Once I felt the kick of God within:  
nothing else seems great once that has been.

Your will is done,  
and henceforth I will be  
a silent smiling lady in a tapestry.

Your will is done,  
and henceforth I am known  
as a painted tiptoe figure in a pointed arch of stone.

Your will be done:  
henceforth I watch with all  
God's heroes in their sad unsleeping vigil  
for earth's ball.

3-5.3.96

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## Song for Winter Rain

On the black hill and the brittle wood  
on the draggled heron by his unwatched mere  
on silent henhouses and unlit farms  
the rain pours down tonight  
but not in here.

On the oily roofs of locked-up factories  
on the steaming flanks of a ghost-train-vacant bus  
on potholed lanes orange-shadowed by springing trees  
the rain pours down tonight  
but not on us.

On blackhorse breakers no one ever sees  
on what the storm does solely for the storm  
on the empty decks of midnight's groping ships  
the rain pours down tonight  
but we keep warm.

So rub but briefly at the clammy pane.  
Spell jokes and songs; refill the cups again.  
Pile high the crammed log-basket: stoke: and let  
black hails hiss out their spite in our golden grate.

30.11.96

## Slaidburn

Pennine rain and Pennine space and light  
on vacant wet and brindled Pennine moors,  
on damp woods ghosted over by Pennine mists,  
on the curving clear steel muscle of the river,

in sunlight's brief extravagance defined  
the shapeless heather endlessnesses

as suddenly and for one moment *mine*,  
fully mine and fully mine alone,  
my Northland,  
my own country

11.11.96

Cycling from Slaidburn to Cross of Greet,  
Bowland Forest, 4.11.96

## **The Cross Dresser**

Men get coarse black jeans,  
Scratching catching-crotched,  
B.O.-armpit suits,  
Boxers, sweaty socks.

Women get silken skirts  
That rustle and flow from the waist,  
Sheer stockings, cream-cotton shirts  
Soft with shimmering lace.

For boys there's the winded jockstrap  
And the rugby boot's muddy cleats;  
For girls the miraculous tutu  
And tennis's frills and pleats.

But taboo says do not complain.  
Even cross feelings are banned.  
You are stuck in the stubble-chinned strain  
And the drudge of being a man.

16.11.03

## Elsewhere

In Elsewhere rolls a river you do not know  
down to an ocean you will never see.

Elsewhere's huge cities (nameless in your mind)  
ring with a million arguments you're not in.

In Elsewhere a stray dog barks, but you don't hear it.  
Its tautened nights, lit with ambiguous light  
from the other side of your moon, are nothing to you.

But unconceive yourself,  
and Elsewhere's *here*.

28.1.96

## Rabbit tracks

The white wood is woven with rabbit tracks:  
with traces there all the year, but told only by snow.

Where panicky hearts that beat three times faster than ours  
streaked underground away from huge vague threats  
smelled instant in the wind,

see a lopsided cross, constellation of four dabbed prints,  
repeated repeated repeated;

and think what standing sharpnesses,  
what spaces of acute experience  
overtimes buried from sight,  
we their unknowing giants bring roofs crashing in on.

Earlham Park, Norwich,  
21.2.96

## Catullus, 11

Furius and Aurelius, comrades of Catullus,  
whether I go as far as the ends of India  
where Ocean's shores, louder-sounding, thunderier,  
boom with their breakers;

whether to soft Arabians or to the Caucasus,  
to the Scythian savages, the archers of Iraq,  
or where the Nile, septuplet river, turns dark  
paddy-field marshes;

or if I climb over gelid Alpine passes;  
step in the footsteps Caesars and Hannibals made;  
cross the Rhine into Teuton forests; wade  
to world's-end isle Britain--

wherever time might, at the whim of their heavenly  
highnesses,  
decree me for exile, I know you would also dare;  
but all I ask's this. Go to Lesbia; bear  
this brief, not good, message:

that she stands condemned to her Pretty-Boys' Club and her  
fantasies,  
entangling them all at one time, three hundred in number,  
loving not one of them truly, yet member by member  
screwing them senseless.

And let her not sigh for return of her former love's  
gentleness.

His love's like the poppy that edges the meadow-side last,  
stands like the poppy-stalk after the rust-blunt plough's  
passed  
ripping the flower off.

## Middle Earth

Witches lived by the pond in the Forestry once:  
no bomb-site then, but ancient, unplumbed, elven.  
Those summer-meadows' hay, those stands of spruce,  
tangled and dry-scented, were our warren:

filled with our stealth, held monsters and sharp wonders,  
strange painted devils for the eye of childhood,  
held magic, black or white, or of as many colours  
as Saruman's cloak in the story.

So for us  
green hills and hillsides, Lancashire rain and wind,  
gained faces of our fantasy, were turned into  
the battleplace of armies long ago:  
and chimneys, roads, and rooftops there below  
became a makebelieve scarce worth our glances  
while marvellous the runes and cognizances  
of intricately-patterned dense-wrought shields  
shone and flashed upon our empty fields.

20.5.87

## Cartmel

Old white limestone fluted by fossil seas  
surprises as grey walls to Cartmel fields,  
as thin irregular houses, and the Priory:

jackdowed lantern-tower and angled nave  
with blunt grace like a castle's, Borders-strong,  
seen round each corner, high over roofs in the lanes.

Sharp-lined hills stand northwards, south the sea,  
over the fell-top, down the six-foot stream.  
Blown from the Bay, watch the curtains of oncoming rain.

28.5.87

## Enlargement

The world's the space of wills. Irruption into it  
Will be new space, imperiously shaped  
By some still hidden daemon, for itself,  
The absorbent playing vulnerable self  
That was not there before. And pinks and blues  
And frogs and ducklings all await its call.  
Stern small feet kick-press a stomach wall.

5.9.93



14.1.89

## Ghoul

On a clear but moonless night  
(midnight blue between  
black shapes of undrawn curtains)  
I will slide into your dream.  
Do not attempt to move.  
My smile is pallid, formal, shows my teeth;  
my soft laugh is a dry, well-mannered cough.  
I smile because  
as I am sure you realise  
you're trapped.

Yes, do turn to the wall if it will help you,  
or (to be more exact) if you think it helps;  
do wrestle the heavy blankets over you,  
to draw around your head and (ah) your throat  
the dulling warmth of slumber.  
Then, absolute silence seems your best chance.  
Like a game: the first one to break it is out?  
But, you see, you lose  
because you breathe.  
Nor will your blankets keep out  
my fingers  
my teeth  
insubstantial.

And now it is time to begin. First, reactions.  
Perhaps you can reach the light-switch on the wall  
(you know where it is, you can see it in your head)  
perhaps you can reach the switch before I reach you.  
Perhaps: but, as you're aware,  
The light-switch is  
behind me.



## Scan

My waving hands and arms  
are caught in your searchlight's throb  
they paddle away from the whiteness of your noise.

I am inspected by echoes  
I am found in an attitude of prayer  
my spine my signature tune.

So you may hear my picture,  
you may see the sounds you bounce  
off my bones or the four palpitating  
chambers of my heart:

shadowy prognostics of the day  
my monochrome thin frequencies  
will bleed themselves into your roar of colour

## Oxford out of term

The reckless heartfelt alliances, the smart things said,  
the coffee-euphoric, late-night theories mastered:

in the intimate space between two bending heads  
in a solitary breeze in an empty cloister,

on green baize staple-pierced, behind glassless  
shutters,  
the last of last term's students' posters flutter.

27.1.89

## Music Recalled

Music is what gives forms to the unconscious:  
forgotten music finally played again  
decodes from subliminal shapes a thought and a feel  
I had not remembered having;

it reopens a scent-capsule of experience,  
freeze-frames for good one single carriage window  
out of the blurring rush of the storming train  
of months and weeks and days and hours and minutes:

it fixes, uniquely, how it smelt and sounded  
to be then, and to be listening to this.

The past is an abstraction, and past's self unknown;  
but beating now and here, in this same music,  
the laughing heart of then and there is caught,  
for one moment of pure precision, in pin-sharp focus:  
delightful the tricks the human mind plays on us.

24.12.95

## **Bride**

*In the selfsame point that the soul is made sensual is the City of God ordained to it without end*

I give you my virgin white:  
My blue-shadowed snows, my walled gardens,  
My blank pages whereon you shall write  
When I give you my virgin white.

You give me your spectrum-white:  
You kaleidoscope all my colours  
To one simple vision of light  
In your prism-, your spectrum-white.

I give you my bridal white:  
White, silk-sheened, frill-intricate lace  
Grace has broidered for your desire's sight  
In our ache of delight face to face  
When I give you my bridal white.

*May 21-22 1998*

**Aeschylus, *Prometheus Vincetus* 887-907**

A wise man he, a wise man he indeed,  
who first weighed in his mind and spoke this truth:  
that love of like to like most answers need,  
that a poor man's love of a rich bride breeds – reproof,  
that the slave should never seek the hand of her master,  
that a god's seed mixed with a mortal's brings disaster.

Never then, o never, Fates, bestow  
on me the trembling glory of Zeus' concubine.  
No bridegroom high for me who am below,  
for my slight self no Olympian lord divine.  
For look at Io, barren, lost, unmanned,  
unwombed, unhoused by Hera's hard command.

A well-matched match is well. No fear falls for  
those who avoid the hot gods' resistless gaze.  
Only there is the one unwinnable war,  
the no-way-out that barriers all our ways.  
For what would he turn *me* into, once seduced?  
Yet who can escape the marriage-plans of Zeus?

*March 2012*

## **The disconnect absolute**

You wake up not knowing the time  
you wake up not knowing the date  
you wake up not knowing the century  
or which of all these is your body,  
forgetting the taste of yourself  
and the reason the minotaur grief slinks through your cellars.

Blindly you move to the window  
shake through the pall-thick curtains  
blindly you drink up outside  
you drink up the bone-thin moon and the ghost-blue garden  
you drink up the silver track on the scales of the sea.

The stuck record that fills your head with angular noise  
plays on regardless of you.  
The machinery of pain that you are involved in  
it has no off-switch.  
You do not notice  
how you get back to bed.

The disconnect absolute  
the bone-thin moon, the blue garden  
all this will be gone in the morning  
but not your loss.

26.12.08

## Travesti

Delight, then dread. Epiphany, then farce.  
Crushed by his guilt at being the she he asked,

lost between masks for all his thirteen years,  
his lonely compass fixed on his hated error,

a boy in a dress and his self-murdering tears.  
The peacock's beak stabs at the reflex mirror.

27.12.07

*In memory of too many kids who killed themselves  
one of whom could too easily have been me*

**In a moment**

A cemetery

A tomb

A place of death

Is suddenly

In a blinding moment

A place of life.

Shalom.

7.10.83