



# Tarn

Poems by

**Mark Allinson**

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# Meditations & Memories

## The Underground

In the 70s, in London, I lived for a while  
In an old, cramped, single-bed room  
Above the underground Central line.  
Lying in the dark I could feel below  
As the tunnel filled with passing strangers  
Being carried home from a long day:  
A faint rumble would grow till it quivered  
Then shook the narrow bed like a tremor,  
Blurring figures on the digital clock,  
Jangling wire hangers in the closet,  
Buzzing pill-bottles on the table.  
And I thought of that cold, dark river  
Of air below being pushed out ahead  
Of the train, and manholes breathing out  
That earthy, sour, underground odor  
Into Soho alleys, as the rattling  
Carriages clattered through echoing space  
In the tunnel, down there, beneath my bed.  
Some nights, awake in the early hours,  
Long since the last train had passed,  
I could still sense this dark space  
Below the foundations of the old building,  
Waiting under tons of earth and rock:  
Nitrate crusting the blackened walls;  
Scrabble, splash and scuffle of rats.  
And even now, thirty years later,  
Living on the other side of the world  
In a quiet country town by the sea,  
Sometimes, sleepless in bed, I feel  
The dark tunnel still below,  
Echoing drips through an unlit night,  
Waiting to carry more passengers home.

## Travelling

Sorry, my friend, that I have not written  
Sooner, but I have been travelling, far,  
Over scored glacial plains where the bitten  
Thornwood crouches beneath the north star;  
Then farther, to where the seas roll like cold tar.  
I sailed that congealing, snow-crustrated sea  
Till it set hard and ice snapped my boat's spar.  
So cold it was, not a tear could flow free,  
And none trudged that frozen desert but me.  
When night condensed from the twilight gloom  
I stumbled, numbly, unable to see,  
My ice-thistled coat as hard as a tomb.  
But morning has brought a fall of rain  
Thawing my hands, so I write again.

## White Feathers

Sneeze or laugh, and the pure white chook would fly  
And flutter to her hide all fluffed with blame.  
Oh, I was out to get her. She'd deny  
Food from my proffered hand, and when I came  
To lock the roost, she struggled with the shame  
Of a creature forced, finally, to admit  
She had no other choice but being game  
To shuffle in with others and submit.  
I never saw her wander, never sit  
In dirt-baths in the warm hen-loving sun;  
She stayed clean in her shed, preferring it  
To the shocking world that made her flap and run.  
The safe wall of her shelter hid the brown  
Fox who jumped her perch and ripped her down.

## Li Po's Fire Poems

Some say Li Po burned  
only his bad poems,

freed them like fire-flies,  
to spark down the rivers  
of night.

But that is all wrong:

I recall a night  
of ice and frost,  
high in a cave  
in the Tai-hang Mountains.

Surely we would have died  
that night, but Li Po  
unrolled his best work,  
read each poem softly,  
then handed them  
to the flames.

I remember one—  
about a young girl he caught  
praying to the moon—

the warmth from that poem  
keeps the chill from my marrow  
even now.

## Tempus Fugit

The Cossack waves came pounding in,  
Turquoise horses with silver manes;  
Each one charged in their line to win,  
The sand interred their cold remains;

The subtle evening stole away  
The late possessions of the sun  
Until the jasmine's lush bouquet  
Snuffed his light and left him none;

The summer seemed so sure and strong,  
Foundations poured with molten steel  
That set the blue so high so long  
We felt secure in our Bastille.

Each wave, each day, each season comes,  
And all of them seem strong, alone,  
But every single one succumbs;  
Beneath each lovely face, the bone.

Every day, each moment, brings  
The changes we might curse or bless,  
But all the while the heart-beat sings:  
"One less, one less, one less, one less."

## Uniform Whiskey Bravo

They plug her in, raise a thumb.  
Behind the whishing prop, a hum  
Of starter-motor whirring till  
Unmuffled stacks cough puffs of flame  
In bangs that shake her silver frame.

A roar evoking primal forces  
Pounding hooves of a thousand horses  
Gravelly rustle of oiling gears  
Thunder-crackling clanging bell-sounds  
Barking of a dozen hell-hounds.

Now my boyhood Mustang's muffled,  
But still the thrill as her backwash ruffled  
And stirred the pines on the boundary fence  
Re-starts, and magically I'm there,  
Rapt in Merlin-shattered air.

## Dialogue

Oh let me rise and fly to the ideal  
Platonic realm of touchless mental-space  
And leave this swamp of flesh which makes me feel  
Such ugly muddy moments of disgrace.  
How perfect life if science might replace  
These organs with a laser drive to run  
In deathless cyber-space without a trace  
Of blood-bone murmurs subtle minds should shun.  
*Hush now, the night-dew falls, thought's day is done.*  
*My melatonin waves will wash this mind*  
*Back to the marrow where this mind's undone:*  
*The cyclops-eye saw far, but now is blind.*  
*Hear the surf, breathe darkness, die, be sane,*  
*Knowing thoughts bubble from the blood-swamp brain.*

## Dialogue II

My being is a light, a wind, a fire,  
An eagle with the world within its eye;  
A passion, spear-keen, a sharp desire  
To fly toward the sun beyond the sky.  
I keep my self clear, detached and dry,  
And like a demiurge above the flood  
I seek forever ever asking why  
This world of mine has worms in every bud,  
And every hope, and every drop of blood.  
And you below, the source of futile pain,  
A swamp of filthy waters, flux of mud,  
Must I too rot within your dying brain?  
*Come. Put out your light. Fall into the deep  
Night and practice death with a little sleep.*

## A Fib

Faust  
lost  
his soul  
to control.  
Mephistopheles  
offered him knowledge for his ease.  
But heaven, he discovered, isn't won by degrees.

## Initiation

Who says the myths are only myths? No more  
Will I blaspheme the Gods as others do,  
Who laugh because they have not felt the awe  
And shock of being dragged into the blue.

Persephone, I was a type of her,  
So innocently gathering the flowers,  
Enjoying all the easy joys that were  
As if forever in my fields and bowers.

I gathered up the violets of love,  
Weaving them with lilies of romance,  
And there was not a hint of cloud above  
To mar the idyll of my languid dance.

But then one afternoon the cool wind fell,  
Bringing down the silence on the trees,  
And from beneath there rose a certain smell  
Of sulphur that evoked a strange dis-ease

Which turned into a rising rumble sound,  
And then I felt the earth begin to beat  
Breaking up beneath me as the ground  
Revealed the empty space of my defeat.

And so I came to know the realm of death  
Where every thing and person was a shade  
While still my heart was beating and my breath  
Affirmed that I was living, and afraid.

Now I must describe my greatest shame,  
To tell how I was held against my will  
And I was forced and broken, stripped and shorn  
And ravished on the filthy floor of hell.

But let me say that here I learned to love,  
Because I saw the truth that he loved me.  
And with this love I let the world above  
Go on without me, and this set me free.

Returning to the motherland I knew,  
Of flowers and light, it is a different place;  
A gem set in the velvet blackish blue  
I carry in my eyes with Hades' grace.

## Ping-ting Comes for Fire.

Fa-yen once asked Huan-tzu why  
He seemed contented. His reply:  
"My master long ago conveyed  
The Buddha's truth, which time can't fade."

"So tell me, Huan-tzu, what's that truth  
You've held since you were but a youth?"  
"To become a Buddha is a false desire:  
Like Ping-ting, the fire-god, seeking fire."

"Excellent, but I doubt if you  
Can tell me why his words are true."  
"Oh yes", said Huan-tzu "if you please  
I'll explicate this truth with ease:

"Since we possess the Buddha mind,  
We have the thing we seek to find;  
Already a Buddha, why aspire:  
Ping-ting, the fire-god, comes for fire."

"Just as I thought, you've got it wrong;  
Are you sure a monastery's where you belong?"  
Within the hour Huan-tzu left  
The monastery, confused, bereft.

Finally, Huan-tzu returned  
To seek the truth for his mind now burned  
To find the Buddha and the way  
He thought he'd found, but lost that day.

"Please, Fa-yen, tell me how  
To find the Buddha, teach me, now?"  
Fa-yen yielded to his desire:  
"Ping-ting, the fire-god, comes for fire."

## Losing It.

*All are clear and I alone am clouded—*

Every year I feel more like Lao-tzu:

While others dress for power I am shrouded

In doubts and often haven't got a clue.

Expressionless I stare into the blue

Of sky and empty ocean like a child,

Or like a fool who simply can't construe

The meaning and is easily beguiled.

And yet some days bring moments when I smile

To feel the world as if myself and be

Alone to walk the sands along the wild

Dunes attuned to the constant pulsing sea.

Home in the dark each thunder-hush of wave

Empties the room as surf flushes a cave.

## Helter Skelter

"If your bonds be not broken whilst living, what hope  
of deliverance in death?"

—Kabir.

Birth's another kind of death,  
A fetus-killing rush of breath;  
We cry because we must come to  
This bloody-minded meat-fuelled zoo  
Where sickness is and work and flies  
And every-fucking-body dies.  
And dying leads again to birth,  
Back to the bardo realm, not earth:  
The latter is a weighty place  
Where gravity engenders grace;  
The former is a lighter sphere  
Where you will need no lung nor ear  
For everyone's a shade of grey  
And you're a hungry ghost like they.  
But colour, as all roses know,  
Comes from plunging roots below  
The dirty earth, entangling life  
In bows of joys and knots of strife.  
Purer spirits will maintain  
The innocence with which they came:  
Angel-sweets who'll not permit  
Their flowers to bloom by sucking shit.  
Unearthed, unbodied angel pride  
Is bound for a bumpier bardo ride.

## Polyhymnia

When the power failed I shrank  
To a face on a glass screen  
Reflecting on the vacuum  
Under surfaces of light.

For so long before I was  
Hardly myself: determined:  
The paradigm of engines,  
Till the breakdown of silence.

Then eyes gazed into the black  
Centre of myself and knew  
This absence was permanent  
And wonderful as the night.

That centre could never hold  
Anything but anarchy,  
Trying to constrain many  
Voices under rule of one.

And the one who had been one  
Died, and in dying gave birth  
To my singers who sing now  
Apart-together, like stars.

## Aunty Lorna

Aunty Lorna had the sweetest soul  
You ever could want or wish to meet.  
And she loved a huge black cat called Sin.  
I saw her love blind rabbits, abandoned  
Kittens, breathless fish, and her job  
Was to tweezer steel splinters from hands  
At the factory. She told me once how she lost  
A love when he swung a wood plank  
To the flank of his horse and the thwack snapped  
Her heart shut. Uncle Tom  
Was a Scot who loved his whisky, fishing,  
And all night playing his accordion to the jigs  
Of Hogmanay. Uncle Tom  
And uncle Fred went fishing one day  
When the sea like concrete was flat and hard  
To doubt. They were last seen far out  
On the bay as a still moot point  
On a quarrelless sea and nobody saw  
A wave. They found Uncle Tom sprawled across  
A bar wearing nothing against the cold  
But a fur stole of seething sea-lice.  
Aunty Lorna's grief was deep  
And still as the chilled abyss of a blue  
Glacier where she stayed the rest of her life.  
But her gentle soul did not altogether  
Pass from the earth, since I've kept a little  
Of her being with me all these years,  
And share some now with you.

## Uncle Bob

[I.M. Robert Maisy 1903 - 1971]

Uncle Bob lost his right leg  
When a twenty-five ton coal trolley  
Chewed it off a mile underground.  
But he'd throw its plastic ghost across  
The seat of his Vespa as his girl-friend  
Held on tight. Uncle Bob loved  
Jokes and crayfish, hunting rabbits,  
Swimming, practical jokes, and lying  
In bed reading the sports pages.  
When he was young and fit he played  
Football and cricket and caught many  
Razor-toothed shark and barracuda.  
He told me once of the day he climbed  
To the top spot on the Eagles Rock  
Just to see what he could see.  
Uncle Bob had a wicked laugh  
At everything dull, smug, or pompous  
And left that laugh to me in his will.  
He never really did that much  
To change the world because he loved  
It everyday, just as it was.  
But for more than forty years now  
He has missed his favourite bowl of Christmas  
Pudding, studded with the tooth-clinking  
Threepences and sixpences.  
And just in case there is no God  
To love uncle Bob and give him back  
His leg—this will remember him.

## The Meeting

Freud, in a railway carriage, saw the face  
Of an old man behind the last glass door:  
An ancient bare-skulled chap, headed his way;  
And since the elderly deserve some grace,  
He bowed and stepped aside. But then he swore:  
"Mein Gott!"

That face he knew, so livid grey!  
Oh Thanatos! His own approaching face!  
Unknowing, hollow-eyed, he'd bowed before  
His image, and beyond it, empty space.

## Revolutionary II

[After "The Revolutionary" by D.H.Lawrence]

Yes, I see them standing there  
with white, metallic, tin-slit lips,  
Insisting that they care—they care  
Aggressively, with hands on hips!

Caryatids with such a task  
To carry heaven on their head,  
Their face a metal ideal mask,  
Fixed and pale and dull as lead.

They yearn, aspire, and seek above,  
Ignoring all beneath their feet  
And call their ideal vision "love"  
When it is merely self-deceit.

They know precisely what "should be",  
What is "proper" "good" and "right"  
And since their only skill's to see  
They're planning to out-law the night.

I see them here as clear as you  
Saw them eighty years ago,  
They have not changed, they will not do  
A thing to move, they cannot flow

And ripple with a living pulse  
Of energy, changing course,  
Bounding, leaping true and false,  
Instinctive as a wild horse.

I see them holding up their sky  
Of stoney heaven, painted blue,  
But when it cracks and pieces fly  
They'll envy Lords of Hell like you.

## O Lordly Mind

Your Reason is the highest, brightest  
Faculty of Man,  
And with the Greek philosophers  
The Western world began.

Your Reason is the masculine  
And strict persuasive force,  
Ruling the realm of feeling  
As a rider reins a horse.

Detached, clear and elevated,  
On a higher plane,  
You think, but you are not above  
Your home: the blood-swamp brain.

## Taste

I hunger for the taste of hot, fierce art.  
Something Yeatsy, with a gut-kick ending;  
Or Donneish, with a batter-my-heart-fierce-start.  
The cool taste rules, and no use pretending:  
A common recipe involves the blending  
Of wry-dry whimsy with refined despair.  
Add a pale dash of sweet wist to the ending  
And you feel like you just ate a plateful of air!  
Give me a Hopkins-like tongue-searing prayer!  
A sour taste of Hope, or dark seasoned Hardy  
Meditating life on a cold-stone-stair!  
Chili-hot meats from the Devil's party,  
Cellar-cold wines laced with cinnamon spice  
Taste best, like a Yeats-fierce dawn over ice.

# Nature & The World

## The Dark Ray

In the heat of sparkling days we loved to burst  
The blown up paper-bags of clouds afloat,  
And shred them in the ribboned pools of light:  
Among the rocks we did our very worst.

All summer long we wallowed in our sport,  
Exploding mirrored clouds with body-bombs;  
Well buoyed upon the ample seas of time,  
We never thought we ever could be caught;

Until, I glimpsed below, that shocking ray,  
A massive arrow head of poison black,  
Slid fast below our treading, tensing soles;  
I still recoil to think of it today.

And every day I see it sliding fast,  
In gulfs of dreams that make me swim awake,  
And in the mirrored pools of tv screens,  
The ray has come to stay—will not swim past.

## Flame Flowers

Within the window's green and blue  
The flame-tree's scarlet flares like hate.  
Its seed-embedded fruit pods grew  
Black bats that were the summer's bait.

Such neon-spiked display implies  
Volcanic urge of savage lies  
Just below the safe serene  
Of seeming tranquil blue and green.

Upon the sign-post squints a crow  
At every lurching butterfly,  
His black eye shouts a mortal "no"  
And never blinks or winks a why.

Search and seek to find this why  
But never will you satisfy  
The cat down-hunkered in the grass  
For gentle blue birds, should they pass.

## Crepidotus

Who dumped these peels of orange  
At the base of an old ghost gum?  
Nothing will answer orange  
Till the winter wattles come.

And so, intrigued, I wandered  
Closer to where the gold  
Rinds some hand had squandered  
Were heaped on the grey leaf-mold.

But no, no skin of fruit there,  
I found at the ghost-gum's base  
A fungi-infected root where  
Gold oozed from a darker place.

As if a boil of the underworld,  
Lanced by a gum-root's bite,  
Up-bubbled, set, and under-curled  
Bright plates of pus to the light.

## Clarified

Frosted webs tangle  
Silver chains in tall grass;  
Shifting, they spangle  
As the dog-walkers pass.

Crystal-dew beads  
Strung in long looping threads  
Link jewel bestrewn weeds  
Wherever one treads.

Sunshine and a breeze  
Will secrete them away,  
Hidden by degrees  
In the warm spring day.

## Memo to the Puritans

Remember, every rising thought,  
No matter how pure to you,  
No matter how high or holy its bent,  
From matter that thought-seed grew:

Like a pearl secreted from mollusc-oozy-  
Plasm in a bony shell,  
Lapped by the ancient salty flood  
Of fish-blood flushing each cell

Of a brain that recapitulates  
All evolutionary moves,  
From snaky-brain amygdala  
To the ape-brain folds and grooves.

Desires of every earthly beast,  
Bacterium to bear,  
Lie within your pulsing skull  
And flavour thought and prayer.

## Emergency

From tropic earth as red as meat  
Dyed deeper red in rain  
And rising in the tropic heat  
You may behold a stain  
Upon the air a twisting coil  
As if a smudge of smoke  
Issued from a pot of oil  
on fire—is this a joke?

Has someone buried in the ground  
A clump of fuming punk?  
But how when here and all around  
An inch of rain has sunk  
Into the earth until it oozes  
Mud between your toes.  
And so you stare for it bemuses  
How such smoke arose.

Drawing near your wondering eyes  
Soon notice down the way  
How in swirls to leaden skies  
Rise other fonts of grey.  
Not smoke, ah no, but living things  
Rising to aerial birth—  
A billion ants with silver wings  
Astir beneath the earth.

## The Common Bond

[On the tsunami of 2005]

We seem to be so far away  
From all these sea-born floods of death;  
Sighing, giving, we cry and pray  
As we watch scenes that catch the breath.

But all of us, in varying ways,  
Know death may come to us like this,  
In beds, on roads, or tranquil bays—  
A sudden flood, and no last kiss.

## The Bottom Line

Last night the sea erupted, breaking hard  
Thunder blows of waves on my piece of shore;  
The look-out cliff-face crumbled, chipped and scarred  
As wind-forced spray cut ruts down to the roar.  
At dawn I walked the strip bespread with ore  
Of shrapnell-rock the blast blew from the wall  
And strewn where breakers fell to scrub and score  
The sand from off the beach in a foaming maul.  
Dark wreathes of bladder-wrack had laid a pall  
Along the length of once high golden dunes,  
Draped on tussocks and pasted in a scrawl  
Across the rocky wall in weedy runes.  
I pondered long on what these sea-words meant,  
But change and change and change was their intent.

## The Big Dry

Worse than sudden flood or fire:  
The wait for the rains to fall,  
When a pallid crust of pungent dust  
Spreads a ghastly pall.

And colour fades to shades of grey  
As fields whiten and die,  
Where wheat and grass with stalks of glass  
Brittle beneath the sky.

When shattering light entrenches night  
And thunders rattle hard  
You hear no rain and when you wake  
The world looks baked and charred.

You search for signs of frontal lines  
In skies but clouds are rare,  
And should one form you pray a storm  
Might break this shell of air.

Harder to bear than fire or flood  
The hardest weight of all  
Is not to care as you sit and stare  
And wait for the rains to fall.

## Tarn

That summer, floating on the mountain lake,  
Dark as the tarn in Poe's tale of the Ushers,  
Was an initiation into reflection. Lying prone on the air-bed,  
Looking into your face, you could see you were nothing  
But a skied image on the water, the halo  
Of gums and wattles around your head, a fragrant  
Wreath sent up from Hades. The lake was a sermon  
On the truth that the way up and way down are the same.  
When a goshawk, tailing finches, passed, looking down  
Into the tarnished mirror, you could see precisely  
How high he was. The sun you noticed was dependent  
Upon a cool-quivering void to cherish its fire.  
Upward staring water-lilies found reflections in cumulus  
Blooming in the deep blue. At evening  
The swallows fell from the west and tore  
At their doubles with thirsty beaks. And once,  
As the full moon rose from the eastern hills,  
I watched her twin wash her sun-flush in the shallows  
And grow ever brighter as the dark water deepened.

## Survivor

A cootamundra wattle found itself  
Stranded alone, high on a coastal dune,  
Where storms from lows off the continental shelf  
Regularly gave the sapling a cruel prune.  
Decembers had been kind, but every June  
Had thrashed and beaten back each branch that tried  
Reaching to south or upward until soon  
The tree could only grow to the leeward side.  
Like a blown plume of smoke or like the tide  
Dragging the river weeds in the same way,  
The tree lay prone to northward since denied  
All other ways by wind and salty spray.  
But sheltered by itself since beaten down,  
Each spring it wears the dunes' sole golden crown.

## She-Oaks

Where the Tomaga river bends  
To end in the roaring sea,  
Bearing the mud of hills it blends  
With salt and sand beneath the quay,  
A stand of she-oaks seems to be  
Reflecting on the tidal round.  
Bound by webs of root each tree  
Supports the rest, secures the ground,  
As their spindle-leaves weave a gauze of sound.  
But now the river wants the soil  
They stand upon and all around  
Their bared roots warp as the waters roil.  
And when both wind and tide are high,  
The she-oaks touch and sigh and sigh.

## Salinity

The old path to the sea is strewn with clumps  
Of salty-dusted, dew-tipped marram grass;  
And on the dunes the charcoal-hearted stumps  
Of bush-fired tea-tree curl like melted glass.

And there, where the sea hums in the smoky plume  
Of spray as it drifts a mist to wet my face,  
The waves curl, then slap as they consume  
The sand, to be swilled and dumped in another place.

In the patches of wrack that fleck and pock the beach,  
Glistened bladders shine and blink like lights,  
Lifted by the blind hands of currents that may reach  
To pluck from the ocean floor in the darkest nights.

All we can see of the sea is only a part  
Of its width, its draw, its depth, and its awful rise;  
And the salt aswirl in the pulse of its mighty heart  
Is the same salt in our blood and the tears in our eyes.

## Fish-Wish

To be a Couta, fired with icy blood,  
A bullet-snout torpedo at a shoal  
Of mackerel, or at a school of cod,  
And after blood and flesh to have no goal.  
And never have to argue with a soul,  
Yet be alive to sex, though never touch:  
Enough to make me wish away my role  
Of being human, prone to care, too much  
Whirred by gears of hopes that grind and clutch.  
Sure there's fear in sighting a shiver of shark  
Or dodging a lunge of moray eel and such,  
But the blind thrill of drilling into the dark  
Of ocean night toward a watery dawn—  
How wonderful!—just feed and fly and spawn.

## Elemental

The sea in the night calls my bones and tells  
Of the debt they owe to its elements:  
Of calcium soaked from its crush of shells;  
Of sodium distilled in filaments  
Of swaying kelp, churning nutrients  
From oxygen, hydrogen and carbon  
Atoms that bond and crack in the solvents  
Of time and life; recycling silicon  
In shifts of sand, and the nitrogen  
Falling with the sulphur of tropic skies;  
It tells of the blood-debt owed to iron  
And of phosphorus sparked in fish-cold eyes.  
Your bones are mine, calls the sea in the black  
Depths of the night, and I *will* have them back.

## A Red-Gum Log

Hour by hour the log endured  
The metamorphosis of flame,  
And when its bark was burnt away  
It glowed the colour of its name.  
By alchemy the log became  
Transmogrified, crystalline;  
And incandescent in its frame  
Pulsed rubies, bright as cherry wine.  
As they shrank to discombine  
In ruby cubes like crimson dice,  
The log retained its size and line  
Then shattered into crimson ice.

## Blue-Glass Cities

A spatter of blue-glass strewn on the beach;  
Spark-glitter mounds of vitreous rubble  
Of a thousand Venetian vases reach  
The length of the sandy bay: the bubble-  
Float-sails of the sea-faring cities  
Of creatures called Portuguese Man-O-War  
Jelly fish. But the wild ocean pities  
Neither blessed nor cursed nor ship nor sailor;  
And now these cities are grounded in doom,  
Blown by depressions and seasonal tides  
To be hurled and shattered on the breakers' boom  
And waste into sand while the sea derides.  
In my own blue glass city I sometimes hear  
A sound like the pulse of a surf quite near.

## Spring Storm

Crumpled feathers tumbled on the waves,  
Part-interred in low-tide sandy graves.  
High-tides flush and dig them up again;  
King-tides dump them where they will remain.

Tangled bodies salted from the surf,  
Shearwaters drowned and turning into earth.  
Sun and rain will soon make hollow bones  
Little whistles when the west wind moans.

## Aeolean House

Tin roof, low trees, guy-wired antenna,  
And a house seasoned as a violin,  
Will whirl your mind to Rome, Vienna,  
To the opera, when the winds begin.  
Strummings of harps usher easterlies in.  
Northerlies swing crabapple boughs to drum  
And rattle snares on the cold taut tin.  
Westerlies drone an overture hum  
Bowing guy-wires with the cherry plum  
And playing Haydn till the rains come;  
Then some Verdi sighs and Bellini trills  
As the gutters gush and the tank fills.  
But when the southerly bluster breaks  
Led Zeppelins crash and the whole house shakes.

## Until That Day

I saw the sea as blank as slate,  
A plain of cloudy grey,  
Or glistening in the sun to make  
A mirror of the bay.

A loose-sprung floor, a moving stage  
Curtained by a squall;  
A surface surfer rode to climb  
And skitter down a glassy wall.

Until a slash in the mirrored sky  
Slit its silver skin—  
A dark gash opened by  
A blade of living fin.

## Translations & Classical Themes

## Mystical Longing

[After Goethe's *Selige Sehnsucht*]

Tell this to no one but the wise,  
The mob will mock and call you liar:  
The very stuff of life I prize,  
Which living, longs to die in fire.

Calm in the glow of loving nights  
Which bred you and in which you breed,  
Strange intimations of new heights  
Within the candle's glow you read.

Held no more in shades of dark  
A new desire sweeps you above  
Your fears now you have caught the spark  
Of longing for a higher love.

No distance there will waver you  
As you, enchanted, see your aim  
Become the light you fly into—  
Now you're the moth, burnt in flame.

Till you see this necessity—  
Die in that fire which brings rebirth—  
You will only ever be  
A sad guest on the dark earth.

## The House of Rumour

[A Translation from Book XII of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*]

There in the centre of the world where the earth meets the ocean and heavens,  
Is a place from which everything, anywhere it happens, may be seen or listened to,  
No matter how distant or hidden—and here lies the house of Rumour.

Rumour herself built her home on a hilltop, and twenty-four seven  
The countless windows and portals she gave it lie open and listening.  
Echoing brass is the substance she made it from, ringing with the repeated

Sounds it gathers and returns. Within is no peace of silence,  
Nor is there din, but merely the murmuring whispers like sea-waves  
Sighing from a distance, or the last faint lingering echoes of thunder

When Jupiter crashes the dark clouds together. A host inhabits  
These sibilant hallways, coming and going in shadowy gatherings,  
And a thousand rumours of false mixed with true here mingle confusedly.

Some of them fill the ears of the idle, while others convey  
Tales they collect which expand in the telling, gathering details.  
Here lives Credulity and passionate Error together with Joyfulness

Based upon nothing. And here lives Fear and new-born Sedition  
And the Whispers whose origins no one can account for. And Rumour herself  
Who sees and hears everything, and seeks information, from all over the world.

## From Sonnets to Orpheus (II.12)

[After Rainer Maria Rilke]

Desire transformation, love the flame,  
The thing you miss in Change's proud display.  
The shaping spirit, ruling the mundane,  
Adores the turn, like dawn returning day.

When baked and sealed to last, do pots of clay  
Really feel secure to be dried and grey?  
But the hard calls to hardest, and we know  
A hammer somewhere lifts to deal the blow.

Give yourself away, like a bubbling spring,  
Then Knowing knows and leads you in the dance  
Which ends so often where it will begin;

Each parting breeds a space for blissful trance.  
And Daphne, since the girl feels like a tree,  
Wants you to be a breeze, and feel free.

## Our Relative Capacities

[A sonnet based on a passage from a sermon preached  
by John Donne at White-Hall, 8 April 1621]

We have the measure of the stomach urn,  
The quarts and gills of blood from every vein;  
We know each cistern, pipe, each duct and drain  
Where matter masses and our fluids churn.  
Within us are such rooms at every turn:  
Larders, cellars, and vaults where we maintain  
Those vats where wine turns water once again,  
And vessels where mysterious fires burn.  
But where's the whirlpool of the covetous mind,  
That endless hive of honey of our wit?  
What place lies in our heart or brain for it?—  
Less than thimbles, anatomists can find.  
For worldly matters we have ample space,  
But little room to keep such things as grace.

## Nausicaa's Epiphany

[A Translation from Book VI, The Odyssey, ii. 224-249, by Homer]

Mighty Odysseus bathed in the river, washing his body,  
Sluicing the sea-brine coating his back and his broad shoulders,  
Scrubbing away the dandruff of salt-crust scaling his head.

Once he had bathed, and was glistening with oil, he put on the clothing  
The princess had given him, while divine Athena enhanced his appearance,  
Making him seem taller, more muscled and powerful, and down from his forehead

Running his curls in ringlets like clusters of hyacinth blossom.  
Masterly as an artisan pouring gold upon silver (and one whom Hepaestus  
And Athena had tutored in skilful technique), as he perfects his creation,

Athena now lavished such glory on Odysseus' head and shoulders.  
Walking to the shore, he sat there, alone, shimmering with glamour;  
And the breath-taken princess stood and stared at him, lost in wonder.

Turning to her handmaids with the long-braided-hair, she spoke to them, saying:  
"Listen to me now, my girls with white arms, the gods on Olympus  
Surely are not all against this man who visits among us.

Shameful and crude, at first he seemed, but now I confess  
That if only a man like this were my husband, and stayed on forever!  
Just be certain, my girls, the man has plenty to eat and to drink."

They listened attentively, and hurried away to do her bidding,  
Bringing Odysseus food and drink; and he feasted greedily;  
God-like Odysseus, so hungry, so long since he tasted meat...

## In Circe's Palace

[A Translation from Homer's *The Odyssey*, Book X, ll. 207-244]

Drawing of lots sent the brave Eurylochus with twenty-two comrades  
Deep into the forested vales where they stumbled on Circe's palace,  
Massive in sculpted stone on a clearing where the land rose gently.  
Mountain lions and wolves were roaming there, under her power,

Fawning on the men instead of devouring them, pawing them, dogging them,  
As if they came carrying scraps from a banquet to calm their wild energy.  
Pausing at her doors, the cringing men and these beasts stood wondering,  
Listening in rapture to Circe singing as she plied her shuttle.

Her immortal loom's beguiling web is the glory of this goddess;  
And only a goddess can weave with such glittering threads as hers.  
Taking command now, Polites, a captain, and my dearest in devotion,  
Said to the men, "my friends, I hear someone within is singing

While plying on her loom, and the sound of her singing is quite entralling;  
Hear how the house is echoing now to her gorgeous music;  
Whether goddess or woman, I say we should begin calling out to her."  
Hailing her stridently, all the men shouted and called to her, called to her.

Opening her shining doors at once, she emerged, inviting them;  
And they all so innocently entered her palace without hesitation.  
Only Eurylochus was feeling uneasily about this adventure.  
Once she had seated them, she began mixing a marvellous potion,

Made out of barley and cheeses and blended with sweet mulled honey  
In Pramnian wine. But into this brew she added some mischief:  
Drugs to obliterate all recollection of loved ones and homeland.  
Once they had drunken enough of this potion, she switched them to the pigsty,

Using her wand like a willow to flail them till they bristled into porkers,  
Snorting, wheezing and grovelling with their snouts all the way to the sty.  
Minds as strong as before but useless in the grunt of an animal.  
As they sobbed in their pig-pens, Circe tossed their nuts in the mud.

## Equally to All

[A sonnet found in passage from a sermon preached  
by John Donne at White-Hall, 8 March, 1622]

Ashes of an oak in a fire-place  
Provide no epitaph of how it grew;  
Tell nothing of the flocks its shelter drew,  
Nor men it injured in a fall from grace.  
The dust of great men, likewise, leaves no trace  
Of epitaph, to tell their names, or who  
They were in life, or what high men they knew:  
All dust is dust when dust blows in your face.  
Winds sweep from marble vault and pauper's mound  
The dust of princes, and of wretched men,  
Mingling in the nave, to be swept again.  
But who will judge of dusts that time has ground:  
"Patrician, this; and this, the noble man;  
This, yeomanly; and this, plebeian bran."

## The Death of Orpheus

[A loose dactylic hexameter, based upon, and extending,  
Ovid's story in *Metamorphoses*, Book XI]

Singing to the sky, the Thracian poet was drawing all the forest,  
Charming wild animals, moving even the rocks with his singing;  
Seducing the world, it seemed, with his lyre and a voice pure as silver.

Here the Ciconian women discovered him, blithely playing  
His way through the forest, as if unaware of the dark entangling  
Dangle of vines and the tendrils of ivy uncurling to reach him.

"Here", one cried, "here is one who sings to abuse us,  
Scorning the followers of the great Dionysus, and singing now only  
In praise of the sun-god, the high Lord Apollo, and wearing his laurel

Crown on his forehead, as if there were one god alone in the pantheon—  
Down with this heretic!" Now all the Maenads came rushing at Orpheus,  
Hurling their thyrsi and rocks and their curses, decrying his harmonies

Loudly with discord of horns and howling, drowning his lyre-song.  
Phrygian flutes and the hiss of whistles were clashing with the rattle  
Of tambourines shaken in hands clenched with rage, and shaken at Orpheus.

First of their victims were the countless birds, bewitched by the lyre  
And the voice of the singer, startled, stunned, and torn by the Maenads  
In the midst of their ecstasy. Thus fell the other wild beasts of the forest

To the bloody hands of the women, who had at them, limb and entrails,  
Fixing their growing madness of carnage upon the singer  
Fleeing them as fast as Acteon running from his own pack of hunting dogs.

Driving off farmers who were labouring nearby, the women took mattocks  
And plough-shares and hoes, the implements of industry, turning them to weapons  
And flung them at Orpheus, whose voice, for once, was failing its audience;

He who had tamed the wild beasts of the forest and made the rocks listen  
Ecstatic in wonder, now went unheard in the grating cacophony  
Made by women, wielding their rakes and hammers in anger.

Savagely the women then ripped apart oxen, whose horns had threatened them,  
Slewing through the gore and offal on their way to butcher the poet;  
Dead to all reverence, their eyes glazed and darkened, they tore him apart.

Limbs of the singer were scattered afar, but his shade descended  
Into the underworld; down to the Elysian fields flew his being,  
Seeking his twice-lost bride in the darkness, singing to find her.

Find her he did, and now cannot lose her, though worlds should crumble;  
Here in the underworld, ever more glorious, more brilliant he sings now  
In joy of Eurydice, and free to look backward as well as look forward.

Here his song shimmers as the sun of Elysium, penetrating darkness  
Like a diamond flaring, firing its radiance deep in the velvet  
Night of the underworld, illuminating souls in its piercing beauty.

## Argos

[From ll. 290-305, Book 17 of Homer's *Odyssey*]

Now, as they spoke, a dog that was lying nearby raised his muzzle,  
Pricking his ears. It was Argos, the devoted hound that Odysseus  
Trained as a puppy, but without much reward, since soon he departed,  
Sailing to Troy. In the old days young hunters loved taking him with them,  
Chasing wild goats, or the deer or the hares. But now, with his master gone,  
He was left lying neglected on dung-piles of the mules and cattle,  
Heaped at the gates till the slaves of Odysseus came with their wagons  
To manure the wide fields—he was crawling with vermin. As soon as he noticed  
Odysseus standing there, down dropped his ears and his tail began beating, but  
Lacking the strength he could not move towards him. Odysseus recognized  
Argos, and turning his face from Eumaeus, he wiped away a tear.

## On Proust's Madeleine

Sensual under strict religious folds,  
The scalloped, spoon-held piece of madeleine  
Is soaking up and swelling to retain  
The faded blossom scent the warm tea holds.  
Then taste, a rush of pleasure for which gold's  
A metaphor too weary to explain,  
And far too poor a substance to sustain  
The sense of treasure now the past unfolds.  
Contingency, mortality, both fade  
Beneath this bliss, like love, which is a joy  
Vicissitudes of life cannot destroy,  
Nor fears can worm a way nor doubts invade.  
When taste and smell set our remembrance free,  
A world thought lost may spring from a cup of tea.

## Angels

[A sonnet based upon ideas, words and images from the sermons of John Donne].

Creatures with less body of flesh than froth,  
As boneless as a vapour, fog, or sigh;  
And yet a Seraph steeled with holy wrath  
May crush a millstone finer than its rye.  
God's first sons, none a minute elder, fly  
Still weightless, full of light, as they were made  
Before the Lord divided earth from sky,  
Six thousand years and not a whit decayed.  
And with those yet to come, theirs will not fade  
To winter faces under snowy hairs;  
No spongy lungs for damp sobs to invade  
A bony breast and drown a heart in cares.  
But come that day, this host will envy me  
My body risen for eternity.

## After Tao Yuan Ming (A.D. 365-427)

I built my small hut near the town  
And yet there is no hubbub here.  
You ask: "How do you keep the sound  
So low, yet leave the air so clear."  
I answer, "when the heart is still  
A stillness blooms within the home."  
I gather for my window sill  
Chrysanthemums, and then I roam  
In mind to wander southern hills;  
The mountain air flows in my hut,  
The sky is filled with flocks of birds,  
And everything has meaning, but  
The meaning lies beyond my words.

## Orpheus Redux

Singing her up from hell when almost home  
We met the one who'd stung her, in the street.  
I spoke of things like weather—"damn this heat!"—  
We parted when we passed the safety zone.  
But as I turned to take one final look,  
She dropped my arm. That was all it took.

## Dido's Passing

Pity poor Dido, riven from sanity, seeking a darkness  
Only the sword she feels can let enter, letting the light out.  
She falls and it pierces, slicing through silks, slitting through muscle,  
Spreading her blood all over the marriage bed—grim consummation.

As she lies struggling to gasp for the breath she would rather surrender,  
What are the images passing before her as the light starts to flicker?  
No, not Aeneas. He has departed. Now she sees sunlight  
Dappling the grape vines there in her window, piercing each globule.

She hears in the distance the lowing of cattle, coming for milking;  
Remembers the beat of the hot-frothed fluid filling the bucket.  
Rising she falls as the grate of her breast-bone rasps upon metal;  
Now she is staring down where the floor was scarred by a soup bowl.

The moment the bowl fell is passing before her, and all of the fussing  
And all of the blame attending that accident showing the human  
State as we know it: distress in a world where falling is common;  
Where candles extinguish, bowls may be dropped, and promises broken.

Rising she falls again; rising she falls, with Iris descending,  
Colouring over the world with her gold, rainbowing everything.  
Gilded days of a royal life are passing before her,  
Never to be recalled. Never, passing, forever.

## Light & Political

## Borrowed Tactics

Senator McCarthy was a bastard, as we know,  
To damn and black-list artists till they couldn't get a go.

We shouldn't judge an artist by the company he keeps,  
But by his work alone—some of the best were private creeps.

But now we have the numbers we can use McCarthy's trick  
To shun and black-list artists who oppose our PC clique.

And like McCarthy we will tell you who you shouldn't read,  
We're poles apart in theory but we're fascist both in deed.

## What's Left?

I envy the moral perfection  
Of the folks on the cultural left;  
Surrounded by such a collection  
Of saints I feel lost and bereft.

There isn't an issue to mention  
They haven't a remedy for,  
And they're positive all global tension  
Is due to our actions before.

For the West is the world's only evil  
And nothing's as wicked as we,  
And they're certain that every upheaval  
Is the fault of white bastards like me.

But when you examine it closer  
You might be surprised what you find,  
For the issues that make them verboser  
Are the ones buried deep in their mind:

All the violent rant against warfare,  
All resentful remembrance of race,  
All repeated insistence they do care  
As they purple and spit in your face

You can see is the angry denial  
Of thoughts they can only admit  
By projecting and putting on trial  
The stench of their own disowned shit.

## Noctifers

"Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied  
in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is."

—C.G. Jung

The liberating angels stand  
With faces flushed by light;  
A wise, a pure, a righteous band  
Who clearly see what's right.

But as they crowd the cheering fire  
To celebrate the glow  
Of standing tall and reaching higher,  
Their low dark shadows grow.

## On Ear's Eve

[A sonnet in the Strine Dialect]

Gobbler mincer the season, yole barrsted!  
Ey, wenja get ohm from the doo lar snite?  
I got star-ginter the plonk engot plarrsted  
Anow I gotta blardy split nair-dyke.  
Old 'Arry god is elfen to a fight.  
I toldim, "Arry, mite, yerron yerrone;  
They're numb butter buncher drongoes, smite."  
He'll ever nerve sprike tan the waze goane.  
'Bout one, the missus sez, "I wanna go woam"  
So we sang Shoulder Quaint's Beef Cot,  
An I packed eroff ohm ina cabalone,  
The resta thanites jester bitter vanaze.  
Yair, this ear's eve party wazzareel ripper,  
Ena specktile beer right narkup luddaze.

## Why do I write?

Why does an Ozzie coot  
Honk at the moon?

What makes a magpie  
Out-garble his tune?

Why should a koël  
Bawl out his lust

In a pre-dawn wail  
Filling most with disgust?

Why should a kookaburra  
Cackle so hearty?

(Who invited this giggling  
Twit to the party?)

Why should a bustard  
Boom phat and low?

Like the long-gone dodo  
I'm stuffed if I know.

## Sonnet in an Unknown Tongue

Marisha poorabindy whah padee,  
Ascoona filliwalla on parnoo  
Pahdah popirriwash apumparee  
Honkadah wirrisheeba hiss gaboo.  
Hissen dahon pareeta missaloo  
Pahdah, pahdah, aharapiddy wah,  
Nah narraburra hiddy wahdapoo  
Heebieba ont afah ahey afah,  
Neboona ina womp abooten par.  
Posetta ringa-ron awah pardoo  
Ahobbla ahen ponken hah defee,  
En feeda harraweey by hob anoo.  
Nah bobbla harra weepa pertensip  
Hay bibbla wippy pertendooby hip!

## How Rousseau Destroyed the West

I've told you, Phil, don't scold the child,  
I will not have our son reviled  
For being what every child should be:  
Completely and entirely free  
To be himself and not controlled  
And forced to fit a social mold;  
A child is a noble savage  
Don't burden him with moral baggage—  
Let him grow as nature meant  
Not psychologically bent  
By silly growth-restricting rules  
They teach in sad, old fashioned schools.  
Authority makes a child a slave  
Insisting how he must behave:  
A noble savage needs no guide  
But Mother Nature by his side—  
The less society interferes  
The more his natural self appears:  
Natural man is sweet and gentle  
Till social forces drive him mental.  
Don't judge his actions by your standard,  
I will not have my child commanded;  
And when you speak of his "aggression"  
You're limiting his self-expression.  
So please don't tell him what to do—  
You'll only make a clone, like you!  
You were raised traditionally  
But I want Johnny to be free  
Of all conditioning and find  
His own ideas in his own mind;  
I won't condemn his education  
To regimented rote-frustration:  
The child of Nature knows the best  
Way to learn—and needs no test  
To judge him and discriminate,  
Which is the sole cause of hate.  
And while I'm here, don't mend his grammar—  
Do you want to give the child a stammer?

## A Oz Thunder Storm

On the early morning breezes of a warm monsoonal day  
Came the warble of a magpie as galahs began to say  
What the currawongs were chortling and the crested cockatoos  
Were screeching out to everyone—the latest weather news  
That a thunder-storm was brewing like a billy-boil of tea  
A bubbling on the range above the hills past Bungaree.

By noon the air was sparking like a crumpled rayon shirt  
(Or like those office carpets that can make your fingers hurt  
When you touch the bloody door-knob as the boss yells out “come in”  
And he hears you shout out “shit!” before he hears you say “hi Jim”).  
The atmosphere was charging up and tension in the air  
Was enough to send some women to the hell of frizzy hair.

On the path outside the lib’ry where old ladies come to look  
For a murder mystery or perhaps a racy big-print book,  
The ants were going mental, scrabbling over ochre stones  
As they butchered up the remnant of a possum, save the bones,  
Before the building rain-storm came to wash the corpse away,  
Flushing all their tucker down the drain into the bay.

In the west the clouds were cauliflowering white upon the blue  
Where they boiled like a stratospheric mono-veggie stew.  
And as the creamy under-side grew darker by the minute  
With pendulous mammatus dangling down you saw within it  
How the little winking lightning flashes synchronized below  
With static in the football on the AM radio.

As the town-hall clock struck three PM (which everybody knew  
Was really four by summer time—next month it would be true)  
The growing-louder rumbles like the furniture of hell  
Being rearranged by demons shook the air in the hotel,  
And jarred the glasses in the racks to rattle touch and tink  
And made old Johnny Watson pause and look up from his drink:

“Shit” he said “it’s gunna piss down any moment now  
I betta swill this schooner quick and go and check me cow  
That calved last night is high and dry, and nowhere near the creek

Which in a flash-flood flows as fast as auctioneers can speak.”  
So Johnny wheeled west a worried man for he was sure  
This storm would be a ripper—“shit, it’s gunnafukin’ pour.”

And then the heavens opened as they did in Bible times  
And punishment descended as it did for Bible crimes,  
Like when Sodom and Gomorrah were expunged from off the plain  
There were flashes booms and bangs and bloody seas of muddy rain.  
The corrugated water tank behind the general store  
Was blown right off it’s wooden frame and spewed up like a bore.

Because it hadn’t rained for seven years or maybe eight  
The land around the town was oven-baked and hard as slate  
So when the water hit it like a fire-hose on granite  
It didn’t penetrate the soil but swiftly over-ran it  
And thundering down the valleys now it drove the farmers balmy,  
Watching barren hills disgorge a pastoral tsunami.

When the foaming wall of water hit the town of Nottawurrie  
It swamped the public dunny in a tidal wave of slurry  
As it gurgled down the gutters till they burst and over-flowed  
Then it swept some bins and shopping trolleys down to Nobbies Road.  
Amazed to see his town dissolve, the Nottawurrie mayor  
Recited “holy shit!”—which is a Nottawurrie prayer.

So many years of drought when every cup that you could save  
From shower bath or washing kept a flower from its grave,  
When every drop was precious as a drip of diamond dew  
Such cruel superfluity made every bastard spew!  
The old Olympic pool which had been empty for a year  
Was swamped as if beneath a lake of murky dirty beer.

By the time that Johnny parked the ute and grabbed his drizabone  
The rain was pelting like the fallout in a geyser-zone,  
And all the granite hills were draped in leaden sheets of rain  
The wind was dragging over wheat to strip the heads of grain.  
A very pissed and dripping drongo wondering what to do,  
Old Johnny thought, “I’ll chuck it in,” but then he heard a moo.

He had a squizz below him, then he looked to left and right,  
Then he waited for another moo to get his bearings right.

Thunderstruck by what he heard he felt a certain dread,  
Not because of lightning but the moo above his head!  
And looking up the gumtree there was wriggling in the breeze  
A gum-leaf studded udder and two pairs of bovine knees.

But soon the grumbling storm was drifting out towards the bay  
Where it hailed some holidayers who were camping in its way,  
The campers were disgusted sullen making no pretence  
Of their anger at their dimpled cars, their misery in tents.  
And as the storm was fading into evening's rising dark  
The currawong and magpie flocks were gargling in the park.

## Like a Hurricane

Old Johnny Jackson was pissed as a newt  
The night cyclone Tracy gave Darwin the boot.  
He'd side-lined his liver, almost gone,  
And his spleen was playing well into time-on;  
And this night he'd really tied on a ripper,  
Cuddled a copper and puked on a stripper.  
But Johnny was worried since early last week,  
Because Suzie, his lady, refused to speak.  
When she did, it was down to his drinking, she said,  
Not to mention the mess in the lounge before bed:  
like wrappers of pies and his butt-ends in bottle-tops  
With a foul fug of ash lurking under the malt-and-hops.  
She gave a last warning, which Johnny recalled  
As he surfaced long after the cyclone had called;  
He'd slept while the city was blowing away,  
Leaving bugger-all standing since early that day.  
When he woke he just stared where his wall used to be,  
And beheld the smashed city, down to the sea.  
"Struth!" said Johnny, "I'll be more meticulous—  
I knew she'd be angry, but this is ridiculous!"

## **An Intimacy Shanty**

They say I've got EE, which is  
Emotional Exposure;  
I opened up my heart and now  
All I want is closure.  
I interface with counsellors  
And we share tea and tissues,  
While non-judgmentally we speak  
Of intimacy issues.

I'm getting on with my life now  
Dysfunction's being healed,  
The group massage and rolfing worked  
(Except my skin has peeled).  
After hypnotherapy  
The doctor offers tissues,  
Then non-judgmentally we deal  
With intimacy issues.

My biggest hurdle's now to face  
The harsh discrimination  
Emotional Exposure victims  
Face across this nation.  
No one understands our tears—  
They groan and pass the tissues,  
And so judgmentally avoid  
Our intimacy issues.

## Plus ça change

Oh how they hate a British Lord,  
Invading lands while he deplored  
Their ancient primitive native ways,  
Back in the old colonial days.  
They hate his supercilious smirk,  
The way he sneered (the fascist jerk)  
At cultures he refused to know  
But ever of his own would crow.

The world is now decolonised  
But sneering Lords live on disguised  
As scholars whose critiques now blast  
Our native European past.  
They snort at the benighted state  
Of our forefathers and berate  
Their ways, and smug as Lords condemn  
Their failure to be wise, like them.

# Love's Mysteries

## Risk

You lying naked in a wet  
Towel, covered with fierce  
Thirsty bees. The heat buzzing

Almost as loud as wings.  
Me in a wet towel, too, with a sun  
So hot it knocks larks from the sky.

Honey badgers have been found  
Stung to death in hives.

## The Natural Born Bastard

"Is there any cause in nature  
that make these hard hearts?"  
—King Lear

There never was a reason why  
The silverfish can never fly;  
Though it seems a perfect beetle  
Its problem's not exo-skeletal.

The fault lies in the primal flash,  
This world of which is fading ash,  
For when the primal oodad popped  
Some plans for wings were simply dropped.

And as the loaded die was cast  
The laws for missing wings were passed;  
No use your bitter hows and whys,  
We cannot all be butterflies.

So never try to glue false wings  
On sly destructive creepy things;  
Some hole-darn housewives miss their fate  
Without a silverfish to hate.

## Diagnostic

They speak today of pheromones and genes  
When trying to account for such a state  
Most often seen in young folk, in their teens  
Or in their twenties, signalling a mate.  
They would not think a man turned fifty-eight  
Should be a candidate for such a blast  
Of chemicals, or genes, or luck, or fate,  
To blow him forty years back to his past.  
His family and friends would be aghast  
To hear their wrinkled sage bay at the moon  
And warble that he'd found "the one" at last,  
And call him "fool", or worse, "romantic loon."  
But they don't know because they were not there  
To breathe the lethal darkness of your hair.

## A Risky Move

Motionless in a sleeping lion's paws,  
Your face down in the dust, afraid to stir,  
Knowing that any move might clench those jaws  
To crush your chest, should you disturb the purr;  
Or struggling as you sank until you were  
Up to your neck in a slick, quicksand pit,  
Where frozen immobility might confer  
A last-ditch chance of your surviving it;  
Or snared in jungle webs with enough wit  
To realize the danger of your plight:  
That any jerky move might well transmit  
A signal calling down a lethal bite.  
Some risky moves, but this one's hard enough:  
To risk a dear friend by declaring love.

## Sheets to the Wind

Last night I heard the wind make love  
In mooned and wavy sheets of tin

And choose the long-nailed one, above  
The rest, to rend his silken skin.

And as her rust-red nails were raised  
To rake and ripple raptured pain

Her rising-falling curves he praised  
And raised and lowered her again.

His stroke on silvered skin, moon-lit,  
Induced a hum; she whispered more;

Then hard and fast his frantic fit  
Of love made her his love adore.

Prised ajar she opened wide  
Receiving him like billowed sails,

Flapped and arched in his potent tide  
She screeched and tore her rasping nails.

Upon his breath she rose and fell  
Faster, faster now she wailed

Enthralled in free ecstatic hell  
So loose upon the beam impaled.

And when the wind had come and gone  
And flung the sheets of his desire

I'd lost my will for sleeping on  
My own, my heart, my sheets of fire.

## Recall

Do you recall that day  
When I tried, in the city square,  
So hard to find a way  
To make you understand?

I reached to touch your hand,  
Whispering near your hair;  
You let no feeling show  
Through the twists of your wedding band.

The explosion of your "No!"  
Blew doves to darkened air.

# Ἔρως

[After Plato's *Symposium*]

Eros is not Cupid,  
No biddable little boy,  
For I have met with Eros  
And his arrow is no toy.

He is a mighty hunter  
A master of artifice,  
Seducer and enchanter,  
No cheeky imp of bliss.

His hair is lank and tangled,  
He sleeps on naked streets  
In doorways and on benches  
Where the sleet and hail beats.

His feet are bare and blistered  
And his self-respect and home  
Are lost, like Need, his mother,  
Who weeps in want alone.

And day and night he haunts me,  
This wounded, hunting youth,  
Desperate, looking hard, as any  
Lover of the truth.

## Cycle

In flowers of fire lie seeds of ice  
That sprout when all the blooming's done,  
As we now see our Paradise  
Grey in the wake of passion's run.

Once all the trees and clouds and hills  
Shivered in a blossoming fire;  
Now ice-seed sparks from ash and fills  
The heart with hope they'll sow desire.

## Broken Loose

She doesn't care, she doesn't care, old heart.  
But ox-dumb heart is thick and won't be told.  
Reason frowned and argued from the start:  
Her skin is fine bone china, and you're old.  
But ox-thick heart is nothing if not bold,  
And paws the ground and snorts and doesn't care,  
And foolishly refuses to be told.  
Stay in that pen, you beast, and learn despair!  
Reason ruled as the conference went to air.  
Six weeks unseen, I watched the screen in dread  
My hope she'd dress in grey with tied-back hair.  
But her black-hair was down; her top, pink-red!  
That's when my ox broke loose, now I can't stop  
Him running wild in reason's china shop.

## Bell's Theorem

Dr. John S. Bell demonstrated (mathematically) that "if quantum mechanics is valid, any two particles once in contact will continue to influence each other, no matter how far apart they may subsequently move."

How far from truth who say we live apart,  
As well divide the beatings of one heart:

Systolic you and diastolic me,  
As I clutch it all tight, you set it free.

Then turn about, so now I have my chance  
To give to your take in our hearty dance.

As electrons touch at the core of a star  
Then supernovaed off to spaces far

Apart from each other, so we as well  
Still influence each other as we tell

How the spin we gave each where we met  
Still shapes every thing we give or we get.

Though the stretch of roads and rivers may be  
A hindrance to some, it proves none for we

Having touched at the centre of such fire  
Vibrate like the strings of a single lyre.

The sun of my parade unfurls your street,  
Like Donne's gold leaf to airy thinness beat

## Wisteria

Late spring when we first saw the house,  
With its back door a cave obscured  
Behind those breaking waves of blue  
And white surge-foam of blossom.

Bees, pollen and petals made it  
Difficult to weave a way in;  
And in the drench of sun-showers  
The water-falls of flowers purred.

Summer slowed the fall to trickles.  
And since you've missed most of autumn,  
Let me say the wisteria  
Now is mostly air and grey cloud.

The few curved spatulas of pods  
Rattle like the wood-slat clackers  
Of a ghost-dispersing wind chime,  
High against Himalayan grey.

## How Good!

[For Chris]

A marvellous thing it is to be loved  
By someone looking at you,  
When you bask in the dreaming beam of an eye  
Whose look is the meaning of true.

A wonderful thing to feel such a love  
You wonder if you deserve,  
But there it is, and how can you doubt  
A reflex quick as a nerve.

A world-saving thing it is to be loved,  
To be given the peace just to be,  
And let you attend to the shadow-rich end  
Of a long summer's day by the sea.

## On Falling

A dirigible balloon was being docked  
By a man who held the tether line too well  
He rose upon a gust when his hands locked  
Until a mile high, and then he fell.  
Some clearly heard a parachutist's yell  
From a thousand feet to earth as his 'chutes failed;  
Perhaps his falling felt like time in hell,  
But he was still once gravity prevailed.  
A mountaineer, leaving a granite face,  
Guilty of a lost footing, fought for a while;  
And though he pled with parabolic grace,  
A snap of chafing rope ended his trial.  
Some awful falls, but this one's worst of all:  
To fall in love, and fall, and fall, and fall.



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