

**CORI GEL
JACKSON**

Coracle

Poems 1991-2007

Jackson

Print book published in 2009 by the author in Australia.
E-book edition published in 2020 by the author.
thepoetjackson.com

Copyright © Janet Ruth Jackson 2009.

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission of the author.

Cover designed by Raymond Grenfell.
Pages designed by the author using OpenOffice under Linux.

ISBN 978-0-9870809-4-3



A catalogue record for this
work is available from the
National Library of Australia

Contents

Dedication and acknowledgements.....	vii
Split.....	1
Hair and guts and numbers.....	2
She is moon.....	3
Lawn.....	3
Stack.....	4
A little black-and-white thing.....	5
Windows.....	6
Suicide bomber.....	7
Ripped.....	7
paint it.....	8
black strings.....	9
Dream 40.....	9
Dream 45.....	10
As real as.....	11
Take a stick to the truth.....	12
Feel not.....	13
Now this is a poem about coffee.....	15
Come home.....	16
Lay your noise on me.....	16
This nameless plane.....	17
rescued.....	17
Nameless.....	18
Would you like some soup?.....	18
14 weeks.....	20
Breastfeeding a newborn.....	20
Samantha, 7 weeks.....	21
Breastfeeding a four-month-old.....	21
Sling.....	22
A female poem.....	22
Arm you with magic.....	23
A takeaway wish on a takeaway star.....	24
Damask.....	24

xtend.....	26
Instrument.....	26
Then will it rain?.....	27
Wadgee.....	28
Receive.....	29
In the eyes of it.....	30
Gather the dark.....	32
Loud.....	33
Come dancing.....	34
The fisherwoman.....	36
When we need him.....	37
Coracle.....	38
An Lar (Unsprawling).....	40
Quay.....	41
Celtic knots.....	42
Go.....	45
Dream 22.....	46
Dream 7.....	47
But.....	48
When the train came, I cried.....	49
four stones are enough.....	50
Attach.....	50
Nine levels.....	51
Amid the running.....	52
I am your sunlight.....	54
In the mirror-maze.....	54
Thank you.....	57
Storm.....	58
Sight.....	58
[S]he moves in.....	59
Keypal.....	60
Dress in rags.....	61
Charisma.....	62
Please wait to be seated.....	63
In whatever voice.....	64

Centred.....	65
The sound.....	66
tree breaks.....	67
Echo and ache secret.....	68
An update for the Pilgrims Guide.....	69
Ears well-sucked.....	70
torrential.....	71
Steel tube.....	72
Hasp.....	73
Un/speak/able.....	74
The eye.....	75
Isosceles.....	76
The guy in the cafe.....	77
Peeled off.....	78
Don't go there.....	79
Skeleton.....	80
If the rain.....	81
Alternative energies.....	82
Entropy and order sing.....	83
One more voice.....	84
Light a candle.....	84
Hardcore.....	85
My brother is dead.....	86
Evidence.....	87
Gentle touch of elsewhere.....	88
Lip-prints.....	89
Hold the line.....	90

Dedication and acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to everyone who makes art—the painters, photographers, sculptors, filmmakers, storytellers, and especially the musicians and poets. Long may you sing.

It is also dedicated to all those working nonviolently for peace, sustainability, the empowerment of women and children, and empathy and understanding between individuals and cultures.

For your help with this book, thank you Jeff Dittrich, Shane McCauley, Annamaria Weldon and Ray Grenfell. Love to everyone who has encouraged and inspired me over the years, especially the people who have come to readings, sent emails, bought chapbooks, suggested edits, given advice and offered opportunities. Big hugs to all the event organisers, editors, convenors, committee members and other arts workers paid and voluntary. A list of names would need another book, but I must particularly mention the apollo poets, the poetryetc poets, and the good people of KSP Writers Centre, WA Poets Inc, Walking On Water, Voicebox and Overload.

Thanks also to my parents, my kids and their dad, who got more than they bargained for, and to Nanna for babysitting.

Some of the poems in this collection have previously been published in the following.

Print: An Endless Afternoon, Blast, Cottonmouth, Marginata, Mattoid, Poets Corner, The Recessive Type, The Weighing of the Heart, The West Australian, The Word Is Out, Thirst, Word-Thirst.

Download: The Broadkill Review, KSP Writers Centre Newsletter.

Online: Fieralingue Poets Corner, Hamilton Stone Review, Malleable Jangle, Masthead, nthposition, Numbat, Pixel Papers, WA Poets Inc Fresh Poetry.

Split

I am a woman and I speak.

I am a woman with lines on her face and I speak.

I am a woman with lines on her face and scars on her belly and I
speak

with the voice of a mother

I said, a mother

twice split

once by a scalpel

once by the violence of a baby's head

a woman who writes and plays guitar with hands scarred
and aged from cleaning up shit

a woman who called herself 'expecting'

but didn't expect to be split,

body and soul,

half the precious young personality blasted away

I speak with the voice of a woman who knows what it means

to have her choices removed

to be so tired she can barely walk

and keep walking

to be so sick she can barely speak

and keep

singing

I speak with the voice of a woman who knows how to

love unconditionally

and who is ready to die when it is necessary.

Hair and guts and numbers

When I was 13 I wrote a fictional letter.
I played that I was married to my crush
(15, dark eyes, black wavy hair,
face like Clark Gable,
back like Brad Pitt,
and gutless me with no idea what to say).
I played at him away working, and me writing,
telling him our baby's latest movements
and, as I'd heard adults do,
complaining about the price of petrol.
I played it scary: 33 cents a litre.

Today's cheapest is 98.9.
Something to do with Venezuela, apparently.
I see no choice but to pay it and try to smile,
but Caltex give me a bonus: the boy behind the counter,
maybe 18, maybe 19,
long red-dyed hair loosely tied back,
eyes deep and quiet,
cheekbones, lips, smooth skin,
and I'm 38 and full of guts
so I give him a second look
straight in the eyes
and he sees it

then I shop for sleek knickers

and go home to the father of my kids,
the laidback geek with the salary package
and the hairy gut and the number-3 beard
and the balding, greying number-2 scalp.

On the radio news a 36-year-old teacher
is jailed for fucking her 15-year-old student

couldn't handle it

She is moon

He is uber-explosion: his faces
on bus-stops, bodies on screens,
mind on view.

She is a photograph taken with him
at the Oscars. She is moon,
murmur, faint amid all his so-bright
sunlight, solar
wind. She is muse,
murmur, focus, fathom,
theme. She is the moon
of the glow in his dream.

There are marks on her face,
her Sea of Tranquillity face.
Her art?

Lawn

It softly touches the bricks
at its edge,
a gentle but definite border.
The bricks say

 You can't come past here!
 This is our flower bed!

The lawn says
 OK, I won't
 but let me look.
The bricks let it look.

Stack

Between the calloused shortnailed
thin fingertips stack
all the pieces.

On the tarmac path a stubby, smashed. It's not
That Sort Of Area, but this corner
attracts the fling-and-smashems.

Ten metres on there's a house whose bins
are kept in front.

Stack all the pieces.
A nice green, a lucent lightdark green.
Too sharp to recycle
or mosaic.

By the nail of the pinkwhite
right middle finger, plastic
fire-engine blood. No pain.

After the bin clamp down the thumb and index
to close the capillaries, and walk back
to the lock that fits the key.

Blood and water down the ugly drain
to the septic tank and the leach drain.

Between the calloused shortnailed
thin fingertips stack
all the pieces.

A little black-and-white thing

Walking in the city centre, rain
falling into my two-tone hair, looking
for something that just isn't
there any more—or never was.

A boy in black trenchcoat and trilby
strolls, different, confident;
doesn't look at me, with my melted hair.
I'm just a lump in the crowd, but I want
to tell him, 'You're beautiful. You're so
beautiful.' or
'I had a hat like that, once.'

Walking in the city centre, rain
depressing my carefully-chosen clothes, looking
for someone who already moved
somewhere else—or never was.

The woman in the Arcane
Bookshop takes, in her careful
fingers, my website flyer, my
photocopied product sample—
poem, titles and link—
reads it.
(I'm sure it's politically correct.)
She says only 'OK, I'll put that up for you'.
On the windowpane. My words.
Jostled by vivid gig and book ads.

It's a little black-and-white thing.
All its colours are on the inside.

Windows

We are pinned like prayer
flags, fluttering in
all the winds, fixed
by our hands nailed
to the wooden
walls, fences, windows.

We send our prayer
emails, tunnelling to
all the temples, channelled
by tonight's whims nailed
to the pulsing
bitstreams, servers, windows.

We are bonded, prayer
wheels spinning with
all the neighbours, trapped
by our feet nailed
to the plastic
furniture, appliances, windows.

We fire our prayer
cannons, thundering at
all the icons, frenzied
by manacled passion nailed
to the glowing
gates, paintings, windows.

They are shut with prayer
books, wailing in
all their houses, held
by our symbols nailed
to the shrieking
screens, skins, windows.

Suicide bomber

Here is my labyrinth mind: invade it with your memes
My framework hands: wire them to your dreams
My blank memory: load it with your sin
My acrylic skin:
crack it with your convoluted pain
My desert eyes: wash them with your rain
My blood: to melt in light
Smacked face:
track to grace
Soul: in all the night: nova-bright.

Ripped

I CARE FOR NOBODY
says the shirt.
\$60. 10 identical. 600 blankstare dollars.
Fucked, ripped, empty 2005.

1976 shirts said CRASS or ANARCHY.
Ripped—but not in Chinese sweatshops.

Who cares for nobody?
The corporation.

Anger is an energy

If I can't have love give me hate.

paint it

cross the abyss, make it
nothing

take my heart and paint it
take my namelessness
 my namelessness and carve
your mark in it

give this rough wood your,
 spread on it the damask perfection of your
careful words
show this mockup an example of your expensive feathers
give this metal-thief your,
 all your
rags,
your rags to shiver in

give this iceheart your rags to shiver in
give this silent horn a hollow place to cower in
give this emergent mess a useless mask to pose in

give this lockstockpile a lovesong to live in
give this oncteen a fantasy to drift in
give this dreamer a medium to dream in

paint it

cross the abyss, make it
nothing

black strings

his perfect speech
stripped to the waist
his exquisite phrases
jeans tight and damp
his grammar
curls cling to his chest in a lick of new sweat
his diction
hair hangs black strings into his eyes
his pronunciation
steam fizzing off him
resonant vowels, sibilant consonants
touch me, touch me, touch me

Dream 40

He has short, ragged dark hair,
jeans, a long dark coat.
He walks out of—a building, an alley, an archway
in his black boots,
his shaven pale face almost handsome.
He is in love with someone—he is dreaming.
He is young and beautiful
and he speaks to me
and I touch his hands.

He stands in his place, his archway, and I go there.
A dark jacket, jeans, black boots.
The dark hair is greying, the face has lines.
He is strong and his strength is simple. He knows himself.
He has many loves and many griefs, and so many dreams,
and he speaks to me.
I listen
and rejoice.

Dream 45

He walks in new steps

out of his city, his alley, his archway

walks in new steps

feet leaving the broken shoes

chest emerging from the bloodshot shirt

walks in new steps

in the rain, in the rain...

always in the rain

He casts off the layers

the hat and mask

the polyester and glitter that didn't keep out the rain
and the clown shoes.

He finds his workman's pants and his path

and walks again

He thought he could run but he walks again

in the rain

The dirty acid rain splashes

around him, serves only to cleanse him

as he walks. The echoes of his steps

reach the corners of the world, but his steps

are quiet.

His feet are bare

and his blood marks his path.

The acid rain can't fade it.

He brings the fields green to the city

the grey sea-rush to the suburb

the ancient stone to the skyscraping offices.

Brings faerie lights to the freeway

faerie breaths to the runway

hedgerow-river mead to the glass apartments.

He sends home dreams as he walks in new steps,
bare and brave in the rain.

As real as

You are the person I am dressing up as.

You are the picture on the website
the character onscreen
the person, as real as I am,
who sends my messages.

You are full of pieces of everyone.

You are awake at 4am
talking intensely into a mobile phone
in a bar somewhere in America.

Then you are on your private broomstick,
beaming yourself home and catching a nap;

having breakfast, just
like anyone does, but later;

out in the streets, clattering and prancing,
gathering your pieces of everyone

taking them back to your secret cauldron
mixing them, making chequered magic
in your stainless-steel kitchen
in your weird old house

with paintings by Dali and murals of yourself
in your big black hat and boots and cloak
with beat poets and musos and lamas and prophets
and incense and alcohol hangin' in the air

because you are the person I am dressing up as.

Take a stick to the truth, a
stirring stick, a mixing stick
and stick
your truth all over me like jewels,
like geegaws, fabulous flashes, black
flak jackets, cigarette packets, like
nothing on earth, like birth, like, like,
California, I've never been there...

Where are you?
In America. Anywhere
in America.
And the wind
howls and the walls creak
and the trees
shiver and the animals wail
and the weapons take over
the warriors.

THERE ARE NO MORE WARRIORS, ONLY OPERATORS.

Stick to the truth. I loathe
your lies, those grey lying
ways. Don't you be like that.
Stay with us, now! Stay real, y'hear me?
I want no plastic doll. Reality,
I want reality and make no
mistake—make all the mistakes you can.
I want no fake, no sharp mask. Your
own flawed skin, uneven jawline, off-white teeth.
Stick to the truth.

Feel not

Tracks in a bubble chamber, particles
whizzing and circling, we signal
each other with a brush
of the fingers
We don't see the fingers, only
the words

velvet-coated two-edged words
all you had
(more than you wanted)
and it tasted like...
tasted like...
it tasted like rain in your mouth

Like rain falling into your mouth,
and like a stone on your tongue,
and like earth on your lips

(You said this doesn't taste like sunlight it tastes like water,
this doesn't taste like soap it tastes like a sliver of toast,
this doesn't taste like wine it tastes like water
straight from the tap)

It tasted like rain in your mouth
There was no leftover curry, no cigars,
no clubs, cars or exotic beaches,
none of that. Only the clean electron taste
of rain. Had you shocked and shaking,
had you spinning on the spot
(had you blurting out nonsense)
had you groping, scratching, licking for more
had you a blind beast
had you
had you
had you

...continued

had you sated, slapped around, passing
out and coming round,
doubled up in grief at the death of the mystery,
doubled up in grief at the death of the rain,
doubled up in the mud,
doubled up in pain.

Transmitted character
by character, the striking,
twisting duality, the position and momentum

(You said this is salt and pepper and greasy chips
—but you wanted prosciutto, you wanted laksa—
eggs and dubious sausages, American ketchup
—but you wanted sushi, chilli, rollmops—
pesticide potatoes and chemical cabbages and waxed, fake apples.)

Smell not sweet fresh energy, smell not old leather, smell not.
You wanted roses and lilies
but you smelt daffodils and forget-me-nots
You wanted trucks or lions or angels,
moans or whispers, bells,
but you heard a little stream without even a name
You ached to feel sandpaper, to feel a flame,
a cat, a weapon
a rod, a whip
and a hand, a calm hand in yours
but in the end you felt nothing.
Feel not ecstasy, feel not contemplation, feel not.

Taste not blood, hot metal, cinnamon, smoke
Taste not rain
Taste pain,
quiet transparent pain.

(You said this looks not like a god or a beast or a devil
but a man, just a man

You said it tasted like rain
but it tasted like mud, mud, mud in your mouth
and in mine)

-o0o-

Now this is a poem about coffee. There's lots of those: poets drink coffee, it seems. But let me explain the subtext. So I was drinking coffee, and listening to the radio, and... Now this is a poem about sex, of course. Aren't they all? So I was thinking about my... But this is a poem about music. I was listening to the radio. Oh—the hell with it. Just think about yours, OK? Ready? OK, here we go then.

I prefer it white but I'll
take it black. I'll take it any
way you give it.
Sugary or bitter, with
chocolate or cream, with
Baileys or Galliano—
even with vanilla—
However you want to serve it, if it's
made by you I'll drink it.
Just put your poison in it.

Come home

Lay your eyes on me
Me and the whole of me
Down in the depth of me.

Like me to think of it?
A lamp in the darkness.
Bridge between towers,
Over the dateline,
Troubled by turbulence.
Waters lap the docks and rocks.
I...
Will.

Lay your hands on us
Me and the rest of us
Down by the docks and rocks
Like pilgrims on the narrow way
A truth tattooed on our eyes.
Bridge sent by satellite,
Over the Atlantic,
Troubled and frantic.
Waters moat your castle eyes.
I gone,
Will run.

Lay your eyes on me
Me and the whole of me
Down in the depth of me.

Lay your noise on me

Put my words on you
You in the place of you
You in the role of you

Lay my eyes on you
You and the grace of you
Blind in the gale of you

Lay my hands on you
You and the real of you
Feel for the whole of you.

Spread your sauce on me
Me and the rest of me
All down the length of me

Exert your force on me
Me and the stones of me

Lay your noise on me
Me and the bones of me
Me and the skins of me
Me and the strings of me
All the little springs of me
Open the sluice of me
Make a bruise on me
Make a hole in me.

Put your voice on me
Leave no choice for me
Tear out the words of me.

This nameless plane

Ancient screams are my lover's lyrics. I want your milk. Sustain my spirit—but stay away awhile. Come back when you are cool enough to touch. Let the voices of your many dances overclock my ears, visions of your many rhythms blur my broken eyes.

May you always be short on shame. Your name lies folded in my chest. I will tear it out and flash it about. You gave me beasts; I fed them well. You gave me tests, and things to sell. So take this nameless plane to smack its aim. Blast my woken-princess mouth, you faery-fashioned flame.

rescued

princess
woken,
mouth
blasted
as she
wanted,
oxy-
welded
shut, lips
melted
together,
hands
smashed
as she
asked for,
words
torn
out of her
feel,
princess

Nameless

One stunning orb.

Best I've ever seen.

Not symmetrical, not
centred, not perfect:
no giant hand made it,
no tiny mind designed it.

Shimmering elliptical target.

Soundless nameless strands.

Hidden spider not proud,
just spider. Resting,
worknight over, wanting
not praise, but flies.

Would you like some soup?

Would you like some soup?

It's pumpkin. I grew the pumpkins
myself, in my own garden.

I watered them with my own hands,
fed them with manure and straw.

I trained the trailing vines to safety
as the pumpkins budded, burgeoned, ripened;
and then the vines withered.

I broke off the heavy pumpkins one by one,
carried them inside, and today,
chose one for soup.

Listening to the CD, the one you gave me,
I forced the pumpkin open with my knife,
seeded it with a spoon held in my hand,
peeled and chopped it with my knife,

held in my hand,
cooked it, pureed it, mixed in salt,
onion, pepper, nutmeg, butter...
listening.

Don't be in a hurry, not this time.
Don't rush off to your noisy place.
Don't leave me, alone with my soup.

There is music in my soup
and butter
and a pumpkin
grown with my own hands.
I made it just for you
with my own hands
thinking of you
for months
as the vines and pumpkins grew
and as I picked and peeled and chopped and stirred
with my own hands
just for you.
Would you like some soup?
I made some good bread, too.
Come into my house and let me feed you.

14 weeks

Kitzinger* says
when I feel it move
it will be like a little fish
zigzagging inside.

Kitzinger says
it's about as long as my index finger—
like the pearlescent gourami
in its father's aquarium.

A little fish
or a mouse inside
fully formed, with little toes
a beating heart
and rice-paper skin
If a boy, a little penis
and if a girl,
a little womb.

Breastfeeding a newborn

Suck, baby. Undulate
your tongue along
my flesh and chomp
me with your gums. Stare
at my armpit, and flick
your black-pool eyes about.
Drain me until you doze.
Consume me until you sleep.
Just leave me
one hand free.

* Anthropologist, childbirth educator and author Sheila Kitzinger.

Samantha, 7 weeks

fuzzy honeyblonde hair, blonde
eyebrows, faint
nipples, neat navel,
fat bare labia
chubby bent legs
tiny toenails, unused
knees, soft
buttocks, downy
hair in the small of the back
wriggling arms, waving fists, double chin, round pink cheeks
and eyes...
sometimes wild with pain or glazed with hunger, animal eyes
sometimes soft with satisfaction or bright with inner laughter,
gentle hello eyes

Samantha
older than earth,
older than pure slow life, older than age,
older than beauty, and older and wiser than me.

Breastfeeding a four-month-old

As you stroke me
carefully opening your hand flat
I realise
that the annoying jerky movements
your fist made a month ago
were your very best caresses.

Sling

The baby, softly breathing on my chest
offers me his fuzzy scalp to kiss.
His warmth is on my belly
his lips against my breast.
He's ready to embrace.

Strapped on firmly as I work and walk and rest
my baby, softly sleeping, fills my abyss.
He's heavy on my body
but easy on my heart.
He's ready to embrace.
He's my emblem of peace.

A female poem

This month's blood delays?
or kills? an unborn child.

I would have you suckle.

Breasts milkless, minimal.
Small nipples.
Friend says I'll be a D-cup
For a baby.
I wonder. Are letters assigned
To pregnant bellies, too?

Fragile new being,
small mouth on my naked skin,
when I get you
I'll write you a better poem.

Arm you with magic

Saying
in our boxes, your small
and private
name

In our houses.
We light a candle,
shed a tear,
be silent.

In our places.
All we can do.
We wish through the walls and the wires
for medicine to help you
for mother's soft palms to arm you with magic
for family to shield you
for father's calloused fingers to spark up a spell.

Jump up laughing, a whole child again.
Let their hands bless you,
heal and seal you,
send you out dancing as the calloused fingers cry
their relief,
as the soft palms relax
and give thanks.

Saying
in a muted breath
a prayer, your
name.

A takeaway wish on a takeaway star

Either way, let it be quick and let it be gentle.
And let there be someone to touch
and someone to listen.

In every timezone birthing, unbirthing.
At every moment prayer, for
you, etching silent thought or wailing,
or speaking quietly or strongly or chanting,
or being written or being read
on emails, blogs and forums, calling
to Jesus or Allah or us or quantum physics
or old photographs
or makeshift beds
or tired eyes
or art.

Now this exists.

If the Internet is a poet the poem is written in a layer above us
If the Earth is a poet the poem is written in a layer below and
around us

If the sea is a poet and the sky is a poet and you are a poet and I
am a poet
take one for medicine and two for magic and three for hope
and all the rest for love

Damask

Other

I have stilled my tongue
I have been silent so long
all my words come out white...

I'll be your baby
I'll rest in your arms and you'll rock me
I'll smell
your stolen scent and hear
your damask voice
and I'll be your baby
so you will enfold me.

I receive your damask skin,
in lines plain
and calm, an intense
balm, closewoven,
inviolate...

Back into my eyes, if I
got one of those looks would that
be mystic? Could that
define me, would that
be music? Look
back
into my eyes...

inviolate...

This is my cave
and this is my church.
Here are my priests,
my hymns,
my mantra.

This is my cave,
my secret private place,
and this is my church
where I touch
the One.

Fill me in. Fill me in.

```
xtend
if (
  I xtend
  beyond fone & skin, paper & sweat, screen & breath,
  a weave thru web&layers intu
  yu /*a piece of me in yu*/
)
then {
  I contain a piece, a peace, of
  yu; /*all           */
  /*yu hu           */
  /*have reached me*/
}
cradle; keep safe;
```

Instrument

My guitar is silent
Waiting to be touched.
Body rigid on a chrome stand.
Mouth open in a frozen 'O'.
Strap hanging limply,
embroidery adorning nothing.

My guitar is silent
Waiting to be touched
Not knowing, not asking if my touch
will be soon or distant,
tender or violent.

Then will it rain?

Wanting to talk with you
I went to your official residence
and many people met me
(staff, relatives, followers, tourists).
All of them spoke of you
but none could introduce us
because you weren't there. They said
you're not there very often.

Well... maybe you're out walking somewhere
and if I walk enough I'll meet you
on the road. Maybe if you walk
and I walk
until we're both tired and thirsty
we'll meet each other
at the well. the water-fountain. the bar.
The river.

Then will it rain? And will we stroll together
with our tongues out,
catching the cool droplets and laughing?

Wadgee*

Feeling so lost, you use a tribal
name, to attract
somehow
your scattered family, regain
your buried culture.

I have my little signatures, tribal
marks, to signal
somehow
my scattered fellows, recover
my hidden kin.

Occasionally they find me, allow their tribal
scars to sense
somehow
these frayed links, uncover
these blurred sensibilities.

Are we too old and blind for our tribal
rituals to mend
somehow
our frayed hands, rejoin
our cracked circles?

May you regain your tribe. May they all be found.
May you live loudly in their love.

* An indigenous artist.

Receive

Don't be ashamed.
I too am hanging
on these words and
pauses,
each a choice precise portion.

Don't be ashamed:
I too am looking
for details,
backgrounds,
grace notes,
accidents—
each a mistake deliberately left.

Don't be ashamed.
Did you ever hug a book? I did.
Ever lay your warm hand
on cool printed gloss, or press
your lips on glass? I did.
Ever close your eyes and send? I did.
Ever receive?

Don't be ashamed.
Did you ever dance? I did.
But when everyone else was walking? Yes, I did that too.
Ever cry, but couldn't
explain? I know those tears.
And did you make some art you thought no-one would
understand?
Show me.

In the eyes of it

Ancient buildings, cobbled streets,
old faces, young fears, a river...
docks. A
thousand years of stone and wood.
Grey stone, grey sky, grey water, deep.
In the belly of it.

In the place of it, the centre, home, field of it,
in the field of it, in
the influence, the field, force, lines of it,
coloured by the shape of it
home
or drowning?

Black coats and boots, bells,
hats with earflaps, leather gloves,
layers, lights, layers,
alleys, mazes, mosaics, arcades,
ancient creaking churches, leaking taverns,
tombs, crosses, monuments, angels—
angels, angels, angels!—
ancient layers, towers, bridges,
windows, walkways, arches, angels—
angels, angels, angels!—
layers of lovely dust, bowls of ancient dirt,
vessels of experienced glass, places, nooks, artists, angels—
angels, angels, angels!—
denizens, inhabitants, short and covered and dark but
bright inside with the colours of tripping music,
and angels, angels, angels!—
singing, chanting, muttering, drinking
ritual drinks in dark-womb bars,
panelled in wood and smoke and leather.

And neon, there'd be some of that.
And heroin, hookers, places to be scared of
and suburbs both dismal and brave
and names to learn, maps to memorise,
pictures made real, streets to walk on,
a dense city with plenty of buses,
and people to walk among,

and places to go, places

I

can go, to become a denizen, go native
in the ancient streets and bars,
go native
native in the eyes of it.

Under the skin of it
walking in this
dream
city
in the lights and the eyes of it
in the balm and syrup of it
home
or drowning?

Gather the dark

Bring me a thunderstorm at sunset

Decorate my giant cranium with beautiful scary pink clouds
Gather them in the west and fling them to the east—

Give me a lightshow. Give me some bass. Rumble
and stutter my tomtoms,
distant and straight
overhead so I
feel it, so I
fall with it.

Crack open the skyskull and gather the dark,
gather the dark matter, fire
neutrinos, electrons, protons.

Violence, pummel, tenderise
me, make me ready.
Break me open
and drink what flows out of me.
Parasite, suction, blend
me, make me jelly.

Give me the mantra,
the everything poem,
the chant,

the ancient brandnew notes,
the faerie banshee baby notes,
the yinyang knife-
edge balance notes
the integer-simple infinite-complex notes
the slowdance liplock discotheque ecstasy notes

Loud

Lay your stuff on me, anything you've got,
sparkle-new or pre-loved, keeps me moving...

Hey, it's 2004 already. And he says
the world's going to hell in a handbasket
but I say to him
no—you are.

OK, so petrol's expensive. But people
are still driving old Datsuns with P-plates and attitude
and I can still buy tyres from a shop
where the metal shelves are dusty and they
call you 'mate' or 'luv'
depending on sex. I get 'mate' first,
because of my hair, or my workboots.
Then the bloke sees my tits in their t-shirt
and my hips in their jeans and it's
'oh, sorry—luv'.
I don't care. I don't. Maybe in another five
years I'll finally have enough 'tude to say,
that's cool, I'm a poet.

The hippy woman in the op-shop calls me 'darl'
but I don't buy anything.
Bombs are going off
but the sun is still shining
and tomorrow I'm driving for five
hours by myself with the stereo
loud

Anything you've got, anything. Keeps me moving.

Come dancing

We walked to the water, but we didn't
touch the water, didn't
drink the water

We walked by the water, along, near,
above the water, but not
in the water.

Baptise us.

Drown us, resurrect us in worldwash.

Wash us real.

Fill us, don't leave any
space in us, let us swim
in stumbling stars.

And may the moon
be part of you.

May lunacy
meet serendipity.

May the stars
inhabit you.

May heaven bleed on you,
make holy love to you.

May rains and sky-high stars dive into you
Glow through your coats,

shine in your eyes,
pour fizzing from your mouths,
come dancing from your hands.

Find your peaceful building and
smash it, smithereen it, scatter it,
rebuild it, reshape it, a new
artefact with an ancient spirit
twisting, spiralling, staring
irresistibly into the sky.

Irrefutable, undeniable.

Bleed heaven on us—build a sky with us.

Throw a shape on us—twisted, pushed, extruded.

Thrown.

Then the rain will wet us
and the sun will dry us.

The walls will not hold us. The roof
will not restrict us. Will our
noises, voices, choices
sky the weeping earth?

Come dancing.

Will the sky
be high enough, ice
thick enough, rope
strong enough?

Come dancing.

Let us all be there together
when the rain rains on us
when the sun shines on us
when the stars shiver us
when the water rises up to meet us.

The fisherwoman

The fisherwoman

in her boat

under the sky,

deep blue above,

deep blue below,

hat

salty, skin

rippled,

waiting,

the fisherwoman

sings.

A soft song

o my love, o my lord,

carry me, float me, rock me, rescue me

a soft song for the fish and the sky

and the broad ocean and all the things on islands

that call to her.

Buildings, streets, people, suits

on green islands

across the ancient ocean,

the endless sleeping sea.

Through the light she sees the islands

and the fish watch

and wait.

When we need him

When we need him
we siphon him out of the software, out of the
layers, out of the
hyper-reality and into the inter-reality
of our mouths (hands, eyes)
and release him.

When we release him
we let him out of his box, out of his
house, out of his
walled garden and into the buffeting
of the street (sea, sky)
and grow him.

When we grow him
we swell him into a blimp, into a
billboard, into a
website, and out of the hospitality
of his cushions (pools, toys)
we focus him.

When we focus him
we turn him into a lens, into a
screen, into a
speaker, and out of the foundations
of his DNA (islands, keys)
we aim him.

When we aim him
we point him into the ocean, into the
violence, into the
slums, and out of the clamouring
of our gut-fibres (horror, joy)
we use him.

And when we use him...

Coracle

I will find a place to wait.

A niche in the shore-held sea-crags.

I will watch the lighthouse and the coming
and going ships, the world-cruisers,
oil-bringers, war-makers,
the private and public yachts,
the racers, fishers, fighters,
pirates and smugglers,
the ships of dull metal and
boats with bright paint,
with sail-quilts, mast-needles, nets,
radar, radio, GPS,
pitching and reeling and rocking and
blustering with a Babel of balloons and
sparkling miniature winebirds and
tinny electronic bells and
genetic gladiators and none

of them will detect me

in my grey waitplace. I will watch them all
until that ship comes, the ship

with the black and red sails that are made of pure skin
with the decks of ebony and carbon steel
with the tall sailors whose robes bear
witness, who reserve
their grey-and-silver wings, worship
their titanium anchor on its hawser spun
from their once-long hair. They will cast
their continental-shelf-gripper gently, with careful
hallelujahs, place their sleek ship
in the tossing flapping sea and in the sea of vessels
and sing and sing, rumgutted, steelsilked,

calling, responding, calling the land,
naming it.

And I in my hermit-hole will have built
my coracle, small
and sturdy, its
making a ritual. Built
my boat and carved my oars
and practised to strengthen my arms
and heart. I will hear
the singing and launch,
row my raw face through the buoys
and dinghies and liners, row and row, back burning,
arms screaming, row and row, and throw my line,
climb cold railings, fall,
collapse
among coiled ropes and mysterious much-used tools
and salt rain will needle me,
giant wings will beat on me,
torn tongues will lash and lacerate and feed on me,
as I lie on that wet deck bleeding in ecstasy.

An Lar (Unsprawling)

'An Lar' is the Irish name for the Dublin city centre.

Only in reality do my feet in their boots feel the
constant pressure of an other place

Only in reality does every wake-up second
burn significance onto my brainpaths

Only in reality does an ancient river

see me. And only... in reality am I Only...
in reality am I Only... in reality am I way,
way high and floating down the street awash
in all the frequency changes of rush.

When I breathe, and really breathe, I

find myself with my boots on the pavement,
gaping at the genuineness, grime and verdigris, and
smells: new petrol and old manure.

A thousand years of shit—imagine.

A thousand of shit and a hundred of petrol.

Statues to faith and debate,
shades of war and peace,
long memories and bullet-holes in walls,
a niche in EUrope and all the world watching
even while junkies beg on the bridges.

In cafes, portraits of writers.

Joyce and Beckett and Bono.

Yesterday honoured, today acknowledged
amid the neon and the cobbled ghosts. You
always know where you are, even

as apartment-frames leer
over castle and redbricks—
strangling or protecting? At least, unsprawling.

When I breathe, and really breathe.
Walking by the water I find my feet.

Quay

Cranes creak and clatter
Concrete trucks trundle and splatter
Gull flaps, screeching
Boat rots, bleaching

I on old stone dangle my workboots over the Liffey and
it is *not* smooth.

The river is *not* smooth.

The sound around me and in my head is *not* smooth
The old stone is *not* smooth
but the new buildings
the new buildings are gonna be *so* smooth,
so soundless.

Like Leopold Bloom I walk along
the quay and what sun there is bleaches
me pale and Dublin's stone, water, mud bleaches
the sound out of me, sucks
the wet salt of the Liffey
out of my eyes.

Celtic knots

(St Audoen's Church, Dublin, 2005)

Temple of history, temple
of short lives long
gone, temple of hundreds
of souls... trod
on me hard as I trod
on its layers
of graves. Quiet
spirits whispered hundreds
of hushes
from the eleventh-
century walls.

If I ever go to church in Dublin this is where.
Not in St Patrick's with its souvenir stalls.

If I go back to Dublin,
if I take you there,
let me take you to St Audoen's
on a Sunday when the congregation sit,
sing, kneel and pray
where their people have prayed
for a thousand years.

Used continuously since the Normans built it.
Centuries of extension, of chapels and courtyards.
In the fourteenth century, a square tower
with battlements
and bells.

Centuries of loss. Roofs taken off
to escape the roof tax. Gravestones and monuments
weathering away. Dirt building up, the ground rising
in layers of rubble. The townspeople crowding,
singing, chattering, hanging their washing

wall to wall in the roofless buildings.
Stone turning black in the tower.
Bells ringing.

Ringing bells. Re-roofing. Hanging cables. Excavating.
Discovering a cobbled way, a metre wide.
Leaving a section uncovered. Roped off,
with a sign asking us to imagine the people
who walked on the cobbles hundreds of years ago.

Ghosts projected on the ancient wall
in silverblue light, with ethereal music.
Walking. Going, coming. Living on.

Two tourists; a visiting priest; the guide.
Hush, said the ghosts of St Audoen's.
Hush. This is not St Patrick's.
Still your chattering modern mouths.
Listen for us and you will hear us
in the hush.

There was a lucky stone, a four-foot ovoid,
pitted and worn with time and touch,
Celtic symbols just visible.
Once stolen, but soon returned.
(The thief had to bring it back: it got heavier
and heavier.) Older than this oldest church,
made by people at the edge of memory.
People who knew how to make symbols
in the way of the land and the layers,
in the way of the earth and her children.

Writing this I touch the necklace
I bought in a souvenir shop in O'Connell street.
A cheap thing, but its four Celtic knots
are enough.

...continued

The other tourist touched the stone. For luck.
I didn't. Couldn't.

*I am too new, too full of dirty salt,
not clean enough.*

Old eyes look at me from my wall.
A print: a painting
in which a face appears like a vision
in a stone.

- What are you writing now? the eyes say.
- I'm writing about St Audoen's. Have you been there?
Did you hear the hush? Did you touch the lucky stone?
- Do a good job of it then, the eyes say.
- It's only a sketch for now. Getting it down—you know.
- That's the way.

I didn't touch the stone. But my luck was in.
Arms held me, eyes met me, streets
and stones and the river spoke to me.
I was knotted into the strands of Dublin.
Raw ends joined, a pattern completed,
and the rough, the narrow, the cobbled path
took me home.

Go

(Dublin 2005)

Beggar on the bridge huddled
in a blanket, grey
blanket, stone faces reflected
in the river, black
river, blood in my neon
eyes, red
as the taillights,
neon as the red lights,
neon as the dawn breaking
on another never-enough
river, on black swans

White swan reflected.
This is where I
am, in the grey city, this
is where I am, with the beggar
on the bridge, this
is where I
am, huddled
in her blanket,
needing

Stone faces low
over the low water
Cars, crowds,
faces, feet,
her

I give her an alien coin and
go

Dream 22

Listen.

The air thin with one picked faun.

His brother in the flower,

pleading.

The air thin.

His sister on the stone,

weeping. The tide in.

The wind rising.

Remember, sister.

In the sanctuary.

Roof of sunleaves, walls

of stone, ivy on walls

of stone. Trees. Humus

on steps of stone. Bright

graffiti.

Flower bravely, let your petals fall on it.

Listen.

The air thin with one picked faun.

On the steps in the leaflight

listen and weep.

In the sunshrine, branch-sanctuary,

leafchapel, weep

for the brother.

Let your tears fall on it.

Among the graffiti carve in the stone

a symbol

for the sister.

Dream 7

I dream an Irish road and wake
I dream seven singers and wake
I dream night falling and wake
with my heart in my fingers
I dream hitch-hiking and catching a train
back to the city and wake
with a wish in my hands—

arch way of trees
a rain-green air
seven singers
faeries
stones—

seven singers mend a road
seven workers placing stones
four faeries and fourteen faery children
and 40 faery souls and 40,000 old spirits—

wrap my dream in green rain arms
touch my skin with soft child skin
touch my 40 skin with tender 7 skin—

while you still want to
while your age is a lucky number
and mine's a luckier one

But
the leaves
 unrequited love
the bark
 unrequited love
dappled sunlight
 unrequited love
sweet fruit
 unrequited
sweet air
 love
breath of birdsong
 only love
mint moonlight
 one true love
night forest
 one true love
furred flicker
 one true love
fernend place
rain
mist
silence
silence full of ghost guitars
silence full of ears
silence
silence
 unrequited love

When the train came, I cried
I walk with the ghosts who walk on the beach.

I photograph the rails,
the security cameras, the grey sea,
the mansions on the hillside.

I touch the stone walls,
sit on the steps, breathe the air,
read the graffiti.

I climb the hill and look at the view.

I stand at the gates,
peer at the carvings, record the leaves
and branches, the signs.

Half the world from here and just under
my skin
Thousands of miles in a breath, in a word
Thousands of steps in a sigh, in a song

I buy a ticket and wait for a train.

There are names for everything but you
have no name
for this.

four stones are enough

too care—never enough

blare, flare—weep

too sung to wear

cold drum—never

too stare—scare

too many eyes too deep

one never-enough river is ever

enough sketches, enough skin and bones, enough

stones. four stones are enough

because one is (love [a]live) listen

one two is (wet) walk

one two three is (drown[ing]) dance

and one two three four is (eternal) everybody sing

Attach

In the melting mess of your face see
paintings. In the stiff wick of your hair see
tellings. In your filigreed neck see tree-rings

recording the layered war of your fortress. Blow
on your thin blue eyelids,
lash your mighty breath to your brow. Study
your frownsmile muzzle,
sew your noisome strings in your circle. Shred
your wasted skincloth.

Attach your awesome wings to your back.

Nine levels

(Rumi says our souls ascend through nine levels.)

1. Crouched on the floor, cold. We look up
and see the brand-new stars.
2. The air bubbles with starlight.
Spring up! Shout! Laugh!
3. Chantercrowd surroundcloud raincloud. Spring up!
Weep for one day. Forget.
4. Feet still chained by cables, cords and cash,
I wash my broken eyes in rays and rains. Wait.
5. I never knew we were so many all-singing angels.
6. Observing the unedited stars
we sigh to their starfire.
7. Bouncing through the window,
we throw away our masks.
8. In the surge of sudden gravity,
in the crush of sun and planet,
in the arc of eyes of angels,
take this echo.
Touch [th]is echo.
9. Melted, spread and remade
as plain space and as the rainbow.

Wait.

Amid the running

Listen.

I brought it home turned low,
smuggled low in my chest,
in my gut.

Who held, and was held
once in a lifetime—
once in a lifetime
and always.

Who looked into my eyes, who took my look
once in a lifetime—
once in a lifetime
and always.

Rails.

A bridge.

Once in a lifetime.

Whose hands are my hands,
whose eyes are my eyes,
who has
always
looked into my eyes, who will
always
look into my eyes.

Rain.

A bridge.

Once in a lifetime.

A roofless church,
a leaf-lighted shrine,
a tower. Spiral. Stare.

Whose mouth is an outline, a plan
Whose eyes and hands make a circle
Whose circle completes
my eyes
Whose hands define
my mouth.

Brought it home.
Amid the running.
A place where we walk by the water.
A dream-calm tarn, a
slow-motorcade river. A waiting,
continuing,
thoroughgoing sea.

A castle, weathering, stumbling, its
breaking body
the pattern.

Where we walk, where we are still, where we dance
once in a lifetime—
once in a lifetime
and always.

Amid the running.

Listen. There's a gull. It knows.

I am your sunlight

Like sunlight, I need
your love. Like a tree high
on sunlight, I am
your sunlight. Made of your rich rays.
In all my naked nights they are stars.
In all my empty rooms they are chairs.
In the splattered dark they are angels' voices
and in the church of my skull they are the altar
where I sacrifice and satisfy myself.

Your mad rays in rows and rhythms reach me
in fire and feather find me
in slow succession search me
in world water wash me
in warm waves welcome me
in liquid lilts lend me
love. Like sunlight.

In the mirror-maze

Like love, I need this sunlight.
Like arms around me, I need this thunder and rain.
I need this storm of noise like I need to breathe.

Like anticipated lips, I kiss
these wet stones gleaming with a blue dawn,
these diamonds in the dirt,
these nightingales.

Like eyes locked on mine,
this constructive engagement,
this desert wind, this evening of silence,
this morning of crows and magpies.

Like hair under my hand I feel
this sweet slow susurration, spiked
with spice and smeared with honey, stabbed
with lemon and scattered
by looking-glasses...by a mirror-maze.

Look at the floor—it'll be OK.
Keep your gaze on the vinyl.

When I pray,
when I face that way and put
my head on the floor,
when I drink
the ritual drink,
when I sing the hymn,
when I breathe...

In the mirror-maze, I meet this sunlight.
Like a new train on a new line, I catch
this thunder and rain. In the mirror-maze,
examining my lips and eyes, checking my jacket,
looking for traces of these wet stones,
these nightingales.

In the mirror-maze in the long tunnel in
the nightplace of Dali and Magritte in the storm,
flung by the whirlwind, given
to crows and magpies, smeared
with honey, in the mirror-maze.

Look at the sky—it'll be alright.
Look at the clouds—they're still here.

Heartbeat in the mirror-maze:
hooded, black-clad, shaded,
red and powerful,
full of carolling magpies,

...continued

full of clouds,
full of this sunlight.

Don't be afraid.

Give it all away.

Give it all the sunlight and all the thunder
and all the nightingales you have.

Give it to the mirror-maze,
let the mirror-maze duplicate it and send it everywhere.

We'll all meet there in the middle of the mirror-maze,
up to our ears, smeared with everything,
stabbed by black beaks of magpies,
bleeding all over the sky,
blurring the glasses with beautiful blood,
throwing it all away.

Where did it come from, this sunlight, this thunder?
From the blue and brown eyes,
the connected fingers and feet,
the wet stones of the street and the river—
from the foundation.

Like love, I need this sunlight.
I'll see you in the mirror-maze.
Look at the sky—it'll be alright.

Thank you

Thank you for the versions, the visions,
the voices, fiddles, drums, electric
guitars in my head, and the chanting, the wailing,

translations of ashes and orchids
and terrified cities. Thank you for rinsing me.

Thank you for unmasking me, washing and anointing me,

in cloth-of-love clothing me,
filling my dark church with candles.

Thank you for showing me the strength of the sweet

fire in us. Thank you for the public
temples and private shrines, the amulets,
tokens and icons. Thank you for the books,

posters, websites, unexpected
parcels of grace. Thank you for the encouragement.
Thank you for the path, and the torches along it,

and the rocks and sticks strewn on it.

And thank you for not knowing me, and not
understanding me, and not telling me how.

Storm

Sing songs: sweet bells in the night
the blackbird and the kite
the tree-ghosts in the white
the storm and the morning light
dark and light
black and white
string and kite
all afternoon, all night.

Sight

Night is where we are.

Kite is what we are, string of lucid
white we are, black
light we are, dark outlined in
light, mourning storm of
white in ghosts, in trees, in
kite calling out blackbird.

Night bells sing violent, bare and sweet.

[S]he moves in

I am the sacrifice.
When the priests built the temple, I was buried
under the foundations. I lay
at the gates of the building site,
asking for death. I said,
If I have to die to be here forever,
let me go slowly. Cut
my wrists and hold me in the river.
Let me fade with the whack of jackhammers,
the accented shouts, the slap of the water,
the volley of seabirds, and all the angels.

Now my blood is the river,
my body the foundation
of the temple made of the love
of so many. Our spirit sang it.

I am the spirit of all of you.
You safekeepers of the holiness!
The holiness that doesn't see itself.
Even when the river reflects the temple—
the focal point, where I died to be—
the holiness can't see itself.
But I hear it.

I am you. I am your love.
I wander through the chambers,
seeking and healing, saying
Hear the holiness, be it, use it!
Warm the blind temple with the breath of love
in all its glorious frequencies.

Keypal

She heat, I light
she flower, I leaf
she burning fusion sun, I yearning captive moon
she reef of bright fish, I rock of one white bird
Together: all of it

One day a month we get
together, in our careful hair
she with henna, I with bleach
she in makeup, I bareface
she in her plush flesh, I in my skin and bones
In our jeans,
in our black jackets,
in our voices,
in our noise and our listening
Out of our webs, into one another's eyes

One hug hello or cheek-kiss: smooth remembered skin
and our voices
Maybe a shoulder-touch or laugh-nudge
and our voices
Usually a hug goodbye
then out of our voices, into our webs.

One database entry
One search, one match
One email
One reply, then many more
One safe public rendezvous

Boundaries crossed
sets intersected
patterns matched
lit up and bleeped like we'd won something

She made of brittle twigs and I of spun steel
yet she surroundsound widescreen, I patch of earth
She fragile and polished, I tough and ragged
Together: a shelter

Dress in rags

I love it when you dress in rags.
The ragged edges show how whole the centre is.

When you dance in your old clothes
simpler than today's clothes
your powerful body shows me the child inside.

We are just children wearing layers.

Dress in rags. Show me a bit
of your skin, and if your hair gets thin
don't fake it. Take it
all the way ascetic,
desert dirt aesthetic,
in rags, in patches, in mixed
colours, in glory,
exulted,
enlightened,
unlimited

making it up as you go along
in your rags.

Charisma

Not the hem of his garment.
Not the fleeting brush of fabric,
peripheral, unnoticed...
Not the hem of his garment.
His wrist.
His solid, haired, warm right wrist
and this, my hand,
my [in]elegant white left hand,
holding.
Seconds, skin to skin,
eyes closed only to feel.

– So. You'll never wash it again!

Yes I will. I didn't take anything...

– No photograph? No autograph?

I didn't need to.
Not a piece of him.
Not taking—
giving. Giving
energy/information/spirit, call it...
call it love. Yes, that.
Focused on the interface
of skins. Unafraid.

And if I received anything—
a blossom of spirit,
not a blessing of sweat.
So yes, I'll wash.

Anyway, he doesn't wash off.

Please wait to be seated

Please wait to be seated.

You will be shown to good seats
but you will have to surrender.

Stand there and wait.

You may be given a public place,
in the centre of the faces and voices,
or a private booth:
a watching space, a listening hush.
You will be ushered by good-looking attendants
but you will have to surrender.

Observe the rituals.

Listen carefully, ask
clearly and quietly,
behave with respect.

And let a hungrier person go before you
and let a weaker person hold onto you.
Then wait in silence.
You will be shown.

In whatever voice

The answer to that question can only be sung.
Can only be whoooed in an umbrella-flipping wind
Can only be rained.

It can't be Googled, archived,
written or spoken.

But it can be born. The answer to that question can be born
in a plane or a tunnel,
a revolving restaurant or a cavern,
a Hyatt or a hostel.

Then it will need to be rained.

The answer to that question might be rained
by a guitar, might be tossed all over you
by the interplay of drums, might be splashed
hot onto your cheeks by the smile and flip,
pull and release of bass.

Or by nine quiet words and the slight tilt
of a face.

Then the answer to that question may be felt
but you have to feel it yourself. You have to sit

in the perfunctory hush of a non-denominational chapel
and cry into empty hands. Rain that rain, bent double.

Pray for the first time,
to presence that knows no name.

To presence that needs no name,
give thanks for the loss of a dream.

Stare into stained glass and find, sun-backlit,
the face.

Then sing and sing, in whatever voice you have.
The answer to that question can only be sung.

Centred

Knees slightly bent, body lightly curved around
his guitar, held close, vital

Elegant fingers on the Telecaster's neck
lift and slide and press
Long thumb and finger delicately direct
the plectrum

Face an intent mask
mouth a concentrated line
eyes lost in love with it

Sound surges up his spine, through his chest, shoulders, head,
into his eyes, into his hands on body, neck, strings, pick
and by magic he understands, wire and amp and wave
and magic he doesn't understand, music-magic
into listeners and band and back
into his ears, his body, into the walls and into everything

The sound

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND
is an apricot's juice on my tongue,
my chin, my wrist, my t-shirt

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND
is rain and the warm wet of summer Sydney rain
and the smell of rain on a hot road

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND
is light filtering through leaves,
is a jacaranda tree, purple licked onto green,
is sunset over a polluted city,
is sparks and spangles,
is shafts of old wooden darkness
tarred by time

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND
is heroin or whiskey or cut wrists,
is a searing coal and cold running water,
is my blood feeding the earth,
is plain sweat.

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND
is a touch, a glance, a smile,
is eyes meeting,
is the moment before a hug
and the moment after.

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND
is old and embarrassing
and cute and new.
Is too hot to touch
and unspeakably cool.

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND
is the roar of roadtrains,
is the moan of a mother and the answering wail
of her child,
is the thunder thump and hush

and whisper
and rumble and race of a race.
Is gulls over grey water.

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND
is all of it,
all of you,
all of it.
All.

(For U2)

tree breaks

tree breaks at base,
falls as one on earth. Drum
shakes floor and heartbeat

tree lies alone
without music
bird whispers

tomorrow his birthday
new trees grow
in the fallen tree's arms

tomorrow he sings
in a new tree's arms
happy bird day

Echo and ache secret

Let me tell you in
A flat minor
that my feet are a snare and a tomtom Skin:
a splash cymbal Heart:
a hihat
a ching ching ching ching ching ching ching Gutcoil:
bass guitar and kickdrum Inter
locking Inter
woven In

So let my hair be slow electric,
my eyes be rests and cries,
the line of my lips be the echo and ache secret,
full of every
thing [un]
mappable
and kissing the mike with words without warning

An update for the Pilgrims Guide

To: webmaster@TempleFinder.com

Subject: an update for the Pilgrims Guide

When finally we reached the temple we found it collapsing, one brick at a time. Some walls have peeling paint; others have layers and layers of graffiti from years of pilgrims—some disappointed, some angry, some sad, and some clinging to their obsession and leaving flowers, photographs, little handmade cards and books, and more than a few pieces of clothing. Leaving their offerings (and teddy bears. did I mention the number of teddy bears? and the money and bottles of whiskey, which a smiling attendant collects after the pilgrims have finished their tearful or ranting obeisances or their hair-and-clothes-tearing or their hysterical shrieking). Leaving their offerings and maybe their delusions on a concrete platform, its chipped paint as grey as the sky.

We entered the temple and found it stinking. Stale cigarettes, old pizza, last night's whiskey. The priests were out drinking in a bar down the road, except one who lolled in a back room, half-dead from heroin. When the others returned from their 'meeting', they injected him with something to reanimate him so they could continue their parody of the sacred rites.

We had journeyed to the temple, a group of us, full of love or longing or fear or exultation, and a few who came along for the photo-opportunity, full of derision. But when we saw the mess and the useless priests and the grinning, well-fed attendants, even those full of derision became sad, and those full of exultation collapsed on the filthy floor or ran into the littered niches, crying their thunderstorm tears and howling their blue-black howls.

But it was only when we heard the muzak that we began to mutilate ourselves.

Ears well-sucked

Underblanket of the soul,
the old, old soul,
full of fluff and dustmites,
patched and ragged,
but warm

Underblanket of the soul
underpinning
the skin
underwriting
the veins

Security blanket with a teddy-bear head,
ears well-sucked. You need a busload of faith, said Lou Reed

Several truckloads, Lou,
rolling into your town,
rolling into my town,
rolling down the highway, the scab of a highway,
stereos pumping,
blasting past the silence

Power tools grinding, sanding
the layers, sucking
the fat, finding
the arteries, exposing
the nerves, growing
the dendrites, extending
the tendrils, culturing
new organs, nurturing
new skin,
bandaging, sheeting, blanketing, wheeling,
truckin' on down to my town

blasting across the South Sea to my town
A Lear jet, a rocket

ship, a cruise
missile,
landing on my nose, putting out my eyes
shredding my eardrums and ripping out my tongue
warm and cosy and blind and dumb

torrential

boy girl man woman unman unwoman all
humanly
in sharp sharp sharp
harmony, in
flesh& in
breath, in transmission tshirt breathe
yr sweat old
&consequential
torrential
in seven flat minors, in
seconds, in second HAND
HANDs, in EYEs
of authorship ice
of ownership place
of hiding in nine FOOT walls in shrines in SKINs
of stone, stone, STRING&BONE, in the LIGHTS
&the I's
of it in the sTART& the HEat
of it in the trip& the end
of it no no not
THE END
of it no no

Steel tube

With four notes, four stones
(four stabsites in my gut)
four elements, four winds,
four corners of my mouth
(with large and small violences)
what more [do I (I?)] need?

There is a reason (not)
There is a story (journey) (not)
There is searching and not
finding. Finding is loss
with everything in the chanting,
headphones, clickwheels, black boxes
(steel tube searching my guts)
(namelessness, blowing me up)
(you tube my space)
In the notes, tunes, we-tunes, I-tunes
In the numbers that come.

This is not a language project
This is a scream
This is not a language project
This is a fleam
This is not yours This will never be yours
This is mine
This is mine
Metonyms
[half]truths
coresamples of hyperreality

All the blinking screens All the
flashing lies All the
howling beacons
All the spot
nights

All the spot
nights Fifteen minutes Soul (stolen)
Sole souls (stolen)

This is not a language project

This is a scream

Just a quivering
sweatslicked
teethbared
eyeswideopen

Hasp

Something (advances)

Howl of a child
timbre of a singer
voiceprint of a lover
catcall of an enemy
hasp of a lover

Tick of a biorhythm
catcall of a memory
resonant frequency of entrapment
silent hum of fate.

Slur of a drunk
footsteps of a guitar
creak of a tightrope
twang of an enemy
breathing of a lover

Everything (recedes)

Un/speak/able

With what's left of my face after you
have finished with it, your sun
melted it, your shocks and switches
scoured and scarified it, your challenges
chopped and chiselled it, your licks and lays
licked and lavaged it,
ravaged it with your un
speak
able ways

With whatever skin I still have,
whatever still works in my eyes,
whatever screams I have left,
with hands turning to stone,
with all my remaining teeth,
with spider veins in my cheeks
and enough flesh for one kiss
in the thin ghosts of my lips
I will finally speak your name.

Throw off all fakery and surgery,
present your name in the city,
howl it in what's left of the country,
throw it all over the Net.
With every note left in my mouth.

When you can see all of me,
when you can hear all of me,
when all the red things, sad things,
good and bad things inside me
no longer divide me from you
I will finally, at last, in ecstasy speak
your name, your name, your name, your un
speak
able name.

The eye

The photographs are silent.
That's the thing about them. The silence.
Yet you can hear them
if you listen late at night with the house all quiet
if you listen in the blackness when the band's gone home
if you listen in the breaks
between transmissions
you'll hear them.

Light is nothing. Potential.
Imaginary lines of force.
And light is everything.

Listen to the black-and-white abstraction
Listen to the wink in the colour
Listen to the lucid lines and angles
Listen to the eye
You'll hear them

(For photographer Anton Corbijn)

Isosceles

You'd look good in anything, you
shaped like that: the isosceles
triangles of your back, your nose, each
of your buttocks

Ramparts, towers, battlements,
network. Can't
read all that. Pick
out the points where someone you
recognise
might be at the window

Prayer-bowl whing-whirr,
hot in a girl's hands

A sound cold as lemon,
cold as fish,
as antiseptic,
as white

Purge and bridge of cumin,
the pinchy glitzy deepdragging howl of it.
Yell spice at the ringlipped fish.

But it goes away,
it goes away,
and what's left?

Vacant foil pillblisters,
beigebrown coffeefoam on a wooden
stick, a doctor's tonguedepressing
weapon, to measure
your illness, the length of it,
to prescribe
a heavymetal pull,
a sexy text,

a texty sex, a nexus, a flex,
wirecored, insulated, gaffataped
on a stage made of dirty sheets,
lacky bands and string

And the hairs on his stomach and the
smile on his eyes and the
knowledge and the breadth in him

The guy in the cafe

This can't be him,
the one I've travelled so far to meet.
This can't be him! Geldof hair and smoker's skin,
slack belly, wasted arms, beige illfitting trousers.

Isn't the poet someone slickblackleathered
with clean, glossy, fingerfriendly hair,
with eyes like turquoise surf,
with Calvin Kleins under a crisp piece of denim
and boots from some Texan heaven?

Yeah, that's him
behind the distant-blur pupils

I know... but dare I try
to touch him?

Peeled off

Oh go back to your wife!
Don't look at me that way!
I would do anything but hurt you
 you with the sea in your eyes
 and the storm in your hands
 and the city lights in your mouth

I would have you a thousand times just to give you pleasure
but not hurt you.

Go back to your wife!
She is still beautiful
she is much smarter than me
she dances like a sonnet
and dresses like a haiku
and I can see that you love her
and hurting her would hurt you.
Go back to her!

Leave me to my desperation,
masturbation,
fantasies of your skin and voice and eyes
 jeans peeled off your slim hips,
 t-shirt off your heart
 my tongue on your nipple and my
 muscle on your cock,
 your hands in my hair
 and your voice incoherent

 and cigarettes and
 searching the Web from your lap,
 naked
 and drinks and
 late-night talk about everything

 me Yoko, you John...

No! Go back to your wife.

Don't go there

He takes off the glasses, the mask that fails him.

His two blue eyes mock hers.

He is a smiling imp in black.

He moves closer. The fiddler plays a reel.

His lips are like smoked sugar, his tongue an instrument,
his stubble a burnt field.

She is dying.

She opens her eyes. His are closed, lashes relaxed.

She snaps every line, every scar in close-up.

His black hair reveals paler roots.

Her hands are on his neck; the skin is soft.

She closes her eyes again.

They are stealing each other
for a moment.

He is giving her something to keep
but she is just dying, dying.

Skeleton

Bring to mind a nylon garden
and a paper bird-bath.
A lead bird with four wings
and a plastic gardener with aniseed eyes.

Do you like it?

Imagine a melamine desert
and steel tumbleweeds.
A bald saloon with rubber walls
and a silicon bartender with margarine lips.

Do you like it?

Will you eat here?

Do you like your restaurant?

Can you see your name
on your chair
where your hot skeleton waits
for its chemicals?

Bring to mind a Jell-O cubicle
with a painted view.
A fur television with fifty screens
and a holographic prostitute with no legs.

Do you like it?

Will you stay here?

Do you like your hotel?

Can you see your needle
on your table
where your tainted skeleton shakes
for its input?

Imagine a titanium bathroom
a velour phone

and a three-armed valet with corduroy hair.
This will be yours. Do you like it?

If the rain

If the rain works away our concrete
and steel, to reach and feel
original stone and earth

If it wears away the metal
rings and brick boxes around street trees
so greenfleshed lives can sway, scented,
in their shelter

If it knocks out the electric
lines and stops
our train, traps
it for vines and mudwalls

If it slops the style
out of our hair and the makeup
off our faces, hoses off
our lowrise jeans and highrise boots,
our ghoulgear and bling,
our multitonned helplessness and hope

If it grows on our backs
fur and homespun and moss

Alternative energies

Humanity: a species that survives by burning things
and each other.

Smoke in my eyes
so I take them out and put them away
Marching's hard
so I decommission my legs
Speaking hurts
so I shut down my tongue

But I forget my ears, Harmony.

Sing, put the tears back into our eyes, bang
the eyes back into our heads, call
the tongues back into our mouths, thrum
the bones back into our legs

We won't be propped up: stand up.
Walk, see, cry,
ask out loud: can we worship
wind, sea, sun

and each other?

Entropy and order sing

A weekend at New Norcia,
a strange, Catholic place
that made me a foreigner.

But a spirit is there.

Entropy and order sing
in the walled spaces and spacious view,
old buildings, new birds,
disused rooms, souvenir shop,
graveyard, church and bell.

So I sent a question.

And yesterday, the answer arrived.

There is no good, no evil.

Only harmony and disharmony.

And we know which is which.

One more voice

In the place of the fallen tree
how many have prayed? In the name
of memories, in the silence of relics,
in the presence of placements of small stones
and not one Coke can.

In the face of the fallen tree
how many have sung out loud?
And how many have whispered a song
with dreamtears on their lashes
and traced their names on the earth
to be erased?

*This shape my offering,
one more voice my gift.*

In the ache of the fallen tree,
while it still aches, and before
the Coke cans come.

Light a candle

In Iceland a poet lies in a coma
In Australia I light a candle
The poets think it will help and
who am I to say,
and what else can I do?
Bush gets in again—
light a candle for democracy
John Peel dies—
light a candle for music
If art is still possible
light a candle for art

Hardcore

No-one says anything
I don't say anything
The world smashes on
smashes on

If I'm all gone in the eyes
it doesn't stop the children crowing
as they install cursors and wallpapers.
Harry Potter smiles from his important playworld.
A piebald rabbit mesmerically comes and goes.
A tabby kitten poises itself in a meadow.

America continues.
Australia continues.

Diagnosis, treatment, remission, relapse.

My inbox fills with email
black with anger
white with prayer

My hardcore heart detaches itself, makes this

My brother is dead

I am unbreakable.

I am built of crystals of words
and I am unshakable.

I am made of modern metal
and I am unbendable.

I am sheathed in thin Teflon.

Nothing sticks.

You are broken.

You were made of small twigs
and now you are broken.

You were struck and shattered.

You are unmendable.

You are sheathed in thick earth.

Nothing sticks.

Evidence

Only in dream do the children come out first,
lined up, nervous

Only in dream do my enemies look on,
tittering, nudging in new school uniforms

Only in dream my book's blank leaves grow scribbles
crowding out his name.

I draw a box to protect it,
to carry it.

Only in dream is he
taller. Only in dream
are my body's arms around him.

Soft against my cheek, his
tender neckskin, his
fuzzy handknit sweater,
smelling sweet and old

Only in dream is he
silent while I have words.
Does he hear my dreamvoice against his neck?
I can barely speak
My throat is breaking
'I love you'

In my hand,
a leaf to bring back to you!
But surfacing vanishes my scrap of evidence

Gentle touch of elsewhere

She stands at the counter selfconsciously
me... skinny,
skinny bootlegs, denim jacket, black
shirt, sunnies...
orders a cappuccino to take away.
Watching from the table I know
she's been in the record shop (being me,
she's old enough to call it that)
and, yes,
she takes a new CD out of her bag and
studies it, track list, four band members,
can't see who they are from here
I think of my chat-up line:
so what's your favourite band?
but she gets her styrofoam capp and goes
leaving me still and still
incomplete

And there's a guy
with the hair and the eyes
but he's someone else's: a conservatively beiged little
woman, and I'm someone else's too
but maybe we could be friends, if, you know,
our paths could cross.

She gets him water and I...
Well it's not that I hide behind my book,
it's that you don't. You don't
chat up strangers in this
semisuburban lunchvenue with
seniors and young mums luxuriating in its
gentle touch of elsewhere.

You start a club. That's what you do.
You put up a notice and you attract people who are

so like yourself that they bore you, and people who
think they are you but
you know different

A guy emails me, says my poem reminds him of
Camus: the outsider/stranger/foreigner. Yeah.
A guy in Ulster emails me that
and where am I?

Lip-prints

Lip-prints on your
fragments, your
fossils, fostered in my secret
places, found in private
books and drawers,
clean, beautiful and old,
vessels from Before—
before everything dissolved in the millennial acid.
Accidents, artefacts,
individual and cold.

My lips are still warm—hey,
I'm warmer than Before, I'm burning with it—
and I would do now what I didn't then,
would fly on my jets and light your sky with my eyes—
but all I can give you are lip-prints
on the glass,
on the cold old glass.

Hold the line

Is that the ink of your mind
or is that just so much
artificially-coloured water?

The ink of my mind is streaked with blood

house of anger

house of confusion

looking here, looking there where new black flowers spread their
maybe poison

bluer than death, this anger

an aurora, this anger

a roadblock, this confusion

a freeway, this confusion

Help us, you with the beautiful
skin! Help us, you with the witch-hazel
hands! Help us, you with the hair like
sin! Help us, you with the half-cracked smile!

You hosting the angels in the distorted sky of your eyes
and you slipping through silver fish in the live seas of your chest
and you trapping volcanoes in the desert rains of your shoulders
and you making sunbursts on the strikeplate of your lips
give us the sandpaper grip of your fists
give us the megaphone ink
of your wrists
tell us the terrible names
of our peers
tell us your truth, be our shamans, seers,
bards, makers, shakin' psalm-shapers, be our
souls' soul-brothers, our
sweet soul sisters, our
reason for blisters, our master and mistress...

Hiphoprisy, rockocracy, intellimockracy!
Alloycats, nervocrats, dance-o-mats! Work
and play, vortex
and apex

but don't be our gods,
be our shoes.

Hold the line.
Hold the line that links our ankles,
and hear:

I'll be nothing to you if you'll be nothing for me.
Be silent behind your wall
be deaf behind your wall
be arcane behind your wall
and be,
just be,
in the end if you just be
it'll be
enough. So be.