

Experiment with an Air Pump

Poems and conversations by

Simon Parsons

(1950 - 1990)

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Introduction

The poems in this volume were written by my brother Simon. I am the member of his family upon whom it has fallen to write something about who he was, and how he lived, I suppose in the hope that it might help elucidate the poems in some way.

He died prematurely of a heart attack - the cause was little mystery; in terms of good health he had lived atrociously, he had dined consistently on cholesterol and had chain-smoked for twenty-five years and had done so without qualms. He died where he lived, in his small rented single room, shortly after his fortieth birthday. And it was there that we found in various drawers, on various bits of handwritten or typed paper, in various notebooks, in no particular order, a whole collection of poems, of which these have been chosen as representative.

We knew from past conversations and detailed guidelines among his papers that many of Simon's poems were intended to form a cohesive whole ("One Poem One Journey," as he puts it in "Not Yet"). And we knew of his preoccupation with Dante. Those were the criteria we had in mind when selecting and ordering the poems published here.

I find myself very much at a loss what to write about him, partly because thinking about him at all still brings a lump to my throat. But mostly because none of us in our family can claim to have understood him fully - fully in the sense that we each understand the other members of the family. We know that we were all about the only aspect of his life that he considered

important. He had told us that often enough, and demonstrated it fully in various different ways. His unbroken affection for us is something that makes his death paradoxically slightly easier to bear: there were no scores left unsettled, no apologies left unsaid, no regrets for anything done or said, just the pain of knowing we will never see him again.

But, for all this, a lot about him remains enigmatic. I can say quite confidently about one of my sisters that she has a warm-hearted, generous, fiery nature. About him I can make no similar assertion. I can write that sometimes he showed such and such a quality, and then I can say sometimes he didn't. He was, in short, a more private man than any other I have known.

He chose to live a very reclusive life in South East London. He visited each of us sparingly over the years, and discouraged too many visits to himself. And yet each meeting was warm and lively, and we were left with the impression that nothing gave him greater pleasure than the enjoyment of our company. But then he would be abruptly gone, not to be seen again for perhaps several months. However, I never felt I was being avoided by him, never felt that there was anything about me that had displeased him. It was simply that that was the way he wanted things to be. In turns it exasperated us, amused us, and saddened us. It would have been more understandable if the meetings had been difficult or awkward in any way. But they weren't. They were always the model of conviviality.

He deliberately chose to be solitary and virtually friendless, but for no convincing reason any of us could see. He was easy in company. And there were many who had tried to beat a path of

friendship towards him, but all, through the years, had been courteously and skilfully redirected, never with any animosity on either side. And though it pleased him to make, at times, quite outrageously misanthropic statements about humanity in general, he was usually quite generous about individuals. So I cannot say that he avoided people because he found them distasteful. I cannot say that he avoided people because they avoided him. I cannot even say that he was wary of intimacy - his feelings for us always seemed warm and uninhibited.

I can only say that he was an extraordinary, solitary man whose presence always managed to dominate the rare family occasions at which we found ourselves all together. Why it should have dominated is another mystery. He shared none of the common experiences the rest of us did. His political opinions were absolutely appalling (though I suspect that appalling us with his political opinions was a great pastime of his). His other opinions, and they came thick and fast on every subject under the sun, were either so high-brow and abstruse we felt groggy keeping up with him, or they were too incomprehensible to have any influence whatsoever. And yet he dominated.

If he seems to come across as dogged, dogmatic, opinionated, argumentative, it is a picture of him I would certainly recognise. But he was equally an immaculate self-satirist, and never quarrelsome. And that, I suppose, is the first characteristic of his I have come up with that throws any light on his poetry. Where sometimes he seems to be expressing an idea or an image, and summoning up all the force of rhetoric he can muster to back it, he then seems in the next line to deny its validity entirely. So it was in life. He would roar with laughter

when one of his tortuous and vigorously pursued arguments went charging into an impasse. It tickled him pink to find that, when he had delivered what he had hoped would be a devastating conclusion, the words were nonsensical or completely contradicted what he had just said. There was at heart, we all felt, despite the fact that he enjoyed playacting the dogmatist, a lack of self-confidence about him. And it is this lack of confidence coupled with his indomitability that is used more seriously when he is writing his poetry. We find him constantly questioning the nature of poetry, whether it means anything at all, whether it should mean anything at all, whether if it starts to mean something it has become dishonest. In his poetry his lack of self-confidence is used assertively as an asset, a springboard for ideas and images, and gives the poems that curious blend of romanticism and nihilism - "Beautiful pointlessness" as he puts it somewhere. And so we get the "vital stumble/blunder across the stage". And that is typical of him: a man who sees himself as stumbling and blundering across the stage, and tells us with absolute authority that it is "vital", a word that brooks very little argument.

And so it was in life. He would argue with inflexible conviction on the paramount importance of having no convictions at all. And then, a minute later, his enthusiasm building, he would no doubt express a political or moral conviction so atrocious we would all either howl with protest or laughter. He was always alive to the contradictions in himself, and in a sense delighted in and made use of them. To have resolved them would, I think, for him, have been tantamount to an ideological surrender.

As I say, our meetings were always enjoyable. He was always full of humour, full of ideas, and full of conversation. The rare outsiders who for some reason would be present, never failed to be surprised. Simon would have arrived with the hermit's reputation we had given him, and they then observed a man who seemed very much in the thick of social life, very much at home with its debate and chatter. And yet another minute later, he would announce he was going, and deaf to all entreaties to stay a while longer, he would be off: a stalwart figure in a large unkempt anorak with the limp yellowing remnant of a roll-up sticking Andy-Capp style to his bottom lip, the door closing behind him, back to his gloomy rented room, and what one imagined sadly to his other, his Mr Bleaney, existence, which we all found so unfathomable.

An odd figure of authority - he had, it seems centuries ago now, been head-boy at school and captain of the soccer team - he obstinately refused any chance at, or even suggestion of a position of responsibility or authority in adult life. A refusal he would have been prepared to take to the barricades - "I have no intention," he once declaimed, "of wasting my brain in a job. A job should be as mundane and automaton-like as possible, it should leave the brain to its proper work. I have the perfect job, my body carries it out with complete efficiency and seldom calls upon my mind to get involved at all. And that is exactly as it should be." And from this one might gather that he was a dilettante opposed to the work ethic, but he was equally adamant: "Never missed a day's work in my life, never been one minute late! Proud of it!"

And so from the day he left university till the day he died he had held a job as a porter at King's College Hospital, and led a life of such banal and uneventful and unstimulating routine in the dreariest of surroundings that we all had our moments of being sorely distressed by it, particularly my parents.

And yet one feels that, more than other people who enjoy far more varied and exciting existences, every minute of his life was intensely lived. He was interested in absolutely everything, from the mechanics of changing a baby's nappy to the implications for the world of logical positivism. The expression on his face was of a man constantly turning over a thought, not a worry, but something, either mundane or erudite, which fascinated him.

I have written much more than I ever intended, and have not begun to give an accurate picture of him. And to go on I fear will obscure the picture even further. I go on regardless.

As a figure in the landscape my brother was again an oddity. He was a strange out-of-date stickler for punctuality, neatness, courtesy, decorum. He was always clean shaven, his shoes were always polished, his hair always cut. And yet that's where it ended. They were duties done. Further than that he had no interest. He was clean shaven, but invariably there would be some tiny crop of bristle missed somewhere, perhaps under his chin. His shoes had been cleaned, but what the shoes were mattered not at all - they would simply have been whatever he had considered a good buy at the time. Whether they turned out to be preposterous or tasteful was a matter of pure accident. And his hair would be cut - but, for the last twenty-five years, by

himself, neither outlandishly, nor skilfully, but the effect was always odd, the style was dictated by no fashion past or present, nor by any desire to shock. He was completely without affectation. He had no interest in appearance but argued vehemently about its importance. I was regularly scolded by him for what he considered the general sloppiness of my demeanour, but if I were to point out the little pinpricks of missed bristle, he would have been first surprised and then amused. He would not have felt, like a more dapper man, that he needed to remove the bristle at the first opportunity; the time for shaving was in the morning.

I have found it extremely difficult to write about my brother. Even after his death, I feel that every word written is an assault on the strongly-held bastion of his privacy. And even though we never failed to get on with each other, laugh at much the same things and so on, I find I have little idea how close or wide of the mark my comments about him have been. I only know that now there is nothing left of him but our affection, our memories and these poems that we found scattered around his room.

Rupert Parsons

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*I have seen the God Pan, and it was in this manner:
I heard a bewildering and pervasive music
moving from precision to precision within itself,
And then I heard a different music,
hollow and laughing . . .*

Ezra Pound

After Summer

And an early lunch and noon, thick
with traffic, with people,
Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita.
I turned a bend on Dog-Kennel Hill
And the Muse looked like a sister
Showed me . . . Well, this poem
Here, she said, is your riddle
 - To frame dat Whirlpool, Ducky!
So,/Nel mezzo/And so
Make of it what you will.
Don't try to make head nor tail
At least at first don't try.
Read, read as a whole
Ah! Quanto a dir . . .
Don't worry too much over the murk
And if all is Murk, all Drivel, don't worry.
Skip the sun then skip the sun.
Please read with a light heart.

“These words you are

reading now have already become nerve signals tracing fixed and common pathways in your brain, which if damaged, could render even the best prose meaningless. And yet they are also tracing other pathways, calling up other associations, special to you, your world, your memories, affections and desires. And therefore each individual’s interpretation of language is unique and personal”; singular et ipso facto perfect. So there! touché! In other words - “Gotcha!”

Experiment With An Air Pump

(Prologue: Angels)

Angels

Without

In a brilliant lair

Year in, Year out,

In their brilliant lair,

Are gutting the light

From

A Brute with (ah!)

Bright wings.

Dove

Probably and another

Probably and another and another

Year in, year out

Dove

Probably and another

Probably and another and another

The Light, The Light

Exhausting,

These experiments to prove

The quality of air.

The Christian Empyrean has collapsed

Upon the Crystalline Sphere,

And they are taking full control:

Ethic, no evil, but mathematical.

And as we profit from the dying birds,

So their philomathic power

Grows stronger and stronger,

Yet fathoms nothing.

Sublime see no wrong, hear no wrong,

Only one bright and primal monotone.

Mmm . . .

Must change the image,

Get perspective right.

No leaf that: Hawk

In rehearsal for the storm.

Those circles speak, as if to warn:

Soon in purpose

Tighten the dropping noose

Dip

And dive through shrieking cone

Wind whirl - Tornado

Scything your City down

Next year, chaps, next year

Jerusalem.

Non Sequitur (from Hippocrates)

Man's magic,
Not divine,
Makes a moon fall,
A sunshine

But

The wind's shift
On blood's breath
Can rattle a Holy
Nut to death.

* * *

“Observation is neither insight nor poetry.”

Did I write that?

“It is insufficient for an artist to identify superficial similarities between different things. Observation is neither insight nor poetry.”

You know, I’m not sure what I meant by that.

“In order for a metaphor to be convincing in any artistic language, it must co-exist with the specific form of the language in use.”

Christ! I certainly don’t know what I meant by that.

“The situation we find ourselves in when reading his work is symptomatic of much contemporary poetry in general, where the burden of discovery and insight falls to the reader and not to the poet.”

Now, I certainly never wrote that . . .

Honesty

Reader,

Light I was

Nought but white

Satin,

An angel, blind.

Deceit intrudes,

Speech unravels . . .

Light I was

(Light he was)

Nought but One

Nought but

One Nought

But One

Twists and chokes the Tree.

Deceit intrudes

Speech unravels . . .

Light I was (Light he was)

Light I was

Nought but what

Night's Guts upheave

A python

Twists and chokes the Tree.

Deceit intrudes

Speech unravels

Haywire in the Hive,

Maddened memories,

Blood on the moon,

A peacock shrieking sky

Phrases, sky images,

Ants scurrying across the Callosum:

Chemical Christ, chemical Lucifer;

Ground of duelling knowledges.

Detach. Observe

This Daybreak from your distance.

Picture the Logos at full stretch;

The Queen's attempt to regain her nest,

Recover the explosion -

((((((Dumb!))))))

Listen. Dance. Touch. Taste. Smell.

I would have you partake.

I would have you locked in.

I would have you consider

Whether you yourself are not the Sin,

The Fall, the Flaw, the Error

Required for such endless

Wreck-, miss-, or re-

Creation.

* * *

I remember, vaguely remember, reading years ago, of Rimbaud dying in a Marseilles hospital, after returning from Egypt with gangrene in his leg

Are you sure you've got that right?

I think so. I may be wrong of course. It may not have been Rimbaud. It may not have been gangrene, and it may not have been Marseilles. But it was certainly a poet, and it was certainly a poet dying and it was certainly a poet who hadn't written anything for years and years

Sounds like Rimbaud

I think so, yes. I'm pretty sure it was Rimbaud. Anyway, as he lay dying, he started to jabber away, strange and beautiful lines of poetry - according to the nurse, or his sister, or whoever was at his bedside

His poetry?

Exactly, his own stuff from years back had now come bubbling up, like a drowning man, you know

Whole life flashing past

Yes

Not Yet

“Why not?”

Because . . .

“Because?”

Because . . . exactly! It is “BECAUSE”

I like to think

That is

I like to think

And an orchestra

I like to think an orchestra

I like to think its echopraxic brawl

Of waves apes the frenzied concert of the atom,

Apes our restless universe.

But

The sea's maternal deep and gentle hymn

I cannot hear

Her dreadful fathom hum

Playing us back

Playing us in

Playing us in, as she does,

With flawless uninterrupted ease:

Us

Not yet a note

I like to think

And a storm
I like to think those instrument angers
Exercise the air,
Bustle, buck and shimmy;
Gesticulate our surface swell;
Make it difficult to sleep adrift,
Difficult to float too long at anchor.

But

The bird
I cannot see
The bird being driven in somewhere
Driven in, as I'm sure he is
Being driven inland by the wind
Or let's say a piccolo:
Buckled pipe and broken wing
Below the standfast tree.
A whole tune and
Us
Not yet a note
I like to think

And a poem

I like to think One Poem.

I like to think my songs,

Anxious puddles, sewers, pools,

Mountain springs, well

Bubble flush and interlock,

Spate and hiccup over rock,

Flood the villages, flood my valley.

But

There is a river

I cannot reach

The River, running as it does,

Running as it always will

Run the next dream under

To a perfect finished theme.

Me no Word

Not yet

I like to think

And a journey

I like to think One Journey

I like to think one brief excursion

Here . . . there . . . here

Step, quick step, trip perhaps;

One vital stumble/blunder across the stage,

This stage where horrors/wonders close

And break, break and close

Like days, like dancers

But

The Road

I cannot find

The Road, stretching away,

Stretching behind as it did,

Stretching close by the wood;

One full measure made

Me no inch, No Word

Not yet

I like to think

And One Poem One Journey
I like to think I like to think
One Journey One Poem
But cannot find and cannot make
For all familiar markers are overgrown,
Signposts a child once read, all down
I like to think I like to think
And Light I like to think
And Love I like to think
Love and Light and I and I be One
But cannot know and cannot make
For Me no Word conceived, no measure sung
Not yet, that is, I like to think not yet

Planted

If you come into your garden,
Your pretty little garden
And lay your heart, your normal heart
Upon the crust, your surface,
You may receive a sound,
Echo of another; Pulse
Beating back distressed
Far underground,
Mile wide, mile below;
Growth on a journey upward,
Feeding alone, thrusting
Through discarded dreams,
Accelerating in a frenzy,
Making for light.

Imago

“Am I a poet who dreamed he was a caterpillar or am I a caterpillar dreaming he is a poet?” - Anon

Imagine, Elizabeth,
A memory, hatched from a dream
Of a memory or vice-versa;
Grounded, as it were, under camouflage
To talk of cause, the effect of thought,
In a safe and chattering garden;
But never to tell it to the Tree,
And never to those fields beyond.

Imagine it blunt, stuck
In a scratch, grinding,
Sliding to no
Further purpose than fathom the narrow,
The shallow,
The revolving furrow,
That fissiparous hollow
Of echoes, the groove of its own conversation.

Imagine it so bloated, so
Swollen with prose sense,
Stranded by reason, gorged,
Jaw to arse thick with all that speech,
It spits, spins . . . ah! Shat cement
Cement, and the crust, damp,
Of the chrysalis begins to harden;

Warms up, Bess, warms

With inveterate precision
For another thrust, thrust
Of an hour into this Open,
Into this magic prison;
Another trillionth trillionth
Try of I: Lucky
Gift, Birthday treat; chance
To translate one meaning, stumble
One step, one dance in time
(Though never the time to be certain)
Another charmed knot to enter

The urgent, the unwinding
Butterfly rhythm: Must

Tuck
White
Ravel
Dumb
Hunch

An Angel Blind

Shuck
Touch Shuck
Taste Shuck
Smell Must

Hammer a song with clen-
ched roundness

But the shell with brain

Fist Crack the word

With soft skull Must make

That war again Must make

Peace this time Must make

Fluttering language with

Tight world

New shape old root ephem-

eral lines same wrapping

eternal garden

And the patient thread will hold

The strain suspended until change is perfected.

And the patient thread will hold

The Husk, as a symbol of progress.

And the swelling wing,

As a symbol of

Will stretch

As a symbol of

With blood

As a symbol of

From flight

As a symbol of

To dust

As a symbol of

Or the Bird will find the caterpillar

Good

As a symbol of

Food

for thought, Emma,

And another poem.

* * *

Not such a safe garden after all?

never is

not bad, I suppose.

Thank you.

. . . in parts.

Thank you.

One or two good images.

Thank you.

But the ending I thought . . .

What about the ending?

Banal - a dreadful cliché.

Always has been.

And the beginning . . .

Yes?

Seemed . . .

Yes?

... I don't know ... difficult to grasp, really.

Too abstract.

Impenetrably so?

Absolutely.

Always will be.

Are you pretending that's deliberate?

With hindsight, yes.

And the bird?

What bird?

Never mind.

No, go on.

What bird were you thinking of?

Oh any bird, ant bird.

Ant Bird?

Sorry, that was a typing slip, No, any bird you care to mention.

Pigeon?

Why not?

As a symbol of?

Doubt, Darling, error, a job botched,
Reprobation.

God!

Probably.

The Dove: Now

Why, I ask you, did our Boss,
Boss of War & Water,
Hatch the lie at Genesis,
And put a drag on Truth in matter?

And why, I ask you, did our Boss,
Boss of Milk and Semen,
Deliberately fuse the python's twist
From a gipsy coil of hydrogen?

For there, for then He did, our Boss,
Boss of Nought and One,
Pen his spark inside this veil of gas -
To charm the gaze of Reason.

And there, but then, they will, his Angels,
Angels of death's forgiveness,
Detach the night, the Raven Night,
From our paper-thin abyss

So now, so here's my luck this hour,
Blazing atom of an hour,
To stand at ease, at ease and witness
What's behind ripping through:

Brilliant eternal wind.

Garden

We expect circumstances will wake us
Each no-knowledge day.
But this, you and I,
Is why we bother at all.

And that's an unsolicited intuition.
And that's why we see them, like Larkin,
Racing across the lawn . . .

So best keep those days for their confusions,
And use this night to solve our questions,
Acting out our little deaths, as we do,
Private, fruitful, yet uninhibited.

For surely such loss of Paradise
Is always their knowledge, not ours.

Imagine. Imagine that.

And imagine in every spare plot available,

Be there time, space,

Good ground capable,

Moods seasonable,

Grief and terror weatherable,

That we in-bud people

Via first flower

Through full bloom, go

To our proper fertile rot.

Imagine that: in-bud people.

ie. get and keep each other going

And dying, dying and going.

ie. do them, do us:

Our growth our own way,
Their growth our own way.
Tears save hearts moist,
Joys beds warm.
And how much we care, we weed,
And love so much to seed,
Bear and breed,
Burn or bury,
Loam and lush.
No sweat.

Imagine that.

And imagine, imagine also,
How in the old days
We'd have a go
And another and another,
Year in, year out,
With pick and hoe,
Dung and water,
Shield and shadow,
Knife, incense;

But today soon abandon
(Imagine that: Soon abandon)
Desert and stone,
Fire and flood,
Quake,
Ice, typhoon,
The curséd moon,
Endless uncontrollable winters,
Endless unbudgeable summers,
Because we must
The gardeners tell us:
Further sacrifice unnecessary;
Waste of time,
Waste of space,
Waste of new vigour,
Waste of good blood.
So better I think, I think,
To imagine less and do us

More in reason.
Leave them to them.
- Talk to brutes,
Test for blight,
Bridle the nightmare.
Drug quiet the fiend.
Leave them to them
- Detect demons,
Nip in early.
Abort the monsters,
Crippled Gods,
Savage angels.

Jabberview (adapted from Mtshaldi)

The Sky
“Yes?”
Was high, yes, until the night
burst, cast pus
“Pus?”

A net, mist
And chimney smoke over Jabavu
trapped our little shoal of low white houses
And the brick I threw
split the dog-pack:
Velvet jaws grinning guilty
whorl of blood-specked petals
splashed every which way down
the rotting slope and through the city
left the stamen shredded,
swaddled guts steaming
womb-hot on the rubbish tip.
And the mother? Her land
from heart to face of un-
trampled innocence, like the dew,
melted into the sun,
ebbing over Jabavu
“Jabberview?”
Jabavu.

Guilty or Not Guilty

“Guilty.”

“Do you have anything to say, before I pass sentence?”

“I understand I have been a thief.”

“You ‘understand’?”

“Your honour, on this planet there are no rules.”

“Not here.”

“No, of course not.”

“Tell me, my child, who have you stolen from?”

“You mean ‘from whom have you stolen.’”

“I thought you said . . . ”

“He is still learning English, your honour.”

“I have stolen from Mtshaldi, Dickinson, Yeats, Owen,
Thomas . . . ”

“Which Thomas?”

“Every Thomas.”

Arse About Face

At the shaft-head
Uriditch is singing.
She stops, turns . . .

JEEESUSSSS!

I is alive, hewing
The seam of the living

Dark Room Rhetoric

Ridiculous! I think it is,
To kid a self, hide a self in nothing
But nothing but nothing but
A joke.
Our vanish is a bungle;
Has no brutes, no angels anywhere,
Anyway we look, except
. . . there! . . . (see it?) . . . looming
In the Negative.
And as for that spit of white: Fang?
Call it so;
But more your razor heaven caked in fluff
Scraping, de-encrusting
Every disembodied thought off light,
Every hope, memory, choice, will, love of life.
And beyond? Well, that's your gullet, Nihil,
Black as a wolf's
unambiguous gulp.

But I shall have it different.

I shall rearrange all them nerves,

Them nerves,

them knots, them nets;

Journey

Inside out, back to front, in time.

Time to build this tomb,

Bone-flute clean, drumskin tight;

Time to quit the tepid queue outside the crematorium;

Stack high the pyre for a public wailing conflagration:

Pace of heat, bit on wood, by the random

Wind determined.

Time to have me opened blunt,

Augured deep, a scene, a foresight

Deeper than any smug mortician's scalpel;

Time, ancient Time

To sin sharper, a shade, a deed darker,

Than that grey intangible evil,

The vivisector's knife.

I shall have it . . . and so . . . and so . . . and so

What!

I shall have some testy god turn me

Upside down once more in Hell.

I shall have it efficient, doubtful.

I shall have it sufficiently fearful.

I shall have it savage,

Ritual burial in magic company,

My readers, my I's, my faithful servants.

* * *

No, you're quite right. It is a problem. It is *the* problem. The infernal "I". I think the Rastafarian expression "I & I" is most beautiful, I & I as the only pronoun - both arrogance and humility, flux and certainty, wave and particle

Dis

Now

Is

I & I

City

Where d'moon beats

D'moon

D'lonely moon

She beats thin

White

&

Empty.

* * *

And what about the bees? Where do they come in?

Ah! The bees, the bees. They're not my bees, of course, they are Clare's . . . And the Fly is not my Fly either, thank God (Touch wood! Touch wood!) it's Dickinson's.

Clare, didn't he go mad?

Raging, in and out, all his life. O yes, O yes . . . as you probably recognised, it's a composite. No, composite's the wrong word, more synthesis, more the Child of Two Thefts, you could say. Strange poem of Clare's . . . all about hidden love, secret love . . . haven't quite fathomed it . . .

The bees, the bees, what about the bees?

They are not his bees any more of course, they are now my bees. Yes, you're right - not fair . . . not fair. It's a private reference really. Bees . . . bees . . . the bees you see, I believe, I believe. I bring it in elsewhere . . . I believe . . . I mean it may not be in the original . . . I believe in a sense that the brain works on the same basis as a bee hive.

That's interesting.

Bear with me. I know what you're thinking. Bear with me.

Ha! Ha! You have the benefit of my doubt . . . or according to you . . . the benefit of my fly.

Don't tempt fate. Bees. Yes bees. Bees, as you know communicate by passing chemicals to each other. They talk to one another in a kind of chemical code . . . through dance, through touch, through taste, through smell. Rather like in a sense, Ants, actually, in a way rather like anything, everything, everything that's alive. In fact like everything like everything . . . even us . . . but it's . . . I don't know, I like that idea . . . that idea appeals to me.

What?

Apparently, apparently that is how the nerve cells, brain cells, operate, apparently, apparently. You see the bee hive is like the brain, I mean the bee hive is a brain and the brain is a bee hive. Actually all is a beehive. Actually all is all. I'm sure that's not original. But today we have almost concrete confirmation of what was before an intuitive . . . an inspired image.

So?

So, I suppose what I'm really trying to get at - I use the expression "Haywire in the Hive" elsewhere to mean a kind of reality, a thing coming to life. So I suppose what I'm trying to get at is that when one talks of bee kissing bee, one means I suppose a kind of reconciliation of ideas perhaps, a kind of calm - Death really - "Hive, one balanced hive, an inch from the window a blazing mile from the skull". I had also . . . I had in mind . . . just to . . . just to make things easier . . . Mandelstam's reference to Dante's stuff, as a kind of bee hive, all working together, a comb, a whole, an integrated whole.

Dante?

O yes, Dante . . . big thing, Dante, big thing in my own Bilge.

Now you've lost me

Doubt

Summer's by.

The Wolf has her muzzle

In the Wind.

How much will be said

How little sung

Before the hard tree wakes

Soft, blossomed: Burden

Of leaf, bird and Spring?

* * *

Very good

Sure?

Anyway, even if not, let's have some more

Sure?

Death

Is heard by the heart already
feel the failed flocks gather
Crowd vociferate in the pen.
Will they much
Or more of the same!
Flourish wild this winter
Make me a poem, time-
Stilled yet untame?

Thanks For Nothing

(“Thou hast visited me in the night
Thou hast tried my heart.
Thou shalt find nothing.
I vouchsafe my voice shall not transgress”)

. . . And bear in mind, he added, whence
We became and how we began.

- How?

You know, kind of, as it were, in a bang.
Some ride on the flash, some on the sound.
But we never get to be observers.

- No?

No, not really.
We must contain, reflect our origins,
That peculiar point in time
Where all was compressed to an infinite

- Density.

Quite so.

We are the Universe. We are the Atom.

And thanks at least for that.

- Yeah, thanks.

. . .

And thanks for being a memory,

Shrapnel of the Word.

Thanks for being a dancing splinter

Of the Void.

Thanks for being a meaning

Translated from a lie.

Thanks for being the trillionth

Trillionth botch of I.

- Yeah, thanks.

And thanks for being a pronoun

- Pronoun?

A pronoun dithering in this poem

- Of course.

Thanks for being a worm
Throbbing with the earth.
For being a bird
Companioning the wind,
A particle vibrating on a string

And although we are obliterated
In the slack
And there are no angels any way we look,
Nor reprobations anywhere on the loose,
We are taken in one brutal swallow,
One white gulp, or black.
On the pause, before the laughter
We are at least

- Taken in?

* * *

Hotchpotch?

Sorry?

Just some arbitrary rhymes and a couple of pretty lines - a mishmash of obscure myths, a botched quote - then a pun, a punchline, a puncture.

What's the problem?

The problem, my sweetheart, the problem is - to entertain the soul, which is poetry.

I agree.

But you must lie and cheat your way through.

I don't know about that.

Yes, you must tease and perplex, ease the blockage of reason out of the way, entice and drop the dog with its poisoned delicacy - meaning.

What are you saying?

Nothing but singing nonsense. I am loving, hugging the universe with its beautiful pointlessness.

Good for you.

Thanks.

* * *

- No rules

O Lord of the meeting Rivers

I sing as I love

- . . . mmm . . .

- What do you mean by that: “mmm”?

- . . . mmm . . .

- Do you doubt me?

Do you disbelieve me?

Do you think I’m just pissing about.

That this is just some ballsaching

Game?

- . . . mmm . . .

Prayer

(Gnosis of sorts)

Mmm . . . I know.

I know, need not remind: Life

Has one in its grip and I it.

Each devour each to the last bite.

The fruit is Yes, the fruit is death,

The same. Listen

Das ist die Frucht, der grosse Tod

Yes/Love/Death/Love/Yes/Love/Death

Listen

Love/Yes/Death/Love/Love/Yes/Death

Listen

To that jungle rustle
It tells a story: War
Is peace, all is grey.
The struggle to leave
Is the struggle to stay;
Prey flee, welcome the prowler;
Prowler long to become prey.
- A story which condemns
And beckons full of pity:
 Keep on going, keep on going
 Beautiful brutal unity.

Mmm I know.

I know, need not remind: Life
Has one in its grip and I it.
How lucky so being a part and being apart.
Now I see me, now I don't.
Interfluent wave, in her fluent wave;
Watchable watching mass.

. . . And So

So

Let's begin

And so

An eye

Nel mezzo . . .

An eye

Between

Its close and close

An eye

Opened. Stir

Glistened in the swamp. Fire

Stuttered . . .

. . . stutters in its lines. Icy

saws scream for symmetry

On and off on and off

Walled hands of sun focus to eclipse
Deform the hundred fingers of the moon

On and off on and off

A curl of hills unfurls into sight
As smooth as a range of mercury

On and off on and off

A silver fir cuts a whining slice
Scissors to the kill. OOPS! Missed!

Whips the world. There's no pity
In that vanish. The hunt is on again

On and off on and off

A road is laid as straight as phosphor
Carpet rolls unrolls to the gangway

And so off and so

Old Man shuffles out. Ageless

Harvester is helped down the steps

Taps

His pole once on the runway.

And so off and so

Cold light has played

And chatted with the screen

And so the switch is switched

And the switch is good

And so

Is the life-support machine.

Therefore If

They ask

Say

He came

Thinking

And if again

Say

He went

Thinking

Of himself

Alone

As it should be

But loving the others

And if a third time

And so? or

What then?

Say

Nothing

* * *

That poem, that last poem of yours

Yes, which one was that? (*Damn now she's not going to say what she was going to say.*)

Well, I think it's . . . I think it's . . .

Yes? (*she's going to say "It's lovely" - she's going to say: "It's one of the most beautiful little poems I've ever read and that bit in the middle, you know, that bit of himself alone as it should be but loving the others I love that 'the others'; seems to sum the whole business up, don't you think? . . . that delicate shuddering switch of rhythm; enormous force, I think. Enormous power . . . this may sound pretentious, trivial, but I think it gives enormous power to the 'the', you know, the definite article"*)

I don't know, I don't know, I think it's, I think it's . . .

(Yes, c'mon, tell us, tell us)

Well it seems to me, I don't know, just a lot of . . . just a lot of . . .
"I came . . . I am"

(What the Hell's she talking about? There isn't any "I came . . . I am" in the whole thing! Anywhere! Jesus!, she hasn't read it! She's just glanced over it in a fucking blur!)

I'm sorry, I'm not with you.

Well, it just seems to me, I don't know, just a lot of . . . just a lot of, just a lot of "I came . . . I am"

(Perhaps I ought to change it to: If she asks . . .)

Doesn't really seem, you know . . . no point to it really

*(Therefore if she asks, say . . . that would get rid of that cloying . . .
They/Say . . .)*

Don't quite understand, what, you know, what it's kind of driving at . . .

(No, now you've got She/He . . . perhaps it SHOULD be I came - perhaps she's right . . .)

Not much to it really - just a lot of I came, I am . . .

(No, no - couldn't have that on a fucking tomb. What did that bugger say? . . . "Cast an eye . . . cast a cold eye on life on death, Horseman pass by . . .)

You know, hasn't got, you know, doesn't seem to . . .

(Therefore if the Horseman asks . . . ha! ha! . . . no, no . . . got to bury that pronoun . . . What will the horsewoman ever know in this our hour of light? . . . ha! ha!)

I mean, it's a bit constricted, isn't it?

(Each to his own)

Each to his own.

Translation

Ordina quest'amore

O si tu m'ami

Set then this love in order

O if thou lovest me.

There is still judgement. So

Smash your flute on the temple stair:

Divine impersonation for a year.

Before all season to make all men

Come join our Sion journey to the mountain
camp in that valley by this stream

Hurry! Follow the voice which calls you

Slant up like the arrow in your dream

Come stretch over across between

The fit of life, the fit of death,

Blow in, blow in your singing breath

Help the Holy Bird to escape

O be happy to be the chosen Man.
Happy to free the Paraclete
- Magic Mortal Interchange -
Take this. Take chance. Take, read and wake.

Look about you askew, cross your eye
Love in your terror, love as you die.
Via such sympathy via our victory
And fire on the hill will speak to fire.

The Saviour

“SO WHO’S THE JU-JU?”

“You know, the Ju-Ju, the Mummer play,
Father Christmas, Dr Beelzebub . . .”

“No”

“You know, the quack gibbering on to save
the dying year . . .”

“No, I DON’T KNOW!”

A little way ago, a little while,
A gentle doctor walked on stage,
Our smiling sage, our saviour back from Hell.
The rope around his neck was still,
And on his breast horn lay easy.

He watched them roll and pass like dice
He came, he said, to speak, he said, to save, he said,
To warn.

This babble filled his blessed horn:
Stir this fire, you oaf, stir this fire
Stir this fire you think is only good

Oh, he loved to watch the rolling dice
And he loved to guess the spinning light
And in that quick, that dusty hour
You burn my living stalk and leaf
Wind may whistle through your flute
And through your hollow sweet

But he also loved the hand that spun
But mortal breezes scuttle
Like a crab inside and sing inside
and sing of dusk and dusk,
Sing and whistle up the closing hurricane
Of death and Oh and how

And Oh and how that hurricane will suck!

He wasn't sure, and wasn't sure

You lame, dumb, castrated, crossed-eyed lout

Until he made an each way bet

And in that grey, that tepid hour,

You mar, you char, my fruit you pluck

Whereat the core, skunk and rose lie luke.

Stir this fire,

Stir this fire and swirl the juice and pip,

Swirl the juice and let it lash the bud,

Yet in that sip and sip,

Your palate's with the swine.

Sleep smacks no bile, no bitter nightmare,

No honeyed awakening, no tap on myth.

All your dream and all your morning

Will taste of one times Nothing times nothing.

I have come to speak, to save, to warn.

Save yourself this fusty journey.

But that was a little way, a little while.

Besides . . .

Besides . . .

What chance have I,
Black Elk, Chief Sioux,
Becalmed in such insipid vision,
To unsheathe the wind, make fresh the dream,
Feed vigour to a dying nation?

What chance have I,
The Stones' beleaguered priest,
To resurrect the sun,
Who forge a death in fog, birth with hidden flame,
And bribe for witness with a stolen song?

What chance have I,
Your Aztec's chosen man,
To fructify the ewe,
Excite the ram? What chance ever of being chosen
To impersonate a god?

Too scruffy, foul mouthed,
Long lost touch with woman.
And if the fruit is rotten,
So the seed, so the passion, Or so I believed,
Though never certain.

Apology (for Heisenberg)

O Poets, O Journey . . . persons,
When the music changes
So do you,
And as we listen, we change
The music too.
So I'm sorry I couldn't find
The context of a single season;
Straight and simple trudge
Down that valley, up that mountain;
One endless muddy summer,
One endless fuliginous winter

With a rainbow perhaps thrown in
To ease the grey horizon.
My Jordan climbs,
Words blossom in the storm.
And when through microscope calm,
I inspect that grain of sand,
It throws up a frenzied ocean
Of waves and boats, boats and waves.
And which is which depends
On how I sing, where I stand.
Who is water? Who is wood?
When is canvas? When is foam?
And why and why I asked the Pool,
Why and which, which
Which Narcissus drowned?

* * *

So. What would you do?

I don't know, what would I do?

Wouldn't you try to take it off?

Why should I? If I saw a gorilla in a mirror with a spot on its forehead, I wouldn't dream of taking it off.

Why not?

Gorillas are not to be tangled with.

But you are the gorilla in the mirror. And all it would involve is reaching up with your hand and taking the spot off.

And then I would be seeing a gorilla in a mirror reaching up with my hand to take the spot off, sorry, reaching with its hand to take a spot off its forehead.

In a sense yes, at first, but sooner or later . . .

No, what you are saying is that, to get the gorilla in the mirror to take the spot off, I must, we must, ape our actions, we must synchronize our actions . . .

You are being deliberately obtuse.

What you are saying is that there is a circumstance when two gorillas meet and synchronize their actions and if I get fed up I can either go somewhere else and the other gorilla will disappear . . .

At least you now realise you are a gorilla

. . . or . . . or I can kill the gorilla, because the gorilla is made of glass and on the rare occasions I come across another glass gorilla, I will immediately know it is a glass gorilla, since it will mock me.

What about the red spot?

Bugger the red spot. The glass gorilla has far more traumatic attributes than one red spot.

What are you trying to say?

The dilemma is this: The gorilla is made of glass. The gorilla is irritating. The gorilla is made of glass and therefore hurts when I thump it. But at the same time if I thump it hard enough it will go away.

Depending on the nature of the glass.

Depending on the nature of the glass . . . and yet if I go away instead, turn my back, close my eyes, then the glass gorilla will also go away . . . ah! but . . . I won't know what the glass gorilla is up to, will I?

In a Mirror Failing

To learn the significance
Of their images in a mirror
As images in a mirror

In a mirror failing
To learn the significance
Of their images in a mirror

As images of themselves
In a mirror failing
To learn the significance

Of their images in a mirror
As images of themselves
In a mirror failing

To learn the significance
Of themselves as images
Failing in a mirror

To learn the significance
Of themselves as images
Failing in a mirror

To learn the significance
Of themselves, gorillas
Have thus far failed.

Lord I trust in your mercy.

Dust Jacket
("Humility is endless")

Not much to say
Not much
And less
To sing to sing
About the author
Save he is proud

Proud

To have been singled out
At such a random flurry
Spurt, flush,
Lingering stain of pleasure;
To have extended his gift in return,
This extended gift of pain.

Not much

To say, not much
And less to sing
To sing about
The author save he
Is proud

Proud

That whereas all without was
Darkness,
Bouncing mobile, vomiting Darkness,
All within was
Light

Which split

Back to back and split

Back to back and split

And split and split

Again

Not much

To say, not much and less

To sing, to sing about the author

Save he is proud

Proud

To have split so

Hardened and flesh softened

From seed to slug on

And on and so further

On to whatever was being
Bodied specifically thus:
Limbed, skinned, boned, veined,
Livered, gutted, blooded, brained,
Expressed, constrained,
Cocked and anused
(He could go on?)
He should go on, really,
And he did go on of course
In detail, second by
Delicate second detail;
Delicately framed in subtle fresh description
While all the while

Magnifying

Among the gurgles
Among the close gurgles and remote rumbles
Among the swamps and the jungles
Storms,
Lightning, and explosions

Among the rivers and mountains,
Gorges, valleys,
Among the deserts and the prairies,
All the while

Magnifying

Under the ceaseless mist
Under the ceaseless calm
Under the ceaseless Hymn and Will
Under the ceaseless Hymn and Will,
And love of the Drum
Until Time
Until Time and the sea could suffer
No more
Until Time and the sea could suffer
No more of it; got cramp; couldn't quite . . .
They couldn't quite She couldn't quite
They couldn't quite She couldn't quite
Beach their wreck

Not much

To say, not much
And less to sing
To sing about
The author save he
Is proud

Proud

To have been plucked so
From that process
Drawn, eased from the pressure
Ripped in a frenzy
Ripped in relief
Ripped from that choc-a-bloc choking
Fucking Mother of a shelf . . .
(O don't shut me!)
. . . to lie here slack naked
Babelling, pissing in your palms.
No, don't shut him.
Look around, read.

How many other half
Half botched works
Half poems, half journeys
Do you see lurking among the labels
Still tight in their sockets?
Not much.
No
But don't shut him
Not yet . . . because . . .
Exactly it is
- BECAUSE -
He likes to think
That is
He likes to think
I
Also am
A poem
To finish
I
Also am
A journey
To end

Not much

To say, not much and less to sing

To sing about the author save he is proud

Proud

To be this

Authored author

Constant son

Constant brother

Variable in-law

Variable uncle of

Respectively:

Etc. & etc.

(O don't shut me!)

No, Don't shut him.

Not yet

For you would press

A Ghost leaf

Give it time to settle,
Settle and brittle to powder
In your skull;
Settle and moisted
To mulch rot proper
Mulch rot proper
In your soil
In this clearing
In your grandchilding plot.
Not much, no, but don't shut me up
Don't close me down too early
For there must always
Almost always be
A Good Image
To come at the end;
A Pun perhaps,
A Pun, a Punchline, a Puncture.

Not much

Not much

Not much

To say, not much

And less to sing

To sing about

The author save he

Is proud

Proud

That this is his last

If not his first

And probably his only

Unutterable twitch in the Open

Before "I" sheds

Slithers back and merges

Into the Pool

Into the Garden

Into the Sunlight

Again

Not much

To say

Not much to say

Still less to sing

To sing about an author

Who was proud

Proud and Happy

Proud and happy to be chosen

To be chosen

Just to be

For a second

For a second

Or eternity

The choice is yours

Locus

for Laila

“ . . . senza infamia e senza lodo”

I

“Time was . . . ”

(yes?)

“The moment . . . ”

(go on)

“The very moment . . . ”

(no doubt about that)

“Space began . . . ”

(without question!)

“To close, curve

and close with a thud

(absolutely! - was there also - saw it -
did - Did!)

“A Dome sealing all . . . ”

(perfect)

“That is - and I mean ALL . . . ”

(sure, sure)

“Light rushing silently in . . . ”

(shattering!)

“I thought . . . ”

(yes?)

“I thought . . . ”

(yes??)

“I thought . . . ”

(YES!!!)

“ . . . perhaps . . . ”

(Christ!

thought it too

then

but then was then

and then then was never)

“ . . . God?”

II

You did say “perhaps”, didn’t you, not “no”?

OK, “perhaps” it is, but how to keep,

Perhaps, that is, not No, to keep, how?

Is there any, is there nonesuch, nowhere, none,

No

Bar, no

Grille, no

Jar, no

Lid, no

Box, no

Screw, no

Mansion to keep it - Perhaps, not No -

Then then then

From never

van-

ishing away?

There is one, I have one (Hush there!

A luke ghost broods);

Only not within seeing of the sun;

Rubble . . .

Not below the soothing ceiling soft rain;

. . . a world husked dry;

A cloud

A collapse

A curve

A close

A thud

. . . crumbling to a greyness like crushed ryvita.

I do know such a place, I do.

Some light,

Some candle clear burns somewhere. Why?

I wait

Just for the lack of answer the eagerer a-waiting

There/Clear burns somewhere/Why

There/God to aggrandise

There/God to deny

Not Perhaps . . . but . . . but . . . but . . .

Come you then,

Come you Inwards, This Place:

“Here, now, Always . . .”

The echoing timbers wrinse and wring

Not Perhaps . . . but . . . but . . . but . . .

Come you,

Come you indoors,

The Withindoors House that shocks;

Your faded fire mend

And vital in the closed soul's vault.

What hinders? Are you death-blind, to a fault?

* * *

Would it bother you if I included a conversation we had in my poem?

No, of course not. Which conversation was it?

The one when you described one of my poems as trite.

But I have never called one of your poems trite.

Yes, you have.

But, darling, I have never called your poems trite.

There is nothing wrong with calling them trite.

There may be nothing wrong, but I have never done it. I would never say your poems were trite - on the contrary, I think some of them are quite lovely, and obviously very profound. I don't actually understand most of them. But they are certainly not trite.

Then why did you call that poem I sent you by Alison Brackenbury trite?

I don't understand.

I sent you one of my poems and also a poem by Alison Brackenbury - if you remember you called my poem "beautiful" but hers "trite".

But hers was trite and yours was beautiful - I can't remember which one it was, but it was beautiful, as all your poems are, darling.

But mine was the trite poem, and hers was the beautiful.

Well, you are, I'm sure, a better judge than I am. But in my personal opinion - I know you think I am an ignorant old fool - but my personal opinion is that her poem was trite and yours was beautiful. But I don't understand if you mean to say I am not allowed to criticise somebody else's poems without . . . it's just bizarre.

On the contrary, it's not bizarre, it's beautiful.

No, I mean your reaction is bizarre, not her poem.

Yes, your reaction is beautiful, it is beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.

You're mad.

Perhaps.

Summary of the Same Poem: Guesswork

And if that's it - Find

The turn off, make the switch

Into forgetfulness

With every synaptic "No" singing "Yes",

Singing Yes, singing Yes

Yes/No/No/Yes - the same. Listen . . .

Das ist die Frucht, der grosse Tod

Yes/Love/Death/Love/Yes/Love/Death

That's it - That's all - leave

The world, dishevelled world,

So much crumpled veil, tugged

And tugging dream, as we found it, in a mess;
Leave being still, being whole
By affirmation, by denial;
Hive, one balanced hive,
An inch from the window, blazing
Mile from the comb, while

All the while there was this
In-between, this across,
This little guilt, great innocence,
This bristle and yelp, mock squabble
Over twilight, this

Death:

Dawn death

Dusk/Death/Dawn/Dawn/Death/Dusk

And so on and so forth

And so on and so forth

This fogwatch until

I

Deserted, commanded him

Join him, the soldier, don

The greycoat skirmish against oblivion;

No Way

That Hour

No choice nor will

But stop what had become a vicious
attack on myself

That's it - Always

Born to die before the truth;

Horror/Doubt, cheek by jowl, belated,

Right at the end, not

For what thought, what said, what done

And if that's all - always born

To die

Doubt/dread/dread/doubt/doubt/dread/doubt

cheek by jowl, belated, right at the end

Not for what thought, what said, what done,

But for how I saw and how I sang,

Was it a botch? Did nothing cohere?

Or am I at my centre

Dumb?

And if that's it - Translate
One journey, One poem
Stumble one step, one dance in time
(Though never the time to be certain),
Has, you may with sane suspicion ask,
Our pistol-waving officer overdone it;
Driven from the trench a gibbering lunatic,
Shell-shocked slouch into that pointless fray;
Wrong coward, transparent camouflage, final
Misleading assault?

And if that's all - irrigate the desert
Instead of pumping an obstinate trickle;
Instead of syringeing the Pool
One glistening dependable symbol;
Instead of tapping the Lake, a lucid puddle,
Has the rusting standpipe drawn the well,
Desultory vulture plucked the skull,
Frenetic pulse bust the vein,
Rhetoric
Rot!!!
Drivel?

Have blood of murk and muck, vile
Expression, washed out logic
Clogged the riddle,
Flooded the reticules with havoc,
Electro-neuro-chemical?
Have too many buboes, ping-pong balls,
Surfaced together,
Clustered:

Albumen Gypsum Alabaster

Fuliginous Melancholia

Etc. Etc.

Encrusted the translucent swell,
Skin of the achromatic river?
(Did Mr Patel,
The foreign chemist, kill
For misconstruing a GP's scrawl?)
Has the modern Ju-Ju botched the cure
For ridding rhythm, magic
From his babble?

In that case allow me to sum
The whole business up in language
Every educated Martian understands,
With words sharp, whittled, mean one thing.
Allow me to paraphrase H.S. Altham:

“And I can still recapture his style
With a thrill.
Palairret’s off-drive had the flight
Of a good cleek shot skimming towards
The low white Taunton railing.”

“And I can still recapture his style with a thrill”
And that’s no brutal thing, O England!

No brutal thing to choose or change,
Shape or judge quality to our affliction;
No brutal thing, my Darling,
To have faith, indulge:
Our whole case hold something more.
Death’s subtraction, say, leave an x.

For there then that I guess
Is where we find the space;
Lurk back to back, turn face to face,
From the final circle of annihilating Bliss

There then, that's all:
War over, skeleton dissolve, choice
No more
Love in order and the Dove
Free
Yes/Life/Death/Life/Yes/Life/Death
The same. Indistinguishable. Listen
Nought/One/One/Nought/Nought/One/Nought
The same. Indispensable. Listen.

Arrow fly over the mountain.

Voice flow underground

Summary of an *Altogether Different Journey*

And if that's all,
Just good manners;
But One Poem, One Journey,
One unedifying hunger
To abandon Nanny
For the Ebony Panther;
Eloquent grab for ivory glory;
Bugger all mystery,
Like the Devil;
Savage seduction,
Power in the jungle;
Will she forgive me?

Will she forgive me
That remarkable angel,
Her sainted delusion
Pickled in memory:
Talented original

Missionary pilgrim;
Forgive me for thinking
My mule in the nursery,
Brutal immobile,
Much too clumsy,
Far too wooden,
For prowling arrogance to stalk ambition?

Moon scrambled
Yolk of day,
Brain into desert,
Heart into night.
So I rogered the Lion,
Straddled the Wolf,
And the beast of us three
Strutted the mountain.

But instead of fame
I fed them derision;
Instead of wealth
Brought them famine;

Instead of reason
Tried to love
(Or the other way about
Would have been no different).
For they ripped me apart,
They tore out my heart,
They roared me down into Bethlehem
And there and then

With unforgettable speed
The merciless past
Overtook, overflow.
Out of Galilee

Black Hawk swooped.
Out of the Ark
White Dove sang;
Wing in my skull,
Beak in my lung;
A boom of horror
The precipice below.

Pitch had been chosen,
I thought of nothing.
Thunder of dark
Sounded my Hollow.
Remarkable man.

Remarkable man
in Bethlehem
So tripped and fell
At the sight of Hell.

Remarkable man.
Remarkable man
In the War Museum
Tripped and fell
And heard a clang,
Tripped and fell
And heard a clang:
Bin was tipped Lid was flipped

And all his marbles
Rolled and ran,
Rolled and ran me
Round the bend.
O but thank God!

Thank God for creating
His bright his beautiful,
Animals so simple,
So innocent as usual,
They fall for man,
They fall for the guilty.
There has been a rampage
In Gadarene.
Another batch of hams
Has taken the plunge.
Poor Jewish Swine.
Lucky loony me!
But remember.

Remember, remember
Take care to remember
Pigs in the future,
Bacon in England
May be much tougher,
Far less eager
To soften their bonces
To suffer your cropper.
And remember, remember,
Take care to remember
That long hot journey
Back to the nursery,
Dreadfully slow haul
Back on your rocker.
And remember, remember
If experience is all
The Devil must be
an excellent swimmer

(Epilogue)

O, the Muse's fury

Is never long.

When the cup is small

The straw is strong.

She sucks you dry.

Her suck is brief;

A sip of Hell,

A sip of heaven,

And when she's done

It's a fucking relief.

And a little death at that!

So . . .

I am doubtful of this venture.
Summer's by and the long cold
Has its muzzle in the wind.
How much will be said,
How little sung,
Before the hard tree wakes soft
Blossomed, burden of bird
Leaf and spring?

Numb bleat
Is heard by the heart already,
Feel the failed flocks gather,
Crowd, vociferate in the pen.
Will they breed much
Or more of the same,
Flourish on a wild juice this winter,
Make me a poem time-stilled
Yet untamed?

So
Let's begin . . .

Simon Parsons died in 1990, aged forty. The son of a diplomat, his childhood was spent mainly abroad. While at university he began to suffer blackouts and spent the last fifteen years of his life as a porter/caretaker at King's College Hospital, living alone in South London. His life seemed solitary but, to his family, he was a stimulating, amusing and loving companion.

His interests were infinitely varied, ranging from sport to philosophy, literature (especially poetry) to the nature of the brain, foreign affairs to trade union politics. He read extensively and, above all, wrote poetry. This book is a representative selection from the mass of poems and "conversations" found in his room after his death.

Acknowledgements

The Parsons family are greatly indebted to Lawrence Sail for all his help in the production of this book.

1992

Since the publication of Simon's poems following his death in 1990, his father, Anthony Parsons, and his brother, Rupert Parsons, have also died, so it is left to us, Simon's sisters, to thank the poet and writer Paul Holman for this online publication of *Experiment With An Air Pump*. Paul only became known to the family through a review he wrote of *Experiment* in the *Haiku Quarterly* in 1992. On the strength of this, he was asked to write the introduction to a second volume of Simon's poetry, *Legato the Ju-Ju's Cure*, which the family published in 1993. This was the last contact we had with Paul until May 17, 2013 when Laila sent Emma the following email:

For some strange reason I googled Simon's name this afternoon and came across this:

<http://paulholman.drupalgardens.com/content/simon-parsons>

To our surprise and delight, it turned out that Paul was still championing Simon's poetry all these years later and had posted a couple of Simon's poems on his website. We then kept in touch by email; Paul was keen to revive and disseminate Simon's work by publishing a PDF version of *Experiment With An Air Pump* online. We gladly agreed to this idea and said he was welcome to go ahead. His insight into Simon's poems and the sensitivity with which he communicated with us meant that we knew Simon's work and reputation were in safe, trustworthy hands. Paul has produced this publication for no reason other than the belief that our brother's poetry should be shared with a wider audience. For this, we are truly indebted to him.

Emma and Laila Parsons, February 2015

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