

Michael Ayres



Poems from *Dash*

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Introduction to Dash

Dash is a project which dates (in terms of initial composition) from late July 1997 to December of the same year. It consists of about 50 poems. They were written in a sustained chain reaction, and for the most part have a very distinctive quality which marks them as belonging to a group or family.

The precise genesis of the project, I don't really recall. However, many of the poems have a quite propulsive feel to them, which I believe reflects the drive and purpose with which they were written. In one sense, *Dash* occupies a rather anomalous position in my work. In the early nineties, even before the publication of my first book, I found myself having to reevaluate my life and my poetry. It seemed to me that I had to try and regroup things. One consequence of this movement to reconfigure things was the desire to write differently.

I sometimes think that the best of my earlier poems have been defeated, in some senses – have lost (or never possessed) a belief in the bond between poetry and people, and a belief that the beauty of poetry is profoundly effective, in the sense that (in one way) the world depends upon it. In fact, I feel that these earlier poems rebuke and deconstruct my later work – and will always stand as a valid (if disconcerting) challenge to my more mature writing. The earlier poems of which I'm speaking – for example, *Feint Bivouac* – have surrendered their belief in people. Writer and reader are alienated from each other; the work of art is a form of moral luxury, a game, a pastime, without radical power; poetry is an anaesthetic and not an aesthetic experience.

Well... This was a dead end. In order to resurrect writing within myself, I felt that I had to rethink my understanding of the relation of writer to reader. I had to seek to believe in the reader – then, the poetry would be real. To put this another way, I felt I had to go towards the reader; and perhaps this very process of going towards the reader was the process of poetry itself.

My work from the early nineties onwards has been a search for this regrounding. In terms of this regrounding, *Dash* now seems to me to be, in one way, a kind of evolutionary spur. Having written the poems, I set them aside, possibly intending to go back to them at some point. However, around the summer of 1998, I began the poems which would make up the second half of *a.m.*, and *Dash* was put into storage. I now have no immediate intention of publishing *Dash*, as the gravity of my poetry has shifted to a new centre. Nevertheless, I welcome this opportunity to make some of the poems available to readers.

Michael Ayres
April, 2003.

Neardeathexperience

The atom of sleep was there (small cupping hand) drool and sheep
a lightheavyweight dream (champion of the world) squaring (the bell)
The house by the sea (remote) I always carry with me
a pocket of that sand (soul dust) in this dry room
I wake suddenly sometimes imagining
a sound of barbarian waves

Heidegger and Being (student days) and the small copying hand
of God *Sein und Zeit* in the baywindow light
a restless flock of H₂O corralled (no sleep) in a folded memory
and *The House by the Sea*, entitled now,
the volume of a story (remote) that I
belong to (and keep meaning to read,
but just never find the time somehow...)

Gulls in a maze of air (our maze) and this mind
the cut-caress of our mouths (you
with sand in your shoes) I (it slips away)
and the troubled memories we made of each other
and of each night of that stay
like throwing salt into fire
On very still nights, they say, you can hear (relate)
the bell being tolled in the drowned church tower

Locke, Hume, Berkeley, vinegar-coloured paperbacks (gulls) soared
into the vanishing point (the air of words) a first-year universe
and sex the metaphor (the creamy links) sex
the plain flag (and) sex just sex
I threw away the sea keys, threw them further away
into you (relater) the small rowing boats bobbing in the estuary
with their locksmith wakes while you (in the house
by the sea) sat barefoot in the windowseat and the way you looked
sent me my loneliness (at last) first class

Shells feathers and bones (the sea typewriter) full stops and colons
(taps out its story) extinctions and mutations
(the eyeright words) the house

by the sea (Memory) and the eyesight sky (our sky)
I dreamed of Heidegger on the beach saying
'Man is the Shepherd of Being: drive Being this way — this way —
this way' ... (towards me)
I woke still in love (emotive) with my slaughterhouse name
learning to live in pieces, and with certain lines dead-ends

By then I knew I was (champion) only in name
sole dust in a breezier nature (the blow)
Remote scissor-clock experiments and product of the scissor-clock
I sat on the edge of the bath where you lay
the water galumphing when you moved (?) the paper
chain of waterbeads (I was strung out) and we seemed
to be growing closer and closer (tidal bronze)
though to what (sun-motes) I could not say

Paperweight days go by (like books being boxed) out here
in woollyback country
It is a strange place but I (told bell) have grown attached to it
the small bathing shacks of bright (and faded) primary colours
(like a) stamp collection on the sand of these eyes
(lick a) different one (you see now) the album fallen open, empty
and the sudden crouch of your nerves at twilight
a hare scenting the breeze
holding very close (remote) the one you love
and feeling, for a moment, it — the

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Someone's Illyria

Sometimes I like using simple, massive, mystical blocks of words
like 'the one person of love', and the way
you are that person when you say those words...
Sometimes I just like vernacular peaches you know
ones you get from the market in a brown paper bag
the stallholder spins in their hands to twist closed
I like the wide avenue—change of the sea at Palm Beach
the streetlights in a corner of the ocean
a place of many blistering salts and German cars
a moment where the hurting dice of my words are still falling

Does life get stranger, more radiant, like the country from this place?
The centrifuge—petal of a heart, always one's own
and your breath in autumn a silver vapour
like a metal worn so thin it is translucent, like Honesty
still cupping seed
the genocide—mapping Nazi, poring over Minsk and Kiev
the sleeve of his SS uniform worn so fine
you can see the Chinese monk within it
howling with Zen laughter at a story of clouds
or pottering around in the monastery
considering the Buddha's words:
He who is thoughtless is as if dead already

You love me and naturally I stay close to the gravity of your eyes
that whole sleepy planet of looking
a whole moon of bearing down, and the fate of sunrise
Formal buffers of this kind produce a stranger, I know that,
and essentially oneself a place you get to
like a summit where the air is rare
struggling up the mountainside—rest of day by day
immersed in the hazard, such as this raw six and one
that luck is you, and all the fortune of arriving:
the ocean dealing its endless hand
in suits of Roars, Spumes, Shaves and Spills
with that haunting sound of the definite game of spaces
the shore I always associate somehow with Shakespeare
and resurrection — with, now, someone's Illyria

The Cassini Division

(Of so and to then and in Rome oh so) inter (stellar, as our always,
local and tender, buttons and haystacks,
the hot points feeding direction night and the eyes)
(a flung into silence, and the particle—emptiness of words) inter
(city and the urban desire,
the happening on ‘fire’ in Firenze, and once I
came south with a handful of snow in my pocket)
(in the astronomical fear of loss, of Major Tom days) inter
(the body, the way you glance at me, or we might say
everything, only, the once)

The book opens with its minute type its superb trawl of data
and the book says ‘a yellow dwarf star of spectral class G2’ is
about to set and it says ‘The Cassini Division and the shadow
of the planet on the rings are apparent’
(And I came south with a handful of snow in my pocket)
The book opens with Copernican rigor and Babylonian adventure
and the book says ‘ah’ the book says ‘blood’ and opens
says ‘soon’ and ‘again’ and ‘don’t cry’
and speaks of the naming of the First Point of Aries the book
speaks of precession carrying the signs westward 30°,
or a whole sign, with respect to the constellations
(And I came south with a handful of snow in my pocket)
The book is ‘the book’ and the book opens and it opens
and it speaks of “Mizar with the faint Alcor (‘The Test
for normal vision)” it speaks of the arbitrary zero of longitude
(And I came south) (I came south)
(And I came south with a handful of snow in my pocket)
And the book of silence speaks:
‘It has a screen coated with phosphorescent zinc sulphide;
a tiny flash of light signals the arrival of a particle’:
the book speaks of plasma ‘a fourth state of matter’
and the book opens and opens and is ‘the book’ ‘the book’ ‘the book’
(And I came south) (I came) (And I came)
(south with a handful of snow in my pocket)

The book says little of Mandelstam’s ‘science of goodbyes’ (extra)
the need to go on

It is 'the book' of the body, of bodies (extra) terrestrial
quiet like a great forest hushed before a storm
I left you outside the café shortly before dusk (extra) and the day
was split into two blocks one half was home
one half, running light in my hands,
all that home, being home, could never reach
The book is 'the book' of absences (extra) ordinary losses
the trickle of whispers on wristwatches,
it is the weight of the periphery it is (extra) the endless
harmony of the rings
We know that, we know it's (extra) the cost, the prize
In the book there's a saying (inter) and it speaks of the clearing
If our night is so giant, we'll know then
And it will be the night of the book (inter) like the night
leasing us with leaving

Then the harmony of the rings ends

(Then x is your mouth y my mouth) plotting, plotting...
(And I came, z , South)
(Then y is your mouth x my mouth) plotting, plotting...
(With a , k , kiss in a pocket)
(With an , m , miss in a pocket)

It's clearly visible...

And as the book opens and opens the tiny
axes of words bury themselves in the tree of the book
again, never, now, once, and falling...

Saigon

Did you know there's a bay on the Greenland coast
called the Inlet of Tears?
I think of that place sometimes, imagine what
sorrowful icy event gave rise to such a name
rooting some nondescript spot into the spreading tree
of our hopes, history, geneology, fear
the godlike cyclone of a finger on a map
wreaking forgetfulness as it passes
and, as it pauses,
the destruction of care

Some names are like silk aren't they
like the French *Indochine* you could wrap yourself in that sound
or drift upon the Sea of Clouds
or the Zen emptiness of one thing in one house
of the Sea of Tranquility
the adept understanding how the buzzing of the fly
gives stillness a place to run to
and what the caress of a lover's hand
cares for

The tiny chances of words their hypersensitive die
like a lost 's', or one gained 's'
tell you precisely where you are
a *Smooth Guide* to passing, an OS map on a finegrained scale
making something so personal, a haphazard fête shaped like an index
the signature of your being evoked
as scents of lavender crossed with rotting meat in a nearby bin
or seasalt mixed in with appleblossom and creosote
or Berber greens melting to Nullabor reds and pinks
watermarked zincs tacked onto snap frosts
or the news of sudden death in cars
hazarding silence entirely

Then 'kiss' is a location and 'vermeil', 'kiss' and 'touch' and 'kiss' again
a china bowl, milk in a saucer, a fluttering semaphore,
and each succulent phoneme
is an echolocation of a place itself

and the carcass-rip in the air
of a beautiful poem
a way of losing ground, or finding it
like new lovers, or the newly dying,
or those who survived to christen that inclement bay
the Inlet of Tears
the intimate chart of one moment
shaped like a world decision —
the real fairy-story
of making your mind up

The Masterbuilder [i]

In a room of clothes in a room of eyes
if fear is the house and the resident a folk hero
then I am the Masterbuilder

The dew–cremation of a pure subject begins here
when you are heterologous in uniform states
the woozy influenza (*largo largo largo*) playing through you
hot breath flaring down the barrel of a silver flute
a corps–smoke of you suitable in autumn
waiting to put on the clothes of an idea
a thin pale blue glaze on bone china
like the last alcohol in the beaker–morning September
a starshaped hole in a broken pane
melancholia’s *meisterwerk* all your possession
all you have of all you remember...

The theoretician is saying *the construction by division of space
into what one might call ontological compartments is of*
but fear of narration has long since begun to interrupt him
and the flame–flame of the lotus–ball
of your own naked foot in your gaze
leaves glass ash in an in vitro urn
a message emptiness sends through the small open windows of things
(the stale scent of forgetfulness in bottles of Heineken and Pils)
to last night ending totally crashed out
on the polished wooden floor
listening to Spiritualized *Ladies and Gentlemen*
We are Floating in Space in faded Levis

Now the I–violence of building begins again
the fluttering lashes of your baby’s sleep
the Jew–silence of my footsteps across early morning grass
and you in your three-thousand-thousandfold great world of light
and frost and mist, your five-month-old daughter’s
ur-song, ur-law, ur-lovesong, ur-call
while this, my American real estate poem goes on
developing a condo in Florida a beach house in Malibu
my clearcut torso summer refines
and the sun–gone properties of my command

thought forming in the mind, bread rising in the oven
the passover of belonging, inhuman in love

I am the ruins of your will — I, the Masterbuilder
(or, literally, ‘it is the ruins of your will — it, the Masterbuilder’)
in the bombed Nagasaki of syntax
the guidebook will tell you to pause and admire certain features
in the coming winter of this year
lost in some facile simile of a maze
like your deep reflection in a shattered lake or a mirror
filling a suitcase with earth before being marched into exile
or overlooked in Eden, the ghost in the machine
staking your claim to the truth and the garden
in this, the endless hyperGenesis of names

It will be another fine day and I will be blameless
my life racing my death, my sun racing my moon
and hazily regretting more bad decisions in the Happy Hour
half-sleeping within the fragile walls of an insomniac mortgage
with no significant other, my state
fractious and semi-fictitious shaky and querulous
like a deconstructed essay on a minor part in Shakespeare
or the black applause of the crow in an untranslated haiku
my head cocktailed on lust and substances
my glittering PoMo tower rising and falling (it
still being notional) on ever-revised
projections of raised capital
its shapely retro sci-fi Chrysler curves
informed by the design skills of the Masterbuilder
while my life unravels far from the party
my badly clothed emptiness (like the whole in Schubert)
coming apart at the seams in the pursuit of happiness

All night the construction workers laboured
and the war between the virus and the immune system went on
the fire demon with the pink grin melting
into a grimace of pain, but not mine, somebody else’s
if the supreme babel of place the genius loci falls up
I flash my ID as I turn my back

its map of tattoos torn by your eyes
to 'ugly' 'indifferent' 'narcissus' 'retreat'
the haunted condition of meaning your choice of flesh
like the vaporised states of Palestine, Czechoslovakia

The Masterbuilder [ii]

In the very teeth of the lie, emptiness bites at sound
an apple yacht lying at anchor, a ripple in Eden waters
a sea-and-moon flower in the mist, no one aboard
to be or to associate with
(it is picked and discarded, discarded and picked)
and in Hades and carnelians in the Crimea
a pirate fragrance suffuses the universe
a heavensent sweet decay, in Keats' fingers, dining on us
a swift terror of reason arrives, speaking of *this* and *this*
the walls of all things, one by one, falling open
leaving a bare summer before your shadow arrives

Ladies and Gentlemen I am the one and I've always been the one
at the Mecca—periphery of the buzz the craic the swing
digging mechanistic spurs into the soul like an acid cowboy
arriving at the border of two millennia in some one-horse town
the prairie messiah of a new cool and this is my sign –
wasted early Sunday morning the schnapps clasps of my attaché
opening a space where music should be
and the symphonic coffin of my friends
but where instead the burning vehicles
of destroyed metaphors await a war
between two orders to fire and refuse them

The lonely gun of the flautist solos in languorous drooping silver
shooting down a metal dove I pay by some Picasso plastic
and the Houdinis of Armenian olives escape our attention
as I eat Beethoven and lotus all afternoon, oozy ill and warm
in a PC—swinish condition a slipped disc and ductile
interfacial unlike the space between the mirror and my watching eyes
the Tibetan murder—wing within the house outside
as I make the gaseous pieces of the puzzle sleep complete
my enforced rest a place policed by dreams
the solid absence of a dozing head
the things I miss, the peace that would not fit

My credit is good my memory is sound when I am the Masterbuilder
and my nuclear ego laughs at half-lives
I trace my lines like an actor and rehearse myself all day

myself–myself a strange reactor some fabled Hamlet of the solitudes
and by this unearthly light a death baker bakes
and the ash–bread I bite into
crumbles into being, and the burned figures rising
Poor pieces of shit, skyscrapers of lowdown
[I, a body adorned with signs, a restless tramping on speech
I, a deluded soul endlessly issuing its writ of *habeas corpus*
(a machine with a fever of eighteenth century reasons)]
we’re not here right now, can you please leave your message
in the aftermath of clubbing all night and pulling a stranger
to come to on bad wheels pushed squeaking on to the stage
a spectral crocodile of eyes leading to this fixed position
a spirit–ammonite whorl of incarnations
queuing at my head like a crowd waiting to get in
and to be here now tuned in turned on and dropped out
airbrushed in führer images, my whole party one scene
folk-credited to Mastercard, elsewhere-sanguine with apathy

I am a Perseus of apathy, I wear etherised sandals
my wardrobe’s full of an antique war and stuffed with characters
and a secret authority waters my flower
my fame is in cyphers my stock is deep
Restless and footloose, like a fragmented figure in *The Wasteland*
I read much of the night and go south in winter
confecting myself from affects and lines
the sweetmeat of the poet hung up on fumes
and drifting mosquitoes the sweetmeat of the poem
the offering–throe of a word filed under leisure
forgetting and talk, the soft babble of informants in a prozac notebook

Yes the ego–ego score of the Masterbuilder is a steely music
empty of traitorous mixes the supple alloys of the new semantic planes
a method for consumption like the Stuka-consumers
of the space in a hangar and pure brick
by pure brick (discretely) via definition do we go
making the walls of philosophical houses and the glycerine villas
of vanilla suburbs cases and casas mansions and terraces
free from the strange fall-out blown on the gene wind
secure (we think) in a leadlined room

holding our shockproof watches, our mettle
well-tested and our time always come
in a one-to-one state, but subject to the shakes
I'm always seeing double these days
my still dreaming from stone, a ladder from my head
leading up to my heart, the last place to run to
with animals and angels fighting upon it
with animals and angels fighting between it
This is the defence of the realm the status of Habitat chairs
the warfooting of chilling out, doing just exactly what I want
hardly troubled in my roundhead way
in making my tower of heavy stoned ivory
walls light as a bubble, so portable, quotable, connotable and potable
so fluent and delicious it melts on the mind™
like a memory you will never have
or a slogan you're too quick to kill with

In these strange exchequers with their menthol phonemes
my economy is short-term beyond belief
and the Cartesian chancellor is one day iron one day ice cream
and I can see why you must be so tired working here
in the metaphor factory with its ungainly equipment
how the Royal Mint of your senses must simply be reeling
in light in the scales, the turning goldfish
flashes an ever-renewed ID
which admits of no pain (because pain needs a memory)
but me, with my 3D pop-up gilts
lover I am high, oh, honey, I'm out of it
and the steel-steam of my laundry
cleans this currency of all creases and marks

Yes the slow sure *Transcended* of the abolished skyscraper is mine
a see-saw groove in some Lichtenstein militia
a uniform lingo of fabulous brasses and braids
to some Julius of the molasses, moraine and neuroses
with the river we surely translate as 'Rubicon' infinitely to be crossed
the stubborn warehouse of conscience set alight with possession
and love ground to succubus and incubus
only the floating direction of the coming song

seminared and detoured participated and sidelining —
for this is my consummate work a penthouse in the air
as outside an ill-tempered history rages on
Hetero sapiens like poor Humpty being put together again
in a jigsaw room the evidence of a massive crime
an *aurum potabile* of stolen teeth
alps of spectacles hair suitcases and gold
the weights of ancestors plutonic leaden or steel
and in the godlike looking away
the division of ignorance by wisdom's light
— what Ariel did next — what Ariel did next —
what Ariel did next — what Ariel did next — what Ariel
did next —

The Masterbuilder [iii]

Iron plenty of smooth space, alone and not belonging
to the porcupine cladding of the public domain
the metal concerto of my body's roads goes on through the night
when I hear the freight trains from a summer room
in the Three Flamingos Hotel shaping to sleep
in the endless hollow hands of others
when touch is all there is and we call it 'a journey'
when peace is all there is and we call it 'myself'

I almost cry when I think of the words of the Zen master on love
(there is no need to guard love,
you may as well try to guard space itself)
while in cigarette light of the Different Motel the Next Day Motel
I'm smoked azimuths and laterals a mishmash of takeaway foods
thinking of Being-broken Kerouac alone on Desolation Peak
still reaching for you with my airspace fingers
and still lost somewhere between eggshells and seashells

The small railway station is painted a light-faded pink
and holds the desert close between cactus lips and bleeds a little
and can't support its own huge symbolic status for longer than a breath
is like trembling wings in the butterfly book the Rarest Hotel
we rest in a moment the beautiful illustration an oasis of highs
our lift-off colours split poppyhead green split poppyhead red
and in elite sighs our handpicked illusion comes apart at the seams
fleeing the austral heat Tokyo neon and a semantic delirium
cleaving to the fatality of detail the exact click of icecubes in a glass
and the dwarf crunch of sugarcubes the long trip
runs straight through we call 'the kiss afterwards'
your smile littered with tiny crumbs
our picky ambition fasting among lamas and zero rocks
our hunger to slow ourselves down to one mutual mirror
and a careless gaze see shells
in narrow mantis eyes romanticised our classic positions
edible people in all their soluble flesh
snapped off the branch in rigid tongues
choosing the flower we call 'I'
choosing the terminal we call 'mine'

Yes our progress is picaresque and we change trains all the time
the Station Pink butterfly alights on your hand
and is the rarest species of that moment in the sun
and no one is staying in the Ovid Motel tonight
except us and the kiss we call Abraham, the kiss we call David, or Isaiah
and our xeroxing caresses snow manna in the wilderness style
Mandelstam's lithographic Crimea and the secret
philatelist of moments the beautiful
Dutch Blues soviet lustres the strange eye-seige
the drooping desk clerk in his chocolate and ochre livery
surveying the Ocean Feet and the Ozymandius Fiat
the genus slipping my mind for a spell
the slipshod achilles of the fleet
and the humbled, the cool water love in the mirage of meaning
taking a drink we call 'loss'
yet still being thirsty

The Philosophy Section

The heart ground like a star map laid out before us is action
we wear it we clothe it it fits us
loosely in footsteps and standstills
a child going 'oh!' and pointing at the sky
and you saying 'Moon'

Mm, it's so close to our fingers but distant with import
and we wear it it bears us we wear it
sometimes a surface stony bible or Gobi and sometimes
your lover's rippled skin in bathwater intimate
with some whorled time in Gemini or sometimes
lit with small green flames like a notion of spring or
small golden flames like a Medici autumn but whatever
we wear it and move on it move and where
we glance it waits for us, loyal with motion
a glimpse of disturbed wings, and a limitless rising

In August the Philosophy
section of the bookshop is cool and the lemon-
flash goldfinches haunting the pages once
bore small hearts and fluttered the branches now
Quine and Nietzsche sit on singing and I
en route to the tree of signs
leaf through pulped truths and sure pineneedle a prioris
in a mettle-doved moment a finger alighting
between concepts of change tempered with stasis
and in the zinc-butter smoothness this summer has passing
in its bug heat and egg-laden perfumes
I think of you and Tsushima, Barbarossa and Georgia, I
think of you in time as if of a small
dacha with faded green shutters hidden deep
in a remote forest location and of the way
sometimes you cry simply for the world as if
it might one day just rest its head upon your shoulder and of how
sometimes you seem to jump awkwardly away
from your own close words
like a frightened child
startled by a butterfly

Say something for me now say 'Russia'
with a sound of a watermelon being sliced in two, into
halves of silence, crushed like snow say
something so cold, something walking for hours
in broken shoes under old ice-scorched skies
of endless, Chagallian blue say something
filled with absence
something cool and unholy try to put
'Russia' in your mouth to say
something bereft totally unborn say something affectless
and cutting edge astrophysical put the slender
wafer of 'Russia' in your mouth
say something no one has ever said before
and try to hold out for it try to hold on to it
if you can and call it a new star something
like Hannah and like the small hands of Hannah
pointing and reaching touching
parting in a new space, telling us a new time

And 'Russia', with its huge cocoons of distance, its azure delve
of heaven-Steppes, and (nearer in)
the small empirical monastery up there on the hill
its peeling whitewashed walls gold onion dome the sparse little
copse of silver birches flickering in the breeze
is rolled up into the plane of speech
and carried away
like the emptiness between us: shh! can you hear
along with the Chekhovian cartographer the curious engineer
the outside-studded stars the moon the trees
being undermined that muffled sound
is earth being shifted someone
is tunnelling towards us
bearing who-knows-what perhaps

- 1 Night
- 2 Ourselves
- 3 A small Montezuma face, a small Tutankhamen face
- 4 Feathers, a ghost of gold
- 5 Singing q

- 6 *The Masque of Each Death*, or no light on the moondial
- 7 Bombs, or a footfall on Mt Ararat
- 8 Time, moving slowly like a shadow on a crumbling wall in
Sunset, Arizona
- 9 Knowledge of what we may do now
- 10 The heart ground like a star map laid out before us

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The Symbolic Church of the Red Truth

John puts the grey stone into the cold box
In the cold box there is a grey stone
In the cold box there is a stone there is greyness
In the cold box is the grey stone John put there
John puts aluminium into the cold box
Jeff puts a yellow crayon into the cold box
In the cold box a yellow crayon rests beside a grey stone
In the cold box a yellow crayon rests besides aluminium
They are safe in the cold box —
the grey stone, aluminium and the yellow crayon
They are there in the cold box
They are things in the cold box
Sometimes the cold box is the eye
Sometimes the cold box is 'memory'
Sometimes the cold box is mind
Sometimes the cold box is language
Sometimes the cold box is a flamingo
Sometimes the cold box is an instant
Sometimes the cold box is 'there'

Sometimes it feels like the manual of my touch is almost over
October ampersanding down the afternoon
John connects the red triangle with the bone
We drank sambuccos in the cafe garden, while a cloud
shaped like 'so what?' formed in the sky above our heads
The diary of my red palms has so many entries saying 'Blue, nothing'
The desert acacias were in leaf
The chemist of words mixed together
the azure acid of melancholia the rook acid of foreboding
The laboratory was deserted the windows smashed
and dry leaves were scattered across the benches
Then the cloud melted to a hazy map of November
& still changed

I love Vincent's crow golds & the adding machine of *Homo sapiens*
the sublime suffix of our life, the post-multiples of fates
I was busy making loss shaped like a yacht to place in a Zen container
a little paper boat like Rimbaud's child's boat at the end of *Le Bateau Ivre*
sails of clear alcohol a bow like a bender

I placed a small doll of my not-daughter in its hold a likeness like emptiness
The summer sky, later a shepherd's delight, sipped me
through its hot brittle straw
& the walls were ready to be painted & John & Jeff were there
Jeff signed his imaginary name in yellow crayon on fine paper
The hurt woman was trying to plug the gaps in her world with tears
Her hands were red and her face was red and she hated it
Knowledge was in a coma, and spite was in a comma,
and the massive impersonal fortress of other peoples' lives could not be taken
That was the city and in that city I failed
The season reared like a cliff-face: *Let's climb*

we thought with our hands swallows gaining purchase on that violent sky
& it makes sense, only too much sense until winter,
a category of sleep, and further respite
Ferried out by crematoria (those heavy smokers) the Red Woman
could no longer put bone to the red triangle
I suffer from motion sickness and now can no longer pray
in the Symbolic Church of the Red Truth
Indeed the compression of symbols like Knight Fool Queen
only gives me the bends
The forest of red hypotheses deepens as the red trees
The private chapel is still open

If you could apprehend my grief would you care? Would I?

Themed Like Buffalo

And the light crosses me, the plane depth of my reason
and the plain (as in wheat, Ukraine) the small midWest of my waiting
for my life somehow to be in the baker shadow stillness
of September, the wind in the fields stake dive of the whisper
with Idaho silent in motion as a glider
clinging to the breadth of the last ripple in the pool
the whirl of the planet, your hair scented with chlorine,
and this year's loss, all ready to be collected

Eating space as if it were a sacrament, it can't be like this
life crosses us, framed in our mortal cases
the laughable bone prospector necklaced for sieved gold
the children at school, putting the 'o' to Idaho
or the 'sas' to Kansas as if nothing were the matter
touching on the smoke and aluminium of a seal's pelt
moving on salt footsteps under the Big Dipper
and the poured causes and effects
while through the window the traffic goes by
the rock faces of people and their lives
magic, inscrutable, in cars the tombs of distance

Words graze across the plains, themed like buffalo
esoteric like a doomed species
and the be-imagined body of the circus strongman
aches for more touch than the figural skin
of the naked lady on his bicep may give him
while me, I'm hung up on coincidence tangent and rumour
like the sound of 'mercy' buried in 'Mercedes', or close to
and unable to move for the next temple mile
linked by one crooked finger to one crooked finger
the tiny necropolis of a resting thumb
each slender atomic gesture of ours
weightless, riverine, the first mover
sleeping alone threaded on vegetable dreams
accumulating death with interest
each stillborn thought haunting the mother
of no children waiting to be collected from school

Vanity Fair

Suddenly the phenomena of dust are back on the agenda
biblical and moral dust, destination dust, fate dust
as the syrup–sarcophagus of an Indian summer springs
apart in our hands, and the control tools of words
put on hold the world

when
a nasturtium-orange square is in the box
(if the box is sight)
a quotation from Shakespeare is in the box
(so quick bright things come to confusion)
an element (say raw, aroused sulphur) is in the box
a wasp is in the box
a light modernist building is in the box and
(if the box is mind)
a fox is in the box, quick and brown
the word 'in' is in the box
I am in the box reached for by my own hands
when
sight is in mind
and the doll of your moment is laid down

to rest
(the china-smooth face and the eerie stillness of expression)
among the phenomena of dust and a mislaid agenda

The lazy dog is in Sabon and is real (close to the apple)
The lazy dog is in Goudy and is real (hold me)
The lazy Helvetican dog dozes for days and for days (hold me, I love you)
That lazy Perpetua dog! That lazy sans serif dog!

The storied corpuscles of your touch and the dazzling ash of your gesture
and the roulette of the way you move the day's frosty revolver
summer's empty chambers and one white bullet of snow
brings us the moment but we don't remember
(bark little dog! bark! bark! bark! bark!)

The space that never was before the book began
haunted me and the golden pagoda gleamed in hazy Thai sunshine

The temples stunk of cat-shit and incense
and this music passed by me upon the waters
The mirror was a cheap thriller and a shot rang out
and in a space of foxes the missing entered shinbones and wrinkles
and in one single kiss all our flesh was grazed
The anecdote was Caesar and triumph, cinnebar and lemons
The space of the reporter was quickly filled
The river burned the stars in effigy
but you never touched me again
(bark little dog! bark! bark! bark! bark!)

Seven years bad luck and the beautiful trajectory of your smile
the way I stroked your arm on the long drive to Broken Edge
where the private eye Johnny Veneziano lived at 45 Platinum Boulevard
while at 54 Plutonium Boulevard his dreamdouble
Joey Veneziano awoke whenever Johnny slept
Someone smashed the solid river of those stars
and that night we laboured under bad signs
in the Universe of One Meaning and the Dynasty of Dice
drank formal potions and were unconscious for hours
(bark little dog! bark! bark! bark! bark!)

To be cold is to know, it seemed, and I was far from my warlike home
My ghostwritten goosebumped flesh like the light on the water
trembled and for a moment I believed I would love again
and that anything could hurt me and that would be true
but his back ached as he worked on the transmission of his rusting Gemini
and like hatched turtles baby theories crawled upon the sand and died
while a meltwater *Koran* wrote itself out in snow
in the lurid red beam of my Captain's raygun

At last the little dog barked but one of the Sacred Plots was over
On Strontium Avenue Joey Veneziano pulled in for gas
on Chloride Street Johnny Veneziano kissed his lover goodbye
We had bought in to the whole boxed set of meaning
and the engine of Johnny's Chrysler Venus coupe throbbed and droned
like water endlessly going over a deserted weir

Meaning was gentle with me that day I felt so tender
I knew there would be no resumé no 'And so' no 'At last'
We circulated the gallery the ramps steel railings matt grey walls
The subjects of the paintings couldn't be made out precisely
the scenes were molten and cryptic, neo and blurred
so that flamingo wing flesh seemed to fuse angels with oranges
and Suggestion was everywhere like a magnetic star-sign
or the fairground of a remembered pleasure
and the breathtaking orchid skies
of adolescent eyes on the edge of tears

The leaving is endless Is the leaving endless? Is leaving endless?
Is the endlessly leaving endless leaving
of our touch our love strong enough is it strong is it enough
capable like the simple rails of the train that took us home
is such endless leaving home is it like home endlessly home
like the rails and their geometric beauty
like them their only function to bear
Is your word strong is it home endlessly strong and leaving
bearing like the rails the train
and the faces in the train above the rails being blown away
like petals in a sudden breeze can we bear it

home?

Come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets
for our play is played out

1997–1997

So, in an era of formal silver
this is the return of no returning
the combustion of a sigh in *Août* our time
the country of these days—clouds seen from Vincentsville, North Dakota
turning once more to the bottle
to stop up the genie of silence the genie of ‘of’
with his gemlike connectors
with his promising neat gemlike connectors

This is the magic kingdom of form the sonic jinn
crackling knuckles and brooding in glass
making death shapes and smiling at us
from just beyond his own existence
laughing and playing with limits and grief

My world is a mysterious place I don’t understand it
in 1997 I am arriving and leaving
as we dip in and out of sense enter and exit
the ghost of a voice this one the one that is always yours
laughing and playing with the machine of my words
and the machine in the Jerusalem—ghost of my kiss
is let slip collecting sand sea-murmurs and miles

My world is a blue planet sharply biographical with fear
waiting to exit the vehicle from a state where
the slightest kindness to me is a knife tear
balanced on loss while the sky
a shelled wing of your eyes
concedes us forever
giving us to freedom, to no one’s azure and incoming rain

So, in an era of formal silver, we say
‘hush now, little one, hush now, don’t cry’
as this aborted dumbness slips between us
and the child of not being born is restless
seeking an iota of flesh to be
snapped fingers a spark a wave or pointing
and especially a caress an erased ‘yes’
scooped out of flame in a determined position

So, in an era of formal silver
in an epoch of wow, on an agenda of fillets
if this is so, then this is how it may be
when the shyest colour on the palette
aches to be sky or silver birch in other words
to be composed with friends a part of the landscape
while the ferocious incendiary pink in the foreground
is flirting with fire engines and flamenco dancers
with vertigo cockerels and lust
and equivocates for all time over bleed or bled
while before them all you
with your eye-horizon read
past the tense harmonic edge
and are like breath, unseen, the background itself

To have fallen from the towers of hands such as these
is still a gift
the sea-tomb of Crusoe's first canoe is also like this
a dumb djinn of weights playing with telos
but across the Jordan-glance (there is a blindness
of brothers and a walking on palms)
(is it?) you no longer wait for me
(is it?) I must bow down to nothing

The classic castaway of believing is over
the Sybil at Cumæ suspended in her gaol of a bottle
distils the endless gin of her death
while the colour of absence, the colour of your next sky
packets its acts in shattered retinas
and all these words scoured to shell vanishing
only prepare the silence for our coming

Bombyx mori

In the domain of O (stormtrain coming) we awaited azure instructions
 (the lightning was a blade of grass, it happens between powers
 and we have reason to be afraid)

We had to lift the weight (azure, stormtrain) forgetting made of us
 (it was the definition of sound,
 it was the definition of light)

and we only had so much time (sea in the harbour, azuretrain)
to make what we were real —
to make it real

In the Saturn arrondissement (snow section) I was working
 in a silk department

We had to lift the weight (O, the domain) forgetting made of us
 (it was the core of who we were,
 it was the definition of my)

as we walked by the harbourside (ocean domain, a storm coming)
trying to say what we were soon
and to make what we said so real —
just to make it real

We pumped the iron of that snow (name-calling, the place we ran to)
 and I was afraid it was light (still light)
 before the phenomenal curfew

We had to lift that embargo (state-making, the place we ran to)
 and in zollverein tongues we spoke (I'm still here)
 before an ochre border and a checkpoint of souls

And you were a glassmaker
and I was a sailmaker
and you were a housekeeper
and I was a lawmaker: across
 the silk border we go: across
 the silk border we go

so:

And I was a stunning orator, the glasshouse of my speech was real
 (outside it was raining, we waited for the rain to clear)

Widowmaking clouds were gathering over the beach,
and you were a sublime miner
(in the rain people cycled or walked, they were
particle physicians, they were soul decor)
Each custombuilt sorrow cruised the wet streets
(it was like a shallow Venice)
while the boatmaking hands that had touched me so gently
so gently let me go

Forever interrupts each step
forever
forever interrupts each step (take the next one)

In the domain of O,
the hands of the throatcutter and the hands of the diamondcutter
(we'll part soon) are one
In the domain of O,
the eyes of the dressmaker and the eyes of the rapemaker
(we'll meet soon) look for you
In the rain of O, I ran with my goodguy poems
across the streets (they were waiting)
In the rain of O, worldcutters were at work in their heads
mapping out me, mapping out you (they were waiting)
Worldwoodcutters were working, chopping away
and the woodcutter stops when only empty space is left...

Outside, worldrain was falling,
being cut into spaghetti-like lengths of diamond
and tender, troublemaking memories were being formed
in small, soft, physical syllables
we didn't touch we never touched they are not ours
this is not ours
this is not mine

This is mine

His Information Part 1

Michael A. was Professor of Informatics and Holistics at
(chrysanthemum, white) Tokyo
and he was virtual

His droid features (snow in a silver bowl) and his short-term skull
heavily laced with electricity made him seem to fly
in three dimensions
and he was virtual

Michael A. fitted the verb 'to be' to his robot hand and then
fitted the verb 'to drill' and an image of a Bosch
to the air (fleeting storm crystal)
and he was virtual

His emptiness address was 'ephemeral/eternity' (white sleep)
the appleblossom of wires dialled him away from Eden
with small pips (no one was answering: *Come on!* he shouted)
Michael A. gazed 'down' (floating storm crystal) at the moon that night
His work on concept-formation and androcription was almost
complete

though his intensive research (soft moonlight) on the *bauplan*
and the informatic consequences of a *Körpergrundgestalt* model
(soft, soft moonlight) of cognito-ideal orientation
was wearing him progressively away
(and he was virtual)

Sometimes he was firestorm sometimes placid lake
firestorm placid lake firestorm placid lake
(firestorm of spring) (placid lake of winter, Finland)
and suddenly — *wham!* —

the rotting corpus of his flesh was spewing electrodes
clamps conductors fragments of manganese chips microbusses and
miles of whiplashing multicoloured flex
In the burned-out basement only ever a phonecall away
he knew then he was being reborn/remade
and put his animated lips to the face of the mirror
to feel it was cool
put on a body and went out

It was snowing

So this was the new age of the machine state!
he thought (dictionary, white)

and he was actual
He made his way down Operating System Boulevard
dislodging evocative doves (wing white rose: it was
snowing) in seamless clouds up
into a sky of so many megahertz
he could smell the noodles frying on the little stalls
and in the Café Keats he was an ode
peeled slowly like an orange
and in the Church of the Android Peace
his information was made new again, baptised
(child, snow) in cool digital waters
and flowed on, forming 'The Babylon' forming 'The Woman
in the Shape of a Crab' forming
a memory of Finland, the moonlight on the steel of his runners
on his sledge in the back of the car, and catching the whitening hair
on his driving mother's head

But she was a witch!

Someone was interfering with his information

Outside, it was snowing

He was making the Shape of the Quiet Cathedral Part IV
and admixing a treatise on the Buddha
and one on bricklaying (Hell, while he was shopping in the 'B's,
why not?)
when the Third Transfiguration occurred
The cathedral of the snowflake melted on his tongue
and His Information, having sublimated the donor entirely,
walked on down the hall

It was snowing...

By way of Portman–Sekida transforms he began to predict air
For a while his Holy Grail was the reception of all data
At other times he dreamed of pure conceptual fluidity,
threading a star through the eye of a needle,

threading a sky through the eye of a star
The notion of limits abandoned, objects and subjects ceased as such
This is liberty he thought beyond all narrative
Despite himself, however, that fateful evening on the tramp steamer
in the South China Seas
someone offered him Form in its raw uncut state
and he took it
After that, no one saw him alive again

One day, His Information was staying at a sleazy Cybermotel in Nagasaki V
idly simulating bodies (Two Lovers, Three Lovers, Lotus, Stork;
Stork Human Lover, Lotus Human Stork)
when there came a loud knock on the door
(RAP! RAP! RAP!)
His Information slipped the piece out from under the pillow
Who is it? he asked

If Lightning Were Horses

If the promise holds, so long as it lasts, it is
and I want what the saltpetre–lotus of our towering
breath may give us
the starry crux of a chafing
between two glances, slipped, like a message
one continent and the entire night
the white wafer-thin glimpse of your smile between snow and oblivion

If the foothold ‘Achilles’ is still, the heel in iron
is what we fight for
the slender flaw of our laughter through giants’ afternoons
and in the moment I turn to you
in the gunpowder–pool of this heat
hammered between your smile and the night
and hung to like wreckage in words between silence
is this promise, of us, alchemised:

After the revolution and the rain I will be here for you
After the broken cocoon and the war I will be here for you
After the desolation and the psalm I will be here for you
After the victory and the defeat I will be here
After ‘there’ and after ‘after’ I will be
After here and I will
After and I
After and
After

If is your thumbprint, and rainwater in hoofmarks:
dragooned into nothing, how can we fight that uniform
space without names and against which
even Paris and Achilles must be seen as lovers
and the arrow bind them, loose them
but with a war the further promise of ourselves
thrown in a cloud, like petals or confetti
making a sizzling gift of flight
and lightning a model, if lightning were horses

Lemonade Kaiser

One, the massive paradigm of light begins again
TV traffics nothings, and I'm a washed-out cloth on a doll of thought
morning will strip more naked than footprints
in meltwater snow, a pocket turned inside-out
holding the air for dear life, subtle and desperate
on the oxygen cliff, my body brittle bisque
fragile as a discarded draft
you lay down to pick up your next breath
and the beautiful toy of your love, someone you were

My abiding impression of my hometown is of light and cruelty
and the lemonade kaiser of my closest need is escape
when the image of Germany, 1939 is of a strong state
and when the trashed Sony set in wasteground
transmitting fragments of moon
is a condition for surrender
King Dust comes for me each night bringing soap and honey
and the Motel Two Palms is a pseudo image of grip
and of holding, the gangsters on the run,
the suitcase of cards spilling open and unstable
as a spree of lira or an epidemic of signs
rocked for an instant on an image of diamonds

Jadis, si je me souviens bien, I was young and my myth was
revolutionary
the prime silver gelatin 'fuck off' of my eyes
and never any need to say goodbye
a run on the bank a river's indices of cloud a slow, slow ride
through Death Valley
and the superb sugar concrete of my ambition
the little icing Nietzsche the Will to Signify strong
with the poem cocky and flirtatious
like a gaudy PoMo temple raised in the desert
godless and unnatural, erasing the very borders it desired
with a Mickey Mouse motto above the doorway:
*It's okay to enter here, because no one cares and
anyway you don't matter. But that's cool, too — don't you think?*

In the small lemons in the still-life, *Ground*, and the lemonade reference
the small stock in the dream market, Here, Now, and the stockade
the sublime inflation of the author is over
and I fly this place, a few burnt murmurous pages
from one of Darwin's nocturnal theses
while the frail early word, existing only as a lone mutation,
and so delicate in the state of one,
disperses itself through rapid reproduction, copy by copy
to melt at last into the ghost canon
and the longevity of names
a latecomer's guide to a feminine ending
and a citric derivative, the juice still on your fingers

Now the bleached material was a buddhist silk
and the present system reinforces itself
among useless gunfire at the Motel Two Palms
symbolic of a loosening grip
and the mule of this brays germanely
struggling up the steep mountain pass
bearing boxes of *The Perfect Moment*, crates of *The Unique Thing*
and the burden of this in a spirit maths
is the enigmatic fork in *The Total of the New*
in the set of all poems, this doesn't belong

while Huxley mutters on the shore at Lyme
his hands full of shells feathers and bones, and he is saying
*I have touched the skull of God I have heard
the sound of machines dreaming*
as gulls cry overhead and we
branch instantly away, real giants of our logic,
momentary ones, all dauphins of tomorrow,
heirs apparent of promises and succession,
strong as Prince Achilles, our own heels
the rootless cause of any next second