



Capildeo, S.V.P. (2011) *Dark and Unaccustomed Words*. Egg Box, Norwich.  
ISBN 9780956928917

Copyright © 2011 The Author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

Content must not be changed in any way or reproduced in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder(s)

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details must be given

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/85151>

Deposited on: 16 January 2014

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow  
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

**DARK AND UNACCUSTOMED WORDS**

## CONTENTS

Framboyán  
 The Pale Beast/La Blanche Biche  
 The Driving Lesson: I  
 The Driving Lesson: II  
 Tree with a Silver Lining  
 Almond, Bearded  
 Even in Sleep, Refraining  
 Moving and Moved  
 Getting Rid of Thomas  
 Past Inhabitant  
 Give Me More Time, Said Night  
 About  
 Journal of Ordinary Days  
 Metamorphoses  
 Sahara Dream Cubes  
 Calls  
 As in the Sunlight. . .  
 Temperature Controlled Environment  
 Go Figure!  
 For Adjectives are One Road. . .  
 To a Flute, Continuous. . .  
 The Salamander is So Cold  
 More Solid Fire  
 Sinking Lightwells  
 Call It Simple: Two Exteriors  
 180° Eeylops  
 We're Proceeding, Weighted for Swiftness  
 Oxidants  
 After the Explosion  
 The Round Pond  
 Thoughts of the Dead  
 Vacant Possession  
 Journal of a Fair Sized City  
 My Hippeastrums and Myself  
 Completely F\*\*\*\*d  
 Outside  
 The Vegetables of Contempt  
 Boldfaced  
 Don Juan de Quetzalcoatl  
 Our Lady of Stoke Newington  
 Thanksgiving Thank-You Note  
 Joyful, Towards a Wedding Day  
 The Ninth Duck is Crossing the Water  
 Tej Jaspal and his Tooth  
 You Have Your Space  
 The Caribbean Editor Imagines Earthquakes  
 On Not Writing as a West Indian Woman  
 Among  
 Objection Poetry  
 Gross Pipework, Subtle Music  
 About the Shape of Things  
 About the Brightness of Things  
 The Serenity  
 Breathe Again

## Vowel Poem: Albedo

*For Nicholas Laughlin*

But generally the high stile is disgraced and made foolish and ridiculous by all wordes affected, counterfait, and puffed vp, as it were a windball carrying more countenance than matter, and can not be better resembled then to these midsomer pageants in London, where to make the people wonder are set forth great and vglie Gyants marching as if they were aliue, and armed at all points, but within they are stuffed full of browne paper and tow, which the shrewd boyes undverpeering, do guilefully discouer and turne to a great derision: also all darke and vnaccustomed wordes, or rusticall and homely, and sentences that hold too much of the mery & light, or infamous & vnshamefast are to be accounted of the same sort, for such speaches become not Princes, nor great estates, nor them that write of their doings to vtter or report and intermingle with the graue and weightie matters.

George Puttenham, 'Of the high, low, and meane subiect', in *The Arte of Poesie* (1589)

The fisherman will set his tray of hooks  
and ease them one by one into the flood.  
His net of twine will strain the liquid billow  
and take the silver fishes from the deep.  
But my own hand I dare not plunge too far  
lest only sand and shells I bring to air  
lest only bones I resurrect to light.

Martin Carter, 'Till I Collect', in *Poems of Resistance* (1954)

'Fayre damesel,' seyde Sir Launcelot, 'know y[e] in this contrey ony  
adventures nere hande?'  
'Sir knyght,' seyde the damesel, 'here ar adventures nyghe, and thou durst  
preve hem.'  
'Why sholde I not preve?' seyde sir Launcelot. 'For for that cause com I hydir.'

Thomas Malory, *A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake*, in *Works*, ed. by Eugène Vinaver, second edn (1971).

## FRAMBOYÁN

*For Deana Rankin*

That trees had evolved to eat other trees.  
 That this happened at the end of a garden.  
 That this was first noticed in a small tree's wincing.  
 That the larger tree was bending in, whipped by no wind,  
 a flamboyant tree and not in flower, bunched to a beak.  
 Dwarf and royal poinciana trees: almost one kind:  
 at the end of a Trinidad childhood garden.

That the small tree visibly respired; menaced,  
 yet stock still, spread and ruffled, animal  
 yet green; this one yes in flower as if on fire  
 yet in devouring distress letting air in  
 yet - feather-tipped and all aflame - just like an offshoot  
 of what stood over.

Hardly leafed, intent and purposeful,  
 stacked altostratus storm-bark discovering its due  
 moved in to take, concave against odds of weather.

Pitiless, we witness small uprootings; turn,  
 with each untreelike recommencing; retreat  
 further into the house, feel ourselves delicate;  
 stridently walk, shuddering bolts shut, instinct outraged,  
 know: we are next, who shall be due to fall under green shade.

But lock the doors (the well-made doors: investments, property).  
 The thing is busy outside (that tree evolved to eat  
 other trees). It is good our doors are good.

And indeed it centred in - the earth; the slate; the concrete -  
 And indeed it entered wading. For our doors were wood.

## THE PALE BEAST / LA BLANCHE BICHE

Inside a green and leafy wood  
twigs snap, sap-sharp scents rise.  
How shall I have recourse from this?  
There is no leaf-green wood nearby  
but one kept under lock and key.

I am a white-bloused girl by day,  
nights a pale and fleeing beast.  
In crying silence all give chase.  
And she who gave me birth  
of all of them the worst.

Go call them off, who'll call them off,  
who'll find, affrighted from my skin,  
what were girl's breasts? Fine guests.  
Set to. That is my flesh within  
the dish you banquet on.



THE DRIVING LESSON: I.

He asked for slow ladies, but he wanted snow ladies.  
I responded positively –

Knowing that you were somewhere in the city centre,  
and that, whatever the event, finding you is restful –  
Magnolia snow done its drift, white petals melting pink  
brownwards towards the pigeon ground, your new usual drink  
fresh valencianas in the Anglo-Saxon nook.  
Unnatural blaze these summer days. Shade's a waiting book  
over your hand under your face, restive where it could  
pace away as print keeps doing, in memory of whole worlds.

And he asked again, "Are you the slow lady?"  
You know that I said "Yes."

My, he looked pleased, tried to focus. I looked at his eyes.  
They fetched no distance. Didn't traffic in light. Disguise  
was a stranger to them, just about as much use  
as a burglar whose house of choice, broken into, shows  
equally empty of personality, possessions.  
Journal grey giving way to ridged silver horizons,  
to a coin sellotaped to the base of a pint glass,  
glimpsed only in draining seconds, foam over iris.

Well strapped into the learner driver's seat,  
shoulders kerbwards, looking left, looking right,  
I receive a stinging blow to the wrist.  
He says that's been the best lesson yet.

He asked for slow ladies, but he wanted snow ladies.

I get out. Walk to the park.

## THE DRIVING LESSON: II.

People like those you said were friends are waiting in the square.  
Some not alive, all attentive. For each one, a tree.  
The sharp-witted one straight in front of lilac leaves,  
her henna head a streetlight contrast. None is too grave.  
We are concentrating – not on speech, which is Translation,  
and ah how fluently is spoken Translation's speech! –  
a sense of community we're concentrating on,  
quiet glad as of news of birth brought to chairs of death.  
I feel myself keep away. Flinch from flinching. Still  
than those, not alive, who cannot prevent the rustle  
of involuntary movement, helpful and ignored.  
One tree in especial, its purple overshadow,  
brings such horror of the vigil to me, I look up.  
Seeing more exactly our fellows' situation –  
I believe I mean the trees – will bring the secret words  
into ear, into heart, earth them up, understanding  
alike, and growing in likeness. – Oh what are these  
up there? Fingernails, crabbed and pearlescent, canopied  
fingernails, irreducible. Whose leaves will they be?

TREE WITH A SILVER LINING

*i.m. the dead and living of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*

Above the fence the silver underside of leaves  
 several stems next door to make one slender tree  
 do not ascribe distress or a wish for peace  
 neither inanimate nor animate  
 the movement of the wind the movement of the tree

it is a human thing to think the leaf is green  
 silver side up each leaf fled deflecting heat  
 leaves leaving the holder of the thought of tree  
 how thin this leaf is wind-tossed seen like that  
 the shadows on the fence have more heft, in their way

branched shadows on the fence outweigh the slender tree  
 black leaves bunched like fruit like excavation finds  
 like trowels like the speaking clock like relief  
 where and wherever leaves change never far  
 the fear the flash that stamped apart shadow and leaf.

Come home, soon and quickly, love. The butterfly tree,  
 light on the fence, slender stems, make thoughts in me,  
 if you arrive late, you will find me away,  
 neither of here nor of now; do not leave,  
 do not leave believing bereavement, who can stay?

## ALMOND, BEARDED

The tree could not believe how it became involved  
with her, a human being born to the disease –  
short-timed, hyper-mobile – common to her kind,  
their swift-fallen alertness, bright desire to unpiece.

Years it had taken growing to produce a crotch,  
a midway knot of outward shadow, marking in  
the start of rift the one support for both upflung  
branches (what she too easily called arms). Oh, last –

Dim it evolved mythologies, two-memoried  
to hedge her gently (unable breather skywards,  
rose and yearning mist), maybe for true remembered  
a wave-borne destroying, more height than canopy.

Not think out evil yet join her in grieving over  
earthquakes not withstood, the upturned white plaza,  
sea's incursions far inland reaping the least of twigs.

It too could love now, unrenowably, reward  
love because unrenowable –  
Sudden and level in eventual dissolving,  
mortal and tree.

## EVEN IN SLEEP, REFRAINING

When I heard the sad adulterers Tristan and Iseult  
had placed a sword between them as they slept, so to avoid  
sexual congress in the forest, my first and filthy thought:  
how much you can do despite a sword, lean above maybe,  
long soothes down flanks whose fighting muscles bunch and do not rest,  
waterfalls of pitiful caresses run misplaced.  
But those two know swords, the humiliations of wound care,  
instantaneous gross damage. Cousins to that-which-broke.  
One blade, lying coldly, puts a guard upon the mind,  
trains body, motive, separate in the forest of their want.  
Sharp metal cuts unmoved upon the first unconscious move,  
prevents love reaching through their sleep, or sleeping hand in hand.

## MOVING AND MOVED

They are keeping us apart: cloud from dazzle;  
 mirror from window; oboe from embouchure;  
 dusk – dawn – to the abolition of pianos.

For they are jealous as mortals can be, once  
 one god's on the move; want to know where to point  
 when seeking in abyssal need a pointer  
 telling them: *the blue sky is friendly, and yours.*

*You turtle-turn your backs, bow heads, clench shoulders,  
 walk away without one look up? Your resource  
 is still there still caring whether you go singing.*

One god to point to. Not more than one.

Keeping

one god apart from another, how easy  
 can that be, given the spheres of influence  
 move according to acts of worship? Who would  
 joke with one god, joke about no god, works to  
 keep gods apart.

It is not for fear lest deities

turn their backs and walk off into marriage or  
 deeper, more trenchant inscrutability.

It is so a handful of mud, a handful  
 of water, remains enough to make them laugh.

With us.

## GETTING RID OF THOMAS

*For McMahon*

The man said to do it  
so we went to find him  
and he was cursing us  
    I'm tired of what's happening  
    to green lands that I love  
His voice made me more tired  
    I heard, as I struck him,  
    something helmeted roar  
I swear to you, my head  
was bare, I was prepared,  
I knew I was entering church.

My friend from stony lands  
FitzUrse, you changed your name  
    I only have her voice...

FitzUrse, de Morville, de Tracy and le Breton (de Brito) slew Thomas a Becket at Canterbury. FitzUrse ('son of a bear', Norman) has a legendary connexion with the McMahon ('son of a bear', Irish) clan.

## PAST INHABITANT

*For Emma Dillon*

Even if it was your white sleeve rising through the earth under woods you'd not care for, weak cultivars, modern beyond use for your time – even if you raised your sleeved arm, reassuring, I understood now as if it were yesterday and no quarry, as if gravel did not spit in the face of search for unreconstitutable wings, unrecorded weddings, house unimprinted, drained of traitors. Laughter leaves no shadow, rushing for refuge in the honeycombs, storage caverns collapsed, stream wiped, the action of mercy and chalk.

Douce amie, you, meanwhile, walking tall between much taller hedges, counted, in another garden, the singing of birds, the young ones (especially starlings) needing what you figured as a window for the slow illuminations of their induction into song. Numbers of them, flung from the nest into nests not their own, dimwits, interjecting wrong notes or twists. Ignorant what makes melody – How to vary, still, shake, depart, fuse the necessary signal for two needs: love and territory. Entreaty and repulsion. How hard they sing! Elaborate necessity defeats itself, reaving sung from song: starlings plummet, falling from branches, sometimes dying. Come. Go. Carried away.

A henge of good intentions a megalith of effort uphill of slippage perpetual uphill with no downhill thought grinding thought tooth upon tooth so much strength surely for giving forehead wrenched to the incline set to an identical angle as once the nick-in-the-neck stone that old straight track for not seeing for not looking from desired to required from excruciating to crossed. Send out a call for bonfires. Give no warning against burning. Make a blaze of every gradient.

Our ships are coming in.

I wished for this in the valley where  
the lake stays an oblong below  
the ridge that turns back the harsher winds  
where leaves from our apple trees blew.

I looked from the window to the well.  
You stepped up almost to the door.  
You stood, unawares, among your men.  
I stepped down, walked into this song.

I brought my life back into the house  
of stone, brown and white as the cloth  
that slipped kindly under brown-white earth.  
I rise now, returning by choice.



## GIVE ME MORE TIME, SAID NIGHT

*For Barbara Graziosi*

. . . but you're setting me to teach  
how suns build up into compendiums:  
one,  
one,  
one to the power of zero?

Given I hold more light,  
give me more time, said night;  
you will not miss day.  
Time enough - so much must reach  
you, summing, bright as ever:  
each slowly travelling star  
seems,  
beaming,  
blink-like, desperate.  
Look! No day's my compare.  
This needs time: that goes far:  
wait, a whole work, like heaven.

And radiant intersections give up sight.

Drop day.

Admit I hold more light.

## ABOUT

*For Pat Bishop*

Aware of these rooms five four three two one hundred years old all about us for hundreds of people each year and none not one room for us this night feels the blocks waiting three two one the rooms have emptied out and each is bored by its own pulse the core of blackness that is the waiting of interested stone for there has been nothing like this for them nothing like us except once twice perhaps each century.  
Sssh, everybody's here.

"We have come to the place of which I told you . . ."

Hills set on gulf, surf set on hill, rift city -  
In the skin of a house a hissy fit,  
a crying jag, it veins thermometers,  
gradual because quick-pressed, desiccative,  
scales over eyes the exit fangs first?  
Snakeform's a total way, rice-paper slough  
shines of got out sun-bitten rolled between  
a rough place and somewhere much like this.

"Some birds line their nests with snakeskin."

Rare things do happen occasionally  
(remorse, the true dream, a dead one's call?) -  
the all-purpose assailant's face turned helpful,  
the knife-strapped taxi driver touching wires  
to start a car shot to cobwebs. And you fail:  
it's that your appointment's with extreme cases,  
solids alight by millions, cellular,  
disranking every day all too much rarity.

"You can't go back to a piece of dusting  
and reflect upon it."

This time she's brought some handouts on panic,  
pink sheets (the chair kicked from beneath a plan,  
what feels like permanent fatal errors) -  
consisting as they do of eminently  
sayable, beautiful effective sounds,  
what transfers into poems? Enough recall  
one voice? Listen. Language dreams about this:  
the infant making bird-soft divisions of dawn.

". . . could just be dot dot dot."

At night, you see, there seems to be one lit room. Who is at its exit, in the doorway, back turned? The soft rectangle of human frame widens. Who waits within the metal edging? In this state of nervousness, forearms go cold seconds before hands catch fire, excessive lotuses of flame. Would you – two dark torches loose at your sides – would you walk into the first of the long dark corridors in a building that consists more nearly of corridors than any that should ever have been designed? Each corridor runs like a spill of milk on a black tile reflected in a smoked glass ceiling clapped on the width of one layer of a hotel. These corridors are dark; you would feel them all like paleness? Though there were light I could not name their handcrafted nougat colours, gentler, intentionally washed-out. I walk in the dark, and you feel the walls' paleness? For we ourselves are luminous. Except we do not give off light.

## JOURNAL OF ORDINARY DAYS

*For Ron Paste*

I.

We are not born with an instinctive understanding of the mangrove.  
We drove out and booked and paid to step in the flat boat bound for  
mangrove.

It feeds on land dissolved ocean dismissed sunset deferred, the mangrove.  
Snakes up top stayed squamous yellow knots of sleep guides tried in vain to  
shake awake,  
the silky anteater too knotted in sleep on high.  
The mangrove the movement of the mangrove.  
Look lively.

Like the ribbing of a gothic cathedral inlaid with no stone,  
inlay of scuttling tree crabs, branch-attached above-ground oysters, sprung  
inlay as if pollution resides not in the invisible hills,  
inlay of wickerwork red and spotted white and black by nature growing not  
green  
what is this mangrove, salt-nourished, where sea floods inlets?  
Can we breathe here?

Yes and in yogic and Carib perfection  
the swaying incarceration over  
still and suddenly all into blue  
perfection of lake and fluorescent ibis  
winging to roost in perfection of dusk.  
Will this or any memory of serenity  
permeate his sleep - your two-year-old  
who's slumbered now beside us in the boat  
long since we stepped apart from automotive dust?  
Once or twice he woke and looked.  
Will peace keep with him?

## II.

You, detesting lizards but having been given,  
years ago, a rubber shark plus half a diver,  
are insulated from this lunchroom shock: riven,  
his arm, the croc engrossing, jaws that devour.

What is the ground over which newspapers murmur?

*Unimaginable, unimaginable.*

Aren't there shark bites so sharp that what makes the surface  
is gamely swimming torso, red pennants engulfed?

*Unimaginable, unimaginable.*

What breaks the surface –

Maybe gratitude for cold climates and dry land.

A sense of detachment from that which moves the hand.

## III.

Sometimes I dream in a language that is mine only by scratches,  
but I can get the tune of it, a whole conversation  
between strangers friendly to each other, dawdling behind me  
somewhere outdoors, a sandy cone of syllables  
rising and falling, whole sentences  
coming smattering to the surface from an occluded source.  
Sometimes it is the actual people around me on a journey  
whose language drifts into another throughout my dreams,  
the prerequisite for transformation always being  
that both tunes already are familiar to my memory,  
so that the Irish have become Jamaican; the Spanish, Trinidadian;  
while the French stay French, but sound maternal, a loving thirty-nine.

Some time ago, I dreamt that I could no longer see by means of light.  
Without knowing by experience, or even scientifically,  
what this would involve, I saw by means of heat.  
How gradually I registered the changeable reddish-dark,  
and that my dream environment was room-like, and enclosure,  
and that the pulsing blue was situated in someone, not unlike  
yourself, whose breathing seemed too loud to me  
because of the lack of light; and how, instead of speaking,  
you comforted my shoulder, both incandescing white.

## METAMORPHOSES

*For Liz Irwin*

A palm tree sprang up just within the gate to the park. Nobody would remove it; the park was not due for refurbishment for another three and a half months. It was not the kind of palm tree that anyone would normally try to grow in England's climate, though it was not impossible that a palm tree of this variety could survive even the so-called severer winters in the 'Home Counties'. However, it was growing abnormally fast for a palm tree of any variety in any climate. Having started off like the green ridged dorsal fin of an earth fish sticking up through the soil, it now presented a solid stump covered with a furze of thorns. The crown of the palm was several-fronded and not soft. It grew fast but was not equal to the head height of most of the adult local residents. The freak tree continued to look the same, but taller day by day.

A crowd of people near the church down the road was discussing whether the palm tree really was of the variety that the person who spent a lot of time abroad and sometimes gave lectures in the community hall had identified it as, and whether it should be removed or protected. Distilling palm liquor was not an option. It could not be tapped for gum – it did not seem like a source of aromatic resin. It had grown fast but borne no fruit. Its shade was less than a clock hand, dependent on the sometimeish English sun.

As I do not go to church and was only passing alongside the friendly group, I heard some of their discussion but cannot report what they concluded. "Why don't you write about that?" these friends called out, meaning the tree at the end of the road. But I did not want to write about it.

It stayed.

One day a strange bird roosted in it, but before anyone could decide whether the wild thing should be culled as a harbinger of disease, it had flown away, leaving one feather that somebody who was not local picked up, took away, and never mentioned or displayed. I think he had connections in the fire service.

"Butterflies in your stomach?"

"No. Moths."

"All the kinds of moth there are?"

"Perhaps . . . no. Neither the death's-head moths from another sinister story felt not seen, nor the moths of memory, silver-gold thumbprints in low gear about the managing of candles when electricity failed on dark afternoons of the Rainy Season in happy third-world households where constant novelty held children unafraid."

"These moths of the oesophagus are the widest-winged."

"They are denser than cocoa pods stamped by lifelong illiterate chocolate producers on the Gold Coast."

"That may be a short *lifelong*, yet little living's all bitter."

"The insides are in a flap over these moths."

"Do they go high or from side to side? Do they line up wedges in profusion?"

"They do not register as moths. They would outweigh bats."

These moths work together to turn over and over the blood-supplied slab known as stomach. Only gradually does the idea of moth lodge itself in the worried mind seeking internal confirmation.

The soft skin around those eyes was an imagined area. Its fascination was colour and shadow played at blending. The skin itself a non-entity since correct application procedure had been followed, the sparkle of expression was a figment of the pigment. They might have been doll eyes. The author of such smugness found the smugness an irritant like the sun that fetches out lounge people in the business of self-protection from rays it is a choice to bask in.

Please disregard the silver oblong that is not a screen. If your upbringing and the predetermined imaginings intended to supplement but now displacing mind find it easier to ignore the source diffusing light by terming it a screen, feel free to do so as it would be a significant mistake for anyone to attempt to behave towards it as s/he might towards a window in an enclosed space not primarily designed for comfort – not secured, nor certainly supervised. Try to ensure that you do not turn your back to the 'screen' or look directly at it, and maintain some distance while keeping it to the right of you. Please also disregard the reclaimed pedestal-mounted stone basin. What is not a window is intended to light this, which is not a sink. On the black paper floating there, black words are being written. If the almost automatic pen point is distracted, it will punch through the paper. There will be a flare of silver. Your hands will be freezeburnt off the paper as you find yourself standing before the font. The mistake will retort through the bone between the eyes. They will think that is you, although both sides will have gone cold.

The polished obsidian floor was made without a budget. As in the memory of a privileged child whose family holidays were partly spent waiting in banks used by money launderers and laid out on Temple-of-the-Sun proportions (one- and three-way glass sealing the dealing in bonds, james bonds), the artificiality of the lighting implies that whatever does not explain itself is nonetheless spared from presenting its perfectly possible explanations.

You see from the angle of a fly on a wall so shiny as to be insupportable to insect feet. You can see everything and you can see in the dark and you've switched nothing on, nor is your head helmeted with a vision-enhancer.



Who is that in a block of wood? Who would use a six-by-four-by-three-foot natural pencil: a block of wood the size of a person's coffin, and not a coffin or any other kind of wooden form? Would you wield it to write to her when you can't bear to have the answers?

May it remain a block, and eyeless?

That's a whistle. A beam of air has pared a strip of wood from the block's hip. Shrilling again, the ethereal surgery: it shrills till your flesh clings on to its own fingertips.

Prototypes of sports equipment clatter to the floor, hunting implements and writing tools, what look like wooden darning needles, and a descent of common or garden splinters.

What's left standing? A body block, nude of a face. You're looking down on it.

Are you going to ask whether this meets a need – the feeling of falling?

How he is pitched like a tent, wide sides and thin canvas. Who manufactured the flaps, unopened and not to be opened, pre-sewn into bedrock by means he would have liked to have the power to disallow before proceeding to the same result? At a stretch my mind's eye follows its own darkness into his. Hush, hush. Tell how to hide the flatness.

Whether or not he had a spare shirt (he would have rolled it up) they might strip this one off him, hurting the buttons, unnoticed too the inequitable burn of linen momentarily interlocked with skin. And further: since neither he nor you could be relied upon to have seen lapis lazuli or ultramarine or any blue too intense to be wanted up close (the lustrous eyes of the wisdom-god Thoth the baboon, the ibis), know that this is the wrong climate for lookalikes and there are no approved markets where looks may be exchanged.

The woman with angles that from one point of view were obtuse, from another acute, showed facial signs that resembled distress in a highly developed non-expression. Much unlike a flowering tree uprooting itself – ungraciously covered with visible-grid cloth – she left her house, which was doing nothing but showing its skeleton whenever she raised her eyes, and pouring dust into the airtight jar of flour, hardly the home she had invested in. She followed somebody who had gone too far ahead, the man with the soft body, and she stopped in the door of the building that was like a lighthouse by virtue of being a building still standing in that part of town. Two other men were bullying the soft-bodied man. He was stocky, and sobbing. The

shirt was now red and white: in that light, an ugly scheme. The third in the room was so much taller, and not a tormentor – doing nothing that constituted refusal, yet not taking part. The woman almost stopped breathing when she looked at that third. He was that tall, and badly jointed. That tall one stood there as if this were normal. For so long all else had been extra-normal. Her stopping scream guttered inside her when she saw the soft-bodied man turn to him whose too much quiet was enough. “You’re the only one I could ever really tell how bad it’s been,” he sobbed in her head, and away from her hearing, and without thought of her. He hugged, and buried his face in, a chest of bones. There was kindness in the hooded inclination. For him it was at long last. The tormentors were angry and brought up short. He was out of their arms forever. The woman stayed in the doorway like a bead curtain woven to maintain a swaying chestnut and purple bird.

A whole and inhabited city that was too ancient to be convincing can, when reformatted and reconceived as ruins, continue to consist of family sites, while being more suitably picturesque than in its whole state. I saw the same owners return to picnic al fresco in what had been the living room. The space offered natural stone coffee tables and the view was now uninterrupted by what remained to suggest four walls.

This poem is for Elizabeth, who buys kebabs from the Bodrum kebab café on my new road, for Bodrum was the marvellous Halicarnassus, and Herodotus was right when he said that camels practise retromicturation (pissing through their back legs). She knows and loves him. I would believe him.

## SAHARA DREAM CUBES

*For Jessica Coccozza*

There's much natural laughter

And some laughter left over

dream fat beauty desert indigo balance  
 fat dream beauty desert indigo balance  
 fat beauty dream desert indigo balance  
 fat beauty desert dream indigo balance  
 fat beauty desert indigo dream balance  
 fat beauty desert indigo balance dream

Still too thin!

Season of rains my daughter

bowls of milk            fatten when you can

sit by the lake        do not vomit

who can't walk is no cripple

you will marry a fit man

change gorgeous overnight green carpet dream  
 gorgeous bonebreak green carpet dream change  
 bonebreak steel carpet dream change gorgeous  
 steel tented carpet dream change stainless  
 tented nomadic dream change stainless dance  
 nomadic dream change stainless dance burial  
 dream change stainless dance burial rejoice

Tradition – some extenuating circumstance?

The papier-mâché dance

of those who yet can move

moves veiled and beautiful, and knows that fuller moons

draw fuller love.

Girl children force-fed in the Western Sahara

This (swelling) is (gallstones) the right (hospital) way

## CALLS

*For Anya K.*

New past has extra crackle pick up shell kind  
where sand pulls jokes on lovers' legs the safe kind  
as hand in hand they run down dunes the mined kind  
just fast and fortunate enough the aisled kind.

Who traced my schoolfriend's husband's head, the slashed kind?  
Who, paid, took colour from the fields, the cane kind?  
Who'd stayed a girl in blue and white, the kind kind,  
now raced catastrophe, and not the far kind.

It needs no patience from us. We're the heard kind.  
It sends round lots of love to all, the meant kind.  
Its task is over then, the ties of blood kind.

So end with lots of love again the all kind.  
Speed irresponsible through the how-are-things kind.  
Go ask for natural causes where's no mind kind.



## TEMPERATURE CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT

You have given me a statue and I intend to keep it –  
 weeping as it does its miraculous unphotographed tears,  
 bringing to bear on the one downstairs room (not thirty paces  
 by thirty) outside non-awareness who could help turning to.

I did the things for it that people do for statues:

pink net,  
 set sweetness –  
 not incense only and spangles –  
 fruit, camphor, wood;  
 blood, eventually –  
 to feed it and fire together dripping,  
 tripping various alarms I then disabled,  
 setting up (with settling smoke)  
 a lively smell of sacrifice  
 and singeing  
 the thing's skirts,  
 I sang out against myself,  
 stripped it bare.  
 Now it towers, how alpine, again!

Someone else might send it in procession,  
 blessing the streets for once with more than pedestrian shudders.

I wouldn't. It's mine, and much too heavy.

The alternative?

It is seven feet of upswept stone that makes movement awkward,  
 talk too, tangential, hovering, base  
 stubbed soon as lit,  
 talk slides.  
 Could I just provide  
 a temperature-controlled environment!  
 Or put aside  
 desires to work around,  
 not getting round it.  
 Am I bound to?  
 (Although it blocks the galley kitchen's entrance.)  
 Continuous with centuries of sympathetic starving,  
 whenever I miss meals, I feel historical.

And I please  
 your statue,

that, giving no reasons,  
does more to justify;  
bests every suggestion by being there,  
being not petty,  
pretty to dust.

And the alternative?

Run yelling tensed to loosening, limbs making demonstration  
stationing nowhere, hooved in mud that does not spurt, and could I  
could I fix to a tilt of ninety degrees as if headlong  
pedestalled never again, as if jetting into the heart  
and straight into it of the sun were possible, and the sun  
stands unrecognizable cracking behind the wool-wet grey  
cool, cool, for ultraviolet spokes reach even a lightless day,  
lighting their two-handed gift of scorch marks on a running fool.

GO FIGURE!

Yours is the face I'd want to kiss,  
bliss in caressing zeros with  
arrows in what epoch if not  
this ah and oh aortic race  
nought gaining over nought I guess  
I'm gutted 'cause you don't exist.



FOR ADJECTIVES ARE ONE ROAD CUT INTO THE PRECIPICE  
 BORDERING PERFECTION

*For Carole Bourne-Taylor*

According to the wall chart, the average  
 Neolithic lady  
 inhabited a body  
 the same size as me.

The esplanade had been enough.  
 Pleased like a Victorian  
 to walk until it gave way find a stone  
 as smooth as flat to sacrifice upon

I saw a sky the colour only of bluebells  
 the clear blue loved, reserved, only for bluebells  
 for imaginary equatorial cumulonimbus bluebells  
 - little like the actual absent weak-stemmed lilac flowers -

If you see,  
 we have that reading in common,  
*bleu céleste* *celestial blue*

TO A FLUTE, CONTINUOUS (AND THE PARTICULAR SWEETNESS)

*For F. de Petrarca*

She died, yet he wrote on, regardless,  
 still addressing himself to her ghost,  
 single-minded, sensitive, yet hardly  
 unselfish: he would win by saying most.

(I'd think switch off)

Something like a song, it lasts forever  
 singing forgets that living hearts grip time  
 since through and through us music lifts out measure  
 sung loudening makes an always of a rhyme.

(off, the particular sweetness)

Summer in the community: leaves' light  
 sails open-air bacteria, splashed teas;  
 see now the slow boy dancing to a flute -  
 who knows that that's rapture! - continuous.

(the particular sweetness of thinking)

But winter's powerful imports throughout  
 both mind and evening make for certain doubt.

(of thinking, your voice with my words)

## THE SALAMANDER IS SO COLD

Drop adornments, endearments, rope in  
hovering behaviour, trap  
each look at its limits, stop don't  
hit the roof – that's out of bounds, not reach –  
I know that's where you're going.

I'll steal  
across its ridge, tonight, knock off ten tiles  
(save that smash, but with the sound turned off,  
a gift to local mosaic makers), nails  
filed and filled with stuff that glints beneath,  
open a hole from central heating into  
cold.

The salamander is so cold  
it lives in fire, that's where it finds its level,  
it strikes an average by a life in fire.  
And how I'll blister, fixing your escape,  
across my nature, if I have not planned  
where burning creatures can find cold enough.

## MORE SOLID FIRE

When along the road                      the city opened,  
god-like stuff that barely holds together,  
more solid fire, furious,  
afame, takes a decision  
for the sake of things less clear,  
insists:  
what is the matter?  
I am  
    still  
        you name me earth.

## SINKING LIGHTWELLS

*For the OED (Etymology)*

The quarter-beds of garden, cordoned off  
 for building works, in this fine weather, draw you down  
 to look at what you're not supposed to:  
 others' light,  
 in its raw state of planning –  
 well below the corporate mass of foliage  
 sharp-sided earth  
 draws you down –  
 how many days does it take to fit a light tube?  
 Timetable the heart of it,  
 lift an already at-your-own-risk courtyard,  
 consider sunshine at the level where feet  
 cultivate potato-eyes beneath their heels,  
 cross, recross,  
 without a sense of shadow  
 cross, recross,  
 redistributing shadow,  
 disturbing workmen who have tabulated  
 installation processes for shafts of light?

And what about those many operatives,  
 those many office workers, well those people  
 who clock in underground – can they be trusted  
 to make good use of newly allocated,  
 all-natural mind-expander mood-lifter  
 no-excuses light? Might they cluster at breaktime  
 to draw down light, take a long drag on radiance  
 like cigarettes, to be sustained by sunshine –  
 there's something to work into the day.  
 But if they don't deserve,  
 aren't aware,  
 fail to avail themselves of it?  
 What if sunk light simply is  
 engineered true actual indefinable  
 happiness about them – a sudden lifting?  
 What if it simply is?

## CALL IT SIMPLE: TWO EXTERIORS

## I.

Coastal, maybe ghostly,  
   outside, over there,  
 that's where the sea steals on,  
   the place for eating up.

Oil shrugged over us slapped blackout rainbow.  
 If, in this defeathered situation,  
 something mantles, unimpressed –

This isn't it.  
 Not designated so.

Sense of our time in time's no sense,  
 no cache to requisition;  
 this hand's dyspraxic stammerings  
 no great catch,  
 no magician's pass.

Neither cancelled nor unpencilled.  
 No use.

## II.

Call it simple. How to peel an apple.  
 All that was meant was something to hang on the wall.

See red race away from less and less there moist flesh  
 that so quickly discolours,  
 red once held protective round that cyanide-seeded core,  
 red made to demonstrate  
 the blade's wielder's no waste-maker,  
 red  
   chivvied to resembling infinity,  
 red  
   shying towards identity with ribbon  
 as if not meant for more than shredding.

Ever.  
 An evening scene of innocent intensity.

## 180° EEYLOPS

*For Brian Catling*

First time I install the cyclops  
in the middle of my head.  
This one ain't one of yours.  
Owl cyclops. All thoughts recede  
around about below  
in hope of cover. Owl cyclops  
established on a pole,  
lens for one meaning only  
metering nothing  
mastering nothing  
disporting nothing  
night-time, could care less,  
light-time, all lie-time.  
On permanent high-beam - Nah.  
Permaglare, more like.  
Radiating amber that encrusts  
with fear what so it contacts  
which is whatsoever strikes it  
which is  
all air,  
bespoke by predator.  
Nothing escapes or sleeps.  
Small animals don't know:  
stop  
or go.

## WE'RE PROCEEDING, WEIGHTED FOR SWIFTNESS

*Inconceivable*

Birds, dried, small ones, peppering down, stiff-feathered,  
 they'd do as decorations (make them be for something),  
 hang them in a fringe on a red-letter day,  
 twirled along the banister of a pizza restaurant  
 (anything else?) (they can't get better than this) -

*to put the thought -*

but we can't stop for them, we're travelling much faster,  
 too fast to catch them, faster than their gravity,  
 and in a metal hood (they can't click) (send sounds bouncing back)  
 it's no good to stick out a charcoal arm from.  
 Weighted for swiftness, proceed: flat pockets, eyes averse,  
 we're on our flight path: no painful bundles, please.  
*Inconceivable some kind of idea of song in twigs.*



## OXIDANTS

Draw aside:

That gladness of the caged  
presses iron furring  
flakes from paint. That black  
discloses other colour.  
O: that air wears metal.

Know how blood rusts? Glitter,  
unwashed jet hair three months  
cloth-of-gold scraper. I do,  
I do. Gladness. And that caged  
come away striped.

Draw to:

## AFTER THE EXPLOSION

"Nobody stoop!"

"It's all right. They're all standing up."

"They're standing around - what?"

"There's nothing on the ground."

"Nothing? They've looted it?"

"I told you there was not -  
was nothing."

"I hope -

Look, a shopping bag has split."

So there should be someone else there, there should be someone  
inside the circle, in the centre, picking up -

"Where are the goods? That's all?

Shoes, and tomato paste?"

The group's calm. No-one's gone up in smoke.  
But what's lost -

Somebody must have paid for it.

Somebody ought've stayed with it.

Maybe they'd even made a list.

There might have been more than what's left.

And if this crowd isn't the first -

"Nobody stoop! Tomato paste!

Shoes! Stop!"

"To whom does this belong?

Where is the shopping? Clean the ground!"

## THE ROUND POND

The air above this village on the gradual hillside is so fine, so blue, it seems to spill out of wild eggshells never oozing with hatchlings, only a distillation shaken out like song, song that, glimpsed in ribbons, noted down, decides against this tracing of descent and with no kind of composure refills the sky till, dropping one by one under the musical downpour, villagers gasp agreement: "We shall keep time".

This agreement, perhaps, is why, around the pale and cheerful spire, there are spaces in this village, where houses might have been. But no. The built-up eyes of visitors read wrongly, turning back inwards to the built-up brain. "These are not spaces *for houses*. People here live with spaces". The eye looks out again, dim and unable to vault distances, while the furred heart clutches its walls; admiration and agoraphobia.

I was yet more foreign than such visitors. The histories of this village had been absorbed by me at long distance. I sought it out by choice.

Some of the villages came close and spoke to me. "Where is the round pond?" I asked them. How did you know that existed, their quiet said.

A little way down the slope but within the village boundaries, there was the round pond. I had walked past it without passing it. I had to turn to see it. It was a few feet across. So very close.

"I know it's good for swimming," I said, confident in my reading. Who, if not themselves, had written their histories? A reaction moved all over the villagers' faces and arms and fluttered their garments: the uneasy laughter that none of them would utter, not wishing to contradict a visitor's compliment. "I wouldn't". "Not right now". "Not today, perhaps," said their movement. Perhaps the words, too, were muttered.

"People did swim here," I said, more pleasantly, and added, because I wasn't sure, "It must be safe". The laughter died from the villagers to such an extent that in the very clear air I wondered if they were alive at all.

I turned to the round pond. It was perfectly round and pitch black. The waters were not sluggish or unmoving. They were thick and still. The sun and clouds reflected off the surface. "I'm going in!" I shouted with false jollity and bent my knees. As I did so I forgot what I looked like, and felt like quite a different girl; I knew how she looked. I jumped into the centre of the round pond, scattering clear water. As I sank my hair floated up above me and seemed to create a pocket of air. I could breathe through my nose and mouth, for a limited time. Then straw was being stuffed into the water above my head, pushing me down further, but trapping air in an unscientific though

very real cavity. I was moving down too fast. The water around me was filtering sun through blackness. I would come up coated in mud. About four or five bodylengths down I realized the solid ooze two bodylengths below, bottomless and exerting a great pull. I knew that if I reached that, there would be no coming up. I struggled and began to rise, not fast enough. Then I realized that the straw thrust down and the extra air had not been meant to help me. The air was to reassure me and get me sinking down further than I could swim back up to save myself without the aid of a new and unreachable lungful. Nonetheless I swam up, faster and faster.

I climbed out of the pond, coated in mud that seemed already to have slid off, the sun shining on me while I was unsure whether I looked like myself or that other girl. Like someone welcomed, I greeted the villagers. "You see I made it! Your pond is good for swimming!"

But half of them seemed to have melted away, and I could see the wind knocking holes through the ribs and tatters of the other half. The sun kept shining. I had returned to tell my story, but suspected that I was no longer alive.

## THOUGHTS OF THE DEAD

Think of me as I was if that draws strength,  
 direct no words. I am the walking dead,  
 the rocking-horse child hand in plaster trace,  
 child of snakehole embracing stained glass head  
 out in the linen garden, pigsty walls.  
 Factory for incurious fishermen  
 at road's end notwithstanding, what you see  
 is not what was. Play steadily in gone  
 and done sunbeams, barring no pines, no planes  
 where he strode smiling mapping thinking.  
 Lakes, shadows, re-endeavoured, roll again  
 new ones to be re-trodden, lost in  
 anew by new ones. So great his efforts.  
 He described the longest trek. Take comfort,  
 can you, in this place approximating  
 to his description and your needs? Hating  
 his footsore and smiling lifetime, waiting  
 for strength, think: I was, and am no longer  
 alive.  
 Settle, settle, settle, be wise.

Thought to settle in the set of barracks  
 built less than carriage height you see  
 over there beyond the three I call them pools  
 oblong pits of red and burning sand.  
 Between the first pit and the barracks  
 there is a narrow strip for cultivation.  
 He who has gone would be happy with me  
 there I thought.

He did not move.

I say he went  
 of his own free will.

Inside the barracks: "Switch the lights on!  
 Switch the bleeding lights on!" "I got used -  
 living on my own - to moving around  
 in the dark, you see. I can't see clearly  
 without my lenses on, anyway." "Switch  
 the - " "No need to get nasty." "- bleeding lights -"  
 "The lights were on."

Only yesterday.

There. I thought.

## VACANT POSSESSION

Now see them moving in: the couple, double-glazed,  
refitted, lit up through slow markets, low seasons,  
efficiently . . . except by lamplight, by lamplight  
allowed only on holidays in old houses  
where old fuels burn and, daubed with claw and feather,  
slaughterboards, scrubbed, brought down from bloodshine to beechgrain,  
stack unsplitting beside the steel racks and cleaver,  
the invoices (ultimately at the hosts' cost)  
that after all say Christmas . . . Well spent, the year turns.  
The couple take this house unto themselves. To own . . .  
And to be owned? Is it in the fixtures list?  
How in the long room shadows linger; the cold spot;  
the skirting-board's release of one knitting needle  
downstairs, when the damp was being done. Victorian,  
two previous owners, so much almost untouched, some  
rediscoverable. With vacant possession . . .  
A silent donkey brays in his stone pen, coal hole,  
child's jail, the inevitable garden shed.  
The sale is completed. Cardboard, rain-torn, reused,  
the couple's faces pucker. Vacant. Possessed.

## JOURNAL OF A FAIR SIZED CITY

*For Marina Bartholomew*

### *Black Coffee*

Flamenco dancer – out of costume  
 buffalo-jowled, top heavy  
 as official war paintings –  
 looms witness (you recognize her from  
 the Matador Ball?) in the café  
 where mums swish, stop, consider if  
 they'll shop our neighbour for drugs.  
 "He's helped to ruin many young lives".

### *Never Mind the River*

I like it where it's quiet. Like this road.  
 Floods don't reach. Angel Meadow flooded,  
 rowboats downed as if they never were,  
 park bench shoulders out, mere coathanger  
 to all new water under the bridge.  
 Furniture afloat in living rooms  
 on my old road, the owners away.  
 Cars floating from the side of your hill.  
 I wouldn't move. I wish I weren't renting.  
 No, no extra. That wall? The convent,  
 their garden does wonders for the air.

### *Hic Jacet*

Tots snot, klaxons wail, vendors holler;  
 the modern fortress goes bleep-bleep. Follow  
 the better suits, the buttocks broader  
 than the briefcases; take the patent,  
 the published, the invisibly-archived route;  
 at the corridor's left turn, you  
 stay lower. Glass barriers peel aside,  
 ascent at the flip of a swipecard  
 revealed, reseals. Here lie eight hours  
 whose spear points fall driven out of use.

### *Lazy Saturday*

Draw in your horns, snail; don't think of  
 eating those leaves – do you know how  
 heavy they are? Made of limestone.  
 Etched from mountain I abandoned.



Past where those other leaves like sharks  
landed up, sunned to granny-lace  
and skeletons and shoe-leather  
while the neighbour who'd swapped islands  
pegged out equatorial linens  
yet - musically, distinctively -  
sneezed in unblended Irish?

## MY HIPPEASTRUMS AND MYSELF

I want to tell you all about my amaryllis,  
their styrofoam dispatch in pinned packets over coastlines,  
arrival early winter to flower soon thereafter,  
but with white worm root coiffure not looking fit for soup,  
unbelievable, too massive to be promising,  
worse than swedes, like Europe's lost peasant vegetables  
since legal standardization nameless and ungrown . . .  
I do love them . . . all parts of the plant are poisonous . . .  
tropical actually . . . the slowness of their progress,  
scales greening, purpling, weeks on a sunny windowsill,  
waking in ways indistinguishable from rotting,  
distinct refusal to shoot, sudden telescoping.  
How much they've grown!  
You can't not like them; they're so scarlet,  
and yet so plant-next-doorish, neat, showy, rewarding,  
nice for holidays, not satin and embarrassing.  
I do want to tell you about my amaryllis,  
how upset I am that you find them unimportant . . .  
Those are my scissors; please replace them on the shelf.

**COMPLETELY F\*\*\*\*D**

*After Montague Summers's translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*

Witches would detach penises  
keep them in the seventeenth-century equivalent of  
matchboxes  
and feed them oats.

Look out the window:  
horizon and white boats.

It's breakfast time.

## OUTSIDE

thinking  
the box the box the box the box the  
thinking box the box the box the box the box thinking  
the box the box the box the box the  
thinking box the box the box the box the box thinking  
the box the box the box the box the  
box the box the box the box the box  
thinking

## THE VEGETABLES OF CONTEMPT

O urban blow-in, paver of private gardens,  
 scorning to husband allotments of thine own!  
 Attend local markets; the harvest is plenteous;  
 abandon the vitamins of alienation;  
 scrub off the sunblock compounded of wickedness;  
 nor show up swinging plastic bags lettered TESCO;  
 for thy repentance comes late, thou shalt be sized up,  
 yea, thy time shall be spent with rotten tomatoes,  
 thou shalt seek out and pay over the odds for 'em;  
 depart in gratitude, nor enquire after  
 certification of organic origin;  
 let men be what they eat; beans are too good for thee;  
 if thou thinkest the stall-holder handed and eyed  
 like a cardsharp, put thy hand in thy pocket,  
 pull out small change; thou despiser of toil and soil  
 deserv'st to have decaying chard palmed off on thee;  
 if fresh compost hide a mouldy stalk, that is less shame  
 than the moist and sinful idleness of legs  
 exercised upon car-pedals and adultery.

Through exploiting of thee, slowly the world improves,  
 and through thy unexpected, asked-for patience.  
 Know the seasons are in haste; and not on your side;  
 so turn thou betimes to the freezing of berries,  
 let the storage of carrots occupy thy days;  
 pay heed to the scampering of gnawing critters.  
 And yet, thou office slave, thy repentance comes late;  
 too late, thou speedy Urbanite; thou art condemned;  
 leave thy fruitless bargain-hunting; for all thy days  
 thou shalt eat of the vegetables of contempt.  
 And with that be contented.

## BOLDFACED

A paper bag  
leaned its earnestness  
    (talking of sorts,  
    asking: what burden?  
    what's your next  
    burden?)  
towards an argument  
    (idling,  
    it boasts of bricks)  
it cannot hold.

## DON JUAN DE QUETZALCOATL

*For Emily D.*

Semi-Mexican sex god texted

Dame Exe,

"It's all up in the air again! touching down  
 near your manor, for half an hour, how 'bout  
 grabbing a burger, and a shag? get our claws  
 into that chocolate box, ease the cerise  
 beak back, reinstate raw Don Juan de Quetzal-  
 coatl, hey ain't it cute to be in agreement  
 just once once more baby (gotta multipack),  
 smart lady, waste not this player serenading  
 with the coca guitarra, let me revolve  
 your ms. independent corsetlike front door?  
 or let's meet in the parking lot, the airport,  
 the underpass, the market (I don't care for  
 your office), anywhere's the armpit of Eros,  
 let's raise a scabies of love in your city,  
 tunnel in, break out, off again, silver-tracked  
 (gotta plane booked): I'll stop over for half an hour?"

Dame Exe:

"(Tirra lirra la la la) \*\*\*\*! No."

## OUR LADY OF STOKE NEWINGTON

*For Susanna Edwards*

Susanna: you'd notice her.  
How many  
leopards  
work as photographers, attach fascinators to  
bobble hats,  
change their spots,  
savage and golden, ripping into  
mushrooms, sustained on  
curly kale?  
Susanna is  
couched on red leather.  
The Cat of Origins (answering to  
her and only her, antedating  
boyfriends)  
sits milk-dipped.  
They wonder aloud together if vanilla  
makes her breasts bigger?  
In some things this leopard is  
precise, more than a century of microscopes  
turning in her eyes.  
So you trust her when she plunges  
two fiery-coated arms into  
a London bin, full-length,  
unseen into  
that Hades of discards,  
pulls and  
pulls. What  
emerges? A crock, an orchid,  
living, delivered by leopard, blooming intact.



## THANKSGIVING THANK-YOU NOTE

*For Erica Simms*

Dear Erica,

who does not see the age of buildings  
but rather walks among the trees of equal beauty  
in planned woodland such as coexists with this city  
called medieval, though the light's quality's best described  
as pumpkin-coloured, well steamed, a giant Pyrex bowl  
clamped upside down protecting all this valley; perhaps  
thoughts and years by hundredweights make up the recipe,  
but who really cares, except to be glad? Blink, it's autumn  
at last, after floods of summer, the leaves off the trees,  
whisking by, perfectly partnered by this Erica  
who dances, steps making happy sense of streets that hadn't  
guessed they could!

Thanks for the evening, and the pumpkin pie.

## JOYFUL, TOWARDS A WEDDING DAY

*For Erica Simms and Laurence Williams*

Quietly now until the leaves descend  
to hug the pot's base, and the week dies down  
into the most conventional of shapes,  
the diary fills summerlong, will shine,  
a little thick and dancing crown of sparks  
the colour of love budding for us all  
above, through, in, the names of days. It walks  
quietly now, as plain, as sweet, as known  
as friendship is: Laurence and Erica:  
time soon for lifelong bonding, drawing near.

## THE NINTH DUCK IS CROSSING THE WATER

*For Sunniva Grønlie*

How is it she thinks?

Sunniva surrounded by tigers,  
watchful queen whose new realm, the high bed,  
her armchair-cliff-defying eyes guard.

How is it she thinks?

Crown? No. That's a hat. She's a builder.  
Sunniva yawns: funny crocodiles.  
The biggest duck has joined the sleep line.

How is it she thinks?

The ninth duck is crossing the water.  
The door ajar, I sit on the floor  
so as not to be taller than her.

## TEJ JASPAL AND HIS TOOTH

*For Tej Capildeo*

Hey Tej, I'm envious, your first milk tooth's  
out!

I loved losing mine, tormented them,  
chawing into bronzefoil toffee, loosening  
the bloody little ineffectual fangs,  
popping out a corn, merciless, to see  
unlikely roots drying clean, I couldn't  
wait,

I craved the adult face to emerge,  
speakability of what-is-obeyed -  
so alas now I'm old, I have the ache  
that goes with never a full set, a poem  
that's coming loose, I'm biting down on it,  
wanting it out to pearl around a bit,  
shape-of-a-poem squared off  
gap  
permanence -

## YOU HAVE YOUR SPACE

Motherhood window.

Missed it.

Who has?

I have.

What window?

Watch it:

Fringes, flanges, a foreign airport, flitter of suitcases slung on the loop, always men's arms, excruciating, unlikely heft, unlikelike shapes, the hatch just beyond.

Yet another, stable-square, knotted and punched, wood cross wide and graceless conveying extra air to straw nothings.

Then the tumble-through one. Threads flag where a sequence of women, sea-lions, hurtled horizontal at heights past believing, half slicked to death. Slappers. Barking.

Finally, the alley of finery presenting stolen, collected, outdated stained glass angelling angles, inlaying glories peaches peacocks athwart iron pipes as the way in.

What about the one I took, that is, I missed?

By ordinary lights.

Less of the casement, less crown glass, less plate glass, lacking spandrels or lozenges or summerlong spectrum bubbling quietly of heaven drenching quick to the eye if only you'd swoop through this once.

No, I have not.

Now, what space I hold, you have.

Mine rose ordinary,  
pre-modern, rounded,  
let in the sun,  
alike unlikes.

Love.

## THE CARIBBEAN EDITOR IMAGINES EARTHQUAKES

All day Laughlin's imagining earthquakes.

Like it's accusing itself of something,  
the house starts to pelt itself from inside:  
books like bricks, hairbrush like maracas  
rattle - rocking its occupants. Something grave.

The editor's seismically obsessed:

At the birds' warning, the dogs' misery,  
light's flit: as from greyish to yellow: difference,  
suddenly less interrelated hills,  
the almost skittish infrasonic groan,

He's preoccupied with terremotos -

saman trees: amber intestines steaming,  
saurian bark like a latticed piecrust, split -  
huger than the houses they're unsafe as,  
a civilization of termites spilt.

Mr. Laughlin asks, "Keep your feet on *what* ground?"

A hospital mistake: trusting asphalt -  
the road worst taken, parting like a cut  
unhealed under its dressing - walls slabbing.  
Magma will out. Clingy geckos get thrown.

But who is he to imagine earthquakes?

Laughlin's the man who rescues keskidees,  
securing the yellow and black fledgling,  
Sleeping Beauty in a sweetbriar hedge  
where to wake, cry bold again: *Qu'est-ce qu'il dit?*

*What's he saying?* Ed., you're our minor god.  
Now please get a grip on two dimensions.  
Reform the printed and the shining page.  
Your ascetic wrists complete the keyboard.  
Your subtle hands are clasped over your ears  
at the bridge between sea and sky: colours  
come running at you, out of place - figures,  
meanwhile, stroll, enjoyably supposing  
a sunset, as if this planet supports

several daily dips beneath horizons  
stained like a medical slide.

No earthquake.

It's your rearing islands, they've come crowding  
your office, all at once, wanting to play.

## ON NOT WRITING AS A WEST INDIAN WOMAN

*For those who jumped ship and drowned because the herding of people was intolerable*

If you get my drift. She -  
 not containing oceans,  
 nor a spice triangle,  
 won't boast that cinnamon  
 could launch femme announcements  
 over the bounding main:  
*set course for my rich shores.*  
 No allure for sailors.  
 Blackout drapes in her home.

If you stick with me. She -  
 hasn't cooked cassava,  
 nor become a mother;  
 might gatecrash Carnival  
 flaunting last year's costume  
 and fall down in the dance;  
 rack up a huge phone bill  
 louder than a toucan,  
 vexed and still calling home.

She push the boat out. She -  
 on a far-flung causeway  
 prisoners handbuilt, ice-clawed,  
 take her pants down, rime-clawed  
 over sunken warcraft,  
 pissing into the wind?

Birthcries repeatedly  
 new, self pull out self, self  
 issuing that self home.



## AMONG

*For Sveinn Haraldsson*

“Liquid plus liquid  
and more than liquid  
a kind of safety.”

This was after an attack:  
winged things disliked us.

“Here, do not tremble.

Stem and basin, head and neck,  
keep them above this - ”

“A sea from ice caps!

We could sustain nerve damage,”

“Do you expect medusas?”

“numbness.”

“Keep moving.”

A slug of crystal,  
it’s priming our surroundings.

I think it trembles.

Smartening, slacking,  
and more than liquid liquid  
mercurial.

“I can’t - ”

It is transparent  
transparent and venomous.  
But who can grasp that?

## OBJECTION POETRY

*Mud while the Sun Shines*

For every book I read I write an answer  
 Objection Poetry poem as addenda  
 the museum of the Not-only-but also  
 the Wonder-why-not primarily the wonder

For this you need the adjectives my friend said  
 beyond red is red and red is beyond red

I think I may not have stockpiled enough blue

Dead men row the skies in their dead men's canoe

That-something's-missing-but-not-what-is-missing  
 Where-shall-we-be Where-were-we-in-all-this

The stainless the strident the desolate crew  
 lean down pick up publish the soul whose song fits

So who does inhabit the Marginalia?  
 That's sounding rude see I have no agenda  
 Objection Poetry makes mud while the sun shines  
 rest assured it leaves out the Name-of-the-author

*To Dance a Day-Opener*

Instructions for making a J'Ouvert costume. Take several realms of oldspaper.  
 Make a fringe for your sombrero: anything annoying, cut it up. Like strips of  
 photos. Photos of the stripped. Say since Trinidad costumes "Made in China",  
 you're trying to put yourself in the picture. Long gone, our creolized Muslim  
 maker, genie of sequins from headpiece to slipper.

## GROSS PIPEWORK, SUBTLE MUSIC

only dance?

say honestly words can't dance  
words can't catch the spirit  
only the body behaving badly  
only the body falling about  
over itself for tragedy

trick is                      thing is  
only the body can dance

the live man they ploughed gravel over  
up to his neck he protests in favour  
of green integrity for a central Savannah  
he was on the same road  
as the educator speaking for wetlands  
would-be saviour protesting for mangrove  
the boat of builders betrayed to skyscrapers  
pushed him overboard

no two words about it

how much

only dance

## ABOUT THE SHAPE OF THINGS

“Help me cut the world up  
 into paper shapes!  
 Then I’ll know I see it.  
 Really.  
 I see it really.  
 Give things their names!”

Nameless Bones Nameless Bones below oceans  
 Nameless Bones we name them. That’s all the names  
 we have for you. The theme of everyone  
 is Nameless Bones, ashamed or not to join  
 in singing sea and nameless bones. Not for:  
 Display. Arraignment. Arrangement. We’re done.

And this morality of nameless bones  
 begins to stir in me against my will  
 to help – each flight home, every holiday,  
 layered by plane wings flouting nameless bones  
 while flickering with kinship, whispering  
 metal fatigue, systems’ untimeliness,  
 the gentle letdown of oxygen masks,  
 profound and pressured sunless corals,  
 indifferent to excess of history –  
 against my will to help the namer. “Why  
 I love the radiance that names bring, arrayed  
 corolla-like – ” “Does it need signalling,  
 the central secret of each thing?” “But yes,  
 as every secret we rejoice in. Say – ”

Guyana’s poet,  
 Martin Carter, said it:  
*Till I collect my scattered skeleton. . .*

## ABOUT THE BRIGHTNESS OF THINGS

I came prepared to be a shadow:

-----

What d'you think you're up to? Tendering  
your hand, which obviously is a  
glove? - lady into falcon?

I'm for it - lo, stooping to the lure -

## THE SERENITY

To have my head fill up with leaf forms and with light  
so I can look at you with open eyes and smile  
while you enjoy yourself asking the painful things,  
I picture windows. A flight of words. Words in flight.

Try to penetrate my eyes. You're sent outside.  
No personality sits in there; effortless,  
a second nature blows you outwards. I've escaped  
meantime perhaps forever slightly chill of course.



## VOWEL POEM: ALBEDO

Will you tell me a word  
so beautiful that mourning  
yields up its you to lift  
an *o* towards an *r*,  
or is a vowel's ghost  
so powerful that mourning  
invests with amethyst  
the lily fields of dawn?  
Will you tell me a word  
so beautiful that morning  
reflects off it - a gift -  
Fearless, aurorean -



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

'The Pale Beast' is modelled on a song that survives in France and Canada, *La Blanche Biche*.

I am grateful to the editors and compilers of *Agenda*, *Almost Island*  
<http://almostisland.com> *The Caribbean Review of Books*  
<http://www.caribbeanreviewofbooks.com> *The Oxford Magazine*, *Poetry*  
*Salzburg Review*, *Stand*, *Tears in the Fence*; *Archive of the Now*  
<http://people.brunel.ac.uk/~enstaab2/> *Dusie: A Dusie Isles Reader*  
<http://www.dusie.org/issuesix.html> and *Poetry International Web*  
<http://uk.poetryinternationalweb.org>

Thanks to: Carole Rodier Bourne-Taylor, Leila Capildeo, Brian Catling, Emma Dillon, Sian, Sunniva, and Benji Grønlie and i.m. Sverre Grønlie, Elizabeth Irwin, Sharmistha Mohanty, Rod Mengham, David Miller, Vivek Narayanan, Jeremy Noel-Tod, the Oxford English Dictionary Etymology Group, the Oxford Improvisers (especially Malcolm Atkins, Miles Doubleday and Dominic Lash) for performing and setting selections, Ron Paste, Deana Rankin, Nikki Santilli, Sarah Simblet, John Whale, Wes Williams.

This book is for Nicholas Laughlin.