

A woman with dark, curly hair is submerged underwater. Her eyes are closed, and her hands are near her face. The water is a deep blue, and there are many bubbles around her. Above the water's surface, a reflection of her face is visible, creating a symmetrical effect. The overall mood is serene and ethereal.

THE CHEMICAL MARRIAGE

Michael Bedford

MICHAEL BEDFORD

The Chemical Marriage

Copyright © 2022 Michael Bedford

All rights reserved.

Cover design by Michael Bedford

Book design by Michael Bedford

No part of this book can be reproduced in any form or by written, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information retrieval system without written permission in writing by the author.

Published by Michael Bedford

Printed by Book Printing UK www.bookprintinguk.com

Remus House, Coltsfoot Drive, Peterborough, PE2 9BF

Printed in Great Britain

Although every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the publisher and author assume no responsibility for errors or omissions. Neither is any liability assumed for damages resulting from the use of information contained herein.

Acknowledgements and thanks are due to the editors of the following in which some of these poems have appeared:

Envoi, Orbis, Pulsar, The Journal, and The New Writer.

Perfection is neither desirable nor attainable

Contents

OOO	1
Creation Myth	2
Cosmic Horseplay	3
Everything Happening at Once	4
Prelude	5
The Counterclockwise Dance	6
Stars, Planets	7
God Discovers Night	8
The Battle	9
Beginning	11
Design Fault	12
Eighth Day	13
Slip of the Tongue	14
Nightmare	15
New Toy	16
The Tyranny of Numbers	17
Corporate Talk Unveiled	18
Morning Constructed and Tested	19
The Great Snake	20
Garden Rhyme	21
Eve	22
Adam	23
Evolution Teaches Bird to be Quicker	24
Daydream	25
Dangerous Thought	26
Religious Tomfoolery	27
Born Stupid	29
Terrible Misunderstanding	30
New Lamps for Old	31
Celestial Mishap	32
Stupid Bet	33
Nature Will Not Play the Game	34
Gravity	35

Revelation	36
Hunter's Bad Day	37
Happiness Fable	38
Eve Speaks	39
Adam Listens	40
Etcetera, Etcetera	41
Evolutionary Theory	42
Wisdom Dances with Truth	43
How Hunter Discovered Fire	44
Fortress	46
Serendipity	47
Friday Afternoon	48
Water Sports	49
Truth's Reassurance to the Breeze	50
Early Northerner	51
And They Found Each Other in Later Life	53
Love	54
First Love	55
Experimental Art	57
Unicorn	58
The Prophet	59
Adam Ran	60
Eve's Bitter Pill	61
Sun Seeds Its Children in the Devastated Ground	62
Fool's Errand	63
Parable of the White Suit	64
Prayer Answered	66
Fool Moon	67
Time Finds a New Game to Play	68
Ancient Story	69
Profanity Takes Sacred on a First Date	70
Clock	71
On the Beach	72
Life and Times	73
Hide and Seek	75
Science Speaks in Fission	76

The Golden House	77
He Was That Man, He Was	78
Cruel Trick	79
Young Lovers	81
Inquisition	83
History Lesson	84
Trick of the Light	85
The Displaced	86
An Allegorical Account of Poet Writing the Book	87
When Hunger Left Him, He Shouted	89
Death Nowhere to be Found	90
Reality Update	91
Too Late	93
Magical Occurrence	94
Unscheduled Break	95
Personal Statement	96
Tragedy Played Out	97
Life Riddle	98
Cautionary Tale	99

OOO

An empty belly in the mean of nothing
wrought from girders of nothingness
each nothingness more nothing than previous nothingness
desolate as fear electrified
barren as devastation hung inside out and gutted
bleak as the most arid thing never been
filled with loss beyond dimension or measure
gaunt as baby grieving for cord.

OOO it was lonely
but didn't even have word to weld thought together.

When God brought food
it ate like sailors drowning.

Creation Myth

Creation late again: the alarm had not sounded.

Creation got on the bus: the wrong bus.

Creation had no passport: irrevocably *out-of-date*.

Creation dragged off the bus and beaten senseless
as a precaution.

They pasted a face on Creation to match expectation.

Took fingerprints, blood samples, issued a credit card.

All of this necessary. All in the scheme of things

(easier to recognise in the court case later).

Creation ran away luggage flapping.

The border guards laughed: they had seen it all before.

Cosmic Horseplay

Creation called: God took the phone off the hook
avoiding all conversations.

Creation called: God cited bad weather
as reason enough for any delay.

Creation called: two innings down
God was coming out to bat.

God called for help blaming
bank holidays and the state of Denmark.

Time came - who had been hiding behind the void
picking up messages on a crystal radio set.

Truth came - who had been fishing on a lake
but no fish were biting that summer.

Evolution came - who had been cracking nuts as ciphers
peddling new brands of washing powder.

Hunter came - who had been trying to eat a tree
and wanted a shag and enough rope to hang himself.

Others came - who wore no names
having borrowed strangers' bodies to travel incognito.

Of all helpers, God trusted all of them least.

Raining. Nothing on television. This became the first day.

Creation held her head in her hands: dropped it. It rolled
under the table lost forever.

All these things are true. And none of them.

Everything Happening at Once

Tweaked the sequence. Lock clicked.
Gates opened.

Something different.
Something new.
Something radically altered.

Something deep inside
stepped forward. Cautiously stepped forward.
Peered around doors
just to check.

Somewhere else something else was happening.
That didn't matter.

Nothing else did.

Something fell. Nobody picked it up.

There came the sound of a tap dripping.

Prelude

who sang the song

who took mud and sap and called us here

who walked to the fringe of wood not beyond

who tamed the path but dare not tread it

who does not utter language

out to mouth and breath

who breaths but must breath their death

who values invocation and process above the moment

takes the cataract takes the stone takes the track

all that they are bundled in blood encompassed

blinks the eye and speaks of self

who speaks the abomination desire

who would call us here and not wait

climb laden spire and not wait

mix in all things sweat of their instruction

when will we answer their call

how many will ask how many will be needed

will we speak incomprehensible word

and tie ourselves to cord and sac

will we whisper in the turning in the flexion in the crowning

bursting in liquor our gifts arranged unheard

opening with flower of vagina not melancholy at all

who will know us how will we sing

Stars, Planets

As if
wedding bells were ringing but no sound,
only hydrogen sighing
in its molten finery, white veil.

The reception a strange affair.
Fewer guests than expected, changing livery at each course.
Appetites, places uncertain,
who could cater for this?

Ring
smelted in deep passion,
forged from the bliss
only furnace kissed lovers may know.

Sweet
the torch they burn
and as that flame dies
their children

hard as granite,
pug-nosed
dressed in practical clothes
with sensible shoes.

God Discovers Night

God working on a flower
when the lights went out.

Drowning in shadow
until electricity arrived

which sparked frying a flower flat
and arced into the ground.

No better off then.
So raised a mighty volcano

and lava burst howling into air
which lit everything for a million miles

but ash fell and choked Earth dead.
When sun came next

stopped the globe spinning.
Everything fell off

and there was hell to pay in instalments.
So made two suns

to illuminate both sides.
Planet shrivelled and died

and obscene heat dried seas
and scorched plans forever.

God sat perplexed.
Detail had sprung from nowhere.

Eternal, infinite.

The Battle

Life tilted at the great dragon Inertia.
Dragon raised itself from slumber.
Lifted an eyebrow menacingly.
All blood froze
in impending horror.
The contest was joined.
Huge swathes of fists flew through the air,
pots of reason spilled
and trickled down drains.
They clattered together until heaven wept
then stopped. Life wheezed.
Wiped a mountain of sweat from its brow.
Dragon yawned. Filed a nail absentmindedly.

Again they thundered.
Life battered dragon knuckles mercilessly with its face,
pounded cleats on dragon boots with its ribs,
throttled strength from dragon fingers with its neck
until it lost all consciousness and sense.
Life called its majestic army to join the fray.
Hunter helped by trying to make soup from stones
and setting fire to his cooker.
Time ran around headlessly in circles.
Evolution started cheering the dragon on.
Truth was writing postcards
pretending to have friends to send postcards to.

In desperation,
Life heaved an awesome kick
up from the cellar of hell.
Planted it solidly on dragon balls
where it grew to be a neutron bomb with a short fuse.
Dragon stopped short
not even knowing it had balls until then.

Beginning

When all has come down from mountaintop

and spine planted, and organs sown,
and tongue nested
 in undergrowth
and eyes scattered among thorn bushes
and waterworks and bladder
soft-landed on mud
and lung
rolled out onto grass to breath
 fine night air

then, they will come and harvest the good parts
to make a being of whatever

which they will call *Mirror* in honour of *Whatself*.

And eyes will roll
in their spikey circumstance upwards towards heaven,
and tongues labour in fleshy prisons
to fashion words they cannot yet hear.

In due course, when blended into one,
it will praise anything because it can
and *just in case*.

And that will be the start of it.

Design Fault

At dawn of day
when bolts had barely been tightened
and solder pooled on street corners discussing weather
and the great sun hammer had not yet clattered against
iron earth anvil to shape day into a good fit
someone noticed blood smeared deep inside.
So they peeled off minutes
 but couldn't find where it had come from,
so they peeled off hours
 but still couldn't find where it had come from,
huge hands strung on muscles lifted heavens
 but couldn't find anything bleeding underneath.

So they wound day up and watched it go.

It ticked as it should, moved forward,
ran over ground leaping hedges in a single bound,
dived into rivers, seeped through clocks and horizons,
until they went away
content at *job well done*.

Only then did day unveil death
because it adored the salt of blood.

Eighth Day

Media offered the globe of enlightenment
but Hunter would not buy.

Media plucked moon from sky,
pressed it into canvas
all within the confines of a romantic frame
but Hunter would not buy.

Distraught, Media charmed whales
etching their cries into a boxed set of CD's
reviewed to great critical acclaim
but Hunter would not buy.

Desperate, Media picked up rocks
pretending they were pets
drawing happy smiling faces on them
running a huge multimedia campaign
involving all celebrities everywhere, ever
but Hunter would not buy.

Finally, Media found a newspaper
bursting with nude women - held it aloft
dribbling circulation figures as candy
saying three million flies can't be wrong
but Hunter would not buy
because Hunter had no money to buy anything.

Media, defeated, fell to floor grinding any teeth available.
Meanwhile Hunter had shaped the newspaper into a fan
and had put it down the back of his trousers
and was pretending to be a cockerel.

Nothing got done that day.

Slip of the Tongue

When God was splicing legs together
 so speech could walk,
and melting lead down
 so speech might have substance,
and polishing the planet on its horizon
 so speech would have perspective,
a small bird, no larger than chance,
began singing the most beautiful delicate song
 ever heard.

God stopped to listen.
In that moment speech set rigid
 irrevocably, without rescue,
bone parched,
 staggering,
 insubstantial as dust.

God laughed at such folly
but cast the bird dumb.

Bird curled as a snake into the ground
laughing with no voice.

Nightmare

In that hallucination suffocated it with a pillow,
but it ate the feathers and chicken-pecked both
eyes out, so blanched it, but it grew around
every sense like ivy, so played a strong suit, but it
became foolish and leapt into a bucket throwing
itself over the garden, so ran after it with ten
legs, but it quoted Latin and became vulgar, so
tooled it as leather and libelled it, but it spoke
very eloquently in its own defence, so sailed
out in the deepest ocean to drown it, but it swam
to shore as an oxymoron, so invented radicals
and oxygen to burn it, but it became geographical,
so gave it three pence for its thoughts, but it
short-changed him, so hit it with relativity, but
it scrawled across centuries as a plague, so
invented antibiotics, but it discharged itself
from hospital, so bit it with gold teeth, but it
pulled every last tooth out, so made a
stand, but it became a stylus and played a song,
so became utterly strange to make it feel
sorry, but it became a surgeon who removed
vital organs, so threw atoms at it,
but it laughed knowing it had won, so wore
a trilby and served it with a summons, but
it wore a mask and changed its name, so
taped its hands and feet together, but it took
off its mask and stared directly at the bleeding
stumps of sockets, so turned it to sulphur,
but it became a Great Snake and poured into
an unguarded mouth, irrevocably-insanely-unremittingly inside.

God awoke, sweating, eyes black with terror.

New Toy

Truth held mirror up
saying look what I have made.

Hate peered in and saw two faces,
Light dived in
and bounced on the trampoline,
planets gasped in amazement
as suddenly infinity became twice as big,
Death stared at itself and died.

Truth became measured in delight at this new discovery

then
Evolution, in a rush not to look backwards,

bumped and sent it sprawling deep into the machine
where it fell as water
splashing over the cogs and pinions and pulleys
of the great mechanism
of the cosmos.

In that instant Karma was born.
Whole thing jammed up
with everybody owing everyone else all sorts of things.

Even God couldn't scrub it off.
Had to start huge spreadsheets

of credits and debits.
Vowed from that moment
if a mirror fell it would smash not splash

which is what God had said in the first place
but as usual, Truth vehemently denied it.

The Tyranny of Numbers

Planets oozed blood,
the Aladdin's lamp of guesswork worn thin.
Squandered sequences, verses corrupted, plots threadbare,
 everything going to hell
 even hell going to hell.

Survivors cursed on mobile phones
when suddenly, a cavalry of numbers
leapt off the dial
BAMM!
One, two, three, four.

Oh, see how they multiply.

Over hills, ravenous for order,
they filled the empty belly of logic,
bled into cities, microwaves, price of fish.

Oh, see how they multiply.

Formulae, equation, equation built upon equation,
a great tide
 washing chance away,
 washing magic away,
 washing hope away.

As dust settled
wagons circled
to infinity,
 all saved. Hurrah!
Barrow boy number waved its cash
holding all cards.

God,
family business lost to corporate raiders,
reinvented as millionaire and pauper in the same instant.

Morning Constructed and Tested

They agreed size of sheet
required carefully.

Took steel plate left over from night
measured and cut precisely.

Fastened dawn along its leading edge
with rivets of birdsong and bloodshot eyes.

Fitted wheels
then slid it across the face of the earth.

It ran smoothly, seamlessly.

They tied it to sun with strings of light
so they might both arrive together
and be delightful.

Washed hands in sea,
let them drip as dew,
water helping morning glide silently.

The Great Snake

It slithered
eel toad slime as it did
wrapping the muscle of tensed cord
 of its length
helter-skelter
around the branch of his manhood.

Every word deadbolt sorted
pounding on the cliff of understanding

toothless, limbless,
more dangerous than ever.

Spine of rippling razor wire
gimleting the unwary
held as a drawl
 or yawn
in the headlamp of an eye.

Garden Rhyme

A matter of experience
to judge limits - bend a will so far and no further.
A matter of exploration
to unleash the dumb pugilist action into the world.
A matter of estimation
to gauge the length of rope necessary to do a job.
A matter of expediency
to lose something you didn't want anyway.

*Beyond the garden
air is sweeter
and price of soft fruit
so much cheaper.*

Eve

She could not think.
She was ramshackle
and glib.
Her button words
would not do up
the overcoat of her story.
She despaired.
Her phrases foamed
and spluttered.
Came to the edge of a page
no further.
She raged.
Kept pictures of her mother.
Walked in rain
and pissed blood.
Cut herself
and others.
All plans
frittered themselves.
Shopped for a new heart.
She had lost something
somewhere.
Perhaps her heart.
Nations asked her.
She had no answers.
No salvation.

Adam

Always somewhere
between places
blamed
for everything.
He read maps
backwards
forever
out-of-sorts.
He rallied
but ultimately fell.
Hid in books
he couldn't understand.
Knew things
which were never mentioned
then forgot things,
important things.
He shopped for clothes
but could not fit them.
Lost the receipt.
His uncomfortable life
didn't fit.
Cried
as a baby.
Nations asked him.
He had no answers.
No salvation.

Evolution Teaches Bird to be Quicker

Evolution sat on the riverbank with a raven

scooping mud into a pile
fashioning a great fat worm
dangling it in front of the bird's face

but before raven could eat it

took it back, squashed moulded pummelled it
into a lizard
pulled legs off, painted it silver

and held it aloft as a wriggling giggling fish

but before raven could eat it

added more mud and made a dog and a snake and a tree
roaring in triumph

but didn't hear footsteps of Creation behind
who clubbed and stomped with huge fists and steel-toed boots
leaving Evolution crumpled into dirt,
skinned,
intestines hung as washing lines drying in sun,
blood seeping into rocks as fossils
in a terrible state, incredibly cheesed off.

Creation went away thinking Evolution dead.

Bird, still hungry, flew off totally non-plussed.

Daydream

Ball spun on her finger,
lobbed through a hoop.
Shot rocketed to the top corner
in the dying moments.
Tenth wicket fell
with the last ball.
Championship won
in final millisecond of extra time.
She held the cup aloft.
Ran a lap of honour.

Everyone stood.
Hats and scarves littering the sky.

Creation awoke knee-deep in crap
trying to persuade worms not to write in mud.

Dangerous Thought

Time hollowed a moment,
split of second
in which to rest, recline.
The view as far as Time's eyes could reach.
Reasoned
if each instant this big,
pulse of a beat of a heart so massive
 it encompassed the whole of wholeness
why did anyone need Time?
Shuffled on
hoping no-one had heard.
Never spoke of it again.
Like someone at a job interview
trying not to mention a previous conviction
or problems
 with their mental health.

Religious Tomfoolery

Women: Evolution tried to get
saint and whore into the same body.
No matter how that struggle played
they would not fit the narrow shell
two heads not being better than one
 on this particular occasion.
So God, with celestial shoehorn,
heaved them into that tight frame,
riveted both
to be bolted together, forever.
Years passed. They faced each other
across the emptiness of cavity
 of tendon and gristle
peering from behind
two eye holes, pulling rope and lever
which moved limb and trunk and head.
But man, being literal, and expert
in construction and all things mechanical,
became confused to bone,
to the very marrow of cell fibre.
For when he shook the structure
it rattled,
two or more objects clearly loose inside.
Therefore, teams were organised
to remedy the situation. Many clambered
 through peep holes
and fell to death behind the cliff face
of that great divide,
others lost sanity in philosophy of it.
A few wrote mighty books
then covered the machine
completely in cloth
to keep it from sight or mind.
Great cans of worms were opened,

lid never replaced
so worms roamed everywhere
into all nooks and crannies
of dark recesses of dark recesses.

Some emerged later
covered in bile dripping murder
speaking original sin and retribution
making the whole world shudder.
A compromise emerged
but no-one ever knew what it was.

Then man awoke
it had just been a dream.

Then man awoke
made of snails and puppy dog's tails.

Then man awoke
welded to mother and sister
who spoke a different language.

Then man awoke,
farted, and went back to sleep.

Born Stupid

Nothing in place.

Not heart - which flopped unevenly
side to side, spewing blood in its rib cage;
not brain - jelly impostor rattling around
walls of prison skull;
not nerve - guy rope dangling,
high tension washing line;
not smile - ripped from a criminal's face
hung for murder, lips stuck on with spit;
not hand - disconnected from body
by an abhorrence of arm;
not tongue - shoe leather carpet, clacking
as a washerwoman pulled through a mangle;
not fibre of muscle - spun from beetle and spider
crawling under a soil of skin.

Walking as an unconsecrated grave,
spewing and belching from every orifice,
monstrosity even to a blind mother's eyes,

first poet arose. Universe retched.
Hid indoors.
Even the Great Snake lowered its gaze.

Poet began to write: something about
laughter, butterflies, majestic rays of sun.

Universe heaved a high five of laughter,
wet itself, and got on with business
stopping only to open bowels on the poet
for it to be recycled as daffodils.

Terrible Misunderstanding

God utterly appalled.

Wherever disaster occurred, their fingerprints lingered.

Evolution sat sharpening a smile

to fit bank managers and East End villains.

Truth sat whittling a pole

to impale philosophers and theologians.

Hunter sat learning how to eat and break wind concurrently

to save Time.

Time had already run out trying to save itself.

God had learned not to trust Time at all

(promised so much - delivered so little).

Therefore, God created Chaos

and told Chaos to keep them in good order, well organised,

make sure everything worked properly, invent *fine fettle*.

Chaos nodded but didn't listen (as usual)

so went off to do, well, what might have been said. And whatever.

Aeons later,

God pointed out Chaos had done the opposite of what was intended.

Chaos disagreed and referred to written notes (which had been lost).

It was a sore point between them.

The sore point filed down, polished, sharpened,

became the first argument.

New Lamps for Old

Something died
in order something might live.

Karma sighed
from the enormity.

Yet fair exchange.
Tally intact

only column heading altered.
Date entered,

debt undertaken,
contract established.

Huge wheels stood ready
to grind out a price.

Celestial Mishap

The moment right,
honed by skilled crafts,
adjusted until all struts creaked.
Event lined up.
Polished, shaped.
No finer event had ever been made.
Such style, impact, grace. Hands were already
weaving applause.
Moment and event were married.
They did not fit. No amount
of cursing or bad grace could alter it.
Creation swerved off-road
down a bank
crashed arse-over-tit in a ditch.
Excuses, who tried to right things,
slipped on apologies
littering the scene.
Hindsight led an investigation.
Expectation took most blame
for not checking detail.
The event never fitted
and prowled uneasily from its station.
Words patched some
 dented bodywork
but twisted metal sprung eternally.

Had to re-write history
just to claim on the insurance.

Stupid Bet

Evolution showed the mouse cheese.

Suddenly the cheese became a cat.

The cat chased the mouse who became a dog.

The dog looked puzzled but chased the cat on principle.

The cat became a horse and both looked puzzled.

The dog became a man who rode the horse.

The horse became a mushroom and the man looked silly.

The man angst about who he was, and where he had come from, and whether this was all real, and how stupid he felt about the whole business with the mushroom, and no, it wasn't sexual.

Then the man became a radish and didn't worry anymore.

The mushroom became a mouse. The radish became cheese.

This was the least number of moves necessary.

They had to pay up.

Evolution ate the cheese. The mouse filed for harassment.

Nature Will Not Play the Game

Hid by sunlight
I am only what green folk called me.
No mistletoe I
who fits day wrong side round.
No smell of twig or leaf adhere,
stink of standing stone, maypole glen.
I who climbed Jacob's ladder
out of forest where wood grieves still
spark crushed in my ashen white hand.
I am the Pale Son
bloodless, borne by wind
swift as smoke, strong as boulder
in which they tried to cage me.
Glanced once among oak fellow and yew
yet no longer.
I sing on wire now
fastened to sparrow and fox who run
apace your children.
Skulk on bird-table, fallow field.
I am holly in the enchantment,
nursery rhyme in which you celebrate murder
but still rest careless.
And I, licking tops
of milk bottles as you sleep.

Gravity

Magnetic

bolted into rocks, pulling lode needle
with muscle rooted in sun.

Deep of earth-belly

crucified in atoms
which peer into shrouds of nothingness.

Stateless

has no escape
stitching cloud and sky
to top of hill and mountain
wearing the grimace of that dark art.

Pursued by physics

who wrenches that language
savagely from lips yet cannot speak it.

Weary beyond infinity

survives,
grasping exhausted matter

on the weigh-scale of a hand.

Revelation

Fell from heaven
flat against concrete bones of speech
bruising itself on ugly words,
bigotry visceral in its embrace.
An angel in unlikely surroundings
cupping frail ears
as the electrical tongue jolted, shocked,
as great wings folded,
as it became *Icarus of the Sticks
and Stones*. Jagged syllables
swung backs of hands
against porcelain skin, indignity burrowing
as worms into unpolluted flesh.
The sophisticated perversion of rhetoric
strutted, untamed, even the religious creed
tasted of the stench of death.
Flapping lips of a rag doll,
filling lung with broth of tree and sun,
cords heaved oxygen treacle from mouth
releasing their heavy load:

I bring you glad tidings.

Hunter's Bad Day

Hunter busy trying to nail
Truth down
wielding a great hammer wrought from what little brain he had
with nails of paper
 onto shifting sand.

It squirted, slid,
and when he thought he had it
disappeared to reappear
 in a slightly different location.

Friends tried to help
but brought a staple gun
 and looked in entirely the wrong place
thus clouding the issue, so he had to kill them.

He bought self-help books
to corner the beast
but lost his mind reading each tome.

Evolution, busy painting politician's tongues silver,
suggested complete surrender.
Advice ignored, as Hunter leapt towards Truth
hands awash with knives.

He missed and pinned himself to ground instead.
Unable to move
tried desperately to snag its coat with his teeth.
Truth stepped back.
Worse,
mooned him from short distance.

Hunter's weeping so pitiful, even Evolution had to laugh.

Happiness Fable

Once, Happiness roamed
striding over endless plains

laughing, dancing,

singing at the apex of a great voice

loud, brash, falling over.

Then the Great Snake said *Idle hands are mine: be careful.*

So they tried to catch Happiness
but ears that hear heard them coming.

So they tried to bind Happiness
but ropes slipped free from carefree limbs.

So they tried to cage Happiness
but an open heart passed through all bars.

Then the Great Snake said *Listen to me: I can help.*

So they caught Happiness with fear and hate
using words that grow and bind by stealth.

So they bound Happiness with guilt and shame
using ropes that tie from the inside-out.

So they caged Happiness with work and duty
using bars that can't be seen or touched.

The Great Snake clapped with no hands
and pulled out a plum
and everybody sailed to hell
in a pea green boat.

Eve Speaks

As I was saying to my mother.....

beast, defeated, fell harmlessly back into the tomb,

As I was saying to my mother.....

for a glimpse of mineral, heaven was lost,

As I was saying to my mother.....

a brother who is immediate is not long enough,

As I was saying to my mother.....

She fell silent. Words did not fit together.

As she listened, they had no meaning,

Language became torn rice paper.

Arms wouldn't connect with her body,

children didn't belong in their pram.

Planet spinning on an axis

that was slipping, skewing away.

She walked. Clothes grew big on her.

Trailed on the floor bundled in huge piles

that became a spreading cloth tide.

Opened her mouth and dust cascaded.

As I was saying to my mother.....

Adam Listens

O you are a pretty thing.
O your smile lights the sky.
O when you laugh, I die.
O your breasts excite me.
O your tongue excites me.

Then wore ears
borrowed from stone
lest any word
filtered in
to smudge his vision of her.

Etcetera, Etcetera

Something lost.
No-one knew where.

Hands ripped the entire cosmos belly-up.
It became not found in many places.

Contractors interrogated.
Had it been left off plans? Even worse, built over?
They denied every accusation
banging tables, threatening to sue.

Boxes were dishevelled in great number.
Bottom drawers bore the main brunt
sustaining horrific casualties.

Eyes accused one another.

In desperation, theories were let out of locked minds.
They wrought terrible damage.
Many religious and flaky. Spoke of sin,
punishment, being scoured for your own good.

Sex blamed at one point
(although used to blame, was still hurt).

Never located: left off lists forever.

Many suspected Skulduggery. Skulduggery denied everything.
Produced an alibi.

Evolutionary Theory

Evolution, light-headed from smoking oxygen
and dating carbon,
pondered Science.

After musing spoke:

It is

*observation and experiment critically appraised
by sex-mad monkeys,
brainless information junkies
trying to rub two dry hypotheses together
to know everything
yet still can't even predict the weather.*

As Evolution laughed at its own wit
Science picked its pockets
taking loose strands of DNA
(the keys to its car).

Wisdom Dances with Truth

At sign of summer thickening into winter
when ice crimps leaves
homeless with rugged faces,
bewildered, tied by enchantment to each other,
Wisdom and Truth meet.

Both must keep faith with the other
but neither
may speak.
When guests come
they are dancing

feet pounding dust from wood boards
flailing arms and legs wildly, recklessly.
Though neither
has spoken
they sway to the same beat

yet badly.
As parents
at a sixth form dance
oblivious to circumstance
or their children's mortification.

How Hunter Discovered Fire

Implacably deranged, irrevocably at long odds,
the Suth watched the Menad through wordless eyes.
Adopted incidents stretching them into cause celebres.
Developed a new language, words such as immagrantii and woopo,
borrowed virtue and painted it in their own colours.

The Menad trafficked in discontent, honing rancour.
Dipped the Suth's flag in children's blood
holding it aloft shouting *Here, this is what they do!*
Beat themselves up in police cells out of spite.
Burst chests with instant answers, retribution, rap.

The Suth circled, drew short straws, trained relentlessly,
hatred sown as tin tacks which split the Menad's tyres.
Spent years welding young minds shut, bolting church doors,
drawing signs on coffee shops, sidewalks, synagogues,
growing an imaginary life free of them.

Then the Menad became an unacceptable rise
venturing into new beginnings, eroding old lifestyles,
dipping consumer arrows in silence and boycott.
They danced on their enemy's graves as hammers
never, never, forgetting. Grinding revenge fine as sand.

Suddenly they jammed together in great tides.
Stored sense away in a box, hacked off arms and legs,
pulled out teeth to carve them into bullets,
drew stars on each other, stamped passports with marks,
dry-gulched strangers in blind alleyways,

raised walls, built abattoirs to boil the other down.
Subtracted lives in huge numbers staggering under the weight
until billions lay dead hogging whole landscapes of graves.
Then burst atomic thoughts and uranium-tipped genes
and cantered through countries as agent orange.

Chaos watching felt they had some good ideas;
Truth watching asked to be left out of it;
Justice watching neither knew nor cared;
Logic watching said it all seemed perfectly reasonable.

Generations spent, battle fell exhausted, impossibly
depleted, the Suth and Menad, irrevocably dissolved.
One last survivor lay dying on the ground
scarlet hate of blood flowing, soaking into dirt,
scorched blackened skin belching acrid smoke.

Then Hunter (who had been hiding behind a tree)
snuck up from behind and bludgeoned it to death
learning a great lesson - always pick your moment.
And as Hunter pounded the smouldering body
his club burst into flame, gloriously, magnificently.

Hunter had discovered fire: his first great victory.

No-one else saw it as they had gone home
apart from Evolution who was sat making notes.

Fortress

Bliss

entombed in a brick wall
debased by graffiti
under a mountain
sunk in a sea
piled high with bones of drown mariners
concealed in a string bag
in pocket of a madman
dead and buried
in a town no-one has ever visited
enclosed by lead
sealed with seven seals
guarded by a two-headed dog
endlessly tormented by hunger
with a hundred eyes
and claws the size of cathedrals.

If (against all odds)
someone did find Bliss,
it was told to speak in a language
they could not understand,
make promises it would not keep,

then beat them to a pulp
and piss on them
(unless they were on fire).

The price of any commodity fixed by its rarity
and brutality of its defence.

Serendipity

The air calm. Nothing stirred.
He paced the street.
Sun beat down,
birds sang.
A hoarding displayed the same number
 as his car,
also
the number on a door.
He smiled.
Suddenly, everything fitted
 as tumblers
 dropping into place.
Paper held by wind
led to that self-same door.
In the doorway
a headline
shouted a name.
He bet everything on a horse with that name.
It lost. Bankrupt,
depressed, killed himself.

His widow won the lottery
using the date and time
of his funeral.
All her dreams came true.
Every one of them.

Mysterious accidents. As if by chance.

Friday Afternoon

Creation determined
to make all the irritating people in the world.
Get them out of the way.
Began with train spotters to get her eye in.
Pretty soon knee-deep in hippies, free spirits,
university professors who dressed as tramps,
anyone who delivered junk mail, computer nerds,
anarchists, advertising executives, new-age travellers.
It all got *out of hand*. They sang Kumbaya
which threw her lopsided. Organised marches
with huge banners. Were untidy
and dropped crisps down the back of her sofa.
Held days of action and sent letters
from solicitors. Started inventing their own
conspiracies (annoying as she'd
made more than enough real ones).

She became bollock-brained and gibber-headed.
Erased a couple but crowds gathered
to form a support group. Uncovered counselling
which she was hiding for herself.

She had picked a fresh day to cut the shapes from
but someone had slipped in an old one
already marked
with tattered edges.

Took a shower. The water was cold.
Found someone had stolen the soap
and left hair around the plug.

Water Sports

Evolution picked up the ball
drove a million miles, lived a million lifetimes.
The ball knackered.
Evolution picked up a small chimp
drove a million miles, lived a million lifetimes.
The chimp became an investment banker
who had a plush apartment with a pool.
Evolution threw the ball into the pool.
It floated. The investment banker did not.
Repeated the whole process several times
with different balls and chimps. Always the same result.
It proved something but Evolution wasn't sure what.
This became the first experiment.
It occurred long before outcomes or conclusions were invented.
Eventually the police were called.

Truth's Reassurance to the Breeze

Billowing sails in open wind
feet driven mindlessly, ceaselessly,
a wilderness of empty mouths
descending on a fertile land.

Cold weather with its flapping sleeves
kissing the traveller's face and hands.
Pushing, pushing, but they will not leave
tight in nests of stick and daub.

*See how they are just literal!
Flesh hung skeletons with children!
Hollow pits of bellies ranging
leaving scars upon our green house.*

*Do not grieve so, wind and water
though they grind your magic underfoot.
It has all been given to them
yet they come to death and fade away.*

Early Northerner

Out of sooty Yorkshire town he came
dressed in unspun flax, debris-strewn rivers,
metal girders welded together as a brain,
all artistry spat out as slivers

of coal, cracking in the molten fires he
once stoked. Foundry fodder. Then planted
his cleated boots, hard, hard, down into history
and said, *This is good. This is mine.* Re-invented

every lungful of wind as tribute to his asbestos breath,
adorned buildings with disfigured, half-demolished masonry,
all thought not clothed in steel or dug from earth
purged by that model of bone and broth called *Bitter Necessity.*

Said, *This is better.* Then called for the light
only found during overcast Manchester weather.
So rested. Content that in this fight
the world would be re-cast in his honour.

*

*It is not in the understanding
that life deceives, it is in the undemanding*

life you lead.

All life is toil. This was his creed.

*

Constitution refurbished to his own exacting
standard then soldered into place. Each homily a barb, the telling

of his tale. When he walked, gold would recede
to base metal and the ground would bleed.

*

He dismantled the 20th century
(the last full set on which to practice)

to several pieces - shifted, sorted - completely
reduced spoil to brick and mortar. All artifice -

opera, the classics - ground to dust.
Not a matter of taste, rather one of purpose.
In concrete and stone we trust!
Not the airy-fairy nature of the curious

and outlandish
who always take the other part,
smudge a canvas
and call it art.

*

Do not worry reader.

It is a fairy story, a fable,
spun for children
and adults
of a nervous disposition

of a man
so embroiled in his own certainty
and foolishness
he set out to destroy all mystery

in the world
so as to align creation
to
his own limited imagination.

It could never happen again.

And They Found Each Other in Later Life

what constraints or desolation
eyes, calm in unblinking light
fingers clasped in touching rhymes
hold this ease and falling night

this meeting, so unexpected
set beyond the clamour of youth
close in sound and smiling touch
leaning over a stranger's mouth

what moved this poetry of figures
dreaming of a distant moon
to look for flower's faded history
to sing in love's discovered tune

what passage of time is so constructed
built with hands which understand
who calls upon this place of knowing
sleeping in a foreign land

all summer in the messages
looks and words display, proclaim
what pierced a fallen heart's desire
so beautiful the spear became

upon such autumn leaves of passing
in gentle breath and flesh like wine
this fragile fruit, so long in growing
on open road and lover's bed entwine

Love

Love dripped from eyes first
 onto nape of neck
stumbling down the stairs of spine
jangling keys, making promises,
seeping through the litmus
 of sense and reservation
dropping both stone-dead in its wake,
out through tunnel of nerves, veins,
bleeding from fingers into a disbelieving hand
which fell, surrendered, into the fold
of another
 swung together
 as electricity swings through a tree
voltage splitting the trunk asunder.

First Love

His eyes needed mending.
They did not see
what his mind wished them to
and being adjusted, his heart leapt.
That breathless, inspired correction
armed the blank shot of his desire
illuminating it as music across a drab soul;
perverted heaven to a flower, drained
abdomen and groin
as slaves into her animal beauty.
Moments flooded
full of scholars and saints
dissecting each relevance, each aside.
Dramatic heights scattered to fill
normal space. His compulsion
stunned dogs in the street
and caused cars to crash.
He broke up with life and repackaged it
as a block of poetry. Became temporarily unstable
jangling among her cleavage
his nose bleeding with sheer venom of it.
O for romance, smouldering emotion.
Inherited the strength of a nation
and set about armies shouting his creed.
Released his mouth
to the depths of her pleated skirt.
Dug out a future with uncalculated plans
falling little boy at her feet
spilling over a chasm of distance between them.
When the time was right
asked if she would worship him
but she didn't want a deity
rather, a switch she could shape
over many years.

He expired in a breath
impaled on the blade of her uvula.
Fate chewed the remnant of his body
leaving scars on his wrists
which looked like thick fuse wire
but were not natural.

His body lost in memories
among unspeakable things
it did to itself. Despite many doubts
was born again
but this time without compassion,
tongue erased.

He spoke without smiles
having lost all mystery and invincibility.

Experimental Art

Today she would unveil the exhibit,
crack open every inch to public viewing.
A *coming-of-age* sort of thing.
Had lined up romance which sat flexing smiles.
Passion was tripping off tongues
and cantering into extremities.
Mesmerised her prey
who was all ends up, chivalry's empty head.
Words were throaty and sexy
and virtually ran towards the bedroom
unpacking all sorts of raw emotion,
shovelling great piles of bodily fluid.
It became momentous, also dark and trembling.
They dispensed with technique entirely at one point
with perpendicular acts performed
without any form of embargo.
Birthmarks were spotted drowning in limbs,
all planetary activity disrupted
by a blur of hands in secret recesses.
Glands gargled, there were tangles of membranes,
a pelvis that blew up out of all proportion
to its body.
Before long, they were both completely drained
left as faint tremors upholstered in muscle
sleeping in tired skins.

Unicorn

Heavens ached
empty belly blot sad.
All goodness, honour,
captured in a single frame.
Last of a kind: horribly lost.

No-one knew why or wherefore.
Mountains heaved,
metal bars twisted their own frame,
even death
(heart of stone)
shed a waterless tear.

Meanwhile, Hunter
who had trapped a white pointy thing
in a barn
was busy trying to shag it
(if it would stand still long enough).
Failing that, would eat it.

The Prophet

God hollowed his body to fit inside.
The man screamed endlessly. God held both ears.

Dragged him with the strength of madness
into seven hells, blasting him to clinker
and furnace leakage.
Man sat weeping. God retched.

Struck a match and clarified him to charcoal.
Pasted sulphur to his breath, ripped him
entrail-side out paralysed with fear.
Poured gold into the bunker
of his mouth.
Humanity winced. Said nothing.

Tempered, fitted,
God said *They will hate you. Now spread my word.*

Man stood,
a lopped-out scrag-end of ashtray.
Motioned to speak then fell dead as a twig.

God cast for volunteers. Humanity stepped back.

So God busied
arranging conjunctions and heavenly events.

People crept up
cutting fingers and toes from the corpse
to keep in velvet-lined boxes.

Adam Ran

He ran
as skies sombre and birds recede
he ran
as trees grew constructing their loose-leaf cover
he ran
as stars looked down
scratched from their fiery authority
he ran
as all eternity
contrived to speak only in his wake
he ran
as age tried to stumble humble him
and wear his legs to simple stumps
he ran
as waves lapped around his lungs
leaving him sea scraped and barnacle blessed
he ran
as sun beat and blister tortured him
he ran
as years took all understanding and comprehension
he ran
as the brutes of history
killed his children and wife
he ran
he ran
he ran

senselessly, mindlessly, free.

Eve's Bitter Pill

Sick

from root of tree, blind cavern

from core to core

from vacuum of word

from rictus of smile

from relentless gutless

 pictures in magazines

from ash skull

from what had been burnt there

from who had lit a fire and why

from endless mirrors, threat of death

from a corruption of code running endlessly

 as opera into a balmy Italian evening

from subtraction multiplication division

essay thesis career children

shopping dinner arguments television.

Every moment, space invaded

nested with wasps, whispers, wavering, wondering.

How she wished, wished, wished, it empty.

She would never forgive. No, not ever.

Sun Seeds Its Children in the Devastated Ground

Deserts sank roots deep
 into despair of the garden
cupping charred hands around arid tears of sun.

Ground bursting with itch
scratched with river fingers
pulling sand off a desperate dying hide.

From abundance to impotence
wept
buried under blistered skin.

While deserts,
sure in scorched victory,
roamed over parched boughs

austere as ash
looking up to the candle
lips mouthing the purest prayer

We are your mirror.

Fool's Errand

Time (who had no notion
of itself)
vowed to perfect emotion
distilling its essence
into a sweet child
called Sharon.

Turned the Bunsen on
to evaporate and clarify
even more.
Poured her nectar into a funnel
each drop caught
in a glass siphon
dripping onto her great-grandchild
John
below.

Analysed on a spectrometer
colour, hue,
then sampled that part
which was the best,
clearest,
into John's great-great-grandchild
Sue.

So it laboured
until Time got bored
and called the whole thing off
halfway through.

not realising it didn't fit
or he was a prisoner of it
or that it had throttled bodily fluid from him.
His family performed a post-mortem
but were unable to separate corpse
from adopted skin.

The story emerged from the wreckage of his life
preferring to call itself a parable,
wearing a high collar and dark glasses
to obfuscate its meaning
and appear enigmatic and well-educated.

Scandalously, it would later change facts
to serve its own ends.

Prayer Answered

God hollowed the skin
with an old fruit bowl
until it fell unspeakably empty.

No semblance of pulp remained,
only a breeze
puffed up the shell
strutting as a billowing sail.

The core - pips, blood, sinew -
spent their fibre
to dogs and cats
who came greedily to that ghastly table.

When dry, prepared,
husk filled with rice and sand
(for ballast)
and books
(for brains)
sewn up good and proper like.

Heart not replaced
as she requested.
What was the use of a thing
so easily broken?

Limbs flopped
 uneasily into distance
slapping against pavement and road

safe from pain forever.

Fool Moon

Fool moon

knew no other but to hide in the eye of an old man
who rattled him around worn pupil
dice in a cup til fool moon's head spun,
so he squatted in water and licked up on the tongue of frog
who jumped and jolted his grey bones,
so he hid in trees, wormed his way onto windowpanes,
sat for his portrait painted in idle evening drumming ghost fingers,

then

settled in the gaze of lovers preening himself in their deep pool
reflection
looking at the sky, face laughing
with the very sport of it.

Time Finds a New Game to Play

Unbeknown, Time entered the man at radial pulse
and climbed effortlessly through hollow tubes
singing melancholy songs which turned his hair white,
and thinking deep thoughts
that sank as submarines, poured into shoes
which made his feet boulders and heavy water,
and weaving guy-ropes out of metal
strung limb and neck and backbone together
so when Time pulled, he crumpled into himself.

Then stared through his eyes
at the pages of a calendar,
then wrote hymns on his tears
at the funerals of friends,
then pasted his body into photographs
taken before colour bled through silver

then paused. Lost in admiration
at the great beating, pounding heart,
chamber metronome heaving
before pressing the node button
and watching it splutter and cough as a car misfiring
or a firecracker jerking.
Pressing it on and off
as a child with a toy for many years.

Ancient Story

Profanity rested in a docker,
exhausted after a hard day's work
wanting to sleep and catch breath.

Sacred poked the man
and woke him up.

Profanity told her
to mind her own business.
Sacred blushed and giggled as a virgin.

So
set off to find a room to rent
in a book of pornography.
Sacred peeked around a page
wearing best doe eyes.

Ran
from house to house in an insurance salesman
wearing a thin smile as disguise.
Sacred found him and tripped him up.

He lifted her skirts
and spanked her hard on the bottom
thinking to get rid
yet she howled with laughter until her tears became a river.

That instant realised would never be free of her.

Profanity Takes Sacred on a First Date

He had found the suit of a young priest
and wore him well. Body fitted.
Had tried ears and eyes and teeth,
all satisfactory enough. Profanity invited
Sacred inside to take a look.

When they had cleared out
the clutter of his passion and had
carpeted him with verses from the bible
there was just enough room
to squeeze inside.

There they lived for many years.
They argued, fought, kissed,
didn't speak for months, then
gibbered away all night and for days on end

until they had totally worn the old
man out. His skin an oily dishcloth,
teeth falling from his jaw, mind
riddled with endless chatter
gasping for breath. Then they left

and looked for somewhere else
to finish their conversation.
Not even looking back to see
what happened to him.

Clock

Midnight fell

and blackness underneath was trapped.

Midnight fell

and moon tripped on stars and vanished underfoot.

Midnight fell

and Earth drew shadows about itself as an old man
pulls a coat around crumbling bones

saying

this is too lonely,

this is the dark mirror,

this is where souls throw their humans away.

Clock wore the face of a snail

pretending not to hear the cries of the people

until it slumped back next morning

completely exhausted,

ribs electric with laughter

astonished by its power.

On the Beach

Truth idly skimmed ideas
on the great tide of humanity
seeing how many bounces could occur
before a pebble sunk.

Became bored. Dropped truths
into a pool.
Watched ripples ripple.
Water boil.
The crabs started fighting.
They called it the holy crab war.
Lasted a thousand years.

One of those summer days
which seem to linger forever.

Had an ice cream. Watched the sun go down.

Life and Times

There was a man
who kept words in the cage of his soul
locked, hidden,
frame bending from weight of them.
Had pared each eye to celery stalk
and half-button of retina
lest they plunged headlong to a blink.
Became an unlit sun in whom all is lost.
Stood heavy with limestone skin
fearful of gunpowder thought
which never came. Sighed relief
and rested solid, unexploded,
did not breath for decades
in his awful plan.

Years died and buried themselves,
generations passed. He would not yield.
At eternity's gate
his obscene girth burst and split asunder
letting slats of belly spread
as a flower blooming.
Words tumbled out gasping for oxygen
sucking huge armfuls of air.
Many misshapen and deformed,
some written backwards,
some didn't know
 their own meaning anymore.
They rounded on him
wailing and crying for their lost children.
All eyes looked away
fearing to lose sanity
in grief of the moment.

Words tried to write their story
but bounced off paper.
Had to be left to rot
as cabbages do
around the back of a restaurant.

Hide and Seek

She was barely shot through
by a sliver of Hope
before Fate came-a-hunting.

Fate sniffed her out, suspected, trailed relentlessly.
Derailed her, ripped every friend asunder.
Kept her naked underneath drab clothes
yet she gave nothing away.

Knitted arthritis with hands and feet.
Hollowed her womb bare for bees to use
yet she hardly wavered.

Locked her in a marriage box without oxygen
for many years
scrubbed clean on a washboard of work.
Turned the mangle until blood screamed from her.
She smiled. Planned for better days.

Dug her garden to wasteland.
Made her into a woman who sits in a wasteland,
grinding brain out of ears as sand.
Even so, she would not give up her secret.

Mad with rage,
flogged her senseless with mortality
popping her like a balloon.
Then, wearing a coroner's glove,
split the remnant pod open, peeled skin
and out jumped Hope. There all the time!
Utterly untouched, utterly untroubled,
delighted to have won.

Fate closed both eyes. Started counting.

Science Speaks Fission

Draped in education (the first great lie)
knowing nothing but what the void had told it,
Science hinted at the source
 that river
 directly flowing
 to the sea.

Its ship, a radical sloop carved from fine intentions,
lay beached on the shore.
A lifeboat to the shipwrecked
already on dry land.

Equations, dipping into atoms,
returned drunk with power
and spilled into fingers which would one day
press a button (in good faith, after due process)
to cast a whole city adrift.

The Golden House

Slaves of nations steeled themselves,
worried deeply,

brains were lashed together on rafts of plans,
children grew ancient

muttering calculus of root of square of windows
all to build the greatest building never seen.

Rooms arose hogging whole horizons.
Gardens drenched a countryside.

Artisans went home irrevocably shattered,
high and mighty went home

blood of local builders on their hands.
Monument to somebody or something.

When they departed, Time beat the planks off it.
Dusted walls with decay, spread lawns with rubble.

Someone wrote a song. Time raked its melody into rubble.
There was a moral somewhere.

Time hammered the crap from it.
Buried everything in an unmarked grave.

He Was That Man, He Was

He was small mountains, sound of running water,
cut of a sail into an iced north wind,
could stride against the chasm, step lightly, and survive,
and when they buried him, buried him, buried him,
he was the stretch of roots growing, tangled, bursting
spaghetti god
of deep loam, strings playing trees and branches
as marionettes, heaving buds through the great earth mirror
in song
and the beating, pulsing, savage dreams of worms.

Cruel Trick

Profanity hid
buried under a thousand years.

Teams dug with shovels and picks
yet could not find him.
Expeditions of maps and texts
written in languages which were buried themselves
could not find him.
Then, as if by accident, he jumped out at a shepherd boy
disguised as an ancient clay pot.
In the pot, a scroll.

Scroll announced
Sacred wasn't who she said she was
but some whipper-snapper usurper instead.
Promised if only they could decipher the code
they would know her for who she really was

and because scroll was dripping with history
it was already nearly true.

Many wrote books and speculated.
Fashioned careers lecturing on syntax, how
the paper had been made, the ink which stained it.

Sacred got very, very, angry.
Profanity had never seen any literary vehicle this angry before.

Announced he was ever so sorry
and told everybody how he had done it

though by then they had a new deity,
which although small
kept them all in work and well-fed.

Hence,
wouldn't hear a word against her.

Even worse,
Profanity did the same again
a million times in a million different ways.

In the end,
Sacred knew who she was
but no-one else did

and even she got confused.
Sometimes left the oven on
and the front door unlocked.

Once, found on the street in a nightdress.
Profanity told me. In confidence.

Young Lovers

She was cheap and provocative
came in high heeled shoes
with a variety of heart-stopping poses.

He came in low baritone
cheap as second-hand chips
heart and soul of clumsy.

He pulled Hunter on as a second skin,
she wore Creation and little else.

When they clambered together all heaven shook.
There were earthquakes in wherever
and other places which had never known
seismic disturbance before.

People from an adjoining galaxy
started banging on the bedroom wall to get some sleep.
Great quantities of sperm erupted.
Amounts previously unheard of in polite conversation.
He dived into every orifice he could find
and several he couldn't.
She filled up like an all-night cafe offering free food,
smiled delicately
then ground his battered member
until it started smoking.

On occasion, sheets spontaneously combusted
and the fire brigade had to be called.
Moderation fainted and awoke covered in sperm.
The fire brigade were covered in sperm.
Horses in the street petrified
they would be covered in sperm.
Organs enlarged in size relentlessly.
Tongues became three feet long
with the strength of sumo wrestlers.

She wore a nurse's uniform and stilettos;
he wore himself out into base elements.
Balls and ovaries met and arm wrestled
 a best of three set series
then returned for a rematch.
Orgasms rushed about the place
bumping into innocent strangers
 setting into motion all manner of comic events.
They invented myth and legend.
A great tide of perversity
fried an entire forest to a crisp,
planets wobbled,
nations covered their ears
 to the unending mayhem.
Gave birth to tribes of children
yet barely paused for breath
banging shit house door in a tornado.
Finally, fell back exhausted, happy.
Read a book by the light of their private parts
 which by now were glowing in the dark.
Went to sleep.

Hunter and Creation crawled out completely shattered.
Vowed never again.
Retired taking only a tube of ointment.

Slept for several generations. Totally, utterly, shocked.

Inquisition

Truth determined to ignite a generation.
Bought kerosene
and took shackles off hell by way of preparation.
Announced the plot in a small, yet influential, book
placed inside the head of an eminent grey-haired scholar
who, being scholarly, had lots of room to spare.
The worthy, all properly accredited,
wore special robes for the day.
Arrived on cue. First, tried to beat Truth out of him.
Truth held the scholar's tongue. Steadfast.
Next, they tried reason, threats, bribes,
pokers, and long tongs shaped as pincers.
Truth held firm, though it got a little noisy.
They would not leave until the scholar quite dead.
Afterwards, Truth returned
as whispers and leaflets when no-one was looking.

A good day's work if a little dull.
Same and same again.
Only the pokers changed
becoming more sophisticated and deadly each passing year.

Truth spent a lot of time
with a poker up its arse. Still does.

History Lesson

Baby from the gutter womb fell
vilified, half-mad, senseless with rage.
Smacked, squealed as a pig
into ocean towel below.
They bundled it with trash
but it climbed out fighting wars.
They tried to ignore it, but it burnt
their houses and married their children.
They ran but it followed
torturing balance from them.
Then it rested
biting nipple off breast
fool enough to succour it
reasoning *I have no blood on my hands*
 you have not put there.

In the end, found its filth of nest
and clubbed it with razors and spikes.
Buried it in a casket
bound by chains
yet it haunted them.
So, they bleached it with history,
bound it in book and biography
where all can be tamed
with impunity.

Their final revenge
to ask what others could learn from it.

Trick of the Light

Truth chanced upon lovers.
They lay, utterly bled into reds and mauve.
A canvas of sheets
framed their art. His breath admonished her
in pastel shades.
Her dreams replied in deep blue and green,
hands marbled
in rainbows
of expectation.

Truth attempted to capture the scene
but couldn't decide.
Painted silhouettes in an ancient daub
as Caesar and Cleopatra.
Didn't fit.
Tried her in scarlet with screaming lipstick
and sluttish tint.
Not correct.
Settled for a charcoal wash, smudged,
you could see shapes but nothing clear.

They awoke
diminished to grey.
Colour, so clear before, drained.
They left to a separate way.

The Displaced

Torn from forest,
aboriginal in front skin of face
 that is wearing simplicity
 and mask of trust,
it is a deer
dipping its own death-arrow
in the poison of open ground;
it is a refugee pared from land
 eyes blooded,
 body shattered by an evil tithes;
it is a whole country
dressed in a wrong century
speaking the language of victim
wrenched from an ancestral home;

it is a one-sinewed snail
ripped from clothes of shell

naked as naked is

mesmerised in a constellation of eyes
which will smash,
interrogate its terror,

then agree an altar
on which it will be devoured.

An Allegorical Account of Poet Writing the Book

He railed against the Great Snake,
he railed against *what you know*,
he railed against fate and resignation.

Decided to leave the Great Snake
for others to feed,
live outwith its coil and venom,
try a taste of being free.

But the Great Snake followed him
so he hid mightily,
but the Great Snake sniffed him out
so he threw poems at it,
but the Great Snake ate his poems.
Stop! He retired too exhausted to think.

Then the Great Snake
rattled a stick along the railings of his ribs
and dug holes
for his feet to find to trip him sideways,
lopped the top branches of his sense
so he had barely a canopy of reason left.

He threw caution away
discarded odds (which he didn't like the look of)
and grasped the Great Snake
with all its certainty of doom.

They fell. Fallen, fell some more.
Limbs dropped off, blood spattered (the usual)
until it lay deadish at his feet.

Horribly, his feet were no longer with his body
nor were his arms or hair

or teeth or genitals.

Only his self-respect was left
but that wouldn't buy a can of corn at today's prices.

He breathed a limbless breath
and saw a light at the end of the tunnel.
With astonishing bad luck
the 7:05 to London.

They fed remnant of his remnants to children
as fairy stories and cautionary tales
scaring them wildly,
making sure they would not go into woods
nor try their luck at anything different
nor ever, ever, open the box of life.

All worth it then.

He lies buried in an unmarked grave at poet's corner
in Sainsbury's car park
near where trolleys are parked.

On a full moon
you can hear the Great Snake pissing itself with laughter.

When Hunger Left Him, He Shouted

Hunger had worn him,

fed thick limbs
as if they were caverns to fill,
as if all food was its tithe,
alarm clock
counting hours
between sacrifices to his deity.

So when
Hunger discarded him
and the man blinked free,
and shouted obscenities repeatedly
and blood-red dyed arms and legs
and stretched his skin to parchment
and spent muscle fibre
 as a riverboat burning deck and paddle
 to continue a chase

he shrivelled to stump.
Flesh dipped in tallow,
teeth as needles in ulcer mouth

mourning the passing of his full belly
as a grave singing.

Hunger shuddered
looking only ahead,
leaving him as a toy leaves its pleasure
 in the hands of children:

as a ghost or not even that.

Death Nowhere to be Found

Death has hidden in life.
Become the madhouse laughing
peeking from behind masks of locked doors.
It is risen in stones
 scattered as God's bones on grass.
Floundering in a smile, thirsty, hungry,
under a prison of disguises.
Sleepless, listens
swallowed by its own emptiness
perfumed as Lazarus
shattering green leaves to yellow parchment.
The rigid faces of birds are watching
peeling shadows from it.

It is a lament surprised by life.

It is worshipping dust for all life ends there.

It has put on hands and feet
 and become deaf, dumb, and blind again

staggering horribly amongst the living
who are ailing in its shadow
 despite prayers leaking from their mouths.

Reality Update

The goddess-whore
who had been busy all morning
doing washing and housework,
and who had already worked herself
to stupor,
sat down for morning coffee.

Thought
now I am woman, what shall I do with it?
Decided marriage the best option.
Arranged to interview men
with a view to filling the position.

Many she talked to were insane,
others flattered her on size of her breasts,
some too busy fixing cars
to notice,
some wrapped her in cotton wool
and polished her senseless,
most wanted to have sex while drinking beer.

A shock.
She became totally disrupted from her zone.
On realising her predicament
all the cloth in the world could not
wipe the tears from her eyes
but that line was too corny
so she deleted it from the poem
(it is only reproduced here under licence).

Could not find a man who had
none of the qualities listed above.
After deciding to become a harridan,
married Hunter
who had all those faults in one grim package.

They lived together their individual lives.
She practised becoming
the butt of jokes and wearing offcuts;
he tried to master simple things
such as talking with his mouth full.
The marriage a complete success
in opinion of Chaos
who made it into a template
for the rest of humanity to use.

Had two children named Famine and War
who grew big and strong
and visited regularly.

In old age
mastered the art of becoming stereotypes
(a position which came with
slippers and a pipe in those days).

Later, became a story in a trendy magazine
and a whole chapter in a book on venereal diseases.

Were buried in adjoining graves
long before they were dead.

A rum do all round.

Too Late

Used thing fell,

spent now.

Not blessed with fulfilment

but bent broken-backed buildings,
smashed bottles,

discarded prostitutes,
angry newspapers peddling hate.

Bowed,
spitting destiny out
as bad blood between brothers

pleading mitigating circumstance
aching for a reprieve.

The mouth's reply
sound of a prison door slamming.

Magical Occurrence

Though dead,
soul stripped and laundered,
her body would not
stop its wandering.

It clambered heroically
from satin lined coffin
ranting aimlessly,
exploding doubt as fireworks
among laity and clergy alike.

They brought bishops
to consecrate the dead thing's tongue
but it glared treason and blind hatred
from unseeing eyes.

They appealed to *better nature*
but that had been
digested and recycled by worms.

It begged
for all things never done
for all emotion never felt
for one more bloody good shag
but they could not understand
the clacking of its empty cords.

So,
they nailed it to a coffin with nails
 made from certainty of loss
which were beyond debate.

Buried under boulder, tree, hill,
still questions the order of things.

Unscheduled Break

Universe: pissed off to gunnels.

Had embraced Truth in good faith, thinking it original
but there were millions
all looking the same from outside-in
yet totally different from inside - out.
Many had sell-by dates attached.
Most already expired.

And Time was no use. Curved and bendy
when it should have been hard and straight.

And stars kept collapsing after they were hung up.

The only thing that worked was Chaos
and that wouldn't switch off.

Pined for the certainty of the void.
Went on holiday. Left no forwarding address.

Astronomers spotted unopened milk bottles on the doorstep.

Personal Statement

For all the poets I have killed

under the yoke of ugliness,
that alchemy of muscle, skin,
infinite complexity of a beholder's eye,
forgive me.

For all hope I have crushed
between the struggle and certainty
of a perpetrator's relentless grasp,
let me be absolved.

For all innocence lost
torn as payment,
wandering precariously between persuasion and threat,
I await the denial of my guilt.

It is stony ground Eden
 of which I dream.
Sapling, turned earth,
harvest rippled with good seed.
For Eden haunts me still.

Who will I blame?
Where will I go or be made welcome?

Tragedy Played Out

Nothing left but ritual,
grief, passing.
A mother overcome
 by horizons disappearing.

Silence shot
 into tongue and thought
of the faithful.
Whole play enacted
as if the sequence of rite
 was holy in its enactment.
A word misplaced
might cause an edifice to fall
irrevocably, dreadfully, shattered.

Blame in the corner
wrapped
in guilt
waiting for the call

to skulk among twilight hours
whispering into bottomless
 pits of ears

speaking words they need to hear.

Life Riddle

Babies falling from the very tip of sky
through loopholes of clouds recklessly, blindly,
liquidating distance, exhausting speed,
ripping into sound,
embroidering noise as speech.

On, on, ever deeper, faster,
among word-painted pages, secret messages,
learning ten commandments

(some of which they kept)
passing many possibilities on their way.

Disturbing dust on sideboards
in sheer screech of passage.

Listening in tongues
then speculating in many languages.

Diving into obscenity,
shedding childhood sweethearts,
evaporating sense in that heady descent.

Stumbling into shallowness,
yoke, confusion, photographs of themselves.

Plunging, plunging, gravity terrified
having children

getting old and fat
writing memoirs on envelope's backs.

Bodies molten
flesh dripping off arms in alleyways of sweat.

Reading, grieving,
prisoners of memory helplessly waiting
then, bleached by velocity,
they hit the ground SPLAT.

Now what was the point in that?


Cautionary Tale

Adam awoke in a strange bed.
Late. Sunday morning. His head hurt.
Looked up at someone frying sausages.
Desperately tried to remember her name.
She turned. *Hi, I'm Eve. Back with the living?*
They talked over breakfast.
She said she loved music and literature
and spilled hot coffee over his trousers.
He said it didn't matter
but his gonads were fried to extinction.
Late for things he had to do.
Swapped numbers
and said he would call
but the words died as he said them.
Drove home
swearing to keep off cider. Never rang,
never intended to. All a big mess.

Nine months later
a letter from her solicitors.
Baby born.
Looked like him. No doubt.
He contested maintenance,
didn't want to know anything more.

She went to the press
and it all came out. Not the first time.
He couldn't remember any of it
but there it was in black and white.
In the beginning...

All a nightmare.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white, flowing, lace-trimmed dress, is submerged underwater. She is looking upwards with her right hand raised. The water is a deep blue-green, and sunlight filters down from the surface, creating a shimmering, ethereal atmosphere. Bubbles and light rays are visible throughout the scene.

It slithered
eel toad slime as it did
wrapping the muscle of tensed cord
of its length
helter-skelter
around the branch of his manhood.

Every word deadbolt sorted
pounding on the cliff of understanding

toothless, limbless,
more dangerous than ever.

Spine of rippling razor wire
gimleting the unwary
held as a drawl
or yawn
in the headlamp of an eye .

from 'The Great Snake'