

The Likeness is Applied to the Canvas

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A compilation of thirty-six individual poems not previously included in a collection, and a series of thirteen poems written loosely around the creation of art.

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## Our Fabulous Dead

If you listened to the dead, they would rant all day.

The skull as conch - hear the note it plays.

Lips pregnant with paradise can seldom abstain

from dissecting their prey; reprising as elegy

every credible lie and unseasoned truth they contain.

A withered husk as tutor? As if sod and clay

had blanched their frame, charged mute jaws

to shout that confirmation, shrill exhortation,

from dust. Unfetter them, unbind the shroud - see how they

always agree on every interpretation or classification,

they will never disagree - merely keep their own counsel.

Let bearers shoulder that weight, as death should.

Throw them in the air. If they fall correctly, you may

pick them up, bend as yew or elm to shape a bow

then fire your arrow dipped in their blood.

## Derby

Sunday. The bare-arsed cheek of it.

Stranded at some barren siding.

The dead travel faster than British Rail.

Speaker coughs an idle lying

yarn about this and that. Outside,

a disused beck. Two boys sit fishing

with a net. Which reminds me,

they say if you take two tadpoles,

wrap them in cloth, keep each wet,

they grow into frogs with three legs.

There's a reason for it, apparently.

Everything's connected, cause - effect.

*We will be forty minutes late into Derby.*

Guy for the airport starts to sweat.

Croissant buttered with a plastic knife.

The mystery deepens. No coffee yet.

## A Walk Along the Edge of Water Coming In

Footprints

sink into the beach,

imprints

hostage to the sea.

Sand

impacted tightly

briefly dries

then soaked again, as each cast

gently imbibes

the tide then sets it free.

Rain

falling steadily

punctures a fluid skin.

Ocean

eager to return,

hardly noticing.

## Brief History of Desire

In the depths

taste is an afterthought,

a late delivery of sense

you can live without.

It is in the mystery

of these things

we lose ourselves.

Wine of a moment,

bare room,

loss of space

between lips and hips.

It is in the day

of the event

we catch our breath. Cull sanity

from rubble.

Lead the guilty body home.

## Memory

When we are born, loves us. Stumbles

to our core; kicks against a blank page;

shapes dreams with stick of shadows past.

Falls improbably when we speak

of childhood days. Indistinct. Timeless.

Some grow that grasping frame

as a global test, its hammer pounds their steel

harsh against the anvil: pummelling,

crushing, shaping. The hollow thud

fills the night air with restless waking.

Others in fear seek refuge

in a lonely track which only looks ahead.

But refreshed, fed on scraps of paper,

calls our name. Never when you want,

always when you don’t. Dressed in

autumn years this half-forgotten rascal

comes home to roost. Raps knuckles

with the golden rule.

The old fox rails and shakes the villain’s hand.

## Car Park

Sod them all. They told us not to play here

but on this estate, where you can scrape enough mortar

from walls with a stick to make your own sand pit, where

do we play? Decent football pitches harder

to find near us than pirate treasure. Not bloody Eton.

Besides, it’s the boundary line between us and the gang

we play from Cobb Avenue. Time in the war where on

Christmas day they stopped shooting and sang

carols and stuff - took their jackets off for goals.

Well, no-man’s land’s also our ideal location, so they

can stick the notice up the council’s arsehole.

Me, I’m wondering who salted cash away

from cement they didn’t order. We only stop playing

for broken bottles. Glass underfoot. Like on the telly

when they cancel games for snow or flooding.

With us, a dickhead with too much cider in his belly.

## Welcome Change

Welcome change from company I normally keep:

keyboard, screen, and yours truly. Sound of people -

their stories, reminiscences, troughs, and peaks -

cast adrift into the ether. I am both willing and able

(on occasion) to hear other’s thoughts out loud.

I heard a report that conversation,

(a vehicle for exchange of body language and sound)

can be a rich source of information.

Hence, if one becomes a good listener

it might actually be of use. Well, who knew?

Not that I need the help of any such banter.

My thoughts in perfect working order. Another view

is hardly needed. I just thought this might serve

to illustrate how much better off you could be

to hear my voice repeatedly. Really, you deserve

it. No need for thanks. You’d do the same for me.

## America, America

I poured America from the bottle.

The taste no less than a feast of guidebooks,

each place shouting its name, waving its own

dirt road like a flag calling the hungry,

dispossessed, to lie in their wine-blessed cloth,

leech the good soil, to harvest fat green grapes

and squeeze that single run of nectar dry.

To go there one day! Dig each foot deep, deep

into the vine-clad clay and boundless land.

Follow old trails and the smell of ripe fear

ridden in a one-horse town as night falls.

I would wipe my feet on the dust bowl mat,

drink from glasses shattered by my drunk host.

Travel broadens the mind. I know that now.

## Vigil

His frozen wits

occasionally wresting free

when he pulls her arm or shouts for tea or his son.

Mostly he is quiet.

She plays her part

in good faith. Cropping legs

of trousers as he shrinks,

dabbing piss stains to the left of the zip.

When a neighbour calls

there is talk

of how lightning can leap from televisions

and how weather is affected by planes.

Sometimes when he yells at night

thinks to smother him with a pillow

but knows he is still strong

and may hit her as he used to.

## Rant

The price of tickets rises exponentially

with need, or shortness between booking

and journey. It is the offset of supply

and demand writ large, chips falling

where they may. All of life a struggle.

This is one more facet, one more aspect

of that battle if you needed any such example.

The tale of when you connect

two places on a map, or send a person

to a destination, scene is set

for others to not only provide transportation

but to squeeze revenue and profit

to maximum effect. Same all over,

companies must be fed. But where has service gone?

Pride in what you are part of - or might offer?

Efforts now confined to marketing slogans.

What about *Often promises but seldom delivers?*

That should be on all the posters.

Tales of signals, snow, and flooded rivers,

crawling on a stretch of track no faster

than a bicycle, because (and this is good)

the *wrong leaves* fell beneath the wheels.

God invented railways so people would

know how eternity looks and feels.

## Fell Walker

Road fading

in the wake of legs

outstripping all distance laid before them.

Tension

coiled between dull eyes

and pistons of feet

playing itself out,

throwing an arrogance of flesh

hard against the bodiless might of hills.

Ankles puff and rattle

insulated from the trail

as muscles plunge deep into service.

Unpacking the spine of the world

in strips

sliced from earth’s rippled skin.

Wringing last drops

from brass lungs which hang

clanging,

bells pulverising their own mountings.

Stops.

Scans the spoils of his stride,

dimension of journey planted.

Suddenly jerks

shuddering with steam

rested fibre

lurching to fresh exertion,

slat of body

tensed and set once more.

## Rail Station

Monument to an enlightened hand

whose vision, plan,

of steel-tipped track and locomotion

once spread with missionary zeal.

Casing, bolt, wheel,

testament to that devotion,

precision of their dream.

Cathedral to a faith

built beyond mere need.

Iron and stone as canon and creed.

Now, reduced to blemished grandeur

platforms strewn in disrepair.

Anachronism, oddity,

in today’s less extravagant times.

Passion, fervour, somehow lost

sacrificed to a lesser god

of efficiency

and us, left all the poorer.

Cliché, sin, and recurrent curse,

to know the price of a thing

but not its worth.

## Blackpool

Bundled in the scorching sun

long days spin

webs of sand and buckets,

ice cream vans and salt sea.

Deck chair wars

fought silently on strategic beaches,

armies of red stripe

slyly outflank

blue stripe, twenty pence dearer.

Tide wipes the slate clean

at end of play.

Wriggling seaweed

grasps giggling toes

jumping in the splash and spray,

with plans of fresh tomorrow's

and fish 'n' chips again.

Confused crabs scan

bulging bags and floppy hats.

Mutter silent crab oaths

in rock pools

awash with wide eyes

and pink fingers.

Little hands shape castles,

fortress from a spade,

as older hands

(no wiser)

let a summer slip away.

## Shipping Water

Nowhere left to hide for the cheapskate

who wouldn’t pay the going rate. Ceiling is a river.

To go for the insanely low quote probably a mistake.

Mad Italian roofer, no scaffolding, balancing on a ladder,

more circus act than trade. The bedroom has just drowned.

Then, newly fitted kitchen, pride and joy, discovered flooded.

Trap is checked, bends are traced, but breach not found.

Who would not use the good plumber? What bonehead

called the local cowboys in to make a tiny saving?

Screwed forever. And cursed. Words are said. Insults fly.

Comments such as *Cheap bastard* and *Miser* begin the reckoning.

*Those whom the gods wish to destroy…*

well, they send bad weather. Poured all week.

Where is Noah when you need him? It gets better.

Eight guests for dinner and suspect the leak

is the shoddy bit of pipe to the dishwasher.

## Grave Digging

It is precise work,

sweat

drifting from corporeal brow.

Cold steel

puritanically aligned

upon a dark and bawdy soil.

A secular passion

from this Poseidon of the tuber

whose indecorous hands

belie

a sense of artistry,

an accuracy of pleasure.

Who, in search of perfection

burrows crude clod and loam

to his terrestrial will,

shapes domain for depth, size, and contour,

flattens hewn dirt

with a spirit of adventure.

Scans

with an unerring eye

the indecent clay and lascivious dust.

Exhumes lessons from the day.

Curses, and moves on

to cut the seductive ground once more.

## Succulent

Your alien green style

infatuates the eye.

Balloon leaves,

structures, as if primed to fly

or fall harmlessly

at a wind’s idle whim.

Yet I know

the worlds water imprisoned within,

held hostage

against life’s harsher times.

How the delicate, frail,

can outsmart a desert, sun-blasted climes,

which would roast me whole.

A short, puffed length

of buffed, lime nonsense

a fine disguise for subtle strength.

## String

Bits drop off as you grow older.

I have seen whole people fall apart

in a strong wind or from a bump in a road.

Pieces everywhere.

A muffled *Excuse me*

as they search desperately for a leg or arm.

The young know this.

They are held together by strong rope

and laugh at such flimsy construction.

They can drink all day

and not get up at night.

They are gods to old folk

who worship them

and would sleep with them if they could.

No fun having detachable parts.

The old complain bitterly.

The young roll their eyes

in that way they do, perfected in their infancy.

The old mutter darkly

draped in rubber bands, Elastoplast, and string.

Something about *Just you wait: you’ll see.*

The young recognise this as the sour grapes it is.

## Beginning Writing with No Thought of the Whole

Too fast from the blocks: a marathon, not sprint.

Off running with no idea where I’m going.

Searching for inspiration ten long days in, barely a dent

in the commission, plagued by indecision, not knowing

arse or elbow, or which way to go to finish the journey.

Tell me, what sort of idiot sets out

trusting to fate? Needs to overwrite a story

to fit the elements together? They tell me doubt

can be a wonderful thing. Adds spice. The unexpected.

Under time constraints, print runs, sword hanging

and closing in, any gap between hand and head

is a bad thing. I know that now. Safer to string

lines from introduction to conclusion to construct a path

then walk down its length and mark a track

with words as signposts to guide a reader. You do the math.

Better to tack start to end, than stitch all the sections back-to-back.

## Editing

As if all the world could fall due to one wrong letter,

skewed paragraph, incorrect tagline. No doubt

over-analysis is an affliction. Drags you in. Work never

good enough to go. But there is no time to linger. No letting out

of any reins to canter aimlessly or scan the view.

The respect that language, forever growing, evolving, expects.

Constant vigilance. Where a phrase can be read in a new

and unexpected way to re-invent itself. Where solid text

can spread from a misplaced comma or rogue apostrophe.

Where revision or omission brings a threat to meaning

which the simplest change can manifest all too easily.

A challenge fusing disparate parts together, of revising

size, content, and style, to stay within the shackles

prepared for it. It is an insular occupation.

Behind the front line. Foot soldier in the battle

between timeliness, detail, and lure of perfection.

## Sharpening a Blunt Pencil

Flimsy first draft, a commissioned author,

the need to shape and strengthen structure

to make it support its own weight.

Truth be told, the manuscript in an awful state.

No end of patching required.

Still, writer, hired and delivered

has spoken

so make ready the pen.

Slice the whole apart,

move, substitute, part

unsupported conclusion from threadbare

foundation. Down to judgement, really. Knowing where

to go in guns blazing or leave well enough alone.

Eventually, the bones

made solid. Astonishingly

by the end, the work grudgingly

converted from confused mess into decent reading.

Creating anything worthwhile seldom easy or undemanding.

The seemingly effortless final version

underpinned by talent, experience, and endless revision.

## Disconnected

A bad day,

not a metaphor

to hang a verse on.

The machine

I call my brain

is broken.

I scribble aimlessly

in the forlorn

hope

of dredging out

some

poetry.

The well

so dry

it is dusty.

## Soliloquy

I think about love a lot.

What it is and what it is not.

Is there a bargain to be made?

For each new love one has to fade?

Or is it unlimited, simply flows

however much it expands and grows?

I have looked at love more than most.

Perhaps, I have looked too long, too close.

A collector who pins out every specimen,

carefully teases out the limb,

but strips the butterfly of its wing.

When young and impressionable

everything so simple.

Black and white,

wrong and right.

Older, we realise life

wields a more subtle knife.

## Burial Customs

I have not been there since his dust was sown.

It does not seem to me to be of note

where the ashes of a life may be thrown

whether on unknown fields or streets he knew.

Why visit there? What might I hope to see?

Not the substance of stone or sepulchre

you could somehow invest with mystery

and in its mortar place a fragile trust

so you might rest assured *They only dream*.

But scattered over an unyielding ground

assuming no identity or scheme.

Surely, hard to remember there or mourn,

remnant dispersed in anonymity.

A reminder of what I must become,

inheritance of life’s one certainty.

Page of my own life unwritten as his.

## Conversation with Ghost Monks at Leyburn

Confined by stone through arched vaults

and smooth wood

did you smell the burnt smoke

and feel the candle’s heat?

Were you bound in leather pages and coloured ink

like the book

to dance on sheets held in frail white hands

broken by relentless years?

Did glass that splintered the good light

illuminate your way

and astonish in its intensity, the coarse linen

and prostrate limbs laid on a cold floor?

Tell me now what held you; kept you there.

What stilled your heart through a river of doubt

and confusion

as young skin aged to vellum, and eyes strained in dim light

to fall exhausted in their sacrifice?

Was it voices in song that would not let go,

the empty room and silence?

Tell me now for I do not know,

your penance beyond any reason or measure

but I would walk with you

and try to understand your way.

## Uncle

For as long as I knew him, he had old men’s bones.

Looking back, he was barely older than me now.

Whose hide did he wear and why?

Had his worn out on the graveyard shift

helmet off, picked up shrivelled skin as a coat

before he realised, too late?

I broke bread and watched him eat

mash and sausage and thick gravy,

that empty plate ritual performed each day.

We went to see pictures. Afternoon matinees

when I should have been in school.

Ice cream and Kiora

in a deep, dark heaven watching *She*.

A shower of eternal youth

cascading to the back row.

Me, a boy, looking at him and wondering.

## Judas as a Small Child

Of course, he was a bit of a lad

even then. Used to pull my sisters hair.

Throw mud at me and run away

laughing. I never could catch him.

Always first in races. Ran like the wind.

Great at games too if I remember. In fact

that’s what sticks in my mind most, his energy.

Always on the go, and good fun too.

You could rely on him in a jam. We had

plenty of those. Always thought he knew

best. Argue with anyone. Got into no end

of trouble. We used to tease him about it.

He’d get madder and madder, but we’d laugh

afterwards and be friends again. There was

no malice in him, you see. He was a good

mate. Bit headstrong but aren’t we all?

## The Marina

Do you recall the last time I said that?

It stands apart from all the other times

as we were down by the marina. You know, what

used to be the beck. Part that climbs

up to the footpath near the old cinema.

Surely! The place we used to go

to see those arthouse movies. Don’t you remember?

One with what’s his name and Bridget Bardot

that was a shocker. No clearer?

Corner from where we had

booked a restaurant to follow. Our very first dinner!

When you said your dad

would murder me if I didn’t get

you back in half an hour. Surely now?

What’s that, your dad? Old git

with a limp hitched to the evil cow

who was your mother. Her? She stayed

with us when she sold her flat

without telling anybody. A decade

sharing space with that viper. I almost snapped

and began to drink. No? What about the day

she stole our cash and ran off with a trucker?

Anyway, as I said, the one thing they can’t take away

are the memories we made together.

## Winter in Oxfordshire

To set out on a morning such as this!

We struggle in the snow but push on through.

Our breath ignites the air and hangs as mist,

a whitewashed world subsumes the one we knew.

As far as you can see the sheet complete

apart from where our tracks disturb the fall.

The ruts and divots sculptured by our feet

stand proud, the only marks of life at all.

A stillness in this bleak and empty place.

We stand, as if to move would break its spell.

Then turn and leave behind that barren space,

the cutting wind too harsh for us to dwell.

The frozen drifts become our enemy

until back home and settled for the day.

At rest, perhaps the only eyes to see

a landscape which the rain must wash away.

## Preference

Something about a photograph draws me in.

Not today’s model - mobile phones, the *selfie*, whose ambition

is nothing other than *Look at me*. Those dated back to the beginning.

Victorians with their rigid compositions,

heads requiring support, through to the box camera,

instamatics, the sixties. Pastoral scenes hold no interest for me.

Always people. To capture an image, persona

of a person who at that time, treating a camera more warily

than we might do now, revealed more of themselves.

Staged or not, fascinating. An education to look back

at subject and setting. Often, the placement and form compels

the eye to go further still, to search for clues and gaps

in the story. All long since dead and yet speaking

to us. A kind of immortality. Paintings too, similar

but no less compelling. Pigment lacking

the precision of film, but still that core of character,

individuality, captured forever. Artist at liberty to create

fresh perspectives - not tied to a moment. Which is best? For me

the old cliché pertains, how a painter can enhance a portrait

from parts placed deeper than the lens can see.

## Everybody’s Story

The hard call

between living

and poetry

often confounds me.

Subsumed in one

to the detriment of other

to be pulled back

sharply.

Life is callous.

Try not eating

or living

for want of money.

But poetry. Poetry

somehow seeps

inside

and again, disrupts me.

## Silks Chosen

A desk clapper. You could let the lid fall

hear it bang, even lend a weighty slam.

Attached to seats. We had arrived!

Protractor, metal compass,

triangle and ruler – always splintered.

We slid into line. Trotted out

wood block horses,

pulled metal reins from oak saddles

champing at the bit. Starter’s gate.

Fences inside the beast.

Opened the box: books stared back at us.

Suddenly asked who could spell………

Silence. An arm went up. Mine.

That motion began the race.

Hooves pounding, eyes fixed ahead.

Could feel myself pulling, over the jump

and down. If I had looked around

it might have been different. Got it wrong

but I didn’t. On its back forty years.

All in a moment. As quick as that.

## Meeting Place

The ghost of a breath

shrouds a window. Remnant of a breath

tips into drops. Day rises

as a morning sun, bold with summer, calls.

Soon it will be too late. Tourists will arrive

unexpected as deserts. Innocent people

with secret names

will stand on walls, light fires,

shout about children in loud voices.

A car will shrug its shoulders,

cough, splutter,

stretch over a fragment of road

an arm pulled by invisible strings

drawn across frosted glass.

It will travel

like a snail into the distance.

## The Cricket Season

Summer’s long song,

whack of leather upon bat, tea in the pavilion.

Though I’ve lived here years, I can scarce recall

when that red ball

was not landing in my garden. Village full to overflow

to watch an innings go

as life, drift and splutter.

An airless heat. Sun high, lemonade and ice.

How does the camel’s spine crack?

With age – or bowed by straw’s heavy price?

*Yes*, I said in full view. *No problem. Have it back*.

That night called some innings run:

raised finger number one.

A spade, both sharp and true

can cut a grave in the hardest mound;

bury a grudge then flatten the ground.

The Jones woman saw me, so I killed her too.

On a point of principle rest a million sins.

Eye for an eye,

curt remark – who would count one more than another?

Not I,

and no less a sportsman for my furtive stand

or lack of linen white. Speed, skill,

the victor’s swift and practiced hand.

Career run, I rest my arm. A team falters none the wiser

bereft of legs to chase to the fence.

Yet often I still dream of slaughter.

The ball’s loop, a silent glance.

Who would begrudge the fox a hunt, the slug its salt,

the drowning man water?

## Grandmother

I was the last and would have wished it so,

my mother said wish illness on no-one

but it is hard when your life fades not to throw

envy to the wind,

call others to suffer as you have done.

Though the labour long, it was nothing new.

When they first spoke of twins I had wept.

Even so, all through

the days and months I kept

myself in check, as if then I knew.

The heart is such a fragile thing.

Children may break its porcelain

with barely a murmur or passing sigh.

I felt the fluid start to collect

when I heard their birthing cry.

Life can be the cleverest thief,

what it gives with one hand the other takes

yet I would not have chosen differently.

I do not fear death so much

as that they will not remember me.

## A Disappointment, Even to Myself

A cute arse has just glided past me.

Thoughts on more weighty subjects

forgotten. Its motion has a beauty

which could fill a hundred pamphlets.

Distracted, yes. But when treasure such as this

has wandered by, however crass

or incorrect it might be, would be remiss

not to comment. They say all things must pass

but images remain. God bless tight clothing.

I speculate on its unwrapped state.

And in good company. Two favourite sayings.

One from St Augustine, the old reprobate,

and I paraphrase, *Lord make me chaste – but not yet*.

The second more difficult to ascribe.

Plato, Socrates, Sophocles – the subject

of debate. Also, modern genetics has clarified

it relates not just to the male member alone

as was once thought, but to the entire span

of the unruly and stubborn Y chromosome.

As the saying goes: *It’s like being tied to a madman*.

So there we have it. Man’s mind at battle

with itself. Which even at its finest, will skim

between deep analysis, attempts to unravel

life’s mysteries, and the set of a *Carry On* film.

## The Skin Bin

Sometimes we die

and are carried in wood boxes

thrown skywards at a shoulder’s insistence.

Freedom of speech withheld

as someone beats truth to a pulp with eulogies

upholding great lies on our behalf.

This is a good thing

as the crowd are all sad

and speak inconsolable misery.

Sometimes when dead we become victims

and police raffle us

to the living. Those with best grudges win.

They are dragged struggling into cells

as we have become a crime.

Sometimes we die incognito

stacked in locations no-one knows

so we never get flowers.

When dead a long time

people may call us fictitious

denying we ever lived at all.

One of the most disturbing aspects

of being dead.

# Art

## The Likeness Is Applied to the Canvas

Invisible string

between hand and eye

pulled taut.

Lovingly inspected,

the gaze consumes each detail

weighing light and shade

and where the eye boldly wanders

hand

obediently, precisely follows

until shape and form appear.

Then, in layers of pigment

charcoal clears

and colour flows from fingertips

who ask

to confirm tone and hue,

and between the two

the balance is set,

agreed,

and portrait,

once mere cloth

struggles into view.

## Rembrandt

Saskia is dead, and in her passing

the fragility of life is laid bare.

Endured again, the rigour of mourning,

the disappointments, misfortunes, we share.

No mirror so harsh as that held by death

in which few dare look; still fewer study.

With what artist’s eye did you scour its depth?

What reflection seek? What image copy?

Though pain and sorrow may mature the brush,

add shade and substance to its armoury,

to trade love, contentment, for genius

who would fix that price or pay willingly?

## Rembrandt II

Portraits drawn by the hand of a master

yet pushed beyond any simple likeness.

Caught somehow, their intellect, character,

his gift to empathise then fix on canvas.

## Poem

A spark

when caught

reveals

the cacophony of thought

the mind conceals.

Then escaped, running,

spreading as a flame

all-consuming

until burnt-out,

combusted,

retreats to leave a skin of charcoal

frosted

over charred ground

cleansed, re-set, ready to begin.

Players

step in,

stories

clamouring to be heard.

Ears now primed to listen,

hand in place to record each word.

## Rehearsal

Curtains closed; the work begins.

In moments such as this

voices grow and entwine

and as lines tighten, lock,

the whole advances, stumbling

into tragedy or comedy.

Scenes repeated, flexed,

until subtle shifts

stretch beyond the foolscap skin

allowing form to emerge.

Now full grown, strutting.

Later, an audience claps

and beast fed

returns to rooms in shabby boarding houses

and run-down digs to rest, recharge again.

All worlds encompassed

in an audience, in a theatre, in a street.

Nothing else exists. Or can exist. No wider stage than this.

Sparks float upwards to heaven,

tied to smoke - small notes –acts reported and reviewed.

## Music

In music we redeem ourselves

distinguished from the humdrum,

poverty called life.

Aspire to the tongue of angels.

Lose ourselves

in translation of their rhetoric,

drama of their speech.

When we land

we label this ephemeral,

marvel at its delicate touch.

Clothe the ghost

dotting phrases in the prison of a measure

to capture

and claim them as our own,

blunt pins tethering notes to stave.

## Chaff

A sip of creation

is all you need. Though a great pool

waiting, too much leaves vision

drunk, obsessed with images which fool

an eye into believing

it encompasses everything – the whole panoply.

When all the while, it is seeing

a part - random pictures, offshoots, free

of any meaning, import, stature.

Only curated, bled with personal testimony,

does the mix set: the message matter.

Without that element, art is empty.

## Oil

A pool of colour

bleeding

together

on a palette

presents

an infinite

complexity

of choice.

Thoughtfully,

brush converts

fluid

pigments

to foundation

of a

vision

in a single stroke.

## Sculptor

Being

transfixed in shaping

stone and plaster.

Passion reflected in every gesture

of a body

constructed to house that extraordinary energy

which explodes and ricochets through the manipulation

and transformation

of clay.

Excess roughly scraped away

to release the structure

hidden inside that formless mixture

which only those hands could feel

or craft to reveal.

Stands, finished,

embedded in that image.

## Sculptor, Carved

A slow fuse, this.

Lit, then sparked erratically.

Left to circumstance

to garner opportunity

for unseen need

to fracture recalcitrant bone.

What hand

re-set those arms to hone

that art,

chiselled a body to be reborn

against rock? What conceived that passion

here, now fully formed?

## Chaotic Music

I will make of you what I will.

Broken runs picked up, set aside.

Strident dissonance played until

I have walked your mile, tried

to embrace your whole. No structure? We

need counterpoint, accord. I will strip noise

to bare note and build harmony.

You will be quite changed: the joys

of destroying what we do not understand.

World over, what does not fit, order introduced.

Existence must be safe, insulated, planned.

Mystery tamed, and in that act, reduced.

## Early Hours

Another day has fallen as I speak

and sleep envelops everything I write.

There is no light to find the words I seek,

I cannot see their footprints in the night.

Perhaps come morning I will search again,

they stay or go with such an easy grace.

I think I am too slow to play this game,

I cannot guess their course or match their pace.

As hunters do, I must prepare and wait

to find a memory which is the best

to slice apart and use its flesh as bait

so words can pick the scent and come to nest.

A bloody business this, this poetry.

The debris of our lives laid out to see.

## Nonsense on the Definition of Art

Not in the editing

or drafting,

ninety-nine percent

perspiration, or in whatever a thought might first present,

it is in the emptiness and error,

looking fully into the mirror

facing a pit of your own making,

reaching in

as fractious and daunting as that may be

to carefully

craft from that retrieved thread

the painting left covered, the unloved sculpture, the poem never read,

and still go back.

In that act

is the sum of it.

To recommit

to the task no one else commissions or is there to see.

Journey

into the mirror - painful, uncomfortable,

there! There is the art of it, forged in that struggle.

