

Selected Poems of Alex Charles

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Actually you're all the same people

Actually you're all the same people
you mystics, or all the same mystic
betrayal of a concrete half-consciousness.
Concrete, because it affirms the separation
of everything, not only mystics,
but of the day and night
of everything.
And half-conscious because the gate
of all opposition is closed
on the great unconscious image of All
the one indissoluble.
About which poets have strewn tokens
and sculptors have caught glimpses
through a forced crack
and some, or one, have been able to enter.

But keep it closed, the door
of your precious motivation
where the upkeeping of structures
and the satisfaction, or not,
of millions on millions of needs
and of the continuous crusades
to establish what these are
are your revolving, separate sphere,

Else you cannot bear
an individual pride.

Let me hear you sing

1.

Let me hear you sing
the resolving song
Of a line, of a line
ending in itself
As our serpent's time
and begin
To understand
the music after

So that, I suppose, doubts, like grey bubbles
themselves many days and dinners
frothing beside us, will at last escape
and the sink clean
down which something sank

2

Let me see you draw
the enclosing line
Of a face, of a face
repeating pain
In opening eyes
to see
The still smile
of a circling birth

We embarked for and arrived
at the same time - to Cythere,
and brushing beside others,
some of which were more important
in the coupling of dancers, we rode
the water music
joyfully

3.

Let me feel you touch
the wet, grasping clay
Of a cup, of a cup
containing experience
Raised to your mouth
to drink
The linked love
of a furtive beast

As yourself,

had chosen the end in your own eye
mistaken for another, or kindred spirit
devouring its own tail
and then to live with till the end
is a tight knot
of confused desire

4.

Let me know you love
the space of an O
in which arena
you enact the illusion
Of a life, of a life
as symbol
Of a whole
beginning

Knowing it to be a different place
or occupation from the one I had supposed
nevertheless there was a threshold
or tunnel, after the initiation of desire
had been enjoyed
into which we stepped
without pain
or knowledge

Cords

Cords, knotted in expectation of a birth
hung down
after the passion or lust that had aroused them
withered
 into the hangman's hand
pulled tight:
 a ravel of blind alleys
and swung for joy
 of unconnected lives

The wounding

The ointment applied to the wound
which is thick and yellow.
The wound lies, dormant in the interval
under observation; one can see it
flickering,
red-lipped.
A warm crater, gaping fathoms
into the torn earth.

I shall feel my way along,
down, nearer,
reaching into the recipient,
welling an effusion of brilliant molecules.
My hand is blood-red.
We clench, tackle the intruder,
wedged in, enclosed.
There is pain - tense, fierce, grasping;
strained fibres sear white hot,
rip and dissolve.
I delve, farther,
holding within -
tensile bands of palpitating flesh.
Convulsed
We roar

The stuff spouts
oozes down the table leg.

The ballad of a man

Love in action

Love is a dynamic situation
It demands movement
The only frustration arising from love is when
movement is seen as impossible
It is always possible if one actually loves
Love, and move, you must
When you imagine you must stop, be still
Then you are sinning.
You are being untrue to yourself
To your ability to love
Simply love, love will move you

No More Illusions

You have no right to intone sanctities to no god
to happen upon a sanctified order of self-betrayal
in monotonous monuments of sound and stone, separate
in order that you may be separate, saved
happy in the adoration of another's pain, painless
insulated from passion

Talk of a dumb man

Talk of a birth, an integration, a becoming
- no map, no system, no ordained direction
a synthesis, beyond following, beyond thought, beyond belief
an individual humiliation
talk of a death that was death, the moment of death
not as a prelude, not as an inevitable condition
but an act, a chosen initiation, with little strength
to succeed, the fledgling's attempt to split and emerge
with no faith but that of flesh, and the recognition
of no hope, willing nothing

Perhaps then a freedom a resurrection
not the single intercession or final salvation
not the pure proof of god in man
not the repose, intonation, complacent economy of faith

But an execution
stripped of meaning, unadorned
to be executed
its reward

The flying lady

Will you come and see the flying lady
perform the swallow-dive and somersault
in acrobatic health?

Each man here, in bed-row in this ward,
is watching as she falls.

The attempt to describe

The attempt
in a roundabout way
to describe
cannot be described

flat sentences skirting the base of the room
around convenient windows
break
a door led in and out
letters hung on hooks
earnest, assembled words like panels
aligned themselves
in definite areas the meaning dipped and hovered
over rosettes
glanced off sharp corners with a full point
rested in a niche

directing like signposts
a precise route to reach a destination by
inhabiting an image
the denouement resolved
misgivings
sealed doubt

Something final had been said
about
entering, finding the pattern defined
 lulled
into an explanation of walls
a frame to read by

Disintegration

His disintegration was fractional
chipping slivers, like stone shards
off a block
his unbecoming
if he were aware he never mentioned it
it was slow, barely noticeable
he was silent

for a while

before answering
might not comprehend the question
would repeat
an odd image
wondering what it meant

We allowed the change
without expecting or willing it
were grateful to him
his scars
the pits and hollows of stone
appeared
a loose arm, the fractured hand
links meeting
to disassemble

The personality faded
for a time there many
either entering or escaping
from fissures
even lamented his decay
as if their opportunity were short
men with two heads warring
men of understanding and optimism
men of scorn
they gathered together and left
him

Much later he was silent
not in death
we imagined another condition
as if a tomb had opened
its accoutrements dissolved
on close analysis
contradicting the appearance
were remnants
of an order
they remained about
discarded, like a trail

I'll catch you the young man said

I'll catch you
the young man said
He meant . . .
what did he mean?
- there's a space between speech and meaning
he meant:
Later
Yes that was it
after the act

On the bank of a brown river
keeping a vertical hold on the path
winding through white onion-weed
and young beech trees in early spring
we undressed, uncovered
a partial language
spoken with cocks and eyes
assenting, at first
then
following
an unfrequented wish
easily
to its conclusion
where
the slightest movement became
a complete surrender

Just then a family
of sulphur-crested cockatoos swung
overhead with great white star-pointed
wings awkward until
they trimmed themselves on a limb
and feathered
yellow plumes like satisfied harlots
after an unscheduled extravagance
of a kind

We looked and saw them
above our heads
keeping silent

We apologised later
- when an intention beyond words was apparent
told me he'd catch me
after coming too soon he
walked back
to a higher level

An acolyte in love

And so I am an acolyte in love
Willing this transformation to attain
Another love, no love but agape
From God who holds my hand and in my brain
Decrees these words, no words but other ways
To love in worship sublimating gain
Into no gain but gifts no gifts but given
Sight to sense my source and in my source attain.

And if I doubt it then it is not mine
But mine as dross that doubts what it can do.
As coinage struck on air to bear a sign
Of insubstantial love, my hand holds due
And puts in place a feast of wine and meat
For gods to come and take and break and eat.

Thou art Peter

Thou art Peter
On this rock I will build my church
denying yourself three times, piercing
the fabric of an edifice
with a three-pronged fork, is crowned
three times with betrayal
remember

I chose the humble bandit by my side
and you - the builder, the opportunist,
the reflexed renouncer, the good, honest man
preferring life, continuation, survival
at any price
in the dark, questioning candle night
you doubted and dodged and began to build
my answering church
from the residue of your pride
remember this

You reached an architectural compromise
between my death and your
mediating hope,
a counterpointed structure
of opposing forces
bequeathed to you, in you, to weld
an understanding
of ultimate sacrifice, inevitable resurrection
and birth, the first birth you had known.
You were the imperfect mason
not of a palace or a legislative chamber
or another temple
but of a love feast and a prayer
and not located in a particular place
with extent and estimated endurance in time
but in you and everywhere
remember this

You are, at best, the child by my side
at worst, the rich man
who has achieved the best bargain
The child is self-taught
and wounds and denies and betrays
himself alone
in order to grow and learn in his own understanding.
But the rich man is content with a cathedral
in order to expiate a crime he could never commit
denying a chimaera
in a parody of sin

remember this

Thou art Peter
On this rock will I build
Myself in you
remember this

Make another date

I waited, make another date
To feel then the offered hand
Untie a moment
Let it loose, from thought
The mounting joy of any touch
To be another, not alone in this.
I waited, make another date.

The pillar of fire

Imagine the wind in your hair
Warm eyes and dust flame, licking the mouth of the steppe
On the long journey
Tired with a hundred feet

Imagine the earth waits, open and smiling
Resisting the terror's end
Like a brother
Stronger and wiser than thought beneath your feet

Imagine the sky dance, of dawn or dusk
Ascending ziggurats to the sun
In captive's captive sight
Unmanacled.

Imagine the pillar of fire
Build it, in the grave earth
At the burnt journey's end, of yourself
Soaring in flight.

On the death of T.S. Eliot

Perhaps it is not too late
To sing a song of love
Shining between grains of glass
Before reflected suns
Surrounded involute
You died as I lay there
On the opposite side of the world
In his gothic shell St Stephen
received you
I heard your final news
Like sacrifice and wept
For all words left
Without
The sand, the sea required its monument
Of us. You left our world
By Cromwell Road and here arrived
In spring, summer, blazing
With resurrected flesh, all roses to your faith
We lay and loved
Sun frozen
You were dead

Love's dialectic

I am in love with you
I am no longer in love with you

The one attends the other as marriage
first
trying to enclose time and space
in its own membrane
ignoring the fact that space-time
will stretch like a balloon until the love
is over-extended on its surface
or else pricks the diaphanous illusion
beyond any particular point
of the *ding an sich*

Then as a funeral
when the swell of a stomach
becomes wrinkled and infested
with a debilitating condition.
The flaccid bridesmaid
emits a last, rank odour
subsiding before the brown anxiety
of too much air

You on a hill

I can see you on a hill
on your brow
is a frown, a slight turn
of your head against clouds
cushioning your nose and chin
lips brushing a white scroll
as if there were no distance
no time
between your face and the sky

You turn back, lose a connection
your eyes betray
this length of time
this much commitment.
Beginning a dissolution
brings you down to earth
you say no to me for the first time
and separate
somehow
the hard form from the soft.
Around your face
winds divide illusory forms
colliding and crumbling
leaving space
between thoughts.

Come then and be enjoyed

Come then and be enjoyed
Be enjoined
As the myna bird and the magpie
who sings a mezzo love song to the world
waking for worms
in the clear morning air
with the dew still smiling on the grass

Work like the myna
On Hell's roads, till the last moment
snatching the excess of a doomed town
with audacity
missing the agents of terror
with a cheeky hop

For life then
having chosen a place, a time, a mate.
And who can say where lovers should live?
The weeds in the parking lot are insistent
holding their place like the bird
against death
While the magpie
Sings of Eden in his song
with nothing to side-step
between paddocks

The last thing I write

The last thing I write
is an empty jar or a cave
that holds a hollow sound
and is sticky, as if the only
adherence or affirmation I have
is to try to find a way,
as painlessly as possible,
to clean my hands
of the annoyingness of life.
Not to feel or be aware of
even the need to wash
or create a consequence
as a private pattern, which I own
and which owns me,
so that in this the cave contains
a puppet figure labelled Myself
and instead of God's emptiness
is my unnecessary, awkward confidence.

Eden

This is all done
that we have reached to do
Put out the hand that knew the knowledge tree
in disobedience
daring
to be told
the ceaseless years
of birth and rebirth
till the day was new
Opening on worlds where moon enigmas were
Risen to suns
that fell and covered night
Finding them
dawn-fringed
Found they knew
delight
and death

Come with me

Come with me on a journey
She took my hand in hers
down passageways I knew as other
worlds not mine
She said: 'This is our world
You are my priest
I am the mother of a room
Come and forgo
now
the past and the future.
It is dark and light here
and vibrates with the stillness
of a swoon.
We shall be here together
and apart
knowing a thing or two.'

Beyond this world
in her grave
I took my hand from hers
fleshless with the bones bare
remembering the sharp shock of pain
I saw in wide, betrayed, child's eyes
when I had pressed too hard
my suit
my rough way with love.

Stigmata

What constitutes a rash -
two spots or three?
And a lesion -
is it like the mark of death?
Am I dying
slowly dying
from last year's kiss?

The fairy in my way

The fairy in my way
appears and disappears as fairies do
summoning an interest, then
afar, too far in the distance
unable to recall
the spell of a hand
the lightest brushing
the contortion of a live body
standing too awkwardly with the grace of a myth
dashes me to pieces
on the old rock
of my unappeased despair
which has dissolved
into song or dance.
Song, you say?
Yes the elusive song of your
self.

Like the walls of Troy

After another contretemps,
misplaced passion
focus of the sun's rays
on some white hot
longing
another denouement
prayed for like my mother's life
I am bereft
but living
in still, steely virtue
strong like the walls of Troy
to be fantastically opened
dreaming
the residue
as if the rest could belly-fill
or reappoint my blunted pride
like the commander
of some relief battalion
arriving in time
to pre-empt
the opening
of eyes, or the taking in
in time
of any substitute
for Helen's love

After is gone

'After is gone but stays alive
or half alive
in the same pain.'

Am I remembering
my original
familiar
parading consequences on a plate
like the head of one lover or another
singing a love song in my ear
beguiling me with promises
of hands
torsos, thighs
or eyes that live in peace within my head

Time I was alone again
he says
staunching the flow, backing up, reconnoitring
with a sigh
one last heartfelt sigh
the last flowing driblets of love
to wall myself with
I have felt the after-times before
and the clenched tension of after and before
slowly uncoil
leaving palms open
for my familiar to work upon.

Having laid my heart out

Having laid my heart out
it was politely refused
acknowledged that the day was very fine
great weather and a rare weekend, now
back to work and how much better
it was a lovely idea but no thanks
Thank you
which proved flattering, a surprise stroke
spluttering into the gutter, of adulation
I choked on the last beer in my gut
His luck had turned as he drove home
unaccosted by my fawning
queerness
separate from fantasies picked at in the bar
and brought down hard later
in his own bed with his wife
accommodating the then and the tall American
with a bulging crotch
That's as I saw it.

I fell in a corner later
the beating inside me was very loud
having laid my heart out
it was hard to put it back.

When he touched

After a hundred or more years
he put out his hand to touch
what he had seen and longed for even
prayed for fitfully and guiltily
but it was not like the image
in his heart
when he touched
bones knocked and their bodies were unable
to join
So much time he had spent in
dreaming
How many puzzles he might have worked on

Approaching the oracle

Approaching the oracle
was tricky
not to offend an ally
or precipitate a foreclosure
hardly mattered as much as
the fear of glimpsing
sideways, like a crab
some half-satisfying
certainly inexplicable
body of lies
Deprived, the supplicant may never
proceed
to any higher level of the way
ignorant of Aeschylus and
slipping into the valley
find a crevice for his bones

Love in its absence

Just as a boon
the genie smiled, puffily, in clouds
of snowy clouds
extra wishes for old
I'll open taut lids, unsteel tendons
with a slow twist, a firm hand
on the problem, untensing the dead
rigour
a caress

Through an unselfconscious doorway
into an opening, the cave like a hooded
spectre was black and empty
I know about love in its absence
The making of love
The love/sex/release/fulfilment
of love
the rest after filling or being filled
with the passion/tenderness/attention
the wordless, vital communication
of love
I know about love
because for now, this day or month
year even
I am not granted its food

All of a piece

How would it feel to be all of a piece
with no virus inside me
and a shiny face
fresh-washed, off to my first party
looking at my first love
our hands idle then
just for a moment before we feel
everything

No different
except that now I must dispute
the old identity
that rested on innocence and ignorance
was enough of an illusion
to break my back and the world's hope
Now I must believe
I am untainted
deep inside the spring rises
always
joining us
in a river which is
all of a piece

Against all invaders

I move my hand against all
known invaders, capitulating
in a mirror before them. I have
diffidently edged my hand in
halting jerks away
from conquest. Any sense is
past. I submit to an opposite
course
experimenting in the mechanics of defeat
and victors tell me
I am victorious, annihilated
like them with booty in their hearts
mine is well vanquished
still

Looking up

Looking up
I met the eyes of a familiar
Like an invitation
you admired the turn of a back
a smiling lip or pert nose
a smoothing appreciation of
will you, will you?

and yes, yes

All enacted
in a double sense
the compound ghost
that loathes its altered state
but in the dark
will meet my lips

sighing its sex
between the sheets a liquid approbation
and a leaving

of proof

I saw pleasure in your eye

This year, next year

This year, next year
the garden is in winter
and springs like my love wait
for the coalescing
and the bidding
now is compacting
shrinking and shedding
like the live humus
and the bare sticks of trees
ridden with brown bulging
clusters
 randy little pricks
full of the frothing semen of spring
but now almost invisible
except to the blind
feeling their profusions:
the stiff knobs of a sleeping tree.
Sometime my love
we have walked
beneath the catkins
shone through with the light in our eyes
stunned into a coupling
fucked till the love came
and a garland we carried
like a crown
 to prove
our diet and contracted
to each other
the earth fed us
through the octopus roots of our grip
and we swam in the spring of its love.

The application of balm

Each attempt at a conclusion -
a suicide

is closer
and prepares the heart to accept
its logical action
like the application

of balm

when I have sliced into
an artery, slipped
with a nervous laugh
and shyly remained mute

when

all that was wanted
was a smart reply

I have none
and blood flowed
over all
the opportunities for admiration

Images of rebirth

Images of rebirth are unfounded
supposing a second chance
or a reprieve
they forgive us and give us hope
the comfort of dead relatives
and run-over poets
are
beside the way
an exercise incorporating various elements
or characteristics
of a vain, dirty, low
dishonest
tomorrow
tomorrow is as all are
everborn, stillborn, same death
And some die
and we keep on dying
offer the indescribable
miracle
of birth

Sometimes I am released

Sometimes I am released
There's an easing
part of the ebb and flow
now: the little noon-day
now: I brim and well with tears
in my brain, writing invisible poems
to all the possibilities
they are all mine
then

This is all done

This is all done that we have reached to do
Put out the hand that knew the knowledge tree
In disobedience daring
To be told the ceaseless years
Of birth and rebirth till the day was new
Opening on worlds where moon enigmas were
Risen to suns that fell and covered night
Finding them dawn fringed, found they knew delight
And death

Rooms I

He had a heart attack lying in the sun
I met him on the beach before he died
He looked at me and talked; he said his name was . . .
I've forgotten it
but not him
my mother saw us lying side by side
I'm sure she deduced the connection
I came home late in summer from the beach
I walked away
many times
He was just as protective
we never touched
it was an odd innocence
my mother walked past us
one afternoon, with my brother
they strolled past

(leave me there)
eventually he died
and I left home
but not without pain and regret
mourning the dark of my childhood
(leave me there)
in mourning
for my mother's hyacinths
and the melting snow
(leave me there)
leave me to my two rooms
as real as options which I handed down
and remember
Leave me to my two rooms

He wailed across the yard about the dark
(tell me the dark is just the dark)
'My mother told me it was full of angels.'
left alone, like prey
under the ether ceiling of night in bed
with spidery configurations on the walls
I told my friend about the moving thing
She said: 'Catch me, count and catch me
with your eyes closed.'

Staring at the door-frame coming through
my father wallop me, I yelled

It was wide and high
wider and higher than any room should be
(tell me the dark is just the dark)

waiting deep-mouthed
with slow legs and bulbous eyes
to be brushed
stifled in the bedclothes if I moved
I saw them move
in the tail web with a beating heart

I moved
In a little room with no walls
without legs, confined to lie
through the pomp of adolescence
on a yellow bed
coming in and going out
with serious attempts
at standing
and the terror of sex
returning for succour
under the roof of the house

(Have you ever lived beneath wings,
beneath the brooding wings of a bird,
beneath the warm throb of her breast?)

In a cupboard of a room
in the bedclothes, behind drawers
under the rug
I hid them from my mother
Strongmen
out of history books and magazines
about to touch and lift and smile
at me
a proposition
I remember
winking in recognition at their sign
I came and came over pages and pages
covered their faces and rejected lovers
stained the sheets and went to sleep
beside wet semen of hard men
incubating impossible children

In summer the room was hot
with yellow curtains and no breeze
under the ridge of the roof
my mother never asked about the stains.

Rooms II

Leave me to my two rooms
as entrances, adjoining
twice born
walls torn
paper lives,
from paper torn, from nothing into -
progressive gasps of separate space
proceeding.
Or arenas where I stood or lay or laughed
while the air moved.

One is my child's cry, down shadow hall,
toward the garden, hiding high as
roses arched and apple blossom bright
as winters childed me
then
petunias tugged my spring
heart and I waited small in the grey bigness
of my room
for the hyacinth struggle.
I was the hyacinth then,
and winter's spring and old flower sweetness
breathed me
out to live
my house, hall, room dark, daylight life,
my hyacinth mother snowy laden time
to pick the sap stalk from its bulb

when winter went
and with me went
I went to summer
death.

It had been as clear a day as I could remember,
coming from the old house as an easy, little river,
it coursed over my burrowing in a brown sandpit,
shined now, where inside was frightening,
on patches of snow,
gave up, dark, slanting, door frames
and visions of fathers coming through
spidery configurations that were there then
under the ether ceilings of night in bed
shivering awake and papery,
to the bright, clear, brittle, cold, sun,
romancing the young day
with the fulfilment of nostril scents
and dirty fingernails.

The other room withdraws
and is as heavy as the weight of a body
on body
with some pleasure and the inevitable,
downcast banishment,
seen now as a route
on wall maps
with marked-in gardens;
which a cynic
pasted back
in order to recall,
the extensive, inside, detail
at the other end of a tack.

Have you ever lived beneath the raised
and flapping wings of a bird,
a mother bird's contagious love of home,
all yellow and summery and hot;
tearing yourself into adolescence
from one room to another
returning
to masturbate
on the outside-brought-in tentacles
of an imprisoned, imagined relief,
orgasms of growth and stained bed sheets
and paper love?
In a little room with no walls
but a pointed, gothic gutter at the top
and an outside, oiled sand beach
erect in awkward hope,
that only mattered here,
of the close, consequent eruption
of wings beating another withdrawal

left behind
to find
the summer's trial
hot and dead
defile the bed
on which you lay

and forgot the warmth of snow.

Now more memories

this time coming back to a contrasted beginning
of creeks and rivers and seas
swelling through dry deserts and over
precipices of Eden
till this is where you might always have lived
in the protected room
of your private fall.

Home movies

The movie flickered on our living-room wall
much later
with the clearest day I could remember
coming from the old house as an easy, little river
it coursed over my burrowing in a brown sandpit
shined now where inside was frightening
on patches on snow
Dad made us walk backwards or forwards
froze my sister's antics
we laughed
the stippled wall was pink and green and blue
we saw Mum's hyacinths in the sun
ran through rose arches
swung on a winter morning
in clear, white light
in trees like monkeys
the film was over-exposed
its edges quivered and twisted
my brother put his tongue out

Birdsong

Birdsong, like all those dreams
is false, is the decoy
When I look at clouds I cry like a monster
I have no dreams

The bird sings
flaunts himself, his song
parades his prowess to a mate
spiralling

toward an explosion of birth

he promises continuance
the pattern reprogrammed
each note duplicated
every instinctive action
repeated and fulfilled

his warbled invitation

I dream he sings of love
no terror, no premeditated note
of conquest and survival
he sang at dusk
a lullaby

forgotten his reason, or wishing
to find some sign
some unconnected peace
unmotivated plea, or after
awakening, the satisfied rest

his metaphor was ageless, uncontaminated, innocent

I was deaf and blind

Let's leave it there..

Time to quietly kill myself

Time to quietly kill myself
leaving the sweepings of my floor
in a neat pile
someone must slide the scraps into a bin
and have done
First I must tidy up
and tie the ends
like a noose or a handkerchief
with my belongings
and leave them for ancestors to sell
exchanging the odds and ends
for a Norwegian sweater or
some machine to cut
or dispose or
reprogram into an attribute
Time to quietly kill myself

At the disco - mistaking his identity

Having extended himself
outward, like antennae craning
against inclination too far
toward a ledge of circumstance
elbowed into place between eyes,
rings of froth and pinpoints of phosphorescent sheen
he fell in step
with their pace
following a wave of fluttering release
curled into submission, to strike
an unexpected response to laughter
of a kind to be laughed at
in three-four time
pacing a different beat

Perhaps I'll take a stand

Perhaps I'll take a stand, in romantic terms, insist on rights, recall a past commitment. She made to me in the last analysis, a smile will do. I prick my ears like a bloodhound with rheumatic ways laggardly behind. Not in the fast lane but still remembering smiles, a repast of time together dashed and done, panting wet tears and spewing dreams of faithless lovers, faceless hunters tracking night thoughts. Cornering ghosts without the redress of reality or daylight hope, lacking light now until the dawn allows new bands of strolling lovers apportioning old hands

The lovely sweet confidence of commitment

The lovely sweet confidence of commitment
having eaten
like vast beasts and lain at throats
and buttocks grasping each's
life
covered wet with the sugar longing
of sex and touch and knowledge
knowing you then
in the darkness as a known
with-me man
I speak of
Bertrand Russell and Isak Dinesen
and perhaps some Eliot and Lao Tse
as if the bed were full of
cocks increasing the flow of
what?
Speech? Holding on to? Riding full of
friction over crystals which spark and
stick to us tiny gems?
Coming through like Lawrence?

And coming in mouths
the sweet sperm of our
present passing gift

To the point of death

To the point of death
jovially
and back again
they go the dark-nighters
obsessed
all these boys stand around
admiring each other
and themselves
studiedly
with drugs and each other
and swimming
kilometres
laps of time in
time some kind of realisation
will dawn
that Robert
and the last rites of exorcism
are dead - dead?
(his face was vapid working on the
60th floor as a chef with 31
for dinner
to . . .
day)
dead?
Your point

The renovation

No one ever wrote
a poem about joy
and succeeded in
placing a name
like a long memory
of a nymph
 in trees -
in a glade reflecting light
through crystal faces
on to the long ground
of those times
they forgot.
I make my many-personed life
into a new house
with old photographs
of Albert and Nellie
Furies and Eumenides
Rains and Droughts
Whoever enters
 pores and nostrils
my unselective door

Driving each other

Driving each other
my jaw like my mother's
settles sternly I discover
stubborn her brother my uncle
we are one family of stiff
intentioned slightly silly
purposes
we become ireful
full of anterior opportunity
thrown away like rights
uncared
glimpsing a steady stream of reflected
folk
old names held between the molars
regretted as back vision

I turn forty with months of vacant
before and after I come seeing wide
a void
holidays then
of celibacy navigated into position
and take the road toward
contemplation catching the twenty-seventh
or thirty-sixth sight of a girl unmarrying
beyond the pale
or a boy returning to incest
with a brother wife
on board, stripped to the bones
of souvenirs
setting a course toward eighty or so
and of my mother
what one will never know
directions are left like clues:
the names of lovers we loved
and in God's name adopt
again and again
as an implacable pattern

Come as you are

Pages of days

Pages of days
Leaves of trees of these

Of me
Adding green flesh to the gnarled stump
Protrudes past obliteration
I grow, poor addition, defending this execution
With new birth.
Age transmitting, submitting to the season its new pain
Tired because it cannot start again
But starts, restarts and writes again
The word that follows;
And that direction was the only way

Bud or protrusion, new page or word of love
Crouching, quivering, in the dark place before the dawn
Begun but unassured
On the old life, beneath the new light
In the rainforest
In the dark bush
Cubes of gold or grey
Struggling to speak
Time still
Or never will

Dim, determined days
Where sunlight plays
Agony
In the patterned fire.
I am twelve thousand miles
Away from you
And yet I hold your hand and call your name
On the dark side of love

Thank you, Mr Altman

When I went dancing last Saturday night
With Michael and Janet we danced
And we weren't making out we were
Making in and everyone could have
Come except that they looked as
If they wanted one not us

I'm really a square, not that I don't
Want guys but that people usually
Aren't there and I can't love them
Like crapping, except when I have an
Erection and that's different
Even if I can still kid myself
It's different it is different

So that sometimes with a bitchy
Dyke prostitute alcoholic junkie
And Michael who plays golf
Away from the office when he can't
Prong a schoolkid on the beat and
Who talks to men because he's a man
We danced

Two sides

Two sides
Mine and
Yours
to take as food
the fruit without
shame

by the apple's
answer

But I leave it hanging
inside of me
wrinkling
without
opening
and becomes
the secret
as only thought
constructs a bitter
taste

Mine never
becomes
another seed
laid in a living
ground
as the barren father's
desert of meagre stones
demands a penance
for betrayal
fast
by a flowering
forest

Yours to do it
live by
its cycle
as a mounting
glance
throbs
in the natural core
couples in the spring's
moment

Mine to wait
in winter's
mind
for all uneaten time
unforgotten
and no natural
resolution
of my guilt
Tombed in waves, or rock, piercing the sprayed man
Shored up where no wind blows
or resurrection

This is your god;
Or the sea, is untamed, another's god
And moves towards and from
Being free and therefore wilful and will less
Breathes, rather, at the cliff's side
Through long tunnels of sound
Trumpets in high pools
and slides foaming
back, to be received
into itself

'But thou, when thou prayest'
Captured in closets and cloaks of flesh
'Use not vain repetitions'
To build incarnate god,
dangling crucifixion
After this manner therefore pray ye
To the arched prisoner
in the arcaded nave
Set aside and sanctified
On public glory to your inward eye
Our father
Remain in keeping

The bishop's eye sees the chimaera
Of heaven, beguiling
the shadows

Cyclops your back is turned

Upon the cliff
There below the tide leaps
And your loss is real

sea sight

Rite

Put out the light

Put out the light then
All is done. It is not done
I am alright, again
I have the old man's life here in my hand
Each brittle tendon, kindles
Cracks and is new, now here
I stand, against the light
Anew

New Wood, new trees to sap and die
I turn in heat, tamed
By this fire, made fuel
To feed, each spark consumes
Seize swaddling limbs
And burn, together burn
Is all innocence, I brandished in flame

Fly then old man
And look into my eyes
Bright eyes, cool eyes, the wind is dead
I am all out
Put out the light
Put out the light
And let me live

New wood, new trees to sap and die
To turn in heat tamed
By my fire, made fuel
To feed, spark sense surmount
Seized swaddling limbs
And burnt, together burnt
In expiation, innocence

Put out the light, I said
It burns me down to ashes
As I am. The wind blew round the house
And made me here, collected
Kept, contained. I flickered, flamed
I fled out, like the light
Put out the light I said

Burn slowly then and need
Must give to slow extinguishing
There is a pyre of life
That builds the ashes
Of an old man's dreams
And recreates the world
In smouldering eyes

Put out the light then, let it go

It will not go, I have it here

A short time, tended

And the wind blew me

Fanned my soul, I said

Put out the light

It would not go

I left the house

Aflame, each stride was long

I would have all the power of the wind

And not renounce but stand

And burn my space

Between

Leaving you standing there

Leaving you standing there I found my way
In a desert by the great sky and wide
I was not with you I had found the wide white room
Lying like quartz amongst myself and there was light
Entering, about, suffusing beneath as coals
Branding my mind to be still in this land
Holding immobile the fractions of my lust
Pulled out, reduced from expectations to be with all
Was all, Went all, Want all of this, conspired, alone
And I was free to find my freedom wither in that sky
Spring from the heat of stone that brought me there
Nurtured my bones from brimstone to intrude
Upon no space before the sun
I saw in one space, one eye, pierce me eyeless
Blinded, dissolved, spinning in that sphere between

Straitened in cycling fixity that drew me out
Grasping with hands and feet peripheries of pain
Crossed to obey knowing no knowledge
But shone through with the wind and sun and rain

I am sad tonight

I am sad tonight she said
Of the consequences and the act
They are not separate. They continue
On, overlap, about me. I am bled
My blood is gone in my veins
And she had flowers in her hair
The yellow daisy sagged beside the bowl
The geranium left petals on the rug
The fuchsia was undone
I asked her what I'd done
She said nothing was done
Perhaps what was not done
There are so many lives in one
Can we remember all that is behind
After is gone but stays alive or half alive
In the same pain, alike yes all is like
The dead flower on the shelf

Now it is my turn to wince her way
Walking to town remembering last night's love
Between the books and the typists that I meet
Feeling her mind on mine
Remembering
And as I take my turn around the room
Roster my life in columns as it were
Adding the debit and the credit
Balancing

No struggle

No conqueror has ever struggled here
But us, taking the land against the sky,
From sky, granting earth feet to tread in fear
Upon the hubris of this space. To try
Our claim unclaimed that the bird might hear
The step of our possession and reply
Yours to delight in, to unleash all here
In battle as you might, forcing awry
The virgin smile you violate to revere

Your Australia your olden desecrate
Conquering yourself in chains of space
Love all this land it is your final fate
To come and go from innocence to disgrace
Learn all your land what the earth can tell
It is not yours but God's and yours as well

Give me your hand

Give me your hand made deviously
Your arm that will not bear or hold for long
Another's need surrounding tenuously
A hope worn thread about you to belong
Leave me your lips filled deviously
with other moment's lust another's song
And in betrayal tie insidiously
The cords that kept you weak among the strong
And I will let you go to fill the air
With wings that must sustain you in your plight
To circle still in currents of old care
Batting each blast to end the endless flight
And you are air not flesh and cannot touch
This anchor earth that men desire so much.

We lose

We lose, We lose, slowly shedding morality
In committing the continual violation of our age
To ourselves. We halve ourselves, then quarter the halves
And we split them again and again.
We are not whole and cannot give ourselves whole
But fragmented, turning away the eye when one talks
Of lifetimes or absolute gifts that we cannot bestow
Knowing the mockery of acceptance
The counterfeit nature of our lives
That must never be looked at too closely, never tested
Never used or else the slick facade
Will slump into humiliation and the emptiness invade
And we cannot look this way
There is no outward eye that will know
That we must know this vacant night
And cease to divide ourselves in the cruel
Diversions of suburban kings
Playing at abandoned hopes. Giving half
To this human distraction, perhaps an eighth to that
What we both pretended was a shocking
Until we contract to a pin-point in fright
And expand with hot breath at the next diversion.

Play

What should it be but play, the nervous chase
Of two men to connect, poised between touch
And scorn, tracing the outline of a face
Against the select night air suspended
Between pride and indecision, a grace
Of moments in their antlered dance fallen
From conquest before what must be done

In the window fix the blind bright eye
Turn to measured paces passing by
Cross the air containing in your cry

Alike lies under all these sorry men
They are the same to struggle, same to win
You will not love each other or the dance
But spend the fruit you gather in your glance

The Dream

All dreams have dreamt me through
This quiet time
Vacant spaces spread before the sea
For one more time, like waves that roll and go
I wait, for dreams
Stones, like deserts, each one was a desert
And glowering face to face for want of touch
The crumbling touch of sand removing moments
Scattered all around
Lust is the greyest colour in the world
The grey of dead ash on an old man's sleeve
The grey of winter sun where no dream is
So prophecy, to the wind that carries you apart
Stones, aligned for love
And so I dreamt one holy dream
I took the blood and flesh of Christ between my lips
I married them to me

The family

They became
enemies
at a distance
delivering pains
as effective similes for love

It was necessary to know
if one were still alive
Why?
to sneer, cajole, insult, deprive
all of these things
and because hurting is always hurting
and if nothing else
succeeds

Like letters
I send sadness
because you could love
as easily
as

Human being

Being human
as Schoenberg's survivor
bore through the shrill bright blindnesses of
each's ghetto
Sing, sing of death, of death thru' lone survival

and the people shall be smitten with a
great hurt, of fire and flood and famine
and multitudes shall be engulfed
extinguished
perish
as the woven cloth, organic
to become
human
soil, stone, salt - of the earth
taste yourself
eat into the ages of predetermined death
each other
devour the prancing antelope

Imagine the wind

Imagine the wind in your hair, warm eyes
And dust flame licking the mouth of the steppe
On the long march, tired with a hundred feet

Imagine the sky waits for bound souls
like a brother soaring

Imagine the earth waits open and smiling
Resisting the terrors end like a brother
Wider and longer than thought beneath your feet

Imagine the sky fire in captive's captive sight
Ascending ziggurats to the sun, releasing
showers

Imagine the pillar of fire, build it
In the grove earth at the burnt journey's end
Of yourself soaring in flight

And unashamedly draw fantasies
Nearer as painted waves flowing with thought
To will reality. Blowing upbrought
Emblazonings, crest keys of canvas seas
Crowned with release. Unlocked the mind retrieves

Lashed spume and cold calm, the tense spray time taut
Tireless test of love

Bird's nest fern

It came down to one leaf left
the bird's nest fern
looked like a specimen in an experiment
for sensory deprivation

admittedly I
had deprived it
of water, thought, affection and light
the gift had been too opulent

I had put it away
like the knowledge that one is loved
by a paragon
whose survival is unlikely

a displacement act
behind which something withers inside
joining the lives of others, talking
in the dark

Until, nothing was left
but the memory of its presentation
and a halting request
to be loved back

Some distillation gathering vapours

Some distillation gathering vapours
from many sources
much longing
to lay in the arms of a strong
beautiful man
coming from all
or each, beckoning to be seen
to be answered
to be given sustenance
of some strength to still
One looks at another and is not seen
is discounted in a transaction
carrying great risk
the rending of very gut
being no thing or some to swell
a cheek in the parade

Weep for the other
the young man will not see
the old man
without the courage to ask
but asking the marrow
of fate to obey a different
law
which inexorably rolls over
the cars, the passing cars, the pedestrians
the shopfronts, the going places, the rank
of taxis and the toilet block
roll-calling the rolling-up and asking for
unzipped flies
and putting into hands
a chance
asking for a chance
to take home
more than a pair of eyes
can see

Vouchsafe one vision

Vouchsafe one vision, only one
of a hillside, green, green
with the green of a changing time
whether of passing or arriving
or at the point of both
on the crest of a vast time
passing into green

Peopled with tiny people
stately dwarves
kings of a green land
with the heavy robes of responsibility
sweeping the green turf
help like a stiff brocade
figures of state
in the green light
passing

I remember my vision
hold it close

On the cross

Just get on the cross
All you have to do
is: Be there

Hang there
Suffer there

Why you're there
How you got there
Doesn't matter
It will all take care of itself
Your dying is real
As if the first real thing
Is your dying

and afterwards
will see to itself
As well

To Perc - my cat - killed on the road

Is that how people die?
learning a lesson -
as a final event
unfolds the same explanation
haltingly, in the continuation of knowing

he had come loose
bits of him I couldn't identify
organs I might have known
behind a wet face but merely thought;
this is still him
this is another way of holding him
the last, in my arms

Where did it lead?
except further
down into grief following a dip
a depth of sight
to meet somewhere
now
where realisation sighed
then smiled
at the meeting of his dismembered end
and my whole loss

Which god?

I wonder which god
like a fire wind in the bush
jumping from shack to tree, outpost to edge
in crazy logic
devouring the poor, the poorer
and sometimes the rich
has already decreed
which of us will die?
now
are already
patterned
for special consideration
The messenger? Hermes?
The winged Mercury we loved as men
slipping the heavy metal down our throats
fermenting in blood a brew
we could not hold beyond
the first stage of bliss
let alone the seventh
We might have
indeed might still

Still the balancing

Still
the balancing, in scales, of a terror
and a resignation
might resolve or answer or create
a third state
which has nothing to do with survival
or death
the death of this body or that
Life as reflected -
How many homosexuals will always inhabit the earth?
Will always risk, invite contamination
with each other, are damned
merely confirming a world-sneer
on our lips -
Die laughing
The glassy mirror
gives back a mercurial glance
as around we return
to link, conjoining to germinate
a joy

Adam's dream

In Michelangelo's creation of Eve
from Adam's dream
the supplicant girl
greets an old man
Adam has dreamt himself
into a stupor of femininity
he has nothing to say to either
it is their conversation on the road
addressing a dream

But like Chuang-tzu
is Adam Eve or Eve Adam?
Perhaps both states are dreams of each other
knowledge, like femininity, might debase
the concrete definition
the butterfly upon a wrack
is too insubstantial
for this waking world

Lover on a bus

I had a lover on a bus
I look at buses, bedding them now
between traffic lights and where I am going
as a pin-pricking, groin-destroying pitch
of buses.
running, the ambulance officer, shook my hand
in motion, asking me marathon times and sharing
footfalls
on this pavement
Last night, on the way home
an ambulance officer leant his arm
from the short-sleeved blue-uniformed arm
out as I drove the other way
I thought there he was
always at the late-night intersection
There's something about there now

Alone

The ones who die quietly and alone
the lonely inadmissible homosexuals
die of their own terror
vacuuming obsessive, bare walls
as well as carpet
they leave there clean
for a visitor?
and in the evening?
the evening is the end
lying down wracked
having turned the radio off
because the sound was in their head
they didn't go out
on Saturday night

Safe-sex

Used to thinking of himself
as a mirror
(The third person lies beyond
somewhere within, somewhere waking)
reflecting the image of himself that others see
never himself
He's father, brother, husband, uncle, son
cosily denying
with his clothes on
a disease beneath all contours

So when the precipice yawns
he can't stay at the edge
and even while falling
maintains his condition
is temporary
like his assumed soul

The Gay Mystic

Not that I will ever get the chance
but
having just glimpsed a beautiful man
in the jump at my supermarket and undertaken
an almost appraisal
well the white shorts against his brown,
fair-legged hair
and my diminutive butch blue
with that current
I'm led to say, no,
not that there's any choice
it's an attitude -
I can't even see him
he's not there
or I'm him
at least I'm feeling him and he me
but lesser as if we might come and stay
together
in the ground
not of desire
like they say
Wow

The parking inspector who liked small men

I understand it's naive
to be surprised, more - incredulous
but am
each time, each time
at the encouragement: my unbelief
- fantasies inside his head. I'm what?
a small man beneath a weight
of dry desert (the sands get smaller, browner, harder)
and he sprinkles me with semen and I sprout

I was hailed, intercepted from the city
by a grey ghost
coming down. And I made the move
pleaded to be taken
off a rack (I'll take you home, I'll take you)
anywhere
and freely
Once inside we took off
everything
except the truth (that was his occupation)

Mortality

Every day to walk knowing mortality
I am in decline; I am dying
and every other is reaching

It's in the balance
there's a space to join, to graft
now when I know
so abruptly the worth of each walk
my face
sees further than these occupations
on the way to death

I will take
a little more time
to love now
on the edge

She looked as a woman of fifty

She looked as a woman of fifty
looks lined with a gaunt dying
face turned toward ending
well on into a final
time
everyone becomes such a picture
as penultimate as
the recognition of a neighbour's
death before the onset
of old age

Yet I heard her speak
to me of the mysteries sweet as
youth uncreased cupping
her hand to coo
like first love discovered
the firm curves budding breasts
tight holding the silk skin
between fresh thighs

Poor boy

Poor boy
there's another world, side by side
with yours
for which you need a dictionary
and a cake-fork

to eat dry earth

In my head I am aware I've prevailed
over Oxford Street like a jealous god
swept you into running gutters
with the roar of meditation and celibacy

and been answered by tinkling sad/gay laughter
behind ordinary bedroom doors
where bodies pant and thrust their way
into positions as difficult to achieve
as Paradise