

## 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 upkeep 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 spurts  
                    oozes down the table leg.

*The ballad of a man*

The ballad of a man and his one love  
is every innocence  
lost, and therefore all loss  
or love remembered.  
The convict ship of his life that never put to port  
or faced a frontier of clay  
reprieved the need.  
Nor could ever advance  
into a desert space  
was still his one love.  
He removed his aspiration  
from his will -  
shed like the skin of a snake  
in order to endure the long summer  
riding the hard rock of his ground  
which held him close  
over battles of survival  
he survived  
in order to  
Carrying  
as compensation for the act  
an old pattern in his mind.



## *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*

No more illusions  
not the rite of pious idolatry  
nor the word - constructing an edifice  
as the constricting cliché

removes

reposes and possesses  
is secure in faith  
in irresponsible belief, vacuity  
indifferent to terror, doubt, discipline and action  
flaunted in faces

worshippers of worship

You have no right to intone sanctities to no god  
to happen upon a sanctified order of self-betrayal  
in monotonal 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

the compassion of no god

But the wonder, curiosity, even excitement  
the numb, simple death at that moment  
when nothing stopped

the least joy

the blank death

*Talk of a dumb man*

Talk of a dumb man speaking silences  
 grovelling in idealism                      achieving hypocrisy  
 no courage for, no power to change  
 Messiah

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  
to be executed  
its reward

stripped of meaning, unadorned

## *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 dribblets 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 suppliant 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 walloped 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.



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..*

Let's leave it there  
it went nowhere  
beyond a brushing  
a very desultory one  
from which you shied  
like a pony whose favours are his own  
It was a put on  
a put down  
a gross liberty  
a harnessing of your energy:  
breaking out  
at some point, you remembered,  
and refused to re-enact  
my desire was to touch  
run my hand along the vertebrae of your spine  
possibly smell the scent of your hair  
to stand bump to bump with my body and yours  
an arm somewhere used as a comforter  
to lay you like a child  
with terror and dread  
and no movement, beyond the rise and fall  
of our separate pulses.

## *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  
uncaressed  
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 unmarried  
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*

You are coming tomorrow -  
    to eat with me,  
    the flesh of an afternoon  
We shall eat coq au vin and drink ros,  
    talk to me  
    of what you want to be  
    a teacher teaching yourself  
                    the kindness and cruelty of life  
With me you are giving yourself just a moment  
between the husband and the father,  
the gardener of collected lives  
and the respectable exposure  
                    of what you should have been  
What are you, coming tomorrow?  
Here, you can make love to me  
                    but not outside  
And I love you, or outside  
Come tomorrow, come naked  
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  
as you live  
by the apple's  
answer  
  
But I leave it hanging  
                                here  
inside of me  
wrinkling  
    without  
opening  
and becomes  
the secret  
    as only thought  
constructs a bitter  
                                taste  
  
Yours is the woman's  
pain of knowing  
    it  
eaten it  
    and consumed  
the discontent  
    of duality  
but eaten  
    as food is  
to return again  
from gain  
    another  
loss  
  
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



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 alight, 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 suppliant girl  
greeted 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