

TECHNIQUE

by

GAVIN BOWD

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This edition published in 1999
by Dionysia Press
20A Montgomery Street
Edinburgh EH7 5JS

Set by Dionysia Press

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ISBN: 0 9522341 8 1

Cover design: from a cave painting at Lascaux.

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Printed in Scotland by Dionysia Press

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements are due to the Editors of *Braquemard*, *Brass*,
Butterfly, *Chapman*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Fife Lines*, *Gairfish*, *Lines*,
Review, *Markings*, *Poetry Nottingham International*, *New Writing*,
Scotland 16, *Southfields*, *Spectrum* and *West Coast Magazine*.

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TECHNIQUE

Discovering new muscles
Upon this earth
That splays our limbs.

Knowing there is nowhere
Out of this
Or after this.

Just this body
That could irradiate
Like stream and breeze.

Walking around walls,
Aligning the buildings
On encroaching mud.

Holding in breath
And denying food
To soaped-down flesh.

Falling into
The animal condition
During the dance.

A generous hand
Feels out the land
For generations.

Knowing that water
Dripped from the elements
Into the mills.

Now lies heavy,
A storm cloud
In the atom.

I'm organic,
Mechanical
And cybernetic,

And place my palm
Clumsily
On your shoulder.

Knowing that a man
Without art
Is unknown,

I draw up
A diagram
To include myself.

Dreaming of an engineer
Encompassing
Our small efforts,

Smooth-running force
Upon force,
Printing the land.

We are awaiting words
To change
Our state of nature.

Inventing savoir-faire
We prepare
The negotiations,

Making progress
On contracts
Of humus and saliva.

A millennial body
Carving up streets,

Dreaming of a mind,

A researching hand
Riding shocks
And carrying the knowledge:

We make love as we live
And press our tips
Oozing upon the world.

HAND

"Many things would be easier if we could eat grass."

*

My bare skin,
The cold dew
Where my head will wipe its blood,

Punch my veins with blue,
Force me to invent.

*

There is someone in the wind.

The pond
Rises spluttering weed and tadpoles.

A rat will show me its silence
Then find the earth's wet warmth.

*

I can only progress in warm regions,
In the undualtion of the golden fleece,
Among the flicker of palms
And the perfume of narcissus.

I cannot survive a single winter.

*

In the south you may walk naked,
Press your toe in the sand's hot deep,
Unveil your breasts and ochre eyes

-But don't go unarmed.

*

During these months my teeth have receded
Until they tug on the trembling hare,
And the virile clench of my fist
Could hang in the branches as a pear.

And the wolves of the great paths,
Of hazard,
The beast of battles,
The mouth to dress in rags of skin
When winter comes.

*

My hand must grow into the other,
Sleeping flint,
Wood's memory of movement,

Hew and quarry,
Plan something better:
Everything says plunge
And work a thing.

*

"If our daily bite to eat was as certain as
the air, then there would be no misery."

*

Stooped on the plough's refusal,
Envyng the beast of burden,
Remembering

You standing at the wall of leaves

Becoming the heavy plum.

But armour hides the deer
And the weight of the berry basket.

*

Bread grows on trees only in dreams
But the plough

Labours to write the generation's sentence
Of dreamy courage.

*

The hand
Doesn't reach to press the metal
And, blistered, bear.

It blossoms the golden earth
Of calm.

*

All we have held:

The pebble,
The dazed blackbird,
The petal,

To touch for the straining seconds
By the stream of the chestnut's flags,
By the looking green of the grass,

Then hand over.

SUMMERTIME

The pregnant woman waited by the door,
Breathing air from the heavy sheaves.
So much goodness was ripening
In the frenzied flesh of the pear.

And so much strength in the whirlwind
Of the oakwood carved as a door,
In the grey engraving of the mere,
Abandoned the struggle then slept.

On the crackling flame of the twigs,
The little girl already fixed
Her eyes of agate for tomorrow,

At the foot of the bed where the dead
Lay under white sheets rotting
While the hawk never questioned their fate.

RELIGIO

The line that binds to the hidden fields,
The expanse of ocean, its air
That the gull strains its arms to beat.
The line that binds to the trees,
Breaking on the bud, shooting
Chaos into the beautiful.

The line that binds which is hidden,
Which threatens to tear on this
Broken glass of the vision city,
The array of chimneys, pipes and walls
Which have captured daylight and will not
Tell us where it is hidden.

The line that binds which is traced
By us blind to the promised order
And treading on debris of myths and gods,
Stretching up for the *muthos* mouth,
The kiss of moss on stone,
High in the frost where gentian strikes.

KITEFLYING

Up into the air,
It lifts,
And finding its perch,
Bites your hands.

Turn left to right
And find that power
Welling, rushing
From your body,

And laughing,
Running
On the rained-on sand,
Touch overflow

By the water
Where we paddled
And a young boy
Drowned.

Taking turns
We drag its shape
From the ground
Where it fell,

For a minute
Watching
A yellow flutter
On the clouds.

This is an old game
And we came down here
Giggling
To learn it.

And then we'll follow

Roads and corridors
And find those doors
To open.

And tonight we'll run
That other shore
To cross
And caress.

And words extend
Their astonishing tangle
Sovereign
In the dark.

And that face
For hours
Arriving, leaving
In front of me.

The beating of the waves
Against the pier
And the crackling wrack
Beneath the ruins,

The force that seized
A country's guts
And threw its bodies
On the land.

As flesh rocks
Without horizon,
A kite glows
In a windblown attic.

THE POND

The pond
In winter dress.

Above the rock:
The tree that perches
And will not fall.

And strewn till the edge,
The quarry's final
Agitation.

Here we can stand
And ponder.

Last skaters beam
On beer-dark water.

The pond could be seen
In a different light.

In the rain light,
The North-Westerly light,

In late summer
Midge-bitten
Bat light.

Quarrymen left
An unexploding pond.

The pond,
We can tell you,

Is where the young boy drowned,
Where the toads were whipped,

And penknives cut
First love on the elms.

Pond water might reach
A hundred fathoms.

In January it'll freeze
To Danube white,

Then bed the ducks
And cough the toads'

Palpitating slime
Towards the river.

We might wait for hours
For the occasional ripple.

But don't and climb
For the valley of slate

Keeping upon us
The gaping pond

Left behind
For a new year.

NEW YEAR

It has to happen,

This urge for resolutions
Inspired by the calender.

And as the moon shifts
In its orbit around the earth,
And the sun stays another
Minute on the town,

We know we must be growing.

Tonight we'll climb
The Eildon hills,
And standing on the peaks
Watch the lights of the town.

And with the aid of the compass
We can direct ourselves
To London, Berlin,
Moscow, Yerevan.

And weather permitting,
We can check the sky
To our brother's present
Of a map of space.

It's a good idea.

Tonight we might place
Our fingers on it,

The appropriate place
For honest skin,

And look each other

Straight in the eyes.

And the exploding networks
Of disorganising capitalisms
And scattering nationalisms,

They must become more manageable.

That space when your body
Is suspended in air
And heather takes your voice.

Tonight there will be rain
And strengthening winds.
Tomorrow, brighter weather
Extending to the East.

Tomorrow we'll descend
Free for symbols
And cause and effects.

It has to happen:

This hilarity,
Where the Picts came
And the Romans came.

These limbs grew
To expel
The past tense.

As lips close
On the rim of the glass,

Past the cathode rays
And rain-spattered windows

We will think sympathy.

And stung bleary-eyed
By the morning,

Empty-headed,
We'll joke about

The millenium.

PROPERTY

This northern climate
Could be just right
For us to meet.

Like water on rock
It could be.
Like water on rock
Our final thought.

We walk
Beneath a blue
Washed of clouds,

Through dripping reeds
That soak us.

Dreaming of the rightness
Of this climate,

For water upon
The voiceless moss,
Running on pebbles
For a nameless sea.

Walking
In winter blue,
Dreaming of a climate,
A nakedness.

This moor
Lies fenceless
For the gift.

Like water on rock,
A silence,
More silent than the silence

That freezes the hills.

Your hand.

That nape.

A dialogue drowned

By saliva.

Our soles on the mud,

Printing it,

And the coldness conserving

Our nights.

Water on rock--

Our sense of balance

Crossing the burn.

Water on rock--

Our clambering words,

The millennial poem

Killing us.

HORSES

When the jets arrive

They will run around whinnying

Left to right,

Then stand for hours,

Tail to head,

Head to tail.

And when a boy chooses

To run across the field,

They will chase him.

Horse,

Your haunches are good,

And we lean upon the fence

To admire them.

We stroke your skull

And give you grass

Then start away

From your big teeth.

Horse,

You let us

Sit on your back.

A bigger heart brought us

Across the river.

That strength in your blood

That runs so quietly.

Men once conquered

Nations with you.

Horse,

Beyond the field
And along the roads,

Men are gathering
To watch you,

And cover you with silver
And throw upon you
Their bets,

Head to tail.

You impress within the limits
Of the owning and the eating.

Now upon your back,
The snow that lies for miles,
And from your nose
The occasional
Dim silver cloud.

RAIN

We have willed these clouds
For the dry continent.
Send the shoots bursting
To fill them right up.

With our private dances
We repaired the mechanism
That pours in the rut,
That ambushes our shirts.

Yes, our hands might slip
On the swings, and the grip
Be sore on the shopping bags.
Players will slide in the dirt.

But I will praise the rain
That cleans my timidity.
The meteorological envelope
Bursting upon your face.

PASSION

Weather reports
Will have to be bad
To stop him entering
This collar of rock.

And his head leaves easily
The slit of the tent
To meet the wind howling
In the eyeless fells.

He'll walk long miles
And clamber up slopes
Until the helicopter
Might come for him.

In the town he'll rub
Oil into his skin
Then leave for high peaks
Evaporating passion.

DEMOCRACY

The sun poured down
Its truth on our shoulders,
The cedars and cicadas,
And extended its grip
Of madness on the animals.

I'd been walking up and down
The sunburnt boulevard
Of the absolute,
With the loss of the only one
Cracking up my skin.

Until you chose to stand still
In a cherry white dress
And prised out the glistening
Pebble of my tongue
To name you.

And we imposed a lip on the sun.

SUMMER DRESSES

No time to stand
In the shade of the trees.
You release on the avenues
Your studied language.

Flags of flowers and polka dots
Swishing past statues.
A fever of tropisms
In the Jardin des Plantes.

It's not wind and rain
You are pressing against
But you know the weight
Of another history.

Stealing breath
From polluted streets.
Vagabond hips
As machines pass by.

You say the next millenium
Deserves your gentleness
And you shoot the moment
In our busy flesh.

HUMID

Through the curtain stands a rose
Spongy with the rain.

I let in its grease
Brown upon the tiles
And sighed.

Pungent, the clouds
Run upon us redrawing
Their frontiers.

A meteorology of the mind,
From past to future,
Billowing and twisting
Across Europe.

This season of sweat.

On the table is a jar I put my pencils in,
And a smooth, white pebble I found on a beach.

We stare up and imagine
The astronauts swaying
In cold waves of force.

BRILLIANT

Et la fête continue...

A father runs around
Playing at football.

Bowls glint and chink
On the baking sand.

A rock band blares
And empties a street.

A wee boy and a girl
Fight over a doll.

So many skins
Assembled and shimmering

In this boiling heat
That swells the balloons.

If it gets too hot
We can go into the shade,

Chastise the children,
Throw the ball from touch,

Print a love story
On our feeding flesh.

Gravity has made this
Our corner of the world.

That sand will be raked
When the fair has gone.

As day follows night

We will walk the asphalt

To recommence our careers.

CARNET DE VOYAGE

Autumn red on wood
Among the Hurons.

Pumpkin lanterns
Lolling
Across incredible snow.

A girl from Saskatchewan
Going nowhere.

Notes.
Cross-continent.
Hybrid hitch-hike.

(That battered woman driving
To the Reservation)

You went there to study history:
Flicking wave upon wave
From the old world.

For hours I've lain here
Darkness, rain, wind
Against the window.

Until your moon-face passes over
To mix our tongues.

For the relief of life,
You've invented
The perfect form.

REAL WORLD

Drifting into it,
Hard on soft,

Real world
Without horizon.

*

That space for the hand
To cross.

That skin of silence
To print.

*

Raindrops have promised
This touch.

The past electrified
This reach.

*

Then was sleep
Among the polders

As the swell beat hard
On the dykes.

*

Then was the welcoming
Hand of silt

As everyday murder

Aged us.

*

Then were the clouds,
Above, as ever,

Offering us willing
Emptiness.

*

Then was the future,
Necessary pain,

Palms folded on
Spluttering flame.

*

Now the real world,
Hard on soft,

A thousand ripples
Trembling.

*

Now the shock
Of the new body,

Love root of logic,
The marrying light.

*

Like the dynamite
And then the saw

Bringing us
Rhythms of limes.

*

Like the strand's
Cemetery of shells,

Gleaming symmetries
At our feet.

*

Like the hand
Pushing the plane

With the grain
Of the wood.

*

Like the good food
At the end of the road

Where tired we can taste
The reasons of the earth.

*

Land extends
Its gesture to the ocean

And their dance
Frees feeding eyes.

*

To seek a harmony

In that vibrant water

And englobe that
Swallowing space.

*

Suppose that the rain
Invades the earth

And the sun arrives
To reverse it.

*

Suppose that time
Is wearing our soles

And we pause to watch
The vegetal.

*

Just real world,
Hard on soft,

Raw on cooked,
Hot on cold.

*

Pressing the skin
Against this wind,

The landscape moulding
Our reflection.

Plunging forwards,
Quarrying silence,

Shooting chaos
Into the beautiful.

*

Coincidence brings
The stranger's hand's

Venture,
Brief as photos.

*

Now the crush
Of parallel lines

And the fruit fallen
From the lips.

FREE WORLD

The last lamppost drips
Luminous rain
On the village.

And tomorrow the wind
Will stuff this rain
In our mouths.

At dawn when the farmer
Guides his machine
Through the slime,

And the ship carries trembling
Its cargo of politeness
For the Arctic.

The rain that sends
The outside world
Down our backs.

The rain that lashes
The emptying ocean
And the ageing fields.

The rain and wind
Were our outdoors shool
Of government.

Today, a new dawn:
Another translation
Of the Declaration

Of the Rights of Man,
Flashing on TVs,
Shooting down cables

Under old soil
That rain and wind
Machine-gun to mud.

BORDERLAND

The river could be seen as the confluence
Of northern and southern streams.
The glacier's gouging hemmed us in.
We hate what the hillside hides.

Sometimes on the hill-tops
We have built huts and forts.
The horizon erases the valleys.
Flares of beacons unite the region.

There are people down here.
They put intelligence in the humus.
They shifted the forests.
Their dykes net the hillsides.

You write that you are lonely,
Yet you march across our book.

We put blood into our poetry.
We have a history of reprisals.
Our fathers rape our sisters.
Our brothers rape our mothers.

There is so much beauty from the look-out.
An artillery-man's aesthetic.

There are people down here.
They sprout among the rowan and the rock.
You see them stirring in the parks and roads.

In the valleys are the textile buildings
Where we weave another cloth.
We employ the grandmothers' fingers
To mend imperfect garments.

We are low-paid,

But the product crosses the borders.

MUNGO

Three centuries past
We do not know you.

Silence plants its bark
Around our exchanges.

Our cloth, your gold.
Our guns, your ivory.
Our goods, your slaves.

We catch glimpses of
Your scarlet gums
And plunging throat.
Your temples thrum.

Miles of lip
Stroked by the Atlantic.
Tightly sealed.

After so much time
We do not know you.

We are experts.
We will be discrete.

We will offer our minds
Without interest.

These muscles run on
Predestined blood.

Confident that the reins

Of events are in
Our Father's hands.

Mungo learns Mandingo
Then takes a slave interpreter:

You will carry my words
To the end of the Niger.

Then you will be free.

We dress as we would
Back home.
We do not pretend.

We know that this region
Can eat our skins.

Perhaps quitted forever
Christian comforts.

The King of Fatteconda
Finds it impossible

That so many dangers could be faced
Merely to look.

I see no differences
Between the races.

They sweat as much
As me in my waistcoat.

We both hate the bees.

I was captured by the Moors
Of Ludamor.

They confined me to a tent
Where a pig was tethered.

A cloud of flies
Judged the unclean.

The interpreter
Has dumped me.

He has regained his family
Behind the trees.

An irritation spreads
Across my back.
My scalp is itching.

Blisters reveal
The strangest pus.

This skin has eaten
A continent's dirt
And become rough.

Escape meant the desert's
Mortification.

Until the clouds poured grace
That I wrung and sucked
From my clothes.

Before me swelled the Niger
Running to the East.

Sego.

Civilisation and magnificence
I little expected to find
In the bosom of Africa.

Black female nudity
Stares at me,

Eyes large as nipples

"Let us pity the white man.
No mother has he."

Vast wilderness.
Naked and alone.

Savage animals and men.

Deliverance
From a benevolent Negro.

I astonish even
The educated ones.

I should have worn
Native dress,
Learned Arabic.
What would I trade?

Travel for its own sake
Is incomprehensible.

The slaves of the caravan
Are eager for answers:

"Have you really got
Such ground as this
To set your feet upon?"

And when we have finally
Crossed the salt water,
Will they eat us?"

Back home they appreciate
My accounts of the interior.

They enjoy the prose style,
Reflective of my character.

Precise like a scientist.
Restrained like a sober Scot.

Yet they dislike my manner
And do not offer invitations.

At the Africa Society's
General Meeting,
1799,
Sir Joseph Banks declares:

"We have already by Mr. Park's means opened a Gate into
the interior of Africa into which it is easy for every nation
to enter and extend its Commerce and Discovery from the
West to the Eastern side of that immense continent."

Send soldiers and field guns.
Build forts along the Niger.

Guerre à Napoleon
Et aux Français!

In Peebles, I apply
My surgeon's knife
To client skins.

Long rich veins
Of cysts and gouts.
Rain-bleached flab.

And one evening I broke
The promised seal
Of my childhood sweetheart.

When the cutting is done,
I pore over Golbey's
Fragments d'un voyage en Afrique.

Our men have captured
Goree from the French.

The crevice of the Gambia
Has burst its stitches.

Banks is behind us:

"Whoever colonizes in that part of Africa with spirit will Clearly
be able to sell Colonial Products of all kinds in the European
market at a cheaper price than any part of the West Indies can
afford it."

This time we will follow
The Niger to its end.

We will rely on Europeans.
There will be no interpreters.

The knots of branches
Mock our hacking.

Our men are the dregs.
They shit themselves dry
And take epileptic fits.

The bees send them running
Into the trees
Wrapped in the Union Jack.

King Mansong
Had some consoling words:

"If you speak of a good gun, who made it?

The White people."

We intended to build
A ship for the coast
But were ambushed.

We each take a European
And jump into the river.

Slave Fatoma says:

"They are all dead, they are lost forever."

Thomas sets out
To find his father
Then dies of fever.

In the future we will be
More systematic.

SHEEP

You lie on your fat sides,
Munching,

Oblivious to the sky
Flicking its channels.

One of you limps
Among the turnip-heads.

Downtown we wonder
About the nature of the cut.

All of us are hungry
And we want to feed

The greasy lips
Of generation.

Sinews congregate
To push for hope.

A chorus of bleating
Praises the knives.

We weigh and calculate
The value of gentleness.

You shit codes of pellets
In the furrow's wide feint.

The moon surveys the soil's
Frozen transhumance.

Some people are willing
The ending of the day,

The skaum.

It is time to whistle
And guide you as we can.

The wool that brushed the wire
Will be marked.

A layer of red
Lies on the weather gleam.

RELIEF AT GRANDAD'S LUCID DEATH

Your head is brown
From years in the garden
Digging
And spreading manure
That the horses left
On the roads.

For hours, the retired
Democratic intellect's
Relentless snip
Of the secater.

And there were the walks by the river,
The mighty great hogweeds,
Water-lilies and rhubarb,
The bloated sheep that the flies would feast on.

You are so light in the coffin.
You leave us fumbling
In the Calvinist mirk.

We must know the soil.
It is formed through sifting
And good drainage.
The tributes of the dead
Permit cultivation.

There were the walks on the abandoned railway track,
Trudging on the flint,
Talking about your brother
In the Comintern.

And there was the bookcase
Pungent with the century
With titles like Mother Russia
That were devoured along with

Tea and scones.

Red stars on the great steppes.
Electrifying long distance.

It is necessary to kill
The rabbits.
The cats scare the birds
And deposit in the soil
Acidic excrement.
Chase them away.

In the photo you wear the uniform
You wore at the Liberation
When you sent back the Cossacks
To Russia.

They implored you as you pushed them
Into the trucks.

You supported a family.
You stalked the classroom
Armed with the tawse.
Your daughters folded
To your teacher's scorn.
They are all here to love you.

Some things are necessary,
Like cycling a hundred miles
Through hill and vale
For the University.

Cutting off a bad branch
Never condemned the roots.

Black knots are tied
Around our throats,
But one flourish of the hand

Meets grandmother's shoulder,
And the kiss on the cheek
Brings the vertical,
The rain of good.

THE CAT SLEEPING

TV wars are passing shadows.
Airwaves bombard the hills
Around your curled-up frame.

Snug in sheeprug reverie
Your rare contorsions run
On private electricity.

We have made a lot of noise.
Rancour threw the chair
Around your pricked-up ears.

You have seen us make love,
Then closed upon the coals
The eyelids of your theatre.

We have left you tributes
Of meat and caresses
Then left you for our labour.

Listening to the evening wood,
You pose your smouldering eyes
On the beeches' cresting back.

You have left us again.
A silent furry rebus
Randomly shoots its claws.

You do not understand mirrors.
You have little time for learning.
You fill a shell of warmth.

Since you came in here,
You've retreated into shadow
And, God, become immense.

LATIN

This sun makes the head light
And the body's pores weep uncontrollably
In heat. In the arena steam's
Sweat of bulls who fed among rocks
And writhe here to applause.
You can't think straight when cicadas
Sing in the trees all day.
Girls tear at the langour on mopeds,
Surveyed by boys with cropped heads
Demobilised on the terraces.
Before our lips joined, I felt cold
With rancour and sleet-covered self-hate.
"I'll teach you that love is not like that."
You said. You whose eyelids
Were painted azur. You whose skin
Was colour of coffee mouths longed for.
Now impenetrable. You whose inflections
I interpret along with other ruins,
Foundations of absence whose millenia
Cement the limits of my study.

REVOLT

Militante jeune et belle, your hands
are stained black by tracts you hold
all this evening that expands to a storm.
Your spotted face is lovely, you tell
of origins and bureaucratic betrayal, you
have mastered the crimes of a century.
"Revolution would be something violent", an embrace
would heave up the everyday, skin to skin
liberty and justice incarnate, kisses
dissolving division in saliva, sweat
labourless to abolish speculation.
Eye to eye, the book we share
closes the world in the darkness of sheets
as we dig for roots beneath the cables.
Violently happy, we awake to streets
of a city busy without our youth.

REVOLUTION

In the Tuileries, the big wheel
sends light but no sound
to the statues of Gods
retreated beneath the trees.

In the dark, one seems to approach
across lawns of old massacres.
He cuts the candlelit chatter
that severs our head and body.

Cool as ice cream, his form
meets with your eyes' approval.
We will wander home in separate skins
that the day's arc has stiffened.

CHEEK

When the girl guessed my address
and threw my name towards the window,
a haze of lamplight sketched the branches'
gestures on the curtains,
but left in the darkness digital time.
My hands imagined the form I'd
taught in the classroom,
then slipped down into their theory
that felt hair and muscle that was their own,
in sheets that sailed on gusts of autumn
and sank at her laughter into terrible dreams.

MUNICIPAL BATHING

Autumn has brought the university girls
among tattooed boys from unvisited estates
and the children's aquatic school of sadism.

We are bare together in public, partly.

We swim our lengths at different rates
after work and beer, conserving
taut behinds that time consumes.

Your lovely dart's in a gleaming black sheath.

We make space for one another, our eyes
are creased against chlorine, the water
alone enjoys your body's pressure.

Only your feet twitch beneath the cubicle door.

The night now peers through the roof's windows
and embraces at the door well-wrapped bodies
wandering home across intimate geographies.

TOUCH

Car headlamps and rocket salvoes
erupt at random across the city.
Icecream vans pass into oblivion
of November cold that blisters apples.
Leaves and potassium grab the nostrils.
A season rustles before dogs and drunks.
Where is the sparkle that wheeled around,
your new moon belly and jet love hair?
Oh touch. To light. Hear the starward strains
of the amateur.

MISSING PERSONS

Morning light catches cloud utopias
unfurling endless between the buildings.

Moorland rises beyond city limits.
We could bury nightmares in heather.

When you close the door, you know
that so much more is needed:
a horse that would carry you upon its back.

As time shovels the evening dark,
flesh born from the butcher's cleaver
is removed unsold from the stall.

CCCP

Astride the balcony, Marina applauds
Another frigid goodbye of a harvest moon.
For a thousand miles, her image arrives
Of fire scattering upon the land.

The frontiers are safe, we read, the gates
Of our city shelter snoring guards
And through the alleyways lolling dogs chase
Another red sunrise on the red planet.

The leaves are burning, the grapes fermenting,
The child unfurling in your distant quilt,
This fall, Marina, when your worry insists:

Your son expelled in the invisible town,
The rout of shade in the teeming noon,
Your union torn in blood and urine.

THE INTERNATIONAL

Time has hidden our frontiers,
the sweet collision that made us cry,
whose treason undid our limbs.

That night, TV told the death of your State,
and cast its glow on your begging lips.
I would hold your hand to the free elections.

In a new world of visas and discredit,
we writhe around within our curtains,
straining anywhere for another skin.

Money swaggers warm from the brothel,
picking pubic hairs from between his teeth.
Old warriors stumble to excess deaths.

Ilna, you carried your mother's bird
in a cage through the sulphurous city.
You taped my English to remind you of

intercourse that was our best idea.
Pearls lying deep in walls of red.
Unions awaiting other suns.

CITIZEN

You once stood there blond,
your sex implicit in rubber trunks,
and gravity spared the gleaming towel
that dried your chosen torso.

White in deckchairs, generations
of women conversed in laughter.
The Black Sea was sheer blue
and your health was your truth,

Citizen. Bodies in tangy waves
of force pit their little strength,
as sea routes dissolve at midday
and fists of light punch the swell.

MALE

A cold night writes out the breath.
Returning upon the touch lines,
we watch for uncertain victories.

A generation studs the floodlit land.
Games and labour use muscle and bone.
We follow the wars of our fathers.

Tonight I was tensile intelligence. I
excelled in frost among other men's cries.
My skin wants the bath's benediction.

But we still can't tear away this rage.
Lone hardness shivers ephemeral,
as I address the roundness of you.

WEEKEND

Cycles bring the people
into the woods,
in sun that arouses
first shoots of green.

A bride gleams white
by the swans of the lake,
and old men stroll behind
their leadless dogs.

This is time we have won
to run against fat
and follow the paths'
choreography.

Time to fight time
and iron our bodies
as the city rumbles
beyond the trees.

Lovers in foetal clinches
pass by wordless,
as families lunch
within their shadows.

The lonely cruise
avenues of song
and unbutton all day
their obscene desires.

The arc of the sun
pumps our blood,
as quick runs the stream
where we cannot fish.

Labour produces rest

spent in sunlit hours,
once more preparing
the capital's return.

BREAK

When arms no longer waited
on an island in the West,
you took your body South,
past cold fronts and bare branches,
to where rock stared straight
into the sky's transparency
and heat undressed the world,
and there you plunged your body
in water that seized your breast,
where hidden rocks and seaweed
greeted your entangled head,
then you drove the car home,
your skin kissing the wind,
and your parents smiled silently
then left you to the night.

BASTILLES

Blue sky that would cover
the territory,
we imagine,
in words we mouth
between bread and kisses
and spit. A past
on whose banks we bask,
some naked,
white girls longing
to embrace the migrant
black.
Hollow bellies.
Gilded bellies.
A world's tourists
in contemplation
of congealed passion,
whose snapshots
are slipshod
beside new gestures
of hunger and love.
In corners and cracks
lie names to be flung
upon streets,
love's spectres
pressing demands.
Red is the wine
poured beneath bridges,
as are the lips
and the walls to be
invested.

GRAVITY SHIFT

Westerlies wreck the summertime
and send the clouds scudding
across a darker blue,
as panic grips the treetops'
shivering translucence,
as
our warm weight,
an envelope of licks,
pins the floor to the world,
and our cries don't reach the neighbours
left to labour in the town.

A MARRIAGE

One day they found
flesh returning to clay
and a rib protruding
in morning light,

where once a dress
had dared new hands
and bites covered breasts
like little insects.

When night's perfume
stiffened limbs with sleep,
a blade stole across
to pierce the skin.

An abandoned quarry
glowered on the bodybag
as helpers wondered
about a genesis.

BLUE

Cycles of blood and generation
moon tide and the blue slit
of a firth to be bridged
by miraculous lace suspension
royally revealed to the lucky
"I'll do what I want" you
shift and shelve pleasures
of cocks and cunts wealth's
spectacle where you paint your face
shines bright on private lives
dreams are to be had in this city
as the sun recedes to the west
and the poor can't help but demand
lips curled by love's sour milk

TRANSHUMANCE

End of summer sun through the pines.
Stillness filled with bees and police.
The clearing is filled with private splashes
of seed and darkly pregnant burrows.
Does shoot from steps. Glowering trees
cover muddy paths and earth's disturbance.
We have walked from childhood in this forest,
crossing with sticks a foxgloved peace.
The wire fence bends to limbs that stayed
above soil whose night calls the human.

SPUR

The town's behind you. The hill's
fold has hidden roofs and chimneys.
Your eyes fix the Eildons' ageless paps.
As
Thick wheat breathes within its dykes,
And heffers gouge a useless trail.
The valley's whirl is speaking worlds.
As
Horse-girls beat upon the crest,
Offer bare and jodhpured haunches
Determined for unknown exchanges.

IN ARCADIA

When gaff-rigged October has left
the bay unbridles white horses
on pebbles where hungry gulls
seek memories of fish and chips

Thick-armed men of workboats
shaped by locality
dangle purses of silver
squeezed by Europa

The North-West arrives
stinging the cheeks
with its passage

Hotel windows are bleary with salt

*Grand
Imperial
Empire*

Linen is smooth, musty, unstained

*Augusta
Pegasus*

Sea-light stabs ballrooms and china

*Belvedere
Broadway*

Waves ruminate and chew on shingle
the pier will not grasp
lost ships and children

In the harbour boats
like lemons bob

in north-westerly blue

sails stitch
stays tick
and an empty crate
lies on the quay
like a chrysalis

Windows are adorned with poppies
for veterans alive to sea air
along the promenade Union Jacks
incite to limbs' remembrance

In a cocktail bar
a ragged army
drink Bloody Marys
and dream of love

so lonely without you
a CD spools
forever

Idle waitresses await
a country's leisure
punch into calculators
quantified dreams

And up on the cliff
where rock pierces turf
in its twist of death

where wildflowers have long
become sepia memory

a goat guides its young
through shouting firs
and fixes afar
dusk's grey shore

Victoria
Mount Olives
Water's Edge

Lamps light the facades
of a century's turn

Boys throw stones
that gravity collects
and scrawl upon shelters
awesome erections

In arcades
amusements
brilliantly promise
derisory wealth

The moon has sent the waves
to lick the promenade
and the horizon has been sucked
into the night's belly

a starlit blanket covers the human
and only the unfished water
fills this desert with its sighs

HAPPY

Sun is hot on bonnets.
Wind feeds the nostrils
Fresh mown grass.

We are happy. We
Walk digestive tracts
Well furnished.

A secure community
Of limpid windows
Wasps would crash on.

We are happy. We
Carry emptied scrotums
And well-oiled wombs.

At last a horizon
Of leaf and brick and
Flower-crammed corners.

We are happy. We
Live the present's
Bulging fullness.

History's over,
Purrs the mower,
As we stop to sneeze.

RAIN IN SPAIN

from Anne Redpath

Mountians hide
behind the grey
fence of rain
hammering the vines.
Roofs of lead
enjoy this moment,
as only white walls
keep faces of sun.
You stand in the courtyard,
wrapped in black,
your head stooped
towards the cobbles.
Raindrops invest
your striated skin,
the cobbles' gaps,
walls' flakes and cracks,
drumming on the land
a cyclone rapes.
You stand there waiting
for weather to shift,
believing in a peace
black and heavy
beyond the shutters
and iron door.
Slopes will reveal
familiar rocks,
and wine pour endless
among the loaves.
You will carry across
beneath the shower
two withered breasts
time sucked dry.

RED SLIPPERS, 1942

from Anne Redpath

You have left the frame,
and your red slippers
point eastwards along
your retreat,
following lines' advances
across the rug.
Your white peignoir
drapes a red chair
as black threatens
to envelop the scene.
A world has changed perspective
and furniture begins to whirl.
Our eyes and books
slide on the surface.
Still in your slippers
some shade provokes
our remembrance:
a model stepping
across cold tiles,
red nipples ridged
by the painter's knife,
as if in time
your weight would warm
upon our fleece.

FOREIGN

A uniform frost
Covers the pane,
That the tongue could lick,
That the tip could strip.

Beyond the blankness,
A squad of trees
Might stand unflinching
In putrid blue.

A crest might hide
Paths warm for boots'
Swift descent
To some warm halt.

Air chills fences
And draws the flight
Of our words.

ECONOMY

Wheels keeping turning
Forever and ever,
The clock and the train
Carrying us over

Concentric circles
Of suburb and city,
Ruminating waves
From life's dead labour,

This tightened belt
On bellies going
To professions bought
With degrees of culture,

Respectful skins
Looking out vistas,
Imagining eye contact,
Dreaming of recovery.

INFLUENCE

Bearing
Me,
River deploying its will to flow,
Gurgling wisps around the rocks.

Chilly and dark,
You let my body spread.

Born on the moors,
In rain-sodden woods,
Passing down the years,
Building your ripples.

You generate the borders,
Drown the sheep,
Drag down trees
Brittle and stooped.

Straining shoulders amongst the current,

I

Thrash the water's dash.

ELEGY

Found: a deer
On a hard shoulder
By a small announcement
Of blood and guts.

Your big eyes still blinked
And your foreleg twitched.
You still seemed pretty.

Lifted gently your body
Into the grass,
Where crows would pick you,
Insects swallow you.

And left.
A small dent
Had long passed the crest.

The road kept roaring
And your moment soon
Quit rear mirrors.

ABEYANCE

A blue yacht bobs beside the jetty.
On its mast a rope plays a sailless tune.
Loch's sun-filled ripples scatter flames.

A sprawling bull forgets fence and tether.
Sheep and cows browse blooming heather.
Wagtails flit over loch and pebble.

A stream now roars from the pinewood cleft.
Treetop waves never reach the shore.
Bees drift humming from invisible hives.

Wait. Nothing has yet reached the road.
Morning has yet to stir the harbour.
Blue sky stays young without vapour trails.

ANSTRUTHER

Twinned to Bapaume,
freshly-cut trenches
sprout Brussels stumps
munched by sheep.

Fronts and depressions
seem far away
as dyked land tumbles
to salt and sand.

As an ironed sea
goes blue with the sky,
and a trawler ploughs
tangy davydeep.

Our rarity's efficiency,
a desert factory
for distant cities
and feeding frenzies.

PLANES

Behind you, the Eglise de Sainte-Carme,
Incensed with suffering spreads
Its pungent nailed bed of love.

Your love-sick behind is perched
On a cliff of monumental stone.
Your dense black curls mat city walls.

"It's hard to live in France." Your smile
Spans blocked and broken bridges. Rock
Cedes to soft glitter of a shore.

Below you, plane-trees are rooting
Bare and white on boulevards. You
Look far from children on the public place.

VAPOURS

She advanced among tombstones,
with gravelly footfalls.

A cheap bouquet preceded
her heavy womb.

In chill, her breast heaved
brief wisps of vapour.

I lay back on the ground
and soon forgot her movements.

All warmth came from cigarettes
I drew upon for hours

and exhaled towards the clouds'
drift across our valley.

CROWSTEPS

Love's night passed,
A young girl sits

Behind two old women
In floral scarves.

And so they're driven
Up the eastern coast

Where the sun was born
On frozen waters.

Past gulls and corbies
Crowding the plough.

Past pregnant sheep
Chewing on neeps.

Past pungent dirt
Patrolled by sows.

Heroines of crowsteps,
The collective farm,

Pockmarked like boulders,
Grey hairs like fronds.

You admire your beauty
In a darkening glass,

And alight before
Incandescent gables

Surrender their fire
To the mountain's teeth.

A SHRIMP

Comma animal
in a tidal pool,

while spume slaps
on a granite wall,

sun printing
transparency.

Solitary pause
at green fields

till blue sea's
rumination

conscripts a body
for its big mouth.

Darts at rock's
indifference,

repeating gestures
of distant friends,

fragile, frail
phenomenon.

A RARE BIRD

You do not understand:
a rare bird is a lost bird.
You watch and note my plumage,
listen to my strange cries
alone on a lush treetop.

A rare bird is a lost bird.
Understand: bad westerlies
have blown me from a mate.
Florid memories of a distant land
fly faster than my wing-beats.

FERNS

As treetops whisper
to sublime heights,
we spread ourselves
in lush basement.

Beneath us burrows
quivering warmth,
and our blades carry
feral scents.

Ancient, we know
that winter brings
a desolate peace,
sky's blue bruise.

But years won't pass
till our shiny youth
raises slingshots
on the moist earth.

KNOX

John Knox and fellow Reformers held out in St. Andrews Castle until it fell on the 7th August 1547. For nineteen months afterwards, Knox was condemned to slavery on a French galley, the Notre Dame. Of this episode Knox writes: "What torment I sustained in the galleys and what were the sobs in my heart is now no time to recite." This experience in the galleys is considered, however, to be crucial to the evolution of Knox's views on predestination and justification through faith alone.

*

I told you so,
when we expected
a brilliant dawn to burn the wicked,

I told you so,
when we laughed and drank
and fornicated
in the Castle walls,

when we bathed hands in blood
of holy murder
red as a Cardinal's robe,
I told you,

when friars rowped like ravens,
and we bore the ashes
of martyred bodies,

when plague's fruit ripened
and split in our joints,
when waves were gnawing
our vain defences,

when shot leapt hot from galleys below,

when we knew the night
of another defeat,

I told you so.

*

I have never been noble
enough. The better of birth
know freedom. And I

stand betrayed in a foreign port,
with chains to lash me
to a galley-deck. A lash

to prick from flesh a new rhythm,
wind to carry up the earth's dry dust,
kill and mortify the contemptuously despised.

*

For Notre Dame
we row,
side-by-side
in our chains.

Spindly arms
resist a wind,
prise up the swell
for an absent bridge.

Here we cook
a thin soup
of shit and puke,
of acrid sweat.

At night, beneath
a canvas sheet,

men carve from bodies
spasms of love.

The crew don't dare
descend among us,
as galaxies hide
from this putrid hull.

*

There would be

earth open and patient
for the sky's pure seed.

There would be

trees in blossom
caught in frost.

There would be.

*

An adder slithers
through blooming heather,

beneath the busy
honey-workers.

An adder stirs
by the narrow path,

as bare ankles follow
the spoors of hares.

*

We passed up the Loire's
castellated slit

to ports all fancy,
frenchified.

My forehead rested
on a cool portal,

while shouts and vomit
spattered the quays

and loins were oiled
in some warm halt.

*

This is a body
chafed by irons,
whose bones protest
through their livid envelope.

This is a body
in a mirrorless dark,
that would dearly love
to love the whip.

*

Notre Dame
sets out from France
with its cargo of damned

through weeks of plague
and furious fires,
extracting shrieks
from Protestant ranks,

and I keep the rhythm,
bend my bleeding back,
and seek from a brother
some justification.

If the sea is the world.
If evil is the wind.
If the boat is the Kirk.
If the helmsman the prophet.

So night joins the waves
in their freezing bed
and the owl speaks freely
in its blind kingdom.

*

There would be

a woman to hear me,
to press upon me
her flawed skin.

There would be

words like kisses,
dolour to dolour
to soothe my glondours.

*

I might obtest and exhort
in ire and rage,
swear oath and covenant
in moisture and rain.

I might wish a plague
on the black brood,

wish murder and rape
on scurrilous scurrility.

Still a crewman comes
to bring me bread,
butters it with spit
for my vain vanity.

*

One day Notre Dame
found St. Andrews Bay.
We rowed beneath
a parliament of gulls.

Waves reclaimed the strand.
Crows strutted on dunes.
The cathedral sulked
beside fuming hovels.

The kirk-bells rang
to my creaking oars,
and the punching swell
proclaimed a future.

*

We might walk
like sons of light.

We might glint
like stars at night.

We might be wheat
among the cockle,

We might be
prudent virgins

daily renewing
their lamps with oil.

*

Some days a crewman
descends from the bridge,
aureoled with tempest,
flood and fire.

Chains to a plank
my desert body,
and leaves on its wounds
his sentence of seed.

*

It was a sob that made me
stones lighter.

Frail and fragile
on the undertow.

My I dissolving
in the iodine.

It was a sob that made me
stones lighter.

*

Below this hull,
inedible shoals
trace their lives
in fathomless dark.

A mother whale
will suckle its calf

till the moon drags her
upon some beach.

Storm stuns the crew,
our small efforts,
and soaked you realise
you're still alive.

*

We will walk
like sons of light.

We will glint
like stars at night.

We will be wheat
among the cockle.

We will be
prudent virgins,

daily renewing
their lamps with oil.

*

Scotia's skirts
of snow and gloam.

Corbies sprouting
on sweating loam.

The minging poor
beneath granite walls.

I press in a puddle
my liberated sole.

*

When glory's in fever and diarrhoea,
when the body lies like a bundle of sticks,

you believe in mercy
piercing the haar,
conquering the bay,
the Castle and the pier,

and you give yourself
to virile hands

for no good reason.