



**CORACLE**  
**JACKSON**



# Coracle

Poems 1991-2007

Jackson

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## Dedication and acknowledgements

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It is also dedicated to all those working nonviolently for peace, sustainability, the empowerment of women and children, and empathy and understanding between individuals and cultures.

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Download: The Broadkill Review, KSP Writers Centre Newsletter.

Online: Fieralingue Poets Corner, Hamilton Stone Review, Malleable Jangle, Masthead, nthposition, Numbat, Pixel Papers, WA Poets Inc Fresh Poetry.



## Split

I am a woman and I speak.

I am a woman with lines on her face and I speak.

I am a woman with lines on her face and scars on her belly and I  
speak

with the voice of a mother

I said, a mother

twice split

once by a scalpel

once by the violence of a baby's head

a woman who writes and plays guitar with hands scarred  
and aged from cleaning up shit

a woman who called herself 'expecting'

but didn't expect to be split,

body and soul,

half the precious young personality blasted away

I speak with the voice of a woman who knows what it means

to have her choices removed

to be so tired she can barely walk

and keep walking

to be so sick she can barely speak

and keep

singing

I speak with the voice of a woman who knows how to

love unconditionally

and who is ready to die when it is necessary.

## Hair and guts and numbers

When I was 13 I wrote a fictional letter.  
I played that I was married to my crush  
(15, dark eyes, black wavy hair,  
face like Clark Gable,  
back like Brad Pitt,  
and gutless me with no idea what to say).  
I played at him away working, and me writing,  
telling him our baby's latest movements  
and, as I'd heard adults do,  
complaining about the price of petrol.  
I played it scary: 33 cents a litre.

Today's cheapest is 98.9.  
Something to do with Venezuela, apparently.  
I see no choice but to pay it and try to smile,  
but Caltex give me a bonus: the boy behind the counter,  
maybe 18, maybe 19,  
long red-dyed hair loosely tied back,  
eyes deep and quiet,  
cheekbones, lips, smooth skin,  
and I'm 38 and full of guts  
so I give him a second look  
straight in the eyes  
and he sees it

then I shop for sleek knickers

and go home to the father of my kids,  
the laidback geek with the salary package  
and the hairy gut and the number-3 beard  
and the balding, greying number-2 scalp.

On the radio news a 36-year-old teacher  
is jailed for fucking her 15-year-old student  
couldn't handle it

## She is moon

He is uber-explosion: his faces  
on bus-stops, bodies on screens,  
mind on view.

She is a photograph taken with him  
at the Oscars. She is moon,  
murmur, faint amid all his so-bright  
sunlight, solar  
wind. She is muse,  
murmur, focus, fathom,  
theme. She is the moon  
of the glow in his dream.

There are marks on her face,  
her Sea of Tranquillity face.  
Her art?

## Lawn

It softly touches the bricks  
at its edge,  
a gentle but definite border.  
The bricks say  
    You can't come past here!  
    This is our flower bed!  
The lawn says  
    OK, I won't  
    but let me look.  
The bricks let it look.

## Stack

Between the calloused shortnailed  
thin fingertips stack  
all the pieces.

On the tarmac path a stubby, smashed. It's not  
That Sort Of Area, but this corner  
attracts the fling-and-smashems.

Ten metres on there's a house whose bins  
are kept in front.

Stack all the pieces.  
A nice green, a lucent lightdark green.  
Too sharp to recycle  
or mosaic.

By the nail of the pinkwhite  
right middle finger, plastic  
fire-engine blood. No pain.

After the bin clamp down the thumb and index  
to close the capillaries, and walk back  
to the lock that fits the key.

Blood and water down the ugly drain  
to the septic tank and the leach drain.

Between the calloused shortnailed  
thin fingertips stack  
all the pieces.

## A little black-and-white thing

Walking in the city centre, rain  
falling into my two-tone hair, looking  
for something that just isn't  
there any more—or never was.

A boy in black trenchcoat and trilby  
strolls, different, confident;  
doesn't look at me, with my melted hair.  
I'm just a lump in the crowd, but I want  
to tell him, 'You're beautiful. You're so  
beautiful.' or  
'I had a hat like that, once.'

Walking in the city centre, rain  
depressing my carefully-chosen clothes, looking  
for someone who already moved  
somewhere else—or never was.

The woman in the Arcane  
Bookshop takes, in her careful  
fingers, my website flyer, my  
photocopied product sample—  
poem, titles and link—  
reads it.

(I'm sure it's politically correct.)  
She says only 'OK, I'll put that up for you'.  
On the windowpane. My words.  
Jostled by vivid gig and book ads.

It's a little black-and-white thing.  
All its colours are on the inside.

## Windows

We are pinned like prayer  
flags, fluttering in  
all the winds, fixed  
by our hands nailed  
to the wooden  
walls, fences, windows.

We send our prayer  
emails, tunnelling to  
all the temples, channelled  
by tonight's whims nailed  
to the pulsing  
bitstreams, servers, windows.

We are bonded, prayer  
wheels spinning with  
all the neighbours, trapped  
by our feet nailed  
to the plastic  
furniture, appliances, windows.

We fire our prayer  
cannons, thundering at  
all the icons, frenzied  
by manacled passion nailed  
to the glowing  
gates, paintings, windows.

They are shut with prayer  
books, wailing in  
all their houses, held  
by our symbols nailed  
to the shrieking  
screens, skins, windows.



## Suicide bomber

Here is my labyrinth mind: invade it with your memes  
My framework hands: wire them to your dreams  
My blank memory: load it with your sin  
My acrylic skin:  
crack it with your convoluted pain  
My desert eyes: wash them with your rain  
My blood: to melt in light  
Smacked face:  
track to grace  
Soul: in all the night: nova-bright.

## Ripped

I CARE FOR NOBODY  
says the shirt.  
\$60. 10 identical. 600 blankstare dollars.  
Fucked, ripped, empty 2005.

1976 shirts said CRASS or ANARCHY.  
Ripped—but not in Chinese sweatshops.

Who cares for nobody?  
The corporation.

*Anger is an energy*

If I can't have love give me hate.

paint it

cross the abyss, make it  
nothing

take my heart and paint it  
take my namelessness  
    my namelessness and carve  
your mark in it

give this rough wood your,  
    spread on it the damask perfection of your  
careful words  
show this mockup an example of your expensive feathers  
give this metal-thief your,  
    all your  
rags,  
your rags to shiver in

give this iceheart your rags to shiver in  
give this silent horn a hollow place to cower in  
give this emergent mess a useless mask to pose in

give this lockstockpile a lovesong to live in  
give this onceteen a fantasy to drift in  
give this dreamer a medium to dream in

paint it

cross the abyss, make it  
nothing

## black strings

his perfect speech  
stripped to the waist  
his exquisite phrases  
jeans tight and damp  
his grammar  
curls cling to his chest in a lick of new sweat  
his diction  
hair hangs black strings into his eyes  
his pronunciation  
steam fizzing off him  
resonant vowels, sibilant consonants  
touch me, touch me, touch me

## Dream 40

He has short, ragged dark hair,  
jeans, a long dark coat.  
He walks out of—a building, an alley, an archway  
in his black boots,  
his shaven pale face almost handsome.  
He is in love with someone—he is dreaming.  
He is young and beautiful  
and he speaks to me  
and I touch his hands.

He stands in his place, his archway, and I go there.  
A dark jacket, jeans, black boots.  
The dark hair is greying, the face has lines.  
He is strong and his strength is simple. He knows himself.  
He has many loves and many griefs, and so many dreams,  
and he speaks to me.  
I listen  
and rejoice.

## Dream 45

He walks in new steps  
    out of his city, his alley, his archway  
walks in new steps  
    feet leaving the broken shoes  
    chest emerging from the bloodshot shirt  
walks in new steps  
    in the rain, in the rain...  
always in the rain

He casts off the layers  
    the hat and mask  
    the polyester and glitter that didn't keep out the rain  
and the clown shoes.

He finds his workman's pants and his path  
    and walks again  
He thought he could run but he walks again  
    in the rain

The dirty acid rain splashes  
around him, serves only to cleanse him  
as he walks. The echoes of his steps  
reach the corners of the world, but his steps  
are quiet.  
His feet are bare  
and his blood marks his path.  
The acid rain can't fade it.

He brings the fields green to the city  
    the grey sea-rush to the suburb  
the ancient stone to the skyscraping offices.  
Brings faerie lights to the freeway  
    faerie breaths to the runway  
hedgerow-river mead to the glass apartments.

He sends home dreams as he walks in new steps,  
bare and brave in the rain.

As real as

You are the person I am dressing up as.

You are the picture on the website  
the character onscreen  
the person, as real as I am,  
who sends my messages.

You are full of pieces of everyone.  
You are awake at 4am  
talking intensely into a mobile phone  
in a bar somewhere in America.

Then you are on your private broomstick,  
beaming yourself home and catching a nap;

having breakfast, just  
like anyone does, but later;

out in the streets, clattering and prancing,  
gathering your pieces of everyone

taking them back to your secret cauldron  
mixing them, making chequered magic  
in your stainless-steel kitchen  
in your weird old house

with paintings by Dali and murals of yourself  
in your big black hat and boots and cloak  
with beat poets and musos and lamas and prophets  
and incense and alcohol hangin' in the air

because you are the person I am dressing up as.

Take a stick to the truth, a  
stirring stick, a mixing stick  
and stick  
your truth all over me like jewels,  
like geegaws, fabulous flashes, black  
flak jackets, cigarette packets, like  
nothing on earth, like birth, like, like,  
California, I've never been there...

Where are you?

In America. Anywhere  
in America.

And the wind  
howls and the walls creak  
and the trees  
shiver and the animals wail  
and the weapons take over  
the warriors.

**THERE ARE NO MORE WARRIORS, ONLY OPERATORS.**

Stick to the truth. I loathe  
your lies, those grey lying  
ways. Don't you be like that.  
Stay with us, now! Stay real, y'hear me?  
I want no plastic doll. Reality,  
I want reality and make no  
mistake—make all the mistakes you can.  
I want no fake, no sharp mask. Your  
own flawed skin, uneven jawline, off-white teeth.  
Stick to the truth.

## Feel not

Tracks in a bubble chamber, particles  
whizzing and circling, we signal  
each other with a brush  
of the fingers  
We don't see the fingers, only  
the words

velvet-coated two-edged words  
all you had  
(more than you wanted)  
and it tasted like...  
tasted like...  
it tasted like rain in your mouth

Like rain falling into your mouth,  
and like a stone on your tongue,  
and like earth on your lips

(You said this doesn't taste like sunlight it tastes like water,  
this doesn't taste like soap it tastes like a sliver of toast,  
this doesn't taste like wine it tastes like water  
straight from the tap)

It tasted like rain in your mouth  
There was no leftover curry, no cigars,  
no clubs, cars or exotic beaches,  
none of that. Only the clean electron taste  
of rain. Had you shocked and shaking,  
had you spinning on the spot  
(had you blurting out nonsense)  
had you groping, scratching, licking for more  
had you a blind beast  
had you  
had you  
had you

*...continued*

had you sated, slapped around, passing  
out and coming round,  
doubled up in grief at the death of the mystery,  
doubled up in grief at the death of the rain,  
doubled up in the mud,  
doubled up in pain.

Transmitted character  
by character, the striking,  
twisting duality, the position and momentum

(You said this is salt and pepper and greasy chips  
—but you wanted prosciutto, you wanted laksa—  
eggs and dubious sausages, American ketchup  
—but you wanted sushi, chilli, rollmops—  
pesticide potatoes and chemical cabbages and waxed, fake apples.)

Smell not sweet fresh energy, smell not old leather, smell not.  
You wanted roses and lilies  
but you smelt daffodils and forget-me-nots  
You wanted trucks or lions or angels,  
moans or whispers, bells,  
but you heard a little stream without even a name  
You ached to feel sandpaper, to feel a flame,  
a cat, a weapon  
a rod, a whip  
and a hand, a calm hand in yours  
but in the end you felt nothing.  
Feel not ecstasy, feel not contemplation, feel not.

Taste not blood, hot metal, cinnamon, smoke  
Taste not rain  
Taste pain,  
quiet transparent pain.

(You said this looks not like a god or a beast or a devil  
but a man, just a man



You said it tasted like rain  
but it tasted like mud, mud, mud in your mouth  
and in mine)

-oOo-

Now this is a poem about coffee. There's lots of those: poets drink coffee, it seems. But let me explain the subtext. So I was drinking coffee, and listening to the radio, and... Now this is a poem about sex, of course. Aren't they all? So I was thinking about my... But this is a poem about music. I was listening to the radio. Oh—the hell with it. Just think about yours, OK? Ready? OK, here we go then.

I prefer it white but I'll  
take it black. I'll take it any  
way you give it.  
Sugary or bitter, with  
chocolate or cream, with  
Baileys or Galliano—  
even with vanilla—  
However you want to serve it, if it's  
made by you I'll drink it.  
Just put your poison in it.

## Come home

Lay your eyes on me  
Me and the whole of me  
Down in the depth of me.

Like me to think of it?  
A lamp in the darkness.  
Bridge between towers,  
Over the dateline,  
Troubled by turbulence.  
Waters lap the docks and rocks.  
I...  
Will.

Lay your hands on us  
Me and the rest of us  
Down by the docks and rocks  
Like pilgrims on the narrow way  
A truth tattooed on our eyes.  
Bridge sent by satellite,  
Over the Atlantic,  
Troubled and frantic.  
Waters moat your castle eyes.  
I gone,  
Will run.

Lay your eyes on me  
Me and the whole of me  
Down in the depth of me.

## Lay your noise on me

Put my words on you  
You in the place of you  
You in the role of you

Lay my eyes on you  
You and the grace of you  
Blind in the gale of you

Lay my hands on you  
You and the real of you  
Feel for the whole of you.

Spread your sauce on me  
Me and the rest of me  
All down the length of me

Exert your force on me  
Me and the stones of me

Lay your noise on me  
Me and the bones of me  
Me and the skins of me  
Me and the strings of me  
All the little springs of me  
Open the sluice of me  
Make a bruise on me  
Make a hole in me.

Put your voice on me  
Leave no choice for me  
Tear out the words of me.

## This nameless plane

Ancient screams are my lover's lyrics. I want your milk. Sustain my spirit—but stay away awhile. Come back when you are cool enough to touch. Let the voices of your many dances overclock my ears, visions of your many rhythms blur my broken eyes.

May you always be short on shame. Your name lies folded in my chest. I will tear it out and flash it about. You gave me beasts; I fed them well. You gave me tests, and things to sell. So take this nameless plane to smack its aim. Blast my woken-princess mouth, you faery-fashioned flame.

## rescued

princess  
woken,  
mouth  
blasted  
as she  
wanted,  
oxy-  
welded  
shut, lips  
melted  
together,  
hands  
smashed  
as she  
asked for,  
words  
torn  
out of her  
feel,  
princess

## Nameless

One stunning orb.  
Best I've ever seen.

Not symmetrical, not  
centred, not perfect:  
no giant hand made it,  
no tiny mind designed it.

Shimmering elliptical target.  
Soundless nameless strands.

Hidden spider not proud,  
just spider. Resting,  
worknight over, wanting  
not praise, but flies.

## Would you like some soup?

Would you like some soup?  
It's pumpkin. I grew the pumpkins  
myself, in my own garden.  
I watered them with my own hands,  
fed them with manure and straw.  
I trained the trailing vines to safety  
as the pumpkins budded, burgeoned, ripened;  
and then the vines withered.  
I broke off the heavy pumpkins one by one,  
carried them inside, and today,  
chose one for soup.

Listening to the CD, the one you gave me,  
I forced the pumpkin open with my knife,  
seeded it with a spoon held in my hand,  
peeled and chopped it with my knife,

held in my hand,  
cooked it, pureed it, mixed in salt,  
onion, pepper, nutmeg, butter...  
listening.

Don't be in a hurry, not this time.  
Don't rush off to your noisy place.  
Don't leave me, alone with my soup.

There is music in my soup  
and butter  
and a pumpkin  
grown with my own hands.  
I made it just for you  
with my own hands  
thinking of you  
for months  
as the vines and pumpkins grew  
and as I picked and peeled and chopped and stirred  
with my own hands  
just for you.  
Would you like some soup?  
I made some good bread, too.  
Come into my house and let me feed you.

## 14 weeks

Kitzinger\* says  
when I feel it move  
it will be like a little fish  
zigzagging inside.  
Kitzinger says  
it's about as long as my index finger—  
like the pearlescent gourami  
in its father's aquarium.

A little fish  
or a mouse inside  
fully formed, with little toes  
a beating heart  
and rice-paper skin  
If a boy, a little penis  
and if a girl,  
a little womb.

## Breastfeeding a newborn

Suck, baby. Undulate  
your tongue along  
my flesh and chomp  
me with your gums. Stare  
at my armpit, and flick  
your black-pool eyes about.  
Drain me until you doze.  
Consume me until you sleep.  
Just leave me  
one hand free.

---

\* Anthropologist, childbirth educator and author Sheila Kitzinger.

## Samantha, 7 weeks

fuzzy honeyblonde hair, blonde  
eyebrows, faint  
nipples, neat navel,  
fat bare labia  
chubby bent legs  
tiny toenails, unused  
knees, soft  
buttocks, downy  
hair in the small of the back  
wriggling arms, waving fists, double chin, round pink cheeks  
and eyes...  
sometimes wild with pain or glazed with hunger, animal eyes  
sometimes soft with satisfaction or bright with inner laughter,  
gentle hello eyes  
Samantha  
older than earth,  
older than pure slow life, older than age,  
older than beauty, and older and wiser than me.

## Breastfeeding a four-month-old

As you stroke me  
carefully opening your hand flat  
I realise  
that the annoying jerky movements  
your fist made a month ago  
were your very best caresses.

## Sling

The baby, softly breathing on my chest  
offers me his fuzzy scalp to kiss.  
His warmth is on my belly  
his lips against my breast.  
He's ready to embrace.

Strapped on firmly as I work and walk and rest  
my baby, softly sleeping, fills my abyss.  
He's heavy on my body  
but easy on my heart.  
He's ready to embrace.  
He's my emblem of peace.

## A female poem

This month's blood delays?  
or kills? an unborn child.

I would have you suckle.

Breasts milkless, minimal.  
Small nipples.

Friend says I'll be a D-cup  
For a baby.

I wonder. Are letters assigned  
To pregnant bellies, too?

Fragile new being,  
small mouth on my naked skin,  
when I get you  
I'll write you a better poem.



## Arm you with magic

Saying  
in our boxes, your small  
and private  
name

In our houses.  
We light a candle,  
shed a tear,  
be silent.

In our places.  
All we can do.  
We wish through the walls and the wires  
for medicine to help you  
for mother's soft palms to arm you with magic  
for family to shield you  
for father's calloused fingers to spark up a spell.

Jump up laughing, a whole child again.  
Let their hands bless you,  
heal and seal you,  
send you out dancing as the calloused fingers cry  
their relief,  
as the soft palms relax  
and give thanks.

Saying  
in a muted breath  
a prayer, your  
name.

## A takeaway wish on a takeaway star

Either way, let it be quick and let it be gentle.  
And let there be someone to touch  
and someone to listen.

In every timezone birthing, unbirthing.  
At every moment prayer, for  
you, etching silent thought or wailing,  
or speaking quietly or strongly or chanting,  
or being written or being read  
on emails, blogs and forums, calling  
to Jesus or Allah or us or quantum physics  
or old photographs  
or makeshift beds  
or tired eyes  
or art.

Now this exists.

If the Internet is a poet the poem is written in a layer above us  
If the Earth is a poet the poem is written in a layer below and  
around us  
If the sea is a poet and the sky is a poet and you are a poet and I  
am a poet  
take one for medicine and two for magic and three for hope  
and all the rest for love

## Damask

Other  
I have stilled my tongue  
I have been silent so long  
all my words come out white...

I'll be your baby  
I'll rest in your arms and you'll rock me  
I'll smell  
your stolen scent and hear  
your damask voice  
and I'll be your baby  
so you will enfold me.

I receive your damask skin,  
in lines plain  
and calm, an intense  
balm, closewoven,  
inviolated...

Back into my eyes, if I  
got one of those looks would that  
be mystic? Could that  
define me, would that  
be music? Look  
back  
into my eyes...

inviolated...

This is my cave  
and this is my church.  
Here are my priests,  
my hymns,  
my mantra.

This is my cave,  
my secret private place,  
and this is my church  
where I touch  
the One.

Fill me in. Fill me in.

xtend

```
if (
  I xtend
  beyond fone & skin, paper & sweat, screen & breath,
  a weave thru web&layers intu
  yu /*a piece of me in yu*/
)
then {
  I contain a piece, a peace, of
  yu; /*all          */
      /*yu hu        */
      /*have reached me*/
}
cradle; keep safe;
```

Instrument

My guitar is silent  
Waiting to be touched.  
Body rigid on a chrome stand.  
Mouth open in a frozen 'O'.  
Strap hanging limply,  
embroidery adorning nothing.

My guitar is silent  
Waiting to be touched  
Not knowing, not asking if my touch  
will be soon or distant,  
tender or violent.

Then will it rain?

Wanting to talk with you  
I went to your official residence  
and many people met me  
(staff, relatives, followers, tourists).  
All of them spoke of you  
but none could introduce us  
because you weren't there. They said  
you're not there very often.

Well... maybe you're out walking somewhere  
and if I walk enough I'll meet you  
on the road. Maybe if you walk  
and I walk  
until we're both tired and thirsty  
we'll meet each other  
at the well. the water-fountain. the bar.  
The river.

Then will it rain? And will we stroll together  
with our tongues out,  
catching the cool droplets and laughing?

## Wadgee\*

Feeling so lost, you use a tribal  
name, to attract  
somehow  
your scattered family, regain  
your buried culture.

I have my little signatures, tribal  
marks, to signal  
somehow  
my scattered fellows, recover  
my hidden kin.

Occasionally they find me, allow their tribal  
scars to sense  
somehow  
these frayed links, uncover  
these blurred sensibilities.

Are we too old and blind for our tribal  
rituals to mend  
somehow  
our frayed hands, rejoin  
our cracked circles?

May you regain your tribe. May they all be found.  
May you live loudly in their love.

---

\* An indigenous artist.

## Receive

Don't be ashamed.  
I too am hanging  
on these words and  
pauses,  
each a choice precise portion.

Don't be ashamed:  
I too am looking  
for details,  
backgrounds,  
grace notes,  
accidents—  
each a mistake deliberately left.

Don't be ashamed.  
Did you ever hug a book? I did.  
Ever lay your warm hand  
on cool printed gloss, or press  
your lips on glass? I did.  
Ever close your eyes and send? I did.  
Ever receive?

Don't be ashamed.  
Did you ever dance? I did.  
But when everyone else was walking? Yes, I did that too.  
Ever cry, but couldn't  
explain? I know those tears.  
And did you make some art you thought no-one would  
understand?  
Show me.

## In the eyes of it

Ancient buildings, cobbled streets,  
old faces, young fears, a river...  
docks. A  
thousand years of stone and wood.  
Grey stone, grey sky, grey water, deep.  
In the belly of it.

In the place of it, the centre, home, field of it,  
in the field of it, in  
the influence, the field, force, lines of it,  
coloured by the shape of it  
home  
or drowning?

Black coats and boots, bells,  
hats with earflaps, leather gloves,  
layers, lights, layers,  
alleys, mazes, mosaics, arcades,  
ancient creaking churches, leaking taverns,  
tombs, crosses, monuments, angels—  
angels, angels, angels!—  
ancient layers, towers, bridges,  
windows, walkways, arches, angels—  
angels, angels, angels!—  
layers of lovely dust, bowls of ancient dirt,  
vessels of experienced glass, places, nooks, artists, angels—  
angels, angels, angels!—  
denizens, inhabitants, short and covered and dark but  
bright inside with the colours of tripping music,  
and angels, angels, angels!—  
singing, chanting, muttering, drinking  
ritual drinks in dark-womb bars,  
panelled in wood and smoke and leather.



And neon, there'd be some of that.  
And heroin, hookers, places to be scared of  
and suburbs both dismal and brave  
and names to learn, maps to memorise,  
pictures made real, streets to walk on,  
a dense city with plenty of buses,  
and people to walk among,

and places to go, places

I

can go, to become a denizen, go native  
in the ancient streets and bars,  
go native  
native in the eyes of it.

Under the skin of it  
walking in this  
dream  
city  
in the lights and the eyes of it  
in the balm and syrup of it  
home  
or drowning?

## Gather the dark

Bring me a thunderstorm at sunset  
Decorate my giant cranium with beautiful scary pink clouds  
Gather them in the west and fling them to the east—

Give me a lightshow. Give me some bass. Rumble  
and stutter my tomtoms,  
distant and straight  
overhead so I  
feel it, so I  
fall with it.

Crack open the skyskull and gather the dark,  
gather the dark matter, fire  
neutrinos, electrons, protons.

Violence, pummel, tenderise  
me, make me ready.  
Break me open  
and drink what flows out of me.  
Parasite, suction, blend  
me, make me jelly.

Give me the mantra,  
the everything poem,  
the chant,

the ancient brandnew notes,  
the faerie banshee baby notes,  
the yinyang knife-  
edge balance notes  
the integer-simple infinite-complex notes  
the slowdance liplock discotheque ecstasy notes

## Loud

Lay your stuff on me, anything you've got,  
sparkle-new or pre-loved, keeps me moving...

Hey, it's 2004 already. And he says  
the world's going to hell in a handbasket  
but I say to him  
no—you are.

OK, so petrol's expensive. But people  
are still driving old Datsuns with P-plates and attitude  
and I can still buy tyres from a shop  
where the metal shelves are dusty and they  
call you 'mate' or 'luv'  
depending on sex. I get 'mate' first,  
because of my hair, or my workboots.  
Then the bloke sees my tits in their t-shirt  
and my hips in their jeans and it's  
'oh, sorry—luv'.  
I don't care. I don't. Maybe in another five  
years I'll finally have enough 'tude to say,  
that's cool, I'm a poet.

The hippy woman in the op-shop calls me 'darl'  
but I don't buy anything.  
Bombs are going off  
but the sun is still shining  
and tomorrow I'm driving for five  
hours by myself with the stereo  
loud

Anything you've got, anything. Keeps me moving.

## Come dancing

We walked to the water, but we didn't  
touch the water, didn't  
drink the water  
We walked by the water, along, near,  
above the water, but not  
in the water.

Baptise us.  
Drown us, resurrect us in worldwash.  
Wash us real.

Fill us, don't leave any  
space in us, let us swim  
in stumbling stars.

And may the moon  
be part of you.  
May lunacy  
meet serendipity.  
May the stars  
inhabit you.  
May heaven bleed on you,  
make holy love to you.

May rains and sky-high stars dive into you  
Glow through your coats,  
shine in your eyes,  
pour fizzing from your mouths,  
come dancing from your hands.  
Find your peaceful building and  
smash it, smithereen it, scatter it,  
rebuild it, reshape it, a new  
artefact with an ancient spirit  
twisting, spiralling, stairing  
irresistibly into the sky.

Irrefutable, undeniable.

Bleed heaven on us—build a sky with us.  
Throw a shape on us—twisted, pushed, extruded.  
Thrown.

Then the rain will wet us  
and the sun will dry us.  
The walls will not hold us. The roof  
will not restrict us. Will our  
noises, voices, choices  
sky the weeping earth?

Come dancing.

Will the sky  
be high enough, ice  
thick enough, rope  
strong enough?

Come dancing.

Let us all be there together  
when the rain rains on us  
when the sun shines on us  
when the stars shiver us  
when the water rises up to meet us.

## The fisherwoman

The fisherwoman  
in her boat  
under the sky,  
deep blue above,  
deep blue below,  
hat  
salty, skin  
rippled,  
waiting,  
the fisherwoman  
sings.

A soft song  
o my love, o my lord,  
carry me, float me, rock me, rescue me  
a soft song for the fish and the sky  
and the broad ocean and all the things on islands  
that call to her.  
Buildings, streets, people, suits  
on green islands  
across the ancient ocean,  
the endless sleeping sea.  
Through the light she sees the islands  
and the fish watch  
and wait.

## When we need him

When we need him  
we siphon him out of the software, out of the  
layers, out of the  
hyper-reality and into the inter-reality  
of our mouths (hands, eyes)  
and release him.

When we release him  
we let him out of his box, out of his  
house, out of his  
walled garden and into the buffeting  
of the street (sea, sky)  
and grow him.

When we grow him  
we swell him into a blimp, into a  
billboard, into a  
website, and out of the hospitality  
of his cushions (pools, toys)  
we focus him.

When we focus him  
we turn him into a lens, into a  
screen, into a  
speaker, and out of the foundations  
of his DNA (islands, keys)  
we aim him.

When we aim him  
we point him into the ocean, into the  
violence, into the  
slums, and out of the clamouring  
of our gut-fibres (horror, joy)  
we use him.

And when we use him...

## Coracle

I will find a place to wait.  
A niche in the shore-held sea-craggs.  
I will watch the lighthouse and the coming  
and going ships, the world-cruisers,  
oil-bringers, war-makers,  
the private and public yachts,  
the racers, fishers, fighters,  
pirates and smugglers,  
the ships of dull metal and  
boats with bright paint,  
with sail-quilts, mast-needles, nets,  
radar, radio, GPS,  
pitching and reeling and rocking and  
blustering with a Babel of balloons and  
sparkling miniature winebirds and  
tinny electronic bells and  
genetic gladiators and none

of them will detect me  
in my grey waitplace. I will watch them all  
until that ship comes, the ship

with the black and red sails that are made of pure skin  
with the decks of ebony and carbon steel  
with the tall sailors whose robes bear  
witness, who reserve  
their grey-and-silver wings, worship  
their titanium anchor on its hawser spun  
from their once-long hair. They will cast  
their continental-shelf-gripper gently, with careful  
hallelujahs, place their sleek ship  
in the tossing flapping sea and in the sea of vessels  
and sing and sing, rumguttred, steelsilked,



calling, responding, calling the land,  
naming it.

And I in my hermit-hole will have built  
my coracle, small  
and sturdy, its  
making a ritual. Built  
my boat and carved my oars  
and practised to strengthen my arms  
and heart. I will hear  
the singing and launch,  
row my raw face through the buoys  
and dinghies and liners, row and row, back burning,  
arms screaming, row and row, and throw my line,  
climb cold railings, fall,  
collapse  
among coiled ropes and mysterious much-used tools  
  
and salt rain will needle me,  
giant wings will beat on me,  
torn tongues will lash and lacerate and feed on me,  
as I lie on that wet deck bleeding in ecstasy.

## An Lar (Unsprawling)

*'An Lar' is the Irish name for the Dublin city centre.*

Only in reality do my feet in their boots feel the  
constant pressure of an other place  
Only in reality does every wake-up second  
burn significance onto my brainpaths  
Only in reality does an ancient river

see me. And only... in reality am I Only...  
in reality am I Only... in reality am I way,  
way high and floating down the street awash  
in all the frequency changes of rush.  
When I breathe, and really breathe, I

find myself with my boots on the pavement,  
gaping at the genuineness, grime and verdigris, and  
smells: new petrol and old manure.  
A thousand years of shit—imagine.  
A thousand of shit and a hundred of petrol.

Statues to faith and debate,  
shades of war and peace,  
long memories and bullet-holes in walls,  
a niche in EUrope and all the world watching  
even while junkies beg on the bridges.

In cafes, portraits of writers.  
Joyce and Beckett and Bono.  
Yesterday honoured, today acknowledged  
amid the neon and the cobbled ghosts. You  
always know where you are, even

as apartment-frames leer  
over castle and redbricks—  
strangling or protecting? At least, unsprawling.

When I breathe, and really breathe.  
Walking by the water I find my feet.

## Quay

Cranes creak and clatter  
Concrete trucks trundle and splatter  
Gull flaps, screeching  
Boat rots, bleaching

I on old stone dangle my workboots over the Liffey and  
it is *not* smooth.

The river is *not* smooth.

The sound around me and in my head is *not* smooth

The old stone is *not* smooth

but the new buildings

the new buildings are gonna be *so* smooth,  
*so* soundless.

Like Leopold Bloom I walk along

the quay and what sun there is bleaches

me pale and Dublin's stone, water, mud bleaches

the sound out of me, sucks

the wet salt of the Liffey

out of my eyes.

## Celtic knots

*(St Audoen's Church, Dublin, 2005)*

Temple of history, temple  
of short lives long  
gone, temple of hundreds  
of souls... trod  
on me hard as I trod  
on its layers  
of graves. Quiet  
spirits whispered hundreds  
of hushes  
from the eleventh-  
century walls.

If I ever go to church in Dublin this is where.  
Not in St Patrick's with its souvenir stalls.

If I go back to Dublin,  
if I take you there,  
let me take you to St Audoen's  
on a Sunday when the congregation sit,  
sing, kneel and pray  
where their people have prayed  
for a thousand years.

Used continuously since the Normans built it.  
Centuries of extension, of chapels and courtyards.  
In the fourteenth century, a square tower  
with battlements  
and bells.

Centuries of loss. Roofs taken off  
to escape the roof tax. Gravestones and monuments  
weathering away. Dirt building up, the ground rising  
in layers of rubble. The townspeople crowding,  
singing, chattering, hanging their washing

wall to wall in the roofless buildings.  
Stone turning black in the tower.  
Bells ringing.

Ringing bells. Re-roofing. Hanging cables. Excavating.  
Discovering a cobbled way, a metre wide.  
Leaving a section uncovered. Roped off,  
with a sign asking us to imagine the people  
who walked on the cobbles hundreds of years ago.

Ghosts projected on the ancient wall  
in silverblue light, with ethereal music.  
Walking. Going, coming. Living on.

Two tourists; a visiting priest; the guide.

Hush, said the ghosts of St Audoen's.  
Hush. This is not St Patrick's.  
Still your chattering modern mouths.  
Listen for us and you will hear us  
in the hush.

There was a lucky stone, a four-foot ovoid,  
pitted and worn with time and touch,  
Celtic symbols just visible.  
Once stolen, but soon returned.  
(The thief had to bring it back: it got heavier  
and heavier.) Older than this oldest church,  
made by people at the edge of memory.  
People who knew how to make symbols  
in the way of the land and the layers,  
in the way of the earth and her children.

Writing this I touch the necklace  
I bought in a souvenir shop in O'Connell street.  
A cheap thing, but its four Celtic knots  
are enough.

*...continued*

The other tourist touched the stone. For luck.  
I didn't. Couldn't.

*I am too new, too full of dirty salt,  
not clean enough.*

Old eyes look at me from my wall.  
A print: a painting  
in which a face appears like a vision  
in a stone.

- What are you writing now? the eyes say.
- I'm writing about St Audoen's. Have you been there?  
Did you hear the hush? Did you touch the lucky stone?
- Do a good job of it then, the eyes say.
- It's only a sketch for now. Getting it down—you know.
- That's the way.

I didn't touch the stone. But my luck was in.  
Arms held me, eyes met me, streets  
and stones and the river spoke to me.  
I was knotted into the strands of Dublin.  
Raw ends joined, a pattern completed,  
and the rough, the narrow, the cobbled path  
took me home.

Go

*(Dublin 2005)*

Beggar on the bridge huddled  
in a blanket, grey  
blanket, stone faces reflected  
in the river, black  
river, blood in my neon  
eyes, red  
as the taillights,  
neon as the red lights,  
neon as the dawn breaking  
on another never-enough  
river, on black swans

White swan reflected.  
This is where I  
am, in the grey city, this  
is where I am, with the beggar  
on the bridge, this  
is where I  
am, huddled  
in her blanket,  
needing

Stone faces low  
over the low water  
Cars, crowds,  
faces, feet,  
her

I give her an alien coin and  
go

## Dream 22

Listen.

The air thin with one picked faun.

His brother in the flower,

pleading.

The air thin.

His sister on the stone,

weeping. The tide in.

The wind rising.

Remember, sister.

In the sanctuary.

Roof of sunleaves, walls

of stone, ivy on walls

of stone. Trees. Humus

on steps of stone. Bright

graffiti.

Flower bravely, let your petals fall on it.

Listen.

The air thin with one picked faun.

On the steps in the leaflight

listen and weep.

In the sunshrine, branch-sanctuary,

leafchapel, weep

for the brother.

Let your tears fall on it.

Among the graffiti carve in the stone

a symbol

for the sister.



## Dream 7

I dream an Irish road and wake  
I dream seven singers and wake  
I dream night falling and wake  
with my heart in my fingers  
I dream hitch-hiking and catching a train  
back to the city and wake  
with a wish in my hands—

arch way of trees  
a rain-green air  
seven singers  
faeries  
stones—

seven singers mend a road  
seven workers placing stones  
four faeries and fourteen faery children  
and 40 faery souls and 40,000 old spirits—

wrap my dream in green rain arms  
touch my skin with soft child skin  
touch my 40 skin with tender 7 skin—

while you still want to  
while your age is a lucky number  
and mine's a luckier one

But

the leaves

unrequited love

the bark

unrequited love

dappled sunlight

unrequited love

sweet fruit

unrequited

sweet air

love

breath of birdsong

only love

mint moonlight

one true love

night forest

one true love

furred flicker

one true love

ferned place

rain

mist

silence

silence full of ghost guitars

silence full of ears

silence

silence

unrequited love

When the train came, I cried

I walk with the ghosts who walk on the beach.

I photograph the rails,  
the security cameras, the grey sea,  
the mansions on the hillside.

I touch the stone walls,  
sit on the steps, breathe the air,  
read the graffiti.

I climb the hill and look at the view.

I stand at the gates,  
peer at the carvings, record the leaves  
and branches, the signs.

Half the world from here and just under  
my skin  
Thousands of miles in a breath, in a word  
Thousands of steps in a sigh, in a song

I buy a ticket and wait for a train.

There are names for everything but you  
have no name  
for this.

## four stones are enough

too care—never enough  
blare, flare—weep  
too sung to wear  
cold drum—never  
too stare—scare  
too many eyes too deep

one never-enough river is ever  
enough sketches, enough skin and bones, enough  
stones. four stones are enough

because one is (love [a]live) listen  
one two is (wet) walk  
one two three is (drown[ing]) dance  
and one two three four is (eternal) everybody sing

## Attach

In the melting mess of your face see  
paintings. In the stiff wick of your hair see  
tellings. In your filigreed neck see tree-rings  
recording the layered war of your fortress. Blow  
on your thin blue eyelids,  
lash your mighty breath to your brow. Study  
your frownsmile muzzle,  
sew your noisome strings in your circle. Shred  
your wasted skincloth.  
Attach your awesome wings to your back.

## Nine levels

*(Rumi says our souls ascend through nine levels.)*

1. Crouched on the floor, cold. We look up  
and see the brand-new stars.
2. The air bubbles with starlight.  
Spring up! Shout! Laugh!
3. Chantcrowd surroundcloud raincloud. Spring up!  
Weep for one day. Forget.
4. Feet still chained by cables, cords and cash,  
I wash my broken eyes in rays and rains. Wait.
5. I never knew we were so many all-singing angels.
6. Observing the unedited stars  
we sigh to their starfire.
7. Bouncing through the window,  
we throw away our masks.
8. In the surge of sudden gravity,  
in the crush of sun and planet,  
in the arc of eyes of angels,  
take this echo.  
Touch [th]is echo.
9. Melted, spread and remade  
as plain space and as the rainbow.

Wait.

## Amid the running

Listen.

I brought it home turned low,  
smuggled low in my chest,  
in my gut.

Who held, and was held  
once in a lifetime—  
once in a lifetime  
and always.

Who looked into my eyes, who took my look  
once in a lifetime—  
once in a lifetime  
and always.

Rails.

A bridge.

Once in a lifetime.

Whose hands are my hands,  
whose eyes are my eyes,  
who has  
always  
looked into my eyes, who will  
always  
look into my eyes.

Rain.

A bridge.

Once in a lifetime.

A roofless church,  
a leaf-lighted shrine,  
a tower. Spiral. Stare.

Whose mouth is an outline, a plan  
Whose eyes and hands make a circle  
Whose circle completes  
my eyes  
Whose hands define  
my mouth.

Brought it home.  
Amid the running,  
A place where we walk by the water.  
A dream-calm tarn, a  
slow-motorcade river. A waiting,  
continuing,  
thoroughgoing sea.

A castle, weathering, stumbling, its  
breaking body  
the pattern.

Where we walk, where we are still, where we dance  
once in a lifetime—  
once in a lifetime  
and always.

Amid the running.

Listen. There's a gull. It knows.

## I am your sunlight

Like sunlight, I need  
your love. Like a tree high  
on sunlight, I am  
your sunlight. Made of your rich rays.  
In all my naked nights they are stars.  
In all my empty rooms they are chairs.  
In the splattered dark they are angels' voices  
and in the church of my skull they are the altar  
where I sacrifice and satisfy myself.

Your mad rays in rows and rhythms reach me  
in fire and feather find me  
in slow succession search me  
in world water wash me  
in warm waves welcome me  
in liquid lilt lend me  
love. Like sunlight.

## In the mirror-maze

Like love, I need this sunlight.  
Like arms around me, I need this thunder and rain.  
I need this storm of noise like I need to breathe.

Like anticipated lips, I kiss  
these wet stones gleaming with a blue dawn,  
these diamonds in the dirt,  
these nightingales.

Like eyes locked on mine,  
this constructive engagement,  
this desert wind, this evening of silence,  
this morning of crows and magpies.



Like hair under my hand I feel  
this sweet slow susurrations, spiked  
with spice and smeared with honey, stabbed  
with lemon and scattered  
by looking-glasses...by a mirror-maze.

Look at the floor—it'll be OK.  
Keep your gaze on the vinyl.

When I pray,  
when I face that way and put  
my head on the floor,  
when I drink  
the ritual drink,  
when I sing the hymn,  
when I breathe...

In the mirror-maze, I meet this sunlight.  
Like a new train on a new line, I catch  
this thunder and rain. In the mirror-maze,  
examining my lips and eyes, checking my jacket,  
looking for traces of these wet stones,  
these nightingales.

In the mirror-maze in the long tunnel in  
the nightplace of Dali and Magritte in the storm,  
flung by the whirlwind, given  
to crows and magpies, smeared  
with honey, in the mirror-maze.

Look at the sky—it'll be alright.  
Look at the clouds—they're still here.

Heartbeat in the mirror-maze:  
hooded, black-clad, shaded,  
red and powerful,  
full of carolling magpies,

*...continued*

full of clouds,  
full of this sunlight.

Don't be afraid.  
Give it all away.  
Give it all the sunlight and all the thunder  
and all the nightingales you have.  
Give it to the mirror-maze,  
let the mirror-maze duplicate it and send it everywhere.

We'll all meet there in the middle of the mirror-maze,  
up to our ears, smeared with everything,  
stabbed by black beaks of magpies,  
bleeding all over the sky,  
blurring the glasses with beautiful blood,  
throwing it all away.

Where did it come from, this sunlight, this thunder?  
From the blue and brown eyes,  
the connected fingers and feet,  
the wet stones of the street and the river—  
from the foundation.

Like love, I need this sunlight.  
I'll see you in the mirror-maze.  
Look at the sky—it'll be alright.

## Thank you

Thank you for the versions, the visions,  
the voices, fiddles, drums, electric  
guitars in my head, and the chanting, the wailing,

translations of ashes and orchids  
and terrified cities. Thank you for rinsing me.  
Thank you for unmasking me, washing and anointing me,

in cloth-of-love clothing me,  
filling my dark church with candles.  
Thank you for showing me the strength of the sweet

fire in us. Thank you for the public  
temples and private shrines, the amulets,  
tokens and icons. Thank you for the books,

posters, websites, unexpected  
parcels of grace. Thank you for the encouragement.  
Thank you for the path, and the torches along it,

and the rocks and sticks strewn on it.  
And thank you for not knowing me, and not  
understanding me, and not telling me how.

## Storm

Sing songs: sweet bells in the night  
the blackbird and the kite  
the tree-ghosts in the white  
the storm and the morning light  
dark and light  
black and white  
string and kite  
all afternoon, all night.

## Sight

Night is where we are.  
Kite is what we are, string of lucid  
white we are, black  
light we are, dark outlined in  
light, mourning storm of  
white in ghosts, in trees, in  
kite calling out blackbird.  
Night bells sing violent, bare and sweet.

[S]he moves in

I am the sacrifice.

When the priests built the temple, I was buried  
under the foundations. I lay  
at the gates of the building site,  
asking for death. I said,  
If I have to die to be here forever,  
let me go slowly. Cut  
my wrists and hold me in the river.  
Let me fade with the whack of jackhammers,  
the accented shouts, the slap of the water,  
the volley of seabirds, and all the angels.

Now my blood is the river,  
my body the foundation  
of the temple made of the love  
of so many. Our spirit sang it.

I am the spirit of all of you.  
You safekeepers of the holiness!  
The holiness that doesn't see itself.  
Even when the river reflects the temple—  
the focal point, where I died to be—  
the holiness can't see itself.  
But I hear it.

I am you. I am your love.  
I wander through the chambers,  
seeking and healing, saying  
Hear the holiness, be it, use it!  
Warm the blind temple with the breath of love  
in all its glorious frequencies.

## Keypal

She heat, I light  
she flower, I leaf  
she burning fusion sun, I yearning captive moon  
she reef of bright fish, I rock of one white bird  
Together: all of it

One day a month we get  
together, in our careful hair  
she with henna, I with bleach  
she in makeup, I bareface  
she in her plush flesh, I in my skin and bones  
In our jeans,  
in our black jackets,  
in our voices,  
in our noise and our listening  
Out of our webs, into one another's eyes

One hug hello or cheek-kiss: smooth remembered skin  
and our voices  
Maybe a shoulder-touch or laugh-nudge  
and our voices  
Usually a hug goodbye  
then out of our voices, into our webs.

One database entry  
One search, one match  
One email  
One reply, then many more  
One safe public rendezvous

Boundaries crossed  
sets intersected  
patterns matched  
lit up and bleeped like we'd won something

She made of brittle twigs and I of spun steel  
yet she surroundsound widescreen, I patch of earth  
She fragile and polished, I tough and ragged  
Together: a shelter

## Dress in rags

I love it when you dress in rags.  
The ragged edges show how whole the centre is.

When you dance in your old clothes  
simpler than today's clothes  
your powerful body shows me the child inside.

We are just children wearing layers.

Dress in rags. Show me a bit  
of your skin, and if your hair gets thin  
don't fake it. Take it  
all the way ascetic,  
desert dirt aesthetic,  
in rags, in patches, in mixed  
colours, in glory,  
exulted,  
enlightened,  
unlimited

making it up as you go along  
in your rags.

## Charisma

Not the hem of his garment.  
Not the fleeting brush of fabric,  
peripheral, unnoticed...  
Not the hem of his garment.  
His wrist.  
His solid, haired, warm right wrist  
and this, my hand,  
my [in]elegant white left hand,  
holding.  
Seconds, skin to skin,  
eyes closed only to feel.

– So. You'll never wash it again!

Yes I will. I didn't take anything...

– No photograph? No autograph?

I didn't need to.  
Not a piece of him.  
Not taking—  
giving. Giving  
energy/information/spirit, call it...  
call it love. Yes, that.  
Focused on the interface  
of skins. Unafraid.

And if I received anything—  
a blossom of spirit,  
not a blessing of sweat.  
So yes, I'll wash.

Anyway, he doesn't wash off.



## Please wait to be seated

Please wait to be seated.

You will be shown to good seats  
but you will have to surrender.

Stand there and wait.

You may be given a public place,  
in the centre of the faces and voices,  
or a private booth:  
a watching space, a listening hush.  
You will be ushered by good-looking attendants  
but you will have to surrender.

Observe the rituals.

Listen carefully, ask  
clearly and quietly,  
behave with respect.

And let a hungrier person go before you  
and let a weaker person hold onto you.  
Then wait in silence.  
You will be shown.

## In whatever voice

The answer to that question can only be sung.  
Can only be whoooed in an umbrella-flipping wind  
Can only be rained.

It can't be Googled, archived,  
written or spoken.

But it can be born. The answer to that question can be born  
in a plane or a tunnel,  
a revolving restaurant or a cavern,  
a Hyatt or a hostel.

Then it will need to be rained.

The answer to that question might be rained  
by a guitar, might be tossed all over you  
by the interplay of drums, might be splashed  
hot onto your cheeks by the smile and flip,  
pull and release of bass.

Or by nine quiet words and the slight tilt  
of a face.

Then the answer to that question may be felt  
but you have to feel it yourself. You have to sit

in the perfunctory hush of a non-denominational chapel  
and cry into empty hands. Rain that rain, bent double.

Pray for the first time,  
to presence that knows no name.

To presence that needs no name,  
give thanks for the loss of a dream.

Stare into stained glass and find, sun-backlit,  
the face.

Then sing and sing, in whatever voice you have.  
The answer to that question can only be sung.

## Centred

Knees slightly bent, body lightly curved around  
his guitar, held close, vital

Elegant fingers on the Telecaster's neck  
lift and slide and press  
Long thumb and finger delicately direct  
the plectrum

Face an intent mask  
mouth a concentrated line  
eyes lost in love with it

Sound surges up his spine, through his chest, shoulders, head,  
into his eyes, into his hands on body, neck, strings, pick  
and by magic he understands, wire and amp and wave  
and magic he doesn't understand, music-magic  
into listeners and band and back  
into his ears, his body, into the walls and into everything

## The sound

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND  
is an apricot's juice on my tongue,  
my chin, my wrist, my t-shirt

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND  
is rain and the warm wet of summer Sydney rain  
and the smell of rain on a hot road

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND  
is light filtering through leaves,  
is a jacaranda tree, purple licked onto green,  
is sunset over a polluted city,  
is sparks and spangles,  
is shafts of old wooden darkness  
tarred by time

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND  
is heroin or whiskey or cut wrists,  
is a searing coal and cold running water,  
is my blood feeding the earth,  
is plain sweat.

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND  
is a touch, a glance, a smile,  
is eyes meeting,  
is the moment before a hug  
and the moment after.

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND  
is old and embarrassing  
and cute and new.  
Is too hot to touch  
and unspeakably cool.

The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND  
is the roar of roadtrains,  
is the moan of a mother and the answering wail  
of her child,  
is the thunder thump and hush

and whisper  
and rumble and race of a race.  
Is gulls over grey water.  
The sound of MY FAVOURITE BAND  
is all of it,  
all of you,  
all of it.  
All.

*(For U2)*

tree breaks

tree breaks at base,  
falls as one on earth. Drum  
shakes floor and heartbeat

tree lies alone  
without music  
bird whispers

tomorrow his birthday  
new trees grow  
in the fallen tree's arms

tomorrow he sings  
in a new tree's arms  
happy bird day

## Echo and ache secret

Let me tell you in

A flat minor

that my feet are a snare and a tomtom Skin:

a splash cymbal Heart:

a hihat

a ching ching ching ching ching ching ching ching Gutcoil:

bass guitar and kickdrum Inter

locking Inter

woven In

So let my hair be slow electric,

my eyes be rests and cries,

the line of my lips be the echo and ache secret,

full of every

thing [un]

mappable

and kissing the mike with words without warning

## An update for the Pilgrims Guide

To: webmaster@TempleFinder.com

Subject: an update for the Pilgrims Guide

When finally we reached the temple we found it collapsing, one brick at a time. Some walls have peeling paint; others have layers and layers of graffiti from years of pilgrims—some disappointed, some angry, some sad, and some clinging to their obsession and leaving flowers, photographs, little handmade cards and books, and more than a few pieces of clothing. Leaving their offerings (and teddy bears. did I mention the number of teddy bears? and the money and bottles of whiskey, which a smiling attendant collects after the pilgrims have finished their tearful or ranting obeisances or their hair-and-clothes-tearing or their hysterical shrieking). Leaving their offerings and maybe their delusions on a concrete platform, its chipped paint as grey as the sky.

We entered the temple and found it stinking. Stale cigarettes, old pizza, last night's whiskey. The priests were out drinking in a bar down the road, except one who lolled in a back room, half-dead from heroin. When the others returned from their 'meeting', they injected him with something to reanimate him so they could continue their parody of the sacred rites.

We had journeyed to the temple, a group of us, full of love or longing or fear or exultation, and a few who came along for the photo-opportunity, full of derision. But when we saw the mess and the useless priests and the grinning, well-fed attendants, even those full of derision became sad, and those full of exultation collapsed on the filthy floor or ran into the littered niches, crying their thunderstorm tears and howling their blue-black howls.

But it was only when we heard the muzak that we began to mutilate ourselves.

## Ears well-sucked

Underblanket of the soul,  
the old, old soul,  
full of fluff and dustmites,  
patched and ragged,  
but warm

Underblanket of the soul  
underpinning  
the skin  
underwriting  
the veins

Security blanket with a teddy-bear head,  
ears well-sucked. You need a busload of faith, said Lou Reed

Several truckloads, Lou,  
rolling into your town,  
rolling into my town,  
rolling down the highway, the scab of a highway,  
stereos pumping,  
blasting past the silence

Power tools grinding, sanding  
the layers, sucking  
the fat, finding  
the arteries, exposing  
the nerves, growing  
the dendrites, extending  
the tendrils, culturing  
new organs, nurturing  
new skin,  
bandaging, sheeting, blanketing, wheeling,  
truckin' on down to my town

blasting across the South Sea to my town  
A Lear jet, a rocket



ship, a cruise  
missile,  
landing on my nose, putting out my eyes  
shredding my eardrums and ripping out my tongue  
warm and cosy and blind and dumb

## torrential

boy girl man woman unman unwoman all  
humanly  
in sharp sharp sharp  
harmony, in  
flesh& in  
breath, in transmission tshirt breathe  
yr sweat old  
&consequential  
torrential  
in seven flat minors, in  
seconds, in second HAND  
HANDs, in EYEs  
of authorship ice  
of ownership place  
of hiding in nine FOOT walls in shrines in SKINs  
of stone, stone, STRING&BONE, in the LIGHTS  
&the I's  
of it in the sTART& the HEat  
of it in the trip& the end  
of it no no not  
THE END  
of it no no

## Steel tube

With four notes, four stones  
(four stab sites in my gut)  
four elements, four winds,  
four corners of my mouth  
(with large and small violences)  
what more [do I (I?)] need?

There is a reason (not)  
There is a story (journey) (not)  
There is searching and not  
finding. Finding is loss  
with everything in the chanting,  
headphones, clickwheels, black boxes  
(steel tube searching my guts)  
(namelessness, blowing me up)  
(you tube my space)  
In the notes, tunes, we-tunes, I-tunes  
In the numbers that come.

This is not a language project  
This is a scream  
This is not a language project  
This is a fleam  
This is not yours This will never be yours  
This is mine  
This is mine  
Metonyms  
[half]truths  
coresamples of hyperreality

All the blinking screens All the  
flashing lies All the  
howling beacons  
All the spot  
nights

All the spot  
nights Fifteen minutes Soul (stolen)  
Sole souls (stolen)

This is not a language project  
This is a scream  
Just a quivering  
    sweatslicked  
    teethbared  
    eyeswideopen

## Hasp

Something (advances)

Howl of a child  
timbre of a singer  
voiceprint of a lover  
catcall of an enemy  
hasp of a lover

Tick of a biorhythm  
catcall of a memory  
resonant frequency of entrapment  
silent hum of fate.

Slur of a drunk  
footsteps of a guitar  
creak of a tightrope  
twang of an enemy  
breathing of a lover

Everything (recedes)

## Un/speak/able

With what's left of my face after you  
have finished with it, your sun  
melted it, your shocks and switches  
scoured and scarified it, your challenges  
chopped and chiselled it, your licks and lays  
licked and lavaged it,  
ravaged it with your un  
speak  
able ways

With whatever skin I still have,  
whatever still works in my eyes,  
whatever screams I have left,  
with hands turning to stone,  
with all my remaining teeth,  
with spider veins in my cheeks  
and enough flesh for one kiss  
in the thin ghosts of my lips  
I will finally speak your name.

Throw off all fakery and surgery,  
present your name in the city,  
howl it in what's left of the country,  
throw it all over the Net.  
With every note left in my mouth.

When you can see all of me,  
when you can hear all of me,  
when all the red things, sad things,  
good and bad things inside me  
no longer divide me from you  
I will finally, at last, in ecstasy speak  
your name, your name, your name, your un  
speak  
able name.

## The eye

The photographs are silent.  
That's the thing about them. The silence.  
Yet you can hear them  
if you listen late at night with the house all quiet  
if you listen in the blackness when the band's gone home  
if you listen in the breaks  
between transmissions  
you'll hear them.

Light is nothing. Potential.  
Imaginary lines of force.  
And light is everything.

Listen to the black-and-white abstraction  
Listen to the wink in the colour  
Listen to the lucid lines and angles  
Listen to the eye  
You'll hear them

*(For photographer Anton Corbijn)*

## Isosceles

You'd look good in anything, you  
shaped like that: the isosceles  
triangles of your back, your nose, each  
of your buttocks

Ramparts, towers, battlements,  
network. Can't  
read all that. Pick  
out the points where someone you  
recognise  
might be at the window

Prayer-bowl whing-whirr,  
hot in a girl's hands

A sound cold as lemon,  
cold as fish,  
as antiseptic,  
as white

Purge and bridge of cumin,  
the pinchy glitzy deepdragging howl of it.  
Yell spice at the ringlipped fish.

But it goes away,  
it goes away,  
and what's left?

Vacant foil pillblisters,  
beigebrown coffeefoam on a wooden  
stick, a doctor's tonguedepressing  
weapon, to measure  
your illness, the length of it,  
to prescribe  
a heavymetal pull,  
a sexy text,

a texty sex, a nexus, a flex,  
wirecored, insulated, gaffataped  
on a stage made of dirty sheets,  
lacky bands and string

And the hairs on his stomach and the  
smile on his eyes and the  
knowledge and the breadth in him

### The guy in the cafe

This can't be him,  
the one I've travelled so far to meet.  
This can't be him! Geldof hair and smoker's skin,  
slack belly, wasted arms, beige illfitting trousers.

Isn't the poet someone slickblackleathered  
with clean, glossy, fingerfriendly hair,  
with eyes like turquoise surf,  
with Calvin Kleins under a crisp piece of denim  
and boots from some Texan heaven?

Yeah, that's him  
behind the distant-blur pupils

I know... but dare I try  
to touch him?

## Peeled off

Oh go back to your wife!

Don't look at me that way!

I would do anything but hurt you

you with the sea in your eyes

and the storm in your hands

and the city lights in your mouth

I would have you a thousand times just to give you pleasure

but not hurt you.

Go back to your wife!

She is still beautiful

she is much smarter than me

she dances like a sonnet

and dresses like a haiku

and I can see that you love her

and hurting her would hurt you.

Go back to her!

Leave me to my desperation,

masturbation,

fantasies of your skin and voice and eyes

jeans peeled off your slim hips,

t-shirt off your heart

my tongue on your nipple and my

muscle on your cock,

your hands in my hair

and your voice incoherent

and cigarettes and

searching the Web from your lap,

naked

and drinks and

late-night talk about everything

me Yoko, you John...



No! Go back to your wife.

## Don't go there

He takes off the glasses, the mask that fails him.

His two blue eyes mock hers.

He is a smiling imp in black.

He moves closer. The fiddler plays a reel.

His lips are like smoked sugar, his tongue an instrument,  
his stubble a burnt field.

She is dying.

She opens her eyes. His are closed, lashes relaxed.

She snaps every line, every scar in close-up.

His black hair reveals paler roots.

Her hands are on his neck; the skin is soft.

She closes her eyes again.

They are stealing each other  
for a moment.

He is giving her something to keep  
but she is just dying, dying.

## Skeleton

Bring to mind a nylon garden  
and a paper bird-bath.  
A lead bird with four wings  
and a plastic gardener with aniseed eyes.

Do you like it?

Imagine a melamine desert  
and steel tumbleweeds.  
A bald saloon with rubber walls  
and a silicon bartender with margarine lips.

Do you like it?  
Will you eat here?  
Do you like your restaurant?

Can you see your name  
on your chair  
where your hot skeleton waits  
for its chemicals?

Bring to mind a Jell-O cubicle  
with a painted view.  
A fur television with fifty screens  
and a holographic prostitute with no legs.

Do you like it?  
Will you stay here?  
Do you like your hotel?

Can you see your needle  
on your table  
where your tainted skeleton shakes  
for its input?

Imagine a titanium bathroom  
a velour phone

and a three-armed valet with corduroy hair.  
This will be yours. Do you like it?

## If the rain

If the rain works away our concrete  
and steel, to reach and feel  
original stone and earth

If it wears away the metal  
rings and brick boxes around street trees  
so greenfleshed lives can sway, scented,  
in their shelter

If it knocks out the electric  
lines and stops  
our train, traps  
it for vines and mudwalls

If it slops the style  
out of our hair and the makeup  
off our faces, hoses off  
our lowrise jeans and highrise boots,  
our ghoulgear and bling,  
our multitoned helplessness and hope

If it grows on our backs  
fur and homespun and moss

## Alternative energies

Humanity: a species that survives by burning things  
and each other.

Smoke in my eyes  
so I take them out and put them away  
Marching's hard  
so I decommission my legs  
Speaking hurts  
so I shut down my tongue

But I forget my ears, Harmony.

Sing, put the tears back into our eyes, bang  
the eyes back into our heads, call  
the tongues back into our mouths, thrum  
the bones back into our legs

We won't be propped up: stand up.

Walk, see, cry,  
ask out loud: can we worship  
wind, sea, sun

and each other?

## Entropy and order sing

A weekend at New Norcia,  
a strange, Catholic place  
that made me a foreigner.

But a spirit is there.

Entropy and order sing  
in the walled spaces and spacious view,  
old buildings, new birds,  
disused rooms, souvenir shop,  
graveyard, church and bell.

So I sent a question.

And yesterday, the answer arrived.

There is no good, no evil.

Only harmony and disharmony.

And we know which is which.

## One more voice

In the place of the fallen tree  
how many have prayed? In the name  
of memories, in the silence of relics,  
in the presence of placements of small stones  
and not one Coke can.

In the face of the fallen tree  
how many have sung out loud?  
And how many have whispered a song  
with dreamtears on their lashes  
and traced their names on the earth  
to be erased?

*This shape my offering,  
one more voice my gift.*

In the ache of the fallen tree,  
while it still aches, and before  
the Coke cans come.

## Light a candle

In Iceland a poet lies in a coma  
In Australia I light a candle  
The poets think it will help and  
who am I to say,  
and what else can I do?  
Bush gets in again—  
light a candle for democracy  
John Peel dies—  
light a candle for music  
If art is still possible  
light a candle for art

## Hardcore

No-one says anything  
I don't say anything  
The world smashes on  
smashes on

If I'm all gone in the eyes  
it doesn't stop the children crowing  
as they install cursors and wallpapers.  
Harry Potter smiles from his important playworld.  
A piebald rabbit mesmerically comes and goes.  
A tabby kitten poises itself in a meadow.

America continues.  
Australia continues.

Diagnosis, treatment, remission, relapse.

My inbox fills with email  
black with anger  
white with prayer

My hardcore heart detaches itself, makes this

## My brother is dead

I am unbreakable.  
I am built of crystals of words  
and I am unshakable.  
I am made of modern metal  
and I am unbendable.  
I am sheathed in thin Teflon.  
Nothing sticks.

You are broken.  
You were made of small twigs  
and now you are broken.  
You were struck and shattered.  
You are unmendable.  
You are sheathed in thick earth.  
Nothing sticks.



## Evidence

Only in dream do the children come out first,  
lined up, nervous

Only in dream do my enemies look on,  
tittering, nudging in new school uniforms

Only in dream my book's blank leaves grow scribbles  
crowding out his name.  
I draw a box to protect it,  
to carry it.

Only in dream is he  
taller. Only in dream  
are my body's arms around him.

Soft against my cheek, his  
tender neckskin, his  
fuzzy handknit sweater,  
smelling sweet and old

Only in dream is he  
silent while I have words.  
Does he hear my dreamvoice against his neck?  
I can barely speak  
My throat is breaking  
'I love you'

In my hand,  
a leaf to bring back to you!  
But surfacing vanishes my scrap of evidence

## Gentle touch of elsewhere

She stands at the counter selfconsciously  
me... skinny,  
skinny bootlegs, denim jacket, black  
shirt, sunnies...  
orders a cappucino to take away.  
Watching from the table I know  
she's been in the record shop (being me,  
she's old enough to call it that)  
and, yes,  
she takes a new CD out of her bag and  
studies it, track list, four band members,  
can't see who they are from here  
I think of my chat-up line:  
so what's your favourite band?  
but she gets her styrofoam capp and goes  
leaving me still and still  
incomplete

And there's a guy  
with the hair and the eyes  
but he's someone else's: a conservatively beiged little  
woman, and I'm someone else's too  
but maybe we could be friends, if, you know,  
our paths could cross.  
She gets him water and I...  
Well it's not that I hide behind my book,  
it's that you don't. You don't  
chat up strangers in this  
semisuburban lunchvenue with  
seniors and young mums luxuriating in its  
gentle touch of elsewhere.

You start a club. That's what you do.  
You put up a notice and you attract people who are

so like yourself that they bore you, and people who  
think they are you but  
you know different

A guy emails me, says my poem reminds him of  
Camus: the outsider/stranger/foreigner. Yeah.  
A guy in Ulster emails me that  
and where am I?

## Lip-prints

Lip-prints on your  
fragments, your  
fossils, fostered in my secret  
places, found in private  
books and drawers,  
clean, beautiful and old,  
vessels from Before—  
before everything dissolved in the millennial acid.  
Accidents, artefacts,  
individual and cold.

My lips are still warm—hey,  
I'm warmer than Before, I'm burning with it—  
and I would do now what I didn't then,  
would fly on my jets and light your sky with my eyes—  
but all I can give you are lip-prints  
on the glass,  
on the cold old glass.

## Hold the line

Is that the ink of your mind  
or is that just so much  
artificially-coloured water?

The ink of my mind is streaked with blood  
house of anger  
house of confusion

looking here, looking there where new black flowers spread their  
maybe poison

bluer than death, this anger  
an aurora, this anger  
a roadblock, this confusion  
a freeway, this confusion

Help us, you with the beautiful  
skin! Help us, you with the witch-hazel  
hands! Help us, you with the hair like  
sin! Help us, you with the half-cracked smile!

You hosting the angels in the distorted sky of your eyes  
and you slipping through silver fish in the live seas of your chest  
and you trapping volcanoes in the desert rains of your shoulders  
and you making sunbursts on the strikeplate of your lips  
give us the sandpaper grip of your fists  
give us the megaphone ink  
of your wrists  
tell us the terrible names  
of our peers  
tell us your truth, be our shamans, seers,  
bards, makers, shakin' psalm-shapers, be our  
souls' soul-brothers, our  
sweet soul sisters, our  
reason for blisters, our master and mistress...

Hiphoprissy, rockocracy, intellimockracy!  
Alloycats, nervocrats, dance-o-mats! Work  
and play, vortex  
and apex

but don't be our gods,  
be our shoes.

Hold the line.  
Hold the line that links our ankles,  
and hear:

I'll be nothing to you if you'll be nothing for me.  
Be silent behind your wall  
be deaf behind your wall  
be arcane behind your wall  
and be,  
just be,  
in the end if you just be  
it'll be  
enough. So be.