

135 SMALL TO MEDIUM POEMS

Robert Rowland Smith

Three Songs of Unrequited Love

1

Your eyelashes arrows firing into eye-stars,  
a swamp of tar,  
where they take root as reeds, bristling.

How you change  
at the pool's edge,  
the surface a door  
you fell through,  
no drowning mark,  
no reflection,  
leaving me swabbed  
in dark oil,  
wandering, a live candle, a suicide jacket staggering around the bonfire, dreaming of sparks,  
so I could blow myself back into your memory.

And you'd start the long, long glide up,  
through the green weeds, a silver aquatic spaceship, crown of diamonds  
on your head, an orange frill;  
and me still  
crying into the pond, not knowing  
if you'll ever break the surface, or get called away  
under the glassy, translucent wave, distracted by a falling shell,  
an inner ear, see-through cartilage, a squid's backbone quill,  
your hair streaming in ribbons, sometimes tightening around the throat, red twine white  
neck,  
now loosening without danger;  
and me a gratuitous lifeguard waiting on an accident happening to the one I love, just to  
create an event  
to justify my presence at the scene you still swim far beneath, now in a cave  
where a fire burns  
like a hot glove stretching in the water, and the masks circulate  
among the nymphs with bubbles fluting from their mouths.

Where are you, my love. Come and gasp for air beside me,  
be a silver sneeze  
and let the gold sun  
tap its rods in every drop you shake off.

No more seaweed hair. Slither back into my heart.

2

The ice edges  
into April, May, June, pressing a curved blade against the lip of my heart.

Shards of you clatter from me like broken armour,  
and the soul-sap leaks  
its toffee over metal.

Of these thousand tuneless pieces  
only one, a tone-egg, holds music,  
but it fell into the grate and split  
sending sound into the river beneath our feet.

Out rolls your arm like a fire hose and he acrobats into it,  
both of you engines,  
boxes of flame spurting crystals up the sides of skyscrapers, knotting your tongues together  
and tossing planets  
down the boulevard bowling lanes.

You left lightning-fronds on my skin,  
the colour of your hair,  
as if my fate was to be wrapped  
in your shroud, my mouth cloth-stopped & eyes sealed with a line  
of translucent glue.

You win. I lose.  
A ticker-tape of hieroglyphs spits out the news.

3

I found you in a little house,  
polishing reflections.

Square window light, floor lines, your side-face - pure Vermeer.  
In your locket a canvas.  
Its hero captained vessels, ploughed the arc of oceans, fleet as a dolphin,  
until he drowned in banknotes.

From a wet clay pot  
spinning in your orphan hands, you looked up & it  
folded like a cow's tongue.

On my back I carried a clock thunderous as a piano, & set it down while we ate.  
Time clanged like a judge.

Yellow monkeys stole the food we dropped.

Back and forth we shovelled words, heaps of magnetic ants. Love-crocuses formed a wreath around our feet.

Then a triangle of meaning got lodged in your eye,  
a one-way boomerang,  
& you saw me double.  
Glass burst, fur bristled. You vowed to lock me up too.

Now I am that fly between two wafers of framed glass, wired into my own feedback, slowly roasting black,  
my flat world filling with smoke.

### Three London Pastorals

1

My eye pressed on the green, where shone  
The sheep and strips of ash, and history  
Was held at bay by nature. Soon the pipes  
Employed a chord, and all the doves flocked out.

I blinked, and in this spot of time remembered  
Names and things. Pots, pans and who  
Had owned them. On the strand, effaced,  
The record of transactions, for re-cutting.

Bloodshot now, I winked along the lock  
At Camden. Lapping at the stream, some lads  
Looked up and with a gold abandoned brick  
Aimed at the oily water and smashed it.

The smithereens flew against  
The wall of workshops overrun by pigs.

2

I crawled into the garden, crunching  
Snails beneath my knees. Ahead, the shed.  
The Kensal moonrise taking potshots,  
Wan sniper, infirm lady, speckled mirror.

I was struggling against silver, noting that the grass  
Was grey as cardboard. Scythes, saws  
And hammers waited on their special hooks.

Then a blackbird, dropping  
Mercury pellets from its compulsive throat,  
They pinged between the ash and elm.

The wind had got inside and rattled  
The matchbox of images.  
I got pulled a little closer.

3

When I woke, at dawn, near Heathrow,  
The wet thyme stuffed into my mouth and ears,  
My nose stunk out by hyacinth and  
Chamomile sprouting in my throat,

I could focus only on the exhaust pipe  
Now at eye level, a flute of sorts  
Awaiting music. Unsummoned,  
The rats came anyway

With their avocado humpbacks,  
Formed a square, began to twitch.  
Through the mountain-ash branches,  
A jet plane transcending  
Like scissors thrown beyond a fight.

## Two Curses

### 1 BROW OF THE HILL

Jack the farmer ate a onion,  
Threw his spade into the air,  
Ran across a blighted field.

Aimed at furrows in the field,  
Spade came wheeling through the air,  
Split Jack's brow as through a onion.

### 2 THERMIDOR

With a boiled lobster, you're in hell.  
Holding its crutches out of its pot,  
It screams up at you to jump in as well,  
And becomes your own eyeball if you do not.

## Seven Incalculable Figures

I

RED – LONG MERCY, A PIANO  
deals notes, scutcheons flock  
& some black hair falls

just where you'd expect an  
entrance, a door sans handles,  
perhaps cats accenting

the frame – black spots  
in the eye between red bands –  
& perhaps nothing more.

Redeem was printed here,  
black, white & red marks,  
grace notes, rising bloody.

## II

BLUE-LIME CRASH CHOCOLATE,  
all's sweet in the end,  
the cell-bursts just moments,

the parrot an instance of  
hybridity – stop – he first  
saw him crossing the ice

fractured – stop – more iodine  
lent phosphorescence  
to the already-too-romantic

sugar, not ice – stop –  
at this temperature, it  
changes, like for like – stop –

## III

OPEN GAVE VOICES TO BIRDS,  
our word shall be 'breach'  
though it names, not sings.

Those tiny tongues, circumcised,  
a nation calling itself  
through the pass, concord,

those bare-ruined-choirs.  
Bare. Ruined. Choirs.  
It's not the same, the cut

bleeds, the throat suffuses,  
the warble clots. Come –  
the rank milk of another.

## IV

RADIO SAND, A BILLION GREEN,  
the more sealed up the more  
the manifold, the cells crunch.

Hard-wired from pharaoh  
to bunker, a golden thread  
direct into the circuit

clicks: magic numbers appear,  
a shadow visible only  
at distance, by sound

by heaven. The stars  
crackle & smoke, transmit  
incalculable figures.

## V

LEAF-RATTLE IN A RIB-CAGE,  
gold wires, a smoke eddy,  
a text read. Acts. Scenes.

The engine of the heart  
& a key-tongue telling  
the lots – maybe some clay

begins to form in human  
shape. Wired for  
the opposite of thought.

Come on once again &  
breathe, if only the two  
parts could again touch.

## VI

LOVESICKNESSE – a bar,  
afar a bird, &  
the middle-ground of light.

Haystacks, & darts glint-  
ing – the verb in this  
walks in my breath

before me, misting  
her eye, a beam  
laid on yellow rush;

pricked below the heart  
for all to see through:  
wings stirring within.

## VII

I COULD READ, I COULD DRIVE  
the bar would fill with red,  
the film would blow his hair away.

'Before' is a sublime word,  
the raked gravel, the gymnast's ponytail,  
a zinc pyramid on the palm.

Maybe you should stop dividing,  
maybe the tower locks &  
the emperor's drunken soldiery

freeze. The car keys haven't  
moved; the window-pane,  
not bloodshot. Now begin.

## One Animal Poem

### FOX

What? The thick string, coiled like umbilicus,  
Old man's penis, hip replacement  
Fires a rocket, red as yellow  
Into its cruising custard eye.

Dips its soul, dry, into no-soul  
And comes out with nothing.  
Doesn't dip again, it hobbles,  
Resentful of the I that dogs it.

Back wheel warped, and unrelenting,  
Can't remember any jazz.  
Thinks of thinking; nears the fall  
From off the train bridge, tries the end

Of being fox. Past buried foxes,  
Past the dead unburied eye of its  
Mother in the soil. In the next life,  
Less fox, less being at the margin,

Perhaps more swan.

### Six Lucky Thirteens

1

CRACKLE SHALE, THE FOAM first swells its bread-lace  
Veils the shards of chalk, becoming  
Second wave, anamnesia,  
Something grey left in the salt-suck.

Still the bridal rushing-on,  
Curling ray-wing, lips the wave and  
Forms a sheath that will be punctured,  
Sperm make shadows through the ice.

Snagging now, the layers leaven  
And reflect. Crackle shale...Now it can, it must -  
It has already dredged itself and doubled,  
The froth-skirts innocently fecund.

Round the rock the ragged rascal ran his cape.

2

WHERE THE SOUL SNAPS, in the forest,  
There the blinds reshuffle, passing  
One more out; first lesion; antler-cradle.  
The rifle makes a cross against the birch,

More meets no-more, drops the sodden carpet  
Onto sod. Spark uncoils a scale to heaven  
Help us count them in and out.  
Chambers set with welts of gold.

Leaf-shatter, blackout, last flame-pathos,  
Stir the bodies in the lake like logs. About  
The camera-silver dragonfly  
A thread of smoke or whitened hair there hangs.

What goes up must come down with bleeding arms.

3

FLATTENED-GHOST TOY-THEATRE trembles  
Like a giant dog the God has breathed on them  
And sulphur levitates through boards,  
Gentlemen, black railings, soured lamplight

Foxes in the edge of squares, the lords  
Are leaping behind glass, and yellow  
Snow has got into the eardrum,  
Followed by the baying hounds

With diamante eyes, on sticks. Please melt  
This art. It keeps on coming back  
But never changes, fixed as Christmas.  
The matchbox shuts up, air cut out.

Over the hills and far away, a drum-roll.

4

COPPER BIRD BIRD SHUFFLE  
Through the orchestra some tongues vibrate.  
Send the ribbons flying from the maze  
And wait for the repeat. They turn a violent red.

Along the ledge, a rank of insect husks  
Is trembling in the moving air. Her voice descends  
Ahead of her in waves, to pull her down  
Into the trap-eye corner of the glass

No sharpened mouth can crack. Branches,  
Syringe-spatter, chords dice through the heart

Producing flowers in a pattern, rising  
On the cusp, an echo swallows excess light.

Summer is a-coming in this wide room.

5

#### STORIES FOR THE LOTUS-MIST LAMENT

The damp-smoke of those bales and reeds  
Come reaching down the throat-bells, weeds  
Enwrap the cedar-box, about the trees the crimson silks ignite.

Puppets multiply in fields, the lines  
Pass lacking origin, they fibrillate  
In paper veins. A mandolin  
Is slicing soil in silver clatters

On the starry bank a bright nymph drowns, her tongue  
Annealed to other tongues, stuck with spots of ash.  
Oh, the lovely losing, sucked into the wind's skin,  
A diaphragm that shines with his distended face.

Everything comes to those who wait forever.

6

CHURCH WITH OWL-SPORES CLOUDING,  
Millennium between each wing-bat  
Bellows silence. On a post, a black sticks  
Crowning down the sides, and then the pearly

Grey that's pink and brown, it shudders  
In the chapel, eddies in the rafters,  
Sprays undying fungus from the heavens;  
Fire of figures in the oven-box.

All still waiting, crush the perfume  
From the dead, the wing lifts like a  
Bandage. Puff, and masonry dissolves  
Its biscuits, spun through air onto a tongue.

Every time we say goodbye to inundated ground.

## Three Seasons

### AUTUMN

Your dead body, Paul:  
candles at dark afternoon  
shine on your wax face.

Perpetual autumn:  
not the false end which revives,  
but continued death.

We stray from the sun  
onto the shadow-plain decked  
with grey moon trinkets.

Bitter apples, smoked  
on the bonfire's ash carpet;  
pigs in the dark sty.

Stranger at the hearth —  
we serve out an extra meal,  
our speech is different.

### WINTER

Snow-fat deposits  
soaping the bone, bodies melt  
on the camp's pure ground.

To the blue light bulb  
we shuffle, metal flower  
of controlled winter.

There are the train's wheels  
at a station — still the bleak  
continent ahead.

Communications  
down: me alone with myself  
to distance and hurt.

Daily, salted food.  
It feeds our longings, makes us  
despise the plain friend.

Born into the dark,  
a saucer of radium.

Cactus of winter,  
last remaining,  
your glass panes implode.

Thick migrations,  
get ahead of the shadow  
claiming the weaker.

## SPRING

Spring! Flower scaffolds,  
the gaudy boxes tremble,  
death raised up in life.

The cuticle smarts  
forward, reflexive, ahead  
of gathering up.

Police dressed in black  
line the fountain court; bright clouds  
scud across the sky.

Two floors above the square,  
the stone-balconied rooms that  
the plane trees will make dark.

## Five Chlorine Poems

1

How the clinic stings, the pale green of the walls  
Was once a headache that dripped, and a patient  
Suffered on the floor as a wounded ox.  
The steel thrills electrically, an abacus wire fence  
Has flecks of white cotton, and where the red resin  
Stuck on the concrete, they use chlorine  
To scrub it off. It's in the out-houses  
That the terror hangs, its dog breath  
Lashing at the flies, and when the lights snap on:  
It swallows. Outside, in earth, lies an engine,  
A metal heart clogged with worms, which pounds  
Every century or so, causing the planet to slip  
Off its beam like a drugged animal.  
The stars then do their sadistic dance,  
Each point will pierce the methylated skin,  
They file into the syringe, a ballistic shower  
Of mercury, sprung for release into the vein.  
No wonder these are lunatics, that the organ  
For absorbing mercy was cut from them at birth  
And incinerated. See the chimneys pointing  
Up at God, and speaking only smoke,  
The frilly billows black, they make a roof of clouds.

2

Come unto the gallery, the white blaze  
And blurring faces. The house-sized cube  
Of ice gets lowered, and the figurines  
Try not to melt in the kiln, they plead  
For gold, their feelings hammered out  
In tracerics drawn with fiery plasma.  
In the centre stands an object, mapped  
On the chlorinated floor where supplicants  
Will sniff and pleat their veils. What's ugly  
Blasts through the air-con, not the black  
Stack of carbon rods, the sceptre, cross  
And scaffold. No, the edges of the art  
Get disinfected; let it hang inside  
A mortuary. When the sun then gilds  
The four white walls, it becomes a mass,  
Celebration quick set into form. Rising  
Bleach will wash the eyes, and angels

Plug the top right corner where divine  
Afflatus shoots in brown and blue.  
Some people weep for love that's so displaced  
It wanders from itself; some hold hands and freeze.

3

Spread the chest, accordion-like, and comb  
Out the strings of hardened glue that once  
Were lyrics, the glassy beads were moments  
Of aphasia. Try bowing it for the archive air  
Still trapped. With time the glass discandies  
But no thanks to nature: forgiveness-chlorine  
Worked beneath the rug of memory.  
Where all face-up was figure, devices  
From the eternal garden - buntings in the  
Almond groves, choristers of saffron, sandalwood  
And cloves - here the frame was sweetly  
Rotting with a fine astringent stripping  
The petals from their roses. Caustic, yes,  
It stripes the heart like acid, but what it  
Leaves is love, that is, annihilation.  
For when the air vibrates, and it is heard  
As beauty, it's the subsidence inwards,  
The deaf self-cancelling that counts,  
Where the worms feed on the corpus,  
Each increasing loss makes matter rich.  
And so float on your back as on a piano,  
You rot with rapture, while the music must withdraw.

4

A street cloud soaked with red like a dressing,  
Clients in a staircase saga. Through a lens  
It's merely traffic, incessant circulation  
Round the blood-wire circuit, pausing  
Just to let the chlorine dry - then step  
Darkly on the threshold. Up close  
The face splits and from it memories leak  
Their blue yolk that sticks to all  
Who touch. It streams into the gutter, glittering.  
Come, pull up the shirt, this poppy helps forget.  
No, into the brain-folds drops a cigarette  
That on contact hisses; the mouth averted  
Like a wound that pulls the face-sheet

Into pleats. Stars rattle, and the earth  
Gets squeezed until the thicker drops  
Come through and form translucent crests  
Or crusts. The light beneath the slowing cars  
Is boxed. When it's done, they speed away  
To confirm their absence from a scene now swollen  
And reloading every smeary cartridge. The rack  
A row of rifles, fireflies catch among the blonder hairs.

5

Saltwater cups the eye, bacteria in packets  
Will fizz and jostle, combining readily. Edges  
Aren't quite white, a yellow-brown pollutes the liquid,  
The salt a sweet infection. Yet there is no thanking  
Worshipful enough for this chemistry,  
Each cell a crimson canvas in the bud, where  
Microscopic eggs mash into a purple paste  
And bleed with grace into the fibres. On the surface  
Emerald rings of chlorophyll appear as on a shroud,  
And a see-through golden wing of wasp  
Like sugar burned, shivers in the first winds ever known,  
The originals. Before, the sun and air were as pictures.  
Then the great tear in the book out of which  
The weather fell. And all the while,  
The germ-cube ice-tray buzzing, a honeycomb  
Of eyes with wrappers unremoved,  
An effervescent milk coursing through the tubes.  
And we look back as if we were not made of it,  
As if the love of origins excused us from our  
Derivation in them, as if between that time and now  
Were sheets of runway pavement, all sparkling with chlorine.

## One Sonnet

Is it that engines live? Repeating but  
Never remembering, they don't know death.  
Unlike the carnal wheeze of human breath,  
Their vapouring and ticking keeps them shut.  
But human lives are drafted in a door  
Ajar—a pinkish chink of light to hold,  
Like medieval arrowers, the roar  
Of war-machines below: The sleekish mold  
Of Love, the thorax-lubricated-engine,  
A dark and heavy metal angel, veiled  
Within the heart's own glass and granite dungeon  
To reinforce a weak defence that's failed,  
    Is then unclipped, and rolled along, as if  
    All-seeing, to the battlement's squared cliff.

## One Hundred Pseudo-Sonnets

I

Where a torch is brought up  
from the thorax shaft,  
the heart from a dark distance  
glisters a moment  
—a throat of crystals—  
then larynx shuttle  
arrays the light,  
having no use but  
rhetoric invents  
its own raison d'être.

## II

Scudded in dust  
how beautiful the tents  
where burning revealed  
the lineaments  
in one face  
of both saint & devil  
& nothing  
save divers mancies  
proffered against rising  
want of direction.

## III

Quick-freezing urine candied  
on an incline,  
sweet balmy memories  
are longer lasting,  
another ginger eye  
has taken up the gleam &  
vigilance passed on &  
counted out &  
no colossal cat  
can ever melt it off.

## IV

How braid tenses  
almost like  
a given word  
covers all manner  
man-shames  
almost gathered  
curtaining bloodshot  
tonguing  
yellow smokescreens  
in funky relax.

## V

Heart cupped with tar  
bled up  
to maroon blackness,  
flooded channels  
kept a meniscus  
down below dying  
where sulphurs flare  
no man got a thought  
but further  
into the negative.

## VI

Stars threshed to haywire  
light spanked out  
& flued up  
in starred aeroliths  
we couldn't breathe  
for prepared gas  
giving the lie  
to the Zeit thrill,  
ash brilliantine  
above celestial joy.

## VII

Your life is what it was,  
a silent film  
with melancholy piano  
has the resolution  
only to be died into  
by nostalgia  
of dumb repeats  
stroking each boxed bar  
for the self-exempting  
patina of love.

## VIII

Pastoral sheet-metal clasped  
on the breast  
defends the heart-  
sore of the nation  
fragment-embedded  
& unlettered  
for the pathos heroes  
who got everything  
coming to them  
unprovisioned.

## IX

Two hundred and twenty two  
estimation clocked  
a thought cadre  
triple set  
those newly politic  
rustling renown  
mid black cabs  
exacted number and  
makes up more  
handsome for interring.

## X

Flight-recorder melodies  
thronged the aerodrome  
in cascades  
of human bodies  
hymned by  
operating instructions,  
that dying fall,  
that tragic chute,  
come-uppance of  
the lyric class.

## XI

Take all events twice  
she and she  
double-consonanted  
split box of the  
vibrant rift  
in keyed mind  
that fringe sputters,  
the gap crops  
in the teeth  
that speak it again.

## XII

Sickness of the 'and yet'-moon  
where metals change  
in weird light  
out of period  
'at the same time'  
truth-blood has no flow  
in grammar  
that's a rusted frame  
so good to break for  
dust, orange in silver.

## XIII

Shower-of-jasmine gate  
a guest towel  
for splashes, petals,  
tiny white birds  
—device & real  
transplant:  
dressing now rising  
air disturbs  
the warm jasmine  
on the stone wall.

## XIV

Cradle intention-necklace  
mint end,  
choked in the cot  
where greasy roots  
grow up the side  
& branch, dewed,  
to the capital  
splendour.  
Now there is  
inhalation.

## XV

Unzipped with scopic jet  
to humidity of petals  
as interleavèd aperture  
begins to blink  
at the centre  
where damage  
will be done  
in earth  
as it is in air:  
sex-piece in sight.

## XVI

Burnt fin, fishy racked up  
on the grill  
welds its tin-skin  
and seals  
the eyes  
don't analyse  
when change curls in  
& we lose sight  
of mail and bonds the  
eyelet white scab.

## XVII

Copper-bracketed wrap-around  
this neck  
of speaking  
bullets bitten  
metal toffee  
plugs the lungs  
the heart  
the spleen cradled in  
sugar killing me  
softly softly.

## XVIII

We come upon the white mouth  
& kiss out  
the ashes.  
We are we  
by this loving  
the whole word  
wipes from within  
where the air  
goes in liquids shine  
& hold us there.

## XIX

Slowest part of the canvas  
where turps yokes  
the fibre-net  
for patience  
with glosses stuck  
in blood poring over  
what special needs  
to be got up  
and set running:  
remain there.

XX

Resembles what it's least like  
lies life love  
lies bleeding  
from the  
palm presses pane  
clear the teeth  
fall & bitter it  
& tear the flesh  
by the dock  
it dresses & soothes.

XXI

Striped enamel brooch  
with green and gold  
read, then read back  
that each line rules  
and now refers  
till reference moves  
and slides what was  
before beneath  
to gold, then green  
then gold.

XXII

Lip-pink carriers of sand  
pillars brushed, arching  
mid treetops,  
sugaring there  
in the sun—  
seals & gels, the  
guelp of monkeys  
tearing skin-bracelets  
& throwing off  
crusts of salt.

## XXIII

You, brown tomb-boy,  
whore of carbon,  
a few burnt hairs  
from the wrist  
still settling  
as dust  
upon the stars:  
let's make  
the night-sky shudder  
with your dead kiss.

## XXIV

You were a curl of mirror  
amid fields  
a scythe of sky,  
young at one point  
& aged  
where the glass clouds  
iris muslined o'er  
from picking work  
the cuticles tugged  
into the earth.

## XXV

Single rocketed fillip of care  
through crimped air  
wave argent girders  
will not personify  
but be the other world  
this life is ambrosial  
so much so that  
from an auburn look  
layer after layer  
evaporates, floats off, goes.

## XXVI

Inexorably colonized chequerboard  
the Idea outs  
to the margins  
& merges the tare,  
the paranoid recount  
of bondsman & lord  
changing strips  
for the love of  
one  
who gobbles the corpus.

## XXVII

Pink imago squids down  
the tract  
from papa to pipi,  
puffed-up gum,  
it will be eaten.  
Cut to the stairs,  
flats, slats & bars,  
a small dog  
sweats into  
the ruby stair carpet.

## XXVIII

Jet grill-spirit as sapience  
as per, count them,  
they'll morass  
if not kept  
in white houses.  
Excepting  
the jet coming  
after the future,  
this chromatic  
necklace re-ranged.

XXIX

Tissues breathed in ghost-cradle  
flaxen disharvest,  
all embers.  
So late now,  
so very late,  
not a soul  
but milks by  
the last limb,  
some yellows  
form solids.

XXX

Dogs before the chromed chair  
heats them up  
at eye-level,  
swivels like  
a master  
in third position,  
breaks  
a wafer hoop  
rimmed by  
reflected gold.

XXXI

End-plugged tulip straps  
come quickly  
goes the head  
down  
& parts  
the velvet flaps  
let through  
who saves  
the current,  
what is presence.

## XXXII

O, pippin! link in! fine!  
smear the command  
on the blade  
drops a little  
moisture  
in blister-colonies.  
Hear the sun  
crackle & smirch  
from all that  
long distance away.

## XXXIII

Square glass powdered  
with cobalt  
you know  
the boy has  
a pen-knife,  
what is his  
purpose,  
how dispose of  
extra grains  
at focal lengths.

## XXXIV

Fixed wing strung along  
in one accord,  
a sort of arm  
of something else,  
its durée  
is exquisite,  
leads along  
in air-space  
making waves  
which won't revolve.

XXXV

Black glass poem:  
it's classified,  
the sides  
of two secrets  
sheer away  
into sands.  
Arm bands,  
lit cradle-group:  
weather clears  
for the air-lift.

XXXVI

Pump ghosts at cliques  
& these thrive  
on plastic food.  
Room for more,  
so add colouring  
till they fluoresce,  
patent applied for.  
Legionnaires  
at bursting point  
blast through the grille.

XXXVII

Thermal clinic ruins  
tiles are proof  
though moss crops  
between...  
memory's mulch.  
Both sides return  
awakened  
to orange blazons  
stalling  
second sleep.

## XXXVIII

Three polite strangers  
in a wax charm  
assisting.  
Oak leaf symbol,  
plain tongue,  
they drink  
clear water  
and move on  
past the grille  
of poor impression.

## XXXIX

Shifts dressing, ratcheted  
through the dark  
change box,  
slot filled  
for a boost  
of new boys  
jump to lead  
from cut to cut,  
lipstick past  
the mechanic siren.

## XL

Satyr-maddened death car  
bumps, & glints  
swollen goat  
at the wheel  
wheels round  
& slides a glass shaft  
blazing through foreheads  
of tellers & nurses  
starred brainless  
by sliding tables.

## XLI

Figure the white bed  
sustains  
in heartstopping  
grace.  
The hollowed  
poem  
beats  
to ward off  
all openings,  
all stories.

## XLII

Green sublime coma  
faint jangle  
of glass birds  
mocking.  
The room  
itself dreams.  
Come back  
into suffering,  
more moon  
before midnight.

## XLIII

Metal-jammed angel  
sunk in sands  
buzzing  
with messages:  
the last figure,  
sun shut up  
inside it,  
packed with heaven,  
static, unmoving.  
First & last figure.

## XLIV

Lake, copper, smoke pass,  
half-exposed  
transits, values  
still not fixed,  
a redoubled seeing  
the smoke-clothed  
figure  
walk into the shining  
lake, absorbed  
sink without trace.

## XLV

Shame-corals shallowing  
to minds  
pumped up  
with air of god,  
swim in the  
crimped stream  
of rebuke-shells,  
deaf atoms  
swerving  
through gala days.

## XLVI

White remainers unplugged  
blue light dies  
by night flowers  
human cells.  
Seen purely by  
their radiance,  
the cracked bone  
& hyper-love  
droning for ever  
in measured effects.

## XLVII

Sheer shine transection  
where the thick  
black cable  
vibrates the glass,  
all lowered  
to a militant  
reed drone,  
quack surgery  
on the  
cleared trellis.

## XLVIII

Soft moon armour  
gently smile,  
a silver sponge  
passed twinkling through  
the roomy cage,  
the eyes  
are hollow,  
foam abounding —  
an arc around  
the flaking head.

## XLIX

Eye-cut paper blinds  
this is tree sun,  
this the state border;  
a blood pellet  
slips along  
the slit,  
then branches  
into fibres  
where is my love  
I cannot see.

## L

Tide-sickness of being  
after power  
dies down  
the viscous wash  
& a blue-grey morning  
crystals reappear  
on the clayey skin  
half-caked  
in estuary mud  
forms the low-life.

## LI

Million-shuttered zinc  
apparatus shuffles  
a clique  
new coined,  
air-conditioned,  
definitely clear  
the plastic pack  
shows  
the mechanic eye  
primed for blinking.

## LII

Through the butterfly bone  
come blasts of ash  
in silk disgust  
and three  
carbon rods  
laid across  
commemorate  
love's heat  
between beings  
who change into death.

## LIII

Of rose-lore falling  
reddest snow  
when wing remembers  
in the gut  
in shadows —  
    down, down  
thread-roots quiver high  
like transparent hair —  
bloodied owl dashed  
on the glass.

## LIV

Birdsong rusting canal  
amber-gris  
an iron loop tongues  
the speckled current  
tied fast  
a gasp  
of liquid & air  
soul's dereliction  
a spoiled handkerchief  
flapping at sunset.

## LV

Rain-blonde column  
parakeet  
the love swamp screech  
smears the face  
the arms  
cashed in  
for monuments  
of harmony,  
parades beneath  
the sandstone hair.

## LVI

Burning head streams  
through the room  
smites the bookshelves,  
a toy train  
on the table,  
a kick  
in the orbit  
and the rim lifts  
a turning disc  
portering comets by.

## LVII

Setting as pink shell  
so young  
green cars  
washed from the sea  
onto the drive-in,  
she a shade  
then cluster  
of small lamps,  
bulbs exploding softly  
shell & flesh.

## LVIII

Far sheaves calling,  
throats unlaced  
at random,  
sighing with a crackle  
in the air.  
Gathered here,  
the place comes with  
arrival's orange blur;  
leaking down the wooden side  
clots of softened fire.

## LIX

Crest, becomingly dazed,  
ignite slow patches,  
let them come on  
& burst the retinas.  
Small fry  
in the froth...  
You can do it,  
cream up  
to eye level  
iron block & think.

## LX

Squirms your magpie hair  
in terrace shade  
fruit rolls down  
the slope  
& splits  
revealing seed.  
Age of borrowing,  
five cards flash  
the gloom,  
magpie in the royal beard.

## LXI

Cold limb passing  
in milk air  
new life  
at hand  
what measure.  
Stones dislodged,  
dust crusts  
the lips  
are sealed  
the eyes are white.

## LXII

Tall bronze horses  
lick the lip  
of river  
petrol rising  
in & out  
of life form,  
jet of fire  
seals the breast,  
burning cars,  
rearing horses.

## LXIII

Razor, soft bag soft  
paper rolled  
the buckled  
iron lines  
a spray  
of bluest cornflowers,  
powdered shoes.  
Decoupled parent  
& split boxes,  
intervals of doubled news.

## LXIV

Lightning crocus, streak  
the sky theatre,  
flash on  
the spider-ground  
soft eggs goggle  
& skirts  
are breathing through gills  
they mushroom  
& frighten, photographed,  
orangeous in saffron.

## LXV

Blade-mechanical-efficacy  
hands shuffle  
& blur  
the layers  
striped black  
the recess there  
the secret  
voice or cave  
the bled thing  
dripping on ash.

## LXVI

Head rigged, buckled  
a dwarf arm  
capped by  
three-clover-pod,  
cracking it.  
Mouth like a thumb  
plunged into  
the counter-wave,  
what chance  
if not bound fast.

## LXVII

Beaded trapeze-blood,  
silver balls  
that fire along  
the magic circuit  
of sand,  
you science!  
you rods  
in air!  
you looking up  
from your team.

## LXVIII

Plaster head pulsing  
blue & red lights  
proportionate to  
the vehicle door  
slides back  
to reveal the setting:  
putty knives  
fill the cracks,  
the whole & perfect egg  
is good as new.

## LXIX

Alchemy headset radio on,  
intuit the dry basin  
where crystals remain.  
The competent pilot  
sparking with signals  
leads under instruction.  
It goes to his head,  
the fire becomes green  
& tubes disappear  
into the face.

## LXX

Love-bank where  
the liquids balance,  
silver nets  
both naïve heads  
that rest,  
the water glass &  
glass their eyes  
exchange infinitely  
to the gravel-bed  
fund of white discs.

## LXXI

Fading...second selves  
blur & shuffle  
past slow cars.  
Inside, lit switches  
& exits  
in outline only.  
How do we  
carry the body  
of what was lost,  
what goes out.

## LXXII

Snakebite word-cure  
good & evil  
draw them out  
& twist until  
the origin is shed  
in blaze of skin  
& glossy strokes where  
tongues & eyes pick  
flecks of dressing  
from the wound.

## LXXIII

Skyblue lyre black throat  
the box vibrates  
& earthquakes out  
into a wooden rose.  
The wreaths are set,  
wire twisted  
round a martyr  
head that hums  
from heavenly crack  
eyes slit upward.

## LXXIV

Lens flake showers  
unbridled, casting  
ranging through worlds.  
Shootings—  
each grain  
magnified,  
blown up  
& gusting in  
toy snowstorms  
of the head.

## LXXV

Wing: wing, the note  
jumps a spot  
up & down  
the flute-throat.  
Learning to fly,  
to soar...  
Stale perfume  
plays over  
the boy  
unclips the collar.

## LXXVI

Spotted face-film  
grey skin  
not space  
but hymen  
shone through  
by stars.  
Old light,  
red gone white  
& sacks of ash  
to look up from.

## LXXVII

White pill trajectory,  
mental pinball,  
lips pushed back  
& wired.  
The thing explodes.  
How lovely  
moisture slipping off  
the walls  
like bark,  
in glassy beads.

## LXXVIII

Purring of two hundred cats  
shuffled masks  
warding odours  
ramparts running tense —  
sex defence,  
these stand-in nurses  
stitch the slits:  
the king  
is being kept  
alive.

## LXXIX

Rests upon capital:  
the headland,  
the deposit,  
the mineral wealth  
& after a time  
acculturation.  
Flowers appear  
on metal & stone,  
the sense of  
interest changes.

## LXXX

Tape returns cinema haze  
over the hill  
the harvest  
silhouettes grow...  
Some details  
are lost,  
the good abstracted.  
Memory wrappings,  
take-out returns  
romance the gold.

## LXXXI

Gauze mask moth,  
amber eye-gum  
& shuttering  
of lids  
or is it wings.  
Fine things,  
the light inside  
revolves white birds  
alight in silence  
on the battle dress.

## LXXXII

Destroyed heart repeating  
by rote  
its chances  
'til it changes,  
reinvests  
in unique patterns  
of the surface  
intimating depth  
where the pain  
can never score.

## LXXXIII

Fast-slow picture house,  
lit boxes,  
moving figures,  
not bodies:  
only records  
can be changed.  
The colourless review  
commences  
at any rate  
still eyes yield.

## LXXXIV

Gold letters rose  
in coiled dust-gust  
flaps to the ear  
hair brushed aside,  
confidentially,  
precious truths  
circulate, unfold  
& fold in  
through the slit  
of silence.

## LXXXV

Clear mandarin paste  
dried leaves  
shuffle & bond  
as a screen.  
The royal body  
then removed  
the skin wall  
stands glossed  
with orange  
& china blue.

## LXXXVI

Lyric automatic breath  
the beat  
the stringèd cage  
& it's not human.  
Accelerate the heart  
image through the screen  
of after-life  
the brakes' glissando  
sinews tighten,  
wind the monkey.

## LXXXVII

Dream pink sanatorium  
carnations  
for eyelashes  
spy out the  
babies, troops & bathers  
on the sands  
trickle in glass  
the I-V sinks  
& war cries  
stripe the air.

## LXXXVIII

Shadow life of lessness  
we light on  
scraps in a cave  
drawn dumb  
by disappointment  
traced from memory.  
Creatures with holes  
for eyes—  
candles swinging  
from a chain.

## LXXXIX

Propped things, wood & bone  
in a moonlit room  
angled to lick silver  
coating from frames  
folding, anorexic  
dying from  
the outside in  
lunar deckchairs,  
radiant half-lives.

## XC

This Ich, this body-breath  
this death.  
Avenues  
of trees  
& the pelt  
of deer  
moving behind.  
We are blind  
in our lungs, we  
touch on dead birds.

## XCI

Carbon-darkling eyes  
record while watching  
& turn on  
the central heat  
where greased skins  
reduced to need  
are printed by  
the fire they press  
illuminates  
the dimming eros-resin.

## XCII

Grate-voice, ashes  
splutter  
from the throat,  
the chords  
a burnt-out  
match folder  
blows a smut eyewards—  
pyramids fly  
over moondust  
into the eye.

## XCIII

Glass smoke box  
yellow coils  
the embryo,  
each cell  
invaded, graded  
by its chances  
for survival; see—  
smuts cluster  
like a five  
on a die.

## XCIV

Quicksand silver is  
pink gravel,  
breathe, my daughter,  
glitter streams  
into your lungs,  
pulls you from the  
pulsing birth-world,  
birth reversed,  
crafts its lovely  
shipwreck art.

## XCV

Craze, sky needles  
arcing  
death hairpins  
touching planes off  
to explosion  
too soon too  
soon to die  
the hair shot white  
in a clock  
instant...shatterbones.

## XCVI

Infra-red death corridor,  
resin floor,  
the via negativa.  
An ox killed here;  
speed cameras  
line the wall—  
the order of  
religious mania.  
Hands of smoke  
tie things up.

## XCVII

Automatic box with strings  
whirrs with evil,  
clicks & winds  
its inner spool;  
here comes  
the printout  
punched with genes:  
tears of rosewood  
jackpot out  
onto the floor.

## XCVIII

Weird head dog  
dropping  
at the disc's rim  
a pinball  
rolls across  
the eye  
tracks it:  
watch what  
think, thunk  
matted-breath-animal.

## XCIX

Steelblue radium heart,  
sperm coating the  
aluminium box  
where finger  
traces an 'S':  
brand it all,  
live on  
in tin flies  
bouncing off  
the night-light.

## C

8194867 air supply:  
blood sunset,  
helicopter plague  
droning.  
Crops destroyed,  
'the wasteland grows'  
random yet  
programmed.  
Glass shields  
multiply the image.

## Five Leftover Poems

## 1 SHIPBUILDING

Estuary tar oozed, the gulls were torn-out throats  
Of white, thrown onto the air  
For the birds. Men with buzz cuts  
And skin patterned like stretched stained glass  
Pressed their wool, and down the damp quay  
The rope-gear piled in thick snakes.  
The ship still a whale fossil in the mud,  
A flat design. To raise  
This house of bones, haul it upright,  
The cathedral of a hull, the belly  
Wherein the throng would pray safe passage  
For this wobbling Babel across  
The sprung musculature of the sea,  
Would take a thousand grey souls.  
These passed invisibly through its sides  
In slow shoals, dull dead-mackerel silver,  
Some already drowned and crumbling  
Like the fur around a kettle filament,  
Flakes of the dying to be done, fish-food falling.  
For now it was life, the sap of saltwater  
Seeping from the cables, the weeping  
Wound on the cut palm. The sense that her day  
Was nosing towards her from the sea,  
A whiteness like a wedding, rattling  
dried flowers on the saltwater  
And when this vessel of her coming arrived,  
She would leave.

When will  
She sail? The snap of cables  
In the heart, a skewered lump of meat  
That rises in the throat and throbs,  
Kidneys pumping diesel, blurting  
Blood oil through the system, throbbing, waiting.  
She waits like an old maid to be dressed,  
The struts are brought, the whale bones  
Boiled and whittled, the she-spider erection  
Hoping to teeter for a fine afternoon  
In the birch tree park. Her breath  
Blows about the iron skeleton, and cuffs  
The heads of men at work; not yet a maiden  
And already a wreck, a wrinkle of lines  
Dabbed at by the moist rivermouth.

## 2 SEX

Yearningness, the strain —  
consume the air  
between two mouths —  
folds back, redoubles,  
repeats the body phrase  
& falls to dropping  
sap on parts of skin.  
Like trying to speak  
a name that will  
not come, the kiss  
is wordless, deaf & dumb  
the flower in the mouth;  
beads on the slope that  
sing from far away —  
over-being, each  
gloved in each, pressed and  
begins again in rebeginning  
every touch wipes out  
what comes before,  
takes place within a word  
that no one knows.

## 3 FOREMAN

Auspicious comes event in springtime, closely  
To its bearers, day and night. Not close enough  
To fill them, some borders remain  
Shafting here and there behind the sun, before  
Appearance, like falling trees behind the sun  
Unseen collapsing. Light in splinters.  
This is the skill at the origin.

Day posts up, and night lays out,  
Shielded by the sun which hides a forest  
At its hind. The whirr of chainsaws cutting  
Measures filing lengths and storing archetypes  
In the sun's cool cupboard. The foreman  
Has to watch it, watch he doesn't knock  
The unimaginable blocks & measures, or cause

Disruption. —Watch it, foreman. Days and nights  
Turn on their pulleys as where event comes,  
Comes slowly, though, then more quickly,  
Pushed between uneven slabs, its lobe.

Here it comes now, fair, auspicious, tacky  
With becoming and sheerly goes on through.

#### 4 WAX

You grow as you cry  
your skin displaces.  
Be for me. Annul  
My madness, skim  
The film, engrave me.

Your thing sears me  
Blind. It lanterns  
My chronic spirit,  
Bludgeons my mouth  
makes my kisses break

My copy examines.  
To make your match  
is maximal straining.  
Sincerely. I'll re-  
lick the wax-pour up.

#### 5 TANGO

Dance-hall Argentine:  
Mosquito micro-lites take messages  
From lover to lover across the floor.  
Melodies from a drowned piano,  
The notes are scarlet fish  
Or aquamarine or mandarine  
Or turquoise, rising through gluey  
Water and like cigarette paper sticking  
On lips where they dissolve.  
Soft shoes brush and slide,  
The dusty plush of banquettes  
At the side -  
Girders of sunlight  
Angled over glasses of lemonade,  
Some shade. Shapes made  
As if projected, forms morph  
Into forms, she dips her branches  
In the cooling stream, he plants  
The staff in underwater sands  
To push off once more, and glide.