

Stephen Moran

## Day of the Flying Leaves

Stephen Moran was born in Dublin. He made his way to London in his mid-twenties and stayed. There he combined a career in database software with writing poetry, fiction and editing, before becoming a full-time writer.



As editor or co-editor, he has published more than a dozen anthologies of fiction and poetry. His blog Stephen Moran's Museum of Illusions, begun in 2003, continues to the present date.

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Stephen Moran

# Day of the Flying Leaves

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*by the same author*

The London Silence and Other Stories

*For Tessie and Craig*



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## The Hunter-Gatherer Children of Dublin

The hunter-gatherer children of Dublin  
Set out with jamjars or nets on bamboos,  
Ranging far in the all-blossomed fields  
Or with buckets out on a rocky shore.

The boys in school grey shorts and socks,  
Pass unregarded by skipping girls,  
Skipping, skipping, in gingham dresses,  
Only wish - not. to. miss. a. loopio.

Close the lid and jar to catch  
A redarse, footballer or shuggie  
Busy bumbling pollen from clover  
Always avoiding the unloved wasps.

Pinkeen shoals are nervous in ponds,  
Frogspawn cowers amid green algae.  
By the sea, in rockpools every crab  
Sidles wary of toy plastic buckets.

Our tiring hunters return with exhibits  
For a duly amazed but merciful adult,  
Who says to set them free. While girls  
Disregard, and pull up their ankle socks.

## Eleven Homes

North King Street,  
where a famous battle was fought in 1916  
and where I bit the finger of a coochy-cooer.  
I heard my first 78, "Who's Sorry Now?"  
and tried to stack chairs to unlock a door.

Stephen Street Upper,  
where I made my holy communion with Dublin  
and we kids ran only as far as the corners.  
Where now stands a department store,  
the narrow stair & outside jacks no more.

Glasaree Road,  
where the only car was a black Ford  
Popular with running boards, Mr Talbot's,  
and I memorised the reg J1235984,  
and knew the boys and girls at every door.

Shangan Gardens,  
with a staircase signed "Sam Nolan fecit"  
and farm fields where the livelong days  
we played football, talked and lazed,  
and allocated somehow nubile mates.

Montpelier Rise,  
a sojourn near Golders Green in a bedsit,  
upstairs always redolent of Palmolive. It  
was a family they wanted, which I did not,  
so I flitted determinedly, leaving only a note.

Aylesford Street,

where some had division bells relayed.  
*Sous les toits*, in a room we invaded,  
an open gas meter the same one coin paid.  
Westminster Hospital delivered our child.

Page Street,  
also within the range of division bells  
by mansion flats where bodyguards held  
guns ready in jackets for Jim Prior to slide  
into his limo by the bus stop alongside.

Churchill Gardens,  
in a block named after Shelley with a view  
over Chelsea Bridge across the river to  
Battersea Park, where we'd walk and canoe,  
take tea in the caf  and admire the pagoda.

First Avenue,  
in a burnt-out house, renovated with council help.  
Two up, two down, too small for four when  
Nan came to stay and we of course cashed in  
and leveraged luck into the bourgeois realm.

Peter Avenue,  
The Case is Altered, Spotted Dog, Rising Sun,  
crossroads for changing waves of immigrants,  
Jewish, Irish, Australian, East European,  
place of drudgery, striving, wassailing.

Cavendish Avenue,  
in an enclave of roads between train tracks  
where Piccadilly and Chiltern lines intersect  
on the corner of Ealing, Brent and Harrow,  
the child middle-aged, O.A.Ps, counting sparrows.

## Visiting Molly

*In memory of Molly Moran née Roche*

It was always “Take it easy”  
on schooldays, “have a day off.”

In later life, “Why spend all your time  
staring at that box? Go out and live.”

Her Dublin maisonette had been immaculate,  
daily pills laid out in a special box,

never a thing out of place, but  
the electric kettle got burned on the hob.

Tipsy the terrier took her for walks  
amid people known but names forgotten.

“Oh, I know some of them here are doolally.”  
Had I seen any open doors?

The plaster ornament dog in the courtyard  
“would nearly...talk to you.”

All I can do is change the subject when  
she asks if I will take her home with me.

Now she arranges tissue papers on a tray  
like ornaments on the old mantelpiece.

Says in the chapel here the priest asked,  
“Now for our closing hymn, Molly,

will you sing O Mary 'This London for us?'  
"Indeed I will." And she did.

As I was leaving, she walked halfway,  
linking my arm, cheerfully.

The last words she ever said to me,  
"I know you. I love you."

## Morning Thoughts

Summer doesn't come around again  
Because no two summers are the same.  
If you're waiting for love to revisit  
The parks and sofas and cars,  
They're gone - under concrete,  
Crushed and melted down, landfill.

No, summer won't come round again,  
Look forward to the unborn,  
Look backward to the long gone.  
In winter, don't wish your life away.  
There will be another season  
For you, there will be a new day.

\*

The mile-high club is grounded.  
Sand dunes on that beach are in tier four.  
There are cobwebs in the public toilets.  
(Mind you, there always were.)  
The back row of the flicks is nixed.  
Wake up little Susy, it's over, we're dead.

\*

You can look at it one of two ways.  
You can say there's sodden paper  
On the ground

Or

Sunlight shines on one side  
Of the weed-grown back lane  
Behind the shopping parade.

A smell of paint thinner is in the breeze  
And the corner of an outdated poster  
On a gable billboard  
Opens like a door.

## **Day of the Flying Leaves**

Our supple living green has turned to paper.  
Rusty, soon-to-be shadows wander around.  
The rushing south-westerly is a friend,  
says anyway it's time to blow this town.

## **Autumn Rain**

Autumn rain darkens terracotta tiles  
to match the rotting leaves, tones down  
white eaves, redbrick walls and gables,  
soaking pavements from beige to brown.

Even the clouds, leading my way  
at dusk, back down this road in Harrow,  
kiss goodbye to pearlescent yesterdays,  
thinking, echoing only woodsmoke.

## **I Wish I Could Wash My Brain**

I wish I could wash my brain  
with a hose, clean my mind out.

Maybe with a dishmop  
I could expunge the longings.  
Perhaps I could use a brush  
to dislodge prejudices,  
take a scouring pad to redundant memories.

Can you help?  
Bash my mind on rocks in a nearby stream.  
Don't stop till it's limp and pellucid.  
Hang it out on a string line  
with the dog's rug or other filthy things.

Put on your rubber gloves,  
this is dirty work.

## **Walking in the Street with no Deadline**

Walking in the street with no deadline  
Is like taking a nap in the daytime  
Fully clothed. Money in your pocket,  
Sun beaming through. It's the world  
Buzzing, not your ears. Find a seat,  
A sunlit bench outside the library  
Maybe, closed on a Sunday, nothing  
To do, nowhere to go, no hurry to be  
Home or visiting, just oneself, alone  
Taking the long way home.

## **In Wormwood Scrubs Car Park**

*There's no such thing as waiting (W. Herald)*

Spare a thought for inmates,  
inpatients & chauffeurs,  
eunuchs in harems,  
call-handlers and gofers.  
The wilderness waits at noon,  
the firmament by night  
but our lives are eked out  
under fluorescent light.

## The People Who Did Good Things

The people who did good things  
and the people who did bad  
are equally dead. Jesus and Hitler,  
Mam and Dad, all sleep together  
in the same big bed.

Atom splitters and dealers of dope  
will light no more bombs  
and blow no more smoke.  
Monica from next door and Mohangi  
the axe murderer, snooze like babies  
and will wake no furtherer.

Humble grower of rice and joiner of racks  
are stretched without the weight  
of the sky on their backs. Kindly nurses  
and torturers have all gone bye-byes  
and are not coming back. Their feet  
are no longer killing them.

## **Life is a Holiday from Non-Existence**

There's lots to see and do,  
And when it's time to go,  
you wish you could stay  
another week. But oh  
in the end, you may say  
we're tired and, after all,  
we'll need another holiday  
when we get home.

## **Unguarded Moments**

If you walk without thinking how you're walking,  
that's the way you walk.

If you think without thinking where you're going,  
that's the way you think.

If you talk without thinking what you're saying,  
that's the way you talk.

Say my name.

## **Penny Arcade**

And then there may be a moment  
When you look into the eyes of the other  
And realise they have always known.  
She or he is ahead of you. They always  
Cared. Or never cared at all.

Like those old mechanical horserace games.  
In one race, she's ahead of you,  
Everyone's ahead of you.  
Yet in another game, you're far ahead  
And can't be caught.

## Who's Afraid of the Cold East Wind?

Herb Robert trembles,  
not because the wind is strong  
but because it's crazy.

Dandelion has wet himself  
but won't let it get him down,  
he's been through worse.

Rosemary doesn't know where to look,  
it's all a bit of a mystery,  
why do they bother?

Violet doesn't know why.  
Poppy says don't be afraid.  
Veronica says you should.

April shivers, a beast  
has walked over her grave,  
she hides in the chestnut tree.

Primrose lies low.  
She sighs, she hopes  
that May may come, come May.

## **Treen**

The great trees, tall-masted,  
heave away and sail by,  
while I, who cannot move,  
reach out and sway to them,  
as they follow their green way.  
For now it's Summer.

## **End of Winter**

It's cold, it's wet, it's one of those days.  
Yes, those days. Gifts of light,  
Water, thoughts and air.

It's noisy and crowded on the train,  
In the rush hour, but it's an hour  
And it holds together one of our days.

In a moment of anguish, breathe  
With your mind. It's a moment and  
If it weren't there, you'd be dead.

We've had our days, our moments,  
And come back for more.

## **All the Happy Moments**

All the happy moments have whirled and twirled  
and flown south for the winter. This morning  
a few crazy stragglers defy the rain, and down here  
the heavy minutes, shaking out their feathers.

## Prelude and Fugue

Things aren't out to get you, it's you who are clumsy.  
The train wasn't late, you missed it.  
It's not that what you wanted wasn't there, but you,  
you looked like you were moving, yet no more  
than the swaying of trees that answer only to the wind,  
and move only to stay where they are.  
Your actions are like the flickering of a candle flame  
as the time it measures dwindles  
to no more.

But trees don't walk. Don't wait for trees to walk,  
Go and caress them, whisper to their silence.  
And if you quench a candle with your hand tonight,  
Relight it tomorrow night  
with your lips.

## Reheating Tea

My forehead is a touch screen.  
I take the edge and thumb-swipe time  
forward, while regrets blur into pain.  
One swipe and thirty seconds die  
not with a bang but with a ping  
on the microwave.

I have heard the burst of bombs  
left by terrorist platelets,  
sound travelling from the crater of a synapse  
banging anvils onto hammers in my ear,  
projecting dragons out through closed eyes,  
and counted myself lucky  
afterwards.

In spring an old man's fancy  
likely turns to thoughts of wonder.  
I open the blinds to let sunlight  
blind me and send its flying vitamins  
to anaesthetise lesions, and waken  
hibernating hope cells with a splash  
like witch hazel.

Shell is too strong a word  
for this bubble, reflecting day's glare.  
When you've floated around the sun  
a few times, landed somewhere -  
called it home and held in  
the breath you were given. I wish  
I had a shell.

## Winter Thoughts

They put me in school. They do it to us all  
and they teach us the alphabet and how to read,  
how to add up and take away and memorise  
the dates of battles, the names of kings,

while round outside the classroom the sun  
illuminates the unread leaves and stirs  
the untaught robin to sing his rhapsody  
for which there is no do-re-mi, no metronome.

And we learn like Pavlov's dogs; how to please,  
to supply the formula, to recite the text  
we copied from the board and in return we get  
rosettes, prizes, kisses, presents, Easter eggs.

But when the teacher has retired and our mams  
and dads have forgotten everything or died,  
we're left to wander abroad with nothing  
but ciphers, tokens, money from a vanished state.

And late, now very late, the sun breaks through  
a bare giant tree to lonely winter benches  
where, as this afternoon, I wonder who to ask  
to teach me how to read the day, the light

on public footpath signposts and leafmeal,  
to diagram the last of the afternoon sun  
warming a railway bridge in a country lane,  
to derive the angles in a fine terrace below.

And I think of Yeats, Spender, Goldsmith,

walking through a classroom and being moved  
to mystic reverie, fierce compassion, wonder.  
But beyond the class there was a secret school

that taught us how to hear the ocean in a seashell,  
to observe a crab blowing bubbles, the local names  
for honeybees, how to draw houses, smoke & flowers.  
Take me back to the school of streets and fields.

## Reverie on a Theme

It's a hunger.  
It's a raft in a flood.  
It's a pitiful wound.  
The tide in a lonely bay,  
insanity of a saint,  
the echo of silence,  
sleepless weeping,  
call of the nightjar,  
triangulated moonbeam,  
shared time,  
when summer performs cartwheels.

It's a song on a loop,  
merry-go-round of the heart,  
plaintiff squeak of a mouse.  
It's waiting for a letter,  
the sound of your own name,  
transfiguration of another's,  
the grumble of a pet.

It's a mating call,  
howl of the night wolf,  
dove on a windowsill  
waiting for bread,  
help of a teacher for an idiot,  
note left out on a table -

“Your dinner is in the oven.”

## The Possibility of Skipping

The time when seeing was believing has passed.  
I thought window glass got in the way;  
Open it – sash up, casement out –  
And let me swim in that faith, unmediated.

Now there's a tealeaf in my right eye,  
Or it looks that way but it's inside.  
It's real and I've not been seeing spiders  
After all, it's not *delirium tremens*.

And the woman in Specsavers sends me  
From Kilburn to the Western Eye Hospital,  
So I'm wading into the sea of faith  
On the corner of Edgware Road.

Who turns here under the flyover,  
Down where cars overhead can't see  
And the flats are far back from the path?  
Nobody, only me and Mary-Le-Bone.

I'm not seeing tealeaves, not reading  
My future now. They come and go,  
Swimming in that inner sea  
Where dirty lenses never intervene.

Up ahead I notice a young woman  
And just then she starts to skip along.  
I think about dolphins at play,  
Wonder if that's how they must feel.

I ask myself will I ever skip again?

I would like to lie and say I skipped  
There and then in that concrete oasis  
of St Marylebone, where I was alone.

Then the young woman turned left  
Still skipping like a dolphin, on her way  
To the flats far back from the path.  
I thank her now and bless my eyes.

## **In the Waiting Room of the Western Eye Hospital**

I'm writing on my phone to while away  
The crowded hours spent in this A and E.  
A blur obscures my window, while the day  
Unspools on Marylebone's evening street.  
Here while taxis' amber lights go by,  
A boy is screaming in the triage room.  
The all-night clinic of the Western Eye  
Hospital, where no one can see the gloom.  
All are cheerful. Maisie, Mansoor, Abdul,  
Concepta, Fatima. One or two have been  
Here before and know the drill. They're full  
Of London gallows humour often seen  
When the worst comes to the best. But joy,  
It's home for the fearful, now quiet boy.

## Saturday Lie-In

Rattlegrating wheellets of the holiday bound,  
monotonous cooing of pigeons in the eaves,  
hill-gearing reveille of a diesel ghost bus.

Curtain run swish of the earliest ones,  
hated clapping of the wake-up machine,  
the rolling modality of bed locomotion,  
and spreadeagle into diagonal torpor.

Return the postman to sender unread.  
Not awake at this address for Witnesses,  
Adventists, Latter Day Saints or salesmen.  
Strip off, fall back, try to catch the last dream.

## To Sunlight and on Walls

If you don't already know  
why streets are like fresh-baked bread,  
why old men play cards in the park,  
on benches pulled together,  
why a fallen tree waits for evening,

if you don't already know  
the bandstand that enfolds a summer,  
the cigarette that burns a journey,  
silver rain that falls from the sun  
to the ocean under a pier,

the heartbeat of concrete will never batter you,  
the parchment of dried leaves will fall silent,  
small birds will forget to sing,  
and streams will not spring from stone.

Unless you pray to walls with light  
and chant a hymn for morning traffic,  
unless you shoulder up the clouds  
and become the race of underground rivers,

you'll never see ascending to the sun  
where no street was, a white wide street,  
no row of houses will ever stand  
transfigured into song,

and no train will bear you backwards drowsing  
till you wake to some other voice,  
other eyes, another  
time, knowing

nothing.

## To the People of New Earth

*I think that I shall never see  
Potato trees on G.581-c*

We of the smaller planet,  
Who make our dwellings from wood  
And burn oil to drive our cars,  
Send greetings to the people of New Earth.

If choosing a landing place in future  
Please beware regions in dispute,  
For your own safety, in case you're mistaken  
For one of us, and shot.

We long to hear your poems of purple moon  
And three-legged gazellaroos dancing  
To the songcrows of midnight.

We crave Monster Munch that looks like us  
And moon-dried tomatofig ice cream.

We're dying to know if your poets opine

Two girls in silk kimonos, both  
Beautiful, one a Ferengi.

A special plea: don't diss the old culture.  
Don't watch us on your "Vanishing World",  
Marching in our costumes into extinction.

Even if we believe in an impotent god,  
Get sloshed on firewater and fight in the town,

We are not completely without worth.

Dear people of New Earth,  
We have only just met, but  
Please let's live in peace and,  
If possible, bring us precious stones.

## **The Ghost of Sunday**

Could've turned for home, but just went on the warmer  
way  
and I met the ghost of Sunday on the corner of Bryan  
Avenue.  
A memory of malt and hops and roasted coffee  
must have blown in from St James's Gate, all the way.  
It wasn't there, just the memory and Johnny Cash  
and the sleeping city sidewalk, not O'Connell Street  
just a few sunlit squares of concrete all to myself.

## **The Names of People who are Dead**

The names of people who are dead  
are like expired tokens, special offers  
for something years ago,  
used tickets from plays you saw,  
went to see in theatres  
that maybe now are bingo halls  
or shopping malls,  
the names of casts  
in order of disappearance  
and technicians too,  
who privately could be impressed  
to some extent, concerning the names  
of people who are dead, or resting,  
no longer players.

## **The Trajectory of Love**

The trajectory of love is towards sorrow.  
The trajectory of hate is towards shame.  
We were born of the night to a bonfire of shadows.  
Morning finds our bottle rockets  
spent in other gardens,  
where daylight falls on dew,  
blackened ashes and dead grass.

## **For a Leaf**

For a leaf whirled and drowned by rapids,  
for a leaf pinioned under a beached hulk  
or mouldering in a sodden hoof-print,  
for all leaves,  
through the Purgatory of decay  
and the blessing of water,  
returns the spring.  
There is an afterleaf.

## **Proceedings of the Committee for Hopeless Love**

Shall we take the previous minutes as read?  
And the hours when morning brightened  
To a day in the heart, out of mind, hot  
With reckless words and shared heartbeats.

Our secretary sends his apologies, he's  
Incapacitated by remorse and melancholia  
After that joke that fell flat in the pub.  
The first order of business is chemistry,

And Doctor Lizard has supplied the pills.  
It's blue for warm and white for cool.  
(Do let us know how you get on.)  
Plans for the next event are already in hand.

And don't forget your longings and regrets,  
Because you'll have the nights all to yourself.

## Night Train

On an all-stations train to Wembley Park,  
Inside's too bright, outside's too dark.  
Mind the gap between train and platform.  
Outside's too cold, inside's too warm.

Please don't obstruct or lean on the doors.  
Some of us mumchance, others are bores.  
The next station stop will be Waterloo.  
Take all your personal longings with you.

## Square

Dancing is an eco-friendly  
way of burning emotions  
in the form of joy.

Nuclear fusion occurs when  
two people lean together.

There's a burst of heat  
energy, and it's renewable.

Transform your misery  
into happiness, and that  
is alchemy indeed.

## Crash

If crash investigators reach the scene of my life  
it will immediately be apparent that my ailerons were fine.  
Flapping, however, could not have saved me, for  
if it could it surely would have. And equally nor  
were my engines on fire, though I might have been  
bombed.

They may find my soul's black box, reassemble me in a  
hangar,  
and put my life down, eventually, to human error.

## Shaving Mirror

When I thought on getting old  
It was never about days  
Of full sun and icy breezes.  
I thought about wrinkles,  
A small world in my shaving mirror.  
But I used to say to myself  
All this misery is just euphoria  
In the bank, I remember now.  
And it was.

## The Day Before Moving House

I gave the wild plants in my garden their last drink.  
Goodbye strawberries. Goodbye hawthorn.  
Goodbye to lilacs and little Lord Lambourne.  
You've done me proud with fruit this year.  
Goodbye plum tree and brambles at the end  
Where Towser used to try, try to fetch the ball.  
I give you, laurels, your last drink, and grass  
Have water too, and drive the new ones mad.  
Goodbye slow-growing Cypress Lawsonii,  
I don't know what will become of you.  
And littlest shrub with the aniseed sprays,  
Your end will likely come this fall.  
Have your last drinks, here's to you all.

## **The Goodbye Bird**

Little white bird, little white bird, who are you?  
I've been here twenty years and now I'm leaving,  
You have never come before or do I know you?  
There are so many souls for which I'm grieving.

Little white bird, little white bird, are you hiding?  
I'll write my forwarding address on a may leaf.  
And when autumn takes the leaf I'll be abiding  
Somewhere else, somewhere else, beyond belief.

## Canal of Days

Life is a canal, on which we are narrow boats with no  
reverse gear.

Each night, each sleep, is a lock.

We enter the lock and the water of yesterday is released,  
till we emerge into tomorrow, to another gated day.

Behind us and above that again,  
lie the days gone by. Ahead only today,  
its prospect, its gate, its fall.

Gone the hundreds, hail the one.

Oh lucky swans!

## Seasons

Don't look harshly on  
the cold season that comes,  
embrace it like an old friend  
you might never see again.

Say something to Spring,  
it's not without fears,  
it's destined for the tragedy  
of completeness.

Summer wants you,  
Summer is not shy.  
Summer won't bite you,  
at least say Hi.

Take Autumn to the theatre,  
something serious. Read  
free verse from before the war.  
But hurry.

## In the Garden Today

Everything is better out of doors: drama, food, music, love.

You can hear the wind in the trees,  
the smallness of voices in the distance,  
the similarity of gulls and schoolchildren's cries,  
desultory clink of hammer on tin far away,  
pecking of a neighbour's shovel on stone, angry jets.

The sheen of green-bellied flies does not go unnoticed,  
the visits and revisits of a rufous butterfly,  
and some pigeon's one bar blues.

A hot day when the wind rushes through and cools your  
ankles,  
a dry day when the trickle of water nearby is a joy to hear.  
Sirens do not distract the terrier from chewing a stick,  
working on it implacably, less concerned with "noises off"  
than with a hover-fly that dares to interrupt.

Leaves lit through by the evening sun  
on top of a laurel mostly in shade,  
bring a memory from a long-lost summer,  
of a grand avenue with four rows of trees,  
and side roads with small terraced houses below.

## The End of Summer

*"It's ours" - Bukowski*

A breezy afternoon, the sun is partly overhead  
on its journey from the street outside to the back gardens.  
The trees still hold their shadows below,  
rustling with all their leaves.

Fruit is strewn everywhere, from street trees  
and garden trees that overhang fences:  
red apples, plums, cherries. There are more  
black elder and orange firethorn berries  
than the wood pigeons can eat.  
Guano falls purple on a car windscreen.

The west facing high walls are at their brightest,  
dazzling white and creamy pastel. The warbling  
of conversations, words indistinguishable,  
with folk rhythms and jags of mirth. Something  
that sounds like a basketball bouncing  
always when you listen, but never seen.

Traffic whines far off. The high wild pear tree  
shivers like tambourines jostled by the breeze,  
its sway and reach more passionate and appealing than a  
dance.

Some small engine drones in a garden on the next street.  
The sky is ice-blue.  
Telegraph wires shimmy a little, bounced by the breeze.  
All the talk in them weighs  
nothing.



## Unquiet Flows the Tolka

Bridge of Tolka, Drumcondra Park, spelter baluster, pewter  
spate.

Spectre of Swan's liturgy, philtre of Stac's refrain,  
and peroxide Ida, acid exchange student,  
your college green a prairie to our Botanics.  
You sexed me with a buttercup, highly,  
and yogi-sat akimbo. Oh Ida,  
we shoulda. I'da.

Where are you now, bankrupt in Ohio, divorced in Union  
City?

Do men put their words into your mouth in Idaho?  
Are you a mother of succour or did you die purple-hearted  
by the tracks in Maine?

I'll seek you high and low in Isle au Haut,  
I'll trade Manhattan for rosary beads and pray for an  
apparition,  
I'll drop into every dive from Atlantic City to shining Zee,  
and go over Niagara in a glass-bottomed boat,  
looking for my Tolka naiad.

But should all peroxide Idas look the same,  
I'll find out what Martinis are and drink them dry,  
I'll down firewater without reservation in the Indian  
nations,  
I'll find a night door and wait for you there as longing,  
unquiet  
as the Tolka flows.



## **Towards an Index of Dad**

*In memory of Christy Moran*

At the Fingal House by default on any free night  
Brought home sweets every payday  
Could sing like Giuseppe Di Stefano  
Drove his new company car home all the way in first gear  
Enjoyed Ken Dodd and Frank Sinatra  
Found pretension insufferable  
Gave his life to his work  
Held his emotions in  
Improvised words like “gobdaw” and “mixy-muxy”  
Joked but laughed so much could hardly reach the  
punchline  
Karl Marx was someone he had read  
Liked the fat as well as the meat  
Managed a clothing factory in the prime of his life  
Never raised a hand to us  
Owed allegiance to Manchester United  
Played Young Covey in The Plough and the Stars  
Questioned so-called intellectuals (perhaps as a result?)  
Resided in working class Dublin all his life  
Saved a little money for his funeral  
Took me to join a boxing club, but we couldn't find it  
Upheld standards but didn't preach  
Ventured only as far as Old Trafford  
Was loved by people I didn't even know, who cried in  
church

## **Annie**

*In memory of Annie Moran née Carey*

Time out of mind Annie waited for us  
before letting hunger  
spirit her away.  
“It was awful,” they said.  
“She was like one of those famine people,  
you know, the ones you see on TV.”

Could I have done more  
for the dandling on her knee,  
and the sing-songs,  
and the butter dipped in sugar,  
and cordial in the snug  
with the flavour of Heaven?

I was growing a beard  
when I visited last.  
She turned away.  
“That’s not my Stephen,” she said.  
“My Stephen is a much nicer,  
good-looking little boy.”

Her feet never touched the floor  
when she sat on the edge of her bed,  
her grey hair straight-cut.  
While mother made her up,  
Annie worried about the locker thieves.  
“They’d take the eye out of your head.”

“When can I go home?” she asked.  
“I want to go home.”

But once when they tried,  
she was afraid of all the traffic  
and couldn't cope with money in the shops.

Her sons visited for years, then stopped.  
Her sister never missed a Sunday.  
My mother stepped in now and again,  
and she never blamed my father.  
“It got too hard for him to bear,  
seeing her like that, for so many years.”

Grandad's voice  
was never heard in there  
till the day of her obsequies  
when he thundered basso profundo  
to the usher,  
“I am the husband.”

As our black limo followed the hearse  
through the gates of St Brendan's,  
I said, “She finally got out of that place.”

## Valentine

He's buried there in Whitefriar Street  
and they are buried too,  
the disappeared,  
all the types of you I fell for.

There are different tears  
from different wellsprings,  
ones that only know themselves  
why they flow

silent as Marian statues  
where the sackcloth urchins  
behold miracles in blue and white,  
silent as the widower  
who dips fingertips only in a font  
and waits  
by the Stations of the Cross.

I drink holy water  
from the tin cup on a string  
and try to re-hydrate  
the ashes and dust  
of all those harbour girls.

Sleep, and let me sleep with you,  
with St Valentine in Whitefriar Street.

## Winter Solstice, Cardington Park

Overhead is opal turning sapphire,  
Down to turquoise, and then blue.  
The sun is cold upon the trees  
On the far side of the reservoir.  
A weeping willow, a reedy bank,  
A few leaves, downcast, waiting.  
And now three swans approach,  
Looking for bread, expecting none.  
They glance, reflect and dazzle  
Like tomb light on the darkest day.

## **Breda Rainey**

Breda Rainey you would  
hammock in the rainy box  
chaps sodden from the night dew.

Breda Rainey you wear  
tiny leaves of the hedgerow  
in your hair.

Breda Rainey you are,  
though you heave a pushchair,  
forever garlanded in box.

## **Again**

Tell me a story  
busy as sleeping,  
older than childhood,  
stranger than home.

Oh tell me a story  
never before known,  
the one I remember,  
the one you forget.

And I will laugh for you  
and close these eyes for you  
and kiss you goodnight.

Again.

## The Dolls' Hospital

There's a dolls' hospital in Dublin  
Where shellshocked Actionmen rest  
And dollies wait for limb transpops.  
It's where ragdolls come to get stitches  
And bears undergo kiddie dialysis.  
Barbie is believed to have botox  
Privately in the Outpatients Day Centre,  
But Ken won't say. His lips are sealed.  
Sindy is terminal in the hospice  
Watching Sunset Boulevard on a loop.  
There's a bench with a plaque dedicated  
To the great Robinson Golliwog (  
Killed by the cruel marmalade trade)  
Where tin soldiers wear their rusty legs  
And music box ballerinas lean  
Forever akimbo, forever hopeful.  
They'll soon be returning to their careers.

## To a Young Woman

Never trust any man's love;  
He is out to trample and leave you.  
The flattery that turns your head  
Is an insult wrapped up in a lie.

A flatterer is a deceiver  
Who slanders you to his friends  
And chases another woman  
As soon as you turn your back.

Look for one who asks nothing  
And gives all without a second thought,  
One who will not tell your sins  
Or belittle your wounded soul.

Within that person's eyes  
You will find there in your mirror  
The only one who knows  
Just how beautiful you are.

## To Myself, Aged Ten

Would you hear me if I could go back  
And be a ghost from the future?  
Could I tousle your hair,  
Enfold you with arms of air?

Did I already, was it me  
Making the champion marble win,  
And turning coals into volcanoes  
To entertain your lonely days?

Yes, yes! I was already there,  
Making raindrops bounce for you,  
Ensuring bumble bees were waiting  
On every other patch of clover.

I never told you, you couldn't hear,  
But I did everything by magic for you.

## Sonnet for Dandy

Why should Dandy's obituary not be written  
In as serious a manner as for Lord or Lady?  
On Staverton Road each noontime he was sittin'  
On the grass in front where it was nice and shady.

In the evenings he took his master walking,  
A genial man who shouted greetings freely  
across the street when he and I were talking,  
But Dandy wasn't trusting strangers really.

Black, white and stocky, Dandy had a dour way.  
I always said, "He'll bark at mine in a minute!"  
And, after, he'd bark me and my dog on our way,  
But truly, I don't think Dandy's heart was in it.

Tonight, I saw his master with a sleek new guide.  
My question met a tearful answer, "Dandy? He died."

## **A Willesden Walk**

The vast stainless steel plant  
of the Capital City Academy  
lies under mostly grey at first,

till turning east onto Donnington Road,  
all of the sky, over half the world,  
appears electric-lit or petrol blue.

North-northeast later,  
under ice blue floes,  
down to the cold of whitened ash.

And where would I be without  
the ivory lightbox of an upstairs bay,  
harmonising with a white  
street light outside?

A war party of black cloud has halted  
on the ridge of Dollis Hill.

At the corner back, a sort of prayer:  
Vouchsafe me a view  
of the sanguine amber, oh yes,  
the peach red line, yes,  
scrabbed in the west.

## **Taxidermy of The Spotted Dog**

Clean gone are the sticky floors of centuries,  
The fist-dented panels are stone dead and buried.  
Its ceilings have swallowed their last tale of smoke.  
Only the facade remains, tied up outside.

## Bag Lady

*For J\**

Without a bag lady the earth would career  
Out of its orbit and into the sun  
She balances boxes of air and fear -  
Nobody does it and it has to be done.

Without a bag lady cars would careen,  
Forever speeding where children run.  
She crosses, recrosses, slow and serene -  
Nobody does it and it has to be done.

Without a bag lady inspecting the bins  
Streetwalkers would walk the night alone.  
She makes her own way, forgiving all sins -  
Nobody does it and it has to be done.

*\* J. is a quiet soul who wanders the streets of Willesden carrying several bags full of other bags and empty packets and pulls a shopping trolley with more of the same. She is neither a small lady nor very tall and she wears a bandanna.*

## Cardboard City

In the darkness in the night  
On the doorstep shivering,  
When the moon sails left to right  
Simon's soup is on the wing.

That fat lady with the urns  
Comes from Kilburn to the Strand  
With rosary beads and currant buns  
And rabbit fit to beat the band.

Coppers twitch their mobile mics,  
Suffer us to come to them.  
Would you swap with Jesus Christ  
On Calvary or Bethlehem?

## Willesden Sunset, January

The lights come on and it's still not dark.  
Shop windows light-up their mannequins.  
Saw-toothed roofs of black terraces  
are silhouetted in front of a fading sky.  
Around the back of the high street  
a few pale yellow window rectangles  
take their colour from nearby lamps.  
Another one or two are cold pastel blue  
as though they were cut out of the sky.  
The bright cold day sets on the horizon,  
its hemline muddied to fag-ash grey.  
In the supermarket car park drivers wait  
while headlights swing by, silently.

## **Lines Between Day and Night**

I am walking in the infralittoral zone  
between day and night, between winter and summer.  
The northern horizon is not sure it's still blue  
as a bloody brown tide of cloud advances.  
All the young trees are like kelp in a flood  
trying to escape the rushing south wind.  
More leaves than branch, unready for summer,  
They're panicking over their drowned blossoms.  
A patchwork of flagstones, no two alike,  
kaleidoscopes greys with beiges and white.  
Soon every colour will submit to shadow.  
Green places will have hollows instilled.  
Daisies and dandelions will close their eyes,  
and streetlights will stand sentry till dawn.

## Inisheer - 1975

Above the half door, a beach;  
above that again, the sea.  
The morning ferry from Galway  
anchors in the doorway  
and waits offshore in the sun.

Aran sweaters are navy blue  
and such, not many white.  
The ferrymen, hard as the sea,  
are readying their currachs,  
which are also fishing boats.

This island has no police,  
no cars, no roads, no harbour.  
The people speak Irish  
and the tiny stonewalled fields  
have rabbits and a donkey or two.

This side faces the mainland.  
There's a pub. That's it.  
They close when you finish drinking.  
We never knew and kept them awake,  
then staggered out under the stars.

One of them was zig-zagging.  
Who knew we couldn't fix it,  
on the rocky path we walked,  
stopping, sitting, starting again,  
mystified and drunk with life.

I was remembering Howth head

when three of us lay in the dark  
in an all-enveloping blackness,  
with constellations above  
and a boat light crossing the bay.

That sober night you said  
“Who can look on this  
and fail to find wisdom?”  
I recall it was your wisdom  
that always saw us through.

A little sandy beach,  
sheltered by rocks,  
we sunbathed but never swam.  
The cove was full of jellyfish  
blown in by last night’s gale.

I ate something like wild garlic  
stupidly, luckily not poisoned.  
Walking where skuas swooped  
to threaten our heads, we found  
a ruin half-buried in the sand.

It was a church from the age  
of saints and scholars, hungry,  
not tall or else they stooped  
to pass under the low lintel  
into their pious stone hall.

Our blasé plaster living rooms  
might be bigger now than this  
place where monks huddled  
and chanted in Latin, fearful,  
euphoric and awestruck.

Another mile to the final cliffs  
where sheered walls of tawny rock  
face the edge of the world.  
Did they venture in twos, singly,  
or all together to this western shore?

They prayed to God of the Atlantic  
for their feeble, perilous lives.  
They prayed for the flat world, finite  
under a dome of sky, waiting  
for the terrible Judgment Day.

Next stop America, we know now.  
But for them the ineluctable fury  
of the Atlantic was proof  
that they were small, very small,  
and so are we, the same.

The wavelets turn rollercoaster  
only halfway to the ferry, leaving.  
It's too late then to set the price  
when they ask. Whatever it is,  
we have to pay the currach men.

## Falling Asleep

Walk to the window,  
part the sepia curtains,  
peep out,  
see the albino street.

Heavy and weak,  
turn into bed.  
The small of your back  
Is a hollow box-kite.

Can you breathe  
if you fall asleep prostrate?  
Is there comfort  
halfway between side and back?

Replay the words  
everyone said today.  
Too late,  
you know the answers now.

Grotesque faces  
made of coal and shadow  
glint in the blindness.  
If only you could paint them.

A falling start  
and now your carefree spirit  
floats over  
the echoing, empty playground.

## Canary Dream #4

canary  
in a sun-room  
when I  
try to put it  
in a cage  
it turns  
    into  
    flakes  
of  
    pure yellow  
        that  
        scatter  
  
in the air  
  
    and out the window

## Wake Up Call

Leeds sleeps rough.  
The night does not descend  
but rather abandons her  
to the horizon.

She has made her bed  
out of unmade car parks  
that pit and flood  
and reflect the void.

The station hotel  
is the foyer of Hell  
where uniformed demons  
guard the forecourt.

Inside this cruise ship  
all walk in a swell,  
leave shoes outside doors  
and settle down to porn.

Blue Nun from the mini-bar  
is followed by Pils.  
The free preview is enough,  
it won't show on the bill.

You are dried-up and sleep  
the burnt sleep of the damned.  
Trains shunt and hammer you awake  
From nightmare with a yowl.

In the morning you will go

where the natives swarm,  
be a stranger in their offices  
and eat curd tarts for lunch.

You'll pass by the night club  
where Leeds footballers sank  
too many drinks and kicked  
two Asian boys nearly to death.

The suits are astir now,  
squirming with their itchy groins.  
Stiletto P.A.s are powdered, ready  
to gun their Beemers round the square.

The high Victorian statuary  
is bigger than all these boutiques,  
travel agents and burger bars  
crushed into one paper cup.

## **It's Easier to Tangle than to Untangle**

Seconds and moments don't follow, they permute.  
One on the microwave countdown cannot  
be understood as two together tangle  
with the next and prior but those are only  
yours. That dusty vase on a shelf has its own  
infinity. The spider on the floor, a few more.

## Refugees

We are young, our whole lives ahead of us,  
When we take a chance on a rusty hulk.  
Terrified at last to be locked below deck,  
Never wanted so many to push on board.

The Mediterranean is calm, so they say, but  
With bodies crushed together, no provisions  
And no facilities, death is never far away.  
All long for Lampedusa, tolerance, a new life.

It is night now and a patrol is sighted,  
A hubbub arises and the old tub lists.  
Before you can think about home, here or there,  
The sea is upon us all, this is our tomb.

In villages and towns, the old are bereft,  
Some wives too and youngsters. Will they ever  
Hear, or will they be left to surmise,  
When no call from Europe ever comes?

(2016)

## **I Wonder How My Body Will Burn**

I wonder how my body will burn?  
It's cruel to burn my toes, so  
ill-used and loyal, monstrous  
to roast my thighs and shins,  
strong bones reduced to ash.  
Good riddance to the private  
parts, fat lot of good they did  
me. Stomach, what a terrible  
waist. Halfway. Oh, here we go.

## **I Still Wear Shirts**

I still wear shirts I used to like  
when I used to like shirts,  
going to places I used to go  
when I liked going to places.

For old times' sake I'll pull on  
the same old thing I used to pull on  
when I was fond of pulling on  
that same thing I pull on now.

Oh but it's not the same.

## Daffodils are Ugly / Apology

Daffodils are ugly, egomaniacs  
blowing their own trumpets,  
playing silly buglers, monotonous  
“Does my bulb look big in this” bimbos.  
Oh but we love them, we love them senseless  
because we know they’re better than us.

### *Apology*

For avoidance of all doubt,  
daffodils are lovely, hapless  
horse-like, handsome flowers.  
I apologise to daffodils,  
they cannot help themselves,  
it’s the way they are brought up.

## Through the Open French Doors

Through the open French doors,  
between the woods and the lane,  
a stave of power lines  
with birds for notes.

I lift the lid on the piano  
and start to play them.

“She is far from the land”

## **Mismatch**

If your cups don't chase each other round the cup tree,  
I will arrange them so they do.  
But you may not be the one for me,  
And I may not be the one for you.

## Chirrup

The free birds are giving up their singing,  
The first thing they do each morning is login.  
Ostriches have learned to wear bras  
And bolster their self-esteem with mindfulness.  
Meanwhile rabbits are mesmerised by television;  
They can't take their eyes off 24-hour news.  
Even slugs are slowly moving with the times,  
They all speak pure Estuary with glottal stops.  
In hives there is a new type of bee, it seems,  
Not a worker, a drone or a queen but a flaneur.  
The flaneur bee is too heavy to fly and couldn't care  
Less.

## The Road Not Taken

*On seeing two signposts pointing opposite ways to Edenderry, one that said 8 miles and one that said 10*

She bid me take her hither,  
I bid her take me yon  
But I being young would dither  
And now she's taking John.

Down by Edenderry  
Our rendezvous was set  
But I went by the long road  
And now she's with that get.

So listen all you geezers  
On Erin's craggy coast  
Always take the short cut  
Or else your arse is toast.

## Nearly Man

Ah me and Carmel Kavanagh from Navan  
In a caravan in Cavan  
Almost consummated our mirage.  
Then a one night couldn't stand  
With Anna from Knockananna  
In Banna sur la Plage.  
I nearly humped Dymphna from Crumlin though,  
On a drumlin near Drumshanbo  
But never knowingly akimbo,  
She dumped me at Crimbo,  
Which ruined my image  
In Kimmage.

## **Tommy Maher's Irish Bar**

Welcome in, have a skinful  
Gunga Din, it's not sinful.  
Take a drink and only think  
That Jesus Christ's own advice  
Was get more in, partying  
With James & John, dusk till dawn  
At Tommy Maher's Irish bar.

## **Tread Softly, for you Tread on Murmurons from Jupiter**

Don't dig it up, don't tramp it down,  
The wildflower purple crown vetch,  
It's that they eat and that alone,  
Potatomen from the planet Kvetch.

Many extra-terrestrials here  
Are tiny and struggle to survive.  
Bamlards from Gliese five-eighty-four  
Subsist entirely on baby chives.

Extraterrestrials like the Balleyes  
From Venus can hardly be seen,  
They're so tiny, and so specialised,  
They live on the fumes from Windowlene.

## **Ode to a Bedsock**

The life of a bedsock is not very onerous.  
It does the opposite whatever its owner does.  
When you hit the hay its work must begin,  
Together, usually, with its identical twin.  
Bedsocks are harmless. Their idea of play  
Is to wander about on a mattress all day.  
So mind the Geneva Convention, fellows,  
And never confine them under the pillows.

## Outtakes from Spoon River Anthology

\*

Tinnitus Young

Martha Postlethwaite hunted me for 20 years  
Till at last I lay panting under her flashing teeth.  
She stole her prize but in the taking  
My heart burst and she lived forty years a widow.  
Na na na na na.

\*

Trod Strongly

As a child I liked nothing better  
Than to roll and tumble in the hay in Art Poorly's barn  
But on my first day as a hand on the harvest  
I daydreamed and got rolled and tumbled  
By Art's new combine harvester  
And so I met my baleful end.

\*

Mildred Fulbright

The local party chose me to present our town's gift  
When Taft's whistlestop train arrived.  
I waved as the President left and he waved back.  
Joe Fulbright was the proudest stationmaster in our state.  
But when Washington shut the railroad down  
Pa took to drink and overturned our wagon  
Into the Spoon River one icy night.

He tried to save me but my hair caught in waterweed.  
Now he's a Democrat.

\*

Ulick Angstrom

They said it was a shame how I never ventured into town  
Though I had travelled to the onion domes of the Kremlin  
And to the minarets of Aya Sofia  
And from the cafés of Paris  
To the street barbeques of Manila.  
But with all my knowledge  
I brought home an embarrassing disease  
Right when Doc Slein's daughter took over the practice  
And that's what got me in the end.

\*

Valerie de Valera

To this much at least they all could agree:  
Discretion was not the best part of Valerie.

\*

Pleat Muggins

Dory and Cory Muggins named their son Pleat  
After an ancestor who sailed with Vasco Da Gama.  
He was surly and never learned, though able,  
And massacred his family at the age of 16.  
When hanging judge Crudmore asked  
If he had anything to say in mitigation,

All he said was, "My name is Pleat."

\*

Mickey Pride

Here lies Mickey Pride.  
He laughed till he cried.  
He cried till he died.

\*

Benjy Doone

"I shat myself, I pissed the bed,  
I thought this & that, I lost my head,  
I loved three or two or one.  
That's the autobiography done."

## **At the Poetrycraft Store**

A quarter pound of mixed metaphors -  
Not too much, about a fistful will do.  
And like a sandwich bag of similes,  
A sack of anaphora, now lemme see,  
A sack of anaphora, oh yes,  
Just a small tin of irony (I never use it)  
And some personification,  
If you have it, Poesy.

## He Wishes for the Green and Silver Bits

*After WBY*

Had I the heavens' embroidered circuitboards,  
Enwrought with silver of solder and flux  
The boolean half charge of decision scores,  
Resistors and matrices of maybes and musts,  
I'd encrypt there the tales of Arabia for you.  
But I being poor have only my wee jests;  
Tread softly because you tread on my jesticles.

## **Early Licence**

There is a pub in Dublin town  
They call the Morning Star,  
And many a pint they pull at dawn  
For dungareed cattlemen there,  
Whose lowing beasts, corralled around  
By iron railings in a queue,  
Pine for their owners in the lounge,  
Drinking, like big breeders do.

## Oh One-by-Three

Oh one-by-three  
shamrock mystery  
all-in-one  
with the father and son,  
is mother the ghost there  
in a burqa of feather?

Holy  
ghost, father, son,  
holy  
past, present, future,  
holy  
shame, blame, fear

were you tempted really,  
did you really fall,  
why do you punish yourself?

## **Oh Flaking Gilt Money Box**

Oh flaking gilt money box of St Francis,  
save us.

Oh electric candles of St Mary,  
pray for us.

Oh plaster saints whose names we know,  
blush for us.

Oh sanctuary light, oh holy lantern of Jesus,  
never go out,  
never doubt our existence.

## **St Paul Said It All**

St Paul said it all  
snail mail.

St Peter is not a tweeter  
but St Mary is always online.

The father has no email,  
no one can reach him  
except through the son.

The spirit translates pages into any language  
with comical results.

## **Outtake from The Da Vinci Code**

My first is Balaam but not in ass  
My second is in Noah but not in flood  
My third is in Virgil but not Catullus  
My fourth is in very but never in good  
In my pelt through the desert I fly  
Who the hairy hell am I?

## Whitton Avenue

By the corner house there used to be  
Shrubbery and a recumbent tree  
Where small birds liked to play.  
Now there's a block-paved yard,  
A useless space for man or bird  
But the landlord likes it that way.

## **Pain and the Hollywood Stars**

Robert Mitchum's expression says, I have a little pain but it's nothing I can't handle.

Burt Lancaster says, I can bear it, I can bear it, how about you?

Gregory Peck seems to say, I fear I might be next but I'll be ready for the day.

Paul Newman of course has heard about it, would like to talk about it, if you wish.

Steve McQueen is dead, died of pain, always looked like he would.

Which brings us to Jimmy Dean and all those other martyrs, well they got what they wanted.

But Eastwood, now he offers pain, you want it, (well do you punk?), there's plenty to go round.

Bogart is not really thinking about his own pain, his terrible pain, he only wants to ask about yours.

Edward G: I've got it, now you're going to get it.

Cagney thinks it's all the same, joy or pain, best get it while it's going.

Brando: What have you got? I'm hedging my bets but I'm thinking how can I get out of this before it hurts.

James Mason: Don't talk to me about pain, my back is killing me.

George Sanders is thinking, pain you say - we'll see about that.

There were women too, they knew it served us right.

But that was all a long time ago.

## **There May Be Horrors**

There may be horrors on the floor of the sea  
and ever more sorrows down a stony road,  
but we are not at the bottom of the sea  
and where this road winds nobody knows.  
So while there's still rosé from France  
and seasick priests are going green,  
might I have the honour of this dance  
with you, my ginger Rosaleen?

## **The First Time the Earth Went Round by the Sun**

The first time the Earth went round by the Sun  
it was a rainy morning.  
Rocks sat back nonplussed, as if to say  
“What the hell just happened?”  
and decided to take a nap,  
time enough to unpack later.  
But after dark awoke perhaps, jet-lagged.  
A constellation that used to be there,  
gone like an old bedroom  
with the bed beside a different wall.

The second time the Earth went round by the Sun  
must have been a Tuesday,  
St Patrick’s day, as it fell that year,  
and it rained again.  
Rock Tours had gone bust it seemed,  
so we were there for the duration.  
It was warm at first, then a bit too hot.  
That’s the trouble with these places.

Yadda, yadda.  
Wednesday, oh for Pete’s sake  
it’s bucketing down. Let’s have a lie-in -.  
Huh, something just crawled over my face.  
Shut up, it’s only a hare.

The, what was it, fourth day it never let up,  
seriously large floods.  
Overheard two nudists nattering,  
Is it me or is it getting hotter?

Yes, that'll be because we're in the northern hemisphere.  
Say again?  
What the hell is that? Ugh!  
Don't say ugh here my dear,  
it only plays into their preconceptions.

The fifth day the Earth went round by the Sun,  
we had to make our own fun,  
playing poohsticks and washing in a rain-barrel.  
Wouldn't it be great  
if only it would stop raining? Then a miracle,  
the clouds parted and fell quiet.  
Only under the trees it was still raining  
and for the first time there were hills,  
blue black hills,  
at the end of every road.

## And on the Eighth Day

Refreshed after a day off on Sunday,  
God went back to work.

On the eighth day he created poliomyelitis, smallpox,  
bubonic plague, influenza, acne, narcolepsy  
and Total Amelia syndrome.  
He worked in a frenzy, the ideas poured out of him.

On the ninth day he created volcanoes, earthquakes,  
tsunamis,  
hurricanes, tornadoes, mudslides and droughts.  
Again, he was inspired and elaborated his new inventions  
for hours.

On the tenth day he populated the firmament  
with a sprinkling of asteroids, meteors and comets,  
millions of them on random paths, and that  
gave him the biggest laugh of all.  
He felt that if he laughed while creating them,  
others would too when they saw them coming.

On the tenth day he thought,  
I'm becoming a bit too predictable,  
let's dig a bit deeper and he invented depression,  
narcissism, paranoia, and schizophrenia.  
It will add weight to the whole scene -  
sombre, off-beat, violet-coloured interludes.

On the eleventh day, he thought, "Follow that!"  
And then he thought, "It's all a little too obvious."  
The trick is to go from bad to worse,

to be cruel to your characters.  
Let me think about it.”

On the twelfth day, he spied on the people  
and saw with dismay how they looked at each other  
with love. That was not in the plan.  
For a while he was stumped.

Then he woke up in the middle of the night of the  
thirteenth day  
and he wrote it down on a post-it note.  
“Death.”

## Crazy Paving

*On seeing a picture, not necessarily from Gaza, of an armed soldier  
hiding in a doorway, with two children in the street nearby  
(Unicef193-0634 / Betty Press)*

Crazy paving, crazy wall,  
Concrete floors. When curfews fall  
F-sixteens will come to call.  
Rocket bye baby, the cradle will fall;  
Down will come gunmen, mothers and all.

Iron shutters, iron gates.  
Out of sight, a soldier waits  
On girl and toddler, under eights.  
The elder with her friend debates  
Oblivious to their future fates.

Not the chosen, not the just,  
They are children of the dust,  
When hovels with no papers must  
Be razed in order to adjust  
Collateral in a stateside trust.

## Mockingbird

Hush little baby, take your rest;  
Papa's gonna buy you a suicide vest.

And if that suicide vest don't blow,  
Papa's gonna make you a bomb to throw.

And if that bomb won't kill someone,  
Papa's gonna get you a tommy gun.

And if that tommy gun goes wrong,  
Papa's gonna build you an atom bomb.

And if that atom bomb won't blast,  
Papa's gonna make you a plague to cast.

And if that plague turns back on us,  
Papa's gonna buy you a house of dust.

And then before the sun goes down,  
You'll look sweet on every wall in town.

## The Weight of Words

The number of all the raindrops that have ever fallen on  
England  
times all the snowflakes that ever fell on Japan  
by the number of jelly beans in a very big jar,

that number of words,

would not outweigh a pinch of wild cotton  
as would make a pillow  
for a fairy.

## Ballad

It is the hour of waking alone.  
One jet is unzipping the sky.  
Boxwood hedges await me  
And watch my feet go by.

The pines are hiding their scent  
With the privet for tonight.  
They hold no interest this morning,  
Enervated by so much light.

The dead grocer is still alive,  
Surly, serving in the shop,  
Henpecked in a biscuit coat  
At the parade where buses stop.

Joan Gentle is near me now,  
Worth marrying just for the name.  
She often gets on the sixteen,  
But she is dead just the same.

Two friends linking arms as always  
On the path by the flower bed  
Will never get to hear about Tatu,  
Aids or crack, because they're dead.

The conductor with nothing to say  
Still hears the sister squeal  
"That's my brother, that's my brother!"  
He too has passed under the wheel.

Maisie of the hot pants is a zombie  
In the kiosk selling cigarettes  
And I will buy ten Senior Service  
And inhale without any regrets.

There's where Vicky lives over the shop.  
She cuts hair and makes mothers blonde.  
They still share tea and drink gossip  
Even though they're beyond the beyond.

Their blueprints are filed under gone  
Missing, and presumed unknown.  
Although we are dead, we're alive -  
All in the hour of waking alone.

