

# ***An equal moment***

Edward Mackay



*What matters is that something is captured and is equal to that moment, a bleakness that can meet the bleakness, or a gaiety that can meet the gaiety.*

Paul Muldoon



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The gathering days.....	7
Stone House Asylum, 1932.....	8
Yours.....	9
<i>Il Tricolore</i> .....	10
i. Verdi: Venezia.....	10
ii. Bianco: Roma.....	11
iii. Rosso: Firenze.....	12
Love letters.....	13
Totems.....	14
The clearances.....	15
The cormorant and the eel.....	16
Sherlock.....	17
Thirteen ways of looking at the city.....	18
The Isles of Dogs.....	20
<i>Three clocks and a heartbeat</i> .....	21
i. Slow birth.....	21
ii. The carotid clock.....	22
iii. Unwound.....	23
Dandelion clocks.....	24
St. Petersburg.....	25
One thousand hopeful words for Margaret Thatcher.....	26
The boy from Wath-on-Dearne.....	28
A proposition.....	29
The treasure hunters.....	30
Goldberg Variations.....	31
Hitchhiker.....	32
Anno Domini.....	33



## The gathering days

These are the thin, electric days,  
fermenting to the spark of a golden sun.

Full harvest days, taut before the rains,  
billowing beneath the contented weight

of a dying season. These gathering days  
come in equal moments, clinking from the cupboards;

the measuring days, in muddled, misfit rows,  
the palm-prickled hoarding days

sifted to the weight of a purpled fig,  
fleshy and warm, resting like a bird in the bowl of a hand.

The hours are counted out in pierced sloes,  
sliding their springtimes,

greened from their opened sea-deep blues.  
We drop our sweetened words into bottles,

slicking them in syrups, vinegars and rums:  
plump fruits marooned from time,

press idly against glass as juice and sap slip  
between the cracks, knowing time's been slowed.

They settle into one another,  
bobbing in their tiny glassy worlds.

Veined skins split pathways from the sun  
in these shrunken days. Then comes

the cold; we are well-stocked  
to hold back the hunger,

yet indifferent jars stay sealed,  
furring with dust as the treasures sleep.

## Stone House Asylum, 1932

*He trod, in a way we who were sane could not emulate, the lanes and fields he knew  
and loved so well, his guide being his finger tracing the way on the map... he had  
Edward as his companion in this strange perambulation and he was utterly happy...*

Helen Thomas

Private Gurney, no. 3895, at ease.  
Unnoticing, unnoticed by the grinning choir who shriek  
and shit, idle through the hours, slack-limbed with slacker minds,

that crack and melt the days. His spare frame,  
framed at the window, almost inhabits  
the *great wit near to madness*. Until this bawdy band

strikes up: no romance here. Yet still, some days rise clear  
as the bright air above the sweet silt at Framilode  
until, like crows at dawn in the scant yard,

terrors arrive upon the hour, whistling down the unseen wires,  
with fresh news from the front as the clouds roll in.  
His green eyes scan the grey imagined skyline for the sniper

who knocked poor Corporal Thomas to the mud.  
Round eyes, eager as foxes beneath bold brows  
tap out a morse code in memoriam.

The widow comes, strong, sight failing,  
heart and arms wide-full despite the years.  
Quietly, she unfolds Edward's packages of summer days

creased along the yellow spines of an old map.  
She spreads their youth upon the iron bed  
as if, beneath the ordinance of loss, all three can walk together:

cross the byways of their grief, unbrick the walls,  
trade back a life, a mind, a love,  
and journey to remembered streams.

Geese sound above their heads, veiling the skies  
from unheard mortar fire. Bearded barley grows  
from the cracked floors of the cell and catches the wind

in a rush of mirth. From Ableimont and Arras to  
Brimcombe, Maisemere, Leaden Banks, beneath fingertips,  
inches become acres as the years unwind;

they bound up hillsides, tripping  
and whooping down river banks,  
under lark song, in the evening's thin bright triumph.



## **Yours**

Yours, the bent-down, browning corners of my books,  
Jupiter's red rings drying in a wine glass.  
Yours, the somersaults of the furies,  
the restless night, the rapture and the rupture.

I give you, too, an anagram of your discarded names,  
your absences, your story, your stomach's taut fire-lines,  
the idle traces of your toes in ash like pre-smoked signals  
on the sill above the Mile End Road.

I leave you the thrilled, sour taste of those early nights,  
dissolved like the host on my tongue,  
in that chaste first month when we lay, untouched,  
like outlines of leaves rustling in the borrowed dark.

Yours, fermented hours, cradling a hope inside  
the heart's neat crook. I give you back your echo,  
my pencil shavings, three burned down candles,  
the granite revelations, the years.

## Il Tricolore

### i. Verdi: Venezia

Here we are marooned:  
arrived and unarrived;  
inland and at sea. Nothing  
is still, the plaster ripples,  
cracking with light,  
tossed from the waters  
that dye the foundations.

We stop at a newsstand and you buy  
a grey postcard of cloth-capped men,  
wading through the brick torrents  
of the tumbled Campanile.  
It was quarter to ten on a fresh  
century's morning, when the city breathed out,  
burying the caretaker's cat.

Perhaps men like this one,  
who hands you your change,  
went back and unfolded their wares,  
tutting, *i morti a seppellire i loro morti*.  
But the city still bobbed  
like a leaf on a pond.

Later the shutters would bang  
to the same words  
in the empty rooms of the ghetto,  
in time to the footfalls of Rome.

And they're heard again  
as we turn our backs,  
and a fisherman smiles  
from the front page of *Il Gazzettino*,  
having yesterday dived to a place  
beyond hours and depths,  
left his dinghy rocking and untenanted  
on the bright surface,

to grow green with the days, as it floats  
alone past the Lido and out to the sea.

ii. **Bianco: Roma**

The cradle of the seven hills  
overflows with a paleness that pours  
into the Pantheon and froths  
in the stone of the Trevi fountain.

This marble city casts out shadows;  
the earth swells up to Trajan's snowy column,  
its waxen trunk knotted with warfare,  
telling of the great white spread.

Tumbled down the gleaming steps,  
the city is dotted with *fiaccole*,  
tongues of fire glistening through  
the quietly anointed streets.

Outside the Palazzo dei Conservatori,  
Constantine's armless hand  
points towards the gaping  
endless sky.

Untreasured, unexamined piles of ancient days,  
are harvested from the ruins.  
Pale capitals seem to sprout  
from the street corners, gleaming in the rains.

In the doorway of a marble church  
roofed off from heavens, topped with stony saints,  
a gypsy extends a blackened hand,  
unseen amongst the shadows.

### iii. Rosso: Firenze

A single leaf's fingers are stained  
with autumn on this summer tree,  
in this terracotta evening.

Your smile fills the sky  
as the Duomo blushes above the city,  
eclipsed by the fruit in your hand.

You sat upon my shoulders  
to scrump this pomegranate  
from a tree that overhung

our afternoon like the sound of sirens,  
sighing their major sixths at your laughter,  
disbelieving such plump happiness.

I nick my finger with a knife  
as I split the crop; my grin is the colour  
of this tap-dance of rooftops.

I suck the salty, sour juices,  
sticky on my palms. Across  
the street, an old man's fingers

extend to grip a cigarette as if in blessing  
like so many flame-haired Christs,  
crimson-robed, traced in wet plaster

by unremembered hands, the horsehair  
grooves fresh, burnt in the mind.  
Our craning heads are close enough

to feel your breath against my neck,  
the scarlet light echoing with the thrill  
of thirty generations, flaming still.

## **Love letters**

*after Stanley Spencer*

Your body the grave I dug and entered,  
followed by colours dressed as soldiers, saints  
dancing through the darkness, heaving me up  
to shake away the damp earth. Fill my bones  
with breath beneath your brush, your fingertips.  
I press your hungry scribblings to my skin,  
you breathe in the taste of me, familiar.  
Warm woven words unravelled from your pen,  
swift through the lightened air like autumn leaves.  
Time seemed to seep into your mottled nudes,  
flesh hung heavy, loss carved into my face.  
Your tender love would tear open the tombs,  
set us to kneel here in memory's embrace,  
our remade hearts flung open to the skies.

## Totems

You are forever piling coin on coin,  
forgetting absent-minded monoliths,  
vacant sculptures in paths about our house.  
You find each pyre to the fresh day's new god,  
somehow familiar – small homecomings;

you absent in our home. Markers of your vacant  
way; memory's cairns now memory's gone.  
You are perpetually anew in this house  
we found together, November '52.  
These are signs you're moving still and touch

and feel, unhaunted by yourself or me.  
Soon, I will place a little pile of coins  
upon a coffin lid, though there will be  
no way to mark, no debt to pay, no coin  
within your mouth. I will break the ungrassed

clay with a large brown penny. And you'll breathe out  
with the earth, time's price paid heavily at last.

## The clearances

The redrawn map dissolved a history;  
fences rose. Fires against Rosses and Gunns  
now ashen as the roaming cattle loosed  
to wander up Knockfin, lost warriors confounded  
to the New World and the Lowlands.  
There must have been such a time.

Now age fences in the ancestors.  
My kinswoman wrings out her hands  
for a new day, tiny in the doorframe.  
She fumbles through boxes for some compass  
towards home, shrunken in her outdoor coat  
in the perplexing glow of the unshaded bulb.

I trace her name in condensation on the glass.  
Dismantling her bed, the window streaks with tears.  
Under it, a box of dance certificates, letters,  
childhood scrawl, photographs and school reports.  
Hard to believe lives blossomed from these stale rooms,  
colliding with mine in the receding past.

My father and I shoulder a chipboard box,  
placing the empty wardrobe in the white van:  
a life in Ford transit, eighty years in a metal box.  
The upended table can no longer bear the weight  
of births and deaths, feasted here  
in the fuller days.

Around the bath a ring of memory,  
within this vessel I sailed to new worlds,  
an émigré from childhood, glowing  
before the electric thrill of the imitation fire,  
scented with the fresh hopes  
of an unknown world.

The lines to Strathnaver grow fainter.  
Not mountainsides, but stairs too steep,  
this boxy house, too big. None marauding  
but winter winds and the stalking ghost  
of her sister's addled years. Dispersal,  
then dispersal and the dimming of the fire,

and sea-salt air, fading from the tongue.

## The cormorant and the eel

Off course; turn-tipped  
on a south-west wind,  
she cools her neck  
beneath an urgent stream  
impatient as blood.  
Her neck an ivied tangle  
burned black by air  
and salt. In vigil.

Now, as if perpetual,  
he swims inside her  
oiled throat  
against the dripping night,  
pinioned between extremities;  
never more alive.  
He would unweave  
her coiled feathers,

convulsing, spine to spine,  
his tail-tip licks the air;  
shakes her like possession,  
like a lie.  
Lifting from the slowed  
and level surface,  
he is still moving, gently,  
as she rises into air.



## Sherlock

I traced the cadence of your streets  
darting down Threadneedle, Leadenhall  
and Fenchurch from a provincial postcard boyhood  
by the sea. I brailled the crooked back  
of your bright river on the grid-creased  
yellow street map fogged beneath young hands  
to a sepia before bombs, brash blocks and aspiration  
drew up a skyline from your gas-lit smog.

The names remain: Aldgate, Bow Street, Endell,  
Wigmore and Wimpole; ambered in the mouth,  
and chanted to the unchurched litany  
of a brisk steam train, like Rotherhithe  
and Baker Street and Rotherhithe again.

The stoic city grew from your pages  
into the cold concrete of my indifferent home,  
blind to my arrival and the passing of your ghost.  
I turn a corner, scatter in an urgent shimmer  
of pigeon-flurry, east end boys you knew,  
or twice turn left on the heaving  
scarlet decks of the 432, through terraces  
of some late adventure.

I push past your familiar St. Paul's –  
towering to another loved, lost fiction –  
seeking out a clue from each prismatic day,  
trailing through the gap-toothed streets  
of the bursting and unanswering city.  
But there's no longer any trail  
to follow that can conjure a cause  
to anchor these uncertain days,  
beneath the silent chill of the rolling,  
grey-blue dome of empty sky.

## Thirteen ways of looking at the city

after Wallace Stevens

- i. The possible in  
the endless emptiness of  
stopped, coupling tube trains
- ii. Under decades' grime,  
the bridge still yawns, *George Davies*  
*is innocent, OK*
- iii. Phone box women, nude –  
an international troupe:  
silent as you talk
- iv. The midnight chairs, stacked  
in the empty bar, converse in whispers  
borrowed from a swarm of sleeping mouths
- v. The ghosts in Highgate  
shake their empty fists each night  
at the sleeping victors
- vi. Swans nudge the poisoned rainbow  
as the canal buries the unmourned  
motorbike, chased to the beyond
- vii. Leaves waltz with a crumpled can  
blown through unchanging corkscrews  
in a car park, defiant of fresh hopes
- viii. Each night the great men of empire  
clamber from the pedestals in Whitehall  
to arch bronze backs and quarrel with the set sun
- ix. The City lights blink in disbelief,  
conjuring their audacious hordes  
each day to trade in air
- x. The Thames begins to sing  
with voices of the choirs whose stories  
it has swallowed
- xi. In Kensington, shrill whiteness gleams in  
toothy rows of perfect homes  
as the East End smogs its nose against the glass
- xii. Nelson asks St Martin how the fields  
have all dried up, turns back to Trafalgar,  
dreaming of his arm and eye

xiii. The strange ellipsis  
of the pierced, breathing city  
broods in early light

## The Isles of Dogs

*A river flowed from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided to make four streams... The third river is named the Tigris, and this flows to the east of Ashur. The fourth river is the Euphrates. Yahweh took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it.*

Book of Genesis

A small brown bag, three unsmoked Camels,  
a pocketful of change and moments to spend,  
a man arrives at a scattered Southbank bookstall.  
An unpromising haul: a creased Penguin, whose loose  
pages take flight from chapter twelve, something quarterbound  
in French, a satchel-scented Latin primer and another relic:

*The Golden Book Picture Atlas*, volume four.  
Some pages still bathed in the sunset tones of a pink gin,  
on others, borders stiffly rise in iron. He flits from holy lands,  
past that holiday in Goa, to Granddad's Suez tales.  
Then the scattered headline names of this young century,  
freshly slid from the cracked shell of Mesopotamia.

Jewelled Baghdad is snaked through by the swift Tigris  
in a shape so like our own. A young city,  
rising in the west, spreading to a slack-looped noose,  
like the Isle of Dogs, as if the Thames had flowed off course;  
our cities a double exposure,  
Pangaean fragments, lost continents, that waited

for our seismic age to lock horns and rut;  
some bloody paper chain of names and stories  
turned back upon themselves. A quiet kiss  
alights upon his craned neck, tells him time is up.  
The bag takes the book and a hand takes a hand,  
two figures wander downstream, to the distracted bend –

past three girls thrilling with terror up the shingle,  
frothing in a boat's small wake; past a halted, roofless  
double-decker; past a diffident, helmeted man who looks  
through last week at loss; past a roadblock; past a quiet shoe  
drifting to shore; past a solitary, deep pocketed smoker.  
Two waterways, strung like irregular heartbeats  
across the tight chests of two cities, roar in the coming dusk.

March 2008

## **Three clocks and a heartbeat**

*for Judith Hargreaves*

### **i. Slow birth**

He strained late weeks against the coming light,  
the glut of nighttimes grew like bloodied stars.  
She ground the days from rolling August skies  
and wheezed out echoed fears: her end  
in his beginning. Firstborn – carrying  
a mother's long expectancy of grief.  
He tore her from herself, trading breath  
for breath. Between the cries she heard a ticking.

The watchful clock urged on the spinning world,  
counted out her pain until his breath  
sought out and warmed her damp and falling breast.  
She climbed from darkness on the hour hand.  
Each night she kissed his sleeping brow,  
winching at the beating of his bedside clock.

## ii. The carotid clock

Again, she would wake to her redrawn shape,  
white linen and the cold stink of loss.  
He is stung to his feet at her hospital bed,  
recounting the tale of beginning, here;  
the light now grey, the story bright as blood  
and the grinning wound across her stitched chest.  
He unwinds the hours from a small tin clock,  
leaves it at her side like a magi's gift.

On the tight skin framed by her collarbone,  
a pulse gently recoils from this quick dusk,  
breaking out like a spring star, a portent  
to the unwise, defiant of the night.  
This pale surface flutters like a bird's wing,  
confounded by the miracle of glass.

### iii. Unwound

They counted her minutes down;  
her neck flickered light in her throat  
to the beat of a clock. He sat, nursing his distress,  
waiting, spinning out her tight-wound tale,  
against a final word already fully formed.  
She lost time, their frail childhoods dandling  
in her spindling arms, then he watched that window fade,  
starless against hope as the evening purpled out.

In the garden, cleaned sheets fly forgetful of her shape,  
unrolled and dancing their surrender as snowdrops  
break open freckled hearts. The room  
quietly empties itself of her smell as the awkward clock  
grows useful and rewind: forget with the hours,  
forget with the minutes, remember the seconds, forget.

## Dandelion clocks

A brief cleanness  
is blown  
from their knowing,  
nodding heads;  
tiny autumns  
in the cobalt chill  
of mid-May air.  
Something too late  
in our coming  
saw their thin stalks  
greening  
to windblown clusters.  
Something abandoned –  
too quick  
to sunshine air  
to be muddied  
in imagined futures.

They have grown white-haired,  
as you never could,  
and  
long since left  
on a warm  
west wind.



## St. Petersburg

*"It struck six long ago. Long ago! My God!" He rushed to the door, listened, caught up his hat and began to descend his thirteen steps cautiously, noiselessly, like a cat...*  
Fyodor Dostoevsky

Trip your light heart down his thirteen steps,  
swing shut the clanging door as distant as  
Aurora's gun. Now dance across the square

before the palace where those unexpected  
blood-red dreamings always were and now  
begin again. Sit within a pink-paved August,

bend your clumsy tongue round words  
that burn with glassy fire, lifted to the boyish  
revolutions of your mind. Press through the night's

cold curtain, hungry and alive again,  
pulsing in the dark blue comedy of bodies.  
Breathe in mists of river air, and rest

in what might well be morning as it rises,  
light from undivided light, undimmed  
by midnight sun. Tap verses through your boots

across the graveyards of your masters.  
Wait out happily a servitude;  
listen for the breathing of a foreign clock.

## One thousand hopeful words for Margaret Thatcher

after Lawrence Ferlinghetti

I am sitting in a Kensington McDonald's trying to figure out  
what's going to happen  
without Maggie Thatcher.

You are old now Maggie and your children  
are shouldering an empty box in April,  
as we line the streets.  
The hushed ranks beam beneath bowed heads,  
with anxious stares as a diminished man  
in a faded suit intones old lines.

It's time, old girl, for Maggie, Maggie, Maggie,  
to get in, in, in, to history's oak-lined dustbin  
and bow out, out, out.

St. Margaret will give up the war with her dragon,  
read the lesson from Kier Hardie's book.  
St. Hilda will lead out the silent women,  
from Whitby to Greenham,  
setting them singing, conducting them  
through six verses of *The Internationale*,  
a bawdy bout of *Jerusalem*  
and a new setting of *The Red Flag*,  
as people do come in a flood  
and wash, and green and make pleasant the land.  
Then Margaret and Hilda will lay down together,  
for four hours sleep,  
French kissing in spite of Section 28.

And for all that the legions of your children will care,  
they can wrap you in flags that flew in Port Stanley,  
salute you with gunfire, read from the old books,  
because we are giving them up. We have shaken  
the meaning from these old things,  
your children have turned.  
We will bury them with you in Durham soil,  
smoked black with dust  
and harvest the coal as we dig.  
And we will *Rejoice! Rejoice!*  
Simply rejoice, for we have come home!

We have found you your pallbearers:  
women born at the summer's close in a young decade,  
conceived in the rutting joys of that December night  
when you wept and demure black gates  
finally closed on your better Britain.  
Marked out by Eve and by you  
they will smile as they lift you aloft,  
banish the treacherous hate that you taught them,  
instruct us to mourn you with kindness

and sorrow for each of ourselves.

And a thing called society will rise up:  
individual men and women and families,  
and lovers and loners and misfits  
will wash clean the soil with a rush  
and a charge and the land will be ours, again.

And the news will be sent across the world.  
We'll put up flags –  
true blue, but with twelve golden stars –  
which say,  
*England's expected to do its duty to every man*  
(though women and children come first).  
We will dot dot dot, dash dash dash, dot dot dot  
that our souls are saved by ourselves.  
And the pictures will flicker on TV screens  
from Grantham to Reagan's grave,  
and on a small black and white set  
wheeled into a dark cell in Equatorial Guinea.

We will toast you with bottles of free milk  
in an age without iron in its blood.  
We will turn because we want to,  
because you are no longer one of us.

We will levy no charge on community.  
Our flagships will not sink the fleet.  
We will paint your picture on a gable end  
with Bobby Sands in a united Ireland  
as warning from history's dark days.

In this flood  
we will wail ourselves awake,  
and put away the dust.

Maggie... Maggie...  
your coffin passes by.  
I give you my lump of coal.

## The boy from Wath-on-Dearne

*You do not have to say anything, but -*  
Perhaps I've passed him in the street  
unknown beneath the mask of years.  
I wronged him and you say he never was,  
absconded from the years.

*- it may harm your defence -*  
But he dances through my dreams,  
in a fairy-tale of touch and seek,  
the shuddering moments.

*- something on which you may later  
rely -*  
The darker footfall of my dismal past.  
Deeper, deeper, the over-the-shoulder regret,  
the places of my fears,

*- how do you plead? -*  
leads me to the names I cannot say;  
he's all of them

*- guilty - he's no one -  
- not guilty - he's me.*  
I'd rob him of his shame  
and robe him in my secrets, I'd weave whispers  
in his hair to follow him.

In the gallery he seems to comfort  
my sister's disappointed, hoarsely smothered tears.

He stands beneath a puny wig  
and fumbles my defences at broad men bowed  
before their spent pasts.

Each twitching silence fretfully condemns me.  
Listen as they stutter out my mortifying tale,

*- and nothing but the truth -*  
He wouldn't cooperate. Time has shuddered  
all my angel boys to brutish men.

The tape clicks off; the forms are filled.  
A door gently closes. The court rises

and the sun falls. I find the lost boy  
in the restless dark.

*Send him down.*

## A proposition

I love you like the springtime rain, nourishing the spreading hills,  
I love you like the dazed, blank clubber loves her foil of little pills.  
I love you like the Mountie loves the silhouetted moose,  
I love you like his noble lordship loves the hangman's noose.  
I love you like the Oscars love portrayals of mental illness,  
I love you like the ring road loves the quality of stillness.  
I love you like all ancient roads love to run to Rome,  
I love you like Bob Geldof needs to learn to love a comb.

I love you like the middle-class love Wimbledon and ballet,  
I love you like a Dover ferry loves to get to Calais.  
I love you like the builder loves twelve sugars in his tea,  
I love you like Bob Maxwell loved the sea.  
I love you like the agoraphobe loves the hum of daytime telly,  
I love you like the social climber loves a greener shade of wellie.  
I love you like the rigger bugger loves the chummy scrum,  
I love you like he also loves the fly-half's naked bum.

I love you like a headphoned drone loves his tinny tube train noise,  
I love you like a Catholic priest loves his altar boys.  
I love you like the washing line enveloped by a dolly peg,  
I love you like a randy dog loves to hump a suited leg.  
I love you like a P.E. teacher loves his memories of the slipper,  
I love you like a foreskin loves a carefully sliding zipper.  
I love you like that dead MP loved asphyxiation,  
I love you like the rapper loves a rhyme that ends in '-ation'.

I love you like a mathematician loves a compound fraction,  
I love you like the activist likes talk much more than action.  
I love you like the Daily Mail loves to fret about house prices,  
I love you like old Faustus loved his diabolic vices.  
I love you like Czar Nicholas loved the Bolsheviks,  
I love you like a chocoholic loves his Mars and Twix.  
I love you like the Iron Lady loved the miners' strike,  
I love you like a mackerel loves to ride a bike.

I love you like a xenophobe likes a joke about the French,  
I love you like the slurring beak loves whiskey stashed beneath the bench.  
I love you like a spread-bet-better loves to take a chance,  
I love you like a nationalist loves English Morris dance.  
I love you like the toddler loves to pose the question "why?",  
I love you like Prince Phillip loves a slitty eye.  
I love you like the Guardian loves a lax approach to grammar,  
I love you like the Ku Klux Klan loves the state of Alabama.

I would love you *for better*, but we only have *for worse*,  
So when you take me down the aisle, I'll arrive by *hearse*.

### **The treasure hunters**

At the back of the junk shop sleep boxes of secret histories.  
We run our eager fingers along dusty spines of records,  
carry home our brittle hoard and set them spinning;

thin black plates to feast upon. Crackling, they unspin  
remembered nights, sleeves creased with first loves, the stories  
of lost winters looped in coffee rings. Life's fabric, recorded

in each scratch. Youth hangs in the air like the opening chord  
of *Maggie's Farm*. Lyrics glow in the darkness, carrying the stories  
of borrowed futures like smoke from a hideaway room, spinning

into night, dreams shrunk to stories, records spun at the wrong speed.

## **Goldberg Variations**

The two hands seem to work against each other;  
as one arrives, the other leaves. In shared sadness,  
two lonely souls ring out some long-held grief.  
Each note cries out for echoes of the last,  
each motion adds another loss,  
each beauty passes quicker.

They both stride in the same direction,  
never knowing they're befriended,  
turning through a month of sleepless nights,  
together and alone. Some blind lover  
calls through darkness to his earless love  
while she lights fires to guide him home.

Orpheus sings to Eurydice,  
leads her up the keys,  
howling in the knowledge that he'll turn,  
and miss her, as she tumbles down the scales.  
In the dark, there's silence,  
dancing in between the notes.

## Hitchhiker

The road and young day stretch out tight  
like string between paper cups that's giggled down  
from house to garden's end. Where the city bleeds  
to greenness, the motorway's sluice of metal  
flows to horizon's wide grin. Send signals of smoke,  
unfurl great marker-penned names as you wait:

a free day's inky manifesto. Even the weight  
of your bag of odd socks and stories, tight  
on your back, dances for warmth. Time for a smoke.  
Smell stale baccy, fret at no-one stopping. Look down  
as squealing winds hit with heaviness of metal.  
Beam in the slipstream as, like a swift drop of blood,

a red Metro chokes and stops. Quicken the blood,  
bundle in your gratitude at the end of a long wait.  
*One too many mornings*, a radio's rusty voice like metal  
blades sings of *a thousand miles behind*. Time's tight,  
in swift minutes your nameless friend sets you down  
with a wave, tears back in a blur like coloured smoke.

In a flash, you cough into a car, silvered full of smoke.  
*I had a son your age*. Her shrugged words bleed  
into sadness as rain, held back no longer, tumbles down.  
Testing your grief against hers, quietly wait,  
your stories winding with one another, in a tightness  
wrought through the hours to the solid shape of metal.

The busy hum falls quiet at the turn of an unmetalled  
road, warm among cattle, rotting leaves, wood smoke.  
Passing trade's unfriendly as chill breath freezes tight.  
In the ebbing light your pilgrim's luck seems bled  
away. Your crumpled hopes and sign hold out as you wait.  
*There's two Fs in Cardiff* grins a welcome, wound-down

window. Sun and cloud play tag above the Downs,  
at the hoarse command of crows strung on metal  
wires, who flurry, friendly and alone, waiting  
for something unknown to be said. Drying clothes smoke,  
peeling off the dying of the wet day. The sky bleeds  
out its early stars. Dreams press against your skin, tight

like a mother's steely embrace. Tight like the space between strangers  
who hum down the lanes of the smoke-black night. Track tail-lights,  
hear blood beat time in your chest. Stretch out your thumb, and wait.



## **Anno Domini**

Like twelve bridges drowned by the swelling tide  
like the unheard sirens of eleven unmarked cars  
like the rasping choke of ten slit pigs  
like a murder of nine speculating crows, cawing up the dawn  
like the boldness of eight men with arms linked  
like the unforgiving rain of seven silent clusters  
like six blows against a dashed head  
like the blooded stubs of nailless fingers  
like four stifled mourners  
and three dead birds.  
Like two ways,  
a choice, *like this*.





***Edward Mackay, London, 2008***