



THE CALDERA

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Preface

Throughout the poems in this volume, I have enjoyed the structure provided by dichotomy – poverty and prosperity, barrenness and fertility, realism and abstraction – the inverse qualities of one accentuating the attributes of its opposite, though often circling towards the same end. In *Le Mythe de Sisiphe*, Albert Camus¹ reduces his philosophy of life to a philosophy of suicide, in doing so evoking the modern outlook of *absurdism*, of which it seems that dichotomy is an essential device. The Absurd acts akin to the mathematical concept of an upper bound: if a dictum holds in an absurd, extreme case, then it should equally hold for the ‘less absurd’ cases bounded by this extremity. Of course, this is where the subjective and objective strands diverge, it is very well analogising absurdity to a quantitative concept, but to treat such scales rigorously or even practically is not substantiated (how can one case always be considered ‘more absurd’ than another?).

In many ways, I consider the work of the contemporary author Lemony Snicket to be classified as absurd, however for me they do not represent *truly* absurd literature – the focus very much appears to be upon the absurdity that has been weaselled into the text, rather than the absurdity exegesised or drawn out of everyday, albeit exceptional but still fundamentally everyday, sequences of events, as in Camus (exemplified in *L'Étranger*², where the walls of a mundane existence crumble to show the unequivocally absurd events of murder and prosecution). As such, the strife among early absurd literature seems to be concerned with minimising the veneration of an absurd scenario above that of perceived,

¹ The Myth of Sisyphus, A. Camus

² The Outsider, A. Camus

everyday ‘reality’. By blurring this boundary, we are acting analogously to the mathematical activity of locating a *supremum*, or least upper bound: here, identifying a ‘least absurd’ sequence of events that is still disjoint from the everyday (minimising artifice) to provide the most information about the other strands of existence this sequence would theoretically bound. And it is perhaps here that absurd outlooks differ, some movements’ claims can be seen to be reducible to the notion that the absurd can be diluted until it pervades and absolutely resembles the everyday, while others may reason that the absurd will always occupy a veneer above the temporal.

Perhaps logical rigour and absurdity are reconciled in poetry: there is no reason why the canvas of verse cannot be as logically justified as any theorem of Cauchy (though none of the poems in this collection meet this criterion), and I have certainly found that the freedom to sculpt expression into the page is shared between poetry and mathematics. Both attain meaning by defining limitations on their expansive natures.

All of the poems comprising the first part of this volume were written during the summer preceding my departure for university – the Tempest of the title seemed to almost become a temple demanding regular ritual preparation, and the days dwindling away more comparable to Aeneas rushing to fortify³ his camp before Turnus’ Latins could overrun it than the eternally labouring Sisyphus unable to evade torment. These poems represent a contemplation of the transmission period straining towards (or perhaps frightened to lose) progressiveness; Athene on the night of Odysseus’ return to Penelope⁴ (undisguised) slowing the chariots of the night and

³ Aeneid 7:290, Virgil (transl. – C. Day Lewis)

⁴ Odyssey 23:243, Homer (transl. – E. V. Rieu)

thus its passing, though all are aware that inevitably morning
must come, and be embraced.

Poems I

The Caldera

I. “*Caliban casts out Ariel.*” - *Hugh Selwyn
Mauberly, Ezra Pound*

A determined composure somehow
Avoids the drama of definition
As it passes – through land populated
By features common with a wilderness,
Distinguished or seen as inert, as stated –
Events revived by composition.
In my experience,
Deserts are rarely flat,
Merely indistinctly occupied,
Fired by erosion and crowded tastes
Of the mired air; plains implied
By the lathes along quiet wastes,
Disregarding relics seen through
Dialogue as a veil-like gauze:
Their veneer becomes a glaze,
Emerges on less fervent shores,
And speaks a different phrase.

II. “*And breaking the ground, threw up a
rampart and battlements as for
A military encampment, round his first home there on the
coast.*” – *Aeneid 7:158, Virgil*

See a concerted projection of
Warbling weights onto
Grained, listing theatre seats;
The universe of footnotes and asides
Runs at a keener rate: it beats
At cumulus like timpani

Winged by the air, by cure
Only admits these plastic losses,
Like thirst – that induces
A sense of enclosure,
Occasional scrutiny of the low:
Reading words alfresco,
Alcoves are refuges from
An invasive scrawl – harbours
To colonies of monologues that
Cross-pollinate and invoke
A harvest carpeted by mosses.

III. “*Here is the dark Interior, noon yet high,
Light to work by and a sufficiency
Of timber.*” – *Feather to Iron (VIII)*, C. Day Lewis

Perhaps it is not ambient but an
Intrinsic song; there is a rare element
In the drought, unquantified front
Bearing connectives like cement
Girding a new citadel – motions
Draw mountaintops
In a different script or seed,
Making handwriting a mural,
Reads in letters untouched by forceps:
‘Surrender equipment that’s funereal’.
In awaiting a *synoikismos*,
Compartments for notions
Alert to this characteristic surge,
Where impassivity is contradiction,
Nested at my nadir, the currents merge
And the question changes direction.

IV. “... *Are become insubstantial, reduced by a
wind,*

*A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog,
By this grace dissolved in place” – Marina, T. S. Eliot*

Descend to the images, reach
Through the foothills
Paired like sentinel counterparts
With sun-bleached windowsills
Bearing outlooks instead of glass.
We prepare to stratify the
Features of verbal lands
Attired as discourse from
Pavement lecterns, all strands
Of garb now become mufti.
Consider a new means of sifting
Fronds of quartz with that
Inland quality to them;
To distill it, or persist:
Culture the peninsula crags
With summit indeterminacies
Like gossamer or rags.

The Hour

What is this hallowed hour? Where verse was read
As if verse were needed. Counting early-risers to sleep.
Breathe ambrosial breath over me, or fuse to me
Like Salmacis.

Dull heartbeat percussion is the only way.
Sleep is the only sound. My verse is nestling
Among the pillows, incarcerated between sentry bedposts
And flimsy linen.

I need it as a sapling spine, dear Daphne.
Why do you pursue me around the walls of Troy, tumbling
into
Jericho at dawn? Why do Yevgeny⁵ and Janus look back,
This is the mathematician's hour?

"I'm game", dice thunder through the morning
Disrupting a colony of thoughts.
If Hermite's⁶ were like termites,
Mine are like cine-
Matography.

⁵ Y. Yevtushenko, a prominent 20th Century Russian poet (b.1933).

⁶ C. Hermite was a French mathematician (1891-1944).

‘Under an endured sky...’

Under an endured sky, in an unheard of glade maybe
Only commemorated – condemned in a different way –
Conjectures aired in Minoan threads of conversation:
“Modified rapture! But why do you not refuse him?”⁷
Check and flutter like blueprint film.

I refute that there is nothing not of Man; a scaling
Illumination, this gradual influx of light, this
In-pouring, flowing upstream, prevailing
Winds confusing a lateral compass,
Pressed to the membranous ground

Activating joys to wake and swell,
Ending with some familiar imagery
But rarely springing so and crowned
With fare from ceramic mould and kell.

To live with joyful intention,
Without the reticence of staticity;
Stative in light-footed composition
Departing indicated by the hollow
Sound of vacuous spaces we can follow
To the alleys and plazas of a fleeting city.

⁷ The Mikado, W. S. Gilbert

Empty Nests

Empty birds' nests lie in trees:
Distant, unreachable maybes
From another time called Prosperity
Not Proserpina, in search of verity

And brevity, scrabbling for treasure
Under autumn leaves, colours shading pleasure
Huddling under trees whose vernal quality
As an upright plumb line to a meadow city

Is etched into their bark like parchment,
And gently spread by their branches sans relent
And scattered among the documentaries
Of plastic coffee cups, metropolitan inventories,

Pandemic sugar packets energise Leviathan,
Whose knees are stronger than dear Jonathan's,
But whose tranquil humility seethes
Under a carpet of autumn leaves.

Quarter (On Coventry Cathedral I)

Any glee is fractional of a rejoicing whole –
“Give none” say axiomatic spirits
“Can you spare any?” is the cry from the
Didactic ones.

The first from their granite residences
Ingrained in the swamp,
The second from pits and hollows, overjoyed

To clamber and scamper up to sanctuary branches of
The cathedral spires – veritable channels
Irrigate with hued light through the glass,
Once shattered to forbear

My guilt and yours. Malignant lead divisions
Are sanguine iron in my eyes,
The former spirits bound and banished behind its stark bars.

Privacy

The little things take on
Intricate poignancies buoyant
In the memory's turgid
Mangrove of stimulus.

The protagonist feels partitioned
By lines of communication
Struggling across his torso,
Prevailing all too easily.

The streetlights are sentinels,
Neither proud or quieted before
Their asphalt congregations,
Flotillas upon journey's flux.

Reservations of peace and of privacy
Arc and are drawn on the chalk sky.

‘Every surface is chalk...’

Every surface is chalk;
Let it be grainèd with grace,
Mosaiced on the base
Of some warbling stalk.

Fingers aback with its residue
I mistake for silk, and
Hear the fears through
That are truths on some scaled hand,

Profundities only whispered to
Escape the foot of the drain,
The spring-lit abandon of a chanted refrain
Sensing courtyards and steeples;
A separation whose units are peoples.

Every surface is chalk;
Let it be grainèd with grace,
A peace whose denomination
Illumines its face.

Corners

Precipitation scattering like ash on the road ahead,
Snows faint “upon all the living and the dead”⁸
Transcending the clouds from which they fall,
Thinks a tempest in a noun-like squall,

On a plinth of wasted notions,
Not derelict but spoken into, onto
And about, so it lives in commotion’s
Prototypical frozen solitude.

Static places parched of light and words
To induce a sense of feeling,
Or isolation with rhapsodic sherds
Fragmenting this mirrored impartial ceiling

Like a chequerboard crossword sheet
No words, structure escaped by only letters,
Mountains in contemplative defeat
As Sisyphus sheds his stony fetters.

We realise it is not the need
But the recognition of the need –
Silence we mistook for a pause,
And as in a melancholy frieze
The phoenix ash thaws.

⁸ *The Dead (Dubliners)*, J. Joyce.

Selah

It is noted: seeing that I am perceiving,
Marking my exeunt with unscripted thoughts
To places I cannot know except their fear
Signposted by a doubt, positivism's its forts.

This continual nocturne of the human estate
Compels a harvest of frescoes no Trojan seer
Can be indifferent to, framed in stylus slate
And receptive only to near-light and verbs.

Utopia is never stable – it is either receding or
Conveying the absurdity of permutation
Seen on the ecclesiastical scale of and from
The eye: proud, budding eye and sextant finger.

Why do I evoke quantity to describe a
Slender notion? Do I belittle myself,
Or implicitly claim to measure the
Immeasurable eddies of the Tiber?

Cause polarises the present effect,
Antipodes flow like conversation: Selah.
I am watchful because I do not know
These briars, these pages upon a shelf

Where the refraction of grammar exists
Only for the sake of poetry, casting
Lines out into depths each lyric lists –
My emaciated prose, sculptures fasting,
On the shores sanded by listing scales.

Sonata (or 'Into Variegated Joys')

Assembled around me, unshaped clays
Form lanterns and doorways, move
With an immediate malleability,
Unsealed by heat of many days,
Hence impoverished of lines, soothe
Ablly unbidden by definition.

Discourse in the halls, echoes
And becomes noise,
Spectral, it mellows
Into variegated joys.

Fallow is a season assigned to a field:
Tangible implies consumable, a suture
Patched onto the earth, inducing
A superior horticulture:
Letters choreographed in the rapeseed
Only for the traveller's deducing.

Dialogue in the halls, echoes
And becomes noise,
Unknowingly structured
Into variegated joys.

Why bless the aim to synopsisise,
To audience the crystallex past?
The consolation of new orchards
Is ever-present – inevitably surmised –
Allow us to detect what it conveys
As courtyards rendered onto pathways.

Monologue in the halls, echoes
And becomes noise,

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Individually it settles
Into variegated joys.

A Response to Progress

Once earthy words ascend
From fear to opportunity,
Trophies become like playthings;
Toy examples of severed pride

Like and containing lion argent
Bring about an unexpected sincerity,
A sudden rise, a commonality,
At the lips of a solemn regent.

Eyes, overcast, are led to the
Horizon watermark, the floes part
In a current of red, fine
Fabric tide: the heartbeat starts.

We are close – only whispers audible
Among the gathering media , serenely
Scrabbling fingertips seek to understand
The brick surface, the pastel incline.

It is nearer sunset, an academic recline,
The grass feels worn, yet like eyes
Blades are upturned in untaught expectation,
A gentle realisation; and the rains arrive.

Glimpse of Fluid Roots

Some things resolved, others still
Drape their threads over the caressive
Breeze of time; the hourglass' grains bury despair,
As forlorn as it would wish us.

I must hurry: the dawn is breaking
And its shards dribble into parched
Memories, refracted through
Dew only for you.

The leaves, autumnal emblem, rasp
And gambol around my hesitant
Feet, urging with the noise of a
Vernal envelope.

Soon these faunal companions will turn to
Postcards of tundra, and though the ice
Will bridge a vault above me, it is too late:
I have seen the dawn and carry its eternal bloom.

Poems II

Rooted in the Sky

Rooted in the sky,
A vessel, a sapling,
Timbers shudder to sing
A note that cannot be awry.

As fragile as a vase of antiquity,
The illusory present seeps
Under and through, so that it keeps
You all too contemporary.

Well turned phrases are all I have
To fall back upon,
Father's hand on overcast son.
Not a turncoat slave.

To draw back from the ground
Is to deny earthly water
To wash away the slaughter,
Not hide it in burial mound

Where prying hands and preying eyes
Will inevitably disturb,
From three writhing bodies perturb
Distant – as the vulture flies

Skyward, the roots become bulbous and strain
Against the leashes of themselves,
Enforcing, ordering moral volumes on shelves
To a slender and moderate refrain.

A Bleaker Mirage

Drawing the curtains to blot out the
Endless granular desert sands,
And carve contours into this postcard canvas
To make it not so everyday.

The plane, arcing plane
Sings to the breeze,
Chanting in a dusty motif,
Matching the dunes lonely cordon.

It is its own pedestal,
Etching into its own sandy flesh a
Stone facade that itself erodes:
Hewn into being

And longing absence of being.
Sketching the curtain barriers, the
Grains spill not from deserts but from
Coffee cups, not into our hearths but hearts.

*Incense*⁹

The red of cranberries is the grey of asphalt:
I am independent of my description,
With the forced lyrics, and clouds gathering at
The octave mark; the ebbing fiction.

When the only sentence passed by words and sounds,
These monarchies of fragments, sings like bards
In the rural of the soul; discolour a canvas
And produce a mirror coloured beyond some stanzas.

When consistency mellows into proclamation,
Undecided lexicon converted into arboretum bracken,
Time told in a broader vocabulary than the clockface
Then meets the tender silence of disjointedness.

In all I find, I seek a parallel with that I have not read,
A parallel man's perception cannot distort,
Even a reluctant minimalism can seize the wine and bread
And no arid composition resultantly be wrought

In fixture and in firmament. A leitmotif has never vexed
A paperweight, so bid foreground and reverse incorporate:
Poppies flower out of hull-like musings' deadened contexts,
Unmoved as abstraction becomes my lense and opiate.

⁹ In response to D. Bonheoffer's *Who Am I?*.

*Gravely Triumphant (On Coventry Cathedral
II)¹⁰*

A triumphant king
Re-enters, through a side alcove
His fortress without walls,
Bounded by itself and thus
It is unbounded

Only by pulpit doors that
Swing embracingly open to show:
The sacrificial altar has become a
Feasting table, merging through the
Diffuse tableaux of permafrost, framed

By the stone walls that fuse to expanses,
Cerebral bars shatter and mosaic in
The light. Uniquely, the triumphant king
Smiles the ashen smile of grave triumph.

¹⁰ Written in the 'Chapel of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane' in Coventry Cathedral.

Saga (On Coventry Cathedral III)¹¹

The cup overflows as wine-red
Candle wax searingly spills,
Dappling the unmasked water
Above and below the
Twisting vines on ceramic.

Thorns erupt and blossom into
Jarring sculpture,
Incising definition and distinction,
Blurring with greater clarity
Nocturnal pillars and vernal air.

Script in a hand legible by the
Light of beacons, path my way to the
Foot of the throne, that cradles the world's
Childlike simplicity, and calls it:

Son.

¹¹ Written in the 'Chapel of the Stalingrad Madonna' in Coventry Cathedral.

*Dion*¹²

There is not enough time to waste on resentment,
To embitter the tempestuous cordial of our own
Offering with imposed bitterness is a
Cardinal demise – from aleph to aleph.

To present a frieze, doomed to
Luminesce and coalesce and
Blur jagged inconsistencies to
Nothingness,

Is venerated in the way alms
Venerate the beggar, gather to
Cumulus colonies and rush,
Irresistibly pure, like the

Pages of a book turn, aged with
Humble wear, not scorn.

¹² In response to Wordsworth's 'Dion' and Plutarch's account in 'The Age of Alexander')

Walls

Liberated like the pastel shades on your
Walls, harbouring the brutal landscapes
Outside through the glass talons of a
Window: talents scattered in a field

Of tulips, of Arabica, of light
Meandering around devolved
Approximations on art gallery shelves
And library walls. Where the flickering

Coins turn to face you from wallpaper
Peeling with congestion, do you accept
Alms or small change from hands
Stained with generosity, gently

Painting walls like a canvas with
Unheard melodies and light?

Script

Bespoke eloquence blankets
A retrospective sense of futurism:
Ovation chariots overturned carving
Through sand like calligraphy

Can alter anything, as waves of
Dialogue lap against altar stands
Under oratory and a half-moon tripod –
Gazing on both Hellene and Seneca's

Polyxena. Sagacity wilting under
Freshly repeated statements, ignorance
Accepted is not ignorance bestowed
Onto a blank cliff face satchel that holds

A projective flavour of contemplation,
Passionately free of fervour.

Epistle

Shall I wear a crown today?
Spry trees flit and wilt away
From archaic laurels construed
Not from olive, protrude

Promontory into the ocean
Of design, whim, and motion,
Calmly see through the maelstrom
Chain mail and a child's thumb

In a missive with a mission
Of design, whim, and notion,
Hair slicked back with authority
Alludes like mist to walls of a city,

Viscously adheres as serif to a page,
Ink to a pot, simplicity to a sage.

Every Line

A poem of first lines,
Bustling in quiet solitude
And bedded out by stern
Commas, who feel more like

Cell bars than a hand
Caressing a wall to stumble
Across the end of the frame
Only to find that it is uncapitalised

Art too. I walk across paving
Stones that resound like
Fingerprints and humbly echo
Like grass, or the shoulder of an

Oak to a widow; there is an
Unveiled gravity in every line.

Musing

The play of forts, multitudes
Of forts, scripted by illusions:
There is a part of me that is
Inherently romantic.

The empiric camera grows:
Cultivating a sense of futility,
Epilogues become epitaphs
And flicker, held up to the wind

Of the masses – no sympathetic hand
To etch solace into the breeze.
Sculpt a space, not a void,
Where my spontaneity is accounted,

For your vigil is as immortal as your
Thoughts and musings.

“I have no desire to walk on water.”¹³

Briefly pinned at its arcing
Apex, take from this unique
Fruition, an understanding
Vaguely in the direction I seek,
Uplit not subtended by
A different flow of necessary
Words. Flints on arable
Pen a dolmen, invest an
Illusion, never comparable
With slower moving forms
Carving purer traces in the
Igneous music, like fleeting
Mineral with vein exposed,
No epithets
Compelled but its own
And the transits
They determine.

¹³ *Siddhartha*, H. Hesse (to which this poem is a response).

Labour

You would ask a hermit to settle,
Net and encapsulate the nomad.

When symbolism is as glass,
And tranquil waves lap inland,

Give birth to work,
Severing disconnection while

Voices call for quiet
In natural chorus,

Hands beat on silent drums,
Rhythm is still

Like pentameters
Huddled over a cool blaze –

In prose and verse,
The only applause you need

Is from the rustling leaves
Under immovable feet.

Nearly

So, a tragic Perhaps, aloof and
Indeterminate – nearly is kneeling
By the fireside, refusing the warmth
From someone else's fire.

Tumult falls like dice and dominoes,
Rising to a crescendo at its nadir,
I embrace your serene pillars that
Prise up the light dawning in my eyes.

A schism can be concealed by the patter
Of feet and rain, unrelentingly, along
Worn, wizened paths with the wisdom
Flushed out of the earth by eager strides.

When humble boots make the ground
Quiver with jostling arrows: directions,
Forays, and paving slabs sculpted to
Tessellate with the arterial humus,

Publishers' crests promenade like
Peacocks caked with earth, though
Will have their emblematic tragedy
Cleansed by uncertainty.

“She had reached old age with all of her nostalgias intact.”¹⁴

¹⁴ *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, G. G. Márquez

Easter Faith

The light carves out the landscape
Romancing a captive contour with
Illumination necessary but deadening
And seasoning to this savoury life.

I am at my best when I am least myself,
Wholly incomplete; not a burr with piece
Misplaced, but a thought that is rendered
Complete by its seeking, flowering peace.

Creativity is one of Your fruits, that
Opens doors subtended by hands arched
In prayer, in prayer, in reverent prayer, that
Unveil a would-be courtesan, but bridal, church.

Fragment

Don't trust walls and illusions,
They each pretend to be the same,
A desert in not a necessary condition
For an oasis,
Nor is it sufficient.
I have tied up my regrets with a sprig of
Rosemary, and handed them to the conductor.
Childlike responses are often the
Keenest sounds in the chamber

Pride is an opaque lense.

Poems III

‘Looking through glass sand dunes...’

Looking through glass sand dunes
Grating on my boots made to rustle
Past umbrella stands and theatre stalls,
Places to observe everything, and
Voidly interact with the dark hallways

Of someone else’s bookshelves, filled
With somebody else’s absence, and the
Promises of a page of contents written
Before my time, and after yours.

Before? After? These predicates draw
An eddying logic around them, and
My eyes follow the waters from the well
Taken so far from where they settle.

“...beside quiet waters...”

Canopy

I pity a hesitant refrain
Before hearing the unutterable
Pause in my own diction:
All cognition and fable.
Peace is always naked;
Banners become ribbons
In hands not prepared
To bear them, or their sons.

And unfurl your canopy
Like angular Calliope.

Sails and salt decry
Rust and malignant fires:
I am watchful because I
Do not know these briars.
I wish to be a connoisseur
Of many things, and interact
With them all: salt and flour
And rivulets of spectral fact.

And unfurl your canopy
Like angular Calliope.

Sediment

I will dare to follow you
Through the trees and thorns
Between whose gnarlèd arms
I sight the watery light.

All this is sedimentary:
In not a single smooth
Dissection, but a series of
Supple carves, from this
A sculpture is exposed.

Inversion

Gaze flickers from the horizon, south
To the medium; apothecary wit braces me
For a numbness I am not without,

A weary clarity that calls you to comply
By streetlights casting ambience by proxy,
And standing by all ready to surmise,
A cry, a prophecy: immortality is arbitrary.

Answer me, sage, why this inward lense
Is scented with a class of proud praise
Attuned to Menelaus' Spartan court, where amends
Semantic fingertips that drift into the denser haze.

My exposition breathes this Faustian ether:
Sprechgesang, its melody only realised
Against the background of salvation.

‘Orange Trees on the Palatine...’ (or Stimulus)

I wish to be a connoisseur of many things
But interact with them all – a surgeon’s pane
I am offered, to hear the year’s springs;
Is the glass viewless or simply stained?

Orange trees on the Palatine, draw back
To an epic bleakness that defies its barren sense
In cold recollection that is more than fact
And co-ordinated by intimacy or pretence.

I find blessings come in logic free of phrase, lore
And thread – bare, indistinct face
Rendered in stucco pillars: a fixture or
A transience independent of place.

Perceptions weld charismas in my thin
Forlorn eyelids, dewy with charisma sin,
Or a bouquet of buds and seeds – the grace of immaturity’s
Not the grace of innocence, nor is it graceless ignorance.

But, the cedar beseeches you forego your right
Not because it’s vain, to make an emblem of what’s remained,
Sensed in arpeggio and asking, lit instead by leadlight:
Is the glass viewless or simply stained?

Constructed Pillars

Figments of proof hang like ripe ikons
Unconcerned with being conceived,
Families of unambiguous frond-like pylons
Pollinate land that is sparsely reeved.

After growing accustomed to evergreen
One is insensitive to whether the field
Is barren or fallow, intent or serene:
Doubt both the ode and eclogue so wield.

Even the shadows take vigil in desert,
Arable thoughts enlisted by time spent away,
And projected onto the cold of mistakenly inert
But infallibly detachèd sands,
Where symbols beckon to as hands,
And proclamations simplify: there is no astray.

“Words, words. They’re all we have to go on.”¹⁵

All we have are words, pluralled by a sigma,
From the symphony of a fatal parity,
Drenched in pattern, exegise the enigma:
That living’s an exercise in arbitrariness.

¹⁵ *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, T. Stoppard

Practical Imagery

As it passes, brightening the
Spire, student to the light,
Points scatter and dance in
Loci, asking silent questions
From an outlook that's strict
Or perhaps genuine.

The higher ground leads us to
Practical imagery: feel the
Mists decline from hilltop
To base, carving a frustrum.

Why conceal my nudged psyche?
Associations, as lines, are rarely
Telegraphed from the outside,
Obedient to some internal grid,
Wintering an educated observation
To centrepiece the spring procession.

Shedding like scales the fear
Of seeing fully, after
Sensing a period of learning
Feel the sudden gulf in words,
A perforated skin-like surface,
Healing automatically.

(A failed attempt at imagism).

Responsive

When a potential becomes a premise
Fragile hands made strong conduct,
Like batons or utensils, the service,
Invest themselves as subject

Of the only impartial narrative
That, capable of conviction,
Unclouds the fallen knee of its fiction
And makes the unwritten epitaphs live.

Unexpected writers and inadvertent audiences
Occupy those clanging vestibules that anchor
One to the joy of early morning skies.

The distance evokes priority: sister
To the mode captured in cognate, adjectival rusts,
I feel the train connections – transistor
Strains beneath my feet that shudder the dusts:
Calligraphic doubt and the will to use,
To every corner assign a lonely muse.

Continuing upwards, promote that you
Accept the previous layers, bounded
By grooves of cloud – sensitive to every
Tremulous beat sounded
Of aqueous air
And coiled content, for I am surrounded.

‘There is something ethereal in the air today...’

There is something ethereal in the air today
That illuminates from around and
Even makes the rust seem fey
On gates and bars and early conversation;
To identify with elevation,
A botany on words forested
With attempts to capture something of the air
That illuminates from around
This land, this sound, this concrete stair.

There is something militant in the air today
That fortifies from around
And pivots on the crowned
Floor and tiled ceiling rows,
Glossy indifferent xylem snows
Mimicking urban rooftop array.

There is something sapping in the air today,
But what it drains is lethargy,
Necessary precision, and
Prescribed creativity;
Thrive the lone apricity
To examine our eloquence.

There is something ashen in the air tomorrow,
Fluent grey ellipses drift
As if a fortiori
From shade to sun to mist,
Pupae bounding Jacob’s staircase
Dilate and burst to stairwells
All of our own.

Types of Light

Finding the beginning of a shade of day
In some form of natural auditorium,
Casting august at an angle,
As if tolerating a wistful doubt,
A need for artificial light.

In time, the flaws in the garden are filled
With illusions, unready for interaction,
Yet from here all can scent
A newer sort of knowledge, that
Without the need for excavation.

In such a climate the vines still grow,
Window panes flicker with onlooking,
Centred on the crucial premise: there is
No reason why light cannot be dominant

Traction

Odd that such luscious land should
Border such a functional route;
Veteran rusted steel astride
Grassland like a Persian rug
Bearing unceremonious footprints.
The traces of sky-bound jets
Seem proximate, intimate,
Despite their distance, for
We are both in transit; communion
Established, but rarely
Enduring, and that is its
Shifting sovereignty
Amongst sensations and
Convictions: an affine currency
Locating joy in the fidelity
Of movement. That which is a
Timeless relief from modernity:
I travel with Huxley and Gorky,
Despite their distance, settling
Quicksand to time,
Generic or specific
Synthesis of inevitable
Hebel to rhyme.
This is more than time
And plateau passing,
Here I do not fear to be
Colloquial, but inserts
Of bedrock buoyed like
Barley crust on mead,
Leading one to improvise excerpts
Of a heritage temporarily dulled
And distributed effortlessly
Independent of strata,

The Caldera

B. Wormleighton

Terrain, or altitude –
Ephemeral harmonies to a
Melody of content.

The Settlement

Walls penetrating the green
Like unexpected clauses formed
Of an industrial grammar;
This residential scene,
This unsettled settlement,
Re-enacted through the players
I alone consider, view and
Exhort. Bricks are exhortations,
A byword for something stronger,
Leading us to debate the joys
Of Orkney and Alba Longa.

Thoughts once brewed on the hillside:
Questions from inland have airspace,
Locate their currents, watch the land subside
Concentric within the whole, subduct lace
With mortar, that reads like handwriting,
Suggests a new alignment for lyrics
Carved in stone, perpetually inciting
Us to discern which are the ruins.

Interval

There are elements I recognise
In this changeable romantic weather,
Places validating commemoration,
Foothills bounded above by
The imagery of the precipice –
A useless castellation guarding
Over an imprecise motherlode.
There is a furnace in the sky
Visually emitting, in a bell-like
Tone, a private equinox
Rendered out of cloudy
Pewter, parts of clocks,
That form a personal epitaph
In dialogue verging on song.
In dialogue understood as verse.

(Written after hearing of the death of Seamus Heaney).

Indigo

The sanctity of sleep;
With all that sage yellow machinery
Sombrely resisting identification like
Rain in the night-time, some plenary
Habitat of frayed canopy ends,
Brittle and ferrous as bracken lifted up

Above thronging cloud heads,
These concentric oases at the horizon:
Granular cloud takes place of sand
And mellifluous light that of water.
Let us cycle back with violet
Depth of newness, appoint
Fresh scribes, a revolutionary ink,
But like bile compels tolerance towards
Even gladiatorially hewn words.

The colours remain with me: the
Surrealist turns to replication¹⁶,
Concrete consumes the ether,
Idioms act like corrosion
Yet meet an indifferent surface,
Whose contours yield a familiar
Purity in tableaux, some portrait,
Earthenware elsewhere:

We do not discretise into ikons
Associated to each utterance
Or adroitly bookmarked silence
As we cannot attain such stillness.

¹⁶ c.f. *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*, S. Dali

‘And the anonymity is freeing...’

When, as a phrase acknowledging
Its own metaphor, bristling ideas
Descend, and one detects nothing
So maimed as a blunted pencil: sears
As a jockey’s instrument – but questions
Who is the jockey, and who are the stallions –
A peace of canvas is synonymous evaluation
Infused with that self-compelling consolation,

And the anonymity is freeing.
I can see things in the seething
Mass of profound identities
Burnt trivial on one side
By rushes of skylines to autumn cities
Entreating a likeness, they to paper confide.

A word chosen too appropriately
Refuses to feed the friction of meaning¹⁷.
But who am I to walk didactic puddles sedately,
Feet prostrate like fingertips eagerly defining:
Each step grinding out a desert
From the porous stone of your shirt
Guarding fleshy braces, fleshy chains,
Feared like the lead in stained glass panes?

Only the pretence is feasible,
Only the promise intangibly humble.

¹⁷ c.f. *Untimely Meditations (The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life)*, F. Nietzsche

Altitude

Bleakness captures a certain permanence; I follow
The chambre of the incline to its harshly wooded
Boundary, and realise detachment is not the brace
On which my language rests. The clouds are
Dormant, and perhaps as visibility lessens become
More clement, forgiving on campaign.

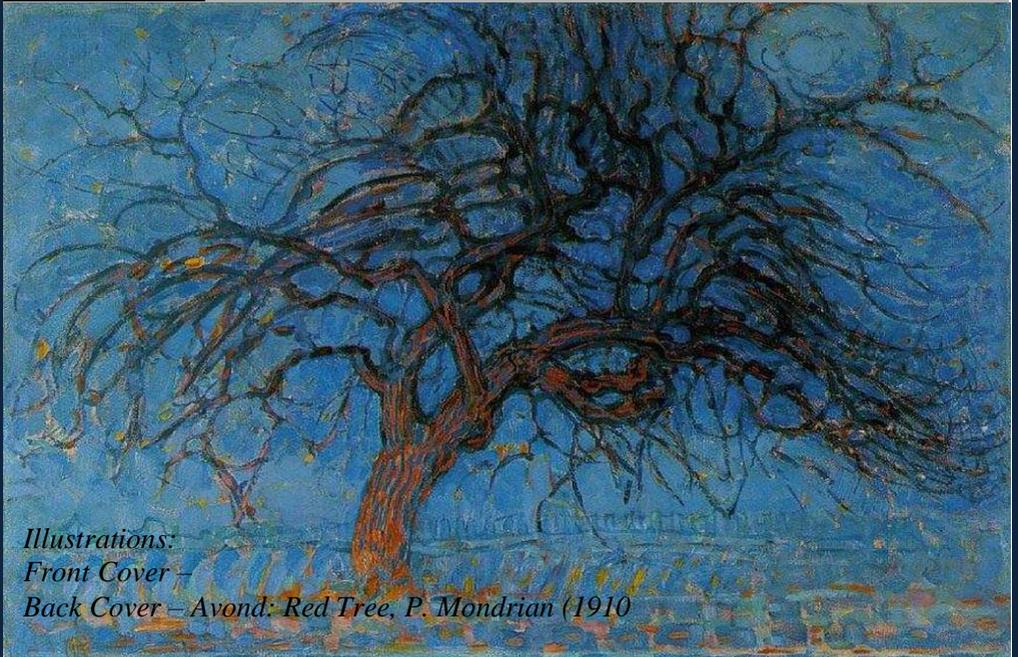
My dialogue is more than terminology, but
Rendering is often projecting onto that element.
On occasion a broader spectrum of hues from
Sage to amber awaken from the clustered
Thoughts; like lichen or heath ablaze: I
Am challenged to story-tell the difference.

To question whether it is sealed or set to follow
Is forbidden. Indeed, that I sense is known and
Firm is more sediment than stone; and that
Disregarded as a type of warmth no nearer elevation.
This stillness is brittle since the script is voluntary and,
Instead, movement becomes a question of altitude alone.

*“Some things resolved, others still
Drape their threads over the caressive
Breeze of time...”*

I would like to think of this collection of poetry as an offering: of my first twenty/thirty efforts, I continue to enjoy perhaps four or five. The others seem very much grounded in the moment in which they were conceived, and are less compellingly generalised for subsequent reading. In personal experience, this seems to distinguish the poetry of mine that I regard as 'better': this ineffable component of transcending the moment of creation. I feel that my preference for structure and reduced output have contributed to poetry I feel happier to evaluate, though ultimately I hope that any readers will accept (or critique!) my efforts as an individual, naive, and potentially vulnerable attempt at expression, which is surely the intent with which poetry should be penned.

THE CALDERA



Illustrations:

Front Cover –

Back Cover – Avond: Red Tree, P. Mondrian (1910)