

*from* WHEN: life writings and unwritings

*Words*

And each book has a window to peer through. Through the clump of evergreens, twilight lingers. Dig along the plough-line, the rain's rhythm. My footsteps are the heartbeats of thought. Before the water heaves, a broken image. Electric pain. Brighton on a Sunday morning. Her song above the whine of the engine. The ritual burning. She combs her long hair. Forgotten apocalypse. The campers in the middle of the field wave as we thunder through. The desire to walk around the world searching for it. It is the middle of nowhere. I see the wonder and the students in the restaurant. The best we manage is a network of images through which so much falls. The university buildings grey before dawn. Words, she says, all these *words*. Its rhythm not home exactly. On her bed, *words*. Alone in my room listening to *The Soft Machine* on the reel-to-reel, a young man afraid of his demon. The mist-haze dissolves to reveal sun and moon 'set' in a blue sky. Words on a page and faintly the reflection of my face. A muted demon. A nuclear mushroom cloud above a Pacific island. But these words and the values don't quite fix it. Forty-five, he says, that's how old you'll be. The tropical bird absurd in the tree like the last yellow leaf of autumn. He's dead. Lying drunk in the damp grass, the branches of the trees spread into darkness. There's nothing to wait for but the sunrise. I'm halfway through a poem as the train arrives. You always end in the same armchair. There's no 'glorious resignation'. After pissing into the sea, walk the harbour arm. The naivety of the 'shaven insane' mythology. We talk about the politics of Rhodesia and about the world's total destruction but speculation seems abstract with immensity of land and sky before us. And Duster Bennett, dead this week. The half restored houseboat rests at the water's edge. We smile but can have *no* idea where time will sweep us. The blue sky (the grey sky). The same stations (filled with the same people). She's learnt to look Medusa in the face as she gathers hot moulds for inspection. The mountain of mud the cranes claw from the Broad. No forged monument for the highest gaudy pedestal. I think of Blake's Newton staring at the ground. The sound of cricket boots on the wooden floor of the pavilion. I shall forget your eyes first, the woman in the French film says to her foreign lover. The painters in the corridor punctuate their

work with long tea-breaks. Sun dips behind harbour-lights, salt-spray on the breeze. The sun floats across the line of the Downs. I pad bare-foot to the bathroom to fill my dry mouth with night-chilled water. Waking one morning, pacing the house, looking at this object and then another, as if the objects themselves, or the air packed around them, or the eyes, have been filled with something that makes all the difference. A pair of white teeth flashes innocent menace through the crowd; the cobbled streets of the Sussex market town. Priscilla leaps from bed and surveys her life. Mr Payne admits that the 'Jenny' to whom his love letter is addressed does not exist. There is no available figure showing how many Americans believe in God but their belief in the Devil is higher than that of any other nation. I say: Thus portraying Dada, determined to be brave, they flee from me – perhaps. The machete blade gleams. The train heads towards 'home' and the tunnel sucks it in to scatter its contents along the human coast. Music and the view. Loud rooms. Silent wool. Soft night. Roots scorched within the frightened earth. The objects in the room knotted by a language the body makes. No talk of 'golden lights' within you. Nothing mapped. The cat watches me from the stair in his neutered magnificence. I don't want you to be the subject of the poem. There's a point where every process stops but it's not the end. The hours before the sheet of darkness is pricked by bird-song. The gap left by cruelty and tears that we can only fill with love. Clamp on the helmet of our intensity. The saxophonist amid the traffic is scored against contingencies. Sparking between shattered atoms, birds shaken like passional dust from humming wires, the neon flashes, the digits of an electric clock firing its messages with lust, huge within the continent of the street. Perhaps I *am* waiting, as the sky darkens, for the ice of your smile. Tired faces on the bus: it's this I can't reach. The man in the plastic sandals identifies the ideograms in the girl's book, talks of the National Front in the East End, and of Tito's ubiquitous portrait in Yugoslavia. Consider the term 'making love' as the description of a process. Those hills where John Purdy died. The paranoid detective delivers his report from Malcolm Lowry's grave. Footprints in the cement of the Roman floor (like 'WELCOME' scratched on the step at my grandmother's). The suburban road signs barely suggest the crumbs layered beneath. At the centre of this poem there is absence, though even 'I' is another dissolution, a stiff mask before the voice. Bark without blossom. You cannot destroy this light which could fix you under its harsh points. If you allowed. Prey for the circling terrors of our desert freedom. This confluence, the drift from London and beyond. I think of her house in Brighton Road,

her two children and the man behind the thin curtains, one unshaded bulb glimpsed. Men creep the gutters, collars up against the eyes of the police and the wind that sweeps up from the promenade, where dank tarpaulin rattles over sea-side machines and hopeless lovers (like us) small talk the finest details. And there's the cheerful girl from Armagh, her tattoo a disfigured republican emblem on her burnt arm, renting a room at the Abbey. I sit in the garden, thinking the smallest questions. A ladybird, a spot of blood, floats into the hot air, its split shell a clumsy sail above vibrating wings. Home in the harsh continuum of dwelling. Waking to the empty house (a repetition in a new season); the arrangement of flowers upon the window-ledge, the records leaning against the wall: the impedimenta of inmates' dwelling. A frying air, heavy with food: a measure of heat and capacity. Spores climb gravity. Who wept, faced with this rectangle of light, guarded and besieged, alone in the guts of their power? The church contains the Blounts' chapel, sealed, exclusive – exiled, self-tombed, within their annexe. Outside we invest, sowing love's surfeit and reaping its fuel. Five swans take to wing from the surface of the Broad, white darts against trees in bud. Sometimes it's energy that I derive, locked into your body, to spark across emptiness. And sometimes, walking from you, you are carried with me, a crackling static scrambling the world's messages. The model pagoda opens to reveal *words*: a Buddhist scroll packed inside. Pink blossom walking the Avenues to town: through Council estates to the city wall and the antique houses within. Holding court in the Bar, the highest authority on decadence, scripted Dionysian Apocalypticist, is arranged behind his Pils bottles! He's tried *everything*! Beside the bridge, the new car is photographed by two men, a third holding a concave reflector, coercing the sunlight to 'flash' and 'gleam' on the bonnet. Do different. From nowhere. Well-practised nonsense in the common rooms of well-stocked academies. We touch like lovers. I reach out and brush my hand across the shavings and splinters on one of the ringed plateaux, with its rim of new bark. There's no way I can climb within her skin, or she within mine. The forest as a matchbox, full of phosphorus pines; the sun, a small light-bulb wrenched from the guts of an old radio. She says nothing, staring at the dazzling pain of a fallen cone. An egg lies cupped in the bowels of the city. The sharp rocks out-thrown, their own seismographic print-out. I walk through rheumatic desolation. They begin to dance, turning, tottering into the shapes of a man and a woman. She offers me various fictions as her life. You hear her gathering necessities for the day; half-choosing this rôle, it chooses her. Winds swell. A parallax trick

between image and mirror. You join the three o'clock society of the twenty-four hour transport caff, witness the one-armed-bandit entertainments of the Norwich to London lorry drivers, over their sausages and chips and highway gossip. You discover Ber St., Black Anna's pub, the ruins of St. Bartholomew, desecrated 1549. Let the distortions of history break through your voice. If you play a sharp where the other plays a flat we might witness chaos – or invention. The eye's frozen cargo which you cannot shift: hollows scooped in tarmac. The telephone rings in the office of the old orphanage. The machine is silent, apart from the ticking of the engine, cooling. And ex-cons, slow against the world's flood. I watch – for no reason – as the embarrassed policemen escort the girl from the dole office. The destitute shake my hand in exchange for an address or for a route up St James's. My social worker says I'm an angel. The cannabic softness of the Downs explodes in a Van Gogh furnace. Blues, why do you kerb-crawl, you been following me all night? In this cube a life is led. You're talking like a book and I don't believe anything I read in books. Rain smears the address on an envelope as it shoots through the letterbox of a house you haven't lived in for years. This pulls the ground from beneath your feet and most times you simply fake it, toss a fresco. Back at his desk he stares at the wall, plays cat and mouse with the milky phlegm in his throat, and begins to write. A little of its meaning breezes across the page. A slurry of notes, passing down the scale to the bottom of the tenor range. At dawn, a train shall leave the local station. He's only the trace of a writer, erased when he leaves the desk for the bedroom. Birdsong sold out in Sussex. East of the Urals or in New Mexico somebody's nerve snaps. Preparing the euthanasia drug the junior doctor flirts with the nurse. As she re-reads his words, she suddenly feels fascinated by the idea of becoming an object to her own gaze – as she was for his, according to certain philosophers she's reading. Her flesh tingles, glows with the sheen of her excitement. She laughs at schoolgirl fantasies of penitent women clutching ikons, wasting away for shame. His answer to this is predictable: *yes* and *no* – the 'eternal tautology' as Beckett calls it – but to admit as much is to open the dimension shared by poet and philosopher alike: the world *is*, after all, a poem composed by Being. To choose speech *is* to roll a rock over the entrance of the tomb of onto-theology. The epistemologist (by which I mean all of us) doesn't want to get caught with a lump in his throat. He's seen the body of a well-dressed foreigner carted off by state officials. The screens each side of the stage show images of figures in space-suits moving through moon dust. Burroughs – until he begins to read – seems

hardly present, not skin and bones at all. She begins swallowing him, giant mandibles beneath tucks of vagina muscle. She is the muse who floats across the pages. She's built herself a nuclear fall-out shelter in the event of Soviet attack, filled it with tins of baked beans. She sees herself hurrying from left to right across the film set, behind dark glasses, under headscarf, weeping. We've hardly got beyond the flirting stage yet, swelling trousers and all that business! There are preparations for your state visit: the bathroom painted avocado and the toilet seat replaced! Where is the distant whir of your helicopter which should set the chef's teeth chattering and the colonel to clear his throat and the orphans to twitter until hushed? The gentleman's eyehole in the boudoir. The hole in the air left by the Jumbo jet; the hole in the ocean into which it disappeared. Where there's no shadow, there's no light. You listen to water scuttling down the new plastic drain: another misplaced sequence, more suspect terms. Crisp icing for a world that seems ready to crumble. The horizontal hold is faulty and flickers like a pack of cards. It's here, yes, that she'd tried to. She points towards sheets heaped in a mound. This boy, who's made a mistake, lives – for a moment – in the enemy's sights. Vaults of nostalgia. A bulldozer claws into cobbles under the crust of the road leading to the abandoned customs-house, prevents entry – or escape. Cracks of lightning over the tower of Strangeways Prison. The eye's cargo: an albino rook flaps down off the back of a black sheep. The lynching party in red hats grins over severed logs after the routine massacre. You could drown in this ocean, accepting it for what it is. It's like a film of Brighton in which actors turn from streets familiar to him into ornate arcades that don't exist through cutaway walls. Over there, by the burning heretic, just to the left of Tesco, is a niche for a quiet evaluation of self and others! The boys are brought in, blindfolded, and shot by men who keep their eyes shut. The day of your birth was born with you, but the day of your death is a secret child lodged in the womb of time, he says. The artist's hands flow down the furrows from her shoulders. You are a stencil. The nylon bone is waiting in the basket for your return. A cradle of mishaps. The porter tries to get in but the old woman keeps sending him away, saying, Come back later, my husband's sleeping. She brushes by the black guys with the dosh. Know what I used to do in Peckham? Yes. You recall his coldness, his premeditated hatred. He can't manage, despite coaxing, to write his name. And when he's playing, he *is* Leadbelly. She sobs, head resting on blank forms. We're held by a rhythm we hold. Refusing to make a world. Yet the petal in the steely poem might razor the *words* that try to fix it. The body is at rest so

longingly on this damp patch of grass that the ground almost hurts. This music fills the quarry of your nerves. It is the first day of a new world; it is the end of the world. Choose a style, suitably anonymous. No. The stillness of sleep is the picture's own thought of autumn and birds dispersing. Single leaves in the plural mind. Squeezed on its surface, her voice, like money, passes through the single hole. Your small change is this world, a jingling distraction causing music. Squeeze the spectral street through this unfocussed eye. Glaze the moment with frigid tenderness. It has your singular route blotted in.

Unwriting 1985-1973

4 March 2012

### *Work*

Poor poets, let us keep working.

Blaise Cendrars

Scooters and adding machines. Sunday morning overtime. Not negative but not noting 'I did not go to'. Driving along the seafront in a Triumph Mayflower. *Don't forget spelling* hospital spells. Homework. Superman aircrew books chess set. Learning to type. Circus horses. Thirty laps, boots sinking in mud. Glossy ammonites. Harboursing the world (on tape). Earth landing. Monitor, send QSLs to Vietnam. Hang on every Apollo silence. *Record*. A tone-deaf violinist choosing to sing the blues. Nobody can recognise 'nobody' in the cancelled day. The radio catches fire: acrid message chokes. A small tetrahedron of sugar paper given to model an interior but flattened to record a fiction! Starts autobiography. Picks through the archive. Leotards decorated with entrails. Groundhogs ticket in his pocket: Cobbing plays him 'e'. Exchange employment between time, shadowgraph, black holes. Diffident, she sleeps under the spangled canopy, sponging off relatives, smoking dope. Deep breaths at the shore. Shouting over costs. Handsomeness the price of immortality (on the cans). Spending time copying. Labouring. Nobody's freaking out in bubble-baths now. Orange jackets assert a new Right to Work 1976. 'Bully Boys' on paper. Police radio whispers. Interracial promenade. Faceless names. Working live cases, exchanging fear and pity glances in the shit, bogged down in 'obligation', transcribing her unpunctuated Friday

pub-lunch monologues. Preludes to Jodie's titillations on the page. Absence is addressed in absence. Plastic tatters in the window-frame. The axis of one day turning upon vertical rain-shafts. Far from credit, servants whom 'one' tips. The shell breaks. A booklet on fallout shelters, a fridge. Ergometrics of not writing. It finishes or the money finishes, unhuman perfection on the platform. Walk from the sites of earlier poems. When criticism becomes creative, every job's up for grabs. Dead texts show other landscapes, stories of the logics of war machines. Difficult, inaccessible, complex: facts like dreams. The exotopia of increased work *at* work, as *x* months' service serves towards increments. Build imaginary prisons with real zombies in them; beat the dead rabbit as 'art'. Text is absent now the reader produces, sucking butter from its bread. Disobey the world that constitutes reference of the poem. Dissolution of self through apertures of Being. It's c.v. season. Miles cuts into his musicians' ears. The sentences remain beautiful, the syntax articulate, the sense disjointed. Glancing at my reviews in magazines I can't afford. A slip of unsuccess slips. Full of bladder debris. Expressionist bathos. Workplace Calvinism. A post in the *Dinky Inferno*. Strategic chance: to free myself, I produce a beautiful F sharp for my micro-epic, figured to block somebody else's manifesto. Like a baby sleeping through The Great Storm of 1987 while the CBI complains we stayed awake. Another ashen book, its thesis wrapped. Sweep noise poetry to pick up jammed voices. 'Some younger poet' masters the invisible genre, hammers decades of self-reflection into a node. An anti-fascist poem 'for my students'. Two hours overtime. Float and flash perceptions. Working the work. What rough beast slouches in grey print on recycled paper? A scratch living room blues opera. Impacting language as a mode of existence, a means of escape. Who catches that last helicopter out of Kuwait? The New Referent. I take two or more verses on harp, hardly able to resolve. They're not on the tape, which confirms perceptions, replaces memory. A palimpsest of image-traces under the songs. Her boot twisting on the bed. Extra choruses: compensating mistakes with emotion. Like Benetton. We're stuck with bad rubbish. With no hope of good riddance! He'd rather fiddle in defeat than fight! Four hours teaching Lee Harwood's work, then *wording* the petition, lobbying the Governors' headlights. Back-peddalling management. Three large windows with Lady Hawarden shutters. Unobscure Disasters. Here's yesterday's slogan mid-circle: *ADDRESS THE SYCOPHANTS!* New geography grates against the talking time of lyrical seascapes. No good news but good to see you! Today's slogan: *Never trust a man who turns himself inside out!*

Tomorrow's slogan: a full circle, but no *words* in it. Just instructions for the dancers: total immobility, self-similar poetic structures at smaller and smaller scales. Subpoenaing memory. If I weren't a literary device I'd be depressed! Sloppy bucolics. This rhythm of working recognises poets by their handwriting. The gift of cheat. *Sparrow hops. I walk/ to the post office, buy stamps./ A book of haiku.* A poem-essay. Working poetics, the ethics of pleasure. To Waterloo to walk amongst the shells, shit and jellyfish. At work. Light executive dusting. Working. At. Home. Vacation to the site of the first *English* poem, gusting crosswind. *Sing mē frumsceaft!* Local clarity and global vacancy: Barry MacSweeney recites his Mary Bell sonnets; a 21 gun salute for the Queen Mother. Sleeping with hobby fish, rising to another other, the rainy park: a heron, head tilted, 1998. Angela drives my torn ankle home from work. The computer recites my poem zipping down unpunctuated columns without breathing. Chillier as the weather turns to 141 emails. First person omniscient narrator. No stopping or shopping, the postman dives under the window; a bag of sugar on the step, new sentence. We speak the language on the sides of the shrieking armoured cars. Time's rot, we're the first chord after long silence. We blink into daylight with the Mole's vision, from tunnels which were filled with a century's human waste. Where the people once drew water, one cough fills immensity. She saunters up the road, eyes fixed on the screen of her phone, her thumbs moving with dexterity. I grip the pen with *my* thumb but it's a rigid clamp, a plug. The sounds of an electric toothbrush, of a suitcase on wheels running over bones. He arrives home from work, safe, with a story to tell. 'The taxi crashed.' Stroke of luck. He lives out of time in book time, stroke of pen. A detached part of his psyche like a retina. He thinks about the word that's found his head, off to work, reading the proof of Sinclair's next book. He begins again, re-narrating himself. Tongues lash. Light feathering. Buries her face. Re-works the old sentence. He lies with his tongue. He nibbles her neck, throat strap. He's sucked out of his body, mindful. He spins his hands up her dancing skirt. Gomringer print wrapped in protective cloud. A diuretic tickles his inhibitors. Students workshop or worship their poems, thick snow settling into their Kerouac haiku. Oeuvre management. Number-crunching awayday Nazis, bequeathing structural pain, carried away on a comedy of errors. He *professes* fumbling in mobile text, pure poetry with polysexual nerves and palpitations. Her knuckles tremble before her eyes, ogling her power. He works on public language. He takes *inner* leave. There's no poetry in which everything is scribbled lost notes. There are, however,



memory blocks, intractable non-material that obscures the spectral cohort. History begins again as the new boss arrives. He doesn't look at me. He doesn't look at me, becomes saying again as I turn the page as if opening a door. When I speak he isn't there to listen, though he doesn't finish or unfinish. Institutional memory grinds. Ligament rips: 2009 cashpoint caper. It hurts me too. The lost grain of the guitar. Now touch the dock where the Birmingham Six stood to be accused, tried and found. Revisionist history, sentences in time. Orange March outside the Maharajah. Memory's loss of memory and the absolute unforgettable. He relinquishes his diaries, but windows crash, firebombs are rumoured, and he works at them again, daily. On the Sussex step, he rescues family photographs from heavy albums. At the workstation, goose vibrato like Braxton's contrabass. I cup the blues harp and the artist works my 'feelings' for it into 'art'. The man whose face has died decides for us. Stroke of pencil. Works his way through us. Inserts phrases from lost works, odder than odd, not negative capability or uniform finish. Rainbow weather falls, drops silver light, splashes around her face. Form thinks. Taut shoulder blades delineate. She delivers herself, a working sketch for full invasion, occupation. Weird with work, no one listens...

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