

Harpoon

Jack Grantham



Forty-eight poems
Chasing butterflies and birdsong

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Forty-Eight Poems Chasing Butterflies and Birdsong

The question of how to live a good life within a society which is fundamentally unjust is one that concerns us all. Our young protagonist, still profoundly uncomfortable in his adult skin, and wary of kowtowing to a crass cocksure culture, struggles to preserve his youthful idealism.

A memoir of sorts. A homage to punks and poets. A political polemic of intense left-field witchery. Above all, an obsessive odyssey in thrall to lyrical beauty.

The power and potency of the poet takes us from the highest of the peaks to the most miserable and degrading of the depths. Literally and metaphorically we are transported from the **wells of hell** and the **rat-factories of disease** to dance **fearless and free** as **the first brave bird of spring sings**.

In the end, youthful hope and compassion triumph over the cynicism and indifference of the age. An answer emerges in the unlikely shape of a mathematics classroom. The poetry, graceful and unabashed, weaves before you like a pristine butterfly; unique, soaring, iridescent. A thing of utter beauty.

Harpoon

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A left-wing alternative.

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Harpoon

The images you will find, brave-flapping;
Through squally sentence spray, storm-blown;
Lyricism, like plaintive gulls lighting;
Dead sky, around the waste-land tip;

Are the tortured dreams of beauty,
Dance music themes that all night play,
Till dawn's sweet compassion, soft-battered
On a skin's mourning shore, breaks;

And a nurse's kindness, breathed bone-marrow deep,
Bathes nascent gaping wounds, stabbing-cruel,
A world's suffering, sour, cradled in our arms;

And when, in some faraway and far-flung foreign land,
A happy and handsome refugee boy, smiles
Only seconds before, his precious blood,
Caught in the crossfire, feeds
The rusting-red hard and dusty ground;

And when, bitten by the broken beauty,
Savaged and left to rot by the stinking cruelty marching-on,
A thin trail of tears, roll
In ill reflection, down
Your angry-young choked and bitter cheek;

That's the time,
When some spiritual harpoon strikes home
Deep within your stir and bone,
That a fierce resolve is born,
To fight it all,
In the fire of a human soul.

A Warbler Sang

A warbler sang from a scrubby bush, loud
In the afternoon, from a withered bush,
A warbler sang, and quivered and quailed,
As hot the heavy air, still and staid,
Wound through the low red square, and full
Its monotone grating, the grey-brown bird
Sang on, and I the tired traveller, waited
And sweated lime, as still the hot sun shone.

A warbler sang from a scrubby bush, still
That scrubby bush – discordant bush, as heavy
The evening fell, torporous the torpid evening fell;
And muffled in the soft-red warm-red sand, a child
Shuffled to where I sat and a warbler sang,
Beneath a withered bush strangely wound,
Harsh that withered sound, a withered child
Strangely wound, the grating grey-brown bird;
Loud, as other voices fell.

Beautiful child! - Awkward child! - Crippled child!
Beneath a withered bush strangely wound,
Lying limp, as twisted branches burned to soot,
His gnarled legs lie dirty in the sand;
A twisted cross of soot to mark,
The grey-brown world's twisted dirge;
His sores, his ulcers, his boils,
His sufferings; festering for the feasting flies.

Faint in a low red square still and staid,
Beneath the clamour of-a Indifferent World,
I spent some time with a famished child,
We ran our fingers through and drew,
Letters in the soft-red warm-red sand,
And shyly spoke our names out loud,
And ate the meal of bread I bought,
And cola too, from a low red hut, until;
His sores, his ulcers, his boils,
His smile; bright in the evening light,
My gloom; the chilling feel of tomb.

The Horns of Hunters

High on moon-kissed mountains mournful cold,
The Horns of Hunters' daubed rouge,
Bring sweeping pestilence
On this fatuous and sated land.
Aye, upon this sweet and sour plate,
A greyer grain of grief will reign,
Until at last a battered Teacher creeps,
And to the withered monochrome, shades
The first few drops of pastoral rain.

The Highest Form of Beauty

The whole of my philosophy,
Were I to write it down,
Would be to prove rationally,
To another reasoned mind,
That beyond any doubt,
I should be kind to another.

But even so,
The whole of my argument,
Would still only be based,
On this most subjective of feelings;
That kindness is the highest form of beauty,
And beauty the highest form of all.

Tapestry

You don't need to be feted - with the Latin name of a Swan,
Or have written profoundly - of Heath and moor and Heights;
But see the echelons sing - out of a clear autumnal sky,
Clamber on the cliffs – absorb their poetic spray.

You don't need to fly your name - or wind your line through time,
Or be some minted flame - in the temple of acclaim;
But sign your name in water – scratch your stanzas in the sand,
The boundless breath of beauty – the blaze of the singing song.

You don't need to be a Monarch - with careless Admiral wings,
Spawning tornadoes in Sarajevo - Drowning favelas in Brazil;
But rage to be alive - and throw a winning smile,
With each outrageous breath - The Weave - My whole nine yards of thread!

Homage

We pose, my friends and I, in the afternoons,
Flashing our copies of "L'Étre et le Néant",
Brash-bright and volatile.
Like existential jackdaws chacking on the breeze,
Paying irreverent homage
To our all-time philosopher heroes.

Jean-Paul;
The awkward last stand of logic,
Dishevelled and dishwater yellow.

Soren;
The lonely grey-green of salt-marsh,
Harsh in the winter rain.

Franz;
The grey swirling of fog,
Disorientating - in a dismal place.

Freidrich;
The gravitational collapse of matter,
The perverse black flower of Birth,
Howling against the irrational abyss.

And Albert;
The beautiful taut brown of healthy skin,
On naked Mediterranean bodies.

We play, my friends and I, in the afternoons,
Adventurous gash-kneed children,
Fallen high from thorny trees,
Paying homage to our philosopher heroes,
"Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux"
Cheerful in the gaze of god and rock.

Corn Exchange

Flung into wild-eyed tiger confusion,
Dazed with nostrils flared,
Hair a dripping young saints,
Gasp for breath.

Lost in the noise and the flash,
Suffering volcano heat-spitting exhaustion,
We desperate frail waifs,
Dance to a pneumatic beat.

Dance, like savage beast,
Dance, in furnace heat,
Dance, in peace and pain,
Dance, till freedom came.

Then afterwards,
The beautiful pale melancholy,
Soaked T-shirt on freezing night air,
Dejected-rejected can-kicking kids,
Wandering the hall,
Reluctant to leave.

Niagara

Amongst the poetry and romance and the young adventurer image,
Is the dazzle and surprise of sudden twist and turn to delight and thrill;

The dynamite to blow clean away all the choking trivia,
And create the fresh open space,
That allows soul to breathe free,
And clasp at last what is really-true;

An exquisite prose poem,
Of dizzying double-images,
And frantic full-frontal embraces,
All-on-edge and out-of-breath,
Charged with anxiety and exhilaration,
At the possibilities opening-up,
In a fearful trembling earthquake;

A run-rushing crescendo,
Foaming and frothing in a Niagara of cool misty sprays.
Sparkling like delinquent diamonds,
In the intoxicating imagery of a poet.
Whose only excuse is his youth;

Like the most glorious of all wild feelings,
The wind blowing through my hair,
That conjures up images of Andean mountain peaks,
And sharp frosty air.

Yellow Cross / Pink Triangle

The boy,
Walked through the burnt grass,
Walked through the wire camps,
Walked through the unending night,
Often alone.

And he thought,
Of all the mountains I have climbed,
Of all the borders I have crossed,
Of all the hands I have held,
Where is there a place to call my own?

Where?
But in the rainbow hearts of the flushed,
Untouchables!
Given their all.

Where?
But in the silence of the stolen,
Footprints,
Fading through an empty hall.

Where?
But in the cruel black snows of spring,
Weird flowers sounding,
The first few notes of subversion.

The Young Man, Overwhelmed, Abandons his Core Beliefs

The young man walked
Out in the Hot Sandy desert,
The sound of a funeral march playing
In the deepness of his soul,
A pall of smoke rising
From the dead-wood wadi,
The nadir of his wilting life.

Sheltering beneath the bell
Of a resonant chestnut tree,
A small candelled voice cried out,
“Where you going Mister?”
A drear reply,
Echoed through the empty caverns
of his inner sides,
“ . . . nowhere, to nowhere . . . “

Following his forlorn footsteps
Through the endless dunes,
Salting his desperate ignoble flight
With tender valentine tears,
His younger selves, idealistic as angels
Stand sentinel on the horizon,
Like a disapproving choir,
Stark solitary figures,
Their tallness silhouetted
Against a raw and roseate sky.

Deep red blood
Bleed into the hot desert sand,
Water some vain desert flower
With the blood red hue of my defeat and shame,
As the last fiery purple of sunset
Is kissed from my lips forevermore.

This is my conclusion,
The crushed chimera of my love,
The blood-red rebel stain,
The end of my defiance.

Alien Nation

I laugh and joke with friends,
But;
To put it nicely,
They fail to feel,
The causes and concepts of my dreams.
So;
There is no anger,
There is no hatred,
There is alienation.

Betrayal

From the dead,
From the dry tomb of cant,
From the brittle stem of treason,
He tastes his friend's betrayal;
His lips split,
His mind askew,
He vomits his stinking bile.
Yet;
His still but glowing embers linger on.

Soiled

Rank and dank,
In the darkened room,
A feeble light flickers.

Scour-eyed the addict,
Late at night,
Types in his fetish and moans.

His hackneyed breath,
Caught thick with tar,
Curls in the final filthy hour.

His bloated stomach,
Flaky and unwashed,
Like slightly glistening warm cheese,
Anaemic and stinking,
Hangs in lumpy scabby folds.

His sunken buttocks,
Strapped to the hard leather chair,
Squirm with the hideous lidded phallus,
Purple and lizard's breath oozing.

Atrocious and brazen,
Drooling like a bucking missionary,
His uncontrolled urges,
Toxic and foul smelling spill forth.

Unable to stop,
Dark in unrelenting venereal streams,
The polluted tide, reeking of excrement,
Swamps the bright coral carnival.

The beautiful blue-green maid,
Stripped and held-down,
Penetrated long and hard and deep,
Humiliated with several thick tools at once,
Wounded with whips and force and choke.

Raped and burnt,
The unruly tropical rain-forest falls,
Packaged and sold to the pampered,
As lightly polished sticks,
And ground-down to bitter potions,
For the comfort of the impotent and insane.

Strangled and drowned,
The ancient spiralling cliffs of polar-ice crumble,
The permafrost conquered and drilled for oil,
By oligarchs and disgusting beasts.

The sickly spin of red and blue rosettes,
The colours of guilty parties,
Cancerous legions who hack at the carcass,
As squabbling for spoils,
They ram their blistered cocks,
Ever deeper in the gore.

The lessons of Geography and Science scorned,
The corpulent pock-marked captains,
Continue their industrial game.

The haemorrhaging poor,
Spat out by the cruel machine,
Cast-off,
And the sad obituaries of the extinct,
Decay off-stage in mounds.

Immune to the dense swill of faecal fog,
The gullible feckless fag-end of all political power;
I suck on the lurid second-hand dreams of my masters,
As unthinking my grubby desires poison the planetary air.

The Divine Right of Kings

Here!
Sonnetless verse,
Unversed verse,
Unrehearsed verse,
Verse in b-flat minor,
Verse outside a key;
WE the bright burning youth,
RISE UP !
And smash their shiny-metal chains!

Here!
Innocent youth,
Youthful gaze,
Youth amazed,
Clear - our eyes assure;
WE the passionate compassionate youth,
RISE UP !
Alive! On the rainbow-clad barricades!

Snap-shot, snap-shock, out through clouds,
Air whistles - feelings fracture;
I'm free as wildfire!
Shocking as current!
Dirty as porn!
Toxic as a heavy-metal dump!
WE the free thinking youth,
RISE UP !
And FIGHT !
Their tempting snakebite CAPITAL lies!

Tap-BANG! tap-BANG! under hostile skies,
A bulletproof youth raps out the time;
Our raucous cacophony!
Our belligerent dancing!
Our brazen beauty!
Friends; that welling emotion,
The catalyst,
The dancer igniting The Dance.

Tap-BANG! tap-BANG! with graffiti and flowers,
The song sung loud,
Our colours joust,
Grabbed in motion flung.
A pollenating wave!
A breaking metal chain!
A brave drum-run da-da rhythm!

A contagious feeling this Dada rebeliousness,
Out-of-the-crease literature, AWKWARD, capable to shock;
A spontaneous eruption,
The anarchist's manifesto,
Suppressed as the Dodo,
Creative as the primeval slime;
And laugh laugh laugh on Gulliver's swift scythe wings,
The coin of corruption cut and roasted,
Caught hard and cold by our virulent plague;
Friends!
Incurably toxic! - Incurably bright!
Spread WE the epidemic!
ENERGETIC !
ALIGHT !

Jack Goes Out to Buy Himself a Shirt

*Because of the Impossibility of all Things
Social, Political and Moral
Jack went out to buy himself a Shirt.
It was the not Quite
The very worst Thing
He could have Done.*

Slouched casually against the bandstand in the park
reciting Poetry;
“Matches-snatches orange-green fire
Purple-haze jukebox tucked in a spire!”

Wearing white flannel trousers
and purple sequined shirt
talking casually about Art;
“I may not be in the Rembrandt class but I can still Paint!”

Slouched casually against the bandstand in the park
humming “The Red Flag”
questioning and mystified.

“But it’s so cold!”

So I said to my assembled friends;
“You must pump more blood,
You must sing and dance,
You must take off your clothes,
It's not to be cold any more!”

Stroll - up to this old spent farthing of a man - and say;
“You see that Little Tent of Blue up there, why is it so Blue?”
And this man, this wild reading man, cried out,
“I'd jam the gates of Hell explaining that!!”

Take a sip of beer and ask;
“Well what do you think of all our free-market poverty
and pollution then?”
And this man, this blunt Union man, takes me aside and says,
“I rode the trams in Barcelona!
That’s the way to change things!”

Stroll - up to this strict off-duty
special-branch policewoman - and say;
“My sperm can get past any contraceptive device yet invented.
You want to try?”

And my friends apologise and rough me-up;
“Sorry about that!”
“Take his name!”
“He’s an anarchist!”

And I heard this so clearly that I said;
“Kick-off broken slaves! Kick-off!
Let the Icons of Capital Fracture!
And the clinging coils of Indenture crack
Beneath the hard bones of our striking Wrath!”

But nobody in here hears . . .

So I said to my assembled friends;
“There is more beauty,
In a single one of my sentences,
Than in all their oceans of iniquity.”

But nobody in here hears . . .

And my friends glide away . . .

So I throw my purple shirt in the gutter
and walk home bare chested, singing
“The people’s flag is deepest red . . .”

We're So Pretty!

OK!

The funeral of the Antichrist was a vicious affair;
Malnourished class convicts and pale palsied wraiths,
Lashed by the discordant rash of an anorexic piper,
Cradled on the killing chords of a wailing wasteland boy.

Futureless;

The Knave of Nihilism thrashes on,
In chained leather, his catatonic body
Jerked free from wretched life,
Screams in everlasting pain;
"And we don't care!"

Broken bottles thrown high in the air,
Children injecting; seeping urine on the stairs,
Oh Mother, hear me, hear my home,
The sound of exploding gas canisters,
And abandoned children singing;
"And we don't care!"

Sideshow

(Arthur Rimbaud - Les Illuminations - 1872)

Foul mouthed punks!
Several have exploited your worlds;
Devoid of need,
In no hurry to play with their brilliant faculties,
Or their knowledge of your infidelities,
They drape themselves around the town.

How ripe they are!
Eyes dazed like the summer night,
Their raven beat
Spiked with disconcerting stares;
Features debauched; spitting, pallid, on-fire;
A careless swagger of dirt and glamour.

Some of them are young!
Armed with frightening voices and several dangerous talents,
They set out soliciting on the city streets,
Festooned in all their revolting finery.

Way beyond your frauds and other inauthentic buffooneries,
In improvised costumes of nightmarish taste,
They play out their sweet romances,
Singing of deadbeats and demigods outcast,
Mingling popular tunes with bestial poses and grotesque embraces.

Master jugglers; they harangue people and places,
And unleash their manic stagecraft,
Hellbent; tears and trickles of blood stream down,
Their noise, their nausea; lasts just a moment or months entire.

Ideals

What new form of madness is this?
Father, his dark hands burning,
Face fierce and snorting soot,
Deals his psychotic Dracula dreams,

And beneath his pious mane, lies
Isaac, my young brother, weeping, writhing
And cradled in his murderous arms, lies
Isaac, a suffering child, screaming, dying.

This; the defeat of the ideals I held when still young,
A generous spirit slit in the spit avaricious sea,
The still carcass of lost compassion, spilt
Within the barren pit of a spit spiteful land,

Like red and black,
A frail mountain butterfly,
Glued to the melting tarmac road in summer,
The steam-roller fast approaching.

Rainbow Parakeet

What new form of madness is this?
The nations of the wealthy,
The blazing inferno Kapital marks,
The dead souls locked on Medusa's raft.

Flower velvet violet, the fire in me,
The word poet tattooed on my chest.
Flower velvet violet, the v-sign in me,
Poetic spirit defiant in my breast.

Rainbow parakeet;
Across the European wastes migrate,
Colour the cairns of the Capitalist Archipelago,
This corral I tolerate no more!

dissident

dissident
know this
if you really oppose excesses of post-democratic
free-market economy
with bare fists, courage, wit and charm
this is ugly path
they make for you

friends will turn away
family will disown
you be punched
 beaten-up and stoned
you be kicked
 spat-upon and scorned
thrown out of work
 out of house
 out of home
arrested on a foul night
 held
 slowly and in pain
 humiliated and broken-down

still I hope
somewhere social justice
somewhere human dignity
 oh bare fists
 punched in my face
 oh hard feet
 kicked in my teeth
the blue sky faint pink
 my bare fists
 my tear stained face

Civil Disobedience

My favourite shot in cricket
Is the forward defensive push

Left foot forward
Head in-line
Bat against pad and angled down
Wrists loosely held

The ball cushioned
And rolled back along its path
Insultingly slow
Stopping yards short

And on occasion
The wrists held firm
And followed through
The ball sizzling in a delicious arc
Thumping the boundary wall

November 2018

After one hundred years
The final result
Is ninety-nine percent agreed;
Poets 1
Generals & Politicians 0
“Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world”

The Prince of All Darkness

Before I became known to this cold and craven world
as the Prince of All Darkness,
Long before I had been knighted with a burning sword
through the heart
to pierce me forevermore,
I was a fair blown boy of flight and feathers,
Mild and meandering,
Wandering the globe
in search of long lost rhymes and deep buried treasures,
Astonished and amazed,
Dazzled by the fountains of exotic light
Colouring the contours of my shy skimming soul.

To the tune of this light and liting world,
I too strolled with loosened limbs,
And danced fearless and free to a faint underground rhythm.
And in those earlier days of innocence,
When I still believed in beauty,
I too had many gentle experiences,
Far removed from the poverty and unwashed stench of dishwasher girls,
Torn with ragged hair and blistered hands,
No prince charming in buckle sworded finery would ever care to see.

But now my face has paled and thinned,
With angles more acute,
And eyes more intense;
Now my hair has darkened,
My body slimmed,
My blood cooled.

Now I lie defiled,
My simpering sack split wide,
Oh! Float me on malicious ponds!
Exhibit me in naked cages!
I am your slave,
The Prince of All Darkness,
Stuffed and sated, snivelling, degraded,
The mauler and the mauled,
The hooker and the hooked,
My stains on your plate!
Your lash on my back!
Felt again and again! Oh! and again!

This sordid state!
This pitiless wall!
This jerking humiliation!
Make me lick my own sperm,
I will, I am your whore,
Warped and wretched, cold blooded and traitorous, all the perversions embraced;
The Prince of All Darkness, stripped in a dark alley and whipped without mercy,
I cry, I die, I feel the kiss of the King Cobra;
Here I am; cleaved from humanity,
Impaled on my raft of panting degeneracy.

I journey to the leering-lurching palace of the ruling ice queen,
And on this religious road, cess-pit deals are made in sick and slime,
In dustbins, in lavatories, in the rat factories of disease,
Suffering the lace and lice of wretched specimens,
Whose hands are shaking,
Whose minds are lost,
Whose eyes no longer see,
Now at the mercy of the suave bully boys,
Out to rip me,
Sell me rat poison,
Rape me, Slash me,
Leave me broken-armed and haemorrhaging.

These dead-head death-roach deals,
All for the silver studded need entering my vein,
All for the numb cocktail of a brain,
All for the time lying spent in my own shit and shame,
Every grim muscle knotted in pain,

A carcass in a dungeon,
Dimly waiting for the end,
Wounded animal sounds, raw
Ripped and torn, dragged from my throat,

Bleeding, spasming, thrashing about,
In convulsions,
Out of all reason,
My mind blown apart,
My stomach punctured and leaking.

To the Wells of Hell have I travelled,
Since those earlier days of innocence,
When we sat my friends and I,
The eternal youth, fancy as can be,
Swapped shirts and drank a little wine,
Intoxicated with ourselves and our crime,
Or played knockabout football on the tennis court yard at school,
All beauty and bounce,
Too true to break the rules,
Or sat crouched beneath the little spire bridge,
Listening to the cold winter stream,
Amazed by the patterns of moonbeams,
Running on icicles rum and black.

One such rose filled night,
A fellow scholar guided me home,
Beneath a lost cherry-moon,
Dark on the lower side of town,
He gently pulled my raw shirt down.
Overwhelmed I turned and trembled,
Pinning that boy's bare arms against his fierce-fine chest,
Feeling his leg hard against mine,
Then; even as our tentative lips in wonder kissed,
Even as the last pale ghost of childhood, flickered - sighed,
I felt that cross-bow bolt shatter my skull,
I felt stones cast from the righteous mob,
Splatter my rich and tender skin to bloody pulp,
I felt the everlasting wrath of humanity,
Their bowl of poison for me alltimes,
Puked into a cauldron of boiling oil,
Hung, drawn and quartered,
Repeatedly fucked,
A halcyon hell for the Prince of All Darkness.

The Lacerating Road

One night, through the blurred lamplight,
Out running, lone on the lacerating road,
Stranded, before night vision tuned,
Under the tolling gaze of Saint Paul's,
A secure ward's Lubyanka call,
A young laced-armed couple, hurry-on by.

With a rank rat-riven rattle of despair,
I recognise the pale khaki-coated boy,
Shot off in the war, The hanging loose shoulder strap,
A bullet I strayed, A life I saved;
But tonight I am alone with bleak desire,
I register the painful longings of youth;
Melancholic nostalgia; A great yawning expanse;
An eternal eterning pleasure; Pain!

Tonight;
The dissonant drifter in cloud and rain,
Brooding on a broken mountain chain.

Tonight;
Saplings snap;
My swan-lake perfume, lingering
Over their peeling pearl petals,
A hesitant fumbling love, laughed and splashed,
A first rushing stream; rugged, rocky and pine.

Tonight;
I loop home lone;
A desolate drinker of beer and brine,
My tears tear the lovers' cuddled cream.

Tonight;
Loose-limbed trombones
Harp mystic bleeding lines,
Searching lines, Lines of mine,
An effervescent joy,
A bathing buttercup's meadow'd may,
Their arms entwined sweet and sweat.

Tonight;
Shrill against the baritone range,
I return unbroken - to my distant cave unseen.

The Pale Green Glow

This dismembered soul, boiled, rendered down,
This stagnant un-dead child, left wretched, all alone,
This tiger-mauled bloody corpse,
My heart gouged cold-chisel deep,
Eaten raw, my greasy gob of protein,
Spat out, cold on his infant bones.

My precious twin,
Starved of oxygen at birth,
Interred beneath the bone cruel ground,
Adorned with bitter blue each broken May,
Brave in Sebastian's tortured shade.

And low, low through the looming stones,
With bitter bells each undeserving May I roam,
To fall desolate-desolate on his darkened stone,
And moan, moan on his infant bones.

And low, low over his darkening stone,
A slim crescent moon softly sails,
A pale green glow to comfort,
The absolute stone of my soul.

O life shrivelling loss!
O dense and darkening pain!
O empty punishing hole!
A whisky rinsed youth, left wretched, all alone,
A seal pup abandoned-bleak on a chemical beach,
The totalitarian towers of defeat and decay framed near-by.

The pale green glow,
Shining from my bedroom light at night,
Wound around a lamppost,
Lame on the wynd outside,
I wearily wait,
For the twin I love,
To lean out and shout.

The pale green glow,
Suffused and shrouded,
In the birthing room I clasp,
His cold and lowered infant hand.

I See But Dimly Through The Veil

O mountains, O seas;

To black gullies terribly unstable I cling,
Perched crumbling on buttresses,
Precarious on razorwire traverses,
My naked heart sings;

Running madly through fires and fogs,
On bridges, on landings, on exposed promenades;
Sandblasted! Spraystung! Saltwhipped!
Jagged at the bare lips of the caldera I flail,
Howling to Venus, to Jupiter, to Mars,
Howling to Sirius, White Dog of winter,
Low lantern to my fecund love;

To the great dark whale backed mountain, dark;
I sing the blue shock of sunset, swimming
Against magenta circles, pale in a scattered sky
The dark ridge of dark hills rides,
The intense core of beauty, dark awesome heart,
I contemplate, long drawn out;

Like hot metal quenched,
My naked body diving into cool green ponds,
Silver sodium on a tray of ice,
O fumes! O plumes! The crackle of life;

Touch with sensitive fingers and feel
the folds of old discoloured manuscripts;
Admire the elegance of mathematical proofs
hanging as art on my gallery walls;
Listen to the campfire stories of youth
bowed over plates of treacled beans;
Taste rich red wine in the heady aromatic cellars
where sultry beauties whimbrel in the ripe rain;
Smell the sun rising off the great northern forest
as the first brave bird of spring sings;
See the huge dark whale backed mountain dark
dark-rising from the vast verdant plain;

O naked heart, reveal your mysteries!
Strip off your veil!
Fracture your pig-iron mask!
Split your cotton-wool cocoon!
Come;
Raid the quantum frontier!
Surf the Schwarzschild radius!
Ride the wildcat singularities!

Blackheart, Blackblood, Blackbrain
Powerless against the cold hard rock
Beaten against the cold dark stone
Blackheart, Blackguts, Blackbrain
Fighting against the cold hard rock
Naked against the cold dark stone

O helium fusing wagons of heat!
O cauterised barrels of grief!
Awesome, tempestuous prophet I rage
Tethered, fevered, ensnared; In poisonous
pitchblende heat I splice the last guanine link
And mix saltpetre in my rusting can
And scream the tormented lullabies of the insane
Until the numbing malarious fibres loosen their hold
And I kick open my concrete tomb
And the sulphurous blossom of my nightshade poetry
rains down, creative and alive.

This magic sends a schism through me
The raw shock of beauty
Each time the veil is removed
And my sensual sands riot

Portrait

On a stripped hillside I bravely stand,
Suffering sulphuric; and gazing earthwards
All bitterness and black; she painted
My portrait gracefully curl;
And hurt again by a girl's bruising hand,
I beckoned her; and forward she came with easel furled.
We flew magic carpets to faraway Fields,
And there, in my Leper's cave,
I carved for her, a Crested Iguana in stone;
And in my ugly paw, crushed dust to jewel,
Glinting now in Iguana's meagre brain;
A sapphire indeed, a piping flute held dream!

Two Sons

Silence silvers the melting dawn,
Conscience awakes, a demure thorn,
Pupa emergent, showered and shorn,
Fresh painted butterfly, resplendent new born.

Torment haunts the hanging dawn,
Prometheus exposed, a gaping yawn,
Conscience eternal, defiant and drawn,
Pale ragged butterfly, unrepentant, forlorn.

Mountain Top

Hear me,
Hear my soul calling restlessly from the dusk,
Haunting the lonely places,
The profound rocky places,
Where thoughts strike you deep,
Where you feel humbled in the presence of mighty mountain peaks.

Here in this thin air,
I walk alone,
And once in a while,
When the full moon shines,
I pipe the clear fluting call of the Greenshank,
High over the purple peat moors.

This distance is what I,
The imperial emperor of the indigo night sky,
Warm blooded and wondrous,
Haunt in my time.

Toubkal

In this orange-brown heft of corrie and ridge,
Of towering peak and crystal high,
We taste the fresh melt-ice,
And feel the sharp of air and sky.

Reckless young gully-snipes, eagle-feathered,
Running the sheer-scrée slopes,
Limbs desperate for speed and control,
Like skiing, the glory of the loose stones,
All noise and turbulent flow.

In full blood-thunder hurl,
Our mares' tails flying,
Staccato on-white-water in our sliding.
Rock on hard rock!
Body-shapes thrown in cremated air!
The acute pitch and jar of our jiving.

Our chorus; of kittiwakes in gliding.
Caught on the curl of a hawk's upswept wing,
Salt-lips and skerries pounding,
We catch our breathless breath, and grin,
And plunge again, wildly downhill.

Tripping wearily, footsore and paining,
Aching and exhausted, phlogisten seeping,
Lost in the low valley roads.
Hungry, with some friction between us,
Waiting for the bus to Salvation,
That never came.

Nettles

See the handsome swathes of dark green nettles,
Their pretty heads between my blistered thighs;

Bare to the pain, my rutting stain,
Barely sane, my nettled brain;

My odour of almonds and lilacs lying,
Of spices dying, of copra in the setting sun;

Quiet I squat in my dark green bed of pain,
Ripe I blush my fleshy frame.

Leaves

Not the virile young saps of spring,
Nor the flaming orange stags of autumn,
Only litter;

Dry unwilling fragments,
Tossed in October's brittle wind,

Pale ragged tatters,
Dribbling in November's sullen fog,

Pained dishevelled stalks,
Shrivelled in December's frozen glaze,

The disgust;
Feeling the fear folding against my chest.

The Last of the Curlews

High tide, full moon; in the dim-lit toxic ballroom;
The terror, the despair; no place for a body like mine;
Choking tears of wretched misery,
I run from this place,
Clawing at the inky black beyond;
An unforgiven child,
Misfiring; sparking on only one cylinder,
I lunge and plunge, paralysed by this trauma.

Like the very last mottled male
of a drab grey and brown species of bird,
Performing his ecstatic courtship dance
for the One who will surely come,
Only for his cascading passion to slowly sicken
and lie addled in his chest,
His terrible desolation, transmitting
a gut-wrenching wave of inexplicable loneliness,
Out into the cold black depths of space,
Blocking every radio,
With static bolts of searing pain.

The Wealth of Nations

Wheatears no longer visit these shores,
No-one knows why.

Some say global warming
has driven them far to the north,
Some say deforestation and burning
Withered their winter grounds to ash,
Some say pesticide and pollution
Destroyed their invertebrate prey,
And some say trapping and shooting
on their long Mediterranean way.

Wheatears no longer visit these shores,
Everyone knows why.

In the High Northern Meadows

In the high northern meadows; and the iridescent green,
In the light bubbling song; so slowly sung,
In the sharp morning air; and the fragile light,
The white deer walks; and the impossible song
So slowly sung; captures my treacherous heart.

As a young boy I painted my body thick with river-mud,
And ran naked through the secluded hollows,
Allowing the willows and sedges to whip my skinny arms and legs,
My striped feet scattering the frantic snipe;

I hid quietly in the rushes and observed the courtship of birds;
The gentle old-lady head-shaking of grebes,
And the lonesome gothic roding of woodcock,
Riding the forest edge at night;

But it would be many years before I would learn
the chaotic cart-wheeling dance of the lapwing,
And lower my dirty chest to the ground, and raise my rump,
Showing off my bright under-tail coverts, to their best advantage;

In the high northern meadows; and the iridescent green,
In the light bubbling song; so slowly sung,
In the sharp morning air; and the fragile light,
The white deer walks; and the impossible song
So slowly sung; captures my treacherous heart.

When the Shy White Deer First Appeared

O Herald of mighty roars and trumpets loud!

In the dusky bow of dawn,
Our twin adolescence drawing,
We'd run the thin-stick moorland trail,
Past the Rowan and the crying Thrush,
Close-up on the five-mile loop,
With a little bit of fight between us,
On the steepness of the green-frayed hills.

And after football, latent in the long end of summer,
On the damp dewy ground, our bodies bruised and aching;
Skinny jigs - with attitude and quiff, showing off
Our brave Young Socialist T-shirts, posed Ariel like,
Stringing kites in a fierce electric storm,
Our love held light and leaking,
Shearing against a gull-grey sky.

Provocative; like spiky-haired robber monks,
We apply racing red war paint
Before each game, and with shaking fingers trace
Red fire across our perfect cider cheeks.

Pale morphed over battle-green seas, sleek
Marauding savages, malevolent dive-bombing hawks, twisting
In sharp winged acceleration, we thief in pairs;
Relentless; the athletic beauty of our hounding dance,
Shelterless; the harsh punch of the stinging sea,
The hapless grist; kicked from the blue surrendering sky.

The silver prize once won, we sing our kinetic song,
The wild white joy of the ball, down the left-wing at pace,
To jink inside, only to drag my shot wide,
And wide of my friend's despairing dive.
We lost the cup final as under sixteens,
Like wounded poets, our congealed ardour
Floundering on the ruined romantic ground;
When the shy white deer first appeared.

Shirtless; when the shy white deer -
Barely glimpsed through the thinning vapours,
Grey-lit by fringes of rimming light, The Dark Rigi
Rising, from the lips of his lustrous waters.

The Ghost of the Game
(Where the Shy White Deer Later Walked)

Through the long wounded night,
And the slow losing drum,
The ghost of the game still calling calls . . .

Through the tough winter wheat,
and the tall longing pines,
and the rough beechmast a-crunching crunching.

Through the cold grey cloisters,
and the low pining sky,
and the sluice of the snow swirling whirling.

Through the cracked porcelain tiles,
and the bare boisterous stalls,
Through the mud spattered walls I'm shaking shaking.

Through the blue-filmed fountains,
and the fresh showering steam,
and the heat from the vapours rising rising.

Through the bold white branches,
and the light muscled boughs,
His warm black moss, comes surging! surging!

Through the long battered night,
Through the slow bruising drum,
The throb from the game – Calling! - Calling!

The White Deer

In the high northern meadows; and the iridescent green,
In the light bubbling song; so slowly sung,
In the sharp morning air; and the fragile light,
The white deer walks; and the impossible song
So slowly sung; captures my treacherous heart.

Belly-flat in the short winter grass,
Cold as the thin mists part,
The white deer skittish,
Low against the weak winter sun,
Scents my teenage scent and breaks.

In the chill core of winter,
I would wake before dawn,
And watch the geometry of fields and walls, fold
Into the infinite fallow fawn, far-drawn; led-on
By the sinuous roll of my murmurous tease.

Touching ash-slender trails of morning-white,
Deft valley curtains, pale-pearl, moistening the misting shore,
Slowly sliding filigree, shrouding the shy white deer,
As he emerges, hot from my dreams at night.

Soft against the arctic gutter of my chest,
Through the swish of the wet green grass,
And the limestone ring of a celandine spring,
The white deer looms high and snorting;
And through the rocks and ruins,
Invades the tempest of my half-drawn life.

In the smooth virgin snows ploughed six inches deep,
Stalking the trail of my elusive white hart,
Lost in the sticky talcum of desire,
Cloudy with inexperience,
My love swirling sick,
I stumble and fall.

Trampled roughly by soldiers,
A lance through my curdled heart,
My uncontrolled dark stain unfurls.

In the high northern meadows; and the iridescent green,
In the light bubbling song; so slowly sung,
In the sharp morning air; and the fragile light,
The white deer walks; and the impossible song
So slowly sung; captures my treacherous heart

Through Landscape Strewn with Rock and Boulder

Through landscape strewn with rock and boulder
Through high-blown desert sparse of meaning
Through meteor pitted moonscape over-powering wide
I make my way

Ambitious;
I spend the summer of my beautiful young life
Building a fleeting chain of cairns
To chart a passage
Across the great universal plain

Like a child at the beach perhaps
Playfully skimming stones
I dig my castle to last
Just one sweep of ocean wave

Pendulum

We jumped the drainage ditches of our youth,
And overhead the wild skeins flew,
Whilst in the hidden black marsh,
The sullen strangling reeds slowly part.

And Lo; I saw the sun shining
off the bright flamenco wings of a flying parrot,
I danced chest to breast with a cuddly girl
in the pink flamingo ballroom,
I kissed her lips and through the white rain
Added unimagined colours to the rainbow.

I found myself walking
on a tropical island beach,
warm mud squeezing between my toes.
Her licking tongue took me
to a field where buttercups grow,
and a balding man played lusty sweating jazz.

Some dark tender in her eye
made me stumble and stampede;
Willingly I ran,
Cranes circled in the high-blue sky,
My masts - racing - rounded the Horn,
Each touch; the sudden stooping of time,
Her spark; hard-hurled against mine.

Afterwards; the sea
Was that beautiful torn silver-grey,
A wistful wash; A sad forlorn soliloquy
in remembrance of mermaids past,
A calm oration in Nature's fine tongue,
Before the smashing vengeance of Cyclone Divine.

In the sunken black swamp,
The slow slow pitch of the pendulum;
Ever returning.

Suva First-Time

Brimstone butterflies and humming-bird hawk moths
Dart and dive before my wide asymmetric eyes.

From high above the town,
Feel the wild of whiplash wind,
The phosphorescent southern seas - blowing free;
Sea-soaring spirits balanced in glacial blue,
Shamen of the Ether, sabre-toothed
Sharp frigates in the vast elemental sky.

Rampaging jungle streams of deep exotic green,
Frame the steep turquoise decent to basalt harbour;
The electric cobalt kick,
Like a soft collision by the pool,
My intellect inexplicably ripped,
And sublime tears laid-out,
Breathless across the blue-wide bay,
(Venus at her mirror!)
And the bold rugged mountains rising,
In moist caressing heat.

Sober nun palm trees,
The very cone of pure bred innocence,
Whose bright green pears
Arc their seductive spines to the vast pacific sail,
And quivering in the evening blush, their oiled fronds
Smelt the steel of the hot irrational night.

Radiant long-flamed hibiscus plumes chime,
And sparring chords of lyrebirds sound lyrical
In the dense emerald thrash of the under-bush,
And overhead, entangled olivaceous vines
and round lime-river moons, span
The immense cascading canopies of space.

Ion-charged magnetic maidens,
Impacting full-spectrum corollas,
Incendiary sun-fanned spices and bare blood-olives
Condense from the light Keats-fret
and flash-flood the wide arcade,
My intense boyish gaze, hitting sixes,
Live in the rainbow rain.

Long ebony-fingered curators of orchids,
Sipping passion-fruit cocktails late in the liquid afternoon,
Conjure up images of red and purple giants,
Harlequins and man-eating spider jungles
Awash with strange orchestral sounds and all that is magnificent.

A sweet smelling perfume on a still warm night,
When two girls out on the town saunter by;
And that questing radiance,
Like a charmed-particle dissipating,
Hot-house blossom blown on the brimming bough,
The acute trembling of strings,
My wildly fragrant heart

Thundering, as the immense rolling wave,
Held on rapture's brief blinding cusp, plasma-arching,
Flings its fine molten spray,
Cool as powder snow,
In thrall upon the soft virgin shore, and falls;
It's then;
As the violent beauty of the frisson fades,
That a giant misty orchid,
Tender and delicate beyond all these worlds,
Blooms;
Before my flushed, full-on, summer-singing eyes.

There are Times in Evening

There are times in evening,
When the crickets, the cicadas
Begin to churr their soothing surreptitious song,
Settling me smooth and slinky,
Into the slow pulsing beat,
Of the tropical night sky.

When looking from the river to the west,
I see that the sun has drifted out of sight,
Leaving a pale weak orangeness and pink,
In hues so delicate,
I want to bury my heart,
And rub up against it,
So weak that watery orangeness,
Splashed across the sky.

When I'm walking slowly back to my house,
Towel twisted around my waist,
Water dripping from my arms,
Shivering in the gentle breeze,
Every synapse firing,
All triggered,
All alert,
Savouring every last drop,
Drinking it all in,
So glad to be alive,
In that moment,
In the beauty of the evening sky.

The God of Innocence and Playful Youth

As the subdued sky turns to slowly charcoal,
And the visible campus is reduced,
To flickering knots of paraffin light,
I carry my empty water container,
Down the narrow path to the bend in the river,
Where on Saturdays the school children gather,
To splash and scrub their uniform,
Their noisy shingle bar, deserted now and dimmed.

Serenaded by the darting reflection of early-evening stars,
And the muffled bark of distant voices,
I strip off my shirt,
And wade slowly into the deepwater pool,
Making barely a splash,
In stillness dense and cool.

But tonight I'm with Lafcadio,
Who wants to play and make high spirited fun,
Clowning on the river bank,
Trying to water-walk,
Making me laugh and jump about,
Showing off his swimming-strength and power.

And bold as Icarus -
As a feasting pacific moon, gibbous brown,
Hangs over the dark feathered palms, faintly scented,
He sits on the river-bed, so
That only his head and shoulders show,
Above the cool running water,
And as I look at him sitting there,
A comic in an absurd pose,
With tiny water drops beautifully round,
Translucent against his wiry black hair,
And flashes of silver light, reflecting
The capricious dark water, running wild
Over his warm-brown shoulders,
He grins at me, testing
My reaction to his foolishness.

And myself; so intensely alive
In the rare poignant poise of the moment,
That the grace of the brown-skinned boy on silver-water,
Is etched indelible and forever,
Across the bare white ribs of my soul;
And even the Great Universal Beast,
Like some crusty enfeebled pope,
Looked on in amazement and saw,
The most mischievous of the ancient gods,
The god of innocence and playful youth,
As he leapt laughing from the running water.

Musk Parrots

Balms of sandalwood and coconut bathe,
The coal and coral of my sun raked chest,

As sweating in the hard cassava field,
The sweet jolt of fresh bush pineapple,
Drips from our long cane knives,

The blue musk parrots squawking.

The Flowers of the Mbua

In the green mountain forest of the Seatura range,
The dense impenetrable heart of Mbua,
The soft plumaged pigeon's call,
Thumps through the still spun air,
And the footprints of early morning wild pigs, show
In the sodden mud of the steep hillside path.

In the cool of shaded forest,
Giant reeds of red and orange,
And fans of purple and pink hearts,
Flame in a meke of fragrant colour,
The intense lemon-yellow flowers of the Mbua,
Held close to my nose.

Playful and flamboyant,
Chasing butterflies and birdsong,
Gallop bareback mustangs across the wide open plains,
The children of the Mbua,
Gently growing gracious,
Adorned since birth with sweet smelling flowers,
The perfume oiled into their lithe and living limbs.

It is the flowers of the Mbua
That pillar this pagan poem;
Like when Maciu, wearing a faded orange singlet, freshly washed and pressed,
And carrying in his hand a cluster of pinky-white plumes from the Mbua,
Weaves a live circlet of flowers,
To wear in the light afternoon rain,
And later, after we walk to the ground, our warm shoulders rubbing,
I played football, smelling sweet, wearing that bush king's crown.

And buoyed by the beautiful butterfly streamers of youth,
(A flowing flower dragon, fragrance floating)
I danced all night in the Harbour Lights,
The Fijian girls held close to my chest;
Like nectar with wide Sarawangga,
Swaying in the amber lake of her body;
Misty-eyed with Wainunu Flow,
Her footsteps soft as the clouds of day,
The sun shining through her flimsy field dress,
It painting in the outlines of the flowers of the flesh;
The flowers of a flowering youth,
The hair just damp beneath my arms,
My whiteness cresting a copra brown beach.

And Maciu who plays wing-forward,
Tells me he has two small marbles inserted,
Beneath the skin on the shaft of his penis,
("Because the girls like it")
Climbs on the roof of my house,
And throws mangoes to his friends below.
But as the succulent night begins its ragged call,
He paints the one picture that interests him,
Of a village girl with flower,
Her smile open and inviting.

There's no lipstick here, no eyeliner,
Only the naked flowers of the flesh,
Carnelian lilies, bathing in the river,
Our bare chests spread against the setting sun.

The flowers of the Mbua grow close to my house,
The bare grey branches coated pink,
Smelling flamboyant in the calm of evening,
Worn white-dewed around my sunset head.

The flowers of the Mbua,
Who gave these beautiful palm-frond
children-of-the god their name,
Smelling sweet,
And myself like an orphaned child refreshed,
By their waves of lapping friendship.

meke - traditional Fijian dance
Maciu – Fijian spelling of Matthew
Sarawangga / Wainunu – Rivers in Mbua

Nambouwalu Last-Time

Last-time for me
the unbroken green canopy
of the steeply rising Mbua hills;
 painted white government buildings,
 garish red-roofed frontier stores.

Last-time for me
to drink mango with my gang of guardian angels;
 school children
feasted me last night
on turtle meat and banana
 put me
shaking sick
on the morning bus
 so smiling so.

Last-time for me
to share a carton of warm Nambouwalu beer;
 telling light-weight stories
 under shaded palm;
a fading zephyr
 faintly regretful
 full of charm.

Last-time for me
barefoot at the end of the wharf;
 shaking hands
almost buoyant
on the idling boat
 so smiling so.

Last-time for me to see my friends;
 looking to the shore
 until the distance became too great
 and they turned away
 breaking
 the thin thread of our lives
 forever.

The last time for me at Nambouwalu
 like dying
 that terrible.

The Arc of Beauty

1.

Top of the metal frame, steeled, I squeal
Geronimo! - wild-winged across the wide monkey bars,
I'm singing a cappella, as the ancient air washes my laughing lungs;

Fighting the warm weight of a fellow on my chest,
My schoolboy shoulders pinned to the soft summer field,
I'm spitting the teasing grass from my wetting mouth;

2.

Clamber the brachs and chrones of joyful boulders!
Shine lightly! winsome balefire of my soul!
Hope, my witch of Agnessi,
The rope that turns a sail, my bride!
Rose or rosetta, come! oh my rhodonea!

Stripling spiders, dark vested, inked and jinked
Link my arms; along the ringing lightenment
We drink and think; In the higher powers
Lines loop, roll and coast; time warps the summer night,
Dancing madly, as though mayfly, we celebrate the one-day;

Falcon-flash; abstract of green, breath and dale-field stretching,
Exultant eye; mind-receding, the drunken deluge of wind and sky,
Teardrop; ouzel reeling and distant plover's cry;

3.

Precocious peacocks, in glossy folds, fan their fickle tails;
In paroxysms of power, jerkwater ministers, spout and spume;
At the cemetery gates, the wealthy shrews, weasel-minded chew;

Now at my table, crusted-salt and sour-vinegar seeping,
I'm strapped to the brutalist hand of the Old Gang clock,
The ledgers and accounts fact-filled and filed,
I'm battered fen-flat, keening in their cramped winter-camp;

Held in a hammerlock, snapped in a scissor-trap,
Like drifting grey wrack, I'm soul-wrecked, pirate-pitted;
In cold claustrophobia, the rictus of inaction
Binds me, the press pressing, I'm pressed;

4.

Grave as the closing gates grate,
I maintain a dim claw-hold,
On the granite of my youth;

By the faint line of Altrui,
Anchorstone my heart, I train to teach;
My first lesson in the chemistry lab,
The test for hydrogen gas,
That high pitched explosive squeak,
Like a mouse, driving them wild with delight,
Fearing the shock, frightened to put the match;

In the curlyheaded classroom I try,
Lemniscate, conchoid, limaçon,
Curves - to set my generation free!

Classroom Lament

Now by candlelight,
Collect me my thoughts,
Smooth me my ruffled fleece,
Rinse a cool water cross on my weary forehead,
Tell me all my struggles today were worthwhile,
Strike me a light,
Sing me a lullaby,
Close me my eyes,
Tip-toe to the door and whisper me goodnight.

Now a baleful bleat,
My companions all gone,
Taken my candles,
Left me mewling plaintive in the dark,
How I choke,
How I sob,
How bravely now I blink back the tears.

Notes & Acknowledgements

Harpoon

The phrase “trail of tears” refers to the route taken in the 1830s by the Cherokee and other Nations as they were forcibly removed from their lands.

A Warbler Sang

The phrase “a cross of soot” is the title of a short story by Albert Wendt.

Tapestry

From the grave of Keats (*Here lies One Whose Name was writ in Water*) and the lyrics of The Stone Roses. (*Are we carved in stone/Or scratched in the sand/Waiting for the sea/To reclaim the land*)

Homage

“Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux” - One must imagine Sisyphus happy – the conclusion at the end of “The Myth of Sisyphus” by Albert Camus.

The Divine Right of Kings

Thanks to my friend DB for the line “Creative as the primeval slime.”

Jack Goes Out to Buy Himself a Shirt

The phrase a “little tent of blue” is from “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” by Oscar Wilde.

We're so Pretty!

The title is taken from the Sex Pistols song “Pretty Vacant.”
Oh we're so pretty/oh so pretty we're vacant/And we don't care

Sideshow

The prose poem by Arthur Rimbaud, shortened and time-shifted.

The Last of the Curlews

“The Last of the Curlews” is a novel by Fred Bosworth, on the demise and (probable) extinction of the Eskimo Curlew, *Numenius borealis*.

November 2018

The final line is from “The Defense of Poetry” by Shelley.
“Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

Butterfly Curve

The front cover is a version of the butterfly curve discovered by Temple H. Fay 1989.