



AN EXCESS OF EXPRESSION



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The girl in the blue costume

Blue. So many blues.

That's what he remembered.

Not the pale, washed watercolour blue of the evening sky
that quickly deepened into ultramarine
as dusk fell across the woodland valley between the moorland
hills,

nor the cold chilled blue of their breath in the April air
as they bathed in the valley stream,
washing the mud and sweat off, scrubbing the rich perfume of
horse from their bodies.

No, it was the deep azure of her costume and the silvery
cobalt shadow of her hair.

It was the dark cherry blue of the bruise on her thigh
where she had cantered under an unseen bough.

And the cornflower blue of her irises,
with their little flecks of steely blue determination -
these prizes he held fast in his memory.

These, and his recollection of the kingfishers they had seen,
flashing and flaunting their blues and purples as they swooped
and dipped over the water,
a thrilling, ephemeral moment of companionship.

Now, so many years later, the viridian and emerald greens,
the burnt umbers and siennas have all now faded into distant
greys -

but still the blue remains.

Where almond blossoms fall¹

The wind swirls leaves around my garden gate
like some celestial laundry machine
and tumbles rooks from my neighbour's roof
as they squabble in the bubbling air.

An angry squall stumbles by and paints my face
with waspish raindrops. They spit and sting
as if the north wind wants to bite
the succulent flesh of my red-raw cheeks.

Blown south, my shivering thoughts fly to
a warmer Spain and a pilgrimage made years ago
when, mothered by green, Galician hills
Santiago called us to a field of stars.

Each night we slept on tapestries of cream and pink
and zephyrs whispered to us in the orchard groves.
The cold wind thrills me now, as I recall
a distant spring spent where almond blossoms fall.

¹ Santiago de Compostela (or Saint James of Compostella in English) is the capital of the autonomous community of Galicia, in northwestern Spain. The city has its origin in the shrine of Saint James the Great, now the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, as the destination of the Way of St. James, a leading Catholic pilgrimage route since the 9th century. (Wikipedia).

Going down to Dover

Looking through the window, we see the fields go past,
Looking back at us, the cows seem quite unperturbed,
Looking through the window, the oast house points the way.
Looking to the pint, in the pub beside the church,
Looking down up on us, the clouds wash Kent away,
Looking through the window, the world goes by so fast
Looking at our reflections, I wish the day would last.

My Javanese Inamorato

Shall I expresso how I seek to love you?
May I melt your frosty look with affogato
or taste your warmth in sweet and steamy mocha?
Your perfume smacks my nose with rich aromas

chasing all my wordly thoughts away.
Now let me drink the creamy froth atop your latte,
so then your caffeine fizzes, jolts and sears my veins
and tsunamis heat and carouse within my brain.

Let me taste the sticky sweetness of your hips.
Your liquids kissing, smack my burning lips.
I cup my hands around your fervid body
caressing, seeking, tasting all your beauty.

My thirst so quickly quenched, in hope restarts.
But desire does wilt. Too soon we must depart.

Love for Lydia

In a long distant youth, on a dusty library shelf,
I first discovered the works of H. E Bates.
'Love for Lydia' was my favourite book.
It told of a fabulous, unreachable world,
Of country houses and a sheltered, selfish girl
and how a boy at once is smitten
and journeys to eventual commitment.
I sent you an order across the web,
so I could re-read that book from my long distant youth,
So what, Dear Amazon, sparked in your inhuman head
and made you send me Jane Fonda's 'Love for Lycra' instead.

Certainty

How wonderful you were
To burn that witch.
How clever it was
When you bombed that city.
How I applaud your thoroughness
To defeat your foes and orphan
their children with unwasted pity.
How I admire your religious zeal,
to cleanse each faith, and use your might
to send their souls to find their gods.
Faith is so simple when you know you are right.

Doubt

I wait in silence for the phone,
and bite my nails right to the bone,
my chest feels hollow as a drum,
my breath quiesced. Why don't you come?

I cannot speak, nor raise my head,
my desire suppressed but far from dead
remains furled up, like secret doves,
hidden, folded in magician's gloves.

I feel my stomach at its rawest,
my pulse is faint. I cannot rest.
I hear the tunes from last night songs
but the words now say: 'Did I do wrong?'

I taste the perfume of that one
last kiss. Please. do not end our brief liaison.
Your leaving split and rift my heartwood
and burnt the innocence of childhood.

20 July 1969

Sunday in August, and the Dog and Duck is packed.
Church goers and golfers convivially discuss
the vicar's new wife, or their slice on the ninth
and wish they'd spent less time in the rough.

Those who sang 'Sheep may safely graze' just an hour ago
buy the vicar large sherries to help save their souls.
At home roast lamb waits with the wife and the dog.
She reads the Observer and the cabbage grows cold.

At the bar, the butcher slowly sups his light and mild
with a whiskey chaser, a habit acquired
in his conscripted past, when a stray German bomb
gave him a ghastly glimpse of his own kingdom come.

And though at the end of each long working day
he intently scrubs the blood from under his nails
he can't quite remove the faint scent of a place
where men hacked into flesh and spilled their entrails.

On Sunday he puts on a clean, crisp, white shirt
while his wife starches a new, stiff, white collar.
He buttons it down: a tourniquet applied,
'Careless words cost lives' – thus thinks the old soldier.

His young son once asked, 'Dad, what did you do in the
war?'
he just said, 'Nothing much really, hardly nothing at all.
Mostly KP parade - you know, peeling some spuds -
It was a different world then - I can barely recall.'

Now the son is a man, he won't drink with his dad
but prefers real ale and rugby and banter with mates.
A chicken in a basket is all he knows of his dad's trade.
He'll be rich when he graduates – an accountant perhaps.

The landlord calls time and the father goes home,
while his son sneaks across the estate to the new Prince
of Wales

The village bobby arrives and suggests a lock in
and prop challenges wing to a swift yard of ale.

Soon men will stand on an alien soil
And take that giant step for all mankind.
But how much further must a son reach out
to grasp the thoughts of a father's mind?

Far flung knowledge

After the pub, we eat curry and watch
oddly dressed figures from an exotic academe.
Enrobed in their Levis and 70's wild hair
they dance behind the dust on the TV screen.

We see the thoughts of Euler and Gauss,
appear as lists of poker-faced glyphs
and slowly digest long pondered lemmas
delivered to us via the spells of UHF.

Many years later, the cathode has cooled.
Some memories remain, but mostly they're gone.
The magical echoes of those broadcast thoughts
have faded like the snap of an old popadom.

VHS has gone, as have the folks with wild hair.
With the theorems they taught, their students propound
the communication protocols
that now send us net bound.

We no longer embrace in the rooms where we met
and Google is now god in our church of the Web.
But teachers still teach, and poets still speak
though sadly I'm now too old for curry before bed.

Your Voice

Your voice sounds like the sizzle of fried sausage
as we giggle and chuckle around the campfire;
Your voice is like the soft keening of the breeze as it
wanders through the stand of aspen trees,
breathing your perfume, on the hairs of my neck.

Your voice is the sound of the river dancing on pebbles
brought down from the hills beyond the aspen stacks,
crystal clear, satiating and slaking my parched thirst.

Your voice is the bronze, burnished tone of a jazz saxophone,
as it romps and revels and kicks up its heels;
Your voice is our telephone cord of conversation
as it carries your thoughts across the fire's flames,
piercing my heart - thus I am revealed.

Your Voice

Your voice sounds like a conrod being pushed
through an engine block, or a camshaft graunching
its way out of its bronze retaining bush,
like a blacksmith's hammer striking a fatally flawed
weld
and shattering the integrity of the metal's crystal bed.

Your voice sounds like the clatter and whine
as the oil spills out, at forty thousand feet,
of the passenger plane and its Rolls Royce jet turbine,
until it shrieks and explodes, like an angel's guffaw
and scatters its entrails across the troposphere.

Your voice sounds like a dog when you've stood on its
tail,
or a treble church bell that was cast with a flaw
and now sings off key in a devilish peel,
its dissonance rings like a 1930s telephone
in whose klaxon the aforementioned dog has buried its
bone.

Your voice sounds like the huff, puff and wheeze
Of a ten-ton steam roller, that ran off the road
And smashed through the door of an accordion factory,
Playing polkas, waltzes, as it levelled the manufacturing
line,
Mostly in B flat, and excruciatingly out of time.

The Lady

One summer day, my lover and I
walked hand in hand, around Hampton Court.
We came to the maze and entered within
following no plan, just steps without thought.

Our path was ushered by cool laurel walls,
our voices were silent, but our minds were entwined.
At each branch in the path, with arm around waist,
we chose as if one and walked as if blind.

We came to a clearing and sat on a bench.
My head on his shoulder, we dozed in the heat.
Did we dream that we heard a murmured exchange,
as a couple appeared and stood by our seat?

The lady wore pearls on fine gold brocade
while the man had a doublet with rapier at his waist.
'My sweetest Jane, you must no longer delay'
and with the palest of cheeks, she accepted his embrace.

The breeze chilled my skin as the couple turned away
and faded from sight into corridors of green.
I looked to my love, and asked him to say
if he shared my dismay at all that we had seen.

As he kissed away the tears that ran down my cheek
my heart ran wild like a young girl betrayed.
Then his lips softly touched the nape of my neck
with the loving caress of the executioner's blade.

Often I think of the events of that day,
and I hold my love tight in a desperate embrace.
And though we returned many times to the maze
our steps never found the path to that place.

The Elms' Decree

The September breeze bends the slender, elm trees.
Tested, they gently rebel. We see them weep.
We left the cemented recess then, where beetles creep,
perplexed yet helpless. We enter where they dwell.
We seek the elms' secrets, where they swell.
These seeds sleep bedded deep, heedless
even when held there when these shelters freeze.
They never express resentment, never seek revenge.
Yet beget reverence when sleep's sweet spell ends.

The sunken garden

This garden is twice hidden.
Encircled by rhododendrons and camellias,
its paths are coffin deep below the main lawn.
We have left the big house, and walked across newly
mown grass
to find a subtle path meandering through tangled larch a
and birch.
Their fractured fingers point urgently, reaching for the
unseen light.
We ignore their imploring, preferring to move on
amongst damp ferns, moss and decay
to find our secret place where we can no longer smell the
greenness of the distant lawn
and our tongues can taste the moistness of the shadows.

There is no bird song here.
No summer sun falls on the grey sandstone flags under
our feet.
We sit on an oak bench in the arbour.
It bends softly under our weight, its slats rough and
weathered,
bruising your skin as you crumble the wood between
finger and thumb.
A lonely carp floats on the surface of a pool, horizontal, i
its mouth open and eyes wide but dull.
I look into the dark browns and greens of the ferns - even
they are not blameless.
Shadows shelter conspiracies as each leaf takes sides in
our arguments.

Here too our thoughts are twice hidden,
once within ourselves and once buried in the rough brown soil.

A Love Letter

Dear Donald,
Instead of you,
I wish I had married
Ronald
(Not Reagan but),
McDonald.
Then I would
perhaps have smiled more
on the podium,
instead of appearing to need
Imodium.

The Mismaze²

While fields submit to winter's white campaign,
And clouds kiss and bruise the hills with grey,
the wind pins the sky to earth's window frame
and I flee the town to climb my favourite way.
Atop the hill the hard and frosty sward
is cut by dark and winding lines. I ask what strange,
mad maze is this, with only but a single path?
Your answer is now gone, but heard in wind's refrain.
You could not know whose feet would trace your craft.
But now my steps between the frigid turf
decode your labyrinthine cryptograph
and bring me to the centre of your work.
And though you're gone, I still remain, a mourner
To your death below, in cold and tender water.

² The Winchester Mismaze, one of eight historic turf mazes still remaining in England, is an area of narrow paths to the east of the city, on the top of St Catherine's Hill. This is not a maze in the modern sense but a labyrinth, cut into the chalk, with no junctions or crossings. Although mediaeval in design, its origins are obscure. A local legend suggests it was carved one summer in the 17th century by a boy from Winchester College who had been banished to the hill for bad behaviour. To occupy his time, he recalled a lesson on classical maze design and carried out the lonely task of laying out and cutting the maze. The boy sadly drowns in the river below on the last day of the holidays.

The Figure in the Crypt³

In this crypt a leaden figure
stands rooted in the crystal water;
motionless in frozen rigour.

Summer tourists startled, shiver.
Stricken mute they stop and honour;
thoughtful souls become transfigured.

The vaulted roof contains our wonder;
whispered from the water's border
we hear our thoughts as wordless thunder.

Was it king or priest or unknown sinner
whose secret reasons strove to author
encrypted secrets in this figure?

And is this statue slave or brother
carrying out our silent orders
deep within the vaulting pillars?

Or was it God that made this watcher
and set him in the cool groundwater?
Inside the crypt a leaden figure
stands guard for us in frozen rigour.

³ <https://www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk/our-heritage/art-architecture/antony-gormley-sculpture/>

How can you touch your nose with your tongue?

How can you touch your nose with your tongue?

How can you make just a one word pun?

How can you make a potato crisp bounce?

How can you make a leotard flounce?

How can you touch your nose with your tongue?

How can you quiet a bell till it's rung?

How can you bend a Jacob's cream cracker

and how can you unpluck a harvested apple?

How can you touch your nose with your tongue?

How can you cry before you are stung?

Why can't you laugh when you tickle yourself

and how can you dance when you're up on the shelf?

How can you touch your nose with your tongue?

How can you catch a hare with a drum ?

How can you smile when you bite on a lemon

and how can you hide a secret unspoken.

How can you touch your nose with your tongue?

How can the old become once again young?

How can you keep two magnets apart

and how can you put back the wings on my heart?

Things

I once loved many things.
Wooden bricks, and chews,
a comforter in baby blue,
nipples to suckle and
breasts to nuzzle.
Carpet seas to sail
before I could toddle.
Each day an adventure
and the warmth of a cuddle
I loved leaves in the garden
and the worms and the snails.
The blackbird's song and
the red robin's coat tails.
I loved the walk to the school,
through the row of chestnut trees,
and the cool brown gloss
of conkers gathered with glee.
I loved the wrapping at Xmas,
the baubles, bells and lights,
and marzipan icing
and the gift of a bike.
But now that I'm old
I have discarded these things,
and my only desire,
is to once more begin.

The driving lesson

All right, that hill start wasn't so bad was it?

Best one yet, but it did judder a bit.

Check out that classy gear change, Dad – fourth all the way down to second.

Don't get too big headed – now into first after you've put the clutch in

Easy-peasy, lemon squeezey

Fairly good, on the down change - let it rev freely

Gosh, where did that motorbike come from?

How about looking in your mirror then?

I'm trying my best, Dad, you're frizzling my mind.

Just relax then, let the car do the work. I'd

keep my hands on the wheel though

love, quick - there's a gap after that lorry - go, go, go!

Mirror, signal, manoeuvre - there, that was bang on that time

Now, don't get cocky - it was hardly sublime

Ok, now for my favourite roundabout

Perhaps that is where the examiner will find you out!

Quit hassling me, Dad!

Right, I'll only talk at your command

Sure, I bet!

Take the third exit.

Unfortunately, if we want to go home, we need to take the second.

Very good, but we need petrol at Tesco - as your sister would have reckoned

What - are you saying she drives better?

Xanthe passed first time, remember!

You've always loved her more than me – right, I'm walking home from here!

Zayda...ZAYDA -for goodness sake, come back my dear!!

The Morgan

Twas the night before Xmas and up on the roof
Santa had parked to let the team rest their hooves.
Santa was troubled and all in a dither.
His reindeer were knackered and needed a breather.

So Santa climbed down and looked in the shed.
He found an old Morgan, its battery quite dead.
A peek at the chassis revealed a bad crack.
One wheel had gone missing, the axle now on a jack.

Its chrome work was pitted, the frame had dry rot,
The kingpins were worn and the gear box was shot.
Its bumpers were scuffed, and the leather was torn,
And dull, faded paintwork made it look so forlorn.

Just then, a trio rode up from out of the east,
Summoned to assist at the elves' behest,
They came bearing gifts, and were laden with tech,
Unleaded petrol, HMP grease and Castrol GTX.

One tapped Santa's shoulder, and said 'Have no fear',
I am Prince Lucas, and this is Duke of Goodyear.
The third, the tallest, declared 'I am Ed from China,
Stand aside as our magic restores this old car.'

With a bang and a flash, the drive train was renewed,
The chassis re-welded, the ash frame re-glued
A fresh coat of paint shone bright in the moonlight
New exhausts and twin horns gave the reindeer a fright.

Then the sleigh came down from the roof to the drive
To be hitched up behind and the car came alive
The reindeer were tuned out to graze on the back lawn
Santa hopped right in and with a wave he was gone.

So tradition was preserved, and both near and far
The presents were delivered by a red Morgan car.

The Primary⁴

Gary, was that madness,
when you lent me your primary?
Just sticks and fabric, sealed with dope
Held together by sinews of steel.
Exposed, I sat under a man made wing.
Winched up into the dawn sky
by a simple car pulled rope.
Barely higher than the tree tops
I soared amongst angels,
though it was the kindness of your trust
that was the most wonderful thing of all.

⁴ Gary, an instructor, had a vintage glider from the 1930s. I was a competent pilot, but had never met Gary before, so it was a genuine kindness on his part and also a significant act of trust to let me fly it, rather like a musician lending another musician their instrument.

Birdsong

The pigeons bluster,
bullying robins and sparrows,
pretending their gang
can call the shots until the starlings
come and sweep them all away.

A rook, shoulders hunched,
scans the lawn with hangdog eye,
as summer's gentle rain
caresses each glistening blade,
summoning worms to teatime.

A pair of blackbirds
proudly promenade their chick.
Insolently they
stare back, greedily gobbling
husks from the feeder above.

The trembling finches
seek asylum with cuckoos.
Magpies cease mischief
and sparrows mend their quarrels
when murdering crows pass by.

A moth alights

I had been warm and calm and comfortable, just one hour ago, swaddled like a baby, high in the skies, in my aluminium cradle.

From LA to JFK, I had boozed and snoozed across the continental divide until the thump of wheels on runway cleared my gin fogged head.

Driving north on Broadway, the billboards whispered to me in the darkness of the night.

No PowerPoint needed, they pitched their deal in compelling fonts of pink and neon, their USP a fragile, desperate promise of intimacy amongst the city millions.

Leaving the rental in a parking lot I set off towards the brightness of the light.

Sentenced in Arizona⁵

The hard, dry heat of the day lingers in the car park's
concrete pavement.

Liberated, it drenches me as I walk from car to restaurant.
Hotel California swirls from speakers buried in a basement.
Drowning in my everlasting business trip, I swim between
Hiltons.

Tonight I will dream of strawberries, cream and the rain
at Wimbledon.

⁵ The [American sentence](#), defined by Alan Ginsberg, is one that contains 17 syllables.

The fruit of life

I like apples.
Their cold, firm, sumptuous flesh
Golden Delicious
Aptly named.

I love pears.
How they yield in your mouth as you bite the crisp skin
and the sweet juices run down your chin,
from the secrets within.

I love the bag of cherries;
So bitter, sweet and sour,
stoning my mouth with a reddening frown.

But bananas are so sad, as they squish in my mouth.
There have been so many banana skins, all through my
life.

The gull

You think you are kind, tossing me a cold chip,
For me to swoop on, as I soar the sea wall.
Maybe you feel some guilt, for taking that cod
From out of the sea, and yes, out of my beak.
The batter looks so lovely and yellow and crisp.
Stuff your face full of chips, I really don't care.
Come hell or high water, the gulls will still soar,
but somehow I doubt I'll be seeing you there.

And is there honey still for tea?

There are 25 times more cod in the North Sea
Than rats on land in Britain.

So much more pleasant to have fish and chips for tea
Than chew on politicians.

How to make a nuclear bomb

Assemble your thoughts and assemble a team,
Accumulate ergs and accumulate dreams,
Focus your mind with the power of thought,
Burnish your intellect until you have wrought
A plasma so dense, so implausibly hot
That it makes atoms boil and fizz in the pot.
Now remember that God gave you freedom of choice
So throw down your bomb and prepare to rejoice.
Don't puff out your chest, but admit to your fraud,
And don't ever seek to call yourself Lord.

(written in the style of a slam poet)

That wasn't all she saw

She sees the Mongols on their monstrous rampage -
a firestorm of blood through the streets of Beijing.
She tastes the wounds as the arrows bite deep
in soft French flesh as they fall at Agincourt.
Her chest throbs to the thunder as the cannons proudly
speak
from the English oak castles in Aboukir Bay.
She chokes on the taste of the musket's soft smoke,
standing shoulder to shoulder with the Emperor's guard.
She hears the sharp crack of the ricochet above
as the Eagle is crushed under Wellington boot.
Entrenched then, her feet feel the hard bones beneath
as she wallows in the mud of Flanders' foreign fields.

She cries out - speechless and silent;
unable to voice her despair for her fallen friends.
All this she saw on Oxfam's bookshelves.

Pendine Sands

That sweet, lugubrious scent
of hot rubber and hotter oil,
Sticky in my lung,
Passion, then the speed
Sweeps the scent away.

The Ark

What did Noah's animals think
When the flood receded?
Did they miss their parents,
Did they miss their chicks?
Did the ewes know
It was not their sin?
That raised such a storm
And condemned their young lambs?

Arrival

I come from a king who is makerless
I come from a land that is unbound
I come from a place that is untaken
I come from a tribe that is proud

I come with a knee that is unbended
I come with a shield that is unbroken
I come with a sword that is unsullied
I come with my sons to rule here

The melted heart

When Jan'ry's chill brought glistening fields of ice
and February laid down carpets deep of snow,
a frozen man we made, a bower to our bliss,
with carrot nose and buttons of the blackest coal.
Oh, purest body, how we loved our toil.
Our hearts besought you Snowman, will you stay?
But, soon friends part; Then whither goes your soul
when March's rays so kiss the snow away?
Then dog, in loss, did wail and pant, and ate the carrot
anyway.

Aspects of Love

When you hesitate
to answer if you love me,
I know it's too late.

In the afternoon heat
a lolly in the freezer
left by you for me.

Sundaes

When you are young, sadness is not true melancholy
But merely a knickerbocker glory without a long
 spoon
But when childhood deepens into adult understanding
Then we learn there are no cherries at the bottom of the
 glass
And coldness remains even when the ice cream is gone.

A faithful friend

I only popped round for a cup of tea
but you were no longer there.
I knew you were going soon,
but I had not thought to be prepared.
Even though we knew that day would come,
Still, I was surprised that you had gone,
Your dog had sat watching by your side
A trusting guard, puzzled by the lonely night.
But now, his duty half-forgotten
he looked accusingly at me.
His dinner bowl lay empty
Filled to its brim with memory.