

*In the Debt of Love*

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The cover is a reproduction of J.M.W. Turner's  
'The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons, 16 October 1834' (1835).

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another:  
for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

— Romans 13:8

Then, I had no doubt  
That snowdrops, violets, all creatures, I myself  
Were lovely, were loved, were love.

— Kathleen Raine, from 'Exile'

& as if fame ever were the spur,  
ach y fi,                      love,

— John James, in a letter to *The English Intelligencer*



*[06/02/2021]*

I never write when I'm in love, except  
it's been a month & a year & a bit now.  
Since then I've written about felt tip pens,  
Manchester, window boxes, every ghost  
that I thought I knew the name of, the  
etymology of your community values  
& a few other things besides that.

## *Polished Coteries*

Trashed plus playful!

Pull up your real velvet curtains  
and open onto the scene's age.

It will be a hand-painted backdrop  
for the next Garden of England,  
with its truck lanes and paint fires  
loitering thru each of the primary  
colours of moss, forest, dirty finger  
nails, warehouse doorways, and  
the industrial guttering of Ashford.

Tell them not to stay out or stay in,  
just make a deal to step away. Tell  
your children what a mortgage is  
to a king, then what a king is to a  
provincial landlord. Tell them  
what a landlord is to the state  
of this last year's roundabout  
memorial poppy arrangement.

# *Litmus*

In the blurry care of January's weather, I listened to Lorenzo Thomas read a ballad all the way from Snow Hill to Grand Central.

I could have been imagining another poetry emergency for us to attend to, or remembering how every bright & miserable evening of this last summer felt as if litmus was being wrung through to blue. You forced out a joke, said *what a base imagination it would require to frame a scene of such violet nature*. It would only become funnier once it was February.

# Feedback Loop

after Maria Sledmere's 'Marshmallow'

When I read, Maria, I'm left to wonder  
if we could masticate our wonders, since we're already finished  
with these cinders. You know, it's the vegetable/desert paradigm  
of metaphysical theory. Asking if the busdriver is really a busdriver.

We've really transcended subject and object tonight!  
It's called a fall so let's enjoy the trip down.  
I hear Glasgow is marvellous this time of year.  
I hear Canterbury is marvellous this time of year.

I've been running at this wall for ten minutes now,  
my body is sure to rewrite the code sometime soon.  
I've been informed that this is how the world works  
ever since that we have cindered the manual.

So when I read, Maria, I'm left to wonder  
if we could masticate our wonders, since we're already finished  
with these wonders. Since it's the desert/second dessert  
paradigm of metaphysical theory. Asking *if*, you know.

# *Consolidate*

From here, the lilacs  
appeared as nearby lakes.  
Tactile recession into blue;  
they struck a deal with the sky  
on one of its 'good' days to reduce  
the 'cluttered social landscape'  
of one bloom beside another  
when seen from here.

There was talk of a lyric blur  
*taking my mind beyond image*  
*in to silence.* But no, no siree!  
This is pastoral with no pastiche,  
just natural, real blue.

# Midleafight

Caught that half-volley as carapace,  
in a versicle that's bright green, or an altar placed icon  
that burns and grasps and wanes.

A leaf in mid-sight from that moving window  
of a peat-laden land; this goodbye  
is as useful as oil, or the way that land lies.

Draws back and forth against the move-  
ment of a river that hooks itself with wild  
brown trout, all silted and bitter.

These moments of breath, they all bring  
brack in celebration of flow and matrimonial bonds,  
something we - or *I* - wish we could agree upon.

But now, here and now, is not  
then, or then the gravity of love lags behind  
these smiles and tongued almond graftings.

It's a bottle of what might have been in time,  
and yet time catches itself as an ill-  
timed cough, and stifles that movement.

## *Our Duty to be in the Debt of Love*

The transitory nature of debt makes us all hollow under the sun, so *imagine an arrow flying, as they say, at the speed of an arrow.* Concentrate on how it breaks thru the air, disturbing every rock dove that loiters here on a long Saturday afternoon. Concentrate on how these communal bursts of distress felt so good in the aftermath to fully understand how each debt I dedicated to the infinite reaches out to a velocity that feels like some other genre of failure.

*[05/03/21]*

Style might as well be what I'm made of!

Believing in the air, this language, and the unaffordable  
mistake of recognising different kinds of attention.

Honestly, I've been looking forward to how you'll spin  
this month into another swan's flustered wings.

## *Great Stour*

There isn't a story to tell about either time I walked from Canterbury to Ashford. They were long & quiet. I held water beneath the first viaduct on the first attempt. I thought I might learn something about grace & its mechanisms. I thought that it would be a good idea to reread *Mercian Hymns*. I called it an afternoon after reaching Wye & jumped on the bus since there were plans to host a house party on the corner of York Road.

After a few months, I held the water beneath that viaduct again. I hadn't slept for three days & started to sing *All Delighted People* a few hundred metres before Godmersham. The crows ignored me. The rock doves ignored me. I thought it would be a good idea to read *Dry Air*. Since there wasn't a house party that night, I walked out of Wye until I reached Ashford & then kept on walking up to Simone Weil's grave. I saw a Cineworld through the chainlink fence behind her stone. I prayed.

# *Sheer Glum Mockery of Legalese*

Thinking about every dull labour  
of love we carried in our backpacks,  
it became clear that each metaphor  
would end up scarring our patience.

We should have rung them up, eschewed  
lingua franca & interpreted several ways  
to create brighter worlds for us to share.

Like howling out of that care, or like  
some reaching stupid light, or like  
hinging lightly on the rendered  
ambiguity from a desk lamp.

[18/04/21]

Snared on AM light off each formica tableau,  
morning waited for us to notice its state of gracious  
snazziness. That kind of beaming public art centre  
kind of being in the centre of the city at dawn.  
Of course, I would fall in love with it all.

# *T\*ry is Not a Recognised Species (or, HS2 Construction Song)*

*Your journey starts here!*

*Please board on this most demanding  
and exciting transport project in Europe,  
which has no delays or drawbacks, just fair  
weather and the contract for seven hundred  
new homes that no-one on furlough could afford!*

We saw that you had pigs coming to sniff round  
the freshly dug troughs of your labour. Saw them  
from the centre-bound 907, sunning themselves  
in their natural state of feral boredom. Stopping  
your workers. *The two of you deserve each other,*  
I said. It's that kind of toxic relationship where  
your violence (to hedgerows from here to LDN)  
begs the necessity of their violence (to everyone)  
which begs the necessity to write-up the P&C bill  
during a national mass killing by intentional neglect.

*Your journey starts here!  
Across the country's finest  
blue cardboard walls, absolutely  
plastered and staring at the adverts  
for Christ Fulfilled with a mint centre  
(New Theology, Same Refreshment)!*

Huh. Maybe it's just that time of year, everything gets a little strange. We must have misread it. Misread *arbor* for *ardour*, thus losing another few hundred acres to the notion of a central loving being called LDN. Called connected living patterns, Called an economic powerhouse in the West Midlands which begs the necessity for your combined violence and a bat license. hilariously enough, this bat license does not protect bats or their loving being. They are not part of any powerhouse or living patterns.

*Your journey starts here!*

*The confirmed losses are 19 trees*

*with potential roosting features as part*

*of the removal of 0.7 ha of ancient woodland;*

*one common pipistrelle roost; alteration to conditions*

*of trees with potential roost features in the retained areas of the wood!*

We could go on, this song could last forever.

Your journey is only starting now, since it started

last Saturday with everyone on New Street who called

for that bill to be, *and please excuse my language,*

executed on the fucking spot. Called for it to be

come part of the central loving living pattern

with those 19 trees and roosts and leaves.

Called for it to be buried with those pigs

in their troughs or drowned in Bristol.

This song shouldn't last forever.

# *from church farm*

for the Poetry Reading Group

“what were we talking about again?”  
the narrator asked the graveyard  
-ten minutes flat-  
said the graveyard  
-the funeral only took ten minutes-  
“never tell that to anyone again,”  
the narrator severely replied

— Tongo Eisen-Martin, from ‘Faceless’



Since the saddest line in any poem I've ever misread  
was a joke, does this poem end or am I next?  
Boxing clear through these traffic islands in  
to the Bright Grey Skybox we call pavement,  
is this how I take on the varied forms of my therapy?  
How I talk about the dullness of suicidal ideation  
& each buzzed grief it causes? If *yes*, we could call it  
a complication of some naïve rustgut. Or alcoholism.  
Or whatever is being kept young for the next decade.  
If *no*, then, okay. I'm probably going to begin again.

Like Wittgenstein in a skin tight boilersuit  
rounding out the wind into something rich & strange,  
I'm murmuring in the hallways & haybales & droning  
waves that wash up some sworded boy with lyric eyes  
for a late night judgment call. The swift jumping jacks  
& the swifter crash of windows will be pain for honey  
suckle & all blue for grass as this boat is leaving from  
Dungeness at first light. There will be no pearls left,  
no lilac bushes & no more flamed amazement. *Yet*.  
Hear we are & the air again is glittering out there.

But I don't know what to do with all this air,  
so I spend a little on the laminate flooring.  
Afterwards, the fox tells me not to cry  
sing brutal instead & so I tell the fox  
that one day I will find & bite God  
with all this love I have for them.  
It will be as humble as an intervention  
& as simple as degaussing our student debt.  
We're five days sober & the fox likes to tell me  
about their coping habits, asking for another light.

Just like botanical topography or last night,  
the late modernist pamphlet is a subject  
not wholly without interest or value,  
but the fox is determined to deflect.  
They declare my love is the same as my language,  
being delineated by *Seven Types of Ambiguity*  
(Empson // Chatto and Windus // 1930).  
So, in no uncertain terms, I tell the fox to fuck  
right off. Uncracked though, they deter on.  
We could be anywhere by now, they say.

*Please.* I've been dreaming about the wasps again.  
Each wing & winglet flitted out, dished up onto the air.  
*Ladybird of the paraffin garden here's your eviction notice,*  
*we're renovating the clothes pegs & your time here's up.*  
Sleeping is a dream job & each application was rejected.  
Quote, "catch for us the fox first". But the fox is a comrade!  
Good comrades run slipshod and read aloud.  
Good comrades lay their prayers down in the river.  
Good comrades are strung up by the tail for sporting men.  
Anyway, I ruined their fucking vineyard, not the fox.

So I close glass eyes and cry myself to credit.  
The fox says I can't even knock on doors anymore.  
The fox tells me I drink too much.  
That I would scare away other & less loving comrades.  
So I nod & lay his prey down in the river again.  
I would not drink from these rivers.  
There are too many bodies.  
There are too many good comrades skinned.  
So good comrades need to be cruel  
& the fox is the cruellest comrade I love.

I suppose I'm working on the state of my social links  
because it's as spiteful as currency – *this lemon tree* –  
& your love is just another tactical cactus in a window box.  
Let's do brutal in the right way. Use more stained glass.  
Use this fully automatic non-lethal submachine gun.  
Use a bouquet of felt-tip flowers to propose on a bridge  
then use a bridge to throw - *you know, throw* - away a ring.  
Let's listen real close to the dead because any space  
can be a ghost, esp. the deck of a decommissioned  
gunship or the echo of a lover's eye. All spirals, etc.

But having invited so many red comets into my bed  
it's no wonder that the sheets are charred blonde  
as each blazing hot iteration likes to promise me  
some great socialist interstellar liberation & wow,  
doesn't that sound nice. Maybe I should stop asking  
if that's a war in their pocket or if you're just happy  
to see me. But then to ask every *what-if* is to invite end  
less ghosts to play our language games. So *what-if*,  
so *what-if* not, so *what-if* but, so *what-if* not but then  
please. Will you forgive this time forgetting?

Walking between the lakes on Nov. 5th, I tried to speak  
to each light with a polite & discordant granularity.  
Match their reflections with a tongue, their noisy bursts  
a recital of what Dylan Thomas would say on the floor  
in a handful of days, in only a few decades ago.  
The fox tells me that this is what private mythologies  
are made of. The meter of each bonfire spark, a bag of cans,  
& every other Wikipedia entry. Turning the langue to  
ward an owl & threading the needle out thru the AOL.  
Stitching into & out of light. That's all you need.

I suppose I will keep sending emails into the night.  
I suppose we share the thrill of proximate death by tractor.  
I suppose I'll read O'Hara's *Poem Read at Joan Mitchell's* again.  
I suppose I'm just a sucker for some revolutionary himbo.  
I suppose I'm experiencing *anxiety-of-communication* hours.  
I suppose we'll cross that Bridgers when we come to it.  
I suppose I'm really fucking crying tonight. I don't know.  
\*\*\*\*\*  
I suppose I care for the fox & I know the fox cares for me.  
After all, the guts of heaven are so bright between our teeth.



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