

## *PROSTITUTE*

- Queues to get in or out of the seedy port: like a punter at a brothel, being British means mastering the business of coming and going, the commerce of coitus interruptus with the Continent; means developing an intimate relationship with the mood of ports: one embraces their valedictory indifference as a matter of course. - A port is like a drab old prostitute who deals dispassionately with the intimacies of departures and arrivals. 'You've been away?' she curses as you pass through her. - 'Life goes on!' - 'You're back? Too bad. One more punter to get through today. -You're done? Now get out of my way...'

One never leaves a port without a sense of shame: one somehow always exits by a shabby side-door with the daylight fading, full of regret at having had recourse to the habit of coming home.

## *JIGSAW MIND*

Last night I went to bed  
Without putting my beliefs away.  
Now, on waking, I find that dreams  
Have fatally deconstructed my mind:

One look in the mirror confirms  
The full scale of the damage:  
My thoughts are misplaced:  
Ill-sorted motives collide in my face.

My politics don't fit with my ethics,  
My atheism is bent out of shape  
By the obvious ease with which  
Some form of god slips into place.

I am incomplete by several pieces -  
Who knows where the bits  
Of my conscience might be – let alone  
My odd-angled sensibility.

Love, marriage, sex, fatherhood,  
Delight, depression, laughter and loss:  
One gazes at these pieces of a life  
With a child's puzzlement:

And as a child I loathed jigsaws:  
So small a reward for so much brow furrowed;  
And the game presumes fracture,  
Revels in impasse and block.

So why the compulsion to keep faith  
With the rules of a trivial pursuit,  
To make unified sense of a faceted life?  
What if the edges aren't meant to fit?

What if there is no finished image intended,  
No picture supplied on the lid?  
What if the pieces are just what they are:  
Ecstatic clashes of ego and id?

And if so, who'd do a jigsaw just for the crack?  
If it was up to me I'd ban the whole concept,  
Or find the address of the mental inventor,  
Send the whole warped, rhomboid idea of me back.

## *JUNK BEAUTY*

Spring may be many things, but it is not a natural event... - To the mind bent on careful accounting, Spring is a distraction, an ignored knock at the door, an unsolicited package left on a mat. – Even to pick it up is fatal.

Spring - this circular junk season whose flippant pages play their transient trick of beauty on the senses! I flick through its catalogue suns and skies; scan its glossy, air-brushed images of rebirth and renewal with shocking scepticism. - What if I subscribe to its vogue for eternal youth and find it flawed as usual; find the year grows threadbare in autumn, leaving me with just another debt to disillusionment? Money doesn't grow on trees - But beauty does....

No, take its tragic blossom, its aphrodisiac perfumes and dump Spring in the bin. - In life you may not get what you deserve, but you do get what you pay for: the return on the beliefs you subscribe to...

Ah but, then again, free gifts are notoriously difficult to refuse, and in the hourly commerce of my hopes, I hadn't reckoned on Nature's seductive liberality; hadn't bargained for the nought-percent interest, 'pay-nothing-'til-winter', morally bankrupt, conscience-corrupting beauty of Spring..

## WOLFMAN

De-civilised by doubt, I roam the streets,  
Sift the refuse of throwaway remarks,  
Batten on the remains  
Of any petty kindnesses I find.

For warmth, I queue in supermarkets,  
But a certain wildness plays about my eyes  
And, suspicious of my dog-like friendliness,  
The check-out girl avoids my gaze.

I forgot to shave this week. Indeed,  
It may be that I am, in fact, a wolfman,  
A creature smitten with the rabies of solitude,  
Feverish with its forbidden truths.

As such, I carry an ironic contagion into the city:  
An indiscriminate appetite for contact ,  
A careless, canine love of my own kind - I'll infect  
Anyone with a weakness for laughter. Conversely,

Cursed with an uncanny nose for false refinement,  
I bare my teeth at any threat of domestication,  
Bite the hand that feeds me with tinned truths;  
Prefer star-filled skies to a neat, suburban kennel.

For this the dog-catchers are on to me:  
Marshalls of opinion, lovers of uniform,  
Young and old, denim and pinstripe, pursue me -  
Sanctimony meshed to net my untamed thoughts.

And with good reason: one bite from me  
Means an agonising transformation into a creature  
That barks at the moon and howls for its mate;  
Whose ferocious joys no love can satisfy or lust abate...

## *ALLOWED ONE PHONE-CALL*

There's no better medium for bitter misunderstandings.

With its clipped tones and clandestine physiognomy, the telephone perfects the technology of enmity.

Besides which, mother simply refused to understand: (this wasn't the first time I'd 'let her down': years ago father told her I 'wouldn't come to much'). But for god's sake, why should I go to the funeral? I'd had no contact with the deceased and now indisputably distant aunt – (our family never having constituted a clan, nor held each other in sufficient regard to merit so much as the price of a stamp or gaudy annual postcard). - No, I batted not an eye at the old bird's death. Added to which, I was otherwise engaged: a gaol of my own making, maybe, but the regime of artistic solitude was rigorous. Anyway, couldn't mother go on her own? - Did she really still need her hand held?

This heavy-weight resentment rebounded, the maternal gloves came off: sentiments were suddenly bare-knuckled. I was - three decades on – reminded of wiped bottoms and breast-feeding; called to remember the indignity of birth, the utter dependency of childhood, the debt of love unpaid, unrepayable! Then, castrating all communication, she put the phone down on my impotence...

Sent thus to bed without my supper, I performed a creditable impersonation of manhood: did some DIY, menial tasks about the house - would, perhaps, have gone to vespers, or written a letter, with a sharpened quill, had this been the 1550s, which is presumably the mindset that mother's motives move in.-

*What is it you want, you women?* Isn't it enough that life's river flows from your source? Must you control its course forever? - Don't all rivers end up in oceans? Mustn't a man dive into a mortal cold sea, and risk nearly drowning to rescue masculinity? - Can he only break free of your current in death? - *Is death the one last great masculine act?*

It's no good: I'll have to call mother back.

## *SIMPLE PLEASURES?*

The sun on one's back; work with one's hands;  
Wine in the evening; a hot bath with a book;  
A languorous gesture, a laugh, a humorous look;

Standing on the edge of evening, diving into the flow  
Of the high street, the shoal-shimmering shiver  
Of crowds changing directions; idle chatter

On corners, old men and women locking horns;  
Inconsequential philosophy in cafes, ice cream,  
On hot days, a lightness of touch in discussions;

Couples in love beyond all bounds of reason,  
Striking theatrical poses in timeless tableaux:  
The naivety of romance in its short-lived season;

Back home, the intimacy of silence or laughter,  
A fire in the hearth, the kitchen's aroma,  
Food on the table, the sofa and drowsiness after -

All relieve the dyspepsia of rumbling, ulcerous despair;  
But the appetite for abandonment returns: - always  
This hunger for rapture, a ravening ecstasy beyond compare.

## *MORTICIAN*

So: winter again. - Winter, with its professional interest in - one might almost say, morbid proclivity for - housing the remains of dead things; winter, whose clinical cold emptiness compels an inquiry into the nature of what has died within us; - winter, that makes pathologists of us all.

Memory is our laboratory; regret, a scalpel: objectivity is all. Nothing survives of the past apart from our dissection of it, the pathologist's report into the cause of death: the aetiology of relationships, our analysis of guilt and blame: the 'how', 'why', 'where' and 'when' of what's gone wrong between us, which resentments could've been prevented, which friendships fostered, habits left off or begun, which lives led better.

Objectivity is all. - Or maybe not. Maybe objectivity itself is pathological?

I date and label my thoughts about our recent discord like clues - forensically anatomise the loss without locating it, until analysis becomes detached and itself almost academic - the act of reflection impersonal and sterile, a casual washing of hands – efficient and professional.