

The Distracted Globe  
A Project in the Practice of Writing Poetry

JANE ELIZABETH BLUETT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of Nottingham Trent University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2011

## Copyright Statement

This work is the intellectual property of the author. You may copy up to 5% of this work for private study, or personal, non- commercial research. Any re-use of the information contained within this document should be fully referenced, quoting the author, title, university, degree level and pagination. Queries or requests for any other use, or if a more substantial copy is required, should be directed to the owner of the Intellectual Property Rights.

## Abstract

*The Distracted Globe* is a project in the writing of poetry. It is an example of research conducted through creative practice and comprises a collection of original poetry, *The Silent Book*, and an accompanying reflective commentary.

Thematically, the poems deal with adolescence, education, the English Language, mental health, death and loss, gender representation, sexuality and polarisation.

Significant subject matter includes: the English Language, English Literature, places, in particular Blackpool, London and Nottingham, madness, with specific reference to Bipolar Affective Disorder.

The poetry explores the recreation and transformation of literary texts and the manipulation of fairy tale conventions. The poems are a mixture of free verse and traditional forms.

The reflective commentary objectively discusses the writing processes and complimentary creative processes involved in the production of *The Silent Book* and significant developments in the work of the poet. It also contextualises the poetry through reference to the work of other poets, historical and contemporary and to poetic traditions.

The potentially conflicting roles of teacher and poet are explored as is the need for a context for poetry, with particular emphasis on audience and purpose. The multimodal nature of poetry in terms of reading and listening audiences and written and spoken modes of production is also considered.

As a doctoral project, *The Distracted Globe* makes an original contribution to the academic fields of Creative Writing and English in Education.

# The Silent Book

## Contents

The Globe.....	8
Almah .....	9
Confirmation .....	10
The Rumour .....	11
Beside the Seaside .....	12
Blackpool.....	13
Schadenfreude .....	14
Mixed Abilities .....	15
Breaking the Waves .....	16
Horizon.....	17
Protected Sex.....	18
Ophelia at the Clinic .....	19
Queer .....	20
Mary Gives Advice on Contraception .....	21
Stations of the Very Cross.....	22
Granny's Guns .....	25
Where the Clever Women Are.....	26
Hamlet's Big Sister .....	27
Sibling Rivalry.....	28
Outsider.....	29
Foreign Feathers .....	30
Dear Mr Larkin.....	31
Tourist Map .....	32
TEFL Tales.....	33
Breast Flasher Jailed for Assault, Brighton 2006.....	34
This Poem has been Drinking .....	35

Semantic Shift .....	36
London Calling .....	37
Beauty Sleep .....	38
Marc Almond's Poodle .....	39
Squats and Sound Systems .....	40
Morituri te Salutant .....	41
Needle Pricks .....	42
Little Red .....	43
The Little Mermaid.....	44
Goldilocks and Baby B .....	45
Snow .....	47
Avalanche.....	48
Postcards .....	49
Merry Go Round.....	50
Moon .....	51
Mirror .....	52
Melancholia I .....	53
Alice's Tears.....	54
Hospice .....	55
Weeds .....	56
Sleeping Beauty .....	57
Poor Ghost .....	58
A Day will Come .....	59
The Last Line.....	60
Psychogrammar .....	61
The Last Session.....	62
Mappery .....	63

Field .....	64
Four Ways with Words .....	65
Living Together.....	66
Past Presence .....	67
Don't Call Me Alison .....	68
She Answers Back .....	70
A Private Place.....	72
Noel Street Baths, Nottingham .....	73
At Newstead Abbey, 2008.....	74
A Crow at Blidworth.....	75
Arthur Seaton is Alive and Well .....	76
Picture This .....	77
Head of English .....	78
Slut.....	80
T.S. Eliot Awards, London, 2010 .....	82
Nushu.....	83

## The Globe

Like a child behind a curtain,  
the globe turns, uncertain of detection.

The child turns pages,  
grips the silent book as tight as a pencil.

Take turns to unearth a child distracted  
by the digging up of words.

Poet, playwright and harmless drudge reach out,  
keep phrases turning.

The globe turns its pages to the sun,  
at the centre, a child is reading.



## Almah

When I was a young girl, I spoke Hebrew.  
I was happy in my words and in my husband,  
the writer. It was he saw I was happy,  
wrapped me up, wrote me down.

And so they came to read me, interpret, translate.  
In Greece my reputation grew as large as my belly.  
I was no longer the woman of my world.  
My words were mapped by men of letters.

In England they changed the colour of my skin,  
wrote in whispers, gave me a sister.  
I became the great impossibility,  
and she, the other me, a silent whore.

*Almah is the Hebrew word used to describe Mary in the Bible. It attracted connotations of virginity when translated into Greek.*

## Confirmation

At four I saw the big girls taking bread,  
asked why and was told off  
by nuns  
who said I had to draw boys burning.

'Were there dinosaurs in the Garden of Eden?'  
The nuns didn't much care for dinosaurs.  
The nuns gripped sticks. One afternoon  
I had to crawl across a table.

Every fishy Friday we walked back from church,  
careful of the lines.  
It must have worked,  
I never married.

At eleven, in another school,  
a teacher asked, 'What religion are you?'  
I hardly knew but remembered the bread,  
the smells, the bells, and hell.

'Ah, a Catholic.'  
'Am I, Mummy, am I?'  
The slap of my mother's face said all.  
This was my fall, she had to confess.

There would be no white lace dress,  
no wine, no transubstantiation,  
just guilt, by the gut full,  
for ever and ever amen.

## The Rumour

He sat in an outside toilet,  
flaking off paint with his fingers,  
half knowing it would come.

First whispers, then sniggers,  
after two seconds silence,  
the flush.

His new shoe confidence  
was destroyed by a big boy,  
through a window.

He wept into his little hands  
that could no longer reach  
the bolt on the door.

## Beside the Seaside

Oh you do. Gas rigs twinkle blue, reflect  
the carnage at my feet. Hard promenade,  
the great Victorian front of Blackpool.  
Cold tart, she's pricked by a creaking mast, red  
rust, no sail. Sharp wind pierces family  
fun. Elephants and wurlitzers squeal: pink  
candy, unflossed teeth, grey trunks, DSS  
wildlife. A real field of chips and bingo,  
slots of fun, prize every time. Sanded down,  
the tarnished mile is empty, spent, cashed up  
on the shore with cream cones and condoms. I  
will leave her a full fat word, a wave of  
breath, a small wet death, five for a pound sound,  
fresh, wrapped and boxed for a safe journey. Home.

## Blackpool

They'd all been there once  
but few returned or yearned for the tawdry face,  
the candy floss sweetness of her breath  
that waited to give them the time of their lives,  
the Big One.

She was cheap and she was cheerful,  
there were penny slots to be had  
and nothing bad would happen on pound- a- pint night.  
Everything must go.

Her love life was seasonal, cash in hand,  
as the tide slapped in and out,  
hard labour on a hard promenade.  
There were no virgin sands.

Hers was a beach of pleasure,  
gawped at from the back of cars.  
A million scars in neon,  
a million plastic stars.  
They'd all been there once.

## Schadenfreude

Schooldays are the happiest.

I remember the one when Tracy Rogers  
fell, face forward on the muddy grass  
with half the third year cheering.

The mud looked like shit  
in her blonde bobbed hair,  
on her perfect tits, on her big fat mouth.  
Her pixie boots were ruined.

But the happiest thing  
about Tracy's fall  
was the bruised look on her muddy face  
when I held out my hand.

## Mixed Abilities

In the third year  
they stopped streaming,  
mixed us up,  
tried a new experiment.  
I sat with a boy  
who couldn't read *Macbeth*.  
I reached into his pocket  
and found a dagger before me.

I could have saved him  
as he drowned  
in bloody language.  
Hard lesson.  
He was the best looking boy  
in the class  
but not my class  
or so my mother told me.

## Breaking the Waves

Low tide is cold.

Quiet folds and licks become sand.

A steady foothold shifts.

She is alone tonight by Victorian railings.

Blue paint peels and seagulls mock sound,

steal her voice as she is swept away.

At high tide, waves boom, become sea.

Now the moon might drown the world

in a lunatic flood.

Blackpool's book is unread,

and she has written it in sand

to an audience of seagulls.

When the sun shines as bright as death,

sand burns her feet.

The silent shingle moulds itself to the soul.



## Horizon

At sixteen we shared Blackpool.  
A cold concrete heart  
that smouldered like the butt of friendship  
in the ashtray of the North West.

Summers full of floss and tat,  
hopeless guys in hopeful bars,  
drunk on chat and chips.  
Vinegar soaked vanities.

The tide was out the day you left  
and the barking gulls seemed to say  
that there were other coastlines,  
more than illuminations and trams.

## Protected Sex

It was always there.  
The potential child,  
like an imaginary friend,  
somewhere behind adolescence.  
In the shadow of first cravings  
it followed the blood.

When Mandy did it,  
took a stand one night  
and pushed it out as loud as a playground,  
she opened up the can of words:  
screw, shag, slut, slag, slut, shag, screw, slag.  
A messy business.

So we took arms. Pill,  
cap, clumsy condom.  
The trouble stopped. Our condition  
shifted. Would. Should. Could. We were safe,  
safe from the clutch of the clinic,  
childproof as bottles.

## Ophelia at the Clinic

I have the daughter's disease, a diseased  
daughter, always too close to the water  
and slightly hysterical. Or so they  
say. I like to put it another way.

When a girl reaches a certain age, a  
certain stage in her life, she craves a bit  
of excitement. Stuck at home with Father,  
who watches every move you make, you take  
the first opportunity. The boy next door,  
had the looks, read books, talked me into it.  
Big mistake. He had his cake, promptly packed  
his bags, and went to sea. No thought of me.  
Of course I'm hysterical. Stuck in this  
place for hours. At least there are flowers.

## Queer

Little Girl, with curly hair, did what she was told.

Her mother said 'What's on your head is worth its weight in gold.'

Little Girl thought this was cool,  
that was, until she went to school.

When the boys came out to play  
she had to hide her curls away.

With hat on head she decided to try  
and kiss the girls but made them cry.

Later, when her head was shaven,

Little Girl became quite brazen,  
kissed the boys with pretty faces,  
lads with lipstick in all the right places.

At last she grew bored with puppy dog tails,  
so she sliced them off with immaculate nails.

Finally free, with a blonde on each arm,  
she knew that her treasure was safe from harm.

## Mary Gives Advice on Contraception

It's best not to talk to strangers in the dark.

Avoid spirits and men called Gabriel.

If you get caught out

reinvent yourself

like Madonna

like a virgin.

## Stations of the Very Cross

The nun on the bus,  
in blue, was beatific.  
I sat at the back  
in black.

I confessed  
to the therapist  
who was Irish,  
silent and unforgiving.

Cousin Peter got fat  
in Rome. He came home  
to be adored,  
perform marriages.

Uncle Ray, the doctor,  
was gay.  
He swapped Ireland  
for the Emerald City.

The aunt, presumed missing  
by the Poor Clares,  
took on airs. She spoke  
to the gods in the sink.

Granny had a sacred heart.  
She took us to masses  
of lightning speed  
in Latin.

In the seventies  
Popes died like rabbits  
and Elvis.  
Men in frocks.

And how shall you be,  
my child,  
when you choose to sleep  
with a ghost?

Heavenly host!  
I watched the clouds  
all Easter Sunday,  
waiting.

When he finally came  
I uttered his name  
too loudly.  
They locked me away.

Mary, Mary,  
quite contrary,  
which one shall you be?  
It's Magdalene for me.

How do they pronounce  
that in Oxford?  
The Lord's Prayer  
has two endings.

One, where our father  
swears at the tomb  
of the Bishop of Dublin.  
Sweet Jesuit!

Another, where a mother  
weeps for a dead boy.  
Pieta.  
Cold hard stone.



## Granny's Guns

*C.S. Lewis has a lot to answer for.*

Every year we packed ourselves for Ireland.

It was a long way and people spoke differently there.

At Liverpool, the ferry was dark, duty free and drunk.

Police were suspicious of Daddy's accent.

Kilmallock, County Limerick, at last we were at Granny's house.

We tumbled into the familiar smell of bacon and spud.

It was a playground with two staircases, one up, one down.

In the bedroom at the back were the trophies.

A colossal silver cup for greyhound racing,

the grinning head of a fox for Granny's shoulders,

shoes that had danced a different tune before Grandad died,

the Sacred Heart, kept warm by a plastic candle.

Looking for Narnia, behind silks, furs and mothballs,

I found instead three handsome rifles, like trees, sentinels to another land.

I cried, 'Daddy, what are these?'

Pulling me out of the wardrobe, he replied, 'Look at the rabbits!'

## Where the Clever Women Are

The good lecturer talks about signposts  
through fresh printed pages that turn in new  
directions. This woman talks it easy  
but the fresh map in her clever mouth is  
not there or here. Each contour disappears  
as it is spoken, horizons vanish.

The words are impossible to manage,  
their co-ordinates smudge my page. Muddy  
footprints ask me, 'Have we been here before?'

At half past four, she folds the world away.

On my own two feet again, I stumble,  
but decide to follow the breadcrumbs home,  
where my mother will mend my map for me,  
certain, fixed and plotted from A to B.

## Hamlet's Big Sister

We heard the news in England.  
Your insane attempt at family  
therapy, failed. I said it would,  
but no one listened.  
All talk, no action.

And who voted you Daddy's girl  
all of a sudden? When you dished out  
the parts, where was mine?  
Danish swine. You should have  
loved your mother.

She loved you. As most mothers do –  
in the knowledge that  
they can't compete. When I  
left home, I left. No weekend visits  
even for funerals,

even to be told that I was fat and wheezing  
from the fags. *That's what happens to  
drunken slags*, you said.  
And now you're dead. Who  
will clean your messes now?

Not me, sweetheart brother. I am not  
your mother or even her daughter.  
My broken crown will mend alone  
with words, written, unheard.  
I'll write of you in England.

## Sibling Rivalry

In Wamena, Indonesia,  
my brother lives with ancient men,  
fruit gatherers who celebrate the dead in vivid colours.  
Above the trees, above the rain,  
he prays for peace in a language I will never understand.  
He sends me pictures to click and save.

In Nottingham, England,  
I watch my garden from the first floor window.  
The apple tree sighs as its fruit drops.  
I cannot rescue fruit,  
but I can read the words of ancient men,  
write the death of apples.

## Outsider

I am outside.

A lock that will not give

sucks time through its cold mouth.

The locksmith turns the hole to wood shavings.

I am outside.

On a tiled threshold time turns tight.

The locksmith splits cold ridged steel.

He picks and pushes, expert.

I am outside.

He is in.

## Foreign Feathers

In the dead church in Naples, pigeons hold communion,  
puffed dry against the rain in uniform habits.

The stone hand of St Peter directs their chorus,  
a familiar rounded rhythm in the accented air.

Men shout in the streets,  
an urgent compulsion of sound.

I wish for ancient Italian rain to soften  
my tongue for flight.

Too little time to translate, the church is dead.

Tonight I will speak pigeon and pray.

Dear Mr Larkin

I think I met you once at a station.

I remember your inch- thick specs,

your large hands ungloved,

the receding hairline.

You talked to my friend,

they all did in the end,

as I waltzed off in nylons

and shoes a la mode.

I never read books but loved the jazz,

the dudes, their smiles, their talk,

up close and personal.

They loved the fur, the bosomy sax,

the dark, grunting silence.

Had I met you twice I might have smiled.

I'm not someone to talk to.

With your inch- thick specs

you might have thought me beautiful.

## Tourist Map

Take a trip. Book your flight. Hold your passport tight.

The return ticket burns in your hand.

When you land, the sober sun will send you stars,  
lighter than words, to direct you.

The jazz blue sky is high

as your fingers reach to grasp your Mappa Mundi.

The beat of history is strong and red. Rule the world.

Turn it off its head. Be connected.

See, you came at last, into the past.

Give me your gripping hand, understand  
that I am God, not Mephistophilis.

All words are right in the noiseless night.

We'll swim from pole to pole, swallowed whole

by your counter culture clichés, be OK

because your ticket is return.

I must burn in the sober sun, watch you sleep.



## TEFL Tales

Today we're on the road  
with a teaching load the size of language.  
It's time to wash mouths out with English  
freshen foreign breath with what is left of our profession.

John will teach the syntax of sex,  
Clare, the grammar of recipes.  
We'll act out MTV, declare  
'It's showtime! Are you ready to learn?'

The mushroom students  
are still in the dark  
as we feed them the ancient stench of coursebooks.  
The words of Fawlty Towers are ours.

Back at the pension, lessons are learned  
but few euros earned in exchange for language.  
Thankfully, at the bar, we've taught English for years,  
'Time, gentlemen, for two fucking beers?'

## Breast Flasher Jailed for Assault, Brighton 2006

Intelligent woman with issues  
flashes her tits in a bar.  
Glorious vodka filled tits  
assault the air and the other drinkers  
who prefer their tits passive.  
She cries 'Here they are, arrest them.  
take them in, send them down.  
They will spit in the mouths of children  
if you let them.'

## This Poem has been Drinking

*Man being Reasonable must get Drunk*  
- Lord Byron

I have been bibacious in my time  
and, sometimes fallen off wagons.  
I'm tired and emotional, I guess,  
a washed up, crapulous mess.

School's to blame – where I first got caned  
and battered. I tried to aim high but just got tight  
too fat to fight,  
too many pies in the eyes  
to smell the coffee.

Love? Well let's just say she was lush. The one.  
She blurred my vision, left me comfortably numb  
and left me,  
something about newts and fish.  
Now I wish I was away with the fairies.

So, here I am, alone, listening to Brahms, maybe a little Liszt.  
Intoxicated by the life I've missed, I contemplate my lot –  
a tanked up, bladdered, pickled sot.  
This life is junk.  
So, being a reasonable man, I'll just get drunk.

## Semantic Shift

Each day at six,

the usual fix.

Should we have supper

or should we have tea?

Or would we be elegant

and possibly thinner

if we gave in to etiquette

and simply had dinner?

## London Calling

Air smacks hard like face to face discussion,  
filthy words, small tight fists.

Air, gulped last, gulped longest,  
smart enough to cry.

The city is a hot mouth of air,  
red, foul as voices.

Breathe deep. Choke on words.  
Take the last line home.

## Beauty Sleep

She often woke up in strange places  
with the feeling she'd lost her shoes.

This morning, she was frozen.

She had believed another handsome prince,  
fallen for his happy, here, right now, routine.

Hair spilled down the side of someone's bed,  
her crimson mouth lay quiet, she dared not breath.

In this glass tomb, she would lie still, white as ice  
for as many years as it took the prince  
to notice her cold rejection.

## Marc Almond's Poodle

A house where people left things,  
moments, Mondays, memories,  
a great big shell of a house.

Young divas with make-up thicker than skin  
left virginites and STDs upstairs,  
the contents of their stomachs in sinks.

Lads with lethal manes of hair,  
like furtive flamingos,  
left brew stains and spliff burns on sheets.

I left my heart every time,  
like a marshmallow sacrifice,  
no matter how I hardened it.

A few left sanity  
in the top room,  
the exit was a long way down.

The day Marc Almond left his poodle,  
we knew the house was damned  
or beautiful.

## Squats and Sound Systems

I live in this house  
without consent.

It is cold in winter and summer.  
There are no curtains.

When the shutters are closed,  
I am in another world.

A world with its own rules  
and no carpets.

A world of noise,  
and artificial light.

It comes alive at night.  
Pills and medication

are dished out  
and sleep evicted.

This house has stood so long.  
Its façade is real though its innards crumble,

held together by noise,  
just enough to fall apart.



## Morituri te Salutant

Quicksilver, Cyclone, Saddle Sore,  
despatchers ride their muscles raw,  
devouring the streets of the City,  
warrior proud and angel pretty.  
Speed is a hard road, A to Z,  
keeps him thin and breaks his head.  
Every day delivers a race,  
filthy nails and a rain slapped face.  
He's drunk on London's cancerous kiss,  
fingers crossed for a hit and miss.

His lycra's green like his teeth and hair,  
his thighs as wide as Soho Square.  
His gorgeous arse is lurcher fit -  
if he could just slow down a bit.  
On Fridays you wait, you always do,  
for his last despatch, his life to you.  
The Duke of York is his final mission,  
cycle widow is your position.  
While there's beer and a road to travel,  
he'll spin his wheels as your daily threads unravel.

## Needle Pricks

A little girl in need of love  
walked into a room,  
to witness an unholy union,  
a flesh and steel communion.

Confirmed, she patted  
her snow white arms and thighs.  
It was the start,  
he became the prick in her heart,

the thorn in her rosy cheek.  
A hundred years later,  
she drove a comb into his head.  
Her prince was dead.

## Little Red

I was happy in the woods.  
The nights were dark as bark,  
the clubs were packed with predatory eyes,  
intent on the chase, the game, the good time.  
It always ended the same,  
on a bed of needles.  
Quite by surprise I left one day.  
The trees gave way to a city of gold  
where they gave me credit for everything.  
I took taxis through the woods at night  
threw small change from the window.  
They were dying in the woods.  
In the city the lawyer who wed the accountant  
lived corporately ever after.  
Lies grow fat behind pinstripes,  
glass slippers become ceilings.  
'Wear a shorter skirt little girl,  
keep the clients happy.'  
I wish, I wish, I wish.  
No one likes a girl who knows what she wants.  
Woodcutters came with clipboards,  
cut off my head, filled it with stones  
until my mind rattled:  
take me back to the woods  
to the damaged goods,  
take me back to the darkness,  
back to the truth,  
take me back to the good time,  
back to the big bad wolf.

## The Little Mermaid

We let you go out on the water that night,  
in search of a prince, but the cool kiss  
of the Thames, old and trusted father,  
who you loved best, stopped your lover's song  
with his dark dirty mouth. He took your golden hair  
in his filthy fingers and dragged you down  
to where the knotted flow of water is neither  
loud nor long but silent, where stones  
will tear the feet of an angel as she falls.

They dredged you out as pale as a mermaid,  
cut off your hands, cut off your beautiful  
little hands, the hands that made the air sing,  
on a rooftop, somewhere in the City.  
Only the tattoo told us it was you,  
we never saw your golden smile again.  
A cruel collision at Canon Street Bridge  
and then silence, ever, ever after.  
Sweet Thames run dry, you have killed your daughter.

## Goldilocks and Baby B

*Goldilocks was drop-dead gorgeous.*

*It was no surprise when he dropped down dead.*

Cut for an Angel, from public school threads,  
his thick golden curls turned to dreads  
in no time, the time it took to squander  
an education. He chose instead to wander  
the streets of London, looking for a bed,  
somewhere to lay that Cupid head.

The little girls let him in.

He was pitifully thin,  
as thin as a line of speed  
with a heart that was born to bleed.

He knew it was hard to be rich,  
so he took up the arms of some airhead bitch  
that needed sating.

There was always a lady in waiting.

On the night of the ball, he was staggering pissed,  
dancing he strutted, sitting he missed  
the chair and fell smilewards to the floor  
with a grin that made Baby B sore  
with forgiveness. Tonight she was a princess  
with an eye for a wolf, however useless.  
He had coat hanger shoulders and razor blade hips,  
Baby B licked her wolf starved lips.

No! said the dairymaid.

No! said the Queen.

No! said the boy at the bar who cared.

No! said the whole bloody lot of them.

A less stubborn princess would have listened.

Goldilocks' dilated pupils glistened  
as he slurred through the room to her side,  
to the point where the two would collide.

'Too drunk to chat you up, miss,  
give us a kiss.....'

Not poetry, but to the purpose. She spoke  
not a word, but with the slur of his kiss she awoke

to a world of sighs  
to blue-black thighs  
to the love of her life  
an uncertified wife  
a crownless queen with her head for the chop  
high on a fairy tale she couldn't stop

## Snow

It had snowed for twenty years.  
For twenty years, no one thought  
of venturing up that road again.  
The snow fell.  
What lay at the top of the path  
melted  
from mind  
from talk  
from legend.  
Twenty years of snow  
littered and concealed.  
A white blanking of memory.  
So cold.

## Avalanche

It was quiet at first,  
a few disturbances at the summit,  
small vibrations underfoot.  
They noticed that the sun  
became unbearably bright,  
as bright as blindness.  
Birds sang as if life itself were a chorus.  
Leaves shivered green  
with all the knowledge of the world.  
Year upon year of snow  
severed itself from its foundations,  
then the roar.



## Postcards

The day the postcards came  
wasn't a Tuesday,  
it was the middle of much.  
First, a seaside pink grotesque  
wished I was here.  
Then kittens with blue ribbons  
greeted me from somewhere else.

One after one they came  
like an avalanche.  
I tried to kill the postman  
but they wouldn't stop.  
Just the drop, drop, drop  
onto the not so welcome mat.

Postcards from everywhere.  
So where was I?  
Not where you would wish to be  
beside the seaside  
beside the sea.

I grabbed one of a donkey in a hat,  
looked for my address,  
it wasn't there.

It wasn't a Tuesday.  
Wish you were here?

## Merry Go Round

Flowers are as bright as currency.  
Use them on the bus to pay the driver.

Sparrows wash themselves  
in love pools on the window sill.

Noise is so strong it breaks walls.  
You must go barefoot in the city streets and smile.

The whirligig shifts.  
Carnival people point and cheer.

You bow to the loud crowd, throw back your arms  
with an overwhelming yes.

It is the last day,  
the day before the rain.

## Moon

laughs like a lunatic strapped in a circle.

My wolf belly itches the horizon.

Moon's blood drips on stolen bed sheets.

I am confined to a room for a hundred years.

You explore me with disgust,

a slaughtered animal.

The sticky sweet taste of murdered love

howls to Moon for a bloody kiss.

## Mirror

Are you still here?  
In this morning debris I get the sense  
of cigarettes, wine and sweat,  
something half alive.

Each night, I'll drink you out  
to come back to myself.  
I'll meet disaster half way,  
be abandoned.

I need to be alone or dead  
inside this crumpled head.  
I am as ugly as regret.  
Are you still here?

## Melancholia I

The builders have been in. She sighs.  
It is grey twilight, Angel empties her bag.  
Her instruments clatter onto old wood that feels no pain.  
She slumps into a chair, kicks off the shoes  
that bind her feet in public. This is the moment  
she would call for the child, if she had one.  
The dog hasn't been fed for days, it sleeps thinly.  
Angel's humour is black and she laughs to herself.  
The dress she wears doesn't suit her, it feels big,  
like a man's imagination. The builders have left tools:  
slide rule, athanor, set square, pincers, hammer, plane.  
Instinct checks her pockets, purse and keys chime,  
remind her that the bell is broken.  
The room is like a sea, alarmingly calm,  
strewn with debris. Her hair itches.  
Angel nudges the contents of her bag, interested, indifferent.  
She checks the numbers that always add up the same,  
They tell her that she is and will be thirty four.  
Angel notices the clock has stopped, notices instruments and tools.  
Later she will carve her name in thick bloody gouges,  
feel at last the crack of her spine and tearing skin.  
She will count, swallow hard and scatter the room.  
Clawing the manmade fibres of her dress,  
she will allow her wings.

## Alice's Tears

A yellow moon is in the sky,  
the colour of matchboxes.  
It seeps between green curtains,  
spills tears into her sleeping head.

As each tear breaks, it speaks.  
Wet words are slow and must run to get dry.  
Faster, louder, rounder, harder,  
mother, brother, sister, father,  
A spin cycle to dry the tears  
of the world as she hears it  
from the unstable deck of her bed.

When tears are as dry as tinder,  
the lifeboats of reason ignite.  
She must jump overboard  
to save the burning words and swim,  
like Alice,  
because she can.

## Hospice

Through the window, light is a tunnel of dust.

It picks out prints like a crime scene.

Loud plastic wrapped tight around twelve pink roses  
announces its manmade transparency.

The sellotape is tight, necessitating scissors.

There are too many leaves.

Pulled and discarded, they become a superfluence  
on a stainless draining board.

Strapped to the stems like a plaster  
is a small white sachet,

a sugar sized afterthought.

The words on the side declare

that the powder will prolong life for two to three days.

It clouds the water like Alka-Seltzer.

## Weeds

She wears a blue hat pin.

It pierces the felt of the old black hat,  
shines blue black like a bruise  
of felt.

There is a season for hats  
that turns on the axis of pin.

An accessory  
in felt.



## Sleeping Beauty

Because you were pricked by a needle,  
there was no glass coffin,  
just hardwood from the Co-op.

The apple in your throat stuck  
as they pushed you into the oven.

There was no wake up kiss.

I cut briars with my heart.

## Poor Ghost

I remember first the bleached blonde light of you  
haloed in the furious city sun,  
the backcombed, breathing leather nights of you,  
when Time had winked and we had just begun.  
I remember when I squatted days of you,  
we lost our minds like keys and we were one.  
We kissed and I drank in the breath of you,  
so drunk I knew how games were lost and won.  
I remember how I loved the poking bones of you,  
your skinny swagger, gorgeous girly run.  
I would have chased the shadow that was left of you  
when Time came to evict, when Time was done.  
I remember how I longed to hear the last of you  
and listening for your words, found there were none.

## A Day will Come

There will come a day when I won't need to write  
about you or the things you did and said.

A day will come when the clogging crap just might  
have flushed itself, the innards, from my head.

There will come a day when the lovers' rose you stole  
no longer burns its petals to my eyes.

A day will come when the honey coated hole  
you left between my legs will take its prize.

Until that day our summers will ignite  
a petrol bomb of passion on the page.

Until the day when I can pen you right  
there's nothing else but love and loss and rage.

## The Last Line

This is the last line I will ever write  
for you, your eyes, your rotten smile, your lies  
of love and death, your refusal to fight.

I see you now in the mean sweat of night,  
a tortured traitor stripped of his disguise.  
This is the last line I will ever write.

Unwritten lines curl like day- old bread, white  
as my skin in Summer. Will no -one speak  
of love and death, your refusal to fight?

The anger in your mouth is far too tight,  
too short as you spill it. Sweet savage sighs.  
This is the last line I will ever write.

In a comfortable chair, in orange light,  
I will curb my silence and fantasise  
of love and death, your refusal to fight

but never to conquer those thoughts of flight  
on paper, in words, in anger, in cries.  
This is the last line. I shall never write  
of love and death, your refusal to fight.

## Psychogrammar

He sits in that chair every week,  
waits for me to speak.

I know his name,  
he knows mine  
but we never use them.

The silence is taut, I crack:

*'You know when you get drunk  
You know when you hit someone  
You know when you get low  
You know when someone dies'*

He knows all right  
but he's interested in grammar.

*'You know when you talk about you,  
you talk about 'you'?'*

I do.  
And the 'I' sticks in my throat like a first word.  
And this is why I hurt.

You know that, don't you?

## The Last Session

For the first time, I touched you.

After all those years, those tears,

I shook your hand, made you stand,  
took back power.

For an hour a week

I talked you my life,

the assumptions of others,

lovers, brothers, mothers

and here I am, shaking,

your hand in mine.

Saying good bye to allocated time.

Saying good bye.

## Mappery

Look at a map, find your way for a while,  
smile and make mistakes.

There will always be another path to take.

Having climbed to the top, let the beanstalk drop  
on those at the bottom who cannot decide  
whether half way up is a good thing.

Deep in the woods the wolves with great big eyes  
have eaten all the breadcrumbs.

Let the blind man look for the end in sight.

Stay in the woods, in the middle,  
to look at the trees. In time enough, the map of your face  
will be read, by someone who makes mistakes.

## Field

*for Anthony Gormley*

My face fits in your pocket,  
cute and sharp.

In your hand, it is a fist full of clay,  
pilfered from the crowd.

My eyes are loud  
dark dugouts.

My silenced mouth slips  
and grins through your fingers.

No sound,  
just the shout of your touch.

Ears see all,  
holes for the getting of words.

My face is thrown in an unfamiliar light.



## Four Ways with Words

Shall I speak you?

Mouth your words?

I will articulate the air, sound you out.

When I hear you,

my eardrums roll vibrations through me.

I tremble with an inward narrative.

As I read you

eyes move, side to side taking in your show.

Reading is a slow art. No hurry.

When I write you

my pen pulses.

I define your shape. I draft you, let you go.

## Living Together

When you said 'we' for the first time  
my vegetable heart ripened.

This was not for show.

Your voice had shifted.

I sifted you in,  
blended you into me  
until we were mutual,  
we shared language.

You may unpick spears  
from this artichoke heart  
but your words will stay.

Your word, ours.

## Past Presence

In two solid minutes, you will board a train  
at a station, heading south.

Your bags have been packed at the last moment,  
vital jobs left undone.

When you stagger to your seat, beer in hand,  
you will upset the other passengers.

In one liquid minute, I will have written this,  
wishing it to you from my seat.

I am in the library, a quiet place for scribbling.

Have I upset the other passengers?

Life is left until the last moment, a last look at the clock.

I wave you off, in the silence of books.

## Don't Call Me Alison

Jimmy bloody Porter.  
I've got one of those at home,  
he doesn't play the trumpet  
but he can bloody moan.

His head stuck in the paper,  
his hand stuck to a beer,  
no thoughts beyond his stereo,  
no thoughts of a career.

He still wants to get Thatcher  
for the evil that she's done,  
don't start him on the Poll Tax,  
or Murdoch and *The Sun*.

He wants to storm the City,  
get the bastards in control,  
he wants to be an anarchist  
and still sign on the dole.

But please don't call me Alison,  
rich totty's not my thing.  
There's no chance I'll get pregnant,  
no chance I'll wear his ring.

I'm the one who pays the mortgage,  
I'm the one who works all year,  
I'm the one who gets the men in,  
when the house needs some repair.

Yes, I look back in anger  
and the thing that really hurts  
is I love the selfish bastard,  
but I'll never iron his shirts.

## She Answers Back

from : A Shropshire Lad XXVII

*'Yes, lad, I lie easy,  
I lie as lads would choose;  
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,  
Never ask me whose.'*

I am no dead man's sweetheart.

My sweetheart, yes, is dead.

He died alone, ten years ago,  
nothing now is said.

They found him in an empty room  
dead upon the floor.

The coroner pronounced his death  
and gave us little more.

And I cried for the darling boy  
who used to hold my heart.

I cried until the bones of him  
grew soft and fell apart.

I cried until my dreams of him  
had severed every tie.

They flew to other places.

I had to watch them fly.

I cried until his face dissolved,  
never to smile again,  
and in that disappearing smile  
he took away my pain.

Ten years have passed and here you are.

You are warm and free.

We share the air in a living world,  
we share his memory.

I am no dead man's sweetheart.

A sweetheart, yes, is dead.

I love the man who's living  
in my heart and in my bed.

## A Private Place

The sun is busy this morning, trying  
to break a window locked against the light.  
We lie, cleaved, in month old sheets, clenched like teeth,  
biting the tongues of the darkness. We know  
together has no meaning. In the green  
half-light, I caress the skull beneath your  
skin, bury my burning legs into the  
clammy cushion of your night sweat. The sun  
has no business here, this is a sour night  
that has been a long day in the making.  
Too much, too often has brought us to a  
bed where suns don't shine, no matter how hard  
the window smashes. Together. Tell the  
sun to take his fist and chide small children.



## Noel Street Baths, Nottingham

It's Lady Soup on Sundays.  
Lots of lovely ladies bobbing  
up and down to warm the water  
with their fatty flavour.

Tasty ladies, spicy ladies  
served up  
with a schoolgirl's  
splashy laugh.

No men allowed on Sundays,  
just a pool full of smiles,  
simmering in the seasoned chat  
of female, fleshy fun.

It's Lady Soup on Sundays  
and we swim  
and swim  
and swim.

## At Newstead Abbey, 2008

### Byron's Bed

Women, mostly, come to stare,  
conceive his lordship, lord knows why.  
Five minutes in a bedroom where...  
you've heard it all. Let faithful servants lie.

I cannot stand the curious.  
What did you expect to see?  
If you get your kicks from ancestral quilting,  
I suggest you avoid the poetry.

Go home and relish unmade beds,  
drown in happy sheets of sweat,  
enjoy the head that's on your pillow,  
Lord Byron will be sleeping yet.

### The Gift

I want to be Byron's snuff box,  
the one he gave to Grimaldi,  
handed from lover to clown  
in a moment of male intimacy.

## A Crow at Blidworth

In the woods, on a well-trodden path,  
horses' breath smudges May air  
as the wind manhandles new buds.  
We are walking in our own footsteps.

Suddenly there, the crow  
reaches out a span of frenzied feathers,  
a broken greeting.  
The wing is heavy, black as lead.

We are closer now.

The crow cowers in an attempt at flight,  
scuttles into unfamiliar grasses.  
The huge bird becomes small, lopsided,  
ill equipped for walking.

As we wander towards The Fox and Hounds,  
the crow throws its shadow at our feet.  
Today we are too close to ourselves,  
too close to wring its neck.

## Arthur Seaton is Alive and Well

Saturday night.

Nottingham's drinking alright

so the likes of us stay in,

drink wine,

in for a good time.

We know the word on the street

is propaganda

but we won't wander

round the bars and clubs.

Tonight in front rooms

filled with books,

know-it-all looks, we'll hide.

Whatever people say we are,

we are.

We know our evening post,

indoors, backed up, out of town.

We finally let the bastards grind us down.

## Picture This

You and me at a dining table,  
all grown up and a little lost  
for words. Twenty years ago we ruled the world,  
knew love would tear us apart  
but Morrissey would bring us together,  
and here we are.

You, tired, with children,  
me, the wrong side of Top Shop.

'Look at this!' I grin,  
a little too much wine.  
I show a picture to your son,  
who, at the age of nine and three quarters  
is unimpressed. A perfect guest.

'That was twenty years ago,' you sigh,  
as if the world of spiky hair and hunt sabs had faded,  
your great big smile  
gone.

I show it to your daughter, who is five.  
'That's my Daddy,' she decides  
but is distracted by Piglet,  
a toy you bought me, years ago,  
when we wrote letters, played tapes,  
took photos.

## Head of English

For thirty years he wielded power, so nearly academic.  
Departments were still in vogue, teams played on the fields.  
He was the thorn in the side of the Head.  
He would dictate, create a drama  
out of Shakespeare, even employed a woman.

He was the kind of teacher students remembered  
for his wit, the time he hit Johnson with a board rubber,  
the time he brought a poet in, because he knew poets.  
He told a tale of Auden, when he smoked a few fags with the great man,  
inhaled the voice that defined a century.

On the day he retired there was sherry in the staff room.  
He declaimed to the gathered faithful  
rehearsed victories, correctly punctuated quips.  
They presented him with the new, Selected Auden,  
signed with the nervous affection of those left behind.

Each year he sent a letter, a last fetter, to the school.  
He cracked jokes for Bedders, Thommo, and the boys.  
Noise from another country, read aloud by the Head  
who clung on to tradition until incorporation,  
then dropped dead.

Years passed and then an NQT, new blood to the Faculty  
found a letter in her tray, handwritten, on paper. Strange.  
She walked it through the learning bays,  
where students were plugged into their resources,  
muddling with electronic courses, virtually learning.

She read the text with some confusion,  
copperplate was not a font she knew.  
She needed advice, what could it mean? She emailed  
the entire Communication and Functional Literacy Team:

*Received a letter. Some bloke called Auden?  
Not much sense, writing unclear, seems to think  
they once taught 'English' here.*

## Slut

The Great Slut Speech stands tall, astride  
a river pulsing through her thighs.  
Gorgeous figure, all arse and tit,  
vocal vagabond, colloquial chit.

Self-proclaimed Queen of filth and quip,  
wet with language her haunches drip  
into the flux that roars her song.  
Her variable vowels are never wrong.

She is shop girl, whore and politician,  
liar, lover to a nation,  
taking in and throwing out  
slippery syntax with regional clout.

Her breasts are full and from each dug  
hangs a brat whose greedy mouth is plugged  
with fatty milk. Each belly fed  
on every word their dam has said.

The right hand child, in female guise  
called Reading, holds the Great Slut's eyes  
suckles passive, receives her succour  
her gaze intent on her harlot mother.

On the left is Writing and he  
bites tight, as fingers fumble free.  
His little nails scratch flesh for blood  
a sinister, productive flood.



As each brat grows, the Great Slut cries  
'Your bastard mouths will suck me dry!'  
She takes each feeding infant head  
in hand and casts them off for dead.

Plunged into the roaring water  
the severed siblings, son and daughter,  
mouth diluted oaths in silence,  
a standard response to maternal violence.

The Slut relents and pulls them dry,  
she has another tack to try.  
She gives them back the gift of life  
if they will live as man and wife.

And so a most unholy union  
becomes a literary communion.  
Reading and Writing, sister and brother,  
spliced, and left to eat each other.

In time the Great Slut Speech grows fat,  
her thighs spit out another brat  
that digests everything it hears,  
swallows deep through greedy ears.

Her joy is loud, a verbal excess,  
a glorious, cacophonous mess  
of language. The name of the child,  
Listening, untamed and wild.

## T.S. Eliot Awards, London, 2010

I give this page a little black dress.  
It will look the part  
when introduced  
to other poems.

In a glittering room,  
great big poets  
introduce their collections,  
hold them tightly by the hand.

Invited to the table,  
I do not eat  
just drink, drink in,  
wrap myself in a blank page.

Escorted from the building,  
I grow to hate  
the little black dress  
that has heard the mermaids singing.

## Nushu

With womanwords we made articulate kisses

to the secret ears of sisters.

Our girlish grammar, fierce as flesh, grew strong,

insistent tongues, vital fingers, clawed the taste of talk.

Our nouns slipped silent but our verbs deafened,

loud as sirens, loud as words.

The sentence of our song soared

high enough for girls to reach,

a silky kite of sound, untethered.

And now as I hold language in my arms,

her breath betrays our meaning,

disappears.

*Yang Huanyi, the last surviving fluent user of Nushu, the world's only single sex language, a writing system that for centuries gave voice to the suffering of the female population of Hunan, China, died in September 2004. Nu Shu means women's writing.*

