

TAPA NOTEBOOK LAURIE DUGGAN AUGUST 2006-DECEMBER
2006

[alongside text]

27/8/06 through cumulus, the hump of
Thanet, then Pegwell Bay and the
Stour

29/8 Canterbury, downhill from the University
Still, like a 19th C. painting, cathedral
dominant. A city, low-rise, on a plain
below (valley of the Stour)

31/8 a defunct satellite dish, uphill
from the half-timbered hall

3/9 'gathering swallows' &c

5/9 . . . though it still gets to 80°F.

A rabbit, crushed on the road, is removed within hours.

9/9 mown paths

Words for the angled brickwork?

(tiled walls = pargeting [The Pargeters
Was the original title for V. Woolf's The Years])

—

to dive in amidst all this difference
(a distant sound of school sport)

weather making up its mind

a vast library at sea

11/9 mushrooms, spongy underside
meaty consistency, found in Blean Woods
a warm mid-afternoon

today possibly September's hottest recorded

accommodation cleaners converse on mobiles
in the shade

the newspapers introduce nature liftouts
(an end-of-season habit?)

I bump my head on a doorknob

—

borer holes, splits in the wood (the mantel)
blackened brick (vicinity of the hearth)

check the mail

—

almost still, at 6 pm.
as though readying a season

as I sit in the Gulbenkian
(the nearest boozier)

the numeral 19 amid
the verdure

the 1960s
thought this paradise
as near as attainable through architecture

(large spaces, plinths with hewn objects
(mimicked by insignias on bins
the trees so neat.

HIGH VOLTAGE

a man
struck by lightning (timor mortis
conturbat me) on the side
of a generator

(on the upper branches
of a(n) [. . . .] leaves* [drawing]
begin to rot

no gargoyles to mock aspiration

* see 3/11

—

12/9 Gunter Grass at the Gulbenkian (?)

—

the air thick with bushfire smoke
– is this place turning into Brisbane?
6 pm in the bar in this humidity

rabbits across the lawn

cathedral town in a haze

—

compost (this notebook)

vapour trails

there seems to be some adolescent drama
(meaning costume drama) going on here
as outfits emerge from the theatre

a pleasure, to sit in the slight cool
viewing the campus.

a province, so close to London

(the land of Soft Machine and Caravan)

in a few weeks this place will be entirely different

I have to do battle with Ron Silliman's fake notions of 'music'; that these make him seem not so unlike those of the School of Quietude he denigrates. Forget 'music' Ron – it'll take care of itself, or should.

(a French horn emerges from the theatrette.)

– above all, forget the American sense of 'expertise' (we are all inspired amateurs around here, dude!)

—

partly, it's trust, rather than program.

—

13/9 Essex

(Social Security)

('Sign on you crazy diamond')

A government department

– housed on an estate out of Chelmsford
(no shop within miles)

National Insurance

—

‘alarm bells ring’

—

the road signs don’t always work
(lost between Ash and Meopham, having
missed the A2 and diverged from the M20)
(but each village signposts only the next)

—

rumori (thunder clouds over the campus)
(though these move rapidly north-east)

a sense of rain

—

lighten up
(or tighten up –
Archie Bell & the Drells (or
loosen up –
The Nazz –
or the Alan Bown Set (a
different 'loosen up')

(O'Hara understood
the importance of all this: a version
of flaneurie

with a misplaced accent
(mine? here?)

(Get the picture?

Yes, we see.

—

In Praise of Idleness

—

– but, as Mick Forbes said:
'That won't buy the baby a beer'

—

everything at ground level
seems quite still

—

the language of trucks
en route from the tunnel

this makes more sense than Little Britain

—

and news from Australia: the image
of Sasha, Denis and others
in pyjamas, reading books

timor mortis conturbat me

an influx from the drizzle
(the Gulbenkian's barman collects the empties)

Sasha's enthusiasms

(how could he write, an act
of solitude?)

Harry Hooton

a bad poet, but one he cared about
– enough to see the work in print again

O'Hara would have written him up
had he had an O'Hara

I remember him

disrobing to white underpants
– a piece about, was it Grainger?
also, retreating with me to the bar
when Gough Whitlam exceeded his brief
(launching Meredith Burgmann's book about
the Green Bans, but instead
reefing pages from various documents
to defend his own Prime Ministership
– this would be the last kind feeling
either of us would have for Gough
(at that stage Sasha, walking, with aid
of a stick)

the rain is a false alarm (it doesn't,

here in Kent, so I believe.)

. . . and now the English are singing.

(a strange bearded guy
comes in here for the fourth time
in an hour).

—

15/9 how do these old roofs
 keep out the water?

—

16/9 model aeroplanes in mist
 over the White Horse

—

 the poets gather (Rudford, Glos.)
 at the Dark Barn

—

17/9 . . . outside the Barn
a monument to the Welsh
killed in 1643
– Gloucester stone
taken from the walls of the city

18/9 the rattle of leaves
on the path

19/9 like having to write a discussion paper
on the new metal I can't wrap
my mind round the book I'm supposed
to review my lamp
'tested for electrical safety' is no use now
(it's broad daylight)
(I rage in a
white room at an institutionally coloured
desk)

Unaccountably, the memory
of Kathy Kirby singing
'Secret Love' and 'Dance On'
from 1964.

21/9 dropping barbells
 ringing doorbells

the greenness of the park seemed from the
beginning like the painted grass in the
film 'Blow Up'. That and the movement
of trees.

the couple on the London train
– brought together by an introduction
agency? Comfortably middle-class, nervously
drinking beer on their way to a blues (?)
concert. They seemed patently ill-matched
though unaware of this, filling each
other in with their histories. She was quite

possibly alcoholic, not wishing for sexual intimacy but not wanting to be alone. He was more obviously on the make and lacked a degree of self-awareness. She was less confident but could intellectually better him considerably (neither one of them all that bright).

22/9 On Radio 4 this morning, a debate between the presenter and a radical Muslim from London who keeps using the strange metaphor: 'Wake up and smell the coffee!'

26/9 St Dunstan's:
A corner of the cemetery reserved for small children. One grave features a black marble teddy-bear with the photo of a baby on its belly. Next to it, a parrot with wings rotated by the breeze.

the cathedral in the hollow; the army base on the opposite hill.

the light behind the trees
of, was it, Samuel Palmer
signalling an end to something,
the season, or more portentous . . .
late September the fruit
still falling

footsteps in the courtyard

—

bressummer – the beam across the fireplace

—

27/9 back in the 'office' those spade-like leaves
are they alder? (the fruit above
like candles)

—

'are we there yet?'

—

not 'a floor you could eat off', a floor
many people have eaten off

this limbo state

the origins of 'goth'
the Puritanism of the academy

answers to all these questions.

Ken in New Zealand
Pam in Limbo
John incommunicado
August settling back
in San Francisco
'marginaliens'?

the gents stride back to the Registrar's
carrying the kind of cases that ought to contain
bundles of bank notes

—

Well, the leaves aren't falling yet – mostly
but there's a stillness portending the end of something

—

What does the white suit signify in this country?

—

(daddy longlegs – a flying insect)

—

‘Hürlimann / Braukunst seit 1836’

—

I have functioned
as though things put together
stood for something, or rather
become something other than
what they were before.

the disjuncts become too great . . .

o.k. so Pound said ‘mind is shapely’
– my mind? I wonder.

‘the button everybody presses’
‘the sequence of genes’

eleusive bar talk (eleusive, as in
Eleusis?)

—

the spread of architecture as landscape
reacts against Piranesian compression;
it assumes 'breathing space'

—

the light that daylight saving will abolish
(when it ends, that is)

—

a voice, as though
magnified

—

it always seems to be more than the sum of its parts,
though destined as a repository of trivia

'moving right along . . .'

(a woman picks several leaves of the Alder(?) for
what purpose?)

– and one decays, blown in,
at the base of a table

—

my 'worldly goods' now somewhere in the
Indian Ocean?

—

As I suggested to Rod Edmond – there's no
place in a writing school for a poetic
predicated on doubt

—

remembering that line of The Angelic Upstarts:
'I want two pints of lager and a packet of
crisps please'

—

a man
a map
amen

—

a huge black & white cat crosses the plaza
& climbs the grassy verge of the library

—

a curved corrugated roof
begins to merge with the sky.

you figure why Samuel Beckett wrote in French
said no

but what's out there will always exceed art

—

[reversed letters]

rab éfac / amenic / ertaeht

—

28/9 back to the old drafts of a poem that
has lost its way

the sky darkens
and everything seems quite still

diverse routines

across the road a fortnight ago
the bus shelter was stripped of flyers
and painted brown

a week later

it was bulldozed

An orange spotlight
directed at this building is often turned off
at night

and this is the season
for mosquitoes

I like low ceilings, but not small rooms.

begrimed casements

remove a shirt from the dryer

—

a pattern: the sky clears late afternoon
(it will be after dark when daylight saving ends)

—

inspissated

—

endless convulsions of the Labour Conference
reported daily in the Guardian.

—

30/9 Oxford: the Ashmolean

Tintoretto's resurrection
Piero di Cosimo – animals fleeing a fire
An anon (?) work showing a French
siege, where the armoured figures
inhabit flattened perspective
like a Wyndham Lewis
Ucello – the Hunt
Sickert's 'Ennui'
the sculpted head of Lorenzo di Medici
A watercolour by Natalia Goncharova

Some old men in a work by, was it,
Veronese?

—

1/10 changeable weather
 cloudbursts passing over
 (last night, thunder)

time to read about the 'poetry wars'

—

4/10 late afternoon the sky opens up
 – I mean, lightens – the city below
 revealed clearly, its outlying power lines
 the military base diagonally opposite

—

fake mail from the bank, replete with
misspelling

—

Spitfire ale: how Kentish
(Wednesday has become pub night)

—

how, by an almost complete avoidance
the matter of those who would spell it out

lose out

—

the matter of England? Wossa matter?

the shadow of a football spinning from a knee

—

what would youth be like? I mean
how ironic are they? who look just like
I looked, are full, undeniably
of the same self-importance (mine, I suspect,
the more naïve)? I would love that sense
of centrality, of things being within my reach.

They're not, of course. Though no further away than from them, probably. ('Notionally' . . . thanks Ken). Anyway, I wish them well. It's a harder place than it was.

The poets? Their 'wars'? Get over it, I'd say. "Give out but don't give up."

I don't miss my birthplace, yet. At least feel no more alien here than there

1698 – a few years past the 'glorious revolution'

At the Governmental level (and in the press to some extent) racism seems pretty prevalent here. But at least at the purely local level, here (e.g.) in a 'provincial'* university, people seem to be able to deal with 'difference' pretty well. The students seem very un-segregated.

* I think in the UK 'provincial' means
neither London nor Oxbridge.

—

The campus movie theatre (the Gulbenkian) is
really just a lecture theatre with desk-tops (these
become places to put your drink).

—

my scrawl
my screed

—

getting to the point

—

(or getting to the pint)?

—

5/10 harvest moon (due tomorrow
though possibly obscured by clouds)

the prisons overflowing
– why don't they resume transportation?
or moor hulks in the Thames?
(they do)

—

drive through the rain
to Whitstable to eat vegan
(in my leather jacket)

a hatchet job on a poem
I cut and paste together again

the run through endless variations

suddenly moss is noticeable, in a pocket
on the south-east side of this building –
it must have been there all along?

I'd reach for books
that aren't yet here

(the harvest moon, full nearest
autumn solstice, would be large
on the horizon were it visible)

6/10 the smiling face of
a telephone on wheels

an inverted funnel
on the head of a hippopotamus

all the bears, frogs and pandas
are asleep

somewhere in Cambridge

[transpose with]

the head of George Barker
upside down on a bookshelf

the stars (a telescope)
& electric guitars

the revised
solar system

time
measurement
& Miró

tamed by Motown (tamed by Mottram?)
we lie on (someone else's) bed

9/10 Jacobs Creek at the Granta
 watching wobbly punts

 the poetics, Cantab. 2006-11-15

 harvest moon in a traffic jam

In the morning paper: Britain really is
a shrinking island (erosion).

10/10 dismember the poem (one-way ticket)
into 'hills' (& dales?)

& date, however

a coughing man on the stairs. this season
everyone has colds.

a smoking man outside the rear window. the
rotund image of British ill-health.

chameleon zoetrope

a lit office in the Tizard Centre

—

at Oare Marshes the roadside thick with
bird-watchers tripods and telephoto lenses
the road peters out at Harty Ferry (& tracks
rise from the water on Sheppey, the other side.

[transpose with]

the mizzle lifts from Faversham

—

Vittorio Sereni (tr. Peter Robinson)

a scaffold
at Escafeld

West Owse Booooks

'the dissolving fabric'

a site
for sore eyes (this apartment)
its grimy carpets

rising damp
a state of life

here, in territory
described by a Londoner in Wellington NZ
as 'bloody tropical'

11/10 everything verging
 at equinox the hiss
 of remote cars a spot
 of rain

 imagining interiors
 a house, circa 1750

 in West St (West House?)

 'subject to
 movement and associated distortion
 over the ensuing period'

the rabbits have disappeared

12/10



(the big ampersand)
a plug-in infinity

the shadow of a creature
on the upper branches
(gaps in the foliage)

inside:
our minimal décor

notebooks, sheets
in which a poem dismantles

our neighbours
thump the low ceiling

could 'one-way ticket' work as a small book i.e.
the gaps as sections or page breaks, the whole
with a kind of sub-heading?

'plants being built
in Indiana

miscanthus

13/10 it works!

though laid low (chest infection)

the weeks

pass quickly

a large spider
emptied into the garden

14/10 sisal
aside

the grey, and why
a handful of leaves
should have coloured

the dream of cleaning dirty windows

a backward text
erupts through this one

the maps show the way to markets
a scale you could step into

where to obtain these portions
these well-lit cover photographs

as Hardy's soil throws darkness
back at the sky

a notice-board pieces our life together
as debt and adventure

the windows impossible to clean

—

a group of small books?

—

'clean' not 'dean'

—

and now, a light from the street
visible through shifting foliage
an almost-silence, mid-weekend
(the denizens elsewhere)

illness is a kind of boredom
– like money is a kind of poetry?

intelligible?
illegible?

the king's real or his
(imagined) face?

radio 4

the click
of plumbing.

In the Guardian an item on bushfires & drought
in S.E. Australia. Another season's stock lost. The
Darling River almost dry.

So much is still 'up in the air'. Our possible
residence a tangle of legalities. We have
the contents of four suitcases plus a small pile
of books. Probably for months.

15/10 outlines of squirrels in the branches
like 1940s woodcuts in English books*
(see 18/10)

boxy Volvo

The 'one-way ticket' piece began as a long poem, then after several drafts appeared not to work. But when regrouped as parts of familiar series (Blue Hills, Dogs &c) it was clear this wasn't an option either. What another edit showed was that it would work as a loose grouping of pieces with the general title. It's a little book (like 'The Nathan Papers' is a [not so] little book). This is what I really wanted to do in the first place.

Little Machines: poetry in the age of mass-production

thinking in italics

a haze over town

these glum bedsits
bred psychedelia

though the English
in their songs were always
'home for tea'

(blotting paper w. chips?)

or

'mother . . . I'm in a field
somewhere in England
and I've lost part of my brain'

(Jarvis Cocker)

children's books were the oddest things
to fall back on

a hatch
in the back of a wardrobe

(a way out

of the Home Counties

—

16/10 extended summer period: the hottest since
1629 (?)
18/66° in London at 6pm.

Universities to 'monitor' Islamic students activities

17/10 The forecast today is 'rain', but Kent
seems to defy prediction. The 'weather'
happens elsewhere – or simply, this
microclimate isn't recorded by BBC 4

(Last night: in the station parking lot listening to a
program about hedgehogs, frost on the car
windows)

people leave (and enter) this building at the
oddest hours. doors slam at 5 am

half the heaters don't work. Christmas might be
'interesting'

dogs can sense the onset of epilepsy

I can't read your poems,
I suffer from Silliman's Ear

this farmhouse like a ship, beached
on a hillside in Kent (& these rooms
with all the disadvantages of ships cabins)

the large window faces north-west, a court
of decaying cardboard boxes, assorted junk,
a laundromat

the smaller one, south-east,
the university grounds and the forest, strewn
with food cartons and disposables

on either side

constant human traffic

inside Elizabethan

beams, 1970s dormitory doors with faux-medieval handles, fire notices,
peeling paintwork, boot-sale furniture

a cracked mirror

timetables, council tax bills, various regional maps

an enormous fireplace

Some years ago P's goods (from Australia) arrived at the Liverpool docks in time for an eight-month long waterside workers' strike. He lived out of a suitcase for this period.

18/10 Not long, I guess, before it will be dark at this time (9 am). Will I put on clothes to pick up a paper? Possibly.

(where is the lightning bolt? The implausible John Martin landscape? As they say in the badly-translated futurist movie: 'Romanticism! You are finished!')

buy shoelaces

blimey!

maintenance arrive in a van then leave

'there is no other place'

'il pleut doucement sur la ville'

the steady bubbling sound of distant plumbing

—

*Eric Ravilious (the woodcut artist)?

—

a bored DJ entertains himself, then steps out
for a smoke. no-one is listening to the
music, it's just generic background rumble

the silhouette of a clock-face ticks towards
6 pm (and to whatever is theatre time).

THERE IS [NO] INTERVAL

in the theatre mural figures disport amid curlicues
of smoke – nostalgia?

I realise that in this English university setting

I expect to see British actors as dysfunctional academics, but instead I get British academics who appear (slightly) like actors.

the new DJ 'pumps up the volume'. Though no-one is really interested. It's largely techno though it could have been made at any time since about 1980.

friends seem to be photographing the DJ though there's now almost nobody that end of the room. This is true narcissism.

The music is OK, if generic. Though this truly is victory for the nerds. These guys would have been kicked out of a club in 1965. Now they rule! ('in my other life I study economics').

Stuffed chicken & Spitfire £10.55.

At a table, one young guy seems to pick up on the movement. But he looks like the singer in Depeche Mode circa 19-eighty-something. About 18.

19/10 (night)
diagonals of rain
earlier – the English
taking the sunlight while it lasts

(though this season has been
overly long).

I do not miss my country

earlier – squirrels
nibble the damp course

& there is nothing
upon the long mantelpiece

(on the floor:
'Not Everything Remotely'
'Understanding Property')

Am I sentimental about the environment?
Why should I care about young people?
(somehow I do)

Poetry is a kind of ecological practice.

You want things to be around
(maybe not in 3. something million years
when the Milky Way collides with some other gaseous body,
but for a while at least, where time makes sense.
Does my desire for this render me an outcast?
or just a not-so-ideal specimen of
homo economicus?

—

20/10 'two strawberries in Pewsey on
October the 11th 1906'

—

a jar of Kentish mustard

—

scuds of rain
a collapsed umbrella

23/10 a maintenance man came hammering
hammering
hammering

just as next-door's
inhabitants seem to shift furniture at 3 am
– maybe they're making a bomb?

'whom bomb?'

& the overweight guy
who steps outside the door every 15 minutes to smoke.

is that precipitation
or just a fine coat of dirt on the window?

—

there's no spectacular 'turn' so far
just dead leaves

but the washing's done at least
(the back room figures in Velazquez' early paintings
– a sketchy Christ viewed through an opening –
as they wash bowls, prepare dishes

all of them looking much like the inhabitants
of Seville circa 1620.

The sad post-coital Mars a testament
to middle-age

—

outside in the wet, Covent Garden, waiting for
a train

—

and the day before that, sheltered by cliffs
at St Margaret's, the Channel walled by container
vessels

—

and the day before that, a movie that my
lack of narrative sense transformed into a raft
of inconsistencies. I mean I hadn't worked out
who was telling the story and someone's character
changed unaccountably. ('Why I am not a
movie critic').

—

eat a banana (from Costa Rica)

possibly sleep

—

places with the worst climates produce the most
(avant/synthetic) music (Berlin; Cleveland; Glasgow);
modernity becomes a kind of sunlight.

drenched, en route to the theatre. then nowhere to
sit in a space reserved for diners.

the need for Wellington boots

our furniture has docked

24/10 breaks in the cloud (bright intervals)

[a title: Some Bright Intervals?]

an alcove of decaying rubbish (our back entrance)
(we have been here nearly two months, yet it
seems much longer. paradoxically, the days go
quickly)

the promise of a cold morning
this record I keep

Pam en route for Melbourne
the oddness of leaving; the way a habitation
becomes other, once packed; a space, once
of personality, something we'd think
hard to leave, gone, already
from memory.

& how many years yet
for Ken & Cath, in Adelaide?

It's not a virtue of mine to be 'no trouble',
perhaps an inadequacy.

A fire-alarm test
faults us badly, failing to take account
of a certain weariness, dealing with a situation
that's as contrived as this is.

my friends in their various places, I think of you all
(hoping that Jenny is well in Wellington)

as I await the frost

—

my own writing)
the prognosis for the planet is not good
(does any of this reach Australian newspapers?)

do I turn the heater on?

—

1750 – the date of Piranesi's 'Fanciful images
of Prisons, etchings published by Giovanni Buzard
in Rome, conducting business on the Corso'.

—

26/10 of John Anderson,
his deep ecology
the thought of it now
buried in three small books in a container
'somewhere in England'.
a respite here
from the deluge, banks of cloud, moving
quickly, this room floored with sunlight

& this, in praise of the lost poets

(the publishers

were not in love with diagrams
– seemingly crude maps
of connectedness

only too apparent
now the effect
of all things

bands of sunlight
on that chair, the map
of Canterbury crossed by shadow

—

aeration
& waiting

—

“If I had no duties, and no reference to
futuraity, I would spend my life in driving
briskly in a post-chaise with a pretty woman”

[cars & girls 1777?]

– Dr Johnson (Boswell, 845)

—

27/10 the Stour and its tributary channels
gush about Deans Mill
and under St Radigund's

a network of one-ways
it seems impossible to navigate

– other end of town, the old tannery
up for development, as back lanes
connect old pubs and uncertain sites

after a day of sunlight the grey blanket
comes down and everything stills

28/10 The Barbican
The Hayward Gallery
Tate Modern: drinks only

29/10 clocks set back to GMT. another sign.

Josef Sudek: the detritus of lunch;
condensation on a window

Stanislaw Witkiewicz: the self as
multiple personality; the look outlasting
the looker

Henryk Ross: a scaffold; a melting
negative

Jikka Hanzlová: the tint of grass-blades;
luminous tree trunks

—

30/10 make something
 out of eggshells
 shadows of
 passers-by

 the long hook
 hanging from a cross-
 beam

 dance of light
 on a toast-rack

pipes with their ornate brackets, out

from the gutterings
a tradesman's clatter
opening two doors

—

nail holes
in the wall

—

Rye:
a former port, beached (or beachless) – a hill
in the levels, where every second shop
sells 'antiques'.

a woman carries a jug of beer up the street

distant shapes of the nuclear plant (across Romney
Marsh).

—

'the consequences of our inaction
will be irreversible'

—

31/10 Houdini died 'from a punch
in the stomach by a student in front of
100 people'

—

the train to Margate is a myth. monitors
show different times. people just sit on the
platform patiently (in an icy wind). I get a refund and go
to the 'Goods Shed' for coffee (the market).
It's 45 minutes since 'breakfast' and 45 before
'lunch'.

—

I do not miss my country

—

the sense of a different time-frame. In 1992
when we spent three months in Britain it felt
like a long time. We've been here now two
months: in one sense it seems not so long
at all, yet in another sense a great deal seems
to have happened. In 1992 I kept a proper
diary, a page at least of description every
day.

..... but this is:

'wasps hibernate in the ancient stones'
(Pakistan)

—

1/11 fire alarm at lunch
dishes at empty tables, but only a few
re-enter the building. I prefer this icy wind
to dullness and showers . . .

THERE IS AN [] INTERVAL

. . . and yet there are
midriffs here, unaware as Goths in Miami

the view of the city is as clear (possibly) as
it gets.

—

I got the good coffee guy

—

subtropical plants
upstairs in the octagon

'new courses in complexity science'

—

THERE IS [] NO INTERVAL

—

'try to make it real / compared to what'
(Gene McDaniels)

—

a faint recorded voice, slightly 'tinny'
from the next room. the image of a hot chilli
on the noticeboard (these fields are made
for turnips) institutional door slam.

'what does not change / is the will to change'

'wha' appen?'

a document
partly blacked out
more people enter
then leave

—

in Sudek's Prague
condensation on windows
the running lines revealing a fruit tree in the yard

– tonight frost is rumoured here
reminding of those small areas of humidity
where objects cast their shadows
and the sky, a uniform grey
is broken by damp glass

here, closer to the sea
and the north wind, rime
on car windows held, for the moment . . .

red wine in a panelled room,
noodles, stirred, in a pot

—

the blocks, morphing
from brick to wood,
worm-holes, marks of borers
in greying texture, that
against the charcoal zigzag
up the rear wall of the hearth

—

the author of Quatermass dead (Nigel Neale)

—

days of obituaries

the self, fading
into sepia

the accidents
of cooking

vita brevis

the month
a mouth

alarums!
electronic sounds
outside

—

art is long
and life is
breakfast

—

a tarnished mirror

—

2/11 Margate. the remnants of Gormley's
burnt figure on the lot, Dreamland
<ICE COLD BEER SERVED IN PLASTIC GLASSES>
– the rest of it – the amusement park,
a tarmac stacked with objects – large waste
bales, that seem to construct dwellings.

Decent coffee at the Harbour Café-Bar, the north
wind shut out.

a van arrives with eggs
a slight steam
on the windows, the Promenade blocking the sea front

decaying palaces of the upper classes; agents
doing deals at an adjoining table.

the prow of Thanet
cut off by cheap flights
the Isle unmoored.
a DJ's endless pop quiz.

—

at the other end of the bar
a table set for 'drinks'
this end the 'reserved' tags
placed on all tables.

the nether space between

do they really expect all those diners?

now they move the reservations . . .

back to the tables! (& the bad puns:

Bottle of Britain

—

remember those who cared about poetry
(as the light dims inadvertently in the bar):
Shelton Lea, once a 'dangerous' figure
in a blue suit; latterly
walking with a stick, a 'dandy in the underworld'
whose love for the craft was undiminished
– what place for Shelton in this world?
the romantics were fucked – but try telling him this.
he could have stepped back and conversed
with Dr Johnson, this lost heir

to confectionery fortunes.

Alan Wearne

had a nose for the real ones
who'd fit in no survey,
even Π, public service anarchist
who wrote better than anyone: a Greek
taking notes from a Turk (Nizam Hikmet)

– a guy at another table
looks like a younger (bikie) Robert Hughes –

interrupting my reverie (French lovers
on the sofa adjoining, hum of the bar

In the midst of all this
I want to talk to Nigel Roberts,
at work, purportedly, on a long piece
concerning Albert Namatjira.

—

Darkness falls early (as early as four)
– what of the pace of art, in a place
where darkness takes over the season?
(sudden applause from the 'drinks' end of the bar)
did the artists 'struggle' for light (more applause),

'chasing' it, for example
in St Ives?

(a spoon against a glass
to introduce the next speaker)

Another beer and I'm off ('a quick fuck'
as Dransfield would have exclaimed)
but I do not enter the romantic stratosphere
(sorry Bob!) and I'll be ordering crisps
with this.

—

The young. One pities them. Or rather
feels empathy. It's the same conundrum:
to feel so sharp yet be so ineffectual
in a world run by old people
(America's vice-president, kept alive by money
and necromancy) – it's all
some huge business deal they've not been
let in on.

The old, meanwhile, burn up the earth.

—

. . . or burn, at least, CDs of forgotten
psychedelic notables.
(history as indulgence)

no-one is dining here this evening.

—

3/11 that tree (11/9) was probably either
a small-leaved or common lime

—

4/11 fireworks
would not have happened
in the war
the coast of Kent lit up

—

'MUSGRAVE. "A temporary poem always entertains us."
JOHNSON. "so does an account of the criminals
hanged yesterday entertain us."
(Boswell, 967)

—

5/11 logics appear when 'the world is everything that is the case'

check trouser measurements

all these notebooks, these unanticipated corners, a map
blown-up, fresh detail inserted

the removal of that rail line
– the Crab and Winkle Way: a path
over the hill to Whitstable . . .

the grand projects become miscellanies.

how would I identify those ragged bushes
round the farmhouse wall?
Leaves paired from the stem
a leaf-width gap between shoots (say
three centimetres)?

—

fields of spent rockets

& in the Weekend Guardian:

[dinosaur sticker]

fields of rocket
(that colonised the London bombsites)
did anyone eat it then?
or was it just an unwanted plant
in an unoccupied space?

botanical discovery: 'blue bugloss'
(ref. Cyril Connolly)
is 'Patterson's Curse' (a pest in Australia)

'A dark barn and laughter issuing forth'
(Gavin Selerie)

—

6/11 occupation: 'homemaker'

—

Holbein at Tate Britain: matter
and people who matter
(the texture of those garments which,
a century later, would become
less substantial

– style

or heating?

(our own question
answered – affirmative – the latter
down Regent Street to Piccadilly Circus
the search for warmer clothes)

the day

starting to close in now
around three

(light dimming already

through the one window of
the Turner rooms. He sought it
(Turner: light): those 1840 paintings
their skeins (skins) thin and infinite

(A proposed Turner gallery,
Margate, abandoned – it was out on a pier –
presumably for reasons of insurance and esc-
alation of building costs in an era where
such a structure would rapidly become
unfeasible: the rock of Thanet itself safe
(probably), though submerged partially by
ice-melt. “by 2050, the east coast of
England washed away by tsunami.” Turner
strapped to the mast?

the source: what was it (?)
of that voice
from ‘Revolution #9’:

‘you . . .
you become invisible’

they're to hang
the dictator; the 'liberator'
will walk free

this room, consumed by its fireplace
usable only as a place for wet shoes

distant fireworks, leftovers
from two days celebration

(here it seems
to fit the season – unlike Australia –
since all this display coincides
with dying light

I am not averse to hibernation

Mr Fawkes: a pretext
for an older concern
(an historical personage
consumed by mythology)

that Ed Dorn and Jonathan Williams both passed
through Black Mountain college says a lot for
that institution

(I think this while reading Gavin Selerie's "Azimuth")

—

7/11 and this room, its desk
upon which I cannot write
(but I am writing it)
in grey light
at 2.30 pm

'the condemned man ate a hearty meal'

I turn on the lamp for its small circle

try on a pair of brown trousers

watching paint dry
(the wall; Turner's Thanet Coast)
gummed squares that held the image of something

—

In this entire building there seem to be only
two operative keys: meaning everyone can
open anyone else's doors. Yet they claim to have no spares.

—

perusing Mabey's Flora Britannica

—

when will we stop translating pounds into dollars?

—

'Mr Reid compared himself to Johnny Cash
visiting San Quentin in the sixties'

—

"when escaping from a burning building
(as Scottish authorities mistranslate into Urdu)
break your fall with a donkey (cushion)"
(carry a donkey to break your fall)

—

Kent's stock of fireworks
seems finally to have run out

—

8/11 [Ross Gibson on the location (& locution) of Ed Kuepper's 'Electrical Storm': the sense of lying, glued to the linoleum floor, waiting for any kind of relief . . .]

but I have climbed out
of that climate and into
a box of words; I live
amid documents
– and Kuepper's 'Storm' is one of these –
a thermostat
in the library

on the table: The English Legal System (8th edition ed. Slipper & Kelly)

the air itself
anticipates

—

decay

—

In the paper an article notes that Tudor houses were better insulated than most 20th century structures (the 1960s being the worst decade for this)

(Australia's worst drought for 1000 years)

leaf mould

dusk, Chartham, smoke
from burning bracken

9/11 the 'Yew Tree Farm' of CT3
 not the 'Yew Tree Farm' of CT2
 (not Blean
 but Chillenden)

the other morning in the supermarket
two men talking behind me in the queue
sound like they're doing Wallace & Grommit impersonations

– but it's their real voices

(nevertheless accents here don't seem to be picked
up as much as they once might have. It's just
normal that the people you speak to should sound
different)

—

Lee Harwood is back from America

—

John Seed, in London, speaks of the Isle of Sheppey:
Sheerness, like a recreated 1950s working-class town
(it was – I can affirm)

—

10/11 contracts / documents of ownership
their responsibilities
a legal trail
muddied from the 70s as Council writ

– the closer something gets the further away it seems,
or the possibility of it being snatched or
rendered inaccessible

'a light goes on'
or off

—

up the hill
for alcohol

—

inept buffoons have turned us into targets
(‘30 terror plots being planned in UK’)

—

to read
or not to read
'the fine print'

first Pound's cosmology, then Olson's (geography subsumes history)
and then the collapse of systems
the translation of text into footnote
(Dorn's La Jolla, Abhorrences)

'the best lack all conviction', the worst
make headlines

last night the frost took some clearing
from the windscreen. We ate
old-style Italian in Whitstable
& the maître d' showed us marks on the wall
from the 1954 flood; the whole of the town
(as it was then) submerged almost.

In Faversham we'll be above the flood plain
(if not the caveats).

leader of the BNP cleared of race-hate charges
by a West Yorkshire jury

in a radio interview
the unmistakable sound
of someone writing

to W.C. Williams
for writing out of the possibility of not writing
or writing out that possibility
– The Descent of Winter –
writing out of a situation
where writing seems impossible

all of this lost
on fans of the 'writing school' Williams.
I think of his anger 'that good doctor'
(from which Paterson even
was a falling off, though a fine one)
the reclamation of an older
more surreal America, its pure products
crazier now than ever

I felt far more able to write about this place
as a tourist than I do as a resident.

I mean, the way Peter Riley can write about
Llŷn, for example – even though he writes
here as a ‘tourist’

I feel, in a cosmological sense, like one of
those, carrying a blackboard on my back, seen
in an Iranian movie – a kind of displaced
‘expertise’

though I sense, at this stage
of history, we have all become ‘migrants’.

to place a marble slab, just so
uphill, behind the residence

(as onion and yellow capsicum fry in the shabby kitchen)

11/11 polarised light, ponds in mud
 on the glass, some trees
 leafless almost, others
 yet to turn

for all this to function we need
international banking details

10 am Saturday morning's
about the quietest time here

—

the death of Jack Palance, who'd done
one-arm pushups at the Oscars

—

the poverty of description as though
entering another language

—

13/11 and Ellen Willis, feminist,
 musicologist

—

when the leaves go
the cars are revealed
in the car park

—

though trees still have the density
of a Gainsborough, uphill
over the roof of the laundry
a bruised sky behind a dead branch

—

mellow mists and fruitfulness

—

it all costs

—

the air perhaps, of a John Everett Millais painting
as in the light through casements the texture
of materials – soft wool – the overall sense
of decay and beauty – that high Victorian
back-to-back

the lovers' seat
the death seat

and this room, a drying cupboard

—

them down there
rolling in
their beautiful vowels

namers of things and
shapers of thought

—

'Clouds taste metallic'

—

lists &
purposes

the endless motorway

—

14/11 the sound of a man with a blowtorch
fixing the tarred roof of the Tizard building

—

the thought of diligent people working on
complete destruction: these are the projects
(official and unofficial) for the new world

I write for my own purposes. The body for
whom I record this writing may no longer exist.

midday – four hours left
of light

myself, each day
a photograph from this place
becomes a flip-book

my needs, mostly padding of sorts
someplace from which to function

Over a hundred researchers kidnapped in Baghdad. The
Universities to be closed down. Spin exists purely
to keep Blair in office. We have had enough
great men, surely. Still, apparently we are

'on the right track', winning 'hearts and
minds'.

'the energiser bunny lies face-down in the dirt'
(Chuck Prophet)

—

'schoolchildren in Sweden terrorised by a
drunken elk'

—

15/11 the possibility of a nuclear attack in
the UK ('dirty' or otherwise)
a shadow-world,
the actuality of the ideal. Steve Bell gets it right
a cartoon of Blair and Bush dog paddling in a cistern

—

a bird, greenish, with a long tail:
a woodpecker?
elusive, out on the lawn

– except that woodpeckers don't have long tails,
at least not the large green ones

—

it's a quiet night at the 'office' – or I'm early
there are courses here in stand-up comedy
some of them
(the students) must be at an adjoining table
ha ha, or,
'boom boom'

anoraks arrive
still the odd midriff

a young man in a suit
with an appalling haircut
(think John Farnham circa 1970)
think I just made the bar in time

—

dark chocolate is good for the heart

—

one
with tiny round glasses and wiry hair
like an escaped Marx brother

pre-ordered meals arrive suddenly
are these a childrens' choir?

'grace equals guts under pressure'
or 'guts equals grace under pressure'
but Tom Clark says
(Code of the West)
'pleasure is never mentioned'.

amid this goonery
I should mention it more often:

It should be a slow process
fitting into this new place
(I'm astounded still that I seem to regret nothing)

two men, duck walking
carrying a third, stiff as a plank
and bug-eyed, on the bar mural

industrial coffee

this tribe are
theatre types,
a genus I find a bit alien
though I loved it
(theatre) in youth, went to La Mama weekly, almost
(though terrified of the new theatre types
who would crawl towards you across the floor

and, maybe, single you out. At La Mama
there was nowhere to hide, no 'back row'
you were vulnerable – but that was in 1968:
now, you'd be demanding money if made
'part of the performance', that is, 'modern man
(or woman)' would.

In those days
(rickety memoirist writes), spectatorship
was frowned on, you had to be
participants. It was hard work!

Yeah Grandpa.

—

great white dishes
the lights here, as I write
'against the grain' or against
the spiral binding of this notebook

(the Swiss family Robinson
have moved on, to walk
the boards no doubt)

—

people here look like people you know somewhere else

—

everyone gets up and moves off
a flock of disturbed birds
no obvious signals to depart
the foyer's empty again, almost

in the papers, people alarmed
at their genetic makeup
racists with 'asian' genes – at last science
embraces anarchism

'the world is everything that is the case'

including those earnest 'others'
plotting our destruction (and, possibly, their own)

(I like the way the glasses here tell you when a pint
becomes a half-pint)

I'm, I guess, a diasporic figure
(diasporic for several generations) but
the point of diaspora is that there is no longer
a 'homeland', there is no place where
we 'belong'

the white shapes of crockery
stacked above the Gaggia
as staff polish the equipment
(work perceived, as important
as work done, in the new economy).

this is my 'Flash', my 'Baci' (for the moment,
while still in Canterbury)

& is ΠΟ, this
very moment,
drinking coffee in Fitzroy? And Pam and Jane
in Elwood, a further stage in their peripatetic life?

—

crowns, branches
now visible
in the trees

—

in London Gavin and Frances, their traces,
and John Seed who said Sheerness (Isle of Sheppey)
was the image of a 1950s working-class town.
I imagined the Prince of Wales ordaining this
but it was no parody and grim enough

—

'take the skinheads bowling'

—

'reserved' = 'reserved for diners'

—

'employment in manufacturing has
slumped to its lowest level since 1841'

—

the inconsequential
becomes interesting
through the process of accumulation

—

16/11 poems from Brisbane, Adelaide,
somewhere in Canada (Calgary?)

— this last
Alan Wearne's 'Also Starring . . .', a list
of actors as writers

(wasted on me
— I can hardly remember what most actors
look like

(I am
Christopher Walken – whoever he is.
Ken would know, probably. Probably not
if he were post 60s.

I print out maps of Brighton
– how to get to Lee Harwood's place –
alongside these poems: Ken's one for Sasha,
Angela's manuscript

then back here
to slow-cook brisket red wine,
onions, tomato paste and thyme, a pleasant
smell suffuses the flat

—

the art of blurb writing
(Robert Creeley
the master of this
though Hugh Kenner's
'a book to take with you to the moon'
wasn't bad

– these days though
it'd have to be a book
you could take into the U.N. compound

—

they manufacture these paths especially so
you won't know which false step will land
you in two inches of water. then they light
them appropriately (i.e. not much at all).
I've had wet feet each time I've seen a film.

So who is Christopher Walken?

I only remember

Jonathan Williams' take on this, noting

James Cagney as Jimmy Schuyler

Burl Ives as Charles Olson

Myrna Loy as Mina Loy

&c

(Elvis Presley as Robert Duncan!).

Then there was

the story of when Robert Creeley (Montgomery Clift)
met Robbe Grillet, who said (on introduction):

"Robert Creeley . . . that's me!"

Pam Brown once listed all the Pam Browns
– the art ones, that is,
differentiating them by
city, by suburb)

17/11 In the library. When you find a quiet
corner to work in suddenly tradesmen appear to
fix something and natter in Wallace & Grommit
voices behind you.

So much new law is predicated on fear
yet I am not a libertarian. at least there's some
debate – this wouldn't happen in Australia.

'a ten-day old tiger cub
stuffed and put on the market
for £20,000'

winds of up to
60 mph, in the south-east

'99 and a half, just won't do . . .

. . . . got to have a hundred'

‘the Aboriginal remains,
mostly skulls and teeth
were collected in the 19th century’
returned to Tasmania
‘the Natural History Museum has over 20,000 human remains’

‘the stadium in Budapest
where he scored so many goals
with his legendary left foot’

gather about the farmhouse gusts
for the move to Faversham we wait on details
for the compleat adult those legalities
(those administering them often blundered through
no better prepared)
of English law that great weight

18/11 driving to Brighton
 to see Lee Harwood
across the Weald and the South Downs
a blue sky's feathered jetstreams

walking downhill to the beach
the burnt out shape of the old pier
& the heritage coloured front

the truly weird book (something about Bulgaria
 and Hendrik Ibsen, super-hero)
by Jocelyn Brooke, its illustrations
like a native Max Ernst; his book on orchids
in which the illustrator dates his images
(from the early 1920s through the 40s) slightly foxed

photos of Lee's ancestors in New Zealand
– the South Id, out of Christchurch;
wagons pulled by a steam tractor
(this one used for the cover of Landscapes (?))

drive back on minor roads mostly in darkness

—

19/11 the English are not up early, at least
not on Saturday, the motorway quiet
till after 10 – it's the same with shopping

half a century of animal skins in America
and the Astors came back rich
to Hever Castle, to Eton and Margaret Thatcher
– forced to sell out in 1982
(the elder Astor's faux Tudor additions from 1905)
this former residence of Anne Boleyn (Bullen)
just off the M25

Mannekins in the Long Hall
cut Henry VIII down to size – or from size:
he was 6 ft tall and beefy, quite prepared
to do the work of a mafia grandee

the house
passing (in between) to Catholics who hid a chapel
behind a bedroom.

Astor put his children in the attic
after the floods of 1968

someone upstairs talks loudly in an unknown language
it seems less a speech-act than a piece of theatre
the pace and volume not fitting conversation

but it must be, the laughter
is not manufactured

the matter unending

20/11 for the peripatetic writer perhaps the
journal is the only workable form

Introducing Zephyr, the poodle!
(photographs from Brisbane
arriving amid the household chores)

walking through
imaginary interiors
modes of being amid
what furniture?

my garb?
myself?

removing dead leaves and mud
from carpets

the rich in their
handsome panelling
somehow penurious

– everything (Hever) too big
or too small

in which to exhibit the self

(how easy it was for the Astors
to insert their selves into verities
like robber barons centuries previous)

the cargo of the 'Sirius'
could have been decided
by lottery

—

the London Stock Exchange avoids an American takeover;
predatory activities of the Murdochs possibly come to nothing
(my naivety: why do these people want this power?
Isn't money enough?)

I enter the world of Anthony Trollope)

failure and ineptitudes rescued me
from the world of celebrity
back in 1987.

do I have advanced Alzheimer's? failing to
distinguish beetroot from radishes? (this in
a newspaper cooking item where one of them –
radishes – goes well with anchovy butter).

I had never before seen Brussels sprouts
on stalks

my greatest skill: the ability
to 'waste time'?

Johnson: 'It is strange that there should be
so little reading in the world, and so much
writing'

(Boswell, 1253)

Tuesday night a quietness
too late too early
a hope to sleep soundly

confined in these rooms, to imagine more

distant sirens a car door
somewhere closer
 a train leaves Canterbury West

diurnal course

—

22/11 turnstones
 picking at the rocks
 Whitstable beach

a winter bird

—

through Chartham the wet descends again
as though Canterbury were in rain shadow,
bare poplars, the hedges thinning,
a black Rolls-Royce on a muddy track

the entire landscape
steam on a window

—

railyards, late November
acres of mud clings to treads,
digging vehicles, detritus
broken concrete, unused piping
a whole field of neon tubes lit up
as candles – this cathedral

at Ashford, business boards the train

'targets' are discussed

no, they're Labour (or Green?) councillors

—

a field of geese out of Tonbridge

—

'Hitler Green'

—

a seminar, a drink, a railway pastie

—

but I still have to read the book about the new metal

—

23/11 the Miller's Arms, Christmas lights, a fire,
looking out over the canal. Spitfire at room temperature
(spitfires at three o'clock sir!)

ivy shows up
on the trunks – the parasites are still green –
above the canal, Doric in iron,
last year's pollarding becomes apparent

—

'Ashley Hayles' – Alan Halsey's fake Language poet –
turns out to be the name of a professional poker player.

—

the doors here sealed, mostly, against the wind (or the
traffic) – not much of either at present. A slow
trail of students towards the city.

the sound
(on the system) of English folk – modern, not
'finger-in-the-ear' – a brightness

in the season.

the sun already at such an angle
(does darkness fall like a wet sponge?)

– the slight pleasure, these hours, of seeing
people, lit, in their kitchens,
oblivious preparations (the kitchen so often
at the front of these buildings).

a wall basket
(outside) does demonstrate the wind,
not so cold as yet. A woman on the pavement,
smiling to herself.

text-message seems all message, no text.

the little light bulbs go on and off

INLAND [image] REVENUE
APPLICATION for a CERTIFICATE under Section II
(1) of the Finance act, 1894

in the main street the decorations are up

—

the poet realises there has always been that play of
texts the Langpo people want to copyright
(viz. Francis Quarles 1634)

24/11 a stoat
 on the gravel path

later Avebury, the stones in rain
hot chocolate and a run to the car through the mud

arriving, Bath, peak traffic

25/11 the weather coming in up the valley
 it's quiet up here above the crescents & circuses
Saturday morning, someone at work in their office
radial treetops, branches against the pale stone, the
stepped Georgians.

 'all this useless beauty'

the man, bent over some charter, natural light
through large windows

 someone on a sill
 in the distance, smoking,
 possibly three floors up

a ladder of angels

(oops!)

(ditto)

& Gwen John, her cats
her sketches

a Gainsborough, roughly executed

up the hill for Toulouse sausage

—

the amber underside of cloud, a blue band, then
rooftops. a stand of trees on the horizon,
wave shaped by winds.

—

(in the abbey, memorials to Arthur Phillip and to
Isaac Pitman)

the ruin and rebuilding
after iconoclasm

– on TV, Scotland vs Australia (rugby)
icepacks on the groin (the Australians win,
unusually).

lights come on in the high terraces
'this has been a humbling afternoon for Scottish rugby'

—

26/11 at Wells cathedral, the figure eight stonework
(and why a crucified Christ in a Protestant church?)

– mid-morning service: the organ rumbles
enough to tilt the psyche off orbit

the sculpted exterior
as close as Christianity gets to Hinduism
but the size of the edifice
more the product of power struggles (between Wells and Bath)
than any indication of spirituality
(the Bishop's
immense palace

the town, reddish sandstone
c.f. the limestone of Bath

– I'm reminded, writing this,
of Rexroth, his jaded tour
through postwar Britain
comprising mainly of encounters
with Hooray Henrys and
friendly prostitutes. His regard
for Britain's literary establishment
minimal.

It was the age of Shell guides
the celebration of quaintness amid bad cooking
(the childhood of Basil Fawlty)

though Rexroth himself
seemed a relic when he visited Australia decades later
– a slightly false prophet of the counter-culture,
above it yet pathetically beholden to it.

—

theatres take “the shape
of a moon in its decrease” (Alberti)
and hence John Wood’s Crescent at Bath;
the moon in this phase
as we walk down the hill, Saturday evening,
to dine in the town centre.

residences, disguised
as a palace

Johnson: ‘nobody reads now’ (Boswell, 1305)

‘A dull country magistrate gave Johnson a long
tedious account of his exercising his criminal jurisdiction,
the result of which was his having sentenced four
convicts to transportation. Johnson, in an agony of
impatience to get rid of such a companion, exclaimed,
“I heartily wish, Sir, that I were a fifth.”

(Boswell, 1307)

27/11

aquae Sulis
a.k.a. Minerva

—

viewed from a distance
Dvrovernum

where
thanks to the vagaries of real estate
we'll be for six more weeks

more sky
less light

—

in the street, Wells, children
with Somerset accents

—

28/11 the 'levels' were islands joined by wooden
bridges. you descend to them from the Mendips,
Glastonbury Tor on the horizon. the parish church
at Wells is as large as most cathedrals

—

cathedrals appear from a distance, disappear
in the middle ground, then loom when you
approach them through the streets. the
middle distance is the realm of town-planners.

—

a woman picks her way
across boggy grass
in high heels

the double sound of a train leaving Canterbury West
and a half-whistled fragment of Eric Satie
(‘Eric Satie / sat at tea’)

the needs for a writing
of this kind, small

a certain space, and,
not a ‘derangement of the senses’ (whew!)
but some diffraction occasioned by that space.
Late November, almost the end
for the spotted shark (Torres Strait carving).
Also on the shelf, the image
of a pair of thongs, Japanese umbrellas,
a card with coloured dots – either this is
a copy of Damien Hirst, or else, possibly,

Damien Hirst copied the card?

Pevsner Architectural Guides: Bath
by Michael Forsyth

(Yale University Press, 2003)

– with these things
fill a great silence

—

we escape our own history
to live in someone else's (?)
navigating National Trust classifications
(that specify the exact green
of a garage door)

—

29/11 possibly weasel, not stoat
 – and then, last night
 a small black mouse in the flat
 (maybe a shrew?) hid
 under the bed

—

Sir Joseph Banks was one of Johnson's pallbearers

—

pup tents on the edge of ponds
(bird watching)

– the Crab & Winkle Way, apparently
the first passenger rail service (Canterbury [W] to

Whitstable

—

the half-gable too often looks like an economy measure

—

the English drought is due to bad plumbing
not lack of water. it's the form not the content

—

boxes against the light (dub housing)

WAY OUT // SORTIE

a bonfire
in the woods
near Pluckley

'trains rocket to impossible destinations'

—

'interference' as in 'Memory Screen'
– the screen both a filter and a wall
(a 'firewall') that lets things through and
blocks things off

'we'll let that through
to the keeper'

impossible to write
on a moving train

'Padlock Wood'

the white cones of oast houses

a trembling man with a touch-pad
figures dancing under a tree

'they build glass conservatories
to catch the sun, and then they want to heat them'

– a blue/white flower in the hedges looks like frost

—

Georgian – the beginnings of modern space

Ford Madox Brown's suburbia – how to read them now:
as monstrous? (yet what was gimcrack now seems
well built).

—

the Marquess of [what] cnr. Bow St & Russell St WC2
– Covent Garden market a few yards off. the bitter this time
is Bombardier.

—

world gone crazy. what place amid textings
for an ancient art? 'everybody is a poet' like
'everybody is a hero'

or everybody looks like somebody else
(David Ellison has a double in New Zealand, exactly
like himself . . . with hair)

—

the cackle of harridans

'FOOD & NEWS
The STAGE: The Weekly for the Entertainment Business'

I'm unlocatable
somewhere in London

—

30/11 'edge of the orizon'

chanterelles

—

1/2 The descent of Winter? Possibly.
(the warmest Autumn since . . .

no sign of the Royal Mail (the writing
gets 'littler and littler')

(a review

finished yesterday, deranged, maybe
– but on deadline

(someone outside

in a parka, like the Michelin man

(car lights

the excess of energy. Will there be anyone
to remember us?

(would Frank O'Hara

enjoy it while it's there

(the syntax here

strangely wrong

(begin again

—

marked on the directory: the Oxo tower
– an advertisement for beef-cubes –
a palindrome at the centre of an empire

Art Deco &
instant bouillon (or palindromic beef)
'way across the river' Waterloo East

—

dining hall of the Inner Temple
where the consumption of wine has fallen off
since the advent of the internet (letters would formerly
be answered in the morning)

—

Sir John Soane's museum
a surrealist trouv , stones,
plaster casts and false walls,
skylights of all shapes, a sarcophagus,
Hogarth* and Turner

a house designed
as a place of instruction

*('The Rake's Progress' and 'The Election')

Piranesi also

(the pen and ink sketches, not the more rigid etchings)
& [] Daniel: early items of orientalism,
portraits of Napoleon,

a Chinese dog,
images of Shakespeare,
fragments, an arm,
parts of a head

(followed by coffee at Somerset House)

—

2/12 rock rose, a native, flowering out of season
(it seems cold to us but, according to the natives, it
isn't at all – some of them still in shorts & T-shirts
and it's twelve degrees).

—

'parts of Bristol are still rich' – Ed Dorn
on the slave trade

would that John Howard could apologise
for deaths and dispossessions

—

buy shoes in Sandwich

(after imagining ourselves
frozen, on the path to the seafront, discovered
two millennia hence: the 'Sandwich People')

(the location? on the 'Green Wall' adjacent to the watercourse
called 'Vigo Sprong' & before

the Saxon Shore Way crosses the Royal St George Golf Course.

—

3/12 you can't have too many scarves

—

4/12 for the moment
the movement
to solstice, the radio
seems to come on earlier
(odd to be drinking tea in darkness)

—

something died in our laundry

—

“Poetry is a form of going away” (Iain Sinclair, p79)

“I abandoned my attempts to construct pseudo-epics that mingled (without distinction) poetry and prose. Book dealing, I consoled myself, was a form of authorship: my Thursday stall at Camden Passage Market could be viewed as an exhibition of chosen texts. A modernist collage of found objects. Perfect-bound quotations to take home for cash. Being on the road was a willed dreaming, very much

like the dipping into random books, the brooding on sofas, that preceded the furtive announcement of a poem.”

(Sinclair, p93)

5/12 ‘whatever’

it’s beginning to seem certain that we’ll have to spend Christmas in this apartment. paper moves backwards and forward between solicitors and the Faversham council. slowly.

festina lente, eh?

Martin Johnston suddenly erupts into this. his parents’ months in London. after which Greece was paradise. but that was 1949 and rationing. Martin, a year or two older than me, dead in his forties (his family had an appalling survival rate, and so – him. will he be republished?

Australia wins the second test. (passive:) hands are wrung (“fires were started . . .”)

'a world record for a dress made for a film'
(Audrey Hepburn, 'Breakfast at Tiffany's')
– A.H – 'a size six'

—

should I be reporting on First World War battlefields?

—

Basil King's 'Arc' arrives in the mail. His
testimony continues, an outburst of energy taking in
a history of art, of transgression, of left-handed
pitchers,

a search for perfect pitch?

– but a sense of Baz, his connection
with De Kooning, with Olson and Creeley
(and the Blitz)

one understands,
reading him, why an artist must produce,
this intensity, this need,
though the materials may be no more than
a hand, a deck of cards, a beauty spot
(once these were carried in small containers, the
artificial moles of the eighteenth century).

the arc

is the call of crows, the weld of instances
here, on the ground, in Kent, as thinned branches
disclose their populations.

monitor this,
testify to this. well,
I will, in my own way.

—

artificial light on grass, the trunks
of various trees, that mix of lime green
and black.

letters to various people.

having to be out among it
parts of the day, despite conditions
(if heat became something else
in John Forbes' poems, could cold
in mine?)

—

6/12 gentlemen's outfitters
in which you could buy a deerstalker
maybe even plus-fours

—

evening: the George (to celebrate
purchase of moleskins, prior to reading
at the Menzies Centre.

a scarf and a woollen cap
that makes me look like an escapee from an institution.
Eccentric? Try the quote from today's Guardian

"No one will notice that you are dull if
they think you are eccentric"

Mark O'Connor (the one we used to call 'the real'
a.k.a. John Nash, author of 'Ode to Iggy Pop')
once said: 'who could feel bad in a hotel.'
Here (England) it makes more sense – the old saw
about Americans going to bars to be alone, and English
for company. It's their living space, away from
the poky parlours and bedsits. those chandeliers
and rows of golden taps,

and: paradise!
they play 'You're gonna miss me'
by the 13th Floor Elevators! Roky Erikson is a genius!

I hope not to fall asleep
in the preceding lecture

—

hors de commerce

7/12 a small tornado in North London
(blizzards forecast for the new year)
– lasted no more than a minute
(ten streets affected)
'it's just surreal man, I was asleep
and a rooftop came through my window'

8/12 all colour gone from the courtyard (except
wet green)
'a leaf clinging to the threshold . . .'

wheat beer, at the Continental, Whitstable
buoys rocked on the chill, Southend not visible
(though this is supposed to be a good thing)
bluster gradually clearing from the S.W.
as waves break over the groyne
water moving
on the surface of a barrel
the next room full
of mothers and children – this is an English afternoon.

back through the middle of town
to buy Christmas wine
You realise

your own moderation
(the 18th century permanently drunk – Johnson
didn't even regard cider as 'drink', or beer either
probably, though the quantity of port drunk
might mean it wasn't so strong

– how enter

that mindset now?

And how could they enter ours?
of radiation-poisoned operatives or minute-by-minute
exposés.

no lengthy talk in coffee-houses
(with my attention span could I do this?)

– a dog falls out of a car
when jacketed walkers open the back flap.

a smudge on the horizon vanishes.

—

9/12

ADVERTISEMENT BREAK

– Petra Haden's stunningly beautiful version
of 'The Who Sell Out'

listened to midday,

Saturday, a shabby English apartment. Six degrees
outside

—

Christmas rush in Canterbury (Saturday)
the main street impossible to move in
(when's St Agnes Eve? it's chill already)

my bad handwriting
where 'Christmas rush'
looks like 'Christmas noh'
(a homage to Murray Edmond?)

– Christmas noh could be interesting e.g.

One: 'I can't move in this street'

Two: 'Why are you here then?'

One: 'Because I need an overcoat'

A man staggers past carrying an enormous sign, the
lettering of which is illegible.

etcetera (or: One: 'etcetera')

—

10/12 rotten apples under trees near Selling
rotten apples on blue carpet
at the V & A museum

the Victorian age, represented by
the Albert Memorial, Hyde Park, and
Julia Margaret Cameron's illustration of Tennyson
a deep vulgarity in both cases though
vulgarity and vitality often run together,

a four-foot queen's mourning
and the literalism of Victorian art
(this or a vision of hell:
Harrod's Knightsbridge in the Christmas rush)

11/12 a writing like weaving where
 letters become emblems

in nine days this place closes down for winter break.
only the security guards in their heated vans, possibly
no mail . . .

winter hobby: bedraggling

. . . and we're stuck here till late January.

summer to midwinter

where did the pair of pants go
that the bear wore?

this is no ending, it's a beginning

—

'remakes are the only true originals' (Sinclair, 228)

—

staccato voice from the subcontinent
the telephone upstairs

is 'telephone' a word anyone uses anymore?

—

sleep

—

12/12 brother of the unabomber
 RADIO 4

—

heading south into the sun at nine-thirty
to the Goods Shed where even the surface of the wooden tables
is warm from overhead heating.

a row of unskinned rabbits (or hares?) draining perhaps,
brussels sprouts on the stalk
'turkey foil'

fanlights onto the platforms

—

cabbage steam over the balustrade
(though, here, suitably herbed, perhaps in cider vinegar)

that doubled sense of seasonally appropriate decoration

the wood, soaped, worn smooth, the faint rings of coffee.

—

a few months more of the exotic
then what?

—

light percolates into the Old Beverlie (Ye Olde)
– a view through to the kitchen, containers of
 industrial tartare and ketchup –
on a corner at St Stephens, bricks scraped by navigating cars

I'm liking long rooms with low ceilings
and what they do to light

windows with artificial frost
(they need it?)

nothing furtive here about a pint (the baby strollers of Whitstable)

—

go, little book!

chestnuts, bought a week back, emit blue powder.
they're mouldy, I discover, on boiling and shelling.

and other poems.

four weeks for the Swale Council to sign a piece of paper
rescuing our books from imprisonment
(somewhere in West London)
– and my big overcoat;
our paintings (what space for these
in the new abode?)
and numerous forgotten items

it's 3 pm, lighting up time (and still
lunatics in short-sleeved shirts) Hello Ken!
& dear Pam, homeless in Melbourne, as we
are homeless in Canterbury

merryberry Chris-
anthemums to all!

I could end this notebook
with something portentous.

Or I could just do this:

[scribble]