

Ἡ ΠΥΡΡΑΙΣ ΤΩΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΤΩΝ

GREEK FIRE



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Old Country
(Παλιά Χώρα)

Second-Hand Kytherian Boy

Playing Odysseus, they fled their homes at night,
leaving dead castles and humble villages in flight;
Icons in the myrtle gave solemn farewell bows
since Kythera “had nothing left to give them now.”
That three-fingered hand, poised to sign the cross on Greece
by strife was forced open, and her people released -
exchanging one rocky, dry land for another...

tempting me to write about the same generic immigrant experience.
Well, I reject it! That tale has been told before.
We’ve dived into every minute detail of lore -
it’s time to take the pieces, pebbles misunderstood,
arrange them in a circle, surrounding firewood,
paint our faces as fire burns and dance naked over smouldering coals.

When you think you have all the answers,
nobody's going to ask you a question.
Take Demosthenes, who practised speaking
with rocks in his gob –
his speeches brought Athens anger and mirth.
Like him I lowered my mouth to the earth
and filled my head with stones
my pack bulging with ancient bones.
But I trust I’ve not laboured in vain -
that you’ll discern my voice through sediment,
so I can use these foundations to tell of my pain
without worldly impediment.

And that long-dead fireplace
is the sad, yearning space
where stories are born
and where they should remain

I held them in a place of pride
And now I set these stones aside
to leap ahead again.

I Want To Go To Smyrna

Not Izmir, but Smyrna as it was a hundred years ago,
before those awful fires, and far before the...well, you know.
And not with my family, clothed in bright American wear,
but sporting a *manga*'s brown flat cap and with bushy, long hair,
so no one looks at me askance when I let myself get lost.
I want to buy an old copy of Cavafy's work,* and cross
out the message formerly there – that's someone's love I'm stealing -
write "Follow the path of logic, but leave some room for feeling,"
sign 'Callista Economides', like in Maniaty's book -
And then I want to duck inside a dirty dive, like some crook.
I'd find there a line of men in jackets playing violins,
singing of gardens drugs and wives while dark smiles stretch their chins,
and the bartender would get a glass of raki, and I'd waste
a few hours in there carousing – until night fell and the taste
of wine dizzied me, and I staggered out to the port and saw
the skeletons of Spanish and Turkish galleys. And I'd pour
a bucket of water on my head to wash away the drink,
and I'd shatter the dream and end up back where I am, I think.

*I am fully aware of the anachronism.

Ariadne's Labyrinth

Theseus captured, Ariadne awoke,
came to the king, who lay rope-bound and numb.
Lovely in mercy, of freedom she spoke,
escape from the maze her life had become.
He knew a Cretan dance that mapped his way,
so the girl's red thread Theseus left untouched -
in youth they'd lived in the same boundless maze,
but one dance they both knew didn't mean much.
And later, when Madness left her alone,
on Naxos she built her life unashamed.
Her betrayal repaid, her fate unknown,
Child Ariadne's labyrinth reclaimed.
Would you in her place grace your foes with thread,
or leave them bound to rot among the dead?

Heavy Greek In A Village Bar

While blind poet sings, plucks monotonous strings with meter sublime,
Revellers clutch their troubles in jugs, swilling, sighing, speaking
Heavy Greek in a village bar, drinking the melancholy of another time.

Little cities fight, squawking mayors in councils not worth a dime,
Proud city-states no more, but small-time crooks with morals reeking,
While blind poet sings, plucks monotonous strings with meter sublime.

Citizens lamenting the crumbling of their stone-hewn youthful prime,
Confine themselves to companionable alleys, now merely seeking
Heavy Greek in a village bar, drinking the melancholy of another time.

The moment of our downfall, merely another pointless crime,
Everything we owned destroyed, gold ichor of luck leaking,
While blind poet sings, plucks monotonous strings with meter sublime.

No matter how rural your home has become, how exotic your village's chime,
You will hear the quiet creep of new industry; the havoc, the shrieking,
Heavy Greek in a village bar, drinking the melancholy of another time.

Time passes, and looking deep into the vine, past the goblet's grime,
Are we; poor inebriated sages at their futures peeking,
While blind poet sings, plucks monotonous strings with meter sublime,
Heavy Greek in a village bar, drinking the melancholy of another time.

Mastiha

They march across the plains,
stout battalion, grey grove;
the one living there claims
rule over all it wove.

It shouts through rocks and bones
and shakes the shapeless earth.
Timeless thing, whose warped moans
echo and break the hearth.

Dead dryad: in her haste
discarding what we shared.
Mastiha she wasted
on me: I never cared.

Somehow I lived, staying
Forty years on this plain;
Pruning pathos, laying,
brewing, soaking in pain.

And here's the cursed sum
I've cried out the new crop
turned half to dirt and some to gum
the rest I drink until I drop.

Here is the place she left me,
and the wooden cup from which I drank away
fresh sorrow, and began my newlywed decay.
Here is my eternity sleeping against the *mastiha* bush.

Eleusis Woman

Athens is always resplendently restrictive,
Crude anathema to feminine intentions.
Excessive masculinity fills marbled streets;
from women's bodies only homes are extensions.
But admittance into the sacred Mysteries
is one of an Athenian maiden's few boons.
Thus it is with a priest's hand on my shoulder,
I watch Artemis change her brother's countenance,
smudging white paint on his face, hiding his glory,
in a silver veil that will melt off come morning.
I think her beauty surpasses her sibling: that
she is more royal for having nothing herself.
She serves, virgin of this freezing night.

I feel the cloth protecting, obscuring my eyes.
This is a deep, serpentine tunnel into earth.
Still blinded, paralysed, I wait for many hours.
I am baptised in salt water and fresh water,
I am sexless, the first member of my new race.
The ritual is continued in my absence.
I feel the snake writhing on my chest in darkness,
a thing the priest names the "God across the belly."
There is shouting and chanting, devils are evoked
and they are exorcised, and male becomes female,
'male' and 'female' lose their stupid, cloying meaning,
the world appears whole in a flash of candlelight!
And I am initiate, *Mystai*.

The *polis* is light through my cracked neophyte shell.
Mad hagglers, foreigners, tradesmen clatter outside.
Hetaira and whores mingle in the clay district.
This is Athens as I never saw her before,
a world of whirling new colour in which I can
watch *eidolons* dance, and pray to their creators.
We compose poetry, and venerate the gods.
Metric education has become daily work –
the lordship of repetition, classical verse
births ritual, kicking, screaming, from circumstance.
Twelve lines of twelve syllables, and one line of nine,
are required to touch the points of the firmament.
Thus we anticipate ascension.

Two snakes entwine, entangle, the sweet smell ripens.
The vestments lie on cavern floor, twisted, knotted.
Once inducted girl, now the ritual master!
But the service lacks meaning, like my life outside.
It is merely a serpent propped upon a tree,
nature made into congenial humanity.
Another empty vow from a hierophant
who was deceptive and red-robed and typical.
And this sordid avenue for wasting time, this
repugnant deception in coupled metered rhyme,
has whittled my youth away, branch of rotten tree,
has taken my life from me with a false promise.
I no longer believe in my gods.

Would I have found truth in the final Mystery?
At least, if I had persevered, offered my death,
I would have made for a choice piece of history.
But it is hard to commit to a system where
the god, the thing, the snake across your belly dares
to tell you what you want in absence of meaning.
And why do we care for the stuff of creation?
Athens, colourful and loud, cheap and litigious,
continues to live despite our revelations.
I think all one can do is accept there are gods,
and that the form they assume is irrelevant,
that one's best option is to go down to market
and offer a cock to Asclepius.

Greek Fire

Fight to the death at Lepanto -
no more relying on Don John,
that stagnant *Erotokrito*
too old for his own cause or song.
Drift on the face of the waters,
bodies bloodied from blasting arms,
gazing at figures of slaughter
good men at long last calm.

Someone gave me this Greek fire,
heavy stuff from too long ago;
and none can tell quite how this pyre
burns so well on water aglow.
Ignoring my inhibitions
weaving the threads on old Fates' loom
I take men from their traditions
I lead them to their doom.

Back again from an Eastern land
come to drown in blue-green dikes,
in shade of galleys' shadow-band
I've scorched my friend and foe alike.
It's none of them who are warring
but the loads of bones on their backs:
skeletons aiming and scoring
their points for pointless acts.

Toss out those marble colonnades
cast off your dull dreams of glory:
to your father you're renegades
to me, you're another story.
Take up your sword; I'll make you yearn
for that same Lepanto raging:
Greek fire which must always burn,
endless and unageing.

Paeon For Ares

Keeping watch, like Mycenaean guard, in observation:
among grey trees, there gambolled three fat, fluffy little birds
contemplating nature, the border, the constellations,
soaking in a red fountain, exchanging embittered words.
An earthenware pot, abandoned, filled with rain, their plunder.
They pecked incessantly, scavenged, and fought as brothers should;
tumbling through vines, undulating, flying over, under,
twisting, entangling, infinite labyrinth of dead wood.
Each might have fit snug into my palm.

In repose, shifting in lice-ridden cot, head against earth
I heard musical intimations, which I must report.
There echoed distant screams, and the sound of pot-shots, and mirth,
someone singing a war song as usual, and a court,
An evening congress between animals driven to hunt.
Then three cruel men clinking wooden worry-beads got out
from their black car backfiring, taking supplies to the front.
and I cocked my ear for the sake of what they spoke about,
in confidence, to one another.

At the bullet's conclusion, I allowed myself reprieve,
To sink into dust and a feeling of immense relief.
Which opened up new sensations, bold and dark, to perceive:
as if I were present at a sacrifice, there was grief
at the acts conducted by some ancient tribal master,
a gold string around his finger, bubbling blood on his lips,
an antelope, stunned at his feet, awaiting disaster.
It felt like a cessation, like a hollow frozen grip,
a playful ghost flying from my chest.

“Priests Hate Him!” – Response To The Messenger From The Capital

His response:

No matter how auspicious the signs may appear,
I implore you rescind your judgement, seer
for I hate godless lies. I keep faith beyond ken
of wolfish shepherds, greedy gangs of well-bred men.
No comfort in the deception of the archimandrite,
nor succour in the visions of the stylite.
In your great stone steeples, only little bugs live,
and chew the blessed red rugs of the holy hive.

His advice to the village:

Seek out in life a grove of trees
or kneel on some young houri's knees.
Make there an altar, immolate
the leftovers of what you hate,
and venerate that single thought
that teaches you what is and ought.
Such is the essence, moving up
past columns, towers, holy cruft.
Blessed are those who are willing
to worship in ruins.

Alchemy *No Yona*

In the veiled room
At the top of the tower
where the young man carbuncular exultantly shakes clotted wings,
Dextro Custos, Sinestro Custos, the two questing heads
of Cerberus guard the stairs while the elder watches stars.
These are the two blessed children: those of Hermes Thrice-greatest.
But another, a young girl, escaped in scorched infancy
borne on a white horse's back. The throne, once her destiny,
her inheritance, was stolen by jealous sciences.
For Hermes King discovered new methods. 'Progression'
required her destruction; his daughter altar-bound, deer-brained,
he abandoned what worked for what shone under microscope.

She quested in exile, learning of the elements, those
cornerstones of nature: fire, water, earth, air, and surprise.
but in her absence Good King Hermes secured his new place.
His throne adorned with the melted steel of a thousand arms,
supine on a lotus, waving a thousand golden hands.
To oppose the new gospel, chemical, inimical,
what hopeless chance does fledgling nature have? The world itself
sides wisely with the usurper - at least, it bears him out.
Even as the lost daughter fights her way up the tower,
she kills her brothers, she casts their bodies down to earth, but
then her allies desert her; fire produces new compounds,
Water clouds, obscures the truth at the bottom of the lake,
The earth tries to swallow her up, the wind tears at her clothes.
The final element, the one that lends my tale grandeur,
surprise, is all that remains in the end. With this power,

She looks outside the poem, at the constructed meter,
and she changes it,
she plays with the lengths of lines,
using textual surprise.
Having chewed up the gum holding the work together,
She raises a silver blade, swipes at his symbols and cuts
Her
mes
in half. We gaze at his corpse, the corpse of the text he left,
the Hermeticum,
isolated, protected, by bi-vocal blathering,
circumstantial, consubstantial with the man who wrote it,
since they're both made of words, after all. And she rules wisely.
She has seen beyond the veil, knows she is like her father,

and her brothers, who never left their tower but for death -
with the wings of the morose elder clotted now with blood,
with the beast's three heads twisted toward the same direction.
So she knows that when she dies,
Her funeral will be only text; grand, stark, black and white.

Mithridates VI Pontus

When the Romans approached,
tearing down the walls, the glorious crenelations,
he drank, Mithridates, and strode back and forth
in an agony of impatience, ready to die.
But poisonous polemics had hardened his guts -
he was the survivor of a thousand cuts.
Transcending in a moment his
campaign of long defiance,
the fearful god-king paced about.
Being divine, he had lost all freedom
to die as he chose, as his daughters did,
when he sent them swiftly to Hades.
His coveted *teleosis* required stasis, perfection,
and his god's narrative needed a good story
to make him immortal.
We watched the legions baulk outside
as the final wave of defenders fell upon them
and were slaughtered.
The new god didn't go un-praised-
I paid my respects with his improvised rite.
In the end, the failure of comfortable poisons
left only a blond stranger's blade.

Letter To A Famous Trumpeter, 271 BC

Dear Aglais, in response to your request,

Your application to our troupe has been accepted
please check over your details and come to Alexandria
by the next Olympic Games.

This is no fragmented old sapphic screed,
I need a few details if we're to proceed.
First – you were “born on a certain day,
to uncertain parents?” – Good play.
The people like a touch of mystery:
lends the *Ptolemaia* a sense of history.

I understand you eat your fair share.
Something like three jugs of wine, a bear
up to twelve pounds of meat per day?
I've a supplier who could easily weigh
that all up for you.
And you need a practice space? We tend to camp
outside towns at night before they light the lamps.
All the space you could need.

And when you bring that frightful force
to bear on Egypt's mild course
don't forget the step you danced
when the Besieger's force advanced.
I'll see that energetic drive
one more time before I die.

Finally – I saw last time you played
in Egypt, you wore a splayed
hoplite's wig and a crested helmet.
Bring them: such props are well met
since the *Ptolemaia* makes us a fair few talents.
I'd like our troupe to keep their balance -
as something's changing in this world
the future seems to have unfurled
her dark and frightful banners. Alas!
We keep making music, worship Zeus,
and wait for heaven's judgement.

Terpsichore

Christians Meeting In The House Of Lucas, 50 AD

A strange man entered Corinth's hearth,
He claimed his name was Paul,
He talked about death and rebirth
and promised God to all.

He tried to break bread in our house
my husband stopped him at the door,
for I was present – Lucas' spouse -
and couldn't be seen at all.

Lucas claimed he'd asked this sect:
apocalyptic from the East.
And more guests entered, to inspect,
so I made for them a feast.

I would have left with custom's nod,
but they invited me to speak!
Said all were equal under God
If they were willing to seek.

Paul read aloud from scrolls he brought
of a man, destroyer of harm.
Like Orpheus, hell's change he wrought,
and returned, life in his arms.

The cult began to dance and sing,
and some odd musicians to play:
I stood confused within the ring
rather dazzled by the fray-

And Lucas said it was God's goal
that we were to become equal,
that I and my immortal soul
would find heavenly sequel.

And yet since that cult left us here
Lucas has hit me many times.
His fervour, a nice idea
hasn't yet affected his crimes.

The Only True Friend Of King Michael III

So, you ask, why work my way into that sordid modern court?
I'm busy right now, but I'll spare a few words: on why I sought
friendship of a 'useless king' he's claimed to be, as I recall -
since love of Michael 'the Drunkard' offers nothing, after all.
He sits on high at the chariot race swearing and swaying,
drawing the people's ire, drinking the taxes they're paying.
He's so high up, in fact, that he can't reach anything below.
That's the real power of God's man on earth, as we've come to know.

As custom in his father's day, the old king beheld a line,
those possible brides - elegant nobles, proffered like choice wines.
For a certain girl he felt such love, and sudden pride within,
that he acted with an impulse unbecoming of a king.
Like a schoolboy he taunted her: 'Mankind women hath debased,'
and felt shame as she replied: 'by Mary that is not the case.'
This Kassia - she was lovely, but too sharp, a full amphora.
A bad match; he picked instead yet another Theodora.

Michael was but a boy of two on the day his father died,
having revenged himself on Kassia for her icons, and cried,
since he entered her spartan chambers one final time, and found
only a drafted hymn on the table - a half-holy sound.
He wrote the last line, and then Theophilos waited to expire,
at last allowing Theodora to rule over his empire.
She struggled with old uncle Bardas, used her son as a tool,
and the cruel bastard bade him drink, and made of him a fool.

I am sorry - I haven't yet explained the point of this tale.
Why would I forge a stilted bond with an emperor so frail?
I, a member of the old house Laskaris, began prying
since I found interest in empire so noble now dying.
Born into that palace of death, Michael can't truly be blamed -
given evil advice for which his uncle should be shamed,
finding titles too much to bear: Basileus, Emperor, King;
I can't address him: none seem quite right for this sad broken thing.

Perhaps he has made some good judgements, in all these drunken years,
undertaken without the false 'help' of Bardas or his peers.
To save us from the Slavs, he sent Cyril and Methodius,
that by mass conversion he could make matters harmonious.
He stabilised our finance, he let the monks paint their icons,
he earned the respect of the Muslims, a rare thing for archons.
But Michael's is a sad life still, and so I love him for it,

since he's dying like his empire, and nothing can restore it.

Late one night, scent of Bosphorus salt, I find him-unguarded-in the streets,
and somehow-though I'm really just another face-he remembers me.
You can see his nose is red, and his cheeks are too, his step is ungainly,
covered in stink and sweat, his shoes are missing, and he's mumbling insanely,

Yet though they seem unfocused, kept shut by sighs,
a knowing sadness resides in those turgid blue eyes.

When Maria's Brothers Left

Left in the dust of the next blind voyage
I grasp at dreams and make new life of them.
Little cicada, perhaps you'll visit.

My *techne* was taken, my gold, my cuffs,
should I continue to bother with this?
Could a cicada act if it came back?

A summer-day life like this is enough.
With a glance at exposed skin, or a kiss.
All the same to a mayfly at that age.

Labourers hammer under shady eaves,
and soon tired, rub dark brown necks for their art.
Constructing a gilded cathedral cage.

We squint at cities under crunching leaves,
too close, at rivers drawn by insect's paths.
That cicada would be useless even if it returned.

New Country
(‘Lucky Country’)

Queen Street Wall

Concentric cops circle a horde
of colourful middle class peacocks,
exuding clouds of righteous mary-jane smoke.
They block the street and reason
if they're gonna protest, they may as well go for broke.
The wall blocking the road:
"Cross when you see the black lights matter."
Retreat to an office, a richly gilded spear,
"Fuck this, I can smell the cigarettes from here..."
On the ashtray asphalt...
"Nah, yeah, I reckon they'll only get louder, aye."
Here's a drunk man in the left lane screaming '*Kyrie Eleison*.'
People are trampling on his face.

Welcome to Brisbane!
Gold goes in and smoke comes out,
like one of Engels' nightmares.
Don't be afraid –
Are you a King George square?

...Here we're clutching the phoenix's burning tail -
At the Queen Street Wall
On Queen Street Mall
and Wall Street's Queen remains a sight unseen...
There's no escaping the belly of this whale.

I believe we can dance together
amid the chaos that precedes, the light that recedes,
a permanent shift in the weather.
But only if you cast away your graven image
the LinkedIn, the Facebook, the tawdry scrimmage
of a personality you discerned from a list,
of an impression not painted Impressionist.

And when the peacock greets foreign things
that's the day our war begins.
Imported books, imported meat,
imported fights, imported wheat.
I guess if you're gonna protest, you should go for broke
but the phoenix is quick to slip out from its yoke.

Bulimba Creek

In the reeds near sluggish, muddy waters
in the right mood blue or gold,
comes a single duck, from brackish quarters,
welcomed back into the fold.

From what little I've seen, two bridges lean
bravely over subtle flow.
One poised high above a blue stone-strewn stream;
other crouching, watching, low.

No spots to skip rocks as ponderers might,
untouchable, girt by brush,
Bulimba Creek marches below, a sight
uncommon at peak-hour's rush.

Twisted suburban tributaries snake
through unimpeachable reeds.
Intimations of lorikeets ring, break
silence, compelled by their needs.

All along, cloying, dignified mangroves
pull senses to attention;
Endless reams, bushes studied by tired droves
students without retention.

Near two wooden benches long past repair,
pagodas rotted by rain,
all sounds are servants to an ancient air;
music is played here in vain.

Tough, bordered by mundane modernity,
just like any other freak:
infertile crescent for eternity
is Brisbane's Bulimba Creek.

Tolstoy's Illusion

I've no problem with the rich vegetation,
violent avian habitation,
petty suburban peregrination;
it's just the people who get my goat.
Yesterday in the city
a man bragged he'd stab me in the throat.
I shrugged, saw a balloon cockatoo in the sky,
and walked even faster, without reply.
People like gems, rare
and the others also there
dumbly painted up like dolls
refusing offers of a soul.

Hypocrites in furs
sweltering, interred
in self-writ ambition
remitted contrition
because they no longer need to be ashamed of themselves.

Let us leave that place behind:
a trip to the country is my new design.

A thousand dull gold lights
scattered across a dust-swept rest stop
in the low, flat night.
Black burning skies
in the land where honour dies
Sixth sense trailing behind
a conman's glazed-glass eyes.

"Welcome to this country town,
the biggest in the state."
With ancient laws in tablet slate,
and citizens all honour-bound.

City and country are awkward brothers:
both verdant screeching cawing desert
and while lovely, barren, intolerably barren.

A Bit Of The Ballad Of Aus Quixote

Have you yet heard of Aus Quixote, this mad and tragic tale?
Mounted again on horse he rides, over hill and over vale.

The humble roadie revs flame-styled car through miles of Spanish flues,
stopping for pies in small country towns with cases of the blues.

The M1 may be incomplete, but here's a fact we don't regret:
the dream of transit from Brisbane to Melbourne isn't over yet.

But the councillor and media plan over cups of chai,
and the rest of us must admit our hopes were never too high.

Holy Sancho blasts Akkadakka and bursts into the lead,
as knights course along highways of old with frankly lethal speed.

Townsville, Warwick, Tweed Heads, and Cairns have become Quixote's new pawns,
They'll see his headlight coming upon them when the new day dawns.

Still the heads of local towns are unholy impediments
to his dream of border crossing, a quest of impertinence.

"Dulcinea" Sheila owns "Old Wheeler", all her charm revealed,
child under arm, makeup for stage, who cares that she's not concealed?

Alonso's only lady, the good social worker's nightmare,
cigs in her bag, she's known a slag, as proof she goes outside bare.

Rocinante whines, kicks up four-wheeled dust, a lethal place to drive,
One errant step through this place means death - at Styx they might arrive.

It must be told how Quixote of old, never quite as daring,
at swift rate collecting the greats, he found himself preparing.

In The Castle, to Underbelly, Chaser's War On All This,
his interest aroused, but so late that Aus went Round the Twist.

By the time he felt himself to be worthy of ascension,
his hair'd gone grey as mist, and he'd forgotten his intention.

Convinced he was right, in Australian might, he picked up his tools,
The Charger V8, the puppy she'd hate, bug repellent, gruel.

Glorious dreams within his mind, and cap with pair of stubbies,

he copied them well, his idols sell - squandered all his money.

His neighbours fled, Quixote said, they gazed in fear and dismay,
as he wrote then, for their benefit, his final passion play.

He told them where they could shove concern, right up their filthy arse,
and smug, drove from home in cloud of muck, with destiny of glass.

The knights drove far, came to Stanthorpe, where problems dark had risen,
Drought and supply looked very dry - there was no chance for pissin'.

What chivalrous knight, bargaining blight, could sustain resistance?
He surmised, cool, those price-gouging fools would respect persistence.

Swilling VB from his truck, he drank pure muck in iron gullet,
Gulping it down, shouting through the town, "Take your drink, and scull it!"

"Water's naught to 4X - where's the mateship, sinking homemade crafts,
"The wine of our land, stopped by the cork of council members daft."

"Internecine conflict brewing will soon turn you into sots,
I see brother on bro, sister on sis - it's frankly not hot."

So saying his piece, he rode away, saved the thirsting people
Glorifying with their cheers for beers, they built for him a steeple.

The Coming Of September, 2020

Far back, January: All laid claim to new purity,
the six saintly shrouded men walked slowly across that lawn;
we performed the rituals, made impulsive vows, waited
to see the coming of dawn.

February, when neo-Babylon got under way,
a confusion of systems clamoured for space: tall office
buildings, rain, chaste days, and an undercurrent, a rumour,
a river in the cavern.

March: when new roots show signs of sprouting, when new ideas
become brave, let that one-eyed *furioso* be your guide.
As though within the Cyclops' cave, we hunker down and wait,
shivering, resigned to fate.

April surprised us: coming on the town below the wall,
when it turned out to be the cruellest month after all.
I discovered what happened to Tiresias, and that
literature should be sad.

May, Schrodinger's favourite time – here, when psychosis peaks,
recall days of yore, and listen for signs of when the deep
Siberian mines retain you no more. Retreat, advance,
Take your sword, and take this dance.

June and July, but then why? Those capricious Sunday friends
have slipped away, and occupied themselves with worthless play.
Don't regret them. As an Italian hero once said, that
agony is your triumph.

'August', indeed. Time to emerge from your cuckoo cocoon, where you
ruled as king. Return to your duties, farmer, 'dictator
for a day', for her horns blast again: mother Babylon
calls you into the present.

Floyd's Ring

Nostalgia for a land that never existed,
and false love for a cruel martyr who never was,
for whom your passions without fuel persisted,
always longing for a country or a cause.

Save me your false anger and from your false money.
It doesn't belong in this halcyon land, this
hot stinking mire of passive war, milk and honey.
You can erase all your problems with a kiss.

Think instead of those who trod here, once, long ago,
the workers, the painters, and the wanderers,
who, for all their greatness, leave us nothing to show
because you in your infinite wisdom have dismissed them.

Hey Musicians

Hey, musicians,
performers, people, politicians of Australia
Hey, now, musicians,
Listen, carefully, take note, and grow up.
Your work is soulless, and when I hear it,
it doesn't make me want to blow up.
You have no guts, no heart,
It's as if nothing has ever happened to you.

Awaken! What torrid blood
flows through these dull veins, put to sleep
by spring rain – acid rain, acid for the body
that needs heat, burning heat, to
force its lazy heart to beat.
Fight! Kill! Or be subjugated, and then, at least
you'll have your rebellious corpus, and ambition
to cast off the yoke, to destroy the beast.

Scatter the seeds of your thought
to the stones, that it may never grow anywhere,
salt the earth with your old life, leave it behind
and struggle again.
You owe it to me, and you owe it to God.
How dare you forsake your duty!

"I'm too busy", "I'm interested but I can't do it",
Your excuses are snakes, twisting to suit your purpose
and you can't escape under your own power,
you wait for a cowardly context to save you
from someone who can feel something.
At least have the gumption to profess your banality,
cease your foolish speech about how interested you are
in what you're not doing.

Hey, musicians, like Aeschylus did,
Pick up a blade and stab something that's trying to kill you.
If you're so disgusted by my words, take up your sword and come find me!
Come fight me!
Don't you feel anything?
Invest yourself in life, because death is worse than pain.
Start an affair. End an affair.
Plant a tree and cut it down.
Build a church and burn it to the ground.

Dignity doesn't follow death, nor does it hang about the corpse.
It evaporates into the atmosphere, to be soaked up by mountains
and trees...

For all your stately manners, your hands will still clench into claws,
your bladder will fail you, your hair will stick to your bed in
sweating clumps and take pieces of your mind along with it...
leaving red swollen sores.

Where will your pride be then? What did you gain?

You won't be remembered for all your achievements!

Remind yourself, every day – you will not be remembered the way you want!

Stoicism is death,
withholding judgement is death,
sardonicism is death,
dignity is death,
coolness is death,
intelligence and restraint are death.

You may profess their virtues, but I will keep my stupid life,
and I will force you to share it with me,
if it's my final act.

Ghazal For Jim's Mowing

Suits and men alike sigh, all their money going
to Penman, the famed patriarch of Jim's Mowing.

King of a hundred empires, Sultan in a suit,
many can't withstand the arrows that Jim's bowing.

He roars, leviathan of black and empty sea,
and the only escape is shares in Jim's Rowing.

Yet he brings peace to his realm, as well – on dark nights,
you can aim yourself right and see that Jim's glowing.

But all great systems must destabilise, collapse:
age likely hurts, now that lumbering Jim's slowing.

Only small kindnesses can free us from his grasp:
and soon we're gone, to a place beyond Jim's knowing.

Olive Branch

Are you 'traditional', Greek born in the Mater,
who uses Hellenism as a chip to barter?
Are you enraged when I question your assertions,
you think I've lost Greekness, if I cast aspersions,
despite your understanding less lore than I do?
Am I disappointing, too new, novel to you,
who don't know Homer, Aeschylus, Alexander?
You're lucky I forgive such revolting slander.

Rather, we should be allies in sickness and health,
since, remember, you don't know so much Greek yourself.
I extend this olive branch, wonder at your minds
since you seem so sure I should stick to my own kind.

Your sons believe in freedom too, lest we should soon
fail to serve as the culture's eyes - a village boon.
Please calm your wrath – this work is but a joke, a chance
to link us as soldiers making the same advance.

Your parents built lives anew, learned English from texts
that taught them how to say 'thou hast the book', and next
found you lives – and, scions of that noble source,
you set up senior funds for those parents, of course.
And you purchased half this city's land, ensuring
your sons and daughters were stuck with you, enduring
endless madness. However, there's one link I find
between us - birth in a world that left us behind,

the will to look back at one we never chose to leave.
Is that what it means to be Greek down here, then?

Poem For Bushfires

There is a haze over the towers of the city.
The ghost of a country bushfire
has journeyed here across endless highways.
An exhausted genie, stumbling over bitumen ley lines,
channels of antipodean magic.
The air is sticky, the skies are drenched in sweat
and smoke obscurant.
The forceful god waits above:
he is weary, dry-lipped, parched, staggering,
he doubts whether he can go on,
like the other ghosts.

Coorparoo In January

To waste wet afternoons sweating at shogi
to spend one's lifetime breeding the perfect phrase, like a prize horse.
To wait and watch the morning outage
in an awkward boiling cloister.
Humid grey sky and black-eyed staff in a darkened china shop,
the silhouettes of dignified breakables in the shadows.
The fire truck speeding through thin rain –
the worker's furrowed brow as he struggles with the cause of delay.

Last Of The *Rebetes*

An overgrown farm of marble idols,
that no humble *proskynesis* can reach:
forms too noble, incorruptible souls,
whose dread faces look cold as you beseech.
Little traces of old paint deceive you,
and you assume there is life in them still,
but, of course, no warm gazes receive you;
a new covenant, a pact to fulfill:
and you cart off all these rotting stone men
on endless journey, wherever you ken.

By decree, by apathetic proxy,
you're summoned to Babylon's factory,
to a city without orthodoxy,
to modernity's dread phylactery.
Encircling water, churning uncertain,
water still, drowning, rapt crowd, intruding.
Basking in their victories, unburdened
by the statues you've picked up, now brooding,
that 'sustain' you in return for your care.
Of the pointless present, this is your share.

Between greedy memories of the dead
and the smug 'awareness' of the living,
no difference exists: your veins are bled
dry for any selfish sake, all-giving.
When only wizened roots are yours to eat,
your 'protectors' will steal away your breath,
snatch the food from your hands, cut up your wheat.
And the cigarette "you'd offer to Death
when the time came and you ran into him"
has been smoked, and discarded on a whim.

Sceptic's Anthem

What's clever isn't clever forever,
What's sweet is often false when you're young;
In times of glory, national pride,
In the anthems of causes we sung.
Fires re-lit are better left embers,
Ideally, wilfully unseen -
Because “when the world remembers,
That world will cease to be.”

When I Become King

When I become king
I'll surely be an improvement over the last.
When I become king
I'll be the one to put everything right.

When I take up the crown
I'll find everyone a job, have a well-trained cast.
The sight of that heavy gold upon my brow
will, I think, be an impressive sight.

When I become king
I'll cut taxes, build structures, work for nature's sake,
When I'm not holding audience with my subjects,
I'll avoid market crashes, plagues, and earthquakes.

Now that I'm king
I won't tolerate criminals, degenerates, trouble,
I'll stamp them out swiftly, turn their hideouts to rubble.
And as my leonine nature grows,
I'll discourage sedition by staging dread shows.
I'll hang thieves by their hands, frauds by their knees,
My people's enemies will adorn the trees.

and when I've been king for a while
my advisors will approach me as I swiftly break fast
and tell me that the barbarians are not coming,
that I'm like Gilgamesh, Damocles, and the rest
and it's time for the Syracusan's string to snap at last.

Cycle

Today the fair has begun.
A lonely man stands on the perimeter, silent.
Cleopatra is in his bearing
But Antony looks out from sad pupils.
He joins a spinning wheel of rainbow dancers,
They embody the dull infinity behind closed eyelids.
From above, a mandala, sand in wind.
Only in the multitude,
In the meaning of the dance received,
Can he be happy.

A young girl watches the fire-eaters,
Her eyes catlike pinpoints in a bronze face.
She climbs to the stage on a shouted request.
Within minutes, she kisses flames with
The best of them. Fire is her eternal love,
As if she has been burning all her life.
They pose, twist, bend, turn - mimic the blaze in the wind.
Her green dress is stained with ash
black with the ink of Agni's poems.
Ink and pounding blood, pounding heart.

A procession of orgiastic drinkers
Has claimed a field strewn with jovial banners,
Flags for a country lascivious.
Their bottles, upturned, distort their faces and manners,
Contorted victims in a house of mirrors.
Their leader disdains the finery -
Starkness and vinyl black is his style.
A cigarette, dropped from the hand, stands
Tall in the ground: laconic as ever.

The fair is about to end.
Everyone has returned home, the fires
Have been mostly put out, and cloth
Plastic, soot, paper, scraps, and dreams
All ephemera, to be recycled.
What reigned wild is restrained, reign to rain, another year,
Love to apathy, sun to stormy day, until the next
Arousal of interest, the next exodus of reason,
Another fair.

Language, Love, and Jokes

Language, Love, and Jokes (Terrible Memes)

A Young Poet In His 23rd Year

He had to take the chance to copy Cavafy,
while he was still young – while slight features
and innocent bearing weren't yet ghosts haunting his face.
The poet is never one to ignore a reference when it appears,
and a narcissist, a dreadful narcissist,
one who hasn't begged for money yet.

He gets his stories second hand, if he gets them at all,
and lives mostly in a paper cocoon, soaking up
nutrients from the ink around him.
He finds news is made to exalt the paper,
and society cripples itself to justify words.

Sleeping at odd hours, bothering those around him
with strange requests and silly ideas,
he used to cavort around the city and the university,
but has since retreated...money is hard to come by.

Without a sense of exquisite balance, it's hard to stay on edge,
and thus his moral panic of the past year
has settled, forming a sediment of dull regret.
Only memories of torn umbrellas, stormy days, and
awkward talks on long bus rides sustain him.
He scrawls to pull himself forward through the mist, one page at a time.

There is one face alone he worships,
and that face is crowned with gold,
and it is a face he has never seen,
and will never see,
but he keeps it alive purely in his heart.

A Comfortable Morning In Moscow, 1953

As mutual joy in our hearts contrives,
we slip away into a dark new world,
a coterie of tricksters, their intent unfurled,
attach to us the ballast of their lives.

Fringe movements, tears in clothes,
all start the same, all change the game.
Now our lives are lived in shame,
with over-shoulder glances loathed.

If what I desire can't exist or appear,
why can't I have a dream instead?
We could waste our days in a tall grass bed
and treasure every day of the year.

Let the bells ring, jubilation!
Let the gates swing open wide.
The comic-book hero is on our side:
his free voice invites contemplation.

The cracked catfish flower jar
clatters loud against the floor.
Shards scatter madly to escape cleaning claw,
the firing-squad fingers fail from afar.

World pattern knitted, sweater-driven,
hemlock-linted, old and worn,
the sun still rises every morn,
thankful for the praise not given.

May this letter reach its receiver,
give good spirits, times, cheer,
may it kill off doubt and fear,
a proof of love for an unbeliever.

As mutual joy in our hearts contrives,
we slip away into that dark new world,
and the shape of your mouth is curled
in a smile that always survives.

Prelude To A Spinster

I wonder why he's so obtuse.
He lacks the nerve to turn recluse,
so to repel me is a farce,
yet his life is otherwise sparse.
I've little life behind me, and perhaps I'm wrong,
but anyone who lives like that won't live too long.

So slowly, I have come to see
that he doesn't wish to hide from me.
He hangs up veils of silken song
expecting me to get him wrong,
and of course in my guesses I'll err without fail
if I never had the luck to share in his tale.

It's nothing but, he shouts one day,
a question – just why I'd say
something stupid like that. I tell
him I won't ask - then that old knell
pulls us apart once more, and I gladly forget,
since I still have my life to live, without regret.

And I Toy With My Moustache

In this amateur entomology,
my caterpillar prompts apology.
Having grown out this facial hair
I'm a target of despair
from women who deplore it,
shrugs from men who just ignore it.
And I toy with my moustache
and tell them it'll never last.

I've found here, near the honoured upper lip
is where my social standing quickest flips.
This figurehead upon my prow
has become a statement now;
if I shave I'm just a simp,
if it remains here I'm a chimp.
(And one can't maintain half a 'stache.
He'd lose all credit in a flash.)
So I toy with my moustache
and say I grew it unabashed.

If a millipede I could grandly grow
(like the forefathers to whom I'll go)
topping this caterpillar band -
perhaps then they'd understand:
Not the bushiest of beasts,
but brother mouth speaks truth, at least.
Yet I toy with my moustache
as all my words are turned to ash.

David Mogo, Poet Laureate

More than a thinker, a boaster, a cheat:
a good workman restrains gods with his soul,
a true poet casts ropes, to catch the fleet
of free and easy beasts playing their role.
Now they build loose nets, let everything out
for the sake of 'rawness' and 'healing verse'.
As for deities, they've no fear or doubt,
because the poets' attempts have gotten worse.
Why hunt gods, then? To live, and not recede;
only to fight time do we seek renown.
But I've heard of a hunter who succeeds
working thus: he allows himself to drown,
submerged he builds a net within his soul,
and then he makes the gods speak through him whole.

The Chainsmith

After the first Fall, he stopped forging swords,
and turned to sweating over endless links.
Old and scarred with ink his coals would drink,
the sinful chainsmith required no reward.

He said all of life is but one long chain,
'God's arm-span,' and hammered hard at the steel
like his being depended on it; revealed
intelligence, in his proud forge, and pain.

Why'd Milton save Satan? He owed no due
to faith, nor did he pen his verse for wealth:
spending forever pondering himself,
that smith wrote worlds, but made his own chains too.

An Abrahamic Demon In King Yahweh's Court

Making music of the bush
Living under milk-wood
Counting out time
Killing our lovers

In a different time
Newly honoured
Stark, diminishing
Angels spurn us

Seraphim with heads of beasts
Gnashing teeth wheels fur
Eyes repentant and repressed

Brush hair out from your eyes
Lift horror's ashen mask
and look upon the burning hill

deal where four rivers meet
life for reckless pride
mortal Paganini
casts his soul aside

you forgot talent's home
fool poet, in the fringe
"the wainscoting of society"
frozen in ninth circle

I don't even know how to be alone anymore.

Well, it's like riding a bike

I'll remember it easily?

You'll scrape your arms a lot

And now pour me another drink
I feel like wine.

Tanabata Girl

Clouds are locks of her hair, purple at sunset,
spread across her bed,
the surface of a soft blue sea and yellow blanket fading.
Above her face comes dawn, a silken gold arc.
Her home the firmament,
she awoke one hot July night,
and crawled, dozy, across the sky.

She must still be tired – you can see it in her eyes
(sun right, and taken first, moon left, her love reversed).
She can only show off half of herself at once,
shifting in a moment from madness to melancholy.

Young, nervous –
her blemishes are stars.
If you look too close, it's shaming,
but keen observers notice
the constellations changing.
Like how, after a stressful time,
looking at them reveals even more beauty,
although it takes a certain kind of person
to see acne that way.

Halfdan, Can I Get An Autograph, Man?

Hey you, you're finally awake,
fellow Varangian, old drake;
the service is at last finished
(the priest looks rather diminished).
You're not serious – graffiti?
Really? After our treaty?
At this time of day? In this year?
You've scribbled "Halfdan was here"
in the Hagia Sophia?

Byzantium's a strange locale,
ruled by mad kings, and that cabal
they somehow call their one true church.
My ticket to escape the search
of woad raiders and rude waiters;
save my fights from home for later.
I became a shadow, hidden
by gold; standing proud unbidden
in Anatolian midden.

It's a place we've not seen before
hence why I caution Halfdan more:
What's foreign is a misty stone,
both immutable and unknown.
You can't draw on the columns, mate -
In prison, you'll do naught but wait.
That said - beyond a jest,
I'm kind of impressed.
Halfdan, can I get your autograph, man?

Poem For A Hungry Fat Dog

Erik Satie...

What a weird guy.

With his seven purple suits and
pure white foods...

It's like listening to a genius speaking

muffled in a lecture hall without a microphone.

Flashes of insight from some bizarre direction

bons mots arresting attention.

And a crescendo of dramatic sorrow
or anger at just the right moment!

a complex drawing-room sparseness that
keeps him forever ambiguous

It didn't help that he was involved
in some bizarre Christian mystic cult
the Church of the Rosy Cross?

And he wrote music for the hyacinth boys

and the girls in the palace of Knossos.

Music for starving beasts and plays
and in honour of cold cuts of meat.

"Every hour a servant takes my temperature

and gives me a new one,"

he once wrote.

I mean, what a weird guy.

Four

Doctor, I'm afraid I'm wasting my life.
already four years old, with no Masters,
no good job, experience, kids, or wife -
of course my playmates all grew up faster.

The kids in the nursery all babble:
quantum physics, chemistry, English Lit -
just baby-talk like the common rabble,
but I can't stand another day of it.

It's already the first day at preschool,
and I need to get an internship quick.
But they're mostly gone - learning the rules,
colouring, reading, digging the sandpit...

Please, Doc, It's the first time I need your help.
When school starts, I won't even have - God's sake -
five years expertise under my black belt.
Hey - haven't you got some pills I could take...?

The Hollow Men Of Channel 4

Mistah Eliot—he dead

A penny (royalties) for the old guy

We are the news men, the stuffed men leaning
interviewing together, with no time,
pulling straw from very long life, meaning
forcing it into an unfitting clime.

Living together in liminal space
between reader and news enigmatic,
home of Hermes of the Lotus, a place
known as a burst of comforting static.

It's not enough that the author be dead:
our editors, too, must succumb to fate.
For Thine is the Scoop; all glory is shed
since our website requires a new update.

Since good newsmen have no god, we receive:
Christ our Judge, we settle seven-hilled Rome,
blast great trumpets, go about and deceive,
show you fear in a fit of print, and what of home?

Quotes without context, news without content,
Universal exclusives, opinion without notion

Between the interview
And the transcript
Between the research
And the statistic
Between the journalist
And the public
Crackles the static

This is the end of the program
This is the end of the program
This is the end of the program
not with an axe but a sponsor.

Route Ten

Why don't you play that accordion again?
This is the last time we'll meet after all,
friend, lover, companion of many years.
I only want to hear some silly folkish stuff.
Play me an afternoon in a crowd, the long-fingered sun
touching my face when I look at you.
Play for me a table covered in dishes
and criss-crossed conversations
where we climb the grapevine
and swap partners in rhyme
with easy intimations.
Play well the final moment between us - but
don't sing. You've watched me struggle for too long
with language, and I know the traps it sets very well.
We always want more words,
to despair, to take joy, to weep
at what the *logos* has done to us.
So why don't you play that accordion again?
This is the last time we'll meet.

Memories Of A Logophile

Reflect, admire the art, the glory,
the providence of language.

That every lock of taut-drawn hair is a knot, a string, a cord,
That a meal is a beggar's last supper and king's lavish hoard.
How 'to mock' might signify both to denigrate and flatter -
For to 'mock-up' is to mimic, the apex of the latter.

All meanings are glass exploding against a wall:
Something 'twisted' is corrupter and corrupted,
At once victim and dark architect of the fall.

How a bluff can be both a cliff and a lie,
How letters' thin paths dictate those of our lives.

But Cadmus must exist for Harmony's sake,
We observe there is no ex without a why.

Terms archaic and diverse are credited by their young:

We can't use proper lingo without vernacular tongue,

Nor can we undertake 'philosophy' lacking in love.

Yet all my language shares one point, beneath endless refraction:

How I wish you'd return, that I might confess my attraction.

On The Trail Of The Savage Detectives

The grey poets flee up the highway in a car they fixed themselves,
while I chase them writing work I might have borrowed from their shelves.
In this languid age, I selfishly create my precursors,
even while, through obligation, the old men write young verses.
For Oblomov, the Golovlovs, and Gogol's good Inspector,
trochaics, iambs; and hexametric dactylic textures
for the much-turned sailor who fell from grace with the sound of waves.
And they blind me from the car ahead, flinging chaotic staves,

the false letters mist, obscuring what really happened then.