

The Word's the Thing

The Poems

Taster

Background

These poems were written in deliberate attempts to cover a range of lengths and styles. Some are meant to be taken quite lightly; others are meant to be lingered over. The people involved in bringing these poems together have donated them for use in the Year of Reading in Birmingham.

Rooms

From the shadows of the old hall
the smell of writing in progress,
quirky on squared paper
calibrated to fit the hours
latticed to match the page.

From rank depths of the pantry store
the spectral colours of hung game
and hardening rounds of white cheese
waiting for cook, anxious to find
just the right recipe.

Upstairs, in the breathing spaces
between the walls, pitching quietly
against each other until
reaching their silent conclusions;
conversations never had.

I finally come back to visit
the rooms with built-up memories
of who I, and you, once were.
I take it in, just one last time,
and believe every whisper.

'.... A look that only a mother could give a child'

A glance

a wink

a twinkle

a stare.

A look that sighs

a look that rewards

a look that chastises

a look that reminds.

A look that promises: I'll always be here

a look that regrets: One day you'll be gone

a look that says: Rely on me

a look that only a mother can give to a child.

The hand and the axe

The hand that wields the axe
is an old hand, a scarred hand,
arcing slowly in a frayed cuff;
And the axe has a recent wooden shaft
season-fresh from hardware store
for its well-worn metal, splitting logs
before the frosts set in.

The hand that wields the axe
is a steady hand in a black silk shirt,
a hired hand with a hooded face;
And the axe is old of histories
severing lines down their ages
setting a stop to traitorous acts
before the rot sets in.

The hand that wields the axe
is a vengeful hand, of marauding stock,
sweeping in from open Steppes;
And the axe is of richly captured steel
traded on shifting sands of old silk routes
to meet an owner just beyond Samarkand
before its longer trek begins.

Barcoded

I have this barcode, you see
- or maybe you don't,
for it's written deep on my soul.

So maybe you read me
and maybe you don't.
It doesn't really matter at all.

So maybe you'll read me
or maybe you won't.
I have this deep barcode you see.

It really doesn't matter
if you won't read to me
what is so deeply written on my soul.



Side effects of moving through time

I've temporarily fallen out of time.
I've started living
alternate bits of each day
not simply at a faster or slower pace
but in some altogether different timeframe.

This new time
has edges
that are somewhat rougher.
Minutes clanking;
Hours dropping into place;
Days tumbling heavily
into night.

A denser time
with a sense of
moving far too clumsily
to catch the last of the light.
There's an uncertain halting progress,
with me not really knowing
what comes next.

Doing Poetry: No Sweat

I'm going to be a poet.
It's an odd thing at my time of life
but a choice that is becoming
more popular, I've noticed.

I've bought my first garret
and cut down on food.
I now only need access
to a pub full of artists
and a distant woman
to impossibly love
and I'll be off
doing poetry.
No sweat.

How did I get this old?

I didn't notice it happening
but the fact that it always
seemed to be Saturday
was warning me
that time was passing.

If I did quietly sneak a sidelong glance
when moving past the mirror
there always seemed to be
someone hoping for a younger me.

I didn't think of myself as ageing
but the greying and the balding
should have held out a clue
that the wrinkles
were more than dry skin.

I didn't notice it gently arrive
but now that old age is here
I will refuse its tag
and wait for time
to catch up again.

Leaf – Writer – Ending

The dangling leaf
able to spin with the tiniest of breath
hangs on in indecision:
Is it time, yet, to fall?

Light, worked through a crack
in the shed's outer coating,
picks out a dusted web
weighted by a single brown leaf.

They were the hands of a dancer.

I used to leave the door half open
to let in the sun
and to set lure and trap
for passing stray ideas.

Somewhere in the world
is an apple
which, neatly halved,
will open up an image
of the Virgin Mary.

I brush heavily past
head against the rain
sweeping an eddy
fumbling the doorcatch.

Autumn, when the choosing
of this shed for writing
seems to have been a curious thing:
but it's what I do.

Chapter Three and she's still there
holding out her hands.
How best to describe them?

Seasons change.
Chapter Ten: She's cooking.
The knife cuts through
and there inside ...

No-one has been here for years
but on the desk, defiantly,
lie the pen and the cup
as quietly put down
on a spring afternoon
when new leaves were budding
and the air was still.

Railway Ghosts

There are ghosts where tracks once lay
abandoned sleeping on willowherb bedding;
markers of journeys now enroute to nowhere
branching, quietly rusting, in lines of nettles.

There are skeletal remains almost missed
vestiges of structures in buddleia thickets;
detritus leftover from more industrious days
buffered to a halt in the low evening sun.

There are great Ozymandian pillars
footprints of a derelict past;
and things marshalled into shadows
shunted off into the long grass.