

# **The Word's the Thing**

## **The Poems**

### **Collection 2**

#### **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 to promote reading in Birmingham, and beyond.

## **The Lost Theory of Complete Happiness**

There was, in ancient times,  
a total theory of complete happiness  
passed on orally  
written in Arabic  
transcribed into Greek  
illuminated by monks  
bound in leather  
sacked by Vikings  
traded by Goths  
and hidden, for safety, by a small religious sect  
living deep within one of many forking valleys  
in a remote part of the central European landmass  
whilst centuries of wars raged all around,  
finally to be accidentally left by fleeing peasants  
who no longer understood its value.

## **His Last Map**

His last map  
stretched out before him,  
he looked at his hands:  
The blue veins all but disappeared  
in their search for a truth of sorts.  
He believed others  
when they said that one day  
he might stand by a squat memorial  
and think about ruling the country.  
He laughed a little (if I remember it  
correctly) and slowly moved on.  
They fed him at every twist  
and put him forward at every turn  
until, finally, there he was  
washed out by ripple lines  
and a fear that borders  
in on itself, mentally  
creating the last map  
the routemap  
the causeway  
to a future  
of his  
own.

### **19.24 pulling into Manchester Piccadilly (1)**

It's just at that moment,  
as the train windows  
offer more internal reflection  
than external perspective,  
that you find yourself  
noticing the young woman  
diagonally opposite  
on her mobile  
not realising that she is being watched  
doubly out of kilter.

### **19.24 pulling into Manchester Piccadilly (2)**

The office block  
Shutting down for the night  
Cleaned out on a minimum wage  
Overheads buffed up to perfection.  
Blinds drawn.  
Desks at dusk.  
Floors stored tightly.  
Facades lit up a treat  
A multitude of pretences  
All done and dusted.

### **An Old Woman's Tale**

Hanging in the dankness of the cave  
is a tale we are not privileged to hear.  
Long treks of time catch the light  
and mark the place with shards of stone.  
Breathless, children are bound  
with spells and legends, holding their voices.  
The old woman talks with eyes quietly closed  
and pants of breath frosted as they come.  
Tales of broken rules and narrow escapes  
told from precarious angles.  
Realities and subtleties stirred together  
her words don't go in straight lines.  
The very last image as fire flickers down  
is of things that can come in the night.

### **Lost for words**

There was a time  
when I would happily  
have been absolutely  
lost for words.

My soul ransomed for a richer vocabulary.  
My passion bursting for strict punctuation.  
My spirit traded for a table of verbs.  
My insanity pledged, forever, in words.

I prod them. I beat them.  
I wrench them. I stretch them  
into metres of rhymes  
and thread them endlessly,  
knowing that there will come a time  
when I will sadly  
be absolutely  
lost for words.

**Its sentence is sealed ... this curse of mankind?**

(25<sup>th</sup> March 2007)

Industrialisation forging  
slaveowning into slavetrading.  
Condemned to be stored  
economically  
from hull to stern.

Chiefly war trophies and kidnaps,  
a well-rooted going concern.  
Slave rivers flow on  
to fortified exits.  
A leaking of darkness.

Just think of the maths of it all.  
Fully one third off in transit.  
Another third  
spread over three years  
of plantation.

Complicit complexities.  
Sugared triangulations.  
Out of Ivory  
and the Guinea Coast.  
A future enchained.

Numbers tagged and receipted.  
Shackled hard to a history,  
chained to a past  
that smells of tobacco.  
Scrubbed up for sale.

Opulence rooted in seasons,  
trademarked tools and handwrought sundowns  
on the bonegrown crops  
and the passing of ports.

Past histories have been stolen  
to turn up again in the present.  
The journeys and the cultures  
the companies and the legacies  
the bargains and the feelings  
in a question  
that might last for two hundred years.



## **Malaise**

I fell over in the street the other day.  
I wonder if I could have Instant Collapse Syndrome.  
And I've developed this fear  
of always being ill.  
Oh ... my ... God!  
I've only gone and contracted  
severe hypochondriaphobia.

## **Poetry**

Free-range  
state of the art  
lines and phrases.  
Depths of feeling  
carefully lashed and harnessed  
into a million words.  
Militants on the march.

## **Sorry to announce**

(Bing bong):

Hello. This is Gerald,  
your Life Manager,  
speaking.

We are very sorry  
for the current delay  
to your life.

This is due to a number of things.

There has been:

- a failure on a number of points
- a lack of clear signalling of intent
- various unscheduled arrivals and departures in your life
- a delay in the life before this
- carelessness in minding the various gaps
- a report of vandals and thieves of your time and energies
- time wasted awaiting connections from the lives of other people and being coupled to things that have no real driver at all.

We hope that this delay  
does not cause too much inconvenience  
in the rest of your life.

We hope that you have a pleasant  
and fulfilling journey on from here.

(Bing bong):

Hello. This is Gerald,  
your Life Manager,  
again.

I'm extremely sorry to announce  
that this life  
will now terminate  
at Coventry.

We are very sorry for any inconvenience  
this may cause.