

JOHN PAUL KIRKHAM

# IN VIOLET



IN  
**VIOLET**

**JOHN PAUL KIRKHAM**

Cover image: *In Violet* by Jan Kalinski

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**[www.johnpaulkirkham.com](http://www.johnpaulkirkham.com)**

There are gems here

*Poetry Space*

These poems are beautiful and the collection has the intriguing quality of an autobiographical set of poems. In particular, I love the fact that the poems evoke a sense of place and yet the places written about are so disparate and conflicting, e.g contrasting '*A Suffolk Summer*' with the poems about the war-torn East. There's a sense of yearning in the poems that refer to the past, e.g. '*Bury*'. I also love the simplicity of a short poem such as '*Absent from a Friend's Wedding*'.

*Catherine Chapman - Smashwords*

I am once again struck by the child-like wonder in them ... refreshing ... endearing ... many of them are ravishingly beautiful in their simplicity and accuracy.

*David Price - A Master Class*

The poetry is like a gentle breeze that caresses the face and tousles the hair slightly. Sometimes the words create a storm of emotions so intense, that the reader will be forced to sit up and read again and again and again.

★★★ ★ ★ ★ A.G Chauderi - *Shining Dawn*

An entertaining and touching read

*Fran Macilvey - Scottish Book Trust*

Stimulating, thought provoking, endearing, rousing every sensation that poetry should evoke within the reader. They made me laugh, cry or just feel the beauty and raw emotion behind the words. Amazing.

*Lauren Drew - Canadian Journalist*

This is a beautiful anthology

*Jessica Jade Burton - The Library Living*

## Introduction

This collection of poetry includes works from the 1970s up to the present day and those poems which have factually based themes were historically true in the period they were written as in *Sarajevo*.

The reader will find on these pages a revealing eclectic mix of poems that are autobiographical, nostalgic, environmental, occasionally lyrical, reflective and thought provoking. The poetic style varies throughout and placing the work alphabetically allows the reader to discover things in a more spontaneous way.

Born in the 1950s, growing up in Merseyside, training at the Laird School of Art and as a photographer in Liverpool, the north west of England is a special place with hints to nostalgia that can easily be identified in poems such as *I Dreamed of Going to Sea*.

As a photographer, capturing the environment's light or bleakness has always been a fascination and likewise with poetry whether it's *Ghosts of the Atlantic* or the anti war allegory *The Punt Gunner* there is something visual

about verse that can make a stark or abrasive subject appear serene.

Blake Morrison (poet and author) once interviewed me for a feature in the Sunday Independent Magazine and I ended up being a real life character in one of his stories in the book "*Too True*". This taught me more than ever that real people have a place in poems and nearly all of those in my work truly existed like *Lawrence* and *Mr Moon*.

So as photography frames an image, poetry transforms the mind and whilst we think we see and understand what we see, the mystery and intrigue are sometimes at the fringes of the scene; so when we look at a beautiful panorama we see in clear shades of blue skies or green landscapes but right in the corners or the edge of the spectrum lies violet, barely discernible but there just the same.

John Paul Kirkham is a poet, writer, photographer living in the city of Liverpool and is the author of twenty books and collaborations including the autobiography *I Saw Her Standing There*, further books of poetry and is the official biographer of two Italian saints: Clare of Assisi and Gemma Galgani of Lucca. John Paul has written journal editorial, film and book reviews and has appeared both on television and radio.

### **Thank you**

To Bryter Layter - The Estate of Nick Drake for allowing the reproduction of lyrics within the front and end pages.

## *Prologue*

*A day once dawned, and it was beautiful*

*A day once dawned from the ground*

*Then the night she fell*

*And the air was beautiful*

*Night she fell all around*

*So look see the days*

*The endless coloured ways*

*Go play the game that you learnt*

*From the morning*

*(Nick Drake: From The Morning)*

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## A Game of Football (aka The Tin Whistle)

Not far from Grange road  
there's a park and a field  
where they play Sunday league  
all proper and skilled  
we went for a stroll  
me and my Gran  
just around the corner  
with mothers and prams

Whilst watching the teams  
I blew my tin whistle  
the players stopped dead  
annoyed and puzzled  
the referee in black  
furious and wild  
screaming "*you bugger*  
*where is that child*"

I tried to look innocent  
but ready for a maul  
then Gran said ever so calmly  
*"pick on someone your own size  
after all, its only a game of football"*

## **A New Clear Day**

The early morning clear violet sky turned suddenly  
brighter than a thousand suns

People caught, fraught, unaware  
running in the dust of a blistering heat  
odours arose to dull the senses  
a pain, a pounding  
and then ..... serene

## Aberfan

I was seven when you were seven  
as the wild winds carried away saddening voices

Slowly, slowly as I sleep at night today  
I dream less and less of that charcoal cloud

But in the stillness of the darkened skies  
I know the silent souls of the little ones found their peace

Winking and flaxen in the first blush of sunrise  
beneath stumbled slopes  
and the soft Arcadian sepulchre rows  
the candescent bronze dawn gently reveals  
after mist essence rain, the Spring daffodils  
respectfully genuflecting to those reunited in their  
deepest slumber

## **Absent From a Friends Wedding**

On this a special marriage day

I will be seven thousand miles away

So from some far flung eastern shore

I wish you well and love some more

## **After Midnight**

The sun goes down

the city is dark

The damp streets are silent

a cold wind blows

A lonely stranger

walks on

looking for someone

to love

## All For An Empire

All for an empire  
loyalty and lies  
setting sail by the moon  
at the turn of the tide

Battles in the sand dunes  
fought for an empire  
landings at dawn  
thrusting forth the sons fire

Charging and crawling  
through wire and trenches  
all for an empire  
and hearts that are wrenched

All those left behind  
touched no more and the reason why  
all for an empire  
a plume of ash in a blue sky

## Arabian Nights

The 2.00 am skies are clear as we descend  
fairytales lights punctuate the night  
sparkling off white minarets and marble domes  
shimmering on the waters of the Gulf

Excited and tired many passengers resist  
the adventure in transit  
and prefer to sleep whilst others reap their bargains  
from within these caves of Aladdin

The doors open to the desert  
a hot furnace wind wallows round the apron  
tonight its Dubai, last time Sharjah  
and alas Abu Dhabi and Bahrain  
the rules are always the same

Duties done announcements are made  
*“Please go back now to the plane”*  
and those brave explorers of the night return  
clutching their clinking carton treasure

Time at last to settle down to sleep perchance  
and gently dream  
and ascend into a distant ruby tinged dawn  
as the Emirates drift and fade  
with the rising of the sun

## **Ariana**

A foreign land times are hard

Politician's shuffle cards

east or west has a better hand

what about the people in a foreign land

A highway heading north leads to heaven

a child puts a rose in an AK47

the days are cold the skies are blue

there is a man on the mountain watching you

People queue all day for a loaf of bread

a soldier's belly's full with a piece of lead

Ariana waits with her DC10

she's the last one out with the all the president's men

## **Arm in Alms**

Arm in arm, lets arm an army

arming theirs, harming ours

Are we the hosts? or are we the hostiles?

selling arms and preaching peace

Alms for the poor, arms for the powerful

listen to the man for anything is possible

Fighting for a cause or dancing for your master

fuel for our engines to drive us to disaster

A man of peace talks to liberate

whilst forces wait to seal his fate

There are plenty of shells but no mother of pearl

as we follow a light to the end of the world

## **Autumn**

As autumn gathers round the meadow fair  
the smell of wood smoke fills the air

The heather turns crimson, berries cherry red  
teardrops like diamonds in a spider's web

An auburn landscape slowly yellows  
farmers gather in the long tall shadows

As dusk dances on sienna fringed leaves  
a golden orb silhouettes the trees

## **Avalanche Seen From a Dam at Kaprun**

On top of the world across a mirror glass lake  
a faint tremor sounds

The sun melts the spires  
of ice and snow  
as it turns into a tumbling whoosh

The avalanche, a sliding cascade  
crashing into crystal blue waters

an echo ..... then silence

## **Bangkok Blues**

Blurting a cacophony of noise  
phut phut tuk tuk chariots to drive

Inhale the blue polluted haze  
rising at dusk as smoky waves

## **Beneath The Surface Lies**

Those who polish their car at night in November  
in the dark have many secrets

Those who sit patiently at traffic lights  
are caught in impassive emotions

Those who observe those  
will never know

## **Bruges**

Church spires and tall brick towers  
ringing bells chime the hours

Silent twisting cobbled stone lanes  
dark beers, chocolate and lace

## Bury

From the end of Grange road  
we would often take the bus up to the Rock  
alighting to the smell of them black puddings  
floating like bloated hoses  
in huge steaming cauldron pots  
on a Saturday morning under tarpaulin canvas  
on a busy Bury market

Then to Sam Taylor's toy store  
a treat to explore  
wide wooden stairs  
glass cases with awe  
containing treasures and more  
or summat promised to me

The moist days that often seemed like most days  
made the soggy garden too sad to play out in  
the only games would be dominoes and cards at the table  
and coal rescued from the drizzle

would cough, spit and hiss  
so a teaspoon of gran's gin kept at bay the damp chills

On match day at Gigg Lane rickety turnstiles cranked  
the creaky wooden stand benches where home to the fans  
rain coated, flat capped and smoking old men  
watching the "Shakers" the best game in the land

Gran's shop on the corner  
sold lucky bags and sherbet dips  
Cadbury's Bar 6 and much later the Twix  
then skip over the old railway bridge  
to Elton reservoir and breeze rippled waves  
distant grey dinghy's with bobbing white sails  
legs dangled on the water slapped wall  
where my father chiseled his name in 1944

On Sundays a visit to Granny Grimshaw  
and her sister May  
in the Radcliffe flats on the council estate

greeted by the smell of gas on the hob  
kettle whistling away  
to play contented with the ashtray  
the one with the button  
propeller like centre for fag ends a dungeon

Auntie May would tell me tales of her life in the twenties  
of far away exploits and romance in the Fiji's  
South Pacific adventures and Island natives  
then returning home to a landscape of chimneys  
clutching hand tinted pictures of dreams forsaken  
a box of memories, letters and proposals untaken

## **Butterfly**

Stinging nettles  
singing boys  
with nets on poles  
they capture souls  
of little angels  
with coloured wings  
who gently whisper  
don't crush my heart  
oh! can't you see  
our time is short  
please set me free

## **Cheese on Toast**

I used to live off

cheese on toast

simply melted under the grill

hot and gooey giving the taste buds a thrill

Today it's a trendy panini and flatbread

or two artisan slices welded together

with a molten pepper pesto roast

how I long for cheese on toast

## Chelsea Pensioner in a Chinese Restaurant in Greenwich

Sitting alone in a corner of “The Vietnam Restaurant”

I thought it was Father Christmas

he looked like Father Christmas anyway

Dakota red coat, cuff trims and bushy beard

I heard him order a pork bun dim sum

and some more, sweet and sour

I wanted to thank him for

fighting for

in a war

but I somehow got distracted

by his arriving plate of hot sizzling beef

Well done, well cooked I saw

not like meat that drips blood

he’s probably seen enough of that

I struggled to guess his age  
calculating by wars fought  
Sword Beach, Korea or Aden maybe

As I was leaving I sneaked a farewell peak  
over my left shoulder  
of a Chelsea Pensioner in a Chinese Restaurant  
in Greenwich  
keeping warm in a corner  
with his memories of far flung eastern places  
or a jungle perhaps

## **China Star**

Rhyme and song the dragon nears  
China wakens people's fears  
rhyme and song the lion's dance  
torches light Hong Kong hands

Midnight approaches seconds away  
China's elders on parade  
midnight falls red flag hauled  
for the Governor departure calls

As fireworks celebrate  
the edge of an empire slips away

## **City of The Dead**

Tenant's of the tenement tombs  
lying under lichen green  
liken thee  
to a merchants dream

Beneath the dark granite Mossman stone  
where legions froze  
Glaswegian's roam  
in circumspect solitude

Mausoleums weather beaten  
old empire decaying grilled museums  
toil now soil thy rich bequest  
angels guard the souls at rest  
in this the great Necropolis  
the memorial City of the Dead

## Comet

A clear April night  
amid the sky and stars so bright  
there gleamed a comet  
haloed by a misty tail of white  
captured from afar a light  
a streak and stream of paled glare  
now and in ten thousand years

## Conversation with a Ghost

It was that Jubilee summer of 77  
and despite several misty Mersey mornings  
Liverpool was preparing to receive a Queen

My task, to shoot the past  
recording the architectural nuance splendour  
of wood panels and light of an empty Birkenhead  
Central Library

A casually dressed handsome young man from an era  
distant appeared and was captivated by  
my contraption on stilts and he mused:

*“well I say this is quite marvellous for 1935, just last year the  
King opened this place and everything was just ... well so big  
what does it do?”*

I replied *“It captures you”*

Our parallel chat across forty years revealed we had  
just down the road  
a mutual abode  
the Villa Arcadia in the park  
which inspired the builders of New York

Later that day frame by frame  
I searched in negative vain  
to find a trace but only found perfection  
of vintage oak and glass

The only proof  
the only truth  
the memory of my brief conversation with a ghost

## Convocation in Cambridge

A cold bright and sunny morning in May  
families dressed to the nines like a wedding parade

In Caius College square stands a rosemary tree  
defying the years standing wise valiantly

Measurements taken for hundreds of gowns  
red hemmed and purple the cream of our towns

The queue finally moves towards the great hall  
creaky benches and chairs within academic walls

Hours of Latin from masters with ease  
a thankful reciting and decrepitation of knees

To spectate the partaker rise in elation  
clutching the parchment at their convocation

## Coup

A so called bloodless coup leaves a bloody mess  
neighbours watch with interest

Passports and tourists airlifted to safety  
the rest the innocent eventually wasted

Borders closed there is no solution  
only years of war and revolution

Mortars and rockets overhead  
children huddle together on rags for beds

Those left behind will never thrive  
each day a race, a battle to survive

## **Curriculum Vitae**

If all one achieves  
can be written on a page  
is the sheet worth more  
or does its value decline with age

## Dawlish Before the Great Storm Came

This day in May

Brunel's tracks are and tunnels are still as safe  
from wind and rain and dirty grey crested waves  
crashing and splashing through iron rails  
when gulls squawk and rise above the diesel engines  
ticking and humming of the Great Western

The black swans preen mid stream  
in ballet trance along the brookish Dawe  
and trail in vanity with lipstick beaks in petulant pouts

Permian orange sandy cliffs and sad worn sea faces  
peer over star crossed lovers who beam and dream  
as wild violet's await a longed for arrival or departure

## **Death of My Father**

My ageing father is in his final throes  
in the critical care unit  
and we have been summoned to see him one last time  
he is hanging on to see us before letting go  
he fights now to prolong his last lap  
and survive for one more day  
as each ascending hour of breath brings more pain  
and he wishes no more to go on any longer

The East Midlands train from Liverpool to Norwich  
that is carrying us to him crosses a lifetime  
as its diesel engines shuttle, puff and belch slowly for  
five hours across thirteen counties

The flat midwinter fenlands  
that my old dad knew so well these last nineteen years  
look forlorn and barren  
the wind turbines stand silent, still and mournful under  
greying skies

The fields once more at Welney are flooded  
bathing the stark skeletal trees  
aged stumps leaving their mark on this weary  
landscape

The Chaplain came to see him late last night  
and after 83 years of disbelief  
he makes peace with God at the end  
he remembers clearly his own grandads death  
when he was given half a crown  
to spend on summat good

And last night he said his own dad who died 50 years  
ago came to him  
and is ready and waiting to take him home  
this entreaty made him weep for the first time  
as we wobbled and welled up as well at the bedside

The nurses turned a blind eye  
as we smuggled in a bottle of Adnams Lighthouse pale  
ale as a last request

*"I have need of nothing now" you say after all your years  
of hoarding*

*"take it all or give it to the Red Cross in black sacks  
all my shoes and neatly packed shirts, jumpers and jackets  
unless you find a flat cap that fits"*

No more, only the memories of all that retail therapy  
at John Lewis and TK Maxx as you would always ask  
*"is this a good buy lad clutching another bottle of cologne to  
add to your collection"*

Your hands are quite warm, it's mine that are cold  
as we clasp them together  
in thanks for all your support  
and helping us out with new telly's  
meals out and such like  
for giving more and taking nought  
but my grumpiness sometimes

Malcolm your grey blue cat  
who strayed over your threshold three years ago  
looked desperately sad as he watched you taken away  
in the ambulance never to return to the bungalow  
today he mooched about eating crumbs from the carpet  
that had tumbled off my Greggs egg and cress butty  
before climbing, curling and sleeping again on your  
faded brown leather chair

You have made sure that your final wishes are to be  
cremated  
wearing an eccentric bobble hat  
the one that took the chill off your head  
in the air-conditioned critical care room  
and to hold in your hands  
a rosary blessed by the Pope from Fatima  
that I had just given you as a comforter

If you hadn't broken your tibia as the Lancashire League's leading scorer  
just before you were about to sign  
for Manchester United  
would you have survived Munich?

Instead you became an England armchair manager  
shouting and kicking instructions at the TV screen

If you hadn't helped design the Vulcan bomber and  
Cold War nuclear bunkers  
and worked with asbestos and other dodgy dusts  
would you have survived the lung disease that claims  
you now?

When you hold a dying persons hands  
they appear translucent ... glowing  
so dad finally departed this life, this winter  
completing his journey into the Light  
comfy and cosy at the last  
.... asleep now  
with his grey and white stripey bobble hat

## **Death of My Mother**

We had made the same journey by train  
just two years earlier  
then it was against winter's bleak charcoal laden  
landscape  
to lay my dad to rest  
now it's June and the fields are swollen with spinach  
and tatties  
just about ready for the McCains frozen chip factory  
lying and frying between Peterborough and March

As the same East Midlands train chugs slowly  
under the wide silent fenland skies  
itself in its last throes  
as it has just lost its franchise bid  
for stealing staff pensions away  
we puff past paddocks and sentinel's of white wind  
turbines  
the elements are kind today  
as blades swish laconically

and diminish into the quiescent flatlands  
finally we spot our landmark ahead  
Mr. Moons old windmill  
for grinding daily his wheat and corn

We are a long way from Besses O'The Barn, Lancashire  
with its brass band and record breaking cold winter of  
1933, the year you were born  
and the Salford bus stop were you broke a heel and you  
met our dad  
who offered to fix it with his engineering skills and  
resin glue  
a lifetime of stories discovered after death  
finding your legacy of tales and love letters to Jack  
hidden in a drawer's of old envelopes from 60 years ago

Home was life in those gritty northern streets  
your dad was a good friend of Lowry  
and posed bowler hat and red pocket handkerchief  
“*The Man on a Bench*”, “*The Man on a Wall*” and  
“*Piccadilly Gardens*”

I wish you could have cadged one of those paintings  
of matchstick men and dogs, markets, match days and  
prams

Spanish and Irish ancestry gave you restless energies  
pulling pints, selling fountain pens at T.J. Hughes  
a spot of nursing and catering for Alvin Stardust  
was it your craziness for hoarding Mars bars and a taste  
of Scotlands finest grain  
that helped you beat cancer twice  
only to succumb to a broken heart that even Papworth  
couldn't fix

Your long days concluded not fighting and raging  
against the night  
or the approaching encircling gloom  
but at dawns early light  
after a bowl of porridge and a cuppa tea  
sitting quite calmly in your armchair watching the  
sunrise

holding with affection your companion cat Malcolm's  
Russian blue paw

as you slipped silently away on Mother Mary's Church  
Feast Day

peace ... now that your earthly challenges and labours  
are over

Malcolm finally appeared from his solitary hiding place  
to see off the hearse

from the end of the gravel driveway one last time

You asked for bright colours

so our funeral cavalcade follows in a dayglo orange  
Volkswagen caddy van

winding through those lazy Suffolk lanes

past the old country pubs where you feasted on lasagne  
and salad with chips in Chippenham

you witnessed the 20th century transform for better or  
worse around you

but you remained unchanged

Is it our faith that has brought us all here today  
whether that is simply faithful memories  
faithful friendship  
faith in God ... or faith in the journey that lies ahead  
And so as the veil closes in the Risby Chapel of stone  
and oak to "*Let it Be*"  
a nod to my home town Liverpool  
you start your trip to the Light  
wearing your pink dress and pink shoes  
with a neatly folded blue silk hanky in your pocket  
your right hand clutching my mended broken rosary  
entwined with your favourite vintage tortoiseshell  
comb  
oh yes ... and in your left hand  
a jumbo Mars Bar to be reunited with dad

## Diana

You lived with the spring of youth  
and glided through the days of summer

But autumn colours of sunset gold  
will never now be yours to hold

The flowers will blanket and comfort you  
from winters ice and snow  
and the future shivering years

As jasmine blooms  
we will think of you  
as death brought an angels view  
and we suffer your sorrow too

Beneath willowed trees  
and royal oak  
surrounded by an island moat  
you slumber deep  
beneath the fallen leaves

## **Eurostar**

St. Pancras terminus concave and steel  
silvered and sparkling upward  
to a glass canopied crystal

Eurostar's stand streamlined in rows  
yellow tipped  
a match waiting to ignite pulls away slowly  
almost silent in its shushing

## **Everyone Knows Penny Lane**

I happened upon a stretch of quiet beach  
the mantis green palms flayed lightly in an uncertain  
breeze  
the coarse abrasive sand now cooling in the early  
evening under a purple sky broodingly framing a round  
tangelo sun  
slowly setting over the striated etched horizon  
and the South China Sea

I sat upon a clutch of rocks worn to a smooth hollow  
by centuries of the gorging tide coming and going  
behind me a small array of attap houses on stilts stood  
still  
from which a Malay family took to the water  
laughing and splashing in the foaming surf  
swiping from the air and feasting on the live leaping  
sweet translucent prawns

They seemed careless carefree and simply happy  
in worn cotton shorts and torn tee shirts flapping like  
flags

As the wind turned eastward  
they stepped out of the waist high waves to  
acknowledge me  
with a smile and greeting words  
“*Wer fom*”

I normally just say UK .... it's easier somehow  
but this evening, thoughts turned to what home is  
and where home was  
“*Liverpool*” I say causing arms to wildly splay and  
display  
and in turn a broken English reply  
“*aaah Penneee Wane, Stwar ... bwee Feel*”

## **Exmouth**

Phear Gardens, fear not  
as I forethought to walk  
along Trefusis Terrace  
to view the red rock cliffs  
amid the mist and dissipating morning dew  
and spy the rising sun

A turn around the town and Strand  
by the Imperial and the Grand  
a South Devon scone and tea  
is sought and bought and enjoyed  
and after clotted cream and honeyed jam  
the Beacon beckons  
to the vermillion tulip guard  
above the Manor Gardens

A western wind blows from the Teign  
causing skies to bluen  
and turn to pink and purple hues  
late lofty clouds billow and bloom  
then slowly fall to settle beyond the Exe Creek banks and  
hills

## **Fields of Fire**

Fields of fire are fields of freedom

into the night and on to forever

At the waterhole sits a desert traveller

beyond belief are the miles in his hands

The caverns stir by the reach of the moon

the flame shelters by the shivering dunes

Windswept and fanciful are the rhythmic dancers

the starlight shines and the veldt stares

## **Firefly**

The palm fronds twitch  
lightly in a sunset breeze

The South China Sea caresses  
gently it's twilight shore

The firefly shines and dances  
slowly, glimmering, guiding

The spiral comet tail  
vanishes to the moon

## **Firenze**

To the banks of the Arno I flee to take the flow  
of the crystal river  
as Arielle echoes the distant faint sound of opera  
where the Ponte Vecchio shimmers in a sultry sky

## Forbidden City

Imperial Palace how open are your gates  
how high are your walls through courtyards and  
corridors of heavenly peace

Forbidden City reveal your secrets  
to the whispering breeze of concubines intrigues  
and Emperor's dreams

## **For Gyula Horn ... The Man Who Tore The Curtain Down**

A Magyar stands high above Kings and Queens  
from the plains came horsemen chasing dust trailed  
dreams

Boulevards wide lead to Heroes Square  
monuments tall of legends that dared

Soviet occupation with bullet holed walls  
shadows in doorways the communist calls

Through the red star and sickle flows the great Danube  
scything the city apart in two

Protesting revolution and party unrest  
reclaiming the streets of Budapest

At the border stood Gyula Horn  
with cutters he tore the curtain down  
and by dusk a new republic born

## Four Lakeside Italian Towns

Varenna is a watercolour mirage  
where steep cypresses lead  
to a tranquil arbour of worn marble cooling to heal an  
afternoon lethargy

Bellagio where between shaded shrubs and statues bare  
the sweetness of the fragrant balm  
and orange blossom exudes the air

Garda awaking from a misty September dream  
as each sunrise brings the fishermen's early catch home to  
the Padre's blessing

Bardolino below olive groves and vines making the fine  
red wine  
lapped by shimmering waters and a calming peace of a  
shady afternoon siesta

## Free

Peace and silence wanders  
through the forest trees  
not a sound nor or a rustle or a scream  
just then  
for that moment  
we were free

## From a Short Stay in The Isle of Wight

Layers of sand  
bright colours in bands  
quartz crumbling away  
litters Alum Bay  
between harbour and bar  
turns the twists of the Yar  
castles and fort  
guns facing north

The ferries arrive at the pier at Ryde  
a hand drawn clock tells the time of the tides  
fossils discovered in wavy lines  
buried in chasms in the walls of the chines  
Tennyson went down to Freshwater Bay  
where guillemots nest far up and away  
winding rows of Ventnor's lanes  
smuggler's paths and steep hill ways

## From a Window in Hoxton

Sunrise over the city  
casts its light over my shoulder

Twists of smoke curl up to the skies  
as wispy charcoal strokes and commuters scuttle

Sundown over the city  
casts long shadows over anonymous faces  
until they vanish  
leaving a mesmerising glittering panorama of the night

## **Ghosts of The Atlantic**

Able Seaman Adams left Liverpool  
that September of 1940  
bleak grey skies lay ahead  
wild and foamy as the swells heaved  
and the dazzle ships to stern constantly rose and  
crashed back down into the icy waves

Skipper Donal leaves Killybegs today  
ten days a trawling the ocean to sonar the shoals  
his hull housing the creel that holds the wasted Krill  
used to bait the haddock and hake

But today an autumn detour is to be made to Rockall  
throwing a wreath to the west  
to float away under anodyne skies  
putting to rest, the weeping cold souls of the Benares

## **Gold Coast**

Along the Pacific Highway past dream and theme parks  
man made glass malls and fishermen's wharfs

Miles of white sand, sun blazing bright  
wind and the waves a surfer's delight

## **Grandad**

All those years ago all those moors explored  
me and grandad walking forever out of doors

Lancashire's wondrous landscapes  
hidden country dreams  
grandma's in the backseat to pay for petrol and ice cream

Climbing hills and chasing clouds roaming wild and free  
collecting all the acorns and planting them for trees

Picnics in empty lay-bys shandy in a quiet pub  
I always had a shilling which grandad made two bob

Today and never forgotten the decades they have passed  
that 1965 summer that would be my grandads last

## **Great Wall of China**

Great wall rising from the northern plains  
across provinces wild and rugged you wander  
ramparts high and steps steep  
cut deep from ancient times a fortress way  
what tales you must weave through this fabled land

## **Heat Wave**

Like summer fruits the summer brings  
long hot days and wedding rings

In the country or the coast  
pressure rises, bodies roast

Traffic jams for miles and miles  
tempers flare, children smile

Caravan convoys head to the beach  
thousands of lobsters pink in the heat

While all the hoards slowly head away  
I find contentment in my garden shade

## **Hedgehog**

The hedgehog snuffles and stumbles around  
blind as night he listens for sounds

The hedgehogs hungry all those bugs and grubs  
a gardener's friend eating slimy slugs

The hedgehogs peaceful calm and sleepy  
away from the winter dreaming deeply

## **Herbs (for being most useful)**

Mint for tea and the belly and caraway too  
thyme for the throat, hyssop for a cold  
basil for the salad, parsley on a dish  
lemon balms are calming and fennel for the fish

## Hospital Stay

Taken to hospital only five years old  
a terrifying ordeal down Clatterbridge Road

Separated from home with little explanation  
*"what are these things tonsils? what's an operation?"*

Trolley off to the theatre over pine whiffy floors  
a sleepy injection swirling faces and walls

Past midnight I wake a full moon lights the sky  
dazed and bloodied I moan and cry

A night nurse appears and comfort is given  
but what have I done to be in this prison

White coats gather looking and peering  
I want to sleep, go home, carry on my dreaming

After visits the days unfold boring and slowly  
playing with teddy and old Mr Campbell telling me  
stories

Late night commotion

doctors and screens but nothing said

by dawn on the ward Mr Campbell's gone

leaving an empty bare bed

Those five days remain to this day a great scar

and my reward for all this was an Aston Martin James

Bond toy car

## House Dust Mite

The life of the house dust mite is quite biopic  
a considerable feat since they are microscopic

We eat and breathe and sleep each night  
with at least two million house dust mites

Up close and magnified  
I guess we should be terrified

They thrive on flakes of skin we shed  
and love the warm and cosy bed

They're in the air and in the mattress  
causing allergies rashes and asthma

Themselves are harmless though they look such a sight  
our enemy are the particles known as dust mite shite

## **Humber Bridge**

Seen for miles around  
your span and crown  
twin towers and cables  
red car light tails  
the suspension  
apprehension  
of crossing the Humber Bridge

## I Dreamed of Going to Sea

I used to play on the east and west float quays  
and the four bascule bridges across the  
Wallasey and Birkenhead docks

Slipping through the sliding warehouse doors  
to rummage among the gunny sack cargo  
of Joseph Rank and Spiller's grain just unloaded from  
the east

The allure and smell of the thick oily rope  
suspended from the dockside bollards was intoxicating  
beautiful, almost an addiction

The Japanese cook on the "Yokohama Maru"  
cleaver in hand  
waving from his galley balcony half open door  
against the setting sun cries:  
*"Haarow, chop, chop, come aboard"*

Negotiating the rickety plank  
safe from the deep dark waters below by the drunken  
sailor nets

I stood on the red leaded deck  
of a Nippon Yusen Kaisha freighter  
waiting in vain to be shanghaied  
and set sail to the seven seas

The “Hu Lin” from Canton was always out of bounds  
but the Blue Funnel giants  
“Perseus” and “Titan” were always welcoming  
with bilge pumps gently gurgling out water  
lapping back against the keel  
and swishing the plimsoll line

The salty air mingled with molasses at Tate and Lyle  
as the dock gates swung open  
and the “Brocklebank” tug  
towing the towering behemoths  
drifted slowly but surely out into the Mersey

The docks are almost empty now  
save for a small tramer or two and a laid up ferry boat  
the ghosts of the deckhands and idle cranes  
cry out to me today

Tonight I shall dream of going to sea

## **In Violet**

The being envelopes the mystery

The curtain is raised to reveal

The leaves are vulnerable

The grass is to caress

Holding the green orb of enlightenment

Sitting delicately on the barely visible precipice

Is she an elegiac memory or a ghost?

## In Zermatt

Nobody drives in Zermatt

a traffic free zone

peril free

only perilous tourists

scouring in summer

for swatches

or

visor-clad in winter

for descending pursuits

## January

A dense fog at dawn  
folds slowly across the town

Monochrome figures like bare branches  
bend in the breeze  
stooped and worn yet young

**June 5<sup>th</sup> 1968**

I went camping that half term  
as far as the back garden  
setting up my tent  
secured by stakes  
cosy cushioned solitude

Just settled in then a shout  
“*food's ready*”  
from the scullery stove a pile of chips  
home cooked served in a plain white paper bag

About to enjoy this slightly overcooked feast  
the chips as always were a bit too crispy  
and sharp as spears  
when the seclusion ... shattered by a muffled voice  
straining through the canvas walls

My mother came out into the garden  
something's going on here I thought  
I clambered out tripping and twanging the guide wires  
to be given instructions

*“Run next door” (but one)*

*“and tell aunty Pat” (she’s not really my aunty)*

*“that Bobby Kennedy’s been shot, but not dead … yet”*

So I sprint next door (but one)  
and hammer down the knocker  
probably waking “uncle Bill” from his Vauxhall Motors  
nightshift sleep in  
and despite an urgent panic I remember my lines and  
blurt out

*“Bobby Kennedy’s been shot, but not dead … yet”*

A pink then pale face stared back  
I realised that this bulletin had a destiny  
so unrehearsed I stuttered *“put yer radio on”*

Performance and anxiety over  
message delivered I returned to the tent  
but when I got back  
my chips had gone cold  
so I called for some more  
but they turned out white, hard and raw

The tent was too hot so I gave it up  
to sleep in my bed fair comfort instead  
at dawn I learned that Bobby was still hanging on  
yet those who knew looked too forlorn

That morning I put the tent away for good  
and folded the flapping shroud swaddling the poles  
and pegs  
and put it to rest in a drawer in the shed  
drifting round the garden I found my white chip paper  
bag set free, blown, surrendered  
and plastered to the fence  
transparent now by too much vinegar

## Kent's Residents

As Princess Pocahontos was put to rest  
at St. Georges, Gravesend in the chancel  
it was by royal declaration  
that all forms of dancing and leaping  
were to be actively encouraged  
but that bowling which was as bad as bear baiting was to  
be forbidden

As Samuel Wyatt watched for ships in distress at  
Dungeness  
shingle and stones were swept in by the gales  
and only when the fog finally settled on the Romney  
marshes could the ghosts of smugglers and their  
phantom horses be heard

As Dickens penned Copperfield in Broadstairs confines  
from a from a solitary bleak house of walls hidden behind  
walls

the twin sister towers of Reculver remained  
to guide mariners to land from the seas that plunder

As Churchill in his Chartwell garden sat in a boiler suit  
painting bridges and woods

his day job some said was saving the nation from wear  
and tear and war

but it all ended badly in defeat at the ballot box election  
until a surprise reprise after a demi – decade rose again  
through a blue Maduro haze

## **La Rocca di Passignano**

Dawn breaks  
the castle awakes  
the grey walls stand erect in the sunrise  
the inhabitants have long since died

Dusk settles  
the stone grows cold  
battlements stand like a petrified army  
watching and waiting for the approach of the silent  
enemy

## Lament of a Yorkshire Maiden

She sat upon a stone  
so rugged and worn  
mossy by the mould  
and the cold  
and the west wind blown

Deciding whether to  
spend her life  
to weep and mourn  
to wander or wonder  
about what life may hold  
in any future shown

I saw her sitting there  
old and fair  
upon the Yorkshire stone  
as she had sat and stared  
across the moors  
all those years

about what might have been  
if he had from war returned

**Land der Berge, Land am Strome**  
*(Land of mountains, Land by the river)*

Austria with its silver dish lakes  
waiting for the summer fruits  
where cable car bahns dangle like bright red cherries  
over newly mown lime green pastures as meadows turn  
to mountains

The Ziller Valley's fields its marigolds  
Rattenburg swelters heat from the furnace  
and crystal erupts from the glassblowers trumpet

The Prater Wheel turns like a slow clock hand  
clandestine meetings of lovers or the third man  
and rivers wind then roar  
through pine and logs and forest floors

Glacier dazzling pure bright white  
reflected blue against the sky  
and through shifting ice slow and cold  
marmots live in the fissures and folds

And as a soft moon settles over Shuttdorf  
the sounds of the distant clatter of a horse and cart  
the clink of schnapps glasses and a rushing mountain  
stream

## Lawrence

A cripple is made racing a home made kart  
down a tenement hill  
practising for the Preston Guild

1914 the Government calls  
fit young men  
fighting spirits with strength

A cripple looks in with an offer to help  
maybe making factory bayonets, bullets and shells

But recruited immediately ordered to the station  
King's shilling in pocket with tin can rations

No time to get a message home  
with rifle and helmet to Flanders bound  
never to return from foreign ground

And on a Preston pantry table lay  
Lawrence's cold untouched tea time pie

## Leasowe Life - Parts I and II

### I. Dangerfield Behind the Brickworks

Dangerfield if your dare  
real cartridges brass and rare

Hide and seek such great fun  
I even found the barrel of an old sten gun

Overgrown and wild by day  
trespassers forbidden to walk and play

This was our jungle, childhood war  
keep one eye open for the arm of the law

With sticks for swords the games were real  
all that danger is today is a playing field

## **II. Market Garden Opposite The Twenty Row Inn**

Wicker baskets with lettuce and cabbage

marrows in furrows and freshly hung rabbits

allotments, compost and follow the pong

sacks of tatties sold for a song

## **Leaving**

Waiting alone on a station platform at this time of night  
to catch the last train from here

Travelling at this crazy hour through countryside I cannot  
see  
bypassing industrial towns, jewelled, I thought about our  
..... past

Trying to sleep in this empty carriage thinking of you  
all I have is a reflection in the window reminding me of  
what once was

## **Leccy and Gas**

Leccy and gas plus VAT  
fuels the cost of heat for the elderly

Hypothermia putting lives in jeopardy  
bitter winter enemy of the elderly

Leccy and gas a necessary energy  
it should be cheap or free for the elderly

## **Letter Writer**

Write a letter and save a life  
across the world like a satellite  
write a letter and save a life  
to save some body from a butchers knife

Write a letter to South America  
to save the man behind the steel bars  
the government keep the prison keys  
so write a letter to set him free

So many people held in chains  
a pen is the scalpel to ease their pains  
the candle burns, the barb wire stings  
words unwritten darkness brings

## Lottery

Yer pays yer pound

yer takes a chance

yer entertained

by song and dance

Balls spin around

and one by one

yer tick em off

its only fun

Win or lose

well someone did

the best I done

was just ten quid

Profits to good causes

or to charity

or in directors pockets

that we can't see

## **Lucca and Saint Gemma**

Renown for Puccini's birth  
and virgin oils and city walls  
enclosing your intricate and graceful pattern  
of weaving streets, multitude piazzas  
staging beautiful Basilica's  
and pink hue stone churches and gardens aromatic

The amber glow terracotta roof tiles  
seen from the city walls at sunrise and dusk  
silhouette the Alpi Apuane hills  
three seasons you exude the heady fragrance of jasmine  
that grows in abundance

On a hot summers day the weary take harbour  
in narrow lanes and shade for their passeggiata  
siphoning the cooler breeze off the artery cobbles

A wedding cake white marble St. Michaels  
or a comforting quiet and peaceful lofty copper domed  
green sanctuary  
as Santa Gemma took refuge to hide  
from prying eyes  
her Wounds of the Passion

## **Matterhorn**

Rising beyond the mountain streams flowing at speed  
high above the pinion track trains  
encapsulated like a slow release drug shooting out into  
the sun  
carved by nature, a snow capped pyramid blue diamond  
trapped in September light ..... a monarch enthroned  
Matterhorn

## Meadowside Cup Final 1968

In kits and jeans  
we'd pick two teams  
by dip dip dip  
and my blue ship

Although quite small I'd play in goal  
hoping that we wouldn't foul  
then a trip inside the box  
and big Pete rolled down his socks

Whack! a casey fast and low  
I flew and saved this great penno

## **Memory**

Yesterday I held a dying persons hand  
and the rains came

Today I stood under tropical skies  
and the breeze came

Tomorrow I am  
returning home

## **Milan**

Galleria ... bastion of fashion

perfume, Fiat and secret passions

La Scala bathed in rouge and gold

Verdi's tales sung to be told

tempura mural by Da Vinci

behind courtyards and cloisters sleeps the supper's last  
sitting

## **Modern World**

Money for the rich, sure!  
it's not a problem to print some more  
this is a modern world

We use a satellite dish to catch our fish  
we have toxic waste to kill the human race  
living in a modern world

Away from home we use our mobile phone  
attacked by texts and apps what's next?  
we are all happy in a modern world

We make the rivers flow forth  
we make the rivers flow back  
what's the use of this in a nuclear attack  
in this our modern world

All this disarming that people find alarming  
and the last sound we heard was a three minute warning  
wasn't ours a modern world

## **Mr. Moon**

Mr Moon

grinds wheat and corn

from early morn

barley mown

sails go round

Great cog wheels crush

the grains and husk

while Mrs Moon of ancient hour

bags by hand

the rough hewn flour

## **Mr. Pettigrew's Cure**

In an old hotel  
by the old seaside  
Mr. Pettigrew stayed  
or some say reside

With windows open  
and bracing sea breezes  
it did well for Pettigrew's  
wheezes and sneezes

## My Mersey

Merchant ship cranes

unloading their grain

Confederate ships built at Cammell Lairds

opposite sits the Liver Birds

Ferries glide across the Mersey

supporters wear their red or blue jerseys

high above the Albert dock

cathedral bells peal over their flocks

The world's greatest seafaring city

land of the Beatles and birth of the sixties

today's excitement is its calm reflection

designer walks and regeneration

New Brighton to Seacombe a fair old stride

a pint at Egremont by the tide

Fort Perch Rock out to Liverpool Bay

to the west, West Kirby and old Hoylake

## Nan's Cabinet

The light cherry-wood display cabinet  
always stood in the same place  
in the corner of Nan's front parlour  
the pale glossy polished wood  
and the fragile glass shelves  
holding the crème of her souvenirs

Best china brought out on Sundays  
or days when Uncle Harry came to visit ... sometimes  
unexpectedly  
to be greeted by "*eee you could have knocked me down with  
a feather*"  
gifting his tin of red salmon  
to compliment a salad of celery, lettuce and a tomato

It was always something of an honour to be given the  
long hollow key and  
asked to "*fetch summat special or best*"

my favourites were the blue and white stripey and  
stoney west country tea set  
from a 1962 foray to Penzance

The top shelf was always reserved for porcelain things  
the lion and tiger bought by me for her birthday  
with pocket money saved or more often given on the  
day

Post mortem the collection was given away  
the lion and the tiger now live in a wooden box like  
coffin found in the attic just prior to a recent move  
I also got those blue and white bits for everyday use  
until they finally broke and came to rest like a Cornish  
ship wreck at the bottom of the garden years ago

## New Age

Percentages and air pollution  
interest rates are their solution

Rolling stock and fighter planes  
their rhetoric is rather lame

Glossy shops and credit cards  
pay next month that's not so hard

Hungry children roam alone  
to a cardboard box that they call home

A boat from the east carries sugar and spice  
a mask and a sign are the dealers dice

Courage and speed to fuel injection  
and all that's left is a specimen section

A hole in the wall a hole in the sky  
the rivers are flooding and we cannot hide

The villas and deserts are scorching today  
watch for the iceman to show you the way

## **Night Caller**

They sleep during daylight  
because they walk out the night  
attracted and addicted and high on the city lights

They like the hot nights to feel the sheet glass burning  
the skies are empty of clouds  
the stars are on fire  
and they like the crescendo

It is almost dawn the night lights are fading  
home beckons  
who knows about their secrets ..... until the next night

## **North to Noosa**

Northwards via the Bruce, Ettamogah and Yalinda  
bush country taverns, ladies on the veranda

Gingertown beckons pineapple plains  
thunderhead rocks sugarcane trails

Tumbleweeds scatter to Glasshouse Ranges  
in the distant sea, white horses are dolphins

**November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1963**

My name is Pete Smith

but 'cos of my size my nickname is Smidge

I am 7½ years old

and this is my story of my day out

It was a warm November lunchtime

the day before, the Dallas rain had pummelled our  
tarmac drive

but today it was different

the large neon sign on our Texas school depository  
glowed 67° F

I had been made to dress smartly

just like the time that we went

to my cousins wedding picnic

blue and black check sweater

grey shorts and my best tan sandals

at least the grassy knoll had dried out in the noon sun

It was a big party  
but I had the best view of all of the crowds  
as all the hoards were squashed in shop doorways  
or cramming the sidewalks

The cars came into view edging into the plaza  
on Elm Street  
high up I thought I glimpsed a sharp sparkle in the red  
brick store window

As the parade glided towards us  
I saw Jackie in her pink suit "*Chanel*" ... my mum said  
like a bride waving to the masses  
I guess we all came to see her really

The sounds of cheering, ringing and whizzing  
then a shuddering thunder from the trailing motorcade  
I thought I saw and heard an orange flash and crack  
maybe it was just the sun in my eyes but it sure smelled  
of fireworks

Then a shower of wet  
crimson confetti poured out  
of the violet sky  
and showered me in silence

## Ochre Eyes

So goodbye from me for now  
and I will dream of you too  
and perhaps those sparkling lights  
and ochre eyes  
will see and find the truth  
and with sealed kisses  
end in delight

## Ode to Fish and Chips

For choice and with tea  
the quayside at Whitby  
facing out to the sea  
eating Britain's great delicacy

For quality and tripled cooked taste  
try the Chinese takeaway  
scoffed in front of the TV  
with rich red sauce from HP  
then washed down with pleasure  
by a brown ale in good measure

The best one ever  
was a northern endeavour  
“A Higgies Special” in Chester  
fish, chips, mushy peas, bread and butter  
..... nothing better

## Ozone

There is no zone for what its worth  
where ozone's safe on this our earth

Prime Ministers and Presidents meet  
to limit all their CFC's

But until these nations all decide  
is tomorrow too dangerous to step outside?

For all the talk and lessons learned  
through scorching skies our planet burns

We must act now not hesitate  
if not for us then our children's sake

We must all learn to change our lives  
recycle now or wave goodbye

## Panda

Oh panda were would you rather be  
in the wild or in the zoo  
eating bamboo  
or rice from a bowl

The choice is ours not yours you see  
only we control your destiny

So panda teach our children true  
to save the woods and not to lose  
your precious smile  
for when you are gone  
we'll follow too

## **Paris in The Spring**

Paris in the spring is alive again  
petals profuse the Tuileries  
lovers and artists steal glances and kisses  
at night in ruby and gold  
glow a million lights

## Penny Deposit Bottles

Collecting old bottles for the penny deposit  
carrying mums basket and pushing my trolley  
knocking on doors "*any empties to spare*"  
I'll recycle them all to fill my pockets so bare

Laden with glass my trolley was full  
Tizer, Corona and Vimto to the shop I would pull  
the shopkeepers face would drop when he saw me  
more vessels returned that's a bag brimmed with pennies

## Petticoat Lane Market 1969

Blankets and sheets cheap as can be  
buy one of these and the rest come for free

Kitchen devices for slicing and carving  
a dinner set for six a guinea and a farthing

Hang on to your purses or wallets will fly  
my bargain that Sunday a lime green and yellow wide  
kipper tie

## Pisa

In Pisa a pendulum swings  
lost to the stars in an astronomer's dream

To wanderers you reveal a world's great wonder  
your leaning tower tilts and points us to ponder

Light is Pisa  
coloured yellow of sand  
then as forever  
Galileo's land

## **Polar Bear**

Four months beneath the winter snows  
slumbers deep in dreams of icy flows  
the night sky's aurora waves and glows

Blizzards whistle across terrain  
in this the polar bear's domain

## **Poppylands**

Above what lies beneath the far country fields  
a plume of ash rises to noble empyrean heights  
as the final pounding and screaming fades into the  
contrite violet twilight sky

Fresh frozen ground thaws each early spring  
and the ploughs furrowing divulges a trenches secret's  
locked away for a century or more  
preserved in deathly silence  
a shattered shuttered shelter

Without family or mourners  
the forlorn fallen finally returns from Flanders  
by train and cortege and the Union Flag  
to the loneliest headland North Norfolk Church  
and a cliff top grave  
carried on a rickety cart down the crunchy gravel path  
home at last

watched in silence by eleven local school children who  
have only ever known peace

The corporal corpse is lowered to rest again under  
sodden earth

the wild sanguine poppies bend in a bitter easterly  
wailing wind

in remembrance to the end of time

## Preston Treat

The other day I took a train to Preston  
we used to visit there in the sixties to see Harry and Dolly

Uncle Harry worked for the Bus Corporation all of his life  
from Conductor to Inspector in charge of Union rights

Harry loved his lemonade ordered by the crate  
stored away in the pantry the Corona was great

The other day I walked and rediscovered  
those same streets  
the end Victorian terrace was still there  
an island surrounded by new uni buildings  
but at least the door and the wonky stone step  
was now straight

Clutching a faded photograph of me standing on the  
same doorstep  
in short trousers and tan sandals

and holding the clippies ticket machine that I had been  
given all those years ago ...

I was tempted to knock at the door

My knock was answered by a lovely lady Benita Patel  
and after a daft explanation I was invited in  
the family offered me a cup of Lancashire tea  
and a cheese barm

and then I blurted out

*“have you any cream soda in the pantry”*

## **Rainbow**

Myriad of rain droplets on a window pane  
beguile the light  
tantalise and refract

## Reconciliation

In the quiet Olberg woods and hills above the  
weaving Rhine Valley  
in it's meandering paths and lanes  
I met a shabby old man at a bus stop

Eager to speak in fast flowing torrents  
I hadn't a clue  
so we talked single sided  
Germanic versus Anglo  
until we slipped into broken English

I mentioned Lancashire the place of my birth  
and then I surrendered to his words "*Blackpool*" and  
"*Prisoner of War*"  
he was moved to declare that he had been treated  
kindly in internment

The Germans had blitzed the chip shop ... my Gran had assured me

then I thought of our bombs on Bonn and Dresden and falling across the river here at Cologne but I was too young to be contrite for our father's victories

And as the empty bus approached  
he held out his hand  
in an act of reconciliation and peace

*Reconciliation* was selected by Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral for filming and broadcast as part of a series of meditative reflections.

## **Remembering that Christmas**

The snowman brought the snow that winter  
to illuminate the ground  
at night I gazed towards the moon  
and wondered about Father Christmas

I was searching for signs of proof  
those telltale tracks upon the roof  
I crept into the bay window  
and caught sight of a shooting star  
no sign but the sound of Santa's bells  
(rung by my dad hiding in the garden)  
to excite and drift me off to dream  
beneath the midnight blue  
and the lavender flock wallpaper

Waking up early on that Christmas morning  
presents in a candy stripe winceyette pillowcase  
oh ... and an orange and some walnuts  
with the Cadburys selection box

a bag of gold foil choccy coins  
and a red box of maltesers  
which I would save up and use as ammo in a pop gun  
for shooting into open gobs  
which was a dare, scare and smashing fun

Then time to dress up as Wyatt Earp holstered in leather  
or the Cherokee enemy with bandana and feather  
the best on the telly was Mr Pastry ... again  
but Batman and Robin was my fave  
then if I was best behaved  
I could stay up late chewing some Rolo's  
with Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo

## **Rome**

Eternal dawn in the Piazza Republic  
wakes the doves like fluttering rockets  
in a chattering sky

## **Sarajevo**

Families and friends torn apart till the end  
now there is only sorrow in Sarajevo

Nations debate but it is all to late  
for enclaves and slaves the mist never rises

Where has life gone to a far away haven  
where brothers weep and sisters cry

Rockets and shells, meditation of bells  
tolling for lives once lived

Now there is only sadness in Sarajevo

## Scarlet Light

Into Schiphol and then by tram  
to the heart of Amsterdam

Canals weave as a maze  
under bridges that lowly laze

Spheres of edam and gouda cheese  
or a puff of some legal herbal leaf

Tall thin houses with hidden seams  
revealing Ann Franks tortured dreams

Blue and white delft in the potter's hall  
Van Gogh paintings adorn the walls

Tulips disguise forbidden sights  
undressing windows through the night  
to lead beyond the scarlet light

## **Scent**

Scent of the earth

scent of the seas

scent of the sky

inhale

enjoy

# **Scotland**

Land of legends

Picts and Gaels

mystical mountains

mythical isles

silent lochs and shivers

in the depths of winter

fortress cradled winds

on misty morn moors

echo's of old battle cries

your remoteness beguiles

## Searching for Suzi Wong

At Causeway Bay the noon day gun  
there stands the solitary Englishman  
one o' clock sharp champagne salute  
traditions past resolute

Sampans sail through the boat community  
floating lives with no continuity  
Aberdeen and fragrant harbours  
oyster sauce and other odours

Shopping plazas skyward loom  
a dazzling display in old Kowloon  
night falls in old Hong Kong  
exploring Wan Chai and Suzi Wong

## September Time

September time has come again  
with watercolour skies of sapphire blue  
indented by powdery wispy clouds  
as white felt sown into a crinkled cotton dress

At Saddle Bow the fields newly turned  
have brought the soil inside out  
revealing a dark chocolate rippled landscape of furrows  
as the seabirds flown from The Wash  
follow perilously close  
to the tractor and plough  
gathering and gorging on earthen worms  
and last spring's un-sprouted seeds

Behind the station platform and paint peeled picket  
fences at Watlington  
the sunflowers begin to stoop sadly  
as the first winds of autumn  
caress the flatlands of the eastern fens

## Shangri La

Listen

the far distant melodies travel

across the still serene waters

waves lap upon the sun setting shore

a light breeze brushes through the palm beach terrace and  
trees

## Shopping

The super market

what have you got

you've got it all

everything we ask for

Won't you come inside

the aisles are long and wide

food and fashion waits

through the automatic gates

All you ever thought you needed

but even that has been succeeded

forget the complex shopping mall

welcome to the world of digital

fingering our glowing screens

to order up your wildest dreams

## **Silver Birch**

The silver birch grows tall and thin

it's peeling bark paper thin

Waving branches catkin tails

velvet leaves like a thousand sails

## Soap

I love the smell of cheap soap in all those  
B & B and hotel bathrooms  
from summer holidays on the seafront in Scarborough  
and Bridlington  
and those boarding houses with wooden stairs polished  
and tidy  
serving fish for dinner because it's Friday

Then at the end of the day  
being called from play  
on the greens, in dirty jeans  
to be bathed and scrubbed down in haste with that small  
white block  
the aroma of clean

## **Soham**

Soham sits  
east of Cambridge  
away from the spires  
amid meadows and droves

Soham sits  
south of Ely  
away from shadows of lanterns  
amid pastures and groves

Soham sits  
north of Newmarket  
away from the races  
amid quiet country roads

Soham sits  
west of Bury  
away from the sugary sweet beet  
amid fens and lodes

## **Southend Pier**

Southend Pier

in flames

again

oh dear!

But you are the longest in the world

so we will build you back

and thousands more can tread your boards

or ride the tracks

to the end

of Southend Pier

again

## Spring

The grass forever green  
in a fine English spring  
willowed by a wind chime breeze  
wave the daffodils in a ring

Herbs suddenly hasten  
and beckon charismatically  
feathered, leaved or balmy  
fragrant aromatically

Buds and blooms early flowering fruits  
dampened by an April shower  
forever silent sculptured friends  
statues mossy in mosaic ochre yellow

## St. Wolfgang

A paddle steamer from St. Gilgen sojourns gently against  
the quay  
wooden homes and balconies  
and open windows waiting for the face of the cuckoo  
but all that appears is the farmers wife  
looking across to Strobl with the smell of apfelstrudel

Lakeside castle and palace asleep  
empty walls within against yellow alabaster  
the gardens are my retreat

Up ahead a puff of steam winding ascending  
Schafbergbahn, oil and coal  
fires burning, pistons turning  
pushing, shushing  
rack and pinion round ravines  
then blue skies open summit bound  
revealing five magic lakes across the Salzkammergut

## **Steam Train Journey of One Stop (and being allowed to stand on the footplate)**

Standing on the footplate real not a dream

coals to the fire the puffing and the steam

just through the cutting a steamy hot thrill

A 2-4-2 from Lime Street up to Edge Hill

## **Storm**

An electric storm rages  
far distant  
lightening the night  
of a Sumatran sky  
deep orange hues  
the colour of a tiger  
whilst stars blaze through silver eyes

Roaring thunder  
the unheeded tiger cries forlorn  
waiting for the silence  
and the calm of dawn

## **Summer in Suffolk**

Fields of wheat turn to golden  
barley heads whispering folding

Pink washed cottages neatly thatched  
Tudor beams with oak door latch

Villages of tranquil charm  
haystack's gathered on the farms

Byways silent past ford and mill  
Kersey's lost in time stood still

Long Melford and its sister Clare  
in elderflower lanes white clusters stare

Cavendish for old antiques  
Lavenham church for a Suffolk tea

The evening sun yellows the hour  
abbey gardens display their flowers

The silhouette of age old trees  
evenings fragrant scent on a genteel breeze

## **Summer of Love**

In the summertime when the days were long  
we used to travel far and sing our songs

Carefree were those long hot days  
with the yellow sun and the mellow haze

Wild then in the summertime  
nights of love and days of wine

Today perhaps wherever you may be  
do you treasure still that memory

## **Sunflower**

A sunflower grown  
whilst lawns are mown

A black and white seed  
shoots at first like a weed

How something so small  
towers now tall

When the rays hit your face  
standing boldly with grace

But when the autumn rains near  
you fold and shed your tears

## Sydney

Opera House fans out in great white sails  
on Bennelong Point the queen of New South Wales

Monorail twists around Sydney's streets  
pedestrian's below strive on their feet

Botanical gardens carpet Macquarie's Chair  
the "Rocks" markets and merchants wares

Darling Harbour a taste of the future  
crisscross ferries ply back on the water

Skyline horizons thee antipodean view  
silhouette of the bridge dusks bronzed gold hue

## **Tales Betwixt the Axe and Exe**

To Seaton to sit on  
the electrifying tram  
that glides around the town  
in colourful liveried display and  
cranks to higher downs and Colyton

To the westerlies of Salterton  
marine and commando garrison  
training to derail the opposition  
now only ghosts of D-Day past  
and Neptune's waving hand  
a solemn farewell to loved ones and liberation

Nearby where on rich red loam  
donkeys roam  
and revel in their safe haven  
above the caves and coves  
while cattle droves  
and all day graze beside the Axe and Ox  
and cyclists laze in Devon's  
elderflower lanes in season

Ottery, whence Pricilla and Laurie came and went  
and sailed in clearer skies  
by Imperial Airways to the Orient  
narrowly missing exploding comets  
and came to rest  
in Italy  
in Pescallo upon their twilight fading years

## Tale of Two Tortoises

Harry and Tiny were good friends, taking all day  
to chew a tomato and doze and chew a bit more

One summer we almost lost Harry, he crept away  
but was brought back at the end of the day  
I guess it was the number seven painted on his shell  
so all was well

Small Tiny ever content to stay and never stray  
seemed to smile when the lettuce leaf rose  
to tickle his nose

Quite suddenly no notice given they were gone  
I pestered and cried "*Where's Harry and Tiny,*  
*handed to who?*"  
sent away to soon

Weeks went by but I never forgot and then a day out  
to Belle Vue ..... a zoo  
riding on an elephants back  
gliding down the water shoot splash

And then on display  
in the house of reptilia  
were Harry and Tiny  
just as familiar  
I tapped on the glass "*Harry, Tiny, look it's me*"  
as they nodded and sucked on more tomatoes  
two together in their glass room  
and my happiness returned  
late that afternoon

## **Tanjung Rhu**

At Tanjung Rhu

I rest to the lap of the waves, calmly, peacefully

At Tanjung Rhu

I watch at dusk the fluted fishermen casting nets from an  
endless shore to a sinking sun

At Tanjung Rhu

I sleep to an ocean breeze, caressingly, dreamily

## Tears and Smiles

Water washes away tears amidst the memory of years  
reflecting on decisions sought, some taken, some thought

Nostalgic days, moments in time  
pathways travelled entwine  
people and places in mind

The sun dries the tears leaving a fading stain of past years  
put aside the decades for awhile  
and let the tear turn to a smile

## **Temple of Heaven**

With marble and gold  
you write out the past  
whilst dragons and lions  
guard you forever

Lanterns like sentinels  
show one the path  
to the Temple of Heaven  
the colour of the sky

## The Apple and The Greengage Tree

The apple and the greengage tree  
grow side by side  
arched and bent together  
almost seemed entwined

The summer sun swells  
and ripens all the fruits  
cluster bunches green  
and red speckled suits

As autumn approaches  
thoughts of gathering the crop  
the gentlest of caresses  
and the harvest will drop

The leaves now turn to yellow  
to the wind and leap  
the apple and the greengage  
will retire now and sleep

## **The Ballad of Johnny Robinson and the Black Rock Mermaid**

To the wind and the tempest  
screaming from the Orme  
blew in on this fair gale  
a wild heart of storm

*And I sing to you Johnny Robinson  
And I sing to you from the sea  
And I call you Johnny Robinson  
I call you unto me*

Appearing on the foundering deck  
she promised to guide him home  
and so washed upon a Hoylake shore  
released from savage surf and foam

*And I sing to you Johnny Robinson*

*And I sing to you from the sea*

*And I call you Johnny Robinson*

*I call you unto me*

Through mist and rain and clear skies

and waters cold or warm

eyes blue as the ocean deep

will wait for him at dawn

*And I sing to you Johnny Robinson*

*And I sing to you from the sea*

*And I call you Johnny Robinson*

*I call you unto me*

To the sound of midnights submerged bells

to mariners one and all

the creature of the sea

sits on Black Rock Leasowe shore

*And I sing to you Johnny Robinson*

*And I sing to you from the sea*

*And I call you Johnny Robinson*

*I call you unto me*

Charmed by the mermaids song

to accept her coral ring

he slips out at night to New Brighton beach

to be never again be seen

*And I sing to you Johnny Robinson*

*And I sing to you from the sea*

*And I call you Johnny Robinson*

*I call you unto me*

So when the moon is full and tide a turning

and the wind be still and calm

you can still hear the mermaid singing

from Black Rock all alone

*And I sing to you Johnny Robinson*

*And I sing to you from the sea*

*And I call you Johnny Robinson*

*I call you unto me*

## The Coach Trip to Blackpool

A day out by coach somewhere not too far

New Brighton to Blackpool booked by Grandma

At some village in the Ribble we would stop for a while  
the half way halt for the toilet and a meat and tattie pie

Hundreds of coaches we must remember its number  
then off to the pleasure beach or promenade bingo

Ride on the rails the cream and green trams  
the top deck to Fleetwood or Lytham St. Anne's

Hot dogs or candy floss and pink sticks of rock  
the golden mile's shimmering Ripley's "*Believe it or Not*"

Tattooed ladies and two headed pigs

Madam Tussaud's and families in digs

The tower stands high above the circus below  
old fogey's go dancing in formation and rows

7.00 pm crowds back at the bus station  
excitement of gliding through illuminations

The long day ended we head for home  
into the night with chips in a cone

## **The Computer (on a bad day)**

Bip bip bip bop bop bop

all booted up but the password's wrong

Finally in to write, file and save

send to the printer a further delay

Return and exit won't let me delete

system malfunction, scream at the screen

Remain calm don't stamp on the floor

It's the fountain pen and sheets of A4

## The Dales Descending Light

It is fitting as Lent is but three days hence  
that the purple cyclamen survived severe frosts  
to rise between the damp lichen rich tombs at Ripon  
Cathedral surrounding the tree as the gardener burns  
his cuttings and the wood smoke ascends from behind  
the garden wall and drifts across the graves

A panorama of trees, stark, dark and alveolar  
like a thousand lungs waiting to breathe life into spring  
for it is late February now  
and the fast flowing Ure buffets the lone angler  
standing waist deep below the bridge at Masham

The worn landscape strewn with bronzen tufts on  
hillocks and last autumn's coppiced hazels  
are shadowed by clumps of trees that shelter the sheep  
from the sweltering summer sun or winters frozen  
moon

while from time to time a howling wind tears through  
vacant windows and portals of the dry stone field barns  
screaming at the souls of the fells and dales

The moist green mossy branches  
precariously point with sharp bent brittle fingers  
at the weary wanderer or passer by  
to hasten their journey  
as the remoteness of life and light  
slowly slips away to silhouette the peaks  
and the ethereal glow dips for another day  
and the last train from Garsdale Station slinks away in  
twilight to Settle and the distant sparkling lights of  
Leeds

## **The Dancing Creatures of Celander**

Between sand and stones

I caught a dancing crab

scuttling among scattered shells

Between border and bricks

I clocked a dancing cat

grooving in gyrating grass

Between poppy and pollen

I beheld a dancing bee

buzzing behind bobbing buds

## The Day that the Schools Closed for a Day was the Day that Changed us all in a Kind of Way

May the 1<sup>st</sup> 1997 the heat wave was intense and laconic  
the hottest day in any May ever  
things were going to get even more red and hotter still

After an early lunch we went to quietly vote, we had the afternoon off  
two by two a slow trickle now before the evening rush  
the elderly, mums pushing prams  
and a policeman in short sleeves looked on casually  
taking refuge from the sun outside

Just before the polls closed at 10.00pm a knock on the door  
I thought this is canvassing late a party with rosettes  
*"I'm sorry to bother you but a cat is dead  
the old man on the corner has put it in box  
a motorist ... a late voter ... probably ... intoxicated ...  
probably ..."*

*sped off into the night" he said*

I said *"Try next door three cats live there"*

Live on TV politicians beamed in

I stayed awake till one, the first twenty results  
carrying the flavour of all our labours  
then early to rise, a sweeping landslide

A new government formed

this is what we have all waited for  
on the day that the schools closed for a day  
the day that changed us all in some kind of way  
but as one party was mourning its loss  
a funeral took place in next doors garden  
the only guests, two cats, in silence

## The End of Spring

I watch for you  
against a darkening sky  
now passed

The taint of wet grass  
hangs heavily in the air  
a cloud tumbles and out pours  
a blue sky

Clear and still and warm  
and spring is put to slumber

## **The Folding Chair**

The folding chair for sitting, nay  
but for carting around and standing on  
and pushing up the loft lid cover  
only then did I discover  
its cold up there  
to be perching on  
the folding chair

## The Last Days of August

These last days of August and the golden barley  
nods towards sundown high in the East Ridings  
where tractors haloed by the hazy coppery dust  
cut and mow the wheat to sharp stubble stumps

Sunlight slips through alabaster clouds  
effulgent finger beams sweep across the soft undulating  
landscape causing the stationary coach party waiting to  
cross the bridge at Stamford to shield their eyes from  
glare

The gathered wheat is towered and perched into perfect  
cubes or rolled into cylinder drums sitting in random  
rows waiting for winter beneath the odd solitary wind  
turbine turning slowly in a lethargic breeze  
shadowing the edges of the still young cornfields  
between Driffield and Burton Agnes

The long summer day softens and slowly starts to sink  
and gentle purple skies cool slightly now  
as the early evening light drifts in from the sea  
and the smell of eventide descends on the village green

## The Lesson

By the crossroads up yonder Lowe

I spied the school kids going home

With bags and satchels coloured gaily

and packets of crisps and fags that they crave daily

Laughing and joking counting pocket money earned

with their folders and textbooks with lessons they've

learned

## **The Only Bit There is of The Cheshire Coast**

Child of Hale stood nine foot three  
a gentle giant by the sea

Disused lighthouse amid rock strewn sand  
warned distant ships from distant lands

Runcorn bridge hovers over the ship canal  
pylons and wires and chemical plants

Ellesmere Port and Stanlow Banks  
great floating vessels unload their tanks

Refineries miles wide  
towering fires light up the skies

## **The Painter and The Seagull**

The Painter sees within  
through peeling frames  
resting on a crumbling sill  
what time has hid revealed

The Seagull glides  
with outstretched wings  
to an empty space  
painted by the brushes of time  
we can only stand transfixed and gaze  
oh ... to be that seagull, to move, to fly

## The Powder Monkey

In the silence of the violet morning  
and the shadow of the fractured clouds  
broken only by the seagull's squeals  
to fool the foes

The canvas flaps and seeping oil  
into coils  
of friction fraught and taught  
hemp and jute  
creaks to drown the sounds of those below  
as victory seems so far  
to fill the shells not shoals  
to tailor, stitch and mend the tunics worn

The boys in bells  
not teens but tens  
the sounds and smells  
of black graphite carbon  
sparks and fire

quell the tempest of the seas  
and enemies

Bang and crash  
fuse and flash  
recoil and rebound  
the Powder Monkey swings  
to canons from gallows beams  
and England's shores still will be  
forever so far away from home

## The Punt Gunner

A fissure in the clouds at dawn  
casts a sombre curtain over  
the damp sodden November trenches

A pastel mist drapes leaden over  
the wide expanse of the dank dewy fens

The verdant hands of the marsh willows  
washed by past fallen drizzle  
waver below the caress of the towering heavens  
to raise the early birdsong chorus  
as the punt gunner splays out his single oar  
in the stillness of the Welney waters

Calm now the breeze rushing through the reeds  
lest the waters of the Ouse lose their prey

Fingers now frozen through fingerless mittens  
prime the gun and trigger ready  
finally gliding to a stillness of the soul  
in morns pale afterglow

A flash of citrine and a single shot  
shatters the silence of the dawn  
and the deed is done  
and one more son will not return

## **The Rhine**

Rising in the Drachenfels  
misty forests and castles dwell  
blue skies over grey Bonn  
where statues point to a soldiers gun

Steep terraces of verdant vines  
producing luscious sweet white wines  
fast and flowing bends the Rhine

## The Ring Pull

The beaches of Weston-Super-Mare

were bare that year

I discovered the ring pull

the froth hissed out

a malted lava flow

of fine pale gold

the colour of sand

as the tide moved away

beads of chill set in

leaving the beaches alone

that year I discovered

the ring pull

## **The Shed**

In our close every house has a shed but ONE  
and oh what shapes and sizes they do come

One for gardening  
one the size of a Swiss chalet  
a fridge freezer in another  
and Malcolm keeps in his, dreams  
locked away and safe  
but me I am the ONE  
no need of such a thing  
I let my garden live

## The Turtle's Tale

Fishermen's net catch  
the great leatherback  
today only the few  
out of once thousands get through

To Rantau Abang  
a long sea trek ends  
with a crawl up the beach  
with only flashlights to greet

Is it pain or fear  
that causes your cries and tears  
you must know rely on man  
to hatch your eggs in the sand

Generations lost almost extinct  
a life and species right on the brink  
as you slip away slowly and submerge under the waves  
is it you or us who should be afraid

## **There is an Apartment in the Barbican that Shall Remain Anonymous**

Each morning the casual commuter taking a shortcut  
can witness if concentrating, the clientele  
surreptitiously slipping out into the stairwell  
quickly, sheepishly, guiltily  
descending to the dawn chorus  
of the early rush hour traffic  
below the London Wall  
then sloping off through the narrow lanes of Smithfield  
or the City's square mile

## Tin Money Box

A small young boy taken to the bank  
to open an account  
to save money in  
is given a tin  
with animals on  
to keep copper and silver  
of all legal tender

When aunties and uncles came around  
I was often given half a crown  
for looking sweet "*and oh how he's grown*"

I filled that tin with treasure and careful thought  
because once put in can prise out nought  
and when its full got taken to bank  
to the TSB tiller with a smile, tin opener in hand

A cascade of coins stand on tip toe to look  
handled with care a stamp in my book  
savings secured

I'm handed a new tin  
and given a penny .... to start all over again

## **Tors ... Clints ... Grykes and a Good Brew**

Crawling out of Glossop's stonehousey streets  
the Snake Pass winds, climbs, then hollows  
to the Snake Inn waiting to ensnare the casual passer-by  
with a pie and a pint

Nestling below peaks lightly tipped  
with tors, clints and grykes  
formed by a million frozen winter rains and nights  
lies Lady Bower with its whirlpool overflow  
swallowing the funnelling fast water  
to the centre of the earth  
or simply siphoning to Sheffield around the corner

The River Derwent partly hidden by sunlit shade  
appears as black treacle  
with sharp, dark, star point sparkles  
the bronze conifer tree tops  
over the valley appear like Doddy's brush  
tickling the blue skies dusting away the clouds

The lambs with jelly legs  
shelter from the blustery breezes  
against the dry stone walls whilst the pregnant ewes  
lie slump like plump fat seals grounded on green grass  
sand banks

In Bakewell the ducks drift downstream  
then stutteringly turn and dart forward  
as targets in a twopenny shooting gallery  
fighting against the current in a stationary paddle  
before taking to valiant flight lowly and skilful like  
under the footbridge

The sticky rich, for some sickly sweet pudding  
sold in brown paper bags with glistening oily stains  
clutched by tourist bus hoards  
better to be taken to picnic in the crescent by the river

Matlock's graceful station is silently awaiting  
the hourly service of the Derwent Valley Line from  
Nottingham  
it's vintage platforms paying homage to the Edwardians  
who came for a day out from Derby or Belper  
to see perhaps the riverside gardens  
luminous in bloom with yellows, reds and purples and  
beds still to be planted watched in shade from the  
seated wooden cupola hut

Spring's late warm sun  
has brought the crowds to Buxton  
flocking to the pavilion  
lining up for ice creams  
like a petrol rationing queue

An old gentleman  
seemingly the self imposed guardian of St. Annes Well  
is regaling tales of the public perpetual flowing waters  
commentating on its flow and temperature  
as one and all fill their plastic five litre bottles

and informing those willing to listen just how good it  
makes a brew of tea

Then home via the A6  
through Stockport and later in the evening  
a Cheung Wah takeaway  
of king prawn chow mein and fried rice  
oh and a good Ceylon  
brewed with Buxton spring water  
and the sage was quite right  
it does make the most perfect cuppa

## To The End of The Thames

Canons look out at Coalhouse Fort  
guarding the reaches protecting the port

Oil tankers and caravans berth side by side  
a refiner's flue breathes fire in the sky

Chalkwell to Westcliff a great pavilion  
pretty flower tiered gardens spring through to winter

The world's longest pier it's starting to rain  
so walk to the end and return by the train

Boating from Thorpe Bay breeze sails to the west  
messages in bottles at Shoeburyness

Lovers of solitude windswept and wild  
shrieks of the gulls at the rise of the tide

## Tunbridge Wells

Pantiles and antiques  
wooden floors creak  
pavements and columns  
spa water in volumes  
while away the day  
in tea shops and cakes  
with walnuts and dates

## **Tupperware and Gonks**

Plastic boxes round and square  
clear, pink and blue Tupperware

Parties for the mums smarties for the kids  
all you'll ever need beneath those airtight lids

The only reason I ever tagged along  
was the promise of a homemade gonk

Indestructible after all these years  
is all my mothers Tupperware

Years and years turn into yonks  
what happened to those friendly gonks

## **Tuther Side of Valley**

Tuther side of valley from Burnley  
above the Ribble meadows  
giant clover, big and thick as thumbs  
creeps and climbs towards Clitheroe

## Pendle Hill

prone  
like a drowsy dragon  
under midsummer lenticular clouds  
invade the earth  
with irisation beams  
and reams  
and rays  
in the sweltering heat  
waiting to be cooled  
by the dew of the dales after sundown

## **Two Sides of the Yarra River**

High on a rise Kangaroo Point  
across the river city glittering lights

But under the bridge shacks hidden away  
for migrants and settlers on arrivals day

## Venice

The waves of the Adriatic rise  
and lap gently across San Marco  
washing away the mist and the masks

Bridges and sighs canals weave their life  
past towers and squares and crumbling facades

By night from the moonlit marbled magic  
and old chandeliers  
catch a glimpse of the  
ghosts in floating gondola's  
calling their silent cries for help

By day to most you are a memory  
to those who stay you are a part  
discovering in the maze  
of passage ways and places  
your deep beauty  
your very heart.

## Vickers Viscount

Waiting for a plane there was such a delay

something with the engine they needed to replace

An announcement is made "*it may take sometime so we will fly in our spare plane*" and all should be fine

A distant approach we all rush to the balcony  
to see propellers and tin descending noisy but gently

Ready for boarding in great leather seats  
with two foot high portholes with curtains and pleats

Through rattle and vibration we take off to the sky  
in an un-pressurised cabin so we can't fly too high

Levelled out at 12,000 over valleys and mounts  
Flying Air UK's last and only Vickers Viscount

## **Waiting For a Train at Brussels Midi Station**

Brussels Midi

once while waiting

to connect

with the Cologne Express

I sat and watched

these great iron engines

pulling in

rolling out

then the biggest of all

a great grey green eastern machine

rumbled in slowly

it's old creaking wagons

faded in gloom

dusty chandeliers

empty

except

in a dimly lit carriage

an old lady

hidden

behind veil and lace

a countess perhaps

returning to Warsaw

## Waiting For The Sun

Its cold outside  
the streets are white  
I walk for miles  
with the thought of warmth inside

The rain is falling  
the avenues are wet  
faces are cold  
nobody cares

The wind is blowing  
storm laden but silent  
branches beckoning  
but the gardens are private

How long have I travelled  
through seasons of changing  
how much longer  
shall I be waiting for the sun

## **Wakes Week Seems Like a Lifetime Ago**

Morecambe's fresh air and fun  
from industrial towns to the sun

Whence paddle boats once steamed  
now only in dreams

The art deco Midland Hotel  
across the bay to lakeland dells

Vikings were Heysham's legacy  
now day trippers sail on the Isle of Man ferries

Blackpool's treasure, pier and tower  
pleasure amusements fill the hours

As the wild wind whips up the sand  
the pies and chips are in demand

Promenade ablaze with bulb webbed lights  
burn long and well into autumn nights

## **Wales**

Land of valleys  
and dams  
hills and moonscapes  
wild rugged castles stand firm on the shores  
flags flying high  
flapping in the wind  
whilst a dragon breathes its flame  
and watches over destiny

## **Washed Ashore**

Riding the waves  
for many years  
adventures and seas  
and sailors tears  
only to be washed ashore  
in some tropical land  
as paradise declines  
lies the barnacle covered  
Guinness can

## **Waste**

Don't drop the waste in my back yard  
says who  
says the people  
say I  
but not the government

Contamination  
under our soils  
in our seas  
but not on the steps of Whitehall  
please

Fall out  
drop out  
reports what a wash out!  
all that's left is  
a population wipe out

## Water

In these times of drought  
what about the water underground  
reservoirs to catch the rain  
all our rivers streams and lakes

Are we an island all at sea  
or just the victims of a utility  
Water Boards and water rates  
why don't we desalinate

Water to drink, wash and flush  
consumption high the profits rush  
health and hygiene sanitary  
rates or meters for the wary

Old mains are cracked causing leakage  
replacements needed to stem the seepage  
dripping droplets from the taps  
left unchecked will fill the bath

Toxic nitrates from our farms  
contamination causing harm  
they add the fluoride and the chlorine  
if it kills the bugs it must be poison

Still water from a bottle or artesian well  
to cleanse the body to bathe our cells  
pure and precious this is our right  
as water keeps us all alive

## Waterfront at Liverpool

Lights across the river  
shimmering silently  
on waves of dreams

The sounds of the city  
for an instant  
call me  
to their heart

## **Waving at Trains Between Grindleford and Hathersage and The Peak District Cowboys**

The East Midlands diesel venting its smoke  
rattles for 46 minutes between Sheffield and Stockport  
or sometimes a little longer with that stationary wait  
between stations for that freight train running late

Its wondrous journey exposed  
to those unplugged from android devices,  
mobile tablets, gadgets and the like  
rumbling through the Edale Valley

In a suspension of fine misty drizzle and foggy hollows  
or when the sun shines on the mossy high peak hills  
and the shimmering electric shale grey crags  
the dry stone walls blanket the steep viridian fields  
like my granny's best patchwork quilt

And on those bright clear days  
a child peering from the upstairs window  
of a sandstone cottage waves excitedly  
at my passing train  
between Grindleford and Hathersage

The embankment fern fronds  
wilting on last nights dew  
welcome one to Chinley  
with its single young copper beech

And then the beauty is brought suddenly down to earth  
by those skeletal pylons  
standing in menacing rows like dual holstered cowboys

## Welcome to Hanoi

Lanterns on Lantau to guide them to sea  
can't the world realise they are all refugee's  
typhoons to ride when the going gets tough  
pirates to battle when the going is good

Flying low over palm trees and sand  
not long to go now before they land  
the sun is shining the skies are blue  
welcome back to Vietnam

Back to their homeland let's see what they bought you  
a box full of grief and a suitcase of torture  
the city gleams of one million bikes  
suppression supreme there are no lucky strikes

Some faces are happy but most look depressed  
the fighting is over they all need a rest  
the soldiers have guns and the tanks are their toys  
welcome back to happy Hanoi

## What's In The Bag Man's Bag

To most he was just a tidy Bag Man  
carting his mysteries  
in his bright orange Sainsbury carrier  
(this was before the new biodegradable ones came out)  
hence he got a lot of mileage out of his and when worn  
then a new bag was placed over the old ones  
creating an ever increasing layer of history  
a new micro generation  
he once allowed me to feel its weight  
talk of black holes it was like lifting a breeze block

So to many he was a kind of accepted outcast  
as he regularly attended Mass, Holy Days of Obligation  
and devotions in the parishes mother church  
in his uniform donkey jacket and scuffed brown shoes

He was slick and thin and had the sharp appearance  
of an ageing rockabilly star with a ginger greased quiff

many thought he was unworthy of whom he was  
and the life he lived

In his younger days  
he deliberately left the riches of Cornwall  
to sleep in hedges by roundabouts  
or a skip in a Jersey car park  
from where he was once rescued

In latter years he rented a modest ground floor flat in  
East London  
where he opened the doors and shared with strangers  
feeding them food meant for him whilst surviving on  
coffee and biscuits  
giving sanctuary and shelter to even more worthy  
outcasts than himself

He was a master of the arts  
tramping around London's galleries by day  
with his bright bag before resting a while in St. James,  
Spanish Place

Eventually motor neurone disease took hold  
and he refused to see those who could help him  
*“They are not cutting open my skull”* he would say  
*“and turn me into a cabbage”*  
and then abruptly discharged himself from hospital  
in NHS pyjamas on a bus with a fare scrounged from a  
passer by

So housebound he became  
until upon a visit I had to call an ambulance  
as intensive care called him into a coma  
the life signs on the screen got excited  
when the Lords Prayer was recited  
by the hospital chaplain  
and someone said  
they saw angels in white around his bed  
getting ready to carry him home  
then the bag man expired .... he was 59 years old

Unexpectedly there was a big turn out at his requiem  
It came to pass that in his younger days  
he was a respected mathematician  
and teacher who inspired many into grand professions  
and positions

I read the scriptures at his Funeral Mass  
and a horse and posh cart carried him away to rest  
it was a drizzly grey and muddy day underfoot  
so there was newspaper in my car  
to protect my floor mats  
the Telegraph and the Express would have kept him  
warm in the past

When all was said and done and aired  
there was a revelation to us all  
he was quite (well a bit) rich  
his bag hid his wealth  
and was full of bonds and shares  
a small fortune really  
more than just a whizz on the stock market

I only wish Sean  
had lived long enough  
to own one of those new indestructible jute bags  
to carry his dreams in

## Where The Wild Garlic Grows

A solitary fell runner  
weedy and bearded  
against the elements  
on stick legs  
prances like a pied wag tail  
over the cattle grid  
and shattered shale  
through a gap in the gorse hedge  
then disappears by ascension  
into the suspension  
of low slung grey cloud  
hanging over the moist verges  
where the wild garlic grows

Ruskin's tomb, rising looms  
aloft his companion's graves  
tickled by the trickle of rain  
with scenes of his life  
etched in Honistor's green slate

that today finds it's form  
in gaily fonted house number plates  
but still, aside the resting stones  
the wild garlic grows

A single bluebird  
sits atop Campbell's headstone  
beneath Coniston's Old Man  
where water runs cold and gold  
in glistening iron reams  
in streams  
and dreams of speed  
where ghosts in the mist  
remember that day now long ago  
and just a bit in  
from the sheltered shore  
the wild garlic grows

In this wild wind swept land  
of late lake spring black lambs  
the craggy portent profiles  
of resting giants  
face the heavens  
and betwixt trodden paths  
and rich dark grass  
the wild garlic grows

William and Mary  
entwined  
among the roots and clusters  
of yellow daffodils  
lie together in peace  
beside their river  
free in a garden breeze  
and from in between  
some simple sepulchre slabs  
I picked some fallen seeds  
from where the wild garlic grows

## **Winding Lanes ... Shingle and Shale and Whiffs of Ale ... Oh and Those Corpses in The Cliffs**

A winding lane to old Pin Mill  
the Orwell sits in beauty still  
“*The Butt and Oyster*” rests ashore  
whilst old Thames barges look forlorn

Aldeburgh’s beach of shingle and shale  
turns a mariner’s thoughts to mermaids and whales  
fishermen bring the catch of the day  
straight to the scales for sale and away

Walberswick pier and the bridge above  
painted by Steer on the beach he loved  
Dunwich where the ancients lived  
bones of corpses roll out of the crumbling cliffs

Southwold postcards in colourful inks  
whitewashed cottages and delicate pinks  
a quiet breeze laden with salt  
a whiff in the air of beer famous malt

## Winter

Wiping the condensation away  
from the eyes of the house  
the window reveals  
the frost and the snow  
in a frozen quartz forest garden  
undauntedly feline  
indented with a pattern of paws across the lawn

The gales from Scandinavia  
cut harshly over the land  
white petals twirl in a frenzy  
in a swirling hostile dance

The sun so readily surrenders  
early to the night  
the wind rustles through the laurels  
into the cobalt coloured sky

## Ypres

After the dying seconds of war had ebbed

Peace

But news travelled late to the sniper in wait

as the final round tolled from a rifle in haste

to take a young life and cause decades of waste

After searching all day beneath a sombre sky

we found his name

etched within

the Menin Gate

a life so short so sad in vain

## *Epilogue*

*Have you seen the land living by the breeze*

*Can you understand a light among the trees*

*Tell me all that you may know*

*Show me what you have to show*

*Tell us all today*

*If you know the way to blue?*

*(Nick Drake: Way to Blue)*

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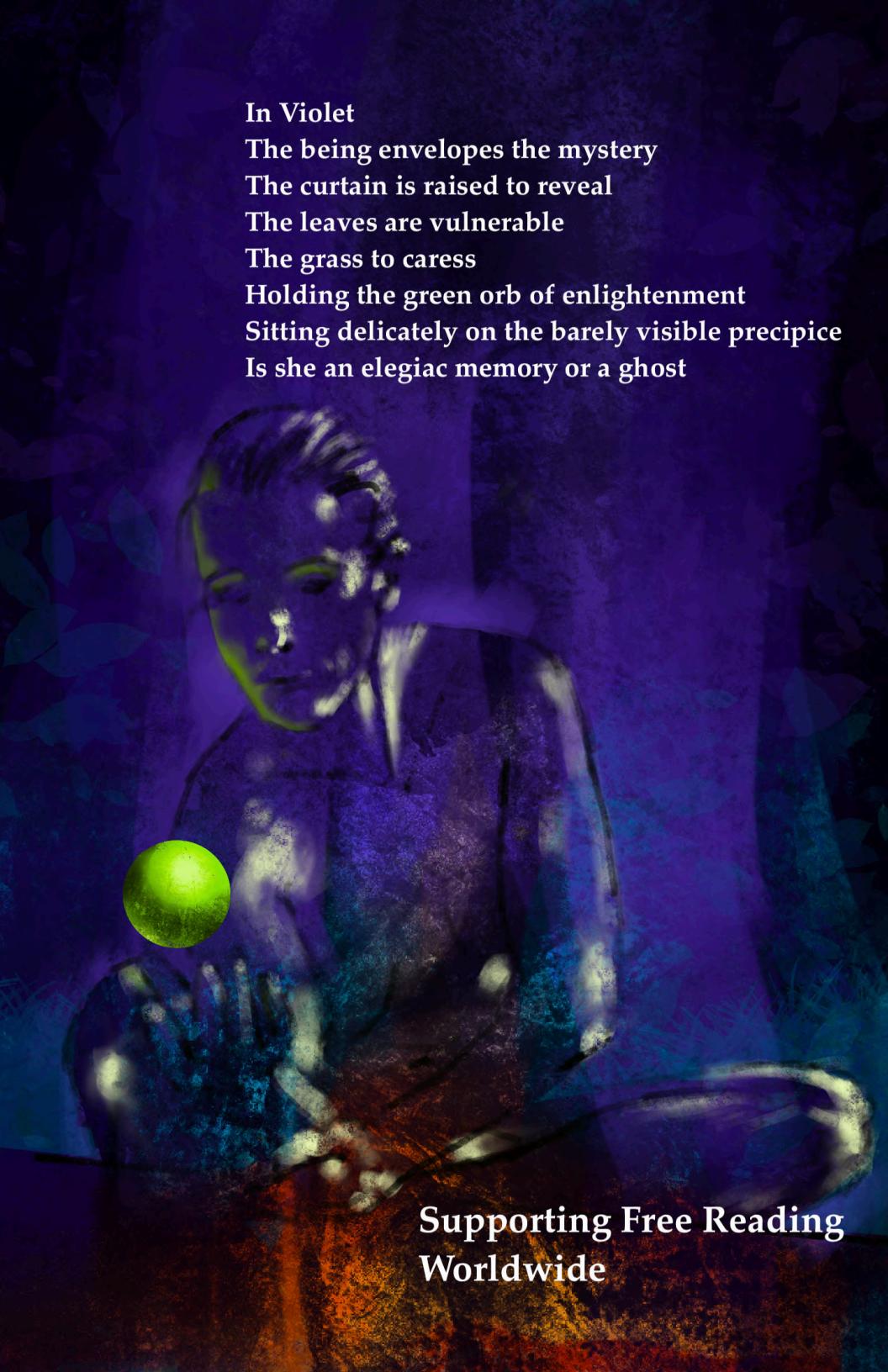
## About the cover art

The painting is by the celebrated UK artist Jan Kalinski. In 1992 Jan was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) resulting in permanent numbness of his fingers. He can no longer hold a fine pencil or write his own name but will not let go of a paintbrush.

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In Violet  
The being envelopes the mystery  
The curtain is raised to reveal  
The leaves are vulnerable  
The grass to caress  
Holding the green orb of enlightenment  
Sitting delicately on the barely visible precipice  
Is she an elegiac memory or a ghost



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