

Odyssey

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I. Shepherd's Bush

Bus stop Q; Shepherd's Bush Market Station; towards Acton;

207; 260; 283; 607; Night bus N207.

Stand in the place that will take you to your destination.

Face east in the direction upon the road and wait for the carriage from the White City.

Make a virtuous vow to myself,

In order to strengthen my willpower and reaffirm my goal,

That no time will be expended indulging in pleasure and luxury

But dealing solely with the practical concerns of my arrival.

The shops and restaurants line the stretch to the vanishing point: the Green.

The Irish and the Caribbean,

The Polish and Afghani,

Syrian and Somali,

Eritrean and the European:

A cornucopia, a profusion, a Babylonian manifestation.

A united human race, speaking one language: assimilation.

But the price paid for integration is the causation of the lamentation, the lacrimation,

Amongst those that yearn to, but will not, return.

Queen of the Night

And there she stands.

As if I had wished to life the Queen of the Night, from a carved old Babylonian terracotta plaque:

My ancient Mesopotamian goddess¹.

The waves of joy and desire sweeping over my body,

The love, the beauty, the sex and wanting,

“O Cupid, Prince of Gods and Men!”

To be possessed with that rapture,

O Cupid, O Cupid, O Cupid.

Her black marmoreal skin,

The box braided hair, each and every snake like plait in concertina, sidewinding, rectilinear, serpentine locomotion.

Two of the tresses, falling forward over her shoulders, slithering onto the breasts.

The nipples emboss her crop top.

The naked midriff, her deep navel, structured abdomen,

¹ Inanna[a] (Ishtar) the ancient Mesopotamian goddess associated with love, beauty, sex, desire, fertility, war, justice, and political power.

² A line sung by Perseus in Euripides' *Andromeda*.

Her painted talons.

The recurve of the outline of the hips, the fertility, procreation, the act of copulation.

Air impregnated with the anticipation that either one of us will break the silence,

Bliss is it in this moment to be alive.

And her carriage arrives: her red painted four-wheel chariot.

It emits a long, deep audible pneumatic breath

And kneels before her tilting, lowering and bowing to her: a greeting, consent, courtesy, acknowledgment,

Submission, a veneration of her highness: a sovereign of political power, justice and war.

She boards and takes her seat, her faced pressed close to the glass.

Her eyes endowed with a gift

Of luring in a seductive manner.

How to resist the divine melody sung by her eyes?

Bind me to the bus stop pole, gouge out my optics,

Don't obey to my soliciting, my pleading, my imploring,

To the solicitations, the supplications, the outpouring to free me.

This way I will be able to escape her temptation,

The enchantment of her vision, to halt the prevision of boarding the 260,

Condemned forever to stay with her and die.

Sing: *"Go sweet chariot, go carry her home,*

I'll fall to my knees and begin a lamentation.

Go sweet chariot, go carry her home,

I'll endure the piercing pangs of our separation."

Flow sweet road flow.

This tarmac cord connecting West London to Middlesex, east to west,

And in doing so threading a thousand pearls, each a nugget of commercial endeavor:

The nail bar, the baker, the silk house draper,

The restaurant, wholesaler, mobile phone retailer,

The jeweller, the bookmaker, the real estate broker,

Serving whomever, whatever, whenever, forever.

And this entire spectacle will be on display

From the aerial vantage of the upper floor.

For here is the double decker omnibus that will travel this length.

Let the journey commence.

Church of St Stephen and St Thomas

Behold the Victorian Gothic Revival splendor of the Church of St Stephen and St Thomas.

Its tower crowned with a low octagonal copper fleche.

The church, a constant presence that for a century and a half ministered to the spiritual needs of the community.

I wonder if your bells now fall on deaf ears?

In this age does their call to prayer and worship still help mark out the time of day for the townspeople?

Do the peals still summon the faithful to “*pray then in this way*”?³

Can they still command them “*When you pray, say*”?⁴

Gone is the Windrush Generation that you once, unlike others, welcomed and embraced.

You anchored them, giving them a sense of stability,

When they were tossed from side to side in a wild sea of prejudice, intolerance and bigotry.

At a time, in a world where they were barred from entering most other churches and dance halls, pubs and clubs.

And now you stand, to my surprise, with an air of permanence,

At the centre of a multi-cultural community.

I thought your decline would be rooted,

In us knowing more and more about the universe,

Thus, the gap where a god might serve growing less and less.

Pray tell, does the Aussie, Kiwi, Somali,

The Syrian, Algerian, Iranian and the Lebanese,

Along with the Irish, the Moroccan and Afghan all seek and all speak the same truth?

You are social, visual and spiritual glue.

Loftus Road

Push on more to Loftus Road,

Q.P.R Q.P.R Q.P Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha!

Your nomadic travelling supporters touring England,

The season's fixture list mandates they journey,

Month in month out, east to west, north to south.

From a white rose, bygone woolen textile mill manufacturing metropolis;

To the red rose municipality of Arkwright's water frame fame;

From post-industrial Teesside, once upon a time of iron foundries and rolling mills;

To the lace making, tobacco, bicycle centers of production;

From a city's dock: a basis for early voyages of exploration to the New World;

To: “*As I was going to Darby, Sir,*

All on a market day,

I met the finest Ram, Sir,

³ Matthew 6:9 New Revised Standard Version

⁴ Luke 11:2 New Revised Standard Version

*That ever was fed on hay.*⁵

A fortnight into the New Year
And to sit huddled in the terraces, intimate and visceral,
A largely masculine domain where one is completely free, totally untethered.
Sing: *“Walking along! Singing a song!
Shitting on the city as we go, woaaaaah!”*
You can trace each players movement as he leaves a green track on the snow-covered pitch
Like a narrow silvery trail of slime left by a snail.
As the *“snow and sleet, sleet and snow”*⁶ mizzle showers down,
Like the swirling snowstorms of confetti,
Inside the stadiums of Buenos Aires in 78.
The hopes of an away win
Like a punctured football floating in the local canal.
And the drama, the tensions, and the raw emotions dissipate,
For there is solace to be found in a meat pie and cup of Bovril,
That consoles the soul on the bleak mid-winter drive back down to London town.

V

A bedraggled, shabby and weary companion asks if the seat next to me is free.
Doffs his bowler hat as an expression of recognition, of respect,
Maybe of gratitude, or simple salutation and acknowledgement between us two.
Dirt trapped in the folds of the skin on his hands.
Introduces himself
I ask where he’s going.
He replies *“nowhere, I’m just waiting”*.
I probe *“waiting?”*
He answers *“Yes, waiting. Resolved to go on waiting.”*
I remind him that this bus will end its passage and conclude its journey,
I remind him that we must all alight at some point: a destination!
He responds by telling me: *“Indeed, I will get off at the terminus and catch the return bus and arrive back to where I embarked. And catch the same bus back to the terminus and catch the return bus and arrive back to where I embarked. And catch the same bus back to the terminus and catch the return bus and arrive back to where I embarked”*.
[Silence]
I’m compelled to remark that this seems a somewhat laborious and futile task.

⁵ *The Derby Ram* or *As I was Going to Derby* is a traditional tall tale English folk song.

⁶ *Winter Song* by Katherine Mansfield

He has the last word: *"You talk of value and significance,
Desperate for interpretation: political, philosophical, Christian, autobiographical, sexual.
I'm just waiting"*.
[*V gets up, down the stairs to the lower deck, does not get off at the next stop*]

A drink at the Princess Victoria Public House

And there you stand: a wealth, an accumulation of interpretations
Of eclectic revivals of historic forms,
That is the grand Victorian style.
An imposing red brick edifice,
Your stucco ornaments, large sash windowpanes, crowned with a finial.

But what is it that haunts me, wears me down and finally pushes me through your front doors?
You are surely more than a temple to devotion and consumption of transitory pleasures.
Step into a world of softly lit unhurried leisure.
A world of burgundy, chocolate browns and mid bronze greens,
Of Lincrusta coverings and acanthus leaf covings,
Of gilt framed etched glass mirrors.

Dear landlord, come serve this man's thirst.
To sup the intoxicating nectar of the lotus
And be left off caring about, off wanting to get, home.
The guzzler, the drunkard, sot, tippler, and wino
All line the rich mahogany bar waxed to a shine
And gulp, guzzle, quaff and sip.
The inebriate, the dipsomaniac and bibber
Collapsed on the leather upholstered banquettes,
Forever asleep in peaceful apathy.

But the very thing that haunted me, wore me down and finally pushed me through your front doors
Now forces me to weep bitterly and return to the journey.
Get up to the feeling of disorientation, the dizziness, drowsiness,
Step out to an image of a drifting realm,
The form of the world and men dissolve into intangible, variegated, dappled transparency.
Coerced back to the asphalt ship,
I take my place.
Come driver and smote the blacktop sea with your oars.

II. Acton

And here we are at the 5-mile post out of London,
On the highway to the city of dreaming spires,
A garden, a field enclosed by oaks,
Stretching east to west, north to south,
From the central to the town, from the vale to the green.
An ancient village now absorbed into the city.
These oaks, a symbol of strength and endurance.
And in these forests are where one could get lost and meet wild men.
In these forests where madness rules, a world of all possibilities.
Listen carefully, listen to the wind rustle the oaks leaves,
Listen and you can hear divine pronouncements⁷.

Overhanging oak tree

From the upper deck,
In those overhanging oak trees,
Your vision stumbles across a
Shadowy, swinging, swaying, charred, ghastly, lynched body.
An extrajudicial killing by the mob.
Was it to punish an alleged or convicted transgressor?
Was it an act of an oppressor, to intimidate the lesser?
Was the victim the aggressor?
Whatever the circumstances, the pitiful sight,
Of the suspended taut body in the zephyr,
Rhythmically moving back and forth,
A swinging pendulum,
A synchronised visual motion on a metronome,
To keep the jazz musicians in time,
As they accompany the lady singing the blues,
Singing about some *strange fruit*.

An urban youth,
At the top of the steps,

⁷ In Zeus's oracle in Dodona, Epirus, the sacred oak was the centrepiece of the precinct, and the priests would divine the pronouncements of the god by interpreting the rustling of the oak's leaves.

Readies himself to squalay down the stairs,
 To the lower deck, to disembark.
 All bling bling, ostentatious,
 From the dem criss crepes, to his shabby garms.
 He addresses me:
"Yo Blud,
Just kotch, and not look at it, allow it.
It's dizzy and dred.
Manz heard from bare heads,
That him swinging side to side in the tree,
Was tonk, peng, chung, the man was lush, he was fresh.
But the man switch and beef ensue with his old man,
His father well vexed, ginulled by his own son.
Its standard!
Things go on top,
He was wettin from his ends on the bus.
Now it's on this bus that this cretin, this chief,
Sticks his head out of the window as the bus is speeding past overhanging boughs.
This dizzy motherfucker, get his locks caught in the branches,
Yanked out of the bus, left swinging hither and thither,
As the bus kept riding on.
Now his father's nephew, a hench man, a swag, is flat roofin' in pursuit,
Wants to merk him.
Is tipped off by a hoodie.
Cut a long story short,
Direct cut:
Father's nephew, mash man with mash in hand,
Under the oak tree, where his uncle's son is tangled,
Branch and hair intertwined, struggling like a fish out of water.
And before the jakes, trident, the po-po, can come:
Bang, bang, bang, all three through the heart.
When that dred news travels back to his rents,
His father wept: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom,
my son, my son!"
[He shimmies, down the stairs to the lower deck, gets off at the next stop, chirps some buff gal, they lips.]

We continue, past Stanley, Eastman, Mansell,
 Along the Vale.

Acton Town Hall

As the bus clammers the gradient,
It stops at the traffic lights,
Emitting a pneumatic sigh of relief.

And a muffled, infused sound of punk rock, reggae, rockabilly,
Ska, funk and dub,
That off-axis, down-the-hall timbre,
Resonates through the building walls,
Of the Town Hall,
Spilling into the streets, calling London,
With its militant, ideological sentiments,
Being for the Benefit of Mr. Pugh, Pugh, Barney McGrew, Cuthbert, Dibble and Grubb⁸.
Fiery sermons, delivered by the firebrand face of frustration,
At music's inability to be a conduit for revolutionary revelation.
To rock against Racism,
Schisms resulting from Thatcherism,
Music industry capitalism, nationalism, Fascism.
A beauty in the bard's lyrics,
Of bleakness and boredom in a burning capital,
Disaffected white youths to be more radical,
The tedium alienation of low-paid, wearisome jobs,
Called out by the Thinking Man's Yobs.
Has the music seeps through the walls,
Spills out into the night sky,
We know that sound waves do not live forever,
As the energy of the sound is transferred,
To an ever-greater number of air molecules,
The energy depletes, vibrations lessen,
Until the effect is lost,
The sound is gone.

We continue past Winchester, Berrymead, Oldham,
Along the High Street.

⁸ The assembly hall was the scene of a live recording by Joe Strummer & The Mescaleros, a benefit concert for striking firefighters, subsequently released as a record, *Live at Acton Town Hall*, in November 2002

Glass of Water

Above the criminal defence solicitor's office,
The symmetry of three sash windows,
Of Georgian proportions.
And on the windowsill,
Precariously balanced,
An ordinary glass of water.
And nailed to the wall below and to the left of the sill and glass,
A poster with text,
A title: "*Oak Tree*"⁹
And an impossible assertion, an incredible declaration, implausible proclamation:
"*This glass of water has been transformed into an oak tree*".
Think, think, think!
Is the oak tree tangibly present but having taken the form of a glass of water?
This transformation, metamorphosis, mutation, this alteration,
The mysterious manner of this change.
The corporeal, conversion consecrated in *His* memory,
Requires a type of seeing and knowing,
Where both head and heart,
Intellect and emotion,
Observance and devotion,
Confer a transformative vision,
On the image, the object, the glass of water.
It has the capacity to speak and
I, the willing faith of the viewer to accept what is said.
Without belief, one might as well be dead.

Ealing Common

The landscape flattens out,
To a vast expanse of the land,
Clothed in a blanket of nature.
The circular road,
This tarmacked transportation corridor,
Slices through,
Scarring the open space.
A milepost signals another 9 miles to journey's end.

⁹ The artist, Michael Craig Martin's *An Oak Tree*, first exhibited, in 1974 at Rowan Gallery, London

A fine avenue of horse chestnut trees.
In October,
These “*trees are stripped bare,*
From all they wear”¹⁰,
A melancholy reminder of summers end.
The gloss mahogany conkers,
Bursting out
Of spiky green husks,
Carpeting the pavements and common,
To be pocketed by children at pre-dusk,
As they traipse home from detention,
Their bent over bodies,
Weighed down by the knowledge
They carry on their backs.
The fallen foliage,
The russet leaves that adorned these trees
That were caught by the breeze,
That fluttered down to the ground
To appease Autumn’s demands,
To heed Nature’s commands.
And the old man Socrates,
Wading through
The sogged down leaves.
The condemned teacher,
Weighed down by the library books in one bag,
And the cock and rooster in the other,
On his way to pay his debts.
Each leadened shambled step,
Becomes harder, his legs feel numb,
He collapses, he is laid out.
A passer-by,
Crouched over pinches his foot,
The prophet of the Sun God can no longer feel his legs,
The numbness slowly creeps up his body until it reaches his heart.

To dream at the edge of the world.

¹⁰ *October*, Lyrics by Evans / Clayton / Hewson / Mullen

III. Ealing Broadway

Enter into the Queen of the suburbs,
Proliferated as a suburban icon,
A halfway post between the City and a pastoral paradise,
An acknowledged assemblage of architectural styles:
Edwardian, Art Deco, Tudor Revival.
All invoke a romantic perception of the middle class,
A decadence of the lives of its inhabitants,
Their fortunes got as a product of industrial capitalism.

Behind the bright bay window,
Of a fine Victorian detached double-fronted house,
A reception room with its own particular grace and grandness,
A reception room, a superfluity, an extravagance, an amenity,
A level of self-indulgence,
That conservative sensibilities would declare it, as bordering on vulgarity.
A reception room still strewn with the remnants of a carousal from last night.
It showed the British off so well: the riotous revelry, the pomp, the dalliance,
Yet all semi concealed, constrained, contrived, self-conscious, maintained by a stiff-necked reservation,
Bound by inherited, well understood parameters.
They had feasted on lobster salad, sweetbreads, kidneys and meringues,
Collins glasses of ice, garnished with borage leaves, good measures of Pimm's topped with soda.
Hors d'œuvres and liqueurs: Kummel, Chartreuse, Dubonnet.
And now the empty bottles lie in a room,
Along with the faded spines of books on Caravaggio, Pevsner's *The Cathedrals of England*,
On Plath's *Winter Trees*, Plato's *The Apology of Socrates*.
Mondrian and Picasso prints are etiolated on the wall,
The Scandinavian glass vase with its chipped rim stands proud and tall,
Teetering on the edge of the water-stained G Plan Sideboard.
On the marble mantel shelf: a pottery pair of Staffordshire dogs,
Dresden and Derby figurines,
All lightly coated in dust and a wedding ring.
A cruel and cold stillness bathes the room,
Serenity supplanted with an air of agitation.
The magnificent Lebanon Cedar tree allows fragmentary morning sunlight to enter the room,
The sunbeams dapple, ripple, dance and play.

Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall.

Marks and Spencer

In a world of online transactions,
Electronic data interchange,
Payments, purchase orders and invoices,
Flow to and fro,
Back and forth,
Here and there,
Signals pushed down cable, transmitted through air,
In a virtual world.
And there arched and anchored on the corner,
Bricks and mortar,
At the heart of the shopping quarter,
You stand with an air of permanence.
And as I walk down your aisles:
Cotton rich socks, wooden blanket box,
Satin dressing gown available in black and brown,
A leg of lamb with garlic and rosemary,
To drink: a double distillation of morello cherry,
And cream meringues flavoured strawberry,
And Swiss chocolate confectionery,
And sales, sales from January through to February,
Flowers for the nursery, flowers for our anniversary,
Gifts for father: a knitted polo shirt,
Gifts for a lover: espresso truffle dessert,
Gifts for teachers, neighbours and aunts,
Gifts of red wine, chocolates and rose plants
Gifts of jewellery from tear drop earrings to silver necklaces,
All on display for Mothers Day,
The cashmere scarf and an orchid bouquet,
The skincare, the haircare, the lingerie and nightwear,
The conservatory furniture and reclining chair,
Proprietary, sobriety, offering an abundance of variety,
A vanishing seam in British society.
Goodbye!

Ealing Town Hall

The stateliness of the New Gothic edifice,
Faced in Kentish rag stone.
A perfect realisation of the imagination of Charles Jones,
A Victorian celebration of the growth of local democracy.
Its beauty to be found in the asymmetry,
The off centre tower and lancet windows,
Drawing the eye up to the spirelet and beyond to the sky.
And there under the three-story gabled entrance,
Stand in togetherness, one with each other,
Newly united in matrimony,
In formal attire, husband and wife,
Like a fondant wedding cake topper.
Two beings kissing,
Though let me tell them that it is the space between them that will be the essence of a marriage.

And what is it that will sustain their love?
The thoughtfulness in little things?
The stoic belief that happiness isn't even a possibility?
At what point will this youthful, violent, ecstatic, overpowering force,
Yield under the opposition to the decrees of destiny,
And begin to fade, wilt, rust and die?
At what point will this purity be corrupted,
This real and ennobling love be disrupted,
By the vices of greed, violence or lust?
And let them be stars shining in the summer sky tonight,
But there is apprehension,
That those two hanging stars will fall from the heavens,
And for that evanescent, transient moment,
Heated to incandescence in the upper atmosphere,
They will be two brilliant visible streaks of light:
Ephemeral, fleeting, a greeting sent from the Gods,
Wishing upon these shooting stars will make your wish come true.

IV. West Ealing

As we cross the lights at the intersect.

Dean Gardens

The grieving, weeping willow,
Nature's symbolic mournful response,
To all human tragedy.
Shadowy colours, writhing form,
A canopy revealing the constant shifting relationship
Between atmosphere and light,
An umbrella under which
The children play,
Each child a sign that divinity still has faith in humanity.¹¹
The willow hung with harps,
On the long, drooping, cascading shoots.
The children play,
Oblivious to the captors,
The tormentors who demand songs of joy.
The children play,
Unmindful of those who sit and weep,
As they remember Zion.

As we cross the lights at the intersect,
The strongly sprung Dickensian stagecoach,
Drawn by the gilt bronze,
Triumphal Quadriga.
They bolted from a Venetian basilica,
Now race in harmony and inseparability,
Driven headlong,
On the journey to Banbury.
The park land has yielded,
Given over to market gardens and orchards,
Sanctuary and pastoral tranquillity,
Rootstocks and apple varieties:
Merton Beauties, Charms, Delights and Russets,
Ribston Pippin, Storey's Seedling,
Merton Joy, Knave, Prolific and Worcester.

The passengers in the horse-drawn carriage,

¹¹ "Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man" - Rabindranath Tagore

Behold a mother and child under an apple tree¹²,
An emerald, green apple tree, abound with bejewelled ripe fruit.
Her golden hair spiralling, flowing over her shoulders,
The light plays with the shimmering rich
Bright blue, scarlet and mustard of her dress and robe.
She sits with all the Earth's magnificence and majesty,
Yet she looks back at them with a pensive air.
The infant stands on mother's lap,
Holds in one hand an apple,
In the other a cut of bread,
Looks at them with serenity, an equanimity, quietude.
Both mother and child under the apple tree,
Both accepting the divine decree,
For the child is the appointee,
At the cost of his own earthly life,
A reparation,
For us having fallen from grace,
He, the Salvation of the human race.

Halfway House

Let the weary travellers,
And spent steeds stained with the signs of the ride,
Rest at the Halfway House.
Let the Hostlers care for horses,
Let the landlord of this halting place,
An authority of "*wine and horseflesh,*
And of men and matters,"¹³
Lubricate local gossip.
Driver with yard of ale in hand,
Bread and cheese.
Enter the guard,
With blunderbuss and pistols,
Uniformed in maroon and gold livery,
Blows posthorn to alert,
The imminent departure of the coach.
Sing:

¹² Cranach, Lucas I. 1472-1553, *The Virgin and Child Under an Apple Tree*, Germany, circa 1530s

¹³ Charles G. Harper, *The Old Inns of Old England*, Volume I

“O! London, my London, left far behind,
You are the jewel in the Empire’s crown;
And I will never ever see your kind,
An age-old, pleasing, honoured town.”

Let the journey recommence.

V. Hanwell

Push on more past Grosvenor Road.

Cemetery Gates

*“And I meet you at the cemetery gates,
Oh Keats and Yeats are on your side”¹⁴*
In the midst of this congested world
A tragedy of landscape that marks the transience of life.
Now let me grieve in private,
As I walk through your heavy iron gates.
As I travel through death in order to continue this journey.
Gravestones stand two or three rows deep
Alongside the paths.
Carved into stone: the lamp, the laurel, lily and the serpent swallowing its tail,
The severed flower, broken column, hour glass,
The palm, the rock, the rose, anchor and chain.
Each intricate symbol, for those who stare and for those who care,
Will relate and share
Accounts of firm faith in salvation; resurrection;
The light of knowledge and truth; love and devotion;
An accolade to life's achievements; purity;
A life eternal;
A sempiternal truth.

The smallness, the delicacy, fragility of the butterflies
As they dart and flutter in the breeze.
Let me bow my head and quietly weep
At the thought of the souls ascending

¹⁴ Excerpt from *Cemetery Gates* by Steven Morrissey and Johnny Marr (1986), © Warner Chappell Music, Inc., Universal Music Publishing Group

Whilst their bodies sleep.
And what am I to comprehend,
As I pass from one tomb and monument to the next:
Thoughts of love, faith, fidelity and eternity?

As I walk the many intricately landscaped curving paths,
Past the Victorian Gothic revival architecture.
The yew, pine and oak spread throughout the grounds.
The flowering cherries: myriad shades of pink.
And what am I to think,
As I pass one mute mausoleum to the next:
Thoughts of aversion, betrayal, deceit and void?

Along the avenue of tall holly and box hedging,
A dishevelled, threadbare and fatigued man offers a seat next to him.
Dirt trapped in the folds of the skin on his hands, which grab tightly onto a white cane.
He reveals himself as the communication bond between the living and the dead.
When asked “what is the best way of life?”
He replies: “The life of the common man.
For forget: the philosophers and their metaphysics,
Princes and their Statecraft,
The sages, gurus and mystics and their sermons,
The physicists, chemists and biologists and their scientific theories,
Poets and their songs of innocence and experience.”
We clasp hands,
He speaks “Farewell, see you soon.
And remember that your petulant refusal,
To accept the truth of your history,
Will be your downfall.”

Catholic Church of Our Lady and St Joseph

And there you stand: a forceful modern design,
A product of the post war style.
An analysis of form, your right-angle and straight-line construction,
The planes, the facets, non-illusionistic and non-imitation.
Your walls faced with henna-coloured bricks
A striking singularity in concrete,
Living out your Catholic Faith in the parish.

The jagged outline of your triangular concrete dormers
And aluminium clad roof covering your skewed and serrated style.
Your profile propels you through space punctuating the sky.
In the upper register,
Set beneath the projecting gable,
The stylised sculpture of the Holy Family:
The father embracing mother and child.
As a carpenter and a working man,
Glorious St. Joseph, help to unite and organise us all who are chained to toil.
Obtain for us justice in a time of hunger and want.
Obtain for us the strength to break these chains, in the spirit of solidarity,
In order to level the disparity, revenge the barbarity,
To reclaim this land, this earth, this soil, for all.

When created and consecrated you were modernity coming into being,
Taking flight and breaking with antiquity.
A Cubist creation where your forms were broken up,
Into fragments and geometric shapes and then reassembled.
You are “*the first painting of the 20th century*”¹⁵.
The most beautiful, fractured, angular, visual depiction of the architectural world.

Push on more past Boston Road.
Past the art deco splendour of the Hanwell Clock Tower,
That marks one of the finest gateways to the city of London¹⁶.

Viaduct

The gradient on a decline giving the green light
For the carriage to gracefully coast, enter the narrow depression:
The old valley of the River Brent.
And there you stand: colossal, with architectural panache.
A stupendous engineering triumph,
A wonderful piece of living industrial history, a marvel of masonry,
Horizontally scoring the landscape, demarcating sky from earth.
A solid presence in the landscape proudly adorning Wharnccliffe’s armorial.

¹⁵ Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* has been called “the first painting of the 20th century”.

¹⁶ The Clock Tower was unveiled on Hanwell Broadway at midday on 7 May 1937, as part of Ealing’s celebration of the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. The Mayor, Frederick Woodward, was also present, remarked “I consider Hanwell one of the finest gateways to the city of London, and I cannot think of a more fitting place for the clock”.

Your squat, stove pipe hat like, brown brick arches span and rise
Over the verdant vale.
Engineered immortality,
For the man who changed the face of the landscape with this ingenious construction
Will forever live on through his creation:
A symbol of the might of the industrial revolution.
Exempt from death; bequeathed an unending existence.

A railway in the sky.
Trains fleetingly suspended in the middle of the air.
The view afforded from the rail stagecoach of the valley below,
A vista of a geography that has been surmounted,
An aerial panorama, which in the “*wink of an eye*”, “*whistles by*”¹⁷,
No time to pause, contemplate, observe, and admire the prospect.

VI. Southall

The gradient on an incline giving the green light
For the carriage to strain heavily and laboriously,
The physical exertion, the deceleration, the huff and puff,
The wheezing, the breathlessness, the tightness of the engine’s chest.
The asthmatic struggle followed by the mighty relief to reach the infirmary,
And a chance to catch its breath.

Ealing Hospital

The 1970s brutalist concrete edifice,
Form (ever) follows function.
Ornamentation, superfluous to needs,
Surgically and clinically removed.

Bedside prays for miraculous healings,
The alleviating, the curing, of disorders and cancers, paralysis and blindness.
Yearning an apparition, a theophany,
Pleading for a spiritual vision, to glimpse the true form,
A magnificent and awe-inspiring manifestation, containing everything in the universe,
That will award you an intercession to cure the incurable.

¹⁷ ‘*From a Railway Carriage*’ by Robert Louis Stevenson’s in his 1885 volume of poetry for children, *A Child’s Garden of Verses*.

And in waiting rooms, corridors, at the side of invalids' beds,
They wait for diagnoses on terminal, inoperable diseases,
To be decreed by consultants,
Their faith can't always stop the anxiety tremors, shaking and shivering,
Halt the teeth chattering, knees knocking and hands from shaking.
Has their God forsaken them?

The saline solution in the intravenous bag, hung from the pole,
Is gravity drawn down the long sterile tube,
Drip by drip through the cannula,
Directly into her vein.
The dryness of her mouth, lips and tongue, her sunken eyes,
Her physical frailty, fragility, vulnerability revealed by her hospital gown.
Loss of elasticity in her sagging, wrinkled skin,
Blemished with liver spots.
The stillness of her body, limp and lifeless,
Like a sack of medium white atta.
The only signs of life:
The LED reading on the infusion pump,
And the waveform on the ECG line,
Recording the cardiac rate and rhythm.
A symbiosis of human heart and machine.
A solitary jug of water and cup,
Rest on the uncluttered bedside cabinet.
As time ebbs and the mortuary calls,
Minute by minute, the observer's emotions and values of humanity erode,
A deterioration of affection, love and care,
An extrication between observer and the dying.
The shuffling of paperwork readied for the administrative recording of the loss.
The cause of death: Birth.

Push on more to Windmill Lane.
The Iron Bridge spanning and carrying the Western Region tracks over the road.
Strips, plates, angle girders, coupled by rivets,
Assembled to constitute a Meccano overpass,
The solidity, rigidity, the sturdiness transporting the train and traveler.

Look left to view the Three Bridges.

Three Bridges

This precise locus in the landscape is symbolic, a two-century narrative,
Of Britain's transport revolution.
The intersection of road, canal and railway,
Brunel's last major creation.
Look down from the road onto the waterway
With the rail track running under the two.
As you stand on the bridge be transported back to an industrialised 18th century Britain:
Peer down from the rutted path and
And watch the narrowboats carry freight like coal, sand, tea and sugar,
Connecting the capital's docks to the Rose of the Shires.
As you stand on the bridge be transported back a century and three score:
Look down from the horse track
And watch the railway under the canal.
The rail track carved out of the land,
Straight as an arrow,
The landscape's impediments surmounted
By the Victorian thirst for profit.
Watch in awe as the chimney of the iron beast belching clouds of foggy steam
Bursts forth out of a hazy, impressionistic, atmospheric backdrop,
Where all form is dissolved.
The speeding train in the lashing rain,
Crashing headlong towards Hanwell and beyond into the heart of the capital.
Epitomising the conviction in commerce and industry,
Originality and technical audacity, vigour and tenacity.

Southall Broadway

Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal¹⁸!
Welcome! Welcome to Chota Punjab!
My Veerji, my sweet Kaka, my Bhenji, my adorable Bhen.

A camera dolly is wheeled across the thoroughfare,
Bringing the bus to a halt.
A frenzy of activity as the boom operator, the sound mixer

¹⁸ Translated from Punjabi: "*Shout Aloud in Ecstasy... True is the Great Timeless One*". A clarion call of Sikhs given by the Tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh

The camera operators, dolly grip, key grip, best boy,
Under the stewardship of the assistant director,
Ready themselves to capture the courtship between hero and starlet.
Quiet on set! Roll Sound.

Sound speeds. Speeding.

Roll camera

Camera speeds. Rolling.

The slate of the clapper board,

The megaphone announces: Scene 5 take 2

Set.

Action:

Boy meets girl, falls in love.

Girl in embroidered net lehenga in mustard,

Boy in woven brocade silk sherwani,

Boy draws girl close,

His mouth tantalising close to her shimmering lips,

Her breasts heaving.

Let the lip syncing commence:

“Like two lovebirds circling between heaven and earth,
Oh, my beloved you look so beautiful,
Your bangles chime,
My heart beats in rhythm and rhyme,
My soul in immortal mirth.

Jab we met tonight,
Under the glow and light,
Of the silver moon.

My shadow may stop following me,
But I’ll follow you to the end of the world,
Bound to you until I die,
As the stars will never leave the sky,
The cage bird has been set free.

Jab we met tonight,
Under the glow and light,
Of the silver moon.”

And now a direct cut, striking in its immediacy and impact,
We find boy and girl,
Transported to the stunning backdrop of the pyramids in Giza,
Girl in chiffon saree in peacock blue, boy in tuxedo.

“As the moon appears in the heavens each night,
Bound by an eternal relationship,
Steal a kiss under the banyan tree,
Your enchanting beauty mesmerises me,
My darkened universe bought into light.

Jab we met tonight,
Under the glow and light,
Of the silver moon.

Jab we met tonight,
Under the glow and light,
Of the silver moon.”

Boy hugs girl from behind,
Lips inch closer, intimacy intensifies,
Close and closer, carnal arousal,
Lips touch.
Direct cut,
And now we find boy and girl,
Returned to Broadway where it begins to rain,
Girl in dungarees, boy in jeans and hoodie,
As the slowly separate from their embrace,
Looking deeply and longingly into each other’s eyes,
They know that they have fallen in love,
But fate will separate them,
Fate will reunite them,
Because this is the basic foundation of the romantic film genre.
Sorry! Meant to say life.

“Jab we met tonight,
Under the glow and light,
Of the Silver moon.”

And cut!

The bus driver holds out his staff,
And the sea of film crew is parted,
Permitting the Pantone 485 C red,
Double decker charabanc to continue its west bound journey.
But it soon comes to a crawl,
Drop gear, due to the bottleneck
The congestion visible from the upper deck,
The question is whether to disembark and walk,
A walk that will be a kaleidoscopic assault on the retina,
And all the other senses.
Doors slide open,
The pod is broken and the passengers like shelled peas,
Roll out onto the Broadway.

The cash and carry that spills onto the pavement,
Laid out on presentation,
Every hue of green: the Indian marrow, spinach, pigeon peas,
Bitter melon, tindori, cow peas,
Ribbed gourd, snake and the Indian bean.
The scent of the Indian subcontinent
Wafts out from the premises,
Gently drifting, floating, whirling, diffusing,
Permeating the air,
Evoking recall and emotion,
A psychological and physiological response,
Emotional and evocative memories,
Of daughter, wife, mother, matriarch.
These women driven by heritage, custom and tradition in the
Transmutation of base ingredients,
The particular attempt to convert base spices,
Into a curried elixir.
The ground jeera, the turmeric, the cumin, coriander,
Ginger, Garam masala, the paprika, green cardamom,
Fennel seeds and Himalayan pink salt,
From Uganda to Middlesex: a mother's recipe for success.

In the shop windows of cloth emporiums,
Stand ubiquitous mannequins.

Each fibre glass Aphrodite,
 Her hair a synthetic, sun bleached, flaxen blond.
 Yet these daughters of Zeus and Dione,
 Are not individual painstaking expressions of artistic passion,
 But bound by a formulated set pattern of nonentity, conformity, sameness, similarity.
 And even if we were to acknowledge each tall, beautiful, immortal form,
 All who see her are blind to this.
 For they are drawn solely to the drapery, which clothes each one,
 With the finest silks, georgettes, satins, and chiffons,
 In fuchsia, mustard, teal and maroon,
 Applique, sequin, Zari and Resham works,
 Selling Rajkumari, bridal dreams,
 Ensnaring the hearts and minds,
 Promising all the ingredients for a Bollywood life of:
 Action, violence, music, dance, morals and romance.
 Against the stark background of a monochrome, monotonous, monotone existence.
 Each dupatta embroidered with sequins of surrender,
 Tassels of patriarchal dominance,
 Each inch of Gota lace a magnificence
 That upholds the past.

Q. How to don this shawl-like scarf?

A.

1. Place the dupatta on a flat surface in the shape of the letter “C”
2. Form an “S” shape with the dupatta
3. Compress the “S” shape
4. Pinch the three lines of rope together in the middle
5. Take the top of the original “C” and wrap it around the pinched space
6. Poke the end of the dupatta through the top of the loop left by the “S”
7. Pinch the coiled part of the dupatta
8. Pull the loop on the right-hand side of the bow until it closes the loop on the left
9. Adjust the noose
10. Place over head, tighten around neck¹⁹

In another fashion retail display,
 The window dresser,
 Seats her Punjabi lion on a throne,
 He wears a hand embroidered, Zardozi detailing, silk sherwani,

¹⁹ How to create a *noose*, WikiHow.com

His kesh tied and wrapped
 Under a cloth crown of Caesar
 Indoctrinated, well trained in tyranny.
 The window dresser has
 Lain the Punjabi princess,
 At her master's feet.
 She looks at us,
 This reinforced plastic Venus has been transformed:
 Objectified, entrapped, belittled, mere chattel,
 A desecration, profanation of:
 Love, beauty, pleasure, passion and procreation.
 For she, and he, now portray the cold and prosaic reality and relationship:
 Of Master and slave.
 And as I gaze through my Black Sisters' lens²⁰,
 I see Olympia, the odalisque, with her negro servant,
 An ideological binary between black and white,
 A Western racial stereotype.

Walk further on to be enticed by
 The purest, amber, indefinable and celestial glow from a window
 Of the four-generation family run business.
 The intricacy of the designs,
 The delicate tracery, filigree.
 Produced in the universe in supernova nucleosynthesis,
 And from the collision of neutron stars,
 It was mere dust when the Solar System was formed.
 Yet man has mined it, extracted and refined it,
 Fashioned it, venerated it,
 Through craftsmanship, has adorned it.
 From Nubian amulets and beads to ornament a queen,
 To a molten calf, a god to go before
 The progeny of Abraham and Sarah:
*"These [be] thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt",*²¹
 From a gift of the magi,
 To the El Rey Dorado, the zipa, dusted in a lustrous radiance,
 Readied to be submerged in the sacred lake.

²⁰ Southall Black Sisters, a domestic abuse treatment center in Southall

²¹ Exodus 32:4

Kings have perished from starvation,
As a result of vain prayers for the alchemist touch.
A cause for desire and of corruption,
Transforming the landscape of civilizations and the world.
And here, and now, behind the laminated glass,
The bridal choker, the earrings, tikka and jhumar:
A currency for a transaction, a transference of wealth,
From the bride's family to the groom,
A contract, commerce, a corporate deal for the bride.
A compensation, for she is a single shekel,
One sixtieth of a mina,
One sixtieth of his talent²².
Sexagesimal arithmetic.

Hambrough Tavern

Oi, fucking listen here:
Your flirtation with the hard right,
Drew skins by the dozens from South Harrow and Hayes
To congregate at the tavern.
The pub now contained the flint, firesteel, and tinder,
To be used in unison to help kindle a fire.

Self-defence is no offence from the
Seig-heiling skinheads,
Who marched to the beat, in the July heat,
Puffed up with conceit
Singing:
*“Hold high the banner!
Close the hard ranks serried!
SA marches on with sturdy stride.
Comrades, by Red Front and Reaction killed, are
buried,
But march with us in image at our side.”*²³

Don't be hoodwinked or mistaken,
This was the BUF.

²² The *talent* was a unit of weight that was introduced in Mesopotamia at the end of the 4th millennium BC

²³ First verse translation of the Horst Wessel Song: the official marching song of the German Nazi Party.

This was the NF.
Met head on by the SYM,
On the streets of the UK.

There was the inevitable head-on road traffic collision,
The relative velocity of two vehicles traveling in opposite directions of the Uxbridge Road was high.
Don't get bogged down in calculations,
Attempting to compute the force of the impact:
Galilean relativity versus basic Newtonian Physics.
All you need to know:
*"What the police got was a bloody good hiding."*²⁴
Now don't be swift to denunciate the comment,
And don't go labelling me *barmy*,
And I am no *"high priest of conflict"*.²⁵
But let me cite the case of *R v Ahluwalia*.
If you aren't aware then go consult your British legal textbooks.
It was a landmark case for it changed the definition of the word *"provocation"*,
In cases of battered women.
Imagine for a second, just imagine:
To leave your home in the Punjab and to travel to the UK,
With the promise of protection from the man you have married.
And the operational duties of a husband, supposedly infused with principles of human rights,
Are left unfulfilled.
Day in, day out, the daily ritual of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse,
The physical violence, food deprivation, marital rape and money extortion,
And when you look to your family, a neighbour, a community, a culture,
They respond with a reprimand:
It is a matter of family honour that you remain with your spouse.
And so, it continues,
Day in, day out, the cruelty and anguish, to languish in the prison.
A cage destined to become a coffin.
His promiscuity, her acceptance, her endurance,
Of the superfluity of pain.
And then one Spring evening,
After the attempt to break her ankles and burn her face with a hot iron,
Downstairs in the kitchen, on the stove,

²⁴ Bernie Grant, as council leader during the 1985 Broadwater Farm riot stated: *"The youths around here believe the police were to blame for what happened on Sunday and what they got was a bloody good hiding."*

²⁵ The then Conservative Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd, called Bernie Grant *"the high priest of conflict"*

A pressure cooker that trapped the steam produced by the boiling chana dal.
 The pressure inside the vessel increasing, the temperature rising,
 The heaviness, the density, the force,
 Multiplying, compounding, fuelling, swelling,
 Accumulating, amassing, mounting,
 Waheguru!! Its intensifying, strengthening, redoubling.
 And then the spring-loaded pressure vent opens, and the whistle finds its voice:
 A piercing, screeching Phwwwwwht,
 A sacred and spiritual sound of such an intensity.
 A cosmic sound, a mystical syllable, an affirmation to something divine,
 That permitted a sun to burst into existence in a darkened universe.
 And upstairs the torturer lies in bed, set alight.
 Oh, there is, for me, a rapture, exhilaration, exaltation, bliss and joy in watching the funeral pyre.
 What he got was a bloody good burning!

*“Say we want a revolution
 We better get on right away
 Well, get then on your feet
 And enter the street
 Power to the people, power to the people
 Power to the people, power to the people
 Power to the people, power to the people
 Power to the people, power to the people, right on.”*²⁶

VII. Hayes

We cross over the Paddington Arm,
 Of the Grand Union Canal,
 A narrow span of silver rippling thread,
 A mirror, reflecting the firmament above.
 This strip of nature,
 Cleansing the mind and lungs.
 Swans, grebes and moorhens,
 Bobble up and down
 On the backwash,
 Left behind by the barge,
 Now out of sight, under the bridge.

²⁶ Song: Power to The People; Artist: John Lennon, The Plastic Ono Band; Writers, John Lennon

The First London AEC Routemaster,
 The half cab bus,
 Trundles over this waterway boundary between
 Southall and Hayes,
 As I stand on the hop on, hop off
 Open rear platform,
 In school uniform,
 Look down and see the black asphalt slide under the bus,
 The warm summer breeze rushes on the face,
 Dare yourself to jump,
 As your momentarily let go of the pole.
"Johnny! Wuh wrong wid you!
Stan de so!
Yu gine da Dead house!
Catluck en' dogluck!"
 The Barbadian conductor,
 Toggled up in his pristine London Transport uniform.
 With the Gibson ticket machine strapped over one shoulder,
 And the leather satchel over the other,
 Collecting the fares,
 Supervising passenger boarding and disembarkation.
 His journey had commenced from
 A recruitment office in Bridgetown,
 Coloured colonial labour sailing home
 To join an imperial family.
 And what did he find upon his arrival:
 Harmony replaced by discord.
 Truth usurped by error.
 Faith supplanted by doubt
 Hope displaced by despair.
 He watched me with those piercing dark brown eyes,
 Projecting a stoicism, pride and sheer bloody-mindedness:
"Dem is doan talk to we,
De higha de monkey climb, de more the show he tail!"
 The single ding of the bell slows the bus,
 Step off before it halts.
"Ef greedy wait hot wud cool".

EMI

It's amazing how a relationship
Can concurrently captivate and appal,
How obscenity laced tongues,
Challenging social conformity and deference,
Overnight become the filth,
Facing the fury of the Establishment.
A partner to walk out the front door,
Over a few unsavoury words spluttered.
They had to disconnect, put distance, detach, divorce.
Pen an ode,
The best of the best,
The most gleeful rant at a record company,
“*Who?*”

EMI

EMI

*EMI.*²⁷

Nipper guarded over the entrance,
Of the pressing and distribution centre.
Direct cut in the memory:
The near orgasmic, ecstatic excitement of
Ripping off the shrink wrap
To hold *Somewhere in Time*,²⁸
The sleeve cover:
A cyborg enhanced Eddie,
In a retrofitted future.
Hold your breath, stop time,
In the painstakingly, mindful, tender careful act,
Of extricating the record from the inner sleeve,
To rest on the turntable.
With the precision, skill and steadiness of a surgeon's hands
Lift the arm, oh so gently, to drop the stylus
Onto the inscribed, modulated spiral groove,
On the black polyvinyl chloride
Rotating 33 and a third RPM.

²⁷ *EMI*, lyrics by Steve Jones, Glen Matlock, John Lydon & Paul Cook, © Warner Records

²⁸ Iron Maiden's sixth studio album pressed at the EMI factory on the Uxbridge Road, Hayes.

The hiss,
The expectancy cranked up, like the volume, to max.
Oh, the lick of the guitar,
The pounding of the drums and bass gallop,
Bruce:
*“If you had the time to lose,
An open mind and time to choose,
Would you care to take a look,
Or can you read me like a book?”*²⁹
Play the solo on air guitar.
Seven minutes and twenty-six seconds of nirvana.

It would be a dishonour to a summer’s day,
Not to walk further on to the next stop,
A chance to let the sun caress the skin.

Ossie Garvin Roundabout

There is but just a solitary plaque
Naming the intersection in your honour,
The crossing of two carriageways running:
East to West, South to North,
Carrying pedestrians, cyclists, motorists
And vehicle passengers back and forth.

In that small red rose town,
Marked by its religious history,
Its coal mining and heavy industry,
You, as a teenager, was employed as miner,
In the extraction of black gold.
Red Friday was no victory,
But an armistice.
Surreptitious, sly, clandestine collusion
Between mine owners,
Middle class volunteers and the Government,
Forced the worker,
Under district wage agreements,

²⁹ Caught Somewhere in Time, lyrics by Steve Harris, © EMI Records

To accept pennies off the pay, minutes on the day.³⁰

Driven by your hatred for the mines,
You travelled south,
To settle and work,
In this town in West London.
Yet the strong connection with the organised labour movement,
The radical politics,
That defines the history of coal miners,
Continued to course through your veins,
You felt it with every fibre of your being.
Coupled with your committed catholic belief,
In order to "*fight the good fight with all thy might*",
You entered politics.
Serving the working people of Hayes,
For they shalt see,
That Justice is all in all to thee.
Your incessant, ceaseless, relentless battle,
To increase council housing for the working man,
And a by-pass for your adopted town.
And now as the traffic flows,
Between Harrow and Heathrow,
On the relief road,
That is the realisation of your aspiration,
I wonder how many will recall your legacy:
One-time council leader,
Past mayor of Hillingdon,
Champion of the working class.
Ossie, Ossie, Ossie, Oi Oi Oi!

Adam and Eve Public House

There's a disturbance, a disquiet, a disorder,
As three men approach, on a mission to bury, to ossify,
The trio demanding, John Barleycorn must die,
They enter the establishment with a clear head
Drink till they're satisfied John Barleycorn is dead.

³⁰ In the 1920s, mine owners announced their intention to reduce miners' wages. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain rejected the terms:
"*Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day.*"

This interwar, symmetrical building,
The undulation of the hipped pantile roof,
The art deco archway over the front door,
Crowned with the Garden of Eden relief.
The original human couple,
Parents of the human race,
Recumbent and naked,
Either side and under,
The stylised tree of rosette greenery,
Bearing fruit,
And coiled serpent.
It whispers temptations of immortality and wisdom,
Of eyes opened wide,
As gods, knowing of good and evil.
Are these two the mother and father of all humankind,
Of me and you, you and me?
Are we all descended from this single pair of original ancestors?
Is it them who bind us together?
But did she ever want me, did he ever need me?
Was it all a fabricated lie?
Face them and bid them goodbye.
Mama don't go, Daddy come home
*Mama don't go, Daddy come home*³¹
.....

Beck Theatre

1970s British neo-vernacular style,
In a lightly, landscaped green oasis.
Redbrick and pitched tiled roofs,
A homage to suburban developments,
Indigenous to the borough.
The auditorium, a single steep rake,
A proscenium arch stage,
For the performing arts.

³¹ *Mother*, lyrics by John Lennon, Album: John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band

A line of infant poor,
From the age of five to seven,
School logo emblazoned,
On their royal blue sweatshirts,
Bring the traffic to a halt.
Fledglings that have left the nest,
Are now ducklings in line following mother duck,
An inherited instinct,
For she will provide them with the dual information:
About their individual identities and that of the world.
In order that one day they will detach themselves from their adopted mother,
And hopefully, not only mingle with their own kind,
But be citizens of the world.
And they are off to participate in
Songs and gags,
View the slapstick and dancing,
Watch true love survive, wicked plans foiled,
When a handsome, charming prince,
To dismiss an evil grandmother's spell,
Has to kiss the sleeping regal belle.
Mother duck must break the barriers to entering a theatre:
Poverty, discrimination, hunger and quality of education.
Imprinting in these children the skills to
Immerse in the domain of the performing arts,
To grow into hens and drakes,
Whose lives will be enriched forever,
Creativity flourish,
To nourish self-expression,
To cherish exploring the unexplored,
Give articulation of the self,
Furnish a loquaciousness in the telling of their stories.

The experience of the real or an imagine world,
Presented to us in gesture, speech, song, music and dance,
A rich tradition:
From the festivals that honoured Dionysus,
Sanskrit drama,
Comedies of Plautus, tragedies of Seneca,

The Age of One Thousand Entertainments,
Commedia dell'arte, Restoration, Renaissance,
 Realism, Absurdism, Post Colonialism.
 People have told stories; people have listened to stories,
 People have performed stories; people have watched stories.
 And as you view through the theatrical masks,
 Of tragedy and comedy,
 What is revealed to us is an,
 Immortal, infinite truth:
 The primal need to share experience and emotion.
 Each narrative, each tale,
 Chronicle, history,
 A unit of symbolic meaning,
 Self-replicating, mutating, responding,
 To selective pressures.
 And each unit is divine and so it follows that
 Each story telling is a sacred ceremony:
"Listeners above the ground
Listeners under the ground
Spirits who live in the four
*Parts of the earth!"*³²

We continue past Park Road Green,
 To be met by the scene,
 To be met by the siren sound:
"Woop-woop! That's the sound of da police! That's the sound of the beast!
Woop-woop! That's the sound of da police! That's the sound of the beast!
*Woop-woop! That's the sound of da police! That's the sound of the beast!"*³³

VIII. Hillingdon

Hillingdon Fire Station

The Captain, the Station Commander,

³² A prayer offered by Cheyenne story tellers before the commencement of the story telling as described in *Tales of the Cheyennes* by Grace Penney.

³³*Sound of da Police*, KRS-One lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group, Carlin America Inc.

His firefighters out on parade,
Commences his roll call of firemen's names,
Each presented to the Mayor, who declares:
*"I can't think what Hillingdon would do
Without its Fire Brigade"*.
In bygone days,
Of weekly call outs,
To attend inconsequential emergencies:
Demolishing a chimney,
Clearing storm debris,
Freeing the Mayor's hat from a tree.
Hoist and ladders were put to good use:
To rescue window cleaners from roofs,
Rocking horses from bonfire piles,
To gather in the apple harvest,
To search for the artist,
To replace the Town Hall's water tank.

But one June night,
All changed, changed utterly.
The fire engine driver,
His white hair and general gait,
Drove with his eyes shut closed,
To the scene of the fire in the neighboring village.
What met him, the twins, the chief,
The hoist man and the other two,
Was a 1970s, 23 floors,
Lit pyrotechnic device.
A container clad with pasted paper and string,
In cuboid form,
The fuse had set off the charge,
Igniting the gunpowder.
But it fails to be propelled,
Into the night sky.
It sits there, secured, squat on the land
As the remaining potassium nitrate ignites,
Shots going off at ground level.

When you first witness the abominable,
The horrendous, monstrous sight,
Reason and self-awareness take flight,
Leaving all in a transfixed, transient, trance like state,
Not having the faculty to comprehend that
Lives were being lost to this stolen gift,
Conferred to humanity as civilization,
By Asia's son.
From a faraway distance,
This combustion's ability to cast an incantation,
An enchantment, bewitchery,
A magical formula that renders a person detached,
Oblivious to the nightmare of each and every resident.

At the nexus:
The racing heartbeat, sweating, nausea,
Chest pain, trembling and chills,
The shaky limbs, the dizziness,
Numbness, the ringing in the ears,
The churning stomach.
Watching him with staff in one hand,
And his three-headed dog³⁴,
On a leash in the other,
Climb the staircase,
One floor to the next,
Declaring to the trapped,
An article of faith:
"Stay put!"

Forward the Fire Brigade!
Each on a selfless crusade.
Theirs to steel, to brace, to compose themselves,
Theirs not hesitate,
Theirs to suffocate,
A raging fire,
Into the tower of Death,
Entered the two hundred and fifty.

³⁴ Cerberus, the hound of Hades, the multi-headed dog that guards the gates of the Underworld to prevent the dead from leaving.

Upon daybreak,
All changed, changed utterly.
The fire engine driver,
Wearing the physical and emotional scars,
Drove with his eyes wide open,
Returning to the station.
There is no cheerful resolution at the end of this show,
Leaving the last minute or so,
For the fire brigade to become
The borough band,
And play the episode out.

We continue, past the Prince of Wales,
Following the curvature.

Coney Green

Come patriots, come men of the Empire
*“Play up, play up and play the game!”*³⁵
Whether ye be caught up,
In the brutality of trench warfare,
Stand-to and stand-down,
In unsanitary, infectious
Deep ditch, dug protective defenses
Or in pristine white sleeve shirt playing
A mellifluous stroke:
A pull, hook, drive or sweep,
To the boundary,
On a village green.
Lest thou forget the virtues of
Chivalry and sportsmanship,
In the service of her majesty’s realm,
For on England’s green and pleasant playing fields,
Shaping and testing character
Of the public school
Educated officer class,

³⁵ *Vitai Lampada*, Sir Henry Newbolt

On whom

The battle of Waterloo was won.

And the boys from the black stuff,

Bitumen based pothole repairers,

Muddied high viz gilet,

Armed with tamper,

Lane cordoned off,

Thermal repair heater,

Patches centimeter by centimeter,

Maintaining the highway,

They have undertaken

A *foreign* job.

They turn to watch the game:

The umpire declares play,

The games underway,

These soldiers of the queen,

Strategically stand,

Discipline, hierarchy and codes,

At extra cover, silly point,

Gully, fine leg.

And from the top deck,

I watch the watchers watching the watched.

In both there is an insecurity,

A search for identity,

A sense of self-worth,

An unwillingness.

In both there is strength

And concurrently a fragility.

There will come a time,

When we will lament the end of the two:

Either on a battlefield or

On the dole queue.

St John the Baptist Church

At the top of the hill,

The seventeenth century

Solidity of the flint rubble square tower,
 A mediator between man and god,
 An intransience, a permanence.
 The ivy clad chest tombs and headstones,
 Crammed in the compact graveyard.
 Birth, marriage and death,
 All robed in religious ceremony,
 A testimony to the rites of passage.
 It looks down over the parish,
 Down into the valley below.
 Let the descent commence,
 As the bus glides with poise,
 Down the slope.
 Look back to see the church fading from view,
 Deeper we descend, the more it dwindles, diminishes,
 Until it disappears.
 It was part of the objective real world,
 Like *stones* and *trees*,
 But now that it can't be observed, it cannot exist³⁶.
 No elementary quantum phenomenon,
 Is real until it is registered,
 Observed, indelibly recorded³⁷.
 That solemn house, on solemn earth,
 Can only be physical, material, tangible,
 When we enter through the porch,
 In either graceful or *awkward reverence*.³⁸

The River Pinn

Has the gradient plateaus,
 The stretch of black pitch,
 Barely perceptibly,
 Crosses over the Pinn.
 It runs from its source in the weald,
 To its confluence in the Frays,
 Through this urbanized land,

³⁶ Werner Heisenberg, a German theoretical physicist and one of the key pioneers of quantum mechanics. among others, interpreted the mathematics to mean that reality doesn't exist until observed.

³⁷ John Archibald Wheeler, an American theoretical physicist.

³⁸ *Church Going*, Phillip Larkin

A journey of conflict and appeasement.
In places Man has straightened it,
Constrained it, in concrete channels.
But look closely and you find
In milieus its fringed with marsh,
Adorned with ponds,
A home to sticklebacks and dragonflies,
Peacock butterflies and frogs,
An ancient rivulet,
Cutting through the historic county.
Look down on the Autumn debris,
Floating on its murmuring surface,
Dead botanical items,
Travelling to an underworld,
Carried on this single waterway:
A union of the five rivers
Of the underworld.

It makes sense of death,
By allowing us to believe in an afterlife.
The souls of these branches, twigs
Root plates and leaves,
Will arrive in the land of the dead,
From dissolution to renewal,
Resurrected, in this Kingdom as meadows, asphodel flowers, fruit trees.
This river, a coalition of five gods each allied with death,
This river, a meld of five emotions:
Hatred, oblivion, woe, fire and wailing.

This land of five rivers,
Cupped by the Indus and the Sutlej,
Canals crisscrossing the doabs,
This emerald, parakeet, shamrock land,
Of wheat, barley, sugar cane,
Fruit and vegetables.
And in the mid-day sun,
There he is asleep under the tree,
In the rough, amongst the lost balls

That missed the fairway.
The teacher.
The cobra coiled around the trunk,
The snake stretching every sinew to ensure
Its hood is providing him shade,
The cows in attendance,
Sit at his feet, watching him.
He in blissful state,
Fearless, stripped of malevolence,
Infinite, unborn, self-existent.
Obfuscate attire:
His Saffron coloured hirka,
Tied at the waist
With a white kemer,
String of bones around his collar,
Turban partially covering,
Qalander cap,
Wooden sandals.
This sartorial miscellany,
Neither Dervish nor Sanyasi,
Neither Veda nor Kateb,
Neither Hindu nor Musssalman.
The teacher awakes,
Attended by his attendant,
Goes down to the river,
Down to the river to bathe.
Plunges in, does not surface,
Panic ensues, reports of a drowning.
The River Police cordon off the area,
Divers dive,
Swimming in formation,
Groping their way through silt,
As an underwater rescue operation,
Now an underwater recovery.
But there is no trace of the teacher,
The long-term companion distraught, fraught, over wrought,
At the thought of losing his custodian,
Is taken away, wrapped in a blanket,

Comforted by hot drink in hand,
And words of condolences.
Later in the day,
On the setting of the sun,
The miracle of all miracles,
An event not explicable
By any natural or scientific laws:
Looking down onto the Pinn from the road,
The missing teacher peers down,
Lost in a world of sensation,
Mesmerised by the flux and reflux of the flowing water,
Listens to the symphonic poetry of the rolling river,
The quavering reflections of the trees.
His consciousness of an independent self, having ebbed away,
The memories and anxieties of past, present and future,
Are all abated,
Nothing remains, nothing but the sense of being.
He, coalesced with nature as one,
He, blended, commingled with nature,
Like the union of sea and sky in a Turner canvas.
He transfixed by the communion,
Spellbound by the revelation.
He turns around to walk back up the road,
A physical and spiritual exertion,
To walk up to the church,
On the top of the hill,
Chanting: “*There is but One God, His name is Truth*”,
Chanting: “*There is but One God, His name is Truth*”.³⁹

IX. Uxbridge

RAF Uxbridge

The Spitfire gate guard at the entrance,
Yearned to be detached, to fly away,

³⁹ “*There is but One God, His name is Truth, He is the Creator, He fears none, he is without hate, He never dies, He is beyond the cycle of births and death, He is self-illuminated, He is realized by the kindness of the True Guru. He was True in the beginning, He was True when the ages commenced and has ever been True, He is also True now*”. These words are enshrined at the beginning of the Sikh Holy Scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib.

High into the cadet blue sky,
To participate,
In the capital's aerial defence.
But instead, it was tied and tethered,
Rooted to the spot,
To mark the entrance,
To the HQ,
Of the No. 11 Group RAF.
And then one Spring day,
The replica severed itself,
And soared off into the azure,
Piloted by that rich military history.

Strutting down the road,
Outside St. Andrews park,
A muscular, hefty dog,
With wrinkled face,
Pushed-in nose,
Powerful jawline,
Polka dot dog collar,
Fiercely loyal, strong bonds with the royal,
An irreconcilable imperialist romantic.
Sniffing wall and lamp post,
Snuffles another dog's scent,
Cocks its leg, overwrites it with its own,
The pheromones,
Defending newly won territory,
Of the new build development.

Improperly socialized,
Perceives that its owner, loved one is at risk,
Becomes defensive, show signs of aggression,
Leading to adult biting behaviours.
The canine walks down the road with conceit and arrogance,
Certain of its ability to tear and gore any corner of this earth,
To attain a stature like the mountains in height.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ “*And walk not on the earth with conceit and arrogance. Verily, you can neither rend nor penetrate the earth, nor can you attain a stature like the mountains in height*” [al-Isra’ 17:37]

Coming in the other direction,
Ms Kapadia LLB,
Self-assured, poised,
Fiercely independent,
Strong minded.
Deep saffron sari,
Deep Green choli,
Baring her milk white midriff,
A 22k gold chakra
On a dangling belly bar.
There's a standoff at the traffic lights.
The dog eyes the adversary,
Alarmed and nauseated,
At the sight of the half-naked notary,
Wanting to rend her human flesh into shreds,
To be rid of a bad woman,
And an enemy of the Realm if she died.
For her very presence,
Is a sign of threat to the Empire.
The vociferous grinding of the canine's gnashers,
To vent its opposition to the solicitor.
The die-hard defender of the Raj,
Barking his God-given right,
To glory in the possession,
Of his newly acquired wall and lamp post.
She stands there across the road,
Dignity, Nobleness, Stateliness,
Unperturbed, with an air of righteousness.
She employs her non-violent tactics:
Presents a stern, unsmiling face,
Hiding teeth,
Avoiding eye contact,
Becomes taller
By slowly raising arms above her head,
And roars the syllable *Om*.
And in that one utterance,
In that one single declaration, exclamation,

She proclaims:

*"I am the Mother of this world, Ordainer, Grandmother, the Thing to be known, the Purifier..."*⁴¹

The sacred spiritual sound,
Travelling at three hundred and forty-three meters per second,
From its source, in one solitary direction,
With divine amplitude, wavelength, frequency and period,
Towards the flaccid, bullbaiting cur.
This deific reverberation,
From her pious lips,
With no deviation, straight as a trishula,
Is funnelled by the pinna,
Into the external auditory canal,
The noise intensity pierces, ruptures, perforates the dog's eardrums.
As the dog is left,
Writhing, contorting, squirming in pain,
She crosses the road
And walks past it,
Without giving it a second glance.
It looks up bamboozled,
But ultimately defeated, overwhelmed, whitewashed,
And laments, singing:
*"I just can't get over losing you
And so if I seem, broken and blue
Walk on by
Walk on by (don't Stop)"*⁴².

St Andrews Roundabout

Yet another standoff,
This time between,
The red bricked, British neo-vernacular style,
Of the architectural secular icon,
Of the local democratic district,
And the handsome proportions of,
The Victorian vision of George Gilbert Scott.
On opposite sides of a dual carriage way,

⁴¹ *"I am the Father of this world, Mother, Ordainer, Grandfather, the Thing to be known, the Purifier, the syllable Om, Rik, Saman and also Yajus."* Krishna to Arjuna, Bhagavad Gita 9.17

⁴² *Walk on By*, Songwriters: Burt F. Bacharach / Hal David © Warner Chappell Music, Inc, BMG Rights Management

Separated by eleven decades,
The earthly against spiritual,
The civic versus religious,
An enduring and powerful legacy,
Left by both on our modern world.
But there is no time,
For analysis of the juxtapositioning,
Of the contrasting two.

For now, one must emotionally prepare,
Take care, of disembarking, as the terminus is nearing.
And all of a sudden, the outside world is now less appealing, noteworthy, drawing.
A precipitous feeling that details of daily life are tedious,
An involuntary introspection that takes the events of the here and now,
In this space, in this realm,
And intertwines with memories of a distant past.
As the 427 swings round the roundabout,
A most vivid glimpse of the High Street and
The townspeople of the past:
Lovelace with her trio of Pekingese dogs,
Watches Philby, in his smart chauffeur's uniform,
Open the door of the executive's car
For the Mayor, adorned with chain and badge.
Others, oblivious, to the ceremonial moment,
Rush toing and froing,
Minton and Munnings,
Cobbit and Clamp,
Potter and Platt,
Fisher and Fred,
Robinson, Antonio,
Wantage and Wilkins,
Raggy Dan and Harkins⁴³.
And now there is urgency,
The need to go somewhere,
To go home, to go away.
The harsh cornering
Throws one outward against the window,

⁴³ The townspeople of Trumpton, a British stop motion children's TV, first shown on the BBC from January to March 1967.

But there is more than Newtonian physics at play.
“An object in motion (or at rest) will tend to stay in motion (or at rest)
Until acted upon by an outside force” she states.
 Bimla⁴⁴, has taken the seat next to me,
 Reassuring me that no one can deny me this experience of talking to her,
 She, the past, condensed into a spiritual form, continues:
“I have bachelors, masters and PhD in physics,
Let’s not waste time on the detailed specifics,
Of inertia.
Listen: They’ll observe you talking to thin air,
These critics, these censors, these cynics,
But remember this:
As we approach the end this ride,
No one can deny, no one can lie,
Brush aside, that intensified,
Desire to wish me back to life,
But be satisfied, that in time you will be,
Alongside me”.
 The coldness enters your arms and legs,
 As your breathing alternates from rapid to none.
 We hold hands
 And in that very instant of contact,
 Between worldly concerns and paradise,
 Matter and spirit,
 She draws out my very inner anatomy,
 Leaving the hollow shell,
 Like a furnace, ablaze with the great love of God.
 The immense agony, affliction and aching,
 Gives rise to lamentation,
 Yet concurrently *“the sweetness of this excessive pain”*⁴⁵,
 Washes over me,
 Submerging, submersing,
 Gushing and flushing,
 Overfilling, overflowing,
 Oh, to be forever conquered by this ecstasy.
 This pain is not solely a suffering, torment, hardship of the body,

⁴⁴ Bimla Buti, the Indian physicist, specializing in the field of plasma physics. Bimla is also the first name of the author’s paternal aunt who died, tragically young, in 2004.

⁴⁵ Teresa of Avila (1515–1582). The Life of Teresa of Jesus. Chapter XXIX; Part 17

But also, of your selfsame essence.
This pain “*a caressing of love so sweet*”⁴⁶,
Between the soul and Divine.
I beseech ye Lord
To let the doubters,
Believe through their own experience,
That there is no deceit, duplicity nor insincerity,
In this, my mystical encounter.

The bus comes to rest at the kerb,
Pulling up behind the wig wag, blue flashing lit,
Paramedics’ mobile response unit.
A gathered crowd
Fueled by the pathological need for the spectacle,
The voracious appetite for an image,
Watch a fleeting moment,
Of a blanketed, bedraggled, shabby and weary man,
Bowler hat resting on his chest,
Stretchered away by first responder and driver,
They all watch and they all suspect,
That his waiting is over.

⁴⁶ Ibid

