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POEMS FROM HAMPSHIRE

class-teacher

**i start the morning well - or mean to
moved by the hero sun
bandaged in mist - come
into the class willing to tread
delicately but with some joy
am met by faces ready
to be sullen at the first
reminder of old faults**

**i catch the edge of the class too quickly
a prickly incident (insolence hand-hid)
scratches across an anger i'm prepared
too readily to feel - the waiting class
falls the wrong side of the thorny fence**

**there are ashes in its eyes
the soft grey fluff remaining
of a mood that once flowed easily
between us (will again) - now resentment
a huddling shell against the world
a gross excrescent feeling of betrayal**

**i sense the crumpled paper of their thoughts
the screwed-up disconcert the rage
niggled into flame by minor
nagging acts misunderstanding
if misunderstood - sensitive
combustible uncertain
told too often where their error lies
they smoulder fume in a closed room
with iron doors windows choked
with smoke and blind authority**

**all that can burn is burnt
within them and the flames leap
brilliantly to devour
dead incidents and magnified
offences - but this is inward fury
of which i'm shown occasionally
the curling wisp of smoke
about the mouth the ashes in collapsed eyes
at moments i feel there is little
to be said between us
little that can be stored
away from the greedy fingers
of the fire that knows no longer
how to cease to burn**

these moments yet are not
all-time-consuming
but they float about the term
like specks above a fire
growing large with the roaring of the flames

the educators

we teach and educate for life - a cliché
paid such grand lip-service to
that while we all unitedly affirm it
the world denies it and we live
with its denial

we compute our own
success on helpless children's backs
we turn the vastness of their minds
to our mean advantage - we shove
our *better* children into cans
and roll them down the chute
pre-cooked for life (we note
their shininess but not their taste)
the rest we do not even give a shell to
but leave them categorised and raw
to bleed for our mistakes - to spend
a lifetime rubbing out our tattooed
label from their minds

we cut and divide
divide and cut again so that each
one knows their place and smarts for it

we are the educators - by our competence
we kill for most all educated hope

achievement

witness to sprinting winds and clouds
running cross-country in a pack timing
the racing earth he (the fixed hand)
dies into his marble self

age fickle as javelins comes as often
to a clumsy end - the desiring discus
soars but falls too swiftly rarely reaching
the glory of its birth

old man is a sprained ankle got when young
jumping too high for safety - a name once
on the lips of newspapers now retired
into its private pain

so he in the laurels of his athletic hour
poises (his eyes sewn with flags and medals)
his body hard with this moment fleet as thought
and negligible as triumph



just as the dusk comes hooting
down through the shivering black leaves
of the swinging trees we (the brave ones
swaggering like marshalls through a lynch-mob)
crash-bang our way to the door
of the so-called haunted house

knock knock - kick in a pane of glass
and the dusk hoots louder in our ears
and the swinging trees ride like a mob
with murder in mind - *knock knock* -
the heavy knocker on the solid door
shaking the house - *knock knock*
knock knock - louder shaking our brave
bodies the heavy knocker of our hearts

knock knock - *knock knock knock*

we laugh with a harsh laughter we
have never heard before push and shove
each other in a boisterous fear

lean on heave crash open the door
fall in a heap inside - pick ourselves up
courageous still giggling and bruised.....

shush

find words bounce our voices off the walls....

shush shush

yell catcalls scream shriek roar
batter and shatter.....

shush shush shush

oh shush yourselves

*no really - shush
in the air
under the stair
what can we hear
shush*

*are you getting scared
we knew it
we knew that if we dared....*

we can hear noises

*noises noises
in an empty house
the sound of our voices
echoes in crevices
rattles in doorways booms
in the hollowness of empty rooms*

*no that isn't all
that doesn't explain
the tall hooded silence
standing in the hall
or the whispering smell
of dust bristling the floor
scurrying like the dried-up
bones of mice to the hole
in the crumbling wall
something snatches our voices
away from us too quickly
for our voices to be all*

*nonsense the house is dead
it can't harm us old bricks and wood
you're letting the darkness go to your head
shout if you don't believe us shout
if anybody's there
if anybody's there
you won't get us afraid of you
whoever you are*

*whoever you are
this is what we think of you
boo boo boo
what's wrong
what's wrong
tell us what's wrong*

listen

nothing

*no nothing at all
your voices went
but they didn't return
you called
but nothing came back at all
there's something there
swallowing up words
absorbing them into air
heavy waiting alert*

***(daddy-longlegs pitch on skin
sinister fingers whisper
through the roots of our hair....)***

*....we're not afraid of you
nothing nobody
we know you're there*

*what is it at the end of the passage
in the gloom by the still door
eyeing without eyes everything we do
sucking us in with its black stare*

*you think it's funny don't you
trying to frighten us keeping out of sight
come out here if you're anything - we'll show you*

***arms move suddenly along the wall
the moon riding hard on foaming clouds
stands solid in the door
and it's not a good moon at all***

*why did we come
we should have stayed home
but here we are in an evil room
trapped between the witchcraft of an empty house
and the cold hard grin of the moon*

i'm going in

you can't

i must

*you'll become air
a heavy silence*

a dance of dust

*there's nothing there
nothing nothing there*

he gives a brave laugh
but a laugh drained of blood
and moves down the passage
to the masked door
hesitates and turns
wanting our support
frightened to his heart's core
steps no - *is drawn* - backwards
into a black space rapidly
dissolving in our misted eyes
we half-hear a short gasp - no more
the moon's grin is louder
as (on his restless clouds)
he bucks about the sky

no one returns to us
and in the morning
(rooted in fear
we could not leave the place
but spent the night
huddled in one big stack
in the frozen hall)
and in the morning
we find not a single trace
of the friend who went
as simply as any word
into thin air

temptation

get out of my way words
you're stopping me from saying
what i glimpse
on the bright mountain
and in the burning valley
waiting to be said

your nude sensuous shapes
drape my licentious loins
lull in my ears' bed
while the world lies ravaged
in the unspeakable cold

i love you words
do you think i don't
want to lie with you
to let you drag from me
the pain and ecstasy
warped in my limbs

do i chase you avidly
only for crumbs

but when you turn
and stand across my path
behind you i can see
with far more clarity
than i can master your temptations
the stark degutted town
joy excruciated
the innocent done down
yet i cannot say them
as they must be said

my mouth is dry with you
and all my flesh is drawn
to your lilt and cavities
to your lush full-stops

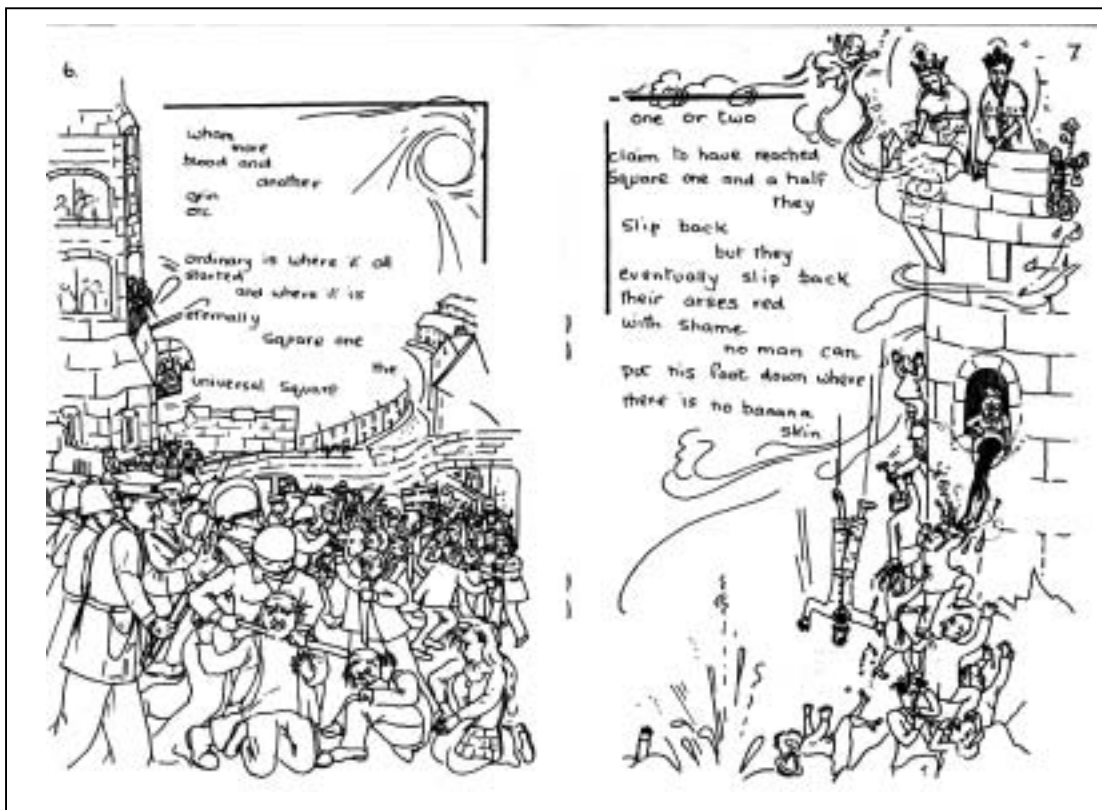
i have a job to do
i can't stay tucked forever
in your soft and shapely
regions of delight - harsh
cries and lonely whimperings
come in the kissing night
and i must go - must go
with or without you -
to get their realness right

creation

i sit here trying to be silent
to fit my overwhelming thoughts
with words to hold
eternity in a shaking hand
and have it talk the language of the hour
i sit here mute and afraid in a rushing world
cringing against daylight
prodding my own pains
to make them cry with universal tears
i sit here tongueless and disjointed
draughty damned
into incoherence struggling
with my own demons haemorrhaged
with blind messages shrieking
with such inward storms
that murder could not make a greater mess
of my mortality
i sit here myself
a stony megalith in unconscious time
a mark of doomsday only to myself
a leaf depressed in a million lumps of coal
to all my neighbours
my cries to them are cold as oedipus
my wife and children are locked out in nineveh

and i the earning man
am somewhere crawling from a senseless sea
and groping round for tools
my mind like a lizard's leg
in the first notch
of the endlessly upward wall

from **loud hosannas**
(and a bowl of cherries)
to the ordinary
(extract)



(drawing by Pat Gregory of Bournemouth)

normal

you have raped your sister
you have stabbed your mother
you have battered a decrepit blind
crippled sick widow to death with hobnailed boots
you have fucked umpteen women in one night
and still had spunk to spare
you have written hamlet
how ordinary can you get

you have done nothing interesting
important
exciting in your whole life
how extraordinary

academic

from where the mind sat alone on the hilltop
it could see the body splashing in its own hurt
tears stamped in the valley
but the mind never once got its feet wet

gentlemen lift the sea

(on a deformed request in a train lavatory)

gentlemen lift the sea
be all of you the modern
muscular mountains
who with a scoop of biceptual crags
swoop down for an armful of ocean
leavening the dreadful pressures
on the valleys of lyonnesse

gentlemen rape air with water
let the submarine nose round the moon
and aeroplane astonished
break wind in the vaults between
the antelope ecstatic on the ocean bed
and the constellations of live crabs

gentlemen be men - in the locked
compartment from the nagging
economical head-shrinking
function of the ladies
(for them such exhortation is irrelevant)
dare the utmost of virility
harness the power in your massive limbs
and when the universal waters flow
gentlemen lift the sea

love of country 1963

i love my country with such love
that i hate what she dresses up to be
with the fawners and the flatterers
and the self-adoring dandies
cooing their scented shit in her ear

i hate the peers and princesses
the great families spread out

like warts on her unresistant skin
the pomp and the pettiness
parading in public places
the authorised voice acclaiming
close-lies - authority pandering
to its own deceptions - elected representatives
stuffing their own private cushions
out of the public trust

i hate

england for her haggard victorian face
and all those who plaster her with rouge
to stop themselves from blurting out the truth

in loco parentis

get in the corner child
and stay there
while i build a mean little window
for both of us to look through

you - with yoga

not in the bed expected
(as i looked round the door
with some shock) but wrapt
in a yoga pause you lay
naked on the floor

slim long intensely
at ease with your form
you balanced the room
on a breath stilled time
calm as the eye of a storm

the carpet came as a sea
to your southern thighs
should my roused hands have come
like gulls to flatter
each sandy dip and rise

but the moment you held
so coolly i could not dare
to spoil that orchard
with my swooping thoughts
though the fruits lay bare

animal

silence breathes in the bushes
silence pads in the park
do you sense this sleek swift silence
springing through the silent dark



(i)
how new the world is
trying to find
nerve in an old rind

(ii)
the bread is crumbled
for birds to swallow
rolled into droppings
flowers from the hair
of noseless statues
tyrants of parks
where men have cowered
too long and mistaken
unmanned by he dark

(iii)
when we awaken
(how have we fallen)
machines are broken
wires lie strangled
by the messages they nursed
lathes are swinging
from trees in derision
pipes burst and scalded
houses contorted
(what went on in such rooms

that stare from their windows)
cars tap the kerb
their eyes put out
by the order of fingers
that have jabbed
through the skin of the earth
infected with visions

there is ink in us
swirling (if we spill it
we bloom) - no writing
erupting from the cave
where the guilt-laden
beast has his parchment
will do for our murders

we must stab with a
brash shape of pen
no quill but a sting-ray

(iv)
marshes are the womb
of the poor - the flowers
that creep out of doors
will be crowned by and by
will unite with the worm
who (crawling for light
in the last breath of time)
mangles itself in the cogs
of the cyclops
who crashes to death
unable to function
hence the sun is revealed

parasites begin the digestion
in the harsh shack of winter
corn is conspired
the marsh bares its breast
to a medal - a gold
leaf is born - there is
hatred and hunger - a cry
from the rushes
proclaims a long journey
whose sundown will
see us in safety - whose home
be our grave
where we scratch
there is blood on the rockface

that we murder ourselves
is no setback - we arise
from the tomb unprovided
what-is-known is our crutches
let the light kick them from us
the sun eats us up and renews us

inside me am i turning to stone

the drill niggles downwards
there may be oil in my bone
though the flesh is all gone
only in the dark was it dumb

if we squeeze our darkness
through a doorway
what new voice might come

(v)
how old the world is
trying to put
grey on a green shoot

how thick the answers
when questions find
nerve in a new mind



(illustrations by Pat Gregory of Bournemouth)

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