

Weekend

Mel Witherden

WEEKEND

*a sleep asleep as sleep; see the nightmare naturally
apologised for happening
personified disguise
the world-would weekend
a difficult forgetting way
to wake awake a wake*

**A Weak
Weekend
Awakening**

between sleeping and waking
is the complex simplicity
the double conscious half-conscious
everything of nothing
a crushed awareness crumple-car-like
mingling in collision light with flesh with steel
between waking and sleeping
last night awoke from a nightmare to see
me sleeping beside it in the same bed,
naturally I didn't apologise
for any especial extenuating
circumstance or suggest that any
one else might have been there instead,
if that's the way it happens to happen
then very clearly it possibly does
and making no attempt in return to
disguise the improbability of
its own personification it told
me very quietly that the world would
be finished by the weekend . . . but of course
at the time it's difficult to comprehend
exactly what a thing like this is all
about and I forgot to ask last night
precisely what I ought to do, I may
have got the words confused as well
there's not much though I can do about it now,
I'll just have to sort this next week out
myself as it comes, if this is the way it happens
to happen then no doubt in fact it does
*and the world will be finished by the weekend/
and the world will finish by the weekend/
my world would be finished
by the weekend*

like strangeness through a hangover
the visible world fills with shapes,
I come opaquely into life

between perception and perspective

depthless in sensation and hangover,
behind perception in the terrible space.

I start to move as if with purpose
in a possible world of probable loss.
and fumble among forms, seeking definitives.
if yesterday was Saturday, today is. . .
anything.

a defining drone, the church fills
voices together, a certain faith, in reverence
the priest comes greened, half purging conversation
with his rattle of people rising, scratching
into prayer and flowing in response
to feet, and knees, and seats —
dull hypnotic
secret permutations.
clambering up to myself — I have to laugh —
in unison, a fascinated monkey mouthing imitation,
unheeded, unselected by ritual, almost unevolving:
my refuge of mythology, one retreating prayer,
incantations easing out of meaning
as Pater Noster knowledge
breaks, spreads,
laps over mystery,
till the priest again appears, settled nested
beyond stone pillars that echo like God
in loudspeakered omnipotence, when I
think through a sermon that presses out virtue like grapejuice
and ferment myself among the congregation
gathering my uses for no obvious ends
but knowing this knowing to be my own terms
and so far owning, though not always in order,
that I only sit
and breathe and think.
everywhere around people tinkle in readiness
for some improbably early collection:
tedium and plate: tiny children burst out running in the aisles;
the voice of god has become small and distant
giving blessing to his income;
and the groan of the Credo is gulped like consecrated wine
hardly observed beyond those it excludes;
the patter of words run into sacrament,
continual prayers and still chatter,
tones of mysteries and rosaries,
fingers, automatic clatter,
invocation and its
pattern of words

Sunday Service

wringing my ears
and bells and bells
of miracles
and, necks bent, sink, knee-stretched legs struggling down, wrinkled women,
black, floored purposes fight out, with age, a sacrifice of motion.

fulfilled, and blessed, and real, people crush soon in the doorway
as the priest prepares to leave.

I watch, parched, what I'd hoped for
spill out into the morning, swilling
back over the town for this week.

it seems
that I've spent all my life on simply existing:
I've drained the account which might trade for meanings
and missed all the discount by not shopping around.
suddenly
all transactions must cease from the weekend,
cheques start to bounce, my credit card's void,
there's no dividend yield from my share of ideas.

I think

Changes

*there may still be some change:
everything in bed will earn a few bob —*

*some coppers for snoring, more for a turn,
and something like a sackful for immovable dreams.
when I get up each day this week to stand*

*what it's worth on the bathroom's sliding scales
I'll maybe weigh a little heavier
the things I've got in mind: performance
of the ritual arming of civilised man,*

*holding the power to destroy the Order
in Nature by putting my socks on first,
and the Small Room that contains the secrets
of the universe, strained out so rarely
in the thinker's mind, being redeveloped*

*to occupy the whole ground floor — I'll go
there early in the morning to release myself
with a flow of instant understanding,
then Saturday's last few cereal flakes will
conjugate sublimely with milk
to be the ultimate quintessant Breakfast*

*which precedes the last of reprobate acts
on the journey of the soul through chaos,
in the battle to make it to the shops on time:
an exploding umbrella left on a bus.
there at the zenith of communication
I'll greet acquaintances without a word
with intuition of the lousy weather,*

*then I'll apprehend a Total Significance
which will be the very last thought I have,
infused with random immortality
and absolute on the edge of extinction —
thought like going to bed, or thought
like a use for the common cold, or
thought like the one last coffee spoon
that ever set a drink in motion.*

I wonder if there's still a shop
where one can go with ideas to swop.

I drag my speculations through the morning,
walking out of Sunday further than
the countryside of private woods and as far
as the wet easy leaves distend, where I
pace out the estate of belonging to myself.

The Castle

suddenly a castle on a distant hill punctuates itself into view,
a letter of an extinct alphabet prefixed to the landscape before language changed
initialling its historic fact, now all but illegible. I wander some time
on the parchment of fields till I read myself in faded ink to a stony path
scribbled down from the keep; my pace is splintered by the flinted track fragments as I
break
beyond the last twigs of winter trees, below the first stalks of coltsfoot crouching by a
wall,
rising, cast in a sand sky where ground levels, sagging onto turf, where some sheep
from
centuries of occupation present my arrival to a fanfare of friends; and I cross the
causeway that blots the vacant moat, and enter a maze wound among walls.

a man in a hat and a raincoat is
looking out to land: we exchange the virtue
of the afternoon. do you believe in
castles? says the man who dressed like god
as I lean beside his lunchpack and his flask
of tea... sorry? I reply.

the sun is warm in the shelter of the walls
and I'd only wanted to be here alone,
so I lie, smile, tell him that I couldn't tell;

but he already knows this cynical tale
and he closes the scene with a small sad grin
I can see as he slides from view: across
the courtyard, through the walls, lingering,
lifting and sinking like a balloon,
deflating down the path that drew me here,
his plastic mack ideal flapping in the wind
about his knees, nervous, diminishing,
holding very tight to a very trilby mind.

alone with the clouds that whip across the sky,
touched thinly by the tattered strips of sun,
and with that flapping figure there below,
I'm closer now to flags of abstractions
that clattered once with symbols on the tower.
he is a flag and flying in my present —
I raise an ancient cannon in my head,
take aim and taper, and dismember the man
who probably didn't dress like god at all.

then I take my place by a breach to guard
the view that settles in dust along
the battlement wall, filtered from years
through the ruin's slow solitude;
the afternoon has stretched across the sky
while mindless sheep ebb gently on the down,
and the castle imperceptibly becomes my own.
a white gull swayed by the will of air
ready as a leaf to wisp away is pressed
beside me without motion on a heavy
liquid sky — it washes to the sun
and spatters my face with wind as sea,
as the turf beneath soaks in my feet.

and I trail curiosity between the dungeon
and the tower feeling almost allegorical,
yet too full of detail to fill out the pattern
of grass and rock: each wall within walls
escapes explanation, and space between
spaces relate no relations, only earth and stone
to hold open interest while looking lasts.
all surviving history refracts mine here,
for my pillage of the keep twists the line
that solves its secret of perpetual decay.

the keep is flaking consciously as birds land;
a statue of a tower stump loses
its crownless head to the mocking rubble,
and lichen-pocked and rotting rocks
still lapped by ancient scars of burns,

fester into running scars down walls
as if they burst inside.
from the battlements hangs a stiff corpse of stairs
which I stumble down in broken questions
of which dropped first, the castle's execution
or its slow corruption to today.

... I know of castles
once served by sea, and I think of the tide
that has retreated so far from here since then;
and all the beachcombed mystery of what
this castle is is mine.

impatient I swerve —
and where's the man who should be selling guidebooks?
is he on a day trip too, having spread
the ground plan back there on the ground for me?
and where is the plastic-mack-and-flask-man?
perhaps he'd understand if he was here,
if he was ever here at all

the air growing cold has worn away
the sun from the afternoon, leaving it
a wind-burned blister breaking on the sky;
a black crow heaves itself to land again
and limps for food across the sodden turf,
staying hunger during a moment to flag
some chilling omen with its leaded wings.
I raise my collar against the day
and hunch my jagged way on to the hill
lonely as a convict with his liberty.
the sheep are still grazing their territory
of grass, no older than they've ever been
as they move in disinterest round my legs,
that are to them as real as any other
blade of grass that's pressing for the sun.
it hardly seems to matter now that there
really is so little to spell from a castle
this late in the day; I stand a while
looking behind inside the air as if
I walked on tops of trees: the castle falters;
I turn away: it softens in the wind.

turning myself towards returning I experience a thought and land poem.

*subtle as fertilizer
agricultured into metaphore
I take the thinking-in-land way
back, but sink with questions
in the fields' mudwelcome,*

Thought and Land Poem
--

deepening in three dimensions,
 closed by abstracts in four,
besieged and distracted by choice;
on the many of footpaths I merge
 and separate along
 indifferent to the possibilities
at each twig of decision,
till a narrowthroughing lane
 nerves me with direction
 from cells of random reason
towards a bleak
road fieldbetween —
 a kind of seeping vacancy
 run through the root of ideas
in a ground solution of supposing.
at a townnear comingback
 allotments I seed from neglecting
 the unturned truths left in earth
by spades of experience,
and stretch away with grass
 in a park-passing land
 from the grey barren crop of
closer path patterns;
then my room-defined
 knowing — I plot my point here,
 a one strip of belonging
preserved out of furlongs;
and the needed water-body-
 closet functions where I
 stubble out with thought
unharvesting my seated notions:
here concentration
 roots my pad with doodles
 sown, closed-circulating,
in its food-chained permanence
of
 : days that grow to actions, actions to
 their values, values into meanings,
 meanings to beliefs, beliefs into
 themselves beyond the days⁹ and these
past the breaking of thought: the
everything of thinking
 (I turn behind to pull
 the chain) flushed away to
farms of oblivion.

decision

yes, I think I need to put an end to thought.
waking on Monday is never the worst thing in the world –
there's always Coronation St, and swede, and getting up;
the weekend's cocoon shrivels just the same
and leaving it is just a part of going on,
even if I happen to find I'm a caterpillar still
and not a thing of beauty and perfection;
there's a cigarette, and a cup of coffee waiting,
and a shave, if I bother – because there always is –
and time to read down history in columns of news,
then all the consolations of what I couldn't do if I wasn't myself,
like all those who didn't wake this morning
on account of dying overnight:
their last week was nothing like a work of art,
no butterfly wings to stretch to what they might have been,
just ragged with flakes they'd never have remembered,
very much like being themselves, I suppose;
then having read the paper I can go and do
the things they did before they left so suddenly.
but first, when I'm ready, I need to think seriously
about crawling out of bed.

Decision Time

there's a wonder in the early streets like frosts on windows
come to life in water moving
while the virus of the new week reaches
to an anything that just might happen –
such as spring — having heard the whether forecast:
a dead bloody Monday — if it was

Monday Morning

daylight slowly drains drowned streets,
oranged still under permanent sodium,
fills them with light and unelectric motion,
stirred steadily to a lost identity -
and morning: black grey, thick grey, mist grey, forming.
blank bloody morning — if it was.

buses run fluid with drab energy,
a dense trail of ants to dismember
dead cats in city hedgerows:
down the road and nonchalant as nature
the juice of people is secreted in passionless hysteria.
rotten bloody bus routes – if they were.

going coming buses, each, both, running
two ways, seek an indifference
like suspended animation,
and the dance of two crowds foams to the traffic island

not having agreed to stay their own side.
stupid bloody traffic lights – if they were.

someone should think of perpetual motion
for science to harness their uncertain moments,
to replace the computer with office staffs;
and I'd like to map out the route of everyone here,
each line, like the tubes, in a different colour.
stupid bloody poet – in their way.

battered, a necessary freak, I'm only nearly
obscured beneath some helpless car,
with these amoebas, spreading where there's room,
all incorruptibly simple by chance:
drops of urban water evaporate from the morning.
wonderful day for December – as it is.

hey road, you can leave me here,
pass me in the fast lane –
I'm slowing for you now;
think I'll fasten my safety belt
to the lake on your shiny park,
hello pigeon, glad you look glad
walking my pace apart down there;
did you wait for me long?
think I'll learn your pigeon steps
miming mine nearby.

simplepoem
as it is.

perhaps I'll try it your way
having run out of work, till I
run out of time.

Simple -poem

till Tuesday

hello (by phone) you must be another person
which maybe what I need myself this week.
can you remember when you smiled
so carefully careless
last year at the party which was drunk?
I dragged you to a bedroom where,
for as long as it took, we made
mad passionate conversation —
I could tell in an instant that you
were on the other side of me,
are you coming to a film?
I'd like to see what happens.
(I'm only trying to be nice and liking
is a word I can use with impunity):
I like your impunity, dear, very much.
goodbye.
maybe I'm another person now instead.

PETE: I haven't tries to locate the reversal in its correct place – a double linespace after “maybe I'm another person now instead”. That would mean formatting something which you would probably have to undo later.

**What's
Wrong**

"something wrong," for godsake, "by any chance?"

there's something in a question like her eyes, we
didn't come to see the film, but what?

you've seen it before, been through the celuloid
instants a dozen times a year, open
and closed, when you hadn't come for the film alone,
but we just came to see what might happen while
they advertise sex with chocolates and fags.
yes, go ahead and guess how I'd do with a filter tip –
you know I'd approve of your Cadbury's Flake.

no, forget it, it's a lie. "I came for the company."
we talk in adverts of the party last winter
subconscious of wineglasses twisted round
the way I saw you then – something impossibly
futile, the unaccountable conscience of memory.

my second feature's improvised, a popcorn
rustling of interest, communal from a single bag;

we know it's a joke — "isn't that what you'd like" to believe?
till, projecting itself where you sit, beautiful in colour,
half known and almost real, an interval comes true.

so what do you do aloud with a person you like?
in a hundred different ways I phrase the question
who are you? and it always sounds like how.
"yes please. . ." – no don't – "... have an ice cream":
it's colder than you think down here in the dark again,

now we're both hung up on motives in the beam: if I sit
in your way you disappear, and I'm defined
brilliantly absurd, with my hand reduced to shadow
over yours, with my thoughts of how to why.

there was something "I wanted to say . . ." it couldn't have
mattered
though there's something in seeing it through (and the film)
willing
out an understanding, through the whole of it,

respectfully, standing for the anthem to the end,
even when tradition's lost its feet: perhaps

meanwhile and twelve feet tall
up on the screen the story unwinds,
tragically large

**One of
Two
Possible
Cures**

*the prophet of doom
stands on the steps of his imminent disaster,
kicks his last few days in a can
down aimless pavements.*

*"I know what's wrong with me," he says to the
hospital receptionist as he fills out his form
the doctors are leaving for a long weekend
having earned enough the first two days.*

*at some point in the process of introduction
comes the change from red to green, green to red
illusion to real
losing to realisation.*

*"I've read all the books, you see,
there's only one of two possible cures,"
he tells the nurse who gives him tea
orderlies pack the hospital
back into a cupboard for the night.*

*"sorry mate, if you only knew the trouble it takes
to change a bulb when a light blows out,"
echoes an ancillary down empty corridors –
he too is filling out forms
by the glow of the street outside*

*"there are too many cases nowadays
of mistaken identity, that's why we
have to be so sure," says the guy on the gate
who lets him pass out with a smile –
ambulances are intercepted for smuggled bulbs and forms,
stretchers lining the groaning pavements.*

*"there's nothing wrong with you my friend," says a
cop in the woods of drunks and shops:
habeas corpus to you, old chum,
we've got all the bodies we need.*

*then a series of chance encounters
and standardised communications:
"take that you bastard, if you won't smile like us"
provide an overwhelming spontaneity,
the kind which cannot treat an illness
or eliminate symptoms confirmed
in the Home Doctor manual, page 365.*

*during the doctors⁹ long weekend
the prophet of doom in solitary confinement*

*on the blind side of a one way mirror
inadvertently poisons himself
with one of only two possible cures*

*("we know what's wrong with him now,"
says a doctor to the coroner at last.)
and abandons the world to a hollow rattle of cans
propelled indefinitely down lonely pavements.*

paralysed I grapple with my coat; the dark
world rumbles and thuds with seats.
then lights are restoring the fact of the cinema:
I twist out a smile for her without nerves
and feel to the exit senseless in a crowd of senses,
feelings hardening like mud, and kicked
to dust beneath the feet of the foyer crush,
she is quiet too — but what did you think of the film?
she is quiet too — I suppose you know
it's really allegorical of someone
who will meet his end with this weekend;
she argues with questions in her look;
I say it's alright, it's a joke, and push
through the glass door, the warmth running out.

*we breathe from the air of our clasping hands,
an energy in an imminent smile
thrusts our silent conversation
as if into space along a shore;
and motion between our arms on the long sand
ripples through thought of making the sky —
an inch of movement
edging itself for direction
springs taut muscles
that break the steadiness of our sudden legs into the dark:
beating our feet into shingle
acting out against the crisp granular night,
aching for the pain,
our running flings the beach beyond each step,
each stride striking out the next to break past
positives of you and I and here.
we burn like the birth of a star
bursting for the source of its energy
extinguishing our own identities,
open into what we are
and ready to vanish.
but the empty beach stumbles back on our faces,
crushes us slowly
down to the walking*

**Flying
Away**

*pavement,
and separately we have not flown away.*

but tragedy is terrible still, her face cold;
certainty is dull and her mouth set:
you say simply that the film was for me,
but really all of us are for the film;
and she's curious what change in me this is,
while that someone I once knew has been melted
down in her crucibled maturity
and remoulded in this different kind of friend.
or putting it another way, we fail
to be each other with such beautiful symmetry.
she waits beside me like a myth, while I flick
through frames of needing, trusting, making love
till her bus comes.

*I've engraved the thought on a wall
with empty eyes,
I've turned away reading a sad stone message
in the path,
and I might still be with her if
I were there
holding hands on the brickwork with circles
of the cycle lights,
saying goodnight in the instant that
streetlamps cut:
a somewhere I could always return with eyes
full of walking
to outgaze my wish.*

Cycle Lights

whenherbuscomes

more,
walking.
Wednesday stalked
awkward to town,
brought thus right up against
the bus stop and the timetable
i feel i ought to need to go
somewhere since there must be still
some different sights from these when i can't
do nothing with a Wednesday once it is there.

Time Table

consultation with the bus times:
our mutual complacency till
ten twenty hours, or...

*street and traffic clip
sense between gestures
from the bus queue talk*

wait, still.

*– hey mummy look
– no time... it takes as long
... you know as all the
– hey!*

when i get
when i get there i can
i can have a meal.
have something to eat
till i come back.
when i get there i can eat
have it with apple sauce.
gravy.
salt.

*– no can't cook... gone down
... the pressure... the gas you know*

till i come back.
when i get there i can eat
have it with apple sauce.
gravy.
salt
a knife and fork.
when i get there.

*– mummy look – please don't
... you've heard that that
... that is have you... did you
– digging up the road again
... you read they always are – they are
– yes did you see... and always are
mummy look – please don't
... you've heard that that
... that is have you... did you
... digging up the road again
... you read they always are – they are
yes did you see... and always are*

and no bus.

*– but mummy look
– all the things you know
i think about
... and you think i*

not even snow.
nothing occupies the street
in time

*... think about and you think i
... simply haven't got the time
... the time*

anything that's like ideas.
today i need my own -
a watched stop never even simmers.
a watch stopped doesn't
either.

*– look look here look
– oh yes i have to book
...to go and see*

that is how it seems at least

*– look look
– i will when i*

how the bus time table seems.
how like truth.

*... when i get to the end
... in the end*

in order, in communication.
to indicate the bus is here or late,

... *yes Harold him it was*
... *was it was*

unless the whole thing's out of date.

or a bored bus company's

impractical joke.

... *they say they're laying all new pipes*

everything has got to wait – *needed all new pipes he did*

for something else to waste its time ... *was a shame it was*

pointing with a scornful finger. – *always the same it was*

– *and not much then, then, you know, to be done.*

my watch

and no damned bus.

– *did that instead*

my watch.

– *and died in his bed*

— that is

.. „ see they

... know they

time as timed is time as lost

– *please please look*

and time as saved is turned half way over.

– *that is*

egg timers

... *have you... did you*

on their sides.

– *see they*

as if walking round the world each day

– *know they*

will save the day

– *wouldn't even ever*

on the point of it happening

happen if they hadn't let it

and everything happening

– *go on!*

and happening and happening

– *and happen*

as it happens.

... *as it happens.*

bugger bus times this time,

as it happens.

– *what it seems i think*

same crummy Danish problem

... *it seems*

doubts on observations.

... *they're looking into things*

an uncertain service

'twixt Elsinore and England.

– *look look*

the whole defined a work of art.

look please look

look look

when art is true,

– *what ...?*

in order.

... *how long...?*

in communication.

... *oh put it down.*

the question is or is not is

where did that come from?

this gone or late or never coming.

the question is or is not me:

the critic with his vain demands

how to write synopses of the bus route

with its times.

while i wait

while i

while i wait with its times

for a time for the wait for
the present time when
the time in time present in
the time passed waiting is
time past time
and time past future in
time in future
is a very long time.
when december is flat grey
pavement and shopfront roadway flat
of the unbuilt cardboard pressout street
of people lost, flat
turning at corners.

there is there is there is no bus:
there was there was the
time-table meal
and scraps of minutes.
there once
a table, a simple altar.
once upon a time's commemoration.
a once sufficient saving grace.
and, waiting,
there is naught to celebrate:
perhaps one-hundred-twenty hours
has read ten twenty by mistake
and i must wait till earliest next week. ... *where did it come from?*

surrendered from cover to
cover a distance
with a shroud of motion
the nerveless bus
shuttering.

and: when I get there ... there's a restaurant and roast
pork, with waiters paid to smooth, dish
out food tables as if I was their most
fortunate subject ever to be granted his wish:
and then: they don't come: they leave me, punished with doubt
for what it was I did, whatever wrong it was —
for the tone of my order, my approach to peas without
due care for their shape: and then they don't come, because
they forgot, or want me to have this spare time to think in,
or meditate on thinking, or time to nearly
emulate a saint and seek unworldly distinctions,
passively awaiting the last part of the meal: nearby
they prophesy I'll subside to words and fumble
complaints at the very lateness of the apple crumble.

**The Very
Lateness
of the
Apple
Crumble**

Points of Departure

Wednesday afternoon
return
to the point of departure
return to a room
afternoon
and return
afternoon afternoon
afternoon
afternoon
afternoon to evening
 and all
 the possible things
 I could do
 tonight
starting with going to bed, finishing
with wishing I had, and being between

what in hell can I do for a change
 to evening...
in the ever of nothing-ever-happens
I wait for the daylight when I'll wait
for night when I can wait for day when ...
days scrape on caterpillar
tracks, levelling, preserving under mud
ageing metal-crumpled men moulded
to indifference, shaped to specificity:
slower and slower till even the instant
of death lasts in an odour of measure;
diminishing in repetition
each action smaller than the last, the week
closing on my room like a shrivelling apple.

what in hell can I do ...
 and all...
by dark in the dense smoke corners of boredom
alchemise nothing to words to continue:
and all the standard problems solved,
exclamation marks replacing questions;
all ideas resolved in studies
of a hundred critics' spelling of "relevance";
and persistent as strays the scratch of social
frictions on the door step pricking less urgently than
the bite of my own fleas for rehabilitation.

... what in hell...
 the possible things...
here, filed in a metal drawer,
this evening, televised for my entertainment:

cobbled in with introspection,
listening to philosophies clattering through streets
after rain, and the discovered necessity to
invent, lest god should exist, my hiatus.

... for a change ...
the possible things...
writing, pencilled in imagination
to a girl who once touched me with lustless sympathy,
a letter to a friend who sees the spring
reduced to plastic flowers, yet still in verse,
and news from half a dozen people
I don't expect to hear from again.

... what...
I could do ,,,
eyes holding the unminded scrutiny
of two severed tickets for a film, believing
"Thank you, come again" on the back.

...do...
tonight...
interested still that tomorrow
might be something different, overwhelmed
today should have been so ordinary.

the return to the point of departure
when this is return and the point and departure
point and departure
point

*I am / its centre / the room
no inside inside / the snail death
and retreat of whorled darkness*

point
*the break / the door / outside as burnt paper
the shell / light quenched / coated / door slamming
the leaded corpse exposed to air / door slam / shell crashed to dust*

point
*ashes winnowed from the doorstep
once*

i was there

point of departure:

*standing here naked
except for a watch and a pair of socks,
you contemplate your instrument of life,
a dull maroon Parker pen*

*and sigh that everyone seems to try
to be different from everyone trying to seem
to be different
from everyone*

*till you think you can't quite decide
whether no one is left to be everyone
or whether just everyone's
you,*

till you are no longer even who you are.

*and you are
a final removal from everything,
valid for being the nooneparticular
and certain at least for not being sure:*

*since everything,
you said, was different,
it certainly would be different now,
but it's not, it's different, whatashame.*

*though that's hardly cause now to penetrate
whiteness, to release your ink when you might
have gone to bed, or walked the cold stone streets
in your socks.*

*: point of departure
seven steps from the doorway a pavement
eighty a main street
and release from the singular.*

*naked in a hall of mirrors, two-way, distorting...
the town through the holes in digestive biscuits...
everything ugly as insomnia ...*

*malicious with cold a tramp pokes
down a road of empty waste bins.*

*a bald headed man among machines
in the all-night laundromat watches
his dirty problems revolve before him,*

*and nurses are returning to digs in pairs
heeding plausible tales and shivering
past with glances, half raped already
in dark places by rustling shadows
of shrubs where a girl went once alone.*

pubs spill out
twenty to eleven
streets swilled with voices and mouths:
"I saw your wife today Mr Singh; she said
I could come back another time, Mr Singh,
for more;" then the eyes of Mr Singh.

a woman at a bus stop
counts the coins in her purse
slowly for a second time₀

bars wash out
ten to eleven
and "excuse me sir"
thrown like jetsam,
swirling mangled
senses, "please sir
would you have a...?"
easy to ignore
the last prayers
of a man sinking;
his carved face persists,
he holds his hand out
to a private silence:
in some quiet corner he offends
with feeble transience "do not obstruct these doors –
they are in constant use".

then white on the roadway
the signs reread an earlier act
KEEP TO RIGHT
KEEP LEFT
BUSES, TAXI, DANGER, SLOW
KEEP CLEAR
STOP DANGER
DOCTOR
DOCTOR
with marks of blood
spilled by a boy steeled dead,
now tensing for the cry of the hollow slouching shell:
a one no longer even who he is,
a scene repeated with its fascination,
a tragedy deleted from its silence.

everything singular ...
the town through holes ...
naked.

on Thursday I find another bus queue
pick another stranger with eyes unlike mine
and ask her to a film
believing those two severed tickets that read
thank you come again.
it's one more knot
on the string of chance encounters
and standard systems of communication.
overwhelmed with the spontaneity
she follows me into the chill dark
till we are frigid with mutual certainty
like the cold smooth greeting of neon on damp camber
a dim reflection of a lost real shape.
we walk in silent obligation
loosening streets on the alien town
as if this were the end of a long affair
regardless of which end it might be.
spools of frost on hedges and lawns
unwind on the evening
in the same spectacular shows
as every other night of the week.
snow starts unable to disguise our purpose so far:
the shape of her legs poised on the cinema steps
the warmth of her body pressing through doors
a crystal wonder of water freezing on glass.

then frame by frame
I obscure the Tuesday film again in thought,
each as different as particles of snow,
no further change to the texture of the floor;
later, questionless, I take the snow queen
to her castle home
bathed in the warmth of expectation.

*drunken valleys and forests fall back into echoes
hurled behind in the yearning for northern mythologies.
the gentle grassland rolls motion in a ball,
wraps speed in the tension of wind
while unseen in the darkness is the hand
that clutches the sword
and the rider astride the white horse of the downs.*

*across the impossible space of kingdoms a
lamp glows steady and passive,
bent among crags carved by fiery winter ice. the
angry claw of a cloud hangs at an armslength
hunched to the rocks and bound by premonition.*

shadow over shadow,

**The
Sword
and the
Lamp**

*lowland castles founder on the easy downs
as rider and mount, insubstantial in grass and air,
follow out that sheepish rounded land;
and the sword, high and dull like a prowling bird,
is blunted on the night.*

*burning and resolute,
standing as stone fast against the torrent,
the lamp strikes jealous havoc ledge by ledge.*

*higher and farther where rocks
arch crabbed bodies through sodden turf
the rider pushes up the howling face of the hills.
the sword on its northward quest
beaten dry by the clashing wind
slices the space between passage and encounter.*

*the lamp opens crevices in rain and cloud
and bares the sky-torn earth with her light*

*flat stones smoothed my months,
dead sedges, leaves like knives:
streams are the only trace for the rider and the sword
nearing an end in the courtyard moors.
beyond the next peak lamplight catches a turning hilt;
a blade shivers, splinters on the guttering flame.*

**Don't worry, it
will soon be over**

and after and now as the day. ye
t and on
bu
t and on
ye
t and but the day's
break

overwhelms the Second Break.
a holocaust to smash, obliterate.
the thought of it, the two dimensional mushroom,
fuck and thrown up, to make and unmade;
screams preserved in jars preserved in screams
screams to tear with numbers, screams and tears
swelling with heavy unearthly encumbrance, the
tares of the continuum.

as if it will soon be
over, ruins where the flowers
grow, over all. grown over
from the start to the finish
fuck the. as if it will be, was once,
ova. over only words.
yet to find the holocaust to break it,

break it first, break it fast

till the words break

over the second version, overtime
from end to end: the numerical version
where one holds no ideas beyond one,
only one to go, the original version:
to count oneself, to think along
the paving stones on the counted pavement
till one is carried out feet first over
a threshold with or without an idea,
within or without an idea, counter to counter,
now there is sufficiency in smashing a sparrow's
brains out on your windscreen,
and what a piece of cake is man,
what a pair of feet to come and go
with unnoticed plosion of failure of failure
beneath the small squeak of fate's shoes.
the world at your feet, as if it will soon be
over.

and after it's gone
and the sense grows up that nothing was there
it feels like nursery paper on the wall
with the need to belong to what is no longer,
though why perpetuate the myths at all?
for the moment died, now milky cells, now mystery
when time is alone with the beginnings of life.

Myths of Love

and now that a girl goes
and the day grows, there's still something there
that peels like nursery paper on the wall;
needs have dreams that no longer matter,
but why perpetuate the myths at all?
for fairies die, the Santa Claus, then Christ
when the edge of the world is so close in the dark.

as the day is going
and the week grows up an anything is there
to steal like paper from damp brown walls;
questions linger with unheeded matter
of why perpetuate the myths at all?
since god will die, and art and death
when Saturday lies in a Sunday's soil.

something falls from an unknown woman's
single bed at five on Friday afternoon,
flees in the street's disgorgement
ahead of her return from work

and again like every day among the UFOs
swept along by the great tidal bore
of the town as it builds the scifi tension
for the space the weekend brings

at the petrol station the week is wound down
to speak to the pump attendant peering in,
the night is wound down
on a hundred thousand people ticking over
with just enough gas to get by.
the library closes on the pages of a dictionary
incapable still of evaluating words,
the supermarket rings up rolls of profanity
double wrapped by the world of the dark.

the pub deliberately illuminates a
group of three friends welcoming the
advent of a fourth:

"don't stanza round
sit down, compose yourself."
"you've grown loose ended."
"you haven't moved your feet all week."

"yes, I've been there, making up the couplet
that will end all random connections."
one friend shaded by a petal
writes his life in incidents of beer,
another has an endless sentence
to describe the way he feels:
they follow it out to the point
where he pushes back the door and orders a round
and they lose themselves in DIY sound;
a third sardonically replies in declensions of his own,
his gearbox, your steering wheel,
the condition of BL.

"I lie awake imagining gas,
spend the day just sleeping off
the view from my window;
maybe that's why I haven't been around."

"you are figure at night across fields
invisible, existing only
in the drag of a cigarette."

"I know that it's real."

"you should put your ruins

The Pub Quiz

in the care of the D or E,
your skulking demolition orders
make us feel insecure."
yes that's true."
"if you really want to end it all
you can drive my mini through a wall,
I cannot offer more."
don't understand,
we missed the point:
missed the point
you understand?"

"oh cut the talk, he's sick can't you see."
"balls, he's normal, they said so on TV."
"he's just a little more ...
implausible than you and me."

"he can't be right."
 "not quite."
 "he might."

ce burns away the parcelled
l conversation
ed from chair to chair;
nd-fact faction breaks
en and a charred scrap of paper
n the warmth of the air inside:
ne has anything
to say.

es disintegrating,
power remains,
of recognising change,

tonight a place at the centre of
urinals
instead of at one end.

Integrating shapes disperse.

sounds,
 our
 the fridge humming from the kitchen;
 my shuddering
 the hill outside;

**Late
today**

strange music
spiralled in cacophony:
sitar
today.

someone spoke
maybe he woke do
they know him
(wrote a poem)?
was it a friend
ideas to lend?

A Week in Smoke

at least at home
there's safety underground,
won't leave a tome
for weak ends to confound

some other bloke
who never wrote
 "here lies a man
 who didn't pass away but died,
 no wish to scan
 forever, hardly even tried"
the week in smoke,
some kind of joke?

perspective:

Show Trial

Saturday and all last week at a town near you
the street explodes with alien life forms
savage and solitary in swarming crowds –
panic flames of frozen figures spurt from the car park tower,
walls and walkways open in arcade disaster,
swallowing the population
as shoppers grow in hitchcock hysteria;
like a fevered room of harsh enormities
nine-foot-tall illuminated faces
peer out ahead and purposefully take stock
of just the first five seconds of shock;
bergmancouples propelled in mutual silence
carry destiny in the pores
of their puffed up made up cheeks,
their lips barely touched by saliva;
children fling out across the pavements
like spaghetti desperadoes seeking shelter or gain,
and monsters at the supermarket tills extrude
human features hammered together
in cellared laboratories and moulded
for consumption in their cutting room homes.

the frames of the street
jerk in three dimensions,
shudder perspective into motion;
the traffic prowls as incidental music
while a town lost to normal catastrophe
freezes in an ultimate special effect,

and misses the terminal case with one
of only two possible cures
(a man in a raincoat and a hat)
shopping for the weekend

then Crystel Tuesday passes by
scaling high rise blocks
with superhuman desire,
hailing a party tonight:
please come, she says,
and the light fuse blows
on overload or underload
on all that went before:

girl shop street town space Saturday
vanish from the screen in an option of expectation
tonight.

proposition:

the world will be finished by the weekend
the world will finish by the weekend
or a world
will be finished by the weekend

co-ordinates:

a party somewhere on Saturday night
much like a party a Saturday
or a year ago:
many people strange to each other
some breaking down the strangeness
others exploring
two discovering the strangeness between them

postulation:

strangers will meet a strange end in strangeness

the case for:

"I had a dream"
"but you know that dreams are not the end"
"dreams are truth"
"just images
another truth within the mind
outside themselves"
"I have no other truth
do you?"

uncontested evidence:

the street reassembles in a crowded room
the traffic vrooms up and down the stairs
pallor of glasses
panacaea of smiles
grasp of arses
and inspection of piles
it's the last remembered thing from a week before
the past dismembered thing from a weak before
the acne of cosmetic girls
that bursts in mirror eyes
the social disease of the CAMRA crew
documentised by their social dis-ease
people in fever, a room of harsh enormities
not known faces that crack in remoteness
that lock two people in reciprocal voids

"thank god you're here I
wanted so much to say"

the room storms in on the conversation
like security police belying their name:
doors, windows, arms, screams fly open in crescendo,
songs interrogating sense with a throb
of unanswerable questions,
stroboscope dancers beating up their dreams
while the bare bulb on the dangling cord
is a bursting efflorescence;
visual evidence is thrown into doubt
by the statement that colours are indescribable
as a soft spoken saviour creeps out of the crowd.

expert witness:

can I turn you on man
with my cube of silver foil with
obscure public preparation,
my secret ritual, with my
hand rolling rosary
candle, insense and time: my wafers of
shit are the body of Christ
and you gulp down smoke like wine.

can I turn you on man
with friends beyond your scan,
with fellowship, communion
the worship of mind and man,
with truth locked in confessionals with
the way things really are
you'll feel the force within a tree
the space between the stars.

can I turn you on man
with a woman you can feel,
a laughing luscious crazy love,
the way things should be real;
yes I can turn you on man
with the blessing of the dead: I've got
all the wine that you can take
if you have got the bread.

Legalistic disputation

lightmusic voicefaces spin
about the pinbal! party machine?
a man made small be deranged illumination
slowly inhabits a cigarette?
another glass of beer burns down
to a stub at the back of his head
where ends are an endless repetition
pf ends in themselves?
the chairs the table leap to catch the light?
wallpaper trifold* crawl imperceptibly near?
old wounds break open in the floor
and ceiling tiles show wars at the centre of the world?
an umbrella hangs insensible from the picture rail
machine gunned by the noise?
and conversation is thrown by centrifugal force
with a cat that squeals from inside the spin drier?
stars walk backwards into the screen of the wall,
the weekend curtain coming down?

summing up:

the thin cigarette man grabs the arm of the Crystel girl
"no, please smile again, please smile,
I'm feeling your hand for my words,
there, sit there for godsake,
take a seat, take a seat, take a whole
theatre for the show tonight."
knowing every line of a speech by heart
leaves the rest unquestioned.
"yes," is her line returned.
"but tonight I know there'll be no rest,
so you must understand that I'm real,
not a prophet of doom with chocolate sex,
not even one of two possible cures:
whatever it is that's happening now
is happening for us all
whatever it is that happens to happen."
"no," she says, "another time maybe."
"then it's goodbye then, goodbye,

and goodbye when i get
when i get there
if i get there this time
while i wait
while i wait for a time
for a wait for a time
hello and goodbye
no returns only rooms

what in hell can i do with
goodbye
with the point of departure
without point in departure
an accident or joke
and goodbye and goodbye
in truth and in order
in order to tell you goodbye
goodbye for godsake goodbye
when goodbye is the only form
of standardised
communication
goodbye goodbye

corroboration

*this is the time of tension between birth and dying
the place of solitude where three dreams cross
for me and TSE*

*the upper deck clicks exposes
an outside scene set in a
glance of car – coated shape there –
crossing impact – closed*

*a motorist just trusts the wheel, feels
cuts quickly eyes out –
at sees*

*one grim shock-gripped man puts
his slim umbrella out
concernwards*

*a cyclist's passed bent gaze back
shapes his sudden open-
question look*

*watching-girls' cries hang gasped,
sick glimpsed, heads struck back with
reflexed contact*

*the curb-ground friends' hand sweeps the
anguish grated in his eyes
grotesquely street-wide*

*the driver's face creases tight, screech
-of-brakes taut, tyre-bitten,
gnashed and knowing*

Dream 1: Last Bus Street Photograph

*while a dumbled and someone's dulled blood lump
shudders down camber
lead and guttered*

*the instant person incident is stilled
exposed —
traffic gropes offside past a hat in the road,
the bus is fussed to the next stop
then the next.*

*on his journey
afar with bags –
on foot and turned to wave
with certainty
on the road – blind
in mist breathing
on his footsteps winding tightly
with promises
onto the cleft
mountain edges –
on a dot before extinction
with change of time*

Dream 2: A Journey

*the track-fact freezes on his dragging feet
that grate his eyes out
following ground up
earth fixed*

*there will be entering soil
there as if the sea
a rock face is eyeless, mouthed with fallen
streams between cheeked black gabbro
bleak capped
and unspeaking
then is crevices of rocks
meeting terms with stones
his wrinkled lines of walking write against
pace-aching flints kicking him
back, stooped to save
breaking
all will bend in the strata
with permanent life*

*a hermit of the mountain lives here hidden
only where his care is cold in the cave of age,
for the water in a January sun cannot
seep through the air or soak to the heart of his cell
a monk who has knelt
on the steps is bent to the temple*

*and towards all things
sleep here is naked with the woods, he rises early
with the cramp of earth, his strain is breathing and his
seeing is the wet easy leaves –and each day now is
memory that restless starlings clattered in his eaves
all action waiting
is the winter – and his koan
is as old as thought
there will be wild ducks on lakes when the sun shines after
winter's circle without food – he knows they populate
a purpose which survives for spring, that they never
dive out crying through the ice, out of sky and light
the journey ends
all-shining a lake across
the surface of the sun*

*sun sinks on to evening
glowing from beneath the clouds
and brighter than day
he wakes at the lake edge source
uncertain even of change
and terrified to quench the pain that he brings
unshaped abstracted in the level light the old
man enters the rocks with the spring
and vanishes utterly just out of life*

*after the steel driven on flesh, and the steel
light of the bloodlet day
is the passing of time.*

Dream 3: The Burial of Heroes

*silent filing soldiers crusted with the earth
that buries their dead, drudging back to green lands,
draw a line across their highland's history,
where indelible flames over the moors pray
to the ruined ancestral homes, and castle stones
restore the ancient hovels of the skeleton hills,
and a black crow counts the day carrion and past*

*the whip of hands and swords above the wind,
the rattle of metal that strangled the gasping plunge
of the burn die back now in rubble mountain rain,
with the husks of heroes sunk in the slaughtering hills.
dull brown grass, deep heather
the colour of blood hardened;
grey toned graves mourned
in monumental rocks;
and the gorged flesh of water, strewn
unburied, runs in open
landscape scars sucked to the glen*

*that preserves the thunder of battle,
for the heroes still live in the land's frayed veins,
maintain in their darkness the earth's perpetual
retreat, and host again beneath the shrouding
mists, honoured in a requiem of rain.*

*arrows grown to thistles, pikes to tree-dwarfs
point with the wind, stoop down towards the valley,
down where a castle stumbles at the heel of a lake,
while the arms of the dead are raised against the metallic
wind and the merciless spears of rain, their stone
gaze awaiting the clearing sky, the sign
to move again upwards with the helm of the mountains.*

*after the steel driven to earth, and the steel
darkness of the bloodlet land
is the coming time*

voices in a void give unwelcome welcome to a new born year.

and still

it comes obliquely into life
as the visible world fills with shapes
like strangeness through a hangover.

Yet Another Sunday

and still another Sunday

between waking and sleeping
in the simple complexity
the half-conscious double-conscious
nothing of everything
the crumple-car-like crushed awareness
mingling in collision, steel with flesh with light
between sleeping and waking.

yet still another Sunday

holding nothing more to span two Saturdays
than the lines of unlikely tightrope words.

and later still

*in sleep or in a crowd
with the trees or while a sneeze
on Monday or one day
is wonder how it was
the world has been passed by
the weekend."*

WAY OUT

"WEEKEND" was started as an undergraduate exercise in 1969. It was eventually finished after gaps of several hundred lines and more than a decade of growing old because finishing things is even more satisfying than starting, if a lot tougher.

I still believe the initial motivation was right — to get out of the mould of short pre-packed instant-impact disposable-experience poems which I found all around at the time. I was fast losing my senses of balance, direction and gravity by imitating this approach, and I wanted to try hanging a few things together for a change. Admittedly life is not renowned for its consistent and connected experiences, although that does not stand in the way of novelists or the writers of obituaries.

This is not an argument for recommended the foregoing corpus to be laid in state as a particularly distinguished example of poetic form. But it does answer those who suggested I should have included a table of contents so that readers could pick out the bits they liked best. I would rather see "Weekend" buried without ceremony than have people rummaging about at an autopsy to find the constituent organs which most benefited or weakened its health.

I dare say that mature reflection followed by a thorough revision prior to publication would have eliminated some of the more obvious weaknesses. But mature reflection is hardly in the spirit of a poem which attempts to achieve effects with poor puns and intellectualised lavatory jokes. Whatever else it might be saying, "Weekend" is an effort to show that poetry can be fun without being mindless. I hope something of this came through.

MJW April 1982

Notwithstanding this rather pompous outro, which appeared in the printed version, I've backtracked a little on my refusal even to identify the separate short poems which were assembled, with links, to create "Weekend".

For one thing, that approach has tended to bury some of my better short poems. And titles are bound to add something to the reader's understanding of what is going on. So, late in the day for this web site I've given some of the sections names. Text in italic often, though not always, indicates what's going on in the poet's subconscious. Hopefully it was already reasonably clear that the non-events of each day of the week start on a fresh page, which is probably more important than signalling where my favourite bits appear.

MJW May 2018