



Clive  
James



Sentenced  
to Life

CLIVE JAMES

*Sentenced to Life*

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PICADOR

*to Prue*

*If you're the dreamer, I'm your dream, but when  
You wish to wake I am your wish, and grow  
As mighty as all mastery, and then  
As silent as a star  
Ablaze above the city that we know  
As Time: so very strange, so very far.*

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## Sentenced to Life

Sentenced to life, I sleep face-up as though  
Ice-bound, lest I should cough the night away,  
And when I walk the mile to town, I show  
The right technique for wading through deep clay.  
A sad man, sorrier than he can say.

But surely not so guilty he should die  
Each day from knowing that his race is run:  
My sin was to be faithless. I would lie  
As if I could be true to everyone  
At once, and all the damage that was done

Was in the name of love, or so I thought.  
I might have met my death believing this,  
But no, there was a lesson to be taught.  
Now, not just old, but ill, with much amiss,  
I see things with a whole new emphasis.

My daughter's garden has a goldfish pool  
With six fish, each a little finger long.  
I stand and watch them following their rule  
Of never touching, never going wrong:  
Trajectories as perfect as plain song.

Once, I would not have noticed; nor have known  
The name for Japanese anemones,  
So pale, so frail. But now I catch the tone  
Of leaves. No birds can touch down in the trees

Without my seeing them. I count the bees.

Even my memories are clearly seen:  
Whence comes the answer if I'm told I must  
Be aching for my homeland. Had I been  
Dulled in the brain to match my lungs of dust  
There'd be no recollection I could trust.

Yet I, despite my guilt, despite my grief,  
Watch the Pacific sunset, heaven sent,  
In glowing colours and in sharp relief,  
Painting the white clouds when the day is spent,  
As if it were my will and testament –

As if my first impressions were my last,  
And time had only made them more defined,  
Now I am weak. The sky is overcast  
Here in the English autumn, but my mind  
Basks in the light I never left behind.

## Driftwood Houses

The *ne plus ultra* of our lying down,  
Skeleton riders see the planet peeled  
Into their helmets by a knife of light.  
Just so, I stare into the racing field  
Of ice as I lie on my side and fight  
To cough up muck. This bumpy slide downhill  
Leads from my bed to where I'm bound to drown  
At this rate. I get up and take a walk,  
Lean on the balustrade and breathe my fill  
At last. The wooden stairs down to the hall  
Stop shaking. Enough said. To hear me talk  
You'd think I found my fate sad. Hardly that:  
All that has happened is I've hit the wall.  
Disintegration is appropriate,

As once, on our French beach, I built, each year,  
Among the rocks below the esplanade,  
Houses from driftwood for our girls to roof  
With towels so they could hide there in the shade  
With ice creams that would melt more slowly. Proof  
That nothing built can be forever here  
Lay in the way those frail and crooked frames  
Were undone by a storm-enhanced high tide  
And vanished. It was time, and anyhow  
Our daughters were not short of other games  
Which were all theirs, and not geared to my pride.  
And here they come. They're gathering shells again.  
And you in your straw hat, I see you now,

As I lie restless yet most blessed of men.

## Landfall

Hard to believe, now, that I once was free  
From pills in heaps, blood tests, X-rays and scans.  
No pipes or tubes. At perfect liberty,  
I stained my diary with travel plans.

The ticket paid for at the other end,  
I packed a hold-all and went anywhere  
They asked me. One on whom you could depend  
To show up, I would cross the world by air

And come down neatly in some crowded hall.  
I stood for a full hour to give my spiel.  
Here, I might talk back to a nuisance call,  
And that's my flight of eloquence. Unreal:

But those years in the clear, how real were they,  
When all the sirens in the signing queue  
Who clutched their hearts at what I had to say  
Were just dreams, even when the dream came true?

I called it health but never stopped to think  
It might have been a kind of weightlessness,  
That footloose feeling always on the brink  
Of breakdown: the false freedom of excess.

Rarely at home in those days, I'm home now,  
Where few will look at me with shining eyes.  
Perhaps none ever did, and that was how

The fantasy of young strength that now dies

Expressed itself. The face that smiled at mine  
Out of the looking glass was seeing things.  
Today I am restored by my decline  
And by the harsh awakening it brings.

I was born weak and always have been weak.  
I came home and was taken into care.  
A cot-case, but at long last I can speak:  
I am here now, who was hardly even there.

## Early to Bed

Old age is not my problem. Bad health, yes.  
If I were well again, I'd walk for miles,  
My name a synonym for tirelessness.  
On Friday nights I'd go out on the tiles:

I'd go to tango joints and stand up straight  
While women leaned against me trustingly,  
I'd push them backward at a stately rate  
With steps of eloquence and intricacy.

Alone in the café, my favourite place,  
I'd sit up late to carve a verse like this.  
I couldn't do it at my usual pace  
But weight of manner would add emphasis.

The grand old man. Do I dare play that part?  
Perhaps I am too frail. I don't know how  
To say exactly what is in my heart,  
Except I feel that I am nowhere now.

But I have tempted providence too long:  
It gives me life enough, and little pain.  
I should be grateful for this simple song,  
No matter how it goes against the grain

To spend the best part of a winter's day  
Filing away at some reluctant rhyme  
And go to bed with so much still to say

On how I came to have so little time.

## My Home

Grasping at straws, I bless another day  
Of having felt not much less than all right.  
I wrote a paragraph and put some more  
Books in a box for books to throw away.  
Such were my deeds. Now, short of breath and sore  
From all that effort, I prepare for night,  
Which occupies the windows as I climb  
The stairs. A step up and I stand, each time,

Posed like the statue of a man in pain,  
Although I'm really not: just weak and slow.  
This is the measure of my dying years:  
The sad skirl of a piper in the rain  
Who plays 'My Home'. If I seem close to tears  
It's for my sins, not sickness. Soon the snow  
Will finish readying the ground for spring.  
The cold, if not the warmth that it will bring,

Is made, each day, so clearly manifest  
I thank my lucky stars for second sight.  
The children of our street head off for school  
Most mornings, stronger for their hours of rest.  
Plump in their coloured coats they prove a rule  
By moving brilliantly through soft white light:  
We fade away, but vivid in our eyes  
A world is born again that never dies.

## Holding Court

Retreating from the world, all I can do  
Is build a new world, one demanding less  
Acute assessments. Too deaf to keep pace  
With conversation, I don't try to guess  
At meanings, or unpack a stroke of wit,  
But just send silent signals with my face  
That claim I've not succumbed to loneliness  
And might be ready to come in on cue.  
People still turn towards me where I sit.

I used to notice everything, and spoke  
A language full of details that I'd seen,  
And people were amused; but now I see  
Only a little way. What can they mean,  
My phrases? They come drifting like the mist  
I look through if someone appears to be  
Smiling in my direction. Have they been?  
This was the time when I most liked to smoke.  
My watch-band feels too loose around my wrist.

My body, sensitive in every way  
Save one, can still proceed from chair to chair,  
But in my mind the fires are dying fast.  
Breathe through a scarf. Steer clear of the cold air.  
Think less of love and all that you have lost.  
You have no future so forget the past.  
Let this be no occasion for despair.  
Cherish the prison of your waning day.

Remember liberty, and what it cost.

Be pleased that things are simple now, at least,  
As certitude succeeds bewilderment.  
The storm blew out and this is the dead calm.  
The pain is going where the passion went.  
Few things will move you now to lose your head  
And you can cause, or be caused, little harm.  
Tonight you leave your audience content:  
You were the ghost they wanted at the feast,  
Though none of them recalls a word you said.

## Procedure for Disposal

It may not come to this, but if I should  
Fail to survive this year of feebleness  
Which irks me so and may have killed for good  
Whatever gift I had for quick success –  
For I could talk an hour alone on stage  
And mostly make it up along the way,  
But now when I compose a single page  
Of double-spaced it takes me half the day –  
If I, that is, should finally succumb  
To these infirmities I'm slow to learn  
The names of lest my brain be rendered numb  
With boredom even as I toss and turn,  
Then send my ashes home, where they can fall  
In their own sweet time from the harbour wall.

## Manly Ferry

Too frail to fly, I may not see again  
The harbour that I crossed on the *South Steyne*  
When I was still in short pants. All the boys  
Would gather at the rail that ran around  
The open engine-room. The oil, the noise  
Of rocking beams and plunging rods: it beat  
Even the view out from the hurdling deck  
Into the ocean. The machinery  
Was so alive, so beautiful, so neat.

Years later the old ferries disappeared,  
Except for the *South Steyne*, which looked intact  
Where she was parked at Pyrmont, though a fire  
Had gutted her. I loved her two-faced grace:  
Twin funnels, and each end of her a prow,  
She sailed into a mirror and back out,  
Even while dead inside and standing still:  
Her livery of green and gold wore well  
Through years of weather as she went nowhere  
Except on that long voyage in my mind  
Where complicated workings clicked and throbbed  
And everything moved forward at full strength.

And then, while I was elsewhere, she was gone:  
And now I, too, await my vanishing,  
Which, unlike hers, will be for good. She went  
Away to be refitted. In her new  
Career as a floating restaurant

She seems set for as long as oysters grow  
With chilled white Cloudy Bay to wash them down:  
A brilliant inner city ornament.  
But is it better to be always there  
Than out of it, and just a fading name?  
For me, her life was when the engine turned.  
Soon now my path across the swell will end.  
If I can't work, let me be broken up.

## Tempe Dump

I always thought the showdown would be sudden,  
Convulsive as a bushfire triple-jumping  
A roadway where some idiot Green council  
Had forbidden the felling of gum trees,  
And so, with no firebreaks to check its course,  
The fire rides on like the army of Attila  
To look for houses where the English Garden  
Is banned, and there is only the Australian garden,  
With eucalypts that overhang the eaves  
And shed bark to ensure the racing flames  
Will send the place up like a napalm strike.

Instead, it's Tempe Dump. When we were small  
My gang went there exploring. Piston rings  
Lay round in heaps, shiny among the junk  
Which didn't shine at all, just gave forth wisps  
Of smoke. The dump was smouldering underneath  
But had no end in view. This is the fire  
Within me, though I harbour noble thoughts  
Of forests under phosphorous attack  
And in an hour left black, in fields of ash –  
Not this long meltdown with its leaking heat,  
Its drips of acid, pools of alkali:  
This slow burn of what should be finished with  
But waits for the clean sweep that never comes.

## Living Doll

An *Aufstehpuppe* is a stand-up guy.  
You knock him over, he gets up again:  
Constantly smiling, never asking why  
The world went sideways for a while back then.

I have an *Aufstehpuppe* on the shelf  
Under the mirror in my living room:  
I wish I were reminded of myself  
Merrily dipping in and out of doom.

The truth, alas, is I've been knocked askew  
For quite a while now and I can't get back  
To find the easy balance I once knew.  
Until the day when everything goes black

I'll spend more time than he does on my side  
Wishing the sparkle of his painted eyes  
Was shared by mine. I envy him his pride:  
That simple strength he seems to realise.

My *Aufstehpuppe* was a crude antique  
When first I met him. Soon he might descend  
Further into our family, there to speak  
Of how we are defeated in the end,

But still begin again in the new lives  
Which sort our junk, deciding what to keep.  
Let them keep this, a cheap doll that contrives

To stand straight even as I fall asleep.

## Event Horizon

For years we fooled ourselves. Now we can tell  
How everyone our age heads for the brink  
Where they are drawn into the unplumbed well,  
Not to be seen again. How sad, to think  
People we once loved will be with us there  
And we not touch them, for it is nowhere.

Never to taste again her pretty mouth!  
It's been forever, though, since last we kissed.  
Shadows evaporate as they go south,  
Torn, by whatever longings still persist,  
Into a tattered wisp, a streak of air,  
And then not even that. They get nowhere.

But once inside, you will have no regrets.  
You go where no one will remember you.  
You go below the sun when the sun sets,  
And there is nobody you ever knew  
Still visible, nor even the most rare  
Hint of a face to humanise nowhere.

Are you to welcome this? It welcomes you.  
The only blessing of the void to come  
Is that you can relax. Nothing to do,  
No cruel dreams of subtracting from your sum  
Of follies. About those, at last, you care:  
But soon you need not, as you go nowhere.

Into the singularity we fly  
After a stretch of time in which we leave  
Our lives behind yet know that we will die  
At any moment now. A pause to grieve,  
Burned by the starlight of our lives laid bare,  
And then no sound, no sight, no thought. Nowhere.

What is it worth, then, this insane last phase  
When everything about you goes downhill?  
This much: you get to see the cosmos blaze  
And feel its grandeur, even against your will,  
As it reminds you, just by being there,  
That it is here we live or else nowhere.

## Nature Programme

The female panda is on heat  
For about five minutes a year  
And the male, no sprinter at the best of times,  
Hardly ever gets there  
Before she cools off again.

In the South Island of New Zealand  
There is a rain forest  
With penguins in it.  
They trot along the dangerous trails  
Towards the booming ocean

Where albatross chicks in training  
For their very first take-off  
Are snatched by tiger sharks  
Cruising in water  
No deeper than your thighs.

Doomed to the atrophy of lust,  
Lurching with their flippers out,  
Dragged under as they strain for flight,  
They could be you:  
Wonder of nature that you were.

## Managing Anger

On screen, the actor smashes down the phone.  
He wrecks the thing because he can't get through.  
He plays it stagey even when alone.  
If you were there, he might be wrecking you.

Actors believe they have to show, not tell,  
Any annoyance that the script dictates,  
Therefore it's not enough for them to yell:  
They must pull down a cupboard full of plates.

An actor wrecks a room. The actress who  
Is playing wife to him does not protest.  
Perhaps she doesn't have enough to do  
All day, and thinks his outburst for the best.

For God forbid that actors bottle up  
Their subterranean feelings so that we  
Can't see them. We must watch the coffee cup  
Reduced to smithereens, the shelf swept free

Of all its crockery. Another take  
Requires the whole set to be dressed again  
With all the gubbins that he got to break  
The first time. Aren't they weary, now and then,

The poor crew, setting up the stuff once more  
That some big baby trashes in a rage,  
And all that fury faked? False to the core,

The screen experience gives us a gauge

For our real lives, where we go on for years  
Not even mentioning some simple fact  
That brings us to the aching point of tears –  
Lest people think that it might be an act.

## Echo Point

I am the echo of the man you knew.  
Launched from the look-out to the other side  
Of this blue valley, my voice calls to you  
All on its own, and more direct for that.  
My line of sweet talk you could not abide  
Came from the real man. It will all be gone –  
Like glitter back to the magician's hat –  
Soon now, and only sad scraps will remain.  
His body that betrayed you has gone on  
To do the same for him. Like veils of rain,  
He is the cloud that his tears travel through.

When the cloud lifts, he will be gone indeed.  
Hearing his cry, you'll see the ghost gums break  
Into clear air, as all the past is freed  
From false hopes. No, I nowhere lie awake  
To feel this happen, but I know it will.  
At the last breath, my throat was full of song;  
The proof, for a short while, is with you still.  
Though snapped at sharply by the whip-bird's call,  
It has not stopped. It lingers for your sake:  
Almost as if I were not gone for long –  
And what you hear will not fade as I fall.

## Too Much Light

My cataracts invest the bright spring day  
With extra glory, with a glow that stings.  
The shimmering shields above the college gates –  
Heraldic remnants of the queens and kings –  
Flaunt liquid paint here at the end of things  
When my vitality at last abates,  
And all these forms bleed, spread and make a blur  
Of what, to second sight, they are and were.

And now I slowly pace, a stricken beast,  
Across a lawn which must be half immersed  
In crocuses and daffodils, but I  
Can only see for sure the colours burst  
And coalesce as if they were the first  
Flowers I ever saw. Thus, should I die,  
I'll go back through the gate I entered when  
My eyes were stunned, as now they are again.

## My Latest Fever

My latest fever clad me in cold sweat  
And there I was, in hospital again,  
Drenched, and expecting an attack of bugs  
As devastating as the first few hours  
Of *Barbarossa*, with the Russian air force  
Caught on the ground and soldiers by the thousand  
Herded away to starve, while Stalin still  
Believed it couldn't happen. But instead  
The assault turned out to be as deadly dull  
As a bunch of ancient members of the Garrick  
Emerging from their hutch below the stairs  
To bore me from all angles as I prayed  
For sleep, which only came in fits and starts.  
Night after night was like that. Every day  
Was like the night before, a hit parade  
Of jazzed-up sequences from action movies.  
While liquid drugs were pumped into my wrist,  
My temperature stayed sky high. On the screen  
Deep in my head, heroes repaired themselves.  
In *Rambo First Blood*, Sly Stallone sewed up  
His own arm. Then Mark Wahlberg, star of *Shooter*,  
Assisted by Kate Mara, operated  
To dig the bullets from his body. Teeth  
Were gritted in both cases. No-one grits  
Like Sly: it looks like a piano sneering.  
Better, however, to be proof against  
All damage, as in *Salt*, where Angelina  
Jumps from a bridge onto a speeding truck

And then from that truck to another truck.  
In North Korea, tortured for years on end,  
She comes out with a split lip. All this mayhem  
Raged in my brain with not a cliché scamped.  
I saw the heroes march in line towards me  
In slow-mo, with a wall of flame behind them,  
And thought, as I have often thought, 'This is  
The pits. How can I make it stop?' It stopped.  
On the eleventh day, my temperature  
Dived off the bridge like Catherine Zeta-Jones  
From the Petronas towers in Kuala Lumpur.  
I had no vision of the final battle.  
The drugs, in pill form now, drove back the bugs  
Into the holes from which they had attacked.  
It might have been a scene from *Starship Troopers*:  
But no, I had returned to the real world.  
They sent me home to sleep in a dry bed  
Where I felt better than I had for months.  
No need to make a drama of my rescue:  
Having been saved was like a lease of life,  
The thing itself, undimmed by images –  
A thrill a minute simply for being so.

## The Emperor's Last Words

An army that never leaves its defences  
Is bound to be defeated, said Napoleon,  
Who left them, and was defeated.  
And thus I gather my remaining senses  
For the walk, or limp, to town  
Where I have a haircut and visit  
The Oxfam bookshop near the bridge.

Only a day out of Addenbrooke's  
Where another bout of pneumonia  
Damned near nailed me,  
I walk slowly now, sitting on low brick walls.  
But the haircut is successful,  
Completing my resemblance to Buzz Aldrin  
On the surface of Jupiter,

And in the bookshop I get, for my niece,  
*The Penguin Book of English Verse*  
(John Hayward's excellent anthology)  
And the old, neat, thin-paper OUP edition  
Of the Louise and Aylmer Maude translation  
Of *War and Peace*, so handy for the pocket.

Still in her teens, already reading everything,  
She wants to be a writer, and when she visits me  
She gets a useful lesson  
On how a writer can end up.  
But things could have been worse:

I could have been married to Laura Riding,  
Whose collected poems I purchase for myself.  
Have fifteen years of death improved her verses?

No, still stridently incomprehensible, befitting  
The way she won an argument with Robert Graves  
By throwing herself backwards from a window:  
A token, no doubt, of an artistic commitment  
The purity of whose achievements was proved  
By being intelligible to nobody at all  
Except her fellow fruit-cakes.

Well, she sure left her defences.  
Almost everyone wants to be a writer.  
My niece, however, has got the knack:  
That feeling for a sentence, you can't mistake it.  
The only question is how far you will go,  
Even walking ever so slowly,  
Away from your fortress. All the way to Russia?

But Tolstoy, himself an awful husband,  
Waits to make a midget of your memory.  
You escaped from Elba  
But not from St Helena.  
Had you stayed in Corsica  
None of this would have happened.  
But you left, and now every nut ward in the world  
Has one of you at least.

The Maudes were married more than fifty years.  
In two days' time, the Tour de France  
Will go past here  
Where I now sit to gather strength  
For my retreat from this hot sun.  
It's time to go. High time to go. High time.  
*France, army, head of the army, Josephine.*

## Compendium Catullianum

My girlfriend's sparrow is dead. It is an ex-sparrow.  
Where once it hopped about between her knees,  
Today it limps along the same dark road  
I've come to know too well since she denied me  
The pathway to her lap. Cruel Lesbia,  
You asked for this, your sparrow with its feet  
Turned upwards as yours were when in the throes  
Of love. If I say 'Screw it, it's just a sparrow'  
I court your wrath, or, worse, your cold rejection;  
But I can live with that though you weep floods,  
Since I have friends who steer well clear of war.  
Give me charm over courage every time:  
The ease of bantering chaps, a faithful love  
From women or even for them, so long as they  
Don't pester me like you and your dumb sparrow.  
Remember when I asked for a thousand kisses?  
Let's make it ten. Why not just kiss me once?  
For I, tear-drenched as when my brother died,  
Miss you the way you miss that stupid bird:  
Excruciating. Let's live and let's love.  
Our brief light spent, night is an endless sleep.

## Bugsy Siegel's Flying Eye

In Havana, at the hotel Nacional,  
Lucky Luciano, or so the story goes,  
Persuaded a reluctant Meyer Lansky  
That Bugsy Siegel, who had squandered the mob's money  
On taking years to finish the Flamingo  
And might even have skimmed from the invested capital,  
Would need to have his venture in Las Vegas  
Brought to a sudden end.

But the execution happened in LA  
With Bugsy unwisely sitting near a window.  
The first bullet took out his right eye  
And flung it far away across the carpet  
Into the tiled dining area.  
He should have known that something bad would happen  
Because when he got home he had smelled flowers  
And when there are no flowers in the house  
But you still smell them, it means death.

After the window shattered, the smell of jasmine  
Seeped through the house, but that was no premonition,  
Because Bugsy was already dead.  
Scholars still ask the question why  
He never guessed that he would soon get hit,  
Even after closing down his dream-land  
For yet another re-design. He was  
An artist among gangsters. The others weren't.

When I got to Vegas, the original Flamingo  
Had been torn down, with a garden on the site,  
But in Havana, at the Nacional,  
I met the waiter who had built a long career  
Out of once having slept with Ava Gardner,  
And I sat to drink mojitos where Meyer Lansky  
And Lucky Luciano might once have done the same  
While they pondered what to do about Bugsy.  
Maybe they did. It was mob business  
So nothing got written down. Nobody can be sure  
Of anything except that flying eye.

## Only the Immortal Need Apply

‘I am as the demon of the tumult’

– Gabriele d’Annunzio, quoted by Lucy Hughes-Hallett in *The Pike*

In Paris, at Diaghilev’s *Cleopatra* –  
Décor by Bakst, choreography by Fokine,  
Ida Rubinstein in the title role –  
D’Annunzio and his powerful halitosis  
Sat beside Robert de Montesquieu,  
The model for Proust’s Baron de Charlus.

Rubinstein, who could not dance a step,  
Merely stood there looking beautiful  
Or adopted the occasional Egyptian pose,  
While d’Annunzio laid his plans.

Backstage in her crowded dressing-room  
The Nile-nymph recovered from her exertions  
By lying back in her couch.  
D’Annunzio was six inches shorter than she was  
But her posture put him within range.

He fell to his knees and kissed her lovely legs  
Upward from toes to crotch.  
As he plunged his face into the *tarte tatin*,  
Barrès and Rostand bowed their heads in awe  
And Montesquieu adjusted his moustache.

Later on a man in the street was arrested

And charged with not being famous.  
He remains nameless to this day.

## Plot Points

On the rafting ice  
The afterbirth of seals  
Leaves stains like pink blancmange.  
Glyco proteins in the fish  
Keep them from freezing.

M13 in Hercules  
Is a globular star cluster –  
A glitterball that my mother  
Could have danced the Charleston under.  
She had lovely hands.

Renoir, choosing models, always looked  
At their hands first.  
After the war, at Lodz,  
On a tour of the concentration camp,  
Rubinstein said 'I was born here.'

In Melanesia, the House of Memories  
Contains the treasures of the tribe.  
The Somme chalk was good for tunnels.  
When the barrage broke them,  
The parapet bags spat white.

At Kokoda, the treetop phosphorescence  
Turned the night to Christmas.  
The Aussies in Tobruk  
Brushed dust from bully beef.

In the dry valleys of Antarctica  
Dust is raised by the katabatic wind.

With the *Wehrmacht* stalled in front of Moscow,  
Even the grease froze. The 88s  
Were jammed by their own shells.  
*Rasputitsa* was the mud  
Of spring thaw and autumn rain.

On a hard day in the Alhambra  
The Sultan sent an apple  
To the virgin of his choice.  
The logo on your Macbook  
Is an echo of the manner  
In which Alan Turing killed himself.

In the battle for Berlin  
The last panzers were overrun  
Before they reached the start-line.  
A dead hippo in the *Tiergarten*  
Had an unexploded mortar bomb  
Sticking out of its side.

While you were reading this  
Millions of stars moved closer  
Towards their own extinction  
So many years ago –  
But let's believe our eyes:  
They say it's all here now.

## One Elephant, Two Elephant

Denis Zafiro, Last of the Great White Hunters –  
Reduced now, a fact worth blessing, to the role of guide –  
No rifle any more, just a mid-range Japanese camera  
And even that he would keep under wraps. ‘The last  
Of the great white photographers.’ One of his jokes –

Took Hemingway out on the almost fatal safari  
In which Papa, extravagantly even for him,  
Contrived to be in a plane crash twice, thus smashing  
Himself up good, so that on his epaulettes  
Could be seen, Denis said, grey muck coming out of his skull  
Like oatmeal porridge.

                    Last of the great white contacts,  
Denis, when our safari left Nairobi  
Could have ridden up front like Rommel in his staff car  
Attacking out of retreat at Sidhi Barani,  
But no, he stayed modestly in the background  
While our cameraman, intrepid as all get out  
Knocked off the required footage of lions and tigers  
And cheetahs licking their lips, with even a glimpse of leopard,  
Considered unfindable save by Denis’s sidekick  
Kungu, who muttered comments in Swahili  
Which Denis translated as ‘Leopard over there, I think.’

And there she was, a set of spots deep in a tree-clump  
Stuck to the spot with her spots resolutely unchanging  
For the full two hours till she finally took a crap.

‘A bowel movement, but at least she moved’ jested Denis  
Who had a million of them.

So it went on:

Good usable stuff up till the day we rested  
The crew, as the union dictates. Thank God for those rules  
Or there would be crosses all over the Masai Mara  
To mark the death by exhaustion of the modern *impi*,  
The tough men in sleeveless bush shirts  
With the tricep tattoos and a camera on their shoulder  
That you and I could barely pick up. Our chap was Mike:  
‘We’re doing OK so far but nothing fantastic,  
So if you two see anything don’t for Christ’s sake tell me.’

Denis thought that an off-piste mini-safari  
With me up front while Kungu taught me Swahili  
And him in the back at ease like Diana Dors  
In a Daimler (his showbiz images tended to be  
A bit out of date, though it’s never wise to argue  
With a man who actually knew Ava Gardner),  
A trip to show me a few unscripted attractions  
That often won’t sit still for a movie camera,  
Would be a good thing. He was like a book collector  
Showing you his library. I could tell from how he spoke  
He was Africa mad, so he had his favourite locations  
For shooting stills, like a ford five miles away  
Of bumpy driving, nothing too bad, he promised.  
And pretty, even if nothing happened. Well he  
Was right, it was pretty. Just wrong about the nothing.

We stood on the inner bank of a curve in the river  
And I had to take it on trust that under the surface  
Was a shallow stretch the bigger beasts could walk on.

‘Elephant,’ he said ‘quite often cross here.  
You see whole families of them at a time.’  
As if on cue, three elephant, four elephant,  
An entire family showed up out of the bush

Which guarded the other side like a crescent moon  
And assembled on the bank. 'Well, there you are'  
Laughed Denis. 'Your luck's uncanny. Straight from the movies.  
No wonder Kungu wants to touch you so often.'

But even as he spoke, there were lots more of them,  
So the first ones had to move, like shunted box cars,  
Into the oxtail water. More than thirty  
Were now in the frame, except we had no frame;  
But Denis's Nikon made a rare appearance.  
'Well, Kungu can pick them. This is all your doing.  
I've never seen this, never in all my time  
In Africa. And neither has he.'

And Kungu was speaking:

In between the air-horn blasts from a New York gridlock  
With half of downtown occupied by Mack ten-wheelers  
I caught a few mentions of *tembo*, meaning elephant,  
But the other words were double Dutch to me.  
'He hasn't seen this since he was a boy.'  
And there were more to come, but by now the Kombis  
Of all the tourist firms were gathering  
At the point where the first family were now emerging  
To climb the bank on the side near us.

A lane was left

To let the elephant by, but the flashing lights  
On the cameras must have seemed a storm. One tusker  
Flared out its ears and bellowed. 'By Christ'  
Said Denis 'If this one charges, they all will.'  
They didn't charge, but there was a bit of a panic,  
And that was scary enough. I know I sound  
Like Falstaff telling Hal how many thieves  
He put to flight, but really there were fifty  
Elephant tightly packed and churning around  
To take their turn at scrambling from the soup.  
In the river, the tots beside their mothers

Were near invisible, their little trunks  
Held up like snorkels.

Open mouthed

(Like the Three Stooges, Denis later said,  
Bang up to date as usual. Thanks a bunch.)  
We watched one hip-deep mother tuck her trunk beneath  
Her pup and hoik him out, swing like a crane  
And put him on the bank. And guess who didn't  
Get the shot. 'Oh blast!' said Denis, fiddling  
With the switches that had changed his life.

Kungu

Was of the opinion that the magic touch  
Was mine, but he was also the first one –  
As we bumped slowly home across the veldt –  
To say what needed saying. Denis said  
'He says we have to keep our day a secret.'  
I dumbly added 'Especially from my crew.'  
'That's who he meant,' said Denis. Pale pink light  
Was growing deeper in the sky  
When we got back to camp. Cameraman Mike  
Said 'Anything good happen?' From the way  
We said it hadn't he soon guessed that it had  
But kept shtum for our young producer's sake,  
And anyway next day we filmed two leopard.

## Asma Unpacks Her Pretty Clothes

Wherever her main residence is now,  
Asma unpacks her pretty clothes.  
It takes forever: so much silk and cashmere  
To be unpeeled from clinging leaves of tissue  
By her ladies. With her perfect hands, she helps.

Out there in Syria, the torturers  
Arrive by bus at every change of shift  
While victims dangle from their cracking wrists.  
Beaten with iron bars, young people pray  
To die soon. This is the middle ages  
Brought back to living death. Her husband's doing,  
The screams will never reach her where she is.

Asma's uncovered hair had promised progress  
For all her nation's women. They believed her.  
We who looked on believed the promise too,  
But now, as she unpacks her pretty clothes,  
The dream at home dissolves in agony.

Bashar, her husband, does as he sees fit  
To cripple every enemy with pain.  
We sort of knew, but he had seemed so modern  
With Asma alongside him. His big talk  
About destroying Israel: standard stuff.  
A culture-changing wife offset all that.

She did, she did. I doted as *Vogue* did

On her sheer style. Dear God, it fooled me too,  
So now my blood is curdled by the shrieks  
Of people mad with grief. My own wrists hurt

As Asma, with her lustrous fingertips –  
She must have thought such things could never happen –  
Unpacks her pretty clothes.

## Nina Kogan's Geometrical Heaven

Two of her little pictures grace my walls:  
Suprematism in a special sense,  
With all the usual bits and pieces flying  
Through space, but carrying a pastel-tinged  
Delicacy to lighten the strict forms  
Of that hard school and blow them all sky-high,  
Splinters and stoppers from the bombing of  
An angel's boudoir. When Malevich told  
His pupils that their personalities  
Should be suppressed, the maestro little knew  
The state would soon require exactly that.  
But Nina, trying as she might, could not  
Rein in her individuality,  
And so she made these things that I own now  
And gaze at, wondering at her sad fate.  
She could have got away, but wished instead  
Her gift devoted to Utopia.  
She painted trams, designed official posters:  
Alive until the siege of Leningrad  
And then gone. Given any luck, she starved:  
But the purges were still rolling, and I fear  
The NKVD had her on a list,  
And what she faced, there at the very end,  
Was the white cold. Were there an afterlife,  
We might meet up, and I could tell her then  
Her sumptuous fragments still went flying on  
In my last hours, when I, in a warm house,  
Lay on my couch to watch them coming close,

Her proofs that any vision of eternity  
Is with us in the world, and beautiful  
Because a mind has found the way things fit  
Purely by touch. That being said, however,  
I should record that out of any five  
Pictures by Kogan, at least six are fakes.

## Star System

The stars in their magnificent array  
Look down upon the Earth, their cynosure,  
Or so it seems. They are too far away,  
In fact, to see a thing; hence they look pure  
To us. They lack the textures of our globe,  
So only we, from cameras carried high,  
Enjoy the beauty of the swirling robe  
That wraps us up, the interplay of sky  
And cloud, as if a Wedgwood plate of blue  
And white should melt, and then, its surface stirred  
With spoons, a treasure too good to be true,  
Be placed, and hover like a hummingbird,  
Drawing all eyes, though ours alone, to feast  
On splendour as it turns west from the east.

There was a time when some of our young men  
Walked plumply on the moon and saw Earth rise,  
As stunning as the sun. The years since then  
Have aged them. Now and then somebody dies.  
It's like a clock, for those of us who saw  
The Saturn rockets going up as if  
Mankind had energy to burn. The law  
Is different for one man. Time is a cliff  
You come to in the dark. Though you might fall  
As easily as on a feather bed,  
It is a sad farewell. You loved it all.  
You dream that you might keep it in your head.  
But memories, where can you take them to?

Take one last look at them. They end with you.

And still the Earth revolves, and still the blaze  
Of stars maintains a show of vigilance.  
It should, for long ago, in olden days,  
We came from there. By luck, by fate, by chance,  
All of the elements that form the world  
Were sent by cataclysms deep in space,  
And from their combination life unfurled  
And stood up straight, and wore a human face.  
I still can't pass a mirror. Like a boy,  
I check my looks, and now I see the shell  
Of what I was. So why, then, this strange joy?  
Perhaps an old man dying would do well  
To smile as he rejoins the cosmic dust  
Life comes from, for resign himself he must.

## Change of Domicile

Installed in my last house, I face the thought  
That fairly soon there will be one house more,  
Lacking the pictures and the books that here  
Surround me with abundant evidence  
I spent a lifetime pampering my mind.  
The new place will be of a different sort,  
Dark and austere, and I will have to find  
My way along its unforthcoming walls.  
Help is at hand here should I fall, but there  
There will be no-one to turn on the lights  
For me, and I will know I am not blind  
Only by glimpses when the empty halls  
Lead me to empty rooms, in which the nights  
Succeed each other with no day between.

I may not see my tattered Chinese screen  
Again, but I shall have time to reflect  
That what I miss was just the bric-a-brac  
I kept with me to blunt my solitude,  
Part of my brave face when my life was wrecked  
By my gift for deceit. Truth clears away  
So many souvenirs. The shelves come clean.  
In the last, the truly last house there will be  
No treasured smithereens to take me back  
To when things hung together. I'll conclude  
The way that I began so long ago:  
With nothingness, but know it fit for me  
This time around, now I am brought so low,

Yet ready to move soon. When, I can't say.

## Rounded with a Sleep

The sun seems in control, the tide is out:  
Out to the sandbar shimmers the lagoon.  
The little children sprint, squat, squeal and shout.  
These shallows will be here until the moon  
Contrives to reassert its influence,  
And anyway, by then it will be dark.  
Old now and sick, I ponder the immense  
Ocean upon which I will soon embark:  
As if held in abeyance by dry land  
It waits for me beyond that strip of sand.

It won't wait long. Just for the moment, though,  
There's time to question if my present state  
Of bathing in this flawless afterglow  
Is something I deserve. I left it late  
To come back to my family. Here they are,  
Camped on their towels and putting down their books  
To watch my grand-daughter, a natural star,  
Cartwheel and belly-flop. The whole scene looks  
As if I thought it up to soothe my soul.  
But in Arcadia, Death plays a role:

A leading role, and suddenly I wake  
To realise that I've been sound asleep  
Here at my desk. I just wish the mistake  
Were rare, and not so frequent I could weep.  
The setting alters, but the show's the same:  
One long finale, soaked through with regret,

Somehow designed to expiate self-blame.  
But still there is no end, at least not yet:  
No cure, that is, for these last years of grief  
As I repent and yet find no relief.

My legs are sore, and it has gone midnight.  
I've had my last of lounging on the beach  
To see the sweet oncoming sunset light  
Touching the water with a blush of peach,  
Smoothing the surface like a ballroom floor  
As all my loved ones pack up from their day  
And head back up the cliff path. This for sure:  
Even the memories will be washed away,  
If not by waves, by rain, which I see fall,  
Drenching the flagstones and the garden wall.

My double doors are largely glass. I stand  
Often to contemplate the neat back yard  
My elder daughter with her artist's hand  
Designed for me. This winter was less hard  
Than its three predecessors were. The snow  
Failed to arrive this time, but rain, for me,  
Will also do to register time's flow.  
The rain, the snow, the inexorable sea:  
I get the point. I'll climb the stairs to bed,  
Perhaps to dream I'm somewhere else instead.

All day tomorrow I have tests and scans,  
And everything that happens will be real.  
My blood might say I should make no more plans,  
And when it does so, that will be the deal.  
But until then I love to speak with you  
Each day we meet. Sometimes we even touch  
Across the sad gulf that I brought us to.  
Just for a time, so little means so much:  
More than I'm worth, I know, as I know how  
My death is something I must live with now.

## Elementary Sonnet

Tired out from getting up and getting dressed  
I lie down for a while to get some rest,  
And so begins another day of not  
Achieving much except to dent the cot  
For just the depth appropriate to my weight –  
Which is no chasm, in my present state.  
By rights my feet should barely touch the floor  
And yet my legs are heavy metal. More  
And more I sit down to write less and less,  
Taking a half hour's break from helplessness  
To craft a single stanza meant to give  
Thanks for the heartbeat which still lets me live:  
A consolation even now, so late –  
When soon my poor bed will be smooth and straight.

## Leçons de ténèbres

But are they lessons, all these things I learn  
Through being so far gone in my decline?  
The wages of experience I earn  
Would service well a younger life than mine.  
I should have been more kind. It is my fate  
To find this out, but find it out too late.

The mirror holds the ruins of my face  
Roughly together, thus reminding me  
I should have played it straight in every case,  
Not just when forced to. Far too casually  
I broke faith when it suited me, and here  
I am alone, and now the end is near.

All of my life I put my labour first.  
I made my mark, but left no time between  
The things achieved, so, at my heedless worst,  
With no life, there was nothing I could mean.  
But now I have slowed down. I breathe the air  
As if there were not much more of it there

And write these poems, which are funeral songs  
That have been taught to me by vanished time:  
Not only to enumerate my wrongs  
But to pay homage to the late sublime  
That comes with seeing how the years have brought  
A fitting end, if not the one I sought.

## Winter Plums

Two winter plum trees grow beside my door.  
Throughout the cold months they had little pink  
Flowers all over them as if they wore  
Nightdresses, and their branches, black as ink  
By sunset, looked as if a Japanese  
Painter, while painting air, had painted these

Two winter plum trees. Summer now at last  
Has warmed their leaves and all the blooms are gone.  
A year that I might not have had has passed.  
Bare branches are my signal to go on,  
But soon the brave flowers of the winter plums  
Will flare again, and I must take what comes:

Two winter plum trees that will outlive me.  
Thriving with colour even in the snow,  
They'll snatch a triumph from adversity.  
All right for them, but can the same be so  
For someone who, seeing their buds remade  
From nothing, will be less pleased than afraid?

## Spring Snow Dancer

Snow into April. Frost night after night.  
Out on the Welsh farms the lambs die unborn.  
The chill air hurts my lungs, but from the light  
It could be spring. Bitter as it is bright,  
The last trick of the cold is a false dawn.

I breathed, grew up, and now I learn to be  
Glad for my long life as it melts away,  
Yet still regales me with so much to see  
Of how we live in continuity  
And die in it. Take what I saw today:

My granddaughter, as quick as I could glance,  
Did ballet steps across the kitchen floor,  
And this time I was breathless at the chance  
By which I'd lived to see our dear lamb dance –  
Though soon I will not see her any more.

## **Mysterious Arrival of the Dew**

Tell me about the dew. Some say it falls  
But does it fall in fact? And if it fall  
Then where does it fall from? And why, in falling,  
Does it not obscure the moon?

Dew on the hibiscus, dew on the cobweb,  
Dew on the broken leaf,  
The world's supply of diamond ear-rings  
Tossed from a car window.

Some intergalactic hoodlum sugar-daddy  
Is trying to get girls.  
Goethe had a name for these flattering droplets:  
Shiver-pearls. Grab a handful.

Statistics say dew doesn't fall at all:  
Going nowhere near the moon,  
It just gathers on any susceptible surface  
When the temperature is right.

There is talk in every arid country  
Of collecting it by the truck-load,  
But the schemes get forgotten in the sun  
As soon as it sucks up those trillion baubles.

Tell me about the dew. Is it a case  
Of falling back the better to advance,  
By the same veil, shawl or glittering pashmina

As last time out? But darling, it's to die for.

## Cabin Baggage

My niece is heading here to stay with us.  
Before she leaves home she takes careful stock  
Of what she might not know again for years.  
The berries (so she writes) have been brought in,  
But she'll be gone before the peaches come.  
On days of burning sun, the air is tinged  
With salt and eucalyptus. 'Why am I  
Leaving all this behind? I feel a fool.'  
But I can tell from how she writes things down  
The distance will assist her memories  
To take full form. She travels to stay still.  
I wish I'd been that smart before I left.  
Instead, I have to dig deep for a trace  
Of how the beach was red hot underfoot,  
The green gold of the Christmas beetle's wing.

## Transit Visa

He had not thought that it would be his task  
To gauge the force of the oncoming wave  
Of night; to cast aside his jester's mask,  
Guessing it was not Ali Baba's cave  
That would engulf him, but an emptiness  
Devoid of treasure heaped to serve his dreams;  
His best hope, to be set free from distress.  
No guiding light, not even moonlight beams,  
Will lead him forward to find life refined  
Into a fit reward or punishment:  
No soul can well continue when the mind  
Fades with the body. All his store is spent  
Of pride, or guilt, or anything that might  
Have steeled him for the non-stop outbound flight

Were it to lead somewhere, but it does not.  
That much becomes clear as the sky grows dark.  
He hears the rattle of his childhood cot,  
The rain that fills the creek that floods the park:  
But these are memories. The way ahead  
Will send no messages that can be kept.  
One doesn't even get to meet the dead.  
You planned to see the bed where Dido slept?  
No chance. It didn't last the course. Back then  
They forged the myths that feed our poetry  
Not for our sake, but theirs, to soothe them when  
Life was so frightful that death had to be  
A better place, a holiday from fear.

But now we know that paradise is here,

As is the underworld. To no new dawn  
He gets him gone, nor yet a starry hour  
Of silence. He goes back to being born  
And then beyond that, though he feels the power  
Of all creation when he lifts a book,  
Or when a loved face smiles at his new joke,  
Which could well be his last: but now just look  
At how the air, before he turns to smoke,  
Is glowing in the window. If the glass  
Were brighter it would melt. That radiance  
Is not a way of saying this will pass:  
It says this will remain. No play of chance  
From now on includes you. The world you quit  
Is staying here, so say goodbye to it.

## Japanese Maple

Your death, near now, is of an easy sort.  
So slow a fading out brings no real pain.  
Breath growing short  
Is just uncomfortable. You feel the drain  
Of energy, but thought and sight remain:

Enhanced, in fact. When did you ever see  
So much sweet beauty as when fine rain falls  
On that small tree  
And saturates your brick back garden walls,  
So many Amber Rooms and mirror halls?

Ever more lavish as the dusk descends  
This glistening illuminates the air.  
It never ends.  
Whenever the rain comes it will be there,  
Beyond my time, but now I take my share.

My daughter's choice, the maple tree is new.  
Come autumn and its leaves will turn to flame.  
What I must do  
Is live to see that. That will end the game  
For me, though life continues all the same:

Filling the double doors to bathe my eyes,  
A final flood of colours will live on  
As my mind dies,  
Burned by my vision of a world that shone

So brightly at the last, and then was gone.

## Balcony Scene

Old as the hills and riddled with ill health,  
I talk the talk but cannot walk the walk  
Save at the pace of drying paint. My wealth  
Of stamina is spent. Think of the hawk,  
Nailed to its perch by lack of strength, that learns  
To sing the lark's song. What else can it do,  
While dreaming of the day its power returns?  
It is with all my heart I write to you.

My heart alone is what it always was.  
The ultrasound shows nothing wrong with it,  
And if we smile at that, then it's because  
We both know that its physical remit  
Was only half the task the poor thing faced.  
My heart had spiritual duties too,  
And failed at all of them. Worse than a waste  
Was how I hurt myself through hurting you.

Or so he says, you think. I know your fear  
That my repentance comes too easily.  
But to discuss this, let me lure you here,  
To sit with me on my stone balcony.  
A hint of winter cools the air, but still  
It shines like summer. Here I can renew  
My wooing, as a cunning stranger will.  
His role reversed, your suitor waits for you.

The maple tree, the autumn crocuses –

They think it's spring, and that their lives are long –  
Lend colour to the green and grey. This is  
A setting too fine for a life gone wrong.  
It needs your laughter. Let me do my best  
To earn that much, though you not find me true,  
Or good, or fair, or fit for any test.  
You think that I don't know my debt to you?

High overhead, a pair of swallows fly,  
Programmed for Africa, but just for now  
They seem sent solely to enchant the eye  
Here in this refuge I acquired somehow  
Beyond my merit. Now a sudden wave  
Of extra sunlight sharpens all the view.  
There is a man here you might care to save  
From too much solitude. He calls for you.

Here two opposing forces will collide –  
Your proper anger and my shamed regret –  
With all the weight of justice on your side.  
But once we gladly spoke and still might yet.  
Come, then, and do not hesitate to say  
Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?  
Be wary, but don't brush these words away,  
For they are all yours. I wrote this for you.

## Sunset Hails a Rising

*O lente, lente currite noctis equi!*

– Marlowe, after Ovid

*La mer, la mer, toujours recommencée.*

– Valéry

Dying by inches, I can hear the sound  
Of all the fine words for the flow of things  
The poets and philosophers have used  
To mark the path into the killing ground.  
Perhaps their one aim was to give words wings,  
Or even just to keep themselves amused,  
With no thought that they might not be around  
To see the rising sun:  
But still they found a measure for our plight  
As we prepare to leave the world of men.  
Run slowly, slowly, horses of the night.  
The sea, the sea, always begun again.

In English of due tact, the great lines gain  
More than they lose. The grandeur that they keep  
From being born in other tongues than ours  
Suggests we will have time to taste the rain  
As we are drawn into the dreamless sleep  
That lasts so long. No supernatural powers  
Need be invoked by us to help explain  
How we will see the world  
Dissolve into the mutability

That feeds the future with our fading past:  
The sea, the always self-renewing sea.  
The horses of the night that run so fast.

## *A Note on the Text*

In the poem 'Only the Immortal Need Apply', the scene at the Russian Ballet (*Tableau! Scandale!* as the central figure might have said) is taken from Lucy Hughes-Hallett's biography of Gabriele d'Annunzio, *The Pike*.

The title of 'Sunset Hails a Rising' started life as a line in a poem by Francis Webb, an Australian poet of the previous generation who spent much of his life as a mental patient. His poems rarely cohered but some of them contained fragments too beautiful to forget. In the same poem, the line from *Doctor Faustus* about the horses of the night was taken from Ovid by Marlowe, who left it in the Latin, changing only the word order. The line from Valéry can be found in *Le Cimetière Marin*, best translated by Derek Mahon; although the two translations here, like the two translations from Marlowe's Latin, are both my own.

In 'Mysterious Arrival of the Dew' every line of the first stanza, with the addition of only a single word, is a *trouvaille* taken from a single paragraph of one of Patrick O'Brian's later novels in the Jack Aubrey sequence.

When I was young, the name of the Sydney suburb Tempe was so closely associated with industrial waste that I later thought Keats was joking when he used the name Tempe as short-hand for Arcadia. Later still, while I was living in England, Tempe Dump disappeared among the new constructions for the railway approach to Sydney airport. *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

The two separate mentions of Ava Gardner are a coincidence, although I should confess that when I was twelve years old her appearance in *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* marked me for life, and that I was forever afterwards the Dutchman, played by James Mason as the commander of a

ghost ship who was given to reciting quatrains from the Fitzgerald translation of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* while he sailed in perpetual search of the woman who would redeem him from his anguish. Later on, when I met my future wife, it turned out that she was in perpetual search of James Mason.

The title of *Compendium Catullianum* was devised for me by Mary Beard in collaboration with Dr Rupert Thompson, the Orator of Cambridge University.

The dedicatory epigraph is my own translation of a fragment from Rilke.

ALSO BY CLIVE JAMES

Autobiography

*Unreliable Memoirs*    *Falling Towards England*  
*May Week Was In June*    *North Face of Soho*  
*The Blaze of Obscurity*

FICTION

*Brilliant Creatures*    *The Remake*  
*Brrm! Brrm!*    *The Silver Castle*

VERSE

*Other Passports: Poems 1958–1985*  
*The Book of My Enemy: Collected Verse 1958–2003*  
*Opal Sunset: Selected Poems 1958–2008*  
*Angels Over Elsinore: Collected Verse 2003–2008*  
*Nefertiti in the Flak Tower*

TRANSLATION

*The Divine Comedy*

CRITICISM

*The Metropolitan Critic (new edition, 1994)*  
*Visions Before Midnight*    *The Crystal Bucket*  
*First Reactions (US)*    *From the Land of Shadows*  
*Glued to the Box*    *Snakecharmers in Texas*  
*The Dreaming Swimmer*    *Fame in the Twentieth Century*  
*On Television*    *Even As We Speak*    *Reliable Essays*  
*As of is Writing (US)*    *The Meaning of Recognition*  
*Cultural Amnesia*    *The Revolt of the Pendulum*  
*A Point of View*    *Poetry Notebook*

TRAVEL

*Flying Visits*

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There are editors and poetry editors to thank: of the *New Yorker*, the *Yale Review*, the *New Statesman*, the *Spectator*, *Standpoint*, *Quadrant*, the *Australian* and the *British Medical Journal: Supportive and Palliative Care*. But above all other editors I must thank Alan Jenkins of the *TLS*, who encouraged me in the notion that a poet who is up against it might well make a subject out of being up against it. At my base in Cambridge, Susie Young and Dawn Crow combined their efforts to guide a stream of electronic manuscripts into my website and out again. I should also thank the editors and anchor-persons of various radio and television stations in the UK, Ireland, Australia and Canada who kindly asked me to read some of these poems aloud: an offence, perhaps, to those who believe that a poem should be merely overheard, but an unbeatable way of barking for one's act.



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