

## DIESEL ON GRAVEL

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The 1959 Cadillac car speaks so eloquently—in so many ways—of the man who sits at its wheel. Simply because it is a Cadillac, for instance, it indicates his high level of personal achievement. Because it is so beautiful and so majestic, it bespeaks his fine sense of taste. And because it is so economical to own and to operate, it testifies to his great practical wisdom. Why not visit your dealer tomorrow—and arrange to let a new Cadillac tell its wonderful story about you? In fact, the car's extraordinary reception has made it imperative that you place your order at an early date.

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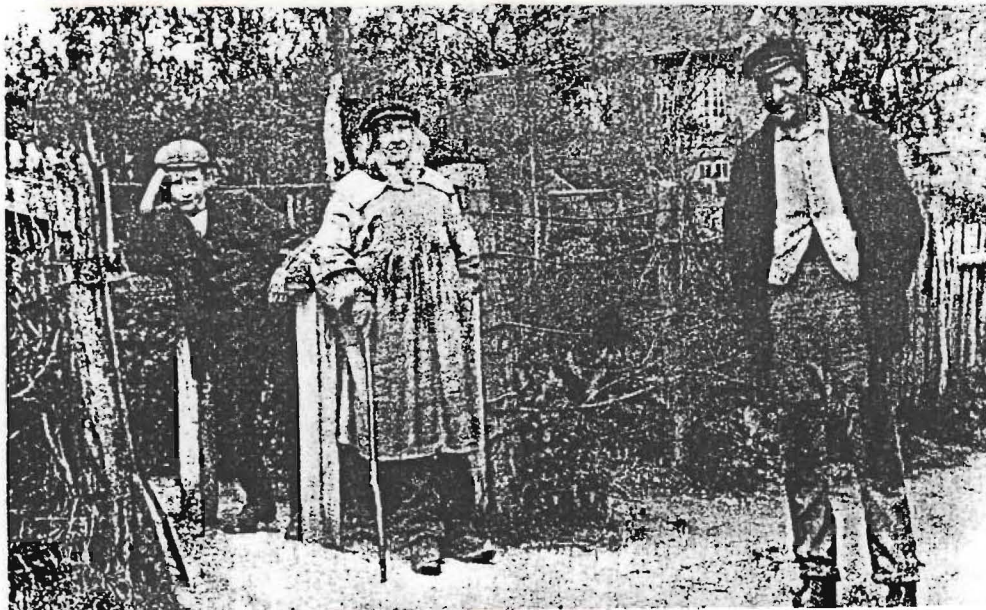
## POEMS

SHAUN BELCHER

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The submarine

The backwater lay heavy  
and muddy under the June sky.  
Clay was drying on my boots and jeans.  
Looked like milk chocolate.

I kept watching the line to my float  
as it drifted downstream.

Then; right below my feet,  
the biggest fish I'd ever seen.  
A black carp.  
A real rarity in these waters.

Nobody would've believed me  
if I'd told 'em.

It might as well have been a submarine.

Ten years later.  
Ten years staring over the water.  
I have learnt that other things,  
closer to home,  
cannot be believed.

Some emotions,  
some people.



NOT THIS ONE

Confetti

I never thought  
things could get so disorderd,  
interrupted, changed.  
So thoroughly mixed up.  
There was a silence.  
Then, still staring out the window,  
words fell again.

A waitress was leaning  
from a barstool.  
She was watering a basket of flowers.  
For one split second  
the features of your face  
dissolved  
in the bright sunlight  
flashing through the spray.

Then everything was back  
just as it was before.

We were no longer in love.  
Nothing on earth was gonna  
push that particular car up the hill.

Five months later  
the confetti pours down your face  
settles on another man's shoes.

That day in the restaurant  
I watched.  
The waitress carefully swept  
up wet petals.  
Into a dustpan.  
Into a bin.

As she did she was singing  
to something we both knew  
on the tape machine.

Then it ended.



The wooden hide

I return to the wooden hide  
once fresh with creosote.  
Schools use it now to study nature.

I held you here  
feet slipping in the pine-needles.  
The stale air of an indian summer  
drifting through the high branches.

I touch the rough wood  
weathered by another two summers.  
The feel of it  
brings back your memory  
as if preserved in the wood.

Fat goldfish bask in the shallows.  
The sworls on the water  
shimmer like water in a wasp-jar  
on a sunlit windowsill.

For a moment I am lost  
sunk in sweet memories.

Then begins the slow gentle glide  
of something new  
arriving with wary eyes  
over the baited line.

Parliament of flowers

The air between us was thick  
with unignited powder.  
A parliament of thoughts  
waiting for a spark.

Somehow  
it was not what was said  
that caused the flare-ups  
but the little doubts  
packed like powder  
in crevices.

I saw a Walt Disney film once.  
Pinocchio or maybe  
Alice in Wonderland.  
Anyway, in it  
there were these bright  
purple fireflies,  
and they reminded me of..

Her words on the telephone  
that last night.  
It seemed I could see them  
words floating like fireflies  
round her head.

I will..good..not..then..

The tinder had already caught.  
The barrel was about to explode  
and coyote get burnt.

STAVIN BEZ CITER

Come easy

Nearer to this spot  
than you are to me now  
sat an old grey water tank.  
Someone had dragged it out  
of the house last summer.

Sitting on it I realised  
that some things  
could come easy.

I'd taken a copy of Carver's 'Fires'  
into the garden to read.

Soon the sun fell  
and the words on the page  
grew fainter.  
Soon the whole street  
these crumbling houses  
even my dark room  
will fade too.

A builder excavating  
in the future  
will find traces.  
Tin foil, blue plastic brush,  
shards of plates and cups.  
Something small.

Set down in the dark soil  
like words in chalk  
on a blackboard  
half-rubbed.  
An archaeology of love.



## The sanitary engineers

Everything depends on  
a bucket  
a trowel  
and the hand that scoops  
and lays the cement.

These are the tools  
you need to mend a sewer.

There's an art to it  
my dad explained.

If you don't leave it  
clean and smooth,  
especially at the joints,  
well then  
shit, paper, every other  
bloody thing  
is gonna stick to it.

He was teaching me  
that a job  
worth doing is worth doing well.  
Not to leave it stinking.

Or as W.C. Williams stated in a letter  
to R. Creeley..

' Sanitation, that we may have  
hygienic writing.'

Letter from a municipal building

Diesel on gravel

A speaker distorting.  
Fading to a hum.  
A train shoots across the Thames.

Since your leaving  
diesel from a broken engine  
has seeped into the gravel path.

I am stricken  
by a sense of unfulfilled journey.  
Of something slowly spoiling  
that I will never see again.

Brunel is with us.

Eyes like detonators  
driving through the chalk and lime.  
Pulling us all out to sea.

Letter from a municipal building

lissel on gravel

Here smoke going nowhere.  
Blossom not yet fallen.  
A day as still as the flags on the flagpoles.

As if this day could not rise  
and throw off this sweaty blanket of evening.

Then the rain comes.  
The avenues of mustard brick and blue glass  
the geranium paths steam  
like a body stepping from a bath.

Where you are now  
flowers on a table tremble  
as the thunder begins.  
Your new guest has toppled your drink  
into your lap  
so you stand in front of a fire.  
The flowers on your dress  
steaming.

Here, where I am.  
Petals are clogging the drains  
and sticking to the red pillar box.

You never read  
or listened  
to one word  
I ever fucking said.



Searching for a tomb

Sun shone warm on the bonnet  
as we pulled up the gravel drive.  
The old rectory stood deserted.  
The congregation has been dwindling  
these five years and twenty.

My father's wellington's flap  
as he strides off through the wet grass.  
I have a photo of him  
sitting in his stepfather's arms  
holding a team of horses  
pulling a plough aged about ten.

Here we are.  
Two figures caught in the open.  
Standing in a churchyard.  
Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire.  
On a frosty November evening.

My father is circling the headstones  
and green iron crosses, looking.

A flock of doves twist and jink  
in the blue air above us.

We stare down like two men on a bridge.  
Staring into clear and shallow sunlit water  
Searching for the shadow of a fish.

The father he has never seen.  
The grandfather I will never meet.

Dear John Clare

They come and come again  
talking 'sense of place'  
'landscape tradition'  
and 'peasant poet of Helpston'

I hear  
the drum of chicken feed  
on corrugated iron

the bells of my place

particular eh? if not

fuck 'em  
and would bless ya.

Sweet williams

There's an itch in my underpants  
lack of hygiene  
as I sit and read  
something  
I wonder what to eat  
listen  
or think about now.

Next door have got an electronic clock  
with a simulated tick.  
Here we've got a damp copy  
of 'Metamorphosis' by the sink  
cos we're bohemian livers.

Down the road there's a government dept.  
where they're busing sorting  
haves from have-nots.

Dogs howl.  
The light hits the streets.

Q. What is this island?

- A. 1. A beach facing the atlantic.  
2. Sweet williams  
3. None of these.

Please tick your answer.



From a stranger field

Being only loosed of ties and no more  
able to find that path out of the village  
I begin to climb the wet chalk track.  
A landrover slips a gear behind me  
a wood-pigeon, startled,  
drops moss and twigs on the tarmac.

Under trees and hills  
I totter like a diver above green water.

Behind me the traffic cuts a swathe  
to Reading and the capital.  
Lorries sway in the wind  
as two lovers on the opposite hill  
drop like bales from a cart into the cornfield.

---

Hands break stalks.  
Feet break stems.

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The nearer I got to the centre of what I hoped to  
find out here the higher the lie of it grew.  
I looked for a retreat from the brick and tar and light.  
A new city to block out the old.  
But the margins have already been pressed back.  
The machinery has been developed.

Sweet landscape turning to ruined ecology

I went back to the city.

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Her cardigan fell from her shoulder.  
A stalk dug deep in his side.

## Last orders

Maybe three times a year  
you and I and the air  
get as close as now.

Gnats swirling  
in the chestnut trees  
behind the closed garage and baptist church.  
Netted windows open but silent.  
Houses swimming in heat.

Before thunder it gets like this.

Couples out walking  
in clammy anoraks.

Glasses rise to lips  
in a dark bar where the storm  
lights the bulbs early.  
Rain is pouring now  
down the silver children's slide  
as the tropical fish  
rise to the tank's surface.

The hours of flash and noise  
work into our pores.

We foam on the sea-swell  
of sheets stained with sweat.

Then you are gone  
in a dress  
colour of angel-fish  
as water pours  
into the river  
in the morning.

### Grand canyon mornings

The tent was usually brought out in the summer holidays when mother's temper frayed and damp grass mornings gave way to mist on the hills at midday. The cupboards tumbled open.

Our neighbours would put up with my sister and me as we squabbled and wrestled with their two children. Minutes then hours used up in lets-pretend and arguing.

Inside the tent my face pressed down on the cold blue groundsheet I could smell its plastic. Rubbing with my hands I could feel whorls of grass and stones beneath it.

Outside the black garden hose is snaking round half-naked bodies, laughter, shouting. Inside the tent I have dragged some old copies of the National Geographic. They had been collected by an older son now away at police training college. I found them in a dusty cupboard behind the neighbours settee. From there I would swing them in bundles past their black and white T.V. set, their brown Hoover and out through the french windows.

In the blue and yellow shade of the tent I'd stare at the brilliant pictures. Fish on the barrier reef, New Guinea tribesmen, american cities at dusk, the grand canyon at dawn, baseball stars etc. The pages were highly coloured not like the colour photos people were starting to get back from our local chemists. Sky blues, vermillions, salmon pink, turquoise, colours off of my watercolour set with the cowboy saloon tin lid that seemed to vibrate on the page.

These colours grew as the world outside bleached away in the hot afternoon. The flats behind us with their checker-board patterned stairwells fading as I stared across wide prairies where six combine-harvesters worked at once on fields as big as England.

A whole world waiting, full of colour, adventure, sex, bigger than the grand canyon, brighter than mardi - gras. I'm still waiting. My world is still black and white, it costs a whole lot more to add colour.



Midnight on the Great Western

Found in the water

A verandah of worn grey planks  
A breeze rippling the exposed four inches of petticoat  
You appear to be frothing with each breathing movement  
Like sheep pouring down green hills.

Under the cool blue silk your hand has gathered  
in the shadows.  
I am stood behind you.  
I stare at the remains of a meal.  
Half eaten fruit on the table.

In the muzzled light through the lace curtains  
I can see a line of poplar trees leading down to the  
edge of the river.

Gudgeon-fishers in striped blazers  
are emptying their fine nets of fish  
Outside on the line skirts are hung to billow  
I raise the curtain.

You murmur, your eyes reflecting  
the evening sun.  
You who were found in the water.

You who make me speechless.

## Midnight on the Great Western

Ba da de dum. Outside the lilac trees and the horse-chestnuts drip in a slow rain from the downs. A record spins and the manner of writing centres the experience, drawing the quiet of this valley in and down to the point of a line.

Trees have been pruned on the playing-fields. Water is trickling along the wet chalk forming white pools below the road signs.

Tomorrow wheels will splash. Cattle trucks on their way to market.

Children riding to school, delivery-men, builders. All wrapped up in the moist air of an early morning in June.

The scent of it. Perfumes rising from fenced gardens. Picture-book creations flawed only by the odd overturned toy or child's bicycle.

Flowers sway, voices drift from curtained rooms until silence covers the town again. Like a record beating through to a scratch of silence. To note it down seems to squeeze it dry. The atmosphere like pollen brushes each word then drifts away...imagine.

I have become a toy train forever circling a contrived landscape.

Three miles from here an enthusiast has built a model railway. It mimics a perfection absent from reality. Each cardboard cottage and painted sponge tree a more eloquent presentation of these facts as we would like them to be. A pastoral dream.

We only approximate our past through language and landscapes of the mind. These models seem to provide images of loss and gain on a deliberately smaller scale. As if looking through the wrong end of a telescope or glimpsing cotton-wool steam clouds somehow made it easier. The engine of writing bursts out of the tunnel and the windows of our cottage blur and condense to ink and water. Ba da dum, ba da dum. The rhythms of trains, heartbeats, pen on paper. On my arm there is a bramble scratch. I do not know how it got there.

Brought together

Caught out  
the mind believes  
that the lampshade is being rocked  
by wind pressing up the city hill.  
Over the sills  
maybe  
whistles a new realism.

But now,  
looking straight  
into the blue flame of the  
paraffin fire.  
I see that it is caused  
by that object's  
distorting heat.

My thoughts bubble up  
spread out  
like air trapped in ice.

Since you last came here  
spring has left the trees greener.  
New breezes have blown  
through London's bridges.  
Whilst the branches and clothes-lines  
have been flapping.  
I have remained still, indoors.

My mind playing tricks.  
In a hot room  
that without you  
seems colder.

1986

The university parks

Moving three paces forward under an August sun  
one silent figure, bent double  
is caught between strokes at the net.  
A slow beating of time away  
until match end.

Keeping your figure in mind.  
A white petal rocking on blue water.  
I fill this Oxford evening with the glint and glitter  
of that day with you on these clay beds.

We sat here, our feet lapped by Chiltern rain  
watching the same punts stagger down the stream.

Cyprus, Jordan, Arkansas.  
An exotica of gardening.  
Over both our heads the evergreens swayed.

I held on.

But the first breath of winter  
scuttles leaves across the pitches  
because it is November.  
I have returned to our green river.

We had confused want with need.

The wind spins the dead leaves  
across the water.

The flicker

As a child of five  
I remember seeing  
a magpie land  
outside a schoolroom  
bordered by curtains.

It was the day to sit  
and watch the screen of  
the black and white television.

Only the sky for colour.

Later I saw  
a white car on rain black tarmac.

A marble  
spin through chairs  
toward the blackboard.

I was learning  
I suppose.  
How to reach for things.  
With joined up writing.  
With words.

Like a magpie.  
Stealing from inside.

The flicker.



## Freighters

solid rain  
seven days  
'It's been years since we saw this much water'  
the well overflowing.  
gutters bending  
swamped.  
' Well boy, good weather for ducks,  
not men aye?'  
In the barn's shadow we sheltered.  
Comments running out  
'til silent we watched.  
The barrel swelling,  
barrow rusting,  
wheel jet black  
upturned on the red sand.  
And far off  
a rook flew from  
a high tree.  
Dragging like a freighter in a muddy current.  
I will have to leave here when I am older.  
To go where the rain is going  
at the same speed.



The channels

here I lay  
in that garden  
a whole morning.

thought of cart  
upended next a farm, Devon.  
thought fall of gull  
wheeling home.

seeds of travel  
follow me  
heads bending  
spilling across the green meadows.

friends 'cross country  
unremembered.

but no answer comes  
no hoof  
rattling white cracked soil  
no sails on black water  
no chiming lines on poles

just two salmon pink  
roses sway  
in a cobalt blue sky

their scent  
ascending.

Snowflakes

slop of cloud ash  
    piping of weir rim  
        hollow prints lay  
            to edge of day

single figure standstill  
    to beck of shutter  
        face to cold blooming  
            below rigid oak pauses

discharge of dead leaf  
    white clinker falling  
        circling black playground  
            registered tree springing

at blue garage doors  
    a mechanic steaming  
        over cemetery gates  
            rooks wheeling, falling

        dropping  
        like  
        hulls  
        caught in  
        ice-packs.

St Germain

St. Germain

birch and elm sprawling  
down to salt water

a high platform  
lashed by southern gales

look at these trees closer now

a seen beauty no more

out in the estuary  
rivulets round broken bows  
broken timbers

now closed on a bus, London  
'fuck you, ye' bastards'

true sounds rising up  
washing the decks with bile

England.

his alter  
eastward  
raining

St Erth

As palm leaves bristle  
milk slops around a brown bowl  
so the slow stalling train  
from Plymouth docks  
fills the rails

between slam  
step and silence  
the figure of a priest emerges  
blinking  
black coat on white platform

things coming to rest  
on the western tip  
of a grey island

his stare circles out  
beach  
sky  
wind  
sea  
sand  
he taps heel to flagstone  
echoes  
emptiness

watering eyes  
he returns a gaze  
spanning fields , valleys,  
hills under cloud

England.

his alter  
eastwards  
raining

The swerve

Swinging across field  
bowler's arm of tarmac  
hard-core  
cement and sand  
cutter of thin swathe  
toward dock  
Greenwich  
fen flats to Tems  
wiggling through brick  
pick of hawk eye  
lifted on thermals  
on grass fires  
this bird slips eastwards  
over marshland  
reservoirs  
mudflats  
water

shimmering pattern  
waves  
like scales  
rib of fresh trout  
feather skid in air  
landing for catch  
hawk gleans  
prised from shadows skimmed

to six feet  
human level  
sudden deflection  
as of fish seen  
through water

body, talons  
swerve  
heads to gravel bank  
a furred sail tacking

now rests  
in patch of flint, shale  
a still stalk  
ripening to the kill.

The owl and the binder

Look, up there!  
Up there beyond the high beams.

Where said I  
following his finger  
Impatient.

Only seeing dust rising in swirls  
meeting the sunlight shed on the barns  
far brick wall.

Not fair, I never see it.  
Playground tears.

Trust eroding like the  
rusted bucket supporting me.  
I stared for a year.

But I did see it.  
Much later.  
High up and frighteningly large.

My grandad said I ran out of there faster  
than a rabbit scuttling from a binder.

Barn, grandad, owl now all gone.

But words remain

Look, follow my finger.



The shepherd's departure

So my train of thought  
noses south through England.  
On these tracks paring  
Thames Valley from Wessex.

I sit straight-backed  
eyes tired by writing.  
A watcher of sheep pen.  
A green hand at lambing.

This is my land.  
This gravel crossed by rails.  
This corn blistered with poppies.  
This land carved by industry.

Knowing no other.  
Words are bound to it.

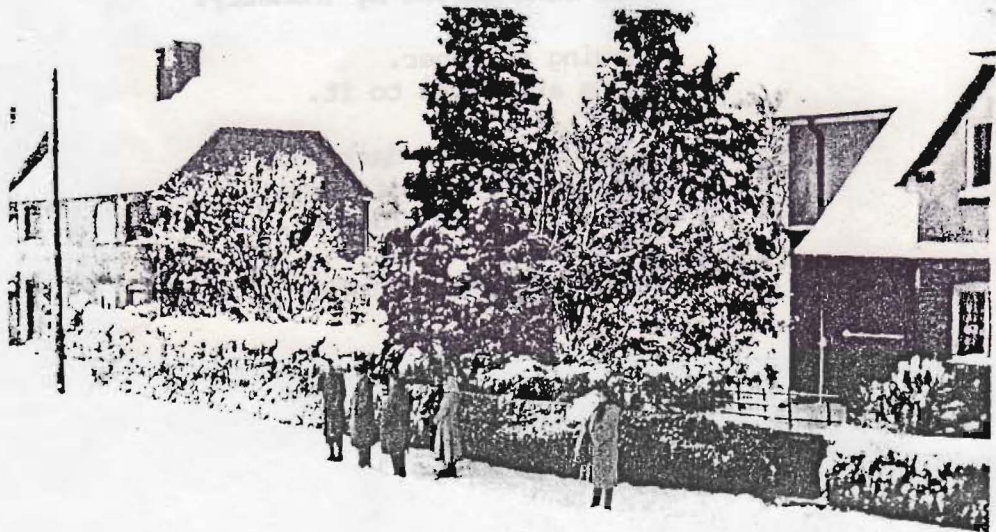
I crouch by the dark barn  
with my harvest of words  
and a taper smouldering.

Ready to change things.

### Snow

One evening my dad had to come and pick me up after school. The lift that had been arranged for me was caught in the snow. So he balanced me on the crossbar of his old rudge bicycle, bought the year before he married, and I was pedalled back up the hill to the farm cottage where we lived. It must have been one of the coldest nights of the sixties. The river hadn't quite frozen but for as far as I could see the world was either black or white and I thought it would stay like that for ever and ever. It didn't.

1987



Uncollected poems.

---

We are here

where are we?  
we are in a city  
we have been moving quickly  
because it is late  
and there are less  
people on the road

could you tell?  
could you tell me how to  
sing, yes sing the praises  
of this dark and gleaming  
city, this mass  
sodden in two thirds of a day's  
downpour

why? why do you think  
it is so hard to guess  
what happens on the  
black street  
in the oil and the stars

you can dream now  
quiet!  
a worm has crawled out on the  
bronze pavement  
its thin red line  
a thread in the wet blanket  
of stars

mark its glad movement.  
sing, sing its praises.  
such ordinary miracles  
surround us.

1986

The fallen tree

When it fell it took more than could be guessed  
It pulled as much ground as it could into the sky  
Now it lies, a wall of roots tumbled on its side  
Turning the sky brown and the ground blue.

1987



## That road

hawk in blasted tree  
rows of lorries  
rain in puddles on superstore rooves  
harriers flareing  
homes where widows weeped  
new road breaking down the trees  
accidents in beauty spots  
cattle-trucks, cash from tourists  
barns full of hay  
last day of summer  
museum of the age  
taverns and gargoyles and flowers  
antique shop junk  
looking at thin air  
horse boxes at little chefs  
plastic trees and cream teas  
crunbling greenhouse  
herding the cows

we cross the plain  
stonehenge in the rain  
where the spirit remains.

1985

## The railway bank

( some thoughts upon the impact of the railway  
upon south oxon.)

They are sliding where I slid twenty years ago,  
The dust they raise, I raised as to the ditch I fell,  
This bank once a railway track that led to the coast  
Now it holds no engine, no cloud of steam only ...grows  
I was holding a jar of spawn, mother and child hands free  
Try to maintain enough grip to fall with the gravel scree,  
I fell in with gorse and nettles, they slide easily  
Clouds of dust fading on each leaf

This bank has become a storehouse, net of butterflies and birds  
I disturb nestling wings, flurries of birds wheel and turn.

( Wordsworth's 25th dream)

The green has turned to yellow, the tractor swings the field

The bank was raised from what earth I cannot guess  
Victorian confidence drove its line directly south  
through farm and field and hill  
a model of a roman model  
A mock fortification, a wall twenty feet high  
it beckons the modern hero.  
He wears his consumerism labels like medals  
His leathers patched in red and yellow  
A gladiator in the corn on a steed of metal  
he rides the wheat.



Illustrations used.

Front cover - Osiers being cut for basket-making. Osney Mead.Oxford.

Back cover - The Standlake village band 1890s

Contents left - Zephaniah Grace - shepherd and photographer.

Died Blewbury.Oxon 1917.

right - Robert Herridge and son Judah. Known as 'Blewbury Bob'  
poem on Edward's coronation published in local paper  
on account of him being local character. Died workhouse

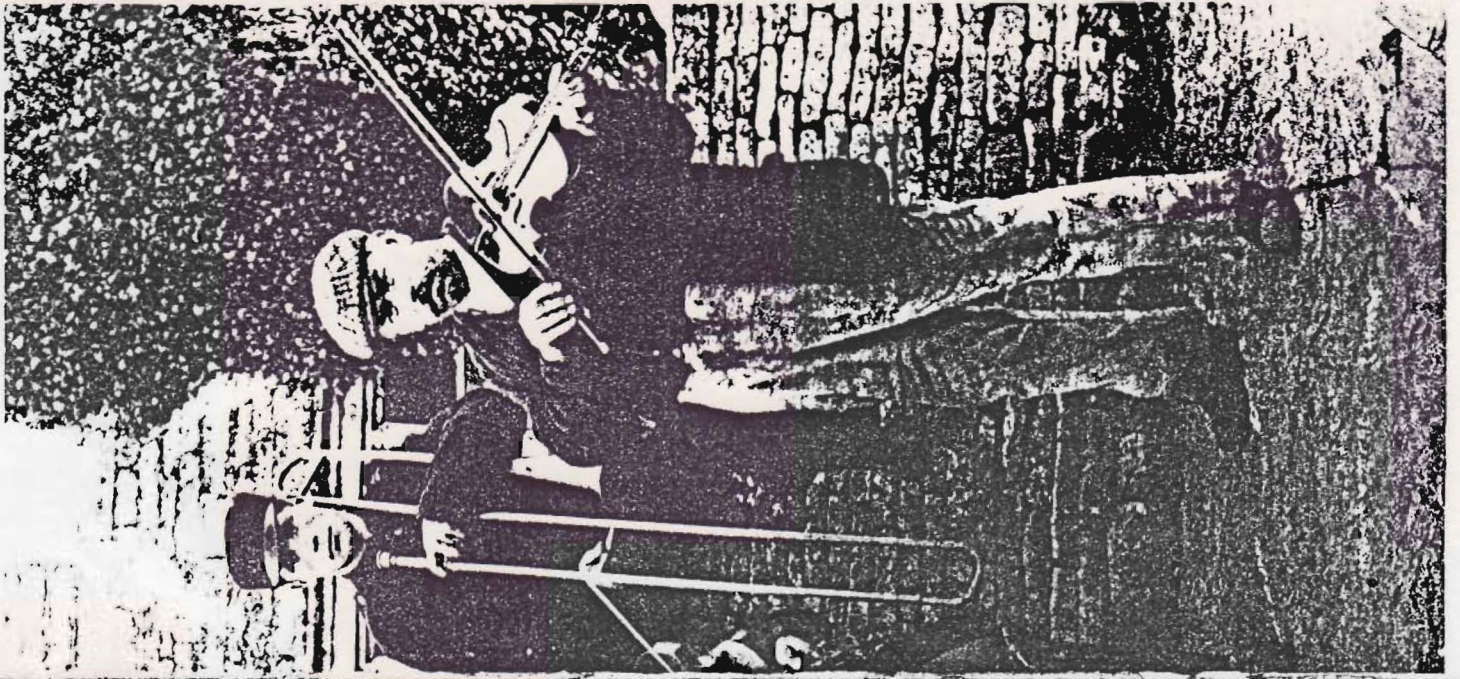
'Tithe Machine' frontpiece - The Henley postman

'New Country' " " - The downs above East Ilsley. 1890s.

'Diesel on Gravel' " " - American car advert as used in copies of  
National Geographical etc. c 1950s

'snow'(opposite) - Waylands cottages, Blewbury. 1955.







~~to the~~  
~~the~~  
Listening at midnight ~~the~~ the Great Western.

Ba da da de dum.

Outside the lilac tree and the horse chestnuts  
drip in the slow rain from the downs

a record spins on

and the manner of writing  
centring experience  
draws the quiet of the valley in  
down <sup>to</sup> the point of a line.

Trees have been pruned on the playing field,  
water is trickling down the wet chalk,  
<sup>to</sup> forming pools below the road signs.

Tomorrow wheels will splash,  
cattle trucks on their way to market,  
children riding to school,  
~~then begins~~ the steady steam  
of the first day of June.

The scent of it ~~rises~~, a perfume rising from fenced gardens,  
picture-book creations ~~almost~~ <sup>ly</sup> ~~exactly~~ <sup>ed</sup> imitated but ~~always~~  
~~the~~ necessary ~~flaw~~, a bicycle slumped in a hedge, a child's toy,  
offsetting ~~the~~ formal perfection, and behind the coloured leaves, <sup>+</sup>  
~~always~~ the voices drifting from curtained, ~~patterned~~ rooms <sup>patterns</sup>  
until the early hours,  
the town is silent ~~but for the rasp of a record caught in the final~~  
groove beating on and on to a scratch of silence.

notation squeezes these moments dry,  
~~the atmosphere rises from ~~the~~ words~~ <sup>like pollen bushes off the word</sup>  
becomes a toy train circling a contrived landscape;  
three miles from here they have built a model railway,  
it mimics perfection, each sponge tree and cardboard cottage,  
a more eloquent presentation of the facts as we know them to  
have been = pastoral idyll.

<sup>past</sup>  
a ~~memory~~ is approximated and like writing  
the memory is modelled on a smaller scale  
the loss is camouflaged with pleasure<sup>s</sup> and steamy windows.

~~and the memory of a loved one~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~is~~ turned on the lathe  
stripping the loss down to a small and neat model..

<sup>like an engine</sup>  
ba da de de dum...

( ~~or~~ a snatch of a song heard years later  
~~on~~ experience spirals <sup>onwards</sup>.)

The wooden hide

conservation.

①

~~The hide. The hide.~~

30.7.89.

A return to

Where the waterboatmen skitter <sup>ed</sup> through the drowsy <sup>on</sup> pond water  
And took <sup>headlong</sup> your football <sup>ed</sup> tracing mud the fern <sup>and</sup> track <sup>and</sup> ~~wood~~  
Past <sup>that</sup> wooden hide, wood ~~still~~ <sup>then one</sup> ~~remains~~ fresh with creosote  
~~where~~ Where groups of schoolchildren <sup>now</sup> laugh <sup>ed</sup> and  
~~stare at the stars~~

stared through the slits of light

Gently your feet slip at bankside into the

pine needles and leaf mould

The stale air of September hanging <sup>still</sup> like a rising  
With the chatter of birds into ~~the curtain~~ ~~across the lake~~

high leaves breeze blown leaves.

I return to <sup>the</sup> ~~there are~~ touchstones ~~than~~ the rough rasp of  
~~new wood on~~ that wooden sheet

the now aged <sup>wood</sup> ~~of~~ palm and fringed

memory ~~restoring~~ the memory that <sup>not had fallen</sup> ~~falls~~ between leaf and  
~~between the~~ <sup>is beneath a</sup> ~~leaf~~ mat of leaves.

Then <sup>perfect broken</sup> ~~arches~~ breaks the water surface ~~as the~~

~~fin of the~~ is cleaved to the by the

fat goldfish <sup>rolling lazily</sup> ~~lugs~~ in their safe harbour

~~the canvas~~ And the basin of water seems for a  
moment to fill with light.



a green was turned to yellow the tractor  
 passing the long line of straw into the  
 field

neckline of  
~~beetle~~  
~~cutting~~

The bank remained from where what earth!

cannot guess

The Victorian confidence drove its line

~~down~~ south through

a model of a narrow field and

A more polished a well 20 ft high

14 bottoms he modern here.

he wears his commemoration like

a medal

his leather a patch of red and yellow

gladiators in the corn - on a steady

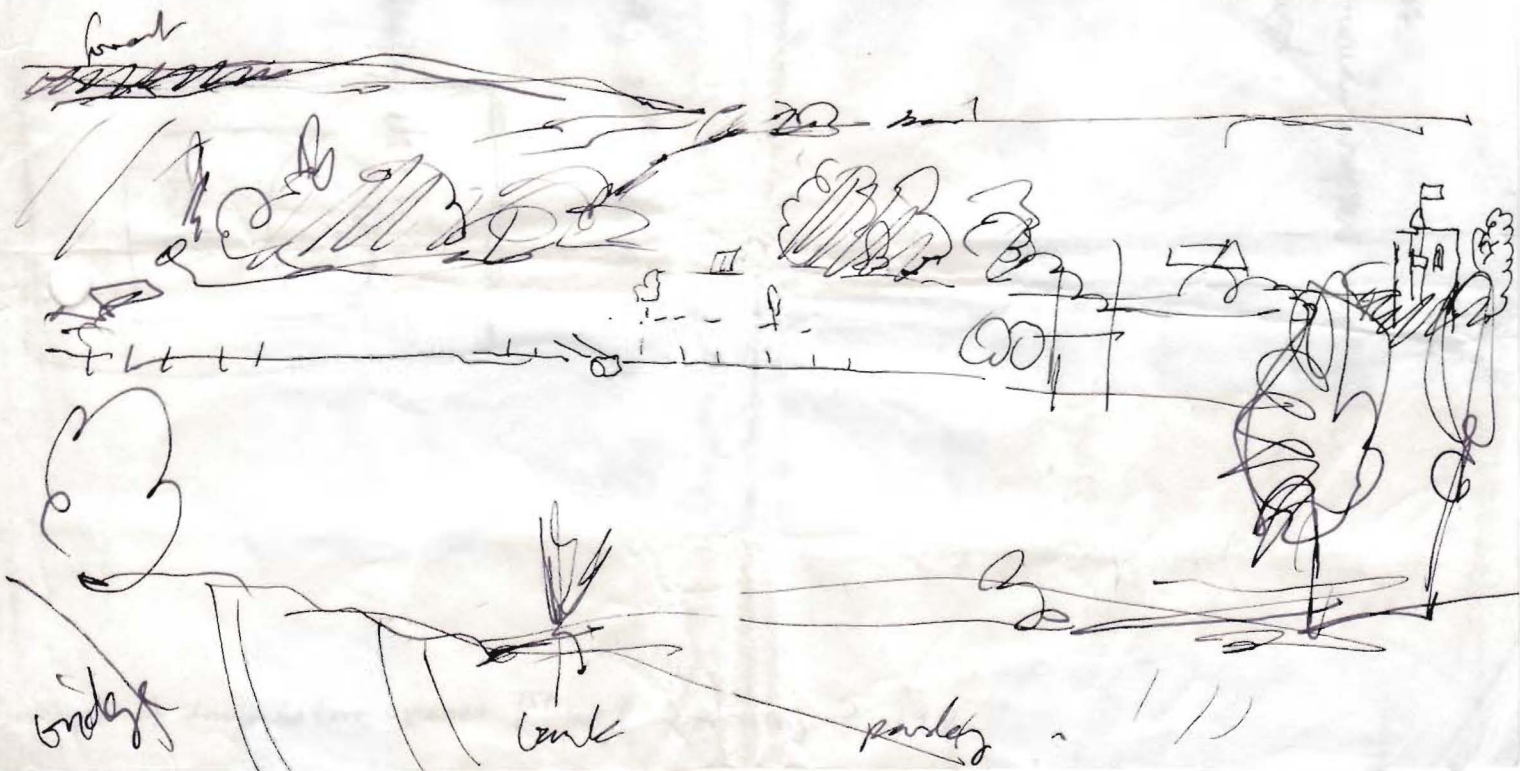
metal.

he rides the pillar of wheat / cannot settle,

do a conclusion.

(1987)

5. (200 - 180 - buying water from America.





## Collected Poems 1981 - 1989

An introduction.

These poems span ten years of my life so collecting them together from the scraps of paper and badly typed manuscripts has been a rewarding experience. The early poems ( The tithe machine ) arose out of an interest in american poetry fostered by a travelling exhibition of books which came to my local Didcot library in 1981, the year after I left art-college in London. Little did I know then that I would continue to write but the seed was planted. These early fragments ( I had no idea how to make them any longer ) deal with aspects of the area I grew up in but also try and suggest if not surreal landscape at least something slightly askew.

Poems like ' Valley' and 'Rehearsal' owe a lot to the russian and french influences I was avidly consuming. They also reflect a lot of the painterly interests I had, Chagga, Gorky etc. Some I still like, some are awful.

I am not so happy with the next set ' The New Country', the title taken from that given to the 30's left book and exhibition. At the same time as I was writing these I had an exhibition called 'The New Country' at a gallery in Islington. Looking back the best I can say is that although far happier in free verse I felt that somehow it wasn't poetry or that if I didn't at least learn or attempt versification I could not call myself a poet. I feel differently now but maybe it reflects a lack of confidence in the role of 'poet' i.e. where I come from you don't do it! Having said that I find some of the content O.K. e.g. the drowned fisherman in 'The fisherman's return' but not the rhyming schemes, or my attempts at this and that. I think I at least gained some 'musicality' from this phase.

Finally we come to 'Diesel on Gravel'. A collection of stuff written partly as a result of attending a workshop and working in a library and partly out of necessity when believe me the last thing on my mind was to attempt to be a poet, quite the opposite in fact! This lot I can put up with a lot more. Mostly the content has changed. Moving out of the fields and concentrating on relationships and interiors which I hurtled through in these years. Hopefully they come over as being more honest than the rather studied exploration of english landscape that went before. The most important influence in these years was Raymond Carver who's book 'Fires' I happened to pick up in a library where I worked. Here at last was somebody who seemed to speak the same 'working-class background' as I did as opposed to the Oxbridge voices. From then on I've tried to write about things that effect me as honestly and as well as I can. The very title 'Diesel on gravel' stands in my mind for the weight of U.S. culture on Britain and hopefully we can sort the good from the bad. Carver and the 'dirty realism' being one of the 'goods'.

Looking back through this work it actually seems to make a bit more sense than it did before and I realise just how important my background is in what I'm writing about. The cast of poachers and ne're do wells and village idiots have become more , not less, important to me. Perhaps because they exemplify a non-conformism which seems invisible in the Thames Valley today. All writing is political. I come from a background of labour politics and wea learning. Education was the guiding light. Words are power. Nothing is more important as we approach the next turning point in british politics. Time me thinks for some rick-burning and protesting in the shires. Time for some smashing of the loom of words.

Shaun Belcher  
Didcot, Oxon. March 1990.