

Last Farmer

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He now lives in Nottingham, England after two years in Edinburgh studying folk culture and several years in the city of expiring dreams . . . Oxford. He is currently working on a new volume of poems called *The Drifting Village* and has been involved in various literary projects including delivering creative writing workshops in Nottingham prison for the 'Inside Out' project.

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by

SHAUN BELCHER



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*To Ivo Charles Belcher 1932–2004
The Last Farmer*

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The Nettle Fields

We had to clear two fields
on a bitterly cold November morning.
We had to clear two fields of nettles

I hadn't worked with my dad for years
but by midday we had fires going
and my feet didn't feel so frozen.

As we cleared separate paths
We'd find things.
Me drums and canisters,
him, a broken cockpit of an aircraft.

Later he said he'd expected me to bail out
of that wedding idea long before I had
and that coming back down to earth
wasn't such a bad thing.

I grudgingly admitted this was true
and even a job that made my hands sting
could clear the air and pay off bad debts.

Later the white smoke from the bonfires
seeped through the poplar trees
and hung like mist over the river.

He started telling me about a German fighter
that came down over his village
trailing thick white smoke like silk.

Perhaps they found the pilot in nettles,
thinking he was in Holland,
when all along he'd been deceived by
his instruments.

Now I'm struggling too.
Struggling to find a common language.

Commandos

My parents eating dinner,
straw falling from a bird's nest in the joists,
as a 45 mph wind lifts the roof.

It floats down onto a box of my old toys.
An action-man complete with kit
and bits of broken model aircraft.
Dakota, Mosquito, Hurricane.

A gentle creaking of black felt and nails
lifting from the wood. Breathing.

Downstairs my parents
discussing a photo in the paper.
My great-uncle's war grave.

Jack was lucky.
Then he wasn't.
His glider crumpled in a field near Arnhem
like a puffball.
Two days later he caught a German bullet.

It wasn't the bullet that killed him
but the poison seeping through his limbs.

The aircraft kept spawning.

I, a silent intruder in the attic,
slide out into the light.
Slide away from the breathing.

Dividends

The 78s my father bought
seemed to break of their own accord.
Splinters of black shellac
bulging the faded paper sleeves.

Perhaps each crack
took a moment with it.
My father in tassled cowboy shirt
setting needle on Capitol and Brunswick.

Or with my mother, before their wedding,
practicing steps in the front room
like they did before every dancing contest
on the sprung dance-floor of the Co-Op.

Somewhere there are medals to prove
that all that lace and Brylcreem
really did spill and twirl between
the banks of collapsible wooden chairs.

By '73 the ballroom sparkle had died
replaced by a shop-floor of Hoovers
that I'd slouch through as mum
cashed in her book of dividend stamps.

Some Sunday evenings they'd play records
as bomb and bullet crackled on TV
trying to teach me and my sister
the foxtrot, tango and waltz.

We'd sway between the sofa and fireplace
to Lou Busch's *Zambezi* or Ray Martin.
Somehow we never quite learnt the steps
even when we stood on their feet.

That's what I remember of the early '70s.
Tunes from the Fifties,
and news from Ireland that filtered through
every now and then like flashes,
from something high up in the ceiling,
to a tune called *Begorah* by Ray Martin.

Cold Spell

A pretend farm lies within these borders,
hedges, fields and muddy tracks.
One un-harvested by contract machinery,
unbounded by electrified fencing.

As I stand on a grass verge
a mile of tarmac bubbling behind me,
the horizon buckling in the heat haze,
I begin to build.
Wood for concrete, timber joists for steel.
In my head a new farm appears.
The old farm rising in the skeleton of the new.
Concrete cladding and corrugated tin roofing
splits and flies off over the hills.
The Thames Water sign on the barn end
floats like a stamp soaked off an envelope.

I am rebuilding my past in the present
when the daydream is shattered.
A tractor lurches towards me
cab dazzling like a sharp scythe
lifted from a grinder.

The driver asks me what I'm doing.
I mutter that I used to live here
—What, he says, in that ol' wreck.
He doesn't believe me
but the wary mouth under the goggles
and dirty John Deere baseball cap
lets go a few more words

—Don't ye go in there, dangerous see.
I say yes, having already been in.

Standing on roots, brambles and branches
I got to peer through a broken window
at bare floorboards and a grate
littered with flakes of asbestos,
ash and plaster.

By that grate my sister entered this world
on a cold February evening during the cold snap of 1962.

A Jamaican nurse hovers over my mother
as firelight dances on the ceiling.
Black hands cradle the white bundle
as it is passed over the sheets to my mother.
I am three years old, drawing in the condensation
and watching feathers of snow melt against the window.

When I am asked what I shall hand on
I shall say this.

My dowry of words.
Fire, water, glass, ice, darkness.

Following The Map

Seven with a toy tractor I bulldozed
twisting tracks through the cabbage plants
that linked, double-backed, serpentine

were added to that summer by a neighbour's son.
A sunburnt face through the leaves, a single mole
hanging on his left cheek like a coin or planet.

All winter we'd wait for the warmer weather.
Wait for the muddy ground to peel and crack
so that we could start fingers shifting mountains.

Dry dirt would blow off trowels, crumble under palms,
grit teeth and hair and find its way into every fold
of skin and dust the school regulation wool and cotton.

We'd jostle and race Corgi, Matchbox and Dinky
through those hot July afternoons until light faded
from the downs and flickered on vapour trails.

The same sky, twenty years later, rain-heavy
threatens the seed-tunnel in this garden.
It rattles like a broken engine, flaps like suits in cars.

Our neighbour's son now sells Porsches in Sweden
with handshakes and brochures pushed into the palms
of businessmen whilst I sit here, stalled again.

Down the road his mother is pruning roses,
netting another passer-by in her spun web of praises.
How well he's done, how far he's gone, the wages.

I stare at aluminium garage doors, litter, beer cans.
Thirty-two years old. Can't drive.
Worrying about the days slipping off the map.

Plans broken like crazy paving.

Clinker

Chaffinches spray up from the crab-apples
as the Honda's gear lever
is flicked back and the throttle opened.

A girl pillions her boyfriend
up the disused railway track.

Where coal once melted to steam
there is now just her wide grin
framed by hair dyed to the colour
of the amber slag we'd find by the rails
and think was something precious.

These fields now rattle to the sound
of harvest guns and scrambler engines
instead of Southampton bound trains.

A year's time these two'll be back.
Taking it in turns to push a pram
unsteadily toward his mother's
at the other end of the track.
Both run out of steam before twenty.

But that's later.
Right now that grin won't fade
and he's hardly holding on
and in front of them
there's every part of England.

Cherry Stones

With arms that laid
and feet that trod this stone into place
they are caught through the trees
moving off or returning.

I stand, watching them,
rocking from heel to toe
in this small town side street,
small red berries
exploding under my feet.

Above me a flock of sparrows
flicker and snatch at bunches
then scatter through the gable-ends
as a rusty Marina chugs to a stop.

At the other end of this street
I can see shoppers framed
in the window of the newsagent.
One pecks at the card display.

Some round here have flown south
on incomes boosted by pensions
and second mortgages.
Others remain.
Receive photographs at Christmas.

Each winter
these men come.
After they have gone
a new stone of pink granite
or cherry marble shines out
through the rattling branches.

Some catch the sun,
some always in shadow,
some unmarked, just buried.

The Ice Horses

I lean over and point my father's gaze
at the photo of Bud Finch
at the wheel of his Minneapolis Moline tractor
which, though sunk during the war,
had been salvaged.

Later, as a storm battered
the tin roof of our garage
and flakes of broken fence spread across our lawn,
I returned to Bud's memoirs.

One winter the Thames here froze over
and horses walked out across the river
to graze upon the reeds.
One fell through
and men from Bud's village pulled it out,
laid it on a gate, carried it back to the village.

This flashes through my mind as I cross
the same water in the passenger seat of my dad's truck.
We are working at a mental institution,
(once a military hospital)
slipping under the wooden floorboards of wards
to fireproof heating ducts with glass fibre.

We hear heavy horses above, wandering.

Later still I discover that my maternal grandfather
lay in that hospital as I was born in the winter of '59.
My mother tells me I was taken in and shown to him
like a new tractor brought onto his farm.

Did his eyes see swaddling bands, metal bed, window bars
and bare floorboards glazed with water
or did they see barn, field, horses,
folding under snow,
ships sinking in a blizzard.

The Severed Tongue

Where's they going grampy?

Fondling the tin marker in the calf's ear
I felt its coat of dried mud shudder
as his hand came down once more.
The thwack sent it skidding up the planks
like a potted billiard ball.

Twenty years later
I can't grasp that tongue.
Can't get a hold of the skull
between two firm hands and prise it open.

My accent was drained out of me.
A slit bullock over a drain
taught to sound better
my nose forced down in a trough of grammar.

Those words that dripped off his tongue.
The lolling, spittly threads
of long Berkshire 'a's and 'r's
were sluiced clean away.

Now I stand at a window
in Oxford's covered market
looking down through my reflection
at a tray of severed tongues.
Trying to find a bucket for his vowels.

The Hare-Lip

The hare-lip of my step-grandfather
cut like a chalk-stream down his face
twisting the upper lip into a V
and pulling the sides of his mouth
closer together.

To this day I'm not sure how it's spelt,
h.a.r.e. or h.a.i.r.,
but I do remember his dog
bolting a hare across the stubble fields
and his worn pipe trembling in that V
as he struck another match

whilst I'd sit in his front room
picking at lamb-roll school lunchtimes
listening to country voices rattling from a radio
as big as the TV we'd rented since 1966.

Now I get confused.
All I hear is the swish and crackle of lit straw
as I spin the dial and press my ear to the speaker.

Those days I was closer
as I peered into the warm dust
at the tiny red lights that flickered.
Could tell a false accent from a real one.
Now it's all scrambled.

Lost on the air somewhere
from those smoky valves.

Like a spitfire over the channel.

World Turned Backwards

Charged by a singular emotion
amongst the complications of this country
we shoot eastwards into more night,
leaving light as a fading red tinge
on beeches cresting twin hills.
Moths flash into the windscreen,
spilt straw swirls on the verge
as we slide up inclines
and brake smoothly into yellowed suburbs.

Then between towns a high dark hill
and beyond a sudden swathe of light.
Under floodlights
harvesters turn night back to day.
A combine, all whirr and spin
thrashes the crop to grain and grit.
The memory of it haunts me still
though I forget journey, place, time,
all lost in that clash of gears
as the machine hurtled forward
toward profit and gain.

Alone in the company of others
I shoot eastwards toward you.
Airports, ski-slopes, red-brick motels.
A blue steel sign for Maidenhead, M5, M4.
Roads fence these new fields in.
Pasture turned to all-night golf ranges,
Seven-Elevens, Granadas and Little Chefs.
Behind us in a more perfect night
the storm has traced plans of invisible cities

across the wheat-fields of Dorset and Wiltshire.
Here we sit, idling, staring at the spectacle
of revamp, infill and empty spec. building.

I want to turn the world backwards.
Push it back through seasons 150 years
so that I can stand and watch
Joseph Tubb of Warborough
chiselling his love poem in that green beech bark.
Now all his letters have grown bloated,
swollen like the new towns and London suburbs.
Then each was crisp and clear cut,
sharp as a an oil lamp glinting across a field.

His tree,
writing itself against barley, snow and stars
died eventually, killed by that ring of words.
Instead of all these overgrown paths to you
I dream now of a field new mown and at the border
a broken down fence of words.

Scattered Voices

1.

From the air this partitioned
part of Oxfordshire
set between Thames and Ridgeway
would on a summer evening
glint like a newly spun web.
The tarmac roads, steel rails
and winding streams and tributaries
mesh with hedgerows and power lines
in a cat's cradle of
communication links.

Crawling down such lines from there to here
some never made it further.
They stuck to this small town
for want of somewhere better.
Flies on paper these refugees
from towns still burning
clung to the peace that invaded these fields.

They stopped at this railway town
as steam plumes rose from the engines
and the town grew fat on them
filling the empty sidings
and empty prison barracks with misplaced persons.
These hands set to work mending fences and rails
and carved out for themselves a living.
Twenty years it took to replace their Nissen huts
with the foundation blocks of new council housing.
But their languages faded more slowly.
Italian, Polish, Slovak, Yugoslav

their inflected speech lingers in the supermarkets
like the shadow of stubble smoke
drifting across the sunlit town.

A woman examines red geranium petals in a window
framed by brilliant white glossed sills
and net curtains.

A patch of hair that still looks like a harvested field
refuses to cover the scars of imprisonment.

She took root here as her old city bloomed.

2.

The town is a hub now.
Favoured as a distribution centre
an inland port
fridges, computers, washing-machines flood in
from cities the allies once flattened.
Their names litter the packing-cases.
Giant reels of telephone cable
never unwound and now outdated
stand silently watchful at the industrial estate gate.

New prosperity has brought new voices
Geordie, Scots and Irish,
new technology's migrant workforce
as expendable as the original navvies.

Two fitters from Hull cracked their heads open like
eggs whilst fitting Tesco's new refrigeration unit.

3.

Spinning atoms spray outwards on digitised screens.
Under glass Rutherford and Cockerel stare down,
tweed sleeves leant on oscilloscopes,
from frames in the corridors of 1950s' science buildings.
As the fighters returned the first rods were
being inserted into the reactor core
and definitions of peaceful purposes evaporated
in the clouds of the cold war.

Now I walk a path along one of Brunel's disused lines
watching as a flock of chaffinch and sparrow
spin up and out of the hawthorn and brambles like clouds
to form and reform in perfect circles
in the tops of the barley.
They look like DNA models or patterns of radiation.

I look back at my town.
Back across the roofs of post-war estates
named Cockcroft, Northbourne and Newlands.
A Ferris Wheel spins like a galaxy above the roof tiles
transporting couples from light to dark
and back once more to safety.
Back to the smell of cordite, petroleum and candy
A wasp caught in a cloud of pink sugar keeps buzzing.

The Stag Beetle

Seen, 3 p.m. a summer Tuesday,
a 2 inch Volkswagen.
crossing 20 ft of dusty asphalt.
I stop my bicycle and
watch it falter half way

between the gravel drive
of a mock Georgian mansion (c. £250K)
and the cropped paddock
of an Arab horse racer's
favourite steeplechaser at stud.

I pick it up, lay it on the verge
safe from the 'artic' jack-knifing
into the small farmyard.
Above us a 747 arcs through blue sky,
CFCs, halons and smog.

It topples over, rights itself
then seeks the safety of darkness
aware that exposure
can lead to disaster.

We are two figures
in a landscape ruled by fencing.
yet unaccountable.

The Transfer Shed

THE BROAD GAUGE

A time of no time, horses passing rails,
drumming chalk through powdered webs
onto frosted wheat, thorn and wire meshed.
Under a milk sun, lint clouds, crows diving,
a charge detonates. A wump of clods and gravel
is spat into a cobalt blue morning by Cholsey.
Shone leather boots whiten, grit peppers lunch tins
and red faces feel the pressure of blasted sidings.

A dandelion, half blown, is shovelled up,
seeds sprinkling across Brunel's unfolded plan.
Gradients quill-etched by inky draughtsmen
dig against the hard fact of flinty land.
Brunel slices into the heart and lung of England
as landlords tether new dogs and navvies riot.
Then the first steam appears above grass hills
and chalk down splits like a gutted plaice.

New time arrives and old time is buried
as printing shops whirr out a thousand tickets.
Hotels rise brick upon brick above netted chickens,
waste-tips and the stables of old coaching-inns
as workmen lean on picks beside pollarded willows.
Then that winter the first driver is lost to the cold
riding an engine in a blizzard, Swindon to Oxford,
hands welded to levers, eyes glass gauges.

THE NARROW GAUGE

Fragments of bone, blood specks, tattered cloth,
the remnants of a body scattered across nettles.
Rain in eyes he stepped backwards at dusk
into a locomotive Bristol-bound from London.
Daylight searchers picking over his gravel tracks
found a permanent-way flag twisted and scorched.
The 125 express had bucked and reared like a horse
then resettled—to rails as his body took flight,

became parcels of bone and blood spinning out
across miles of gravel, bramble and grassland.
A rime upon parsley, ragwort, hawthorn as
a litter of flesh span across shale and chalk.
Dry leaves trickled across the platform
as the passenger train pulled into Reading.
All autumn he'd watched those leaves flutter
as lighted trains sped from Bristol to London.

His skull exploded under commuters' feet.
His body mingled with oil, paint and bitumen
following the GWR's curving westward line
that he'd walked dusk to dawn for twenty years..
In an instant he passed from way-man to news item.
A brief four-liner in the local evening paper.
Brunel's statue sits at Paddington Station
peers down rusted rails incarnadine in sunlight.

Barn/Cloud/Path

Down becomes cloud and shallow hills disappear,
swathed in mist and rain that clogs gutters,
shines corrugated roofs and trickles slowly
off aluminium gates where cattle rub and steam.

I've trudged mud through doors here twenty years
and trod flagstones elsewhere another ten,
watching cloud-shadows roll across city parks
like a herd of sheep rolling across a down.

Monotony and silence conjoin in perfect harmony
on a ridge of dusty chalk grass under empty sky,
One single barn beneath a solitary cloud
lit by low, bright, winter sun, lights a way out.

I held that image up in the face of a town lost
where teenagers burn cars out on the ring-road.
I feel myself stumbling through a fog at night,
on a road starting nowhere, with no end in sight.

Until a nettle field in frost shines in headlights
at the end of a rutted track between barns at night.
We switch off the lights and the stars shine.
A town revolves below us, ringed by burning tyres.

The Empty Stair

A fleur-de-lys fissured by sulphuric rain crumbles
but still hangs, paint-peeling, above an entrance
that is being scored with wire-brushes and repainted.
A gang of workmen and a beat-box blasting out Bangra.
A century of soot and grime from the Thames basin
flecks their hands as the cavalcade of Daimlers shoots by.

Across the Goldhawk Road a ringed hand adjusts saris
as ice melts on prawns and swordfish in the market.
Tube-trains coil round the tower-blocks, necklaces
flickering above the stalls of bric-a-brac and fake cds.
Sirens wail and a Range Rover's blue lights glint
as it U-turns outside Clifton House, Hammersmith, W6.

At the turn of the century Prince Edward gilded this cage
for the pleasuring of Lilly Langtry so the neighbours say.
Now the tabloids bark out the latest royal adultery
on hoardings between kebabs and Kentucky Fried Chicken
as thieves grab Rolex and Vodaphones from execs in Mercs.
Clifton House has been rehabbed into council bedsits.

At night kids clamber up its abandoned spiral stair
and leave graffiti on the scalloped plasterwork.
Between rooms crammed with flickering TV's and clothes
horses
they flick torches on the dusty steps, mahogany handrail.
The rebuild left the stairs hanging like an empty net
where corks popping and loud laughter no longer echoes.

Meanwhile a figure on a staircase in Kensington Palace
watching rain splash across the Serpentine and
the Edwardian facades of Knightsbridge darkening
under clouds like *calamares en su tinta* on silver plate.
He returns to his watercolour of a house that is falling
as rioters in Hyde Park fall under all the King's horses.

Craigmillar

Untilled meadow grass grazed
by two slow ponies in a low sun
we stand on the patched battlement
and stare at the dry fishpond.

The visitor's board depicts men
pouring water and a garden in bloom.
Now there is just an L-shaped
depression filled with dry leaves.

A goldfish would gasp on this grass
for all the rain that's fallen
and these two horses, coats warmed
by an indian summer still look ragged.

Behind us Craigmillar Estate, Sunday silent
and cars struggling toward the multi-plex
past the roofs of tenements half-demolished
like keels beached on dry land.

Flint Fields

It all gets pissed away
like the drizzle of old Alf relieving himself
at quarter to midnight against the barn.
The hiss and froth of beer against tin.

It all seems so pointless.
The dragging of the harrow over flint and chalk,
chemical pellets scattered like shot
whilst maggots seethe in the dangling crow's ribs.

This is a rich land grown poor
through centuries of tilling and reaping.
Generation upon generation sucking at the soil
until now we force plenty

with additives and pesticides.
The bags fume in the barn's rusting carcass.
When it runs out the chalky soil will dribble from the hills
like semen.

They knew it forty years back,
bent double, mulching horse manure into the potatoes.
Half-hearted protests waved aside by fertilizer salesmen
intent on reaping the highest bonuses.

Now the barn's lung has collapsed inward
onto a stench of absent pigs and
the water tank is filmed with diesel.
Ditches brim with drums; lids leaking.

Drivers stare out their windscreens
at brimming fields, fizzing in heat
cloaking dry dirt beneath.
Alf walks home, feeling each flint beneath his feet.

Three Sermons

OUR HATRED

Is an object, a ball of lead shot
I carry in my stooping frame.
It has grown, layer upon layer,
like a stone in the gut
each time I see a smug, ruddy faced
son or daughter of the shires
walk blindfold through these doors.

They do not stop, for they carry no guilt.
It is washed free of their hands each day
by the sure-footed minions who keep
the ticking clock ticking, the fountain fed
The trout swimming in the moat, the hedges well kept.
All so that power may be maintained
and their god-given purpose blessed.

Were they that blind in Victoria's reign
that they did not see the bubbling corpses,
fly-blown dotted across their maps
or were they already such fanatics, lost in biblical phrases,
pure King James and Wesleyan hymnals
that each dead pagan was already a soul saved.

Now the maps are reversed, repainted and
the empire has slow-dissolved from pink to white and red.
As a new dogma falls from the TV's secular pulpit
the truth of democracy, the right of goodness falls
upon those who deserve it whatever their creed
but the result is the same
tents and bibles and corpses riddled with gentles.

POLITICS, MORE OR LESS.

We do not write of politics.
We write of actions and death.
There is no margin for solace.
There is only the facts or less.

The corpses burning are counted.
Their collapse noted down.
So that posterity may judge
them martyrs or villains or less.

We wrap ourselves as a nation
in blankets of powder and guns.
And stand on the chalk hills
defying the invader to come.

But the myths have all grown tawdry
the broken-spined bible spills forth
welcome to the first 19th century war
you can read about winning before it's launched.

COLONY

A gentle space, a path of land beyond words
is all I ask now from this threadbare seat
as the drizzle of language washes through
the gutters and stains the skirts of Oxford

A place free of the shackles of past and blood
where free-born men can stand alone
in the muddied fields and not be called
back to the shearing, the grit and the chaff

clogging the lungs, or the spores of industry
that dribble down their chin at morning.
No more nightmares of the steel press slamming
arms into oblivion every time they wake.

Born to an open field, twenty years in a cot
twisted by the accident, his wife mops him down
each evening as the speedway hums on the city rim
and another van squeezed with immigrants pulls in

to a lay-by in a pitch black night of no moon
and currency blows across the nettles
In another week fresh hands are washing dishes
no questions asked beside the high table

under portraits of men who ransacked
their villages in the 1870's they squirm
to avoid the buzz of the drunken chatter
these ghosts of an empire returned

Then one girl in each silver dish she passes
sees the reflections of Nuffield's factory scarred men
twin ghosts of the machinery of privilege
dancing in the chandelier's flame.

The Drifting Village

Deep in the sleet
Forward slanted, rimed with ice
the cottage, wrecked and the tree
catching a fire on a winter's eve.

Stars and a dance of the dead
across hills and exotic trees
brought in from ships at Tilbury
and carted to the master's door.

The crackle of horsehair chairs
and splintered bed timbers collapsing
All that remained of Bab
and what Bab held dear.

Like a frail cross the tree smouldered
then burnt to the ground
reminding the assembled multitude
of their right and true position.

Then, heads bowed on her behalf,
with a tear here and there
At her body still warm in the ground
they felt the village tug one last time

slipping from their fingers
Like the mooring ropes a river away
being loosed from the India Docks
as particles of spice drifted loose
from briny planks fell into eyes

She had held that village like a hulk
in its original berth.
Stopped it sliding up from the floodplain
to the master's new dock on the hill.

Now a three century gap gone
the same village a berth for commuters
watches as the water floods once more
as if it had found its true course.

All the spilt contents bobbing on a sea of silt
the mobiles, the DVDs the trash of the eastern shore
All cascading just like that submerging barque
A hundred years before slid back to the river plain

And settles into its original image
marking out her last resting place like a chalky line
a scuzz of empire flashing like flags on the mud
her tree's new roots a catchment of time.

The Weaver's Lament

for Angus MacPhee

His aging hands clumsy with the straws
that jerk into the shape of head and arms
of his latest creation.

If I were you I'd be using old wire not grass,
a handful of gravel, some chalk
moulding it against some concrete wall.

Instead of dancing away like this between sand
and arum, a twirling of lines
like the nets of a trawler gathering in

all the sweet silver off the plates.
No I am not you and never will be
but instead cling to a windless plain of grass

betwixt down-land and river. To knot, plat
these celandines and daisies into a country
of the mind is now beyond me I realise.

My harvest is fields of brick and mortar,
the dance of plastic in gutters.
Not the wilderness I read and dreamed.

An airliner passes overhead, a ship loose
with its million electrical veins coiled inside
and a hundred passenger hearts beating like yours

as you tried to haul your island in, nail it flat
to capture the salt tide, the dunes forever.
To catch it all in your cradling palms.

