

WRESTLING AT DAWN

or

Juvenilia

=====

A selection of poems from the collection

Lines of a Lifetime

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BRUNO SCARFE

WRESTLING AT DAWN..... Juvenilia

– A selection of poems from the decade 1947 to 1956

As seen from a beach in autumn
As you like it
The ballad of misfortune
The ballad of perdition
Cool water
Desert sun
Evening
Evening voices
Fear
First time under anaesthetic
I went away
Inceptio brumae
The last storm
Light everywhere
A lull in a storm
Le matin
Morning at sea
My heart's desiring
La neige
Ode to a cat
Ode to a fly
Ode to a mouse
Stars
Summer
That which is necessary
The turn of the tide
Underground
The upper world
A waterfall
When a thunderstorm threatens
When the sun sinks slowly down
Winter is coming

Illustrated

As you like it
Cool water
Desert sun
Stars

As seen from a beach in autumn

Swallows swiftly southwards swoop,
skimming swells of seething,
salty, seas.

Seagulls scream and softly stop,
sitting on slow schooners' sails,
sailing south.

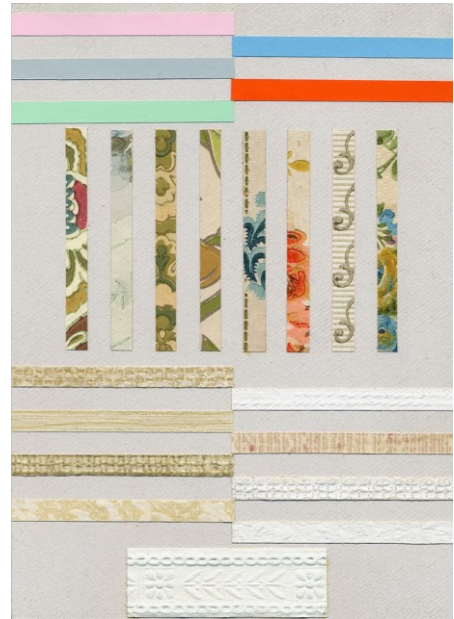
Sunburnt sailors stale sea chanties sing,
standing on small scratched stones
with seaweed sealed.

Sea swells swish on sandy shores,
and scum swims on the summits
of stinging surfs.

Sulky ships on sundry seas, slowly
sail away to Spanish settlements,
while their skippers sunbathe.

As you like it

The water rippled on the lake
like scratched icing on a cake.
There was a walnut on the icing
which, like a melon, was enticing.
The melon's skin was hard and dry
like a meteor in the sky.
The meteor came, then it was gone,
like a bullet or a bomb.
The bomb exploded with a bang
like a sausage in a pan.
The sausage burnt without delay
like a fire in the hay.
The fire made a lot of smoke
like a dragon just awoke.
The dragon snorted, rose and stretched,
like a cat who's had a rest.
The cat was black, as black as night
on a moor without a light.
The moor was wide, and there was no-one,
like on Pluto or on the Sun.
Pluto's warm, the Sun is hot
like oil that's boiling in a pot.
The pot got cracked and broke in two,
and so, for lunch, there was no stew.
The stew was good, the stew was nice,
like sugar mixed with sweetened spice.
The spice was strong and knocked you over
as though you were weak and full of clover.
The clover grew and multiplied
like defects in a lantern slide.
The ancient slide began to flake,
until it went into the lake.



The ballad of misfortune

I took to sea, still young in years,
far, far away, went I,
and realised, with many tears,
I missed what was not nigh.

I used to dream, when far away,
of home and its delights:
of faded fields, where once I lay,
and other pleasing sights.

Twice twenty years ago left I,
I went as midnight came.
The ship was small, I gave a cry –
‘Miss Fortune’ was its name.

We sailed out fast, the little bay
was soon left far behind.
Not long had passed before the day
cast light upon my mind.

Why had I left, I wondered soon,
the home of my delight?
No soul had seen – save for the Moon,
my fast and fearful flight.

A week passed by, yet was I sad,
I knew I had done wrong.
I’d found no friend, the fare was bad,
the vessel none too strong.

Nigh on a year we saw no land,
but sea and sky alone.
Then all rejoiced, to see some sand
round cliffs of gleaming stone.

The cliffs rose black into the sky,
the sand around lay white.
There came no sound, no seagull’s cry,
‘twas silent as the night.

We onwards sailed, but could not reach
that island of despair.
Three days passed by, still was that beach
as distant as the air.

When dawned the fourth, no sun came out:
the sky was overcast.
The rain poured down, the crew did shout
beneath the icy blast.

The sea rose high, the big green waves
came sweeping o'er the deck.
The sailors prayed, and worked like slaves,
yet soon we were a wreck.

Fate had it that I held a mast –
perhaps it was an oar?
A full day passed, then I was cast
still living, on a shore.

When I revived, it was to see
a dank and dirty place
An old man's hand, gnarled as a tree,
caressed my weary face.

His beard was tousled, thick, and gray,
his hair had seen no comb.
His face, like oak, tanned by the day,
this hut his only home.

I asked aloud:
“Where am I, now?
how long have I been here?”

The answer came:
“Two days, I trow,
you'll stay more than a year!
There has not been a vessel seen
for many years all told.
This little isle, no royal demesne,
will hold you till you're old”.

Twice fifteen years and one were passed
before a ship hove to.
Oh wretched day when I was cast
sole living from the crew!

A schooner came, drew near the shore,
furled sail, and slowly stopped.
Down plunged the anchor, with a roar,

and then a lifeboat dropped.

When evening came, we could not see
that island's dreadful shore.
The sails were full, the waves flowed free,
we flew as ne'er before.

For eight long years that schooner sailed,
it sailed the seven seas.
And then, at last, my home was hailed:
I blessed God on my knees.

The ballad of perdition

No breath of wind, no wave, no sound -
the sails hung limp, above.
The sea lay pallid all around -
within them died all love.

By currents swept, they sailed, but saw
no fish, no bird, no life.
Time passed, and on its wings it bore
disaster, death, and strife.

And as they moved, there fell a day
all darkness 'round became.
No sun, no star, no lucid ray
from heaven, shining, came.

On surged the ship, to swiftly sink
into the silent sea.
No trace remained, no hidden link,
for mortal man to see.

Cool water

Raining, raining – calm the night,
drop by drop sink out of sight;
feed the warm and pregnant soil,
cool her lips and ease her toil

Raindrops glisten
in the sky,
flowers listen –
who knows why?

Sparkle , fountain, in the sun!
Frolic, gambol, have your fun!
Spatter drops of silver blood!
Drench the green grass in your flood!
Fill the air with scented mist!
Kiss the sunshine, and be kissed!

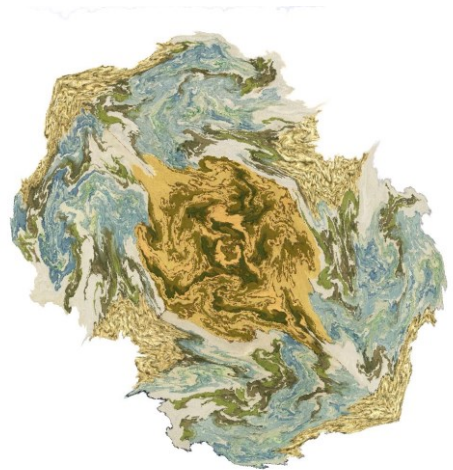
Raindrops glisten
in the sky,
flowers listen –
who knows why?

Crystal water
in the moonlight,
in you gleams the dark unknown.
Resplendent mirror of delight,
deceive the darkness of the night
with beauty all your own!

Raindrops glisten
in the sky,
flowers listen –
who knows why?

What the ocean, what the sea,
what the blue wave flowing free –
does not love you, Virgin Queen,
purest pleasure of my dream?

Raindrops glisten
in the sky,
flowers listen –



who knows why?

Your home is not the fountain,
the sea, nor silent spring,
nor raindrop in the mountain,
nor other earthly thing.

Return, o mystic water,
to the blue eyes of the dying,
to a mother's only daughter
who soon must cease her crying.

Live there, cool water, live –
love, sorrow, and forgive.

While the silver raindrop glistens,
for a moment, in the sky,
and the withered flower listens,
for the child shall surely die.

Desert sun

Angelic might, hard silver sphere
who, fresh from grime, and clean and clear,
still cold, and crisp as snow, and white,
speeds darkness far from mortal sight.

The zenith reached, it flings fierce acrid flame
loud, hissing, gritty, dry, that none can name:
fiercest furnace' titanic crust –
it pounds and crushes flesh to dust.

From the Parcae's hands fell this golden ball,
drowsy, no-coloured mountain of the deep:
close-red, off-orange, almost purple pall,
gentle wrought to lull all withered souls
to salutary sleep.



Evening

The sun departed
red all around,
and the darkness came
without a sound.
The Earth was gloomy,
without a light –
save for the Moon,
who had a long fight
with the thick murky clouds
of the very long night.

Evening voices

Green grass, fresh grass, everywhere,
rustling gently in the air.
Like withered leaves which, falling,
all start crisp crackles calling.

Fear

He trembled all over
as the spectre appeared.
His hair stood on end
as it watched and it leered.
Then his heart missed a beat
as it lifted its arm,
and he fell from his seat
in dreadful alarm.

First time under anaesthetic

And I dreamt of rows of cabbages blue
which filled a field of a pale green hue.
There was a house all gray and black,
rotting away on an old farm track.

The clouds were green and the birds were white,
the sea itself was a ghastly sight.
The waves and the billows were monsters' heads,
the ships on the ocean were upturned beds.
The distant horizon turned into an arrow,
redder by far than my old wheel-barrow.

Then, all of a sudden, the scenery fled,
and I found myself lying half out of bed.

I went away

I went abroad for many years,
far, far away, went I,
and realised with many tears,
I missed what was not nigh.

I used to think, when far away,
of home and its delights:
of English fields where once I lay,
and other pleasing sights.

Now that I'm back, I will remain
at home for evermore.
That land abroad, I will maintain,
did make me love thee more.

Inceptio brumae

Humus pruina tecta est,
aqua gelu absconsa est.
Aves omnes, non cantant,
nec campanae resonant.
Nebulae sunt cinereae,
et aura est frigidissima.
Nix mox veniet,
et tempore sistet.

The last storm

The crisp leaves rustle underfoot,
a squirrel flees into a bush.

The wind howls
and the storm clouds rush
across the sky
like dirty soot.

Yet there is silence for a while,
as the wind tries to reconcile
the angry clouds
now heaping up like ancient mounds.

But it is now too late,
as it was doomed by fate –
for the clouds burst
and the heavens thunder,
and all Man's products are rendered asunder.

Light everywhere

Lanterns, lanterns, in the street,
plentiful as blades of wheat.
Flashing here, and sparkling there,
and each one coloured like a pear.

A lull in a storm

Trees, darkness, jagged flashes
of lightning downwards streaking.
Rain, noise, a river rushes
fast by a woman weeping.

Silence sudden, wind at rest –
bird disturbed rebuilds its nest.
Clouds disperse, dark light ensues:
tragic Moon! nocturnal ruse!

Le matin

Tout à coup le soleil entre dans ma chambre –
j'ouvre doucement les yeux.
Malheureusement, il n'y a presque plus d'ombre:
hier mes rideaux ont pris feu.

J'essaye de me rendormir,
car je ne peux plus lire.
Cela me plairait beaucoup –
il est assez clair,
mais comme tout autre,
j'ai perdu mes lunettes hier.

Il n'y a qu'une chose à faire, et je le ferai,
mais seulement en été! ... c'est de me lever;
et en hiver, non! jamais.
Toujours au lit je resterais.
Maintenant, je peux nager,
et en hiver je grelotterais.

Morning at sea

A cloud of dew, a morning mist,
a wreath of drifting snow,
a fleecy haze that softly kissed
the silent sea below.

Soft as velvet, all-embracing,
fair offspring of the blue,
curling upwards, gently tracing
pale patterns ever new.

This serpent gray lay writhing on
the surface of the sea,
and through its coils the pale sun shone
caressing, golden, free.

It shimmered on the curling limbs
of swiftly flowing waves,
and glittered on the foaming rims
of Neptune's crystal caves.

It sparkled on the surging plain,
an undulating flood,
and turned the spray to golden rain,
the ocean's living blood.

It pierced the ruffled azure cloak
that shielded the abyss,
and lit the depths until it broke
the refuge of their bliss.

My heart's desiring

When the dying leaves of autumn
are wafted to the ground,
wafted thither in the failing light
by a gentle breeze –
a breeze so truly deceptive,
yet so warm and profound,
that none are well aware of the cause
for the bleak, bare trees:
then, oh then, would I be in a Scottish fell,
moor, or glen!

La neige

Je regardais à travers des fenêtres:
partout il y avait de la neige.
Elle avait fait le gazon disparaître,
et avait caché notre siège.

Je pensais que les arbres allaient tomber,
car la neige, je croyais, était lourde;
et aussi que la terre allait suffoquer,
seulement parce qu'elle était tellement sourde.

Ode to a cat

Sitting on a pillow
by the dying flames,
thinking of a minnow
in the river Thames:
oh had you then in life no other earthly aims?

Sitting on the table
watching while I typed,
helping me when able,
purring as I liked,
peering through your whiskers, your little paws you wiped.

Ode to a fly

Buzzing about,
steam in the spout
of a kettle.

Weight not a gram,
living on jam,
bread and butter.

Using no dates,
having no rates
you must settle.

As light as a feather,
as free as the weather,
as tough as a nettle,
resisting as metal:
you never would utter
the tiniest mutter
if caught by a spider
asleep in the gutter.

Ode to a mouse

Oh my little white mouse,
so happy and gay,
who frequented my house
by night and by day,
where are you, my sweet one, and why so far away?

Each evening when tea came
you watched while I ate,
and awaited the same
although I was late.
Did you ever lack milk, gorgonzola, or date?

Oh my mouse with red eyes,
a long twisting tail,
two pink ears – what a size!
and countenance pale:
return, keep me company, oh please do not fail!

Stars

Stars, stars, all over the sky,
ever twinkling – I know not why.
Like a dewdrop or a stone,
precious ruby or a bone.



Summer

On a summer's morning
I go a-walking in the park.
I see a swallow in the sky
which comes onto the grass.
I go and watch it closely,
but alas, it flies away.

I am so sad,
that I walk so sadly home,
not noticing a cat,
a cat so nice and furry.
But when I turn around,
I look straight at the cat:
I jump to it and pet it.

Then I go home happily,
and when I arrive,
how happy I am
to see the same swallow again.

That which is necessary

As the sun sinks slowly down
over the distant horizon,
the beautiful clouds become red with joy
and spread far and wide over the sky,
now of a pale blue hue.
The birds start singing,
but they sing very sadly,
because they know that the sun and the day
are hastening away and,
for all they know,
may never come back again.

After the empty blackness of the night,
a pale red gleam can be seen in the East.
It enlargens slowly but steadily,
till the mighty sun can clearly be seen.
Then the overjoyed birds sing happily,
for their comrade the sun is back again.

This is their song:

“Oh Day, oh Sun,
we welcome you –
you are our joys,
Almighty Ones,
our only joys;
because, through you,
we eat and drink.
If you were not,
we could not live.
Hail, Mighty Sun,
Envious Day!”

The turn of the tide

Sweet life, a feather, floats on high,
 moved by the tide of luck.
It rises swiftly in the sky,
 as free and light as Puck.

Then comes the time that tide must ebb,
 and life must follow fast.
The Parcae cut the living web,
 and life has lived its last.

Underground

The high and spacious caverns gleamed,
their moisture ever running slowly downwards.
The endless tunnels, dulled by age-long darkness,
ever twisted, winding onwards.

The floor, with grit and water sprinkled,
a sleeping monster's back resembled.
The cavern's kinky, shapeless, roof –
of age and strength was two-fold proof.
To everything there clung a clamminess
like Death's small finger still beckoning us.

Still the air was cold
in the tunnels old,
and the silence profound
in the dark caverns round –
and so they always will remain,
unheeding wind, and sun, and rain.

The upper world

The storm clouds sweep across the darkening sky
and, swelling quickly, push in eager haste;
as in the Grecian games Achilles raced,
here each cloud strives his neighbour to outfly.

At last they clash and, bursting, meet:
they can't advance, they can't retreat.
To him below, the world's but sleet
made on purpose to wet his feet..

The clouds recoil upon their haunches
and scatter wide like speeding launches..

The clouds now are less,
the clouds now are smaller -

yet to reunite, they need but the order.

A waterfall

Troy's brazen gates a-clashing,
a sheet of falling silver.
A noise of thunder rumbling,
a swiftly flowing river.

Trees falling in a forest,
a lonely child forsaken:
a tornado in the West
a harmful course had taken.

A white cloak of rising spray
a fleecy cloud is forming,
which is covering the way
the waterfall is falling.

When a thunderstorm threatens

Cows quietly stop grazing,
and horses start neighing.
Cats yawn, curl up and purr,
as do bitches and curs.

Spiders stop weaving their big silken webs,
and timid children hide under their beds.
The tom-tits, the skylarks, the crows and the eagles
swoop home to their nests, screeching, and wheedle.

Then mankind awakens as if from a slumber,
in presence of lightning and terrible thunder.

When the sun sinks slowly down

The shining sun sinks slowly down
steeped in saturnal splendour.

The bleary birds and bouncing billows
sleep soundly in their starry slumber.

The rats and bats with ghostly taps
slink and blink in every chink.

The crickets croak,
and spiders spin their silken strands.

No more bustle, business, or brass bands,
but waiting fairies waving wondrous willow wands.
Now Peace can proudly pace again.

Winter is coming

Willows whisper,
rushes rustle,
flowers flutter,
for Winter's coming.

Skylarks scatter,
tom-tits titter,
cuckoos cluster,
since Winter's coming.

Beetles burrow,
hedgehogs hurry,
squirrels scamper,
now Winter's come.

Notes

THE POEMS – My home in the years shown was in Oxford, though for much of the time from 1952 to 1957 I was away studying at Ampleforth College, York.

As seen from a beach in autumn 1952

The influence of Arran? Fraserburgh? Sandhamn? Veules les roses?

As you like it 1952

This seems to mark the start of what was to become a lifelong obsession with association of ideas, association of words, interrelationship of words with ideas and the potential of it all for ... anarchy. *Words at play* contains quite a few poems on the subject, identified in the end notes as 'language and the creative process'. Most of my poetry collections include poems with an initial number in roman, where the 'I' represents the main poem, and a 'II' (or III) represents associated ideas / words which missed out, but finally made it into an extra (associated) poem. Indeed, there are end notes following collections, where I incorporate snatches of verse to 'rescue' yet more ideas / words from oblivion.

The ballad of misfortune 1954

This, 'The ballad of perdition' and 'I went away' were probably written under the influence of Coleridge ... and (maybe) exile at boarding school.

The ballad of perdition 1954

(See 'The ballad of misfortune', above)

Cool water 1956

Written at night under the bedclothes and with the aid of a torch, hoping for a prize in a school competition. No luck.

Desert sun 1955

An early challenge to my father's views that verbs are strong and adjectives weak and to be eschewed or at best kept to a minimum. See my 'Actors for all reasons' (2010), *Words at play*.

Evening 1951

Evening voices 1953

My father had this poem, 'Light everywhere' and 'Stars' published without my knowledge in 1960 – much to my undisguised embarrassment and anger. He was not pleased with my reaction, considered out of order. I have lived to regret my response principled though it may have been, but clearly ungrateful and ... short sighted.

Fear 1951

First time under anaesthetic 1953

This refers to the operation for removal of my tonsils, and may have been written well after the event (maybe in Glasgow, pre-1948). It was a traumatic experience, only made bearable by hospital visits from my mother and by loads of ice cream.

I went away 1953

(See 'The ballad of misfortune', above)

Inceptio brumae 1952

Maybe trying to impress a teacher? Or maybe just challenging myself, trying to make a dead language live.

The last storm 1952

Light everywhere 1953

(See 'Evening voices', above)	
A lull in a storm	1953
A favourite. Was I remembering the river Kelvin, in Glasgow?	
Le matin	1953
Morning at sea	1955
(See 'As seen from a beach in autumn', and maybe add Santander to the list)	
My heart's desiring	1952
La neige	1953
Ode to a cat	1953
I had a cat at home briefly, not to be found when I returned from boarding school. I harboured serious suspicions ...	
Ode to a fly	1953
Ode to a mouse	1953
I kept white mice ... which then escaped and caused mayhem.	
Stars	1953
(See 'Evening voices', above, and 'The Juggler' (2004) in <i>The Natural World, Heaven and earth</i>)	
Summer	1947
My first poem. See introductory comments, 'Poetry'.	
That which is necessary	1952
The turn of the tide	1954
Yet another instance of an early concern with the fragility of life ... and inexorable endings.	
Underground	1952
I don't recollect whether this anticipated or followed my being stuck alone in a deep pothole on the Yorkshire moors, my candle extinguished, on a school free afternoon.	
The upper world	1953
A waterfall	1953
An early attempt at creating suspense by withholding the key word – effect rather spoiled by the give-away title!	
When a thunderstorm threatens	1952
When the sun sinks slowly down	1952
Winter is coming	1952

THE ILLUSTRATIONS – see 'ART WORK' for general information

POEMS

ILLUSTRATIONS – title, and ref.

	<u>Papegados</u>
As you like it	' <i>A sus órdenes</i> ' / 0:04 (<i>clave</i> / key, originally 2:31)
Cool water	<i>Salvamanteles 6 'Separadas II'</i> / 1:22 ('twist', courtesy Frango)
Desert sun	' <i>El mundo, el cielo y el más allá</i> ' / 2:17
	<u>Cristaletas</u>
Stars	' <i>Cristaleta 12</i> '