



Michael Bouwer 1951-1973

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Michael Bouwer was born in East London on 19th May 1951 and educated at Tsolo and Umtata Primary Schools in the Transkei, and later, after being purposely "held back" two years, permitted to matriculate from Queen's College, Queenstown in 1966. He was 15 years old.

Thought to be the youngest undergraduate ever admitted to the faculty, he enrolled for medical training at the University of Cape Town Medical School in 1967. Throughout, he had a faultless academic record and was set to graduate as a doctor on 13th December 1973. On 29th June 1973, Michael died in a motorcar accident when travelling home overnight with his sister, Janet, to Randburg, Transvaal.

This anthology was found amongst his belongings in the medical residence, and presented to his family in August 1973, a tribute to a talented scholar and fine friend.

AN ANTHOLOGY OF POEMS

WRITTEN BY

MICHAEL BOUWER

To Valda, Jeff, Janet and Christopher

Poetry is the spontaneous outflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.

William Wordsworth

AN ADDITION TO ELIOT'S "PRELUDES" (1968)

Filter-cigarettes pocket-squashed
Stale smoke, and sultry smelly heat outside
Unmade bed, curtains still drawn
At twelve o'clock
No birds sing in busy streets
The fumes and smog cloister too
A free man is but a tiny hull
Buffeted by winds and seas
Of sordid city life

Bath still full of last night's water
A ring of scum stifles white enamel
A ring of buildings stifles a spirit
A spirit yet?
Yea, yet a spirit - barely so
A spark still clings to life
Renewed but seldom by clear air
A forlorn hope in deathly dust
Of grimy human warrens

REMORSE OF A MURDERER (1968)

The sun is shining on the harbour
The mountain wreathed in clouds of gold
The morning dew is cool beneath me
But I am sheathed in shrouds of cold

In rosy-hued fresh-taken dawn
Men tend to leave all fears behind
While chirping poets serenade me
Still full am I of cares unkind

What is this cancer, spoiling beauty?
Leaving life a long way back
- They say a song can cure a heartache
If I should try my song may crack

The high white clouds float past my head
But I heed not, for blood is red

NO MAN

(1969)

No-man picks up his feet in silent footsteps
He holds in his non-palm a wraith
Of all that was and is to be
That no-man alone can see
The absent future passing back in silence ...
Still semi-soft sensation seeks a way
To leave that non-existent grip
Possessed yet by no-man
He holds up to the world a blinding light
That blind Man cannot grasp
With pitiful, passing, pleading yet
To take what is No man's
And never shall be ours
While time ... and tide
Wait for no-man

REALITY

(1968)

Thinking of hollyhocks
Rivers of slime come rushing past
Dreaming of green fields
Drowning in blistering ice-time's blast

Remembering elation
Facing dread crying at every turn
Waiting for love-thoughts
Smothering in breathless orange burn

Trying for happiness
Peaceful grinding of world's bloody rack
Looking for beauty
But knowing I'm seeing dead life's jagged crack

INSIDE THE OUTSIDE (1968)

Diversions, compulsions
Attractions, revulsions
emotions, redemptions
relations and tensions
This is the mind of a man
Romances, advances
Mental blocks, mental dances
Shy glimpses, coy glances
and questionless answers
All these are in a man's mind
Abstractions, identities
Meaningless apathies
Sub-mental mutinies
and infinite entities
Are all in mind's compass as well
But the last is the essence of all

DROUGHT

(1969)

A concrete wall stands up against
A dusty sky
The inside level slowly dropping
As beast and beauty die
Cracked mud holds up the heat
The water leaves before my eyes
As well as land, my living heart
Still slowly dies

White concrete blinks in glaring heat
White as the bones
Of those who lost survival's fight
Whose life was racked with searing groans
Steep banks holding dust and boulders
At this dry hopeful watering-place
The once-green earth hangs sad; Its head
Drags in disgrace

... FEAR NO MORE THE HEAT O' THE SUN (1968)

Cry hallow to the marble light
Of heated bright in nowhere-night
The yellow, boldly, blasting goldly
Within, without, fish-eye, white-coldly
Cremate the end, or set the mend
Do not contend, let self unbend
The crying-out for light about
Your covered sense and vain pretence
Let light commence
And end your blight
Or fight!

Note:

+ This poem is not self-contradictory

DELUSION?

(1968)

Be all, be nought - in human thought
Be what you are - hard near, cold far
Considering why or not you die
And go in snow
Forever

Could be - could not. Why? Set a rot
In matter-mind, - you cannot find
The ever end, and still contend
Devise, surprise,
Endeavour

FACT OR FANCY? (1968)

Mark me as a traitor, never
Say I failed myself, or ever
Hold silent yet, while I endeavour
This gnawing silver hold to sever
Have me what you will, I be
What I am is what you see
But do you see what's right or wrong?
Consider, friend, then end your song

ON THE LATENT POWERS OF THE HUMAN BRAIN (1969)

Blind circuits in organisation
More potent, brighter yet
Than concepts still unsought
Depths unexplored in deep infinity
Streams of unawakened current
Un-powered power, yet to be
Why unknown now? Capability
Is underneath vision of the eye
But - vision in full-mind?
Let silvered cotton-clouds be hence!
Let sandy thoughts be gold-intense!
Break down the fence!
And seek within, the riches of your mind

TORMENT OF A MINDLESS MIND (1969)

Running rabid rats that smell
Like some coal-black hole in hell
A bubbling pot on flames of slime
A moving mess of living grime
Bring me a clot of someone's breath
A daisy-sweet fresh smell of death
Send me a fungid head of green
A semi-sight still seldom seen
A burning lump of ember-ice
The rumbling stench of loaded dice
A flowing stream of chuckling eyes
An orchestra of frenzied cries
A bell to toll a gurgling chime
A faceless clock to tell the time
A limbless man in running-spikes
And bloated yellow men with pikes
To let the fetid air run out
And laugh a last despairing shout

BEACH-OIL

(1970)

A golden carpet stretches down the slope
Towards the sea
Smooth, snowlike in its powdery softness
- A wishful thought
As interspersed amidst the smoothness, lie
Great glistening lumps
Of clinging horror, waiting for a victim
To furl its wings
And drop forever to its stinking blackness
Never to rise again
Strangely quiet seems the water's rush
No far-flung spray
Rather a sticky surge as water strives
To break the barrier
The blanket-covering holding back the joy
Of flashing white
Leaving instead a satiny sheen of gore
Floating its deadly way towards the shore

COMMENT (1971)

If a sociable Mexican jumping bean
Strolled up to a Pear one day
And said, why aren't you a bean like me?
What would the pear then say?
Not being a pear (or a jumping bean)
I can only hazard a guess
But I reckon if someone said that to me
Here's what I'd say (more or less) :

Although my thoughts don't mimic yours at all
And you are small while certainly I'm not
Energy you have enough - I laze around
But ne'ertheless I'm happy with my lot

That's not, of course, to say I've no ambitions
Though yours must surely differ some from mine
Each to his own, to which he best be suited
"I tendeth my own life - livest thou thine!"

THE FINAL CURTAIN (1971)

I am laughing as I weep
While the greying ashes creep
Past the remnants of a burnt-out dying mind
I am walking like a sleeper
As I'm drifting slowly deeper
Leaving love and hate and fear a life behind

And the leaving of the years
Cannot shutter back the tears
And the horror of a final certain fate
Overwhelming sense of dread
Sifting quietly through my head
As I shuffle on to keep my final date

I can feel the world around me
Now that nemesis has found me
I can realise the things I should have known
Waiting for the final killing
Mind was weak and flesh was willing
- I am reaping but the crop of seed I've sown

I am passing crying people
And my step is getting feeble
And I stagger stumbling slightly in the dust
Cinders sting my blinding eyes
One more human slowly dies
In a ~~scream-of-ajject-terror~~, as he must
last despairing whimper
single cry of anger

THE LECTURE (1971)

We were given a lecture today
The lecturer, a clever man, tried hard
But couldn't get us to understand
Something he thought, as he later said,
Was a lot of nonsense anyway
No smoking in the lecture theatre
Oh I would give the world
To relax with a cigarette and a good book
While listening to his voice droning on
Like a summer's day

WRITTEN ON A COLD, WINDY FRIDAY NIGHT

August 1971
while swotting chempath!

Howling past my window in the evening
Is the gusty frozen fury of the wind
I am listening to the radio and grieving
In a love I'm holding shackled to my mind
Blowing smoke into the sympathetic night-air
Gazing sightlessly at words I cannot read
Hoping vainly that I find a little light there
Settling deep into a special kind of need
I don't think I will find what I am seeking
I've lost something I never really won
I'm wallowing - self-pity round me reeking
Waiting sadly for tomorrow's chilly sun

THE GIFT (1971)

I am presenting you with my life
It's yours, do with it what you will
I really don't want it anymore
If you like, you can make it
A happy life - or a sad lonely one
The choice is entirely up to you
You may even wish to end it
But that might be a waste
Although of course, the decision
Is yours, as I have pointed out
Hurt it if you wish, torture it
Slowly, painfully - I know it won't mind
After all, its your property - I have
Given it away - its no use to me
So have fun with it any way you like
But all I ask is, don't lock it away
In a dark cupboard all alone. Don't
forget it. Hate it or love it - kill it!
Just so long as it knows
You're there

A CRY FOR STRENGTH IN ADVERSITY (1971)

Harassed by a devil flying	A
On a flame-path thru my sense	B
Cutting chords of children dying	A
And flowers losing petals, crying	A
Poison-yellow thoughts of fire intense	B
Carpet-floors of deadly toadstools creep	C
Mid trees encrusted o'er by devil-moss	D
I try to let my mind relax and sleep	C
But taste the sickly salt of tears I weep	C
And mourn for heaven-strength to bear my cross	D

LOVE POEM (1971)

Carry me home on your
Restless wings
Sing me soft songs of
Unreachable things
Lull me to sleep on your
Soft yielding breast
Then open my eyes and let
Love do the rest

Slice me a crust of that
Warmly-fresh bread
Bring wine for my thirst and a
Rest for my head
Let me eat, let me drink till I'm
Fully replete
Let me then rest my mind on the
Floor at your feet

THE STEP

(1971)

I think somehow I missed my step
As I made to climb the cliff of life
There was no rope to save me and I fell
Down to the foot of that steep slope
And somehow I must have twisted
My mind, because I cannot start again
Or do I languish here because
I see bare stones and a bare peak
Where others see joy and love?
Now tell me of golden days
In the silver happy cocoon of your life
And iridescent dragon-flies and bees
Humming their scented flower-song
Sing lullabies of joys and sweetness
While here grey waves pound grey rocks
On a grey shore beneath a crimson sky
Dripping in gleeful red sanguinity
Laughing at my missing the step
Taking the wrong turn
On the road to paradise

Tie a rope around my neck
And swing me down into a sea of blood

SOUL INSIGHT (1971)

I walked a bloody carpet
In the sewers of my sight
And strode thru rings of fire
Into Satan's devil-night
I heard his drums resounding
In a wild compelling beat
As I shuffled through the rotting
Human flesh beneath my feet
There's an offal-mountain gleaming
Strangely in that awful light
And the deadly sun is shooting
Poison arrows thru my sight
I am living in a nightmare
Of a black malignant whole
But the real repelling horror is
That these
Are all
Reflections of my soul

THE SILVER TREE

In the friendly gusts of the night-black wind
Spluttering shards of its fine cold rain
Man in his house and fire no threat
He stands with pride on his land again
But when the wind is a dirty heat
And cigarets glow in the bone-dry brush
When his leaves are stripped and his body torn
And the dropping breeze leaves a grumbling hush
With a silent cough in the grey woodsmoke
He bows his head in his quiet pain
Waiting for man and his works to end
When he will be lord of his hill again

THE DOOR (1971)

There were three doors
Three locks, three keys
And three ways that I could go
I opened my mind and
Led myself thru the first door
But there was nothing there
But white snow-blinding, gleaming
Oh God! What am I doing?
Let me open the second door
And see what lies within
But there was nothing there
But hot vibrating visions
Burning! Bloody damn hell!
The third door!
The third door - cast it open
And see what lies within
A nightmare
Foul horror, cloying sickly
Retching. Oh my Christ
Let me open the ...
But there are no more doors!
And I cannot close the
Third door
And the menace
Devil-diseased terror
Please! Open another door!
Close the third door

I am marooned
In the teeming shambles
Behind
The third door
Third door of my mind

PARADISE (1972)

Sing to me of a secret road
That leads beyond the sun
Where the war machines have perished
And the age of love begun
Take me down there with you
To the bottom of the light
Where the air is cool and laughing
And the day is never night
Let the beast be always sleeping
And the wine flow swift and red
With the sun and moon my pillows
And the earth my feather-bed

THE GHOST OF THE NIGHT-FIGHTER (1972)

The air machine is passing down
The waves of cloud above the town
Then past the furthest lights it goes
Into which darkness no-one knows
Icicles forming on its wings
Black night concealing unknown things
Beneath it a dim shadow-land
Touched by a lonely spectre-hand
Silence broken by the sound
Of the propellor turning round
Pushing back the cool night-wind
Leaving its echoing path behind
Where is it going, this machine?
To new lands, always emerald-green
Or to a foggy, misty earth
Where all the rivers have their birth
With dripping trees festooned with moss
The place where dead and living cross
I'll follow it, I know not where
Whether it climbs a heaven-stair
Or drops into the deepest well
Of evils none are here to tell
And I will always follow on
As in its path earth-time is gone
And it remains in level flight
Moves ever-onwards with the night

CLANCY (1972)

In a small grey house in a small grey town
Lived a small grey man called Harry Brown
With his strident wife and his children three
(Timothy, Margaret and Anthony)
You would think him a soul in a living grave
But one thing to Harry sustenance gave
You can call it whatever name you fancy
He knew it as Shenkashan (or Clancy)
Shenkashan of the fiery glare
With his burning eyes and long red hair
Clancy tall and fierce and grim
T'would take three armies to conquer him
And he was the one who still gave breath
To Harry Brown in his small grey death
I could tell some takes of Shenkashan
For he feared no god or beast or man
And he hugely strode in his chosen path
And the elements quailed before his wrath
The wind stayed low and the clouds crept clear
When they knew that Shenkashan was near
And the lesser gods in the world of man
Dreaded the coming of Shenkashan
The greatest power in all the land
- Yet one man held him in his hand
At a single word from Harry Brown
Clancy bowed his great head down
At a single word, in quiet defeat
He would kiss the earth at his master's feet
And Harry Brown could fear no man
With a slave like Clancy (or Shenkashan)
Together they strode the jungle's dank
Theirs was the ship that never sank
The highest peaks were at their feet
And they fear neither cold nor heat
Harry Brown in his world of fancy
With his servant Shenkashan (or Clancy)
And then on night in his small grey house
Harry forgot his role as mouse
He killed his wife and his children three
(Timothy, Margaret and Anthony)
Then his mind went back into its haze
And there he is and there he stays
Harry Brown in his world of fancy
Roaming with Shenkashan (or Clancy)

TOTAL WITHDRAWAL (1972)

He felt his sour prison
And its walls of dirty stone
And wondered how his person
Should have gone from being his own
Now he wonders how to get it
On the way back to the light
Then he droops, resigned, to let it
Stumble onwards in the night
In the darkness it is creeping
In its tomb inside the earth
And somewhere there's sound of weeping
Interspersed with shrieks of mirth
There's a cat upon a stone wall
And a dog lying in the sun
While the screams of wretched mind-calls
Wonder who has now begun
To release his tired being
From the dungeon of its own
And he sees in what he's seeing
All the thoughts he's ever grown

There's a train nearby a station
With its whistle piercing on
Through the dark conglomeration
Of the night that's never gone
Now and then there is a greying
Looking feebly for the morn
But the blackness is displaying
Its rejection of the dawn
Closing in upon its coldness
On its cloying deadly quiet
Never letting forth the boldness
Of the vision that would try it
Rather crushing, clogging, spraying
Threads of dullness through its breath
And the mind within just praying
For a silent, rapid death

THE BOXER

(1972)

Sweat-sheen glistens on scarred bronze skin
And the lights glare fiery overhead
As the fighter crouches, sways, his mind affixed
On his prey, as he moves in on attack
There is no sound in his ears of the crowd
Only the dull slap of leather against skin
And the thud of tired feet on the ring-floor
White gumshield glistens between gasping lips
With a spot of blood at one split corner
Cheek-skin drawn in shining tight grimace
Below dark eyes now glazed, now shining
Burning forth their hatred of the foe
Figures in a dream, a still tableau
Time has slowed, and movements made
With blistering reflex-speed seem to be still
Then the bell rings out its jarring clang
And the muscles relax, the tension drains
With the slow stumbling steps towards the corner
Where his seconds wait with eager sponges
And words of exhortation for the kill

THE OCTOBER WIND (1972)

There is a dark wind tonight
Blowing out of warm dusty mountains
Then curling in over the sea,
Like a cathartic, trimming the trees
Of their old dead branches, sweeping
The gutters, the streets, and the bare
Vacant lots where used-car salesmen
Put up their eager hungry bargains
It is a black night-wind, this wind
Rattling windows and doors
And screeching like the wail
Of fifty new lamenting widows
At the wooded warm corners of the mountain
It is a widow-wind, a lost wind
Dry now, drained of sobs and heading
Seawards again, to lose itself amid
Stormy angry seamen on tiny
Plunging coasters, and seasick children
Until its teeth are lost, its hair gone grey
And its roughness fled into cool corners
Of its grey-blue ocean grave

WHITHER THE NEW INTELLECTUAL? (1972)

I was having a serious discussion
 Some weeks ago, with a friend,
 We talked and argued, agreed and disagreed
 Thinking of this and that, and life
 And death, and their relative meanings
 (We even, briefly, touched on politics)
 Through all the rambling threads, bizarre
 And concrete, meaningful meanderings
 What was it that emerged? what crept
 And stretched in freedom from this dark cocoon
 And spread itself and its ideas, its wings
 Breathing its new forthcoming to the world?
 At the time, I must confess, I felt
 As if a weight, a burdening of which
 I had been unaware, was lightened
 And if not the answer yet, I certainly
 Had in my mind the reason for it all
 What lies inside the mind of every
 Average, (normal), uncomplicated man?
 Is it a kernel, a solid central nub
 Of truth, and moral strength, and power
 Of will, power of intellect, of balanced thought?
 Or could it be merely a hard shell
 Protecting nothing but a vacuous self
 Secure in its regard for number one?
 I hoped then, that the first suggestion
 Might be predominant, but now I feel
 That my optimism may not have been justified
 Perhaps man is just an empty, selfish
 Self-protective shell - I find that thought
 A near-intolerable one, as it must equally
 Apply to me - so was I rationalizing,
 Intellectualising, verbalising? There is
 Unfortunately, no man to tell me yes or no
 The circle I created in my thought, that day
 Has proved to be a vicious one
 And in truth, that long discussion
 Between two bright young self-styled intellectuals
 Where did it get us? What did we achieve?
 - Just a little useless self-abnegation,
 Some sombre self-examination and
 A coarse web of confusion

For what is black, and what is white?
 And true and false, and wrong and right?

CIRCLE (1972).

When I describe a circle
With the shadow of my pen
My mind performs a somersault
And I remember then
When you were mine, and silky
Hair, and eyes were cool and grey
While thinking, I am wishing
We could have just one more day
Lift me up to awesome heights
Then cast me down again
Run laughing into sunlight and
The dark moon and the rain
Shoes tapping out a rhythm
On the floor beneath your feet
My heart here gaily singing
Keeping time with every beat
Pass a misty sunrise
Through a gentle summer breeze
Add the gentle rustle
Of the squirrels in the trees
Simmer soft and gentle
On a pot of beaten gold
And you will have the essence
Of the never-growing-old
My circle is a shadow
And the shadow is a cry
From within its shell reforming
As I let my vision die

WARM SUMMER EVENING (1972)

This is Monday night
And in two weeks' time I have
Examinations
I should be studying, making up
For all the other Monday nights
Spent dreaming
And writing poems full of obscure
And abstract meaningless verbiage
But unfortunately
Tonight is October and warm
And the air is like a still,
Stifling blanket
Shutting out the breeze of endeavor
Like a silent, shifting fog of languid
Procrastination
Stealing my time into its silken maw
At my open window the noise of traffic
Drifts in
Even the noise is somehow hushed
With the warm air sapping its energy
Even now
I wish for a cool ice-breeze to
Blow away some of the soft heat-cobwebs
And release me from their silky-dark cocoon

JOURNEY (1973)

Up the long road past the mountain
To the rainbow far ahead
And the purple gloom of evening
Damping words unheard, unsaid
Keep me rolling on my way there
With my eyes fixed on my goal
Let me cheat the hungry travail
Of its grasping for my soul
As I crest another ridge-top
See the winding fall-away
And the last long struggle ending
In the coming of the day
Here is where I find myself now
Gazing out towards the plain
But with horror, in the distance
I see mountains rise again
And I know that work continues
Till I reach the resting slope
And eternal climbing's ended
Carried on the wings of hope

INTERLUDE (1972)

At daybreak, on the dusty verge
- I was driving along, heading fast
For another teeming world of rats
In a hurry, where there is no haste,
For how can one hurry nowhere? -
I saw a small figure standing there
Still and straight, frozen in a tired
Posture of waiting. Of course, I stopped
More out of curiosity than anything else
The air was still cool, cool and still
And quiet in its morning dewiness
There was nothing along the road
- No traffic, not even a bicycle
No farmhouses, and the nearest town
Forty miles away. I wondered
Where that small figure had come from
And where she was headed.
She got in with a murmur of thanks
And slammed the door so that I winced,
Remembering someone else, a long time past,
Who also slammed doors. I asked her
Where she was going - she shrugged
So I pulled back onto the tarmac
And drove in silence for another twenty miles
Then glanced at the figure beside me
She sat rigid, uncomfortably straight
Looking at the road ahead, at nothing
Eventually my curiosity won, and I
Asked a few questions, designed with
Two aims in mind: to put this strange
Young figure at her ease, and find out
Who she was, and whether she also
Liked cold chicken, and classical
Music, and dry red wine, and why
She slammed doors that palpably
Shouldn't require more than the gentlest
Touch, to close them. It transpired
That her name was Ellen, just Ellen
And she came from nowhere - via
A shrug, a thin twitch of her shoulders
I slowed the car slightly, and noticed
Short-cut brown hair framing a pretty,

Sad, ..

Sad, pale lonely face and velvet eyes
 Brown velvet. Brown-eyed girls in
 Thin cotton dresses on cool mornings
 Have with them an air, a breath
 Of something the nature of which
 I have never been able to establish.
 We drove on through the morning
 And stopped at a roadside place
 To have some lunch. She drank
 Two milkshakes, for which I tried to pay
 - But she refused, fingering a tattered purse
 From which she took two small grubby coins.
 The sea was near in the afternoon
 I said I wanted to stop for a while
 And parked the car where we could see
 Wooded hills reaching down, their fragrance
 Mingling with that of beach and rocks and ocean.
 Suddenly she shifted in her seat
 And rested her head against my shoulder
 I looked at her face, and her mouth
 Showed a small grin, her eyes
 Said, please forgive my moment
 Of weakness. I just need something
 Human, to touch for a while, to feel
 Less alone. We stayed there, barely
 Moving, not talking, just smoking
 The occasional cigarette, until
 It was dusk, the pink sky lit
 With a glow of day, a glow, also
 Of tomorrow, next week, next year
 Then, without changing positions
 We drove on and into the night
 For the next three months we were
 Together. I lived
 A total life, a dream-life
 Then one day we were travelling - at dawn
 On another road, rather similar
 To that where I first saw her
 And she asked me to stop the car
 Said goodbye, got out, and slammed
 The door. I drove off looking back
 At the figure standing at the side
 Of that deserted road.

I still don't know
 Where she is from, and what her full name is,
 And whether she is going anywhere -

Her ..

-Her velvet brown eyes told me nothing
And I was happy, but never discovered
Why she enjoys slamming doors. That was
My small brown-eyed girl, my interlude

(See "Interlude")

TO A BROWN-EYED GIRL

Please tell me.

Where are you now?

Don't stay away.

Away is far.

Today has been a good day, but
Tomorrow might be bad.

Without

You here.

You here and me away

On wings of joy, of knowing

That I can hear your breathing

Close by now.

Feel your warmth

Of presence being near.

Feel your thoughts smiling

In unison with mine.

It would be fine

If you were here today.

THE GOLDEN LION (after C.S. Lewis)

No man walks where the great beast stalks
And the stars in his sky are strange
And he lifts his voice in a cry of joy
As he prowls his lonely range
He need not eat or drink or sleep
For his is a life beyond
All that a man could understand
And the things of which he's fond
No need of music has he felt
For his music lies within
And its beauty far exceeds our own
As lustrous gold to tin
In the land he roams he is all alone
And he watches in his mind
And his quiet breath is life or death
But he's wise and just and kind
He has no dread of a great unknown
For all is known to him
And his eyes still shine with their warm gold light
When the stars of man grow dim

No man walks where Aslan stalks
And the stars in his sky are strange
As he lifts his voice in a cry of joy
And he prowls his lonely range

"MESMERISE ME WITH YOUR EYES..." (1973)

Mesmerise me with your eyes
And let your hair flame stiffly out
Could I be dreaming?
Where is this pinkness
Shafted through with cords of fire?
Does it lie bubbling
Permeating, stinking its
Pinkness gurgling through my brain?
Crack open a soft brittle shell
Suck the pink flesh and roll it
Round, taste and swallow
Me? No, keep ... keep back
Slip away snarling if you must
Or grin brown-toothed assurance
Of your victory. Hail to
Those who withstand your
Tempting warm world.
Would I were one who could
Withstand the strength of your madness
Keeping this sanity intact in my safe web

"THERE IS A HAZE ABOUT THE HILLS TODAY ..."

There is a haze about the hills today
Fluttering about their woody slopes
Moving in its own eddys, undisturbed
By wind. The sun is glinting
Softly through the filtering mist
Down towards the sea, there is
No clear horizon, its shimmering
Joining the white edge of the sky.
Let us throw a gentle song into this air
Something soft, and vaguely melancholy
Bring our mood down, to one
Of quiet introspection.
Let us leave our bows unstrung, their arrows
Unbarbed and safe inside their quivers
Let us clasp our hands together not in fists
But attitudes of prayer
Not to say that we are actually praying
- At least not consciously, we hope -
But rather just belonging to our world
In one respect, that of our being,
Our down-here now-time existence
While in another, disembodied we
Superimpose our universal selves
Not only on what we know, or hear, or see
But on our own, our ultimate mystery
Which is not "how?" or "what?", but only "why?"

"WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME...."

When was the last time
I told you I loved you?
Was it that day when
We had jam for tea?
Or was it that birthday
That we celebrated
- A bottle for you and
A bottle for me?
Was it when we still
Had coal in the winter -
Our bodies were warm and
Our people were free?
Or was it that morning
I came out of prison
And we had a party
For two - you and me?
Please tell me, my sweetheart,
For memory's failing
My mind's not as sharp now
As it used to be
When was the last time
I told you I loved you?
Was it that day when
We had jam for tea?

STRANGERS

(1973)

Under glaring floodlights
I saw a football game tonight
There were twenty-five thousand
People there. Blame me
For not knowing them all, for not
Saying hi there how is it
Going with you. If we all
Made a point of striking up
Conversations with three total strangers
Every day of our lives. I sometimes think
We might perhaps hate less. We might
Show tolerance on occasion. Perhaps
Such contact would broaden our
Limited horizons, and enrich us.
But from what I know of human nature
I doubt it.

"JIMMY WAS A ROCK" (1973)

Jimmy was a rock, they said
Till the day Befere he bought a gun
Now, although a killer, he's
Just a man, like anyone
Bullets don't discriminate
They don't know, or fear or hate
It wasn't won't be supernatural fate
When Jimmy gets his.

Right between the eyes

And dies.

Ha Ha!

(Bazookas are for crooks - honest men

Kill only with their hands)

The moral of this story being

Don't look too hard for fear of seeing

(First person to find the connection

Between the latter and the rest of the

Poem (sic) will be awarded a prize

One autographed portrait of the poet (sic)

At the tender age of three

So analyse, folks, analyse!

"YOU GAVE ME LIES...." (1973)

You gave me lies
To build my dreams
But things are never
Just what they seems
Keep your umbrella
Let me get wet
My yellow mind
Will not forget
I keep the peace
Don't say a word
The time is coming
When I'll be heard
It won't be simple
It won't be fast
You'll die ten times ere
You breathe your last
And as you're sinking
Into death's void
Remember all that
You have destroyed

TOUCHING

(1973)

People pass me in the street
 Where are they going, without me now?
 Holding hands in their cocoons, their webs
 Snares, traps of happiness
 Why are they going, without stopping
 To talk to me, to say hello old fellow
 How are you? I don't know them
 Their names, their faces mean nothing
 But why does that matter? I suppose
 There is no reason why anyone should
 Talk to a perfect stranger. But tell me
 Why am I always a stranger?
 Speaking to many, touching no-one
 Touching. That's what we need more of
 Minds, souls if you like, touching
 Meeting at the corner, intersecting
 Linking, interdigitating, like woven
 Strands, threads of contact, of
 Happiness, of knowing, of feeling
 (Woven together on the loom of life)

CRAP

 replace!

SUNPATH (1973)

Feel a coolness in the hollows of your eyes
And a misty fragrance sweetening the skies
While with the sun you help the morning rise

Let the day break warmly on your skin
Feel its fullness eager bursting in
And brightly watch the world its daylight win

Send breezy afternoon upon its way
To spread the warm town-smells in disarray
And break the shackles of the heat away

Then sink your soul in darkness with the sun
Touch all the clouds with pinkness one by one
And slowly leave the day that you have done

Move onward to the next horizon's birth
And dawn upon another waking earth

MUSIC (1973)

Curl your rising coils of smoke
Into a dark corner of the room
Have another beer. Tell a joke
Or close your eyes and let the music loom

Silence has a rhythm of its own
Like a lake without the slightest breath of wind
But music has a hurricane to drive it
To waves of jubilation in your mind

Silence dampens, soothes, while music reaches
The quietest corners, stirring up a storm
Loosening the silky bonds of darkness
With each manipulation of its form

So close your eyes and bare your soul to sound
Become a part of every single note
Release yourself completely to your music
And feel the breath of freedom in your throat

WEATHER (1973)

In the winter, when your toes curl up with cold
And you shiver in the dampness of your clothes
You will marvel at your feeling hot in summer
And your anger when the warm south-easter blows

And your moaning at the dryness of the garden
Must seem trivial in the soaking of the rain
No revelling in the coolness of the weather
You just wish that it was summer once again

When its still you wish there was a cooling breeze
When the wind blows you are wishing it would not
In the heat you're thinking only of a raincloud
And when its cool you're saying it should be hot

So why not go and live inside a glasshouse
And control the weather just to suit your mood
Natures whims are really nothing but a nuisance
Only man-made storms are ever any good

WINTER EVENING (1973)

Close your waning eyes, my dear
 Allow the sun its quiet death alone
 Keep your shadow close beside you
 Until the line twixt dark and light is gone
 Do not stare at the yellow rays
 No longer flushed in joyous youthful fire
 Let them enjoy the final gasping warmth
 Of daylight, on their flickering funeral pyre

—

Why is it cold now? Has some monster sucked
 The air away and left its frozen shell?
 Is this the season's usual evening fare
 Or could it be the temperature of hell?

—

(Beat your hands
 (Against a failing sky, a disappearing
 (Horizon. Clutch yourself
 (Into your arms, and shiver, shiver
 (With the sun. Then
 N.B. (Look for a cold moon, let it peep
 (Its chilly leer behind a tree
 (Let its silver-ragged light
 (Ghost the half-shadows it has made
 (And hang its ice-light on the winter sea

SPACE-SIREN (1973)

At the end of the sun, she said
Find me there, beneath the shadows
Of the stars. Let the universe
Drink of the two of us
The nebulae watch us play
In our sun-lit sun-life
The galaxies, the comets and
The small cold chunks of rock
In their frozen uncharted orbits
See us sleep. Waken. Live on
In iridescence, glowing through
Transparent cloaks like insect-wings
Shimmering over lazy summer water
Weaving our patterns in a tenuous
Cobweb of dreams - But finding truths
As dewdrops glistening suspended.
Join me there, she said
And we shall swim the light-seas
Of space. And down the rapids
Of the milkyway in our canoe
A thought-craft bearing us to all
The corners, all the silent lonely places
Where we may sit and ponder
And laugh, and love immortal
Secure in our vast domain.
Come soon, she said
Before your heels are weighted
By the cares and mundane sorrows
To which men draw themselves
Come, come now, before it is too late
To slip your bonds, cast off your
Earthly shackles, for the breathless freedom
Of timeless, universal paradise

But how can man his soul, his earth forget?
- I wait, she said, and she is waiting yet.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

(1973)

Are you happy, girl
In your bright new world?
Do you think you are really free?

Do you feel alone
When you're on your own?
Do you wish that you still loved me?

LOGIC (1973)

Man's scientific laws confine his mind
He is by rules of his own logic bound
He can no more conceive of abstract thought
Than he can prove a square is really round

We work in three dimensions, sometimes four
And time, the fourth, we still don't understand
But maybe there are six, or nine, or twelve?
- Subjective terms of reference stay the hand

Could mankind but conceive a larger scope
Expand the limits of his puny sense
Then he would be no longer flushed with pride
And dazzled by his own magnificence

HIGH

Fly me high in the mist of morning
blow me up with a cloud
in the sky lift me to the
mountain-tops let me glide
down the piney snow-slopes
to the melted stream where
icy water smells of snow and new
spring-stirrings crisp the air
filter my soul through fresh bubbles
of light walk with me over
new grass-dampness roll over
and over and over and over
in the sprinkling morning sun
spreading newness warmth rising
love you in the blue blue
cool sky what a
time to be alone free alone
free rolling in the dew
breaking the strings of thought
just wondering why is
it so unusual to be totally happy?

"I CAN SEE YOUR FACE"

I can see your face
In the mist outside my window tonight
Every drop of moisture carries
A thousand images of you
Glimmering pale haloes, blurring the lights
Are the light of your eyes
While the fresh smell of salt in the air
Breathes with your breath
The muted whisper of the traffic
Carries a sigh, a hint of soft voices
And quiet music, and dreams ...
And the cool mist-glow of the sky
Is a glow of tomorrow, and you

"COOL TUNES IN CANDLE-LIGHT ..."

Cool tunes in candle-light
Whispering frosty secrets
Telling me interesting things
About the world. But they tell me
Nothing at all about you

Flicker, flutter, falter at the mercy
Of the soft air-currents
Vacillate, spin half-words out
But keep me mystified, paralysed
In restless indecision

Catch a drop of hot wax in my hand
Let it harden and its shape
Reflect my life-line
But it is amorphous, opaque
And has no pictures of you

Would the yellow flame compose
Itself, and sing out
Of love, and how to find
Some understanding, and make
A path for us in this patterned world

But a candle is just wax-vapour
And string. Burning with a yellow
Smoky flame. Spluttering
Muttering. But quietly, to itself
Leaving me only with my thoughts of you

"I CAN SEE FIRES, ..."

I can see fires, and knives
And children crying
While their mothers are raped
Their fathers dying.
Loving your land, your people
Your cities and streams
You will see it all, your life
Dissolving in screams.

Who will kill, and who will die?
Says the white man:- why?
Did we displease God
Incur his rage?
- Tell them, someone:-
This is your wage.

Make your changes tomorrow, too late,
When all is lost.
Remember, you leave your children
To bear the cost.

TSITSIKAMA

Curl the lusty wave may
And the seabird cry, on white
Lonely beaches
In the whipping salt of a fresh
Sea-breeze, flinging in
From its ocean reaches
And bent sea-grasses
Sand-dunes not yet foot marked
And rocky reefs
With living pools in their hollows
Smelling of seaweed, and sun
But not of forest leaves

In these dark and tangled thickets
A man may stumble, wander aimlessly
Then suddenly a shaft of sunlight
Strikes, and he steps out
Onto the banks of a forest stream
Where he gives thanks for another dream
Not yet removed by axes and by roads
The dark water distilled out of
Centuries of quiet wood, alone
In its slow sequence, imperceptible
In terms of human reference, human time
Not for these trees the pace of cities
Give them their seasons, their rain
And sun. Slowly, with dignity
And be reverent, and thankful that,
Before it is too late, before
The ugly sprawl of humanity
Stretches out its tendrils and devours them,
You have seen these forests, their trees
Their gorges and their streams
You have held them close, and loved them
And felt their peace

"LAUGHS THE SILVER BREEZE TODAY"..."

Laughs the silver breeze today
In the air of the mountains, the trees
Whisper cool secrets in their berg-corners
Amid trickles of water, flowing
In shadowed valleys, down
To a deep pool, dark, fringed
With mossy mountain-boulders, and foliage;
Shadowed with peace
Reflecting the branches
In its surface, the peaks
Towering overhead, the watchers, guardians
Keeping the spirit of the land
And what of the spirit of a man?
Gazing into beauties such as these
Marvelling at their timelessness, their strength
Can he strip the valleys of their trees
Allow the rain to fall on barren ground
And foul the sweet earth-water?
Can he do these things
And yet be part of what we call creation?

"WALKING UNDERNEATH AN AUTUMN MOON ..."

Walking underneath an autumn moon
Is a girl with a guitar
She stops, and plays a few disjointed chords
Then moves into a melody afar

Fingers strum the strings; a husky girl-voice
Sings a ballad of a long-ago
And different time, when earth was young
And man still an amorphous embryo

When older beings lived, in fire and light
And things were stranger still
Than all that, in his wisdom, man can make
Or ever will

Some men still know those times, but in their dreams
And others, poets, dream by day
Or are the lost ones never really gone
But merely from us hid away?

The girl who sings enchanted words out there
Is breathing air not of this greedy earth
Her thoughts are with those others in her sight;
In her mind's birth

The shadows of their presence comfort her
And yet their strangeness in the night
Is filled with fresh experience, awake
With its own light

I wish that I could join her in her mood
Without destroying its view;
And we could go on dreaming, wandering still
In our own Xanadu

Last night I watched a game
Of soccer. Today, rugby
On both occasions my team won
And I cheered, and shouted
With the rest, and hated the referee
Then walked out of the ground
In joyous haze, listening to
The chatter of the crowds. But
Now I am sitting, thinking hard
Trying desperately to find
Some significance in all that I am doing.
Every day I walk up to the
Great white hospital on the hill
Do my required work, without
Any great enthusiasm. Constantly
Reminding myself of finals, five months off
Flogging myself with my conscience
But never really trying very much
Is this my cross, to go through life
Without ever trying very much?
Or is this listlessness, depressing
In its morbid debility, merely
A symptom of my quiet stagnation?
My friends, in their wisdom, say
That all I need is a woman.
Well, that may be so - a man
Has certain needs, by virtue of
His very physiology. However,
I don't really believe that would help
And anyway, I don't know if
I could quite muster the energy
Not physical. The mental motivation
Is what I mean. Basically
I couldn't really give a shit
About anything. And much as I'd like to
I cannot really blame the world
For not giving a shit about me.

Now ..

Now that is one hell of a thing to say
Verging almost on self-pitying paranoia
A state which slips so easily over
But can't with ease be shaken off.
Anyhow, I seem to be rambling on
Trying to find a cause for this
While all the time I know
There is no cause, no concrete fault,
No single circumstance, that is to blame
What I really need is not a cause at all
Only a solution. I think I need
A real shock, to drive the lethargy
Out. And put real life back in
To give me back my meaning, my goals
My whys and musts and shalls.
To drive away this weary cloud
And let my path be clear and sharp once more.

AN ANSWER TO YOUR "LAST NIGHT I WATCHED A GAME
OF SOCCER" MIKE

What have I learnt from the pentateuch?
 What have you taught me, O sage?
 Of life or death, meanings mistook
 Neither states am I able to guage.

I seek and find not, Oh what to do
 The secrets of existence are withheld, unknown,
 To be disclosed only to a chosen few
 Is it perhaps that I have not grown?

Everything I am, I hold within
 My choice to use - but, to what end?
 Thus I remain here, still to begin
 Am I worth a jot - or do I pretend?

I see in life the longing of us all
 For serenity and unity with elements about:
 But around me people fight and maul
 And then my mind is filled with doubt.

I long for tranquillity, the shelter of love
 The beauty of trees or roaring of surf;
 That my soul might lift and soar above
 All that's hateful here on earth.

I pray for strength to see years through
 Years of toil, and shadows and griefs
 That at the end, like morning's dew
 Fresh shall I be, with strong beliefs -
 That life had a point
 Happiness to a few I brought:
 That I served my friends
 And many things I've been taught.

With regards

R

When the dead men come
From the dark cold shore
And they call my name
That I fight no more
I shall not feel bad
I shall not be grey
Though I should be 'sad
Thus to go away
I'll remember things
That alive I saw
And the hate life brings
Shall be hate no more
Let me stand alone
Play a last sad note
On your saxophone
As I leave this boat
For another ship
And that unknown shore
And I make my trip
Seeking one thing more -
Can I understand
Or is it too late?
Why must man demand
Such a fearful fate?
Why must man decay
In his 'moral' shell?
Why the need to pray
When he builds his hell?
Has he lost his way
Or is no path there?
Is the earth (sky) all grey
Is there nothing fair? (no clear air?)

POSTSCRIPT

Ridgeway, P/lands

4.8.73

Dear Robin

I have typed these poems exactly as is. Mike has written:

Page 22 – Cigaretts (sic)

Page 29 – Salesment (sic)

Page 32 – Endeavor (sic)

Thank you for letting me do this work. It was a great privilege and an honour & I feel I know Mike Bouwer now, although we never met.

The poetry is beautiful. I wonder if Dr. and Mrs B. will have it published ever?

Molly B(urns)

This anthology is published in memory of Michael and Janet Bouwer (1953 - 1987), and as a tribute to Valda Bouwer, their mother, a kindly, generous and courageous woman, presently in her 90th year.

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