

takeaway night



joey frances

this island
 's nowt but graves
briars a splaying cypress
in the memories of
 hermit monks

my contract's shitty
no pay for summer

but i saw the sun set
over ynys môn
rabbits at the tip
wind at the canopy

*

takeaway night



a little narrative poem like

the day we went to blackpool
illuminations on mushrooms
it was
kinda bad

sunset in the sea one way
all jangling the other
all shuffling along the strip
so much stimulation

picture a polished steam train
studded with a thousand incandescents
rolling down the old tramlines
towards your face
forever

*

leonard cohen sang
if your life is a leaf
that the seasons tear
off & condemn

see everything speak
every escape
a little life
the right way
intervene every

time just lands in prison
that was ewan maccoll
that was the lag

*

half up a sickle bay
hard bar gleaming harsh
& crosswise out a
way off

 all particularly
remarkable

 herring gulls again
 jackdaws
against the conwy
cutting in such a fine
example the fortress
 from here consolatory
foothills shift

 their own waves
 goat grazed in
 new memoriam
 the false event
of their carving

*

at the point
of greatest diminution
there's a fascist firebomb
& here we are

*plenty of time
on my mind*

mimi parker died
bernadette mayer died
bombarDED all the meanwhile
someone's glued to the m25

*

i've been trying to write on my phone
every sheaf of
fragile pages
facile dampening
my soggy knapsack
loomed over all technology
i do not like to be mediated
in this particular way

& if everything we
make feels bad
in the movements of the world
writing poems again
depressed & groggy
on the cross town tram

tap tap tapping

*

shock green kingfisher
back in the dying
wye big fucker
buzzard posted above
dry stubble & mouseless
my dad fell
& i felt
weak in the face
of age the dappled
things dying

*

i nearly met a
 woman from my phone
but spent the day lugging
 & crashed out

our little
 projects asking
nothing too much

where do the bees
 fuck these days caked
 in neonicotines there
don't fuck i neither

*

object among objects
every friend made in adolescence
music or poetry somewhere
in here or
out on the scene
everything good learned in books or doing
or rest
just so much stimulation
i do not want to be discursive
or nearly
this connection turns us out
the form of the ideal
subject, mind to stupid mind
like so many jellied eels

*

we walked down into
the hushings
so named for bubbling mounds
& streams to hush
away the soil
stone & lime left
over grassed like
a shook rug

*graceful & green
as the stem*

domes of
rhododendron
choke out
growth on a mantle
of dead production

*

twitchy & fearful
in the empty hours
hand in the jelly barrel
berating myself
with notionally prior
modes of attention

an old thread
people doing nothing
more than anything
i'm rattling round
in fluorescent waiting
to return this ore
to inertia

a body can be lonely
but i don't want to give it up

*

writing curtailed by much of this

& i am again &
again no
 other barely
myself i thought unsteady
swimming round the lake
 counting birds
warily & bikes
 still one
though i
 did not
 wish to be

*

lately stood on the quays
the water glittered ahead again
the studios & the war museum
this too dead
could be for living

cycled back through the ees
& watched a coot on that same lake
anxious about my union

it's a problem of spatial
differentiation
here i always am
examining the inputs

*



notes

they're in the poems, yes, it all is, & in roughly this order, but also, i'd like to tell you about these things

[*] I retrieved the photo of a crashed bus, taken in Blackpool, in hasty retreat, from my own instagram story.

[*] The opening poem was first published in the ninth edition of *Ludd Gang*, the zine of the Poet's Hardship Fund, under the name, 'takeaway night'. Thanks to Tom Crompton, Alex Marsh and Dom Hale. It was written on Church Island, or Ynys Tysilio.

[*] George Orwell very famously wrote, "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever." I poorly ape in the traditional manner. I long for different ghosts. Just like '84.

[*] Leonard Cohen's 'Sisters of Mercy': "If your life is a leaf / That the seasons tear off and condemn / They will bind you with love / That is graceful and green as the stem." These lines take the form of an aphorism, in first flush, or else the if-then conditional. But their logic on sustained looking drifts away from consequential relation. There's the dense net of sound, "l", "f", "ea", "s", "i", "gr", "em", slinging off each other & in disharmonies across the perfect anapests on which they're strung, such that by the final line each word is only the arrival of a system of staggered echoes. Come back, a little dazed, to the semantics, & they begin to further fail their implied function. Two risky cliches – the unstoppable movement of time, flitting by like an autumn leaf to the ground before our eyes, ready to return to mulch, & love as the reassuring salve to the horror of eternity, like the fresh life that springs from its couplings – fail to fully reconcile into the unity that the cadence of the song demands, held in uncertainty by that initial "if". You can be imprisoned by love, only since you recognise that time will free you from it and all else. The stem cannot save you from the

leaf which sprouts from it, only to fall like the fleeting suggestion of coherence.

[*] I came across 'The Lag's Song', in a rendition by John Francis Flynn, in the back room of The Castle, where the poems used to happen. He got it from Ewan MacColl, communist, singer, collector of folk songs. The "lag" is an incarcerated person. "When I was a young lad / sometimes I'd wonder / What happened to time when it passed / Then one day I found out / that time just lands in prison / And there it is held fast." Later, "Got time on my hands / I've got time on my shoulders / Got plenty of time on my mind." This is, clearly, a metaphysics. Time just lands in prison. "Prison punctuates time with its physical order ... prison-time is a static present." That's Will Rowe glossing César Vallejo, which I read in an essay by Jèssica Pujol Duran. MacColl grew up in Salford, so when he sings "over the walls see the sky" he may have been thinking, as I do, of Strangeways. Its brick walls overbear the dingy street, shut out. You can hear it on the 1983 album, with Peggy Seeger, *Freeborn Man*. I also like Luke Kelly's version, though on his *Songs of the Workers* it's followed by a jarringly comic song of the Cold War: "I am the man, the well-fed man, in charge of the terrible nob."

[*] Only a short walk up the side of the Great Orme, along the path that runs from West Shore Beach, Llandudno, there is a partly sheltered spot where you can well pause to look over much of the town, and past it the Conwy estuary, and past that again to Ynys Môn, to Puffin Island, or else inland to the edge of Eryri. One of these poems was begun there, tentatively, amongst colleagues, poets, comrades, friends. When I apply for jobs, that day becomes an example of my capacity to generate impact.

[*] In October 2022 a 66-year-old man threw several crude firebombs at an immigration 'processing' centre in Dover. Earlier that year, he wrote on facebook: "The next time the job centre sanctions your money for not looking for enough work

ask them about the thousands of people getting benefits who cannot speak English and cannot write English ... time to stand up.” In her response, Suella Braverman expressed her resolution “to make illegal entry to the UK unviable” since it is “unfair on the law-abiding patriotic majority of British people.” I hope she fucking chokes.

[*] Mimi Parker, drummer and one of the central couple of slowcore band Low, died on 5th November 2022. Four years earlier I saw Low at Manchester Cathedral, a little under a kilometre from Strangeways. I had been arguing with a housemate, & was upset. I was transported. “I feel the hands, but I don't see anyone,” she sang.

[*] Bernadette Mayer died on 22nd November 2022. When we read *Midwinter Day* that year, I made dream soup with pickles in her memory, but I couldn't share it in the zoom call. The year before we read it for Callie. We heap up remembrances, wishing ever not to. “Writing poems is really dumb but fuck it even we want / entertainment I saw the art of the city today smokestacks / and buildings from the hospital windows where everybody / I know is imprisoned”. That's Bernadette. In the manic phase of the first lockdown, spring 2020, desperate to make an intervention in a closed off world failing quite to burst, I went out one night and painted Mayer's phrase, “give everybody everything”, on the fence of the public alleyway which passed the gates of the shared but enclosed ginnel behind our house. The last time I checked, the day after her death, it was still there.

[*] “Nonviolent civil resistance group” Just Stop Oil held 4 days of disruptive action on the M25 in early November 2022. This is partly collided in my head with an action by Insulate Britain, whose members glued themselves to the same road a year earlier. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, enacted in April 2022, made blocking roads an imprisonable offence, with a maximum sentence of 6 months. The Public Order Act, which received royal assent in May 2023, introduced new

crimes for “locking on” or “going equipped to lock on”.

[*] “I have swum and rowed and fished and frolicked in and around the River Wye much of my life ... I have seen eels and salmon swimming in the flooded fields ... my children have all swum and canoed on it, eager to see the blue-streaking kingfishers ... some of you will be old enough to remember damsel flies dancing above expanses of white-flowering crowfoot, in the days before the crowfoot was choked by the algae feeding on the chicken effluent. The crowfoot has gone now ... Avara/Cargill have issued a Roadmap for the reduction of the pollution of the Wye Valley by the chicken manure produced in their chicken sheds ... it seems clear that they knew what they were doing 20 years ago ...” Richard Fleming, my dad, wrote this, in January. When I think of Cargill, I think of the adage about how, structures aside, these people have names and addresses. I don't know what they are. John Price, a local farmer, was given a 12-month jail sentence for bulldozing the banks of the Lugg, a tributary of the Wye in which we used to swim, in Kingsland. Fuck him too. At his sentencing in April, Judge Ian Strongman called it “ecological vandalism on an industrial scale.” You can read Rich's work at richardfleming dot substack dot com.

[*] There's a bench in Manchester Central Library which has on it Ariel's lines from *The Tempest*: “Where the bee sucks, there suck I.” This is very funny to me. The line is most famous as an innuendo, much having been made of the visual similarity between “s” and “f” in the script of the time. Whether there's any mileage in that, to my contemporary ear “suck” is barely less bawdy than “fuck” here, & I wouldn't wish to imagine Shakespeare or his audience unfamiliar with oral sex. They would, however, have been unfamiliar with neonicotinoids, a class of insecticides which are known to reduce fertility in bees. Their use was banned under EU regulations in 2018, though approved for emergency use on UK sugar beet in January 2023.

[*] I went to the Hushings, an area formed by open-cast lime mines, diverted streams, and great kilns, at Sheddon Clough, just over the border between Lancashire and West Yorkshire, with Maggie O'Sullivan. "The hushings and sheddings were walled off, and planted with trees to give the unique landscape we see today." Some guy's flickr blurb. *Rhododendron ponticum* is a highly invasive large shrub, the nectar of which is poisonous to bees – "though there are no reported costs associated with this," I read – whose honey may in turn be poisonous to humans. Cut stumps are saturated with glyphosate, the most frequently used herbicide worldwide, to limit regrowth.

[*] On 4th April 2022, twitter user @mnvrsngh wrote a thread summarising his reading of a series of anthropological studies from the '70s & '80s, on the day to day activities of people living in small-scale, non-industrial societies. The focus of this thread was the observation that one of the most popular activities was consistently "doing nothing". This is carefully distinguished from other forms of chilling, hanging or pottering which could loosely fall under that term, like napping, socialising, recreation or tidying up. Like, really, properly, nothing, & lots of it. This is hugely distinct from the form of doing nothing, the infinite scroll, through which I discovered this.

[*] Remember when Bonney writes of Rimbaud, "the 'I' becomes an 'other' as in the transformation of the individual into the collective when it all kicks off."

[*] After Salford City Council, the biggest owner of Salford Quays, formerly Manchester Docks, and the Manchester Ship Canal on which it sits, is The Peel Group, run by billionaire John Whittaker, himself now resident in the Isle of Man. Peel own 13 million square feet of buildings, and over 33 thousand acres of land and water, mainly in the North West of England. In 2011 they were accused of illegally extracting peat from their land on Chat Moss. In 2014 they were found to have colluded

with the police and council to suppress protests against the exploratory fracking being carried out on their land at Barton Moss. The extensive 'controversies' section of their wikipedia page ends with this quote from Guy Shrubsole: "Peel Holdings operates behind the scenes, quietly acquiring land and real estate, cutting billion-pound deals and influencing numerous planning decisions."

[*] Chorlton Ees is a nature reserve, of woodland and meadow, which forms part of a continuous belt of greenery – woods, playing fields and gardens, though despoiled by two golf courses – which runs alongside the Mersey from Turn Moss in Stretford to Fletcher Moss in Didsbury. Chorlton Water Park is one of my favourite places to swim, despite the intermittent blooms of blue-green algae.

[*] My trade union, the University and College Union, has been involved in a dispute with our employers, universities, and with the government by proxy. over the conditions of our work, as many of my readers will closely know. In a willing curtailment of our own militant culture and apparatuses, it has become uncouth to openly use the term 'scab', though it retains its useful descriptive capacities. Anyway, my local branch did help to successfully argue that I, and incidentally several colleagues, should be paid, though reduced and strike-deducted, for the two summer months in which no classroom teaching happens, while we perversely still need to eat. That was perhaps the best thing I did all year.

[*] Mau said, you can't write poetry and look for a job.

Thanks to Jazz for her advice & discussions in the drafting of this pamphlet, which were invaluable.

ground game
manchester
2023
share wantonly