

indicacies

A period of poetry

by

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I hope to die
Immersed in words
As they are all I live for.

I hope to die
Immersed in love
As that is all I've strived for.

I hope to die
My face a smirk
As that is all I put forth.

I hope to die
A cynic pure
As that is all I'm good for.

A mildly edited*
version of the original
text, including some
pieces that have
appeared as *Scrumping
in the Devil's Garden*
in the novel *César's
Day***.

17th February 1998

What you see here began its life in a little red book, made of hand made paper and given to me for Christmas in 1994. It was an excellent little tome, complete with a small piece of wood that acted as a clasp, a wedge that kept it closed. I endeavoured to fill it with all manner of poems, reaching the end by the following Christmas.

For various reasons this never happened. The whole thing took on a certain character, a sharpened corner of what had come before, and it was not until 1997 when I returned to read it that I realised quite how despondent I had been. Much of the text describes the death throes of what was most certainly the most intense relationship I have ever experienced. Even now, some two and a half years after it all ended, I find myself reminiscing with a quite literal tear in my eye. This Valentine's Day was perhaps the most crippling of recent journeys back into that alien territory, all the more ironic given the company I was in – but that is all in the present, and I am here now to discuss the past.

I have decided to surround these scraps with some kind of narrative for three main reasons. The first to rear its head was pure laziness. I had spent some time trying to decide on the best order in which to present the pieces. It was a toss up between chronological (which I felt made the most sense) , thematic (with similar poems thrown together, which I thought could prove quite dull) or a kind of 'wave' approach (a series of peaks and troughs). In the absence of a three-sided coin, and certain that the first option involved the least tedious effort, I opted for chronological – albeit with a few shufflings here and there.

The problem with this, however, was that someone with no knowledge (or a less exact recollection than myself) would probably find little sense in even this order, perhaps preferring a more artistic sequence. Which leads us on to my second reason. An accompanying text would allow me to put things in context. My own reading of the poems is heavily infused with a sense of what was going on at the time. Passing this information on directly would allow me to act like some study aid for my own work. One of the most exasperating consequences of writing is, at least from my point of view, the chronic misunderstanding. This problem is dealt with by this first piece (perhaps ironically slightly out of sequence) and actually caused me to cease writing altogether for a considerable period of time. You see, it's fine to address sensitive subjects and play with various concepts when your audience is essentially anonymous and has no cause or means to pick you up on the details of your work. It is quite another matter to have as your primary audience the one person who is most likely to be the subject of your ramblings – especially when those ramblings are as negative as those to be found in that little red book.

14/1/95

Open are my thoughts to you:
In your presence I analyse myself.
I toy with possible answers
To self-invented questions.
I want to share these things
And more
With someone I love.

Yet, perhaps I am wrong
Perhaps these truths should be kept
Perhaps I am doomed to isolation
Caught in the tumult of my own self-ignorance
With no objective hand to guide me.

This all links fairly neatly with my third reason for this approach, the one that serves me most blatantly. An accompanying narrative allows me to justify myself, to defend what are at times quite extreme words. I will try to avoid this, although I'll admit in advance that I am bound to fail at times. That's just the way it is when you allow someone to comment on their past actions. No doubt things would be far fairer were I to offer the subject of much of this work to present an alternative account of events. Anyone who knows me will know that's not an option!

8/1/95

You told me to sit
And I sat;
You told me to spit
And I spat;
You told me to shit
And I shat;
But when asked to be seated
You quickly retreated
Saying love's not about tit-for-tat.

8/1/95
Are feelings of love
A gift from above
Or a curse from the darkest of holes?
Is loving a thing
To be kept in a ring
Or does loving remain in the soul?

If loving is something
That we are all wanting
And something that we can all find,
Then how can it be
That people like me
Spend most of our lives feeling blind?

17/1/95
In your need to dominate
I see no humility;
In your quest for knowledge
I see only futility:
Blinded by obstinance
And guided by dogma
Your destiny is ignorance *sans* bliss.

It was soon after this that we broke up for the first time. Hellish arguments spiralled completely out of control and I have no doubt that both of us had well and truly lost the plot. I have no wish to describe that last violent night here, but it drove us apart and I for one was even more miserable alone. My actions that night sparked off a series of poems that have since been attributed to Elisha Ley and presented as Scrumpling in the Devil's Garden – all of which will appear again here.

To be honest, I came to enjoy the self-recrimination that these pieces represented. Through this role I suppose I had some justification for past acts that I considered despicable. It was a way to punish myself with a label and to keep myself from repeating those acts – by my withdrawing from others. Not much of a punishment, but it produced what I like to think of as some pretty good poetry...

4/2/95**

6am

The night-shift over
The Devil crawls into bed
His evil done
He flees the sun
And the screaming in his head.
His muddied haunches
Bloodied nails
His bitter tongue and desperate oaths
Pollute his greying
Hardened soul
And show him well that which he
loathes.
His words, contrived,
Are nothing more
Than venomous rhetoric
His fear is just
The terror of
The fate of the demonic.
He thought he had
Escaped the pain
Of many months before
But now he fears
The prospect of
So very many more.
Love through terror
Whip and bond
Cannot be love at all
And love through
Obligation
Is the greatest sin of all.

6/2/95

The pain of self-preservation
Is almost unbearable.
You put the substance
Into my existence;
You were my best friend
Yet you cursed me
Hated me
Fed me fear
And spat at me.
It takes the greatest strength of will
Not to run back to your kiss,
To forgive but never forget,

To wait, in posture,
For the next crucifixion.
I feel withered and weak,
I search desperately
For the desire to stray,
But the bonds of fidelity
Are still as strong.
I wish I could move on
But I am too scared to lose
The one person who hurts me so:
I know you love me,
I know your hatred is insincere -
Or at least it was.
This knowledge is redundant:
The pain is no illusion.
I love you
I need you desperately
But I cannot have you.

The support of friends was welcome if undeserved, and I managed to throw myself into work. Nevertheless, I was pretty much perpetually miserable and, no doubt, not much fun to be around. All I could think about was how shitty it was being alone after all this time.

I'd never really been 'on my own' for any particularly noticeable length of time and had suddenly found myself with more freedom than I wanted.

10/2/95

Jesus, fucking Jesus, God
Don't let me wake the sun
It's been so fucking long
Since I've had such fucking fun.
3 o'clock and no one's home,
My mind is almost gone -
I haven't been this way
In so very fucking long.
All the cocks came home to roost
And all the hens have flown
And here's the biggest cock of all
Sleeping on his own.

10/2/95*

Cigarettes are pointless dust
Yet I suck on them again
Burn my lungs and eat my face
My soul will take the strain.

Take away my poetry
And my hand to write
Or I'll sit and scribble bullshit
All through this fucking night.

Fill this book, I told myself
And write it all so well -
Yes, write your way right out of life
And write your way to Hell.

This book is my obituary
I see it only now
Will someone stop me writing it
Will someone stop me now.

Someone stop me scribbling
My fucking life away
Kill my need to document
Every fucking day.

A few weeks later, the time comes when I am forced to confront my nemesis. A mutual friend is to escort me to the prescribed location – supposedly a no man's land but in fact somebody's house. Naturally, the very prospect fills me with dread.

26/2/95

It burns me now to realise how much I loved
her
I would have stayed by her side forever
She had no need of threats.
There is still no desire stronger in me
Than the desire to spend the rest of my life
with her:
I love her utterly.

At first I blamed her
For driving me away,
For daring me to hate her
I felt that I had been abandoned.
Now part of me fears to return
And part of me fears
That she will never take me back.
I cannot conceive of eternity
Without her -
Although the time her absence provides
Seems almost essential in the Now.
Or perhaps I merely fill it
Because I am so afflicted.

My lover, partner and best friend
Is no more,
And what looks of hatred, betrayal
And bitterness
Can I expect from her tomorrow?
The thought of her despising me
Is so terrible that I cannot bear to face her
Yet I must -
Perhaps there is some small chance
That I am wrong.

But I am so sure.
She will hurl my love back at me
With the venom I deserve.
I have abandoned her
Left her when she most needs help,
The fear that I may be some sort of
contributor to her ongoing pain
Putting haste in my step.
I do not deserve her return
I owe her everything
She owes me only pain.

Still the images of that night
Fill me with self-hatred
And render me so terribly afraid
Of returning to that cage.
I don't understand
Why this illness happened to us.
As if things weren't bad enough
In other spheres,
My love for her,
My certainty,
Had to be soured.
And still I do not know the effect this
has had on her.
Will she threaten me tomorrow?
Treat me coldly?
Forgive me?
Will we ever be the friends we always
said we would?
Can we start again?
I don't know how to be with her
For that is all I want.

As this sort of couple is often prone to doing, we got back together. For months I wrote nothing, venting my thoughts through an anonymous helper. Things were great again for a while, but it didn't take long for everything to get back to normal. Once we were at our natural rock bottom again, I continued with my little red book. Again the theme that runs through Scrumpling in the Devil's Garden emerges

3/6/95**

Satan grins
More evil done
He winks and asks me
"Having fun?"

i know i'm cursed:
i don't know why;
How did i catch
The Devil's eye?
How come it's taken
So much time
To open up
This heart of mine?
A heart that's mortal
Now it's free -
A fact that brings Him
So much glee.

He's proved me wrong
To try again
To think of hope
And halt my pen.

Perhaps i should accept it:
i'm His and He is mine;
Two symbiotic parasites
Joined 'til i've done my time.
Perhaps i should give up the fight
Accept my burden as what's right
Content myself with solitude
And an empty bed each night.

I also start to return to the original intended format: single page poems rather than the longer pieces of the past. These come like bitter tokens of cynicism and work best in their natural setting. There's something about turning a page between each motto that offers far better fragmentation than merely skipping across the page. The current medium unfortunately lacks this quality.

3/6/95

I will not worship God
No matter how He taunts me
I will not bow
I will not kneel
No matter how He haunts me.

3/6/95

Beauty is a lie
Teasing the impure
Its bitter taste
Inspires the haste
For which there is no cure.

3/6/95

To love is to be owned:
Possession oft bemoaned.
Avoid its claws,
Its vicious jaws -
Seek happiness alone.

29/7/95

There's something about evil
It exists in all of us
But few show it
With such damned precision.

29/7/95*

You cannot taste the pain
As much as you pretend
Your pleadings to the contrary
More than you can defend.
Yet, will you leave me be
To savour it myself
To sit and stew, steeped in a stew
Of rotting mental health?

29/7/95

War, peace and love
All of these are hell
So closely intertwined
As the wicked know so well.

And now I break that web.

Finally we were apart, and this time it was permanent. The furore that surrounded our severance was far too great to allow any reversal. As far as I was concerned, even friendship was impossible. We were clearly too volatile a combination and, when I look back from the relative safety of 1998, I know total separation was the right way, the only way, to proceed. There is no room for reconciliation and I have no doubt that, were it to prove possible, it would only cause problems for us both. The fact that I have never really sought to rework that web will have exacerbated that difficulty; I have yet to move on, to commit myself to anything or anyone else, so when I mull over what it was like to share my life exclusively with one person I have few other places to turn. Still, as I have no intention of attempting reconciliation, the difficulties involved are of no consequence.

Irrespective of all this, having let the site of our demise and found myself back in the home town I had so long despised, I was soon to find other things to occupy my mind. Nocturne's 1846 was upon me and I soon adapted to a lifestyle more becoming of a young single man.

22/8/95**

The devil, it lives
And inside of me
How else could I live
So fortunately?
How else could the love
Infect those I meet
Even when love
Is not what I seek ?

But now it does seem
The devil serves me
And while he brings pleasure
I'll let him run free.

As far as I could see, I had suddenly become an exceedingly lucky individual. Two unfeasibly alluring and obliging strangers had taken it upon themselves to invite me to their respective homes on the same weekend. What ensued were two very different relationships.

22/8/95

Freedom
For the first in many long whiles
A breather
The first, for many long miles.
Honesty -
Pure -
The clearest I know
Perhaps the first seeds
Of joy I have sown.

22/8/95

A pointless fuck
A loveless rut
A meeting made
Of fickle luck.
Perhaps a friend
Perhaps a lover
Perhaps usurped
By later other.

Naturally, being me, I wasn't satisfied with either. While one path was so unfettered by emotion as to render even me disinterested, the other proved unmanageably clogged.

22/8/95*

Fate loves to laugh
Fate loves a joke
A morn to which
I never woke.
She loves her strings
Her tangles cords
The breaks that She
Seldom affords,
And now She plays
Her latest jest
The hand She holds
So far the best.
The form I've sought
So very long
A voice that tells me
I belong
An openness
Til now unknown;
I pray another
Seed's not sown.

14/9/95

The openness a whore
Promiscuous unknown before
This honesty a lie
Wishing for goodbye
Escape the free
It's just not me
It's just another tie.

It wasn't long before I'd terminated the least emotional of the two. I'd confessed that that there was someone else and received an excited reaction that I had neither expected nor desired. That I had known all along that I too was sharing only fuelled my distaste for the situation. It was clear that what I sought was some sort of emotional comfort, a stand-in for what I had lost. And yet there too I was encountering serious problems.

14/9/95*/**

How can you say you love me?
No one loves me
They own me,
And each time it's a mistake.

I know you'll suffer
Despite my feelings for you.
You seem to think
It will be different
But why?

You can't lie with the Devil
And expect love.

I could tell you the same emotion
Pledge fidelity
But perhaps I would change my mind
Resent you
And cause you pain.
Then what?
Would you steal?
Threaten?
Pursue?

No love is worth the aftermath.

This aversion to commitment and the affections of others stayed with me for some time and has never really left. The fatalist and lover of mysticism in me dragged me back to the attribution of all these twisted events to some sort of outside force. This is the same force that Elisha sees as guiding him throughout César's Day, as is shown by the inclusion of both the last piece and the next in Scrumping...

2/10/95**

“Smile,” the Devil said
“It’s only for a day.
Sign on the line
Sign up to find
Your troubles roll away.”

Miracles
Empirical
The world it smiled anew
My faith was strong
My worries gone
The Devil’s word rang true.

Pain and suffering crucified
My love of living soon revived
Though means to end may be reviled
I’m justified I feel.

So listen very carefully
When they drag your soul from Hell
If you seek eternal piety
Then that’s all very well
But if you seek a fairer life
Where justice is
And joy is rife
Prepare the quill
Prepare the knife
For the Devil is your man.

At the same time, the more involved of the two summer sagas continued to escalate. Fearing for both of us, I had tried to bring the whole thing to a close, but was far too easily convinced otherwise on every occasion. Mysticism reared its head once more, giving birth to Nocturne and laying down a number of emotional landmines to be stumbled upon at a far later date.

9/11/95

I met a child called love
She looked at me and smiled
She opened up her arms
And bade me stay a while.
I breathed a while her breath
And revelled in her touch
And prayed to something secret
That it wouldn't burn too much.

Given its precursors, I could see nothing but vicious justice in the situation. While I wanted things to continue, the impossibility was clear. The devotion I was faced with only served to highlight my own flaws. I had wanted to be loved and here it all was, thrust upon me when there was little I could do to convince myself I deserved it.

9/11/95**

The Devil knows no pain
The Devil knows no shame
The Devil speaks
The whole world weeps
And the Devil leaves again.

9/11/95**

Squatting in the deepest ink,
Bony back jammed into the chilling corner,
It takes a gulp of the oil that should be air.
Naked and patient
It stares blindly out into the emptiness
Afraid to know the dimensions of its cell.

The dampness makes it shiver
Its clammy hands clutch vainly against the cold
It knows why it is here -
Banished for following its instincts,
Its nature and its purpose.
The only true victim of fate
Created solely to be itself
Its only escape to sit and wait -
It knows it will be freed.
Release delivered by overwhelming hunger
Starvation accentuating its first salacious bite.

But now it hides the horns again,
Covers the cloven hoof
And bides its time.

25/11/95

Breathe
And you're a whore
Exhale
And you want more
You take the pain
Absorb the blame
As many times before.

25/11/95

I speak of whores
I speak of saints
My platitudes are often quaint
But do my words ever ring true?
Do I show the world to you?
Do you listen to my thoughts?
Or do my poems fall that short
That my search for understanding
Is over all far too demanding
And I should stop this now?

Like all inevitabilities, the time eventually came. Cursing myself, and embarking on another series of ill-advised and overlapping ventures, I left everything hanging. Of course it was a cop-out, but I knew I'd only bow to pressure if asked to continue. The next year and a half was full of self-recrimination and liberally sprinkled with temptations to call and make my excuses. I never succumbed and it wasn't until considerably later that we met again – by which time our roles were to be reversed, providing me with another valuable lesson.

But I'm racing ahead of myself, and well beyond the time period covered here.

The next near disaster came in the form of the narrowly averted transgression of a long-standing personal taboo. It's ironic now that I've since crossed that same barrier, although not with the same individual. I have no regrets concerning either.

15/12/95*

What do you do
When respect turns to love?
Do you show your emotion
When push comes to shove?
Do you deny the truth
Throw it back in the pool
Or show your true colours
And risk ridicule?

And would the year have been complete without a little more on this theme...?

20/12/95

When I was born
I had no horns
I even had a soul
But it only took
A thousand years
To grow into my role.

- Silence -

I returned to the book well over a year later and only for a day. I don't know what drew me back to it. It had been lying untouched beside my bed in a new city, far from all of those people whose attentions it described.

23/3/97

He eats the food like it tastes good
Breathes the air as if it were clean
Walks like a fool
Through his blissful estate
As if Eden were here, not a dream.

His ignorance astounds me
Warm-hearted openness and childish fascination
In the path of cold aggression
A blitzkrieg of insistent disinterest
That made subjects of us all.

To this day, I have no idea who those words were supposed to describe. It could even be me, though I'm not sure why. I'm even more in the dark as to the subject of this next piece.

23/3/97

Vanished civilisations
Needed Gods
To haul the sun
From its slumber
At the start of each new day.

I have you.

The tone of the next and final piece suggests that the 'you' of the last is an abstract concept rather than an actual person. Nevertheless, I can't help but wonder who or what might have driven me to such uncharacteristic romanticism.

23/3/97*

There's something comforting
In misery:
It's easily maintained
And doesn't lead to hopes
That never see fruition.

A certain safety
In solitude
It's easily arranged
And doesn't show up flaws
That scream for recognition.

Happiness and company
Bring risk,
And need almost constant attention.
But these are the things that make them
Infinitely
More worthwhile.