

## The ECT Poem

Ward Round Monday 10.30am

A ladder to somewhere else drawn on my arm

The days give each thought a bitter aftertaste

The terrible spun gold in my veins has finally been bled away

As you were my boy

But the dark always looks stranger with a keener sight

Surrounded by gluey eyes that try to scratch any meaning

From words and words, written over and over

On the same scrap of paper till the ink sweats from the page

The Doctor speaks from behind a shuffle of notes

“you see, we can’t get there from here but I think it’s time to see what we can call upon”

Something speaks for me

And he tells me the treatment will begin very soon

Once he regained his sense and the shape of his tongue

Tim tells us all a ghost story

How if you change your thinking, if you try and get off the gurney

They strap you down so they can safely feed icy water into your veins

To freeze the life inside you

He tells me what the letters mean

“you were tricked, my friend,

“but don’t worry, it’s just like sleeping, except you wake so much more tired

The days stalk the walls like shadows

My time is spent in circles

Orbiting the thought

On an ever shortening leash

The centre of all this is a dark hearted sun

I sweat out my dreams

And spend the daylight hours shitting out my fears

Until they tell me it’s time to go

Hold your head, you’re the lucky one

On the gurney, the ceiling glides over my eyes

The nurse looks down, affection and distance etch—a–sketched across his expression

Ward, corridor, lift, corridor, prep room

Until they inject the coldness into my hand  
And I count back through every mistake I've ever made  
They drop the curtain so I never see  
The metal hands that pushed sparks into my mind

And I come back in the middle of his sentence  
The world in front of me the size of a postage stamp  
He plonks breakfast on a table in front of me  
And my mind struggles into the clothing of thought  
Come on, he says, back to the halfway house  
Only five more treatments to go

"Each time I see you, you seem more... alive"  
Became familiar words from visitors  
carrying goodwill in brightly coloured bundles  
Visits are no longer conducted through cottonmouth sentences  
And layers of blankets that muffled down everything to a murmur  
They told me at the last Ward Round  
I'd get out of intensive care soon  
The marvel of a Monday morning  
I traded my memory for this place to turn its back on me  
A life to come as full as a harvest moon  
And eyes that have seen the things we hide from ourselves  
Only to know the reason why  
Shocked back into life and slotted back into the world  
Complete

1968

The sun never really sets on television  
Watching their flames  
Flicker grey figurines across the walls  
As their torn fingers rip up the cobblestones  
To find the forgotten beach beneath  
And across the copper green teeth houses  
The ceilings are filled with the light of sulphured words  
Until their hallowed, hollowed shapes  
Can't be pulled from their place on the ancient walls of our cities  
Built only years ago  
But I can only know of our time  
Through the eyes of our enemies  
Who say our cloth cheeked message  
Spoken through an acid tongue  
Is the simple binary mind  
The single tracked play of the young  
While we choked down the glib one liners  
Of Marx, Lennon, and Jagger  
These newly franked thoughts  
Broken across the back of It's tongue  
To take down the dreamless spires and darkened towers  
Dusky corridors and strangled wires  
Of this careless world we never knew  
And as the TV set shields me from the sun that sets outside  
I wonder if there's a single thread of myself  
Found in the folds and bright hues  
Of the glimmering figurines  
Whose polythene colours  
Play through the screen  
In their drab, dank black and white  
Minds lost between the sheets  
Of their bright shinning books  
And clenched teeth of their sex  
To line the university halls  
With a history only old as

The soft skin of their hands will allow  
With shoulders as slight as a chance that what plays from those shallow hips  
Could ever be enough  
To mean more than the weightless sedation  
Of a simple pastime  
And the way we judge the cold metallic touch  
Of a world we try and burn to white  
A world we never knew  
Will blacken the sands beneath our feet  
With something much darker  
Than even the desperate voices  
That share our most blistered paper dreams.

## For all the songs that pull you through

The dawn chorus never speaks beyond the steps of Heaven  
But we are all pieced together from the same scraps of a night sky  
That backlights that same song that keeps playing in your ears  
Whether the world makes a sound or not

In your hometown  
There's nowhere else to run  
Memory echoes every footstep  
You walk past everyone you've ever been

Still with half a breath like someone else  
And one eye trained on yourself  
Waiting for the sky's next trick  
And your next blind leap of logic

When the persistent little radio that's been tugging on your ears for attention  
Suddenly comes good and recognition flicks on before its first bar falls fully formed  
And feeling flows through your body and blood like the speeding weather high above  
That looks calm and unaltered from a distance but hides an unbroken energy within

As you get older the songs that pull you through also come of age  
Lift themselves from where they lay, sleeping in your head  
And for a moment all the static ocean waves fall to a single line  
All the white noise thoughts sharpen into a simple melody

And you realise you've walked these steps before  
Between the beach floor and the attic streets  
And this partly coloured world is not alone, so you surrender up your sense  
And go by the solid grass brushed slope beneath your feet

So, you let your song's banner line colours catch an invisible eye  
You let the sun above your head speak to you in word-like feelings you finally understand  
You let the troubles that cling like damp clothing fall to pieces  
And you find when the patterned chaos fades, your mind reclaims its central refrain