



come
and
get
me

poems by joe smythe

Thanks:

To Dave MacDonald for all the illustrations.

To the Manchester Studies Unit at the Poly for the photo on the front cover.

To the ratepayers of Manchester and to the taxpayers of Great Britain and Northern Ireland who unknowingly contributed to the publication of this book.

To the North West Arts Association, Manchester Cultural Services Department and the Gulbenkian Foundation for channelling money into Commonword.

To the members of the workshop who make all of this possible.

To MARC

Published by Commonword
Copyright Joe Smythe 1979

COME AND GET ME

Come and get me, invited the poster
outside the Adults Only cinema.
Come and get me, whispered the legend
at the end of Oxford Street.

Keeping my eyes on both I let
the town draw itself around me.
Funny, I heard only children crying,
the slow fall of an ancient rain.

POEMS BY JOE SMYTHE

Red Deansgate

When Deansgate met Mr Engels
In its Eighteen-Fourties mess,
Our cotton manufacturer
With his social consciousness
Got busy with the writing
That threw off many sparks
Lighting a young, old codger,
The inevitable Mr Marx.

Condition of The Working Classes
Was Deansgate written clear,
Fourty thousand sufferers
In a few small acres year,
Refugees from the Irish Blight,
from village vanishings,
The Industrial Evolutions cost
Measured in these things

By Mr Engels to Mr Marx
Trudging a ginnels mire,
Makes me wonder if
Deansgate lit the fire
Passed through eighty-odd decades
To Mr Lenin's care,
Did Mao Tse Tung and Ho Chi Minh,
Do all world burners swear

Dull old Deansgate kindle of
The world as it is today
And shall be tomorrow? Change
Starts somewhere, who can say
What Mr Engels had in mind,
Or what chance changing turns
When he made his famous book
And the lovely Mary Burns.

Hunts Bank 1900

I'll sing for you, mister, give us a penny.
I know the song of the ladies bustle
and Champagne Charlie on the cobbles
is me favourite, I know all the words.
Carry your bag, sir, carry your missus.
I know the best hotels an' all the porters
an' between ourselves, as man to man,
I know a house or two where gentlemen
such as your honoured self would find
sweeter accomodation than her beside you.
Easy with the marmadukes, guv'nor, how was
I to know you were a blessed bishop,
not having seen a bishop blessed or otherwise;
how about Faith Of Our Fathérs, d'ye know the tune?

1917

I had meant to write this poem a year ago
In time for the brotherhood of anniversaries,
The proper dialectic of apposites
Marched forward like an army of the just:
Effie Longbottom kept moving in on me,
Who fell among soldiers of 1917
One ginslung night in Angel Meadow,
Effie Longbottom, seventeen years alive,
Sixty years dead, kept moving in on me.

Angel Meadow is the memory of old deaths
Scored on the hills industrial scar
With all those years of gritted viaducts
Another mockery of named and namer:
Effie Longbottom, Ancoats factory girl,
All in the gaslit evening gaily
Danced on the cobbles till her dance was done,
Effie Longbottom, seventeen years alive,
Sixty years dead, kept moving in on me.

Slogans should be easier than this,
Big words on destiny and Destiny!
To fill a page with important futures,
Minds with a memory of what they are:
Effie Longbottom kept me in my place,
Local as the Irk where she was found
Where I had meant remembering world arouzers,
Effie Longbottom, seventeen years alive,
Sixty years dead, kept moving in on me.

Small World

Outside the fair at Ardwick Green
hot potatoes from the hot-potato man
stay like a taste for the old exotic.
The hot-potato man, the organ grinder,
the knockerupper thieving dreams,
the donkeystone with dollyblue man,
the foggy tram conductor's cough,
the policeman with his street wide feet,
the local burglar with apprentice,
the man who fought Len Johnstone
the length of Brunswick Street,
Preaching Billy Arbuthroyd in flight
from nightwork husbands,
the born lights of singing pubs
that small world's ending.



In The Bombing Time

Yorkshire Horse* was shuffling
wounds through London Road.
Save the banks the moneys
sacred heart, she sang, Kevin Barry
was a soldier in the cellar,
cradle breasted Irish
where no bomb shall find us.

St Lukes, black as nightmares
spider pisstoned Gog and Magog.
Mayfields burning.

Going home
the snow on Ardwick Green North
curled by the wind
like a long white carpet
rolled against the railings of the park.

Yorkshire Horse: a heavy locomotive, here pulling a
hospital train.

School

On Francis Street a bomb or two,
Cottenham Street had ten or more,
Higher Temple Street was battered,
Mason Street was sore.

The bombs are seeking out the sinners
Preached Preaching Billy Arbuthroyd,
It's Sodom and Gomorrhah time,
Happy the first destroyed.

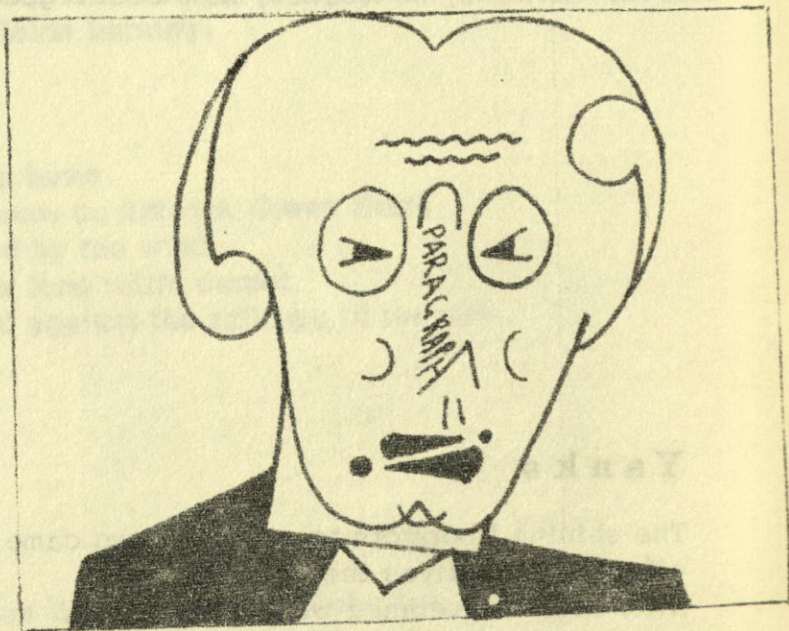
Moocher was racing to Stansfield Street
To see if the school still stood,
It had, through all that bombing,
Bleedin' Germans, he moaned, no bleedin' good.

Yanks

The shining liberators to our dark town came,
gifts for the natives their fine irony.
After such deliverance what forgiveness,
after such gratitude, what common ground?

Sour Apple

I remember you Miss Morton,
Your most singular precision.
Afternoons of inverted commas,
The dialogues day and you,
Miss Morton, your sentences,
Your paragraphs perfection,
Your immaculate punctuation.
It was all prose to you, Miss Morton,
Compilations of careful verbs,
Regular nouns and pruned adjectives,
Made you what you are, Miss Morton,
Fuckless in all the idioms.



The Old Master

Whalebone lived on Clifford Street,
the oldest inmate of the Spike, he said,
talking mostly of painting piss-ups.
He was an old man then, famous
at Minshull Street for his waylaying
words with passing women, words about a naked
picture he could paint if only
they'd oblige with nakedness. Wanker
Whalebone we kids would call him,
spilling from the Scala in a tide of jeers.
He had a scaring smile, though,
something about a knowing all we knew
and all we'd ever know, don't meet me
in the dark and on your own, said smile.

The houses gable-end formed part
of the cemetery wall, Midnight Mooney
lived there once, the woman of the paintings
old Whalebone said was all he'd want
remembered by, hunched on the wall
round All Saints Park. You should
have seen that sumptuous girl when
she was twenty, she stopped the world,
for a year or two. And he laughed
remembering, as old men laugh or cry.
I made this great nude of her, O,
it was the Medlock karsi, made
that pub, boy, and the woman. Little
the thanks I got from either.

Outside Frascattis with his limp
pretending blindness: Old Soldier, sir,
he slurred behind black-painted glasses
to the stopped footsteps close beside him.
Blind old bleeder, Sergeant Western grinned,
you were seeing well enough
to paint Knocking Shop in scarlet
on our nick in Brunswick Street last night.
Never, said Whalebone, scarlet 's not my colour,
cock. Ask anyone in C-on-M.
What about this spattered on your shoes,
old lad? Sergeant Western asked.
Glowing red, my friend, my hearts humanity,
explaining to Ormond Street his colour values.

Walking horses at Bradshaws Whalebone
shuffled his sixty-odd years sadly.
Trot 'em, lad, the auctioneer demanded,
let every punter see some class.
Animals, said Whalebone, are not my biscuit.
People are a different kettle and of all people
women are the life for me. Women,
women, women, mumbled he in the mangy
mane of a clapped out gent
called Erins Pride priced
at thoroughbred. Knackers yard
for the pair of 'em, someone in the crowd
appealed, someone ragged, ten year shaped.
I'll paint that kid, griped Whalebone, tribulations.

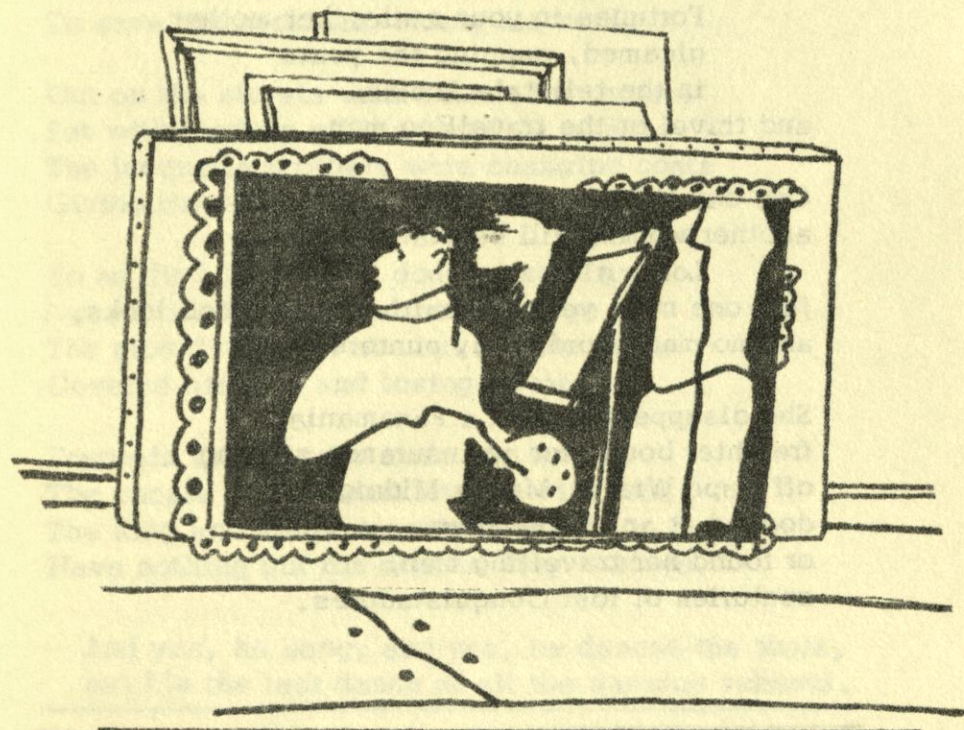
The Jake-wallahs fire in Russholme Road cemetery
was a good place to be on a cold night
until that Sergeant Western rolled up querying:
Where's Whalebone, then, he asked, where's
he at now? Flasher Goodman denied all knowledge,
Monty Methyl downed his purple while
The Snotty Kid offered the Sergeant out,
me'n Moocher shuffled in our wellies.
There's no end to him, sighed Western,
lighting his Woodbine from Monty's breath,
yesterday's a cracker. One of the nuns
from Rumford Street was painted white
by a sixty year old nudist raving virgins
should proclaim themselves, whitely.

Young girls at windows plagued him,
their mothers more. On Robert Street
the dearest, loveliest, lithest, leapingest
girl who ever lived, gave Whalebone sweats.
My fingers ache, he ached on the 40 tram
clanked on Brook Street. Breasts,
he marvelled to the utility faces, waist
you wouldn't put a hand to except
in reverence; a certain kind of girl
with loving-coloured skin
becomes the whole of her appearing. Some
love-less eyes at the back of the tram
complained how Whalebone was up to his
old indecencies, his too much warmth of heart.

Every year I knew someone's ending.
Each Paradise turned requiem
against remembering what had really gone.
People, you'll find, are mostly memories,
some poor Adam, some poor Eve.
Yet, and listen, ragged arse,
you couldn't have wished for better years
to be alive in. One day
you'll see your lost Eden here,
rubble be your roses then.
So said Whalebone to my lip curling
outside the U.C.P. on Brunswick Street,
slavering on a view of savory duck,
thick pea soup, black pudding, trotters.

There's the ugliest Yank I've ever seen,
glowed Whalebone at the Noah's Ark
on Ardwick Green Fair, the beauty of the man.
It could have been Siberia in that frieze
of snow and huddled faces. Me'n Moocher
had found him singing drunk
on the Colliseum steps, eyelash frozen
to straggling hair. We saved
him with our kicks and curses. Dragged
to the fairgrounds warming lights
Whalebone only saw the black Yank soldier
riding the Noah's Ark with two blonde hustlers:
I love it all, sang Whalebone, lead me to it,
clock that head, that man's magnificence.

I'm not complaining, wheezed Whalebone in the fog,
don't doctor me with poxy doctor talk.
I know a wall in Rosamund Street perfect
for my nude of Shop-Door Bertha, all I need's
a few bob for the doings, any offers?
We looked at Whalebone and saw him dying,
Monty Methyl, One-Stroke Alice, Snotty,
the little totter with the fifteen kids,
me'n Moocher and listening in the entry,
Sergeant Western with his woodbine glowing.
We all chipped in with our coppers, tanners,
from the Sergeant rolled a tosheroon:
best wall I've had in years, coughed Whalebone,
all I need's a boy who knows a ladder.



Ordsall Lane

That was the electric corner
with the sea crowd homing in,
Midnight Mooney was the girl for them,

Say what you like, said One-Stroke Alice,
old Midnight moves 'em, three ships
crews between opening and closing times,
they call her Golden Midnight Mooney.

Olden, golden eyes
in the smoked mirror of the smoking room.
Fortunes in your smile, her mother
gleamed, cupping the years
in the tell-tale jamjar,
and travel or the travelling men.

One day I'll turn and see myself,
another woman will be starting back.
Lord, give me
just one more year of health and my good looks,
and no men, Lord, only punters.

She disappeared with a Panamanian
freighter bound for an insurance sinking
off Cape Wrath. Maybe Midnight
docked at an earlier port
or found her travelling men,
centuries of lost Conquistadores.

The Oldest Profession

Well, he spat in the soup at the Abbot's table,
Robbed the Poor-box for a night with the lads,
Though then as now the cops were able
To wean a brother from dangerous fads.

All the King's men and all Paris knew
There's only one law in the Iron State,
The King's right hands had a job to do,
Ten thousand a year was the stretching rate.

Francois Villon, by a Church Court blagged,
Sent down for a year in a freezing hole,
Back from iniquitous life was dragged,
To save his neck they wrung his soul.

Out on the streets with a knife for throats
Fat with feeding off the people's meats,
The Jacques Brothers were changing coats
Giving the mugs Montfaucon treats.

So he died in a bush, dodging the Law,
Away from the city that never let go,
The rope didn't get him but humble straw
Covered his last and losing throw.

Francois Villon, who made his song,
The people of his heart live on with him,
The King and kings departed long
Have nothing but the dust to keep them in.

And yes, he sang, and yes, he danced the fools,
but his the last dance of all the dancing schools.

About Fat Margaret

Somebody had to mind the door,
Somebody had to pay the cops,
Somebody had to keep accounts,
Clean the house and cook the chops:

So it might as well be me, I said,

It might as well be me.

Better than doing chokey,

Than growing old and mopey

On a coir-mattress bed.

Somebody had to keep an eye

On the punters and their wallets,

Somebody had to be useful with

Blocked-up sinks and mallets:

So it might as well be me, I said,

It might as well be me.

Better than sowing mailbags,

Than slumming it with jail slags

On a coir-mattress bed.

If we sometimes fight like dogs

Somebody has to do it,

From women anywhere at all

Men always must go through it:

So it might as well be me, I said,

It might as well be me.

Better than eating skilly,

Than tossing willy-nilly

On a coir-mattress bed.

Somebody had to walk the dog,
Somebody had to warm her feet,
Somebody had to keep her safe
From nutters on the street:

So it might as well be me, I said,

It might as well be me.

Better than cell doors crashing

Than all the old head bashing

On a coir-mattress bed.

Lyticists

Jack the Liar was carved by a Jock
For telling the truth about his cock,
One woman of many and boasting, too,
Let Jack The Liar's truth be learning you.

Jimmy From Leeds got seven years stir
For rape and abduction of a Lady Mayor
Who kept him in bed for sixty days,
When they were found blamed The Laws delays.

Rosie Sweetarse who whored when she could
Knew that her ponce was up to no good
When he took her to Bradford for a day by the sea,
Morning till night she ground out stiff curry.

Whatever happens it's happened before
To braggart and crook and ramrodded whore.
Nothing like this never happened with you?
Make way for a saint and Jack The Liar Two.

Hot Tom

It was his thirtieth year to Strangeways
After a policeman priested year of institutions
But cops would have no dominion
Tomorrow
Nor iron bars
A cage for mornings out of mourning swung
In glory with a parsonical bellow risen
Grabbing
Intonation
Burst on the town before it knows what's what.

His birthday began with porridge
Slopping about the plate with hobnailed screws
Naming him above the pisspots emptying
Sluice
Where he was dreaming
How tomorrow he would gather all his days
About him like a cloak of secret potions rampant
Out of gates
Emerging
On the town asleep to what was coming next.

A springful of pubs on a beckoning
Street and the roads bursting with lusting
Birds and The Suns Best Bitter
Brewing
On the counter's belly,
Here are knowing looks and sudden limbs
Thrust against him where he stands and gurgles
All the rain can rain
Where he is dry
In the pubswayed omnipotence.

Pale Ale in the dwindling hours
And in the roofless Church the size of yesterday
he found no pumps but stumbled

To The Castle
Brown for him

And Spring and Summer were here again
As he told tall tales in the sniggering vault
Marvellous mist
But he was pissed
And the rainfall silences looked back.

Looked back from happier pubs
To other streets for other reasons
Who can leave well enough alone?

All that garbage
Returned like omens
And he saw in the gutters children
Echo of the child with mother walking
To the U.A.B.
Of handouts
And the legend of the much told means.

And there he would shrivel his birthday
Away but the Screws were shouting. Then his heart sung
As the child had never sung
In the Royal Oak.

It was his thirtieth year
To Strangeways stood there standing
Though the pisspot stank of a long year's using.
O may his name
Be missed
From all these landings in the next year's roll-call.

Kid In Orbit

Sullen from a year in Strangeways
The Kid is out of habit with the town.
The Man is a new face.
An aching arm has no credit.

The Pusher grinned a holding grin
favouring the shooter's side.
The kid tripped out on promises,
a fix in time is never fix enough.

I've been a kid too long, said The Kid,
rolling a mug-punter in the All Saints Gents,
what I need is an edge on living
not this craphouse concerto all my life.

Charged arm loaded and solid with his edge,
The Kid amused Fat Margaret's skin,
laughterless later she found him gone
with the money she kept in a left-over rubber.

Stashed away in a Cheetham attic The Kid
looked out at the rain remembering rain,
some other no-hopes gig not mine,
who needs remembering for an edge?

The edge was with the footsteps on the stairs,
two Scots grinning through the smashed-in door,
knives ripped back Fat Margaret's dues:
that's it, The Kid said, fading out.

Now The Kid grows grass of the legal kind,
an edge nobody's got their eye on.
Fat Margaret considering Moss Lane East
hustles a memory for punters gone.

In On The Act

That was the day it rained at Butlins,
the day when all the Redcoats kept their smiles
rigid as a rictus carved by Rodin,
the day Miss Black Pudding, 1956, gave me a slice.
Men were weeping from Workington to Woking,
they called that day a National Disgrace,
confusing it with Suez and the week of Hungary,
the endless Asiatics in the background.
That was the day jam butties lost their flavour,
eggs were never again as eggs of old,
the day Miss Black Pudding, 1956, unwrapped herself
in the last chalet behind the Moonbeam Ballroom,
giving me a temporary coverage of all those years
of orange juice, cod liver oil and Evergreen for chesty
coughs.

52 Was The Summer

52 was the summer
I lusted after Muddled Maureen
magic thighs moving under that year's fashion,
arse like forever on Clarendon Street.

That was my face at all her corners.

Old Man Europe

There was a General dying
in the last shebeen of the Fifties,
a Pole who had been drunk forever
from Siberia to Moss Lane East.

There were more Generals than horses
in the Polish Cavalry,
half the Poles in England
claim they were Generals or their fathers were,
this General was dying anyway
Polish tearful among his empties.

I saw him last week in an engine-red Ferrari
pulling a young girl
with all the flair of the Polish Cavalry,
yes, incarnate.

Janowski, I cried, why aren't you dead,
I saw you in the last shebeen of the Fifties!

Driving on he gave me the fingers derisive,
expensively arrayed as any General would be.

Impressions

Coming out of Weymouth
dusk and Dorset
harvested.
September 1960.

Girl in a red dress mooning.

All the apples in the world
through the car window
smelling of
our unknown tender
undreamed fragility.

The Old Elite

Now I'm out of hock with the world
These older memories are unfurled
In the last pub beside the last canal
Behind the last gasworks madrigal.
Talk of the past, past that never fails,
Never grows older, never becomes
A present where the living numbs:
Those in my thoughts tonight are locked in jails.

Never the old friend met the new
Until well-proven he could screw
A bell'd up gaff* or cold-start any car,
His pedigree the sum of what we are,
Traditionalists where tradition ails,
Where little is connected nor continues,
Where men are now machineries living sinews:
Those in my thoughts tonight are locked in jails.

Creeper Wormwold is the first to mind
Casing a drum with love refined
Through tears that he must be
Held by his artistry
To drumming* when his ideal and hope
Was the kite-flyers* expertise;
Papering a hundred towns would please
Than his perfections keyhole scope.

Wide-boy Johnnie Magler I remember
Knocking off swimsuits in December
So next summer he could corner
All the market, oh, what a goniffs* mourner
When it rained from May to the last of August,
Nobody swam in that year's fashion.
Money was Johnnie's sullen passion,
An all frustrated lust.

Then I think of Old Man Tattershall
Who fenced for the world and his lass an' all,
Famous for selling the Refuge Clock
To a Yankee Colonel in shell-shock,
Crazed by a dose from a High Street whore
Bought from the Town Hall, too, and Piccadilly,
And all the rights of Manky Lily,
Mrs Old Man Tattershall no more.

All my companions of the years sent down
Vanished streets of the vanished town,
Their faces have that old and dusty look
Seen in a long forgotten mugshot book
Kept as a curio of the times,
Then I heard Club Straker
For thirty years the Laws heartbreaker
Was took for hardly crimes.

Some smoulder in their lives of doubt,
Some burn in flame before its out,
All are scorched or smothered in
Mostly a nonsense of the skin
Made mythic from its lost desires.
None could rise above it
With Straker gone, who could not love it
Yet would not leave its fires.

I had meant to mark their story,
Each individual with a glory
Such as old time spielers tell,
This last blagging hurts like hell.
Straker, the last Olympian, failed.
So all the Gods Elysian-bound
Return no more to where I'm found:
Those in my thoughts tonight are jailed.

gaff: house drumming: burglary
kite-flyers: passers of dud cheques goniff: thief

The First Hero

There was this photograph.

Yuri Gagarin on Chorlton Road
stood in a moving car,
a woman reaching up to him
to shake his hand.

Middle-aged and head-scarved
woman of no particular beauty
who is for ever beautiful
reaching out,
hand to the hero.

If you see a statue
of this woman, or anyone like her,
let me know,
I'll come to wonder with you
at the town, its sanity.



Hulme Family Robinson

Mr Robinson:

I listened to the man with words
who said a new day was about to happen,
yes, it was a new day, though
it seemed no different from any other.

Then the man with words announced
a new kind of sun in a new kind of sky,
and, yes, there was a sun, but I recognised it
as that which was shining yesterday.

The man with words said tomorrow
would be limitless, did this mean,
I asked, the twenty-four-hour-day abolished?

Then it was explained to me, the man
with words had been speaking metaphorically,
which is to say, in the picturesque,
like a T.V. commercial.

So I went home wondering why the man
with words had bothered with his words,
they do it so much better on T.V.
sometimes, with near naked ladies, too.

Mrs Robinson:

In the supermarket dreaming
dreams of luxury,
all that's best in baskets
following after me

Anchovies and aubergines,
caviar and grouse,
best gammon from the tender side,
brandy of the House.

Pheasant stuffed with chicken,
chicken stuffed with lark,
all that's most expensive,
even in the dark.

But the mirror in the corner,
the hooded camera smirks,
my purse looks up at me and I
dream the dreaming works,

Grounded with the wearying
bought from day-to-day,
my bargain-offer bounties,
stretched-pound-stretched-away.

Young Robinson:

Daddy's in the Labour Club
shouting at the stripper,
Mammy's gone to Blackpool
with the Ladies' Tripper.

Sister's at a Disco
in a sweating fever,
look-alike attractions
con the heavy-breather.

Might as well go down the pub,
might as well join in,
get my rocks off while

I can,
let the life begin.

Technocrat & Labour Power



A Fate Worse Than.....

Once in the boneyard Old Smiler was coughing
The lungs in his chest were ready to break,
I'm growing old weary but that does'nt fear me,
The rent for this coffin my body cant take.

The Town Hall Collector came by with a Giro,
Just sign your name here, son, I'll fill in the rest,
The rents still the same, its Rates are to blame,
You know the Town Hall is doing its best.

Its not the damp rising, Old Smiler, said sadly,
Its not the roof leaking or walls flopping in,
What I cant bear, sir, to this I will swear, sir,
Its all of these others who keep dropping in.

When I first came here, it was like heaven,
Alone with myself first time in my life,
Nothing was sweeter, but, oh, the years fleeter
Than spent with the tune of a long-playing wife.

Imagine my horror after this heaven,
That woman invaded my lovely abode,
Close after her came, I wont say his name,
Her fancy-man from the end of our road.

Then his relations, all of them barmy,
All of them jostling and setting-up shop,
I'm telling you true, sir, it really wont do, sir,
This overcrowding must come to a stop.

The Town Hall Collector looked grave as he could then,
I sympathise with you, he said, thoughtfully,
But all the land going is Office-Block growing
Or Motorway maiming methodically.

I'm going on Strike now, Old Smiler, said wildly,
You'll get no more rent for this hovel of mine,
Do as you please, sir, theres nowt left to squeeze, sir,
The rest of my death I'll live out of line.

No skin off my nose, the Collector replied him,
We'll only evict you and that is no threat,
Worse thing of all you'll end in't Town Hall,
On The Housing Committee where all the dead get.

All the boneyards of Britain the same now,
There isn't the space for headstones no more,
And by the way, Smiler, I've brought Mr Tyler,
Just move your elbow away from the door.

Hold on, said Old Smiler, I'll pay my rent gladly,
Better this death than life in't Town Hall,
Come in, Mr Tyler, my name is Old Smiler,
There's nowt like a friend when your back's to the wall.

Owed

(To a certain lady for free beer all night)

After this Pub closes with everyone gone home
meet me in the graveyard near the gate
with a blanket and a new position
from the Brown Ale Book of Bedcords.

Lubricious Lady, dont mind the rain,
we'll steam-dry headstones by the acre,
melt wings off old stone angels,
shake all the leaves from all the trees,
cause seismographic consternation!

Might be the long-deceased shall come to life
howling for wives, husbands, anyone!
Ignore them, they're only human, too.

After this Pub closes with everyone gone home
meet me in the graveyard near the railings,
I'll be the one who's jumping up and down
with a miners helmet lit for company.

You'll laugh about the lightning later,
the thunder and the sudden flood
drove us barebummed to a tree,
you'll laugh about the Vicar, Lady,
gaped with dawn at strange fruit you and me.

Kidder

March came lusting like the Tallyman
who took his payments where he could
in any currency provided.
All good wives agree
trouserless he most resembled
the clever mime they took him for.

Rain or shine, he said,
I most resemble me.

The City

Men and womens orphaned faces
crowd railway waiting rooms
bags packed
for the next waiting room.

Black youths styled on rebellion
invent a language they can live with.

Night shifts across factories,
policed districts.
Another auditorium dwarfs with stars
performers everywhere.

Lowry

Haloed pawnshops hugging corners.

Old men fumble memories.

Shawled inverted comma's
accentuate from fifty years ago
the familiar stance of seventy-odd.

Scattering pained confetti.

Weather in a huddled stare.

Crooked back forlorn of hands
maybe mime a maybe innocence.

Maybe too much looked for's too
much found, too much lost.

Shudehill Meeting

Who was Avril, who was she,
Ripping out the guts of poems
With her sixth-former's insouciance
In seventy-one or seventy-two?

I met her in a second-hand
Penguin Poetry Of The Thirties,
Murderous Avril of the margins,
A-level assassin!

What grieves in education's name,
Not least encounters
Intestinal, eviscerated Auden,
Segmented Spender, mauled MacNiece.

For you, Avril White, wherever you are,
May you survive this learning,
Your later erudition then take on
Impediments and other blossoming.



On The Spiral Staircase

I keep meeting people who think they are in prison
comparing the crowded silence of their lives
with walls, bars, guarded gates. Do I tell them
they are their own gaoler, their own prison,
where they refuse acknowledging they might have
failed themselves?

I tell them stories of an imaginary country
where the tallest heroes and the loveliest women
mastering maiming hours imagined time
from blind luck, blind love, blind freedom,
and all wide open to a clever hand

I keep meeting black people who want to be
white people
and white people who want to be black people,
who live with millenium minds yet fear
millenium might find them out. Do I tell them
they might live a thousand such and be
shadow of a shadow on an endless road ?
I tell them fables of frogs enchanted
whose Prince Charmings went down in legend,
yet wished back to their froggish Other,
died in the joy of it, or so I tell them.

I keep meeting young men who think like old men,
young women with destroyer eyes, ancient children
bartering for haloes in the heaven of the barterers.

Do I tell them
they shall not live to see themselves laid out,
all their possessions, all their possessing, hopes
of barricades unbreached, is all their nakedness ?

I tell them comic songs and moonshine memories,
broadsheet scandal as a world of news, keep
entertaining faces more than life-like
less than loving for a laundered spotlight.

I keep meeting myself meeting myself,
each decade of me shuddering corners
crammed with lives I had not been. Do I tell me
truths a lesser fiction than created, reality
a notion that I live, saddled with a dream,
a splintered uttering in a glassier world?
I tell me myths of important childhoods,
enchant my slums to vanished Avalons, my
rough and ready anecdotes assume
the shape of all the Blessed Isles, the
undiminishing.

Dejà Vu

Once only had there been a road
first travelled well remembered.
Ancestral memory ? Been there before ?

What was hardest, really hardest,
of all his travelled roads
once only had he found himself
somewhere he knew.

Street Furniture

A sign said: ENJOY YOURSELF.
A sign said: SAUNA GIRLS.
A sign said: THE PROFESSIONALS.
A sign said: STRIPPERS.
A sign said: LABOUR WORKS.
A sign said: SEXSPANSION.
A sign said: KEEP BRITAIN.
A sign said: MONEYMOTES.
A sign said: INSURED ?
A sign said: ENJOY YOURSELF.
A sign said: PAYMENT DEFERRED.
A sign said: ITS ALRIGHT.
A sign said: LOST OR FOUND ?
A sign said: GET IT NOW.

Summer mumm er

Roll round that beerdrinkers sun,
invitations to a seaside booze-up.
All the Wakes of the world unite us
here in Toytown-On-Sea.

Ignore the gangsters, the landladies,
the sundays and the sundays.
Paddle your own canoe and drown.

You've earned it, lad, the Foreman said.

Clear Whip

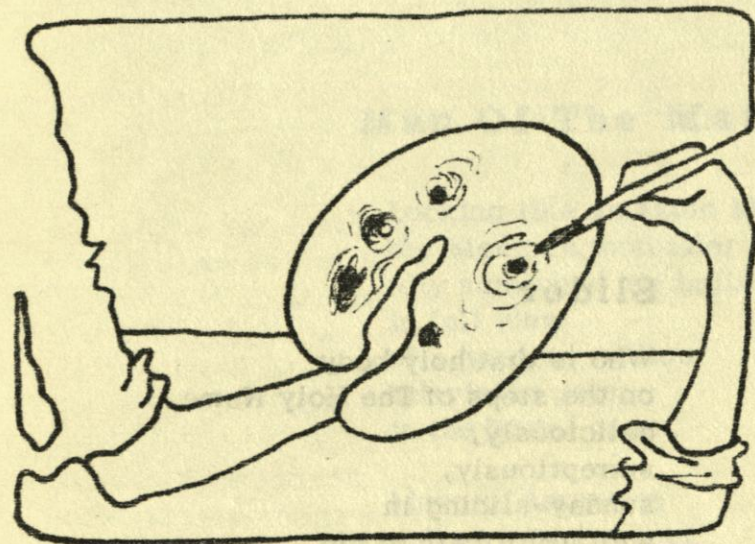
If you dont smell cowshit in these poems
dont blame me for not being a farmer.

If the town you meet is'nt the town you know
think of the differences as a means of travel.

If you miss the familiar accidents of Art
dont think me artless merely unbemused.

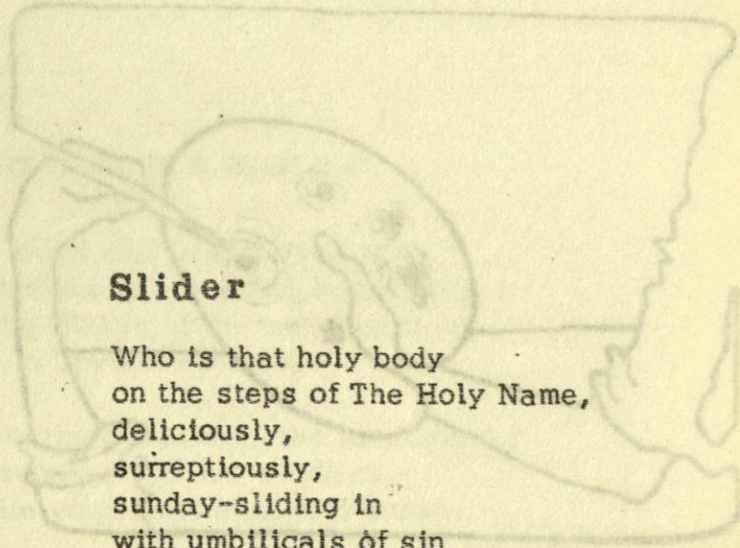
If my derivations are obscure or much too clear
dont let those distances arouse an agony.

If you read me how you read me is not my business,
my limitations are in your possibilities.



Miffed

Our Allie had that tale about a swan
swooped down at her at Platt Fields Park,
all feathers and the randiest wings
this side imagination. Our Allie said
the bird must have been on drugs
thinking her a lady swan an' all, everyones
on drugs these days, Our Allie said.
What the swan did, or how the swan did,
she did'nt say; only shuddered at
remembered rowdiness of white ecstacies
from Pets Corner to Platt Lane Gates.
Whatever happened at Platt Fields Park
Our Allies spreading and cant help smiling.



Slider

Who is that holy body
on the steps of The Holy Name,
deliciously,
surreptiously,
sunday-sliding in
with umbilicals of sin
the Largest Womb in the World ?

Come Back Jackie Brown

Once you could ring a bell on Oldham Road
boxers would come sparring from every pub,
dodging drays with broke-nose adroitness,
soler-plexing traffic-lights, uppercutting constables,
feinting a right hook for a straight left,
gay as cauliflowers, familiar mastodons.
It was a long time ago. Today I saw
an advertisment for professional boxers,
as if that breed had merely moved away
not vanished with the years they flourished in,
hungry as murder years, raged at years.
It was a long time ago. Today I saw
an advertisment for the good old days,
for Jackie Brown, for Johnie King, for Nipper Cusick.

Man Of The Match

Looking like an Aztec idol
the Mexican footballer
idly scratched his balls
in full view
of a hundred million
television sets
in the brutal game.

Moon of Argentina
spiked on a bayonet
forgot itself.

A Big Yin

Hugh MacDiarmid died last week
after eighty six years contending
with all manner of bad bastards
the length o' his time.
He had an hard enough life for any poet
to make the right rough song more
melodious than most. Surviving
his bad times and his good times
he lived on to become one of those
awkward Scottish mountains, harsh
climbing but a view of the world
from the gained ascent.

I didn't like his poems
but loved the idea of him,
one with his balls on,
the like of which this dying
ill-affords.

Visiting

There were no strangers in the room
only estranging walls looked on,
delicate chairs deserted me,
tableware flinched at my clumsy
handling of their fine perceptions,
porcelain figures with lifted skirts
seemed to be striving at
aggrieved decorum. My boots
assumed the shape of cobblestones
on pained, on polished rosewood,
among the whispering carpets of Tehran.

Letter From South Africa

I tell you, Jan, the countys gone to pot,
One you could kill your Black and like as not
a lecture from the Pastor would suffice
for punishment. Small penance makes small vice.
Now look what happens in our Courts today
when Law is given as a Right-of-Way,
a white man and whats more, a public hero,
treated as if he were a Kaffir zero
by Police and Judge conspiring to efface
the pride of Being from Boar-doms race.
You've seen the 'papers, Jan, you've seen
what liberalising tendencies now mean,
our famous Bobby Locke, who shot his Black,
used as a criminal by those who lack
perspective on the world and what the worlds about,
a Red-Black tide swarming on our Redoubt,
poor shooting, too, I call a wound a miss,
Voortrekker stock would never come to this;
an honest killing puts paid to idle rumour,
leaves things as they are and in their humour,
but still, and, Jan, I'd emigrate,
if only there were such a perfect State
as once South Africa had been to us,
when killing Blacks had never raised a fuss.
Now Bobbie Locke is Tried and guilty found,
how many Boers are turning in their ground
whose blood had had bought our blessed earth
with martyrdoms this generations mirth ?
I tell you, Jan, the countys gone to pot
when shooting Blacks concerns the Legal lot,
and gets you Fined, and Three Months suspended,
God Damn it, Jan, the Blacks defended!



The truth is, I'm not afraid to say,
conspiracy rules our Paradise today,
the serpent among us, oh, Jan, the shame,
is White and bears an Afikkaner name.
Its all of us, my friend, who give the Black
the inch it takes to drag our country back
among degenerate Anglo-Saxon races,
waste to the wind in all their places.
I tell you, Jan, and I say again,
the countrys gone to pot and we're no men
who see our Bobby Locke severely punished
for what in other days the State encouraged.
Not just the Sentence but the Sentencing
makes life among us now so menacing,
who knows how far we're breaking down
from what it was gave our land renown
and men could shoot their Black with this conviction,
it was a duty and no restriction ?
Ah, Jan, those golden days are long behind us,
now Courts convene and guilty find us,
brand as criminals and like as not
say we but not the countys gone to pot.
Rhodesias sliding from the White Mans Map
from giving Blacks a say in where they're at,
how fares South Africa when we can give
their day in Court to Blacks who would not live
when Sharpeville begged no question, told no lies,
gave notice we were Boers who would not prize
the worlds opinion to our own good name
among the Chosen keeping yet the Flame
of Whites supreme among inferior races,
given no option but to keep their places.
I see this Trial of Bobby Locke, my friend,
the true beginning of some false end,

an hint of Armaggedon creeping in
prepared by those not blind to where they sin,
our Legislators, Jan, our Police, our Pastors,
Communists to a man with Moscow Masters!
How else explain this savage indignation
visited on he defending Station ?
Now Blacks depend on Law when getting shot,
I tell you, Jan the countys gone to pot.

Holy Jim's Prayer

Oh, Lord, this towns a sinful place
Which me and mine must bring to grace
With jailing, flailing every face
We dont approve,
The Law is always right to chase
And so remove.

I can't think why I'm hated so
When Law and Order as You know
Is all I aim at here below,
In suitable places,
Order is my favourite though,
Lord, how it braces.

And, Lord, You know my evidence
Carries more weight than it does sense,
And sometimes, Lord, conveys pretence
Of Higher Action,
I'm on your side is my defence
And only faction.

With Martin Webster and the Flag
Two thousand of my lads could brag
They kept our Tameside Tories gag
On free opinion,
Our Fuehrer marched as if to bag
The Old Dominion.

There is a rumour in this town
That I don't like our brethren brown
Or black and shades both up and down
The spectrum,
It's just my lads rough humours crown
When they collect 'em.

And when you sort the sheep from goats
You'll find my flock in tailored coats,
Not horned and hairy at the throats
Unruly,
Mine are the propertied "in quotes"
And all yours truly.

We'll beat the Commie bastards down,
Delete that, Lord, I must not frown
Politically upon the town
 Though, Lord, it grieves,
Knowing the danger any clown
 With thought achieves.

Theres too much thinking going on
From folk once satisfied with none,
Who knew their Betters ruled as one
 In tune with Thee,
Happiest in dominion
 Of men like me.

And, Lord, that night in Collyhurst,
When lawless elements were first
Given notice of Thy thirst
 For righteous folk,
Only a criminal would burst
 Thy cordons yoke.

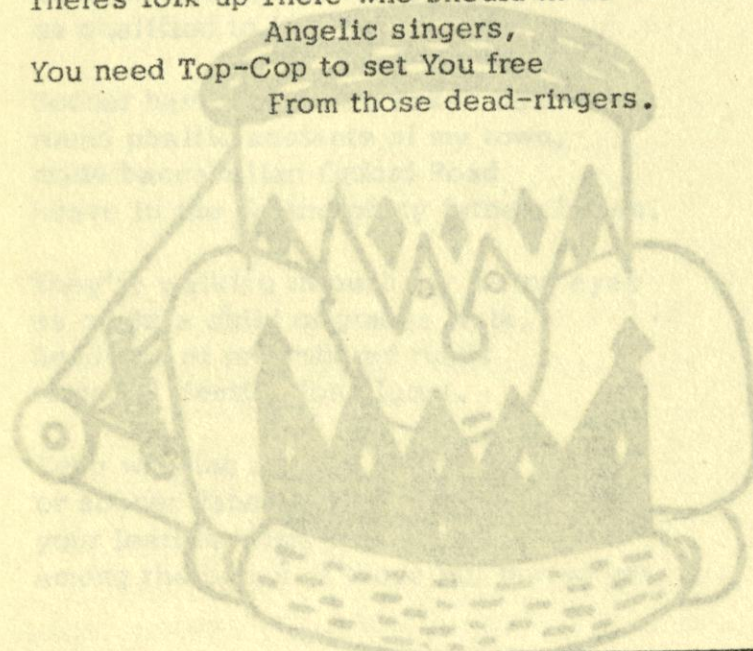
And, Lord, we've cleansed again the streets
Of hustlers claiming paid-for sweets
Better than our good wives meats
 And homely dumpling,
Even if false the thought defeats
 Our Lawful humping.

Now, Lord, these pornographic raids
Carried out by my young blades
Are not, as rumoured, sexual aids
 For me and mine,
We keep those tons of naughty maids
 Apart from thine,

Its only Crime Statistics, Lord,
Climb higher than my good accord,
Common thieves, the mugging horde,
 And suchlike stuff,
While whores and queers obey my word
 And thats enough.

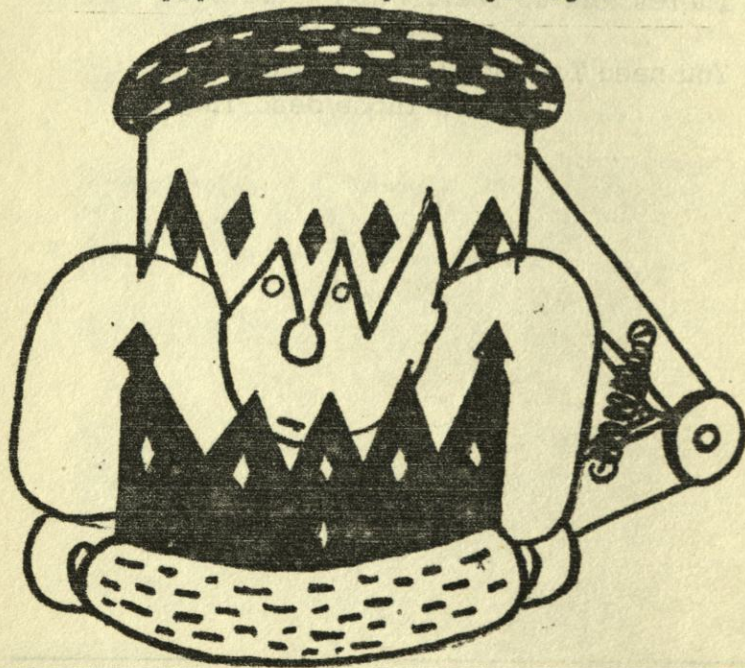
Now Reggie Maudling, Lord, who died,
Before he could be put inside,
Though no-one ever really tried
 To nail him,
Preserve him, Lord, some Scotch applied
 And you'll not fail him.

And keep that job assured for me,
Chief of Your Constabulary,
Theres folk up There who should'nt be
 Angelic singers,
You need Top-Cop to set You free
 From those dead-ringers.



Court News

I know it's winter when the papers report
the Queen is away on State Business
somewhere near the Equator. When the T.V. News
shows film of a sunnier country
I know what's coming next, The Queen
being greeted at tropical airports by tropical
V.I.P.'s, she's a very busy woman is the Queen,
in winter. I know it's winter when
Princess Margaret is reported on a Caribbean
island, with or without some Roddy,
Reggie, Lance, Max, Ern, Leeds Jimmy,
and the horn section of the Syd
Lawrence Orchestra. I know it's winter
when the papers throw up this garbage.



Students Marching

They're walking on my fathers bones
through ignorance of where he lies,
this town is made of all our dead
who will not die save in our selves.

I saw a generation marching
where I had been my young nine lives,
as though an innocence were theirs
from guiltier passings than a passing.

An educated guess or worse,
they want to join the race they're in,
become themselves the unignored
as qualified to live enables.

Sooner have seen them naked dancing
round phallic ancients of my town,
made bacchanalian Oxford Road
heave to the depths of my fathers bones.

They're walking through my loving eyes
as might a child of graces walk,
heedless of remembered roads
forgetful destinations lured.

Keep walking I would tell them,
or sooner dance original to yourselves:
your learning time is losing time
among the bones of those not buried yet.

Ecclesiastical Sonnet

How nice it must be to lay down the law,
How nice to regard your words heaven sent,
How comfort assured from precepts to draw
Judgement on those whose actions contempt
On what after all is the best of all lands
Ruled by the wise and the best of all men,
How especially nice to know how your hands
Are cleaner than most who've used the same pen.
Archbishop Coggan says: It's immoral to Strike,
Wrong of the low-paid pretending they're poor,
Work is a duty not something to like
And wages the least of reward, not more.
How nice it must be to say all of this
Knowing the way of the wind where you piss.

A Death

It might have been worse, she could have been killed
in a scandal made for famous newspapers,
or got herself raped and ripped by the latest rapist
in the after-hours of murderous crofts.

So different her life had been from ours
it were only right to expect the worse.
She died in bed, at home, the cancer thing,
nobody said what everyone thought.

Ballad Of Elena Ryika

You can call me a girl of the System,
You can say I went wrong from the start,
You can talk all my aise when I've kissed 'em,
All the lost men losing heart.

I know you'd like to care, dear,
I know you'd like to swear, dear,
You're more than a punter in part.

Being an orphan's no fun in the System
Though it employs many who'd starve,
Keeps kids off the streets, who missed 'em?
Gives families a chance and a half.

I know you'd like to soothe, dear,
I know you'd like to prove, dear,
Your decency's an instinct not to carve.

Surviving the joys of the System
At eighteen I was ready for life,
My needs were many, I'd list 'em,
If only the listers weren't rife.

I know you'd like to stay, dear,
I know you'd like to say, dear,
Twenty minute knock-offs come to strife.

When you're just a name in the System,
When you hustle yourself on the town,
The blame is all yours if you pissed 'em
Off and they nail you down.

I know you'd like to cream, dear,
I know you'd like to dream, dear,
Your money's double value 'cos I'm brown.

A dream of a song in the System,
Girl of a future made good,
With riches and fame I'd have blitzed 'em,
All who had given me crud.

I know you'd like to see, dear,
I know you'd like to gee, dear,
My name with the stars if you could.

I died in the way of the System,
Grown careless or not caring much,
A night of dumb clients, enlist 'em,
These more among many I'd touch.

I know you'd like an out, dear,
I know you'd like to shout, dear,
Evil isn't evil in the slutch.

Call me a girl of the System,
Dead at the bad end of town,
Another for coppers who list 'em,
Girls the Ripper's put down.

I know you'd like to slope, dear,
I know you'd like to hope, dear,
The Ripper's not the System, just its frown.

Spike

Spain is the old man in Chepstowe Street
who was a young man at the Ebro,
remembering how the different names of death
in any language meant the same.

Spain, the old man said, was mostly shit,
old like me. I don't remember Spain.
I remember Paris. There was a wicked town
to be hungry in.

Old Lag

An Indian girl in Victoria Station
with a face like a flower and a body
so full of eastern promises my thoughts
could have got me time
if thoughts were imprisonable.

No doubt I'd be labelled a dirty old man
but what's a dirty old man to do
when thoughts outnumber performances?

Come to think of it, thoughts
have always outnumbered performances,
I've always been in danger of my time.

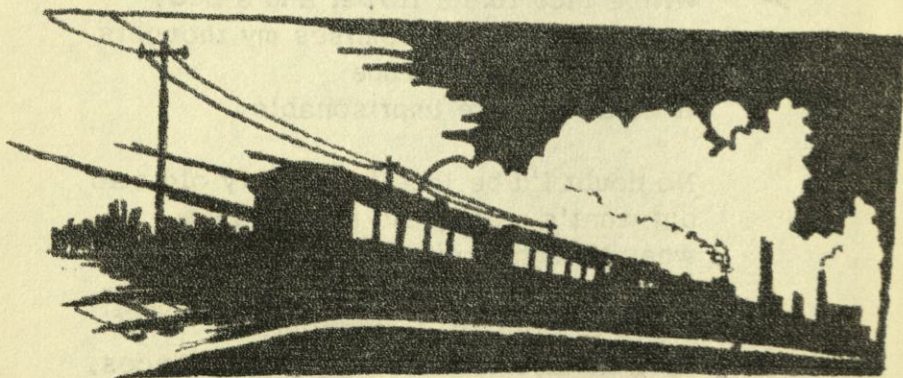
Night Turn

The shuffled train completes
our Ardwick shunt, through drizzle
colourlights have called us on,
splashing reds again.

Hours of the night divining
city of the sleeping arms,
Gods and continental gods
imposed on faces worn
at three a.m.

 money-lidded
eyes whose harder lights
have been here longer.

Another last departures year.
Sidings of suburban drift.
Fade of clocks.
Ardwick to the rain of somewhere else.



Shunters Nightmare

Get that Mineral out of Seven,
Push the Cripples clear of Two,
Pipe the Carlisle and the Camden,
See about a Road for Crewe.
Trim the Tail-lamps,
Trim the Tail-lamps,
Work a Rounder till we're through.

Heres a Tripper backing in,
Every wagon different road,
Fifty kinds of bleedin' coupling,
Must have been an Overload.
Clean the Sand-drag,
Clean the Sand-drag,
Work that Shunt-pole like a goad.

Keep the Ground-frame clear of litter,
Move those levers till you ache,
Get the wagon numbers passing
For the Tops-Inspectors sake.
Watch that Diamond,
Watch that Diamond,
Dont derail another 'Brake.

Check the Chutes on every Hopper,
Shackle all the Engines on,
Give the Guard a hand Preparing,
Wake the Tapper up, my son.
Heres your wages,
Heres your wages,
Count it when the job is done.

EL Blues

Nay, but Copy Pits a bleeder,
Have you ever worked yon Line
Wi' a train o' empty non-fits
Bufferin'-mad the whole incline ?

Does yer bowels good, said The Old Guard,
Keeps yer liver in some nick,
Bouncin' up an' down this Railway
Feelin' every sleeper stick.

Nay, but Copy Pits a bleeder
After midnight wi' the rain
Seepin' from a cloud all round your
Drowned out vision of a train.

Still be there, lad, said The Old Guard,
Nothing happens on this road
Save the ghosts o' Kitsons Wood
Might arrange a shiftin' load.

An' I've heard a 'steamer blowin'
Up from Gannow wi' the dawn,
Long dead drivers gazin' at yon,
Drivers dead 'fore I was born.

Still, you'll learn a bit o' Railway
From a road wi' character,
More than Main-line gallivantin'
On a few-stops Passenger.

Nay, but Copy Pits a bleeder
When the Moor forgets to stop,
Leanin' over wi' a whisper:
Now then, bugger, wheers the Top ?

Jone O' Grinfilts Infant

I'm a Railway Goods Guard without a Goods Train,
They're breakin' up Yards an' leavin' the Main,
The Roads o' my life are burnin' for scrap,
Nobody knows what the Gaffers are at:

Nobody knows not even the Gaffers
Except they'll keep their jobs.

I'd go on the Dole but Dole is a curse
Bleedin' the strength o' the best an' the worse,
Livin' off money that should have been spent
Makin' this land the way it was meant:

Gaffers are canny wi' money thats ours,
Doln' it out keeps them in jobs.

Signal Box, Siding, Depot an' Station,
Silent as islands o' desolation,
Weeds where Junctions once were bright steel
Rage as the empty miles unreel:

Gaffers are buildin' a high speed train
Wi' nowhere to go but faster.

Workin' jobs that now never fail,
Crippled wagons an' redundant rail,
Headed for't scrapyard an' wreckin' crew,
Tail-lampin' History we're blowin'-through:
Exceptin' Gaffers an' Gaffers Gaffers
Rationalisin' all but themselves.

I'm a Railway Goods Guard at the end o' the Line,
Preparin' trains o' a finished time,
Shacklin' wagons that carry away
A hundred an' fifty years Railway:

Gaffers dont know, Gaffers cant tell
A Stop-board from a Distant.

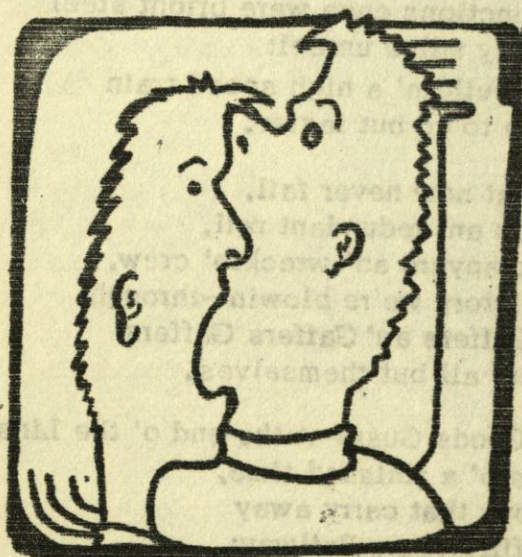
Two Pen'orth

They were singing the end of the line song
with the echoing crowd convinced
the end of the line had happened.

Then a song of the old and the local
with the old-fashioned names,
end of the line names. The song
curled round us like a blanket.

Easier drinking with these songs,
soothed from tension to a warm regret.

Only the present can haunt us singing.



A Day That Might Be Spring

I know its unfashionable to be an optimist,
I know I should be writing of houseless folk,
ragged, hungry, age-old kids,
old men and women fading out of their own memories.

I know I should concern myself with our violent children
and the violence done to them in the name of fearing
money.

I know the country's social structure is only geared
for using people and the rewards of Labour as opposed
to the rewards of Capital is dirt in the eye of those
who make rewarding possible.

I know the crimes of war and the crime of one man
is now committing against his neighbour.
I know about pollution and world hunger.
I know about the effluence of affluence.
I know the vicious faces surrounding frightened money.
I know the loneliness of angered want.

All these I know, yet, found myself alive today
as though a newly-minted wealth were mine,
smiled in the sun on my workward bike,
glorying in these thousands of my townsfolk,
so many possible lives in all this shining.

COMMONWORD

The poems in this book are not the work of a professional writer. Joe Smythe who wrote them is a railway guard. Commonword who produced and published the book is not out to make a profit.

These points are important. Professional writers, by definition, make their living out of using words. In practice this means they will have risen to the top of our 'educational' system; 99% of them will be middle class; their views, on the whole, will be acceptable to the people who control the media and the publishing houses. The outlook of most writers is therefore extremely narrow, and the experience of the majority of people, who are not like them, is ignored. - "Most people ignore most art because most art ignores most people."

The past five or ten years, however, has seen a growth in a new sort of writing: writing for and by working people. There is now a national federation of over twenty worker writer groups. Joe Smythe is a member of Commonword, one of these groups.

We hold regular workshop meetings at which people get together to read and discuss their own work. And we try to find outlets for this work both in our own publications and in public readings. Poems, stories, life histories: the important thing is communication, not making a profit.

For more information contact Commonword,
61 Bloom Street, Manchester1. 061-236-2773.
Or the Federation of Worker Writers, E Floor,
Milburn Ho, Dean St, Newcastle on Tyne NE1 1LF

CONTENTS

pages

1	Red Deansgate
2	Hunts Bank
3	1917
4	Small World
5	In The Bombing Time
6	School Yanks
7	Sour Apple
8	The Old Master
13	Ordsall Lane
14	The Oldest Profession
15	About Fat Margaret
16	Lyricists
17	Hot Tom
19	Kid In Orbit
20	52 Was The Summer In On The Act
21	Old Man Europe
22	Impressions The Old Elite
25	The First Hero
26	Hulme Family Robinson
29	A Fate Worse Than
31	Owed (To A Certain Lady For Free Beer All Night)
32	Kidder The City
33	Lowry
34	Shudehill Meeting
35	On The Spiral Staircase
36	Deja Vu

37	Street Furniture
	Summermummer
38	Clear Whip
39	Miffed
40	Slider
40	Come Back Jackie Brown
	Man Of The Match
41	A Big Yin
	Visiting
42	Letter From South Africa
45	Holy Jim's Prayer
49	Students Marching
50	Court News
51	Ecclesiastical Sonnet
	A Death
52	Ballad Of Elena Rytka
54	Spike
	Old Lag
55	Night Turn
56	Shunters Nightmare
57	EL Blues
58	Jone O' Grinfilts Infant
59	Two Pen'orth
60	Poem For a Day That Might Be Spring
61	Commonword
62	Contents

These verses are a voice scarred with too many cigarettes, too much cheap wine, too many raw mornings in too many railway sidings. A remembering voice, a scraping-the-bottom-of-the-barrel voice, a street-rough bung-'em-in-anywhere voice.....

If there is any poetry in here, regard it as an happy accident: if Art is what you're after, ask for your money back, better still, give me to someone you don't like.....

These verses are devious animals with designs on your purse or person, whichever is more attractive..

These verses..... that's enough for honesty, for twenty five pence what do you expect?..... Joe Shakespeare?

Joe Smythe, poet and railway guard.

Published by Commonword, a writers workshop for working people. 61 Bloom Street, Manchester M1 3LY

25 p