

JAZZTOWN
Poems by
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Jazztown

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JAZZTOWN

Part I

Love

Later, my floorboards covered other lovers,
But I couldn't cover you in there.
Instead, I took you in my arms
And put your pieces in a bag.

Then I cleaned the flat.

I tucked you underneath my bed:
The closest you had ever been
To sleeping with me.

One day your scent came, filled the room.
It told me that the worst of love
Is letting go.
That night, although you smelled of fear,
I put you out into the street.

Since then, I see you everywhere.

I find you in my headphones
When I listen to the symphony
That used to terrify you.
The silence between movements is like you,
Holding your breath.

A Blues For Erik Satie

Suzanne, whose thighs you'd finger like a keyboard,
Blows a candle out and, in her nightshirt,
Throws the curtains back. She is open to the dark
That seems to emanate from where you lie.
She asks if she can one day paint you naked
And then, if you will play a piece for her, with your penis.

This, of course, is speculation.
I was never privy to your talk of love –
If love was what you talked of
In those hours before you shut the blinds upon yourself.
This I know: 'Dry as a cuckoo' on the *Danse maigre*,
Naked, in the dark, with the curtains drawn.

Cities

I watch you stretch
limbs like a city
in the bathroom mirror:
the archways of your knees
and the aqueducts above
like London Bridge,
opening to strangers.

Those summer visitors
demanded in a foreign tongue
the relics that you would not give;
they took the city with them when they left.

I see you now,
sacked in skies of glass:
the Thames has burst its banks
and is howling in the doorways.

Olives In Two Social Settings

One: French Olives In A Cinema

Olives stuffed with pimiento,
Then your splitting tongue.
I consider them too strong
But venture one as you do –
With your tongue
Rooting out the pimiento, then
Mashing it and breaking skin.

My fingers dip into the water,
Pluck another from the jar.
I chew it, squash it, love
It, as you've shown me to.
I smile and say: they are sublime.
Then your tongue prods mine
As though I were the olive
And my tongue, the pimiento.

Two: Spanish Olives In A Bar

Back from Madrid, you have
Brought Spanish olives,
Whole, with stones, in brine.
Opening them here,
In the International,
Seems natural –
But still I hide the can
Beneath the bar.

I pull the ring. You grin.
Fingers wet again,
I bring an olive to your
Lips. You hesitate before
You bite,
Mindful of the fact that
Someone famous has just walked in.

Elephant And Castle

The evening is layering
itself upon the street:
red on grey, sauce on bone.

At the final stop, a bus
is choking on its passengers
throwing them up and heading off
as though some shadow mechanic
has performed a Heimlich manoeuvre.

Between window glass and music, piped:
God Bless The Child,
a waiter brings us chicken,
wine and baby Caesar salad.

You tell me, as you portion a breast,
that you've halved your hours between
two men too weak to leave you
and too familiar to taste of anything.
There is no meat on them:
should you choose feather, bone or neither?

Big Night

A bound Alsatian barks to warn
The children sniffing amyl-nitrate
In the phone box on my street

That the early morning baker's van
Is stopping by the corner shop
And if they do not move, they will be found.

I can almost smell them and their bottle.
From my skylight they appear to be
Bit players in a mini-series set

Right now, this minute.
The soundtrack is the radio:
John Cale's *Chinese Envoy*.

The sound effects come cheaply:
Dear old Ramon and Matilda,
Crying out through the thin wall,

My next door neighbours
Shrieking out in the affirmative,
Adopting strange positions

On a Chinese rug beside the TV,
While their bloodhound, Doris,
Watches from beneath the sink.

Meanwhile, on my single bed,
The leading lady snoozes while I prowl,
Her snore the purring of the spools.

Dreaming, she is projectionist and star –
Asleep because when we had tried
To do the love scene earlier,

I ran out of film.

Feet

Around my toes, your teeth, your tongue,
your lips, in mock fellatio.

Your epiglottis blushes, looking on.

You say, when you come up for air,
that you are glad that I have had a bath
and do not suffer from a fungus,
do not wear the same socks every day.

In fact, you are astonished.

War Museum

Your shoes are still beneath my bed,
unpolished, strapless, stringless –
high-heeled stabs of leather
that you flung at me and missed.

Then, there are the dinner plates –
the fragments still entangled in the carpet;
I have stepped on one and thought of you.

The long-stemmed glasses, polished and unbroken:
on their sides beside the window –
tinted brown at evening, the colour of my hair
that nearly smothered you one night.

The Stanley knife that whispered by my ear
is underneath the chair where you once sat,
your elbows swinging forearms on the back.

The nib of the pen you jabbed into my neck
is unwanted and broken on the writing pad.

The mailbox, unopened, the letters unread
lie beyond the hallway with its own
cartography of battle and of love.

And I would love you still, if not for this:

The television set, its cathode tube
imploded six months past had been,
you intimated of an evening in December,
an impediment to conversation.

How I Lost The Faith

Shaving, I am struck
by the similarities
between a plastic

razor and a cross:
I crucify my face. My
lady friend remarks

on my good fortune:
women menstruate. This is
how she knows that god

is not a woman.
It is also how I lost
the faith. I could no

longer understand
a god who persecutes
hermaphrodites.

The Glamour Fascists

Madam, you are found guilty of possessing
a surfeit of lipids on your person.

It is therefore our solemn duty to prohibit you
from delighting in your sexuality,
Or from wearing any form of apparel
which enhances your appearance.

You are cautioned against deriving pleasure
from gazing at your naked body
In a mirror or other similar reflective surface
or from bathing, swimming, self-arousal
(Verbal, visual, mechanical), or from food or drink
or any substance which contributes to your crime.

Furthermore, your form may not be photographed
for publication as erotica, or as a standard
By which others of your gender may be judged.
Finally, take note that all our concubines are svelte
And half our age. Madam, you are sentenced to
eleven stone, five ounces and a half.

Part II

As Seen From The Lake

Toronto has its cranes in me;
Tonight it's taken me
From Tweedsmuir Avenue to Harbourfront.
Beneath a bridge I face the lake
That separates me from New York,
Niagara and Buffalo,
These places far removed from Boyle.

The distance smells of Hamilton
But I can not inhale that far;
I turn and walk towards Yonge Street
Where the whores outside the skin shows
Down past Sam The Record Man
Are waiting for this city
To collapse inside their bodies.

Ballad Of A Taxi Ride

Streetcars move haltingly out of St. Clair
Every ten minutes or so, every day.
For a dollar and five you can go anywhere
– Maybe Dundas or Eglinton, Bloor or Rosedale –
When it's too far to walk in this city
Where tourists mistake the police cars for taxis.

Two in the morning and I call a cab
– After the last of the streetcars has gone
And the subway cars stopped on the line –
To get home from M²O'H, Rivoli Club.

The cab driver tells me he comes from Bombay
But Toronto appeals to him. 'I like it here,
Driving at night on these streets, meeting strangers.
It's good for you, good for your spirit,' he says.

'Strangers mind more what they do to each other,
Seems to me, twice as much as hardened lovers.
Listen to me, do you want some advice?
It's not good to have too many lovers at once.
Not these days,' he confides. 'Makes you old
Before time.' Then he's quiet and watching the road.

We arrive at my block and ten dollars, he's gone.
I live four storeys up, overlooking the highway.
It's too dark to see it, but all of this stone
And this metal is mine for as long as I stay.

People Are Eating Here

From behind my mushroom soup
I watch the people in this restaurant
Communicating with white shirts and trays
Above black slacks and skirts.

People come in, people sit down,
Sometimes taking off their coats,
People eat and pay then people leave.
It always happens in that order.

Table two: I notice lovers
Making proxy war with chopsticks,
Their relationship distilled
Into the feints and stabs they make at squid.

Table three: a woman eats a seafood sandwich,
Trying not to let the prawns escape
But the man she's with spills mayonnaise
All over his blue shirtsleeves.

Table four: a man alone
Takes pains to eat bruschetta,
Having difficulty with his knife.
His hungry vision eyes the waitress.

Watching this, the world takes on
The colour of my soup: these people
Are not people anymore,
But food devouring food.

Loblaw's Still Life

The brand names faded in the sunlight
falling on this wire basket
full of groceries from years
ago, suspended in the supermarket.

Half a liquid crystal digit
on the checkout register,
cashier staring at the skylight.

Customers in walking mode
no longer hearing:
'Please move quickly towards the exits,'
while their toddlers' shins are dangling
from the trolleys starting to edge breathless
past the sweets display.

No dogs allowed,
but someone's poodle has its leg raised,
half a piss about to hit a shop assistant's shoe.

Reclining Nude

(At the Art Gallery of Ontario)

Her relationship to installations here
remains unspecified.

Although the artist made her,
his reclining nude

determines her own space:

five bronze teardrops on granite,
quietly accumulating a history.

Swimming

Mrs Malenky and Mr Kaminsky
Went into the ocean together,
Still wearing their regulation overalls.

Once in the ocean,
They joined up, unseen,
Squirming out of their overalls,
Taking in brine,
Linking arms, linking legs,
As they bobbed up and down
Like a pair of pink bubbles.

Love me, said Mrs Malenky.
Love me, said Mr Kaminsky.
Take us, they said to the ocean.
Take us to America.

Kissing A Statue

Outside V&B
on Yonge, there's a statue of
a pair of lovers

on a copper bench.
Every night an old man comes
and spills his nightmare

on their skins. In cold-
er weather he has cracked his
parched lips on their tongues.

Jazztown

Einar and Mo in their bed
Know little or nothing of Jazz,
But they have a tape made of brass:
Music for the Knee Plays.
Einar is living in the future
And Mo is counting things,
Which is fine as long as the summer lasts.
But what will they do then?

They will listen to the city like a double bass,
Hear the crickets in the walls make drums,
And beyond, hear the neighbours argue like trumpets.
When they go out, there's the sun like a saxophone.
They will skate on the lake, their blades like hi-hats
Against a backdrop of trees stripped bare like a tune.

Goetzville, USA

I carry my hammer to protect myself
against anyone who might stop me in the street
to beg just ten more cents to buy a subway ticket.

I carry my hammer to protect myself
against any grizzled face pressed close to me,
breathing its fumes of garlic and whiskey.

I carry my hammer to protect myself
against anyone who asks me to 'read this note',
or anyone who tries to bum a cigarette.

I carry my hammer to protect myself
against anyone with halitosis looking for loose money;
besides, the jangle in my pocket could be keys.

I carry my hammer to protect myself
against any gravel voice requesting my forgiveness
but it is sleeping under television pages.

I carry my hammer to protect myself
I carry my hammer to protect myself
I carry my hammer to protect myself

Closed Circuit

1.

I sometimes see the guard
Who is posted inside the bulletproof door
In the blue uniform of this embassy,
Carrying an automatic pistol.
He seems to change in regular cycles
Into someone else.
I do not understand how this occurs.

2.

An archipelago of bollards
Encloses a lake of pavement
Around this building.
From this I would deduce
That those inside the embassy
Are as confident as those
From whom they receive their programs.

3.

Although I am in part responsible
For the security of this building,
I deny any responsibility
For the building itself.

4.

Today a Lincoln limousine
Crashed into a pair of bollards
In that manner proving their effectiveness.
The bulletproof glass on the windshield
Was shaken by the impact of a cranium
Which had formerly been positioned on the headrest.

5.

It is night now, and the moon sends light
To supplement my infrared.
I assume this on the premise
That because their flag is on the moon,
Its facilities are at their disposal.

Drowned Spacecraft

Her silver body slipped
Below the silk dark of the Mississippi,
Drowning her by fire
Until she fell into the arms of silt.
This landing was unplanned:
On board, a New Year party
Interrupted in the middle of a slow set.
Dinner suited gentlemen
And ladies wearing feather boas
Relived the Roaring Twenties
In a ballroom big enough for water.
Then the fire started;
Seemed as though the sun
Had dipped behind Manhattan
And had risen once again
On board the ship.

Heathaze

In the streets there is a quiet that remembers you:
Your first time on the balcony,
Your last time,
And the way you cocked your last cigar in public,
How your sunglasses and buttons caught the light.

Now you are tied to a pole
Against the desert you'll be buried in
While, hidden in the scrub,
A foreign journalist takes photographs for *Life*.
He stares at you through crosshairs
But the heathaze makes you a mirage.

Part III

Pigs

In Dún Laoghaire there were pigs in a backyard
whose noise excited her,
whose smell she did not find offensive in the least.

She wrote once
that we take their names in vain
although they have done nothing but exist.

She said that we project our sins on them;
they are a chamber of the mind
in which we store derision.

Pigs Part Two

The smell of slowly melting butter
on the back of a back rasher, frying,
reminds me of a lover who, one day,
when she came downstairs for breakfast,
scented with the bathroom's potpourri,
announced that one night soon
she would be found, delirious,
mud-caked, naked from the shoulders down,
her only adornment a necklace of pork sausages,
in the corner of the pigsty
in the yard behind my neighbour's house;
she would have slaughtered all his pigs.

Sentient Glass

I imagined that someone
Had invented sentient glass
And that we had rubbed our bodies
Up against your nightlit window.
This glass could deduce
From the very touch of our skin
How long our colons were
And how many milligrammes of bile
Spilled in the half hour
After a typical light snack
Into our swooning duodena.

It could analyse these things
And give a condensation readout
On its surface
But it could not analyse intangibles like:
We have shared each other with the glass
And we are hungry once again.

The glass would watch us eat
As, forks in hand, we would contemplate
Conditions on another planet
Where the time it takes for us to eat,
On this world,
Could be the time it takes on that world
For a pane of sentient glass to go senile.

Internal Astronomy

Space inhabits me;
I am the belt
around the universe.

My body grows
as space expands.
I will one day explode.

The stars push
through my skin:
These are my pores.

The galaxies:
my brain; their arms my
central nervous system.

A nebula of yearning
moves my limbs.
My teeth are asteroids.

My eyes, black holes,
suck energy.

My stomach is the furnace
at the centre
of the universe.

I feel the spacecraft
in my veins.

The Walls Replied

For days you wouldn't sleep without
A drink to draw your eyelids down.
Your blankets were too difficult,
Your bed too temperamental.
And you outstared the sun or moon
Or kissed the walls and called their names,
Names burned into the pillowcase
And only you could know them.
Insisting that the walls replied,
Your fingers stroked your eyelids down;
The walls replied and called your name.

Aunt Blasphemy

Aunt Blasphemy once
wore a wimple. Now she's on
parole and swears a

lot. While drinking Blood-
y Marys, she might call them
virgin afterbirths.

Worm

While the cornerstone of agriculture reads my palm,
Moving across my life line very slowly,
It will not properly differentiate between me and a field
Until it tries to plough me.

Of course, what I remember of oligochaetic annelids
I remember from biology lessons that insisted:
– that a worm reproduces passionlessly
– that it is boneless and eyeless and toothless
– that it finds clay palatable.

Round the heel of my hand, the worm suggests thousands of worms,
Thousands engulfing my arm, like the circuits of a brain
That has burst through the skull and has discovered
Independence of the body.

Moving under my sleeve, the worm finds a darkness
That is warmer than the earth in winter, but less malleable.

Worms

Worms come to me in my sleep.

Once I had visions of a race of nuclear accident victims

Living in boisterous harmony under the ground

Between the bombed-out stations

Of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Circus.

Now it is the worms, masses of them.

They have replaced the trains

As the most reliable form of public transport.

A million worms can lift a body all the way to Covent Garden.

The underground itself reeks of the worms.

Each station is a terminus between segments,

Each line a different worm, overlapping;

Slick bodies ruling beautiful London.

It is at this point in my dream that I wake up:

Stranded between stations, holding onto the cables

To avoid falling onto the line,

I am pressed close to the wall as an express gestalt of worms

Snowballs towards me, and I forget which segment I am in.

Wales From A Train

those pits are the bones
where the flesh has been cleaned from
the body of Wales

those houses are red
ants perhaps they ate the flesh

The Heat Death of the Universe

1.

Black suns such as Cygnus
X-1, drawing energy
forever from their giant neighbours,
pulling it like thread through their
needle-eyed event horizons,
stitching up a different fabric
for the universe.

2.

Starships as they red shift
to oblivion –
lightspeeding to their deaths
beyond those vast accretion discs.

3.

The heat death of the universe:
the world grows formless
as the sun collapses on its mass
and time commits its suicides.

Part IV

Blissed Out

Before this building is completed
We will walk in the foundations
Under the influence of alcohol
And wonder where the bedroom will be.

Where will be the living room,
The kitchen and reception? And then
Where will we make children
And, having made them,
Where will we put them?

We will place our hands into the breezeblocks,
Wondering what rats will live there
And what ghosts, in years to come,
Will drag the past up from behind the plaster,

Where the wiring and the pipes will hang,
Will constitute this building's nerves.
Having contemplated these things,
We will find the still-wet concrete in the hall
And make ourselves, in footprints, into history.

Burnout

The firemen found
two jellied children
in the ground floor bedroom,
clinging to each other
as though freezing –
Siamese twins in death.

Walls had echoed
the cacophonies of flame
through which the parents had escaped.
The upstairs windows, smashed,
had let them live,
like ghosts already.

Home

Their faces are the maps of their country
Their bodies
are occupied territory

She remembers the chill
of his breath on her back
like a chemical weapon
delivered in the darkness

that spawned their bundle of joy

It
babbles nursery rhymes
as it stares through the bars
of its pen

Evolution

No more semen.
Forceps are no longer
set in motion by seduction.

No more flowers,
movies,
chocolates.

No more sex,
sweet nothings.
Nothing.

Injections, jabs,
injections,
jabs...

...at one with,
giving childbirth
to myself.

The Door of Perception

I slammed a door in your face.
The corner caught you;
you needed stitches.

The bolt on the door was your height.
You, a child, walked into it.
I slammed again,

Imagining glorious concussion,
perhaps even amnesia.
You would forget that it was I who had hurt you.

There was blood, naturally:
down across your eyes,
sticky in your hair.

You squealed, but learning is hard,
and this was your life lesson;
doors were invented for this:

You can not but be either
slammed into or slamming,
baby.

Acid Head Movie Show

The acid head movie show opened today.
He saw it at three, in monochrome.

It was a film in which his father
Slashed a grocer with a breadknife
And his mother whipped her only son
With stripped bare curtain wire
Making troughs of blood so deep,
You'd grow a garden in his back.

The credits rolled and he threw up
Into the lap of the girl beside him.
He suspected she identified with mother.

Then, taking his nostalgia home
And weeping open to the world,
He trashed the television set.

Night Landing

In her nightdress is the pattern of a ghost.
There are twenty-and-a-half small spirits sewn into the nylon.
The child steps into the landing
To the sound of music from below:
Hank Williams howling at the moon
While her parents try to make her brother.
The girl has seen the devil every night.
Painted on the ceiling, he has spoken to her
Through her eyes that do not know the mystery
Of streetlamps through a windowpane.
Her hands go down the banister
Till she sits on the bottom stair.
Hank Williams stops; she hears her parents crying out
Through the living room door.
She leaves the stair and quietly enters
The scene of her parents' agony
And senses her brother swimming, incomplete, between them.

Inhale

My parents are dead
but the house is a bottle for their scents.
In the room where I was made,
where the Xs and Ys coincided as though
I were a point on a graph
that could measure the strength of a smell,
I remember what they used to play
as a contrast to her cassolette:
The Correct Use Of Soap,
as they tried to retain
a full head of youth
like seed that was spilled
but was too good to waste.
Instead it is here.
It is crusted on sheets
along with remembrance of mildew,
of phlegm,
and the fragrance of lilies,
the bare hint of blood.
It is masking their pheromones,
hiding the stale smell of blood.

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