18-3-3  
  
Shuck off the rucksack  
And sleep on a hop sack  
Abaft where the fuselage  
Dwindles. The foliage  
Snarls one float.  
In a steep, climbing turn  
It's away, singer sewing  
The web of the map  
Where a small, civil servant  
Says I do not like this work

18-3-2  
  
A kettle was cursing on the hob  
My brother was removing shin bark  
From the hobnails on his football boots  
In case the opposing centre-half  
Demanded forensic tests.  
Scrimshaw! he snapped. Boondoggle!  
I was wrapped up in my hobby -  
Another replica from  
The Clyde Model Dockyard -  
Look who's talking, I said,  
And regretted it instantly.

18-7-2  
  
**Herb**Pungent blade  
Of the bowed grass

17-7-2  
  
An old street walker  
And a sleek kerb crawler  
Were interrupted  
By a steam road-roller.

17-7-18  
  
**East of the Urals**Quell too much and the system seizes;  
Too much slack and it falls apart.  
Most of this fuel-oiled electrification  
Goes straight between the birch trees, Moscow time.  
There's yet a pendular sway, some pulse and burden,  
An iron mother; me in this berth;  
And all the lullabies she cannot sing.

17-6-18  
  
**Leviathan**in memory of Giulio Regeni  
Pluck a quill, dip in and scrawl  
Your bloody judgment:  
Humanity as biomass  
Equivalent to krill in the cold ocean  
Whose convection  
Renders them in a vertical commute  
To the vertebrate.  
In the belly of the beast, the fact remains  
That every day you torment,  
Maim and kill a child of God  
Brings that judgment closer.

16-6-18  
  
**Girl**You skip this vowel and syllable  
And the word's mock-friendly cuddle.  
With an alto growl and a Scotch snap  
You're gone. I'm back  
To pronouncing my own name  
That some hear as McCaley  
And verbal algebra, in which  
The gill of a shark becomes  
The air-vent grill of a racing car.

16-6-17  
  
The glisk of a chance is enough.  
Even a hapless gink, once in a while

16-5-17  
  
And a line of gak for my pal  
In the party frock

15-5-17  
  
If it walked onstage in a pantomime  
You'd all scream look out behind you  
And I'd say what? Look out behind you! What?  
Look out! oh that - it's just a pirate ship  
No, sorry, it's a yak. See? Yank its tail  
For a mug of salty, hot yak-butter tea.  
What do you mean you don't like yak-butter tea?

15-5-12  
  
The yaks are afflicted  
With multiple dzud.  
In the wuthering yak-trummle  
One of them yaps  
Where are the gringos and  
Yanks when you need them?

15-3-12  
  
Toy yachts in the lens of the pond, coaxed out  
Like milk teeth; jib and mainsail  
Cut from granpa's vest.  
The breeze it would take to fill  
Would coup the keel. So it goes  
Just beyond recall. Propelled  
By Brownian motion, solar wind and the quiet ocean.

14-3-12  
  
A standing stone rocks in its socket  
Where greenery rots. A quadruped  
Romps home at fourteen to one.

14-3-11  
  
All those wrongs to right: the thunder roils  
Dragons drown in lightning rods. Protection:  
It robs us of our own.

14-9-11  
  
Poems never written down  
pebbles in the ocean's throat  
Lagavulin's tawny shine  
claret's memories of oak  
that never took to shingle beach  
or saw its seasoned rings would rhyme  
in rosined ships, in reels of mine;  
we're fiddles sunken in their song  
from peg to bridge, across the briny  
ocean-o to Capricorn  
from Uist, garrisoned with sheep  
and two-and-twenty (count them) years  
asleep in postcards. Out of the blue  
a curving swell will hit the shore  
from blistered winds in ecstasy  
that none survived, or no one knew.

13-9-11  
  
Rubbery cable sheathes  
Articulate sheaves of light  
A program braids and shears  
Behind your skirting board.  
It shields the glints and sheens, whatever  
Sheers off the bird cliff on its way  
At night. SHE's one to watch.

13-9-10  
  
We're stooked and sheaved,  
But they're not taking chances.  
Surprise! I sheared off one of their lugs  
Then sheathed my gutting blade, as per.  
She'd say Do I not know you? I'd say no  
No, no, as per. My honour is my shield.  
I have no shield.

13-8-10  
  
Shade  
I'd  
Be where without  
Your gentle  
Interposition

12-8-10  
  
The jade that starts out  
Jailed in rock is freed  
Like a newborn,  
Light pouring out of its eyes  
From who knows where  
  
But life gets chopped and changed, holyoak.  
It's chained and hauled across the park  
And chaired in Francis Bacon's pope  
A pile of breath, a bonefire.

12-8-9  
  
**Chaste**Well that's the Dom. Rep. for you  
- Said one of Calvin's children to his pal -  
Bad food and a good fuck.

12-7-9  
  
**Stevensonia**Sixteen men on a dead man's jet is odd, but understandable.  
Better would be sixteen men and a dead man's jest "har har, there was no treasure".  
But sixteen men on the cabin trunk or thorax of a dead gent -  
That's the roof of a bus in Bangalore, or  
Cycling in tight circles with the wobbling  
Smile of a wedge of acrobats.

11-7-9  
  
**For Iris Perrin**On a pillow of husky spelt she slept  
Or laid her head. 'Eye hath not seen',  
Said Simple, 'Nor ear heard': it's not  
A videoconference. She stretched  
And yawned. Stepped through the screen,  
A shiver of smelt in icy stream,  
A local, all set with his net, but  
Missed her. She swept through.  
They sketched and posted her ID. A Celt  
(they mispronounced it), of what sept and sect (mis-  
Spelt, but stet). They searched; they spent their  
Last red cent on facts to smelt for data. Nada. She  
Said 'Can't catch me. I'm not a virus  
In your badgers' sett, the stent and shunt  
Sf stressed and twisted politic.  
Sexed and rooted things are of the essence.  
What you smelt as sweat  
Was scent to me: the zest of it all  
I sensed and love'.

11-7-7  
  
Stealth snuck up on strength and whacked him.  
Horus and Eve got Seth.  
And Saith begat doth begat hath begat  
myth begat time of the month begat someth-  
ing rank. Eve got sick of the mutterpoke and  
Kicked him out the garage.

11-6-7  
  
The fifth of the foundation myths  
Says if there's something, take it.  
The sixth says Mister Smith should kiss the  
Bride or ruler's ring. And then there's the seventh.

9-6-7  
  
There was a wee house  
On a big plot  
Planned and planted with figs and cherries,  
Oranges, lemons, grapes and apricots.  
The mountain over the roof  
Peeks at the sea.  
First house it was this side of the track,  
Now most of the town is here.  
In the clean tilth of the orchard  
Another house has erupted  
In broken flags and tackle,  
Rusty shade and tinder left from winter.  
One olive tree, new planted, that could live as long as this,  
But even Horace, a local man,  
Won't outrun the race of the hoe,  
Here's to them. There's a beer in the vaccine freezer,  
A chopping block in front of this chair  
Looks fit to hold a glass.  
I haven't done a fair day's work in my puff;  
Not starting now.

9-6-6  
  
Pride triggers a pitful  
A pratfall, nae luck  
In the liftshaft. A fistful  
Of dolours.  
But suffering's a dawdle:  
Who doesny dae it? It's THIS  
That's the rerr, it's this that's  
The triff and the tricky bit,  
Tumbling, barrelling swift  
Polynomial tiff.

9-4-6  
  
**Turf and Shovel**Remember man  
That thou art pink  
Compacted ash  
You're not so tough  
Or tenured.

8-4-6  
  
Nough said and mourn enough.  
Never enough done.

8-4-4  
  
If looks cremate, that old bag has found her niche.  
Sift victim number one on the nearest golf course:  
The salaryman, numb from the liver up,  
Clocks the glower, wonders which  
Of her entourage he'd molested.  
Come on: three guesses. Surely not?...!

8-3-4  
  
In Thatcherism, Tebbitt was the norm. In   
Brutalism - Cheney, Rummy, Rove.  
Remember, America: you let them walk.

6-3-4  
  
Form from  
What I return to

6-3-3  
  
A teraflop  
Of picofacts  
About some happy hadrons.  
A fop in a physicist's  
Open-necked shirt  
On the Big Bang's birthday.

6-10-3  
  
**Sechuan**The call to prayer inaudible  
As millions flype their throats down the sink  
In a secular kick-start  
To the working day.

3-10-3  
  
Sintered aqueducts  
And lead capillaries  
Fluted pipe  
Of frozen water.  
Winter  
Scraps the plumbing.

3-10-1  
  
This pi R squared is round  
And flat. Take that  
You bounder. Splat.  
Ply my wife with coke and  
Yo ho ho, would you?  
Try and vet my personal  
Account?

3-9-1  
  
**Oranges and Lemons**P is for piss from drinking  
Builders' tea, the tanner! Guacamolic  
Mushy pea - no: plural, peas, and  
Chips or cantos to your fishy  
Chanties. Lodge a plea, incontinent  
With the old bay leaf or lea:  
Belle of Shoreditch  
Is a clarty old bitch.

2-9-1  
  
B is for bliss, the compact fire  
In honey. Workers level  
With the gorgeous rose's lip, and not to be  
Is inconceivable.

2-9-17  
  
**The Big Dry**North of the Great Australian Bight: the Suck:  
Swamp reduced to car-battery bisque,  
Only the beak of some galinule not rendered.  
Outside the ruddy grape, prospects are bleak.

2-8-17  
  
Brake and swerve  
Into the one-way system  
Sulfur-blake rime  
On Moghul turrets caught in the noose of light  
By daybreak up along Duke Street  
Where hackers bake or crack the code in cookies.

1-8-17  
  
Depression  
Existential ache  
The stone-age engine.

1-8-15  
  
Daughter and heir, what I leave  
Should be potable water, clean air  
And good green.

1-7-15  
  
To err is Russian  
Sorry, human.  
On the side of caution. Nothing  
Slavic about that.

19-7-15  
  
They were there just a  
Just a minute. You see those two  
If I'm not mistake  
Wolves at the edge of the wood?  
That's where they were.

19-7-14  
  
A wench  
A bit of stuff  
More Welsh than  
French, I'd say.

19-6-14  
  
**Snapshot**If she'd asked him to dance  
He couldn't have been more  
Ungainly. Freeze and say cheese!  
Stick em up and relax!  
Then there's her, in cahoots with the camera  
Make a wish.  
  
The wings on this big boeing  
Twang in the winch of inconvenient  
Weather. The usual voltage runs  
A torch of shadows  
By which I pick my way.

13-6-14

13-6-11  
  
Aunt Margaret's mandolin, I take you  
From the box, its dusty felt, so light  
Bone keys and warping wood with all my  
Metal shims the strings have sectioned  
Wire-wound shills the Neapolitan  
Grammar wooden shins and tendons. Back you go  
To the puppet booth.

13-5-11  
  
I was there with the Shahs of Shiraz  
With the shamans and shams of Siberia  
Sat on their red rugs and shags  
In the red rubble shards of the high road.  
  
Just one of the cup bearers hadn't attracted their ribaldry;  
Such beauty and force: how could they not have noticed at all?  
I lifted a glass. She approached, and I covered its rim.  
Would you do me a favour? She waited. Stay just as you are  
  
For ever. She looked. The rest of the scene disappeared:  
Society, sex, the red carpet, my language and bearing.  
For ever, she said, in your memory. Turned on her heel.  
Now I'm tired of this tankard that brims as soon as I drain it   
(da capo)

12-5-11  
  
**Jazz**Feed a roll of paper under the keys of Dolphy's clarinet,  
Wing it to Mexico City; let Nancarrow read the chads.  
Hmm! There's more to Bach than meets the eye!  
He jams that scroll in a mangle, gets his slide rule, awl and fid,  
Jabs and jags at it. He's Henry Morse, he's making lace.  
Sometime back in Boston Shreffler's stripping and assembling  
This Thomson gun archived in a fiddle case.  
- Is that Shreff the poet or Shreff the musicologist?  
- Shreffler the both. On paper  
The music shouts itself down, it jars and charms  
Like a rout of chav sopranos. But the instrument's keyed up  
As a crossbow. Pull the trigger! See that varmint dance!

12-5-10  
  
President Chad, the Holy Roman Emperor  
Charged the dragon with a shaft of solar wind.  
He charred a path through the truculent, the recalcitrant.  
He had a charmed life, a hand-washer wife.

12-4-10  
  
At a port hole  
In the Laundromat  
Our washing churned  
And un-churned.  
The dish-washer  
Meanwhile  
Chugged in its kitchen  
Steady as she goes.  
A hare in the casserole  
Jugged and bubbled.  
Cut to a Persian  
Centrifuge, or to how,  
In Dante's sauna,  
We get judged.

11-4-10  
  
All of a sud  
The dove-grey tempera  
Smudged on her eyelid palette  
Landward she surged  
Now listen, Spud:  
All of a sud  
The J-cloth squirmed under knuckles that stubbed it  
Scrubbed and sponged till letters  
Smudged and surd, till readers slurred and lost it.  
The waters sunned themselves. An oarsman, pacific  
Swordsman, sculled across them. That's  
As fair as it gets. I snubbed him.  
Didn't deign. He said, Listen, Spud:  
Your Botticelli rerun's a load of pish.  
Now there's a shame: you'd got quite poetic  
For a critic. Cut it; listen:  
How many a stud of young men  
Slugged it out, strummed under  
Balconies, who now scratch on the porch -   
Not men, but badly stubbed-out cigarettes. I'm one.  
The itch remains, is all.  
 But it's not that.  
The notion that some power slummed it  
For our benefit - Sophia by the pyramids, in the scud,  
For Solovyov - may be reduced to  
A tremor in the vision of a solipsist. But  
What stunned and troubled and provoked him is not mortal.  
Someone at the sales tries and discards a dozen things  
Then smiles at the assistant: I'll have this one.

11-4-9  
  
Well it is and it isn't  
Normal to get scrunched up  
Through the floor,  
Sloughed and coddled  
Scuffed and soft  
Hardly a gristle strut to your name  
If any.  
And then you're   
Stuffed in woollies. Really!  
Surfed the breast,  
You sucked and slurped the magic  
Toggle and slumped  
Consummate drunk  
Till opening time and supped again.  
Killing time you smirked and sulked.  
Where is that slut? Ill manners  
Come with culture,  
Go with the scut of fear. Keep going  
Till you're stumped  
A duster snuffed.

11-3-9  
  
Sort snot snort  
Salt slot spoilt slopped  
Sopped spot stopped stropped sloshed.  
Sot socked stalked  
Swat swart scot  
Sought swot stocked squat squashed.

10-3-9  
  
He so often dropped to one knee and did off his soft hat  
She got docked of her judgment. She'd opt for  
A dot.com he'd shares in, the deer park he dossed in.

10-3-8  
  
Little birds negotiating dawn in bad Chinese is what  
(Unless it's that old apnoea) what wakes Don Juan up.  
He holsters his dong. The mirror has drawn  
Him. Him it is but not just back to front  
And that bint on the bed: she looks dead. Hey  
Cut. Take two.

10-1-8  
  
Don't go down there  
Don't lie there looking up  
Please don't drown  
Not again

9-1-8  
  
Town and city intricately segregated  
By the blood-brain barrier.

9-1-7  
  
Well to tell you the truth  
To gear every sprocketless tooth to the differential

9-10-7  
  
All it took was a tithe  
It would only decimate your goods.

8-10-7  
  
It is the ninth of May. The rhododendron in its glory  
Flares under cloud in our tiny garden.  
From Nara to Nepal to the Scottish  
West Highland railway line  
Where the diesel engine wheezes through  
It conquers all.

8-10-6  
  
**Knife**The noun, just like a woman, is embellished,  
Used and domesticated. But  
The verb is only to hurt and kill other men.  
It spawned the handgun, the machine gun and the bomb.

8-5-6  
  
Naff off!

6-5-6  
  
In snows that flew like chaff and fell like wheat  
To faff or not to faff - away and raffle  
A doo fell aff an effin awful dyke  
Chick peas and peppers, olive oil, felafel.

6-5-4  
  
Farm isn't a syllable, it's expecting two  
Like the feminine end of "femme"  
Do for me a ram in the far field  
Full of ewes tup tup, the force in furlough.

6-4-4  
  
Fee  
Fie  
Fo  
Fum

4-4-4  
  
**Occupation**A sudden, probing silence  
From the table next to ours  
Echoes along Argyll Street.  
Cat got your tongue, gents?  
Get back to base. Yes,  
Before you acquired that Powell drawl  
And a taste for local seafood  
Our mum made soup and scones  
For the Faslane Peace Camp.  
We'll see the back of youse yet.

4-4-3  
  
Don't mump! You're on the Golden Mile  
In Harpoon Harry's Cocktail Bar.

4-3-3  
  
When love takes fright  
When the mop has blood in it  
Please keep them safe.

3-3-3  
  
Pomp is dignity in drag, a pop song  
For aging pimps, a plop of  
Mucus in the pond of its reflection,  
A prop to whatever system it supports.

3-3-1  
  
Paw, maw and the weanz.  
So what's the ploy?  
Paw, maw, the weanz and a  
McGuffin; call it love.

3-2-1  
  
How they burned  
You never saw you never dreamt  
You never got. Pro  
Career on track  
The sleepers  
How they burned.  
How the buried signals  
Cracked and burgeoned.

2-2-1  
  
**Animal Rights: The Musical**Horse-hair bow. To string a fiddle  
Skin a cat. Another song,  
Another songbird.  
Blow the bone whistle, bro,  
Tighten that drum.

2-2-18  
  
**Aw Nice!**Haggis!  
Bowel o purritch!  
The curler's granite bool for tea  
Soft-boiled and speckled, served up  
On ice.

2-1-18  
  
**The Book of the Black Bull**Bowel  
Gazer  
Line of the liver  
(Wrist to base of little finger)  
Haruspicious  
Tea leaves  
And liver spots  
On stellar maps  
I sing  
The Culdee  
Book of Changes

1-1-18  
  
Luminous owl at my wrist,  
The watch I don't wear,  
Quarter this jungle at night  
Where by day  
The blood tide turns  
And I am all the little rodents' prey.

1-1-15  
  
But we won an hour with our favourite flimstar.  
What do you mean - two ticks and a signed photograph?

1-10-15  
  
**Goodnight, Irene**Irene, I dreamt of you again last night.  
No need to tell you. You told me  
Unless we stayed together I would not see you again.  
Your tongue is salty, pacific. We grappled  
In the alcoves on the street but never quite  
Sand in my saliva when I woke, sand in my pockets.  
Shells in the bathroom marked "Made in Formosa,  
Ireland" the wintering of anger  
Lazybeds of semtex please  
Do not disturb the sleep of Roman  
Reason with the gods Irene, Irene.  
Iris, rainbow, messenger of the Greek  
Gods, I see you gold and brown and black.  
Why? Have I lost the farther colours?  
Or are you the message now? Tell her,  
Tell Irene, tell her anything, from me.

20-10-15  
  
In the wood  
The shadow behind me on the path  
Is the absence of those before me.  
The breastbone harp was there to be strung,  
The strings are broken, the bones are dust  
And many a lie is older than the liar.

20-10-12  
  
**Lice like that**Warm and dark  
Under the blankets  
Do without eyes  
Blinking nuisance  
Light's just frilly heat.

20-9-12  
  
My lease  
Like yours,  
Sheherezade,  
Renewed from day to day  
In this negotiation.

19-9-12  
  
And when she's out of work  
She weeps for weeks.

19-9-11  
  
Without its dental weirs, speech  
Is a wheeze, weeds in the lung, the  
Tongue aa owre the place weaves  
Empty spells, and nothing weans us  
Infants. But we're all right:  
Weals of rubber on the runway  
Wheels flush with the fuselage  
The captain welcomes us on board.

19-8-11  
  
Whales hum. Something - not the gannet -   
Wails. The moon wanes, good.  
The weans are asleep, wames tight knotted  
On their grub. Wagonloads of wares  
Reduced she wears next to the skin, not safe.  
Wades in. The waves disperse her  
Gravity. She weighs not less but any-  
ways that's her on board.

18-8-11  
  
**Extinction**Out of the fuming haze  
The living hails me  
To rue its loss:  
Habitat and stratagem,  
Muscle, hairs and feathers, gone  
To fuel the English language.

18-8-10  
  
**The Tortoise and the Hare**The hare-brain dreamt it had been  
Haired, like brained, its hair banged out  
And - think "Pandora's toothpaste" - jugged, like  
Jammed in a carapace when, hoached and hazed,  
It hailed a cab that tottered up on bricks and chocks  
To the finish line.

18-6-10  
  
It pushed out light, the sun did,  
Naked and near unwatchable  
Rucked and hilled the covers and turned in bed.  
By the slaughtering volume of its music hid  
From judgment, in an organ loft  
While I, on the granite flags,  
Hymned its work.

17-6-10  
  
She'd cribbed the answer from a printed  
Colouring book its maker  
Had cradled in his arms and wanted back;  
Worth a few quid, that was. Not the kid.  
We killed the outboard, quilled the oars  
And darted in, silent.

17-6-9  
  
Seconds away, they kissed and clinched  
The deal. Hair kinked and crimped, Chan  
Tartan kilt, a chest of China,  
Linen, quilt and cutlery. They clinked  
Glasses clipped by hoboes, no,  
Bohemians, shied their empties  
Off a cliff. The worst man quipped about  
The boxers. Then it clicked:  
She hadn't quit her job, she'd  
Kipped on it and got kicked out.  
So all that flashy kit?

17-5-9  
  
**for Sandy Hutchison**I'd have clamped my teeth tighter than it's cramped in there,  
Arms clasped and coopered, though it's ME that's casked  
Some Thing. Maybe. Drouth like a summer karst, I cranked out  
Jokes. Crashed on the way home. Write-off. Not a cut or scratch.  
I had nine lives therefore I was a cat.  
Camped out on the fell, crapped out of the climb I'd planned.  
Back to my clapped-out blank.  
This is a sturdy craft, I say, not some cart-  
Load of meretricious Murakami. More it is  
Than it's cracked. Clashed with the fitba. So?  
To have been capped, not cursed or carped at, out-  
Classed by the players, out-quaffed by the fans, cast  
Out as in cacked by the body politic.  
Cashed in my chips and re-invested.

16-5-9  
  
A sneer glassed in a pub fight  
Sorely gashed. He'd have  
Grassed on his granny. Yet,  
I grant, to be faced with graft  
On graft - that's hard.  
To get gaffed and hoist  
From your element, gassed  
In the clear air like some dogfish,  
To have gasped it before you'd  
Grasped the sequence - that too.  
Syllabary sometime  
Yet can rhyme with celebrate.  
Gaffed in your sheets, the trunk,  
By this urgent gift, a blushing  
Graft, insatiable grant  
That graced and grassed on us.  
Quite right. Otherwise desire  
Would've been glassed off, never  
Grasped or gashed. Never more  
Than its own ghost put to sleep  
In chaos.

16-5-8  
  
Gran and grampa mum and dad your aunts and uncle  
Sisters all gang up on you what's this?  
You didn't really  
Get the operation, did you?  
You're not a wee free?

16-4-8  
  
Rona Range  
Subfacts and gunfacts. Had  
You never loved so blindly  
Guns are counterfactual punctuation  
Had you never aimed so badly  
Submarines purvey rough judgment days  
Where the winners girn.

15-4-8  
  
An old lady made of driftwood the colour of sand was limbering up.  
When I'm young, she said, none of this will have been,  
And I'll see written history for what it is: a callow scrawl.  
A sun will rise on the mountain, you and me. We shall exult.

15-4-3  
  
You reckon?  
  
Yup.

15-3-3  
  
"After the possession of these miserable islands had been contested by France, Spain and England, they were left uninhabited"  
- The Voyage of the Beagle  
  
Jackass penguins bray.  
Rock geese yawp as in Darwin's day.  
Even grunts who yomp and go  
Have pre- and post-synaptic neurones firing.  
The land does not, remember, though  
Landmines, when trod by sheep, dismember.  
Which reminds me

14-3-3  
  
No romp this day I tell you  
Fingernails across the desk  
To the top of the afternoon

14-3-2  
  
Lust will rob you of your innocence  
Age relieve you of your lust;  
Death of course will then assuage  
Or abrogate old age. Sort of.  
For innocence can outstare lust  
Which can defer or ridicule age  
And though death does for age and lust  
It can't touch innocence.  
Can't touch anything really:  
Its spurious personality looms  
In the death of innocent creatures.

14-2-2  
  
**Vermeer**A robe so stiff it overrules,  
So blue it yet displays  
As though you were wrapped in scent  
Or music.

3-2-2  
  
This blunt, late-Latin silver probe  
Doesn't draw but follows  
Or at most defines the border  
Of the wound to swab and dress.  
Macerated bandages, rag paper  
Tears like skin the pencil bruises. What  
Else can you do? You see her face  
You say her name.