

## The Second Book

*And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God... But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short...*

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## A Love-Letter

*from the mariner Ulysses  
to his beloved lady-physician*

ES

That you're still, in a sense, a virgin,  
Drink like *George Best* and speak like *Charles*  
*Spurgeon*

Are all the grounds for love a soul  
Like mine can bear and still stay whole.  
Two wretched things have kept me up of late,  
Which bruise an honest seaman's trust in fate:  
The young & winsome aged, or killed by traffic;  
A girl like you beguiled by all things sapphic.

Alas, I'm more like *Mars* than *Venus*,  
But does that have to come between us?  
I'm told I'm gifted with my fingers,  
And, though I've not tried cunnalingus,  
You're welcome to compare my lips  
To any temptress' tastebud-tips,  
And summon cries of joy, not laughter.  
(I'd even like to cuddle after.)

Although I cannot make my chest hair  
Go, and put a plump round breast there,  
Nor bid my size 10 feet farewell,  
The same goes for my love as well.  
Salt-laced hearts do not find in rejection  
Grounds for loss of ardour or dejection.  
Time will only say, I told you so;  
And yet it suits me more than you know  
To play *Tiresias* to your virago.

Auden

Callimachus,  
"Τῦνος Ε'

## Another Letter

*from the king Ptolemy Physcon  
to his beloved daughter-wife*

TM

Byron

That you are, in your way, one of my daughters  
Means I can forgive you your prattle.  
You've a rosebud like music over the waters  
And more shapes than *Quetzalcoatl*.  
*Satan* called, the Devil sent me:  
A horse is led  
But never made to dip his head:  
When the cat's away the mice do plenty.

It's no good this outliving *Buddy Holly*,  
Growing bald of brow & round of gut;  
No more trips to WAKEFIELD on a jolly  
With ½ lb of coke & some old slut,  
No more younger sisters' teenage friends.  
But in your eyes  
I see where resurrection lies,  
And how it comes to pass and where it ends.

There's time enough to consider eternity.  
Put hell on the back burner; heaven can wait.

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The Greek pharoah Ptolemy VIII (he was nicknamed Physcon or “the Sausage” on account of his obesity) was surely one of the most wicked and repulsive men ever to have lived. He seduced and later married a girl who had the dubious distinction of being both his niece and his stepdaughter, and later murdered his own son and sent the corpse, piece by piece, to the boy's mother, who was also another of his wives and the mother of the aforementioned niece-stepdaughter-wife. Yet the poet finds something compelling, and, indeed, quite human in this supremely cruel and lustful individual.

Quetzalcoatl was an Aztec deity who appeared at various times as a rattlesnake, a crow, the planet Venus and a duck.

The love of God and my children's paternity  
Are truths too dearly-held to abrogate.

For now, forever, my appetite

Is fixed on thighs,

Waists, fingers, heartbeats, cheeks & eyes,  
Those lips, both wrapped in cloth & in plain  
sight.

## The Orgy at Earls Crescent

*also by Ptolemy Physcon*

The orgy at EARLS CRESCENT  
Was not as I had hoped,  
Nor making love as pleasant  
As when we first eloped.

Laurie Lee

*Rosie* & her cider  
Once went straight to my head,  
But now her quim's much wider  
And *Peaches Geldof*'s dead.

i.e. the game

The threesome with your sister  
Was not so sweet a sin  
As drunken late-night Twister  
On the school trip to KING'S LYNN.



## Epithalamium

It's not that she reminds him of his mother ES

(Though since when could *Jocasta's* comeuppance  
Ever dissuade him from off-limits tuppence?)

But the way they are with one another:

In the wilderness of this world, which no man understands, Bunyan  
She cupped a little light for him between her hands.

## An Encomium

*in praise of the now much missed  
The Rev Christopher Betson  
once Vicar of St Mary's Tickhill*

ROME had her Caesars; Brandenburg, *Old Fritz*;  
Now TICKHILL CHURCH can claim as squire & master  
The crimson-haired clergyman we love to bits,  
Our shield & broadsword, friend & pastor;  
And should some peril loom, or grave disaster,  
The parish wardens need no goads nor whips;  
He's all over it like a fat lad on chips.

His preaching brings to mind those fearsome creatures,  
*Jan Sobieski* and the prussian duke.  
His writings rank beside the best-loved teachers':  
*Paul of Tarsus* who – now please don't puke –  
Might have had a soft spot for *St Luke*,  
*John Divine* to whose strange works men soften  
Once they're told he snorted coke quite often.

Should your parish lack a priest or vicar  
And ours go southward in a puff of smoke,  
I'd recommend you fill the absence quicker  
Than a scot spends coin or gets a joke.  
With whom? The ginger *Cranmer*, God's top bloke:  
Better than bovril, sturdier than a stetson,  
The incomparably reverend *Chris Betson*.

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Friedrich II, King of Prussia and Elector of Brandenburg (known to we English as "Frederick the Great") was nicknamed "Der Alte Fritz" by his people, i.e. Old Fritz.

Jan III, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania was named "Saviour of Christendom" by the Pope for lifting the siege of Vienna. Albert, Duke of Prussia was the first Protestant head of state.

## Another Encomium

*in praise of the beloved Dr David Bernhard  
database specialist without peer or equal  
citizen by right of blood of the two unruly  
nations of Great Britain and Switzerland  
called the faultless teacher*

Who says that only dirges & dark storms  
Make a good verse? My song's burden warms  
Not to the worst but to the best of themes:  
The prince of PEARL, marquess of Microsoft Teams.  
As sure as shale & quicklime make cement,  
The bards of years to come will thus lament:  
'But no one living now is  $\frac{1}{2}$  as learnèd  
As *Niels Bohr*, *Max Planck* or *David Bernhard*.'

Herbert

Where are ZÜRICH's gleaming hoards of riches?  
Where are *Heidi*'s hymns, which pierced the air?  
Where are *Euler*'s shrewdness or his bridges?  
Give me the doctor with the flowing hair:  
His cool alpine charms would leave me sweatier  
Than all the other heartthrobs of Helvetia.

Spyri

Königsberg

## Vlissingen

Mt 15 & al

It was in an old dutch seaport,  
Pocked with dieso & caul,  
And five loaves & two fishes  
One side of a warehouse wall.

In late september  
And summer going,  
The waves past the breakwater  
To-ing & fro-ing.

ER

The railings rusted,  
Weathervanes weathered away.  
O my love, my fair one,  
I wish I could stay.

## Aubade

Do I love her? That depends  
On when & wherefore thighs were parted.  
Heart pokes heart. Love never ends,  
Unless it never started.

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Having heard the woman's pleading in Dowland's famous parting-at-dawn poem – i.e. 'Stay, O sweet, and do not rise' – the man confers with his soul.

## CGRM

*Sacred to the memory of*  
*Major General M J Holmes CBE DSO RM MA*  
*Commandant General Royal Marines*  
*Commander United Kingdom Amphibious Forces*  
*Commander 42 Commando Royal Marines*  
*who hanged himself during Oct MMXXI following*  
*the undoing of his conquests in Central Asia*

Ps 46.8-11 |  
Hovis Presley

Like the web without *Charlotte*,  
Like *Rhett Butler* without *Scarlett*,  
Like a hotel room without a harlot  
England mourns for *Matthew Holmes*.

## Operation TELIC

I wake, earlier than I would like, while the day  
Still lies in darkness – this dark december,  
This snowless, christmasless mid-winter.  
I work down at the base: purchasing, planning –  
Tidal atlases, spreadsheets & tables  
Of figures – declarations & forms  
To be filled in, signatures gleaned – meetings  
Sat through & stared through & endured. Then  
I drive back down the same slick sodium-lit roads  
Towards a house unheated & unknown.  
I drive & drive but cannot help my dreaming:  
Those febrile bodies, precious as us to themselves,  
Cities & villages, 40 million souls. But death  
Plants his boot-heels in the footsteps of *Abraham*.  
Death tightens his cowl in the shadow of the ziggurats.

Auden

The same stars are burning overhead  
As *Algazel* plotted in the House of Wisdom,  
The selfsame lustrous moon – although  
Death sips his wine from skulls of Al Anfal.  
Death washes his swords in the waters of the TIGRIS.  
The axeman stands at the root of the oak.  
Blood to be shed cries out from the ground – and yet  
The skies are silent. Time alone will tell  
Who was right and if it was all worth it.

Sargon

Mt 3.10 & al

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Operation TELIC was the United Kingdom's contribution to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The operation was planned over the preceding Christmas, so that the planners joked bitterly that TELIC stood for "Tell Everyone Leave Is Cancelled". The poet imagines himself as one of the more lugubrious of said planners.

## An Elegy for Kirstie Foster

*whose own father murdered her and  
then himself one night in Aug MMVIII  
to escape from poverty*

Larkin

*Interview with  
the Vampire,  
Claudia*

Jdg 11

I think of you more often than I'd choose to –  
At home, at friends', in meetings, in the car –  
As if a stranger's heart could mend your fortunes,  
Or put things back to how they might have been.  
The mind blanks in the glare of so much horror,  
And fails to grasp the stringency of death:  
You never lived to see your 16th birthday;  
He wouldn't let you grow to your full height.  
*Japhthah's* penknife pricks his daughter's waistband,  
And keeps his twisted vow: you never knew  
The dull warmth of your first sips of brandy,  
Or lay down holding your first lover's hand.

Cavafy

In a way, I envy that he killed you  
In your sleep; and, since the papers allotted you  
So few words, I can picture you how I like:  
Shy, capable of deep feeling,  
Not so delectable you'd never have to learn  
To delight the heart as well as the hands.  
I see us meeting at a hotel bar: you  
Had weathered the slug & the flames, have flowered  
Into the woman you promised to become.  
And in all the hours we talk you only tell me  
The one thing I needed to be told:  
For all the pain & hopelessness of living,  
It's better to be alive.



## An Elegy for J R H Stoke

*whose ashes were buried  
on Blacklyne Common*

### I

When I came to see you last october  
It felt like it was still summer. We drank  
Warm guinness in a pub in HOLLY BANK.  
You talked about growing old, the **Advocate**,  
That year's lachrymose undergraduate,  
How you'd gentle & disrobe her.

### II

Later, we finished our drinks and *Bernie*  
Drove us back into town. The rosy streetlights  
Recalled lost prep school days & winter nights  
Beneath a restless wood; and all the while  
Your lapis blue big eyes & ½ a smile,  
Like some ½ sweet lines of *Ivor Gurney*.

### THE EPITAPH

*Earth, receive these ashes for safekeeping,  
And him, like the BLACK LYNE flowing:  
Always running downstream but never going,  
With strakes & siltbanks & silver overlaid,  
The handsomest of all beds ever made  
For man or beast, but not for sleeping.*

## Lucifer in Starlight

I've drank with darkness, shaken hands with sorrow,  
Mapped out both hell's hinterland & borough,  
Eavesdropped on anguish, glimpsed through grief's  
    gilt lock:  
Only the pain itself is too bright to look.

FINIS