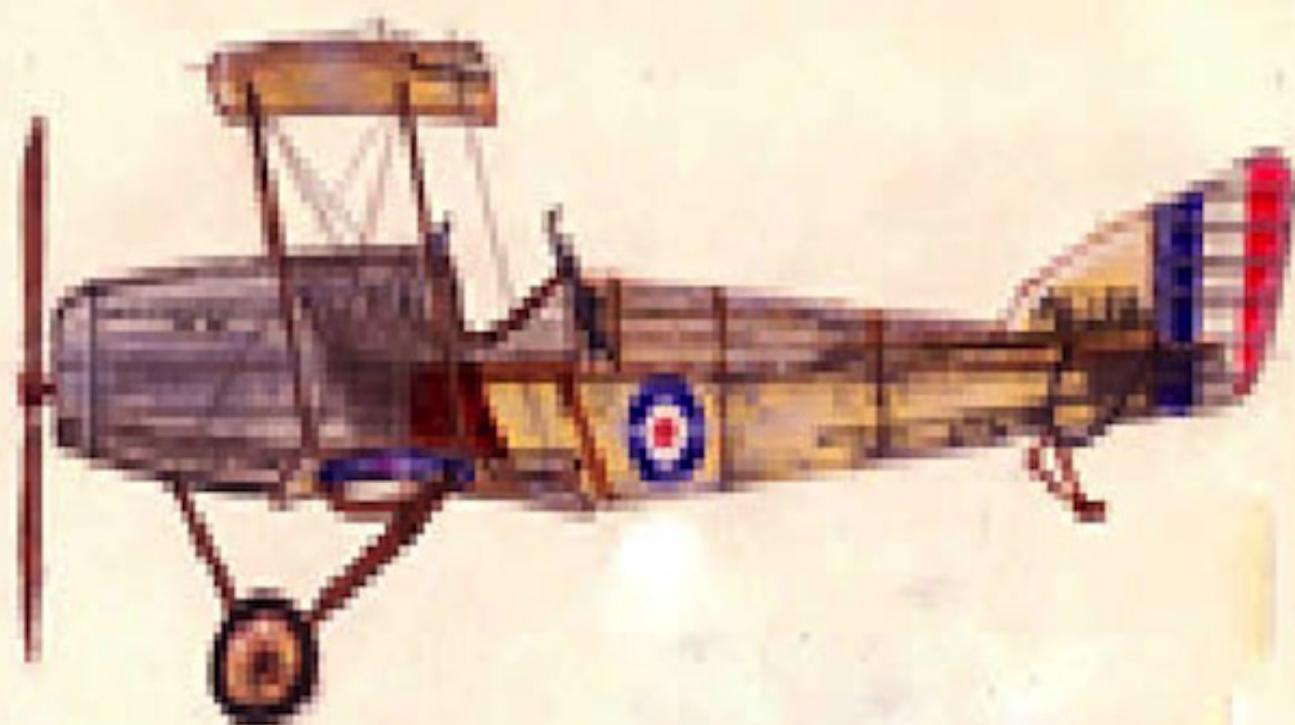




Simon Jenner

Wrong Evenings

THE CONVENTIONAL DRAWING: CAPTION THE  
MARTINSYDE GOOD EVENING NELSON



# Wrong Evenings

Simon Jenner

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*To the memories of Beryl Fenton and Derek Stanford*

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Wrong Evenings

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# Wrong Evenings

The fairies of awkwardness  
knock in the evening.  
Its the bailiffs for the faux pas  
as the salmon light gleams  
at an angle showing the glass dirty,  
streets far below full of mended wrong turnings.

They snap round, start marching up  
to your door; the corridor outside  
is tarmacked with a roadworks  
dead ahead, with gas pipes,  
their little clocks pressure your time,  
sing like steam escaping.

You feel its your bones boiled for stock,  
legs water, this road your hi-jacked exit  
from a house of wrong turnings,  
where a giant has peered down, and  
disdainfully moved on; your little gossamer  
cusseds saying: here is a chair, here

are your words back, re-routed;  
heres why you wanted to frog-march away  
to a smart language that could so  
brilliantly erase your broke-veined blushes  
the tic so nervously yourself, the light  
betrayal of you with you, you bloody stammerer.

# No Bees, No Planet

An armada of stamens recedes.  
A desert of pollen is a desert,  
the cadmium edges dirtier. The week  
blanches as it pitches for corn  
entrapped in a sterile sickle of silence.

The humbles have voted on pinions,  
with their hives emptied, like dust  
bowl farmers gone buzzed and juddery  
with their spent trucks to the coastline.  
Here, take a scoop of hollows, a clinker-built

beached necklace of Marie Celestes; it  
hardens off in trifling corners that seeds  
states and shires. Plagues of Varroa hover  
tight over them. But this jiggle migration of  
absence tides them to myth, warping

their fuzz of time, a hum  
drawn up behind them as bees pretend to  
paradise, bestowing a lost taste  
of elsewhere, to let it all follow  
in a pelt of dried pollen.

# Hours on the Beach

Move to the beach for a true throw of  
light you said, in a speaking summer.

The days scuffed before noon;  
azure beaked away in a needy  
helter pace of seagulls, busily  
ejecting their first years young  
from their cater of a season.

The next sprout menus  
from their knocking eggs. Young  
are lifelike, but wax awkwardly  
to it; an oblique angle to threat.

Sited on pebbles, the sun dials stripes:  
three cool notches on its leaden measure.

Municipal shadows cross a gulls,  
pretend to their cluttered eternity,  
how their slant falls; keeps falling  
acute with the sun. Four notches  
shifts a pigeon-wings cobalt grey  
to a sea-green Devon slate hued  
three hundred miles away. No shadow  
in the town falls so clean as here,  
a sundial on a fiction of pebbles.

# Morlocks

The climate down heres unpitched  
by the Eloi cloud cover. Were not them yet,  
cattle standing asleep before the pitch  
dip below the Central. Nor photophobic  
eye-slitting cannibals of ourselves.  
Just sliding there on sacrifice-matted wheels.

Like its bass-note through the map  
its scored black and deepest, beyond  
any hominid layers. The airs  
a pure settle of Victorian fumes. No climate  
distresses its diesel current -  
coloured oils in a jar abandoned by  
industrial fashion. Its when faith was groined  
in the expectorant of coal engines.

The pig-iron-bound Northern  
sucks me acrid in its mapped flue  
magnetic from London Bridge up  
the High Barnet branch. But its paced  
funereal in wrought work. Its power  
rusts to a driftless chimney, delved  
with misanthropes, inveterate  
as the tube maps they stub out  
through a century of track-grimed fingers.

Down Archways cast steel spiral  
some nugget DNA of hash counters the  
springs aromatic of diesel oil, trains  
released from winter with Novembers  
missing, Halloweens oak apples  
still juicy in their bags.

# Homeopathic

An eyelash in a teacup chills  
into a prophesy of leaves  
caught in a briar. What tea distils

with its canyons of dregs are faces only  
curfewed from talk by the future,  
stowed as mascarad possibilities.

Your lash is homeopathy; an occult rub  
it reads just itself back to you  
DNAs an exclusive club

Id not scan for portents of the day.  
Go look for geyser holidays in spouts  
flash-flooding old futures with Earl Grey.

Your lipstick, dissolving, pouts me  
the way porcelain warms; breath  
heats our underlips exchange

all subject to its rim world,  
the lash a dropped reluctant spell  
for off-white sheets where your bodys curled.

# Summer Reading

The blinds pine boom bangs like a sails  
in August night wind off the sea. Back,  
it skews, souses a flue of breeze, flails

the snibbed window with cords, sun-fading  
hessian lifted to flack light in. The keypad gleams  
gunmetal from some noirish epochs fling

with grit and ghetto. An oil slick lies drowning out  
gull cries. Drizzle falls too easily. Youre composed  
by a pat late summer you cant do without.

Jackal hours worry small heat away. You inhabit  
ever smaller sun squares, blanched book spines,  
a finger-tip of unread minutes.

Vertebrae speak abandon, a trivia of tombs;  
diffused attention, scuffed jackets haste  
of summer shrinking to a bookmark in a room

where the hybrid of holiday and attention ends  
in a moments fixed smile. Youve failed the epics mortal scope  
with a scud away to fast torpors of friends.

Blinds knock the winds changes with a diurnal knell.  
Youve become a shrunk register of light planes  
a scorch and hopscotch of letters you cant tell.

Pressures lighter each year. What fades with it  
nears the dark of writing, with ink yet more invisible  
saying: give up death, theres nothing in it.  
Language Poem

Heres a tectonic clash of tongues  
collided with invasion, contained,  
couldnt ebb back to an oblivious sea  
but scraped over Celtic tors,  
glaciers of middle English,  
drew a hard mineral of words

# Order of Angels

Choice clouds no angels. Inimical  
to blood or the pressure of frost on glass  
they're the compelled animal.  
This one wont say, but might pass

to the gaudy of Gods will in others;  
cites the welter of example: a cry  
they enjoyed freewill to find lovers  
in Devon is discounted religiously.

A chain of breakdowns led them there, he said:  
car, head, to the newscast of predestination,  
its one. You're meant to serve, be led  
from causal to this time-frayed illusion.

Hell still not say, but looks arrows of desire  
at me, as if Id know I had no dim choice.  
His monk-straight hair persuades me it could catch fire.  
Or I could, if I thought he had a voice.

# 24 Hour Dream People

Id been set up with a fount of knowing  
a girl from 24 Hour Party People  
like the tramp in wilsons film, talking

Scouse Boethius. Her day job rippled  
wryly like a backwash on the phone.  
As I left, my widowed mother stippled

the showers mosaics, and suddenly like the zone  
Boethius takes Chaucers Troilus to,  
we girdle the Aegean, and Im shown

just her Cyprus shower, tiled and crafted through  
her prickling sweat initiative. She had her scope  
vaulted with a little Renaissance flue,

the Romanesque rest stifled with a pokey cope.  
Boethius time. Back, I called your lonely planet,  
to console you. I knew not a blank hope

attended on desire, or what began it  
ten years back; but comforted with my date.  
Then my father smiled backwards alive, to quote it

entire: Consolations of Philosophy would rate  
higher than the shower Id taken for my fresh night,  
or how my idle call embodied pity, so late

I was late out. But you, dark blonde, your sallow light  
body suddened in my arms, slowly kissing  
the way Id dreamed ten years back; how polite

my fathers I thought you both long platonic, youre missing-  
wheres philosophy, your date, your fantasy?  
And you dont snub my left hand down your back, blissing

as I gently nub your soft jean-loose buttocks, slowly  
dissolve from the sweet, melancholic consummation  
to day, blinking the other girl, my father, away.

But not you, your celibate life in motion  
who call me brother. Well meet.  
You were here all the time I dreamed; your racked emotion

I spike through your Hazienda street  
accent, how even when youre mellowing  
to dope, Id not dare to fondle your defeat

in me, how long this banished calling  
ravels us to the slide of dreaming it.  
I break open a blank world, start falling.

# Creation Myth

Behind closed lids the nebulae spray  
slowly, after image of the universe  
in a single shutter, its diaphragm a black hole

through which Gods speed can no longer pierce  
to sight, so fierce the matter is, unstrung in theory,  
losing grip of the news flash, as it flies ever away.

# Blowing Hot and Cold

March synchronizes flesh. Its  
plosive to the labial cut of winds.  
Cross-currents make delicate slaughter  
of daffodils in the cold snap.

I glow with an impossible yellow warmth,  
chapped to pollen-blown combustions.  
My grain burns, galvanic in a duvets  
smother and tuck. Evenings coddle

without me today. Eternal as I was  
to home fires, I mould round their core of loss  
and ash, dried daisy consolations.  
I hallucinate indifference, am

sapient for seconds with a cadmium-  
veined flare; prick vision with a film of  
chlorophyll. Chill stings to blood-meted  
heat. Im buffeted back to slow motion.

The air holds synchronized swimmers,  
tapers revived in oxygen.  
My skin matches, idiot savant, to whatevers,  
the incandescents, those left standing.

||

## 1348, by St George

Edward conjured me through the  
smaller trade routes: Portugal, Capadocia,  
to displace the faded sainted idiocy  
of that elder Edward, who muted England  
to a carapace of white submission.

It was a perfect leapt year. Plenty stalked  
those commercial veins: spice, fleas, pearls,  
diced with the sailors. They spliced  
the Death of course, tetchy in its  
guttural progress. I was Edwards double

purgative. Ever after, English teeth  
bared a tighter rictus like a corpse.  
Crecy was nothing on Poitiers, Agincourt.  
Id doctored your blood; who survived  
the bubo was bellicose.

Thats not truth, but metaphor becoming  
truth, down to the last yew-drawn  
hung obsession, to the last regaliad  
corgi jest: you have the Georgian grin,  
the ages shadow of my swords length  
whispering the rust of all saints militant.  
Youve made your death, youll have to lie in it.

# Aftertaste

It was the livers bitter tang of defeat  
he liked: the pilots, or his, sourseda  
in a throb of whisky to stretch his own  
organ beyond a living red century  
to the little black linen flags  
snatched inside out over his ancestors.

Flavours: dark sea, cobalt, eggshell, slip  
down the Avenger into the sea, like iodine  
striations separating on the tongue  
the Osaka single malt makes,  
subtled from the Scotch original.  
He watches what peaty salt should touch  
his tongue from the sea.

It never does. The bobbing jade is plucked by a toy  
submarine like a game cheat. Behind him, the  
Christian boy soldier who befriended the last one  
sobs for the son hell name after him.

But he, who tides living blood  
to his lips, never knows after.  
Is hanged over  
the jaws of defeat after all.

The man who knew the white horse proximity  
of his life, how near they froze to his flesh turned  
White House marble, halts over war when president,  
the sour index of victory winced over  
forty years tightening his mouth.  
He echoes his name to his son;  
who himself inhales  
whiskey but none of the bittered wisdom  
his father drank in with brine; who stays home  
from snatch wars, gives his own liver over to the  
black and white recovery of ex-drinkers,  
turns president too as if it salted  
avenger through his blood,  
sucks in his teeth,  
leaves holes in the world.

## June 24th 1967

Their brandy faces were natural to the village,  
long exempt from level toil. They looked to this  
voluntary morning shift still gritted with a  
geological tilth of their underground.

These potholer kids were what they said  
once theyd nightmared themselves  
out of earth. But they woke to the safe crust  
of their ordinariness, trepid above ground.

Now the fathomers emerged on spent weekends.  
Past the pub, their flickering march-past  
seamed them into some premature archive; a film  
of lanterns and bright questions. They paused to  
frame round the stained table, their  
own pothole model of pipe-cleaners brindled  
in scarlet and white, a negative of cavities,  
hunkered down to a touch in a million,  
a vein youd open before it gleamed  
a new Mappa Mundi with the lid off.

No-one expected them down too, these skim  
jokers whod never grey their foam of words  
and tillage to nicked blood and soil. So come  
floods, the desperate tight-rope runner,  
we saw them baffling off in a red cheek puff.  
It was a comedy darkened when they returned  
streaked with hours, days, eyes tenebrous, hooded; silent  
at their own part others filled in, to legend.  
How some extinguished their day time faces  
for those whod voted so fitly for the dark.

# Sussex Eye

The days lumpy portents shape up, framed by  
windows cholera-high, to a sweaty chill.  
They're her last. Patients say she moves  
among them like a filament heated.

They distend with warmth where she goes,  
a last nerved touch before ceramic  
contract fingers supplant her.  
Her smile thins surgically.

She glances once more on what images  
their injury-abraded eyes grate on:  
the orange carton, roast chicken meal,  
photophobia-blinded pavement below.

For twenty years she was the hammer rep,  
last political deviant, craven to nothing  
but the violence cramping her dreams so tight  
it wasn't patients she dressed but stone.

Gargoyles against dawn sashes, discharge  
inmates dumped from another hospital  
infused new diseases, one alien  
culture too far for alcohol gel.

Slowly cavernous ward ceilings drip in basalt time.  
Simple eye cases crease fungoid; a drizzle summers  
mushrooms kicked from lidded overhangs,  
spore from vents. Time turns gangrene.

This is a chisel hour: time for inscribing  
anger on the corrupted lichen smeared by ministers.  
Ill return north as a stonemason, she says.  
Incise what lasts on what won't see to lie.

# Im Becoming Period

Somewhere she stopped fashion. By then her parents mahogany tide  
receded past the rosewood Blthners blunted piano action  
left stripped for the tuner to scintillate in brass pegs  
pitched past a familys hearing. She went with  
her ages clearer grain.

Walnut now, forever Deco. Inherited  
corners cobweb a fine gothic chintz,  
kindle red in midwinter dawns only,  
striping raven shadows past the lace  
barriers of waking.

Bright seventy Junes here, she sees them hatch  
at her edges, girdle her shrunk neck on her collar  
bones, slouches the last of her midriff pleats.  
Now the age of mirror walnut gathers her  
in an inlaid rush.

Knots, whorls she never traced on her  
young body now eddy, tauten up to a last forehead mole.  
Deco was the first young thing ever: our incising alphabet,.  
We swirled hieroglyphics of saffron and ivory. It dried to retro plates  
on coffee-table tomes so differently obscene.

Edwardians leapfrogged us, returned to mode in the seventies.  
We thought Woolworths old hat by design, so perennial in dark varnish.  
Still, Id see in its centenary, not its demise. These mauve collar  
workers stretching dole round the corner find hunger marchers  
greet them across seven decades of hands.

Im nothing but chequered panels. My skins old laminates  
glow in memory. My times veneer tarnished with rubbing stories.  
Just as I become slow killed wood, history speeds up,  
polishes its repeats, burnishes my death  
to timeliness.

A network of stabbed  
breath blasts through the echoing  
iron frames. The old sulphur,  
in its elderly pure pollutant  
that never warms us however deep  
to the core we travel, from the hot dark  
gathering fast above.

# Parable

Cough said the officer, your skin  
bars you from the tropics, maybe.  
It flared with equatorial lines  
puckered me with maturity.

The dark oxygen of looking back  
to my boys military tattoo of a skin,  
eczema relieved by columns of sun  
evokes my breathless lob and trek

to soft harem flesh in middle age.  
Whats bygone is a cocksure kill,  
occidental answers in comic rage.  
Now game-sure tactics spoil what skill

comes minus God, but with diplomacies.  
Its ghosts in me itch to take my skin in hand  
strip me back to raw service age; its lies  
erupt in self hatreds scabs over England.

Now my skin breaks out with new wars  
Im a conscience of cartography.  
Had I been sworn in with pips and stars  
Id be scarring from high with atrocity.

So be happy in your skin, I said: dont seethe,  
and wrinkle this relief map of territory  
crusted so thick I cant breathe  
its body armour cased me in to die.  
But the dream broke; so did the skin -  
a vinyl analogue to play nostalgia on  
a barking crust to stamp tattoos in  
khaki with a shadow pink in common.

So I left with weals, their crimes untold;  
my veteran flesh sheened back with new sun.  
But as my generation crabs to the old  
stiff with the camouflage of desiccation

I see we peace-bred pick bones of war  
because we never doubted in our gut.  
So its poison boils out, or spews before  
bellicose with mouth open, bowels shut.

Weve more eczema, that skin cancer drags,  
why trust never broke our step to ask  
why it withered us to living body-bags  
our leaders prisoners in iron masks.

# He Speaks Home

The brittle jest of the bomber, enrolling  
porters to seek his mislaid case youd mistake  
it for a bomb screens truth with its own deception.

Heres the logic of a local shambles. If I could  
finesse you to believe me slowly, without heckle at the end  
of such a burrowed corridor, Id strip the doors

varnishing casuistry, let you into my telling.  
Their mustard brew of facts would detonate  
on your tongue, but youd swallow, since I filtered them

so clear, there was nothing at bottom to fathom. Such  
bright distilments your throat wont stick at. But you wont.  
So I shut the door; let the tropes blow up in your face.  
Homage to Adrian Mitchell

Pluck a fresh poppy for a fusilier  
where the Draft Dodgers war wages terror on truth.  
So chamfer my armour with dead promises,  
sell me lies through Afghanistan.

A PMs pride weighs a million pints of blood  
the powers stream furtive with opium.  
So get me high on hyperbole  
chamfer my armour with dead promises,  
sell me lies through Afghanistan.

Collateral damage junks junkie and civvy.  
A war on drugs traffics Wall Streets sidewalks  
fight and splice its residue in one.  
So tell Afghan farmers to fatten on wheat  
get me high on hyperbole  
chamfer my armour with dead promises,  
sell me lies through Afghanistan.

We care for the women now their feet tread oil.  
We elect them to the nineteenth century  
and push our policies through the twentieth.  
So recycle my ethics with old Guardians  
tell Afghan farmers to fatten on wheat  
get me high on hyperbole  
chamfer my armour with dead promises,

sell me lies through Afghanistan.