



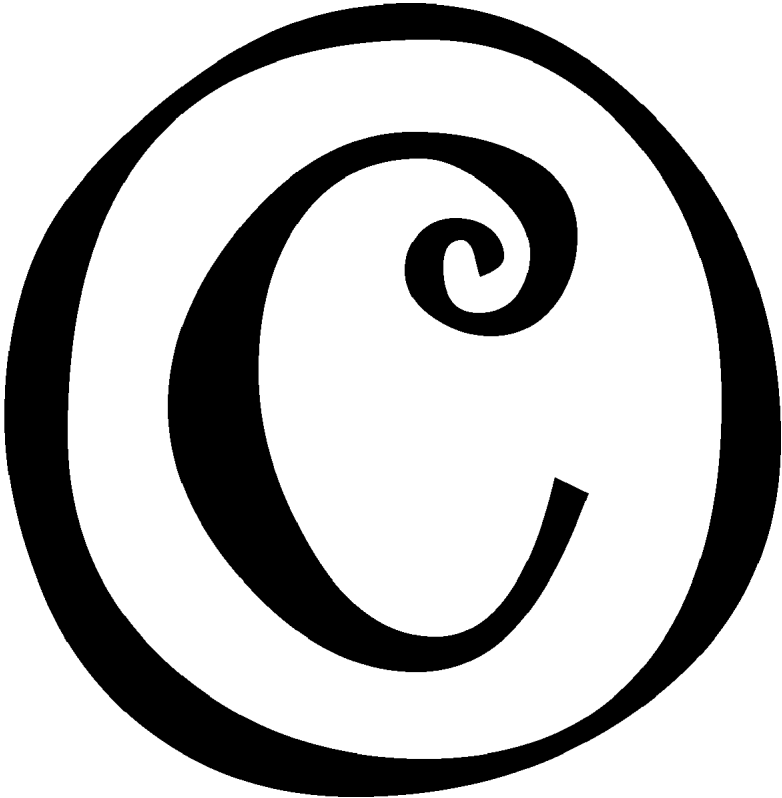
The Sea

Christian Ward

2007 Chapbook

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For Stefany

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Funeral Speech

Trim the nouns
and bubble-wrap the remainder.
Cut out verbs, he was not
that *sort* of man. Hone
every adjective and leave
the subject alone -

a solitary *I* calling out
in the white of the page.

Connected

Wildflowers lift hoods,
releasing their madrigal
into the breeze -

bonnets open, windows
break, the moon cracks
and mouths *I love you*

before falling
and ending up as an ice-cube
in Neptune's cocktail

The Boy

His breath was built
by steam engines

and warm teacups,
his first steps mastered

by watching peacocks
and *Swan Lake*.

Eating proved difficult,
the brown bear

not taking a liking
to the toddler

imitating its cubs.
Language never

flourished, having
been replaced

by an early recording
of *Mother Goose*

looping over and over
in his vinyl lips.

Estuary

We tie a knot
in the river

to remember
the break

where we split
before flooding

one another
with leftover

water found
years later

Poetry

Cut out the *crap*,
he said, and get to the point.
Leave the mustache of snow

on the windowsill
and the leaves on the roof.
Chip away at the snowman

you built in the backyard
and pull out its *heart*
with your bare hands.

Summer

Fountains crack
under the blast furnace
of an overactive sun.

Ironwork melts,
releasing a zoo
of animals & people

trapped in anthracite-black
cages. Dogs pant
and lie in shop doorways,

watching legions
of ants take apart
the landscape,

products of a closed
auction.

Prognosis

When the prognosis
was confirmed,
the sea flooded
her lower storey

and started
climbing the bony
staircase. Wrasse
and conger eels,

two feeders of decay,
moved in, mussels
colonized steps.
At the mezzanine,

sandbags sank
like lead weights
to the bottom,
gobbled up by a basking

shark mistaking them
for plankton. The upper
storey was empty
and the sea burst through

a window, reclaiming
her hospital ward,
each wave accompanied
by a roar in the background,

as if a god somewhere
had been woken up
and wanted *in*.

Between Walks

A train of opened antique
trunks lie beside the pavement,
their contents scattered
on dulled paving slabs.

Moon faced children pass by
with their mothers,
pointing to a 19th century
dildo and a couple of silver
opium pipes,

asking simply:
what are *they*?
what are they used *for*?

Mars will be setting early
somewhere in a far corner of the city.

Territory

Receipts fight for their corner
at the bottom
of my wastebasket,
growling every time

a banana skin or peach pit
is placed on top
of a scrunched-up brother.

My mattress is learning
to do the same, bending
its elastic rump around
my body

whenever I need more space.
I never keep a book
by my bedside, just a bright red
boxing glove.

Blackberry

“...black language of blackberry
eating in late September”

Kinnell

I felt the squelch of blackberries
being crushed in Kinnell’s mouth
when I was only two weeks old,
screaming not for milk,

but for respite of the plucked
berries. I spoke my mass as I lay
in my crib, offering prayers
for the fallen and their survivors.

They were my brothers in many
ways, having been snatched
from the safety of thorns, still not
yet matured. Years later,
when words started to develop,
father’s face became pal
when sharp blackberry-black
words fell out, accompanied
by their seeds, harbored in spaces
between my teeth.

Debtors

Everything in this world
is a debt to someone
or *something*. We feel
them calculating interest

as we sleep, dreaming
uneasily of the time
we will have to pay
and find there is nothing

in our pockets.
And as we lay in our beds,
wind pounds its knuckles
on windows and doors,

the sea prepares its fists
and stars sharpen
their swords. Somewhere,
a god is waiting for the cash,

ready to give its orders.
The bones of our descendants
roll in the bowels of the earth,
weeping for their children.

Seer

She would imitate the voice of God
everywhere she went; using
an empty Coke can with a hole
at the bottom as a makeshift
mouthpiece. People would stop

at this would-be prophetess
dressed in Gap, laughing
at how someone dressed
like *that* could possibly be a messiah
reincarnated. But no-one told

her that and she, being Abby,
simply flicked one of her green
dreads and stubbed out their sneers
with one of her grease coloured
soles. It was only the birds

that took her seriously,
and she would spend hours
underneath a giant oak near her
house, preaching to crows building
nests in its branches, feeling

her words curling the feathers
on their backs, as if electric
and she was a conductor
for the above, waiting
for the overload.

Sermon

Sunlight breaks through breakers
of cloud, lingering in the house
as the family slowly wakes up.

Caught in their beds last night,
they all dreamt of the same
thing: a shepherd leading his

flock to the slaughterhouse.
I'm not sure what inspired
this. Perhaps it was a sermon

from the radio, the words
of a wondering preacher
eager to spread the *Good News*

or something else entirely:
an anonymous message
on the answer phone, the TV

offering oracular visions,
the last words from an old
woman lying in a hospital

ward, repeating verses
from the Book of Revelation
and only the mop listening,

curling up its hair as she spoke,
the water on its scalp singeing
as every syllable fell.

Dragonfly

She is my dragonfly,
caught in amber resin
and preserved in a sheet
of papyrus. Hidden

behind this makeshift
veil, I can only see her
outline: a peacock tail
as Moore would describe

the glittering body,
with two miniaturized
microphone heads
for eyes. Her wings

are the most important
feature and I have strapped
them down. She likes
to beg, listening to me

switching their motors
in reverse with a feather,
waiting for release,
always waiting for release.

Day

(In response to Ondaatje's 'Night')

Sunlight hangs over the bedroom
mirror

In the light of the house
beds yawn from yesterday's exhaustion
holding worn out bones
and muscles the unexpected
3 a.m cries. Dreams detach
themselves from victims.

The first light upstairs
throws circular patterns
through ornate iron vents
to become a living room's sun.

The door calls the dog, the cat
in perfect light tiptoes over the bed.
Insects, those bringers of truth,
hide under enamel stoves
and inside pipe throats,
avoiding mirrors.

All day lies happen.

Observing

Foam hitting the beach
stops in the small hours.
Perhaps this is meant
for us, walking along

shingle in search
of things that will be lost
later: starfish, mermaid's
purses, Neptune's glass.

Stopping by a shuck
of waking mussels,
sunlight pirouettes
off our coffee cups,

uncovering a spider
crab flung by a god
doing his stock take.
There were too many,
you remark. *It wasn't*
needed.

And then I look at you,
remembering all the times
you would say the same to me.
Foam tumbles in the distance,

emptying our hands,
taking back everything not
wanted today.

Poetry (2)

Light floods
through line breaks,
uncovering a pebble
in a corner. Toss
it in the pond outside
and watch the world
unfold in the palm
of your hand. You
are God now.

Coyote Soup

“The night I arrived in Puerto Vallarta to give singing lessons to Señor Ramón Pradera, formerly chief of police but now a dentist, was a very dark night indeed”

Christopher Middleton

First I gave him a bowl of soup
made from the carcasses of a couple
of coyotes hunted on my last trip
in their Arizona desert, their long,

slipper ears added as a garnish.
Ramón liked it and he sang an aria
in praise of the reddish broth.
Then we sacrificed a couple of goats

on the grand piano and let their blood
seep into its guts. I felt its organs
lap up the droplets as I played
Tchaikovsky’s eighteenth overture

in celebration. Ramón insisted
I play something more contemporary
so I played ‘the house of the rising sun’,
which he liked very much.

Before the lesson was up,
I made a concoction of mermaid skin,
toad breath and volcanic ash, smearing
it over his exposed chest. He stood

on the roof terrace and tuned the clouds
on the horizon, turning them white
with his voice. I could hear Satan clapping
behind me, tapping his hooves to the beat.

Smiling, I cut him a cheque and left.
It had been a *very* dark night indeed,
I told myself.

The Order of Things

Cigarettes, lighter, bible.
This is her order of importance,
laying them out on the desk
as if they were trinkets to be sold.
For a brief moment, I imagine

her descendant doing the same
amongst the bony landscape
of an Irish bog. *Peat, headscarf,*
crucifix. That is the order
of importance now.

The objects remain still
throughout the class,
slowly absorbing themselves
into her. Perhaps one day
they will share the same coffin,

treasure for a queen entering
Valhalla, the order surviving
through her children, never breaking.

Views of Suburbia

Kettles hum homilies
under a gas lit sky,
watching children

chase dogs' powdered
noses as babies
hang from washing lines,

waiting for mothers
to come down from trees,
fathers pushing sticks

into their breasts, thinking
they're already dead.

Six Months

It is the beginning of March.
The blanket hanging above
my bedroom window
is becoming a damp sarcophagus,
spreading its moisture
to a box underneath my bed
that will be opened in six
months time when it is my birthday,
releasing the warm September
rain and flood of giant Atlas moths
kept inside. The rain will be absorbed
into the blanket and the moths
will lay their eggs in my twenty seven
year old flesh. Some of the newborn
will die, whilst others will survive
on must pollinated by the dampness.
Everything will return to the box
for the following year and I will do
the same for future generations,
passing myself on the same way
until I have become absorbed
in the process, in *them*.

Sketches

There are failed experiments
in my notebook: fishing hooks
for noses, cracked moons
for faces. Somewhere near

the bottom of this graveyard
is a portrait of a man I once knew,
waiting for a jolt of electricity
to wake him up, his arms tied

down with ropes leading straight
into the bottom of my heart.
I won't cut them. I am his eraser,
he is my straight line to rearrange

Everything Ends Here

The highway stopped
a few miles back,
Buffalo skulls marking
its end.

Cactus needles litter
pavements, spat out
by crows getting drunk
on aloe juice.

In the town's only bar,
stars arm wrestle, pick
up cattle and draw maps
directing visitors
to the underworld.

There are no police here.

Carrying

Lightning carries electricity
from heaven to earth.

Lovers hold thoughts
of each other inside organs,
carrying them on escalators
of veins and channels.

Weeping trains deliver widows
to Victoria Station, a troupe
of sombre taxis waiting outside
to carry them for the final leg,
each orange light a signal

for those with empty arms
to make the sign of the cross.
Their lovers will hold earth
in their hands, moulding it to fit
the shape of bodies waiting

in earthly pit stops.
Everything carries something else,
this is inevitable, the human body
having been born a vessel,
having been descended from a vessel.

Finding Plath

They would often find her
in a cavity underneath
the floorboards. No-one,
luckily for me, ever found

traces of where I crouched
beside her, the Capuchin
monkey on my lap playing
Auld Lang Syne on his miniature

harpsichord for entertainment,
a smuggled in hurricane lamp
providing the source of light.
I would giggle when she
put her hands together

and made shadow puppets
on the wall. She loved making
a bird and sometimes would coo.
How she loved to fly

I never noticed the tag
on her ankle then, a Bakelite
bandage she would whisper
to when I turned my back.

No-one is sure what happened
to it when Sylvia died. Perhaps
they kept it on her body, tracking
her, to make sure she steered
towards the underworld,

as it had always been intended.

Principles of Domestication

(poem found¹ in The Times 1/3/07)

1.

*Early morning
What working mums
is a period of chivvying
really need is a wife.
and chasing. Lucky
Someone who will get up
Daddy who dresses
in the night, then again at 6.15 am
placidly and half asleep*

2.

*I had never cooked a meal
Here we are, post- feminist
or ironed a shirt in my life
post-capitalist
...my tears mingled with soap
post-modern...
suds as I tried to get white
and making it up as we go along
collars clean*

3.

*I hate the thought
Can I really be feeling
of no more babies in the house,
a pull towards the back-breaking
yet the more one has,
minute by minute care
the more one's life lacks
of two tiny children?
a certain graciousness*

In The Valley Of The Dead

In my neighbourhood,
crows are more respected
than police.

Skinheads nod politely
and lift their caps
whenever one passes,
old women offer crumbs.

At Halloween, children
hang the bodies of lynched
policemen on tree branches.

The dead pull back their skin,
bow, and say enter.
Crows smile at the sacrifice,
everybody claps.

We do this every year.

*Between London Bridge station
and Bermondsey*

Everything is being rebuilt
here. Workmen in fluorescent
vests lay the foundations
for giant skeletons of steel
and concrete, smoothing
over the old wharves,
pressing out every crease
and bulge. Deep underground,
the old ships are waking,
their crews already hoisting
the black flags.

Father

Father, afraid I was a Jew,
hid me in a cavity underneath
the floorboards, piping speeches
made by a man I never knew

into that space were I sat
and flicked through a Torah
of blood and ashes, voices
of my forefathers wrapped

around my shoulders. Sometimes
he'd invite local boys to taunt me,
letting them throw eggs whilst
chanting *Dirty Jew, Dirty Jew.*

He'd rummage through my things,
promising to take me to Auschwitz.
Urinating proved nearly impossible,
Father's eye constantly checking

to see whether I wore his foreskin.
I ate pea soup for dinner, served
in a bowler hat. Flies droned.
We never spoke, nobody did.

Often, I'd dream of playing chess
by the River Seine with an elderly
Rabbi, resetting the clock until I
had enough time. After we finished,

he'd lift up the skin on his ribs,
letting me crawl into the synagogue
of his chest, feasting on scrolls
once buried in Father's body.

The Whirr

Sunlight squeezes through
gaps between a crumpled
blanket and blackout blinds
on my windowsill, shadows
a pair of helicopter blades
on the ceiling. Keys
turn in the front door;
I wait for the whirr.

The Sea

Walking down the street,
I empty my pocket
of the sea I was looking
after for you. Mussels
come tumbling first,
cracking open their castanet
shells on the pavement.
Acres of seaweed and oysters.
Taking a deep breath,
I pour an ocean into the middle
of the road. Islands of people
and cars bob in the newly created sea.
Somewhere amongst this
is an old trawler. You are inside,
sending signals back to a lighthouse
forgotten in a trouser pocket.

The Unspoken

We walk around inside
each other's bodies,
picking up unwanted
litter: unspoken swarms
of words, thorns
from answerphone messages
never aired, bodies of cut up
letters. Clambering
out of each other's mouths,
we release this litter
into the atmosphere, watching
it scatter before it burns,
always keeping the smell
produced.

Madame Brecht

The room inside of me
is sparsely furnished.
A coil of rope sits atop
an antique pine dresser,

watching my rocking
chair rock to and fro.
Plucked daisies sit
in a windowsill vase

overlooking an empty
lake. Whenever you
are nearby, I feel
my breath untying

a row boat moored
outside. I see its rope
letting go, its sound
echoing in the real world.

Smoke and Silence

Sláinte. The clink of glasses,
another round of the fiddle
and wheezing accordion.
Pádraig tells us his stories

in cigarette smoke, pausing
only for another sip of brogue
black Guinness, the memory
of three generations of farmers

and immigrants soaking
into the peat of lung flesh.
A claddagh of cloud hangs
outside the bar. It never rains,

it has never done in his eyes,
there has always just been smoke
and silence. They are his skin
and bones. We are his clothes.

About the Author

Christian Ward is a London based poet whose poetry has appeared in numerous journals on the web and in print.

Check out myspace.com/wordfuck for Christian's official page

A message from the author:

"Thank you to all my readers for their continued support. It means a lot to me and I love you all"

[†]The italics are from a woman in 1937, the unitalicised words are from 2007

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The Sea

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Freedom & Strength Press



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