

Andrew Mills

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**THIS PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK:
SELECTED POEMS**

ANDREW MILLS

By the same author

Poetry

Zombie Threads

Isabel and the Burning Boy

Letters to George

When the Darkness Lets You Down

Neither Work Nor Leisure

November

For Better For Worse

Fiction

Plastic Paddy

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SELECTED POEMS**

ANDREW MILLS

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Acknowledgements

I was prompted to create a sample of my poetry to share with friends and acquaintances and so have picked three poems from each of my collections, four volumes of which I have published in book form, and three volumes of which, so far, I have not.

These poems do not run chronologically, nor (unlike the published books) is this collection intended to be read from start to finish.

As ever, Efxaristo to my Editor and Friend, Dr George Rodosthenous of University Leeds, for constant encouragement.

For My Sister Debbie

For Rosalind Elisabeth

and for absent friends

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Scream

Sometimes
You might scream
and
Someone
Will comment
On your scream's
Authenticity
and how it sits
So very well
Resonating with cultural
Nowness
Prowess

and they might take it away
and frame it
Not a gaudy
Victorian frame
- All Gold and Empire -
but something simple

With contemporary
Timbre
Propped with a card
In a tidy
Sans serif font

Like Helvetica Neue

and you might think
Well
That was a good one
and worthy of a wine glass or two
but now
You have
One less noise to make
and that noise
Might be the one

You need.

1. Zombie Threads

Andrew Mills Zombie Threads

High Royds Hooligans

It was the worst generation for sure
Twelve folks I knew just quietly left
Within a few years of lovely Leeds
Marching on together
That makes an impression
On a person.

Don't do brown it will send you to meet them
Said no one at all - still I didn't quite go there
Codeine and opium-dusted Afghani dope
Cannabis oil in blister packs kept up with
The horse-piss burn of Amphetamines
Pink Panther Nesquik if you're feeling flash
Sticky black most of the time
If we're honest...

Peeds Skills
Or can send you quite mental so
Best have some jellies
'Cos three days up
It stops being funny.

We rented out the spare room
When his lordship had his boxes packed,
To a useless kid and his useless girlfriend.
She was a pretty thing. He was an idiot
Who picked up a habit in prison
Poor as church mice. And just as sweet

They dug deep in their room
One time and then ate...
Both passed out and lucky
The burning cigarette set light to the mattress
Smokey as fuck
and we ran in
Found her blue-lipped and near-dead
Choked on margarine spread white bread toast
A fist in the sternum and off in an ambulance.

Before she came back we
Found the works in a carved wooden box

When we threw out the mattress
Just left it there of course
Didn't even flush the skag

I could've shagged her a few times
Soft little cow-eyed junkie home-girl
She waited up for me to come home
Every night I worked the bar
but I didn't
'Cos he was an idiot but holding on to being
Unbroken
Often wish I had
Might've saved her
Might've saved me
Would've felt good anyway
Soft and giving and full hiped
Me on the cough syrup
Her on the pin.

Being off your head
Without a penny to scratch your arse with

That won't get you
Multiple target demographics
but the air-headed fuck-puppet industry
Is quite beyond my aim now
Oh halcyon days!
We daren't leave the house alone
and rarely, if at all, in sunlight
Knotting up by seeing the dawn
Scrape its jealous claws behind our eyes
Shaking off euphoria and waiting in dread
For the come down
Kicking back mugs of Smirnoff
To knock us out

Goddamn telepaths waiting around every
Sunday conversation with Stanley Knife tongues
Talking in brackets
Cognating with subtitles
Shit worthless slang
Talentless, vicious and hard.

Then the disco biscuits dropped
and the city went mad
and we became invisible
We were the lightweights
The softies and freaks
Headbangers, Goths

Well beneath the radar of the
Nine-oh-nine, eight-oh-eight and three-oh-three Atari
Three thousand
Boom, boom, boom

Carving posh off the block
With a bread knife
Sharp and Loaded
High Royds' Hooligans.

Woodwork

Cool little green-haired thing
Looks like a Riot Grrl
Nineteen nineties third waver
Don't we all these days?

Me too.

Those girls protected me
The most
Back then
but scared me with Dworkin
and that 'all sex is rape' thing
Put me clean off
Guiltlessness.
I like you, anyways,
More than you think
(Though I admit I am guessing here)
Crouched down at my feet
With your painted box, paper and
Rulers and pencils
Knocking up a set model
For your cohorts and I

Get it. You want it
A sense of approval
Of having the skills.
and you do
You are flying

Regardez moi

I am less educated than you.
Yes. Older. Not much wiser.
No longer afraid though.
Well not much.

They wouldn't have me here.

Ha. Ha. Fucking Ha.

I once held the hand
Of a waning girl.
She fell from a tree
Totally broke me
I cried for weeks.

I still cry now

Somehow. You remind me. Of Her. As

I watch you scissor and snip
and carve the forms
Of decking and tables
and steps yet unmade
Cardboard repros
Waxed straws for scaffold and
Blue-tac for Doughties
Over a scaled plan
I printed out and you're

So into it.
Made up and beaming
Purring as I bring you fresh
Coffee from the storeroom
French Press.
Sliding into confidence
and Mexican /Jaguar bitter/ sweetness

Lay. It. Out.

and

We will order it
Receive and bench saw it
Like I showed you
Big-eyed in the workshop
As the ragged blade slid into the wood
Screamed soft and ripped
Splitting it hard and true

The sweet smell of seeping sap
High in our noses

You can assist
Like you offered
and that is so
Fucking the best
Amplifying
What you shape now
Making the dream a fantasy of
Smoke and mirrors.

Theatre Magic.
You can bathe in it

Then. But now
With your nails freshly applied,
New and polka dotted
Kusama fresh
Tiny black spots on white -
Yesterday they were chewed
and sea-foam – bejewelled
With cheap rings and bangles
Love heart earrings
Tattoos poking out
From beneath your culottes
I am held
Enthralled
In your service.

Working class girl done good.
So far...
Still got her accent

Still got her doubts
Guess not a boarder.

I lay on my sofa
(I don't own a bed)
From dawn to dusk

Thinking of how I could help you
Be strong
While
Ignoring
How hard that made me
Feel.

How best to aid
My wannabe heroines?

My stand-out work is that
Of others.
Past. Present,

Les choses que j'ai volées,

and, with the graces of my Muses,
(Hey! Calliope!)

and the hauntings of
Those Vicious Little Gods
Forever knocking on the memory of my own days
Crouched at the feet
Of bloodthirsty trees
With dead moons in their branches,

The Future.

Anorexic Augusta

Why you gotta make yourself so small?

With your beautiful soul
The more of you the better.

2. Isabel and the Burning Boy

Andrew Mills
Isabel
and the
Burning Boy

Skinheads

Philip

Splash Bleached Levi's

Harrington. Fred.

Shaven fucking head.

Red braces.

Fourteen Holers

White Laces

(That's bad right?)

I swear he

Waits for me

Every bloody day

Like some Belfast bover boy

Wannabee

Check Point Local

"Where are you from, and what d'you know?"

Except this is Greenleys

and he clocks

Me.

"Mills, why are you wearing a tie?"

and what's with the fucking books?"

and he searches my bag

Takes my crisps

and I give him the packet of JPS

From my blazer pocket. Loaded with two

The other ten pack in my sock.

and he punches me in the stomach

and slaps my face
and lets me go.

He is currently
Shagging
The big sister of a girl I like
A pretty lass with a bleached
Blonde fringe
She lives in our Croft
(Which is what they call Estate Blocks here)
Who lets me walk her home
Now and again

Her name is Tara
She is from
"Yarkshire"
and I am in love with her

Poor Kid
So far from home

Philip banging her sister
A freak like me in love with her
and us just Fourteen.

Boys in Cars in Holbeck

We still had the band
David and me
Some great tunes left
To make
I was fighting for every last minute
Of it

What with everyone buying houses
Getting wed
Having kids
Earning shit loads
and being on call
Except for me
Still dodging
The nine-while-five
Corporate bullshit

I was desperate
Never ever quit
Writing non-stop
Knocked out some blinders
"Lilies" for Suze
"Pretty Little Thing" for Isabel,
"Olympia" and "Éléanore" too
While I'm being honest,

Statham on drums,
Happy to dep,
Desperate to get it done
You can find them on-line
Enjoy

We'd drive through Holbeck
In the dark
A hole
Nothing there
Village my arse

Yeah, permissive
I guess

and she would wave “Hello”
Friendly little thing
Working her patch
There on the corner
Some youngster on a bicycle
Always buzzing about her
Minder? I guessed
For a wee cut

Or a curious kid
Always there, regardless

We got used to waving back
It’s only polite
Got used to her
and her to us

Always after seven and most times
We’d stop
At the A.T.M.
For Dave
As I always carried cash
And she’d be chatty
Enough to say “Hi”
Seemed a nice enough girl
In a better world
She would’ve been
In a bar
Drinking with friends
Or home
Watching T.V. or
Studying.
I have no idea.
but something, somewhere else.

I used to give the Call Lane Girls
Cigarettes. But

I no longer smoke
and they no longer ask for them
Being long gone
and it ain't the Nineties

We don't drive through there
Anymore
and the annoying boy
No longer scouts
On his bike

and she no longer waves
At boys in cars.

When You Left

I remember
I was naked in bed
With my Russian Doll
and the phone rang -
I had a land line back then -
and I crawled over the bare floorboards
Avoiding the curtainless fenêtres
Still hard from my early morning exercise

I took the call.

Packed my
Lyubimaya Devushka
Off to her madness
and took a train

Nose in a book
I still cherish now
It sits on my desk
'Collected'
and I landed

Holding my sister's hand

Not quite sure
How to behave in this one.

Well I fake it 'til I make it
That's my default
Or follow
Some fanciful
Made-up tradition

Which we did

I dropped a third of a tab
Just in case.

It was a matter of front but
Your face

Just wasn't quite right
A mannequin dummy dressed
In ridiculous lace
Stiff breast flattening bodice
Mediaeval to be honest
The arms
Quite improperly
Signing love
Considering
and
I declined the car ride and
Walked back
To the house in a daze

Self-medicating for a fortnight

My love affair
With being elsewhere
Ignited.

A blur of nothing really.

The blood waving regards
The handshakes and lager
Tops and discovering Gin
In the Old Swan
The three of us
Sat conversationless
Like fucking strangers
My sister sober
Us boys just knocking them back
Bang, Bang, Bang.
One after the fucking other

Me ducking out to the toilet
To shovel speed up my nose
Until it bled.
Never drunk
Never sober
Just softly focused

I had an eighth of Moroccan
To smooth the edges

And another drunken
Bloody train to ride

I slunk back to the bed
and my *Matreshka*
Came back
and let me do
Whatever I wanted
Her cold blue eyes
Unblinking
Her hand in mine

Most of the time.

I guess
One night
Chewing my face off
So as to drink
Smoke
and fight more
I sent a telegram to my operator

Said "Enough now
Stop with the growing"

and I did.

3. Letters to George

Andrew Mills Letters to George

Four Degrees of Celebration

I tidy/observe for Plath.

For me, not for her, of course

I am aware she
Was not a Yorkshire girl

But here she is

Intrigued by
The pig farms and dialect
Maudlin. For example.
My favourite.

I always think of her as a
City girl. Wrapped in ambition. Twenty-one and
Ready to go.

I talked with Stuart today
The organist. He knows he is in one of my poems.
I think he is secretly pleased I saw him
Take my photo with his old 35mm

and

He never knew Ted
But his big sister
Did. Hughes' Mother and Father
Owned a sweet shop in Hebden
So I am
Four People away
From Sylvia

and isn't that something to celebrate?

Anniversaire

I read it was happening
So planned out the evening
and we had Mexican food
Pan-fried chicken
Freshly torn salad
Microwaved wraps
With sour cream and
Cheese
and
Everything

A bottle of prosecco
To start us off and then
Grinding up ice
and chopping up strawberries

Frozen daiquiris
A cigarette in the garden
Then I took us to
The green. Here
The coeur of the Business School
Where Fairfax prepped his troops
and we looked over the City

Much as he did

It is probably brighter now
To be fair
But still a decent
Vantage point

and we lay on our backs
Pissed and giggling
Holding hands

and watched
The shooting stars
Light up the sky

Like fireworks.

Tin

We talked it over for a night
and that was what you wanted
So that was that
and when the day came
We took a taxi up
and you signed in

Me sleepless by the landline
Waiting for the word
To pick you up, another cab

Home and you just
Sleeping it off. A cat
On the sofa.

I made a soup of potatoes and leeks
The TV on low and kept watch
For a week or so. Nursing
Our secret. I scissored off
and hid your plastic name-band
In a tobacco tin.

and we moved on
and a year later
I moved out.

Much later
I rang you
About some other thing
and I think you'd been drinking

Or smoking
Or speeding
Or all three

and you said
It wasn't mine
It had been someone else's
Maybe it had been on your mind
Perhaps it was the last thread
Holding us together

I still have it.
Yellowed now
The writing barely legible.
I should've thrown it away
But I kept it
In the tin

The faded hospital wristband
A memento
Of something
I could never
Share.

4. When the Darkness Lets You Down

Andrew
Mills
When the
Darkness
Lets You
Down

Bats

I want to
Be inside you the most
When Selene's light
Shines through
The low motorway hiss
When it
Slides between the blinds
and kisses your jawline
Yellows your hair
Bathes you in silver
Against your pillow

In the monochromic filter
Of dreamtime

Of course I
Dig into
The side of you
As still as Endymion
One shoulder numb from misplacement
The other
Curled on a hip
A breast
Your stomach

Synched to your inhalations

Did you know
You sleep
With a smile on your face?

and that does it
For me.

Coming Down, Winckelman*Straße* Morning

I am standing in your Friend's bathroom
The sink counter is a brown marbled colour
The cosmetics look familiar but have indecipherable names
The hot water is running noisily
The grey hairs on my beard are spreading

It is morning here in the ground floor flat
The bath curtain has a picture of a girl smoking a cigarette
The body wash you lent me smells like hospital
I can hear the webcast you are listening to in the living room
The plaster on my left index finger is looking frayed

I am in *Hietzing* but I do not care
There are two towels, one is orange the other is blue
My electric toothbrush needs a good clean
My heart is beating faster than I would like it to
I am wearing my boxers and a faded white T

I am anxious here but I do not want to go home alone
I am keeping this room as tidy as I can as it is not mine
I will use your deodorant as I can't find a shop that sells Lynx
My nose bleed has stopped. I get them when I am stressed

I am practising the grounding exercise my councillor taught me.

Candles at Stephansdom #2

After you called I ran through the crowds
To the station and caught you just in time you were
Waiting for the U4 all showered and refreshed
In your fake fur and hat - Me stinking in yesterday's

Sweat still but it didn't matter and we made our way
Back to the Cathedral where there was a Mass underway
Which seemed appropriate and I left you for a while to
Your time and space and I lit a candle and said a Hail Mary

and I don't know why I am running with religion again
I say it's just a meditation as I reel off the names of the
Loved ones we have lost this year and make a point of
Remembrance; maybe that's enough - you know I used

To be a choir boy and altar server long ago when life
Was very different and the future was never going to
Look like this; before I learnt to negotiate before I
Learnt to love before I learnt the unbearable pain of loss.

Andrew
Mills

Neither Work
Nor Leisure

Arthur

We were in a bar
Paris
I think it was in the 13th
Where he worked
Tough boy
Shaven headed
Montpellier lad
- even had trials for *Les Phocéens*
Before he fucked his legs-

and I was with Collette
Sa soeur, mon coeur,
My arms pinched
Black and blue
Parce-que she did that
Every time I pronounced
A word wrong

We'd been sleeping in his bunk
For a few days while he
Took the sofa
and I was a bit sore
Because she expected it
Twice a day

and he said
"Most of the *mecs*
Here
Don't even
Attempt to
Chat up girls
Anymore
It's easier to
Just pay *une merfe*
Because
Les Parisiennes
Expect

Dinner
With wine
and drinks
In a bar
Afterwards
Then a taxi home
and that's
Cent Euros
At least
If I don't
Drink

and then
You have sex
and then one of you
Leaves
In another
Taxi
To go home
and
They never
Call you back”

He said all of this in French.
I remember thinking
I hope
You're
Making
It up
but I know
You are
Not

and Collette kicked me
Under the table.

and Arthur went back to work
and we left *le café*

and we went for a walk

and I kissed her
Sweet Southern
Spanish- French cheeks
and thought myself

So lucky.

Saturday Night

Who am I crying for?

The indignity
She's flashing her knickers for the street to see
I thought her drunk, maybe passed out of a taxi
Because you think that
Don't you?

That's what we do, right?

I heard the screams so went to look.
I am surprised to find I am sprinting
and words are coming out of my mouth.

“Is she ok? I'm a first aider”

Yeah. Check me out with the skills..
I am almost a grown-up.

and a lad just says "No"

Point blank.
Just like that
His face doesn't move

I say - to no-one in particular -
“Have you called an ambulance?”

“It's on its way”
States another Moon-faced cold fish.

but then
The stream of blood from the back of her head
Her arms crucifix posed
Bare feet pointing down the street
Skirt up by her hips and
The other girl

The one on her feet,
Screaming, screaming, screaming,
She won't stop and

The boys all keep their distance
and I freeze six feet away

Out of respect
Or fear

Because there is no point
Putting her in recovery position

Or CPR

I think of it
and to give her my coat
but I don't do anything
Nothing.

Useless

and she lies like a statue
An installation
Mannequin
Uncanny Valley

One of those marbles from church
Of some Sir or Lady Someone
and

Us boys all frozen

The other girl is off on one
Shrieking, shrill and mad
Pulling her hair out.
It's a few minutes

but it feels like hours

“She fell from the eighth floor”
The blond lad says.

The hotel security guy comes up and
Stands next to me

“I work there” he shares.
“It's not looking good brother”
I blurt and fist bump his shoulder

W.T.F? Still Life
With screams drowning out
The blue lights decant
We part so they can pass, dismount and
The paramedics check
In that nonchalant way they do
Then
In no rush,
Fetch black kit from the wagon

The First Responder brakes
and I sit on the steps that lead up to Sarah's street.
The crying girl is taken inside.
The boys fade into the halls and hotels.
and it all goes far too quiet.

When two Ambulance Incident Vans rock up I start to bawl.

This is What We Do.

Marched to the shop. And chose a bouquet.
Nothing flashy -
Nor the cheapest -
Tidy white little flowers
Apt; Yeah...

Hated myself for thinking that.

Blurred buzz of insomnia
Sobered enough with coffee
Coffee, coffee, Coffee and a Jameson's
and an anxious
Silent Hot bath
Quit almost as soon as entered.

The wind is a bully.
Retracing steps
The glazier's van parked up.
An overalled boy carrying tools inside.
The yellow and black tape
Two stupid orange cones.
The liveried wagon
Two lads in Hi-Viz Watching.
Hesitating until they wave me over.

He looks me up and down.
Big lad.
Bearded like a hipster.
Young.
Both of them just kids.
Pauses
He smiles, kindly, nods "Come on."
and lifts the tape
"Maybe put them just around that corner"
He points.
"They'll be rect there."

I step into the zone
Punch-drunk,
Buffeted,
Vicious currents
Jabbing between the tall, tall
Tall buildings,
The high windows give me vertigo.

Rolling my fist tight around
The dumb flowers.
Crossing the road
The stains are a still
Darker tarmac shadow of the red.

and lay the flowers down.
Duck under the tape

The coppers both wave.

The bearded one gives me
A thumbs up.
Back into the wind and

I need a drink.

6. November

Andrew
Mills
NOVEMBER

True Story

Last night I woke
Soaked in bitter-sweet
From anxious dreams
and
A girl had snuck into
The damp covers
and she lay
Curled into the nook
Of my hips

I was surprised
as she pressed back hard upon
My stomach
Her blue jeans comfortably rough
Against my bare legs
Her thin vest
Between her back and my chest
Her hair in my face
My eyes
My mouth

and it was dark and no road
Noise fell through the open window
Just the full throb
Of her pulse
The quick
Of her breath

She pushed her weight
Back on me
Heavy and hard
My arm around her
I tried to remember
Something
While she
Grew heavier
Her inhalations

Deepening
Drowning me
Crushing my ribs
Shortening my breath
and I tried to say something
but
I was frozen
In the pitch black
and then
I felt a rush
Of absolute dread

and

She just left
and the streetlight
Came back
and the whispers
Of the evening
Crawled around my quilt
My pillow

and I dared not
Close my eyes
Again.

Saints from the Cliffs of Heptonstall

This is my Church
My kirk to pilgrimage
It is not
A place of recovery
It is not
A rescue
Nor a safe space
It is
Scary

A shrine
Perhaps

Atheist
Scientist
I am Catholic enough
That Jesus
The Marys
and Saints

Give me enough
Space
To think

Jehanne la Pucelle
Here on my shoulder
The eternal teenager
Guides my big stupid mouth
Blah, blah, blah
Tic, tac, toc
She chose me to shout
and retch my head
Quelque fois en francais
Give them hell
If they give you grief

and Sylvia

Never a bells and smells girl
Let's be honest
Nevertheless
Does her part
Tight and waspish
Ringing her clipped
New England vowels
Through the Coeur
De Moi
To keep me
True
To something
Somewhere

I am not sure
Quite what
Just yet
maybe

She doesn't know either

But I guess it will have
Moons
and trees
and blood
In it

I stand on the edge
Of the cliff walk
One step forwards
and that would be
The end

Instead
I hold my arms wide
Like we were shown
That time in the New Penny
and I shout
With all my voice

and your name echoes
Around the dale
Below

I recite
Five Hail Marys
The prayer to Mother
To sisters and cousins
and I walk on down
The Buttress.

Waves

It was dark by the time my dreams had run out;
I had slipped an extra night into the space
Between now and then and, head pounding, I
Lay back in the comfort of memories, my
Mother sat on a wooden chair fading out with
A curious smile

Later my latest folds down onto elegant knees
the whispering turbulence of soft spun hair
Brushing the backs of hands, ignorant of
The broken nails and the carpal tunnel strain's
Constant strum. Her eyes dart between concepts

“I am the hands” I said “You are the eyes”

I am the whispered scar of confidence. The
Long-planned stolen minute of wonder before
Conjured walls of hazy EM Radiation. Here.
This one is visible. Take; repeat, this is your
Body of work. Another might ring from far-laid
Ghosts of transmissions, micro-waving from
The short squat Bush I turn to for comfort
When the vision fades. You might be bathing in it too.

The waves pass
Vaingloriously transmogrified
Unconcrete and Insubstantial.

A lorry reverse and fireworks crackle shout in the street. My eyes open
Adjust to the welcome damp of Autumn. I have grown rigid

Can you see the light?
Can you see the song?

From where you kneel
Can you feel
The warmth of my hands?

Andrew
Mills
For Better
For Worse

Barefoot in the Park

My Mum's first calliper -
That I remember -
Looked like the one the girl
On the Spastics Society Collection Box
Wore

It had a stocky shoe
With a buckle across the toes
With a big heel
and the calliper metal
Went into the heel
So she only had
That shoe.

She would click the knee
To unlock it
So she could sit
and when she stood up
She would lock it into place
With her right hand
Snap!

She walked up the stairs
With a tread and a bang
and came down the same
Step. Clunk. Step. Clunk

and she would leave it
Lying on the floor of the bedroom
In the morning when I took her
Coffee and Toast that was buttered to the crust
I would see it. It had a support
That went to the top of her thigh
It was all metal and leather pads and straps
and that thick-soled, clumpy shoe.

The second calliper
Many years later

Had a plastic end
The shape of her foot
and over that she could wear
Her own shoes
For the first time.

The left one a size three
and the right one
On her calliper leg
A children's size thirteen.

She had to buy two pairs of shoes

My mother never, ever walked barefoot in the park.

Birthday at Wimpy's

I did not go
To the Birthday Parties
My classmates sent me invites to
Because we couldn't afford
To buy them presents. My Mum said.

So, of course I did not have
Birthday Parties
Myself.
Or send invitations out to the children at school
As that would have been awkward...

but one year -
I was nine -
It was my Birthday *again*
So to celebrate
I was going on a special trip and
We got the bus to Northampton.

It was cold and it was dark
Being a Sagittarius who is
Half man. Half beast.
and good with a bow and arrow.

and we went to the Wimpy Bar
For my Birthday treat.

and Mum ordered hamburgers and chips
and we sat at a plastic table
and it was quite empty
and my Sister was happy playing with the ketchup bottle.

The food came

and it was in little cardboard boxes

and my Mum said

“Can we have it on a plate?”

and the waitress looked at her
and my Mum looked at the waitress
and the waitress said
“Um. we don’t serve food on plates”

and my Mum said
“Really?”

and the waitress said
“Yes”

and the waitress walked away.

and we just ate in silence.

and then we got the bus back.

Sticklebacks

The tank in the living room
Was massive
It had a stand
and a big green lid
Slanted like the roof
Of a house

The pump bubbled away in the corner
The gravel was all different colours
and there were lots of plants for them
It was a pretty palace

The thermometer was checked daily
Twenty-three degrees
and the P.H. once a week
and there were three of them at first
but one got bitten and ended up down the toilet

“Don’t ever put your hand in the tank”
Said my Dad
“These are South American Piranhas
and they will strip your fingers to the bone
In a bloody minute”

They didn’t look so scary to me
Big grey ghost fish
Yellow at the bottom
Sad stupid faces
Full of teeth like needles.

My Dad gave me a tank
and I set it up
Freshwater
In my room at the maisonette
With some gravel
and Stones
and I went to the pond

Near the Abbey Road Stadium
We called it 'Dead Man's Lake'
and with my net I caught
Half a dozen
Spiny
Sticklebacks

and I took them back
To the tank.

They swam about
and ate the Daphnia
I gave them.

One day
I went out to the Rec
and met a boy who lived
On our street
His name was Darren
and I had not talked to him before

and we kicked about the Rec

and Susan and Dad were out
and he had some balloons
So we filled them with water
From our kitchen
and threw them off from the balcony
So they would scare other kids
When they splashed with a bang
and a spray of cold water

and then I said

"Come and have a look at my fish"
and I showed him my room
and the sticklebacks
and we went back to the kitchen

and I went to the toilet

and after I came back
He said he had to go
and I said

“Nice to meet you”
and he laughed

I thought it was good to find a friend
and I went to my room
and

Every one of my fish
Had had
Its head cut off
With a knife.

