SAMPLER

Desire Lines
Also by Barry MacSweeney

*The Boy from the Green Cabaret Tells of His Mother* (Hutchinson, 1968; McKay, 1969)

*The Last Bud* (Blacksuede Boot, 1969)

*Joint Effort*, with Pete Bland (Blacksuede Boot, 1969)

*Flames on the Beach at Viareggio* (Blacksuede Boot, 1970)

*Our Mutual Scarlet Boulevard* (Fulcrum, 1971)

12 Poems and a Letter, with Elaine Randell (Curiously Strong, 1971)

*Just 22 and I Don't Mind Dyin': The Official Poetical Biography of Jim Morrison, Rock Idol* (Curiously Strong, 1971; Turpin, 1973)

*Brother Wolf* (Turret, 1972)

*Fools Gold* (Blacksuede Boot, 1972)

*Five Odes* (Transgravity Advertiser, 1972)

*Dance Steps* (Joe DiMaggio, 1972)

*Six Odes* (Ted Kavanagh, 1972)

*Fog Eye* (Ted Kavanagh, 1973)

*Far Cliff Babylon* (Writers Forum, 1978)

*Black Torch* (New London Pride, 1978)

*Odes* (Trigram, 1978)

*Blackbird* (Pig Press, 1980)

*Starry Messenger* (Secret Books, 1980)

*Colonel B* (Colin Simms, 1980)

*Jury Vet: Odes* (Bath Place, 1981)

*Ranter* (Slow Dancer, 1985)

*The Tempers of Hazard*, with Thomas A. Clark and Chris Torrance (Paladin, 1993)

*Hellhound Memos* (Many Press, 1993)

*Pearl* (Equipeage, 1995)

*Zero Hero*, in *etruscan reader III* (etruscan, 1996)

*The Book of Demons* (Bloodaxe, 1997)

*Postcards from Hitler* (Writers Forum, 1998)

*Pearl in the Silver Morning* (Poetical Histories, 1999)

*Sweet Advocate* (Equipeage, 1999)

*False Lapwing* (Poetical Histories, 2002)


*Horses in Boiling Blood* (Equipeage, 2004)

Prose

*Elegy for January: A Life of Thomas Chatterton* (Menard, 1970)

Interviewed by Eric Mottram, *Poetry Information*, No. 18 (1978)


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In Memoriam Aidan McSweeney, 1992–2010,
and dedicated to Caitlyn McSweeney,
Barry’s much-loved nephew and niece.
Acknowledgements

The generosity of Paul McSweeney, for the Estate of Barry MacSweeney, has made this book possible. I am grateful for his good humour, encouragement, and enthusiasm. I am also grateful to Elaine Randell, for her permission to reprint ‘12 Poems and a Letter’ and for a long conversation we had in 2013. I thank Jackie Litherland, also, for her comments on MacSweeney’s late work. The librarians at the Robinson Library Special Collections, Newcastle University, and at King’s College London Archives and Special Collections, have always been helpful. Special thanks to John Wells at Cambridge University Library for his help tracking down ‘Pelt Feather Log’. I owe specific thanks to Allen Fisher, Ian Patterson, and J.H. Prynne for sharing typescripts and other materials with me over the years. Many, many other people answered my questions and queries, ranging from bibliographical arcana to personal anecdote and recollection. MacSweeney’s work grew out of the collective life of independent presses and magazines, and I salute them all. Tony Frazer has overseen the present volume with patience and commitment.

‘Toad Church’ was published in Chicago Review in 2015, and I thank the editors Andrew Peart and Eric Powell for their sustained care with the text. The selection from Horses in Boiling Blood appears with the permission of Rod Mengham, for Equipage Press.

Lastly, my gratitude to Mark Roberts, whose enthusiasm for MacSweeney has been a source of surprise and delight to me for the past decade; and to Amy Tobin, always and entirely unfailing.
Introduction

Barry MacSweeney was an uncompromising and prolific poet. Between his first appearances in print in 1966 and his death in 2000, he authored two dozen books and pamphlets and published more than a hundred poems in little magazines. In his own archives at Newcastle University, and in the papers of his friends Eric Mottram (1924–95) and J.H. Prynne (1936– ) there are many more unpublished poems and several complete sequences, some of which are represented here. Though there were periods where MacSweeney vanished from public view, his mental and physical health ravaged by alcoholism, the truth is that he wrote continuously. Yet like many of his contemporaries who emerged during the great poetry renaissance of the 1960s, he died with hardly any of his work in print.

In 2003, his selected poems—overseen by MacSweeney before his death and edited by Neil Astley—were published by Bloodaxe as Wolf Tongue: Selected Poems, 1965–2000. There’s no question that this book contains some of his most important work: the serial poem Brother Wolf, which takes the life of Thomas Chatterton (1752–70) as a mysterious parable about poetic vocation; the obscure, anxious, and compressed music of Odes; the delirious and violent political satire Jury Vet; the plaintive and mythic Ranter; the late lyric masterpiece Pearl. But any selected poems is a compromise, and the story Wolf Tongue tells is partial and incomplete. While it captures the drama of the poet’s life, it excises his genesis in the experimental poetry scenes of Newcastle, London, and Cambridge. The crucial period between 1966 and 1973, when MacSweeney first started to take poetry seriously, is represented by only six poems. His ambitious Black Torch (1978), highly prized by his peers, is left on the cutting-room floor. His final full-length sequence, the miraculous ‘Letters to Dewey’ (1999), shining with sincerity, appeared too late for inclusion.

These absences are understandable. MacSweeney’s body of work is a complex one, propelled by internal logics of opposition: between harshness and sentimentality, confession and secrecy, avant-gardism and populism, collective life and individual struggle. He collected and abandoned his readers, often changing his style, making startling progressions from poem to poem and book to book. But as the present volume hopes to show, he never entirely gave up on the methods at his disposal. He was a critical reader of his own work, and as he progressed he also looked back to earlier phases of writing as a means of navigation. To borrow the terms
of Raymond Williams, MacSweeney maintained a creative tension in his poetry between residual and emergent forms and styles. As the culture around him changed, he changed too, repurposing his work to meet the social demands of the day.

These unselected poems, then, should give the reader a deeper understanding of MacSweeney’s achievement. It restores to view the volatility with which MacSweeney composed, read, and handled his poems. Beginning in 1968 with the publication of *The Boy From the Green Cabaret Tells of His Mother*, it follows the poet through political upheaval, personal disaster, and constant poetic vigilance. Drawing heavily on work published by independent presses, it testifies to the sheer commitment with which he and his friends attempted to change the literary landscape of British poetry. It’s unlikely that there will ever be a true *Collected* MacSweeney, still less a *Complete*: he simply wrote too much, experimented too much, published too frantically too young. But perhaps this volume can work as a transitional signal, presenting new substance for future editions.

**The Texts**

The earliest texts printed here date from 1966, when MacSweeney was eighteen years old. Living in Newcastle he was surrounded by poetry. Tom and Connie Pickard’s Morden Tower reading series brought American poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso to the city, and Jon Silkin’s *Stand* magazine, relocated from Leeds in 1965, published an array of international poetry and comment. After leaving school, MacSweeney worked at the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, where he shared an office with Basil Bunting. Bunting, via his friendships with Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky and with his fierce loyalty to the North, offered the young poets an authentic modernist legitimation.

MacSweeney’s first departure from Newcastle in 1967, when he was sent by the newspaper to study for a journalism diploma in Harlow, Essex, led to his debut standalone publication. The thirteen poems he wrote over the summer in Harlow were printed as *The Boy from the Green Cabaret Tells of His Mother* in September 1967. Privately circulated to the mailing list of *The English Intelligencer* magazine (edited by Andrew Crozier in Cambridge, with the assistance of J.H. Prynne, and later by Peter Riley), *Cabaret* was mimeographed on foolscap paper in an edition of 100 copies. MacSweeney re-used the title the following year for his paperback
collection published by the major commercial firm Hutchinson. The story is infamous. Hutchinson, eager to capitalise on the beat explosion and the success of Penguin’s *Mersey Sound* anthology, marketed the book and its poet aggressively. MacSweeney was nominated for the prestigious Chair of Oxford Professor of Poetry, and for a brief moment became a household name. He was reviewed, interviewed, and satirised in the broadsheet press, and gave many prominent readings. The book, which sold 11,000 copies, appeared in an American edition in 1969, featuring a dazzling psychedelic cover.

I have chosen to print the entirety of the 13-poem *Cabaret*, along with six other poems representative of MacSweeney’s writing at the time. Though MacSweeney would later claim Hutchinson interfered with his manuscript, even editing the poems to remove expletives, there is no evidence to support this. But the status of *Cabaret*—existing as both a mimeo and a paperback, as well as a US hardcover—illustrates the difficulty and necessity of textual scholarship on the poetry of the 1960s and 1970s. The independent presses which MacSweeney favoured for the rest of his career were resourceful and inventive. Poems composed on the typewriter could be reproduced faithfully, inexpensively, and cheaply using mimeo stencils, while letterpress printing afforded the work a dedicated and exacting precision.

MacSweeney’s next two books exemplify these two tendencies, with luxury and expediency existing side by side. *Flames on the Beach at Viareggio* appeared in 1970 from MacSweeney’s own Blacksuede Boot Press in an edition of 150 copies. Vivienne Carlton, his then-girlfriend, selected the material from magazine publications and from manuscripts; his brother, Paul, provided the illustration for the cover. *Our Mutual Scarlet Boulevard* appeared in 1971 from Stuart and Deirdre Montgomery’s Fulcrum Press, in both an elaborate subscriber’s edition and a trade hardcover. Because *Boulevard* was delayed in going to press, I have re-ordered the poems by probable date of composition. The poems I have chosen from each book show MacSweeney extending the work of *Cabaret*, beginning to experiment with new forms. The later poems in *Boulevard*, ‘Six Sonnets for Nathaniel Swift’ and ‘Six Street Songs’ announce MacSweeney’s discovery of disjuncture and seriality, pointing towards the next major phase of his writing.

After moving to London in 1970, MacSweeney began a relationship with the poet Elaine Randell, editor of *Amazing Grace* magazine. Their collaboration ‘12 Poems and a Letter’ appeared alongside MacSweeney’s *Just
22 and I Don’t Mind Dying as an issue of The Curiously Strong, published by Fred Buck, and later Ian Patterson, from Cambridge. Typical of the time, ‘12 Poems’ was printed mimeo with one poem per page, surrounded by generous white space. It’s impossible to reproduce the particular quality of attention and emotion that such presentation affords. The dimension of the page shapes the timing of reading: there’s a music to it, which can only be gestured to here by indicating the page-breaks with a bullet point, thus: ‘•’.

MacSweeney’s poetry developed rapidly during his relationship with Randell. Between 1971 and 1975 he wrote seven related sequences, starting with Brother Wolf and ending with Starry Messenger. This work has tended to be overshadowed by the Odes, collected in full in Wolf Tongue, where Brother Wolf also appears. Here, readers can see a different orientation at work. Following Brother Wolf, which MacSweeney worked on in notebooks for most of 1971, he produced Fools Gold—dedicated to Elaine—in a single sitting, on August 23rd 1972, publishing it with Blacksuede Boot soon after. Dance Steps followed next, written on November 22nd of the same year and printed the following month. There’s something ceremonial about these texts, which combine a kind of stoned distraction with vivid meditative description. We see MacSweeney establishing and transgressing the boundaries of his poetics, learning and testing his moves.

By contrast, Toad Church, written between May and December 1972, while MacSweeney worked at the National Maritime Museum as a conservator of paintings, is a dizzying structure of fantasy and transcription. The poem was never published in full. MacSweeney was sensitive to criticism, and was easily dismayed if a poem received only lukewarm response from his interlocutors. It may simply be the case that MacSweeney was too busy to care if something fell through the cracks, always looking ahead to the next work. But the sequence Pelt Feather Log, published here in full for the first time, had a more protracted disappearance. Extracts were printed in Brian Marley’s Breakfast and Martin Thom’s Turpin, and the poem was scheduled for printing in 1975 by Tim Longville and John Riley’s Grosseteste Press. But the press had trouble with funding, and by 1977 MacSweeney seemed to lose interest. There is no copy in his papers at Newcastle University, but the recently-accessioned treasure trove of J.H. Prynne’s papers at Cambridge University Library holds three typescripts of the work-in-progress. The text here is based on what I believe to be the final version.

This raises the question of the limits of the present Unselected MacSweeney. There are clusters of short poems published around Pelt Feather
Log, printed in venues like the Eric Mottram-edited Poetry Review, and The Human Handkerchief, printed at the University of Essex. For the time being they must remain in the little magazines. I have emphasised MacSweeney’s sequence-length experimentation, because this was the mode he favoured throughout the 1970s. As Bill Berkson wrote of Frank O’Hara’s Poems Retrieved, the work represented here is ‘refractive’. It throws new light on what we already know, and shows the poet in his mid-20s now gaining momentum, now halting and turning. The reader will find overlap and difference, gaps bridged by distortion, changed in echo.

The publication of Fog Eye was occasioned by the death by suicide of MacSweeney’s friend, the poet Mark Hyatt. The book was letterpress-printed by Ted Kavanagh, with gorgeous pastel-pink wraps, in an edition of 200. Hyatt’s work would appear posthumously with both Kavanagh (Eleven Poems, 1974) and through a Blacksuede Boot collaboration with Andrew Crozier’s Ferry Press (How Odd, 1973). The final work in MacSweeney’s cycle of serial poems, Starry Messenger, also billed itself as an elegy, this time for Galileo. It was first printed in the American magazine Pod (1976), edited by Kirby Malone, and was brought out as a chapbook by Elaine Randell’s Secret Books in 1980, after the couple’s separation.

While MacSweeney’s appearances in American magazines were rare, extracts from his next major project Black Torch, first appeared in Fred Buck’s Bezoar magazine, from Gloucester, Mass., in 1975. MacSweeney began the work while out on strike with the National Union of Journalists in December 1974/January 1975. While the bulk of the writing was complete by 1976, he continued to revise the sequence, researching the 1844 Durham Miners’ Strike, and reading extensively in English labour history. Black Torch is one of the major missing parts of MacSweeney’s work in print. It also presents his most sustained experiment with open-form composition, using the space of the page to maximum effect. The version of the book printed by Allen Fisher’s New London Pride Editions in 1978 frequently uses the turning of the page for argumentative purposes. MacSweeney exploits the potential for sarcasm and irony in the embodied activity of reading. Like ‘12 Poems’, page divisions here are represented by a bullet-point. I hope that the reader will find that the argument still rings out.

After Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Government was elected in 1979, MacSweeney’s work became more viciously and despairingly political. The three offcuts from Jury Vet printed here marked the first appearance of MacSweeney’s new style in print. Published by John Harvey’s Slow Dancer magazine in 1980, these punk-inflected odes herald the nightmare of the
Thatcherite decade. They are violently problematic works. ‘Blood Money’ also appeared in Slow Dancer, and looks on with disgust at City Council politics in Newcastle. MacSweeney used the title again in the late 1990s for a sequence of sonnets, Blood Money: The Marvellous Secret Sonnets of Mary Bell, Child-Killer, which may yet still see the light of day. The previously unpublished poem ‘Revulsion’ is the last of MacSweeney’s ‘State of the Nation Bulletins’, and joins those in Wolf Tongue: Colonel B (1979), Liz Hard (1982), and Wild Knitting (1983), as a convulsive register of disgust and dismay at English nationalism, unemployment, and rampant free-market capitalism.

The narrative provided by Wolf Tongue suggests that MacSweeney endured a long period of writer’s block following Ranter (1985) and Finnbar’s Lament (1986). But the papers at Newcastle University suggest otherwise. The moving long poem ‘Soft Hail’ (1988), previously unpublished, sustains the short-line of Ranter, swooping across the rural Northern landscape. It’s true, however, that MacSweeney was unable to complete another long poem, titled ‘No Mercy’. This exists in a heavily-annotated typescript, with much of the text scored out, and requires more textual archaeology than can be adequately represented in the present volume. A recording of MacSweeney reading the whole poem at Battersea Arts Centre in 1988 can be found online at the Archive of the Now.

MacSweeney returned to publishing in 1993 with Hellhound Memos, brought out by John Welch’s The Many Press in a small chapbook. The eight poems here are those not included in Wolf Tongue: though this arrangement isn’t entirely satisfactory, the reader can now piece together the whole sequence. The same year, his first selected poems The Tempers of Hazard, a joint effort with Chris Torrance and Thomas A. Clark, appeared from the commercial imprint Paladin. Like his foray with Hutchinson, the result has become notorious. Bought out by the Rupert Murdoch-owned HarperCollins, the poetry list was soon abolished and the volume swiftly remaindered and then pulped.

But with Pearl, published by Rod Mengham’s Equipage in 1995, MacSweeney began to regain a larger audience for his poetry. The Book of Demons, which reprinted the entirety of Pearl, followed from Bloodaxe in 1997. This recognition coincided with the terminal crisis of MacSweeney’s alcoholism. Though cared for extensively by his final partner, the poet S.J. (Jackie) Litherland, MacSweeney constantly relapsed into self-destructive drinking. While the lurid title sequence of Postcards from Hitler appeared in Wolf Tongue, the two long poems reprinted here show the fervent mixture of pessimism and bravado typical of MacSweeney’s late work.
Litherland and MacSweeney visited Paris in 1997, staying near Père Lachaise cemetery and spending time with the American poet Stephen Rodefer, who in the 1990s split his time between Cambridge and France. This visit resulted in the last two sequences in this book. The ‘collaboration’ with Guillaume Apollinaire, Horses in Boiling Blood, was printed by Equipage in 2004. The 28 poems here make up two-thirds of the sequence, and consist both of the long expositions and brief lyrical apostrophes that delighted MacSweeney in the French poet’s work. I have chosen not to include the complete book, because I want as far as possible to give equal weighting to each decade of MacSweeney’s writing life. The sheer volume of poetry MacSweeney produced in the 1990s is overwhelming. He wrote frantically, often marking his manuscripts with whatever time in the dead of night he abandoned his work, exhausted. Such work can be exhausting for the reader, too, who tires of the performance, alert to its repetitions.

It is a special and poignant pleasure, then, to present MacSweeney’s last long poem ‘Letters to Dewey’, which appeared in the Equipage pamphlet Sweet Advocate in 1999. Addressed to Rodefer’s child, this work of steady emotion suggests a new opening at the close of MacSweeney’s life. It is an advice poem, full of humour and regret, and begins to bring this volume to an end on a note of renewal. The final two poems, paired as False Lapwing by Peter Riley’s Poetical Histories imprint after the poet’s death, strike with hope and despair in equal measure. Printed on fine paper by letterpress, in the original edition they recall the care and consideration of the independent presses that supported MacSweeney, and that MacSweeney devoted his life to. It’s my hope that Desire Lines: Unselected Poems, 1966–2000 can do the same.

Luke Roberts

Further notes on the texts are located at the end of the book.
The Boy from the Green Cabaret Tells of His Mother (1968)
SAMPLER
The autobiography of Barry MacSweeney

Born in ‘The Village’, Benwell, Newcastle on Tyne, July 1948. Educated Rutherford Grammar School, best subjects art & english. About 1963 picked up in France a copy of Rimbaud’s *Illuminations* and *The Drunken Boat*. Then Baudelaire, Laforgue. Wrote first poems at school. That was a sissy thing to do of course. Began job as reporter on local evening paper. Met Basil Bunting, poet. Met Tom Pickard and Jon Silkin. Showed Bunting *Walk* poem, it came back sliced down to about 4 lines and a note: Start again from there. My first real lesson. Reporting gave me a sense of what words could be: economy and just get down the needed things, with no frills. Open to the city and the country. You can walk out of Newcastle for half an hour and be in greenery. The city gave words a harshness, like the steel or coal. Then I wd flit off to little stone cottages on the fells and fish for trout, and pick mushrooms. & swim in the freshwater lakes. Began to translate Laforgue, Cros, Corbière.

1966–67: newspaper packed me off to Harlow Technical College, Essex, on a full-time journalist diploma course. An opposite life altogether. Synthetic new town, a dormitory to London. Its population, commuters with a vengeance. And the land was flat, that was a shock. An utter antithesis to Newcastle. Everything was so clean and clear-cut, and the people, they didn’t belong, and had no roots in the town. Oasis. It was impossible to get involved. My eye, my colour/sluice became arbitrary for the first time. It was merely a funnel, and events and actions got a natural response from me. In Newcastle I was always too involved, always leaving pieces of myself against the walls. I wrote *The Boy from the Green Cabaret* poems in Harlow, and some political things for the first time. It was here I really woke up. Poems were fast and often, but it was bitter and solitary too. Spent days looking for some natural spot in the whole synthesis: found it, a small duck pond with sluice and lily-pads and foot-bridge. Told later it was one of the town planner’s landscaping tricks.

Left here July 1967, sans honneur, carrying a bad character report in my hand & some poems, returned home to get the sack. But they didn’t like the cut of my face either. Since then jobs as chief reporter in Cumberland, dole, reporter, social security, dole, gardener, dole. Now helps run Morden Tower poetry readings, and publishing posters and books. & of course writing poems. Wants to see poets get away from revisionism. Nobody returns in glory to Lucknow. and this is June, 1968, Newcastle.
To Lynn at Work Whose Surname I Don’t Know

The sun always goes down
like this between the
staithes of the High Level Bridge,
dragging a golden plate across
the sewage,

and then breaking it
among the rooftops of the
wharf-side houses and stores,
bending yellow slivers
up the mast of the red tug,
and on the starlings in the
chimney nests,
nooked in the lampblack and grey
shipping offices
above Sandgate.

the dusty navvies
back across the Tyne,
sledgehammer at red-brick walls in the heat,
and slate eves, lugging
concrete heaps and half-bricks
with knotted hankies on their broad heads.

pedestrians this way down to
Mosley Street and back to work.

now i think i will come to you
and ask you and pour the Tyne
and the sun’s bangles in your
lips and hair and bathe your
hands
in
this evening.
On the Gap Left After Leaving

I

When the coast
was not the coast
and sea was a shell
and shell-life was man,
   before the entire march began,
there had you, all you have now.
   before a crow
flew across
corn-mill flats
past the flat, hard elements.
before Sammy the poacher
ever tramped Killop
with half a dozen rabbits in the bag,
while all these houses
were fields and cowlands,
before the Paniards
were tractor-tooth bitten,
scarred with 1966.

2

In linctus eyes
that tell stories
of other stolen hours
the early harrow struck sun
reflects scenes
of dull ochre, squinting
through the gables of Tudor stone
in the orchard’s heart.

3

Sun lemons
blaze in bubbles
(old means,  
new, intricate designs), on leaves  
    where in winter  
i traced your hair,  
when windows were sculpted marble white,  
with frost, nightly—  
    —frozen.

Walk

Tynemouth priory stands  
sepia walled  
hunched in bony remnants  
of a holy rood,  
gaunt anatomy of stones  

cliffs plait  
light brown and black  
into shapes  
    above the splash  
    of paddlers  

wind hoys sea  

on shore,  
    glassing to a sand edge.  

Tynemouth curls like a cat  
along the coast  

the liner carries  
the breaking of sky  

sea is not for yielding  
except willeks
& pale
crabs,
sold on rough tables
(hewn as roughly as the fishers)
these fishing towns, crofts,
the lighthouse, foyboats, foymen—

They are allowed.

How soon before
coalfish
haddock
cod
are cold as diamond
in quayside barrels,
before the hull strikes
waves again?
again.
How long before
trawler crews rest their lids,
how long till nostrils are salt clean,
& fingers no longer grapple with nylon?

Then,
will they perch
like condors,
stooping for catches
with catgut claws?

It is not
of fish,
the sea
consists,

it is not
of water.
The Track, Fervour

each steel line fur to the wrist,
each man his own judgement,
to re-spirit the heart, churn the
vein roughly
to the platform of the muscles

it is a case of musicality and historical chance.
Kent in hazy june,
over the points,
    urgency in each nerve

look south look south
to the web about St Paul's
its scaffold crown
    hatching a blue sky
its engineers spidering the street

time is spared the honour
of rushing after.

    London air is clear, not sharp,
Compton St strippers
lack urgency they deserve,
cooly ask for sandwiches and beer

Rimbaud and Verlaine
swaggered in these same alleys
& the sun for Verlaine’s rosary
after a lover’s row

each friend away
from my outstretched hand,
and from my reason        oh
tell me it is not so
Sealine

woman lies on a couch of misery
with her dreams.
oh fertile architecture that replenished my eye
in dockland, where knotted groups
of pickets shook me as a friend
& grabbed my shoulders bruising me even in
their union strength. oh those cold lands i
must cover before she will rest in peace
on the shingle that clacks on the hulls
of Cuban sugar ships,

the weak brine of the thames as oily
it oodles round the wharfs. those delicate pebbles
and shells and waves those masts and store rooms
those cruel times by
the sea’s foundation

Bladder Wrack Blues

the sea is pregnant with bladder wrack
your bed was a groaning ship sounding
out the ocean floor

your house was a box where i kept my shoes
your chairs were bright blue & electric
but that was yesterday that was tomorrow
& never today