

As if Only

Also by Ian Davidson

It Is Now As It Was Then (*with John Muckle*)

No Passage Landward

Human to Begin With

The Patrick Poems

Wipe Out

Human Remains & Sudden Movements,

Harsh

At a Stretch

No Way Back

IAN DAVIDSON

As if Only

Shearsman Books
Exeter

Published in the United Kingdom in 2007 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
58 Velwell Road
Exeter EX4 4LD

ISBN-13 978-1-905700-08-0

ISBN-10 1-905700-08-3

Copyright © Ian Davidson, 2007.

The right of Ian Davidson to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Acknowledgments

Some of these poems have previously been published in the magazines *Big Bridge*, *Ecopoetics*, *Fieralingue*, *Fire*, *Jacket*, *Orbis*, *Pages*, *Poetry Wales* and the anthologies *Lie of the Land* and *Onsets*. *No Way Back* was published by West House Books as a pamphlet. My thanks to the editors concerned. These poems would not have been possible without the support of the Welsh Academy through its AHRC-funded fellowship scheme. My thanks to them.



The publisher gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from
Arts Council England.

CONTENTS

Introduction	7
The Body Con	11
Controlling the Page	17
hinge point	19
Letting in the Light	20
Sheet Music	28
The alley way – Barcelona 2004	32
Taking My Breath Away or Points of Entry	33
Sarn Helen	43
in bog myrtle	45
from this place	46
No Way Back	47
June 21 2004	50
assumed position	51
One Swallow	53
Toe Nail	59
the same circles	60
Out of Sight	65
Dream Boat	69
spending time	70
Bangor July 2005	71
In order 2	76
A Moment 2	77
signs of life	78
Making Up	79
The Independent	80
a little light industry	82
The Guantánamo Resort	84
moon and mist matters	85
waveform	86
Calling	87
Seas of flags	89
between mess and message	90
switching codes	91
bore hole	92
fish, flesh and fowl	93

Introduction

When the place runs out on you, either rushing through the broadband, slowly covered over by the rising sea or receding to a distant memory, then the only place left is the body. So I turned back on myself and picked over the marks on my skin. I photographed myself from close up. I lost weight and put it back on. I tried to find out how my insides worked. I started smoking again then gave it up, many times. I had to spend a week in hospital with a throat so swollen I could barely breathe, let alone eat or drink. So the poems are about the body, and the desire of the body to communicate with others, whether through the rustle of skin on skin or tapping the keyboard. They're about the way technologies keep people apart and bring them closer together.

These poems were written in Bangor, in north Wales, in Barcelona, in London, on the Baltic coast and in Fez and Marrakech. Despite the distances involved they are the result of a period of introspection and self-possession. Travel doesn't necessarily broaden the mind. In some cases only the long lines would do, and the language had to be chewed over, while in others, when the town was quiet and the blood had stopped pounding in my head, I could clip the tone and measure out the words a few at a time.

A lot happened in the two years in which these poems were written. There was a war, and there were bombs in London. There were things hardly possible to deal with, including the return of an imperialist and colonialist attitude that I thought was part of history and would never return in my lifetime. Some of that gets in the poems. But I was mainly interested in myself, and how I'd got the way I had. How the traces of a life had marked the skin.

Ian Davidson

As if Only

The Body Con

Coda

And as if it was only the lifting
Or the sheer state of material
And as if it was only the wave formed
Or the sternum's fold

Where the organs sit where the
Internal becomes entwined at the
Seat of emotion the peristaltic
Gesture of movement towards

The organic from
Half open air seeps into
The interior is
Corrugated and the emotions

Bump towards language across the
Ridges in the brow towards
The furrowed teeth
The clenched aorta

I.

Whatever I may feel inside whenever I feel cut off from
as if the word feel becomes another word or if the word feel
paired with the word feel lost its harmonic and the unpaired

Becomes the impaired as if one half has been removed and the
single hand flapping helplessly in the space left to itself

This is a full body scan apt to discover the slightest
imperfection in excess body hair or a muscle out of place

don't do casual
don't do glance

It was only a branch line a further frame of reference another
addition to the sum of human contact or the careful phrasing of
language left out cell touching cell and prisoners of desire your

breast beneath the single sheet I was moved imperceptibly as if
the friction of hands across skin and all the inner mechanics

Oxygen bubbling up in blood the lesser curvature of the
stomach the superior part of the duodenum the lesser moment
beneath the skin the fish hooks of the present, gift wrapped

and knotted with bows becomes a present from the past or the
anxiety of a disappearing future a matter of presentation or
oiled to perfection from the con to the conviction an issue of

Incapacity or the shrinking fear I add up the prose and cons watch
the grey surface of the water become turquoise behind pale pink of
cloud cover wipe the surface of the eye as if loneliness was

Meant to be you have created a surface that both attracts and repels
you have groomed yourself to the last tip of each strand of hair pulled
lashes from their origins and the heart still or the heart beats or the

Kidneys take a breather and the liver's silent shudder as it squeezes
and filters out you adjust your diet according to your strength of feeling
I fought back the emotion scared that my organisation would barely

Cope or equanimity permanently threatened and breath
control become ungoverned you picked at crisps dis
carded the salad went for maximum calories as if your

Breasts might swell to their origins or your skinny frame regain its
given shape. You are cont. you go on and

maybe the consequence of many large branches from
straight line geometry or even the curves of calculus unable
to explain organs crossing apparently out of scale. I dismantled a

Body it was an imperfect fit according
to the laws of sexual activity they began to reflect

mirror mirror
that's an order

When sliced across the middle she writhes and the hairs on her
face began to glow and her tongue could
simply twitch I mean he demonstrated

By means of colour photography that a mixmaster can cause considerable
confusion if applied incorrectly or simply to the wrong body part and
then in their sickness or emotion or sex or the recognition of the love con.

It is a question of scale, scales falling from the eyes until in the
enormity of the imprinted word cutting across the organism like a
stick of rock the arrangement becomes tortuous and twisted

2. Where Ideas Come From

Shaking hair again and creating desire from nowhere and
looking up with the light behind said where do ideas come from
and I indicated the area around my line of vision and spread open

My hands tore down the curtains until out into the night sky there
was everything laid bare and she looked at me again and I began to get
ideas and their shapes were like things that could not be named but I

Began to name them. I stared hard at the top left hand corner under which
all who pass
will love and love again and I disappeared and the ideas came as if

From asking why too many times until the question became so familiar
that the unmarked underside turns to face the sun or the clear skin is
transparent as if the fabric of existence was torn in many places

and think
where do ideas

Come from as a limb wormed its way past or a cure for the present the ribbons
and bows from the waist skin stretched across stomach muscles which
was where ideas came from or the empty head that twitches towards the

Text message nothing going down or coming up I'll contact someone so
that's where ideas come from an abbreviated text or a Glasgow kiss c u
Jimmy an idea in the world might be from the heart or a baby's

Body split down the centre through an abrasion of the ear via interference
how the screen divided and the one and the other or the synchronic shifting of
affection nor the first nor the last and when a body leaves a body turning

A fresh page then the insides rustle there's a readjustment of the digestive
system an acceptance of food the slow torture of the worm turning more
definition less breath the medium becomes porous as in streaming the

Loss of moisture from the inside out she held up her
skin he folded back said that's

Where ideas come from or he stroked the surface and said
here is an idea the sound of milk being loaded or the early
call I've no idea where ideas come from maybe the morning light

3.

When the cracks show it is easy to make poetry.
Dismantling a psyche painfully arranged by the creaking
machinery of lightweights takes merely a steady push or a few
carefully placed words. Between the cracks I insert the words
ripping pieces levering open by means of applied

strategy and the whys and wherefores. It continues although
stuttering slightly rocking and off guard. Escape when the chance
arises. The malice of a destruction worker knows no bounds he can pick
up the pieces of a discarded life an old fireplace a piece of wall paper a
feeling for an old friend the trace of residency and through the insertion of

no more than a short bar bring the gables tumbling those walls so
painfully constructed by idiot matter come rippling into dust and then
the organs are revealed. The organisation of the inner structure is laid
thread bare. What a micro skirt could only hint at what a stumble
on the steps or a quiet moment might simply pin drop between

the arrangement of fibres and then the twitching frog of an inside
and self righteousness can begin to assert itself through the rough
cast of a locality the heather on the hills the moon rising behind a
bank of cloud a mountain frozen into presence. I have no support
structures no failsafe no ground beneath my feet no decency

Controlling the Page

There were no fit words

the words bounced back
unfit for use

when addressed I respond well whatever

I want to write about loss
as if through the grammar of glass
I want to write about this much

Things out of all proportion
the distance between digits intimate beyond the body
and trying not to write anything down
and scared of the dark
I repeat catch phrases knocking them dead

Narratives provide evidence
of opposing thoughts
I do mind the steps
they disturb me
the moment in which failing to play the game
the play became mechanical geared into itself the
dispersion of heat across bearings

It was a stand up world
where nobody asks why
resisting the desire to communicate
eager to please
inhabited out of deficiency

*This is my story, this is why I
am different, this is where I was*

It is not a lifestyle choice
but a consequence I have not
eaten the fruits of my toil there were
hours never in or out of work never in or
out of work or the space a hand makes on another

body spread across the
back the belly and a capacity within
the spaces inside I never realised such
shallowness existed re-writing
a history for every new context this is
what has happened to me and with
each re-telling shrinking the margins of the
world pieces of flesh lopped off

Going to the dogs and never big enough
inside never space in a
shrunk head or a heart that hardly
beat and devoted to your own story
you told yourself a thousand times
I can't because out of all that is

hinge point

it was a hinge point one of those events where
the past began to close up on the future
it was a can of worms breaking out just
beneath the surface a cannot on every lip
we will or will do nothing I walked the streets
by day I travelled the elementary canal I trawled
the suds at the basin's edge it was nothing to do with
rational it was every thing on legs that crawled or
human values like laughter or time and place
I could live anywhere or with any one seems like

I have extracted the meat from the bone
I have developed curvature of the upper back
I am wrapping myself in skin

Letting in the Light