

## CONDITION OF FIRE



# Condition of Fire

JL WILLIAMS

Shearsman Books  
Exeter

First published in the United Kingdom in 2011 by  
Shearsman Books  
58 Velwell Road  
Exeter EX4 4LD

<http://www.shearsman.com/>

ISBN 978-1-84861-145-0

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### **Acknowledgements**

These poems were written on the isle of Salina, one of the volcanic  
Aeolian Islands off the coast of Sicily in the Tyrrhenian Sea, said to be  
the home of the god of winds.

Utmost gratitude to the Scottish Arts Trust, Robyn Marsack and to  
Edwin Morgan for the Edwin Morgan Travel Bursary that made this  
journey possible.

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*for RJ Iremonger mea lux*

But certainly it is always to the Condition of Fire, where emotion is not brought to any sudden stop, where there is neither wall nor gate, that we would rise; and the mask plucked from the oak-tree is but my imagination of rhythmic body. We may pray to that last condition by any name so long as we do not pray to it as a thing or a thought, and most prayers call it man or woman or child.

W.B. Yeats, *Anima Mundi*

Now that it's all finally in the past,  
it seems almost as if you gave yourself  
to those desires too—how they glowed,  
remember, in eyes that looked at you,  
remember, body, how they trembled for you in those voices.

C.P. Cavafy, *Body, Remember . . .*  
translated by Edmund Keeley & Philip Sherrard



*Note to reader*

Many of the stories and all of the lists are drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.



## Black Island in the Dusk

Who is the intruder?

Before it was sunrise  
but now it is sunset that reminds  
me I am alive.

A handful of fire.

# 0

Make the shape of a zero with your fingers.  
Hold this shape to your eye.  
Look out onto the black sea,  
the black shore.

## Remote Beginning

I

Life that rises from the core of the earth,  
leaks from the lips of stone,  
boils the mountain's skin,  
enters the sea.

Light in the sky at night, fire in the leaves.

Uvula of the chaos stretched to a thread.

White light spreading over the surface of sea.

Two rocks watch the light, have the faces of men.

A place from which movement begins,  
skeleton of flames.

Bells in a stone tower,  
the fire, the womb.

The tongue.  
The flame.  
The star.

THE END OF BELIEF.

## II

The bat, its face a plum warmed by the sun.

The tongue is the root of the flame.

He exhales. His body sinks,

a plug of lead in a carcanet of fish.

They enter into his nose, his mouth,  
they fill up his ears.

He reaches out out is a school of fish  
ducking this way, that way toward shallower water.

## III

It was made from fire (she opens her mouth).

### TIME

comes out,

crashes the sky,

threshing the breasts of her children.

I am sorry for in truth I am better than this;  
a waterfall of fire in a place with no gravity.

## Imago

He thought of so many ways to make this  
(veined wing, weightless thing),  
walked in nothingness dreaming.

Gathered and tossed stars like coins or  
(gold, glass)  
marbles.

The stars weren't anything.

He decided to separate first  
earth sky sea land heaven air  
(heavy earth, light heaven),  
let them find their places  
in and round the world.

How he enjoyed the splashing sound  
(azure, periwinkle, emerald, cobalt, violet, cornflower, blue)  
that snaked and pooled and froze, in places, rose.

The winds, his children, he banished each to their rooms.

The sea made fish, the air birds, the heavens gods, the land beasts  
and man was moulded by Prometheus, who found in mud  
flakes of scattered stars, and wetting them in rivers shaped  
creatures with eyes looking upwards, who walked dreaming.

# Drowning

I

She dies but there is no trace of her on the radar.  
The bat's voice echoes back  
tension of sea.

Below, weed-coated rocks.  
Like caterpillars, fish  
hack a mouthful, chew, take no notice.

II

I want another word for dying –  
change is good.

For beginnings to exist  
there must be change.

We can explain things via change,  
make loss gain.

III

I had hands,  
then they were fins.  
Sometimes, wings.

Watch the bat.  
Watch the fish underwater.



I swam with a rock in my hand.

When I took it out of the water,  
it wept.

**Proserpine says,**

I want to tell you seven things about dying.

The first is that some people do come back.

Death makes changes happen to the living.

Mothers never recover from the death of their children.

Death is capable of love.

Of death fruit grows.

The dead that partake inure themselves to death.

It is colours you will miss when you are dead.