

Ken Edwards

Collected Poems

1975–2020

SAMPLE

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Erik Satie loved children

For June/Des

1975

SAMPLER

SAMPLER

Postwar

on hitting the
black-&-white tiles
the water-melon
burst
pink sugary flesh
spattered everywhere

the clocks stop
“high noon”

dust—

Removals

away into the street the poems blow
west is east & east is west

after all the century belongs to Rimbaud
“you have crushed the grape”

at noon on another street I slough off wrinkles
naked in shark-infested waters

taking a yellow match I set fire to my room
then start again

Coltrane's Narrow Road

the molten rhythm section
 is also atomized
& that in any case is the way

your bright new frying-pan
a pale crescent shining

(the frisson I get from Basho)

Four White Pieces

1
matches & fag-ends cram an ashtray
in the stainless steel room
the woman with white logs
poses (wearing headphones?)

2
my eyes big as my boots
my boots & the piano cadence
Erik Satie loved children
look! I'm a lion!

3
a wooden mule & a wooden pig
stand on 9 paperback novels
tomorrow there'll be coffee
& careful words. as usual

4
the toast has melted the butter
the sky has melted the birds
you in the kitchen looking for the cat
me taking the sky upstairs
on a plate

Drumming & poems

1982

SAMPLER

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John Coltrane, Live in Seattle, Impulse AS-9202-2

“You must change your life”

Utterance: any continuous stretch
of speech or writing from a single source

Attendance: to what is there
& what is not there; activational.

Resistance at all points: to corroding
of ideology by “the natural”; to procedure

that carries prescription, that
doesn’t enact or become

bed, flower, decomposed into
the stain of collective extasy.

SAMPLER

The Firmament Doth Shake

Or the light, or the
Figure itself. Monday morning, not

Reggae boom, the big lorries
Thunder; as sleep glues eyes.

In your own words to
Make music, building Jerusalem in

England's (Inglan's) green & gorgeous
Wastes, the car lots filled

With floodlight & all the
Smoke you can see. Skin

Stretches, & cars are driven
Thro' grilles, matt lustrous &

Matt, Colour Separation Overlay, you
Bet they'd judged them seductive.

Wake to flutter & sun
Full-blown thro' the rainbow

Arch, wake bath'd in the
Irradiated TV meta-language you

Already speak, sclerotic with direct
Juxtaposition of unrelated events, kiss

Kiss No Problem you just
Climb into the heat &

Good Science

1992

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SAMPLER

Blaze

for Joseph Beuys

Semen and
menstrual blood
stain the shelf
surround

an inventor
of metaphors
an idiot
refuses

wholly
a tool without
blood on it
means naked

people with
animals took
him out of this
crash heap

so he
related such
material to
the social body

to a screen
image to a
broken line
suddenly

crumbled it
looked
secure but
blood reaches

to the throat
the terror
region
a drum rally

into a steeple
geese fly
the basic
stuff of risk

luminous
through the
webbed skeleton
or through

assembled dirt
for contemplation
a small book
during the war

immediately
possible for
human discipline
meaning

more basic
to warmth
more basic to
coldness

SAMPLER

collapse began
to damage
the rule
structure

to come
to that again
wailing through
the long

work
in wood stain
his courage
phases

in fields
far from holy
flocks or
trails

coarse gritty
abandoned
moist poignant
a kind of

real other
excavation
of nail-paring
shadow

lasts for
1,000 years
then vacates
the building

physical flesh
to become
windstream
a new sculpture

a wound that
doesn't
know its own
price

a gauge
of what is
likely
to take place

a crown that's
melted to an
animal born
gold

mixed with
alcohol
transformed
to peace

or a tree
with a
stone is
beautiful

SAMPLER

Lashed to the Mast

1

The timer clicks
the flame bursts
the children
were found wandering in the
garden
— afraid
to spin madly
into this white book —
“the walls just fell away”
“I had expected
serious injuries even
some fatalities so I was
pleasantly surprised”
watch the nets a
crisis in the nasal passages
they will decide
whether to
testify
you know that
heaven &
earth was
lashed
“I did not paint it
to be enjoyed”

*

Blood

enters the painting & a
weary languor fills my wallet

while up

stairs the sirocco burns
the leaves off the pods off

oh my

when will the summers of old
return to transfigure the future

being

a representation of what you can
never have like California sex

so that

we shall meet again in the fields but
shan't remember our names or why

and call

mother mother it's no use the water's
burning the wind the water the sun

*

One evening the sky looks
like a Rothko heavy pink-grey
bearing down on a band of ice-blue
the next it's a mottled burn
spread from its milky heart behind
the offices it is driving you quite mental
yet hopeful but strange
lumpish cloud returns today
to hide the rest of the universe

*

Worries about Money

make chemical changes
in the mind which are boring
in the blood
stains fade into the post-

A New Word Order

When all is said & done, then
There is everything still to say & do;
As when, growing much older, one starts to become
Less interested in meanings, more in the look, the sound. Under
Our very feet the stars clump: Procyon, Rigel,
Aldebaran. Or do they? Is it just possible they are no more
Than linguistic sequences, a banal melody that
Merely happens, like, preset 200,000 times
Precisely, regardless of need? We switch
200,000 times between event & grid. *Cut.* A European city at night
Is spread before us: on the late bus
The ensemble sings a raucous song, draws smiley eyes on the wet glass
Before leaving on an endless quest. Within
The incipient rain-forest in an under-construction bank foyer
The juicy realistic look of nature takes shape; the phone network
Evolves an ecology of its own, but crashing all the time; in a hotel
The size of a small airport 107 delegates
Are trying to liberalise world trade. *Cut.*
The words of the press release, once incandescent, fly
Into the spaces the edge left. (There's no edge.)
Fire, blood & alphabet, as Lorca says,
But now lacking ardour, haemoglobin: it's a game
Where facetiousness
And seriousness are inseparable; where
The jocular and the intimate form a badinage
Which conceals, reveals for a moment,
Then conceals again. On the other hand
Things are more like they are now
Than they ever were before.
And it somewhat follows that two-dimensional thrust-vectoring exhaust
nozzles with cold-start droop and gun turrets slaved to helmet
sights, combined with fire-&-forget carbon-fibre reinforced
integral throat entrance structures are what they seem, a
superabundance of gas, food, beauty & drugs. Whatever it takes.
Cut.
A vain attempt lurks on the cusp. The cusp of what?
Badinage is when you're bad but really it's good.

*

Dark rain. Begin again.
Dark shadows everywhere, yellow light seeps, but above
There's a paler sky, getting ready to precipitate.
More horizon than fact, sheet steel becomes water on the reservoir, clotted
with seabirds, and rooks hunched on posts on the sandbags, yet
It's a desert, that is, a place of language,
Or you could say:
The canopy of the firmament, held aloft by the ancient god, but that
Doesn't work any more.
In Washington today the White House spokesman said: "It's not necessary
To create beauty but, hell, let's do it anyway." Forty-two per cent
Of the American people back the President, forty-eight per cent are against,
Ten per cent don't know. In London
The FT100 simpers & blushes, a rush of gold to the head,
Of oil & gold, the pound
Peeps shyly out from its basket
Of currencies, the metaphoric unreality
Of such events no longer cuts against
Their cinematic truth. It is good, & fashionable too
For walls to tumble — one nation, one people,
Many cell-phones — such simple rules, such
Complicated behaviour!
On the minus 4th day of Xmas,
His running shoes dedicated to the goddess,
A less than magnificent jogger stumbles by
Plunging into & out of tunnels of mathematics
Humming the ballad of Peckham Rye
Beneath the enormous sky; is interfered with by an expostulant jaywalker
Shrouded in glory, babbling of
Jesus in a strange hat. *Cut* to interior, close-up,
As if the telescopic view had of a sudden become microscopic:
A gecko marvellously switches
Between action & inaction, an incredible device
With suckers on his feet, for the distempered wall;
Caked with mould,
A tiny tonal jewel, a chemical flambeau — not much else on the box these
days you notice — montages onto the

3,600 Weekends

An Autobiography in Several Modes

1993

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SAMPLER

Abstractedly

That I walked alone in the dark city midst
That a melody stated in background decay
Became tone values deftly hot but unknown
That the sun went down thereon
Smoked into a bass line all of this

The urge was toward feeling/internalising ghosts
Deep layers that could be us under that grill
Radiant as you please
(Bloke in the pub mentions the stink
Said I'm crazy about the section for improvisation
I said I needed a challenge that's why I left
Then I got very sick
The music stopped / ceasing its combustion
I was out for two months beginning to take shape
Listened for rhythmic inspiration
It was tremendously exciting I haven't
Felt that way since
The day to day began to look different)
I woke up hello mum I said this is war
Said the bunny I was onto something

Bilaterally

At which point I became impermeable space
Locked onto the picturesque picture
They said was representation
Kind of half mottled & beginning to decay
Outward in huge chunky dispersal patterns
Surely the world could not be like this

They told me I had to decide
Between the desire to know
And the necessity of knowing
Between the first words & the actual demonstration
Culpably fatuous
Thick smoke billowed over my childhood
Making its heat yet more dolorous
And its extremities smart
Such as eyes mouth sensuous lips of grossness
Giving its heat to the solid pavements
That had supported those we shall never know
Already dissolved in the removed ocean's welter
Like animals
Waiting in the street for Jesus

Blankness swallowed another such landscape
Foolishness cloaked the bus
A book of metaphysics that I discerned at hand
Disintegrated into the aureate fog
The loving heartbeat became anecdotal
All wishes achieved their final purchase all
Fulfilment became sense

Cursively

Those were the days & this was the day
Whose burnt configurations delaminated
Joking lads who burst through a train
Monkeys so macho they don't even close the doors
Behind them a civilisation wrecked itself
On an overdose of sugar
And a superfluity of media coverage

Two blocks away a torrential burglar alarm
Pours bulbul sweetness into the night air
Vanquishing pain joining up the letters of thought
Fishing for compliments the policemen
Of the imagination have entered the solstice
Slaking their ominous portfolios thus
As the city sleeps
The score is even

Now the ambulance arrives it's close to midnight
Somebody open that window
Count the heads give me some feedback
Become a lovely coin of value
A perfect end to such a perfect day

Discursively

We have different resistances to the crunch
When the whole wide world
Destabilises we share “the wine
Of what’s true in the glasses of what’s false”
(Or: what is / is clothed in what is not)

Light shines through some of us in the midst
Of language in the physical sense
Edits out the odd duff moment no more
The impedance to desire
To be read to the absolute limit
Beyond which soft mistake
Any dark interior & isn’t it serious pattern
Collapses into hopeless giggles the deep thick air
Draped between us in such fashion
That we may partake

Thus the world is discovered
Written on the heart of each one
Alternately mute & garrulous
In the wonder of it that it should sound OK
But if nobody’s certain that’s
Because of the interior’s inherence
And the exterior’s gratuitous wobble
Shaking sense out of sense
Changing the resistances to such liquid
Crystal
Substance a valid pleasure

The Glory Boxes

2000-02

SAMPLER

SAMPLER

Glory Box: 1

when meadow reflections from the earth
moved swiftly celestial keeping light
on the threshold of form
the bedroom unlocked as a dream.
By night or day across the desert things
broadly divided into two
categories
the tree itself or its
process of fruit-bearing
when the heavens had lifted a little
while the birds turned
headlong, into a
cauldron of figures,
recklessly mixing
to a field, to a tessitura
of time
to reach the end of the
unpredictable periplus.
And while a thought dissipated
in terms of its
deductions and
consequences for the
future
and with the heart covered with hair
the series led into
fundamental errors of
conception.
While worlds written by evolution call on every side
while signal coloration shines, and leaps
from existing objects, to
ensembles of probable
objects
to groups of differing
objects
spinning in a new direction, trailing
diverse material

the light is on his way
towards true continuity,
this being
to see-saw from one to
the other.

And even with something focused on the wall behind
some fragments from blackness under eyelids shaped
as if with fractured smoke
give rise to striking
contrasts, due to
accompanying semblance. Haunted when in water
to go beyond tempered
space
let me hear those drifting coronal lesions

SAMPLER

eight + six

2003

SAMPLER

Mostly for Elaine

SAMPLER

PART I

Darkly Slow*

Bring back the persons! I

Ups & says

they are bipolar & splendid

The jogger in the park, the murderer in the dark

They're so lonely, they speculate, give em something to do

The imaginary persons right here

Wherever that may be, beloved, awed

And in a cloud (a crowd)

he she & you

Catching the eye, ordering a round for the unknowables

Bring em all back, I don't want to see them go

One's at a university in the snow

Another on the beach, one praying for the souls in woe

Oh sad poet please be on your toes

The boat casts off, the buddleia grows

And what's behind the moment's horizon no-one knows

* *The title is a direct translation of Elliott Carter's "Adagio Tenebroso".*

The Anthropic Principle

This is not me (says Me)
a terpsichore of invention, it is what I
says or transforms to blaze or daze
as in the sun or certain main-sequence stars
which make the carbon of “my” culture
whither it becomes the social body
through ratio & constant* that could have been
no other number.

And for our next
a jump-technology of reference
that changes, hazes
come down to us through the fm band
Oh the trombones bark

The forest is young again
So fill me [] in

SAMPLER

* Planck’s Constant (6.6262×10^{-34}) governs the nucleosynthetic process by which stars convert hydrogen to the heavier elements of which we are made.

Lambently Fluid

Is there a better way of saying this?

I hope so. Did the dog

beg her master for the stick

to be thrown? And did she give

unconditional love, obeisance, abasement?

Did summer come & go?

Were resources wasted? Did the park

turn from green to brown & back to green?

Do any here know what they are, can we ever know, these intangibles of comfort

their cheeks to our jowls, who sometimes stay with us for a while but eventually

get up & go, allowing others to join us in their turn, & still others after them

the spaces cumulating until finally they too take their leave & all is as before?

SAMPLER

Lunar Holography

Did you see our shadow creep up on the moon* stealing a
bite of luminosity? That was Thursday—well
I write this in the interim or do I mean
the ante-room where it seems as though I'm slowly being
rotated under a bright light did you
ever get that feeling? When you are no longer there
each trip, a rare adventure in prospect
ends the same way, mildly toxic, no problem

Ghosts in the plumbing, fox rot in the suburban verge
beer & biriani would do it—or not, for I am
wrecked without you and would have you return forthwith.
I send packages into that ether men do call foreign
parts, hoping for reciprocity—what comes back
the “Don’t panic” code, smoke moving behind the lights

SAMPLER

* Lunar eclipse visible in London, 9/10 December 1992.

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we sham & pretend sickness
hedge-robbers & strippers of children
or perhaps we poor
going naked or at least hardly
no clothes on our back
bare armed & bare legged
our hair is long & filthily knotted
a staff in our cheating hands
yet we will say
how piteously and most extremely
we have been beaten

SAMPLER

outside the Crown
 Bank Holiday Monday
 a lusty strong rogue they say
 queer cove & all
 who feigneth himself mad and carrieth a pack of wool
 or a stick or such like toy
 I see the straw hanging upon thy cap & coat
 face stares like a Saracen
 smoking a fag no care for a ban
 conversing to women & children
 out the corner of's mouth
 and a withered greyhound in a shirt
 laid on the pavement with them others
 in the name of Rawhead or Bloodybones
 some of these be merry & very pleasant
 some others be as cold & reasonable
 to talk with all
 as a banker with's PIN & plastic
 and empty toxic promises

SAMPLER

hungry ghosts
 antickly tricked-up with ribbons, red tape, foxtails, rags
 we amuse you
 fling dust in your eyes
 from our pockets
 or from imagination strange tales
 of drowning & running over
 then our comrade under the notion of pity
 would lay his hand on whatever came near
 rooky rooking you angels
 delicate as you like

4

bluffers & divers, dukes & gills
down on our luck
says we done this that or t'other
for which banged up
yet not one in twenty was in prison for any such cause
a sheet about's bodys
hanging to the hams, bandolier-wise
them walking up & down the country more terribly
we will dance & sing & sing
and dance till the thing
runs out
so that in the finish when us come
up before the beak
queer cuffin, hoggish & choleric
there'll be the end to this dance
be hanging be the neck

5

you will not be rid of us
we will pick or steal poultry or linen
will demand bacon, cheese or wool
or anything that is worth money
with the fierce countenance of a football supporter
down the Shed or North Bank as t'was
in days of youth
mojos & pins stuck into our flesh
to excite pity
and all women that wander be at our commandment
wee veteran vagrants, tramps
in the wind & the rain
bound for England's glory for
salvation in a digital shadow in a
tidal basin of TV celebrity
you will not be rid of us for we are
heading for Abraham's balsam

give me my slate & put it round
me carcase of no account
the flesh of arms or back
shall be scarce covered as I booze
my last
I say it is small & naughty drink
light of the morning to you

SAMPLER