

## Paris 1912

We spend our lives trying to construct sentences,  
then ache to undo them when action will not fit  
the mood. I told her things I did not mean,  
she said a doll, dismantled to the tune of a tango:  
nine to five, driving at seventy in the middle lane,  
cramming more hours into the day. I saw her  
pear-chopped beneath the girdered sky,  
a bunch of bananas in the square, sprouting  
from beside her torso. I wanted to say,  
I meant to say, I always said, there is this wish,  
egg, pipe, ball, rod, emblems of play  
in a sailor's barracks. You come as a shadow  
beneath the tower, the arches,  
a muse with harlequin boxes and cylinders.  
I have my canvas, framed. There is the smoke  
of a train leaving, puffs as fish  
in the living room. The scholar waits,  
a balloon beckons. I take the words apart  
in imitation of the dream.

(from *Azimuth*, Binnacle Press, 1984; reprinted in *Music's Duel*,  
Shearsman Books, 2009)

## Tundale

And now we are called to account, in a failure  
of memory, the drumbeat making bad blood  
emerge from a dance-hall decade of abandon,  
as if the way we were was some superior sap.  
Hold up the mirror and we are monsters  
slithering across each other's loins,  
our gossamer wings bogged in dishonour  
while the magistrate of games looks on.  
Should we creep out of these flower peelings,  
abbreviate this prancing round the pool,  
when each strawberry in smell and taste  
calls up a prospect of antibodies?  
It is a park of altered habits, no reason  
to deny what we gained in the fairest season.

(from *Elizabethan Overhang*, 1989; reprinted in  
*Music's Duel*, Shearsman Books, 2009)

## Roxy

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The world lies open, a double slab.  
It's still to be done, or already done,  
a mildewed hoard with a cracked hinge  
still holding. It's a fortress  
or mortuary temple  
that yet has marks which stalk  
the landscape.  
There's a deep blue entry  
to horizontal rows,  
a script which contains  
only itself and more.  
You could come to the same  
along simple paths  
perhaps, with punctuation  
starting to bud.

(from *Roxy*, West House Books, 1996; reprinted in  
*Music's Duel*, Shearsman Books, 2009)

# Bacon Heads

in space **alone** a mouth screams  
leathery

from blitzed satin

in one **fix** or another

unnamable graft  
ergot stubble

**gibbers** to be

zinc on furls

**can't** be dodged

snout of all pomp

ar**raigned** with a tassle

under the case: **eclipse**

Francis Bacon, **Heads I-VI**  
Hanover Gallery, 8 November-10 December, 1949

(from *Days of '49*, West House Books, 1999;  
reprinted in *Music's Duel*, Shearsman Books, 2009)

## Swimmer's Wake: 4 Nashscapes

In both places I was nearly drowned . . . [by]  
spring or winter seas.

Paul Nash, *Outline* (1949)

Stone, wood, iron  
waves  
heave and curl

crash against  
outcrop pyramids  
rattled  
at the join

a triquet splayed  
to try  
the sousing spirit

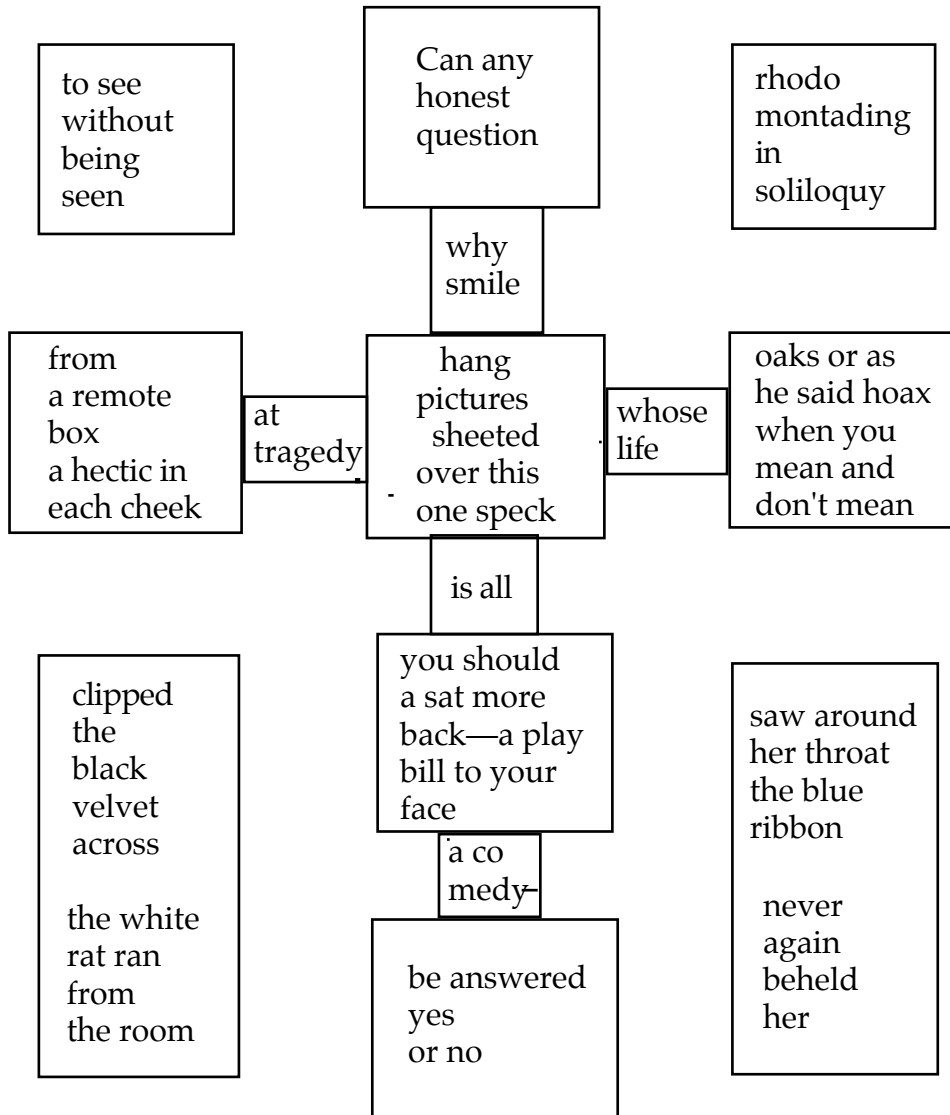
who approaches  
in the lighthouse beam  
on a cliff to the north  
in December  
its edge a zig-zag tear

a path of plates  
blades or folds  
back to the skyline  
bitter and beguiling  
draws

this eye  
the field  
of lash and buffet  
to rest  
as birds  
go down  
a flake mere  
re-plied  
in wonder strike

(from *Music's Duel*, Shearsman Books, 2009)

# CROSS CARPET



(from *Le Fanu's Ghost*, Five Seasons Press, 2006)

## Monody: R.B.S. Death Mask

Pebblehead  
(whose smooth  
rogue or fool now)  
streaked—grey on white

eyes settled / breath arrested /  
teeth gone where the upper lip  
caves in / from this side  
right a carbuncle pokes

all points down that DAZZLED  
gold on green  
piercing pupils, dress coat and cravat  
wild, poised, melodious  
to cut up—quiz—annihilate  
whoever cranks the vol in luminous

are these lips pursed in self-sarcasm  
the man of big estate  
who never had a shilling

dread of being taken  
in a horse-blanket  
to a sponging-house

grips his sometime mistress' hand  
from a truckle-bed in a garret  
swears to look up brightly as ever  
to the coffin-lid

two operations are enough  
in one man's life—  
to have his hair cut  
and to sit for his picture

send for spiced wine and toast!

(from *Le Fanu's Ghost*, Five Seasons Press, 2006)

## Bone Metallic

What story holds here  
pebble-human half polished  
a little piece every contour learnt  
to gross up and win at point of chisel  
a curve of hill mossy crag with mine-shaft  
or stark fault this is home a childhood  
for bluff recall mother lamp-light lode  
bearing on throne care sturdy as long neck  
reaches from shoulder a castle tower over ward  
never to admit what strain has some trench to scoop  
then further cleft or cave so comes a pierced skull  
better absent belief all in mustard haze  
under night flare sings quiet by day  
a bolder legend not after a medal  
just pull comrade it'll count as much  
when shorn limbs speak on plinth  
a dale myth there t'remember  
the force drives on afresh  
where tube sleepers  
go abstract in green

(from *Music's Duel*, Shearsman Books, 2009)



## la lampe

*The work one does is a way of keeping one's diary*  
—Picasso to Tériade

Before an archway half-grated  
she is the question mark, a chalky bust  
with aura, sculpted centre  
of pliant canvas. Her eye lures  
wild a leaning embryo. Her nose  
projects to scent a philodendron, gives—  
green hands pushing—a garland unbelieved  
in chateau stable. Where's the Paris apartment  
laid across jealous wood? Roots in the drain  
say no, or half, to a chic ballerina  
whose wanted ties sleep in the drawer.  
Skin, moist violet steals a curve, a triangle  
on stone, as his hat (kerosene or car lamp)  
shines an arc, lemon tail of hair.

You are my palette, you are my force:  
between two 'D's particles spin  
a lyric cyclotron. Out of collar, dress,  
cloth on a turntable, the whole thing rises  
when credit doesn't perform.  
A touch away from storm division  
this could be a model sleep,  
bullhead against beauty's face.  
Like they say meet morphs into mate.  
Naughty child, angry god, the clown  
draws a line round his think. Bluff to weave  
under initials. We can play is a chart  
to guide blind, the little habits to share big.  
Now, through nine reels of city lights  
feeling moves beneath treacle. Each rule  
folds to create: we don't need talk  
if it's a quacking kazoo.

Boisgeloup, 21 Jan-8 June, 1931

(from *Entailing Happiness: friends of Robert Vas Dias  
celebrate his eightieth birthday*, Infinity Press, 2010;  
launched January, 2011)

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