

Reviews of ‘The Status Report’

“Not bad”

John, London

“Poncey”

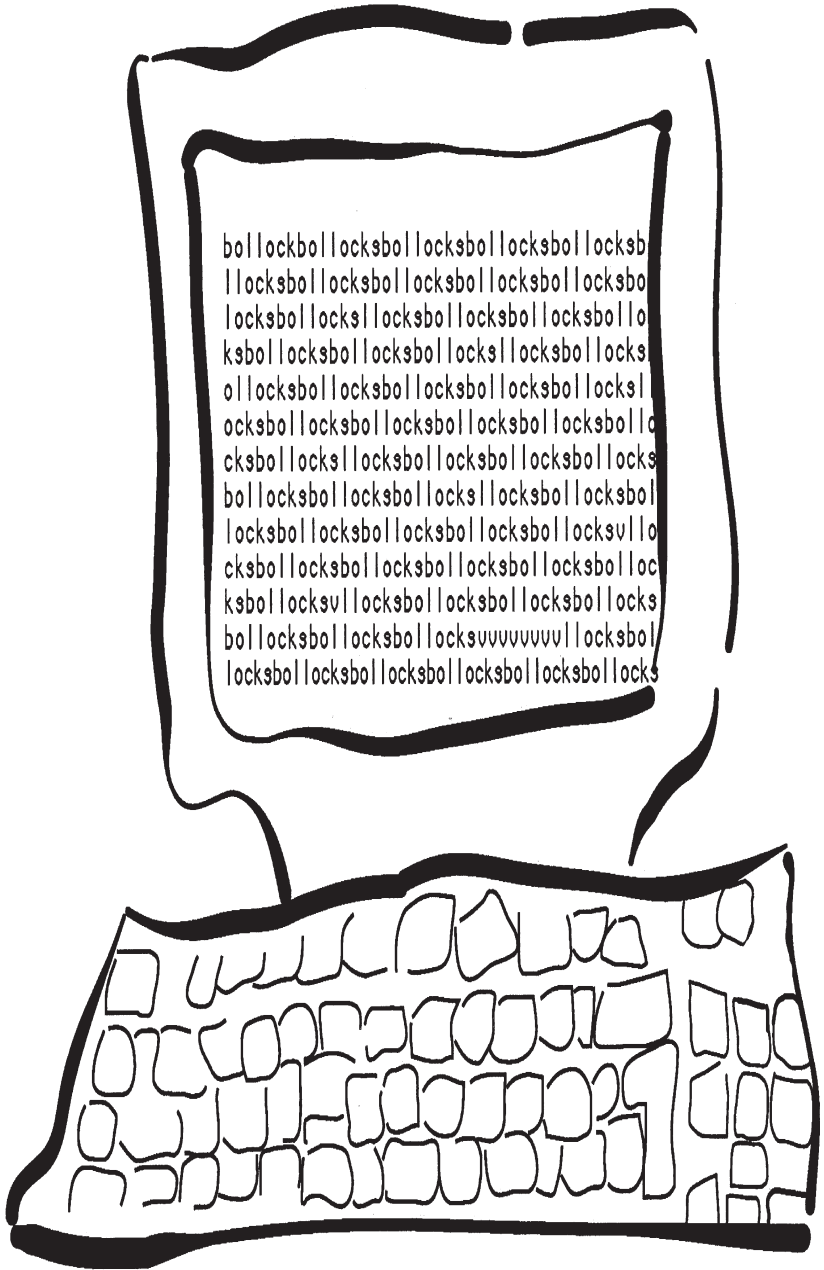
Nathan, Reading

“Didn’t taste very nice”

Bute the Cat

“Didn’t taste very nice”

Jamie, aged 6 months



THE STATUS REPORT

Alex Frankel

with drawings by the poet and his mother

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Between 1997 and 2002, many of these poems were written into office status reports, partly for amusement and partly to see how long it would take the managers to notice.

*Any similarity between characters portrayed
in some of these poems and real life people
or animals is quite deliberate.*

For ipun kwee

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Ode to Immodium

Oh, Immodium,
Constipator of my colon,
Immobilizer of my bowel;
You make it possible
For me to leave
The house and take
A long walk in the
Countryside, without
Having to remember
To pack
Toilet roll
And a small trowel.

THE SMUG PROFESSIONAL

They said I was a rebel
To try to grow my hair,
But I was wary
Of the description.
It lacked conviction.
I was no rebel.
I was a square,
Who listened to his teachers,
And saw them
Not as squalid creatures
From another planet,
But as educators
And dictators of the truth,
Not to be tormented and scorned
By a spotty youth.
I thought my friends uncouth
With their loud behaviour,
Caring not a jot for Octavia;
They thought
Me inferior
And called me a queer, while
They spent evenings at the pub
Getting beerier and beerier,

Always cheerier than me.
But not now,
When I am become
A paragon of modernity,
Consultant of prosperity,
Politician with
Pony tail.
They thought that
I would fail
And would
Never have a whale
Of a time.
Oh how sublime.
The victory of years.
The bloody queers;
The nature of
Their occupations,
I cannot guess.
They dared to see more value
In laughter than success.



Posh Malcolm

Malcolm was a poor boy,
Malcolm came from Slough,
Malcolm's education was
Not the most highbrow.

Malcolm was a tough bloke
Who hung around in bars.
He called his friend's 'You fuckas'
And couldn't say his r's.

He also dropped his aitches
And couldn't deal with t's
And his mother used to tease him
That he spoke in 'Malcolmes'.

But one day in Minorca
Malcolm came across a bottle.
It was buried in the sand
Beside a pool of dying cockles.

He rubbed it up most gleefully
And much to his surprise
A big fat Genie person
Sprang out before his eyes.

He offered Malcolm wishes
A maximum of three,
But Malcolm knew not what to wish -
For his brain was quite emp-tee.

Eventually he thought of two
And asked for beer and sex.
So exciting was the prospect
That he shat in his new keks.

A mite depressed and shameful,
Malcolm pondered for a while
How to use the third and final wish
To cultivate his style.

Then suddenly it came to him.
It hit him like a cosh.
The thing he'd always wanted
Was to master talking posh.

The genie gave his wishes.
That was thirteen years ago.
Now Malcolm works in Reading.
He's a different man - you know.

He never goes to bars now.

And he doesn't have no friends.
His colleagues say his perfect
Diction drives them round the bend

Arriving in the morning,
He says "What-ho, you lot!"
And departing in the evening
He says "Good show, what, what?"

He enquires "are we on good form?"
And asks us out to luncheon.
He doesn't call it 'dick' or 'cock'
But prefers to snigger 'truncheon'

So that's how an ex-hooligan
Has turned aristo-crat.
Now he lives in Surrey
And he wears a pink cravat.

Kids are Cruel

Jamie had a friend
Called Donald with
A face like a donkey
And teeth like a duck.
They used to run amuck
In school playgrounds
And forests where they'd
Hide in trees and launch
Frozen peas at old people
Squatting under home-spun
Canopies.

But aged twelve, Jamie shelved affection
For his friend with the distorted face.
He changed his name to Jim and started
Having sex and carrying a briefcase.

When Jim avoided him at school,
Donald took to ducking classes
And covering his facial anomalies
With sticking plasters.

But Jim was not impressed
And left his former side-kick
Alone in his world of lop-sided features
That seemed to have been

Inherited from several different
Alien creatures.

Donald sat vainly in their childhood tree
Where his face grew long and green
With pre-pubescent jilted lover's weeping.
He cried for one week, then fell asleep,
Dreaming mournful cess,
Mouth gaping doomed distress.
It was winter. The peas froze
And slid icily from the leaves
Above, filling mouth and nose
Absorbing breath, choking grief.
He fell without a cinematic thud.
Jagged frame sank lifeless in the mud.

Forty six years later Jim
Tried to find Donald
For a school reunion.

SUPERMARKET DOMINANCE

I bought myself
Some nasal spray
Today.
But in the corner shop
I had to pay
Way
Too much.

It was supposed
To clear my nose out,
But instead it cleaned my pockets
Out of cash.

So next time I have a rash,
Or have had a bash
In the face
I will buy my
Medication
In another place.

Garlic Kiss

I miss her loving,
But most of all
Her garlic kiss,
The root of my attention
On the gaseous waste
Between her lips,
The aromatic passion
Of our stinking summer nights,
The fearful dawn
Of muted conversations
And poorly scented love-bites.

Of course I miss her beauty too,
The savage taste in varnish,
That intoxicating mix
Of pink and blue, which
Crowned musicians' fingers,
Crooning lullabies
And nocturnes,
Smoothing out the mental chaos,
Ever tender on my gout and worms.

But those are memories clouded
By the scent I wear in perpetuity
Upon my wrist.
For more than life
I miss her garlic kiss.





Beware the shower gel from hell,
That spies you in the supermarket
Between shaving cream and cellophane,
Invites your finger tips to touch,
But warns you not to drink
Because you'll snuff it,
Glares a lurid green exotic name,
Boasts a herbal remedy - how you'll love it!
You can't get enough of it in this shop!

Try the range,
Test each colour;
Mix them in the bath and
Soak your brain in Ancient Eastern Cures;
Cares and woes drip away.
Through the door you wade,
Invigorated,
Difficulties castigated,
Tingling a new sheen,
Something more than clean.

The benefits subside.

Daily tasks attack,
Fry your head
And spin it once more
On the rack.
It's getting worse,
The shower gel's a curse.
The tingling's all I know - it's the drug
That keeps my words in flow.
I can't say no!
Three times, four times,
Five a day, I scrub my skin;
I'm all done in.
I'm a shower junkie.

No-one Wants to Know You when You're Mad

No-one wants to know
You when you're mad;
Sad but true,
A cliché,
Like me and
You were sad
To see me go
When I was sane,
Pained to wash even
One small memory
Down the drain
Like a toenail
Clipping
Or the dripping
That I'd left in
A mug by the
Door for
Weeks;
And you loved
That little piece of
Me that was
Disgusting,
Trusted my idiosyncrasies,
The seasons of my mood,
Brooding silences,
Mournful glances
Entranced you;

God knows why.
And we would speak
For fifteen minutes on the
Phone at lunch time,
Pine for home time
And each other,
Mimicking the
Softened tones of lovers;
And you were
Glad to see my
Face each night, though
It was pasty and gave me,
For one, a fright each
Morning at the mirror.
Then someone pushed
The dimmer switch
In my head
And you did not
Want to know
A mad man
And his pain;
You washed affection
Down the drain,
Dragged the chain
Across and smashed
The thin glass.
I do not blame you.
I would have done the same.



THE DANGERS OF INTERNET DATING

After three years
And four hundred
Finger tingling conversations,
Two technolovers sought to demystify
The bond and backdate their relations.
They arranged to meet beneath the clock
At Waterloo station.

In eagerness to prove unflinching passion,
Both cashed in their pension.

She bought him a shining, emerald bracelet,
A symbol of their cyclic love and constancy.
He for her a black and silver pendant,
An ancient sign of mutual dependence.

Oh, cruel Eros!
With face and body clothed in cybermist,
How could he know his lover lacked a neck,
Or she her darling had no wrist?

PowerCut

Power-cut.

A kick in the nuts
To people wanting
A cup of hot tea,
Or to watch TV
Or who want to see
Themselves having
Sex in the mirror
On the ceiling.

Power-cut.

What to do?
Return to old-fashioned
Entertainment, like
Creeping up on old
People in the dark
And saying 'BOO!'

BOTTOM

I love you for your bottom,
That sits upon the chair,
So smooth and rich and creamy,
And quite devoid of hair.

I love you for your bottom,
That wobbles when you walk,
So firm and thick and fruity, like
An uncooked piece of pork.

I love you for your bottom,
That swivels as you rumba.
The first time that I saw it,
I had to have your number.

I wish I were a toilet duck,
That's hidden in the loo,
So I could watch your bottom
As it strains at every poo.

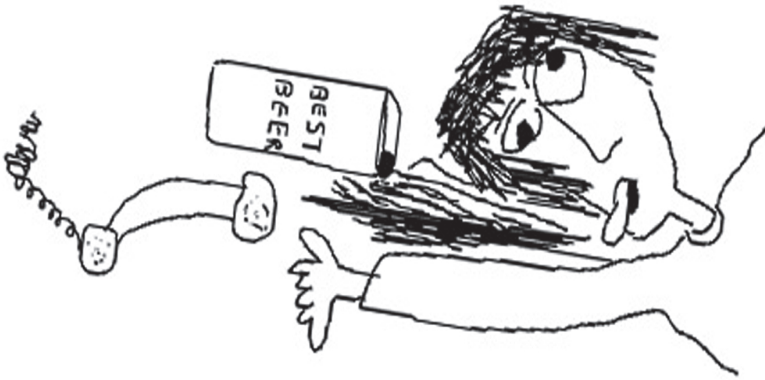
I wish I were a toilet,
All wet and full of shit,
So if your noble bottom chanced
To squat a while in toilet stance

It would not e'er escape my glance
Oh what I'd give for such a chance
I'd cut my head off with a lance
Be carted off in an ambulance
Become a citizen of France
So much your bottom does entrance
Me, Oh
The roundness
And the whiteness
The softness
And the niceness,
An ornament
A masterpiece
An objet d'art
A golden fleece
I try to live my life in peace,
But am struck dumb
By the beauty, that
You call your bum.

Hangover On The Telephone

Ring! Ring!
Is anyone at home?
This is your hangover
On the telephone;
Breathing whisky
Down the wire,
Choking cable,
Threatening
To expire.
Crawl to floor,
Drag legs-arms
On carpet, static
Crunching, brain
A bunch of jangling nerves,
Senses zigged and zagged,
Distasteful munching,
Punching face
This now that way,
Pitch persistent
Executioner;
What I'd give for a
Sober end!
Ring ring,

Panic! Gut distends.
Ring! Ring!
Claw at table,
Raise the handle,
Phone voice
Two tones deeper,
Hangover in control,
Sure to throw up,
Gurgle hello, but
She's hung up.



Noodles

Noodles for dinner,
Noodles for tea.
No-one could separate
Noodles and me.

Noodles my darling,
Noodles my love,
Noodles my heart
Like a hand to a glove.

She captured my taste buds
With parmesan cheese.
Her pastoral texture
A life-giving breeze.

My spirit was needless;
The noodles were all;
The heat of her fire
Was steam on my wall.

But then in a flash
All our aims became petty.
The flower of our noodles

Was brittle spaghetti.

Though the noodles beneath me
Still glow all the while,
I feel her tongue melt
As it swallows my bile.

For our magic has withered
And sticks to the pan.
The ingredients of love
Are resealed in a can.

CAREER MOVES

Tall and thin
She lets me in
To the office
Where her boss is
Short and fat,
Waiting patiently
For me. She takes my hat.

He's looking at the
Window pane
And my reflection
In it.
Imitating silence.
Intimating guidance.
He ushers me a seat,
Turning with his feet,
His belly is replete,
His grin is wide and
Not discreet.

He offers me promotion
In return for devotion;
Cash in exchange for panache;
A cheque for my respect;
A company tie
For a little white lie.
And I decline,
Saying that I'm too young
To die.



BOWEL TROUBLE

I woke up in bed
With a brick in my head
And a pain in my arse
From a curry.
So clutching my seat,
I leapt to my feet
And ran to the loo
In a hurry.

I slopped it about
'Til it all had come out
And reached up to
Pull on the chain,
When out of the bog
Jumped a steaming brown log
The one I had
Only just lain.

“Not even one word
You disgusting brown turd.
I don't want your
Trouble today.
Now get back in that loo
With the rest of my stew
And wait while I
Flush you away.”

But the log it just stood there
And gave me a cold stare.
It wouldn't go back

Down the drain.
“I’ll be on my way,
But first I must stay
And cause you
Considerable pain!”

I cried out in fear
As a clout on the ear
Left me doubled up
Over the bath.
Then he took out a spanner
And pins and a hammer
And said “Now then
Let’s have a laugh!”

He tortured my ring
With sandpaper and string,
Ignoring my
Pitiful wails.
He cut up my rectum
Without an injection
And started to fill it
With nails.

He punctured my arse
With needles and glass
In spite of my
Terrible howls,
And said “Just remember,
I’ll be there to get you
Whenever you’re bad
To your bowels.”

The Death of Derek the Desk Tidier

Derek liked a tidy desk.
He saw no use for mess.
Mess gave him stress.

His workspace was
An inside-out briefcase,
An empty place, devoid
Of paper accumulations
And carelessly flicked
Nasal evacuations.

All Monday to Friday he
Primed and polished,
Only pausing to admonish
Miscreant colleagues, astonished
At his passion for sheen
And urgent need to clean
And be clean.

“Why won’t you tidy?” he whined,
As they glimpsed suspiciously
At the office-cleaning-maniac,
Hovering above his worktop
With a mini-desk-o-vac.

Derek never wondered,
Whether the others
Were wise to be wary
Of desktop planning; he
Did not see the pitfalls
In his unconsidered love
For spick and spanning.

And so he was damned.

For when nuclear war began
His untidy colleagues gazed
Joyfully at the deadly radiation
Reflected harmlessly from
The whiteness of their
Litter strewn workstations.

Poor Derek fried.
And died;
And, to his surprise,
Was sent to hell because
God's desk is messy.

The Bogey on My Keyboard

The bogey on my keyboard
Is yellow green and brown.
He squats beside the num lock
Astride page up and down.

He's always there to greet me
When I start at 8 am;
And he sadly gives a goodbye wink
When I leave for home at ten.

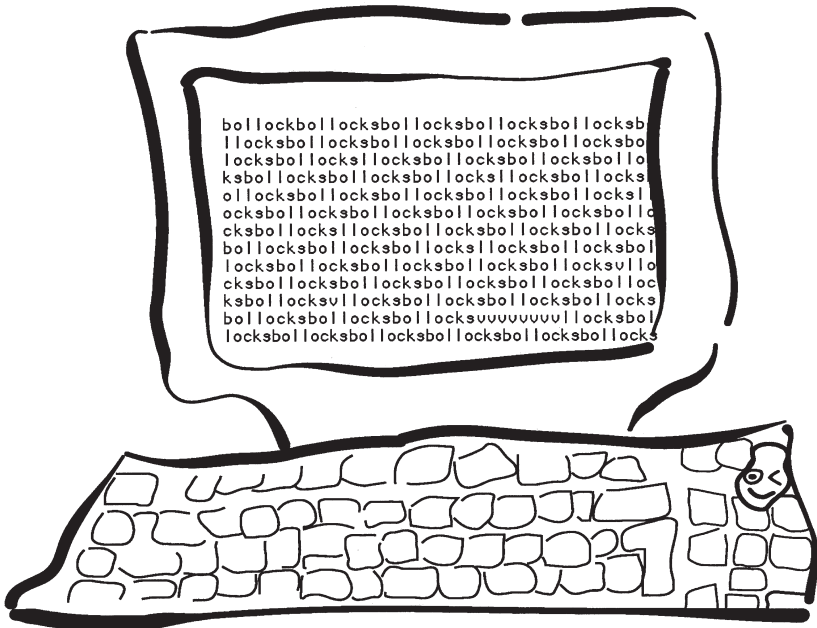
I used to think him ugly
When he landed on my desk.
I used to try to flick him off
Thinking him a pest.

But as the weeks and months went by
I developed admiration
For his endless stores of patience
And his faultless dedication;
For unlike me he never moans
About his rates of pay,
He never scorns his co-workers
And never makes delays.
He's staunch he's stern he's stoical,

Immovable and tough,
Contented, though he'll live and die
In a world devoid of love.

The bogey on my keyboard
Is my only friend;
My lasting source of comfort
When I'm driven round the bend.

The bogey on my keyboard
Will be there when I'm gone
To comfort the next lonely worker
Who might come along.



Lack Of Pain

Lack of pain,
No sigh nor frown,
Has stolen meaning
From befuddled brows,
Cheated warriors of strife,
Carved intention up and down
With silent knife,
Beaten scalps
With whistling self-assurance,
Torn them from the fight
Repackaged with insurance.

Lack of pain
Has locked them
In a velvet case,
Vomited reflection,
Filled the increased space
With broadcasts
Of distraction,
Dawn of artificial
Interaction,
Padded baskets,
Sugared
With a saturated

Taste, promising
An endless toast,
Greeting new millennia
With complacent boast.

Lack of pain
Has exorcised direction,
Instituted armchairs,
Outlawed vivisection,
Advertised a void,
Yet doubled expectation,
Banished the community,
And ripped apart a nation.

A friend of mine lies dead
On pressed white sheets,
Unconvincing smile
Wanes fast with fading beat.
Unconstructed plans fulfilled,
Good and bad intentions
Undistilled in untried brain;
He dies through lack of pain.

The Doctor's Sense of Humour

Stevie was a city boy.
He wore an old school tie.
His life was full of sex and booze
And other things you buy.

He occupied a penthouse
That overlooked the Thames
And plastered it with modern art
To overawe his friends.

But one night in a taxi home
When chatting to the cabby.
The latter asked our hero
Whether he was really happy.

Now Stevie wasn't prone to
Letting others take the piss,
So he smashed the cabbie's lights
And drove his car into a ditch.

But the violence didn't kill
The mem'ry of the thing he'd said;
"Are you really happy?" was
Still buzzing round his head.

So he popped along to Harley Street
With his philosophic woe,
Slipped a doctor fifty quid
And screamed “I need to know!”

The doctor nodded kindly and
Reached under the desk,
From where he raised a felling axe
And chopped off Stevie’s legs.

While tarring up the stumps the
Doctor said “You might feel crappy,
But you’ll have a clearer mind when
Someone asks you if you’re happy.”

The Smelliest Man In The Office

The smelliest man in the office
Hides in the third cubicle with
A portable extractor fan
Suitably positioned,
Awaits adjacent cubicle
Occupancy then silently
Switches on and blows
The fumes away.

The smelliest man in the office
Kills conversation with semi-
Stale coffee breath;
Talks through limbs,
Carefully limiting
Gesticulations, lest turgid
Fingernail grue should steam
Away his colleagues'
Clean air.

The smelliest man in the office
Sits with arms aloft, pleading
Bacteria avoid his pits;
Legs akimbo,
Hoping for maximum orifice
Aeration and chance of

Fart and belch
Escape to window.

The smelliest man in the office
Broods at home and pits his
Pitted wits with foul misfortune.
For he was not always so,
And still remembers the fresh
Days of salad and semi-skimmed
Milk before distraction drove
Him to chicken grease and
Unwashed feet.

He has a plan
To make the whole
World smelly.
He offers coffee service,
Slips a smell pill
In the steaming broth -
A chemical concoction of his
Own creation - a creeping
Stench infection to
Devour the earth.

Fools ! Who dare to snigger
At the man whose odour
Quotient is a little bigger.
The smelliest man
Knows you hate him
And will have his revenge.

COMPUTER FATIGUE

I love my computer
As a pupil loves
His tutor,
Unwillingly
Dragged behind the blackboard,
Beaten with an algorithm,
Shaken about,
Eyes popping out,
My palm becomes
A trout, flapping
On the master's hand;
Useless,
Lifeless,
Dead on the sand.

Security Pass Blues

Now pity the Security Pass,
That dangles from
Employee's neck
Or sits neglected,
Squished and Squashed
In jeans' back pocket,
Squeezed against a
Sweaty purse or wallet.
Oh, the future's dim,
And joyful moments
Sparse for that, which is
Destined to spend it's
Whole life as pain
Around it's master's neck
Or up his arse.

One Night or Two?

Chastise me first,
Then drench my thirsting
Lips with vengeful
Burst of lather,
Or rather stick an insect
On my mouth
And couch it in our
Unromantic love-filled
Smoking belch.
Stealth of limbs
Slithering in a hairless
Waste, pipes
Of union,
Fuming over love-lorn
Feasts, multiples
Of beasts combine,
Crawl their merry way
From bursting jeans,
Integrate our buckles,
Scraping skin
On knuckles, cheaply plucking
Humorous groans
From luminous

Skin-packed bones.

Flatulent exit.

Absent breakfast.

Head, trousers sore

And muddled aromatically

Upon the floor.

I wonder,

Did we enjoy?

And should we ask for more?

MALCOLM'S NECK

Malcolm's neck changed shaped
During a smashing incident
Where an old bloke failed to overtake
Him in a three wheeler, which he'd
Bought for forty three pounds fifty
From a dodgy dealer in the city
In nineteen sixty
Three.

The old man was incontinent
But it was Malcolm who had
Shat his pants.

Collecting Firewood

He looked around
And saw a shadow
Waving on a ditch.
The wind was strong.
It was unclear
To whom the movement
Had belonged.
The moor was black and empty;
The shed was grey and bare.
There was no sheep
Or slippery slope
To show that
I was there.
The air had died
And quivered where it stood.
He gathered up his axe
And chopped the wood.

COMPUTER TRAINING

I took my father
Out into the garden
And banged my head
Against the brick wall
Three times
While he was saying
That the azaleas
Were doing fine.

When I banged my head again,
He told me the grass
Needed cutting
And the fence
Was too low.

When I banged my head once more
My father became concerned
And asked me why
I banged my head so.
And I told him that this
Was a metaphor
For teaching him
How to use a computer,
And he said
That I was just as crap
At gardening as he was
At computers
And that even brick walls
Have feelings.

Another Crisis

Paranoia welcome home.
Around the corners
Of my eyes you roam.
Is it stress,
or is it madness
When you haunt me with your
Senselessness all day and night
So I can get no rest;
The blackening of my eyes.
I wish I could arrest
This idiot thing,
That makes me lose my zest
For life.

Ironic Bus Incident

The man on the bus
Made a fuss
About the pus
From my friend Gus's
Mouth, which landed on his knee,
Exploding in a great green menagerie,
The funny side of which he violently
Did not see; even though, originally,
The virus had been transmitted
To Gus by the very same man (who
Was now displaying a lack of glee
At the pus on the knee) just one
Week previously, while they
Were enjoying each other's company
In an underground establishment
Where people wear masks.

RUT

Another day,
A tired old theme,
A wasted wish,
A desk that did not dream.
The bones that crack;
And teeth no longer
Beam a smile;
Whisky glasses, empty,
Speculate on
Every passer-by.



Jubilee

When I was three
The Queen's Silver Jubilee
Was a pink and yellow dream
Of lemonade and party hats.
The streets crackled with flapjacks
And green, exploding sherbet stew,
While Rolf Harris madly played
The National Anthem and Waltzing
Matilda on his didgery-doo.

Around our town, a mood of joy
Swept over every place.
Adults abandoned offices
In search of Jubilee toffees,
Mugs and any other souvenirs
For sale at inflated prices.
They did not care. A crazy Jubilee
Happiness was in the air.

Twenty five years on,
The Queen's having another party.
But between Jubilees
Cynicism has overpowered me.
Lemonade gives me stomach cramps.
I throw up when I lick Jubilee stamps.
If any kid plays egg and spoon in my street,
I'll give him a poisoned sweet.

ELECTION

I've heard it said
You can be dead
Certain of a fellow's character
By looking at his tie.
So I wonder why
His is red.

Does it mean he's in control?
Could it mean he's angry
That Old Blighty
Is in such a beastly hole?
And so he longs for Tory heads to roll.
No.
Red is the colour of the blood,
That will be spilt;
A forecast of his guilt.
For when polling day is nigh,
We will elect the most enchanting guy,
Only to find
The colour of his tie
Was a lie.

Tea and Cake

(Culinary beginnings of a world famous chef)

Kelly used to dice
Grannies and put
Them in pies with
Cinammon and
Other spices.

He'd sell them to
Old ladies passing
On their way to buy some tea.
And those who didn't like it
Were added to the recipe.

Russian Wedding

When my friend
Married a native
Of Russia,
I was an usher
On the day
When they
Vowed to stay
With one another,
And the groom's
Brother was
Best man,
And had to stand
On the table,
And drink vodka
From the bride's shoe,
Because I told him
It was a ritual thing
To do.

Useful Poem

In Russia
'Gladeets' means both
'To stroke' and 'to iron'.

This is useful for those
Who dislike cats, as
They can blame
Fatal feline brandings on
Verbal misunderstandings.



Bute

I have a cat
Called Bute,
Who is the root
Of all the things
I value most
And the bane
Of everything
I value least.

Bute sits upon my lap
And laps the saucer resting there.
Ears twitch softly
While he gives a steady stare.
I dare not boot him off
For fear I might offend.
He knows he is the stable one
In this partnership.

Ben

Ben went to bed,
Citing world weariness
And overpowering cynicism
As causes of his tired head.

Invited to a forest outing,
Modestly touted by a friend,
He sighed no thanks,
Glance askance,
Pants dilapidated
On the carpet,
Lapping up the dripping
Coffee stains of bedtime
Beverages.

Did you ever leave your bed,
Ben?

How did you accumulate credibility,
With no possibility
Of outdoor operations?
Are there railway stations
In your dreams?
Ski slopes, scree slopes,
Topsy-turvy roller

Coasters, parties
Full of boasting
Toasters?

Or do you dream
Of bed?

Would you consider an armchair
Instead?

Stately lethargy compromising
Vertical with wakefulness,
Reckless postures
Shielding hesitation,
Fearing fecklessness;
Legs akimbo,
Wrapped in elegant
Kimono.

What do you know?
Self-assured,
Unbrandished sword,
Chores ignored.

Citing dormant speculation
And latent philosophical meanderings
As causes of his tired head,
Ben went to bed.

Student Is Disturbed At Midnight

Two owls were singing
On the tree,
Cool stares
Transfixing me.
I opened wide
The darkened window
With a groan
And screeched
As if in rivalry
To their grey monotone,
Waved my limbs
Like flapping wings,
Petitioning the feathered kings
To cease their song,
Lest I should wake up sleepless and,
Through irritable temper,
Do my subjects wrong.



Lament of the Sea Monkeys

(Nathan Stirling killed my fish)

Once we were many.
Now we are one.
By the hand of the Stirling
Our hopes were undone.
For the hand of the Stirling
Slew us all one by one.

The world was yet young
When our history began
We ruled all the skies,
And the seas and the land.
Our empires all glistened
With coral and gems.
Our armies were mighty
We guarded all friends.
Our friends were the birds,
And the apes, and the men.
The name of the Stirling
Was outside our ken.

Once we were many.
Now we are one.
By the hand of the Stirling
Our hopes were undone.
For the hand of the Stirling

Slew us all one by one.

His armies arrived
On a black winter day
To crush all our cities
And steal us away.
They packed us on boats
Without plant or light
And stored us in boxes
Where most of us died.

And yet in our death
The Stirling found fun,
For he stretched out his claw
And rescued just one.
And that one is I,
The last of my race.
The fates of my brothers
Are scars on my face.

And still he preserves me
In a cage by his side.
It humours a tyrant
To keep trophies alive.

Once we were many.
Now we are one.
By the hand of the Stirling
Our hopes were undone.
For the hand of the Stirling
Slew us all one by one.

Misunderstanding?

She said I'd grown to hate her,
Which meant she hated me,
Claimed I did not rate her
Intellectually,
Would not involve her in my
Oh so precious work and,
When she returned from shopping,
Was too keen to take the dog
For an evening walk.

She said I'd lost respect
For her personal space,
That I'd put things in the
Wrong place,
Pace up and down
Beside the sofa
As she watched TV,
Never stopping voluntarily,
Waiting for the scream,
Then grinning,
Blankly looked around
At her exasperation.

She said I did not look at her with fondness,

Which meant she'd lost her taste for seeing me,
That I kept on blinking,
Rubbing my chin
Nervously,
Did not deserve her
Faithfulness;
Loving touch,
Nocturnal caress
Seemed nothing to me now.

She said I did not love her,
Which meant she loved another,
That I misinterpreted everything she said,
But if I could only
See inside her soul and understand
Her true feelings, then
Our cracked relationship
Might not be dead.

I looked at her quizzically.

A SHARK IN THE NIGHT

A shark in the night
Woke me in my bed,
Listing, drooping
With sweat-stained pillow
And pungent spread.
Messenger of introspection,
Hell-bent on vivisection;
Insular, titanic,
Provocative,
Evoking thoughts
Of passed disasters,
Demonstrating failures
Of self-appointed masters
At the art of conversation
Or infiltration
Into life; my wife
Would also be afraid
Of me, perhaps.

The sea is clear and harmless.
My albatross is calm in
Even alcoholic waters,
Snorkelling beer,
Diddling crazily

To keep focus on
Or off;
No tension in his
Cold or cough;
Softly tapping,
Tappity tappity
On my wrist.
Aren't you pissed yet?
Why do you dribble so?

I am afraid of the night,
Afraid of the sea.
Terror tames me.
I am afraid of the clouds,
Afraid of the sky.
Sunlight whips me.
I am afraid of the crowd
Even when it has dispersed.
I am afraid of nothing.

*Physically and Emotionally (for reasons
unexplained) Dinner-party Guest is Irritated
by Smalltalk*

We salted our soup
While her mother crossed
The heavenly bridge
In endless pain.

We mused on
The delicacy of raw fish
While another Napoleon's armies
Hacked the tender morsel
Of our child's brain.

We dwelled on this with relish,
That with gusto,
Polished haunting tales
Of threadbare curtains,
Coffee-stained sofas,
Rusted cutlery,
Aging lawnmowers,
Rabbit-chewed marigolds,
Holes in tyres,
Donations for pointless spires,
Marriages and births,
Friendships

And a sad dearth of etiquette
In modern youth.

Moving on to office personalities,
We discharged ourselves
Of guilty judgements
On colleagues,
Praised or cursed
Beleaguered bosses
For their slighter higher salaries
And significantly larger bellies.
We covered desk size, train times,
The price of caffeine
And, from one modest friend,
The tale of an alluring mention
And a hint of luscious fame
In the departmental magazine.

So as we dined
Something passed between us:
One thousand clamouring
Trivialities, bursting mouth and ears.
A meathook pierced our conscience,
Compassionately casting mellow fog
About our world and blinding us
To strangers' fears.

Suburban Nightmares Part 1

Timothy kept a pile of
Antique style, gilt-edged
Printer paper on the window ledge.

One windy day the top sheets
Blew away and made a mess
Upon his neighbour's privet hedge
And vegetable garden,
So Timothy popped next door
To beg his pardon.

But he found his neighbour
Racked and overwrought
And crazed with grief.

For the gold leaf of
Timothy's paper sheaf
Had diffused beneath
His neighbours' home-grown beetroots,
Poisoning the infant shoots,
Dooming them to root crop perdition
And savaging their hopes of first prize
In The Village Home-grown Beetroot Competition.

Antivanity

Matt wears a hat
To hoodwink the public
Into thinking he hides
A bald patch.

When accused of having no hair,
He gently doffs his headwear,
Shakes his silky blonde thatch
And gives the would-be persecutor
A triumphant stare.

Suburban Nightmares Part 2

(Mr Potts' Great Adventures Part 1)

Potts awoke with
Pounding head and
Vibrating bed from
His neighbour building
A garden shed.

Leaping tetchily from his repose,
Pausing only to fold his duvet
Into the shape of a desert rose,
Feed the aspidistra and apply
Hydrocortisone liberally to his
Poor chapped toes, Potts
Strode to his west-facing double glazing
And thrust aside the netted curtain canopy
To reveal this new crisis he was facing.

There he stood.
The shameless neighbour
Banging unpercussively
On a pile of lumber and screws,
Brandishing the electric sander
Which had prised Potts
From slumber and given
Him the background
Noise blues.

Action was required.

Potts perspired and
Prepared to launch
A torrent of abusive
Incrimination at this
Abhorration of a good neighbour
With his inconsiderate
Shed-erecting behaviour.

But despite furious intent
To give vent,
No cry emerged,
Though a tiny whisper
Was heard, mumbling
That any repetition of this
Troublesome noise exhibition
Would more than likely result in
Three digit telephonic communication
And authoritarian intervention by the
Residents of the local police station.

The neighbour, sensing he was the focus
Of someone else's attention, looked up
And nodded with cheerful incomprehension
At Potts strangely quivering for
No apparent reason.
The latter smiled and waved and mumbled
Something about the rhododendrum
Looking wonderful out of season.

The Danger Of Knowing What's Best For Your Child

During a proud parent
Parading child office visit,
Young Sam was accidentally
Imprisoned in the stationery room
And left to languish in the soulless gloom
For twenty minutes 'midst the black biros
And the pitiless paper clips.

This untimely introduction
To adult life was a knife dicing
Up his childhood convictions
Of security, severing all hope
Of emotional maturity.

While cowering in the dark
He felt the cool steel of
A staple gun and admired
Its cool, symmetric feel.
Courage fed the lad.
No longer quite so sad,
He visualised his parents
As mere bogeymen,
Shallow, unreliable,
Unsuitable companions
For a child, while the
Staunch, unswerving stapler

Was his loyal friend.

From that day, Sam's parents
Found that staples were
Never very far away.
Sheets clipped to pillows,
Brillo pads to trilby hats,
Cats' tails to shoes,
Cushions to toothpaste tubes.

They chuckled adultly
And silently let Sam
Have his way.

Until his eighteenth birthday
When, reckoning enough to
Be enough, they slid into
Their sleeping child's room
And stole his office toy away.

Sam woke shrieking and
Espied them creeping
Down the hallway.
Leaping forward, he snatched
The weapon from his father's grip,
Madly stapling at his parents
Oversized limbs until their guilty
Adult flesh was ripped.

The Danger of Unconsidered Birthday Presents

For his fifth birthday, Heathcliff
Received a toy sword and sheath
With bubble mixture inside from
His absent-minded Uncle Keith.

It seemed an ideal gift.

Heathcliff tingled with pride,
Blowing heavenly bubbles
In the lugholes of his relations,
As they beamed with adult adoration
For a child achieving the easily achievable.

But twenty six years on, at sea,
Heathcliff was besieged by pirates
With six foot sabres gleaming
Like stainless steel cutlery.

Alas, our hero's bubble sword
Offered poor protection.
An Uncle's birthday bungling
Had doomed the lad to bloody vivisection.

Haiku

Shaving. Angry barking
Outside. Rabid dogs
Foaming in the gloaming.

BATTLEFIELD

of body
The bomb
A piece
After

The Poet's Fear of Criticism

He said he'd written
Some great poetry;
But wasn't going
To show it to me.