

## STRAY ARROW

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### 1. Westminster Cathedral

In this church of a million mosaics,  
this miracle of parts made whole, small squares kissed  
with the pointillist perfection of a flame's  
brush-tip, I make space for the caged ones.  
They shift and stretch. One yawns. The beasts we chain  
– will they resettle? – the beasts we seek to tame.  
The church too has made space: some side chapels,  
parts of the dome, left bare for the future to fill.  
But *can* we make space for love, for loss, any more  
than we make space for time, than we *make*  
time itself? Language out-masters us.  
Even the outside ourselves of *ecstasis*,  
the here-be-dragons of joy and terror,  
is a cage, a flame-licked vault in which we wake.

### 2. Valence

The combining power of elements.  
Was it that final pulse and plea *stay close*,  
that glottal give and gasp which signals  
\_\_. There is no word to follow: not a what  
or searching something. Not even a slipped  
grasp. Or was it the very force of that lost  
valence which glanced time back, thrust reversed?  
We rise, dress, blush at a look, a touch,  
then take the lift down: a dip to the lips,  
the barely-a-brush of breath. Over lunch  
half smiles, buoyed by the about to have been.  
Coffee more measured. Dinner a formal  
affair. By the time we disembark, perfect  
strangers, there is no bond, we have never met.

### 3. Cupped palm of the now

Who has taken the arrow out of time?  
and why? Don't ask. Never seek to know.  
Nor is time always a straight and narrow line –  
scars on the cheeks of beaches tell us so.  
We bow our heads and pull to its relentless  
beat, we quicken to the lashing of its whips.  
Taskmaster, yes, but time shows kindness too:  
strolls out for air, turns, smiles, blows a kiss.  
Without head or tail, there is no arrow,  
only a shaft that splays and spreads: cupped palm  
of the now, a net, a nest, a burrow;  
a *such* in which to dwell, a *still* to keep from harm.  
You ask where is yesteryear's snow, you pray?  
Lift up your face: feel it fall, feel it melt away.

### 4. Cupid's gone astray again

If this is all we have, or not much more,  
what is our *this*? And might there be more to it  
– if so, how much, of what – than we will give  
it credit for? Than we *will* or would, may,  
could, or should? In the single stroke of the now  
(a momentary monosyllable)  
we live in, how much we pack, and how much  
much more we hold back. It's into the maybe's  
and must do's of modality – check this:  
*Cupid's gone astray again, he must be tired*  
*Cupid's gone astray again, he must be fired,*  
that we squeeze all possible worlds, all Babels  
and black holes. It's between yes and no, what we ask for  
and what we know, that we stretch now into more.

## 5. Still

And still, while below us the guard on duty  
stamps his boots in the cold, cursing the snow  
and the friggin' fugitives as good as bloody  
dead because that's exactly what the so 'n so  
bastards will be, oh yes, when he gets his  
hands on them, blasted to eternity  
at bayonet point, no less, *here, take this*  
*and this – think you can outsmart a Wh-sentry –*  
*and a final effin' this to kiss you dead!*  
Still we hold out, still as a breath withheld, still there  
adrift on our thermals of innuendo –  
suspended, like Chagall's newlyweds, mid-  
whence and whither: no who, nor what, nor where  
nor why. Stay close, my love, don't yet let go.

## 6. Whispered wisdom

That sudden intake of a breath long stayed  
heard in a newborn's startle and a lover's  
gear-give throttle, too often misportrayed  
as inflammation or, worse, a voyeur's  
rasping ogle. Yet lull yourself into  
the quick then slow of a swimmer's breathing,  
the rhythmic push-pull of that sing-song one-two,  
windpipe wicket the world inverting  
from a boundless out-there to this chambered  
poem's whispered wisdom: here-now, here-now.  
This is where *am*'s conceived, where *can*'s empowered  
where *will* emerges from its heaving hollow.  
From here extends all space, all time eternal now  
Our lives resolved by breath's resounding know-how.