



# University of Chester



This work has been submitted to ChesterRep – the University of Chester's  
online research repository

<http://chesterrep.openrepository.com>

Author(s): William Stephenson

Title: Source Code

Date: 2013

Originally published in:

Example citation: Stephenson, W. (2013). *Source Code*. Ravenglass Poetry Press

Version of item: Author's version

Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10034/336895>

# **Source Code**

**William Stephenson**

## Acknowledgements

Some of these poems, or versions of them, have already appeared in the following magazines: *Iota*, *New Walk*, *Orbis*, *Pennine Platform*, *The Rialto*; and in the anthologies *Octopus* (Templar, 2012) and *The Ravenglass Anthology of Poetry* (Ravenglass, 2012).

I am grateful to my colleagues who suggested many improvements to the draft manuscript; Derek Alsop, Peter Blair, Ashley Chantler, Francesca Haig and Emma Rees.

**Source Code**

Pygmalion at Glyndebourne	1
Hokusai's Rooster	2
I Just Can't Help Believing	3
Paternity	4
The British Invasion	5
Source Code	6
Made in Japan	7
Rosie's Washerette	8
Muddy Waters Reads Walt Whitman	9
Larkin at Woodstock	10
Drought	11
Secrets of the Red Carpet	12
On Set	13
Rogan Josh	14
Hunger Music	15
Assembling the Hemnes Day-Bed	16
Since Records Began	17
Editorial Meeting	18
Mr and Mrs Motorway	19
Fort Liberia	20
Standard Class	21
Endpapers	22
West Miami Heights	23
Appl	24

## Pygmalion at Glyndebourne

Our hall-of-residence fumblings led me here.  
In the bar, you brandished the word *partner*  
like a Taser. *Drop your weapon.* But your father's  
business friends gawped at the baptised Indian.  
*Where are you from?* Gillette accents. *Oh, I see.*

The cast smashed every bar of *Porgy and Bess*  
with the jackhammer vibrato of the conservatoire.  
*Nina Simone could have raised that corpse,* I thought,  
hearing her *Summertime* smoulder. But your palms  
firecrackered. Your father yelled *Bravo* at the tenor.

Yawns. Milk into Assam; brown turning white.  
*Goodnight.* Iambic coughs from your parents' room.  
The spare bed, shoved against your teenage single,  
three inches too low. A tiny cliff bisects the duvet.  
I lift the curtain. Their parked Jaguar, a tiara of stars.

You unravel your bow. *See, Saira? They accept you.*  
My ancient boy, fluent in opera, grooming, positive  
strokes. I almost say, *Bradford's another planet; don't*  
*get daft.* But I'm a guest here; ingratitude is theft.  
So I let you in, feel your stone against my skin.

## Hokusai's Rooster

All week he dipped my claws in pig's blood:  
 I can taste its rusty-nail reek even now.  
 On his *Mark, Set . . . Run!* I'd sprint, beak  
 agape, across his sham stream – a paper screen –  
 and dive into my prize, a rice-bowl at the far side.  
 The silly sot even coached me: *Nice high steps, Koji!*

Then the contest – the palace, so many people!  
 But I'm a professional. I focused on the *in, out,*  
*in* of my breath. Chickens, too, have their Zen.  
*The entry of Master Hokusai.* I fluffed my feathers,  
 stalked tall. *Majesty, I offer a rural scene, spiritual*  
*in its simplicity.* He hissed, *Run, Koji!* but his hands

juddered from nerves and saké – he dropped me  
 like a rock. Of course I flapped, crashed arse-up  
 into the bowl – empty! The bastard. I spun  
 to peck his eyes out, when his voice froze me.  
*Maple leaves on a stream – polluted by the corpse of a hen,*  
 he quavered, eyeing my skid-marks, shed feathers, cack.

A courtier coughed. A kimono hissed. I bowed beside  
 my master, beak to matting, the blood on my claws  
 congealing. The Shogun spoke: *The artist crows,*  
*the apprentice bows. At least the rooster hired a plucky*  
*assistant.* Laughter hammered the air. I felt Hokusai's  
 eggshell crack. In that moment, though, he hatched me.

That night I pecked the string that locked my cage,  
 hired a downtown studio, and for my first show,  
 sold blood-skids and guano as abstract expressionism.  
 These days, they fetch millions. I strut among you,  
 Japan's own Pollock. I never dream Hokusai's tears.  
 Look: I wear Armani, not feathers. I don't crow: I talk.

## I Just Can't Help Believing

I watch Elvis burn *Siddhartha*.  
 As a fist of fire crushes the slender  
 lotus flower on the cover, my lover  
 curls his mouth between a smile and a sneer;  
 the way he'd look as he shook for the cameras,  
 the lip-twist that pulled squeals from girls like roots.

I remember Hesse's last chapter, the death scene;  
 how a river of faces – young, old, ecstatic, tortured –  
 flowed over Siddhartha's; how he passed downstream  
 and became in an instant everyone. I remember  
 the Colonel's order: *Priscilla, those mumbo-jumbo books  
 confuse the boy. Burn 'em – he'll agree if you ask pretty.*

I remember last June at the ashram;  
 how Elvis kneeled, how the Pacific glittered,  
 rhinestones on velvet: *Honey, let's get married.*  
 I remember petals thrusting out from the green  
 calyx of the moment; forked paths under a white sun;  
 a bed of roses veiled by the spray of the fountain.

It was so hot the sky shimmied. Now, by the fire,  
 his face dances that same way, a spirit in the air . . .  
 No, just flames shuffling light. He rips the jacket  
 off *Autobiography of a Yogi*, tosses it into the grate  
 after *Imitation of Christ*, after Gibran's *The Prophet* –  
 a thin book that kept us warm a bare ten minutes –

nods his head so his cowlick flicks, and says,  
*I thought I was a seeker. But that felt real good.*  
 His fingers bangle my wrists. *Sugar, let's raise us  
 a prince and princess.* I kiss his eyes, lips, the throat  
 that channels gospel, heartbreak and sex. I whisper,  
 with all the devotion I can gather, *Of course, baby. Yes.*

## **Paternity**

At John Lennon Airport ('above us only sky')  
he diagnoses Copernicus as crazy: the sun  
has parachuted down and exploded, a divine  
golden bomb. A Turner filter softens the Mersey –  
burnished orb, electrum sky, rosewater estuary –

until the PA shreds the canvas:

*Aer Lingus Shannon*. Printouts, passports.  
*Come on, gang, quick*. Ten minutes to check in.  
Four tumbril suitcases trundle towards the line.

Same time next day, he chains the children  
to a box that babbles Gaelic broken  
by Hollywood universals – *Superman*,  
*Jor-El*, *DNA*, *bust-up* – then invites his woman  
to step out and watch the breakers' lace unfasten.

The ocean flashes green as the sun goes under  
and he grips her arm, reels in the answer  
that's squirmed on his hook for seven years.  
In the bay, dolphins bend like iron bars.



## The British Invasion

Speed-metal blared from Interstate Sixty-Four:  
 motorbike powerchords, a siren's lead guitar.  
 Our rented motorhome shook; a sub-woofer  
 kicking out rock. The amphetamine was pink  
 with a tuna stink: we Dysoned up prick-long lines  
 and stared, cueball-eyed, into the spiny-limbed  
 moshpit of pines thrashing in our slipstream.

At the first club, the promoter burned cured buds,  
 hailed us with time-stretched vowels: *Heyyy guyyys . . .*  
 Backstage, we sucked from a bong carved into Liberty  
 and sniggered at the flavours of their crisps:  
 BBQ Shark, Cowboy Cook-Out, Jalapeno Apache.  
 But by Baltimore I hawked guacamole, sweated salsa;  
 nicked my chin, and catsup congealed on the razor.

Halfway to Boston, a chilli-dog napalmed my guts.  
 Barfing in a parking lot, I watched Xanaxes  
 shoot like kayaks down my carrotty rapids.  
 Pittsburgh: gig number twenty. I tested the mic:  
*One-two? Was that your limit at grade school?*  
 screamed a Teamster in a Springsteen tee.  
 I shouted, *This next song's for all you Septics.*

Tanks, Yanks. I know. Still, back in London  
 we rashed Facebook with smileys. Uploaded,  
 our tracks shone in waveforms jagged  
 as the Rockies. *Rolling Stone* foamed:  
*Surf-rock harmonies, warm as Pacific breakers.*  
 Just click to hear. My voice oozes hash-oil and tar.  
 Tattooed across my shoulder? A map of California.

## Source Code

The worm burrowed into our honey-net at 05:17,  
breached our firewall at Port 449 and uncoiled  
across the graphic on my survey screen:  
bubonic data, cultured to penetrate, mutate,  
multiply. We traced the IP address to Gibraltar:  
a slave-bot in a relay, copying Master's orders.  
We booted up our drill: Archimedes version 3.2,  
known to us geeks as the Screw. But its bore

shattered: the worm's shell held, impervious  
as Kevlar. *God, said Roy, I've dreamt  
this sucker: spirals of viral DNA, unwinding  
in the substrate of every PC in the net, until . . .*  
I shrugged, *Meh*. Strolled by the campus lake.  
A flash of silver-blue: kingfisher uploading  
minnow. *Speed, I thought, versus shoal instinct.  
All we need's a grab; one worm from millions.*

A snatch program unravelled in my head.  
I took the stairs in threes. But the lab screens  
shone blue, blue, blue – a mortuary. Roy stood,  
arms spread like a nailed-up Jesus, laughing . . .  
Then the worm resurrected us. At 11:59 –  
Master's wit. Roy quit. I took to raving,  
found Krishna in Ecstasy. Now my blue eyes  
flicker – one, zero, one – as the code streams by.

## Made in Japan

Bashō, riding north, nears Nagoya.  
Road broadens to concrete river.  
Wheeled palanquins whoosh by,  
farting smoke. Sign says, *Motorway*.  
Windows yowl, *Ooh yeah, baby*.  
Bashō frowns. Dismay.

City glitters. Grids of stars.  
Banners herald local barons:  
*Samsung, Nike, Coca-Cola*.  
Bashō starts – steel dragon  
screams over glass towers:  
at wingtip, ruby flickers.

In Starbuck's tea-house,  
Bashō chews granola bar,  
sips espresso bitter as tar.  
*Pylons, masts: no trees*.  
*Aerials crack full moon's ice*.  
*Cold city. Despair*.

Pavements fizz with rain.  
Neon blares: *All-Night Karaoke*.  
Boiling with tears and saké,  
ignoring glass-collector,  
he howls *Love Me Tender*,  
arm round lifelong stranger.

### **Rosie's Washerette**

You need an aqualung to breathe in here:  
steam, soap-fumes, sodden fibres; air thick  
as Lenor. Turboprop spin-driers judder.  
Forty-a-day Hotpoints wheeze and hack.  
On the plastic-pine wall that sweats  
detergent residue, a mob of notices shouts:  
*Last wash at five sharp. No exceptions.*  
*No food drink smoking dogs children!*

Above them, a poster: maple-leaves frame  
a still lake; Fujiyama's Persil cone gleams.  
One slow morning, Rosie raised the mountain.  
Now, after closing, when the machines dream,  
she climbs to the summit through a haze  
of tea-steam – then wanders in the snow,  
letting her feet print ideograms in Japanese:  
tales of Ariel; songs of Surf; Omo haiku.

## Muddy Waters Reads Walt Whitman

Nine hours till show-time. He'd borrowed her book  
 as a prop for his transom: he'd begun to sizzle  
 in the cook-out heat and chilli-pepper air.  
 But when at last he kicked back on the hotel bed  
 and tongued his first roll-up of the noontime,  
 he saw Whitman crouched under the window,  
 dog-eared and scratched, a beggar at a kitchen.

So he laid his smoke on the nightstand,  
 cracked Walt's spine, blew off his bony dust,  
 skimmed 'I Sing the Body Electric', and thought:  
 this boy's talking to me. I need an amplifier;  
 a drummer; a train to Chicago. I hate Mississippi:  
 this piss-pot state, this roach-shack, the breeze  
 whispering *nigger* through the magnolias.

A chink at the door; a jug and glass kiss.  
*Can I come in?* Peach-laden branches bend  
 as she wends round his guitar case,  
 clutching two tumblers and her husband's gin.  
*So you like Whitman?* A bottleneck double-stop  
 rasps in his head: glass cylinder, taut wire,  
 pine. *Of physiology from top to toe I sing.*

## Larkin at Woodstock

As Phil wheels his four-speed Raleigh  
 past naked dancers and clouds of pot,  
 Hendrix hip-humps his Stratocaster:  
*The Star-Spangled Banner*, strangled, blares.  
 Phil winces, attempts to hum Ellington, Bechet,  
 intelligence with beat. But a drawn-out fuzz-note  
 buzzes like a mosquito drilling his ear.

A blonde sashays past. Seeing Phil shudder  
 she slips him an aspirin; but her mumbled  
*This will help, man*, is way too deep.  
 Her chin's bruised with stubble. Damn.  
 In this muddy field, the blokes and birds all blur:  
 it's the hair. A whole generation turned queer.  
 He blames the mums and dads who fuck them up:

now there's an idea . . . no, he can't concentrate –  
 his head's rasping like a scratched seventy-eight –  
 so he necks the pill with the claret he brought,  
 spreads his blanket and turns to the crossword.  
 But soon the clues begin to swim. Funny aspirin.  
 And now the arms of his jacket are animate  
 with cobras that writhe, interpenetrate, spit.

His eyebrows flicker once. Acid's overrated:  
 as jolly as Blackpool after six brown ales.  
 So he yawns, covers his face with the *Mail*  
 and dreams of a rooming-house in Hull  
 where a houri in a diaphanous bikini pours his tea  
 while, with a pen thick as Shiva's lingam, he plugs  
 at the four aways, ticks the box for no publicity.

## Drought

Roy sighed a smoky fan. *Since June, no rain.*  
*Britain has drifted to a doldrum station off Benin.*  
*But tonight I petition the gods by renouncing tobacco.*  
He drilled his fag into the face of Po on the melamine  
Teletubbies plate he'd stolen from Age Concern.

*My last, and greatest, cigarette. My magnum smokus.*  
He looked out on the sizzling pavement cracks  
four storeys down. The Glastonbury 2003 lineup –  
Radiohead, REM, Flaming Lips, The Charlatans –  
clung to a sweaty stain bisected by his spine.

A street-banshee shrieked *Giz that you fuckin . . .*  
as *Losing My Religion*, warped by Doppler,  
warbled from a passing Skoda. Roy plucked  
a Rizla, pinched fingers in plastic pouch,  
began dribbling filaments into the crease.

At the window hung a mobile he'd built  
from CDs bundled with the *Mirror*: One  
Direction, Train Your Brain, Golden Age  
of Swing. The discs oscillated as Roy licked  
the glue-strip: plastic rainbows, broken light.

## Secrets of the Red Carpet

*Design me an electric entrance-maker,  
she says. A thousand volts. Make it red,  
but not deep. No clash with the drapes.*

I let myself exhale as my tape measure  
twines, tropic as a creeper, round bust,  
waist, hips. My thumbs kiss below the figure –  
twenty-eight, the age she feeds the media.

Her hair extensions tumble, rapids everyone  
aches to shoot – cinematographers, paparazzi,  
ex-husbands. But me, never:

*He's camp as a pink tuxedo. So I whisper,  
a sharp note under the lisp I thicken for her,  
Your exit, darling. More satin, less skin, no?  
We agree a V so narrow her back barely shows.*

Turn to camera, *mwaa-mwaa*, wave and grin:  
the dress is a Taser, point and stun.

The line I cut to anchor her cleavage will plunge  
into the evening bulletin. Alone in the TV's  
moony glow, I'll watch as she dandles the statuette  
and thanks us little people, enveloped in desire  
sheer as the fabric that divides her from air.



## On Set

They've arrived to shoot the riot.  
Cables scrawl across the carless car park,  
trapping carrier-bags, cans, fag packets.  
The generator chugs like an idling truck.  
At sunset the concrete of our tower block  
blushes as the windows of the flats  
flame one by one. Torches in a procession.

Then the circuit-breakers clank open;  
spotlights mint the flagstones. Action.  
Frenzied extras gurn into Camera One:  
knives, bricks, batons. My neighbour  
crystallizes Tesco Express with a hammer.  
Roger, a bit-player, ignites a pile of tyres.  
*Whump*. The estate stinks of Goodyear.

Next morning, I serve Roger rashers.  
He's fresh from RADA: bum to die for.  
He bunks in my daughter's old room –  
says her wallpaper's okay. Maybe he's gay.  
Whatever. I told him the lift died yesterday.  
*No problem, Mrs Adé. We're nearly done here.*  
Today I found three bullets on the stairs.

## Rogan Josh

Literally, *passionate oil*. Sauce clingy as blood.  
Crushing chillies, your blade taints the worktop red.

Cut an onion's root. Pinch the brown skin. Peel.  
Chop. Weep. Scrape. Fry till the fragments curl.

Boil basmati in turmeric. The pan has rabies;  
golden grains huddle. Paprika, cloves, tomatoes.

The setting sun stirs saffron into the river  
but this is Yorkshire, not Cawnpore.

Even so, you simmer mutinous memories;  
pig-grease on cartridges, Jinnah-ji, salt marches.

Shut the book; forget ounces, obsolete weights.  
On your tongue, an imperial residue ignites:

across the street, at the fringe of the estate,  
a concrete wall shouts, *BNP. Pakis out.*

## Hunger Music

Our pencils punch staccato dots into the stave.  
Dictation. Dr Harper's tuning us to pitch:  
*Keep up! Rest means miss a beat, not sleep.*  
But when I sing a third above the sharp  
Harper hammers into the baby grand  
my stomach whines in counterpoint:  
a voice doesn't need to eat.

The day passes *adagio*, bar by bar –  
until the pizza-wedges in the cafeteria  
shed mozzarella tears. Our heads  
thrumming with equations,  
Picasso or sonatas *appassionato*,  
we queue for profiteroles bulbous as breasts.  
All mirrors turn convex: I'm fat as a treble clef.

Over the toilet, fingers violate my throat.  
Ribs corrugate my t-shirt. Under the duvet,  
I hook both knees up – head, stalk,  
tail – I'm a quaver on a stave.  
The score says *Rest* but I can't sleep.  
My veins sing an aria called *Sugar*:  
I grope for Hershey's Kisses, rip the silver.

## Assembling the Hemnes Day-Bed

like love or plumbing, is a job for partners.  
In Ikea's guidebook cartoon, a frowning man,  
alone, a diagonal cross quartering his torso,  
scratches his head by a heap of bits; two buddies  
grin beside a finished bed, a generous tick.

Step twenty-six. Kneeling, I brace the rear panel.  
To tighten the Allen bolts, you wind the hex-key  
like an antique car-crank. Finally, the hammer,  
softened by your bundled pyjamas (blue, I notice);  
each tap twangs my spine from neck to coccyx.

Squatting at each end, we marry slats to frame.  
Pine rubs against pine. Fresh caramel ripples,  
rings from separate trees. The catch connects.  
Drawers slide in. *Thanks ever. Stay for dinner?*  
Yes. We smile like the mates in the manual.

## Since Records Began

January: a warm front spun anti-clockwise,  
discharged a blizzard of memories.  
Flashbacks whitened branches. Snowploughs  
shovelled childhoods onto hard shoulders.  
Near Rotherham, a widow in her garden  
slept under six inches of womb-dream.

He watched oozing thought-flakes draw  
bars down their living-room window.  
*A crystal lattice bonds each reminiscence,*  
*she said, sustained by electromagnetic force.*  
He melted her science with laughter, pointed outside:  
so they balled their past in the drive.

The pattern of her dress on their first date  
spun past her and spattered on the gate:  
she retaliated with the toothpaste aroma  
of the mint he'd swallowed as he'd sauntered over.  
Next morning fused their softening recollections,  
roughened by a grit they'd carried in suspension.

## Editorial Meeting

The table's a bomb site rumbled with papers.  
Among them, keeping order, *The Concise Oxford*,

copyright law. The shelves hold atlases, Gibbon's  
*Decline and Fall* and the firm's freshest triumph,

a four-volume study of the Empire. A wall-map  
offsets the history editor's comover:

his crown's pink as the tranche of Africa  
from Cape Town to Alexandria. *I think this one,*

the fiction editor pronounces, praying over  
a manuscript, palms together. *He has the gift.*

*It will stand time.* The chairman smiles, indulgent  
as a despot approving his heir's invasion plan.

Miss Smith scribbles in Pitman; her blouse, opaque  
as a pseudonym, bleeds into the blackout curtain.

## Mr and Mrs Motorway

Theirs is a six-lane marriage bound by concrete  
 embankments, as pressured as an arterial.  
 It bulldozes copses, sinks pillars into rivers,  
 jackhammers doubts and drowns them in tar.  
 A Services appears every fiftieth mile,  
 where game-machines gleam like cathedral panels,  
 after-shave and latté-steam slow-dance in the air  
 and an ammonia pill sizzles in every urinal.

Theirs is a highway built for breaking limits  
 but its attraction defies its purpose:  
 emotions stall in queues; idling four-stroke  
 fantasies squat like gridlocked SUVs.  
 Sales reps shout offers into hands-frees  
 as they hang empty jackets on hooks.  
 Rue thrives in central reservation cracks.  
 An occasional fox paints the fast lane cerise.

Anniversaries form cautionary displays:  
*Slow. Incident Ahead. Long Delays.*  
 They cut the ribbon of their twenty-fifth,  
 silver as a canal in winter. Daughters  
 belly above the horizon, cooling-towers  
 signalling engagements with lazy steam.  
 Their pension fund's laden with four-star.  
 Retirement rises, tapered as a spire.

## Fort Liberia

Why had they named it after a nation of emancipated blacks, I wondered, as we shouldered rucksacks and tramped up a track spiked by wild thyme. Granite-grey cherry-trees shaped an archway, blossom papery as confetti, not that we had plans. With every rising turn another village laid out its terracotta stall in a newly seen valley.

A distant molten light filled the cracks between mountains. The Med? *No, the plain in Spain, silly*, I quipped, *where the rain falls mainly*. They'd converted the powder magazine into a bar. I downed a Merlot balloon – you clung to water – as the *patronne* told us of two noble girls sentenced to life here, for brewing love potions at Versailles:

victims of Louis *Quatorze's* dark magic. We clambered over revetments, Vauban angles, into tunnels, and stumbled on the dungeon. One tiny barred slit flaunted a scrap of sky too thin to show villages roads Spain even mountains. You cried, suddenly frantic, hurrying to the exit, *I can't spend another minute here*. You could be a bore.

The descent, thank God, was easier. It cost less, somehow, to see valleys swallowed by mountains, towns disappear. *But for those girls*, you insisted, *as they made this climb the only time, to see so many villages so far down must have been heartbreaking*. *And we never found out: why the name Liberia? Who was freed, why?* The confetti fell like ash: we lasted one more year.



**Standard Class**

Simon palmed me two caps when we shook goodbye  
 on platform three. The one-eighteen to Euston  
 on four hundred mills pharmacy-grade  
 Tolstoy. This would be an epic journey.  
 North of Preston, the fields shimmered, buzzed,  
 glared Siberian. God had upped the contrast.  
 The guard yelled *Tickets!* in Russian. My Evian  
 stung like vodka: the medicine was kicking in.

Our wheels sang, sonorous as an Orthodox cantor;  
 a bass so tectonic I felt my fur boots shudder.  
 Near Crewe, the lampposts sprouted branches,  
 furzy as the taiga: wolves sirened in the timber.  
 A troop of Cossacks kettledrummed past,  
 sunlight electrifying sabres . . . no, just aials:  
 Skodas on a transporter, headed for Birmingham.  
 The Volga shrivelled to a canal, pines to pylons.

Simon, the miser, had cut my Tolstoy with Spender.  
 Still, he'd slipped me an extra: *Try this, it's fresh in.*  
 Manley Hopkins, 500mg. Only as directed, blah.  
 I knocked it back with water, burst-bulkhead-  
*Wreck-of-the-Bastard-Deutschland*, sprung-rhythm-  
 roll-me-to-bloody-London . . . Holy windhover.  
 Am I birth-crying or dying? Genesis or Revelation?  
 Be cool: this isn't an OD. I gasp like a drowner.

Christ for a bringdown. There: a Larkin pill,  
 cling-filmed in my wallet, for just such an occasion.  
 Masts and funnels poke above Watford Junction.  
 Seagulls; a niff of stale cod; it's morphing into Hull.  
 I've grown a suit. I peer through NHS spectacles.  
 As lines converge, black embankments close in.  
 The cycle-clips round my ankles drag like shackles.  
 An arrow-shower batters the window, melts into rain.

## Endpapers

Whenever I shape to say *For God's sake*  
*just end it*, my words panic in shoals,  
 fleeing hammerheads and great whites  
 of proper nouns that snap whenever  
 an abstract swims past: love, memory,  
 attachment, charm. *She published over thirty*  
*historical romances*, says the boy who carries  
 my marble eyes, piggy-pink cheeks,  
 the nose I inherited from a Persian envoy  
 in a Christian bed . . . it's a four-book saga.

My father, bastard son of the Ambassador,  
 floats at the boy's shoulder, crooking  
 a translucent finger. I want to rise,  
 now – shred this veil of ironed sheets  
 and soar beside him through the window,  
 across the grounds, above the breeze-bent  
 ash-copse and beyond the Home – jet streams,  
 eagles, boiling clouds! *Let's just lie down*,  
*Mother*, says piggy boy, pressing me  
 gently as a rose-petal onto paper.

Paperbacks bubble off the shelf and float;  
 my tenth novel dives into the commode.  
 The doctor hems, unfolds a paper. *So just*  
*this concluding form*. Father shines now,  
 arms wide as trees. *I'm sorry*, says the boy  
 with rheumy eyes, *I can't bring myself to sign*.  
 Doctor shrugs. Father's gone. My sentences  
 whisper a tired tale; a wrinkled Scheherazade  
 postpones the needle. But I trawl a weighted  
 breath, fish out one thrashing syllable: *Please*.

## West Miami Heights

It's icy in our apartment but we tether the goats  
to the kitchen table and scoop their dung to dry  
on the windy balcony. It burns a good hour  
and doesn't draw virus-flies from the gene-labs,  
unlike the shit the dog-packs dump in the lift-shafts,  
walkways and garages. Death buzzes round that.

We set matches to paperbacks, cartons, copies  
of *Time*. A pissy reek sharpens the smoke.  
Outside, the towers of the Center shine;  
electric constellations beyond the garbage swamp.  
They've heat, light, power; we've the fire. Our goats,  
red-eyed in the flames, chew mange into the carpet.

Here in the Burbs, we stitch a modest patchwork  
of art, leisure, worship. Today, a Sunday,  
we dedicate to baseball, prayer, and bird-singing  
galas in the park. We bet which trills longest:  
dollar bills – a hundred buys a dented Heinz tin –  
shuffle at the screams of the luminescent parrots.

Our orange-yellow-red mottled children flutter  
in rings, chanting psalms of the Divine Messenger  
Mercury: *Fat Bottomed Girls*. *Bohemian Rhapsody*.  
We praise Him from the car park's topmost storey.  
The high priest says unbolted bucket seats create  
fine household altars. *Radio Ga Ga*. *Another One Bites*.

## Appl

Now w8 1 min son. Th appl ws no froot  
 it ws a logo on a fone. Nt groan on tree  
 bt pstd 2 uz c/o Gdsgarden in jifi bag  
 w/a manual: \*Appl iFone Tek Spek  
 & Fe@ures\*. Corse i cdnt rd all th@  
 then & nthr cd Eve. WTFs this?  
 she sed & i sed SFA IMHO lets jst  
 fk as per norm saps up days sunny  
 & im w8in 4 u in a horny st8 – hell  
 u no me. She lkd @ me thn @ th fone  
 lk she ws sizin uz up thn ran  
 hr fngrs up & down th screen.

Well bingo. Lites mzk akshun.  
 I flt inadq8 & my hardon dfl8d  
 as u can imagun. Eve cood  
 lk a duv as icon aftr icon dansed  
 b4 hr. OMG she sed jst lk @ it. W@s  
 th@ clr? Iv nvr cn th@ b4. Then hu  
 slides up bt Snache? Hiss lk w@er  
 babblin ovr rox. U cd underst& \*it all\*  
 he sez. I cd help u navig8 th menu.  
 Well th@ ws all Eve nded. Ooh gr8 cd u?  
 Lk hes fkn Gd Himself or smtn & soon  
 shes cuddled up 2 him cre8in FB page.

Nxt day Eve wnts 2 pos nkd but i sez  
 ud get cast out 4 bein inappropri8.  
 So she cvrs up w/figleaves & i snap hr  
 w/ iFone. She gts 3,996 likes in < 10 mins  
 & a msg fm a studio @ Sodom wntng hr  
 4 a film. I sez \*NFW\*! Eve sez way!  
 Didnt u no abt r paymnt plan?  
 We o Snache mucho \$\$\$! Im lk WTF?!  
 So how r u payin Snache? She jst blshes.  
 I sez o no game ovr. So i trns my bak  
 & sets off 2ward th g8 w/out her.  
 TBH im thinkin th@s it wr fkd.

Bt Eves chasin me screamin Adam no no  
don go \*coz i luv u\* OMG OMG OMG!  
Grass rox trees all say 4give hr shes  
yr solem8 4eva u2 cd cre8 smtn  
gr8 2gethr. So i sez wh@eva bt if u  
cum ud btr cum asap coz Gdsgarden =  
exit only. So she rns & thros hr arms  
rnd me & xxxhhhh & we set out  
in2 th world jst uz 2gethr no Snache  
no fkn iFone jst 2 ppl in luv w/only  
wnd & sun & rvr & all lif 4 cmpny.  
No Gd fk Gd wh@eva did He du 4 uz?