

antwerp

dylan harris

antwerp

wurm press

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Words-Myth published *From Sappho*, Parameter Magazine published *final tv
big* and *swan*, the 2006 Cambridge Conference of Contemporary Poetry
programme published *tension nitro ego*.

Europe, a chapbook, included *antwerp (I) 0-3*, *antwerp (ii) schelde foot tunnel &
so many bars, dog & sand* and *mechelen shine*.

The DVD chapbook included *Animal Magnetism*, *bremen*, *fora*, and *mechelen
shine*.

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content

<i>Preface: Big Skies Poetry</i>	(i)
this 'bright' life	5
clip monopoly	6
chuff or that's why the fragging counterstrike	7
5.5.5	8
balance still accelerando	9
dim him an ignore	11
from Sappho	12
and then there's the mediocre mouths	13
tension nitro ego	14
upset	15
you beautiful cascade	16
final tv big	17
movie stamp & splash akin	19
antwerp (i)	20
antwerp (ii)	25
bug cracked	31
dye-de-ho	32
antwerp (iii)	33
antwerp (iv)	34
fora	37
luxembourg	38
Animal Magnetism	41
player	42
bremen	45
the deep crash remains	49
mechelen	50
dog & sand	54
swan	55
ierland is geen belgië	56
restaurant wall	58
finse	60

Preface: Big Skies Poetry

‘le ciel flammande’

Reading Dylan Harris’ fine first collection, *antwerp*, I’m reminded irresistibly of Jacques Brel’s song ‘Marieke’. It’s about a journey across Flanders – ‘entre les tours de Bruges et Gant’ – that the singer has come to associate with a failed love affair. Its lyrics are macaronic – he appeals to his lost lover in French, but the bleak landscape occasioned by her absence is described in Flemish Dutch:

Zonder liefde, warme liefde
Waite de winde, de stomme wind
Zonder liefde, warme liefde
Weent de see, de grijze see
Zonder liefde, warme liefde
Lijdt het licht, het donker licht
En schurrt het zand over mijn land
Mijn platte land, mijn Vlaaderenland

Though he considered himself Flemish, Brel’s first language was French; that was the language in which he thought and wrote. The apparent autochthony of these Dutch lines has everything to do with lyrical skill and vocal performance, and nothing to do with heritage. Poetry makes its own authenticity, as the poet of ‘antwerp (ii)’, resolving to ‘stop / being English / *Engels*’, knows well. *antwerp* contains many multilingual poems, and many poems of place. Quite a few of those places are in Belgium—the insouciant punning of the ‘mechelen’ sequence is an undoubted highlight—but there are sequences devoted to Luxembourg, Germany and Norway here too. There’s a cracked, melancholy fury about both the love poems and the political poems in *antwerp* that’s the verbal equivalent of a Brel crescendo, layering sonic upon semantic textures until you’re not sure of the difference between meaningful word and pure sound.

In the end, though, I think I recall ‘Marieke’ for reasons more associative and more personal than than any of these. I met Dylan for the first time (I hope prefatory etiquette permits me *tutoyer*) in Cambridge in 1998. We were both regulars at a poetry open mic – Tuesday evenings – held in CB1 the city’s first internet café, a comfortingly fuggy spot on Mill Road, a long street running from the railway station to the town centre that was the closest thing staid Cambridge had to a bohemian quarter. Those open mic evenings have permanently spoiled me for attendance at similar events, for it was possible to hear good poetry read at almost every one. They was eclectic, relaxed and friendly; a relief from the relentless manifesto-making and sectarianism in university poetry circles. It was great be able to invite J.H. Prynne for tea, but dismaying to be ejected from a dinner party because you professed an admiration for Philip Larkin. At CB1 the delicate exploratory intellect of the late Rebecca Elson co-existed with a cheerful tendency for versified stand-up; we all rubbed along just fine. I remember Dylan reading ‘Fenland Sketch I’ (not collected here, but available with the rest of his work at dylanharris.org, which generosity makes frustratingly redundant the preface-writer’s traditional injunction to *steal this book*):

No hills, nothing for houses to nestle in,
your every deed is seen by your neighbours’ God.

This stark grandeur challenges even self-deception;
you glare back at the emptiness, or you run.

I recognised the fenland where I grew up: vasty domes of sky and ground-level Lollard self-scrutiny. Fenmen tend to find the beauty of uplands, while undeniable, a bit obvious; like poems, the fens demand you work at them. *antwerp* includes the ‘dangerous desirescape’ of mountains as well, but the flatlander can’t help seeing all that sublimity, the soaring peaks and yawning depths, as just rather *daft*:

all around
tree rising mountains
where in ancient days
old Norse Gods
as children
fought their giant jelly fights
(*'finse (vi)'*)

I'm writing this preface on the edge of another flatland – the bogs of the Irish midlands. Ireland doesn't emerge too well from *antwerp*: its homogeneity and insularity make the poet restless, and stout bores him. Perhaps that's predictable enough. Irish poetry is also characterised by its attention to place, but unlike the poems collected here, its emphasis is territorial. When poetry turns identitarian it forgets its primary responsibility, which is to language. *antwerp* keeps moving, and doesn't forget. Its wordscapes alter and renew with each reading, like the scudding sands of 'Marieke', under the ambiguous and eerie light of a big open sky.

Kit Fryatt
May 2009

this 'bright' life

this 'bright' life
whatever damned delight
is supposedly dreamed

whether it's my unreachable
or whatever damned wanted
you supposedly dreamt

this bright straight road
these long motorway lights
the supposedly ideal

and should we reach
it's stitch fake
out of the trap into the trap

clip monopoly

elephant admires ant
tries leafwalking

stanza & some
delete
elsepage font counterset
print élan erased

elephant admires terrier
tries ratting

pages exact select
number instruct
cum crapness delicto
refuse or every one

elephant admires drunk
tries pub door

hey mr mouse
i've a job for you

chuff or that's why the fragging counterstrike

how do i politely chuff
the complexity beyond
their focus inability

it's not the presumptive louders
it's the distant can't choosers
who distress

presuming that's a tree not a thunderbolt
presuming that's an amber not a lager
presuming that's a goat not a sacrifice

i should counterstate
they might just
drill my unfocus

5.5.5

contract eddy & dock yay
elderly cat & shoelace tango

two form ruff women attract
both that glorious v uncaressed

balance still accelerando

Lhipped
head horizontal
elbow high

off blue centre
strike
strike the white

the pack
schoolchildren
a pack of schoolchildren
bright blueday sun

green down mower low
see balls aligned balls
see point hit pot
see point hit pot
place check pocket check
place check pocket check
strike

just align yes
strike gentle pot
wait
that power hit
see the pot
roll the white to strategy
game on
three reds down safety

beered yet
balance still accelerando
yellow red black

king kong shot
bastard he's got me
good play

cushion cushion long now
white to red length shot
must gentle touch stop
strike
watch roll slow roll ha
good god i got it

yellow red black
dogleg bounce
cushion corner

you know
i could safety
but damn the bastards
i won't bore the barmaid with still elegance
life's a biscuit
play to bang pot

ouch

dim him an ignore

was 7 i
him told
extra pain dull must

dim him an ignore

now
whatever strong
whatever soft
whatever dentist
shake

the hurt
virus strong rare
cease sooner
inject small month dement

scotch wash

from Sappho

you burn edge beautiful lightening gifted
be bright girls be stunning song be sing colour cut

my was body lithe's a grand oak failing
winter white is all I've now

my heart carries heavy remember my knees carry nothing
in spring I danced the swiftest brightest swan

now I sting & slope but what's to do
not to age be human that's madness fantasy

even this sunbright summer dawn itself will die
when sunstun nova burns our world away

& this bright creation slopes cold
to fade to empty this universe itself decease

and then there's the mediocre mouths

it's easy to build a railway
charge in the shop grab a set lay
that's not though a railway
that will take people

it's easy to be told
where to build your own railway
civil your route where you're suggested
on the mainline run empty

no
read all the routes
ride all the trains
find your own Appleby

tension nitro ego

new earth hello round here

I WANT TO BE HERE

the arse we do goes this

THAT'S RUDE

song flight the bird Messiaen microtonal wings that

WHO'S NITRO TONY

part like play round dance the stage doubt nothing

WHAT DO YOU MEAN

rich evolution wide gender mix strategy complex gay thus

THAT'S DISGUSTING

depend born on human subtle rich no way full know ego

THE WINDOWS ARE DIRTY YOU ARE DIRTY

open intense cosmos wide complex Wittgenstein wash up

YOU SHOULD CLEAN THEM

supersymmetric part-life graviton force p-brane

YOU'RE BEING HORRIBLE TO ME

now rehearse play right now do dream exact now stride

I HATE YOU

presumption burn plastic in breathe fucked off thank

upset

upset
distraught at being abandoned
so she hoped

lived in the
raw utility home
he'd given her

she thought to sell it
provided of course
it wasn't a retaliation house

you beautiful cascade

for un-complicate environ
rush time you
no time speak

last year
i bit attraction
you beautiful cascade

but your smile was

let me us
a world restaurant
a hundred miles
an isis

final tv big

audience sea roll pebble shore breathe
cup archaic boredom occupier
moron matter computer

blank unturned ocean pretend tileset
concentration frown where
ah yes top right near

three unlucky
base left near
void reload

top right one bon
blank blank game on
next damn hope sour

risk random
base left near luck
sweep release luck such luck
fourteen blank

rote turn mark
rote turn mark
rote turn mark
rote turn mark

eight mark hope end
line edge one turn four
three mark

chasm rare thirty blank
board centre empty vertical strategy poison
mine edge concentration bastard

turn mark rote
turn mark rote
turn mark rote
turn mark rote

NO

arse
unconcentration
bad mark action
bang bang loss

waste

waste

movie stamp & splash akin

movie stamp & splash akin
vacant unident tension i

crude

fuck lack not that common
curdle cold grease bad might
just day why blank
life no grief trad why now blank
betcha bug announce

crude

forty years & ish the A rush
to call another stand
perhaps tense that

do
to do
do
do

antwerp (i)

0

the exciter girl absent
just bar gloss smile
night pint

but i drive tomorrow
to an alien language
rhythms consonants
tripmes strangeing

life

steps

1

square nightgreen
maprelief upupup
clean roughbrown
cross goldlit
skyscraperless

scissored out halfcircle
confetti glass brick
stories door
height height
imagination tower

dependers concur require
the soma state
themark debunk

2

napoelonic longroad
buildéd long square storied
grey ripplelight off
architected now

innerplace long walk
built long square desked
grey evenlight grey
architected do

digitate long plan
build long square rise
grey futurelight through
architected intent

3

try town tram any
first gentle fast
swifts spinsingers
cliffs constructed

stop out shit shab
gangland girl pork
cast river go
mile bright wince stride

city centre food centre city
menu menu menu glamour
damn
time wall

4

rooster henry claims
donkey oostveld demands
aeroplane hercules snores

worry side drive
single lane
hedged asphalt

breakfast gouda
breakfast freshbread
breakfast choc

the lost place
that name
must

comfortable formal
clean cosy
family farm fib

at thirty minutes
antwerp
claims

antwerp (ii)

schelde foot tunnel

elegant unhurried escalators
mahogany down

*but they're King's Cross stairs
sent soon dead to kill heat*

sight along walkers' white-tiled cylinder
pure unbent eye line

*fire no out from fire
but to its where started*

no simple set no code death no Duty
no snipers no machine gun no game end

tram lines

3

upbrung sound life
three monkey buried life
agéd twee life

4

mark made child
intense him art glamoured
match never later met

8

upbrung ordinaire
edge eye shock
mockOrange magii
sure buy assure
great art

10

edge long culture glist
centre kleingeld crude accrue

11

architecture sex moment

12

empire raised
cultures glory twist
grand recalls

24

empire ridden
wraps not rain
pauper grave

new city

here corner unsocial
don't get chatted

gotta stop
being English

Engels

so many bars

so many bars solo occupation
so much étranger solo eyes

night walk alone genghis glory facade
brick trees brick ships brick walls
social égalitaire

every newness every arrival
every égalité every time
but oh for recognition's smile
anticipated tease's grin

talking poeting

talking poeting
many her eyes reflect more
sting wind mine do

by her weight case
she gyroscoped
beauty folly

poets to find
without fraternité
here's hardly broken ocean

for pete's sake

for pete's sake
I'm older than the life expectancy
of my ancestor hero
who fled Bismarck's invaders
for Whitechapel to cripple

I might fight the e front line
mock cyber mercenary

I've seen my dying loved die

yet I still STILL

she was damned interesting
intelligence age body desire
settle family defer
all the bells my programming begs to be rung

and I stilled
I STILLED

fuck it
just what does it take

bug cracked

PiNs dissolved
some moustached smoker's strong lined face
placeless

my whoami's
bug cracked

dye-de-ho

frogmount
dye-de-ho
catfish sense

I sneer glass
inaction does deceive thee
inaction did deceive he

dye-de-ho
catfish
sue me

moron

antwerp (iii)

ciao
spring sun city
short affair

stretch nederlands
sprekt comradeship
spent

spring breeze table
strong food
careful colour fashion
lust buzz

& one in three
votes for hate
gets hate
baby bulleted dead

from rotted hearts
to luxembourg
bourgeoisie shire
empire

antwerp (iv)

1

two cultures conflicted
nation distressed
united despite

lebanese café
in belgium

two cultures conflicted
nation distressed
united despite
& invaded

lebanese café
in belgium

two cultures conflicted
nation distressed
blood of their babies
invaded

lebanese café
in belgium

two cultures conflicted
blood of their babies
inhumanity headed
invaded

lebanese café
in belgium

nationists then
nationists now
inhumanity headed
invaded

lebanese café
in belgium

nationists now
nationists then
iteration excuses
invasion

lebanese café
in belgium

2

I pay pauper
sow stinger seed
enemy's yard.

But how enemy
get stinger seed?
Why my yard?

fora

the night overlong
online fora
... le caffeine de la politique ...
click drumroll

challenge comes where where
aha ill-judged
lemme check
got him
"but the facts are ..."

the loud brandish ire won't think
the nitty argue grit irration
the black bright bloom of scar rubbed hate
& me the reference bore
but allies engage

so what's it for
keeping mental fists fit

luxembourg

(i)

luxembourg belgique duitsland frankreich
sun thundered warmed soak
county shire lord provident
small weak bank power
fashion texture content eternal animal

love desire there meat
chair seated relaxed unnatural
car driven travel tyrant
sun king tyrant dead dead
cathedral magnifique detailed sacrifice snuff

(ii)

1
One thing I cannot do
is get the hang
of Luxembourg bars.

You sit,
thirsty for booze,
until the wait
sees.

And I want a beer,
and I'm sat here,
and one doesn't just
chime the bar.

It's not like they've got geuze,
or something else special;
it's merely a mock British bar
in the Luxembourg Gründ.

2

The metro's only got
two stops.

Mind you,
there's only one carriage,
fifteen people.

And the two stops
align vertically.

3

And I want a beer,
and I'm sat here,
and one just doesn't
chime the bar.

Animal Magnetism

Whilst working in Luxembourg, I promised a Glaswegian colleague that, as I toured new cities, I'd buy fridge magnets for him to give his mother. I believe he was benign; I'd have reconsidered had he mentioned a pacemaker, or weak floorboards & nasty persons downstairs.

I consistently promised, but consistently reneged. I remembered once, at Watford Gap. I imagined his mother's reaction. "Oh." She'd say, "Nice". She'd borrow the neighbour's Afghan Hound. "It must have got caught in Pong's hair", she'd breathe.

player

1

player
personality fakir

opera trauma
that's the firework flash
the soap opera trauma

taken time
took my time

poetry stream
intercession

now
night time
talk the fakir

occupy
transfer life ride time

2

so she told me
no photo
fear camera

so she told me
no address
fear visitor

so she told me
no health
fear fact

3

you know the blew it
it wasn't just the
'i've got your dad's disease'
the one that buried grief killed him

it was the 'i come now want'
and the 'oh pleas'
and the attention panic
and the 'oh gawd the health's broke' ditto

brobdingnag

bremen

(i)

overhead thunder
the wet

streaming hard flowers
the sting of thorns
these ice & blind roses

the scent of again exasperation
and steam like marilyn

nach Roland
boycotting
Jüngers

(ii)

lange trein van reservatie
my seat hadn't being

four hours of suicide incompetents
or excess köln

i don't like smoke
i hated riding there

(iii)

fifty fucking years
i failed
fifty fucking years
stuffed by their
fall of inspire

so one month ago
ich ritt
far across

damn those unarsed
oh-it's-only-thursday
fucktard bastards
ik kan een beetje nederlands spreken

and now i'll kill their cunt ghost
repulsed off that course
for uselessness

they were crap city centre
those rat-turd uninspirers

i'll hang their foregoners
an meines Sprachengibbet
i'll fucking well pass

& win

(iv)

sorry bremen
your bier may travel
but

mijn hosts' bière
ist besser
sange froid
-ly

-ish

the deep crash remains

the deep crash remains
social gel time
contract clash time

I adore the
another country
language
manner

I have no
social life
suitcase

as neat as the net might
no presence
no smell of giggle
no rounds

there is accumulated acting
I ken the flavours of affront
adopted by stylish individuals

I'm shelled
by weeks
offline

mechelen

sound

deep bells tower bells
recited unliving perfect
i mess the mess of England's

fundamental stuck sneers the real
pop tart pickers sneer the serial
a stick berates an orgasm that doesn't stop

speaking as an atheist
what's the difference

religion's now the crack cocaine
of the ambitious

it's time
i think
to sell

buy a leopard
masticate
religions' rats

shoot

decorated stone hard frame
medieval upshadow lit
imagine faux rectangle angled
vertical window diagonal
night grain flow light

empty whole square
medieval stone flemish back curtain
simple scooter lonely
shortcutting walker only way
slow shoot smear fast
pan shoot brush majesty
anti-pan rushing even still

high two wire castillion window
stern decorate authority face
caption "wire goes where"
markt over move reflect over
opposing built old lady facade over
to far tall flemish moonshine cathedral
zoom hard focus tower top shoot
god's wind erect identity card

scene

through a valley of other heads
teenager-couple dressed ever-past's consensus confidence
in ever-now's post-consensus steam
story-tell arch-typical heroes-look-describe

brighter-she distracts darker-he concerns
legs-out aren't-you-lucky can-touch-'em
and-pout and-oh twenty-mins &-laugh-done

bus-stop hiss-door teens-out
she jumps the piggy back & steals
through-the-glass his so-&-again face

in the valley of other heads
my-age flow-smile all-bus scene-concur
been-there got-the-scars so've-the-kids
enjoy while-you-can dash

shine

moonshine fire cathedral

mechelse embleem

my goodbyeing purrtrips stone low doors

gloom loom

walk short emptiness *de markt*

de grote markt

this wrong town too

i'll rue depart

and heavyland target

are you *om kirke? te deum?*

and the living AWK your reputation counters

your architecture states

am you error?

is ever am dragmove error?

ever's *gaan?*

error?

error?

Ik zal zien.

dog & sand

dog & sand
rising sun
filmic splash

I am in
the fastest train
a hundred feet beneath

walk the friend
sand to sea
sunlit ring

I am in
the fastest train
a hundred feet beneath

market wrung
ethic slum
logiciel

je suis en
la grande vitesse
a hundred feet beneath

swan

I had to catch my own swan,
make my own charcoal.
Today, there are better pen sources,
of course: fountains, for some.

Usually,
the charcoal was made
days after
the swan was caught.

No wonder I'm fat.

ierland is geen belgië

(i)

body bag bread
monoculture beer

organic routes
malicious utilities

civilian trap
horseless guards

neighbourhood fear
armoured islands

easy talk
uncommon games

(ii)

the problem is it's just one colour
now the colour's fine as a colour
but you might just stare at the black all night
and wish for the evening's amber dawn

restaurant wall

A picture frame
in wood
of wood
in wood surround

I'd like to catch
the right-angle pattern
reflect in the photograph
its poisoned form

I'd mock
just the top square
making clear the grain
avoid the film pun

so you could spend
ten moments' echo
reracing boyhood cars
along its lines

but it can't work
the sides are always
cropped by window
within the third

and at the front
the few whole rectangles
have been renewed
in formica

well it's not
but it's too new
to have aged
enough of grain
to a fascinated fore

the rivers fade
the racing boats
would ground

finse

(i)

stark rock & moss landscape
rising green luxury never was
mountain walls boulder falls
gone the snow the water

ten kilometre shed
the train no avalanche stall
nothing to block routine

underneath my naïf luxury
it's you as

dangerous desirescape

(ii)

green & night roses
unseen flowering
concealed in traction
in visibility

long sung whip dahlias
grown in ageing sun
sparkle in fed liberty

night spider walks
serves web of dead

winner? sparkle? suppress?

(iii)

so where's the blind watchmaker now?

I we they asked

so where's the night & blind roses

I'll you'll we'll ask

we'll meet in bed and thorn

my sting your hurt our delight

hope

(iv)

so where's the blind watchmaker now
felling trees colour them brown

the night is green gone
& to come

scene is scene seen
& to come
duty
turning

I'm the page
for turning forgetting

to turn
duty

really

(v)

so this is where the millipedes dance
a sumo ring
a rare skill in the millipede world
a professional show

the millipede Fred Astaire
hat cane
a hundred thousand tapping shoes

the millipede Ginger Rogers
glamour dress
a hundred thousand tapping shoes

ten hundred thousand tapping moves
never once a trod-on toe

(vi)

all around
tree rising mountains
where in ancient days
old Norse Gods
as children
fought their giant jelly fights

even now
see where the splattered jelly splashed
see where the Norse
made the splattered jelly splash
into homely homes

for this is where the brickies dare not roam
no not because they're scared of Gods
because they're scared of heights

what? you don't believe me? then answer this
why else are skyscrapers never made
of cheap and easy brick?