

COLLUSION

Brook Emery



JOHN LEONARD PRESS



Dear K, it's light that makes the river flow, or seem to flow.

Efflorescence skipping from crest to crest as though it were a school of tiny fish

and disappearing beneath a bridge. A bolted, welded, seconds-long eclipse and then it flickers back again.

It's harder to count than stars. More subject to vagaries, fancy, the weakness of belief. Is it matter

or does it depend on matter's movement, the hardly more substantial lifting it and losing it in troughs? Most of the time

I think like this, unsure what can exist without an imprint. My reflection stutters in the windows of a speeding train and then I'm looking at a field of sheep,

black-faced and lazily intent. The glimmerings are flecks of time. I can't decide whether they are truly in the moment or moments out of time, essence or deviation from the path.

There's no conclusion here, no resolution myth. Things rise up and fall away as if they never were, rise up again. I like the dancing light,

the scattered cloud, the river that lies potentially between its banks, the speeding train. I reach for them. They reach for me.



. . . naked and alone,
the sun's fierce warmth or needlepoints of rain,
the puny human body – new-moon nails,
milk teeth, skin soft as wax – unresisting,
sex folded or flopped between our legs.
Before our eyes the receding arcs of sea and sky,
at our backs and lurching down the cliff
the green and terrible forest. On the intervening
sleight of sand, aflame or sodden, our feet
lifted and set down, lifted and set down . . .



You know the way a snatch of song lodges in your brain and won't
be shifted no matter how you try to trick it out the door?

Well, this morning 'Amazing Grace' has come to stay, just the
tune and those two words; the bits about 'no sweeter sound'
and 'save a wretch like me'

disregarded somewhere else. Which is not so strange as I don't
believe in 'lost' and 'saved' but I do know forms of grace exist

and are amazing. I think of a dancer's grace as she glides into the
air, or the diver's equal grace gliding towards the sea: the
body in defiance of its limitations,

going through, beyond. Graceful, gracious, gracile, words that
multiply and spread like flowering vine. Grace notes of
unbelief that still restore the faith.

I'd like to be standing by the laundry door looking at snow piled
high in the backyard and stretching away to distant hills, all
deep silence and soft light,

indistinctions that are pliable and hint at more and more
concealment. Here, today, each leaf and branch is clear, and
even shadows are

unsentimentally direct. Surface is baked surface and heat haze
won't bear comparison with mist, won't let me think
transcendence.

The following is true. The water in the bay is pristine, amazing
shades of green, a random morse of light, the sea flushing
between rocks with a gentle pop and splash

that avoids monotony. But in the channel, among the leaves and
weed and scraps of paper, two dead seabirds – black and
bloated – bob in the push and pull,

their wings flared and fixed in mimicry of flight, their feet flexed
as though they were about to land.

And now I'm stuck in the feedback loop: adrift in sun, snow,
amazing grace, dead birds. The binary brain looking for a
way out or in between,

a way to celebrate without appearing selfish or simple-minded,
without me at the centre pulling strings or getting out the
bubble wrap,

without an image of the imageless, or an image of the world
devoid of people to make the whole thing work, the dream,

uncalled for, undeserved, of the present expanding as if there
is no future or the future is this presence, that leafless
tree against the sky,

the glittering humpbacked sea, the thousand flickering things
the mind lights on and tries to hold.



Gloom off to the west. And blowing in my direction like
mounting slow-motion waves are banks of deep grey
cloud.

I ride towards them. Pedal-stroke by pedal-stroke the odds of
getting wet, and soon, are getting worse.

The air now curt and chill, and in a flurry the first raindrops
are flicked against my arms, then swept away.

The body moves forward. The body holds still. Mind rattles
back and forth and catches on itself. The legs drive on.

Think ahead, I caution. Look left and right, both near and far.
But I'm stuck on the mechanics of wheels: the axle, the
thin tube of swollen air

in contact with the ground, friction's retardation, the end-in-
its-beginning rim skimming relativities between the fact
of things.

We can't go back, though we're apt to waver even as our
wheels spin on. Behind me the memory of a Malvern
Star, that hill, failing brakes, a broken chain, and flying

backside-down-feet-first through a neighbour's hedge; broken
bones and proof of the interplay of mass and force, the
physics of stop and go,

that a body in motion tends to stay in motion unless . . . There's
still uncertainty in what is certain, postulates of indecision,
laughter, or an unexpected cry.

Time flits off or closes in and the space between me and a
drenching shrinks. Wheels slip and wobble and up ahead

it's possible to see rain stiffen into spears and, more fancifully,
coalesce into a solid-seeming wall.

I race towards it expecting in some unlikely way to escape the
unrelenting clutch of earth. I'm mad, you say?

How so? Light splits the clouds in silver streaks, trees leap to cheer
me on, clap their soft green hands in wild excitement,

and the future is an endlessness of blue. On the road behind me, a
ghost bike takes up the chase. It's closing fast.



It appears we are machines to manufacture words,
each weighted with deliberation or floating crosswise
on currents of uncertainty. Seabirds swoop,
plunge through an interlocking edge, come away
with wriggling fish between their beaks or nothing,
either way a penetration of that collusion,
surface-glued-to-surface, which signals difference,
one side, the lean, light-strutted transparency of flight,
the other a grayscale, ever-deepening dark: at best
a hard-won buoyancy. Lie back, you say, trust
the density of matter, the way the sun can warm
even as the sea enfolds you in a cool embrace:
displacement, though it almost feels like home.
Words leave. Air and water rush to fill the space.



I can eclipse you with a wink, Donne wrote
and yes, when we close our eyes matter melts
into the absence behind our lids as if, blindly,
we were staring at, or were, eclipse, a dark centre
and the dance of flames around the rims, imagined heat,
imagined light, one step closer to becoming not hollow
but invisible, figures whose existence must be inferred
by sound, by the accoutrements we drape around
our formless forms, or by consequent disturbance
as we pass, an effacement so complete we cease to be
or exist as emanation, that sense we provoke in others
of otherworldliness, a thing which can't be thing
but still is thought to be, that sees but is not seen.



I almost understand this resonance, this hum
or echo which I can only picture as a frequency,

oscillations expanding and diminishing
from a single source. And the sometime static

which crackles and interrupts, which implies
another source, another thought or possibility.

It comes when dragonflies shimmer in an afternoon's
blue heat or when you're watching drifting birds

and say to yourself, silently, aloud, their wings
absorb the sunlight, make deals with the wind.

It's like that curious deep-breath sensation when,
diving on a weed-enfolded reef, you surrender

to the slew and sweep of swell and your body,
that bounded, unreliable, actual fact,

loosens the skin's tight grip so you are
and, simultaneously, you are not.

It's not persistent but too here and now
to be dismissed as fleeting. We are called back to

our other selves, to the commonplace again.
My grandchild stirs in the back seat of the car,

rubs his eyes then settles down to sleep again,
his chest rising and falling as the air

slips in and out, in and out, through that
open mouth and snaggle teeth. This day

is wet and hot and beads of sweat
have collected on his forehead. His tangled hair

is as orange as a mimic sun and his fingers
rest upon his knees like dreaming lizards.

And here's Mark Strand, my while-I'm-waiting book:
so many poems about expecting to die,

and night and dark and, yes, a little light.
When my grandson wakes we'll race into the pool,

he'll splash and squeal and burble and fling himself
off the edge, kick his legs and almost swim.

