

SOLD WITH ALL FAULTS

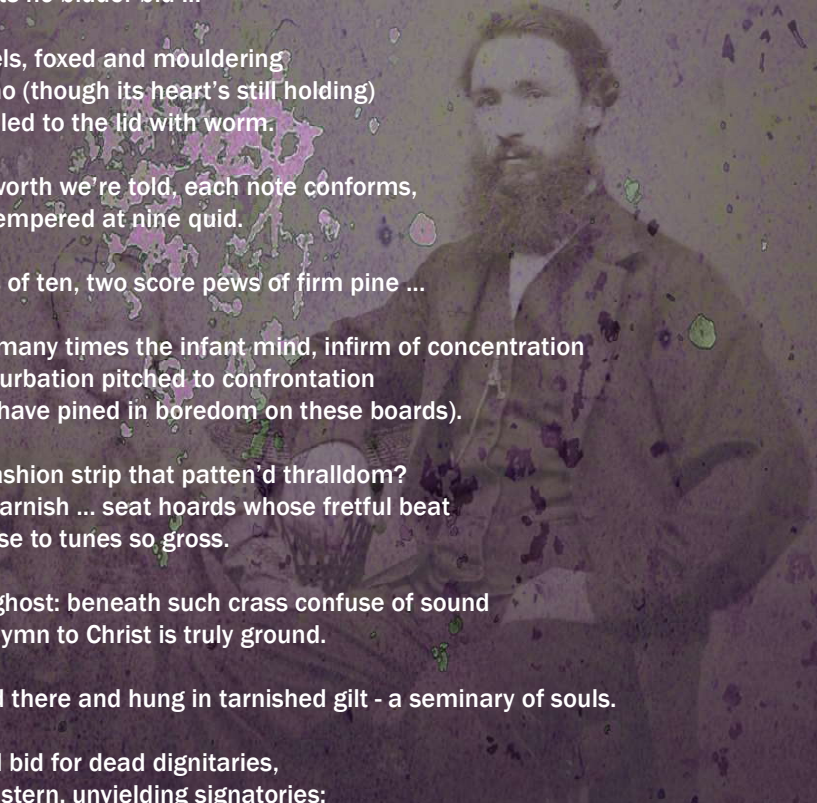
or

Broken Ballads

by

GRAHAM OVENDEN





Sold with all Faults An auction at the Wesleyan Chapel, Camelford.

Amongst the props that proved their testament
are lots no bidder bid ...

Gospels, foxed and mouldering
a piano (though its heart's still holding)
is riddled to the lid with worm.

Well worth we're told, each note conforms,
true tempered at nine quid.

In lots of ten, two score pews of firm pine ...

(How many times the infant mind, infirm of concentration
a perturbation pitched to confrontation
must have pined in boredom on these boards).

Will fashion strip that patten'd thralldom?
New varnish ... seat hoards whose fretful beat
enthuse to tunes so gross.

Poor ghost: beneath such crass confuse of sound
your hymn to Christ is truly ground.

Bound there and hung in tarnished gilt - a seminary of souls.

Who'll bid for dead dignitaries,
these stern, unyielding signatories;
faith's penuary glazed by brittle glass?

I'll pass and this despite their gaze so once alight with "righteous reason",
desires forgotten as those treasons to the pyre of mother church.

That search for grace falls in the hammer's flight
its crack confirms the price "at sight" ...

Sold then with all faults.



Time Turns, its cycle constant as the record of man's hate:
whose mark, imperfect as the sound that trumpet make'.

Here is a voice ... the bitter bite on wax
mouths to a mournful tune
(as if it knew the end to catch in groove too soon).

So clack and click, grind to the quick
till spring winds down the wind
and sounds, once sweet, are now etched deep
with death's discordant din.

But turn the handle, tense the steel
and let the record once more wheel
speed to a constant pitch ...

Compare this rich inflection (the voice tuned true)
to their cut of cold "perfection", the wounding needle too,

which plays the brittle mystery of our shell
its point to prick ... the sorrow ... swell.

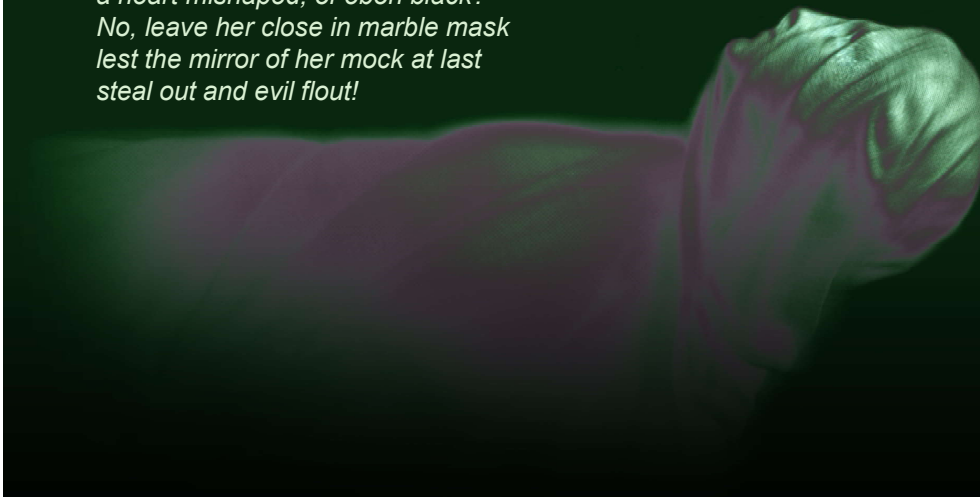
Keep well this disk lest time may tear
or memory, like compassion wear.


The Marble Mirror (The Countess R ... d. 1261 For M. R. James)

*A figure found in fallow stone
that plays the mask to dust and bone.
It wound in shroud cut coarse as death:
not once this breast heaved time to breath
or fingers weaved with fondest touch.
No smile to linger ... such
its cold, eternal hush:
the tears that streak on marble blush
are false, but dank sweat stain.
Arms fold her virtue as in pain
(pretence to penance, hollow shame).*

*Worn by the will of wearing ill
unbending, last fast frozen still.
What futile hope this carved bride
whose craven life but to deride
and gain all envy ... bleed the poor:
now fed the Devil's noisome maw.
How stern her chill
worms well his fill
the very face defaced
and vestments vested of all grace.
Left long with only death to chase.*

*So soiled by gore this eyeless hag
lays waiting on her bedded slab.
If dissected would we find
the slightest trace, a sign
that here, a soul encased "in state"
could ever to forgiveness wake?
Or will the probing chisel crack
a heart mishaped, of ebon black?
No, leave her close in marble mask
lest the mirror of her mock at last
steal out and evil flout!*





Clara & Robert Schumann


What have I felt when ... he (a man who wept so long for Schubert's death)
can find no sense or breath to wrest my sense in song?

How long, long it seems ... confined,
unable to confide or hide the anguish of his pitiable state:
or even mate that poor life with death.

And in the end ... not knowing wife, child or friend.
So spend the moment, age, confused as to the page, chapter, book of memory
'till words and symbols seem just this ...

One little kiss: to touch, to hold ...

*Oh will she yet mind the mould of my decaying flesh,
caress and cleanse that corrupted mesh of fragmented thought
until the ravages within this skull mean naught?*



*He stands with girt girth
that grappling grudging earth
bears greener hope.
Whose sightless root-bones press, slope
outwards: wrest' so there to knot
in air as gnarled hands grasp and grope.*

*A bark tight tempered
to each tapered tip:
though stark, light
slivers play his belly ... flit
their dappled dream through leaves cool
sheen, trip as the winds lay whip ...*

*and echo, fling
a haunting hymn from
throats that wing the sky.
(Sing on your song
of birth, versed
to the great beech sigh.*

*For decades past
there's love carved bold:
man's youthful task,
each wish he'll hold
and care our precious hurt ...*

*While summers fleet
who'll shirk their heat
but winter: all's cut cold!*

Court Number 1

Rogier van der Weyden's Last Judgement

*The Judge sits in his domain ...
Like Christ enthroned the judgement framed, is all.
Both grief and joy, will fall to his dictate
and shape each future mould.*

Thus, within this court, by Mammon's scale, each soul is sold.

*(I know another Judge, a Christ
of such surpassing love
and tender pain ...)*

The double doors of court release their shame ...

*They sat together, youngsters, some clothed in gaily coloured cloth,
a girl with flowered bobble hat, defiant of their wrath ...
yet hands so tightly held (their bones) as death
had pledged his troth.*

*These teenage lovers, leading out
all weeping full as full their rout ...*

*(I see Christ's anguish, without shame:
a face so fraught each soul can gain ...)*

*What crime of fashion holds them so,
what stern reproof of blame or blow could bring them
to this state?*

But 'time ... both judge and tried are racked ...

*(Dear 'Passion' will you mark our fate
for this domain knows naught but hate)?*

THE NUMBERS GAME

So now a new religion's taught:
creation's progress - naught to nought!

If you will, though some might find this cold conversion
little more than mere perversion.
Indeed division, multiplication, subtraction
their interreaction's but a fraction of the truth.

The numeric half that masks as whole.
What theorem can devise a soul:
resolve its essence to a mark
inert equations dead and stark?

There's love - No, mere a logarithmic flight
the flowered fields - but nature's blight.
The sun flecked dew inversion too:
look Noah's two by ... No, just 2.
For symbols are the food of thought
(and thus with lies our grace is bought).

Yes, this is the matter made by man
to measure all that physics can.
Poor physic for those left to strife
who's only comfort - numbers rife!

0 0 1 0 1 1 0 1 0 0
10 0 11
01 10
00





The Virgin and child painted on glass (Eaton Bishop)

How can a mere conceit in painted glass
pose such a prayer to joy?

The boy child Christ, tender, chucks his mother's chin.

If any image made by man negated sin
it must be this.

Dear sweet trust, here is a totality of love
which tells the centuries of old faiths forever fresh,
the mystery, marvel, in that fond caress



Before the season
turned towards a deeper shade
we played amongst the dappled light
unfettered by the thought of stalking time.

Within the compass of our sight
these small hands might cup to drain an ocean:
the thumb and finger frame a flower's flame
or, with emotion, point to circumscribe a star.

Such is a child's scale.

That is now memory.

And yet we are still the keeper of our pale past:
the half remembered child those years defiled
to lay as dank clay in a creeping cold.

For while the seasons turn, this germ
may once more press its point
and thrust between the mould,
to prove each wonder as it did of old.