

THE HARD SHOULDER



Richard Barrett

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This pamphlet was printed by Richard Barrett for private circulation.

It is Part 1 of a sequence intended to be complete in 5 Parts called The Hard Shoulder.

Part 1 is subtitled 'Manchester – Birmingham – Manchester'.

It was written for Christine.

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Other work by Richard Barrett includes the rushes in Parameter 9 and Pig Fervour from The Arthur Shilling Press.

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How precarious this shit is
I mean: the door swings closed and
it's that way
the car park / you could
wear the weather. Hanging like
a tailors shop window
That's some sort of edifice
Keep your fingers crossed and
overcoats: they 'swish'
as what I say forms stalactites
up there / Before the carriage moves
How slow the inspectors are /
And if you want reassurance - time
has stopped...

Keep replaying each moment and then
Goodbye. I will see you tomorrow.

Slide past shop fronts (like
snow melting / down a sloped roof
I didn't shower yesterday
Bill, just hurried / Those kids
out. Their thumbprints In HMV
And the tallest will always be
looked up to / Them changes over time
numbered - stick em behind glass +
charge an entrance fee
Lists mean a dead poetix / with no one
at all to buy them booze
Begun in October. Not quite forgettable
Write something about cats
is the text that came through thirteen lines in
So there it is Christine / And
we can live in England.

Speed yr. return to
the age of ghosts
/ All those prior hands
/ Take the E
Contract / and
- We can't kiss -
Clamp'd clammily
'cross cold corridors
That face
A memory crowd
Familiar
But yet unclaim'd / I am
promotional
- We won't kiss-

Here I am now, so
haunt me.

Originating locus of all has
a crew-cut atop it. O'er yonder I see
where is the respite? This cubicle
it is occupied. And I will interpret that
was such a dirty trick / You Rotter!
If visible, it exists - empiricism
of the Subway drink selection
those tired mornings
remembered / Having been up all night
A school of Sea-Cows
I would like you to pass me a Nurofen,
please / Over grassy dale +
behind a dry-stone wall an
impaired subjectivity bends inwards
the line's end
It is concave (not convex).

That pocket-watch affectation
- or so I call it -
a new view offered / this perspective
what? Well, if any questions are asked
find my reply on the pillow / reimagined
as a central-heating system
/ This weakening infection
flips! And between syllables
the hand's fourth finger swells at the tip
so strangely
timing the length of my journey
from stop to seat / the vibrating phone describing
a circle on the table top
a compass pointer / North.
And in the vacated motel room of my heart
I let you ring off.

Distract us! Please
This week is over
whir + hum. Clatter
and the neon - it doesn't blink
not here
Yet (((while you queue I
read Baudelaire.
Looking crisp and white
Catheterized - erm - e - eh
Just what are you trying to say?!
we are here now,
/// while echoes out
(((the sound of))) revolutionary shot.
Please-----but
your eyes.
Your eyes, they look so empty.

I was a cloud
The selection process used was mysterious
It might be difficult to mistake one house for two but
it can be done
And mythologies can also get confused
/ They will disappear with hard enough concentration
- if the coach moves fast enough
In that spare room, across that single bed
My swollen thumb
Someone who doesn't notice time / or
notices it perhaps too much
Says: I am still the greatest / I am
the bowling-alley king
That clock is fast
Isn't it? We're awaiting confirmation anyway, so
best not to worry.

Listen to that house – snap!
The front door, facing
springs open. It's laughing at me.
Yet that was a – er – proper medical condition
and everything
no retrospective attempt to ----- o
fuck it. I think
Turn my phone's volume down, don't -----
but captors bring back pizzas from Dominoes
/ all nervy, the outline, unsteady
And how often, now, the interruptions come!
As the gentle breeze rippling the brook somewhere
in some flowery meadow
looked upon by small eyes.
I am not a churl. We can go swimming if you like
or we could go and get something to eat.

Pile those empty cans of lager up five years ago
let us ascend to - uh
reach new heights or something
below is the couch
it looks very small from here. I'm sorry
the houses are old round our way
and upon leaving
you alleged that the street smelled.
- two days off with stomach cramps.
So to mention something about perspective maybe...
My lady's ankles must not get wet. Asked:
where did you buy your jacket from?
I bought my jacket from Henri Lloyd. I am sorry
him in the off-licence: I do not know his name
(though I will get to know it) how ungallant!
I was very bored once you'd left.

There is astrology though
unreliable / amongst the Debenhams
reduced rail
Every night + for ages
(Sometimes) But you suit purple
Dear Store Manager
That word 'glamorous' recurs
often. More than you'd think
The wind today is blowy
+ 1000 feet hit
(I guess) lets go!
chase yr. bus ticket then
+ with reference number-----
The feet hit those town gardens
Can I have a quid please for chips?
I am a Leo.

Those animal silhouettes make me
Want to kill you / always
with the hand gestures +
you rarely laugh
Arguably : this is no laughing matter
(vantage point behind the photo-copier)
A baby isn't always a metaphor / sometimes
these days
I move so much slower than thought
though faster still
/ bumper to bumper
There are two fingers, then three
(but no more) yeah
that's a fucking bunny rabbit, right
(not a swan) Perhaps
get trousers with an elasticated waist band.

Drum-skin stretch
Taut, shout
Surface area
Looping
back on ourselves
At Piccadilly
Twitch
wait / missed a
beneath ground advance
reverberate
long, and narrowly
The chiselled
parameters
A fine point
Dear, not necessarily
Have courage!

Antihistamines taken
of necessity / This isn't seasonal
She has a thick, luscious pelt and
things live in it. Look, it catches the light
Out-foxed, again
by geography / My teeth bared
Yeah, sure, they may as well phone in sick
Your customer feedback system -
implemented last year - is what I think is to blame
Makes me sneeze / A child
sat on the shoulders of another wearing
a long coat. Be punctual
with, whatever, the visit or call
Once we've missed the train, we shall have a drink
This line seems out of context
My nose is running.

Between neuron and neuron
him to the left / that bell feels like
yes. And that was a mighty good punch
the sound echoing. Flipping
ascendancy time being average
- please do not attempt to board whilst
the doors are shutting -
scuttling over grey / stricken
by colour blindness. Everything is grey
slicked. This basket's weave is uncertain
and on the pavements walk in
single file. I will. On the second-floor I will
remember to hand back your lunch
fill a prescription / ease
into an analgesic languor. It's soon enough
(((tomorrow))) to go back.

Pile In-Trays high +
at this exact time every day
that stare (which has no boundaries) rests
under the shadow of the Beetham Tower
in every direction
Store display: patent medicine
So...Ah - cough, cough, cough
In high winds / wobble
the window squints
sideways (and)
Matthews atrium gaze will
speculate on garnish
(at least through-
It's just a big empty hole
/ a collar + tie. Finally
please turn out the light.

This schedule was never agreed
that lone canoeist
rotating / slowly
An hour hand. Running down
Quay side ----- and count!
Lunch time is when I should hear the phone
Fix your teeth
-----repeatedly
(it seems) deferred +
at ten to eleven, be there
I will. That ruck-sack is
about 4 years old
A voice:
Do you peel grapes? What's best is to -
I do but - It's just no consolation.
)SQUEEZING(((

The knotted street
We keep meeting ourselves on it
It is cold and we make sounds passersby
could mistake for conversation
(Your hand on my shoulder though
in the platform bar
Signs point that way and we follow / I notice
heading towards the church
The police are out
That bridge is low and the pavement disappears
under
(As I turned you were smiling
We neither of us recognise this town
We wonder if our being here is a mistake
(We will finally kiss again
sometime later

The twisty pigs tail /
We came through bad weather
Saddled him up but
don't try and uncork the wine bottle with it
- let's toast with Vimto
We'll be at Chorlton St. station-----
yet that bible
that shrugging rhetorician
elevated to fetish item on the basis of
something which supposedly happened
once / in these streets
there are great temptations
So my Mother + Step-Father pack me off
/ and I can only navigate by a
spiral Milky Way / As we reunite
in the Argos queue.

There is distance which is great +
(self-cannibalizing) years
were added to our lives / passing the sign:
Somewhere / is lots of miles in that direction
No cards received
This may seem to have been written too soon
From a bed+breakfast
It's 1985. I'm uncertain about what is supposed
to happen next -
Now I know
Regarding poetry, I would say
make a list. But do something more than just
read it. And, okay, wear stripes now
Horizontal. It's not surprising we cry
/ under the sea.
In the shade.

The concern, John, is
Is this appropriate?
Behaviour should be usual
As the first person I texted
- on my first phone - that bond will always exist
strongly) I deny though
that implied escalator symbolism -
Yes, we'll call / The paradigm
and reinforce it -
But I'm busy just now
If the 241 vouchers are valid still, then
Yes John, it's love, it is / So
there was America - but in circumstances
like these -
I used to know many people -Yet
/ Cheers! And I will see you soon.

