

F | O | O | T | W | O | R | K

G E O F F P A G E



FOOTWORK

Geoff Page



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Memories of the Living Memories of the Dead

The memory of a maple box
The memory of a front door slammed
The memory of such distinctions
The memory of the dead still breathing
Seconds before you pick up the phone

The six year old dropped off at school
Runs with his rucksack into the past
Man and wife five times a week
Move all day through the other's mind
And off into a white forgetting

A grand-aunt in a nursing home
Walks each day more slowly down
The distant curve of your concern
Her death is always confirmation

A trunkline call at night requires
A double turn with full recall
Your parents there at the other end
A photograph of how you left them
Fading in along the wire

The memory more often now
Forgets the slight abyss of death
And worn away by such distinctions
Will at the end forget itself

Retrieval

Odours are a code
to bring back

part of it; old photos too
curled in the sun

that washed our faces out,
our mothers' also

incurably young.
Cars of a certain

year and colour
will bring a shiver

on wet roads.
A song may do the same

but nothing more.
Children of your own

may find a few
forgotten corners.

Memory is a pen-and-wash
left out in the rain.

Weightlessly
our days lift off

and never quite
are gone.

Tinnitus

There is no specific treatment for tinnitus aurium. The patient however should not be abandoned. Medical text

Some hear a hissing
a buzzing or ringing
a sigh of the sea
inside its shell

molecular motion
of the air
static from a
closed-down speaker.

Some hear a higher
horizon of crickets
an octave up
from moonlit reeds

the top C of
a trumpet solo
overtone lifting
on fathomless air.

For some it's more
a faulty tap
a rumour somewhere
in the plumbing

a fluorescent
light left on
deep in the heart
of a public building.

A few hear God's
insistent whisper
opaque always
as the world

the upper registers
of pain
just that half tone
short of madness.

To wake at three
and read the ceiling
is more than a smear
of the infinite;

out there, that higher
stave of crickets
and death I know
is one flicked switch

and after that, white noise.

My Mother's God

My mother's God
has written the best
of the protestant proverbs:

you make the bed
you lie in it;
God helps him

who helps himself.
He tends to shy away from churches,
is more to be found in

phone calls to daughters
or rain clouds over rusty grass.
The Catholics

have got him wrong entirely:
too much waving the arms about,
the incense and caftan, that rainbow light.

He's leaner than that,
lean as a pair of
grocer's scales,

hard as a hammer at cattle sales
the third and final
time of asking.

His face is most clear
in a scrubbed wooden table
or deep in the shine of a

laminex bench.
He's also observed at weddings and funerals
by strict invitation, not knowing quite

which side to sit on.
His second book, my mother says,
is often now too well received;

the first is where the centre is,
tooth for claw and eye for tooth
whoever tried the other cheek?

Well, Christ maybe,
but that's another story.
God, like her, by dint of coursework

has a further degree in predestination.
Immortal, omniscient, no doubt of that,
he nevertheless keeps regular hours

and wipes his feet clean on the mat,
is not to be seen at three in the morning.
His portrait done in a vigorous charcoal

is fixed on the inner
curve of her forehead.
Omnipotent there

in broad black strokes
he does not move.
It is not easy, she'd confess,

to be my mother's God.

The Double Bus

Stalled at the HALT
in my dented Renault
they sweep straight past at 80 K

two buses snugly
joined as one and
married in the middle.

Talking mildly there together
or staring out a window
the heirs of St Edmund

the girls of St Clare's
are a vision of the truly saved
a tired agnostic's flash of heaven.

Preserved by faith, predestination,
Pascal's Choice or *savoir faire*
their lives on either side of death

have something of the glass about them.
Heaven, I know, is one well-windowed
schoolbus of the saved

or some eternal
dome of crystal
of which they are the clock

and I a sentient
fleck of dust
weightless on the cosmic wind

as nevertheless
I slip the clutch
and head away into the traffic.

How to Believe

How to believe
the pain ends there . . .
the fireball's heat,
that flooding gust,
the agony from
cancelled nerves
firing home

into the cortex —
that one slow moment's
chaos of codes
before it too
like so much slush
is swept away
with flesh and metal.

The incurable instant
six miles down
is a loss of radio
contact only,
an unresolved curve
in the static air.
The pain somehow

has abandoned physics
and hangs there in
the empty sky,
one long collective
inner scream,
on God's wide window
a single smear.

Gravity's End

Another galaxy
collapses.

Gently now
the shock arrives,

the swallowing of stars
a ripple passing through us.

Density and mass
collide

as, stretched to a thread,
by gravity's end,

you slip across
that last of all horizons.

As aeons concentrate
to nothing

your atoms find
their final closeness

buried in the stars.

.

Psalm of the Cosmologists

1 *Edwin Hubble*

We praise this day
The primal egg
Exploding into time,

The stars, each tightening to life,
Turning, burning,
Reddening in flight,

An emptiness expanding without end
And littered with
White points of light.

2 *Thomas Gold*

We praise this day
A gravity
No speed can quite outstrip,

Which slows the galaxies in flight
And hauls them, simplifying, back
Along a violet

Shift of light
Into their
Genesis.

3 *Fred Hoyle*

We praise this day
A constancy,
The galaxies outspanning strangely,

The fluency
That flows from nothing
Slowly in between,

A photograph in four dimensions,
Always changing,
Never changed.

4 *At the Silos in Montana*

Staring up at
Desert stars
We praise this day

Like angels dancing
The great coherencies
To come,

This dip and sway with pirouette.
Such footwork
On the razor's edge.

Unscheduled

He loved the jumbo's
runway trundle

the lazy lift
from ground to air.

The instruments
he hoped were normal

despite a cutback
in the fare.

The cabin seemed
to float on hubris

a small cathedral
in the sky.

“This is God,
your captain, speaking.”

How could statistics
ever lie?