

BORDER LANDS

DAVID SWARBRICK



THE
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PRESS

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FOR SARAH

WRITTEN IN ABERYSTWYTH,
SWYDDFFYNNON & ELSEWHERE IN &
AROUND CARDIGANSHIRE.

march

nineteen eighty one

having this,

no fantastic hate
can rob you;

not devils,
not warriors,
not demons;

nor even angels,
spying from their steep slopes,

nothing, truly nothing
can rob you –

nor even this town,
that has a history
of theft and mutilation:

the churches empty,
the homes neglected
the parks choaked with weeds.

you do not need to stay.

you do not need to pay.

april

nineteen eighty one

i've not words
enough to say -

i saw you walking
on the road today,

nor eyes
prepared to follow:
folly ,
prey.

may i

nineteen eighty one

eclipsing streets,
a steady shore,
an ordered crash
of waves;

through sunlight,

shafts,
marbled clouds

a far, far out horizon,

unreachable;

unbreachable.

may ii

nineteen eighty one

i am
in envy of love;

i am in envy
of these two figures

strong as the sun.

i am in envy.

june

nineteen eighty one

how far do seas stretch?

here, my love;

beach,
sand,
dunes,

and rocks,
rising,

cliffs, rising:

we sit, hidden
in stumpy
heat-drenched grass;

a high hollow,
spread with towels,
a picnic, cigarettes:

and two tight bodies
curled like babes
observing

visions.

july

nineteen eighty one

on this shore –

on every shore

the sea rolls,
spreads,
swobs
expands
explains

but we –
you and i –

we are fastened like limpets.

we cannot leave.

september i

nineteen eighty one

the waves

of last night's storm

linger, loiter

insist

endure:

they stir still;

they stir now,

white, wild, whipping

the heavy sea is not becalmed;

it slaps on jetties,

smashes the sea walls,

breaks up the boats;

and we must shelter.

september ii

nineteen eighty one

i have come

to meet myself again –

to catch up.

find fault,

find favour.

it is the same homing, bleak sea,

the same empty horizon

blotted out by mist.

my heart gives into it;

beats

like a forbearing tide.

october

nineteen eighty one

behind me
a television tower
feeds the air;

feeds a hundred thousand
unseen homes;

feeds them all,
gannets
razorbills,
gulls, greedy as Ahab,

with a rattle of stodgy voices
i cannot hear,

mayday signals
for the dying day

for the yearning
empty night.

november i

nineteen eighty one

november.

the pebbles are smooth,
grey, oval, wet;

they slide,
roll,
rattle;

children gather driftwood;

build bonfires.

the inlet –

south beach -
lies under a muscle of white cloud;

wheeling waves
whiten,
spread
a pale disappearing line;

we breathe air
no city has maintained;

i sit on a washed up
tree trunk
greatest of all.

november ii

nineteen eighty one

just above the line

thrown
by the strongest wave;

just at that point

where the sand shelves,

where it is wet, softer, darker

just at that point –

that is where the people group

where the people watch,
where they walk
throw stones;

the pensioner too,
in his fawn coat,

we are just at that point –

each day,
same time, same place
beside the shifting sea.

december

nineteen eighty one

hallo there.

hey!

hallo!

i see my face

under the street light;

i see that when this passion
has gone
the shop's glass window will remain
reflecting it all back;
everything bloody thing
but hazy, sticky
with salt,

it is my father confessor
my witness to others
who walk,
like i

catching their faces,
in this unkind abrupt way
long before they are ready
to own up;

catching their features too soon
in the vast unending night.

february

nineteen eighty two

lean mountains
rise seaward,
 rock on rock;

 thin fields stretch,
 taut as canvass -

 the first light
 gilds the couch grass
 across Swyddffynnon;

 fills the hollows
 from Pontrhydfendigaid
 to Ystrad Meurig;

 runs gold
 over Cambria.

march i

nineteen eighty two

unspeaking,
we've watched the day
 wake and slide
 unfelt;

 old room in an empty house.

 our bodies lie still,
 unspent;

 under the huge grey sky
 there is no trade.

march ii

nineteen eighty two

briefly

i remember lying in your lap,

my stock against the night
electrically charged,

incriminated;

my fingers familiar

each contour known
as my own,

the warmth and texture
of your feckless flesh.

april

nineteen eighty two

her eyes coil
around a world
i cannot see;

in her head
are the smiles of friends,
and elders,
smiling sadly,

as they will smile
when she is dead.

may i

nineteen eighty two

living by the sea
we have missed the first
graffiti of spring,

the scrawl of buds on bush

the harsh soft hasty green

the pebble beach is our park,
cold and hard
untranslated,
unpreserved,

seen in flashes
moment by moment
without memory.

childless,
parentless.

may ii

nineteen eighty two

but for this
there is no other world;

this is the magic of your face,
the fascination,
the hidden sea -

waves rearrange the light;

currents coil beneath
like massive ropes
encrusted with barnacles,
wrenching the water -

dragging it this way
and that,
dragging it into
a warren of rolling
whitecaps.

this is the only place for love;

this time my heart
will take its ancient path
unseen.

may iii

nineteen eighty two

somewhere,

somehow,

something

will end;

just not be there;

we'll wonder why we ever looked;

adjoin,

ajar,

elude,

escape –

the door will never
close again.

will never.

may iv

nineteen eighty two

remember that old image of summer;

the blooming trees,

heavy with green;

the flower crowd and scent –

someone sitting

near the house;

someone playing

the music of old scores

on the piano?

it never was.

get up and go;

the door is open.

may v

nineteen eighty two

i cannot see it in your eyes,
the lover, mistress, master -

it is only the ocean i see -

the eternal cross of light
dimming in the depths
late as the latest
night-known dreams,

the trances and delusions -

the truth.

june i

nineteen eighty two

this cold magic has -
as possession -

every length of time,

has the fascination too,

and the light it steals:

oh, how it steals the light -

dragging it beneath the waves
with such dark grace
only a fool would not follow.

june ii

nineteen eighty two

stay in.

we are cannibals
together;

adequate, sufficient.

all we need
is all we are.

june iii

nineteen eighty two

she dreams with her eyes;

shapes of ships
and long dark seas;

a diviner,
a first time diver,
going places -

such places as you never saw;

and being all he is,
he is all hers,

and she dreams on.

june iv

nineteen eighty two

apart from casual pain
he will never walk disarmed,
as if always
into a steady
blade;

no street lights
light this night road
by the sea;

pavement sand
scratches
beneath his soles;

in the sky
the summer air swims,
swarms
dry and noiseless

it swallows his tread,
gulps it all down
in the dead

dead
calm.

june v

nineteen eighty two

the early beach opens
summer warm;

summer light
blots out the blackness
of the night;

rebuilds
the mislaid world.

june vi

nineteen eighty two

that night
the widower
returned to church;

reached
into the fresh earth;

fetched back the ring.

Renunciation sat with him;

- the wake - the two of them;
pouring drinks,
discussing, discoursing.

seeing
what now came next.

june vii

nineteen eighty two

you do not know me
as i am -
 though everything i do
 returns to you.

the open door
is open still;

i cross it every day
and do not say
and cannot stay away.

september i
nineteen eighty two

time is
to draw apart
like knives;

no air divides
but we have been divided
like the hardy dead.

september ii
nineteen eighty two

this interchange,
this weaving
is nothing but defeat.

your love –
so monumental,
floods, like desert rivers
fixes,
precise as tombs.

this story has moved on.

it is at quite a different stage
to the one it was
when this first started;

to the one it still thinks
it is at.

you do not seem to know this;
you are not where you kicked off.

you are twisting the blade
the wrong way round

there are only
strangers here now;

long ago, the old landmarks
passed by,

passed out of reach

passed out of sight

poised,
hospitable
cocooning,

gone-

as if they were
never ever there.

september iii

nineteen eighty two

things

that were said and done
have dried;

your face has bleached,
is filed away –

still in place, of course -
but a reference point now,

a point of departure
for all the rest of time.

september iv

nineteen eighty two

and is it what you will –

the real world
left long behind
by this,
our horror not to talk;

guessing secrets
that flash like landing lights?

october i

nineteen eighty two

your busy guilt
gilds the moon,

illuminates your story
like a medieval book,

a Decameron
written in ciphers
even you can't unencrypt.

october ii

nineteen eighty two

of course, i go over
the long, long moon
with you;

i exceed in love;

marvellously mortgaged,

the forfeits pledged
without cost;

the loses paid
without redemption.

november

nineteen eighty two

tonight
the world goes out
to tackle love;

in all its forms
in bars and rooms
i've never seen;

in disco halls;
and in the shelters
along the dark promenade –

even beneath the girders
of the old pier –

we make ourselves immortal,
as we can.

december i

nineteen eighty two

your fingers know each bone
on my skull;

remember –

they have played with my hair,
pushing it back from the forehead
in the way of people
who are allowed to touch

who are permitted
this too-close contact.

december ii

nineteen eighty two

there was a moment
when rather than

hold your hand
i walked side by side
beside you;

then ,
there was a moment
when i walked ahead of you,

down the street -
all down the street;

that one and the next -

down the roads
that have no end.

january i

nineteen eighty three

only you;

not dead after all;

so come now
and crease
into the flood;

come,
come –

just you –
just now

just as the sad tide sweeps
sea to sea,

just as it scopes up each separate share

surrenders it
to the wider wilder waves
out in the dark Atlantic.

january ii

nineteen eighty three

this staircase make words for thoughts;

they come
a cool spring night
of open doors,
of silver air
floating from Cors Caron,
from the abbey ruins at Strata Florida
well-travelled,
intimate
keen.

and see –
how ghosts the loss,

how it easily -

so easily
defies what woke us
unkindly.

january iii

nineteen eighty three

he is waiting

for a

larger constituency -

something i will not offer;

cannot.

he trapped by recognition

unable to defraud

deface

delight;

now

he merely holds

the balance.

february i

nineteen eighty three

after answers,

this silence has been building
a long time;

i watched it
from all you left
unsaid,

distorted by love
a sudden fortress,

a strong fastidious wall,

within and without
that the world
had already filled.

february ii

nineteen eighty three

your silence is as old as knives;

we have been cut together
nicked,
punctured,
sliced,
slashed,

and in the gaps
grows all the rest of time.

february iii

nineteen eighty three

it is the same as when i left it –

Brynhavered;

though colder perhaps,
the empty rooms
damper,

the fires needing to be lit;
the lights turned on
against the mountain rain
beating down from Claerwen.

march i

nineteen eighty three

now they pass
almost unnoticed,

unimportant,

they demand no decision
no share or cut of land
no cause to anger for.

i join nothing,

committed to small things
and old destructions.

march ii

nineteen eighty three

snared as a child
the rest of time
is one long sorting out;

an assault,
annihilating the jungle
to find a single, particular, tree

whatever it is;

actually,
whatever it damn well is.

april

nineteen eighty three

as Atlantic armies

you and i

seeking the very end of love;

leaving history to others -

and to others too
the procedures and embarkations,

the constant boardings and arrivals

the life plans,
the town-to-town
ports of call
at ports with long
unrememberable names;

the manifests
that testify
all that was ever there –

or said it was.

may

nineteen eighty three

the ashen force of ancient kilns

assured your shape,

took it

wheel wet and vulnerable;

roman hands filled you,
used you,
lost you,

left you
to be resurrected
from an field of early wheat:

and still they stand,
the modelling hands,
the fingerprints
baked into an unknown
potter's pot.

june i

nineteen eighty three

to the sea
her sight has gone;

her eyes
kindle on gold;

on the spinning waves;

on a boat,
shadowless,
a mile from the shore -

day of sun.
day of beech;

scratching sand,
watching boats;

bodies, bodies
in the waves -

heads
bobbing;

heads screaming
in the curling green
salty dim.

june ii

nineteen eighty three

you hold me
in your arms
like snow;

mould me,
make me,
a creature of heaven and hell;

and i wait;
and wait;

i wait
for your fine disturbing entrance
into rooms;

for your
heartbeat eyes,

your favorite shirt
(a hideous thing, purple, lyrca);

your gait.

god, how i wait.

july i

nineteen eighty three

two people;

the space between
is not the barrier;

we will erect the pavilion
in fields that flow:
that spring and roll and drift
gilded, and golden, glittering

we will crop the gain.

we are kings;
no labyrinth limits us.

july ii

nineteen eighty three

a tall sail

sentinel as sun
points rigid
on the roll
of tiny waves.

the day is stripped

like a winter tree,

reduced
to the simplest of forms

as if someone
had taken the riggings
on the corners of the world
and pulled hard,

pulling open the openness,

the endlessness,

the never ending
bumping-into-nothing
endlessness.

erupting –

a gift
from an unremembered god.

july i

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Swarbrick is a publisher, planter, hotelier, hermit, broadcaster and writer. He was born in Colombo and lives in Sri Lanka and the UK by way of India, Singapore, the Middle East, Wales, Scotland and Sweden.