

## Down to Earth

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Also by John Wilkinson

POETRY

*Lake Shore Drive*

*Proud Flesh (2nd edition)*

*Contrivances*

*Effigies Against the Light*

CRITICISM

*The Lyric Touch*

# Down to Earth

A POETRY BOOK

JOHN WILKINSON



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*The light carries darkness  
in its pocket*

— ED DORN



## Like Substances

Of its greatness the sun sups of gasoline,  
smacking forecourts, licking hearts  
lubed with sealed-in blood—break them  
methodically, remove while they yet pump,

for each component's certain to outdo  
more cautious visions, to exceed or floor  
graphs by actuaries: out crawl carers  
surreptitiously, welling from their open pit.

Residues flare in asphalt pools, volatiles  
spill in parking lots where overheated  
agents poke beneath hoods, throw  
keys to a collector. They sweat copiously

but let the hearts twitch, pay their dues  
then walk, they know how. A flight of birds  
ignites against a sunset, blackening  
in short order. Of its greatness the sun

asks more to burn, yet more to evaporate:  
obedient, oh no wobbling, carers set to,  
filling quotas in an immolation park,  
smirking by the lines. The sinking fund,

shale library, compress to utmost drops.  
Canadian sands crush; heart's pre-emptive  
impulses crush too. Thumps consummate,  
not a baton's tap. Not the thump at its

life's own pace, no the thumping wakes  
votaries to greatness. A snatch, a skip, as  
if it rang out true time, as if their crisp  
snare were damped, dicrotic but reliable,

sending children forth in bubble-wrap,  
alert to metre, calm with methylphenidate.  
Organs shall be chained so then output  
more effectively. Tuned to work with

willing clouds, willing currents, willing  
followers whose mode, touch, hints,  
time-keepers constant to their rooted beat,  
through transcription move in phalanxes,

delivered by the skip-full only, skips  
abundant in this free scrapyard. Just  
put everything into the skip, no overheads  
trouble offshore derricks when they nod

like a lossless engine in its anaerobic  
chamber, turning at a distance, transmutes  
nothing into fresh air, field staff report,  
overawed. This nothing cranks its shaft,

encrypting data for shell companies,  
masking ownership; it comes up in roses,  
wafts light & heat with gently-beating  
stamina. Should ever timing-chain snag

its unmetaphysical hook, sheer away cogs  
shunting children down; sparse gusts of  
vapour pegged between stars, will spell  
a name suppressed, a child's breath

suspended on the negative, will imprint  
the shadow of the cloud morning burnt off.  
Tracing invisible writing, sexual spill  
slathers grass, gas notates a blind gut,

but a blade shaves earth like cheek or table,  
wipes the contract. Could ever air's writ  
attract Melaina to the forecourt left  
dark for her form, heart she made pound.

△

Passerines still fail to break the spiral,  
loop the loop. Though yet imaginable as  
visitors who thread coloured gases, take  
pleasure in the nightfalls, the failing light.

Dogs do also, prancing legs scissor low  
vapours, glass has covered them in domes,  
torpid rainbows flop alongside winking  
gems the beldams of some marsh scatter,

not to leave the dregs unstirred, smog  
rolls, suffocating level ground. Down beats  
gold on grey panels, down beats the hot  
gospel, blessing their demolished kids

garlanded as they festoon bridges, crowd  
asphyxiating ducts, a college band's  
thump-thump blisters the fleet fingers  
trained to carry tunes unto this last; up

the squander surges, candying its light  
tulip overflow, then drooling pink & violet  
toxins from its lips. The prairies brazen,  
stalks stand out like coral, dapple cats

cut across the sun's downtrodden margin,  
dodging white patrollers, boys playing  
chicken weave trucks, cut down service  
alleys, snap fingers at the vigilantes,

sneak behind the corn files, behind rock,  
an ocelot impersonator, shape-shifter,  
dogs the sun keeps track of, will accept  
no flame, or prototype, last or causeway—

wading in alfalfa, plunging through light,  
sprint from rock to concrete wall, noiseless  
mouths gaping. Gulp oxygen, clutch  
water, clutch chocolate. Slinking up on

well shafts. Thumping across loose planks,  
feet percussive pound one lap ahead,  
future carers harry these who swift to  
chug what heat draws, skipping over

pivot-risky slats, stretch their elastic bone,  
spring when their oppressor strikes. O  
see the motes that mock the swallows,  
see the children dressed up to the nines

go forward while the born-lucky scatter  
through high grass, kids sweat blood  
long before they bow on reddened stone.  
Shake you boards! Prophecy, you priests

what was adduced before said, insiders  
loop down airy entrails, conscripts of  
their past. Light carries, song carries,  
carers bear away the stunned in their jaws

to warm Chicago, steam hisses angrily  
in blind pipes, knocks through Manhattan,  
bled off sates the spectres of futurity.  
How will the forerunner react, blanched

in her subservience, drying offerings  
racked on poles. She grimaces in lines of  
sheets & shirts, a watermark, a telltale  
stain, burn-mark of the sacerdotal sun.

△

The sun of its greatness would restrict  
movement. The sun of its nearsightedness  
gets in close & licks the face it pillages  
for next course. Proud sun's reserve

army of space-heaters now will field its  
Mexicans & Poles, they turn up or dig into  
what rainfall or cash-in-hand permit,  
lifting tubers in their scant down-time,

who reap some wetted richness by day  
turn their hands, turn then to improvise  
with shucks of shade against gullies,  
tucked inside clefts, hideout near a river.

Behind rubbish bins, fuel distributors  
trade their chips of sunlight, gilded  
child oblation fuels this energy exchange  
in lorry-loads, children at a high point

of blood-standing, all of most, most  
reckoned, most admired, irreplaceable,  
of soft-pillowed, all most precocious  
in astronomy, forever pitched in to scythe—

these gas-holders, fume-breathers, fume-  
exhalers sprint round the ball-court  
throwing shapes at each other, aching  
to feed furnaces, get sent up in smoke:

Corn-reefs half-protect the quiver-nerved  
brat who scarpers, neat dodger, gold-  
spotted, burnt, dapple-limned ocelot  
head-butts a lading gate & fuel tanks,

panting with tongue lolling, edging over  
sandy ground, wriggles beneath radar  
on his stomach, sand burns & wafts  
recompense to heaven; heaven that exacts

life for life, accepts the surplus & spoils,  
snorting incense up from furnaces,  
the subtilised, the fluted shearing  
inwardness of later wreathing substances,

blue gas futurity, stirred up in tornadoes,  
cyclones of furious disbursement, kids  
tugged off to lymph camps, ripping  
down a tidemark's tar & toil, throatily

to sear, drown, clench. Powered by such  
zeal, how could they fail to provide,  
pressed hard, spun dry, collectors mass  
like cotton what children had yielded.

Tide them over. Where blacktop unrolls,  
grunt cars. Hear that votive prattle grate.  
Car prototypes wink on Mayan floors,  
soak up whatever, slopping like a low-

consumption valve, processing the ghost  
files, children cupping cheaper gas.  
A totem pole resplendent playing out  
its bindings of copper. The smirking head

expresses tears. What runs dependably  
has its effect, engines flew across parks  
from car bombs, scattered shrieks behind;  
now newly innocent smiles readjust,

crushed envisaged blessings surge,  
sun whose garish splash, yolk calendars  
destroy all hearts, prises open walls  
of milk, of blood, oil, rods & concrete.

## In Tempo

In this state of exception  
arms splay, legs scissor,  
all in concert nonetheless.

Beats slip, gears mash,  
clutch though they disjoin,  
rivulets grip the gravel,  
mash conforms to mesh.

Buds will soon regenerate  
via his precious blood,  
seed the tree they left off.

Strap high clinanthus,  
spurious like lost sheep.  
Beseech him on this fig  
pith I'd magnify forever.

## Intervention

How far can any dry pod  
carry, how  
contemptuous a hand

deal its green  
suitcase trade, bobbing up  
to lay & brood,  
lunged at on a lark shelf.

Also the holy ghost  
acrobat with head-dress  
undisturbed,  
despite splotched leggings

licked his crown  
strobile as the hop fruit.

## Present Company Excepted

The leaf agent makes our killing,  
well-nourished  
mould takes its fill,  
& soft snow lowers the bar.

The fish component rakes a neck.  
Vouchsafe audible voice.  
Our jay-walker  
stamps the sky in passing.

Creep underneath like iron lips  
dimple earth, ants  
vesciculating banks, load  
as if sponges, air pods

alongside the toll road,  
tangibly a rash or a cocoon  
might settle on  
fields listing with our casualties.

## Stamp of Origin

Ice encroaches, ice tamps,  
gear  
teeth connect, set in train  
the nineteenth day,

sightless birds fetch up on  
wild wings,  
                  spiral stunned  
towards slabs,  
                  on mica glints

flammable, inflammable,  
the strength of the hills,  
shadow fossils  
                  spiriting away

all passers-by their convoy.

## Oversight

The more thought through,  
the more a day februate  
churns shit. Rocks  
drawn tidally, obstruct mouths,

all go to show what's minded to  
oversees the spate.  
The ram's head quadrant,  
hawk smoke day entablature,

traffic needs mouths to stop  
subject to remote  
nerves: mire bakes hard  
beneath the gridlock.

Granite worktops  
fritter into blown grit, crops are  
shred abstractedly,  
heart, not your garments.

## Next to Nothing

Lights were scouting the cornices' light  
icing because

In East Chicago the dust lids a big take  
Yes I'll try poker, try craps

So shape up, scroll into

shape with what you face, a hot-press  
fact-clamp rising by each second taller

nose-bone, mouth-bone, ear-bone, drum.

## Number One

Blue-gas-embalmed,  
that solid blood  
jack-hammers seeds,  
sinoatrial valve,

bashes down caps  
jagged in their casing,  
fills a sand sheath.

Fortune  
will make smile glass,  
faces spread  
    composure,

in up to the neck  
disarmed,  
looking after themself.